

AUBRY (AUBREY) FRANCOIS, XAVIER

1824-1854

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AUBRY (AUBREY), FRANCOIS XAVIER, born at Maskinonge, a village on the St. Lawrence River in Western Quebec, Canada, December 4, 1824; went to Independence, Missouri as a young man and by 1847 had commenced freighting across the plains to Santa Fe. He made a reputation for quick trips between the two places, his method being to leave horses along the route for use when traveling in the opposite direction. The first such trip began at Independence in March, 1848. He returned in 8 days, leaving Santa Fe on May 19. The next year he left Santa Fe on September 12, and by using six horses left with various caravans along the trail, arrived in Santa Fe on the seventh day, which earned him the sobriquet of "Skimmer of the Plains".

Aubry left Santa Fe in December, 1852, with 5,000 sheep which he herded down the Rio Grande to the headwaters of the Gila, down that stream to its mouth and thence into California, where he sold them at great profits. On the return trip from San Francisco, with 12 Americans and 6 Mexicans, he went by the Tejon Pass to the Mohave River and thence eastward to the Colorado River which they crossed on July 23, 1853, probably about 20 miles above the mouth of the Bill Williams River. They left the Colorado on July 30 and went on an easterly course north of the Bill Williams. Beginning on August 3, they were harrassed by Indians who shot arrows at them almost every day; they then traveled south eastward, and on August 10 crossed "a stream of good water, with timber along its course which is evidently a tributary of the Gila" (the Hassayampa). His diary states that on August 13:

We here met Indians, who professed to be very friendly, with papers of recommendation from the commanding officer of Fort Yuma, on the Gila trail.

August 14th.--We left early, and after traveling 5 miles in an eastern direction, stopped to breakfast near an Indian camp of Garroteros (Apaches). They professed friendship but having no faith in their professions, I selected a camp on the top of a small hill, which would give us advantage in case of a fight. All went on well until our mules were saddled, and we were ready to start, when, at a given signal, some 40 or 50 Indians, apparently unarmed, and accompanied by their squaws, children and babies, (tied to boards,) in their arms, very suddenly charged upon us, and attempted to destroy the whole party with clubs and rocks.

The signal of attack was the taking of my hand in farewell by a chief, which he held with all his strength. So soon as these first Indians commenced the fight about two hundred more rushed from behind a hill and brush, and charged upon us with clubs, bows and arrows. I thought, for a few minutes, that our party must necessarily be destroyed; but some of us having disengaged ourselves, we shot them down so fast with our Colt's revolvers, that we soon produced confusion among them, and put them to flight. We owe our lives to these firearms, the best ever invented, and now brought, by successive improvements, to a state of perfection.

Mr. Hendry, an American, and Francisco Guzman, a New Mexican, greatly distinguished themselves.

Twelve of us, just two-thirds of our party, were severely wounded. I, among the rest, was wounded in six places. Abner Adair, I fear, is dangerously injured. It was a very great satisfaction to me to find that none of my men were killed, nor any of the animals lost. We bled very much from our numerous wounds; but the blood and bodies of the Indians covered the ground for many yards around us. We killed over twenty-five, and wounded more. The bows and arrows that we captured and destroyed, would have more than filled a large wagon.

Before the attack commenced, the squaws kept the clubs which were from 18 to 24 inches long, concealed in deer skins about their children. When put to flight,

they threw their babes down into a deep brushy gulley, near at hand, by which many of them must have been killed. This is the first time I ever met with a war party of Indians accompanied by their wives and children. The presence of the latter was evidently the removal from our minds all suspicion of foul play on their part. I was never before in so perilous a condition with a party in all my life. On this occasion, which will be the last, I imprudently gave my right hand, in parting to the Indian Chief. The left must answer for leave taking hereafter.

This fight took place somewhere in what is now southern Yavapai or northern Maricopa County; they crossed the Verde on August 21 which is described as:

A large stream which is, no doubt, a branch of the Gila. The mountains to the north of us are very rough, and without timber. There is no grass on the stream, which is 30 yards wide, with three feet of water in the channel. Its course is from north to south.

Two days later they "struck a stream of good water, but without grass or timber" (Tonto Creek) east of which they "met with the Apaches, 'Tontos" and later other Indians on August 22:

Who, I think, are not Apaches Tontos, as they do not speak any Spanish, and refuse to answer our questions. We obtained from them over fifteen hundred dollars worth of gold for a few old articles of clothing. The Indians use gold bullets for their guns. They are different sizes and each Indian has a pouch of them. We saw an Indian load his gun with one large and three small bullets to shoot a rabbit.

From there they traveled along the northern slope of the White Mountains, crossed the Little Colorado and arrived at Zuni on September 6 and in Albuquerque on September 10, 1853; on over half of the journey, they subsisted on mule meat and also:

my inestimable mare Dolly, who has so often, by her speed, saved me from death at the hands of the Indians. Being wounded some days ago by the Garroteros, she gave out, and we are now subsisting upon her flesh.

Late in 1853 Aubry again went to California with sheep via the Gila route and left San Jose for the return trip on July 6, 1854; the party consisted of 60 men and included Miguel Antonio Otero, Francisco Peres and J. Francisco Chaves, all three of whom afterwards served as Delegate to Congress from New Mexico; his journal indicates that, after crossing the Colorado River on July 31 near the same place as the previous year, the party traveled eastward in a more northerly direction than before since on August 8 (probably in the vicinity of Bill Williams Mountain) they came to the trail made by the expedition under Lieutenant A. W. Whipple, which went westward along the 35th parallel early in January of that year; two days later they struck the Little Colorado River 8 miles below the Great Falls, followed that stream eastward for three days and thence to Zuni, arriving on August 17, 1854; the party was so large and well armed that it was not molested by the Indians at any time during the journey.

Immediately on his arrival at Santa Fe on August 20, 1854, he went to a bar for a drink where he met Richard Hanson Weightman, former publisher of Amigo del Pais In Albuquerque; they quarreled about an article in that newspaper to which Aubry objected and Weightman threw a tumbler of liquor in his face; Aubry drew a five shooter from his belt, one barrel of which prematurely exploded,

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the bullet going into the ceiling; Weightman drew a Bowie knife and stabbed him so that he died soon afterwards.

Places named for him in Arizona are Aubrey Valley and Cliffs in Northern Mohave County, Aubrey Peak and the Aubrey hills in the southern part of that County, and the town of Aubry or Aubrey Landing on the north bank of the Bill Williams Fork where that stream empties into the Colorado River; the town was established in August 4, 1864 and a Post Office on October 2, 1866; steamboat navigation on the Colorado River having ceased, the Post Office was discontinued on November 3, 1886.

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