

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1998

Review of *Journal of an Expedition to the Grand Prairies of the Missouri 1840* By William Fairholme

Jay H. Buckley

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jay_buckley@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Buckley, Jay H., "Review of *Journal of an Expedition to the Grand Prairies of the Missouri 1840* By William Fairholme" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1281.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1281>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Journal of an Expedition to the Grand Prairies of the Missouri 1840. By William Fairholme. Edited by Jack B. Tykal. Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1996. Drawings, bibliography, index. 186 pp. \$29.50.

William Fairholme (1819-1868), a twenty-year-old Lieutenant of the British army, and six fellow officers shared a sporting expedition to hunt buffalo on the Kansas Plains in the summer and fall of 1840. They made one of only five parties to travel the Santa Fe Trail that year, its lowest incidence between 1822 and 1843. Fairholme's journal, therefore, provides an important record of the Great Plains for the year 1840 from a British officer's perspective, particularly in its vivid descriptions of cities and towns between lower Canada and the Missouri settlements.

Fairholme tells us a lot about traveling in the 1840s. Not only did his party use the commercial route of the Santa Fe trail, but also traveled by boat, stage, carriage, horseback, and steamboat, experiencing no conflicts with Indian tribes along the way. These gentleman of leisure were not on an intelligence-gathering mission for their government, a government concerned about joint-occupation of the Oregon Country, but on a buffalo hunting trip to present-day Kansas, pure and simple. The party included Lt. Col. William Greenwood, Charles William Ridley, Robert Vansittart, Charles Ashe Windham, Henry James Warre, William Henry Leicester, and Robert Paterson.

Their ventures included battling mosquitoes, dealing out large doses of mercury to cure the ague, smoking, drinking, marveling at a prairie fire, meeting several Kansa Indians, and reading Shakespeare. Fairholme offers vivid descriptions of flora and fauna, makes disparaging remarks about Americans, and details recreation and amusement in the Kansas River valley. Like most people of their day, the party's members were hardly conservation-minded. If an animal was in range, they shot it. During their single week of buffalo hunting, they left at least 130 buffalo skins worth more than \$500 (at \$4 a hide) to rot on the prairie.

Fairholme kept field notes in a journal from July to November of 1840 while on the expedition and three years later rewrote his experience in a flowing, narrative style. In 1977 the Huntington Library obtained his narrative and selected Jack B. Tykal, who had written a biography of Etienne Provost, a guide for the Fairholme expedition, to edit the manuscript and write the introduction. Tykal's editing is sufficient, although not extensive. The words and spellings are Fairholme's, to which the editor has added punctuation, paragraphing, and chapter divisions. Published for the first time by Arthur H. Clark, a fine press for Western Americana, the journal includes fourteen sketch-drawings by Fairholme that complement this limited edition. The volume will be enjoyed by collectors of western history and those who relish stories of the West.

JAY H. BUCKLEY
Department of History
University of Nebraska-Lincoln