

Joseph Franklin Barton Writings
about the Hole-in-the-Rock and His Miracle There

Verdure Utah May 10th, 1914

In the early part of the year 1879 I was called by Erastus Snow to be one of a company of about fifty men to establish a colony somewhere across the Colorado River.

At this time (I) was residing at my native town Paragonah Iron Co. Utah (I say native having been borne only 4½ miles distant at Parowan). Was 24 years of age, married and had family of two children. The company was made up mainly from Iron County Utah.

As soon as spring opened about twenty men were selected from the company to do exploring work across the Colorado River in the Southeastern part of Utah which up to this time was a very wild and unexplored tract of country.

The exploring party going out by way of Lee's ferry and Moancopy Ariz landed on the San Juan River about 25 miles down the River or north westerly from the noted four corners a very conspicuous point in the United States.

In the early fall 1879 the explorers returning to their homes gave good reports of Land..Water and grass

Now came the busy time as it was the desire of Erastus Snow that the company proceed on their journey to the new land immediately. Consequently I with my family and brother Amasa M Barton on the 3rd of Nov 1879 bid farewell to our Fathers Mothers brothers and Sisters and friends whom were very dear to us and joined in with the band of missionaries who were going out to subdue a barren waste, build homes and establish new colonies chiefly for the purpose of commencing the civilization of the wild and powerful tribe of Navajos who for a number of years had been raiding and committing many depredations in Southern Utah.

Reaching the Butler Ranch a few miles above the town of Panguitch on Sevier River we encountered a heavy snow storm which lasted four days which put 4 ft of snow on the Escalanta Mt and made it almost impassable for the outfit. However our cattle were put to the front and the cowboys succeeded in leaving a fairly good trail. After reaching the town of Escalanta we turned to (go) down the desert to the sunny South, pulling in at 40 mile where we had the first general roundup of the whole company which was made up of some 80 wagons. We found it necessary to call a council meeting as we now find that our proposed route to the San Juan County while some shorter than either of the routes traveled by the exploring party in the Spring and early fall in going to and returning from the San Juan Country is wholly unexplored.

At the meeting a company of ten young men were selected to do some exploring work beyond the Colorado River consequently the next morning the company of ten myself included having a small boat that had been brot (brought) from Escalanta by Chas Hall started for the River arriving that evening at the Rim about 12 to 1500 ft above the River and about 2 miles from it by the trail we would have to travel. Next day we enjoyed considerable experience in getting our boat to the River by way of the ruff trail. Having accomplished this feat we took 3 days provision and our blankets upon our backs and commenced exploring for a route by which we could gain the summit or main tableland.

After exploring to our satisfaction we returned to the main camp with the report that without shooting our way thru it would be impossible for the company to reach their destination on the short cut road. This proved to be rather discouraging as the company had not been provided with powder nor steel whereby to blow to pieces the ledges that we might pass on. However another council was called and from the fact that the Escalanta Mt was now so full of snow that it would be impossible to take the back trail any farthur than the Town of Escalanta that it was resolved to send pack animals back for powder & steel and in the meantime move the camp to the Colorado rim. But on account of scarsity of wood water & grass it was deemed advisable to divide the company leaving ½ back at 50 Mile Spring, 5 miles from the

rim, from which camp we would walk to our work Monday morning remain all week and walk back Saturday evening. This work continued for about two months. It was here that we spent our Christmas holidays in dancing singing and merry making. For all that it was the hardest winter ever known in Utah everybody in both camps enjoyed the best of health and generally a good spirit prevailed.

When the road work was so far completed that we could get out across the Colorado some four or five miles a general breakup of both camps was indulged in.

Of course everybody was very anxious to try the new road down the celebrated hole in the rock which is a crack or gat thru the rim rock (barely wide enuf for the passage of a wagon) which led to a narrow ruff canyon that wound its way to the River. The first descent of the hole in the rock being 26 ft and which took several days blasting to fill and even then was thot to be a very dangerous piece of wagon road. However by means of a long rope and 10 men the wagons of the first camp were lowered thru the hole and set on their way for the River (3/4 of a mile distant) before any of the teams of camp no. 2 put in an appearance. The writer happened to be some distance in advance of the balance of company no. 2 and reached the dreaded road just at sundown and knowing that if he waited for the ten men and rope he would camp on the rim that night but after taking a survey of the cavity and putting on ruff lock and urging his team considerable finally got them to face what seemed almost next to death. However the next 1/2 minute landed team wagon and driver at first station about 300 ft down the hole in the rock right side up where upon examination he found that the chain to ruff lock had broken but thru a providencial act the chain had flipped a lap around the fellow (wagon wheel spoke) in such a manner as to serve for a lock