

## **Chapter Four**

### **Meek Cut-off**

Mountaineer Stephen B. Meek was born on Independence Day, 1805, in Washington County, in southwestern Virginia. This was the same county of origin of two of Meek's contemporaries -- both our Absalom Smith (1805) and James Smith (1802) ancestors, the fathers of James and George "Washington" Smith, respectively. Meek was an "independent" cuss, who wrote in his autobiography that when he was twenty years of age he recalled becoming: "imbued with that restless spirit of adventure that has since been a marked characteristic of my life, and left my home for the then comparatively unknown West." This same "restless spirit of adventure" -- which was perhaps responsible for the phenomenon of the entire Oregon Trail migration -- appeared to have guided every aspect of Meek's early life, which in turn greatly influenced the discovery and development of several of these various early western wagon roads.

Stephen Meek and his more celebrated younger brother, Joe Meek, had spent the decade of the 1830s in the western fur trade. In 1833 they accompanied Joseph Walker on an expedition that resulted in locating what would become a major branch of the Oregon Trail known as the California Trail. Intending to explore the Great Salt Lake, they had gone too far West, and ended up exploring down the Humboldt River to California, over a country then entirely unknown to trappers, across the Sierras and into California's Yosemite Valley. Retracing their route, they met Capt. Benjamin Bonneville in the fall of 1834, and accompanied him trapping the Snake River and all its tributaries to Walla Walla; and throughout central Oregon: up John Day River, over to Lake Harney; then to the Malheur, Owyhee and Powder Rivers, and wintering back on the Snake. Meek spent the remainder of the decade exploring and trapping throughout the western United States.

By the beginning of the next decade, commercial beaver trapping had declined to such an extent that Stephen Meek returned to Independence, Missouri, in 1842 looking for work. In that year he landed the job of guiding the very first small company of wagons to try the Oregon Trail. Upon that venture's successful conclusion, in the spring of 1843 he then piloted a few settlers who had become dissatisfied with Oregon, southward down the Hudson Bay Company's Old Trappers Trail from Oregon to California. Meek then sailed from Monterey to what was then Colombia, nearly died crossing the isthmus, and finally sailed on to New York, arriving there in 1844. After briefly visiting his Virginia home, in early 1845 Meek proceeded on to St. Louis, where he obtained letters of recommendation from fur traders William

Sublette and others, which helped him secure the job of guiding that year's St. Louis Division out of Independence over the Oregon Trail as far as Ft. Hall.

Upon reaching Ft. Hall in early August, 1845, once again Meek became unemployed and again looking for work. He then hit upon a novel idea. Meek would offer to guide the 1845 emigrants over an old trappers' pack trail through central Oregon to The Dalles of the Columbia, to avoid anticipated Indian harassment on the "regular" northern route. His small party then traded their wagons for pack animals, so they could hurry on ahead, and tell the lead wagons all about Meek's exciting proposed new route.

If there was ever anyone who was equipped to lead the 1845 emigrants over this new route, it was guide Stephen Meek. Having trapped this same high desert country a decade earlier, presumably he was intimately familiar with every inch of the terrain. Then too, there was his proven track record of successfully piloting several early emigrant wagon trains, the present one included. Even though his proposed route through the central Oregon desert had never been tried by wagons, under Meek's expert guidance how could anything possibly go wrong?

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*FIELD: Sun., Aug. 24.--The story of the murder of two Frenchmen by the Walla Walla is pronounced a humbug by the people of the fort. They say that the Walla Walla entertain a hostile feeling towards us, and will probably try to injure us as we pass through their territory, but their numbers or equipment would not render them dangerous to such sized companies as we are in at present. Still, the nature of the country is such that if they took advantage of it they could damage us considerably. We had traveled thus far as three companies without any general commander, and previous to our starting this morning, it was agreed to choose one. Accordingly, James B. Riggs, our own old captain, was elected captain of the whole by a unanimous vote.*

*A man named Meek has engaged to pilot the leading company, Capt. Owensby's [sic], which is the only one now ahead of us. He was to guide the outfit through to the Dalles of the Columbia river by a new and near [shorter] route, following the pack trail from Fort Boise and missing the Walla Walla altogether, leaving Fort Walla Walla on his right and cutting off between 100 and 200 miles' travel. A vote was taken whether we should follow them or keep [to] the old way, and a majority decided upon the new one. We traveled about 16 miles, camping upon Malheur creek, near the forks of the two roads.*

The Riggs company was entirely unfamiliar with this "man named Meek" who had passed by them only one week earlier without recognition. Meek did not approach every company commander individually as they traveled north. Instead, he made his pitch to the "lead" company, was "engaged" by them, and the Riggs company then voted to follow along, as did the others who chose to take Meek's proposed new route. William Goulder, whose small party had been

traveling with Nicholas Ownbey's lead company, told the story this way:

*GOULDER: On reaching old Ft. Boise ... Stephen Meek, a brother of the renowned trapper Joseph L. Meek, had overtaken us as we were journeying down the Boise Valley. Meek was accompanied by his young wife, whom he had married somewhere on the road, and also by a young man, Nathan Olney ...*

*From Ft. Boise westward, the route heretofore taken by the immigrants was the old Hudson Bay route by the way of Burnt River and the Grande Ronde Valley, and across the Blue Mountains, to the waters of the Umatilla River. It had been made known to us that the Walla Walla and Cayuse Indians, who then inhabited the country west of the Blue Mountains, the region through which this 'regular' route lay, were somewhat disposed to be unfriendly to the whites, and that they had threatened to make themselves troublesome to immigrants passing through their country. At Fort Boise, Meek told us that we could avoid all trouble and danger by taking a route over which he could guide us from Fort Boise to The Dalles of the Columbia.*

*With the assistance of Olney, Meek made a rude map of the country, showing a route up the Malheur River and across low intervening ridges to the Des Chutes [River], and thence to The Dalles. This route [through central Oregon], he said, would give the Cayuse and Walla Walla country a wide berth and enable us to avoid all contact with the supposedly hostile Indians. Accordingly, a bargain was made with Meek to guide us over this route. The immigrants were to pay him \$50 and furnish him with provisions for himself and wife and traveling companion. He claimed to be familiar with the route, having, as he said, passed over it several times.<sup>1</sup>*

### THE 1845 MEEK CUT-OFF

*FIELD: Mon., Aug. 25 (Day 1)--Went about 11 miles across the hills, camping on Malheur river again, since crossing to this side of Snake river again the road has been fearfully dusty. In fact, a person who has never traveled these wormwood barrens can form no idea as to what depth dust may be cut up in them by a few wagons passing. To a person walking in the road it is frequently more than shoe deep, and if the wind happens to blow length-wise with the road, it raises such a fog you cannot see the wagon next in front.<sup>2</sup>*

All told there were roughly 200 wagons that departed on the 1845 Meek Cut-off, fairly evenly distributed into four companies of around fifty wagons each. The lead company traveling with Meek was commanded by Capt. Nicholas Ownbey and Samuel Parker, departing August 24; next came Capt. J. B. Riggs, departing August 25; then another company, perhaps led by Alexander Liggett, leaving on the same day; and finally Capt. Sol Tetherow, departing August 26. "The other 1845 emigrants kept to the regular Oregon Trail route through northeastern Oregon, traveling north toward Burnt River; the English group, the wagons of Sam Barlow, McDonald, and Knighton parties, and later companies of Joel Palmer, Abner Hackleman, and Captain Brown."<sup>3</sup>

*FIELD: Tues., Aug. 26 (Day 2)--Went about 10 miles, still keeping up Malheur, crossing and re-crossing it twice, and camping upon it. We were obliged to take to the bluffs to get across several narrow bends of the river, and we there found some as hard [a] road as any we have yet traveled. Indeed, I begin to think wagons can go anywhere.*

*Wed., Aug. 27 (Day 3)--Went about 18 miles today. The road, although leading across the bluffs which in a country where mountains are a rarity would pass for pretty good sized ones, was tolerably fair, but there is an abundance of small, sharp stones in it, black and hard as iron, and very wearing to the feet of the cattle. ...*

The companies were following Ownbey's company piloted by Meek, with the Riggs company one day behind the lead group. They followed a generally westward course up the Malheur, the major Snake River tributary flowing from west to east through central "Oregon" (see Map II). For the next three days, they traveled thirty miles over sharp, hard volcanic stones that made the cattle "cringe at every step." Already, three or four oxen had "laid down in the road and given out every day." Meek's new route was turning out to be very tough on the work oxen, which were after all, the real heroes of the trail migrations.

*FIELD: Sun., Aug. 31 (Day 7)--Went about five miles this morning and camped once more on Malheur river near a peak in the Blue Mountains called Fremont's peak [now Castle Rock], the highest point of land in this part of the country .... Mon., Sept. 1 (Day 8)--Went about five miles, camping again on the Malheur .... Tues., Sept. 2 (Day 9)--Traveled about 15 miles today, in a direction but little west of south, camping upon a small branch of the Malheur. ...*

The bad roads made it exceedingly difficult for the wagons to make adequate progress each day, caused breakdowns, as well as problems with the oxen's sensitive hooves. Because of these bad roads, there was likewise some dissatisfaction about Meek's new route developing amongst the troops – which was getting Meek off to less than a "good start" with his followers.

Diarist Samuel Parker, who had traveled very near the Riggs company all the way from Missouri, told of much the same conditions with the quality of the road during the first several days on this new route. In a series of characteristically terse entries he reported: Aug. 26 "Verry Rocky and hilly;" Aug. 27 "Bad Road;" Aug. 28 "Bad Road;" Aug. 29 "Verry bad Road, Broak 3 wagens this day;" Aug. 30 "Rock all day, pore grass, more swaring than you ever heard;" Sept. 1 "the worst Road you ever seen, 5 wagons Broak;" Sept. 2 "went to a small creek down the worst you ever seen a wagon gow, stony;" Sept. 3 "stony all day, fore miles you codent see the ground."

Sarah King Chambers of patriarch Nahum King's family was traveling probably a day or two behind Capt. Riggs' company. It was near Castle Rock when she suddenly succumbed to an unknown fever that she had contracted a few days back. She was buried there at that place and her husband placed a stone

marker on her lonely grave which exists to this day.<sup>4</sup>

*FIELD: Wed., Sept. 3 (Day 10)--Went only about six miles today, as we were obliged to put in a new axle-tree. Camped upon the South fork of Malheur again. It is now pretty evident that Meek, the pilot who is leading the company this route instead of the old one, does not intend to fall down to the Columbia via the John Day river at all as he told them on leaving Fort Boise, for we are evidently now through the Blue Mountains, and still making a south-west course. It is now said that Meek's intention is to take us over onto the head of the Willamette if he can find a place along the Cascades which will admit of the passage of wagons through, and if not we go down the Deschutes river to the Columbia.*

The John Day River is one of three major "Oregon" tributaries of the Columbia flowing south-to-north, emptying into it between the Umatilla River on the east, and the Deschutes River further west. Meek could have easily led these companies up one of the northern tributaries of the Malheur, and then down the John Day, but whether he had told them he would do so is doubtful. By now no one seemed to know exactly where Meek was headed -- down the John Day or the Deschutes to The Dalles, -- or over the Cascade Mountains and directly into the Willamette Valley.

*FIELD: Thurs., Sept. 4 (Day 11)--Went about 18 miles, the latter part of the road being rough and rocky. Camped upon the head of a small branch of the South fork of Malheur. The mountains where we first struck them were naked and perfectly destitute of timber. Near Fremont's peak we began to see some timber upon them, and since passing that point the hills have all had more or less timber upon them, it being generally low cedar, and on reaching the top of the last hill before descending into this hollow, tall pines appeared to crown the hill-tops before us.*

*Fri., Sept. 5 (Day 12)--Went 15 miles, camping upon the Lake fork of John Day's river. I was mistaken about our being through the Blue Mountains. Although we were through the main range, yet the road for the past few days has led across low mountains which, having their steepest descent toward the west, did not appear high until we ascended them. The map of the country we had with us also indicated that we had passed the head of John Day river, as the Malheur was made to head much further south than the John Day, and yet we have held a south-south-west course from the Malheur, and are now upon the head forks of the John Day river.*

*Sat., Sept. 6 (Day 13)--Went about 14 miles today, camping upon another fork of Crooked river instead of John Day as stated yesterday, and we are in fact upon the waters of Deschutes river, and steering direct toward the Cascade mountains in order to attempt a passage through them. The tale of our going down the John Day river was a mere tale of Meek's in order to get us upon this route and then take us wherever he pleased. But if he now fails to take us across the Cascades his head will not be worth a chew of tobacco to him, if*

*what some of our men say prove true. He is with Owensby's company, which is one day's travel ahead of ours, and we make their camps every evening, where we find a note buried at the foot of a stake, stating the distance to the next camp, and the names of the streams.*

Field explained that the source of the company's confusion were the notes Meek had been leaving each night with the names of streams for the Riggs company behind them to pick up as they came to each new camp. Meek had changed his mind about where they were three times in three days, going from being on the South Fork of the Malheur, to the Lake Fork of the John Day (whatever that was), to finally being on the Crooked River, the main southeasterly tributary of the Deschutes. These were not just minor errors over the names of some streams either -- the three rivers named by Meek occupied entirely separate watersheds! Meek was creating the impression that he was hopelessly lost -- not only did he not know where they were, but apparently he did not seem to even know where they were headed.

As the companies emerged from the lower extremity of the Blue Mountain range, they were actually in the process of passing from various branches of the Malheur River, and crossing over the Stinkingwater Mountains on the way past the Silvies River near today's Burns, heading toward Harney Lake. The Silvies River drained into large Malheur Lake, just east of Harney Lake.

*FIELD: Sun., Sept. 7 (Day 14)--Went about 16 miles, camping upon a lake of miserable, stagnant water, filled with ducks, geese and cranes, and surrounded with tall rushes, the borders being miry. Had excellent grass, but were obliged to pack wormwood for half a mile for fuel. During the night 15 head of horses and mules left us.*

They had finally reached Harney Lake, a large, shallow alkali lake in southeastern Oregon, filled with brackish water unfit for drinking. The lake was located almost due southwest from where the companies had started into Oregon, so Meek had been leading them in a steady southwesterly direction. Their direction was away from both where the source of the Silvies River almost touches the source of the South Fork of the John Day, and also away from The Dalles of the Columbia, which was in the northwesterly direction towards which they eventually would be headed. They had now entered into an area known as the central Oregon high desert plateau, with its long stretches of flat, monotonous arid desert, as far as the eye could see.

*FIELD: Tues., Sept. 9 (Day 16)--Last evening a child of E. Packwood, of Illinois, which had been ill a few days died suddenly. At present there are a good many sick about the camp, the majority of them complaining of fever. The child was buried in the dry wormwood barrens ... Went six miles, camping near a spring which sinks near where it rises.*

The emigrants had reached Crane Springs, on the western side of little

Silver Lake, and confusion was not the only problem that was manifesting itself on Meek's new cutoff. The death of Elisha and Paulina Packwood's two-year-old son Elkanah was due to something he contracted in the last few days -- apparently the strange "fever" about which a good many around the camp were now complaining. Very little was known of micro-organisms in those days, but the lack of a reliable source of fresh drinking water on the Meek Cutoff seemed to be somehow related to this strange "fever" of which the emigrants were beginning to complain, after only a little more than two weeks on this new route. This "mysterious disease," which was to soon become widespread on the Meek Cutoff, did not strike any of the other 1845 emigrants who stayed with the "regular" Oregon Trail. Both groups were about the same size and had other similar conditions of food, and so forth -- except that those on the regular route had a continuous and reliable daily source of fresh water.

Epidemic typhus (sometimes referred to as typhoid fever) is a potentially fatal family of diseases caused by an inadequate supply of fresh water, combined with poor sanitation and waste disposal. It is transmitted by the pathogens found in contaminated water, and probably in this instance carried by lice. Because it has been found in the crowded conditions commonly found in jails and military camps, it has been known as "jail" or "camp" fever.

*FIELD: Wed., Sept. 10 (Day 17)-- ... Went about 30 miles today ... and camped after midnight at a spring, where we found Owensby's company, which had arrived 24 hours before us. ... We found about 100 head of their stock between the two encampments, apparently nearly famished for water, and drove them on with us, but few of them giving out on the way, although they looked miserable.*

Adding to the problems caused first by the rocky roads; then by the loss of confidence in Meek's familiarity with the new route; and finally by the fever beginning to spread through the camp; the companies following Meek were out in a barren desert during the hottest days of summer, and were then beginning to experience the effects of an acute lack of water -- the lifeblood of any wagon train. Their situation had become critical, and, what is more, based on what Field wrote the next day, apparently they still did not know where they were, or even exactly where they were going! Surely the emigrants' situation could not get much worse.

*FIELD: Thurs., Sept. 11 (Day 18)--It being 2 o'clock this morning before we got to camp, we stuck to it the remainder of the day. Owensby's company left about noon for a camp six or seven miles ahead. His company are [sic] in as much confusion as any set of fellows I have seen on the road. Having lost confidence in Meek, many of them are trying to hunt a road for themselves. ...*

Field's entry was written at Wagontire -- formerly known appropriately as "Lost Hollow" -- which was located at the far southwesterly point of their route on the western boundary of present-day Harney County, in the very heart of

the central Oregon desert. There were natural springs at Wagonfire, but there were not many of them, and those were not copious.

*FIELD: Fri., Sept. 12 (Day 19)--Went about six miles. ... Found two-thirds of Owensby's company still here, the remainder having gone on with the pilot and captain.*

*Sat., Sept. 13 (Day 20)--Started this morning in expectation of a long drive across the plain before us, but when about four miles from camp met Meek's wife in company with a friend, returning with the news that they had found no water as yet and requesting all who were at the spring to remain there until he found a camp and returned or sent word back for them to come on. Nothing remained for us to do but drive back to the camp we had just left, where we found Tethero[w]'s company also, so if misery loves company here is enough of it, for this small camping spot is nearly eaten out by our own large stock of cattle, and to add to all this there are some of the company nearly out of provisions.*

The emigrants were now hopelessly lost, and there were at least a hundred men on horseback who for nearly one full week had been out searching for water -- unsuccessfully -- while the rest of the emigrants remained within what was so aptly referred to as "the wall of aridity which confined them." And now Field reported that in addition to all their other problems, because of these delays, there were those who were now nearly out of provisions!

*FIELD: Sun., Sept. 14 (Day 21) --Last evening the portion of Owensby's company which were out upon the plain returned with their cattle and water kegs, having left their wagons out upon the plain seven miles from here and no water had then been found within 30 miles of them. Today Meek ordered them to return to this place and sent an order for us to remain at this place until tomorrow morning, then let 10 or 12 men accompany him with spades and dig for water at a place he thinks it can be found, in the dry bed of a creek.*

*This evening Owensby returned with his wagons, teams, cattle and all, having enough of lying out in the plain upon uncertainties. Meek came in after dark and said that from the top of a mountain a short distance from here he had discovered a cut in the side of a mountain apparently 16 miles distant where from the bright green appearance of the willows and grass there could be no doubt of our finding water and requesting that some horsemen might accompany him to search the mountain sides still further; he thought there would be no danger in some wagons starting tomorrow.*

*Mon., Sept. 15 (Day 22) --This afternoon about three o'clock, 21 of Tethero[w]'s wagons, together with six or seven of Owensby's company, made a start for the spot spoken of yesterday, which lies northeasterly from here, Meek accompanying them. A company of eight or ten wagons passed through the hollow we are encamped in, and started out into the plains by moonlight in the evening. They were a company we had never seen before and they said they were the last to leave the States for Oregon this year, starting some two or three weeks behind us. Their loose stock were nearly all working steers, they having*



*enough apparently to change teams every day.*

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As the companies left from Wagontire, their situation looked very bleak indeed. Historian Donna Wojcik described the emigrants predicament very appropriately as: "People too weak to walk or ride a horse, had to find room in the jolting wagons. Cases of sickness increased and fatigue overtook the weaker ones. Heat from the sun's rays absorbed by the heavy-double wagon cover nearly suffocated the occupants. Even with the extra weight of passengers, the weakened oxen trudged steadily onward. The stronger women and children plodding alongside wagons, now and then tripped over sharp rocks. ... Now and then an ox fell by the wayside to rise no more, and a cow yoked in its place. There were times when the contents from one wagon was [sic] transferred to another and the empty wagon left behind while the team was hitched to others ...."<sup>5</sup> All of these problems combined with being without water for themselves and their cattle, and now many of the emigrants were also running dangerously low on food.

*Tues., Sept. 16 (Day 23) --Capt. Riggs accompanied by the two Wilcox's started yesterday morning to search for water at a place they had seen the day before, and which the description given by Meek of the spot he expected to find water at, applied to precisely. They returned this morning reporting it the same with plenty of water and grass. We made preparation for starting immediately, but could not get ready until late in the afternoon, as our cattle were so scattered. We had a clear, full moon to light us on our toilsome way, which lay across a mountain to the northward, and after traveling about 20 miles we reached the long-sought spot at daybreak.*

In crediting Meek with knowing where to go for water, Field was apparently unaware that while Tetherow's group was out searching for water they had been approached in their camp one night by a local "digger" Indian who was hungry and looking for a meal. After feeding the poor fellow, the group made known their situation, and the Indian pointed out to them the direction to water. The spot they reached at daybreak was probably Buck Creek, the first southern branch of the South Fork of Crooked River, the main eastern tributary of the north-flowing Deschutes.<sup>6</sup>

*FIELD: Wed., Sept. 17 (Day 24)-- Lay by today wishing to get a smaller company if possible, three large ones being mixed together. Thurs., Sept. 18 (Day 25)--Traveled about 11 miles in a northwesterly direction, striking a smart-sized creek running in the same direction and camping upon it.*

They had now reached Crooked River itself. At last, the emigrants were now assured of a steady source of fresh water, all the way down to the Columbia. Thank God, perhaps now their fortunes were beginning to turn for the better.

*FIELD: Sat., Sept. 20 (Day 27)--Went about eight miles, camping upon the same stream mentioned yesterday .... Sun., Sept. 21 (Day 28)--Went about 16 miles today, still keeping down the river.... Mon., Sept. 22 (Day 29)--Went about seven miles, keeping still down along the river .... Camped at the foot of a tremendous hill, which it is necessary to ascend, and which when we first came in sight of appeared to be strung with wagons from the bottom to near the top, several companies being engaged in the ascent at the same time.*

*Tues., Sept. 23 (Day 30)--Went about 12 miles, striking away from the river and camping upon a small branch of it. Had a long and hard pull in the morning to ascend the hill spoken of yesterday, but once up we felt amply repaid the trouble of climbing by the prospect which lay before us. There were the Cascade mountains stretching along the western horizon, apparently not more than forty miles distant, forming a dark outline, varied by an occasional snow-peak, which would rise lofty and spire-like, as if it were a monument to departed greatness.*

After following the westerly course of Crooked River on its meandering toward the Deschutes, the emigrants then cut across from the present-day town of Post, past a high plateau along Wickiup Creek and followed the Ochoco River into what is today's Prineville. From there they probably followed the route of what is now highway 26 northwesterly toward present-day Madras, the lead company stopping on the way at Rim Rock Springs. The emigrants at last had plenty of fresh water, but the entire migration led by Meek now carried with them an unwelcome traveling companion they had unknowingly picked up during their many days in the desert without this fresh supply.

On that same day, diarist Samuel Parker eluded to the affects this unwelcome companion had upon the travelers, when he made the first one of what would be many alarming reports:

“to a Spring 18 [mi.] Beried 4 persons heree.”

There had been isolated deaths from camp fever reported earlier – Sarah King Chambers had been first on September 3, followed by young Elkanah Packwood who had died suddenly on September 8, then baby Emaline McNamee succumbed on Sept 16, and 13-year-old Eliza Harris was stricken on Sept 19. But now this was the first time the fever has been reported taking such an alarmingly large number as four persons in one single day!

The following day the Riggs' company reached Rim Rock Springs after Parker, and it was there driver Field made this uncharacteristically terse comment:

*FIELD: Wed., Sept. 24 (Day 31) --Went about 15 miles, camping at a spring in the midst of the plains, without a single landmark to tell its situation.*

The reason for the brevity of this September 24 entry is that it was the

last one James Field recorded in his diary. On this day – exactly one month after the Riggs company had started out on the Meek Cut-off -- the otherwise strapping and perfectly healthy twenty-two-year-old Riggs party's lead teamster had succumbed to the deadly camp fever that now traveled rampant among the emigrants, and normally claimed only the weakest for its victims. Teamster James Field had lost a consciousness he would not fully regain for the remainder of the journey.

At this point in the story, the following comment was published in the *Willamette Farmer* newspaper, which had serialized the Field diary many years later:

*NOTE: This ends the journal ... ED. FARMER.*

Although this was the end of the Field diary, it was far from the end of what had become the disaster known as the 1845 Meek Cut-off. Of those one thousand or so unfortunate souls who had embarked upon this new route and remained alive, they were still many miles from their valley destination, and their overall condition was growing worse every day. Drastic measures would have to be undertaken if they were to reach The Dalles mission before many more emigrants succumbed to this deadly fever.