

SPECIAL ISSUE

150th Anniversary of THE CAMDEN EXPEDITION OF 1864 (From Elkin's Ferry to Camden)

This year marks the 150th anniversary of what is known as The Red River Campaign which involved a march of the Union army commanded by Gen. Frederick Steele into southwest Arkansas. This article deals only with the part of the campaign known as the Camden Expedition in what is now Nevada and Ouachita counties. The march from the Little Missouri River to Camden took 12 days with several skirmishes along the way as the Confederate forces tried to stop the advance of the Union army into this part of Arkansas.

I have included a crude map on the next page showing the approximate route of the army from the crossing on the Little Missouri to Camden. Please remember that at this time Prescott did not exist and neither did Nevada County. Nevada County was not created until 1871. There were only a few main roads through the area at that time and they were in bad condition, especially where they crossed creek bottoms. You can refer to the map as you read below some excerpts from the actual battle reports from some of the commanding officers and others.

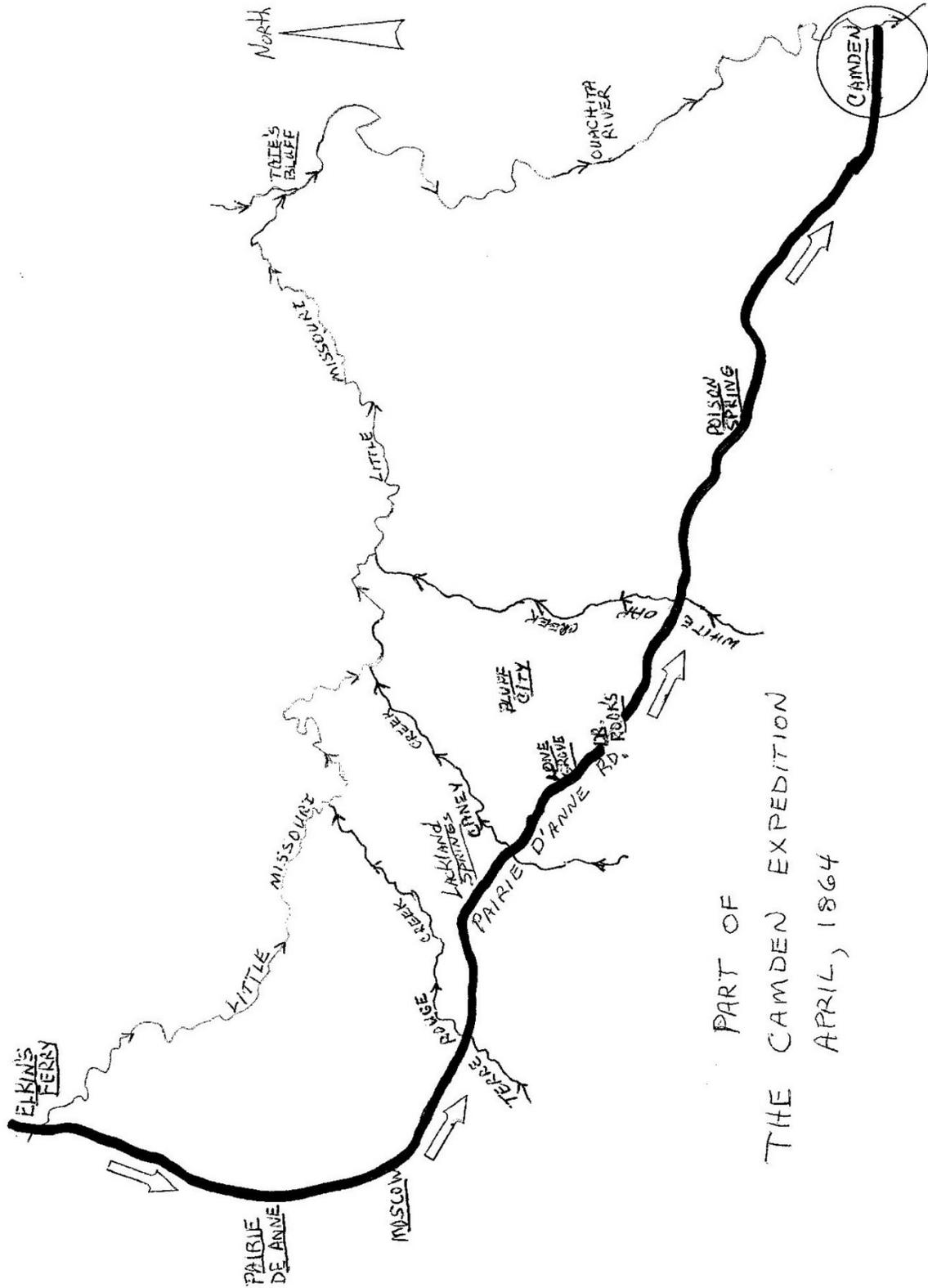
Elkin's Ferry on the Little Missouri—April 3, 1864

The Union army of about 10,000 men had left Little Rock on March 23, 1864, headed southwest and had reached a point on the Little Missouri River called Elkin's Ferry on April 3, 1864. The Confederate army tried to prevent the Union army from crossing the river but was driven back a few miles. This skirmish was a Union victory and by the next day Steele's large army had made the crossing on the river.

Report of Major General F. Steele (see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 24, page 661)—

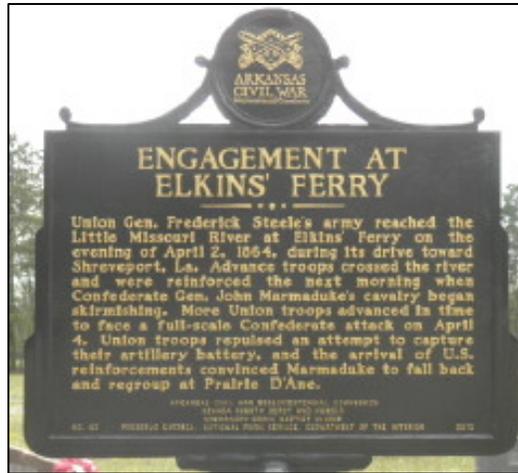
I had crossed the Little Missouri at Elkin's Ferry and was on high ground, having found the other two roads to Camden impassable. A heavy rain fell raising the Little Missouri so that it could not be forded, and rendered it necessary to corduroy about five miles of bottom and lay pontoon bridges to get Thayer across.....At the Little Missouri they had a line of breastworks crowning the hills where the bottom terminates over a mile in extent. After a severe skirmish, they fell back to Prairie D'Ane.....

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PART OF
THE CAMDEN EXPEDITION
APRIL, 1864

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Marker placed at Nubbin Hill Cemetery

Prairie d'Ane—April 9-12, 1864

Prairie d'Ane was a mostly open area of grasslands some 25 square miles surrounded by timberland. It was a well known landmark in the early days. There were periods of intense fighting here as well as periods of relative calm. Some soldiers told of writing letters and playing games during the breaks from the fighting.

From *The National Tribune* Oct. 18, 1894, page 1---A former soldier's account of The Camden Expedition---

After going some four or five miles we came to the edge of Prairie d'Hane (d'Ane). Here the skirmishing became very heavy and finally emerged into quite an artillery duel. The rebel forces numbered several thousand under the command of "Pap" Price himself (Gen. Sterling Price). We were posted on the prairie about a mile from the woods. Our own forces now were supposed to number 10,000 or 12,000 men.

A soldier's description of the action at Prairie d'Ane quoted in an article called The Camden Expedition of 1864 by William D. Baker (as part of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program)---

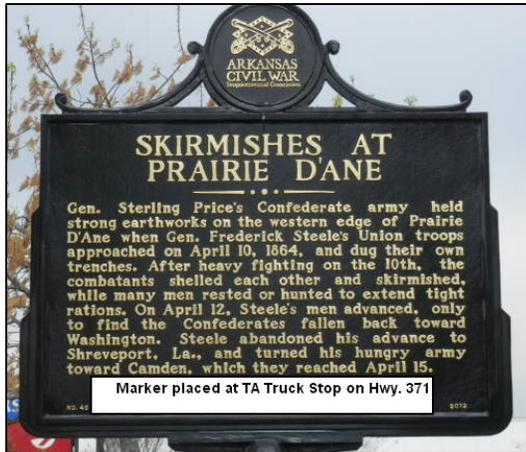
"The horizon from east to west was one leaping incessant blaze of about six thousand muskets lighting up the very sky and making night hideous with the screaming missiles. The batteries, too, joined in the combat and burst like volcanoes from the solid earth, throwing large jets of flame at every discharge"

The Battle of Prairie d'Ane was called the Battle of Gum Grove by the Confederates because of a grove of sweet gum trees at the site. It was a Union victory. Grave markers were placed here in 1954 for three Union soldiers known to have been buried in a field belonging to A. B. Stewart. The markers were placed on the roadside on the Blevins highway about a half mile from where they are actually buried. The soldier's names were William P. Funk, Edward Bates, and Erasmus D. Lockman. There was

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some controversy at the time about the placement of the markers for these Union soldiers. Some felt it was an insult to the people who lived in that area at the time. Due to vandalism, the memorial was removed to the Nevada County Depot Museum. Two of the markers are still intact.

The large cemetery in Prescott is called De Ann Cemetery. It is sometimes spelled De Anne. It takes its name from the old landmark of Prairie d'Ane.

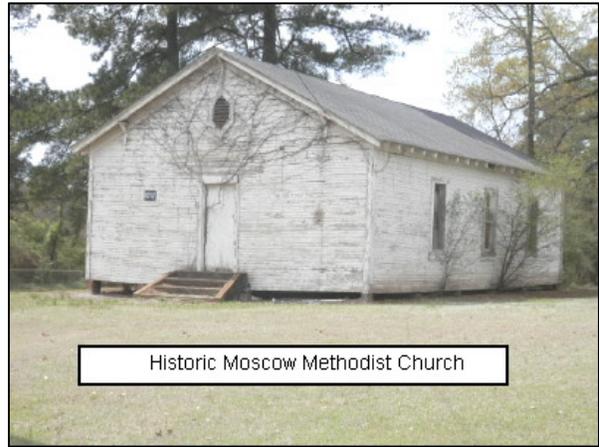


Moscow—April 13, 1864

Moscow was a small village at that time just a few miles from Prairie d'Ane. Today, it is on the outskirts of Prescott. An old church still stands there next to a very old cemetery. After the skirmish at Prairie d'Ane, Gen. Steele abandoned his drive toward Shreveport and advanced toward Camden as fast as possible hoping to take the city before Confederate reinforcements could get there. The large army consisting of thousands of men plus a large number of wagons and artillery proceeded toward Camden. A few miles away they encountered Terre Rouge creek bottom. While they were attempting to cross this bottom, the rear of the army was attacked at the village of Moscow. The Confederates were driven back and this also was considered a Union victory. An historical marker was recently placed at Moscow Cemetery marking the skirmish that occurred there.

Moscow Cemetery is one of the oldest in the county. Some of the earliest pioneers of Prescott are buried there. In recent years, a chain link fence was installed around the old church building and brush cleared from some of the old graves. Some of the grave markers are broken or lying flat on the ground, but if you are ever in the area, you might be interested in visiting this old cemetery.

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Terre Rouge Creek—April 12-14, 1864

About three miles from Moscow, the Union army encountered the Terre Rouge creek bottom which presented a very difficult challenge. As they struggled to get across this creek bottom, the rear of the army was being attacked by the Confederates.

Report of Lt. Col. Adolph Dengler (43rd Illinois)—(see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, page 734)---

On the evening of the 12th, we camped near Terre Rouge Creek, Terre Rouge Creek bottom, which extends where we have to pass it about seven miles and was almost impassable for wagons. On the 13th, we entered this bottom..... While part of the men built a corduroy road which usually disappeared in the bottomless swamp before fifty wagons had passed over, we toiled and struggled on until noon on the 14th when we had behind us the last of these seven miles of mire and swamp.

This crossing was on what is now known as the Cale Road out of Prescott. As you drive that road today, you can imagine how difficult it was back in 1864 taking thousands of men and hundreds of wagons across that swampy creek bottom.

Caney Creek bottom

Report of J. B. Wheeler, Chief Engineer, Captain of Engineers (see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, page 675)---

The next obstacle was Cypress Bayou, as it is on the maps, but called by the country people Caney. Here two bridges had to be repaired and some corduroying to be done. From this point until we reached Camden, the road was good. While the advance was crossing the Terre Rouge Creek, the rear was attacked by the enemy. Gen. Thayer had command of the rear and drove them back, scattering them with ease.

Dr. Rook's plantation near Lone Grove—April 13, 1864

Dr. Rook's plantation was located near Ebenezer Cemetery about four miles southwest of Bluff City.

Report of Brig.-General E. A. Carr to Maj. Gen. F. Steele (see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, page 762)---

I am camped along the road from Lone Grove toward Camden....The Caney makes a sweep to the southwest from the crossing, and is said to be impassable, so as to protect us from the south until we get several miles further east. Some of my foragers saw twelve rebels about a mile north of here today. I propose to take out the family of a soldier of the 10th Illinois, which is at a cross-roads called Bluff City, three miles north by northeast of Lone Grove; also those of two Union men living near here north of the road. The soldier says there is forage in his neighborhood and that he can take a train of twenty wagons off the road at Lone Grove and come in again several miles in advance, loaded.....The road, so far, from Caney is sandy, and rain cannot hurt it.

There is a story about a buried treasure connected with this campsite at Dr. Rook's plantation. According to the story, a Confederate soldier buried a considerable amount of gold or silver near the camp in a container such as a churn and marked the spot with a piece of iron. The soldier was killed a few days later in the Battle of Poison Springs. He had told another soldier about the buried treasure and after the war that soldier returned each year to the campsite to look for it until he became too old to make the trip. Mr. Hildre Griffith, who purchased the land in 1926, plowed up the iron marker in 1928 as he was cultivating his fields, but didn't know the significance of it. The treasure has never been found. (Source: *The Nevada News*, Sept. 7, 1961)

Some say this gold was from a Union payroll wagon captured by the Confederates.

White Oak Creek—April 14, 1864

Report of Brig. Gen. E. A. Carr to Maj. Gen. F. Steele (see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, page 762)---

Upon arriving here a short time before sunset, I sent out 500 men to reconnoiter the Washington Rd., 250 to go to the junction with this road, and 250 to take a crossroad which leaves this one and a half miles in advance. The party on the crossroad went on to the Washington Rd. and formed a line across it. A few minutes later after this there came a party of about 200 men from the west. My men challenged, "Who comes there?". Answer, "Friends". "Friends of whom?" "Friends of Jeff Davis", whereupon my men fired on them, killed one, wounded and captured another, and captured one unwounded..... I have three men wounded, one through the chest.

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Camden—April 15, 1864

General Steele's army arrived in Camden on April 15, 1864, tired and weary from days of marching and fighting. Their supplies were running low and the men had been on half rations. He found that Camden did not have enough supplies for his large army.

Report of Lt. Col. Adolph Dengler—43rd Illinois (see War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, page 734)---

Camden, high on the banks of the Ouachita, is a strongly fortified town. It had been, up to our occupation, the headquarters of Gen. Price.....It is, next to Little Rock, the largest and most prosperous town in the state. But our occupation of this beautiful place proved to be of short duration. Already, on the 16th, our rations almost entirely out; the men had received only half rations of crackers since we left Little Rock; forage for our horses was all along very scarce.

General Steele sent out a foraging party with about 200 wagons west of Camden to secure some supplies they had seen on their march to Camden. The foragers covered a large area up to fifteen miles off the main road and as far as eighteen miles west of Camden. They camped at White Oak Creek for the night and then the wagons loaded with corn and other supplies headed back to Camden. The Confederates had become aware of this wagon train loaded with supplies and attacked it to make sure the supplies Gen. Steele so desperately needed didn't get back to Camden.

Poison Spring—April 18, 1864

This battle took place about twelve miles west of Camden. The Union supply train was attacked here by the Confederates and the Union soldiers were forced to abandon their wagons and flee back to Camden. Several hundred men were killed here. This was a Confederate victory.

Report of Col. J. M. Williams, Commanding First Colored Kansas Vols., War of the Rebellion, Vol. 34, pages 743-746)---

The action was commenced about 10 a.m. and terminated about 2 p.m. I was forced to abandon everything to the enemy and they thereby became possessed of this large train, two six-pounder guns, and two twelve-pounder howitzers. At no time during this engagement was I able to employ more than 500 men and two guns to repel the assaults of the enemy, whose force I estimate at 10,000 men and twelve guns from the statements of prisoners.....I have named this engagement the action of Poison Spring, from a spring of that name in the vicinity. My loss during the engagement: killed 92; wounded 97; missing 106. Many of the reported missing are supposed to be killed.....The gallant dead, officers and men, all evinced the most heroic spirit and died the death of true soldiers.

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A small part of the Poison Spring battlefield has been made into a state park. One of my jobs when I worked for the Arkansas Forestry Commission back in the 1960s was to help clear the brush for this park. There are picnic tables and a trail you can walk to view one of the natural springs. The water is sparkling clear, but few take a drink because of the name Poison Springs. The story goes that a man once took a drink from a spring and died soon afterwards and it was supposed the water was poisonous. The

name Poison Spring dates back to before the Civil War.

General Steele, faced with the loss of the supplies at Poison Spring, hoped to get needed supplies from Pine Bluff. Another foraging party was sent out, but it was attacked at Mark's Mill, another Confederate victory. General Steele was forced to leave Camden on April 26, 1864 and head back toward Little Rock. Another major battle was at Jenkin's Ferry on the Saline River. It could be considered a Union victory since the Confederates failed to keep Steele's army from crossing the Saline River. Taken as a whole, the Camden Expedition was a Confederate victory since they were able to hold southwest Arkansas from Union control. It was not a major victory since they didn't destroy Steele's army. General Steele arrived back in Little Rock on May 2, 1864 with only a few prisoners and a few captured pieces of artillery to show for his efforts. Union losses were 2,750 casualties, the loss of 635 wagons, 2500 animals, 8 artillery pieces, and 2 steamships. Confederate losses were about 2,300 casualties, 35 wagons, fewer than 100 animals, 3 artillery pieces and one steamship (*source: Encyclopedia of Arkansas*)

To remember these historical events of 150 years ago, two reenactments are planned in our area. There will be one at Prairie d'Anne on Saturday, April 12th sponsored by the Nevada County Depot Museum (a charge for admission). About 350 re-enactors will take part and several thousand people are expected to watch. Contact the museum (870-887-5821) for tickets and more information. Several events free to the public will be held in Ouachita County from April 14th to April 19th. The reenactment at Poison Springs will be April 19th. You can contact White Oak Lake State Park (870-685-2748) or the Ouachita County Historical Society (870-836-9243) for more information on the Poison Spring reenactment and other events in Ouachita County. You can also check out these two websites:

<http://depotmuseum.org/> and <http://ouachitacountyhistoricalsociety.org/>

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While the main route of Gen. Steele's army is shown on the map, remember that Confederate soldiers used other roads trying to get ahead of Steele's army before it reached Camden.

Foragers on both sides went through the countryside looking for supplies for the men and the animals. Many settlers lost canned goods and feed stored in barns for their livestock as the soldiers took whatever they could find. Some settlers hid their valuables so the soldiers couldn't find them. Many feared their homes would be burned. Many settlers who thought the war would never reach Arkansas found themselves at the mercy of foraging soldiers and witnessed large troop movements in the spring of 1864. Those who lived near the battle sites could hear the noise of cannons and muskets.

When several hundred men were killed in a major battle, there was the problem of what to do with the corpses. I suppose many were buried in mass graves near the battlefield. I'm sure some died from other causes or in small skirmishes along the way. There could be many unmarked graves of Civil War soldiers scattered about the countryside leaving their families wondering whatever became of them.



Signs like this were recently placed on many of the highways in our area. Many people are interested in the Civil War and many of our ancestors served at various places during the war. It is interesting to visit the battlefields and to research military records to learn more about the part our relatives played in this conflict. You can find Civil War grave markers in most of our local cemeteries and some families even have old letters written by their relatives during the war.

Reunions of Confederate veterans were held for many years after the war. These were well attended by the veterans and local citizens with parades and speeches by various distinguished guests. Serepta Springs was the main location for many of these reunions in Nevada County.

The Civil War was a bloody conflict which lasted for four long years and resulted in the deaths of approximately 620,000 men, more than any other war in American history. It is a good time to think about the sacrifices of those men who gave so much and to remember how our area of Arkansas was affected by the war 150 years ago this month.

RAINFALL RECORD FOR 2014

January (1.2 inches)

February (3.6 inches)

March (5.0 inches)

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Don Mathis
San Antonio, TX 78212

Cornbread and Buttermilk

My mother used to think she was in heaven if she had a bowl of cornbread with buttermilk.

Now she is in heaven.

But if she was here, I would make her some for Mother's Day.

Happy Mother's Day Mom!

We miss you!

You may feel the same way about buttermilk as I do (how do you know when it's spoiled?), but go ahead and try some! You can use the buttermilk to make the cornbread; add some corn or jalapenos to the batter if you're feeling really adventuresome.

Get a bowl and put some fresh cold buttermilk on your red hot cornbread and dig in! I guarantee you'll smile at the first mouthful!

Do this in remembrance of your mother -- or my mother, Bernadine Walker Mathis-Gillespie (January 24, 1925 - February 18, 2010).



Don Mathis and Bernadine Walker Mathis Gillespie

