

(From the book: "Scenes of Wonder & Curiosity" by Roger R. Olmsted)

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PACKING, IN THE MOUNTAINS OF CALIFORNIA.

Miners in search of the precious metal, have penetrated the vast forests, explored the deep canons, climbed the rocky steeps, and, eventually, many of them have made themselves a dwelling place among the rugged and almost inaccessible mountains of California. Thus shut out from the cities of the plain, packing, to them, has become an indispensable necessity; and is not only the means of obtaining their supplies, but, like the ever welcome expressman, a kind of connecting link between the vallies and the mountains.

In some of the more isolated mining localities, the arrival of a pack train, is an event of some importance, and men gather around it with as much apparent interest, as though they expected to see some dear old friend stowed away somewhere among the packs.

This necessity, has created an extensive packing business with the cities of Stockton, Marysville, Shasta, and Crescent City, but very little with Sacramento, at the present time.

We are indebted to a friend in Stockton for the following interesting information concerning the packing trade of that city.

The quantity of freight packed on mules to the counties of Calaveras, Tuolumne, Mariposa, and Tulare, from Stockton, is about two hundred tons weekly, or one fifth of the entire amount of goods weekly transported.

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There are generally from forty to fifty mules in a train, mostly Mexican, each of which will carry from three hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds, and with which they will travel from twenty five to thirty five miles per day, without becoming weary.

If there is plenty of grass they seldom get anything else to eat. When fed on barley, which is generally about three months of the year--November, December, and January--it is only given once a day, and in the proportion of from seven to eight pounds per mule. They seldom drink more than once a day, in the warmest of weather. The average life of a mule is about sixteen years. The Mexican mules are tougher and stronger than American mules; for, while the latter seldom can carry more than from two hundred to two hundred and fifty pounds, the former can carry three hundred and fifty pounds, with greater ease. This fact may arise from the mules in Mexico being accustomed to packing only, and over a mountainous country; while the American mules are used only for draught. The Mexican mule, too, can carry a person forty miles per day, for ten or twelve days consecutively, over a mountainous trail; while it is very difficult for an American mule to accomplish over twenty five or thirty miles per day.

The Mexican mule can travel farther and endure more without food than any other quadruped; and with him, apparently, it makes but little difference whether fed regularly or not; still, like animals of the "biped" species, he has no objection to the best of good living. They can, however, always be kept fat with but little care, and it is but very little that is required; while the American mule, to do only half the amount of work, requires good food, regularly given, besides

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being well cared for otherwise. The Mexicans consider them altogether too delicate for their use. Then again, from the steady regularity of their steps, the Mexican mule is much the easier, generally, under the saddle, and a person will not often become as much fatigued from riding one a week, as he would be in riding an American mule for only three days

The packing trade of Marysville is very extensive with Downieville, Eureka North, Morrison's Diggins, St Louis, Pine Grove, Poker Flat, Gibsonville, Nelson's Point, American Valley, Indian Valley, and all the intermediate and surrounding places in the counties of Sierra and Plumas, giving employment to about two thousand five hundred mules, and between three and four hundred men.

From the town of Shasta, during the winter of 1854-'5, the number of mules employed in the packing trade to the various towns and mining localities north of Shasta, was one thousand eight hundred and seventy six. This does not include the animals used by individual miners; and, according to the "Shasta Courier," of Nov. 11th, 1854, it would be safe to estimate the number at two thousand.

"With this data a very fair estimate of the amount of freight packed from Shasta May be formed. Each mule load will average two hundred pounds. A trip to the most remote point to which goods are taken will never occupy more than two weeks--in many instances three or four days less. It is a very moderate calculation, then, to average the trips of the entire two thousand mules at two weeks each."

"This will give a result of one hundred tons per week, as the aggregate amount of freight packed from Shasta--which, at the very low figure of five cents per pound, would yield the sum of twenty thousand dollars per trip, to the packers."

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The principal places to which freight is thus transported from Shasta, are Weaverville, (or "Weaver," as it is now called,) Yreka, and the settlements around, and between, those points. One is astonished to see the singular goods that are often packed across the Trinity and Scott mountains, to those places; such as buggies, windows, boxes, barrels, bars of iron, chairs, tables, plows, &c.

In the fall of 1853, there was an iron safe, nearly three feet square, and weighing 352 pounds, transported on a very large mule, from Shasta to Weaverville, a distance of thirty-eight miles, over a rough and mountainous trail, without an accident; but, after the load was taken off, the mule lay down, and died in a few hours afterwards.

All kinds of goods, at all times, are not alike safely packed. A friend of ours, who resides in Yreka, sent, among other things, a rocking chair and looking-glass, "and when I reached there," said he, "I found that the chair back was broken, the rockers off, and one arm in two pieces; and the looking-glass was as much like a crate of broken crockery as anything I ever saw."

A gentleman has also informed us that in the summer of 1855, two sets of millstones were packed from Shasta to Weaverville, the largest weighing six hundred pounds. Being looked upon as an impossibility for one mule to carry, it was first tried to be "slung" between two mules, but that being impracticable, it was abandoned and packed on one. The following fact will give some idea of the expense often occasioned, as well as the immense weight sometimes packed, over a rough and mountainous country:

When the "Yreka Herald" was about to be published, a press

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was purchased in San Francisco, at a cost of about six hundred dollars, upon which the freight alone amounted to nine hundred dollars, making the entire cost \$1,300.

The "bed-piece," weighing three hundred and ninety-seven pounds, which, with the "aparajoe," ropes, &c., exceeded "four hundred and thirty" pounds, was the weight of the entire pack, placed upon a very large mule.

On descending the Scott mountain, this splended animal slipped a little, when the pack over-balanced and threw him down the steep bank, killing him instantly.

Many a mule, in California, has breathed his last in a ravine where accident had tossed him--to be the food of wolves or coyotas.

One train was passing the steep side of a mountain, in Trinity county, when a large rock came rolling from above, and struck one of the mules in the side, frightening others off the track; and killing one man and three mules.

During the severe winter of 1852, and '53, there was a pack train snowed in, between Grass Valley and Onion Valley, and out of forty-five animals, but three were taken out alive. It is almost incredible, the amount of danger and privation, to which men who follow this business, are, sometimes, exposed.

It is truly astonishing to see with what ease and care these useful animals pack their heavy loads over deep snow, and to notice how very cautiously they cross holes where the melting snow reveals some ditch, or tree beneath; and where some less careful animal has "put his foot in it," and, as a consequence, has sunk with his load

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into trouble. We have often watched them descending a snow bank when heavily packed, and have seen that as they could not step safely, they have fixed their feet and braced their limbs, and unhesitatingly slide down with perfect security, over the worst places.

There is something very pleasing and picturesque in the sight of a large pack train of mules quietly descending a hill, as each one intelligently examines the trail, and moves carefully, step by step, on the steep and dangerous declivity, as though he suspected danger to himself, or injury to the pack committed to his care.

The packing trade from Crescent City, a seaport town about three hundred miles north of San Francisco, is one of growing importance. From thence most of the goods required in Klamath, and some portions of Siskiyou and Trinity counties, are transported. There is already an extensive trade with Jacksonville, (Rogue River valley,) Illinois Valley, Sailor's Diggings, New Orleans Bar, (on the Klamath river,) and county seat of Klamath, Scott's river, Applegate creek, and several other prosperous localities in that section.

There are about one thousand five hundred mules in the packing trade at these points. It is no uncommon circumstance, to meet between twenty and thirty trains, with from twenty to seventy-five animals in each train, and all heavily laden, on your way from Jacksonville to Crescent City. The loud "hippah," "mulah," of the Mexican muleteers, sounds strangely to the ear, in the deep, and almost unbroken stillness of the forest.

It seems to us, that the Mexican sings no song, hums no tune, to break in upon the monotonous duties of his calling; but, is apparently

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indifferent to every kind of cheerfulness, until the labors of the day are done, and then but seldom.

A large portion of the trail lies through an immense forest of redwood trees, and which, from their large growth and numbers, are much more imposing in appearance than the mammoth tree grove of Calaveras.

The soil must be exceedingly fertile, as the leaves of the common fern grow to the height of from twelve to fifteen feet.

On the trail from Trinidad to Salmon river there is a hallow tree, measuring thirty three feet in diameter, which is the usual camping place of trains, holding all the packs for the largest, besides affording shelter and sleeping room to the packers.

The distance from Crescent City to Jacksonville is 120 miles, and generally takes packers about ten days to go through.

There is now a considerable packing trade carried on between Union--Humboldt Bay--and the mining settlements on Salmon, Eel, and Trinity rivers; also, with the town and vicinity of Weaverville.

All of these trails across the coast range of mountains, are very rough, and almost impassable during the winter, from snow in some places and mud in others.

.....The Mexicans invariably blindfold each mule, before attempting to pack him, after which he stands quietly, until the bandage is removed. A man generally rides in front of every train, for the purpose of stopping the train when anything goes wrong, and acting as a guide to the others; although in every train there is always a leader,

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known generally as "the bell mule;" most of the mules prefer a white one, which they unhesitatingly follow, so that when "he" starts it is the signal for the others immediately to follow.

They seldom start before nine o'clock in the morning, after which they travel until sunset without stopping, except when something goes wrong.

When about to camp, the almost invariable custom of packers, after removing the goods, (by which they always sleep, in all kinds of weather,) is, for the mules to stand side by side, in a line, or in a hollow square, with their heads in one direction, before taking off the "aparajoes;" and then, in the morning, when the train of loose mules is driven up to camp to receive their packs, each one walks carefully up to his own "aparajoe" and blanket; which he evidently knows as well as does the packer.

An "aparajoe" is a kind of packsaddle, or pad, the covering of which is made of leather and stuffed with hair, and generally weighs from twenty-five to forty pounds. These are always used by Mexican muleteers, and are much easier for the mule than a common packsaddle.

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