

FIRST DRAFT

Capt. J. N. Macomb, Exp. in New Mexico & Utah.

Plate VII.



J. J. YOUNG from a sketch by Dr. J. S. NEWBERRY.

T. Sinclair & Son, 310, Phila.

HEAD OF LABYRINTH CREEK, LOOKING SOUTH-EASTERLY.

1876 REPORT OF MACOMB'S 1859 EXPLORING EXPEDITION

Artist J.J. Young, who wasn't part of the Macomb Expedition, painted this representation of Labyrinth Creek from a sketch drawn by expedition geologist John S. Newberry. Today the drainage is known as Indian Creek, and it lies primarily on Bureau of Land Management property just outside of Canyonlands National Park.

ROADBLOCKED

Macomb expedition of 1859 was stymied by Utah's Canyonlands

On Aug. 23, 1859, members of Capt. John N. Macomb's Exploring Expedition stood on a butte overlooking the Needles District of today's Canyonlands National Park.

They realized immediately there was no way the Army could build roads across this rugged terrain. The landscape near the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers was "impassable to everything but the winged bird," wrote expedition geologist Dr. John S. Newberry.

In April 1859, Macomb — with the U.S. Army's Corps of Topographical Engineers — was assigned to lead an expedition from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the San Juan River, then to the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers.

In 1857, amid fears of a war between the United States and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — the Mormons — the Army had sent a large force to Utah and eventually built Camp Floyd west of Utah Lake. It also built a wagon road between Camp Floyd and Fort Union in northern New Mexico in 1858.

Next, the Army began looking for a path from Fort Union to southwestern Utah without having to travel north through the Salt Lake Valley. Hence, Macomb's orders.

But that wasn't the expedition's only assignment. Macomb's team was to accurately map as much of the Main



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Branch of the Old Spanish Trail as possible. And they were to fill in empty spaces on the maps for the Four Corners area.

Newberry and other civilian scientists were to record the geology and plant life along their route and take astronomical and barometric readings. While doing so, Newberry made an important scientific discovery. He found fossils of the first sauropod — or long-necked, plant-eating dinosaur — discovered in the American West.

The expedition produced a report with stunning drawings, a detailed map of the Four Corners region and precise descriptions of the geology, fossils, plants and ancient ruins. But it arrived 17 years after the fact.

The Civil War and bureaucratic delays meant that the official report of Macomb's expedition wasn't released until 1876.

By then, John Wesley Powell had completed two trips through the Grand Canyon, and reports of his journeys had been published in magazines. Also by the early 1870s, government surveyors Clarence King, Ferdinand Hayden and Lt. George Wheeler were busy mapping the West. People were more interested in their work than an obscure expedition from before the war.

By 1876, Macomb was a distinguished Civil War veteran

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Plate X.



J. J. YOUNG from a sketch by Dr. J. S. NEWBERRY.

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THE NEEDLES, LOOKING SOUTH-WESTERLY.

1876 REPORT OF MACOMB'S 1859 EXPLORING EXPEDITION

One view of a rock formation near the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park. Painted by J.J. Young from a sketch by John Newberry.

working on Mississippi River projects. He displayed little interest in his earlier project, as he wrote just four pages of the official report. He also disparaged the country they explored. "I cannot conceive of a more worthless and impracticable region than the one we are now in," Macomb wrote of

the area near Canyonlands. Members of the expedition gathered in Santa Fe in June 1859. There, they met Kit Carson and dined with Catholic Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy, according to surveyor Charles H. Dimmock. They also met New Mexico Gov. Abraham Rencher, attended church

festivals and dances. They left Santa Fe on July 13, 1859. Eventually, there would be about 60 men and 70 mules and donkeys, plus sheep for food. There were civilian assistants who helped take scientific readings and

See MACOMB, page 9B >

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