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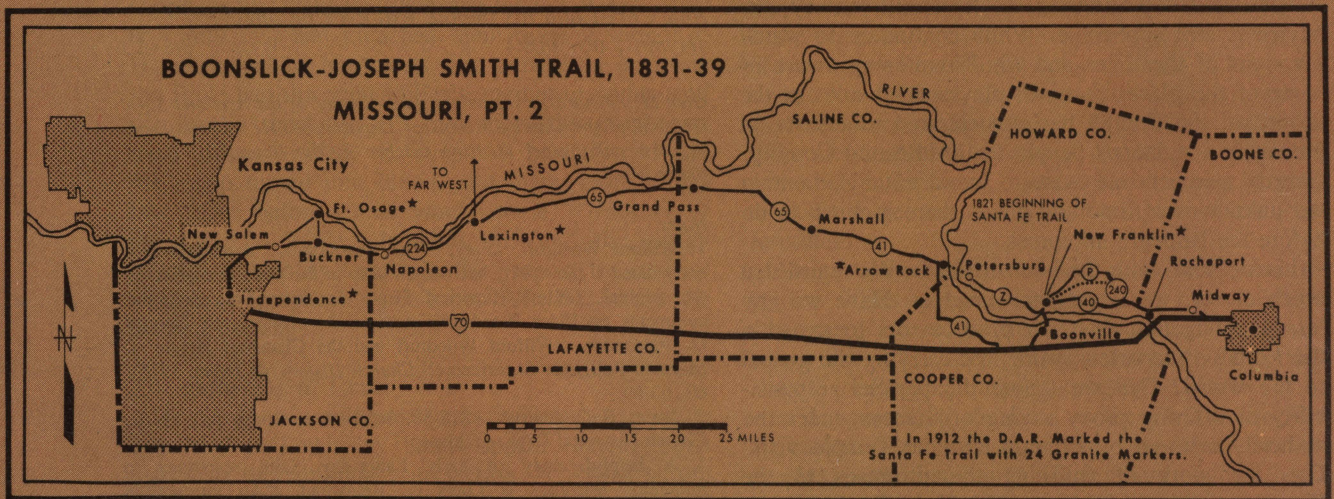
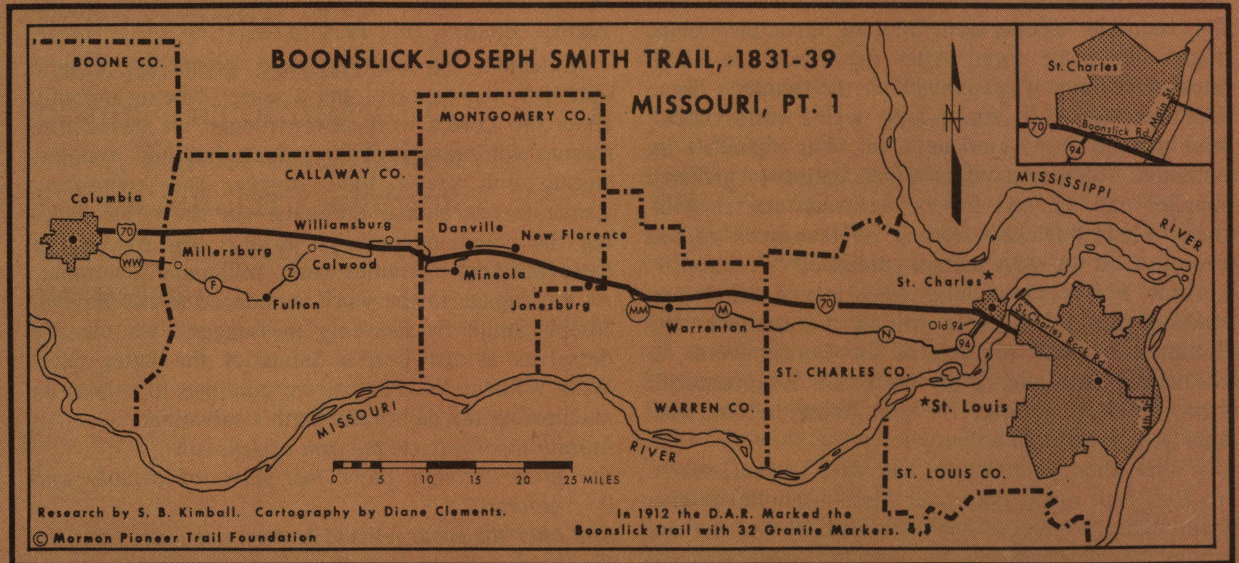
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Leadership at Home and Church



Two More Mormon Trails

By Stanley B. Kimball



West from Saint Louis: The Boonslick Trail, 1831-39

The Boonslick Trail began as a 1764 Indian-trapper pathway that started in downtown Saint Louis near the Old Courthouse and developed into the first road to the Far West, mother of the better known Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. Because the famous frontiersman Daniel Boone and his sons extended the early trail to some salt springs, an animal "licking" place, in Saline County, the trail is named after him.

The Mormons also used it during their 1831-39 sojourn in Missouri, first when Parley P. Pratt and four other missionaries traveled from Kirtland, Ohio, arriving early in 1831 to preach in the Indian Territory just west of the Missouri River. Their work with the Shawnees and Delawares was not successful because of objections raised by the Indian agent and local ministers. But they were the first Mormons in what was soon to become one of the main centers of the new Church—Jackson County, Missouri.

Joseph Smith himself visited Jackson County during the summer of 1831, walking the entire 240 miles from Saint Louis. He returned part way, probably as far as Howard County, by canoe. At McIlwaine's Bend, a curve that no longer exists and can no longer be identified, he received a revelation on August 12 not to travel farther by water and returned to Kirtland by coach. (See D&C 61.)

The following spring Joseph made a second trip to Jackson County, taking a coach from Saint Louis. Subsequent references to Mormons using this road are few; but as long as they traveled between Saint Louis and western Missouri, this is the way they would have gone.

In 1912 the Daughters of the American Revolution sprinkled thirty-two markers along the trail, starting immediately behind the Old Courthouse on Fourth Street in Saint Louis and going as far as Franklin, Missouri. Although some of the markers are in out-of-the-way places, they are a good check for determining how close one is to the original road.

Travelers should start from the Old Courthouse, first visiting the famous Saint Louis Arch and the Jefferson Expansion Museum, then go north on Fourth Street to Washington Avenue. On the northwest corner of this intersection, on the Missouri Athletic Club, is a Mormon Pioneer Trail plaque marking the site of the first chapel used by the Mormons in Saint Louis, 1854-57. Take Fourth Street to St. Charles Rock Road to reach Saint Charles, mentioned by the first Mormons in 1831, go south on Main Street, west on the modern Boonslick Road and pick up old Highway 94. You'll pass the Saint Charles Ward's new meetinghouse on the way.

The old Boonslick Trail, with its modern DAR markers, has now become the state and county highway system identified as 94, N, M, MM, Z, F, and WW.

After Columbia, Missouri, comes New Franklin, built after the river washed away the original town. Here the Boonslick Trail turns into the Santa Fe Trail, identified by a large granite marker honoring its 1821 beginning. In 1912 the Daughters of the American Revolution put twenty-seven markers on this trail as well. In Joseph Smith's day, Mormons crossed the Missouri at Arrow Rock by ferry. Today's traveler must detour on Highway 41. Arrow Rock is now a state park with historic markers and buildings. The dotted line here and at New Franklin identifies portions of the trail that can no longer be traveled by vehicle. From Arrow Rock to Independence, the trail exists as Highway 41, 65, and 224.

Lexington was an important river city and many Mormons arrived there by river boat, then went overland to Far West and other northern Missouri communities. During the expulsion of 1838-39, many Mormons fled to Lexington, then crossed to Illinois by boat. It was also near Lexington in April 1852 that the steamboat *Saluda* blew up, killing twenty-six Mormons and seriously wounding many others.

After halfway between Lexington and Independence is Fort Osage, an old log trading post now restored, that Joseph Smith passed by canoe in 1831.

Independence is rightfully known as the Queen City of Trails, as several monuments on the Jackson County Courthouse grounds attest. The traveler interested in Mormon history has a rich selection of sites in the Independence and Liberty area. The LDS Visitors Center in Independence is at Walnut Street and North River Boulevard.

The Mississippi Saints' Trail, 1846-47: Colorado, Wyoming

In April 1846 a group of Mormon converts from Monroe County, Mississippi, started north with the intention of joining the main body of pioneers on the North Platte River, somewhere near Fort Laramie. These Mississippi Saints followed the Mississippi River north to the Iron Banks, near present-day Columbus, Kentucky, and then cut across the Missouri, following existing county roads, to Independence where they picked up the Oregon Trail and followed it to within a few miles of Fort Laramie.

There they discovered that Brigham Young and the pioneers had not been able to start for the Rocky Mountains that year and were in Winter Quarters on the Missouri River. Facing winter themselves, the Mississippi Saints followed a trapper trail dating from the 1830s south to Fort Pueblo on the Arkansas River in present-day Colorado. There, joined by three sick detachments of the Mormon Battalion, they spent the winter.

Nothing remains of Mormon Pueblo; even the graves of those who died there have been obliterated by the flood waters of the Arkansas. Fort Pueblo was located at the junction of Fountain Creek and the Arkansas, but since the river has changed its course at least once since 1846, we have no idea where the old fort was located. It is possible, however, to drive to the present confluence of these two streams on Highway 227 near the Union Stockyards and imagine what it was like in 1846-47. Near here, on Highway 50 at the intersection of Moffatt and Lansing streets, is a marker to the Mormon Battalion.

In the spring of 1847, the Mississippi Saints and battalion members started north again for Fort Laramie, retracing their route over the same trapper trail they had picked up near Fort Laramie the previous autumn. This trapper trail connected a string of forts from Bent's Fort east of Fort Pueblo on the Arkansas River up to Fort Saint Vrain on the South Platte River to Fort Laramie on the North Platte in Wyoming. Part of this trail was later called the Cherokee Trail and was used extensively during the Colorado gold rush of 1859.

From Fort Pueblo to the South Platte near present-day Denver there were three variants of the trail. It appears that the Mormons followed the one closest to the mountains, along Fountain Monument, East Plum, and Plum creeks to the latter's confluence with the South Platte just south of Denver. Keeping the majestic Rampart Range of the Colorado Rockies to their left, the Mississippi-battalion Saints would have passed the 14,110 foot-high Pikes Peak near Colorado Springs.

Fortuitously, Interstate 25 follows the old trail closely as far as Castle Rock, a dramatic outcrop of salmon-colored stone which served Indians, explorers, and the Mormons as a landmark.

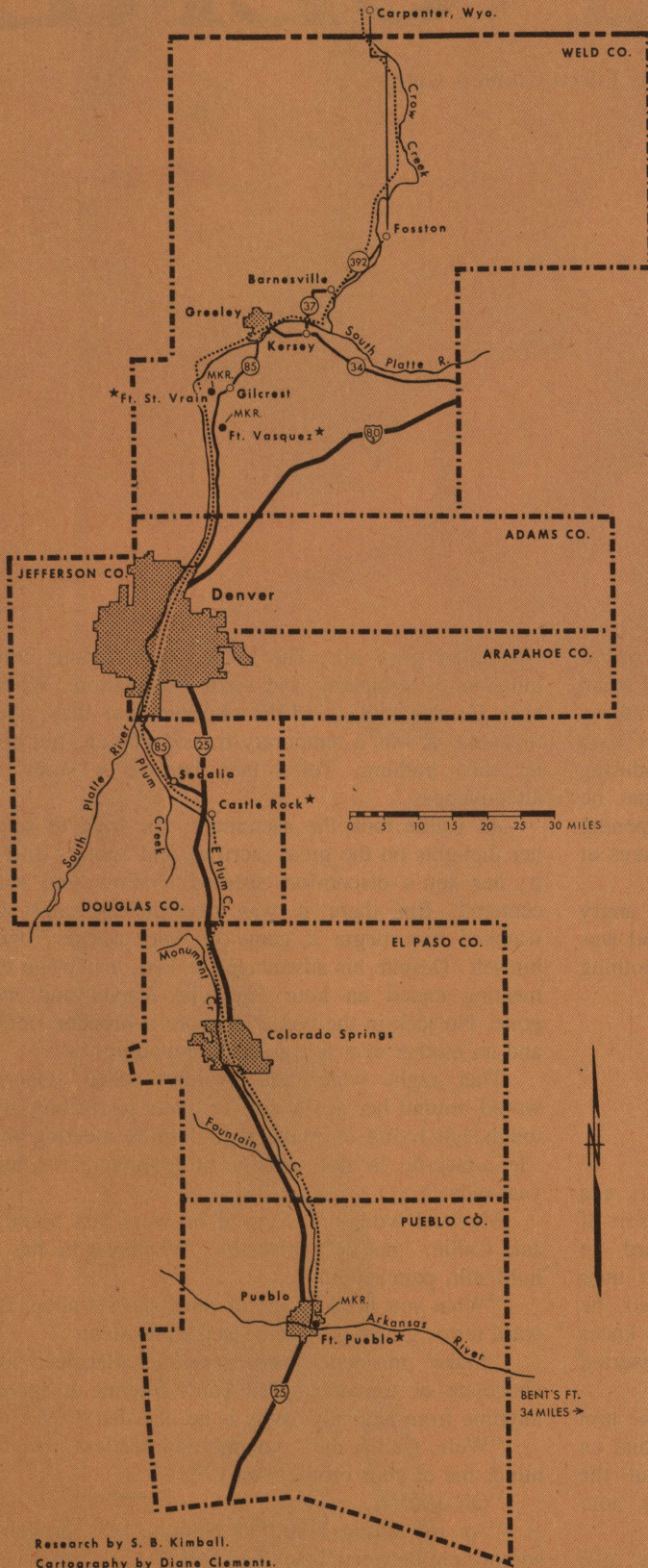
Once the Mormons reached the South Platte they followed it as far as possible to beyond present-day Greeley. With the towering Front Range of the Colorado Rockies on their left they would have first passed Fort Vasquez which had been abandoned in 1842 (reconstructed today in the median of Highway 85) and second, Fort Saint Vrain which had been abandoned in 1844. Nothing remains of this fort except a marker three miles west of Gilcrest on a dirt road. (Ask locally for directions.) Both these forts were originally on the South Platte River, but the river has since changed course.

East of Greeley, the Mormons picked up Crow Creek and followed it north into Wyoming where the Rockies faded away into the west and the High Plains began. Just inside a natural basin named Goshen Hole, the trail divided and the Mississippi Saints had two options: to take the shorter way close to Cherry Creek or to cut straight over to the North Platte and follow the Oregon Trail proper to Fort Laramie. It appears they took the North Platte route.

The vanguard of these Saints reached Fort Laramie before Brigham Young and happily greeted the pioneers from Winter Quarters when they arrived sixteen days later on June 1. From that point, the two companies traveled together. □

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MISSISSIPPI SAINTS TRAIL, 1846-47 COLORADO



Research by S. B. Kimball.
Cartography by Diane Clements.

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MISSISSIPPI SAINTS TRAIL, 1846-47 WYOMING

