The Cimarron Cutoff with Napton & Gregg; Military Preparedness, Bork & Bethell

I now quote from William Napton's book where he gives the details of his experience in crossing the Jornada.

Napton, William B. "To the Cimarron." In On the Santa Fe´ Trail in 1857. Kansas City: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1905. Reprint. Arrow Rock: The Friends of Arrow Rock, Inc., 1991; pp. 33-38 passim:

> *... good headway was made by the trains up the Arkansas until we reached the "lower crossing." It had been determined by the wagonmasters that we would cross the river here, taking the Cimarron route. Although the river was fordable, yet it was quite tedious and difficult to get the heavily loaded wagons across the stream, the water being waist-deep and the bottom uneven.*
>
> *Neither an ox nor a mule will pull when he gets into water touching his body. The mule, under such circumstances, always has a tendency to fall down, and so get drowned, by becoming entangled in the harness. To meet this emergency the ox teams were doubled, ten yoke being hitched to each wagon, and were urged to do their duty by a half-dozen drivers on each side, wading through the water beside them.*

Amplification of the phrase, "*urged to do their duty*":

Murphy, Dan. Santa Fé Trail: Voyage of Discovery. Las Vegas: KC Publications, 1994, p. 21:

> *"Boss, the trouble with them oxens is that they don't understand the kind of language we're talkin' to 'em. Plain 'Gee' and 'Haw' ain't enough under the present circumstances. Now, if you could just find it convenient to go off on that hill, somewhere, so's you couldn't hear what was goin' on, I'd undertake to get them oxens out."*

A teamster's comment to shipping firm owner William Waddell.

Generals have stars—the bullwhacker had his whip. This was no carnival whip we see today. It was a monster, suitable to driving oxen or mules dragging three tons up the slope of the prairie to the Rocky Mountains. In the days of the professionals the whip started with a three or four foot stock of heavy wood, and then a braided rawhide lash that could be twenty feet long. On the end was a replaceable "popper," an eight-inch piece of rawhide that could crack like a pistol shot, and could cut hide like a knife. But that was not the point of it. A teamster bragged if he could get to Santa Fé and back without drawing blood.

The point was to "*pop*" it at just the right spot, by the correct animal's left or right ear, to guide and inspire him.

We might call these "*audible goads*" to "*inspire*" the animal back into the proper wheel-track. Returning now to Napton's narrative:

> *The greater part of the day was taken up in getting the wagons across, but it was accomplished without serious loss. Everything being over, we encamped at the foot of the hill on the opposite side, and rested a day, in recognition of the Fourth of July.*
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> *We fired some shots, and Captain Chiles brought forth from his trunk some jars of gooseberries, directing the cooks to make some pies. The gooseberries were all right, but the pie crust would have given an ostrich a case of indigestion.*
>
> *The old Santa Fé trail, from the lower crossing of the Arkansas, ran southwest to the Cimarron, across a stretch of country where there was no water for a distance of nearly sixty miles. All the water casks were filled from the Arkansas River for the use of the men, but of course there was no means of carrying water for horse or ox.*

The weather was warm and dry, and now we were about to enter upon the "hornada," the Spanish word for "dry stretch." Intending to drive all night, starting was postponed until near sundown. Two or three miles from the Arkansas we apparently reached the general altitude of the plains over which we trudged during the whole night, with nothing but the rumbling of the wagons and the occasional shout of one of the drivers to break the silence of the plain.

The approach of morning and the rising of the sun ... like a ball of fire, emerged from the endless plain to the east of us, as from the ocean, soon overwhelming us with a flood of light such as I had never experienced before.

During all that day's march the heat was intense and the sunlight almost blinding, the kind of weather that creates the mirage of the plains. In the distance on either hand, fine lakes of clear water were seen glistening in the sun, sometimes appearing circular in shape, surrounded with the proper shores, the illusion being apparently complete, so much so that several times during the day I rode some distance seeking to ascertain if they were really lakes or not.

I found them receding as I approached, and was unable to get any closer to them than when as a boy I set out to find the sack of gold at the end of the rainbow.

In the forenoon of the second day from the Arkansas we reached Sand creek, a tributary of the Cimarron, where we found a pool of stagnant water, not enough for the oxen, but sufficient for the trainmen to make coffee with, and there we camped.

A few hours afterwards we struck the valley of the Cimarron, and, after riding up the bed of the apparently dry stream, we discovered a pool of clear water. The cattle were so famished that they ran into it, hitched to the wagons, their drivers being unable to restrain them, and it was with considerable difficulty that the wagons were afterwards pulled out of the mud.

The third account of crossing the Jornada comes from our old friend Josiah Gregg.

Gregg, Josiah. Commerce of the Prairies. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954; pp. 49–54 passim:

Our route had already led us up the course of the Arkansas river for over a hundred miles, yet the earlier caravans often passed from fifty to a hundred further up before crossing the river; therefore nothing like a regular ford had ever been established.

Nor was there a road, not even a trail, anywhere across the famous plain, extending between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers, a distance of over fifty miles, which now lay before us—the scene of such frequent sufferings in former times for want of water. It having been determined upon, however, to strike across this dreaded desert the following morning, the whole party was busy in preparing for the 'water scrape,' as these droughty drives are very appropriately called by prairie travelers.

This tract of country may truly be styled the grand 'prairie ocean'; for not a single landmark is to be seen for more than forty miles—scarcely a visible eminence by which to direct one's course. All is as level as the sea, and the compass was our surest, as well as principal guide.

For the first five miles we had a heavy pull among the sandy hillocks; but soon the broad and level plain opened before us.

The next day we fortunately had a heavy shower, which afforded us abundance of water. Having also swerved considerably toward the south, we fell into a more uneven section of country, where we had to cross a brook swelled by the recent rain, into which one of the wagons was unfortunately overset. We were now compelled to make a halt, and all hands flocked to the assistance of the owner of the damaged cargo.

We now moved on slowly and leisurely, for all anxiety on the subject of water had been happily set at rest by frequent falls of rain. But imagine our consternation and dismay, when, upon descending into the valley of the Cimarron, on the morning of the 19th of June, a band of Indian warriors on horseback suddenly appeared before us from behind the ravines—an imposing array of death-dealing savages! There was no merriment in this! It was a genuine alarm—a tangible reality! These warriors, however, as we soon discovered, were only the vanguard of a 'countless host,' who were by this time pouring over the opposite ridge, and galloping directly toward us.

The wagons were soon irregularly 'formed' upon the hill-side: but in accordance with the habitual carelessness of caravan traders, a great portion of the men were unprepared for the emergency. Scores of guns were 'empty,' and as many more had been wetted by the recent showers and would not 'go off.' Here was one calling for bullets—another for powder—a third for flints.

Exclamations, such as "I've broke my ramrod"—I've split my caps--I've rammed down a ball without powder" —"My gun is 'choked'; give me yours"—were heard from different quarters; while a timorous 'greenhorn' would perhaps cry out, "Here, take my gun, you can outshoot me!" The more daring bolted off to encounter the enemy at once, [shouting, "Skin that smoke wagon and see what happens"—"Where are you goin' with that shotgun?"—and "You wretched slugs, don't any of you have the guts to play for blood?"—while the timid and cautious took a stand with presented rifle behind the wagons.

The Indians who were in advance made a bold attempt to press upon us, which came near costing them dearly; for some of our fiery backwoodsmen more than once had their rusty but unerring rifles directed upon the intruders, some of whom would inevitably have fallen before their deadly aim, had not a few of the more prudent traders interposed. The savages made demonstrations no less hostile, rushing, with ready sprung bows, upon a portion of our men who had gone in search of water; and mischief would, perhaps, have ensued, had not the impetuosity of the warriors been checked by the wise men of the nation.

The Indians were collecting around us in such great numbers that it was deemed expedient to force them away, so as to resume our march, or at least to take a more advantageous position. Our company was therefore mustered and drawn up in 'line of battle'; and, accompanied by the sound of a drum and fife, we marched towards the main group of the Indians. The latter seems far more delighted than frightened with this strange parade and music, a spectacle they had, no doubt, never witnessed before. But, whatever may have been their impressions, one thing is certain,—that the principal chief appeared to have full confidence in the virtues of his calumet [ceremonial pipe]; which he lighted, and came boldly forward to meet our warlike corps, serenely smoking the 'pipe of peace.'

Our captain, now taking a whiff with the savage chief, directed him by signs to cause his warriors to retire. This most of them did, to rejoin the long train of squaws and papooses with the baggage, who followed in their rear, and were just then seen emerging from behind the hills. Having slowly descended to the banks of the stream, they pitched their wigwams or lodges; over five hundred of which soon bespeckled the ample valley before us, and at once gave to its recently meagre surface the aspect of an immense Indian village.

The entire number of the Indians, when collected together, could not have been less than from two to three thousand. In such a case they must have mustered nearly a thousand warriors, while we were but little over two hundred strong. Still, our superior arms and the protection afforded by the wagons, gave us considerably the advantage.

However, the appearance of the squaws and children soon convinced us, that, for the present, at least, they had no hostile intentions; so we also descended into the valley and formed our camp a few hundred yards below them.

> *Although we were now on the very banks of the Cimarron, even the most experienced traders of our party, whether through fright or ignorance, seemed utterly unconscious of the fact. Having made our descent, far below the usual point of approach, and there being not a drop of water found in the sandy riverbed, it was mistaken for Sand creek [which runs north of and parallel to the Cimarron], and we accordingly proceeded without noticing it.*

These are just a few of the exigencies our frontier friends encountered as they traveled the Cimarron Cut-Off. We will note a few which have doctrinal implications. We begin with this latter encounter with the Indians which brings out a few doctrinal principles that are applicable whether observed in the small context of a prairie skirmish or magnified to the maximum level of international confrontations. Our next doctrine is:

The Importance of Military Preparedness and the Right to Bear Arms

Let's first note the several comments by Gregg which indicate certain strengths and weaknesses apparent among the frontiersmen as well as the Indians.

1. The sudden appearance of Indians on horseback.

   This is interesting. Apparently due to complacency and over-confidence based on treaties signed with the Osage and Kaw Indians, the pioneers failed to practice the "*common law of the prairies*" during the daytime.

   Back at Council Grove, Gregg related to us this information:

   > *There is nothing so much dreaded by inexperienced travelers as the ordeal of guard duty. But no matter what the condition or employment of the individual may be, no one has the smallest chance of evading the 'common law of the prairies.'*
   >
   > *Without requiring a vanguard to watch the train's outer periphery, this nomadic community of wagons is required to orient without warning to an overt hostile attack.*

2. Gregg refers to this as "*a tangible reality*."

   When lack of preparation causes outside adversity to create a sudden change of circumstances then one is faced with the ordeal of immediate adjustment. Caught off-guard, the ill-prepared suffer the paralysis of disorientation and maladjustment. Blame can be placed on facilitated wheel-tracks of wickedness.

3. Gregg refers to this as the "*habitual carelessness of the traders*" causing them to be "*unprepared for the emergency*."

   Poor decisions facilitate a careless lifestyle which limits one's future options for preparedness under pressure. A nation which becomes careless in the recruitment, support, training, and deployment of its military defenses is a nation which is in the process of becoming "*unprepared for the emergency*."

   Bork, Robert H. "Feminism Conquers America's Armed Forces." In Slouching Towards Gomorrah. New York: Regan Books, 1996; pp. 218, 220-223.

   Bethell, Tom. "No Nukes America." The American Spectator. Dec. 1996, pp. 18-19.

This is a good way of saying that our guns are:

4. "*Empty and wetted*."

   Unpreparedness results in vulnerability to sudden attack. Failure to maintain a cache of ready arms in case of emergency endangers the entire community if on a trail west, or an entire nation if in time of clandestine nuclear proliferation.