Bonnells Observations

1838 - 9 -

Copied by W. J. Bollaert
1844

Had the weather been propitious I had intended visiting part of N. & N. W. Texas by land — but will offer a few remarks relating to the N. Eastern part of Texas extracted from the notes made by Mr. Bonnell. commencing in July 1838. made during a a tour by order of the Government relative to the different tribes of Indians, & extracts from notes of an opposite side another tour in Novr. 1838. journeying N. W. & N. and then Easterly —

1838

1838. July 12 Left Houston. through a 2 & 3 rate soil . . . . . 22 miles
to Buckhannons on a branch of White Oak Bayou.

13. To Richards 6 miles — Green retreat on the Brazos 22. Land undulating good soil.

Green retreat famed for beauty of location & richness of soil, situated 5 miles E. of the Brazos 14 miles below Washington

14. Passed over fine undulating country & well watered to Washington on the west bank of the Brazos. Susceptible for steam-boat navigation above this place. It is celebrated for its good society. It is healthy & surrounded by a rich body of land

15. Left for Independence formerly Coles settlement. Here is good society, rich lands, health & fine water. Travelled 25 miles.

16. Travelled today 40 miles on my at Lagrange on the

Colorado. The Country interspersed with hill and dale, rich, well watered & abundance of timber. Twelve months since Lagrange was a wilderness, it now contains 50 houses.

19. Crossed the Colorado & journeyed 18 miles up the river to Grotsmeyers farm

20. Crossed the river at Burleisons ferry & 20 miles brought us to Bastrop. Many of the citizens absent on an expedition to locate lands on the Llano & San Saba. It is hoped that they will not bring on an indian war.

Bastrop is on the E. bank of the Colorado; it stands on a prairie of some 2000 acres & surrounded by a chain of hills. Population 4 to 500.

22. Travelled 16. miles up the river to widow Rogers.

23. Passed plantations on rich prairie bottoms 13 miles to Brownsby's this has been the highest settlement for many years - locations are now making on all directions. Mr Barton & family are 6 or 7 miles above this on the western bank.

24 Still travelling up the river. Pass within sight of Fort Houston. reach the intended site of Montopolis on the E. bank 3 miles further "Waterloo"*, 3 miles from the falls. This must be the head of steam boat navigation, being the most eligible spot this side of the falls. It is an advantageous spot for a

* afterwards Austin

trade with Santa Fé. As yet the river & two miles brought us to Mr Bartons, the Daniel Boon of Texas he says "he cannot bear the idea of being intruded on by settlers. I hope at least the mountains will protect him". He has run many narrow chances of being scalped, but carries a good rifle which is the best passport with our S. Western indians. He has two beautiful daughters. Bartons residence is of peculiar beauty - many springs - & a creek full of fish. Buffalo in abundance.

25. Visit the falls; they are of 300 or 400 yards in extent & will obstruct navigation. Three miles above there is another fall, said to be of greater extent.

On leaving the falls, ascended to the summit of a high hill. My companions called it "Mount Bonnell", the Colorado appearing but an inconsiderable stream. We could see its course some 15 or 20 miles, winding among the hills. Broken peaks of mountains, rising one above another could be seen 25 miles northward. The prairies covered with flowers, & the thousand "islands" of timber all round completing the prospect. The summit of "Mount Bonnell" composed of a coralline

looking rock, oyster & other marine shells.
Return to Hornsby, without seeing indians.
26. Return to Bastrop. Men the people expect to die with fever if they visit the coast this season of the year; & those of the coast, believe that it is as much as a man's scalp is worth to travel in this vicinity.
27. Arrive at Lagrange. ~~28. Cross the river~~
29. Sunday. I see many of the children with their books going to the Sunday school.
30. Crossed the Colorado on our journey westward. Wounds brought us to a ranch of the Navidad. The country fine, ~~well watered~~ water & timber scarce. Our party consists of Mess — Mess — Judge E. Mayo — & self a very respectable force for an indian fight! —

My faithful animal "Peter Muly", is about the ordinary size & the gentlest & best animal that ever lived for climbing a mountain. He has received the brand of the Central Mexican government, was at the storming of the Alamo & the battle of San Jacinto; he was made a prisoner of war, received the brand of the Texan republic; he then managed to escape, got among the mustangs,

re-captured by a Mexican ranchero, sold to a Texan officer & then passed into my hands. travelled six miles & camped for the night on the prairie

August 1st. Some of our horses got away. 2nd. S. M. The judge ~~had~~ brought a pony a mile from a settlement some distance off. Having the ladies with us we consoled them as well as we could & could not help repeating.

"Oh that a desert were my resting place
With one fair angel for a minister."

travelled six miles & encamp with west side of the La Vacca. good land, healthy & well watered.

3. Journeyed 30 miles. camped on a prairie two miles from Gonzales. To day had a distant view of the mountains & nearer bros rich, broad rolling prairies; thousands of deer & an occasional drove of wild horses or mustangs.

At night we had a rather at whist by moonlight.

4. Came to Gonzales, Heavy rains. Crossed the river; ~~encamping~~ two miles from it met with half a dozen travellers going to San Antonio. Two of our own party the Major & Captain deserted & go on to Goliad.

6

5th Encamped on the first Sandia (creek) Near this is an old hunter, the inmates of which were killed by indians five or six years since. We saw some of their bones still unburied. We see signs of indians, who appear to be travelling south.

Met a party from San Antonio, they report that one of their company had been attacked by seven indians about an hour before & had made his escape from them with difficulty. They are of opinion that there are lots of indians, watching the road & advise us to return. The ladies say they "have not come this distance to be scared by reports". Three of our party turn back, thus our force is reduced to, two ~~ladies~~ ladies & seven gentlemen.

Travel 10 miles & stop to supper at the 40 Mile water hole. Think it imprudent to stay here for the night & travel 10 miles further camping on the prairie - keeping a regular guard until morning. Post-oak country & little water.

6th Eight miles, reach the the Abolo river. Very pretty country & fertile. Crossed the crystal stream of Salado & three miles more brought us to San Antonio.

7

(Introduce if necessary, the surrender of Lee & fall of the Alamo)

7th Quite ~~valley~~ over San Antonio, a portion of it has been called the Vale of Avoca, and a town laid off (on paper) of the same name. The proprietors presented each of our young lady travellers with "a lot", they being the first American ladies who had visited San Antonio since the revolution.

Here is abundance of fruit, grapes, peaches, figs, melons &c. (grapes figs)

Mission of Concepcion two miles below the city. East bank
do — of St. José' three miles below the Concepcion on the western bank —

9th Leave San Antonio; rumours of indians & mexicans in the vicinity. Travel 9 miles & encamp on the prairie at a water hole

10th Pass the Mission of San Juan, 10 miles below Bejar. The country about here is picturesque & soil of good quality. Fear of indian & Mexican depredations

11. Our company is reduced to, the two young ladies the judge Dr — & self. Stop to dine on the Cibolo, Capt. Boyd & eight friendly Mexicans come up. The Captain gave us an account of an indian fight he had three days since here about, which lasted six hours. Our company increasing rapidly

8

We find travellers at every watering place waiting for company, being afraid to travel the road alone on account of Indians & Mexicans. Travel 26 miles.

12. Our company now amounts to twenty persons. 10. am alarm of indians. We immediately took possession of a small grove of timber preparatory for action. But the indians thinking our company too large, dispersed. The Country through which we are travelling is very fine. Passed the spot where Col Karnes & two others, were attacked by 15 Mexicans four days since, but escaped unhurt. 5 PM reached Goliad. The town is almost deserted. Col Morehouse is encamped here with 150 men keeping a watch for mexicans.

13. Visited the Fort, which is a heap of ruins; destroyed by Fannin a few days before his own capture to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy. This has been urged by some of the Mexican officers as an excuse for the wholesale butchery or massacre, the Mexicans call it "execution" of himself & four hundred men four days after they had surrendered by virtue of an honorable capitulation.

This sanguinary murder has placed a barrier between the two races. But was in some measure nobly avenged on the field of San Jacinto.

left Estiad, passed Fannins battle ground 10 miles below the town. Encamped on the Coleto.

14. Twelve miles to Victoria. It is a pleasant little town on the banks of the Guadalupe & 30 miles from the mouth of the ~~river~~ river.

15. Travelled ~~twelve~~ thirty miles, reaching the La Vaca.

16. Pursue our journey up the La Vaca — travel 26 miles. The country fine & population good.

17. Travel ten miles. 18. Travel 16 miles. 19 At ~~Lagrange~~ Lagrange arrived at Lagrange.

25th Travel 18 miles, stopping on Cummings creek, leaving my old friend Peter Mulry to graze on the prairies of La Grange, having purchased an American horse. There is a white sulphur spring. The land is rich & well watered.

27 Travelled to Independence. 29. On road to Nashville through a post oak country, with but occasional fertile spots. Buffalo in abundance. 31. Arrive at Nashville. Saw good crops, fruit, water melons &c — This town is situated in the heart of a beautiful country on the west side of the Brazos, about three miles below the mouth of Little river & about 65 miles from Washington.

It is one of the finest situations in Texas, but the exposed situation of the frontier has hitherto prevented

its improvement.*

Sept. 1. Crossed the Brazos & travel 5 miles through a rich & well timbered bottom, when we cross the Little Brazos. This is a stream running parallel with the Brazos for more than a hundred miles, generally at a distance of from 4 & 8 miles. The country between these two streams is a rich bottom of heavy timber. Travelled 16 miles further & remained for the night at Anglan's

2. Travel 12 miles & reach the little village called Navasota, from the river on which it stands. This is the extreme northern frontier, & much excitement with the subject of indian depredations. Left Navasota on return to Nashville. Travelled 6 miles.

3. Travelled 8 miles, & came to the intended site of a town called Lamar, as yet it does not contain a tavern or grog-shop as yet, but it contained something of real interest - a blacksmith shop. Travelled 16 miles; re-crossed the river arriving at Nashville: We learned that indians had visited Nashville last night, killing two colves & stealing eight horses out of the heart of the town; three of them were tied to the cannon, which a few days ago had been sent up from

* 1844. At present this is not the case, & many are settling in this part of the country

Houston for the defence of the place. I have to take the precaution of sleeping with my horse to save him.

4 Left Nashville, travelled 18 miles to Mr. Robinsons. If all the hunters possessed the heart of this man we should not hear of so many indian depredations. His own rifle & three of his sons are always in order – this the indians know & keep at a respectful distance.

5. Travelled 30 miles to Hill's.

6. Travelled 12 miles to Dix's. Passed through Independence. 7th at Washington.

13. Left Washington. 6 miles to Whiteides. 14th to Geers Retreat 14 miles. 16. to Robertsons. 16 miles to Donahoe's. 3 miles to Groves. 16 to Roberts. 16th travel 33 miles to Houston. This town is only one year & a half old & contains 3500 inhabitants; it publishes two newspapers; has a theatre; 20 or 30 commercial houses and does a good business. It continues prosperity is the best commentary upon its advantageous location. It has four steam boats, which run regularly between it & Galveston. And the two fine steam packets running between that place & New Orleans give a weekly communication with the U. States.

12

20. Left Houston for Nacogdoches. Travelled 20 miles up the Washington road to Barnetts.

21 Travelled 16 miles further up the Washington road to Curley's. To Montgomery 22 miles. The country passed over from Curley's is rather barren, but well watered and plenty pine & oak, but rather 6 miles from Montgomery Court House, where the land became rich.

22. Travelled 22 miles, through a rich country but without houses to Richardsons. 14 miles more to Huntsville through fine prairies. Huntsville is surrounded by rich lands.

23 To Cardina on the Trinity 16 miles. Saw sulphur and petrifying springs in the vicinity. Saw a large petrified fossil tooth that had been found in one of the streams.

24 To Duncans 8 miles. Crossed the Trinity river. Although navigable 5 or 6 months in the year, now scarcely wet our horses feet above the fetlocks. After three miles of a rich bottom, struck a barren long leaf pine country which continued to the ~~Sachez~~ Neches* river, travelling this day 36 miles, camping in the woods about 3 miles from ~~the~~ the Boluai indian village. They are hostile towards, & not seen about their village.

* probably from Natchez, the name of a great indian nation at the time of the discovery of America.

* probably from Natchez

25. Crossed the Neches at the Bokai village, but saw no trace of the indians, except a few of their cattle, hogs & chickens. Travelled 7 miles through woods.

26. Travelled to the Angelina; the country from the Neches is well watered & timbered & may be termed second rate upland. Continued 12 miles through good uplands to Nacogdoches.

Here I met with the President, General Rusk & other officers. There has been much excitement here on account of the movements of certain Mexican citizens of Nacogdoches & those of the adjoining country attempting to overturn the government & set up for themselves. They were silly enough to think they had nothing more to do, but publish a "grita" call the indians to their aid to drive out the Americans out of the country. In four days 800 "Red Landers", Volunteers were ready for service. The indians were awed into submission, & the Mexicans quitted the country without striking a battle.

Some were taken & are now awaiting their trial for treason, & may pay the penalty

14

of their mode fault under the gallows.

Everything however appears to be quiet & I arrived in town just in time to enjoy the winding up of the campaign – not the fighting but the dancing.

Nacogdoches is pleasantly situated in that portion of Texas known as the Red Lands. It has a population of 600 souls: it does not appear to have any decided advantages in point of locality as a commercial place, but on account of its good society, healthy & pleasant situation, it will always be a desirable residence.

Octr. 1. Left for fort Jessup. General Houston accompanies us to San Augustine. Remained at Berry's during the night

2. Travel 28 miles to San Augustine. This is another Red Land town. It is pleasantly situated on a hill, & improving rapidly. Contains 800 inhabitants

3 Travel 3 miles to Roberts.

15 4 To Brooms 10 miles. To Milam 4 miles the County seat of Sabine county. Here President Houston leaves us on his return to San Augustine.

to miles more brought us to the Sabine river at Gaines' ferry. At this place is a town laid off called Pendelton. The Red Sands commence below Gaines' ferry near to the Sabine & run west to the Trinity River, & extend north ~~to~~ nearly to Red River. They are generally of the best quality of upland, well timbered & well watered.

They are healthy & many people look upon them as the most desirable portion of Texas. The redness is occasioned by red oxide of iron. The land is light, & easy of cultivation, & bears drought very well. Crossed the Sabine, the boundary between Texas & the U. States to Mc. Guffins 8 miles.

5. To fort Jessup 24 miles; treated with great attention by the American officers of the garrison.

7. Left Fort Jessup & by Gaines' ferry reached San Augustine on the 8th. meeting with President Houston. Rumours of indian wars. General Rusk ordered a draft of 300 troops to be made.

10 Left San Augustine in company with the President on our return to Houston. To Sublette's 4 miles. Travel South & leave the Red Sands.

16

Journey 16 miles through poor pine woods only valuable for its timber (except an occasional fertile spot) to Whites.

11. Travel 18 miles to Judge Lowe's. Country poor & barren, but covered with lofty pine. Through this section flows the Angelina & Neches & their numerous branches, most of which are during the winter season navigable for keel boats, barges, timber rafts &c. The Neches & Angelina may at a very trifling expence be rendered navigable for steamers to within a few miles of Nacogdoches & San Augustine.

Judge Lowe has a Saw mill, and on his property a white sulphur spring, of which many persons visit for the benefit of their health.

12. Travel 16 miles to Jasper. We repaired to the Court house where the President delivered a short speech explanatory of the measures of his administration & the present situation of the country. He acquitted himself with his usual eloquence, & the house rang with the applause of his admiring hearers. A public dinner followed & a Ball in the Evening.

The town is well situated in a section of

country known as Bevils settlement. This is a tract of land on both sides of the Neches river, about 25 miles in length & 20 in breadth. It is as rich as any land in Texas, covered with Magnolia, wild cherry, black walnut, oak, mulberry &c — The trees are of great size & height, & the ground covered with an undergrowth of cane. It is furnished with an abundant supply of springs of streams of fine running water; surrounded on all sides by poor pine barrens & appears like a bright spot in the midst of a desert. The town of Laralla is situated in this tract on the Neches river. The river to this point is excellent for Navigation.

13. Travelled 25 miles, principally through Bevils settlement. ~~Camping~~ Remaining at night in a house in the Pine woods.

14 Travelled 18 miles through a thick bottom to Pembertons ferry. Two miles through the river bottom found ourselves in the pine woods, where we experienced a very long & heavy thunder storm, with torrents of rain. Travelled 36 miles more.

18

15. Came to Village creek 12 miles, a considerable stream which runs into the Neches. After a hard

days ride came to Vocum's. This settlement is on the edge of a very large prairie extending to the gulf.

16. Travelled down the western edge of the prairie 33 miles to White's

17. Three miles to Liberty. Crossed the Trinity. 14 miles to Whitings through a muddy road & thick bottom.

18. Remain at Whitings owing to the heavy rains. This settlement is on the eastern edge of a large prairie extending from the Trinity to the San Jacinto.

19. Arrive in Houston.

Extracts from Journal of a Northern campaign against the Indians.

On the 6th Nov. an express was received at Houston from General Rusk, relative to indian depredations by the northern indians. I was detached with 250 mounted men for that service

26. Left Houston marching 8 miles.

27. Proceed up the Washington road 28 miles to Kerley's

28. Arrive at Groces retreat 25 miles

29. Proceed to Washington 16 miles

Sept – 5 Arrive at Nashville. The place almost deserted. We camped at the upper end of the town, putting a double guard around our horses.

6. Crossed the river, to give our horses the benefit of grass in the rear bottom

7. Marched 22 miles to ~~Stands~~ Strouds. 8 Remained here with our camp.

9. Fall back upon Strouds. Receive news that General ~~Rusk~~ Rusk has taken 20.000 dollars worth of arms from the Caddoes – which arms they had received from the United States.

Saw suspicious looking fires about, which the settlers say are certain indications of indians

10. Sent a party out to reconnoitre for indians, but to return in two days.

Removed Camp to Muddy creek two miles from Strouds. It is a beautiful clear running stream in spite of its name & camp is ~~a~~ pleasantly situated & our men have called it "Camp Bonnell"

13. Owing to information from our spies we shall not go towards Little river as intended, but to the falls of the Brazos. Travelled 13 miles & Camped at Bartons

20

14. Sent six men as spies up north the Brazos & to

up Little river & report home at the falls of the Brazos. Marched to the Falls of the Brazos.

The Country about the Falls is one of great beauty & fertility, but its settlement has been prevented by the marauding parties of indians. They rarely ever attack a house, but confine their operations to the stealing of horses & an occasional murder of a solitary traveller.

7. Received a letter from Mr Stroud who informs me that the indians had visited his settlement and stolen six horses. Leaving Capt. Daniels in command, I took a party with me to intercept the indians if possible.

Forded the Brazos 200 yards below the Falls. It has a fall of eight feet, & at low water divided into more than a dozen channels, leading outward from the centre in the form of a horse-shoe. The water of the Brazos is brackish here.

The deserted town of Viesca is situated on the west bank at this place, surrounded by a rich country, but has not been inhabited for the last three years. The Buffalo & Wild Horse are

found in the streets of a town which a short time since was a flourishing village.

Travelled 20 miles. Killed a Buffalo for supper.

18. Blew a heavy "Norther". The battalion wrapped in different coloured blankets, & shivering over the fire, presented a very ludicrous scene.

A spectator might have taken us for a band of the wild indians, who roam over the prairies of this country, & had a party of our own countrymen fallen in with us we might have got into a fight on account of our suspicious appearances. Travelled 25 miles, crossing the bottoms of Pond & Elm creeks, examining the country in every direction. Camped on Pond creek. Found no traces of indians. ~~Although we are in winter, this rich country looks beautiful~~

19. We do not proceed further for want of grass for our horses, & are compelled to take up the line of march towards the settlements. We do not discover traces of indians.

Left camp. At noon came upon a herd of Buffalo from 600 to 1000 in number.

Travelled down the prairie between Pond & Elm creeks for 25 miles. Four miles more brought us to the Brazos river. On the banks of the river are indications of coal. Crossed the river & camped three miles distant from the river

20. Moved our camp to Strouds.

21. Our spies came in from Little river. They penetrated nearly to the head waters of it, neither discovering indians or any signs of them & it is their opinion that no indians can be found within less than 250 miles of this place & that it is inconvenient to make a campaign against them this season of the year.

22. Captain Daniels arrived to day from the falls with the "balance" of the ~~battallion~~ battallion, he came down on the west side, through what is termed the indian country, but saw no traces of indians. Sent an express to Houston setting forth the condition of the country &c.

1839
Jany. 2. To day our express returned from Houston. We had been in expectation that we should have been ordered to join General Rusk when there would have been a prospect of actual service judge then our mortification, when we were peremptorily refused, and ordered back to Houston. This produced almost as much gru as if we had been ordered to a prison.

3. Left the camp at Walkers ferry in Houston on the 5th