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Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting the report of Colonel Johnston's survey of the southern boundary line of Kansas.

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SOUTHERN BOUNDARY LINE OF KANSAS.

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING

*The report of Colonel Johnston's survey of the southern boundary line of Kansas.*

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APRIL 16, 1858.—Ordered to be printed, together with the accompanying paper and map.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
*Washington, April 15, 1858.*

SIR: In compliance with so much of the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 16th ultimo, which calls for a copy of the report of the survey of the southern boundary line of the Territory of Kansas, and the map accompanying the same, I have the honor to transmit herewith the report and map called for by the resolution.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN B. FLOYD,  
*Secretary of War.*

HON. JAMES L. ORR,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

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WASHINGTON CITY, D. C., *February 13, 1858.*

SIR: Your letter of the 5th of May, 1857, directing me to ascertain the most practicable route for a railroad from the initial point of the boundary of Kansas to the Rio Grande, was received on the 8th of September.

The survey of the boundary line was finished on the 10th, but the necessity of going nearly 80 miles towards Fort Leavenworth to meet the supply of provisions, which should have been delivered near the end of the line on the 31st of August, delayed me until the 14th. This left little more time than the march to Fort Leavenworth required.

As the Canadian flows in a very deep cañon from the Santa Fé road to the mouth of the Pajarito, it seemed to me that such examinations only were necessary as would enable me to compare a route near the

boundary of Kansas, to and along the Santa Fé road, with one striking the Canadian near the 99th meridian, and following that described by Captains Simpson and Whipple, Topographical Engineers, to the Rio Grande—the Topographical Bureau to furnish information of the western part of each.

Previous reconnaissances had given me reason to think the line of country 20 or 30 miles south of the 37th parallel more favorable than that along it, and that the spring known as the Rabbit Ear was the head of the north fork of the Canadian. I therefore went to that spring, about 13 miles within New Mexico, on the Santa Fé road, and thence turned eastwardly, along the course indicated by the red line on the map, to the Cimaron. From that point I went, with a company of cavalry, to the bend of the Canadian, near the 99th meridian, to examine the country, thence to the Missouri line. Captain Wood, with the rest of the party, was instructed to continue the examination of the first line to the Salt plain, thence along the Little Arkansas to the main river, and from it, by the head of the south branch of the Little Verdigris, to the initial point.

The mules were so reduced by the cathartic properties of the water and want of food—for the grass had been destroyed by the buffalo—that Captain Wood was compelled, about midway between the Salt plain and the Arkansas, to turn to the north to the beaten road. This route lies along or near the north fork of the Canadian, from its head near the Santa Fé road to the 100th meridian, then strikes, in 11 miles, the head of Buffalo creek, which it follows 30 miles to its mouth in the Cimaron. For 20 miles from the Santa Fé road the valley is narrow and water abundant, with wood enough for travellers, but for the next 80 miles it is without running water; there are, however, occasional pools.

In all the valley below there is a bold stream of good water, and in the last 30 miles occasional clumps of cotton-wood trees. The summit between this valley and that of the Cimaron is about 200 feet above the first, and 300 feet above the second; the first height to be overcome in 10, the other in 30 miles. The country between the Cimaron and the Salt plain, 65 miles, is undulating. The greatest elevation 150 feet above the Cimaron. From the Salt plain to the Arkansas the valley of the Little Arkansas is followed. Between the Arkansas and Verdigris the country is somewhat broken, but the valleys broad and rich, and the hills generally covered with post oak and black jack, with larger timber along the water-courses. Excellent building stone is very abundant, too; it is altogether a beautiful district. From the Verdigris to the Missouri line the country is rich, rolling prairie; the principal streams, however, are lined with heavy timber.

As far as construction is concerned, this route is a good one, compared with others between the same meridians. It is about 520 miles from the Missouri line to the Rabbit Ear; for half that distance grading would cost almost nothing. Supplies of water and building stone may be easily obtained; on this side of the Arkansas there is abundance of timber. Beyond the Little Arkansas, however, the country is sterile and destitute of timber, and therefore unfit for settlement. The pro-

file on the map is that of this route; the western portion copied from that of Dr. Wislizenus; the measurements were barometrical.

On the other route, the country east of the Arkansas is like that further north, just described, but even more fertile and better wooded. About three-fifths of the distance from the Arkansas to the Canadian is over rolling prairie, the soil good, small water-courses, lined with wood, numerous. The rest of the distance is over three broad ridges covered with post oak and black jack; the first north of the red fork, the second between that stream and the north fork of the Canadian, and the third between the two branches of that river. This route is shorter than the other, and in almost every respect better. It has especially the advantage of passing through or near a much greater quantity of arable land and wood.

I had neither time nor instruments for such surveys as would have enabled me to make estimates; nor a second barometer to determine the general profile of the southern route—that marked with yellow on the map.

When the southwestern Missouri railroad shall be in operation to Springfield, either of these routes to New Mexico will be far preferable to that now used. Either will be shorter, quicker, and better supplied with grass, water and wood. That by the Canadian will have the advantage, in all these respects, over both the others. It may also be used in winter. It can be more easily protected, too. The southwestern district of Missouri can furnish large supplies of flour, bacon and forage; and the Creeks and Cherokees, good and cheap beef. A body of cavalry could be maintained as well and economically near this part of the Missouri line as on any other portion of the western frontier. There are good locations for infantry posts on the Arkansas, both branches of the Canadian, and the Washita.

The route near the Kansas line might now be advantageously used (in summer) by the returning merchant trains to bring salt to Missouri. There is, where it crosses the Cimaron, a natural and probably annual formation of salt. It was visited by Captain Boon, 2d dragoons, in 1843, and was pointed out to me by my excellent guide, James Conner, Delaware chief. I saw it on the 22d and 23d of July, and am confident that there were then at the place at least 600 acres of crystallized salt, generally about two, but in one locality six or eight inches thick. There was a similar, but less extensive, formation in the Cimaron where the line crossed it, near twenty miles above, and several intermediate ones.

When we returned (October 4) it had been swept away or melted by the long and heavy rains of July and August—the rainy season in that and the country above.

Your obedient servant,

J. E. JOHNSTON,  
*Lieutenant Colonel, 1st Cavalry.*

HON. JOHN B. FLOYD,  
*Secretary of War.*