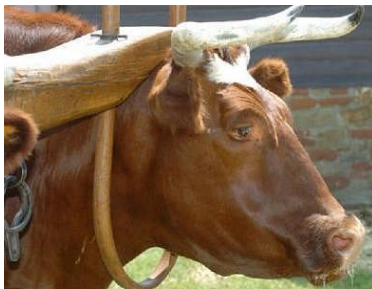


UTAH CROSSROADS CHAPTER OF OREGON/ CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Volume 18. Number 1

March 2007

Page 1



Thor 1995-2007

Arthritis conquers the great ox Thor

On January 26, 2007, the great ox Thor died. Dixon Ford, his keeper but not his master, had Thor put down to end his pain and suffering from crippling arthritis. It might seem strange to have the obituary for an ox in the NFP, but Thor was special. We traveled with Thor and Zeus while celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ezra Meeker's first Oregon Trail Monument Expedition.

As we traveled with them for twenty

(Continued on page 3)

Spanish Trail is topic of meeting and field trip

By Lyndia Carter

The spring Crossroads membership meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, April 12, at 7:00 p.m.** The subject of the program is the **Spanish Trail**, sometimes called the Old Spanish Trail. **Col. A. L. Matheson** of Cedar City is the presenter.

The meeting will be held in the County Commission Chambers in

the **north** building of the Salt Lake County Complex on State Street and Twenty-First South.

Trip details on Page 8

Col. Matheson is deeply involved with the national Old Spanish Trail Association and is the Director of the Old Spanish Trail Association for the State of Utah. He has spend countless hours in researching and searching for the Old Spanish Trail.

He comes prepared with knowledge, experience, and love for the Spanish Trail which he is excited to share with Utah Crossroads Chapter, OCTA. We look forward to an outstanding lecture and a fun exploration of a trail with which few of us are intimately familiar.

(Continued on page 6)

Let's put Brent Reber
On OCTA's board

Brent Reber, Crossroads past president, is a candidate for OCTA's board of directors. Nominations will close on March 31, and ballots will be mailed to members soon after that.

We urge members

(Continued on page 2)

Dromedary experiment goes from folklore to fact

By Harold Schindler

Legends are wonderful. Most Utahns have heard of the Bear Lake monster, an Americanized version of Nessie of Loch Ness. But not too many know of Jerry, the Arabian camel.

In September 1936, Charles Kelly, a Western history buff of the first magnitude, was adding to his research notes on the Hastings Cutoff to California (his book *Salt Desert Trails* had been published a few years earlier) and he had occasion to talk to William Carter,--an early Grantsville, Tooele County, resident. During the conversation, Carter's wife mentioned a dromedary that chased two frightened horses into Grantsville one Sunday in

the early 1900s. She could recall no particular date.

"The camel seemed tame," Kelly jotted in his notebook. "Mrs. Carter says the school children rode it and she rode it in a July 24th parade. It later wandered off and was not seen again. It did not appear to be a young animal. They called it Jerry." Kelly made no further mention of the camel, perhaps chalking the story off as folklore. But there is another possible answer; for Jerry, "a ship of the desert," was not the first such sighting in the parched hinterlands of Nevada.

Reports cropped up from time to time in those days and as a matter of record, the Nevada legislature had taken the trouble

Let's put Brent Reber
On OCTA's board

(Continued from page 1)

of Crossroads to vote for Brent. Utah's representation on the board will be diminished in August with end of Vern Gorzitze's term as OCTA president.

Once again we urge all members of Crossroads to vote for Brent.

to pass a law in February of 1875 prohibiting camels and dromedaries from running at large on public roads in the state. The act was repealed in 1899.

The business with camels had its impetus about 1850 with the California gold rush in full swing, and thousands of emigrants jamming the overland trails for a chance to settle in the land of milk and honey (and mayhaps find a lump or two of placer gold in the bargain). The Isthmus of Panama was choked with rushers who opted to steam to California. Still twenty years in the future was the transcontinental railroad, and the U.S. military was struggling with the knotty problem of protecting its real estate in the Southwest

(Continued on page 3)

CROSSROADS is the newsletter of the Utah Crossroads Chapter of the Oregon-California Trail Association. It is published in March, June, September and December. Questions and suggestions for improvements or criticism can be sent to Jerry Dunton at jhd@sisna.com or to P.O. Box 9645, SLC, UT 84109.

Officers are:

Oscar Olson, president, [801-485-0862](tel:801-485-0862)

Allen Heapes, vice president, heapesa38@hotmail.com

Craig Fuller, secretary, cfuller@utah.gov

Drew Wanosik, treasurer in training,

dwanosik@xmission.com

Gar Elison, treasurer, gelson@comcast.net



Dixon Ford and great oxen, Thor and Zeus, kept the story and feel of a bygone era fresh in the minds and touch of today.

Crippling arthritis conquers the great Thor

(Continued from page 1)

some-odd days we learned a little about why pioneers had such respect for their oxen. They are big and smelly and drool most of the time. They leave piles where ere they go. But they are also strong, tolerant, obedient (most of the time) and intelligent. Most of all they will teach you about “doing what needs to be done.”

As Dixon Ford noted in his email announcing Thor’s passing, “The most unfortunate part of Thor’s passing are the thousands of people who would have come in contact with him had he lived a few years longer. The most fortunate are those of us who had the opportunity

to know, love, and show him to thousands of people who otherwise would never have had the chance to interact with such a magnificent animal, in both appearance and disposition.”

For us, Thor and Zeus are symbolic of the hundreds of thousands of the oxen who traveled the trails. Some died on the trail while others were instrumental in building their family’s new homes when they reached their destination.

Rest in peace, Thor. And thanks for a great journey.

Dave and Wendy Welch
welchdj@comcast.net

Experiment goes from Folklore to fact

(Continued from page 2)

and lower California acquired in the war with Mexico.

How to move people and provisions through hostile Indian country and supply the forts spreading through Southern California and the Southwest? That was the question. Pack mules and ox trains were barely adequate in the desert regions. And so was born the Great Camel Experiment. The military had first toyed with the notion in 1836, but it wasn't until 1848 that a recommendation came to import a few camels in a test of their worth on the American frontier.

Horses are not native to America, but they flourished after being introduced by the Spanish Conquistadors in 1540. There is evidence that camels may have been brought to America by a Virginia slave trader in 1701 and to Jamaica about the same time. U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis proposed a military camel corps as early as 1855, but the American Southwest was not the Sahara and there was no Lawrence of Arabia on the horizon.

(Continued on page 12)

Minutes of February Board Meet

Utah Crossroads Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association Board Meeting, 22 February 2007, 1:00 p.m.

President: Oscar Olson

Secretary: Craig Fuller

Board members: John Eldredge, Charles Burkhalter, Jerry Dunton, Roy Tea, Steve Berlin, Lyndia Carter, Allen Heaps, Brent Reber, John Eldredge. Others: Vern Gorzitze, President, OCTA.

Motion was made and seconded to approve of the December 19, 2006, board-meeting minutes. Minutes were approved.

New Business: April membership meeting: There was a discussion about the April membership meeting. It is scheduled for Thursday, 12 April, at the Salt Lake County Complex, 2100 South and State Street. Lyndia Carter indicated that Col. A. L. Matheson of the Utah Chapter of the Old Spanish Trail Association would be the presenter. The Salt Lake County council chamber has been reserved for the next several years.

Spring Field Trip: Roy Tea suggested that the Salt Lake Cutoff trail from Snowville to the City of the Rocks. It will be a one-day trip. Several alternatives were suggested: Cherokee Trail and the Old Spanish Trail hosted by a representative of the Old Spanish Trail Association. Lyndia Carter said she would follow-up with Col. A. L. Matheson with a possible field trip in April.

Oscar Olson made a suggestion to poll the general membership of Utah Crossroads to ask what field trips members have been on and what trails they would like to visit and learn more about.

On June 1st Joe Nardone will be

dedicated a Pony Express marker at Camp Floyd.

The fall barbeque was discussed at some length—when to hold it and where. It was decided that the fall barbeque be held at Benson's Mill in Tooele County either on August 25 or September 15. Oscar Olson will schedule the use of the Mill.

New Business: Craig Fuller raised the issue about involving the Boy Scouts in photographing segments of the various historic trails and GPSing those segments photographed. The involvement of the Boy Scouts would accomplish a). Teaching the scouts something of the history of the westward movement and the trails b). Get young people interested in historic trails c). Fulfill several merit badge requirements d). Photo-document segments of various historic trails. There was discussion about the pros and cons involving Boy Scouts.

Craig Fuller suggested that someone interested on the board or among the general membership of Utah Crossroads be asked to be the chapter's legislative liaison. Vern Gorzitze said that nearly all chapter of OCTA has someone checking on pending legislation in the various legislatures. Ron Andersen does it here in Utah for personal interest. There was discussion about the difficulties in gaining access to legislation. [Note: Craig Fuller in this set of minutes is providing the web address for the state legislature: <http://www.le.utah.gov>. At this web address you can review last year's legislation, current legislation, status of the bills, committee hearings, and listen to committee hearings.]

Charlie Burkhalter reported that he has received one hundred carsonite trail markers and they are in his garage. He also has a supply of decals.

(Continued on page 5)

Saddle was important to Identity of the American Cowboy

It was one of the winter's hardest snowstorms, yet the Crossroads membership meeting in January prevailed.

Roger Blomquist, instructor of Western History in the history department at Brigham Young University mounted his faithful steed (alright, got into his car) and braved the storm, navigating the ice and snow clogged streets of Provo, where he lives, and mastering the slushy, dangerous freeway to present an excellent program to intrepid Crossroads members who also risked life and limb, not to mention their automobiles, to attend his lecture.



Dr. Roger Blomquist

Blomquist had such an engaging, storytelling style that soon everyone forgot the storm outside, at least for a while, and sat back and relaxed to learn about cowboys, horses, saddles, and cattle drives. His lecture, entitled **Saddle Up and Saddle Over**, focused on the influences of both Texas

and California on cowboys and their saddles.

Roger who is a historian and teacher by profession is also a saddle maker and horseman by avocation.

This combination made his program especially interesting. He displayed and explained several saddles that demonstrated the two influences, that of the vaqueros of California and the cattle drivers from Texas.

As he clearly showed, styles of dress and saddles were distinctive. Blomquist noted that cattle drives into the Great Plains from the South, mainly Texas, took huge herds northward into Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana after the American Civil War.

Cattle driven eastward from California (and to a certain extent Oregon) made their way into Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. The men and boys who drove the cattle possessed distinctive styles of clothing, equipment, mannerisms, and saddles that made their place of origin obvious. Blomquist discussed those differences, and using the saddles he brought with

(Continued on page 6)

Minutes of February Crossroads Board Meeting

(Continued from page 4)

Jerty Dunton reported that he has gathered a complete run of the chapter's newsletter and will scan them and put them on CD's for anyone wanting to purchase them.

Vern Gorzitze suggested that the chapter's web site be updated with current information.

The following

dates were scheduled for board meetings, to be held in the boardroom, Utah State Historical Society, 300 South Rio Grande Street, Salt Lake City, at 1:00 p.m.: Thursday, 10 May; Thursday, 16 August; Thursday, 15 November.

Meeting adjourned.

Old Spanish Trail is subject of both spring meeting and spring field trip

(Continued from page 1)

Utah Crossroads officers and board decided to make the Old Spanish Trail the theme for this spring's program and tour.

To revitalize our love of the trails after the winter doldrums, we are going to focus on a trail that figured prominently in Utah's history before white settlement, the Spanish Trail. Traders heavily used the Spanish Trail, a commercial route from Santa Fe to Los Angeles, from 1829 through 1848.

It should more aptly be called the Mexican Trail, because Mexico had declared and won its independence from Spain by that time, but the name Spanish Trail seems to

have stuck anyway. The descriptive "old" was added by American explorers and settlers apparently because the trail predated American settlement, so it was "old" in the sense that it was already there and did not have to be blazed.

Parts of the "Old Spanish" Trail became segments of roads used by emigrants and settlers after 1848. The western half of the Old Spanish Trail became the Southern Route to California for emigrants and travelers.

The trail, more than 1,100 miles in length, cut through five states: New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California.

The largest segment is in Utah, and in places traces of the trail may still be seen. The trail followed natural geographic features, such as watercourses and mountain passes, and avoided the canyons of the Colorado and Green Rivers. Because of these natural obstacles, the trail swung to the north and made a huge bend in Utah.

The Spanish Trail was a pack trail, not intended initially for wagon travel.

Traders driving large caravans of horses and mules, loaded with trade goods from Santa Fe, much of which was in the form of woolen textile products.

The Santa Fe merchandise was exchanged in California for herds of horses and mules. The traders also traded with Indian tribes, particularly the Utes, as they journeyed through Colorado and Utah. The Indians

(Continued on page 7)

Saddle was important to the identity of American Cowboy

(Continued from page 5)

him he pointed out the characteristic variations.

Cowboys are an intriguing element of the Old West and the audience seemed enthralled with his program. He also talked about saddle making and how various saddle makers made their mark on the

West.

Blomquist's genial, animated manner invited audience participation and comment. Several people joined during his lecture with their knowledge and experience to make the evening highly interactive, informative, and fun. We got a delicious taste of by-gone days and ways.

2007 OCTA Convention website being built - already has some links posted. www.visitscottsbluff.com/octa.

Old Spanish Trail is subject of both spring meeting and spring field trip

and traders also trafficked in Indian slaves, often raiding weaker tribes, such as the Paiutes. Besides the main trail which connected New Mexico and California for trade, branches of the Spanish Trail went into Utah Valley and other locations to expand trade possibilities.

Using a Power-Point program of photographs to illustration his presentation, Colonel Matheson will discuss the who, what, when, and where of the Old Spanish Trail. For us rutnuts, the where is of special interest and will help us prepare for our spring tour which is going to follow the Old Spanish Trail from Castle Dale, Utah to the Nevada border.

Col. A. L. Matheson retired from the U. S. Air Force after many years of a varied and active career. He served as a Forward Air Controller during the Vietnam War. He has also been involved with global airlifts with "C-5's". He has in his lifetime accumulated

some 17,000 hours of flying time. He entered the U.S. space program and was responsible for the Challenger space shuttle program. He was Director, Space Launch Control and Communications Contracting, which included the Challenger launches and recovery. Col. Matheson grew up in Cedar City, so decided to retire back to his hometown. He is a great advocate of history. He served eight years as president of the Iron County Historical Society.

His father was an original "keeper" of the Old Spanish Trail in 1950, and so Colonel Matheson grew up with a love for the Spanish Trail. He is Director of the Old Spanish Trail Association for the State of Utah. He teaches at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, and had been on the faculty for 17 years.

He has also operated a flight school with a fixed base in Cedar City. As a flight instructor, he has had plenty of oppor-

tunities of fly over and see the route and traces of the Old Spanish Trail. He also had done aerial photography of the trail. He says now, however, his feet are more on the ground than in earlier days of his life. He has great knowledge and experience to offer in regards to the location and history of the Old Spanish Trail.

The Old Spanish Trail is a very interesting piece of history about which the Crossroads Officers and Board feel excited to bring you the opportunity to hear and learn. **Mark Thursday, April 12, 7:00 p.m.** on your calendars and come join us to learn from Colonel A. L. Matheson. Please feel free to bring family, friends, and anyone you feel might be interested. This is an event that should be shared!

For more information, you can call Lyndia or Robert Carter, program chairs, at (801) 489-8256 (this is a Springville number, so it may be long distance for most of you). Or you may wish to call Crossroads President, Oscar Olson, in Salt Lake City (801) 485- 0862.

The OCTA convention meets Aug. 7-11, 2007 in Gering Civic Center in Gering, Neb.

Trek on Spanish Trail calls out to Crossroads

By Lyndia Carter

Keeping with our theme for this spring, the Crossroads spring field trip takes us on a tour of the Old Spanish Trail from Castle Dale, Utah to the Nevada border this April. Colonel A. L. Matheson serves as guide, with assistance from field trip coordinator Roy Tea.

Colonel Matheson is an expert on the Old Spanish Trail and has done much personal exploration; he has conducted field trips for other groups as well. We hope you will join us. The field trip is designed to be flexible. It is a two day affair, but participants can choose to do either or both days.

The dates are **Saturday, April 21 and Sunday, April 22.** We suggest that you carpool if possible; it saves fuel and minimizes environmental impact, besides it's just a lot more fun with other people along to share the ride, stimulate conversation, and increase the laughter. A four-wheel drive vehicle is **NOT** required. **CB radios will be needed.** If you wish to go but do not have access to a vehicle, please let Oscar

Olson know so he can help you find someone to ride with.

If you are interested in going, please let Oscar Olson (801-485-0862), Lyndia Carter (801-489-8256) or Roy Tea 943-5891 know as soon as possible so planning can proceed. We hope that many of you can participate. It has been almost fifteen years since we did a Spanish Trail trip and many of you either were not members back then, or were not able to come along with us that time. I (Lyndia) took the tour when Steve Madsen led it way back then, and, believe me, it was unforgettable. Don't let yourself miss this opportunity now.

For additional information about Colonel Matheson and some general information about the Spanish Trail please read the article about the April membership meeting in this newsletter. Colonel Matheson is the speaker for that meeting. We hope you can attend the membership meeting since it will provide excellent background to make the field trip more

meaningful.

The tour begins at **Castle Dale, Utah.** We will meet (rendezvous) **Saturday morning** at the Museum of the San Rafael at **9:00 a.m.** For those of you who wish to spend Friday night in the area, Price offers a variety of accommodations and so would be the better place to stay. Castle Dale is very small and limited as to motels and restaurants. The starting time is a bit later than usual to allow those of you who want to leave home Saturday morning a better chance to get there on time and it will permit us the opportunity of visiting the museum before setting out. The first day's itinerary ends at Johnson's Fort (Enoch) and then we spend the night in Cedar City. We plan to arrive in Cedar City by about 4:00, so those of you who need to end your tour and return to your homes that night will have ample time to do so.

The tour will continue on **Sunday, April 22.** Those who want to join the tour and couldn't come on Saturday may join those who are going for the second day. We

(Continued on page 9)

Old Spanish Trail Is target for Spring field trip

(Continued from page 8)

will rendezvous at one of the motels (we will let participants know in advance) at **9:00** a.m. and continue west. The tour will end in the afternoon, by **4:00** or earlier, in the Mesquite area. This should give everyone a chance to get home in good time.

As you can see, it is possible to do as little or as much as personal schedules will allow. It is imperative, however, that you let leaders know what you plan to do. We do not want to leave anyone behind or have you leave without knowing what happened to you! Please let us know your intentions.

The Spanish Trail was a pack trail, not a wagon road and went through a variety of terrains. The plans for **day one** (Saturday) include portions of the Spanish Trail from the Castle Dale area through Castle Valley. We will follow the trail as it crosses the Wasatch Plateau via Salina Canyon. The original trail split into a high road and a low road. The high road



Walls going up that Elko center

Elko, Nev. — Masonry contractors started putting the walls up on Elko's future California National Historic Trail Interpretive Center. "It's exciting to see walls going up," said BLM California Trail Center Manager Dave Jamiel. "Although the Trail Center is over 30% completed, the majority of the work thus far has been below the surface where it's hard to see progress. That's different now. The Frazier Masonry crews are making excellent progress and the walls should be complete by the end of the March or early April." When completed, the Trail Center will occupy an 11-acre footprint and will include 16,000 square feet in the main facility and a similar-sized interpretive plaza east of the building. Construction is scheduled to be completed in early 2008. Photo and text by Mike Brown of the BLM.

crossed the Fish Lake Plateau and it may be too wet to do in April. We will likely take the low road which went through the Richfield area and then followed the Sevier River. This was a natural route which presented few difficulties for pack trains. We will see beautiful scenery through Salina Canyon and along the Sevier River valley. The two trails merge near Junction, so from there the Spanish Trail is once

again a single route. Beyond Circleville, the trail leaves the Sevier Valley at Bear Valley Junction and crosses the north end of the Markagunt Plateau to Paragonah and the Parowan area. As we cross the Plateau and enter the valley we see some spectacular scenery (of course, some of what we can do will be dictated by the weather and road conditions). The

(Continued on page 10)

Old Spanish Trail is plan for spring field trip

(Continued from page 9)

trail passed through the Parowan Valley, as will we. We will end the day's excursion on the Spanish Trail near the town of Enoch. We will then drive to Cedar City for the night, or those who need to return north may leave the group.

There are many accommodations in Cedar City. Several are located closely together at one of the freeway exits. You may choose the place you like, as there are a variety of price ranges. among those in that area. Please make your own reservations. The Abby Inn (1-800-325-5411) is very nice. Others are the Crystal Inn (1-888-787-6661); the Quality Inn (1-435-586-2082); and the Econolodge (1-888-Econo13). A Motel 6 is close by, as is a Super 8. There are several restaurants very close (this is food alley). The Denny's Restaurant is handy for breakfast Sunday morning, but there are other choices as well. Cedar City is the rendezvous point for Sunday's tour.

For **day two** we start from the Enoch (Fort Johnson of pioneer days)

area and work our way southwest. We are concentrating on the era 1829-1848, Spanish Trail days, but the trail from here actually became the emigrant road to southern California after white settlement. From Parawan to Los Angeles the road is well documented by primary sources as to location. But remember, in the days of the pack caravans and traders it was a trace in the ground cut by thousands of horses and mules, not wagon wheels. The trail from Enoch goes through open country with watering holes at Iron Springs, Antelope Spring and Pinto Creek (Newcastle area). We will follow the trail up to the Mountain Meadows, a favorite resting place on the Spanish Trail, but we will spend very little time there since our focus is not the Mountain Meadow Massacre.

We follow Magotsu Creek and the Santa Clara River to Camp Spring. The trail then crossed the Beaver Dam Mountains with about the same route as old U.S. highway 91 and descended the long Utah Hill. This is ruggedly

stunning desert country. Our trek takes us into Arizona to see Beaver Dam Wash, the lowest point on the trail thus far. From here we make our way to the Mesquite, Nevada area, where our journey ends.

It will be a busy, extremely interesting two days, (or one day, if you choose). **Bring food for lunches for both days and be sure to bring plenty of water!** Sun screen, hats, jackets, and umbrellas are all useful items to bring, too. Let Oscar or Lyndia know as soon as possible if you think you want to participate — we will try to firm up numbers a few days after Col. Matheson's lecture, but we do need to know earlier if at all possible. We are sure than Col. Matheson will be an excellent guide and that this trip will be well worth your time. Please reserve this weekend on your busy work and social calendar.

For those interested in doing a little pre-trek reading, may we suggest the following:

Crampton, C. Gregory and Steven K. Madsen, *In Search of the Spanish*

(Continued on page 11)

Old Spanish Trail is plan for spring field trip

(Continued from page 10)

Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles, 1829-1848, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 1994).

Hafen, LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, eds., *Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles*, (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1954).
Crampton, C. Gregory,

“Utah’s Spanish Trail,” in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Fall 1947, 361-383.

Madsen, Steven K., “The Spanish Trail,” in Peter H. DeLafosse, *Trailing the Pioneers: A Guide to Utah’s Emigrant Trails, 1829-1869*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press and OCTA, 1994).

If you have questions about the itinerary or want

to contribute ideas to the tour, call Roy Tea, field trip chairman, (801) 943-5891.

Remember 4-wheel vehicles are not required. CB radios will be required. We will have a few extra radios available. Call Oscar Olson (801) 485-0862, Lynida Carter (801) 489-8256 or Roy Tea (801) 943-5891 to join the trip. Also attend the April 12 meeting for some insight of the trail from Col. Matheson.

YOU CAN CONGRATULATE OCTA ON 25 YEARS OF SERVICE

OCTA is planning a special extended Summer issue of *Overland Journal* to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the *Oregon-California Trails Association*. You can show your appreciation by adding your name to the "Congratulations" list or buy a space in which to compose a message.

ADVERTISING RATES

Add your name to the list: \$25

"Congrats" message, in which you can compose a maximum 90-word message (3.5" X 2").

Suggestion: make this an ad in memory of family members who actually came west on the overland trails: \$50

Quarter-page (3.625" X 4.875"): \$85

Half-page (horizontal or vertical): \$150

Full page (7.25" X 10"): \$250

Outside back cover (7.25" X 10"): \$400

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO RESERVE YOU ADD SPACE, please contact OCTA headquarters: contact@octa-trails.org - 888.811.6282 THE DEADLINE FOR AD RESERVATIONS IS APRIL 21; ADS ARE DUE MAY 21.

Dromedary experiment goes from folklore to fact

(Continued from page 3)

Still, if there was money to be made in such a venture, the private sector would eagerly pursue it. And so it did, in the form of the American Camel Company, a short-lived New York speculation which sputtered briefly in 1855, before expiring. The Army then budgeted \$30,000 to "purchase and import camels and dromedaries for the military." One David Dixon Porter visited England and was encouraged to seek British Army opinion of camels. He also studied the animals at the London Zoo.

Ultimately, Porter with Major Henry C. Wayne arranged for shipping thirty-three Arabian camels from Smyrna to Indianola, Texas, in May 1856. A second drove of forty-four animals arrived the following year. Major Wayne was ordered to transfer the camels to San Antonio, and there to turn them over to a retired U.S. Navy lieutenant, Edward F. Beale, who had served for several years as Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California. It was he who brought the first California gold

east and he had explored Death Valley with Kit Carson. Beale was a believer in camels for use in the Western deserts.

Secretary of War John B. Floyd, successor to Davis after the election of 1856, ordered a wagon route surveyed from Fort Defiance, New Mexico, to the Colorado River, and Lt. Beale was his choice for the task, with collateral orders to test the dromedaries as pack animals at the same time. Thus to Lt. Edward F. Beale fell the honor of being the first and last commander of the U.S. Camel Corps.

It was during the transfer to San Antonio that Major Wayne overheard a number of grizzled Texans comment with some cynicism on the camels; allowing that they would have a bleak future in the United States. They "walked funny" and didn't look as if they could tote much. Wayne ordered a kneeling dromedary to be loaded with two bales of hay, each weighing 300 pounds--more than triple what a prime mule could pack. The onlookers murmured in disbelief. "That hoss will never stand with

that load." At the major's signal, two additional bales were cinched to the beast's pack saddle--the total: 1,256 pounds! "Impossible! Not a chance in h---!. Cain't be done!"

Wayne nudged the camel, which obediently lurched upright and strode off with the load. The crowd broke into cheers. The dromedaries had won their first supporters. When the grand experiment was over, Beale would prove camels could carry enormous loads--some up to a ton--walk forty miles in a day for as many as eight to ten days without water over barren country. They could swim--and did, across the Colorado--and function in sand or snow. Their drivers swore "camels would get fat where a jackass would starve to death."

On the strength of Beale's report, Secretary Floyd recommended the purchase of 1,000 dromedaries for the U.S. Army--but the clouds of Civil War were gathering, and the Experiment abandoned.

So what has all this to do with Jerry, the Grantsville camel? Well, Beale had turned over twenty-eight government dromedaries

(Continued on page 13)

Dromedary experiment goes from folklore to fact

(Continued from page 12)

to the California Quartermaster in 1861. The Camel Corps story spread throughout the West (in this century, Hollywood would treat this historical footnote dramatically in "Southwest Passage" in 1954 and as a comedy in "Hawmps" in 1976.) The California and Utah Camel Association bought some Army animals in 1859 and sold them at auction to a company in Esmeralda County, Nevada, which employed them to carry salt from a marsh there to a silver mill in Washoe County some 200 miles distant.

The dromedaries didn't receive the same understanding care as they had in the Army and suffered from the high alkali content in the region. Neglected by teamsters, some camels died, others ran off into the desert and still others were sold to mine owners in Arizona to haul ore. It was said a party of Frenchmen had rounded up twenty to thirty camels near Tucson, broke them to pack, and sold them in Virginia

City, where a visiting Yale professor reported seeing camels in 1865.

Within a decade, the animals had become enough of a nuisance on wagon roads to result in the previously mentioned legislative act prohibiting them to wander at large on Nevada's public roads. For years, there were scattered reports of camels seen in various parts of the Southwest and Nevada, and even remote areas of

Utah. Those reports usually were accompanied by claims that the "escaped circus animals" were frightening horses, mules and teamsters--the teamsters, in turn, would open fire in the face of such "vicious creatures." Fortunately, the residents of Grantsville, were more curious than terrified when Jerry, the camel, visited their town.

*First published in *The Salt Lake Tribune* on Jan. 2, 1994.

Upcoming Events to Remember

—April 12 meeting. Col. A.L. Matheson will discuss the Spanish Trail.

—April 21-21 Col. A.L. Matheson will lead a two-day trip along the Spanish Trail.

—OCTA's 25th National Convention will be held in Gering and Scottsbluff Neb. From August 7-11.