

The Butterfield Overland Mail Road across Texas

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CAN anything new be said about the old Butterfield Overland Mail Route that is just approaching its one hundredth anniversary? This famous route that crossed Texas just before the Civil War has been the subject of many hundreds of pages of published material. Are all the facts already in print? Anyone who wishes may, without extended effort, look up such facts as these:

1. The old dirt road over which the United States government established this first large scale transcontinental mail service was 2,795 miles long.

2. The road began at Tipton, Missouri, a railhead 160 miles west of St. Louis.

3. It extended across the present states of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California and terminated at San Francisco.

4. It passed through the towns or cities of Springfield, Missouri; Fayetteville and Fort Smith, Arkansas; Sherman, Gainesville, Jacksboro, and present-day El Paso, Texas; Tucson and Yuma, Arizona; and Los Angeles, California.

5. Another branch of this mail road extended from Memphis, Tennessee, westward and joined the principal road at Fort Smith, Arkansas.

6. The postal authorities at Washington agreed to pay the mail contractors, John Butterfield and associates, \$600,000 per year for their service.

7. These contractors were to furnish semi-weekly mail service, and their mail coaches actually made the 2,795-mile journey in approximately twenty-five days.

8. A total outlay that approaches \$1,000,000 was spent by the contractors in preparing to carry out their contract.

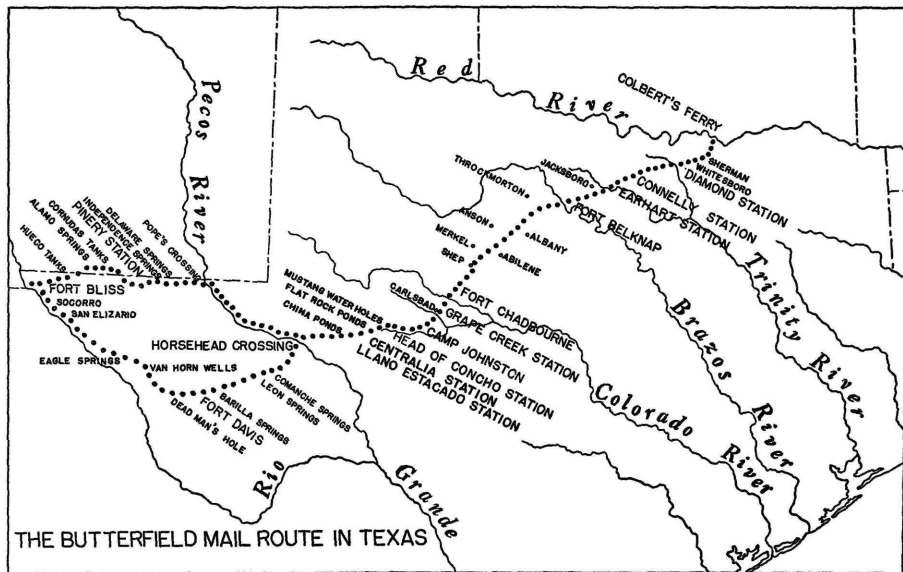
9. They purchased about one hundred Concord coaches and many hundreds of horses and mules, to say nothing of the many mail stations that they built.

All of these facts are either well-known or easily accessible. A paper that goes no further has no right to waste either the reader's time or the printer's ink. Actually, the predicament in which the writer finds himself is far worse than even that. The articles written by the twenty-four-year-old reporter of the *New York Herald*, Waterman L. Ormsby, who was the only through passenger to ride the first Butterfield Mail coaches west, have been put into book form and even recently reprinted.¹ Ormsby's articles were interestingly written and filled with many of the answers that a research worker would want to know. But much more extensive than the Ormsby articles is the three-volume work by Roscoe and Margaret Conkling published in 1947.² In nearly one thousand pages, with maps, charts, and photographs, the Conklings tell the story of the Butterfield Overland Mail so near to completeness that certainly no one can hope to compete with them in a short paper.

Obviously the only justifiable course left is to approach this subject from a somewhat different viewpoint than did the Conklings or any of the others. Here, then, is the big detour that this study wishes to make. How can anyone after nearly one hundred years know exact facts about the route of this old mail line? The Conklings seem to have done most of their investigation of this question by personal interviews—and a monumental piece of detective work it was. This paper, however, proposes to supplement that investigation with a somewhat extensive use of land records, and the investigation will be attempted only within the boundaries of Texas. Surveyors crossed the old road many times and often set down in their field notes mathematical data about it that no human memory could hope to retain. The exact nature of these surveyors' notes, wherever they are available, is such that one can know not only the tracts of land over which this early mail road passed but he can know in what part of each of these tracts the old trail may be found.

¹Waterman L. Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, edited by Lyle H. Wright and Josephine M. Bynum (San Marino, 1954).

²Roscoe P. Conkling and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* (3 vols.; Glendale, 1947).



This statement must be subject to the limitations that surveying records containing the necessary data are not always available. Obviously no notes could have been made where the surveys antedated the Butterfield Mail Route. This is true of nearly all the land traversed by the road from Colbert's Ferry, thirteen miles northeast of Sherman, to Fort Belknap, near the center of Young County. Even here, however, the land records help to establish the route. The log of the mail route, for instance, shows that J. R. Diamond was in charge of the first stage stand fifteen miles west of Sherman. The records show that Diamond's land lay about one mile west of the present Whitesboro, that he was here as early as June 26, 1855,³ and that his pre-emption certificate was issued on August 18, 1857. Furthermore, the land was patented to Diamond on May 31, 1859.⁴ One finds from local inquiry that the Butterfield station stood by the roadside on this land one mile west of Whitesboro. The foregoing land records offer ample confirmation for the conclusion.

Similarly, one may check published statements from some histories misstating that this important mail route missed Montague County entirely. In 1859, however, while John Butterfield and his associates were in full operation of their mail coaches, the east line of Montague County was surveyed. The surveyors' notes show that Butterfield's old stage road crossed this county boundary line just two miles and 1470 *varas* north of the southeast corner of the county.⁵

Land records show that J. J. Connelly (who operated a stage stand forty-one miles southwesterly from Gainesville) was in possession of the land known as the S. E. Clements tract in north Wise County on January 30, 1859, while the old stage line was

³Grayson County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, Sherman), B, 408.

⁴The old land patent is in the possession of R. V. Dicus of Whitesboro. The date of issue and the date of the pre-emption certificate are both revealed by this instrument. Thus it is certain that J. R. Diamond lived at that place when he had charge of what is known as the Diamond Stage Stand.

⁵The 1859 survey of the east Montague County line may be found in the files of the General Land Office at Austin. The *vara*, a Spanish unit of distance, was used in the Spanish and Mexican surveys and land grants in Texas. One *vara* equals approximately thirty-three and one-third inches. See Virginia H. Taylor, *The Spanish Archives of the General Land Office of Texas* (Austin, 1955), 75n.

in operation. This fact puts down another pinpoint on the route of John Butterfield's mail road.⁶

In resume, this early road has been traced across Grayson and Cooke counties and across the southeast part of Montague County. In its southwestwardly course, the road emerged from Montague County and reached Connelly's Station in northern Wise County, some three miles southeast of the present-day town of Sunset. Moving still southwestwardly the road entered Jack County ten miles and sixteen hundred *varas* south of the northeast corner of that county. The veracity of this routing is established by surveying records.⁷ The east line of Jack County was surveyed in 1878, some eighteen years after the Butterfield Mail had ceased to function. The surveyors merely called the road the Jacksboro-Gainesville Road. But there is no doubt that this old local wagon route was a part of the Butterfield Trail, for the Jack County commissioners (according to their minutes) accepted this very road and discharged the review committee that laid it out just eleven days before the first Overland Mail coach rolled into Jacksboro.⁸ The commissioners noted in their minutes of September 9, 1858, that the road extended eastward from Jacksboro to J. B. Earhart's land and connected with the "over-land mail route at the boundary line of said Jack County in the direction to Gainesville near J. B. Earharts on said county line.

" The fact that the Earhart Survey is within a few hundred yards of the point at which the county line surveyors of 1878 crossed the Jacksboro-Gainesville Road ought to dispel any doubt about the identity of the road.⁹

Earhart operated a Butterfield station on his land by the present Jacksboro-Decatur Highway near the ten-mile point on the east Jack County line. For some reason the small strip of grassland at Earhart's became known as Hogeye Prairie.¹⁰ After

⁶Wise County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, Decatur), A, 98.

⁷The survey of the east Jack County line, dated May 14, 1878, is recorded in the original Jack County Commissioners Court Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, Jacksboro), III. The part of the survey that reveals the location of the Jacksboro-Gainesville Road is on page 215.

⁸*Ibid.*, 49, 55.

⁹See the General Land Office map of Jack County, dated 1925, for the location of the Joseph B. Earhart Survey.

¹⁰Apparently because of its shape.

the Civil War a village by the name of Hogeys grew up on this one-time important road near Earhart's.

The same commissioners court minutes that registered approval of the road to Earhart's recorded other points along the forthcoming mail road. It passed Bean's Crossing (on the West Fork of the Trinity) and crossed "Lost Creek nearly due east of the southeast corner of the public square in the town of Jacksboro. . . ." ¹¹ The road also passed by B. D. Ham's place, which is identified by a land survey as being six miles west of Jacksboro. This same local road, now famous as the Butterfield Trail, passed into Young County at a point eighteen miles and 540 *varas* north of the southeast corner of the county. The fact comes from the county line survey of 1881. ¹² This highway that had by 1881 lost its national significance was called by the surveyors simply the Jacksboro-Belknap Road. Like Cinderella it had been stripped of its finery and had reverted to the level of kitchen maid, but its location on the map was still the same.

The next important point on the road was Fort Belknap in Young County. The commissioners of this county, like those of Jack, had also laid out their part of the new road. ¹³ Land surveys in Young County east of Belknap made no reference to this thoroughfare because the land surveying was done five years ahead of the road.

Ormsby, one of the first westbound passengers on the mail coaches, declared that the entire stretch of the trail between Gainesville and Belknap was new. Actually the citizenry of this whole area of Texas from Red River to Belknap prepared the way for the incoming stage coaches as if they were unrolling a carpet for the footpath of a bride. Cooke County appointed an overseer exclusively for the overland mail road, ¹⁴ and Jack County rushed at the job like a runner out of breath and opened its thirty miles

¹¹Jack County Commissioners Court Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, Jacksboro), I, 55.

¹²*Ibid.*, III, 380.

¹³Young County Commissioners Court Minutes (MS., County Clerk's Office, Graham), I, 25.

¹⁴Cooke County Commissioners Court Minutes (MS., County Clerk's Office, Gainesville), I, 30. Thomas Mackey was appointed county overseer of the overland mail road.

of road less than two weeks ahead of the first stage coaches.¹⁵ The Young County commissioners appropriated \$150—a sizable sum in 1858—to cut the new road through both timber and prairie eastward from Belknap.¹⁶

Grayson County extended a welcome that was indeed unique. The citizens had a champagne supper for John Butterfield himself.¹⁷ The party became quite informal, and one local enthusiast became increasingly more talkative and began to tell about a certain old grey goose that had a nest underneath Sherman's small log courthouse. The story was challenged, and the party moved over to the little courthouse to investigate. Bets were placed on the outcome of the investigation and the party began to tear down the structure, a log at a time. Bets continued as the logs continued to fly. At last the bottom of the small building was reached, and there was found the nest of the old grey goose.

The people of Sherman suffered no great loss in the destruction of their courthouse. Immediately after the coming of the Butterfield Overland Mail, Sherman doubled in population, and without hesitating the residents built one of the finest new courthouses in their part of Texas.¹⁸

Westward from Belknap, Texas was almost devoid of population. There was no chamber of commerce spirit in that part of the state to welcome the new venture either by an outlay of cash or by an outpouring of champagne. In one particular, however, the trail hunter is blessed for some miles west of Belknap in his search. Strangely enough the surveyors' notes in this new and unsettled part of the state in 1858 give much more data on the route of the Butterfield Trail than in surveys from Red River to Belknap.

The road ahead was not new. For a number of miles westward from Belknap, the Butterfield route followed the military roads

¹⁵Jackson County Commissioners Court Minutes (MS., County Clerk's Office, Jacksboro), I, 44, 45.

¹⁶Young County Commissioners Court Minutes (MS., County Clerk's Office, Graham), I, 25.

¹⁷Mattie Davis Lucas and Mita Holsapple Hall, *A History of Grayson County, Texas* (Sherman, 1936), 92-93.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 93.

that were already in existence before 1858.¹⁹ Fortunately these military roads were opened just before much of the land was surveyed. Thus, in tract after tract of land many of the surveyors laboriously set down in their notes the exact route of the Overland Mail. If these extensive notes were repeated here, the recital would become as monotonous as long-drawn-out quotations from a volume of arithmetic. The map makers at the Texas General Land Office and those employed by the Texas and Pacific Railway Company have made this part of the task much easier than any such recital of field notes. Their county maps, with only short omissions, have traced the Butterfield Trail from Fort Belknap across the remainder of Young County,²⁰ across the counties of Throckmorton,²¹ Shackelford,²² Jones,²³ and Taylor²⁴ and on to Fort Chadbourne²⁵ in Coke County.

In crossing this tier of counties the old mail road did not pass through any town or village that finally came into being when this area was settled. The mail road missed the future town of Throckmorton twelve miles to the south. It passed ten miles west of Albany. It passed twenty-eight miles east of Anson and missed Abilene by a full seven miles to the north. The road crossed United States Highway 80 just one mile west of the village of Tye and passed along the north base of Castle Peak, the prominent

¹⁹The log of the Overland Mail included Fort Belknap, Fort Phantom Hill, and Fort Chadbourne. Obviously it was necessary to do no more than simply to use the military roads that already connected these forts.

²⁰See General Land Office Map of Young County, dated March, 1898.

²¹See General Land Office Map of Throckmorton County, dated March, 1898. The early surveying notes and the map of the Peters' Colony land (in the General Land Office), dated 1854, are the sources of the military road information on this map and the Young County map cited in footnote 20.

²²The old Texas and Pacific Railway Company Plat Book, 11. This is a map of Shackelford County not dated but made by the Texas and Pacific land surveys in the 1870's.

²³*Ibid.*, 13. This is a map of Jones County, dated 1874.

²⁴See General Land Office Map of Taylor County, dated August, 1897. See also the (printed) map of Taylor County made for Charles J. Canada, Simeon J. Drake, and William Strauss, proprietors of the Texas and Pacific lands. Both maps were based on original surveying records.

²⁵Texas and Pacific Railway Company Plat Book, 16. This map of Nolan County traces the Fort Belknap-Fort Phantom Hill-Fort Chadbourne Road from the Taylor County line across the corner of Nolan County and on to Fort Chadbourne. The road traced from Fort Belknap to Fort Chadbourne on the maps cited in footnotes 20-24 was, of course, also the Butterfield Trail.

little mountain that sticks up in the sky like a column a half dozen miles south of Merkel. To the southwest of this peak the trail bent its course through the little steep-walled canyon long known as Mountain Pass.²⁶ From here the stages climbed up on the prairie plateau of west Taylor County and even missed the present-day village of Shep, three thousand yards to the west.²⁷ Plainly, civilization, when it finally came with its new county seats and its railroads, laid down a pattern entirely different from the old.

At Fort Chadbourne, only three miles deep into northeast Coke County, the problem of the present-day trail hunter again becomes more difficult. The surveyors' records that mention the old road are much less numerous; but few as they are, they do establish certain facts about the route. The first of these is a note taken on the southwest boundary of a tract of school land surveyed for Caldwell County in 1883.²⁸ This note shows that the Butterfield Trail crossed this boundary line 1,500 yards from the south corner of the survey. The old land line which the surveyors of 1883 were measuring ran parallel to the present-day Robert Lee-San Angelo pavement about a half mile to the northeast of that road. This point is almost twenty miles southwest of old Fort Chadbourne and lies in the flat country three miles south of the Colorado River.

Also the surveyors reported that the trail crossed the east line of the R. H. Harris Survey, which was three and one-half miles southwestward of the Caldwell County school land.²⁹ Continuing a mile and one-half, the surveyors referred to a land corner as a point in the Butterfield Canyon.³⁰ These notes plainly outline a course up the valley of Buffalo Creek over a high, steep, rocky hill and down into the valley of Grape Creek. It was at this steep hill that the mules refused to pull the first westbound stage at 2

²⁶Mountain Pass, some twelve miles southwest of Merkel, is shown on both of the Taylor County maps mentioned in footnote 24.

²⁷The road data traced on a present-day map of Taylor County from these older maps mentioned in footnote 24 make it possible to relate the path of the old road to points on the map as of today.

²⁸Tom Green County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), C, 188.

²⁹Coke County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, Robert Lee), II, 63. The survey was made on June 3, 1879.

³⁰Tom Green County Deed Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), W, 333.

o'clock on the morning of September 25, 1858. W. L. Ormsby of the New York *Herald* and Nichols, the stage driver, were forced to wait until daylight before they could persuade their stubborn mule team to make the difficult climb up this hill.⁸¹

The Grape Creek Station near the south line of Coke County on the present-day March Ranch took its name from the creek that was near it.⁸² The old mail route crossed the Concho River just east of the site of Carlsbad (fifteen miles northwest of San Angelo) and, according to the best information obtainable, it reached the Middle Concho near the mouth of West Rocky Creek below the site of the old Arden post office. There appears to have been the location of a stage stand that was in operation soon after the beginning of John Butterfield's transcontinental mail service.

An interesting side note, meanwhile, proves the later location of a stage stand—apparently the above stage stand moved four miles westward—in Section 59, Block 10, of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company Surveys. This new site known as Camp Johnston is substantiated in the Probate Minutes of Tom Green County. Volume A of these old minutes was rescued from the flood of 1882 that swept away the former county seat town of Ben Ficklin.⁸³ The water-stained pages of this volume tell of the sale (by C. Bain and Company who had become the owners) of this stage stand in the above mentioned section in the early 1880's when transcontinental stage lines had become outmoded.

The Butterfield route passed up the north side of the Middle Concho most of the way to the head of the stream.⁸⁴ There was a deviation from this course at the mouth of Kiowa Creek where the road crossed to the south side for a short distance.⁸⁵ Here at the east river crossing (below Kiowa Creek) the *St. Louis Republican* told of an Indian scare in its issue of January 5, 1859.

⁸¹Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, 56.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 56. Ormsby said it was five miles from the steep hill to the Grape Creek Station.

⁸³Tom Green County Probate Minutes (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), A, 165.

⁸⁴Personal interview with Wade Henderson of San Angelo.

⁸⁵Charles William Pressler, *Traveler's Map of Texas*, 1867 revision.

Apparently the last permanent water as the stages moved up the Middle Concho was in or near the Nathaniel Gocher Survey No. 1943, a tract of land that is now owned by the Sawyer Cattle Company. Surveyors noted a stage stand in this block on July 29, 1859—when the Butterfield Overland Mail had been in operation for ten months.⁸⁶ The date makes it certain that the mail station was the property of the Butterfield interests. This fact puts the writer in the uncomfortable position of being in conflict with the Conklings' study, but there seems to be no way to escape that conflict.

With this station at the head of the Concho established without doubt, supporting evidence can be adduced for locating a station near the early post office of Arden. It was approximately thirty miles down the river from the stand on the Gocher Survey to Arden—which is also the distance given in the original log of the Overland Mail between the head of Concho station and the next mail station to the east. This fact offers strong support to the assumption that the lower stage stand on the Concho was at this site near the one-time post office of Arden. There seems to be no doubt that this station was later moved four miles to the west as stated above.

The station at the head of the Concho may be used as an anchor point for study of the route westward just as it has been used in rechecking toward the east. According to the original log of the Overland Mail, it was seventy miles from this point to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River. Careful measurements on good present-day county maps show that the road must have been at least three miles longer than that.⁸⁷ Perhaps, considering the meanders of the road, seventy-five miles is a more accurate figure for this distance than the mail log gave. But whether seventy or seventy-five miles, the road during most of the year was a waterless drive.

Each point where water might be found, even though tem-

⁸⁶Tom Green County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), I, 234.

⁸⁷A straight line from the station at the head of the Concho across maps of Reagan, Upton, and Crane counties to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos measures the distance as seventy-three miles. The writer did this experimental job of map surveying across the maps of these three counties by L. C. Heydrick of Wichita Falls, Texas.

porary, was carefully noted along the route. Eight miles west of the station at the head of the Concho were the Mustang Water Holes, which were often dry. Eleven and one-half miles ahead were the Flat Rock Ponds, shallow basins in the surface rock that sometimes held water.³⁸ These ponds, according to the Conklings' excellent study, were just west of the former Reagan county seat town of Stiles. Six miles beyond the ponds was old Centralia Station in the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railway Company Survey No. 1947. Centralia was built as a way station on Ben Ficklin's mail road established after the Civil War, but all visible evidence indicates that his road at this point was the same as the road used by the Butterfield interests more than a decade earlier. Land surveyors on May 4, 1873, recorded field notes that tie the location of this stage stand to the permanent land records.³⁹ Confirmation of the fact that the El Paso Road passed by this station is given in the field notes of the adjoining survey some seven years later.⁴⁰

Further exact data are furnished by the map makers of the General Land Office. For twenty miles from Centralia Station southwestward to a point near the present-day town of Rankin in Upton County these draftsmen have mapped the mail road.⁴¹ The full twenty miles were used by the Ben Ficklin stage coaches instead of the Butterfield but the part of the road by Centralia Station was also used by the Concord coaches of the Overland Mail. At a mile and a half southwest of Centralia Station the older mail road branched westward toward China Ponds,⁴² Castle Gap, and Horsehead Crossing,⁴³ all of which were known points on the Butterfield Trail. The Conklings discovered the ruins of an old stage stand on the west branch of the trails, two and a half miles west of this point where the roads forked. They named the old depot Llano Estacado and, beyond any reasonable

³⁸Conkling, *The Overland Mail*, I, 361-362.

³⁹Original Transcribed Surveyors Records, Tom Green County (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), IV, 219.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, XVI, 432.

⁴¹General Land Office Map of Upton County, dated, 1918.

⁴²*Ibid.* China Lake is shown in Block Y, Section 23, Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway Company lands.

⁴³General Land Office Map of Crane County, dated 1902. Horsehead Crossing is shown in Block 1, Section 37, Houston and Texas Central Railway lands.



A CONCORD COACH USED ON THE BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL ROUTE

doubt, proved by newspaper items current during the time of the Overland Mail that the man-made and man-supplied oasis was a link in the Butterfield chain of stage stands.⁴⁴ The station was undoubtedly established in answer to the urgent need for water on this seventy-five mile stretch of waterless stage road. Ben Ficklin's answer to the same problem on his mail road, which came after the Civil War, was the establishment of Centralia Station.

The General Land Office draftsmen did not map the Butterfield (or westward) branch of these two mail roads even as far as Llano Estacado Station, but they showed it again at China Ponds in central Upton County (called China Lake on some present-day maps) and from there they showed it all the way across the west half of Upton County.⁴⁵ These stage station ruins discovered by the Conklings were eighteen and one-half miles from the point where the mail road skirted the north side of China Ponds. It was thirteen and one-half miles from these ponds to the east end of the historic little mountain pass that is known as Castle Gap, which zigzagged a full one and one-fourth miles in a southwesterly direction. Finally, it is twelve miles a little south of west to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos.⁴⁶ The total of all these miles from the station at the head of the Concho to this crossing on the Pecos River amounts to seventy-four and one-half miles.

Land records establish the route of the road at the Concho Station; land records again establish the route at and near Centralia Station; and again land records chart the course from China Ponds all the way through Castle Gap near the western edge of Upton County. The land maps at Austin locate Horsehead Crossing at the west end of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Survey No. 37, some twelve miles northwest of present-day McCamey in Crane County.⁴⁷

Thus, by land records almost alone, aided only by the known

⁴⁴Conkling, *The Overland Mail*, I, 366-369. J. Evetts Haley, *Fort Concho, and the Texas Frontier* (San Angelo, 1952), 90n, discovered authenticity of Llano Estacado name.

⁴⁵General Land Office Map of Upton County, dated 1918.

⁴⁶Tom Green County Surveyors Records (MS., County Clerk's Office, San Angelo), D, 123-125. J. W. Armstrong of Tom Green County made the survey in 1884.

⁴⁷General Land Office Map of Crane County, dated 1902.

locations of a few towns and old forts, the course of the pre-Civil War Butterfield Overland Mail route can be charted without great error from Colbert's Ferry on Red River to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos. West of Horsehead Crossing land records are still the major source of information for outlining the route of this old trail all the way west to the Rio Grande at El Paso.

The first of the Butterfield coaches did not actually cross the river at Horsehead Crossing but turned upstream on the east bank fifty-five miles to Emigrant Crossing⁴⁸ and yet another sixty-five miles to Pope's Camp. The writer has not checked this route in land records but the physical path of the river can itself fairly well outline the course of the road between these points. The wagon road which the mail coaches followed had been made by the supply trains of Captain John Pope who had attempted to produce artesian water near the New Mexico line.⁴⁹ After his unsuccessful experiment was finished and abandoned, both his road and his camp were taken over by the Butterfield interests. Pope's abandoned camp was on the east side of the Pecos about four miles south of the New Mexico line. Pope's Crossing

⁴⁸The search for the location of the Emigrant Crossing Station constitutes a most interesting problem. Roscoe and Margaret Conkling reported in their book, *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, I, 377-378, that the probable location of this stage stand was somewhere in Section 25 or 26, Block 33, of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Surveys. The thoroughness of the Conklings' research methods might cause one to accept their solution to the problem without question. If, however, one studies carefully the notes left by Randolph B. Marcy (*Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. [Serial No. 562], Document No. 64), he is led to a different conclusion. Marcy's notes are not at all consistent with the physical facts of the river and the topography at Section 25. The Pecos turns sharply to the southeast at Section 25. Marcy traveled 8° north of east from his river crossing and said that he traveled down near the river in so doing. Plainly his crossing could not have been southeast from that point instead of 8° north of east as he reported.

On the other hand, Section 16, which is five miles downstream from Section 25, is a point at which Marcy's notes are thoroughly consistent with the bends of the river. Moreover, this point in Section 16 is well-known locally as Emigrant Crossing. The writer has worked somewhat laboriously studying the bends of the river on the ground and from maps. He has found no other place that is consistent with all of Marcy's notes except the crossing in Section 16 which is locally known as Emigrant Crossing. Apparently the Emigrant Crossing Station was five miles upstream from Emigrant Crossing itself. There may be, however, some other solution to the problem.

⁴⁹"Conclusion of the Official Review of the Reports upon the Explorations and Surveys for Railroad Routes from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean," *House Executive Documents*, 33rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (Serial No. 797), Document No. 91, pp. 16-18.

was some three miles upstream from his camp.⁵⁰ It was here, a mile or two below the state line, that the mail road crossed the Pecos and extended due west in its route toward present-day El Paso. Some eight and one-half miles west of the Pecos near the center of Section 11, Township 1, Block 59, of the Texas and Pacific Railway lands, the road crossed Delaware Creek. From here the route of the Butterfield Trail is preserved by Texas and Pacific Railway records most of the way across north Culberson County.⁵¹ The writer has a blueprint from the Texas and Pacific tracing of these lands, showing both Delaware Creek and the road that lay to the north of it. At the crossing of Delaware Creek in Section 11, the road was a mile and one-half south of the New Mexico line. Nineteen and one-half miles west of this creek crossing (somewhat more than that by the road itself) the mail road reached Delaware Springs at a point nine miles south of the New Mexico line. Thus, following the general course of Delaware Creek, the Butterfield Trail bore somewhat to the south of its westward objective in order to reach this watering place at Delaware Springs.⁵² Turning slightly to the north of west from here for fifteen miles the road reached Independence Springs just a little less than eight miles south of the New Mexico line.⁵³ Five miles to the west the early mail road reached Pine Springs about six and three-fourths miles south of the New Mexico line.⁵⁴

Here the road could not continue in its westward course since El Capitan Peak, two miles to the west, stood across its path. Bending around the south end of this imposing mountain through Guadalupe Pass, as does the present Carlsbad-El Paso Road, the Butterfield Trail soon reached out of Culberson County into the barren land of the Hudspeth County salt flats. In making this

⁵⁰Ormsby, *The Overland Mail*, 72.

⁵¹These lands were first surveyed by Jacob Kuechler in 1879. They were re-surveyed and mapped by Paul McCombs in 1884.

⁵²Most of the road to Delaware Springs is shown on the McCombs map. Notes on the margin of the map show the exact location (in Section 9, Township 2, Block 62) of the springs and the Butterfield stage stand near by. Delaware Springs were south 78°30' east 373 *varas* from the northwest corner of Section 9. The stage stand was south 81°22' 478 *varas* from the same point.

⁵³The McCombs map shows Independence Springs in Section 43, Township 1, Block 64.

⁵⁴The McCombs map shows Pine Springs in Section 41, Township 1, Block 64. Other notes on the map in Section 41, which may refer to the stage stand, are illegible.

curve to the south of El Capitan Peak the old road passed out of the area later surveyed for the Texas and Pacific Railway Company onto Public School Block No. 121, the maps of which did not chart the path of the early mail road.⁵⁵

Near the boundary of Hudspeth County, however, the Butterfield Trail extended northwestward into the Texas and Pacific lands again—into the area where the road is again shown on the land maps. For ten miles, beginning in Section 42, Township 1, Block 67, of the Texas and Pacific Railway Company lands, the mail road extended almost exactly northwest to the Texas-New Mexico line.⁵⁶ The road passed out of Texas at this point between two monuments that were erected on the state line by the joint Texas-United States Boundary Commission in 1859.⁵⁷

Actually the mail road was not named on the Texas and Pacific land maps, but the fact that it passed by Delaware Springs and the stage stand at that point, by Independence Springs, and by Pine Springs—all of which are known points on the Butterfield Trail—makes its identification hardly subject to question.

Another group of surveyors in addition to those employed by the Texas and Pacific Railway Company has rendered material aid at this point. The joint commission appointed by Texas and the United States surveyed this part of the Texas boundary line (which is also the south line of New Mexico) in 1859. Their survey was in progress at the same time that John Butterfield's mail coaches were moving back and forth over this same part of the Butterfield Trail. The surveyors made extensive observations which map makers charted on paper.⁵⁸ The result of their work leaves a complete map of the Overland Mail Route from this point that is now northeastern Hudspeth County all the way across a small segment of Otero County, New Mexico,

⁵⁵See General Land Office Map of Culberson County, dated 1908. El Capitan Peak is in Section 48, Township 1, Block 66.

⁵⁶See General Land Office Map of Hudspeth County, dated 1917.

⁵⁷*Ibid.* These monuments are shown on the map with the road passing between them.

⁵⁸*Senate Executive Documents*, 47th Cong., 1st Sess. (Serial No. 1987), Document No. 70. This is a report of the Texas Boundary Commission of 1859 and 1860. Map No. 1 appended to the report shows the mail road across what is now El Paso County and the west part of Hudspeth County. Map No. 2 joins Map No. 1 on the east and shows the mail road eastward nearly all the way to the east Hudspeth County line.

back into northwest Hudspeth County, Texas, and southwestwardly through modern El Paso, and up the Rio Grande to where the old road finally left the boundaries of Texas.

The surveyors camped for some days in northeast Hudspeth County by the side of the mail road just about a mile from the place where the road passed out of Texas between the two monuments previously mentioned. The camp site was called Crow Springs. Later a stage stand was erected at this place—but evidently it had not been built when the surveyors camped at the springs; at least their map omitted it. Some twenty-eight miles northwest of Crow Springs the boundary commission map shows the stage stand at Cornudas Tanks, some half dozen miles north of the Texas-New Mexico line. About ten miles beyond this station the map also shows a stage stand at Alamo Springs. Some seven or eight miles westward from Alamo Springs the road bent back into Texas, probably into Section 6, Block B, of the University of Texas land.⁵⁰ Here again the commission erected a monument on each side of the mail road, but the General Land Office map of Hudspeth County does not show these monuments. Another fifteen miles along the mail road is the well-known point in El Paso County known as Hueco Tanks. The mail station was just east of the small mountain that is on the north of the road at this point. Franklin, a mail station within modern El Paso, was another thirty miles westward.

The trail extended westward across the southern rim of the United States to California where it turned northward and terminated at San Francisco. The part of the route westward from Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos was abandoned after a year of operation because of the shortage of water. A ferry was established at Horsehead Crossing, and the route was changed to a road that was already in operation through the Davis Mountains.

A review of the cardinal points on this branch of the Butterfield Overland Mail reveals the following facts. From Horsehead Crossing the distance was thirty-four miles southwest to Comanche Springs. The trail from Comanche Springs west followed the San Antonio-El Paso Road which was already well established. Ran-

⁵⁰See General Land Office Map of Hudspeth County, dated 1917. This block of the University of Texas lands covers some 450,000 acres. It is the largest tract of the University land holdings.

dolph B. Marcy gives the names of important camp sites and the distance from camp to camp as follows: (1) from Comanche Creek to Leon Springs—8.88 miles, (2) from this point to Barela Springs [Barrilla Spring] 33.86 miles, (3) from here to Fort Davis 28 miles, (4) to Barrel Springs 18.42 miles, (5) to Dead Man's Hole 13.58 miles, (6) next to Van Horn's Wells 32.83 miles, (7) to Eagle Springs 19.74 miles, (8) to the mouth of Cañon de los Camenos 32.03 miles, (9) then the road runs up the Rio Grande to San Elizario [San Elizario] 61.13 miles, (10) then to Socorro 9.25 miles, and (11) finally to Fort Bliss 15 miles.⁶⁰

Without great difficulty, one may find the present-day locations of nearly all of these points from the locations of existing towns or from land records. Comanche Creek (actually the point was Comanche Springs) is at modern Fort Stockton. Barrilla Spring is preserved by land records as the west corner of Pecos County.⁶¹ The stage stand that took the name was on Limpia Creek (principal branch of Barrilla Creek) two miles to the south. Fort Davis was at the present-day town of the same name. Barrel Springs are located in Section 1, Block 1, of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company lands in Jeff Davis County.⁶² Dead Man's Hole is in Section 31, Block 3, of the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company lands, also in Jeff Davis County.⁶³ Van Horn's Wells are west of Lobo, nine miles south of the town of Van Horn and less than a mile west of U. S. Highway 90.⁶⁴ The site of Eagle Springs is preserved by the 1917 General Land Office map of Hudspeth County. It is Section 9, Township 9 South, Block 68, of the Texas and Pacific Railway Company lands. Cañon de los Camenos is near the Rio Grande, southwest of present Sierra Blanca. From this locality the road went up the Rio Grande past San Elizario and Socorro to Fort Bliss and Franklin, both of which were in what is presently El Paso.

⁶⁰Randolph B. Marcy, *The Prairie Traveler: A Handbook for Overland Expeditions* (New York, 1859), 289-290.

⁶¹See General Land Office Map of Jeff Davis County, dated 1915. The spring that marks the west corner of Pecos County is shown on this map.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴*Ibid.* The stage stand was in Hudspeth County, but it was on an extension of the Jeff Davis County map that the stage stand was shown.

Above El Paso the tracer of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route comes to the border of Texas and this time to the end of this trail hunt. The search has depended heavily on surveyors' notes and on the simple arithmetic of distance. The chief function of this effort has been to correct some of the errors that have crept into the record and to establish more definitely the route of an interesting old trail that still adds its touch of glamor to the story of frontier America.⁶⁵

⁶⁵For the sake of accuracy such local errors as the following ought to be corrected. The Texas Highway Department erected an expensive monument on U. S. Highway 281 about five miles northwest of Bowie that purports to mark a point on the Butterfield Trail. There is another marker about seven miles northwest of Bowie on U. S. Highway 287 that also attests to the same misinformation. Both markers are a full twenty miles off the actual Butterfield Mail Route as indicated by the commissioners minutes and surveyors' notes cited in this paper.