

# Jedediah Smith Letter to Wm. Clark

July 12th, 1827

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This letter is found in the *Letterbook of the Superintendent at Indian Affairs for St. Louis*, vol. 4, pg. 46-49. This letterbook is now held by the Kansas State Historical Society. The letter was reprinted in the *Missouri Republican* on October 11, 1827. It was also reprinted in:

- Dale, Harrison Clifford, *The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829*, 1918, The Authur H. Clark Company, Cleveland
  - Morgan, Dale, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1953
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Little Lake Of Bear River,

July 12th, 1827.

Genl. Wm. Clark,

Supt. of Indian affairs

Sir,

My situation in this country has enabled me to collect information respecting a section of the country which has hitherto been measurably veiled in obscurity to the citizens of the United States. I allude to the country S.W. of the *Great Salt Lake* west of the Rocky mountains.

I started about the 22d of August 1826, from the Great Salt Lake, with a party of fifteen men, for the purpose of exploring the country S.W. which was entirely unknown to me, and of which I could collect no satisfactory information from the Indians who inhabit this country on its N.E. borders.

My general course on leaving the Salt Lake was S.W. and W. Passing the Little Uta Lake and ascending Ashley's river, which empties into the Little Uta Lake. From this lake I found no more signs of buffalo; there are a few antelope and mountain sheep, and an abundance of *black tailed hares*. On Ashley's river, I found a nation of Indians who call themselves *Sampatch* they were friendly disposed towards us. I passed over a range of mountains running S.E. and N.W. and struck a river running S.W. which I called *Adams River*, in compliment to our president. The water is of a muddy cast, and is a little brackish. The country is mountainous to east; towards the west there are sandy plains and detached rocky hills.

Passing down this river some distance, I fell in with a nation of Indians who call themselves *Pa-Ulches* (those Indians as well as those last mentioned, wear rabbit skin robes) who raise some little corn and pumpkins. The country is nearly destitute of game of any description, except a few hares. Here (about ten days march down it) the river turns to the south east. On the S.W. side of the river there is a *cave*, the entrance of which is about 10 or 15 feet high, and 5 or 6 feet in width;— after descending about 15 feet, a room opens out from 25 to 30 in length and 15 to 20 feet in width; the roof, sides and floor are solid rock salt, a sample of which I send you, with

some other articles which will be hereafter described. I here found a kind of plant of the prickly pear kind, which I called the cabbage pear, the largest of which grows about two feet and a half high and 1 ½ feet in diameter; upon examination I found it to be nearly of the substance of a turnip, altho' by no means palatable; its form was similar to that of an egg, being smaller at the ground and top than in the middle; it is covered with pricks similar to the prickly pear with which you are acquainted.

There are here also a number of shrubs and small trees with which I was not acquainted previous to my route there, and which I cannot at present describe satisfactorily, as it would take more space than I can here allot.

The *Pa Ulches* have a number of marble pipes, one of which I obtained and send you, altho' it has been broken since I have had it in my possession; they told me there was a quantity of the same material in their country. I also obtained of them a knife of *flint*, which I send you, but it has likewise been broken by accident.

I followed Adams river two days further to where it empties into the Seedskeeder a south east course. I crossed the Seedskeeder, and went down it four days a south east course; I here found the country remarkably barren, rocky, and mountainous; there are a good many rapids in the river, but at this place a valley opens out about 5 to 15 miles in width, which on the river banks is timbered and fertile. I here found a nation of Indians who call themselves *Ammuchabas* they cultivate the soil, and raise corn, beans, pumpkins, watermelons and muskmelons in abundance, and also a little wheat and cotton. I was now nearly destitute of horses, and had learned what it was to do without food; I therefore remained there fifteen days and recruited my men, and I was enabled also to exchange my horses and purchase a few more of a few runaway Indians who stole some horses of the Spaniards. I here got information of the Spanish country (the Californias) and obtained two guides, recrossed the Seedskeeder, which I afterwards found emptied into the Gulf of California about 80 miles from this place by the name of the Collarado; many render the river *Gild* from the East.

I travelled a west course fifteen days over a country of complete barrens, generally travelling from morning until night without water. I crossed a salt plain about 20 miles long and 8 wide; on the surface was a crust of beautiful white salt, quite thin. Under this surface there is a layer of salt from a half to one and a half inches in depth; between this and the upper layer there is about four inches of yellowish sand.

On my arrival in the province of Upper California, I was looked upon with suspicion, and was compelled to appear in presence of the governor of the Californias residing at San Diego, where, by the assistance of some American gentlemen (especially Capt. W. H. Cunningham, of the *ship Courier* from *Boston*) I was enabled to obtain permission to return with my men the route I came, and purchased such supplies as I stood in want of. The governor would not allow me to trade up the sea coast towards *Bodaga*. I returned to my party and purchased such articles as were necessary, and went eastward of the Spanish settlements on the route I had come in. I then steered my course N.W. keeping from 150 miles to 200 miles from the sea coast. A very high range of mountains lay on the east. After travelling 300 miles in that direction through a country somewhat fertile, in which there was a great many Indians, mostly naked and destitute of arms, with the exception of a few *bows and arrows* and what is very singular amongst Indians, they cut their hair to the length of three inches; they proved to be friendly; their manner of living is on fish, roots, acorns and grass.

On my arrival at the river which I named the *Wim-mul-che* (named after a tribe of Indians which resides on it, of that name) I found a few beaver, and elk, deer, and antelope in abundance. I here made a small hunt, and attempted to take my party across- the mountains which I before mentioned, and which I called *Mount Joseph*, to come on and join my partners at the Great Salt Lake. I found the snow so deep on Mount Joseph that I could not cross my horses, five of which starved to death; I was compelled therefore to return to the valley which I had left, and there, leaving my party, I started with two men, seven horses and two mules, which I loaded with

hay for the horses and provisions for ourselves, and started on the 20th of May, and succeeded in crossing it in eight days, having lost only two horses and one mule. I found the snow on the top of this mountain from 4 to 8 feet deep, but it was so consolidated by the heat of the sun that my horses only sunk from half a foot to one foot deep.

After travelling twenty days from the east side of *Mount Joseph*, I struck the S.W. corner of the Great Salt Lake, travelling over a country completely barren and destitute of game. We frequently travelled without water sometimes for two days over sandy deserts, where there was no sign of vegetation and when we found water in some of the rocky hills, we most generally found some Indians who appeared the most miserable of the human race having nothing to subsist on (nor any clothing) except grass seed, grass-hoppers, &c. When we arrived at the Salt Lake, we had but one horse and one mule remaining, which were so feeble and poor that they could scarce carry the little camp equipage which I had along; the balance of my horses I was compelled to eat as they gave out.

The company are now starting, therefore must close my communication.

Yours respectfully,

(signed) JEDEDIAH S. SMITH

of the firm of

Smith, Jackson and Sublette.