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"A Day and a Half's Journey for a Nephite"

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Chapter 53

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Alma 22:32 "It was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea."

The narrow neck of land is an important geographical feature in the Book of Mormon. For many years people have debated whether the narrow neck was the Isthmus of Panama, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, or somewhere else. Some have argued that the neck must have been very narrow, because Alma 22:32 says that the distance across the "narrow neck" of the promised land from the east to the west sea was "a day and a half's journey for a Nephite." How wide could this distance have been? Recently analyzed information suggests that it could have been quite wide indeed.

First, since the Limhi explorers (see Mosiah 8:7-8; 21:25-26) passed through this narrow neck without knowing that they had done so (they thought they were still in or around the land of Zarahemla), this warns us that the narrow neck must be of some substantial width.

Second, we also know that some people can go a long way in a day and a half. For example, a new BYU Media Productions film *Tarahumara: Footrunners Live On* describes a northwest Mexican Indian group who call themselves the Raramuri (footrunners). Some of them have been known to run five hundred miles in six days and to return that distance after a day's rest. Even more, the book *Ultra-Marathonning, the Next Challenge* documents such accomplishments as Edward Weston's *walking* five hundred miles in six days. The record for the greatest distance traveled on foot in twenty-four hours was set in 1973 by Ron Bentley of Great Britain—161 miles.¹ Since the Nephite record says that it was a day and half's journey for a Nephite, we might infer that this was a significant feat and that it would have taken longer for someone else.

Moreover, the isthmus itself may have been wider than the "day and half's" distance since we cannot be sure that the measuring point began on the east *at the sea*. Alma says that it was a day and a half's journey from "the east" to the west sea. The journey may have begun some distance inland.

Obviously, we do not yet know how wide the narrow neck was, but these figures show that it could have been a substantial distance. The width of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which is now accepted by many Book of Mormon scholars as the Nephite narrow neck of land, is 120 miles—an acceptable distance for the day-and-a-half journey.

Based on research by John L. Sorenson, first appearing in Insights (February 1985). See the appendix on distances in John L. Sorenson's "The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book" (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1990).

Footnotes

1. Tom Osler and Ed Dodd, *Ultra-Marathonning, the Next Challenge* (Mountain View, California: World Publications, 1979), 10, 126.