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**THE 1847 CROSSING OF
IMPERIAL COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
AND BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO
BY THE U.S. MORMON BATTALION.**

BY WILLIAM M. FARRIS

**I.V.C. MUSEUM SOCIETY
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By William M. Farris*

Authorized by the El Centro Contingent
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W.M.F.
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INTRODUCTION

The beginning of this 1847 saga of "Mormons" in the deserts of Imperial County, California, and northern Baja California, Mexico, actually starts in the year 1846 with an exiled people camped on the plains of frontier Iowa. These were an unwanted people on the move, leaving the confines of the then twenty-eight United States of America.

On January 26, 1846, Brigham Young, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, instructed Elder Jesse C. Little to make his way to Washington, D.C., with the single objective of embracing "any facilities for emigration to the western coast which our government shall offer." Elder Little was successful in his mission to the capital. As a result of his efforts, his meetings and conferences were brought to the attention of President James K. Polk. President Polk saw the possibilities the westward-bound Mormons presented, and he consequently conveyed his feelings to the War Department. On June 3rd, the War Department instructed Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, "You are hereby authorized to muster into army service such 'Mormons' as can be induced to volunteer." The United States had been engaged in war with the Republic of Mexico since May 13th.

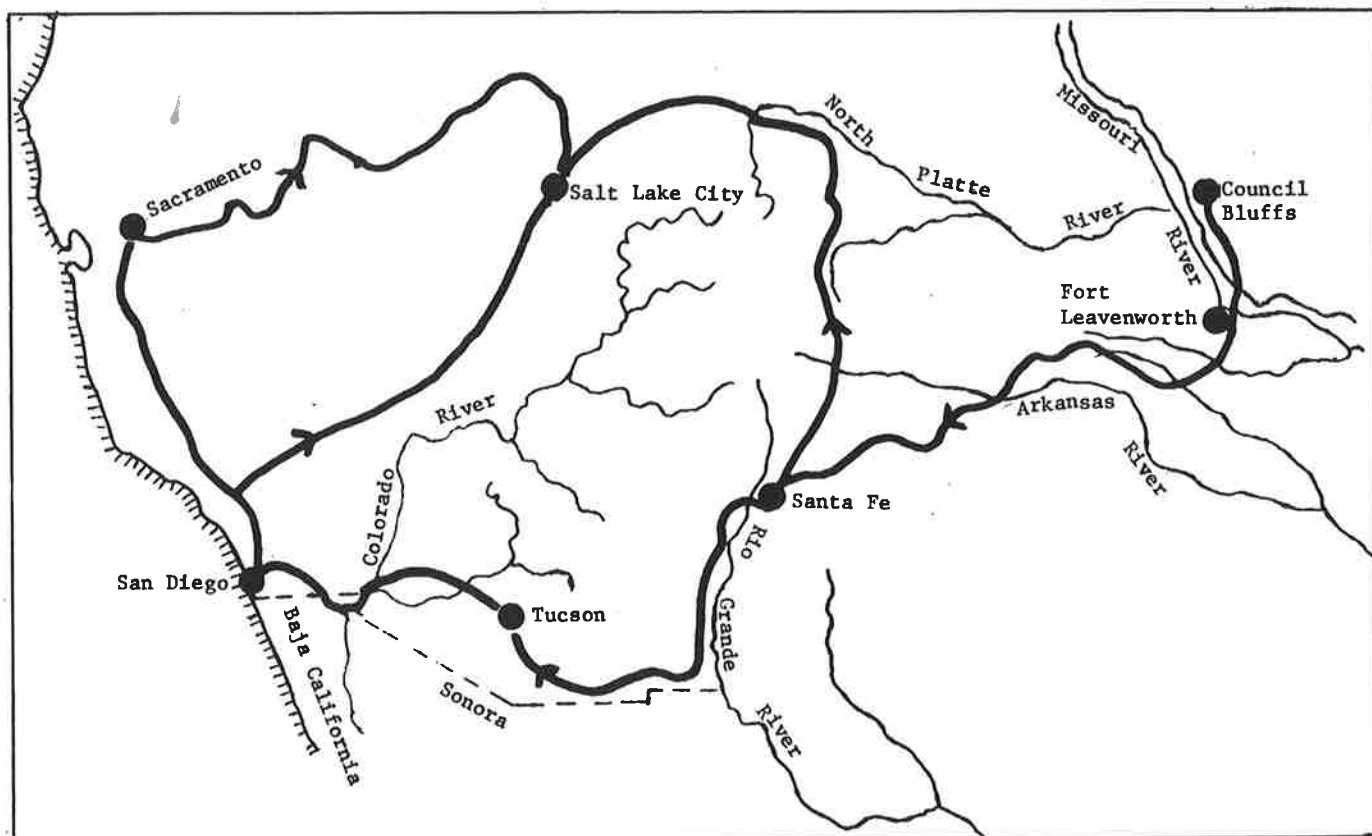
Colonel Kearny ordered Captain James Allen, of the First Dragoons, to go to the Iowa camps of the "Saints"(1) and explain to them a certain circular. This "Circular to the Mormons" outlined provisions for pay, rations and other allowances and comforts which were available for any male Mormon who volunteered to serve in the Army of the United States for a period of time. With some modifications the terms offered in the Circular were acceptable to the saints, and it was approved by Brigham Young. The main body of the Circular requested "the services for twelve months of four or five companies of Mormon men who may be willing to serve their country for that period in our present war with Mexico; this force to unite with the Army of the West at Santa Fe, and be marched thence to California, where they will be discharged from duty."

Of the men who volunteered five hundred were selected to serve. These volunteers were organized into infantry companies and were officially known on the rolls of the Army as the "Mormon Volunteers." However, due to its makeup this army unit soon became known as the "Mormon Battalion."

And so a battalion of Mormon infantry soldiers, serving its country voluntarily, is ready to march across what was to become the southwestern sector of the United States of America; to the deserts of Baja California, across the Yuha Desert and on to the Pacific Ocean. As this battalion performed its military duty, it marched itself into the annals of American history.

As a formal unit of the United States Army this battalion marched two thousand miles. Its mission was road building. It started in Iowa and passed through what are now the states of Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona and California to the shores of the Pacific Ocean at San Diego. The territory traversed was then a wilderness area,

1. "Saints" is a biblical term that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) employ to identify each other. In the same vein a non-member is a Gentile.



MAP I.

Often called the "Greatest March of Infantry in the Military History of the World." The Route of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to San Diego and on to the gold of Sutter's Mill and finally home to the Mormon gathering place of Salt Lake City. A group of sick individuals and some women were released at Santa Fe and went north to the North Platte River and then west to the Rocky Mountains.

most of which had never known a wheeled vehicle. In fact, the first wheeled vehicles to cross what is now Imperial County, California, were the army wagon transports of the Battalion.

The Battalion, commanded by Captain Allen, departed from Council Bluffs on July 16, 1846. It marched first to Fort Leavenworth, in the then Unorganized Territory, where it was equipped, armed and received some military training.

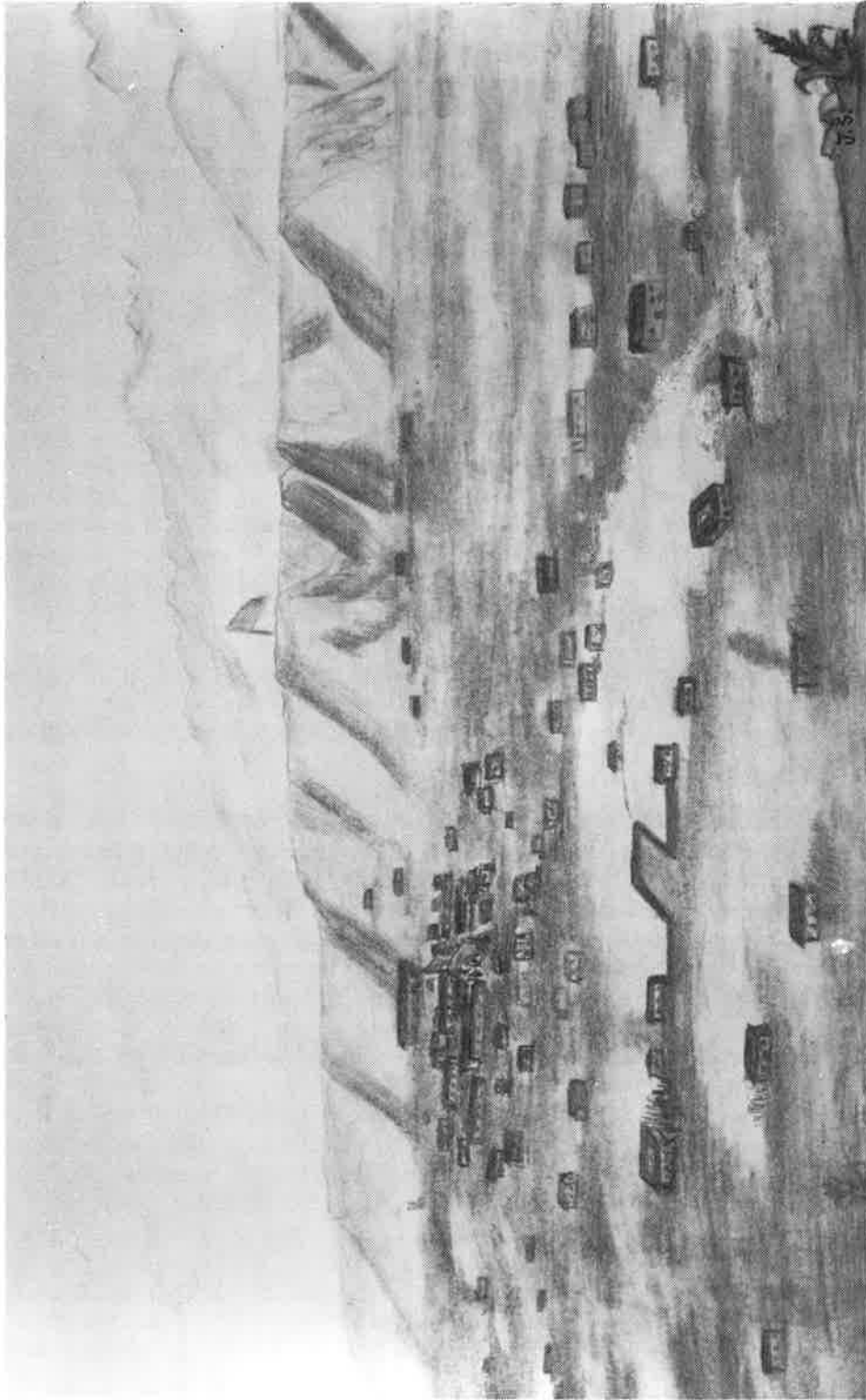
A few days after they had taken up the march to Santa Fe Captain Allen died and was buried along the trail. The Battalion, now led by the next in command, Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith, was force marched to Santa Fe. Immediately upon its arrival in Santa Fe Captain Phillip St. George Cooke took command. Captain Cooke was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel by General Kearny when he took command of the Battalion. It was in Santa Fe that the Battalion formally became a unit of the Army of the West.

The march from Santa Fe to Tucson began on October 19th. From Tucson the track traversed the homeland of the Pima Indians. These native Americans inhabited the fertile lands along the Gila River of Arizona. Colonel Cooke was aware that the main body of the Mormons were on the move west seeking out a new homeland. These fertile Gila River lands may have prompted his remarks to the Mormon Captain Jefferson Hunt that "this might be a good place for the settlement of the Mormons." Captain Hunt in turn advanced that very proposition to the Pimas, who received it favorably. The Indians' inferred positive reply may have lent weight to the actual colonizing of this river valley by the Saints in later years.

On January 8, 1847, the Mormon Battalion arrived on the banks of the then unknown and mysterious Colorado River. They had followed the Gila River to its confluence with the Colorado River. Present-day Yuma, Arizona, occupies this historic desert river fording place.

From the mouth of the Gila River the track lay ahead for 260 miles, ever westward. The wagon road the battalion would next prove would be across more than one hundred miles of the dreaded Colorado and Yuha Deserts. In these deserts there was to be intense suffering and privation. Although the men were on one-quarter rations and already weak from their physical efforts, their burden was nevertheless to be doubled. Great stretches of soft sand would force the men to help the mules pull the wagons. Due to the shortage of mules the men would have to step in and by hand and rope help pull the wagons. In these areas of heavy sand there was no water to be had except by the digging of deep wells. Often these wells turned out to be dry or strongly saline. Even before the Battalion, led by the gaunt Colonel Cooke and now guided by the famous (Mr.) Pauline Weaver, reached the banks of the Colorado River, its principal food supply of salt pork and biscuits was in short inventory. Equipment and wagons were sometimes abandoned along the trail because the mules were too few and too weak to pull them. The men were to suffer further from the extreme ranges in the temperature.

The Spanish idiom *Jornada del Desierto*, which means journey through the desert, in brief describes the subject of this booklet. The objective is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the accomplishments of those Mormon soldier-pioneers.



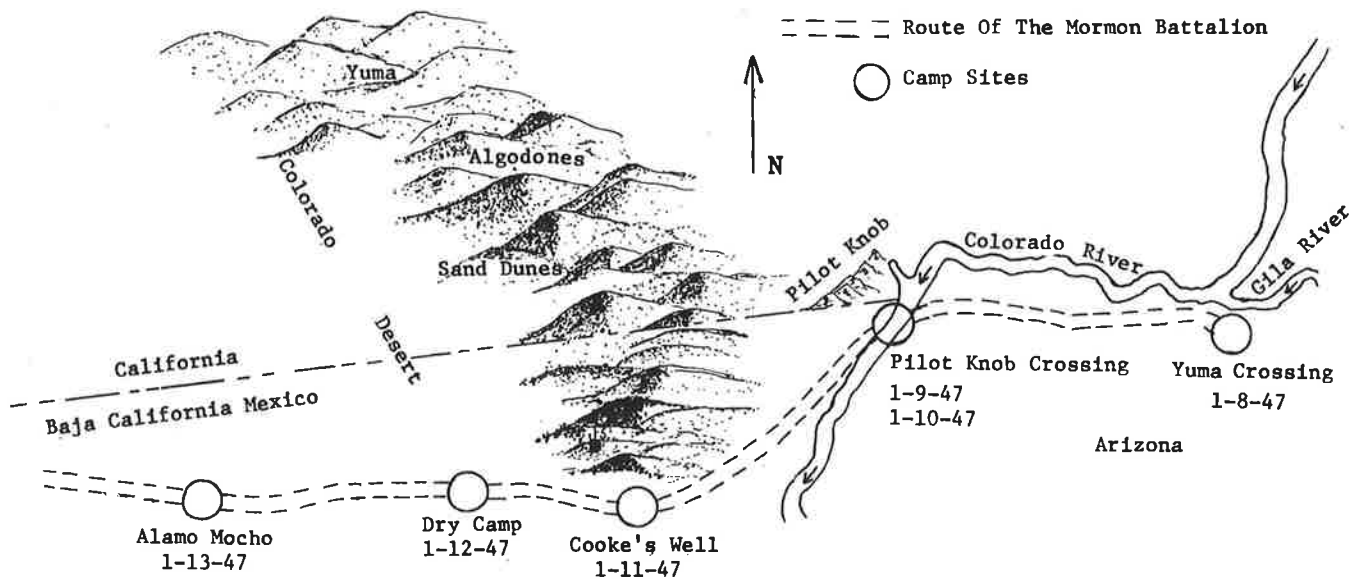
SKETCH OF SANTA FE AS IT APPEARED IN 1846



Painting owned by the Church of Jesus Christ
and Latter-day Saints, used by permission.

MARCH OF THE MORMON BATTALION

G. M. Ottinger



MAP II

SATURDAY, 9 JANUARY 1847

Leaving the mouth of the Gila River the Mormon Battalion was marched by Cooke to the west paralleling the south bank of the Colorado River for a distance of ten miles. Then, as now, this was the land of the Mexican. The trail they followed was at best nothing more than a pack-animal trail. Soft sand and clay complicated the travelers' progress every mile of the way.

The Colorado River has immense fertile bottom-lands in this area. However, the going was so hard, and it was such a primitive and dreary place that Cooke wrongly believed "it to be the most useless of rivers to man: so barren, so desolate and difficult."

Camp for that night was set up opposite what is now the pueblo of Algodones(2), Baja California, Mexico. The brush on the west bank of the River was so thick and tangled that it appeared to be impenetrable. Francisco, one of the guides, was instructed to ford the river and set the brush on fire. This was necessary to clear an open area in preparation for the next day's crossing of the river. This fording place in later years was known as the Pilot Knob Ford.(3)

A detail of forty men was detached from camp activities to gather mesquite, or as it was chronicled Mezquit, beans to be used as feed for the famished mules. Mesquite beans grow on an attractive desert tree and were long utilized as a staple food by the native American Indians. The men gathered and sacked these beans for mule fodder. Some of the men tried grinding the beans into a flour. Their idea was to use this flour to stretch and vary their food issue. The results were unpalatable and the men were not happy with this new food.

2. *Algodones is a Spanish word that means "sand dunes." It is the term the Mexicans use to identify the great sand dunes to the north and west.*
3. *Pilot Knob is a prominent, isolated, desert mountain in eastern Imperial County, California. This landmark was so named by the riverboat pilots who were to ply the River some years after the passing of the Battalion.*

SUNDAY, 10 JANUARY 1847

There was to be no rest for the Saints on this Sabbath Day. Except for private prayers there would be no time for religious services. The entire day and much of the evening would be spent in making the crossing of the Colorado River. They commenced the fording activities at first light.

At the Pilot Knob fording place the muddy, red-colored Colorado River turns south in its journey to the Gulf of California and divides into two channels. The river here was more than a half-mile wide. Due to the strong current the ford would range down the river for nearly a mile. The water was thick with silt picked up in the thousand-mile-plus journey from the mountains of Wyoming. The middle parts of the ford were difficult, deep and cold on this winter day. While the average depth was about four feet, in the deepest parts bottom could not be touched with a tent pole. The river bottom was soft sand of near quick sand consistency. The men caulked the wagon boxes and utilized them as rafts. All in all it must have presented an exciting tableau. The men had to struggle to control the mules, to control the unwieldy wagon box rafts, and to preserve their own lives on this day. Two mules were drowned, but there were no human casualties.

They camped that night, a divided command, on the east and west banks of the Colorado River. Exposure and exhaustive labor had weakened the men, and the night was cold. This fording episode was an exceedingly unpleasant experience for the pioneer roadbuilders.

MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 1847

Dawn of this winter day witnessed the Mormons eating a meager breakfast and preparing to complete the crossing of the Colorado. The winter days were short, and there was much to do and many miles yet to travel.

The fording was quickly and luckily completed, and with no backward look the command proceeded on with the business of marking out and building a road to San Diego. In the days to come they were going to dearly miss the abundance of water that was the Colorado River in those pioneer times.

They now marched in a southwesterly direction to pass around the southern terminus of the great Imperial, or Yuma, Sand Dunes. These sand dunes, while spectacular to behold, are forbidding, floating and ever restless, and they presented such a formidable barrier to the pioneer roadbuilders that travel had to be detoured around them. The men plodded in loose order for fifteen difficult, weary miles through the deep sand that surrounds the sand dunes. The wagons could be zig-zagged around the smaller piles of sand. It was push and pull the wagons all the way. More wagons had to be abandoned this day as victims of the trail. It was dark and about 9 p.m. before the 360 nearly worn out foot soldiers and the remaining four women went into camp.

There was a desert waterhole at this camping place, but it was dry. Colonel Cooke immediately ordered a detail of men to dig out this dry waterhole and make a well of it. The men first had to remove the carcass of a dead coyote. After much digging and the removal of a great pile of sand, at great effort, they did reach water.

They then set about to deepen the hole, but the sand caved in as fast as the men dug it out. Only when a wooden wash tub, that belonged to one of the four wives was set into the hole with the bottom knocked out, could the sand be held back and water obtained in thirst slaking quantities. It was a real life situation of finding water or facing certain death. "It was the most trying hour of my military experience," Cooke was later to relate. This waterhole became known as Cooke's Well.

The traveler-writer John Russell Bartlett camped at this well on June 8, 1851, and described it as follows: "The water obtained here was from a hole dug in the earth some ten or twelve feet deep. The water had to be dipped out in a bucket and passed to a second person midway towards the top who emptied it into a basin on the surface. There was no grass here but a thick growth of mesquite trees, about twelve feet high, with very wide spreading branches."

Some years later the operators of the Butterfield Overland Mail Service constructed and maintained a stage relay station at this well. Unfortunately the exact location of Cooke's Well is now lost to us. Its approximate location is six miles south of International Boundary Monument Number 210.

TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 1857

As is traditionally the lot of the infantry soldier on campaign, it was up before dawn and make ready for the day's activities. They would be on their way before the sun crossed the horizon. The desert was still there before them, and the experiences of the previous day were still vivid. The men had been given a full taste of the true sand desert and with it a forewarning of what they had to look forward to in the days to come. They had entered upon the "Tierra Calienta," the Hot Land as it was chronicled, the big desert of the Colorado River. However, the order of the day remained the same: continue the march to the west, ever west.

From Cooke's Well the Battalion struggled on with the cumbersome wagons in a semblance of military order for twelve miles. The desert here was a wilderness of sand, "strewn and mixed with small stones and gravel," and it was the setting for a dry camp that night.

The men were footsore, short of water, and even shorter of food. The night was again cold, and their beds on the desert floor were miserable. It was on such nights as this that the epic proportions of the expedition were felt. The battalion was entirely removed from its Fort Leavenworth source of supply. The land they were conquering was too poor to sustain their minimum bodily needs. There was no water, and they were afoot in frontier Mexico, the enemy of the United States. These were the times that brought faith and courage to the forefront.

"And by our faith and patience,

And hard, unflinching toil,"(4)

4. *Taken from the Mormon Battalion Song, words by Thomas Morris, sung to the tune of "Behold A Royal Army."*

WEDNESDAY, 13 JANUARY 1847

At the dawning of this cold morning, after basic and routine preparations, the Saints were again on the move. They were headed for the known water at Alamo Mocho(5). The track they were following was crooked and sandy. As the Battalion marched along this track it was leaving behind a basic, easy-to-follow wagon road.

The wells at Alamo Mocho were named for the Cottonwood trees that once grew there, but by the time the battalion watered there the trees were gone. The trees were probably covered by the encroaching sand which here terminated in a bluff forty feet high, making the arc of a great circle convexing to the north. Very little water was obtained by the men from these wells, and what there was, was of poor quality. It did not seem to satisfy either man or mule. The water was not injurious, but it seemed to increase the thirst. The men were anticipating an oasis and a place to rest but encountered poor water and the same desert desolation. The temperature fell with the setting sun. The men had to fall back upon their sustaining faith as they made their beds for another night on the cold desert pavement.

"They found road-making worse by far

Than all the horrors of the War."(*)

Bartlett also watered at these wells. He described them thus: "The desert here is a vast open plain, extending as far as the eye can reach on every side, except on the southwest where a chain of mountains appear some thirty or forty miles distant(6). The undulations are few and slight as the terrain is nearly flat. Near our camp was a steep bank about sixty feet high extending for miles and descending into a great depression or basin where the wells or pits were sunk. From these pits we obtained water."

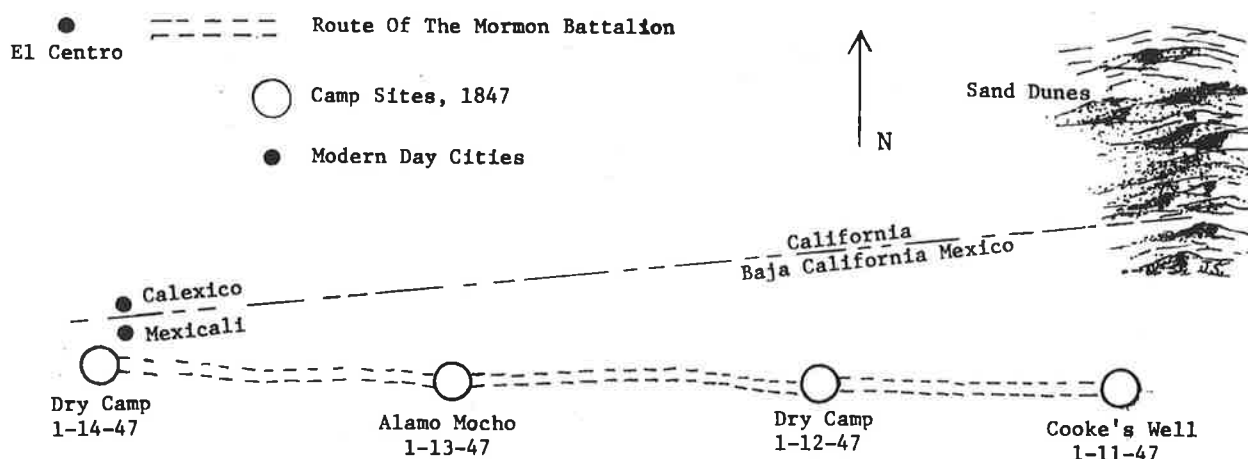
Eleven years after the passing of the Battalion, in 1858, the Butterfield Overland Mail Service followed the same route for the twenty-five miles from Cooke's Well to the water at Alamo Mocho. Butterfield's route proceeded slightly southwest from Cooke's Well along a vestigial channel--possibly the Alamo River overflow slough--to a stage relay station erected by the company at Gardner's Well. The water at Gardner's Well was probably more certain and of better quality. Gardner's Well was located at a site five and eight-tenths miles south of International Boundary Monument Number 216 in the Beltran Slough. Though the wells at Alamo Mocho were still designated on the water system map of 1893, and we know that the Alamo Mocho and Gardner's Wells were near to each other, we no longer know the

5. *Alamo Mocho is a Spanish idiom that means "destroyed cottonwoods." Cottonwoods pertains to the western Cottonwood tree.*

*. *Taken from the poem The Mormon Battalion, and the First Wagon Road Over the Great American Desert, by Miss Eliza R. Snow.*

6. *The Sierra de los Cucupas are a low range of desert mountains southwest of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. They are very rugged and waterless.*

precise location of the Alamo Mocho Wells. They were the victims of modern agriculture and the march of civilization.



MAP III

THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 1847

With the newly risen sun at their back the Battalion pushed on through a mile of sand before descending onto a clay flat which they crossed in a westerly direction. Here was an immense level clay area hard and smooth. It was beyond the knowledge of the men to understand after the many miles of winding through the sand. Numerous shells in the clay marked this hardpan as the bed of an old lake or the bottom of an ancient sea. Some of the clay areas were so hard packed that the wheels of the wagons left no impression as they passed. In the sandy places there were signs of large herds of cattle and horses on the move. These herds were being driven east to Mexican Sonora for safety. The California Mexicans did not want their livestock to fall into the hands of the invading "Norte Americanos."

As the men bedded down that night the miseries of an infantry soldier of those pioneer times were still with them. They were in a hard land, a foreign land with a foreign clime. Hunger, thirst and loneliness, while the constant companion of the soldier on campaign, are never accepted as the normal way of life.

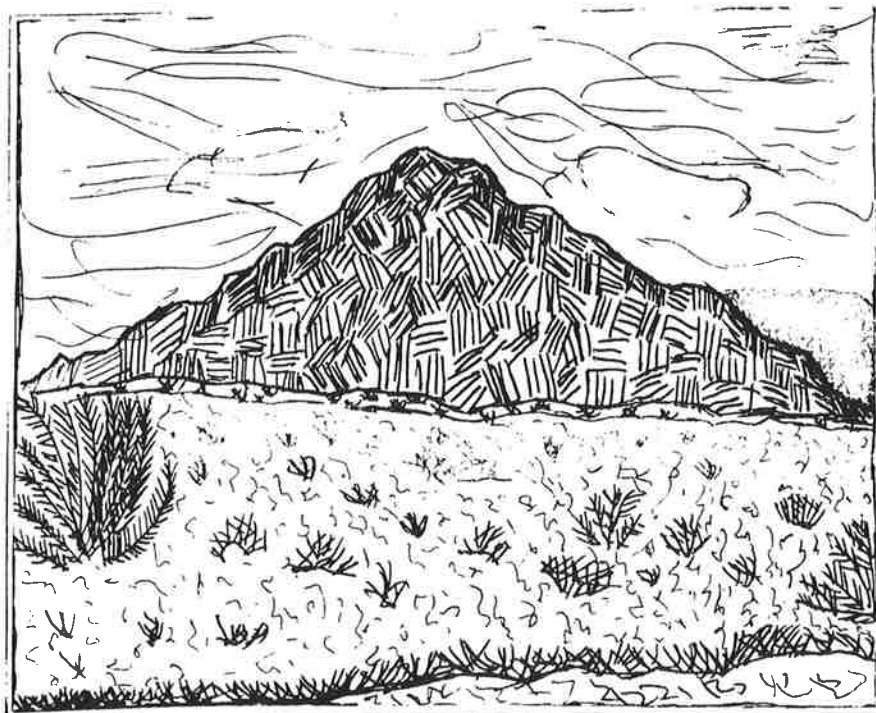
According to the mileage logged that day, their stopover that night was another dry camp. This campsite was probably in the immediate vicinity of present day Mexicali(7), perhaps just slightly to the southwest.

Some pushed the wagons up the hill,
Some drove the teams, some pack'd the mules,
Some stood on guard by night and day,
Lest haplessly our teams should stray,

In these hard times.(8)

After the Alamo Mocho camp the next water we are able to determine with certainty was the Carrizo Creek in westernmost present-day Imperial County, California. When the Butterfield Overland Mail Service commenced operations in this region, its stage line ran from the Alamo Mocho Wells to the western bed of the then dry New River overflow slough which it followed to the vicinity of present day Mexicali. The stage road entered what is now the United States of America at about the present location of International Boundary Monument Number 221. The stage road proceeded directly west to the water at Indian Wells, about two miles north of "Cerro Centinela" (Mt. Signal). The International Boundary crosses the extreme northern slopes of this isolated desert mountain.

The diaries of the soldiers do not mention a dry riverbed such as later used and described by the Butterfield people. When Colonel Cooke led the Mormon Battalion through this section of the Yuha Desert in January 1847, it was all just one big expanse of desert, and it must have all looked the same to the weary men.



Pen and ink sketch of Mt. Signal from the north looking south across the Yuha Desert.

7. *Mexicali, the capital city of the Mexican State of Baja California, was chartered in 1903. Mexicali is known to the Mexicans as the "Young Giant of the North." Baja is a Spanish word that means "lower."*
8. *Verse from a Song composed by Azariah Smith when he was quartered at San Diego in 1847.*

FRIDAY, 15 JANUARY 1847

This day it was again the military routine of reveille and up before dawn. After prayers and breakfast the day began in the military manner. The Battalion was now in the Yuha Desert. This famous desert is a region of sand, cactus, and prickly bush, liberally cut with shallow ravines and littered with numerous sandstone outcroppings. Fossilized oyster shells occur here in huge beds. The entire region was once the habitat of aboriginal man.

Utilizing the knowledge and advice of his guides, Cooke was marching his men to the known water at Pozo Hondo(9), about eight miles distant. To date the location of this well has not been precisely placed. Therefore we do not know if this was the same water that the Butterfield Stage Line knew as Indian Wells. Mileage distances, however, do indicate that Pozo Hondo and Indian Wells were in the same immediate vicinity to the north of Mt. Signal. Colonel Cooke had been heading for this well since he had departed from the Alamo Mocho camping place. His guides evidently knew of this water at Pozo Hondo. Assuming that Pozo Hondo and Indian Wells are at least near to each other, we can deduce that Cooke's command probably crossed the present-day International Boundary about five miles west of present-day Calexico(10), California.

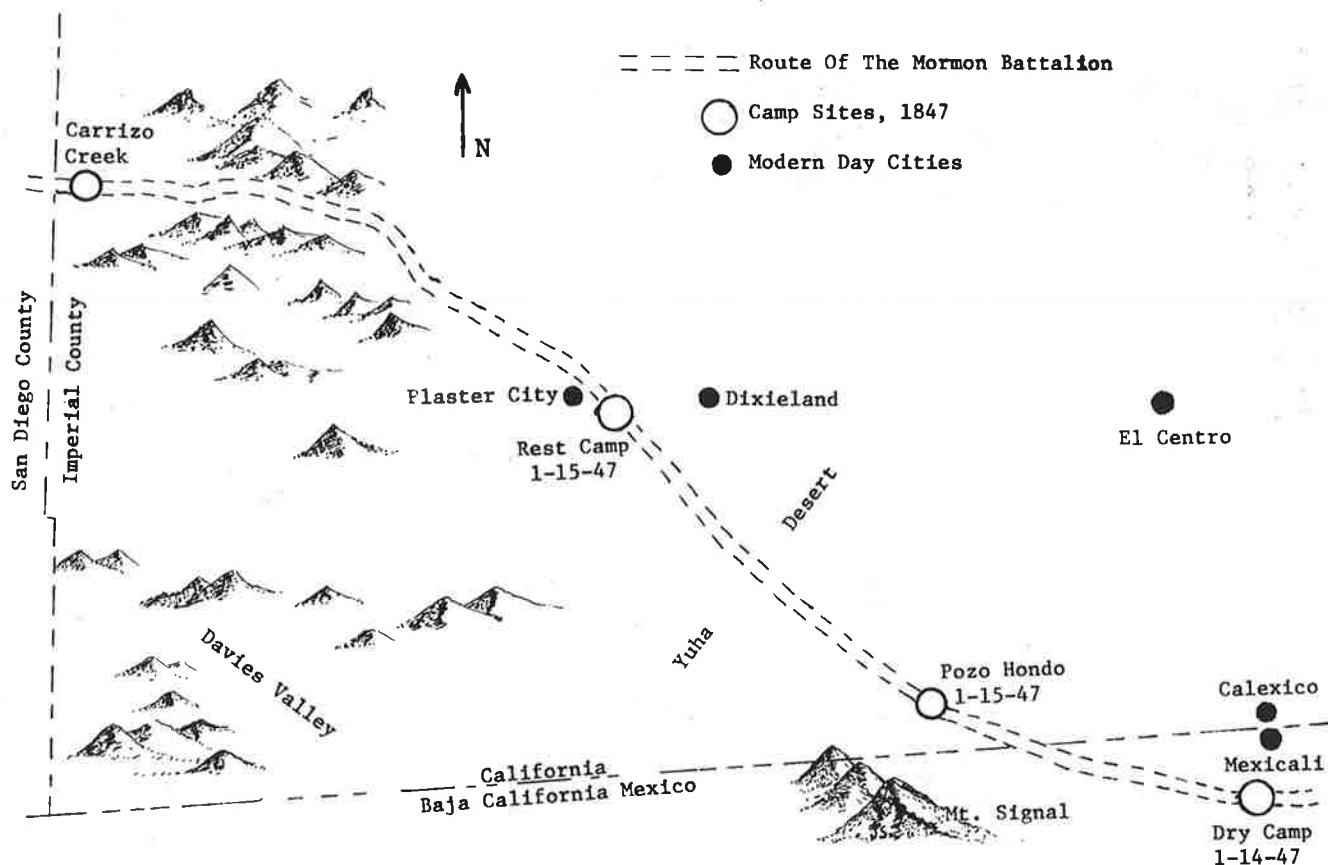
Finding little water of drinkable quality or quantity at Pozo Hondo, the men rested briefly, and at about 4 p.m. they were again on the move, trudging along and helping the wagons in a northwesterly direction toward the water to be had in quantity at Carrizo, or Cariza as it was chronicled, Creek. Although the men were not aware of it at the time, they were marching along the Sea Level Datum Line and adjacent to the beach line of ancient Lake Cahuilla, which is also known as the prehistoric Blake Sea. They advanced, after dark by now, for about eleven miles. At about 11 p.m. they were met by their advance scouts returning from foraging for food and fodder. The scouts were herding twelve beef cattle and forty dearly needed mules. These animals had been taken from the California Mexicans who resided in the mountain area to the northwest.

It was immediately decided to go into a rest camp. One of the cows was killed on the spot, cooked and eaten. This type of nourishment was sorely needed by the men. The freshly roasted beef helped to revive the spirits and strength of the men. As they ate and rested they were amused to watch the returned scouts, who were Californians, attempt to hitch the unbroken pack mules to the wagons. This scene must have presented a lively spectacle illuminated as it was by lamps and desert torches.

This resting place was probably within one mile of Evan Hewes Highway (S80) between Dixieland and Plaster City, near the Dunaway Road intersection. El Centro, the county seat of Imperial County, is approximately fourteen miles to the east of this site.

9. *Pozo Hondo is a Spanish idiom that translates as "deep well."*

10. *Calexico is the southernmost city of Imperial County, California. It shares a common border with Mexicali. The word/name Calexico is derived from the CAL of California and the EXICO of Mexico.*



MAP IV

SATURDAY, 16 JANUARY 1847

The men had only time enough to eat and nap before they were aroused out at about 2 a.m., and again were on their way, guided by stars and by compass. Their heading was supposedly toward Fish Creek Mountain near where they expected to intersect the Carrizo Wash. The men soon found they were warmer walking and struggling with the wagons than they had been while resting on the cold desert floor.

At about the noon hour they finally reached the dry bed of Carrizo Wash. They turned west here and followed this desert wash upstream to water. This water at Carrizo Creek was the first running water the men had seen since leaving the banks of the Colorado River. The Battalion had marched nineteen miles from the short rest camp of the night before.

For the past eight days the route of travel had been at about sea level. At Carrizo Creek while the terrain was still harsh and cruel it was somewhat higher in elevation. Mt. Carrizo to the immediate southeast rises to an elevation of 2408 feet. The long foot-slogging journey from Council Bluffs, now accentuated by a forced march of ninety-five miles from the Colorado River through the terrible Tierra Caliente of the Colorado and Yuma Deserts, had pushed the Mormons nearly to the limits of their endurance. The last five days were the most trying of any since leaving the plains of Iowa. They had crossed the heaviest sand deserts, suffered some relatively hot days and cold nights, with practically no water and little food. Exhausted men were scattered for miles along the back trail, "some sick, some given out for want of water, some with feet so sore they could not walk." Mules, dead or left to die, were scattered all the way back to the Colorado River. The one small consolation the men had was that there were now fewer wagons to push and pull.



U.S. MORMON BATTALION

Uses by permission, Glenn E. Nielson.
" WITH THE MORMON BATTALION "

Mormon Sergeant Daniel Tyler depicted their suffering very graphically: "At this time the men were nearly barefooted; some used instead of shoes rawhide wrapped around their feet, while others improvised a novel style of boot by stripping the skin from the legs of the dead animals. To do this a ring was cut around the hide above and below the gambrel joint, and then the skin was taken off whole without cutting lengthwise. Then the lower end was sewed shut with mule sinews. Then it was ready for the wearer. The natural crook of the hide adapting somewhat to the shape of the wearer's foot." Others wrapped cast-off clothing around their feet, to shield them from the burning sand during the daylight hours and from the winter's cold at night. The blue shirts and hickory pants that the women had dyed for the men at Fort Leavenworth so many miles ago were in tatters.

They camped on the "river", as it was chronicled, just east of the present boundary line dividing Imperial and San Diego Counties. This camp site is located as just west of the site of the Carrizo Creek relay station of the Butterfield Overland Mail Service that was to be erected at a later date.

The Carrizo is a typical desert stream. It rises in the high places, runs its short course and then sinks below the surface of the ground as is the nature of such desert streams. For thousands of years this area was a natural camping place on the aboriginal Indian trails that connected the mountains with the Colorado River. There is an extensive marshy area here to this day.

At this spot the Carrizo ran clear. The men were thankful for the clear, cool drinking water and were elated to be able to have their fill and a surplus left over. That night they had fresh beef to roast to their individual taste, and this, washed down with abundant drinking water, was filling to their stomachs and regenerative for their morale.

The route of march, from just north of Mt. Signal to the Carrizo Creek campsite, was later to be used by the California-bound travelers who were to follow in the emigration years. As the many early travelers churned through the sand with their wagons, they brought deeper and darker colored soil deposits to the surface. In some places desert plants and flowers grow seasonally in the abandoned wagon tracks. From the air the rather straight line of the old roadway was clearly visible up to a few years ago.

The supply wagon transports of the Mormon Battalion had proved this pioneer route to be a feasible, all-weather route to the Pacific Ocean.

SUNDAY, 17 JANUARY 1847

On this second Sabbath Day the Mormons were to spend in the deserts of Southern California, the march was to be uninterrupted. Again there would be no time for religious services. The Battalion resumed its trek to the west, leaving what is now Imperial County and entering San Diego County. They kept to the north bank of the extensive Carrizo arroyo system. This arroyo has witnessed extensive aboriginal Indian travel through the centuries. This region is now within the confines of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

At noon they found themselves sitting under the palm trees at Palm Spring(11). Here were the first palm trees ever seen by the Mormons, and they were a wonder to behold. Since there was little water here and no forage for the animals, the men soon hurried on towards the Pacific Ocean.

Cooke, the Commander, led his men through more heavy sand along the southern bank of Vallecito Creek(12) to a campsite in the Vallecito Valley. The journey had continued to take its toll on the mules and wagons. More mules died this day than on any other day since they had left Fort Leavenworth. By this time the Battalion had abandoned all but five of the original twenty-five wagons.

In places the wagon road they proved is still visible because of the heavy traffic it experienced when it became the standard southern emigrant route to the Pacific Coast of California. After the Mormon Battalion, San Diego-San Antonio Mule Mail Service used this route for a few years prior to the advent of the Butterfield Overland Mail Service.

The Battalion camped that night on a flat, wet portion of Vallecito Valley, or Bajiocito as it was chronicled, just west of the present-day reconstructed Vallecito Stage Relay Station. For a few miles here the land has enough ground water to nourish a grassy meadow. For the first time in a long time, there was an abundance of grass for the mules to graze upon.

MONDAY, 18 JANUARY 1847

Oh happy day. This day was set aside as a day of welcomed and earned rest and recuperation. The arduous forced marching of the previous few days could be put aside and forgotten. The men were cheered up by being able to spend an entire day doing nothing while lolling beside a beautiful spring where they could hear frogs croaking. For amusement they rolled huge boulders down the hills just to see them bounce. Colonel Cooke was surprised "at seeing these half-starved, worn-out men who only the night before had staggered into camp like so many inebriates" now playing the fiddle, singing merry tunes, and even dancing for the sheer joy of dancing. Perhaps the men were sensing the nearness of the great and near-legendary Pacific Ocean and the end of their great adventure.

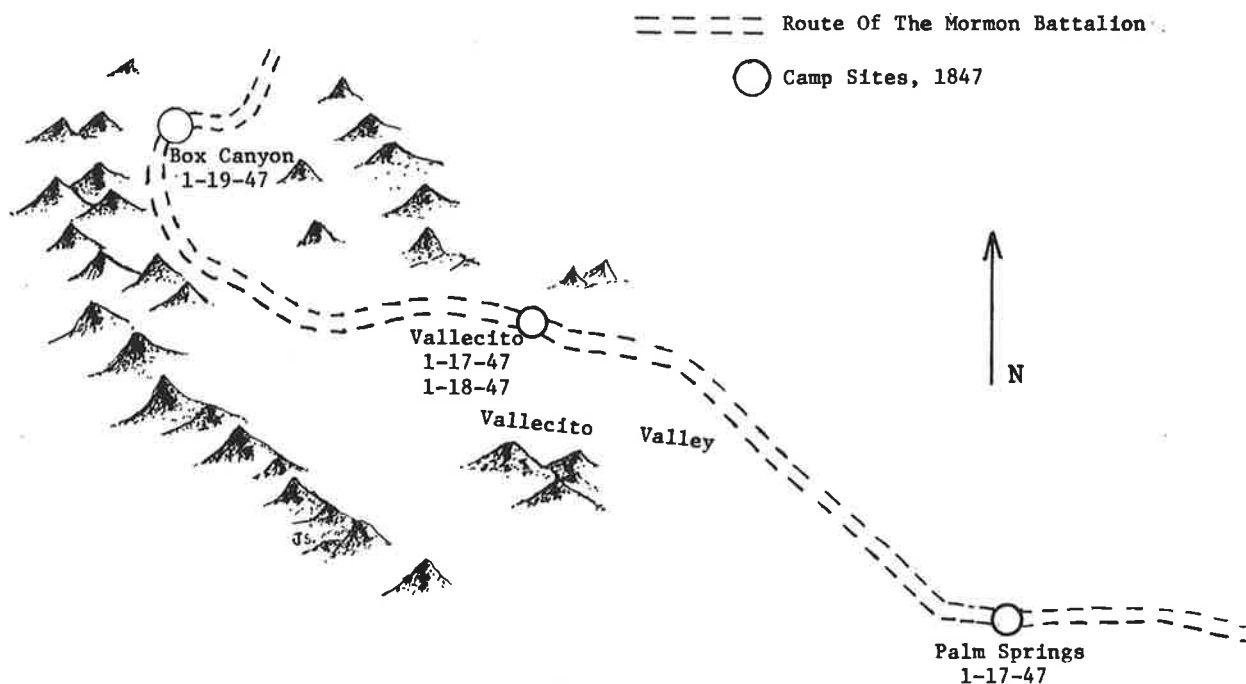
TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 1847

Our tale of a battalion of Mormon soldiers in the deserts of Southern California and Northern Baja California in the year 1847 is finished. This tale ended on Sunday the 17th. when the battalion marched from the environs of Imperial County. The wagon wheels of American destiny had traversed virgin territory, and the threshold was crossed. The stage was set for the great movement of people that was to make California the Golden State. For the men the dreadful "Jornada del Desierto" was already becoming nothing more than a bad memory. The trying times were behind them. But, let us march on for one more day.

11. *Palm Spring is a small desert spring within the confines of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park adjacent to Highway S2. There are a few native palm trees of the Washingtonia genus growing here.*

12. *Vallecito is a common Spanish word that means "small or little valley."*

About three miles north of the Vallecito camping place they came upon a sharp hill. This hill is a jutting bluff of the Sawtooth Mountain Range. From this point the Battalion was forced to follow the dry ravine of Vallecito Wash through Box Canyon. Box Canyon is bounded by the Oriflamme Mountains to the west and the Vallecito Mountains to the east. On this particular day they were to march through this narrow canyon to a dry camping place in Blair Valley.



MAP V

Daniel Tyler wrote this vivid description: "The chasm became more and more contracted until we found ourselves in a passage at least a foot narrower than our wagons. Nearly all of our road tools, such as picks, shovels, spades, etc., had been lost along the way when the wagons had to be abandoned. The principal tools remaining were a few axes and perhaps a spade or two. These few tools were brought into action, the Commander himself taking an axe and assisting the pioneer road builders." In this manner considerable work was done before the wagons arrived. About an hour before sunset one wagon was taken apart and carried over the hill. A rock passageway was hewn out and two wagons were unloaded and lifted through the passage. The two light wagons were hauled up the terraced road by two teams of mules on each wagon. The State of California has marked this as a site of historical significance. Today the scars on the rocks made by the tool-wielding Mormon road builders are still visible. The terraced roadway is still evident. It was the base for the improved roadway that time and travel necessitated.

The trailblazing roadbuilders known in our historical heritage as the Mormon Battalion have marched off our scene. However, they continued on to the Pacific Ocean with the same grit and determination that had sustained them since they had departed from Council Bluffs over six months before. They, each one individually, went on to work out their own destinies.

The example of patriotism, loyalty and dependability displayed by the members of the Battalion has been emulated by their descendants. In every call to arms made by the government of the United States of America, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have quickly responded.

"Our Nation Boasts No Soldiers

So True as 'Mormon' Men."(13)

13. *Taken from the Mormon Battalion Song, words by Thomas Morris, sung to the tune of "Behold A Royal Army."*

EPILOGUE

On January 29, 1847, the Mormon Battalion, still commanded by Colonel Phillip St. George Cooke, arrived and encamped in Mission Valley about one mile below historic Mission San Diego De Alcala. After garrison duty at San Diego, San Luis Rey and Los Angeles, the Battalion was discharged from its military obligation on July 16, 1847, at Los Angeles. A few of the men re-enlisted, but most of them made immediate preparations to travel to the Rocky Mountain gathering place of the Saints. The first returning contingent arrived in Salt Lake City on October 16, 1847, fifteen months to the day from Council Bluffs.

The route marked by Colonel Cooke's men had followed some Spanish and Mexican trails, utilized a few aboriginal Indian trails and cut new paths that would become roads. These roads were used by the San Diego-San Antonio Mule Mail Service, the Butterfield Overland Mail Service, the Column From The West during the War Between the States, and they became the standard southern emigration route for the thousands of travelers headed for the golden west of California.



SAN DIEGO DE ALCALA MISSION

Colonel Cooke himself best expressed the accomplishment of the Battalion in his Order Number 1, issued thus:

"Headquarters Mormon Battalion

Mission of San Diego

January 30, 1847"

(order No. 1.)

"The Lieutenant-Colonel commanding, congratulates the battalion on their safe arrival on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and the conclusion of their march of over two thousand miles.

History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry. Half of it has been through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts are found, or deserts where for want of water, there is no living creature. There, with almost hopeless labor, we have dug deep wells, which the future traveler will enjoy. Without a guide who had traversed them we have ventured into trackless table-lands where water was not found for several marches. With crowbar and pick and axe in hand, we have worked our way over mountains, which seemed to defy aught save the wild goat and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock, more narrow than our wagons. To bring these first wagons to the Pacific, we have preserved the strength of our mules by herding them over large tracts, which you have laboriously guarded without loss. The garrison of four presidios of Sonora concentrated within the walls of Tucson, gave us no pause. We drove them out, with their artillery, but our intercourse with the citizens was unmarked by a single act of injustice. Thus, marching half naked and half fed, and living upon animals, we have discovered and made a road of great value to our country.

Arrived at the first settlement of California after a single day's rest, you cheerfully turned off from the route to this point of promised repose, to enter upon a campaign, and meet, as we supposed, the approach of the enemy; and this too, without even salt to season your sole subsistence of fresh meat.

Lieutenants, A. J. Smith and George Stoneman, of the First Dragoons have shared and given invaluable aid in all these labors.

Thus, volunteers, you have exhibited some high and essential qualities of veterans. But much remains undone. Soon you will turn your attention to the drill, to system and order, to forms also, which are all necessary to the Soldier.

By order, Lieut. Col. P. St. George Cooke,

P. C. Merrill, Adjutant."

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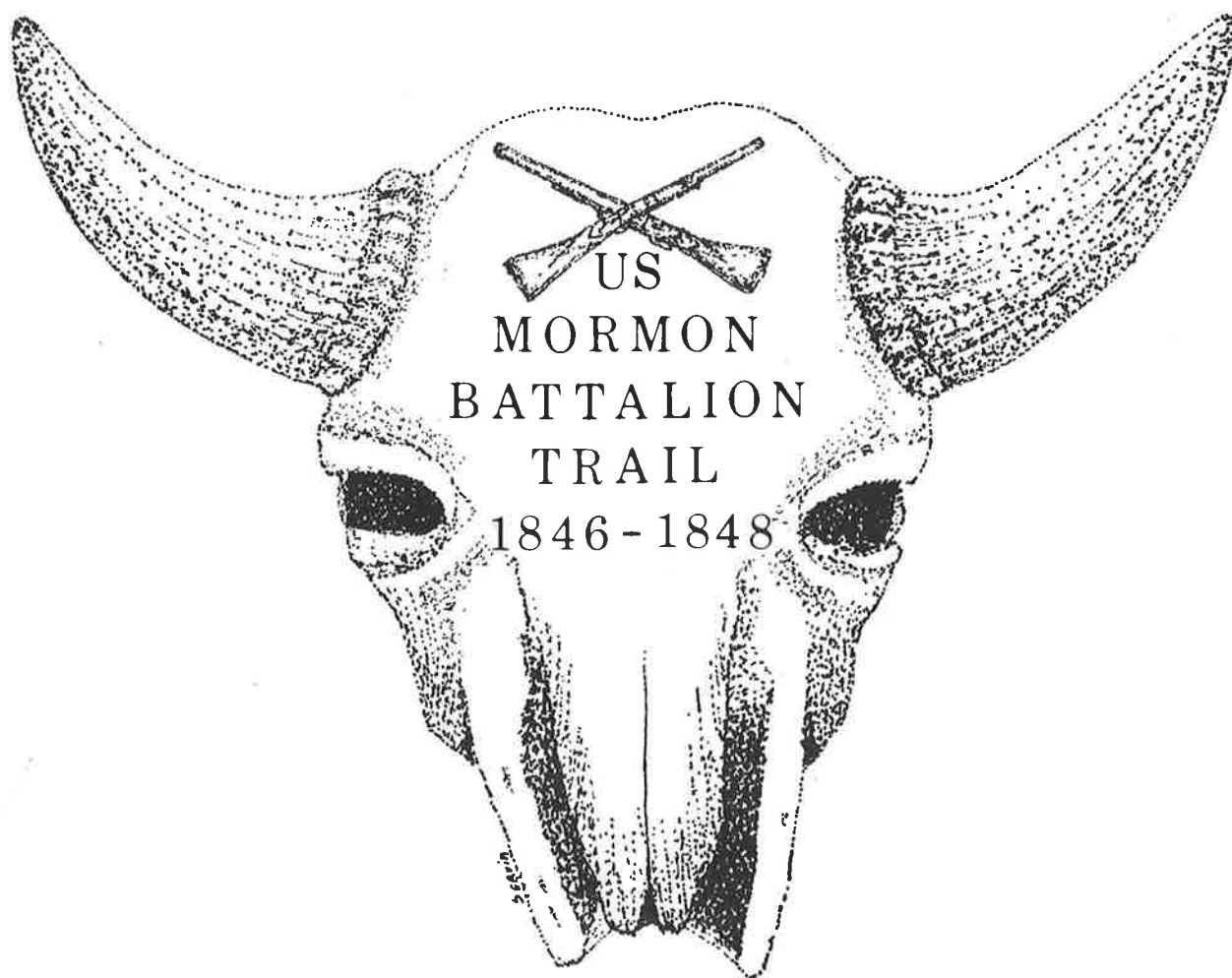
THE MORMON BATTALION, INC.

The Mormon Battalion, Inc. is a nonprofit modern-day organization dedicated to the perpetuation of the rich heritage and accomplishments of the original Battalion.

The activities of the Battalion consist of locating and marking the trail, studying graves, building commemoration monuments and markers, hiking and camping along the route, and doing historical and genealogical research.

The various Contingents of the Mormon Battalion, Inc., are stationed at communities that are in close proximity to the route of the 1846-1848 march.





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