

John C. Fremont Camps Near Lockeford

In March of 1844, John C. Fremont was dispatched by the US Government to survey the western coast of the country for possible possession by the United States. During his travels, Fremont setup camp near what is now modern-day Lockeford, California. In his diary he wrote:

"We traveled for twenty-eight miles over the same delightful country as yesterday, and halted in a beautiful bottom at the ford of the Rio de los Mokelumnes, receiving its name from another Indian tribe living on the river. The bottoms of the stream are broad, rich, and extremely fertile; and the uplands are shades with oak groves. On the 26th we halted at the Arroyo de los Calaveras (skull creek), a tributary of the San Joaquin. The place is beautiful, with open groves of oaks, and a grassy sward beneath, with many plants in bloom, some varieties of which seem to love the shade of trees."

He crossed the Calaveras River at a point now marked by the Lockeford Post Road concrete bridge. Two days later he wrote:

"March 27, today we traveled steadily and rapidly up the valley making about four miles an hour. During the earlier part of the day our ride had been over a very level part of prairie, separated by lines and groves of oak timber, growing along dry gullies, which are filled with water in seasons of rain; and perhaps also by the melting snows. Over much of this extent the vegetation was sparse, the surface showing plainly the action of water, which in the season of flood the San Joaquin spreads over the valley."

"At one o'clock we came upon innumerable flowers, and a few miles further fields of the beautiful blue flowering lupin, which seems to love the neighborhood of water, indicating that we were approaching a stream. We continued our road for about half a mile, interspersed by an open grove of live oaks, which in form were the most symmetrical and beautiful we had ever seen in the country. The ends of the branches rested on the ground, forming somewhat more than a half sphere of regular figure with leaves apparently smaller than usual."

"The California poppy of a rich orange color, was numerous. Today elk and several bands of antelope made their appearance."

"Our road was now one continued enjoyment, and it was pleasant riding among this assemblage of green pastures with varied flowers and scattered groves, and out of the warm green spring to look at the rocky and snowy peaks. Emerging from the timber we came suddenly upon the Stanislaus River."

John C. Fremont emerged on the national scene in 1836 as the first Republican nominee for President of the United States.