

Remembering the 1849-50 Pratt Expedition

Over the Rim: The Parley P. Pratt Exploring Expedition to Southern Utah, 1849-50, edited by William B. Smart and Donna T. Smart (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1999), 270 pp.

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IT IS FITTING THAT THE 1850 EXPLORATION of the Mormon corridor through the Great Basin area of Brigham Young's State of Deseret and the settlement that followed a year later received attention from Utah historians during their sesquicentennial years. It is also interesting that books which detail Parley P. Pratt's 1849-50 exploration and the 1850-51 settlement of Iron County are so similar in nature. Published first, in 1999, was *Over the Rim: The Parley P. Pratt Exploring Expedition to Southern Utah, 1849-50*, edited by William B. Smart and Donna T. Smart. It was followed in 2001 by *Trial Furnace: The Story of Southern Utah's Iron Mission*, by Morris Shirts and Kathryn Shirts (Brigham Young University Press). Both books represent the culmination of years of research to supplement the original diaries kept during the journeys and included in the text. Each offers a day by day—sometimes mile by mile—narrative, helping to establish exact routes, camp sites, and events. For many who long to know more about their ancestors' participation, these books fill in details, telling stories that have not been easily available regarding these key events in the colonization of the Great Basin and the southwestern frontier.

Over the Rim is the work of a husband and wife editorial team, William

B. and Donna T. Smart. Their research began with an interest in Donna's great-great-grandfather, William Henrie, one of fifty men in Pratt's party. Unfortunately, they found only a few references to him. However, they were so moved by the four diaries kept by members of the party and their courageous and little-known story that they decided to continue their research and document the whole expedition. Now they have published those diaries with textual commentary and biographical information on the men who made up the expedition.

The four diarists were Robert Campbell, clerk of the expedition, John C. Armstrong, John Brown, and Isaac C. Haight. The diary entries range from Campbell's lengthy official record with a detailed account of mileage, obstacles, feed, and other matters to the stirring thoughts and briefer commentary of the others, who were often moved by the scenery and adventure of a mid-winter trek into the unknown wilderness. What keeps the reader involved in the narrative of the trek is the differences in what these four diarists have to offer and the contextual commentary that the editors have added.

The Smarts trace the most probable route of the exploration, including the extremely difficult mountain crossing from Sanpete to the Little Salt Lake. They write:

To appreciate the incredible labor of that crossing, the country must be seen close up. An extremely rough jeep road contours south from the Birch Creek campground at about the eight-thousand-foot level, close to the ex-

plorers' route. Six times the road plunges in and out of ravines and deeper canyons, often at grades only manageable in the lowest gear of four-wheel drive. Wagons don't do well on sidehills, so Pratt's wagons had to be hauled up the ascents and lowered down the descents, not at an angle as the road goes but directly up and down, on much steeper grades. (61)

After following the road through this rugged area, albeit during better weather, the authors could more authoritatively state that the journals of December 18 "reflect the expedition's hardest day" (63) and conclude:

No wonder stalwart John Brown wrote of discouragement and Parley felt the need to beseech the Lord not to hedge up their way out of these mountains. And no wonder that Schuyler Jennings,

probably exhausted and with nerves frayed by incessant labor, would curse and threaten with a club over what would seem a minor annoyance. (p. 63)

Over the Rim is divided into four sections: Journals, Official Report, Epilogue, and Appendices (including related papers and biographies of expedition members). It also includes a lengthy bibliography, which will be useful to others researching life histories of the participants. While it is evident that the editors have made a thorough contribution to the history of western exploration as well as Utah and Mormon history, this work is more readable and more enjoyable history because of their exceptional skills as writers and editors. Long after the sesquicentennial, interested readers will be discovering the contribution of this expedition through their fine volume.