

Journal of William Fallon (excerpts)

These are excerpts from the journal of William Fallon, the leader of the fourth relief party sent to bring in the last of the Donner Party survivors, published in the *California Star*, June 5, 1847.

April, 17th. Reached the Cabins between 12 and 1 o'clock. Expected to find some of the sufferers alive, Mrs. Donner and Kiesburg in particular. Entered the cabins and a horrible scene presented itself,— human bodies terribly mutilated, legs, arms, and skulls scattered in every direction. One body, supposed to be that of Mrs. Eddy, lay near the entrance, the limbs severed off and a frightful gash in the skull. The flesh from the bones was nearly consumed and a painful stillness pervaded the place. The supposition was that all were dead, when a sudden shout revived our hopes, and we flew in the direction of the sound, three Indians, were hitherto concealed, started from the ground and fled at our approach, leaving behind their bows and arrows. We delayed two hours in searching the cabins, during which we were obliged to witness sights from which we would have fain turned away, and which are too dreadful to put on record.—We next started for "Donner's camp" 8 miles distant over the mountains. After traveling about half way, we came upon a track in the snow, which excited our suspicion, and we determined to pursue it. It brought us to the camp of Jacob Donner, where it had evidently left that morning. There we found property of every description, books, calicoes, tea, coffee, shoes, percussion caps, household and kitchen furniture scattered in every direction, and mostly in the water. At the mouth of the tent stood a large iron kettle, filled with human flesh cut up, it was the body of Geo. Donner, the head had been split open, and the brains extracted therefrom, and to the appearance, he had not been long dead, not over three or four days at the most. Near by the kettle stood a chair, and thereupon three legs of a bullock that had been shot down in the early part of the winter, and snowed under before it could be dressed. The meat was found sound and good, and with the exception of a small piece out of the shoulder, wholly untouched. We gathered up some property and camped for the night. . . .

April 19. This morning, Foster, Rhodes, and J. Foster started with small packs for the first cabins intending from thence to follow the trail of the person that had left the morning previous. . . . The party for the cabins were unable to keep the trail of the mysterious personage owing to the rapid melting of the snow, they therefore went direct for the cabins, and upon entering discovered Kiesburg lying down amidst the human bones and beside him a large pan full of fresh liver and lights. They asked him what had become of his companions, whether they were alive, and what had become of Mrs. Donner. He answered them by stating they were all dead; Mrs. Donner, he said, had in attempting to cross from one cabin to another, missed the trail, and slept out one night; that she came to his camp the next night very much fatigued, he made her a cup of coffee, placed her in bed and rolled her well in the blankets, but the next morning found her dead; he eat her body and found her flesh the best he had ever tasted! He further stated that he obtained from her body at least four pounds of fat! No traces of her person could be found, nor the body of Mrs. Murphy either. . . . In the cabin with Kiesburg was found two kettles of human blood, in all supposed to be over one gallon Rhodes asked him where he had got the blood, he answered, "there is blood in dead bodies,"—they asked him numerous questions, but he appeared embarrassed and equivocated a great deal . . . April 20, We all started for Bear River Valley with packs of 100 cwt. each; our provisions being nearly consumed, we were obliged to make haste away . . . we moved all our packs over to the lower end of the lake, and made all ready for a start when they should

return. Mr. Foster went down to the cabin of Mrs. Murphy, his mother-in-law, to see if any property remained there worth collecting and securing; he found the body of young Murphy, who had been dead about three months, with the breast and skull cut open, and the brains, liver and lights taken out, and this accounted for the contents of the pan which stood beside Kiesburg when he was found. It appears that he had left at the other camp the dead bullock and horse, and on visiting this camp and finding the body thawed out, took therefrom the brains, liver and lights. . . . On their return and passing the cabin, they saw the unfortunate man within, devouring the remaining brains and liver, left from his morning repast! They hurried him away, but before leaving, he gathered together the bones and heaped them all in a box he used for the purpose, blessed them and the cabin, and said, "I hope God will forgive me what I have done, I couldn't help it! and I hope I may get to heaven yet!" We asked Kiesburg why he did not use the meat of the bullock and horse instead of human flesh, he replied he had not seen them. We then told him we knew better, and asked him why the meat in the chair had not been consumed, he said "oh! its too dry eating! the liver and lights were a great deal better, and the brains made good soup!"

Source: "Extract from a Journal Written by a Member of the Party Latest from the California Mountains," *California Star* 1:22, June 5, 1847. pp2-3.