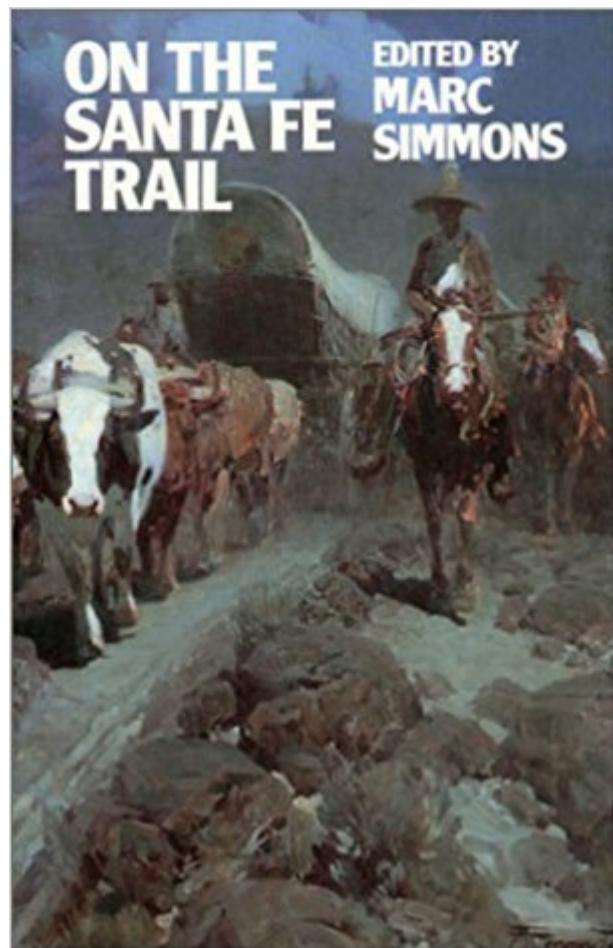


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# On The Santa Fe Trail



## Synopsis

On the Santa Fe Trail, a collection of first-hand accounts by nineteenth-century overlanders, offers an intensely personal view of that arduous trip. In retrospect, the history of the Santa Fe Trail—crossing forests, prairies, rivers, and deserts—seems overlayed with the gloss of romance and chivalry. It is set off by heroic attitudes and picturesque adventures. And it has left a deep imprint on one region of the American West. The trail crossed parts of five modern states—Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico. From the perspective of the overland trade, those five are forever bound in historical communion. The route began in Missouri and ended, after almost a thousand miles, in New Mexico. But it was Kansas that claimed the largest share of the trail: from a beginning point at either Kansas City or Fort Leavenworth it angled across the entire state, exiting over four hundred miles later in the southwestern corner. It would be no exaggeration to say that trade and travel on the Santa Fe Trail derived much of its special flavor from the Kansas experience and that, in turn, the presence of the trail went a long way toward shaping the early history of the state. Many participants in this story, overlanders of various kinds, wrote down what they saw and learned on the way to Santa Fe. It is with that in mind that Marc Simmons has here collected a dozen narratives and reports from the middle years of the trail's history—from the early 1840s to the late '60s—that is, just after New Mexico had passed into American hands. It was a period of intense Indian-white conflict and before the establishment of rail lines along the route. The authors of these narratives—among them several teenagers, a Spanish aristocrat, an Indian agent, a German immigrant lady, a government scout, and a young New Mexican drover of the peon class—qualify as plain folk who, without quite intending to, got swept up in the westering adventure. Simmons has written an introduction to the collection and to each of the narratives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A wonderful contribution to Western American. . . . Vivid impressions. . . . A book that will endure." •Dee Brown, author of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* "One of the great strengths of this collection is its diversity; included are writings by an army major, Indian agent, German immigrant woman, and a New Mexican drover. . . . These travelers offer a wide and enlightening range of perspectives regarding the demanding conditions of the Santa Fe trail. Simmons has wisely supplemented the narratives with useful lists of trail sites, illustrations, a map, and suggestions for further reading. The volume provides significant insights for anyone interested in understanding the westering experience." •Glenda Riley, author of *Women and Indians on the Frontier* "Provides humor and human interest as well as describing the dangers, hardships, and joys of the crossing. The reader will have an excellent understanding of the daily routine of trail life." •C. Robert Haywood, author of *Trails South: The Wagon Road Economy in the Dodge City-Panhandle Region* "A significant contribution to the literature of the trail." •David Dary, author of *Cowboy Culture and True Tales of Old-Time Kansas*

'One of the great strengths of this collection is its diversity; included are writings by an army major, Indian agent, German immigrant woman, and a New Mexican drover.... These travelers offer a wide and enlightening range of perspectives regarding the demanding conditions of the Santa Fe trail....'

Glenda Riley, author of *Women and Indians on the Frontier*

This is a small book, and the history within the covers is a collection of diaries from different persons, including one Mexican peasant - Jose Librado Gurule - who found someone (or someone found him) to write down his memories from the hard-working teamster and laborer aspect. His patient people were virtual slaves of the landmaster, a wealthy Mexican sheepman - Jose Leandro Perea - (who used simple "debt owed" rather than "ownership of" to control his workers, who were in reality life-long indentured servants, never seeming to remove themselves from the debit side of his ledger. This trip was to be no exception to that idea, but rather an extension of it for most. Perea also had a contract to help build a railroad, as well as setting up a frontier supply store, so it's likely he had a lot more in mind for the men to further his monetary benefit once they arrived out there. Since

they paid for their own clothing (debit to the rapidly expanding ledger of Senor Parea) and other incidentals for the privilege of working for him, he quite possibly built the whole railroad with what they owed him for the Santa Fe Trip to supply the stuff he would ultimate sell back to them. It would also appear that all Jose got out of this was a new suit of clothes, which he did manage to do with money he "took with him", which had been his goal - his only goal aspired to - against the risks of the journey. I thought his accounting of the Travails of the Trail to be one of the most interesting and effective, since they were from a different culture; which, though mingling on the same journey with the white drovers, wealthier wagon masters, including his own Mexican boss, was nevertheless a world apart though they moved and lived through the same one each day. Each set of eyes beheld the journey individually; each set of circumstances shaped the work load and the end result; but each life was risked in common every day. It was a very, very good read and is worth adding to your Southwest History shelf. Four stars only because of it's short length in relation to it's overall worth, which was vastly important from the individual accounting aspect of it, and deserved more accumulation of the material from other sources and people. I'm sure there were more diaries out there that could have been found but were not and therefore, never added to an important work like this.

I knew I would be spending part of the summer living in Raton, NM exactly on the Santa Fe Trail so I thought I'd try this book. I later found out from my brother in Santa Fe that the author is an extremely respected local journalist and historian. The book are monographs or case studies of some of the people who lived and often died making the long trek. It was sort of an expressway of its day, the hardship and speed depending on whether or not you had the political clout or have US Cavalry troops as escorts. Anyone who travels anywhere near the Trail, or lives there, should donate this to local schools and libraries.

The book provided background material for a grant I am writing about a different trail. Since I had read several others it was somewhat repetitive for me but if a first read it would have been informative and is diverse in its anecdotes.

The journals collected in "On the Santa Fe Trail," arranged chronologically, detail the breadth of experiences travelers had on the Santa Fe Trail. Some were plainly long and boring, others ended tragically. Simmons introduces each journal helpfully. Some of the writers even had a little bit of humor to add. It's a short book and a good starting point for people who want to get an idea of what

traveling on the Santa Fe Trail was like.

Enjoyed this very much. Recommended reading.

Interesting and good read

A-OK

This is a collection of firsthand accounts of travel/trade on the Santa Fe trail prior to 1860. It is historical but not the dry boring type. I found it an interesting read.

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