

JEFFERSON'S SALT MOUNTAIN: THE BIG SALT PLAIN OF THE CIMARRON RIVER

By *Thomas D. Isern**

On November 14, 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent to Congress a message concerning the Louisiana Territory. He outlined the boundaries of the purchase, described its settlements, and praised its natural resources. To the amazement of the congressmen, among the wonders Jefferson cataloged was "about one thousand miles up the Missouri, and not far from that river, a salt mountain. The existence of such a mountain might well be questioned," the president explained, "were it not for the testimony of several respectable and enterprising traders who have visited it, and who have exhibited several bushels of salt to the curiosity of the people of St. Louis.

"This mountain is said to be one hundred and eighty miles long, and forty-five in width, composed of solid rock salt, without any trees, or even any shrubs on it," he continued. "Salt springs are very numerous beneath the surface of this mountain, and they flow through the fissures and cavities of it."¹

Enthusiastic Jefferson hoped to stir American interest in Louisiana, but with his tale of a salt mountain, he instead opened himself to partisan ridicule. The Federalist editor of the *New York Evening Post*, for instance, observed, "We think that it would have been no more than fair in the traveler who informed Mr. Jefferson of this territory of solid salt, to have added, that some leagues to the west of it there was an immense lake of molasses, and that between this lake and the mountain of salt, there was an extensive vale of hasty pudding . . . into which the natives," the editor concluded with glee, "being all Patagonians, waded knee deep, whenever they were hungry, and helped themselves to salt with one hand to season their pudding and molasses with the other to give it a relish."²

Jefferson's salt mountain was a product not of fiction but of misunderstanding. The genuine phenomenon from which his misconception stemmed was the Big Salt Plain of the Cimarron River, west of present Freedom, Oklahoma. (This is not to be confused with another saline area, the Great Salt Plains near Cherokee.) The Big Salt Plain was and is a plain of some 5,000 acres of red sand situated at the confluence of Buffalo Creek and

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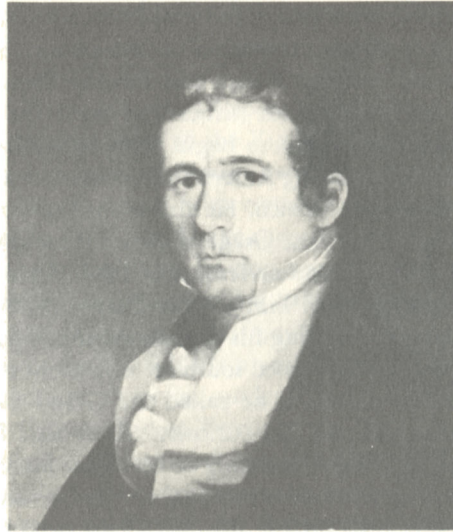
the Cimarron River. Beneath the sands lie deposits of rock salt. Ground water seeps toward the surface, emerging through capillary action as brine—perfectly saturated with salt and weighing 10.2 pounds to the gallon. During warm weather evaporation forms a brilliant, snow-like crust of salt. In several places, especially in the Buffalo valley, brine springs flow freely, creating picturesque brine streams and ankle-deep deposits of salt crystals. The deposits of salt are like flowerets on the sides exposed to air, but the submerged undersides exhibit masses of square halite crystals. The narrowneck, a 100-foot escarpment of red shale capped with white gypsum, faces north and divides the Buffalo from the Cimarron. The Big Salt Plain, from the time of Jefferson to the present, has been the object of so much scientific inquiry, economic endeavor, and human curiosity that it rates as one of the most historic sites in Oklahoma.³

The piecemeal fashion in which knowledge of the Big Salt Plain traveled eastward resulted in Jefferson's belief in a salt mountain. His informant probably was Zebulon Pike, who in 1803 wrote that a man in St. Louis had told him of a "mountain of salt" in the West; Pike himself examined "bushels" of salt in St. Louis. Documents in the man's possession, Pike wrote, described the mountain as sixty leagues by fifteen leagues, dimensions corresponding to those expressed in miles by Jefferson.⁴

The president and others quite reasonably misunderstood reports about the Big Salt Plain, for Osage Indians and other Indians who frequented it long had referred to it as their "salt mountain"; at the base of a mountain, the narrowneck, they gathered salt.⁵ "Salt mountain" was a phrase not easily rendered in French or Spanish, the languages in which early reports of Louisiana came to Americans, without implying that the mountain was composed of salt. Since Jefferson received his reports from St. Louis, he placed the site of the alleged mountain on the Missouri, not on a branch of the Arkansas.

Soon afterward Jefferson received related information. Prior to ascending the Missouri in 1804, Meriwether Lewis interviewed a French trader named Etienne Cadron in St. Louis. Cadron told Lewis that on "a considerable southern branch of the Arkansas" (the Cimarron) and west of the "Great Saline" (the Great Salt Plains) lay "the saline which produces the purest rock salt."⁶ Pierre Chouteau, of the Chouteau trading firm then operating in present-day eastern Oklahoma, carried notes of this interview to Jefferson, along with samples of salt forwarded by Auguste Chouteau. Lewis later donated the salt to the American Philosophical Society, labeled as "Specimen of compact salt formed by concretion and found adhering to the rocks, thro' which a salt fountain issues, situated on the South side of the Southern Branch of the Arkansas River." The clerk of the society added that the sample had been formed by crystallization in solution, and that "The

George C. Sibley, the gentleman explorer from Fort Osage who visited the Big Salt Plain in 1811 (Courtesy of the author).



crystals are small cubes heaped together and in every respect resemble those procured by art." Thus Jefferson, perhaps unknowingly, once himself handled salt from his much-ridiculed salt mountain.⁷

The presence of bushels of salt in St. Louis and the sending of samples by the Chouteaus to Jefferson suggested that now-unknown French voyagers ascended the Cimarron to the Big Salt Plain prior to the American purchase of Louisiana. It was unlikely that traders would have purchased such large quantities of salt from Indians. Other evidence also indicated that adventurers reached the Big Salt Plain prior to 1803. Amos Stoddard, in *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana*, a book published in 1812, cited an interview with a man in Vincennes, Indiana, who in 1771–1772 ascended the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers to a place where he found salt deposits three to five inches thick. Stoddard also claimed to have seen a map drawn by the American freebooter Philip Nolan, who was shot by Spanish authorities in 1800. Nolan, he said, had noted on the map that during one of his horse-catching expeditions in Spanish territory, he had camped at the salt mountain for three weeks.⁸

The man who finally unraveled the mystery of the salt mountain was a gentleman explorer named George Champlin Sibley. An ambitious American expansionist, he was government factor and subagent to the Osage at Fort Osage, Missouri Territory. On May 11, 1811, the dapper Sibley,

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traveling with Osage Indians, French interpreters, and an Irish valet, left the fort for an expedition on the plains. Sibley intended to make peace between warring Kansa and Pawnee Indians and to improve American relations with those tribes and with the various bands of Osage. He expected war soon to begin with both Great Britain and Spain, and he dreamed of leading American frontiersmen and Indian allies in a conquest of Spanish New Mexico. He also wished to satisfy his scientific curiosity. He had heard from the Osage of their salt mountain and had identified it as the origin of Jefferson's reference of 1803. Sibley, who had carried a treatise on minerology with him to Fort Osage, resolved to investigate.

After concluding his diplomatic missions in the Kansas and Platte river valleys, Sibley turned south across present central Kansas to view the Great Salt Plains, which he called the Grand Saline. Inspection of these flats further whetted his curiosity. After first hastening to the Little Osage hunting village, probably on Medicine Lodge Creek in present-day Kansas, to recruit reinforcements against the Comanche, he rode south through the gypsum hills for the Big Salt Plain, which he called the Rock Saline.

At the Rock Saline the explorer found little salt, recent rains having washed away all except small deposits in the Buffalo basin. There he found four brine springs, around which, the Osage told him, salt sometimes accumulated to a depth of five to twelve inches. Near one of them Sibley knelt to hack out with his tomahawk a lump of salt sixteen inches square. "The quality of the rock salt is unquestionably superior to any that I ever saw," Sibley reported to his superior, William Clark. "It is beautifully white and I suspect a great deal heavier than the best imported allum salt."⁹

Returning to Fort Osage, Sibley publicized the Grand Saline and the Rock Saline with letters to Clark and others and by word of mouth. Three other well-known western travelers—John Bradbury, Henry Marie Brackenridge, and Josiah Gregg—later cited Sibley in their writings. Particularly interested in his reports were residents of Boone's Lick, Missouri, the principal source of salt for the Missouri valley. David Woods, a citizen of Boone's Lick, in 1817 wrote to President James Monroe a description of the salines of the central plains, including the Big Salt Plain. He vainly urged Monroe to authorize an expedition to treat with the Indians for rights to the salt.¹⁰

After Sibley, the next Americans known to have visited the Big Salt Plain were eleven men led by Thomas James and John McNight. Among the first Americans to open commerce with New Mexico in 1821, they ascended the Arkansas to a point above the mouth of the Cimarron. There they purchased horses from Osage Indians and continued west guided by Nathaniel Pryor, a veteran of the Lewis and Clark expedition then living with the Osage. They followed the Cimarron to its confluence with Buffalo Creek, finding salt

deposits there. James concluded that the bluffs of the narrowneck were "evidently based upon salt." The men broke off chunks of salt with their tomahawks and traveled on to Santa Fe.¹¹

In 1838 a Frenchman named Pierre Melicourt Papin, agent among the Osage for the American Fur Company, came to the Big Salt Plain with a party of Osage determined to drive trespassing Pawnee away from the place. According to Victor Tixier, a French youth who traveled the southern plains with Papin and the Osage in 1840, the Osage surprised the Pawnee gathering salt. The Pawnee fled into the bluffs, leaving one wounded man to be killed on the salt flats. Tixier noted that the Big Salt Plain was "the one place on the prairie where the Osage go most frequently."¹²

The best-known explorer to visit the Big Salt Plain was the son of Daniel Boone, Nathan Boone, a captain of dragoons under Brevet Brigadier General Zachary Taylor at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory. In 1843 Taylor sent Boone and sixty-two dragoons to protect traders on the Santa Fe Trail against partisans from Texas. He also was to investigate the western salines; he no doubt had urged this mission on Taylor, for Boone was a veteran salt-maker from Boone's Lick. Returning from the Santa Fe Trail in present central Kansas, his command met a large party of Osage under Tocasaba, who accompanied the soldiers to the Big Salt Plain, called by Boone the "Rock Salt." Boone arrived there on June 30. On July 1, a second party of Osage under Talle arrived. "It was evident that the Indians were not pleased by our visit and wanted us away," Boone noted, but first he thoroughly examined the place. "A crust of chrystals is now on the plain in many places an inch in thickness, and is easily obtained, perfectly clean and white as anything can be," he wrote. "The quantity of salt appears to be unlimited."¹³

Boone found in the Buffalo valley "one immense salt spring of water so much concentrated that as soon as it reaches the point of breaking forth it begins depositing its salt. In this way," he concluded, "a large crust of Rock is formed all over the bottom for perhaps 160 acres."¹⁴ Rock salt beneath the surface broke the captain's probing mattock. He and his men thrust their arms deep into the springs, held their hands in the air, and watched white crystals form on their skin. Boone carried this extraordinary report back to Taylor.¹⁵

Still another renowned visitor to the Big Salt Plain was Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, of later fame as a Confederate general. In 1857, under orders from United States Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, Johnston led about 400 infantrymen and cavalrymen south and west from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory. They were to hold councils with the Kiowa, report on feasible routes for a transcontinental railroad, and protect surveyors running the southern boundary of Kansas. On July 22, Johnston

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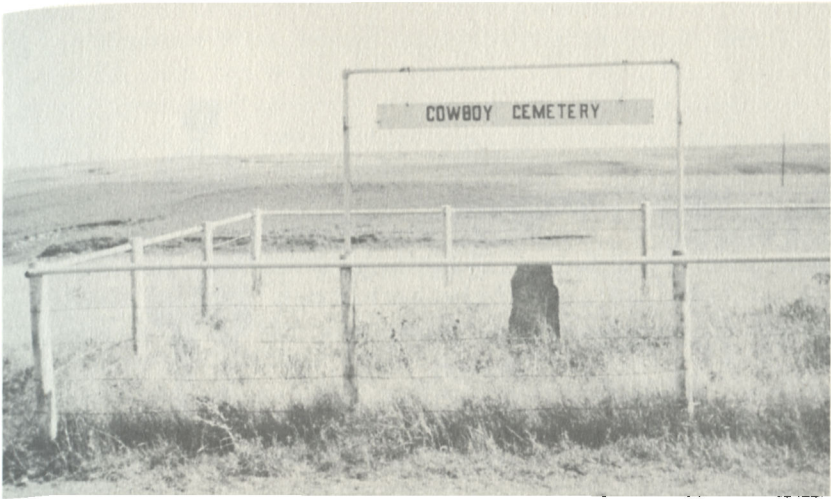
took Company I of the First Cavalry Regiment south from the Kansas line to gather salt on the Big Salt Plain, returning to camp July 24 with two wagon-loads. The troops fed it to stock and used it to salt buffalo meat. On October 3, during the return march, Johnston brought his entire command up the Buffalo valley to the Big Salt Plain. A weary diarist, Private Eugene Bandel, noted only, "At the mouth, there is one of the frequent salt plains of this region."¹⁶

No other explorers of record came to the place until 1873, when twenty-odd employees under United States Surveyor Edward H. Darling ran section lines across the flats. By that time the Big Salt Plain and the other saline deposits of present western Oklahoma had become a concern of federal Indian policy. When the Treaty of New Echota in 1835 conferred on the Cherokee Indians ownership of the Cherokee Outlet, it provided also that saline areas within the outlet were to remain open to use by other tribes. The Osage and the Pawnee continued to frequent the Big Salt Plain, later joined by tribes colonized in Indian Territory, such as the Sac and Fox.¹⁷

The Cherokee themselves showed little interest in the salines until 1881, when the national legislature dispatched two delegates, Daniel H. Ross and R. M. Wolfe, to Washington. They asked Congress for permission to lease the salines to private developers. Congress responded with House Resolution 6687, designating three salines that the Cherokee might lease—the Great Salt Plains, the Big Salt Plain (then termed the "Middle Saline"), and the Little Salt Plain (a few miles up the Cimarron from the Big Salt Plain). All leases were to provide for a royalty to the Cherokee education fund of at least one dollar per ton of salt.¹⁸

Ross and Wolfe returned to Indian Territory and advertised for bids on leases. They opened the bids at Fort Gibson on September 16, 1882, but decided all were too low and rejected them. Proceeding with another part of their mission, a survey of the salines, they hired J. M. Harsha, county surveyor of Reno County, Kansas, and traveled late in September to the Big Salt Plain. Using a point atop the narrowneck as a starting point, they marked off an area six miles by nine miles. On their way back east they surveyed the Great Salt Plains. To the Cherokee legislators they carried chunks of salt spaded from the brine streams of the Big Salt Plain.¹⁹

The Cherokee apparently made no further attempt to lease the salines until 1888, when the tribal legislature empowered the national treasurer to negotiate leases. Robert B. Ross, treasurer, accordingly signed leases on all the salines, a man named H. H. Trott leasing the Big Salt Plain. However, the leases required the approval of the secretary of the interior, and Secretary John W. Noble disapproved them. John H. Oberly, commissioner of Indian affairs, had pointed out to him that the survey done in 1882 had been



The Cowboy Cemetery, located on a ridge several miles north of the Big Salt Plain. A local rancher constructed it to commemorate two cowboys killed by Cheyenne Indians in 1878 while hauling salt (Courtesy of Otis Bickford, Freedom, Oklahoma).

inadequate, for it had failed to connect with the township lines established by Darling in 1873. No leases could be made until this was corrected, and the correction never was made.²⁰

Failure by the Cherokee to execute leases on the salines did not mean that they were unused. Ranchers who grazed stock in the outlet obtained salt for them at the Big Salt Plain. T. E. Buck, who in the 1880s worked for a ranch in southern Kansas, said that near the salt springs "a wagon load may be scooped up in a few minutes. Thousands of tons have been hauled from these plains and used for stock salt, and in many instances farmers have used it for curing meat, and for other domestic uses."²¹ Among the gatherers of salt were two cowboys from southern Kansas, Reuben Bristow and Fred Clark, who in 1878 drove a wagon to the Big Salt Plain, filled it, and started back for Kansas. A few miles north of the salt plain, on Jug Mott Creek, the two fell victim to Cheyenne Indians under Dull Knife escaping the reservation. Hands from the ranch found the bodies of Bristow and Clark and buried them with the spades the two had used to load salt.²²

In 1893, when President Grover Cleveland proclaimed the outlet opened to settlement by run, he withheld from entry the three saline reservations earlier established by the Cherokee. Homesteaders in the area had free use of the salt, and many gathered wagon-loads to sell in towns in southern



An early-twentieth-century journalist traveling with Dr. Charles Gould stands beside a doodle of salt in the Buffalo Creek basin (Courtesy of Oklahoma Geological Survey).

Kansas. T. N. Young, who took a homestead near the Big Salt Plain, made many such trips, selling salt for seven or eight dollars a load. Settlers increased the flow of brine from the springs by opening them with spades. They stacked salt with pitchforks into waist-to-shoulder-high piles to drain the water out; such a pile was called a "doodle."²³

The Big Salt Plain soon drew increasing public attention. "The immense saline reservation in the northeastern part of Woodward County is a remarkable sight in the summer," noted the editor of the *Edmond Sun-Journal* in 1897. "The surface of the earth, so far as the eye can reach, is encrusted with salt from half an inch to more than a foot in thickness. . . . Stockmen scoop it up by the wagon load and feed it to their cattle."²⁴ The following year an agent of the United States General Land Office, George D. Orner, toured the salines. He noted that at the Big Salt Plain cattlemen were hauling away wagon-loads of salt and marveled, "It is easy to find chunks of salt weighing 1,000 pounds."²⁵ Orner recommended that the salines be either leased to developers or opened to entry. Such reports stirred territorial governor Cassius Barnes in 1898 to proclaim, "Oklahoma can easily supply the great West with all her salt."²⁶

In early 1901 Congress, through an act designed primarily for developers in the Mountain West, opened saline lands on the public domain to individual entry. Senate Bill 3313 provided that saline lands might be claimed under laws governing placer mining. Working placer claims eventually could be proved up for permanent title under regulations established by local miner's claim clubs.²⁷

In prompt response 168 individuals, in person or by proxy, met in Alva on March 12, 1902, to establish the Natrona Mining District, its boundaries those of the old Middle Saline reserve. Most of those at the meeting were parties from Alva, organized in a loose company, who intended to win control of the Big Salt Plain for commercial purposes. Regulations adopted at the meeting provided that a miner could take a salt claim of up to 160 acres by first marking its corners with posts and then recording it with the register of deeds of Woods County. Retention of such a 160-acre claim required that the claimant accomplish \$800 worth of labor or improvements on it annually, or a proportionate value for fewer than 160 acres.²⁸

During the next few months some local users of salt took claims, but members of the company from Alva staked out nearly the entire surface of the salt plain. They divided it into 160-acre claims, each of which was recorded by a partnership of eight men. They sank several wells to establish more free-running sources of brine; presumably they planned to establish a factory. Their efforts failed, for a local resident who visited the site in 1903 reported that no claims had been proven up. The only activity on the salt plain was the usual traffic of farmers and ranchers.²⁹

The same visitor, F. W. Brock, also noted that one of the brine springs in the Buffalo basin flowed hot water, which along with cooler waters formed a large pool. He and several companions bathed in the brine. Brock predicted that the place would become famous as a health resort. According to other early residents, at the turn of the century it was common for health-seekers to camp near the springs and bathe in them. As Brock described the bath, "It was invigorating as a plunge in the ocean wave. In a few minutes the water had evaporated, leaving a thin whitish layer of the finest salt. Yielding to impulse, we washed it off. But in a few minutes we discovered that we had not improved our appearance, for we were as white as ever."³⁰

No other attempt to develop the resources of the Big Salt Plain occurred until the Buffalo Northwestern Railroad built up the Cimarron valley to the site in 1918. A group of men from Pomeroy, Ohio, then formed the Santa Fe Salt Company and purchased land on the north side of the salt plain as the location for a salt works. Across the plain, in the Buffalo valley, they staked out salt claims on which they drilled brine wells. From the wells they ran a pipeline to a warehouse they built across the river. They also built a railroad siding to their plant. Initially they planned to force the brine up a vertical

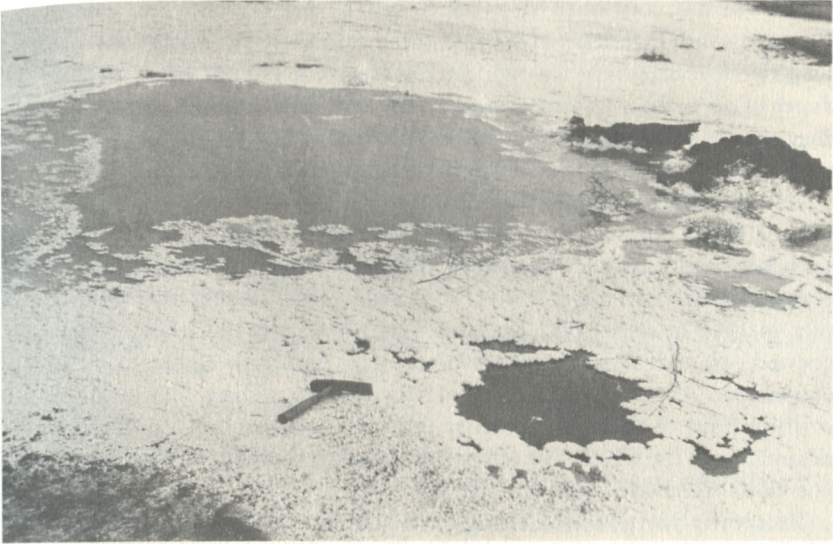
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pipe fifty feet long and spray it from a nozzle at the top. The water was to evaporate in the air and the salt fall in granular form on a platform. The apparatus proved impractical, so the company installed steam-heated evaporation vats. In May, 1922, a tornado swept away the Santa Fe salt works, and they never were rebuilt.³¹

By that time a stubborn entrepreneur named Ezra Blackmon had arrived at the Big Salt Plain. Blackmon, born in Sherman, Texas, in 1893, came to Oklahoma with his parents in 1910. He attended Morningstar School near Freedom, farmed a few years near Coldwater, Kansas, served in the Medical Corps during World War I, and returned from the war to find crop failure and agricultural depression. In the winter of 1920–1921 he began hauling salt from the Big Salt Plain for sale at ranches in the region. He made a permanent camp by a fresh-water spring a few hundred yards north of the salt plain and established transient camps at Lookout, Oklahoma and Coldwater, Kansas. He drove one mule-drawn wagon himself and hired a man to drive another.

After the failure of the Santa Fe Salt Company, Blackmon began an effort to win personal control of the salt plain, not through placer claims, but by buying or homesteading adjoining lands. The salt plain lay in the beds of the Cimarron and the Buffalo, both non-navigable streams, and in the absence of placer claims, the owner of the river bank controlled mineral rights to the center of the stream. Through entries under the stock-raising homestead laws and modest purchases, Blackmon sought to control both banks of the Cimarron. Some entries he made in the name of John Blackmon, his father, or that of Alta Blackmon, his wife. (Alta May Swain had been Ezra's teacher at Morningstar School; she had married him in 1924.) Blackmon fought to exclude other claimants from the salt flats with zeal rivaling that of the jealous Osage a century earlier. To reinforce his claim to the Cimarron River bed, he at one point set an employee to work furrowing the flats with a lister. Asked what he intended to grow on the salt plain, Blackmon coolly replied—salted peanuts. By the mid-1930s he controlled the entire salt plain.

Other than a shallow depression made with a horse-drawn scraper and used to catch brine for evaporation, Blackmon had made no significant improvements on the property. In 1935, backed by a partner, Carl Eklund, he raised \$100,000 for major expansion. Blackmon, as foreman of the new Blackmon-Eklund Salt Company, set up a series of steel evaporation vats heated by steam pipes, the steam coming from a boiler fired with fuel oil, the brine flowing from a well. As salt crystallized in the vats, a conveyor belt powered by a tractor and fitted with angle-iron scrapers swept it out to a loading platform. Trucks carried it away for sale as stock salt. Shortly afterward Blackmon installed a hydraulic press to compress the salt into blocks.



Gould's hammer lies atop salt crystals encrusting the pool (Courtesy of Oklahoma Geological Survey).

"For a time we went along fine," said Blackmon. "Why, in a single day we loaded trucks from as many as five states."³² The plant, he said, could produce sixty tons of salt a day. Soon problems arose, however: Blackmon blamed gasoline taxes and state ports of entry that hampered his customers, but more likely the difficulties were technical. The heavy brine encrusted and corroded the steam pipes. When Blackmon's men pounded off the salt with hammers, the pipes began to leak steam. In late 1937 the plant shut down.

In the summer of 1939 Blackmon-Eklund revived on a limited basis. Scrapping the steam equipment, they excavated shallow ponds, or pans, to catch brine and scraped salt from them with a remodeled road-grader. They stacked the product to drain and sold it for \$2.50 a ton. Even this effort soon ceased. As a non-essential industry during World War II, Blackmon-Eklund received no production quota from the United States Bureau of Mines and thus could hire no workers. In 1944 Blackmon-Eklund lost its holdings to creditors.

Yet stubborn Blackmon tried again after the war. Obtaining a loan from a friend, he resumed production, gradually buying back landholdings that were of little value to anyone else, but which gave him control over the salt

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plain. He has continued to produce salt to the present day, cautiously expanding his business. His brine wells pumped salt water into earthen pans two feet deep. His few workmen scraped the salt out when it reached a depth of six inches, leaving a crust on the bottom as a sealer. For a few years they used a salt-picker designed by Blackmon, but usually they operated road graders and front-end loaders to scrape and pile the salt.

In 1968 Blackmon operated only a single ten-acre salt pan, but in that year he won a contract to supply the Oklahoma Department of Highways with salt to spread on icy highways. His granular product was just the right texture for effective use on roads. Whereas in 1967 he sold only 291 tons of salt, in 1969 he sold 4,005. Such sales continued into the 1970s. Blackmon opened two additional twenty-five-acre pans and built a warehouse for his equipment. He obtained additional revenue by selling oilmen brine for drilling fluid. Recalling his earlier experience in farming, the canny businessman said the advantage of the salt industry was that "You don't plant, you don't cultivate—you just harvest."³³

Prosperity brought little change to Blackmon's style of life. Although his Blackmon Salt Company was listed in Dun and Bradstreet's *Million Dollar Directory*, he and Alta still lived in a tiny red house just north of the salt pans. After Alta moved to a rest home in Enid, the old man lingered alone at the Big Salt Plain—a living link to its colorful past.³⁴

The Big Salt Plain in the twentieth century remained as much a place of fascination for modern visitors as it had been for early explorers. Natural scientists studied it and brought groups of students to examine it. The most notable scientist with an interest in the place was Charles N. Gould, founder of the Oklahoma Geological Survey and first chairman of the Department of Geology at the University of Oklahoma. As part of a general tour of Oklahoma Territory, Gould, along with biologist A. H. Van Vleet and two students, came to the Big Salt Plain in 1900 in a covered wagon. While the students struggled in the river bed with the wagon, Gould gathered plants and Van Vleet pursued birds on the salt flats. Among the countless other scientists and students to frequent the place were A. I. Ortenburger and R. D. Bird of the University of Oklahoma, who studied the salt plain's ecology during the 1930s, and Kenneth S. Johnson, a geologist from the same university, who reported on Blackmon's salt production in the late 1960s.³⁵

Such scholars were heirs of a tradition of inquiry about the Big Salt Plain that stretched back to the time of Jefferson and Sibley. The irony was that they and other modern Oklahomans were unaware of the rich history of the place. The Big Salt Plain stimulated the interest of presidents, attracted a roster of explorers that reads like a Who's Who of the American West, provided an essential element for Indians and pioneers, and was the basis for

an interesting industry—and yet the site is not even listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Big Salt Plain was not only a geological wonder, but also a focal point for the history of the southern plains.

ENDNOTES

• Thomas D. Isern is a visiting assistant professor of History in the Division of Social Sciences, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

¹ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 1503–1504.

² *New York Evening Post*, November 28, 1803, p. 3.

³ Description based on author's examinations of the site in 1976 and 1977.

⁴ Donald Jackson, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, with Letters and Related Documents* (2 vols., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), Vol. II, p. 227.

⁵ George R. Brooks, ed., "George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, Vol. LIX (April, 1965), pp. 191–192; George E. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), p. 286; Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), pp. 403–404.

⁶ Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 180–181.

⁷ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804–1806* (7 vols., New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), Vol. VII, p. 300, Vol. VI, p. 159.

⁸ Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana*, pp. 404–405.

⁹ Sources on Sibley include Thomas D. Isern, ed., "Exploration and Diplomacy: George Champlin Sibley's Report to William Clark, 1811," *Missouri Historical Review*, Vol. LXXIII, No. 1 (October, 1978), pp. 85–102, quote p. 102; Brooks, ed., "George C. Sibley's Journal of a Trip to the Salines in 1811," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, Vol. LIX, pp. 167–207; George C. Sibley to General William Clark, February 22, 1811, typescript in Grant Foreman Papers, Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Oklahoma; George C. Sibley to Colonel Rector, July 29, 1814, photostat in Foreman Papers; and Thomas D. Isern, "George Champlin Sibley, 1811 and 1825–1826," in Joseph A. Stout, Jr., ed., *Frontier Adventures: American Exploration in Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1976), pp. 19–37.

¹⁰ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846* (32 vols., Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904–1907), Vol. V, John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America*, pp. 191–194, Vol. VI, Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage up the River Missouri*, p. 151, Vol. XX, Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, pp. 245–246; Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (17 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934–), Vol. XV, pp. 284–286.

¹¹ Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962, reprint of 1846 edition), pp. 63–66.

¹² John Francis McDermott, ed., *Tixier's Travels on the Osage Prairies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1940), pp. 224–225.

¹³ W. Julian Fessler, ed., "Captain Nathan Boone's Journal," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (March, 1929), pp. 62, 90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁵ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Nathan Boone: Trapper, Manufacturer, Surveyor, Militiaman, Legislator, Ranger and Dragoon," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIX, No. 4 (December, 1941), pp. 323–324, 338; Fessler, ed., "Captain Nathan Boone's Journal," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VII, pp. 58–105.

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¹⁶ Ralph P. Bieber and LeRoy R. Hafen, eds., *The Southwest Historical Series* (12 vols., Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1931–1943), Vol. II, Eugene Bandel, *Frontier Life in the Army, 1854–1861*, pp. 166–167, 198–199.

¹⁷ Edward H. Darling, "Field Notes of the Survey of Lands North of the Canadian River between the 98th Meridian and the 100th Meridian West Longitude, in the Indian Territory," Tract Books, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History* (4 vols., New York: Random House, 1973), Vol. IV, p. 2465; Indian-Pioneer History, Vol. 6, p. 1128, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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²⁵ *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), May 5, 1898, p. 5.

²⁶ *House Document 5*, Vol. 14, 55th Congress, 3d Session, p. 704.

²⁷ *Congressional Record*, Vol. XXXIV, 56th Congress, 2d Session, pp. 334, 576–577, 1280–1281, 1296–1308, 1769; *Statutes at Large of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), Vol. XXXI, p. 745.

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