

Monument Station, Gove County

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ON THE rolling bottom land of the Smoky Hill river, 22 miles south and four miles east of Oakley, are the "Smoky Hill Pyramids." Of the many travelers who come to view them, few realize that less than a mile to the south are the deep ruts that mark the old Smoky Hill trail which carried so many pioneers from Leavenworth to Denver, Salt Lake City and the West coast. Nor do they suspect that about a mile west of where the trail strikes the present road is the site of Monument station. To go a step further, they could stand on the very ground of this old military post and not have the slightest idea that it was once graced with the title "fort."¹

All that is left are a few scattered rocks that once were part of the foundations of the buildings and a long L-shaped trench that reaches out to the bluff of the river and might easily be mistaken for a washout were not both ends closed. Several holes, some almost covered, are still to be seen, and denote the position of the "dug-out" of the early post. An occasional tin can and perhaps a few square nails may be found near the depression that one time served as the trash pit. Other than these scanty marks of identification it might easily be mistaken for just another part of this Gove county ranch.

Monument station received its name from the previously mentioned pyramids directly to the northeast, which in the early days were referred to as the "monuments."

The first mention of Monument station is in a letter dated September 12, 1865, from Isaac E. Eaton of the Butterfield Overland Despatch to Thomas Carney, then mayor of Leavenworth. At that time the Smoky Hill route was to be used by Eaton's company in transporting freight and passengers from Leavenworth to Denver and the purpose of the letter was to promote trade. Stations were located between nine and 21 miles apart along the trail with approximately every third station being a "home" station. At these home stations passengers would be fed and kept by a family.²

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1. There is some argument as to whether or not this post was ever referred to as a "fort," although this is the common reference used today.

2. Mrs. Frank C. Montgomery, "Fort Wallace and Its Relation to the Frontier," *Kansas Historical Collections*, Topeka, v. 17 (1926-1928), pp. 194, 195.

It was claimed for the Smoky Hill route that it was better than either the Santa Fe or the Oregon trails because it had a sufficient supply of water along its entire course. What its sponsors did not point out was that it bisected the vast Indian hunting grounds between the other trails. From the outset Indian depredations were a common occurrence.

The first attack on a Butterfield Overland Despatch coach near Monument station was on October 2, 1865. About 30 Indians made the attack. The passengers fought for some time but finally had to abandon the coach, taking the horses and starting east. The Indians plundered and burned the coach, burned the station house, and drove off some mules.³ Before the year was ended Gen. G. M. Dodge placed troops on the road west from Fort Ellsworth at Big Creek, Monument station, and Pond's Creek.⁴

Troops were at Monument station on November 20, 1865, for in the post returns of Fort Fletcher it was mentioned that a portion of this command was called east to help patrol the road because of the especially difficult situation with the Indians that winter.⁵

In December of that same year the station was mentioned once again, as Lt. George Handy accompanied by a sergeant, eight corporals, and 21 privates went to Monument station to escort the paymaster back to Fort Fletcher.⁶ At this time a Captain Stroud was serving as commanding officer of the post.⁷

Evidently there was no commissioned officer at this garrison shortly after, for on January 12, 1866, one was sent there.⁸ Two days later Lieutenant Bell of the 13th Missouri cavalry was sent from Monument and Pond Creek stations with two wagons and 20 men to Fort Fletcher for supplies. The commander of the post reported that they had rations for only 15 days, and he felt that he might have to abandon the station. These troops were still there six days later (January 20, 1866), for the post surgeon of Fort Fletcher was there on that date attending to the sick.⁹

3. *The Daily Rocky Mountain News*, October 16, 1865, as reported in "The Smoky Hill Trail in Western Kansas, 1859-1869," a thesis by John W. Neyer.

4. Montgomery, *loc. cit.*, p. 198. There seems to have been some kind of evolution of names in the development of these stations. The station that is specifically called "Pond's Creek" here is later called simply "Pond Creek" while Monument station is sometimes called "Monuments Station."

5. "Fort Fletcher Post Returns of November 20, 1865," as found in the *Records of the United States Command*, selected pages from v. 456, Department of the Missouri, National Archives, Washington, 1945 (microfilm).

6. *Ibid.* (Pages not numbered.)

7. Neyer, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

8. "Fort Fletcher Post Returns," *loc. cit.*

9. *Ibid.*

Perhaps the necessary supplies never reached Monument, for the post was evidently abandoned. On March 1, 1866, Companies A, E, and I of the First United States volunteer infantry were ordered to march to Monument station and "re-establish" it.¹⁰ On March 28 we find the commanding officer at Fort Fletcher sending one company of cavalry and one of infantry there.¹¹

Except for a single mention of supplies being sent to this post in November, 1866,¹² the voice of history is silent until June, 1867, when J. H. Betts, having recently experienced an Indian attack at Big Creek station, moved to Monument and established a sutler's store.¹³

July 14, 1867, saw the coming of 1st Lt. David E. Ezekiel, commanding I company of the 38th infantry.¹⁴ In the same records which give this information it was reported that Ezekiel had relieved a Lieutenant Nolan of the Seventh cavalry, who had previously occupied the post with his troops. This may have been the company of cavalry dispatched to Monument from Fort Fletcher on March 28, 1866, but this is not conclusive since there was apparently a great deal of rotation at this post.

Root and Connelley, in their *Overland Stage to California*, tell of an incident supposed to have taken place at Monument station. It seems that Enoch Cummings was a driver of one of 40 wagons belonging to Powers & Newman of Leavenworth, and on August 22, 1867, he found himself camped on the Smoky Hill river at Monument. "Several hundred" Indians surprised the caravan at about 5:00 o'clock in the morning. The defenders immediately secured their stock and prepared for battle. The Indians made a grand charge from the west as the sun was rising. All were mounted and their bodies were painted with a variety of color. Cummings described the early morning rays of the sun striking their painted bodies and polished shields and guns as one of the most magnificent spectacles he had ever seen. The battle lasted 32 hours; when the Indians finally withdrew and the travelers counted up the casualties and losses for both sides, they found that one Indian pony had been shot and one mule belonging to the travelers had been run off.

A check of this account suggests that either Cummings was

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Montgomery, *loc. cit.*, p. 197. A sutler's store sold food and drink to troops.

14. "Monument Station Post Returns," August, 1867, as found on photostatic copies obtained from Edward Beougher of Grinnell.

farther away from Monument station than he thought, or that this is something which was evolved in his thinking at a later date, for the post returns of this month show that Company I of the 38th infantry consisting of about 100 men, was stationed there at the time, yet no mention is made of the troops or of the travelers seeking help from them during the battle.¹⁵

Capt. John B. Conyngham was sent to Monument station in August of 1867, to assume duties as commanding officer of the post. He relieved 1st Lt. D. E. Ezekiel who remained there as second in command. At the time he assumed command, he wrote:

This Post is situated upon the Smoky Hill stage route in the state of Kansas, ninety (90) miles west of Fort Hays and forty-seven (47) miles east of Fort Wallace.

No post office has been established at the post. Communications addressed "Monument Station, Kansas" are received with some regularity by the "way pocket" which is carried upon the coaches of the United States Express Co.¹⁶

The winter of 1867 was not too eventful for the inhabitants of this station. Although there was still some difficulty with the Indians along the trail, nature proved to be the greater enemy, for heavy rains made the trail impassable. The railroad was gradually pushing its way westward and was receiving the same opposition from the Indians as did the coaches and wagons over the trail.

By the spring of 1868 the railroad had reached as far west as present Oakley. Due west some ten miles was Antelope station. Antelope station was renamed "Monument" and has retained that name to the present day. It is a community of 200 people. Actually it is 35 miles northwest of the original Monument station.

With the decrease in travel on the Smoky Hill trail, and an increase in Indian attacks on the railroad workers, Co. I of the 38th infantry was ordered to abandon the place on June 24, 1868, and march to "Monument [formerly Antelope station] to guard government stores and protect the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern District."¹⁷

The troops were there but a short time, for on August 23, 1868, they were ordered to march to Fort Wallace.¹⁸ And thus closed the short history of this temporary military post.

15. Frank A. Root and William Elsey Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California* (Topeka, published by the authors, 1901, and reprinted by Long's College Book Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1950), pp. 367-370.

16. "Monument Station Post Returns," *loc. cit.* The Butterfield Overland Despatch sold out to the Holladay Overland Mail & Express Co., April 15, 1866, who in turn sold out to the United States Express Co., February 1, 1867.

17. *Ibid.*, June, 1868.

18. *Ibid.*, August, 1868.

In recent years, Dean Carver and Zack Phelps, making an investigation of all the stations in Logan and Wallace counties, did some research at the ruins. They estimated that there had been a stone building about 75 by 100 feet and a walled parade ground of perhaps an acre. The stables, corrals, blacksmith shop, commissary, and houses were south of the main fort building and along the bank of the river. They also believed they had found an underground tunnel to the river which could have been used to get water in case of siege by the Indians.¹⁹

All of which could very well be true, but very little could be proved from the ruins now. Rain, wind, and amateur archaeologists have stripped the ground of the identification needed. Early settlers in this area used some of the rocks to build their own homes, and nature and curio hunters have done the rest.

19. *Oakley Graphic*, March 13, 1936, as found in the Kansas State Historical Society's "Trail Clippings," v. 3, pp. 220, 221; and in Neyer, *op. cit.*, p. 41.