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Route for the Overland Stage

Jesse G. Petersen

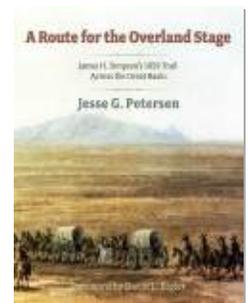
Published by Utah State University Press

Petersen, G..

Route for the Overland Stage: James H. Simpson's 1859 Trail Across the Great Basin.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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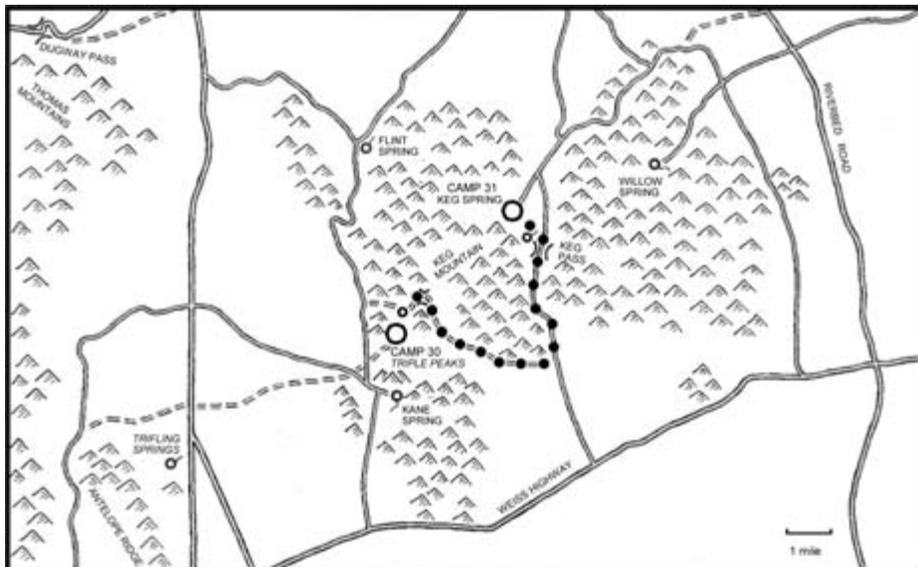
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Eleven

Triple Peaks to Camp Floyd



Camp 30-E. The campsite was in the foreground. This area is in a large cove about midway along the western base of Keg Mountain. *“Late in the afternoon...we were obliged to halt and encamp for the night in a locality near some triple peaks, where there was neither grass nor water.”*



JULY 30, 1859

JULY 30, CAMP NO. 30, NEAR TRIPLE PEAKS.—*We strike our course northeastwardly to one of the springs we hoped to reach yesterday. The animals look sorry enough, and if they do not get water soon, must perish. On our way we were met by Mr. Reese with the remaining animals. He reports he found the other spring through the happy circumstance of meeting a crippled Indian, who showed it to him, just at the time he was despairing of finding it. It is about a mile to the northwest of the first spring. After proceeding in a general northern direction 5.6 miles, or 2.6 miles farther than Stevenson said it would be, we came to one of the springs and encamped.*¹

PREVIOUS TO SETTING OUT that morning, Private Kennedy, at about 9:00 o'clock returned to the camp and reported that the group he had been with had not been able to find the spring they were looking for until after it had gotten light. When they finally found it, they discovered that it was just a small seep, and they would have to do some digging before the animals would be able to get any water from it. The problem was, they did not have anything to dig with. Simpson immediately instructed Sergeant Miller to take some shovels to the spring so that the men who had remained there could dig it out. This apparently did some good, because at about noon the herd that had been at this spring arrived back in camp. Someone in this group reported that the other herd, which included Simpson's own horse, had strayed away during the night. Reese and the other men who had been with that herd were now searching for the missing animals.

Simpson ordered the returning mules to be hitched to the wagons immediately so that they could get moving again. At that time there were not enough animals at the camp to make up teams for all the wagons, so one of the wagons had to be left behind until a team could be sent back for it.

Simpson made some additional comments about the crippled Indian and the efforts the men were making to get water out of the springs. He returned to the subject of the day's journey, and added some further information about the route.

*Our route to-day was across a divide about a mile from last camp, and then down a cañon, to within a mile of Sevier Lake Desert on southeast side of these mountains, and then up a ravine across the crest again of the mountain to the north slope of cañon, leading down to Salt Lake Desert, or Sevier Lake Desert, as the dividing rim is scarcely perceptible. Road Good. Journey 5.6 miles.*²

This proved to be a difficult description to follow. A major part of the difficulty was caused by Simpson's mileage figures. After studying these descriptions at length, plotting various alternate routes on the map, and making a number of trips to the area, I have concluded that the route they followed during this day's travel was as described below.

Upon leaving the camp, they headed in a northerly direction, climbing up the slope through a shallow draw. There is no road or trail in this area today, but I have hiked it a couple times in both directions, and do not believe that this route would have presented any problems for the wagons. After about a quarter of a mile, they rounded the point of a low ridge and made a turn to the northeast. After crossing a low spot on the ridge, they descended its northern slope through another draw. At about six-tenths of a mile from the camp, they reached the bottom of a shallow canyon that runs down the western slope of the mountain. Today, a seldom-used jeep trail follows the almost-always-dry streambed along the bottom of this canyon. When the expedition reached this streambed, they turned to the right and began climbing toward the main ridge of the western half of Keg Mountain. After traveling another half mile, they reached the summit of a low pass that is just slightly over a mile from the campsite. Immediately after crossing this summit, they turned to the southeast. Following a route that went down another shallow canyon, they came to a relatively flat area that forms a large cove in the south side of the mountain. This was the section of the route that Simpson was talking about when he said they went "down a cañon, to within a mile of Sevier Lake Desert on southeast side of these mountains." Here they turned in an easterly direction, keeping as close to the southern base of the rugged foothills as they could. At

about four and a quarter miles from camp, they came to the mouth of a narrow canyon that leads northward to Keg Pass. Simpson was referring to this canyon when he said they went up a "ravine." Turning into this canyon, they crossed the summit at Keg Pass and, after descending the northern slope for a short distance, came to a small spring and began to set up a camp.

JUNE 1999

Knowing that my father-in-law had spent a lot of time in this part of the country when he worked as a government trapper, I asked him if he knew of any trails that crossed the western ridge of Keg Mountain. He said that he was aware of only one way to get across this ridge, and he would be happy to show it to me. A few days later, we drove to the west side of Keg Mountain by following a road that comes from the north. When we reached a point about midway along the ridge, we turned eastward into the mountain, following the bottom of a narrow ravine. It was plain to see that during a heavy rainstorm, the ravine would be filled with water, but it was also apparent that it was regularly used as a jeep trail. After about a mile and three-quarters, we crossed the ridge and began to drop down into the large cove on the south side of the mountain. It was quite apparent that the expedition's wagons could have followed this route across Keg Mountain's western ridge. Today's jeep trail does not cross the ridge at the same place that the expedition did, but makes a turn to the north a short distance before reaching the summit, and then goes another two-tenths of a mile before crossing the ridge at a slightly lower spot. This little variation in the route makes a less steep approach to the top of the ridge, but the spot where it crosses the ridge is too far from the campsite. Simpson said the summit was a mile from the camp. The summit that is on the trail that is used today is 1.3 miles from where I believe they camped, while the summit that I believe was crossed by the expedition is slightly less than 1.1 miles.

I am quite certain that this route is the only way that the expedition could have gotten to the interior of Keg Mountain from its western side. But Simpson's distance figures for this section of

the route do not work. In the text of the report, Simpson stated that the distance between the two camps was 5.6 miles. Differing only slightly, the table of distances lists the mileage as 5.7 miles. When I measure it, I get 8.6 miles. Feeling that this discrepancy was too much to simply ignore, I spent a considerable amount of time and effort attempting to find a shorter route through this rugged terrain. I finally had to conclude that there is no other feasible route, and that Simpson's figures for this section of the trail were wrong.

When the expedition reached what Simpson called the ravine, they turned to the north and climbed to the summit of Keg Pass. From there they dropped down the north slope of the ridge for about two-tenths of a mile, and came to the small spring where the soldiers had been digging. Upon reaching this spot, they immediately went about setting up camp, but it did not take them long to realize that their problems were far from over.

Greatly to our disappointment I found it affording but a very small quantity of water; scarcely enough for cooking purposes. Every effort was made, however, by cleaning out the cavity, to collect the water with the greatest possible economy; but after all we could do we could only water the animals by successive bucketfuls, and that at intervals of several minutes. At this rate it was evident that the animals would die before we could satisfy them.³

During my many visits to this area over the past few years, I have never found any surface water at the spot where this spring must have been. However, it must be kept in mind that all of these visits have taken place during a period of fairly serious drought. Even though I have never seen any water here, I have observed a good growth of a type of bunch grass that is usually found where there is some subsurface moisture.

I then visited, with Lieutenants Putnam and Murry, the other spring, about a mile to the northwest, and found scarcely a pint of water in it. Notice, bearing magnetically N. 20 E., probably 12 miles off, in the Champlin Mountains [Simpson Mountains], what appears to be a creek [Death Canyon Creek] and plenty of grass.⁴

The first sentence of the above comment makes it very clear there were two different springs in this area. The first one was the slow seep just below the Keg Pass summit. The second, which Simpson at first referred to as the "other spring," was located about a mile to the northwest, and it was the one that the crippled Indian had shown to Reese. There can be little doubt that this second spring was today's Keg Spring, and it is the one that Simpson named Good Indian Spring in honor of Quah-not, the crippled Indian, who lived near it.

At first glance, Simpson seems to contradict himself regarding the location of the camp. First, he states that immediately after reaching the first spring they set up camp: "After proceeding in a general northern direction...we came to one of the springs *and encamped*" (emphasis added). But on his map, in the table of distances, and in two separate places in the text, he indicates that the camp was at Good Indian Spring, which was the second spring that he came to. After wondering about this apparent contradiction for quite some time, it finally occurred to me that they could have camped at both places. Since neither of the springs provided much water, it would make sense for the expedition to have used both of them. Perhaps some of the men stayed at the first spring, while others moved on to Keg Spring. Although it is doubtful that the exact circumstances will ever be known for certain, I think it is quite likely that the main camp was at Keg Spring.

Now to get back to the events that occurred after the expedition arrived at the first spring. When Simpson realized that this small spring was never going to provide enough water for their needs, he took Lieutenants Putnam and Murry and went to Keg Spring. Although they found very little water, their trip was not completely fruitless. When they reached the spring, they could look across the valley to the east and see the Simpson Mountains and a stream flowing down its southwestern slope. They were looking at Death Canyon, which is in clear view from the ridge just above Keg Spring, but out of sight behind the eastern ridge of Keg Mountain from the first spring. An unlimited source of water was now within sight. The next thing to do was to get the animals to the water. The three officers

immediately returned to the first spring, where the main body of the expedition was waiting.

As soon as possible send all the mules except the weakest; which can be watered here, to said creek, under care of four dragoons and eight teamsters, Mr. Reese and the old crippled Indian we have found here going along as guides....The spring which he showed us, and near which he has his wick-e-up, I call the Good Indian Spring, after this Good Samaritan Indian....The mountains in which we are encamped I call after Major Irvin McDowell, assistant adjutant-general....The springs near us are represented by the good Indian as having been made by some horse-thieves (white men) about a year and a half ago.⁵

When Simpson returned to the first spring, he immediately detailed a few of the soldiers and teamsters to take most of the animals to the water at the base of the Simpson Mountains. It was probably at about this time that Simpson decided to move at least a part of the expedition to Keg Spring. Due to the fact that the two springs were providing enough water for the men's needs, the main body of the expedition remained at these camps for an extra day and night. Someone was sent back to retrieve the wagon that had been left behind at the triple peaks campsite. Everyone else settled down to spend some time recovering from the rigors of the past few days. William Lee's journal gives a brief description of this day's events:

Saturday, July 30th. Did not leave camp until afternoon, the mules having stampeded in search of water, not having had any all night. We at last started with a majority of the mules, and having to put in a part of the riding mules, we left one of the wagons behind, and marching five and two-thirds miles, came to camp at a small spring with just enough water for cooking purposes. The mules were driven twelve miles to a spring for water. It seems this place has been used as a hiding place for horse thieves and stolen animals. Some of the men found a fine large stone corralle up in the mountains near here, which Pete, our Indian, thinks was built by Tintic (a Ute Indian) for a large number of stolen horses.⁶

The concept that I had developed relating to the expedition's route through Keg Mountain had been based solely on my own reading of Simpson's report, and my visits to the area. It was not until much later that I learned that someone else also believed that the expedition had traveled into the interior of Keg Mountain. In 2002, I was looking at the index for the *Utah Historical Quarterly*, and noticed a reference to an article about Good Indian Spring. I immediately followed up on this, and learned that in 1984, the *Quarterly* had published an article written by Owen Bennion, in which he concluded that Simpson's Good Indian Spring was the same as today's Keg Spring.⁷ Bennion had spent several years living and working on a family ranch in the Old Riverbed area, just east of Keg Mountain, and had traveled into the interior of the mountain on numerous occasions.

Although Bennion and I had both concluded that Good Indian Spring and Keg Spring are one and the same, our theories about how the expedition got to this location are different. The map that accompanies his article shows the trail as following the Weiss Highway from Topaz Mountain to the south side of Keg Mountain, then turning north to go over Keg Pass, instead of crossing the western ridge of the mountain, as I believe it did. (See map for July 28 and 29.) As I see it, the problem with Bennion's theory of the route is that he does not account for the trifling springs loop on Simpson's map, the location of the Triple Peaks camp, the divide that was crossed at one mile from this campsite, and the fact that after crossing the divide, they traveled in a southeasterly direction down a canyon. Bennion's route and my route come together at the point where the expedition started up the ravine that leads to Keg Pass.

Also of interest is a footnote to Bennion's article that relates to the origin of Keg Spring's name:

*My father, Glynn S. Bennion (a historian and rancher), once told me that Keg Spring was so named because of a keg, half buried in the mud of the spring, found by the California immigrants who camped there on their way to the gold fields. Keg Mountain got its name from the spring.*⁸

It is certainly possible that this local legend has some basis in fact. Although they were not necessarily going to the gold fields, we do know that some emigrants did follow Simpson's route to Keg Spring. In his 1859 journal, Edward Mathews indicated that his small party camped at what he called "Indian Springs" on the night of August 15.⁹ A few weeks later, Bolivar Roberts, a Chorpenning employee, reported that he had found an emigrant party camped at "Indian Spring."¹⁰

AUGUST 1, 1859

AUGUST 1, CAMP NO. 31, GOOD INDIAN SPRING.—9 A.M. *The mules which were sent to water night before last are momentarily expected, but we think it best to get the mules we have with us to the next water as soon as possible, since the spring where we are is so small that, without the use of troughs to collect and economize the water, but few can be watered satisfactorily. The civil portion of my party, with three wagons, therefore, move forward, leaving the balance to follow us as soon as the other mules arrive.*¹¹

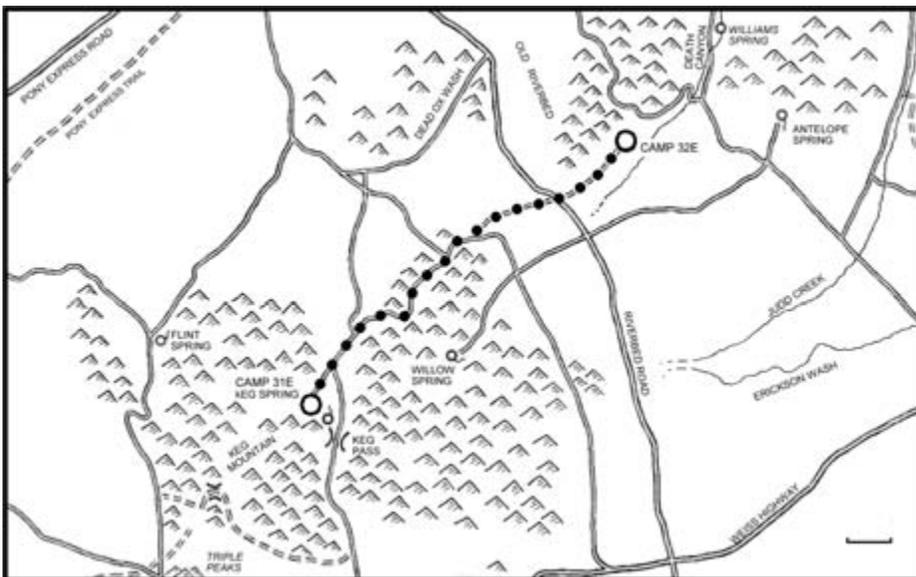
ON THE MORNING of August 1, even though some of the animals had not yet been brought back to the camp, Simpson decided to start moving again. The men hitched up the teams that were available, and began moving down the north slope of Keg Mountain.

*Pass down cañon, in a northwardly direction, through a thick grove of cedars, over a rolling country, skirting McDowell Mountains to our right, and in about seven miles reach a desert valley or plain running southeastwardly from Great Salt Lake Valley into Sevier Valley. In about two miles more, reach west foot of bench of Champlin Mountains, and encamp at half past 2 within about two miles of good and abundant water and grass in cañon of the mountains to which the mules are driven. Journey 9.2 miles.... The spring, creek and canyon near our camp I call after Assistant Surgeon Thomas H. Williams, United States Army.*¹²

The expedition was following what is now a fairly well-traveled road down the north slope



Camp 31-E. Keg Spring. This was the second spring and the second place that they set up camp after crossing Keg Pass. *"I then visited, with Lieutenants Putnam and Murry, the other spring about a mile to the northwest. . . . I call [it] Good Indian Spring, after the Good Samaritan Indian."*



AUGUST 1, 1859





Wagon ruts found by the author and Jim Hall about a tenth of a mile west of Camp 32-E. The cut-downs are difficult to see in the photo but are very distinct when looking at them on-site. Jim stands at the spot where the wagon road crosses the bottom of the gully.

of Keg Mountain. This road soon begins to circle toward the east, and eventually to the south. The expedition left this road when they were 5.6 miles from the camp, just before it makes a bend to the south. After leaving today's road, the expedition's route took them along the north side of a shallow draw until they reached the valley floor. The very bottom of this valley was once the channel of a sizeable northward-flowing stream, and is now known as Old Riverbed. After crossing this area, they began climbing the southwestern slope of the Simpson Mountains. After climbing up the slope for about a mile, they went into camp a short distance to the south of a long and narrow knoll that projects into Old Riverbed, and is aptly named the Snow Plow. This campsite was about two miles southwest of the mouth

of Death Canyon, and about a half mile northwest of the streambed that is now known as Death Canyon Wash. Simpson gave the name of Williams to the creek, the canyon, and a spring. Both Simpson and William Lee mentioned that the camp was about two miles from Williams Spring. In his report relating to his post-expedition work detail, Lt. Smith said the campsite was three miles from Williams Spring.¹³ This spring must have been located in Death Canyon Wash, about two miles from the campsite, and about a mile from the mouth of Death Canyon. It is not marked on modern maps, and I have not been able to find it. The nearest spring that can be found in this region today is Antelope Spring, which is up high on the bench, and nearly four miles from the campsite.

SEPTEMBER 2004

I had been examining some aerial photos of the eastern side of Keg Mountain when I observed a faint trail that I had never noticed before. This trace begins at the bend where the expedition's route leaves today's road, and continues down the slope to the bottom of the valley. I had previously believed that the expedition had followed the bottom of the drainage, and I had hiked this route about a year before. The track I now saw on the photo is on the ridge on the north side of the wash. A few days later, Nancy and I drove to this area and, after a little searching, found the almost totally abandoned two-track at the point where it crosses Riverbed Road.

Turning west onto this trail, we headed up the slope toward Keg Mountain. The going was very slow, and on two or three occasions, I had to get out of our SUV and scout ahead to make sure we were still on the trail. We eventually reached today's well-traveled road near the bend. Another section of the trail had been located and traveled.

MARCH 2007

Jim Hall and I made a trip to the southwestern base of the Simpson Mountains to visit the site of Camp 32-E. I had been in this general area several times before, but after some additional study of Google Earth images, I decided that I had placed the campsite too far from the base of the mountain. The purpose of this trip was to make an on-site visit to the new location, to see if it was a place where they could have camped and, if so, to take photographs and GPS readings. Relying on my GPS to take us to the site, we left Riverbed Road and began following a faint two-track in an easterly direction. We were able to drive to a spot that was just a little over a half mile from the new location. Leaving my SUV on the old two-track, we set off on foot in a southeasterly direction and soon arrived at the campsite. We found that it was a smooth and almost level area that would have been a good location for a camp. Looking to the east, we could see a gap in the old lake-level bench, through which the stream coming out of Death Canyon would have flowed. Looking to the west, we could see the old two-track that

marks the expedition's trail as it comes down the east slope of Keg Mountain. The trail was heading straight toward us, but it disappeared after crossing the bottom of the valley. Since Simpson's map shows that this section of the trail traveled a straight line, we decided to walk toward the section of the trail that we could see. There were no traces of a trail near the campsite, but we wanted to see if we could find anything farther to the west. It did not take long. After walking for a little over a tenth of a mile, we came to a shallow gully and found clearly visible road cut-downs on both banks. After another hundred yards, we came to a slightly deeper gully, and it also had cut-downs on both banks. Although no trail is visible approaching or leaving either of the gullies, the cut-downs clearly mark the expedition's route as it approached the campsite.

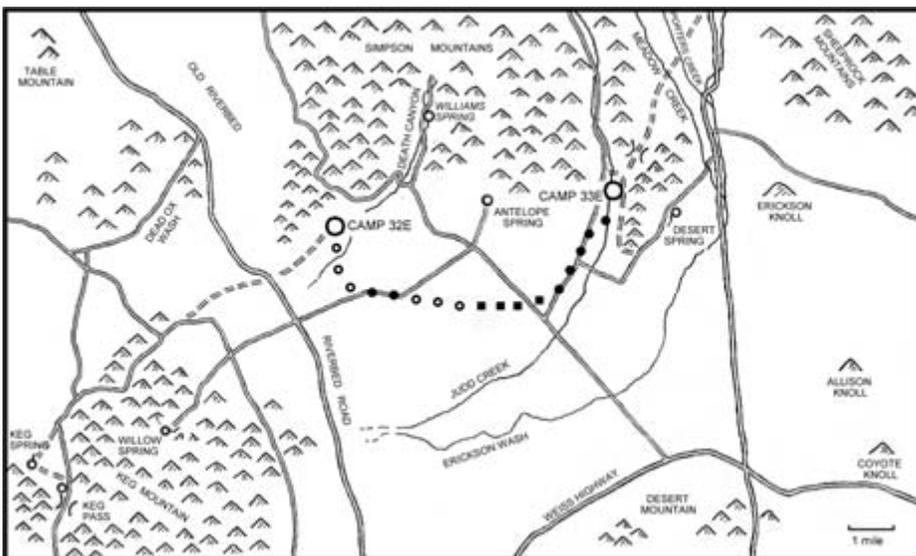
 AUGUST 2, 1859

AUGUST 2, CAMP NO. 32, WILLIAM'S SPRING.—At 5 A.M., after getting breakfast, the whole party moved forward; general course eastwardly, around the southwest base of Champlin Mountains [Simpson Mountains]....At half past 12 we reach a creek [Judd Creek] flowing from the Champlin Mountains, upon which we encamp....I call it after Maj. Henry Prince, paymaster United States Army. The road to-day, in places, stony and rough, and occasionally hilly, on account of ravines....The animals have been scarcely able to get the wagons to camp, so much have they suffered for the past few days on account of the absence of water and incessant traveling.¹⁴

THIS WAS ONE of the few times that Simpson failed to mention the distance traveled in the narrative portion of the report. But it is found in the table of distances, and it was 8.7 miles. A straight line between the two camps would measure six and a half miles, but the nature of the terrain forced them to take a route that circled around the southern base of the Simpson Mountains. Although there are several roads crisscrossing this area, except for the last mile and a half, none of them follows the route that the expedition traveled during the first seven miles of this day's journey.



Camp 32-E. Near the southwestern base of Simpson Mountains: “reach west foot of bench of Champlin Mountains, and encamp. . . within about two miles of good and abundant water and grass.” The animals would have been taken through the gap in the center of the photo.



AUGUST 2, 1859





Judd Creek is marked by the band of dark willows in the center of the photo. An old two-track can be seen approaching the crossing.

The stream that Simpson called Prince's Creek is now known as Judd Creek. Several abandoned ranch buildings can be found near the mouth of Judd Canyon, and an occasionally used two-track road comes from the southeast and crosses the stream at this point. Simpson's map indicates that the campsite was on the east bank of the stream. It appears to me that it was about a quarter of a mile downstream from today's crossing, and about the same distance upstream from where traces of a completely abandoned road crossed the creek at one time. Between the two crossings, and for a couple of miles below the abandoned crossing, steep banks make access to the stream difficult, if not impossible. But at the abandoned crossing, the banks on both sides are considerably less steep, and the old road is still

visible. After fording the creek, the expedition made its way upstream for about three-tenths of a mile and made camp for the night.

This camp would be Simpson's last. The next day he and Ute Pete would leave the wagons and ride all the way to Camp Floyd without stopping for an overnight camp. The other members of the expedition members would spend two more nights on the trail. Simpson's report does not say anything about the two remaining camps, but their locations are listed in the table of distances.

AUGUST 3, 1859

AUGUST 3, CAMP NO. 33, PRINCE'S CREEK.—
*Start at quarter to 6, in advance of party for Camp
Floyd, Pete accompanying. Continue up Prince*

*Creek for half a mile, and then leave it to left, and pass up a branch cañon, filled with cedars, one-half mile more, to summit of pass, These cañons are of good grade. From summit of pass by pretty good descent, get into a valley, which I call after Maj. Fitz John Porter, assistant adjutant-general.*¹⁵

FROM THE SOUTHEAST CORNER of the Simpson Mountains, a relatively low ridge extends even further southward for about two miles. Judd Creek flows through a shallow canyon that lies between the main part of the mountain and this ridge, and Camp 33-E was located about midway along its length. A two-track road circles around the southern tip of the ridge, and I had traveled on it a number of times before I ever started researching Simpson's trail. When I began studying Simpson's route, I assumed that this road around the south end of the ridge would have been the expedition's route. However, as soon as I started making measurements of the distances, it became apparent that this assumption was wrong. I found that a route around the tip of this ridge would be at least three miles longer than the distance given by Simpson, so I began looking for possible alternatives. As I carefully re-read Simpson's description of the route he traveled that day, I realized that I had overlooked his statement that after leaving the camp, he had traveled upstream. His exact words were "continue *up* Prince Creek for half a mile, and then leave it to left, and pass up a branch cañon" (emphasis added). This statement eliminated the possibility that he had gone around the southern tip of the ridge, because in order to do that he would have had to have traveled downstream from the campsite. So I began looking at the area to the north of the campsite, and soon found a small canyon cutting into the ridge in a northeasterly direction. Taking some measurements along this route, I found that the distance matched Simpson's mileage figures almost exactly.

JULY 2000

During my next trip to the Judd Creek area, I drove past Desert Spring and around the southern tip of the ridge, as I had done many times in the past, but this time I kept to the right instead of crossing the creek near the

abandoned ranch buildings. After a short distance, I reached the mouth of the little canyon. To my surprise, I found myself on an old road that was heading into the canyon. Although it was rough and rocky, and I had to keep dodging the juniper trees that overhang the narrow road, I soon found myself at the summit of the ridge. This road appears to have seen a lot of use in the past, but has obviously been abandoned for many years. Just below the summit, on the north side of the slope, an ungated fence has been built across the road, and just beyond that, the road has been completely washed out for several yards. Turning around at the summit, I drove back down the canyon, then back around the southern tip of the ridge, then north again along its eastern base. A little exploring in this area failed to turn up a road that would take me back to the trail, so I parked at Black Spring and began hiking the three and a half miles back to the summit of the little canyon. I headed southwest on an abandoned road that turned out to be the same as the road that crosses the ridge above Judd Creek. Near the center of the valley, I lost the old road for a short distance, but it reappeared as I approached the foothills, and I was able to follow it all the way to the summit. Modern USGS maps show a jeep trail between the summit and Meadow Creek, but the sections of the road that I found between Judd Creek and the summit, and between Meadow Creek and Black Spring, do not appear on the maps.

Simpson referred to the area lying east of the Simpson Mountains and south of Erickson Pass as Porter Valley, naming it after a major in the US Army. Although this name is not in common use today, many of those who are aware of it are under the mistaken impression that it came from Orrin Porter Rockwell, who lived for some time on a ranch that was located about five miles to the north, in the south end of Skull Valley. But Rockwell did not stake out his ranch until several years after Simpson had named the little valley after the officer who was General Johnston's adjutant.¹⁶

Proceeding northwardly through this valley, in 2.3 miles cross Porter's Creek; 2.7 miles more brings us to the slight rim or divide [Erickson Pass] between



The author believes that this spring in the channel of Government Creek is the one that Simpson named Brewer's Spring.

*Skull Valley and Porter Valley, and 3.2 miles more to a spring, which I call after Assistant Surgeon Charles Brewer, United States Army.*¹⁷

In Porter Valley, at about two miles northeast of the summit of the ridge, Simpson's trail crossed a rather sizable streambed that is marked on the maps as Meadow Creek. This was not the creek that he mentioned in the report. After another half mile, he came to the stream that he called Porter's Creek. Meadow Creek is almost always dry, but Porter's Creek is fed by a couple of small springs, and always has at least a small amount of water flowing in it. Perhaps this explains why Simpson did not mention Meadow Creek. After crossing Porter's Creek, Simpson and Ute Pete continued in a northeasterly direction until they reached today's Erickson Pass Road near Black Spring. Turning

directly north here, they crossed Erickson Pass and dropped down the northern slope into the southern end of Skull Valley, where they came to Brewer's Spring. Lee's journal does not mention a name for the spring, but he does say that it was in Tintic Valley, which seems to have been the name for the entire area to the south of Rush Valley at that time.¹⁸

In the text of his report, Simpson stated that after crossing a rim or divide, which is clearly Erickson Pass, he traveled 3.2 miles and came to a spring, which he named for the assistant surgeon, Charles Brewer. The table gives a different mileage figure, indicating that it was 2.8 miles from the summit to the spring. I have been unable to find a reasonable explanation for this discrepancy, but I am quite certain that I have found Brewer's Spring. At 2.8 miles northwest from Erickson Pass, right in the channel of

Government Creek, there is a spring that produces a constant and fairly substantial flow of water.

Simpson mentioned the spring in his report, but did not say anything about a stream. However, Lt. Smith did mention the existence of a creek in the report of his return trip to the Drum Mountain area. Two weeks following the completion of this assignment, Smith addressed a report to Simpson in which he said that he had followed “Brewer’s Creek” while traveling southward on a new trail. This new trail left the expedition’s outbound route at the western base of Lookout Pass, and eventually brought Smith to Brewer’s Spring, which was where Simpson and the expedition had made an abrupt turn to the east. Smith’s report included a description of the route he followed to Brewer’s Spring.

On the morning of the 7th I moved west, through Johnston’s Pass, to its west foot. Here, as directed by you, I left the beaten road, and turning to the left, moved up a ravine which leads into Johnston’s Pass from the south [Little Valley], and furnishes a path thence into the ravine of Brewer’s Spring and Creek. The distance by the odometer from the point where I left Johnston’s Pass to the point where I struck the ravine of Brewer’s Creek is eight miles and four-tenths....From the point where I struck the ravine of Brewer’s Creek I moved up that ravine to your recent return trail from California, a distance of three miles.¹⁹

It appears that Smith’s route took him south through Little Valley, then southwest until he struck Government Creek. Following Government Creek upstream for three miles, he came to the expedition’s trail at the point where it turned to the east. This was also the place where the expedition camped on the night of August 3, and I am certain that this campsite was near the presently-unnamed spring that I found in the streambed of Government Creek. Although there is an abandoned road that leads from Erickson Pass Road to the area where this spring is located, a locked gate prevents vehicular access.

SEPTEMBER 2001

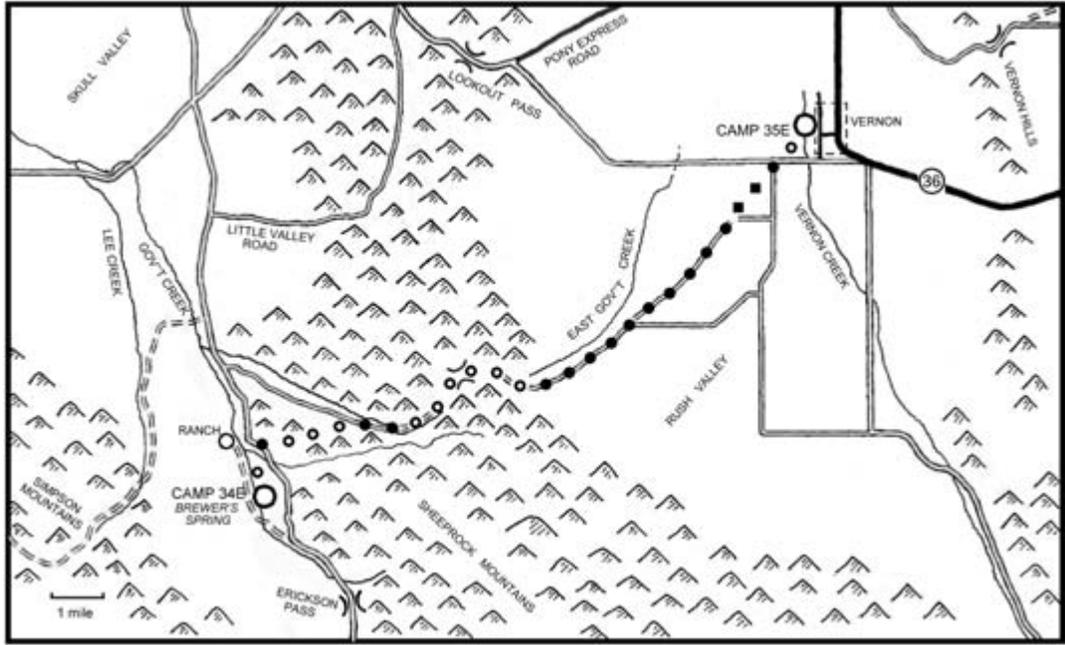
Louis Dunyon and I drove to the Government Creek area in an attempt to find Brewer’s Spring.

We had examined a USGS 7.5-minute map of the area, and had found the symbol for a spring in the Government Creek channel, and it appeared that this spring was located at the correct distance from Erickson Pass. When we reached the area, we found a four-wheel-drive trail that took us to the creek at a spot about a quarter mile downstream from the spring. We walked upstream along the east bank of the creek until we came to the general area of the spring. We had a GPS receiver with us, programmed with the approximate coordinates of the spring, but we could not be entirely certain that we ever arrived at the right place. The problem was that on that day, there was a substantial flow of water coming down the creek, and we could not tell whether or not there was a spring in the channel. Three years later, near the end of a very dry summer, I returned to this area again. There was no water in the streambed above the spring, and this time the existence of the spring was obvious. As soon as I saw it, I realized that Lou and I had been at the correct place during our earlier trip. In the very bottom of the streambed, I found a pool of water about six feet in diameter and about three or four feet in depth. Flowing out of the pool was enough water to produce a stream that was nearly a foot deep.

The names Brewer’s Spring and Brewer’s Creek did not survive for long. By 1864, emigrant journals were mentioning a Government Spring, which I believe was about three miles to the north of Brewer’s Spring.²⁰ Some maps from the mid-1860s show a Government Spring in this general area.²⁰ It is probably safe to assume that the nearby stream had begun to be called Government Creek at about this same time. What might be a clue to the origin of this name is found in Charles Tuttle’s journal. On August 8, 1859, he wrote: “We encamped for noon on a small stream where there was a large herd of cattle kept they are principally cattle which have been brought through by *government* trains and Freight Trains” (emphasis added).²¹ The earliest map showing Government Creek that I have seen is an 1873 mining district map that I found in the Hutchings Museum in Lehi, Utah, but it does not show Government Spring.



Camp 34-E. The campsite was in the foreground, on the east bank of Government Creek. Brewer's Spring is in the streambed at the end of the fence that slants across the left side of the photo.



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AUGUST 3 AND 4, 1859

 AUGUST 3 AND 4, 1859

ON AUGUST 3, Simpson and Ute Pete passed by Brewer's Spring and climbed over the Sheeprock Mountains to the east. The main body of the expedition traveled this section of the route on August 4, 1859.

Turning northeast, or to the right, in 2.3 miles you reach, by a pretty good ascent, the summit of the Guyot range [Sheeprock Mountains], by what I call Oak Pass [Government Creek Pass], about 5 miles south of General Johnston's Pass [Lookout Pass]. This pass leads, across the Guyot range of mountains, to Rush Valley.... Two miles from summit reach east foot of pass in Rush Valley.²²

I have been unable to find a name for the summit of this pass on any modern maps, but the 1873 mining district map shows it as "Govt Cañon." It is found on the ridge of the Sheeprock Mountains, between East Government Creek and Government Creek, and very close to six miles south of Lookout Pass. My USGS maps did not indicate a road going over this pass, and after making a couple of trips to the base of the mountain on both sides of the pass, I realized that if I wanted to follow Simpson's trail across this mountain, it would have to be on foot.

SEPTEMBER 1999

I drove part way up the canyon of East Government Creek, and then hiked for about a mile to the summit. A few days later, I drove to the west side of the mountain and part of the way up Government Creek, then hiked about two miles to the summit. On both sides of the pass, I found indications of what appeared to be a long-abandoned road. On the east side, the trail was quite well defined all the way to the summit. On the west side, the traces were very faint, and almost nonexistent in some places. I am certain that this was the route used by the Simpson expedition, and it is almost certain that many other wagons also traveled this trail. The 1873 mining map indicates that it was a usable wagon road. In the summer of 2004, I made another trip up the east side of the mountain to obtain an on-site GPS reading at the summit. I

found that ATV riders have discovered this trail, and what had been a fading track in 1999 has now become a well-worn trail that is channeling run-off water from the slopes above. The old trail is becoming a deep wash. I do not know what is happening on the western slope, but I fear the worst.

 AUGUST 3 AND 5, 1859

From east foot of pass strike northeastwardly across Rush Valley for Camp Floyd Pass, in 6.7 miles crossing Meadow Creek, a flowing stream, 4 feet wide and 6 inches deep, and along which are good camping places.²³

WHEN I FIRST ATTEMPTED to plot the trail across Rush Valley, I had assumed that Simpson had turned to the northeast at the mouth of East Government Canyon and had followed the streambed for some distance. As a result, I initially placed Simpson's crossing of Meadow Creek a little over a mile north of the town of Vernon. The site of this crossing is important, because it is also the place where the main body of the expedition camped that night. Finding that there are no roads that follow, or even come close to, the route that I had plotted, I hiked all the way from the mouth of East Government Creek Canyon to where I thought the crossing and campsite would have been. Three years later, I found that I had been wrong. I was looking at some aerial photos of the area, attempting to make some more precise measurements, when I noticed some faint marks that appeared to be a trail of some sort. I could see that this faint trail leaves today's road at the mouth of East Government Creek Canyon, but instead of following the streambed, it continues in a fairly straight line for some distance. Following these marks on the photos, I found that they gradually turned to the northeast, and then faded out as they approached Vernon. By extending a line from the portion of the trail that is still visible, I found that it comes to Vernon Creek where the stream is the nearest to the center of the town. Taking some measurements on the map, I found that this trail reaches the creek at the distance that was indicated by Simpson.

OCTOBER 2005

A few days after finding the marks on the aerial photos, Jim Hall and I drove to the area southwest of Vernon to see if we could find the trail. He parked his vehicle just south of the town and rode with me to the mouth of East Government Creek Canyon. Heading east on foot, we immediately found the old road and were able to follow it almost all the way to Vernon. We found that in a few short sections, the trail has entirely disappeared, and in one long section, it has become a stream-capture channel that is nearly four feet deep in some places. I am certain that this trail was once a well-traveled wagon road, and because it fits so well with Simpson's mileage figures, I am convinced that it was the route he followed through this area. When I examined the 1873 mining district map from the museum in Lehi, I found that it shows what appears to be a usable road that comes from the Judd Creek area, crosses the Sheeprock Mountains through "Gov't Cañon," passes through Vernon and Five Mile Pass, and ends at Camp Floyd. In other words, the 1873 road follows Simpson's route all the way from the southern base of the Simpson Mountains to Camp Floyd.

In the text of his report, Simpson mentioned that he and Ute Pete crossed Meadow Creek on their way to Camp Floyd, but we have to look in the table of distances to learn that the expedition made an overnight camp on this stream, almost certainly at the point where Simpson crossed it. The name of this stream has changed a couple of times over the years. Before the ranchers of the area began to divert the water for irrigation, the stream flowed in a northerly direction through the entire length of Rush Valley. Simpson called this stream Meadow Creek, and it would seem that this name had been in use for some time. However, a map of western Utah that was published by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1872 indicates that the name was Faust Creek.²⁴ The 1873 mining district map shows it as Vernon Creek. This stream begins in the interior of the Sheeprock Mountains, about fifteen miles south of the town of Vernon, and before the water began to be diverted, it sometimes flowed all the way to the northern end of Rush Valley, where it emptied into Stockton Lake. However, even

then, the stream occasionally dried up before reaching the lake. When Simpson was camped on this stream on May 3, during the expedition's outbound trip, he described the stream as follows: "This stream, which is of gentle current, is so narrow that you can jump across it, and is but a few inches in depth. It runs northerly about ten miles and sinks."²⁵ He knew about the location of the sink because he had traveled through this area the previous October. At that time the sink of Meadow Creek would have been in the vicinity of the now-abandoned community of Center.²⁶

Today the stream that has been known as Meadow Creek, Vernon Creek, and Faust Creek has become two different streams. In the southern part of Rush Valley, it is Vernon Creek, and it dries up when it reaches a point just west of the town of Vernon. About four miles north, the second stream, which is now known as Faust Creek, comes to the surface and begins to flow up the valley, where it passes through Atherly Reservoir and dries up within two or three miles to the north. The 1858 expedition made two camps on what they called Meadow Creek. On October 19, during the westbound portion of this trip, they camped on the creek about two and a half miles north of where Pony Express Road intersects with SR 36.²⁷ Eight days later, while on the way back to Camp Floyd, they camped somewhere near the site of the Faust Pony Express station.²⁸ The 1859 expedition also made two camps on this stream that they called Meadow Creek. During their outbound journey, they camped on the present-day Faust Creek section. The eastbound camp was about six miles to the south, on the Vernon Creek section.

After crossing Vernon Creek, Simpson cut through the low pass in the Vernon Hills, then followed a straight-line route across the eastern part of Rush Valley and merged with his outbound route at Five Mile Pass. From there he continued to the east, and arrived back at Camp Floyd on the evening of August 3, 1859. The main body of the expedition camped on Vernon Creek on the night of August 4, then traveled to Camp Floyd on August 5.

After I had determined that Camp 35-E was directly west of Vernon, rather than a mile north of town, I had to find a new route through the



Camp 35-E. In southern Rush Valley, near the town of Vernon, on the east bank of Vernon Creek. *“From east foot of pass strike northeastwardly across Rush Valley, crossing Meadow Creek, a flowing stream.”*



AUGUST 3 AND 5, 1859

area to the east. This turned out to be a surprisingly easy task. Simpson did not mention it in the text of his report, but the table of distances lists a “summit between Meadow Creek and Rush Valley,” and lists the distance from the creek to the summit as 3.7 miles. It had always been clear to me that the trail would have crossed the Vernon Hills at some point, but when I had mistakenly placed the camp too far to the north, I had plotted a route that went through a low pass near the northern end of the hills. After moving the campsite to its correct location, I found that this pass was about two miles too far to the north. As I began looking to the east from the new campsite location, it quickly became apparent that the trail would have gone through a low place that lies between the two main peaks of the Vernon Hills, almost directly east of the town. The next step was to plot the route between this summit and Five Mile Pass. The route that I had earlier plotted between the wrong campsite location and Five Mile Pass had not corresponded with any existing road or trail. I had not been very concerned about that because I simply assumed that no one else had ever followed this section of the return route. But when I began looking to the east from the southern summit, I found that a straight line drawn all the way from Vernon to Five Mile Pass would fall directly on top of an existing road. It became apparent that the road between Vernon and Five Mile Pass was another section of Simpson’s trail that developed into a well-traveled road. For quite some time, this road must have been used as the main route to Vernon. Later, when the Rush Valley section of Pony Express Road was improved, it became the main road, and this more direct route that went directly from Five Mile Pass to Vernon was almost totally abandoned. Although there is very little traffic on this road today, it is occasionally graded by county road crews, and, with the exception of the first two miles directly east of Vernon,

and about a mile immediately west of Five Mile Pass, this section of the trail can easily be driven in any moderately high-clearance vehicle.

OCTOBER 2005

A few days after I had finally figured out Simpson’s actual eastbound route across Rush Valley, Nancy and I drove to this area and got onto the trail near the pass in the Vernon Hills. From there we drove eastward across Rush Valley to Five Mile Pass. This left a two-mile section between the town of Vernon and the Vernon Hills that cannot be driven in any kind of vehicle. Returning to this area a few days later, I hiked eastward from SR 36 toward the Vernon Hills, following this two-mile section of the expedition’s route.

In about 18 miles more attaining summit of Camp Floyd Pass [Five Mile Pass] and in about three miles more, at 7.15 P.M., reaching Camp Floyd. Road to-day, except as stated, through Oak Pass [Government Creek Pass], good. Journey 44.5 miles.²⁹

Early the next morning Simpson sent Ute Pete back to the main party with a number of hatchets that he thought the men could use to cut their way through the heavy brush in Oak Pass. However, the hatchets went unused because the expedition had gotten through the canyon and across the pass before meeting up with Ute Pete. That night, the expedition made camp on Vernon Creek at the spot where Simpson and Ute Pete had crossed it the previous day. William Lee wrote in his journal; “When we got to camp, we found Pete waiting for us with four days’ provisions and several lariats and hatchets.”³⁰ One has to wonder why Ute Pete had stopped at the creek instead of taking the hatchets to where they were needed. The following day, the expedition traveled the rest of the way to Camp Floyd, arriving sometime during the afternoon.