

# BLM to mark Dominguez - Escalante trail

The Cedar City District of the Bureau of Land Management is planning to mark portions of the Dominguez-Escalante Trail throughout Iron and Washington Counties as part of the coming Bicentennial celebration.

According to Dave Vickstrom, District Recreation Specialist, the local troops of the Boy Scouts of America in southwestern Utah will assist the BLM Cedar City District in placing trail markers, stepping stiles across fencelines, and interpretive signs at historic campsites along the trail.

At this time three sections will be marked for hiking. These sections are from Thermo Hot

Springs through Horse Hollow in the Mud Spring area, from Ash Creek Reservoir to Toquerville in the Black Ridge Area, and south of Hurricane to Warner Valley in the Sand Mountain area.

Work will begin in September and continue throughout the fall months.

To give some idea of the importance of the Spanish expedition and how it fits into our local history, the following background of the journey is noted:

The same year that the United States declared its independence, there was an important event taking place in the

western territories of North America. A party of Spaniards was exploring the area west of the Colorado River. This event constituted the first party of

Europeans to explore the interior of the west.

Two Franciscan priests, Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante and Fray Atanasio Dominguez, in

their quest to establish communications with the Catholic missions in California desired to find an overland route from Sante Fe to Monterey, a route that would escape the deep chasm of the Colorado River and at the same time traverse more friendly Indian country than the warlike Apaches along the southern route.

Thus, in 1776, at the time when General Washington was battling General Howe in the war for U.S. Independence, Escalante and nine other men were exploring deep into the interior of the west. Their trek into what later became known as Utah preceded the hardy Mormon Pioneers by 71 years. The trek across Utah began on September 11, near Jensen, Utah, and ended November 8, 1776 at the Arizona line near the Crossing of the Fathers.

During the journey Escalante kept a diary each day which described the terrain, campsites, and gave the approximate distances traveled. Specific locations along the trail are distinctly defined. Hardships caused by starvation, adverse weather and rugged terrain are documented. He also told of the Indian cultures and their susceptibility to Christianity.

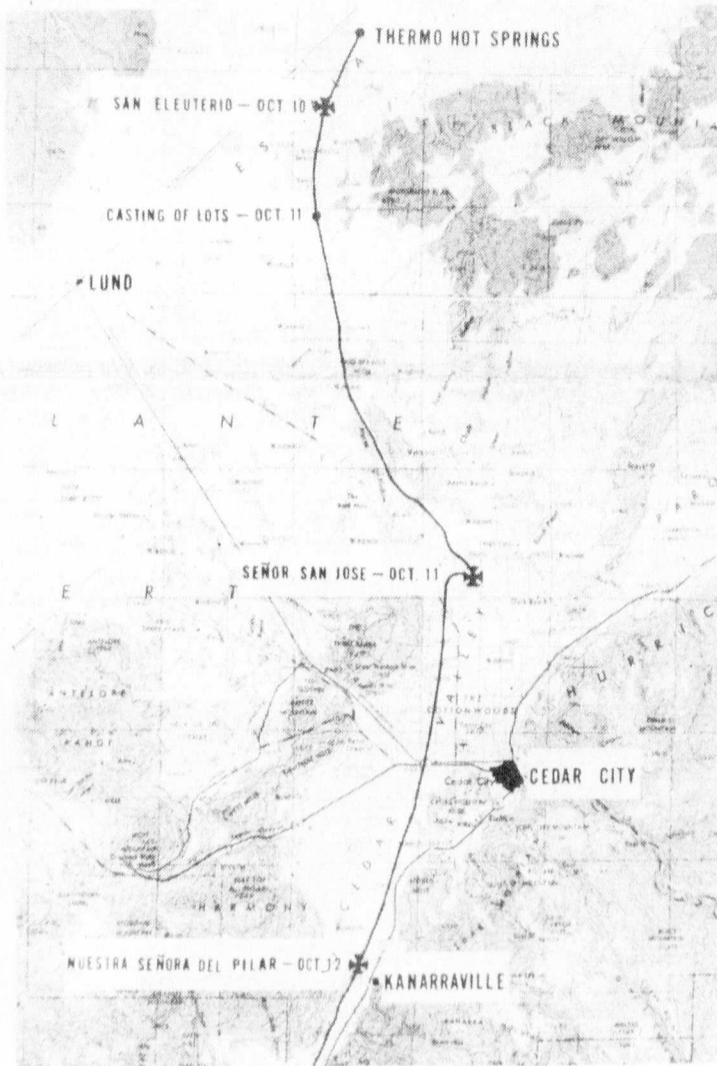
The reasons for not completing the Monterey destination is explained and the controversial and unpopular decision to return to Sante Fe is clearly outlined.

Of particular importance in the Cedar City area is the site of the "casting of lots" located east of Lund. At this point in their journey members of the expedition came to the decision of whether to continue on to Monterey or to turn back towards Sante Fe. The priests were in favor of returning to Sante Fe as winter was fast approaching and they could see the high "sierras" or mountains towards the west. Also, the priests had seen the Great Salt Lake Valley with the Indians and felt much had been accomplished in discovering a place where a fruitful mission could be established.

Other members of the expedition led by retired army captain, Don Bernardo Miera, wanted to continue on the original course. Escalante described them as having individual thoughts of worldly possessions and gains which could be realized by merely reaching Monterey. This was in complete discord with the purpose of the expedition and caused much dissension among the party.

It was finally decided to cast lots, "putting in one the word MONTEREY and in the other COSNINA (Sante Fe), and to follow the route which might turn up". Dominguez made a brief talk exhorting the men to subject themselves to the will of God. With the men prepared for the outcome of the gamble, they cast the lot, "and it was decided in favor of Cosnina". Escalante added, "Now, thank God, we are agreeable and gladly accepted this result". It is very doubtful Miera was in this frame of mind.

What would Utah be like now if this small party of Spaniards had continued across Nevada to California rather than turning back to Sante Fe?



**TRAIL MARKING.** Father Dominguez and Escalante journeyed through southwestern Utah in the month of October, 1776. They named each of their campsites after saints who were revered and held in high esteem. Certain "saints' days" came on the days the priests were in this area and, therefore, such names as San Eleuterio, Senor San Jose, and Senora del Pilar, were used. Plans are underway for local Boy Scout Troops to assist BLM in marking the trail.