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The Santa Fe trail

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THE SANTA FE TRAIL

By

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Santa Fe, New Mexico

"A subject of more enduring interest than the story of the old Santa Fe Trail, the great highway over which was carried the commerce of the prairies, is not to be found in the history of the great southwest." —Ralph Emerson Twitchell

INTRODUCTION

For over four centuries the vast plains that lay between the Rio Grande and Missouri River felt the moccasined tread of the Comanches, Apaches, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes. These soft-footed nomads were replaced by the clang of the armored conqueror, Coronado, and by a host of Spanish explorers seeking the fabled Quivira and its Seven Cities of Gold. Black- and brown-robed priests, marching with scorched sandals, and armed only with towering crosses, were followed in turn by bearded buckskin-clad fur traders and mountain men, by canny Comancheros, and weather-beaten drovers. There were the tireless freighters and profit-conscious merchants driving heavily laden wagons with billowing canvasses that formed great trains which stretched for miles across seemingly endless prairies. Thus, the first truly great highway of the American west originated—the Santa Fe Trail. It represented an air of El Dorado that inspired and stimulated a spirit of progress and a desire for gain. Pilgrims, pioneers, traders, soldiers, and prospectors—tens of thousands of them—jolted over the rolling ruts that began to stretch into a slender winding ribbon which linked precariously the quiet pastoral culture of Hispanic New Mexico with the dynamic restless culture of the blossoming French and American settlements along the banks of the great Missouri.

It was a colorful throng that accepted the adventure and responsibility of its calling. Armor-clad conquistadores of imperial Spain, Mexican lancers, and American dragoons bearing guidons of conquest in a destiny that was to expand a growing nation. Names, great and small, became associated with its development. There was "Kit" Carson, "Old" Bill Williams, "Jeb" Smith, Pike, Fitzpatrick, Becknell, Ceran St. Vrain, the brothers Bent, Sibley, Gregg, and Kearny.

With the successful opening of the Santa Fe Trail others pushed on in search of more distant horizons. As a result of this, and of equal significance, was the commencement of the 1,600-mile Camino Real, the "King's Highway", stretching southward from Santa Fe to Chihuahua, and the interior markets of Mexico. Still others pushed west past the mud villages of the Rio Grande and across mountains and desert to the gold fields of California.

It was a trail of promise. In the mind of its traveler was the dream of freedom and opportunity. Many found what they sought. Others fell into dismal failure and unmarked graves. No one ever called it an easy life. The tears and sweat dampened its glamour. The romance was somehow never felt. Even the sense of adventure was at times lost in drenching thunderstorms, blizzards, sicknesses, and monotonous marches through sun-tortured, dust-choking deserts. Its romance and glamour lives now and will for centuries to come.

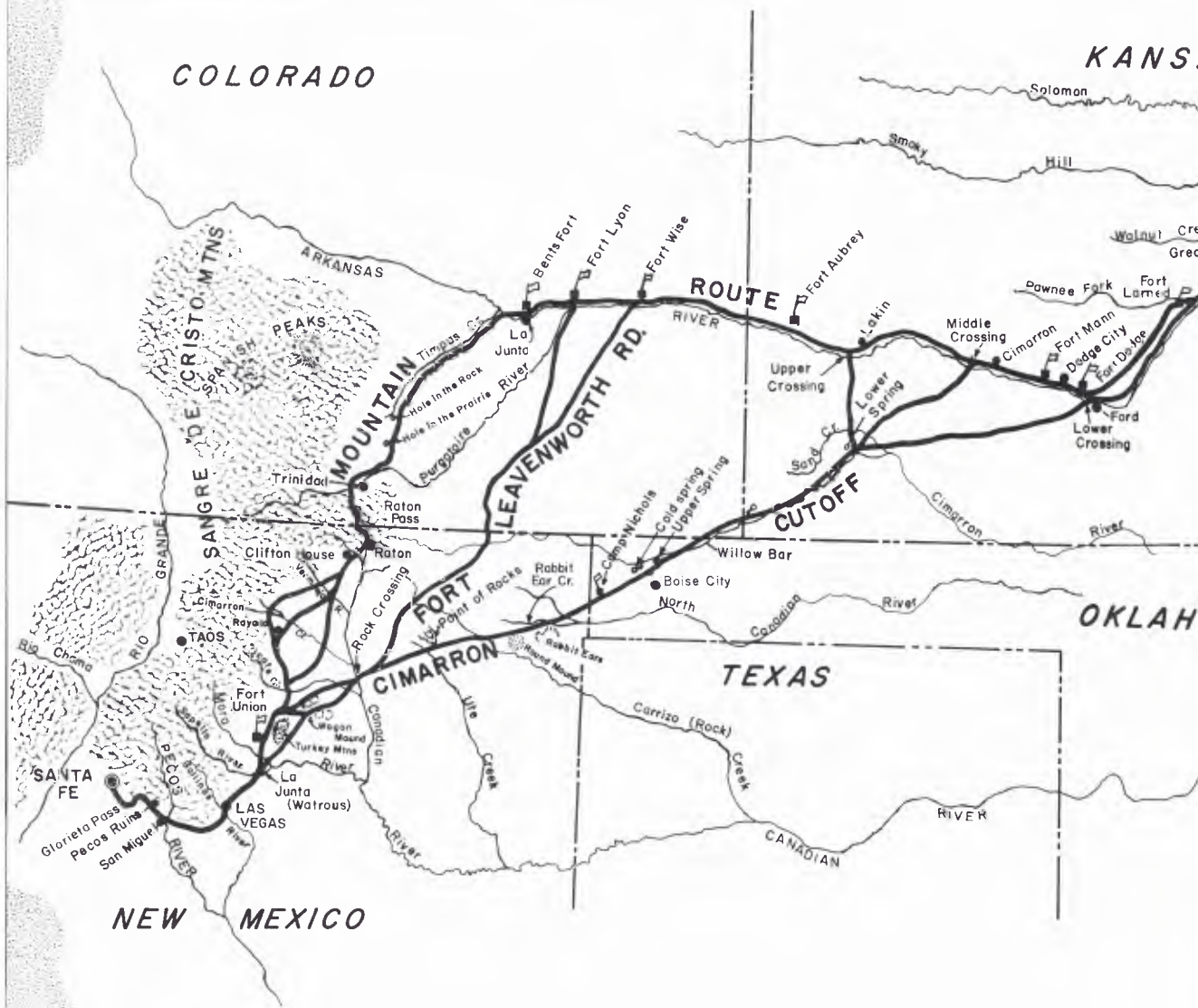
EARLY HISTORY

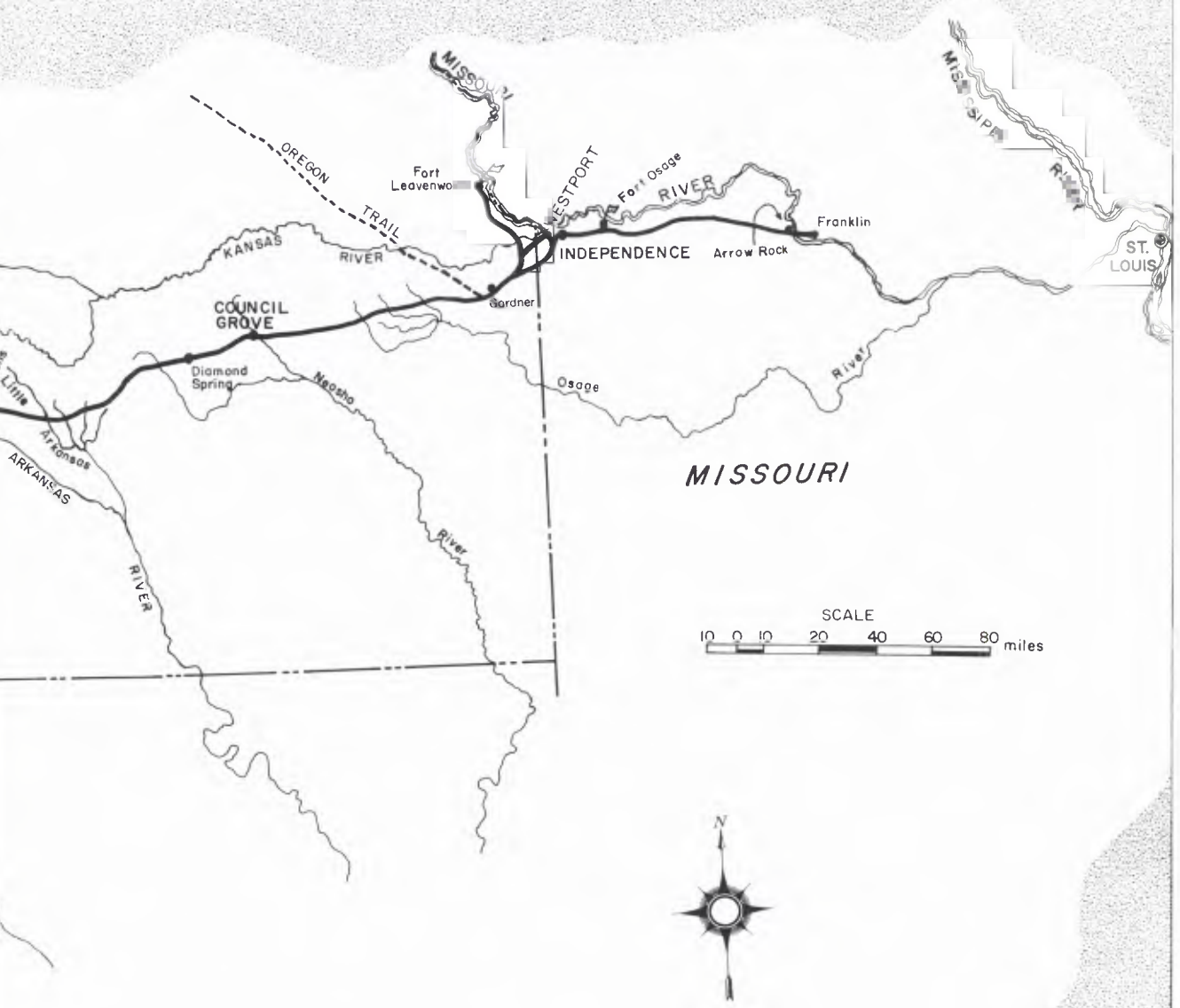
In the early part of the 19th century the expansion of western immigration had reached into the valleys of the Mississippi and Missouri. Tales of the mountain provinces of New Spain, particularly their commercial needs, were brought back to the western merchants by the early mountain men. It was known from these early trappers that the Spanish authorities looked with disfavor upon trade relations with the United States. The experience of Lt. Zebulon M. Pike, his capture and imprisonment in 1807, was in itself enough to whet the adventurous appetite of high-spirited men.

Pike, however, was not the first American in Santa Fe. The earliest expedition, of which there is an account, was that of the Mallette brothers who entered the New Mexico capitol in July, 1739. Their purpose was exploratory. The first expedition formulated strictly for trade was made in 1763 by a group of Frenchmen who established trade relations with the Spanish along the upper reaches of the Arkansas River. The second expedition to Santa Fe was made by Baptiste La Lande, a French Creole, in the summer of 1804. The year following the arrival of La Lande, an American trapper named James Purcell wandered into Santa Fe. In his narrative, Pike speaks of both La Lande and Purcell whose acquaintance he made in the capitol city in 1807. Pike declares that Purcell was the first American who ever crossed the plains to New Mexico, thus overlooking the accomplishments of La Lande whom Pike, in all probability, did not consider an "American".

In the succeeding years following the capture of Pike, small unattached parties of men still made attempts at establishing trade relations with the belligerent Spanish. In November, 1809, three men by the names of Smith, McClanahan, and Patterson set out from St. Louis. Nothing further was ever heard of them and it is believed that they fell into the hands of the Plains Indians.

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COLORADO
KANS
Solomon
Smoky Hill
Walnut Cre
Gree
ARKANSAS
SANGRE DE CRISTO MTNS
SPANISH PEAKS
Bents Fort
Fort Lyon
Fort Wise
Fort Aubrey
ROUTE
RIVER
Pawnee Fork
Fort Larned
Lakin
Middle Crossing
Cimarron
Fort Mann
Dodge City
Fort Dodge
Ford
Lower Crossing
Upper Crossing
Lower Spring
Sand Cr.
La Junta
Timpas Cr.
Hole in the Rock
Hole in the Prairie
Purgatoire River
MOUNTAIN
LEAVENWORTH RD.
Trinidad
Raton Pass
Raton
Clifton House
CUTOFF
Cold spring
Upper Spring
Willow Bar
Cimarron River
Rabbit Ear Cr.
Boise City
North Canadian River
OKLAH
Point of Rocks
Rock Crossing
FORT CIMARRON
Rabbit Ears
Round Mound
TEXAS
TAOS
RIO GRANDE
Rio Chama
Cimarron Raya
Fort Union
Wagon Mound
Turkey Mtns
Canadian River
Carrizo (Rock) Creek
Las Animas River
PECOS
SANTA FE
LAS VEGAS
La Junta (Watrous)
Glorieta Pass
Pecos Ruins
San Miguel
RIVER
CANADIAN
NEW MEXICO



THE SANTA FE TRAIL

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July, 1966



FIGURE 1

In 1812 an expedition of twelve men under the leadership of James Baird crossed the plains. Believing that the Treaty of Hidalgo of 1810 had severed the bonds between Mexico and Spain, they entered Santa Fe. Unaware of the execution of the Catholic priest, Hidalgo, and the end of that rebellion, they were arrested by the authorities, their goods confiscated, and they were imprisoned in Chihuahua for a period of twelve years.

In 1815 the famed fur trader, Auguste P. Chouteau, in company with Julius De Munn, visited the settlements of Taos and Santa Fe and secured permission from the Spanish governor, Alberto Maynez, to trap and trade in the northern mountains. They set up their base of operations along the banks of Huerfano Creek, northwest of present-day Walsenburg, Colorado, and there carried on successful trading for two years. In 1817 a new governor, named Allande, rescinded their privileges and they were arrested and imprisoned in Santa Fe. They were subjected to a humiliating court-martial and were forced to leave the dominions of Spain. De Munn relates that upon their release, "all our property was kept and we were permitted to come home, each with one of the worst horses we had".[1]

A notable exception to the early traders in Spanish-held Santa Fe was a nineteen-year-old Indian trader named David Merriwether. In the year 1809, in the company of Pawnee warriors, young Merriwether was forced into a battle with Spanish troops along the south banks of the Arkansas River. They were defeated and Merriwether was captured and imprisoned in Santa Fe for a short time. In 1853 he returned to Santa Fe, having been appointed by President Pierce to serve as the third governor of the newly formed territory of New Mexico.

Although many men had preceded him, William Becknell is generally considered as the father of the Santa Fe Trail. This honor is rightfully accorded for several reasons. First, his initial expedition in 1821 came at a time when Mexico had achieved its independence from Spain. Upon his arrival in Santa Fe he was received with courtesy and warm hospitality, a response that was unheard of in the past. Second, considering the small amount of merchandise that he carried, he reaped a very handsome profit. Third, on his second expedition in 1822, anxious to avoid the circuitous route through the upper Arkansas, he pioneered the Cimarron Cutoff. This route left the Arkansas River near present-day Dodge City and crossed through what is now southwestern Kansas and the Oklahoma Panhandle. Becknell suffered many hardships across this waterless stretch, but opened a route that was 100 miles shorter, and which later became the most popular way to Santa Fe. He instituted the use of wagons on the trail. Prior to this time only pack animals served as conveyances. His diary recordings were the first usable guides into a new land. On his return to the States, his encouragement and glowing accounts of the potentials of profit spread throughout the merchandising centers of Missouri.

Becknell provided the true stimulus of the trail and it is from this time, the year 1822, that the initiation of the Santa Fe trade may be dated.

1. Twitchell, Leading Facts of New Mexico History, p. 101.

SURVEY OF THE TRAIL

The success of Becknell, and subsequent expeditions in 1823-24, attracted the attention of the United States government. This attraction was prompted by prominent merchants who began circulating petitions to the Missouri Congressional delegation setting forth the opportunities of trade, promotion, and demands for government protection of caravans. Senator Thomas Hart Benton organized his political machinery to meet this demand and on January 3, 1825 rose in the United States Senate and presented his drafted bill authorizing the President to cause a road to be marked to the settlements of Mexico. The bill passed and on March 3, 1825 James Monroe affixed his signature to the bill and it became a law. It provided for the appointment of consuls to Santa Fe and Chihuahua, and the appropriation of $10,000 for surveying and marking the road, and an additional $20,000 for treaties with the Indians for a right of way.

On March 16, 1825, President John Quincy Adams appointed a Santa Fe Road Commission. Named to the posts were Benjamin H. Reeves of Howard County, Missouri; George C. Sibley of Fort Osage, Missouri; and Pierre Menard of Kaskaskia, Illinois, who later resigned and whose place was filled by Thomas Mather, also of Kaskaskia. The Commissioners selected a most competent surveyor in the person of Joseph C. Brown.

The survey commenced at Fort Osage, Missouri on July 17, 1825, and followed the route that was formerly established by the early traders. They chose the more direct southwesterly course, the Cimarron Cutoff, and on October 19 reached the Canadian River near present-day Taylor Springs. On the west bank of the Canadian River the trail turned south toward the waters of the Mora. Upon reaching this point Commissioner Sibley was confronted with a decision. He recorded: "If I had attempted to reach S(an)ta fee, by way (of) San Miguel, my Horses must nearly all have failed, and many of them been lost. If I attempt to haul the Waggons over the Mountains loaded as they are, the Horses must necessarily fail. If I leave the Waggons & Pack the Horses, still the horses must fail, & probably the Waggons be lost entirely. If I hire Mules to pack my Baggage over to Taos, I believe I shall be able to get the empty Waggons over the Mountains, and thus at a small expense save all my Horses and Waggons, & prove the existence of a Waggon route over the Mountains into the Valley of Taos: And I determined, upon all the considerations, to adopt the latter plan".[2] It was an unfortunate decision. The trail to Taos, as surveyed, was highly impractical. The rugged mountains which intervened to the northwest provided passages suitable only for pack animals.

The survey party reached Taos on Sunday, October 30, 1825. Faced with the task of acquiring provisions for the winter, Sibley and his men remained in Taos for nearly a month. They arrived in Santa Fe on November 30, 1825 and then, after tedious negotiations with the Mexican

2. Gregg, ed., The Road to Santa Fe: Univ. New Mexico Press, p. 105.



FIGURE 2

government, secured further authority to continue their surveys. The surveys were completed in the summer of 1826. Their reports and journals were filed with the United States government in 1827.

The survey of the Santa Fe Trail proved to be a useless expenditure. They had overrun the appropriation in an excess of $1,500. Their field notes and maps were never used by the United States government, thus depriving the public of a contribution to the geographical knowledge of the West. By far, the greatest mistake was the choice of Taos as the terminus of the trail. They overlooked the markets of Santa Fe, thinking that Taos would develop as the trading center of the Southern Rockies. Although shorter in distance, it offered an almost impossible terrain for wagons. Consequently, the traders refused the route and opened their own road to Santa Fe.

The survey was well manned, well executed, and extremely accurate. Sextant observations were used for latitude and longitude, along with compasses for direction, and chains for distances. It was unfortunate that such a detailed and dedicated purpose should fail. However, the survey did contribute one lasting benefit—treaties made with the Osage and Kansas Indians at Council Grove on August 10, 1825 insured safe passage for caravans on the eastern prairies.

NATURE OF THE TRADE

By the early 1830's caravan procedure and the best route to Santa Fe had been established. Trade had taken on an overwhelming aspect, and in the few short years that followed, the term "Santa Fe trade" actually became a misnomer. As the volume of business increased, traders were shipping more than half of their goods to the southern markets of Mexico, often without even breaking the loads in Santa Fe. Experiences of these travelers of the plains are preserved in numerous diaries. Dr. Josiah Gregg, a physician turned historian, who made several trips to Santa Fe in the years 1831-40, has recorded the best account of experiences of traders in his book, "Commerce of the prairies". The following table, which is the only complete summary of the trade, was compiled by Dr. Gregg.[3]

Dr. Gregg does not credit William Becknell as being the first trader to use wagons on the road to Santa Fe, therefore omitting their usage in the year 1822. Gregg, usually so accurate, further errs in saying that Becknell was defeated in his efforts to cross the Cimarron Desert, and had to return to the Arkansas and go by way of Taos. The fact remains that Becknell did survive the Cimarron Cutoff, and in so doing brought three wagons with him into Santa Fe, which he sold at a tremendous profit.

ROUTE OF THE CARAVANS

Prior to the year 1828, the principal point of rendezvous for western plains travel was the town of Franklin on the Missouri River. This bustling frontier town was truly the cradle of the Santa Fe trade and holds an important place in the history of the trail. William Becknell's pioneering expeditions of 1821 and 1822 were both outfitted here, and many of the trail's early figures called the environs of 'Old Franklin' home. Its reign was short lived, however, for the Missouri River engulfed it in a disastrous flood in 1828. Regardless of the flood, the town was doomed to decline for, as navigation became advanced on the Missouri River, 100 miles of troublesome roads could be avoided and the elimination of the ferry at Arrow Rock; thus, the town of Independence became the principal point of embarkation. Besides serving the travelers to Santa Fe, it also became the point of departure for most of the Rocky Mountain trappers as well as immigrants to Oregon.

Year	Mdse.	Wagons	Men	Traders	Mdse. to Chihuahua
1822	$ 15,000	—	70	60	—
1823	12,000	—	50	30	—
1824	35,000	26	100	80	$ 3,000
1825	65,000	37	130	90	5,000
1826	90,000	60	100	70	7,000
1827	85,000	55	90	50	8,000
1828	150,000	100	200	80	20,000
1829	60,000	30	50	20	5,000
1830	120,000	70	140	60	20,000
1831	250,000	130	320	80	80,000
1832	140,000	70	150	40	50,000
1833	180,000	105	185	60	80,000
1834	150,000	80	160	50	70,000
1835	140,000	75	140	40	70,000
1836	130,000	70	135	35	60,000
1837	150,000	80	160	35	80,000
1838	90,000	50	100	20	40,000
1839	250,000	130	250	40	100,000
1840	50,000	30	60	5	10,000
1841	150,000	60	100	12	80,000
1842	160,000	70	120	15	90,000
1843	450,000	230	350	30	300,000

From Independence the caravans traveled across the rolling grasslands of eastern Kansas. At Council Grove, 150 miles to the west, general rendezvous were held and authority delegated to organize movements. Past Council Grove, with leaders selected and a system of government agreed upon, the wagon trains became disciplined. They drove in parallel columns, two in eastern Kansas, four in dangerous Indian country.

Proceeding southwesterly the route traversed the central tributaries of the Arkansas River, the Cottonwood Branch of the Neosho, Turkey Creek, the Little Arkansas, Cow Creek, and Walnut Creek, each presenting its own difficulties of fording. Gregg relates on his first trip in 1831 "Next day we reached Cow Creek, where all the difficulties encountered at Little Arkansas had to be reconquered: but after digging, bridging, shouldering the wheels, with the usual accompaniment of whooping, swearing and cracking of whips, we soon got safely across and encamped in the valley beyond".[4]

The Arkansas River was reached at its great bend west of present Lyons, Kansas, and the grassy prairies abruptly changed to sandy soils studded with cacti. The monotony

3. Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies: Univ. Oklahoma Press; ed. Moorhead, p. 332.

4. Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies; ed. Moorhead, p. 40.



FIGURE 3

dividing ridge then turned to the right. Line of pine trees on right horizon mark

of wagon travel along the north bank of the river was soon broken by vast herds of buffalo, and "hump-meat" became the order of the day. The next landmark was Pawnee Rock, a prominent sandstone pinnacle, which travelers climbed, carved their names on, and from which they got a splendid view of the surrounding plains. Seventy-five miles beyond, the leaders of the trains began evaluating a choice of routes, the Cimarron Cutoff, or the longer Mountain Route.

THE CIMARRON CUTOFF

This route entailed the fording of the Arkansas River. There were three main crossings for those taking the cutoff, one near present Ford, Kansas where the river bends far to the south, called the Lower Crossing; another, 30 miles west of Dodge City between Cimarron and Ingalls, Kansas called the Middle Crossing; and a third, the Upper Crossing about 40 miles farther up the river near Lakin, Kansas. The Middle Crossing proved the most popular because here was a shallow stream several hundred yards wide. Sink-holes and quicksand were common occurrences and once into the water the double-teamed wagons were kept moving to avoid miring and submergence.

Prior to 1846, caravans using the middle and upper fords which lay west of the 100th meridian found themselves in foreign land upon crossing, as established by a treaty with Spain in 1819. First impressions of Mexican-held territory were not favorable. The sandhills stretched for miles along the south bank of the river, then 60 miles of desert from the Arkansas to the Cimarron.

The Lower Spring of the Cimarron provided the only water for miles and to miss it meant disaster. From the Lower Spring the trail followed the valley of the Cimarron River, crossing and recrossing its sandy bed. Beyond the Middle Spring the trail passed through the southeastern corner of what is now Colorado and into the Oklahoma Panhandle where Willow Bar and the Upper Spring were regular campsites. The route left the Cimarron River at the Upper Spring and maintained a southwesterly course. Five miles farther was Cold Spring where travelers paused to inscribe their names on the soft sandstone walls.

The next important landmark was Rabbit Ears Mountain which guided the caravans into the present limits of New Mexico. Then came McNees Crossing of the North Canadian River, Rabbit Ears Creek, and Round Mound where again the plainsmen climbed to view the surrounding country. In this vicinity it was customary to send runners ahead to Santa Fe to make arrangements with Mexican customs officials. Slowly the train followed, passing Point of Rocks and on to the crossing of the Canadian River where Mexican troops often met the wagons and escorted them to Santa Fe.

South from the rock crossing of the Canadian River the caravans continued on to Wagon Mound, crossing Ocate Creek en route, then on to La Junta (present Watrous) at the confluence of the Mora and Sapello rivers, where the Mountain Branch of the trail joined the Cimarron Cutoff.

The first regular town reached on the trail was San Miguel, about 25 miles west of Las Vegas where the Pecos River was forded. The road then turned north to skirt the mountains, passed the ruins of Pecos, and once through the rocky defile of Glorieta Pass, the caravans entered Santa Fe.

From Independence to Santa Fe the total distance was variously estimated at between 720 and 775 miles, and usually required eight to ten weeks of travel.

THE MOUNTAIN ROUTE

Those preferring the longer and safer route continued along the north bank of the Arkansas River for almost another 200 miles to Bents Fort, opposite the river from what is now La Junta, Colorado. The fort, established in 1833 by Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, was a principal stop on the trail. In 1846 it provided the staging area for Kearny's troops in their American invasion of New Mexico.

After several days of relaxation the caravans forded the Arkansas River near its junction with Timpas Creek and went south across a barren area. Following Timpas Creek the travelers found the water to be alkaline and undrinkable. Near the headwaters of the creek they were refreshed by spring-fed Hole In The Rock, and ten miles beyond in a natural depression called Hole In The Prairie. These two watering places provided the only sweet water between the Arkansas and Purgatoire.

Crossing into the shallow valley of the Purgatoire the route continued west to near present-day Trinidad, Colorado, where it turned south to begin its ascent of Raton Pass. This rugged passageway was both a barrier and a gateway that symbolized the Mountain Branch of the trail as did no other landmark. No one could cross the Raton highlands without remarking on its wild and beautiful setting. At the summit one could view the Spanish Peaks and the great chain of the Rockies; to the west the Sangre de Cristos; and to the south the volcano-dotted plains of the Canadian Valley. South from the summit the trail descended to Willow Creek. The descent was slow and precarious.

The exact course of the Santa Fe Trail through Raton Pass lies west of the present modern highway, generally in a location that is now occupied by the A.T.&S.F. Railroad. From Trinidad it ascended Raton Creek Canyon to the summit directly over the present railroad tunnel, turned to the northwest along a dividing ridge, then south down Willow Creek to the present town of Raton.

Lt. J. W. Abert, a topographical engineer who followed the Army of The West in 1846, describes in detail his recollections of Raton Pass:

"We commenced the passage of one of the most rocky roads I ever saw; no one who has crossed the Raton can ever forget it. A dense growth of pitch pine interferes with the guidance of the teams; in many places the axletrees were frayed against the huge fragments of rock that jutted up between the wheels as we passed; pieces of broken wagons lined the road, and at the foot of the hill we saw many axletrees, wagon tongues, sand-boards, and ox yokes, that had been broken and cast aside".[5]

5. Abert, New Mexico report 1846-47, p. 35.

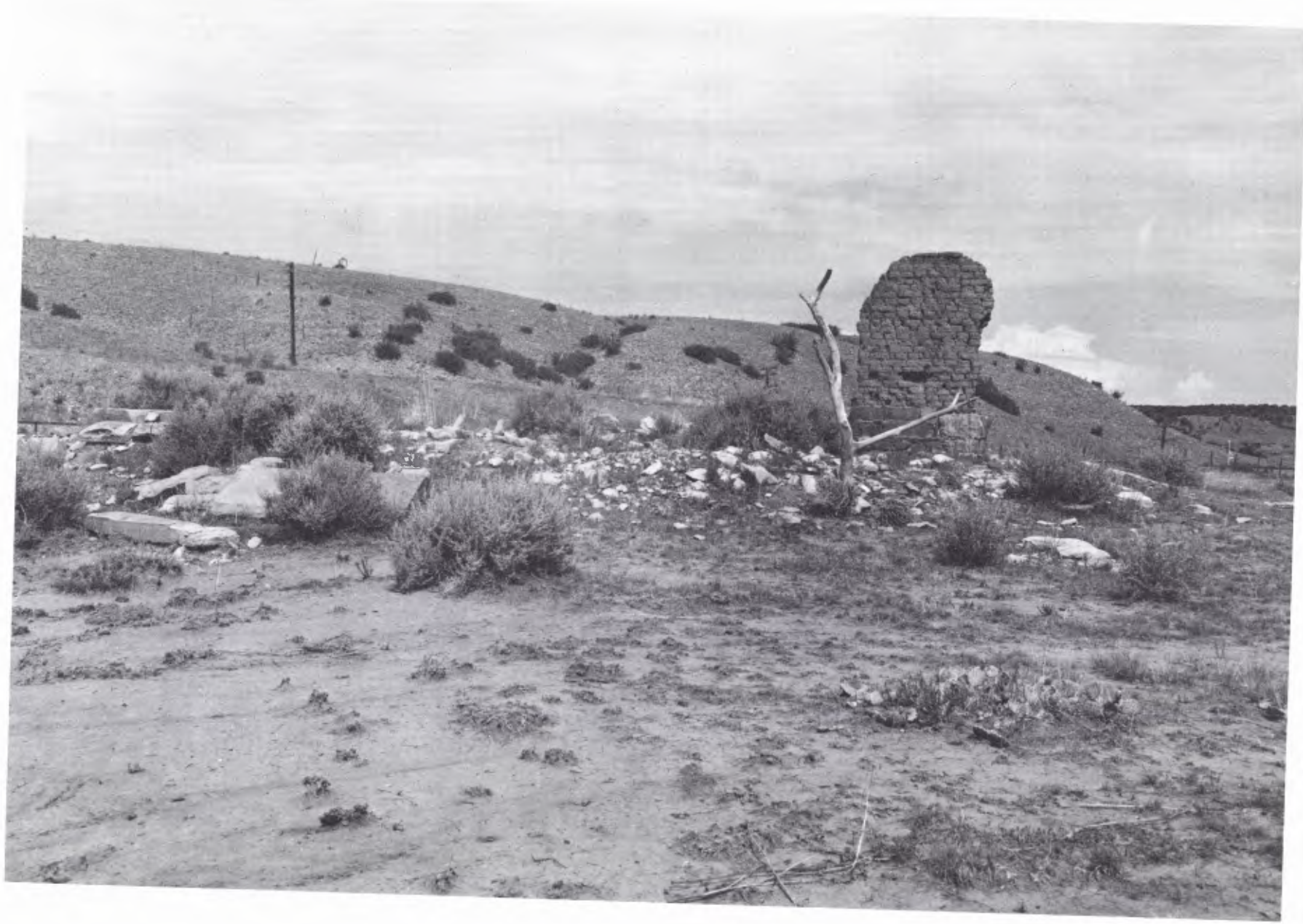


FIGURE 4

CLIFTON HOUSE. Built in the years 1866-70 by rancher Tom Stockton to serve as a rendezvous for cowboys during fall roundups. Its strategic location on the Mountain Branch of the trail soon attracted the Barlow and Sanderson Stage Company. They leased most of the house, and later added outbuildings and barns. Clifton House became one of the principal stops on the line. Some passengers elected to stay overnight, and the place became famous for its meals and lodgings.

Having reached the level plains of northeastern New Mexico the caravans crossed the Canadian River 7 miles beyond Raton Pass. Afterwards there were crossings of Vermejo River, Cimarron Creek, and the gorges of the Rayado and Ocate. The route skirted along the west base of the Turkey Mountains and shortly thereafter entered the picturesque Wolf Creek Valley. A short distance beyond lay the waters of the Mora and the "La Junta" with the Cimarron Branch of the trail.

With the exception of the march of the Army of The West, the Mountain Branch was not highly significant to the routine progress of trade, and to the development of the history of the trail—this distinction belongs to the Cimarron Cutoff. However, its claim as an important route is secure in the fact that it did bear heavy traffic at various moments in the history of the trail.

True, it was void of savages which plagued the Cimarron Route, but, like its counterpart, it also had its waterless stretches. Add to this the almost unsurmountable barrier of Raton Pass, and an additional 100 miles of terrain which generally required another week's travel. The route was not popular and, at times, was even abandoned.

LATER DAYS OF THE TRAIL

After the acquisition of New Mexico in 1846 the trail began a new era. It ceased to be a route of international commerce. Rather, it became a trunkline uniting the newly acquired possessions of the Southwest with the eastern States. Giant lumbering freighters, along with hundreds of military supply wagons and migration trains established avenues of traffic that continually raised trail dust from one end to the other. As the trail entered the last half of its history it became a great force instrumental in developing and populating the vanishing frontier of America.

Commercial freighting boomed. The volume for the Americanization of the West leaped upward every year. In 1858 alone, 1,827 wagons representing a total investment of $3.5 million crossed the prairies. There was a great demand for calicoes, bleached domestics, hosiery, shoes, flour, whiskey, hardware, and ammunition. As settlements progressed, additional items became important—furniture, musical instruments, even pianos, and heavy machinery for mining operations.

Meanwhile, the terminals of the trail changed. Independence bowed to Westport (later Kansas City), and Fort Leavenworth on the east. Fort Union, established in 1851, became the principal destination for distribution of supplies in the west.

Throughout the war years in the 1860's freighters increasingly began avoiding the Cimarron Cutoff. Fear of the route was expressed by the fact that Confederate guerrillas from Texas might attempt to disrupt supply lines with the States. This, combined with the mounting hostilities of the Plains Indians, forced the tradesmen and military to move their supply routes farther to the west to take advantage of the forts that lay along the upper Arkansas. The Mountain Branch became popular during this period and a new route, the Fort Leavenworth Road, was opened. This new freight route was designed by survey teams from Fort Union as a means of bypassing Raton Pass and still be within protective sectors.

The many forts that sprang up along the route were prime instruments in the military protection of the trail. Fort Mann, near the Arkansas crossings, was the first real fort on the trail. It was founded in 1850 and served as the "halfway house" between Independence and Santa Fe. Most of the fort establishments were short lived, however, and their construction was located at areas where hostilities were most frequent. As these areas became quieted the forts were abandoned. There were four permanent posts on the trail—Fort Larned, Fort Dodge, Fort Lyon, and Fort Union. Throughout the turbulent years of Indian warfare these four posts were faced with the burden of keeping the trail open.

As early as 1846 stagecoaches were used on the trail. The coaches carried passengers but chiefly the mail contracts made the business profitable. In 1847 an Act of Congress designated the Santa Fe Trail (from Independence, via Bents Fort to Santa Fe) a post road. Throughout the 1850's however, the stages also used the shorter Cimarron Cutoff.

The coaches carried nine persons, seven inside and two on top. Passengers paid $150 and were permitted 45 pounds of baggage. The fare included meals, and the trip usually took between 25 and 30 days. Schedules varied greatly and were not dependable.

In 1863 the Barlow-Sanderson Overland Mail and Express Company was awarded the mail contracts, and began operating stages between Kansas City and Santa Fe. The company adopted a more dependable service. Weekly stages began running in both directions. Schedules were maintained. Relay stations and stop-over houses were constructed and staffed, and better equipment was installed. This far superior service reduced the time from Kansas City to Santa Fe to two weeks.

Half-hour stops and meal stations between Bents Fort and Santa Fe were located at Bents Canyon, Trinidad, Clifton House on the Canadian, Cimarron, Sapello Crossing, and San Jose. Ten-minute relay stops included Wootton's Ranch in Raton Pass, Rayado, Sweetwater Creek, Ocate Crossing, and at the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon three miles north of Fort Union.

CONCLUSION

An industrial development was created by the Civil War, and foremost among these energies was the great westward surge of the railroads. The old trail had thrived for nearly 60 years but by the mid-1860's its importance was being challenged by trails of steel.

The Kansas Pacific was well into the plains of eastern Kansas in 1865, and continued rapidly westward cutting the trail off at its roots. The eastern terminus of the trail was forever changing. By 1867 the Santa Fe Trail east of Fort Larned was void of wagon traffic. Shortly, the Cimarron Cutoff was bypassed and that portion of the trail was now a servant and a spur line of the railroad. The Mountain Branch along the Arkansas River remained opened for several more years, but in 1873 the Kansas Pacific reached

Las Animas, Colorado, near the site of Bents Fort and this became the eastern terminus of the trail.

Financial backing for the railroad lagged for awhile in eastern Colorado, and this gave the shortened "path of empire" a few remaining years. It also allowed Uncle Dick Wootton to continue collecting tolls on his improved wagon road over Raton Pass.

Meanwhile, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad was pushing up the Arkansas. It reached Granada, Colorado in 1873, then pushed on to join the Kansas Pacific at La Junta in 1876. Time was short and even Uncle Dick could see the belching black smoke advancing from the east. In 1878 the Santa Fe secured a right-of-way south of Trinidad, and the dark recesses of Raton Pass failed to escape the steel penetrations of progress. It pushed on to Las Vegas the following year. Finally, on February 9, 1880 the rails entered Santa Fe. The old trail was dead.

The railroad dominated for a generation and then came the highways, which we still sentimentally call "trail routes". Evidence that the traders often discovered the best pathway are hundreds of miles of modern highways which follow the general lines of the old trail. When you drive such a highway you visualize the type of country through which the caravans passed. You see the same mountains, rivers, and landmarks, and you pass through the same defiles. The desert stretches are much the same, and it doesn't take much of an imagination to realize that today's thirty-minute trip over Raton Pass required three to four days of wagon travel.

In many places, however, the trail and the highway do not coincide. The early trail blazers did not have adequate information to find the best way. They were often hampered by the requirements of water and grass. In these still undeveloped areas, such as the Oklahoma Panhandle and parts of northeastern New Mexico, traces of the trail can be followed from landmark to landmark. The plainly discernable grass-grown ruts can lead the modern traveler past life-giving springs that still flow, and through isolated places where the old forts stood, and their ruins still stand. One can be guided past the Rabbit Ears and on to Round Mound where upon its summit the view is exactly as diarists described it over a hundred years ago.

The Point of Rocks is much the same and after climbing it one can almost imagine a rustic village of camping wagons at the base, oxen and horses grazing about on the prairie, whitened wagon covers arranged in a circular fashion holding trail-weary men talking in groups as they repair equipment; campfires blazing brightly, and bonnet-topped women busying themselves with the preparation of meals.

And so, even though the great Conestogas have ceased to roll, and the jingle of saber and spur are forever silenced, the old trail still lives in the imagination of man, and rightfully takes its place as one of America's most cherished traditions.

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