

DESERT TRACKS



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

January, 2004

From the Editors

In this newsletter we give the report of SWOCTA's fall mapping trip along the Gila River in the vicinity of Oatman Flats. The ongoing task of mapping the southern emigrant trails is being carried out by SWOCTA's Trail Turtles. Rose Ann Tompkins comments, "The Turtles are a talented bunch who enjoy the days that we spend in the field away from the hectic pace of daily living, and at the same time who contribute to the long term task we have set for ourselves." We can attest from our own experience that the Trail Turtles also are a *tough* bunch. We, the editors, set out in late November, 1998, to find the Oatman graves, together with a second car of people who we met at Painted Rocks. They appeared interested in exploring the site, but they were not in good physical condition. Despite the directions we obtained from a local rancher, we got hopelessly lost in the maze of very dusty roads in the vicinity of the site. And despite the time of year, one member of the other party fainted from the heat and had to be rushed to a Yuma hospital, one hundred miles away. Those who are interested in the southern emigrant trails need to be in good condition and well-prepared for the desert outback!



SWOCTA Chapter Dues

Dues for 2004 are now due. Please send a check for \$10 for each mailing unit (individual or couple) to

Harland Tompkins
1125 W. Mission Dr.
Chandler AZ 85224

The check should be made out to "Harland Tompkins." If you have an email address, please send it as well. Please remit by March 1, 2004. After March 1, postcards will be sent to current members who have not sent in their renewal dues.

Strongbox Custodian's Report

The last Treasurer's report appeared in the January 2003 newsletter. At that time the treasury contained a balance of \$952.31. Spending for 2002 was small and at that time the officers decided not to ask for dues from the membership for 2003.

Receipts during 2003 were \$22.88 which consisted of two new membership dues and interest. Disbursements during 2003 were \$471.98 (newsletter expenses, \$256.03; mapping report expenses, \$215.95). As of 1/29/04, the treasury contains a balance of \$504.23.

In the two years prior to 2003, expenses were minimal (no newsletters were published, and mapping expenses were small) and the officers chose to omit the annual dues collection. It is my sense that for a viable chapter, the treasury balance should be at least \$500 and not more than \$1000. Accordingly, we make a call for dues for 2004 in this newsletter.

Strongbox Custodian
Harland Tompkins



TURTLES' TRAIL TROVE

Mapping trip on the Gila River

October 27 to November 2, 2003

by Richard Greene

The Trail Turtles for this trip included Tracy DeVault (AZ), Richard and Marie Greene (NM), Dave Hollecker (NV), Kay Kelso (AZ), Rose Ann Tompkins (AZ) and Ken and Pat White (AZ). Before we started, Neal and Marion John e-mailed us photos of the forest fire that was creeping towards their home in Lytle Creek, CA. They had to stand by to see the outcome and although the fire came within feet of their home, they and the house came through it safely. Then we learned that Don Buck had broken an elbow while loading his truck for the mapping trip. He had elbow reconstruction but could not drive. This was not a good beginning! We missed them and they missed one of our most incredible outings. What made this such an incredible trip? First, Rose Ann's aerial photos, her analysis of them and her action plan made finding trail easy for us. Second, we saw more grooves and rust on rocks than on any prior trip. Artifacts were scattered everywhere we went. There were petroglyphs, inscriptions, the Oatman Massacre site and a "hidden" pocket of trail paradise. Also, there was Dave's portable shower stall and instant hot water heater that added to the pleasure of a great week of mapping. And, despite some rough driving, there were no flat tires. It was a Trail Turtle's dream come true!

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Past newsletters and a color version of this newsletter can be found at:
<http://www.physics.uci.edu/~jmlawren/SWOCTA.html>
<http://members.cox.net/htompkins2/SWOCTA.htm>

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DAY 1 - MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

The Turtles met as planned at 4 PM at the Butterfield Stage cistern just west of Butterfield Pass. We've gotten to know this place well; it is a good place to meet and a nice place to camp out. We could see the lights of Gila Bend, the flares from a military range as they performed mysterious exercises and shooting stars and speeding satellites. We all felt good to be back together and on the trail again.

DAY 2 - TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28 Butterfield Trail Cistern to Painted Rock

The group shuttled the vehicles to Highway 85 and walked back to meet Tracy and Richard, who were hiking a section of trail from the final GPS reading that we took last spring. Kay's Subaru had no problem except for a couple of rocky areas where clearance was tricky. The trail was easy to follow to the highway with lots of rust. However, we had no luck on the other side of the highway where road construction, farming and a canal had destroyed the trail. At that point the trail follows the Gila River Valley where flooding and farming make locating the trail nearly impossible until it climbs out of the valley near Painted Rock.

From the highway we drove to Gila Bend, had lunch, and then went on to the Painted Rocks campground. There was just one other camper. That afternoon we followed trail heading west from the campground, which was another easy effort. Back at camp we saw the dust from Dave's van coming to join us. We were pleased to see him. He had been telling us about the shower that he was bringing and we were eager to check it out. Ken, Pat, Kay and Richard left to GPS a section east of the road into Painted Rocks that had been mapped without GPS readings. Once again the trail was quite visible, with rust, grooves and some Carsonite markers.



The trail petered out once it dropped from the mesa into the river valley and back east towards Gila Bend.

After that evening's group buffet we explored Dave's shower. The shower tent is 7 ft. high and about 3 feet square; this is just right, there is no awkward bending. Chairs were used for sitting and getting in and out of clothes. There were floor mats to stand on. The best part was that there was instant hot water! The heater uses propane and has a switch for self ignition. The water is pumped from a plastic container and runs through narrow copper tubing where it is heated in passing. The shower head is at the end of a flexible hose and the water is pumped up. When soaping you put the shower head back in the container so that there is no waste. It was wonderful! Dave said he bought the heater at Sam's Club for under a \$100. The tent is optional but the heater system is essential. After enjoying our showers we sat and chatted under the stars.



THE OATMAN MASSACRE

On August 10, 1850, Royce Oatman with his wife and seven children left Independence, Missouri, in a wagon train led by James C. Brewster, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whose disagreements with the church leadership in Salt Lake City, Utah, had caused him to break with Brigham Young and lead his followers to California. There were about fifty people in the nine-wagon party. The emigrants crossed into New Mexico where dissension caused the group to split near Santa Fe. Brewster headed north and Royce and several other families took the southern route through Socorro, Santa Cruz, and Tucson. Part of the company resolved to stay in Tucson, and the rest proceeded down the Santa Cruz to the Gila and the Pima villages. The Oatman family on their own left the Pima villages to make the trip down the Gila into California. At the site west of Gila Bend their wagon was too heavy to be pulled up the steep slope to the top of the mesa, so they unloaded it and moved the contents up by hand. While the Oatmans were resting on top, a group of Indians approached and asked for food. What they gave was not enough to satisfy the Indians, who then attacked. All of the family were killed with the exception of two daughters, Olive and Mary Ann, and a son, Lorenzo who was clubbed, thrown off the mesa and left for dead. Lorenzo survived and made it back to the Pima villages and from there to California, where he spent the next five years in an effort to find Olive and Mary Ann. Olive and Mary Ann were taken into captivity and sometime later the girls were traded to the Mohave Indian tribe. Mary Ann died in captivity, but Olive survived and was ransomed in 1856 by the United States Government at Ft. Yuma. After Olive and Lorenzo were reunited they met Reverend R. B. Stratton, who prepared a book recounting their tale; this is the main source book on the massacre. Olive later gave a series of lectures in the eastern U.S., which are reprinted in the work by Pettid.

Both Olive and Lorenzo asserted that their attackers were Apache. However, in 1903, ethnographer A.C. Kroeber interviewed an Indian named Tokwaea, who claimed to have been one of the Mojave warriors who escorted Olive to Fort Yuma after her release. Tokwaea said the Indians who had attacked the Oatmans were Yavapai.

The Bartlett Boundary Survey party came across the massacre site in the summer of 1852 and noted fragments of trunks, boxes, clothing, and human bones. In the fall of 1858, Waterman Ormsby, traveling on the first westbound Butterfield stage, reported seeing the graves of Royce Oatman and his wife.

A good deal of information concerning the Oatmans and the massacre can be obtained on the web by a search on Oatman Massacre, including information provided by descendants of the Oatman family. A brief account can be found in Edwin Corle's book "The Gila, River of the Southwest" (Bison, 1964). Detailed directions to the site, updated by Chuck Oatman in January 2004, can be found on the web page www.sentex.net/~cdoatman/479site.html.

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Pettid, Edward J., ed. "Olive Ann Oatman's Lecture Notes and the Oatman Bibliography." *San Bernardino Museum Association Quarterly* 16 (1968): 1-39.

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DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29
Painted Rock to Sentinel Flats

Our plan was to proceed to the Oatman grave site through the alfalfa fields in the Gila's flood plain. We wound our way down dirt roads and had to backtrack here and there as we worked through the maze of fields. We had a close call when dust clouds hid our caravan of vehicles from a truck hauling alfalfa bales. As he was not expecting to see a parade of vehicles, the truck driver pulled out after just one vehicle passed. Along the way Richard missed a turn because of the dust clouds; the caravan appeared to vanish down a slope. Following radio contact Richard was soon back with the group.

We took in the Fourr family graves and the nearby wagon road going up to the top of the mesa. William Fourr built a toll road from Painted Rock and lived in a stage station in Oatman Flats. Not far away is a DAR marker that memorializes the site and the purported graves of the massacred Oatmans. (There is conjecture as to whether the Oatmans are actually buried here.)

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From the flats you could see the cross signifying the Oatman Massacre on the top of the mesa. After scrambling through dense underbrush Pat and Richard took the rocky trail up to the top where they arrived at about the same time as the rest of the group, who had driven the vehicles up by a circuitous route. Plenty of rust and great grooves told of the heavy traffic on this section.

After a lunch under the EZ-UP shelter and Tracy's truck-tarp (shade makes such a difference on the desert!) we broke up into groups to explore the mesa. Once again Rose Ann's aerials guided us to several traces across the very rocky mesa. There were big rocky cairns scattered over the area and we were curious about their origin. We encountered a large chasm and moved parallel to it which led us to a "cemetery" of artifacts. There were hundreds of items scattered around in a cleared flat. This must have been a major camping area. Nearby the trail crossed upstream of the chasm. At the crossing the rocks showed grooves and rust and led on west.

We decided that the "cemetery" was a good place to camp for the night. The wind was picking up so we had to tie down Dave's shower to Tracy's truck to stop it from being bent out of shape before we took our showers. After cleaning up we sat down to the feast that Pat and Ken had brought and stored in their cooler. Even though it was windy we stayed up and chatted.

DAY 4 - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30
Sentinel Flats to Abandoned Conde Ranch

The wind had died down and so far the weather had been good to us. It had been cloudy and hazy quite a bit of the time, mostly due to smoke from the CA fires.

Once again we broke up into groups. Pat and Ken followed the main trail as it headed west, Dave and Kay were doing the same, while

Tracy and Richard followed another trail that led down a slope to the upper and shallower end of the chasm. Richard couldn't believe his eyes at what he saw: a pool of water with petroglyphs all around. Tracy discovered an inscription "O. W. Randall 1849."



The rest of the group was called on the radio and gathered in this "pocket of paradise". We soaked up everything we saw: the pool of water, mortar holes, petroglyphs, the path down from the other side (near our campground). Wagons could not have used this trail, but pack animals could have, and others could have brought stock here to water.



Dave saw a Spanish cross glyph; there were other initials close by to the 1849 inscription; there was a 1915 inscription; and as we explored the canyon we found that there was abundant grass and trees. Travelers through the area *must* have used this spot. There is no place like it anywhere that we have visited in this area. It was with great reluctance that we left this Trail Turtle heaven. We have a new task: to find any information on "O. W. Randall 1849" and any mention in a dairy about this spot. Does the BLM even know about it?

The rest of the day we followed trail to a power line. Rose Ann shuttled people to their vehicles. Beyond the power line there were many traces leading to some flats. At this point Kay (who had planned a short trip) left for home, Ken and Pat left for a motel in Gila Bend while Rose Ann, Marie and Dave headed for the abandoned Conde Ranch that some had visited earlier. Tracy and Richard continued to follow trail until it was time to call it a day and then went on to the Conde Ranch.

The abandoned Conde Ranch buildings are at the edge of a mesa with a grand view of the Gila valley and the country on top. The valley here is narrow with rock bluffs on both sides, causing travelers to use the mesa top. Scattered around were remnants of ranching: wire, miscellaneous iron, broken glass, a water tower, rock buildings and the inscription "D. CONDE 1911-65" all within a fenced enclosure. The rock buildings had window openings that offered fine views. We set up camp for the night near these buildings.



DAY 5 – FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31
Conde Ranch back to Sentinel Flats

We awoke to a sunrise of vivid colors. Pat and Ken, who we located via cell phone on their way to the ranch, told us that they had met a game warden who said to look out for hunters as this was the first day of the Deer season. Hunters, guns and Trail Turtles are not a good combination.

We could see equipment that the ranch had used below the mesa and we decided to investigate. There was a large steam boiler (wood fueled), mining draglines, iron rods in rocks and a rock structure but only one petroglyph. On top of the mesa there was another furnace. It appeared that the ranch was busy in its time trying to make life more comfortable and productive.

We followed the power lines out across a combination of rock surfaces, sandy soft spots and challenging deep cross drainages. We encountered hunters' vehicles and passed a campsite of trailers with power generators and ATVs ready for the hunt. We arrived at a parking place that was close to where Tracy and Richard had ended up on the previous day.

There was good trail and, coming down the rocky trail from the mesa and into the sandy valley, Pat, Ken and Richard found plenty of wagon artifacts. But this time the trail petered out as we approached a high berm. It had to be man-made because it did not fit the terrain and started and stopped without reason. The water it collected stimulated the grass and brush growing on one side of it. There were cattle grazing in the brush and a cowbell could be heard ringing. Pat and Ken found some trail on the other side of the berm but we put off exploration until the next day.

Over dinner, we talked about our next mapping trip. The sentiment was expressed that we might return to previously mapped areas so that we could enjoy the trail without having to search for it.

DAY 6 – SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1
From Sentinel Flats to Indian Point

It was overcast and cool which made for pleasant hiking. We picked up the trail that Pat and Ken had found beyond the berm, discovered some artifacts and ran into a graveyard for old equipment. There was an old bulldozer, a car, and miscellaneous junk, but the trail disappeared in the sand and brush. The decision was made to

drive across country following the direction of the trail to Agua Caliente. We drove on precarious sandy paths and got whacked and scraped by the brush and trees that were spilling over the route. We blindly followed our leader, Rose Ann, who with great skill and continual navigational aid from Marie, brought us out of the jungle into cultivated cotton fields. Soon we were relieved to see farm buildings and the dirt road that led us into Agua Caliente (which was just a stop in the road with no obvious conveniences). A good asphalt road took us to Sentinel at the junction with Interstate 8.

After lunch we headed for Indian and Sears Point. We approached Sears Point on a well-used graded road. Using the aerial photos Rose Ann took a side road that led us to the trail. Pat and Ken went one way and Tracy, Dave and Richard in the opposite direction. We all found the trail quite visible and saw all the rust and artifacts that we could hope for. At this point we were getting so used to finding artifacts that we almost stopped peering for rust. Tracy's group ended up at a gravel pit where their section of trail faded out as they approached the flats.

Back at camp two men in a dune buggy drove by and asked Rose Ann what we were doing. Rose Ann replied that we were on the emigrant trail to CA and not hunting. They were perplexed about rut nuts. Later, a small black cloud appeared overhead, which surprised us with a sprinkle; every other place we could see was clear and the stars were out. It was cool and a good night for sleeping.

DAY 6 - SUNDAY NOVEMBER 6
Indian Point -- our last day -- home

Dave, Ken and Pat followed the trail along the mesa top and down into the flats. This was an easy stretch. Along the way Dave found an 1862 inscription.

Tracy and Richard explored Indian Point. Scrambling along the side of the mesa among the huge masses of fallen rocks they discovered many petroglyphs and some inscriptions (one from 1886 and some from early 1900). They dutifully recorded the inscription information and the GPS reading. From one site on the top, an exceptionally large number of petroglyphs could be seen. mesa.

While we ate lunch, Rose Ann downloaded our GPS units for the final time, and we said our "Goodbyes." It had been an incredibly rewarding mapping trip. Thanks, Dave, for all those wonderful showers!

SPRING MAPPING TRIP

The Southern Trails Mapping Committee will have a mapping week this spring from April 6 to 12, 2004. The group will return to the same area along the Gila River as last fall to fill in gaps and look for alternate routes. This will be rugged work, with dry camping that will not be in established campgrounds. A self-contained 4WD vehicle with high clearance is required. It is recommended that you have the ability to sleep in your vehicle.

If you would like to obtain more information, contact:

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