

Freighting in the Early Days

I first came to Colorado from northeastern Missouri, with my wife, son and daughter, in the spring of 1879. We came through to Colorado Springs with a train of 17 wagons, drawn mostly by mules, in six weeks and two days. I then located at a lumber camp sixteen miles from Greenland and near Bijou Basin. Greenland was six miles from Palmer Lake. At that time Palmer Lake consisted of nothing more than a station.

I was engaged as a freighter by a lumberman--I can't recall his name. My duties consisted of hauling lumber from the mill to Greenwood, where it was shipped by rail, mostly to Denver. I received from \$3 to \$3.50 per thousand feet for the haul.

There was a good growth of timber in that vicinity then, and one could hear the whistles of ten different mills every noon and night. Small farms or ranches were numerous there, too; the crops grown were wheat, oats, barley, hay, and vegetables.

That fall we pulled out for Kansas where I homesteaded a ranch in Phillips county about ten miles from Phillipsburg. The year of '79 was plentiful one and the crops in Kansas were excellent; but the following year it was quite the reverse. Hot winds burnt up my entire crop, and the other farmers suffered likewise. The condition extended over the entire state; and it was impossible to secure employment then at even twenty five cents per day.

I had two brothers-in-law at Buena Vista who wrote and told me what a splendid country that was and how good conditions were there, so

It did not take me long to decide to board a train for the mountain country. I arrived in Buena Vista April 2, '81; my family following later.

The beautifully situated town was booming greatly, and, I imagine, had a population of about 3,000. Times were wild and sanguinary. There was a voracious demand for labor, and one could secure a job at almost anything we wished. I went to work for my brother-in-law, Flinchbaugh.

Then one morning, about one week later, I met the owner of a string of burros which he had just driven in from New Mexico. I made a deal with him, buying 15 head at \$15 each, and then bought 7 more from local people. Flinchbaugh furnished the capital and we became equal partners. We bought complete pack outfits, paying \$3.50 each for the saddles. We then purchased potatoes at \$3, and flour at \$3.75, per hundred. This was our stock of trade, and each jack was to be loaded with 200 pounds, except one unusually large one, which was to carry 300; making total load of 4,500 pounds. We hired a packer to help me as my partner remained at Buena Vista.

Early the second day we started, a foot and driving the jacks, for the new mining camp of Aspen, eighty miles distant. This was before the opening of the Independence Pass route, was completed so we traveled over the Cottonwood and Taylor Passes and ranges. The first night we made Halfway House, a hike of 20 miles. This station was operated by Osborn, and consisted of hotel, saloon, and stables. Meals were fifty cents, hay and grain at least five cents per pound. Osborn was killed in a fight during my second trip, and I met ^{Joe Turnbull,} the man who shot him, on the road fleeing from the scene of the murder.

Winter had not yet passed in the mountains, so we struggled through snow and mud. I became footsore and had to remove my shoes to substitute burlap sacks, which I wrapped around my feet. We did not unpack during the day and ate a lunch on the move; thus traveling

steadily from 7 a. m. until 4 p. m. The second night found us in Taylor Park; and by the time we unpacked the jacks I was so weary I could barely crawl into my blankets. We spent the third night at Barman, near the foot of the range; and the following night we reached Aspen.

The fact that we had passed many a freight wagon stuck in the mud, enroute, proved to be a boon to us. For as soon as we reached the new mining camp we were besieged by 500 people, clamoring for my wares. "How much do you want for your flour and spuds?" was their cry. "Fifteen dollars a hundred each." I replied, and the rush was on. Well, at those prices we sold the load as fast as we could unpack it. Within thirty minutes it was gone; and we didn't have to deliver one sack!

Aspen was surely booming. There were hundreds of tents there but few buildings. Many buildings, though, were under construction, and the next morning I believe I heard the rapping and knocking of 200 hammers.

I made two such trips as I have described when the road over Independence Pass was completed in '81. This was a much better road and easier route, and the freighting distance, from Granite, the forwarding point, was but fifty miles. Naturally freighting charges and the prices of commodities fell.

My partner and I bought a freighting outfit of one wagon, a team of horses and one of mules, and packing our string of jacks, too, we began freighting over the new route. We hauled two tons, receiving 2½ cents per pound for commodities and 2 cents per pound for bullion, with which we always loaded on our return trip to Granite. It required five days--we usually remained in Aspen overnight--to make the round trip.

Toll charges for the round trip with four horses and wagon amounted to \$7, while we paid ten cents each for the jacks. These were the rates when one bought tickets amounting to at least \$25, otherwise they were higher. There were six or seven toll gates between the two

points and we had to show our ticket at each gate.

Satisfied that Glenwood was about to boom, Bill Robbie, a lumber man of Granite, hired Tom Rogert, Cufbert, and myself to freight three loads of lumber there. This was in the early fall of '82. We made the trip, without incident, in about four days, and this was the first lumber to reach the town. The only building in the town when we arrived there was a cabin which stood just east of the Roaring Fork river; there were quite a number of tents, however.

Curious about the famed hot springs, we went to the pool for a swim. The pool, then a natural one, was about forty feet across and six feet deep; the water being very hot but cooled off sufficiently to endure by a spring of cold water.

The clerk and recorder of the town offered the three of us choice corner lots free if we would ~~only~~ begin the erection of buildings on them. We only laughed at him; and the next morning we struck out for Granite. Shortly afterwards the town began to boom and the lots became valuable.

In '83 the freighters and stage lines operating between Granite and Aspen lost many horses and mules, all of them good animals, caused by a hoof infection. The disease, which became prevalent during the muddy seasons, was some form of the footrot, and was thought to have been caused by a poisonous mud on the east slope of Independence Pass. An animal would become lame, its hoof then turning blue and swelling to immense proportions, finally bursting or rotting off. It seemed that no one had time to doctor the poor animals, so they either died or were shot. Losses ran into the hundreds. A cure was not discovered, but the epidemic finally died out.

I freighted into Aspen until the railroad reached there; then, of course, freighting was doomed. Once, it was during the dead of the winter, and the snow had been falling until it was as much as ten feet deep, the round trip to Aspen proved to be one of my worst experiences. Although

traffic was heavy, the snow drifted so badly the road was not kept open. We were at one place, between Bromley's and the top of the range, for three days and nights in a traffic jam. That may sound odd but it is true. Someone got stuck in the snow, teams began to line up, unable to pass, until they reached in both directions for a great distance; and it was impossible for anyone to advance in either direction. We finally cleared up the jam by carrying sleds, stages, and wagons, and their loads out of the road and to new positions. It was mighty labor and we were all exhausted from our efforts.

Then at other places, where the way down was steep, we traveled to fast. At this time I was driving a six-horse team with wagon and trailer. It was almost impossible to hold the heavy load. At times I found it necessary to put four rough-locks on the trailer and two on the wagon to keep them under control. Even then one of my wheelers fell and was dragged at least 100 feet before we could get stopped; but it didn't kill him. Of course the price of feed rocketed at the stopping places, and we paid ten cents per pound for hay and grain. The round trip required fourteen days and nights, and I lost \$100 making it. This was my worst and last trip.

I then returned to Buena Vista, where I established my home, and began freighting in that vicinity for Pat Gutchell, a lumberman. I freighted lumber to various places, including Calumet and Nathrop, receiving so much per thousand feet, depending upon the distance. When the Colorado Midland Railroad was constructed in '86 I helped to haul all lumber and timbers for the bridges between Hilltop and Wild Horse.

Freighting continued to be my occupation until about 1920. Since then I have been engaged in various other capacities; but I still make my home at Buena Vista.

John Powell