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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

Col. Fremont's Disaster

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Col. Fremont's Disaster.

Mr. Kern, who made one of Col. Fremont's party in his late disastrous attempt to cross the mountains, writes to a friend, Mr. A. Robideaux, of St. Joseph, many particulars of the sad event, which are new, as well as deeply interesting. We find them in the St. Joseph Gazette, of the 13th inst.

Mr. Kern says that, to Bent's Fort, every thing went well. Williams, an old guide, was with them, and gave confidence to all.

"Leaving Hard Scrabble, we continued up its creek into the mountains. As we advanced, the snow increased. Crossing the first range, we fell upon the waters of the Wappanah, passing through the mountains to the Del Norte, by your old waggon road—the snow still increasing.

"We continued a couple of days on the Del Norte, and then turned up what Williams called your pass on the Compadne. In this he was evidently mistaken, for a worse road I never saw. We went up on the Canon, our animals falling and the snow deepening every step we took, bidding fair, as it subsequently turned out, to defeat our crossing. On the 15th of December we attempted to cross what we supposed to be the dividing ridge between St. Johns and the waters of the Del Norte, but were driven back by the storm. The next day we returned to it again, and were successful enough to get on the other side to a small clump of pines. We unpacked our animals on a bare point, and drove them to the hill-top, in hopes of their finding a sufficiency of food for a day, as the snow had drifted from it in places. From this hill they never came again; the storm continuing, and having no shelter, they perished. Camp then commenced making portages, in hopes of reaching the river.

"By hard labor we worked our way gradually down. On the 26th, King was sent ahead with Old Bill to Abaque, to bring us relief, while we were to continue down. On the 11th of January, he not arriving, the Colonel became anxious, and started with his mess and Godey, in hopes of meeting the relief party. Our provisions had given out, and we were living on parefleshes and tug ropes. Already Proux had perished from hunger and exposure. On the 16th, all having reached the river, we made our little packs of bedding, and with our rifles started for—God only knew where. Here commenced our greatest suffering. The company had for its head Vincent Haler, about as contemptible and cowardly a fellow as ever walked; his own lack of courage quickly diffused itself among the men—so you may suppose how things went on.

"Probably up to the 29th we had lost nine men. Our mess and another had made our final camp. We were blind from the snow, and unable to see the sights of our rifles. A dead wolf was all we had to sustain life among nine men. I had closed all my affairs, and felt that a day or two more would end my troubles, when, about noon on 'the 28th, we heard a shout, and Godey entered the camp. Here ended our troubles. From him we learned the fate of King's party, who had been found by him on his way down on the 16th. Poor King had died from exhaustion somewhere about the 9th; the rest were in a miserable condition—frozen and partly crazed. They had given up all hopes of returning to us with relief.

"Thus ended the expedition—commenced, so far as outfit was concerned, under as flattering prospects as ever one started. The loss in dollars has amounted to over ten thousand—in life, ten."