The Report of Captain John Mix of a Scout to the Black Hills, March-April 1875

WATSON PARKER EDITOR

The Custer Expedition to the Dakota Black Hills during the summer of 1874 and its widely publicized discovery of small particles of gold in the valley of French Creek near the site of the present-day city of Custer created a large and unlawful interest in the mineral possibilities of the Black Hills.¹ This mountainous area had been set aside as part of the Sioux Reservation by the Treaty of Laramie in 1868 and was forbidden to civilian prospectors. Until the fall of 1874, vigorous army supervision had had a dampening effect upon the enthusiasm of the miners.²

However, one prospecting group was organized in spite of military objections by the indefatigable Charles Collins, editor of the *Sioux City Weekly Times*.³ The band was known to its members as the Collins-Russell party, although Collins himself did not accompany them to the Hills. Later, the group became known as the Gordon Party, taking their name from the guide and leader, John Gordon. These twenty-eight adventurers left Sioux City on 6 October 1874 and made their way across the

- 1. Donald Jackson, Custer's Gold (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), is an excellent account of the 1874 expedition to the Hills. Captain William Ludlow, Report of a Reconnaissance of the Black Hills of Dakota Made in the Summer of 1874 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), is the official report of the expedition's engineer officer.
- 2. Army efforts to exclude and remove miners invading the Black Hills are discussed in Watson Parker, "The Majors and the Miners: The Role of the U.S. Army in the Black Hills Gold Rush," *Journal of the West* 11 (Jan. 1972):99-113.
- 3. Jane Conrad, "Charles Collins: The Sioux City Promotion of the Black Hills," South Dakota History 2, no. 2 (Spring 1972):89-114 provides an excellent survey of Collins's promotional activities. Collins's own History and Directory of the Black Hills (Central City, D.T., 1878), contains information on early Hills history.

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southern Badlands to the Hills, where, a few miles south of present-day Sturgis, they intersected Custer's trail, which they then followed to Custer's base camp on French Creek, seven or eight miles south of Harney Peak. Here the experienced Wisconsin lumbermen of the party built a stoutly palisaded and bastioned stockade some eighty feet on a side, and erected six or seven cabins to protect themselves from the coming bitter winter. As supplies began to run out and prospects for gold became increasingly promising, the little group sent out small parties, hoping to bring in additional prospectors and supplies.

The army had known that the Gordon Party was on its way to the Hills, and the enthusiastic reception given to Gordon and Witcher when they returned to Sioux City confirmed military suspicions that miners were illegally wintering in the heart of the Sioux Reservation. ⁵ Several expeditions from various army

- 4. The basic sources on the Gordon Party are: Annie D. Tallent, *The Black Hills; or, The Last Hunting Ground of the Dakotahs* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1899), and David Aken, *Pioneers of the Black Hills, or Gordon's Stockade Party of 1874* (Milwaukee: Allied Printing, n.d.), both written by participants. Of interest is a manuscript purportedly written by Thomas H. Russell, also a member of the party, a copy of which is in the Deadwood, South Dakota, Public Library. The first part of this manuscript throws some light on Russell's association with Charles Collins, but the part of the manuscript that deals with the actual trip to the Black Hills parrots Tallent almost exactly.
- 5. The following names and spellings of the members of the Gordon Party are from Tallent, Aken, Mix's report, and the recorder's book of the Custer Mining District. The members include:
 - J. W. Brockett-left the party after a few days on the trail.

Moses Aarons-died in the Badlands on 27 Nov. 1874.

John Gordon-guide and leader of the party.

Ephraim (Eaf.) Witcher-left the stockade with Gordon for Sioux City on 6 Feb. 1875.

Charles Blackwell and Thomas McLaren-left the stockade for Fort Laramie on 14 Feb. 1875.

J. Newton Warren, Henry Thomas, Dan (Red Dan) McDonald, and John J. Williams—all four left the stockade for Fort Laramie on 6 Mar. 1875; McDonald and Williams then guided Captain Mix back to the stockade, reaching it about 6 Apr.

David Aken-author of Pioneers of the Black Hills.

Russell H. Bishop

John P. Boyle

Charles Cordeiro-variously spelled

George H. (Harvey or Harry) Cooper

James Dempster

posts had already braved the Dakota winter in vain attempts to remove the Gordon Party. As supposedly milder spring weather came to the plains, military attempts to capture the invading miners steadily increased. It was at this point that orders from the Department of the Platte reached Fort Laramie, instructing its commanding officer to make every effort to find and remove the miners from the Hills.

Headquarters Fort Laramie, Wyo Tery. March 22nd, 1875

Special Orders) No. 47) (Extract)

II. Pursuant to telegraphic instructions of the 18th instant from Headquarters Dept: of the Platte, Company "M" 2nd Cav: (Capt: John

Lyman Lamb

B. B. Logan

Charles Long

Angus McDonald

D. W. (Black Dan) McDonald

James Powers

Thomas L. Quiner

Thomas H. Russell

D. G. Tallent

Annie D. Tallent-author of The Black Hills.

Robert E. (Bird) Tallent

R. B. (or B. B.) Whitney-all remained in the stockade on French Creek and were removed by Captain Mix about 10 Apr. 1875.

Gustave Behnke-of Oshkosh, Wis., claimed to have been a member of the Gordon Party, and his obituraries, about 21 Jan. 1937, provide details of his activities. As many of the members of the party were from Wisconsin, it may well be that Behnke, under another name, was one of them.

F. F. Fletcher—although Fletcher is listed as one of the claimants to the last recorded claim at the stockade, it is evident from letters written to him and reprinted in the Feb. 1962 Wi-Iyohi of the South Dakota State Historical Society that he was not present but was merely a silent, and distant, partner in the enterprise.

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Mix Comdg:) and 1st Lieut [A.] Leonard Hay 9th Inf: 6 attached Mounted, armed and equipped for field Service, rationed for 25 days, and supplied with ½ forage for its animals, and 150 rounds of ammunition per man, will proceed tomorrow morning (weather permitting) En route to the Black Hills Country, and arrest (by force and arms if necessary) the miners said to be encamped near Harney's Peak, or any other white men found in the neighborhood, and bring them with their teams and other effects to this post. Captain Mix is authorized to supply such miners as are destitute of food with a quantity sufficient to prevent suffering. He will take with him Baptiste 7 the post guide as Interpreter, and the two miners Williams and McDonald 8 now at the post as guides for the present occasion.

By Order of Lt Col L. P. Bradley, 9th Inf: 9

A. Leonard Hay, 1st Lieut. and Adjt.
9th Inf and Post.

Acting in obedience to these instructions, Captain John Mix and a considerable expedition started out from Fort Laramie on 23 March 1875; his report, which follows, was submitted on 19 April:

- 6. Aken, Pioneers of the Black Hills, p. 142, stated that "several extra officers had accompanied the command, simply for the novelty of the trip.... The officers all got drunk as soon as they could conveniently do so, and continued in that condition until notified that they were going to run out of rations." Captain Mix added Lieutenant C. La Point of the Second Cavalry to the list of officers; his reticence about mentioning officers by name in his report may have been due to the fact that some of them should not have been with him at all. The Post Returns of Fort Laramie, however, do not indicate any officers either on leave or on detached service during the dates of Mix's expedition.
- 7. Baptiste Pouier? In any event this Baptiste probably did not accompany Mix as far as the Gordon Stockade, for on p. 92, Tallent noted in her book that the command met him, on its way out of the Hills, with a message from the Red Cloud Agency.
 - 8. John J. Williams and "Red Dan" McDonald.
- 9. Colonel Luther Prentice Bradley is often referred to as "General" in writing and in conversation, giving him, by courtesy, his brevet rank of Brigadier General, which he received for gallant and meritorious service in the Battle of Resaca, Georgia, during the Civil War.

Report of Captain John Mix

The Report of Captain John Mix

Fort Laramie, W.T.

April 19 1875.

Post Adjutant,

Sir:

On March 23rd A.C. ¹⁰ Company M 2nd Cav. numbering 63 rank and file, and 3 commissioned officers (Lieutenants Leonard Hay, Adjutant, 9th Inf., Lt. C. LaPoint, 2nd Cav., and myself) started hence, pursuant to S.O., No. 47, c.s. ¹² from post Headquarters, for the Black Hills Country, to arrest and bring hither, any miners or other white men found there in violation of treaty.

Same day encamped on Rawhide 1 mile N.W. of trail to the upper agencies: ¹³ wood water and grass abundant and of good quality: distance marched 23 miles.

10. A.C. probably means "of the current year," i.e., 1875. The text of Mix's report given here is located in the Old Military Branch of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

11. Lieutenant A. Leonard Hay joined the army as a private on 18 June 1864, was promoted to second lieutenant in the Ninth Infantry on 2 July 1864, to first lieutenant on 29 September, and became adjutant of the Regiment on 1 July 1865, a post he retained until March 1878. He was promoted to captain in March 1878 and retired in June 1891.

Lieutenant Henry Clayton La Point joined the army as a private on 30 August 1864, became a cadet at the Military Academy in July 1869, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Second Cavalry on 13 June 1873. He was promoted to first lieutenant in January 1881, and was dismissed from the service on 24 July 1888.

Captain Mix was a thoroughly experienced and distinguished officer. He joined the army as a private on 11 April 1852, and served successively as corporal, sergeant, and first sergeant of Company F of the Second Dragoons. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Second Cavalry on 14 August 1861 and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He resigned from the volunteer service on 27 December 1862, receiving a regular army commission as first lieutenant in the Second Cavalry, and being promoted to captain on 19 October 1865. In January 1881 he received a commission as major in the Ninth Cavalry; he died in the service on 26 October 1881.

- 12. C.s. means "current series" of general orders.
- 13. The trail led to Camp Robinson, Red Cloud Agency, and the Old Spotted Tail Agency, all posts on or near the White River.

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March 24. Pursued an old trail along Rawhide about 6 miles in a direction N.N.W. and having been delayed by repairing the old road concluded to camp.

March 25. Left the trail, and after passing Rawhide Peak, distant from last camp 6 miles, marched N.N.E., until we struck L'Eau Qui Court, ¹⁴ where we encamped without wood or fire. Wind blew steadily a perfect

gale all day: distance marched 25 miles.

March 26. Moved toward same point as on yesterday about 17 miles, when greatly to our surprise and chagrin, the course we should have pursued led down a line of precipitous cliffs, which so far as judgment could be based on careful observation to our right and left for 20 miles, were absolutely incapable of descent, and forming the extreme northern border of Nebraska. Below us spread the valley through which Hat Creek and its tributaries flow, while in the distant haze could be seen faint and dim the soft blue outline of the Black Hills. During our temporary halt, signal fires were seen on our right which appeared to be answered from the high country far away across the valley. Finding no pass we turned right about and retraced our path 1 mile, and encamped near some water holes. Grazing excellent, water good but no wood within sight. Total days march 18 miles.

March 27. Directed our course Eastward 15 miles, endeavoring in vain to find a way down the precipice, and made camp at 4 P.M., without water, save from melted snow.

March 28. Here remained until 2 P.M. and expended some labor and patience in making a road down to the valley, but abandoned the hopeless task, and made 8 miles Eastward across some rough country and encamped at Sunset. Obtained a scant supply of water with some difficulty.

March 29. Having found a pass, by making a wide detour, brought down the train, by easing up the wagons with lariats, and encamped on Hat Creek where we found abundance of wood water and grass. Close by, over the stream saw an Indian grave, possibly a year old, on which rested a swaddled corpse. Found a specimen of petrified turtle quite large and almost perfect. Distance marched 8 miles.

March 30. Very cold and snow falling, and apprehensive lest we should fail to see our way remained in camp.

March 31st. The appearance of the Sun halo indicated severe weather, nevertheless, we broke camp at 7 A.M. and made 14 miles in a N.N.E. direction and encamped on a branch of Hat Creek. Found wood and good grazing, but the water was milky white, gritty to the taste, and seemed to be strongly impregnated with borate of Soda. Saw numerous pony signs and tracks, and imprint of moccasined feet showing that many Indians had been there. Crossed a lodge pole trail 10 days old, leading westward.

14. L'Eau Qui Court, Rio Qui Corre, the Niobrara.

April 1st. Marched 35 miles northward, Keeping the highest summit of the Black Hills steadily in view. During the day's march passed 4 extensive sulphur beds: country hilly and barren. Crossed a heavy wagon trail at 7:30 A.M., presumed to be that made by the Nebraska state survey last fall. Encamped on Hat Creek whose water was muddy and milk white, but not unpleasant to the taste.

April 2nd. Traveled North and saw at 2 miles distant, the junction of this stream with the South forth of the Big Chevenne, across which towered high hills crowned with pine trees and impassable for wagons, so we changed direction to the Eastward and made about 14 miles over a broken and hilly country, and encamped down the Chevenne. Wood and grass in plenty and water very muddy but sweet and palatable. Thus far have seen but little game.

April 3rd. Broke camp and saddled up at 6.45 A.M. and bore N.E. 10 miles crossing the Chevenne twice, when we struck the trail made by the Indian Commission in August last. 15 This we followed with slight deviations until it brought us within 8 miles of Harney's Peak, [but not on 3 April] and thus far, after leaving the Rawhide, our course had been governed by the compass; the maps affording us small aid in judging of the configuration of the intermediate country. Had we taken the road to the agencies and pursued it at least as far as Camp Robinson, the march might have been more expeditious and less troublesome. The trail led us across the Cheyenne and through Buffalo gap until 4.30 P.M. when we encamped on a little stream having marched in all 25 miles. Wood scarce, but grazing excellent; the water though clear is hard, acrid, and nauseous. The pine topped mountain which has been in front of us all day, marks the entrance to Buffalo gap; we have named it "Point du Jour." 16

April 4. Remained on account of rain and sleet until 11.30 A.M. when we broke camp and marched in a direction N.W. through snow and fog. 17 Encamped on a dry creek where we found wood and secured a little water

from snow holes: made but 10 miles.

April 5. Marched in snow and fog up an ascending grade and 15. "The trail made by the Indian Commission," refers to the expedition to the Black Hills led by the Reverend Samuel D. Hinman and Captain Charles Meinhold during August 1874, an exploration that nearly made contact with Custer in the same area. An abridged version of Hinman's report, edited by Watson Parker, can be found in Bits and Pieces 5, no. 11 (Nov. 1969):5-9 and the report in its entirety in the U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1874 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1874), pp. 90-97.

16. Point du Jour is apparently Unkpapa Peak on the south side of Buffalo Gap and Beaver Creek.

17. Tallent and Aken also agree on the existing blizzard conditions in April 1875.



Members of the Gordon Party. Top row: Tommy Quiner, David Aken, Angus McDonald, Lyman Lamb, Red Dan McDonald, and John Boyle; bottom row: Jim Dempster, Dempster McDonald, R. B. Whitney, and B. B. Logan.

encamped on the West side of French creek: distance made 9 miles. This place we found by an inscription plainly cut in one of the trees; was the former camping ground of the Indian Commission in August 1874, ¹⁸ and here the trail ended. Believing we were in the vicinity of the miners' camp, parties were promptly sent out to reconoitre, but owing it to the heavy fog and persistent snow fall, success was not attained until the following day. ¹⁹

18. This would be the Hinman expedition. It apparently lies on the line between Sections 3 and 10 in T4S-R6E in present-day Custer State Park.

19. Mix claims that his men discovered the Gordon Party on 6 April 1875. A table of the various dates mentioned by Mix, Tallent, and Aken will be of interest:

Event	Mix	Tallent	Aken
Gordon Stockade found	6th	4th	4th
Day or days to pack up	8th & 9th	5th	****
Miners leave the stockade			
and arrive at Camp Success	9th	6th	-
Depart from Camp Success			
for Fort Laramie	10th	7th	7th
Arrive at Fort Laramie	18th	about ten days	
THAT I I OF DUTAINE	1041	acous ton days	

Regarding the soldiers' discovery of the miners' camp, Aken stated:

on the 3d of April the worst snow storm of the winter began. The wind was quite strong and piled the snow in heaps. We were beginning to look for Gordon [who had left with Witcher for Sioux City on 6 February]. We had figured that he might have secured an outfit and returned lightly loaded by this time, but instead of Gordon, Red Dan [McDonald] and [John J.] Williams, with a couple of boys in blue, came to camp through a blinding snow storm. They were mounted on cavalry horses, and informed us that the company was out at the foothills, about twelve miles distant, where they were waiting to escort us out of the hills. [Actually, Camp Success where Mix stopped was well within the Hills, and 8 miles from the Gordon Stockade.] ²⁰

Annie Tallent recorded the discovery of the Gordon Party as follows:

One evening during this storm, just as the great gate was about to be closed and barred for the night, four men, unheralded and unbidden, rode boldly right into our stronghold, causing no little consternation and excitement in our usually quiet little community. At first sight they were thought to be the vanguard of our expected reinforcements, but upon a second look it was seen that two of our visitors were in military uniform, while, in the other two we recognized the familiar faces of our quondam comrades, J. J. Williams and Dan McDonald, who, as emissaries of Uncle Sam, had also donned soldier's clothes. The blue coats and brass buttons betrayed their mission. ²¹

Mrs. Tallent went on to reiterate that

the four mounted men who rode, unannounced, into our midst on the evening of the 4th of April, proved to be J. J. Williams, Dan McDonald, and two lieutenants [italics added] in the Second United States Cavalry, detailed from their camp twelve miles below, bearing orders to our party to make immediate preparations for leaving the Black Hills. The entire force sent to remove the trespassers, consisted of a troop of cavalry, about twenty-five pack mules and a large train of wagons, to carry rations and forage, and an ambulance for the use of the female trespasser, all under the command of Capt. Mix, of the Second United States Cavalry. ²²

Captain Mix's failure to reveal the names of the soldiers or officers who actually were responsible for the discovery of the Gordon Party and Mrs. Tallent's report that *two lieutenants* accompanied Williams and McDonald to the stockade substanti-

It is probable that Captain Mix kept the more accurate records, and it is likely that Tallent, so many days from civilization, was off two or three days in her reckoning. Mix, on the other hand, seems to have entirely omitted an account of 6 April from his report.

^{20.} Aken, Pioneers of the Black Hills, pp. 140-41.

^{21.} Tallent, The Black Hills, pp. 84-85.

^{22.} Ibid., p. 85.

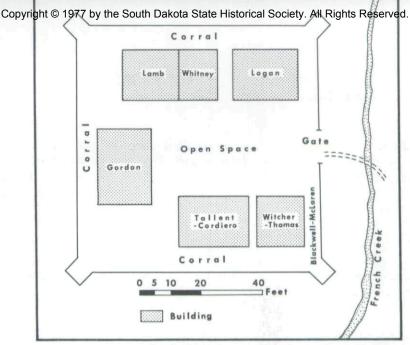
ates Aken's allegation that more officers accompanied Mix to the Black Hills than those assigned. Mrs. Tallent may have been mistaken about the two lieutenants, but she was fully aware of the distinctions of military rank, and if she said that it was two lieutenants that came to the stockade, she was probably correct. Yet, it is difficult to believe that Captain Mix, camped in the midst of a blinding snowstorm, would have detailed his only two subordinate commissioned officers merely to accompany two civilians, Williams and McDonald, on what might have been a wild goose chase through the wintery Hills. Mrs. Tallent described her arrival at Mix's "Camp Success" on 6 April.

we came in sight of the military camp dotted over with numerous white tents, and the blue-coated soldiers, who had already reached camp, moving about under the scattered trees. A little removed from the others was noticed a smaller group of tents, the headquarters of Capt. Mix and his staff—a distinction always observable in military camps, I have learned since then. ²³

It is hard to believe that Captain Mix and Lieutenants Hay and La Point would have, by themselves, required accommodations that could be reasonably described as a "group of tents." It may be that Captain Mix and Mrs. Tallent were secretive about the names of the officers involved (and Mrs. Tallent had plenty of time to learn them, between 6 April and 18 April) because both desired to conceal the unofficial members of the expedition, who, if their presence had been officially recognized, might have gotten into trouble.

April 7. Lieut. La Point was sent over with a pack train of 30 mules, instructed to bring away all the effects of the miners which could be transported in that way. The settlement called Harney City, but 8 miles [Tallent says 13 miles; Aken says 12] distant in a straight line, was reached by a tortuous path 13 miles in length crossing French Creek 26 times, and from our position was inaccessible to wagons, by reason of the high divides and thick growth of pines. It is about 7 miles south of Harney's peak and comprises 6 log huts, enclosed in a stockade 80 feet square, substantially built of pine logs, 10 feet high, bastioned at the corners and looped holed for rifles, and is well adapted for defence except against artillery.

Tallent stated of the stockade, "Capt. Mix, in his description of our stronghold to Gen. Bradley, on his return with the prisoners to Fort Laramie, said: 'Why, if they had resisted I



Captain Mix's diagram of the Gordon Stockade. Tallent stated that there were seven cabins in the stockade, naming them from the right of the gate the Logan, Whitney, Lamb, and Gordon messes, the Tallent family cabin with Cardiero in a separate wing of it, and the Witcher-Thomas and Blackwell-McLaren messes.

should have been obliged to return to the fort for artillery to dislodge them." Probably the lack of rations, more than a military threat, induced the Gordon Party to surrender peacefully. Aken stated:

The captain explained that no one would be allowed to enter the Hills until a treaty could be made, and that as soon as such a treaty was made, our claims and holdings would all be respected. He also acknowledged that he would not have been able to have taken us from the stockade without artillery, had we seen fit to resist, a fact that we were well aware of. But as no one else would be permitted to enter during the summer, it would be useless for us to elude this or any other company [of soldiers], for it was very evident we could not subsist during the summer on game, even if left along by the Indians. ²⁴

Outside of this enclosure were laid the foundations of 12 huts, with a generous supply of heavy timber, for the superstructures. All this material wrested from the inexhaustible forests hard by, and, with scant supply of edged tools, fashioned and worked into comfortable habitations, evinced great industry; the skill and forethought of enterprising provident and intelligent men.

Two days, the 8th and 9th 25 following, were allowed the miners to

24. Tallent, The Black Hills, p. 67; Aken, Pioneers of the Black Hills, p. 143.

25. Tallent, The Black Hills, p. 85, stated that the Gordon Party was "given just twenty-four hours to hunt our scattered stock and make other needful preparations for leaving the stockade."

find and drive in their stock, and gather up their effects, and, then our rations and forage running low, and fearing lest the still falling and drifting snow might shut us in, we broke up the came (named "Success") and, April 10th, [Tallent and Aken state 7 April] began our return march, bringing away all the miners, numbering 16 men, 1 woman and a boy, named as per list enclosed, with fourteen head of oxen, 3 ponies, provisions, bedding and tentage, reluctantly abandoning 10 head of oxen which had strayed away, 7 wagons, and the stores and heavy tools of the entire party. This day, through snow we retraced our course crossing Burntwood Creek 5 times and somewhat weary made our old camp on Buffalo Creek 19 miles distant.

April 11. Followed our old trail and encamped on the South side of Cheyenne fork, making 10 miles. Across a cut in the high divide, the whole train was let down hill by lariats, which consumed much time.

April 12. Pursued the trail of the Indian Commission 21 miles and encamped on Third Butte Creek, a tributary of white river. The stream was almost dry, wood was scarce and grazing poor. Early in the day a pitiless wind blew from the north across the frozen snow, the temperature being very low. Saw an Indian but could not approach him.

April 13. Made 19 miles, without deviating unless to skirt gullies filled with packed snow, across which our course lay, and encamped on White river near old Camp Spotted Tail. On our right as we approached the stream, and within one mile of it, could be distinctly seen, 42 miles away, the point of Crow Buttes, termed "Dancing Hill."

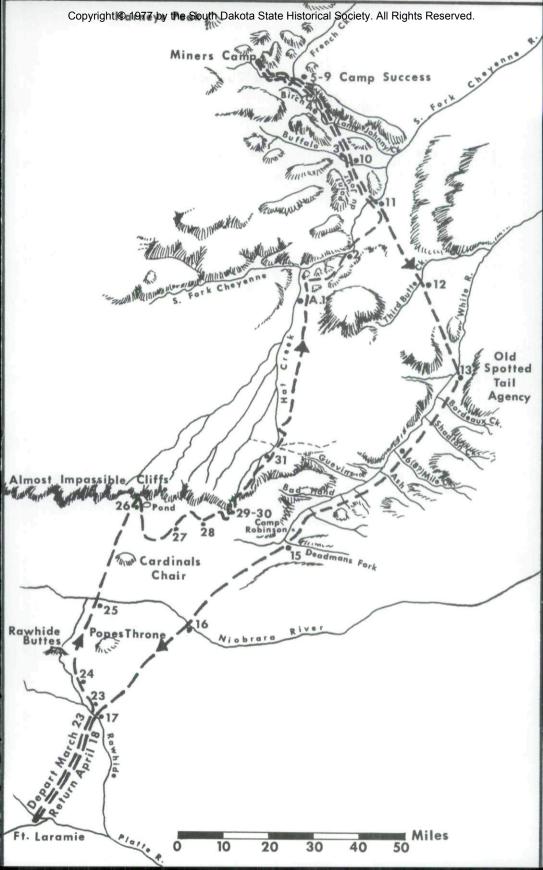
April 14. Passed Bourdeaux, Shadron and Ash Creeks, and encamped on Six Mile Creek, which was flowing full of turbid water, marching 21 miles.

April 15. Repaired the bridge, which had been partly washed away, and continued on the Red Cloud trail & encamped at Dead Man's fork, making 29 miles.

It was apparently on this day that within a few miles of Red Cloud Agency.

the train was met by a Frenchman, named Baptiste [Pourier?], bearing a message from the agent in charge at the post, warning Capt. Mix of the hostile attitude of the Indians, who were, he said, making threats of sanguinary vengeance on the invaders... and advising the Captain to conceal all the Black Hillers under the canvas of the wagons of the train. Capt. Mix told the boys of the fate in store for them, and advised them

⁽Succeeding page) Map of Captain John Mix's expedition to the Black Hills to remove the Gordon Party from 23 March to 18 April 1875. Mix's report and his map, from which this map was drawn, do not always coincide, particularly for the 14 April camp on the banks of Six (Eight?) Mile Creek, which the report describes as south of Ash Creek.



all to get to cover as quickly as possible; the boys, however, resented the proposition with much scorn.... Not only did they not hide under the canvas covers, but on reaching the agency they circulated freely among the Indians.... of course their guns were well in hand, and no doubt their very boldness disarmed the savages—but instead of proceeding to wreak vengeance on the real culprits, they [the Indians] seemed to vent their entire displeasure on the only innocent member of the party. The ambulance in which I was seated was immediately surrounded by about a dozen of the most diabolical looking specimens of the human form it had ever been my misfortune to see.... I don't know why, but those mistaken and misguided savages seemed to regard me as the archtespasser of the party—the very head and front of the whole offending; and I feel sure that had it not been for the presence of the troops, I would have been speedily disposed of then and there, and my scalp would have graced the belt of one of those inhuman savages. ²⁶

Aken stated that "we passed through Red Cloud's agency and stopped over night near the camp of the Ogalalla Sioux." Annie Tallent recorded that "we were afterward informed that the military force had some difficulty in preventing an outbreak, so wrought up were the Indians over such a wanton breach of their treaty rights."²⁷

April 16. To the L'Eau Qui Court, [the Niobrara] 23 miles.

April 17. To the Rawhide 26 miles.

April 18. To Fort Laramie 22 miles, crossing the Platte at the old ford: found high water and the river rising rapidly.

Annie Tallent, agreeing with Mix in saying that the party reached Fort Laramie "in about ten days," stated that when the party was about two miles from the fort, "a gay cavalcade of ladies, on horseback, were seen approaching the train, presumably to meet their returning husbands and friends, and incidentally to get a glimpse of the prisoners, whom they regarded with excusable curiosity." As it was rare for an enlisted man, unless a noncommissioned officer of considerable seniority, to be married, it seems possible that the ladies had come to greet officer—husbands far in excess of those allotted to the expedition by the Special Orders under which it had marched. Mrs. Tallent continued, elaborating on Mix's "found high water":

They brought the alarming information that the Platte River was swollen nearly out of its banks, and so rapidly rising, that in less than an hour it would be impossible to ford the stream. There was no bridge at that time. The train pushed on with all possible speed, soon reaching the banks of

^{26.} Ibid., pp. 92-93.

^{27.} Ibid., p. 93; Aken, Pioneers of the Black Hills, p. 145.

Report of Captain John Mix

the turbulent Platte. On the surface of the stream, logs, roots of trees, and even some whole trees, roots and branches, and all manner of debris went rushing along with the dreadful swish of the current towards the Missouri. There was no time to be lost, so the horses with their heavy wagons plunged in, heading up stream and almost floating on the bosom of the powerful current, and reached the opposite shore in safety. ²⁸

Our trail going, measured 218 miles: returning, 203 miles. Total distance 421 miles.

The march was hindered by the defective transportation: The mules being undersized and generally in poor condition, were weak and unable to keep up with the column whose average gait was not above 4 miles an hour, and the wagons though not heavily loaded had often to be assisted across the gullies and up the ascents by manual labor. I would respectfully call the attention of the Commanding officer to this fact; the transportation furnished by the Quartermaster (Major James M. Moore) was not such as the concluding paragraph of the telegram from Dept. Hd. Qrs. directed to be furnished. The teams were not "twelve of his best," but on the contrary; only three of them being fit for the lightest work, and they could hardly be called good. The lariats were practically useless, being by actual measurement from 9 to 12 feet long, exclusive of the portions around the neck. The extra coupling poles were simply pieces of oak timber, and had to be fitted every time one was broken, causing a delay in each case of about one hour and a half.

During our entire trip we were offered no molestation whatever, and suffered no annoyance of any kind from the Indians. All those seen at the agencies on our return, expressed great and complete satisfaction at the result of our scout, whose direction and destination, unseen by us, they had closely watched.

Tallent stated that Captain Mix told her that we had been in far greater peril than we dreamed of, for, he said, on reaching a high point about fifty miles from the Hills [26 March], with his command, the signal fires kindled by the Indians who had already surrounded the Hills could be plainly seen, and also that forced marches had been ordered that our imperiled little party might be reached before being massacred by the incensed savages. ²⁹

I desire to thank Lieutenants Hay and La Point, for their cheerful, energetic, and intelligent co-operation. The enlisted men of the command, (as they always do) behaved splendidly, and cheerfully submitted to the severe labor, and numerous hardships, of the trip, in the almost blinding snow storm which lasted eight days. Miles of road had to be shoveled through deep snow: bridges to be built, and wagons let down, and drawn up, hills by lariats, but not a murmer was heard.

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^{28.} Tallent, The Black Hills, p. 94.

^{29.} Ibid., p. 92.

A sketch of the country will be furnished as soon as it can be

completed.

Some of our party have fine specimens of ore, (probably Argentiferous Galena) generously distributed by the miners; no diggings or gulches were examined by any of our party, for lack of time, and by reason of the fierce storm raging, while we were encamped in the mineral region. A few of the miners had small quantities of beautiful floss gold, which they said had been collected within sight of the stockade. As a class the miners bore the appearance of hardy, intellectual and Enterprising men.

Very respectfully,

Your Obedient servant,

(Signed) J. Mix

Captain 2nd Cavalry, Commanding.

LIST OF NAMES OF MINERS

R. B. Logan
D. W. McDonald
Thos. Quiner
R. H. Bishop
J. P. Boyle
Geo. H. Cooper
Lyman Lamb
M. R. Corderio

James Demster
James Powers
A. F. Long
D. G. Tallant, Wife and Son
R. R. Whittney
Angus McDonald
David Aken
T. H. Russell

As evidence of the vigor with which the army had protected the Black Hills from the invading miners, Secretary of War William K. Belknap forwarded Mix's report to Zacariah Chandler, secretary of the Interior and officer responsible for the administration of Indian affairs.

Report of Captain John Mix

401

5395.

June 26th, 75.

To the Honorable

The Secretary of the Interior,

Cheyenne River A : is

I have the honor to transmit, for your information, copy of the report of Captain J. Mix, 2d. Cavalry, of a scout made from Fort Laramie to the Black Hills country and back, between March 23d. and April 18th., current year, for the purpose of turning back miners, with a map showing the route taken.

Very respectfully,

move the Your obedient servant, no appresentation of the United States government

dooksel off (Signed) William K. Belknapoorga sonso regular asitiss and Secretary of War I add goings

At Fort Laramie the members of the Gordon Party of aniely demanded of Uncle Sam transportation to Cheyenne, as it was nearly 100 miles distant and the country very sparsely settled. The most of us could have made the trip in three days on foot, but the incentive, the spur, was gone. We simply sat down on the knee of Uncle Sam and told him his little job was not complete until we were delivered in Cheyenne-and this he forthwith proceeded to do. On our way we were met by Charles Collins of Sioux City, the organizer of the expedition. He had been sent by Sioux City, with means to defray our expenses to that place. The help was very timely, as the most of us were dead broke and a long ways from home, 30

The wide publicity that the Gordon Party's letters had given to the Black Hills, as well as the dramatic way in which their removal had been accomplished by the army at once stirred up several further mining expeditions. The noted scout "California" Joe" Milner was heading for the Hills from Fort Laramie before the Gordon Party had reached Cheyenne, and the newspapers there reported that "numerous bands of miners are constantly pouring into the Hills."31 In spite of the best efforts of the military, the Black Hills gold rush was under way, was and and subsider Yarktennis, Unopapus, Blackfiel, Sans Arc. Tw., Keltle, Mioneconjou, Lov

^{30.} Aken, Pioneers of the Black Hills, pp. 149-50. The search last sectoric value 2 byte

^{31.} Yankton Daily Press and Dakotaian, 26 Apr. 1875.

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