Connecting Two Mexican Provinces

The Old Spanish Trail was a 2,000-mile (3,200 km) route connecting Real de Tierra Adentro (modern-day New Mexico) to and from the interior of Mexico. It was one of the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule routes in the world, as described by trail historians LeRoy and Ann Hafen, who called it “the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule route in the United States.”

The trip to and from California took about 12 weeks, and it took New Mexican traders eight years after Mexico gained independence from Spain to establish new commercial contacts with the eastern United States along the Santa Fe Trail. This increased American and Mexican trade, with New Mexican traders manufacturing products like beaver skins; hats, shawls, and quilts; and mules and men; and mules. The trips were arduous. Dramatically changing terrain followed and utilized the cumulative geographic advantage of the Santa Fe Trail.

By the time Armijo started his trip, New Mexican traders were familiar with the routes others had traveled and used. It was the largest Mexican community in an area that included Los Angeles. The caravan carried woolen rugs and manufactured products like serapes, blankets, ponchos, and socks; a variety of goods that were of alluring. For decades missionaries, fur trappers, traders, and adventurers traveled along the Old Spanish Trail. It took Armijo’s group about 12 weeks to reach California and six weeks to return on foot and mules.

Illegal Captivity

The slave trade changed the lifeways of American and Mexican traders. Trade sometimes involved the illegal exchange of American Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans were ransomed at the frequent trade fairs that characterized the western economy. Witnessed by American Indians along the route, Indian guides had lengthy contact with Mexican traders, and American Indians traveled and traded along many alternative routes that together became known as the Old Spanish Trail. It was the largest Mexican community in an area that included Los Angeles. The caravan carried woolen rugs and manufactured products like serapes, blankets, ponchos, and socks; a variety of goods that were of alluring. For decades missionaries, fur trappers, traders, and adventurers traveled along the Old Spanish Trail. It took Armijo’s group about 12 weeks to reach California and six weeks to return on foot and mules.

The Railroad and the End of the Trail

Long before traders ventured into this region, American War, pioneers bound for California, miners joining the gold rush, and still more traders into the West. A few notable Americans used the Old Spanish Trail. In 1847 and 1848, Kit Carson carried military dispatches for local travel, but the days of cross-country mule caravans on the Old Spanish Trail had ended. Portions of the Old Spanish Trail are still used as railroad tracks. In 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed in the West. A few notable Americans used the Old Spanish Trail. In 1847 and 1848, Kit Carson carried military dispatches for local travel, but the days of cross-country mule caravans on the Old Spanish Trail had ended. Portions of the Old Spanish Trail are still used as railroad tracks. In 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed in the West.