Chapter 5

Little Water—Many Indians

While the wagon train camped at Leroux Springs, Savedra went ahead to search for water. On the evening of July 29, he returned to camp with a gloomy assessment. He reported that there was not a sufficient supply of water for the stock for seventy or eighty miles ahead, and there would not be until the start of the rainy season in October or November. Many in the wagon train thought that their stock could not travel that distance without water, and that perhaps they should remain where they were at Leroux Springs until the start of the rainy season. At least the springs provided plenty of water and grass. Most were reluctant to risk their animals on such a long, waterless stretch, for they were all well aware of the high prices that cattle were selling for on the California market; their stock was to be their grubstake when they arrived at their new homes. They had brought their cattle this far, and by God, they were not going to lose them now! Udell strongly opposed staying put:

I contended that we had better travel on, for, with careful and proper treatment, we could get the stock through to water, and if we remain here until the rainy season, in all human probability our provisions would be exhausted, and we should perish with starvation—and to me death by starvation is the most horrible thing I can imagine. But all my entreaties were in vain—none would agree to go on.¹

After a thorough discussion of their situation, the emigrants decided that maybe Savedra could be mistaken, and perhaps they should send some of their own members ahead to see if they could find water. The next day, July 30, six men volunteered to go and search for water. They took enough provisions to last four or five days. On
the evening of the following day, one of these men returned to camp and reported that a weak spring had been discovered fifteen miles ahead, but its capacity was insufficient to accommodate the whole wagon train at one time. There was some discussion of dividing the wagon train into two sections, with one section traveling a day ahead of the other, at least while journeying through this arid section of the country. This would reduce the pressure on the limited supply of water and grass. Remembering what they had been told by the army back in Albuquerque about staying together while traveling through Indian territory, most of the group were fearful of dividing the wagon train. Udell argued that they should move forward in smaller companies, rather than risking starvation or thirst by traveling in one large group. But others argued that it was too risky to separate for fear of Indians. In later years while preparing his journal for publication, Udell could not resist the temptation to insert these words of retrospective wisdom:

If our company had been as fearful of separating when among the Mojave Indians as they were here, where no Indians lived near, we might probably have saved a number of lives of the company, and all our property and much suffering.

After much discussion on the subject, they came to the conclusion that their best chance for survival was to divide the train into two sections, at least temporarily. So far, they had not been bothered by Indians, and maybe this threat had been exaggerated by the folks in Albuquerque. They agreed that the Rose company would start forward the next day, while the Baley company would wait until the following day.

On the evening of August 1, after the Rose company had moved ahead, the five men who were out searching for water returned to camp and reported that they had found plenty of water in different places for the next fifty miles. One of these scouts, Thomas Hedgpeth, succeeded in killing a bear and brought part of the meat back to camp with him. The fresh bear meat and the news that water was discovered ahead improved everyone's mood.

The Baley company departed Leroux Springs the following morning. The first day out they traveled twenty miles and camped that night at the springs where Thomas Hedgpeth killed the bear the day
before. Some of the emigrants called these springs Hedgpeth Springs, while others referred to them as Bear Springs.³

The next morning they caught up with the Rose train camped at Spring Valley. Udell doesn’t say why the Rose train stopped here, but it was probably to let their stock do some grazing while waiting for the scouts to return with reports of water and feed conditions ahead. The united wagon train then traveled another twenty miles that day. That evening they were forced to make a dry camp, but fortunately they had brought enough water with them for domestic purposes; the stock, however, had to go without. The next day, after traveling five miles, they came to a deep canyon which they called Alexander Canyon (probably Cataract Creek). At the bottom of the canyon they found some pools with enough water in them for all the stock. They laid by the remainder of the day to let their cattle graze and drink their fill of water. Meanwhile, Savedra went ahead to search for the next water hole.

The following day they traveled four or five miles down the canyon, but were unable to locate the road. Realizing that they were heading in the wrong direction, they turned around and began searching for a way out of the canyon. They finally found the road and started in the right direction, but the effort consumed most of the day. That night they camped at the top of the canyon.

While making preparations to get underway the next morning, Udell discovered that his horse was missing. He walked back ten or twelve miles to search for it, but he was unable to find the lost animal. Just as he was about to give up the search, he met Thomas Hedgpeth leading the stray horse back to camp. Udell was overjoyed. He stated in his journal that evening, “My tongue failed to express in full my joy and gratitude to him.” The wagon train traveled twenty miles that day, but Udell probably walked and rode more than forty miles, not bad for a sixty-three-year-old man who claimed to be in ill health! That night they again had to make a dry camp.

They expected to find water within six or eight miles the next day, but were unsuccessful. After traveling another six miles, they met Savedra returning from his scouting trip. He stated that the water he expected to find had dried up, and there was no certainty of finding more short of sixty miles. This was indeed bad news! Under normal conditions of travel, sixty miles would take at least three days.
the poor animals had gone without water the night before; three more
days without they could never do! Another council was held. All but
Udell agreed that their only choice was to turn back to the last water
holes in Alexander Canyon. Udell logically argued that they might find
these water holes dried up when they returned, as the holes contained
mostly rain water, and then it would be even farther to the next water.
Even if they found water in the canyon, he reasoned, they still faced
the danger of starvation since their provisions were almost gone. Again,
Udell’s arguments were brushed aside, and all turned back. Udell, dis-
gusted with the decision to turn back, wrote in his journal that night,
“Had there been a road that I could have traveled without a guide, I
should have gone on and risked the consequences.” This was the first
backward march for the wagon train, an ill omen for the future.

The return trip to Alexander Canyon took all the next day and
most of the night. Since it was still dark when they arrived, they were
unable to see well enough to get their wagons down the steep-walled
canyon to the bottom. They unhitched their thirsty oxen which
eagerly found their way to the water, having traveled fifty-two miles
without. Luckily, some water still remained in the deep holes, but it
had become stagnant and was full of wigglers. The thirsty cattle drank
it anyway. So did the thirsty people.

The emigrants were beginning to lose confidence in Savedra,
and like Beale on his expedition the year before, they also were forced
to do much of their own scouting and exploring. On August 9, several
men on horses carrying provisions enough to last several days set out in
all directions to scout the countryside for water. Meanwhile, those who
remained in camp busied themselves manufacturing casks from the
pines and junipers that grew in the canyon floor. With these homemade
containers, they hoped to be able to carry enough additional water for
the cattle to last for at least one night. “Our water still holds out,” Udell
recorded, “like the widow’s cruse of oil, and tastes more pleasant, hav-
ing been stirred up so often for us.”

On the afternoon of August 13, a hard rain shower partly replen-
ished the rapidly drying water holes. That evening the men who were out
searching for water the past five days returned to camp with more good
news. They found a large spring eighty miles ahead and only five miles
off their course. There was a strong probability that the rain they received
that afternoon left water in some canyons that they located forty miles ahead. This, and the water that they could carry in their wagons, should be enough to enable them to reach the newly discovered spring. This favorable turn of events raised everyone’s spirits. Udell records that they had hymn singing by some excellent female voices until late that night.

They spent the following day filling their casks with water and making preparations for the next phase of the journey. At 5:30 p.m., the signal was given to start the wagons forward. After traveling all night and most of the next day, they arrived at Partridge Creek late in the afternoon. Partridge Creek was normally dry at this time of the year, but fortunately, the recent thunderstorms deposited enough water in large holes in the rocks for both man and beast. Here, they camped for the night after traveling almost continuously since leaving Alexander Canyon the night before. That evening they were blessed with another heavy thundershower which filled Partridge Creek with water. It was now well into the Arizona monsoon season.  

Udell noted, “A kind providence has visited us in our needy circumstances for which we should ever praise and honor Him.”

The next day’s travel brought the wagon train to the vicinity of Mount Floyd, which Udell called Apache Peak. (Mount Floyd was named by Beale during his 1857 expedition; being a prudent man, he named the peak after his boss, Secretary of War John B. Floyd.) Beale had not yet published his map at the time the Rose-Baley wagon train arrived in Albuquerque in June of 1858, so Udell had no way of knowing that the peak was already named. Nine miles farther up the road they came to another deep canyon where they had expected to find water, but there was none. The recent showers did not reach this far. Disappointed, they traveled another twelve miles without finding water, and were forced to make another dry camp.

On August 17, they again traveled all day and well into the night without finding any water except a small quantity discovered by Udell at the bottoms of two different canyons that Udell named Udell’s Canyons, (the name didn’t stick). At midnight they halted and made camp, having traveled thirty miles that day, tying their record set on May 18. Scouts discovered a large spring that day, but it was some distance from the road and in country too precipitous and too difficult to locate in the dark; they would have to wait for daylight.
Early the next morning they drove their thirsty herds over terrain too steep and too rugged to take wagons. They were rewarded by finding a large spring with plenty of good water. Water from the spring flowed through a small valley of fine grass. This was just what the cattle needed, as they had been traveling almost day and night for eighty-five miles without adequate food, water, or rest. They left the cattle at the spring overnight, to give the poor beasts a chance to recruit. Guards were placed during the night to keep the Indians from stealing any of the stock. Udell took two five-gallon kegs of water back to camp with him that evening. “The mountain was so steep,” he wrote, “that I could not carry them on my horse, but had to roll them up half a mile, one at a time.”

In spite of careful vigilance during the night, it was discovered the next morning that a mare belonging to Rose and a mule belonging to Savedra were missing. Three of the herders were sent out to search for the missing animals. They soon found the animals’ tracks and followed in hot pursuit. They tracked the missing animals all day, but were unable to overtake them. Late in the afternoon, while going through a deep canyon, arrows were shot at the men. Indians were seen darting between rocks, and now and then, an Indian would stick his head up for a quick shot. Fortunately, none of the men was hit. With night coming on and with their horses tiring, the three searchers decided that a more prudent course of action would be to abandon the chase and return to the wagon train.

The next day, while the wagon train was traveling, Savedra spied some Indians on the side of a mountain. With much patience and the use of sign language, he was able to coax them down. Seeing that no harm was meant, they followed the wagon train until camp was made, all the while keeping up a constant jabber. When near the emigrants, they would pat themselves on the chest and repeat over and over the words, “Hanna, Hanna, Hanna” (good Indians). Udell, and others, called these Indians Cosninos or Cosniños, but most likely they were members of the Hualapai tribe as the wagon train was now entering Hualapai country.5

The Indians knew a few words of Spanish and English, and Savedra understood some of their dialect. Through this medley of languages combined with the use of sign language, Savedra was able to get
this story from them: Yes, they had the emigrants’ horses, but they had taken them from the Mojaves, who had stolen them from the emigrants, and they would bring them in the following day. They said that they were good, or “Hanna, Hanna” Indians, and that the Mojaves were bad Indians. Not wishing any trouble, the emigrants treated them kindly and fed them all the food they wanted. They were inclined to believe that these were the same Indians who had stolen the horses, and they held little hope that they would ever see the missing animals again. Savedra said that the Mojave Indians never came this far from their own country.

Resigned to the loss of the livestock, the wagon train continued onward, arriving at Peach Springs (Beale’s Hemphill Springs) on the evening of August 19. The next morning, to the surprise and delight of the emigrants, about twenty-five Indians came into camp leading the stolen animals. It quickly became apparent that they expected to be well rewarded for their trouble. L. J. Rose had this to say about them:

It was soon evident that they anticipated very extravagant rewards, all expecting shoes, clothing and trinkets, besides some cattle. I gave each of the two [the two who claimed to have actually recovered the horses] a blanket, shirt, pants, knife, tobacco and some Indian trinkets, and the balance tobacco and some trinkets, also preparing an ample dinner for them, and again a supper. I also gave the two who returned the horses a certificate that they had voluntarily returned them, and that I believe they had also stolen them. Many remained in camp with us that night, doubtless for the purpose of stealing, but the guard kept so sharp a lookout that they found no opportunity.

The next morning, to the great annoyance of everyone, about fifty more Indians came into camp also expecting to be rewarded. They asked for shoes, claiming that they had worn out their moccasins in retaking the horses from the Mojave. They also wanted cattle. After being fed and given some tobacco and trinkets, they left at about 11:00 a.m., to the great relief of all members of the wagon train.

After dinner, while making preparations to get underway, it was discovered that six oxen were missing. Several men were sent back to look for them. After tracking the missing animals for some distance, the
searchers came upon four carcasses. Two of the carcasses had all the meat cut away while the other two were partially butchered. A short distance farther, the other two oxen were found. They were freshly killed and still warm, the Indians apparently scared off by their pursuers before they could strip the meat from the animals. Due to approaching darkness and the possibility of an ambush, the pursuit was called off.

During this phase of the journey the wagon train was doing much of its traveling at night, owing to the great daytime heat of the desert and the long distances between water holes. At regular intervals during the night they would stop for a short rest. At one of these rest stops, eleven-year-old Ellen Baley, a daughter of Gillum and Permelia Baley, fell asleep and failed to awaken when the wagon train moved on. Somehow, she was not missed until the train traveled some distance. The poor girl awoke to find herself alone in the middle of a vast hostile desert. Filled with fright, she began running to catch up with the wagon train, but in her confusion she took off in the opposite direction. When she was discovered missing, her father and older brother, George, immediately rode back to where they had stopped. To their horror, she was not there! Captured by the Indians must have been their conclusion! Nevertheless, they continued their search by calling out the little girl’s name at the top of their voices as they rode back. Their efforts were soon rewarded when, far off in the distance, came a faint cry, “Papa, Papa.” Her father immediately answered and kept calling her name until he caught up with her. When reunited with her family and the other members of the wagon train, Ellen had a tale which would be told and retold by family members until the present day.

From Peach Springs to the Colorado River, a distance of approximately one hundred and ten miles, the wagon train was harassed almost constantly by Indians. During the day, from their places of concealment, the Indians would take potshots at the emigrants or at their cattle; at night they would swarm into camp in great numbers and attempt to steal anything they could get their hands on. The Indians became so bothersome they had to be roped out of camp. The constant vigilance was beginning to wear the travelers down. Still, they considered the Indians only a big nuisance and not a serious threat to the wagon train.

On the evening of August 20, they arrived at White Rock Spring (also called Indian Springs) located in Truxton Canyon. This
was a large spring with plenty of good water. Because scouts had reported another long stretch without adequate water or grass, the emigrants decided to again divide the wagon train. The loss of livestock from starvation and thirst was considered a more immediate threat to the group than any threat from Indians.

The next day, the Rose train moved ahead. Because of the uncertainty of finding water and grass, Rose left a large portion of his herd behind at White Rock Spring to recruit, under the supervision of his foreman, Alpha Brown. His intent was to move forward as rapidly as possible to the next known watering place, Savedra Spring, thirty-three miles ahead, where their guide assured them they would find an abundance of good water and grass. He would wait at Savedra spring for the Baley company to join him, then send word back to Brown to bring up the remainder of the herd. He wanted the wagon train to be united before moving ahead, as the Indians were becoming more numerous and more threatening.

Savedra discovered this spring the year before while serving as Beale’s guide. Pleased with his discovery, he named the spring after himself. Since this was one of the few things that Savedra had done to please Beale, Beale let the name stand.

On the morning of August 22, the Baley train left White Rock Spring to rendezvous with the Rose company at Savedra Spring. That afternoon, some members of this company received quite a scare. Three of the men rode ahead to check on a recently discovered spring. Another small detachment climbed to the top of a nearby hill to scout any possible danger from Indians. Suddenly, the men at the top of the hill heard a volley of shots emanating from the vicinity of the spring. Believing that their comrades at the spring had been attacked by Indians, they let their imaginations get the better of them. They ran back to the wagons shouting, “The Indians have attacked our men who have gone ahead and have killed them all.” Some were so excited that they were sure that they had seen the men fall. Several of the women fainted on hearing this tragic news. Cautiously, and with guns drawn, the men slowly advanced toward the spring. Arriving there they found, to their surprise and great delight, that their comrades at the spring had not been attacked by Indians; they had simply been shooting at a large snake, which they succeeded in killing. With sheepish
grins the young men who had given the false alarm hurried back to deliver the good news to those waiting anxiously at the wagons.⁸

When the excitement died down, the Baley company again moved forward, traveling another eleven miles before making camp in the Hualapai Valley. This was another dry camp, but they were successful in finding a spring some five miles off to the left of the road. After the evening meal they drove their stock to this newly found spring, but to their disappointment the water issued from the spring so slowly it was impossible for the thirsty animals to get their fill. Nevertheless, they decided to return them to the wagons and move on, as they were anxious to get to Savedra Spring where they hoped to find the Rose company and plenty of water. They traveled another five miles and camped for the remainder of the night without water.

The next day, the Baley train crossed the Cerbat Mountains through Boys’ Pass and arrived at Savedra Spring near present Kingman, Arizona.⁹ In spite of what Savedra had promised, the spring bearing his name proved to be a great disappointment. It might have yielded a plentiful supply of water the year before when Savedra discovered it, but this year it produced barely enough water for domestic use.

At Savedra Spring they found Rose and most of his company. Rose, too, was unhappy about the inadequate water supply at the spring, but he also realized that it was not wise to let his herd get too far behind the main body. He decided to wait at Savedra Spring until Alpha Brown could bring up the remainder of the stock from White Rock Spring. To deliver the message to Brown to move forward, Rose sent his young brother-in-law, eighteen-year-old Ed Jones, mounted on Picayune, Rose’s fastest horse.

On his way back to camp after delivering the message, it being an exceedingly hot day, young Jones decided to stop and rest under the shade of a large tree. While resting, he fell asleep and was spied by a group of Hualapai warriors mounted on ponies. They stalked him until they were close enough to make a charge. To be caught out in the open, unmounted, would mean certain death.

Fortunately for Jones, he was awakened by the hoof beats of the Indians’ ponies in time to leap on the back of Picayune. Putting the spurs to the animal, he literally rode for his life. Thanks to a fast horse, the young man gradually pulled away from his pursuers, but not before
they released a volley of arrows in his direction. Several of the prickly barbs struck Jones in the back and one penetrated deep into his body, causing a serious wound. By hanging onto the pommel of his saddle for dear life, he retained consciousness and rode safely into camp. When he was removed from his horse, he lost consciousness from loss of blood, and for several days his life hung in the balance. He slowly recovered but it was over a year before he was able to ride a horse again. One of the arrow points remained in his side, making it impossible for him to ever again do any heavy lifting.  

By driving hard all day and all night, Alpha Brown reached Savedra Spring with the remainder of Rose’s herd on the evening of August 23. He was harassed continuously by Indians on the way and lost seven head of cattle. The scouts reported that the next reliable water supply was thirty miles ahead at a place called Mountain Spring, located at the eastern base of the Colorado (Black) Mountains. In between lay a rocky, scorching valley (the Sacramento). Because of almost constant traveling both day and night during the last few days, combined with a shortage of both feed and water, many of the emigrants feared that their cattle would never make it that far. But they also realized that because of the Indian menace, low provisions, and a scarcity of both feed and water, they could not remain where they were. Udell described their plight in these words, “We concluded to go on as far as we could; perhaps some of the stock might get through, which was our last forlorn hope.”

As soon as Alpha Brown arrived at Savedra Spring with the remainder of the Rose company’s stock, the wagon train began making preparations to move ahead. After the evening meal was finished, they hitched their oxen to the wagons and got under way. Because the weather was still very hot, they believed that their famished stock would have a better chance of survival if they again traveled at night. To better protect their cattle against night forays by the Indians, the two companies combined their stock, which had heretofore been kept separate, into one united herd (they were unbranded). In this manner they could double the number of herders and keep a better vigil.

At about 11:00 a.m. on August 24, the wagon train arrived at Mountain Spring, having traveled thirty miles during the night and morning. The cattle stood the trip better than expected considering
their poor condition, but three or four head were missing, either stolen by Indians or dead of exhaustion during this leg of the journey. At Mountain Spring they found plenty of water but no grass. They were now within twenty-five miles of the California border, but in between stood some very formidable obstacles: The Colorado (Black) Mountains, the Colorado River, and the Mojave Indians.

The Black Mountains, which both Whipple and Beale called the Colorado Mountains, are not high, most peaks being less than 6,000 feet in elevation. Nevertheless, they are extremely steep and rugged, as well as arid and barren. They extend along the east side of modern-day Lake Mead and the Colorado River in Arizona to a point near Needles. Beale’s Wagon Road crossed this range at Sitgreaves Pass at an elevation of 3,652 feet. Sitgreaves Pass is named after Lieutenant Lorenzo Sitgreaves of the U.S. Army Topographical Engineers who led an expedition through this region in 1851, although he actually crossed these mountains through Union Pass ten miles to the north. Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives, also of the topographical engineers, named this pass after Sitgreaves in 1858 because Ives mistakenly thought this was where Sitgreaves had crossed the range. Beale called this pass John Howell’s Pass after one of his men.

Union Pass is a much easier pass than Sitgreaves, but the emigrants had no way of knowing this. They were only following the trail that Beale had marked. In some places on the west side of Sitgreaves Pass the terrain was so steep that Beale had to let his wagons down by ropes. One of his wagons was smashed to pieces while being lowered.

The Rose-Baley wagon train spent all day of August 25 at Mountain Spring watering their stock and resting for the difficult climb over this rugged range of mountains. All the next day was devoted to clearing rocks and improving the road in preparation for the journey ahead. In many places the road was all but impassable because of its precipitousness. That night, by the light of a full moon, the emigrants began their toilsome climb to the top of Sitgreaves Pass. The going was tedious and slow; double-teaming was necessary in many places, but finally in the late afternoon of August 27, the wagon train reached the crest of the highest ridge of this desert mountain range. From its lofty summit they could plainly see the Colorado River flowing in the distance, its silvery surface shimmering in the late afternoon sun. Shortly, they
would be pitching their camps under the shady cottonwood trees that lined its banks, and watering their thirsty animals in its cool, life-giving waters. Fresh fruits and vegetables for the weary travelers and feed for their starving animals could surely be purchased from the Mojaves—for didn’t Beale say they were agricultural Indians? They had brought along an ample supply of tobacco, calico, trinkets, beads, and other trade items for bartering with the natives. Soon they would be in California, the land of milk and honey, and all their troubles would be behind them. But, alas, fate had decreed a different scenario.