

FIRST DRAFT Commerce took Southwestern turn 200 years ago on Santa Fe Trail

William Becknell knew he was taking a chance in traveling from Franklin, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the autumn of 1821, leading pack horses and mules loaded with trade goods.

Others who had attempted such trade missions had been arrested by Spanish authorities. Some were sent to prison in Mexico City for lengthy incarceration. So, he was pleasantly surprised at the greeting he received when his small party arrived in Santa Fe on Nov. 13, 1821, 74 days after his trek began.

After crossing a mountainous country, he arrived at Santa Fe and were received with apparent pleasure and joy," Becknell reported.

Becknell pioneered the Santa Fe Trail, the primary commercial route from the Eastern United States to Santa Fe for more than 40 years.

The main route ran west through what is now Kansas, then turned south across the Arkansas River west of modern Garden City, Kansas. On crossing the river, travelers left the United States and entered Mexico.

Another route ran west into present-day Colorado, turned south near La Junta, crossed the Arkansas River and headed over Raton Pass into New Mexico. This route was longer but had better water and grass for livestock.

In 1833, Charles and William Bent established Bent's Fort on this route.

Twelve years earlier, Becknell no doubt was aware of turmoil that had occurred in Mexico, as various factions sought to overthrow Spanish rule and create an independent nation. But he probably hadn't heard that Spain finally accepted Mexico's independence just a week before Becknell began his journey.

He found out soon enough. Although Spain had refused to allow Americans to legally trade within its colony, the new leaders of independent Mexico had no such qualms.

"The day after my arrival, I accepted an invitation to visit the Governor, whom I found to be well informed... his demeanor was courteous and friendly," Becknell wrote. "He asked many questions respecting my country, its people, their manner of living; expressed a desire that the Americans would keep up an intercourse with that country."

Becknell and his traders suffered from fatigue and illness on that first journey. They experienced days when no good water could be found, and faced heavy rainstorms and snow.

But the 1821 trip was mostly uneventful. On the return trip, they traded with and were treated hospitably by Indians and "had provisions in plenty."

The next year, on Becknell's second trip, he encountered different problems.

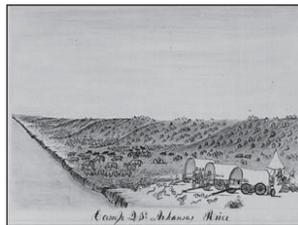
He set out in May, 1822, and said, "No obstacle obstructed our progress until we arrived at the Arkansas River." About midnight our horses were frightened by buffalo,



This map of the Santa Fe Trail shows the main route that ran through most of western Kansas before turning southwest to Santa Fe, and an alternate route through southeastern Colorado.



Army Gen. Philip St. George Cooke as he appeared late in his military career. As a young officer, Cooke was involved in guarding merchant caravans along the Santa Fe Trail.



Drawing of a camp on the Arkansas River along the Santa Fe Trail near the Kansas-Colorado border, as it appeared to traveler Daniel Jenks in 1859.

and all strayed — 28 were missing."

They recovered 18 animals and discovered Osage Indians had made off with the others. The Indians also beat a handful of Becknell's men who stumbled upon them while searching for the horses.

"We had a strong desire to punish those rascally Osages," Becknell wrote. "These Indians should be more cautiously avoided and strictly guarded against than any others on the route."

In a few years, however, it was Comanches, not Osages, who were harassing traders along the trail.

After Comanches attacked two merchant caravans in the autumn of 1828, killing three people and stealing livestock and trade goods, the governor of Missouri demanded military protection.

In April 1829, four companies of the Sixth Infantry from Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis were assigned to accompany the merchants as far as Mexico.

One of the soldiers was 19-year-old Second Lt. Philip St. George Cooke. In his autobiography, Cooke described both the excitement and drudgery of long days on foot.

"This first day's march was twenty-six miles... I was scarcely able to raise a foot from the ground when we arrived in the evening at the Round Grove, the rendezvous, where we found the 'Caravan' — about 70 Santa Fe-bound merchants with 35 wagons.

He recovered quickly, however: "I expected to be so sore as to be scarcely able to march next morning, but was most agreeably surprised to find myself as supple and fresh as ever."

Cooke complained about "the vast sameness of the prairies," which "was seldom relieved by a fringe of trees, even on

the creeks." Like other western travelers, Cooke was eager for one thing: A week into their trek, the soldiers "first heard the exciting cry of 'Buffalo!'" he wrote. "Many pleaded for permission to pursue our few horses were in great demand, and several went on foot."

Only one bull was killed in that first encounter, shot 20 times. The Sixth Infantry reached the stopping point on the Arkansas River in mid-July, escorted the caravan into Mexican territory, then returned to U.S. land and headed home.

But in early August, several men ahead of the main detachment were attacked by Comanches. Two days later, the detachment's camp was attacked by 400 to 500 mounted warriors, who sought to drive off the Army's oxen and horses.

Cooke experienced his first combat with Plains Indians then and quickly realized that infantry was no match for well-mounted Native fighters.

"It was a humiliating condition to be surrounded by these rascally Indians, who, by means of their horses, could tantalize us with the hopes of battle, and elude our efforts," Cooke wrote. "Much did we regret that we were not mounted, too."

Fourteen years later, when he was again assigned to guard merchants on the Santa Fe Trail, Cooke was a captain and the leader of about 190 mounted dragoons.

And, although Indian attacks were still a concern, by 1843 there was a new threat: land-based privateers from the Republic of Texas who wanted to steal trade goods, especially from Mexican merchants.

When one group of 107 privateers crossed into U.S. territory and threatened the caravan, Cooke arranged to meet the

leader of the privateers, who had a commission from the Texas government.

Cooke told the Texan he and his men would have to surrender their guns and return peacefully to Texas, or Cooke's dragoons would attack their camp and arrest them. The Texan reluctantly complied, and Cooke won accolades for his handling of the event.

It is unknown how many merchants and caravans used the Santa Fe Trail each year. Cooke said hundreds of wagons gathered for the 1843 journey, along with large herds of mules and oxen.

But it is known that in 1846, the trail became a military road as the United States engaged in war with Mexico.

After gold was discovered in California in 1848, the Santa Fe Trail also became a part of the southern route for gold-seekers, and later, settlers.

The trail was critical in the development of the American Southwest and Colorado. The Santa Fe Trail was designated a National Historic Trail in 1967. From Sept. 23-26, The National Park Service will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the trail in and around Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site near La Junta.

Sources: "Journal of Two Expeditions from Boon's Lick to Santa Fe," by William Becknell, Missouri Intelligencer, April 22, 1823, through www.newspapers.com; "Scenes and Adventures in the Army," by Philip St. George Cooke, 1857, through Google Books; "History and Culture of the Santa Fe Trail," www.nps.gov.

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23 Navajo Nations homes are finally getting electricity

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TONALEA, Ariz. — Tribal President Jonathan Nez has finalized a subgrant agreement between the Navajo Nation and Navajo Tribal Utility Authority to extend power lines to homes in the community of Tonailea, providing long-awaited electricity to at least 23 families.

Several Tonailea residents scheduled to receive electricity attended Saturday's signing of the agreement for the 23 homes located in the former Bennett Freeze area.

Selena Slim said she has lived in Tonailea her entire life without electricity and spends \$75 on a regular basis to purchase gasoline for her generator to provide electric power for her home.

Slim recalled when schools switched to virtual learning at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, she had to pay even more money for gasoline to provide internet service for her children to complete online instruction.

At Saturday's signing, Nez spoke about the importance of building and improving the tribe's infrastructure to provide long-term benefits for communities and families.

In 2019, Nez and tribal Vice President Lizer approved \$3 million for the design and construction of a new chapter house, which is near completion.

The reservation is the country's largest at 27,000 square miles.

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