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FREMONT AND HIS EXPLORATIONS IN UTAH

By Dr. Joel E. Ricks, State Historian Sons Of Utah Pioneers.

John Charles Fremont, explorer, soldier and aspirant to the Presidency of the United States, was born January 21, 1813, in Savannah, Georgia. He was the son of Anne Whiting of Tidewater Virginia Society and a French emigrant Charles Fremont. The marriage was a turbulent affair and the father died young, leaving John Charles with little guidance. The life of young Fremont was tempestuous. Though he showed in childhood a certain boldness which was inherited from his grandmother, he was chiefly occupied with studies.

In 1826, Fremont was enrolled at the University of Virginia and spent one year in the University of Pennsylvania. He then returned to the University of Virginia, but was sent out of the university and had to complete his five years' course by study at home. He then entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, but was dismissed on the ground of indecent conduct.

Fremont's first contact with the frontier and in 1836 he experienced Indian contacts which were of great value in his later exploits on a more distant frontier. In 1838 Fremont was commissioned second lieutenant in the Topographical Corps of the United States, and in 1839 he became a part of the expedition under Joseph Walker, which traversed the Rocky Mountains. The party consisted of about twenty-five men. They left their camp on the Kansas River just west of the Missouri boundary May 10, 1842. Then they crossed country to the Platte River. They followed the Platte River to the Rocky mountains by the famous Oregon Trail. They crossed the Rockies by the gently ascending Pass, but to approach the mountains on a different line. It was intended to examine the broad region south of the Columbia River lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. In this way the two expeditions would give a connected survey of the interior and western half of the continent.

The party consisted of Creole and Canadian French and Americans numbering thirty-nine men and included Thomas Fitzpatrick, noted mountain man as guide. The company possessed "a brass twelve pound howitzer" to frighten the Indians or defend the party if necessary. The 31st. of May 1843 the party reached Elm Grove on the Santa Fe Trail. Fremont and the wagons turned to the Arkansas River which they followed to St. Vrain's Fort. Kit Carson joined the party and upon his advice the party returned to Bent's Fort for supplies. At St. Vrain's Fort the party divided. Fitzpatrick, in charge of the main body was to go by the emigrant road by way of Fort Laramie to Fort Hall on the Snake River while Fremont, Carson and a smaller party was to pass through the mountains to South Pass. Fremont
reached the Oregon Trail on the Sweetwater, traveled through the South Pass, crossed the Green River and pushed to the Bear River which he was to follow to the Great Salt Lake. Traveling along the Bear River Fremont was impressed by the springs which he called Bees Spring (Soda Springs).

**Fremont in Utah**

August 27 the party reached the borders of present Utah. They called their stopping place "Gate of the Pass" August 29th Fremont's diary recorded (we) "ascended different neighboring peaks, in the hope of seeing some indications of the lake but though our elevation afforded magnificent view, the eye ranging over a long extent of Bear River, with the towns and fertile Cache Valley in the direction of our search, was only to be seen a bed of apparently im praticable mountains."

From the northern part of Cache Valley the expedition followed a trail over the mountains to small stream which they called the Roseaux (Malad) River. During their journey they met Shoshone Indians, who appeared poorly fed. Fremont records, "A great portion of the region inhabited by this nation (Shoshoneans) formerly abounded in game, the buffalo ranging about it in herds, as we had found them on the eastern waters, and the plains dotted with antelope, but so rapidly have they disappeared within a few years, that now, as we journeyed along, an occasional buffalo skull and a few wild antelope were all that remained of the abundance which had covered the country with animal life" This information he obtained from the famous fur trader Thomas Fitzpatrick. They camped on the Malad River due west of where the Bear River cuts through the mountains west of Cache Valley and September 1st, paddled down the Bear River to the marshes that barred the entrance to the Great Salt Lake. They returned up river and followed an Indian trail along the east shore of the Great Salt Lake past the site of Brigham City to the Weber River. September 5th Fremont wrote: "At this place the trail that we had been following turned to the left apparently with the view of entering a gorge in the mountains from which issued the principal fork of a large and comparatively well timbered stream, called Weber's Fork. We accordingly turned off towards the lake, and encamped on this river, which was 100 to 150 feet wide, with high banks, and very clear pure water, without the slightest indication of salt." From a high bute probably just south of Ogden Fremont saw the Great Salt Lake which he described as follows: (We) beheld the object of our anxious search - the waters of the Inland Sea, stretching in still and solitary grandeur far beyond the limit of our vision. It was one of the great points of the exploration, and as we looked eagerly over the lake in the first emotions of excited pleasure, I am doubtful if the followers of Balboa felt more enthusiasm when, from the heights of the Andes, they saw for the first time the great western ocean --- Several large islands raised their high rocky heads out of the waves." September 9th they began their voyage on the Great Salt Lake and visited several islands. They left the Great Salt Lake and traveled northward where they reached the Oregon Trail.

**FREMONT IN THE NORTHWEST AND CALIFORNIA.** Fremont's party moved northward to the vicinity of the Snake River south of Fort Hall. They deviated somewhat from the Oregon Trail but turned southward before the Columbia River cut through the gorges near the site of the Dalles. They followed the mountains to Pyramid Lake then down to Carson Valley up the Walker River then north and through the Sierra Nevadas to Sacramento and March 8, 1844 they camped near Sutter's Fort (now Sacramento). They had followed a course which is now virtually the road from Carson City to Sacramento. Leaving Sutter's Fort they continued down the Great Valley of California traveling southward between the Sierra Nevadas and the San Joaquin River and crossed the mountains south of to the head waters of the Sacramento River. From here they traveled northeastward following quite closely the Old Spanish Trail to Utah.

Fremont in Utah Again. May 4, 1844 they reached the Muddy River in Southeastern Nevada and the next day they came to the Virgin being followed by Indians and May 10th they camped on the banks of the Santa Clara near the Utah State line. They camp of May 12 was on the ridge separating the waters of the Sevier and the Colorado and pitched their camp at Mountain Meadows where the coldness of the meadows was in sharp contrast with the rugged hot dry country through which they had traveled. May 14 they continued west to the Sanpete River which they passed May 21. They came in sight of Utah Lake. He described the naming of the Provo River as follows: "Among these (mountains) the principal river is the Timpanogo - signifying Rock River - a name which the rocky grandeur of its scenery, remarkable even in this country of rugged mountains, has obtained from the Indians. In the Utah language, og-wah-be, when coupled with other words in common conversation is usually abbreviated to og; timpan signifying rock."

Here Fremont summarizes his journey as follows: "In arriving at the Utah Lake, we had completed an immense circuit of twelve degrees diameter north and south, and ten degrees east and west... The circuit which we had made, and which had cost us eight months of time, and 3500 miles of travelling, had given us a view of Oregon and of north California from the Rocky mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and of the two principal streams which form bays or harbors of the coast of that sea."

Fremont further records, "Turning our faces once more eastward, on the morning of the 27th (May) we left the Utah Lake, and continued for two days to ascend the Spanish Fork, which is deepened in numerous branches among the very rugged mountains; finally passing through the waters of the Uintah River we arrived on the Duchesne River and on June 1st they arrived at Roubidoux's post on the principal fork of the Uintah River and on the 7th arrived in Brown's Hole and the Green River."
From the Green River Fremont and his party traveled east crossing into the north Park, the middle Park and the South Park of the Colorado Rockies to the Arkansas River, near the site of Pueblo and returned to St. Louis in August 1844.

References:

Fremont, John C. Memoirs of My Life.
Fremont, John C. Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the year 1843 - 44.

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Dellenbaugh F. S. Fremont and '49.

This outline should follow the one on the Fur Traders and can be fitted to each camp by reading from Fremont's Journal, the portion dealing with your locality.