

Connecting Two Mexican Provinces

In 1829, La Villa Real de Santa Fe de San Francisco de Asis, provincial capital of New Mexico, was just a dusty frontier town that sheltered a mix of Spanish colonial families, newer Mexican arrivals, displaced Indians, and a small, but growing number of Americans. Over 1,000 miles to the west, the Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles was an even smaller ranch town. Consisting of little more than a church and plaza, and a few homes and government buildings, it was the largest Mexican community in an area characterized by dispersed ranches, decaying Spanish missions, and Indian villages.

During the winter of 1829-1830, Antonio Armijo led a caravan of 60 men and 100 pack mules from New Mexico to Mission San Gabriel in California, east of Los Angeles. The caravan carried woolen rugs and blankets produced in New Mexico to trade for horses and mules.

Other trade parties soon followed. Some found alternative routes that together became known as the Old Spanish Trail. It took Armijo's group about 12 weeks to reach California and six weeks to return on the trail historians LeRoy and Ann Hafen called, "the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule route in the history of America."



View of Santa Fe in 1846 by John W. Abert



Detail, San Gabriel Mission, 1832, by Ferdinand Deppe
Courtesy Santa Barbara Mission Archive-Library