

WOEFUL TALES OF A DOG'S LIFE ON THE NOBLES TRAIL

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Many emigrants commented in their diaries on how hard travel to California was on the live stock that pulled their wagons. We know from these accounts that many oxen, mules, and horses died or were abandoned on the way. But seldom do we read about the suffering that dogs endured coming overland. Two woeful series of events that happened along the Nobles Trail give us an insight into how tough a dog's life was while traveling overland with their masters.

The first of these woeful tales comes from Benjamin Franklin Ruggles on Aug. 8, 1859:

To day while crossing that high point our Dog "Bounce" "Give out" he has been lame and getting used up for a long time, but has rec'd considerable attention his feet are worn and cracked by Alkali they have been kept greased and covered with cloth as well as could be for some time back which has enabled him to keep along, but to day with heat and dust and thirst and worn out with fatigue he laid down and refused to follow, we have haul[e]d him considerably of late but think he is about as able to walk as our worn team is to haul him After a while his owner went back after him but could not get him along but a little way, however before we stopped for night he came up with us, We are told that but a few of the dogs that start a cross the plains ever reach California the trip being more than they can perform

Ruggles did not tell us what eventually happened to "Bounce."

The second tale came from Ira H. Butterfield, Jr. who recorded on Sept. 30, 1861, while traveling over the Smoke Creek Desert:

drove twenty miles to Smoke Creek. Nooned at Buffalo Springs. I had a shepherd (collie) dog that I brought from Michigan. He was a fine dog and had been very useful in rounding up the sheep when starting in the morning or when they were scattered when grazing. He had become foot sore, however, and after starting the sheep, he had for several days been put in a wagon. I did not drive the sheep and the care of the dog was left with the men who did drive them. At Buffalo Springs at noon, it was found that the sheep drivers had neglected to put the dog in a wagon so he had not come on with the train. We had driven ten or twelve miles that forenoon. I went back alone to find Mr. Dog. He was still where we camped over night. It was getting toward night. The train had gone on to reach Smoke Creek, hence it was twenty miles to where I would find the train. I reached the noon camp by daylight, but as I had to carry the dog in front on the horse, I could not go very fast, and after dark I had to carry him all the time or I might lose him as he would not travel very far with his tender feet. It was a lonely ride but I had a good horse and made camp at midnight.

Four days later, on Oct. 4, Butterfield sadly reported the loss of his dog:

drove thirteen miles up Susan River. At noon, I found that my dog had again been left or had gone back somewhere and I started back after him. I went back fifteen miles to a ranch or station we had passed but could not find him. He may have gone farther or the rancher may have hidden him. I could not know and decided to give it up as I was not prepared for an extended trip alone, although we were in what was called a friendly Indian country. I was very much disappointed in the loss of my dog.