



The March of the Mounted Riflemen: From Fort Leavenworth to Fort Vancouver, May to October, 1849

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It was an awesome sight, that regiment of Mounted Riflemen slowly marching up the Oregon Trail, already crowded with gold seekers and their animals in 1849. In May of that year five companies of men and 171 supply wagons started from Fort Leavenworth on a five-month, two-thousand-mile march that would take them to Fort Vancouver. After distinguished service in the Mexican War, the rifle regiment had mustered out and then reorganized for the purpose of establishing and garrisoning forts along the Oregon Trail.

The March of the Mounted Riflemen, first published in 1940, is important as the only complete record of one of the longest marches ever made. Most of the book is devoted to the journal of the quartermaster, Major Osborne Cross, which describes the experience of recruits unprepared for such an undertaking. There were numerous desertions among the soldiers and teamsters, who were faced with a cholera epidemic and the heavy loss of horses and mules in poor grazing country, but for those who finally crossed the Cascades there was pleasure in spectacular scenery and interest in dealing with friendly Indians. Included is the journal of George Gibbs, a civilian artist and naturalist who accompanied the marchers, and a report by Colonel William Wing Loring, the commanding officer. Together, these primary documents offer valuable information about the Oregon Trail and the great emigration of 1849.

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