

Trail Turtles Seek, Find, Map Southern Trail Routes

*Story and Photos
By Richard Greene and
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The Trail Turtles mapping group was out on the trail in October, again working to identify trail segments. Sixteen mappers turned out for part or all of this October 2012 trip.

This mapping trip is the beginning of an effort to fill in the “gaps” of earlier mapping trips. The idea is to work from the Rio Grande west. The goal of this trip was to complete the mapping of two trails that left the river north of what is today Hatch, NM. Diaries tell us that some emigrants went more or less straight west, missing Foster’s Hole, and intersected Cooke’s Road beyond the water stop. The other trail went more north and into Cuervo Arroyo, following it upstream to join Cooke’s Road before Foster’s Hole. Some travelers used these routes before Fort Thorn was established on the river north of today’s Hatch, and some used it after Fort Thorn was established. Joe Allen was hired by the Las Cruces BLM some years ago to map and write a report on these two trails. Joe died in 1995. Although the report was never published, his notes and a rough draft of the report are on file at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. His report was very useful in looking for these trails, along with GLO maps, trail diaries, and Google Earth images.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 10

Tracy DeVault, Richard Greene and Mike Volberg arrived in

Deming, NM, on the evening of the Oct. 9 to install an OCTA historical marker at the John Chaffin gravesite.

They met Jane Childress (BLM, Las Cruces) early that morning in Deming, NM. Jane would supervise the placement of the



Cam Wade at the grave of John Chaffin, Cooke’s Peak in the background. This OCTA marker was placed on Oct. 10. (Photo by Charles Townley.)

marker and make sure that there would be minimal disturbance around the gravesite.

After an hour’s drive, the group arrived at the site near the trail landmark, Cooke’s Spring. At Jane’s direction this marker was placed at ground level. It had taken us a several years to get to this moment.

While in the area we discussed the Sun Zia Power project coming through the area. Jane thought that our knowledge of the trail would be useful to show if the power line went over the trail.

The group drove through Cooke’s Pass to the Massacre Peak mass grave site of Anton Brewer and eight Mexican herders killed by the Apaches. The mass grave was a large mound of small white rocks and on top of which are scattered some big rocks – it looked like a desecrated grave.

We went on to an old mining pit and by it were some boulders with mortar holes. We then mapped a section of trail with rust and some spectacular grooves in gray rock. After that, Tracy and Richard hiked up to the top of the nearby rocky bluffs to see a cave with rocks stacked in the front. Spectacular petroglyphs and more mortar holes could be found by the cave and on the slopes. After that, we all went back to check out the Fort Cummings cemetery and stage station.

Tracy had an old 1880s photo of a buggy beside Cooke’s Spring. Tracy and Richard scrambled over a nearby rocky ridge and believed they found the location from which the photo was taken. Walking to the building built over the spring we read and looked at a photo on the marker and noticed many buildings once existed around the spring. This could be why the buggy was there. The spring was used by the Atchison-Topeka-Santa Fe Railroad to supply water for locomotives; the railroad built the springhouse.

THURSDAY, OCT. 11

This day involved mapping in Cooke’s Canyon, in an area of parallel swales down a steep hill near the western end of the canyon. Large rocks had been stacked along the sides of the trail – in some places the rocks were stacked as high as walls. Wagons had been grinding down rocks and there were assorted metal fragments, pieces of iron, and glass. The trail had some badly eroded sections.

Trail Turtles...Map Some More

After lunch we did additional mapping back to Cooke's Spring. There was plenty of evidence of trail on the way back: lots of rust, glass, cans, and a nice muleshoe.

FRIDAY, OCT. 12

We left for the trip to our first mapping spot near the Double S ranch. After covering several miles on ranch roads, we parked close to the "Cardinal's Hat" rock formation. It was the start of mapping the Lower Road from Fort Thorn to where it joined Cooke's Wagon Road. We split into two groups with some going east and some going west. Tracy had provided us with all the waypoints we would be checking out on the aerials for this trip — we downloaded waypoints into our individual GPS units and would follow these waypoints on the "Go To" feature of our GPS.

For those going west the trail was easy to see until after some distance we got to a fence line about two miles out; then it disappeared. We found a solder top can. Nothing was visible at the junction of the two roads. We found two cartridges (1870s), some rust, and metal fragments on the trail. This is close to a line shack with three graves from the Lake Valley War (more on that later). The line shack has been fixed up since our last visit into a nice home with power — the three graves are in not as good shape.

The group mapping east did not find much for the first mile due to heavy grass in a low lying area, but on going up a slope the trail became very evident. Trail continued down the other side

of the slope until it was lost in a low grassy area. Evidence found included many good rust rocks, glass, horseshoes, and solder top cans.

The rancher did not want us to camp on the ranch and she suggested that we would find a good campsite at the Lake Valley historic mining town just a few miles north on Hwy 27. Several went there. The caretaker of the historic town recommended camping at the old cemetery up on



Don Buck and Richard Greene pause to examine a trail artifact. (Photo by Charles Townley)

the hill across from the town — so we went there.

Most everybody buried in the cemetery was born in the mid-1800s. The oldest grave births (1826 and 1827) belonged to two Civil War vets whose tombstones proudly stated their military affiliation. The two dominant families were the Nunns and Lathams who were on the same side in the Lake Valley War. (The "war" happened in 1921 and was a dispute over drilling for water on Double S Ranch land. The Nunns and Lathams challenged the Sykes family and in the shoot-out several cowboys lost their lives. The three graves on the ranch were from this dispute.)

SATURDAY, OCT. 13

We headed back to the ranch. The rancher met Tracy and voiced her concern over so many cars. Tracy told her that we had our food and gear in the cars and we were lucky that she agreed to let us go on. Tracy promised we would stay off the grass.

We followed the same ranch road out to Cardinal's Hat and took a turn heading north just before yesterday's parking area. We eventually ended up by a corral called Outlaw Well. Several hiked up Jug Canyon to Foster's Hole. The hike was not strenuous. About 100 yards from the Hole we could see the Mormon Battalion plaque shining on the rock wall of the hole. It was worth the hike to see the incredible sight of Foster's Hole almost full of water as Cooke had described. We took photos of Dan and Gregg sitting above the pool where Cooke sat and watched his men get buckets of water out of the Hole for the animals. Some mapping was attempted, but only an old pearl handled penknife and half a mule shoe were found.

Everybody else mapped east of Outlaw Well as far as Cuervo Arroyo but found nothing. Tracy concluded that "this was not where the road went."

After lunch we drove back as far as a township corner we went past coming in. Tracy and Richard walked east down the fence line hoping to find a way to get to where we needed to map but there was no access. We would have to drive to Hatch to find a way in.

On the way out of the ranch, Tracy stopped to thank the rancher for allowing us to map. They had a

Trail Turtles Still Mapping

good conversation and Tracy came away with the feeling that we had forged a friendship.

Some of our group toured the Lake Valley historic ghost town. The caretaker came out and answered all our questions until closing time. Here's the brief story: Lake Valley was a boom town when silver was discovered. The Bridal Chamber was the big silver mine, and ore from it was displayed at the 1882 World Exposition in Denver. In 1882 the town was considered "lawless" until the gunfighter Jim Courtright became marshal and tamed it. In 1884 the railroad came. The stage ran daily between Lake Valley, Hillsboro, and Kingston — the other mining towns in the region.

In 1893 silver lost value and Lake Valley suffered. In 1895 Main Street burned down. People started to leave. In the 1920s and into the 1950s manganese was mined for short periods. The last residents left in 1994 and Lake Valley became a ghost town and is now a historic site.

SUNDAY, OCT. 14

Everyone met at Hatch about 8 in the morning. Our radios helped us find each other. Hatch has changed a lot since we were last here — there is a solar farm on Hwy 26 close to Hatch and it has doubled its economic activity.

We took Hwy 187 north out of Hatch and turned west onto a dirt road before crossing the Rio Grande — the river consisted of patches of dry mud and very shallow water. We were looking for the road to Arroyo Cuervo. The side road we followed paralleled

the river before turning away and leading us to a steep hill to go over the surprisingly massive earth retention dam of Arroyo Cuervo. We mapped the North Route from the Fort Thorn area.

We headed out into a bushy,



Richard Greene at Foster's Hole. (Photo by Greg McEachron).

sandy, flat heading for a pass between low lying hills. We found some rust along this bench above the wash. Eventually on this wide bench we came onto Cooke's Wagon Road where we found plenty of rust, cans, half a mule shoe, a horseshoe, and a boulder covered with rust. Encountering ribbons of trail close to the prior day's finishing point we found rust across a wash.

MONDAY, OCT. 15

The group drove two miles back down the wash from camp to map. Our Google Earth images showed a possible trail on a bench in this area. We found nothing going west. When we went east we found rust specks (probably from cowboy horses), cowboy cartridges, and pieces of an old light blue green bottle. We ended up not far from a power line. The only indication that this could be the North Route from Fort Thorn was a musket ball Tracy found on the way back.

We went to the power line road to go south out of the arroyo. After several miles we left the power line road and took another road heading northwest until we found a suitable place to camp. It was a fabulous view from atop the mesa. A fiery sunset was another plus.

TUESDAY, OCT. 16

Early morning found us mapping back on the South Route. We had camped almost on the trail. Right by the road we found rust on the trail going both east and west. It was the start of a good mapping day. We went in both directions on the trail. For those going west, Cardinal's Hat was visible on the western horizon. Trail evidence was found, including parallel swales going up a slope.

Those going east moved along the trail all the way to the power line road. This end point connected with our work in 2005.

Tracy, along with Neal and Marian Johns, camped at the west end of Cooke's Canyon for the night. The next morning they spent some time examining and photographing the extensive mortar holes, petroglyphs, and two small caves in the area.

Tour the Gold Seeker Emigrant Route; Butterfield Overland Mail and Stage Route 1858-1861; historic Apache Spring and military Fort Bowie with the Trail Turtles during the Historic Trails Symposium in Tucson, AZ, March 16. *See pages 11-13 in this issue of NFP for full details.*