

The following is an excerpt from an unpublished manuscript written by Bert J. Silliman, in November of 1952 in Green River, Utah. Mr. Silliman was a petroleum prospector and formed the Nequoia Association with E. T. Wolverton in 1918. Mr. Silliman believed there was sufficient evidence to indicate that Spaniards, with their Indian slaves, built the trail at Spanish Bottom in Cataract Canyon.

● ..there was an older road, more direct to a different destination, and in contrast to the OLD SPANISH TRAIL, an attempt had been made to mark and improve the trail. It clearly belonged to a different era, with other kinds of merchandise and it is a too great stretch of the imagination to expect either Spaniards or Indians of their own volition, to make stone stair steps, switch back dugways, pile the loose rocks in neat rows at each side of a wide "right of way" and build houses and corrals at the nightly camping places, with ruins of furnaces for smelting ore or perhaps as forges for the horse-shoers, it strongly suggests that this was done by slave labor.

This OLD SPANISH TRAIL with its beginnings in the Rio Grand Valley of New Mexico enters Utah in the Four Corners country, the only place in the United States where four states have a common corner, south of the Abajo Mountains near the south end of Elk Ridge is a prominent land mark called the Bear's Ears, because of the resemblance of two craggy pinnacles on its apex to the ears of that animal. The old trail passed between the ears as does a present road, and the old timers called it the BEARS EARS TRAIL.

Thence it went northwesterly along Elk Ridge to a point overlooking the Cataracts of the Colorado. The trail down a side canyon to the river level was in active use by the Utes when Powell passed with his boat expedition in 1871. The crossing was made just above the first cataract and the widening of the canyon on the west side still goes by the name of Spanish Bottoms. The ascent of the sheer western wall was made by stone steps and a switchback trail that excited my eighty year old "river rat" friend who first saw it near 50 years ago! Why it was that wide as he extended his arms about four feet. At the top of the ascent, just before entering the land of the Standing Rocks, the passage is through a sunken valley. A block of stone had dropped between two fault lines in what geologists call a graben. After skirting the base of the towering Vermillion Cliffs a few miles, one

comes to the only breakdown or doorway through this line of cliffs within 50 miles. This is Sunset Pass and gives access to Nequoia Basin, or as it is usually called, Hatch Canyon. This is all that a pass should be, it comes just at the nick of time, and requires no tedious climb to attain its summit. Just turn right and enter. The basin is of considerable extent and sports a "rock island" at least 5 miles long. The narrow canyon leads to the Dirty Devil River which the trail crosses and goes up by Poison Spring Wash to the Burr Desert. These names sound rough, but I think that should anyone be curious enough to trace out this old trail, they would agree that the names are appropriate.

Fremont came this way in early 1854, but there are only the briefest incidents of cold and suffering recorded. He says, "the falling snow and destitute condition of my party again interfered to impede examinations," and only a few days later even his iron constitution and indomitable will had to succumb. Fortunately, his weakness was transient. Mrs. Fremont, in an unpublished manuscript relates, "Suddenly my strength gave out, all power of motion left me, I could not move a foot. I sat down in the snow and waited, after a few minutes, strength enough came back, and no one noticed what had happened."

Fremont left the Bear's Ears Trail somewhere in the Burr Desert and went Westward. To the North, the prominent landmark, Temple Mountain, loomed above the enclosing San Rafael Reef which ran as far to the north as eye could see. The Old Spanish Trail crossed the Dirty Devil River and went north, turned northwestward up South Temple Wash through a gap in the Reef, passed by towering Temple Mountain on the right, and steeply climbing gained the surface of the elevated dome which is Sindbad. And looking backward, I can only say, as I have said before, that the inside vertical line of sheer cliffs of the Reef extending without break for miles and miles save for the narrow canyon through which they had entered did not require any stretch of the imagination of those very early Spaniards who first came this way, to remind them of Sindbad's Valley "exceedingly great and wide and deep and bounded by vast mountains that spired high in air. None could descry their summits for the excess of their height, nor was any able to climb up thereto."

The Old Bear's Ears Trail continued northwestward diagonally across the Sindbad by the way of Cole Wash and Horn Silver Gulch and out through the western Reef near Molen. On its way, my informants say, that in places it is laid out

with such precision that it suggests the use of instruments. That there are places where the old trail has worn two feet down in said shale by much usage. An old inscription which bore the date of 1777, a cross and a Spanish name, but now almost or quite illegible. Fifteen or twenty grave mounds along the road side may possibly indicate the site of a sanguinary battle, with heavy losses incurred by the Spaniards.

From Molen, the old trail attending northwesterly, crossed Castle Valley to Huntington Creek. Up Huntington Canyon to Trail Canyon, by which ascent was made to the plateau top. Thence over Wasatch Plateau near modern town of Schofield, down Spanish Ridge between Soldier and Thistle creeks to their junction as Spanish Fork River. Thence ten miles down the canyon to the open Utah Valley and the country of Timpanagos.

What merchandise was carried over this route we do not know other than that given by an adaptation of the old Game of Hare and Hounds, with the exception that my informants did not spend a summer tracing its course by little bits of paper but by fragments of rich ore that had dropped from ore sacks atop the pack saddles of the travelers; especially at their nightly camping places. The fact that the road had been improved and enough ore had fallen along the trail that it could be traced, would indicate that it was in constant use for a considerable period.

A rough guess could be made that the purpose of this road was to convey ore from Utah Valley to Santa Fe, but we have no written record of any appreciable amount of mining operations along the route or are there producing mines at this date. True there are many remains and relics of ancient

workings that may date back two centuries or even earlier. But they seem more like prospects than mines that have produced ore in quantity, and I know of no case where an old working has been made productive. It is also true that there are legends of lost mines such as the "Lost Josephine" which have persisted to this date. The bitter opposition to mining of the Indians and their tradition of Spanish mines worked by Indian slaves under inhuman conditions, and an uprising of the Indians against their cruel masters, in which after a desperate struggle the Spaniards were killed to the last man, and the hated mines carefully filled in, and covered and disguised in a way only an Indian would know, would open up the possibility that the good mines were successfully hidden.

There is written evidence that the Indians did just this to producing mines in northern Mexico. And we know that in 1680 there was just such an uprising of Indians in New Mexico in which all the outlying settlers and traders were massacred and only those of the larger settlements escaped death and even these were expelled from the country and it was years before the Rio Grande Valley was retaken and recolonized.

Thus there is much to be learned, and much evidence to be sought out, if such exists, before we can get more than a sketchy story of the OLD SPANISH TRAIL and the still older BEAR'S EARS TRAIL and the men who traveled them. For what reasons? To what end? When? ...

Bert J. Silliman
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