

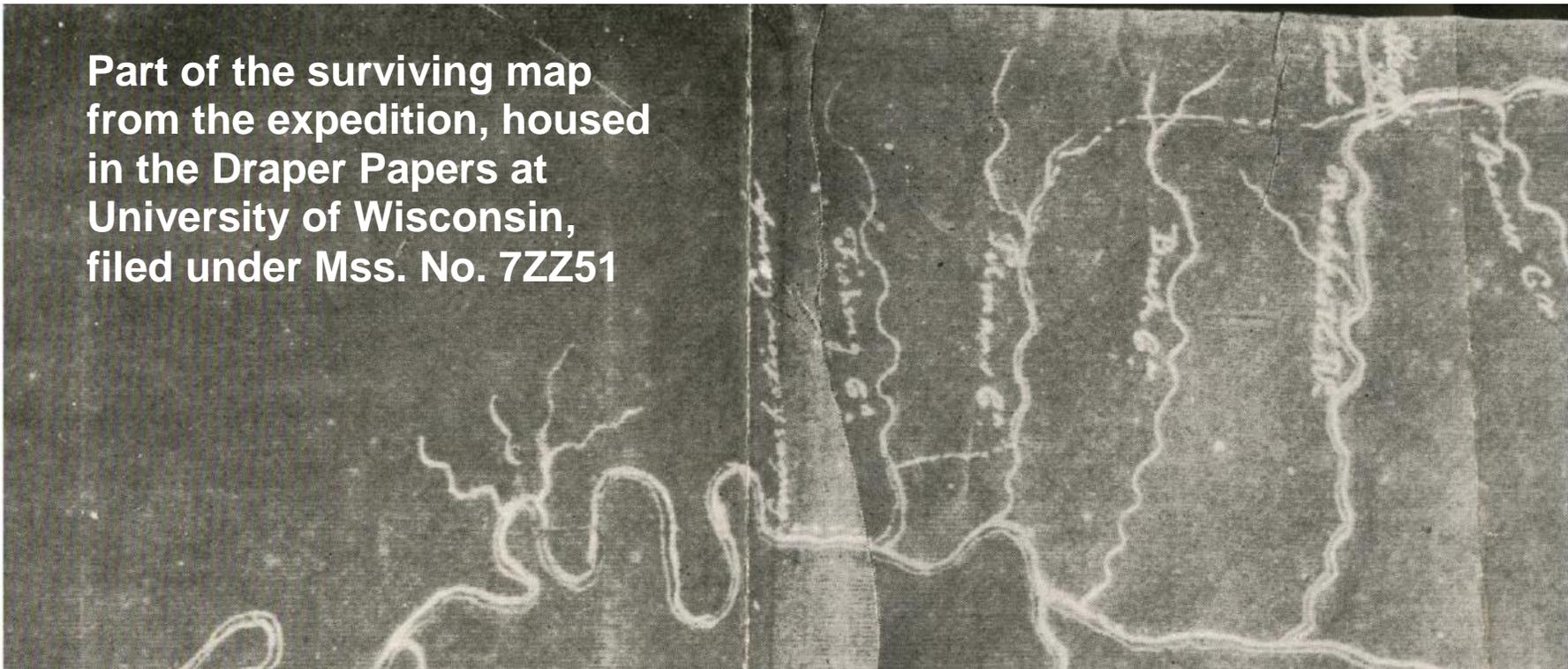
# Christmas on the Cumberland 1779-80



**Sioussat, G.L. 1915. The Journal of General Daniel Smith, one of the Commissioners to Extend the Boundary Line between the Commonwealths of Virginia and North Carolina, August, 1779, to July, 1780. Tennessee Historical Magazine 1: 40-65.**

Daniel Smith (1748-1818) was from Stafford Co. VA, but settled in Sumner Co. TN. He worked in 1779-80 with Thomas Walker (1715-94) to extend the line westward between Virginia and North Carolina. That line is often known as “Walker’s Line”. The following extract from Smith’s journal covers mid-winter of 1779-80, after “a very mutinous spirit began to appear among the Guard” (employed to support the expedition), due to difficult topography, approaching winter, and Indian threats. They decided to avoid the Cumberland Plateau, following the river up into Kentucky, then down to rejoin the line west of the mountains. [Brackets below include interpretative comments and are not part of the original text.]

**Part of the surviving map  
from the expedition, housed  
in the Draper Papers at  
University of Wisconsin,  
filed under Mss. No. 7ZZ51**





From 21 Dec 1779 to 12 Feb 1780, the Smith-Walker expedition waited for the river to thaw.  
 PR = Price's station (at Mill Springs); PI = Pitman's settlement (near Ruth east of Somerset).

“Thursday 9th. Cross’d Rock Castle & left the Kentucky road, encamp’d on the river about 3-4 mile below where the Kentucky road leaves it [near mouth of Skeggs Creek]. A Hard wind tonight.

Friday 10th. Lay still, waiting for Major Bledsoe to come up [from TN], who had been left where we saw Col. Henderson [= Richard Henderson (1734-85) of Transylvania], looking [for] lost Horses, took the latitude of this Place ‘tis 37° 13’ not sure the Inst. right adjusted. Tonight Major Bledsoe came up. [= Isaac Bledsoe (ca. 1735-93) who settled in Sumner Co. TN]

Saturday 11th. Travelled about 8 miles, tho perhaps not more than 5 on a right line, our general course about West, lay near the head of a branch of Rock Castle at a small Canebreak [probably head of Line Creek]. Rain tonight.

Sunday 12th. Much rain to day, all day. Lay still.

Monday 13th. Cloudy and some showers of snow. After 12 o’Clock the creek not suiting our course from this Camp we travelled along a ridge nearly West, till we came to a branch of Buck Cr. which we kept down till after it Sunk [probably Sinking Valley], this evening we fell on a Trace [perhaps close to Route 1677] that we suppose led to the French Lick [near future Nashville], encamp’d on it. A Cold night, our day’s march 6 m.

Tuesday 14th Decr. A Very cold day, but clear, travelled along the Trace N. Westerly about 2 m. to Buck Cr. which too high to ford lay at it all day. An excessive cold night.

Wednesday 15th. Cold and Cloudy. Travelled up Buck Cr. about 1 mile on the E. side by which we missed two crossings of the cr: then we crossd’ it and travelled along the Trace [perhaps close to Route 461] a little to the Southward of west, cross’d another fork of Buck Cr. at a lick [perhaps Flat Lick Creek], up a branch and out at the head thereof, then down a branch of Pittman’s cr . encampd at the first Cane thereon. A little snow tonight 8 m. today.

Thursday 16th. Went down the Cr. by myself about 2 1-2m. found Pittmans’ & several other

families encamp'd there, went back to camp lay still all day. [probably = William Pitman (1736-89) from Greene Co. VA—but who were these “other families”?]

Friday 17th. Went down Pittman's cr. cross'd it several times, then at last left it and travelled across to Fishing cr: which we struck about 5 m. above the mouth, lay on a small branch at the mouth. Misty all day. 12 miles today.

Saturday 18th. Lay still, went down cr. to find the river. I did not go far enough, kill'd a buffaloe & return'd. Mr. Michie took Lat. 'tis  $36^{\circ} 58'$ . [Michie was probably a relative of Smith's wife, Sarah Michie]

Sunday 19th. March'd down the cr. nearly South about 5 m. to the river then about W. S. W. 1 m. down the river, and encamp'd. Lat. of this place on an accurate obser  $36^{\circ} 54' 42''$ . Dble. Alt. ver. ob.  $59^{\circ} 19'$ . [For explanation of the “double altitude” method for estimating latitude, from meridian observation of the sun with a sextant, and other old surveying techniques, see <http://www.lewis-clark.org/article/1917> etc.]

Monday 20th. Major Bledsoe went to look for Trees to build Canoes and go down by water in pursuance of a resolution which we took at Laurel River, having return'd and found them, next day Tuesday 21st. we march'd down the river about 5 miles to the Place.

Wednesday 22d. Set about the Canoes, Mr. Michie took Lat. 'tis  $36^{\circ} 51' 31''$ .

Thursday 23d. I took the Lat. Meridian dble alt.  $59^{\circ} 22'$ . ver. ob: Lat.  $36^{\circ} 53' 31''$ .

Friday 24th. Do.-- Do.--  $59^{\circ} 25'$  rather cloudy  $36^{\circ} 53' 16''$ .

Saturday 25th. Christmas Day. Do.-- Do.--  $59^{\circ} 27'$ . ver. ob.  $36^{\circ} 53' 16''$ .

Sunday 26th. No work on canoes these days.

Monday 27th. Working on Canoes. Cloudy & misty or little rain.

Tuesday 28th. Do.-- Do.--

Wednesday 29th. Saw the Sun a little tho not enough to take a good observation.

Thursday 30th. Cloudy & a little Snow.

Friday 31st. Clear & cool. Mr. Walker took Lat. ver: ob. dble alt 60°3. Lat. 36.53.58  
discoursed a little with Wm. Young [probably William Young (ca. 1720-1818) from Antrim,  
Ireland, settled in Jessamine County KY] who just came from Ky. [meaning the central  
settlements]

Saturday Jany 1st. 1780. Launched one of the Canoes. Jerry Pearce came over from Prices &  
lay with us to night. Snow to night. [?= Jeremiah Pierce 1734-1803 from Orange Co. VA]

Sunday 2d. Thro scarcity of meat went down by water a hunting with 2 others. Cloudy & some  
snow. Killed T'urkies at night to live on. lay 4 m. below Station Camp. [below Fishing  
Creek]

Monday 3d. Went about 3 miles lower & killed 6 Buffaloes. Late before we got them butcher'd  
clear& very cold night.

Tuesday 4th. Moved up the river with two of our B uffaloes. The ice was so bad coming down  
the river we could only reach our Sunday nights camp where we lay with Oba. Terrel. [=  
Obadiah Terrell or Obediah Terrill, for whom the Obey River was named; born < ?1750,  
died ca. 1812; <http://wkygenealogy.blogspot.com/2008/05/obediah-terrill-long-hunter.html>]

Wednesday 5th. Got back to Station Camp, but some how by accident got the britch of my gun  
broke off.

Thursday 6th. Cold to such a degree the river froze over, and continued froze over till Sunday  
9th. Jany 1780 when Major Bledsoe crossed over on it to go to Prices [Benjamin Price's  
station at Mill Springs]. In this Time I fixed up my gun Barr in another Stock & lock.

Thursday 13th. Went down the river a hunting in order that less provision might serve at our  
Station Camp as there was no appearance of a thaw. J. M. & F.W. went with me. Lay at  
Obas' camp.

Friday 14th. Lay on the Riv. 9 m. below Station camp to go to the nearest way killed two  
buffaloes.

Saturday 15th. Killed a mother buffaloe.

Monday 17th. Went alone back to Station Camp. Thursday 20th. Returned to J. M. & F. W.

Friday 21st. Moved down the river 6 m. lower killed 5 buffaloes.

Thursday 27th. Went back to Station Camp, no appearance of a thaw yet. Stayd' here till

Monday 31st. Mr. Sharp went back down the riv. with me. [perhaps = Abraham Sharp (1741-1827) from Bedford Co. VA]

Monday 7th. Feby. Snow a little last night & today.

Wednesday the weather had moderated a little.

Thursday 10th Feby. An appearance of a thaw coming on. We went to Station camp. Rain tonight a litle.

Saturday 12th. Riv. rose much. Sunday 13th. This morning the Ice broke and we launch'd our Canoe.

Monday 14th. Launched another Canoe.

Tuesday 15th. Launch'd the other and sat off down the river lay about 1 m. above our first encampment, vid. plat of riv. [from Latin "videre plat" meaning "to see map" of river]

Wednesday 16th. At 39 m. dist. by water from Canoe Camp passed by the mouth of a large Cr. on the S. Side at 57 m. encamp'd at the foot of a large bottom on N. Side where the riv. runs E. just above the mouth of a small cr, where there was cattle left & Mr. Sharp lay from us.

Thursday 17th. At 72 m. passed by a curious nat. bridge on N. Side [about 2 miles downstream of Millers Creek in Russell County]: at 76 m. encamp'd on N. Side in a large bottom [Rockhouse Bottom]."

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Front photo: the Falls by Doug McCoy, 30 Jan 2014 [[www.DougMcCoyPhotography.com](http://www.DougMcCoyPhotography.com)].

Back photo: "Rock Castle", the later home of Daniel Smith and his wife, Sarah Michie, in Sumner County, Tennessee [<http://www.nashville-vacation-fun.com/rock-castle.html>].

**“Rock Castle” in Hendersonville, Sumner County, Tennessee  
(built in 1784-91 by Daniel Smith, who became U.S. Senator)**

