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Exploring Desert Stone

Steven K. Madsen

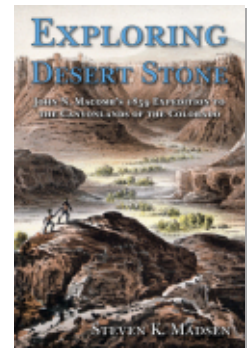
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LETTERS OF JOHN S. NEWBERRY TO
SPENCER F. BAIRD,
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The following letters provide fresh insights into the Macomb Expedition and Newberry's activities related to the survey. Newberry shared a close friendship with his mentor, Spencer F. Baird, and named his third son after him.

Newberry's handwriting is very difficult to transcribe. Hastily written, his letters reveal the energy that he devoted to his work.

* * *

On the Prairies
May 17th, 1859

My Dear Baird

We left Independence yesterday all right, and are now fairly en route—It has rained almost constantly since we left Washington, and the roads are awful!

We have a coach all to ourselves and are progressing as comfortably possible under the circumstances—

I scribble this while the boys are going to bed & can only say—We are all right so far, and beg you to write me from time to time at Fort Defiance.—With kind regards to Mrs. B.

Yours affectionately
J. S. Newberry

From the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.

* * *

Santa Fé
June 4, 1859

My dear [Spencer F.] Baird

We arrived here safely yesterday—Had rather a fatiguing journey across the plains, but have all been well[.]

Have seen Macomb, and like him very much, but as we suspect he might be slightly improved —. If you had him at the Smithsonian for a half day and could talk zoology into him all the time, I think he would be better prepared to go into the field than he now is[.] His interest in natural science is no[t] quite decided but general & abstract —

It's doubtful if we go to Ft. Defiance[,] more likely to Parawan [*sic*] & perhaps to Salt Lake —. Shall probably know by the end of the week —. Navajoes are again at war, and we are on [short rations]. Macomb has mad[e] application for 300 men as escort so we shall probably be safe but will be restricted in our movements.

Kind regards to Mrs B. & the Club.

Yours hastily, J. S. Newberry

* * *

Rio Florido
Lat. 37° 13'—Long. 108°
Aug 3d, 1859

Dear [Spencer F.] Baird[,]

Tomorrow morning I am off to an ancient Pueblo of great interest—near our present camp—& on our return—if we return, for it is a trip of some danger—Pfeiffer the indian agent returns to Santa Fé and will take our letters.—I have therefore lots to do—but take time to send you word from this far off region—to let you know that I do not forget you and the Old Smithsonian—however completely I may be forgotten there.

We are now more than 200 miles N.W. of Santa Fé in a region never before explored by whites, and a beautiful region it is.—as beautiful as any part of the continent, high cool, just now very wet, a region of picturesque mountains.—pine forest, grassy & flower decked vallies—with clear cold trout streams—with botany very like that of our northern states—a cretaceous geology of great interest—a fauna very meager. but similar to that of the great basin, generally.—Blacktailed deer. Elk. Antelope. black and grizzly bears.—badgers, coyotes—all very rare.—no rabbits, no squirrels—few birds—Stellar Jay, [Picicorvus], Melanerpes laquatus, Crossbills, Pine grosbeck, crows, magpies, ravens.—few hawks—buzzards &c.

It has rained every day or night since leaving Santa Fé—and I have been able to do little in the way of [preserving?] birds—we are [entirely] too [late] for eggs[.] I shall do however all I can though I have no help, and few facilities.

We hope to be back in Santa Fé by Oct 1st, and in the States in November We are among indians—but so far all are Utahs & friendly[.] We hear rumors of war from the indians but hope to get through safely.—

Give my love to Stimpson Foreman, Schaefer, & etc.—as well as my respects to Prof Henry[,] Mrs. Baird & other friends & [illegible] me here as Elsewhere.

Yours faithfully
J.S. Newberry

* * *

Santa Fé N.M.
Oct 1st 1859

My Dear Baird

We have just returned from our San Juan trip, all in good health, and having had a very successful and[,] barring the rain[,] a delightful excursion —.

We were gone from here only about 75 days, and of those it rained over 50. So you may judge we had rather a moist time.— I had the greatest possible difficulty in preserving zoological & botanical specimens, and indeed for a time nothing could be done in either dept. and specimens before collection were ruined.

In geology I have been more successful than I dared to hope[,] obtaining complete sections of all the rocks of this region from the base of the carboniferous (at the granite) to and into the Tertiary.—

Our route led N.W. along the southern bases of the Navajo, San Juan, Pinos, La Plata &c. Mts.—some 400 miles to the junction of Grand & Green rivers—Most of this region is delightful—fine pine forests with beautiful green & flowery vallies—traversed by trout streams coming down from the mts. The prevailing geology cretaceous of which formation I was able to make a very complete analysis —. from base to summit some 3500 feet.—The Colorado I found running in a deep canon and bordered by the wildest and most fantastic scenery to be found on the surface of the globe—Less grand but far more varied & [interesting] than that of the lower part of its course—How much much [*sic*] difficulty we had in forcing our way to the junction of the Gran[d] & Green rivers you may be able to infer from my sketches—of which I have lots.

In the Triassic? sandstones of the banks of Grand river—I found a great saurian—of which I was able by great effort to exhume & [bring?] away—the bones of one extremity nearly entire—the remainder with [its?] teeth still remaining buried in the cliff –. The femur is 31 inches long & very ponderous—It is not Pleurosauros .— Ichthyosaurus or Iguanodon—but what it is I cannot say –. I shall submit the bones to Dr. Leidy—Fortunately all my large collections of fossils were brought in safely, though often in great danger in fording large rivers[.]

From the junction of Grand & Green rivers—we struck across to the San Juan near its mouth –. Thence we followed up that river 150 miles—then struck off to Jemez, & so in—

The San Juan is a fine stream as large as the Rio Grande below here its valley productive & once inhabited by a very large population—as, the ruins of pueblos were scarcely out of sight while we were near the stream[.]

On the whole the trip was exceedingly pleasant & profitable to me—I was uniformly well & worked hard, very hard –. But every day paid. I have now seen enough of New Mexico & am ready to go home.—. In Zoology I did everything possible, but I fear you will think that very little—We remained here six weeks before starting out and I could not find a single bird's egg after we reached the field (July 20)—We start in across the plains in about 2 weeks.—& hope to reach home by the middle of Nov.—

Till then adios.

Yours affectionately

J.S. Newberry

PS. A thousand thanks for the letters & papers you sent me—& [?] to Washington [?]

* * *

Cleveland O

Nov. 25, 1859

My dear Baird[,]

I arrived here safely & well on Tuesday last after a long and wearisome journey from Santa Fé by way of El Paso, San Antonio, & New Orleans—

I am happy to say that I found Mrs N & the boys as well as I could wish—Spencer Baird particularly is to use a book phrase—all the fondest parent could desire—healthy, handsome, smart and about as amiable & good as his great name sake—I think he will not disgrace his name—

We had a very pleasant & interesting expedition, and in geology particularly the results exceeded my expectations—In Zoology my efforts were rendered nearly fruitless by the barrenness of the field and the constant

rains[.] I fear you will be disappointed in my collections—but I assure you I did my possible—

I hope to be with you within a month with Capt. Macomb & the collections—He is coming slowly across the plains to Ft. Leavenworth.

I take great pleasure in returning my sincere thanks for your kind letters, and the papers you sent me at Santa Fé—Both were inexpressibly welcome—

Please present my respectful regards to Mrs. Baird[,] Genl. & Mrs. Churchill[,] Prof Henry &c.—& believe me.—[Como Siempre]—

Yours affectionately

J. S. Newberry

* * *

Cleveland O.
Nov. 27, 1860

Dear Professor,

I have just received your inquiry about the plants.

Ives' are done with and may be included in the general collection.

McCombs plants you engaged to send to Dr Torrey last spring did you not? I will write to Dr. T. immediately about them and see if he can catalogue them for our report. If not, Dr Englemann will take them up at once. They had perhaps better be left for the present.

We are all well.

Kind regards to the Smithsonian

Affectionately

J.S.N.