



JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

RED BRIDGE CROSSING OF BLUE RIVER

Jesse C. Douglas

1838 November 1

“Thursday, 1st Novr.

Left camp Independence [a couple miles south of town] a little after 9—one hour or so having been allowed the Indians for their religious exercises. At 3 o’clk. we reached our present encampment on Blue River, sixteen miles. The journey was exceedingly pleasant—the weather being warm and the road very good. Subsistence and forage of a good and healthy character, and to be had in abundance. To-morrow we shall cross the state line, and thereafter experience some difficulty in provisioning—the country being almost an entire wilderness.”

*****In 1838 the federal government removed more than 800 Potawatomi Indians who had refused to leave Indiana. These Potawatomi were forced to walk from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas along developed roads. From Lexington, Missouri to somewhere in Johnson County, Kansas, this forced walk followed the Santa Fe Trail. The diarist Jesse Douglas was the agent of William Polke, the federal conductor. Various persons have wondered where this Potawatomi entourage crossed the Blue River. Trail historian Craig Crease deduced the large group crossed at Red Bridge. On November 2nd, the group crossed the river and then became lost due to observing only occasional faint traces. Finally the route was found. Crease says the Red Bridge Crossing did not become commonly used until around 1840. Thus this would have been the crossing where traces of the trail on the west side of the crossing still were faint in 1838. The Red Bridge Crossing is interpreted with markers in Minor Park of Kansas City, Missouri. Those markers are on the west side of the Blue River, just south of Red Bridge Road. A Potawatomi Trail of Death marker also is in Minor Park, located on the east side of the Blue River, not far south of Red Bridge Road. **Source:** Douglas, Jesse C. “Journal of an Emigrating Party of Pottawattomie Indians, 1838”, pp. 147-177, quote on p. 173, in Willard, Shirley and Susan Campbell, editors. *Potawatomi Trail of Death—1838 Removal from Indiana to Kansas*. Rochester, Ind.: Fulton Co. Historical Society, 2003.

If you wish to know locations of Trail of Death markers, click on **MARKERS OF POTAWATOMI TRAIL OF DEATH**.

Issac Wistar

1849 May 6

“There is a large camp below us on the Blue, badly afflicted with cholera, of which five have died, two of them last night.”

1849 May 7

“There is quite a populous graveyard at the crossing of the Big Blue, and numerous single graves along the trail.”

*****Both of the above Wistar quotes are by a '49er on his way to California. Cholera obviously was of concern to trail travelers. Red Bridge Crossing is in Minor Park in Kansas City, Missouri. A DAR Santa Fe Trail marker is in the remaining trail swales on the west side of the Blue River, just south of Red Bridge Road. **Source:** Marshall, Ross, unsigned. “Red Bridge Project Begins”, *Trails Head Tidings*, 8(2): (April 2010), 3-4, quotes on p. 4.

Edmund Hinde

1850 April 26

“About 7 o'clock we decamped on our way for the Blue River. On the road we discovered the Hind Axeltree [sic] had given away which was in one sence [sic] fortunate had it broke when out from all timber we would have been in a nice predicament. Altho broke we took in our food and crossed Blue River and sent back for a new one.... ..We are now only three miles from the plains and then we leave all settlements.”

*****Hinde was California-bound. Many trail swales are on the west side of this river crossing, south of Red Bridge Road, in Minor Park of Kansas City, Missouri. **Source:** Marshall, Ross, unsigned. “Red Bridge Project Begins” *Trails Head Tidings*, 8(2): (April 2010), 3-4, quote on p. 4.

Calvin Graham

1853 May 1

“Left camp went 7 miles to the Big Blue River crossed went one mile and encamped.... ..plenty of wood & water.... ..here is blacksmith shop.... ..the Blue is pretty high but ford able”.

*******Source:** Marshall, Ross, unsigned. “Red Bridge Project Begins”, *Trails Head Tidings*, 8(2): (April 2010), 3-4, quote on p. 4.