

# DESERT TRACKS



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SOUTHWEST CHAPTER OCTA

June, 1999-2

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## SPRING MAPPING TRIP: RECONNAISSANCE OF THE FT. SMITH- SANTA FE TRAIL

In the early evening of April 22 we all arrived at our planned meeting place- Sallisaw State Park, OK. Our scheduled arrival in OK was amazing when you consider we had come separately from AZ, CA and NM.

Our group: Rose Ann Tompkins (Trip leader, AZ), Don Buck (CA), Tracy & Judy DeVault (AZ) and Richard & Marie Greene (NM).

Sallisaw State Park was idyllic- we were camped by a lake with ducks and geese for entertainment, the OK climate was cool and the humidity was comfortable. We had showers/restrooms- a good camp.

We fell into our camp routine, chatted and resolved the next day's action plan. Later, a spectacular lightning show and the rain- inevitably- sent us to bed.

The purpose of our reconnaissance: SWOCTA would like to have a Southern Trail diary published as part of OCTA'S Emigrant Trails Historical Study Series. The diary would publicize the use of Southwestern trails by emigrants on their way to California. A good diary is William Goulding's. He used the Fort Smith and Southern Trail to California.

**THE WILLIAM GOULDING DIARY**— In 1849, Goulding joined the Knickerbocker Exploring Co. to go from New York to California. Goulding's diary shows the group left Ft. Smith on March 26 and followed the Canadian River to Santa Fe on a recently opened wagon trail (NOTE: Goulding left just before Marcy's more publicized trip that left Ft. Smith on April 5, 1849). The Knickerbockers dissolved at Santa Fe and Goulding's party sold their wagons to pack to California. Goulding left Santa Fe (June 2) and took the Southern Trail along the Rio Grande, Cooke's Pass, Guadalupe Pass, Santa Cruz River, Gila River to the Yuma Crossing (arriving July 27). From Yuma, Goulding crossed the desert to Warner's Ranch and on to Rancho Santa Ana del Chino (arriving Aug. 12). Goulding continued on the Camino Real to Monterrey, then, took a steamship to San Francisco. On Sept. 18, 1849 the last entry was made in the diary.

In order to publish this diary we need to know more about the Fort Smith Trail.

FRIDAY, APRIL 23- We were on our way by 8.30am (our usual time) but not before we had a moment of Southwestern nostalgia. We saw a fair sized tarantula on the bench at our picnic table and before someone sat on it.

Our first stop was to be the Choctaw Agency near Spiro, OK. Goulding arrived on March 27 and we were experiencing similar weather conditions- overnight rain, wet ground. Goulding wrote "... we arrived, about noon, at the Choctaw Agency. The place is called Schulyville, or Moneytown, the Choctaw word for money being Schuly..". Today the site is the national cemetery for the Choctaw Indians.

It was apparent that Oklahoma is primarily privately owned, cultivated farm land and finding trail "ruts" was not going to be practical at this time so we were driving as much as we could on the roads that most closely followed Goulding's route. We certainly got a feel for the country that Goulding described "... the fields were covered with a rich carpet of green.. in the valleys, or on the hill slopes, the most beautiful groves or copses of wood..".

The next points of interest were the San Bois River that Goulding forded, a high hill which caused wagons to be double teamed and Goulding described as "...This mountain seems to be composed, in great part, of an excellent quality of grindstone.. Huge masses lay on the surface for many miles..." and then we came to the South Fork of the Canadian River. We found a marker for the ferry that took Goulding across the Canadian but not the actual spot.

We also used Marcy's "The Prairie Traveller" for additional trail references.

We got to Eufaula and Lake Eufaula. The weather had turned windy and cold and we stopped for lunch. At Eufaula, the forks of the Canadian merge and Rose Ann and Don were interested in the town of North Forks that was submerged in the lake. We chatted with some fishermen but none knew about North Forks - not even the one that built the dam for the lake.

We proceeded on to Holdenville and the nearby Little River. First, we found the marker for Camp Holmes (established in 1834 by Lt. Holmes), then, we got on the bridge over the Little River that was close to Goulding's route and tried without luck to locate Edwards (or Little River) Village.

Goulding wrote "...Little River village consists of some 30 or 40 small houses, built with logs, and dashed with mud. Mr. Edwards and his son-in-law own them all. They have a store, well supplied with provisions, dry goods & hardware, which they are obliged to transport in wagons from Ft. Smith, over the same route by which we had just passed.."

We camped by Lake Holdenville . The dirt roads around the lake were muddy and there was a real threat of thunder storms. The Greenes prepared for the worst because they

did not have a 4x4 - they camped beside the incoming muddy road and were ready to run for asphalt if there was any rain.

SATURDAY, APRIL 24 - The rain started about 5.30AM and the Greene's were packed and gone to the safety of the asphalt. The Greene's radioed back their position and were joined a while later by the rest of the group.

We headed for breakfast in Holdenville and in a downpour. Judy talked to the locals at breakfast and one of them gave us some information on "Edwards Village". We headed for the Holdenville Library and there Rose Ann and Don got a book on local history which proved to be somewhat of a bonanza with it's maps and references to the California Trail through Oklahoma. Meeting the town historian/archivist helped too.

The heavy rain had let up and we returned to the bridge over the Little River and proceeded on to locate "Edwards Village". We were told that the property owner did not welcome visitors. We knew we were close but never did get to the actual site.

We headed for OK City and the History Museum at the Capitol Building. Unfortunately for us we could not get the information we wanted because certain areas were closed. We left for lunch- a disaster: we waited and waited for our food; then the orders were wrong and Marie eventually did not get any food. On leaving, the cashier made the usual courtesies and heard "No, things were pretty bad." We got us a free pie.

We headed for Lexington and into heavy rain. At Lexington we drove around until we found the marker for Chouteau's Trading Post - in 1835, Chouteau opened a store to trade goods with the Indians during treaty negotiations and became a stopping point for emigrants. With the rain pounding down we headed for Chickasha and the comfort of a motel - camping was out of the question.

That evening we ate "the" pie and Don said on the way to meet us he stopped at Archer City and discovered that it was being promoted by Larry McMurtry, Pulitzer Prize author of "Lonesome Dove", and was becoming famous for "Books Up". It appears McMurtry is buying, storing and selling thousands of books that he buys in mass and can be seen stacked to the ceiling in these "warehouses". So if your in Archer City, TX...

SUNDAY, APRIL 25 - It was still pouring when we got up. After breakfast and driving through the flooded streets of Chichasha we decided to see what our intended camp site for last night was like -the rain had stopped by the time we arrived at Red Rock State Park. Pity the weather had been so bad because Red Rock State Park was a nice place. We drove down into a small canyon and our camp would have backed up against 40 ft. rock walls. Nice camp. Maybe next time..

We headed for Rock Mary and the Mounds. As we drove we were well aware of how lush and prosperous the farms looked and at the same time wondered if they would be as attractive in the heat and humidity of the summer.

When you see the mounds you realized that it must have been a landmark that created an impression on the emigrants - they impressed us as they stood out on the flat land.

Goulding wrote on April 29, 1849 “..we came in sight of a great number of mounds. I took a sketch of the first, approaching them at a distance of nearly two miles, when near to them they were about from 50 to 100 feet high.. innumerable quantities of all sized mounds appeared in all directions. Some of them loomed up like the pyramids of Egypt..”

Goulding sketched, we took photographs.

Rock Mary is not the most impressive mound and in fact does not stand out as much as the others because it lies in a depression. However, Rock Mary is noted because it is specifically noted in Marcy's and Whipple's reports and some emigrant diaries . Rock Mary is recognized as a historical landmark and two plaques have been erected- one at the base says that the mound was named for “Mary” by Lt. Simpson (a romance on the Trail) and the plaque on top states that the US Flag was flown on top by Lt. Simpson.

Those that braved the walk to Rock Mary got soaked from their knees on down as they walked through a knee high crop and the sodden ground. It was worth it .

We drove into Weatherford , OK for lunch and took in a little of Route 66. After lunch, we headed for the Divide between the Washita and Canadian rivers.

Goulding was not as descriptive through this area as Marcy's “Prarie Traveler” so we followed Marcy who wrote on May 26, 1849 ( Camp 37), “ We continued to follow the dividing ridge today for thirteen miles...” Marcy also noted “.. I am convinced that.. a natural wagon road .. can be found upon the crest of the Divide..” We continued on the Divide until we camped at Dead Indian State Park. It rained that night as well.

MONDAY, APRIL 26 - From the campground we drove over a slippery muddy road to Antelope Hills, a noted landmark. We went on to Canadian, TX and checked out the museum. It was closed one day a week, Monday. (By the way, this was Monday). At the public library Rose Ann got some info. We washed the mud off our vehicles and ate lunch. After a long drive we arrived in Amarillo and stopped at a busy KOA ( trains went by and plains flew over - a lot). After showers, laundry and shopping we drove to the Country Barn Restaurant to have dinner with Charles Davis, a SWOCTA member who lives in Amarillo, and a group of local historians: Jim Northcutt, a Charles Goodnight lookalike (a pioneer figure in this part of Texas), Bob Izzard - author of Panhandle history, Kathy Revett and Beverly ?. We enjoyed being with them.

TUESDAY, APRIL 27 - Our first stop was the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum. While Rose Ann and Don looked through the archives for trail information the rest of us either toured the Museum or ran errands. We met Charles Davis after lunch and drove to Alvin Lynn's house to pick his brain about the FS -SF Trail. Alvin is probably the

most knowledgeable person around on this and other trail in the area. We spent several hours with Alvin, then, Charles took us to nearby trail locations. We drove to Palo Duro Canyon State Park to camp. While we fixed dinner, the campground host came by to bury a dead possum- took the edge off a fine meal.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4 - After we got up we were visited by a large flock of wild turkeys. Six or so males strutted and displayed for us. We went back to the Panhandle Museum to get maps that Alvin had recommended. We proceeded west to search for ruts and other trail signs. No luck. In Vega, we met with the local sheriff for his view of trail history. We headed out and along the highway found a historical marker on Marcy. We drove to Glenrio to search for more ruts but to no avail. Our next stop was a cemetery from where we could see ruts. We then headed for the gap between two large mounds: Big Tucumcari and Little Tucumcari. We located the point where Alvin said the trail crossed the highway south of town. At a creek and the highway the trail crossed the creek. On the east and west side of the highway there were nice cuts in the creek bank but nothing to show that the trail had gone through. We drove to Santa Rosa State Park to camp. It was windy but we had a nice sunset. It was a big salad night.

THURSDAY, APRIL 29 - Judy and Tracy fixed cinnamon and orange rolls for breakfast. We planned to go to Anton Chico and there end our trip. It was drizzling when we got to Anton Chico to look for trail information. Our first stop was Abercromby's, a store with a date of 1873 on the side. We then checked out the post office, gas station and cemetery - no luck. As it turned out, we just missed the local historian. We headed back to the highway and went our separate ways. Our reconnaissance trip was over.

## SWOCTA'S SPRING OUTING

Our May outing had enough experiences for any trail lover. The focus of our outing was the Old Ehrenberg-La Paz Road. It ran between the Colorado River and Prescott-Fort Whipple. A section of the road ran west of Kirkland Valley (37 wagon road miles southwest of Prescott) and the army outpost, Camp Date Creek (18 miles beyond Kirkland Valley). It provided the 26 attending trail fans with a fascinating two days.

On the first day, we started at the historic Single Six Ranch. Billie Jean and Kurt Vogel manage the ranch. The hilly and mountainous terrain of much of the ranch has saved some of the very best Old Road remnants that one could hope to find. Billy Jean told us about the present life of a rancher (long hours, hard work and, maybe, some profit). Like many Arizona ranches, the ranch has an attractive life style.

Curtis Ritter was one of our guides. His family has lived and ranched in the area since the late 1860's. His family really cared about the history of the area and Curtis has a wealth of historical knowledge. Curtis is over eighty and an excellent storyteller. He

shared one of his father's boyhood experiences: One day Curtis's dad was accompanying his father on their monthly wagon trip to Prescott to secure supplies. The boy was on the trip because he was promised some candy. As they approached the town they saw smoke rising in front of them and when they got to a rise just outside the village it appeared that the entire community was ablaze. Viewing the scene with great concern the boy turned to his father and said, "Does this mean I won't be getting any candy?"

With 4-wheel drive vehicles and hiking Curtis and Billie Jean guided us along the Road. In an exceptionally rough stretch Indians ambushed many traveling groups. Curtis showed us two sets of victim's graves. One grave was of the (then) Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Arizona and his assistant. We saw a lot of Indian petroglyphs, an artistic inscription dated 1874 and the remains of the Ritter homestead. Not far from the homestead was a series of well constructed rock walls that wandered across quite a wide area. We saw a similar wall the next day located in the area of Camp Date Creek. Not even Curtis knew who built these walls.

It had been a sunny day in the low eighties with a nice breeze. After our tour, we went to the Kirkland Bar and Café - good food & drink. We were joined by the Vogels and Mrs. Ritter. Afterwards, we drove to Prescott and the home of Judy and Tracy DeVault. We enjoyed refreshments. Bill Smith and his wife Jan put on a slide show and talk. Bill is a volunteer Site Steward at Camp Date Creek. He knows more about the Camp and its surrounding area than probably anybody else. Even though we were tired, Bill's talk generated enough excitement for our upcoming visit to Camp Date Creek.

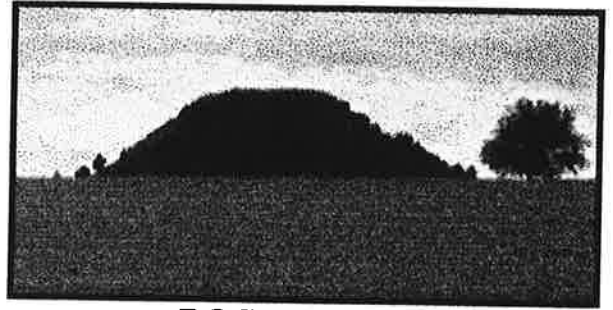
Sunday morning found us driving out to Date Creek. On the way Bill showed us the rock inscription done by Prescott pioneer Jim Sheldon in 1864. Sheldon Street in Prescott is named for this gentleman who was later to die in an action on the Hardyville Toll Road north of Prescott. The remains of Camp Date Creek consist mainly of various stone foundations. Most of the buildings had been built of adobe and have long since melted away. Because of Bill we could visualize how the camp was arranged and better appreciate the dramatic events that took place there. The most intact ruin is a commissary built from native stones by the troops. Several walls still partially stand though the CCC boys took stones for road and bridge building during the 1930's.

It was wonderful a weekend and opened our eyes to the exciting old road exploration possibilities in Arizona and the Southwest. Much credit for this weekend go to Tracy and Judy DeVault and Fred and Joyce Rozum- and of course our guides: Billie Jean Vogel, Curtis Ritter and Bill Smith.

# SWOCTA PHOTO ALBUM



**ANTELOPE HILLS**



**ROCK MARY**



**TURKEYS AT PALO DURO**



**CAMP DATE CREEK - BILL SMITH LEADS**



**BILLY JEAN VOGEL**



**CURTIS RITTER**



**PETROGLYPHS**

## SWOCTA GOES TO OSTA

June 5 to 7 was the annual convention of OSTA (Old Spanish Trail Association) in Las Vegas, Nevada. The three day convention was highlighted by a day of talks, a bus tour day and a car tour day. We saw trail from the springs of Las Vegas to Resting Spring Ranch in California.

Among the 52 attendees were quite a few OCTA members, including 13 SWOCTA members. We added two more people to our membership, Charles and Judy Querfeld. Charles is President of OSTA. The SWOCTA members included Susan Doyle, Pat Etter, Reba Grandrud, Richard & Marie Greene, Dave Hollecker, Baldwin & Orme Lamson, Bill & Mary Mueller, Jack & Ruth Root, and Rose Ann Tompkins.

Rumor has it that Ruth did well at the blackjack tables, and Susan and Pat sure liked the nickel slots.

SWOCTA  
PO Box 483  
Angel Fire, NM 87710



Harland & Rose Ann  
Tompkins  
1125 W. Mission Drive  
Chandler, AZ 85224-2354