THE SOUTHWESTERN TRAILS TO CALIFORNIA IN 1849

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Most of the argonauts of '49 who journeyed overland to California traveled the northern route by way of the Platte River, the South Pass, and the Humboldt River. That many argonauts also used southwestern trails to reach the gold fields is now well known, yet the details of this migration remain to be told.² It has seemed worth while to contribute more definite information on this subject, because the movement of population to California in 1849 across the south-western frontier was national in scope and importance.

Early in 1848 gold was discovered in California by James W. Marshall. No sooner had authentic news of this discovery reached the East than the people were informed by President Polk that Governor Mason of California, after a personal tour of the gold fields, had reported that in his opinion there was "more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers than would pay the cost of the present war with Mexico a hundred times over."³ Public excitement, already aroused by the wild rumors emanating from California, now became intense. Thousands of men in all parts of the country and in all stations of life made preparations to hasten to the golden West. Farmers left their plows, merchants closed their shops, journalists forsook their profession, mechanics quit their trades, farmers, merchants, journalists, and mechanics left their respective professions to embark on the journey to California.


² After the present paper was written an article was published by Mabelle E. Martin in the Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXVIII, 1924, 287-301, entitled "California Emigrant Roads through Texas." This article discusses some of the details of the California migration through Texas, but the present paper, in treating the same subject, differs materially from Mrs. Martin's article.

physicians and lawyers took down their shingles, men deserted their wives, and many clergymen abandoned their holy calling to seek after worldly treasures. This "yellow fever," as it was called, was, indeed, a contagious disease, which spread with great rapidity from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi Valley, producing such excitement as the country had never before witnessed.  

Which was the best route to California and when to start, were questions most frequently discussed by prospective emigrants and by the newspapers. Of all the routes that were mentioned, the southwestern overland trails at first received the least attention, except in certain parts of the South and the West. The all-water route around Cape Horn, the land and water routes by Panama or Mexico, and the Platte River overland route were most popular. But after the expense of the trip by sea began to be appreciated, and especially after the news of the difficulties encountered by emigrants crossing the Isthmus of Panama reached the country, more serious consideration began to be accorded the overland trails through the Southwest. In many sections ex-soldiers of the Mexican War persuaded emigrants that the roads from Texas and thence through Mexico were by far the best. Late in December, 1848, the New York Tribune, which heretofore had been a staunch advocate of the water routes to California, admitted that the overland trail by way of Santa Fé and the Gila River, though long and tedious, was probably as good a route as any, especially for those who started from points west of the Allegheny Mountains. The Tribune continued to advocate trails through the Southwest in February of the following year, suggesting the route through Texas and along the Gila River for those who could pass New Orleans by the middle of March, and the route from Arkansas to the Gila River by way of Santa Fé for those who could pass Little Rock by the first of April.  

4 Boston Courier, Jan. 13, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Jan. 20, 1849; Charleston (S. C.) Courier, Jan. 30, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Dec. 19, 1848; The Mississippian (Jackson), Feb. 16, 1849; Daily Missouri Republican (St. Louis), April 9, 1849; Fort Smith Herald, March 21, 1849; Howe, op. cit., 4; Bancroft, op. cit., 118.  

in Philadelphia and Washington in the published letters of men who had first-hand information of western travel.\textsuperscript{6} Newspapers in Mobile and New Orleans began to advocate roads leading from Texas through Mexico, while in Mississippi and Tennessee many opinions were expressed in favor of the way by Fort Smith and the Gila River.\textsuperscript{7}

But of all those who were most enthusiastic in recommending the southwestern trails as the best means of reaching the new El Dorado, the frontier states of Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri must be ranked first. Their enthusiasm was determined by their own interests, for by encouraging overland migration through the Southwest they expected to place themselves on the main highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Numerous letters from all parts of the country were received by the frontier towns in these states inquiring about the best route to pursue. Such inquiries were promptly answered either through the newspapers or by means of circulars distributed through the mails. Texas and Arkansas were in favor of the southwestern trails to California from the very beginning, while Missouri for a time was divided in its opinion between the Platte River route and the Santa Fé trail.\textsuperscript{8} Firmly convinced of the advantages offered by the routes which they championed, these states supported their contentions by lengthy, if not always accurate, arguments. They quoted statements of frontiersmen, army officers, travelers, and explorers. Texas energetically advertised two main groups of routes. One of these groups included the trails extending from Brownsville, Corpus Christi,\textsuperscript{9} and San Antonio to the lower Rio Grande, and thence either southwest to the Mexican port of Mazatlán or northwest by way of Chihuahua and the Gila River to the American port of San Diego. Another group embraced trails from San Antonio to the Gila River, proceeding either through

\textsuperscript{6}Daily Missouri Republican, Feb. 27, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, April 11, 1849.
\textsuperscript{7}Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Jan. 5, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, Feb. 9, 1849; The Mississippian (Jackson), March 7, 1849.
\textsuperscript{8}Texas Democrat (Austin), Feb. 24, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register (Houston), Jan. 25, 1849; Arkansas Banner (Little Rock), March 20, 1849; Fort Smith Herald, Jan. 17, 1849; Daily Missouri Republican, Jan. 9, Feb. 7, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, Jan. 11, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Dec. 30, 1848.
\textsuperscript{9}Corpus Christi was very active for a time in advertising a supposed route from that place to El Paso; but when this way proved impracticable it advocated the trails through Mexico.
Presidio del Norte and Chihuahua or through El Paso and New Mexico. It was argued that these routes, on account of the mild climate of Texas, would permit the emigrant to make an early start and hence bring him to the mines before those who took a more northern course. Furthermore, it was claimed that the argonauts who chose the route from San Antonio to El Paso would have the protection of United States troops under General Worth, who had been ordered by the War Department to open a military road between these points. Arkansas was very active in advertising the trail which began at Fort Smith and Van Buren and proceeded along the Canadian River to Santa Fé, whence the so-called old Spanish trail might be followed to Los Angeles or the Gila River trail to San Diego. It asserted that this course was the most direct route to the gold mines, that it was less dangerous than the trail from Missouri, and that emigrants who traveled it would be accompanied by a military escort under the command of Captain Randolph B. Marcy. Al-

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10 The modern Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

11 The editor of the Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, commenting, in the February 15, 1849, issue, on the arrival of some emigrants from St. Louis to take the route through Texas to California, remarked: "These emigrants, therefore, may actually be digging in the gold mines of San Francisco or Los Angeles, before the emigrants left at St. Louis can commence their journey. The peach trees here are in blossom, the grass is springing up fresh upon the prairies, and the Spring birds are singing merrily, while, according to Telegraph accounts etc., St. Louis' cold chilly winter still chains the rivers with icy bands and covers the prairies with his snowy mantle." The citizens of Austin distributed a circular advertising the routes through Texas to California. In this circular it was stated: "The Missouri trail has ceased to be considered the only avenue of emigration and commerce. . . With a climate of great salubrity and mildness, a soil which supports the richest vegetation during the entire year, and a geographical position which naturally connects her with the far west, Texas claims the possession of advantages to the traveller, merchant and emigrant which cannot be found combined on any other route. The free air of the prairies bids defiance to the diseases of the crowded seaports or pestilence-breathing marshes of the Isthmus. Abundance of game protect the Hunter from the dread of famine, cool streams assuage his thirst, and scattered mists of timber afford a grateful shelter from the noonday heats." S. G. Haynie, Circular Regarding Emigration to California (Austin, 1849). See also Nacogdoches Times, Jan. 20, 1849; Corpus Christi Star, Feb. 10, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Jan. 25, March 8, 1849; Texas Democrat (Austin), Jan. 28, Feb. 24, 1849; The Mississippian (Jackson), March 23, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), March 2, 1849.

12 The editor of the Little Rock Arkansas State Democrat, April 27, 1849, warned the emigrants of the dangers of the trail from Missouri: "If there is any proper time for starting to California, from the frontier of Missouri, it is about the first
though Missouri was more partial to the northern route, it also recommended the well-known Santa Fé trail from Independence and Westport to New Mexico, and thence either along the Gila or the so-called old Spanish trail to California.13

Such advertising, characterized as it frequently was by typical western exaggeration, resulted in the publication of conflicting statements in Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas; each state, and sometimes each frontier town within a state, claiming to be astride the best route to California. Still, publicity produced results. Early in 1849 some gold seekers in every state in the union except Delaware and Michigan14 began to make preparations to travel to California over one of the advertised southwestern trails. They invested in extensive equipment for the western journey, buying such articles as bacon, flour, coffee, salt and pepper, dried fruit, clothing, bedding, tents, cooking utensils, guns, pistols, ammunition, mining tools, wagons, and oxen, mules, or horses. Some of these purchases were made before leaving home; others were made in the larger cities on the way; still others were made in the frontier towns along the southwestern border. In most cases emigrants coöperated and formed a company, adopting a constitution and by-laws, contributing a specified sum of money to defray expenses, and electing officers to di-

13 Daily Missouri Republican, Jan. 9, Feb. 7, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, Jan. 11, 1849.

14 It is possible that emigrants from these two states may have traveled to California over southwestern trails, though the writer has no evidence to this effect. J. H. Widber, Statement of a Pioneer of 1849 (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1; Michel Caricof, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1; Boston Courier, Feb. 6, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Feb. 10, 17, 24, 1849; Charleston (S. C.) Courier, Feb. 5, 1849; St. Louis Daily New Era, Feb. 22, March 1, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Jan. 12, 1849; Arkansas Banner, April 3, 17, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), Jan. 26, March 16, 30, 1849; Fort Smith Herald, April 4, June 20, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Feb. 15, 1849.
rect the fortunes of the organization until it reached the promised land. These companies, like the overland caravans to Santa Fé, were organized along military lines, each one being in charge of an officer called a captain, who usually was an ex-soldier of the Mexican War, or an experienced trapper, or a frontiersman familiar with western travel. Hundreds of emigrants congregated at Boston, New York, Mobile, and New Orleans, where ships were chartered to convey them to the Texas ports of Brazos Santiago, Corpus Christi, Port Lavaca, and Galveston. Others traveled from Philadelphia and Baltimore, partly by rail and partly by stage, to Pittsburgh or Wheeling, where river transportation was available to the western border. Many emigrants west of the Allegheny Mountains embarked on river steamers at Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville on the Ohio, and at St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, and New Orleans on the Mississippi, and pursued their way to the frontier towns of Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas by way of the Missouri River, the Arkansas River, or the Gulf of Mexico.15

On account of its mild climate, Texas was the starting point for the first overland migration to California in 1849. Early in that year emigrants from at least twenty states16 began to assemble at Brownsville, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Austin, Fredericksburg, and in the vicinity of Dallas. These towns soon experienced such boom times as had not been seen since the early days of the Mexican War. They were highly elated at the prospect of being placed on the main highway of travel from the East to California and had visions of becoming great and prosperous cities. For the time being they were very active in welcoming

15 Widber, Statement (cited ante, note 14), 1; Audubon, op. cit., 42-50; Boston Courier, Feb. 6, 1849; Weekly Herald (New York City), Feb. 3, 17, March 10, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Jan. 27, Feb. 24, March 10, 24, April 4, 1849; Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, Feb. 15, 1849; Dollar Weekly Commercial (Cincinnati), March 8, 1849; Daily Missouri Republican, Jan. 21, 23, Feb. 25, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, May 1, 1849; Memphis Tri-Weekly Appeal, March 20, 1849; Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier, Feb. 27, 1849; Arkansas State Gazette (Little Rock), March 22, 1849; Arkansas Banner, Feb. 6, March 13, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), March 16, 30, 1849.

16 Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. In 1849 there were thirty states in the union.
the emigrants, in suggesting to them the best routes to follow, and in furnishing them with needed supplies for the overland journey. The only thing to mar this otherwise cordial reception was a severe outbreak of cholera, which swept through the whole country in 1849, reaching Texas in the latter part of February of that year. The worst attacks appear to have been at Brownsville, Laredo, and San Antonio, where the epidemic raged for many weeks. In the latter place, where the heavy mortality included General Worth of Mexican War fame, it was reported that deaths were so numerous that the cathedral bells were "no longer permitted to toll for the departed"; and that "men of strong nerve and undoubted courage shrank in fear," many fleeing to the country to save their lives. A number of emigrants succumbed to the disease, while others became so discouraged that they abandoned their trip to California and returned home. Yet the majority continued on their journey and departed for the gold regions in high spirits, close to three thousand leaving Texas for California before the end of the year.

As early as January the first overlanders started from Brownsville, Corpus Christi, and San Antonio, and after crossing the lower Rio Grande proceeded primarily through Mexican territory. From Brownsville they traveled in a northwest direction, either by boat up the Rio Grande or by pack train along its banks, to Roma or Mier, and thence westward through Monterey and Saltillo to Parras — the route traversed by the army of General Taylor during the Mexican War. From Corpus Christi they journeyed over well-worn commercial trails to Rio Grande

17 Mary A. Maverick, Memoirs (ms. in the Univ. of Texas Library), 104-6; Christian Reis, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1-2; Audubon, op. cit., 51-69; Howe, op. cit., 31-36; C. R. Williams, Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes . . . (Boston, 1914), I, 53; Western Texian (San Antonio), Dec. 29, 1848, Jan. 12, May 3, 1849; Northern Standard (Clarksville, Texas), Feb. 10, April 28, 1849, Feb. 16, 23, 1850; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Feb. 15, March 8, April 12, May 17, 24, 1849; Texas Democrat (Austin), Feb. 10, April 7, 21, 28, 1849; Corpus Christi Star, Jan. 20, 27, Feb. 10, 24, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Feb. 23, 27, March 13, 15, 31, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, April 28, 1849; Boston Courier, April 24, 1849.

18 This number is an estimate based on a summary of all the source material available to the writer.

19 Some of the first emigrants to leave Corpus Christi started out with the intention of proceeding by way of El Paso, but because of the difficulties encountered on the way they were forced to cross the lower Rio Grande and travel through Mexico.
City and to Laredo, from which points Parras was reached by way of Monterey and Saltillo. From San Antonio they proceeded over commercial and military highways to Eagle Pass and to Presidio del Rio Grande,\(^{20}\) and thence to the southwest through San Fernando and Monclova to Parras—the road traveled by the troops under General Wool in the Mexican War. After leaving Parras the emigrants followed one of three main routes. One of the most popular of these was the route through the city of Durango to the port of Mazatlan on the Pacific, where water transportation could be obtained to San Francisco. Another much-traveled route led through Parral, Chihuahua, and Janos to the Guadalupe Pass,\(^{21}\) where it joined Cooke’s wagon road from the Rio Grande and followed it to the port of San Diego in California. Here the journey was continued by boat to San Francisco or by overland trail to the mines. The third route, which was the least used by emigrants, extended northwest from Parras to Altar in the state of Sonora, and thence to the Pima Indian villages\(^{22}\) on the Gila trail to San Diego. Some emigrants did not follow the main trails. One company, for example, left Corpus Christi and journeyed northwest along the Nueces River with the intention of eventually reaching El Paso; but finding that this was not feasible it turned back to Presidio del Rio Grande and traveled one of the main routes. Another group of emigrants from San Antonio left the regular road near Monclova, and after an arduous journey to the northwest over a little-used mountain and desert trail finally emerged at Presidio del Norte, where they took the route through Chihuahua and Janos to the Gila.\(^{23}\)

Emigrants traveling the above-mentioned trails were the first

\(^{20}\) About forty miles south of Eagle Pass, Texas, on the west bank of the Rio Grande.

\(^{21}\) Near the junction point of the present states of Chihuahua, Sonora, New Mexico, and Arizona.

\(^{22}\) Near the modern town of Maricopa, Arizona.

\(^{23}\) A. L. Adams to M. A. Maverick, May 11, 1849, Maverick Papers (mss. in the Univ. of Texas Library); Audubon, *op. cit.*, 92-155; *Civilian and Galveston Gazette* (Galveston), May 28, 1849; Corpus Christi *Star*, Jan. 27, Feb. 10, 17, 24, April 21, May 5, 1849; *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, April 5, Aug. 30, 1849; *Northern Standard*, April 7, 1849; *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), March 2, April 15, 25, June 20, July 13, 1849; *Boston Courier*, April 23, Oct. 19, 1849; *Charleston (S. C.) Courier*, July 24, 30, 1849.
to reach California in 1849 by routes which were primarily overland. They required anywhere from three to six months to make the trip. Except for those who journeyed part of the way by the Gila route, the majority met comparatively few real hardships after leaving Texas. Excessive heat, an occasional scarcity of water, and inadequate shipping facilities at Mazatlan were among the more important obstacles encountered; yet none of these, though exceedingly disheartening at times, was sufficiently serious to result in the loss of life. Even though the thieving propensities of the Mexicans were much complained of, the argonauts on the whole were well treated by the people as well as by the central government, the latter permitting all gold seekers to carry arms for self-defense provided the emigrant companies did not assume a military guise. Emigrants were delighted with some of the scenery along the way and showed much interest in the quaint customs and habitations of the natives, which were so different in many respects from their own. Some were even induced to remain in the country for a while to aid the inhabitants in their attempt to exterminate several of the more warlike Indian tribes. A number of Texans who were thus employed by the state of Chihuahua had a rather unique contract which provided for remuneration on a commission basis, $200 being paid them for every scalp of Apache Indians over fourteen years of age and $100 each for all scalps of Apache under this age. Most of the emigrants who traveled these routes were men, and the majority used pack animals rather than wagons as the chief mode of transportation.\(^24\)

The second group of routes used by the overlanders from Texas began at San Antonio and extended to the northwest, crossing the upper Rio Grande at Presidio del Norte and El Paso. These routes, unlike those from Brownsville, Corpus Christi, and San Antonio across the lower Rio Grande, were

comparatively new and had only recently been explored by some enterprising citizens of Texas and by the United States government. In August, 1848, the citizens of San Antonio, desiring to establish direct commercial relations with the inhabitants of northern Mexico, had sent Colonel John C. Hays on an expedition to find a practicable wagon road from San Antonio to Chihuahua via El Paso. Accompanied by a military escort of Texas Rangers under the command of Captain Samuel Highsmith, Hays had only been able to reach Presidio del Norte after an arduous journey of over fifty days. Too fatigued to continue the rest of the distance to El Paso, he had returned home and had reported that in his opinion the best wagon road from San Antonio extended north to the San Saba River, and thence northwest across the Pecos River to El Paso.\footnote{John S. Ford, Memoirs (ms. in the Univ. of Texas Library), 477; Samuel A. Maverick, Chihuahua Expedition, 1848 (ms. in the Univ. of Texas Library); Maverick, Memoirs (cited ante, note 17), 102-4; Western Texian, Jan. 12, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Dec. 26, 1848; Texas Democrat (Austin), Aug. 16, 30, Sept. 20, 1848; Texian Advocate (Victoria), Aug. 31, 1848.} Shortly after the return of Colonel Hays, the War Department, desiring to open a road to the territory recently acquired from Mexico, ordered Lieutenant W. H. C. Whiting of the Engineers and Lieutenant W. F. Smith of the Topographical Engineers to make a reconnaissance to "ascertain if there be a practicable and convenient route for military and commercial purposes between El Paso and the Gulf of Mexico, passing by or near San Antonio or Austin." On February 12, 1849, Lieutenants Whiting and Smith, accompanied by a small military escort and by a guide who had traveled with the Hays expedition, left San Antonio and made their way northward to the San Saba River over part of the route recommended by Colonel Hays; and, after following this stream to its source, proceeded westward across the Pecos River to El Paso. But because of the scarcity of water between the San Saba and Pecos rivers, Whiting and Smith decided to follow a different route on the homeward trip. After traveling down the valley of the Rio Grande about one hundred miles from El Paso, they turned east to the Pecos River and continued down the right bank of this stream about sixty miles. From this point they crossed over to Devils River, which was followed to within
a few miles of its mouth; and then journeying almost due east they crossed Las Moras Creek, the Nueces River, and the Rio Seco, arriving at San Antonio on May 21. Lieutenant Whiting reported that the object of the reconnaissance had been attained and that his return route could be made into a practicable wagon road for military and commercial purposes between San Antonio and El Paso. Meanwhile, another exploring party had been organized by Major Robert S. Neighbors, United States Indian agent in Texas, and Dr. John S. Ford, a prominent resident of Austin. Ford was sent by the citizens of Austin to accompany Neighbors in order to locate a practicable wagon route from Austin to El Paso. Neighbors and Ford traveled north and west by way of Brady’s Creek, the Concho River, the Pecos River, and the Rio Grande to El Paso. On May 6 they started out on their return trip and traveled eastward over the Guadalupe Mountains to the Pecos River, which they followed to the Horsehead Crossing. From this point they journeyed east to the Concho River and Brady’s Creek, and thence southeast across the San Saba and Llano rivers, arriving at San Antonio by way of Fredericksburg on June 2. Both Neighbors and Ford reported that their return route was an excellent wagon road to El Paso.

The return routes of Neighbors and Ford and of Whiting and Smith soon became known as the upper and lower roads, respectively. Both extended from San Antonio to El Paso, the former by way of Fredericksburg. Even though some of the more impatient gold seekers left Fredericksburg over what was later called the upper road as early as February and March, the ma-

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26 The San Antonio Western Texian, May 24, 1849, made the following comment on the survey of Whiting and Smith: “They have explored a large section of country of which little has been hitherto known, and have succeeded in surveying an excellent wagon route from this place to El Paso, in nearly a direct line. ... The importance of this information, both for military and commercial purposes, can hardly be calculated. ... The popular impression heretofore has been that the face of the country was of such a character as to render a practicable wagon route on this side of the Rio Grande totally out of the question. This delusion, however, has entirely vanished by the return of this party.” Nacogdoches Times, June 16, 1849. See also Ford, Memoirs (cited ante, note 25), 477; House Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 5, pp. 281-93; Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 64, pp. 4-7.

27 Ford, Memoirs (cited ante, note 25), 477-99; Texas Democrat (Austin), Feb. 24, June 16, 23, 1849; Corpus Christi Star, June 16, 1849; Robert Creuzbaur, Route from the Gulf of Mexico and the Lower Mississippi Valley to California and the Pacific Ocean (New York, 1849), 3-4.
jority began their journey in this direction during April and May. The first companies to get started employed Indians who had accompanied Colonel Hays, Texas frontiersmen, and Mexicans as guides, and with considerable difficulty made their trails to El Paso by way of the San Saba, Concho, and Pecos rivers—a route already partly traversed by Highsmith on his return from Presidio del Norte in 1848, and by Whiting and Neighbors on their way to El Paso early in 1849. Later companies followed in the wake of the pioneers and along the return route of Neighbors and Ford, thus making the upper road a well-marked highway by the early summer of 1849. Some emigrants, after crossing the Pecos River at Horsehead Crossing, traveled southwest to Presidio del Norte, and thence either through Chihuahua and Janos to the Gila trail or northwest along the Rio Grande to El Paso. It was not until early in June, after the favorable report of Whiting and Smith, that the emigrants left San Antonio over the lower road to El Paso. Practically all who went this way, including the famous Colonel Hays, accompanied a detachment of United States troops28 under the command of Major Jefferson Van Horne who, together with Captain Joseph E. Johnston and Lieutenant W. F. Smith of the Topographical Engineers, constructed a wagon road to El Paso over the route recommended by Lieutenants Whiting and Smith. Emigrants traveling the upper and lower roads passed El Paso sometime between May and September, and continued thence to Cooke’s wagon road either southwest through the Mexican towns of Corralitos and Janos to the Guadalupe Pass or northwest along the Rio Grande through New Mexico to a point about thirty miles above Doña Ana where Cooke’s road started for California. Wagons as well as pack animals were used for transportation over these routes. Because of serious internal dissensions along the road, many emigrant companies were dissolved by common consent and proceeded on their way in small parties. Intense heat, a scarcity of water, dusty trails, and a lack of provisions

28 A battalion of the third infantry had originally been ordered to proceed to El Paso by way of Fredericksburg, but after the favorable report of Whiting and Smith this order was revoked and directions were given to proceed instead over the lower route from San Antonio to El Paso. Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 64, pp. 40-41.
resulted in severe physical hardships for a number of overlanders, some being forced to eat horse flesh, mule flesh, and even snakes to avoid starvation. El Paso was the oasis in the desert for the emigrants. Here they rested and recruited their animals before continuing the journey to the Gila. Here they purchased supplies at high prices from Mexican and Missouri merchants. Here, too, several Texans came into conflict with the town authorities. And at El Paso or in the near vicinity some emigrants celebrated the Fourth of July, listening to appropriate speeches and to the reading of the Declaration of Independence during the day and singing patriotic songs and firing guns at night. Most of the argonauts left El Paso in good health, little dreaming of the sufferings awaiting them on the Gila.29

The third group of routes traveled by the forty-niners from Texas started from the vicinity of Dallas and Preston and extended westward across the Trinity, Brazos, and Colorado rivers to the Pecos, where they joined the upper emigrant road to El Paso. Though the argonauts proceeded in the same general direction as Connelly’s trading expedition to Chihuahua in 1840, they found no trace of the route taken by that caravan, and hence were forced to mark out their own trails. They began their journey during March, April, and May and traveled across northern Texas to El Paso without encountering any serious obstacles except an occasional scarcity of water. The majority were natives of northeastern Texas; a few were Louisianians who had come up the Red River by boat as far as Shreveport, Louisiana, or Pine Bluffs, Texas. It was estimated that about

29 Cornelius C. Cox, Notes and Memoranda of an Overland Trip from Texas to California in the Year 1849 (ms. in the Univ. of Texas Library), 1-33; Joseph G. Eastland, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1-3; Henry C. Wilson, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1-2; Reis, Dictation (cited ante, note 17), 1-2; Ford, Memoirs (cited ante, note 25), 497-99; Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 64, pp. 26-29, 40-54; Colorado Tribune (Matagorda, Texas), Dec. 10, 1849; Texas Monument (La Grange), Feb. 19, 26, 1851; Rusk (Texas) Pioneer, Aug. 8, 1849; Texas Union (San Augustine), Sept. 15, 1849; Texas State Gazette (Austin), Aug. 25, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, April 12, 26, May 17, June 28, Aug. 16, 23, 30, Sept. 27, 1849, March 7, 1850; Texas Democrat (Austin), April 21, June 16, Aug. 4, 1849; Northern Standard, April 7, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), June 6, July 13, 1849; St. Louis Daily Union, Aug. 16, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Aug. 11, 1849.
three hundred people, including several families, made their way over these trails with wagons and pack animals and reached the gold mines in from five to seven months.30

The western frontier of Arkansas was another prominent starting point for many California emigrants using southwestern trails. More widely advertised for this purpose than the state of Texas, Arkansas not only attempted to convince the public that through its domain ran the best route to the gold mines, but also tried to enlist the aid of the national government to construct a wagon road from its western border to California. As early as September 23, 1848, a number of citizens of Fort Smith held a public meeting at which resolutions were adopted calling on the state legislature to petition Congress to authorize the survey and establishment of a national road from Fort Smith to California. A memorial embodying the substance of these resolutions was agreed upon by the Arkansas general assembly and presented to Congress on January 3, 1849. The military committee of the Senate, of which Jefferson Davis was chairman, reported favorably on the memorial on January 31, but no further action was taken.31 Meanwhile, Senator Solon G. Borland of Arkansas, suspecting that the Senate and House either would not or could not come to a decision on this matter very soon, got into direct communication with the Secretary of War and applied for a military escort for those overlanders who contemplated leaving Arkansas for the mines early in the spring. It was Borland’s opinion that such an expedition would prove the excellence of the route traversed and demonstrate to Congress the advisability of constructing the road asked for by the memorial of the Arkansas legislature. The War Department ap-


31 On March 3, 1849, Congress passed a law appropriating $50,000 for the survey of “routes from the valley of the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean.” These surveys were intended primarily for military purposes, and were to be carried on by the Topographical Engineers in Texas, California, New Mexico, and the territory of Nebraska. U. S. Statutes at Large, IX, 372; Cong. Globe, 30 Cong., 2 Sess., 638; Senate Journal, 30 Cong., 2 Sess., 96, 169-70; House Journal, 30 Cong., 2 Sess., 194; Senate Reports, 30 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 276, pp. 1-3; Fort Smith Herald, Sept. 13, 27, Oct. 25, 1848.
proved of Senator Borland's application, and not only ordered Captain Randolph B. Marcy to command a military escort of dragoons and infantry for the protection of the emigrants from Fort Smith, but also instructed Lieutenant James H. Simpson of the Topographical Engineers to accompany Marcy and make a reconnaissance of the route traveled.\textsuperscript{32} Marcy was ordered to proceed from Fort Smith "along the valley of the main Canadian, wholly on the south side of the river, by the most direct practicable route" to Santa Fé. He was informed that the principal objects of the expedition were "to ascertain and establish the best route from this point [Forth Smith] to New Mexico and California; to extend to such of our citizens as design leaving here in a few days and traversing your route such facilities as circumstances may require, and it is in your power to give, to insure them a safe and unmolested passage across the prairies; and to conciliate, as far as possible, the different tribes of In-

\textsuperscript{32} On January 24, 1849, the day after the War Department ordered a military escort for the emigrants from Fort Smith, Senator Borland wrote to the editor of the \textit{Arkansas State Democrat} (Little Rock) that the memorial of the Arkansas legislature would elicit a full report from the Senate committee on military affairs, and that a bill would probably be drawn up to accomplish the object desired. "But to perfect such a measure as this" he continued, "time will be required. . . What we desire now (not only in view of the great national work, but in special reference to the immediate interests of our own State and people), is a step that can be taken at once, and can accomplish its purpose by a sort of \textit{coup de main}, within the course of a few weeks, or months at farthest. The eyes of the nation are looking out for the shortest and best route, for this great channel of connection . . . which will indeed be . . . the connection . . . of the Atlantic with the Pacific. It is, alike, our duty and our interest, to give the right direction to the eyes of the nation, in this respect. . . And no mere assertion of ours, however loudly made, or often repeated, will produce conviction of the truth. We believe it. We therefore must prove it. It is our duty and our interest to do so. This expedition from Ft. Smith, is to furnish the required proof. Such has been my main purpose in making this application to the War Department. True, I was desirous to aid the emigrants and traders, who got up the enterprise, and will compose the party. But it was the great purpose I have mentioned which mainly moved me, in applying for the military escort. As to the protection this escort will afford, I do not deem it indispensable, by any means; for, I have no doubt, the expedition would go on without it, and, probably, with entire safety. . . But it is the public character imported by it, to the expedition, it owes its chief value and importance. . . And, then, the additional fact, to secure which I was most solicitous, that an officer of the Topographical Engineers will accompany the expedition, to make, and report, a reconnaissance of the route, in direct reference to the future location of a national road, makes the arrangement complete, as we would have it. Such a report will be (and justly) received as authority." \textit{Arkansas State Democrat} (Little Rock), Feb. 9, 1849.
dians who inhabit the region of country through which you will pass."  

Promise of government protection led many emigrants to choose the route through Arkansas as the best way to the gold mines. During the spring and summer of 1849 about three thousand argonauts from at least twenty-six states assembled at Fort Smith and Van Buren, the principal points of departure for California in western Arkansas. The largest number came from New York and the southern states. Numerous river steamers were kept busy night and day transporting the gold seekers up the Arkansas to Fort Smith and Van Buren. These towns, as well as several other towns along the river, furnished the emigrants with some of their supplies for the western journey. Fort Smith did an especially large business and was exceedingly anxious to demonstrate that it was not merely a military post but a thriving town capable of supplying travelers with anything they desired except wagons and firearms. It also boasted, as did the other towns, that there was no danger from cholera within its limits. The coming of the forty-niners led many people of Arkansas, like those of Texas, to become greatly excited at the prospect of being on the main highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Fort Smith believed that ere long it would become "the great starting point to Northern Mexico, California, and Oregon." Van Buren had visions of rivaling St. Louis in population and wealth and of becoming "the depot of the rich trade of India." The editor of the Arkansas State Democrat, commenting on the large number of California emigrants passing through Little Rock, enthusiastically declared that in a few years he expected "to hob-nob on the side-walks with China-men," and prophesied that "Arkansas must soon become a central point on the great commercial highway of the world."  

33 Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 12, p. 2; ibid., No. 64, pp. 169-70; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), Feb. 9, 1849.  
34 This number is an estimate based on a summary of all the source material available to the writer.  
35 Maine, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Besides, there were some emigrants from the District of Columbia, and from Germany, England, Scotland, and Ireland.  
36 Fort Smith Herald, Nov. 29, 1848, Feb. 7, 21, March 14, 21, 28, April 11,
The first argonauts to leave western Arkansas departed in March, about two months later than the earliest migration from Texas. From Van Buren and Fort Smith they journeyed along the Canadian River and across the Pecos River to the vicinity of Santa Fé. This route was not altogether new, for it had been traveled in whole or in part by Indian traders in the twenties and thirties, by United States troops from Fort Gibson in the thirties and forties, by Dr. Josiah Gregg’s trading expedition from Van Buren to Chihuahua in 1839 and 1840, by Lieutenants Abert and Peck of the Topographical Engineers in 1845, and by a party of emigrants from Fort Smith to Santa Fé in 1846. Most of these journeys were known to the inhabitants of western Arkansas and information concerning some of them was given to the emigrants. However, except for the trail on the north side of the Canadian from Van Buren to Chouteau’s trading house, there were no visible signs of the earlier expeditions to guide the gold seekers. With frontiersmen, Indians, ex-soldiers of the Mexican War, and the military escort under Captain Marcy as guides, the argonauts began their journey and proceeded westward over two main routes: one partly north of the Canadian and the other entirely south of that river. Those traveling the former departed from Fort Smith, Van Buren, and Fort Gibson, and made their way over the so-called old road along the north bank of the Canadian to Chouteau’s trading house, about one hundred and eighty-five miles west of Arkansas. Here some crossed to the south bank and followed it the greater part of the way to New

37 Senate Ex. Docs., 29 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 438, pp. 23-75; Weekly Reveille (St. Louis), April 20, Sept. 28, 1846; Fort Smith Herald, July 26, Nov. 1, 1848; Santa Fé Republican, Sept. 12, 1848; Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies . . . (New York, 1844), II, 9-61, 137-56, reprinted in R. G. Thwaites (ed.), Early Western Travels (Cleveland, 1905), XIX.

38 On the left bank of the Canadian River, near the present town of Lexington, Cleveland Co., Okla. Originally it had been “a little stockade fort, where considerable trade was . . . carried on with the Comanches and other tribes of the southwestern prairies,” but in 1849 “scarcely a trace” of it remained. When the forty-niners passed, it was declared to be “a locality with a name, but no habitation.” Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 12, p. 6; Fort Smith Herald, May 23, 1849; Gregg, op. cit., II, 18.
Mexico, while others continued up the north bank a short distance and crossed to the south side at a point which is now in the southwestern part of Blaine County, Oklahoma. The other route taken by the emigrants, which was called the new road, was surveyed and constructed between April 5 and June 28 by the troops under Captain Marcy and Lieutenant Simpson. It began at Fort Smith and extended along the south side of the Canadian River to Santa Fé, passing points opposite Edwards' trading house and Chouteau's trading house, and crossing the Pecos River in New Mexico at Anton Chico. After arriving in the vicinity of Santa Fé, the emigrants continued their journey to California by way of Cooke's wagon road, Kearny's trail, or the old Spanish trail through Salt Lake City. Though a military escort of United States troops from New Mexico and the Topographical Engineers under Lieutenant Simpson had, at the earnest solicitation of Senator Borland, been directed to accompany the argonauts from Santa Fé to California, these orders were revoked in May, and the emigrants were permitted to depart without the protection and guidance that had been promised.

The experiences of the overlanders on their journey from Arkansas to the vicinity of Santa Fé were of a more varied character than the experiences of those who took the route through Texas. For the first one hundred and fifty miles west of Fort Smith and Van Buren the rate of travel was exceedingly slow, because it rained almost every day, making the roads extremely boggy and well nigh impassable. Wagons frequently sank into the mud up to the hubs and had to be dragged out with ropes. One emigrant wrote home that he had seen the fifty wagons in his company "'stall' ten times each in a day." Some of the wagons were left sticking in the mud, their disgusted owners abandoning them and using pack mules for transportation the

39 Near the north bank of the Canadian River, south of the present town of Holdenville, Hughes Co., Okla. Here there was a small settlement where, according to Marcy, "'horses, cattle, corn, and many articles of merchandise' could be purchased by the emigrants.

40 Widber, Statement (cited ante, note 14), 2-3; Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 12, pp. 2-25; ibid., No. 64, pp. 169-233; Fort Smith Herald, March 14, June 13, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), April 13, 27, May 18, 1849; Southern Shield, July 21, 1849; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), July 14, Aug. 29, 1849.
rest of the way. To the impatient gold seeker who had been so frequently assured of the excellence of this route such conditions were disappointing, and extremely discouraging letters were written to friends at home declaring in no uncertain terms that the road along the Canadian was the worst in the world. But after passing beyond the vicinity of Chouteau’s trading house, fewer obstacles were encountered. Here the Great Plains began, where improved roads and plenty of sunshine put the emigrants into better spirits and increased their rate of travel.41 Though a few argonauts had died of cholera during the wet weather east of Chouteau’s, west of this point their health was excellent. The brisk air of the prairies and the exercise incident to the trip whetted their appetites. Nor was there any lack of food; for buffalo, deer, elk, and antelope were sufficiently numerous to provide the hungry traveler with many a splendid meal. One man enthusiastically remarked that he “could give a Christmas dinner once a week.” The only Indians encountered on the way were Comanche and Kiowa, with whom Marcy had a “talk,” and from whom he obtained a promise not to molest the travelers—a promise which was well kept. An incident of unusual interest occurred when a family in the Fort Smith Company announced the birth of twin boys, one of whom was named “Marcy,” to the great satisfaction of that gentleman. After arriving at the settlements in New Mexico, the emigrants encamped at Galisteo or San Miguel, near Santa Fé, or farther south at Albuquerque or Socorro, where they recruited their animals, repaired wagons, purchased supplies, and made preparations for the rest of their trip to California. The main depot for supplies was Santa Fé, where a number of argonauts bought

41 Lieutenant Simpson gives an interesting description of an emigrant camp at the end of a day: “Now comes the busy scene of pitching tents, collecting wood, preparing food, &c. The sound of the axe, the metallic ring of the blacksmith’s hammer, the merry voice of children, the lowing of cattle, the braying of mules, is heard. Some children are playing near the water. . . The . . . ladies are attending to their domestic concerns, in the preparation of a good meal for their families, or of a comfortable sojourn until the morrow. At sunset . . . the sweet sound of the flute, perchance, will come floating on the ear, or the well accorded voices of a band of happy vocalists, or the merry notes of the violin, accompanied with the tripping sound of feet; all these may be the accompanying circumstances—as they not unfrequently are—of the evening.” Senate Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 12, p. 13.
articles at high prices from merchants who trafficked over the old Santa Fé Trail. Santa Fé was a lawless town in '49. Drinking, gambling, and general rowdyism were the order of the day and night, to the great amazement of those who had been reared in less boisterous surroundings. Many emigrants participated in the local pastime of gambling, with the result that a number were relieved of what little funds they possessed, and a few became so poor "that they were reduced to the necessity of selling their clothing, or even the likenesses of friends." The New Mexican towns through which the overlanders traveled were very hospitable and entertained the visitors with fandangoes. These affairs furnished a pleasant and unique diversion for the weary travelers, who were always unstinted in their praise of the graceful dancing of the dark-eyed señoritas. Most of the emigrants from Arkansas passed the vicinity of Santa Fé between May and August, and reached the gold mines of California in about seven or eight months.\(^{42}\)

Another route traveled by emigrants from Arkansas was one which was opened at this time and which later became known as the Cherokee trail. On April 20, 1849, over a hundred gold seekers from northwestern Arkansas left Fayetteville and proceeded west to the Neosho River in the Cherokee Indian country, where they were joined by a small party of Cherokee Indians from Tahlequah. Here an organization called the Washington County Gold Mining Company was formed, consisting of about one hundred and thirty persons with about forty wagons. They forded the Neosho at a point near the present town of Locust Grove, Oklahoma, and journeyed north of west to the Verdigris River. After crossing this stream they at first traveled in a northwest direction between the Verdigris and Little Verdigris rivers, and later continued in the same direction between the

Verdigris and Arkansas rivers, finally reaching the Santa Fé trail at Turkey Creek on May 12. From this place, which was about sixty-five miles southwest of Council Grove, they followed the Santa Fé trail to Pueblo, where the company dissolved and the emigrants decided to proceed over different routes to the mines. About seven months were consumed in making the whole journey.

Of the three frontier states which served as starting places for forty-niners traveling southwestern trails, Missouri was the best known. From its western border extended the three great trails to the West — the trail to Oregon, the trail to California, and the trail to Santa Fé. The latter was the most prominent of all the southwestern trails. Ever since the days of Gregg, and even before, it had been popularly known as the highway of the "commerce of the prairies." Now it began to be considered as a highway of migration. Early in 1849 a large number of river steamers crowded with gold seekers made their way down the Ohio and up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and thence up the Missouri to Independence, Westport, and Kansas, the three eastern termini of the Santa Fé trail. In these towns, as well as in St. Louis, supplies were purchased for the western journey. For many years Independence had been accustomed to providing outfits for emigrant and trading caravans to the West, and now it was kept especially busy in meeting the demands of the great migration that passed through its streets. "Never since we have had any acquaintance in this place," wrote the editor of the Independence Western Expositor, "has Independence presented a more business-like appearance than at the present time. From morning till night the streets are crowded with people from all parts of the United States, all waiting for the rising of grass before they launch themselves out on the almost

43 The present Pueblo, Colo. In 1843, John C. Frémont described it as a place "where a number of mountaineers, who had married Spanish women in the valley of Taos, had collected together, and occupied themselves in farming, carrying on at the same time a desultory Indian trade." He stated that these mountaineers were "principally Americans." Senate Ex. Docs., 28 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 174, p. 116.

44 Cherokee Advocate (Tahlequah, Ind. Ter.), Feb. 19, April 16, 30, May 7, July 30, Aug. 6, 1849, Jan. 21, March 11, 1850; Fort Smith Herald, Feb. 21, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), July 20, 1849; Daily Missouri Republican, July 4, 1849.
boundless plains. From nine in the morning until late in the evening it is next thing to an impossibility to drive a carriage through our principal streets. The public houses, as well as the private boarding houses, are crowded with emigrants, but our hospitable citizens endeavor to make their situation, while here, as comfortable as possible." Yet here, as in Texas, the appearance of cholera struck terror into the ranks of the travelers. This terrible disease began its ravages in western Missouri early in May, with the result that the little town of Kansas was "nearly depopulated," and the streets and business places of Independence, so recently crowded with countless gold seekers, now presented a "desolate appearance." A number of argonauts became so discouraged that they abandoned their journey and returned home. The majority attempted to escape the disease by fleeing to the prairies; but it was not until Council Grove was passed that they were finally successful in shaking it off.

Between the latter part of April and the middle of September about twenty-five hundred emigrants from at least ten states left western Missouri for California via the Santa Fé trail. Independence, Westport, and Kansas were the main starting points. A few overlanders from southwestern Missouri proceeded through Fort Scott and reached the Santa Fé trail at Council Grove. Some emigrants were forced to take the Santa Fé route because they arrived too late to travel the Platte trail. Several others, in order to avoid the cholera epidemic or to obtain sufficient grass for their animals, deserted the crowded Platte trail after traveling it a short distance, and crossed over to the Santa Fé trail a few miles west of Council Grove. All

45 Western Expositor (Independence, Mo.), April 28, 1849, in The Brunswick (Brunswick, Mo.), May 5, 1849. Some of the great business activity in Independence was caused by the arrival of emigrants who had selected the Platte trail as the best way to the gold mines.


47 This number is an estimate based on a summary of all the source material available to the writer.

48 New York, South Carolina, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Tennessee, Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas. It is probable that additional states were represented in the migration over the Santa Fé trail.
gold seekers traveling the Santa Fé route proceeded over a well-worn trail to the southwest, and after passing Council Grove and Fort Mann⁴⁹ arrived at the crossing of the Arkansas, where the majority forded the river and journeyed to New Mexico over the Cimarron trail, while a few continued up its north bank to Pueblo via Bent’s Fort.⁵⁰ At Pueblo some turned to the northwest and followed various routes through Salt Lake City to the mines, while others turned south and traveled through the village of Greenhorn,⁵¹ to the left of the Spanish Peaks, and over the Raton Mountains to the vicinity of Santa Fé. After replenishing their supplies in New Mexico, the emigrants continued their journey to California over Cooke’s wagon road, Kearny’s trail, or the old Spanish trail through Salt Lake City.⁵²

Except for the dangers from cholera east of Council Grove, the experiences of the emigrants traveling the Santa Fé trail were on the whole very pleasant. Some seemed to appreciate the serious nature of the journey ahead of them. One group of argonauts before leaving their camping ground in western Missouri listened with great attention to a sermon given in the open

⁴⁹ Near the north bank of the Arkansas River, about five miles west of the present Dodge City, Kan. Fort Mann was built in the spring of 1847, because “a station, equidistant from Fort Leavenworth and Santa Fé, was needed by the Government, at which to repair the wagons and recruit the animals, by rest, in safety.” It was described as “simply four log houses, connected by angles of timber framework, in which were cut loopholes for the cannon and small arms.” Though occupied by United States troops in 1848, it was without habitation when the emigrants passed. Ferguson Diary (ms. in the Missouri Historical Society Library), Aug. 3, 1847; L. H. Garrard, Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail . . . (Cincinnati, 1850), 296-97; Daily Missouri Republican, Oct. 1, 1850.

⁵⁰ On the north bank of the Arkansas River, about seven miles northeast of the present town of La Junta, Colo. It was destroyed in August, 1849, either by William Bent or by the Indians. House Ex. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 17, Pt. I, p. 213; Daily Missouri Republican, Oct. 23, 1849; De Liniere, The Santa Fé Trail (cited ante, note 46), 95.

⁵¹ The present town of Greenhorn, Colo. In 1849 it was described as “a place inhabited by mountaineers with Indian wives.” George W. Wither to Robert H. Miller, Aug. 12, 1849, Miller Papers (mss. in the Missouri Historical Society Library).

⁵² W. C. Randolph, Statement of a Pioneer of 1849 (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1; George M. Palmer, Dietation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1; Benjamin Hayes, Emigrant Notes (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 410; George W. Wither to Robert H. Miller, Aug. 12, 1849, Miller Papers; Daily Missouri Republican, May 14, 17, June 24, July 4, Sept. 12, 1849; The Brunswicker, May 5, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), June 1, July 24, 1849; Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, May 6, 1849; Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, D. C.), June 26, 1849; De Liniere, The Santa Fé Trail (cited ante, note 46), 112-13.
air by a minister from Independence, who spoke with some eloquence on the text: "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God." It "reminded us" declared one listener, "of our homes, our wives, children, parents and friends. The occasion with us seemed to be the last link of civilized association for months." All companies went well-armed to provide against possible Indian hostilities. Men with experience in fighting Indians, ex-soldiers of the Mexican War, and trappers served as guides. At Council Grove a few days were usually spent collecting supplies of timber—"axle trees and spokes"—for wagon repairs. On the Great Plains beyond this point a great variety of weather was encountered, including warm days, cool nights, rain, hailstorms, and thunderstorms. Many buffalo were seen. A short distance west of Fort Mann large numbers of Arapahoe, Cheyenne, and Apache Indians were met with, but all proved friendly and committed no acts of hostility. Those who traveled the route via Pueblo caught their first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains in the neighborhood of Bent's Fort. After leaving Greenhorn a number of emigrants delayed their journey by looking in vain for gold in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The argonauts from Missouri passed the vicinity of Santa Fé between July and October, and were treated with the same hospitality by the New Mexican towns in the Rio Grande Valley as were the emigrants from Arkansas.

After traversing the Great Plains and arriving at the base of the Rocky Mountains somewhere between El Paso and Pueblo, the overlanders from Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas continued their journey to California over two groups of routes. One group extended to the southwest along the Gila River, the other to the northwest through Salt Lake City. The most difficult part of the journey—over or around the Rocky Mountains—was still to be completed. Few emigrants foresaw the dangers ahead, for all had been assured of the excellence of the trails.

53 Daily Missouri Republican, May 24, 1849.
about to be traversed. The majority began the last half of their journey with expectations of reaching California in a comparatively short time.

Those who made the best time traveled to the northwest by way of the Great Salt Lake. The trails in this direction began at Santa Fé and Pueblo and extended to the northern route to California, joining it at various points between Fort Laramie and Salt Lake City. One of the most popular of these was the old Spanish trail from Santa Fé to Salt Lake City. Opened by the Spanish Indian traders in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and extended to Los Angeles by Mexican and American trappers in the third decade of the nineteenth century, this trail in recent years had been used in part by traders and emigrants between New Mexico and California. It was a mule trail and the emigrants who traveled it went by pack train, disposing of their wagons before leaving Santa Fé. Another route used by many argonauts started from Santa Fé or Pueblo and extended north to a point where Greeley, Colorado, is now situated, and thence west to Utah Lake and Salt Lake City by way of Frémont’s trail of 1844. Others proceeded still farther north and reached the Platte trail at Fort Laramie or a few miles northwest of Fort Bridger. After a short rest in Salt Lake City, the majority continued their journey to California over the northern route via the Humboldt River, though a few waited until the fall to travel the southwestern route via Los Angeles.

Most of the gold seekers who traveled from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles were those who had arrived at the Great Salt Lake via the Platte trail too late in the season to continue on the same route to the mines. They were persuaded by the Mormons to...

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55 Benjamin D. Wilson, Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 22-23; St. Louis Daily Union, Aug. 30, 1849; Arkansas State Gazette, Sept. 6, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), Aug. 17, 1849; Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat, April 19, 1850; Cherokee Advocate, Jan. 21, 1850; Southern Shield, July 28, 1849; Joseph J. Hill, "The Old Spanish Trail," in Hispanic American Historical Review, IV, 444-70.

56 H. S. Brown, Statement of Early Days of California (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 2; Randolph, Statement (cited ante, note 52), 1-2; Widber, Statement (cited ante, note 14), 2-3; George W. Wither to Robert H. Miller, Aug. 12, 1849, Miller Papers; Senate Ex. Docs., 28 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 174, pp. 277-86; Alta California (San Francisco), Sept. 13, 1849; Cherokee Advocate, Aug. 6, 1849, Jan. 21, 1850; Daily Missouri Republican, July 2, 1849; Southern Shield, July 21, 1849.
take the trail to the southwest because it was less liable to be obstructed by snow during the winter months. This trail, as previously stated, was an extension of the one from Santa Fé to Salt Lake City, and popularly but incorrectly known as a part of the old Spanish trail. It had been traveled by Frémont in 1844, and by Mormon and other traders in 1847 and 1848.\textsuperscript{57} Between September and November, 1849, hundreds of emigrants left the vicinity of Salt Lake City and journeyed southwest along the Virgin and Mohave rivers to Los Angeles—a route now followed in a general way by the Los Angeles and Salt Lake division of the Union Pacific Railroad. Mormons and frontiersmen served as guides. Though heretofore traveled only by pack train, this trail was now traversed by wagons drawn by mules and oxen. Transforming a mountain and desert trail into a wagon road was not an easy task for impatient gold seekers. The way led in and out of precipitous canyons and across alkali deserts. Provisions and water soon became scarce. Oxen and mules dropped dead in their tracks, forcing many emigrants to abandon their wagons and proceed afoot. Thirst and hunger were aggravated by intense heat and almost suffocating dust. Men were driven to desperate efforts to keep themselves and their families alive. Some attempted to eat a colt which had died of starvation. Others consumed a stray wolf, entrails and all. Many lived for days on horse flesh and mule flesh. A few died of thirst and starvation many miles from the settlements. One group of emigrants, deserting the main trail near Mountain Meadow\textsuperscript{58} in order to reach the mines by what they thought to be a more direct route, soon lost their way and suffered indescribable hardships, a number perishing in the desert in southern California, which thereafter became known as Death Valley. Fatigued and emaciated but not disheartened, the argonauts eventually dragged themselves through the Cajon Pass to Los Angeles. Here they rested a short time, and then pursued their way to the mines by overland trails or by ship to San Francisco.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Andrew Goodyear, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 3; Senate Ex. Docs., 28 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 174, pp. 259-71; California Star (San Francisco), Jan. 29, 1848; D. C. Peters, Kit Carson’s Wild West (New York, 1880), 213-22.

\textsuperscript{58} In southwestern Utah.

\textsuperscript{59} Peter Derr, Account of Experience with First Overland Train on Southern
More extensively traveled than the routes to the northwest by way of Salt Lake City were the trails to the southwest along the Gila River. By far the most popular of these was the wagon road made by Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke and his Mormon Battalion between November, 1846, and January, 1847. Leaving the Rio Grande at a point near the present town of Rineon, New Mexico, this road extended to the southwest across the Rio Mimbres and through the Guadalupe Pass to the San Pedro River, where it turned north and proceeded down the valley of this stream about fifty-five miles before going west to Tucson. From Tucson it continued northwest to the Pima Indian villages on the Gila River, where it connected with Kearny's trail and proceeded west along the south side of the Gila and across southern California to San Diego. Most of the argonauts diverged slightly from Cooke's road upon their arrival at the San Pedro, crossing this river a short distance southwest of the present town of Bisbee, Arizona, and reaching Tucson by way of Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz River. This trail had been followed by United States troops under Major L. P. Graham in their march from Chihuahua to Los Angeles in the latter part of 1848. At least one company of emigrants left Cooke's road a few miles west of the present town of Deming, New Mexico, and journeyed directly west to Tucson—a route which one of Cooke's guides had reported was capable of being traveled in case sufficient water could be found. Many argonauts passing through El Paso made their way to the southwest through the towns of Janos and Corralitos and reached Cooke's road at the Guadalupe Pass. Kearny's trail was used by a

Route from Salt Lake (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1-3; J. D. Gruwell, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1; Gustavus C. Pearson, Recollections of a California 49' er (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 1-2; John G. Nichols, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 3; David Seely, Dictation (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 7-12; Daily Missouri Republican, Dec. 28, 1849, Jan. 18, 1850; Fort Smith Herald, June 8, 1850; W. L. Manly, Death Valley in '49 . . . (San Jose, 1894), 104-278.

60 The present town of Santa Cruz, Mexico.

61 Diary of Judge Benjamin Hayes' Journey from Socorro to Warner's Ranch from October 31, 1849 to January 14, 1850 (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 108-20, 152; Cave J. Coutts, Diary of a March to California, 1848-9 (ms. in the Bancroft Library), 62-98; Cox, Notes and Memoranda (cited ante, note 29), 49-52; House Ex. Docs., 30 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 41, pp. 551-63; Alta California, Feb. 1, 1850; Daily Missouri Republican, Nov. 23, 1849; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Nov. 22, 1849, April 11, 1850; Texas Monument, Feb. 26, March 5, 1851.
considerable number of emigrants. Well known to the fur traders ever since the early part of the nineteenth century, it had been followed by Kit Carson when he guided General Stephen W. Kearny and his „Army of the West” from New Mexico to California between October and December, 1846. It left the Rio Grande a short distance north of the point where Cooke’s road began, and proceeded west along the Gila River to the Pima Indian villages, where it was joined by Cooke’s road and continued to California. Another trail used by a few emigrants extended west from Albuquerque to Zuñi, and thence southwest to the Gila by way of the valley of the Salt River. After crossing the Colorado River a short distance below the mouth of the Gila, most gold seekers journeyed by way of Carriso Creek and Warner’s Ranch to San Diego or Los Angeles. From these points some reached the mines by boat to San Francisco; others by an overland trail along the coast; still others by overland trails through the Tulare and San Joaquin valleys. A few emigrants reached the Tulare and San Joaquin valleys by way of the Tejon Pass.

The trails along the Gila were first used by gold seekers in 1848. Hardly had the news of the discovery of gold reached Mexico in the early part of that year before a large number of emigrants from Chihuahua and Sonora began their journey to California. They traveled north and west and reached San Diego or Los Angeles by way of Cooke’s wagon road, meeting it at the Guadalupe Pass or at Tucson. Though there is evidence that some overlanders left New Mexico for California in 1848, the largest number from this district departed in the spring of 1849. Whether they took Cooke’s road or Kearny’s trail has not been ascertained.
But the great majority who traveled along the Gila were emigrants who had come across the Great Plains by way of Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas in the spring and summer of 1849. While some who decided to journey over little-used trails employed Mexicans or American trappers as guides, most of those who used Cooke’s road or Kearny’s trail relied almost entirely on Cooke’s Journal or Emory’s Notes for their geographical information. Both of these accounts with accompanying maps had been published, and were in the possession of many emigrants. Those using Kearny’s trail or the trail through Zuñi went by pack train, and reached the wagon road on the south side of the Gila only after undergoing a number of privations in the mountainous country. Several emigrants on the Zuñi route were killed by Indians near the Salt River. Most argonauts however, traveled Cooke’s wagon road. From the Rio Grande to the Pima Indian villages on the Gila their experiences were somewhat different than they had been led to expect. Except for an occasional scarcity of water, few difficulties were encountered before arriving at the Guadalupe Pass. But here they met their first disappointment and labored hard and long to drag their wagons over the mountain trail which in places was “almost perpendicular.” As the emigrants proceeded they cut inscriptions on the trees along the route, usually noting the name of their company together with its numerical strength, its rate of travel, and its experiences on the road. Graves of emigrants who died on the way were found along the roadside — mute evidences of the dangers of the trail. At Santa Cruz and Tucson necessary provisions, such as corn, flour, beans, sugar, dried peaches, and bread, were obtained with some difficulty from the inhabitants, who were totally unprepared for such a large demand. In these Mexican towns the overlanders were once more treated to native hospitality by being entertained at fandangos. One of the most difficult parts of the road was the crossing of

45; California Star, April 15, 1848; Alta California, Feb. 15, 1849; Daily Missouri Republican, May 17, July 10, Aug. 6, 1849.

66 Lieutenant William H. Emory of the Topographical Engineers accompanied Kearny on his march to California and made detailed notes of the route traveled. These were published under the title: Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth to San Diego, 1846-1847, in House Ex. Docs., 30 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 41, pp. 7-126. Cooke’s Journal was published in the same volume, pp. 551-63.
the eighty-mile desert between Tucson and the Pima Indian villages. Though Cooke had located some water on this stretch of waste-land, most emigrants found it a real desert and suffered terribly from the terrific heat and the total absence of water. "I consider the crossing of this jornada of eighty miles an era in my life," wrote one traveler from Louisiana, "and shall never forget it to the day of my death. . . . Until one has crossed a barren desert, without food or water, under a burning tropical sun, at the rate of three miles an hour, he can form no conception of what misery is." Clouds of dust arose as the argonauts moved along, producing a thirst which was difficult if not impossible to allay. Some had sunstroke. When at last the Gila was reached, both animals and men rushed headlong into the river to relieve themselves of their physical torture. Nearby were the Pima Indian villages, where additional supplies could be procured. Some of the more experienced travelers journeyed over this desert at night and avoided many of the hardships which attended the trip during the day.\footnote{Diary of Judge Benjamin Hayes (cited ante, note 61), 20-24, 73-127; Cox, Notes and Memoranda (cited ante, note 29), 32-52; Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Aug. 7, 1849; Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock), Nov. 23, 1849; Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat, April 26, 1850; Daily Missouri Republican, Jan. 28, 1850; Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Jan. 3, 1850; Texas Monument, March 5, 1851; Charleston (S. C.) Courier, Dec. 13, 1849; New York Weekly Tribune, Oct. 20, 1849.}

Even greater difficulties were encountered between the Pima Indian villages and San Diego. A few days were usually spent with the friendly Pimas, who traded corn, wheat, beans, and bread for shirts and blankets of a gaudy hue. Traveling the sandy road along the Gila west of this point was made especially difficult because of the dust which, according to one emigrant, rose "in clouds, filling eyes and almost choking us as we trudge along." Many animals could no longer endure the physical strain and died in the harness. To lessen the load for the animals that remained alive the argonauts discarded many superfluous articles which had once been considered necessities. Wagons, Wagon wheels, carriages, log chains, crowbars, cooking stoves, chairs, tents, and gold-washing machines were among the numerous things abandoned along the roadside. The Colorado River was crossed with the aid of the Yuma Indians, though
a few emigrants were drowned in the swift current. Unlike the Pimas, the Yumas were not very friendly, pilfering everything they could lay their hands on, and finally, late in the fall, coming into open conflict with the travelers. On the west bank of the river a number of gold seekers who were short of provisions were supplied with some of the necessities of life by Lieutenant Coutts, who was stationed at the Colorado from September to December as commander of the military escort for a company of Topographical Engineers under Lieutenant Whipple. From the crossing of the Colorado to Carriso Creek the worst desert on the whole road remained to be traversed. It was about ninety miles long, and though water had been discovered on it late in June, it was still a considerable barrier. Additional paraphernalia were here abandoned, consisting of saddles, bridles, blankets, broken trunks, barrels, casks, saws, bottles, gun barrels, and many other articles. The carcasses of mules, horses, and oxen littered the roadside, and "a dry, stifling smell filled the air." The intense heat, ranging from 100 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, "provoked the most intolerable thirst." An extremely hot wind swept over the desert with great violence, and even the strongest "staggered under its withering influence." Among the weary emigrants "there was many a quivering and sinking heart," and "many a fervent, silent prayer offered up to the Throne of Grace." A few succumbed and died on the desert, but the majority finally reached San Diego or Los Angeles by way of Carriso Creek and Warner's Ranch. A correspondent of the New Orleans Daily Picayune probably expressed the sentiments of many when he wrote: "A man who has traveled the Gila route may throw himself upon his knees when reaching this point [San Diego], and thank God for preserving him through it." From San Diego and Los Angeles the emigrants continued to the mines by boat or by overland trails. Even though hundreds of miles remained to be traversed before reaching the El Dorado, the rest of the trip was comparatively pleasant and uneventful. Heavily tanned and inured to hardship, the argonauts arrived at the mines, and more quickly adapted themselves to their new environment than those who had traveled a less irksome route.68

68 Coutts, Diary (cited ante, note 61), 128-67; Diary of Judge Benjamin Hayes
Approximately 9000 forty-niners, constituting an important element in the early American settlement of California, reached the gold mines by way of southwestern trails. In the fifties others followed in their wake. With slight modifications the main trails which they used subsequently became the chief highways of travel and communication through the Southwest. Overland commerce and the overland stage and mail proceeded over these routes. Then in the seventies and early eighties came the construction of the railroads, which followed in a general way the trails of the argonauts of '49.