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### **Report of the Secretary of War, communicating, in compliance with a resolution of the Senate, a report of the Tulare Valley, made by Lieutenant Derby**

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REPORT  
OF  
THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

COMMUNICATING,

*In compliance with a resolution of the Senate, a report of the Tulare valley, made by Lieutenant Derby.*

AUGUST 24, 1852.

Ordered to lie on the table, and be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
*Washington, August 23, 1852.*

SIR: In compliance with a resolution of the Senate of the 10th June, I transmitted to you, on the 15th of that month, a copy of the reconnoissance of the gulf of California and the Colorado river, made by Lieutenant Derby, of the topographical engineers. In further compliance with the same resolution, I now transmit a copy of the report, &c., made by the same officer in relation to the Tulare lake and its vicinity.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. M. CONRAD,  
*Secretary of War.*

Hon. W. R. KING,  
*President of the Senate.*

BUREAU OF TOPOGRAPHICAL ENGINEERS,  
*Washington, August 14, 1852.*

SIR: Since my report of the 14th June, the report and survey by Lieut. Derby, corps topographical engineers, of the Tulare valley, has been found and sent to this office. I have now the honor to submit a copy of the same, which completes the information called for by a resolution of the Senate of the 10th of May.

Respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

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

Hon. C. M. CONRAD,  
*Secretary of War.*

HEAD-QUARTERS 10TH MILITARY DEPARTMENT,  
*Monterey, California, April 9, 1850.*

SIR: The objects of the reconnoissance which you are about to make have already been verbally indicated to you, and I am now instructed by the commanding general to direct your attention again to the most important of these objects:

1st. An examination of the country between the latitude of San Miguel and that of San Luis Obispo, for the purpose of selecting a position that will cover the passes leading from the Tulare into the settled country east of San Luis Obispo.

2d. An examination of the passes between San Miguel and Santa Margarita, and of the valley of the Tulare from that neighborhood to the King's river, for the purpose of ascertaining whether there is a practicable route for loaded wagons from the coast to King's river.

This route should cross the Sanjon de San José at or near its junction with the lake; and it is important to ascertain whether any portion of this route is overflowed in the seasons of high water. If so, what portion of it, and for what period of the year. The route from San Luis Obispo has already been examined by Captain Warner, and it will only be necessary to examine that portion of it that lies east of the San Luis and Monterey road.

If, however, you should have time, it will be well to ascertain the present condition of the road from San Luis to Santa Margarita, and also whether the land transportation may not be diminished by landing supplies at Estero bay, instead of the Bay of San Luis. Captain John Wilson is suggested to you as a person from whom you may obtain much reliable information in relation to this subject, as well, also, as to the safety of Estero bay for vessels. If you should visit Estero bay, the latitude and longitude of the Moro will be determined.

3d. The examination of the country on the eastern side of the Tulare from the San Joaquin river on the north to the latitude of \_\_\_\_\_ on the south, for the purpose of selecting a suitable position for the establishment of a military post in the neighborhood of the Tulare lake.

The objects to be attained in making this establishment, will be the protection of the frontier east of San Luis Obispo from Indian incursions, and the control of the Indians inhabiting the borders of the lakes and the slopes of the Sierra Nevada, east and north of those lakes. The No-tonto village occupies a central position for these purposes, and has heretofore been suggested as a suitable position for the establishment of a military post. You will give a particular attention to the examination of points in that neighborhood, indicating the several points that may possess the necessary requisites for military posts, and reporting particularly for the information of the brigadier-general commanding; the comparative advantages of each; the military and general resources of the country in the neighborhood; the facility with which lateral communication may be made for the purpose of operating against the Indians of that country, and the nature and length of the route by which the command to be stationed there must be supplied. Particular attention will also be given to the collection of such information as may be useful in guarding against the selection of an unhealthy position; and among other facts, you will ascertain, if practicable, the direction of

the prevalent winds during the summer and fall months, and the nature of the country (whether marshy or otherwise) over which they pass.

4th. The selection of the route by which supplies are to be sent from the coast being of very great importance, you will bestow particular care in the examination of such as may be discovered by or suggested to you, In addition to that already indicated to you, there are two others to which your attention will be directed. The first of these is from the highest point of navigation on the San Joaquin by the valley of that river to the neighborhood of the point at which the post is to be established. The second is from Monterey by some practicable pass in the coast range, if one can be discovered, to the neighborhood of the same point.

Both of these routes will probably cross the Sanjon de San José at its junction with the San Joaquin river, and be the same for the remainder of the distance. For the first of these routes it will only be necessary to ascertain the point to which vessels may ascend the San Joaquin, and the length and nature of the road from that point to the crossing of the San Joaquin or the Sanjon, as the case may be; and for the second examination of such of the passes in the coast range between Panheca's and San Miguel as may promise to be practicable for loaded wagons.

Care will be taken to select for the passage of any streams that it may be necessary to cross, points at which the banks on both sides are accessible by wagons at all seasons of the year, that the length of the different routes should be ascertained, and that the nature of any obstacles should be fully reported.

In addition to the above you are desired to collect and report, for the information of the commanding general, any reliable information in relation to the general and military resources of the country through which you pass; its geological structure, &c., &c.; and to determine as accurately as your means will permit, the latitude and longitude of the northern extremities of the lakes Tache and Buena Vista, and any other important points.

The infantry company under the command of Lieutenant Moore is designed to cover your operations while engaged in the Indian country in the vicinity of the Tulare, and that officer will be instructed to do this effectually, and to render you any assistance that may be needed. For the ordinary purposes of assistance and protection in the performance of your duties, the topographical party heretofore authorized (one guide and eight men) will be sufficient, if your operations are conducted within a reasonable distance of that command. If, however, that force at any time be found insufficient, you will make requisitions upon Lieutenant Moore for any escort that may be deemed necessary.

The commanding general does not anticipate any difficulties with the Indians that you may encounter in your operations, but it will be necessary to be constantly on the guard, and that you should not at any time place yourself beyond the reach of assistance. You will see that the Indians whom you meet are treated kindly by your party, but you will not suffer them to remain in large parties about your camp. The utmost economy will be observed in your operations; and the commanding general directs that no expenditures be made, or obligations contracted, except such as are indispensably necessary.

Very respectfully your obedient servant,

ED. R. S. CANBY,  
*Assistant Adjutant General.*

MONTEREY, *July 10, 1850.*

MAJOR: I have the honor to report that in compliance with the above instructions, I left Monterey upon the 10th of April, with my party and the escort assigned for the duty, and proceeded at once to the completion of the duties assigned to me in articles one and two, which occupied me until the 26th, when I returned to San Miguel and reported to you in detail the result of my operations. In the discharge of these duties I measured and took the bearings of the road from Monterey to San Luis Obispo, observing also the latitude and longitude of the principal intermediate points, (a summary of which will be found in the margin,) and I examined thoroughly the ranges of the coast mountains to the east of the road, for the purpose of ascertaining if there could be any communication with the sea from a point between San Miguel and San Luis Obispo.

The road from San Miguel to San Luis Obispo, I found generally good; between Passo de Roblas, (a rancho upon the road about fifteen miles from San Miguel and Santa Margarita,) there are two or three places, however, where for a short distance the ground is constantly muddy, and there is a long and somewhat steep hill to be surmounted three miles west of San Luis Obispo, but these are difficulties of no particular importance, and the road may be, and is in fact at present, constantly travelled by vehicles of every description. The bay of San Simeon, in latitude  $35^{\circ} 40'$  north, is in appearance, a good roadstead, and is well protected from the north and west; but I was informed that both this and Estero bay, which is an indentation in the coast in latitude  $35^{\circ} 20'$  north, (nine miles north of San Luis Obispo,) are impracticable for anything but the smaller class of vessels, drawing but about eight or ten feet of water, and their entrances dangerous, and obstructed by rocks and sand-bars.

The bay of San Luis Obispo, on the contrary, I found highly recommended as easy of entrance, safe and commodious; but as I was obliged to obtain my information from residents of that place, which, with its few half ruined adobe buildings, they persist in considering a thriving city, I think it possible their opinions on the subject may be slightly prejudicial: The bay appears well, however, and is certainly sufficiently extensive. I observed a large brig lying at anchor inside, while there. As I had no instructions to that effect, and it would have occupied some time, I made no particular examination of these bays, or the intermediate coast, but I would respectfully suggest the propriety of having a general survey made of the bay of San Simeon, as the several opinions to which I listened on the subject I found materially conflicting. Between the valley of Santa Margarita and the coast, a distance of about twenty-one miles, there are two distinct ranges of mountains, which we examined north and south, for fifteen miles. They are steep, rocky and barren, or covered with shrubs, and no pass can be found through or over them to the coast, south of Santa Margarita.

From Paso de Roblas, however, I discovered a horse trail running almost due west, which, although it crosses two very declivitous hills and is seldom travelled, may, I think, be made a wagon road to San Simeon bay, should that be found of importance. At present, the residents of the ranchos in the vicinity of San Simeon and Estero bays, in travelling to Monterey, take the beach around by San Luis Obispo, and they appeared much surprised that we had succeeded in getting our mules over the mountains at

all. We found but three passes through the coast range to the west of the road between the latitude of San Miguel and that of San Luis. These are the two roads, the one from San Miguel, the other from San Luis, (via Paso de Roblas,) which, meeting at a point called Estrella, form the pass of San Miguel; and a road passing through a cañada in the hills about fifteen miles east of San Luis, called the Penoché Pass, which debouches near the head of Buena Vista lake, and might with a little labor be made an excellent wagon path. This last, in the event of San Luis becoming a large seaport and the probable discovery of rich mines upon the streams of the Tulare valley, may become of great importance.

Having finished my examination and obtained what information I could with regard to the Tulare valley, I returned with my party to the infantry encampments upon the 26th. We left San Miguel on the 28th, and crossing the river within three hundred yards of the mission, proceeded up a deep ravine in the hills through which we found a trail leading out upon the banks of a small stream, at a distance of two miles from the river. This stream has its rise near the summit of this portion of the range; it is about eighteen miles in length, and flowing in a south-west direction, empties into the Monterey river about a mile above the mission; with the exception of two or three springs in its bed, it is dry during the summer, and its valley forms the western portion of the pass; keeping the bank of the stream, we passed through a beautiful and fertile valley over an excellent road, arriving at Estrella early in the afternoon. The distance of this point from San Miguel we found by the viameter to be 12.77 miles; it is a beautiful spot covered with fine large oaks, and with a little cultivation the soil might be rendered extremely productive. There is a never failing spring of water near the bank of the creek, which we discovered and enlarged. Four valleys diverge from this point, through the south-west one of which leads the road from San Luis Obispo, entering from the main coast road near the rancho of "Paso de Roblas." The peculiarity of the divergence of these four valleys, and their corresponding ridges from this point resembling the rays of a star, has given it its very appropriate name—Estrella. We encamped here on the 28th, and leaving early the next morning proceeded through the pass, having previously sent forward a party of pioneers to make any repairs upon the road that might be found necessary. Keeping the valley of the stream for about six miles, bearing about east by north, we struck a narrow valley or cañada, through which we passed and emerged, after travelling about eleven miles, upon a plain about six miles in length by one or two in width. Crossing this plain, and still continuing to follow the course of the stream, we encamped about two p. m. at its source, a point about two miles from the summit of the range, and distant 16.83 miles by the viameter from Estrella. The road we found excellent, no repairs being required, the country barren, but little grass and a few stunted trees and shrubs growing on the margin of the stream. We observed many antelopes feeding in the cañadas upon our right and left, and killed a large rattlesnake while on the road. Near our encampment three distinct ridges of trap rock, about half a mile apart, run north and south through the hills as far as the eye can reach, presenting precisely the appearance of foundations of ruined walls. They vary in height from six inches to twenty feet, and are about six feet in thickness, but the most singular circumstance connected with them is the fact, *that they lie as nearly as possible in the plane of the true meridian.* We had found at San Miguel, by observation,

the magnetic variations to be  $15^{\circ} 28'$  east, and we now found the bearing of these ridges by the compass N.  $15^{\circ} 30'$  W. On the 30th we crossed the dividing ridge without difficulty, and arriving at a spring about five miles from the summit concluded to encamp, although we had made but six and three quarter miles by the viameter, as I feared we should find no more water until our arrival at the lake, which I thought at too great a distance for one day's march. The road we found very tolerable, but requiring some little repair, as the trail lay upon the side of the hills, which in some places are quite steep. Upon the whole I have no hesitation in saying that the road through the pass is quite as good, and needs as little repair as any portion of the road between Monterey and San Miguel of the same length, and is by far the best pass through the coast range of mountains not excepting Livermore's. Crossing a plain 6.04 miles by the viameter in width, upon the 1st of May we came to a small stream called *Dick's creek*, which, rising in the hills, flows south for about twelve miles, and loses itself in the sandy soil, forming during the rainy season quite an extensive march at its termination. Here we found good water, and the banks of the creek lined with wild oats, affording excellent grazing for the animals; I concluded therefore to encamp here, and proceed with my party to examine the trail leading in the direction of the lake, which I hoped to be able to reach and return from before sundown.

The escort having arrived and encamped in our vicinity, I started accordingly at about 10 a. m., and, crossing two ranges of low hills over a broad and smooth trail, arrived on the shore of the great Taché lake about 1 p. m. We were unable to get close to the water, in consequence of the tulé which environed it extending into the lake from two hundred yards to one-fourth of a mile, as far as the eye could reach. With a glass I could distinguish the timber at the north and the tulé at the south ends of the lake, the length of which I estimated at about twenty miles, but we could not distinctly make out the opposite or eastern shore. The peaks of the Sierra Nevada, at this place twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea and covered with perpetual snow, appeared in close proximity, and, rising far above the horizon, seemed to us to come down precipitously to the very edge of the water. The distance from our encampment to the lake we estimated at eighteen miles, or nearly a day's march, and as the country passed over was a perfect desert, and I found here no forage for the animals but wire grass, the water standing in the tulé marshes blackish, and no wood at all, I concluded to return immediately to camp, and in the morning to make a reconnoissance to the south of our position, for the purpose of finding a road to the southern extremity of the lake, which point I hoped to be able to reach in one day's march. An examination was accordingly made on the 2d, (a portion of the party being left in camp to cut wild oats, which I purposed to transport for forage, as it was evident we would find none upon the shores of the lake,) which terminated favorably, a good path being found through the southern extremity of the valley, and a trail leading apparently around the south of the lake. On the 3d we broke up our pleasant encampment at *Dick's creek*, and succeeded in reaching the southern part of the lake, where we encamped upon the sand for the night, having marched twenty-four and a quarter miles nearly in an easterly direction from the termination of the pass. We found here a ridge of sand about one hundred yards in width, and twelve feet above the level of the lake, which divides the water of the northern or Taché

from the bed (now nearly dry,) of the southern or Ton Taché lake. This last is little more than a very extensive swamp, covering the plain for fifteen miles in a southerly direction, and is about ten in width. It is filled with sloughs and small tulé lakes, and is of course impassible, except with the assistance of boats or rafts. The gradual receding of the water is distinctly marked by the ridges of decayed tulé upon its shore, and I was informed, and see no reason to disbelieve, that ten years ago it was nearly as extensive a sheet of water as the northern lake, having been gradually drained by the connecting sloughs, and its bed filled by the encroachments of the tulé. We crossed the slough on the 4th, being assisted with rafts of tulé by the rancheria of *Sin Taché* Indians, which we found established at this point. They were about one hundred in number, mostly clothed, and very friendly. The captain was an old Indian from the San Luis Obispo mission, and spoke Spanish indifferently well. Several of these Indians had bits of paper on which were written recommendations, signed by various persons, Spanish and American, by which they set great store, and eagerly exhibited for our examination.

I gave the captain a certificate that he had treated us kindly, and proceeding on over the desert, which we found very painful travelling for the animals, encamped on the southeast point of the lake, having made 12.64 miles. We found here another small rancheria called the Tinte Tachés, living, like the others, principally on fish and reptiles, and numbering about fifty. I had a conversation with the captain, who was quite an intelligent old fellow, originally belonging to the mission of San Miguel. He informed me that the Taché Indians, of which tribe his rancheria formed a portion, numbered about eight hundred in all, and were settled on the shores of the great lake, but their principal rancheria, containing about three hundred, is situated at its northwest extremity. They are all peaceable and friendly in their dispositions; and he assured me that they had never stolen or eaten horseflesh, which, judging from the meagre condition of himself and companions, I should think highly probable. We gave them some bread and a little sugar, with which they were highly gratified, and in the morning brought us some dried fish in return, which we accepted, but could make no use of. On the 5th, after marching 15.38 miles over a continuation of the barren sandy desert which had been our route for the last three days, we came to two or three cottonwood trees upon a small stream called Moore's creek, which empties near this point into the Ton Taché swamp, and here, the grass being very tolerable, we encamped. This is the first point on our route where good water, grass, or wood is to be found after leaving Dick's creek. It will therefore be seen that it is necessary for loaded wagons to transport, if travelling this route, sufficient grain to forage their teams for three days.

As I deemed it unnecessary for the infantry escort to accompany me through the desert to Buena Vista lake, which it now became necessary to examine, I proceeded up Moore's creek on the 6th for 12.20 miles, to a point about five miles west of the high peaks of the Sierra Nevada, where I found an excellent encampment, the creek at this point, and above among the hills, being lined with cottonwood and willows and some large oaks, the grass among which was growing luxuriously. Here Lieutenant Moore encamped his party to await my return from the Buena Vista lake, an examination of the country in the vicinity of which I thought might take five or six days.



On the 7th, taking my party, I ascended Moore's creek for about twenty miles among the hills, and found it a small rapid stream, about fifty feet wide, the water extremely cold from the melting of the snow upon the Sierra, and about two feet in depth. We discovered two small branches, upon each of which we observed the ruined remains of a large rancheria. The banks of the stream, as well as the hills surrounding, were heavily timbered with oaks, and three large species of pine.

Leaving Moore's creek we crossed through the ravines in the mountains to Tulé river, which runs in the same direction as the former stream, (a little north of east,) and at about eight or ten miles north of it, emptying into the southeastern extremity of the Taché lake. This stream has two branches, the upper portion of which is well timbered, but the banks are swampy near the lake, and for a long distance in the plain, the Tulé running up to within five miles of the hills. At this time the stream was about a hundred yards wide, from twelve to twenty feet deep, and very rapid, which last is a general characteristic of all the streams to the east of the lake. Upon its upper banks and their vicinity in the hills, plenty of large pines are found; lower down it is well timbered with the different species of oak, sycamore, cottonwood, and willow.

Ascending the stream about ten miles, we suddenly came upon a rancheria of Indians in a sequestered nook of the hills. We swam the river and were met upon the bank by all the men (sixty or seventy) belonging to the band. They received us favorably, although with evident distrust, and informed us that they belonged to the *T'hulimé* tribe. I had been previously told by the captain of the Ton Tachés that they were a hostile, thieving nation, and observed about their rancheria several horses and skeletons of animals, the appearance of which was calculated to corroborate this information. I directed the interpreter to state to them, that while they conducted themselves properly they would be treated with kindness and consideration, but that if detected in horse-stealing or other crimes against the whites, they would be sure to meet with the severest punishment; and that for the purpose of protecting their interests, as well as its own, the government was about to establish a post, and send soldiers to reside in their vicinity. They appeared to understand this perfectly; but I am inclined to think it made but little impression upon them, and I was unable to obtain from any of them the name of their captain, or the entire number of the tribe. After remaining about an hour at the rancheria we returned to camp, having asked two or three who spoke Spanish to accompany us; which invitation they declined. I suspected that nothing but our numbers and the well-armed condition of the party prevented our being treated with incivility.

We left Lieutenant Moore's encampment early on the 8th, taking with us but one pack-mule and the cart, which was necessary on account of the attached viameter, and proceeding S.S.W. thirty-four miles, encamped upon a small stream called Cottonwood creek, having crossed early in the day, at a distance of eight miles from Moore's encampment, another small stream which I called Gopher creek. The latter, I think, is dry during the summer months, but the former is undoubtedly constant during the year. Our route this day was over the most miserable country that I ever beheld. The soil was not only of the most wretched description, dry, powdery and decomposed, but was everywhere burrowed by gophers, and a small animal resembling a common house-rat, which I had never seen

before, of a whitish grey color, short round body, and very strong bony head. These animals are innumerable; though what they subsist upon I cannot conceive, for there was little or no vegetation. Their holes and burrows, into which a horse sinks to his knees at almost every step, render their travelling difficult and dangerous. The low hills south of Gopher creek extend about eight miles into the plain, their summit being about on the same level as the plain between that stream and Moore's creek, and are singularly intersected by valleys running nearly south and north, which are crossed by other numerous small valleys running nearly east and west, thus dividing the whole of this portion of the valley into blocks of hills about a quarter of a mile square, and from one hundred to three hundred feet in height. In riding through these valleys the country presents the appearance of a large city which has been partially overwhelmed by the ashes of volcanic eruptions, which resemblance is heightened by the continual cropping out of upright strata of clay from the loose soil of the hills, resembling exactly the ruined walls of adobe houses.

On the 9th we arrived, after a march of thirteen miles, upon the north bank of the Kern river, a very broad and deep stream with a current of six miles an hour, which, rising high up in the Sierra Nevada, discharges itself by two mouths into Buena Vista lake near its northern extremity. Three large sloughs also make out from the river near its mouth and form an extensive swamp in the plain upon the north bank of the lake. We found the river impassable with animals, and had not time to make a sufficient raft, I therefore concluded to examine its northern bank on the tenth, and proceed to the northern extremity of the lake for the purpose of ascertaining its latitude and longitude, as well as its general character and appearance.

Buena Vista lake is a sheet of water about ten miles in length and from four to six miles in width; it lies about eight miles from the head of the valley formed by the junction of the ridges of the coast range and Sierra Nevada. Like the other bodies of water in the valley it is nearly surrounded with tulé, and upon its north and east banks there is found a heavy growth of willows. A slough some sixty miles in length, connects it with the swamps and bodies of standing water in the bed of the Ton Taché, and through them with the great northern lake. The surrounding country is sterile and unproductive when not an absolute swamp, with the exception of that portion lying immediately at the head of the valley, and among the ridges of the surrounding hills, where are some extremely fertile and well timbered spots, two of which are now occupied and cultivated as ranches or farms. Nothing can be conceived more inappropriate than its name, for no place can be imagined more forlorn or desolate in aspect. Even at the early season of our visit, clouds of the most venomous mosquitoes tormented us during the day, and goaded us to madness during the night; and we found here scorpions, centipedes, and a small but extremely poisonous rattlesnake about eighteen inches in length, reptiles which we had not before noticed in the valley, and which with the gophers and ground rats are the only denizens of this unpleasant and uninhabited spot. A road from Los Angeles, passing through what is called the Tejon, at the head of the valley, crosses Kern river about thirteen miles above its junction with the lake, and continues through the valley to the eastward of the lakes, as far north as the mining district upon the Stanislaus river. On the 11th we started on our return to Moore's creek, taking a path about fifteen miles west of that we had followed in leaving, for the purpose of more thoroughly examining the country. We

found it, however, of precisely the same character throughout—barren, decomposed soil, and no trace of vegetation but a few straggling artemisias, except upon the margin of the creeks. Gopher creek we found entirely dry at the lower point of crossing, its shallow stream sinking in the sandy soil some eight or ten miles above. We reached Lieutenant Moore's encampment about four o'clock p. m., on the 12th, somewhat fatigued and excessively hungry after our disagreeable march; for in the hurry of leaving our pork and coffee had been forgotten, and as we had seen no game upon the road, we were obliged for four days to subsist entirely upon the hard bread, with which, reduced to a fine powder by its jolting on the mule, we made with water a species of poultice, which had served as an indifferent palliative to the cravings of our appetites.

We immediately set about making preparations for our march to the north, and having no reason to apprehend danger from the Indians, I concluded to take but six of Lieutenant Moore's command with me as an escort, and those but to King river, intending to dispense with the services of the escort entirely from that point. But on arriving at Tulé river, which, at the point of crossing we found on the 13th to be but 7·16 miles from Moore's creek, I met a Mr. Shumway, who, with a single Indian, was travelling south to establish a ferry upon Kern river, and he informed me that there was not the slightest danger to be apprehended upon the route, the Indians being all friendly; he, with a single companion, having travelled through them from the Mariposa river, I deemed it unnecessary to require the services of an escort beyond this point. Accordingly, after sending back to the encampments for the wagon floats, which were required in crossing the river, being here about one hundred and fifty feet in width and extremely rapid, and getting my party safely upon the northern bank, Lieutenant Moore returned with his party to their encampment and took up their line of march for Monterey. The country had improved much in aspect from the time of leaving Moore's creek, and upon Tulé river; and during our march upon the 14th, we passed over rich tracts of arable land, fertile with every description of grass, and covered in many places with a fine growth of heavy oak timber. I observed that Tulé river might be easily bridged, it being then at its highest stage and not subject to overflow, and upon its banks could be found plenty of timber available for the purpose, while the rocky hills about five miles above the crossing would furnish stone for the abutments and a pier, which last could be erected upon a small island of hard gravel, covered at present with willows, and situated at this point near the middle of the stream. Upon the 14th we arrived at the river Frances, a large stream nineteen miles to the north of the Tulé. This stream flows nearly west from the hills and empties into the Taché lake about twenty miles north of its south-eastern extremity. It is, at the point upon which we arrived, divided into five branches or sloughs, four of which separate from the main river, about five miles above, joining again from one to ten miles below, while the southern branch has a separate and distinct course from the Sierra, and joins the main stream in the marshy ground near its junction with the lake. The country, eight miles in length by six in width, contained between these branches, is a beautiful, smooth, level plain, covered with clover of different kinds and high grass, and thickly shaded by one continuous grove of oaks of a larger and finer description than any I have seen in the country.

At this time each of the creeks was at its height; they are deep and

rapid, and four of them much wider than the Tulé river. Their beds were also obstructed with floating and sunken timber previously felled for bridges, which the high stage of the water rendered useless; and we would have found it difficult to cross had it not been for the kind assistance of the neighboring Indians who flocked to meet us, and eagerly went to work carrying instruments and other property upon their heads, and swimming the animals and the little cart across without the slightest accident occurring.

These poor people accompanied us from creek to creek, assisting us cheerfully at each crossing, and in return for their kindness I gave them a portion of our provisions and some dirty shirts, stockings and worn-out boots which they prized as articles of exceeding luxury, and accepted with vast satisfaction. There are two large rancherias on the river numbering together about four hundred; they are, however, apparently quite separate and distinct, one occupying the three southern, the other the two-northern branches. Nothing could exceed the kindness and hospitality with which they treated us, and I gave the captain certificates to that effect, which they will undoubtedly present to all future passers by. The name of the first rancheria, as nearly as I could write it from their pronunciation, is He-ame-e-tahs; their captain, De-e-jah. The second rancheria is the Cowees; their captain, Francisco, an old mission Indian from San Luis Obispo. They called the river Ee-dek, but I think the name of Frances much more euphonious. There were many mission Indians among them, some from the old mission of San Juan, some from San Lorenzo, but mostly from San Miguel and San Luis Obispo. All these spoke Spanish a little. They appeared remarkably healthy, and though by no means beautiful, were comparatively well favored. The soil between the creeks being so well watered and shaded, is naturally of the richest description; as an evidence of which I may mention that I observed poles of willow stuck in the ground by Indians as parts of rabbit traps, which had taken root and sprouted into trees. The distance of the first or *Pyramid* creek (so called from the remarkable shape of a hill near which it rises) to the second is ninety-eight hundredths of a mile; from the second to the third, one mile; between the third and fourth, the last of which is the main stream, 2.81 miles, and between the fourth and fifth eighty-five hundredths of a mile.

The third, or main stream, and the fourth are the widest and most difficult of crossing; the second and fifth I believe to be dry during the summer, but they may all be very easily bridged permanently, every material being ready on the spot. I ascertained from the Indians by inquiry that they were not subject to periodical sickness, and they communicated to me much interesting, and I believe reliable information regarding their numbers, manners and customs, and those of the other tribes of which they had any knowledge. The 15th and 16th were occupied in crossing the creeks, which was a matter of labor and difficulty to accomplish, and in conducting an examination of the country in their vicinity. On the 17th, bidding adieu to our friends, the Cowees, we started for King river; our course lay over a barren sandy plain, interspersed here and there with spots of vegetation, but in general a perfect contrast to the rich soil upon the river Frances. About six miles from the fifth creek we observed four isolated hills, or buttes, about six hundred feet high, two of them ranging nearly north and south, and about two miles apart; the other two about three miles further to the east. At the first of these there is a constant spring of water, and on the eastern side of the hill, about three hundred yards from the spring, a

deep circular excavation or shaft, with the remains of an old windlass lying in its vicinity. We were somewhat puzzled to account for this trace of human labor at such a distance from any settlement; but I presume it to be the remains of a well, dug many years ago by the Spanish soldiers of the missions, who, we know, were accustomed to make excursions into these plains for the laudable purpose of seizing upon and christianizing their wild inhabitants. We arrived upon the banks of King river about five p. m., having travelled 23.66 miles in a direct line across the plain. We found here two enterprising men, named Jones and Rider, who with much difficulty had got a whale-boat up to this point, and stretching a strong rope across the river, had established a ferry. They informed us that there was another ferry about five miles above them, kept by a man named Hampton, who, with another man and themselves, formed the entire population of that part of the country. We encamped at their ferry, and crossing the party upon the 18th, I took two or three men and rode up the northern bank about fifteen miles to examine the river, and the character of the country in its vicinity.

King river is the largest stream in the valley, at this time about three hundred yards wide, with a rapid current and the water cold as ice. It is about sixty miles in length, rising in two branches high up in the Sierra, which, uniting about forty miles from its mouth, flow in a southwest direction through the hills and valley, and empty into the Taché lake at its northeast extremity. Its banks are high and well timbered, and the country in its immediate vicinity is apparently fertile. It forms five sloughs like the Frances, but they are much wider, and the country between them is swampy and difficult of access. There are no less than seventeen rancherias of Indians upon this river, numbering in all, probably about three thousand, including those situated among the hills in the vicinity. Of these, those living upon the lower part of the river are friendly and well disposed towards the whites; those high up among the hills are entirely ignorant, treacherous, and mischievous. I was informed by Colonel Hampton, at the upper ferry, that the Cho-e-minee rancheria, situated in his vicinity, and numbering about ninety warriors, had been quite troublesome of late, using his horses without permission, and in one instance attempting to take his boat to ferry over a party of Sonorans. I thought his isolated position, surrounded by these mischievous savages, one of considerable danger, but he appeared to feel no apprehension of their committing any overt act of hostility.

On my return to the encampment I found a party of Indians, armed with bows and arrows, had passed down upon the southern bank, stopping at the ferryman's hut, and telling the occupants that they must leave that part of the country in four days. The ferrymen were not at all alarmed, however, and I think that our presence, and the knowledge that a body of troops were soon to be stationed in their neighborhood, had a very salutary restraining effect upon these Indians, who, I believe, would become exceedingly troublesome if they had no dread of the consequences. It was this band that murdered Garner and his companions in 1849. We left the ferry on the 19th, and travelling south west for 19.84 miles encamped on the edge of a swamp at a point about three miles above the mouth of King river and immediately opposite the No-tanto village. As this point had been indicated in my instructions for examination as a suitable site for a military post, I was anxious to cross the river and visit it, but was informed by the Indians, a large body of whom swam across to our encampment,

that all the country in the vicinity was overflowed, and that it would be impossible to cross, even if we were to construct balsas of tulé, owing to the rapidity of the current. It was evident enough that the country was overflowed, and as I found it impossible for anything but an Indian to get even to the bank of the river, I was reluctantly obliged to give up any idea of crossing at this point. I could see enough of the country, however, upon the other side to satisfy myself that it would be a very unpleasant place for anything but Indians to occupy, and the fact of our not being able to get at it at all would be a sufficient proof of its non-eligibility in a military point of view. The No-tantoes are the finest looking Indians I have met with in the valley. All that came over to our encampment were large well built athletic men, nearly six feet high, and their physiognomy struck me as less repulsive than that of the Tachés and other Indians whom we had seen. Their captain was an old Indian named Antonio. He had certificates of recommendation from Colonel Mason and others, which, by his friendly appearance and offers of assistance to the extent of his abilities, appeared to be well merited. He stated the number of No-tantoes at about three hundred, and informed us that he had never seen the waters so high as they had risen this season. I ascertained from him that the months of August and September are a very sickly period at this point; and was afterwards satisfied of this from information that I received from a respectable man who had crossed King river in the month of August at the village, and who found its inhabitants prostrated by sickness to such an extent that he could get no assistance from them in crossing.

On the 20th we marched 24.92 miles in a devious course with the object of striking the "Sanjon de San Jose," which is a slough connecting the river San Joaquin with the Taché lake, but were unable to get further on account of the mire, the ground between the lake and the San Joaquin being entirely cut up by small sloughs which had overflowed in every direction, making the country a perfect swamp, which I found it a matter of great difficulty to cross. We saw numerous bands of wild horses, numbering in all more than a thousand; they were at some distance, but their appearance rendered me extremely anxious for the safety of my animals, which would infallibly have been lost if they could have broken loose and joined them, as they appeared much inclined to do. We were engaged on the 21st, 22d and 23d in getting through the mire, crossing no less than eight distinct sloughs, one of which we were obliged to raft over, before arriving at the Sanjon. In all of these sloughs a strong current was running southwest, or from the San Joaquin river to the lake. The country over which we passed between these sloughs was miserable in the extreme, and our animals suffered terribly for want of grass. There being no wood upon the plain except an occasional willow on the largest slough we could make no fires, and were consequently obliged to return to bread and water, a diet which, though simple in the extreme, I somewhat preferred to the raw salt pork on which the men luxuriated. The "Sanjon de San Jose" is a large and deep slough about forty miles in length, connecting the waters of the Taché lake with the San Joaquin river, with which it unites at its great southern bend. At this time it was about two hundred and forty feet in width, and with an extremely slow current setting towards the river. I do not think it possible to communicate directly with the lake through this slough. An attempt had been made a week or two previous to our arrival by a party of men in a whale-boat, who examined it for twenty or thirty miles, and found it

branching off into innumerable smaller sloughs, which intersected the Tule swamp in every direction. They also reported that there was a fall of water about six or eight feet at this point. I think it highly probable that there may be a rapid near the mouth of the slough, but should find it difficult to account for a direct fall of that height; and as I could hear of no one else who had seen it, although I met with many who had crossed the Sanjon in every direction during the dry season, I am inclined to disbelieve in its existence. The whole country for forty miles in extent in a southerly direction by ten in width, between the San Joaquin river and the Taché lake, is, during the rainy season and succeeding months until the middle of July, a vast swamp everywhere intersected by sloughs, which are deep, miry and dangerous. A wagon road therefore crossing the Sanjon at any point is impracticable, as it could not by any possibility be travelled more than three months in the year. I regret that we were unable to follow up the Sanjon to the lake, but this was utterly impossible. We found that we could not proceed a quarter of a mile in either direction without getting hopelessly mired, and as the water was fast rising, we could not get back over the swamp which we had already with great exertion and difficulty crossed. There was neither wood nor grass where we struck the slough, and though without any materials for building a raft, it became necessary to cross it immediately. In this emergency a man of my party volunteered to swim the Sanjon, and proceed on foot to the nearest ferry upon the river San Joaquin for the purpose of procuring a boat. This course was adopted and the boat brought up by a Mr. Bridger from the upper ferry at the southern bend of the river, arriving that evening. We succeeded in crossing the animals and arriving at the high land upon the bend early upon the 24th.

The river San Joaquin, rising in the spurs of the Sierra Nevada, flows in a southwest direction for about sixty miles to a point, where making a great bend of over 90° it changes its course to the northwest, emptying finally into Suisun bay. At the time of our arrival its waters were at their highest stage; the back water from the river had filled the innumerable sloughs extending from its banks in every direction across the valley. And I was informed by parties arriving at the ferry in boats on their way to the mines, that the whole country to the north was overflowed; and that large numbers of men and animals were encamping upon the plains, finding it impossible to proceed further by land and being unable to cross the river. The point upon which we were encamped at the southern bend, was about ten feet above the level of the stream, and for two miles in extent north and south was not overflowed. A road from the debouche of the passes of Santa Anna and Pacheco, distant about twenty-five miles, might therefore, crossing here, be made available as a means of communication with the eastern side of the lake, and the streams flowing into it at any season of the year. At this time the river at this point was about two hundred yards wide and from ten to twenty feet in depth, but during the dry season it falls from four to two and a half feet. I think, however, that a large boat could ascend the river *to the bend* during nine months in the year; its further progress would be prevented at any time by the sand bar formed by the confluence of the Sanjon, which extends across the bed of the river and is covered by about two feet of water at its highest stages.

Finding it impossible to proceed further down the valley with advantage, I started upon the 27th from the San Joaquin to the south, skirting the

western coast of the Taché lake on my return march. I had previously sent two men to Monterey with orders to proceed through the pass of Santa Anna, (of which no examination has yet been made,) and to ascertain whether or not a wagon road might be made through it.

At a distance of twenty-two miles from the San Joaquin, we crossed the dry bed of a stream flowing during the rainy season from the coast range to the lake, upon the banks of which are found a few cottonwood trees and a little grass; but with this exception the whole valley south of the bend between the coast range and the Taché lake we found a miserable barren, sandy desert, with no vegetation but a few straggling artemisias, and no inhabitants but attenuated rabbits and gophers. We encamped upon a slough connecting with the Sanjon upon the 28th, where I observed some singular ducks of a light red or claret color, with a white bill and short black tail, and others of brilliant black plumage with red bill and feet, resembling very much turkey-buzzards in their general appearance. I was anxious to obtain some specimens of these birds, but although we shot several we were unable to get them from the water. We encamped upon the shore of the lake upon the 29th, having made 17.32 miles and on the 30th reached the debouche of the pass of San Miguel having travelled 24.60 miles, passing on our route the rancheria of the Tinta Tachés, situated upon the northeast extremity of the lake and containing about two hundred and fifty or three hundred inhabitants. A few of them visited our encampment, two of whom could speak Spanish, and left well pleased with the treatment they received. We took up our line of march for Monterey by the same route that we had pursued in coming out upon the 31st, and arrived there without incident upon Saturday the 8th of June.

The Tularé valley, from the mouth of the Mariposa to the Tejon pass at its head, is about one hundred and twenty miles in extent, and varies from eight to one hundred miles in width. With the exception of a strip of fertile land upon the rivers emptying with the lakes from the east, it is little better than a desert. The soil is generally dry, decomposed and incapable of cultivation, and the vegetation, consisting of artemisias and wild sage, is extremely sparse. The only point in the whole valley which struck me as at all suitable for a military post was the small portion of interval land contained by the five creeks of the river Frances. A position here would be central, being easy of communication with King river to the north and with Kern river to the south, upon which two streams and their tributaries are situated the greater number of Indian rancherias in the valley. The land is excellent for cultivation, well timbered, and abundance of building material may be found in the vicinity, either stone or heavy pine and oak timber. A road leading through the Tejon pass from Los Angeles, and intersecting the emigrant trail through Walker's pass near Kern river, passes directly through this point to the northern mines of the San Joaquin valley. This road will undoubtedly be much travelled when brought into notice, and the post being established at this point, will contribute much to its safety and protection. The post could be supplied by wagons through the pass of San Miguel, either from San Luis Obispo or Monterey, or by a wagon road from Monterey through the pass of Pacheco or Santa Anna, crossing the San Joaquin at its southern bend, and King river at the lower ferry.

From the information regarding the character of the San Joaquin between Stockton and the southern bend, I have no doubt that it may be



navigated by small steamboats to the latter points, during eight or nine months in the year. In this case, this would be by all means the most desirable route of communication, as a depot might be established upon the high land at the southern bend, which would be but two short days' journey from the post. I should judge that the lake, from the difficulty of getting to its shores, and the swamps and sloughs that everywhere environ it, could never be made available as a means of communication, though, if this were possible, a ferry upon its waters would shorten the distance to its east bank by over fifty miles. The whole number of Indians in the valley, as near as I can judge, is about four thousand. These are by no means connected with each other; the Rancherias upon the southern rivers being in fact ignorant of the existence of those situated further to the north. Those who have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the whites, are friendly and well-disposed; the others, although ignorant, mischievous and perhaps maliciously inclined, may easily be kept in subjection by a small force, and by kind treatment. I have the honor to enclose a map and copy of the valley, showing the various routes, and the geographical position of the various points referred to in this report; also two tables, one of latitudes and longitudes, the other of distances, as measured by the viameter.

I am, sir, with high respect, your obedient servant,

GEO. H. DERBY,

*Brevet First Lieutenant Topographical Engineers.*

Major E. R. S. CANBY,

*Adjutant General tenth military department.*

*Table of Geographical positions on the route pursued by Lieutenant G. H. Derby, in the reconnoissance of the Tulare plains, April and May, 1850.*

Places of observation.	North latitude.	Long. west of Greenwich.	Authorities.
San Miguel.....	35 38 00	120 27 00	Lieut. G. H. Derby....
Santa Margarita.....	35 18 22	120 11 00	.....do.....
Estrella.....	35 36 00	120 13 00	.....do.....
Moore's Creek.....	35 46 43	.....	.....do.....
Gopher Creek.....	35 40 30	.....	.....do.....
Cottonwood Creek.....	35 26 41	.....	.....do.....
Kern River.....	35 18 00	.....	.....do.....
West point of Buena Vista Lake.	35 08 23	.....	.....do.....
Tulé River.....	35 50 30	119 07 00	.....do.....
Frances River.....	36 15 00	119 14 00	.....do.....
King River (Jones's Ferry).....	36 24 47	119 28 00	.....do.....
Sanjon de San Jose.....	.....	120 04 00	.....do.....
West point of Taché Lake.....	36 48 00	119 49 18	.....do.....

GEO. H. DERBY,

*Bt. First Lieutenant Top. Eng. 10th Military Department.*

*Table of distances on the route pursued by Lieutenant G. H. Derby, in the reconnoissance of the Tulare plain, April and May, 1850.*

	Miles.	Miles.
From Monterey to the Toros Ranch.....	.....	12.00
Rancho de Guadalupe.....	9.00	21.00
Rancho de Buena Vista.....	8.00	29.00
Soledad.....	12.80	41.80
Camp near San Benitia.....	25.81	67.61
Camp near Ojitas.....	26.25	93.86
San Miguel.....	29.61	123.47
Santa Margarita.....	31.25	154.72
San Louis Obispo.....	10.00	164.72
From San Miguel to Estrella.....	12.75	136.22
Dick's creek encampment.....	29.51	165.73
Outlet of Ton Taché Lake.....	30.04	195.77
Moore's Creek (upper camp).....	34.46	230.23
Cottonwood Creek.....	24.27	264.50
Kern River.....	12.00	276.50
North point of Buena Vista Lake.....	16.80	293.30
From Moores' Creek to Tulé River.....	7.16	237.39
Frances River (west side of slough).....	24.93	262.32
King River (Jones' Ferry).....	23.26	285.58