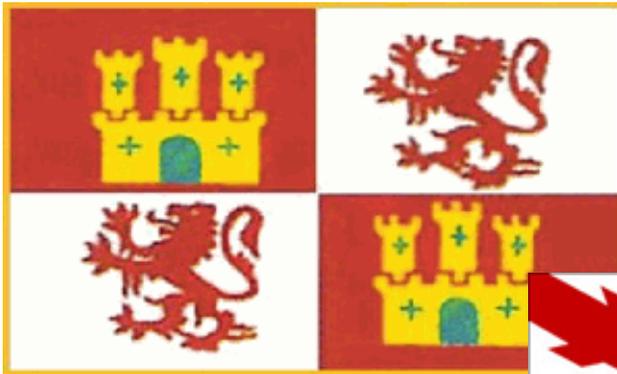
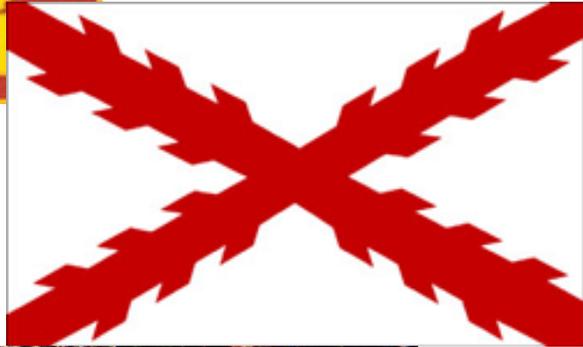


La Sociedad de la



Entrada



Onate's Legacy - El Camino Real de Adentro Tierra

On January 25, 1598, Don Juan de Onate Y Salazar (1552-1626) - the son of a wealthy silver baron from Zacatecas, Mexico - set out from Santa Barbara, Mexico with a party of approximately 600 through the arid landscape of Chihuahuan Desert. Onate was commissioned by the government

of New Spain (Mexico) to explore the northern reaches of la tierra adentro (the interior land). His caravan, which stretched for miles, began a slow and deliberate trek, covering only a few miles each day. The task was daunting, water was scarce, and by spring of 1598 the rising heat became oppressive. Included in Onate's party were soldiers, tradesmen, women, Franciscan friars, native Indians, heavily laden wagons (carretas), and approximately 7,000 head of livestock,



On April 20th, while traveling north along the muddy banks of the Rio Grande, Onate's scout party entered New Mexico, about 15 miles down-river from present-day El Paso, Texas. They continued to follow the river upstream until April 30, when during the catholic Feast of the Ascension, Onate paused to conduct a formal ceremony and "take possession" of the new land and its peoples on behalf of Spain and its King. Here he let his party rest, give thanks, and feast on the fish from the River - what would become the first thanksgiving in the United States was held on the banks of the Rio Grande. Soon after, the expedition crossed the Rio Grande, negotiated el paso (a narrow gap in the mountains), and proceeded upstream into modern-day New Mexico.

Shortly after leaving a camp near modern-day Las Cruces, and following the ancient Indian footpaths that once linked North American and Mesoamerica, Onate sent out a scouting party that left the River corridor to bear north and designate a path for the cumbersome train of carretas. The scout party rode their horses up and through a level and waterless plain, unfolding like a ribbon for 90 miles between parallel chins of sierras. This dry and forbidden

stretch of desert would soon receive the name Jornada del Muerto, or "journey of death".

The northern end of this valley would naturally guide the expedition back to the banks of the Rio Grande. Continuing upriver, Onate and his followers entered the first villages of Pueblo Indians, some of whom fled at the sight of the oncoming party, while others approached cautiously. At the adobe community of Teypama, very near present-day Socorro, New Mexico, pueblo tribesmen provided the hungry and thirsty newcomers with plenty of corn and water, whereupon Onate christened the place "Socorro" (Succor or Assistance) in gratitude of the generous native people.

Resuming their trek north, the refreshed caravan followed the river to Santo Domingo Pueblo, and then turned northeast, eventually circumventing the 900' high volcanic plateau of La Bajada. At the site of Present-day Santa Fe, the party turned northwest and descended to Espanola Valley. It was here, on July 11, 1598, at the confluence of the Rio Chama and Rio Grande, the expedition settled at the Tewa pueblo of Caypa, giving the place their own name of San Juan de los Caballeros. Life for the new settlers was extremely difficult. At first, letters from home, funds, supplies, arms and reinforcements came by military escort - mule and oxen-drawn caravans arriving about once every three years. The first caravans were aimed at the works of the newly established missions, and later ones for trade and expanded settlements. As the missions grew, Spanish mills and mines sprung up and exports began to return south to Mexico, and on to Spain. The trail was the colonists' only lifeline to home - a 1,150 mile-long "highway" that would become the oldest (and for awhile the longest) European road in North America. Eventually, the trail was declared a government road, a royal highway or Camino Real, and for over the next two centuries it served as the lifeline that kept Spanish colonial New Mexico alive.

Up the Camino Real from Spain came seeds for wheat, barley, cabbages, onions, lettuce, radishes, cantaloupes, apples, and watermelons. From Mexico came chile, beans, tomatoes, and exotic varieties of beans and corns. With the colonists came a new language, new religions, and concepts of civil law such as community property, first use/first priority in water rights, mining claims, and the notion of sovereignty (especially as it applied to Indian land claims). Up the Camino came wooden molds for making adobe bricks which would revolutionize structural building techniques, especially among the Indians. More and more technology moved north along the Camino - metal implements like plows, sickles and hoes for farming; hammers' augers, chisels and saw for building; tongs, vises, files and punches for blacksmithing. Instruments such as organs, violins, trumpets and bassoons were brought in by Franciscans for worship. While it may have been Coronado, in 1540, who introduced the first horses into present-day America, it was Onate who brought in the first brood mares, and his Franciscans' the first wines. In 1629, a Franciscan friar, Gracia de Zuniga, and a Capuchin monk, Antonio de Ortega, brought the first vine cuttings that would four years later produce the first wines produced in the United States. Also up the Camino came the churro sheep - descendants from the common sheep of southern Spain. These animals provided precious meat for the table and coarse, long wool for making clothing and blankets. As the flocks grew, ranchers found eager markets throughout the new territory, and back in Mexico as well.

As a result of nearly a half-century of repeated mistreatment and abuse at the hands of European colonists, the Pueblo Indians organized a Revolt in 1680, and it was the Camino Real that enabled

then Governor Antonio de Otermin and the surviving colonists to flee south to safety. In 1692-93, the Trail provided Capitan-General don Diego de Vargas Zapata Lujan Ponce de Leon and his troops a path to head north and retake Santa Fe - facilitating the recolonization of New Mexico.

In 1821, when Mexico won its independence from Spain, it eagerly sought trade with the United States. Gradually, merchant traffic loaded with trade goods coming across the Santa Fe Trail began traveling the Camino Real (now called the Chihuahua Trail) to Mexico. Trade between the United States and Mexico began to flourish. In the middle of the 19th Century, when the United States declared war on Mexico, General Stephen W. Kearny and his Army of the West arrived from Independence, Missouri along the Santa Fe Trail, and took possession of New Mexico. Over the next 20 years, the United States Government built a number of military outposts along both trails, and its garrisons helped rebuff an invasion by Texas Confederates during the Civil War in 1862. As the Atchison/Topeka and Santa Fe Railroads finished laying tracks from Santa Domingo Pueblo to El Paso, Texas in 1882, the practical need for the original Camino passed into history. Only a few remnants of the trail are visible now, having survived nature, war, agricultural and residential development, and the manifest needs of an ever-expanding population.

Perhaps the most significant legacy of El Camino Real is the unique cross-cultural landscape that survives today in the Southwest. Today, layers of earth and time above the first hoof-prints that began to define Camino Real, intersect the modern automobile highways of New Mexico Highway 1, and U.S. Interstate 25. Both of these highways, or super-highways, are a new species of camino that illustrate the power and resources of a modern world. Yet both of these highways closely follow Onate's first journey of over four centuries ago, providing us with a lesson in history and demonstrating the common threads of human desire and behavior that even time cannot erase.

Santiago!

(Spanish battlecry, invoking the Spanish army patron saint, San Iago [St. James]),

"y cierra España!"

"and close (protect) Spain!"

© Copyright Sociedad de la Entrada 2006; all rights reserved by those who contributed text and photos for this article.