

# TRAVELS

IN

THE INTERIOR OF AMERICA,

IN THE

YEARS 1809, 1810, AND 1811 ;

INCLUDING

A DESCRIPTION OF UPPER LOUISIANA,

TOGETHER WITH

THE STATES OF OHIO, KENTUCKY, INDIANA, AND  
TENNESSEE,

WITH THE

ILLINOIS AND WESTERN TERRITORIES,

AND CONTAINING

Remarks and Observations

USEFUL TO

PERSONS EMIGRATING TO THOSE COUNTRIES.



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## Foreword

The first edition of John Bradbury's *Travels in The Interior Of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* appeared in Liverpool, 1817. The book, which achieved considerable popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, is significant for several reasons. It provided the public with one of the first detailed descriptions of the Missouri River Valley since the publication of the findings of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803-1806. It also supplied the public with information about the Ohio River Valley, into which poured a stream of emigrants from the eastern United States, from Great Britain, and from other countries. Because Bradbury wrote about Americans in a friendly, understanding manner, his book helped counteract some of the rather biting observations which other English travelers had made about the United States in the hostile climate of the War of 1812.

John Bradbury had been commissioned by the Botanical Society of Liverpool to investigate plant life in the United States. On Thomas Jefferson's advice, he determined to make St. Louis his base of operations. During the spring and summer of 1810 he undertook a number of short trips from St. Louis to collect plant specimens. In early 1811 he met Wilson P. Hunt, the leader of an expedition to the Pacific Coast for John Jacob Astor. Hunt invited Bradbury to come along. Bradbury accepted the invitation and

accompanied the party some 1,800 miles up the Missouri River to the Arikara Indian villages. There he left Hunt's party and, with Ramsay Crooks, went another 200 miles up the Missouri to visit fur trading stations. Journeying back down the Missouri to St. Louis, Bradbury later descended the Mississippi to New Orleans, experiencing an earthquake en route. From New Orleans he sailed in January, 1812, for New York. Caught in America by the War of 1812, Bradbury remained four more years. After the cessation of hostilities he traveled through the western states and into the Illinois country before returning to England.

Bradbury devoted most of the space in his book to an account of his trip up the Missouri River. His journal reveals the keen enthusiasm of the dedicated scientist, ready to brave almost any hardship to obtain a desirable specimen. His descriptions of the country and his observations of the Indians reveal unusual discernment.

But Bradbury's remarks about the Ohio River Valley, though much briefer, also hold great interest. The cooperativeness of the westerners in organizing "frolics" and "bees" to help one another impressed him favorably. "In no part of the world is good neighbourhood found in greater perfection than in the western territory, or in America generally," he wrote. The lack of class consciousness also won his applause. "That species of hauteur which one class of society in some countries show in their intercourse with the other, is here utterly unknown." The vast emigrations into the western United States demonstrated clearly, he thought, the superiority of that country. Nevertheless, the emigrant who settled in the West without careful forethought risked disappointment, he warned. It was because of superior planning and or-

ganization "that the Germans, Dutch, and Swiss succeed much better than those from any other country."

As proof of the genuineness of his admiration for western America, Bradbury returned after the publication of his book and settled in St. Louis. Reuben G. Thwaites gives a useful account of Bradbury and his journal in his edition of "Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811," in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846* (Cleveland, 1904), V, 9-15.

On the 14th in the evening, we arrived at New Madrid, and having occasion for some necessaries, I bought them in the morning. I was much disappointed in this place, as I found only a few straggling houses, situated round a plain of 'from two to three hundred acres in extent. There are only two stores, and those very indifferently furnished. We set off about nine o'clock, and passed the Upper Chickasaw Bluffs; these bluffs are of soft sand-stone rock, of a yellow colour, but some parts being highly charged with oxyd of iron, the whole has a clouded appearance, and is considered as a curiosity by the boatmen. At the lower end of the bluffs we saw a smoke, and on a nearer approach, observed five or six Indians, and on the opposite side of the river, but lower down, we heard a dog howling. When the Indians perceived us, they held up some venison, to show us that they wished to dispose of it. Being desirous of adding to our stock of fresh meat, I hastily got into the canoe, and took with me one of the men, named La France, who spoke the Chickasaw language, as I supposed the Indians to be of that nation. We very imprudently went without arms, an omission that gave me some uneasiness before we reached them; especially as the boat, by my direction, proceeded leisurely on.

We found the Indians had plenty of deer's

flesh, and some turkies. I began to bargain for them, when the people in the boat fired a shot, and the dog on the other side of the river instantly ceased to howl. The Indians immediately flew to their arms, speaking all together, with much earnestness. La France appeared much terrified, and told me that they said our people in the boat had shot their dog. I desired him to tell them that we did not believe that our people had shot their dog, but if they had, I would pay them any price for him. They seemed too much infuriated to hearken to him, and surrounded us, with their weapons in their hands. They were very clamorous amongst themselves, and as I was afterwards told by La France, could not agree whether they should immediately put us to death, or keep us prisoners until we could procure goods from the boat to pay for the dog, on which it appeared they set a high value. Most fortunately for us, the dog, at this instant began to bark opposite to us, having run a considerable distance up the river after the shot was fired. The tomahawks were immediately laid aside, and I bargained for half a deer, for which I gave them a quarter dollar and some gunpowder. I was not very exact in measuring the last, being rather anxious to get away, and could perceive that La France had no desire to stay any longer.



On reaching our canoe we seized our paddles, and being told by La France that we were not yet out of danger, I joined him in making every exertion to get out of their reach. When we conceived ourselves safe, we relaxed, and he told me that even when we were leaving them, they were deliberating whether they should detain us or not; some of them having remarked that the dog might be wounded. We had been so long delayed by this adventure, that it was more than an hour before we overtook the boat. I blamed them much for firing, and charged them with having fired at the dog: this, however, appeared not to have been the case, as they had fired at a loon, (*Mergus merganser*.) In the course of this day, we passed no fewer than thirteen arks, or Kentucky boats, going with produce to Orleans; all these we left a considerable distance behind, as they only float with the stream, and we made considerable head way with our oars. In the evening we came in view of a dangerous part of the river called by the Americans the *Devil's Channel*, and by the French *Chenal du Diable*. It appears to be caused by a bank that crosses the river in this place, and renders it shallow. On this bank, a great number of trees have lodged; and on account of the shallowness of the river, a considerable portion of the branches are raised above the surface; through these the water rushes with

such impetuosity as to be heard at the distance of some miles.

As it required every effort of skill and exertion to pass through this channel in safety, and as the sun had set, I resolved to wait until the morning and caused the boat to be moored to a small island, about 500 yards above the entrance into the channel. After supper, we went to sleep as usual: about ten o'clock, and in the night I was awakened by a most tremendous noise, accompanied by an agitation of the boat so violent, that it appeared in danger of upsetting. Before I could quit the bed, or rather the skin, upon which I lay, the four men who slept in the other cabin rushed in and cried out in the greatest terror, "*O mon Dieu! Monsieur Bradbury, qu'est ce? qu'il y a?*" I passed them with some difficulty, and ran to the door of the cabin, where I could distinctly see the river as if agitated by a storm; and although the noise was inconceivably loud and terrific, I could distinctly hear the crash of falling trees, and the screaming of the wild fowl on the river, but found that the boat was still safe at her moorings. I was followed out by the men and the *patron*, still in accents of terror, enquiring what it was: I tried to calm them by saying, "*Restez vous tranquille, c'est un tremblement de terre,*" which they did not seem to understand.

By the time we could get to our fire, which was on a large flag, in the stern of the boat, the shock had ceased; but immediately the perpendicular banks, both above and below us, began to fall into the river in such vast masses, as nearly to sink our boat by the swell they occasioned; and our *patron*, who seemed more terrified even than the men, began to cry out, "*O mon Dieu! nous perirons!*" I wished to consult with him as to what we could do to preserve ourselves and the boat, but could get no answer except "*O mon Dieu! nous perirons!*" and "*Allons à terre! Allons à terre!*" As I found Mr. Bridge the only one who seemed to have retained any presence of mind, we consulted, and agreed to send two of the men with a candle up the bank, in order to examine if it had separated from the island, a circumstance that we suspected, from hearing the snapping of the limbs of some drift trees, which were deposited betwixt the margin of the river, and the summit of the bank. The men, on arriving at the edge of the river, cried out "*Venez à terre! Venez à terre!*" and told us there was a chasm formed already, so wide that it would be difficult to pass it, to attain the firm ground. I ordered them to go upon the island and make a fire, and desired Mr. Bridge and the *patron* to follow them; and as it now occurred to me that the preservation of the boat in a great measure de-

pended on the depth of the river, I tried with a sounding pole, and to my great joy, found it did not exceed eight or ten feet.

Immediately after the shock we noticed the time, and found it was near two o'clock. It was now nearly half past, and I determined to go ashore myself, after securing some papers and money, and was employed in taking them out of my trunks, when another shock came on, terrible indeed, but not equal to the first. Morin, our *patron*, called out from the island, "*Monsieur Bradbury! sauvez vous, sauvez vous!*" I went ashore, and found the chasm really frightful, as it was not less than four feet in width, and besides the bank had sunk at least two feet. I took the candle, and examined to determine its length, and concluded that it could not be less than eighty yards; and where it terminated at each end, the banks had fallen into the river. I now saw clearly that our lives had been saved by having moored to a sloping bank. Before we had completed our fire, we had two more shocks, and they occurred during the whole night, at intervals of from six to ten minutes, but slight in comparison with the first and second. At four o'clock I took a candle, and again examined the bank, and found to my great satisfaction that no material alteration had taken place; I also found the boat safe, and secured my-



pocket compass, I had already noticed that the sound which was heard at the time of every shock, always preceded it at least a second, and that it always proceeded from the same point, and went off in an opposite direction. I now found that the shock came from a little northward of east, and proceeded to the westward. At day-light we had counted twenty-seven shocks, during our stay on the island, but still found the chasm so that it might be passed. The river was covered with foam and drift timber, and had risen considerably, but our boat was safe. Whilst we were waiting till the light became sufficient for us to embark, two canoes floated down the river, in one of which we could perceive some Indian corn and some clothes. We considered this as a melancholy proof that some of the boats we passed the preceding day had perished. Our conjectures were afterwards confirmed, as three had been overwhelmed, and all on board perished. When the daylight appeared to be sufficient for us, I gave orders to embark, and we all went on board. Two men were in the act of loosening the fastenings, when a shock occurred nearly equal to the first in violence. The men ran up the bank, in order to save themselves on the island, but before they could get over the chasm, a tree fell close by them, and stopped their progress. The bank appeared to me to be moving rapidly into the river, and I called out to the men in the boat "*Coupez*

*les cordes !*" on hearing this, the two men ran down the bank, loosed the cords, and jumped into the boat. We now found ourselves again on the river: the *Chenal du Diable* was in sight, and appeared absolutely impassable, from the quantity of trees and drift wood, that had lodged during the night against the planters fixed in the bottom of the river; and in addition to our difficulties, I noticed that the *patron* and the men appeared to be so terrified and confused, as to be almost incapable of action. I determined to stop, previous to passing the channel, in order that the men might have time to become more composed. I had the good fortune to discover a bank, rising with a gentle slope, where we again moored, and prepared to breakfast on the island. Whilst that was preparing, I walked down the island, in company with Morin, our *patron*, to view the channel, in order to ascertain the safest part, which we soon agreed upon. Whilst we were thus employed, we experienced a very severe shock, and found some difficulty in preserving ourselves from being thrown down; another occurred during the time we were at breakfast, and a third as we were preparing to re-embark. In the last, Mr. Bridge, who was standing within the declivity of the bank, narrowly escaped being thrown into the river, as the sand continued to give way under his feet. As I observed that the men were still very much under the influ-

ence of terror, I desired Morin to give to each a glass of spirits, and reminded them that their safety depended on their exertions, and we pushed out into the river. The danger we had now to encounter was of a nature which they understood: the nearer we approached it, the more confidence they appeared to gain; and indeed, all their strength, and all the skill of Morin, was necessary, as there was no direct channel through the trees, and we were several times under the necessity of changing our course in the space of a few seconds, and that instantaneously, not a moment being left for deliberation. Immediately after we had cleared all danger, the men dropped their oars, crossed themselves, and gave a shout, congratulating each other on our safety.

We continued on the river till eleven o'clock, when there was a violent shock, which seemed to affect us as sensibly as if we had been on land. The trees on both sides of the river were most violently agitated, and the banks fell in, in several places, within our view, carrying with them innumerable trees, the crash of which falling into the river, mixed with the terrible sound attending the shock, and the screaming of the geese, and other wild-fowl, produced an idea that all nature was in a state of dissolution. During the shock, the river had been much agitated, and the men

became anxious to go ashore: my opinion was, that we were much more safe on the river; but finding that they laid down their oars, and seemed determined to quit the boat for the present, we looked out for a part of the river where we might moor it in security, and having found one, we stopped during the remainder of the day.

At three o'clock, another canoe passed us adrift on the river. We did not experience any more shocks until the morning of the 17th, when two occurred; one about five, and the other about seven o'clock. We continued our voyage, and about twelve this day, had a severe shock, of very long duration. About four o'clock came in sight of a log-house, a little above the Lower Chickasaw Bluffs. More than twenty people came out as soon as they discovered us, and when within hearing, earnestly entreated us to come ashore. I found them almost distracted with fear, and that they were composed of several families, who had collected in order that they might pray together. On entering the house, I saw a bible lying open on the table. They informed me that the greatest part of the inhabitants in the neighbourhood had fled to the hills, on the opposite side of the river, for safety; and that during the shock, about sun-rise on the 16th, a chasm had opened on the sand bar opposite the bluffs below, and on closing again, had thrown



the water to the height of a tall tree. They also affirmed that the earth opened in several places back from the river. One of the men, who appeared to be considered as possessing more knowledge than the rest, entered into an explanation of the cause, and attributed it to the comet that had appeared a few months before, which he described as having two horns, over one of which the earth had rolled, and was now lodged betwixt them: that the shocks were occasioned by the attempts made by the earth to surmount the other horn. If this should be accomplished, all would be well, if otherwise, inevitable destruction to the world would follow. Finding him confident in his hypothesis, and myself unable to refute it, I did not dispute the point, and we went on about a mile further. Only one shock occurred this night, at half past seven o'clock. On the morning of the 18th, two shocks, one betwixt three and four o'clock, and the other at six. At noon, a violent one, of very long duration, which threw a great number of trees into the river within our view. In the evening, two slight shocks, one at six, the other at nine o'clock.

19th.—We arrived at the mouth of the river St. Francis, and had only one shock, which happened at eleven at night.

20th.—Detained by fog, and experienced only two shocks, one at five, the other at seven in the evening.

21st.—Awakened by a shock at half past four o'clock: this was the last, and not very violent, but lasted for nearly a minute.

On the 24th in the evening, we saw a smoke, and knowing that there were no habitations on this part of the river, we made towards it, and found it to be the camp of a few Choctaw Indians, from whom I purchased a swan, for five balls and five loads of powder.

25th.—Monsieur Longpre overtook us, and we encamped together in the evening. He was about 200 miles from us on the night of the 15th, by the course of the river, where the earthquakes had also been very terrible. It appeared from his account, that at New Madrid the shock had been extremely violent: the greatest part of the houses had been rendered uninhabitable, although, being constructed of timber, and framed together, they were better calculated to withstand the shocks than buildings of brick or stone. The greatest part of the plain on which the town was situated was become a lake, and the houses deserted.

The remainder of our voyage to Natches was very pleasant, except two very narrow escapes from *planters* in the river; and without any occurrence that would excite much interest, we arrived at the port of Natchez on the afternoon of the 5th of January, and went to the city, which is situated about three quarters of a mile from the river, on the level behind the bluffs. The port consists of thirty or forty houses, and some stores: for the size of it, there is not, perhaps, in the world a more dissipated place. Almost all the Kentucky men stop here on the way to Orleans, and as they now consider all the dangers and difficulties of their voyage as past, they feel the same inclination to dissipation as sailors who have been long out of port, and generally remain here a day or two to indulge it. I spent a very agreeable evening in the city, in company with Dr. Brown, whom I found to be an exceedingly pleasant and intelligent man.

In the morning of the 6th instant I went on board the steam boat from Pittsburgh; she had passed us at the mouth of the Arkansas, 341 miles above Natchez; she was a very handsome vessel, of 410 tons burden, and was impelled by a very powerful steam engine, also made at Pittsburg, from whence she had come in less than twenty days, although 1900 miles distance. About eighty miles above New Orleans, the sugar plantations

commenced, some of which I visited, accompanied by Mr. Longpre, who assured me that he had not seen the cane in higher perfection in any part of the West Indies. Many fields yet remained, from which the cane had not been got in, and were now covered with snow, an occurrence, as I was informed, very uncommon. From this part to New Orleans, groves of orange trees of great extent are seen on both sides of the river, and at this season, loaded with ripe fruit.

On the 13th we arrived at New Orleans, where I consigned the lead to the agent of Mr. Drinker, again met with my friend Brackenridge, and on the 20th set sail for New York.