

1-6-1854

Central Pacific Railroad. Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting a report relative to Captain Gunnison's survey, &c.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>

 Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

H.R. Exec. Doc. No. 18, 33d Cong., 1st Sess. (1854)

This House Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING

A report relative to Captain Gunnison's survey, &c.

JANUARY 6, 1854.—Laid upon the table and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,

Washington, January 4, 1854.

SIR: In compliance with the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 22d ultimo, I have the honor to submit herewith a report of the Colonel of Topographical Engineers, containing all the information relative to Captain Gunnison's survey in the possession of this department.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JEFF. DAVIS,

Secretary of War.

Hon. LINN BOYD,

Speaker House of Representatives.

BUREAU OF TOPOGRAPHICAL ENGINEERS,

Washington, December 29, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to submit copies of all letters in this office having reference to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 22d December, 1853, calling for information relative to Captain Gunnison's survey of the Pacific railroad route.

Respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

J. J. ABERT,

Colonel Corps Topographical Engineers.

Hon. JEFFERSON DAVIS,

Secretary of War.

[Since the above report, the report of Captain Gunnison of September 20 has been received.]

CAMP SHAWNEE RESERVATION,
June 20, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to forward my quarterly papers, made out to the end of the second quarter.

I beg leave to add that I am now ready to start on the Central Pacific railroad route, proposing to strike up the Smoky Hill Fork of Kansas to a convenient point to leave for the Arkansas. As I shall not probably have an opportunity to send my accounts after this date, I have anticipated a few days in the second quarter.

I have the honor to be, your most obedient servant,
J. W. GUNNISON,
Captain Topographical Engineers.

Col. J. J. ABERT,
Chief Corps Top. Engineers.

CAMP SHAWNEE RESERVATION,
June 20, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to say that I have organized my party for the survey assigned to my command, and, with the escort under Brevet Captain Morris, propose to proceed along the Smoky Hill until necessary to deflect from it nearly as possible in a direct line to the mouth of the Huerfano. This will give a new exploration a part of the way, and very desirable to meet the views of those advocating the route, and I hope it will not much delay me. It will also be useful for the new fort on the Republican, in order to know whether a short route to Santa Fé may be taken across to the Arkansas.

I submit the following names as assistants on the survey:

Dr. James Schiel, surgeon and naturalist;

Sheppard Homans, astronomer.

The gentleman engaged as civil engineer was taken ill at Elmira, New York, and has not yet joined; but I hope he will yet be able to reach us, as our marches for a few days will be short.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,
J. W. GUNNISON,
Captain Topographical Engineers.

HON. JEFFERSON DAVIS,
Secretary of War.

CAMP SHAWNEE RESERVATION,
June 21, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to submit a letter for the honorable Secretary of War, to submit the names of assistants, and advise him of the organization of my party.

I am, most respectfully, your most obedient servant,
J. W. GUNNISON,
Captain Topographical Engineers.

Col. J. J. ABERT,
Chief Corps Topographical Engineers.

CAMP UTAH CREEK, NEAR FORT MASSACHUSETTS,
August 22, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to report my arrival in the San Luis valley, having crossed the Rocky mountain eastern range without accident. We have had much labor in removing trees and bushes and cutting down banks, to work up the east side of a high ridge, over which my guide carried me, assuring me that it was the only practicable wagon-route to the Saugre del Christo. But I have discovered, in searching along the summit-level, a very low depression, by which we can pass through instead of over the hills, where the muleteer paths usually go. This new pass to a branch of the Huerfano presents no real obstruction to any kind of a road.

This route is well grassed, and our animals are in fine condition, having recruited; while our labors in road-making and exploring the mountains have been more onerous than on the plains.

The character and place of my duties have prevented the usual reports on the 1st of the months. Should our exertions be favored as thus far, I hope to make the September report and forward by the California mail from some place in Utah. But all representations concur in presenting a difficult region to traverse to the Great Basin.

I beg leave to enclose a communication to the honorable Secretary of War, with the request that it be presented to him.

It was my desire to make a more detailed account, but illness prevents my writing more to-night, and the train has received orders, and is prepared for an early departure towards the north to-morrow morning. I will only add that I followed the Kansas river valley to the new fort (centre) on Pawnee river, and crossing, took a very level and plain route on the northerly side, crossed the Nepehalla (Solomon's fork) and Saline rivers, by ferrying on rafts of logs, as they were swollen by recent rains; and then, cutting off the eastern bend of the Kansas at the Smoky Hill, passed in the same direction to the Walnut Creek and Pawnee forks of the Arkansas.

Availing myself of Captain Woodruff's sketches and the reconnoissance I made, the true route for the military road would be by way of those creeks to a point on the Arkansas above Fort Atkinson, which would subserve both the Santa Fé and Fort Massachusetts or Taos directions.

I now proceed to the north to the Coo-cha-tope Pass, intending to survey the "Roubidoux Pass" on the way, which I think must present a more direct route to California than the one I have discovered, the latter being on the Taos course, and too far south if any place of crossing the mountains feasible for a road can be had further north. Then, under guidance of Watkins Leroux, we are to go to the Spanish trail, from which place he is to return in order to join Lieutenant Whipple.

I have the honor to be, Colonel, your obedient servant,

J. W. GUNNISON,

*Captain Topographical Engineers,
Commanding Central Pacific Railroad Survey.*

Col. J. J. ABERT,

Chief Topographical Engineers.

CAMP UTAH CREEK, NEAR FORT MASSACHUSETTS,
August 22, 1853.

SIR: Availing myself of your permission to keep you acquainted with my progress on the survey, I have the honor to say that my party has crossed the first great range of the Rocky mountains, safely and easily, to the valley of San Luis.

My exploration on the west side of the Kansas was eminently successful in developing the existence of a plain, slightly inclined, which cuts off the eastern bend of that river at the Smoky Hills. Thence I came in the same course to Walnut creek, and descended to its lower part; and afterwards reconnoitred above. The result would be, that a road should take this more direct line from Fort Coutre to Walnut creek, and cross to Pawnee fork, following it and branches to within five or six miles of the Arkansas, thus cutting off the "Big Bend," and strike the latter river near "Aubrey's crossing." I beg leave to refer to Captain (Lieutenant) Woodruff's map of the Pawnee fork in explanation, a manuscript copy of which I saw at Fort Atkinson.

Those of my command who had been in this country in winter could not recognise places and streams in a different season. Misled by the maps of the Upper Arkansas, I took the Abispah for the Huerfano and thoroughly explored the country below, and have added to the geography of that region at the expense of much personal labor.

An intelligent man of thirty years' mountain experience was procured at the Greenhorn ranch for a guide to the "Saugre Del Christo Pass." By a circuitous route we were led to the mule-path crossing over a high mountain or ridge, which the guide declared the only way. But I reconnoitred the dividing ridge from near Sierra Blanca to the Spanish Peaks, while the train was cutting through bushes and working a road, under my able assistant officers, down the Saugre Del Christo creek to this valley.

My efforts were rewarded by finding a summit-level, very low, and over which a road can easily be made, with almost a single grade of a few feet to the mile, to the Arkansas plains. As an obstacle to a railroad it deserves not the name, and the pass can be made without going up what would be called a hill—a mere slope. The work bestowed on the muleteer mountain track would have opened a feasible road for supplies to this post from the States, and perhaps ultimately the route to Santa Fé.

There is a good wagon track now made where we have come with heavily loaded trains. A large flock and herd are closely following us. The owner has been to one of my camps and returned to the Arkansas to bring on his stock, as the grass is extremely good, and the route will not require wintering in the basin.

My observations on the east side lead me to think there is a "Pass" to the north, more direct and as feasible, which I shall soon examine.

We are to start early to-morrow morning for the north and Coo-chatope. I have secured the services of W. Leroux to the Spanish trail, when he will return to guide Lieutenant Whipple. All accounts agree in presenting greater difficulties ahead; but I hope to report in a few weeks from the Great Basin.

Great press of business, and a severe headache, must plead my apology for the style of this letter.

I have the honor to be your most obedient servant, &c.,

J. W. GUNNISON,

Capt. Top. Eng., commanding Pacific Railroad Survey.

HON. JEFFERSON DAVIS,

Secretary of War.

CAMP NEAR FILLMORE, UTAH TERRITORY,

October 29, 1853.

COLONEL: I should not fail—were it possible in the short time allowed me before the express leaves here for Great Salt Lake City, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, in time for the 1st of November mail, which is probably the last which will, if the winter should prove severe, be able to cross the plains before next spring—to announce to you in form, with all the circumstances, as gathered from those of his party who escaped, the death by massacre of the late Captain J. W. Gunnison of your corps, Mr. R. H. Kern, (topographer,) whom I suppose to be known to you, Mr. Creutzfeldt, (botanist,) a guide, Mr. Potter, an employé, — Bellows, and three soldiers of Captain R. M. Morris's command of mounted rifles, by the Pah Utahs, near Sevier lake, on the 26th instant, at about sunrise. I beg, therefore, to refer you to Capt. Morris's report, which he is now writing to the Adjutant General, and to which I could add nothing, even had I time.

Having been detailed to assist the late Captain Gunnison last spring, on the Pacific Railroad survey, and as he had no other commissioned assistant, his death devolves upon me duties which could not have been foreseen. By a hasty glance at his instructions, I find none except those which appear to have been given him by the Secretary of War direct. I am therefore something at a loss to know, but cannot think it otherwise than proper that my official letters, &c., should be sent, through the chief of the topographical corps, to the honorable Secretary. I therefore enclose the accompanying letter, and have to request that if I thereby commit the impropriety of forwarding it through the wrong channel, I may be informed of it, and the letter forwarded to the department.

I am, sir, your very obedient servant,

E. G. BECKWITH,

First Lieutenant Third Artillery.

Col. J. J. ABERT,

Chief Corps Top. Engineers, Washington, D. C.

IN CAMP, NEAR FILLMORE, UTAH TERRITORY,

October 29, 1853.

COLONEL: The painful duty devolves upon me to inform the department of the massacre of Captain J. W. Gunnison, topographical engineers, together with the following-named persons, at Sevier lake, on the 26th instant, by a band of the Pah Vauts, (Eutaws,) viz:

R. H. Kern, topographer of the party;
 — Creutzfeldt, botanist of the party;
 William Potter, Mormon guide;
 Privates Caulfield, Liptoote, and Mehrteens, company A, mounted
 riflemen;
 John Bellows, employé.

On the evening of the 24th instant, while in camp on Sevier river, fourteen miles above the lake, I received a message from Captain Gunnison, requesting an escort of six men to accompany him on the following morning to Sevier lake.

A lance corporal and six privates reported to him on the morning of the 25th instant, when the party left camp, numbering in all twelve; shortly after which, in accordance with his request, I struck camp, and made a march up the Sevier river fourteen miles with the remainder of the command, there to await his return.

At 11½ a. m. on the 26th instant, the lance corporal, who went in command of the escort, came running into camp, and reported that the party had been surprised, and he feared all were massacred.

I immediately sounded to horse and started for the scene of disaster, with the hopes of being able to reach it in time to save some of the party or to rescue the wounded. Three more of my men were met, who confirmed the corporal's statement, but were ignorant of who had fallen. I pushed rapidly on, and at dusk found the stripped corpses of three of the slain. It being too late to proceed further, my command stood to horse until daybreak, when I proceeded on to the ill-fated camp. Here I found the remainder of the bodies lying scattered around it. The bodies of Captain Gunnison and Mr. Creutzfeldt were mutilated. The former fell by fifteen arrow-wounds, and had his left arm cut off at the elbow; the latter had both arms cut off. Having no means of interring the bodies, I was compelled reluctantly to leave them where they fell. The wolves had so destroyed Capt. Gunnison's remains, that it was impossible to bring them off the ground. I then returned and overtook my train with Lieutenant Beckwith's, near the settlement of Fillmore, and hasten to send by express the sad intelligence to Salt Lake City in time for the mail of the 2d proximo.

From the statements of those who escaped I have learned the following facts, viz: That Captain Gunnison reached the first lake at 3 p. m. on the 25th instant, and encamped to the left of it, between the lake and river, and on a bend of the river thickly fringed with willows; that the party arose at daybreak, and were in the act of breakfasting, when a terrific yell was raised on their left, accompanied by a discharge of rifles and a shower of arrows. The escort seized their rifles, and some exchanged shots, when Captain Gunnison and Mr. Kern ran out of their tent unarmed, and all, finding that the Indians were rapidly surrounding them, tried to reach their horses. Those who succeeded escaped, while those who failed fell.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

R. M. MORRIS,

First Lieut. Rifles, and Brevet Captain U. S. Army.

COL. SAMUEL COOPER,

Adjutant General U. S. A.

CAMP NEAR FILLMORE, UTAH TERRITORY,
October 29, 1853.

COLONEL: The death of the late Captain J. W. Gunnison, topographical engineers, in charge of the Central Pacific Railroad survey, whose death, with the particulars, is being communicated by Captain R. M. Morris, mounted rifles, officially to the Adjutant General, devolves upon me the duty of requesting instructions from the honorable Secretary of War for my future guidance.

The short time allowed me before the departure of the express which goes hence in time to reach the Great Salt Lake City before the departure of the mail which leaves that place on the 1st proximo for the States, does not admit of my making any detailed statement even of the operations of the surveying party during the season which is closing so disastrously and painfully to us. Besides, the report which the late captain made on, I think, the 20th of September last, of his operations up to that date, (an annual statement of operations as an officer of topographical engineers in charge of public duties,) and forwarded through New Mexico, and which it is presumed came safely to hand, makes any statement as to the preceding part of his survey unnecessary.

On that date we were on or near Grand river, travelling towards the Spanish trail, which we struck between that river and the Green. Following it but a few miles beyond the latter stream, we left it, passing north and west to White river, (a small branch of Green river,) which we followed up a few days, and then skirted along the base of the Wahsatch mountains, crossing the St. Rafael, also a small stream, with its numerous branches, to the pass in that mountain known as the Wahsatch gap. We returned again to the Spanish trail, (after leaving it to examine White river,) after travelling a very circuitous route for seventy or seventy-five miles. Soon after passing the St. Rafael, this trail, as it is well known to you, passes through the Wahsatch Pass, a few miles beyond which we left it and struck off directly for the Sevier river—distant from the Pass about thirty miles—and then followed down that stream to where it is crossed by the road leading from Great Salt Lake City to California, *via* Végas de Santa Clara. We here crossed the Sevier and the range of mountains lying to the south and west of that stream (probably at the point at which Frémont crossed them in 1844,) into the valley of the Sevier lake. Leaving this range of mountains, we passed northwest to the Sevier river again, a few miles above where it enters the lake which Captain Gunnison was about to explore, with the country to the west of it, where he was killed. This survey, it was supposed, would not detain him beyond two or three days; thence he proposed to go north, if possible, turning the range of mountains through which the Sevier passes; but if not practicable, then to go through the pass of that river north to the Utah lake and Salt Lake City—examining, if possible, the Timpanogas Pass when opposite it. You will see, therefore, that but a trifle of labor remained to be accomplished in the field when operations were so sud-

denly terminated; for it is no longer deemed safe, at present, to explore these districts in the present hostile condition of nearly all of the Indians of the Territory, did not the condition of our supplies, and the advanced state of the season, forbid it.

A few of Captain Gunnison's notes—those since October 8th, when we were on the St. Rafael—he had with him, and they were carried off by the Indians; also some of the topographical notes and sketches of his assistant, Mr. Kern; but I have not yet been able to ascertain to what precise point, but hope the loss will not be great. I have, through Mr. Coll, the president of the settlement near here, who extends to us all the assistance we require, sent an express to the chief of the band which was engaged in the massacre, and entertain a faint hope that I may recover those papers and books, also the instruments, with which we can ill dispense. I shall keep the assistants left of the party busily employed during the winter in bringing up their observations and notes, and, if possible, employ a draughtsman to supply the vacancy left by Mr. Kern's death. Should no other instructions be received, intended for Captain Gunnison, than those furnished him before commencing the survey, and should I receive none myself before the proper season arrives for commencing spring operations, I shall, if I am able to get the means, continue the survey in conformity with those instructions. Captain Gunnison's party were employed for the trip, and cannot, therefore, be discharged until we again arrive in the States. As all the funds for this survey were in Captain Gunnison's hands, I am left without the means of paying assistants and employés, as I am without those for subsisting them during the winter, &c., &c. I have therefore the honor to request that I may be furnished with authority to draw upon the proper department for the amount necessary to meet the demands against the survey, present and prospective. Could this arrangement be effected, it would relieve me from the risk and responsibility of transporting money with me over vast districts of uncivilized territory, loss by mails in coming to me, &c. If this may not be done, however, I have then the honor to request that drafts for small amounts may be sent to me without delay, to be used from time to time, as the mails cannot be depended upon to arrive with any regularity.

I am not able to estimate accurately the amount of money expended by Captain Gunnison in this survey, up to the time of his death, but believe it will not vary materially from eighteen thousand dollars. And I estimate the expense of the party, including wages and subsistence of men, and wear and tear of transportation, at ten or twelve hundred dollars per month.

It may be necessary that I should be furnished with an order directing me to pay the demands against the survey previous to the death of Captain Gunnison. If so, I have to request that it may be furnished, to meet the unpaid amounts due the men of the party, and one thousand dollars, in addition to the monthly estimate above furnished me, to meet these amounts.

The public accounts of Captain Gunnison will be forwarded to the Bureau of Topographical Engineers as soon after arriving in Salt Lake city as it is possible to select them from his other papers.

I am, sir, most respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. G. BECKWITH,

First Lieutenant Third Artillery.

Col. J. J. ABERT,

Chief Corps Top. Engineers, Washington, D. C.

CAMP No. 70, GRAND RIVER, UTAH TERRITORY,
September 20, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to report the operations upon the Central Pacific Railroad survey since it was placed under my direction in May.

The party for the survey was organized and directed to St. Louis, where the requisite purchases were made. By the aid of Colonel R. Campbell the business of fitting out was much expedited. The teams were bought and rendezvoused near Westport, and I proceeded to Fort Leavenworth for the escort, which has proved very efficient in many respects, of guard and for labor, under the command of Brevet Captain Morris and Lieutenant Baker, of the mounted rifles. In the march and other duties I have been greatly assisted by an experienced officer, Lieutenant E. G. Beckwith, of the artillery.

I considered it necessary to demonstrate practically the character of the route, by taking a wagon train for the supplies. The main part was sent under charge of Lieutenant Beckwith on the Arkansas road, and with one team I proceeded by the Kansas to the Smoky Hill valley, and nearly direct in a westerly course to Walnut creek, on new ground much of the way, where I found a very eligible site for any description of road. Thence my route was along and in the vicinity of the Arkansas to the Ahisppah creek, where I crossed the river and explored the Huerfano country up to the pass of Saugre del Christo. The train passed over the usual mountain track, but after a careful reconnoissance I found a very low depression in the mountain ridge by way of a small creek of the Huerfano valley, which makes the crossing very easy into the valley of San Luis, provided a little labor is bestowed to cut the small bushes and level the banks on the creek. It required much labor on the higher pass, and also to cut the road out on the Saugre del Christo creek; and on the unbroken track generally the work has been severe in the mountain region, particularly for sixty miles along Grand river, where we were forced over a connecting mountain between the Elk and San Juan mountains.

The Musca (Roubidoux) and Williams's Passes were reconnoitred and found very inadmissible for roads. I heard of and explored one, however, at the head of San Luis valley of the Del Norte, which led down the Puncha creek to the Arkansas plains, above its first cañon or defile. The approach to it would be either by way of the West Mountain valley, Hardscrabble creek, or, if found practicable, through

the defile along the Arkansas. It is far superior to either the Musca or Williams's Pass for crossing the dividing ridge.

The Coo-cha-tope Pass was not very difficult for our teams, and thence to Grand river the descent easy. That river runs in deep gorges, with only now and then a small valley, which forced us upon the rocky hills, cut through transversely by creeks, whose gullies were difficult to cross without much labor. This delayed us considerably on sixty miles to the Aug-com-pah-gree, since arriving at which our route has been easier, but we have lost the fine grass that kept our animals in good condition up to that point.

The Grand and Nah-oon-kara rivers are large rapid streams, and only at low stages can they be easily forded.

A summary result may be thus stated of the operations :

One thousand and fifty miles on route travelled with eighteen wagons.

Five hundred and twenty miles of new road made on unbroken ground.

Four rivers (besides swollen streams as difficult) ferried or forded.

Seventy-nine new or rare varieties in the botanical department in the plains, and forty-eight in the mountains.

Twenty-seven varieties of mammals and birds, twenty-six of reptiles and fishes, and fifty or sixty of insects.

Two hundred and thirteen observations for astronomical stations.

The topography of the line and all the prominent hills in sight are taken and daily plotted with approximate accuracy. The geology of the route has also been carefully noted and specimens collected.

The Utah Indians have appeared friendly, and the health of the party has been pretty good. I secured the services of A. Leroux and — Michael, two of the most competent men in the mountains, who are to take us to the Spanish trail; from thence I shall be without a guide. They are to return in a few days to Taos, by whom I expect to forward my despatches.

Most respectfully submitted.

J. W. GUNNISON,
*Captain Topographical Engineers,
in charge of Central Pacific Railroad Survey.*

Col. J. J. ABERT,
Chief Topographical Engineers.