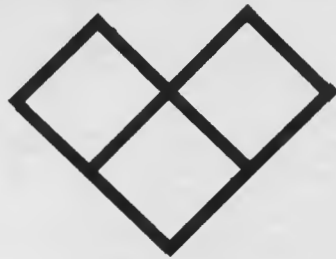
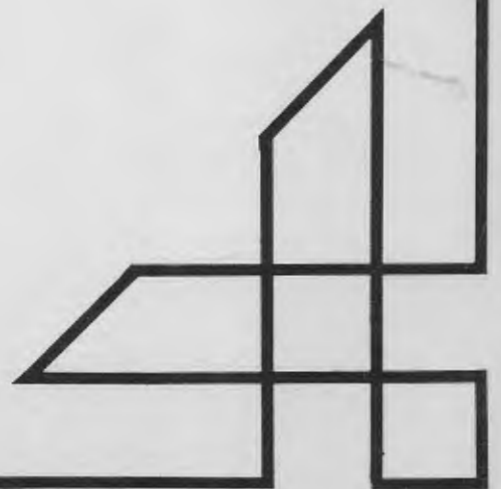
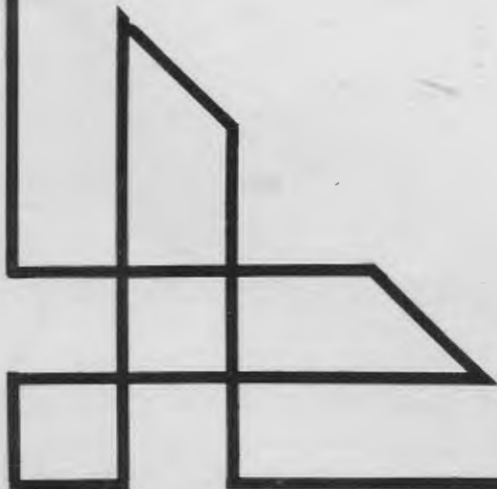


Frontier Patrol



**The Army and the Indians
In Northeastern California,
1861**



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Frontier Patrol

The Army and the Indians in
Northeastern California, 1861

by

Loring White

Winning Essay in the Second Annual
A.N.C.R.R. Contest in Local History,
1974

Association for Northern California Records and Research

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INTRODUCTION

In early May, 1846, Klamath Indians attacked an expedition under the command of Captain John Charles Fremont on the west shore of Upper Klamath Lake, just a few miles north of the California border. Fremont responded by sending out a retaliatory party under the leadership of Kit Carson. This incident marked the opening of conflict between the Indians and intruding Americans that continued in the Klamath Basin and northeastern California until the defeat of the Modocs in 1873. Historians have focused most of their attention on the end of the conflict rather than on its other stages. In the twenty-seven years between the beginning and the end of the clashes was a series of lesser known incidents in this land of lava plains, mountains, and basins. Each was significant in the expansion of American control and the defeat of the Indians in northeastern California. Their study will provide a better perspective on the regional aspects of the Indian-white conflict.

This paper makes a contribution in this direction. It focuses upon the response of the United States Army to the Indian attack on the Evans and Bailey party, which took place in the Upper Pit River Valley in 1861. Here we see two army patrols in action. Here we also see the significance that Fort Crook briefly played in northeastern California. In addition, we see in the person of Dick Pugh, reputedly the first rancher in the Fall River Valley, and example of the cooperation between settlers and the army that frequently took place on the frontier. The article also should remind us that the foundation of many good stories, even during the "pioneer" era in California, remain to be uncovered in archives throughout the land.

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FRONTIER PATROL

PART I - THE FIRST PATROL

On a low, flat-topped hill, a few hundred yards off the back road from Alturas to Canby, there stands a beautiful white marble monument.¹ Here, on August 1, 1861, a party of Oregon pioneers, driving a herd of cattle from the Willamette Valley to market at the Virginia City mines, was attacked by Indians. The herd, variously estimated at between eight and nine hundred head, was scattered over the countryside and the two leaders of the party, Samuel Evans and Joseph Bailey, were killed. The survivors made their way to Fort Crook, some sixty miles distant, where one of the wounded, a man named John Sims, died from arrow wounds.

This little-known episode of Northern California history has been briefly recorded in the Works of Bancroft.² The same story has been dramatized at somewhat greater length by Brown.³ But its significant and interesting sequel has remained buried and untold for all these years in the National Archives.

¹This is California Historical Landmark No. 125. The monument was erected in 1923 by the Native Daughters of the Golden West, with funds provided by the Evans and Bailey families.

²Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon, XXX, in The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft (San Francisco, 1888), 489, footnote 4.

³William S. Brown, California Northeast, The Bloody Ground, (Oakland, California, 1951), pp. 22-24.

MODOC
TABLELAND
(DEVIL'S GARDEN)

MAP OF FEILNER'S PATROLS
INTO THE UPPER PIT RIVER
COUNTRY FROM FORT CROOK
4 AUGUST THROUGH 22
AUGUST, 1861

- Route of First Patrol
- Presumed Route of Second Patrol

PRESENT MODOC-LASSEN COUNTY LINE

BIG VALLEY
BIG VALLEY
To Fort Crook
MTNS.

BIG VALLEY

ADIN
MTNS.

MADELINE
PLAINS

Alturas

Canby

Battle with
Indians
5 Aug. 1861

Crooks Canyon Engagement
9 Aug. 1861

Infernal Caverns
27 Sept. 1861

Delta
Lake

Likely

Engagement with Indians
19 Aug. 1861

Kellogg's
Lake

General Area of Paiute Rancheria
18 Aug. 1861

North Fork Pit River

South Fork Pit River

South Fork Canyon

Mill
Creek

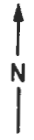
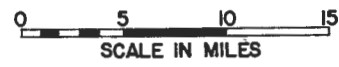
JESS
VALLEY

East
Creek

WARNER
MTNS.

SURPRISE VALLEY

NEVADA-CALIFORNIA STATE LINE



CLW

The sequel is contained in two official army reports submitted by a Second Lieutenant John Feilner of the First Dragoons. They describe two punitive expeditions or patrols he led against the Indians in the Upper Pit River country of what is now Modoc County.⁴

The First Dragoons

We must begin with a word about Feilner's regiment, the man himself, and the setting of time and place. The term "Cavalry" was not in general use by the army prior to the Civil War. Mounted units were known by the old European designation of dragoons.

Feilner's regiment was organized in 1833 as the U.S. Regiment of Dragoons, becoming the First U.S. Regiment of Dragoons when a second mounted regiment was created a few years later. The title of dragoons was dropped and the regiment renamed the First Cavalry in 1861.⁵

This regiment deserves more than passing mention. From its inception in 1833, through the Mexican War of 1846, and all through three decades of Indian Wars, it served continuously on the western frontier. It also played a leading role in the military history of Northeastern California, providing troops at one time or another to garrison Forts Reading, Crook and Bidwell. During the twenty-eight years of the existence of Fort Bidwell, from 1865 to 1893, there were few years that

⁴War Department Records, Dept. of the Pacific, Vol. 160, U.S. Army Commands, Washington, D.C., Record Group 98.

⁵Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789-1903, (Urbana, Illinois, 1965), p. 416.

at least one company of the First Cavalry was not stationed at that Post.⁶ One or more units of the regiment fought at the Infernal Caverns and throughout the Modoc War.

What little is known of John Feilner comes from his service record. A native of Germany, he enlisted as a private in the First Dragoons in 1856. Rising rapidly through the ranks, he became First Sergeant of Company F, and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in April 1861. He was a Captain when killed in a skirmish with the Indians at Cheyenne River, Dakota Territory, in 1864.⁷

From his service record and from the text of his reports, it may be surmised that Feilner was an intelligent and well educated man, as well as an exceptionally competent if not a brilliant officer. He might well have been one of those professional soldiers of foreign birth and training who were to be found in the early American Army, especially during the Civil War and post Civil War periods.

At the time of our story, Feilner was stationed with his company at Fort Crook, in the Fall River Valley near the present hamlet of Glenburn. Fort Crook had been established in 1857 on the Pit River road, which followed the approximate route of the still older Lassen Trail.⁸

⁶F. B. Rogers, Fort Bidwell, (San Francisco, 1959), p. 23.

⁷Heitman.

⁸R. W. Pease, "Modoc County, a Geographic Time Continuum on the California Volcanic Tableland," University of California Publications in Geography, 17 (1965), pp. 68-69.

The fort was singularly ill-situated to protect settlements to the east which, at the time, were struggling for footholds in the Honey Lake, Sierra and Indian Valleys. To the north and northeast was a vast wilderness completely devoid of white settlers. This area would later become eastern Siskiyou County and Modoc County.

It being the first year of the Civil War, the army on the western frontier had been sadly depleted. The commander at Fort Crook was a mere Second Lieutenant, J. H. Kellogg; his entire command apparently consisted of Company F of the First Dragoons. The size of Feilner's patrols indicates that Company F was below the strength authorized by army tables of organization.

Out On Patrol

On the morning of August 3, 1861, two days after the Evans and Bailey fight, Lieutenant Feilner was out on patrol in the Fall River Valley. His command was typical of a cavalry patrol in Indian country: a sergeant, a bugler and twelve other enlisted men, together with two civilian guides. One of the latter was a white man named Pugh, the other a friendly Indian whose name Feilner did not see fit to record for posterity.

About eight or nine miles out from the fort, the patrol came upon two survivors of the ill-fated Evans and Bailey party. Upon hearing their story, Feilner immediately sent his sergeant back to the fort for reinforcements, which arrived that afternoon in the form of six additional men. There was a minimum of red tape to hamper military operations on the western frontier in 1861.

Camping by the Pit River that night, the patrol started on the march at four the next morning. Eight survivors of the Evans and Bailey party, quaintly identified as "citizens of the party who lost the cattle" went along with the patrol. The entire force now consisted of thirty-one men: twenty-one soldiers, eight cowboys and two guides. A pack train accompanied (and occasionally delayed) the column.

The route they followed was that of the old Lassen Trail, through the Gouger Neck area of Big Valley, up the "Pit River Canyon" to the "Upper Pit River Valley," gathering up fifty-two head of scattered cattle enroute. Upon entering the main valley they observed, two miles ahead of the column and somewhere near the present village of Canby, some Indians driving cattle toward the river. A fight ensued; one Indian was killed and two wounded. Feilner received two slight arrow wounds.

Feilner noted in his report, "The whole command, including W. Pugh, the guide, behaved very courageously and soldier-like, especially James Matthew, Private of Company "F", 1st Dragoons." A good officer always gives his men the credit they deserve.

The patrol found that a number of head of cattle had been butchered and the meat hung up on trees to dry. The cattlemen's camp wagons had been burned. About two miles further on, they came to the place where the cattlemen had made their stand against the Indians. There they found and buried the "terribly mutilated" bodies of Sam Evans and Joe Bailey.

The next day, August 6th, was spent in helping the "citizens" gather up all of the scattered cattle to be found in the vicinity and starting the herd, which now numbered one hundred seventy-six head,

toward Fort Crook. When the herd reached Big Valley the following day, Feilner decided that a military escort was not necessary for the remainder of the trip to the fort, and turned his patrol around to return to the Upper Pit River country.

Into The Mountains

It was Feilner's belief that "the various Indian tribes" in the region had all been involved and that "each had made off to the interior of the mountains with his share of the spoils." As later events would prove, this was a remarkably good guess. So, instead of retracing his steps over the old Lassen Trail, he headed in a northeasterly direction, into what is known today as the Knox Mountains or the Adin Mountains. His exact route through the mountains cannot be traced in detail. About noon they came to a "pretty little valley with water and grass" not much of a landmark in a country full of such attractions. Here they camped and, having seen cattle and Indian tracks, scouts were sent out. The scouts returned at evening without success.

About ten in the morning of the following day they came upon "a very large Indian Rancheria which seemed to have been abandoned about one day since, and temporarily arranged for about a hundred and fifty Indians."⁹

Continuing on, they crossed the mountains and came toward evening to another small valley where they found another deserted Indian camp, fifteen head of cattle and a large cattle trail.

⁹While the use of the Mexican term "Rancheria" was peculiar to California and the southwest, Feilner's use of the word so far north seems strange.

The next day they came to a lake, which gives us the first good clue as to their whereabouts. The patrol had crossed the Knox Mountain range and was now on the volcanic tableland which borders the South Fork Valley of the Pit River on the west. Delta Lake was and is the only natural lake in the entire area. After passing the lake they "came on the edge of the mountain overlooking a very large valley on the South Fork of Pit River." Here they "saw some cattle at a distance and a number of Indians scattering in all directions -- got in the valley and made for their Rancheria, at the mouth of the canyon."

The report continued: "there the Indians sent off their women and children and about a hundred warriors paraded. The rocky country compelled us to dismount and attack them on foot, but before we came in shot distance, all of them ran up the canyon, our pursuit was fruitless -- there I found over 50 head of cattle killed and the beef hung up to dry. I burned all I could find belonging to the Indians -- there we encamped."

The canyon used by the Indians as an escape route was probably the one known today as Crook's Canyon, after the General who would fruitlessly battle these Indians six years later. A short distance south of this canyon, directly under the high rimrock of the tableland, is that grotesque jumble of huge boulders and rocks known as The Infernal Caverns. As the Indian defense position it was, it equalled the more famous stronghold of Captain Jack. Feilner used flawless tactical judgment when he refrained from forcing an attack.



Crook's Canyon located a few miles northwest of Likely, California.

Back to the Fort

On August 10th, the patrol headed back to Fort Crook. They had been on the march for a full week; they were out of provisions and had gathered up over one hundred additional head of lost cattle, which would have seriously interfered with any future operations. On the way home, they picked up another fifty head. The patrol arrived back at the fort late on August 12th.

Feilner concluded the report of his first patrol into the Upper Pit River country with an interesting comment -- "Since my arrival, I learn that one of the men who got wounded died; also four horses; which full proves that the arrows were poisoned." In making this comment, Feilner completely ignored that fact that he had suffered no serious effects from two arrow wounds received seven days before.

Aboriginals in tropical countries sometimes had access to virulent plant poisons which they used for arrow-poisoning, but none of the poisonous plants indigenous to northeastern California contained toxins suitable for such a purpose.

The Indians apparently did attempt to make their arrows more lethal; Colonel Parnell has described the crude methods they used involving deer liver impregnated with rattlesnake venom and even putrified liver alone.¹⁰

Strictly speaking, it is more likely that Indian arrowheads were highly septic than that they were actually poisoned.

¹⁰The United Services, Vol. I, Nos. 5 and 6, (May and June 1889).

PART II - THE SECOND PATROL

Looking For Indians

The first patrol into the Upper Pit River country had been as successful as could be expected. Over a third of stolen cattle had been recovered, and it was reasonable to believe that the Indians had been sufficiently intimidated to discourage further depredations, at least for the time being.

Nevertheless, Feilner set out again from Fort Crook on August 15th, 1861, just three days after returning from his first patrol. The army of the western frontier had its faults, but the lack of diligence was rarely one of them. Or maybe the risk of being killed in action fighting Indians was infinitely preferable to the alternative of a slow death from the boredom of a lonely military outpost.

This time the patrol was slightly larger -- two non-commissioned officers and 27 other enlisted men of Company F. The civilian guide, W. Pugh, again accompanied the patrol, but the Indian guide did not go along. The stated mission of the patrol was "to retake the cattle taken by various Indian tribes N. and E. of this post and punish those Indians."

We will make no attempt to trace the exact route of the first four days march on this second patrol. The difficulty does not stem from the illegibility of Feilner's elegant Spencerian handwriting so much as it does from his failure to record identifiable landmarks.

Like any good frontier cavalryman, he appeared to be preoccupied with the grass and water which were vital for the sustenance of his horses, and which he mentioned more frequently in his reports than he did landmarks. Another difficulty is with his estimates of the distances traveled each day, which might have been somewhat exaggerated. Most days, he reported covering 25 or 30 miles, which was a very good day's march for a cavalry patrol hampered by a string of pack animals in mountainous country. But on August 18th and again on August 19th he reported covering over 60 miles per day, which is incredible.

At any rate, the patrol camped the first night on the eastern side of Big Valley, by a "Sagehen Creek." This might have been a now-obsolete name for some tributary of Ash Creek. The next day they marched east, and saw several "very cocky Indian spies" watching them from the mountains to their right and left. Feilner sent out two details in pursuit, but the Indians easily kept out of range.

On August 17th Feilner crossed some mountains (of which there are a plentiful number north and east of Big Valley), and came to a large valley where he found tracks of about fifteen head of cattle, also some pony tracks. Following these tracks, the next day the patrol came to another trail where about two hundred head of cattle had passed. After following this large trail for about three hours, they came to a little flat with the usual plenitude of grass and a small spring. What they found there is best told in Feilner's own words:

"Here we found that the Indians had camped and butchered about 25 head of cattle; about 40 or 50 head of horses must have been in camp at this place and it seemed that the beef was taken away on pack

animals in different directions -- some towards Willow Creek emptying into Susan River, some toward Smoke Creek emptying into Mud Lake. About 20 head of cattle were driven by about 20 or 25 horsemen towards the head of (illegible) River -- Without doubt they were Pah Utah Indians; the more so as I learned by Indians before I started that the Upper Pit River Valley Indians had given to the Pah Utah Indians ten squaws and a reasonable share of cattle, to allow them to go to their country and if necessary protect them."

The Guide

These deductions were more than mere guesses, for Feilner had the benefit of expert assistance in making his observations. The frontier army depended almost entirely upon civilian employees for its intelligence functions. For no apparent reason, these employees were classified as guides, scouts or interpreters. But whatever their title and whether they were Indians, halfbreeds, whites or blacks, they were experienced frontiersmen who had lived with or among the Indians and had an intimate knowledge of their languages and customs. The value of such individuals was inestimable and few officers (except Custer) were ever rash enough to disregard their judgment.

Feilner's guide, whom he identified as W. Pugh, was undoubtedly the same Dick Pugh who had come to the Fall River Valley as a guide with Crook in 1857. Pugh was married to an Indian woman and, it is said, had acquired such prestige among the Fall River Indians that they recognized him as their chief.¹¹ Even Lonesome Charley Reynolds, Custer's Chief of Scouts, had no better credentials.

¹¹ Ernest R. Neasham, Fall River Valley, A History (Fall River Mills, California, 1957), pp. 115-117.

The fact that Feilner had an expert on Indian lore along with him on the patrols gives an added dimension of authenticity to these reports. But it does not answer the perplexing questions which arise concerning the relationship between the Paiutes and the Pits, who were commonly considered to be traditional enemies.¹² Yet here they were apparently working together in sharing ill-gotten gains. So we must digress at this point to consider the nature of the Indians who were involved in the affair.

Paiutes and Pits

The Warner Mountain Range, rising two thousand feet and more above the valley floors on either side, was a barrier of sorts between the Surprise Valley Paiutes on the east and the Pit River Indians on the west. The main Warner Range terminates in a region of broken hills just south of the present Modoc-Lassen county line, with the Tuledad Canyon providing easy access between the territories of the two tribes. It was somewhere in this general area that Feilner discovered the Paiute camp.

The Indians who lived in the Surprise Valley were Northern Paiutes, a large conglomeration of small bands who occupied a territory some six hundred miles long and up to two hundred fifty miles wide on the western edge of the Great Basin.¹³ In its pristine condition, this vast region was barely fit for human habitation, so the widely scattered bands lived mostly in occasional choice locations like the Surprise Valley. By dire

¹²Fred B. Kniffen, "Achomawi Geography," U.C. Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, XXIII (1928), 306-307.

¹³Ruth Underhill, The Northern Paiute Indians of California and Nevada, (Washington, 1941), Plate I.

necessity if not by choice, the Paiutes supplemented their meagre incomes by raiding. The wagon trains of California and Oregon-bound emigrants on the Applegate trail were often their targets, and at the time of this story, they had been busily engaged in raiding and fighting with the white settlers to the south. It should not be surprising to learn that Feilner's "Pah Utah" Indians carried off their beef on pack animals; their neighbors to the north, the Shoshones, had become horse Indians sometime before 1800 and by 1861 it is probable that most Paiute bands were supplied with and had learned to use horses.

The Pit River Indians, on the other hand, were smaller in numbers and somewhat more provincial in their habits than the Paiutes. But like the Paiutes, the tribe consisted of an assortment of small, largely autonomous bands sharing a similar language and somewhat similar customs.

The tribe occupied a long, rather narrow territory along the Pit River from its headwaters in the Warner Mountains almost to its confluence with the Sacramento River.¹⁴ Although periodic times of starvation were not unknown to the Pits, this was a comparatively rich country, and there was little reason for the Pits to venture beyond it. So far as can be determined, the Indians in the Upper Pit River country had no horses prior to white settlement in the area. Some historians have accused them of harassing wagon trains which passed over the Lassen Trail during the gold rush. Yet strangely enough, the first settlers who arrived in the Upper Pit River country in the 1870's quickly established the most friendly relations with the Pits. Vestiges of this relationship exist

¹⁴C. Hart Merriam, The Classification and Distribution of the Pit River Indian Tribes of California (Washington, 1926), Frontispiece Map.

to this day in Modoc County, where most old-timers speak of the "old" Indians with paternalistic affection.

The Pits were raided and their young women and children taken as slaves by the Modocs.¹⁵ As a result, the Pits had acquired a reputation of inferiority. Had they been as inferior as their reputation alleged, it is hard to understand how they were able to hold their relatively rich homeland against such predatory neighbors. As a matter of fact, Feilner's reports and Crook's experience with the Pits in 1867 both testify to their tactical sagacity, which could be misconstrued as cowardice.

Neither the Pits nor the Paiutes had any sort of strong political organization like the Iroquois Federation, nor a formalized ritual of warfare like the Dakotas. Such things were luxuries they could not afford. They were essentially pragmatists, like the Modocs, doing whatever seemed best under the circumstances for their welfare and survival. While the Pits and Paiutes have been described as traditional enemies, the exact nature of their relationship in 1861 appears open to question.

But whatever the reasons, there were not only Surprise Valley Paiutes implicated in the disposition of the stolen cattle along with the Pits, but also other Paiutes from the Honey Lake Valley, from the Smoke Creek area and possibly from other parts of western Nevada as well. And whatever sort of a grapevine telegraph system the Indians had, it certainly was working very well when they struck it rich with the white mans' beef.

Another Paiute Camp

The patrol spent several hours trying to pick out the right trail among a maze of cattle and horse tracks, and finally headed out on a

¹⁵ Verne F. Ray, Primitive Pragmatists, The Modoc Indians of Northern California (Seattle, 1963), pp. 134-139.

trail running in a northeast direction. About three in the afternoon, they saw fifteen Indians crossing a creek and pursued them. The Indians fired several signal shots to warn their camp, which was about a mile away. Because of the rough terrain, the patrol had to detour about six miles before they reached the then-deserted camp. This was a large camp; Feilner estimated that it had accommodated over 300 persons. They found a large quantity of beef hung up on trees to dry, and a large quantity of Indian clothing. The pack train detail was left behind to burn the camp, while the remainder of the patrol was split up into two parties to pursue the Indians. They returned at sunset without success, to camp on what Feilner described as a branch of the south fork of Pit River.

This camp was somewhere in the south Warners, possibly in the upper Long Valley area. The warning shots fired by the Indians in the same area was the first reference in Feilner's reports to the use of firearms by the Indians. It is doubtful that the Pits had firearms in 1861 but the Paiutes, with their vigorous raiding of the whites, had ample opportunity to obtain guns. Just how they learned to use them is another matter. The procedure of loading the percussion cap firearms of 1861 was hardly less complex than that of the older flintlocks, and certainly much more difficult than that of operating a modern breechloader. The presence of Indian riflemen suggests that some Paiute veterans of Pyramid Lake, or some similar fracas, were at the scene.

Jess Valley Discovered

The next day the patrol continued along the trail, which had veered in a northwest direction. After about eight miles, they came to a lake which was described as being about half a mile square. Feilner called this Kellogg's Lake, evidently for his fellow Second Lieutenant in command at Fort Crook. It must have been what is now known as Blue Lake. "Here

the scattered tracks took toward the Basaltic desert," which evidently was Feilner's way of describing the Likely tableland. They continued following the trail in a northwesterly direction and, after six miles of travel, came to a considerable valley watered by one creek coming from the east and another from the north, both joining on the west side.

For once in his reports, Feilner had described a valley so well that positive identification is possible. It could be none other than Jess Valley, and to Feilner must go the credit for its discovery.



Jess Valley in the south Warner mountains.

After passing through or around Jess Valley, the patrol started down the steep and rough canyon of the south fork of Pit River. Toward evening they sighted another Indian camp perched above them on the high

rimrock of the canyon. The patrol fired at the Indians who were peering down at them, at a range of eight hundred to one thousand yards. Two Indians returned the fire and the patrol scrambled for cover. A detachment was sent up through the rocks and brush in an effort to outflank the Indians, but this was useless. The Indians were long gone before the flanking party ever got close to their position.

Feilner reported, "These Indians I understand are the Goose Lake Indians." There never were any Goose Lake Indians as such, but the Hewisedawi band of the Pit River tribe claimed the Goose Lake Valley as their territory, even though it necessitated living virtually under the noses of their enemies, the Modocs.¹⁶

By this time, the patrol was approaching exhaustion. They had been "engaged in the most fatiguing marches" for the past five days, they were three good days march away from home and their supplies must have been getting dangerously low. The Indians had turned out to be most uncooperative; instead of standing still to be punished they simply vanished into another part of the mountains. So the patrol, with forty-two more head of lost cattle in tow, started home for Fort Crook. They arrived back at the fort on August 22, 1861.

Feilner concluded his report with the following pithy comments:

"The nature of the country where those Indians are at present requires several large parties to punish them."

"Most of the cattle are killed -- finding almost on every tree, on top of the mountains, beef hung up."

¹⁶Kniffen, pp. 308,309. See also Ray, Map 1 on p. 206.

"The forty-two head of cattle collected I turned over to one of the cattle owners."

"I am Sir
Your Obt. Servt.
(Signed) John Feilner
2nd Lieut. 1st Drags.
U.S. Army

PART III - EPILOGUE

In 1862, the year after the Feilner patrols, gold and silver were discovered in the Owyhee region of Idaho, close to the Oregon border. The resulting mining boom generated considerable traffic through north-eastern California. Livestock, mail and supplies were transported from the head of navigation on the Sacramento River at Red Bluff to the Idaho mines. At first this traffic went over the old Lassen Trail through the Upper Pit River country and over the Fandango Pass into the Surprise Valley. Most of it was later diverted over a new route from Chico to Susanville, over the Madeline Plains, through the Tuledad Canyon and through the Surprise Valley. Travelers over this route were more or less continuously subjected to harrassment by the Paiute Indians.¹⁷

By 1867, increasing Indiana depredations had created a virtual state of hysteria over the entire region. General George C. Crook moved in with three companies of the First Cavalry and one detachment of the Twenty-third Infantry, establishing headquarters at Camp Warner just across the California line in the Warner Valley of Oregon. Sometime in late August of 1867 (the exact date is uncertain) he set out on patrol to punish the Indians. At first he had even less luck in finding Indians to fight than Feilner. After marching all over the country for three weeks or more, he wound up following the same old Indian trail that Feilner had followed six years before. He came down over the rimrock into the South Fork Valley in about the same place Feilner had, and found what must have been the

¹⁷Pat Olmstead, The Nevada-California-Oregon Border Triangle, A Study in Sectional History (Reno, Nevada, 1957), pp. 115-120.

same band of Indians. But unlike Feilner, he engaged the Indians in a two day battle, losing eight men in the process. The battle ended when the Indians vanished from their fortress into the darkness of the night.¹⁸

This episode, the Battle of the Infernal Caverns, is accounted for in one text book of California history as an answer to the usual sequence of depredations by the Indians of the Pit River region.¹⁹ Crook was purportedly after Paiutes and Shoshones, who were alleged to have been and probably were responsible for all the trouble. But if the Pits got in the way, that was just their tough luck. It is hard to see how the Pits could have been responsible for any depredations around 1861. They had no horses, they had no guns, and to make it more ironic there was little or nothing in their territory to depredate until the settlers arrived in 1870. As a matter of fact, the Indians who attacked the Evans and Bailey party were never positively identified; we assume they were Pits because the incident occurred in their territory. The actual culprits could easily have been trespassing Paiutes, or even Modoc for all we really know.

When all available primary sources materials are critically examined and objectively analyzed, it becomes questionable that the Pits were ever depredators. They may have been unjustly maligned by history.

¹⁸Parnell

¹⁹J. W. Caughey, California (New York, 1953), p. 323.

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