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Review of *Along Ancient Trails: The Mallet Expedition of 1739* By Donald J. Blakeslee

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BOOK REVIEWS

Along Ancient Trails: The Mallet Expedition of 1739. By Donald J. Blakeslee. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995. Illustrations, appendices, references, index. xvii + 291 pp. \$39.95.

In the popular mind the names Pierre and Paul Mallet carry little or no weight. Coronado, de Soto, Champlain, and Lewis and Clark occupy our imaginative space, crowding out adventurers like the Mallets. Even scholars have paid scant attention to the Mallets' epic journey from the Missouri River to Santa Fe in 1739. Donald J. Blakeslee's *Along Ancient Trails* sets the record straight, properly noting the Mallet role in the European exploration of the southern Great Plains. In doing so, Blakeslee not only recounts one expedition but illuminates the complex history of the entire region.

At the center of *Along Ancient Trails* is Blakeslee's masterful effort to locate the Mallet travel route through the present-day states of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. Unlike the superbly documented routes of explorers like Lewis and Clark or John C. Fremont, the Mallet paper trail is frustratingly thin. The original Mallet travel journal survives only in an abstract prepared for Governor Jean-Baptiste LeMoyne de Bienville. Blakeslee has fleshed out this skeletal record by looking to a wide variety of documentary sources, including the letters of the Fabry de la Bruyère expedition (1741), the Pierre Mallet expedition of 1750, and

subsequent travelers' accounts of journeys through the southern Plains to Santa Fe. Blakeslee's considerable experience as a field archaeologist convinced him that documentary and cartographic records alone were insufficient to the task of route reconstruction. Exploration history demands a thorough knowledge of terrain. The ground itself is a document, an enduring witness. Some of the book's most engaging sections recount Blakeslee's own reconnaissance of the Mallet route. It is that informed reconnaissance that adds to the study's credibility and gives it an unmistakable charm.

While most of *Along Ancient Trails* is devoted to a search for the Mallet path, its most important conceptual contribution is hinted at in the book's title. The European exploration of North America was always a cooperative enterprise. European explorers relied on Native people for everything from food and transportation to medical advice and route information. The Mallet expedition to Santa Fe was no exception. As Blakeslee ably demonstrates, the Mallets followed an Indian road to Santa Fe. Both Native people and Europeans explored that road. *Along Ancient Trails* is a powerful statement about the intersection of Native American and European exploration. It is at that crossroads that the volume makes its most significant contribution.

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