

How severe was the threat of Indian attack during the first half of the journey west?

"The various tribes on the Platte-Sweetwater route did pose a threat to those moving west. Just how serious this threat was prior to 1860 can be determined, in part, by reference to several sets of figures. In the sixty-six diaries utilized for this study, there were nine eyewitness accounts and four second-hand reports of Indian attacks or the immediate results of such attacks. Situations in which an attack appeared both plausible and imminent were described in eight diaries. It is apparent that an overwhelming majority of the diarists and their companions encountered no overt threat of attack while passing through present-day Nebraska and Wyoming." [p.194]

"The figures concerning Indian attacks, cited earlier, do not reflect the sole, or even the primary danger from Indians along the Oregon-California Trail. Many, and probably most, of the attacks previously mentioned were undoubtedly motivated by hope of plunder. In addition, twenty-seven other cases of theft or attempted theft are recorded in the sixty-six diaries. Of these, nineteen are eyewitness accounts and eight are based on reports received by the authors of the various diaries. It should also be noted that ten of the eyewitness accounts describe unsuccessful attempts at theft. Thus, while loss by theft was not inevitable, it seems that more than one out of every three parties was very likely to receive the attention of a raiding party." [p. 204]

"In assessing the threat of Indian attack, one more factor must be considered. Of the sixty-six diaries used, twenty-six are records of journeys during which relatively little contact with Indians occurred. Of course, almost all emigrants saw Indians at trading posts and military establishments." [p.2]

[Robert L. Munkres, "The Plains Indian Threat on the Oregon Trail Before 1860." *Annals of Wyoming*, October, 1968.]