Chapter Thirteen
Umpqua Valley

PRINGLE: Sunday, November 1—Moved 3 miles. Find our oxen very stiff and sore from scrambling over rocks with wagons.

November had arrived, and the first of the South Road travelers was just then finally emerging from the Umpqua Canyon where Canyon Creek joins the South Fork of the Umpqua River, near today's Canyonville. Virgil Pringle, traveling in the forefront of the migration reported: "No bread, live altogether on beef." The emigrants were down to the very tough and flavorless "poor beef" they obtained by slaughtering their work oxen as the "poor" beasts fell in the line of duty.

The South Road emigrants had endured a grueling, waterless desert crossing; survived continuous hostile Indian harassment; conquered the lofty Cascade Mountains; and finally, somehow, barely overcome the confines of a narrow, nearly impassable debris-strewn canyon. Those emigrants in the front of the procession had even managed to emerge from the canyon with most of their teams and wagons somewhat intact. But now, even they could not escape from what by then had become *the* most pressing problem faced by all the South Road emigrants – how to keep from starving to death!

By the time the emigrants entered into the Umpqua Valley most of them had been on the road for six months or more, and their food supplies had run dangerously low. Yet it was now the first day of November, and Jesse Applegate had told them they would be in the settlements by the first of October, a full month earlier. Near starvation was widespread throughout both companies, and now the emigrants primary mission had suddenly become one of basic survival. Drastic measures were called for.

Pringle's family had become so desperate for food that on November 3 they sent their fourteen-year-old son Octavius forward to acquire what provisions he could from a Hudson's Bay Company depot ahead some forty miles distant. (His father and sixteen-year-old brother Clark had to remain to drive the remaining two family wagons.) This depot was Old Ft. Umpqua, located near where Calipooya Creek meets the Umpqua River. For the first part of the trip Octavius joined "a couple of young men" who were going on into the settlements located nearly 150 miles beyond.[1]

The problem of feeding themselves was even more acute for those traveling in the rear of the migration, who had lost their supply-carrying wagons in the canyon, and were now packing out with their remaining animals. Angeline Smith told of "the Smith party emerging from the canyon with "nothing to eat but their emigrant cattle, so poor the meat was 'blue and glue:' no salt, just

boiled in clear water until it was tender enough to eat." Rice Dunbar who had led the wagons of many now-wagonless emigrants from Missouri, sounded the same theme in telling how "after October 28th … we were out of provisions and had to resort to killing our poor cattle to live on."

Both Rice Dunbar and Angeline Smith spoke of sending two young men on ahead into the settlements, most likely 33-year-old Henry Croisan, who had earlier married the eldest daughter of the Reason B. Halls; along with 22-year-old Jesse Boone, oldest of the seven children of widower Alphonso Boone. These two volunteers may have been the ones Octavius Pringle accompanied part way, on their longer journey into the settlements to get flour from HBC chief factor Dr. McLaughlin, who operated a flour mill at Linn City at the falls of the Willamette.[2]

The Campbell family, who had lost their mother earlier near Greenwood's Cut-off, was so desperate for food that father James Campbell himself decided to go on ahead to try and reach the valley, and return with supplies. In his absence his twenty-six-year-old driver J. H. Bridges was entrusted with caring for the seven now motherless Campbell children, ages 2 to 13 -- such was the extent of this one family's desperation.

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The Rev. Cornwall's 9-year-old daughter Narcissa Cornwall, remembered their family having remained for several weeks in the camp the Cornwalls had made just beyond the Canyon, where Thornton earlier had told of meeting our Smith ancestor a second time. "Father and our hired men [their three young teamsters] had taken several load of our things out of the canyon on mules and we had given up all hope of taking our wagons any further. This seemed a very unfortunate camp for us and to add to our troubles, father was kicked by a mule and had three ribs broken. By the time he was able to travel the river had risen until the wagon road was impassable and we were compelled to go the [Old Trappers'] pack trail, which ran along the edge of the bluff. We decided to leave this camp and father cached his books, thinking he would return in the spring and get them."

The Smith party itself now wagonless and leaderless, appointed James Smith's twenty-seven-year-old younger brother Henry Smith as captain, because, as Angeline Smith reported, he was "of the same opinion as [her late father, the recently deceased] William Smith, that it was possible for them to go through and reach the settlement before winter. Under his orders, they began to gather up their work oxens [sic] and packed them up with bed clothes and camping outfits. What they could, they packed the cows, too, and there was a few horses in the train that had not been stolen by the Indians."

The now-widowed "Mrs. Ellen Smith and her nine children was assisted by Captain Henry Smith to get her belongings packed up, and Louisa her sick daughter made as comfortable as the circumstances would permit, and that was by putting her side-saddle on Old Darby, the old [two] wheeler ox, and Louisa and Marion, the baby one year old, and Thaddeus, a little boy three years old, a cripple on crutches, rode Old Darby. The rest all walked and carried a load of something. Angeline, nine years old, had allotted to her to carry a blue wooden bucket. Every one knew what was allotted to them to carry," as they trudged along through the Umpqua valley.

On November 5, Pringle wrote that because his oxen were so weak his wife and the girls were now obliged to walk alongside the wagon. The next day the small party traveling with Scott leading reached the North Umpqua River but could not cross because the river was too high as a result of all the rain. The Pringles and many other emigrant families were forced to stay over, with no supper that night. On November 8 they started crossing using a canoe hired from Indians who were camped along the river, and bringing the wagons across the day after. "Had nothing to eat for supper." Then, on November 9, they were fortunate in meeting some Indians from whom they got six venison hams.

Meanwhile the Pringles' young son Octavius had reached the depot ahead in three days and had started walking back with his mare loaded with dried peas and whole-wheat graham flour to feed his family. After one terrified night in the wilderness, he came upon some friendly Indians from Lee's Mission in Salem who took him in for the night, fed him, and started him out the next day with venison for his people.

While contemplating yet another fearful night alone in the wilderness, in walking back in the early evening of November 9 to meet the wagons, Octavius heard his brother Clark's voice exclaiming "Gee up, Buck!," to his ox, and saw his loved ones moving toward him. "Oh! the emotions that swelled and heaved in the boy's bosom … embraced in the arms of a loving mother and smothered with sobs and kisses of gratitude and thankfulness for the return of their boy."

On November 11 the Pringle party, still traveling near the forefront of the migration, reached the place on Calipooya Creek near where the friendly Indians had tended Octavius. There, in the vicinity of present-day Oakland, they got three deer from the Indians and decided to lie up for three days, repair shoes and rest their weary teams. It had been very slow going. During the first third of the month since leaving the canyon, the Pringle-Brown party had averaged a mere four miles-per-day so far in the Umpqua Valley.

The next day the whole company performed the unpleasant task of burying the unfortunate mother of Nancy Bounds, wife of party leader Harrison Linville. Forty-three-year-old Elizabeth Bounds had died suddenly in the bloom of life, leaving her eight children motherless. The woman, who was hearty enough to have given birth to eight children ages two to twenty-seven, had

apparently died from the even more rigorous demands of the South Road -- over-exertion and over-exposure to the very cold and wet elements, combined with lack of suitable food.[3]

On November 13, the half-starved emigrants were pleasantly surprised by the unexpected arrival of fellow-emigrant William Kirkendahl, with whom several emigrants had traveled earlier, prior to reaching Ft. Hall. Kirkendahl, who had gone on ahead with Jesse Applegate's work party, arrived there in the Umpqua Valley with Asa Williams and others from the settlements, bringing flour and beeves of beef. These provisions were sold to the hungry emigrants, to the great relief of everyone who had by now been reduced to having practically no food at all. Thornton, who said this relief party was sent by Capt. Jesse Applegate, acquired flour, beef and other supplies at prices he called "very high." Thornton voiced his concern regarding "the captain" having placed the emigrants in this condition "in order that he might afterwards make a very profitable market for his surplus produce." Whatever were the circumstances of the food's origin, this occasional help from the settlements *was* keeping the emigrants barely alive.[4]

The next afternoon Thornton hired one horse each from Kirkendahl and Williams -- one for he and his wife to alternately ride back to the settlements, and the other to carry two packets of clothing that they had salvaged from the canyon. On November 15 they got underway in a small party led by Kirkendahl – Thornton mentioning that emigrant John Newton was attempting to catch up to accompany them into the settlements to get provisions for his family. The next night, near present-day Roseburg, Newton was murdered by three Umpqua Indians as he slept alone in his tent.

Two days later the Kirkendahl party crossed over the Calipooya Mountains and Thornton recorded in his journal: "seven months from the time of entering upon our journey, we entered the head of the Willamette Valley" (based on their having originally departed from Quincy, Illinois, on April 18). Thus on November 18, Thornton and his wife became the first emigrant couple to emerge from the Umpqua Valley and finally arrive in the Willamette Valley traveling over the South Road – although they had done so without their team and wagon.[5]

Meanwhile, the Smith Party was forging ahead now under the leadership of their new young captain, Henry Smith:

ANGELINE SMITH: Every evening, the first thing to do was to see who was to sacrifice the beef. It was killed and carved up in small pieces and each family got a piece. To be sure, there was but a small share to each one. Then one [problem] was to get something dry to start the fire with. That was difficult to do as they had no matches; and the way this was done by gathering together dry kindling and a bunch of tow, or fine flax, and to take the old flintlock shotgun and shoot into it, and that would set the tow on fire. Then they would peel the dry bark off of the old dead stumps and roll big dry logs together and build big log-heap fires to get dry and warm for the night.

The children would often smoke the wood mice out of the hollow logs and dress, then roast them on the coals and eat them. The women would gather buds and suck leaves and bark that they knew was not poison and boil with the blue beef, and they would drink the broth and eat the meat without salt. It was a rough diet and that was what caused mountain fever and cholera.

According to Smith family lore, (dad's great-grandmother) "Elizabeth Smith, … as sturdy as this new mother was, she was many times tired to the bone, and said there were times when she could hardly put one foot before the other. Elizabeth Smith was given the job of apportioning the food, and devising ways to secure more. The situation became so desperate she found herself and the other women of the party gathering thistles and weeds and boiling them for food … on one occasion they boiled their bootstraps in hopes the broth might give some nourishment. They were without bread for six weeks …" All this, and she had given birth just before starting out from Missouri only six months earlier, and had baby Elza to feed and look after.[6]

There in the Umpqua Valley the fatherless William Smith family now experienced a second tragic loss. Their oldest child, sixteen-year-old Louisa Jane Smith, died of what was probably mountain fever contracted earlier in the journey. Smith party-leader Henry Smith made certain that the men dug the grave deep enough in the frozen grown, to honor the young girl's last request that they not allow her grave to be dug up by wolves and her body devoured.

Just before the lead company reached the foothills of the Calipooya Mountains around November 17, yet another needless death also struck the Linville family. This time it was the wife of Richard Linville, wagon train matriarch 72-year-old Mary Yount Linville. The poor woman had drowned while fording a stream too swollen by fall rains. When the wagon in which she was riding upset in Yoncalla Creek, she got trapped underneath before the men could upright it. Her death coming so soon after that of Elizabeth Bounds, meant that the young couple, Harrison Linville and his wife Nancy Bounds, had tragically lost both of their mothers in the same week, and not more than a dozen miles from one another.

The deceased "Grandma Molly" Yount Linville, had been the oldest woman on the South Road, and was mother of three prominent train members: Linville party leader Harrison Linville; Margaret Linville, wife of Medders Vanderpool, who captained the forward company; and unfortunate Catherine Linville Crowley, who had already lost several loved ones. Molly Yount had also been grandmother to fifteen children starting out on the migration, only thirteen of whom had survived so far. So her tragic drowning touched virtually everyone in the forefront of the migration. And to make matters worse, the many emigrants traveling with the Linvilles and Vanderpools had been the first to willingly set out on Jesse Applegates Southern Route, which was supposed to have brought them into the settlements over a month-and-a-

half earlier. Unfortunately, their early decision had ended up bringing them yet another terrible tragedy.

There was more. In perhaps the most bittersweet twist of irony of all, the deceased Molly Yount's parents had also raised their niece, the daughter of Sallie Ann Yount (Parker). This niece was Cynthia Ann Parker, who was raised as the deceased's own surrogate sister. She later became the wife of the man who had told the emigrants they would reach the settlements by October 1 – Jesse Applegate! And this latest tragedy occurred on Yoncalla Creek, in the vicinity of what would became the town of Yoncalla, near where the Applegate families would eventually reside, when they moved from Polk County a few years later.[7]

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The lead company was now approaching the final barrier to achieving their Willamette Valley destination, and the emigrants' situation truly could not have been any worse. As they contemplated how these half-starved, rain-soaked emigrants were ever going to get across the formidable Calipooya Mountains, Scott summarized what had now become their most dire predicament – made worse by not having a suitable roadway to follow over the mountains ahead, and no one to build it but the emigrants themselves:

SCOTT: Now, here, we were at the foot of this densely wooded mountain -- a mere handful of the first strugglers of a broken and disorganized company of exhausted emigrants, who had traveled more than two thousand miles through burning deserts, dust, and storms, and treacherous foes, with exhausted teams and disheartened men, out of provisions, and it was a hundred and fifty miles yet, beyond this pile of mountains, to where anything could be had for us to subsist upon during the winter. The dreary winter rains were drizzling down upon us almost constantly, day and night. Without the hard discipline which had exercised every one of us we could not have looked this mountain in the face with any degree of resolution or hope. If such difficulties had been at the beginning of the journey, it would never have been attempted.

I knew the general course we must go, but knew little, in detail, of the ground we must travel over, and of the difficulties we should encounter in making a road across the mountain. But from the general observations I had made on our way out, I was confident that a reasonably good road could be made for wagons to cross. But there had not yet been a stick cut, nor a blaze made.

I rallied a small force of hands -- a forlorn hope -- and attacked the apparently impenetrable forest. We sent forward a small party, by the Indian trail, to the settlements for provisions and assistance. But, I think that Enoch [actually Joseph] Garrison, from the Yamhill, who had met us at the Canyon, and myself, were the only men besides emigrants who worked any upon the road from the entrance of the Canyon to the Willamette valley.[8]

"Not yet a stick cut, nor a blaze made" the entire way between the

entrance to the terrible canyon and the Willamette Valley. This was a stinging indictment of the dereliction of Jesse Applegate and his advance road building party, and the road they had failed to provide for the emigrants, prior to leaving early for the settlements – leaving these weary emigrants with but a "forlorn hope" of crossing the mountains before them, and entering into the settlements beyond.

SCOTT: I would go forward, view and blaze the way for a considerable distance, and then return to the working party and help them to cut up as far as I had blazed. Then I would blaze ahead again. In this manner, we finally got a rude way opened, and by doubling teams at the steep places, we managed to get nearly all of the wagons over that had now reached the mountain.

PRINGLE: November 18: Go over one ridge or the mountains and make 2 miles. November 19: Climb another ridge with double teams and make 3 miles. November 20: One steer dies. November 21: Make 2 miles. November 22: Help finish the road and complete the pass of the mountains and camp two miles from the pass of the Willamette Valley.

My wagon and one other the first that entered the valley. All in good health and well pleased with the appearance of the country. November 23 & 24: Rest and feed our teams and move one mile and make arrangements for a small supply of provisions. About seventy miles from settlement.

By Pringles reckoning they had averaged less than four miles-per-day since they had emerged from the canyon, seventy-five grueling miles and twenty-two long days ago. The emigrants slow progress through the Umpqua Valley had been attributable not only to their having to improvise a suitable roadway for their weary oxen as they moved slowly along in the rain and mud, but also by their having to scrounge for whatever food they could find, and bury their dead as they dropped along the way. The Pringles had traveled a total of 2318 miles from where they departed originally near St. Louis. Subtracting the 239 miles from St. Louis to Independence, they had traveled 2079 miles so far on the Oregon Trail and this Southern Route extension, and still had some seventy or so miles to go before they would reach the settlements. The Pringle-Brown party would travel a total journey of nearly 2400 miles before they reached their destination.

SCOTT: When we reached the head of the Willamette Valley, on the north side of the mountain, we were met by a few wagons from the settlements, laden with provisions. This was a joyful meeting for the starving emigrants, and it seemed to remove a great weight from my heart. I felt that my task was accomplished, although with infinite pain, toil, and anxiety. I had kept my engagement.

A. H. Garrison likewise recalled following the Old Trappers' Trail to the

Calipooya Mountains, where they had to call a halt because, "a road had to be cut through the mountains. Mr. Applegate, when he left the emigrants whom he had succeeded in turning onto his route promised to secure men, and open up the road for us, but he failed to keep his promise. But when we got across the Calipooia Mountains, we found a trading post, which he had established in order that he might bleed the poor starving emigrants out of the little money they might have with them." Father A. E. Garrison confirmed after going over the summit and stepping into the valley "taking flour with us which we purchased at the high price of Applegate." Neither Scott nor Garrison identified the source of the wagons, or the operators of this so-called trading post.[9]

SCOTT: I had performed the duty I had assumed, and had led the immigration into the Great Valley at the head of the Willamette River, and most likely, by the best way for a road that could be found. I felt sure that a little time and labor would make this a good road, and the principal route of travel to the Willamette.

At the time later in his life when Scott made this statement he could not have been unaware of the fact that the Southern Route had proved to be considerably longer than the northern route. The distance from Ft. Hall for the old route down the Columbia River and was 730 miles, compared to 985 miles for the supposedly "shorter" Southern Route -- making the South Road actually 255 miles longer, or over one-third again the length of the northern route.[10]

SCOTT: The track made by the wagons that met us could be followed into the settlements by the immigrants, and I felt that my task was ended. Yet the troubles of the poor immigrants were not over.

Indeed -- the troubles of the "poor immigrants" were a long way from being over, as they still had a substantial distance to go before they could reach the settlements. Some members of the rear company were still struggling to get through the canyon -- and they were all out of food! Scott went on to tell how he accompanied the foremost wagons into the settlements, having to construct rude rafts and dugout canoes for getting across the many rivers that had been swollen by the winter rains, as well as the difficulties making headway over the muddy ground during the constant drizzle.

On November 25, Pringle began traveling down the valley, camping on the Willamette River and thinking all the while it was "the handsomest valley I ever beheld," and how the emigrants would be "well paid for their sufferings." The next two days were very cold and wet, and Pringle's optimism was "rewarded" by his losing two oxen from the weather. On November 29 they arrived at today's Junction City, and Pringle began working on building a canoe for crossing the Long Tom River.

Meanwhile, on entering the valley on November 18, the wagonless Thorntons had continued walking northward up the Old Trappers' Trail. Led by

their Kirkendall and Williams traveling companions, they alternated riding on horseback, until they finally reached the settlements in late November. The Thorntons stopped first on Wednesday, November 25, between the two branches of the Luckiamute River in what would later become known as "Lewisville," and had a meal with the David Lewis family from the 1845 wagon train.

On November 29 the Thorntons reached the Salt Creek area in northern Polk County. There they settled on a claim Thornton later purchased from James Allen (whom Thornton incorrectly identified as *William* Allen). James Allen was the son-in-law of our ancestor James B. Riggs, who had led his Riggs' family on the 1845 migration. Allen had taken a claim adjacent to his father-in-law, who's claim abutted that of Jesse Applegate. In fact, according to the claim Thornton recorded, his new "neighbors were James B. Riggs and Jesse Applegate!"[11]

Inadvertently perhaps, Thornton had thus become a Polk County neighbor of the man toward whom he had expressed such animosity for enticing him and his fellow South Road emigrants onto Applegate's ill-defined and unimproved new route, and then later abandoning the emigrants to build their own road so they too could eventually reach the settlements.

Scott himself probably made it to Polk County's Luckiamute River sometime during the first week in December, where he stopped for a time before going on to Jesse Applegate's claim at Salt Creek. There, Scott said he helped Jesse with a mill he was building near the head of Salt Creek, which ran between the properties of Jesse Applegate and James B. Riggs.[12]

Meanwhile, December had already begun, and the only South Road emigrants who had arrived safely at their destination were the Thorntons, and those in Jesse Applegate's road party who had reached the settlements two months earlier – along with the Applegate brothers -- and now Scott. There was nearly an entire immigration of rain-drenched, half-starved and half-frozen families – our James Smith ancestors among them -- who were still on the South Road, struggling to reach the settlements. As they were now completely out of food and it was already so late in the year, these emigrants' situation looked very bleak indeed.