

The Great Prairie Highway

The Santa Fe Trail stirs imaginations as few other historic trails can. For 60 years the Trail was one thread in a web of international trade routes. It influenced economies as far away as New York and London. Spanning 900 miles of the Great Plains between the United States (Missouri) and Mexico (Santa Fe), it brought together a cultural mosaic of individuals who cooperated—and at times clashed. In the process, the rich and varied cultures of Great

Plains Indian peoples caught in the middle were changed forever. Soldiers used the Trail during the 1840s border disputes between the Republic of Texas and Mexico, and America's Civil War, and troops policed conflicts between traders and Indian tribes. With the traders and military freighters tramped a curious company of gold-seekers, emigrants, adventurers, mountain men, hunters, American Indians, guides, packers, translators,

invalids, reporters, and Mexican children bound for schools in Los Estados Unidos (the United States). Spain jealously protected the borders of its New Mexico colony, prohibiting manufacturing and international trade. Missourians and others visiting Santa Fe told of an isolated provincial capital starved for manufactured goods and supplies—a potential gateway to Mexico's interior markets. In 1821 the Mexican people revolted against Spanish

rule. With independence, they unlocked the gates of trade, using the Santa Fe Trail as the key. Encouraged by Mexican officials, the Santa Fe trade boomed, strengthening and linking the economies of Missouri and Mexico's northern provinces. The close of the Civil War in 1865 released America's industrial energies, and the railroad pushed westward, gradually shortening and then replacing the Santa Fe Trail.

gathered wood or buffalo chips for fuel, and cooked and ate the day's main meal, created from a monotonous daily ration of one pound of flour, one pound or so of sowbelly (bacon), one ounce of coffee, two ounces of sugar, and a pinch of salt. Beans, dried apples, or buffalo or other game were occasional treats. Crews then repaired their wagons, yokes, and harnesses; greased wagon wheels; doctored animals; and hunted. They moved

on soon after noon, fording streams before that night's stop because overnight storms could turn trickling creeks into torrents. And stock that was cold in the harness first thing in the morning tended to be unruly. At day's end, crews took care of animals, made necessary repairs, chose night guards, and enjoyed a few hours of well-earned leisure and sleep.

Deceptively empty of human presence as the prairie landscape may

appear, the lands the Trail passed through were the long-held homelands of many American Indian peoples. Here were the hunting grounds of the Comanche, Kiowa, southern bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho, and Plains Apache, as well as the homelands of the Osage, Kansas (Kaw), Jicarilla Apache, Ute, and Pueblo. Most early encounters were peaceful negotiations centering on access to tribal lands and trade in horses, mules, and other items that Indians, Mexicans, and Americans coveted. As Trail traffic increased, so

did confrontations—resulting from misunderstandings and conflicting values—that disrupted traditional American Indian lifeways and Trail traffic. Mexican and American troops provided escorts for wagon trains. Growing numbers of Trail travelers and settlers moved west, bringing the railroad with them. As lands were parceled out and buffalo were hunted nearly to extinction, Indian peoples were pushed aside or assigned to reservations.

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Santa Fe Trail Timeline

Pre-1540
American Indians establish trade and travel routes that later become part of Santa Fe Trail.

1540-1541
Francisco Vázquez de Coronado explores from Mexico to Quivira (Kansas).

1601
Juan de Oñate spends 5 months traveling with wagons and artillery through the Plains.

1739
Paul and Peter Mallet make first French trading venture to Santa Fe from Illinois country.

1792
Frenchman Pedro Vial travels from Santa Fe to Saint Louis for Spanish government.

1819
Treaty between U.S. and Spain makes Arkansas River international boundary.

1821
Mexico wins independence from Spain, and William Becknell's party from Missouri is welcomed in Santa Fe.

1825
Sen. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri (right) arranges for U.S. Government to survey Trail.

1833-1834
The Bent brothers, Charles (left) and William, and Cerán St. Vrain build Bent's Fort.

1836
Texas wins independence from Mexico.

1844
Trader Josiah Gregg chronicles his trips over the Trail in *Commerce of the Prairies*.

1846
U.S. invades Mexico.

1848
U.S. and Mexico acquire almost half of Mexico's lands (including New Mexico) in the

1849-1852
California Gold Rush increases Trail traffic.

1851
Fort Union is established to help protect Trail commerce.

1861-1865
U.S. Civil War. 1862 battle at Glorieta Pass ends the Santa Fe Trail's push westward.

1869
Trail grows shorter as railroad pushes westward.

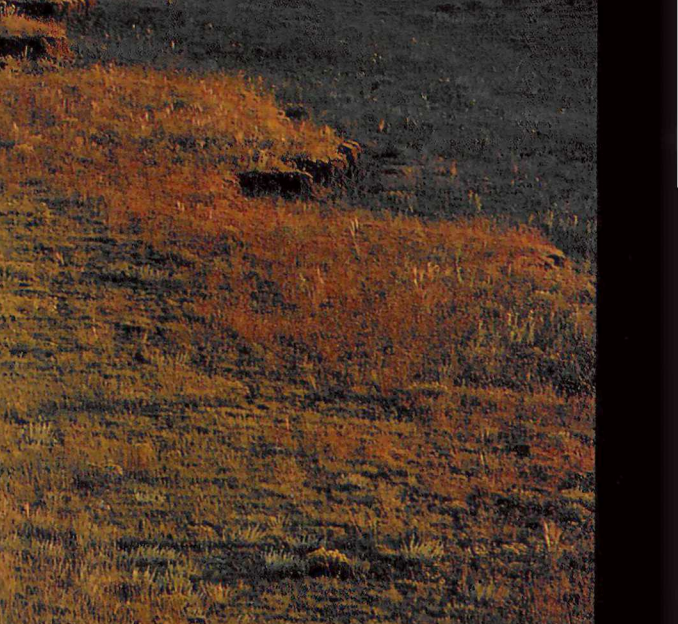
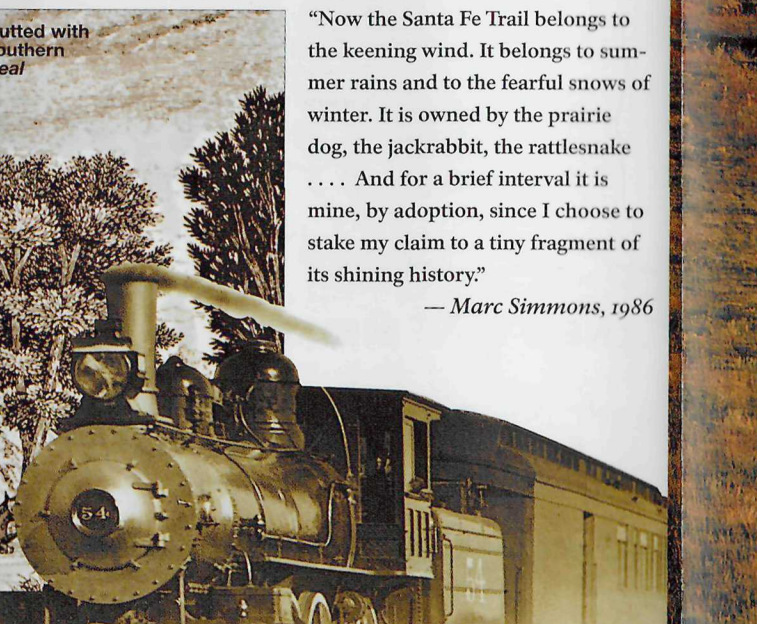
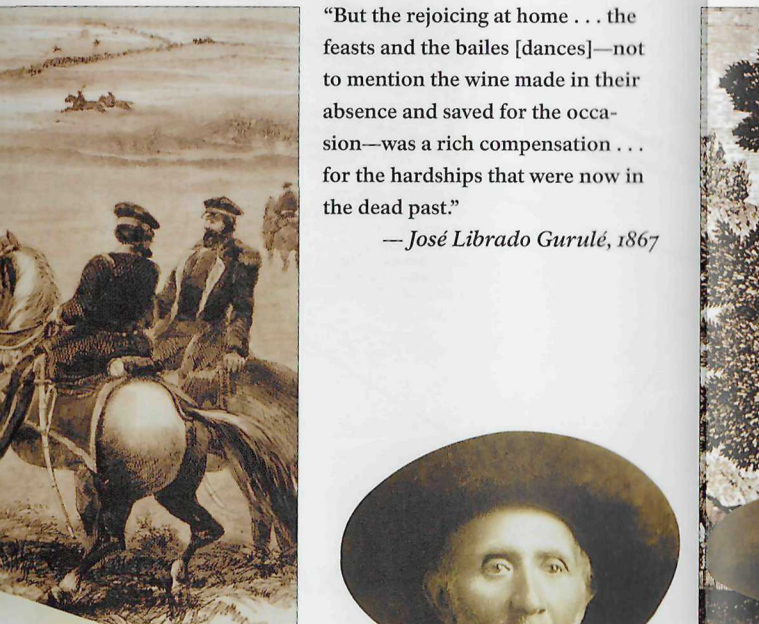
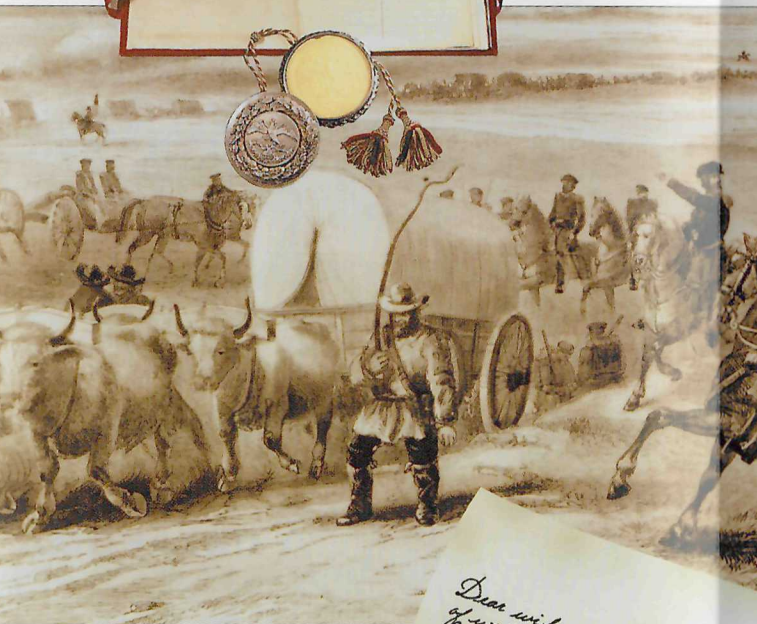
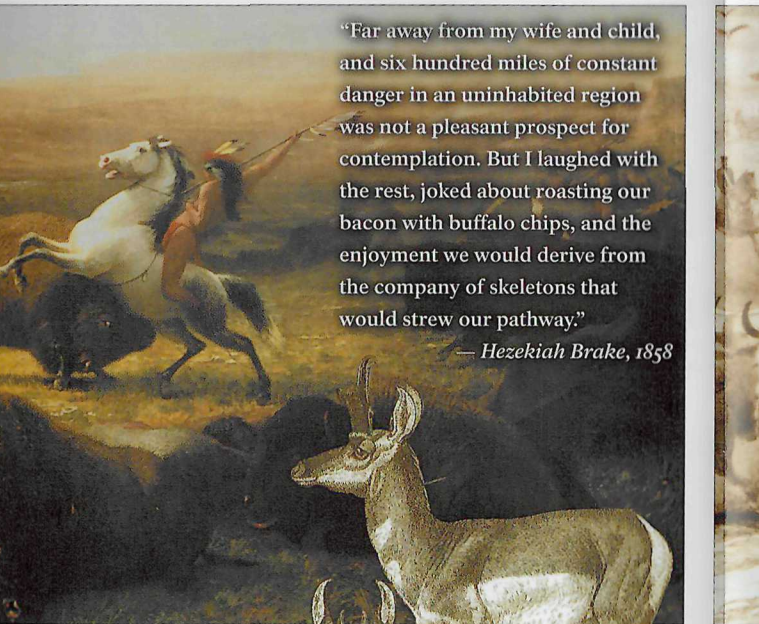
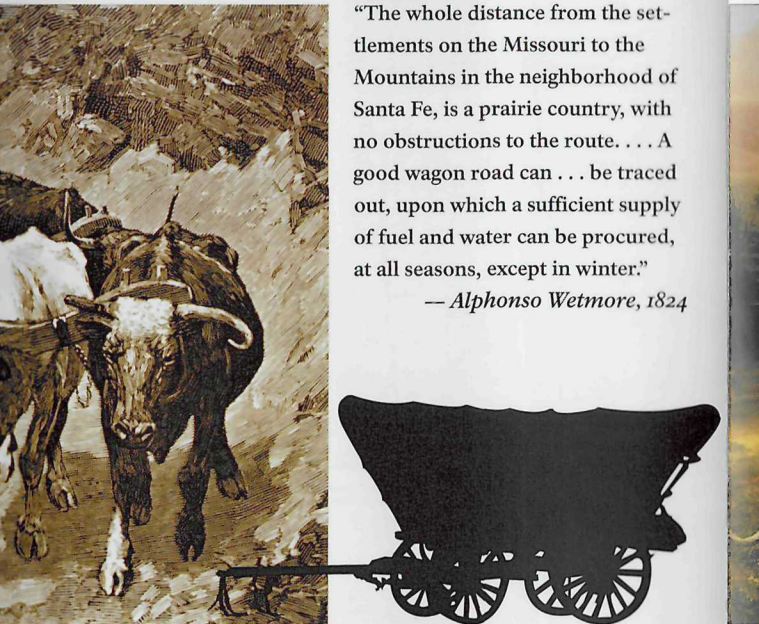
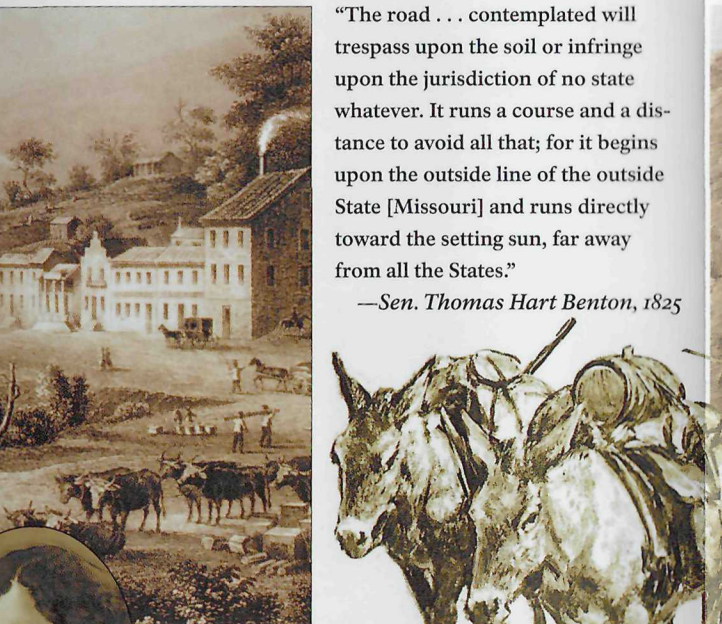
1878
Railroad reaches Forton Pass on the Mountain Route.

1880
Railroad reaches Santa Fe; Santa Fe Trail slips into history.

1906
The Daughters of the American Revolution begins erecting Trail markers.

1986
Santa Fe Trail Association forms to help preserve and promote awareness and appreciation of Trail.

1987
Congress designates Santa Fe National Historic Trail under the National Trails System Act.



In 1821 the eastern Trail terminus was Franklin, Mo.; by 1832 Independence, Mo.; and by 1845, here at Westport Landing (now Kansas City, Mo.). Textiles (left) and hardware were traded west; silver and mules were traded east.

Emily Fisher's Independence Hotel catered to Trail travelers.

William J. Curtis

Mule and ox drivers made day-to-day Trail operations work. Mexican *arrieros* (muleteers) were famous for their abilities. Oxen became favored to pull freight wagons.

Buffalo Bill Historical Center

Some American Indian groups resisted encroachment by Euro-Americans on their lands and resources.

Buffalo Bill Historical Center

The Trail crossed prairies and semi-arid lands. Travelers might see fleet antelope (right). Buffalo were driven close to extinction in the 1870s.

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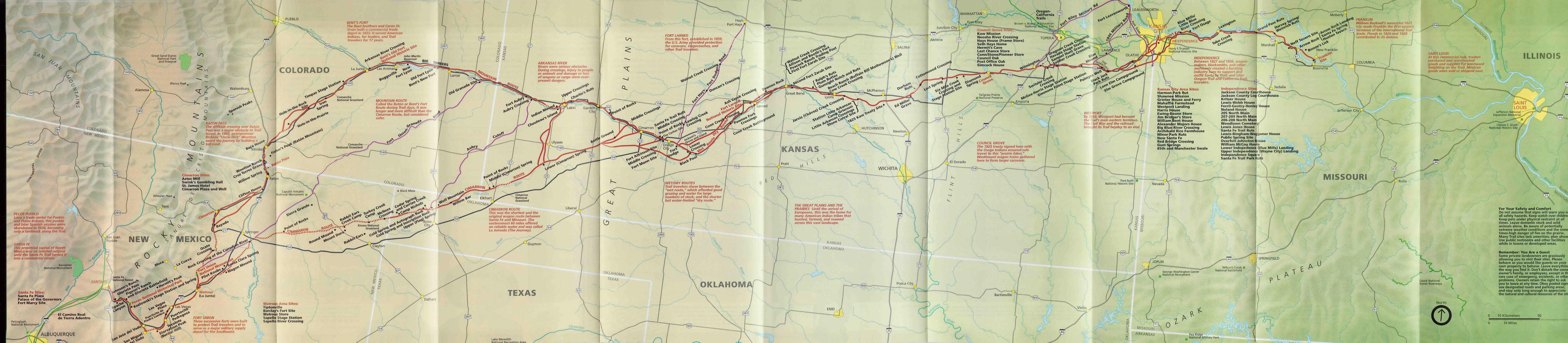
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Visiting the Trail Today

Freight wagons no longer cross the prairies, but the Trail's legacy endures as buildings, historic sites, landmarks, and original wagon-wheel ruts. The National Park Service, working with the Santa Fe Trail Association, coordinates efforts to preserve, develop, and enjoy the Trail and provides technical and limited financial help to Trail projects. Private landowners, nonprofit groups, and federal, state, and local agencies manage most Trail resources.

For information contact: National Trails System Office—Santa Fe, National Park Service, P.O. Box 728, Santa Fe, NM 87504-0728; 505-988-6888; www.nps.gov/safe. For membership and activities information contact: Santa Fe Trail Association, Santa Fe Trail Center, RR3, Larned, KS 67550; www.santafetrail.org.

Private individuals and organizations own much of the Santa Fe Trail. Not all sites are open for public use; some are open only certain hours and days. Check guidebooks and ask locally before going onto private land. Many state, county, and city museums, chambers of commerce, and tourist information centers provide Trail information. Distinctive signs mark the auto tour route that parallels the Trail. **Certified Trail Properties:** Non-federal historic sites, trail segments, and interpretive facilities that meet National Park Service standards for resource protection and public enjoyment may become part of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail through voluntary certification. Look for the official Trail logo.



Background colors on the large map (color key below) suggest the vegetation changes Trail travelers witnessed en route. The box on the map silhouette below shows the area the large map covers.



As you visit Trail sites, please heed the following to protect yourself, the Trail, and rights of private owners. Unless otherwise indicated, hike on designated trails and keep off historic buildings, ruins, and other structures. Do not use metal detectors, dig at sites, or collect—or disturb—artifacts.

Trail sites on federal lands:

- Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (NPS)**
35110 Highway 194 E.
La Junta, CO 81050-9523
719-383-5010
- Cimarron National Grassland (USDA Forest Service)**
242 Hwy. 56 East
P.O. Box 300
Elkhart, KS 67950
620-697-4621
- Comanche National Grassland (USDA Forest Service)**
1420 East 3rd St.
La Junta, CO 81050
719-384-2181
- Fort Larned National Historic Site (NPS)**
Rt. 3, Larned, KS 67550
620-285-6911
- Fort Union National Monument (NPS)**
P.O. Box 127
Watrous, NM 87753
505-425-8025
- John Martin Reservoir (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)**
For information contact:
John Martin Reservoir State Park
30703 Rd. 24
Hasty, CO 81044
719-829-1801
- Kiowa National Grassland (USDA Forest Service)**
714 N. Main St.
Clayton, NM 88415
505-374-9652
- Pecos National Historical Park (NPS)**
P.O. Box 418
Pecos, NM 87652-0418
505-757-6414
- Santa Fe National Forest (USDA Forest Service)**
1474 Rodeo Road
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505-438-7840

Obtain travel information for Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, or New Mexico from:

- Colorado Welcome Center**
109 E. Beech, Suite B
Lamar, CO 81052
719-336-3485
- Colorado Welcome Center**
309 Nevada
Trinidad, CO 81082
719-846-9512
- Kansas Division of Travel and Tourism**
700 S.W. Harrison, Suite 1300
Topeka, KS 66603-3712
800-252-6727
- Missouri Division of Tourism**
P.O. Box 1055
Jefferson City, MO 65102
800-877-1234
- New Mexico Department of Tourism**
P.O. Box 20003
Santa Fe, NM 87503
800-545-2040
- Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department**
500 Will Rogers Memorial Bldg.
2401 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4492
800-652-6552

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