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Catalogs of Michigan-bas... motor truck companies



The TRAIL *of the* LONESOME TRUCK

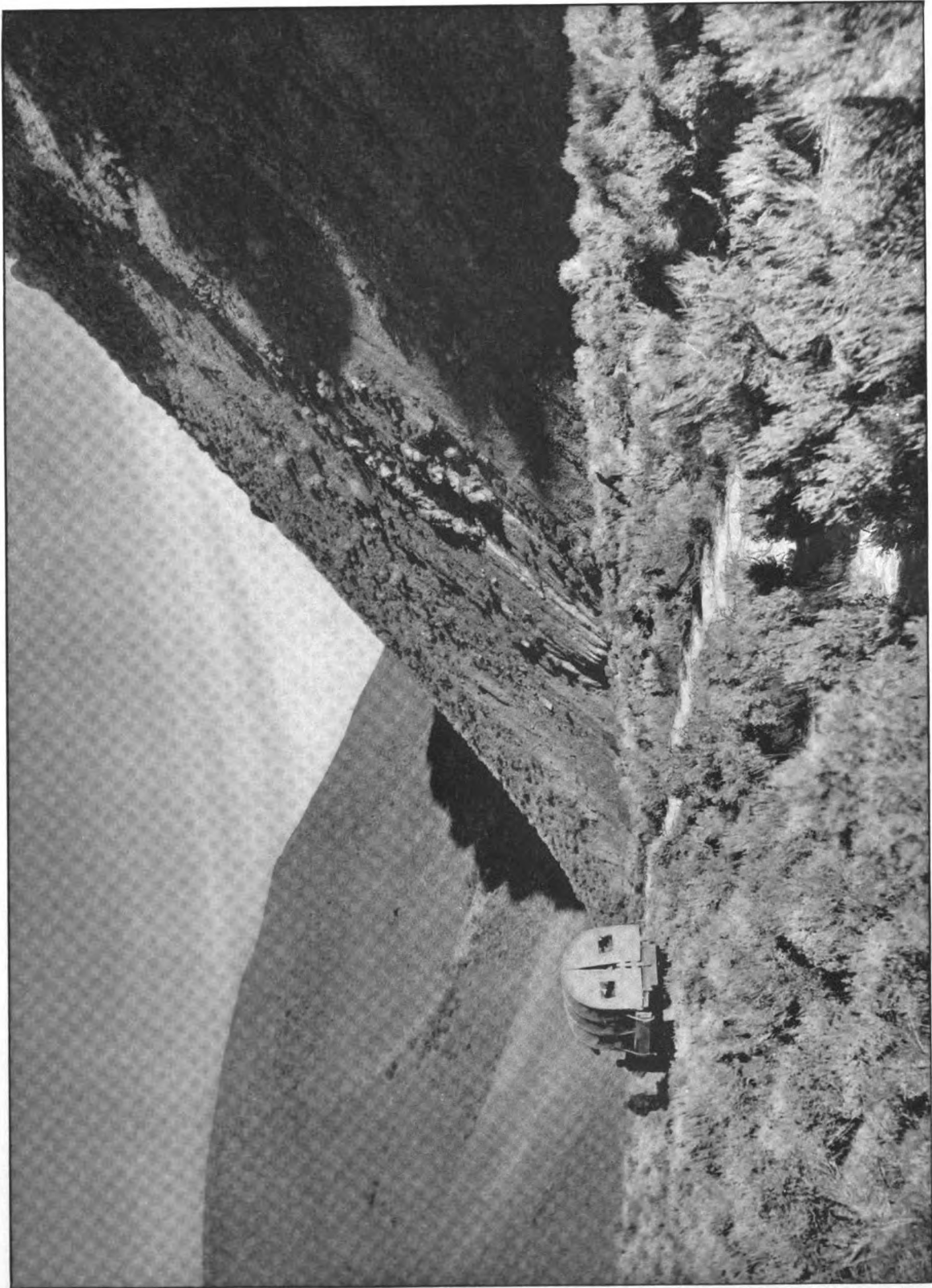
A VIVID RECITAL OF THE UNPRECEDENTED JOURNEY MADE
BY A THREE-TON PACKARD, THE FIRST HEAVY-DUTY MOTOR
VEHICLE TO CROSS THE CONTINENT ON ITS OWN POWER

By W. T. Fishleigh



*Just a reminder that
I've been "out among 'em".
Dr. W. T. Fishleigh*

PUBLISHED IN DETROIT, DECEMBER, 1911, BY
PACKARD MOTOR CAR COMPANY



IN THE VAST SILENCE OF THE SIERRAS



A DEAD TOWN. ONLY THE GRAY, IMPOTENT SHELL OF A ONCE BOISTEROUS MINING CAMP REMAINED

The TRAIL of *the* LONESOME TRUCK



IN THE HEART of that great, desolate expanse which the east knows vaguely as Nevada, came the crux of an ordeal when human fiber wavered in a bitter struggle to keep pace with steel.

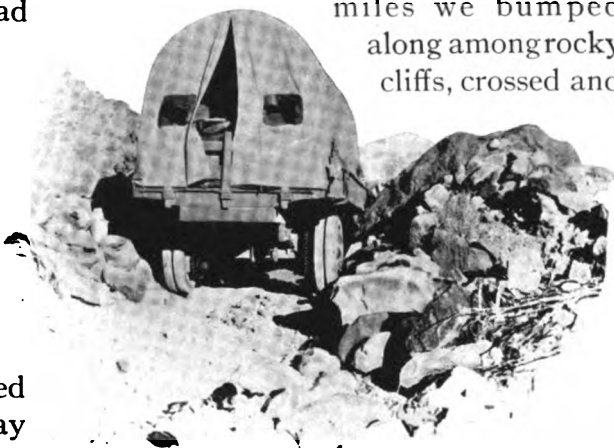
In one day's run to Austin we had climbed laboriously over several mountain ranges, rough and steep jumbles of rock separated by long stretches of tantalizing sand. For hours at a time it was second speed work, a painful crawl under a glaring sun.

Then, for a short space in one of our National Forests, the conditions improved. We ran at full speed and crashed into a big boulder that lay hidden in the sagebrush.

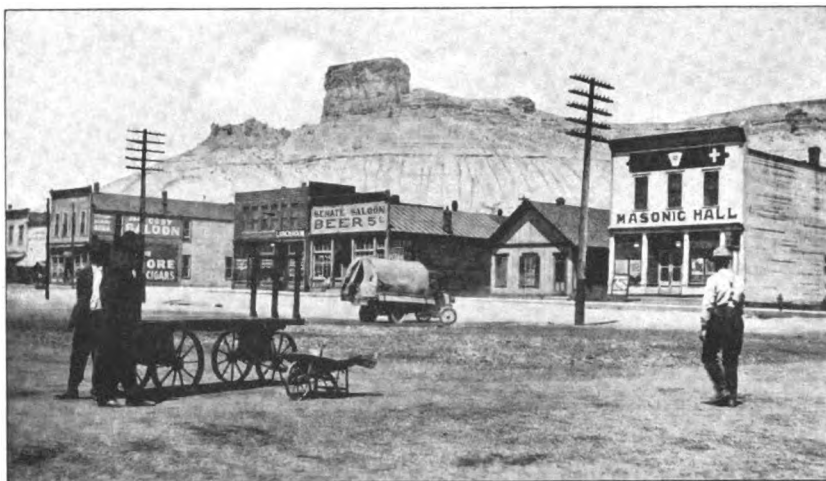
The left front wheel hit it squarely in the middle. We were hurled from our seats. The car with its cargo shivered.

Nothing was broken. The axle was driven back about two inches on the left front spring. Thirty-five minutes with jack and hammers repaired the damage.

West of Austin we battled our way through gorges and narrow passes that were creased with wash-outs and littered with masses of rock. The route led us into a yawning canyon. For eleven miles we bumped along among rocky cliffs, crossed and



IN THE BAD LANDS OF WYOMING



A BORDER TOWN IN WESTERN WYOMING

recrossed river beds with steep banks twenty feet high, stalled in bottomless sand. Then we slid down a loose and shifting bank of shale and blocked the truck just in time to escape destruction on a bed of rocks fifty feet below.

We lost faith in the trail. For hours we had not seen a habitation or a sign of life. Going ahead two miles on foot we came to a rocky gorge that was plainly impassable. For eleven miles, we doubled back over the heartbreaking route.

It was late at night and we were lost in the desert.

At sunrise a group of buildings loomed up cheerfully on a hill. With visions of a warm breakfast we turned our truck toward the unexpected haven. Our spirits mounted with the dawn.

Then a thing sinister and oppressive gripped us. It was Fairview, a dead town—not a cup of coffee, not a human being in the

whole place, not even a dog to wag his tail in welcome. Only the gray, impotent shell of a once boisterous mining camp remained.

The trivial incident was exaggerated in our fevered imaginations. It smote us with sudden dread. The desert mania which turns men

into children was beginning to lay hold upon us. We quit the place as though fleeing from a pestilence.

And now, with a great revulsion of spirit, we came to Frenchie's little shack, which he calls a water station. His place is right on the edge of the sand that stretches away until it merges with the distant range. He sells water for man and beast at so much per head. To us he was the most congenial host we had ever known.

Frenchie warned us that he couldn't serve anything less than the "regular breakfast," as wood and water were so expensive. We told him to go the limit.

As he poured the coffee he confided to us that he had tried many times to get a wife out there; "but it's no use when they know the place." And who could blame them?

We enjoyed our hour with Frenchie and startled his Gallic imagination with accounts of our journey. As we recounted our experience we realized for the



"HURRY UP, BILL, AND TAKE A LOOK AT THEM WHEELS. AM I PLUMB LOCOED OR JUST SEEN' DOUBLE?"

The TRAIL *of the* LONESOME TRUCK

first time the real enormity of our task.

Burnett had been with the truck all the way from New York. He was at the wheel when they disembarked from the Lake Cayuga ferry and made a dash for it as the skids cracked and splintered under the rear wheels. How trivial it

load could battle its way from Omaha to San Francisco in a period of thirty days. Two thousand, one hundred and ten miles, an average of seventy miles a day, over roads that made it a desperate performance at every stage of the journey! Even now we are amazed when we look



WE RAN IN A LABYRINTH OF RAVINES AMONG ENDLESS HILLS

seemed now! He recalled one rainy Sunday in Michigan when they plowed through sand and hills of wet clay from Clinton to Moscow. It had been mere child's play.

Haener told vividly of a race with a storm through Iowa's famous gumbo and of crossing a Mississippi bridge which swayed ominously as the truck crawled over it at dusk, the black waters gurgling with anticipation forty feet below.

Just insignificant preliminaries!

For those who know the country, it is hard to believe that a truck with such a

back over it and realize that the truck stood up against that frightful punishment without a single replacement of a defective or broken part.

Over menacing mountain passes and treacherous cliffs; through Wyoming's notorious Bitter Creek region, where fine sand piles up and blocks the wheels every dozen feet; through the yawning canyons of Utah, punctuated with big rocks and dangerous turns; across the maddening Nevada deserts, too desolate and too hot for description; over the towering Truckee summit, west of Reno—no truck was ever put to more



AN INCIDENT THAT NEARLY WROTE FINIS FOR THE UNDERTAKING, THE TRUCK AND THE CREW

terrific test and no truck ever showed any better stuff.

It became a most serious undertaking from the day we left Omaha. In our trip through Nebraska, we learned the meaning of "fair roads with bad spots at intervals." When a Nebraska man tells you which road to follow, thank him—but don't take it. Once we followed directions and landed in the middle of a buffalowallow on a dark night. It was the blackest, stickiest, most persistent mud we ever had seen. And we had seen considerable mud. When we got out, the harvest hands were eating breakfast.

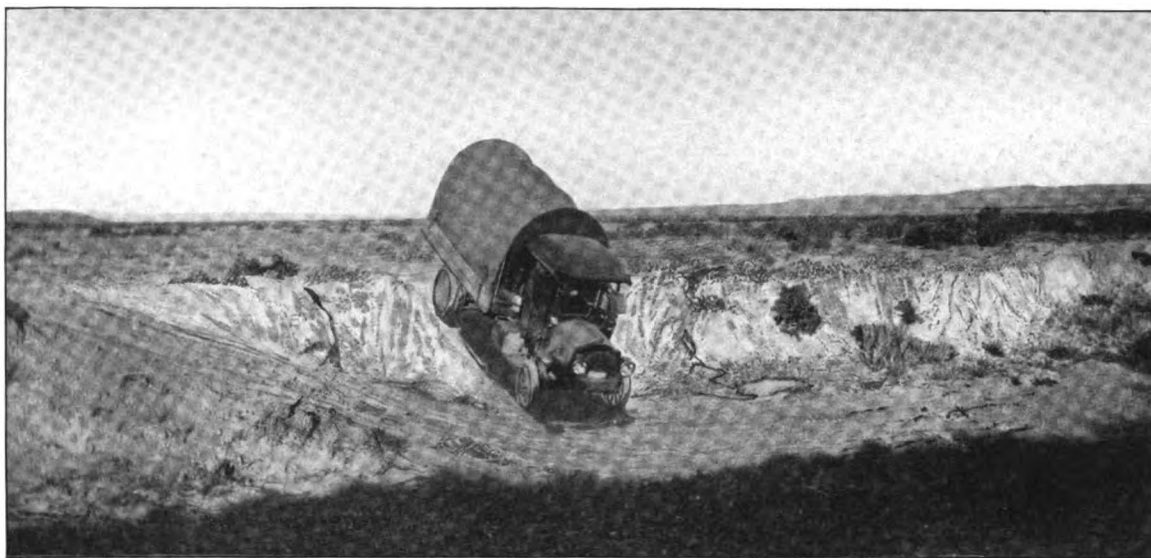
A dozen times a day we met those treacherous mud holes. Often we rushed them; sometimes we bridged them with skids. Frequently we tore down fences, plowed through fields

and climbed over rough hills in order to get around. It was punishing work for the motor, but as its burdens increased its action seemed to improve. It had become our friend.

Beyond Kearney, the country began to widen out. Houses were far between. Alfalfa fields gave place to waste spaces and hundreds of meadow larks broke into startled flight. We were on the edge



ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF THE SIERRAS



PLUNGING INTO A WASHOUT IN THE WYOMING BITTER CREEK REGION

of man's domain. Only the steady hum of the engine kept us from feeling keenly the lonesomeness of our position in that forbidding landscape.

We crossed the long, shivering bridge into North Platte and for a second time came near ending our trip in river bottoms.

Conditions grew steadily worse. The roads were rougher, the hill trails steeper and the stretches of sand more formid-

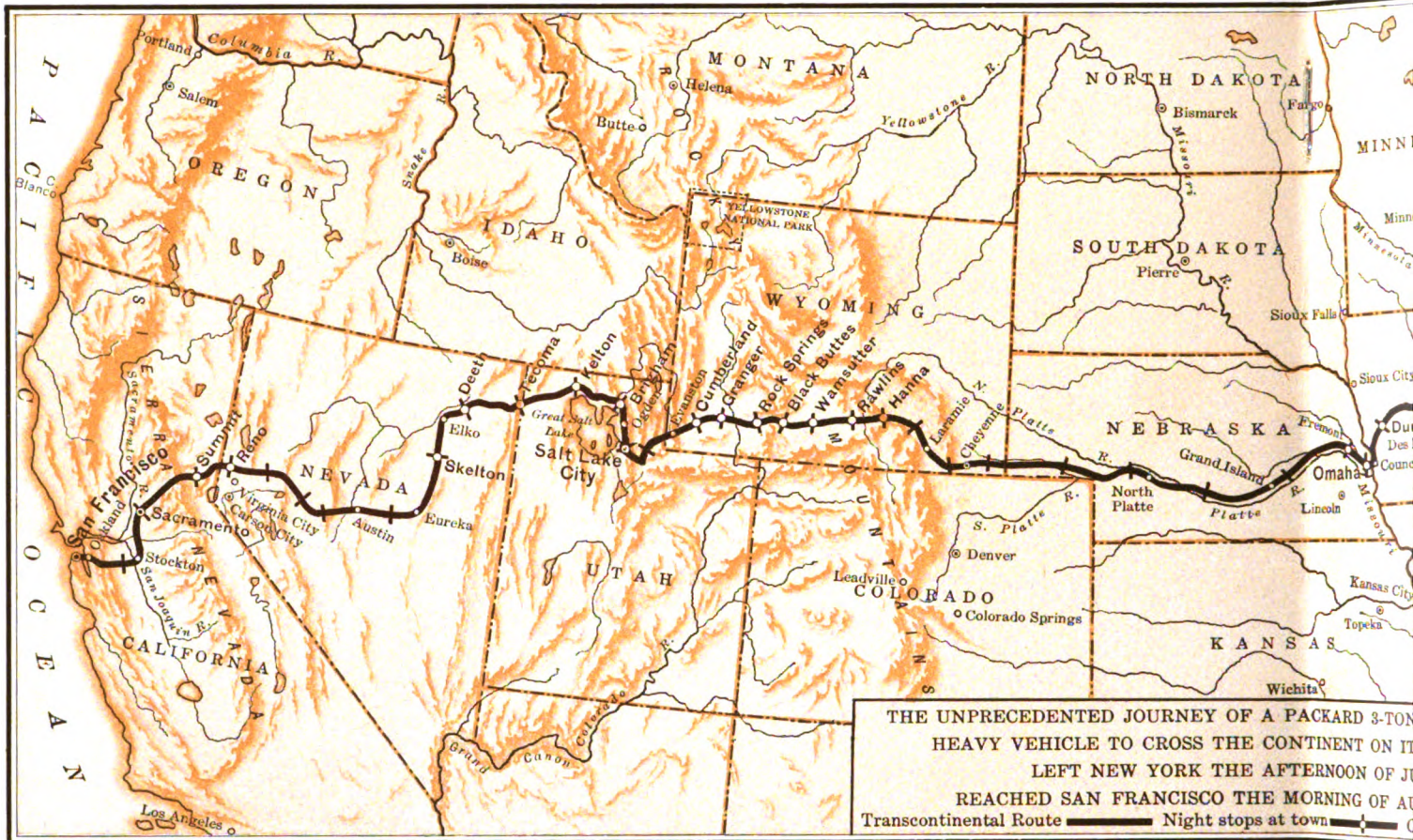
able. The few natives we encountered looked upon us with curiosity if not with suspicion. One slouch-hatted westerner met us at a cross roads with a shotgun carefully balanced on his folded arms. We did not stop.

After Ogallala it became a wilderness—no houses, nothing. Someone had pointed out "a good short cut to Chappell." We ran in a labyrinth of ravines among endless hills. We couldn't move in the ruts with our eighty-inch spread of rear wheels and to pound along over the rocks and cactus mounds was a crime against machinery. Each one of us felt a nerve strain in thus taxing the engine. We needed that motor in our business and we didn't think that anything made by human hands could stand what we were giving it in the brutal necessity of the hour.

As we looked over the line into Wyoming



THIS SORT OF GOING WAS A CRIME AGAINST MACHINERY



The Fact

Left New York the afternoon of July 8. Reached San Francisco the morning of August 24, 1911.

Crew

W. T. Fishleigh, E. L. Burnett and Arnold Haener.

Load

Three tons. Total weight exceeding thirteen thousand pounds.

Route

New York to San Francisco, by way of Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Omaha, Cheyenne, Salt Lake City, Reno, and Sacramento.

Distance

Three thousand, eight hundred and thirty miles.

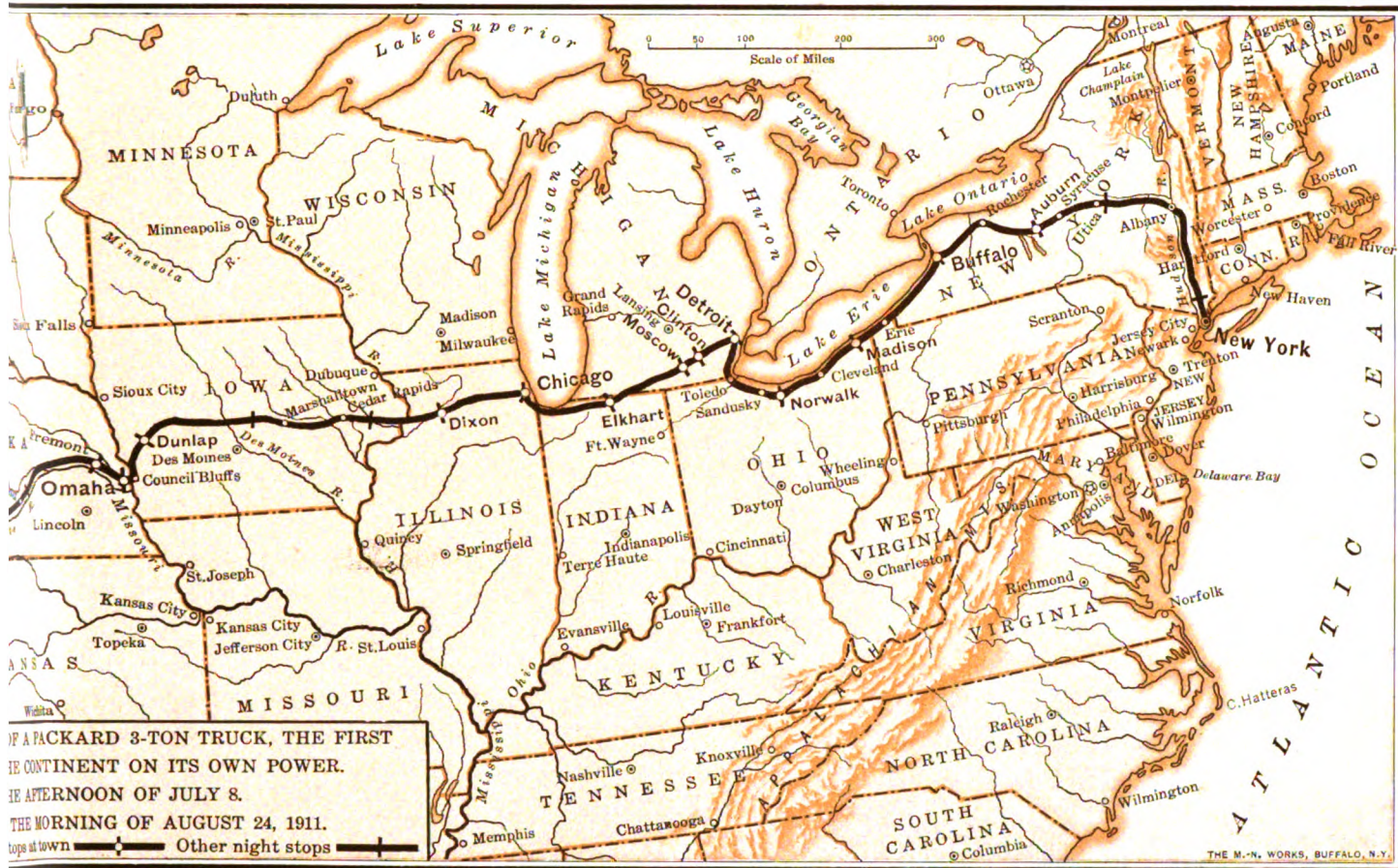
Elapsed Time

Forty-six and one-half days.



THE MEMBERS OF THE TRUCK CREW WERE TAKEN FOR ITINERANT PHOTOGRAPHERS, POT HUNTERS, WANDERING FORTUNE TELLERS, TELEGRAPH LINEMEN, ETC.

LONESOME TRUCK



Equipment

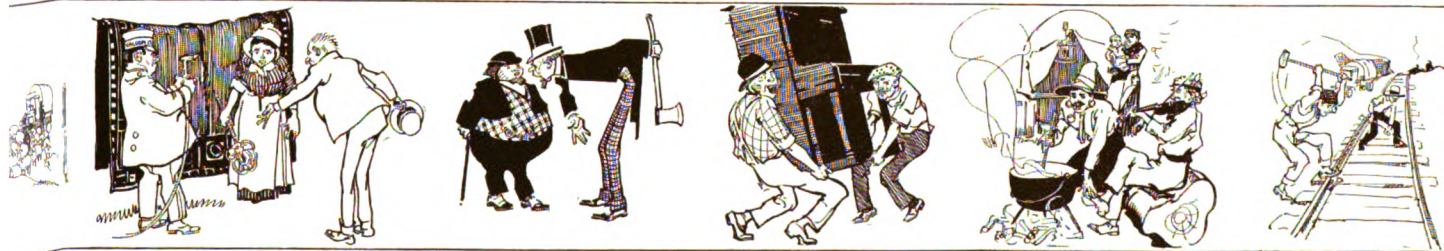
Gasoline and oil in barrels, jacks, rope and windlass, skids, chains, blocking, tarpaulins, sand bags, tools, lanterns, bedding, canned goods and water.

No Assistance

No horse or other outside aid was used at any point, the entire journey being made on the power of the truck itself.

No Replacements

A complete supply of extra parts was carried, but there was not a single replacement, except tires, on the entire trip. The only time the rope and windlass were out of the car was when the crew lashed the truck to a telegraph pole west of Rawlins to prevent it from falling off of a bridge into a canyon.



TELEGRAPH LINEMEN, SHEEP HERDERS, VACUUM CLEANERS, VAUDEVILLE BARN-STORMERS, PIANO MOVERS, GYPSIES AND RAILROAD SECTION MEN



THE TRAGEDY OF THE THREE TREES IN DEETH, NEVADA

we anticipated trouble. We got it. We struck the worst roads in the United States.

We found natural automobile destroyers consisting of baked clay ruts, deep in a wilderness of sagebrush, bumps and prairie dog holes. Long stretches of fine, rolling sand enveloped the lowlands and rocky palisades guarded the summits. Washouts five to twenty feet deep racked and twisted the truck as we dropped into them and gave us the eternal problem of motor racing, clutch jamming and wheel blocking in the mad scramble to get out.

Through these waste places, forty, fifty and sixty miles long, we struggled on. It is called the country God forgot. We traveled for one entire day without sight of a single person, a shack, a tree or a running stream. Just brown hills, rocks, sagebrush and sand.

Twenty miles out of Laramie our rear wheels crashed through a culvert, the third mishap of this sort since leaving Omaha.

We were becoming expert bridge wreckers by this time and in just ten

minutes we were on our way. The dry weather that preceded us made it possible to navigate a mile of mud bottoms east of Medicine Bow. After a rain this morass is impassable for weeks at a time.

Rawlins, with its Bible garage and Boomerang bar, looked almost metropolitan. By this time we were accustomed to seeing Indians and cow men monopolizing a main street lined with saloons.

Nine miles out came an accident that almost wrote finis for the undertaking, the truck and the crew. With the front wheels on a shaky bridge over a deep canyon, the clay approach gave way under the right rear. The rear axle and left wheel jammed on the roadbed but when we tried to back, the whole approach began to cave from under us.

We moved with the swiftness of desperation. Our heavy tackle was lashed to both ends of the frame and looped



SHOWING HOW THE TRUCK WAS RACKED AND TWISTED



WYOMING, AND THE WORST ROADS IN THE UNITED STATES

around a telegraph pole on an abandoned railroad grade. By twisting with shovel handles and crow bars, we drew the rope taut. Even then we held our breath as we took out the load with the truck trembling on the perilous brink. We jacked it up, put skids under the rear wheels, murmured a prayer and went ahead. It was a subdued and serious trio that resumed the journey on the other side.

At five o'clock that afternoon we surmounted the continental divide.

We entered the Bad Lands and lost one of the dual tires on the left rear wheel. It had been literally ground off by the rocks. We tried to hold it in place with wire and rope but the fastenings were chewed into bits in a few hundred feet of travel. The outlook was now almost hopeless. There was no machine for changing solid tires within hundreds of miles. Our orders were to go ahead as long as the truck could make prog-

ress. Handicapped as we were, we drove over the worst roads in Wyoming and through a rocky Utah canyon into Salt Lake City.

At Bitter Creek station we came to the notorious sand patches. A dozen times on the road cheerful natives had warned us that we didn't have a chance to get through. An enterprising citizen, owner of two good teams, makes a comfortable living by pulling motor cars through this shifting, bottomless stretch of engulfing sand. Twice we had to use our skids, but the motor never whimpered.

It took us five hours to skid, push and dig our way through the ten miles from Black Buttes to Point of Rocks. Patches of deepsand, jagged rocks, ruts and sharp inclines packed themselves by the dozen into every mile. Often we had to jam our way through a narrow pass with one wheel in the trail and the other where it chanced to climb on a wall of rock. Time and again the truck strained every fibre of its frame as it



LUCKY TO HAVE ONE WHEEL IN THE TRAIL



HE TOLD THEM THEY COULDN'T GET THROUGH BUT THEY FOOLED HIM

plunged down and almost stood on end in the vicious washouts that slanted across our path. With foot and emergency brakes set, we shot the declines, the chassis twisted at an angle which caused the big frame to creak in agony. With one wheel a foot off the ground and the truck burying its nose in the soft earth, we braced ourselves to keep from being tossed over the bonnet. For ten miles we literally fought for every foot of progress.

Half a day out of Granger we struck an obstinate trail dotted with sagebrush and gouged by deep diagonal washouts. Then followed several miles of tortuous going through the dry muck and silt of a river bottom. Crossing a high divide into Evanston, the rugged canyons and great valleys rolling for miles toward snow-topped ranges lying to the west offered a pleasing variety after the dreary deserts through which we had passed.

From Evanston to Salt Lake City was a panorama of canyon

scenery. It was a steady climb for twenty-two miles after leaving Coalville. They told us we could coast the last twenty miles into the Mormon capital but dangerous rocks and sharp turns along the canyon walls made it a hazardous run. We stopped for a day and a half in Salt Lake City for a change of rims and tires. We enjoyed the novelty of good roads to Ogden and Brigham, but sharp-cornered diagonal ruts, glaring white clay and choking dust marked our entrance into Nevada. Our faces felt the hot winds from the great deserts that shimmered in the sun between the ragged mountain barriers to the south. We camped that night with the truck hub deep in sand.



AT THE LEFT, BURNETT, WHO SAW IT THROUGH FROM NEW YORK TO SAN FRANCISCO. NEWBERRY IN THE MIDDLE AND HAENER AT THE RIGHT, WERE RELIEF DRIVERS



THEY PENETRATED THIS DESOLATE WYOMING COUNTRY FOR HUNDREDS OF MILES

At Deeth we backed into a tree and there were only three trees in town. The natives demanded fifty dollars for the tree and when they threatened violence we went after a lawyer. There was no legal light in the whole benighted burg. Finally we found the constable and signed a statement that in case the tree died we would pay the damages. The kind official held the furious ones in the hotel bar while we made what speed we could toward the setting sun.

We camped at Skelton beyond Elko and that night an incendiary fire destroyed a rancher's barn. The sheriff rushed out in an automobile, a half dozen natives gathered on horseback and Indian Johnny with war paint on came galloping over the mountain. With the noble red man to do the tracking, the man hunt was on and the roads were closed to travel. By changing our route down the other side of the valley we managed

to get through without waiting for the necktie party.

From Eureka, west for twenty miles, it was boulevard and then the extreme of hardship, culminating in the mockery at Fairview and lasting without a break until the tension was relieved at Frenchie's cabin.

For fifty miles to Fallon the way was burning sand and a glaring expanse of salt. Heat rose in a swirling stream off the desert and the lake's blue mirages wrought marvelous effects in the cloudless sky. But our blood was up now and we kept pounding her through. When we drove into Reno on Sunday afternoon, August 20, we began to feel the tingle of approaching victory. We had not been beaten so far and we felt that the worst was behind.

Reno banks don't open until ten in the morning, hence a late start Monday. We plunged into an orgy of voluptuous

scenery. Every mile opened up wonderful canyons and inspiring mountain panoramas. We ran for miles through a rolling National Forest, thick with gigantic pines, through which sparkling patches of snow be-spangled distant peaks.

Past Donner Lake we plunged into a chaos of awful rock—

giant walls, thousands of feet high on either side, and great boulders strewn carelessly about. Our huge car looked like a mere toy on a miniature trail.

We climbed narrow shelves blasted out of the cliff at sharp turns in the road. More than once we went ahead on foot when it seemed impossible to get through. East, north, west and south the trail wound among the rocks, always upward at a sharp grade. Sometimes we could see our road cut into the face of the rock far above us on the mountain side. We wondered how we could ever make the climb. As a sustained



A WATER STATION IN THE NEVADA DESERT

pull, it was the most gruelling test of the whole journey, and never, I believe, did a motor make a more magnificent response.

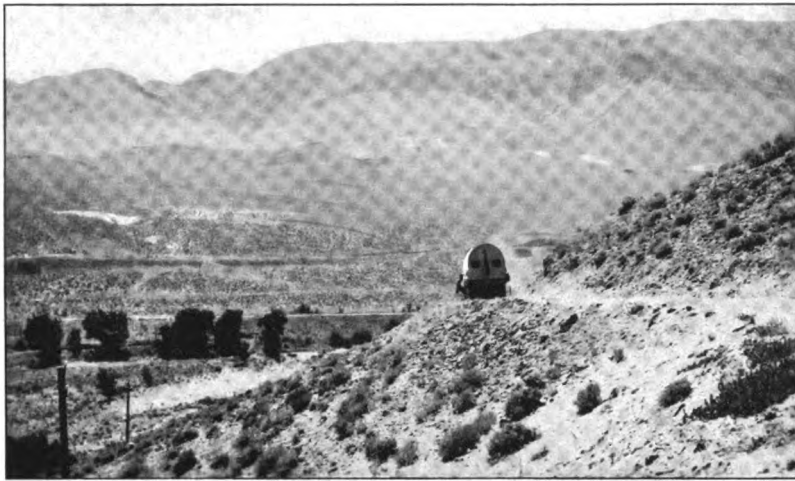
Twenty, thirty, forty per cent were registered on the rocky grades. Only those who have been over it can appreciate that climb. Four or five times we had to block the wheels, race the motor, jam in the clutch and make a few feet, only to repeat the process. They swear that the planking through the snow sheds is at an angle of forty-five to fifty per cent and we believe it. In thirty-six miles from Reno to Truckee, we had mounted thirteen hundred feet. Then we went straight up twelve hundred feet in fourteen miles from Truckee to the summit in less than four hours' time.

It was a wonderful trip and a superb performance for a truck. The reward was at hand.

Once over the summit, we knew that more



AN ODD MEETING IN THE SAGEBRUSH



APPROACHING A GREAT WALL IN THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS

than seven thousand feet would be our drop in the two days' run to San Francisco. Railroads, wagon roads and irrigation ditches wound down those California valleys in a constantly shifting race for advantage of grade. Eyes that were bleared by sun and sand found solace in unending views of fruit-laden orchards and of hillsides clothed with ripening grapes. Over oiled macadam, we rolled peacefully down the long slopes to Sacramento.

Ninety-eight miles had been easy that day and the next was a repetition of it. In the evening we crossed a range of rough hills and camped in a road lined deep with plum trees. Twenty miles of boulevard was all that lay between us and our goal in 'Frisco. We closed our eyes that night in the sweet relief of knowing that the game was won.

We ran into Oakland Thursday morning, August 24, feeling the

flush of victory. You will pardon the pride that thrilled us at that moment—pride in our truck that had come through this terrific test with a perfect score, pride in the time record that was better than we had dared to hope and pride in the Packard standard for which we had struggled not in vain.

Some of the road battles along the route had left us gasping for breath and some of the more perilous moments had seared themselves upon our memory. Sometimes when we were glum with weariness a flash of humor relieved the ache of toil and hardship.

"What'er you fellers doin', fixin' bridges?" inquired a native of Shelton, one of the breathing spots in Nebraska.

"No," growled Haener, "breakin' 'em," and the native grinned his appreciation.

In the general store at Bignell we encountered a lady who was long, lean and brown. "My husband has been wonder-



IT SEEMS GOOD TO MEET A PACKARD CAR IN A LONESOME SPOT

The TRAIL of the LONESOME TRUCK



GREAT WORK, BOYS! IT WAS A HARD JOB AND YOU GOT AWAY WITH IT

in' ever sence we settled here what on earth he done it for," she said, thoughtfully, and we regretted that we were unable to enlighten her.

As we followed the railroad right of way for days at a time we made friends with engineers and trainmen. They saluted us with whistle and bell and waved congratulations as they saw us get through the bad places.

Western hospitality blazed forth in every town and it always took the same form. Had we accepted one-tenth of the invitations we would doubtless be out there yet.

And when some other crew starts to follow our trail they must figure on something more than mere

determination and a wonderful truck. Without the perfect weather which followed us like a good omen, without the charmed lives which we seemed to bear when we broke through bridges and without the favor of fortune in following trails

and interpreting the road directions, there was little chance to get through. We admit that we were lucky, but we had the goods and we made the most of both our luck and our goods.

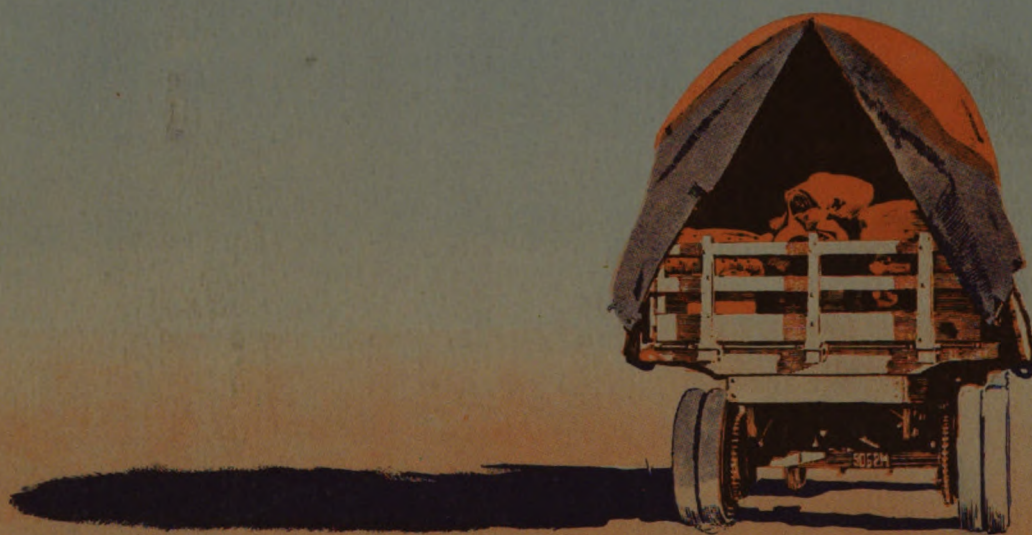
Cuyler Lee and his men met us in San Francisco. A hundred bands were playing and twenty thousand men were marching, while flags waved frantically in the breeze. It was the Eagles' parade, but to our own excited fancy it was our welcome.



IN A FOREST OF JACK PINES



The TRAIL *of the*
LONESOME TRUCK



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