

Cedar City Chapter of Sons of the Utah Pioneers

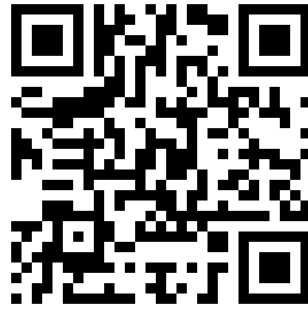


SUP Monument # OST-12 East Side of Highway 91 on Utah Hill

QR to get to this Location:



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Longitude: -113.901111; Latitude: 37.038611; Elevation 5943'; SUP #; OST-12 E of 91 Utah Hill



9 Silhouettes on the east side of Old Highway 91 going down Utah Hill



Old Spanish Trail

Trading on the Early Frontier 1829-1848

“... the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule route in the history of America ...”

LeRoy and Ann Hafen, Trail Historians

The Old Spanish Trail was a heavily used trade route that connected the Spanish-speaking communities of northern New Mexico with those in southern California. Pack trains of 100 or more mules – packsaddles bulging with woolen goods woven in New Mexico – made annual treks between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. The New Mexican traders bartered their goods for horses and mules and drove large herds back to Santa Fe. Over time, the Old Spanish Trail also became the primary route for trappers, explorers, prospectors, and outlaws crossing the Intermountain West.

American Indians witnessed the pack trains and left images pecked in rock.

Mule packers, or Arrieros, were responsible for the woolen goods of many families. These goods represented an entire year’s income.

Mules had incredible strength and endurance, fared better than horses where water was scarce and forage poor, and recovered more rapidly after periods of hard work. Their small tough hoofs withstood the shock and abrasion of rocky, boulder-strewn terrain.



Old Spanish Trail Pioneering Paths Across the West

In 1829, a Santa Fe merchant named Antonio Armijo led the first mule pack train loaded with trade goods to California. His successful venture opened commercial trade between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. Over two decades, multiple, parallel, and intertwined routes developed, creating a network of rugged long-distance trails known as the Old Spanish Trail. Use of the Old Spanish Trail declined by the mid-19th century as new wagon routes opened to carry troops, gold-rush miners, emigrants, and others into the west.

Antonio Armijo was aged 25 in 1829 when he led the first trading expedition between Abiquiu, New Mexico, and Los Angeles, California. In blazing his path across the West, Armijo used knowledge gained from American Indians, missionaries, fur trappers, and earlier exploring expeditions.

The Old Spanish Trail was recognized by Congress in 2002 as the nation's 15th National Historic Trail.

A Brief History of the Old Spanish Trail (OST)

There was money to be made in transporting serapes and other woolen goods from New Mexico to Los Angeles and in wrangling California-bred horses and mules back to Santa Fe. There was likewise a strong economic incentive to move contraband goods and Indian slaves, over this same route. A viable overland route had to be found, though, to cross the remote deserts and mountains of Mexico's far northern frontier.



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In 1776, during the Spanish period, priests Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante left Santa Fe and explored far and wide through northern New Mexico, western Colorado, and southern Utah. Much of this county would later be part of the Old Spanish Trail. During this same time period, Franciscan priests, the Spanish military, and civilian explorers were beginning to settle various coastal valleys in Alta California. No one, however, made the trek connecting California and New Mexico.

It took the vision and courage of Mexican trader Antonio Armijo to lead the first commercial caravan from Abiquiú, New Mexico to Los Angeles in late 1829. Following suit over the next twenty years, Mexican and American traders continued to use routes similar to the one he pioneered, frequently trading with Indian tribes along the way. It was from a combination of the indigenous footpaths, early trade and exploration routes, and horse and mule routes that the trail network known collectively as the “Old Spanish Trail” evolved. (The name was a term rooted in John C. Frémont’s report of his 1844 journey over the trail for the U.S. Topographical Corps., guided by Kit Carson. While the name acknowledges the fact that parts of the trail had been known to the Spanish since the 16th century, the 700-mile trail was not established until the Mexican period.) Many prominent members of both New Mexican and Californio families traversed this route as part of annual caravans. In one celebrated, well-documented instance, two toddlers made the trip while packed into the mules’ saddlebags.

Thanks in part to the Old Spanish Trail, Santa Fe emerged as the hub of the overland continental trade network linking Mexico and United States markets—a network that included not only this trail, but also the [Santa Fe Trail](#) and [El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro](#). After the United States took control of the Southwest in 1848, other routes to California emerged, a wagon route was opened to southern California, and use of the Old Spanish Trail sharply declined.

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