

Richard Ballantyne Company (1855)

Departure: 1-2 July 1855 Arrival in Salt Lake Valley: 25 September 1855

Company Information: 402 individuals and 45 wagons were in the company when it began its journey from the outfitting post at Mormon Grove, Kansas (Near Atchison)

Most people in the fourth emigrant company of 1855 were Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF) passengers who, under Elder Richard Ballantyne, had traveled from Liverpool, England, to America aboard the ship Charles Buck. Ballantyne himself was a returning missionary (he had served in India). The ship sailed on January 17 and, after an eventful 56-day voyage, arrived at New Orleans March 14. The passengers next boarded the steamboat Michigan and traveled up the Mississippi to St. Louis, arriving there March 27. Ballantyne and about 250 of his party then continued up the Missouri to Atchison, Kansas Territory, on the riverboat Golden State, arriving April 5. (Some who joined Ballantyne's overland train crossed the Atlantic on the ship Helios to New Orleans. At least one traveler came on the Siddons, landing at Philadelphia, then traveling by rail to Atchison. Others came on the Chimborazo via Philadelphia.)

Atchison, the Mormon outfitting point for plains travel, was a newly established town. When Elder Ballantyne and party arrived, it did not have a boat landing or streets, and there were only six houses. The emigrants helped create streets, worked at a sawmill, and built a boat landing. Next, the company moved to Mormon Grove (a few miles from Atchison), where Church officials had claimed land. There, the travelers established a 160-acre PEF farm. By July 7, they had completed a ditch and a log fence and had ploughed and planted about 40 acres. A few crops were already growing. Cattle had to be broken and teamsters had to be trained. This was accomplished by having the men yoke the oxen and drag logs around the camp. All PEF passengers received food for the plains but, if they could afford it, they could add a few luxuries. Because of Indian hostilities, Church officials announced that "every male capable of bearing arms, must be supplied with a good rifle or other fire-arms, and at least one-half pound of powder and two pounds of lead, or shot and balls." The Church provided guns to some men.

Ballantyne and 402 Saints left Mormon Grove for Utah about July 1. The train included 45 wagons, 220 oxen, 24 cows, 3 horses, and 1 mule. Each wagon carried 700 pounds of flour, 200 pounds of corn meal, and 1,100 pounds of baggage, plus spokes and axel trees, hinges, and cooking utensils. From Big Blue River on July 10, the Captain reported, "We have had no cholera nor sickness of any kind, except what may reasonably be expected among so many people." He had learned that grasshoppers had attacked Utah's crops and "everything is eaten up in the Valley" and in "the grass for fifty miles on this side." On July 22 he wrote from the Platte River, just below Fort Kearny, that the train was surrounded by "great multitudes" of buffalo. On the 23rd, he wrote: "We have not been hindered a day since we started, but have traveled on slowly and steadily, Sundays excepted. . . . Owing to the fatigues of the journey and the frustrations and excitement produced by unruly cattle, some unwillingness was first manifest on the part of a few to stand up like men in the discharge of camp duty; but this spirit and feeling is gradually disappearing. . . . The Bell is rung around the coral [sic] and tents at 4 o'clock each morning for all the people to get out of bed. In a quarter of an hour after the roll is called, each man is required to be on the ground with his gun to answer when his name is called. A short time is then generally spent in military duty. . . . The spirit of hurrying has not yet troubled us, yet we have felt to use all diligence as the season is somewhat advanced, our provisions are very limited. . . . We intend being as judicious as possible with our provisions, yet we shall need some supplies before reaching the Valley as we only had

in flour to serve us to Green River. . . . Brother Thursting's [Thurston's] train traveled with us several days. . . ."

On July 24, 20 miles above Fort Kearney, the company paused to commemorate Brigham Young's 1847 arrival in Utah-feasting, parading, and dancing to the music of the violin and dulcimer. From July 28 on, the men carried loaded guns while on guard duty. Later, Captain Ballantyne ordered all men not otherwise employed to walk ahead of the company with their weapons at the ready; all were admonished to be minutemen (a total of 80 armed men available). By August 3rd the train was north of the South Platte River. At Ash Hollow the emigrants gathered currants and cherries; the trees were "literally bent down with the weight of the fruit." The train was within sight of Chimney Rock on August 9th and had arrived at Scotts Bluff on the 12th. From Fort Laramie (August 15) the captain wrote: "Unity and peace prevails among us. No stampedes The feed has been good. The roads between Ash Hollow and Laramie have been rather heavy. . . . Our cattle stand the journey well. The Indians are peaceable." Later, feed became scarce and "lots of Cattle lay down and died foot Soar [and for] lack of feed &c." The company was at Bitterwood Creek on the 17th and at La Bonte on the 20th.

A passing traveler wrote: "The saints in this company seemed to enjoy the journey very much though most of them walked almost the entire distance. It was not a little wonderful to me, to see ladies with whom I was acquainted in the east, and knew as sickly and delicate, unable to walk three or four squares, to market or shopping, without experiencing much fatigue, walk fifteen or twenty miles a day, and come into camp at night with light hearts, singing the songs of Zion, and praising their God. . . . Capt. Ballantyne, is indefatigable in his exertions to promote the well being of the Saints under his charge, and enjoys the unbounded confidence and esteem of his entire company. We journeyed with this company until the morning of the 24th [Aug.], when we left them two miles above Deer Creek." The train reached the Platte Bridge on August 25.

At the Sweetwater River, 16 wagons were involved in a stampede, and it took half a day to repair broken wheels and tongues. By then the train was out of provisions and the travelers faced starvation. Fortunately, a few days later, on Little Sandy, the company met supply wagons from the Salt Lake Valley. That night the people celebrated until late in the evening. On August 29 the company was at Independence Rock; by September 16 it was at Fort Bridger. On September 24, the Nauvoo brass band, accompanied by many citizens of Salt Lake City, came to meet the company. With them were President Erastus Snow and wife and sister Ballantyne. These visitors joined the emigrants in feasting, dancing, singing, and praying. Women and some men wept for joy. The next day the train paraded into town. The band, on horseback, rode at the head of the company, playing. Then followed a large flag borne by two young horsemen. Several small flags floated from the tops of the wagons. Reportedly, the emigrants were all smiles. After the company set up camp on Union Square, Presidents Young and Kimball visited, bidding the travelers welcome. On this trip eight individuals had been run over, three were accidentally shot, and five died. Three courts had been held on the plains.