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REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS ON THE ROAD FROM MISSOURI TO NEW MEXICO, OCTOBER 1827

Edited by BUFORD ROWLAND

DURING a visit to his constituents in the summer of 1824, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri was impressed by the fact that the subject of commercial intercourse with Mexico bulked large in the thoughts of the people. By this time the citizens of the new state had inaugurated a thriving trade with the Mexicans in spite of the hostility of the Indians through whose territory the merchant caravans had to pass. The Missourians told the senator that this trade would increase greatly if the government secured permission from the Indians to mark a road over which men and merchandise would have safe passage.¹

Benton promised to sponsor the necessary legislation during the next session of congress. He asked that petitions be sent to Washington showing the advantages of such trade and the necessity of government protection. To secure first hand information about this trade he addressed twenty-two questions to Augustus Storrs upon the "origin, present state, and future prospect" of commercial intercourse between Missouri and Mexico.² With these documents Benton hoped to secure favorable action.

1. National Archives, SEN 18A-G7, "petitions from citizens of Boone and Howard Counties."

2. Storrs had served as postmaster at Franklin, Missouri, and had engaged in the Mexican trade in the summer of 1823. Stephens, F. F., "Missouri and the Santa Fe Trade," in *Missouri Historical Review*, X, 241. His answers to Benton's questions were printed as *Sen. Doc. 7*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess.

It was Benton's plan to place the matter before the senate early in the session which convened in December 1824, but, failing to receive the petitions during the first week of congress, he complained, ". . . the petitions on the subject of the Mexican trade have not yet arrived. They contain a body of facts upon which we can commence legislation with a good prospect of success."³ Shortly afterwards the petitions and Storrs' answers were received. Benton immediately presented them to the senate, and, on his motion, they were referred to the committee on Indian affairs of which he was the chairman.⁴ With these documents at its disposal the committee, on January 11, 1825, reported a bill which authorized the president "to appoint Commissioners to mark out a Road from the Western frontier of the State of Missouri, to the boundary line of the United States, in the direction of Santa Fe, of New Mexico." The commissioners were to make treaties with the intervening tribes of Indians for the marking of the road and for its unmolested use, and the president was to negotiate with the Mexican government for permission to continue the road into New Mexico. The bill appropriated \$10,000 to pay the cost of marking the road, and twenty thousand more for the expenses of treating with the Indians.⁵

In urging passage of the bill, Benton informed the senate that this trade with Mexico had amounted to some \$190,000 the previous year, and could be expected to increase many fold if it were regulated and protected. The increase would prove beneficial not only to Missouri but to the country as a whole since the chief exports were cotton goods which were manufactured in the North from cotton purchased in the South.⁶ With such a national appeal the bill

3. Benton to the editor of the *Missouri Intelligencer*, Washington, D. C., 1824. Quoted in *Missouri Intelligencer*, January 25, 1825.

4. *Senate Journal*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess., December 14 and January 3.

5. National Archives, SEN 18A-B2, no. 23.

6. *Register of Debates*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess., I, 342; *Missouri Republican*, February 7, 1825.

passed with little opposition, and on March 3, 1825, received the approval of President Monroe.⁷

The new president, John Quincy Adams, appointed George C. Sibley, Benjamin H. Reeves, and Thomas B. Mather to the commission,⁸ and on July 17, 1825, they began the survey at Fort Osage, now Sibley, Missouri. The commissioners did not complete their duties until July 1827, and it was not until October that they submitted their report to James Barbour, secretary of war.⁹ The report was lent to Colonel A. H. Sevier, the delegate from Arkansas Territory, and he in turn placed it in charge of the secretary of the senate in whose files it has been buried for many years.¹⁰ It was only when the senate records were transferred to The National Archives that the report was discovered.¹¹

THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS ON THE ROAD
FROM MISSOURI TO NEW MEXICO
OCTOBER 1827¹²

To The Honorable

James Barbour

Secy. Dept. of War

Washington City

Sir,

The undersigned Commissioners appointed by The President to carry into effect the Act of Congress passed on the 3d day of March 1825 "To authorise The President of The United States to cause a

7. *Senate Journal*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess., March 3, 1825.

8. Sibley, a citizen of Missouri, previous to his appointment had spent sixteen years in public service as sub-Indian agent and factor at Fort Osage. Reeves resigned as lieutenant-governor of Missouri to accept the appointment. Colonel Pierre Menard of Illinois was offered a place on the commission but could not serve, and the appointment was then given to Thomas Mather, speaker of the Illinois house of representatives. Hulbert, A. B., ed., *Southwest on the Turquoise Trail*, 101.

9. National Archives, Division of Justice Department Archives, "Register of Letters Received, A," no. 876.

10. T. L. McKenney to Sibley, Washington, August 31, 1829, National Archives, Division of Interior Department Archives, "Indian Office Letter Book," VI, 76.

11. National Archives, SEN 20A-J4, "Report of the Commissioners on the Road from Missouri to New Mexico, October 1827." The report is accompanied by the field notes of the Surveyor, Joseph C. Brown, and a very lengthy Journal kept by George C. Sibley. This Journal, as yet unpublished, covers the period from June 22 to November 30, 1825; and coupled with the Sibley Journal which covers the period from October 12, 1825 to March 31, 1826, printed in Hulbert's *Southwest on the Turquoise Trail*, gives a detailed account of the work of the commission.

12. Errors in spelling and punctuation are here reproduced without comment.

Road to be marked out from the Western frontier of Missouri to the confines of New Mexico" have after some unavoidable delays, fully completed the duties assigned them, and now do themselves the honour to lay before you, for the information of the Government, the following Report.

Anxious to execute the intentions of Congress promptly, The Commissioners did not lose a moment after the receipt of your communication dated the 16th of March 1825 (announcing their appointment and conveying to them instructions) in making Suitable preparations for the work before them aware that the Season would be far advanced before they could collect their Men and the necessary equipment on the frontier, and that they would probably be obliged to encounter the extreme heat of Summer and the Still greater inconvenience of the Prairie flies—These apprehensions were fully realised; for it was not 'till the 17th of July that the enterprise could Set forward from Fort Osage;¹³ the point fixed on for the commencement of the proposed Road, and the Journey for the first 160 miles was attended throughout with difficulty and embarrassment arising chiefly from the annoyance of the Green flies of the Prairies, which obliged the party to travel much in the night, frequently leaving the direct route in order to find Shelter from the flies during the day in the Small Groves, that are Seen, here and there Scattered, like little green Islands over the plains.—This irregular way of traveling not only harassed the Horses and Mules excessively, but rendered a Satisfactory viw and Survey of the country impracticable at the time; and a Subsequent examination necessary.

The only intervening Tribes of Indians whose consent it was deemed incumbent upon The Commissioners to obtain by Treaty, to the marking out and free use of the Road, were the Great and Little Osages and the Kansas; and as it was known to be most agreeable to the wishes of the Chiefs and head men of those Tribes, who were consulted by Mr. Sibley on the Subject at S. Louis in June, to meet The Commissioners at some convenient places on their route from Fort

13. The party consisted of 33 hired men; two servants; J. C. Brown, surveyor; Archibald Gamble, secretary; and the three commissioners. Sibley Journal, July 12. Bill Williams was engaged as interpreter. The appointment of Brown and Gamble, because of their wealth, was the occasion for "spiteful remarks" on the part of unsuccessful applicants. *Missouri Republican*, May 16, 1825. The camp regulations for hired hands were drawn up by Sibley: "all gentlemen coffee drinkers, and those unable to saddle a horse or cook their victuals, are barred; wages, \$20 per month, hands to furnish their own groceries, if any, except in case of sickness; no regular supply of bread to be expected; all hands to be expert rifle-men and hunters; no access by hands to the commissioners' stores or tents; no difference of social rank to furnish basis for favored treatment; hands must expect that the commissioners will maintain camp order and discipline." Culmer, F. A., "Marking the Santa Fe rail," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, IX, 80.

Osage to The Arkansas River; it was believed to be unnecessary to postpone the Survey and examination of the route through the Territory claimed by those Tribes; these being at most only preliminary operations necessary to the ultimate location and "marking out" of the Road.—

On the 10th and 16th days of August, The Commissioners met Successively by appointment, full deputations of the Chiefs and Head Men of The Osages and Kansas,¹⁴ and after carefully explaining the objects and wishes of The Government, so as to be perfectly well understood by them, concluded and signed the Treaties that have been already reported to, and duly ratified by the competent authorities.¹⁵

14. The meeting place with the Osage was 160 miles from Fort Osage and was named Council Grove by the commissioners. The Kansas were met on the Sora. (Kansas) Creek, 238 miles southwest of Fort Osage. Sibley Journal, August 5 and August 15.

15. The following entries in the Sibley Journal give a good description of the negotiation of these treaties: "Tuesday 9th August—Council today with the Osages—The Commissioners explained to them fully & clearly what they desire respecting the Road; and proposed to give them \$800 as compensation for the privilege of marking it through their Land & the free use of it forever—After a few minutes conversation among themselves; the Chiefs declared their Assent to the proposition, & expressed their readiness to execute a Treaty to that effect—And they were told that The Commissioners would meet them again tomorrow, prepared to conclude & sign the Treaty as now agreed on.—And then the Council rose, to meet again tomorrow., "Wednesday 10th August—The Commissioners met the Osages in Council at 11 o'clk: The Treaty was prepared for Signature agreeably to the arrangement made yesterday, and after it was read & carefully explained to the Osages by the Interpreter, it was signed in due form by the respective parties, and a duplicate copy given to the principal Chief—The Comm. then paid them Goods to the value of \$300 St. Louis cost, and gave them an order on Mr. Augustus Chouteau, a Trader now at their Village, for Ammunition, Knives, etc. Such as they may choose to the value of \$500 at fair prices—And that finishes our business with The Osages . . .

"Thursday 11th August—. . . The Osages were stirring very early, and were ready to take leave of us by 6 o'clk. On bidding me good bye they generally expressed to me their entire Satisfaction with the result of their Visit to our Camp—three or four individuals of but inferior note, seemed a little dissatisfied because they had not Shared as largely as they expected in the distribution of the Goods; for this they blamed the Chiefs however, under whose direction the Goods were divided. The Chiefs & principal men all went away perfectly satisfied, as well they might, for The Commissioners allowed them very liberally, as I think, for the right of Way through the country claimed by them as their right, is at best a doubtful one, if the Treaty lately Signed by them at St. Louis with General Clark is ratified and confirmed by Congress—"Monday 15th August—. . . After we had all got a little settled in camp, we had a Council with the Kansas, & having explained to them fully our wishes in relation to the Road, we proposed to them precisely the same terms that we agreed on with the Osages at Council Grove—and these terms they accepted without any hesitation; and agreed to sign a Treaty to the same effect—We told them the Papers would be ready in the morning, & the council rose.

"Tuesday 16th August. . . The Commissioners met the Kansas formally in council. The Treaty was exhibited in due form, containing all the stipulations required by the Act of Congress, and the prompt payment of \$800 in full compensation for the right

Having thus completed their negotiations with the "intervening Tribes of Indians" within the limits of The U. States, The Commissioners proceeded with their Survey and examination without any further interruption to the Boundary line between the United States and Mexico, at the point (as nearly as they had the means to ascertain it) where the 100th degree of Longitude West from London intersects the Arkansas River—which point is in North Latitude 37°-47'-37"—is distant from Fort Osage by the Survey as now corrected 386 43½/80 miles, and which they reached on the 11th day of September.—

When The Commissioners Set out from Fort Osage, they entertained the expectation of being able to carry their Surveys and examinations quite through to the frontier Settlements of New Mexico, before the Winter Set in, So as to enable them to locate and mark out the Road as they returned home early the next ensuing Summer; and to this end were all their preparatory arrangements made, and all their exertions pointed. And they were fully justified in indulging this expectation, by the assurance of your Letters, that measures had been taken to obtain the cooperation or consent of the Mexican Government, which it was hoped would be effected in time to prevent any delay at the boundary line, and by the well founded belief that The Government of Mexico would promptly accede to a Measure which was obviously quite as much, if not more, to her advantage then to that of The United States.¹⁶

Great was the disappointment of The Commissioners therefore, when on their arrival at the Line they were obliged to Suspend their operations for want of the expected authority to proceed through The Mexican Territory.—¹⁷ They waited 'till the 20th of September in the

16. Joel Poinsett was appointed minister to Mexico shortly after the passage of the bill authorizing the survey. He was instructed by Clay, the secretary of state, to secure the consent of the Mexican government for the continuation of the survey into Mexican territory. The authorities in Washington thought this consent would be secured before the commissioners reached the boundary and that the survey could be continued without delay. Manning, W. R., "Diplomacy Concerning the Santa Fe Road," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, I, 518-519.

17. The boundary between Mexico and the United States was in dispute and Alamán, the secretary for foreign relations, refused his consent to the survey in Mexican territory until treaties of commerce and limits between the two countries had been concluded. Poinsett pointed out that the road would be of mutual benefit regardless of where the boundary was finally located, but Alamán replied that he could not "separate the negotiations concerning the road from those concerning limits and a general commercial treaty." *Ibid.*, 519-520.

of way through the Territory of the Kansas forever—all which was read and carefully explained, and then the Parties signed and executed the Treaty in due form. A duplicate copy of which was given to the Head Chief, after which we delivered them Goods to the value of Three Hundred Dollars, St. Louis Cost; and gave them an order on Curtis & Ely, Traders near them, for Goods such as they may want to the value of Five Hundred Dollars, at fair cash prices—The Chiefs expressed their perfect satisfaction with this arrangement."

daily hope that they might receive the permission to go on with their Survey, but in vain, and the Season being now so far advanced, it was believed that go which way they might, there was but barely time left to reach the Settlements before the Setting in of the Winter; especially with reduced and tired Horses and Mules—It was obviously necessary therefore, to determine immediately what to do, and promptly to set about it. After much deliberation, The Commissioners at length concurred unanimously in adopting the following plan of procedure—That One of them accompanied by The Surveyor and a Small party of the hired Men, should proceed to New Mexico as expeditiously as possible to find winter quarters at or near the city of Santa Fé.—The other two Commissioners, with all the remainder of the Men and equipment Should return to Missouri as Speedily as they could.—That if the Government Should so direct, the two Commissioners returning should join the other in New Mexico as early as practicable the ensuing Summer; while the one in New Mexico Should possess himself of Such information within his reach, as might be desirable to enable the Board properly to locate the Road; or in any event that portion of it within the limit of The United States; it being considered indispensable necessary for The Commissioners to possess some previous knowledge of the country, and the route between the Arkansas and the frontier Settlements of New Mexico to enable them even to make a definitive location of the eastern Section of the proposed Road.

This arrangement was considered at the time it was adopted, decidedly the best one that could be made; and subsequent events have proven, that it was the only one that could have been carried into effect by which The Commissioners could possibly have completed the Road even as soon as they have done it—It has also been the means of reducing the expense Somewhat, that was necessarily attendant on the unlooked for delay of the Mexican Government.—

To Mr. Commissioner Sibley was assigned the duty of proceeding to Santa Fé; it being understood that he was to remain in N. Mexico no longer than 'till the 5 of July unless he Should have Substantial reasons to justify a longer Stay.—¹⁸

On the 22d Sept. the two parties took leave of each other, and proceeded on their respective journies—The returning Party completed theirs early in November—The other arrived Safely at San Fernando in the Valley of Taus on the 30 day of October.¹⁹

18. Sibley was accompanied by the surveyor, interpreter, and nine men. Sibley Journal, September 20.

19. The night of his arrival Sibley received an official call from the alcalde and the curate. "Altho I suspected that these men were acting a little arrogantly, yet I deemed it proper to treat them with proper civility—I therefore gave them to understand, as briefly as I could, why I had come here, and told them that I should explain myself more fully to the Governor of the Territory, as soon as I conveniently could." *Ibid.*, October 30. Sibley's contempt for the lesser Mexican officials is well illustrated in L. B. Bloom's "Two Sibley Letters," in *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, IX, 94-97.

Very soon after his arrival, Mr. Sibley enquired of the Governour of The Territory (resident at Santa Fè) if the Govt. of Mexico had taken any order in relation to the Road; and was answered that none had been communicated to him—Mr. S. immediately addressed a Note to Mr. Poinsett, informing him of the progress already made by The Commissioners, Stating the Serious inconveniences and expense of delay, and urging him to obtain the necessary order, if possible in time to enable The Commissioners to complete the Road early the next Summer—This Note was dispatched to Mexico in a few days, under the Governour's envelope by the monthly courier, was duly received by Mr. Poinsett, who answered by return of the courier, that he had not yet been able to effect any arrangement with the Government at Mexico for the continuance of the Road through the Territory of that Governement, but entertained hopes that he would soon obtain one—Mr. Sibley also addressed Governour Narbona on the Subject verbally & by notes, who professed himself to be most favourably inclined towards the establishment of the projected Road, and promised to represent to his Government his views of its importance, which he Said he could Strikingly set forth in the fact that the Trade from Missouri already yielded an annual revenue of Twenty Thousand Dollars, besides many other great advantages.²⁰

Notwithstanding these flattering hopes and promises, no order was received from Mexico on the Subject of the Road 'till the 16th of June 1826; when Mr. Sibley received a note from Mr. Poinsett informing him that on the 13th of May he had obtained from The President of The Mexican States an order to The Governour of The Territory of New Mexico "To permit Mr. Sibley Commissioner of The U. States to make an examination of the Western part of the Road from Santa Fè to Missouri without marking or cutting it out, or establishing any work of any class."—and on the Same day Mr. Sibley received an official notification to the Same effect from Governour Narbona.²¹

Although this permission fell very far Short of what might have been reasonably expected; and could not indeed have been deemed sufficient to warrant The Commissioners in accepting it, without further instructions, if it had been communicated and received otherwise than it was; yet from the knowledge Mr. Sibley possessed of the country through which "the Western part of the Road" must pass, he did not

20. Sibley described Narbona, who had been appointed to the Santa Fè post just a few months previously as "a Gentleman of pretty good talents, quite a man of business, and having been recently appointed to his present Station by the Genl. Governement by whom he is well known, I have no doubt he [knows] their views pretty well & has their confidence." Sibley Journal, November 30.

21. The governor also informed Sibley that the Mexican government found it impossible to send an agent to coöperate with him in the survey. Manning., *op. cit.*, 528.



Western Sector of 1827 Survey from Fort Osage to Taos, New Mexico

From Original Plat, Now in the National Archives

entertain a moment's doubt as to the propriety of its being accepted & acted on by The Commissioners; all the circumstances being duly considered.

The following extract of a Letter from Mr. Sibley to Mr. Poinsett dated "Valley of Taus in New Mexico, June 19th 1826" will sufficiently illustrate his views (and those of all The Commissioners) on this Subject. "This very restricted permission would avail the Commissioners but little indeed, if it were not for the fact, that there is no "Marking" or "cutting out" or any "Work" necessary, or indeed practicable to be done on any part of the Road within the Mexican Territory—From the crossing of The Arkansas to this Valley and to Santa Fè, the Road will not pass over timbered land exceeding one mile in the whole and that is so scattered and open, that it can be passed without the least difficulty with carriages, with no other labour than removing a few logs, poles, etc. And as it will be labour and time lost, to attempt to "Mark out" the Road by any artificial means that The Commissioners can devise and effect, we shall probably no otherwise mark it, than by furnishing a chart of the Route founded upon an accurate examination and Survey, upon which will be noted with great care, all the prominent land Marks already Set up by the hand of Nature, which are numerous, and now serve as admirable guides to the traveler—any artificial hillocks or mounds thrown up, unless of much great magnitude than our limited means will justify, would be destroyed in a very short time, by the immense herds of Buffaloes that are continually passing to and fro over the plains, and what they might be unable to destroy, would assuredly be leveled by the roving bands of Indians, who are always sufficiently inclined to commit wanton Mischief. I have no objection then myself, and I presume the other Commissioners will have none, to proceed with the "examination" as permitted; inasmuch as we can effect every thing under that permission that we could do, if it were as ample as our Government wished and expected—It is certain that if The Commissioners shall determine to proceed as above suggested, that their report of the Road will be such as to make it entirely unnecessary for The Government of The United States ever to take any further order or interest in the matter—I have deemed it proper for me to communicate to you these facts for your information."—

Meanwhile The Commissioners who had returned to Missouri, were officially advised that no arrangement was likely soon to be made between the two Governments for the continuation of the Road through the Mexican Territory, and they consequently determined not to join Mr. Sibley in New Mexico, but wrote him by the Spring caravan on the 19th of May 1826, to urge his immediate return home.—This communication was received by Mr. S. on the 5 day of August, who immediately made such preparations as were necessary for his return, deter-

mining to make a complete Survey and examination of the route from San Fernando in Taus to the boundary line, and connect it with the Survey recently made from Fort Osage to the same point.

Mr. Sibley adopted this course without the least hesitation, because it was authorized by the Mexican Government, would be attended with little or no additional expense, and would in effect enable The Commissioners to complete the whole Road from Missouri to Taus as perfectly as it could be done under any arrangement however formal, that the two Governments might ever enter into on the Subject—He accordingly commenced a Survey at San Fernando on the 24th of August, ran it through the Mexican Territory, and on the 16th of September connected it with the former survey at the line on the Arkansas River.—On the journey from the boundary line to Ft. Osage, Mr. Sibley made some necessary corrections of the first Survey, but had not time or indeed the means to “Mark out the Road” or in fact to complete all the necessary alterations in the Survey of the first 160 miles from Ft. Osage, which as has been already Stated, was passed over at first under circumstances that made a satisfactory Survey of it impossible. Mr. Sibley went out in May last with a Small party to make the last mentioned corrections of the Survey and to “Mark out” by suitable mounds, so much of the Road as extends from the Western boundary of Missouri to the Buffalo Range, beyond which it was deemed entirely useless to incur any expense in setting up Marks—This last object was effected in a very satisfactory manner (notwithstanding the Journey was extremely unpleasant) and was completely finished early in July.—

The Commissioners had the honour on the 10th of January last, to Submit to The President, the opinion (which they still entertain, and beg leave here to repeat) that it is unnecessary for the Government of The United States to do any thing further in relation to that Section of the Road that has been Surveyed through the Mexican Territory. Even if it were practicable to “Mark out” that portion of the Road by permanent artificial “Works,” they would deem it a very useless expense of money and labour, for the reason already given in another part of this report.

In the belief therefore that they have effected all the objects proposed by the Act of Congress under the authority of which they were appointed, The Commissioners report that they have surveyed, located and “marked out a Road from the Western frontier of Missouri to the confines of New Mexico” and from thence to the frontier Settlements of New Mexico.—That they have located the road upon the best practicable route that exists; and that the whole is Sufficiently marked out by natural and artificial conspicuous objects, and by the tracks of the numerous caravans that have passed on it, to prevent in future any, the least difficulty in the commercial intercourse between the

Western parts of the United States and New Mexico, Sonora and Chihuahua; in so far as a direct and most excellent Road from Missouri to the Mexican Settlements is considered useful in promoting that object.

From Fort Osage on the Missouri River (In Latitude $39^{\circ}-10' 19''$ North; and Longitude $93^{\circ}-51'-05''$ west from London) to the Village of San Fernando in the Valley of Taus in New Mexico a few miles eastward of The Rio Grande del Norte, & about 65 miles north 25° East from the City of Santa Fè (In Latitude $36^{\circ}-24'$ North, and Longitude $105^{\circ}-31'$ west from London), the whole distance ascertained by actual measurement upon the courses of the Road as located and established, is $746 \frac{15}{80}$ miles— $425 \frac{78}{80}$ miles of this distance, by way of the Road, lies within the limits of the United States, and $320 \frac{17}{80}$ miles within the Mexican Territory.

The Road in nearly its whole extent, passes over open grassy Prairie; the forest or timbered land over which it runs does not exceed altogether Twenty Miles—Water, fuel and pasturage are sufficiently plentiful, and with but few exceptions are good—Caravans may obtain their chief supplies for Subsistence without difficulty or delay from the numerous herds of Buffaloes that are almost continually passing & repassing over the plains, crossing the route every where along, the greater part of the way—and many years must elapse before this great resource will fail or materially diminish.

Between Fort Osage and San Fernando, there does not exist, on the Road, a Single serious difficulty or obstacle to the passage of Carriages of any description—Even the mountains near Taus, where Scarcely any effort has ever yet been made to form a Road, are crossed without any great difficulty; and whenever the authorities there shall think fit to order it, an excellent Road may be made at a very trifling expense.—Caravans (with or without carriages) may either go direct to the City of Santa Fè, without crossing the mountains at Taus, or they may go down through the Settlements from San Fernando—both routes are, or may very easily be made, perfectly safe and good—And from S. Fè to the City of Mexico, the Road is said to be “nearly equal to a turnpike.” In short, it may safely be assumed, that there are fewer natural obstructions to the passage of loaded carriages (as respects the Road merely) between Fort Osage and the City of Mexico, a distance not much short of 2500 miles, than there are on the established road from Ft. Osage to St. Louis, which is probably not inferior to any (except turnpikes) in the Union, of the same extent, about 260 miles.—

Upon the whole, The Commissioners may congratulate themselves and all concerned, that they have succeeded in Locating and marking out a very direct and permanent highway across the immense desert Plain that intervenes between the Settlements of the Missouri River, and those of the Rio Grande del Norte, which until recently Subdued

by the enterprising Spirit of our Western citizens has been considered an impassable barrier to any direct or profitable commerce.—That barrier is now removed. The Way is open, plain and direct, and a Stream of Commerce is already flowing upon it, which it is believed will grow into some considerable importance; and is certainly entitled to the favourable consideration of the two Governments whose citizens are mutually benefitted by it. Although this is a Subject that does not strictly come within the official duty of the undersigned to mention in this place, they cannot suffer the present occasion to pass without expressing their opinion of its importance—They could not mechanically locate and mark out a Road of such extent, through such a country and for such an object, without feeling some interest in, and forming some estimate of its probable future usefulness, nor can they now omit to suggest what from the view they have been able to take of the whole ground, they consider necessary yet to be done in order to render this Highway between Nations what it evidently should be, not only open, plain and direct, but free in its whole extent from every obstruction.

It has been already stated that no natural obstructions worth notice exist on the road. The only danger to which it is now liable, is from the roving bands of Indians, that sometimes beset small parties of our Traders, and either steal or forcibly take away their Horses, mules & other Property. Such outrages most frequently occur on the journey homeward from New Mexico, and most generally on the Mexican side of The Arkansas, though some of the depredators are known to have their Villages within the Territory of the United States, and receive presents and other favours from the Government. The Indians who are most commonly engaged in these Lawless practices belong to the Nations or Tribes called the Pawnees—Arapahoes—Kiawaws—Comanches—Appaches and Yutahs—The first and probably the second named, are within the Agencies of The United States, the others reside within the jurisdiction of the Mexican Government.—It is not Supposed that the irregularities of these Savages can be Suddenly Suppressed, but it is very confidently believed they may be materially checked, and ultimately entirely prevented by a Seasonable interference of the two Governments—While it may well be apprehended that unless this is done, some of those Tribes may be tempted to form combinations, and establish Something like a system of highway Robbery, that may be extremely difficult to suppress if too long neglected—Individual losses have already been sustained on this road from Indian robberies to a large Amount, to say nothing of the personal suffering consequent upon them.

As there is no position on the whole route, except near the mountains, about 36 miles from the settlements of Taus, suitable for a military Post, having for its object the protection of the Road—No

other fit means of protection can be suggested, than occasional escorts of Troops from the nearest military Posts, and proper admonitions to the Indians.—With the exception of the Pawnees the Tribes that have been mentioned, have but little knowledge of the character of our Government and People; and none of them have any respect for the Mexican authorities—It is presumed however that a very salutary change might easily be effected in the disposition and conduct of those Indians, if the two Governments were to act in concert, and announce in a suitable manner, their determination to protect their commerce on this Road; and occasionally detach light Parties of Regular Soldiers to Scour the country & detect and arrest for punishment all those who should presume to infringe the rights of the Highway.²² A very brief notice of the Country examined by The Commissioners will here Suffice—The Fieldnotes and Maps presented by Mr. Brown, the Surveyor of the Road, which accompany and belong to this Report, furnish in detail whatever it is supposed may be at all useful or interesting in relation to the survey and location of the Road, and of the streams, ridges, Hills, Mountains, etc., that is crosses.—

A rapid glance confined as much as possible to the Scope taken in the Surveys and examinations, will be given, in the belief that it may supply some facts not heretofore very generally known.

It has already been observed that the space between the Missouri River, and the Rio Grande del Norte is occupied by an almost unbroken Plain or Prairie. Taken as one great whole, this vast expanse of open naked wilderness presents but little more variety of surface than the face of the Atlantic Ocean—Its features are generally proportioned to its great magnitude, except as to its streams—Numerous rivulets, creeks & small Rivers flow through it, the most of which are marked in their courses by narrow fringes of forest Trees, and thickets of underbrush. Prominent ridges frequently occur, which give direction to the flow of the Stream, and serve to relieve in some degree the dull and tedious monotony of the scene—These elevations are usually poor compared with the interjacent level vallies and bottoms which are in general tolerably fertile—The herbage of this Plain, is in general, rich and luxuriant, consisting chiefly of strong and succulent grasses of many varieties; some of which would doubtless prove valuable additions to the cultivated grasses of The United States.—In the season of flowers, A very large portion of this great Plain presents one continued carpet of soft verdure, enriched by flowers of every tint—These beauties afford pleasure for a time, but the traveler is apt soon to lose the relish for them, as he pursues his tedious way under a

22. For a good discussion of the protection of the Trail see Beers, H. P., "Military Protection of the Santa Fe Trail to 1848," in *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, April 1937, 113-133.

cloudless sky, and exposed to the unbroken rays of a burning sun, which, but for the brisk flow of air that usually prevails, would be Scarcely Supportable.

Except the Arkansas, the Road does not cross a single stream that is an hundred feet wide (at or near the crossing), very few of them are half that width, and none of them are deep or difficult to cross—One only it has been found necessary to bridge with Poles and brush-wood.—

The Arkansas flows over its shallow, Sandy bed, through a very broad, level naked Valley, the soil of which is generally extremely fertile, having a slight saline impregnation, which renders the pasturage peculiarly nutritious and inviting to the Buffaloes, of which great numbers successively occupy it in their migratory passage to and from the upper regions of the Missouri—The qualities of this pasturage are found also to agree well with the Horses, mules & other animals, used on the Road, restoring them to health and vigour with surprising rapidity.

The Road strikes the Arkansas (going Westward) Ten miles below the extreme of the north bend, at the mouth of Walnut Creek, in Lat. 38°-21'-10" North—and by the Survey 271 $1\frac{1}{2}$ /80 miles from Fort Osage, and then pursues the course of the River, and never far from it, about 170 miles to a large Island (In Lat. 37°-53'-18") where it finally leaves it, having crossed about 20 miles below.—

In that distance, and for full 50 miles below the north bend, the character of this River varies but very little indeed—It bears a uniform width of from 400 to 500 yards, a depth of from 18 Inches to 4 feet—Velocity of current $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles an hour—Its bed, Sand-Banks low and loose—Water turbid, sometimes filthy—channel crowded with Sand banks and Islets—Forest growth, very little, and that little chiefly on the Islets, and is principally of the Species of Poplar called Cotton Wood. Its annual floods occur in June, and frequently inundate much of the adjacent flat land—In its ordinary stages, it may be crossed by carriages without the least difficulty or a moments delay—

At the mouth of Walnut Creek, the Arkansas approaches within 20 miles of the "Smoky Hill Fork" of the Kansas River, and if there is any point upon the Road within the Territory of the Union where a small military establishment might for a short time be maintained, at a great expense, and for some useful purpose, in protecting the Trade, it is here. But The Commissioners cannot recommend it. Whether the "Smoky Hill fork" of the Kansas River is navigable, and to what extent, or how far it is capable of being So, could not be ascertained—Except during its flood, the Arkansas has no navigation within 200 miles of the north bend, or Walnut Creek.

After leaving the Arkansas, there is a striking difference in the general aspect of the country—It is more broken, Sterile, sandy and

dry. Its features are more bold and various, especially after arriving within an Hundred miles of the mountains, where they become more and more grand and interesting. The distance across the mountains is $34 \frac{14}{80}$ miles. Of this, about 10 miles is somewhat rough and precipitous, the rest is level enough; in fact the greater portion of it is open, and rich Prairie—The forest growth on the mountain sides is chiefly Pine of various kinds, but thinly Scattered, and of very inferior size & quality. In the whole distance from the Western boundary of Missouri to the Village of San Fernando in New Mexico, the Road does not pass over any body of Woodland exceeding one mile in depth—there is but one that exceeds 500 yards, and the whole united (in a distance of 715 miles) would not make a forest of three miles in depth—Yet good camping places are to be had at convenient intervals, the whole way; with water, fuel and pasturage, generally good and Sufficient. From The Missouri to the Arkansas, with one or two exceptions only, wood for fuel is abundant at the usual camping places; and the annual deposits of Driftwood furnish ample supplies during the journey up the Arkansas—After leaving that river there is in some places a deficiency of wood; but wherever this occurs upon the whole journey, the ordure of the Buffalo is found in great abundance, which is a very excellent substitute for wood as fuel.

Whilst in New Mexico Mr. Sibley was able to ascertain Satisfactorily some facts, which as they concern the utility of this Road, may be mentioned here without impropriety—First, the Stream that issues from the mountains north of Santa Fè commonly called the “Río Colorado” and which has been heretofore laid down on the maps as a principal head branch of the Red River of Natchitoches, is now well ascertained to be the main branch of The Canadian, that runs into the Arkansas about forty miles below Fort Gibson. The Canadian is navigable only a short distance above its mouth; the whole River being frequently lost for miles together in the deep Sands.—

Second, The Red River of Natchitoches has none of its sources in the great Range of the shining mountains as has been supposed, nor is there any branch of that River that is navigable, even for canoes within Three Hundred miles of Santa Fè, or any of the Settlements of New Mexico. Third, The Rio Grande Del Norte does not, and will not probably for ages to come, afford any safe or certain navigation, exceeding an hundred miles at most, upward from its mouth—In its whole course from the mountains near Taus, to its entrance into the Gulf of Mexico, its channel is more or less choked with Rocks, Ripples, sand banks, etc. Its tributaries are few and insignificant, and this “Great River of the North,” as it is called, even if cleared of the innumerable obstructions in its channel, would only rate among the third or fourth class of Rivers in the United States.—

In fine, it may be safely assumed that the nearest approaches that can be made to Santa Fe, or the other settlements of New Mexico by water, for the purpose of commerce, are by the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, and the Gulf of California at Guaymas.—When the highway now opened from Missouri to Santa Fè shall be cleared of the Pirates of the Plain, there is good reason to believe that the Trade between the two countries in that direction will assume a character and employ an amount of Capital, not only greatly advantageous to those immediately engaged in it, but beneficial in no trifling degree, to some of the manufacturing interests of the United States.

With very great respect, We have the honour Sir to be y. obt. svts.

BEN H. REEVES
G. C. SIBLEY
THOMAS MATHER ²³

St. Charles, Missouri
October 27th 1827.

It may be proper to state, that the Longitude given in the preceding Report, have been from necessity, deduced from the results of the Survey westward from Fort Osage, which place is assumed to be in $93^{\circ}51'5''$, upon the presumption that the Ranges of the Public Lands are correctly Surveyed between that point and the mouth of The Ohio River, where it is believed Mr. Ellicott fixed the Longitude accurately—This method of ascertaining Longitude, must obviously be attended with Some uncertainty as to the result—Great pains were taken however, to test the accuracy of the Survey and measurements, by Lunar observations; but as these were taken by one observer only, with a single sextant & by common time, there is no reason to suppose that the Longitude has been accurately found in a single instance, tho' it is probable they are all nearly correct.

As to the Latitudes, of which a great many parallels were taken at remarkable points along the Survey, and elsewhere, they are all believed to be critically true, and may be relied on, having been taken with very great care, in the best manner, and with the best instruments.

The following Table exhibits some of the Latitudes and Longitudes ascertained at points on the Road from the Missouri to Santa Fè in New Mexico.

23. The commissioners spent \$1,497.54 more than congress appropriated for the survey. The Treasury refused to pay this claim and it was not until 1836, after a special act of congress allowing the sum, that the account of the commissioners was closed. General Accounting Office, Miscellaneous 25881.

Name of Place	Latitude			Longitude			Dist. from Place to Place	Whole Distance
	Deg.	Min.	Sec.	Deg.	Min.	Sec.		
Fort Osage on the Missouri River	39	10	19	93	51	05		
West boundary of Missouri	38	54	28	94	17	22	31	31
Council Grove—Nee Osho R.	38	40	00	96	12	22	109	140
Diamond of the Plains (a fountain)							17	157
Walnut Co. (No. bend Ark R.)	38	21	10				114	271
Mulberry Co. (So. bend Ark R.)	37	38	52	99	about		83	354
U. S. & Mexican Boundary Line	37	47	37	100	00	00	32	386
Chouteau's Island, Ark R.	37	53	18				59	445
Lower Semaron Spring	37	24	00				32	477
Upper Semaron Spring	36	51	40				78	550
Rabbits Ears (a detached Mountain)	36	33	00				45	595
Rock Point (or Mound No. 6)	36	25	42				47	642
Foot of great Mountain Range	36	10	20				69	711
San Fernando Vill. in Taus	36	24	00	105	31	00	35	746
Santa Fe City	35	41	00	106	10	00	65	812