

Desert Tracks

Publication of the Southern Trails Chapter
of the Oregon-California Trails Association

January 2016

Butterfield Trail Issue



Ruins of Ewell's Station

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Desert Tracks:
*Publication of the Southern Trails Chapter of
the Oregon-California Trails Association*

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Cover photo:

Photo of the ruins of Ewell's Station taken on June 7, 1931, by Roscoe and Margaret Conkling .

Courtesy Arizona Historical Society

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From the Editors

As can be seen by the news item in this issue by Michael Elliott, the National Park Service (NPS) is working actively towards submitting a proposal to Congress to designate the Butterfield Trail as a National Historic Trail. This is a very promising development for OCTA's Southern Trails Chapter (STC). Consequently, we are devoting this issue of *Desert Tracks* to articles on the Butterfield Overland Mail.

We begin with a review of several new books on the Butterfield Trail. The review treats a recent overview history of the Butterfield Overland Mail by Melody Groves and a new edition of George Hackler's book on the trail in New Mexico. We also consider the series of trail guides, covering each state along the trail, prepared by the late Kirby Sanders. This work, which is based on a voluminous report that Sanders prepared in 2010 for the NPS, will prove of tremendous value to those who wish to follow the trail. It delineates Sanders' best estimates of the locations of the route and the stage stations used by the Butterfield organization. We also include an obituary for Sanders, who died last spring – a true loss for the trail community.

Gerald Ahnert contributes an article about the historic sites on the Sentinel Plain in Arizona. This area contains traces of the Butterfield, Mormon Battalion, and Southern Emigrant trails and associated sites, such as the location of the Oatman Massacre. Ahnert includes detailed driving directions, maps, and photos, which will allow readers to drive to the trailhead and hike this important area.

At the 2015 STC spring symposium, historian George Hackler gave a talk on the sites of the Butterfield Trail in New Mexico. We have included an abbreviated version of the text of his talk. Those interested in a more detailed presentation can consult Hackler's *The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico*.

A little over ten years ago, Don Matt of Berryville, Arkansas, and his brother Paul began to research the location of the trail in northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri. They subsequently followed the trail from Tipton, Missouri, to Fort Bowie, Arizona, on their motorcycles. In the years that followed, the Matts

continued their research on the location of the station sites in Arkansas. Their findings will be of considerable use to those who wish to follow the eastern end of the trail. In this issue, Don Matt provides an article that relates some of the highlights of their initial motorcycle journey.

This summer and fall, we drove along the eastern end of the trail from Tipton, Missouri, to Fort Stockton in Texas. We have contributed an article on our trip. Along the route, we met many people who were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the trail in the vicinity of their community. One was Tom Ashmore of San Angelo, Texas, a local Butterfield Trail specialist. Tom showed us a section of the trail west of Fort Concho and provided us with our first experience of the use of drones in locating the trail. We have included a brief article by Ashmore that outlines his efforts to distinguish alternate routes from the original Butterfield Trail in west Texas.

Speaking of drones, Tracy DeVault and Mike Volberg – who we hereby designate as Trail Turtles Extraordinaire – used such an unmanned aerial vehicle in their work to locate the long-lost Ewell's Station in southeastern Arizona. DeVault has contributed three brief articles to this issue: one on the effort to find Ewell's Station, another on the search for Ewell's Spring (the source of water for the Butterfield station), and a third describing the use of the drone in trail research.

In the belief that one of the most important issues facing the Oregon-California Trails Association and our chapter is to work to preserve historical trail-related sites, we include in these pages a brief article on the recent purchase of and restoration efforts on the St. Vrain Mill in Mora, New Mexico. Such articles will be a regular feature of this publication in the future, and we are asking the readership to submit articles on any work underway to identify and protect sites along the trail that are in need of preservation.

This issue also contains reviews of three other books. Two are historical novels: *Lizard's Kill*, by Pam Christie, which concerns late 18th-century New Mexico, and *The Mystery of Chaco Canyon* by Doug Hocking, the STC Arizona Vice-President. Hocking's novel is set in the Southwest in the period just prior to the Civil War. In addition, we are pleased to offer a review of Malcolm Ebright's book,

Advocates for the Oppressed. Ebright, who is the head of the Center for Land Grant Studies in Guadalupita, New Mexico, is an expert on the long and sordid history of the attempts to take land in the Southwest away from its original Pueblo and/or Hispanic owners. The book under review gives an extended analysis of the efforts of various advocates to preserve the land for the claimants from the 1600s through the 20th century.

Doug Hocking is preparing what appears to be a very interesting STC spring symposium, to be held in Willcox, Arizona, April 6-9, 2016. An announcement is given on the inside back cover. We hope to see you there.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Progress in Designating the Butterfield Trail as a National Historic Trail

The National Park Service (NPS) National Trails team has evaluated the Butterfield Trail as nationally significant and has completed writing the text for the Butterfield Overland Trail Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment. The next steps for the NPS will be to assemble and edit a draft document, provide copies for an internal review, respond to the resulting criticism, and print and distribute the draft for public discussion. These tasks should be completed by the end of March 2016. There will then be 60 days for the public to comment. After analyzing the public's response, the National Trails team will make any necessary corrections and a finding will be prepared that will be signed by the Superintendent and the Intermountain Regional Director. The final document will be sent on to the NPS Washington office for submission to Congress. This should be accomplished by no later than the end of September 2016. At that point, it will be up to Congress whether to designate the trail as a National Historic Trail.

Michael L. Elliott
National Trails Intermountain Region, NPS



Kirby Sanders (1952-2015)

Kirby Sanders, who worked to locate the Butterfield Trail not only in northwest Arkansas but also along the entire length of the trail, died on May 21, 2015. Sanders began his life-long career as a journalist and writer in the 1970s when he hired on at the *Houston Chronicle*. In the early 1990s, he wrote a series of articles mapping and identifying the historical markers of Henderson County, Texas, for the *Athens Daily Review*. He moved to northwest Arkansas in 1998, where he worked with the Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Partners to find the Butterfield Trail and stage station sites in the area. His initial research into the Overland Mail route earned a 2002 Award for Excellence from the Arkansas Chapter of the American Planning Association. In 2010, he was selected by the National Park Service to prepare a report and a set of maps delineating the routes and station locations of the Butterfield Overland Mail from St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee, to San Francisco, California. Sanders later self-published the report in a series of books titled *The Butterfield Overland Mail Ox Bow Route, 1858-1861*. (See the review of these books in this issue of *Desert Tracks*.)

Sanders is the author of two novels, including one on the final days of Ambrose Bierce, and several books of poetry. He was a community activist, and he was both a peace loving Buddhist and a collector of guns. His friends describe him as a rabble-rouser, a free-thinking non-conformist, a cantankerous old curmudgeon, and as a kind and gentle man. All agree that he will be sorely missed.

Saving the St. Vrain Mill

The St. Vrain Mill in Mora, New Mexico, was built in 1864 by Ceran St. Vrain, a Taos fur trader and a partner with William Bent in establishing Bent's Fort in southern Colorado. The mill was constructed to provide flour to the U.S. Army at nearby Fort Union and also to the Navajo Indians at the Bosque Redondo reservation. The mill is on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2002 it was deemed one of the ten most endangered historical structures in New Mexico. In 2013, several members of the Mora community established the St. Vrain Mill Preservation and Historical Foundation which raised sufficient funds to purchase the mill in June 2015. Since then, the foundation has completed a Historic Structure Report and an engineering assessment on how best to stabilize the building.



The St. Vrain Mill. *photo courtesy of Merlyn Witt*

The next step will be to stabilize the north wall. The engineering firm found that the "soil" under the wall is mostly sand and water. Consequently, the wall doesn't offer enough support to keep the foundation in place. In addition, there is a large crack in the east wall which apparently was already present a hundred years ago. The recommended solution is to pump a fast-setting grout under the north foundation. As the grout expands, it will displace the sand and water and provide additional support. The foundation directors have decided to begin the stabilization as soon as they secure sufficient funding – \$125,000. To this end, the foundation is exploring options for a low interest, long term loan.

Information on the mill and the effort to preserve it can be found at the web site www.stvrainmill.org.

Merl Witt

Southern Trails Chapter at Lake Tahoe

During the OCTA annual convention in Lake Tahoe in September 2015, a new slate of officers for the Southern Trails Chapter was announced. We welcome David Miller, who has agreed to serve once again as chapter president; Doug Hocking, the new Arizona vice president; Bob Jacoby, the new California vice president; and Shannon Perry, the new chapter secretary. Other officers remain the same.



Cecila Bell receives a plaque honoring James Renn for his work to preserve Fort Cummings. The award was presented by John Winner at the awards dinner during the OCTA convention



Following the chapter meeting, Jud Mygatt presents a plaque to John Fromm in recognition of his service as chapter secretary.

Correction: The photo titled "Cornudas Spring" on the back cover of the June 2015 issue of *Desert Tracks* should have been titled "Thorn's Well."

Advocates for the Oppressed: Hispanos, Indians, Genízaros, and Their Land in New Mexico

Malcolm Ebright

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014.

ISBN-978-0-8263-5197-5.

430 pages. Paperback, \$34.95.

During the Spanish (1598-1821) and Mexican (1821-1846) periods, the government in New Mexico issued both community and individual land grants to encourage settlement, to reward loyal subjects, and to create a buffer zone between nomadic Indian tribes (i.e. the Navajo, Ute, Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa) and populated areas. From the 1740s to the 1790s, towns such as Abiquiú, Las Trampas, San Miguel del Vado, Belen, Ojo Caliente, and San Miguel de Carnué were established as *genízaro* buffer settlements along mountain passes used by nomadic tribes as routes of attack. Communal land grants were also made to Pueblo Indians. Unfortunately, however, the judicial climate in New Spain was not favorable to Pueblo Indians or *genízaros* (Plains Indians or Navajos who were sold to Spaniards to become servants), and the history of these land grants is filled with tales of tragic loss, greed, and corruption. *Advocates for the Oppressed* is an in-depth study of the advocates who represented the Hispanos, Indians, and *genízaros* in New Mexico land and water disputes.

Malcolm Ebright is a historian, an attorney, and the director of the Center for Land Grant Studies. He has written separately about Hispano land grants and Pueblo Indian grants in the past. In *Advocates for the Oppressed*, he brings these histories together. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Spanish office of *Protector de Indios*, which operated in New Mexico from the mid-1600s. Early protectors provided legal representation in court to Indians, and they helped Pueblos buy land at fair prices. They contributed to the establishment of the Four Square League law, which required that the land surrounding an Indian pueblo be allotted to that pueblo for one league in each direction from the pueblo. This law set up political boundaries for the Pueblo Indians and helped sustain Pueblo cultures. One of the earliest advocates for the Pueblos in land disputes was Alfonso Rael de Aguilar. Ebright examines two of his important cases: the San Felipe Pueblo case and the San Ildefonso Pueblo case. Other early protectors, like Juan de Atienza, did not perform as well. An example that Ebright uses is the 1715 lawsuit against Spaniards who were trespassing on Pojoaque Pueblo land. Although the office of *Protector de Indios* was vacant during the later part of the 18th century,

during his tenure as Spanish governor of colonial New Mexico (from 1749 to 1767), Tomás Vélez Cachupín fought for the rights of the Indians in their attempts to protect their land and water and oversaw the establishment and protection of Hispano, Pueblo, and *genízaro* community land grants.

The rest of the chapters focus on case studies of particular land grants and lawsuits, beginning with a discussion of two mythical Santa Fe land grants that were created by 19th-century lawyers: the Santa Fe grant and the Cristóbal Nieto grant. Ebright draws on intricate legal records to document the shenanigans of 19th-century attorneys and civic boosters who engaged in land grant fraud and forgery in their attempt to claim valuable property in Santa Fe. This is followed by chapters concerning grants given to Pueblos to protect traditional grazing lands from Spanish encroachment and to provide pasture for the Pueblos' animals. Here Ebright explores the little known history of the Ojo Caliente grant, the Zia, Santa Ana, and Jemez grazing grant (also known as the Ojo del Espíritu Santo grant), and the Cochiti Pueblo pasture grant. Chapter 5 focuses on the La Cienega and Cienguilla Pueblos, their pre-revolt history and later attempts by wealthy Hispanos to take over former Pueblo lands in order to expand their holdings. Other grants discussed in later chapters include the San Cristóbal Pueblo grant, the San Marcos Pueblo grant, the Galisteo Pueblo grant, and five of the land grants made by Tomás Vélez Cachupín and Pedro Fermín de Mendinueta.

Ebright's ideal *Protector de Indios* is Tomás Vélez Cachupín, and he devotes Chapters 10 and 11 to the governor's land grant policy and his attempts to protect marginalized peoples when their land and water right were in jeopardy. Ebright concludes his history with a discussion of the Zuni Pueblo's 20th-century fight to recover their sacred land and artifacts. Using lawyers only as a last resort, the Zunis relied on the advocacy of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and Pueblo leaders. Ebright's purpose here is not to simply provide his readers with the history of New Mexico land grants. He is a 20th-century advocate for justice for rightful heirs in property disputes.

Advocates for the Oppressed is meticulously researched. It has an extensive bibliography and almost 88 pages of endnotes, as well as excellent maps and illustrations by Glen Strock. Anyone interested in the history of New Mexico's land grants and land and water rights will want to read this book.

Alan Peters

The Mystery of Chaco Canyon

Doug Hocking

Self published, 2014.

ISBN-13: 978-0990761921.

610 pages. Paperback, \$16.85.

The story of Doug Hocking's new historical novel, *The Mystery of Chaco Canyon*, takes place ten years after the events described in his earlier book *Massacre at Point of Rocks*. (See *Desert Tracks*, January 2014.)

At the bequest of a dying Masonic brother, Dan and his friends Roque, Doña Loca, and Peregrino Rojo, embark on a search for the Los Lunas Decalogue Stone, a boulder with an inscription believed to be an abridged version of the Decalogue in Paleo-Hebrew. The clues lead them all over the Southwest, including the Estancia Valley, Acoma, Zuni, El Morro, the Hopi mesas, the Grand Canyon, Chaco, Chimayo, Chihuahua, and Casas Grandes. They finally locate Rough Hurech's grave in a mountain cave in southeast Arizona and then return to Chaco Canyon.

Along their twisting route, they meet so many minor characters that, to be honest, it was hard for this reader to keep track of them all. Many of these figures are drawn from history, including George Bascom, Padre Antonio José Martinez, Kit Carson, and Albert Pike. There are also Danites, Masons, Texas Rangers, and Apaches.

Although the plot is motivated by the fictional search, Hocking manages to discuss dozens of historical incidents. These events are described with limited detail, but they might spark a reader's interest to investigate certain incidents more deeply.

The Mystery of Chaco Canyon has all the elements that endeared Hocking's previous book to Southern Trails Chapter readers: short chapters broken into even shorter scenes that make it easy to say to yourself, "I'll just read one more chapter," and before you know it, you are swept up in another bit of exciting action.

Hocking clearly loves history, and in *The Mystery of Chaco Canyon*, he demonstrates a knowledge of and appreciation for the various cultures inhabiting the Southwest.

Rahm E. Sandoux

Lizard's Kill: A Tale of Treasure and Terror in the Kingdom of New Mexico

Pam Christie

Santa Fe: Lone Butte Press, 2015.

ISBN: 9781483424644.

315 pages. Paperback, \$18.98.

Lizard's Kill, the third of a series of mysteries set in 18th-century New Mexico, begins and ends with a map. At the novel's starting point, retired Governor Juan Bautista Anza gives Nando, the illegitimate son of a Spanish don and his Ute slave, a dangerous assignment: to take a map from Sonora to Santa Fe where a contact will take it off his hands. It is not an ordinary map – it depicts the possible locations of New Mexico's mineral deposits which had never been previously cartographically assembled.

The cost of defending an empire was straining Spain's coffers. To keep Spain fiscally sound, King Carlos III took an active role in controlling the economies of his colonies. Thus far, New Mexico's apparent lack of resources had not allowed it to evolve into a financial asset for Spain. If Anza's map finds its way to the king, Anza fears that New Mexico's mineral wealth will be used for Spain's benefit and not for the general welfare of the people in New Spain's northern frontier. Consequently the map that Nando carries has no place names, legend, or indication of scale. It is inscrutable. Regardless, the map can't be allowed to get into the wrong hands, and Nando's mission, therefore, is of the utmost secrecy.

Nando, whom Anza calls his "scroungy lizard," leaves Sonora with sober spirits and begins his perilous journey up the Camino Real, attempting to fulfill the governor's request. Although he is extremely skilled, adept at languages, and able to move through all layers of colonial society, he needs assistance. Once in Santa Fe, he goes to the *Parroquia* where he confides in an aged priest. In addition to the priest, he is helped by Pueblo servants, an aged woman of the gentry, escaped Navajo slaves, and his French/Comanche wife, Marisol. Despite the assistance, Nando suffers a myriad of calamities. Still, obstacles only make him resolute. He is determined to fulfill Anza's request, and his selfless devotion to his task is matched only by the goodness of his heart.

Those who have read John Kessel's biography *Miera*

Y Pacheco: A Renaissance Spaniard in Eighteenth-Century New Mexico or Josef Diaz's *The Art & Legacy of Bernardo Miera y Pacheco: New Spain's Explorer, Cartographer, and Artist* are sure to be delighted that the map that Nando carries involves the gifted cartographer Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco. Miera had begun work on a version of the map, but he had died before getting very far. A cartographer, who had some training from Miera, completed the map. The legend, which had been separated from the map, was made by Miera's son Cleto. As the plot begins to thicken, Nando too becomes a mapmaker, attempting to accurately render the map's details in case something happens to the original.

Pamela Christie tells a very good story. Sabra Moore's drawings and Christie's well-researched text provide readers with a glimpse of a wrenching period of New Mexico's history that is too often forgotten. *Lizard's Kill* is certain to delight readers of *Desert Tracks*.

Alan Peters

Butterfield's Byway: America's First Overland Mail Route Across the West

Melody Groves

Charleston: The History Press, 2014.

ISBN: 9781626194878.

192 pages. Paperback, \$19.99.

The Butterfield Overland Mail Oxbow Route Through Missouri, 1858-1861

Kirby Sanders

Self published (CreateSpace), 2013.

ISBN: 1483932132978.

138 pages. Paperback, \$26.99-\$37.99.

The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico (2nd edition)

George Hackler

Self published (CreateSpace), 2012.

ISBN: 9781481193429.

234 pages. Paperback, \$33.95.

By the mid-19th century, U.S. expansion to the Pacific Coast mandated fast and regular overland passenger and mail service. In March 1857, Congress passed an overland mail bill, authorizing a mail contract for the conveying of letter mail on a twice-weekly basis. The next month the

U.S. Post Office Department advertised for bids for the route. After nine bids were submitted, the lucrative contract of \$600,000 a year was awarded to stage line entrepreneur John Butterfield of the John Butterfield Company.

It took a year for Butterfield to organize and equip the route. On September 15, 1858, the first Butterfield Overland Mail Company stagecoach left St. Louis, bound for San Francisco. The next day, a stagecoach left San Francisco for St. Louis. At the height of its operation, the Overland Mail Company employed approximately 2,000 men and maintained nearly 200 stage stations. The route went from St. Louis to Arkansas through Oklahoma to Texas, where it crossed the Red River at what is now Denison and then angled southwestward to Franklin (El Paso), and then west through New Mexico and Arizona to southern California and north up the Joaquin Valley to San Francisco. A spur ran from Memphis, Tennessee, and converged with the trail that originated in St. Louis at Fort Smith, Arkansas. The 2,795-mile route went by various names, including the Butterfield Line, Oxbow Route, the Butterfield Mail Route, the Great Southern Overland, and the California Overland Express.

Two types of coaches were used by the company: the regular "Concord" and a celerity wagon. The celerity wagon, designed specially by Butterfield's company, was light and fast. With its wide-rimmed wheels, low silhouette and light top, the celerity wagon was less likely to overturn than the Concord. It was used on the rougher part of the route from Fort Smith to Los Angeles. Teams of horses were used for part of the route, but because Indians were more interested in horses than mules, mule teams were employed between Fort Belknap, Texas, and Fort Yuma.

Stage stations were approximately 20 miles apart. In Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, the stations were usually constructed of logs. In Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California, the stations were made of adobe and stone. They were either home-owned stations that were rented to the company or company-owned stations. The number of Butterfield employees at each stop varied, depending on the danger of the locations. Passengers were served meals twice a day at a cost ranging from forty cents to one dollar. The wagons moved day and night. They averaged a speed of five miles per hour. The main purpose was to move the mail, but passengers could buy a one-way ticket for \$150.

Given the effort that is underway to designate the Butterfield Overland Trail as a National Historic Trail, it is somewhat surprising that there is no recent book that can serve as an introduction to the history of the trail. In *Butterfield's Byway*, Melody Groves seeks to remedy this deficiency. The book spans the time from the end of the U.S./Mexican War to the onset of the telegraph and the end of the Civil War. It covers the political history, the choice of Butterfield as the contractor, the construction of the line, the wagons and other equipment, the drivers, and the route itself.

Unfortunately, Groves' treatment is cursory. The book is divided into 32 short chapters, so that, for example, Butterfield himself is only accorded three brief pages. The longest chapter, which follows the route from St. Louis to San Francisco, is essentially a synopsis of Waterman Ormsby's book. There are no explanatory notes and the bibliography is limited to standard secondary sources. While those who are interested in a light read might enjoy the overview, readers will find greater in-depth discussion in past articles in *Desert Tracks* by Frank Norris, Gerald Ahnert, Steve Van Wormer, and the Trail Turtles.

In 2010, Kirby Sanders of Fayetteville, Arkansas, was selected by the National Park Service (NPS) to prepare a report delineating the location of the Butterfield route and stations. The 889-page work was designed to help determine the eligibility of the Butterfield Trail for National Historic Trail status. To establish the route and stations as closely as possible, Sanders carried out an extensive bibliographic survey of both archival and secondary sources. Following the completion of the report, Sanders broke the material into a number of shorter books, one for Missouri, another for Arkansas/Oklahoma, a third for Texas, one for New Mexico/Arizona, and separate volumes for southern and northern California. The books are titled *Butterfield Overland Mail Ox Bow Route Through Missouri 1858-1861*, with the appropriate state names replacing "Missouri."

The books begin with a 17-page introduction that gives a concise summary of the history of the Overland Mail and also a discussion of Sanders' methodology in determining the route and station sites. This section is identical in all six volumes. Each chapter that follows traces the trail from one station to the next in the given state, with color topo maps that show Sanders' best estimate for the actual route as well as the nearest roads that the traveler can use to access the sites.

GPS co-ordinates are given for all sites, and there are many color photographs that enhance the narrative. Sources include archival maps, books, and reports from the trail era, as well as almost all the recent books and current research on the topic.

Readers of *Desert Tracks* will be interested to learn that Sanders explicitly acknowledges the work of several Southern Trail Chapter members – Gerald Ahnert, George Hackler, Dan Talbot, and Chris Wray. These books comprise the most important recent compendium on the Butterfield Trail. They will serve as a useful trail guide for those attempting to follow the route. They will also provide a stimulus for further research to determine the routes and station sites.

Recently, George Hackler has published a second edition of his book *The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico* (2012), which differs from the first edition (2005) primarily in replacing the black-and-white photos with color versions. (There are also a few new photographs.)

The book begins with a historical introduction. Each chapter that follows is devoted to one of the stations, arranged in east-to-west order. There are numerous maps for the route between sites and also maps for the local vicinity of the stations. Floor plans are given for the different stations, and there are many photographs of the trail, the ruins of stations, and landmarks along the route. Relevant history for each station is also included. The book is well researched, and the bibliography is extensive. *The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico* is a delightful mix of Butterfield history, local history, and guidebook. It will be an essential addition to the bookshelves of our readers.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

**OCTA 2016 Spring Symposium:
Historic Trails of Southern Utah
St. George, Utah, March 18-20**

The symposium will focus on regional Native American history, early explorers, the Old Spanish Trail, and the Salt Lake/Los Angeles Wagon Road.

The conference schedule and online registration can be found at
www.eventville.com/catalog/eventregistration1.asp?eventid=1011757#billing.

Arizona's Sentinel Plain: Five Miles of Southern Overland Trail History

text and photos by Gerald T. Ahnert

There are few places where we can find as many remnants of the Southern Overland Trail as on Arizona's Sentinel Plain. On that mesa, sites and trail segments can be found that represent the trail's historical existence over the whole time period from 1846 to 1880. Evidence can be found on this five-mile section for the Mormon Battalion's effort to construct a wagon road and for the use of the route by many emigrant wagon trains headed to California. An emigrant massacre site and the common grave of the victims as well as many other graves can be found on the plain. A rare and well-used waterhole, evidence of progressive improvements to the road, and the 1873 military telegraph line can be seen there. The volcanic surface of the plain has preserved much of the original condition of the trail. In many places the ruts made by the iron-rimmed wagon and stagecoach wheels have left their mark. Hiking the trail on the plain – which is all on federal land – gives us insight into this historic time.

The main contributors to the formation of the tracks on the plain were the heavily loaded wagons of the emigrants. Individuals, primarily from the eastern states, traveled to Texas to join a wagon train to California. In Texas, up to 60 of them might pool their money to buy wagons and supplies, elect a wagon master, and hire a frontiersman as a guide to the west coast. Emigrants declared that the trail in western Arizona was the most difficult section on the entire route.¹ Some died on Sentinel Plain; their graves still dot the mesa.

The San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line preceded Butterfield by about a year. On the Arizona section this line used the old Southern Emigrant Trail, without making many improvements in the road. No new water sources were established and the only newly-constructed building was a crude station at Maricopa Wells. Butterfield consolidated the old trails in 1858 and built new sections with stage stations and water sources averaging 15 miles apart.

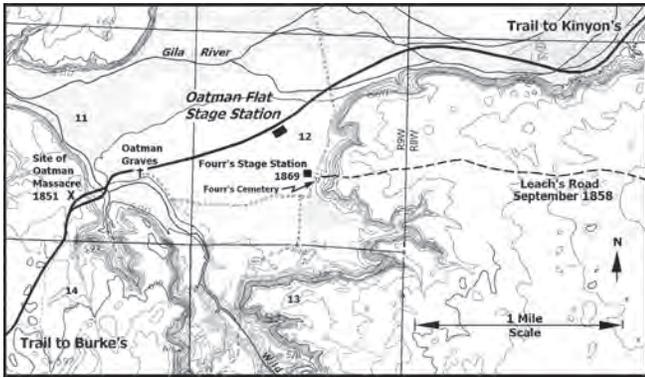
There were various attempts to establish an improved wagon road and water sources to aid emigrants on their way to settle the West. From 1857 to 1858, James B. Leach carried out this task. Some of his probable road improvements can be seen on the Sentinel Plain. His report states that he rolled

back the loose rocks to 18 feet on the straight sections and 25 feet on the bends of the existing trail.⁷ There are existing sections that meet these measurements. On the mesa to the east, bordering Oatman Flat, Leach's new trail can clearly be seen. This is one of the sections of his improved trail that was never actively used. Instead, Butterfield's Overland Mail Company decided to travel around the north base of the east mesa. This was probably because dragging the wagons through the deep sand, rather than going up the steep sides of the mesa, was the lesser of two evils. However, the trail then went up the steep sides of the mesa and over the Sentinel Plain mesa instead of staying along the south bank of the Gila. The reason for this was that along the north edge of the mesa, the Gila River runs through a deep narrow-sided canyon. The wagons and stages would have had a hard time finding a trail between the river and mesa.

The route on the Sentinel Plain remained approximately the same from 1846 to 1880. An exception was at Dead Man's Canyon, near the western end of Sentinel Plain. At that location, the canyon shows the ruts of two parallel trails, one that was direct and a second that used switchbacks to provide gentler slopes used by heavily loaded wagons.

Today, the Sentinel Plain has well-designated desert roads marked by the Bureau of Land Management to access the historic sites. As only 19 percent of the trail through Arizona is on federal land,² this mesa will be one of the most publically accessible in Arizona when the Butterfield Trail is designated by Congress as a National Historic Trail. The Resource Study Act is almost complete; hopefully, Congress will pass the bill for this designation in 2016.³

Sentinel Plain is approximately 85 miles from Yuma and about 30 miles from Gila Bend. The eastern end of the 5-mile trail on Sentinel Plain is at the 1851 Oatman Massacre site. (33.0025, -113.1601).⁴ For those with some desert driving experience, a two-wheel drive vehicle with good clearance is adequate to get to the plain for hiking. Road access to the site is by way of Exit 87 on I-8 at Sentinel. At 1.4 miles north of the exit on the Agua Caliente Road, Oatman Road is on the right. After 9 miles, this graded road leads to the BLM 8232 desert road, which forks to the left. After 0.8 miles there is another fork in the road marked by an iron grader blade. The trail to the right goes about 3/4 of a mile to the Oatman Massacre site. Any place in this area is a good place to park and hike the trail. The most important artifacts on



The Oatman Massacre site is next to the well-preserved trail on the eastern rim of Sentinel Plain. An excellent book for the details of the massacre is *The Blue Tattoo* by Margot Mifflin.⁶



the Southern Overland Trail are the preserved wagon ruts. This is a key reason why it is important not to drive off the designated desert roads – indeed, it is illegal to do so.

The hike starts in Oatman Flat at the common grave of the Oatman family. This is in the river basin, 1/3 of a mile from the massacre site, which is on the eastern rim of the mesa seen in the distance in the photo below. The six Oatmans who were massacred in 1851 were buried at this site because of the lack of overburden on the volcanic plain. This one-acre plot was patented in 1954 and is maintained by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Cultivated farm land now borders

At the extreme edge of the mesa is an old cross pecked into the volcanic rock.



the north side of the site. The trail is at the edge of the graves to the left. In March 2015 the cultivated land was expanded and road access to the site is no longer allowed.

The top half, which was the headstone for the grave of an unknown emigrant, sheared off and fell over the side, mixing with the rubble below. It can be found ten feet farther along the edge of the mesa. It probably originally had the date of the burial.

The trail climbs 70 feet in elevation to the east rim of Sentinel Plain and the Oatman Massacre site. In 1860 Butterfield stage passenger William A. Wallace wrote about this place: “We pass some spots that are very suggestive of violence – for instance, Oatman Flat, and the grave that received the family of that name. This Flat is a desert place at the top of a deep canyon, down which the horses plunge as if they would escape the place.”⁵



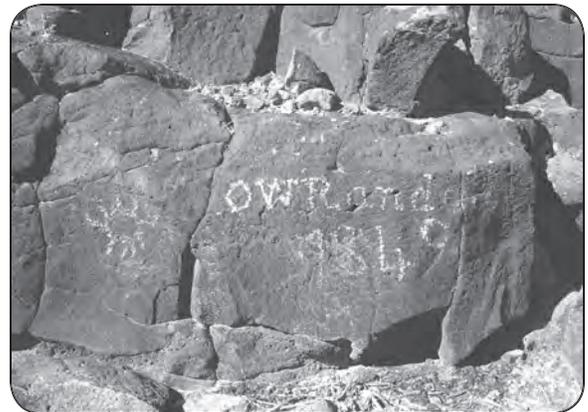
Between the footstone and headstone is a slab of volcanic rock that has broken away from the edge of the mesa. The resting place of this unknown pioneer is probably under the rocks and sand in the “V” crevasse that it forms with the side of the mesa. There is no overburden on the mesa anywhere near here to bury anyone.



About one-half mile from the massacre site is a well-preserved section of trail. Ten feet to the right of it is a narrower section of trail, also well-preserved. Both roads are edged by windrows of rocks. These roads were probably used by the Mormon Battalion, John Russell Bartlett’s boundary survey, the emigrants, the San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line, and Butterfield’s Overland Mail Company. The wider trail that is shown here may have been one of the sections that was improved by James B. Leach. In his government report, Leach stated that he widened the trail to 18 feet, which is exactly the distance between the windrows of this part of the trail.⁷



Used by many travelers, this water hole is about a mile from the east rim of the plain and about 1,000 feet from the trail. Rain was the source of water for the hole and hence water was not always available here.



A rock marked “O. W. Randall, 1849”⁸ is on the wall of the water hole. Some of the rocks nearby are also marked with petroglyphs, one of which can be seen to the left.

The study of artifacts along the route gives insight into the lives of those who traveled the trail. Research at some distance from the ruts is often required to find historical objects. Over the years, many artifacts have been picked up near the trail, but there is much to be discovered at more remote distances. Well off the trail, the mule shoe shown in the next photo was lost by some weary traveler who may not have known his loss. Mule shoes outnumber all other livestock shoes found along the trail by a ratio of at least 10 to 1.



Horseshoe nails are often seen along the trail. The unused nail at the top of the photo below may have been dropped by the military, as it has a maker's stamp. Such nails were usually made by companies near Troy, New York, for the military arsenal distributing center in Watervliet, New York. They were often transported in small wooden kegs. The small square nail's purpose is unknown, but it was probably used for repairs along the trail.



The upended volcanic rock shown below is probably a marker for an Indian trail leading to the water hole near the eastern edge of Sentinel Plain. When the volcanic rocks are in their natural position, the part that is above

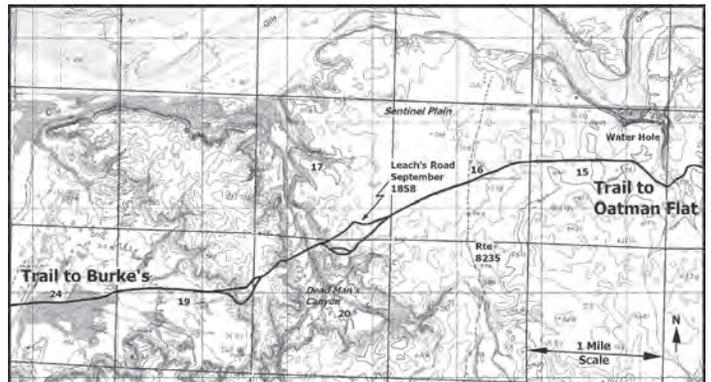


ground has a black appearance due to weathering. The part of the rock that is in the ground has a white layer of desert material hard-baked to the surface. Rocks that are turned over and that show a white surface are often a sign of human disturbance.

These rocks next to the trail are remnants of the 1873-1880 military telegraph line.⁹ Rock piles were needed to support the telegraph poles since there was insufficient overburden. The poles had to be cut from local sources, and consequently they were often short and crooked. The double twisted wires shown on top of the pile were used to splice the poles together.

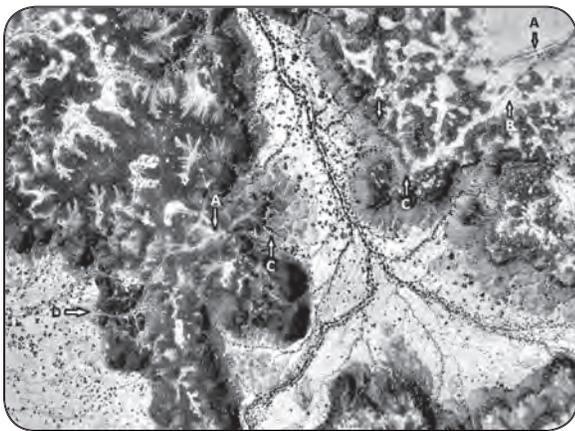


The map below shows the Southern Overland Trail on the west side of Sentinel Plain.¹⁰ The trail has two parallel courses entering and exiting Dead Man's Canyon. The straighter trail to the north was taken by Butterfield's stages and later by the 1873 military telegraph. The gentler sloping switchbacks to the south were probably used by emigrants with heavily loaded wagons. The width



of the northern section meets the specifications of the improvements given in Leach's report. Only 10 to 12 feet across, the switchbacks are much narrower. The trail exits the plain to the open desert on a gentile incline at GPS 32.9800,-113.2226.

The alternate trails can be seen entering and exiting Dead Man's Canyon in this NASA World Wind satellite photo in ortho mode. The symbol "A" marks the straight trail while "B" denotes the trail that leads to the switchbacks which are marked "C." The trail exits the mesa onto the open desert at "D."



This grave is well off to the side of the trail. Because it is small, it indicates a newborn or a very young child. There is some evidence along the trail of newly faked graves. People who fake graves want them to be easily seen, but this one is in a remote site.



There is a great deal of evidence for camps in the canyon. In the late afternoon, the glint of broken glass can be seen from the east rim. After the trail climbs the west rim of the canyon, it takes two parallel routes over the rough lava surface for about a mile and leaves the mesa on a gentle slope to the open desert. Most of the trail is so well preserved that it is not difficult to imagine that for 33 years this was the main "highway" across southern Arizona. Only time separates the imagination from the pioneers that followed this route.

Endnotes

1. *Report of the Post Office Department* contained in *The Texas Almanac for 1858*, 142.
2. Gerald T. Ahnert, *The Butterfield Trail and Overland Mail Company in Arizona, 1858-1861* (Canastota, NY: Canastota Publishing Co. Inc., 2011), 167.
3. Frank Norris, "Butterfield Overland Trail," in *Desert Tracks*, January 2015, 15-20; Aaron Mahr, "Interview with Aaron Mahr," in *Desert Tracks*, January 2015, 9.
4. Ahnert, *op. cit.*, 120.
5. William A. Wallace, "Letter from Mr. Wallace, The Trip Overland from Stanwix to Tucson," *Daily Alta California*, July 1, 1860.
6. Margot Mifflin, *The Blue Tattoo, The Life of Olive Oatman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). For an interview with Mifflin, see Deborah and Jon Lawrence, *Violent Encounters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011). See also Brian McGinty's *The Oatman Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).
7. James B. Leach, "Report upon the Pacific Wagon Roads Constructed under the Direction of the Hon. Jacob Thompson, Secretary of the Interior, in 1857-'58-'59, El Paso to Yuma Wagon Road," *The Executive Documents, Second Session, Thirty-Fifth Congress, 1858-'59*, 9-11, 74-97.
8. Randy Craig Randall, "The Quest of the O. W. Randall Rock," *Desert Tracks*, June 2014, 27-28. In this article, Randall states that he and his companions built a five-foot cairn near the inscription and placed in it a container with a few mementos. As there can be no disturbance to this archeologically sensitive site, this cairn has been removed.
9. *Report of the Secretary of War, Second Session of the Forty-Third Congress*, Volume 1, "Military Telegraph Line," Washington, 1874, p. 124-125, 175-176, 195-196.
10. Ahnert, 2011, *op. cit.*, 124.

Confusion about Texas Sections of Butterfield Trail

Tom Ashmore

At least three sections of the Butterfield Trail in Texas contain separate, parallel trails where the newer trail, which was typically established at a later time as a shortcut, is often confused with the original route. One such section has two trails heading south from Fort Chadbourne to Grape Creek Station, the next swing station.¹ A second section along the Middle Concho River contains both the original Butterfield route and a newer trail built as a shortcut by the military after the Civil War. In a third section, the trail splits at Centralia Draw in far west Texas, with the original Butterfield Trail taking the northerly route and a later post-Civil War stagecoach trail taking the southerly route. Both merge together at Castle Gap prior to crossing the Pecos River.

According to the Roscoe and Margaret Conkling, the stage leaving Fort Chadbourne headed “west for about a quarter mile to the crossing on Oak Creek where the stream may still be forded at normal flow . . . It then followed a winding course through the hills bordering the river” (344). The Conklings state that the trail crossed the Colorado River at the location of Buffalo Creek. The problem that I encountered when I attempted to follow the most prominent trail out of the fort was that it heads south, rather than west, to a very deep cut in the stream. It crosses a small bridge, of which only the abutments remain, and continues due south in a generally straight line, crossing the Colorado River at a site other than the location where the Conklings reported.

After crossing the Colorado River, this trail merges with the former trail on its way to the Grape Creek Station. This road is confirmed by multiple maps later produced by the military.²

The road described by the Conklings is hard to trace, but through an extensive search via Google Earth I was able to find it and follow it exactly as described.

These two different roads to the Colorado River were used during different time periods. The trail described by the Conklings was actually laid out by the military as a road from Camp Johnston on the North Concho River to Fort Chadbourne. After crossing the Colorado River, the military road heads more westerly over the hills, whereas the mail road diverges and heads south-southwest on its own course. The Butterfield Company must have used the military road at first since it was the only road in a forbidding land, but later they chose a more direct and level path to the Colorado River.

When the trail reaches the Middle Concho River west of Fort Concho it makes its way to the next swing stop, Johnson’s Station, by following the river west. Many locals and Texas state topographical maps show the Butterfield Trail not running alongside the river, but going in a straight line, essentially a half mile from the river. This trail was a shortcut built later under the orders of Colonel Benjamin Grierson while he was commander at Fort Concho.³ It was referred to at that time as the El Paso Mail Road or the Fort Stockton Road. It merged back into the old Butterfield Trail about five miles west of Johnson’s Station.

continued on page 23



Satellite image of the two roads through Johnson’s Station, west of Fort Concho.

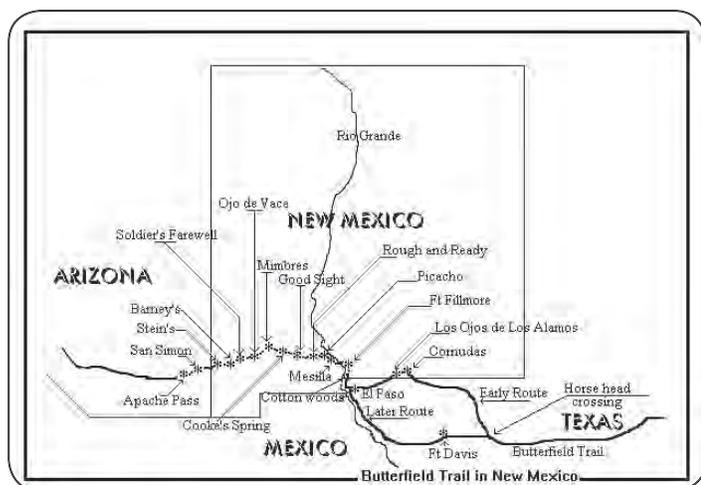
The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico

text and illustrations by George Hackler

[Editors' note: This article is a condensation of the talk that George Hackler gave at the Southern Trails Chapter's symposium in Silver City, New Mexico, in April 2015. Due to space limitations, we have not been able to include all of the photos and maps that were presented during the talk. Most of these can be found in Hackler's book *The Butterfield Trail in New Mexico*.]

Soon after California became a state in 1850, the rich and influential residents began lobbying the federal government for a subsidized overland mail service to replace and improve upon the slow, expensive, and undependable over-water route. Congress directed the Post Office Department to request proposals for moving mail in passenger coaches from St. Louis to San Francisco. John Butterfield pulled a group of investors together, organized the Overland Mail Company, and submitted a proposal. The proposal was accepted and Butterfield was awarded the contract in the summer of 1857. The company began surveying, building roads, and locating stations along the southern route, dictated by the Post Office Department. This road, as finished and improved by Butterfield, became the Interstate 10 of its day and remained as such until the railroad was completed in March 1881. The first stage going west departed Tipton, Missouri, on September 16, 1858. The first stage eastward departed San Francisco on September 15. These two stages passed each other in the dark of night in Guadalupe Pass, east of El Paso, on September 28.¹

Butterfield's contract stipulated that the trip from Saint Louis to San Francisco had to be accomplished in 25 days



or less and also that the mail be carried in passenger stage coaches. To travel 2,795 miles in 600 hours, coaches had to average 5 miles per hour. This average determined the frequency of the stops needed to change teams, drivers, and agents, to drop and pick up mail and passengers, to make repairs, and to allow for meals for the passengers. The coaches had to run day and night to utilize all 600 hours. Average road speeds had to be about 10 miles per hour. To maintain high average road speeds, teams had to run full out. That required change stations about every 20 miles.

For the first 11 months of operation, the Overland Mail coaches followed the wagon road up the east bank of the Pecos River from Horsehead Crossing, then across the river at a point just south of the New Mexico border. Here the trail followed Delaware Creek westward to the Guadalupe Mountains. This road passed through present-day Dell City, Texas, and then made a short loop up into New Mexico to reach two water sources: one at Thorn's Well and the other at Los Ojos de Los Alamos (Cottonwoods Springs).²

In August 1859 the new Postmaster General ordered Butterfield to change his route to the Comanche Springs/Davis Mountain/Rio Grande Valley road. This road crossed the Pecos at Horsehead Crossing, moved through west Texas to intercept the Rio Grande Valley at Fort Quitman, and then passed the communities of San Elisario and Socorro before finally arriving in Franklin (El Paso), Texas.³

After traversing the future site of Dell City, Texas, the original road looped up into New Mexico at the Cornudas Mountains, and on to the first station in New Mexico, Cornudas Station. The name was based on the fact that the rock formation looked like horns to early Spanish explorers.⁴ Although the water source at the station is called Thorn's Well, it is actually a cistern fed by run-off from the high overhanging rocks that collected in a sheltered grotto. Today a man-made modern cistern that has been constructed inside the grotto still collects water. The station was located 900 feet south of Thorn's Well, at the toe of a small limestone hill.

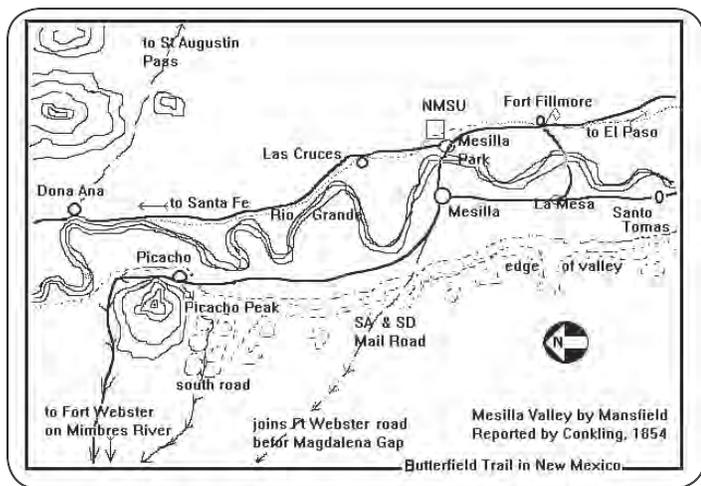
The road continued westward, bending to the south and circling the base of Alamo Mountain. The route and landscape over Otero Mesa have changed little in the years



Thorn's Well.

since the first Butterfield stage passed through. Herds of antelope are still a traffic hazard on the road. After seven miles, the road led to the Cottonwoods Springs station (*Los Ojos de Los Alamos*), on a gently sloping flat on the western flank of Alamo Mountain.⁵ The station was named for the springs and the cottonwood trees that grew there in the spring's runoff.⁶ The interior walls were eleven feet high, and aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. A five foot wall surrounded the main buildings. An *acequia* (irrigation ditch) ran through to the corral and to a shop with a tank inside. Part of the foundation can still be seen. The ruins are in good condition compared to those at other New Mexico stations. The wall locations are discernible, and some of remains of the walls are over six feet high.

Shortly after the road left the Cottonwood Springs station, it reentered Texas. It made its way to the Hueco Mountains, passing Sierra Alta on the north side and then went down on to the flat and into Hueco Tanks. It passed through the



middle of Hueco Tanks, went directly through the area that is now the El Paso International Airport, and then into El Paso, at that time called Franklin. In 1858, the Franklin station was on a large ranch with surrounding support buildings belonging to Franklin Coons. It was on the corner of what is now Texas and Overland Streets. Here Butterfield constructed a building complex with over 10 rooms of living quarters, a blacksmith shop, and a wagon repair shop. This location marked the exact midpoint of the road between St. Louis and San Francisco.

Continuing into New Mexico, the road departed Franklin through a rocky narrows and then proceeded to the area west of Anthony, on the New Mexico-Texas border. In 1858 the river was much farther west, and the area was a small ranch belonging to Henry Skillman. The road re-entered New Mexico a few miles west of town, headed east and then turned north across the sand hills.⁷



Butterfield Stage Station in Mesilla.

The coach stopped at the sutler's store at Fort Fillmore just long enough to throw off the Santa Fe mail and take on fresh mules. It was then off to La Mesilla, just across the river. The Rio Grande was on the east side of Mesilla in 1854. In 1858, Mesilla was the largest settlement on the entire route; there were some 3,000 people living in the area at the time. This was a designated meal stop, so passengers had time to rest and satisfy their appetites.⁸ The Butterfield station in Mesilla was just south of the El Patio bar on Main Street.

The road out of the Mesilla passed in front of San Albino's Church, made a sharp left turn, and then turned right on Calle del Norte. It crossed several *acequias* and then went

about five miles to the next station, Rancho Picacho. As the road left Picacho, it headed north and then made a sharp left-hand turn through Box Canyon on the north side of Picacho Peak. The road worked its way up through this narrow defile, onto the west mesa and to the next station stop, Rough and Ready. Today there is nothing above ground to indicate that there was ever a station there. Archaeologists have uncovered the foundation remains of two chimneys and the old station. In order to protect the remains and the history that was trapped under the walls when they fell inward, the ruins have been covered with a plastic sheet and hidden under several feet of sand and gravel.⁹

The road leaving the Rough and Ready station crossed an area that was later one of many bombing targets that were constructed in the desert during World War II. The one shown in the photograph below was built almost on top of the Butterfield Trail.

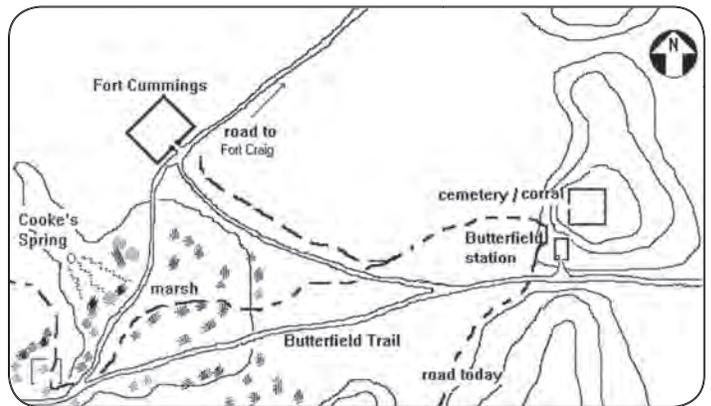


World War II bombing target. The dark straight line of plant growth crossing the left hand side of the bull's eye is the Butterfield Trail.

The road continued west through a geological feature called the Magdalena Gap and then went around the base of Massacre Peak, named after the numerous Indian depredations that took place there. The next station was Good Sight, possibly so-named because of the long view from the station across a grassy plain to the hills that hide the next station. Nothing remains today of the old station.¹⁰ The road dipped down and across the grass-covered plain on the way to Cooke's Spring. It took 61 minutes to travel the 14 miles between Cooke's Spring and Good Sight – an average of almost 14 miles per hour. To maintain that

average, the stage coach had to move at 20 miles per hour on the best part of the road across the plain.

The next station was named for Colonel Phillip St. George Cooke, who had passed this way with the Mormon Battalion 12 years earlier than the Overland Mail Company. The remains of the station's foundation are clearly visible on the top of a little saddle next to the cemetery. The spring itself was a big muddy marsh next to the roadway. In order to try to control the many Indian depredations that took place in the vicinity, Fort Cummings was built in 1863, two years after the overland mail ceased using the road.



As the road left the area of Cooke's Spring it entered a three-mile long, rocky, narrow defile called Cooke's Canyon. There are perhaps 150 to 200 graves in this canyon, accumulated from years of Indian attacks and ambushes. The road passed near many petroglyphs, including the one of Kokopelli in the photograph below.¹¹



Kokopelli petroglyph on the road west of Cooke's Spring.

After climbing up out of Cooke’s Canyon, over a ridge, and dropping down into Starvation Draw, the road beared to the northwest across the plains and then down into the Mimbres Valley. The Mimbres River is often dry at this location. Butterfield built a large station here to take advantage of the good grazing and the water. The station was almost 300 x 250 feet square, with two 90 x 90 buildings against the north wall. The west corner building contained a blacksmith shop, wagon repair shop, and a water tank. The east corner structure was divided into four or five rooms and used as living quarters.



Road to Soldiers Farewell.

As the road departed Cow Springs, it ran directly between the two peaks pictured here. The smaller peak on the left is Bessie Rhoads Mountain; the taller peak on the right is Soldiers Farewell Hill. The Soldiers Farewell Station was located a couple of miles past the middle of the gap. The name “Soldiers Farewell” may derive from an incident that occurred in 1856. Three companies of dragoons, on their way to the presidio in Tucson, camped here near the foot of the mountain. During the night, a single shot was heard. The men woke up and looked about. They saw nothing amiss and went back to sleep. The next morning they found a young private named Gilbert dead from a self-inflicted gunshot. The commanding officer simply reported that he committed suicide due to intemperance, but the effect on the soldiers who had to bury him in this lonely place probably led them to coin the name “Soldiers Farewell.”¹⁴



The large cottonwood trees pictured here mark a spring that served the Mimbres station.

The road crossed the Mimbres River and then worked its way a bit south as it climbed up and out of the Mimbres Valley. It then headed west to intercept the road to Janos, Mexico.¹² In the vicinity of this road, water emerges from the ground and flows on the surface of the desert. The area had been long used by the Indians and by Spanish and Mexican miners coming down the Santa Rita area on their way to Janos.

Butterfield built a station at Cow Springs (*Ojo de Vaca*). The spring today is surrounded by a large working ranch. Currently, windmills pump the aquifer so that the spring still runs out on the ground and is captured in a rock dam behind the ranch house.¹³



Ruins of Soldiers Farewell Station.

Here, looking back at Soldiers Farewell and Bessie Rhoads Mountains, one can see the corner of the station. The massive lower walls and corners were typical of most Butterfield stations, which were built like small fortresses.



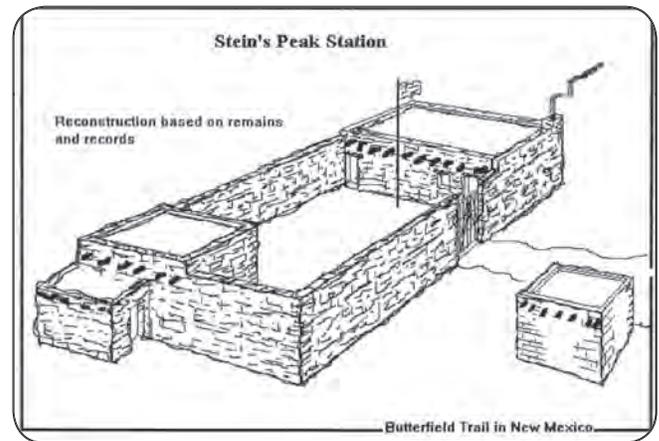
Ranch at Cow Springs.

Departing Soldiers Farewell, the road passed through the edge of the Langford Mountains. The next station, Barney's, gave the passengers a chance to stretch their legs. All evidence of Barney's adobe station, which was somewhere in the Lordsburg area, rapidly disappeared. The area on either side of Lordsburg is covered with playas or lake bottoms. These playas collect and hold water after a significant rain fall. Indeed, one traveler described the road to Barney's as a highway until it got wet – then it became a quagmire.¹⁵

Over the years, the abundance of water at the station helped destroy all evidence of the adobe structure, and also helped confuse the location of the station. Today there are conflicting ideas about where this station actually was. A topographic map will show the Butterfield Trail and Barney's Station in the far north east corner of section 2, T23 , R18 on the east edge of Lordsburg. This may or may not be the correct location.¹⁶ The Powell and King map of 1883, however, shows Barney's to be in the far northeast corner of section 1, and not in section 2. Janaloo Hill, whose family owned the ghost town of Shakespeare, thought that the station might have been located in the north corner of section 34.¹⁷ Jim Parson of Silver City believes that the station was located on the trail in section 1.

Leaving Barney's heading west, the trail passed between two of the large playas on the north side of what is today Interstate 10. The Butterfield Trail went right along the top of a dry ridge that divided the playa, and then straight to the entrance of Doubtful Canyon – so named by early travelers because it was doubtful whether you would make it through. There is a station here at the base of Stein's Peak. The peak was named for Major Enoch Steen, and the station was named after the peak. Later mapmakers thought that westerners were mispronouncing the name, and so they changed the spelling from "Steen" to "Stein." The remains of the station are one of the best examples of a Butterfield rock fortress.

The reconstruction of the station shown here gives us a good picture of what the station would have looked like when it was operating. There was a flag at every Butterfield station. The rooms at top right were living quarters, while those at the lower left were for harness and feed storage. The stage stopped here long enough for the passengers to eat. Having started from Mesilla, the west bound coach arrived here in the dark, and the driver was in a hurry to push on through Doubtful Canyon into what is today Arizona.



Endnotes

1. Waterman L. Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1942) 75.
2. *Ibid*, 69.
3. Austerman, Wayne R., *Sharps Rifles and Spanish Mules: The San Antonio-El Paso Mail, 1851-1881* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000) 148.
4. Conkling, Roscoe P. and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1947) Vol. I, 398.
5. Ormsby, 76.
6. Conklings, vol I, 402.
7. Frazer, Robert W., ed., *Mansfield on the Condition of the Western Forts 1853-54* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963) 54.
8. Thomas, David G., *La Posta: From the Founding of Mesilla, to Corn Exchange Hotel, to Billy the Kid Museum, to Famous Landmark* (Doc 45 Publishing, 2013) 39.
9. Joe Ben Sanders, interview.
10. Conkling, 112.
11. Couchman, Donald, *Cooke's Peak - pasaron por aqui: A Focus on United States History in Southwestern New Mexico* (Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces District, 1990) 39, 170.
12. Greene, Richard, "Trail Turtle's Spring 2013 Mapping Trip: The Mimbres River Crossing" (*Desert Tracks*, June 2013) 24.
13. Conkling, vol. II, 112.
14. Research contributed by Berndt Kuhn of Stockholm, Sweden.
15. Conkling, vol. II, 28.
16. *Ibid*, 126.
17. See "A Tour of Shakespeare with Manny Hough," *Desert Tracks*, January 2009, 16.

Motorcycling the Butterfield Trail

text and photos by Don Matt

[Editors' Note: In the late summer of 2004, Don Matt of Berryville, Arkansas, and his brother Paul rode on their motorcycles from Tipton, Missouri, to Fort Bowie, Arizona. The details of the trip can be found in Don and Paul Matt's blog, www.blogger.com/profile/16320109117050086568. The

description of the trip and the accompanying photos and GPS coordinates that are given in the blog provide an excellent supplementary guide for anyone traveling the eastern half of the Butterfield Trail. Indeed, Kirby Sanders used the Matts' blog as a source for determining locations in his study of the trail, *Butterfield Overland Mail Ox Bow Route*. (See the accompanying review of Sanders' book.) In the

years that followed the trip, the Matts continued to research the trail in northwest Arkansas and have added sections to the blog on their findings about particular Butterfield stations. In what follows, Don Matt reminisces about the trip, focusing on a few memorable experiences that occurred along the way.]

In 2003 my brother Paul became interested in the Butterfield Trail. On one of his many western tours, Paul had purchased a copy of Waterman Ormsby's book *The Butterfield Overland Mail*. He proceeded to praise Butterfield's amazing enterprise until I too became interested. After I learned about it, I began noticing the name "Butterfield" on area roads, shopping malls, and even retirement homes near my house in northwest Arkansas. I had always associated stagecoaches with the Wild West, but what did Missouri have to do with stagecoaches and what did these references to the Butterfield in Springdale, Arkansas, mean? This inspired me to ask, "Where exactly did this mail route go?" It was quite a revelation to discover that it actually started in Tipton, Missouri, went through



Don Matt.

Springfield, then near our backyards in northwest Arkansas on its way to Fort Smith, and eventually on to San Francisco. Suddenly, the history of the old West was alive and breathing right behind the drab highways outside our door. It came through here? Exactly where? And so with the Internet as a tool and Google as my guide, I set out to put history back into the asphalt and crowded cities of my immediate surroundings.

I have always been interested in knowing about early roads – to connect to the past and to the people that first chose to live there gives a place meaning. Wherever possible, Butterfield's route often followed existing roads developed by the earlier settlers. These roads often followed the pathways of the Native Americans. These pathways in turn tracked the movements of the game that sustained them and the pipelines of trade and commerce among the earliest inhabitants.

Paul and I slowly developed an understanding of the general locations of the various Butterfield stations in Arkansas and Missouri. The road the stagecoaches took was hard to determine in those early days of our research. Butterfield had over 200 stations located along the route to provide fresh horses and make repairs. They also served as post offices for the mail and way stations for feeding the livestock, the drivers, and the intrepid travelers. We knew only the station names and the listed distances between them. Although Butterfield typically chose existing roads, he was also known to develop shortcut routes by building his own roads where he felt the time and expense would be returned by making the trail more efficient and insuring the expeditious delivery of the mail.

My brother and I began to chart out a motorcycle tour of the historic road from Tipton, Missouri, as far west as Fort Bowie, Arizona. In 2004, we mounted our motorcycles and tried to follow as close as we could the roads that would approximate the original route.

The selection of Tipton as the eastern terminus of the Overland Mail's stagecoach route was predicated on the fact that the town was at the time the western terminus of the Pacific Railroad. Butterfield's first stage run was on Thursday, September 16, 1858. The mail left St. Louis at 8:00 a.m. on a train and arrived in Tipton at 6:00 p.m. The town was only a few months old and already had a

population of about 200, all of whom apparently turned out to meet the train – although without much fanfare. It took just nine minutes to transfer the mail and passengers onto the waiting stage. The mail was loaded onto a Concord Coach driven by John Butterfield’s son, John Butterfield, Jr. Butterfield was himself a passenger as far as Fort Smith, Arkansas, as was the only through passenger on the first Overland Mail run, Waterman L. Ormsby.

Paul and I arrived in Tipton about noon on August 30, 2004. We had little trouble locating the old part of town.



Tipton City Hall and Police Station. The marker leaning against the wall commemorates the Butterfield Overland Mail.

In 1858 this area would have been a dusty plaza. The site of the old train station is now the Tipton City Hall and Police Station; the train tracks are visible from this structure. In front of the building you can see a large stone marker on the lawn, dedicated to the founder of Tipton. Behind it, leaning against the wall, was a grand discovery: a concrete marker commemorating the Butterfield stage line. Apparently, a number of these concrete markers were erected at the stations in Missouri as part of a centennial celebration in 1958. Trying to locate them became a delight and an immense help in deciphering the location of the old route. The people at the Tipton City Hall were very helpful, and we found a book there that proved quite useful, though not entirely accurate: “*The Butterfield Run*” through the Ozarks by Phillip Steele.¹

The first stop after Tipton for the Concord coach carrying John Butterfield and the mail was Shackelford’s Station. Earlier, my information had led me to believe that Shackelford’s was seven miles south of Tipton and that the stage went through Versailles, Missouri, which was the beginning of a trail that had been established in 1836 to Fayetteville, Arkansas. (In Arkansas, this was referred to as the Springfield Road.) We eventually discovered that Butterfield utilized a portion of this older road, picking it up farther south at Cole Camp, Missouri, and then generally following it all the way to Fayetteville. Just as we were getting ready to leave I found a reference that stated: “This locality is called Syracuse and is principally owned by T.R. Brayton and Mr. Schackelford, who have done much to establish the route through this section.”² Syracuse is a small town on the map about 6.5 miles west of Tipton and on the rail line. It made sense that the mail route would follow the soon-to-be extended rail route in order to take advantage of ongoing improvements that were sure to come with the rail line.

From station to station we picked our way south, looking for the concrete markers along our best guess of the route. Finding the trail was aided by the fact that Butterfield created new connections between stations that followed the shortest point-to-point routes at the time. Because of this, when the telegraph was established after 1860, the lines followed the more direct routes that Butterfield established. This led to many of the roads in the area being named for the telegraph; on current maps they are known as the “Old Wire Road.” During the Civil War, these routes became critical in troop movements for both sides and many battle sites were located along the trail as well. Battle locations, small towns, and obvious river and creek fords acted as beads of information that we could string together to recreate the path.

Whenever possible we stuck to the closest route. Exploring the old Butterfield Trail on motorcycles had a compelling logic to it. Our senses were filled with the beauty and rhythms of the open road. The sights and sounds carried us through the thin veil of time that separates us from a past that was filled with the same sun, dust, and rich smells of the countryside as today. In Missouri and Arkansas, we often found ourselves winding down secondary gravel roads through forests and by fields on bikes that were better equipped for the highway. Some of the roads through

the Ozark Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas were considered the roughest in the entire 2,800 mile route. After riding through this portion of the route, Hiram Rumfield, assistant treasurer of the Overland Mail Company, wrote to his wife: “The man who can pass over this route a passenger in one of the Overland Mail Coaches, without experiencing feelings of mingled terror and astonishment, must certainly be oblivious to every consideration of personal safety.”²³

We traveled the back roads, marking off the stations one by one. Whenever possible we looked for actual evidence of stations. For the most part, all that remained were a few scattered foundation stones. An exception is in Springdale, Arkansas, not far from my home. There the Fitzgerald Station is marked by the only remaining Butterfield stables still standing. Since our visit, it has been placed on the National Historic Register.



Original Butterfield barn at Fitzgerald’s in Springdale, Arkansas.

For the most part we did not spend much time on this trip looking for specific sites and remained content to approximate the trail. Locating the trail resulted in some very low mileage days following back country roads that were punctuated by pleasant encounters and beautiful scenery. One such encounter was near Hogeys, Arkansas. Paul and I found Hogeys to be without distinction, but just beyond, at a cross roads near the Illinois River, was a most remarkable house from the time period of interest. It seemed abandoned. I went into a convenience store across the way to inquire. It was here that I had an epiphany of sorts about the nature of our quest.

I am not very comfortable talking to strangers, and I feel a kind of terrified ineptitude when I go into small out-of-the-way rural stops. I open my mouth to speak plainly, but



Historic house at Hogeys, Arkansas.

find myself relying on long sentences and arcane phrases that degenerate into inane mumbling. Worse, I even find myself affecting a poor approximation to the dialect and cadence of the folks I am talking to. This can be disastrous. Their sharp eye and no-nonsense practicality size me up in a moment, and I am doomed to a justified appraisal as a lunatic, or worse, a blow hard.

When I walked into the convenience store, there were several men standing about whose hard glances put me immediately into a defensive reticence. But this time, instead of blustering, I made a simple statement of my interests and asked about the old house. I explained our quest to find the Butterfield stations and asked if they were familiar with the old stage line. What I noticed here, as well as many times after, was a softening and even a genuine glow at the mention of the Butterfield. You could actually see them look away into their inner vision and down that long road that connected their sense of place with a sense of unfolding history. I wasn’t just asking for directions to the next town. I was asking about their home and their roots and with a genuine interest, acknowledging the value of where they lived. It is with some emotion that I remember this moment when the image of rough, unforgiving men in out-of-the-way places was replaced by the sight of kindness and encouragement behind those very same faces. This reaction, based on our shared mutual interest, was very common in the small nearly forgotten places along the way.

When I asked them about the house and wondered if it could be Park’s Station, they smiled and shook their heads.

They were sure it wasn't. Park's Station was located several miles farther south – it was the first house north of the new bridge on the west side just before the descent of a long hill. The station, which is no longer there, is on land owned by Mr. Philpot. The old structure across the highway that I had asked about is still occupied. It had once been located closer to the creek, but since it kept getting flooded, the entire building was moved to higher ground. I thanked them and left amazed.

Hogeye was not a scheduled stop but was known as an opportunity to supply the passengers with distilled spirits served up from brown earthenware jugs. It is perhaps a measure of Waterman Ormsby's degree of professionalism and tact that he chose to leave out such an indelicate detail as the need to fortify oneself with mountain moonshine. Either that or, since his was the very first run, the old widow woman that was said to serve the draught had not as yet measured the value of such libations to unsuspecting passengers. For you see, it was not until just beyond the Hogeye stop that the road turned to nightmare of very rough travel over the Boston Mountains.

We travelled on to Fort Smith, along country roads in Oklahoma and Texas, to New Mexico. **[Editors' Note:** The Matt's entire journey is described in detail in Don Matt's web-based blog "The Great Butterfield Stage Expedition."]

When we are on motorcycles, Paul and I disdain drinking spirits, but during our trip we made an exception at La Mesilla, New Mexico. We arrived in Mesilla late in the afternoon, after a day that included 60 miles of a back road that had changed little since the days of the Butterfield. The station site is in a building complex known as La Posta. We strolled in and walked past a line of patrons waiting patiently for a table. We were mostly seeking the ambience, but we found ourselves eventually standing in

front of a classic western-style bar. Our incontrovertible rule that beer was relegated to non-driving hours begged for reconsideration. We sauntered up to the bar, which is the only way one can appropriately approach a bar in the Wild West, and took a standing position. We inquired of the barkeep if he could accommodate us with a beer. He was most agreeable, so, in deference to our commitment to sobriety, we ordered lite beer.



La Posta Restaurant in Mesilla, New Mexico.

Sipping the beer from our frosty mugs, we asked him if he could enlighten us to the whereabouts of the actual Butterfield station. With a dramatic sweep of his arm, he pointed to a stained glass window behind him. "This, he said, was the original entrance to the station." In amazement, we stood with froth dripping from our moustaches. To our left was a beautiful painting of a stagecoach coming into the station that indeed depicted the very place where we stood.

There is something about a moment like this that cannot be improved by discourse. Paul, being the sage that he is, knew enough to keep it sacred. We drank our beers in silence. One beer had been our agreed-upon transgression, so we tipped the barkeep and made our way to the door. A day later we completed our mission with a walk into historic Fort Bowie.

We spent a good deal of time in later years traveling to the stations in Missouri and Arkansas, sleuthing out their exact location and looking for any physical evidence left behind. We were spurred into this motorcycle journey by Ormsby's account, but we find that long after the trip the lure of the Butterfield Trail remains.



The Butterfield Trail, now a gravel road, in Texas.

Endnotes

1. Steele, Phillip W., *"The Butterfield Run" through the Ozarks: A History of John Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. and its Route through the Missouri & Arkansas Ozarks* (Self published, 1985).
2. Ormsby, Waterman L., *The Butterfield Overland Mail* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1942) 13.
3. Rumfield, Hiram S., *Letters of an Overland Mail Agent in Utah*, Archer Butler Hulbert, ed. (Worcester, Mass. : American Antiquarian Society, 1929). Quoted in *Wilson's Creek, Pea Ridge, and Prairie Grove: A Battlefield Guide with a Section on the Wire Road*, by Earl J. Hess, Richard W. Hatcher III, William Garrett Piston, and William L. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).



Don and Paul Matt on their motorcycles.

Confusion about Texas, continued from page 13

Farther west, the trail comes to Centralia Draw. The Butterfield Trail heads almost due west from this location, but a post-Civil War stagecoach company, named after its owner Ben Ficklin, chose a new route south and then west. Both trails again merged before arriving at the only pass to the Pecos River, Castle Gap.

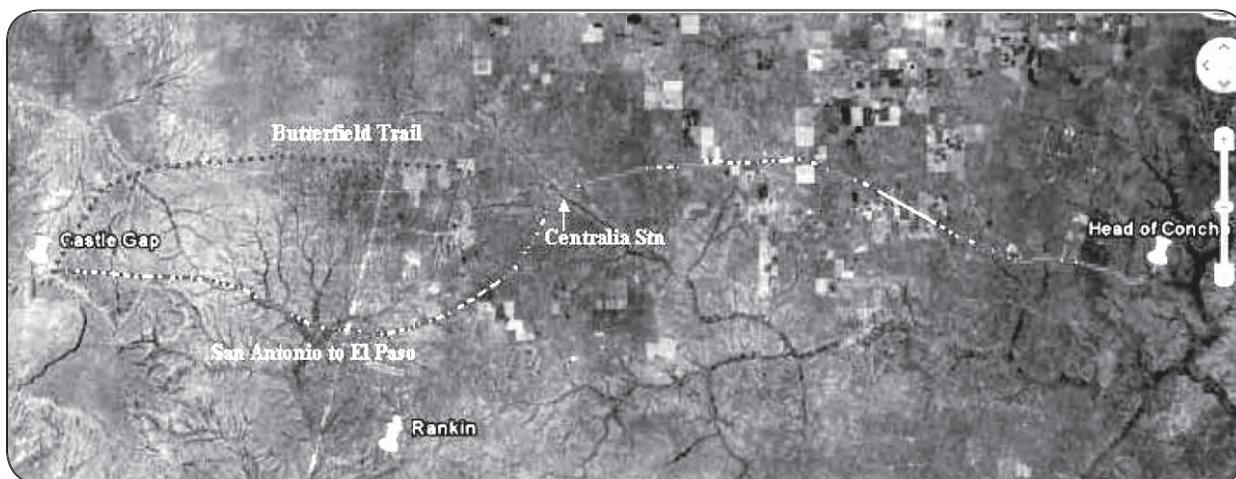
Many people in the area confuse the newer trails with the original Butterfield Trail. The newer trails are more prominent because they were used for a longer period of time and by many more wagons than the original sections. Quite a bit of research and Google Earth imagery interpretation is needed to resolve the confusion about these sections of the trail.

Endnotes

1. At swing stations, the stage stopped only long enough to exchange teams of horses or mules. At home stations, the travelers also had time for a hasty meal.
2. These maps include a hand-drawn map in the author's private collection made by Brvt. Lt. Col. E. F. Strang during his survey from Fort Stockton to Fort Chadbourne, October to November, 1967, and a compilation of military maps from the period 1871-1875 that were produced by E. D. Dorchester in 1927.
3. After the Civil War, Benjamin Grierson organized the 10th U.S. Cavalry, one of the Buffalo Soldier regiments. He was commander at Fort Concho from 1875-1878.

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Satellite image of the two trails running west from Centralia Draw.

Finding the Site of Ewell's Station

text and illustrations by Tracy DeVault

In 1931, Roscoe and Margaret Conkling, while doing research on the Butterfield Overland Mail line, visited the site of Ewell's Stage Station. The station was located on a section of the Butterfield Trail that runs between Apache Pass and Dragoon Pass in eastern Arizona. While it is likely that others have visited the site in the intervening years, no written record of such a visit has ever been found. For well over 20 years, modern trail historians and artifact hunters have searched in vain for the site. From time to time, I have thought that attempting to locate this long-lost stage station would be an interesting project.

Last April, Larry Ludwig, the historian at the Fort Bowie National Historic Site, showed me a photo of a large pile of rocks taken by Roscoe and Margaret Conkling.¹ On the back of the photo, taken on June 7, 1931, was a note saying, "Old Station ruins between Dragoon and Apache, Ewell's Station, Arizona." The rock pile was characterized in the Conklings' book² as "fireplace foundation stones." I had never seen the photo before. (Mike Volberg and I later obtained a copy from the Arizona Historical Society [AHS] in Tucson.) I decided that if the rock pile was still there, the site could be found.

The Butterfield Overland Mail started service in September 1858. Through present-day Arizona, Butterfield stages mostly followed the route used

by the predecessor line, the San Antonio-San Diego Mail Line (SA & SD). From Apache Spring, this line traveled 9 miles west³ to Dos Cabezas Spring and then 26 miles to Dragoon Spring. Butterfield used a more direct route from Apache Pass to an intervening station called Ewell's Station and from there on to Dragoon Pass. Located a little over 12 trail-miles west of the Apache Pass Stage Station, Ewell's was a "swing station" where horses were changed but meals were not provided.

No water was available at this site so the Butterfield employees had to send a water wagon four miles north to Dos Cabezas Spring (soon to be known as Ewell's Spring) to obtain the station's water supply. The water from the spring was stored in an earthen cistern near the station building.

The Butterfield Overland Mail ceased operations in Arizona in March 1861. With no one to bring water to the station, the direct route from Apache Pass to Dragoon Pass was soon abandoned.⁴ Union troops traveling east from California to engage Confederates or Indians often stopped at Ewell's Station on their way to Apache Pass. They, too, had to send to Ewell's Spring for water.

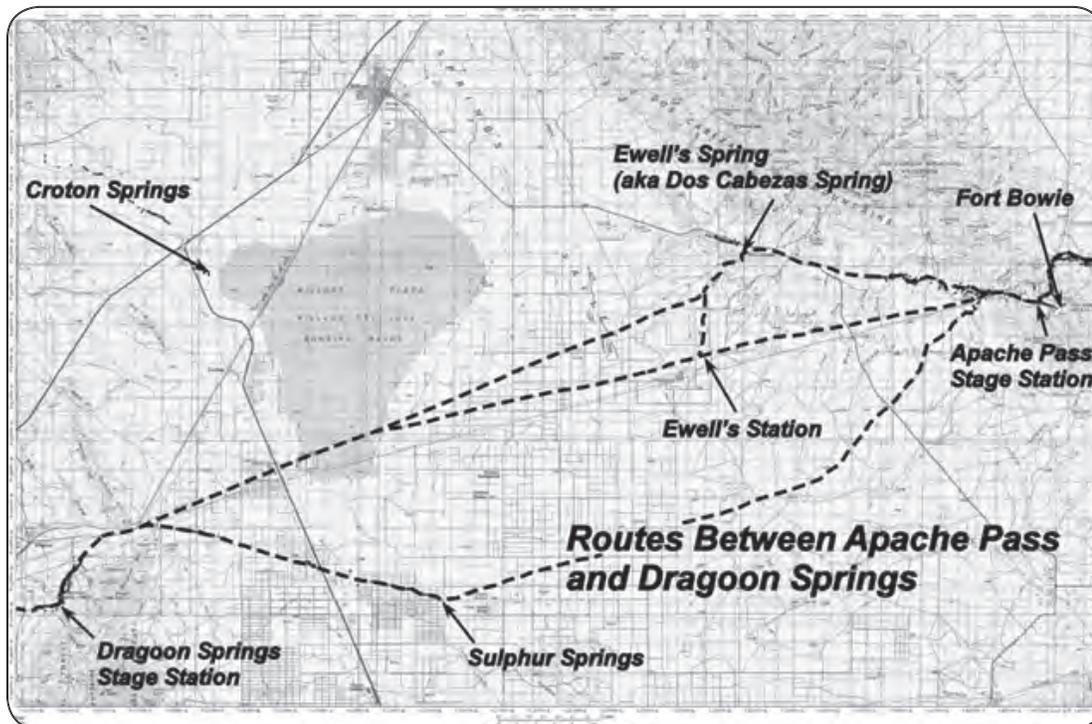
Mike Volberg and I began to research Ewell's Station. Since the location of Dos Cabezas Spring/Ewell's Spring does not appear on any modern maps, we also began research to learn the actual location of Ewell's Spring. [See the accompanying article "Finding Ewell's Spring."]

The Conklings' book gives the following information on Ewell's Station:

The Butterfield road did not go to Dos Cabezas Springs, later known as Ewell's Springs, located a half mile west of the present town of Dos Cabezas. These springs were a watering place on Bartlett's trail⁵ in August, 1851, and also a station on the Birch's route⁶ in 1857. The Butterfield road instead, diverged from Bartlett's trail at a point west of the Pass and followed a course almost due west across the great flat plain to Ewell's, the next station, which was located about five miles southwest of Dos Cabezas Springs, thus effecting a saving of nearly six miles.⁷



The Conklings' photo of the ruins of Ewell's Station.
courtesy Arizona Historical Society



have not found a single contemporaneous report of a Butterfield stage stopping at Ewell's Station during the time that the Butterfield Overland Mail Line was in operation. We did, however, find the following mention of Ewell's printed in a letter in the *Daily Missouri Republican* on June 3, 1860":

An express, just in from the Rio Mimbres, reports that a pack train of twenty-four mules, heavily loaded with "panocha," or Mexican sugar, from Sonora, was

attacked by the Apaches, near the Hanover Copper Mines, worked by Messrs. HINKLE and THIBAUT, on the morning of the 20th – five persons killed, and the whole train captured. The same Indians have also succeeded in stealing all the mules from Ewell Station, Overland Mail Company, as well as from Dragoon Springs Station.

The location that Gerald Ahnert gives for Ewell's Station in his recent book was an estimate based on the information contained in the Conklings' book and several reports that said Ewell's Station was four miles from Ewell's Spring.¹¹ For his estimate, Ahnert also utilized a report by Lieutenant Colonel Clarence E. Bennett. In 1865 Bennett led a party from Fort Bowie past Ewell's Station and on to Maricopa Wells. In Bennett's entourage was a wagon with an odometer. This enabled Bennett to give point-to-point distances to the nearest foot. The distance from Fort Bowie to Ewell's Station was given as 13 miles and 887 feet. If we knew the exact route of this section of the Butterfield Trail, this mileage would give us the exact location of the station. Unfortunately, the Trail Turtles have never been able to find any trace of the trail between Apache Pass and Dragoon Pass. It was not used a lot and much of the western end of this trail section has been destroyed by development and agriculture.

Ewell's, the next station, fifteen miles west of Apache Pass, was located in what is now Cochise County, in Township 15, Range 26, Sections 13-248.

This station was established early in 1859, and named for Captain R. S. Ewell, First Dragoons, who was one of the founders of Fort Buchanan, and in charge of that post in 1860. He afterwards became a Lieutenant-General with the Confederacy.

Ewell's was a change station established to provide a relay on the long forty-mile stage between Apache Pass and Dragoon Springs. A tank supplied by water from Dos Cabezas Springs provided water for the station.

The station building and corral erected on the flat, yucca-studded plain, on the south side of the road, were built of adobe. Nothing but the chimney foundation stones and evidences of the earth-made tank remain to indicate the site today. (139-140)

Ewell's station does not appear in the first reports by Butterfield Overland Mail travelers.⁹ Although the Conklings' book states that Ewell's Station was established in early 1859, I have not located a primary source that tells when Ewell's was established.¹⁰ I also

Mike Volberg began to search the internet and various archives for information on Ewell's Station. While the Butterfield Station was called Ewell's Station and the spring from which water was obtained for the station was called Ewell's Spring, there was also for a time a community called Ewell's Spring that eventually became known as the community of Dos Cabezas, and there was a much later stage station located at Ewell's Spring that was called the Ewell's Spring Station. This later station supported a regional stage line that was used to transport people from Dos Cabezas to Willcox. Often, when we encountered a reference to Ewell's Station or Ewell's Spring, we could not tell which Ewell's the reference was talking about.

Here is an example of this confusion. In his book on Cochise,¹² Edward R. Sweeney describes Lieutenant George Bascom's march from Fort Buchanan to Apache Pass to confront Cochise regarding the kidnapping of Felix Ward.

Bascom's command marched slowly into Chokonon territory toward Apache Pass. According to one account, he followed the hostiles' trail, but this seems dubious in that the Ward boy was later reported to have been taken to the Black Mountains in Western Apache territory. Nonetheless, Bascom continued across Sulphur Springs Valley, heading for the narrow defile between the Dos Cabezas and Chiricahua mountains. He probably spent the evening of February 2 [1861] at the Ewell Springs stage station, some fifteen miles west of Apache Pass. (148)

At first this appears to say that Bascom spent the evening at Butterfield's Ewell's Station. However, anyone approaching Apache Pass from the Ewell's Station area realizes that the pass is absolutely not a "narrow defile." The pass where Ewell's Spring is located, however, is an extremely narrow gap. Also, as far as we can tell, there was no stage station belonging to any stage line located at Ewell's Spring in 1861.¹³ So, did Bascom's command follow the Butterfield Overland Road through Ewell's Station, where water would have been limited, and, the next morning, travel on to the broad expanse of Apache Pass? Or did he follow the SA & SD route to the "narrow defile" where Ewell's Spring was located, spend the night where water was available, and then travel on to Apache Pass the next morning? The distances are about the same in either case.

In late April 2015, Mike Volberg, Richard Greene, and I made our first visit to the area. We decided to systematically survey the area on foot. We planned to search an area of about two square miles that I felt sure contained the Ewell's Station site. In addition to my estimate of the location, we had possible locations sites proposed by Gerry Ahnert,¹⁴ Dan Talbot,¹⁵ and Kirby Sanders.¹⁶ We visited all four locations and found nothing that looked like the Conklings' rock pile. The area had been subdivided into 40-acre ranchettes so that we would have to get permission from many land owners to explore their property. The vegetation was also denser than I had imagined. One could easily walk within 20 feet of the Conklings' rock pile and not see it. We had to come up with another approach to the problem.

About a year ago we had begun to consider the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, aka drones) to look for trail. I had initially dismissed the idea as impractical because when trails cannot be seen with satellite images (which we were already using), they also cannot be seen with drones. Finding the trail often requires searching on hands and knees for rocks with rust specks.¹⁷ While we would never be able to see this kind of trail sign from a drone, the Conklings' rock pile was another matter. I felt that by using a drone we would have a good chance to locate those rocks. I purchased a quad-rotor drone with a high resolution video camera, learned to fly it, and then developed a survey plan strategy. [See the accompanying article "Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for Trail Work."]

In July, Mike and I traveled back to the Sulphur Springs Valley to begin our aerial survey work. The first night, we reviewed that day's drone survey video. One pile of rocks looked particularly promising. The next day, Mike hiked across the desert to check it out. He found out that the largest rock in the pile was only six inches across – much smaller than in the Conklings' photo. I have come to appreciate the high-resolution video obtained from the drone's camera, but in this case it was too good.

While we eventually did locate the station site,¹⁸ our success in finding Ewell's Station was more due

to Mike's research efforts than to the drone's high-resolution video. Following our initial discovery, Rose Ann Tompkins and I visited the Cochise County Recorder's office in Bisbee, Arizona, to get the name and contact information for the owner of the land where we thought the station site was located. After that, two additional trips were made to the search area, primarily to look for the depression/cistern that the Conklings had mentioned. During these trips a number of artifacts were discovered, they were carefully photographed, and their locations were recorded. One of the most telling artifacts was a military coat button manufactured around 1860, during the operational period for Ewell's Station.¹⁹ It is our hope that the site will remain undisturbed until a thorough archeological survey, led by professional archeologists, can be conducted for the entire station site.

Endnotes

1. The photo was part of a collection that was donated to the AHS by Margaret Conkling in January 1972.
2. Conkling, Roscoe and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1947).
3. The figure of nine miles comes from the published itinerary of the SD & SA Mail Line. Our measurements put the trail-miles closer to eleven miles.
4. There are a number of reports showing that during the Civil War the military continued to use this shorter route, often camping at the abandoned Ewell's Station. They, too, obtained their water from Ewell's Spring. We have not found any reports of travel along this route after the Civil War. There are several emigrant diaries and military reports that suggest that after the Civil War the route from Dragoon Pass to Apache Pass shifted south to a slightly longer route that ran past Sulphur Springs where water was generally available.
5. John Russell Bartlett was the Boundary Commissioner for the United States-Mexican Boundary Survey Commission, 1850-1853.
6. Birch's Route is the route that was followed by the SA & SD Mail Line that was organized and financed by James E. Birch.
7. Based on my calculations, the direct route via Ewell's Station saved less than two miles over the longer SA & SD route.
8. It should be noted that the positions reported by the Conklings can vary from slightly off to far off.
9. For example, it is not mentioned in Waterman L. Ormsby's

The Butterfield Overland Mail (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1942) nor in Goddard Bailey's "Report to Postmaster-General Aaron V. Brown" (U.S. Senate, Executive Document No. 2, Volume III, 35th Congress, Second Session). Ormsby was a passenger on the first west-bound Butterfield stage from Tipton, Missouri, and Bailey, an inspector for the Postmaster-General, was a passenger on the first eastbound stage from San Francisco, California.

10. The earliest primary reference to Ewell's Station that Gerald Ahnert has found is "Colonel Bonneville to the Commander-in-Chief, Headquarters Department of New Mexico, Santa Fe, July 15, 1859," in "Executive Documents printed by order of the Senate of the United States, First Session of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, 1859-60" (299-308). The document shows that the station was operational by May of 1859.
11. Ahnert, Gerald T., *The Butterfield Trail and Overland Mail in Arizona, 1858-1861* (Canastota, NY: Canastota Publishing Company, 2011).
12. Sweeney, Edwin R., *Cochise, Chiricahua Apache Chief* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
13. It is our current belief that the San Antonio-San Diego Mail Line stopped at Dos Cabezas Spring (aka Ewell's Spring) for water but did not establish anything that could be considered a station building, nor were there personnel stationed there.
14. Ahnert, *op. cit.*
15. Talbot, Dan, *A Historical Guide to the Mormon Battalion and Butterfield Trail* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1992).
16. Sanders, Kirby David, *The Butterfield Overland Mail Route Through New Mexico and Arizona* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).
17. Iron wagon tires running over hard rock will often leave marks on the rocks that quickly oxidize, turning to rust. These rust marks, which can remain clearly visible on the rocks for more than a hundred years, are often the only evidence of an early wagon road. For more on the use of rust marks to find the trail, see Bob Stuart's report on his analysis of rust samples in the August 1998 issue of *Desert Tracks*; see my article on page four of the December 1997 issue of *Desert Tracks* for a discussion of the classification of rust specimens found during trail research.
18. To preserve this ruin for future archaeological work, I will not provide readers with the location of the site.
19. A report on the artifacts found, along with photographs, is available on the internet at www.southern-trails.org/links/ewells-station

Finding Ewell's Spring

by Tracy DeVault

Reliable reports state that Ewell's Spring was four miles from Ewell's Station. Knowing the exact location of Ewell's Spring and using this four-mile distance would help us locate Ewell's Station. Some sources put it near the community of Dos Cabezas – indeed, the community of Dos Cabezas was once called Ewell's Springs. However, this watering place, referenced in so many historical documents, does not appear on any modern maps of the area and our internet research did not turn up the location of the spring. The southwestern historians whom Mike Volberg and I usually contact for this type of information also did not know the location. This set the stage for our attempt to locate Ewell's Spring.

Our first clue came from an article by Homer Wilkes on John W. Jones. During the Civil War, Jones and two companions traveled from Tucson to the Rio Grande with an important message from Colonel James H. Carlton to Colonel Edward R. S. Canby. In reference to Ewell's Spring, Wilkes says:

On June 17, 1862, the men went ten miles to the spring in the mountains four miles north of Ewell's Station, marked by a large white spot directly above the water. There they remained the night.¹

We eventually tracked down Jones' original statement but found that he never mentioned the white spot. More research led us to Lieutenant Colonel Edward E. Eyre's report dated July 8, 1862. It is our guess that author Wilkes got the "white spot" information from Eyre's report.

... At this season of the year sufficient water and of good quality can be obtained for two companies of infantry at the foot of the mountain, four miles north of Ewell's Station. The spring is prominently marked by a large white spot on the mountain, which is directly over the water.²

The clue of the "white spot" proved to be unhelpful. A thorough examination of Google Earth satellite images showed a prominent outcropping in the canyon west of the community of Dos Cabezas. Just below the outcropping is a large green area that appeared to be a spring, at least in the satellite images. Mike and I

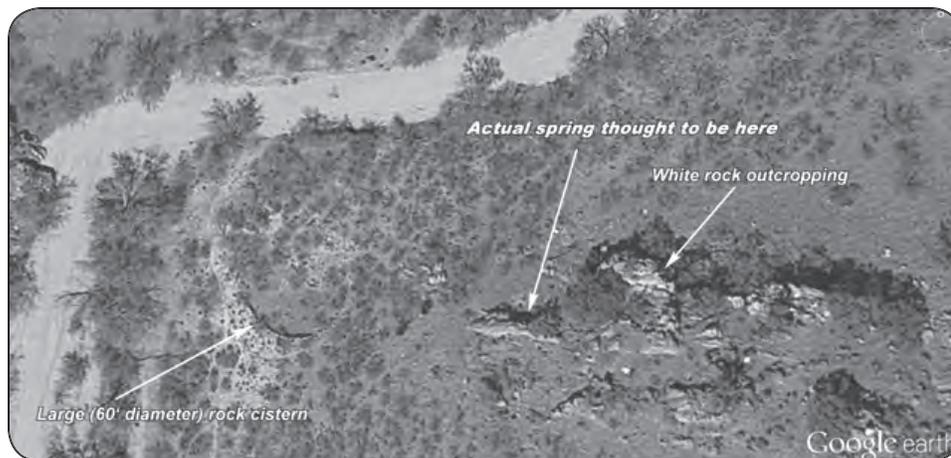
visited the area, and I took a number of long-distance photos from ground level. From the ground, this outcropping appears tan, not white. Also, the "spring and large green area" turned out to be a well and a modern stock tank. Water overflowing from the tank has caused a lot of vegetation growth. We were back to the drawing board.

Mike discovered a book by Phyllis de Garza on Dos Cabezas³ in which the introduction and first chapter discuss the early history of the area. The book also includes a photo of an *arrastra* (a mill stone for grinding ore) that was said to be near Ewell's Spring. I suspected that the photographer, Carol Wien, knew the location of the spring.

I was able to obtain De la Garza's address and phone number. During a wide-ranging conversation that involved a number of items in her book,⁴ she gave me the contact information for both Carol Wien and her brother, Walter Wien. Walter said I should contact Carol, but I was not able to reach her by phone.

Carol Wien still lives in the house in the Dos Cabezas area where her family has lived for four generations. Mike and I dropped in on her unannounced, and we were pleasantly surprised to be welcomed into her home. She gave us the location of Ewell's Spring and also told us how to contact the owner of the land where the spring is located. We contacted the owner later that afternoon and a few days later hiked to the area of the spring.

Ewell's Spring is no longer running, but there is considerable evidence of the spring still visible in the area. We found relatively modern wells, no longer in service, and we also located the old *arrastra*. The stones that made up the bottom of the *arrastra* are highly polished, indicating that it had seen considerable use. The main feature of the area is a stone cistern, 60 feet in diameter, that was used to catch and retain the waters of the spring. It was probably built in the 1880s when the Dos Cabezas mining boom was at its peak. This cistern is large enough to be visible on satellite images. It appears that the spring waters emerged from the ground a short distance up the side of the canyon. And yes, there is a white outcropping of rock above this spot. We had found Ewell's Spring.



Endnotes

1. The article “Expressman Jones” relates Jones’ harrowing trip from Tucson to the Rio Grande. It is by Homer Wilkes and appears on page 36 of the September 1972 issue of *Horse Tales*, a short-lived periodical that can be found on the web. A biography of Jones by Don M. Mahan, titled *John W. Jones, The Southwest’s Unsung Civil War Hero*, appeared in Volume 51 of the *Journal of Arizona History*, Autumn 2010.
2. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* Series I, Volume L, Part I, page 125.
3. De la Garza, Phyllis, *The Story of Dos Cabezas*, with photos and captions by Carol Wien (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1995).
4. One photo in de la Garza’s book shows a large stone inscribed “Ewell Springs Station.” De la Garza told me that the stone appeared in the yard of a Tombstone, Arizona, relic collector, who is now deceased. In her book, she speculates that the stone came from Butterfield’s Ewell’s Station. My research suggests it came from a much later (early 1880s) regional stage line station located at Ewell’s Spring. This later stage line provided transportation between Dos Cabezas and Willcox. According to De la Gara, the stone has since migrated to a bed and breakfast in West Virginia.

Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for Trail Work

by Tracy DeVault

In preparing to do aerial surveys of historic trails, I reviewed the currently available technology and developed a list of capabilities required for using an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV, a.k.a. drone) for trail work. In particular, we need to perform high-resolution aerial surveys of areas that cover several square miles. I found that I could not purchase anything off the shelf that would do everything we needed. Several drones that had only been pre-released seemed to have many but not all of the features we wanted.

I also learned that there are several problems with drones. Not only is the initial financial investment significant, but drones are reputed to fly off inexplicably, never to be seen again. Drones seem to have a penchant for committing suicide by crashing into buildings or other inanimate objects. There is a rumor that some drones have been attacked by birds and a few have chased humans or animals in an attempt to decapitate them.

Last May, Mike Volberg and I drove to Colorado to attend a symposium where we had a chance to fly a drone. A few weeks later, I bought a *DJI Phantom 3 Professional* drone that had most of the features I wanted. It came equipped with a high-technology camera gimbal (a mount used to isolate the camera from sudden drone movements) and a very high-resolution video camera. Most drones are powered by highly sophisticated Lithium-Polymer batteries that are controlled by internal microprocessors. The *DJI*

Phantom 3 can fly only 15 to 20 minutes before its battery is used up, and it takes an hour or so to recharge a battery, so I purchased three batteries (at \$150.00 each) in order to be able to make more than one flight at a time. The total cost was about \$2,500.00. It turned out that several important features that were advertised for this product were not available in the first release and, indeed, are still not available.¹



Tracy Devault with his drone. *photo by Mike Volberg*

Drone technology has advanced to a point where the basic operations of taking off, flying to a designated point, returning to the takeoff pad, and landing the drone have become so automated that most people will not find these operations to be difficult. On the other hand, there are at least four microprocessors involved in the drone equipment, so the user needs to be very comfortable with computer technology to get the entire system set up and programmed correctly.

Our survey plan called for flying parallel tracks a half-mile long and 200 feet apart. In the area we were planning to survey, the highest objects are power poles, about 35 feet high. I selected a flight elevation of 80 feet.² At an 80-foot altitude and with a look-down angle of about 45°, the drone's camera will record a strip on the ground about 250 feet wide. Flying tracks 200 feet apart and photographing 250 feet wide strips allows for overlap between strips. Our test flights, performed in rural areas, showed that this strategy is workable.

The *DJI Phantom 3 Professional* drone has the capability to telemeter the drone camera's video feed back to the controlling transmitter in real time. I had hoped that we could make use of this feature, but other design restrictions rendered this feature unusable. The camera's video feed is also recorded on the camera's internal memory chip. We found that reviewing the drone video in the peace and quiet of a motel room was far more practical. I often had to review a particular flight's video three or four times before I felt confident that I had seen all there was to see. Once we had recorded a video segment that showed the Conklings' rock pile, I was able to fly the drone back to that area and

locate the rock pile using the real-time video feed. I was then able to drop the drone's elevation to 40 feet and take a series of high-resolution still photos of the rock pile.

Most hobbyists never let the drone out of their sight, but this does not work for our survey flights, where we often fly the drone more than a half-mile from where we are standing. Everything is done

by looking at the display on the remote control, which is very much like flying an airplane on instruments. This entire drone operation proved far more challenging than I had hoped. In a year or two the technology should be much improved.

I mentioned above that the internet is rife with stories of people losing or crashing their drones. My first flights were picture perfect, giving me a somewhat false sense of confidence. On two later survey flights, however, the drone controller software crashed. This left the drone hovering at altitude somewhere out over the desert. We were lucky to recover the drone before the battery power ran out and the drone was lost in the desert.

There are many online videos and blog postings that are available to learn about UAV technology. The Southern Trails Chapter's website now contains links to videos and articles on the use of the drone. Go to www.southern-trails.org/links/ewells-station.

Endnotes

1. One of the features we were counting on is referred to as "autonomous flight," where the user develops a flight plan on a personal computer and uploads the plan into the drone's on-board computer. The drone can then fly the flight plan, return, and land at the take-off spot. This feature is still not available. I had to develop a technique where I manually flew the flight plan. This is a difficult, error-prone process, but I was able to make it work well enough to complete our survey work.
2. This is 80 feet above the takeoff point. If the land over which the drone is flying slopes uphill, the elevation above the ground will diminish.

Airstreaming the Butterfield Trail: From Tipton, Missouri, through West Texas

text and photos by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

In honor of the current effort to attain National Historic Trail status for the Butterfield Trail, we decided to spend a few weeks visiting trail sites, focusing on the eastern end of the trail, from Missouri to West Texas.¹

Whenever we travel a historic trail, we bring along a small library of relevant books, articles, and maps. Unfortunately, there is not at present a lot of literature on the Butterfield Trail. We relied heavily on Kirby Sanders' books, which show how to use modern roads to follow the trail. [See the review of Sanders' books in this issue of *Desert Tracks*.] Although the maps in Sanders' books are not always clear as to the numbering or naming of the county and gravel roads involved, he does provide GPS co-ordinates for the various sites, so we used our Garmin GPS unit whenever necessary. For Arkansas, the Heritage Trail Partners have published a map that gives explicit directions for driving on or as close as possible to the trail from Pea Ridge to Fort Smith.² We also relied on Don and Paul Matt's web-based blog about their motorcycle trip,³ which contains many useful descriptions of the roads, helpful photos, and GPS co-ordinates. A. C. Geene's book *900 Miles on the Butterfield Trail* gives excellent historical material and detailed driving directions for the trail in Texas. And, of course, we brought along Waterman Ormsby's delightful account of his 24-day trip on the Butterfield's maiden trip west.

The Butterfield sites and trail routes in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas range from those for which very little information is available or whose location is disputed, to those where the location is known and/or a historical marker is given but for which there is little or no evidence on the ground. Among the most interesting features of the Butterfield Trail today are undisturbed segments of the original trace, as well as sites with structures that date to the Butterfield era. In the pages that follow, we will only relate the highlights of our trip, indicating sites that would provide an enjoyable and informative experience for modern trail tourists.

Our modern stage coach is a 1964 Airstream. Only 16 feet in length, it had to accommodate two adults, a 60-pound

Golden Doodle, and a parrot for one month.⁴ Needless to say, like Waterman Ormsby, we travelled light, taking with us only what we considered to be the bare essentials. (These necessities included two banjos, a mandola, and several bottles of Merlot and Malbec.) Early on October 1, we were on the road, and the dust of our wake rose gently behind us as we made our way to the trailhead.

The mail was brought by railroad to the western terminus of the Pacific Railroad in Tipton, Missouri, and there transferred to stagecoaches. Consequently, we began our journey in Tipton which, as during Butterfield's day, is a small railroad town in western Missouri. The only recognition that this was the stagecoach trailhead is a granite historic marker erected by the "Drywood Threshers" that is propped up on the ground against the wall of the City Hall. Leaving Tipton, we travelled on country highways through wooded groves and farm fields. Along the way, we passed a number of historical markers dedicated to Butterfield's stage line. Many of these were erected during the 1958 centennial of the trail by the State Historical Society of Missouri or by local groups.

Situated on the western edge of the Ozarks, the countryside is a rolling upland. It is extremely beautiful, but unfortunately, agriculture and development have destroyed most Butterfield-era sites and trail segments. The road winds through a number of small towns dating to the 1800s which have markers dedicated to the early history of the area, including Civil War battles that took place nearby. One such town, Cole Camp, was first platted in the 1850s. Located in Cole Camp's historic district, the Sanders house dates to the trail era and is one of the oldest and most intact houses in Cole Camp today. Facing the Butterfield Trail, the house was built ca. 1861 for Augustus Sanders, a wagon maker. At the town of Warsaw, the current Reser Funeral Home incorporates part of the original Nicholas Tavern, which was built in the 1840s and served as a stop for the Butterfield mail. Don and Paul Matt's web article compares photos of the building from the late 1850s to what it looks like today. While the building has suffered additions to the side and alterations in the interior, the central structure remains as it was 150 years ago – it is a gem of the trail era.

The Springfield station was at General Smith's Tavern. A general in the state militia, Nicholas Smith was one of the town's earliest citizens and its largest slaveholder.



Reser's Funeral Home in Warsaw, Missouri. The central structure dates from the Butterfield era.

Today, the site of the station is noted by a granite marker, erected by a college group in the 1930s, that is incorporated into a wall of a building that abuts a Chinese restaurant.

After Springfield, we picked up the trail in the vicinity of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. During the Civil War, the military used the trail to transport troops and they also built a telegraph along the route. In many places in southwestern Missouri and northwest Arkansas, there are road segments (both paved and gravel) that are designated on road signs as "Old Wire Road," "Telegraph Road," "Military Road," or "Old Missouri Road." We first encountered the Old Wire Road northeast of Wilson's Creek; it continues through the national battlefield, where we were able to hike a pristine section of the Butterfield Trail.



A section of the Old Wire Road.

Ray House, which dates to 1852, is situated in the national battlefield. It was used as a "flag stop"⁶ between Springfield and the next regular stop, Ashmore's station. This station was at the home of J. C. Ashmore, a double log building that was later destroyed by fire. Today, the site can be identified by two historic markers at a rather dangerous bend on a small county road.

We continued on to Pea Ridge National Military Park. As at Wilson's Creek, the Telegraph Road went right through the park. Since it was also a military road, it is not surprising that major Civil War battles were fought along the route. We drove through the park to Elkhorn Tavern, which was burned during the Civil War and later reconstructed. It is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The original building was an unofficial stage stop. There are informative plaques about the trail at the tavern site and in the visitor center.



Elkhorn Tavern at Pea Ridge National Military Park.

A few yards from the tavern there is a mile-long section of the original Butterfield Trail. We headed down the wooded path – over rocks and downed tree limbs, along a creek, and to the site of an old tannery contemporary to the Butterfield's day.



Original section of the Butterfield Trail in the woods behind the Elkhorn Tavern.

From Pea Ridge to Fort Smith, the Butterfield Trail followed the route that became the Military Road. In Springdale, we located Fitzgerald’s Station, the site of a tavern that was popular with westering travelers even prior to the establishment of the Butterfield stage line. During the Butterfield era, Fitzgerald’s station was a meal station as well as a changing station.⁷ The property retains the original stone barn/stable that was built by Butterfield’s men specifically for use by the stage line. The barn, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is a key example of a structure that could be a focus of the trail community’s preservation/interpretation efforts.



Original Butterfield horse barn at Fitzgerald’s Station in Springdale, Arkansas.

In Lake Fayetteville Park, we discovered yet another original section of the Butterfield Trail that can be accessed by foot from the park’s paved walking trail. The trail is designated by an informative interpretive panel.⁸ The vegetation in this area is being restored to its native state, as it would have appeared in 1859, making a hike through the area a true delight.

Pristine section of the Butterfield Trail and historic markers in Lake Fayetteville Park.



Fayetteville itself was an important location for the stage line. John Butterfield and his son Charles owned a hotel there as well as a large pasturing area and stables.⁹ Just west of town, John Butterfield bought a 360-acre farm. The stage stop is at the site of Fayetteville’s old county courthouse and Butterfield’s hotel was across the street. The pasturing area was behind the station, sloping down the hillside to a creek. While this area has been subject to development, it is sufficiently wooded that the modern traveler can get a sense of the land as it might have looked to stage travelers.

The Butterfield route offers numerous opportunities to visit a variety of interesting cultural and historic sites. While in the Fayetteville area, we took advantage of the restaurants, the old-time music, and Dickson Street Bookshop, one of the finest used book stores in the country. We drove out to the Thorncrown Chapel, which is nestled in the woods near Eureka Springs. The chapel’s award-winning architecture was designed by E. Fay Jones, an apprentice to Frank Lloyd Wright. We visited the Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville; this also has memorable architecture and contains a wonderful collection of early American art.

South of Fayetteville, Arkansas Highway 265 closely follows the trail to the small towns of Hogeeye and Strickler. Bug Scuffle Road, which begins at Strickler, was placed on the National Register as a well-preserved segment of the Butterfield route. Initially paved, it winds up to the top of ridges in the Boston Mountains and turns to gravel at the site of the Big Scuffle community church and cemetery. The heavily wooded Boston Mountains are incredibly beautiful, with long ridges and deep canyons. Near the summit, we passed a ranch where the owners had created a metal art gate commemorating the “Butterfield Stage Route.”

Ranch gate on Bug Scuffle Road.



The gravel road winds down to Lee Creek and North Lee Creek Road, another original segment of the trail that is on the National Register. We followed the route into Van Buren, whose historic courthouse has markers dedicated to Butterfield, the Civil War, and the early history of the area. While Van Buren was not a relay station on the mail route, it was here that the mail was ferried over the Arkansas River. There is a lovely riverfront park west of the courthouse that is the site of the ferry landing where the stage line crossed the river to Fort Smith. The museum and grounds at the fort have displays dedicated to the overall military history of the fort, the Indians of the area, the reign of the “Hanging Judge” Isaac C. Parker, and also the Butterfield Trail. The National Park Service (NPS) employee at the desk gave us directions to the location of the actual stage stop, where a modern theater now stands. She also indicated the approximate area where the stage line crossed the Poteau River into Oklahoma, which can be viewed from a grassy area near the fort.¹⁰

Our first stop in Oklahoma was Skullyville, an old town outside Spiro, Oklahoma, that has been forgotten by most citizens of the area. The Choctaw Nation’s cemetery commemorates Skullyville as the early stopping point for the tribal members who arrived in Oklahoma after their removal from the East. We needed the help of local residents to find the Oklahoma Historical Society marker for the Walker Station site, which – as are many of the markers erected by the society during the 1958 centennial – is currently concealed from view by the dense growth of underbrush. Operated by Tandy Walker, the old log station was formerly the Choctaw Agency and later known as the Ainsworth place.

We had acquired county road maps at the Oklahoma Visitor’s Center on the freeway, which we used in conjunction with Sanders’ maps to find the sites in LeFlore, Latimer, and Pittsburgh Counties. Unfortunately, there was considerable inconsistency between the county road numbers on these maps and the actual road names seen on the highways. We used our Garmin GPS unit, but we also needed the assistance of local residents – who were always very receptive and friendly – to find such sites as Trahern’s Station. This area of Oklahoma contains long, wooded ridges separated by wide valleys; it is not as rugged as the Boston Mountains, but is every bit as lovely.

On a small gravel road near Red Oak, we found the marker for Edward’s Store. We parked our vehicle along the road and followed a beaten path some 200 feet through the woods to one of most exciting sights of our trip: a trail-era dogtrot cabin, built of square-hewn logs and with field stone chimneys. Here stage passengers were served food and the horses were given a chance to rest before they made the steep climb over The Narrows. Over the years, this cabin was adapted for modern living, but the building has been neglected so that the electric lines, plumbing, and asbestos siding have fallen away, revealing the log structure of the original cabin. If this cabin were subject to minimal preservation efforts, by being given a good roof and having the modern elements stripped clean, it would be one of the most representative sites on the trail in Oklahoma.



Remains of a dogtrot cabin near Edward’s Store.

At the site of Riddle’s Station, near Wilburton, Oklahoma, the trail crossed the Fourche Maline Creek. A local rancher told us that the cutbank for the crossing could still be seen, but was on private land and required a difficult hike through extensive thickets. Riddle’s cemetery has a gravestone for a Riddle descendant, and a swale of the stage route is clearly visible. It is often the case along the trail that a cemetery is all that remains of the Butterfield era, but, as most people interested in history, we find cemeteries to be a fantastic opportunity to connect to the past. Indeed, there was also an old cemetery at the next site that we visited, Mountain Station. This site was not a regular stop, but there is still a flowing spring there that was doubtless used by the stage line. We spent considerable time on dirt roads trying to find the next station (Pusey’s), but our GPS readings did not help and the local ranchers we queried did not know where the site was.

Our next stop was the Confederate Memorial Museum in Atoka, Oklahoma. A short section of the trail on the grounds of the museum has been surrounded by a rail fence. A small cemetery, which contains the graves of Confederate soldiers who died in the area, includes stones for local residents such as Gina Nail. Gina may have been a descendant of Jonathan Nail, who ran the station about 30 miles farther south, where the trail crossed the Blue River. The museum has informative displays on and artifacts of the Choctaw Nation, the Civil War battles in the area, and the Butterfield Trail.

At Boggy Depot Park, we met Clifford Feeteater, who helps maintain the grounds of the park. He pointed us to the historic marker where the station had been; the trail, which is in the woods behind the marker, was not obvious to our eyes. There is a fine old cemetery nearby. The park, which is now owned by the Choctaw Nation, has excellent displays on the Choctaw citizens who inhabited the small town of Boggy Depot that used to exist there. South of the park we traveled on a gravel road marked “Overland Trail Road” that, according to Sanders, was the original trail. We attempted to find Nail’s Crossing of the Blue River, but the approach to the river on the west side is blocked by a fence while on the east side the approach is on a difficult jeep trail, covered with weeds, that appears to be on private land.

We parked our Airstream at a campground right on the Red River and close to the Colbert’s Ferry site. But for the very loud railroad and highway bridge traffic, this would have been a delightful camping experience. We knew we were in line-of-sight distance from the ferry site because we could see from the campground the pilings of the old toll bridge that was built at that location in the late 1800s.



Gravestone of Benjamin Franklin Colbert, the operator of the Butterfield ferry across the Red River north of Denison, Texas. The grave lies on private land in Colbert, Oklahoma.

Our efforts to determine the site led us to Toll Bridge Road, but we could not find a location where the GPS readings corresponded to those in Sanders’ book. The GPS readings were closer at the end of Poteet Lane, but the road terminated at a house. As we turned our vehicle around, a young man – Colton Poteet – emerged from the house. When we explained what we were trying to do, he called his grandmother, who encouraged Colton to take us to the site, which was on a neighboring ranch. The owner was not there when we arrived, but Colton assured us that it would be OK for us to jump the fence and go to the site: the neighbor would be fine with our visit as long as we were chaperoned by a Poteet, a family that has lived in the area for many years. The ranch contained Oklahoma Historic Society markers for the ferry and the toll bridge, a hanging tree, and, under another tree, the grave of Henry C. Colbert (born 1832). As we viewed these sites, the rancher drove up. After Colton explained what we were doing, he gave his approval to our visit and pointed out a second cemetery site on the property. This plot, which was surrounded by a metal picket fence and overgrown with weeds, contained a red granite tombstone for Benjamin Franklin Colbert, who was the original owner of the ferry. While most of the stage stations in Oklahoma were on Choctaw land, Colbert was of Chickasaw descent. The Butterfield Trail in this area followed the Texas Road, which beginning in 1822 was the route followed by travelers through Indian Territory to and from Texas.



The Red River, showing the pilings of the old toll bridge that stood at the site of Colbert’s Ferry.

Crossing the Red River into Texas, we stopped first at the town of Sherman.¹¹ After viewing the historic markers in front of the Grayson County Courthouse, we visited the local historic museum, where the attendants stated that the brick building on the northwest corner of the square dated to 1856 and had been used by Butterfield. This building may correspond to Bird Anderson's hotel, where the stage stopped on the way to the station (Greene 136).

Texas poses a challenge for today's traveler who wants to follow the old stage route as closely as possible. Although there are numerous historical markers designating that the trail is close by, much of the actual route is on private ranch land.

West of Whitesboro we stopped at Pioneer Park, which was created by local residents to commemorate the site of Diamond's Horse Ranch. In addition to historic markers noting the Butterfield station that was here, the park contains a cemetery housing the remains of several members of the Diamond family. In Gainesville, the GPS co-ordinates listed in Sanders' book brought us to the railroad tracks at the dead end of a city street. Here we broke a trailer chain trying to turn our Airstream "wagon" around. There is a particularly nice view of the north Texas prairie at the site of the Butterfield Trail Crossing marker east of Sunset, Texas.

We spent the night at Fort Richardson State Park.¹² Established in 1867 by the U.S. Army to defend the frontier against the Indians, Fort Richardson was the northernmost of a line of forts established after the Civil War. The next morning, we visited the museum at the Union Station in Jacksboro and then headed west on Berwick Road. This gravel road leads to the Winn Hill Cemetery, which is named for William H. Wynne, who was killed in the area by Indians in 1863. The cemetery is right on the Butterfield Trail. Farther west, the road connects with Monument Road, the location of the Warren Wagon Train Massacre.¹³ A recently established historic marker just east of Highway 16 allows the traveler to see the locations where the Kiowa first viewed and then ambushed the wagon train.

A. C. Greene found Fort Belknap "slightly disappointing" (149) because so much of it was reconstructed beginning in the 1930s. There are several remaining original

buildings, however, and a visible swale of the trail runs through the park, so we were favorably inclined towards this shady county park. Fort Belknap was a northern anchor of a chain of forts (including Fort Phantom Hill and Fort Chadbourne) built in the early 1850s to protect people moving to what was then the western edge of settlement in Texas. The museum is in many ways typical of small town museums – an "attic" for local artifacts. Our favorite display was a rock sculpture of a stagecoach created in the 1940s by a citizen of the area.

We continued on to Fort Griffin, which was established in 1867 to protect settlers against Comanche and Kiowa raiding. Because the fort was a jumping off point for expeditions heading west, a rough community sprang up around it that catered to travelers looking for whiskey and entertainment. At the park, which is now run by the Texas Historical Commission, we saw the remnants of the old fort, as well as the official Texas longhorn herd.¹⁴ We spent the night at the very pleasant Fort Griffin campground – as it was raining heavily, we shared the campground with only a few coyotes. In the morning, we talked to Jane Lenoir, the employee at the front desk of the visitor's center. A longtime resident of the area, she has considerable knowledge about the Butterfield sites in the area. She gave us a map of dirt roads that led us to the station site on the Clear Fork of the Brazos, about ten miles north of the fort. The ranch building at the site rests on the original foundation of the Butterfield station, and the original well used by the station still stands, so our effort to navigate a confusing maze of dirt roads was well worth the effort.



Ranch building at the site of the Butterfield station at the Clear Fork of the Brazos River. The original well used by the Overland Mail can be seen to the left of the outbuilding in the lower right of the photo.

Our vehicle was running on fumes as we pulled into the small town of Woodson, Texas. Alas, Woodson had no gas station, and it was 30 miles to the nearest town that did. We talked to a man on the street who took us to his mother's house where he added several gallons to our tank from a plastic holding jug. Typical of the friendly people we had met all along the trail, he said that he just loved talking to passerbys like us and refused payment.

Our next stop was Fort Phantom Hill, established in the early 1851. Shortly after the fort's abandonment in 1854, a fire destroyed most of its buildings. However, in 1858 several buildings were repaired and utilized by the Overland Mail. Today the fort is an unreconstructed ruin. The tall chimneys of the fort's buildings still stand, as do two of the structures associated with the stage line. There is no museum and there was no one on site, but the interpretive panels are excellent. As Greene points out, "you can get the rawness of the frontier . . . [at] some deserted outpost such as Fort Phantom Hill" (149). As we toured the fort, the leaden sky gave way to a sharp, stinging drizzle. By the time we returned to the parking lot, rain billowed down in opaque grey sheets. To our dismay, the Airstream was mired in a slough.¹⁵ We were a long time getting enough traction to maneuver the Airstream back on the road and the incident served to remind us that on the roughest western roads, the Butterfield Overland Mail frequently transferred passengers and mail to lightweight, more durable celerity wagons or to light mud wagons. Unlike the classic Concord stagecoaches, which could be mired in bad weather, mud wagons could travel more easily during inclement weather.



The ruins of the Butterfield station at Fort Phantom Hill, north of Abilene, Texas. The chimneys are all that remain of most of the buildings at the fort.



Reconstructed Butterfield station at Fort Chadbourne.

Due to the torrential rains, we were not able to see Castle Peak¹⁶ or stop at the Mountain Pass site, both of which are notable landmarks of the trail. After spending a pleasant, albeit wet, evening at Abilene State Park, we went next to Fort Chadbourne. This was one of the forts built in the early 1850s that later housed a Butterfield station. We met Garland Richards, the owner of the site, who instigated archaeological investigation of the property and who has worked to restore several of the buildings. Brent Bryan, a staff member and one of the re-constructors, led us on a tour. Six buildings, including the Butterfield station, have been restored in a manner that has left intact all portions of the original standing walls. The rest of the ruins have been stabilized; no further reconstruction is planned. We appreciated the combination of ruins and reconstructed structures, which allowed us to visualize the fort in a graphic manner. The museum has artifacts found during the archeological investigations, material on the military and the Indians, and Richards' extensive gun collection which includes armaments from the trail era. We particularly enjoyed seeing operable historic guns placed next to corroded segments of the same type of weapon that had been found during the archaeology at the site. Two rebuilt stagecoaches, while not actually used by Butterfield, gave us a feeling for what the coaches were like.

The next day we met Tom Ashford and his wife, who took us out to see sites west of San Angelo on Arden Road. As Tom explains in the article in this issue, there are a number of trails in this part of west Texas, including the Butterfield, a trail built by Colonel Benjamin Grierson at Fort Concho, the Goodnight-Loving cattle trail, the upper emigrant trail, and a more recent stage route. As the Trail Turtles know, sorting out the different trails requires considerable research, using archival sources, aerial photography, and on-the-ground inspection. According

to Ashmore's determination, the Butterfield Trail crossed the road at a site about ten miles west of San Angelo, while the Grierson road continued to parallel the road in an east-west direction. As we stood on the roadside trying to see traces of the trail in the very thick weeds, the ranch owner drove up. We had an extended conversation with him about the various historic sites on his property. Then Ashmore took us to the bridge where the Middle Concho crosses the highway. To our delight, he proceeded to use his drone (a hover-type aircraft) to fly out over the private property where both the Butterfield and the Grierson trails ran. We were successful in seeing a trace on the computer screen image where the Grierson trail ran through lush vegetation. We had never seen a drone in operation, so this was a very exciting event for us.



Tom Ashmore setting up his drone.

We met Claude and Virginia Hudspeth that night for dinner and learned that the Hudspeths and Ashmores are neighbors. Both families belong to the Concho Valley Archaeological Society – which was responsible for the excavations at Fort Chadbourne. Claude gave us directions to Butterfield sites farther west of San Angelo. This part of west Texas is very remote, and long driving distances are involved. At Castle Gap, all the trails that Ashmore had mentioned funneled through one opening in the mesa. We drove to Castle Gap Road, which in the past led to a county park but is now blocked by a fence. From that location we got a very good view of the gap. After that, we drove to the west side of the Pecos River to the location of Horsehead Crossing. Although there is considerable beer can litter at the site, it is very remote, with the vegetation, river, and scenery essentially no different than it was in 1858. The cutbank where the stage and the emigrants crossed the river can be clearly seen. For us, the place seemed special, if not magical.



Horsehead Crossing of the Pecos River, looking east. Castle Gap can be seen in the distance.

In Fort Stockton, we learned that the Camp Stockton that preceded the Civil War no longer remains, but is commemorated by a marker at the courthouse square that also mentions the overland mail. Comanche Springs, the important water source for 19th-century travelers, is now covered by a large swimming pool in a shaded city park – it is still an oasis in hot weather.

It had been a fabulous journey. We had visited significant sites on the Butterfield Trail, some quite pristine. We discovered that there is still much research to be done all along the trail to determine the actual route and station sites, and we learned of people and organizations along the trail who are dedicated to that work. We had met many friendly people – local ranchers, citizens, and park employees – who are quite enthusiastic about the history of the trail in their region. We had driven through remote areas with beautiful scenery, visited small towns that dated to the trail era, and gone to cultural and historical sites not related to Butterfield. To celebrate the end of our journey, we stopped at Pody's BBQ in Pecos, Texas. Barbeque fanatics consider Pody's to be one of the top barbeque joints in Texas. Pitmaster Israel Campos has won numerous awards for his meat, including brisket, which has a gorgeous black crust. As we waited for our brisket and ribs, with potato salad and pozole on the side, we raised our glasses to the end of a successful trail trip. On the way out the door, there's a sign asking you to ring the bell if you are satisfied with your meal. Not a single customer left without ringing the bell.

We climbed back into our vehicle, and the Airstream rattled towards Santa Fe. From the backseat, the parrot sang in his cage and the Doodle gave a mournful yap.

Endnotes

1. Created by the National Trails System Act of 1968, National Historic Trails are designated by Congress to protect and develop extended trails that follow as closely as possible to the original routes of travel.
2. Heritage Trail Partners, Inc. "Drive the Butterfield Stagecoach Route of Northwest Arkansas." To obtain a copy, contact www.heritagetrailpartners.com and/or www.arkansasheritagetrails.com/Butterfield/
3. The Matts' blog can be found at butterfieldoverlandmail.blogspot.com/. See also Don Matt's reminiscences about the trip in this issue of *Desert Tracks*.
4. Butterfield's nine passengers rode three abreast, squeezed into back and middle rows, both facing forward, and into a forward row, facing rearward. The facing passengers in the forward and middle rows had to ride with their knees dovetailed. Passengers traveled with baggage on their laps and mail pouches beneath their feet.
5. The Wire Road (also referred to as the Telegraph Road) ran from St. Louis, Missouri, to Fort Smith, Arkansas, passing through the towns of Springfield and Fayetteville. The road received its nickname from telegraph wire that was strung along the road in 1860. In the late 1850s the Butterfield Overland Stage Company used the road as part of their route.
6. A flag stop was one where the stage only paused to pick up passengers if it was signaled to do so.
7. Most stages stopped at stations along the trail for only a few minutes to change horses and drivers. Passengers had a good meal only once or twice every 24 hours at what were called "Home Stations."
8. This is in contrast to many markers along the trail which provide very little information.
9. Four stages and 18 horses of the Butterfield line were kept in Fayetteville.
10. The modern trail traveler is well advised to check in with the staff at the various parks along the route, as the employees often have, or can point to people who do have, considerable knowledge of the trail in the vicinity of the site.
11. Readers familiar with the 1851 Oatman Massacre will remember that in later years Olive Oatman and her husband John Fairchild lived in Sherman, Texas. She is buried at the town's West Hill Cemetery.
12. We have found the Texas State Parks to be fine places for camping. For information, see <https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/parks/things-to-do/camping>.
13. In 1871, Kiowas and Comanches from the Fort Sill Reservation attacked a train of 12 wagons owned by a freighting contractor named Henry Warren traveling on the Butterfield Overland Mail route. They killed the wagon master and six teamsters and allowed five to escape.
14. Western writer Frank Dobie recognized the decline of the longhorn in the 1920s and helped to organize a herd of typical longhorns in order to preserve the breed. A herd was compiled and now has its permanent home at Fort Griffin State Historic Site.
15. During the horrendous storms we encountered in Texas, we often quoted aloud John Butterfield's instructions to his stage drivers on the line: "Remember, boys, nothing on God's earth must stop the United States mail!"
16. According to the Castle Peak marker in the western part of Taylor County, the 2,400-foot peak was used by stagecoach drivers as a beacon and could be viewed for 30 to 40 miles. The peak had been known as "Abercrombie Peak," for Army Col. J.J. Abercrombie, but it was renamed "Castle Peak" when Waterman Ormsby noted that the peak resembled a fortress.

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Join OCTA and the Southern Trails Chapter

To become a member of the Southern Trails Chapter (STC), you must first become a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA). Benefits include regular receipt of OCTA's *Overland Journal* and *News from the Plains*, the STC's *Desert Tracks*, and reduced rates at OCTA and STC symposia. An OCTA membership brochure, containing full information and an application form, can be found online at www.octa-trails.org/preserve/octa-membership. There are different rates for different categories of membership in both OCTA and the STC, but if you simply wish to join as an individual or family, send the following information and your check to the address below.

Name:

Address:

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Basic OCTA membership category

Individual: \$50 annually

Family: \$65 annually.

Southern Trails Chapter membership category:

Individual – \$15 annually

Family – \$20 annually

Mail a check for the total amount (OCTA+STC) to

Oregon-California Trails Association
524 South Osage Street
P.O. Box 1019
Independence, MO 64051

Please indicate explicitly on the application and the check that you wish to join the Southern Trails Chapter. If you have questions, contact the chapter treasurer, Jud Mygatt at jym@onemain.com.

Support the Effort to Designate the Southern Emigrant Trail as a National Historic Trail

A major goal of the Southern Trails Chapter of OCTA is to obtain Congressional authorization for a Feasibility Study toward achieving National Historic Trail (NHT) status for the Southern Emigrant Trail system. The work of documentation of these southern trails – by mapping and written narratives – has a long history in our chapter. Consequently, we are in a good position to begin the formal process of working towards NHT status.

The project needs the support of your local U.S. Congressional Representatives and/or Senators.

It takes only one major sponsor in either body to introduce a bill authorizing the Feasibility Study. Please take copies of the STC brochure and of *Desert Tracks* to the local office of your Representative or Senator with a clear and simple message about the next step: sponsorship and introduction of a bill for authorizing a Feasibility Study for the Southern Emigrant Trails.

Jack and Pat Fletcher

Oregon-California Trails Association
Southern Trails Chapter Annual Symposium
Sponsored by the City of Willcox and the Sulphur Valley Historical Society

Willcox Community Center
312 West Stewart Street, Willcox, Arizona
April 6 to 9, 2016

April 6: Registration, meetings, dinner/reception
Afternoon – Meetings for chapter officers and members
Evening – Dinner with keynote speaker John Langellier, “Buffalo Solider Trails”

April 7-8: Lectures

Gerald Ahnert on the Butterfield Overland Mail in Arizona
Betty Barr on the Story of May Watkins Burns
Bill Cavaliere on Cooke’s Wagon Road
Richard Collins on the Presidios of Tucson and Tubac
Tracy Devault on the Southern Emigrant Road
Steve Gregory on Fort Huachuca
Harry Hewitt on the Bartlett-Conde Compromise
Doug Hocking on George Bascom
Mary Kasulaitis on the Trails of Arivaca
Kathy Klump on the History of Willcox
Daniel Judkins on Antoine Leroux
David Miller, TBA
Suzanne Moody on Fort Bowie
Tom Prezelski on Californio Cavalry
Tom Satak on Cooke’s Wagon Road
Rae Whitley on the Forts Guarding the Trails

April 9: Field trips

Fort Bowie – Led by Rocky Hildebrand. Carpool/moderate hike. Sites include a Butterfield Station, a garveyard, the site of the Bascom Affair, Jefford’s Chiricahua Agency, Apache Spring, the site of the Battle of Apache Pass, and Fort Bowie.

Dragoon Springs Overland Mail Station – Led by Gerald Ahnert. High-clearance vehicles recommended. The tour will include a visit to Croton Springs.

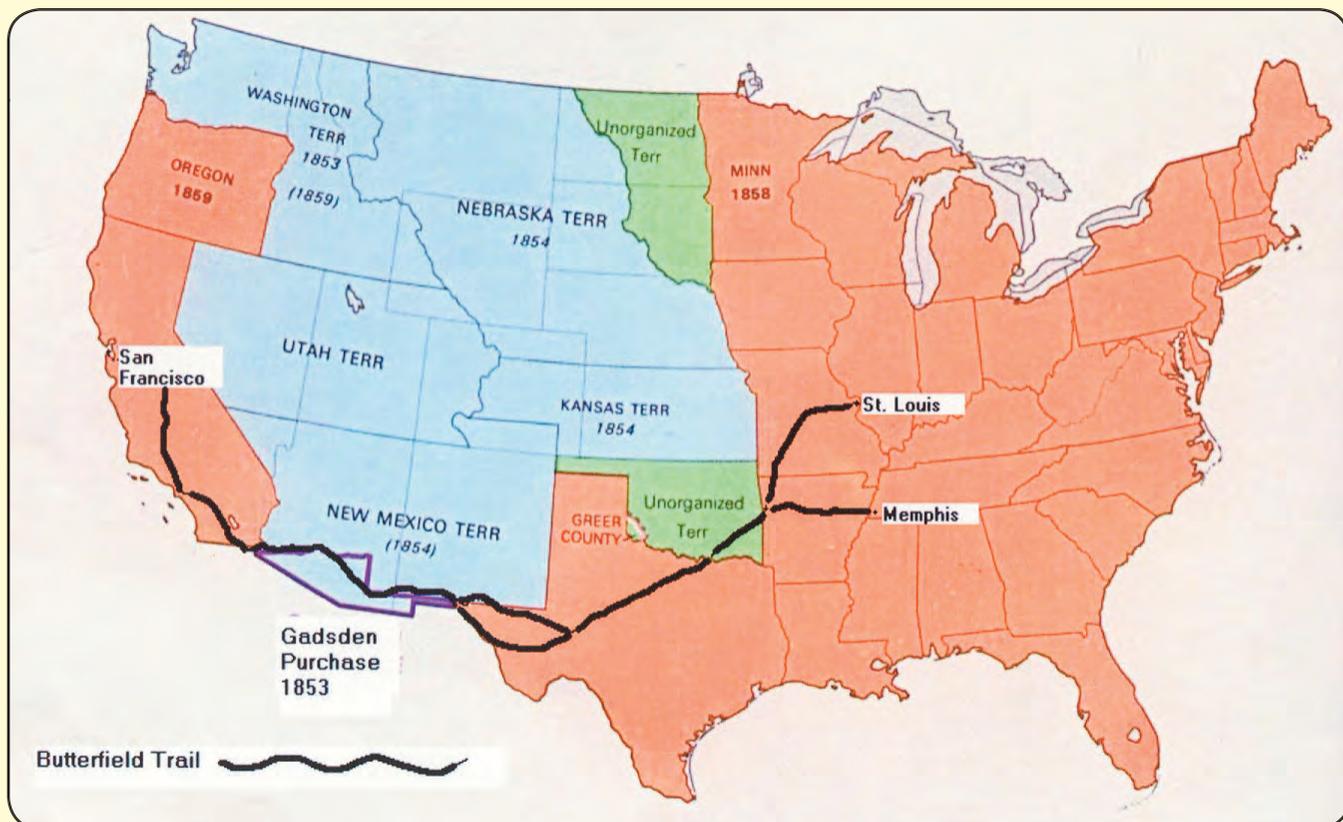
For more information, contact Doug Hocking at dhocking@centurylink.net
Updates can be found by clicking on the Southern Trails Chapter link of the website

Southern Trails Chapter

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Map of the Butterfield Trail
courtesy George Hackler