



The Prairie Traveler: The 1859 Handbook for Westbound Pioneers (Dover Value Editions)

Randolph B. Marcy

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Along with a good rifle and a sturdy horse, this guide was an essential companion for any westward-bound pioneer of the nineteenth century. Its author, Captain Randolph B. Marcy of the U.S. Army, spent most of his military career in the West. At the invitation of the War Department, he shared the benefits of his frontier experience in this remarkable book.

To today's reader, Marcy's manual offers a fascinating view of the rigors and hazards of crossing the country. In 1859, it provided life-or-death advice on everything from finding water and building a fire to avoiding quicksand and treating snakebites. Marcy promised to assist his reader in escaping unforeseen disasters and maintaining relative comfort during the journey, adding that the intrepid pilgrim "will feel himself a master spirit in the wilderness he traverses, and not the victim of every new combination of circumstances which nature affords or fate allots, as if to try his skill and prowess."

Marcy's counsel encompasses choosing the best routes to California, wagon maintenance and the selection and care of horses, food supplies, first aid procedures, and fording rivers. He also conveys information "concerning the habits of Indians," including Native American tracking and hunting techniques, smoke signals and sign language, and battle tactics. Twenty-one original illustrations complement the informative and entertaining text.

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