

Having ridden about twenty-five miles, we came to a broad belt of sand-dunes, which stretches, as far as the eye can reach, to the east and west. The sand-hillocks, resting on the clay, allow small pools of water to collect, and thus afford in this dry country an invaluable supply of fresh water. The great advantage arising from depressions and elevations of the soil is not often brought home to the mind. The two miserable springs in the long passage between the Rio Negro and Colorado were caused by trifling inequalities in the plain; without them not a drop of water would have been found. The belt of sand-dunes is about eight miles wide; at some former period it probably formed the margin of a grand estuary, where the Colorado now flows. In this district, where absolute proofs of the recent elevation of the land occur, such speculations can hardly be neglected by any one, although merely considering the physical geography of the country. Having crossed the sandy tract, we arrived in the evening at one of the post-houses; and, as the fresh horses were grazing at a distance, we determined to pass the night there.

The house was situated at the base of a ridge, between one and two hundred feet high—a most remarkable feature in this country. This *posta* was commanded by a negro lieutenant, born in Africa: to his credit be it said there was not a rancho between the Colorado and Buenos Ayres in nearly such neat order as his. He had a little room for strangers, and a small corral for the horses, all made of sticks and reeds; he had also dug a ditch round his house, as a defence in case of being attacked. This would, however, have been of little avail if the Indians had come; but his chief comfort seemed to rest in the thought of selling his life dearly. A short time before a body of Indians had travelled past in the night; if they had been aware of the *posta* our black friend and his four soldiers would assuredly have been slaughtered. I did not anywhere meet a more civil and obliging man than this negro; it was therefore the more painful to see that he would not sit down and eat with us.