# EXPERIENCES OF A PACKER IN WASHINGTON TERRITORY MINING CAMPS DURING THE SIXTIES

(*Continued from Vol. XIX., page* 213).

Colonel Althouse and I continued on back to Oro Fino with the pack train. Early in the winter I left that camp and returned to Oregon. I spent the winter of 1861-62 in Yamhill County, Oregon. This was one of the worst winters ever experienced in this country. Between The Dalles and Walla Walla thousands of cattle perished, dying for lack of food and water. There was a very heavy snow that winter, and the break did not come until February. In Eastern Oregon the cattle would come down from the snow-covered hills seeking water, but the streams were frozen over. Hundreds died along these streams, and in the spring the dead bodies were washed away by the spring floods.

That winter many careless and improvident miners in the Florence and Elk City Mining district perished. One party, setting out from Lewistown for Portland was caught in a blizzard and froze to death on the sage brush flat at Butter Creek, near Umatilla. Navigation on the Upper Columbia had to be suspended, and for a time even mail and express was held up. The middle of January, 1861, my brother Alex Watt, carrying the express and some mail on his back, got out of the upper country and came down the river on the *Brother Jonathan* to Portland.

In the following year I began to pack goods from Walla Walla to the placer mining camp at Oro Fino, which was then in Washington Territory, but now the State of Idaho. After the Florence placers were struck in October, 1861, goods were transported thither from Walla Walla and Lewiston. Navigation was opened on the Snake River as far as Lewiston in 1862. The town of Lewiston grew rapidly. At first it was just a town of tents and shacks. I was first on the site of Lewiston in July, 1861, as I have said, but there was at that time no evidence of a town there then. It started as a camping place. Hill Beachy built the first hotel in Lewiston, the "Luna House," it was just a frame covered with canvas. The population reached around 600 or 700 in 1865-6.

Lewiston was then the headquarters for a number of express lines. Dwight Bros. owned and ran Hill Beechey's old Lewiston stables, and H. Criter and T. J. Moore had the other

livery stables. These stables were the headquarters for Davidson's Oro Fino and Pierce City express, Fairchild's Elk City express, and Ramey & Co's Florence and Warrans express, and Waldron & Co's Montana express.

In 1863 I began packing goods into the mining camps of the Boise Basin. Umatilla, on the Columbia River, was the chief outfitting point for the Boise Basin Mines, although considerable merchandise, particularly flour, was transported from Walla Walla to those mines. Umatilla, was the center for the heavy freight business into Eastern Oregon, Southern Idaho and northwestern Nevada. J. H. Koontz was postmaster there, in 1865-1866. J. H. King and Thomas & Stanfield ran the livery stables, and J. H. Hailey & Co., operated a stage line into Boise. The distance from Umatilla to Boise Basin was about 300 miles and the price received for carrying freight over this route ranged at first all the way from 40 cents to 80 cents a pound. There were many pack trains on this route. During the first year or two the Indians caused us considerable annoyance. I was on this route for more than two years. During this period freight was carried inland from Umatilla as far as Winnamuca, Nevada.

On these packing trips we seldom carried food for the mules that were employed in packing, but depended upon the grass produced by the regions through which we passed. This native forage usually kept the animals in fine condition. The average pack mule sold for $250. A very good mule would bring $400.00. The wages of the packers varied from $100 to $125 a month, in addition to board. The train master would frequently receive as much as $150 a month. Gold dust was then the only legal tender used; greenbacks were at a heavy discount, and in great disfavor. To attempt to pass them as legal tender at par was considered a shady trick. In fact some merchants even went so far as to blacklist and publish the names of persons using greenbacks to discharge obligations incurred at gold prices. Freight and wages were thus always paid in gold and as a result many of the pack trains carried quite an amount of gold dust and they were frequently held up and robbed by road agents.

On the Boise pack trail in early days some boys had a cayuse pack train. I made one trip with that train. It was a poor outfit. Mules were much easier to work with, and they would carry much heavier loads than the Indian cayuses. Two years later on the Boise trail I found the spot where John Welsh, a packer,

had been held up by road agents and murdered. The place was a mile and a half the other side of Grass Valley. In coming across the rye grass flat, Welch's pack train was held up. Welch had $1600 in gold dust, and a companion had $3,000. in greenbacks—then worth 40 cents on the dollar. When commanded to hand over his money, John said, "I'll see you again." "No you won't," replied one of the robbers, and he blew Welch's head off with a shot from a double barreled shot gun. This was, if I recall correctly, in 1864 and I believe that an account of the murder was published in a contemporary issue of the *Oregonian* at Portland, Oregon.

I was on the trails for ten years but was never attacked by Indians or road agents. The Boise Road was considered the most dangerous from attacks of both. The Bannock and Snake river Indians made frequent raids on the Boise trains, and I have often come along just after an Indian attack or a highway robbery. In this country it was customary to set out night riders to look after the animals. The Indians frequently attacked and killed the herders and ran off the stock; they made such raids all the way along the road from Powder River to the Boise Basin.

One time in 1864 I was camped above Burnt River on some high ground near Miller's station, a well known stopping point on the Boise trail. On the low ground near me there were some cayuse trains. During the night Indians stampeded 400 or 500 head of pack animals. We heard the animals coming up the gulch we were in driven by the yelling Indians. We got our own mules safely into camp just as the Indians came into sight on the high ridge above us.

The holdups on this rout used to hold up whole pack trains slashing the aparejoes and cutting up the rigging trying to find hidden gold. These aparejoes had a hole in the center, usually stuffed with wild hay for packing. It was customary for a packer to pull out the hay and hide his gold dust in one of the aparejoes, and the robbers would often cut up and ruin 40 or 50 aparejoes worth from $50 to $75 each in an effort to find hidden gold dust.

Later in 1864 I went into Elk City at the head water of the South Fork of the Clearwater River with a pack train of freight. Elk City was located between Elk and American Creeks of the Red River; the main branch of the Clearwater. It was a difficult

trail from Oro Fino, over three mountain ridges, and the distance was figured at 120 miles. The population was around 500 or 600 people at that time. We arrived in town in time to partake in a celebration. Four Germans, who had successfuly mined in the camp, and "made their stake," had just sold out their claims and were on a tare. They had charatered all the saloons and hotels in the town, and were offering free food and drink to everyone. They had received between $80,000 and $100,000 in cash for their placer ground, and celebrated their good fortune in true Germanic style. They insisted that everyone in the community join them in having a good time. Every thing, every where, was free. This celebration continued for several days after our arrival, when the happy Germans at length took the trail towards Lewiston, on their way back to the Fatherland, with the best wishes of everyone in Elk City.

I made one trip over the Mullan Road into Helena, Montana in the fall of 1865. This was right after the close of the Civil War. Helena was quite a city, even in those days; the population was around eight thousand people. It would be pretty difficult now-a-days for anyone to form any adequate conception of the activity and bustle in some of these early mining camps such as Florence, Helena, or the Boise Basin at the height of their gold booms. The few streets were jammed with traffic. Pack trains were arriving, unloading freight in front of the stores or departing; the stage coaches would arrive; little groups of new comers were constantly coming in while others were departing with loaded pack horses and outfits for mining and prospecting ventures. Everyone was in a great hurry. New buildings were going up all around and one heard a continual pounding of hammers. The hurdy-gurdys and saloon orchestras were playing. The promotor was loudly calling attention to his town lots or mining stocks. The saloons and dance halls were all going full blast and the whole noisy, hustling hilarious crowd gave an impression and created an effect of hustle and great business activity not equaled by the crowds on State Street in Chicago or on Broadway, New York.

The post office was established in Helena that year, 1865. Before that all mail had been brought in from Salt Lake City by the pony or stage expresses at a cost of 25c to 50c a letter. My cousin, D. M. Jesse, then had a store there. I saw a number of the notorious characters about the town. I recall one man

named Bummister—a German. I had heard of him before in the Kootenai country in British Columbia. He had killed an Irishman there, and hastily quitting that section he came to Helena. There he got into a mining ditch company, and was soon reputed to be worth considerable money. He finally wormed himself into a position of some prominence in the community, and even got to be a guard or minor officer in the vigilante organization. One day a man named Kam Kerby, who had known him in the Kootenays, encountered Bill sitting on a beer keg in front of a saloon and he wanted to borrow a dollar or two from him. When Bummister refused him, Kerby said "You ——, ——, ——, why my kindness saved your neck, coming out of the Kootenays." If this was true Bummister returned the favor in a singular way. Kam had a brother, Bill Kerby, a noted desperado who was then absent bringing a couple of sporting women into camp, and he was therefore not in touch with the recent vigilante activities. The vigilantes were just waiting for Bill Kerby to come back to Helena so they could hang him. Kam, learning of this in some way secured a horse, and going out, intercepted his brother Bill on the trail and had him turn back and leave the country. When Kam Kerby got back to Helena, this Bummister informed the vigilantes against him as an outlaw character and they swung him up on the same old pine tree in Dry Gulch where 11 or 12 other men had been hanged by the vigilantes.

One day while I was unloading freight in front of D. M. Jesse's store at Helena, I heard a personal altercation between this Bummister and another man. Two men, strangers to me, but evidently old acquaintances of each other had met and were talking together on the street some five or six steps away from me. One of these men made some remark about the war that didn't please Bummister, who chanced to be passing by at the time and heard. Bummister stopped and called the man a hard name. The stranger turned to him and said that if he repeated the epithet he'd knock him down. "Who, the Hell are you, anyway?" the stranger added. Bummister pompossly answered, "William Bummister." "Well," said the stranger, with contemptuous emphasis "I don't think much of either you, or your name," and it looked as though Bummister had a fight on his hands.

This all took place on the side walk and the loud talking attracted quite a few people. Bummister seeing he was in for trouble gave the secret sign of the vigilantes, and quite a few men

connected with the organization went to his support. This man, who was a packer, told them in a frank convincing way just how the trouble with Bummister had occurred. One of the vigilantes walked over to the packer's side and soon most of the crowd were with him. One of the vigilantes who seemed to be a leader then consulted with two or three others in the crowd, and then turning to Bill Bummister told him that his name would be stricken off their list. When Bill demurred the man struck him in the face, told him "to carry himself straight," and the incident was over.

I packed into the Kootenay mines in British Columbia in the summer of 1866 and 1867 with merchandise from Walla Walla. I also packed into Helena, Montana, again—two trips during the same year. I first heard the name Roosevelt there in Helena in the 60s. Then there used to be a camp out at Oro Fino gulch—above Helena—known as Roosevelt City after a relative of Theodore Roosevelt, an uncle I believe, who had come out from the East during the gold rush and who became interested in owning ground and opperating a ditch in Oro Fino gulch. What his first name was I don't recall. They later changed the name of that camp to Unionville. Lots of gold went out of the Helena camp in those days. Along in August, 1866, a million and a half of gold left Helena in one shipment made under strong guard from Diamond City on Confederate gulch. This was taken out to Fort Benton, and then shipped by boat down the Missouri River.

I also made trips into the Boise Basin when Bannock City was burned there in 1865 and 1867. The two fires were exactly two years apart. On account of there being another Bannock City east of the Mountains in Montana they later changed the name of the Idaho Bannock City to Idaho City. The Montana Bannock City was over on Grasshopper creek a tributary of the Beaverhead. The town sprang up there when they made the gold discoveries in 1862. From the time I went into these mines in 1861 up to the spring of 1863 all these mines of Oro Fino, Pierce City, Salmon River, Boise Basin, Bannock Idaho, Bannock Montana, Virginia City, Helena were in Washington Territory, and the territorial population had suddenly expanded from 11,000 or 12,000 to over 60,000 people. Probably 25,000 of these were in what is now Idaho and a like number in what is now Montana.

We had no postoffices, or courts at first and the great dis-

tance from Olympia and the loss of time and the difficulty and expense in attempting to transact official business, and the utter inability of officials in distant Olympia to keep track of these transcient mining camps, or to enforce laws soon led to a demand for the creation of Idaho Territory. The Idaho Territory bill was passed by Congress and signed by Lincoln in March, 1863, and the Territorial Government was organized a few weeks later. They hadn't much more than organized Idaho when the same conditions required the creation of another territory east of the mountains. Montana Territory was created the next year, 1864. This town of Bannock City was the temporary capitol of Montana Territory and the first legislature met there in the winter of 1864. Virginia City then won the permanent capitol; Helena didn't get it until ten years later. In this way, during the time I was packing, I've seen the same and identical mining camp in three different Territories.

The main pack trail or road from Walla Walla and Umatilla into the Boise Basin followed the general route of the old emigrant road across the Blue Mountains and by the Grand Rounde and Powder Rivers to Burnt River and down that stream to the Snake River at Olds Ferry near Farewell Bend. Crossing the Snake River we continued up the Snake to the Payette, and up the stream to what was known as Horseshoe Bend; then on up the Payette to Porter Creek or Jackass Gulch, and by trail up Porter Creek into Placerville. Most of the early travel and freight into the Basin went this way. An improved road later left the Payette this side of Horseshoe Bend and went up Shaefer's Creek into Placerville. These roads used to be lined with pack trains, saddle trains, stage coaches and individual parties on foot or horseback with their pack animals going into or returning from the mines.

Part of the road went over alkali flats and the dust stirred up by one party didn't get a chance to settle before the next party came along. A lot of road houses sprang up along the route to supply food and liquor to the travelers. I recall some of them. There was one at this Horseshoe Bend; another at Payette's ranch; others at Burns' Thompson's and Shafer's ranches. Meals were regularly a dollar a throw and whiskey two bits or more a swallow.

Bannock was the largest town in the whole Boise Basin, and the destruction of most of the supplies in the fires resulted in the

immediate movement of the pack trains to that point to meet the needs of the thousands of miners then in the Boise Basin. Fully 2,000 mules loaded with freight went out of Walla Walla alone in the next year with supplies for the Boise mines. The freight charges from Walla Walla were then 35 cents to 40 cents a pound. It took about two weeks to reach Boise Basin and during the summer months, from 1863 to 1867 or later, there were about a hundred pack trains and freight trains operating from Wallula and Walla Walla into the towns of Boise Basin; ten to twelve such trains used to arrive and unload every day during the summer. The mountain roads were practically impossible in winter and early spring. Pack animals proved to be superior to ox teams, and horses and mules seemed to be less troubled by the alkali dust along the road.

In addition to pack-trains, there were "saddle trains," and express riders ran along this route. The owners of saddle trains provided passengers with saddle horses and equipment, and furnished supplies for the trip, and permitted each passenger to carry a small amount of personal baggage, about 25 pounds. Tracy & Co. of Portland, and Rockfellow & Co. ran expresses for a time from Portland and Walla Walla into the Basin. Wells Fargo & Co. later bought them out. George F. Thomas who had a stage line from Walla Walla to Lewiston joined hands with J. L. Ruckle, built a toll road and established a stage line from Umatilla, over the Blue Mountains, into the Boise Basin, and Henry Greathouse put on a saddle train to connect with the Oregon Steam Navigation's boats at Umatilla,—a saddle train was a horse-back passenger line. This was a common means of transportation in those days. Later on a stage coach was brought up from California and Greathouse's saddle train was changed to a stage coach line. About this time Hill Beechy, who had sold out his Lewiston Hotel and livery stable to the Dwight Brothers, moved to the Boise Basin and put in a stage line making direct overland connections from California into the Boise Basin, by way of Star City, Nevada. Hostile Indians stole his stock, attacked his stages, and put him out of business.

There were a number of good sized boom mining towns in the Basin in those days. Bannock, or as later called, Idaho City, was the chief one. It was at the junction of Moore and Elk Creeks, about 35 miles northeast of Boise City and had a population then around 6000 people. Buena Vista, or Buna Vista Bar

was on the opposite side of the creek. Smith was Wells Fargo & Co's., agent there; Alf Eoff was the agent for Holliday's Overland Express. Greathouse & Kelly, and Ed. Pinkham had the local express lines to the neighboring camps—Centerville, Placerville, Pioneer City and Rocky Bar. I would say that there was fully 5000 people in these towns. Pioneer City was first known by the refined name "Hog-Em." Brittan, Ralston and Ridge & Co. were agents in charge of the Wells Fargo & Co. express at these places. Boise City itself was then a town of 2000 to 2500 people. I presume the way "Hog-em," or as later called Pioneer City got its first name was from the greedy character of the first locators who wanted to "hog it all," or stake and hold all the good ground to the exclusion of later comers.

Captain John Mullan, he of the Mullan road fame, was also a prominent stage line operator in and about these Boise Basin camps. As I recall he promoted an overland stage line from Boise south to Chico, California. This line like Hill Beachy's was also greatly bothered by Indian attacks. Captain Mullan was also at one time interested in one of the stage lines running from Umatilla Landing into the Boise Basin.

I was in Bannock, or Idaho City, in 1865 when Fred Patterson shot and killed former Sheriff Pinkham. Patterson was a self important fellow, he boarded at the City Hotel, and didn't get up until about eleven or twelve o'clock in the morning when it was his habit to go to the barber shop, just above the hotel and get shaved before getting his noon breakfast. Patterson was a man who had a superior air about him and didn't mix much, he belonged to secessionists of the camp. He had some kind of a grudge with Pinkham who was a union man. I was camping down at Dry Creek then and had come into town that morning and was on the street at the time.

JAMES W. WATT.

*(to be continued)*