

THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

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for the SUP website*

*The year of our nation's
birth, Fathers
Dominguez and
Escalante laid the
groundwork for future
explorations when their
arduous journey passed
through what is now
Southern Utah.*



Early in the Year 1776 Dominguez had been sent by his supervisor in Mexico to inspect a sub province in New Mexico, and give a detailed report of the mission there. Dominguez was also instructed to discover a route between the old province of New Mexico and the recently founded one in California. Dominguez arrived in El Paso in September 1775 and before the end of March 1776 he set forth on his official mission. In June he summoned Escalante from Zuni to Santa Fe to plan an Expedition to explore a route from New Mexico to Monterey, California.

Through his own experience Escalante had found the route to California blocked by Hopi Indian resistance and also by hostile Apache Indians located along the Gila River, so it was determined to take a more round about way to California. On 20 July of the year 1776, Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Fray Francisco Silvestre Velez de Escalante accompanied by Don Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, an engineer and retired captain (he was the custodian of the astrolabe that was carried to make astronomical observations along the trip). There was also Don Joaquin Lain, Lorenzo Muniz, Juan de Aguilar, Simon Lucero

and brothers Lucrecio and Andreds Muniz in the party. As a group they set out from LaVilla de Santa Fe for the purpose of discovering a route between New Mexico and Monterey, California.

Leaving Santa Fe the Expedition traveled north towards what is now the Colorado Border and after traveling some days reached a point near present day Durango where they camped on 8 August. From there they continued on a northerly route close to what is now the route of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. Continuing on their way they crossed the Delores River and camped near the present town of Delores on 12 August. Continuing to travel in a northerly direction they crossed the Delores River the second time. This route was also along the Uncompahgre Plateau. Following this route they soon reached the confluence of the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers, just below the present town of Delta, Colorado.

Sometime about 27 August Escalante had been told by Yuta Indians that towards the north-in the mountains there was an Indian settlement that was known as Timpanogotzis or Laguna. These Indians were located in the valley of the Utah Lake far to the northwest-- so it was here in Colorado on the Uncompahgre River, that Dominguez and Escalante decided to make a wider detour that influenced the outcome of their expedition and led them to another promised land--the Provo Valley.

Continuing northwest over terrain that is now the Rangely Oil Fields, the party slowly turned more to the west by northwest and then west and finally was stopped by the Green River. A camp was made in a cottonwood grove some six miles south of the present town of Jensen, Utah.

The route traveled was pretty much along the present route of Highway 40 from Vernal to Duchesne, then west through the Strawberry Valley and down the Spanish Fork River, then turning north they got their first sight of Mount Timpanogotzis and the Utah Lake as well as the Utah Valley. They continued north to where the present city of Provo is today.

Leaving Provo the party headed south along the route of present day I-15. From the approximate location of present day Scipio, the Expedition turned west to just south Delta where they turned and headed south traveling through the site of present day Milford. At this point 11 October, having suffered greatly from the cold because of the north wind that did not cease blowing all day and provisions were low, and determining how many leagues the Expedition still must travel to Monterey it was decided it was better to terminate the trip and return to Santa Fe than to continue on. After much discussion they

cast lots and the one for Santa Fe came up. This was accepted by all thanks to GOD.

The Expedition then marched southwest for the next five days; they passed Horse Hollow and Cedar Valley and skirted the vicinity of present day Cedar City, stopping at Indian settlements south of there to gather information about what lay ahead.

Traveling through present day Harmony and following Ash Creek, they crossed the Virgin River and on 15 October pitched camp just north of present day Utah Arizona Border at a place called Old Fort Pierce today.

Traveling on south the expedition camped north of Mount Trumbull (19 Oct). While in this area the party was advised by Indians that the route south was barred by a deep canyon and a river. The sides of the river were too steep to climb. Taking the Indians' advice the Expedition headed east and south of what we call Pipe Spring. The route the Indians told them would bring them to the Colorado River in two days. After much hard ship and lack of food and water, the party found the

river and camped near the site Lee's Ferry (27 Oct). The river being two deep and swift the party was unable to cross it at this point. Traveling north along the river after tremendous difficulties they found a place where they could cross with very little effort. (7 Nov).

Crossing the River the Expedition headed east to Santa Fe and home. 🍀

For detailed information about the Dominguez -Escalante Expedition it is suggested the following material be read: 1. Forging the Old Spanish Trail By Joseph P. Sanekey 2. Pageant in the Wilderness By Bolton 3. The Dominguez-Escalante Journal. Their Expedition through Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico in 1776.



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