La Vereda Del Norte Chapter
This newsletter is revived after a rest, attempting to inspire those living near this part of the Old Spanish Trail (OST).

Please feel free to read, think, and respond to ideas related to how we can enrich the experiences offered by the Old Spanish National Historic Trail.

By Doug Knudsen Historian
The Old Spanish Trail is unique in many respects.

It is not just a path used for a couple of years. In fact, it is more than one path.

It is a route--rather at least three routes.

The routes were taken for various means.

They didn't take wagons; they walked or rode horses and mules.

The people did not go just one way. They were business folks, who went to southern California, sold and then bought, and turned around to take trade goods back to Santa Fe.

This trail is different in several ways.
1. It was a two-way-trip trail for most of the travelers.
2. Few if any took wagons with them (too rough for much of the way).
3. The trail was in Spanish territory for most of the route--but soon became part of America.
4. The travelers often were Mexicans, Anglos, and Indians, working together. They mixed and traded with California people.
5. A few returned three to five times, then decided to stay to help California and Oregon grow.

The Old Spanish Trail Monument is off of Highway 160 east of Del Norte. Photo: John McEvoy

You can now follow the general routes by auto, or horseback, or tour bus, or bicycle or walking. Several have done it, but they ran into barb-wire fences, big and small towns, and highways that divert you somewhat. In the past five or six years, several groups have made the routes and talked publically about their trips. Perhaps you will be the next.

It is now an erratically marked track claimed by the National Park Service and BLM. Thanks to the Old Spanish Trail Assoc. (volunteers). You can join us.

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Historical Response of the Old Spanish Trail Association

Back at the beginning of consideration of the OST, the officers of OSTA were at work to rebut due diligence of the national significance of the Old Spanish Trail. The 26 page OSTA document in September 2000 included information on historical facts of this trail, which was used as reasons to not recognize this trail as ineligible for recognition of it as a National Historical Trail.

The committee of 23 association members (mostly officers and association members) submitted a carefully written set of facts that countered the National Park Service as to the reasons for designation of the Old Spanish Trail and its history of use by many different people for various activities. The government argument to deny the counter argument of the OSTA team was not clear. Never the less, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and colleagues soon boosted the Trail through the Senate and House. The Trail became legally one of our National Historic Trails. 😊 Doug Knudsen Historian

"Some researchers believe the Old Spanish Trail forked and went east of the Sand Dunes, and others believe it went to the west of the Dunes. Maybe all locations are correct as most travelers would take the path of least resistance at the time." Photo of Medano Creek by John McEvoy
Traders, their mules, and their woolen goods are the "stars" of the trail—stars that were introduced to modern people to enrich their perspectives of the world in the 1820s-40s.

But, as usual, there is more to it. The trail's importance for today's visitors includes many other components and related attractions. The history involves more than a few groups of individuals riding to California and back.

The story of the trail (and our interpretation):
- It goes back in history to long before the 1598 arrival of the Spanish.
- It involves more people and animals than those who rode or walked on it.
- It extends to the later developments among the people, led by former trail traders.

1. The location of the trail is more than a single, double, or triple beaten-down footpath.
   - It involves a whole expanse of the Southwest and its people, then and now.
   - The trail's significance can stimulate us to interpret it by:
     - Topography
     - Geology
     - Vegetation
     - Wildlife
     - Hydrology
     - Astronomy
     - Rural western life, customs, and their historic connections.
     - Wilderness experience and policy in mountains and desert.
     - Climatology emphasizing water; from snow to aridity.
     - Way finding methods from long ago (e.g. Culturally Modified Trees).

2. Her-story is a vital component in our understanding of the trail.
   - Who wove the wool into an item of commerce?
   - Who tended and defended the home place while father was far out in the desert?
   - How did the women represent the family in the community for 6 months?
   - How about the women who were traded for horses along the route home?

3. How can OSTA members most efficiently help to present this trail?
   - Research
   - Promotion
   - Protection
   - Education
   - Interpretation 

   par excellence

4. What can you as OSTA Chapter Members do to:
   - Introduce the Trail to the communities near the routes near you.
   - Write articles for local readers.
   - Develop appropriate projects.
   - Involve children in exciting ways.
   - Involve churches, clubs, and colleges.
   - Show the trail near you to visitors.
   - Get people on the trail.

So—what can Association members do now? At least:
- Encourage support of tourism-related businesses by selling them on the trail.
- Encourage local officials to provide access and signage to segments of the trail via gateway parks and communities.

This is now America's trail. You can help! Make it America's best-interpreted trail.
Do You Recognize this Fellow?

This is *Gabriel Archangel*

He made life smooth for many Old Spanish Trail arrivals in California.

He was born at  
Mission San Gabriel, California  

He was once the richest man in the state.  

He represented an integration of races  
- African - Spanish - Indian  

And he welcomed many Anglos coming from New Mexico to California.  

Read about him in:  

**Characters of the Old Spanish Trail**  
By Doug Knudsen

Your opinions, observations and questions are essential to this publication.  
Chime in with your observations and send them to:  

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Exciting News!

This sign is at the intersection of County Road P6 and County Road 21, east of San Luis

The engineer for Costilla County has stated that all eight of the signs that were sent to them have been put up, so this portion of the signage project is complete. The Saguache County Commissioners have indicated that they are beginning to process the necessary paperwork to get signs up in their county also.

Photo courtesy Kat Hazelton Olance, San Luis Valley Museum Association
The next two photos are of rock cairns and a rock art site that are believed to be of both Native American and Hispanic origin.

By Ken Frye

The cairns in the above photo are about 2 miles southwest of Saguache on a high hill just west of US Highway 285. They are near what locals call the "cuts" and are above a Native American site with several ceremonial circles that could be vision quests.

The cairns and the circles appear to align with Mt. Blanca, sacred mountain to the Navajos, Apaches, Ute, Rio Grande Pueblos and other tribes. We believe the cairns may have been marking an ancient trail, water location or ceremonial site and are overlooking what we believe to be the West Fork or the North Branch of the Old Spanish Trail.

There are many other cairns in the area to the west of Saguache on high hills. They were constructed there to be very visible from trails along Saguache Creek. Some archeologists believe the cairns were placed there by shepherders in the late 19th century to mark trails or grazing boundaries. Some other archeologists believe the Native Americans constructed them long ago and there were later used by the Hispanic settlers in the area.

Photo courtesy Ken Frye, President of La Vereda Chapter OST
By Ken Frye

The rock art above is at Vargas Crossing in Costilla County. It is between the East Fork and the West Fork of the OST, where Don Diego de Vargas, the governor-general of New Mexico, crossed the Rio Grande in 1694.

The rock art symbols depicted above are petroglyphs of a Maltese Cross, possibly carved by the Vargas expedition when they came to the area and on the right is a sun symbol. The sun may have been much older and left there thousands of years ago by Native Americans from the Rio Grande Pueblos. It is believed a scout came along on the Vargas expedition from the San Juan Pueblo near present day Espanola and may have heard of the crossing from his ancestors.

Vargas led a band of Spaniards north into the San Luis Valley to avoid ambush by Pueblo tribes after he raided the corn stores of several Pueblo villages to feed hungry Spanish settlers in Santa Fe. Vargas went up the East Fork from Taos to the West Fork and back to Santa Fe.

On the way back to Santa Fe, his party crossed the Rio Grande at an island near the current CO Hwy 142 Bridge. In pioneer days, the site became heavily used as the Costilla ferry. A marker at the bridge commemorates this crossing. The Conejos County Museum (also a satellite office for the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area) can provide more detailed information of this part of southern Colorado. Excerpted from museumtrail.org/in-the-steps-of-pioneers

Photo courtesy Ken Frye, President of La Vereda Chapter OST
The Old Spanish Trail Landform Sculpture, located between Monte Vista and Del Norte, Colorado (along US 160), holds special significance to the Old Spanish Trail within the San Luis Valley. The sculpture stands near a portion of the West Fork Trail of the North Branch of the trail. The sculpture was conceived as a way to mark an historic trail and highlight the cultures of the San Luis Valley and was created by Mettje Swift, of Del Norte.

Two ancient routes ran the length of the San Luis Valley. One, designated today as the East Fork of the National Historic Old Spanish Trail’s North Branch, coursed the open sage country along the base of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range. The other, the West Fork, traversed the San Luis Valley along the base of the San Juan Mountains.

For thousands of years these trails were well used by ancestral natives, and later by Spanish colonists, fur trappers, explorers, herdsmen, prospectors, invaders, military (expeditions), slave traders, and settlers. In following river courses and the lay of the land, the trails say with courteous proof, “this was the way, the ancient way.”