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### The Pacific Railroad Statement of Mr. Leroux

New York Daily Times

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The Pacific Railroad--Statement of Mr. Leroux.

At the request of Col. BENTON, I, ANTOINE LEROUX, native of St. Louis of Missouri, and now an inhabitant of Taos, in New-Mexico, do make the following statement in relation to the Pass at the head of the valley of the Del Norte, and of the country on each side of that Pass; and also as to the best road from Missouri to California. And first tell how I got acquainted with the country:

In the year 1820, when I was in my nineteenth year, I joined Gen. ASHLEY and Major HENRY in an expedition of hunting and trapping to the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountains, and after two years in that part, I went to Taos, in New-Mexico, and afterwards married there, and have made it my home ever since; and from that place I carried on the business of a beaver trapper for about fifteen years, generally on the waters of the Great Colorado of the West; and have trapped the whole country—every river, creek, and branch from the Gila to the head of the Grand River fork of the Upper Colorado, and out to the Great Salt Lake, and on the waters of Wah-Satch Mountain, and out to the Virgin River, and have been four times to California, and guide to a great many American officers employed in Mexico, and know the country from New-Mexico to California.

I will now describe the Pass:

At the head of the valley of Del Norte there is a broad pass about eight miles wide, called by the Utah Indians *Coo-cha-tope*, and by the Mexican Spaniards *El Pue-to*, and which signifies in both languages the Gap or Gate; and has been known to the Spaniards ever since they settled in New-Mexico, and by the Indians always. It is made by the Sierra San Juan, which comes up from the South on the west side of the Del Norte, and gives out there; and by the Sierra Blanca, which comes in from the East like it was going to join the San Juan, but turns off north round the head of the Arkansas and toward the Three Parks, and is eight miles wide. Here between these two mountains is the Pass, which goes out level from the valley of the Del Norte, (and looking like a continuation of it,) which leads to the upper waters of the Great Colorado of the West. The Del Norte does not head in this Pass, but in the San Juan Mountain, a little south of the Pass, where there is also a Summer Pass, but none for the Winter on account of the snow in it. There is a small Creek in this Pass called by the same name, *Coo-cha-tope*, which comes out from the end of San Juan and goes about eight miles east towards the Del Norte, but stops in a small lake, out of which a little stream gets to the Del Norte, which shows how level the country is. The Pass is heavily timbered with large pine trees and with pinon, and there may be some small oaks, but I am not certain. There is not much snow in this Pass, and people go through all the Winter; and when there is much snow in the mountains on the Abiquiu route, (which is the old Spanish Trail to California,) the people of Taos go round this way, and get into that trail in the fords of Grand and Green Rivers. There are trails through it, but after you get through there are many trails, some going to the Abiquiu road, and some up or down the country. This Pass is laid down on a map I saw in the War Office, made by Lieut. PARKE and Mr. R. H. KERN, and is there named after me, because I gave Lieut. PARKE information about it. It is the only map I have seen that shows that Pass, and the best one I have seen of that part of the country, and with a little correction would be perfect.

As for the country on each side of the Pass, I will describe it, and on the east side first.

There is a large valley to the east, about fifty or sixty miles wide and near a hundred miles long, reaching from the *Coo-cha-tope* to the Taos settlements at the Little Colorado. The Del Norte runs through this valley, which is the widest and best valley in all New-Mexico, and can hold more people than all New-Mexico besides. It is all prairie except on the creeks, and on the mountain sides, which are well wooded. It is a rich soil, and covered with good grass, and wooded on all the streams. The Spaniards called it "*El Valle de San Luis*," and it was formerly famous for wild horses and buffaloes; and ever since Taos was settled by the Spaniards, the inhabitants drove their sheep and cattle there to Winter. Before the Utah Indians became so bad, the stock (as many as 50,000 or 60,000 head of sheep and cattle) have been driven there to Winter, where they did well, feeding on the grass during the day, and sheltering in the woods about the shepherd's camp at night. Most of the Winters, there is no snow along the foot of the mountain on the north side of this valley, being sheltered from the north and open to the sun in the south. The United States have established a military post in this valley, not far from the Pass of El Sangre de Christo, and about two hundred families have gone there to live, chiefly near the Fort, and raised crops there last year; and now that they have protection, the valley will soon be all settled, and will be the biggest and best part of New-Mexico. About three hundred families were preparing to move there. The post is called Fort Massachusetts.

This valley has several passes through the Sierra Blanca into the prairie country on the Upper Arkansas and Kansas, the best of which is called El Sangre de Christo, at the head of little streams called *Cuchadas*, which fall into the Huerfano, a small river falling into the Arkansas, not far from Bent's Fort. It is a good Pass, and BENT and ST. VRAIN's wagons have passed through it, and it is passable the worst of Winters—for Col. BEALE's dragoons passed through it the same Winter, and nearly the same time, that Col. FREMONT went through another Pass further west. The distance through these passes is not more than five miles. This is the description of the country on the east side of the *Coo-cha-tope* Pass.

On the west side of the Pass the country opens out broad and good for settlements, and for roads, and is the best watered country I ever saw out to the Wah-satch Mountains and to *Las Vegas de Santa Clara*. After that the water and grass become scarce, and the land poor, and it is called desert, though travelers find camping grounds every night; and the great cavalcade of many thousand head of horses from California to New Mexico annually passed along it. After you go through the Pass at the head of the Del Norte, there are many trails bearing southwest towards the great Spanish trail by Abiquiu, which they join in the forks of the Grand River and Green River (forks of the great Colorado of the West), where it is a great beaten road, easy to follow day or night. The country is wooded on the streams with prairies between, and streams every three or five miles, as the great Colorado here gathers its head waters from the Wah-satch and Rocky Mountain ranges, which are covered all over with snow in the Winter, and have snow upon their tops in the Summer, which sends down so much water, cool, clear, and good. And this is the case generally out to the Wah-satch Mountains and *Las Vegas de Santa Clara*—a distance of near five hundred miles from the head of the Del Norte. Wagons can now travel this route to California, and have done it. In the year 1837, two families named Sloover and Pope, with their wagons and two Mexicans, went from Taos that way.

Col. FREMONT was looking for the *Coo-cha-tope* Pass in the winter of 1848-'9, and was near enough to have seen it, if it had not been hid by the lapping of the mountains, when his guide led him off into the mountains, instead of keeping up the dry valley, which he wished to do, and which would have taken him through easy. It was the worst winter for snow, but we could travel all the time in the valleys and passes. I was below him on the waters of the Arkansas at the same time, acting as guide to Col. BEALE, who was out after the Apache Indians with a detachment of dragoons, and we heard of him at the Pueblo's. He went as high as *Hard-Scrabble* and got corn before he crossed into the Valley of San Luis, and we got corn at the Greenhorn Pueblo on the San Carlos Creek, about 50 or 60 miles below him; and heard that he had passed along, and supposed that he had gone safe through, and knew no better till he got back to Taos, when I told him how near he had been to the place he was looking for. We passed with the dragoons through the Pass El Sangre de Christo (Blood of Christo), and got through easy; and that was the dead of winter, and greatest snow we ever had.

There is a way also up the Arkansas to get to the waters of the great Colorado. It is by Bent's Fort, by the Pueblo's and *Hard-Scrabble*, (at all which places corn and vegetables are raised,) and by *Witham's* fishery, and at the head of the river, leaving the Three Parks to the north. Horsemen and stock can go that way. MAXWELL of Taos, drove out between four and five thousand head of sheep and cattle last Summer, intending to take them to California, but went to the Great Salt Lake and sold them there.

A wagon can now go from Missouri to California through the *Coo-cha-tope* Pass without crossing any mountain but the Sierra Blanca, (and there have the choice of three good passes,) and without crossing any swamp or large river, and nearly on a straight line all the way, only bearing a little south. And supplies of grain and cattle can be had from the Pueblo's on the Upper Arkansas, and also from the Mexicans in the valley of St. Louis, and also from the Mormons at *Ojo San Jose*, and at their settlement on the Nicollet river, and at *Las Vegas de Santa Clara*.

I have been from New-Mexico to California four times, namely, the way I guided Col. Cook, the way I guided Capt. SITGREAVES, and the Salinas route, and the Abiquiu route; and of these four the one I guided Capt. SITGREAVES is, as I informed Mr. SEWARD, the best and shortest route from Santa Fe or Albuquerque; but from places further north, and especially from Missouri, the *Coo-cha-tope* Pass is best and shortest, and has most water, grass, wood, and good land on it; and has most snow, but not enough to prevent Winter traveling; so that when there is much snow in the trail by Abiquiu, people from Taos go that way, as I have already said. The snow in that country is dry, and the moccasins that we wear do not get damp or wet. And being asked by Col. BENTON to state the best way from Missouri to California, I answer: Start

as the people now do, going to New-Mexico, from the frontier of the State at Kansas or Independence, and for Summer traveling go through the prairies up towards Bent's Fort, and up the Huerfano to the Pass El Sangre de Christo; then out by the *Coo-cha-tope* Pass, following a trail to the great Spanish trail. The Winter travel would be to start from the same point, but follow the Kansas river valley for the sake of the wood, and when that gives out cross to the Arkansas, which is not far off, and level between, and follow that up for wood. The prairie is the way in the Summer, but Winter traveling must have the protection of woods and timber against snow storms. And every thing that I tell I can show, and would undertake to guide a party safe through with wagons now.

ANTOINE LEROUX.  
WASHINGTON CITY, March 1, 1853.