

discouraged and more than disgusted with his guides. The river had been examined for four miles each way from LaBonta crossing, and not a place could be found where it would be possible to cross a train. The alternative was presented to march to Platte bridge, one hundred and thirty miles out of our regular course. Soon after packing the train I rode off by myself, on my government mule, up the river searching for an antelope. Without noticing the distance traveled, I was soon nearly five miles from camp, and out of sight of same, over a sharp bluff near the river. Just beyond this bluff I discovered a fresh buffalo trail leading down into the water, and across the river, on the opposite bank, could distinguish tracks that the buffalo had made coming out of the stream. Curious to know how they could cross so straight without swimming in the rapid current, I rode my mule into the river and crossed on a good solid bottom. Returning by the same route, I marked the location in my mind, rode back to camp in time for supper. Soon after feasting on antelope steak that I had captured on my expedition, and having lit my pipe, I strolled up to Gen. Conner and asked if he proposed crossing the Platte at this point, or if he intended to go round by the bridge. The general seemed put out by my questions, which, under the circumstances, he considered aggravating, and answered me rather roughly that we would have to go round by the bridge. I told him if it was the train that bothered him about crossing, I would guarantee to have it on the opposite bank of the river by daybreak the next morning. The general's reply was, "Very well, sir; have it there." After 9 pm., when all was still in camp, I detailed a gang of teamsters, about forty men with picks and shovels, and marched them up the river to the buffalo trail and set them to work making a road. It being a moonlight night, the work was easily prosecuted, and by break of day on the morrow the lead team of 185 wagons stood -- leaders in the river -- waiting the command to march. As soon as it was light enough to distinguish the opposite shore, I rode in ahead of the leaders and gave the command forward. There was no break or halt until the train was parked opposite the general's camp, all before sunrise. In fact, the entire train was parked, the mules turned loose to graze, and the men preparing their breakfast, when the sentinels on the opposite bank of the river discovered the train beyond the Platte and gave the alarm to the general, who rushed out of his tent in his stocking feet to see what he did not believe was true. He immediately ordered "boots and saddles" to be sounded, and in a short time the entire command was with us. After breakfast our column moved on, passing over a country perfectly destitute of grass and timber, and scarcely any water, only one or two places between the Platte and Powder river. We found water by sinking iron-bound casks and empty cracker boxes into the apparently dry sand beds of the main streams and tributaries of the south, middle, and north forks of the Cheyenne river -- not a drop of water visible in the main branch. Our route followed a Lodge Pole trail over a very barren, rough country, along ridges, up and down ravines, where wagons had never passed.

August 9 we obtained our first view of the Big Horn mountains, at a distance of eighty-five miles northwest, and it was indeed magnificent. The sun so shone as to fall with full blaze upon the southern and south-western sides of Cloud Peak, which is about ten thousand feet above sea level, and the whole snow-covered range so clearly blended with the sky as to leave it in doubt whether all was not a mass of bright cloud. Although the day was exceedingly warm, as soon as we struck this ridge we felt the cooling breezes from the snow-clad mountains, which was most gratefully appreciated by man and beast. In front, and a little to the northeast, could be seen the four columns of the Pumpkin Buttes, and fifty miles further east, Bear Butte, and beyond, a faint outline of the Black Hills. The atmosphere was so wonderfully clear and bright that one could imagine that he could see the eagles on the crags of Pumpkin Buttes, full forty miles away.