

DESERT TRACKS



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

September, 2003

From the editors

In this issue Rose Ann Tompkins gives the results of her research into the birth of Gila Howard, who was born on an early emigrant trip down the Gila River. We note that the Stevens Diary is not available in print, so this is a SWOCTA "first". Tracy DeVault reports on the SWOCTA Spring 2003 Trip over the Boone's Lick and Santa Fe Trails, and Richard Greene reports on a pretour trip on the Cimarron Cutoff. We shortened the original articles considerably to keep the newsletter within the present page length. We have kept just enough to give you some flavor of the high spirits of the originals, and we have tried to retain information that will be useful to those of you who wish to travel the trail in the future. If you would like to have a hard copy or electronic copy of the original reports and/or any of the many photos (in JPEG format) then contact

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Finally, we remind you that if you would prefer to receive an electronic (pdf) version of the newsletter, please let us know by e-mail at

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Gila Howard's Birth

The story of the first American child born in what became Arizona has been a part of the state's history for some time. It happened on an emigrant's boat trip down the Gila River. What follows are several accounts of this event, beginning with a diary account of a person present at the birth that also includes a lot of detail of the river trip. Then there are two other accounts of the event. Finally there are three census records, the 1850 US census for Trinity County, CA, the 1870 census for Humboldt County, CA and the 1880 US census for Lake County, CA. All three list Gila Howard. He really did exist!

--- Rose Ann Tompkins

Benjamin Stevens 1849 diary, along the Gila River. (Source: Manuscript in the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia MO))

Oct. 21st. Sunday. Mr. Howard, whose lady expects to be confined in a few days, before he left the states had a light well finished boat built for a wagon bed in which he has travelled to this point. Yesterday, Mr. Howard had it unloaded and corked and this morning we put her into the Hella; no doubt the first boat of the kind that was ever on the Hella; By his invitation I accompany him and his family down the river; the persons on board consist of Mr. Howard, Mrs Howard, and their only daughter, (a very interesting little girl of six years of age), myself, Mr. Atkinson and Mr James Munson, our freight, Mr. Howards's provisions and other effects with about two hundred pounds for Capt. Roberts, who brings along by land his team and the running gears of Mr. H's wagon. At noon we push off and our friends waiting on the banks to see our departure bidding us farewell and wishing us good success. We glide along pleasantly for a mile or two, but soon have to jump into the water

and push over sand bars. The channel is constantly crossing from one side to the other and we have much difficulty in finding it and at some places the river is very wide and cut up by Islands, which renders it very difficult to navigate; after running, as we supposed, fifteen miles, we put to shore a little before sunset, took out our cooking stove, made a fire and changed our clothes, cooked our supper and partook heartily of it, except Major Atkinson, who was very sick, he was very unwell when he came on board and in than an hour after was in great pain having had a chill and then a violent fever. At about eight Mr. Moore came down with his flat boat and several men, landed at our camp. We set watch wrapt ourselves in our blanket and laid down on the sand to sleep. Mr. Atkinson for whom we had made a brush arbor is a little better.

Oct. 22nd. Monday. Major Atkinson being this morning too sick to get into the water and our boat being occupied by Mrs. Howard, Mr Moore very kindly offered to take him with him on his flat; they leave at eight o'clock. Mrs. Howard being unwell, we send back to our train for our Physician, Dr. Bull, who arrive at eleven; we take our dinner and run down the river about ten miles having constantly, or frequently to be in the water to push over sand bars; at a half hour before sunset we put to shore on the Calif. side to shore, move our craft, pitch Mrs. Howard's tent in a hurry before dark; we have a stranger guest a new passenger to accompany us down the Gilla, Who is rightly named Ghela Howard. Mrs. H. is doing well, we get our supper and lie down on the sand to take our nights lodging. Mr. Howard taking the responsibility of standing guard himself, all night. Camp on the Calif. side of the Gila.

Oct. 23d. Tuesday. We pass over sand bars and shallow water, a good deal today, are constantly wet, which is very dangerous to our health especially as we have a desert to pass over of more than a hundred miles and if we should get sick there is no way of being nursed nor any possibility of lying by, so to be sick here, would be a great calamity. At 10 o'clock we pass by where Capt. Roberts train were encamped. They came by land, had much shorter distance to travel then we had and had out travelled us here. Dr. Bull and Mr. J. Munson were unwilling to risk the water any farther and they went on shore and Mr. Howard, Stevens and Wm. Munson came on board. At four o'clock this evening, are overtook. Capt. Moore's flat boat Major Atkinson was lying on it very sick having the

Flux very badly. We landed, put up a shade with willow bows and laid down a buffalo robe, and brought him on shore and sent to Capt. Teasdale's train, which was close by for Dr. Miles, who came and left medicine which I gave him every hour and a half; all night Messrs. Stevens & Munson, went to Capt. Roberts train, which was ten miles back to get him to send for Mr. A., and to get Dr. Bull. Camp on the Mexico side.

Oct. 24th. Wednesday. Mr. Atkinson is very sick and we are anxiously waiting for the return of Mrs. Stevens and Munson; at ten o'clock Mr. H. Stevens with Dr. Bull and Yankey John arrive. Mr. Munson being sick could not take the water any farther. Mr. Atkinson son, Peter, came to stay with his father until Capt. R's train came up, which will be tomorrow morning.

We leave Major Atkinson on shore very sick, perhaps to see him no more, but we cannot stay as it is absolutely necessary for us to get to the mouth of the Hella, and stopping place as soon as possible on Mrs. H's account, who is doing as well as could be expected.

When we first Embarked, we did not think we should be more than two or three days, going down, but the river is very crooked and it is much farther even a direct line than we had been informed. I omitted to say that on the second night, after Mrs. H's Confinement about midnight, there was a lawthern with a candle hanging in it, hanging in the boat. Mr. H. was on the shore asleep and we were all asleep, the candle burnt down and caught the melted sperm at the bottom of it. The tent covering the boat in which Mrs. H and baby and daughter were sleeping, caught fire. Mrs. H called as loud as she could. Mr. H. soon awoke and ran, we all ran and fortunately extinguished it without any serious damage only the freight, especially to Mrs. H, who was in eminent danger. We were wet every day from having to wade in the river to pull over sand bars, until we got to the Colorado, which is the end of our water travelling.

Oct. 25th. Thursday. Mrs. H. still continues to improve in strength.

Oct. 26th Friday. Nothing interesting occurs, but the river is falling and is much wider and worse to navigate.

Oct. 27th. Sat. Today the river has been narrower and a strong current has carried us down pleasantly for more than half the day, we sleep without a guard, tho not safe but we are too much fatigued to stand guard.

Oct. 28th. Sunday. The river wide and channel difficult to find we camp at sunset, where Col. Jackson's train camped last night; a sand bank is our bed every night; a little after dark five men packed with their provisions and blankets on their backs pass along, one is Mr. Funk of Hannibal, Mo.

They were tired of the wagons, which travel so very slow, and are afraid the oxen will never get thru, and so took a little provisions on their backs and are going to walk to San Diego and there take passage on a steam boat up to San Francisco; they are first made a skiff out of an old wagon bed and three of them tried to come down and bring the provisions for the other, two, but after trying it one day, and being in the water much of the time, they were afraid of getting sick, and abandoned the skiff, throwing away the provisions of the other two, as they did not expect to overtake them until they got to the Colerado and that they could buy more there, but a days travel brought them up with their two companions, they will have to be on short allowance as we now learn that provisions cannot be had from here to Warner's Ranch, three hundred miles, at any price.

Oct. 29th. Monday. The mountains seem to close in on every side and present a barrier to the river, as we advance, we pass into a beautiful canon, where the river passes close to the base of two mountains for some distance and presents a most picturesque scene. We suppose ourselves close to the mouth, but the sun is nearly down and we camp.

Oct. 30th Tuesday. The river is narrow and rapid. The sand bars, which were white soft sand are changed for black hard sand, the boat rubs hard on it at places the current is stong; a stiff breeze has risen with a shower of rain, which we have not had before for more than three weeks; the wind blowing up the river. We put to shore to stay a little while; here we saw much Indian sign. Many Indians have been here with their children. The tracks are not very new, but one horse track made today or yesterday comes to the river where an Indian has dismounted, shows they may be near; there is great risk in travelling as we do for a party of Indians if they were to discover us might lie in ambush and pick us all off with their bows and arrows at noon. The wind subsided and at four o'clock we arrive at the mouth of the Gilla where it flows into the Cholerado; on the opposite side of the Cholerado --- american soldiers are posted, the Indians have committed many depredations on the immigrants before the

soldiers were stationed here. It is fortunate for us immigrants that the government has sent out a Typographical engineer to survey the boundary line between Mexico and Calif. as the american soldiers being here affords protection to them in crossing this river, which is fested with hostile Indians. We hesitate whether to camp here tonight as the Indians are close by us in their wigwams; but the garrison being so new we conclude to stay here until morning; an Indian dressed in red cloth cloak with gold lace around it comes to us just before dark and ate supper with us; he showed us a paper which was from the garrison, signed by the officer, stating that he was Cap-i-tan, and a friendly Indian, but that we must look out and be on our guard, as they under his control, would steal and murder too, that they had murdered a packer a few days ago, and robbed him. I wished to leave and go to the garrison, but was over ruled by the majority. We slept or rather staid there until morning.

Oct. 31st. Wed. This morning after breakfast we drop down a few yards and enter upon the waters of the Colerado a beautiful river of deep water, not very clear, but very good water. We landed and went up to Lieutenant Couch's tent, who is the commanding officer of this post. He treated us very courteously; he informed us that he heard we were attempting to come down the river in a boat, but that it would be a failure. He did not suppose that we could get over the sand bars, and was about to fit up a wagon and team to send up for us, but he was agreeably disappointed on seeing our arrival. Mr. Howard knowing nothing about steering a boat or where to find the channel; yet wishing to have the honor of guiding her down [the diary ends here, not known where rest of it is]

Lt. Cave Coutts, stationed at Yuma Crossing.

(Source: *Gold Rush Desert trails to San Diego and Los Angeles in 1849*, G.M. Ellis, ed., Brand Book Number Nine, San Diego CA: Corral of the Westerners, 1995.)

"Mrs. Howard came into camp on the 30th, having come down the gila some 200 miles in a boat, in which she had a fine son, called, of course, Gila."

Charles Pancoast, writing in 1890 about his adventures during the Gold Rush

(Source: *A Quaker Forty-Niner*, A. P. Hannum, ed., U. Pennsylvania Press, 1930)

"Our new Associate, the Husband of the Missouri Woman, was most zealous and active, and proved the most skillful man among us in

SWOCTA Spring 2003 Trip Report

by Tracy DeVault

[Editors Note: A recent guidebook to the Boone's Lick trail is *Along the Boone's Lick Road*, by Dan A. Rothwell, Young at Heart Publishing Company, Chesterfield, MO, 1999.]

Monday, April 28: For this trip we decided to follow both the Boone's Lick and the Santa Fe trails. The head of the Boone's Lick is in St. Charles, Missouri.

Prior to meeting the rest of the group, Judy and I visited the Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis. This is really a beautiful place, with many historically significant monuments. The cemetery office has a hand-out map for tourists, showing the location of the graves of famous people such as William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The graves of General Kearny, Susan Magoffin and Manuel Lisa (founder of the fur trade) were missing from the tourist map, but the office attendant was able to look up the location of these graves in the cemetery records.

We met at the Sundermeier RV Park in St. Charles which is a very nice park for big motor-coach owners, but is expensive for those driving pickups, vans or SUVs.

Participants on this year's outing were Harland and Rose Ann Tompkins, Don and Velma Buck, Richard and Marie Greene, Neal and Marian Johns, Ken and Pat White, Dave Hollecker and the trip leaders Tracy and Judy DeVault.

Tuesday, April 29: Frank Peters, a local expert on the Boone's Lick Trail, was our guide for the day. We followed the route of the Boone's Lick through St. Charles and then headed west. This was our first experience in trying to keep a caravan together while a guide led us through the narrow streets of a Midwestern city. Even though we had two-way radios, it proved to be a real challenge.

There is very little of the Boone's Lick that looks as it did in emigrant times, however a number of secondary roads follow the original route fairly closely. We were able to visit actual trail crossings at Dardenne and Whetstone Creeks. A number of houses that were built along the trail during the emigrant period still remain.

My great-great-grandfather, Peter Davault, settled along the Boone's Lick trail in

1831. In 1850 he built an Inn and Tavern that catered to emigrants and gold seekers traveling over the trail on their way to California. The tavern was located near where the town of New Florence would eventually be founded. A DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) marker is at the site..



Our tour for the day ended at the hamlet of Auxvasse (pronounced locally as ah-vass). From there we drove on to the Graham Cave State Park.

Wednesday, April 30: The next morning we drove back to Auxvasse and met David Sapp, our guide for the second half of the Boone's Lick Trail. Much of the day was again spent following back roads that lay on top of the original Boone's Lick. However, on this stretch, we were able to visit two sections of the road that have been preserved. One section was on the Lochhaas property and the other set was on the Sanders property. Both of these sections of ruts (really large swales) are very impressive. The land with the Sanders ruts has been donated to Boone County. The swales are supposed to be preserved for the benefit of the public. However the surrounding land is being developed into home sites, and it appears that the development is already beginning to encroach on the set-aside property.



In Missouri the traveler needs to be aware of ticks. We tucked our pant legs into our socks and some used insect repellent, but even so, we found them when we took showers, in our beds, and in our hair for several days.

In early afternoon we drove to the Boone's Lick National Historic Site north of Franklin. Two of Daniel Boone's sons operated a commercial salt making enterprise here. A large part of central Missouri and the trail we had been following got their names from this spot. The park service has done an excellent job of interpreting this site.

In Franklin we took a photo commemorating the end of the Boone's Lick Trail and the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail. From now on we would be following the SFT.



We then made our way to the campground at Arrow Rock State Park, which is a great place to stay. We had planned to gather for dinner at the historic Arrow Rock Tavern which is touted as having an historic atmosphere and good food. The Tavern, however, was closed, and the entire town of Arrow Rock was shut down.

Thursday, May 1: The town of Arrow Rock was still closed down in the early morning, and the nearest restaurant was several miles from town. On the positive side, we all enjoyed the Arrow Rock's Santa Fe Trail Visitor Center and several important historic sites in Arrow Rock.

Our first stop after Arrow Rock was the Sappington Cemetery. Dr. Sappington made a fortune providing anti-malarial medication to early SFT travelers. Sadly, we found that the lid was off of one of the Sappington sarcophagi and there was evidence of vandalism in other areas of the cemetery. We then moved on to the Neff Tavern site. Only one of the original buildings is still standing. Next we visited the Smith Chapel where a number of Rose Ann Tompkins'

ancestors are buried. We also explored ruts north of the town of Marshall.

Our next stop was the town of Lexington, an important outfitting and shipping point on the SFT. Both trail museums in town were closed. (This is a real problem on trips like this. Most of these smaller museums are only open a few hours a week. Trying to match our arrival at a particular museum with their hours of operation was a real challenge, and we missed visiting a number of highly recommended museums.) We did get to see the Lafayette County Courthouse with the famous Civil War cannon ball in one of its columns. We also visited the Madonna of the Trail statue. Dave Hollecker suggested that we stop by the Lexington Civil War Museum. While not SFT related, it proved to be the highlight of our stop at Lexington.

Friday, May 2: Fort Osage, our first stop, has an excellent visitor's center. In the back of the adjacent cemetery there are excellent trail ruts, as well as the gravesite of Zenos Leonard, an early trapper and explorer who wrote a book of his adventures. The reconstructed fort sits on a bluff overlooking the Missouri. Its location was selected by William Clark while on the famous reconnaissance. From a fellow dressed in a period costume we learned several interesting facts about the fort: how the reconstruction done, that the swale at the back of the cemetery was used to bring wagons up from the Missouri River to the nearby town of Sibley and the ramp for Fort Osage was on the northwest side of the fort.



From Fort Osage we drove to Independence, Missouri. Several of us explored Independence Square and Independence Spring. We stood at the very intersection where the Santa Fe and Oregon Trail caravans lined up before starting out on their great adventure.

Eventually we all arrived at the National Trails Center, a key interpretive site for the westering trails.

Our next stop was the highlight of the trip – a visit to the Museum of the Steamship Arabia in downtown Kansas City. In 1856 the Arabia hit a snag and sank to the bottom of the Missouri River with a full cargo. In 1988 two local families joined together to find and salvage the Arabia. The result of their efforts is this wonderful museum with some dramatically displayed pieces of the Arabia and a magnificent collection of pre-Civil War merchandise.

We spent the night at Lake Jacomo State Park, on the east side of Kansas City.

Saturday, May 3: After some initial difficulty finding the correct route, we met at the “Indian Scout” statue in Penn Valley Park in downtown Kansas City. This statue is a magnificent Indian, seated on his horse, atop a bluff. The Indian has the look of a scout that has ridden up looking for a herd of buffalo, but instead of such a herd he has found a large metropolitan city. Our other stop in Penn Valley Park was the Pioneer Mother statue. This statue is composed of several individuals representing trappers, explorers, and pioneers making their way west. The central figure is a woman seated on a horse. It is probably the best statue we saw on the entire trip.

After several wrong turns, leading to our group becoming separated, we made our way to central Westport where there are markers and plaques on most of the historic buildings. There is a nice statue in the town center with maps and plaques explaining Westport’s roll in the expansion of the west.

From Westport we drove on to the Wagon Master Statue. This is located near the service entrance of a large hotel, and getting to it is made especially difficult by a number of one-way streets and no-left-turn intersections. By some miracle I drove right to it, but I then discovered that not one of the rest of the entourage had made it. Judy and I spent fifteen minutes using our two-way radios to offer encouragement to those trying to get to us. From time to time we would spot one of them, but usually they were forced by traffic signs to drive on by, or worse yet, go off in the opposite direction. Trail Turtles are true history buffs, with strong constitutions and who would never let a little traffic confusion deter them. However, when they eventually arrived, they seemed to have the look of people waiting on

death row. I reluctantly suggested that we forgo the rest of the downtown sites and head directly for Minor Park.

Near where the SFT crossed the Big Blue River, the trail passes through Minor Park: a large, well-maintained park where some magnificent swales are preserved.

The next stop was the town site of New Santa Fe. This was on the SFT; it was located right at the border between the United States and, what was in trail days, Indian Territory. In fact, New Santa Fe’s main reason for being was that it was the last place where traders and emigrants could legally buy a drink – as it was illegal to sell alcoholic beverages in Indian Territory. All that is left of New Santa Fe is a cemetery with some barely visible trail ruts. For the emigrants, the Santa Fe traders and for us, this was the last stop in Missouri.

From New Santa Fe we drove to the Mahaffie Farmstead in Olathe, Kansas. This was a stage stop on the SFT and it has been well preserved. Our next stop was the Lone Elm Campground. Susan Magoffin and many trail travelers spent their first night on the trail at Fitzhugh’s Mill (which we bypassed) and spent their second night at the Lone Elm Campground. The campground was ideal for emigrants and freighters because of an abundant supply of grass and a spring with clear water. In early trail days a single elm tree stood in the campground – hence the name. However, by the mid-1840s, the lone elm had been cut for firewood. Today there is not much to see here except the inevitable DAR marker.

We then drove to the historic fork between the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. There is a marker at a nearby intersection. Greg Franzwa, in his book *Oregon Trail Revisited*, says the exact location of the fork is in a field a couple of hundred yards east of the marker. We parked the vehicles and several of us walked into the field to where the split was supposed to be. There is no evidence of the trail today.

Next we drove to the Lanesfield School. Trail guides report that there are nice ruts here on the school ground. Unfortunately, the community has decided to develop the school into a tourist site at the expense of the ruts. A brand new visitor center now sits where the ruts used to be. We did get to tour the school house and learn what it was like to attend a one-room school in the early 1900s.

Our next stop was Black Jack Park. There is a roadside pullout here with signs telling about the SFT and about the Civil War battle that

occurred nearby. In a field behind the pullout a very nice section of SFT ruts has been preserved.

We decided to stay the night at Pomona Lake State Park. We had a major thunderstorm during the night. Many trail diaries talk about how miserable it was when the caravans got caught in a heavy downpour. For us modern day travelers, it is really great to climb into a wind and water tight vehicle when the weather turns bad.

Sunday, May 4: Our first stop of the day was the McGee-Harris Stage Station. It was located at the SFT crossing of 110-Mile Creek, so named because it was exactly 110 miles from Fort Sibley. The map we were carrying, showing the location of the station with respect to the DAR marker on the highway, was incorrect and we had to ask directions at a nearby restaurant. There are remnants of two stone and frame buildings still standing at the site. The original crossing of 110 mile creek is still in use by the farmer that owns this land.

From the McGee-Harris Stage Station we drove about 15 miles to the site of the Havanna Stage station. A few hundred yards down the road is the grave of Samuel Hunt, a soldier who died here while his company was patrolling the SFT.

Our next stop was Council Grove, and our first stop in Council Grove was the Hays House Restaurant. It is located in one of the oldest buildings in town. There are numerous historic sites around the town including the remains of the great Council Oak.

Outside of Council Grove is Diamond Spring, one of the most often-mentioned sites along the SFT. The spring is on private property but we were able to obtain permission from the owner to visit the site. The spring, now enclosed in a concrete box, does not look as it did in trail days but still has a strong flow and is quite impressive. There are also traces of SFT ruts in the rancher's field.



Not far from Diamond Spring are the remains of Six-Mile Stage Station. (It derived its name from the fact that it is six trail miles from Diamond Spring.) Only a fragment of a stone wall is still standing. Several of us walked past the station ruin to observe ruts in the field beyond.

The next site we visited was Lost Spring, an often mentioned trail site. Susan Magoffin wrote about spending a day here, holed up in tents, waiting for a heavy rain storm to pass. The rancher that owns this land has done a lot to help modern-day travelers visit the site. There is a place to park and a gate in the fence so that one can easily get to the spring. The spring is today not more than a trickle running into Cress Creek. Some of us walked into a field across the road to see some nice SFT swales that have been preserved.

It was getting late in the day and we decided to skip Cottonwood Crossing -- there is not much to see there today. We set out to visit the grave of Edward Miller, a mail rider that had been killed by Indians. We followed Greg Franzwa's directions exactly but unfortunately we did not use the same starting place that Greg used so we ended up in the wrong spot. We asked directions from a farmer and eventually were able to locate the cemetery. The farmer had been nice enough to unlock the gate that was blocking the road to the cemetery.

In McPherson, the local RV park was set up for big rigs, with no bathrooms or showers in the park so some Turtles opted to stay in a motel.

Monday, May 5: From McPherson we drove to where the SFT crossed the Little Arkansas River. This is marked with a huge cottonwood tree that was used in trail days to locate the crossing and is mentioned in a number of trail diaries. We were able to drive right up to the tree.

It was a fair piece to the next stop, Pawnee Rock. It is an interesting stop; the view from the top is great. From here we drove by the SFT crossing of Ash Creek. This was not a significant crossing in trail days, but it is now listed in trail guides because it is where Susan Magoffin's carriage over-turned. The creek has been rerouted, and the actual SFT crossing is essentially gone.

We drove on to Larned, Kansas where the first stop was the Santa Fe Trail Center. Unfortunately it is closed on Mondays. Our next stop was Fort Larned. The fort was never destroyed and the restoration is outstanding.

Most of us joined a tour of the entire fort. After the tour we visited some ruts and buffalo wallows that are preserved in a field a few miles south of the fort.

Our next stop was the SFT crossing at Coon Creek. The grass was high; but we were eventually able to locate some faint ruts and what appeared to be several dugways leading down to the creek.

We spent an hour in Dodge City, seeing some of the historic sites of this famous cattle town. Four miles west of Dodge City we visited some excellent ruts. Fifteen miles further on, we stopped at the city park in Cimarron, Kansas. This is where the two main branches of the SFT, the Mountain Branch and the Cimarron Cutoff, separated.

There are three campgrounds listed for Garden City but the KOA was the only campground actually operating.

Tuesday, May 6: Our first stop was Charlie's Ruts about 17 miles west of Garden City. We arrived in a slight drizzle. The dedicated Rut Nuts got out of their vehicles and walked out into the field to get the best view of the ruts.

The Kearny County Historical Society has a museum complex in Lakin, Kansas, that is supposed to have a number of trail related exhibits. The museum, however, was closed. This was our last stop in Kansas.

Our first stop in Colorado was a stone barn just west of Lamar. The trail guide said the stones for the barn had been taken from the first Fort Lyon. It also said that there is a keystone in the giant arched door on the west side of the barn inscribed "1st C[avalry] 1860. We found the barn, but the west wall had collapsed. If the inscribed keystone is still there, it is on the bottom of a pile of rubble. We spoke with the owner of the property. He said he had hopes of having the barn reconstructed.

Our second stop in Colorado was Bent's New Fort. The outlines of the fort are clearly visible. It looks as though someone has pushed dirt over the remaining foundation walls to protect them. There are a couple of nice markers at that site.

We stopped at the site of New Fort Lyon. For many years this had been a veteran's hospital. The Federal Government recently turned it over to the State of Colorado, and they have turned it into a correctional facility. The main interest here was the Fort Lyon surgeon's quarters where Kit Carson died on March 23, 1868. In 1957 the upper two-thirds of the

building was dismantled and then reconstructed in the form of a chapel. Even though its appearance had changed, this was still the place where the great man had died. As we drove into the complex, we discovered the chapel sitting in a small park just outside the entrance to the new correctional facility. It had a new foundation and was in the final stages of being moved to this location. The State of Colorado has spent \$50,000 to save the building.

In Las Animas some of us drove to the Las Animas Cemetery where we visited the grave of William Bent. Then we drove to the site of Boggsville. Kit Carson and his family were living in Boggsville when he became seriously ill and was taken to Fort Lyon where he died. Kit's wife died at about the same time and Thomas Boggs took the Carson children to live with him. The Carson house no longer stands, but the houses of Thomas Boggs and John Prowers have been restored. The complex was closed when we arrived.

If you could only visit one site on your tour of the Santa Fe Trail, it would have to be Bent's Old Fort. Its place in the history of the trail and the west, the impressive reconstruction and the feeling you get being there and looking at it, are all spectacular. There is a well-done introductory video. Several of us took the 1:00 pm tour, which includes the room where Susan Magoffin stayed. We could not resist telling the tour guide that some of us had visited Susan's grave in Saint Louis a few days earlier and that our group had been following in Susan's footsteps across the plains.



At La Junta the SFT turns southwest to Trinidad, Colorado. On Highway 350 our last trail stop of the day at the Iron Springs Stage Station. There is not much left of the station, but well marked trail ruts can be seen nearby. We spent the night at Trinidad Lake State Park.

Wednesday, May 7: Our first stop of the day was the Museum in Trinidad. They have some nice Santa Fe Trail exhibits and we all toured the Baca House, owned by one of the area's pioneers. Then it was off to Cimarron. We had hoped to visit the Wooten Ranch in Raton Pass, but we were unable to contact the owner and the gate was locked. We arrived in Cimarron at lunch time and had a great lunch at the historic St. James Hotel. Many of New Mexico's famous and infamous characters stayed here, played here and some died here. After lunch we toured the hotel and watched their video. The Aztec Mill, now a museum, was closed.

On these caravans the wagon master cannot expect to get everyone through safely. Still, we were very close to Santa Fe and so far we had had no serious difficulties. It was at this time that we had our first casualty: we lost the Greenes. Their demise was quite sudden; one minute they were laughing and joking with us and the next minute they were gone. I doubt that it was cholera, a dreaded malady that took the lives of many travelers in trail days. We laid them to rest, and resumed our journey. I, for one, will never forget them.

We headed on to Fort Union, running into heavy winds on I-25 that would be with us the rest of the trip. There are some spectacular ruts in and around the fort. Three alternate branches of the SFT's Mountain Route come in from the north; several branches of the Cimarron Cutoff come in from the east; the combined trails head south to Las Vegas and Santa Fe, and many lesser trails come from various directions. We walked in some of the more impressive ruts south of the fort.



Most of us spent the night at Storey Lake State Park northwest of Las Vegas.

Thursday, May 8: The caravan headed for a site east of Las Vegas where some great ruts were reputed to be. Apparently it had been some time since the author of the guide book had been there. The roads to the ruts were not only closed, they were no longer roads, having gone back to nature. We then tried to locate some ruts south of Las Vegas at a place called Kearny Gap. Locked gates, poor maps and missed turns again foiled us.

We decided to drive on to the Pecos Ruins National Historic Site. The visitor's center is really nice. We were told that it was, in large part, due to the efforts and generosity of actress Greer Garson. She and her husband Buddy Fogelson had, at one time, owned the Forked Lightning Ranch, where the ruins are located. Greer Garson donated the ruins and some money for their preservation. Our tour of the ruins was shorter than it might have been had the wind not been so cold.

Not far past the ruins are the remains of the Pigeon Ranch. One building, perilously close to the highway, is all that is left of the ranch.



This stretch of the trail passes through Glorieta Canyon. This is where the famous Civil War battle that ended the Confederate push into the west took place. Three ranches, including the Pigeon Ranch, were important sites in the battle. Our last stop before Santa Fe was a visit to a small bridge across the canyon. It was used by troops during the Civil War and by SFT caravans after the war.

In Santa Fe we stopped at the End-of-the-Trail marker and then had lunch at the La Fonda Hotel. It had been a great trip.

Cimarron Cutoff Pretrip

by Richard Greene

[Editors' Note: The spring trip followed the Boone's Lick Trail from St. Charles to Franklin, MO and then travelled the Santa Fe Trail (SFT), following the Mountain Route to and through Raton Pass after Dodge City. Six of the group (The "Cutoff Turtles": Don & Vilma Buck (CA), Richard & Marie Greene (NM), Ken & Pat White (AZ)) decided to follow the Cimarron Cutoff on the way to St. Louis in order not to miss seeing it.

We have not attached the maps of the Cutoff that are included in the original report; these can be found on the Trail Turtles Spring 2003 CD. Readers planning to travel the Cutoff might find these maps (as well as the trail guides of Franzwa and Simmons & Jackson) quite useful.]

The Cutoff Turtles met at the Greene home in Angel Fire, NM, on Apr. 23.

THU. APR. 24 - Angel Fire to Clayton, NM (241 miles). We waited at the gate of the Dos Rios Ranch [a little more than ten miles past Springer NM] for Faye Gaines to join us. Faye is the owner of the Point of Rocks Ranch. She would take us there over county dirt roads and following the route of the SFT. The Rock Crossing of the Canadian is on the Dos Rios Ranch and with Faye along it was easy to get permission from the owners to visit the site. Due to snow melt raising the water level and recent heavy equipment damage in the field by the river, we never did see the actual crossing.



Faye led us to her Point of Rocks ranch and along the way we passed several points along the SFT. Perhaps the most significant swale (60 ft. wide) was located after Faye stopped to ask a fellow rancher where the swale was. He said "Just ahead and don't worry, you'll

fall in it." Sure enough, we did. Compared to our Southern Trail swales, it was unbelievable.

Point of Rocks Ranch: If you're ever out this way be assured that you will always be welcome to see the history on the ranch: swales, rust on rocks, graves and teepee rings: Indians moved the rocks away from the base of the teepee when they moved on.



The original tombstone of Isaac Allen was placed in the barn after someone dug up the grave and broke the stone; a replica is now on the actual grave site. (There is no recorded history on Isaac Allen.)

First, we visited the teepee rings and nearby graves. Faye had brought along a brass "plumb" to check if there was anybody buried in the graves. Of course, this got Don to bring out his witching rods, and while Don is good, Vilma is gifted. Madame Vilma could tell using the brass "plumb" which, believe it or not, moved violently in response to her questions: e.g. Is a man buried here? If the "plumb" moved, then it was a man. If the plumb did not move, then Vilma moved on to a woman or child and so on. It was weird!

After Point of Rocks, Faye led us towards Clayton, NM over more county dirt roads and showed us SFT points of interest: trail to the left and then to the right of us and the inscription on rock of "F. Lee 1859." We tried to put up a fallen SFT road sign. In spite of all our efforts the wind was too strong and the sign too tall. Sierra Grande has the largest perimeter of any mountain in the U.S (40 miles). You can see the extinct volcano of Capulin (a National Park) and, of course, the ever present two peaks of Rabbit Ears (named after an Indian chief killed in battle by the Spanish) and Round Mound (a famous Trail landmark).

We visited McNees Crossing. This time we got to see the rock crossing and the eroded banks showing the passage of the wagons

in and out of the Crossing. There is also a rather magnificent monument erected in 1921 in the pasture to commemorate the first Independence Day celebration (July 4th 1831) in NM as noted by Josiah Gregg. We then went on to a kiosk and saw Trail markers in the Kiowa Grasslands. It was getting on in the evening, so we did not walk the well marked section of the SFT.

We drove to the historic Eklund Hotel in Clayton and dined. The Eklund is quaint and has a vintage saloon. Clayton is noted as the place where the outlaw Black Jack Ketchum was hanged and decapitated when falling through the trap door. I suggest you eat dinner first before looking at Eklund's photos of the decapitation. We camped at Clayton SP.

FRI. APR. 25 - Clayton, NM to Cimarron Grasslands, KS (180 miles). We forgot we had moved from Mountain to Central Time so that we had lost an hour and we were going to have a tough time making our 10:00 AM appointment in Boise City, OK, to see Autograph Rock. The latter is aptly named. There were all the inscriptions you could ever want to see. The earliest were from the 1850s.



We were joined by the owner, Carol Sharp, who welcomed us, but said that her mother-in-law was not well and so we could not visit the rock ledge that had older trail inscriptions. She encouraged us to come back in October when the museum had Trail Days and we could visit all the sites, including Camp Nichols.

We headed for the Cimarron Heritage Museum in Boise City. This is a wonderful museum, housing a fine collection of rural America and the Dust Bowl era exhibits.

We drove to Elkhart, KS, where we had another great museum visit at the Morton Co. Museum., which has a fine SFT section.

We then visited Middle Springs (a nicely marked area with info and abundant water) and Point of Rocks (a SFT landmark – there are three locations in KS and one in NM with this name and with the SFT running just beneath them). Some of us took a stroll on the SFT. We also saw stone markers of the SFT near Wilburton. We camped at a BLM campground nearby. This cost only \$7.00; it had no showers and the toilets were just okay but we were among nice old trees and by some fishing ponds.

SAT. APR. 26 – Campground to Topeka, KS (471 miles). Along the way to Ulysses, KS (the heart of the Dust Bowl) we stopped at three markers. They referred to: the Jornada (the dry section between Lakin, KS and Wagon Bed Springs), the death of Jedidiah Smith and the Mormon Battalion. After that we headed for Wagon Bed Springs. A lot of work has been done to make this site a pleasure to visit. There is the wagon bed in the ground, but there is no visible spring. There are markers and some great metal buffalo sculptures. It was near here that Smith was killed by Indians while looking for water.



The museum in Ulysses, KS was not open so we hit the highway to Dodge. Just before we got to Dodge, we stopped to see the spectacular SFT ruts that have been “enshrined” in this park. There is all the SFT history you could want to see. We were now traveling the Mountain Route into Dodge and the Cimarron Cutoff tour was over.

Traveling the Devil's Backbone

by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

This summer we traveled the 440-mile Natchez Trace Parkway, which follows the historic trail that connected southern Mississippi to central Tennessee. The Natchez Trace should be of interest to SWOCTANs for several reasons. It is one of the oldest trails in the Old Southwest Territory. It was an early example of a trail used for western expansion and was a stage for Indian removal, a process replicated later farther west. And it is an excellent example of what the National Park Service can do to preserve our history. The parkway is a beautiful limited-access two-lane highway through the backcountry of Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi. Original sections of the old trace -- ruts! -- are accessible in numerous locations. Trailside interpretive exhibits are of high quality. Buildings dating to the early 1800s can be seen and side trips lead to related historic sites.

The Natchez Trace was heavily used from 1785 to 1820 by Kaintuck boatmen from the Ohio River Valley who floated their products on flatboats down the rivers to markets in Natchez and New Orleans. Once there, they sold their goods, scrapped their boats and trekked up the crude trail towards Nashville and home carrying their profits. Boatmen, itinerant preachers, slave traders, and merchants followed the trail. The distinguished roster of its travelers includes John James Audubon, Andrew Jackson, Meriwether Lewis, Aaron Burr and Alexander Wilson. The trail was designated the official U. S. mail route in 1800, and postal riders often escorted cautious travelers. To expedite travel, Federal troops improved the post road in the period 1800-1810 and the trace soon became an important military road. Early in 1813 Andrew Jackson's force of Tennessee Volunteers marched back to Nashville on the trace. In 1814, his troops used the road to return south in order to fight the British in the Battle of New Orleans, and in 1815, they triumphantly returned to Nashville on the trace. By 1820, the Natchez Trace was the most heavily traveled wilderness road in the Old Southwest with more than twenty inns, known as "stands," in operation. But the route still had its dangers--swamps, floods, insects, unfriendly Indians and brutal highwaymen--all of which earned the route the ominous nickname "Devil's Backbone." After 1820, with the arrival of the steamboat, the use of the Natchez Trace declined dramatically

In addition to the National Park Service's Official Map, our main guidebook was Lori Finley's *Traveling the Natchez Trace* (Winston-Salem, N.C. J. F. Blair. 1995). This documents the Trace mile-by-mile with maps, places to stay and eat along the route and addresses and telephone numbers of sources of more information. Jonathan Daniels' *The Devil's Backbone: the Story of the Natchez Trace*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1985) provides a readable history of the trace, and James Crutchfield's *The Natchez Trace: A Pictorial History* (Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville TN, 1996) includes photos of people and places of historical interest, as well as an excellent historical overview. We also read Eudora Welty's novella *The Robber Bridegroom* and her collection *The Wide Net and Other Stories*. These works feature the trail, its legends and its travelers and gave us a feeling of the rich heritage of this area.

The modern parkway encourages the traveler to transport himself back to an earlier time. Following the course of the original trace, the two-lane road allows no commercial vehicles; traffic is light, the speed limit is a leisurely 50 mph; and there are no distracting billboards. The natural beauty of the trace is incredible. There are wildflowers, waterfalls, black water swamps with bald cypress, forests and rolling farmland. And there are frequent opportunities to get out of the car and walk pieces of the original path.

Our trip began in Nashville at the site of Fort Nashborough. The blockhouses and stockade are a reproduction of the 1780 log fort established by pioneer settlers, led by James Robertson, who led the overland half of the settlement party, and Colonel John Donelson who led the wives and children on a flotilla of flatboats. Among this group was Donelson's daughter, Rachel, the future wife of Andrew Jackson. The settlers drew up a charter of government, the Cumberland Compact which was the first form of government in middle Tennessee. In Nashville, we also visited the Hermitage, the former home of Andrew Jackson. The mansion has been restored to the appearance during Jackson's retirement years, 1837-1845; the furnishings are almost entirely original. Outside is the cemetery where Jackson and his wife are buried.

When we turned on to the north end of the Natchez Trace Parkway we were totally unprepared for the beauty of the gentle rolling hills and groves of hardwoods unmarred by utility poles and lines and trucks. And despite

the fact that it was summer and the height of the tourist season, we had it all to ourselves! In what follows, we list key sites in the order encountered.

An early stop was the Gordon House and Ferry Site. John Gordon made an agreement with the Chickasaw chief, George Colbert, to operate a trading post and ferry on the Duck River. It was constructed in 1818. The two-story brick house is one of the few remaining buildings that were part of the original Trace.

Jackson Falls was named in honor of Andrew Jackson. Jackson was a frequent traveler on the Trace. One of his most memorable trips was his 1791 trip down the trail from Nashville. He had received word that Rachel's divorce from Lewis Robards had been granted, and he rode to Natchez to tell her that they were now free to marry.

Grinder's Stand is 72 miles from Nashville. The ruins of the walls are still discernible behind the log cabin, which is intended to be a replica of the inn and which houses an unstaffed visitor center. In the autumn of 1809, the 35-year-old Meriwether Lewis was traveling the trace on his way to Washington. He arrived at Grinder's Stand in the evening of October 10 and rented a room. By morning he was dead. Although some have suggested that he was murdered, most historians believe that Lewis, suffering from depression and anxiety, shot himself in the head. A short path leads to his grave and monument, a broken column of marble standing upon a granite pedestal, symbolizing a life cut short. A preserved stretch of the Natchez Trace that Lewis was traveling before his death passes by the monument.

The Sunken Trace is a 200-yard section of the original footpath that has been deeply eroded into the ground. Spanish moss hangs



like beards from a canopy of trees that stand over deep earthen walls and vines tangle down the sides. We walked in a tunnel of green. The incredible beauty made it clear why men such as John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson were drawn to this woodland trail.

After Florence AL we visited the site of George Colbert's stand. Colbert, a Chickasaw Indian Chief, operated an inn and ferry at the Tennessee River. He helped negotiate with the United States for Chickasaw rights to all ferry operations on the trace. A clever businessman, Colbert allegedly charged Andrew Jackson \$75,000 to ferry the victorious Tennessee army across the river after their victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans. Following this stand is Buzzard Roost, the site of the inn owned by Levi Colbert. A mixed-blood Chickasaw and the brother of George Colbert, Levi Colbert built his stand in 1801. A short trail leads to Buzzard Roost spring. This section of the trace is especially pretty. The green rolling hills, Alabama's Freedom Hills, are the remnants of the Appalachian Mountains.

Entering Mississippi, we visited the Pharr mounds, one of the largest Middle Woodland ceremonial sites in the southeast, dating to 0-200AD. There are a number of mound sites along the Trace, including the Florence Mound in Alabama, the Owl Creek Mounds south of Tupelo MS (1100AD) and the Emerald Mound near Natchez. The latter is the second largest Indian mound in the United States; built and occupied between 1250 and 1600 A.D. it was still in use by the ancestors of the Choctaw and Natchez Indians when Hernando DeSoto came through the area in the 1540s,.

The scenery gradually became subtropical. At Donivan Slough a woodland nature trail winds through rich moist soil that supports tulip poplar, sycamore and water oak and most exciting for us, the bald cypress. These trees were all standing in swampy bottom land.

Near milepost 270 a five-minute trail led us to the gravestones of thirteen unknown Confederate soldiers. There are many opportunities along the Trace to take side trips to Civil War sites—Vicksburg, Tupelo, Shiloh—but we decided to forgo these sites on this trip.

The Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters and Visitor Center has only a small number of exhibits, a twelve-minute film on the Trace and a modest bookstore.

Farther south, we entered what had been Choctaw territory. The site of French Camp was

named in honor of Louis LeFleur, a French Canadian who established a stand in 1812. His half-breed son, Greenwood LeFlore, negotiated the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek which traded away the last of the Choctaw lands east of the Mississippi. He later served as a member of the Mississippi Senate. His carriage is on display at the site.

In 1820, Andrew Jackson met with the leaders of the Choctaw Indians at William Doak's tavern, which was just west of the present trace. Jackson asked the Choctaw to give up their tribal lands in exchange for land to the west of the Mississippi. Reluctantly on October 20, 1820, the Choctaw surrendered one third of their land and signed the Treaty of Doak's Stand. South of Jackson at the Upper Choctaw Boundary historic site, we saw the line of trees that marked the boundary formed by the treaty. Located near this boundary line was Red Bluff Stand. Owned and operated by John Gregg, this inn was established in 1802 and was the last place for the northbound traveler to get supplies.

Forty-five miles up the trace from Natchez, Grindstone Ford crosses the Bayou Pierre. In the early 1800s it marked the first step into the wilderness. Up to this point the travelers had been in the relatively safe Old Natchez District, but after crossing the ford, they were in Choctaw land. The mosquitos at the ford are as fierce today as in the early 1800's.

At Milepost 20 we took the exit to Springfield Plantation, about one mile west of the Trace. A working plantation for over 200 years, the mansion was begun in 1789 by Thomas Marston Green Jr., a friend of Rachel Donelson's family. Rachel fled here to escape a confrontation with her estranged husband, Lewis Robards. When Jackson learned of the Robards' divorce, he hurried down the trace to Springfield where he and Rachel were married in the mansion's drawing room in the summer of 1791. The current owner, E. LaSalle, gave us an extensive tour of the house. It is one of the first homes in the United States to have a full-length, columned colonnade across the front.

From Springfield Plantation, we returned to the parkway and continued south to Mount Locust. This inn is fifteen miles outside Natchez, about a day's walk on the Trace. Built in 1780, this structure is one of the oldest in Mississippi. The land on which the house stands was originally part of a 1779 land grant to Thomas Harmon. The cabin changed ownership several times before William Ferguson acquired the property. He soon found himself providing

lodging for Kaintucks traveling the trace. Business was so good that he build a two-story annex behind his house that was known as "Sleepy Hollow." Other buildings on the property included a separate kitchen and slave quarters, but only the main house survives. A family cemetery and a slave cemetery are located in the woods behind the main house. By the time Ferguson died in 1801, Mount Locust had become a successful inn. The National Park Service ranger on-site, Ranger Eric "Rick" Chamberlain, is a direct descendant of the Ferguson family who owned the house. He was born at Mount Locust and now lives only a few hundred yards away.

At the Loess Bluff nature area we viewed the deposits of soil blown here during the Ice Age and compacted by time. The loose soil, called Loess, once covered a huge area and to depths ranging from 30 to 90 feet. All that is left now is a strip of topsoil that extends from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Tennessee. The Natchez Trace cuts across these Loess bluffs. .

We arrived in Natchez in time for dinner in the Lower Town. Also called Natchez Under-the-Hill, this once seamy waterfront was frequented by gamblers, thieves, and ladies-of-the-evening. Today it is a quaint area with a half dozen restored buildings

Natchez escaped the worst of the Civil War and consequently has been able to keep its antebellum character. We spent our last day in town touring Natchez on top of the hill with its tree-shaded streets and absolutely magnificent antebellum homes. Several other towns along the Trace (e.g. Franklin, Tennessee and Port Gibson, Mississippi) have many fine antebellum homes.

John James Audubon and his family lived for the winter of 1822-23 in a little frame house at 118 South Union Street. Audubon taught at the Elizabeth Female Academy, in the nearby village of Washington.

That night we ate at The Castle Restaurant located in the restored carriage house of Dunleith. This stately 1856 Greek Revival mansion is surrounded by forty acres of landscaped gardens and wooded bayous. The southern gentility of our dining room seemed a remnant of a bygone age. Struck once again with a feeling of timelessness, we clinked our glasses to the end of the trail.

FALL MAPPING TRIP

The Southern Trails Mapping Committee will have a mapping week this fall from October 27 to November 1. The group will map areas on the Gila River between Gila Bend and Yuma. 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. Most days will be spent walking the trail as the group moves along, seldom returning to the same camp twice.

If you would like to obtain more information about participating, contact:

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Desert Tracks: the Newsletter of the Southwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association

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DESERT TRACKS



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