

Desert Tracks

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

August 2020



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Past issues can be found via a link on the Southern Trails Chapter website southern-trails.org.

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Southern Trails Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association

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Stein’s Station and Stein’s Peak
Photo by Doug Hocking

Thoughts from the Editors...

After 17 years Jon and Deborah Lawrence have stepped down from their role as editors of this journal. They made it what it is, transforming it from a newsletter into a respectable journal. Many who we have met at Southern Trails Chapter and OCTA events have said that the journal is one of the best perks of membership in the Southern Trails Chapter. We asked them to reflect on their time as editors...

Seventeen years ago, Rose Ann Tompkins invited us to edit Desert Tracks. We have always been very impressed with what the Trail Turtles did to research, locate, and map the Southern Emigrant Trail, and we felt that their mapping reports and articles should always remain the core of the publication. To supplement their reports, we included interviews with and articles by historians, writers, and avocational experts on the trails and on the history of the southwestern frontier and the American West. We recruited graduate students and colleagues to write reviews of books that we thought might interest Chapter members. And in our 16-foot Airstream, we traveled the trails ourselves and wrote articles based on our back-country travels. One of the pleasures of this Trail Tourism was meeting new trail enthusiasts, some of whom we then invited to contribute to the publication.

We did not want Desert Tracks to become a publication that merely reported the activities of Chapter members, but one that provided both Chapter members and the public at large with interesting and up-to-date information about the historic Southwest. We tried to represent not just the Southern Emigrant Trail but the history of the Southwest in the broader context of the West. In doing this, we tried to edit to reasonable standards of writing. Producing Desert Tracks has been a very rewarding experience for us. Interacting with scholarly and boots-on-the-ground trail experts has been interesting and exciting. And we have very much appreciated that Chapter members have always been friendly and supportive.

— **Deborah and Jon Lawrence**



Covid-masked Lawrences saying goodbye from Santa Fé.

Dan Judkins is your new Editor and Dr. David Miller is the new Co-Editor. We should introduce ourselves:

Dan Judkins has been a member of the Southern Trails Chapter of OCTA since 2016. He has been an avid reader of the history of the Southwest for about 40 years. He is now retired from his profession of trauma nursing. He worked as an Emergency Department nurse manager, ambulance service director, trauma center administrative director, injury epidemiologist, and trauma outreach educator. He has a Master of Public Health degree and a Master of Science in Epidemiology. He is the author of more than 30 peer-reviewed articles, numerous textbook chapters, and one book in the medical field. He has taught trauma and emergency care for more than 40 years. He edited one trails diary book, and his first published history/trails article was printed in this journal in January 2020. He has given scores of lectures on SW history over the last 30 years.

David Miller earned his Ph.D. in Southwestern history at the University of New Mexico. He has served two terms as president of the Southern Trails Chapter of OCTA. He is sheriff of the South Canadian Cross Timbers Corral of Westerners. He has published books on the fur trade, as well as Southwestern exploration and travel.

— **Dan Judkins and David Miller**

Editorial Policy Regarding Trail Artifacts

As a matter of *Desert Tracks* editorial policy, in most circumstances we plan to avoid publishing photographs that show trail artifacts that appear to have been collected, that is, not left *in situ*. We will also encourage author statements that make it clear that artifacts were not removed or discuss how and why the situation was handled in the particular way that it was.

Period artifacts found on historical trails and roads of interest to readers of *Desert Tracks* are an integral part of the archaeological remains of that road. They are essential to verifying the road as the authentic road that it is thought to be. Removing the artifacts destroys the ability to clearly identify historical roads properly. Seeing period artifacts in place on the ground is one of the exciting things about our historical trails and roads. Publishing photographs in this journal of artifacts that appear to have been removed from their naturally-occurring place seems, to us, to lend tacit approval to a practice that we, in fact, do not approve of. Of course, artifacts on Federal lands may not be removed, according to law (1979 Archaeological Resources Protection Act). Other laws may regulate artifact collecting from state lands. Although artifacts can legally be removed from private land with the permission of the landowner, such removal interferes with future trail research. Readers are referred to the OCTA “Archaeological Policy,” adopted by the Board of Directors of OCTA on March 26, 2011 and published in the March 2018 *OCTA Leadership Manual*, March 2018, page 25, available at https://www.octa-trails.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/1244_Leadership-Manual-March-2018.pdf. The ethics of the issue is best stated clearly by the OCTA Mapping and Marking Committee “...all wagon and emigrant artifacts should be left exactly where they are situated” (page A-13 *Mapping Emigrant Trails MET Manual*, 5th edition, by the Mapping and Marking Committee of OCTA, Independence: Oregon-California Trails Association, 2014; also see page C-8).

There may be certain circumstances where we decide to publish photographs of removed artifacts, such as when a particularly-significant artifact should be seen

because it contributes to the history of the trail in a special way, an artifact is removed and placed into a museum, an artifact that may have been removed many years ago, and other special circumstances. When we thoughtfully decide to make these exceptions, the author of the article or the editors will include an explanatory comment.

On the other hand, we strongly encourage potential authors of *Desert Tracks* articles to include photographs of trail artifacts that were left in place. Ordinarily we will include no detailed description of exactly where those artifacts are located.

— *Daniel G. Judkins and David H. Miller*

The Palatkwapi and Arizona Trails at the Border



Southern end of the Arizona Trail in the Huachuca Mountains. Photo by Larry Simpkins, Arizona Trail Association.

The Hopi Vice Chairman Clark Tenakhongva said in May that border wall construction threatens the Palatkwapi Trail, a traditional Hopi trail connecting the Hopi Mesas with the Casas Grandes (*Paquimé*) in Chihuahua. The Palatkwapi Trail, with segments in north-central Arizona, apparently had a south branch leading to the Casas Grandes in Chihuahua. It crossed what is now the U. S. - Mexico border very close to the southern terminus of the modern-day 800-mile “Arizona Trail” in the Coronado National Memorial. Also, within sight, and a couple of miles further south into Sonora, is the main east-west trail used by the majority of the Southern Trail forty-niners, this segment of the trail being between the north-flowing San Pedro and Santa Cruz Rivers. The site of the Spanish presidio of Terrenate, 1742-1775, is visible from the Coronado National Memorial, about eight miles to the southwest, in Sonora.

Arizona's Stanwix Ranch Stage Station and the Farthest West Engagement in the Civil War

by Gerald T. Ahnert

A confrontation between Union and Confederate soldiers near the abandoned Butterfield Stanwix Ranch Stage Station in western Arizona would become the farthest-west engagement in the Civil War.

*“The Confederate Congress passed an Enabling Act for the Territory of Arizona, which was approved on January 18th, 1862. The limits of the Territory extended east and west along the Mexican border from the Colorado River to Texas and following the 34th parallel of latitude on the north. The seat of Government was fixed at Mesilla [New Mexico]. The government organized by Col. Baylor was recognized.”*¹

Confederate Captain Sherod Hunter brings the Civil War to Arizona. Arriving at Tucson, he writes a report to his commanding officer Colonel John R. Baylor:

*“After a march made as speedily as practicable from the Rio Grande, attended by some violent-stormy weather, but without any accident or misfortune save the loss of one of my men (Benjamin Mays [Mayo]), who died at San Simon [stage station], I have the honor of reporting to you my arrival at this place on February 28 [1862].”*²

Many who joined Hunter's command had been in Arizona before the war and some had been employed by Butterfield's Overland Mail Company, such as Lieutenant James H. Tevis who had been the Apache Pass station-keeper. Their knowledge of the trail would give them an advantage.

Union Colonel James H. Carleton, First California Volunteers, was assigned the mission of taking back the Southern Overland Trail from the Confederate Army and reopening it for mail service.³ Carleton wrote an order about the troop strength sent to Fort Yuma for the purpose of entering Arizona to begin

their campaign against the Confederacy: “I still think this will be re-enforcement enough. When I filled West's companies to 102 each, and send them fifty cavalry, he will have a force of numerical strength equal to seven ordinary companies of regulars.”⁴

John Butterfield's Overland Mail Company contract assigned 320 acres for each stage station.⁵ On March 2, 1861, because of the rapidly advancing Confederate Army, the U. S. government sent an order to the Overland Mail Company to abandon the Southern Overland Trail and transfer the stage wagons, livestock, and employees to the Union-held Central Overland Trail.⁶ In 1861-62, a disastrous flood would destroy or damage Butterfield's abandoned adobe stations on the south bank of the Gila River, which included Stanwix.⁷

Henry Grinnell had been the station-keeper of a Butterfield stage station, two-miles east of Texas Hill in western Arizona. He remained in Arizona after the Butterfield contract was transferred to the Union-held Central Overland Trail and moved into the abandoned Stanwix Ranch Stage Station. Grinnell knew that money could be made by selling barley and hay to the Union soldiers from Stanwix's cultivated fields. Military communications requested Grinnell to provide supplies for the advancing California Volunteers. An order from Fort Yuma dated January 19, 1862, stated: “I have now fears that the hay being cut from Gila [City] to Stanwix will be destroyed. Some thirty tons at Grinnel's [Grinnell's] will be sure to fall into their hands.” Another order from Fort Yuma dated March 20, 1862, identified Stanwix as Grinnel's (Grinnell's).⁸

In June 1860, *Daily Alta California* correspondent William A. Wallace was a passenger on a Butterfield Overland Mail Company stage wagon and in his report, he described the cultivated fields: “There are farming operations here that would do credit to any country. The farm extends two or three miles down the river. Two hundred tons of hay have been cut and stacked this season. There are large fields of barley and alfalfa, and vegetables of all kinds.”⁹

The California Volunteers built defenses at many of the abandoned Butterfield stations in Arizona. In an order from Colonel Carleton dated March 22, 1862, was the following:

*“If the force is successful which has gone to Tucson, I want a company of infantry, one of your best—say Captain Smith’s Fifth Infantry California Volunteers—to proceed to the fine grazing near Grinnel’s [Stanwix] and there intrench itself, working night and day if necessary, being careful to have permanent water close by, with no position, say, within 800 yards that commands it. All the wagons you can spare, including these fifteen, are to take barley to that point, and rations for the company for sixty days. I wish to have 150,000 pounds of barley put there at the earliest practicable moment, to be guarded by the infantry company until needed by the troops who are to operate against the Tontos [Apache]. In case of necessity the sacks of barley would make a good breast-work, but if the company is what I have heard it is in the way of excellence, it can make itself perfectly secure from any force that can be sent against it. There is to be no surrender when once they have gotten there. As these teams return for more barley, they can deposit hay at points this side of Grinnel’s where it may be needed.”*¹⁰

Molds to make adobe bricks were sent with the troops to fortify the trenches with a wall above ground at the edge of the trenches.¹¹

Confederate Capt. Sherod Hunter had approximately 100 soldiers under his command at Tucson.¹² Their scouts returned to Tucson with information that there was a large force of Union soldiers moving into western Arizona. Hunter knew that he would need reinforcements to confront the larger Union force. Until then, they would have to use guerrilla tactics. Before joining Hunter’s command, some had been Butterfield employees and others had worked in Arizona mines and were therefore familiar with the Butterfield Trail and stage stations.

In an order dated April 5, 1862, from Tucson written to Col. John R. Baylor, Capt. Hunter stated:

“I learned also while at Pimo Villages that at every station, formerly Overland, between that place and Fort Yuma hay had been provided for the use of the Federal

*Government, which hay I have destroyed at six of the stations thus provided. My pickets on yesterday reported troops at Stanwix’s Ranch. Which is on this side of Fort Yuma 80 miles.”*¹³

Company A, First California Cavalry, arrived at Stanwix Ranch Stage Station March 16, 1862. With them was Pvt. William Semmelrogge.¹⁴ He was mustered in at the Presidio of San Francisco August 16, 1861.¹⁵ Pvt. Semmelrogge was about to be involved in what would be known as the farthest-west engagement in the Civil War.

*“On Sunday morning [March 29, 1862], while awaiting reinforcements at this place [Stanwix] to continue our march, two of the picket guard were shot at, and one of them severely wounded in the shoulder; by a party of rebels who lay concealed about five miles from here. It seems the rebels, who were, according to the statement of the sentinels, about forty in number; endeavored to take them prisoners; but on their refusing to surrender, they shot at them several times, and only effected a flesh wound in the shoulder of one of our men. They both made good their escape, and on arrival in camp and giving the alarm, Capt. Calloway ordered the cavalry to hasten in pursuit of the marauders. Company D, who were already in their saddles and approaching, about five miles from here, hastened with all speed in pursuit of the rebels, but failed to capture any of them.”*¹⁶

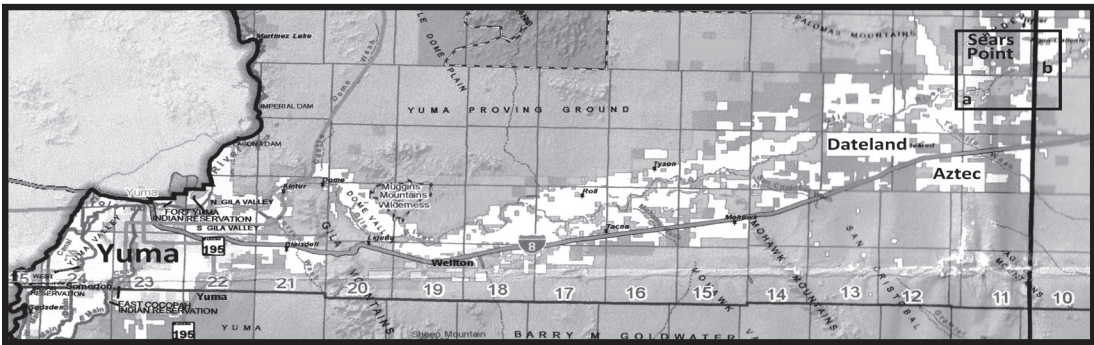
From the *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion* is this account of the engagement:

*“Company A left Camp Carleton, San Bernardino County, Cal., March 1, 1862. Arrived Stanwix Rancho, A. T., March 16, 1862. Distance three hundred sixty miles. Private Semmilrogge [Semmelrogge] (patrol) wounded March 29, 1862, six miles above Stanwix Rancho, on the Gila River.”*¹⁷

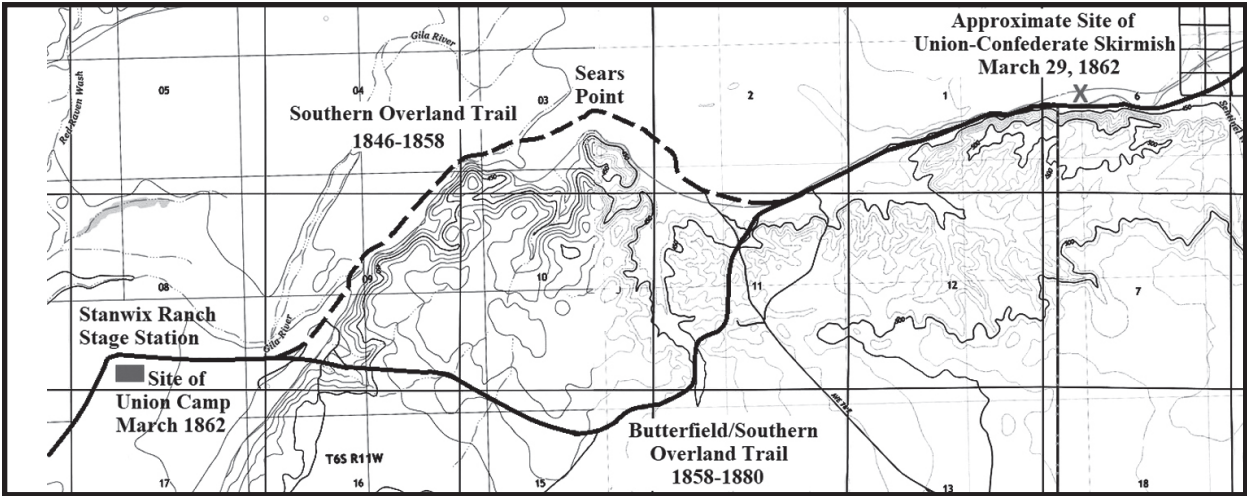
On April 2, 1862, Semmelrogge was evacuated to Fort Yuma. Recovering from his wound, he rejoined his company at Tucson in June. He served with his company all along the Rio Grande and in campaigns against the Apache. At Las Cruces, NM, October 2, 1863, he was promoted to corporal, where he was also mustered out August 31, 1864.¹⁸

Colonel Carleton's troops steadily advanced towards Tucson and Capt. Sherod Hunter realized that his soldiers were no match for the much larger Union force. He abandoned Tucson early in May 1862 and retreated to Mesilla.¹⁹ Their exchanging fire with the Union troops east of Stanwix Ranch Stage Station would officially become known as the farthest-west engagement of Union and Confederate soldiers in the Civil War.

"...two of the picket guard were shot at, and one of them severely wounded in the shoulder, by a party of rebels who lay concealed..."



Above, the location of the farthest-west engagement between Union and Confederate soldiers. Stanwix Ranch Stage Station is represented by "a" and the skirmish site is represented by "b, inside the box at the upper right" Map by G. Ahnert.



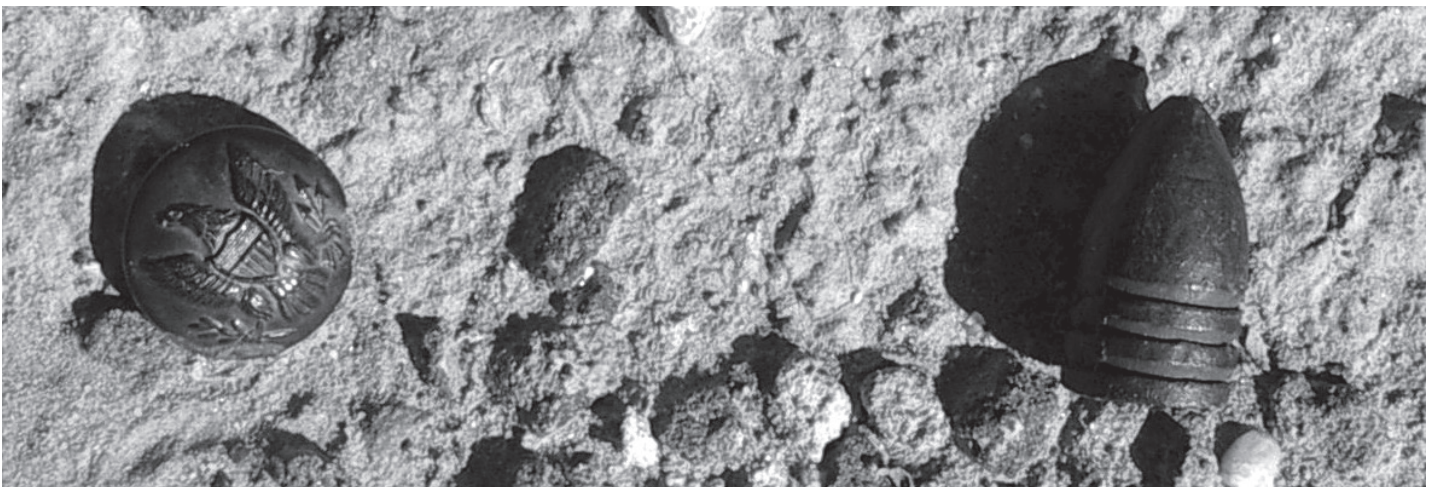
The approximate location, 85 miles east of Yuma, AZ, of the farthest-west Union-Confederate engagement about six miles east of Stanwix — GLO map Township 6S, Range 10W, Section 6. The original adobe Stanwix Ranch Stage Station was a single structure that suffered much damage in the great flood of the Gila River in the winter of 1861-1862. After the Civil War a more substantial station was built on the site, but every trace of the station was obliterated when the flood of 1993 lowered the elevation of the site by as much as six feet. Map by G. Ahnert.



Dan Judkins and Doug Hocking on the Southern Overland Trail two miles east of Stanwix Ranch Stage Station and about 1½ miles south of Sears Point. This is the trail that the Union soldiers rode out on to chase Confederate Capt. Hunter's soldiers after Pvt. Semmelrogge reported back to the Union troops at Stanwix. Five to six miles east was the site of the skirmish. Photo G. Ahnert 2020.



The author's camp about two miles west of the Union and Confederate skirmish. A small section of the trail can be seen to the center-left. Photo G. Ahnert 2019.



Artifacts along the trail east of Stanwix Ranch Stage Station. A Sharp's Rifle Minié Ball and military button. Were they lost by the California Volunteers chasing the Confederate troops? They are in an isolated spot where they will remain *in situ*. Photo G. Ahnert 2020.

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14. Orton, Gen. Richard H., *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion*, 1861 to 1867, Sacramento, 1890, 69.
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16. *Sacramento Daily Union*, California, May 23, 1862, "Letter from the South, Correspondence of the Union, Grinnall's [Grinnell's] Ranch (East of Yuma), April 1, 1862, March to Arizona."
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**From an article in the
January 1, 1849 edition of the
Daily National Intelligencer newspaper
of Washington, DC,
advice to the traveler to California...**

"...should take a blank book with him and keep a journal. This, if well kept, might sell for enough to pay his expenses; at any rate, it would be perused with satisfaction by his children and grandchildren: the future historians and the antiquaries will look for these journals and treasure them with great care."

Techniques for Mapping Emigrant Wagon Roads

by Tracy DeVault and Bruce Watson

Tracy DeVault is a member of the Southern Trails Chapter and the now-retired Trail Turtles mapping group. Bruce Watson is a member of the Colorado-Cherokee Chapter and the Southern Trails Chapter. Both have extensive experience in mapping emigrant wagon roads. Shortly after we learned that Dan Judkins and David Miller were going to be the new editors of *Desert Tracks*, the authors were asked to write a series of articles on how to map trails. (Within this series of articles, we will use the terms “emigrant wagon roads” and “trails” interchangeably.)

This is the first in a comprehensive series of articles on the techniques used to map emigrant wagon roads. These articles will include information on researching trails, finding trails, following trails, recording locations of trail evidence, creating highly accurate maps showing the routes of trails, and archiving trail information. We will discuss in detail the use of modern technologies such as hand-held GPS receivers, U.S.G.S. Topographic Maps, and satellite images that aid in finding and mapping trails. There will also be a section on artifact identification. Finally, there will be an extensive discussion of the various software programs that are used to plot mapping data on U.S.G.S. Topographic Maps and satellite images.

OCTA’s mission includes the preservation of physical trails. Generally, that means preventing the destruction of physical trails by human activities. However, many trail mappers feel that the greatest threat to physical trails is time. Those of us that have closely observed emigrant trails over the past twenty-five to fifty years are very much aware of the deterioration and in some cases the total loss of important sections of emigrant wagon roads due to the ravages of time. We trail mappers hope that the results of our work to map and document emigrant wagon roads will outlast the physical trails themselves.

So, what exactly do we mean by “trail mapping”? It is certainly true that many individuals interested in the settlement of the American West have set out on their own to locate and follow a particular emigrant wagon road. These individual trail-following efforts, at least in the beginning, were done solely for the enjoyment and enrichment of the individual. Although OCTA’s formal trail mapping efforts use a lot of the same techniques, our definition of trail mapping is somewhat broader. What we mean by trail mapping is locating a particular emigrant wagon road, following that wagon road, recording the location and description of individual pieces of trail evidence, and transferring that information (generally called archiving) to organizations where it will be kept safe for long periods of time and made available to individuals and organizations that have an interest in the routes of emigrant wagon roads.

If your chapter has an active trail-mapping group the easiest way to get started is to join that group. What follows is some guidance on forming a trail-mapping group where one does not already exist or where no group is currently mapping a particular trail of interest.

Trail mapping projects are of very long duration. The Trail Turtles’ effort to map the Southern Emigrant Trail lasted over twenty-five years. An effort to map the Old Spanish Trail through Inyo County, California is just now wrapping up after ten years of effort. When starting a long-term mapping project, try to recruit mappers in their fifties or younger as well as older members.

We would suggest that if you’re trying to form a trail-mapping group, do not limit your search for potential mappers to just your own chapter. The Trail Turtles contacted all OCTA chapters when we were recruiting mappers. In the end we had mappers from Northern and Southern California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Florida.

Whether the mapping group is a two-person group or consists of a number of like-minded individuals, it is absolutely necessary that at least two of the members have extensive personal computer skills.

We look for individuals with strong technical skills and an extensive knowledge of a variety of software programs including Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Adobe Acrobat, Adobe Photoshop, and an engineering drafting program. Because mapping data must be maintained for years (and possibly for decades) we look for people with strong organizational skills and who routinely back up their computers and store their backup files offsite. A big plus would be a candidate that has a serious interest in cartography.

We should point out that these extensive computer skills are not required of all of the members of a trail-mapping group. As the Trail Turtles evolved, we found that some members were really good at basic historical research, especially at locating trail diaries, newspaper articles, and military reports that described travel over the trail and trail landmarks. Others were really good at field work, that is, spotting trail evidence. In many places along the Southern Emigrant Trail, all evidence of a swale has disappeared. All that remains are rust rocks, grooves in rocks, broken wagon parts, pieces of horse/mule/ox shoes, square nails, bits of broken glass, broken crockery, cartridge cases, lead balls, buttons, soldered-construction cans, etc.

One of the first tasks that a new mapping group faces is selecting a trail or trail segment to map. Often the original organizers of a mapping group already have a trail in mind. An important consideration is how far mappers will have to travel to map the trail. Since the Trail Turtles were already coming from faraway places, we chose a trail segment that was 800 miles in length and passed through three states. This also led to mapping trips that spanned up to a week in duration. Many mapping groups limit their mapping to trail segments that are within 100 miles of home and limit the duration of mapping trips to one day.

The next thing we would suggest for a new mapping group would be to organize a mapping training class. The information contained in this series of articles, is no substitute for a training class conducted by experienced trail mappers. We suggest a two-day training course that consists of a day of class work and a day of field work. Much of the information

contained in this series of articles is included in OCTA's *Mapping Emigrant Trails (MET) Manual*. These articles and the *MET Manual* do not take the place of a well-conducted training class. Training classes offer the opportunity to ask questions, to see trail evidence first hand and to have extensive discussion of a particular topic.

Trail mappers need quite a bit of specialized equipment. Mapping is often done well away from civilization. Mappers may hike for several miles and be away from their vehicles for up to six hours during a mapping day. Typical hiking equipment includes boots, hats, gloves, sun glasses, sun screen, water, a simple first-aid kit, a snack or lunch, and toilet paper. These days mandatory trail-mapping equipment includes a cell phone. Specialized mapping equipment includes a hand-held GPS receiver, a GMRS radio (for communicating with other mappers in the field), a camera, a recording device (anything from a pencil and small notebook to a digital voice recorder), surveyor's tape, and extra batteries. Also, these days some mapping groups are making use of metal detectors.

In our next installment we will discuss how to organize a mapping workshop and what subjects to cover. Please feel free to contact the authors by email with any questions or corrections: tracydeva@mindspring.com, bgwatson@comcast.net.



Finding and marking the trail.

Dry, Soft, Sandy Washes and Stair-Stepped Valleys: An Historical Overview of the Southern Overland Trail from Yuma Crossing to Warner's Ranch

Part I: Early Explorations 1772-1847

by Stephen R. Van Wormer

To the memory of Phil Brigandi

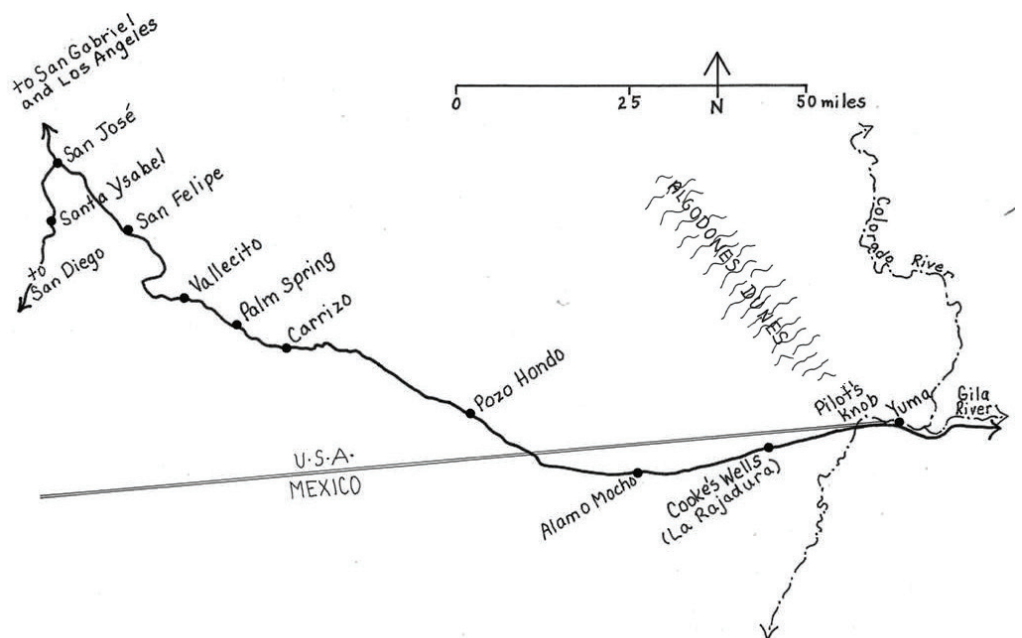
Introduction

Of the many overland trails used during the vast Gold Rush emmigration of 1848-50, the Southern Emigrant Trail is the least recognized for its importance.¹ Thousands followed its various branches westward across the deserts of Mexico, New Mexico, and Arizona, to Yuma Crossing at the junction of the Gila and Colorado Rivers. The route became the major overland entrance to Southern California prior to construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Accounts of travel over the portion west of the Colorado River have been considered some of the most distressing records of overland Gold Rush emigration. West of Yuma Crossing the trail consisted

of a 90-mile stretch with no permanent running water. It dipped south of the Algodones Sand Dunes and then northwesterly to the first permanent water source at Carrizo Creek (Figure 1). After reaching the spring at Carrizo, the overland travelers' situation gradually improved. From this point, at approximately 500 feet above mean sea level, the trail followed the Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Pass through a series of elevated valleys, including Vallecito, El Puerto (present-day Mason Valley), present-day Box Canyon, and San Felipe. This route provided reliable water and gradually lifted the emigrants out of the desert until the top of the mountains and good pasture land in San José Valley were reached at Warner's Ranch, 55 miles to the northwest at around 2,800 feet above sea level (Figure 2). Here the arduous desert crossing ended.²

The Southern Emigrant Trail's origins preceded the Gold Rush by many decades. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Spanish and Mexican military explorations first established the route by following Native American trails. It became well used by traders and trappers who journeyed between California and Sonora in the 1830s. The 1840s and 50s saw invading American armies follow the route to California during the Mexican War, followed by thousands of Gold Rush Argonauts. Then, in 1857, overland mail service was established along the road.

Figure 1. Overland Trail Yuma Crossing to San José (Warner's Ranch), 1826-1848.



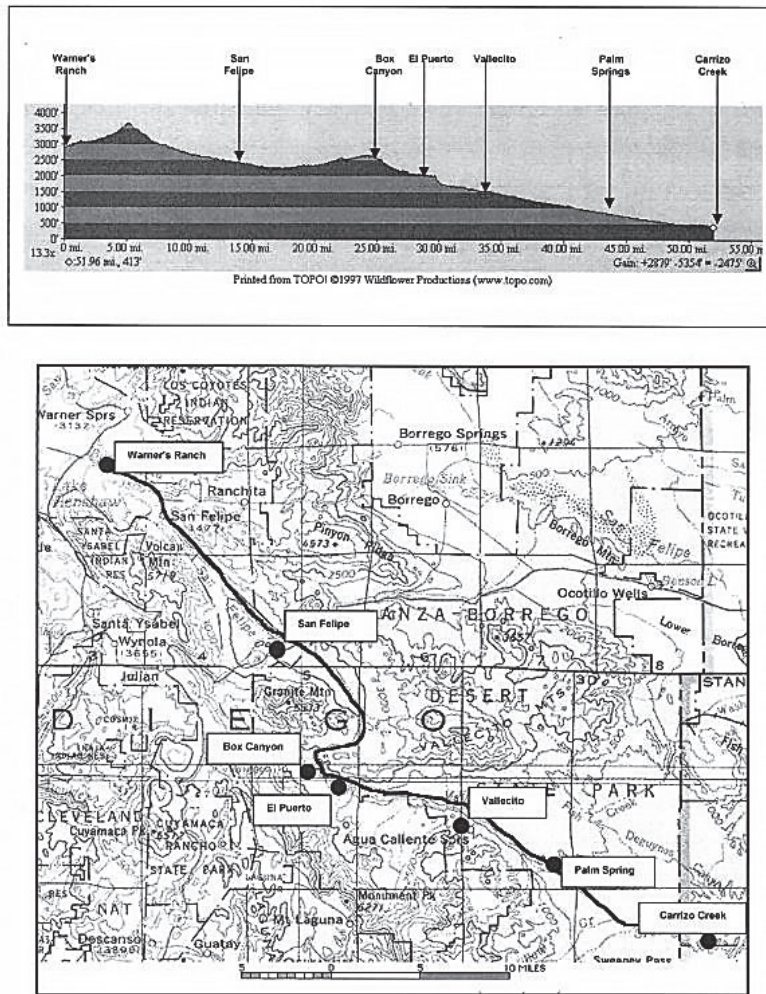


Figure 2. Elevation and map of the Southern Immigrant Trail through the Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Pass.

This two-part series for *Desert Tracks* will document the development and use of the trail from Yuma Crossing to Warner's Ranch in the San José Valley from its inception during the late 18th century through the emigrations of the Gold Rush in the mid-1850s. Part I will cover the period up through the American invasion of Mexico in 1846-47. Part II will explore the travels of various groups that used the trail from the beginning of the Gold Rush in 1848 until the mid 1850s. The use of the road by overland mail stage coach lines was presented in *Desert Tracks* in June 2011.³

Spanish and Mexican Explorations

A series of unrelated explorations by Spanish and Mexican military forces followed original Native American trails and discovered routes and passes

that would eventually be connected to become the Southern Overland Road⁴ (see Figure 3). The first Spaniard to enter present-day Anza Borrego Desert was Lieutenant Pedro Fages who left San Diego Mission with three soldiers on October 29, 1772, in pursuit of army deserters. They followed Indian trails across the Cuyamaca Mountains and desert via the San Diego River channel, Oriflamme Canyon, Mason Valley, and Vallecito and Carrizo Washes, then followed the latter northeast to its junction with San Felipe Creek and the Indian village of San Sebastian. From that point the party turned northward to San Gabriel and conducted extensive explorations of northern California.⁵

Two expeditions led by Juan Bautista de Anza from 1774 to 1776 established routes from Tubac, Sonora (now Arizona) to Yuma Crossing. After traversing

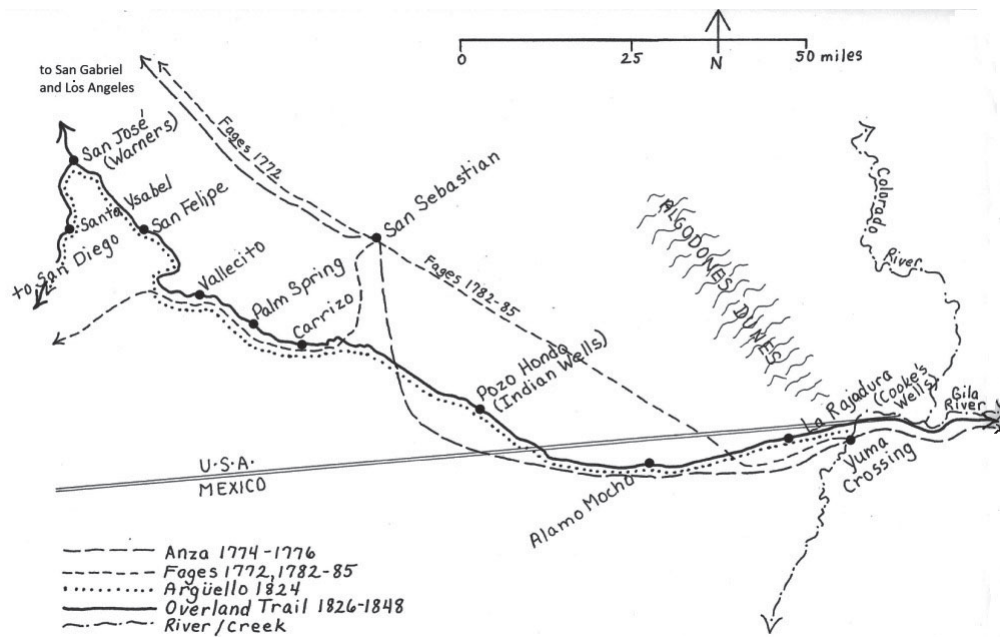


Figure 3. Trail explorations from Yuma Crossing to San José, 1772-1824.

the Colorado, Anza continued southwest around the southern edge of the Algodones Sand Dunes, and then northward to San Sebastian Indian village visited by Fages in 1772. From here he continued north across present-day Borrego Valley and Coyote Canyon to San Gabriel Mission.⁶

Between 1782 and 1785, in the aftermath of a Native uprising at Yuma, Fages made three expeditions to the Colorado River. He retraced his earlier 1772 route from San Sebastian eastward to San Diego via Carrizo and Vallecito Washes. On his various trips between San Diego, San Sebastian, and the Colorado River he discovered many of the points along the Carrizo Corridor that would later become landmarks on the Overland Trail, including the marshes and springs at *El Carrizal* in Carrizo Creek, Palm Spring, and Vallecito.⁷

At this point the route had been established from Yuma Crossing westward around the southern end of the sand dunes and then in a northeasterly direction to San Sebastian, from where it continued north via Borrego Valley and Coyote Canyon to San Gabriel and Los Angeles, or across the mountains to the west via the Fages' Carrizo Creek-Vallecito Creek-Oriflame Canyon route to San Diego.

Because of the uprising and continued hostilities of Indians on the Colorado River, the overland trail from the California Coast to Yuma Crossing remained closed to Mexican Colonial travel after 1786. It continued to be used by Natives for raiding and trading.⁸ Results of these raids would allow Mexican forces from San Diego to discover a route along trails that connected Carrizo Creek to the earlier Anza trail by bypassing San Sebastian via a more westerly route along the New River.

In 1824 Natives from the Colorado Desert stole 140 horses from corrals of the San Diego Presidio. Soldiers in pursuit, led by Lieutenant Santiago Argüello, traced the tracks of the large herd across the coastal mountains via Santa Ysabel and the San José Valleys,⁹ then southward into the desert via San Felipe Valley, and present-day Box Canyon, intersecting Fages' 1772 and 1782 route via Vallecito and Carrizo Washes. However, rather than heading east to San Sebastian this trail continued southeast to the present-day New River, then followed it south to intersect the earlier Anza trail that lead around the south end of the Algodones Sand Dunes to the Colorado River at Yuma Crossing.¹⁰ This route offered several benefits the earlier trail through San Sebastian did not have. From *El Carrizal* at Carrizo Creek Marsh stair-stepped valleys with permanent water sources

gradually led northwesterly to the summit of the mountains at San José from where a continuing series of gradually descending corridors led to either Los Angeles or San Diego.

Argüello's discovery coincided with a fragile truce negotiated with the Natives at Yuma by Comandante General of Sonora, José Figueroa. José Romero, captain of the Tucson Presidio, and Sub-Lieutenant of Engineers Romualdo Pacheco, delineated the trail via the Carrizo Corridor, San José Valley through Santa Ysabel and to San Diego as the official route for overland travel from Sonora to California. An alternative route for travelers wishing to bypass San Diego and reach the coast at a more northerly point led from *El Valle de San José* through *Puerta La Cruz*, *Cañada Aguanga*, and Temecula to San Gabriel and Los Angeles. This would become the main branch of the overland trail 20 years later.¹¹

In spite of establishment of the route, travel between California and Sonora remained infrequent through the 1820s.¹² Starting in 1827, Sonorans, escaping Indian uprisings, used the route to move to California. Mexican government communications regularly came through from 1827 to 1828,¹³ but in 1830 Father José Sánchez reported that Indians had murdered four Sonorans on the west bank of the Colorado and traffic on the road had decreased considerably.¹⁴



Figure 4. A portion of Coulter's 1835 Map of California showing the road to the Colorado River.

Travel continued, however. In 1832 English botanist Dr. Thomas Coulter journeyed to the Colorado River along the Sonora Road and produced what may be the earliest maps and published descriptions of the route (Figure 4). He noted San Felipe and *El Carrizal*, as well as Algodones on the Colorado River. *El Puerto* or perhaps Vallecito is labeled *La Bahia*,¹⁵ and a water hole one day's journey west of the Colorado River at the location of *La Rajadura* was called *Agua Sola*.¹⁶ Commenting on the road between Carrizo and the Colorado he stated "but from hence across the plain, which is here about one hundred miles broad, and totally destitute of pasture, cattle suffer extremely. It is always possible to carry water enough for a party of men; but horses and mules must pass the first two days absolutely without water or food - and even then get only brine at the point called the *Aqua Sola*."¹⁷ The last official Mexican government's use of the road occurred in 1834 when Rafael Amador carried dispatches from Mexican President Santa Ana to California's governor Figueroa.¹⁸

Also, in the early 1830s the Sonora trail became the path of overland traders. In 1832, the same year as Coulter's journey, the Jackson-Young party from Santa Fé, New Mexico followed the old Anza Sonora Trail along the Gila River, through present-day central Arizona, to its junction with the Colorado. They then crossed the desert along the route established by Argüello, Romero and Pacheco to the San José Valley and continued to Los Angeles. As a member of this expedition Jonathan Trumbull Warner first crossed the valley that would later commonly be known as his ranch. Jackson returned by the same route with 600 mules and 100 horses. Traffic increased during the 1830s and 40s as livestock traders drove herds of horses eastward to Sonora and New Mexico and the route between the Colorado River and Warner's Ranch became permanently established.¹⁹ Water holes were discovered and maintained, and the names by which many are still known assigned. West of the river the most difficult part of the trail lay across the Colorado Desert, until the waters of Carrizo Creek were reached. This 90-mile stretch of wind-blown sand drifts, stone-covered terraces, and salt flats with little-to-no vegetation, had no permanent sources of running water.

After crossing the Colorado, the trail headed south, paralleling the river for about seven miles, to avoid the immense Algodones Sand Dunes located directly to the west. The route then turned westward across fine, soft, wind-blown sand along the southern edge of the dunes. Water along this stretch was obtained from crude wells dug into dry arroyo bottoms. These deep channels had been formed, and flowed occasionally over the millennia, when the Colorado River flooded its banks. The shallow holes, excavated into soft sand that easily caved in, had to be reopened each time they were used. The first well, known as *La Agua Sola*²⁰ or *Los Pozos de la Rajadura* (the wells in the crack), sat in a cleft at the base of a 30-foot cliff in the dry bed of the Alamo River, about 15 miles from the Colorado.²¹ Continuing westward across a barren gravel plain, the road passed through occasional drifts of blown sand for another 24 miles until it came once again to the dry meandering channel of the Alamo River (Figure 5). Here a stunted cottonwood tree marked the location of a second source of shallow ground water. Mexican livestock traders named this spot *Alamo Mocho*, Spanish for the stunted or short cottonwood, after its most obvious descriptive attribute.²²



Figure 5. Alamo Mocho.



Figure 6. Trail between Alamo Mocho and Pozo Hondo. U. S. Pacific Railroad Expeditions and Surveys. Reproduction courtesy Ellen Sweet.

Beyond *Alamo Mocho* the trail crossed a salt-encrusted plain almost destitute of vegetation for approximately 13 miles before it reached *La Laguna*, a small pond of saline water unfit to drink. From here the trail veered slightly northwest and after another 13 miles reached *El Pozo Hondo* (the deep well), in the bottom of a dry stream bed now known as the New River (Figure 6). The route followed this dry northwesterly-trending channel for approximately 10 miles, then left the wash and crossed a flat plain of soft, gravely sand covered with stunted creosote and other small desert shrubs until it entered the dry bed of Carrizo Wash (Figure 7). From this point, it followed the sandy stream bed as it wound between weathered hills of ancient mud sediment until it reached the flowing spring and marsh known as



Figure 7. Carrizo Wash southeast of the marsh looking to the northwest.



Figure 8. *El Carrizal approaching from the southeast.*



Figure 9. *Vallecito Valley. The mud hills have given way to granite outcrops with cholla, creosote, and the piñon-juniper vegetation type.*

El Carrizal (the cane grove), around 20 miles from *El Pozo Hondo* (Figure 8). This was the first permanent flowing water source that could be relied upon west of the Colorado River.²³

From Carrizo, conditions gradually improved. Water sources could be counted on at regular intervals as the trail rose gradually out of the desert until it reached the summit of the mountains at Warner's Ranch. Continuing in a northwest direction, the route followed Carrizo and then Vallecito Washes for another nine miles before coming to a small spring located in a palm grove. Later travelers named this location Palm Spring.²⁴ After another nine miles along the same dry stream bed, the trail came to the pasture and springs known as *El Ojo Grande* at Vallecito, where a semi-permanent Indian settlement was located²⁵ (Figure 9).

Beyond Vallecito the terrain gradually began to change. Granite outcrops replaced the sandy hills and desert vegetation gave way to piñon juniper. The road crossed a granitic boulder ridge, today known as Campbell Grade, and reached another marshy area called *El Puerto* where water could be obtained. Beyond this valley the trail entered a narrow gorge, sometimes called Cooke's Pass or Devil's Canyon, and now known as Box Canyon, and then continued in its consistent northwesterly direction until it reached the waters of San Felipe Creek and another Indian village. Beyond San Felipe the trail left the desert floor and rose gradually into the mountains

(Figure 10). The piñon-juniper-like vegetation and creosote gave way to chaparral and oak trees. At Warner's Ranch, 15 miles from San Felipe, the San José Valley opened into broad flat grass-covered grazing land.

In the 1840s Jonathan Trumball Warner established a ranch in San José Valley. As already noted, he first saw the region in 1832 as a member of the Jackson-Young party. Warner remained in California, settling in Los Angeles. In 1844 he received a grant for the valley and moved there with his family during the winter of 1844-1845. They lived in an adobe house near the Indian village of Cupa at Agua Caliente Hot Springs.²⁶ Since that time the area has been known as Warner's or Warner's Ranch and the north end of the San Felipe Valley, leading down into the desert, has often been called Warner's Pass.²⁷

Although the Mexican livestock traders who established the trail left almost no written documentation of their travels, the fact that the route was well established by the 1840s, and that most of the major watering holes and landmarks had been identified and given Spanish place names that were well known by that time, provides testimony to the untold number of successful livestock drives that these hearty Hispanic pioneers completed during the 15 years prior to the American invasion of 1846. Born and raised in the desert, they knew how to drive large herds across arid expanses with little loss. In the decades following 1846, American emigrants



Figure 10. San Felipe Valley, looking northerly toward Warner's Pass. U. S. Pacific Railroad Expeditions and Surveys. Reproduction courtesy Ellen Sweet.

and military expeditions attempted to drive their own livestock herds across the same terrain, and often met with disastrous results. Until establishment of the railroads in the 1870s, the dead carcasses of horses, mules, sheep, oxen, and cattle marked the trail and every water hole between the Colorado River and Carrizo Creek. The fact that the first American armies that traveled this same route in the mid-1840s did not find the water holes surrounded by dead livestock, or the trail lined with the bleached bones and decimated bodies of animals driven from California to Sonora and New Mexico during the 1830s and early 40s, attests to the skill, knowledge, and ability of the Mexican herders who established the trail.

The Forces of Manifest Destiny and the Mexican War

During the 1830s and 40s a belief in the concept of Manifest Destiny became a dominant aspect of American culture and political thought. Proponents were convinced God had willed the American continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant population of the United States. They saw the acquisition of new lands as

indispensable to the complete liberty of Anglo-Saxon Protestants benefiting from life under the United States Constitution. America's ordained mission called for an expansion of "the area of freedom," but British designs on Oregon and the unstable and weak Mexican Republic presented obstacles.²⁸ In 1845 voters elected James K. Polk President on a platform that included acquisition of Oregon and California. Oregon was obtained through negotiation. When the Mexican government refused to consider an offer to purchase California, the President provoked hostilities through a dispute over the southern boundary of Texas. A joint resolution of both houses of the United States Congress declared that a state of war existed between the United States and the Republic of Mexico on May 13, 1846.²⁹

The United States' conquest of Northern Mexico and the subsequent settlement of California that followed had a major impact on development of the Southern Overland Trail, as the forces of Manifest Destiny took over the west. Beginning with the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 and until completion of the Southern Pacific railroad in the mid 1870s, the Carrizo Corridor and Warner's Pass became

part of a major passage for overland migration and communication along the Gila River route. The movement began with military expeditions. Following earlier trails established by Spanish and Mexican explorers and Sonora and Santa Fé traders, invading American armies marching to California established an overland route from Texas through Arizona along the Gila River to where it joined the Colorado at present-day Yuma, Arizona.³⁰ From the junction of the two rivers, the trail followed the already well-established route across the Colorado Desert and northward along the east side of the Peninsular Range through Carrizo Corridor, San Felipe Valley, Warner's Pass, and San José Valley. The trail to San Diego forked to the southwest at this point, running through Santa Ysabel, while the main road continued northward to Temecula and Los Angeles.³¹ General Stephen W. Kearny's Army of the West crossed the desert between the Colorado River and Warner's Ranch in early December 1846, followed by Colonel Cooke's Mormon Battalion in January 1847.³²

The Army of the West

The Army of the West, under the command of Brevet-Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny, consisted of 1,658 men that included horse-mounted dragoons and a detachment of topographical engineers headed by Lieutenant William Hensley Emory. Following commencement of hostilities with Mexico, they left Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in June 1846 with orders to secure New Mexico and continue on to California. Meeting little resistance, Kearny easily established United States military rule and took possession of Santa Fé on August 18. Leaving most of the detachment behind, he headed west on September 25 with 300 men, including Emory's engineers. After eight days on the trail they met the famous overland scout Kit Carson. He had been sent from California to Washington D.C. with dispatches from John C. Frémont stating that the Pacific Coast had been conquered. Kearny sent 200 of his men back to Santa Fé and ordered Carson to guide him to California.

When the Army of the West arrived at the junction of the Gila and Colorado Rivers in late November 1846, they found the latter to be a wide, shallow, muddy,

dingy, red-colored stream resembling the Arkansas and Missouri Rivers (Figure 11). It flowed through a wide valley covered in a dense growth of mesquite and other "bushes" with an occasional cottonwood tree. After crossing at a ford some six miles south of the junction with the Gila, the army continued westward along the southern edge of the sand dunes to the first well, at *La Rajadura*, and camped.³³ Lt. Emory recorded "we encountered an immense sand drift, and from that point until we halted, the great highway between Sonora and California lies along the foot of this drift, which is continually encroaching down the valley."³⁴ The Lieutenant's use of the term "the great highway between Sonora and California" indicated the trail could be easily followed as a result of the extensive use it had received by Mexican traders during the previous decade. Upon reaching the first watering spot the soldiers found a hole five to six feet deep in the bottom of a dry arroyo located a few feet to the left of the road. By digging they obtained enough water for the men and animals.³⁵

The march resumed at dawn the following morning. The trail followed the base of the dunes for another four miles and then veered slightly northward until it reached *Alamo Mochó*. In the mesquite-filled arroyo Kearny's forces located a large hole. They reopened this well and excavated another. Both reached a depth of 15 to 20 feet below ground surface before encountering water. The Dragoons wove a "basket work of willow twigs" around the sides to hold back the caving sand.³⁶ Water was finally obtained late that night ". . . the very worst it was ever my misfortune to drink. It took all night to water the animals — two buckets full each was all that was allowed — and an officer stood by to see division fairly made. Some of our mules being wild and unused to such attention refused to have anything to do with the water." For these the bucket had to be buried in the sand or covered with grass or mesquite beans.³⁷

Over the next two days the Army of the West faced the hardest section of the road. Both men and animals suffered from fatigue as a result of water, food, and sleep deprivation. For reasons unknown, they crossed the salt flat of *La Laguna* but missed the water hole at *El Pozo Hondo*, traversing the entire 54 miles from

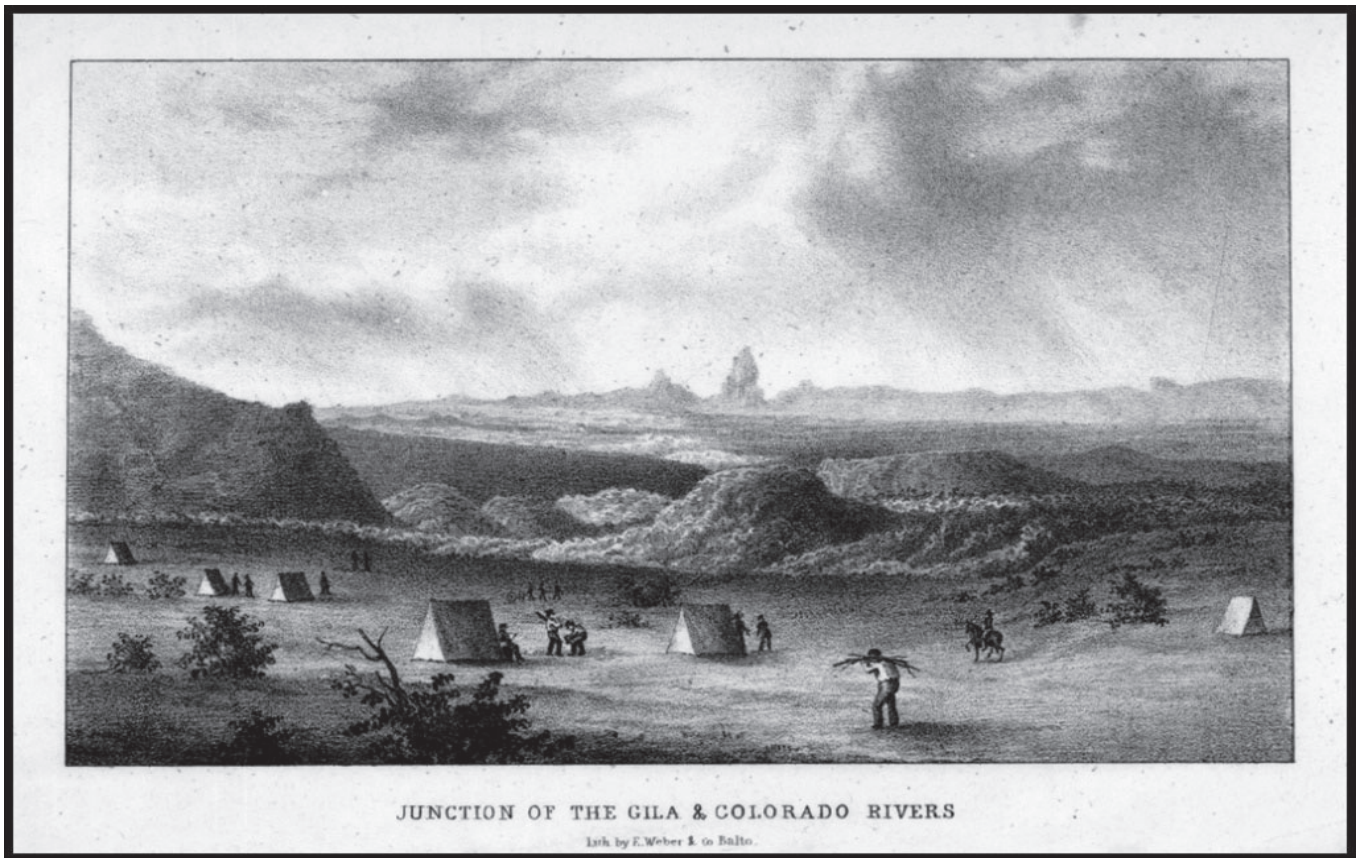


Figure 11. *The Army of the West camped at the junction of the Gila and Colorado Rivers. Emory, Notes of a Military Reconnaissance, 1848, plate between pages 94-95.*

Alamo Mocho to *El Carrizal* without replenishing water. This part of the desert was practically destitute of vegetation. The soft sand exhausted the horses and mules and many began to collapse. The Army reached the brine-filled pond at Laguna at around 8 o'clock that night. Finding its water unfit to drink they rested until 4 a.m. and then continued. Emory wrote "we groped silently our way in the dark. The stoutest animals now began to stagger, and when day dawned scarcely a man was seen mounted." As the sun rose a heavy fog blew in from the Gulf of California. The men's hair and the manes of their mules became "quite wet", providing some relief. When the fog lifted, they found themselves entering a "gap in the mountain which had been before us for four days," formed by the course of Carrizo Creek. The first members reached the waters of the spring and marsh at noon³⁸. At *El Carrizal* the Army halted, making camp "at the source, a magnificent spring, twenty or thirty feet in diameter, highly impregnated with sulfur The spring consisted of a series of smaller springs or veins." Emory described the

vegetation as "cane, rush, and a coarse grass, such as is found on the marshes near the sea shore." The water flowed for only a short distance. "Within a half a mile of one of its sources . . . the sands had already absorbed much of its water and left but little running." A mile or two below the spring the creek disappeared entirely.³⁹

The running creek brought relief to both men and livestock. The horses and mules grazed on the cane and grass and enjoyed the first water they had seen in over 36 hours. In his journal, Henry Smith Turner described the relief and ecstasy all felt:

*"November 28, Saturday.—Started an hour before day, marched 22 miles to Karissa Creek, the west end of this laborious journey. We have lost many animals in crossing it but thanks be to God we are through it and have made fewer sacrifices than any of us expected. We have great cause to be thankful to Almighty God for His goodness to us, and from the bottom of my heart I feel gratitude."*⁴⁰

John Griffen recorded conditions in camp:

“After getting in camp we all felt quite comfortable, and as we had had nothing like cooking for several days every man turned out the best he had — a canister of potted meat and a cup of tea — with a brandy toddy were the greatest luxuries that could be found — and we went at them with a will. We supped out. I took one supper at home — drank penola with Carson — & wound up in the evening by eating again with Captain Moore — it seemed to me that there was no such thing as quenching my thirst. I drank tea and water until I could stand no more, and yet I was thirsty and everyone complained of the same. Many of the messes had nothing but a pure vegetable diet — that is to say, bread — made of salt & flour & water or a little boiled corn, or beans, with not even meat enough to grease it — among the number in this situation was the general. The Engineer camp were even worse off it was reported that they had nothing at all for the men employed in the department, a Mexican who they had to herd their mules had stolen from them and sold the provisions to another Mexican trader who was allowed to travel with the troops. . . . — the question was seriously mooted whether a mule should be killed or not. It was not done — but I suppose will be at the next camp — as we are fully seventy miles from any settlements.”⁴¹

Overall the Army had suffered badly, forced to leave many animals “on the road to die of thirst and hunger” between *Alamo Mochó* and Carrizo, “in spite of the generous efforts of the men to bring them to the spring. More than one was brought up, by one man tugging at the halter and another pushing up the brute, by placing his shoulder against its buttocks.” Emory felt that the most serious loss had been “one or two fat mares and colts brought with us for food. . . Major Swords found in a concealed place one of the best pack mules slaughtered, and the choice bits cut from his shoulders and flanks, stealthily done by some mess less provident than others.”⁴²

With rations low and the forage at the spring inadequate for their livestock, the Army of the West resumed their march on the morning of November 29 toward Vallecito. Still fatigued, they continued “at a snail’s pace,” passing the grove of palms at

Palm Spring. “The day was intensely hot, and the sand deep; the animals, inflated with water and rushes, gave way by scores. . . . It was a feast day for the wolves [actually coyotes], which followed in packs close on our track, seizing our deserted brutes and making the air resound with their howls as they battled for the carcasses.” Although only 19 miles from the water at Carrizo, many members of the detachment did not reach the “little pools” of Vallecito until 10 o’clock that night.⁴³

Vallecito is a picturesque spot, nestled in a small flat plain approximately a mile wide. Granite boulder hills border the edge of the valley on the east. On its western side the granitic peaks of the Peninsular Range rise abruptly to heights of over 3,000 feet. Although described as salty, the grass that grew here seemed suitable for the livestock and extended for a mile or two along the valley. Kearny halted for a day to rest men and animals. A horse was killed to feed the famished dragoons.⁴⁴

As they camped, winter set in. A heavy dark cloud bank covered the mountains on the west side of the valley and a cold wind blew a “hurricane” from that direction. Yet the sky above the camp remained clear as the threatening clouds stayed over the peaks and did not move eastward on to the desert valley. The crossing continued on December 1. The clouds had cleared, revealing the western mountains covered in snow. The soldiers marched into a cold wind from the northwest, passing through the narrow gorge at present-day Box Canyon and reaching the Indian village at San Felipe at dark, which they found deserted. The following day they followed the San Felipe Valley northward and reached Warner’s Ranch. Emory described their relief at leaving the desert:

“We commenced to ascend another divide and as we approached the summit the narrow valley leading to it was covered with timber and long grass. On both sides the evergreen oak grew luxuriantly, and, for the first time since leaving the States we saw what would even there be called large trees. Emerging from these we saw in the distance the beautiful valley of Agua Caliente, waving with yellow grass, where we expected to find the rancheria owned by an American named Warner. . . . The rancheria was in

charge of a young fellow from New Hampshire named Marshall. We ascertained from him that his employer was a prisoner to the Americans in San Diego, that the Mexicans were still in possession of the whole country . . . that we were in the heart of the enemy's stronghold . . . and that we were now in possession of the great pass to Sonora

*"To appease hunger, however, was the first consideration. Seven of my men eat, at one single meal, a fat full grown sheep. Our camp was pitched on the road to the Pueblo [Los Angeles], leading a little north of west. To the south down the valley of the Agua Caliente, lay the road to San Diego. Above us [at the hot springs Indian village] was Mr. Warner's backwoods, American looking houses, built of adobe and covered with a thatched roof. Around were the thatched huts of the more than half naked Indians."*⁴⁵

The Army of the West had not yet seen the last of its hardship. While marching from Warner's Ranch to San Diego they engaged a band of Mexican Californio guerilla fighters under the command of Don Andres Pico at San Pasqual with disastrous consequences.⁴⁶

The Mormon Battalion

Following six weeks behind the Army of the West was Colonel Phillip St. George Cooke with the Mormon Battalion.⁴⁷ Their mission was to open a wagon road to California. The widening and leveling of the original trail so wagons could pass made possible the incredible overland migration that would occur in less than decade.⁴⁸

The Mormon Battalion consisted of 500 volunteers of that religion attached to the Army of the West for 12 months, by order of President Polk. Kearny originally placed Captain James Allen of the First Dragoons in command. Following behind the regular troops, the Mormons left Council Bluffs, Iowa on July 20, 1846, marching to Fort Leavenworth where they trained. On August 12 they left for New Mexico. Captain Allen died in route and Lieutenant Smith took command. The battalion reached Santa Fé after Kearny had departed. Upon receiving word of

Allen's death General Kearny ordered Colonel Philip St. George Cooke to return to Santa Fé and take command of the Mormons. They were to follow and open a wagon road.⁴⁹

The Mormon Battalion reached the Colorado River on January 8, 1847 with 350 men and five officers' wives. They crossed the river on January 10 and continued westward on the afternoon of December 11. The soft, wind-blown sands along the southern edge of the dunes proved to be exceptionally difficult for the mule teams pulling wagons. They began to give out before reaching *La Rajadura*, and two wagons were abandoned.⁵⁰

An advance party, sent ahead of the wagons to find and prepare the well for their arrival, encountered the hole filled in with a dead coyote in it. They dug out the old excavation and started another. The first wagons began to arrive at sundown. However, the caving, sandy side made it impossible to accumulate more than a couple of inches of water until Colonel Cooke ordered a wash tub, with the bottom knocked out, to be placed in the first well. This worked for a while, but then the water ceased. Finally, the second well reached a flow of water more than 10 feet below ground surface that could be dipped out with a camp kettle. At 10:30 that night Cooke ordered a group of 13 to leave in the morning for *Alamo Mocho* and prepare that source.⁵¹

By 11:30 the following day three companies had watered their mules and began the day's march, leaving the rest of the battalion to follow. Two more wagons and a trunk of tools were abandoned. The soft sand continued to be a burden for the wagon teams. After covering only 11 miles, Cooke established camp at a patch of "scant straw-colored grass" at sunset in "a wilderness of sand, mixed with gravel and small stones; the only vegetable production a slim bush, which the New Mexicans call 'stinking wood.'"⁵²

The crossing resumed the following day at sunrise. The Mormons traveled the remaining 13 miles to *Alamo Mocho* by 2 o'clock that afternoon. The advance party had also found this water source filled

in, with four dead coyotes in it. They cleaned it out and began another. Cooke noted: “The Alamo Mocho well is near the foot of a very steep bank, perhaps eighty feet down to a remarkable depression of great extent and as wide as a great river; and most likely it is the bed of one, or of a dried-up creek of the Gulf. The flat bottom is grown up with mesquite.”⁵³ Although the wells produced sufficient water, Cooke complained that “Now after eight hours, the watering is still going on; the poor animals after drinking the impure water, seem unsatisfied, and have to be driven away to the bushes on which to browse.”⁵⁴

Livestock watering continued all night. Early the next morning an advance party of 25 left to locate and prepare *El Pozo Hondo*. The battalion continued to draw “the scant water” from the wells for the mules and cattle until 11 o’clock when the march resumed. As with the Army of the West, the 55 miles from *Alamo Mocho* to Carrizo Creek proved to be the most difficult section of the trail for the Mormons. Deprived of sufficient food, water, or rest, the fact that they found the watering spot at *El Pozo Hondo* did not relieve their toil. The battalion followed the “tracks of hundreds of mules and horses; herds believed to have been driven within a few months to Sonora.” They crossed “some bad sand” and then “a great flat of clay.” After 17 miles, sundown found them at a mesquite thicket where they dry camped.⁵⁵

Marching at sunrise the next day, the battalion covered the seven remaining miles to *El Pozo Hondo* by 11 o’clock. Here they found two Mexican *Californio vaqueros* with a herd of 35 horses and mules and some beef cattle, sent for their relief by General Kearny.⁵⁶ In spite of the best efforts of the advance party the well failed to produce sufficient water. As with all previous water holes, this one had a dead coyote in it. After removing the carcass, the mules sent by Kearny were allowed to drink from the well in order to “clean it out.” After this, in spite of repeated excavation, the small trickle that remained did not suffice even to fill canteens.⁵⁷

The new livestock did provide fresh meat and animals to replace the worn-out wagon teams. For the first time the Mormons witnessed the skill of

the *Californio vaqueros*. “Most of the animals had never been broke and were tolerably wild, and it was diverting to the soldiers to see how handy the Spaniards were in throwing the lasso and catching the animals the Colonel wanted to use.” One of the fresh beeves was killed and dressed, “with orders to cook and eat and be on the march in one hour and a half for the next water and grass.”⁵⁸

The march continued that afternoon. They covered an additional 11 miles by nightfall and made a dry camp for the second evening. “... the mules were kept tied and some bunch grass was cut and fed them.” Besides being nearly starved the mules had gone without water since the previous morning at *Alamo Mocho*. Now “the men too,” were without it. The Colonel determined it necessary to go on “in the cold night speedily to end this terrible state of things.”⁵⁹

At 2 a.m., January 16th the march resumed. Cooke described the hardship and confusion:

“I had a large advance guard and all the guides on duty, telling Weaver not to lose sight of the leading wagon; it was starlight. Four miles from our bivouac I stopped until all had passed, and found that even then a team or two had apparently given out. I gave various orders of relief, transferred mules, etc.; toward daylight it was exceedingly cold, too much so to ride; then the guides got lost, and, by their not obeying strictly my orders, the wagons lost at least a mile; here the new teams seemed almost exhausted; two companies had lost harness and I managed to find some for them. I found the road was about to prove much longer than I had been informed. About 10 o’clock in the morning as usual, it became of summer heat. Finally, near eleven, I reached, with the foremost wagon, the first water of the Cariza;—a clear running stream gladdened the eyes, after anxious dependence on muddy wells for five or six days. One company, which met with an accident, was so far delayed into the heat of the day that the mules entirely failed several miles off; a new team had to be sent, and the wagon came up at sunset. I found the march to be nineteen miles; thus without water for near three days, (for the working animals) and camping two nights, in succession, without water, the battalion made in forty-eight hours, four marches, of

eighteen, eight, eleven, and nineteen miles, suffering from frost, and from summer heat. Considering this, it seems certain that the fifty-six miles from Alamo Mocho, could have been made without great loss in no other way;—the divisions of time for rest, the stop only for a drink and refreshment of meat in the heat of the day, and the cold night marches.”⁶⁰

This was the worst day of the crossing. Men and livestock were strung out all along the trail and it took the rest of the day for them to straggle in. Some had collapsed “for want of water—tired, weak, faint, and hungry.” Twenty mules had to be left, too weak to continue.⁶¹ They found the pasture at Carrizo to be “dry and salty.”⁶²

After a brief rest, the battalion resumed its journey the following day, January 17th, starting about noon. Finding no grass at Palm Spring, they continued to Vallecito “a wet swampy valley, with willow bushes, bad rank grass and no fuel.” Wagons and mules continued to struggle in the sandy washes. “That this fifteen miles of very bad road was accomplished under the circumstances, by mules or men, is extraordinary. The men arrived here completely worn down; they staggered as they marched, as they did yesterday.”⁶³

Many of the men did not reach camp until the next morning. Like the Army of the West, the battalion rested here for a day and the men mended clothes and cleaned guns.⁶⁴ Supplies were low and only eight wagons remained. Rest brought some relief and Cooke noted that “The men, who this morning were prostrate, worn out, hungry, heartless, have recovered their spirits and to-night, and are singing and playing the fiddle.”⁶⁵

Continuing toward San Felipe on January 19th, the battalion crossed two major obstacles for the wagons. After the first four miles they came to the granite ridge of *El Puerto Grade*.⁶⁶ Wheeler, the guide, reported to Colonel Cooke that he could see no way through and believed them to be “penned up.” The Colonel ordered him to find a crossing.⁶⁷ “Ropes were fastened to the wagons, and every man that could get a hold pulled until all got over,” falling into the small valley of *El Puerto* on the other side.⁶⁸ In a few more



Figure 12. *The point where Cooke and the Mormon Battalion had to break away the “great rock” in Box Canyon before wagons could be pulled up the hill (Photograph by and courtesy of Chris Wray).*

miles they turned and entered the wash of present-day Box Canyon. Here the steep walled passage became too narrow for wagons to pass through. After a few yards the canyon opened again only to run against a steep ledge that blocked their way. A hill on the east side of the canyon had to be ascended to get around this obstacle. A “great rock” blocked the steep slope of this hill and, so, also had to be broken away before wagons could pass. The Mormons began to cut the rock away at both points with picks and axes. As the road crews worked, others lifted wagon boxes from their running gear and carried them through the narrow passage. They were then reassembled. The “great rock” proved to be less of an obstacle and was more quickly removed (Figure 12). Colonel Cooke saw a wagon pulled “up the very steep hill,” where the “great rock” had been, “and down again into the canyon.” Finally, enough stone had been chipped away from the narrow canyon walls that the last two wagons were pulled through by mules, “with loads undisturbed.”⁶⁹ They camped that night, once again, without wood and water.⁷⁰

The next day they continued northward. The wagons negotiated another steep narrow rocky pass, presently

known as Foot and Walker Grade, with the aid of ropes. A “good descending road for seven miles led to San Phillippi (Sic.),” and the still deserted Indian village.⁷¹ They camped by the flowing creek and killed two beeves for breakfast. The following day the battalion marched up San Felipe Valley for seven miles and camped. “Everything began to look like there was life in it. The mountains began to show timber and along the creeks the live oak was abundant.”⁷² On January 21 they marched another 10 miles and arrived at Warner’s Ranch.

Next Issue Part II: Gold Rush Migration - International Boundary and Railroad Surveys 1848-1855.

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ENDNOTES:

1. The trail has been known by a variety of different names “in Mexican times it was the Sonora Road. Later it was the Gila Trail, the Fort Yuma Road, or simply the Southern Route ... the Emigrant Road, or the Emigrant Trail. ... The name southern Emigrant Trail did not become popular until the 1930s, but it captures the history of the trail very well.” See Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail,” 2009, 1; and Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail,” 2010, 1.
2. Wray, *The Southern Emigrant Trail*, 4; Robinson, *Gateways*; Jonas, “Wells in the Desert”; Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail” 2009 and 2010; and Van Wormer, *et al*, *An Isolated Frontier Outpost*, 11.
3. Van Wormer and Wade, “How the West was Linked...” 6-18.
4. Tamplin, *Vallecito*; Robinson, *Gateways*, 20-27.

5. Rensch, “Fages’ Crossing;” Forbes, “Yuma Route Before 1846,” Ives, “Retracing Fages’ Route,” 143-155; Lindsay, *Anza-Borrego A to Z*; Robinson, *Gateways*, 20-27.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Forbes, “Yuma Route Before 1846,” 105-107.
9. Father Juan Mariner of San Mission Diego and Captain Juan Pablo Grijalva of the San Diego Presidio entered the San José Valley in 1795 during an exploratory expedition. They named the place *El Valle de San José* and recorded 10 Indian villages as well as the hot springs at *Agua Caliente*. Pourade, *Time of the Bells*, 115; Hill, *History of Warner’s Ranch*, Apdx. I. By the 1820s San Diego and San Luis Rey missions used the valley to graze cattle and sheep. Engelhardt, *San Diego Mission*, 223-225; Pourade, *Time of the Bells*, 122.
10. Forbes, “Yuma Route Before 1846,” 108; Robinson, *Gateways*, 34.
11. Warner, “Testimony,” 3; Beattie, “Development of Travel,” 237; Beattie, “Reopening the Anza Road”, 63; Pourade, *Time of the Bells*, 174.
12. Tamplin, *Vallecito*, 11-23; Robinson, *Gateways*, 34-35.
13. Bean, *Romero Expeditions*, 87-88.
14. Beattie, “Reopening the Anza Road,” 68.
15. The scale of Coulter’s map is so small the label could apply to either location. *El Puerto* seems the most likely since in Spanish both *puerto* (port) and *bahia* (bay) are places of shelter. The name of *El Carrizal* on his map was mistakenly printed “Caranai.”
16. Coulter, “Notes on Upper California,” 64-65; Coville, “Botanical Explorations,” 523-525; Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail,” 2009, 8; Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail,” 2010, 5.
17. Coulter, “Notes on Upper California,” 65.
18. Hutchinson, *Hijar-Padrés Colony*, 65.
19. Coronel, “Cosas de California,” 66-69; Janssens, *Life and Advetures*, 130-131; Beattie, “Development of Travel,” 238; Cleland, *Reckless Breed*, 236-237; Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 135.
20. Coulter, “Notes on Upper California,” 64-65, 69.
21. Ellis, “Colorado Desert Routes,” 23-24.
22. Wray, *The Southern Emigrant Trail*, 3, 19; Robinson, *Gateways*, 54-60; Jonas, “Wells in the Desert”; Brigandi, “The Southern Overland Trail” 2009 and 2010; and Van Wormer, *et al*, *An Isolated Frontier Outpost*, 25-39. [Editor’s note: The Spanish word “*mochó*,” according to *The Oxford Spanish Dictionary* includes the following meanings: cut off, blunt, lopped off, and chopped; the verb “*mochar*” means hacked, chopped off, or lopped off, as in “*el jardinero mochó el arbolito*,” which means, “the gardener lopped or hacked the top off the tree.” Jarman, *Oxford Spanish Dictionary*, 504-505.]

23. Wray, *The Southern Emigrant Trail*, 3, 19; Robinson, *Gateways*, 54; Jonas, "Wells in the Desert"; Brigandi, "The Southern Overland Trail" 2009 and 2010; and Van Wormer, *et al*, *An Isolated Frontier Outpost*, 25-39.
24. *Ibid*.
25. Vallecito appears to refer to the valley and Ojo Grande refers to the springs as per Emory, *Notes*, 104; and Clark, *Travels in Mexico*, 91.
26. Warner, *Testimony*, 30; Ortego, *Testimony*; Bibb, *The Wickedest Man*; Van Wormer and Walter, *Two Forks In The Road*, 13.
27. A native of Connecticut, Warner first journeyed west to Saint Louis in 1830 and became a clerk on a trading expedition to Santa Fe, New Mexico for the famous mountain man Jedediah Smith. He married Anita Gale, a daughter of sea captain William Gale. Anita had been raised by the mother of Pio and Andres Pico. The request included the entire valley which he described as vacant and "surrounded by the mountain with entrances from San Felipe on the east, from Temecula on the north, from Pala on the west and from Santa Ysabel on the south" (Petition, "Petition of J. J. Warner"). The governor granted his request on November 28, 1844 (Grant, Rancho Valle de San José to Juan José Warner"). By the late 1820s, cattle were raised specifically for their hides, and approximately 40,000 were exported annually (Bandini, *California in 1828*). English and Boston ships carried an estimated 6 million hides and 7 thousand tons of tallow out of California between 1826 and 1848 (Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 138). Warner grazed herds of cattle, horses, and some sheep in the valley and grew corn and beans on a small plot of land near the hot springs (Warner, "Testimony," 106). Warner's Pass today is called Teofulio Summit (Brigandi, "The Southern Overland Trail," 2009, 1; Brigandi, "The Southern Overland Trail," 2010, 1).
28. Ruiz, *The Mexican War*, 55.
29. Harlow, *California Conquered*, 55-57.
30. Trafzer, *Yuma: Frontier Crossing*, 8-21.
31. Warner, *Testimony*, 1-6, 19-20; Bibb, "Couts-Whipple Wagon Route," 166-167.
32. Beattie, "Development of Travel," 238-239; Pourade, *The Silver Dons*, 124; Tamplin, *Vallecito*, 24-34.
33. Emory, *Notes*, 95.
34. Emory, *Notes*, 100.
35. Turner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner*, 119; Emory, *Notes*, 100.
36. Emory, *Notes*, 101.
37. Griffen, *Diary of John S. Griffin*, 38.
38. Emory *Notes*, 102.
39. *Ibid*.
40. Turner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner*, 120.
41. Griffen, *Diary of John S. Griffin*, 39-40.
42. Emory, *Notes*, 103.
43. *Ibid*.
44. Emory, *Notes*, 103-104.
45. Emory, *Notes*, 105.
46. At San Pasqual Kearny's Dragoons were routed by the Mexican forces with a significant loss of life. For details of the battle see Richard Pourade, 1964, *The Silver Dons*, 96-116.
47. Tamplin, *Vallecito*, 30; Robinson, *Gateways*, 46-50.
48. Beattie, "Development of Travel"; Pourade, *The Silver Dons*, 124. Cook followed the road north from Warner's Ranch to Temecula before turning south to San Diego. The trail from *Valle de San José* to San Diego via Santa Ysabel did not become a wagon road until 1849 (Bibb, "The Coutts-Whipple Wagon Route," 163).
49. Tamplin, *Vallecito*, 21.
50. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 171-172; Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 42. Journals of the Army of the West and the Mormon Battalion do not use the name *Agua Sola* nor *La Rajadura* to identify this water source. It is simply referred to as First Well. The Gold Rush Argonauts of 1849 began to call it Cooke's Well.
51. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 173-178; Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 42.
52. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 42; Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 179.
53. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 181.
54. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 179.
55. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 181-182.
56. Pourade, *The Glory Years*, 125.
57. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 43; Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 182.
58. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 43.
59. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 183.
60. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 183-184.
61. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 43.
62. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 185.
63. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 186.
64. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 44.
65. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 187.
66. Although coming out of *El Puerto*, the trail across this ridge was later referred to as Vallecito Grade or Vallecito Hill. It is now called Campbell Grade. Wray, *The Southern Emigrant Trail*, 23.
67. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 187.
68. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 44.
69. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 188.
70. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 44.
71. Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 189.
72. Bigler, *Bigler's Chronicle*, 45.

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Doubtful Canyon

by Doug Hocking

Indian trails ran through Doubtful Canyon because it was one of a few places where there was reliable water and grass. It was also a favored camping site for the Chiricahua Apache. There were many encounters with them at the canyon, some friendly, most deadly. En route to the Seven Cities of Gold, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado y Luján, the conquistador, probably passed this way in 1540, although the evidence is sketchy, a few leaden bullets that probably originated in Spain at about the right time.¹

This is a good year to visit Doubtful Canyon from the New Mexico side. Earlier this year the stream was flowing continuously (see Figure 1). According to local ranchers this is the first time it has done so in more than thirty years. In the recent past, the only indication that there was once a spring here was a walnut tree in the wash indicating that water is near the surface. The climate of the 1840s and 50s was cooler and damper, thus springs and streams were more abundant, and it is likely that the stream in the east canyon flowed during most years.



Figure 1. East Doubtful stream flowing in the spring of 2020. Station is out of frame on the left.

Doubtful Canyon is the name of two canyons. East Doubtful, the New Mexico side, is about a mile broad, rising gently to the west from *Las Playas* (or Lordsburg Playa), passing north of pyramidal Stein's Peak and running another two miles to the center of the Peloncillo Range. Boundary Commissioner John Russell Bartlett gave us the name telling us that this was the name the Mexicans applied and explaining that it meant "sugar cone," which in Spanish is *piloncillo*. *Peloncillo* translates as "little baldy." The peak is named for Major Enoch Steen of the 1st Regiment of U.S. Dragoons. The major passed this way in late 1856 riding at the head of four companies of soldiers en route to Tucson to take possession of the Gadsden Purchase, arriving in November of 1856. As a result, the name of the peak is pronounced steen, not stein like the drinking vessel. Dragoons are a type of cavalry, trained and equipped to fight on horseback with pistol and saber or on foot with musketoon, a shortened musket. They were not mounted rifles who used horses for mobility in getting to the battle and then dismounted to fight on foot.

At the western end of the eastern canyon the land drops steeply into a north-south running chasm. Half a mile of steep descent takes one to the bottom of the west canyon and into a narrow defile with sheer walls rising on either side. This might be a great place for an ambush, you might think, but the walls are too steep at this point. The ambushing party would have to lean far out exposing themselves to fire from below. Nonetheless, in the three miles before the canyon debauches into the San Simon Valley, here and there, where the canyon is a bit wider and less steep-sided are fine spots for ambush often used by the Chiricahua Apache. The grade must have posed a challenge to eastbound wagons, but by the late 1850s this was the preferred route of freighters and the military (see Figures 2 and 3).

Today the approach to Doubtful Canyon from the west, the Arizona side, is more difficult than the road on the east. To get there one follows the gas pipeline from San Simon and turns north up the canyon driving along the wash bottom. At some point the trail crosses an unmarked boundary into a wilderness area where motor vehicles are prohibited.

The pass was known to Colonel Philip St. George Cooke who came near to this area in 1846 with a battalion of road builders. Of Cooke and his choice of route, John Russell Bartlett wrote:

“The road we have pursued from the Copper Mines [Santa Rita del Cobre near Silver City] continues south to Janos, and thence to Chihuahua. It is the one taken by the California emigrants who come by the way of Santa Fé. It was first opened by Colonel Cooke in his march with his battalion, and train of wagons to California, in the fall of 1846. He took this route by the advice of his guides though much out of his direct course, in order to strike the old Spanish trail which leads from Janos across a spur of the Sierra Madre, to the frontier settlements in Sonora; because it was known that water was to be found there, at convenient distances. But the more direct route due west from Ojo de Vaca [the Doubtful Canyon route] was unexplored and Leroux, the guide of Colonel Cooke, did not know whether water could be found on it or not. Not wishing, therefore, to hazard the lives of a large body of men by venturing upon an unknown desert, he took the wise course of striking the old Janos road at the Guadalupe Pass.

“Travelling rapidly over an excellent hard road, we reached a pass in a range of hills shortly before sunset, where Colonel Cooke marks down a small watercourse.”²

Cooke’s road runs west from what is now called Cooke’s Canyon through open, flat country as far as *Ojo de Vaca* (Cow Springs). From there the road turns sharply to the south and then heads generally southwest for over 100 miles to Guadalupe Canyon which cuts through the southern Peloncillo Mountains to the San Bernardino Valley. Water and grass are in abundance along the way, but the traveler bound for California has veered off his route making a lengthy detour.

The drop into the west Doubtful canyon is about 200 feet, whereas the descent at Guadalupe Canyon, far to the south, drops seven times as far in leaps and starts over six miles. The Peloncillo Mountains stretching from near the Gila River in the north continuing to beyond the Sonoran boundary in the south, is “the broken, jagged edge of a terrace.” At Guadalupe Canyon the descent is about 1400 feet from the

Animas Valley [in the east] to the San Bernardino Valley”³ in the west. At Doubtful Canyon, the descent continues gradually from the canyon mouth across the open valley floor to the San Simon River, where there is water. The gradual descent makes this route less difficult for wagons than the southern pass.

In 1857, the Department of the Interior appointed Colonel James B. Leach as Superintendent of Construction and N.H. Hutton as Engineer of Road from the El Paso and Fort Yuma Wagon Road Expedition. Work continued through 1858. Hutton stated in his report to the Senate for 1858-’59:

“... west of this point at the descent of the pass through the Peloncillo range, a side-hill cutting was made, about one hundred (100) yards long, and all short turns were widened, requiring the excavation of one hundred and fifty (150) cubic yards of earth, and ten (10) cubic yards of rock; the roadway for fourteen (14) miles to the Rio San Domingo [San Simon River] was cleared of brush and loose stones.”⁴

While many of Colonel Leach’s improvements, such as following the San Pedro River to near the Gila bypassing Tucson, were unpopular, this one may have helped improve the popularity of the Doubtful Canyon route which in the late 1850s and 1860s was much used by the military and freighters.

Nine miles south of Doubtful Canyon is Stein’s Pass where the railroad went through the mountains in 1882. The little railroad ghost town, Steins, was built originally on a quarry site and later became a point where trains took on water and fuel and picked up ore from the Volcano Mine a few miles to the north. Today I-10 uses this pass, but, although gently sloping, it was avoided by freighters and wagon trains as there is no water. Even the town of Steins had to get its water from tankers brought in by train.

About 11 miles south of Steins, Granite Gap provides easy access from the Animas to the San Simon Valley and leads directly to the San Simon *Cienega*, a word translated as swamp. The area provided water and grass and this route was used by many wagon trains. In August 1873, Tom Jeffords, thinking this spot might provide arable land, brought the Chiricahua



Figure 2. Lower West Doubtful Canyon.
A good spot for an ambush.



Figure 3. The descent into west canyon near where Co. I was ambushed in 1864. Apparently this is the section improved by Colonel Leach.

Apache Agency to this location but moved it again within four months as so many of his wards became ill, apparently of malaria. In the 1880s, such notables as Curly Bill Brocious and Ike Clanton set up their ranch headquarters near where the agency had been. In 1925, US80, America's Broadway, using Granite Gap, became the second paved transcontinental highway following in the wake of Route 66. This route may have become more popular after 1856.

In 1849, all of these routes were in Mexico, only becoming part of the United States after November 1856 when Major Steen took possession. The Gadsden

Purchase was concluded in June 1854. Lieutenant Parke of the Topographical Engineers surveyed a route for a railroad passing through *Puerto del Dado*, Apache Pass, two months before the treaty was concluded (see Figure 6, page 30). The headwaters of the Santa Cruz River are in the San Rafael Valley south of modern Sonoita. It follows south into Mexico and then returns north from near the town of Santa Cruz, Sonora, crossing the post-1854 boundary line to Tubac and Tucson. The Guadalupe Canyon wagon road was south of the border along most of its course. This may have increased the popularity of Doubtful Canyon and Granite Gap.

In 1849, Charles Pancoast, crossed over Cooke's Canyon, north of modern Deming, and headed southwest toward Doubtful Canyon. He wrote:

"On Saturday we moved on through a Pass in the Mountains to Cow Springs, where we camped over Sunday.

"On Monday we travelled down a Stream between high Mountains to Sepas. This was a peculiar region, and I believe the Scenery has no parallel on the Continent. A large number of Mountains or Buttes, each several thousand feet high and one to two miles in diameter at the base, are set over a large extent of Plains. The level Valley at their base is covered with a beautiful Grass called Grama Grass, of which our Cattle were very fond. We travelled a zigzag course among these Buttes until we came to the Coyote Mountains, near which we found water, and camped.

*"A Stream came out of the Coyote Mountains and formed a series of Lakes on the Plains. Next day we followed this Stream down to a large Lake that appeared to have no outlet. . ."*⁵

It must have been a wet year for the Animas (or Lordsburg) Playa to be so full (see Figure 4). Still well east of the playa, his wagon train turned south into the long Animas Valley that leads to Guadalupe Pass.

William Hunter, of Missouri, was in a train a few days or weeks ahead of Pancoast. He climbed "Ben Moore,"⁶ a prominence at the southern end of the Burro Mountains near where the road turned south toward the Animas Valley. He wrote:



Figure 6. Detail of John G. Parke “Map No. 2 From the Pimas Villages to Fort Fillmore,” 1854 & 55. This detail on right shows the Peloncillo Range with the dotted line being the road through Doubtful Cañon by “El Peloncillo Waterhole.” On the left the proposed “Railroad Pass” goes by the north end of the Dos Cabezas and the dotted line road goes further south through “El Puerto del Dado,” which is Apache Pass.

“Through this plain could be traced the road pursued by Cook[e], which here forms an angle and take a course about S.W. by S. To the west and where Mr. Leroux on Cook[e]’s map proposes a due west course cross what he believes to be an open Prairie, we could discover from our superior elevation innumerable ridges and hills from south to north, which from this point would seem to forbid any route other than the one pursued by Cook[e].”⁷

Colonel Philip St. George Cooke was told by his guide, mountain man Antoine Leroux, that he believed there was a more direct and easier route westward. Cooke’s map shows a dotted line from Ben Moore directly westwards to the San Pedro River. It is annotated, “Believed by Mr. Leroux to be an open prairie and good route if water is sufficient.” (see Figure 5). At least one company of Forty-Niners, that of Robert Eccleston, followed the dotted line.⁸ William Hunter on Ben Moore looked west toward Doubtful Canyon and saw only “innumerable ridges.” Because the pass is formed by two intersecting canyons running E-W and N-S, the gap in the mountains is not visible from the east and thus may seem “doubtful.” Robert

Julyan, *New Mexico Place Names*, provides a different explanation:

“In the 19th century, travelers to California taking the route through S[outhern] NM passed through a canyon in the northern Peloncillo Mountains that frequently was a site of Apache ambushes. So ‘doubtful’ were the travelers’ chances of making it through the canyon unattacked that the gap was called Doubtful Canyon, a name it still bears.”⁹



Figure 4. The flooded playa where the Overland Mail crossed looking east from Stein’s Peak Station.

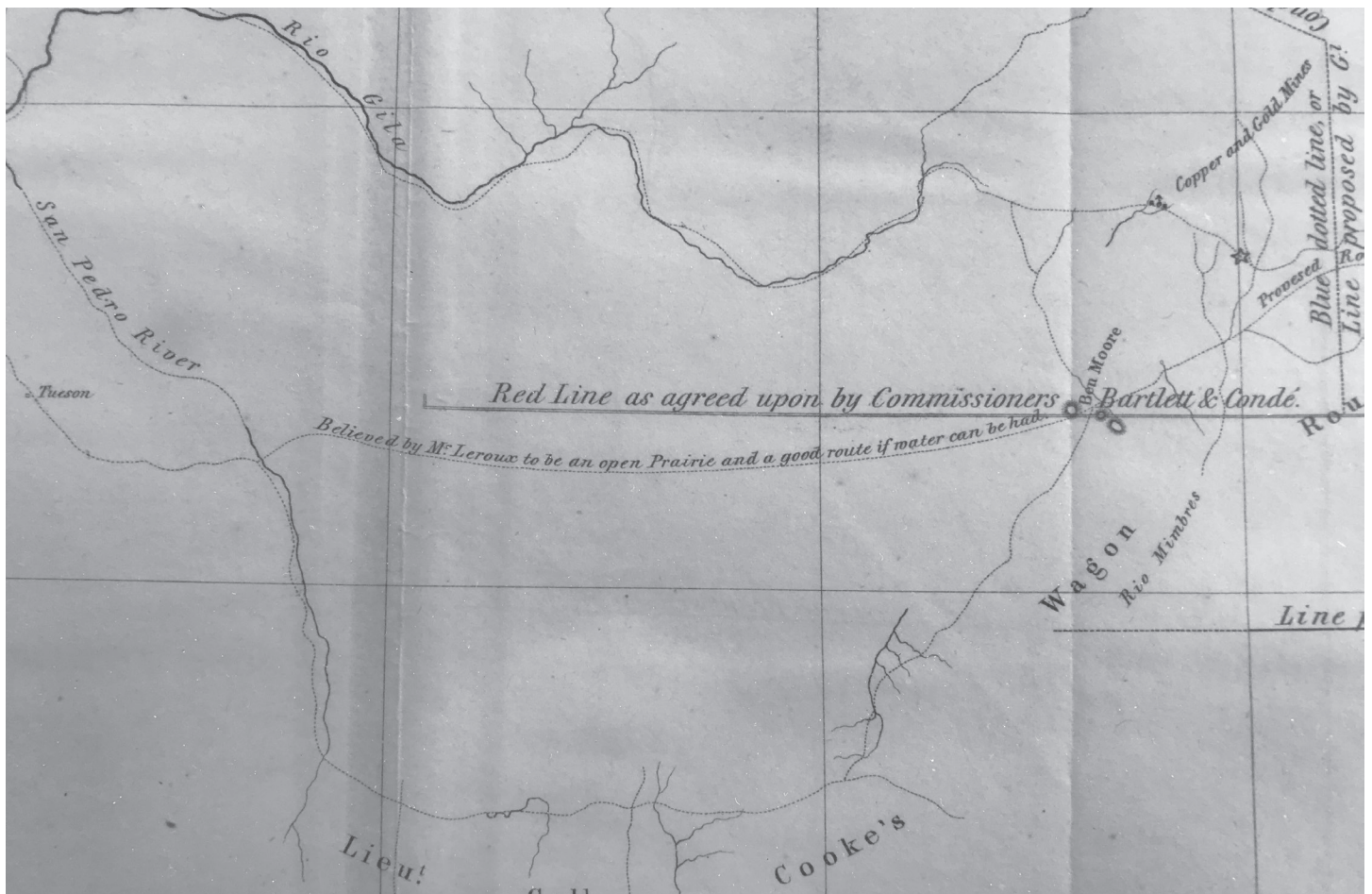


Figure 5. Detail of a map showing the route due west from Ben Moore Mountain to Tucson, which passed through Doubtful Canyon. Note: route west marked “Believed by Mr. Leroux to be an open Prairie and a good route if water can be had.” This map was titled: No. 2. [From Emory’s Map]. Accompanying Commissioner Bartlett’s letter to the Secretary of the Interior, dated “Santa Rita del Cobre, August 8th, 1851.” See page 449, Senate Ex. Doc. 119. ... 32d Congress, 1st Session. Map is in the collection of Editor, Daniel Judkins, at La Biblioteca Canoa.

Hunter’s party turned south from Ben Moore and followed what today is known as Animas Creek. He had this to say:

“Sept 14

“Here we ascended a ledge of table land, forming a continuation of the vale traversed by Quicksand Creek. The road was level and excellent, but muddy in spots from the abundance of rain which fell yesterday...

“On the plain to our left, before reaching the “Pass,” we startled a herd of Antelope from 100 to 150 in number. On being terrified they fell into a single file and as they crossed a range of hills in the distance they resembled a large flock of sheep.

“Many names were written or carved on the trees by

the roadside, mostly emigrants from Texas, some of whom had passed as early as the 10th of June.”¹⁰

The valley still has abundant grass and water and large herds of antelope are still seen. Given the dry desert landscapes they had passed through on the way to Ben Moore and those they faced ahead beyond Tucson, Animas Valley must have seemed inviting indeed.

Whether Apache attacks made it doubtful that one would pass Doubtful Canyon unmolested is doubtful, although there were incidents in 1858, 1861, 1862, 1864, and 1882.

The Butterfield Trail followed the improved road across the figure-eight shaped *playa* to the canyon. The road crossed between the upper and lower parts of the

eight where it was at times and in seasons a few feet under water. In 1858, the Overland Mail Company, colloquially known as the Butterfield Stage, used the road through Doubtful Canyon. We can imagine driver and conductor talking as they drove westward:

Conductor: "Steer straight for Steen's Peak and don't go right or left!"
Driver: "But there's no road only water!"
Conductor: "It's shallow; it'll hardly make it to the top of the wheels."
Passengers: "#\$%^!!!!

Waterman Ormsby, sometime journalist and passenger on the first Overland Mail stage from St. Louis to San Francisco, thanked Colonel Leach, in his newspaper correspondence, for how smooth he'd made the road across the playa. Little did Waterman know that water had created this flat, comfortable stretch of road.

Ormsby wrote:

*"Soldier's Farewell, like Cow Spring and Cooke's Spring, consists simply of one tent for the accommodation of the [Overland Mail] station men, whose fare is about like that which I have already described at other stations, and which I shared. We left Soldier's Farewell on the 1st inst., at 10:15 a.m., having to go forty-two miles to Stein's Peak without water, across a rolling plain with a smooth, hard road, part of which I must credit to Col. Leach. We had learned on our way that the station at Stein's Peak was a favorite camping ground for the Apache Indians, and that but a few days before a band of two hundred and fifty, headed by Chief Mongas [Mangas Coloradas], had gone to the station and demanded the gift of twenty sacks of corn [meal], telling the men they had 'better hurry it up d--d quick.' We met with no adventure on the road but a few shots at 'Key-o-tahs' [coyotes], and seeing a couple of harmless Indians; but in view of what had happened it may be judged that we were a little anxious on approaching the station, for if instead of the corral we should see a heap of smoking ruins and an Indian camp, we might not expect to pass without some difficulty."*¹¹

Picture the stagecoach again with nine heavily-armed – at company advice - passengers crammed aboard along with two crew – driver and conductor –

shooting at coyotes as they went. It's no wonder that prior to February 1861, the Chiricahua Apache never molested a coach. As Ormsby wrote:

*"The first travelers will find it convenient to carry with them as much durable food as possible. As for sleeping, most of the wagons are arranged so that the backs of the seats let down and form a bed the length of the vehicle. When the stage is full, the passengers must take turns at sleeping. Perhaps the jolting will be found disagreeable at first, but a few nights without sleeping will obviate that difficulty, and soon the jolting will be as little of a disturbance as the rocking of a cradle to a suckling babe. For my part, I found no difficulty in sleeping over the roughest roads, and I have no doubt that anyone else will learn quite as quickly. A bounce of the wagon, which makes one's head strike the top, bottom or sides, will be equally disregarded, and 'nature's sweet restorer' found as welcome on the hard bottom of the wagon as in downy beds of the St. Nicholas."*¹²

Hopefully, Waterman's sarcasm isn't lost on readers who unlike the correspondent have slept at some time in the last week or so. The changing of mules at stations was akin to a tire change at the Indy 500, done in minutes, during which the passenger had the opportunity to use the outhouse or eat dinner. Apaches did well to avoid irritable - through sleeplessness and constipation – heavily-armed passengers who had little that the Indians wanted in any event. Besides, Butterfield's employees, themselves well armed, traded with the Chiricahua for hay and firewood and made gifts of cornmeal. In Apache country, Butterfield ordered the construction of ten stations with high stone walls. At night, the stock was brought inside to discourage theft. The Stein's Peak Station at Doubtful Canyon is the best preserved of only two surviving stone stations in Arizona/New Mexico (see photo on front cover).

Two stories, both false, gave Doubtful Canyon a particularly fearsome reputation. On May 20, 1885, the *Arizona Daily Citizen* (Tucson), went with the skeleton story:

"Skeletons of twenty-five or thirty men were recently found in Doubtful Canyon near Stein's Peak. Several

hundred cartridge shells and some small pieces of blue army uniforms were also found on the ground. The red bones of an Indian were also found in rocks nearby, and several Indian graves are only a short distance from the battlefield. That a battle with Indians was fought there years ago there can be no question, and that the entire command of soldiers were massacred is equally certain, for had the soldiers been victorious those of their comrades who were killed would have been buried. Had any one of the command escaped it is probably that a detachment would have been sent from the nearest fort to see that the remains were decently buried. It is probable that the soldiers were surprised as was General Custer and his command and massacred on the spot.”¹³

The United States Army is remarkably good at keeping track of the occasions on which it has lost entire companies. There is no report of any such battle with the exception of three letters in California newspapers dealing with the ambush by Apaches of Company I, 5th California Infantry, in early May of 1864.

“Tucson, May 9th, 1864 - The express from the Rio Grande brings us news of a desperate fight with the Apaches in Steen’s Peak Canon, thirty miles east of Fort Bowie, or Apache Pass. It appears that on the morning of the 3rd inst., while Co. I, 5th Inf., C.V. fifty six strong, under the command of Lieut H.H. Stevens, 5th Inf. C.V., were entering Steen’s Peak canon, en route to Fort Bowie from the Rio Grande, they were attacked by a large force of Indians, on both sides and in front. At the first fire one man was killed and two or three wounded, while the Lieutenant’s horse was killed from under him. Deploying and placing his men as best he could, Lieut. Stevens continued the fight and his march through the canon, a distance of some six miles into the open country, when the Indians retreated. This canon is described as being very bad and dangerous; the sides rising several hundred feet in a very precipitous manner, the greatest part of the way through. The result of the fight, as stated, is one man killed and five wounded - one mortally. The number of Indians killed is stated at from twenty to thirty. Lieut. Stevens is highly spoken of by his men, and he speaks in glowing terms of their action... The names of the killed and wounded are: Sergt.

Tobins and privates Nelson and Stone pretty severely wounded, while it is feared that private Webb will lose his arm.”¹⁴

The several accounts vary slightly especially in the names of dead and wounded. These are letters from soldiers and not the official reports. Private Doscher’s name appears in two of them:

“Our Mexican guide says he never saw men fight better, and he has been fighting Indians for twenty years. We had one man killed. His name was Doscher, a German. Capt. Tuttle will recollect him. He was ahead of the Company and the Indians caught him. We did not even find his body, but we are sure he is killed as his dog came to us wounded, and we know that the dog would not have left him if he had been alive.”¹⁵

Doscher, apparently a stubborn German, was walking his dog ahead of the command against orders and walked into the ambush. His dog returned bloodied without him. He was never seen again. Except perhaps in 1885 when a skeleton (or 25) in uniform was found. So far, no other report of soldiers missing in Doubtful Canyon has been discovered.

James H. Tevis wrote a book published in the 1950s, *Arizona in the ‘50s* (referring to the 1850s). He did not start writing until the 1880s and publication was long delayed over the objections of other people who had been there, notably Larcena Pennington Page. Tevis recounts his fabulous adventures sparing nothing to his readers’ credulity. He was in Arizona and did work for the Overland Mail for a time at Apache Pass. Contributing to the bad reputation of Doubtful Canyon Tevis recounts the following:

“Some few days after this, Major McNeece withdrew the coaches from the Overland Mail Route, taking coaches, stock and employees. When his party, consisting of 122 men, was about two miles southeast of Stein’s Peak Station the Indians attacked them and all were killed. Among them was my old partner, Anthony Elder. After this massacre, three prospector friends from Pinos Altos, Burke, Donahue and Malcolm were taken prisoners by the Indians at Stein’s Peak. Their hands were tied behind their backs

and they were hung up to a juniper tree with their heads down within a foot of the ground. Fires were built under them and they were burned alive.”¹⁶

He goes on to relate how shortly afterward he and two friends were captured by Cochise and taken to Doubtful Canyon where they were slain, and he alone escaped. Surprisingly, no one else recorded the departure from this world of 125 souls, perhaps a fifth of Arizona’s population. McNeese was not in charge of the Overland Mail whose assets were withdrawn in June 1861, but he was a member of a party of five, working for the San Antonio and San Diego Mail (the Jackass Mail) including Anthony Elder who died at Doubtful Canyon in April. They were assessing the possibilities of reopening the transcontinental route for the Confederacy. On March 3, 1861, Congress ordered the Overland Mail moved from the southern route to the central route running through South Pass in what is now Wyoming. The southern route ran through Arkansas and Texas and was endangered by the threat of war.

In March 1861, Confederate entrepreneur, George H. Giddings, operating the Jackass Mail, took steps to acquire the abandoned route, sending his brother John J. Giddings to inspect the Over-land Mail facilities and determine what would be needed in men, stock, repairs, and supplies. Giddings would also make what arrangements he could with the Chiricahua. In April, J.J. Giddings, superintendent of the line, departed from Mesilla in an Overland coach accompanied by employees of the Jackass Mail and some former Butterfield men: Michael Neiss (possibly McNeese), Sam Nealy, Anthony Elder, a conductor, and a driver who is remembered only as Briggs.

By the time the stagecoach passed Cooke’s Canyon, the Chiricahua knew they were coming. From Stein’s Peak at the mouth of Doubtful Canyon, the rooster tail of dust raised by the stage was visible many hours before the coach arrived. Cochise and his warriors partially destroyed Stein’s Station. Using its masonry to build fighting positions along the lip of Doubtful Arroyo, Cochise and his braves waited, watching the stage approach across the dusty playa.

As the coach slowed coming up out of the wash at Stein’s Station, a fusillade rang out. Driver Briggs died with the first shots and fell over the side. Elder, the conductor, riding with him on the box, reached desperately for the reins as the mules broke into a gallop leaving Briggs dead in the dust behind the stage. Elder, too, was felled, and the coach careened out of control, racing past the startled Apaches. On it sped, gathering momentum with three men trapped inside and the Chiricahua in hot pursuit screaming war cries. Around Stein’s Peak the mules ran until the road came too close to Doubtful Arroyo, and the stage tumbled over its sheer side, dumping coach, passengers, and mules into the ditch. Battered but alive, J.J. Giddings, Michael Neiss, and Samuel Nealy sweltered in the confined space as bullets pierced the thin wood and canvas of the light-weight celerity wagon.

Ten years later Cochise would recall that one man, undoubtedly Nealy, put up a fight slaying three Apaches with his rapid-firing Sharps. The other two didn’t. J.J. Giddings was there to negotiate a private peace with the Chiricahua. They must have argued there in the tight confines of the coach until finally Nealy was felled. Then Giddings and Neiss threw up their hands and tried to negotiate in Spanish, a language Cochise understood. The chief signaled, ordering them seized. The Apache removed their weapons and bound their ankles together. They were dragged by their feet uphill to a stand of cedars. There they were hoisted aloft until they hung head-down a forearm’s length above the ground arms tied spread eagle from their bodies. Tiny fires were lit beneath them. Heat rises, and the Apache monitored the fires closely. The agony might last for days if they were careful. Soon Giddings hair began to singe and melt. As his brain heated and swelled, Neiss began to scream. Years later Cochise recalled, “They died like sick women, begging for their lives.”¹⁷

This attack and many that occurred between February 1861, when the Chiricahua Apache made their first attacks on Overland Mail coaches at Apache Pass, through July 1861 were undoubtedly part of Cochise’s revenge after a confrontation with Lieutenant George Bascom turned bloody. April 23, 1861, the Tucson newspaper reported that freighters Edward Donnelly

and Patrick Donaghue departed from Tanks Station—near the future site of Lordsburg, east of Stein’s—for San Simon, the next station west of Stein’s. The return journey took them through Doubtful Canyon. How far they got is unknown as they were never seen again. Two more travelers remembered only as Paige and O’Brien attempted the doubtful route that April and were seen no more. Even Grant Oury, delegate from Arizona to the Confederate Congress, leading a well-armed wagon train, was attacked in the canyon.

Some later accounts confuse the story of two different stagecoaches and locales. They record seven men in a stagecoach, the Freeman Thomas party, killed at Stein’s that spring. In July, seven well-armed Union men, some of them former Butterfield employees, quitting the country in advance of the Confederate invasion, departed Mesilla in an Overland coach en route to California. They made it no further than Cooke’s Canyon, 70 miles to the east of Doubtful, before they were attacked by Chiricahuas. In a three-day battle, they made the Apache pay for their lives and won Cochise’s respect.¹⁸ The actual events in Doubtful Canyon were more than bloody enough without these stories.

During the Civil War, many of the civilian population of Arizona departed for safer lands. The military garrisoned Stein’s Station and built Fort Bowie at Apache Pass after a large force of soldiers was attacked there by an even larger Apache force in the summer of 1862. For a time, Doubtful Canyon was quiet. Cochise resided in Mexico and had little reason to come north. The land was empty of settlers to raid. The transcontinental mail did not run again until 1867.

From the 1860s through the 1880s, the old mail station was sporadically garrisoned by a small body of troops assigned to escort travelers through the dangerous canyon. When the troops were not in residence, it was a favored camp and meeting place for Apaches. It was on their route from the White and Gila Mountains, Gila River, and San Carlos Reservation to Sonora and Chihuahua in Mexico. Winding in and out and through the Peloncillos, the Chiricahua used Doubtful Canyon, and then

entered Skeleton Canyon, which was to the north of Guadalupe Canyon, in a concealed route that would take them to the Sierra Madre and either Sonora or Chihuahua.

In March of 1882, Geronimo, Chatto, and Juh returned to the San Carlos Reservation on the Gila River for Chief Loco’s Warm Springs people and the families they had left behind. Covering their trail by slaying everyone with whom they came in contact—military patrols, ranchers, and Albert Sterling, chief of Indian police—the band was hotly pursued by Colonel George “Sandy” Forsyth, at the head of Companies C, F, G, H, and M of the Fourth Cavalry. In response, the Chiricahua wound in and out of the Peloncillos. Seldom in the annals of the Apache Wars has such a large body of soldiers made contact with a massed Indian band. In Doubtful and nearby Horseshoe Canyon, the battle raged for hours. High above the cavalry, Apaches dodged from cover to cover, firing down on the troopers pinned in position below. The Fourth Cavalry, because in training having wasted little ammunition on target practice, now scored few hits. The Apache, fortunately, were little better marksmen. Eventually, four troopers were wounded. Loco set fire to the grass to screen the movements of his warriors. During lulls in the firing, drumbeats and chanting drifted eerily down the canyon.

Within earshot of the raging battle, on the far side of the hill, the Apaches had stopped to camp in order to celebrate the Sunrise Ceremony. A girl’s time of empowerment—womanhood—had arrived and dictated that ill would befall the tribe if the ceremony was delayed more than four days. While warriors fought an overwhelming force of cavalry, the people celebrated this most important feast at the foot of Stein’s Peak. And then something inexplicable occurred. With one trooper and four scouts killed, and having suffered only a few wounded, the Fourth Cavalry broke contact and pulled back to Fort Bowie.¹⁹

The military community, including scout Al Seiber, was outraged. He wrote to the newspapers:

“Colonel Forsyth had attacked the band with six companies... If he could not handle the band to any

*purpose, why did he not send for more troops...? Captain Tupper's Sixth Cavalry, with only thirty-nine soldiers and forty-five scouts...fought the same band in a very strong place, killed...seventeen bucks ... If eighty-four men can do this, why is it that five hundred men can't do anything?"*²⁰

Perhaps the canyon just got the better of Colonel Forsythe, and he doubted he could take them.

Stein's Station, on the Butterfield Trail, lies lonely today in the dusty wind far from any road. Doubtful Canyon remained in use through the 1880s when the Southern Pacific Railroad, less dependent on water and grass than animal-drawn transport, used the more direct, drier route where I-10 runs today. Doubtful Canyon can be approached only with difficulty, and its entrance is blocked by a locked gate on the Arizona-New Mexico border. In 1926, Giddings' family erected a headstone near where the Giddings



Figure 7. John James Giddings, Born June 30, 1821. Killed by Indians near this place April 28, 1861. Erected in the 1920s. Giddings lonely grave. There were 5 in his party, not 122 as Tevis would have it.

party died²¹ (see Figure 7). It still stands on the lonely hillside facing uphill away from the Butterfield Road toward Stein's Peak—about a mile from the old station—a mute sentinel on what was once a busy, though dangerous and bloody, pass used by all of the trails from the Rio Grande to California and Sonora.

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19. Thrapp, *Conquest of Apacheria*, 235-245.
20. Sieber, Al. "Military and the Indians," Eyewitness to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890, Vol. 1: *The Struggle for Apacheria*, ed. Peter Cozzens, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2001, 290.
21. John J. Giddings' granite grave marker is located about 100 yards within the Cochise County side of Doubtful Canyon.

The La Grange Company of Texas Leaves Its Mark on the Southern Trail

by Daniel G. Judkins

John Murchison¹ (see Figure 1) organized a company of California gold seekers in La Grange, Texas in March and April of 1849. La Grange is on the Colorado River, about 75 miles downstream and southeast of Austin. He ran newspaper advertisements calling on five-person groups to join his company (see Figure 2). He required each five-person mess to be very well equipped, including food enough to last about a year.² Apparently the reason that Murchison decided to organize the company was that his 16-year-old son, Dunkin Alexander, was severely afflicted with the gold fever. Murchison worried that his son would leave on his own and was concerned about his safety, so he decided the best course was to organize a company himself so that he could accompany his son to California.³ Ironically, it was not his son, but himself, that had a major safety issue.

Murchison was the initial captain of the company, and he decided to keep a journal. The original diary was owned by an individual named Leonard Rehm, but its location is now unknown. A handwritten copy, however, was made and is in the Stanford University library.⁴ This was published in a series of six articles in *The Quarterly of the Tuolumne County Historical Society*, 1966-1968.⁵ The diary is a record of the trip all the way to its destination of Sonora, California. It was written by three individuals: first by John Murchison until his death on the trail; then the journal was taken over by Samuel Pearce Birt, covering the portion of the trip through what is now Arizona; and finally, after Birt separated from the main group just after entering the California desert, by John B. Cameron.

There are some missing pages. The first part of the journal, from La Grange to just before the crossing of the Pecos River, May 1 to May 26, 1849, is missing. Murchison's first diary entry of May 27 is on the banks of the Pecos River, and he continues daily entries through June 18 at Hueco Tanks, Texas. This is followed by an entry of June 23 at El Paso, followed

The Texas Democrat.

VOL. 1.

AUSTIN, SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 1849.

NO. 10.

ANOTHER CALIFORNIA COMPANY.

Another company is in process of organization at La Grange for California. They will take the overland route through Texas. The company will consist of about one hundred persons, and will positively leave La Grange on the first day of May. They will have military organization. Each squad of five men will be required to have a good two-horse wagon drawn by four mules or horses, with at least two extra mules, with the following outfit: 2 sheets of sheet iron, 30 inches wide and 6 feet long if practicable; half dozen long-handled shovels; half dozen spades; 2 spike mattocks; 1 weeding hoe; 1 chopping axe; 1 hatchet; 1 handseraw; 1 drawing-knife; augers; 1 frow; 1 iron wedge; extra horse shoes and nails; shoeing tools; 500 lbs. bacon; 200 lbs. coffee; 125 lbs. cold flour; 100 lbs. salt; 50 lbs. rice; the means of carrying at least 10 gallons water; medicine, clothing, &c., in all making about 1600 pounds. Each man must also be provided with a good gun, and at least one pistol and bowie or butcher knife. Every five persons must likewise have 10 lbs. powder and 40 lbs. lead. One hundred is the number to which the company is limited. Companies of five persons may report to Capt. John Murchison at La Grange, where they will be registered for the expedition.

Figure 2. Murchison's advertisement in The Texas Democrat, Austin, Saturday, March 31, 1849.

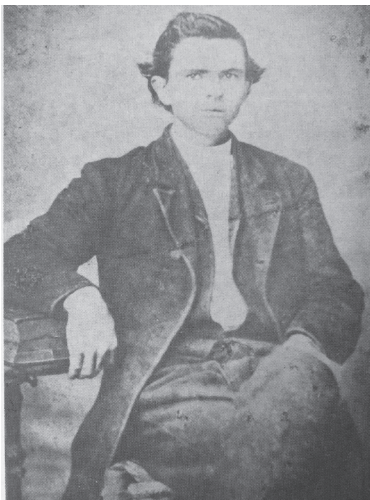


Figure 1. Capt. John Murchison. From Walter P. Freytag, The Quarterly of the Tuolumne County Historical Society.

Departure for California

The La Grange Company departed on May 1 with nine or ten wagons and 48 men. They went up the east bank of the Colorado River to Austin. "On the route leading up from this city [Austin] on the East side of the Colorado River, the road is open as far as Hamilton Valley station. Thence to the South Conchos..."⁶. The La Grange Company then went up the Colorado to the mouth of the San Sabá River, ascended it, and passed the Mission of Santa Cruz de San Sabá⁷ (three miles east of today's Menard, Texas). They then crossed over to the Concho River further north and reached its headwaters, arriving there on May 24.⁸ Murchison's group next crossed a 70-mile stretch with scant water, west to the Pecos River at the Horsehead Crossing.⁹ Before they arrived at the Pecos they encountered the Maj. Robert S. Neighbors / Dr. John S. Ford expedition¹⁰, returning to Austin from El Paso via the "Upper Road." The extant diary of the La Grange Company begins on May 27 as they were in camp, preparing to cross the Pecos the next day.¹¹ They crossed the Pecos at a relatively easy spot long used by the Comanches (see Figure 3 on the back cover, a sepia-wash drawing, made 16 months later).¹²

by one on July 4 at a camp 25 miles above El Paso. Murchison then leaves with several individuals to make a reconnaissance ahead of the main company. The next diary entry is by Birt on July 31, beginning mid-sentence, indicating that previous page(s) are missing. Birt continued diary entries until he left the company just after crossing the Colorado River below today's Yuma, Arizona. The journal was then continued by Cameron until the group's arrival at the gold fields in Sonora, California.

The La Grange men and their wagons ascended the Pecos River for 121 miles (according to Murchison's estimate) from the "Pecos Crossing" to just above what is now the New Mexico border at what became "Pope's Crossing". They left the Pecos at this point and headed west up the Delaware Creek.¹³ Delaware Creek had good water and was not difficult for the wagons (see Figure 4). This same route, the "Upper Road," was used in 1858 by Butterfield's "Overland Mail," initially, building the Pinery Station at the base of the Guadalupe Mountains, before they switched to the "Lower Road" by way of Fort Davis. At the Delaware Springs (one cold and good, others sulfur or mineralized) "One of our men has just planted a rock in the encampment about 8 feet long, 1½ inches thick and 12 in. broad of which they put several [several] inscriptions there..."¹⁴ This is one of the first places where the La Grange Company left its mark on the Southern Trail. Eighteen miles further they reached "the boiling spring," which was only six miles east of the mountain.

After moving some rocks and doing some minor road building, on June 13 they successfully descended the mountain pass (see Figures 5 and 6) and moved on a total of ten miles that day. The descent location is where U. S. Highway 180 is now. The next day 45 more wagons in several Companies followed them down.¹⁵ Fifteen miles further they camped at the salt lake, where they found "tolerable water."¹⁶

El Paso

Several days of hard travel marked by difficulty finding water took them by the *Cornudas del Alamo* mountains and the Hueco Tanks. They then headed southeast through sand-hills for 35 miles on a direct course to the closest point on the Rio Grande, and struck it 15 miles below El Paso, likely at a point between San Elizario and Socorro. Murchison recorded that "we are the first wagons & the first company that every came through."¹⁷ They spent several days sending water back to help some of the other groups on the trail behind them. In El Paso, Murchison wrote a letter to a friend,¹⁸ and commented that many were trying to join their group. They stayed in the El Paso area from June 23 to July 4, then camped at a place 25 miles above El Paso (a

bit more than half way to Mesilla). They discharged five Germans from the Company for disorderly conduct and for cowardice. John Murchison's entries in the diary end at this point.¹⁹

Apparently, Murchison and a few others from the Company decided to go west on the trail far ahead of the main Company, to scout the trail, and to check on rumors they had heard that gold was plentiful along the Gila River. We know that the main company was at the San Diego crossing of the Rio Grande, just below present-day Hatch, New Mexico, on July 11 and 12, and that they left their second mark on the Southern Trail. Robert Eccleston, passing there on October 6 recorded,

*"We camped below where we came out & nearly opposite the entering of the ford on the margin of the river. Some trees adorned the place under which we camped. It was a pretty large cottonwood of, however, no uncommon beauty. On the trunk of it was nailed a barrel stave with the following inscription, 'Lagrange Company crossed here the 11th & 12th of July, 7 waggons & 43 men. 16 miles to Cooke's Route.' On the other side were written on the tree the names, Murchison & James L. Smith."*²⁰

So it is apparent that Murchison was still with the group at the crossing of the Rio Grande (name on the tree, and 43 men in group, having left with 48 and discharged the five Germans). It must have been from this place that Murchison, with a few others, pushed on ahead of the Company.

Murchison Forges Ahead

Murchison and his small group found Cooke's Wagon Road and followed it to the Guadalupe Pass in the Peloncillo Mountains at the modern-day borders between Arizona, New Mexico, and Sonora. They made it through that pass, by the *San Bernardino Rancho* (formerly the *San Bernardino Presidio*, 1776–1780). San Bernardino is located about 100 yards south of the current-day Arizona-Sonora border, 13 miles east of Douglas, Arizona. A hundred yards north of the border is the Slaughter Ranch, with its abundant San Bernardino Spring. Murchison and his small group continued west, paralleling the modern border, through what is now Douglas, and to the *Rio*

de Agua Prieta (dark water river), called “Blackwater Creek” by Cooke, and which, ironically, flows from “Whitewater Draw” at the Southeastern edge of the Chiricahua Mountains. Agua Prieta flows south into modern-day Sonora a couple of miles to the west of Douglas. It eventually merges with the *Rio de San Bernardino* (arising from the San Bernardino Spring), then merges with the *Rio Bavispe*, and finally becomes part of the Yaqui River, which reaches the Gulf of California in southern Sonora. Murchison and his party made it to the Agua Prieta, and then, four miles further to the west, tragedy struck.

The A. D. King diary in his August 8 entry records, “...past a sign on a tree 4 miles from the ford stating the Capt _____ of _____ shot his self dead and was buried to the right of the road under a cedar the only one seen in the valley.”²¹ And so, the third mark was left on the Southern Trail, ephemeral as it was, with the sign on a tree marking Murchison’s grave. The death of Murchison is also recorded in the *Rancho el Chino* record book,

“Capt Merchison was killed accidentally about 100 miles the other side of Santa Cruz July 28. He was from La Grange Fayette Co. Texas and commanded a company of 37 men. – Three days after died in the same company a Mr. Wait from Pennsylvania,” (unsigned) and *“John Merchisom The commander of the Fayette Co organized May the first eighteen hundred and forty [nine] which he had conducted to the entire satisfaction of all. Saturday 8 July 1849 he was unfortunately Shot by the discharge of his own gun he was a worthy member of the Methodist Church and a good free mason. – James H J Smith.”*²²

The third Rancho El Chino record of Murchison’s death is the most detailed, this made by J. B. Cameron,

“...conductor of the Lagrange company arived here on the 18th of Sept. 1849 with three wagons & thirteen men I regret to mention the death of Capt. John Murchison, one hundred & fifty miles west of the Reor Grand on the 27th of July presisley at 12 oclock he was axidancheley Shot by discharg of his on gun being in the act of leeding his horse under the Swinging lime of a tree his gun being Swong in a Strap on the horn of the Sadle a well known custom



Figure 4. Looking east down Delaware Creek, which they ascended toward the Guadalupe Mountains.



Figure 5. Bartlett descends from the Texas Guadalupe Mountains toward the Salt Lake and El Paso in 1850, (a woodcut from Bartlett’s *Personal Narrative*, vol. 1, p. 118).



Figure 6. Guadalupe Peak (aka Signal Peak), Texas. Photograph taken from approximately the same location as Bartlett’s woodcut shown in Figure 5, photo by Daniel Judkins taken 9-8-17.

of caring guns Som of the lime raking back the brich & lock throwing forward the musell in which position She was dischargd the ball entring a little under the right Sholder blade and coming out a little a bove the left brest he fell & expired instonstaniously with out a Strugal or the utrance of one Singal word he has lived respected and died regreted.”²³

The main La Grange Company followed a bit later, presumably meeting up at some point with the small group that was with Murchison when he died, and, therefore, likely seeing the sign on the tree four miles west of the Agua Prieta.

The Company, now under the command of Samuel Birt, continued west paralleling the modern Arizona-Sonora border, sometimes north and sometimes south of the modern-day border by a mile or two. Approaching today’s Bisbee and Naco they passed through a low area known as “Little Ash Creek,” where a couple of years before, Elisha Smith of the Mormon Battalion under Cooke’s command died and was buried. It is at this point that the Company diary resumes, mid-sentence, on July 31, 1849 at Little Ash Creek – “...passed a running stream.”²⁴ Then continued on and reached the north-flowing San Pedro River, which they crossed.

At this point they were forced to veer a few miles further south to skirt the southern end of the Huachuca mountain range, which extends less than a mile into modern-day Sonora. They traveled up the

western-most tributary of the San Pedro, known from earlier times as the *Rio de Terrenate*. The Company passed through a low *cienaga* (marshy area) known since the 18th century as *Las Nutrias*, the temporary site of the Terrenate Presidio in 1775 – 1776 and 1780 – 1787. Ascending the *Rio de Terrenate* from *Las Nutrias*, within five miles or so, they encountered the 1741 – 1775 original *Presidio de Terrenate* (see Figure 7). Birt records this on August 2, “This morning traveled over a wet boggy road [*Las Nutrias*] in narrow valleys between mountains. Passed 2 deserted ranchos, San Pedro & Ter - - -, & old (perhaps) Spanish fortification.”²⁵

The Santa Cruz River

Because there was a north-south trending mountain range immediately beyond the Presidio Terrenate, the *Sierra de los Chivitos*, they were forced to turn north back toward the modern-day Arizona-Sonora border. They then circled the Chivitos mountains, possibly crossing a few hundred yards into what is now Arizona near the old Bercich Ranch, then curved west and dropped down through the oak trees into the Santa Cruz River drainage (see Figures 8 and 9). From there, they went south down the Santa Cruz River less than eight miles to the town of Santa Cruz, which was well-populated (see Figure 10). They were able to obtain provisions there, Birt specifically mentioning wheat, Indian corn, watermelons, and flour.

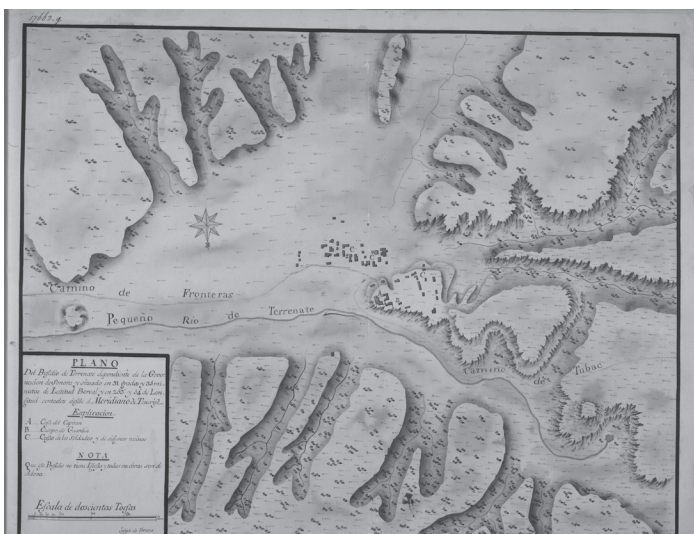


Figure 7. Terrenate Presidio, 1741 – 1775, map drawn in 1766 by Joseph de Urrutia, original in British Museum.



Figure 8. “Valley Leading to Santa Cruz,” by John Russell Bartlett, Sept 23, 1851. Lithograph, from Bartlett’s *Personal Narrative*, vol. 1, p 402. Looking south, the mountains on the far right are the Patagonias (in Arizona) and the San Antonios (in Sonora), with the view here showing the scene entirely south of the current border. The current border would be about ½ mile behind the artist’s position. The Santa Cruz River is in the center of the drawing, and the town of Santa Cruz, Sonora is eight miles further south around the mountain on the left (Sierra del Chivato). A watercolor version of this sketch, without the wagon, is JRB004 at John Carter Brown Library, Providence Rhode Island.



Figure 9. This view is from just north of the current border of the northern slopes of Sierra del Chivato. The Santa Cruz River is just off of the photo to the right (west), with the town of Santa Cruz, Sonora further south about eight miles. The La Grange Company and most of the other 49ers on the Southern Trail came from just off of the photo to the left (east), and followed the valley here in the middle ground, with scattered oak trees, dropping gently down to the south-flowing Santa Cruz River. Compare this with the 1851 illustration by Bartlett in Figure 8. The Bartlett scene is from the area with the oaks in the middle ground of this photo, with the wagon heading west down into the Santa Cruz River valley. Photo by Daniel Judkins, August 27, 2019.

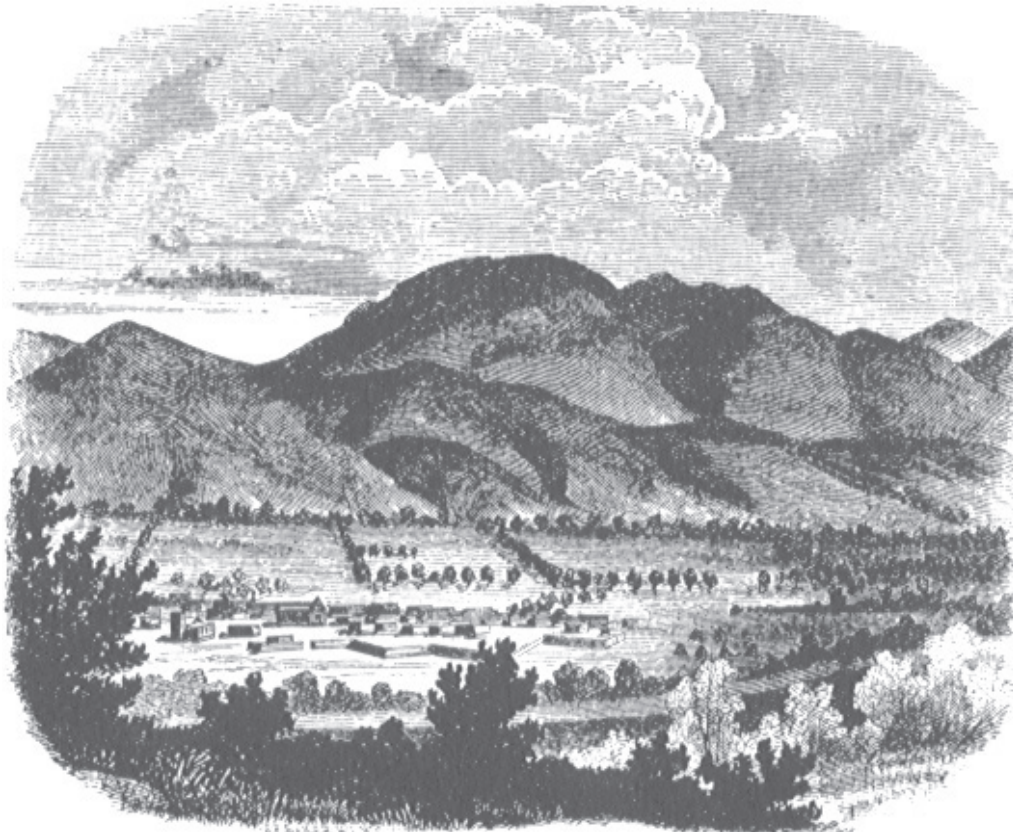


Figure 10. A woodcut by John Russell Bartlett showing the town of Santa Cruz, Sonora in 1851, from Bartlett’s *Personal Narrative*, vol. 1, p. 408. Fruit trees line the fields in the middle ground. The horizontal line of trees just below the mountains is where the Santa Cruz River flows. Many of the trees were quince (membrillo) and some were peach (durazno); they still grow there today. The mountains are Sierra del Chivato. Further directly east on the other side of the Chivatos is the original 1742 – 1775 Presidio of Terrenate. The Presidio moved to two other locations temporarily starting in 1775 and eventually ended up here at the town of Santa Cruz in 1787 and was still there (as a Mexican garrison) in 1849.



Figure 11. Misión Los Santos Ángeles de Guevavi, photographed July 4, 1889. The mission site was visited by Eusebio Francisco Kino and Juan María de Salvatierra in January 1691 and they established it as a mission. This building was erected in 1751, and the mission site was abandoned in 1775, becoming a part of the Tumacácori National Historical Park in 1990. The name “Guevavi” is from the O’odham word *ge’e vavi* (big spring) or *gu waihe* (big spring). Original photograph at Arizona Historical Society.



Figure 12. Misión Guevavi in 2016. Photo by Daniel Judkins.

Continuing on further south down the Santa Cruz River they soon came to a curve to the west and the abandoned ranch of San Lázaro. The river continued to curve and soon headed back north on the west side of the San Antonio Mountains. They passed by the deserted Santa Barbara ranch. Further downstream (to the north) on August 5 they crossed into what is now Arizona and came to a place where “the valley became very narrow but the land very rich, the grass mixed with sun flower...”²⁶ This place is about 3 miles north of the current border and is known as *Vado del Apache* (Apache ford, or crossing), just beyond which is today’s Kino Springs Golf Course, where the river snakes to the east, then back to the west, before continuing on to the northwest. On August 5 Birt notes that they passed “a deserted _____.” He likely was referring to the Spanish “Mission Guevavi” founded in 1691 (see Figures 11 and 12).

On August 6 the La Grange Company reached Tumacácori Mission. Birt usually was detailed in his observations and descriptions of what he saw, but here recorded little about the Mission, “Country to the Presidio of Tubac much the same as on yesterday evening, soil very rich, the growth on it, including the underwood very _____. About a league from the Presidio passed the m[ission?] & Convent of Colarasa deserted at Present as Tubac itself. The convent church is very handsome...”²⁷ But the men of the La Grange Company went into the church at Tumacácori, and there left their mark on the Southern Trail for the fourth time.

An Aside from the Journal – A Modern-Day Encounter with the La Grange Company

In August 1999 I (Judkins) had been reading multiple Southern Route 49er accounts, with many of them recording some admiration of the church at Tumacácori. One Saturday morning that month I was thinking about this, and had a thought, “I’ll bet some of the passing 49ers left their mark in the church.” My son and I got in the car and went to Tumacácori, hoping that my friend, Park Ranger and Chief of Interpretation Don Garate, was on duty that day. He was not, but I asked another Park Ranger, who I had

not before met, about the possibility of 1849 graffiti in the church. He referred me to two notebooks filled with a photographic survey of the walls and architectural details in the church. On the last page of the second notebook was a photograph of a doorway opening labeled “Stanley 1849.” Showing this to the Park Ranger, I soon got him interested. I asked where in the church he thought the photo had been taken (it was not labeled with a precise location). He was unsure. I went into the church and began looking for a doorway opening that looked like that in the photo, and could not find it. Consulting again with the Park Ranger, he said, “well, it might be in the bell tower, but that is locked and not open to the public.” Somehow my enthusiasm won out, and he soon fetched the key to the bell tower, and a flashlight. Off we went, the ranger, my son Jesse, and I, and climbed up the old stairway into the dark tower.

We found the door opening that was in the photo, on the second level up, near the old entry to the choir loft on the south end of the church. The choir loft fell about a hundred years ago, and that door opening now goes nowhere, out into empty second-story space in the nave. But just back from it is a second door opening, part of the bell tower itself. In the photo, a wooden beam was above the door opening. It turned out to be a mesquite lintel. Using the flashlight, we began examining it carefully. Jesse first spotted the faint lead-pencil writing on the beam. Eventually, we were able to make out some of the words, but others could only be partially deciphered. Unfortunately, even with multiple trips back to the bell tower over several years to follow, we were unable ever

to capture clear photographs of the entire panel of words on the mesquite beam. Some photos of specific sections turned out to be acceptable, but the best depiction of what is on that mesquite lintel was a drawing I made while standing there, trying my best to duplicate what I saw (see Figure 13.)

The following names or partial names were identified: C. Barthelemy, 1849, Stanley, O N (with a backwards N), Grange, Allen An__t_s[?]_m[?], P__len, 48, 411, Hunter Rob, and A R Jenkins. Carved into the stucco to the north of the door opening, less than two feet away, was A W D (or A W B). Through the door opening and high up on the south wall of the nave near the top of the room near what would have been the upper row bench in the choir loft before it fell, carved in the plaster with letters nearly twelve inches high was: A R Jenkins (again).

What jumped out at me at first were, “1849” and “Grange,” and I immediately thought of the Journal of the La Grange Company. I then focused on the names that were clearest: C. Barthelemy, Stanley, Rob Hunter, and A R Jenkins.

What followed was research on these names, the names of known members of the La Grange Company, and known names of other forty-niners that were on the Southern Trail at about the same time as the company from La Grange.

I have found nothing directly connecting C. Barthelemy with the La Grange Company. He likely was a fellow traveler on the Southern Trail and may have found himself at the Tumacácori church at the

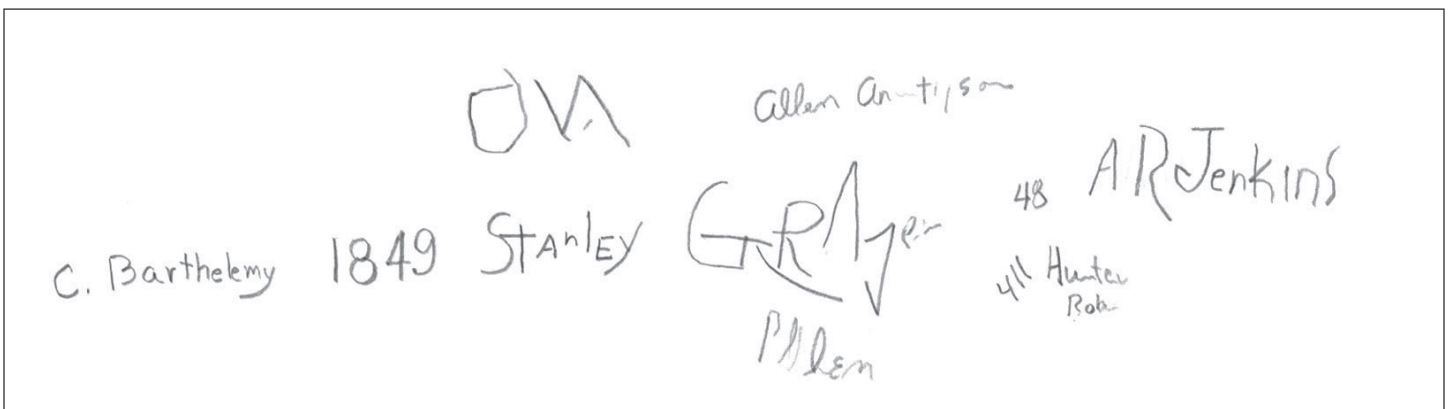


Figure 13. Drawing of graffiti on mesquite lintel in the bell tower, by Daniel Judkins, 1999.

same time as several of the La Grange company were inscribing their names on the mesquite lintel, and decided to join in. In August 2000 I found another inscription by “C Batholom...” (with a missing “r” between the “a” and “t,” and the last part illegible), this one at the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument. Interestingly, the La Grange Company traveled within about 1-3 miles of this ruin on their way from Tucson to the Gila River.

I found evidence that there was an A. R. Jenkins working in the California gold fields in 1856, working at the U. S. Hotel in Nevada County. I have been unable to confirm any other details about Jenkins, or establish a direct link between him and the La Grange Company. But he clearly went to the gold fields, and likely was there at Tumacácori church the day the graffiti were left on the mesquite lintel.²⁸

Rob Hunter,²⁹ on the other hand, was a known forty-niner from Texas. He was not in the La Grange Company, but in the “Texas Company,” a group traveling on the trail at about the same time. He was a long-time Texas resident, and listed himself as being from Leon County, which is about 130 miles from La Grange. Hunter would have been aware of the La Grange Company, as word traveled well up and down the trail; La Grange was between Leon County and Austin, and traveling from Leon County, he passed La Grange on April 27. He returned to live in La Grange (his wife Cyrene Sutton was from Fayette County), and had a son born at La Grange in 1856.³⁰ His name appears on the mesquite beam as “Hunter” with “Rob” underneath it. He likely was present on August 6 with members of the La Grange Company when they were signing their names (he would not have accidentally spotted the La Grange graffiti on the mesquite lintel because the writing was too dim and it was too dark). He did sign in on the Rancho Santa Ana El Chino Record Book on September 2, as “Robt Hunter, Leon C. Texas.”³¹ That same day “A W Drouillard La Grange, Fayette Co Texas” signed the record book, along with another person from La Grange.³² Between September 6 and 19, a number of other members of the La Grange Company signed in.³³ A detailed reading of the Journal of the La Grange Company, and other trail diaries, indicates that members of one group often mingled with members of another group on the trail, or sometimes

formally left one company and joined another, and that company members often got spread out on the trail, sometimes days apart, particularly along the Gila and in the Southern California desert sections. The fact that the La Grange Company members signed in on multiple days over a 14-day period suggests that the Company organization was deteriorating. And other names are in that record book that signed in at the same time as La Grange members, suggesting they were possibly traveling together.

A. W. Drouillard signed in on September 6.³⁴ He was from La Grange, so likely was a member of the La Grange Company. The initials scratched into the plaster immediately adjacent to the mesquite lintel, “A W D,” strongly suggests that these are the initials of Drouillard.

There apparently were two “Stanleys” in, or traveling along with, the La Grange group. “Jno C Stanley, Georgia” signed in on the same page as Drouillard on September 6. The 14th name below that on the same page is “Stanley, Kentucky.”

The clustering of the names Stanley, Robert Hunter, and A. W. Drouillard together on the record book pages between September 2 and 19, with Drouillard conclusively known to be from La Grange, and with Rob Hunter having strong La Grange connections, and the fact that these four names all appear on the mesquite lintel with “1849” and “Grange” suggests they were associated with the La Grange Company. The evidence is certainly soft and tenuous, but convincing.

Starting in the Spring of 2020 I am now a co-investigator of a grant-funded research study at Tumacácori, “Digital Preservation and Interpretation of Historical Graffiti in the Tumacácori Mission Church.” Over the next two years, will we find more 49er graffiti in the church?

The Park Ranger I was looking for on the day we discovered the La Grange inscriptions at Tumacácori was Don Garate. He and I, around 2002, explored into Sonora on the Southern Trail and found the remains of the Terrenate Presidio. Other local Southern Arizona historians and archaeologists at that time had not been there and were uncertain of its exact location. After a morning of exploring, we found it,

sitting up on a 20-30-foot high stone bluff. There we could see the 8-10-foot high L-shaped mound that was the melted adobe of the Captain's house on the cliff's edge (see Figure 8, buildings marked "A" with the L-shaped "*Casa del Capitan*" sitting on the edge of the cliff). We subsequently were able to take a group of about 10 archaeologists to the site, where we found metates, much brown-ware Indian pottery, blue-and-white Spanish *majolica* pottery, thin and delicate Chinese blue-and-white porcelain (prized by the 18th-Century Spaniards), and even a copper coat button. Unfortunately the buildings shown on the Urrutia map in Figure 8 marked "C" the ones that are below the cliff, have been bulldozed and are now covered by a large barn used by the local rancher. We also found the site of *Las Nutrias*, about five miles to the east toward the San Pedro River. It now is a farm with plowed fields, but still is marshy in some areas. Sadly, Don Garate died in 2010. He was an incredible historian of the Spanish-period *Pimería Alta* (southern Arizona and northern Sonora), paleographer of hand-written Spanish period historical documents, and author of the first volume of a planned 3-volume biography of Juan Bautista de Anza.

Back to the La Grange Journal

Birt's journal description on August 6 of agricultural fields and "much fruit is growing there" is unclear if he is referring to Tumacácori or nearby Tubac. Other 49er journals often describe the fruit on many trees at both of these places. There were peaches, quinces, apricots, pomegranates, figs, and more growing there in 1849. The fruit tree orchard at Tumacácori was replanted on the original orchard site a few years ago and once again is bearing fruit. Tasting that fruit at special events is yet another way of experiencing the Southern Trail of 1849.

On August 7 Birt records that "We camped at a water hole after making 12 miles."³⁵ *The San Ignacio de la Canoa* Spanish/Mexican land grant of 1821 – 1822 and its hand-dug well and spring are twelve miles north of Tubac. The old road, in regular use since the end of the 17th century crosses from the east side of the Santa Cruz River to the west side at this watering hole. It is mentioned in all of the historical narratives, Kino, Anza, and in many of the 49er journals. Why

did they all make a point of describing this place, when they were following a north-flowing river? The answer is that the Santa Cruz River is an ephemeral desert river. It "sank into the sand" near the area of the Canoa waterhole then, as it does today. The more than 20 miles from there to San Xavier and Tucson was a waterless stretch. The Santa Cruz River bends a bit toward the east, but the road went directly north from *La Canoa* to San Xavier through the desert, not following the river bend (because there was no water in it). Today that historic road lies along side of and underneath Interstate 19. As they made this passage on August 7, Birt records seeing their first "Cereus Giganteus" (saguaro) cactus, as nearly all Southern Route 49er diaries do at this point on the road.

On August 8 they visited *San Xavier del Bac*, mentioning the nearby dense *mesquital* (a massive mesquite forest). He describes the church in some detail, and noted that a religious procession and ceremony was in progress during their visit. They moved on that day to Tucson, did some trading for provisions, and went on to *Charco de las LLumos* (Yumas), otherwise known as 9-mile well, and camped. Nine-mile well was at the confluence of the *Rillito* (an east-west flowing intermittent stream that now passes through northern Tucson) and the Santa Cruz River. This water-hole, likely artificially deepened, like *La Canoa*, was at a place where the Santa Cruz River usually disappeared into the sand.

From August 9-12 they traveled north to the Gila. They spent a few days with the Pimas and Cocomarcopas Indians at the Pimo Villages and the Maricopa Wells area, resting and trading for provisions. Birt provides a lengthy description of the Indians and their practices. On August 16 they then began the long and arduous trek down the Gila, starting with the "40-mile desert" crossing to the Gila Bend. They arrived at the Colorado River on August 31. By September 3 they had successfully crossed the Colorado and moved on to the first desert well. Here Samuel Birt apparently decides to separate from the La Grange Company, and strikes out with a few others. He stops entries in the Journal, and they are taken up by John B. Cameron.

Cameron continued the Journal through the desert crossing, up to Warner's Ranch at the hot spring, and on through Temecula to the *Rancho Santa Ana del Chino*. That ranch was operated by Isaac Williams, an American, who had the arriving 49ers sign in on the record book, sometimes leaving notes to members of their group who were lagging days behind. It was there that a number of the members of the La Grange Company signed in during the first 19 days of September. This, then, constitutes the fifth time that the La Grange men left their mark on the Southern Trail.

Cameron continued his Journal all the way to their final destination in the gold field at Sonora, California.

Endnotes:

1. Since John Murchison died on the trail in the summer of 1849, he apparently was one of the earliest ones in Texas to have his daguerreotype portrait photograph taken. There are several others dated to the late 1840's.
2. "Another California Company," *The Texas Democrat* of Austin, 1(10):2, col 3, Saturday, March 31, 1849. There is an earlier and shorter announcement about the La Grange Company in the *Houston Democratic Telegraph* and *Texas Register*, 14(9):2, whole no. 688, Thursday, March 1, 1849, in which it was stated that the company planned to leave on April 1.
3. This background information on Duncan Alexander Murchison and his father, John, comes from Walter P. Freytag, historian of La Grange and Fayette County, Texas as presented in De Ferrari, Carlo M., "The Journal of the La Grange Company, Being the Record of a Journey from Texas to California in 1849," *The Quarterly of the Tuolumne County Historical Society* (now called *Chispa*), 6(2):182-184, Oct.-Dec. 1966, 183.
4. Stanford University Library Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, number M0082. See more details at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf996nb3td/?query=%22La+Grange%22+>, accessed 6-20-20. Also see Etter, Patricia A. *To California on the Southern Route 1849: A History and Annotated Bibliography*, Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1998, "La Grange Company" 91-92, "Murchison, John" 92-93, "Birt, Samuel P." 63, and "Cameron, John B." 66-67.
5. De Ferrari, Carlo M., "The Journal of the La Grange Company, Being the Record of a Journey from Texas to California in 1849", *The Quarterly of the Tuolumne County Historical Society* (now called *Chispa*), Part 1, 6(2):182-184, Oct.—Dec. 1966; Part 2, 6(3):193-200, Jan.—Mar. 1967; Part 3, 6(4):206-212, April—June, 1967; Part 4, 7(1):217-220, July—Sept., 1967; Part 5, 7(2):224-228, Oct.—Dec., 1967; and Part 6, 7(3):236-240, Jan.—Mar., 1968. Contact the Tuolumne County Historical Society in Sonora, California at <https://tchistory.org/> or via email at TCHSSales@tchistory.org to order copies of *La Grange Diary*.
6. "Road to El Paso," *The Texas Democrat*, Austin, 1(21):2, top of col 1, Saturday, June 16, 1849.
7. *Misión de Santa Cruz de San Sabá* was established in April of 1757, with the Presidio of San Sabá two miles further upriver. The Mission was soon destroyed and there are no remains. The stone Presidio ruins, however, still stand. It was likely these Presidio ruins are what were seen in 1849. From the upper San Sabá River the Company likely crossed to the Concho River to the north, and ascended it to its headwaters. There also had been a Spanish Period road from the Presidio of San Sabá to *El Presidio del Norte* far to the southwest, located on the Rio Grande south of Fort Davis, and at the junction of the Rio Concho and the Rio Grande. It is interesting that the San Sabá presidio was on the Concho River (of Texas) and Presidio del Norte was at the junction of the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos (of Chihuahua). See "Presidio of San Saba, Menard, Texas" on Legends of America web site, <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/presidio-de-san-saba-texas/>, accessed on 6-28-2020.
8. "From the California Emigrants," *The Texas Democrat*, Austin, 1(21):2, top of col 2, Saturday, June 16, 1849, being a news report of intelligence from the trail by Dr. John S. Ford, who had accompanied Maj. Neighbors to El Paso, and returning by the "Upper Road." The Neighbors/Ford exploring party had met the La Grange Company on the trail to the east of the Pecos River. Murchison learned from them the details of the route to El Paso via the Upper Road, and they learned of the path that Murchison's Company had followed to the Pecos.
9. "Letter from Maj. John Murchison," dated June 23, 1849 from camp near *Passo del Norte*, printed in Houston's *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, 14(33):3, col 3, whole no. 712, Thursday, August 16, 1849. Also see Ford, Dr. John S., "Report of Dr. John S. Ford, upon the practicability of a Route from Austin to El Paso del Norte," written in Austin on June 15, 1849 and published in *The Texas Democrat* newspaper of Austin, 1(22):2-3, entire columns 3 and 4, June 23, 1849. For further information on the route from the Concho River to the Pecos see Ashmore, Tom. "The Pecos River Horsehead Crossing: Wagon, Cattle, and Indian Tracks," *Desert Tracks*, June 2016, 12-13. An excellent drone video of the Horsehead Crossing and remains of the trails leading to it can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muFhYTRpKVI>, accessed 6-28-2020, "Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River" YouTube video, a production of WESTEX SKYCAM.
10. The Major Robert Simpson Neighbors expedition, under direction of Major General William Jenkins Worth, commander of the Eighth Military Department, was to explore a route to El Paso. Neighbors left in March 1849 from San Antonio, went to Austin where he was joined by Dr. John Salmon Ford. They went NNE to Torrey's Trading Post, then turned NW, then SW, to near present-day San Angelo, and eventually struck the Concho River. They headed west overland to the Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos, then west to near what was to become

- Fort Davis. They passed around the northern margin of the Davis Mountains and west toward the area of Van Horn's Wells before dropping south on the west side of the Van Horn Mountains, striking the Rio Grande SE of the Quitman Mountains. They then ascended the Rio Grande to El Paso, arriving there May 2, 1849. The return trip from El Paso was the most important part of their exploration, because they found and opened the "Upper Road." From El Paso they went east to Hueco Tanks, *Las Cornudas de Alamos*, the Salt Lakes, into the pass under Guadalupe Peak, and continued east down the Delaware Creek to the Pecos on the 32nd parallel at the present-day New Mexico-Texas border. They then followed the Pecos downstream past the present-day town of Pecos, by Toyah Lake, and on to the Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos. Just east of the crossing, on May 24, they met the west-going La Grange Company. They went from there east overland to the head of the Concho River, then south to the San Sabá River near the old Presidio, then south to Fredericksburg, and from there to San Antonio, arriving on June 2. See Neighbors, Kenneth F. "The Expedition of Major Robert S. Neighbors to El Paso in 1849," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 58(1):36-59, July 1954.
11. Murchison, "La Grange Company," May 27, 1849 diary entry. See Ashmore, Tom. "The Pecos River Horsehead Crossing: Wagon, Cattle, and Indian Tracks," *Desert Tracks*, June 2016, 12-13.
 12. Bartlett, John Russell. "Crossing the Pecos," a pencil drawing with sepia wash on heavy paper, 11.2 x 15.1 inches, record number JRB064, courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence Rhode Island, founded 1764, open access. Figure 3 on back cover.
 13. Murchison, "La Grange Company," June 7, 1849 diary entry.
 14. Murchison, "La Grange Company," June 9, 1849 diary entry. Throughout the whole area below the Guadalupe Peak one finds abundant flagstone in layers. From the dimensions of the monument stone recorded by Murchison, it is clear that they were using this flagstone.
 15. Murchison, John. "Letter from Maj. John Murchison, Camp near Passo del Norte, June 23, 1849," in the *Houston Democratic Telegraph* and *Texas Register*, 14(33):3, column 3 mid-page, Whole No. 712, August 16, 1849.
 16. Murchison, "La Grange Company," June 14, 1849 diary entry.
 17. Murchison, "La Grange Company," June 18, 1849 diary entry.
 18. Murchison. "Letter from ... Passo del Norte, June 23, 1849," *Democratic Telegraph* and *Texas Register*, full citation in endnote 15 above.
 19. Murchison, "La Grange Company," July 4, 1849 diary entry.
 20. Eccleston, Robert, *Overland to California on the Southwestern Trail 1849: Diary of Robert Eccleston*, George P. Hammond and Edward H. Howes, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950, excerpt from diary entry of October 6, 1849, p 164.
 21. King, A. D. "Journal of an Expedition from Clarksville, Arkansas to California, July 6 – Dec. 22, 1849," University of Arkansas Library at Fayetteville, Camp 28, August 8, 1849, from an October 2019 photo of the hand-written diary taken by *Desert Tracks* Co-editor, David Miller. Reference to this diary entry is here made to the original manuscript because the published version by S. H. Logan in the *Arkansas Gazette Magazine* from January 19 to May 4, 1941 has sections that are regarded as spurious. See Logan, S. H., "Trip to the Gold Fields: Journal Kept by Clarksville Resident During California Gold Rush in 1849 Related Experiences of Arkansas Party on the Long Journey," a multi-part series in the Sunday Magazine Section of the *Arkansas Gazette*, in Sunday newspapers from January 19 to June 29, 1949. Also see Dew, Stephen H., "All That Glitters ... Assaying S. H. Logan's 'Trip to the Gold Fields,'" *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 71(3)244-275, Fall 1993.
 22. Bynum, Lindley, "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California*, 16:1-55, 1934, 16-17, log entries between September 8 and 10.
 23. Bynum. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," 22-23, log entry about September 18.
 24. Birt. "La Grange Company," July 31, 1849 diary entry.
 25. Birt. "La Grange Company," August 2, 1849 diary entry.
 26. Birt. "La Grange Company," August 5, 1849 diary entry.
 27. Birt. "La Grange Company," August 6, 1849 diary entry.
 28. A. R. Jenkins was proprietor of the U. S. Hotel on Broad Street, *Nevada County California Business & Residential Directory -- 1856* and *Nevada City Directory 1856*, at <https://www.cagenweb.org/nevada/nc1856jl.html>, accessed 6-30-2020. He was still living in Nevada County in 1860 as shown on the census record (50 years old, born in Ohio, saloon keeper). This is almost certainly the same "A R Jenkins" who left his name in two places in the Tumacácori church. But no direct connection between A. R. Jenkins and the La Grange Company has been found. Also, Judkins, Daniel G., "Graffiti Associated with the Date 1849 Tumacácori Church Bell Tower," unpublished paper, December 19, 1999, in possession of author, at *La Biblioteca Canoa*, Continental, AZ.
 29. See Hunter, Robert. *A Texan in the Gold Rush: The Letters of Robert Hunter 1849-1851*, Robert W. Stephens, ed., Bryan, Texas: Barnum and White Publications, Inc., 1972.
 30. Personnel letter from Vesla B. Hunter (Mrs. Robert R. Hunter) of San Antonio, August 24, 1961, to Mr. Walter P. Freytag, historian of La Grange, regarding family history of Robert Hancock Hunter of La Grange (1856). A copy of this letter is in the possession of Daniel Judkins, at *La Biblioteca Canoa*, Continental, AZ.
 31. Bynum. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," 12, log entries of September 2.
 32. Bynum. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," 14, log entries of September 6.
 33. Bynum. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," 16-23, log entries of September 8-19.
 34. Bynum. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," 14, log entries of September 6.
 35. Birt. "La Grange Company," August 7, 1849 diary entry.

Southern Trails Chapter

Oregon-California Trails Association



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Desert Tracks is always looking for new articles or papers on our themes. We are searching for articles on the history of exploration, border surveys, and trails and roads in the greater southwest. Such articles would use a scholarly approach, primary sources when available, and documentation in terms of sources. The second type of article we want to feature are short articles on a specific site or segment of a trail, made more vivid with photos and illustrations. We know that many of our readers have been to lots of places along the trails. Now is a really good time to be not just a loyal reader, but become a writer and share some of your exciting trail experiences.

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“Crossing the Pecos”

by John Russell Bartlett

October 20, 1850

sepia, pencil, and wash on heavy paper

11” x 15”

Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River,
about 12 miles NNW of present-day Girvin, Texas

Courtesy of the **John Carter Brown Library**