

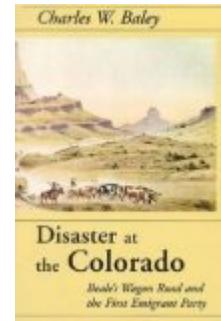
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Charles W. Baley. *Disaster at the Colorado: Beale's Wagon Road and the First Emigrant Party*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002. xi + 216 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87421-437-6; \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87421-438-3.

Reviewed by Robert L. Munkres (Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science, Muskingum College)

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This volume is an account of the first emigrant party to attempt traversing a little known trail to California—the road first laid out by Edward F. Beale. The word “attempt” is used advisedly, because this party of ninety to ninety-six did not reach California on their first try.

While Beale was in Washington generating support to develop the new road he had laid out, the Rose-Baley Wagon Train left Albuquerque for Zuni, then on to what came to be called Beale’s Crossing of the Colorado. Their choice of routes was partially based on fear of Apache and Comanche warriors on the “Southern Route” and of possible difficulties with Mormons (because of the so-called “Mormon War”) on the Oregon-California Trail. Urged on by the populace and the military stationed in Albuquerque, the emigrant train experienced little difficulty until they left Zuni. Water proved to be much more difficult to find than they had been led to expect and the guide whom they had employed was considerably less competent than had been assumed. Well into the trip they began to suffer harassment by Mojave Indians even though the party had been led to believe that the Indians along the route were friendly.

Chapter 6, “Battle at the Colorado,” describes the nature, cost, and effectiveness of the assault mounted by the Indians. The outcome might indeed have been even more disastrous for the emigrants if one of the principal Indian leaders had not been dropped by a long-range shot fired by Gillum Baley. Even so, one entire family of seven (the Bentners) and Alpha Brown, one of the most capable leaders of the group, were killed and eleven or twelve others wounded, some seriously. The reconstituted party (the party had split into two groups prior

to arriving at the Colorado) began the tortuous return to Albuquerque because they believed they lacked the strength to cross the Colorado and go on to California. It is quite likely that they would have perished during this return had they not encountered other trains (particularly that of E. O. Smith) whose members generously shared with them supplies, support, and food as well as deciding to return to Albuquerque themselves. After a difficult winter in Albuquerque, most of the Rose-Baley party then were invited by Edward Beale to accompany him over the road to the crossing that came to bear his name. The final chapters describe the lives of members of the party in California and the ultimately unsuccessful depredation claims filed with the government. The final appeal by L. J. Rose was not denied by the U.S. Supreme Court until 1900, by which time all of the claimants were deceased.

This volume is based on thorough scholarship and diligent research which the author began while looking into the history of his family (twenty of the train members were his forebears). In addition to the other sources effectively utilized, John Udell’s diary (the only journal kept by members of the party) provided a wealth of information. A diligent, if occasionally biased, recorder of significant events, Udell’s letter to his brothers, presented in Appendix B, amply illustrates the point. In using these sources, the author renders well written and balanced judgements in regard to events and personalities while avoiding being judgmental.

This reviewer cannot conclude without making a plea to publishers to return to the use of footnotes instead of endnotes. Bayley frequently presents information both

useful and very interesting in explanatory endnotes. Unfortunately this information can be accessed only via the cumbersome process of continually “flipping” to the back of the book.

Anyone with interests in trail history will enjoy this book as a welcome addition to their library.

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