Santa Fe, Oregon, & California
National Historic Trails
National Trails System

Santa Fe Trail Association
Oregon-California Trails Association
City of Gardner
National Park Service

# Through The Eye of The Needle

The historic junction of three great western frontier trails; the Santa Fe Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the California Trail is located approximately one-half mile to the north. To the southwest lay the Santa Fe Trail and to the northwest was the road to Oregon and California.

By 1827, freight wagons loaded with goods and commodities were traveling between the Missouri River frontier and Mexico's provincial capital at Santa Fe. A single event that year determined the location of this historic junction and foreshadowed the creation of the Oregon and California trails. Fur trappers William Sublette and Moses "Black" Harris, returning from a 1500 mile journey to the northern Rocky Mountains, came down the Kansas River Valley and encountered the Santa Fe Trail near here and followed it east to the settlements at Independence and St. Louis.

Between the late 1830s and the early 1850s, as many as 200,000 emigrants may have passed through this gateway in order to start a new life in the Oregon Territory or to take a chance seeking their fortune in the gold fields of California. During this same period, thousands of freighters loaded with commodities were also rumbling through this junction heading to and from the markets at Santa Fe.

When William Sublette turned south from the Kansas River toward the path of the Santa Fe Trail, he did more than establish an emigrant path to the west, he created a "landmark."

*"This morning we passed the road to Oregon that leaves, about eight miles from Round Grove, the Santa Fe Road, and turns to the right towards the Kansas. A way post had been put there, marked "Road to Oregon."* Dr. Frederick A. Wislizenus - May 24, 1846

*"About noon today we left the Santa fee trace these are two of the longest roads that are perhaps in the world."* —James Clyman

*"We left today , the great Santa Fe thoroughfare, one of the best natural roads in the world, extending through a vast extent of Prairie, so level that the dashing rains which wash, and keep constantly out of repair, roads in more hilly countries, have no effect on this great highway of nature, but to produce a little mud for a few hours, when the water disappears being absorbed by thee peculiar soil on which it descends."* — Samuel Rutherford Dundass' May 1, 1849

*"It was raining this morning and we did not start to 9 and in 8 miles came to where the Santa Fe road leaves the old Orregon trail. It still continued to rain and the roads became somewhat heavy."* — James Pritchard, 1849

*"We are now camped on Bull creek a short distance from the forks of the road one to Santa Fee and other to Salt Lake via Forts to California and Oragon."* — Edmund Hinde, 1850

*By the 1840s, this trail junction was well established and many travelers, both east and west bound, took note of it in letters, diaries, and journals.*

*"When Wagon Trails Were Dim," by Charles M. Russell. Image is courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.*