CHAPTER IV

LONG'S EXPEDITION

(This story is culled from Vols. XIV, XV, XVI of "Early Western Travels." a collection of documents and stories taken from authentic sources, covering the century of American happenings in the way of Western explorations between 1746 and 1846, gathered, verified and published by Reuben Gold Thwaite, an English historian. The portion relating to the expedition of Stephen H. Long in 1818-20 is quoted by the historian almost entirely from records kept by Dr. Edwin James, a scientist and member of the expedition.)

The expedition headed by Stephen Harriman Long, (1818-20) was sent out from Washington to explore the western territory that under the Louisiana Purchase had become the property of the United States government, but was about as well known to its owner as the proverbial "pig in a poke." This followed, after fourteen years, the expedition of Zebulon M. Pike which, though fraught with untold hardships, as shown in the story, was not fruitful of much valuable information.

This result, however, should not be attributed to inefficiency nor lack of daring on the part of the men making up that expedition, but to their lack of equipment and necessary provisions, which lack put life itself in jeopardy. From that very experiment the United States government learned a useful lesson: that to do effective work men must not be compelled to gamble with death. A certain amount of hazard was, of course, unavoidable; but sufficient food and clothing and camp provisions against inclement weather could at least have been provided.

It should also be remembered that in the fourteen years between the two expeditions the United States itself had been developing; and not only was its knowledge greater but also its resources; so when Long and his men headed westward it was under much more favorable conditions than those under which the Pike expedition began—and finished.

1818.

Major Long was commissioned by Secretary of War Calhoun to explore the territory west of the Mississippi River that

now had definitely passed into possession of the United States. Little was known of this vast territory in 1818 except that it was inhabited by Indians. Whether or not the soil would ever be adaptable to cultivation, the streams sufficient to water the land, or the climate suitable for civilized life was not known; yet knowledge of these facts would soon be of vital importance to the new commonwealth. The thirteen states along the Eastern seaboard would not long accommodate an ambitious and growing population. The time was fast approaching when a means of expansion would be essential.

Long's Expedition was made up, besides its military branch, of scientists along different lines. Dr. William Baldwin was listed as physician and botanist; Dr. Thomas Say, zoologist; Augustus Edward Jessup, geologist; T. R. Peale, naturalist; Samuel Seymore, painter; Lieutenants James D. Graham and William H. Swift, topographers; and Major John Biddle, journalist, entrusted with transcribing and keeping all records. By reason of death and other causes, this personnel was changed as time went on, so that the group that finally made the historical ascent of Long's Peak included not one of the original expedition, save Commander Long himself. How this transpired can best be told as the story proceeds.

The enterprise was set in motion in the autumn of 1818, when a military branch was organized under command of Col. Henry Atkinson and spent the winter of 1818-19 in camp near the present site of Leavenworth, Kansas. But it took nearly a year to develop plans, map out the work and provision the expedition; so it was the autumn of 1819 when the troops moved on to Council Bluffs.

In the mean time Major Long and the scientists of the expedition, who had spent the winter in Pittsburgh, came down by way of the Ohio and Missouri rivers and the Mississippi and reached Council Bluffs in September, 1819. There the whole company, troops and scientists, made winter quarters, calling it "Engineers' Encampment." Then, when every thing was settled for the winter, Long and Jessup, the geologist, went

back east for the winter of 1819-20 and returned to the encampment in May, 1820.

But the instructions that Long brought back from Washington changed the plans of the expedition materially. Congress had become dissatisfied with the progress thus far made by the company, considering its cost out of all proportion to results, and therefore decreed that Long should take only a company of scientists and proceed westward, leaving the troops behind; and that his business should be "to ascend the Platte to its source and then return to the Mississippi by way of the Arkansas and the Red Rivers."

THE RE-ORGANIZED EXPEDITION

The expedition as now reorganized consisted of: scientists Captain Bell, Dr. James, Dr. Say, T. R. Peale, Samuel Seymore; lieutenants Graham and Swift, Interpreter Dougherty, four men to act as assistant interpreters, baggage handlers, etc., and seven soldiers, a company of 20 including Commander Long. (Early Western Travels, Vol. XIV, p. 14.)

This party started on June 6, 1820, and at a Pawnee village on the Loup river two Frenchmen were taken on as guides and assistant interpreters, and the party resumed the journey westward June 13.

On June 30, 1820, the Rocky Mountains were first sighted. The loftiest peak observed was at first supposed to be Pike's but proved instead to be the peak that was later ascended and named for the commander of the expedition, Major Long.

The mountains with their snow-capped peaks were an inspiring sight to the explorers, who at once enthusiastically declared their intention of celebrating the national birthday, July 4, on their loftiest summit. The party was now on the south bank of the South Platte River and the distance looked so short through the clear atmosphere that the travelers reckoned the three intervening days would be quite ample for the journey. But the distance stretched out as mountain distances do, and it was not until the evening of July 5, that the party reached the site that is now Denver. Here they camped two days while James and

Peale with two other men sought to cross the front range, hoping to reach the valley of the Platte beyond. (Western Travels, Vol. XIV, p. 14.)

They started the upward climb, but here experienced that baffling hallucination that has been the common lot of all climbers between that day and this—the deceptive distances of illustive peaks. Scaling the first range they saw what seemed to be the summit and climbed to its top, only to find that a still higher peak lay beyond and above; and so on and on they went, this experience repeating itself over and over until the discouraged climbers gave it up and returned to their base.

On July 12, 1820, the camp of the explorers now being but a few miles south of the present site of Colorado Springs, Dr. James with two men set out again to reach the summit. They are said by this History, "Early Western Travels," to have actually scaled Pike's Peak, being the first ever to have accomplished this feat.

But when historians disagree it is hard to tell what ordinary mortals should do. Some say that the peak scaled by Dr. James and his men was not the high peak known as Pike's, but a much lower one in the same range. However, be that as it may, in acknowledgement of the daring feat of reaching its summit, Major Long christened it "James Peak." But that name never got a foothold, so, whatever peak it was, the world-famous one is still known as "Pike's Peak."

On July 16, 1820, the party again broke camp and moved southwest to a point on the Arkansas about twelve miles above the present city of Pueblo. On the following day, July 17, 1820, Dr. James, Captain Bell, and two of their men ascended the river to the site of Canon City, paused at the entrance to the Royal Gorge and turned back, again baffled by what seemed to be impassable barriers; then began the descent of the Arkansas. Two days later they rejoined the other members of the expedition and struck camp a few miles above what is now La Junta. Here a division of the party was made for the purpose of carrying out the instructions from Washington to explore to their sources both the Arkansas and the Red Rivers.

The division assigned to the Red River was headed by Major Long and consisted of Dr. James, Dr. Peale and seven men; that to the Arkansas to Captain Bell and the rest of the expedition. The exploration of the Red River was considered the more important because an entirely new work, the Arkansas having already been to some extent explored by Lieut. Pike. It was a detachment of the Long division without Long himself that finally ascended (according to Chapter 1, Vol. XVI,) the summit of the lofty peak that today bears the name of Long.

The Preface to Vol. XIV of "Early Western Travels," which ought to be authentic, since Dr. James himself wrote most of it, states that on July 24, 1820, Long's party crossed the Purgatory creek and the upper waters of the Cimarron River and after six days, (July 30,) reached a small tributary of the Canadian river, following which, after five days (August 4) they reached the Canadian River itself near the present Texas-New Mexico boundary line. They then believed they were on the Red River until they reached its confluence with the Arkansas. when they were convinced of their mistake.

Here the story of this branch of the exploration is dropped by the Preface, but is taken up again in Chapter 1 of Vol. XVI, p. 11, and the graphic story is told of the explorations of Dr. James and four men who "left the camp before sunrise on the morning of the 13th; (neither month nor year given but from the logic of events it must have been the 13th of August, 1820,) leaving two men at the base of the mountain to take care of the horses while Dr. James and the other two ascended to the summit of the peak. The account is evidently written by Dr. James himself, for he uses the personal pronoun, "we," in the telling. Somewhat condensed from the original, this is the story:

When they reached the base of the mountain, the first thing that attracted the attention of the explorers was a great natural wonder which Dr. James called the "boiling spring."

This was a large and beautiful fountain of water, cool, transparent, and aerated with carbonic acid. It arose from the brink of a stream which ran down from the mountain dividing the ridge of sandstone resting against the base of the first

granite range, and carrying rich deposits of cabonate of lime. This deposit had accumulated on every side and formed a large basin "overhanging" the stream several feet above. "overhanging" is the word used in Dr. James' description.)

The basin, of snowy whiteness, containing probably 300 or 400 gallons of water, was constantly overflowing; the spring arose from the bottom with a rumbling noise, discharging equal volumns of air and water, perhaps 50 gallons of water per minute, and was in constant agitation. The water was clear, sparkling, of good taste and exhilerating effect. (Preface to Vol. XIV, p. 12.)

A few rods distant was another spring of the same constituents but not overflowing; its basin was constantly full but air only escaped from it. Its water had no odor, and a most remarkable fact concerning it was that it had no power of extinguishing flame. This was tested by plunging into it burning splinters of dry cedar. The statement of Dr. James, impossible though it seems, is found on page 13 of Vol. XVI, and is given as the test performed by Dr. James himself. A foot note states that this "boiling spring" is the site of the present Manitou Springs, and that millions of bottles of this water is annually being shipped over the country. Carbonate of lime comprises 9/10 of the mineral matter held in solution. It is from this point that the cogwheel railroad now ascends to the summit of Pike's Peak.

The travelers state that their guide who had safely led them to the base of this mountain here absolutely refused to attempt the ascent. He told the explorers that it could not be done; that many attempts had been made by Indians and hunters, sturdy climbers all, but none had ever succeeded because of the loose sand and gravel that covered the surface of the mountain sides, making a firm foothold impossible; and even though this condition might not obtain on the bare looking stones that formed the cone, it would be impossible to get over the intervening distance to that point; and, even though that could be done, they must still stand defeated at the base of the cone, whose perpendicular sides could not possibly be scaled.

But this argument, however logical, could hardly have been expected to deter a body of fearless—or as the guide would have said "foolhardy"—explorers who had traveled hundreds of miles over trackless plains to reach this place. Could they turn back now and report to their government that they had penetrated so far and because of apparent difficulties had not attempted to go farther? What would any exploring expedition be worth if its explorers were deterred by apparent, or even real, difficulties?

All this they told the guide, but without effect; he was adamant; he would not lead them; if they attempted this death-inviting feat they would have to do it on their own responsibility, not his; and, finding the explorers still determined, he turned, with no doubt a sad farewell in his heart, and left them.

After the guide had proved the sincerity of his own convictions by leaving, the explorers were still determined to make the attempt. It did not look like a difficult undertaking; they could almost see the summit from where they stood; there was timber almost to the top and that could not help but furnish foothold and handhold. They wished they had employed a guide, less timid; but, if he had never been up there himself, he could not have been worth much as a guide any way. And, if what he said were true, that nobody had even been to the summit, no other guide would have been any better. So if they were ever to make the ascent it was clear they would have to go it alone. And there was no "if" in it; they meant to do it.

They thought it might take most of the day to make the journey there and back, especially if they took time to make a thorough exploration as they went along, which was, of course, a part of their purpose in going. But they would start prepared to make a day of it and it would not matter if they did get back late.

So they outfitted themselves for the trip, making provision, they thought, for all possible contingencies. Each man carried a blanket, a good supply of bison meat, three gills of parched corn meal and a small kettle. And so they started. Here was a

little stream; it must have its source somewhere near the top, so they would follow it and let it be their natural guide.

Yes, the sands were shifting and foothold was not easy; the guide had been right about that; he had probably gone far enough to find that out. But explorers are not looking for easy things. They went on, the farther they went the more uncertain their foothold becoming. It might be that the sands were looser near the base and would be firmer farther up. But they did not become firmer or less shifting, and slowly the unwelcome conviction forced itself upon their minds that they had undertaken a hazardous, if not impossible, journey. If a foot should lose its hold nothing could save a man from being either thrown into the fast-flowing stream that was thickly studded with jagged rocks or from having a precipitate tumble to the base of the mountain. But even realizing this they did not turn back. They labored on. And so the first day passed. At sunset they stopped in great fatigue in a small cluster of stunted fir trees, estimating that they had climbed, perhaps, a distance of two miles.

But here they found no ground level enough to furnish a resting place. Even if they were able to brace themselves so that they could sit on the still-shifting sands, they must surely be lost if they should relax for an instant in the sleep of exhaustion. They dared not risk it. Yet they could not descend to the base in the gathering darkness, nor could they go farther in the hope of finding level ground; so they did the only thing left to be done; they anchored themselves by means of ropes, which all mountain climbers carry, to the bodies of trees; they broke off what limbs were breakable and managed to make a sort of fence across from one tree to another. (p. 14 does not especially mention ropes, but logically they could not have done what the story says they did without them, so the conclusion seems justifiable, even inescapable that they used ropes.)

Here they unpacked their provisions and ate ravenously; no banquet back in the states had ever tasted so good. Then they spread their blankets and prepared for the night. Their bodies lashed to the trees by ropes, their blankets on the sharply sloping ground also anchored, they slept, if at all in almost upright

positions. The night was cold and altogether the situation not a happy one, yet not once did they express a regret that they had not taken the advice of their cautious guide.

At break of day on August 14, 1820, they prepared to resume the journey, hoping that the worst of it was over. It could not be much farther to the summit. They would travel light this time. So they arranged all their provisions except a few pounds of bison meat, their blankets, and what clothing they could spare, in a sort of cache in their hill-side camp, to which place they would return for the following night; then they divided their few pounds of meat so that no one would have much to carry, and started on the last leg of their journey.

When they had traveled somewhat over a mile over the treacherous mountainside, mostly straight up, they came upon a comparatively level tract of ground several acres in area, covered with aspen, poplar, birch and pine. Another small stream ran along what they now saw to be the cone-shaped base of the summit; even the peak itself was now visible, its lower part covered with pines, junipers and evergreens and its upper a naked cone of yellowish rock with here and there patches of snow glistening in the sunlight.

They paused at a deep chasm filled with snow opening toward the bed of the stream along which they had been traveling. They could not cross it, so made a long and perilous detour around it. By this time the day was half spent, and the summit seemed no nearer. They now knew they could not hope to reach it before nightfall and return to the place where they had left their blankets and provisions, so determined to push onward and stop for the night wherever darkness overtook them.

A Mr. Wilson, who was not of their original party but who voluntarily joined them on the way, had stopped to rest some time back ,so now the party halted on the level ground to rest and wait for him. They could not see him and began to be anxious; they hallooed, but though their voices seemed to echo to the farthermost parts of the earth they heard no reply; they fired several shots without result, so decided to eat their lunch and go on to the summit, since they were so near, and then search

until they found him on their return.

They reached the yellowish rock that formed the cone of the peak; and this they found to offer advantages over the road farther down in that it was not covered with shifting sands. Still it did not afford easy foothold, as the rock was sheer and jagged and in some places crumbling. It grew colder and the wind arose, but they could see the summit so pushed on over the deceptive distance.

At last they stepped out upon the very summit itself and found a firm footing upon almost level ground some ten or fifteen acres in area. . .

Devoutly thankful for this rest for their weary feet, and with a feeling of immense relief and satisfaction, they dropped down upon the ground to rest; and scarce had they done so when their missing co-explorer came into sight. He had found the summit by another and easier route and was not nearly so tired as they.

WHAT THE EXLORERS SAW ALONG THE WAY AND ON THE SUMMIT

In the midst of the dangers and fatigue of their long and perilous journey, the explorers had discovered many wonderful and almost unbelievable things. At the base of the cone and leading toward the summit was found a forest of small but hardy timber; it must have been of the hardiest possible type to have withstood, even as well as it had, the storm and stress of the long years of battle for its life with the unfriendly elements of nature.

The explorers decided that there must have been a time when conditions were more friendly to the forest; when climate was milder and sustenance to be found farther up the cone-shaped mountain, and that somehow by some mysterious law—or freak of law—conditions had changed and all elements of nature had conspired against the forest. Stones and splintery fragments of rocks had been loosened from far up the cone and hurled with terrific force against the trees, finally beating them down until only the bare, stark roots were left to tell the tragic story. The

half-destroyed trees, still stubbornly holding out against the onslaught, stood like brave but hopeless sentinels with their sides toward the summit entirely stripped of limbs and bark.

It was evident that the red cedar and flexible pine had offered the most determined resistance, since they were the only ones left standing at all. The explorers could not have believed it possible for trees to have lived under such desperate conditions had they not seen them with their own eyes. A few small trees were found still farther up, but these had been sheltered by the crevices and fissures of the rocks.

Patches of soil were found along the way as the explorers neared the top, carpeted with brilliantly-flowering plants clinging close to the ground and not more than an inch in height. Deep blue was the prevailing color, the columbine and others being intensely vivid. This peculiar brilliancy was attributed by the scientists to the intensity of light passing through the unobscured atmosphere and reflectng upon the immense masses of snow, thus giving forth the deep blue of the sky.

A peculiar little animal was found in the region of, and below timberline. He resembled the gray squirrel but was shorter and less agile, more like a prairie dog, yet not to be classed with him. He watched the intruders with sharp little black eyes, and uttered a shrill cry that might have been a warning to his fellows of the threatened danger of tresspassing strangers.

"THE GRASSHOPPERS"

On the summit itself was neither animal nor vegetable life, but far above its crust, partly obscuring the sun, floated a dense cloud of constantly-moving objects which proved to be grasshoppers. This cloud had been observed for some time on the way up, and its character had been surmised from the vast numbers of grasshoppers that had fallen on the snow and perished.

This unusual spectacle engaged the deepest interest of the scientists, who hoped that at the summit they might be able to make closer observations; but when the top was reached they found the cloud still farther above them and reaching to the outermost limits of vision. They found no definite data on which

to base conclusions as to the how or why of the grasshoppers, but their best guess was that in the sheltered crevices of the rocks they had found unmolested breeding places and that, true to their nature, as soon as wings developed they began to fly, and soared up to where, guided—the dwellers in the plains would say—by some malign influence, they organized for the descent and their first square meal; and according to these same plains dwellers, that square meal absorbed a whole year's product. Half a century later they descended in that devastating historical raid upon the farms of Kansas, stripping the earth bare of every green thing found within their blighting pathway; and in Colorado, both before and after that date, bringing ruin to many a struggling colonist. (Verification and amplification of this story will be found in "Early Western Travels," Vol. XVI, p. 21.)

The surface of the ground was covered to a great depth with large, splintery fragments of rock, under which was a bed of ice impossible to measure with the instruments at hand, and apparently as permanent and solid as the rock itself.

The view to the northwest and southwest was of innumerable peaks, lower, and all white with snow. Below lay the valley of the Arkansas, running northwest probably sixty miles. On the north of the peak was an immense body of snow and ice, the ravine in which it lay running down and ending in a fertile valley west of the ridge. To the east, a far-reaching plain melted into the horizon, disclosing dim outlines of streams believed to be tributaries of the Arkansas and the Platte. On the south the range continued, culminating in another great peak supposed to be Pike's.

. .

About 5 o'clock in the afternoon, August 14, 1820, the party began the descent, arriving at sunset at the beginning of timber. Here they found they had missed their way and were not approaching the little camp they had made the night before, where they had left their belongings. The night came on; the shadows lengthened and were swallowed up in darkness; the wind blew cold; the way was hazardous; so they stopped, made a fire, and prepared to spend another night as best they could

on the bleak and inhospitable mountain side. This time, however, they had level ground for their bed—but ground was all they had, their blankets being—where?

At break of day, August 15, 1820, the thermometer standing at 38, they began the final descent. At the end of about three hours travel, they saw a dense cloud of smoke arising from a ravine not far away. This, they feared, might have engulfed the little encampment where they had spent their first night and left their belongings. They hurried forward toward the source of the smoke as fast as they could travel, only to find their worst fears realized, their blankets, clothing and provisions totally destroyed.

And not only that, but the conflagration had spread over an immense area, leaving only blackened trunks of trees that had so valiantly withstood the onslaught of the rocks and winds from the mountain top, and that had given them anchorage on the first night out.

A long and difficult detour was found necessary to reach the base of the mountain; and, as devastation met the eye at every step, the conclusion was forced upon the minds of the explorers that the fire must have started from their own camp of the night before, and that to them, therefore, belonged the responsibility.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day when they reached their starting point, the boiling spring. Taking stock of the adventure as a whole they decided that while they had lost much in material things they had gained immeasurably in knowledge and accomplished a feat hitherto believed impossible. They wished their cautious guide might know of it.

THE FINAL REPORTS

Had the story ended here the people of Weld would have had only the highest admiration and esteem for Major Long and Dr. James. But it did not end here. There was a final Report to the government in which both Major Long and Dr. James gave this future great county a very definite "black eye."

Boiled down to as few words as possible, that Report stated

that this territory, which now produces some of the finest crops in the world, would never be worth anything to the government except as a "barrier to prevent our people from going too far west." And Dr. James corroborated the story in every detail. It is not too much to say that this Report held back development in this region for more than thirty years, and that, in all probability, had it not been for the bursting of the two gold bubbles in 1849 and '59 that stranded so many people here, it might have been delayed much longer.

However, in justice to Major Long and Dr. James it should be remembered that in 1820, except for hidden potentialities, this region was a desert with nothing more appearing on the surface to indicate those potentialities than now appears to indicate what may be here a hundred and eighteen years hence—the year 2,056.

Following is the portion of the Report touching this region, written by Stephen H. Long himself and corroborated by Dr. James, taken verbatim from the records:

Major Long's Report:

"In regard to this extensive section of country I do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and, of course, not inhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence. Although tracts of land, considerably extensive, are occasionally to be met with, yet the scarcity of wood and water almost universally present, prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country. This objection rests, not only against the section immediately under consideration, but applies with equal propriety to a much larger portion of the country.

"*This region, however, viewed as a frontier, may prove of infinite importance to the United States, inasmuch as it is calculated to serve as a barrier to prevent too great an extension of our population westward;* and may secure us against the machinations or incursions of an enemy that might otherwise be disposed to annoy us in that part of our frontier."

Dr. James' Corrorboration:

"We have little apprehension of giving too unfavorable an

account of this part of the country." (in other words, it hardly could be exagerated.) "Though the soil is in some places fertile, the want of timber, of navigable streams and of water for the necessaries of life, render it *unfit for any but a nomad population.* The traveler who shall at any time traverse its *desolate sands* will, we think, join us in the wish that *this region may forever remain the unmolested haunt of the native hunter, the bison and the jackal.*" If only they could see Weld County now.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Stephen Harriman Long was born at Hopkinton, New Hampshire, in 1764. He graduated from Dartmount College in 1809; taught for several years, serving as Professor of Mathematics at West Point. Entered the Army as Lieutenant in Engineer's corps in 1814. and was transferred to Topographical Engineers in 1816 with brevit of Major. In this capacity he traveled through the southwest between the Arkansas and Red Rivers. His unpublished Reports ranked among the most useful sources of information up to that time available.

Dr. Edwin James was born at Weybridge, Vermont, 1797. He graduated from Middlebury College in 1816; studied medicine under his brother, Dr. Daniel James, of Albany, New York; studied botany and geology under Dr. John Torrey and Professor Amos Eaton, and joined the Expedition of Stephen H. Long in 1820, fresh from his studies and full of enthusiasm.