

theme was trade and commerce (p. 26). Other possible themes, all drawn from the pre-1993 era of historiography, were Immigration, American Conquest of California, Development of Western Towns, Military Expeditions and Travel, and Significant Persons. These were relegated to the section on State and Local Significance (pp. 37-45). It is not clear from the study how the Trade and Commerce theme was selected, and how that selection process affected research and analysis. By consigning the remaining possible themes to less than national importance, the NPS evidently did not feel constrained to research fully into these topics, and the resulting discussion clearly shows this cavalier treatment.

For example, the language in the study that refers to the significance of Fremont's expedition of 1844 along the Old Spanish Trail, dismisses its importance, comparing it negatively to the significance of the 1843 outward bound trip along the Oregon Trail: "...it is doubtful that his short journey along a segment of the Old Spanish Trail was the most important part of his trip" (p. 42). To the contrary, the Spanish Trail segment was more important than the Oregon Trail journey. Fremont's journey along the Spanish Trail, Amargosa variant, enabled him to recognize the nature of the huge desert region to the north, with the consequence that once and for all the riddle of the Great Basin was solved. On that trip, Fremont defined the Great Basin, named it, and mapped it. The 1845 Report of that expedition was considered so important to the national interest that each house of Congress ordered 10,000 copies to be printed. 20,000 copies of that report were distributed to eager American adventurers, entrepreneurs, and argonauts. The figure probably represents most of the literate households in the United States. No other federal report ever issued has aroused such interest and had so much impact on American history.

This story, with its overriding national significance, is **NOT FOUND** in the NPS study document. The Selected Bibliography omits sources that include this account and provide expert judgment as to its importance. It is notable that the study document lacks any section entitled Exploration, despite its inclusion in the National Trails System Act as a possible theme (NPS 2000:21). Fremont's 1844 march was indeed of a military expedition, but its importance was less military than cartographic, and in this category, it occupies a place all its own. No less a figure than Carl I. Wheat, historian of western cartography, recognizes that Fremont stands alone among map-makers:

The year 1845...because of a single event, is in fact, one of the towering years in the story of Western Cartography. In that year John C. Fremont's report of his journey to Oregon and California in 1843-44 was published. This report and the Fremont (Preuss) map which accompanied it, changed the entire picture of the West and made a lasting contribution to cartography (Wheat 1955, 2:194).

The features of this map that made it unique among maps of the period are the "white space" nature of its information, i.e., no information entered about places not actually visited and known to Fremont were included. On the map and in his report, Fremont called this region the Great Basin, a name which reflects its interior drainage. Finally, this trip, once and for all, laid to rest forever the seemingly indestructible myth of the San Buenaventura River, which for centuries had eluded explorers but nonetheless graced maps until 1845 (see Cline 1963, Utley 1997:ch. 14, Wheat 1955,2). Fremont's contribution toward understanding western topography and the obstacles it offered to trans-continental travel was indeed in a class by itself.

This event did not occur in the context of the theme the NPS chose to use, namely Trade and Commerce. The expedition would have enormous influence on the development of commercial traffic in the future, but not immediately. In 1844-45, the discovery of the nature of Nevada's interior (then part of Mexico) properly should be discussed under a theme of Exploration.

The NPS study authors (anonymous in the document) insist (NPS 2000:42-43) that the significance of the event itself and of the wide distribution of Fremont's information can only be made after a thorough study of the route of the entire trip, both the trail followed west in 1843 and that used to return to the east in 1844. The Oregon Trail, however, was known by 1844, although not mapped scientifically. The Spanish Trail, on the other hand, was totally unknown outside the precincts of the Southwest and California. Fremont's decision to take this route eastward was a choice made to pursue his determination to solve the puzzle of the interior desert and resolve if possible the question of the existence of rivers and lakes that allegedly existed there (see Cline 1963: 208-216). This is a dream of the explorer, not someone engaged in trade and commerce. It properly belongs to a leader of the Corps of Topographic Engineers, America's space explorers of the 19th century. Garbed in military uniforms they indeed were, yet this was not a military expedition but a march of discovery.

The extraordinarily wide dissemination of Fremont's Report of 1845 accounts for its ready availability not only to authors of emigrant guides, but to hundreds of families who traveled the trail in the years following its printing. This report, and the travels on which it was based, rank among the most important ever made in American history. Simply because no full study has been accomplished by the NPS of Fremont's full trip of 1843-44 does not support their decision to delete it from this feasibility study. It was Fremont's choice of the Amargosa variant of the Old Spanish Trail portion of his expedition that resulted in Wheat's "towering event in Western Cartography" not the march along the Oregon Trail.

Further, it was an accident of history that he left the "regular route." After Resting Springs, Fremont was led not by any of his official guides (Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, Kit Carson, Alex Godey) but by Andres Fuentes, a New Mexican now desperate to get home. He knew the route; the official guides could only guess and make short forays to discover the lay of the land ahead. Together with these celebrated mountain men, this forgotten Fuentes moved the party out along the unofficial trail that eventually led Fremont to Las Vegas Valley, to the Muddy and Virgin rivers, and up the Santa Clara to Mountain Meadows. Had Fremont continued on the trade caravan route that led to the Colorado River, which was his intention at the start, he would have traveled farther on the Old Spanish Trail caravan route, but still not recognized the Great Basin. The Mohave River route led away from the Great Basin, and many of its features could not then and cannot now be discerned from the regular caravan routes of the 1840s. By using the Amargosa variant, Fremont determined the true nature of the land whose boundaries he was circumscribing. When he finally reached Utah Lake once more, having seen it first on his outbound trip, he understood what he had discovered: a huge region of interior drainage which, while largely unexplored, was not drained by any great river that flowed into the Pacific Ocean.

Fremont left the Spanish Trail in southern Utah because he was guided north by Joseph Walker, mountain man and horse trader, who caught up with him on the trail after Mountain Meadows (Vegas de Santa Clara). Walker's usual haunts were the central and northern Rockies, not the southerly mountain ranges that bordered New Mexico. This part of the trail he knew well, and he conducted Fremont to Utah Lake with great dispatch.

The NPS dismisses this highly significant expedition of 1844 because it only traveled a segment of the trail (NPS 2000:42-43). The NPS fails to consider why only a segment was used. They fail to recognize a wider context for the trip, and the explanation of Fremont's decision in southern Utah to leave the Spanish Trail and seek the route to South Pass which he had previously traveled. Wider contexts point to national and international significance of Fremont's choice to shorten the trip and avoid Santa Fe.

The 1844 expedition must be placed in the diplomatic context of the period. Relations with Mexico were very strained at the time, culminating in 1846 with the outbreak of the War with Mexico (see Utey 1997, White 1991). Fremont, son-in-law of Sen. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, well knew the risks of traveling in Mexican territory without permission of either the U.S. or Mexico. His cavalcade was armed and uniformed as a Topographic Corps of the U.S. Army. For him to march to New Mexico would have