

Journal of Silas S. Smith

November 4, 1879 - October 25, 1880

Hole-in-the-Rock Journey

Introduction by Albert R. Smith:

This Diary of SILAS SANFORD SMITH covers a period of time from November 4, 1879 to October 25, 1880 during which time he was leading and assisting to get a colony of L.D.S. people located and settled on the San Juan River in Southeast Utah and one in which to settle emigrants from the Southern states in the San Luis Valley in South Central Colorado.

This Diary is in possession of Mrs. Edith Smith Dibble, daughter of Silas S. Smith, Salt Lake City, 1960, and has not before been published. The Diary is contained in a small leather covered book. The writing done in lead pencil and parts are very dim. In addition to the Diary, it contains some miscellaneous records of calls and transactions and materials assembled for himself and others as he prepared to fulfilling this colonization call made of him by his Church Officials.

This copy was prepared from the original by Albert E. Smith assisted by Mrs. Edith S. Dibble and Mrs. Albert E. Smith.

Some explanatory notes are included where the meaning seemed to be somewhat obscure. Such notes are indicated as made.

The [blue text in brackets](#) were added by Lamont Crabtree (March 2025) after reviewing images of the Journal LDS Church History Library. These images were improved with digital enhancement software.

Tues., Nov. 4 1879—Started for the San Juan via Potato Valley. Drove to Watson's Ranch, 13 miles.

Wed. 5—Drove to Huston's farm and found pasturage. 15 miles.

Thurs. 6—Stopped at Panguitch for dinner. Found the boys with the stock thence to Butler's farm. Made about 8 miles.

Fri 7—Started the cattle across the trail. A severe snow storm came on and we lay in camp.

Sat. 8—Still snowing, lay in camp.

Sun 9—Still snowing.

Mon. 10—Snowing. Stayed in camp.

Tues. 11—Started on. Found the snow near two fee [sic] (no feed). Camped on the divide: tied up.

Wed. 12—Drove to ranch on the East fork of Sevier River pulling and resting.

Thurs. 13—Drove seven miles to Sweet Water Ranch. Very cold night.

Fri. 14—Drove to and camped on the mountain. Deep snow.

Sat. 15—Mired coming down the mountain. Were half a day making 300 yards. Drove to the grist mill, 12 miles. Cold day with wind (near Escalante).

Mon. 17—Came into town. Wrote home.

Tues. 18—Lay in camp.

Wed. 19—Drove down into town and camped in the street.

Thurs. 20—Drove to 10-Mile Spring. Mat [Met] Hall and Sevy, who [reported unfavorably] from route ahead.

Fri. 21—Drove 15 [13] miles to Shepherd??, called 20 Mile Springs

Sat. 22—Drove 15 miles to Coyote Gulch. Poor water.

Sun. 23—Drove 8 miles to Cottonwood Springs. A little good water up the wash.

Mon. 24—Drove 5 miles to camp. Very unfavorable report from exploring party.

Tues. 25—Lay in camp, wrote letters (sent by some men returning to Cedar).

Wed. 26—Lay in camp. Snowed at night. Bros. Schow and Collett came to help look up the road.

Thurs. 27—Wet, foggy day. Held meeting tonight. Resolved to take the skiff down and have a party provisioned for 10 days cross the river and look out the route.ⁱ

Fri. 28—Lay in camp. Still quite lame.

Sat. 29—Bp. Sevy and L. Redd came into camp.

Sun. 30—Held meetings morning and night. Administered the sacrament and arranged prayers in camp.

Mon. Dec 1—Commenced work on the road.

Tues. 2—Continued road work. Rain in evening. Party from across Colorado came in with rather an unfavorable report. The camp decided to try to get through. On Friday some started. On Saturday we doubled teams and sent on half the wagons.

Sun. 7—Moved up 3 miles. I rode up 3 miles further to forward teams. Found water in the tanks.

Fri. 12—Went to work at the cleft in the rocks. Bro. Decker and others arrived at the camp.

During the further exploration and organization efforts, at which time meetings were held and reports of the exploring considered, it was decided to proceed with road work. Silas Smith spent 18 days at this time assisting at the Cleft and was sent back to the Legislature to get an appropriation with which to get through to their destination. This Diary gives account of that trip back and to Salt Lake City, where he was successful in getting the appropriation from the Legislature and from the Church.

Mon. 15—Started for Escalante. Drove 15 miles to Cottonwood Wash.

Tues. 16—Drove 23 miles to 20 Mile Spring.

Wed. 17—Drove 22 miles to Escalante.

Thurs. 18—Busy looking after the boat. Hall had timer all out for the ferry boat and we decided to help put it up.

Fri. 19—Started at noon to cross the mountain on horseback. Rode 13 miles and camped with Bro. Green. High wind at night.

Sat. 20—Crossed the mountain. Snow drifted on East Fork. Afternoon met a drifting, blinding snow storm, soon after which I overtook Butterfield who knew of a ranch house which we found soon after dark where we got shelter for ourselves and horses.

Sun. 21—Were 4 hours reaching the summit, 4 miles distant. Snow, wind-drifted and deep all the way down the canyon. Stayed an hour at Butler's to feed—thence to Panguitch.

Mon. 22—Came over the trail via Little Creek Peak in company with rail boy. Snow deep and drifted. Reached home at sundown.

Due to fatigue and exposure, Silas contracted pneumonia which kept him indoors for nearly a month after reaching his home in Paragonah.

Erastus Snow, Representative to the Territorial Council from St. George, and Jesse N. Smith, a brother of Silas and Representative to the Legislature from Iron County, called to see Silas on their way to Salt Lake City to attend the Legislative Session. Silas reported the condition and needs of the pioneers stranded at the Colorado River and secured their promise to try for the needed help.

Journal of Jesse N. Smith, p. 238: "I was chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Trades, and Manufactures, and also served on the Judiciary, Revenue, and Penitentiary Committees. During the session, I labored to secure an appropriation for the relief of the winter-bound emigrants to the San Juan, to be expended on the road, which was obtained."

In the mean time, Silas secured 25 pounds of Giant Powder, the total supply in that part of the territory, and it was dispatched by Area Judd to

the camp on the Colorado. Journal of Platt D. Lyman under date of January 16, 1880, reports receiving this shipment at camp.

As soon as the legislative appropriation was received, 1000 pounds of powder was secured and shipped to Silas Smith at Richfield, the then terminus of the railroad. He went to Richfield via Beaver and arranged for the shipment to be taken to the 50 mile camp on the Colorado. He also arranged for four men from Cedar who were experienced in the use of powder to proceed to the camp and help with blasting operations there.

Platt D. Lyman Report, Saturday, January 31, 1880: "My brother Amasa M. and three other men came into camp, having been sent from Panguitch to work on the road. They reported that 1000 pounds of blasting powder had been left at the 50 mile by a man sent from Panguitch to bring it to this company."

Silas then set to work getting his affairs in order so that he could return to the San Juan and Colorado for further duties required in that mission.

Continuing his diary . . .

Wed. April 28, 1880—Started on my return to San Juan. Drove 10 miles to summit of mountain. Muddy road.

Thurs. 22—Drove to near lower herd house. Very muddy, mired several times.

Fri. 20—Drove to Panguitch. Stayed at Mary's. (Mary Owens, his daughter, lived at Panguitch.)

Sat. May 1—Drove over the Red Canyon Divide to the coyote holes. Found banks of snow, but no water. Feed good.

Sun. 2—Drove 20 miles to Sweet Water. No feed.

Mon. 3—Crossed over the mountain and camped in the canyon.

Tues. 4—Came down to Hall's and camped.

Wed. 5—Stopped in Escalante until noon. Then drove on to 10-Mile Springs.

Thurs. 6—Nooned at sheep ranch. Found water above the road. Drove 7 miles and made a dry camp.

Fri. 7—Ice on water this morning. Watered at Coyote and camped at Hall's Ranch.

Sat. 8—Drove 10 miles to Cliff Springs. Met Platt Lyman.

Sun. 9—Drove 7 miles to the ferry. Wind blowing. River high.

Mon. 10—Crossed the river. Current was swift and towing the boat up was heavy work. Took all day to make six trips.

Tues. 11—Drove six miles on the hill and drove horses back to water.

Wed. 12—Drove six miles to water tanks for dinner—thence 10 miles to smooth rock tanks. Very little water.

Thurs. 13—Horses gone. Made late start. Drove 6 miles to Swan Lake. Grass and water.

Fri. 14—Lay in camp.

Sat. 15—Drove 20 miles to Clay Springs. Met Butler and others from San Juan.

Sun. 16—Lay in camp.

Mon., May 17—Drove 14 miles to tanks. No water reported but found plenty by digging.

Tues. 18—Passed some tanks and some poor water. Made 15 miles. Found water in Grand Gulch.

Wed. 19—Six miles to Cane Springs. Water poor thence 4 miles to some deep tanks—thence 5 miles. Made dry camp. Water half mile south. Found water.

Thurs. 20—Ten miles to Comb Gulch. Got water by digging—thence 6 miles to camp at Springs where trail leaves the wash.

Fri. 21—Some of the horses gone back on the road. Got the teams and started at 11 a.m. 3 miles to San Juan River. Thence over rough reefs of rocks 4 miles. Found water in tanks.

Sat. 22—Started late. Drove 8 miles to the lower camp—thence up the river 3 miles and camped.

Sun. 23—Went back and held meeting. Spoke an hour, then rode to camp and moved up the river.

Mon. 24—Drove up to my cabins. Found the river so high, a road would have to be worked around the point. Met the boys coming down to work road. Passed the rest of the day working road, thence to camp where all people had gathered to my tent to have supper in honor of my arrival.

Tues. 25—Got my wagon to camp and wrote letters.

Wed. 26—Rode down to Davis' camp and decided to try a current wheel to throw out water.

Thurs. 27—In camp and sowing some wheat.

Fri. 28—Davis came from the lower camp. Reported the bottom flooded between here and there.

Sat. 29—E. Ward started for home. River falling. Baptized

Sat. May 29 (cont'd)—Zac Decker in it, it being his eighth birthday.

Sun. 30—In camp. No meeting.

Mon. 31—Went up Montezuma Creek looking for a place to plant corn. Land covered with brush.

Tues. June 1—In camp sowed some more grain.

Wed. 2—Lay in camp fixing to plant corn.

Fri. 4—Started for lower camp. Stopped at Recapture.

Sat. 5—Held meeting at Bluff this evening.

Sun. 6—Meeting. Bro. Nielsen was appointed Presiding Priest and James Decker, Superintendent of Sabbath School.

Mon. 7—Met in County Court. Districted the county into precincts and appointed some officers.

Tues. 8—Returned to my camp, having advised the people below to move together for protection.

Fri. June 8-11—Moved down 2 miles to the cabins.

Sat. 12—James Lewis and Platt Lyman came in late on the way to Manassa.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sun 13—Held two meetings. Organized a branch. My son Silas was appointed to preside as Priest.^{iv}

Mon. 14—Started for Conejos. (County in Colorado where a colony is being located). Party consisted of James Lewis, P.D. Lyman, and myself. Drove 10 miles to where the road leaves the river and camped.

Tues. 15—Drove 30 miles to Navajo Springs.

Wed. 16—[copy unreadable] at Mitchell's ranch—thence 9 miles and made dry camp.

Thurs. June 17—Nine miles to Manoos. Got some letters. Drove on 14 miles to Steam Saw Mills and camped.

Fri. 18—Three miles to Parrott. Wrote letters. Thence down the La Plata on Farmington Road, 15 miles.

Sat. 19—Started early. Road good. Feed poor. Drove 26 miles. Found ranches and farms after crossing into New Mexico.

Sun. 20—Drove into Farmington, thence down to the mouth of the La Plata, 20 miles.

Mon. 21—Went down the San Juan to where the Stevens boys are located, 10 miles. Got dinner and returned to camp of last night. Country not as good as we expected to find.

Tues. 22—Drove up to Farmington. Got supper. Found we could not cross the Animas River and started back the same way we came down. Made former camp.

Wed. 23—Drove to our first camp on the La Plata.

Thurs. 24—Drove over toward Animas and camped in the bottom below the toll gate.

Fri. 25—Passed through Animas. Nooned at spring near the Florida, thence to within 3 miles of Los Pinos.

Sat. 26—Passed through Los Pinos Station. Nooned at a small stream, thence to the Piedra. Water most of the way, 25 miles.

Sun. 27—Drove 25 miles to a little creek east of San Juan. Found water in several places. Met many teams with freight for the mines.

Mon. 28—Drove 10 miles to Blanco, thence 12 miles to Little Navajo.

Tues. 29—Three miles to Big Navajo. Nooned on the Horn, thence crossed the Charmer and camped. Twenty-three miles today.

Wed., June 30—Toll gate 6 miles. Thence over the mountain at Grader's camp. Head of Pine Creek for noon, thence over steep grade. Passed Toll gate over the summit and camped. Drove 22 miles.

Thurs., July 1, 1880—Came down the mountain 10 miles and lay up in afternoon on account of not being feed to camp on. Further on tonight.

Fri. 2—Drove 30 miles to Manassa. Stopped with Bishop Berthelsen.

Sat. 3—Received letters from Elder Taylor and replied. Rode out to look at the town site of Ephriam.

Sun. 4—Attended the School and meeting. Spoke at each.

Mon. 5—Rode over the Conejos River. Saw Peterson and took dinner at Boice's. Returned in the evening.

Tues. 6—Drove down as far as John Allen's to look at some ranches. Stayed over night.

Wed. 7—Drove over to Alamosa. Found much wind and water and crossed through the sloughs.

Thurs. 8—Started with Bro. Elledge and Mr. Easterday for San Luis to look at a grist mill. Took the train to Fort Garland, thence 16 miles by wagon to San Luis. Returned to the fort, thence to Alamosa by freight train.

Fri. 9—Stayed at Alamosa and consummated a trade with Judge Easterday for his grist mill on the Calabra for the sum of \$3000.00. One thousand down, one thousand in 12 months, and one thousand in 18 months. The purchase includes several Mexican houses. I take one hall and Bro. Eledge the other.

Sat. 10—Came to Manassa by rail. Held Priesthood meeting in the evening.

Sun., July 11—Meeting 10 a.m. and again in the afternoon. Good attendance.

Mon. 12—Bro. Peterson came over. We went to Conejos. Called on Lorenzo Tofrera; also called on Ex-Governor Head at Conejos. Went home with Bro. Peterson.

Tues. 13—Started up Alamosa Creek to look for a new location. Drove about 20 miles and camped on the creek.

Wed. 14—Drove over the land along the benches until noon. Found a good location. Returned to Manassa in the evening.

Thurs. 15—Got up the team. Looked at the shoes (?).

Fri. 16—Stayed in town. Some men came in from camp on the San Juan.

Sat. 17—Started at 1 p.m. for San Juan. Drove 20 miles to saw mill. It rained heavy. Stayed with Bro. Sellars.

Sun. 18—Drove across the mountain, passed two toll gates. Camped on Dog Creek, 22 miles.

Mon. 19—I started early. Passed Charmer and nooned on Big Horn, thence to Little Navajo, 27 miles. Rained afternoon and most of night.

Tues. 20—Passed small stream. Four miles to Blanco. Nooned 12 miles, thence 10 miles to San Juan, then over the divide 2 miles and camped.

Wed. 21—Drove to Piedra, thence 6 miles and camped, making 30 miles. Water most of the way for camping purposes.

Thurs. 22—Passed a spring creek. Early nooned on Beaver Creek. Crossed Los Pinos, thence up a spring creek and across the divide and camped at Florida P.O. Made a dry camp. Drove 30 miles.

Fri. 23—Passed through Animas City at 10 a.m. Nooned at Lightening Creek above the toll gate. Thence to Parrott. Saw my son and several from camp at work there. Drove 30 miles.

Sat., July 24—Drove 20 miles to Manoos. Got a letter from home. Wrote letters in the evening.

Sun. 25—Drove to ruins, 30 miles and camped.

Mon. 26—Took on water at Navajo, 6 miles. Thence 30 miles to the river and camped. 36 miles.

Tues. 27—Drove down home, 10 miles (to Montezuma). Rain at night.

Wed. 28—Went out to look at the crops. Prospect poor.

Thurs. 29—Went down to Bluff City.

Fri. 20—Visiting with the brethren and attending to business.

Sat. 21—Worked on the accounts, making some payments.

Sun., Aug. 1—Held meeting and spoke to the people in exceeding plainness, rebuking some evils and giving advice.

Mon. 2—Held the first election in San Juan County. 65 votes were polled. Also paid 45 per cent on the road accounts.

Tues. 3—Held county court to equalize taxes. Fixed up some bonds after examining the election returns. Started late and returned to my own camp.

Wed. 4—Made some payments on road accounts.

Thurs. 5—Received letters from Elder Snow and one from home.

Fri. 6—Sent letters by parties going out. Shod horses.

Sat. 7—In camp.

Sun. 8—Held meeting and preached.

Mon. 9—John and Silas started for San Luis Valley to get work and supplies. Stephen went as far as Mancos for mail. I stayed in camp and looked after the horses and cows.^v

Fri., Aug 13—Stephen returned bringing letters from home. One from Bro. Snow and papers from Salt Lake.

Sat. 14—Went down to the lower vamp [sic].

Sun. 15—Preached in afternoon. Then returned as far as Recapture and camped.

Mon. 16—Came home.

Tues. 17—Went out for a wagonbox full of hay. Found very little. Nice showers at night.

Wed., Sept. 1, 1880—Went with Bro. Haskell to Bluff City. Stopped at Kumen Jones'.

Thurs. 2—Stayed at Bluff City. Bro. Snow came in with his company at 4 p.m.

Fri. 3—Two meetings held today. Bro. Neilson appointed bishop.

Sat. 4—Drove to my own camp at Montezuma with the traveling party.

Sun. 5—Meeting. Z. B. Decker appointed Presiding Priest. Company moved on in evening.

Sun. 12—Held meeting at Bluff City. Spoke one hour and 30 minutes. Thence home on horseback.

Wed. 15—Started for Manassa.^{vi} Drove 10 miles to where the road leaves the river.

Thurs. 16—Drove 30 miles to Navajo Springs.

Fri. 17—Drove 20 miles and made dry camp.

Sat. 18—Drove 16 miles.

Sun. 19—Drove 10 miles and camped on the La Plata.

Mon. 20—Passed through Animas. Camped near the Florida P. O.

Tues. 21—Nooned on Pine River. Drove over to small stream, 20 miles.

Wed., Sept. 22—Nooned at Piedra. Camped on Bear Creek, 24 miles.

Thurs. 23—Nooned at Pagosa. Camped on Blanco. 22 miles.

Fri. 24—Some horses gone. Started 9 a.m. Drove to Big Navajo, 16 miles. Rained all night.

Sat. 25—Nooned on the Horn. Passed the Charmer and camped on Dog Creek. 20 miles.

Sun. 26—Snowed most of the day. Passed over both of the ranges. Camped on top of Conejos Range.

Mon. 27—Cold. Froze hard last night. Drove through to Manassa. 30 miles.

Wed., Oct. 20—Left Manassa at 8 a.m. by team. Reached Alamosa at 12. Found John and Stephen. They were in from the mill with the loads. Took train for Denver 4:30 p.m. Changed cars at Pueblo at 12:30 midnight. Wind blowing hard. There is a good many passengers tonight.^{vii}

Thurs. 21—Arrived at Denver at 8 a.m. Stopped at the American House. No train for the West till morning.

Fri. 22—Left Denver by Colorado Central at 7 a.m. Colorado Junction at 1:30 p.m. Eastern train bound west behind time. Went over to Cheyenne for dinner. Started west at 4 p.m.

Sat. 23—Reached Ogden at 6 p.m., Salt Lake at 8:20 p.m. Visited Bro. Snow. Returned and slept at Elias Smith's.

Sun. 24—Started south at 7 a.m. Noon at Juab. Telegraphed from Sandy for team to meet me at Minersville. Reached Wilford at 9:30 p.m. Stopped at Williams House.

Mon., Oct. 25—Took stage for Minersville. Met my team and crossed the mountains. Home at 5 p.m.

Wed., Nov. 17, 1880—Started to return to Colorado. Drove across to Milford. Very cold day.

Thurs. 18—Took train for Salt Lake. Stopped at Elias Smith's.

Tues. 23—Ogden at 9:30. Took passage on Omaha train.

Wed. 24—Snowing; train late. One wrecked at Boulder. Detained two hours. Reached Lindell House after 12 midnight.

From the unpublished document:

*Silas Sanford Smith
Pioneer-Statesman-Colonizer
1847-1910*

*by: Albert E. Smith
Grandson of Silas Sanford Smith
Salt Lake City, Utah
1963*

Utah Historical Society Library

With respect to the other years it is not known Smith keep a journal beyond the few years transcribed here. This is all that was included in Albert E. Smith document and no additional entries have been found as of Jan 2010.

ⁱ Account of these exploring parties: Miller, "Hole in the Rock" [copy unreadable] accounts given by P. D. Lyman, George Hobbs and others.

ⁱⁱ Account of meetings held. Decision to send S. S. Smith to meet the Legislature and, if possible, secure an appropriation for tools and powder. C. I. Decker account. Also account by Samuel Rowley.

ⁱⁱⁱ Platt D. Lyman was appointed Assistant President of the San Juan Mission, which included the Colorado Colonies and those in New Mexico.

^{iv} At Montazuma

^v 5 days to Mancos and return.

^{vi} Third trip to Manassa

^{vii} 23 days at Manassa this trip.