

# DESERT TRACKS



Newsletter of the Southwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association  
December 2005

## From the Editors

At the OCTA annual conference in Salt Lake City this August we met Travis Boley, the new Association Manager for OCTA. We later visited with Travis in Independence. We learned that he is very concerned about building OCTA membership. We share this concern; our sense is that the active membership in such organizations as OCTA and OSTA is small and shrinking, and that more truly active members need to be recruited in order to deal with the many issues that confront us in our efforts to map, interpret, preserve and protect the trails. We include in this issue an article by Travis that outlines a proposal that he will make, at the upcoming Historic Trails Caucus of the Partnership for the National Trails System, to develop an educational program promoting all the historic trails. He stresses that we need to begin to work on the “macro” level: that is, we need to promote our specific trails in the larger context of the trails and history of western expansion, and the various trail organizations need to work together to achieve common goals.

We include two articles on the SWOCTA “Trail Turtles” fall mapping trip in Anza Borrego State Park in southern California. One, by Rose Ann Tompkins, outlines the trip, its goals and accomplishments, and another, by Richard Greene, focuses on the day-to-day experience. As always, the Turtles carried out exciting on-the-ground research in an atmosphere of high camaraderie. Further details of recent mapping trips can be found on the SWOCTA Web Page:

<http://members.cox.net/htompkins2/SWOCTA.htm>

An article by Tracy DeVault describes the DeVaults’ visits to the graves of Olive Oatman and Martha Summerhayes, and another by ourselves (the “Trail Tourists”) describes our visits to several sites in Illinois and Nebraska associated with the Oatman story. We review the recent book *Surviving Conquest: A History of the Yavapai Peoples* by Timothy Braatz. We conclude with an exciting interview with Marc Simmons, the “historian laureate of New Mexico,” which focuses on his book *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, the story of the McComas massacre (see the text box on p. 27). Those interested in visiting sites associated with the story should see our article in the Spring 2005 issue

Happy Holidays!

*Deborah and Jon Lawrence*

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SWOCTA Symposium, March 1994. Front row, left to right: Shann Rupp, Betty Lee, Susan Doyle, Bill Rupp. Standing: Jim and Marion Carter.  
*photo by Bob Lee*

### **SWOCTA Loses Another Member A Tribute to Betty Lee**

Betty Lee passed away in Tucson on November 27. She and her late husband, Bob, were enthusiastic members of our chapter from its beginnings in 1987. They were charter members of both OCTA and SWOCTA.

Our first chapter outing was along the Gila River near Safford where the Lees lived. They led this outing and several others through the years. When we had a symposium in Safford, they helped with local arrangements. They opened their unique adobe home to chapter members on several occasions for meetings.

Betty's passion for history and archaeology were very evident. She taught at Eastern Arizona College until her retirement, and she was eager to share her knowledge with all of us. She had an inquiring mind. She was well known in academic circles in the Southwest and much could be written here about her accomplishments. I met her through OCTA and SWOCTA, only learning of her wider interests as time went by.



Betty Lee on the trail,  
Devil's Turnpike, AZ  
*photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*

Even after health and age prevented the Lees from going out on the trail, they always wanted to know how the mapping was progressing. I often stopped to visit them when traveling through Safford on my way to or from mapping in New Mexico. Each visit was a pleasure for me and I hope for them.

I missed Bob and I will also miss Betty.

***Rose Ann Tompkins***

## Promoting the Trail on the Macro-level: A Proposal

by Travis Boley

One of my core beliefs concerning future directions for the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA) is that all the trail organizations would accomplish much more by pooling resources and sharing expertise. For example, in the Southwest, activities could be coordinated between OCTA, OSTA and the Juan Batista de Anza groups.

The Historic Trails Caucus of the Partnership for the National Trails System, which will be held next summer (though the location and time have not yet been set) and will include representatives of the historic trails community (OCTA, OSTA, SFTA, etc.) and our federal partners (NPS, BLM, USFS, etc.), will give us an opportunity to address common concerns. There are three things I propose to put on the agenda. First, that the trail groups pool marketing dollars to promote historic trails. Second, that we develop an education program that utilizes the entire story of the historic trails and westward expansion. And third, that we encourage and support each organization to begin thinking about adopting the paradigm of our scenic trail partners by building trails to connect remaining historic sites, inscriptions, landmarks, and emigrants' and explorers' graves.

Concerning the educational program, I propose that we create an educational DVD, with a supplemental educational CD and website that would provide an overview of everything that helped shaped the West, with particular emphasis on our trails. John Krizek's recent documentary *Forgotten Journey: The Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Saga* is a good model for this. In addition to the film and CD-ROM, it includes an online teacher's guide ([http://thecaliforniatrail.com/teachers\\_guide.asp](http://thecaliforniatrail.com/teachers_guide.asp)). For the purpose I have in mind, such a DVD would include the history of the trails, from the beginnings in the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, through the Juan Bautista de Anza, Lewis and Clark, Santa Fe and Old Spanish Trails, to the Trail of Tears, the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, California, Pony Express and Nez Perce Trails, all

the way to its finale in the Iditarod Trail in Alaska in the 1890s. A case could easily be made to include the Overmountain Victory Trail, as at one time the folks living west of the Appalachians were considered "westward expansionists."

A second proposal is to create workbooks that can be used with or without the multimedia presentations. The chairman of OCTA's education publications committee has written children's workbooks on the Oregon-California Trail, the Mormon Pioneer Trail, the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Santa Fe Trail. He's currently writing one on the Pony Express Trail. I would like to see him, working with representatives of the other trail organizations, take the lead in creating a resource that introduces school children to our entire National Trails System.

The goals, in my mind, are 1) to get school kids out on the trails and involved in our organizations, 2) to encourage school teachers to recognize us as resources, and hopefully to have them to join our individual organizations, and 3) to position ourselves before state boards of education as experts on Western history.

A large percentage of us live near trail sites. We have trails in the Southeast, the Southwest, the Midwest and in the West. If we recognize that the Lewis and Clark Trail really begins in Virginia, where Lewis began his journey, we can include Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky and Indiana, where Clark joined Lewis. Our trails pass through major metropolitan areas--Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, San Antonio, Albuquerque, El Paso, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Boise, Salt Lake City, Reno, etc. Our trails pass through 23 of the 24 states west of the Mississippi (all but Minnesota). East of the Mississippi (if one includes the Lewis and Clark Trail), our National Historic Trails pass through 15 states, excluding only Wisconsin, Michigan, the New England states, New York and New Jersey. That's some coverage. That's quite a story to share with our nation's school-children. And that's my vision of how we should start.

Of course, this will take 100% buy-in and 100% monetary commitment from each trail organization. It will be a job to convince people that work done and resources committed for the benefit of the Partnership will benefit the individual trail organizations. Perhaps we could organize it in such a manner that when the Partnership sells the products, they keep the revenue, but when an individual trail organization sells the products, the revenue would be split between them and the Partnership. We will also need to mass-market these products, for example in *Scholastic Magazine* or a similar publication.

Everyone needs to have input into this. Teachers are always on the lookout for new resources, especially primary resources. It is well-known that kids who interact with their history (rather than studying it in a text-book) not only learn it better, but retain it better. These kids are our future members. I love the story of the schoolboy who was so moved by an Overmountain Victory presentation that he ran home to get his mother to pack his clothes and lunch so he could go off and fight the British! It will be of key importance to include decision-makers at the level of state boards of education. Without their input and buy-in, we won't have a market, or at least as big a market as I'd like to see.

We're all promoting our individual trails on a micro-level. I think it's time to ratchet it up to the macro-level. I think we can only do that in a collective fashion.

## Salt Lake City Offers Trail Buffs Rich Trail History

The Utah Crossroads Chapter of the OCTA hosted the 2005 association convention in Salt Lake City the week of August 14th. It was well attended. The speakers and programs were informative and educational. Dr. Fred Gowans delivered the convention Keynote Speech, entitled "The Battle for the Green River, 1850 - 1857." Todd Bevens talked on Mount Misery and the Death Valley 49ers. Richard Rieck gave a fascinating talk on the numbers, causes and patterns of deaths on the Oregon-California Trail. Keith Meldahl gave a Powerpoint presentation which made the geological history of South Pass very clear. The convention's final paper was delivered by David L. Bigler. His moving talk, "Terror on the Trail: The Massacre at Mountain Meadows," will be printed in the January issue of *Spanish Traces*, the publication of the Old Spanish Trail Association. There was a good selection of fieldtrips, including the Salt Lake Cutoff (with a visit to the Golden Spike National Historic Site at Promontory Summit), the Hastings Cutoff, Simpson's Overland Stage route (with Hastings Cutoff/Lincoln Highway/Pony Express interest), and the California and Mormon trails between Fort Bridger and Salt Lake City.

The new OCTA president is Vern Gorzitze of Salt Lake City.



Donner Springs,  
OCTA Convention 2005  
*photo by Jon Lawrence*

## ***Surviving Conquest: A History of the Yavapai Peoples***

by Timothy Braatz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 301 pp. \$55.00

Historian Timothy Braatz's *Surviving Conquest* is an attempt to understand the history and the geography of the Yavapai people, one of the most misunderstood indigenous communities of the American Southwest. Consistently misidentified and mischaracterized, the Yavapais are four related but distinct groups: the Kwevkepayas, Wipukepas, Yavapés, and Tolkepayas. Although *Surviving Conquest* covers the pre-conquest period, its focus is on the late nineteenth century, when the Yavapais suffered forced removal from their native lands. Braatz seeks to illuminate the process by which Yavapais after 1863 shifted from a hunting-gathering lifestyle to a sedentary agricultural existence emphasizing commercial agriculture and wage work.

In his first chapter, Braatz examines Yavapai life before the American conquest. He begins with a discussion of the Yavapai creation stories and the archeology in the Verde Valley area, emphasizing the close ties between the Yavapais and the specific geographic region they live in and the group's relationship with neighboring Maricopa, Mohaves, and Hualapai. Although the Verde Valley heartland is the Yavapai place of emergence, pre-conquest Yavapais occupied a region of more than twenty thousand square miles, an area that stretched from the San Francisco Peaks in the north to the Pinal Mountains in the southeast and almost to the confluence of the Gila and Colorado River in the southwest. Braatz examines the economic strategies the Yavapais used to survive in their rugged desert environment and then moves into a discussion of their sociopolitical and familial alliances.

After an examination of the ways in which Spanish colonialism, the Mexican era, and early exploration disrupted the Yavapais' lifestyle, Braatz discusses the history of military campaigns to eradicate the Yavapais during the 1860s and 1870s. Realizing that they would not be able to withstand the American forces, the Yavapais believed that their chance for survival in Yavapai territory was to adopt an agricultural existence on federally protected reservations. In 1875, after two years at the Rio Verde Indian Reservation, they were relocated to the San Carlos Reservation in

Western Apache land. Chapter 4 is an examination of the ways in which Yavapais adapted to life in a reservation setting. Despite their adaptation, however, they refused to accept San Carlos as a permanent home and repeatedly requested permission to return to Yavapai lands. Although they were denied their request, Yavapai families began to make their escape, preferring a life in hiding to a life in exile. By 1902, most Yavapais were back on Yavapai lands. Braatz concludes his study with a discussion of how after their return, the Yavapais managed to acquire three federally recognized Yavapai reservations.

In his prologue Braatz admits to be "rooting for the underdog," and throughout the book, he does just that, emphasizing at every opportunity the Yavapais' resilience and innovativeness as they attempt to survive on their own terms. The author's admiration of and intense sympathy for the Yavapai people are coupled with an unsympathetic interpretation of non-Yavapais, especially non-Native Americans, who travel through or settle in the region occupied by the Yavapais. At times this produces a frustratingly imbalanced analysis. Braatz treats most historians of early Arizona and western expansion—including Angie Debo, Donald Worcester, Edwin Sweeney, and James Haley, D. C. Cole, and David Roberts—unfavorably as well. According to Braatz, most researchers of early Arizona history have relied on documents produced by Americans and ignored Yavapai and other ethnographical material. These historians are, according to the author, "prisoners of the imperialist approach" (18) that dehumanizes Yavapais and privileges American expansionism. Braatz's stated purpose is to "exhume historical Yavapais from where time, indifference, and narrow-minded scholarship have buried them" (20). By relying extensively on Yavapai sources—most especially accounts recorded in the early twentieth century by a Yavapai named Mike Burns—Braatz attempts to set the record straight.

Although we find Braatz's political perspective and his disparagement of historians of nineteenth-century Arizona troubling, *Surviving Conquest* is a definite contribution to an understanding of the Yavapai people during the late nineteenth century. Scholars and interested readers in early Arizona history will not want to be without a copy.

*reviewed by Deborah and Jon Lawrence*

## At the Graves of Olive Oatman and Martha Summerhayes

by Tracy DeVault

Everyone that has an interest in southwestern history has heard of the Oatman Massacre. In the early 1980s, long before I moved to Arizona, I read Royal B. Stratton's *Captivity of the Oatman Girls*. Although Stratton's book is overly melodramatic, the basic story is quite interesting. One weekend, my friend John Gregan and I set out to find the Oatman massacre site. This was long before I owned a GPS and it took us half a day to find the site, mostly by talking to local ranch hands. I was surprised and pleased that there was a formal marker at the Oatman graves. Years later I moved to Prescott and eventually joined SWOCTA. Our group has since made several trips to the area, and we have often revisited the site.

The June 2005 issue of *Desert Tracks* renewed my interest in the Oatman story. Judy and I, along with our granddaughter, Katie Marie DeVault, were planning a trip back east to do some genealogical research and to take Katie to visit Graceland and Washington, D.C. I had a vague recollection that Olive Oatman had married and ended up somewhere in Texas. I got on the internet and quickly learned that Olive and husband John Fairchild were buried in the West Hill Cemetery in Sherman, Texas. Sherman was not far off our planned route, so we decided to visit the cemetery. It was a great diversion and gave us a chance to reflect on Olive's very unusual life.

One of the sites of interest to us in Washington D.C. was the Arlington National Cemetery. I had previously decided that, in addition to visiting the grave of John F. Kennedy, we would also visit the graves of John and Martha Summerhayes. You will recall that Martha wrote *Vanished Arizona*, a book about her experiences in 1870's Arizona. I had obtained the exact grave site from the Arlington National Cemetery website, along with a map of the cemetery. They were buried in Section 1, Grave 153C. So far so good.

Once we left the Kennedy graves, things began to go down hill. (Actually our route was up hill.) It was quite a hike to the section where the Summerhayes are buried. Arriving there, we soon realized that we had no idea how to find a

specific grave within a section. We had to ask a number of cemetery workers before we found one who could explain the secret code. However, this still did not work. We would find the correct row but then, before we arrived at 153C, the number sequence would change. Finally, we discovered that there was more than one Section 1. Once we were in the correct Section 1, the Summerhayes' graves were easy to find. Most stones in Arlington are standard government issue. However, many graves have custom made stones. The Summerhayes' stone is very impressive.



OLIVE A. OATMAN  
WIFE OF J.B. FAIRCHILD  
1837-1903  
*photo by Tracy DeVault*



Katie Marie DeVault at the Summerhayes' grave  
*photo by Tracy DeVault*

## Mapping the Trail in Southern California

*by Rose Ann Tompkins*

October 2005 found eleven SWOCTA mappers heading for Anza-Borrego Desert State Park to map for the first time along the Southern Trail in California. We met at a primitive campsite in Blair Valley, which put us almost on the trail, and we could work in both directions from camp. We had a large flat area for our vehicles, a portable shower setup (greatly appreciated by all who used it), and clean pit toilets, which made it a comfortable place. The weather co-operated the entire time with warm sunny days in the 70s and clear nights in the 50s. The modern paved highway parallels the trail through here. This meant that we did not have to use 4WD travel to follow the trail in backcountry. Since we are all experienced at mapping, several groups could work at once in different areas and be taxied easily from place to place on the highway. We covered more miles in less time.

This proved to be a difficult part of the trail to map. It has been a travel corridor from Spanish days to present. It was the route used by Spanish and Mexican missionaries, traders and settlers; by military, gold seekers, cattle drives, and emigrants; by stage lines; and more recently as a county highway. Artifacts are few, having been scavenged by collectors or "cleaned up" by others. Mormon Battalion, Butterfield Stage, and state historical markers have been erected at various places. Sometimes they are on an actual trail, sometimes close-by. We puzzled our way along, but felt we made progress.

Some landmarks are well known. The emigrant diaries tell about them, and the histories written since emigrant days continue to identify them.

### Foot and Walker Pass

Our campsite was near a place now known as Foot and Walker Pass and this was our starting place. Diaries did not use this name, but it was clear in the writings that they passed through it. It is not a

high pass, but a rocky ridge. The trace up the ridge is deep from wear. It is not a long hill, but steep. There is another trace showing road building and documented as the Butterfield Stage Route and the later county road. There is a historical marker at the top.

*January 20 [1847] I marched before sunrise and was soon at the rocky hill, which was very bad. But, by using ropes, the wagons were got over in about an hour. There was an excellent descending road five or six miles to San Felipe . . . Phillip St. George Cooke, p. 224*

We worked in both directions from the pass, finding little trace of the trail in the flats except for occasional rust on rocks. The trail goes into playa areas on both sides, so not much remains.

### Box Canyon

This canyon is aptly named. It is located south of Foot and Walker Pass. Phillip St. George Cooke put the Mormon Battalion men to work making a road through this canyon, in one place having to widen the solid walls in order to make it possible for the wagons to fit. There is also a dry waterfall to go around. Evidence of several roads around the waterfall area are still visible and were mapped. The trail through the entire canyon can still be traced, where it is not in the actual sandy bottom drainage. Several miles were mapped through here and across the valley leading into the canyon from the south and east.

*January 19 [1847] Then, up a mountain torrent bed, I came to the canyon and found it much worse than I expected - there were many rocks to cross, etc. But the worst was the narrow pass, besides crookedness of hard, high rocks. Setting an example myself, there was much labor done on it before the wagons came; that is, with axes we pounded, broke, split, and hewed the rocks to increase the opening. I thought it was all safe before the wagons came, and went on a short distance and found a hill to be ascended, to avoid a still narrower canyon, with a great rock to be broken to pieces with our axes before it was practicable. Much work was done here . . . Phillip St. George Cooke, p. 222*



Don Buck inspects one of the trails in Box Canyon  
*photo by Tracy DeVault*

*here and springs of water; the water although slightly sulphurous, was palatable. The location had always been a favorable camping place. . . Roscoe and Margaret Conkling, p. 223.*

It would appear that the trail can still be found in rocky areas and through ridges. However, in the flats and playas, little remains, although possible traces show up on the aerial photos. Perhaps techniques can be used in the future to give us a better picture of the various trails.

**Bibliography:**

*Exploring Southwestern Trails, 1846-1854*, edited by Ralph P. Bieber. Procupine Press, Philadelphia, 1974.

**Campbell Grade**

This was known in emigrant days as The Door or El Puerto. It separated the sandy desert areas on the east from the better watered areas to the west. It is a steep, rocky ascent with several traces going up. We attempted to map the various traces, but it was difficult to discern which were the earliest. At the top is a very good trace, just a few feet from the paved highway. The area certainly shows a lot of use through the years.

*Wednesday Sept 19<sup>th</sup> [1849] March to El Puerto meeting on the road and at El Puerto a multitude of emigrants, all just "Gold Sot." How sadly many of there will be disappointed in a few weeks more. . . Cave J. Coutts, eastbound, p. 68*

**Vallecito Stage Station**

This reconstructed Butterfield stage station is a county park with a campground. We worked in both directions from this spot, finding occasional rocks with rust and little else.

*Vallecito (Little Valley) was a veritable oasis in the desert to the travelers over this route. There was grazing*

"From San Diego to the Colorado: The Diary of Cave J. Coutts," *Brand Book Number Nine, The San Diego Corral of the Westerners*, Edited by George M. Ellis, San Diego, 1995.

*The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869*, Vol. II, by Roscoe P. Conkling and Margaret B. Conkling. The Authur H. Clark Company, Glendale, 1947.



Rose Ann Tompkins and Richard Greene in the swale going up Foot and Walker Pass.  
*photo by Neal Johns*

## SWOCTA Fall 2005 Mapping Trip: The Southern Trail through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, California

by *Richard Greene*

A few years ago we made a reconnaissance trip of the Southern Emigrant Trail from Chino, CA, to Yuma, AZ, with Phil Brigandi, a southern California historian who is currently Archivist for Orange County, CA. It was a memorable trip. This fall we returned to map some of the highlights of the Southern Trail in Anza-Borrego State Park. Anza-Borrego is a mix of badlands, rock strewn hills, sand, brush and tourists. We mapped from east of the Vallecito Stage Station to Earthquake Valley, about 12 miles in all. The Trail Turtles on this trip were Don and Vilma Buck, Tracy and Judy DeVault, Richard and Marie Greene, Neal and Marian Johns, Rose Ann Tompkins, Ken and Pat White.

### Friday, October 21

Those of us coming from Arizona saw reminders of previous mapping trips on our way along I-10 to Yuma: Butterfield Pass, Gila Bend, and the Sentinel Exit, which leads to the Oatman Massacre site and the site where we discovered an 1849 inscription along with petroglyphs and a pool of water in a shallow canyon. Crossing the Colorado River at Yuma, we were not prepared for the rolling expanse of sand dunes that we encountered as we drove into California. Today the dunes are a playground for dune buggies, but in 1849 the emigrants recorded their hardships when they crossed this area.

Beyond El Centro, at the Ocotillo exit, we took the road to Anza-Borrego. As we arrived in Anza-Borrego, the terrain was desolate hills, sand and brush, dried up scars from runoffs and arroyos. There are signs of trail history at Palm Springs, Vallecito Stage Station, the Campbell Grade and Box Canyon. There are also tourist camps and isolated groups of homes and businesses in areas of private land.

Rose Ann and the Greens arrived at the Blair Valley campsite just before 4:00 pm. Neal and Marian came next, bringing their latest Husky, "Dixie." An hour later Ken and Pat arrived, after going out of their way, and Tracy and Judy, who had gotten stuck in weekend



Dinner in Camp

*photo by Ken White*

traffic near Temecula, finally arrived at 5:30 pm. Our campsite was an arc in the shadow of small, rock strewn hills. There was plenty of room for all of us in a sandy circle, and a clean, fresh, roomy pit toilet was conveniently located a hundred yards away.

Rose Ann thought that the trail went over a hill by the camp, so she and Richard went to investigate. They found a geo cache but soon realized that this was not the location of the trail. We were glad to get Rose Ann off the rocky slopes because we did not need our leader to reinjure her knee, which is recovering from an operation.

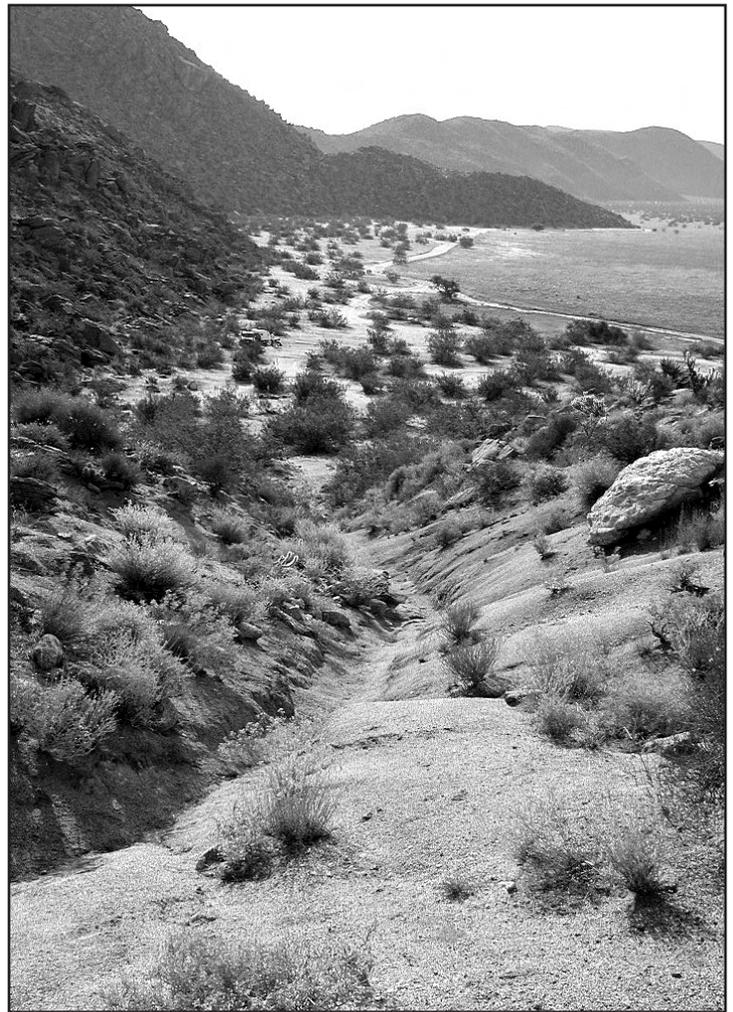
It got dark soon after 6:00 pm. It was a pleasant, starry night. Rose Ann discussed the mapping plan and handed out info packages full of maps and diary accounts. We went to bed about 7:30 pm. It was the weekend, and Anza-Borrego is not that far from San Diego and Los Angeles, so a few people drove by our camp to get to other camp sites. We soon got used to the drive-bys

## Saturday, October 22

It was a good cool night for sleeping. When we awoke, articles that had been left outside were damp from overnight dew. By 6 am there was daylight and by 7:30 am our campsite was sunny and warm. After coffee, we gathered at Rose Ann's luxurious Lincoln Navigator to discuss the specific mapping tasks. Today, Tracy, Ken and Pat were to drive to Earthquake Valley and map back to Foot and Walker Pass. Neal, Rose Ann and Richard would go to Foot and Walker Pass and walk to meet the other group. Judy, Marie and Marian would protect our camp with support from Dixie.

The trail is obvious to the top of Foot and Walker Pass. Close to the top is State Historic Landmark 647. The marker tells about the Mormon Battalion, the emigrants, the Butterfield Stage, and a road used by locals until the 1970's. The view from the top shows a wide, brushy plain going into Earthquake Valley. Directly below the pass are compacted sandy roads leading into the valley. The trail is obvious going down the pass to the road. The State Park signs indicate that this is a horse trail. Alongside is a compacted sandy road bordered by a line of hills on the left. Following the horse trail we encountered Mormon Battalion posts. We believe that this is the trail, but it could be a bladed road as well. This is one of those corridors where no path is definitive.

A park ranger stopped to chat and looked at our aerial maps of the area. He advised us that the emigrants headed for the playa near a community that we could see in the distance. After lunch, we decided to investigate the ranger's suggestions and other possible tracks shown on the aerials. We drove down into the midst of Earthquake Valley and spread out to check for signs of the trail going back to Foot and Walker Pass. We found no signs of trail, but we did have to search for Tracy who for some reason ended up on the top of another very rocky hill. Rose Ann checked in the other direction towards the playa but found nothing conclusive there either. Ken and Pat and Rose Ann shuttled us all back to camp. While we were out beating the bushes we picked up radio calls from Don and Vilma, who arrived about 2:30 pm.



Looking down the swale from the top of Foot and Walker Pass.  
*photo by Ken White*

Tracy had constructed an iron frame that slides out from his vehicle to make a shower stall with a hanging curtain. We gathered rocks to weigh down the curtains to prevent them blowing in the wind. The shower, which has an operating water heater, was wonderful at the end of the day. We spent the afternoon in camp chatting. Dixie the dog dug holes and howled for attention. After dinner, Rose Ann showed a DVD of the National Geographic Society expedition that she and Harlie took to Alaska on the Lindblad Line. It had been a great day with good friends. It was 7:30 pm when we headed for bed as the evening cooled off. We heard coyote calls in the middle of the starry night.

## Sunday, October 23

There was heavy dew overnight, so once again anything left outside was wet. After breakfast we headed for Box Canyon where the Mormon Battalion carved a passage through the rock walls for their



Vilma Buck at one of the Mormon Battalion posts along the trail south of Foot and Walker Pass

*photo by Neal Johns*

wagons. We drove to a pullout where there was a historical marker. Rose Ann “controlled” the mappers from the highway as she could look down into the shallow defile of Box Canyon and watch their progress. We mapped Box Canyon to where it joined the highway and noted lots of rust. It didn’t take long to map this section of the canyon heading west. The bottom of the canyon is sand over bed rock. There is some vegetation on the shelves along the walls. It was a good passage, but with an occasional difficult area. The canyon is not deep or intimidating.

After lunch, Ken, Pat, and Richard tried to locate the trail from Box Canyon to the playa below Foot and Walker Pass. There was not a lot of evidence for the trail. We kept encountering Boy Scout Mormon

Battalion Trail posts. It would be nice to feel assured that the posts are accurately placed, but experience has shown us that they are in convenient spots rather than accurately positioned. Using “Go To” coordinates in our GPS we got to the playa, but we saw nothing to identify the trail – there were no artifacts or even rocks to check for rust in the bush covered sandy soil.

Nobody had any luck finding the trail from Box Canyon to the playa.

The weather so far had been sunny but not blistering hot, and while the cool evenings sent us to bed early, it was also great sleeping weather. This was Sunday, so the weekend campers left.

## Monday, October 24

When we arose, it was chilly until the sun came over the hills. Once the sun was up, the only shade was from the vehicles--there are no trees--so we had to move around the vehicle to stay out of the sun.

Marie and Judy left for Julian to get ice, treats, more water for showers (which they got from a service station hose) and to drop off our trash. Julian is a tourist town which is at a higher altitude and has more of an Alpine landscape. Marian stayed in camp with Dixie and looked after our things.

We headed back to Box Canyon to follow it east to the highway and towards the Campbell Grade. Ken, Pat, Don and Vilma walked east from yesterday’s entry point and Tracy, Neal and Richard walked to meet them. A lot of ground can be mapped in this manner. Once again we saw many Mormon Battalion posts and plenty of rust in the canyon, which becomes shallower and closer to the highway as you head east. By 10:30 am we had finished mapping the canyon. Don took Tracy and Richard back into the canyon to see two old county roads, one just above the canyon wash and

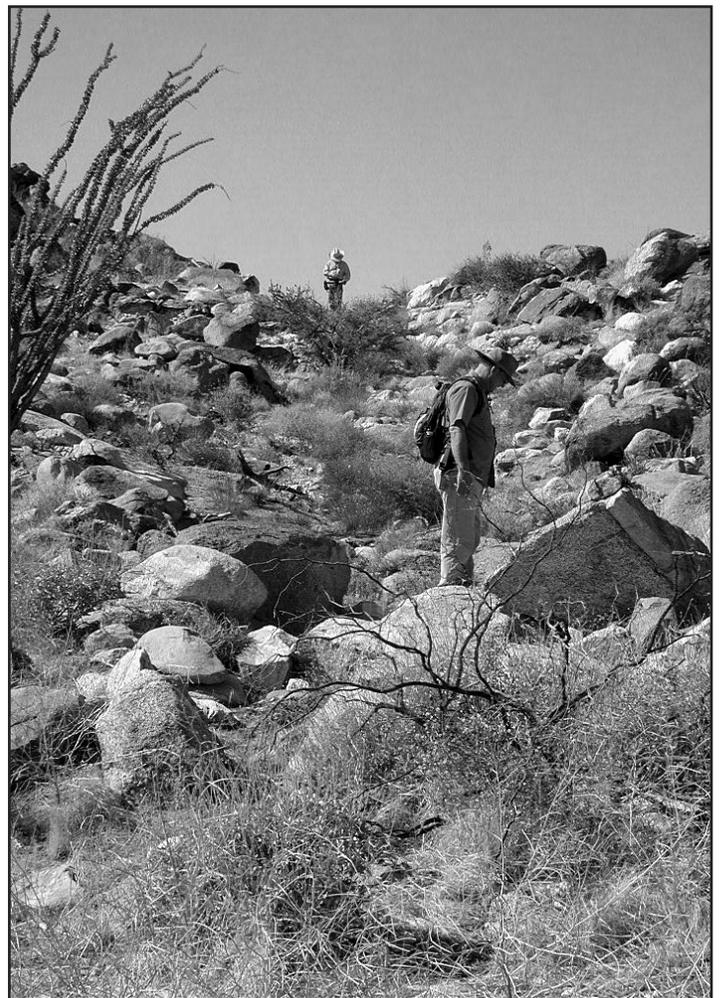


A view of Box Canyon near its north end.  
*photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*

The Campbell Grade (called The Door or El Puerto in emigrant diaries) was impressive. We stopped at a pullout beside the highway and walked a short distance back to where the highway had cut across the grade. We were at the top of a hill. To the east we looked down into the valley towards the Vallecito Stage Station. The trail was visible going down the steep side of the hill by the rock walls that were built along its sides. We could see a white ribbon stretching out across the flat bushy plain. On the west side of the highway was an incredible short stretch of the trail that rose to the very top of the hill; there were large

one below the highway. Rock walls on the sides of the roads signified a well-traveled route. After lunch in the canyon shade, we started mapping the trail towards a small community down the highway where the Butterfield Ranch Camp Resort is located. The buildings by the parking area were burned 10 years ago but are now being rebuilt.

Out of the canyon and by the highway, the trail crosses the road and then crosses back again by a parking area where there is another Mormon Battalion post. We were in bush-covered sandy terrain and the trail entered private property (with houses) all the way to the Campbell Grade. The rest of us in two vehicles headed to the “resort” to wait on Don and Vilma, who proceeded trying to follow the trail through the maze of private property. Rose Ann tracked them down via the radio and picked them up on the highway. A local couple stopped to chat with Rose Ann and told her about a nearby grave and headstone. Rose Ann called Ken on the radio to join her for a visit to the grave. The grave and gigantic rock monument appeared to be a memorial to an early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneer--it wasn't an 1849 emigrant. We all drove on to the Campbell Grade.



Richard Greene and Tracy DeVault map an ascent at Campbell Grade.  
*photo by Ken White*

rocks smeared all over with rust. Over the top the trail came down to the highway again and crossed the road into a fenced pasture where it disappeared into tall grass beyond a big rock covered with rust. Tracy and Richard checked out the short section of trail by the highway while others went down the trail into the valley where Rose Ann picked them up and shuttled every body back to the pullout.

By 2:30 pm we headed for camp. Marian and Dixie had guarded our camp well. Tracy set up the shower, which averaged just over one gallon of water per shower. The next day would be our last day of mapping.

### **Tuesday, October 25**

In the morning the wind gusted and we bundled up. When Rose Ann downloaded our GPS readings the paper went flying in the wind. Marie stayed to protect our camp and the rest of us left for the Campbell Grade.

Tracy, Neal, Don, Ken, and Richard checked out the slope and “splits” in the trail. They walked east down the grade leading into the valley and then across the valley to meet the others at a pullout. Pat, Vilma, Judy, and Rose Ann mapped the trail east of the pullout. The trail was a white strip of hard sand. On the sides was a spectacular display of 10 to 15 foot high ocotillo, in full foliage due to a recent rain.

We drove to the Vallecito Stage Station for lunch. A San Diego County Sheriff Deputy pulled in for his lunch time exercise program, a two-mile walk with hand weights. He chatted with us but wasn't familiar with the Southern Trail.

Tracy and Richard walked from the Vallecito Stage Station along a trail that paralleled the highway and that headed west to the valley going to the Campbell Grade. The trail crossed the highway but Neal, Tracy and Richard could not find where it connected to the valley we had mapped earlier in the morning. They came out beside some buildings on the highway. The Whites and Bucks mapped east of the stage station, finding rusty rocks from time to time. At about 2:00 pm., we were done with mapping and headed back to camp.

Don suggested to Neal that he lead the Turtles on a trip to Baja next fall and everybody appears enthusiastic. We did not tarry long because it was cold. We said our good byes before retiring, as we were all leaving at different times in the morning. It was the end of a good mapping trip with good friends.

### **News from the Trail**

The Mormon History Association's annual conference will be held in Casper, Wyoming, on May 25-28, 2006. For more information, see <http://mha.wservers.com/conferences/2006.php>.

John Robinson's new book, *Gateways to Southern California*, a history of the mountain passes and routes into and out of the southern part of the state, has just been published. It will be reviewed in the Spring issue of *Desert Tracks*.

The Margot Mifflin interview regarding Olive Oatman (*Desert Tracks*, Spring 2005) will be published in the upcoming issue of *California Territorial Quarterly* (Winter 2005).

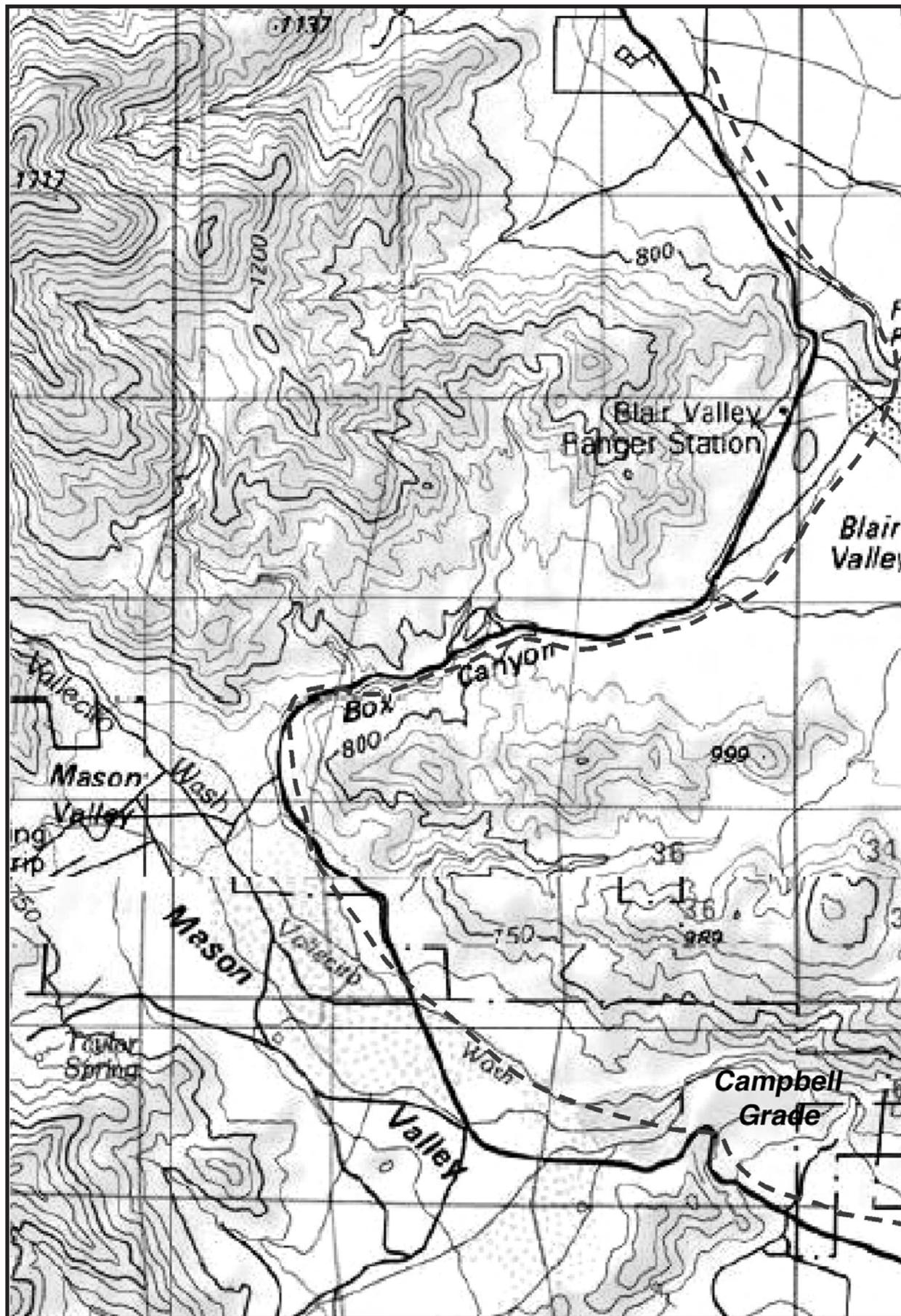
### **Strongbox Report**

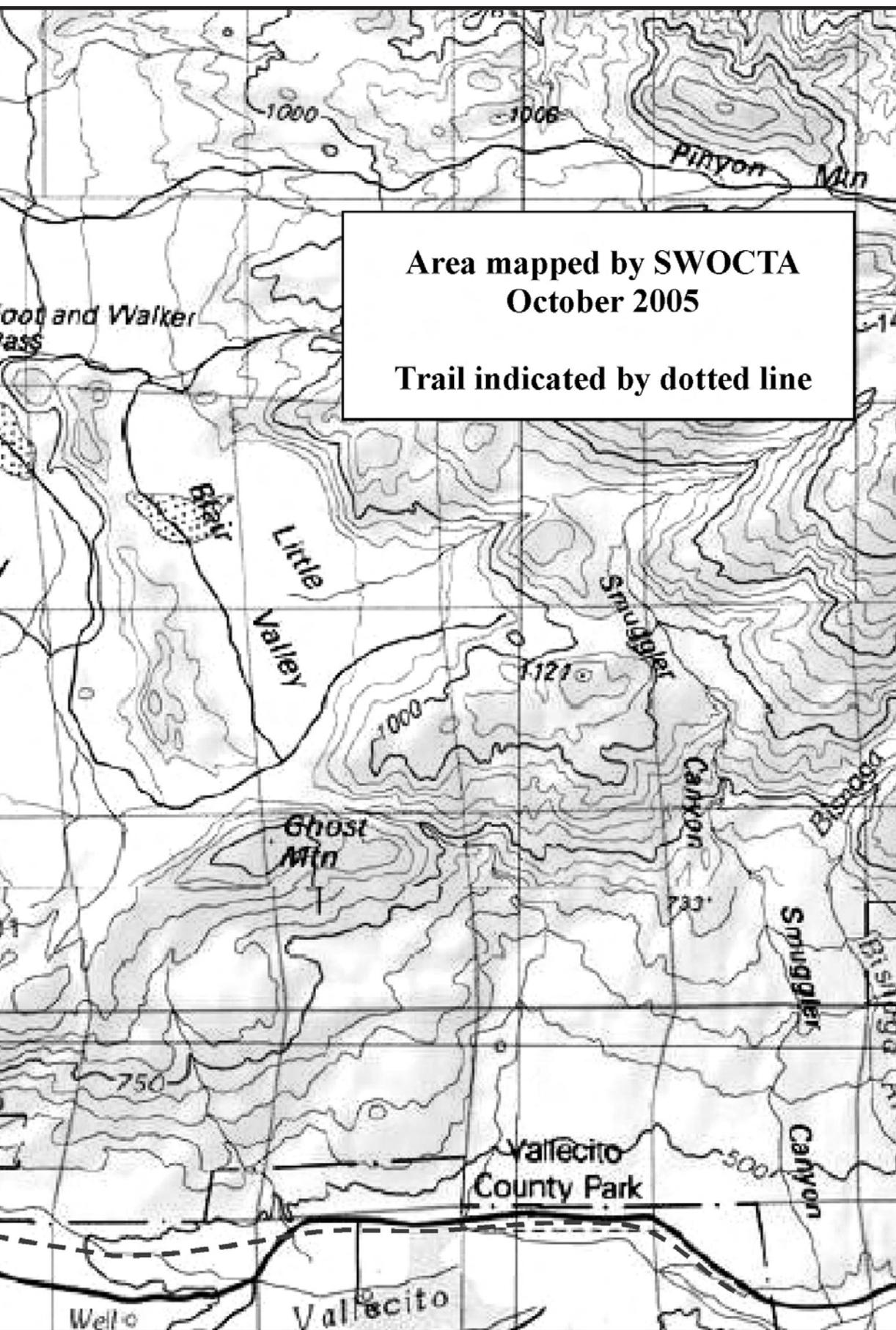
The SWOCTA treasury has sufficient funds that it will not be necessary to ask the SWOCTA membership for dues for 2006.

In the past several years, this has frequently been the case and we have had to ask for dues only occasionally. Beginning this year, we will announce in the newsletter whether or not dues are needed.

In the past, under these circumstances, several members sent in dues anyway and the treasurer sent the checks back to them. Beginning this year, when we announce that no dues are needed, when a member sends a check to the treasurer anyway, the check will be treated as a donation and deposited.

**Harland Tompkins**  
**SWOCTA Strongbox Custodian**





## Touring Oatman sites in the Midwest

by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

This summer, as part of an extended trip to the Midwest, we decided to visit a few more locations relevant to the Oatman story.<sup>1</sup> Using Brian McGinty's new book, *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*, as well as Hal and Doris Clark's book, *The Oatman Story*, we drew up a list of Oatman must-see sites and then narrowed it down to three that were convenient to our route.

Born in Vermont, Roys Oatman moved with his family to the town of Locke in western New York when he was seven. In the early 1830s, the Oatmans moved to Franklin—later renamed La Harpe—in Hancock County in western Illinois. Here Roys' parents, Lyman and Lucy Oatman, built Le Harpe's first hotel. The business was successful, and by 1836, the Oatmans built a larger building that they called the Tremont Hotel across the street.

In 1832 when Roys Oatman was twenty-three, he married Mary Ann Sperry. Shortly afterwards, he opened a store in La Harpe. In 1836, Mary Ann's parents, Joy and Mary Ann Sperry, also settled in the town.<sup>2</sup>

We arrived in La Harpe, Illinois, on a hot and humid afternoon in August. Strolling down Main Street, we passed many empty buildings, and nobody was in sight. At first glance, the town looked unpromising, perhaps a victim of the farm crisis of the 1980's. We located the museum, and although it was closed, there was a phone number on the door. Less than ten minutes after our call, a historical society volunteer, Darlene Bennet, arrived and welcomed us to La Harpe. She kindly opened up the museum and gave us a private tour. Of special interest to us was the small display on the Oatman family, as well as a few Lincoln artifacts that pertained to Lincoln's 1858 visit to La Harpe. Mrs. Bennet let us make copies of some of the museum's Oatman materials; however, most of what they have has already been published in Hal and Doris Clark's *The Oatman Story*. She ended her tour on the sidewalk where she pointed us to the nearby Oatman hotel sites. "Be sure to stop at the park to see the plaque and lilac bush commemorating the Oatmans before you leave

town," she said as she ushered us into our truck.

One block from the museum stands the plaque that reads in part, "Oatman Lilac Bush. In Memory of Royce Oatman Family in La Harpe (1832-1842). Four of seven children were born here: Lucy, Lorezno, Olive, and Royce Jr." The nearby lilac bush is from the original Oatman lilac in Whiteside County. We plucked a sprig from the bush and tucked it inside the cover flap of McGinty's book.

In the early 1840s, Roys Oatman moved his family to Chicago, where he took a teaching job. After a year, the Oatmans returned to western Illinois and moved to Whiteside County. Roys purchased land, built a log cabin, and began to farm. The Oatmans gradually increased their holdings to two hundred acres. In July 1847, Mary Ann's younger sister Sarah and her husband Asa Abbott took up farming on adjoining land.

We drove to Morrison, twelve miles east of the Mississippi River, and stopped at the Morrison Historical Society's Heritage Museum, located on the Lincoln Highway (U.S. 30), at the junction of Illinois Route 78. Although it is small, the museum has excellent exhibits. The two elderly volunteers behind the desk knew the Abbotts and scribbled down their phone number and address. We sat in the car with the air conditioner running and dialed Mr. Abbott. Answering on the second ring, he seemed unsurprised when we told him we wanted to speak to him about the Oatmans. He told us to "come on over."

The Abbott Farm is less than seven miles west from Morrison on the Lincoln Highway. There is a sign in the front yard designating the farm's original 80 acres as a Centennial Farm and a Sesquicentennial Farm by the state. Established in 1848 when it was purchased by Benjamin Abbott, the farm has supported six generations of the family. Ed and Dorothy, the fifth generation to reside in the house, invited us in. We talked about Abbotts, Oatmans, and Sperrys, and Ed made copies of a few Oatman articles for us from his private collection of Oatman lore.

Ed Abbott is the great-grandson of Asa and Sarah Sperry Abbott. Today the Abbott farm is 170 acres and includes Roys Oatman's spread. Roys sold his property when he and his family left Illinois to follow the Brewsterites

Abbott house and barn in Whiteside County, IL, showing Centennial Farm sign.



Ed Abbott standing in site of Roys Oatman's cabin with lilac bush in background. Whiteside County, IL



Oatman lilac bush  
La Harpe, IL



Royal Hotel  
Red Cloud, NB



Lorenzo Oatman's grave  
Red Cloud, NB

*photos by Jon Lawrence*

to Bashan, and the Abbotts later bought it. According to Ed, the old house was torn down and the current house was built in the 1950s, but they incorporated shelves from the old house in the new one. The barn, however, is original. Built in 1857, the barn served as an Underground Railroad station. The Abbotts have a notched stick that family legend says indicates the number of runaway slaves that passed through their barn. Ed told us of a visit by a professor from Black Hawk College who was researching the Underground Railroad. According to Ed, when the professor entered the barn, his hair stood on end. "It is the real deal!" the professor said. Near the barn is an enormous lilac bush. When Roys and his family left for the west, Mary Ann Oatman brought her sister Sarah a farewell gift, a little lilac bush. Dorothy Abbott told us that when the lilac is in bloom, the blossoms are especially lovely and fragrant.

MaryAnn Oatman planted a lilac bush at each of the eight homes she lived in after leaving New York. Ed drove us out to Roys and Mary Ann's house site where we saw the original lilac bush. We took pictures of the lilac, an old oak tree that must have been alive at the time of the Oatmans, and the house foundation.

Before we left the Abbott farm, we bought a copy of *House by the Side of the Road*, written by Ed's mother. A collection of stories about farm life, it includes a chapter on the Oatman lilac bush.

Both Lorenzo and Olive returned to the Abbott farm in later years. For awhile, Lorenzo worked on for the Abbotts and attended classes at a nearby school. In 1860, he married Edna Canfield, a girl who was employed at the farm next door. Lorenzo and Edna moved from Illinois to Minnesota to Montana, and finally in 1885, they arrived in Red Cloud, Nebraska, with their two-year-old son Royal. For eight years they operated the Valley House Hotel. They then ran the Gardner House for two years until they moved to the Holland House on East Fourth Avenue. Lorenzo was building another hotel, the Royal Hotel, when he fell ill and died in October 1901.

Since Nebraska was on our tour route, we drove a few miles out of our way to visit Red Cloud. On arriving, we went first to the visitor's center. Inside, two elderly women sat, sifting papers at a card table. One of the women

knew about Lorenzo Oatman. She sent us to the museum and told us that she was going to call ahead and alert the museum director to our interest in Lorenzo. At the Red Cloud Museum, we were greeted by the director who had the Oatman Collection waiting for us. We perused the boxes, but unfortunately, most of the material we had seen before in the Clark book. Next, we drove to the Red Cloud Cemetery at Third and Cherry. With help from an elderly couple, we located Lorenzo's gravesite.

After a lunch break, we found the Methodist church where Lorenzo's funeral was held. There were boards over the windows and the building was closed. We located the Royal Hotel a few blocks away. After Lorenzo's death, Edna and her only surviving child Royal became the proprietors of the hotel. Local tradition says that the author and Red Cloud resident Willa Cather was a friend of the Oatmans and a frequent diner at the Royal Hotel.

The road north from Red Cloud meanders through gentle prairie land. As we drove, we reflected on the inaccuracies, distortions, and gaps that have haunted the Oatman story. Kudos to Brian McGinty for rekindling new interest in this fascinating tale and attempting to set the record straight.

#### End Notes

1. For a review of Brian McGinty's recent book on the Oatmans, *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*, see the spring issue of *Desert Tracks*.
2. Joy and Mary Ann Sperry joined the Mormon church, and in 1846, they left La Harpe to follow Brigham Young to Salt Lake City. Both died on the trail, Mary Ann in Mount Pisgah and Joy at a camp called Highland Grove.

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Marc Simmons with Deborah Lawrence  
Cerrillos, NM, November 2004  
*photo by Jon Lawrence*

## Interview with Marc Simmons

Marc Simmons is an independent, professional historian living in Cerrillos, New Mexico. He has written more than forty books on the history of New Mexico and the Southwest, and is widely considered to be the Historian Laureate of New Mexico. He is well known to emigrant trail enthusiasts as an authority on the Santa Fe Trail, on which topic he has written the leading guidebook, *Following the Santa Fe Trail: a Guide for Modern Travelers*<sup>1</sup> and several historical works, including *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail*,<sup>2</sup> which received the C.L. Sonnichsen Book Award. As a founding member and past president of the Santa Fe Trail Association, he has been a leader in preservation of trail sites, such as the Pigeon's Ranch building at the Glorieta Civil War battlefield east of Santa Fe. His long-standing interest in Kit Carson culminated in the recent book, *Kit Carson and his Three Wives*.<sup>3</sup> He has been a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and he has received the Golden Spur Award by the Western Writers of America. Recently he has begun a series of books for children that focus on heroic children of the Old West.<sup>4</sup>

We interviewed Marc at the San Marcos Café, near Cerrillos, NM, on 8 November 2004. The interview focuses on his book *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road: a Tragedy of the Apache Wars*.<sup>5</sup> This book treats the history that led to the murder by renegade Apache

Indians of Judge H. C. McComas and his wife near Silver City, New Mexico, in 1883 and the ensuing family history, including the search for Charley McComas, the six-year old boy who was captured by the Apache during the incident. (For further details, see the accompanying text box.)

### *Deborah and Jon Lawrence*

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**DT (Desert Tracks)** Since you wrote *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, have you learned anything significantly new about the McComas massacre?

**MS (Marc Simmons)** Little fragments have come up here and there, but I haven't gotten any big revelation. Several weeks ago, Sheila Tryk, the former editor of *New Mexico Magazine*, sent me a story<sup>6</sup> from the newspaper in Joplin, Missouri. It was by a feature writer who had found some new information. One thing she said which surprised me, and that I wish I'd known when I wrote *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, was that Judge McComas was already a specialist in mining law in Missouri before he left the Midwest for New Mexico. I thought that didn't happen until he came west and made some investments in mines, after which he became involved in the legal aspect. This new fact gives a little more depth to the story. The writer had been to Fort Scott, which is not far from Joplin, and may have learned about it there. I'd never been to Fort Scott. I depended on other researchers there to send me material; and I paid a photographer to make the photograph that was included in the book of the McComas tombstone in the local cemetery. I've also heard from other McComas descendants; I've got a large file on them that I'll probably donate to the Silver City Museum some day.

**DT** Of the mysteries and puzzles concerning the incident, which would you most like to have answered?

**MS** There are both small and large puzzles. I'd like to know what was in Judge McComas's head when, in the face of knowledge of the Apache outbreak, he went ahead with that trip. With hindsight we can say, "How could he possibly take his family on such a dangerous venture?" If he'd gone by himself, maybe he could have braved it out and taken his chances, but how could

he put his family in harm's way like that? I made a big issue over this question in the book. This brings up one of the fundamental keys that I use in writing history, when trying to interpret human behavior. And the key is simply this: people tend to believe what they want to believe rather than what the facts of reality dictate. It is second nature for us to validate our fantasies or engage in wishful thinking, the evidence notwithstanding. There is a good case to be made that the judge was doing something like that, and so brought disaster upon himself and his family.

**DT** At Mountain Home, a hostelry on the road, the guests were talking about the Apache outbreak over the dinner table and Juniata, the judge's wife, was so frightened that she didn't want to continue on the trip to Lordsburg.

**MS** Yes, it is really astonishing. Perhaps there was something in Judge McComas's character, stubbornness or blockheadedness. But given this universal human trait that I just mentioned, it is quite possible that he talked himself out of the danger. And I explained in the book why he might have felt that way: he had taken this road many times, he was familiar with the territory and he wasn't convinced that the Apaches were at that time close to the area around Silver City. He probably saw it as a very small risk. Also, he was intent on his business. There are probably other factors, or something in his head, that we don't even know about, that we can never know. Since history is always provisional, we take the evidence we have and make of it the best account that we can. Yet many points are left unsettled. That is what makes the study of the past so interesting -- you are forced to speculate.

**DT** Another guest, John A. Moore, the county assessor, who was also at Mountain Home, left forty five minutes later. Why didn't he and the McComases travel together?

**MS** I know, that's almost incomprehensible. Maybe he wasn't well but got to feeling better later. Maybe he stayed behind because he was scared, but then his courage returned. We're trying to put ourselves into that kind of situation, but we don't know the circumstances. Nor do we know the motives of these people or their *modus operandi*. All those unknown factors enter in.

**DT** We're interested in the relationship of this incident to the history of the old emigrant trails. While the massacre occurred in 1883, essentially at the end of the trail era, there seems to be connections to earlier trail history. Of particular interest to us is the question as to how dangerous the Indians actually were to the emigrants. Some tribes may have been more kindly disposed than others. On the other hand, tribes such as the Comanches and Apaches were not benign at all. And incidents such as the Oatman Massacre in 1851 were not uncommon.

**MS** This point, that raids on the emigrants were not so common, is one that we've been hearing recently. Maybe on the Oregon Trail especially, the Indians were not as dangerous as is generally believed. But the Indians were always a hazard, and if an emigrant got complacent, then he could run into serious trouble and lose his life, and lose his family member's lives too. On the Santa Fe Trail there is no question that from the very beginning the Indians were extremely dangerous. A typical case was the incident at McNees Crossing in 1828.<sup>7</sup> Two men, McNees and Monroe, went ahead of their party, stopped at the crossing and laid down to take a nap. Indians came and shot them. McNees was killed outright; Monroe was picked up by the caravan when it reached the crossing, but died shortly thereafter.

I tend to think that this emphasis on trying to paint the Indians in a better light, not paying attention to the evidence, is one of political correctness. The same sort of emphasis has been given to the captivity narratives, such as that of Olive Oatman. This is something entirely new in the last ten or fifteen years, people trying to say that the captivity narratives were sensationalized and exaggerated, that these women who were carried into captivity did not suffer as suggested in the published narratives. It is again an effort to put the Indians in a better light for politically correct purposes. Actually, the evidence that the narratives are essentially correct is overwhelming, but perhaps it's easy to gull people who haven't seriously studied the Old West into believing otherwise. In *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, I couldn't decide, based on the existing evidence, whether poor Juniata was ravaged before or after she was killed. But the horror stories were so grim, that even if the journalists who wrote up these poor women's

experiences did tend to exaggerate for a popular audience, and there was a lot of that, it doesn't mean that the story essentially was untrue or that the captives had an easy time of it. Many captives were ruined mentally and physically by the experience.

**DT** There were a lot more incidents of theft of livestock than of murders, but this could be absolutely disastrous. The Donner party might have survived the winter if the Paiutes hadn't stolen so many cattle and horses.

**MS** It was pretty grim. Other things cumulatively might have been more important than massacres, but such fatalities were a serious issue. At times the trails certainly were quiet and a lot of people got through without having serious trouble, but that doesn't mean the danger wasn't there. They may have simply been lucky. Perhaps circumstances existed such that it happened to be a quiet time, for example when the Indians were off hunting rather than raiding.

**DT** One of the strengths of your book is that you look at the situation from so many angles and you put it in a larger context. We love the way you have a chapter on the Apaches, and then you move back into Silver City and give the history behind the McComases coming to the Southwest; you provide the Army's point of view and the citizen's point of view. It must be a challenge for you as a writer to maintain balance.

**MS** I wasn't consciously trying to maintain balance. I was trying to tell as much of the story as I could find. It may turn out to look like balance, but it was not a conscious effort. People have said something similar when reviewing the children's books that I'm doing now on heroic children of the Old West.<sup>4</sup> They say, "Oh, look, he's got a girl in the first story, a Hispanic New Mexican boy in the second story, and an Indian boy in the third." It looks like I'm touching all bases. My goal, however, is to build a story around a few historic events, and involving a real historical and heroic child, that rings true to the time and place. And it's *hard* to find such stories in the existing record. These are the ones I've come up with. So, I've taken a whole lot of flack, but I wasn't attempting to be politically correct by touching all bases.

**DT** In trying to understand the Apache mindset, what do you consider to be the best sources?

**MS** Asa Daklugie was probably the best and I think that Eve Ball, when interviewing him, was pretty well attuned to accurately recording his story.<sup>8</sup> Daklugie learned English late in life. He was the son of Juh, who was a major Apache leader in the Sierra Madre of Mexico, but who didn't receive the publicity of Cochise or Geronimo. Daklugie had the Apache mindset. But the problem is, even then you have to be very careful because these Apache often we're not intending to tell what happened in an accurate manner. They were trying to protect their people. In everything they said, they were attempting to make their people look good. In trying to understand them, a historian is always working under that handicap.

In David Roberts' recent book<sup>9</sup> on the Pueblo Revolt, when he asked the Lieutenant Governor of Acoma "Have you heard of the Pueblo revolt?" the reply was "I'm not sure I've heard of it." When Roberts questioned, "What do your children think of this?" the Lieutenant Governor replied, "Well, they don't know about it. Our elders say we shouldn't talk about that." If the young people ever asked about the Pueblo Revolt, which they probably almost never did because they most likely had never heard of it, the elders would say "This is not for you to know." They just put it away. It was too far back. In trying to understand them, you get to a blank wall. They're thinking on an entirely different track.

And the Apache Indians, how different was the track they were on! In the book I even compare them to the Comanches regarding the cultural approval of cruelty to others. The Apaches were also cruel to animals. I give examples, trying to understand what was in their heads and why they acted the way they did.

Whereas today, a common view of journalists particularly, but one that's filtering down and affecting academics as well, is that anything an Indian said must be true just because an Indian said it. But the modern Apaches, having been influenced firstly through missionary teachings when they were held captive at Fort Sill, and later through the American school systems,

do not think like the old Apaches. The point is that you can't get a modern day Apache or modern day Pueblo to tell you something that will help you understand how they thought back then. In the first place they're not going to tell you. They're going to deliberately falsify in order to protect their heritage. And second, they don't necessarily say to themselves, "I'm speaking on something that's going into the historical record so I should be accurate." That's part of our culture, not theirs. They have a dozen other motives for saying something that's not connected with reality. They want you to believe it and they may even believe it themselves, but that doesn't mean it's true.

A related point was made by Grenville Goodwin, the anthropologist who is the subject of the recent book *Apache Diaries*.<sup>10</sup> When he was a young man, he worked for a trader at one of the reservations, Fort Apache or San Carlos. He learned to speak Apache and got as close to the Apache people as anybody could get. This was during the late 1920's or early 1930's, when there were still a lot of older ones left. Somewhere in his diaries or journals Goodwin mentions that he once asked an elderly Apache to tell him what life was like for his grandparents before they had much contact with white men. The Apache looked at him and said, "I can't tell you that. I don't know how they lived, that was too long ago. You white men don't know how your grandparents lived, either. There have been too many changes." What a revelation! It would have been the 1850's when he was a boy, when he knew his grandparents, and as to what their life was like back then he had only the foggiest notion. Whereas when anybody today asks, "Tell us what life was like in the old days," they assume that the modern Indians will know all that. But as the Indian informant said, "You white men don't know. How do you expect us to know?"

I was mildly amused by an article in the *Albuquerque Journal*<sup>11</sup> entitled "Remembering Geronimo, Hail to the Chief." To quote the article, "A memorial to Chief Geronimo was unveiled by his great-great grandson Harlyn Geronimo on a Saturday at the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. 'My great grandmother talked about this area where the great chief was born,' he said." Now, we know Geronimo wasn't a chief. He was more of a second-tier war leader. He has gone

down in history because he lasted longer than many other Apaches and he was particularly ferocious. But what was more interesting to me was the following quote in the article: "Local resident Jim Ransom, who completed construction of the monument, said working on the project was an honor." It would have been totally unthinkable to people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who lived through the Geronimo period that it would be an honor to commemorate him. Ransom continued: "It is my hope that this monument to Geronimo's birthplace rekindles his spirit, that his love of freedom and his passionate resistance to tyranny rise up today, that it grows until it fills the hearts and minds of everyone everywhere." Nobody in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would recognize these lofty sentiments as being true of Geronimo. As a matter of fact, the army moved him and his people out of Arizona to get them away from the mass of vigilantes who wanted to lynch him once they had him under control. I've heard many horrors about Geronimo that are indisputable. During his later years before he died at Fort Sill in 1909, at which time he was pacified and belonged to a church -- I think the Apaches at Fort Sill were Dutch Reformed -- a reporter interviewed him and asked him what he most regretted about his early raiding career. He replied, "It was all the children I killed." If you read some of the stories about how he killed them, it will turn your stomach. It is unbelievable. There are so many unimpeachable sources and so much collaborative evidence about what they did to children that you can't dismiss all of this as journalistic hyperbole. This is a white man's fantasy: "If I were an Indian, I would do this or that. I would engage in passionate resistance to tyranny." There's not a shred of evidence that that was in Geronimo's mind; that was not an Indian way of thinking. Nor this "rekindle his spirit of his love of freedom." It was his love of raiding!

This so-called "Indian point of view" always amuses me. The view of Kit Carson has fallen afoul of that. Beginning in the 1970's interviewers would ask young Navajos, "What do you think of Kit Carson?" The problem with this question is that the Indians' only sources of information on Kit Carson are white man's books. If they read the anti-Carson books, which is typically the case, they reply "Oh, we hate that butcher." What many of these young people know is what they learned from Vista volunteers who were teaching on

the reservation. Most of these volunteers were eastern preppies who came out to save the Indians. They had read Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*,<sup>12</sup> so they had a negative picture of Kit Carson. I started reading newspaper accounts of young Navajos who said, "We hate Kit Carson because of what he did to us. He was a butcher. We can never forgive him." I said to myself, "Boy, that quote 'We can never forgive Kit Carson for what he did to us,' sounds familiar." I knew when I heard it that they'd gotten it from a non-Indian, and I think I found the source -- *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* -- though I can't swear to it. But then the newspaper people quote it as the tribal tradition. Well, it's not the tribal tradition. The tribal tradition is something else. It can be found in a book the Navajos did themselves. In it, you don't find any vitriol against Kit Carson. As a matter of fact, he's hardly mentioned. Their vitriol is against the neighboring tribes, the Hopis especially, but also the Yavapai, the Apaches, the Utes, who all took advantage of the fact that their old enemies the Navajo were under attack by the Army, and rushed in for the kill.

**DT** What book was this?

**MS** *Navajo Stories of the Long Walk*,<sup>13</sup> published by Navajo Community College. It has been out of print for a long time, although maybe it has been reprinted in paperback. If you want to get the Indian mindset, this is one of the few sources that I know. The interviews were done back in the 1930's when people were still living who as children had been on the Long Walk. It includes input from people who were born later, but who had heard the stories from relatives who had been on the Long Walk. They recorded the stories in Navajo on tape and then twenty or thirty years later they translated them into English at Navajo Community College using Navajos to do the translating. There was no doctoring. Then they published the book themselves, so there was no Anglo editor. It is one of the few cases I know where a publication went through these various processes with only Indians involved. It's fascinating to read, because it reveals the way the older Navajos thought. In particular, they were totally pragmatic when telling of the horrible things that were done to them. One old Navajo woman, who was captured and taken up onto the Hopi mesa, said almost matter-of-factly, "One of their

medicine man came over and snatched my baby in its cradleboard and took him and threw him off the edge of the cliff." Stories like that! But the way they tell it is not as we would tell it: "I went through this wrenching, emotional experience." The way the Indians remember those things is very pragmatic.

A similar pragmatism can be seen in the way the Plains tribes made peace among themselves in 1840 at Bent's Fort.<sup>14</sup> They had been making war and killing each other in a very brutal manner, torturing the captives they brought in, etc. But they had such carnage on all sides that they finally decided it was in their best interest to make peace. They emptied Bent's Fort of trade goods to give as gifts to each other when just a few weeks before they'd been mass killing one another. They just put it out of their minds! We could never comprehend that.

That's the Indian mentality. You have to look closely and read between the lines of a lot of sources before the picture begins to emerge. And what you get is not a real understanding but rather a sense or a taste of what it was that was in the Indian mind. Then you start despairing because you know you can never really grasp it. You're just getting the outer edges. But it makes you humble about giving the Indian point of view. I really get annoyed when people announce, "We're going to give you the Indian side." When people utter statements like "We can never forgive Kit Carson for what he did," what they typically have done is to get the picture from our side from the Army's point of view. When they learn what Kit did they conclude, "If I were an Indian, I could never forgive Carson." But that's not valid at all as the Indian point of view.

Anyway, it is the journalists who build up these stories about 150 years of grieving over the travesties of the Long Walk. It certainly left a deep scar, but for different reasons than a modern white man would expect. I think I'm 95% correct in saying that there wasn't a bitter memory of Kit Carson. In the first place, Indians tended to respect an enemy if there was a reason to respect him from their point of view. Carson may have led troops against them, but they tended to have respect for him as a warrior. They didn't have such a bitter hatred of him and they didn't think that he was a butcher as these modern Indian kids think. What these youth are actually

giving is a modern white man's view, in particular, a white man's view of what he would feel if he were an Indian. This view gets back to the Indians and gets transformed into the official traditional Indian view. But the Indian youth got it from their assistant basket ball coach, a youth who came from Andover, Massachusetts, and the coach got it from reading Dee Brown.

It's a struggle and really that's what I was trying to do in *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, to give you just enough so that you'd begin to see that the Apaches were working on a different level, that they had a different way of thinking at the time.

**DT** After murdering the judge and his wife, why would they proceed to tear up all his business papers and sprinkle them on his body? How can you understand that?

**MS** Such things were not uncommon. In the massacre at Wagon Mound on the Santa Fe Trail in 1850, Ute and Jicarilla Apache Indians destroyed a stagecoach and killed ten men in a big fight.<sup>15</sup> When Lieutenant Burnside and his troops arrived they found the US mail scattered all over the place. Why did the Indians bother to stop and do this? They did strange things and we can't understand the reasons.

**DT** It seems to us that there's a quality of myth in the story of Charley McComas's captivity. The story kept proliferating, and altering, to the point where there were rumors of sightings of him as a red-headed Apache leader down in the Sierras in the 1920's. It reminds us of the story that Frank Dobie tells in *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver*<sup>16</sup> about the lost gold mine somewhere north of Silver City. The stories kept recurring and altering; prospectors continued to try to find this lost gold mine. The stories don't seem to have a lot of relationship to fact. The process kept going on and on. It's probably still going on!

**MS** Yes, they're still doing it today. They've moved the location of the mine now up west of Socorro around the Tres Montosas Peaks, out of the range that has been searched so many times already. There have been recent books<sup>16</sup> by people who have spent their entire lives searching for the mine after tracking down all the different versions of the story.

I don't like to use the word *myth* in this context because it is so overworked. I think it doesn't serve a real purpose to call these things myths. It's not really helpful. What you get in any kind of incident like this is conflicting stories. Some of them are made up. In some cases, people heard the story from somebody else, embellished it and claimed it as their own story. There are all these different ways stories filter down. Historical methodology has its techniques, not much used any more, to try to sift through conflicting stories and try to find a kernel of truth somewhere in there. And sometimes the stories are so conflicting, as in the case of Charley's captivity, that it is just impossible to come up with anything you feel comfortable with. So you end up doing what I did in the book, where I wrote up all the stories, or myths if you prefer, that I heard. They are all fascinating. I probably missed a few. This allowed me to do an entire chapter on what might have happened to Charley McComas. I think that it is one of the more interesting parts of the book.

**DT** Charley's sister Ada Hazleton died in 1963. What were her thoughts about her brother?

**MS** What I heard, especially from Judge McComas's descendants, was that she was almost like Elizabeth Bacon Custer in trying to preserve Charley's memory and keep it pure. I think I mentioned in the book that she got into a fury when she first read a story in one of the men's magazines in 1944, that Charlie had lived and become a raider with the Apaches. She thought that sullied his memory and couldn't possibly be true. She was completely disturbed by the story and from that point on she was very defensive about it. I've found in a number of cases that women are especially defensive when their family line has a black sheep. They are the first to hide it in the closet, if they can. They don't want to sully the family name. They take up the cudgel in defense of the family member.

**DT** Better that he'd be dead than to be an Indian.

**MS** Yes, something like that. Ada lived through that era, and the horrors she heard about when she was a child would certainly have influenced her. She wasn't going to have anything to do with the twentieth-century maudlin regard towards the Indians.

My way of viewing this is that the events have already occurred. If you want to deal with the history, then forget about emotions or making value judgments and simply tell what happened. Any reader can come to his own conclusions. If he wants to make a value judgment, that's fine. But today's value judgments have nothing to do with the events of that time. You can go another step and contrast values then with our values now, but that's a separate story. It's more related to how we've changed, or how we've evolved. But when you're dealing with the story of that time, your primary duty is to stay in that period and try to figure out, to the best of your ability, what happened and then try to explain what it means. It's what it means, the interpretation, that gets you in trouble. Because nowadays academics say that there's no way anybody can be objective. Everybody has a hidden agenda or an axe to grind and may not even realize it, so everybody's interpretations are different. That has led to a denial that there's any such thing as objective truth. Well, that's the height of absurdity because events happened in only one way. We may not know how they happened, but that doesn't mean there's no such thing as objective truth. As a professor of mine once said, "History is the never-ending search for the closest approximation of the truth."

**DT** We're interested in your attitude towards non-professional historians. These include those whose pamphlets you can find in local museums. You make very good use of their work in your book, but since they are not professionally trained, you must have to be careful in using such material.

**MS** Oh, you do. I provide the source but I don't say, "Regard it with skepticism." Anybody who is serious about history will know that, while what is reported may be heresay, it may be all we have. Often in heresay, or in recollections, there is a kernel of truth somewhere. You may not be able to tell where it is, but you tell the story because you want to preserve the kernel. Future historians may see something there that will lead them to find out what the kernel is, or what the whole story is. So it is worth recording all these things and having them preserved, especially between the covers of books, so somebody can use it farther down the road

**DT** One of the functions of the trail organizations is to work to preserve historic sites. In this regard, Shakespeare, New Mexico, is a truly valuable historic site.<sup>18</sup> It was used by emigrants, by the Jackass Mail and the Butterfield Mail, by the Army, and by miners. But it is currently in private hands: Janaloo Hill inherited it from her parents, and now she and her husband, Manny Hough, serve as caretakers. What's going to happen to Shakespeare in the future?

**MS** We don't know. Janaloo asked me recently to contact Governor Bill Richardson, as well as the head of State Parks and the head of the Legislative Finance Committee to support the state's acquisition of Shakespeare. I thought the chances were pretty small, simply because the last thing the state wants is another white elephant to fund while supporting all the other demands made on the budget. Anyway, I got nice letters from all of them, and it is going to come before this next legislature; there'll be an appropriations bill to acquire Shakespeare. I have the impression that the governor is favorable to the idea and might sign such a bill if it comes through. It will be part of some larger bill, and we don't know whether it will even pass through the legislature. If it does, that would be great.

**DT** People like us or historians like you who write about trails, encourage tourists to visit trail sites. This is a good thing, but it can be at great expense to the landmarks themselves, many of which are vulnerable. It's a double-edged sword. We read your book on the Santa Fe Trail, we drive the dirt roads, we walk in the ruts, and we probably do a little bit of damage in the process. In a recent incident at Independence Rock on the Oregon Trail, large numbers of people walked over the site and presumably did damage to the inscriptions.

**MS** My suspicion is that historic trails are not going to bring in hordes of people. Most people are not really that interested in history unless it's in Disneyland where they can go to have a vicarious history experience. The mere process of having to go a long distance on the trails helps weed out all but the more serious. Some of these sites are readily accessible to the public, and that allows vandals in, but there's no way to avoid vandals as far as I can see. Even if a site is highly protected, it still can get vandalized.

**DT** As compared to your other books, you put a lot of yourself into *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road*, especially in the Introduction. You talk about a high degree of serendipity, the pieces of the puzzle falling into place, almost as if the spirits of McComases themselves want their story to be told.

**MS** Something related, that I find most interesting, is that as I got into the story I continued to discover many very small things that Judge McComas did over the years that kept him on this course that led him to that fateful day on the Lordsburg Road. If any one of those little things had not happened, or had been done even slightly differently, he wouldn't have been there on that day at that time. By revealing the full story, which had never been done before, it made it possible to trace back and to see this tissue of circumstances. I think that in all of history almost every significant incident has that kind of chain of circumstances. In this case, all the pieces were present that brought the judge to that particular place and moment, and we can look back and see the whole process. We all have, in our lives, this series of small events that leads us to this or that larger event. Sometimes it leads to tragedy, sometimes to greater things. But if any one of these events, which can be almost infinitesimal, are pulled out of the chain, then the whole thing collapses and our lives come out totally different. It makes us all seem very contingent upon small circumstances. The big circumstances have to be there, but also if any one of those small circumstances is removed from the picture then the edifice collapses. In the life of Judge McComas, the beginning, middle and end would all have been different if any little thing had changed. That really impresses me.

**DT** It's a historian's view of fate.

**MS** Yes, it's a historian's view of fate. Fate or higher powers. We can't truly know about them and we can't factor them in. We can only wonder about them. As historians, we have to deal with cause and effect.

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## The story of the McComas massacre

In 1880, Judge Hamilton C. McComas, who had previously lived in Monticello, Illinois, Fort Scott, Kansas, and St. Louis, Missouri, went to the New Mexico Territory as an investor in and legal advisor to the mining business. He settled in Silver City where he established a law practice. In March, 1882, he brought his family out from Missouri. They lived in the Exchange Hotel until McComas bought a house at Sixth and Hudson.

In early 1883, Chato's band of Chiricahua Apaches, who had fled from the San Carlos Reservation into the Mexican Sierras, were raiding into southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico in a hunt for ammunition. On March 27, 1883, at 2 p.m., the judge, his wife and six-year-old son, Charlie, set out from their home in a rented buckboard for a trip to Lordsburg, in the southwestern corner of New Mexico. They left their two daughters, Ada and Mary, with friends. On the night of March 27, they stopped at Mountain Home, a roadside hostelry about 17 miles south of Silver City. Another lodger at the inn that evening was John Moore, the Grant County assessor. The discussion over dinner was about the Apache raiders and whether or not they posed a threat to travelers on the Lordsburg Road. The McComas party left Mountain Home at 9 the next morning. Moore, the assessor, followed about 45 minutes later.

In 1883, the Lordsburg Road did not follow the route N.M. 90 does today, but veered off west through Thompson Canyon. Several hours after leaving Mountain Home, the judge and his family had passed through the canyon and were just a mile beyond its western mouth, having a picnic under a walnut tree, when they were attacked by the Apache raiders. Evidence at the scene suggests that Judge McComas was shot in the buckboard but leaped out to return the fire of the Apaches in an attempt to protect his wife and child before he was mortally wounded. Juniata was dragged from the wagon and bludgeoned to death. The Apaches stripped the bodies of McComas and his wife and took their guns and ammunition, the surviving horse and Juniata's dress, and they kidnapped Charley McComas. Before leaving the scene, they ripped up the judge's business papers and piled them on his naked back.

Army troops under General George Crook pursued the Apaches. So did militia units such as Captain James F. Black's Shakespeare Guards, a militia unit formed in the mining town and stagecoach stop south of Lordsburg. On May 15, 1883, Crook's Apache scouts attacked a camp of Apaches in Mexico's Sierra Madres. Nine of the Apaches, including an old woman, were killed. Many of the others escaped into the mountains. Some of the Apaches who survived that assault said that Charley was among those who fled into the mountain wilderness. But Jason Betzinez, an Apache warrior and cousin of Geronimo, tells a different story in his book, *I Fought With Geronimo*. Betzinez was not at the Sierra Madre camp when it was attacked, but he said Apaches who were there told him that a warrior named Speedy, mad with grief because his mother had been shot to death during the fight, killed Charley with a rock. The Army never found Charley's body, so the mystery about his fate persists.

Although today the McComas tragedy is only a footnote in the history of the Indian wars in the Southwest, the event was a nationwide sensation at the time and had a lasting impact on the lives of the Apaches.



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