

SPANISH TRACES



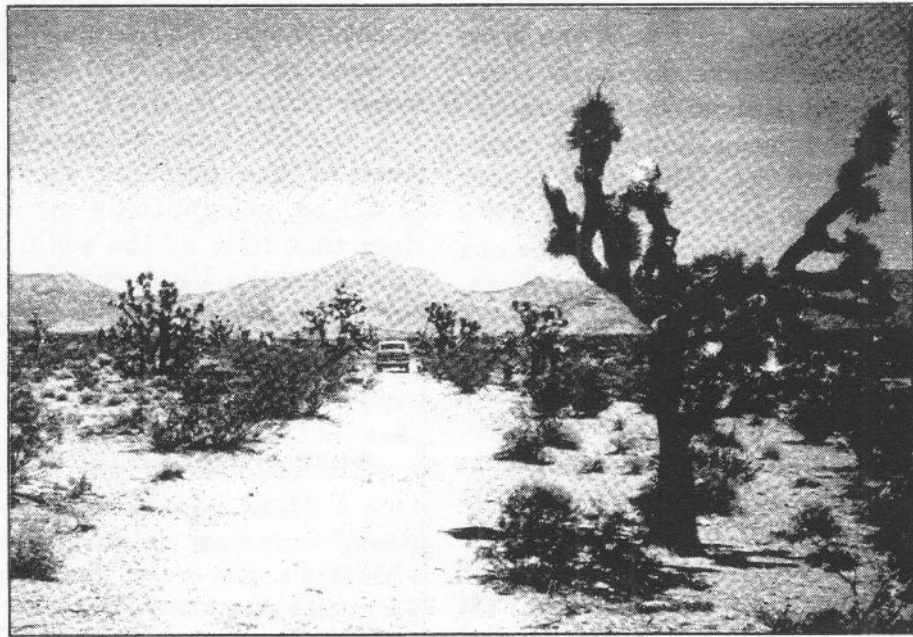
OLD SPANISH TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Volume 3

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No. 2



On the trail with Crampton and Madsen...

Climb aboard that battered, four-wheel drive vehicle you see out ahead on the trail between the Joshua trees to the west of Utah Hill. And join author Steven K. Madsen as he takes us across the Mohave Desert in Arizona and Nevada on a treacherous, western segment of the Spanish Trail. Walk in the footsteps of New Mexican traders and researchers such as Madsen and his late colleague, C. Gregory Crampton.

"In the background, against the southern sky, rise the jagged peaks of the Virgin Mountains. The high, flat surface of Mormon Mesa touches a turquoise horizon. The images seem unreal — oddly dreamlike. It's another world."

Excerpt from Steve Madsen's "Retracing the Spanish Trail: Across the Mohave Desert," inside this issue.

OSTA officers' terms extended

Membership briefed on trail study

They came, they saw, they enjoyed.

At the national conference of the Old Spanish Trail Association held in Saguache in June, OSTA members acted on a number of business matters, heard from researchers as well as National Park Service officials, and got out into the field.

Field trips took participants to a variety of sites at the north end of Colorado's spectacular San Luis Valley, including locations relating to the Spanish Trail's north branch variant that ran up the valley and over Cochetopa Pass to the Gunnison, Colorado, and Green rivers.

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Inside Spanish Traces...

- Info on the next national meeting
- Madsen on the trail in Nevada
- Chapter reports
- New books related to the trail

National meeting...

Continued from page 1

Members voted to amend the organization's bylaws to allow current OSTA officers to serve more than two consecutive terms, for the purpose of maintaining continuity until the conclusion of the National Park Service's study on the trail's eligibility for national historic trail status. The vote in favor of this motion was unanimous.

In another unanimous vote, the OSTA membership selected Santa Fe as the location of next year's national conference, after a generous offer by Willard Lewis, president of Santa Fe's Salida del Sol chapter, to host the 1998 meeting in his hometown.

(Please see more information on the '98 conference and a questionnaire on page 4.)

Presentations from authors Steve Madsen and Ruth Marie Colville on different aspects of the Spanish Trail were well-received, as were briefings by the National Park Service's John Conoboy, of the NPS's Santa Fe office, and Joseph Sanchez, currently directing the research phase of the national historic trail eligibility study.

Madsen addressed the trail's main branch and shared some research that he and the late C. Gregory Crampton performed for their book, *In Search of the Spanish Trail*. Colville discussed the trail's development, as rooted in Southwestern history. Conoboy and Sanchez said that their current work on the national historic trail study involves gathering maps of the routes used by traders that eventually became the Spanish Trail.

Kessler pointed out that ad-

ditional chapters are needed along the trail, particularly in Arizona, Nevada, and California. He intends to call a meeting of chapter presidents at some point to discuss expanding the number and geographic reach of chapters.

Field trips took conference attendees to various locations of historic interest in the Saguache area, including the site of Milton, Colo., stone circles south of Saguache, the so-called west fork of the Spanish Trail's north branch (where it crossed U.S. Highway 285), an 1873 grist mill, the John Lawrence House, Chicago Cemetery, El Rincon del Saguache, Hoagland Stage Stop site, a campsite used by Governor Juan Bautista de Anza on Aug. 24, 1779 and several routes across Cochetopa Pass (a low point on the continental divide), as well as the Old Ute Agency and Camp Rose on the west side.

Conference attendees also enjoyed a pancake breakfast put on Sunday morning by the Saguache Kiwanis Club and dedication ceremonies were held for an interpretive sign located in the northwest corner of the town park. Special mention was made by several members of the outstanding displays at the Saguache County Museum.

Throughout the conference, attendees thanked members of the Saguache County Chapter, headed by Connie Casteel, for a well-run, hospitable and enjoyable national conference. All the Saguache County Chapter's members are deserving of appreciation and praise for their contributions of time and effort.

Minutes of the 1996 meeting were not read, to save time, but were mailed to each chapter

president for dissemination to members.

Kessler explained — in response to requests — that OSTA funds are primarily for maintaining the organization's mission of public awareness, education, and preservation and are not sufficient to tackle interpretive projects led by its various chapters. He encouraged those with information on how to obtain grants to share that information with others.

In other, related matters:

- OSTA President Ron Kessler advised that all OSTA-related mail be sent to OSTA, P.O. Box 510, Monte Vista, CO 81144.

- OSTA's bank balance at the time of the meeting stood at \$1,431.19, substantially increased since that time by the addition of \$450 from the University of Utah Press for advertising in *Spanish Traces*.

Road apples

Anza world conference

The third international conference on colonial New Mexico's Governor don Juan Bautista de Anza will be held at Santa Fe, New Mexico in the spring of 1998 in conjunction with New Mexico's 400th anniversary celebration.

For information about that event please contact O.S.T.A. President Ron Kessler by mail at P.O. Box 510, Monte Vista, CO 81144, or by calling (719) 852-5225.

Six Basquos from Spain attended the second annual Anza conference in Arispe, Sonora, Mexico in May 1997. They were delighted to learn that a famous Basque and governor of New Mexico had preceded them in America.

President's column

By Ron Kessler

The efforts of O.S.T.A. members are paying off. We have a National Park Service study underway to gauge the Spanish Trail's eligibility for National Historic Trail status.

Dr. Joseph Sanchez, director of the Southwest Colonial Research Center at the University of New Mexico, is conducting that study. Sanchez and two of his assistants attended the June meeting in Saguache, Colorado. They had recently been to Utah to gather information and maps from studies done by the late Dr. C. Gregory Crampton and Steven K. Madsen.

Bruce Erickson, one of the team members, is working to organize the maps of the various routes used by early day Spanish and Mexican traders. The team will be looking for information on the trail's neglected North Branch, and you can be sure we will supply it.

For those of you who would like to learn more about the North Branch, which is one of my special areas of interest, the following maps show the route as it crossed the vast San Luis Valley of Colorado. They include:

- Early survey maps of the Conejos Land Grant west of the New Mexico Principal Meridian in Southern Colorado. The earliest records on these maps were recorded by P.A. Wilbar, beginning in 1858.

- George M. Wheeler, Corp of Engineers, U.S. Army, Southern Colorado and Northern New

Mexico, Atlas Sheet No. 69(B) and part of Southwestern Colorado, Atlas Sheet No. 61(D), 1873-77.

(Both of these are available from the Bureau of Land Management.)

- The Nell's Topographical & Township Map of the State of Colorado, compiled from U.S. Government surveys and other authentic sources, Washington, D.C., 1885.

The efforts of O.S.T.A. members are paying off. We have a National Park Service study underway to gauge the Spanish Trail's eligibility as a National Historic Trail.

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The North Branch of the Old Spanish Trail begins at San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico, and joins the southern, or main, branch of the trail at Green River, Utah. The North Branch in the San Luis Valley of Colorado is divided into two trails, the East Fork and the West Fork.

There are three main obstacles which divide the North Branch into two trails. Just north of San Juan Pueblo is the Black Mesa. At the north end of the Black Mesa is the beginning of the Rio Grande gorge and at the north end of the gorge is what Juan Bautista

de Anza described as *La Cienega de San Luis* or the Marsh of Saint Luis.

These three obstacles divided the valley for travelers heading north or south, causing the trails on each side of them to occupy narrow corridors between the central obstacles and the Sangre de Cristo mountains on the east, or the central obstacles and the San Juan mountains on the west.

The routes shown on the three sets of maps listed above tend to overlap one another, indicating the best routes of travel. Evidence of early humankind in the San Luis Valley shows that he followed game trails traversing these narrow corridors in search of food.

The peoples later known as American Indians also used these same trails as they traveled north and south through the valley.

As the Spanish moved north into what is now southern Colorado, they also used these same trails to reach points further north. Finding that people inhabited that northern realm, the Spaniards established trade relations with them.

In later years these trails adopted the name the "Spanish Road," or "Spanish Trail." These ancient trails today are paralleled by modern highways, which still trace the valley on a north-south axis on either side of this vast, intermontane basin.

I urge anyone with maps of the area or information on the main or North Branches of the trail to contact Dr. Sanchez at the Southwest Colonial Research Center, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

Next national conference to coincide with Cuarto Centenario

Planning underway;

please return questionnaire below

By Willard Lewis

The Salida del Sol Chapter's National Conference Host Committee has prepared the questionnaire that appears below, so that O.S.T.A. members have a voice in the conference set for May 2-3, 1998.

To avoid destroying your precious issue of Spanish Traces, simply photocopy the questionnaire, fill out the copy and return it to us. The more input, the better the conference will be. We need them returned right away, so we have them in time for our October 18 meeting.

A strong program committee has already formed. Tom Chavez, director of the Palace of the Governors State History Museum, and Charles Bennett, assistant director, serve on the committee.

Since 1998 marks the Cuarto Centenario of Spanish settlement in the Southwest, many events have been scheduled in New Mexico and elsewhere. One of those events will be O.S.T.A.'s next national conference!

Please contact me at P.O. Box 6073, Santa Fe, NM 87502; or call (505) 984-2978.

Old Spanish Trail Conference Planning Questionnaire

•O.S.T.A. conferences typically hold programs and a business meeting on Saturday morning, with field trips on Saturday afternoon. Sun-

day mornings are dedicated to an interpretive marker ceremony with field trips following.

Do you favor a longer conference with a full day of programs and a brief business meeting? (Yes, No, comments)

If "Yes," how much longer? (Select one of the following: 1) A full day? Before or after programs? 2) A half-day field trip before and a half-day field trip after programs? 3) A half-day field trip only, on the day of the program session? 4) Some other schedule (describe).

•Note your interest in programs by assigning each of the following subjects a 1 through 5 value, with 5 being the highest priority:

___ trail history; ___ trail routes; ___ trail personalities; ___ historical/archival documents of the period; ___ trail identification/marking/preservation (including NPS study).

•Other general program interests? (Describe)

•Specific programs? (Name presenter)

•Ideas for field trips?

•Book-related events desired?

•Desired social activities...

•Other matters that would enhance the conference or your stay in Santa Fe? (Describe)

Please use as much space as you need to relay your interests. We will utilize each and every response to create the most successful O.S.T.A. conference ever. Thanks in advance for responding!

FOR THE RECORD

OSTA is dedicated to the study, preservation, and protection of the trail's historical integrity.

OSTA's purpose is to promote public awareness, encourage research, work with local, state, and federal agencies, assist local chapter formation, obtain National Historic Trail status, and recognize the multi-cultural heritage of the trail.

Meetings of the national association will be held at least once every two years, and special meetings may be called by OSTA officers.

Officers are elected for two-year terms, and are nominated by a committee of five members selected by the general membership. No one may hold more than one office at a time, and no officer other than a director may serve more than two consecutive terms.

OSTA bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting of the membership by majority vote, provided the amendment has been submitted in writing to the president or board of directors at least 30 days prior to a meeting.

Meeting agendas are set by the president. Items forwarded at least 30 days prior to a meeting shall be included; each member may introduce only one item of business.

SPANISH TRACES is published by OSTA for its members. Contributions may be accepted, rejected, and/or edited by the editor. OSTA accepts no responsibility for unsolicited contributions. Those wishing their materials returned must provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage. SPANISH TRACES reserves the right to republish at a future date any of its contents in any form.

Membership:

Life membership	\$100.00
Institution	\$25/year
Family	\$15/year
Individual	\$10/year
Student	\$5/year

(Life, institutional, individual, and student memberships entitle holders to one vote on OSTA business at annual meetings; family memberships allows two votes if two family members are present. Members must be present to vote.)

Send all inquiries and membership dues to:

Old Spanish Trail Association
P.O. Box 521
Monte Vista, CO 81144

OSTA President:
Ron Kessler
P.O. Box 510
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Retracing the Spanish Trail: Across the Mojave Desert of Arizona & Nevada

By Steven K. Madsen

We pick up the trail of the New Mexican traders at the Utah-Arizona line, on the long slope below the summit of the Beaver Dam Mountains. Jedediah Smith blazed the route through this area in 1827. Our course will veer from Smith's trace and take us 150 miles across the northwest corner of Arizona and the southern end of Nevada, to the California border. As we navigate through the region, we will use historical accounts to direct our course and more fully illustrate the trailside landscape. We'll follow the path John C. Fremont took in 1844 on his epic east-bound trek over the Spanish Trail. In this trail environment, the tracks of countless herds of horses and mules remain beaten into the sands of the Mojave.

It appears stark and bleak at first glance, but the Mojave Desert on closer examination reveals a natural beauty and an alluring character. It is a land of unbounded space and long shadows, clear skies and clean air, and seldom-visited hideaways. And scattered liberally across the eastern edge of this arid expanse are Joshua Trees — their spiny branches stretching against an orange sky. Clusters of yucca shaped like porcupines, with green daggerlike leaves, decorate the coarse golden sands. Delicate flowers spring to life after a seasonal rain. Cacti prod the desert air. Resinous creosote bushes emit their strong scent. (Spaniards called the evergreens *hediondillas* — little

bad smellers.) [1] In this setting, the endangered desert tortoise pushes on relentlessly. Lizards scurry about in dim light while mourning doves deliver a plaintive call. Insects and spiders hide in the scant shade of stunted growths. Elusive roadrunners run wild. In the background, against the southern sky, rise the jagged peaks of the Virgin Mountains. The high flat surface of Mormon Mesa touches a turquoise horizon. The images seem unreal — oddly dreamlike. It's another world.

We pick up the trail of the New Mexican traders at the Utah-Arizona line, on the long slope below the summit of the Beaver Dam Mountains. Jedediah Smith blazed the route through this area in 1827.

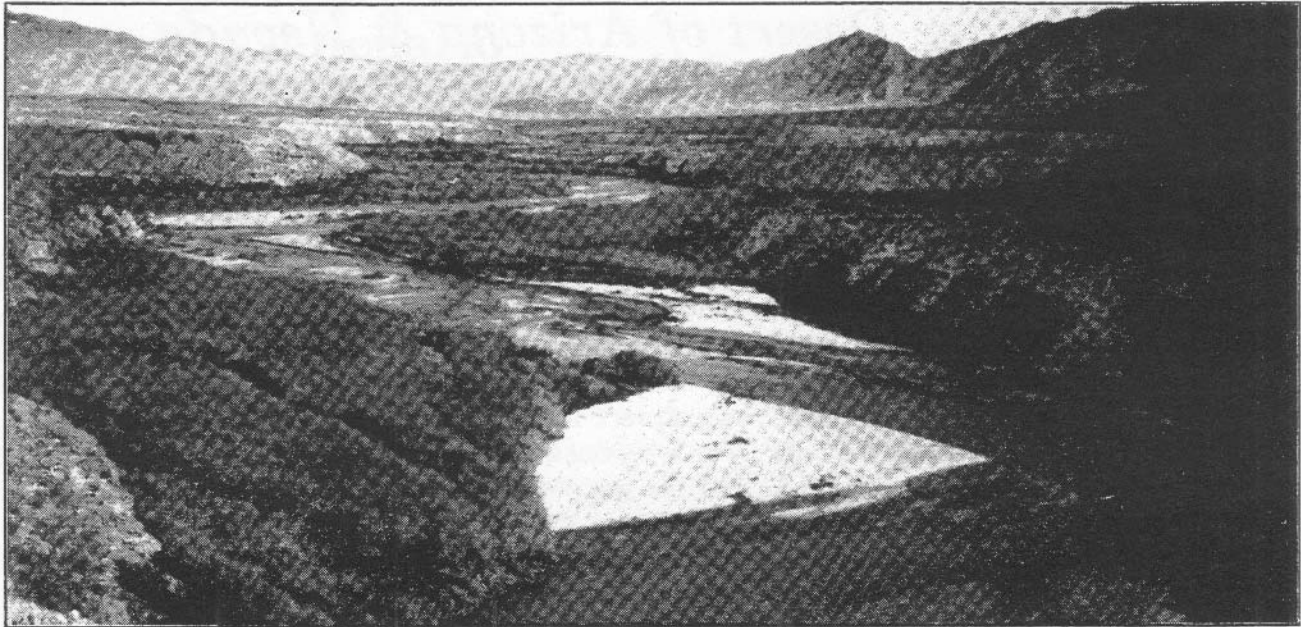
Here on the southwestern slope of the Beaver Dam Mountains, three life zones — the Mojave Desert, the Colorado Plateau, and the Great Basin — merge to form a unique wilderness environment. Several wildlife species mingle in a sensitive biological community. It's a natural habitat for the endangered peregrine falcon, the Gila monster, the Mojave rattlesnake, and the golden eagle. And penetrating this vulnerable ecosystem is the Spanish Trail.

Seven miles beyond the Utah

border, the Spanish Trail crosses Beaver Dam Wash, an intermittent stream that flows into the Virgin River, affluent of the Colorado. The trail crosses the streambed one-half mile above its mouth. Jedediah Smith in 1827 noted the "good-sized cotton wood trees" growing at the desert oasis. [2] Great gnarled cottonwoods, showing signs of beaver activity, line the wash today. Migratory songbirds in winter flock to the greenery in this riparian forest. Leaving the fragile environs of Beaver Dam Wash, the Spanish Trail ascends a sandy hill to the present site of Littlefield, Arizona. Then, the trail for some three miles crosses a high, flat, sandy bench on the north side of the Virgin River, running parallel with the water course. From the elevated benchland, the trail descends a gravel terrace to the channel, just above the river's "Big Bend." Vestiges of the historic route may be seen cut into the rocky slope. At the base of the hill, the trail fades as it pushes on to the riverbed. In the past, the river frequently overreached its banks and washed out the pathway. For John C. Fremont who happened on the stream in early May, 1844, following a flash flood, it seemed "the most dreary river" he had ever seen. [3] On his map of the expedition, Fremont recorded its name, Rio Virgen.

Now considered one of the America's last free-flowing rivers, the Virgin River issues from the

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The big bend in the Virgin River, Mohave County, Arizona, was traveled by caravans on the Spanish Trail during the route's heyday from 1830 to 1848.

Retracing the trail.... Continued from page 5

pine-and aspen-clad Markagunt Plateau, drops into the great gorge of Zion National Park, and emerges into the open country to the south. Then, it enters another gorge, the Virgin Narrows, before emerging into the Virgin Valley of Arizona and Nevada. Once travelers reached the riverbed of the sluggish Virgin on the Spanish Trail, they faced heavy sands — at times shifting quicksands. Slogging through sticky mud, they contended with several difficult, even dangerous, crossings to find solid ground. Along this lower river stretch, tangles of cottonwood and willow, interspersed with mesquite, colonized the banks. (Today, alien tamarisks infest the streamsides, crowding out the native vegetation.)

Wooded thickets were a nuisance to overland travel. Fremont

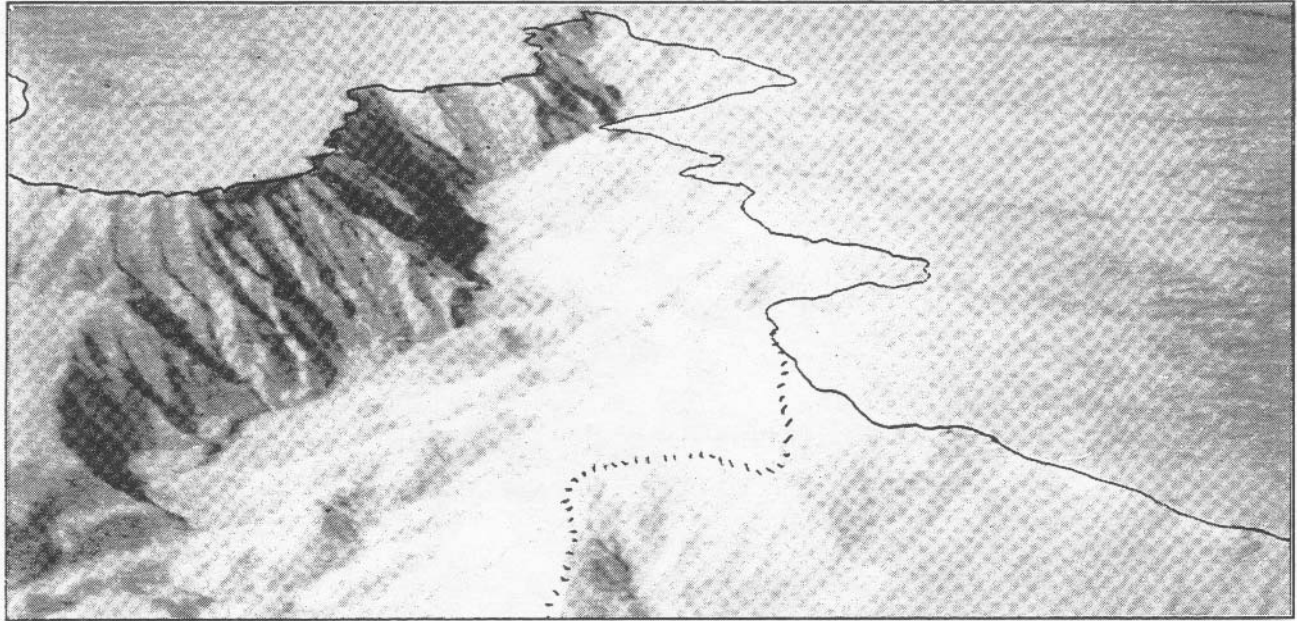
in 1844 reported that the river bottoms "were thickly overgrown with various kinds of brush." [4] Traveling this section of trail in October, 1851, Dr. Thomas Flint reported that cattle drovers in his party were "trying to get their animals out of the thick brush into which they had strayed during the night." [5] In this setting, the Spanish Trail herds grazed on small patches of salt grass growing on the shaded margins of the river, while riders and animals alike sampled the bean-like pods of mesquite trees. [6]

Spanish Trail riders at the Virgin River were in Southern Paiute territory. The Paiutes living along the river banks grew resentful of overland travelers who depleted their natural resources and enslaved their women and children. Using the cover of the Virgin River thickets, they struck at

the passing trains by stealing or killing some of their animals, which they used for food. John C. Fremont, on his second expedition in early May, 1844, placed his men on full alert as they passed through Paiute territory. He reported: "We had to move all day in a state of watch, and prepared for combat — scouts and flankers out, a front and rear division of our men, and baggage animals in the centre."

At night, camp duty was severe. Those who toiled all day, had to guard, by turns, the camp and the horses all night. Frequently one-third of the whole party were on guard at once, and nothing but this vigilance saved us from attack." [7]

Dr. Thomas Flint, traveling overland on the Spanish Trail in October, 1851, found the Southern Paiutes "so troublesome" for his company that the men "concluded



This aerial view of Mormon Mesa in Clark County, Nevada, shows the Spanish Trail as it ascends the precipitous landform in decidedly dry country.

to declare war on them." They kept the Indians at a comfortable distance by taking a shot at them occasionally, not intending to hit." [8] Ultimately, white intruders shouldered the Paiutes off their lands and hunting grounds.

Traversing the former Paiute homelands, the Spanish Trail enters southern Nevada. It runs past narrow green fields in the area of present-day Mesquite and Bunkerville, Nevada, settled in the late nineteenth century by pioneering Mormons. In this vicinity, easily identifiable traces of the region's first automobile road, the Arrowhead Trail, exist alongside the present Interstate 15 route rushing on to California.

About 17 miles downstream from Mesquite, at the eastern base of Mormon Mesa, the Spanish Trail leaves the Virgin River. It climbs the sandy bed of Halfway Wash two

miles to reach the steep slope of Virgin Hill. At this point the trail rises approximately 360 feet in less than half a mile. Recounting his overland trek along this segment of the trail in the fall of 1850, David Cheesman, noted: "... Leaving the Virgin and going up an arroyo to a point where we made the ascent to gain the table land which would lead us to the Muddy." [9]

Wagon-borne emigrants who followed the Spanish Trail in later years found the uphill scramble strenuous. Trail riders on horseback, however, negotiated the steep pitch with ease. By 1866 when artist-photographer William H. Jackson passed this way, a very steep wagon road had been built from the mouth of Halfway Wash to the top of the mesa, two miles south of the old trail.

Today, the Spanish Trail straddles a narrow, curving

ridgeline up a steep, rocky grade to the rim of the mesa. [10] The nearly flat, bone-dry surface of Mormon Mesa, studded with small sharp rocks, wore out the animals and made the trek unpleasant. Orville C. Pratt made a "long march" over this stretch of trail on October 10, 1848, and described it as "a very heavy road, without water or grass." [11] Dr. Thomas Flint, on November 8, 1851, reported traveling "over a rough sharp gravelly trail. Pebbles like rasps." The rugged trail tired the sheep in his train, many of which were left by the wayside. [12] Gwinn Harris Heap of the Beale Survey described the craggy outline of the mesa as terrain "much broken by ravines." Crossing the surface of the mesa in August of 1853, Heap described it as a "hot

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The late Gregory Crampton stands at the top of an eroded draw at the top of Mormon Mesa that shows signs of use from trail days.

Retracing the trail... Continued from page 7

and sterile plain." The mesa top bore a scanty growth of stunted mesquit[e] bushes. He added that "it was thickly covered with sharp flints...." As a result, the unshod animals of the expedition became tender footed and fell behind. [13]

In this wild country, the barrel cactus, threatened by human impact, clings precariously to the broken and barren mesa rim. In former times, desperate sun-parched travelers, swinging machetes, slaked their thirst by cutting through the plant's red bristling exterior and extracting its green "juicy pulp." Crossing southern Nevada on the Spanish Trail in 1844, John C. Fremont wrote, "we ate occasionally the *bisnada* [barrel cactus]." [14]

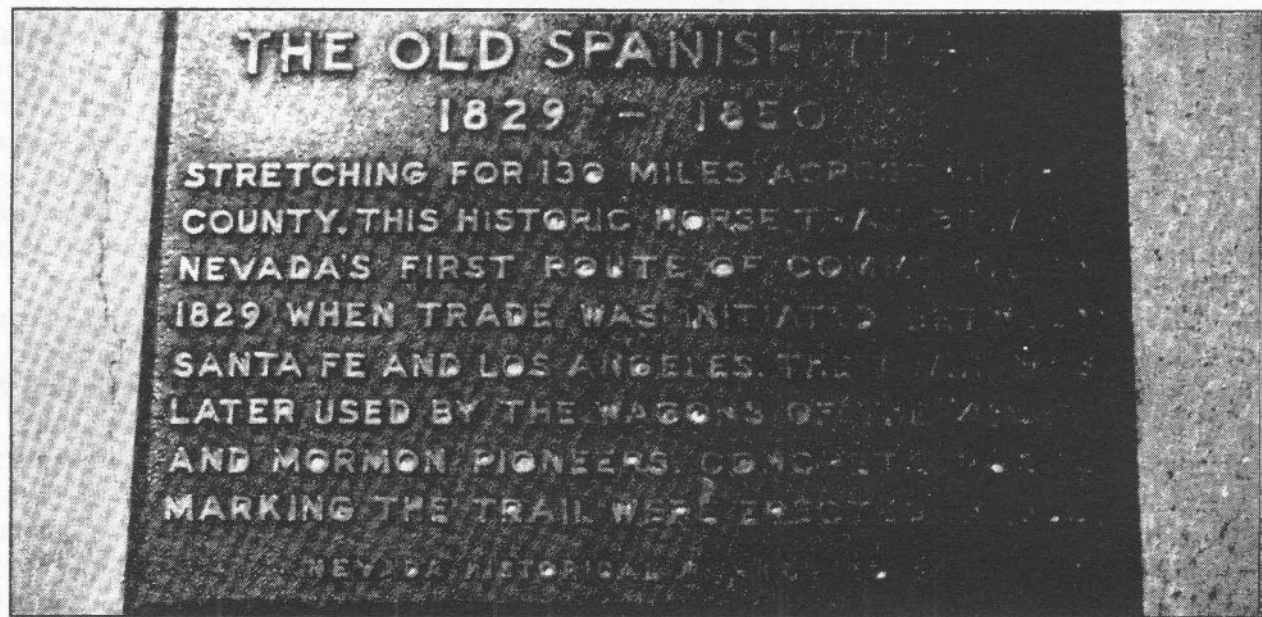
Early traffic over the Spanish Trail avoided Mormon Mesa and

took the route explored by Jedediah Smith in 1827, essentially the same route followed by the Wolfskill-Yount party in 1830-1831. The original course descended the Virgin River to its mouth, then crossed the Colorado River to its south bank. From that point, the trail continued in a southwesterly direction downstream to the Mojave Indian villages at the site of present-day Needles, California. Here the trail recrossed the Colorado and advanced over the Mojave Desert to the sink of the Mojave. From there, the trail meandered westward along the Mojave River to reach the area of Cajon Pass and threaded the mountains to Los Angeles basin. By 1844, when Fremont followed the Spanish Trail, it had become free from its dependence on the Colorado River.

North of the Colorado River, the main-traveled Spanish Trail of Fremont's time, the route we're

pursuing, slowly pushes on some 11 miles across the open landscape of Mormon Mesa to its western rim. It drops rapidly from the mesa's edge, north of today's Interstate 15 near Glendale, Nevada, to reach the Muddy River, a branch of the Colorado in the Moapa Valley northeast of Las Vegas. The spring-fed Muddy flows southeastward some 30 miles to its junction with the Virgin River, covered today by Lake Mead. Moapa Valley lies within the vast Colorado River drainage system, west of Mormon Mesa. In the upper valley, not far from the Spanish Trail, distinct figures of trail riders on horseback and New Mexican traders are etched in the desert varnish on historic petroglyph panels. The Moapat band of Southern Paiutes made their home in this vicinity.

Orville C. Pratt encountered Paiutes here in October 1848: "We made a delightful camp on a fine



This Spanish Trail marker near Mesquite, Nevada, still stands and tells travelers about the heyday of a trail that so far has escaped commemoration.

stream of water, with good grass and found a large body of Indians — Piutes. From them we bought some green corn and beans. And what a meal we made! The valley of the 'Muddy' is large & land fertile. The water is of the best and purest kind and some day, & that too not distant, this valley will teem with a large & healthy population." [15] Today the small Moapa River Indian Reservation, established in 1873, lies a few miles beyond the Spanish Trail crossing of the Muddy River.

The Spanish Trail, from the western slope of Mormon Mesa, parallels the modern freeway to the Muddy River crossing, some two miles beyond the town of Glendale. John C. Fremont called the river, "Rio de los Angeles," a melodious name which unfortunately faded with history. [16] "Rio Atascoso" is the label Gwinn Harris Heap of the Beale Survey gave the Muddy

River on August 9, 1853. He explained, "Rio Atascoso is a narrow stream, but in many places quite deep; its water is clear, and it derives its name from the slimy and miry nature of its banks and bed." [17]

The Muddy River crossing came to be known as the "Old California Crossing" in the post-Spanish Trail period. From here onward, the name "California," — signifying hope for weary wagon drivers bound for the coast — is found scattered in the trail literature. Beyond California Crossing, the trail follows a brutal path — a desert *jornada* (Spanish: a day's journey) of more than 50 miles — across the low desert of southern Nevada. John C. Fremont in 1844 considered this territory a "desolate and revolting country." [18]

This waterless stretch of the Spanish Trail was a test of endurance for many trail-hardened and

weary travelers who chose to cross the desert at night, rather than stagger through oppressive daytime heat. Numbers of overlanders set out before dusk, toiling up the broad and sandy bed of California Wash for 27 miles. Another approximately 12 miles brought them to the present site of Nellis Air Force Base on the eastern edge of Las Vegas Valley. Fremont in 1844 found the trail marked by animal bones. He wrote: "...The appearance of skeletons of horses very soon warned us that we were engaged in another dry *jornada*, which proved the longest we had made in all our journey — between fifty and sixty miles without a drop of water." [19]

Gwinn Harris Heap in 1853 tells us that beyond the wash, travelers crossed "an extensive and undulating plain whose sandy and stony soil produced no vegetation

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Retracing the trail.... Continued from page 9

except artemisia." [20] Today the ruts of the Arrowhead Trail parallel the Spanish Trail in the area east of Nellis Air Force Base. Continuing westward, the old trail passes directly through the military reservation. Beyond Nellis, early travelers took a direct course across Las Vegas Valley to the extensive meadows.

Drawing closer to Las Vegas, drooping Spanish Trail herds smelled the water and quickened their pace. One party noted that its mules began braying continuously three or four miles from the vegas. Though the "night was very dark," the jaded animals found life-giving waters and green grass. [21]

Of the oasis at Las Vegas, Gwinn Harris Heap in 1853 wrote that it "deserves the name of The Diamond of the Desert, so beautiful does it appear in the centre of the dreary waste that surrounds it." [22] The name Las Vegas (Spanish: The Meadows) dates from the caravan days, but no one knows who first used it. Early travelers christened the meadows "Los Bagos de Cayatana," or "the vegas of Cayatan" [23] in honor of Saint Cajetan (Gaetano). (*San Cayetano*, Spanish for Saint Cajetan, was the leading founder in 1547 of the Theatines, a religious order of the Roman Catholics. The feast of San Cayetano is celebrated annually on August 7.) [24] Gwinn Harris Heap in 1853 referred to the springs as "Ojo del Gaetan (Spring of Gaetan)." [25]

The nearby meadowlands he called Vega Quintana, the surname possibly associated with Francisco Esteban Quintana who traveled the Spanish Trail in the early 1840s.

At Las Vegas Springs, travelers on the Spanish Trail found water in perpetual motion, churning with force enough to keep bathers afloat. In November, 1853, a party of 23 men dove in the largest spring, a waterhole about 45 feet in diameter, "endeavoring to sink, without success," wrote Solomon N. Carvalho. Using the longest tent pole he had, Carvalho measured the depth of the spring at more than 15 feet. [26]

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The springs delivered sufficient water to form a clear stream about three feet wide and fifteen inches deep. The water was palatable though warm. Fremont sampled the water on May 3, 1884, and observed: Two narrow streams of clear water, four or five feet deep, gush suddenly, with a quick current, from two singularly large springs; . . . The taste of the water is good, but rather warm to be agreeable; the temperature being 71 in the one and 73 in the other. They, however, afforded a delightful bathing place." [27]

Near the oasis there was a

forest of mesquite to supply travelers with good firewood. Cottonwoods and willows shaded the spring waters as they flowed east down the valley some three miles to the meadows that extended two and one half miles by one half mile, according to Mormon settlers who arrived here in June, 1855. [28]

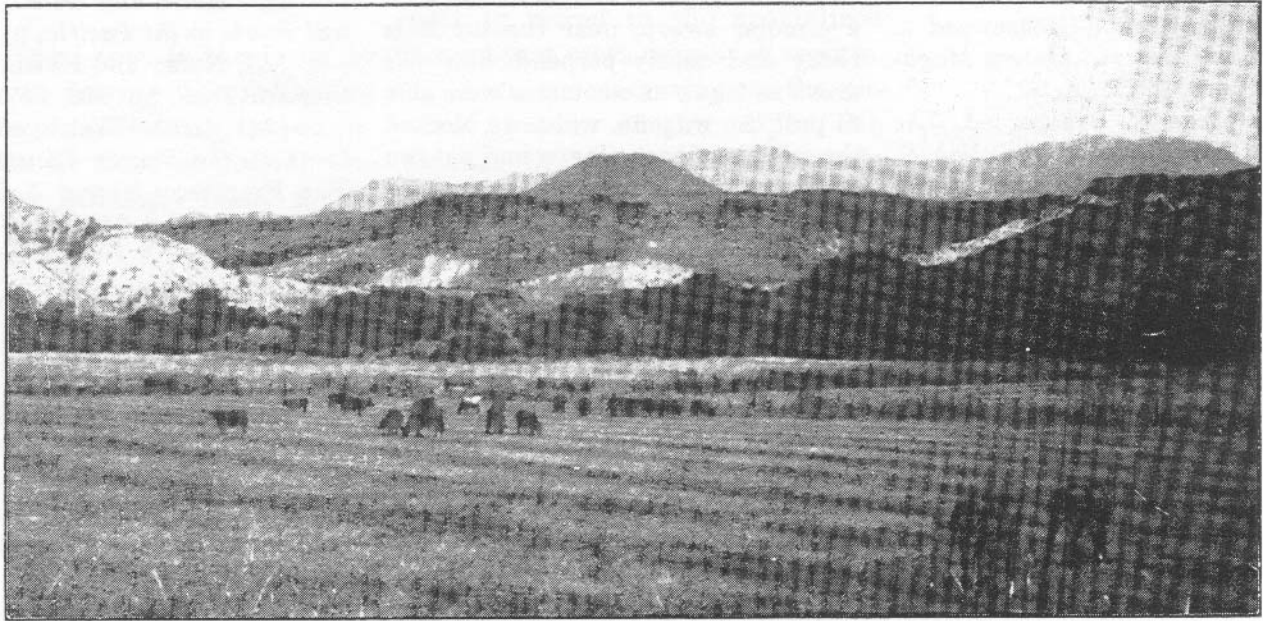
To secure the already established Mormon corridor between southwestern Utah and San Bernardino, the colonizers laid the foundations of a settlement on Las Vegas Creek at the head of the meadows, a favorite campsite for Spanish Trail riders. They built a fortified stockade measuring 150 feet square usually referred to as the "Mormon Fort," and later as the Las Vegas Ranch.

From the vicinity of the old Mormon Fort, the Spanish Trail passes along the north side of the creekbed to reach the site of the springs, then veers southwestward toward Cottonwood Spring, some 16 miles distant. Trekking through the area in 1850, David W. Cheesman found a heavy, sandy road en route to the spring. [29]

Known as "Ojo de Cayatana," "Upper Vegas," and "Pearl Spring" in the early days, Cottonwood Spring lies near the base of the lofty Spring Mountains. [30] Located at the present site of Blue Diamond, the watering place was much appreciated by overlanders on the Spanish Trail. At this spot on May 2, 1844, Fremont found an ample supply of good grass and an abundance of water in holes. [31]

California-bound parties who camped here in later years write of good feed and water.

From Blue Diamond, the



This idyllic scene captures the location of the Spanish Trail in the Bunkerville, Nevada, — and belies the trail's difficulties.

Spanish Trail passes through Cottonwood Valley and then by way of a sandy, rocky streambed, ascends to Mountain Springs Summit through a cool forest of pinon and juniper, over 2,000 feet above Cottonwood Spring. The mountain slope provides a good habitat today for a variety of wildlife, including big horn sheep that frequent the area surrounding the trail. Just beyond the summit, on the windward side of the pass, the old trail reaches Mountain Springs.

Climbing the mountain path in late May, 1854, Solomon N. Carvalho, noted that "the road was level although heavy, being composed of small pebbles, and loose sandstone. I perceived no vegetation, but the usual desert shrubs." At Mountain Springs, Carvalho observed "clear, cold water, near which grew luxuriantly, cottonwood, acacias, and a kind of willow in full bloom." [32] John Clark Dowdle, passing through the area

in 1865, found some sand grass for his animals off the trail, at the site. He reported: "It is a small jointed grass growing from 4 in. to 12 in. height . . . Yet it will grow quite thick . . . and stalks are very sweet. Horses and mules are very fond of it. [33]

Below Mountain Springs, the Spanish Trail takes a southwesterly course as it drops some 1,300 feet in about five miles down the western slope of the Spring Mountains. The trail then descends a easy gradient some 15 miles to Stump Spring on the eastern edge of Pahrump Valley. Unrelieved by trees or rock formations in the vicinity, Stump Spring rests at the bottom of a wash, and is difficult to find.

Finding water was an element crucial to travelers on the Spanish Trail. In this forbidding environment, trail riders were compelled to dig into the desert soils to obtain the precious resource. Fre-

mont, who camped here on April 30, 1844, found that the "grass was nearly as scarce as the water." [34] Trail diarist Orville Pratt, on October 14, 1848, called the spring "Escarbado." [35] (Spanish *escabar*: to dig.) Arriving at what he termed "Aqua Escarbada" on August 13, 1853, Gwinn Harris Heap "expected to have to dig for water; but the ground had been so deeply excavated, that a running spring had been reached." [36]

Two miles beyond Stump Spring, the Spanish Trail reaches the Nevada-California border in a wild, open country some 240 miles from Los Angeles. In former times, west-bound parties at this point faced grueling marches across California's *bajadas* — broad desert playas — as they pushed on to the promised land over the historic frontier pathway.

For endnotes please see
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ENDNOTES

[1] Julia Craw, "Greasewood ... Flower of the Desert," *Desert Magazine* (February, 1971), p. 30.

[2] George R. Brooks, ed. *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California. 1826-1827* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1977), p. 62.

[3] Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, eds. *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, 4 vols. and map portfolio* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970-1984), vol. 1, p. 689.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Waldemar Westergaard, ed. "Diary of Dr. Thomas Flint: California to Maine and Return, 1851-1855," *Historical Society of Southern California. Annual Publications*, 12 (1923), p. 60.

[6] The sweet pods were "a good substitute for corn, being almost as nutritious," wrote Gwinn Harris Heap. LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific by Gwinn Harris Heap* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1957), p. 237.

[7] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 693.

[8] Westergaard, ed. "Diary of Dr. Thomas Flint," p. 62.

[9] Mary E. Foy, ed. "By Ox Team from Salt Lake to Los Angeles, 1850: A Memoir by David W. Cheesman," *Historical Society of Southern California, Annual Publications*, 14 (1930), p. 293.

[10] Addison Pratt of the Jefferson Hunt wagon train describes following the Spanish Trail in the shadow of a small wagon train of gold rushers with a Spanish guide. On November 14, 1849, at Halfway Wash, they turned up the "canyon through which the road leads away from the Virgen." Pratt states: "The road in the canyon was very sandy, which made the pulling very hard on our weak cattle. In the evening we came to a steep hill, which we had to ascend in order to reach the

bench land above. This hill is about two hundred yards long and rises with a circular sweep; near the top it is rocky and nearly perpendicular. We drove as far up as our teams were able to pull the wagons, when we blocked the wheels of each wagon and put ten or twelve yoke of oxen on the forward vehicle, and thus we got up with much difficulty; it is so steep near the top that an ox could barely stand without pulling at all." He adds that he used "a coil of 2-inch rope" and "all of our lighter chains" to pull the remainder of the wagons up. See Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, History Department, Archives Division, *Journal History of the Church, October 9, 1849* [November 14, 1849], pp. 13-14.

[11] LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail*, p. 355.

[12] Westergaard, ed. "Diary of Dr. Thomas Flint," p. 63.

[13] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, pp. 238, 239.

[14] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 686. In his desert wanderings, John C. Van Dyke used a hatchet to "slash into a barrel cactus (bisnaga)" to "get out some of the juicy pulp." He adds: "It was usually bitter or sour to the taste, but it held sufficient water in it to quench thirst." See John C. Van Dyke, *The Open Spaces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 85.

[15] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail*, p. 355.

[16] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 686.

[17] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, p. 238.

[18] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 688.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 686.

[20] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, p. 239.

[21] James Henry Rollins. *Autobiography dictated in 1898*. Typescript copy, 1941, p. 20. Manuscript file, Spanish Trail. Utah State Historical

Society, Salt Lake City.

[22] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, p. 240.

[23] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail*, pp. 366, 367.

[24] Michael Walsh, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints: Concise Edition* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), pp. 240-241; *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), vol. 2, p. 1052.

[25] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, p. 239.

[26] Bertram Wallace Korn, ed., *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West by Solomon Nunez Carvalho* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954), pp. 296, 297.

[27] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, pp. 685, 686.

[28] Church of Latter day Saints, History Department, Archives Division. *Manuscript History*. Las Vegas Mission, 1847-1868.

[29] Foy, ed. "By Ox Team from Salt Lake to Los Angeles, 1850," p. 294.

[30] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail*, pp. 355, 366; Rollins, *Autobiography*, p. 20.

[31] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 685.

[32] Korn, ed., *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West*, p. 297.

[33] See entry for January 2, 1865. *The Journal of John Clark Dowdle*. Covering the period 1844 to June 29, 1894. MS. Joel E. Ricks Collection of Transcriptions, vol. 8 (Microfilm A342, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City).

[34] Jackson and Spence, eds., *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont*, vol. 1, p. 684.

[35] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail*, p. 356.

[36] Hafen and Hafen, eds., *Central Route to the Pacific*, p. 242.

Book Bag

[Editor's note: In this issue we are not reviewing the following works, but merely bringing you information on titles of possible interest that generally relate to the specific subject of the Spanish Trail. As always, this information is written by the editor.]

Rio del Norte: People of the Upper Rio Grande

*From the Earliest Times to
the Pueblo Revolt*

By Carroll L. Riley

University of Utah Press,
1995, paper, 345 pp

ISBN: 0-87480-496-5

Carroll Riley has produced a straightforward description of the geography and native peoples of the upper Rio Grande, predominantly that portion which today lies in northern New Mexico.

This emeritus professor of anthropology at Southern Illinois University and current research associate at the Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of New Mexico, keeps matters simple, though the narrative has an academic ring to it and occasionally lapses into the first person.

Nonetheless, Riley proceeds logically, from a brief, illuminating account of the various names applied to the Rio Grande to the geography of the upper river, to its prehistoric peoples and those in place when Coronado arrived at Tiguex in 1540. Diagrams, maps and photographs for the most part supplement the text quite well. To his credit, Riley is able to describe prehistoric peoples in terms of the archaeological evidence without

getting mired in the specialized jargon that mars most such reports.

In concentrating on the native peoples of the upper Rio Grande, the author does in fact help correct the bias he notes in Southwestern histories that are overly focused on the Spaniards and their conquests. Coronado's and Onate's forays and the latter's settlement in New Mexico are the subject of individual chapters, which is appropriate and proportional to their brief though influential appearances in a story that lasts hundreds if not thousands of years.

However, Riley provides a mostly familiar version of events and changes associated with Spanish visits to and occupation of the upper river based on Spanish documents and secondary sources, where one might have hoped instead that he could produce an interpretation of the native perspective from changes in their material culture or traditions.

Part One of this book is devoted to the aboriginal peoples of the region prior to 1492, while Part Two introduces "The Invaders." Seven subsequent chapters treat Coronado's expedition and its repercussions, while one chapter covers Onate's arrival, one is devoted to the 17th century, and the last recapitulates the Spanish-native conflict and changes in both sides it wrought.

This volume will serve as a solid, if general, introduction to the land and peoples of the upper Rio Grande that form the backdrop to the Spanish occupation that resulted, after centuries, in establishment of the Spanish Trail.

Water in the Hispanic Southwest: A Social and Legal History, 1550-1850

By Michael C. Meyer

University of Arizona Press,
1984/1996, paper, 209 pp.

ISBN: 0-8165-1595-6

For a fuller understanding of reality in the land crossed by the Spanish Trail, one must understand more than the value of wool and horses and how they once were exchanged over fantastic distances. One must understand that the Spanish Trail left the relative safety and comfort of the Rio Grande valley and reached in a monumental sweep across the tributaries of the Colorado River to the seaside comfort of San Gabriel mission at Los Angeles.

The underlying geographic and biological factor is water. It governed the route of the trail. It dictated the length of a day's journey. Its presence meant life; its absence spelled doom.

Michael C. Meyer, director of the Latin American Area Center at the University of Arizona and former editor of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* and *The Americas*, devotes his volume to two basic topics: water and society on the northern frontier of New Spain in the colonial period, and Spanish colonial and Mexican water law. In so doing, he illuminates aspects of the Southwest's lifeblood as it relates to the history of, for instance, New Mexico. That may be the most useful aspect of this volume to students of the Spanish Trail.

But there is much here to open one's mind to the more es-

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teric, legal angles of this vital subject. That includes the basis for understanding the source, development, and modern manifestation of Hispanic water rights in the modern Southwest.

Meyer too sometimes lapses into erudition typically reserved for strictly scholarly studies, including the jarring use of the first person, but his explanations generally are clear and concise. His choice of illustrations will fascinate even the most casual student of the Southwest, as the (sparse) pictures provide early maps, native irrigation systems, and Spanish documents.

In less than 200 pages the reader is introduced to the importance of water in the arid Southwest, shown how it played a central role in native culture, and how Spaniards imposed new systems for transporting it, allocating it, and resolving disputes over it.

While this book has no direct bearing on the Spanish Trail, it cannot fail to impress upon the reader the critical importance of water and how it shaped all of life in the Southwest, including that for traders crossing from one major river system east of the continental divide, via the Colorado River system, to the Pacific Coast.

Conquest: Montezuma, Cortes, and the Fall of Old Mexico

By Hugh Thomas

Simon & Schuster, 1993, hardcover, 812 pp., \$30

ISBN: 0-671-70518-0

There have been a number of works published on the initial conflict between Spaniard and na-

tive in the New World, including a first-person account by Bernal Diaz del Castillo written in 1555. But none, with the exception of this volume by Hugh Thomas, have been as thorough or masterful as *Conquest*.

The author, a British historian, has written a deeply detailed yet readable book about Hernan Cortes' triumph over the Aztec king, Montezuma. Unlike Carroll Riley's simple exposition on the native peoples of the upper Rio Grande, Thomas' narrative weaves a rich tale of two cultures and the pointed conflict between them; it is, in short, a drama that becomes a page-turner.

Not incidentally, *Conquest* illuminates many if not all of the themes that emerge in all subsequent contact between Spaniards and America's natives — including those involved in the creation of the Spanish Trail.

Thomas tells his complex, lengthy tale in 40 discreet chapters, including an epilogue, organized into eight broad headings, which include descriptions of ancient Mexico, Spain's Golden Age, the geography of Mexico, the personalities of the protagonists Cortes and Montezuma, the battles of conquest and the aftermath.

To assist the reader Thomas provides a three-page glossary. Numerous modern maps depict the action described in the text, which for clarity occasionally refers to modern geographical features. Two sections of illustrations provide maps, art that illuminates the ideas and beliefs of both sides and artifacts that are concrete examples of the material culture of the two civilizations and how they waged war.

Five appendices describe sub-

jects such as the population of old Mexico, details on Montezuma's material tribute to Cortes, the Mexican calendar and other matters. Genealogical diagrams are supplied to clarify complex relationships that can be confusing to readers when described only in narrative form. And Thomas brings to publication eight important, previously unpublished documents that bear directly on his story, such as a letter from Cortes in Mexico, circa 1519, and Montezuma's concession of power in 1520.

Extensive chapter notes and essays on sources complete this monumental work. At 600-plus pages of reading (not including supporting material) this volume might give one pause, but with some effort on the reader's part, it lays the foundation for understanding many elements of the most fundamental conflict of the second millennium: the clash between Old World and New.

Road apples

Santa Fe chapter hosts state historian

The Salida del Sol Chapter in Santa Fe, New Mexico held a program on September 27 with guest speaker Robert Torres, the New Mexico State Historian at the State Records Center and Archives. Torres spoke on "The Old Spanish Trail in the American Territorial Period," focusing primarily on the 1850s to 1870s.

Skewed history in *The Denver Post*

Editor's note: On June 29, 1997, an esteemed OSTA member and *Denver Post* columnist Ed Quillen performed a public service by outraging OSTA members and stirring several to action. Knowing Mr. Quillen's good-hearted ways and his penchant for questioning assumptions, this editor is not certain that was his intent, but he brings up a number of good points. And some lousy ones. We thought that we'd reprint it for OSTA members' edification and possible outrage. We also print here one published response from Jack Nelson, president of the Mesa County Chapter, and a gentleman and independent thinker. Finally, this editor throws in his two cents worth.

Ed Quillen's column

Saguache isn't big, but neither is the Old Spanish Trail Association, so the small town was able to accommodate a national

convention on June 21, and I had the pleasure of dropping by for a few sessions.

Voltaire once remarked that the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. Much the same could be said of the Old Spanish Trail.

It wasn't really old, since no one traversed its full route until nearly 300 years after Coronado first visited in 1540. It wasn't truly Spanish — that first traverse came in 1831, a decade after Mexico declared independence from Spain — and two American trappers led the way.

Nor was it much of a trail. Historian LeRoy Hafen called it "the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule route in the history of America."

And besides, Saguache isn't even close to the main line of the Old Spanish Trail. It sits on the North Branch; the South Branch, which cut across the Colorado corner of the Four Corners, was the major corridor during the trail's heyday in the 1830s and '40s.

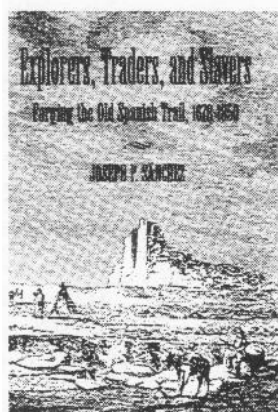
Trail association members conduct some research, looking for ruts and old diaries, but the group's goal is to get the Old Spanish Trail designated a National Historic Trail, complete with signs and literature from the National Park Service. They're on the way — a bill passed by Congress last year directs the Park Service to conduct a three-year study of the trail's suitability for designation.

But the final step might be difficult, since America prefers to honor routes that fit with Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny, such as the Overland, Oregon and Santa Fe trails. The Old Spanish Trail offers a very different insight into our past.

Spain's hold on the northern portions of its New World empire was tenuous in the latter part of the 18th century. From Mexico, the empire had two threads of settlement extending north — one up the Pacific Coast to Los Angeles and beyond, and the other up the Rio Grande to Santa Fe.

If those two pueblos could be

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Explorers, Traders, and Slavers: Forging the Old Spanish Trail, 1678-1850

A history of the trail as well as a narrative of those who used it, including Spanish explorers seeking the mythical Teguayo, scouts sent to gain information about Indian settlements, traders searching for mineral wealth, and mountain men on trapping expeditions. 208 pages, 11 maps Cloth, \$29.95



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Denver Post flap...

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linked, so that they might supply and support each other, the empire might be strong enough to withstand and repel incursions from the British and Russians along the West Coast, the French from the northeast and the Yankees from the east.

So in the service of empire, the friars Dominguez and Escalante were dispatched north from Santa Fe in 1776 to look for a route west. They found part of the eventual course (the South Branch from Tierra Amarillo, N.M., through Durango and Delta in Colorado, to Moab and Green River, Utah), and they left their names on canyons in Colorado and Utah.

Other efforts ensued from the Los Angeles end. Meanwhile a few curious souls ventured north from Santa Fe into our San Luis Valley and then west at Saguache over Cochetopa Pass, thereby creating the North Branch which had east and west forks along the flanks of the San Luis Valley.

Despite some heroic efforts, the Empire of Spain never connected Santa Fe to Los Angeles, and it lost its dominion over that territory.

In essence, the Old Spanish Trail was a failed effort to hold together a doomed empire. That's not exactly the inspirational stuff that our Republican Congress wants us to associate with American history, and besides, the Old Spanish Trail provokes some seditious thoughts.

It was, after all, an empire, not the residents, that wanted the trail built — there wasn't much

grassroots agitation for better roads in la frontera del norte.

And so, whenever a highway is proposed, the story of the Old Spanish Trail makes me wonder "what empire wants this road, and why?"

Or the converse. The day after that convention, I walked down to where the Salida depot used to stand so I could see Union Pacific steam locomotive No. 844 pulling a farewell excursion.

The UP wants to abandon that track. One empire had laid those rails in 1880 to convert a high mountain valley into an industrial zone; another empire must want the tracks out now, but which one, and why?

Quillen leads readers astray in Old Spanish Trail column
(*Denver Post*, July 13, 1997)

Just because Quillen finally got more than 30 miles from Salida does not make him an expert. The Old Spanish Trail Association does more than "some research, look for ruts and old diaries."

Quillen's assumption that the trail is of little consequence is way out of line. The trail from Santa Fe to Los Angeles was so named because it was pioneered by Spanish explorers and later Mexican traders hauling merchandise between the two outposts.

Its life was short but of vital necessity to a nation in the throes of the westward movement. The Missouri mules imported across the route from California served to haul wagons west over other trails.

The Old Spanish Trail, along with its North Branch, was never meant to serve as a route to bind an empire together, as Mr. Quillen argues.

Spain had lost New Mexico before the "heyday" of the route. The trail served a specific purpose until about 1850: Traders, immigrants, dispatch riders, Army expedition and survey crews, trappers and scoundrels all found their way across its stretches.

Travelers with names such as Rivera, Armijo, Dominguez, Escalante, Carson, Brewerton, Fremont, Loring, Gunnison, Leroux, Robidoux, Marcy and Whitman were but a few who did make indelible marks on the annals of Southwestern history.

Mr. Quillen, stick to writing about Salida with all its real or imagined petty problems, and leave us to our old diaries and carved-in-rock trapper inscriptions.

Jack Nelson
Grand Junction

The editor weighs in

A few points on Ed and his column. Ed's factual errors and his errors in interpretation will be obvious to astute readers and students of the trail. And if correcting Ed's "misunderstandings" should happen to involve a torture rack, well, consider that a bonus.

Ed does not touch upon the cost of a national historic trail study, which is rumored to be about \$200,000. That continues to disturb OSTA and its members because we are not interested in spending federal taxpayers' money to gather information that is already available. That is why OSTA and its members have been active in getting that information, particularly trail locations and maps, into the right hands. We'd be pleased if that trail study set a record for frugality. Believe me, I could go on and on, but we're out of space!