

New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 32 | Number 3

Article 8

7-1-1957

Kearny's Route from the Rio Grande to the Gila River

George Ruhlen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Ruhlen, George. "Kearny's Route from the Rio Grande to the Gila River." *New Mexico Historical Review* 32, 3 (1957). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol32/iss3/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL. XXXII

JULY, 1957

No. 3

KEARNY'S ROUTE FROM THE RIO GRANDE TO THE GILA RIVER

By GEORGE RUHLEN*

A ROADSIDE marker stands on New Mexico Highway No. 180 at the crest of the Mimbres Mountains between Hillsboro and Santa Rita bearing the following inscription:

EMORY PASS
Elevation 8178

Named in honor of Lt. W. H. Emory who passed by here with the Army of the West in 1846. His report to the U. S. Government is the earliest scientific account of this region which then belonged to Mexico.

To the casual tourist this is sufficient. To one familiar with the records of the Army of the West it presented a question: Was this the trail over precipitous ravines and across the knife edge of the Mimbres Mountains the one Kit Carson would have chosen to bring Brigadier General Kearny's troops from the Rio Grande to the Gila River?¹

Markings appear on old maps and new purporting to show Kearny's route across the Mimbres Mountains. Some writers have described the crossing in general terms, omitting in many cases essential and salient facts; others have disre-

* George Ruhlen, Colonel, US Army, Ret'd. 3550 Park Boulevard, San Diego 3, California.

1. Ross Calvin, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, Univ. N. M. Press, 1951, p. 4. Dr. Calvin states he was responsible for the wording on the marker at Emory Pass, but since has discovered his mistake. "That actually the expedition crossed the high hills several miles further south. . . . The highway inscription, for which the editor was responsible, should say, not 'Emory passed by here,' but 'Emory passed near here.'"

garded or misinterpreted them. Although the remainder of Kearny's remarkable march from Fort Leavenworth to San Diego has been accurately defined for many years, this portion has long been shrouded in conjecture. The diaries and journals of those who accompanied Kearny contain copious details of the country traversed, notations of prominent and peculiar ground formations, streams, woodlands, direction of travel and distances.

A study of these notes and a comparison of the ground forms of the region with old and recent maps led to a reconstruction of the path taken by the Army of the West. Personal reconnaissance of the locations in question and recollections of pioneer residents corroborated the conclusions reached. Most able assistance was given by Mr. H. L. Parks, a pioneer rancher who has lived near the head of Berenda Canyon, Sierra County, for over seventy years. Mr. Parks is thoroughly familiar with southern New Mexico and the Mimbres region, which he has traversed on foot, horseback, wagon and automobile during his many years of active life.

Let us go back some one hundred and ten years ago to a fall morning in New Mexico; to ten o'clock in the morning, Tuesday, October 6, 1846. It is pleasantly cool with a light breeze blowing up river from the south. Under an overcast sky in the east a striking cloud effect, characteristic of New Mexico, is on display.² On the west bank of the Rio Del Norte, three miles south of the settlement of Socorro, five companies of the First Regiment of United States Dragoons are marching south. An hour earlier they had broken camp and now are continuing their journey down river, enroute to California a good nine hundred miles away. Their route is practically unexplored; neither wagon road nor well defined trail is known to exist; the way is barred by rugged mountains, arid deserts, and warlike Indians. Aroused Californians are probably by this time well prepared to meet these invaders at the end of their journey.

Far south in the distance movement is seen. The dragoons

2. W. H. Emory, *Notes on a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth in Missouri to San Diego, California*, 30 Cong., 1 sess., Hse. Ex. Doc. 41 (Wash., D. C., 1848), p. 167.

watch it with interest as it increases in size, then a thin cloud of dust arises. Coming nearer, the dust cloud resolves itself into a small group of mounted men who spur their horses and charge the marching column with wild Indian yells. The advance guard of the dragoons, well trained by a veteran of frontier skirmishes, deploys for action although doubting that the party has any hostile intent. They are experienced frontiersmen and recognize the charge as a customary mode of greeting common among mountain men.

The party is Kit Carson and fifteen of his men enroute from Los Angeles, California, to Washington, D. C., with important dispatches and mail. Carson is conducted to General Kearny and announces the startling and glorious news that the conquest of California has been accomplished by Commodore Stockton and Lieutenant Colonel Fremont. The province is under the American flag. Opposition to American rule has ceased and a civil government is to be organized and Fremont is to be made civil and military governor of California.

These tidings call for a drastic modification of Kearny's plans and a reorganization of his command. The dragoons no longer need to be the first echelon of a conquering army but rather an adequate escort for Kearny to reach California and complete the mission which has been given him by President Polk.

The route being followed was the southern or Gila Trail which followed the Rio Grande south for about two hundred and fifty miles, then turned abruptly west to the Gila River, down that stream to its confluence with the Colorado River, thence across the Colorado Desert and the coast range to San Diego. It was believed to provide sufficient water most of the way and enabled wagons to be driven on a well travelled road as far as the turning off place. Although the Camino Real to Chihuahua City had been in use for centuries no accurate information as to the routes nor any comprehensive description of the country immediately west of the Rio Grande could be obtained. However, in consideration of the advanced time of the year, it had been decided to take the lower route, the Gila Trail.

The troops started with escort wagons drawn by eight

mule teams in the hope that they might be able to cross the country with them.³ Thomas Fitzpatrick, famed mountain man, who knew the country as well as any American, served as guide; Antoine Robidoux was the interpreter. On October 5th, at the camp near Socorro, another conference was held to determine whether the column should leave the Rio Grande here and strike directly west for the Gila River or continue further south and take a trail which ran some eighteen miles south of the Copper Mines (modern Santa Rita). Years later this latter route was used by the Butterfield Overland Mail. The prospect of doubtful water, the expanse of sand, with lava and trap rock ridges in the hills to the west decided the command to continue further downstream before turning westward.⁴

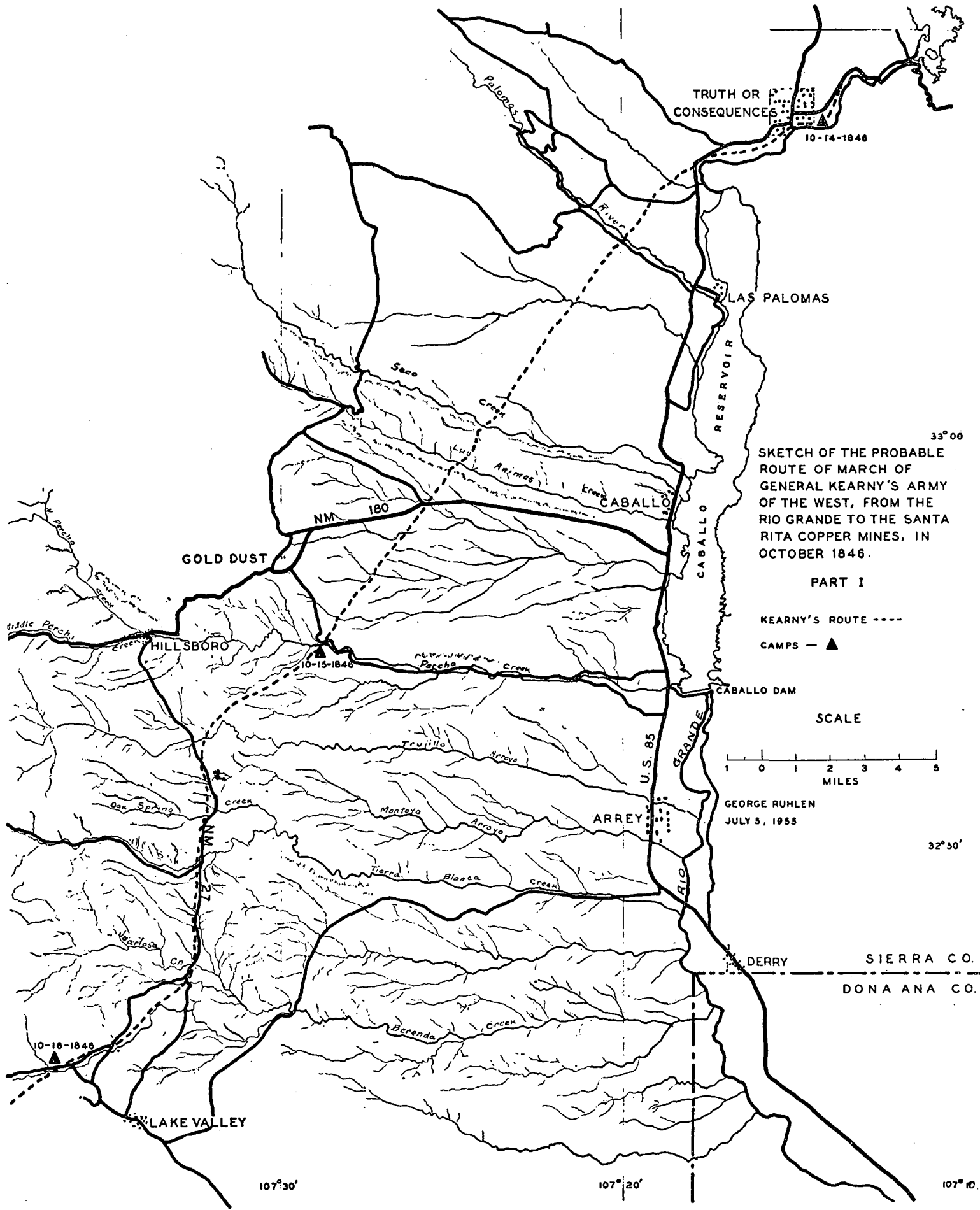
Three miles from the Socorro camp Kit Carson met the column as previously related. It was a most fortunate meeting for Kearny. Carson had left Los Angeles on September 5th and had just traveled the Gila Trail over which the troops intended to march. As a young man he had worked several months for Robert McKnight at the Copper Mines in 1828; he was familiar with the Mimbres Mountain region and had trapped the Gila River and other streams in Arizona and New Mexico. Kearny could not have found a better guide, but Carson demurred, explaining that he had pledged himself to deliver important dispatches to Washington and must fulfill his promise. Kearny replied that he would relieve him of all responsibility and place the mail in the hands of a reliable person for safe delivery — Fitzpatrick. Carson finally consented and again turned his face to the west, forsaking his hopes of once again seeing his family after months of absence and but a few days journey away. This was the act of a brave man and Carson is honored for it.⁵

Resuming the march, camp was established thirteen miles

3. Maj. Thos. Swords, *Report to the War Department on General Kearny's March from Fort Leavenworth to the Pacific Ocean and Return*, Oct. 8, 1847.

4. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Capt. A. R. Johnston, *Journal* (included in Emory's *Notes*), p. 571. Hereafter will be cited in these notes as Emory, *op. cit.* John S. Griffin, *A Doctor comes to California*, California Historical Society (San Francisco, 1948), p. 20.

5. D. C. Peters, *Pioneer Life and Frontier Adventures* (Boston, 1883), p. 281. *Kit Carson's Autobiography*, ed. Milo M. Quaife (Chicago, 1935), p. 109. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 572. Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 20.



TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

10-14-1846

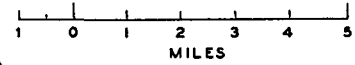
LAS PALOMAS

33°00'
 SKETCH OF THE PROBABLE
 ROUTE OF MARCH OF
 GENERAL KEARNY'S ARMY
 OF THE WEST, FROM THE
 RIO GRANDE TO THE SANTA
 RITA COPPER MINES, IN
 OCTOBER 1846.

PART I

KEARNY'S ROUTE ----
 CAMPS — ▲

SCALE



GEORGE RUHLEN
 JULY 3, 1955

32°50'

DERRY

SIERRA CO.
 DONA ANA CO.

LAKE VALLEY

107°30'

107°20'

107°10'

below Socorro in a grove of beautiful cottonwoods where the command was reorganized due to Carson's astounding news. Kearny selected to accompany him to California his personal staff consisting of Captain Abraham R. Johnston, aide-de-camp, Captain Henry S. Turner, adjutant general, Major Thomas Swords, quartermaster, Dr. John S. Griffin, assistant surgeon; Companies C and K, First Dragoons, commanded by Captain Benjamin D. Moore and Lieutenant Thomas C. Hammond, respectively; Lieutenant Wm. H. Emory's detachment of Topographical Engineers; two mountain howitzers on wheeled carriages in charge of Lieutenant John W. Davidson; a wagon train and a group of scouts and guides, in all about 140 men. The rest of the dragoons were placed under the command of Major Sumner with orders to remain in New Mexico during the winter.⁶

On October 9th the troops camped about twelve miles north of Elephant Butte in the river bottoms. Carson informed Kearny that at the rate of progress being made with the supply wagons it would take four months to reach California and he had serious doubts that they could be taken over parts of the Gila Trail. Anticipating that such might be the case pack saddles had been ordered before leaving Santa Fe but had been left with Major Sumner. These were sent for at once. The troops remained in camp until the 13th when they crossed the river to better grazing ground on the west bank. That evening the pack saddles arrived together with the last mail to be received that year.

Now the entire command was mule borne greatly to the relief of everybody except Lieutenant William H. Emory commanding the Topographical Engineer detachment — with him it was far otherwise. Now the instruments on which he depended to make accurate surveys of the route, the main reason for his accompanying the expedition, which had heretofore been carried so safely in the instrument wagon, were to be entrusted to the backs of pack mules of dubious temperament.

6. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 572. Griffin, *ibid.* *Muster Rolls of Companies C and K, 1st Regt. US Dragoons, Aug. 31, 1846, to Oct. 31, 1846.* National Archives, Wash., D. C. The actual strength of the two companies was 103 enlisted men. Three additional dragoons over the 100 selected were on extra duty with the surgeon as hospital stewards.

We are indebted to Emory for many of the early surveys, maps and scientific information on the Southwest. He was one of the nation's most distinguished topographers and a few years later became United States Commissioner on the International Boundary Commission which established the United States-Mexican boundary. His detachment included Lieutenant William H. Warner of the Topographical Engineers, Norman Bestor, civil engineer and topographer, J. M. Stanley, artist and draftsman, and several experienced "mountain men." This group was charged with making astronomical observations, preparing the report of daily progress, collecting botanical, mineral, and other specimens, noting geological formations, and compiling the topographical surveying data which were used in preparing the map showing the route of march from Fort Leavenworth to Los Angeles.

Emory, prior to his departure from Washington, D. C., to join Kearny, had only twenty-four hours to procure and assemble his equipment, insufficient time to obtain all the observing instruments that would be needed on the expedition. He was unable to find proper chronometers or a telescope powerful enough to observe the eclipses of satellites of the planets, although two 8½ inch sextants and two box chronometers were supplied. While crossing the Allegheny Mountains the stage carrying the party capsized and thereafter the rates of the chronometers were affected.⁷

Emory states, "The latitudes were determined by measuring with one of the sextants the double altitudes of stars near the meridian, and at all important points by observations on north and south stars as nearly as they could be obtained by equal altitudes. At these last points, where the observations are multiplied, their places may be depended upon to the nearest five seconds." This distance on the meridional arc at the mean latitude in which the observations were made is equivalent to about five hundred feet on the ground. A check of all the recorded observations made during the march from Fort Leavenworth to San Diego indicates that the latitudes of camps whose sites can be determined on present day maps are

7. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 131.

close enough to those obtained by Emory that any differences fall within a divergence of a quarter of a mile.⁸

The determination of longitude is not so simple. Being a function of time, longitude depends upon accurate timepieces in order to establish the time difference, converted into arc, between one's own local meridian and that of Greenwich, England. The accident to the chronometers has been mentioned and it is remarkable that despite the use of chronometers whose rates had been adversely affected Emory's observations were so precise.

If the course of the Rio Grande as shown on Emory's map is projected onto United States Geological Survey maps of New Mexico, it will be found to be displaced to the west several miles. Along the lower reaches of the river, south of Socorro, this displacement is about 7' 30" of longitude, equivalent to seven and one third miles. In other words, the Rio Grande is seven miles further east than Emory at the time thought it was.⁹

Elevations were obtained by use of a mercury barometer, an instrument, as a rule, not dependable unless nearby elevations are available at the time of observation and comparisons can be made. At high altitudes changes in barometric pressure of a few hundredths of an inch will cause considerable variations of corresponding elevations in feet. Barometric elevations, however, are of value in reconnaissance work when more accurate means are not available, which was the case with Emory.

Emory numbered the camps on the march serially beginning with Fort Leavenworth as No. 1. Each day several readings of the barometer and thermometer were made and together with remarks as to the weather, winds and clouds were entered on the records. Astronomical observations were not made at every camp, but generally every other day and the distances traveled between these camps recorded.

Emory's fears for his pack-borne instruments were well founded. The rates of the chronometers were so affected that

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 130.

9. *Reports of Explorations and Surveys for a Railroad Route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, 1853-56*. 36 Cong., 2 sess., Senate Doc. 78, Vol. XI, pt. II, pp. 96-7.

calculations of longitude made between October 9th and 26th were derived from direct measurements and from lunar distances. The viameter for measuring distances, formerly attached to a wheel of the instrument wagon, was now attached to a wheel of one of the mountain howitzers. Shortly after leaving the Rio Grande while going through some dense undergrowth at dusk it was brushed off and lost.¹⁰

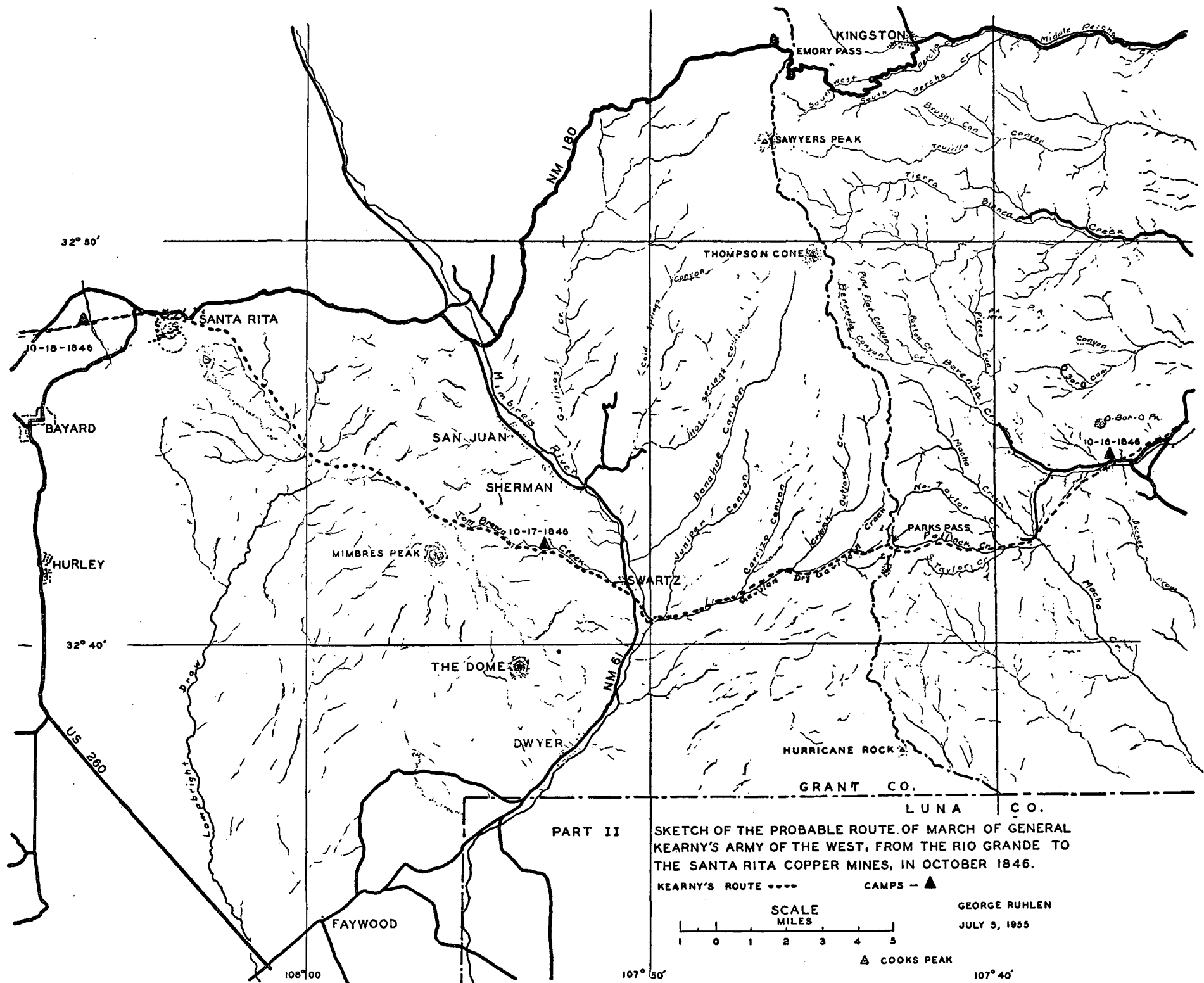
Some writers and readers have assumed that the locations where Emory made his astronomical observations can be plotted on modern maps by simply using his astronomical data without adjustments for the errors in longitude discussed before. Such obviously is not the case. Where Kearny's column followed well known trails, especially along the Rio Grande, Arkansas and Gila Rivers, his route can readily be traced. When he left these river valleys, astronomical observations corrected for displacement errors, barometric elevations, descriptive terrain features, peculiar geological formations, and estimated or measured distances must be used to correctly establish his route.

The dragoons moved out on the 14th with the pack train, a pack for almost every person. The mules cavorted and some packs were thrown, but soon order was restored in the train and the march down river progressed for seventeen miles until camp was made in the river bottom below Elephant Butte, probably in the outskirts of the present town of Truth or Consequences. This camp is listed by Emory as No. 72.¹¹

The next day the march down river continued for three or four miles. There the column left the river and immediately ascended two hundred feet to the tableland. The direction changed to south-southwest, bearing almost on Cooke's Peak, then known as Picacho de los Mimbres, far in the distance. It was a plain trail and evidently Kit Carson knew exactly where he was going. The tableland was cut by arroyos and ravines, two enormous canyons being crossed in succession, "both deep and wide enough to contain all the waters of the Mississippi River," probably the valleys of Seco Creek

10. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 56. Capt. H. S. Turner, *Diary* (Mss. in Missouri Historical Society Library, St. Louis, Mo.).

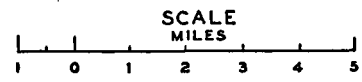
11. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 575. Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Swords, *ibid.*



PART II

SKETCH OF THE PROBABLE ROUTE OF MARCH OF GENERAL KEARNY'S ARMY OF THE WEST, FROM THE RIO GRANDE TO THE SANTA RITA COPPER MINES, IN OCTOBER 1846.

KEARNY'S ROUTE ---- CAMPS - ▲



GEORGE RUHLEN
JULY 5, 1955

▲ COOKS PEAK

and Animas Creek.¹² After marching twenty-four miles Camp No. 73 was established at a place where a fine leaping mountain stream dashed through a rock cut fifty feet deep and twenty feet wide; only a short distance further on the water disappeared into the sand. Here an astronomical observation was made: latitude $32^{\circ} 55' 04''$; longitude (corrected for longitudinal error of $7' 30''$) $107^{\circ} 28' 45''$; elevation 4,810 feet. This location plots on modern maps five miles directly east of Hillsboro in the valley of Percha Creek at an elevation of about 4,900 feet.¹³

It is a simple matter to locate the place where Kearny's command left the Rio Grande and headed westward to the Gila River. Camp No. 70, October 9th to 13th, was on the east bank of the river where a stay was made awaiting the delivery of the pack saddles. This spot was 203 miles from Santa Fe.¹⁴ The camp was moved one mile across the river on the 13th. On the 14th a march of seventeen miles was made to Camp No. 72 in the vicinity of present Truth or Consequences. The following morning, at a point three or four miles down stream the command left the river.

According to Emory's *Notes* this spot was 225 miles from Santa Fe. Maps of the United States Geographical Survey West of the 100th Meridian, generally known by the name of the army officer who supervised it as the Wheeler Survey, show the distance from Santa Fe to the point of turn off to be 225 miles. Although the surveys for these maps were made about thirty years after Kearny's march, few changes occurred along the route, other than some minor improvements to facilitate the passage of wagons. It was the same road of sand, rocks and cactus that travelers had trudged for many years.

Today US Highway 85 follows or parallels the old road along the west bank of the Rio Grande. Along this highway the distance from Santa Fe to Kearny's turn off point is 218 miles. These data substantiate the conclusion that this place

12. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 576. Griffin, *ibid.* Turner, *ibid.*

13. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 57, 167, 177, 576. Griffin, *ibid.* Turner, *ibid.*

14. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

was below Elephant Butte and approximately where the river makes an elbow bend into present Caballo Reservoir.

Between the Rio Grande and the Gila River the locations of three of Kearny's campsites, Nos. 75, 77, and 78, can readily be determined. They can be plotted on modern maps by using the latitudes obtained by Emory and measuring distances from known identifiable landmarks. Camp No. 75 was reached on October 17th. "We then came to the Rio Mimbres, and crossed it, and encamped three miles from it, among hills of volcanic rock."¹⁵ This plots on a small water course locally known as Tom Brown Creek, three miles northwest of present day Swartz, which is situated on the Mimbres River. Camp No. 77 was located west of present Silver City on Mangas (Night) Creek where it makes a bend to the west to join the Gila River. This point is five miles from the Gila River.¹⁶ Camp No. 78, October 20th, was on the Gila River two and one-half miles south of the mouth of Mangas Creek.¹⁷

These initial locations were plotted and verified on a modern map. In each case they are 7' 30" east of the position registered by Emory's observations. Assuming that the longitudinal correction of 7' 30" is applicable to all camp locations between the Rio Grande and the Gila River, a reasonable postulate as all observations were made within a period of six days and under similar conditions, and that the latitudes are correct within the allowable tolerance, then these spots can be plotted by geographical coordinates on modern maps.

The next problem to be solved was the determination of the locations of Camps Nos. 74 and 76 and the reconstruction of the march route between Camp No. 73 and Camp No. 77. This was accomplished by considering the march distances recorded in journals, by supplementing map studies with a reconnaissance on the ground to compare existing terrain features with those described by Kearny's officers, by analyzing information offered by early settlers, and by checking Emory's elevations with those shown on modern maps. After months of effort, extending over several years, testing vari-

15. *Ibid.*, p. 577.

16. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 579. Turner, *ibid.*

17. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 580. Turner, *Ibid.*

ous possibilities, Kearny's route was finally retraced and plotted.

The troops marched at 8:00 A.M. on the 16th of October. The journal accounts of Emory, Johnston, Griffin, and Turner accurately describe the route as a stiff climb through the foothills to the beautiful, rolling, grama grass country south of Hillsboro, with its small streams, tree growths and the dark escarpment of the Mimbres Range to the west. Emory gives the distance marched as 17 miles, Griffin 18 to 20 miles, Turner 19 miles, and Johnston, "Distance 17 miles; 7 southwest." Johnston's meaning was that Camp No. 74 was seventeen miles southwesterly from Camp No. 73 and seven miles west of a north and south line drawn through Camp No. 73. The encampment was made on a small stream flowing down from the Mimbres Range. Johnston rode to a nearby hill to view the country and "From a peak two miles southeast of camp the view presented was very grand; and twenty to thirty miles wide, covered with grass lays below, the valley of the Del Norte widening to the south as far as El Paso, the peaks of the mountains standing around in the distance like the frame of a picture."¹⁸

The distance given, the stream, Emory's trace of the route, and Johnston's view from the peak fix the site of the camp as on Berenda Creek near the Nunn ranch and about three miles west of present Lake Valley, Sierra County. No other location meets all these conditions. Mr. Parks states that this is one of the few places in the area where surface water has always been known to be found. From a hill two miles west of Lake Valley and about two miles southeast of the Nunn ranch one can see Doña Ana Mountain and the jagged crest of the Organ Mountains, as well as a panorama of the mountains from the San Andres to the Floridas. It is one of the few spots in this area where such an unobstructed view can be so obtained.

Johnston thought that the Organ Mountains were at El Paso (modern Juarez) as the maps available at that time placed El Paso at the actual latitude of Doña Ana. Scaled from the maps of the New Mexico State Highway Commis-

18. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 576-7.

sion, the distance from the site of Camp No. 73 to that of Camp No. 74 measures seventeen miles. Emory's recorded elevation was 5,229 feet; United States Geological Survey maps show it as about 5,400 feet; the Wheeler Survey as 5,289 feet. The journals' descriptions accurately portray the existing tree growths, geological formations and rock strata. The reconstructed location of Camp No. 74 is shown on the map accompanying this article. Unfortunately, a cloudy evening prevented astronomical observations by Emory.¹⁹

Determining the route of march on October 17th from Camp No. 74 to Camp No. 75 became the most difficult task of the entire study, even though its terminus, Camp No. 75, could be accurately located. It is one of the few marches whose distance was recorded by neither Emory, Johnston nor Griffin. Turner estimated it as being twenty miles.²⁰ The various descriptions of the route fit almost any part of that area of New Mexico with two significant exceptions; one confusing entry of Emory's unduly complicated the search. To add to the difficulties, this portion of New Mexico is one of the sections which has not been mapped by the United States Geological Survey, making reliable map studies difficult.

The fact that Kit Carson who had covered this route several times was guiding the party and that the purpose of the march was to reach California and not to explore the country indicated that the most direct and easiest way would be used. The very absence of comments in the journals of any difficulties in crossing corroborated this assumption as does Johnston's statement that the route was a bad one for wagons but a good one could be made.²¹ Since the trail was known to Carson and presumably to other trappers, it probably was one also known and used by Indians.

Quoting Emory, "We ascended from the stream, on which we were encamped, by a narrow valley for 2½ hours before reaching the summit between it and the Mimbres, which was

19. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 177, 577. Griffin, *ibid.* Turner, *ibid.* Lt. G. M. Wheeler, *United States Geographical Survey West of the 100th Meridian*, Atlas sheet No. 84 (Wash., D. C., 1881).

20. Turner, *ibid.*

21. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 577.

so indistinct that I passed it several miles before discovering it." He continues,

We descended in an arroyo towards the Rio Mimbres, very narrow, and full of shattered pitch stone; the sides and bank covered with a thick growth of stunted live oak. In full view, nearly the whole time of our descent, was a mountain of peculiar symmetry, resembling the segment of a spheroid. I named it "the Dome." Our road led along its base to the north; another path leading to Janos, a frontier town in Sonora, passes down the Mimbres on the south side. The Mimbres was traversed only a mile; . . . We turned westward and ascended all the way to our camp.²²

The description of the arroyo fits Gavilan Canyon in every detail. Emory also stated that the summit crossing of the Mimbres Mountains was made at 6,000 feet.²³ As none of his elevations along the entire route vary more than two hundred feet from the true, it appeared reasonable to consider this elevation as one of the conditions to be met by any route investigated. A two and one-half hour march by mule in this region is approximately equivalent to a distance of nine miles.

"The Dome" appeared to be the key terrain feature to the route, but peaks which at first seemed to match its description had to be rejected. O-Bar-O Peak on the north side of Berenda Valley, an early candidate, can not be seen after the summit of the Mimbres Range is crossed. Cooks Peak is the most prominent land mark in the region and can be seen while descending the west slope of the Mimbres Mountains, but the trail taken by Kearny's force did not continue along its base to the north, nor does Emory's trace of the route show any dip to the south, but rather an almost due west course.

The present road up Berenda Creek ends at the Parks ranch. Upon being told of the search for "the Dome" and for Kearny's trail, Mr. Parks became quite interested and during the course of the following years spent much time reflecting on possible routes based on his intimate knowledge of the

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 136.

country since the late 1880's. With Mr. Parks as guide and co-explorer a mounted reconnaissance on horseback was made of several possible routes.

Emory's account implies that the route lay up Berenda Creek to its head. However, this course is very rugged, the Mimbres crest is crossed at an elevation of 7,400 feet, just south of Thompson Cone, six hundred feet higher; no formation meeting the description of "the Dome" can be seen, nor does the descent to the Mimbres River resemble the accounts in the several journals. Also, it would require the route to swing considerably to the north. Similar conditions apply to a way up Macho Creek or North Taylor Creek, although the crossings are a bit lower; in neither case is anything like a gap or pass found, but merely a very sharp knife ridge a few feet wide.

Mr. Parks had come to the conclusion that "the Dome" might well be a formation that appeared as such from one direction only, and if such were the case that direction would have to be almost in prolongation of the line of march, since Emory stated that it was visible during almost the entire descent. He could recall no such formation but was familiar with an old trail, later improved to a wagon road, which ran up Pollock Creek on the east side of the mountains, crossed the summit and followed Dry Gavilan Creek and then Gavilan Creek to the Mimbres River. He had ridden and driven over this trail many times as it was used to haul supplies from the Mimbres Valley to Lake Valley when that town was a booming mining settlement.

Riding to the crest which divides the head of Pollock Creek, on the east, from Dry Gavilan Creek on the west, a low saddle in the ridge some forty yards broad was found. To the west, Dry Gavilan Creek joins Gavilan Creek and continues due west to meet the Mimbres River. In prolongation of the line of Gavilan Creek and about two miles west of the Mimbres River is a solitary hemispherical hill which a glance showed answered the description of Emory's "Dome." It is obvious it would lie directly in front of anyone descending Gavilan Creek. Even when viewed a few hundred yards from either side of the saddle its distinctive spherical shape less-

ened. The elevation of the saddle, to which the name of Parks Pass was given, as it had none — nor ever had one, so far as can be determined — in recognition of the Parks family's long association with the region, was recorded as approximately 6,300 feet.

The route up Pollock Creek and down Gavilan Creek, according to old settlers, was an old Indian trail. Pollock Creek is named for a rancher who settled there and was killed by Indians about 1886. The ruins of his cabin still stand on the bank of the stream. The Parks ranch was attacked by Indians in the mid 1880's, and a skirmish between Indians and elements of the 9th U. S. Cavalry took place in Gavilan Canyon in 1881. Hallenbeck's reconstruction of Cabeza de Vaca's route of 1534-1536 indicates that this trail was probably in use by Indians even then.²⁴ Subsequent to Kearny this same trail was used by Fremont in March of 1849 and by William Chamberlin's party in July of the same year.²⁵ Countless others have since used it.

The route over Parks Pass meets all the conditions applicable to Kearny's route, except one. Distances check, descriptions of terrain features check, elevations check approximately, and the trail is so easy that even today it is passable for a jeep or pick-up truck as far as the pass. Finally, it is the one route from which "the Dome" can be seen while descending a canyon. The one exception is Emory's statement that he passed the summit by a mile before realizing it.

Parks Pass is not a knife ridge, being practically level for some forty yards, but the summit is unmistakable. No explanation seems completely plausible. Unable to take observations, worry about his instruments, the loss of the viameter, engrossed by Kit Carson's identifying various landmarks, Emory may have neglected mentally to note the crossing of the Mimbres Range. Another explanation may be that the notes of this day's march became confused with those pertaining to the crossing of the continental divide a few days later. Some errors are evident in the entries for that

24. Cleve Hallenbeck, *Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca* (Glendale, 1940), p. 222.

25. John C. Fremont, *Memoirs of My Life* (New York, 1887), Map. Wm. Chamberlin, *Journal*, ed. L. B. Bloom, *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW* (Santa Fe, 1945). Vol. XX, no. 2, p. 155.

latter day.²⁶ But for a false reliance in the accuracy of this statement of Emory and consequent search for a very gentle grade over the Mimbres Mountains, a determination of the route would have been reached months sooner.

Let us reconstruct the march of October 17th. Upon leaving Camp No. 74 in the Berenda valley at 8:00 A.M., the column left Berenda Creek by a narrow draw on the south side, crossed the upper reaches of Macho Creek, then ascended Pollock Creek to its head and crossed Parks Pass about nine miles from camp. The descent followed Dry Gavilan Creek to its juncture with Gavilan Creek and thence to the Mimbres River, so clear and refreshing in its beauty. Here the animals were watered and a few fish caught.²⁷ Crossing to the west bank, the column swung a mile upstream to the site of present Swartz and then northwest up Tom Brown Creek for about three miles to where Camp No. 75 was pitched among hills of volcanic rock, cedar trees and grass. An astronomical observation was made here: latitude $32^{\circ} 42' 11''$; longitude (corrected) $107^{\circ} 52' 30''$; elevation 5,426 feet. United States Geological Survey maps show the elevation as about 5,600 feet.²⁸

Why the route over Parks Pass was not used for the principal road over the mountains instead of present State Highway No. 180 probably would be an interesting tale in itself. Possibly it was due to the discovery of precious metals at Gold Dust, Hillsboro, and Kingston. The miners of these diggings wanted direct communication with Silver City and Santa Rita and used the shortest way by continuing the trail over the mountains in a direct line. Also, Hillsboro was a county seat in former times, and it is probable that the ranchers farther south were adverse to the building of a road cutting through their ranges. When the diggings at Lake Valley and other places petered out, the farmers in the Mimbres valley no longer had a ready market for their produce there and the Parks Pass road had served its needs. However, even today, it is one of the best routes across the

26. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 578.

27. Griffin, *ibid.* Turner, *ibid.*

28. Emory, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 168, 177, 577.

Mimbres Mountains and the trace of the old road is still visible.

The path of the dragoons to the Copper Mines was a natural trail with easy grades which continued in use for many years as the most direct way to Santa Rita. Mr. Parks told of riding on it from his ranch to Santa Rita to dances when he was a young man and then returning the next morning for a day's work. From Camp No. 75, near Swartz, Kearny proceeded on the 18th up the creek, across a ridge into Lamp-bright Draw, northwestward up the draw, around the mountain now known as the Kneeling Nun, but named Ben Moore by Emory for his friend Captain Benjamin D. Moore of the First Dragoons, who later was killed at San Pasqual — Emory was punning here, as "Ben" is a common Scots term for a single mountain. The route was an old trail and shows on Wheeler Survey map No. 84. Two miles beyond the copper mines Camp No. 76 was made on a beautiful creek, probably Hanover Creek.²⁹

The copper mines were visited and specimens of ore collected for the mineral exhibit. Mangas Coloradas, the Apache chief, visited the camp and promised good faith and friendship for the Americans. After receiving presents he agreed to meet the command at San Vicente Springs. Early the next morning the column set out in fine spirits heading directly west to the springs, the site of present Silver City, to meet the Apaches. However, upon arrival at the springs no Indians were found. All the grass around had been eaten, so the march was continued until long after dark to Camp No. 77, on Mangas Creek where it makes a bend to the west.

The Apaches came into camp on the morning of the 20th and brisk trading ensued for mules, but only a few were obtained. Marching at noon, the Gila River, five miles away, was reached about 3:00 P.M. Camp No. 78 was made on the river about two and one half miles down stream from the mouth of Mangas Creek.

If that portion of Emory's map between the Rio Grande and the Gila River is enlarged to the same scale as the sketch map printed with this article and then superimposed upon it,

29. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 53. Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Turner, *ibid.*

the trace of Kearny's route on the Emory map practically coincides with the route platted on the sketch map. Map distances check throughout, terrain features check on the ground with descriptions in journals, directions check, "the Dome" is in the correct location, and Emory's barometric elevations are within a reasonable tolerance of two hundred feet. At 6,000 feet one hundredth of an inch on the barometer scale is equivalent to over eleven feet of altitude. In brief, the plotted route is considered to meet all tests as the true route which Kearny followed.

By evening of October 20, 1846, when camp was made beside the upper waters of the Gila River, Kearny's command had crossed the jagged escarpment of the Mimbres Mountains and the continental divide. Now ahead lay the long march down the Gila River, across the Colorado River, then the Colorado Desert to the end of the trail at San Diego. At four o'clock Saturday afternoon, December 12, 1846, Kearny and his weary dragoons marched into Old Town during a pouring rain. Their march of nearly two thousand miles from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean was completed for all but three officers and seventeen enlisted men of the First Dragoons; their trail ended forever on the field of battle at the little Indian village of San Pasqual, California, December 6, 1846.