Like many tourists before and since, George Champlin Sibley was eager to share the experiences of a recent journey, and so on August 11, 1811, he sent a lengthy letter to his father giving details of a trip to the area west and south of his post at Fort Osage.

Both the sender and the recipient, Dr. John Sibley, are well-known figures in the history of the early nineteenth-century American West. Dr. Sibley (1757-1837) had a varied career besides his medicine; for a decade he was a newspaper editor in Fayetteville, North Carolina, before moving to Louisiana where he eventually became active in politics and prospered as a cotton planter. At the time of this correspondence, he was engaged in still another activity as United States Indian Agent for the Orleans Territory with headquarters at Natchitoches, Louisiana. This post, which he held from 1805 to 1814, gave him an intimate knowledge of the young frontier and the various tribes of the area, and an acquaintance with the first wave of Americans who came to settle or explore the new territory.

His son George (1782-1863) was no less distinguished. At the age of twenty-three he came to St. Louis with an appointment from President Thomas Jefferson to serve as assistant factor in the Indian trading post at Fort Bellefontaine. Three years later, in 1808, Sibley was named chief factor for a new post up the Missouri River, Fort Osage. He remained in charge—except for a brief evacuation during the War of 1812—until 1822. Before retiring completely from government service, Sibley once again went West, this time in 1825 as a member of the commission to survey and mark a road from the Missouri border to Santa Fe, and in the company of Joseph C. Brown, who did the actual charting.

Still another and perhaps more lasting career lay ahead. In 1815 Sibley had married Mary Smith Easton, whose father, Rufus, was postmaster at St. Louis, and after their life at Fort Osage was over, the couple took up residence about 1827 near St. Charles. There the Sibleys opened a school for young ladies, a modest venture which grew until it received a charter as Lindenwood College in 1853. It was in this role, as a benefactor of education, that George Sibley spent the last years of his life.
The journal of Sibley’s trip which we now publish is based on the letter which he sent his father in 1811. As the author tells us in a note appended to the text, it “has been carefully copied from the original communication to my Father, which was found among his papers after his decease by my Brother, and at my request returned to me. It was so worn, torn and faded, that it became necessary for me to re-write it, or to lose it altogether (as I kept no copy of it). I wished to preserve it however, for future reference. Much of the original was written out rather hurriedly from my pencil notes. Some verbal and other corrections have been made. . . .” He completed the work in 1860, and eventually the manuscript found its way into the Missouri Historical Society collections.

Another copy, not nearly so extensive in content, but with often identical wording, is recorded among the possessions of Lindwood College. It was published by Lucinda Templin in Reminiscences of Lindwood College in 1920 without any annotation and in many places incorrectly transcribed. This version appeared word-for-word and again without any editing in the Oklahoma Historical Society’s Chronicles of Oklahoma in 1927. The latter publication is obviously a copy of the Templin article for it includes the same mistakes; it got to the printer, according to the Oklahoma Society, by accident and before any work could be done on it. Efforts to find the pencil notes which Sibley mentions keeping during the trip have been futile. His personal diary for the period, which is now in the possession of Lindwood College, breaks off on the day he departed, and resumes upon his return from the journey.

Sibley’s trip received considerable attention among his contemporaries, especially since his report was the first account by a white man of a visit to the salines. John Bradbury and Hugh Marie Brackenridge, separately, had stopped at Fort Osage in April, 1811, and received invitations to accompany Sibley which they declined, but when they returned to the Fort together in late July (shortly after Sibley himself) they copied extracts from his notes concerning the salt deposits which they subsequently published in their respective works. In addition, a letter from Sibley to General William Clark was published anonymously in two issues of the Louisana Gazette the following May. This version, since it took the form of a report to a superior, goes into greater detail about the official nature of the expedition, which sought to reduce friction among the Indian tribes, but it still devotes considerable space to the natural wonders Sibley viewed. None, however, gives as complete a picture of the excursion as the present manuscript.

A map accompanied the letter to Dr. Sibley, but it had become lost by 1860 and a new one—based to some extent on the surveys of Joseph C. Brown—was drawn and inserted in the front of the journal book. It has not been published here because, being rather rough, it creates more problems than it solves. Efforts have been made throughout this edition to locate Sibley’s points of interest in terms of modern towns or political subdivisions and this should suffice for the average reader. A word of caution should be made, however, about distances mentioned in the work. We are told in the text that the author based his estimates on an assumption that this horse could travel three miles an hour; obviously the animal was capable of speeds nearly double that on long extended legs of the trip across open prairie. Luckily Sibley had with him a pocket compass from St. Louis so that the directions are as accurate as conditions allow. Knowing the courses, therefore, and being aided by our knowledge of Indian sites, etc., it is possible to trace his journey with a good deal of assurance once the necessary adjustments in distance have been made.

Finally, a note on the text itself. The original word order and spelling have been accurately maintained throughout this edition. For the sake of clarity, however, the punctuation has been altered (but only where necessary) and Sibley’s random capitalization of words has been abandoned.

Notes of an official excursion from Fort Osage to the Kaneses—Pawnees—Osages—the Grand Saline and Rock Saline. In May—June and July 1811—by G. C. Sibley agent of Indian Trade & Indian Affairs.

MY DEAR FATHER.

At the date of my last letter, early in May, I was just on the eve of setting out on an excursion, official I may say, to the wild Indian Country “on this side” of the Missouri—that is to say north westerly and south westerly from this post. I did set out on the 11th day of May, and on the 11th of July got back here safely, having been exactly two months out—in which I travelled in various directions, very nearly a thousand miles altogether; saw a great many Indians of many different Tribes, at their Towns and hunting camps—and among the “Wonders of Nature” that exist in the wild and hitherto but partially explored country through which I passed. I took occasion to visit and examine (rather hurriedly however) the famous Salines beyond the Arkansaw River; heretofore entirely unknown I believe, except to the roaming Indians. I received the most friendly and respectful treatment from all the natives that I met with. The weather was for the most part quite pleasant; and excepting a few days indisposition with my old complaint, sick headache, whilst at the Pawnee Towns, I enjoyed my usual robust health and activity—and on the whole, had an agreeable tour,
marked by fewer difficulties than I had anticipated, and was prepared to encounter.

The following is a brief account of my excursion written off from my pencil notes, of what I saw and what I did—with some occasional reflections—which I send you in compliance with your particular request.

From Fort Osage (which is in Lat: 39°10.19—Lon: 93°51.5 from Greenwich) I travelled South 60° West near about 75 miles, along the Osage summer hunting trace; over a country almost entirely open prairie; well watered by numerous rivers, creeks and rivulets, tributaries of the Osage & Kansas (more properly Kansa) Rivers—these small streams all afford more or less of forest growth, consisting of several kinds of oak, hickory, cottonwood, elm, walnut &c.—and some of the larger branches of the Osage afford fine bodies of most excellent land for cultivation; which will at no distant day hold out attractions irresistible to many of our frontier-loving settlers, commonly called Squatters.

This large and beautiful tract possesses a sufficient variety of surface and scenery, to render it quite pleasing, and even delightful at many points; to the eye of the mere rambler; and will doubtless at some period not very far distant, offer inducements even for permanent Christian settlements. At present it abounds with wild animals, Elk, Deer, Bear, and some Buffalo, besides a variety of Water fowl, with Beaver & Otters in the rivers and ponds.

At this distance (75 miles) from Ft. Osage, I found a large camp of Osages, temporarily located on a very pretty creek, a branch of the Marais de Cygnes, which is a principal branch of the Osage River; which last empties into the Missouri about 125 miles, by water, above the junction of the Missouri & Mississippi. (Here by way of parenthesis, I must write a few words in defence of the name, extent and character, of the Missouri River; tho' I am not so presumptuous as to expect to be able to do justice in the premises, by any thing that I may say here on the subject. It is a common, universal, error, to class the Missouri as a tributary of the Mississippi—when in truth, it is just the reverse—the latter is a branch of the former. Let any one embark on the Missouri at the entrance of the Yellow Stone, 1880 miles above St. Louis, and descend to the Gulf of Mexico, 3200 miles in the whole, and he will find Missouri characteristics invariably, and at no place to be mistaken, in the whole long distance; except partially for about twenty miles, on the eastern shore, below what I shall call, the true mouth of the Mississippi—from the Yellow Stone down to the Gulf, this most remarkable river bears the very same character, current rapid, running in continuous whirls and surges; the surface changes from top to bottom as the flood literally rolls on, within about every half mile: and as the heavy tide of turbid waters rushes on, dashing from bend to bend, and from point to point, against the aluvial banks, and constantly wearing them away, and depositing sand bars and mud banks all along, the water itself becomes saturated with a variety of substances that are received from the loose soil of the banks, and stirred up from the bottom, and always held in solution by the peculiar rolling motion of the current. The water, tho' consequently roily, is nevertheless when even but partially settled, very wholesome for drinking & cooking, and being much cooler in hot weather, than any other river water, is by no means unpleasant to drink, as just dipped up from the river, when well settled, it is inferior to no other Water whatever.

Now the Mississippi, above its junction with the Missouri, possesses a character altogether different—its current is gentle, smooth and placid, never changing the surface, except when much agitated by winds, running over obstructions, &c.—seldom or ever cuts away the banks. Its water is quite clear, and during the hot summer months, when the river is low, becomes filthy, almost putrid, sometimes; very unpleasant & unwholesome, generating foul air very extensively (which the Missouri never does)—even when filtered and cooled with ice, the water of this river is inferior to that of the Missouri taken up fresh from the stream).

Excuse this lengthened, out of the way digression, much longer than I intended. I will now resume my narrative—I remained a whole day and

1. Fort Osage, overlooking the Missouri River near Sibley in Jackson County, Missouri, has recently been rebuilt to its original appearance and is now open to the public. Lewis and Clark had named the site “Fort Point” in 1804 when they passed it going West, and four years later Clark selected it as the location for a new fort and trading factory. The garrison was removed to Arrow Rock during the winter of 1813-14 because of threat of Indian attack and not restored until 1816. A treaty with the Osages in 1825 relieved the government from the need to keep the fort, and it was abandoned shortly after the construction of Fort Leavenworth in 1827. In 1811, Hugh Marie Brackenridge found it “handsomely situated, about one hundred feet above the level of the river, which makes an elbow at this place, giving an extensive view up and down the river. Its form is triangular; the fort is small, not calculated for more than a company of men” (Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana, Pittsburgh, 1814, 217).

2. The Osages hunted as far south as the great bend of the Arkansas River, and the Santa Fe Trail later coincided with a good portion of this traditional route.

3. The camp was probably on the Big Cut-Off Crossing of what is now known as the West Fork of Ottawa Creek in Kansas; later it became an established stopping place on the Santa Fe Trail. (See Elliott Coues, editor, The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, New York, 1895, II, 519, note 4: “Willow Springs” was a noted camping place w. of Baldwin City, on one of the heads of Ottawa cr., which flows southward into the Marais des Cygnes r., a little below Ottawa, county seat of Franklin.)

4. This comment on the Missouri River would seem to be an addition made to the text in 1860. It does not, for example, appear in the version published in Chronicles of Oklahoma, or in any of the early nineteenth century appearances of extracts from Sibley’s report.

5. Sibley here refers to the “American Bottoms” area, roughly opposite St. Louis.
two nights with the Osages in their camp, making some necessary preparations to strike off more northerly towards the Konsee Town, and to enlist some of the principal men to accompany me to those towns and to the Pawnees, having in view, as one main object of my trip, to effect a peace between the Osages, Konsees, Pawnees and Ottogees. The great War chief Sans Orelle, and two other Osages, of the tribe called U-jet-tas, agreed to go with me on that mission. Another, who speaks the Pawnee language—my Osage and French interpreter—my servant Jimmy Henderson an Irishman, and myself, six of us in all, well equipped, and well mounted, formed my party proper. Several others joined in however, but they went along upon their own hook, to hunt and traffic with the Konsees and Pawnees under my protection. On the morning of the 15th May quite early, the camp broke up. The Osages with their families pursued their way southerly towards their summer Buffalo hunting ranges, with as much permittance and glee, and my small company set out in a different direction at the same time.

On a general course of North 70° West, we travelled 65 miles and arrived at the Konsee Town. Our way led through a wild but extremely beautiful, high prairie country, pretty well watered, and variegated with strips of woodland, ranges of quite lofty, rugged, naked hills overlooking very extensive tracts of level low ground prairie. Deer and Elk we found in plenty, and I frequently noticed Antelopes skipping over the verdant hills and vallies with almost bird-like speed.

Some distance before we reached the river opposite the Town, the head chief, with about one hundred of his warriors, met us on horseback (I had dispatched a runner the day before to announce my approach, a formality always expected)—The river was rising and barely fordable, so that our escort did not cross without some little confusion, and the derangement of the gaudy trappings of many of the Cavalier beaux, who were in the most haste to get over. I had all the assistance that could be rendered, and affected the crossing safely and dryly.

We were received at the village in the most friendly and respectful manner, in the Indian style, with all the courtly etiquette and ceremony used by these people on what they consider great and very important occasions. From the river to the town our mounted escort conducted us in considerable state, thru' an avenue of curious, gaping, wondering females of all ages; old men, boys & children, a motley multitude truly. On entering an Indian village, one is surprised always to see so large a proportion of children, and a natural conclusion would seem to be that those people must surely be rapidly increasing. But alas! this is not the case. Wars among themselves, pestilential diseases, evil habits arising from their intercourse with civilized (?) men, and other causes, unite not only to prevent any increase substantially, but to produce a gradual and sure diminution. As a general fact, the deaths are more numerous than the births, one year with another and in any period of ten years the decrease is very apparent.

After a good deal of ceremony, of which I became heartily tired, I and my party (fifteen persons in all, including nine young men who joined as irregular attaches) were conducted to the Lodge of the grand chief, Shone-gee-nee-gare, where we found a feast prepared for us, of which I partook most cheerfully and heartily, an excellent variety of good catables, well served and a good appetite combining to render it very acceptable.

The old chief and his eldest son (a remarkably fine young man of about 22) were unceasing in their kind attentions to myself and my people, to make us comfortable. I was particularly gratified to observe several flags with the Stars and Stripes, flying in different parts of the town, besides the large and very handsome one that gracefully waved over the lodge of the great chief. This marked hospitality was much more than I had at all expected from these people, for it had been my duty, quite recently, to treat the whole tribe with so much (official) severity, in consequence of some depredations and cruelties they had committed on white people repeatedly.
that I had been advised, and even seriously and earnestly cautioned, not to trust myself among them. My friend Sans Oreille had also cautioned me, and was really so much concerned for my safety, that he scarcely ever left my side during the first day and night of my stay among them. And here allow me another digression—It is due to my friendship for this genuine friend and excellent man, and brave warrior, to state that he accompanied me throughout my whole tour, and was never wearied in his watchful care of my person day or night, for a moment. More than once or twice has this friend been the means of rescuing me from great peril, at no little hazard of his own safety, and once most probably from distraction. But I have no reason to believe that any of the Kon-sees entertained any other than friendly feelings towards me, except one very wicked old man (hated by his whole tribe) who, as Sans Oreille told me, made a cunning effort to poison me, and but for his watchful interposition, would without doubt have accomplished his purpose.

The Kon-see town or village stands immediately on the north bank of the Kon-see river, about one hundred miles by its courses, above its junction with the Missouri (which junction is 30 miles above Ft. Osage). It is seated in a beautiful prairie of moderate extent, which is encircled very nearly by the main river on one side, small creek westerly, the north fork just above and a chain of romantic prairie hills northward, which last give a very pleasing effect to the whole of this beautiful location. The town, when I was there, contained one hundred and twenty eight houses or lodges, as they are most commonly called. These are generally about sixty feet long and twenty five feet wide, constructed of stout saplings and poles, arranged in form of a common garden armour and covered with skins, bark and mats. They are commodious and comfortable. The place for fire and cooking, is simply a hole dug in the earth right under the ridge pole of the roof, where a small opening is left to let out the smoke. All the larger lodges (some of them are 80 or 100 ft. long) have two, three or four fire places, one for each family dwelling in it. Such dwellings are of course incapable of any long duration. The skeletons are left entirely naked when the Indians go off on their great hunts, the covering being needed for their hunting camps, which are built very much like the village as to size & comfort, tho’ with much less strength. These lodges (the best of them in the town) are to some extent carpeted with mats and skins, and as already remarked, are quite comfortable, and commodious. The town is built without much regard

to order. There are no regular streets or avenues. The lodges are set up pretty compactly together, in crooked rows along the road, allowing barely space sufficient for a man to pass between them. The avenues between these irregular lines, are kept usually, in tolerably decent order. And the whole village is, upon the whole, rather neat and cleanly than otherwise. There is perhaps as much attention paid in the Indian Towns generally to this department of police duty (cleanliness) as is admissible, or attainable, under the circumstances in which they are obliged to live. Certainly they are by no means insensible to the virtue and importance of cleanliness. Judging from the description I have given of a Kon-see Town, the combustible nature of the materials of which it is built, the manner in which the lodges are huddled together, one would conclude at once, that destructive fires must be frequent among them. This is not the case however. The burning of an Indian village is quite a rare occurrence, and you will easily perceive, that whenever such a misfortune should befall, it can be easily and speedily repaired. Much of the covering would always be saved, and not a few of the skeletons. But if the whole should be consumed, but little time would be necessary to erect new and better lodges. Inconvenience and suffering to some extent, would doubtless be experienced, but not in any degree as great as many people are apt to imagine. I have heard wise men, members of Congress, senators, prescribing “effectual means” for punishing and subduing the Indians, and their grand infallible method was to send a strong cavalry force, to dash into their towns and “burn them with fire,” destroy their growing crops, and drive the inhabitants out. Such a method, if properly conducted, would certainly cause much distress to the Indians for a little while. The towns could be easily burned, and their little crops cut down and destroyed. It is highly improbable however, that any of the Indians would be caught or killed. And as for the rest, I will venture to say that almost any of the tribes, especially such as build as do the Kon-sees and Osages, might without much persuasion, be induced to enter into a treaty compact with good old Uncle Sam, to burn their towns and cut down their crops (or not to plant any), annually, for less than it would cost the Government to equip and send out a military force, such as some of our wise ones at Washington have proposed. At present, whilst these people enjoy the apparently inexhaustible resources of the buffalo hunt, and of other game abounding around them, as well as a great variety of very good vegetable food furnished them indigiously from the forests and prairies (as nuts, roots &c.) not to mention fish—they can do very well without any of those cultivated vegetables in use among some of them, tho’ not all; for there are some nations that never attempt to provide any portion of their food by cultivating fields or gardens.
Doubtless the time will come when the main reliance of all these races, that may survive, must be from agriculture; and with regard to some of the tribes, that time cannot be far distant.

The Kansans had just finished planting their corn, beans, and pumpkins (their whole variety), and were preparing to start out, in a few days, with all their families, for the summer hunt among the buffaloes. Their little garden patches could be seen in all directions, at convenient distances around the village. The whole together would not be equal to one hundred acres. As they have no domestic animals except horses, mules, and dogs, which they take with them always when they move, they have no need of any fencing around their crops. All the cultivation they attempt, is with hoes, done by the women, just previously to their departure for the general buffalo hunt. Their horses and mules, generally in very good condition, were swarming in the beautiful prairie in sight of the town, herded and well watched, by hundreds of boys. All was bustle “busy hum” and merriment. They were soon to set out to the buffalo hunt, by far the greatest enjoyment of their lives. The Kansa River, at the town, is about 300 ft. wide, and is I believe nearly always navigable for keel boats thus far up. Its main branches flow in from the north side, and above the town. One or two enter from the south, which interlock with some of the waters of the Osage, and fall in below the town. Its mouth, as before stated, is about 30 miles above Fort Osage. It is a gentle stream, and waters a fine, rich, and very beautiful country of very great extent. The Kansans have a sort of conventional claim to all the territory that is watered by their beautiful river, in accordance with the common usage among the aboriginal tribes. Such claims, it is understood, limit the extent of their common hunting grounds, for Beaver, Deer, Elk, Bear, etc. But a much more extensive range is allowed facility for the buffalo hunt.

The Kansans (so I call them, because they call themselves so, not Kansas) and the Osages (Washash, as they call themselves) are undoubtedly from the same original stock, tho' they cannot, as they tell me, fairly make out from tradition a kindred genealogy. Their language is so nearly the same, that the difference is hardly discernible, and that very slight difference consists altogether in a peculiar drawn tone of pronunciation with the Kassas. In their manners and customs, they differ only in some very few local peculiarities. At this time the Kassas may probably number about two hundred and fifty fighting men, with a full proportion of women, and more than a fair proportion of children. They are governed by a “Head Chief”, and the counsel and influence of the oldest and most distinguished warriors—a simple patriarchal government. The office of chief being hereditary, tho' not always strictly so. At the present time their councils are much distracted by jealousies arising from the ambitions, and turbulent disposition of some of the warriors and minor chiefs. But there is good reason to believe that the head chief, who is a man of sense and firmness, as well as a great warrior, will be able soon, to effect a reconciliation of the leading partisans, and thus be able to exercise a controlling influence for good, over the tribe. Of late years, these people have scarcely ever been at peace with any of their neighbours, except the Osages, with whom there appears to be now a cordial good feeling which will probably be lasting, as they are constantly becoming more and more intimately connected by intermarriages. Not many years ago the most bitter hostility existed between them and the Osages, and they were rapidly destroying one another. Policy at length united them in their mutual defense against the perpetual attacks of the Pawnees, and more especially the Ioways, Sacs and Pottawattamies.

The Kassas are a stout, hardy, handsome race, more active and energetic and enterprising, than the Osages even, and they have long been noted for their bravery, ferocity and heroic daring, when engaged in active warfare; and they are thus engaged more or less, nearly all the time. They maintain their independence (equally at least, with other tribes) against the Pawnees, Ottos, Missouris, and other tribes, with whom they are continually at war, entirely by their personal bravery and superior skill as warriors. They are by no means ignorant of the position they occupy among the neighbouring tribes in respect to their warlike character, and this consciousness has the natural effect (not confined to ignorant savages), of rendering them extremely overbearing, quarrelsome and ferocious. Previously to the cession of Louisiana to the United States, the Kassas committed frequent acts of violence upon the French traders, who visited them, or were passing up the Missouri to other tribes, robbing, beating and otherwise cruelly abusing them, not unfrequently murdering them. One instance is related of their having burned some Frenchmen alive, after having seized and confiscated their boat and goods. Their constant practice was to way-lay the river in strong parties in the fall of the year when the trading batteaux were passing up, detain them if they could, to trade with them; or else seize and divide their goods, as on a forced credit. Sometimes, tho' very seldom, paying, or much oftener robbing the unlucky trader out and out. Whenever they were able to prevent it, they never suffered a boat to pass them carrying guns and ammunition, lest, as they said, their enemies should be better prepared to fight them. In short, the Kassas, insignificant as they have always been as to numbers, were the terror of the lower Missouri. But they are now undergoing a reformation, under the wholesome advice of Gov. Lewis and Genl. Clark, & the powerful influence of a better regulated trade.

The trade with these people is reckoned valuable at present. The traders
carry them milled blankets, blue & red stranding, scarlet & blue cloth, brass & copper kettles, N.W. Fusils, powder, lead, vermilion, silver ornaments, wampum & glass beads, tobacco, axes, hoes, knives, cotton prints, blk. silks hks, needles, awls, &c, &c, which they exchange for beaver, otter, bear, racoons & shaved deer skins, some buffalo robes, bear's oil, tallow, &c, &c. A single trader with an equipment of $3000 St. Louis cost, will usually collect from ten to twenty five packs of fine furs of $100.00 each, with a large proportion of inferior furs and peltries, worth probably at St. Louis from eight to twelve thousand dollars. But the next trader who ventures there may expect a very different result. The extortions of the traders are always so exorbitant, that 'tis not at all surprising that the Indians sometimes retort by robbery. In truth, the most of the difficulties that arise between the Indians and the whites may be traced to this very cause. The factory system12 as established by Mr. Jefferson, was designed to obviate this evil; and to a great extent it has had that effect. The Konsee are getting more and more in the way of trading at the factory at Ft. Osage. In four days they can come here safely with their packs & having to pass through no enemy's country, and when here are to obtain for their furs and peltries their full value, in such goods as they want, at prices less than half what the traders extort from them.

I left the Konsees on the 22d day of May for the Pawnees. Our course was North about 40° West, distance about 120 miles. The country over which we traveled, is all prairie. For about 25 miles it is hilly and well watered. The hills then wear away into an immense level plain to which the eye can find no bounds, but little to please—there are but few water streams, and the most of those are so sluggish as to be scarcely drinkable. More than once or twice we were put to some difficulty to find water fit to drink. Where wood and water are scarce, game cannot of course be very plenty. We were fortunate however in meeting with several droves of buffaloes and elk, from which we supplied ourselves abundantly for our whole journey to the Pawnees.

Our course brought us to the Platt (Nebras-ca—shallow water) 110 miles13 from the Konsee towns and about 140 miles above its junction with the Missouri. It is a mile wide where we crossed it, and so shallow, that we

12. The factory system offered a means by which the government hoped to control the Indian trade against many of the unprincipled private traders. It had been established by an Act of Congress on March 3, 1795, so Jefferson did not originate it. Largely because of increased demands for free private enterprise, it was abandoned on June 3, 1822.

13. Although the general direction is correct, the distance between the Kansa village and the Platte is nearer to 150 miles than 110.

1965

C. G. Sibley's Journal, 1811

Forced it with ease; in no place did it reach the girths and seldom above the knees of the horses. The Platt, or Nebraska, is a turbid river, very broad, very muddy and very rapid, full of islets—not a tree to be seen, where I crossed it, except a few on some of the islets. It is subject to sudden floods which frequently remove the sandbars and change the channels, the bed is a sort of quicksand. My horse, standing belly deep less than two minutes, was near swimming in a hole by the washing out of the bottom under his feet. It affords no navigation. Nearly all its principal branches flow in from the north side.

Our party (now augmented to 20 persons, by the addition of several Konsee chiefs & warriers) crossed the Ne-bras-ca safely and camped for the night on the north bank. Being now within 10 miles of the Pawnee Republican town,14 I dispatched an interpreter early the next morning to apprise the Pawnees of our approach. This was the 28th day of May, 17 days from Fort Osage and 6 from the Konsee town. Our course to the Pawnee town was a little west of our course hitherto, and lay over an almost dead level prairie. The day was oppressively sultry. When we had got within 5 miles of town, a brushing troop of horsemen met us, sent out by the chief to escort us. This troop was well mounted, and gaudily dressed and accoutered, and really acquitted themselves quite handsomely. On our coming in sight of the town (which stands on the north side of the Otto15 fork of the Nebrasca) the Grand Chief himself dashed across the river at the head of 200 men on horseback, and thus we were received and conducted over the river, with much ceremony and courtesy. The river bank was crowded with swarms of dirty, half naked women & children when we arrived at the skirt of the village, the chief desired us to halt, to allow him to dispose of our company, which he soon bilted in convenient squads, reserving myself & attendants (including Sans Orelle) for his own family and hospitality. This matter being settled, we entered the town, and I soon found myself quite comfortable, tho' I felt feverish and had some headache. It was now late in the day, and of course no business was entered upon. I had my pallet prepared, and attempted to take some repose, determined to keep as quiet as I could, till the morrow.

The Pawnee Republican Town is seated on the north bank of the north, or Otto, fork of the Nebras-ca, or Platt, River, about 100 miles, by its courses, above the confluence.16 It is built immediately on the bank, in an

14. In 1811 the Pawnee Republican town was located on the Loup River. Although archaeologists disagree on the exact site, it was in the vicinity of present Fullerton, Nebraska.

15. Now the Loup River.

16. Actually it was more on the order of fifty miles from the confluence of the Loup and Platte Rivers, unless Sibley meant that the Loup and Platte joined approximately 100 miles up from where the Platte enters the Missouri.
elevated level prairie, which is hemmed in on the north by a range of pretty lofty hills, which run parallel with the river a considerable distance, above & below, leaving a strip of beautiful level meadow or pasture ground, half a mile wide, next to the river. This branch is 160 yards wide at this place. It is a pretty stream, rapid but not muddy, nearly at all times fordable, only navigable downward for canoes & small periagiers.17 Wood is scarce, the principal growth is the cotton tree, a few black walnuts & willows. The adjacent hills produce abundance of dwarf plum bushes, which yield great quantities of very delicious fruit. This shrubbery and the few scattering forest trees appear to be very carefully husbanded & preserved from injury by the Pawnees. The soil does not appear to be very fertile, tho’ it certainly does produce excellent pasture. This pasture, when I observed it, was literally swarming with horses and mules, occupying an area of fully two miles by half a mile, between the hills and rivers. The town is now inhabited by three tribes of the Pawnees, two of which not long ago dwelt on the north branch of the Konsee river,18 about 50 miles, in a direct line above the Konsee town. The successive incursions of the Konsees, compelled them to abandon that position, about two years ago, and to seek protection under the powerful & noted chief Cher a ta reesh19 of the Republican tribe, so called from their location, whose authority over the whole, appears to be firmly established. At this time the town consists of just 170 lodges20 (I had them counted by Henderson & the interpreter). Many families who have lived with their relatives & friends since their removal, are but just preparing to build for themselves. The chief says that when the town shall be completed, it will contain 360 houses and about 4000 people, with abt. 1000 warriors. Building with this people, is not, as with the Konsees & Wasushees, a job of only a few days. It is a serious undertaking. The

17. Progues.

18. The two tribes were the Kitchakkis and the band of Grand Pawnees led by Shariatashir, the name being “an abbreviation of kebara (chief) and charrish (angry cross)" (George E. Hyde, Pawnee Indians, Denver, 1951, 102). The chief, also known as Loup Blanche (White Wolf), was engaged in intrigues to gain control of the Pawnees throughout his life. He apparently was killed in a battle with the Kansa tribe in 1812.

19. Now most commonly spelled Shariatashir, the name being “an abbreviation of kebara (chief) and charrish (angry cross)" (George E. Hyde, Pawnee Indians, Denver, 1951, 102). The chief, also known as Loup Blanche (White Wolf), was engaged in intrigues to gain control of the Pawnees throughout his life. He apparently was killed in a battle with the Kansa tribe in 1812.

20. The size given here poses some problem since no remains of a village of this scale have been identified by archaeologists as the Republican Pawnee town. When Long visited the Pawnees in 1820 he noted three villages: the Grand, Republican miles running westward along the Loup River (James, II, 123 fl.). Since Long's Sibley visited.
crooked pass ways. There is some attention paid to general cleanliness, tho' I must say without any marked success beyond the actual limits of the town.

These people make their travelling tents of well dressed & smoked buffalo skins. They are conical in form, roomy & comfortable, many of them are quite tastily painted in figures regularly drawn. In the construction of these lodges and tents, the far greater part of the labour is performed by the women. It takes from two to four months from first to last, to complete one house.

With a composition of red clay, of a peculiar quality, and finely powdered flint, they manufacture with considerable skill and neatness, a sort of wide mouthed jars or pitchers, of various shapes and sizes, capable of enduring great heat, which they find a good substitute for cooking kettles.

The Pawnees hunt and range over a very extensive tract of country, abounding, at present, with buffalo, elk, antelopes, some bears, horses, and some deer, besides the smaller animals, wolves, foxes, raccoons &c, and is believed to be, in some parts, rich in fine furs. Their trade would be very lucrative if they were settled on a navigable stream. What few goods they get are to be transported more than a hundred miles over land, from the Missouri river. The risk and expense attending this portage deters the traders from visiting them often, and then only with scant supplies. They get no goods from the Spanish settlements, unless they go for them, which they very seldom do. A trading trip to Santa Fe and back would require fully a month.

What little they ever get from that quarter, is mostly in presents to their chiefs and leading men. With so uncertain a vent for their furs and peltries, their attention is chiefly confined to the buffalo hunt, which furnishes them abundance of food and clothing, &c, and is much the least hazardous and laborious. They do furnish some fine furs however (beaver & otter) but in a very small proportion to other skins. Buffalo robes is the staple article of their trade. These they dress and manufacture exceedingly well, and ornament a large portion of them very handsomely, with paint and dyed porcupine quills.

Ten miles higher up the north fork, above the Republicans, is the village of the Loups, or Wolf Pawnees, or as they call themselves. She-nees. Their town is less than the other, tho' better built & in the same style. A perfectly good understanding exists between this band & the others. In fact they are all one people, and are all essentially under the general sway of Cher-a-ta-reesh. The four bands living in the two towns, could I think, turn out twelve hundred very active fighting men, and there is a large proportion of women and children. My impression is that they are increasing in numbers. There are other branches of the Pawnee stock—one or perhaps two on the Red River, high up, and another on the Missouri, not far below the Mandans; known by the name of Re-ca-ras. But the Ne-bras-ca tribes have very little, if any intercourse with the others, and seem to know or care but little about them. They are known to speak the same language, or very nearly so. This language is unpleasant to the ear, & hard to learn. From my conversations with Cher-a-ta-reesh, and inspection of certain documents in his possession, which he put into my hands for that purpose, it would seem that he has been much courted by the Spanish authorities of New Mexico at Santa Fe, and has been often invited by the Governor of that Province to visit him, which however, he has always declined to do.

In looking over the papers, above alluded to, I was surprised to find letters, dated in 1807, to the old chief & his people from the Governors of New Mexico and Baton Rouge, expressive of their satisfaction of their loyalty, &c. These letters the chief says were accompanied with flags and medals, which he gave up to Lieut. Pike. The papers I returned, but told the chief that henceforward, he should keep aloof from the authorities of New Mexico, and so instruct his people, which he promised to do. (I should have noted, that among those papers, was a letter from the Gov. of N. Mex. addressed to "White Hair" grand chief of the Osages", of the same tenor and date of the others, which Cher-a-ta-reesh says White Hair refused to receive, or to receive the flags and medals that accompanied it. I presume the Pawnee chief tells the truth about the affair.) I could find but two American (US) badges among the Pawnees, a small half worn ragged flag left by Lt. Pike, and a medal of the smallest size, that some trader had given to a man of some note for his good offices, influence, &c. Cher-a-ta-reesh said that medal had never been regarded in any other light than a mere ornament.

22. This agrees roughly with Long's estimate of the Pawnee strength (James, II, 134). Long also noted six to eight thousand horses among the villages.
23. The following incidents refer to Pike's visit to the Republican Pawnee village in 1806, when it was located on the Republican Fork of the Kansas River. For Pike's account of the affair see Coute, II, 409-419.
24. White Hair, the elder, also appears under his French (Cheveux Blanches) or Indian (Pahaska) names. "He gained power through the support of Pierre Chouteau ... who had encouraged factional divisions among the Osage, several years previous ... in order to break the monopoly of their trade, which had been purchased by Manuel Lisa..." (Reuben G. Thwaites, Early Western Travels, Cleveland, 1904-05, XIII: "Nuttall's Travels into the Arkansas Territory, 1819," 237, note 194). Just how Shariatariish obtained White Hair's letter is not explained.
In 1804 two Pawnee youths rambled off to Washington on their "own book", without the knowledge of any of the tribe; and somehow or other obtained the recognition of President Jefferson as delegates. They returned home each with a medal and many other marks of distinction, and bore also a written address from the President to all the Pawnees. They had passed themselves off for chiefs, and had evidently humbugged Mr. Jefferson and many others. But their unauthorized mission gave great offense to their chiefs, and the effect produced was decidedly injurious. The young men (who were of no note in their nation) were treated with scorn & derision by all. Nothing that they said was believed; they were stripped of their finery and forbidden to wear their medals. These they sold to some trader, and were never seen again among the Pawnees. The address was preserved by a relative of one of the youths, and put into my hands. (Indians are all fond of showing their "papers"). It had never been explained to any of them, and its contents were totally unknown to them. I availed myself of the opportunity, to have it fully interpreted to the chief and a few of the principal warriors, who seemed much pleased, and promised to explain it to all others. I relate this matter to show how easily our dignitaries at Washington may be Indian-humbugged. As far as I could do it, I remedied the mistake, tho' rather late.

The Pawnees having had little or no intercourse with our people, or communication with our Govt, agencies, whilst they have been familiar with the Spanish authorities in New Mexico, by whom they have always been much courted, it is not surprising that hitherto they have been a good deal under the influence of the latter. It is true that the few acquaintances they have made with Americans (such as Bob McClelland and John Dougherty) have impressed them most favourably of our bravery and power, an impression that is exactly reversed as respects the Spaniards, and it is high time, I think, to cultivate a better acquaintance with these tribes, which is best done by trade & friendly intercourse. This I am endeavoring to promote.

25. These would seem to be two of the Indians who returned with Pike. "We also had under our charge chiefs of the Osage and Pawnee, who, with a number of women and children, had been to Washington. These Indians had been redeemed from captivity among the Potawatomies, and were now to be returned ..." (Coutes, II, 360).

26. Two figures well known in the literature of the early fur trade. Robert McClellan (1770-1815) later acquired fame as one of the Astorians, and Dougherty (1791-1860) became United States Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri tribes in 1827.

27. As Sibley's strong religious bent was most pronounced in his later years, these comments may date from the time of his rewriting the text in 1860.
above the horizon, and to a small blue spot in the sky just above, he thus addressed the venerable chief—"Brave chief and respected friend, when the sun reaches you point in his daily journey, I shall set out upon mine to fulfill my duty. I and my brave comrades here will then start, and nothing but death can stop us. It is my duty as I have already fully explained to you. If you think it is yours to obey the Spaniard and to stop me, he it so, but be assured that the attempt will cost the lives of many brave men. This you may be sure of." Not five minutes remained. The chief stood in thoughtfu] silence, whilst Pike addressed his little band. All were ready. The soldiers braced themselves firmly in their saddles, the indian warriors had strung their bows and some had fixed their arrows (more sure & deadly than bullets). Pike's hand grasped his sword hilt, yet in its scabbard (its being drawn was the appointed signal for the outset, for the indians entirely surrounded him & his men). What a moment! In a few minutes probably, an hundred men or more would "bite the dust". One word from the Pawnee chief was only wanting to prevent this senseless waste of human life. The good sense & humanity of the chief prevailed. He ordered his people to put up their arms, to open the way and permit the little band to pass freely, and go unmolested in whatever direction their young chief chose to lead them. Then turning to Pike he said "Brave young chief, you are free to pursue your journey. Were I now to stop you by destroying you & your comrades, the only way I am convinced that it can be done, I should feel myself a coward, but Cher-a-tee-rech is no coward, no man alive dare call him so. The Spanish chief with his five hundred men was afraid to strike the Ske-nees, tho' they had robbed him. I only whispered in his ear a few words, and he went home again as he came. If he wishes you stopped, let him do it himself if he is able. Cher-a-tee-rech will no longer interfere. Behold, the sun and the blue sky have met. Farewell my son, may the Great Spirit guide and protect you." After some friendly adieu Pike and his party set forward in order, at a brisk gait, and soon left the Pawnees out of sight, but not out of mind, for they loved long afterwards to speak of the brave young American chief.

I have related these incidents just as they were told to me by the chief. He further informed me, as in connection, that during Pike's stay with him, he had surrendered to him at his request, and demand, all his Spanish medals and flags; upon his promise that they should be replaced by others from his great American father, but he had not yet seen or heard anything more about them. He feared they had been forgotten. All this conversation about Pike took place the day after my arrival at the Pawnees, and

28. A reference to the large Spanish force under Lieutenant Don Facundo Malgraves which marched through the Southwest showing the Spanish flag just prior to Pike's visit (Coles, II, 410-14).
29. James R. Wilkinson, son of General (and Governor) James Wilkinson. Dr. Robinson, a civilian, was volunteer surgeon on the expedition.
whilst I lay on my pallet, indisposed, in the chief's lodge; before I had entered upon any business, or even intimated distinctly, why I had visited him and his people. Nothing could have been more opportune than this previous communication from the chief concerning my friend Pike, and his promise of medals and flags, all of which was entirely new to me, as it was also to all other agents of the government. Nor did I doubt the truth of all he had told me so circumstantially.

Now, as my main business with the Pawnees was to explain to them their new relations toward our government, and to advise them of the entire dissolution of all their dependence on, and allegiance to the Spanish authorities of New Mexico, (as well as to make peace between the Osages, Konsees and Pawnees, so that the latter might safely visit the factory at Fort Osage,) I had been careful to provide myself amply with American flags and medals (besides other things) to be used as I might find occasion. When therefore Cher-a-ta-reesh had concluded his interesting narrative, which ended by telling me about the medals and flags promised him by Lieut. Pike, I instantly seized on the coincidence, not only to aid my own views, but also at the same time to vindicate Pike, and make good his promises as claimed by the old chief. I therefore quickly informed him that I was prepared to redeem the promises of my friend Pike, and would deliver the flags and medals that were due before I left, and that I would place them in his hands that very day, sick as I was, if he desired it. This he declined however, saying he was perfectly satisfied, now he was sure they had not been forgotten and would wait 'till I felt better, and could conveniently deliver them; and in the meantime would send out criers to announce to all the Pawnees, that the stranger just arrived was the brother of "the brave young American chief" (they all knew Pike by that name) and had brought the long promised American flags & medals; and this to them interesting piece of news was speedily promulged far and wide, even to the Ske-nees. I was fully aware at the time that the peculiar circumstances of Pike after he left the Pawnees, and ever since, had put it entirely out of his power to redeem his pledge to Cher-a-ta-reesh; and I explained it all satisfactorily to the chief (and I will here add that I have since met Pike, and told him of this whole transaction, my visit to the Pawnees, &c. and he assured me that the old chief's story is substantially true). 31

31. Pike and Sibley could only have met during the late winter of 1812 in Natchitoches, Louisiana, the home of Sibley's father, Dr. John Sibley, whose diary (now at Lindenwood College) has two entries that bear this out: January 14—"Geo C Sibley arrived . . . 2 and February 19—"Col Pike is on his way." It is known that Pike remained in Natchitoches for about two weeks, and Dr. Sibley suggests a departure date for George of about the third week in February, which would have allowed a meeting; "My son whose post is Fort Osage on Missouri made me a visit this winter past he left this six weeks ago for Washington" (letter from John Sibley to Amos Stoddard, April 2, 1812, Sibley Papers, MoShHi).
165 miles to the U-jet-tas, hunting camp on the bank of the Arkansaw. Our route from the Nebrasca to the Arkansaw lay thru a pretty tract, all prairie. At the distance of about sixty miles, to the north fork of the Konsee river, it is rather level, and but indifferently watered. Afterwards the surface is much more broken, or “rolling” as ‘tis called. Besides the north fork, we crossed two other considerable branches of the Konsee, and several smaller tributaries. We crossed the Konsee river about 100 miles from the Nebrasca. Here the Konsee chief and his men left us, and hastened on to where they expected to find the whole tribe encamped for the summer buffalo hunt. We were met by a troop of some 50 horsemen about the middle of the afternoon, who had been dispatched to conduct us to the camp. Being fatigued and hungry I accepted very willingly the invitation. Found the whole tribe encamped in an elevated prairie near a small creek. They were all busily engaged jerking and drying Buffalo beef (having killed as they said, more than an hundred fat ones) and feasting. And truly I enjoyed myself very much for the short time I staid among them. They were especially thankful to me for having made peace for them with their old enemies the Pawnees, and all seemed eager to manifest their gratitude.

I left the Konsee camp at nine o'clock the next morning, and at 3 p.m. arrived safely at the hunting camp of the U-jet-tas. Their camp occupied a most lovely position on the bank of the Arkansaw. Here they had been about 10 days, had abundance of good eatables, having slaughtered upwards of 200 buffalo, besides other choice game.

As they proposed to continue their route towards the Grand Saline in a few days, and my horses were somewhat jaded, I concluded to remain with them ’till they moved on, and to travel with them a day in order to witness leisurely and intelligibly, what I was curious to note: a whole tribe, men, women, youth, children, horses and dogs, with all their moveable effects, in the full enjoyment of the summer buffalo hunt, in the vast prairies of the West—for this great hunt is literally a season of enjoyment, with all these roaming tribes. When thus engaged they appear to most advantage—they are then at home. I passed the time during my sojourn among these my old friends, very pleasantly. They treated me with a kind of sober hospitality bordering on affection, shewing that I was not regarded as a stranger among them.

As Stoddard gives the mountain’s approximate location: “It is supposed to be situated at the head of one of the western branches of the Arkansas. This mountain, if it may be so called, has been visited by Indians only, and on them we are unfortunately obliged to rely for a description of it.” Despite this, he goes on to describe it as a “bluff or mountain composed of a solid mass of fossil salt, and covered with a thin stratum of earth; at the base of which issues a large salt

The Arkansaw at this place is about 200 yards wide—rapid—shallow and red, nearly always fordable. It is remarkable that as soon as you set foot on the South West side of this river, wherever I saw it, you discover a very striking difference in the whole face of the country. Its tributaries from that side are nearly all deeply tinged with red (as is the soil), and are generally deficient in wood, whilst on the N. E. side, its branches are clear and pretty well wooded. The Arkansaw itself is but scantily wooded, with a few scattering cotton trees till you descend to the Verdigrise, a branch from the north, on which the Sha-neers, a tribe of Osage live.

I was with the U-jet-tas, in camp and on the march, eleven days. One object that I had in view, was to organize a party of about one hundred active Osages to accompany me to the Rock Saline after I should rejoin them from my visit to the Grand Saline, the latter of which, I intended first to visit with only a small party. I was assured that it would be extremely hazardous to go to the Rock Saline (sometimes called “Jefferson’s Salt Mountain”) with less than eighty or a hundred men, organized and equipped in all things as a war party; that no Indian ever thought of going to that famous place, or into the surrounding region “so full of wonders”, except in strong force, and even then with great caution. I found that with the influence of my faithful friend Sans Oreille (the celebrated war chief) who offered to go himself, that I might now accomplish this favorite and long cherished object, and fearing to lose so good an opportunity that might never again occur, I was the more urgent now in making all necessary preparations for the trip. No white man, as Sans Oreille and all the chiefs assured me, had ever yet been known to have visited either the Grand or Rock Saline, certainly not the latter, and all that was known of them at all, was through some vague Indian stories, told with much exaggeration by a wagging Spanish trader to Major Stoddard, whose well known credulity in all that relates to the wonderful in the wild West, was frequently imposed upon.

This story, passing through the medium of the Major’s pen (with

32. Another instance of Sibley’s error in distance over long stretches. It is roughly 110 miles from the Platte crossing to the Republican River near Concordia, Kansas, although he lists it as only “sixty miles to the north fork of the Konsee river.” It is most likely that he reached the Arkansas somewhere near present Wichita, approximately 250 miles from the Platte, again considerably more than his estimate. The “two other considerable branches of the Konsee” are most likely the Solomon and Saline Rivers, and rather than crossing the “Konsee” Sibley probably went over the Smoky Hill River near present Salina, Kansas.

33. The Verdigris River, which empties into the Arkansas near Muskogee, Oklahoma.

34. Ames Stoddard was a firm believer in the existence of a salt mountain: “But that there is a mountain of rock salt—cannot be doubted” (Stoddard, “Observations on the Native Salt, Bearded Indians, Earthquakes, and Boundaries of Louisiana,” The Medical Repository, IV (May-July, 1806), 44). In this instance Stoddard lists only second-hand sources for his belief: a Lieut. Nolan (who was told of it on a trip in 1795) and some Osage chieftains (who told it to Stoddard); Capt. Vigo of Vincennes (who visited some salt springs in 1771-72); and James McKay (who was told about it while on a trip in 1795). Later Stoddard gives the mountain’s approximate location: “It is supposed to be situated at the head of one of the western branches of the Arkansas. This mountain, if it may be so called, has been visited by Indians only, and on them we are unfortunately obliged to rely for a description of it.” Despite this, he goes on to describe it as a “bluff or mountain composed of a solid mass of fossil salt, and covered with a thin stratum of earth; at the base of which issues a large salt
such embellishments as his imagination would naturally give it) to Mr. Jefferson who was himself rather inclined to the marvellous in relation to his new purchase of Louisiana, undoubtedly, gave rise to the famous "Salt Mountain Story." The opportunity now presented to me to look into these matters for my own gratification at least, was too favorable to admit of any omission on my part to profit by it. Having at length though not without much difficulty and some expense, arranged all things satisfactorily for the trip to the "Salt Mountain" as soon as I should return from the Grand Saline, and the Osages having struck their camp, we all crossed the river a day's journey, about 8 miles below the camp. My party now consisted of only nine persons—Sans Oreille and five other Osages, Gabriel the interpreter, Henderson & myself. We immediately after crossing the river set out pretty briskly on a course S 50 W, and travelled 20 miles to a small creek in the prairie, say 28 miles from the camp. The country from the Arkansas to this point is all naked prairie, the soil red. We crossed two small branches, each about 30 yards wide, rapid, shallow and red—also two or three smaller streams, none of these afford much wood, a few scattering cotton trees, elm and dwarf plum trees. From the appearance, one would suppose that the whole land must have been recently overrun with buffaloes. The grass was cropped close as an old sheep pasture, and the whole plain covered like a cattle yard with their excrement. But the animals had fled far away; only a few remained, of which one was killed by an Indian. We pursued our way S 40° E—30 miles and arrived at the camp of the Great Osages, White Hair's band, over a tract such as last described, crossing two small creeks, one 20 the other 30 yds. wide, rapid, red & shallow, running into the Arkansas. White Hair and his people received us very kindly. We stayed with them from 2 p.m. 'til sunrise next morning.

S 15° E—20 miles thru broken prairie, crossing two small branches of Arkansas—country and creek the same in appearance as before, naked, red, &c. We now, at 2 p.m., arrived at the camp of the Shae-neers, another tribe of Wau-sash-ees (Osages), by whom we were received and entertained most hospitably. Both of these last named bands were abounding in buffalo meat and other good things—feasting was the order of the day and of the night also. On leaving the Shae-neers the next morning at 10, we steered

very nearly due West, and in that direction travelled about 32 miles, over very broken prairie, crossing several small streams, all of which are rapid, shallow and red; and on most of them are some scattering elms, under one of which we camped for the night, not a little fatigued, having now come to a sandy region, by which the Grand Saline is entirely environed. In the morning very early, we pursued our way, due west, across the sandy belt, 8 miles. These 8 miles lay chiefly over a range of barren sandhills, on the sides of which were here and there a few dwarf plum bushes, not over a yard in height, loaded with large, red, delicious plums, many of which we appropriated. A number of small rivulets of fine water, clear as chryystal, and perfectly fresh, pass among these sands in deep beds, affording on their margins some scattering clumps of plum bushes, and small cotton trees. From the last ridge of these sand hills on our route, I had an imperfect view of the Saline, intercepted however, by an intervening skirt of cotton trees, extending thru' a low flat prairie, that lies nearly parallel with the salt plain and the sand hills, and extends two or three miles. My Indian conductors were unusually alert, as we traversed this wood. There might be some lurking danger there. Some of his people (Sans Oreille told me) had been waylaid and killed there by a band of Pau-dus-ca, not far from where we were then passing. But we neither saw nor heard of any thing to molest us. We passed quietly through, and came to a small river of Arkansas, running S. West along the So Eastern border of a plain of hard reddish sand. Where we crossed this stream, we found it divided into three channels by sand bars, each channel about twenty yards wide. Its water is red, brackish, current quite rapid. It was not quite swimming to our horses, so we forded it very readily, tho' the edges of the bars, and the banks, being a sort of quicksand obliged us to be brisk in our movements. Being at length fairly over this singular stream, I found myself at once on a level, hard sandy plain, the southern side of the Grand Saline, and I had leisure quietly to contemplate the wonderful scene before me, far surpassing in the reality anything that I had ever pictured to myself from Indian descriptions.

It is a perfectly smooth and almost level plain of red sand, so hard on the surface that our horses hoofs scarcely made any impression, except on the crust of salt with which it was entirely covered. As our horses moved about, the idea of riding over smooth hard ground covered with sleet occurred to us all, and we remarked with one voice as it were, the very striking simi-
itude. I endeavored to ascertain as nearly as I was able, circumstanced as
I then was, the probable extent of this vast plain of salt. My eye is pretty
well practiced in making estimates of distances in the great prairies, but
here it was impossible, from the nature of the surface, white and shining
in the sunshine, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion from mere visual
observation. I had no instruments with me fit for the purpose. I questioned
Sans Oreille, who had often been there, as to how long it might take a man
to ride around it, on the outer sandy margin, at the usual travelling gait? He
had never been round it, but supposed it would require a whole day, and in
this all the other indians present agreed. Some of them thought that if the
horse went pretty fast he could get round in less than a day, and one said
he could ride round in half a day if he started very early. None of them,
except Sans Oreille and Mo-no-soo-je had ever been there before. My own
conclusion, from all that I saw and heard on the spot, and at the Osage camp
afterwards, is that the Grand Saline is fully thirty miles in its circumference.
I mean the great sand plain that I saw covered entirely with salt on the 24th
day of June 1811. In this estimate I am persuaded that I am safely within
the mark. The figure of this plain is an irregular one, much the widest at
the south western extremity, and narrowing towards the north eastern arm,
when I crossed it, at which point it is certainly more than three miles wide.
The salt crust that covered this plain when I saw it, was pretty uniformly
of the thickness of a thick wafer. In some places it was thirce that thickness,
and all this was the production of about twenty four hours of only tolerably
fair sunny weather. For ten days previous to my arrival at the Saline, until
two or three days before, it had been excessively rainy in that vicinity (we
encountered several drenching rain storms where we were). Such torrents
had fallen that the two small rivers that run, one on each side, were after 24
hours cessation, nearly swimming to our horses. Ordinarily, as the indians
assured me, they have not water enough in their channels "to swim a dog".
The whole plain, as Sans Oreille confidently affirmed, had been very re-
cently inundated, which indeed, appeared plain enough, from the driftwood
that lay scattered over it, and yet more evidently from a little fish that I
picked up more than a mile from either river.
If then I had been there two days sooner, I should have found but a very
slight appearance of salt, probably none at all, and the whole plain flooded;
but if I had got there fifteen days earlier, I should have found it entirely
covered over with a beautiful clean, white, crust of salt, from two to six
inches thick, of a quality nearly if not quite equal to the imported "blown
salt", clean and fit for use. In this stage the Grand Saline bears a very
striking resemblance to a brilliant field of snow, with a crust on it after a
rain. Had I arrived the next day after the overflow, I should have found
vast quantities of mush salt, so to call it, collected in hollows and furrows
near the lower angle of the plain. Of this I saw and examined specimens
from masses of many thousands of bushels, as I should guess, but it all was
of a reddish tinge, occasioned by a slight mixture of red sand, which effect
is also produced sometimes, by violent wind storms. These conclusions,
drawn from what I saw on the spot, and from what I was told on the spot,
by Sans Oreille, and subsequently by other Osages who had been there
frequently, and witnessed all its various stages of operation, may, I am
quite sure, be relied on for their general accuracy. At any rate I am
satisfied myself with these deductions. It may probably be many years
before any other rambler will enjoy even so good an opportunity as I had,
to examine and inquire about this truly magnificent salt depository. Altho'
I was not there to witness the Grand Saline in its most perfect state, for the
reasons already stated, yet I was highly gratified to find so many inon-
testable proofs touching the rapidity and great extent of its operations. The
whole plain equal in its area to a plot enclosed in a circle thirty miles in
circumference was perfectly covered with a brilliant white crust of excellent
salt, so that so far as regards its general appearance to the view, it was very
nearly the same as if it had been in its highest perfection. So the Osages
assured me, and my own observation confirmed what they said of it. Indeed,
I rather concur with Sans Oreille, in the opinion, that all things considered
(not forgetting the mush salt), I could not have visited the Saline under
any more favorable circumstances. This beautifully dazzling white surface,
have the effect of looming, as the sailors call it, in a very remarkable degree,
producing to the unpracticed eye, very surprising deceptions, especially
when the sun shines brightly on it, as was the case whilst I was there.
The plain when we reached it, was dotted with small herds of
buffaloes. There may have been six or eight hundred, the most of them far
off to the westward. One only of those detached herds which was to the
leeward of us, on our right, was in the least disturbed by our presence, as we
stood on the south east verge of the plain. That one consisting of some
thirty or forty, seemed to my vision so fairly within striking distance as
they ran crossing our course, towards the other droves, though not yet
opposite to us by two or three miles, as it turned out; that I could not
resist the temptation for a chase, tho' warned by Sans Oreille of the real
distance the game was from us. A buffalo chase on the Grand Saline, was
not an every day affair however. My buffalo horse, a present from Che-
ata-resh the Pawnee chief, was fleet and experienced, and pretty fresh, not
having been ridden for several days past, was brought forward by Henderson
and I was quickly on his back, disincumbered of all useless furniture,
including sundry garments. And calling on Mo-no-soo-gee, a fine young
Osage, who was mounted on a trained buffalo chaser, and equipped with bow and arrows (far preferably to any other weapon) to accompany me, he instantly prepared himself, and away we went “full tilt”.

The buffalo was crossing our course nearly at right angles with our position (these animals are not easily put out of their course) aiming to rejoin the other herds at the upper part of the plain; and were running at about half speed when we started. What I had supposed could not exceed half a mile to intercept them, proved to be more than a mile. We met the chase considerably to the right of where we left our party. Mo-no-soo-je had purposely kept a little behind me, to allow me the first shot. I discharged two pistols, and only crippled, not badly, one buffalo. I then wheeled off, and reined in a little, in order, if possible, to reload, but I could not. An empty pistol is of no more use in a buffalo chase than an Indian pipe, and but little better when well charged. All this I very well knew long before from experience. Yet the exercise and excitement, with me at least, of the mere chase, were abundant compensation for my failure to kill a buffalo. Just as I wheeled off, Mo-no-soo-je dashed past me. Both he and the beautiful barb that he sat on with inimitable grace, were naked, except the ornamented scarlet cloth belted around his loin, &c, and a sort of bridle halter made of white horsehair; and both horse and rider were equally animated. The young U-jet-ta (one of the finest models of manly beauty) were round his neck loosely, a handsome collar of wampum beads, composed of some twenty blue and white straws. His ears and jet black hair and his bosom were tastily tinged with vermillion and set off with silver ornaments, and to his scalp lock was appended the warrior’s badge (the deer tail dyed scarlet). In his mouth he carried two arrows, and one on his bowstring, ready for instant use. As his horse was guided and governed almost entirely by well understood pressure of the rider’s knees, and the reins lay loosely on his neck, the whole man was perfectly free and unencumbered. As he passed by me, he cried out adjutumbo, wau-sash-ee che togato - “See how wau-sashies deal with the buffalo”, and away he sped swiftly into the herd, rapidly discharged two arrows and wheeled off. The herd ran off minus two of their number, three cows; in each was an arrow, penetrating the vitals, which soon caused the blood to choke and strangle them. They both fell dead, not fifty yards apart; and but little to the left of our course. We saw the frightened herd as they ran, full half an hour, apparently almost within gunshot. So great and deceptive is the booming on the Grand Saline. I had often participated with Wau-sashies and Konsces in buffalo chases, but always on a large scale. In this instance, however, having a field of such a novel character, and the whole of it to ourselves (Mo-no-soo-je and I), I enjoyed it with more than a double relish.

Whilst still under this pleasurable excitement, it occurred to me that any genuine sportsman (as we understand the term out here in the wild far west) might well afford to make the journey from the Atlantic, to accompany such a lad as Mo-no-soo-je in a buffalo chase on the Grand Saline.

As soon as Sans Oreille and the rest of the party joined us at the dead buffaloes, and we had helped ourselves to some choice pieces for our supper and breakfast, we pursued our way leisurely over the crusty plain. We crossed a narrow neck (course No. W.) which judging by our time and gait, I think we would measure more than three miles over. The great body of the plain was on our left, and presented a singular view, almost boundless, terminated by a range of hills dimly seen, slightly tinged with green. Leaving the Saline, now late in the day, we crossed over a flat marshy prairie, about a mile over, and came to a branch of the Arkansas, about sixty feet wide, running rapidly in a deep channel. It was evidently beyond its usual depth, though not quite swimming to our horses. This stream runs nearly parallel with the northwest side of the Saline, and unites with that on the opposite side, that we crossed in the morning, a short distance below the eastern point of the plain, so Sans Oreille told me, for I did not see it myself. Relying on his intelligence and accuracy, I desired Sans Oreille to draw a map of the grand Saline and its environs, according to what he knew of them, which he very readily executed with the point of an arrow on the crust at the dead buffaloes, which the rest of the men were cutting and packing beef. From the sketch thus drawn, with what I saw and heard, I think I have a pretty reliable understanding of this remarkable place.

The Grand Saline is probably not over eighty miles from a navigable part of the Arkansas, and I am of opinion that an excellent wagon road might be made from one to the other on a line nearly direct. The country is generally pretty smooth and the intervening streams easily bridged. Whether any attempt will ever be made to draw this inexhaustible store of ready made salt into the channels of commerce, or not, need not be now discussed, but if it should be found expedient and desirable to do so, I do not entertain a doubt of its practicability. Nothing is said, in nature is formed in vain, certain I am, she has placed no material obstacles between this grand deposit of salt and commercial enterprise, and has clearly provided thus munificently for some wise and beneficent purpose connected with the comfort of man.

Our scouts, for we had to be very vigilant, reported that they had seen horsemen in the hills south west of us, and thought it very probable that there was a band of Comanches or Padeoues over in that direction. After questioning them pretty closely, Sans Oreille came to the same conclusion. I could form no judgment myself as to the fact reported, but upon Sans
Oreille's opinion that it was most probably true (for he said the young men would not speak falsely to him) I at once decided that my party was entirely too weak to justify our longer stay in that vicinity against the decided counsel of Sans Oreille. There were only nine of us. A troop of mounted Padoncas or Ca-man-ches (who are always at war with the Wau-sash-es) would have made short work of us at a sudden dash, taking us all, of course, for Indians. With much reluctance therefore, I gave up my purpose of spending several days at, and in the neighborhood of the Grand Saline. I now regretted that I had not, as I could have had, a party of fifty instead of nine men, but regrets were unavailing and useless. The evidence appeared good and conclusive, that the prouders were near us in force, and had very probably already seen us. We therefore struck north-westerly towards where Sans Oreille expected to find his people, at one of their favorite summer camping places, which had often been extolled to me for its eligibility and romantic beauty.

We rode about twelve miles on our course, and then camped for the night two hours after night-fall. The next day (the 25th June) we travelled twenty eight miles, no west, over very broken prairie, and many rough places and arrived early after noon, at the U-jet-ta camp where they had been several days, and intended to remain two or three weeks. They had indeed chosen a most lovely spot for their temporary sojourn, on a commanding prairie hill, at the foot of which runs a bold gravelly creek, of clear excellent water. (Some people have the very mistaken notion, that the indians are indifferent about the mere natural beauties and attractions of their localities, the notion is not only erroneous in point of fact, but is unnatural, and quite unphilosophical.)

I found my good friends. I suppose there were a thousand souls in the camp, in the full and free indulgence of all the luxuries of their rude condition. Their position was deemed secure. There were none sick, and their supplies were abundant. The more aged warriors were not unmindful of a proper vigilance. The elder married women were busily employed jerking and curing on scaffolds, the flesh of the fat buffalo. The young men and maidens were lounging around in small groups, dressed, painted and adorned in the highest style of fashion (their best apparel and finery they always reserve to be worn in their summer camps). The larger boys were herding and watching the thousand horses. The younger girls nursing and helping their mothers, whilst other swarms of children were swimming in the creek or gambolling over the beautiful green prairie. They were living most luxuriously on fat buffalo, elk, deer, marrow bones, tongues, hominy, beans, dried pumpkin, plums and other dainties. Mirth and hearty merri-

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ment prevailed. Never had I witnessed such general happiness in any community as prevailed here. It was truly an interesting scene to look upon.

Feeling myself pretty much at home among the U-jettas, I entered cordially into the very spirit of their innocent enjoyments, and quite freely participated in them, as much so at least as I thought consistent with my station, a consideration that I have ever invariably made it a point of duty strictly to observe. And here I must remark, that it is highly improper in my opinion, for any man claiming to be civilized, and educated in a Christian community (and infinitely more so if he holds an official trust among them) so far to forget himself in the presence of Indians on any occasion as to compromit the proper respect he owes to his position, by any frivolity of conduct or conversation. Nor do I consider it much more proper to assume a cold, stiff, overtrained sort of mock dignity before those shrewd children of nature. Either extreme is pretty sure to discredit the white man, both in his official and private standing. And I will also mention two others of the various observations that I have noted in relation to these people. The first is, their attention to personal cleanliness, whenever their circumstances and employments will admit of it. This virtue is practiced and enjoyed by them habitually during the summer hunting season, by means of frequent ablutions in the streams near which they pitch their regular camps. They are never unmindful of this particular convenience in the selection of their camp grounds. The females in troops, almost daily, indulge themselves in this luxury, without the least apprehension of intrusion or improper observation. It would assuredly jeopard the personal comfort, if not his ears, of any offender in this respect, not only from the offended dames and damsel, but from the chiefs and head men. All such curiosity being strictly forbidden, and rigidly punished if detected. The other observation alluded to, relates to the still higher virtue of chastity. I doubt much if there is any nation or tribe or community in existence, who are more justly entitled to the praise of this virtue in its due observance from principle than the Wau-sash-es tribes. It is painful to reflect how soon this state of comparative innocence must yield and give way before the pernicious influence and example of cupidity and licentiousness inseparable from the initiatory stages of what is commonly called civilization (?)

On my return to the U-JET-TA CAMP from the Grand Saline (25th June) I found my war party all ready and anxious to be off. Wau-be-soon-je, a warrior of some celebrity, had been chosen to be our leader, supported by Shin-ga-was-su, a genuine son of chivalry of the stock of Sans Oreille. The party consisted of ninety vigorous, active indians, well

36. Shenga Wassa, a chief of the Grand Osages, was also known as Belle Oiseau (Beautiful Bird).
equipped; besides the leaders and cooks. They set out on the march the second day after my return, all on foot (the Wau-sash-ees always go to war on foot), and I was to join them with Sans Oreille and the interpreter the next day at a place appointed. I had seen these people in all situations, except in their military capacity in actual service; and now beheld me, as a sort of supernumerary volunteer, about to join the command of Capt. Wau-be-soon-je in an expedition to the "Salt Mountain." As I had organized this company, (at my own expense) only for my protection against any unlawful assault or hindrance, in an excursion that I was sure I had a right to make, I joined it not only without any misgivings of official propriety, but with a clear sense of duty circumstanced as I then was.

Early on the morning of the 28th, I set out as above stated, and overtook the war party after two hours travel, at their camp, and immediately the whole company moved on at a brisk rate, our horses being kept pretty busy to keep pace with the footmen, for the country we had now entered was extremely broken and hilly. Our course from the U-jet-ta camp was South 40° West, to the Rock Saline; the distance near about 60 miles. I will here describe this most wonderful place as well as I can, before I attempt a description of the very strange country through which we had to pass to get to it. The Rock Saline is a level flat of redish colored sand (like that of the Grand Saline), containing as I guessed about 500 acres, longitudinally intersected by a small stream that runs into a branch of the Arkansas, called I believe, Rock Salt River. It is bounded from S. E to N. W. by very lofty hills, whose sides next to the sandy flat, are for the most part perpendicular, and faced with rugged rocks of gypsum of different kinds, intermixed with red clay and flint. These hills are entirely naked, otherwise they might be ranked as mountains. Immense numbers of swal-

37. In the Oklahoma version, Sibley lists "my servant Henderson" as his companion, rather than Gabriel Lorr, the interpreter (Chronicles of Oklahoma, V, 218).
38. At this point the Oklahoma version stops.
39. The location of Sibley's Rock Saline has been something of a problem over the years. Thwaites is in error when he writes: "The second saline, called 'Grand Saline' on Pike's map, is located by him on the head-springs of one branch of the Cimarron, which would probably place it in northwestern Texas, or southeastern Colorado." (Thwaites, V, "Bradbury's Journals," 192). The numerous references by Sibley to the gypsum deposits, and the description of the landscape in the area suggest the character of the Blaine Escarpment along the Cimarron River in Oklahoma, and the possibility that his "Rock Saline" was in either Woodward or Harper Counties in that state. This region contains many salt springs and would be in the general direction and at the approximate distance from the "Grand Saline" that Sibley gives. More specific identification, however, is not possible without a thorough investigation of the area, and even then Sibley's description could refer to several sites.
40. Sibley's "Rock Salt River" is the present Cimarron, and one possible location for this particular saline would be the point at which the Buffalo River empties into it, near Edith, Oklahoma. The area had a rich saline deposit and was leased to the Cherokee Nation in 1886 for the production of salt.

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lows have their nests in the crevices of these rocks. From the bases of these hills issue many springs of salt water, which flow over about 100 acres of the adjacent flat, namely, that section of it which lies on the southerly side of the dividing stream mentioned above.

There is good reason to believe that this section rests on a solid mass of salt, in some places not over two feet, in others three or four perhaps, below the hard surface, and to what depth not known. This belief prevails with the indians at any rate, and I saw nothing myself to authorize me to gainsay their opinion. There are four springs that rise near the base of the rocky bluff, within the flat, the water of which is perfectly saturated—(Salt will not dissolve in it). These afford some aid to the numerous small springs that issue from the foot of the mountain, and together with them, keep up a sufficient supply of water over the flat for the sun's evaporation. The whole of this region had been lately repeatedly deluged by heavy rains. The little creek that divides the hard sandy flat, usually not ancle deep, was now nearly swimming to our horses. We got there the second day after the rains had ceased, on a bright sunny day, and found the saline renewing its operations under a beaming hot sun. The rain water had all been either washed from the plain, or had been absorbed by the sand. The springs were flowing over, and had already formed a shallow pond next to the hills, half an inch deep, on which was collecting a sort of ice of salt, so to call it, in particles like fish scales, producing a very striking resemblance of the effect produced by throwing hot tallow into a tub of cold water, the scale of salt rising and forming on the surface of the pond, as tallow will in the tub. This is the beginning of the process. Sans Oreille and others, told me that if there shd. be a continuance of six or eight or ten days of dry hot weather, the whole of the small section would be covered with a solid rock of salt from five to eight inches thick, and that immediately round each of the four big springs, would be formed a kind of hollow cone of salt, open at the top, more than two feet above the surface of the sand. This assertion was supported by the unanimous voice of the indians present, who assured me they had often seen it in that state. Indeed strange as the fact may seem, it was abundantly plain to my mind, and may be fairly deduced from what I saw myself. Notwithstanding the great floods of rain that had so recently drenched the plains (the evidences of which were all around us), there remained large masses of salt around the four large springs, probably a ton weight. At one of these I cut out with my tomahawk a block of beautiful white salt fifteen inches square (which I carried home). I then dug in the spring, a foot below the surface, and hauled out large lumps of clean salt, as large and white as hen's eggs. Some of the indians who were observing my operations asked me, laughing, if I expected to dig through the
rock? If I had been provided with a mattock, I should certainly have entered much more deeply into the subject. The larger section of the plain, produces salt similar to that of the Grand Saline, but not in the same abundance in proportion to its extent. The rock salt is unquestionably the best that I have ever seen. It is beautifully clean and white, and heavier than the best imported alum salt.

Some of Wau-be-soon-gees scouts came in whilst Sans Oreille and I were digging, and reported that they had discovered some quite fresh signs not far off, of Padoosas in considerable numbers, probably some hundreds, men and women. This interruption I much regretted, for the captain quickly summoned his men, and they all, except two who were detained by Sans Oreille, left us in pursuit of "the enemy". There was not the least doubt but a large number of Indians had been at the Saline since the rain; but as there were evidences that some of them were women, and that they were only in quest of salt, I tried to dissuade Capt. Wau-be-soon-gee from pursuing them. But in vain: "they might catch some stragglers and obtain a few scalps". Sans Oreille now expressed some uneasiness as to our safety if we remained any longer at the Saline, and urged our return at once to our last night's camp. For, said he, "this is always a dangerous place for a small party, a few lurking Pa-du-sas or Ca-man-ches might surprise us". I had spent upwards of three hours at the place, and had seen and learned all about it, that I could as I was circumstanced; and though disappointed that I was unable to make a more extensive examination round about the Saline, I was much gratified that I had been as successful as I had been in so brief a visit. Yielding to the advice of my trusty and experienced friend, our little party, only five of us in all, and two of the five on foot, left the Saline.

We returned to the U-jet-ta camp by nearly the same route that brought us out. Five days were spent in this excursion, which brought us to the end of the 3d day of July.

Before I set my face homeward, I must endeavor to give you some descriptive account of my journey to the Rock Saline and the extremely interesting country throu which I passed. The distance as before noted is about sixty miles. It may be more, say 75. It would be next to impossible to ascertain that matter very accurately, even with chains and compass.

The general course of our travel was 40 degrees West of South. The whole distance lay over a country remarkably rugged and broken, affording the most romantic and picturesque scenery imaginable, and in endless variety. It is all naked prairie, the grass eaten down by the buffaloes like an old sheep pasture. A tract of about seventy miles square, as nearly as I could ascertain, in which nature has displayed an astonishing variety of the strangest and most whimsical vagaries. It is an assemblage of barren hills, fertile meadows, and grassy ridges, thrown together in the utmost apparent disorder, and presenting in every direction an endless variety and succession of curious and interesting objects.

After winding along for some miles in zig zag directions on elevated ridges, we would suddenly descend by an almost perpendicular declivity of rocks and clay and gravel, into a series of fertile meadows, watered by beautiful riverlets and here and there adorned with clumps of thrifty cotton trees, elms and cedars. These meadows are partitioned off from each other by chains of red clay and huge masses of gypsum, with here and there a pyramid of gravel. Standing in the middle of one of these meadows, the contemplation of the surrounding scene, would lead one to imagine himself in the midst of the magnificent ruins of some ancient city, and that the plain on which it stood had been sunk by some convulsion of nature, more than a hundred feet below its former level. For the chains that divide and surround the valleys, are composed of huge blocks of red clay, some of which rise to the height of nearly 100 feet, and are capped with rocks of gypsum, which the hand of time is ever crumbling off, and stirring in beautiful transparent flakes over their sides, glittering in the sunshine like so many mirrors. Some of these blocks stand alone and rise in figures the most grotesque—here a huge column crumbling to decay, there a lump of broken and disfigured pyramids laboring under great masses of gypsum, rocks, hanging in shelves and often broken loose by rain and wind, and precipitated into the plain below, where they lay strewn about in fragments of a ton's weight or more. There are numerous gaps or passes throu those dividing chains, which conduct you on the same level from one meadow to another. Some of those throu which we passed were not over 50 feet broad, faced on both sides with rude columns of gypsum, clay and gravel, and upwards of 60 feet high. Passing these, we came to extensive levels of say ten acres, handsomely gravelled over, and surrounded by towers of rock and clay, reminding one of some romantic description of the court yards of some ancient castle in ruins. On passing throu one of those "courts" there was actually a hollow sound beneath the heavy tread of our horses, and the stout Osage warriors, which produced a feeling of awe. Not a word was spoken as we hurried through, the Indians manifesting a sort of reverence for the place, and I too felt very strangely, I confess. Sans Oreille says there are several other such places among the hills and valleys of this region.

For many miles together, we sometimes found the picture exactly reversed; that is, the grassy levels were elevated above the broken column of clay, &c.; or rather the latter were furrowed out of the former in an infinite variety of figures. Hollows from 30 to 50 feet deep, formed by
numerous converging furrows, in funnel like shapes,—immemorable gullies intersecting each other, leaving great piles of red clay, &c. strewed over with glittering gypsum in flakes, with here and there some clumps of dwarf cedars, to animate somewhat the picture. We crossed in our route three considerable tributaries of the Arkansaw, and also several small creeks. The meadows and grassy ridges are at this season swarming with buffaloes and wild horses. From the summits of the highest ridges the views are so almost boundless, hills and ridges rising as it were in endless succession in all directions, all of which, as well as the intervening vallies and meadows are enriched and animated by the immense herds of cattle and horses. Not a tree to be seen to intercept the view, you always command a prospect of a number of the declivities of ridges facing you, and often overlook some of the beautiful meadows. And look which way you will, you always see large droves of buffaloes, quietly grazing or reposing, too far off to be disturbed by the presence of intruders thus looking at them. With a good spy glass I greatly enjoyed this charming & exciting scenery.

It is actually worth a journey from New York to see the buffaloes about 10 o'clock in the morning, pouring from the hills down into the vallies for water. Passing through one of the most extensive of those vallies on the morning of the 30th of June, I was highly gratified with a scene of that description. We were near the center of a level valley or meadow, probably a mile square, enclosed by a very high ridge, whose inner sides were nearly perpendicular. Its form appeared to be somewhat circular, so that one might have traced a man quite round, had one walked on the brow of the ridge.

It was about nine o'clock, and a fine morning. For some 30 or 40 minutes there was a heavy rumbling noise like distant thunder, and I at first thought it was thunder, tho' the sky was perfectly clear. Very soon however, the cause was quite plain on the ridge above and around us; we were literally surrounded. The height was black with buffaloes, all rushing in two opposite currents, to the well known passes into the valley. I am sure that I am safe in writing the numbers thus exposed to my view, with the aid of my glass, at twenty-thousand. Yes, I might say 30,000 and not much exaggerate. The noise they made was almost deafening, what with their heavy tramp and the bellowing of some thousands of bulls. The several breaks or gaps by which they entered the meadow, necessarily divided them into as many droves.

Before they had many of them descended, I proposed to Capt. Wau-beson-je and Sans Oreille to have a grand battle, which was at once agreed to, and preparations were quickly made to attack a detachment of some two or three thousand that was coming directly towards us. We had the wind of them & were hidden out of their sight under the banks of the creek that runs thro' the valley. The assault was well managed. In five minutes the action commenced; about 30 active Osages well armed, against two to three thousand buffaloes. I could by no means remain an idle looker on. My horse, a regular chaser, carried me rapidly into the midst of the gang and I discharged my pistols with some effect. The firing of 80 guns, the yells of the excited Indians, and the tremendous roaring of so many affrighted buffaloes, many thousands, altogether, made up a scene not easily described. The valley was soon cleared, but the thundering of the retreating animals was heard for an hour afterwards. The issue of the affair was 27 buffaloes killed, many wounded and two of the Indians hurt by being run over. We had several other skirmishes on a smaller scale; but being useless sacrifices, gave me more pain than pleasure. It is within fifteen miles of the south western extremity of the wild and romantic tract that I have been so imperfectly describing, that the Rock Saline, or "Salt Mountain" is situated.

As to a description of that region no pen can do it, certainly not mine. That is a picture that the pencil of a first class artist only can draw with any thing like truth. What a rich field is there, for the geologist, the naturalist, mineralogist and botanist, as well as for the painter and the poet! Months might be usefully and pleasantly employed there, by persons properly qualified, provided they could be secure from interruptions of marauding Indians, which I fear it would be difficult or rather impracticable, to effect just now, or within a period of many years to come. But the time will come undoubtedly, when a thorough exploration will take place there, resulting in rich and remunerating developments. (And I am visionary enough to imagine, that the heights and vallies, many of them, will, in the irresistible progress of Anglo Saxo-n enterprise, be occupied by as splendid aristocratic residences as any in America. This prophecy you will probably credit to a rather romantic imagination—time will test the matter).

The country between the Arkansaw and Red River, below the 38th degree of north latitude, or thereabouts, appears to be held by the Ottos, Koseecs and Osages on the one side, and on the other by the Pawnees of Red River, Hietsans, Comanches and Padoucas, as their hunting grounds, and is the seat of the most inveterate and unceasing warfare among those tribes, and so will continue most assuredly till the buffaloes and Indians are exterminated or driven out. Those tribes annually visit the great salines and surrounding country for buffalo, horses and salt; and seldom a year passes that is not marked by some bloody conflict, more particularly and frequently between the Pawnees and Osages. Thus it happens that the district in which the Grand and Rock Salines are situated, has become the
general battle ground of those tribes, which renders it almost impracticable for a corps of scientific men to explore it without a strong guard and at considerable expense.

I have to regret very much that I had not provided myself better with means to take more accurate notes for a map of the country between the Nebrasca, Arkansaw, Missouri and Osage Rivers, and that part west of the Arkansaw that I traversed, including the great salines. I should in that case have been much more particular in all my observations than I have been. But in truth there were no instruments in the country to be had for the occasion, such as I wanted, except a good pocket compass procured with difficulty thro' a friend at St. Louis. But as my route lay, I may say, entirely over open prairie (I do not believe we travelled six miles, certainly not ten, thro' wood-land in our whole journeying) it was not difficult to keep a pretty true account of the courses with my pocket compass, and with due attention to the gait of my horse, three miles an hour, and to my watch, I was able to compute distances with tolerable accuracy; in all which I done the best I could. You will readily conclude that I can make no pretensions to precision in respect of the courses and distances noted. This I mention by way of cautioning you not to put too much confidence in the sketch or map that may probably accompany this (I fear to you) tedious narrative. It is certainly not exactly correct, yet I think it may be relied on for a tolerable sketch of my tour, and may afford a pretty good idea of the country, and more especially the relative positions of the most remarkable points visited by me, in my extensive excursion.

When I returned to the U-jeeta camp I found all my horses quite recruited (I had left them in charge of Henderson at the camp, and used borrowed horses for the trip to the Rock Saline), and on the 5th July set out homeward. The general course was North 60 East, distance say 260 miles; which we accomplished on the 11th. The last journey was attended with more trouble and disaster than all the preceding put together.

As soon as we passed the buffalo range, and entered the tall grass, we encountered the green flies of the prairie in myriads of myriads, for some 70 miles; a plague that no one can half understand who has not experienced the annoyance. Those voracious blood-suckers literally killed my beautiful, noble, splendid horse, presented to me by the great Pawnee chief. His milk-white, silk-like coat, were peculiarly attractive to those tormentors, and being entirely unused to any such, he became furious and ungovernable, and finally broke loose, ran madly to a swampy morass, plunged in and perished there. I could not save him. Perhaps you may not think me too particular in my notice of this horse, when I tell you that he was a rare specimen of that class whose noble nature fits them for becoming the friend of man, and that a thousand dollars could not have tempted me to part from him. My other horse being of dark color and tougher, endured the scourging better, but they were all seriously damaged, and will not soon recover.

Having now given you a pretty general narration of my two months ramble, I will here let you off for the present, begging your pardon for inflicting on you so tedious a yarn.

My notes suggest many other details, which however, I will reserve for some future communication.

Ever, affectionately yours,

To Dr. John Sibley
Natchitoches, La.

Geo. C. Sibley

NOTE.—The foregoing narrative contained in 71 pages of this book, has been carefully copied from the original communication to my Father, which was found among his papers after his decease by my Brother, and by my request returned to me. It was so worn, torn and faded, that it became necessary for me to re-write it, or lose it altogether (as I kept no copy of it). I wished to preserve it however, for future reference. Much of the original was written out rather hurriedly from my pencil notes. Some verbal and other corrections have been made herein.

Elina April 1860

G. C. Sibley

The map that accompanied this journal originally (a very rough affair) was lost. That which is hereunto annex'd (also pretty rough) has been much more carefully prepared, and may probably answer the purpose for which it is intended. April '60

Piute Women

Joaquin Miller's supposedly overdrawn romances are declared not to be all romance, at least so far as relates to the existence of beautiful Piute women. Maj. Powell, the explorer, says that one branch of the Piute tribe has women round-limbed, graceful, sweet-faced, and undressed. The circulation of such facts as these ought to encourage Southwestern immigration.

St. Louis Republican, December 13, 1874