



Red Rock Canyon NCA Environmental Education Program

Crossing the Old Spanish Trail

Grades: 6-12

Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes

Standards Met:

- 6-8 grade:
 - *Social Studies H2.[6-8].1*
Summarize the contributions of the diverse populations of Nevada's early settlers.
 - *Social Studies H2.[6-8].4* Identify and explain the importance of immigrant and native groups to mining, ranching, railroads, and commerce in Nevada and the United States.
 - *Social Studies G8.[6-8].4* Discuss the impact of natural hazards on the use and distribution of resources.
 - *Social Studies G8.[6-8].8* Evaluate different viewpoints regarding a resource.
 - *Social Studies E10.[6-8].1* Describe the transition from the use of commodities as money to the use of modern forms of money.
- 9-12 grade:
 - *Social Studies G7.[9-12].5* evaluate why major cities develop in particular geographic locations and how this affects cultures.
 - *Social Studies G7.[9-12].7* Analyze how location and distance connect to influence economic systems at local, national, and international levels.
 - *Social Studies G8.[9-12].4* Analyze human perception and reaction to natural hazards including use, distribution, and importance of resources.
 - *Social Studies E9.[9-12].2* Analyze how consumers adjust their purchases in response to price changes using the concept of price elasticity.

Objective:

Learn history of Old Spanish Trail use in the area
Improve class teamwork and communication

Procedure:

Go over the History of Old Spanish Trail with students, stopping before the Mexican-American War and the trail going into disuse (see attached). Include that many parts of the trail followed old Native American trading routes that had been used for hundreds of years or more.

After you have gone over the history, inform students they are going to simulate the difficulties people faced while crossing over the Old Spanish Trail.

Mark two parallel lines about 20 feet apart with either rope or student's backpacks. On the one side of the rope, where the students are now, is Santa Fe, and the other side of the rope is Los Angeles. They are Antonio Armijo, and they need to find a way to get from Santa Fe to Los Angeles to set up trade. Unfortunately, the terrain is too rough to just walk straight across. They need to make a trail that will let them get from one side to the other.

Give the group the paper plates. These are the only way to get across the terrain, and represent trail markers the students will put down so they know where their trail is. It takes a lot of work to put in a trail marker, so once it is put down, it cannot be moved. However, the trail markers are also nice and other people might steal them to use on other trails, so they need to be held down at all times, either by hand, foot, or other appendage, so they aren't taken. Students need to get from Santa Fe to Los Angeles by staying on these trail markers, otherwise they fall off a cliff and have to start over.

Note: *You might want to have chaperones assist you in this activity by removing any paper plates they see go untouched. They may also need to catch any of these plates if they blow away. Please make sure students do not place plates on top of vegetation.*

Materials Needed:

- 8-10+ Paper plates or cardboard squares
- Two long pieces of rope (optional)
- Old Spanish Trail Map (attached)
- Old Spanish National Historical Trail by Elizabeth von Till Warren (attached)

Sources:

Old Spanish Trail Association:
<http://www.oldspanishtrail.org/>

The Old Spanish National Historic Trail by Elizabeth von Till Warren, accessed from http://www.oldspanishtrail.org/trail_history.php

Activity adapted from Hot Chocolate River teambuilding activity; original source unknown

Submitted by Anica Mercado

If necessary, inform students that this is more about communication and less about physical ability. The goal of this activity is to get them to work together as a group. Allow them at least five minutes before trying variations.

Variations: Depending on the age group or level of success the group is having, you may want to add or subtract the number of paper plates from the beginning. (Generally they should start with 1-2 more than they need to get across.) You can also add special trail signs, paper plates with an X on them, that do not need to be anchored down as time goes on to make the activity easier. (You might need to weigh these down with a rock to prevent them from blowing away.) If your class has one or two very outspoken people, you can assign a different, more introverted leader ahead of time, or tell those students they cannot talk. You can also choose to make the entire activity silent for added difficulty. If the students succeeded rather quickly, you can have them make a new trail from Los Angeles back to Santa Fe, adding in some of these variations to make it more difficult. Adapt the activity to what suits your

goals and class dynamic.

After the students have all made it across the trail, or when you run out of time, discuss the activity. Did everyone make it across the trail? How did the activity go for them? What worked well? What didn't work well? What would they have changed or done differently? What were their strengths and weaknesses, both as a group and as individuals? How does this translate to how things have gone in class, or in other areas of their lives?

Turn the discussion back to the Old Spanish Trail. It obviously is no longer in current use; why do they think it stopped being used? What differences might have changed its popularity? In addition to the Mexican-American War, the discovery of gold in California in 1848 also increased the value of horses and mules in the area; what change did this have to the trail? What was the economic impact? What do they think of the initial trading system, two blankets for a horse and three or more for a mule? How is that different than we think about value in our monetary system today?

Wrap up with the remainder of history on the trail and its use today.

Suggested Locations: Straight, somewhat wide area.	
Pine Creek Trail: 3, between 4&5, or 7	Red Spring Boardwalk: 1,4, or between 5&9
Fire Ecology Loop: Between 1&2 or 4	Moenkopi Loop: Between 1&2 or 3



The Old Spanish National Historic Trail

by Elizabeth von Till Warren

The Old Spanish Trail became the fifteenth national historic trail when Congress adopted S. 1946 in November and President George W. Bush signed the bill early in December 2002. The Old Spanish Trail linked two provinces of Mexico separated by such difficult topography and climatic extremes that, despite attempts beginning as early as 1776, a route was successfully opened only in 1829. In that year Antonio Armijo, a merchant from Santa Fe, led 60 men and 100 mules on the known trails blazed northward by trappers and traders with the Utes, and backtracked along the route Spanish padres Dominguez and Escalante recorded as they returned to Santa Fe from southern Utah more than fifty years earlier.

Armijo's group then blazed a new path using parts of Jedediah Smith's routes of 1826 and 1827, and Rafael Rivera's route of 1828. Armijo avoided the worst of the Mojave Desert, traveling south of Death Valley following intermittent streams and locating springs to support the party. He arrived at San Gabriel Mission in California with his group intact, although the men were forced to rely on mule meat during their final days on the trail. In California, they traded the blankets and other goods carried by packsaddle from Santa Fe for horses and mules, available in great numbers and little valued by the Californios. Several thousand of these horses were driven back to Santa Fe, where they became important in trade with both Chihuahua and St. Louis.

The return journey marked the first time a caravan made a round trip between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, and the governor of New Mexico trumpeted this fact immediately to his superiors in Mexico City. There was finally a land link between these two regions; no longer was Santa Fe so land locked, because California provided access to foreign markets via her seaports. The international trade between the United States and Mexico via Santa Fe would be enhanced by the commercial traffic between Santa Fe and Los Angeles made possible by Armijo's success. For his efforts, New Mexico's governor appointed Armijo "Commander for the Discovery of the Route to California."

News of the opening of trade with California resulted in immediate commerce between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. With a few exceptions, pack trains made annual treks between New Mexico and California, bringing woven Mexican products to California, which lacked sheep, and bartering them for horses and mules, scarce in New Mexico. Emigrants from New Mexico began to take the Spanish Trail to California in the late 1830s, and outlaws used the trail to raid the California ranchos. Raids for Indian slaves became common, with victims sold at either end of the trail despite official condemnation of the practice. The traffic in human beings reverberated among the peoples who lived along the trail for many years longer than the caravans plied their trade.

People made use of the Spanish Trail for a variety of purposes, which over time led to the development of several main routes and numerous alternates. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail Feasibility Study recognizes several main routes and the Armijo trace in identifying the period of significance for the trail. The year after Armijo's journey, 1830-1831, William Wolfskill and George Yount blazed a different route that used some of the same landmarks. Their route, following the Colorado River to Needles, and up the Mojave River to Cajon Pass, was much favored by later travelers. Some trail users chose to trade with the Utes as far north as Salt Lake, and followed a path now labeled the "North Branch," which led to Grand Junction, Colorado before heading south to rejoin the other major route from Santa Fe via Green River, Utah. Several variants of these two routes were also used, but all came together in southern

Utah, fanning out once again into separate trails from southern Nevada to southeastern California. They came together again at the Mojave River, which brought travelers to the Cajon Pass portal of southern California. The group of main trails and alternates together form the Old Spanish Trail.

Americans became aware of the trail with the publication of John C. Fremont's Report of his 1844 journey from California to the States, the return leg of his expedition to Oregon for the U.S. Topographical Corps. Fremont's Report created a sensation in Washington, already struck with Manifest Destiny fever. Fremont took the Spanish Trail across to Utah. People called the route by various names, but he called it the "Spanish Trail" in his Report, and that is the name that has been used ever since. Recognizing that a large area of the interior desert had no connection to the sea, Fremont first called it the "Great Basin", another name used ever since – in his report.

The Spanish Trail name and use lapsed after the War with Mexico ended in 1848. There was no longer any need to link Santa Fe with Los Angeles by this difficult mule trail; other, wagon-friendly routes were opened. The Spanish Trail was not a route of major emigration to the West; trails to the north and south of it were preferred for this wagon traffic. Spanish Trail caravans continued to trade with the Mormons in Utah, but by 1853 they were no longer welcome there. The New Mexican caravans were out of business.

Popular and academic interest in the trail was only sporadically evident over the ensuing decades. Interest in the trail began to revive beginning in 1921, with the publication of an article by Joseph J. Hill, the 1930 and 1931 work of Eleanor F. Lawrence, and the publication in 1930 of George Brewerton's *Overland with Kit Carson*. William R. Palmer of Cedar City, Utah organized the Spanish Trail Association in 1946. This group placed 100 markers along the trail between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, but faded soon after accomplishing this task in 1950. LeRoy and Ann Hafen of Utah published their definitive history of the trail in 1954; this work inspired still other research, and the post WWII jeep made it possible for the general public to explore the desert, stimulating interest in the trail.

Efforts to mark the trail revived. Nevada, in celebration of its centennial, marked the Fremont route in 1964-65. In Utah, the Emery County Historical Society placed markers in the Green River area in the early 1990s, while in the mid-1990s, Iron County Boy Scouts of America marked the trail through their territory. New energy to identify and mark the trail arose among the people of Grand Junction, Colorado in the 1990s as well. This effort focused much attention on the trail's North Branch, energizing discussions about the Spanish Trail and its importance for the region. Beginning in 1992, a strategy for attaining National Historic Trail designation was laid out by individuals connected with the Riverfront Commission in Grand Junction and the Colorado Board of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

In 1993 these trail aficionados convinced Colorado's Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Representative Scott McInnis to introduce a bill authorizing the NPS to study the feasibility of including the Old Spanish Trail in the National Trails System as a National Historic Trail. In 1994, Colorado supporters founded the present Old Spanish Trail Association (OSTA). This group teamed up with the Colorado delegates and senators from New Mexico, Utah, and California to keep the legislation alive. Senator Campbell and Congressman McInnis succeeded in including the Old Spanish Trail feasibility study in the 1996 Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act.

The first draft of the feasibility study, issued in July 2000, found insufficient information to

conclude that the Old Spanish Trail was nationally significant. OSTA mobilized its resources and crafted a response, which tipped the scale in favor of national historic trail designation. The NPS Advisory Board voted to recommend inclusion of the Old Spanish Trail in the national trail system, and in July 2001, the NPS issued a final feasibility study that concluded the Old Spanish Trail is “nationally significant within the theme of the Changing Role of the United States in the World Community and the topics of trade and commerce, during the period of 1829-1848.”

Early in 2002, Senator Campbell introduced S 1946, the Old Spanish Trail Recognition Act. In 2002, Congress passed the bill unanimously. Secretary of Interior Gale Norton assigned preparation of a Comprehensive Management Plan to both the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service; both agencies are now working on implementing this order, modeled on the approach that produced a plan for managing the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail in New Mexico. The Old Spanish Trail Association is eager to participate in the preparation of this plan.