

4-1-1932

Cope: Master Naturalist

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

. "Cope: Master Naturalist." *New Mexico Historical Review* 7, 2 (1932). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol7/iss2/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Journal of the Santa Fe Expedition under Colonel Doniphan.—By Jacob S. Robinson. (Princeton University Press, 1932, 96 pp.)

This reprint of a journal kept by a private of the Doniphan Expedition is most acceptable as originals are practically unobtainable. The journal appeared first as Robinson's "Sketches of the Great West," which today has an auction record of \$165.00 for the volume. The author's spelling and punctuation are closely followed, but there is no difficulty in identifying place names and local appellations.

Robinson was with the first regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers, which was mustered into the service of the United States at Fort Leavenworth on June 6th, 1846. On the 22nd of that month the regiment started on its memorable march across the Plains to Santa Fé, which it reached after fifty-seven days. From Santa Fé, it proceeded to Chihuahua and traversed the states of Durango and Nuevo León, and returned to the United States by way of New Orleans, having in twelve months covered six thousand miles, part of the way fighting and suffering extreme hardships and privations.

The descriptions of people, customs and places are naïve, and yet show the result of keen powers of observation. On July 21st, the advance of the cavalcade encamped at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas to await the arrival of the main command. Robinson described the fort as follows: "It is a block of buildings in the form of a square about 100 by 150 feet with the center open. The buildings are a blacksmith's shop, carpenter's shop, store house, eating room, government room and many lodging rooms—together with a castle one hundred feet square, in which the stock is kept at night. It is built of adobes, or unburnt bricks; the walls

six feet thick, earth floors and similar roof, supported by rails and logs laid across the top of the walls. The Messrs. Bents have in their employ from 100 to 150 men, whose business it is to trap and trade with the Indians. They have good mattress beds, which are spread on the floors, and everything is kept neat and clean. Many of the men have Indian wives. We found here Governor Boggs' son, who has married Mr. Bent's daughter, a half-breed. The women are dressed very well, wear moccasins trimmed with beads about the ankles, which are very small. All who live here seem contented. They sell rum for \$24.00 a gallon and tobacco \$4.00 a pound; other things in proportion. Among other furniture they have a billiard table. They keep a large stock of mules and horses. They have attempted the cultivation of corn and vegetables and succeeded very well; but the Indians frequently destroying their crops, they had to abandon it. They have a farm at Pueblo Fort where the crops have also been destroyed by the Mexicans this year."

Robinson then proceeds to describe an incident which seems to have made a deep impression on him: "While we remained at Bent's Fort, the first death and burial took place in our camp. Some of the dragoons got intoxicated; and one of them, after having a fight, went into the river to bathe; he returned and lay down beneath a tree, where in a few moments he was found dead—reported to have died of apoplexy. This was on the 24th of July, and on the next day we were called to attend his funeral. He was dressed in his blanket and laid on a rude bier which was hastily constructed of willows, the flag of his country hung by his side; his horse was in front as chief mourner, saddled and bridled, with boots and spurs inverted in the stirrups, and sword, pistols and carbine across the saddle. The band sounded the slow and solemn notes of the dead march, as we bore his body to the grave, over which twenty-four guns were fired, and with a lively air from the band we returned to camp. The next day five men were tried by a court-martial for insubordination, and sentenced each to carry forty

pounds of sand every two alternate hours during the day."

On the 29th of July, a company of infantry arrived at Fort Bent, and according to Robinson these new arrivals were "in good spirits, and in better health than the mounted men" although "the heat is so intense from nine o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, that it is almost impossible to move about. Our guns become so hot we cannot handle them, and the sand burns our feet—but the nights are cool and pleasant; and the atmosphere is so clear that the stars retain their brilliancy until they sink beneath the horizon."

By August 2nd, the entire force consisted of fourteen hundred mounted rifle men, two hundred infantry, and two hundred artillery. Robinson refers to the Purgatoire as the Piquet River. When the invading army struck the Mora, they found an Irishman who had settled there, with nearly 1,000 head of cattle and mules. On August 15th, Las Vegas was occupied and the people appeared cheerful and glad to greet the American troops. Says Robinson: "The Mexicans brought us cheese, bread, mutton, onions, etc., which they sold us at very high prices." Las Vegas surrendered without a fight. At San Miguel, however, the alcalde was reluctant to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. He was given to understand that there was no alternative, and he finally submitted. After passing San Miguel two Mexican prisoners were taken "who were men of some note, one of them being a relative of Governor Amigo [Governor Manuel Armijo]. He remarked to General Kearney that although the position of the Mexicans was so strong at the Pass, he could tell them how to defeat them—just fire five or six cannon, no matter which way, and he would insure them all to run. To this General Kearney replied that if that was the case they must be a very cowardly people."

Apache Pass on the route of march on August 18th, the day that Santa Fé was occupied. Robinson remarks: "On a careful survey we saw how easily five hundred good soldiers might have completely destroyed us. The rocky cliffs on

each side were from two to three thousand feet high; and the fallen trees which they had cut down, hedged up our way. We all felt very well satisfied to pass without being attacked. We had all felt very brave before; but we now saw how difficult it would have been to have forced the pass and were glad to be beyond it. After a march of thirty-five miles, without grass for our horses, we at length came in sight of Santa Fe. The city at a little distance more resembles a parcel of brick yards than anything else; but in passing through we found it of considerable extent. The houses are all built of adobes. The city is full of corn and wheat fields; the corn is now fit to roast and the wheat not quite ready to harvest. The people supply themselves with water from three beautiful streams that run through the town, having their sources in a lake to the northwest. With them they also irrigate their corn fields. We entered the city just as the sun was sinking behind a distant mountain; and as its last rays gilded the hilltop, the flag of our country triumphantly waved over the battlements of the holy city; minute guns fired a national salute and the long shout of the troops spoke the universal joy that was felt at the good fortune that has attended us. But we leave the city to encamp—the men weary and hungry; no grass, no wood and nothing to eat, as our wagons have been left behind. On the 19th, our men, hungry and ill-natured in the camp, seemed disposed to fight among themselves, as there was nobody else to fight. One of the volunteers, named Haskins was tried by a court martial for the misdemeanor of an assault upon an officer; and was sentenced to be drummed out of the service. I went to the square where I found cheese for sale, weighing about two pounds for twenty-five cents; four biscuits for twenty-five cents and other little things in proportion. The women I do not think pretty, but there are exceptions.”

Suffice it to say that the diary rambles along delightfully as the troops proceeded southward through Galisteo, Santo Domingo and Isleta, witnessing Indian dances and

taking part in Mexican bailes. Robinson was one of the men who were detached to invade the Navajo region by way of Laguna and Zuñi. His description of the Navajo ceremonies and customs is graphic and of some ethnological value. He rejoined his command on the march to Chihuahua, incidentally describing an execution of a Mexican spy who died like a stoic. "When he was asked whether he would have his eyes bandaged or not, his reply was no, he would die facing his enemy. He received the last office of benediction from the priest with perfect composure, struck fire the first stroke of his flint to light his cigar, and commenced smoking as calmly as though he was about to take dinner. When the eight rifles were raised and cocked, not a muscle moved to betoken agitation, but he took his cigar from his mouth, held it between his fingers until the word fire was given and in an instant the warm blood spouted from his forehead and breast and he fell dead. We waited a moment until he was carried off by some women when we turned our horses and resumed our march in silence."

The preface, historical preface and notes by Carl L. Cannon are illumining and of value to the student. However, even the casual reader will find the book decidedly worth his while.—*P. A. F. W.*

Cope: Master Naturalist. The life and letters of Edward Drinker Cope, with a bibliography of his writings classified by subject. A study of the pioneer and foundation periods of vertebrate paleontology in America. By Henry Fairfield Osborn, senior geologist, U. S. geological survey; honorary curator, department of vertebrate paleontology, American Museum of Natural History. With the co-operation of Helen Ann Warren [and others]. Illustrated with drawings, and restorations by Charles R. Knight under the direction of Professor Cope. (Princeton University Press, 1931. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press. 740 pp. \$5.00.)

American biography and the history of natural science are both distinctly enriched by the publication of this extensive and really adequate life of one of the country's, and of the world's, greatest naturalists and natural philosophers. The idiosyncratic quality, variety, and abundance of the subject's genius is captured and exhibited for the reader with remarkable skill and gratifying success. The book is the outgrowth of years of knowledge and experience of general and special studies, and figures against a uniquely suitable background of familiarity alike with Cope and with the field, or fields, of his labors. A labor of love and extreme care, it reveals the man directly, largely through his correspondence, also by just characterization and personal reminiscences. It is a balanced book, well systematized, picturesquely descriptive, frank and personal, sympathetic yet impartial, containing a vast deal of technical information as a guide to the student, and many highly readable pages of dramatic narrative and the quotation of brilliant, meaty, or witty sallies by Cope himself. The preparation has been painstaking, co-operative, partly a polygenetic compilation, analyzed and synthesized *de novo*; and its inclusiveness is, on the whole, all that could be desired. Even its omissions are in good taste, and leave the reader in want of nothing essential for a proper understanding of Cope and his work.

The career of Cope (Philadelphia, United States, and the world, 1840-97), his specialties, contributions, explorations, interpretations, personal idiosyncrasies, successes and trials, even his voluminous publications, must here be passed over without a word of summary.

Cope was a pioneer in exploration and discovery both in zoölogy and geology, especially in vertebrate paleontology, whose work in our state figures prominently in the history of American science and whose discoveries in the paleontology of the state throw considerable light upon its geological history.

New Mexico figures in some ways above all other states in the record of Cope's remarkable career. In 1874 Cope

joined the Wheeler (U. S. geological) survey of the territories west of the 100th meridian, entering the virgin territory of New Mexico, as yet untouched by paleontologists—[either by Laidy or March or any other]. His greatest work was done in the *Coryphodon* beds of the lower Eocene, beneath which he discovered the basal Eocene beds which he called the “*Torrejón*” and the “*Puerco*” immediately above the Cretaceous dinosaur beds. This was an entirely new discovery and the fauna were both characteristic and archaic. This paleocene Puerco horizon of Cope ranks among the first of his geological discoveries, and by some is considered such. Later he found mammaliferous upper Miocene and lower Pliocene marl beds near Santa Fe, with the remains of rhinoceri, mastodents, camels and carnivores. His letters and diaries abound in natural history and botanical observations. In the lower Eocene Wasatch beds many fossil mammals, and reptiles galore, even birds and fishes, were brought to light. Important studies were made of the living fauna, especially reptiles, of the state, which figure prominently in long subsequent publications. His letters of this place and period abound in humanly interesting historical incidents of his journey, reference to the Navahoes, etc., and occupy several pages. In 1883 he is again in New Mexico, writing interesting letters home and exploring the Cretaceous. We cannot enumerate new genera and species found, but richly indeed did New Mexico contribute, through the pioneer, Cope, to our knowledge of the ancient life and history of our continent.

William Harper Davis.