



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California
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Sacramento to Owens Valley via Bakersfield, 1873

Conditions of Travel, Society, and Mining

Edited and transcribed by Gilbert P. Gia

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Trip To Owen's Valley¹

Having experienced considerable trouble in learning of the whereabouts and route to Owens Valley, and believing many others will soon begin to make similar inquiries, we lay before your readers such information as we have gained by actual experience, hard knocks, many rebuffs, and the expenditure of considerable money. That we might go through without unnecessary detention we proceeded to the local ticket office at Sacramento and made such inquiries as would be deemed sufficient under ordinary circumstances, and were informed by the agent that we should take

¹ "Trip To Owen's Valley," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Vol 46, No 7021, Oct 4, 1873. This article appeared as an image at California Digital Newspaper Collection (CDNC), <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cdnc>. The story is quite historically significant. -gg

the 6:15 A. M. train on the Western Pacific Railroad to Lathrop, where we would make close connection with cars of the Southern Pacific Railroad for Goshen.



Accordingly, on the 5th of May last we started, as directed,

ARRIVING AT LATHROP *at about 8:30 A. M. Alas, for human forethought, trouble was about to be inaugurated almost at the beginning of our journey. Instead of making close connection at Lathrop we found there in waiting a freight train with one passenger-car attached, yclept [?] an "accommodation train," which would not leave until 11:45 A. M., and then went only to Modesto. Concluding that as our "lightning train" would not leave until 7:45 P. M., we would prefer to pass the day in Modesto, we applied to the agent at Lathrop to know if we could go to Modesto on the freight train on the through tickets we held, and from there proceed on the evening train, but were*

informed that no "stopover tickets" would be given, and that if we took the accommodation train our tickets would be taken up, so we were compelled to wait at Lathrop until 7:45 in the evening. At this hour we

LEFT FOR GOSHEN, where we expected to take stages for Visalia, Havilah, Owen's Valley, etc. Arriving at Goshen we were told that no stages were running on that route, but that we would have to go to Tipton; but after passing Goshen, and while yet in sight of the station we noticed a stage with passengers starting out from that station, and on making inquiry of fellow passengers, learned it was the "opposition" line to Visalia. We were anxious to go by way of Visalia, and at once began to use "cuss" words against the railroad employees, and were even inclined to believe they had lied to us; but our fellow passengers checked us, and said they did not believe railroad or stage employees ever lied. So we took all back and put it down as a mistake only. Fare to Tipton \$17.50. At Tipton we booked our names, paid our passage to Havilah — \$14 — and congratulated ourselves that, as we had now struck the stage that good old way we used to travel before railroads were built, we would have no more trouble. But this line seemed to be an exception, and we had yet to undergo infliction. A pair of Fairbanks scales were run out, and the

WEIGHING OF BAGGAGE commenced. The first victim was a young lady school-teacher from San Francisco, who was going away from

home all alone, for the first time in her life, to teach school at Havilah. She was mulcted [?] in the sum of \$2 50 for "extra baggage" — over fifty pounds. As her trunk was of small size, and hardly believing it could weigh so much, to test the scales we stepped upon them and found our weight had increased about 25 pounds in the last 48 hours. We were assured by the exquisite agent that they were correct; and so we concluded we were again mistaken. We made ourselves a little obnoxious by our intercessions for the fair young schoolteacher, and expected we would have to pay dearly for it. However, we got off on the payment of \$5 on the same trunk we had traveled twice across the plains with by the overland stage route, and, although containing more than [sic] than on the present occasion, it went without extra charge, although the rates then were one dollar per pound. The same trunk we brought over the northern route when we left the valley, and no extra charge, although they allow you but forty pounds. The other passengers contributed from \$2.50 to \$10 to the company, respectively, when we finally got

UNDER WAV FOR HAVILAH over one of the hardest and dustiest roads I have ever traveled. The stages (mud-wagons) are old and shaky, the stock broken down, the time exceedingly slow, and the drivers, with but a single exception on the whole route to Independence, the most profane, unaccommodating and insulting to

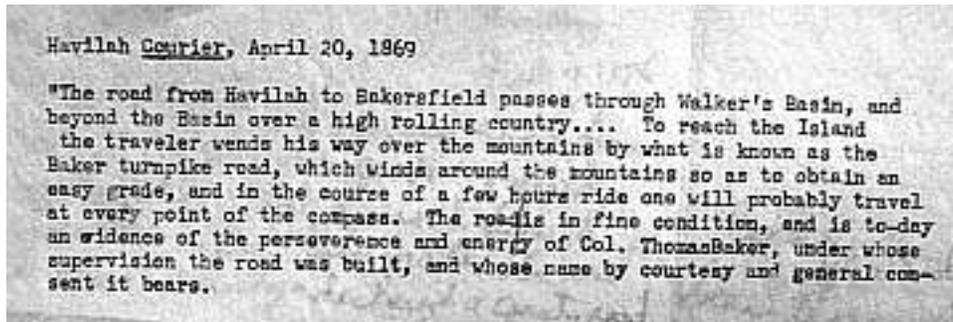
passengers I have ever been compelled to ride with. Yank Booth (it must be there is some redeeming quality in the surname) was the only one of the lot that knew anything about his business. He is a good driver, clever and polite to passengers, and always has a good joke to keep them in good humor, while all the others we rode with seemed to think themselves far above the human species, and to answer a question put to them was beneath their dignity. We will instance one of these fellows, which will answer as a fair sample for all till you reach Owens river. It was at Coyote Wells where we encountered this knight of the ribbons, which on this occasion he drew over the backs of two poor old mustangs hitched to a two-seated wagon, in which were four passengers, with their baggage. He came out and surveyed the load, and began to pour out a stream of profanation which you would not publish or I would give in full. He wound up, finally, by wishing that lightning would strike the ----- [dashes] of a driver that would take on such a load, and that he had a good notion to chuck the baggage into a mud-hole. The passengers stood this as long as they could, and finally told him he had better dry up or they would chuck him so deep into a mud-hole that he would never get out. We started, and night coming on chilly, a couple of bottles of liquor were obtained, and after two or three drinks by two of the passengers, most all gave themselves up to sleep. The driver, however, was not to be put off

with so few drinks, but helped himself. About midnight the proprietor of the two quart bottles awoke, and feeling very cold, proceeded to take a drink, but found them both empty. This driver had actually

DRANK ABOUT A QUART AND A HALF *within four hours. The effect of the whisky produced drowsiness, and he was constantly dropping his lines, and then would stop the wagon and get out to hunt them up. I think he performed this operation twenty-five or thirty times before morning. Occasionally he would go to each wheel, and putting his hand on the wheel burrs, would remark that "he was afraid his spindles would get hot." As we had not struck into a trot all night long, it was at once voted by the passengers that this man was the most careful driver they had ever seen. At the end of his drive we made inquiry to ascertain his name, and understood from two or three different ones that it was "Dick Runkle." Their pronunciation of the name sounded like that; but believing there was a mistake about it, we got a man to write it down, and it still sounded like Dick Runkle; so we gave up in despair trying to find out anything correctly on this route.*

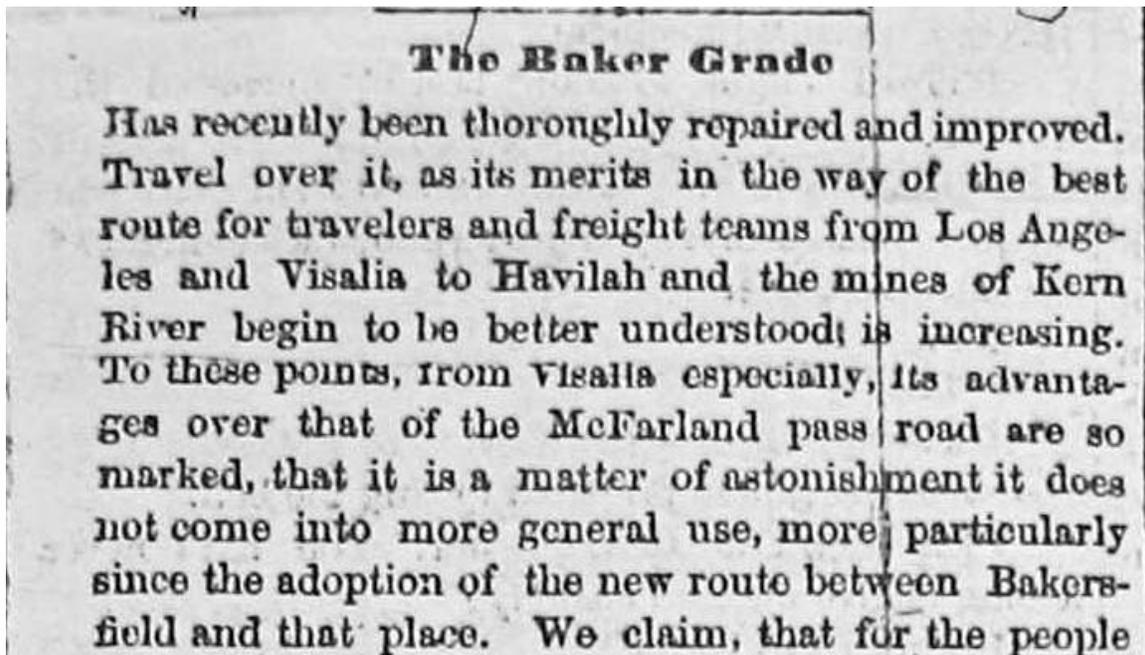
STARTING FROM TIPTON *at about 7 o'clock A. M., we travel all day long over an exceedingly dusty alkali country, and reach [sic] Bakersfield at 7 in the evening, where we took supper, and there, in another two-seated wagon, with five passengers and their baggage, we start for Havilah, which place we reached at early morning. This*

part of the route, from Bakersfield, being a mountain road, is the only pleasant portion of the trip. The moon shone brightly, and we passed some very fine mountain scenery.



William Harland Boyd citation, McGuire Local History Room, Beale Library

The passage from Bakersfield to Havilah was via Baker Grade out of Caliente.



Kern County Weekly Courier, May 6, 1871

HAVILAH² is the county seat of Kern county, and from the numerous graded roads over its mountains and tunnels run therein, we judge it must at one time have been a very lively mining camp. But its glory has departed, and the sound of the stamp-mill is heard but faintly now. But one little mill of ten stamps was in operation, working on custom rock brought in now and then by a few prospectors or "coasters." We were told there were several very good ledges in the near vicinity which were being prospected with the expectation of more extensive operations soon. The celebrated Joe Walker mine is located not far from Havilah, and is considered one of the richest gold mines in the State, but its successful working is prevented by the immense volume of water constantly filling the shafts. Thousands of dollars have been spent in grading roads, driving tunnels, etc., in and around Havilah, and an examination shows that the work was done by experienced hands. We should judge from a personal examination of a number of the mines that the work was discontinued because of the smallness of the veins and from most all of them having "pinched." Board in Havilah, at a horrible hotel, is \$12 per week.

² News of the removal of the county seat from Havilah to Bakersfield in 1872 caused rejoicing and explosions of gunpowder in Bakersfield "to promote conviviality." (Kern County Weekly Courier, Mar 23, 1872)

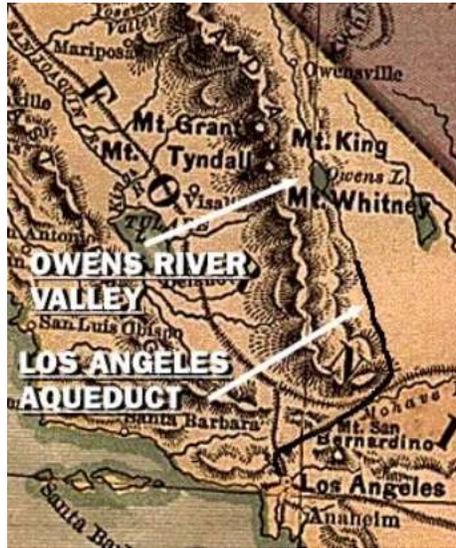


Havilah about 1882³

We stopped here but two days and were glad when we again got
UNDER WAY FOR OWENS VALLEY. *The first station after leaving*
Havilah is Warm Springs. Here baths were fitted up, and we were told
it was something of a resort for invalids. Those to whom a low diet is
prescribed might get along very well, for we certainly could get as little
to eat at the hotel kept there as at any other it has been our
misfortune to stop at. Here we changed our six-in-hand-coach for a
two-seated wagon. The horses — two only— were said to have been
quite old when they were brought in there by the California Volunteers
in 1863, and were, no doubt, selected for their peculiar fitness to run
on that route where there is nothing to eat, as they were entirely

³ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 31, 1954

toothless, and if by chance they did get anything, it would last them a long time. From this place we drive slowly along our route all one day and night and till noon of next day passing nothing of special interest, except Owens Lake, until we reach Lone Pine, eighteen miles south of Independence.



Owens Lake is a fine body of water to look at, but it is so impregnated with alkali that nothing can live in its waters. This is the lake into which, several years ago, the citizens of the valley drove a lot of Indians they were punishing for having massacred a number of women and children. In the fright that took place the Indians became panic-struck and rushed into the lake, and some thirty or forty of them were drowned or shot while in the water.



Lone Pine to Bishop, from 1937 Auto Club map

LONE PINE is the entry for nearly all the Swansea and Cerro Gordo trade, which two latter places are distant respectively about twelve and twenty miles, nearly due east. Lone Pine is situated on the west side of the valley, near the base of the Sierra Nevada range; Swansea on the east side, at the base of the Inyo range, near the head of Owens Lake, while Cerro Gordo lies higher up in the same range and nearly directly above Swansea.

MINES. The only mines in the county that are being worked to any considerable extent are the Union, at Cerro Gordo, and the Owens Lake Silver Lead Company's claims at Swansea. The Union mine has

been pretty extensively worked for several years, yielding more bullion during that time, probably, than any other mine in the United States. Belshaw & Beaudry, who claim to be the owners of the mine, were comparatively poor men when they began operations, some six years ago, but no doubt to-day can have their checks honored for from a quarter to half a million each, and all made in operating this mine. It is claimed, however, that they have a jumped title, and suit was some time ago brought by the San Felipe Company, who claim to have the first or discovery title, for the recovery of the mine, and in a trial had before Judge Belden in August last the jury rendered a verdict in favor of the San Felipe Company. It was supposed that work on the mine would be suspended 'or some time, but Belshaw & Beaudry are still running their furnaces and taking out about twenty-five tons of bullion per day. They have filed papers for a new trial, and if granted it is hard to tell when the matter will be ended. The Swansea claim is also a very extensive mine, and produces nearly as much bullion as the Union. I believe this company own a majority of the San Felipe stock, and if they should eventually succeed in obtaining possession of the Union also, they will have as much as one company could well desire. It is impossible to give anything like correct figures of the amount of bullion produced by these mines, as the owners are not at all communicative in regard thereto. Something of an idea may be gained of the amount,

however, from the fact that hardly a team, within the last six years, of the large number engaged in hauling supplies for nearly all the people of the valley, has ever returned to Los Angeles (the point from which goods are sent into the interior) without taking out as much bullion as their twelve and fourteen-mule teams could haul. How many teams have been thus engaged I cannot say, but quite a large number, as Inyo county has a population of some three or four thousand, and must require a large number of teams to supply her freight. The bullion, although hauled out of the valley at this rate, has steadily increased, until it is found necessary to engage more teams. A contract has been entered into with Nadeau, of Los Angeles, to haul this bullion. He has purchased eighty 12-mule teams, and allowing that he will make the round trip from Los Angeles to Cerro Gordo every eight or nine weeks, it is thought it will take him ten or eleven months to haul out what is now on hand, to say nothing of what can be turned out by the furnaces in the meantime. It is estimated that 100 such teams will be required constantly in hauling away the bullion produced by these two mines alone. This bullion is valued at from \$150 to \$700 per ton. Estimating, then that each 12-mule team will haul 20,000 pounds, eighty teams would take 1,600,000 pounds each trip; say that they make five trips to the mines in ten months, we find they will have hauled out 8,000,000 pounds, or 4,000 tons. It is said,

by those who claim to know, that this bullion averages 8500 per ton; here, then, we have a total of \$2,000,000 worth of bullion now corded up awaiting transportation cut of the valley. This may seem a wild and exaggerated statement, but when one goes there and sees this bullion piled up on either side of the lake — for a steamer is employed in taking it across the lake to the — cabins built of it for temporary uses of the miners, visits the mine itself and sees for himself the enormous ledge developed and the hot streams of metal running from the furnaces, it will then be thought the figures here given ought to be multiplied by two. A great drawback to Cerro Gordo has been the scarcity of water, all that required for the working of the mines and domestic purposes having heretofore been brought from a spring several miles distant and retailed at fifteen cents per gallon.⁴ This difficulty will soon be obviated in a great degree, as some months ago a contract was entered into by a company to lay a pipe to bring the water in. I believe some nine miles of 4 inch pipe is now on the ground, and the waterworks will soon be in operation. From Lone Pine we pass on up the valley north, eighteen miles, to

INDEPENDENCE, the county seat of Inyo county. This place, considering that it is several hundred miles away from anywhere, presents a fine appearance, but no doubt the earthquake is entitled to

⁴ Fifteen cents in 1873 is equivalent to about \$3 in 2011.

a good deal of credit in bringing about so desirable a result, not only for Independence but for Lone Pine, Big Pine, and all the towns in the valley, as but for the reason that they were all knocked down and ruined the old primitive adobe houses would have been made to do service for a long time, no doubt. Good wood houses have, since that event, been erected, some of them exhibiting commendable architectural proportions. A good deal of taste is also shown by some of the inhabitants in ornamenting their yards, gardens and the streets with shrubs, flowers, trees, etc. The town can boast of a much finer Court-house than many others of ten times her size. I believe its dimensions are about 70 x 40 feet, is a two-story frame, and has rooms sufficient for court purposes and all the county officers; also, has conveniences therein for those who have striven hard to obtain a county official position, but finally brought up in the jail department — bound that the country should support them in some way. The town and its immediate vicinity has a population of about three hundred, has three stores, two hotels, a restaurant, a boarding-house, blacksmith and wagon shop, shoe shop, barber shop, stove store and tin shop, two butcher shops, livery stable, brewery, nine rum-mills (well patronized), a Masonic Hall and a printing office. I mention the printing office last for the reason that all the other institutions are better patronized than this, although Chalfant & Parker, proprietors of

the Inyo Independent— the only paper published in the county — done more than anybody for the benefit of the people of the county. Their paper, published once a week, is the only medium by which the outside world gains any information of the Inyo country, and for this reason alone, if nothing else, should be sustained by a liberal patronage. They are not discouraged, however, by their three years hard struggle, and have much hope for the future, knowing that rum-suckers, poker-players and others of that ilk in all new countries, must soon give place to a more respectable and industrious population. Many of the people of Independence are very hospitable to strangers, and do all they can, when one comes amongst them, by kind treatment and honorable dealings, to prevail upon him to settle in the place; while there are others there who expect to remain a short time, make a stake and leave. This class care nothing for the prosperity of the place, and resort to all sorts of underhanded dealings to extort money from those who, patronize them. Independence has suffered a good deal by them. Many strangers coming into the town and stopping at the hotel, have been imposed upon by the landlord's outrageous charges. They, of course, leave the place with strong feelings of prejudice against the town and its people, because of the meanness of one man. To those intending to visit Independence I would recommend them to patronize the Inyo House, whose proprietor is an

honorable gentleman, and gives his guests the worth of their money. It is not the Best appearing hotel outwardly, "but its table and other accommodations are good, and you can feel sure that you will not be robbed.

MINING NEAR INDEPENDENCE *The mines nearest to Independence are the Kearsarge and Silver Sprout in the Sierra Nevada range, and the Eclipse and Waucoba series in the Inyo range. The Kearsarge is located just back of the town; has a fine 20-stamp mill, but has not been in operation since the earthquake a year ago or more, although its silver vein is believed to be one of the very best.⁵ I believe but a short run was ever made by this mill, and, from incompetency of the Superintendent, was not a success. The property has since passed into the hands of persons who are about to resume operations, and favorable results are anticipated. The Silver Sprout Company, which is near the Kearsarge, have had a number of men at work during the Summer in running tunnels, sinking shafts, etc., and a few days ago they struck a large body of very fine ore, and have made arrangements for its being worked in the Kearsarge mill. The Eclipse has not been worked since the earthquake, and, the property being*

⁵ The Great Lone Pine earthquake was one of the largest earthquakes to hit California in recorded history. The quake struck on March 26, 1872 and its epicenter was near Lone Pine, California in Owens Valley. The true size of this earthquake is not known, but historical evidence detailing the damage it caused in settlements and landforms near the epicenter, and the geographic extent to which noticeable movement was felt, leads researchers to estimate a Richter magnitude of 7.6 to 8 or greater — similar in size to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. (Wikipedia)

owned by English capitalists, very little is known of their intentions. It is one of the best mills on the coast and cost a large sum of money, and when it is known by the English owners that the bottom has not dropped out of the valley, they will undoubtedly venture to start her up again. But those that will equal if not excel, in time, the wonderful Union mine at Cerro Gordo, are the Waucoba series of mines, lying some 25 miles west from Independence, in the Inyo range. Enough work has been done there this Summer to show an immense body of ore, and furnaces are nearly completed and other details perfected to carry on gigantic operations either the coming Winter or early next Spring. The ores in these mines are galenas and carbonates, and resemble the Cerro Gordo ores. Independence will be headquarters for these mines. A good wagon-road is now being constructed thereto, and when the Columbus toll road from Carson City is completed, no doubt it will be continued from Waucoba to connect therewith at Columbus, which will lessen the distance to Carson very materially. Indeed, after having gone in by the southern route, via Tipton and coming out of the valley by the northern, via Aurora, and learning the distance to be saved by the

PROPOSED NEW TOLL-ROAD *I cannot see why the northern will not be the best for freighting goods to and bullion from this valley. That it will become the favorite route for passengers, there is not a*

doubt in my mind, even though the stages continue to run as they now do, by way of Aurora, for the following reasons: The distance is no greater; the stages make better time; the road is not near so dusty, there being but little or no alkali dust, while on the southern route you are constantly inhaling it; passengers have a good night's rest in Aurora, and then reach Sacramento quicker than by the southern route via Tipton. The stage-line from Independence to Aurora is owned, by J. S. Ullrick, and from Aurora to Carson by William Wilson, both of whom are not only posted in stage business, but are clever gentlemen and appreciate the fact that the public are entitled to a full consideration for the money paid for fares. Besides, they employ none but competent and gentlemanly drivers and agents. Finding such a vast difference between those of the northern and southern routes, and feeling that the drivers on the northern are entitled to "honorable mention," I name those with whom I rode and met on my return trip from Independence.

STARTING FROM INDEPENDENCE at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Con. [conductor?] Venise drove us through to Bishop Creek in ten hours. We stopped, however, at Mrs. Slinkard's, six miles south of Bishop, for supper, and recommend everybody to do the same. From Bishop Creek to Hot Springs (Benton), 90 miles, we had an all-night ride. I regret very much that I passed through the

BISHOP CREEK SETTLEMENTS in the night time, as desired to give a description of this portion of the valley, which, I am told, is the most fertile and beautiful part, being under quite a high state of cultivation. This, and the country around Big Pine, twenty-five miles still further south, is the great farming section of the county, and capable of furnishing farm products for a large population. Indeed, the whole valley is susceptible of cultivation, and any kind of a crop can be raised if the waters of the numerous streams therein were properly distributed. I believe a project for bringing the waters of Owens river and other streams by a canal higher up, near the base of the Sierras, is soon to be inaugurated, when thousands of acres of the very best of land can be irrigated and made productive, which now lies idle.



Carson City to Reno, from 1937 Auto Club map

At half-past 7 A. M. Wednesday we arrived at

HOT SPRINGS. *Here are very good mines being worked by Albert Mack, who is proprietor of a ten-stamp mill and principal owner of the Comanche mine. About \$2,800 worth of fine bullion, valued at \$15 to \$17 per pound, is sent by the stages to Carson City per week from mines here. At 8 A. M. we start with Dan. W. Ashley, a clever driver, and arrive at Dexter's Well, or Wellsburg, about 2 o'clock P. M., where we get an excellent dinner. This is quite a noted well, being 300 feet in depth, and the water is raised by horse-power. It is situated a few miles above the head of Mono Lake, and I think its water is affected by those of the lake, as it is rather brackish and unpleasant to drink. From here to Aurora, nineteen miles, we have the roughest part of the road, it being rather rocky, but is much to be preferred, I think, to alkali dust.*

WE REACH AURORA at 7 o'clock in the evening, get supper and a good night's rest, and in the morning, after breakfast and an inspection of a magnificent cabinet of specimens owned by Novacovich, the gentlemanly stage agent, we start, with that prince of the ribbons, J. S. Peel, and after a pleasant ride of 53 miles, arrive at Sweetwater, where you get a good dinner, a good team, and a good driver — Al. Briggs — and 46 miles over a good hard road brings you to Genoa, where you take supper, and then start with Billings — an old stage

proprietor, but now a driver — a fine coach-and-six, for Carson, reaching there about 10 o'clock at night, in time to take the 10:40 train for Reno. Here you take the cars of the Central Pacific Railroad at 2:30 A. M., get a sleeping berth, if you choose, for \$1.50, and after a comfortable night's rest, find yourself in the morning rolling down the bill for Sacramento, where you arrive about noon of Friday. The distance from Independence to Carson is made in about 48 hours traveling time, exclusive of stoppages; fare by stage, \$35; fifteen cents per pound for extra baggage — over forty pounds.”

[end]

Remarks

The source for this article was the California Digital Newspaper Collection (CDNC), a noteworthy resource for California historians. Its collection contains 55,935 serials comprising 494,455 pages and 5,658,224 articles of selected, digitized California newspapers dating from August 1846 through 1922, although it also houses later scans from March 2006. CDNC is a project of the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research (CBSR) at the University of California, Riverside and is supported in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian. CBSR has received three grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities to digitize California newspapers for the National Digital Newspaper Program. Titles digitized as part of NDNP are freely accessible via the internet both at CDNC and at the Library of Congress Chronicling America website (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>).

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