Castor Canadensis

The Journal of the Jedediah Smith Society ❖ University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

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*Cover photo of the Mojave Desert (National Park Service, in the public domain).

Jedediah Smith crossed the Mojave twice, in 1826 and again in 1827. In his journal he wrote of the ". . . many days we had traveled weary hungry and thirsty drinking from springs that increased our thirst and looking in vain for a boundary of the interminable waste of sands." Smith's despair dissipated, though, as he approached Mission San Gabriel, ". . . now the scene was changed and whether it was it own real Beauty or the contrast with what we had seen it certainly seemed to us enchantment."

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Traveling the Shell Trade Highway with Indigenous People, Francisco Garcés, and Jedediah Strong Smith

by Lance Holter

The Indigenous People

For perhaps as many as 22,000 years, Indigenous people traveled ancient trails in the American Southwest. While glaciers still existed, the trails must have been limited, but with the end of the Pleistocene, about 11,770 years ago, came the end of the Ice Age. Glaciers mostly retreated and melted, and much of the land became wet and swampy. The changing climate created springs, waterways, and lakes—though some, of course, may have existed as far back as the early Pleistocene. On high ground, sometimes only a few feet above sea level, the Natives improved old trails and developed new ones. As a result, the number of social interactions increased, food-stuffs were domesticated, dwellings became permanent, and trade became essential to growing civilizations. The Age of Humans, called the Holocene, had emerged.[1]

One important trail system and trade route was the Old "Pah-Ute" Mojave Trail, which became a pathway from the Pacific Coast to the interior and facilitated a sophisticated and pervasive trade in marine shells—the so-called Shell Trade.

The Shell Trade began with Indigenous people who had lived on the Santa Barbara Channel Islands and along the coast of Southern California for at least 11,000 years. These Chumash (a name which refers to several groups of Indians) traded with many tribes, some who lived far from the coast.[2] Their trading partners included the tribes of present-day California and beyond to the East: the Serrano, Cahuilla, Chemehuevi, Yuma, Ute, Hohokam, Hopi, Zuni—and, of special importance to this story, the Mojave. [3]

As water warmed during the years 950 to 1300 AD, the number of shellfish (mussels, red abalone, and clams) dramatically increased, and according to historian Damien Bacich, the Chumash exploited these gifts from the sea for trade—particularly the shells.[4]

An abalone shell about five inches in diameter.
The exterior is dull, but the interior is iridescent.
(photo in the public domain)

As the trade became more complex in time, each village and tribe in the Southwest developed a unique skill set or acted as "middlemen." Tanned animal hides, salt, moccasins, black and vermillion pigment, and obsidian were traded for tools, pottery, foodstuffs, seeds, dried fish, deer, elk, and, later, for wool blankets (after the introduction of sheep), horses, and mules. By about 1050, the Chacoan (Ancestral Puebloan) culture in the San Juan Basin had an extensive commercial influence on the region. The great workrooms and storage areas of Chaco Canyon were apparently the center of a vast turquoise-trading network established to acquire macaws, copper bells, shells, and other commodities from distant lands.[5] Such trade, says Erina Gruner, enhanced Chacoan ties with Pacific coast and with their Native neighbors.[6] The Chacoan culture began to decline by 1140, and the centers of power shifted, but the Chacoan trade routes, like those of other Indigenous people in the Southwest and elsewhere, would continue until well into the nineteenth century.[7]

By the 1500s, when the Spanish arrived, the Mojave, according to the National Park Service (NPS), were the "largest concentration of people in the Southwest." As their numbers expanded, trade became essential, though seldom easy, as the NPS notes: "Reaching the Pacific coast required crossing the eastern, barren portion of the Mojave Desert, known for its paucity of water. Thus, the Mojave blazed trails between known water sources to ensure safe passage." One of the most important of these trails, the Mojave Trail, offered water at Piute (Paiute) Spring, Rock Spring, Marl Spring, and Soda Springs.[8] This trail made possible the exchange of crops for goods the Mojave did not possess, such as sea shells, which they used mainly for rituals or decorations.[9]

Into this history enter two great explorers: the first, Father Francisco Garcés; the second, Jedediah Strong Smith.

Piute Spring in the Mojave
(photo by the National Park Service)

Francisco Garcés

Franciscan missionary Francisco Garcés (1738-1781) explored extensively in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, including present-day Arizona, California, Sonora, and Baja California.

Like Jed Smith, he traveled from the Colorado River across the Mojave Desert into the San Joaquin Valley.
(drawing in the public domain)

Operating out of Mission San Xavier del Bac near today's Tucson, Arizona, Francisco Garcés explored a vast area of the Southwest during three entradas or "entrances" from 1768 to 1771, including the Gila and Colorado River Valleys, from the Gulf of California to the Grand Canyon.[10] During these entradas he made contact with many Natives and began the difficult task of discovering possible routes to the California missions through the Colorado-Southern California deserts and mountain passes.[11]

Garcés later joined Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, at least part way, on two important expeditions.

In 1774, Garcés and Father Juan Diaz traveled overland from Tubac Presidio in Sonora into what would become Alta California. With Garcés and then Sebastián Tarabal, a Cochini Indian originally from Mission Santa Gertrudis, serving as guides, Anza's party eventually arrived at Mission San Gabriel and Monterey in the spring of that year. Anza then returned to Tubac.[12]

Garcés was thus with the party that established the feasibility of a route from Sonora across the Colorado Desert to Mission San Gabriel.[13] Having helped to discover the first overland route to California, he left the Anza expedition at Mission San Gabriel and returned to San Xavier del Bac, but not before sojourning for several weeks with the Yumans and other Natives.

In 1775-1776 Anza led an important colonizing expedition, one that would ultimately reach the Pacific Ocean at San Francisco Bay, the location where Anza was instructed to create a settlement. Garcés departed from Tubac with Anza, but, as directed, he remained at Yuma on the Colorado River with one of the two other padres who had also been on the journey. From Yuma, Garcés and his guide Sebastián Taraval journeyed southwest, crossing the Colorado and visiting the Indian rancherias before returning to Yuma in early January 1776.

Within a few weeks, however, Garcés moved north into the region of the Mojave, near today's city of Needles, California.

At this location Garcés' story connects to Jed Smith's 1826 expedition.

The Mojave informed Garcés that an arduous route existed between the Colorado River—along which the Mojave lived—and the coastal missions, but Garcés surmised that a less difficult westerly route might exist through the land of the Mojave from Needles rather than from Yuma. Fortunately for Garcés, Mojave guides offered to lead him on a route they must have known well.

That route, often used by the Mojave, Serrano, and Chemehuevi for trade, would become known as the Mojave Indian Trail, and Garcés was the first non-Native to travel this corridor: "The first documented European exploration of the Mojave Indian Trails came from the Francisco Garcés expedition in 1776.[14] During his odyssey Garcés crossed the life-threatening Mojave Desert, relying on springs along the way because the Mojave River provided only intermittent water. However, Raymund Wood argues that Garcés probably passed just south of the line that connects the many springs. Wood may be correct, but suffice it say that Garcés must have had access to water holes somewhere close to today's Mojave Road.[15]

One of Garcés' encounters along the trail illustrates why it deserves its name, the Shell Trade Highway.[16] Garcés' diary entry of March 19, 1776, provides the detail: "Mar. 19. I went one league south southeast (sic) and arrived at the house of the captain of these ran-cherias. He presented me with a string of about two varas [a vara is about 33 inches] of white sea-shells . . . In a little while after that she [his wife] brought sea-shells in a small gourd, and sprinkled me with them in the way which is done when flowers are thrown. Likewise when the second woman came she expressed her affection by the same ceremonies . . . I marveled to see that among these people so rustic are found demonstrations proper to the most cultivated, and a particular prodigality . . . in scattering their greatest treasures, which are the shells."[17] Wood likens this ceremony to ones in which "women toss flowers to conquering heroes as they ride along in triumphal procession."[18]

The Garcés party eventually reached the headwaters of the Mojave River at the West Fork south of the Cajon Pass, then crossed the San Bernardino Mountains into the San Bernardino Valley: ". . . a little while before I arrived at San Gabriel," writes Garcés, "there had been here some Jamajab [Mojave] Indians for their commerce in shells—those whom I met on their return to their land." Garcés refers to the shell trade as the "most ancient commerce of the nations of the river with those of the sea."[19] In March 1776 he reached Mission San Gabriel where he enjoyed the hospitality of the padres—much as Jed, a Protestant, would a half century later: ". . . I was received," says Garcés, ". . . with great kindness, and the special pleasure to have arrived on the day on which my seraphic religion celebrates Santo Principe . . . ."[20]

Garcés' remaining movements in Alta California are not directly relevant here, but, he did conduct a religious ceremony in today's Tulare County, and he did get close to San Luis Obispo and Monterey. Curiously, Garcés looked upon the southern San Joaquin Valley but never saw its most important river, the San Joaquin. In an April 26 diary entry—when he was in the valley and probably approaching today's Greenfield—Garcés reports seeing decorative sea shells: "I saw here small baskets, knives of flint, vessels with inlays of mother of pearl, like the shell-work on the handles of the knives. . . ."[21]

By the end of May 1776, he had returned—though not entirely by the same route—to the Mojave villages on the Colorado.[22]

Garcés' achievements were many. Historian LeRoy Hafen lists these, among others: Garcés traveled up the Colorado River from Yuma to the Mojave villages; he used Indian guides; he traversed the Mojave Desert and found its headwaters; he traced the Mojave to the San Bernardino Valley; he was the first non-Native to see the Mojave River; he reached the San Joaquin Valley overland from the East; and he successfully returned to the Colorado.[23]

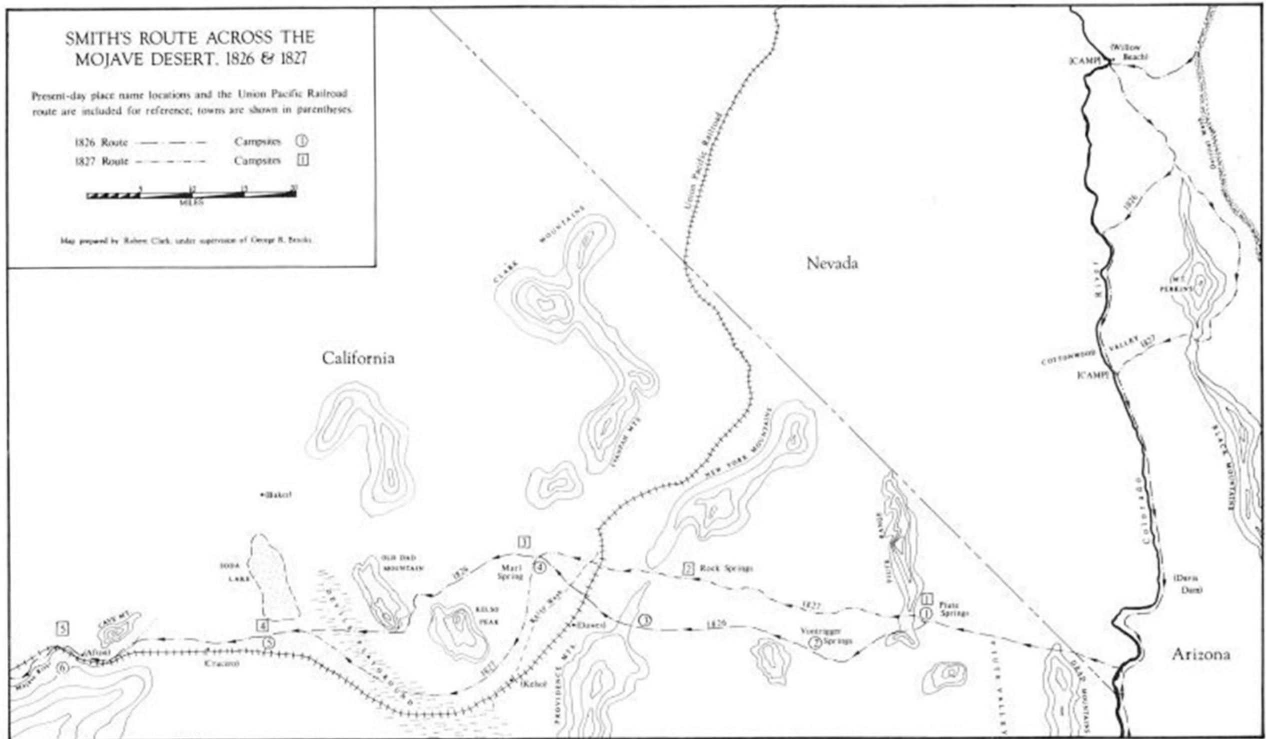
The NPS confirms that Garcés' path from the Mojave villages into Alta California was the one ". . . used by Indigenous people to transport goods from the southwest to trade with the Chumash and other coastal tribes."[24]

Moreover, it was basically the same route Jedediah Smith would use some fifty years later in 1826 on his first overland expedition to the American Southwest and California.[25]

Jedediah Strong Smith

Titled *A Welcome Sight*, this bronze sculpture of Smith by Victor Issa
was placed in San Dimas, California, in 1992. (photo by the San Dimas Festival of Arts)
No photograph of Jed Smith exists.

Smith's Southwest odyssey began in earnest on August 15, 1826, in Cache Valley, the site of the summer rendezvous. Smith and his two partners, William Sublette and David Jackson, had just purchased William Ashley's outfit, and Smith, with a party of seventeen, moved southward to the Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake.[26] Dale Morgan and George Brooks agree that Smith probably reached the Colorado on October 4, thence, four days later, to the Mojave villages.[27]



Smith's Route Across the Mojave Desert 1826 &1827, Robert Clark, cartographer,
and George R. Brooks, editor, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*
(used by permission of Robert Clark)

Smith's goals bore little similarity to those of Garcés: Smith wanted to find the fabled Rio Buenaventura thought to exit from the Great Salt Lake and flow west to the Pacific Ocean. He also hoped to determine the feasibility of trapping beaver in the Far West and to explore a vast territory known only to the Indigenous people.[28] As Jed states in his journal, "I followed the bent of my strong inclination to visit this unexplored country and unfold those hidden resources of wealth and bring to light those wonders which I readily imagined a country so extensive might contain . . . . I wa[nted] to be the first to view a country on which the eyes of a white man had never gazed and to follow the course of rivers that run through a new land."[29]

Upon crossing the Colorado and reaching the Mojave villages in early October, Smith's party faced numerous challenges. Barbour lists fatigue, lack of food and water, a need for horses and sufficient grass for those he had, the taxing and unfamiliar terrain, the arid climate, and the scarcity of beaver.[30] With his options severely limited, Smith decided to head to the Alta California missions for resupply. At first no Mojave offered to guide him through the foreboding Mojave Desert, and so Jed had to rely on "the best instruction" he could "in regard to the route."

Despite formidable risks, Smith entered the desert, traveling some fifteen miles on the first day until arriving at Piute Spring. That night, he writes, "the most valuable horse I had was stolen." Losing his favorite horse, wandering the desert, running out of water, and becoming lost in lower Lanfair Valley, Jed suspected intentional misdirection by the Indians: ". . . a great scarcity of water becoming more apparent I rode and sent others to the high hills and deep ravines in every direction to Look for water

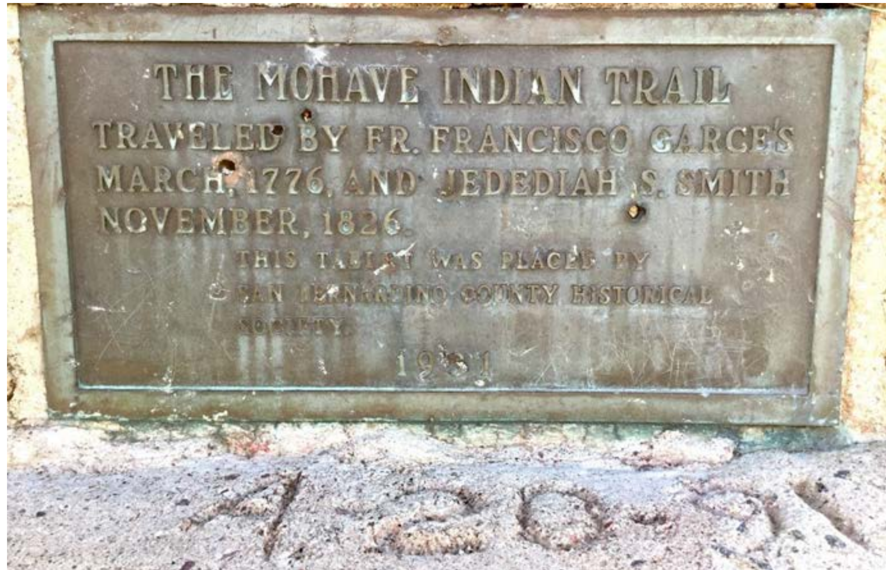
and as none could be found the Idea came forcibly to mind that it was the policy of the Indians to send me into the desert to perish.”

Realizing that this region was “destitute” of water, Smith backtracked to Piute Spring and then to the Colorado, only to discover that the Mojave had departed to a place ten miles downstream. Once there, Smith engaged a young runaway mission neophyte as a translator and eventually two Serrano natives to serve as guides. Smith’s favorite horse having been returned, the expedition departed the Mojave villages near today’s Needles by early November. “The first day,” Smith writes, “I traveled the same course as on the preceeding attempt and encamped at the same spring.” Relentless in his desire to reach California, he was beginning anew his battle against the brutal Mojave wasteland.

The Mojave Desert
(photo courtesy of Milton von Damm)

Unbeknownst to Smith, he would follow Garcés’ route: “By the same trail,” says Morgan, “Garcés had traveled from the Mojave Villages to Mission San Gabriel in the spring of 1776.” This trail was, of course, the Shell Trade Highway, the route on which the Mojave traveled to the Pacific coast carrying their trade goods and bringing back the precious sea shells to their people.[31]

The summer before Jed’s November departure had been long, hot, and dry, with water sources gone, scarce, or severely compromised, but despite any suspicions Jed may have held of being deceived by the Natives, their intelligence of the trail and of water sources ensured the expedition’s survival and success: “Beyond the salt plain,” notes Barbour, “Smith’s guides found an Indian encampment featuring holes in the ground filled with briny water. The trappers dug new holes about two feet deep that yielded less salty water for the thirsty men and livestock . . . Every fifteen to twenty miles Smith’s guides led him to little hidden springs. Some were almost too briny to drink, while others were found in what appeared to be dried up riverbeds.”[32] Fortunately for Jed and his companions, the Serrano guides were remarkably familiar with the trail. Their knowledge of hidden and scarce springs had been passed down through generations of Native traders.



THE MOHAVE INDIAN TRAIL
TRAVELED BY FR. FRANCISCO GARCÉS
MARCH 1776, AND JEDEDIAH S.SMITH
NOVEMBER, 1826.
THIS TABLET WAS PLACED BY
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.
1931
Monument Peak
Registered Historical Landmark No. 618
Photo by Craig Baker, Dec. 24, 2018
The Historical Marker Database. www.hmdb.org

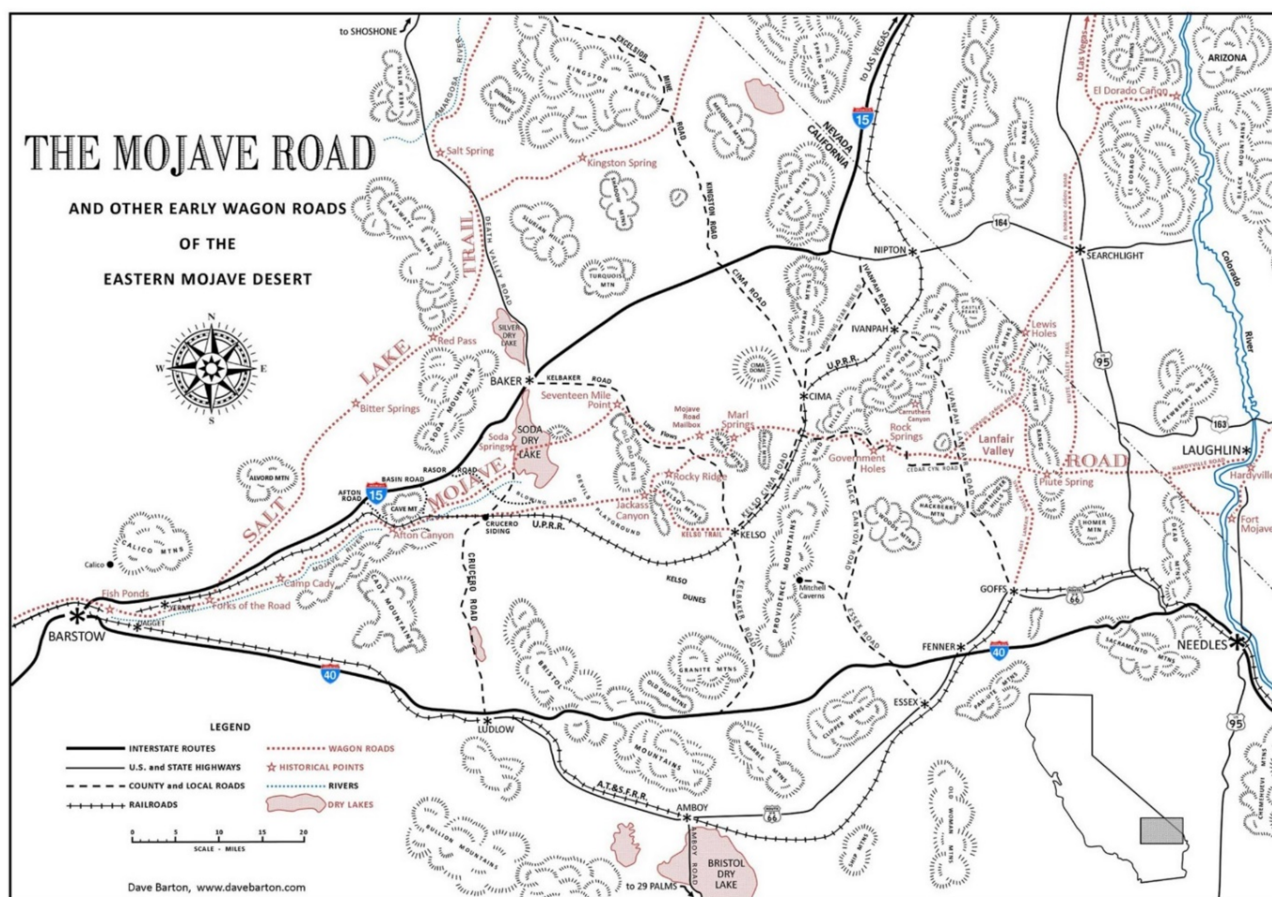
Despite the hardship of the desert crossing, Smith's party reached the San Bernardino mountains in fifteen days.[33] On about November 20, says Barbour, they then began their descent into the San Bernardino Valley and the famous Mission San Gabriel Arcángel.[34] To the exhausted and nearly naked newcomers, the friendly mission padres offered food and shelter as well as bolts of cloth by which to make shirts. Jed's beleaguered party must have been especially delighted when the padres also shared brandy and whiskey.[35] When they arrived there, probably on November 27, Mission San Gabriel must have looked like Paradise: ". . . we had traveled weary hungry and thirsty drinking from springs that increased our thirst and looking in vain for a boundary of the interminable waste of sands. But now the scene was changed and whether it was its own real Beauty or the contrast with what we had seen it certainly seemed to us enchantment."[36]

However, it was not Paradise for the mission Indians. Fifty years earlier there were several thriving Native villages (rancherias) along the Mojave River, as Garcés had discovered near today's Hesperia and Victorville, California. When Smith passed through this same area, the villages were gone, either because the inhabitants had been decimated by disease and intertribal warfare or had been incorporated into the Spanish missions to become neophytes and laborers. Moreover, at Mission San Gabriel Smith would witness the severe physical punishment imposed on recalcitrant Indians—"They are whipped like slaves."

Nevertheless, Smith's expedition had entered Alta California via the Shell Trade Highway—the first Americans to reach the Pacific overland from the East. Barbour describes the enormity of this achievement: "Jedediah Smith and fifteen men and two women had completed the terrible desert crossing. Over a roughly thirteen-hundred-mile march they had experienced no violent clashes with Indians, they lost nothing but some livestock, and all of them made it safely from Bear Lake to California. Smith and his companions had accomplished something no white men, and probably very few Indians, had ever done before."[37] Smith and his fellow explorers had helped to discover what would become the New American Empire of the West.

The Indigenous people—then Garcés—then Smith.

The Shell Trade Highway Today



The Mojave Road and other Early Wagon Roads of the Eastern Mojave Desert.
Mojave National Preserve, US National Park Service.
Image in the public domain from "The Mojave Road," www.davebarton.com/mojave.

Still today travelers can follow Smith's exploration west via the Old Mojave Trail. Stopping at water sources, first-come-first-serve camp sites, and trail markers, they might imagine the trials that Smith and his men endured over their many days and nights of unrelenting hardship in the desert.

Sections of the Old Pah-Ute Trail, now known as the Mojave Road, are currently protected forever as the Mojave National Preserve, established on October 31, 1994, as the third largest unit of the National Park System and the largest National Preserve in the United States.[38]

According to the National Park Service, the Mojave Road is approximately 150 miles long and extends from the Colorado River to the Mojave River near Wilmington, Los Angeles County, California. However, most of the Mojave Road is within the Mojave National Preserve: "The road enters the park near Piute Spring on the east side and on Soda Dry Lake near Zzyzx [formerly Soda Springs], California, on the west. The road is not regularly maintained, and some sections are rough and sandy; [a] 4 x 4 is recommended. If visitors wish to drive the entire length of the road, usually 3 days are required."[39]

The best way to follow Smith's path is to begin at Ft. Mojave, Arizona (a suburb of Bullhead City and the site of the former Beale's Crossing). The route today is sometimes known as the Mojave Road Recreation Trail and follows the Mojave Road, which first served settlers in 1858 as a route into Southern California, and which, by the following year, came under US government control. Until 1871 army posts protected travelers as the Mohave and Apache Wars ensued from 1858-1859 and 1849-1886, respectively. The route also functioned as a path for transporting goods and thus facilitated mining and agricultural development in California and Arizona.

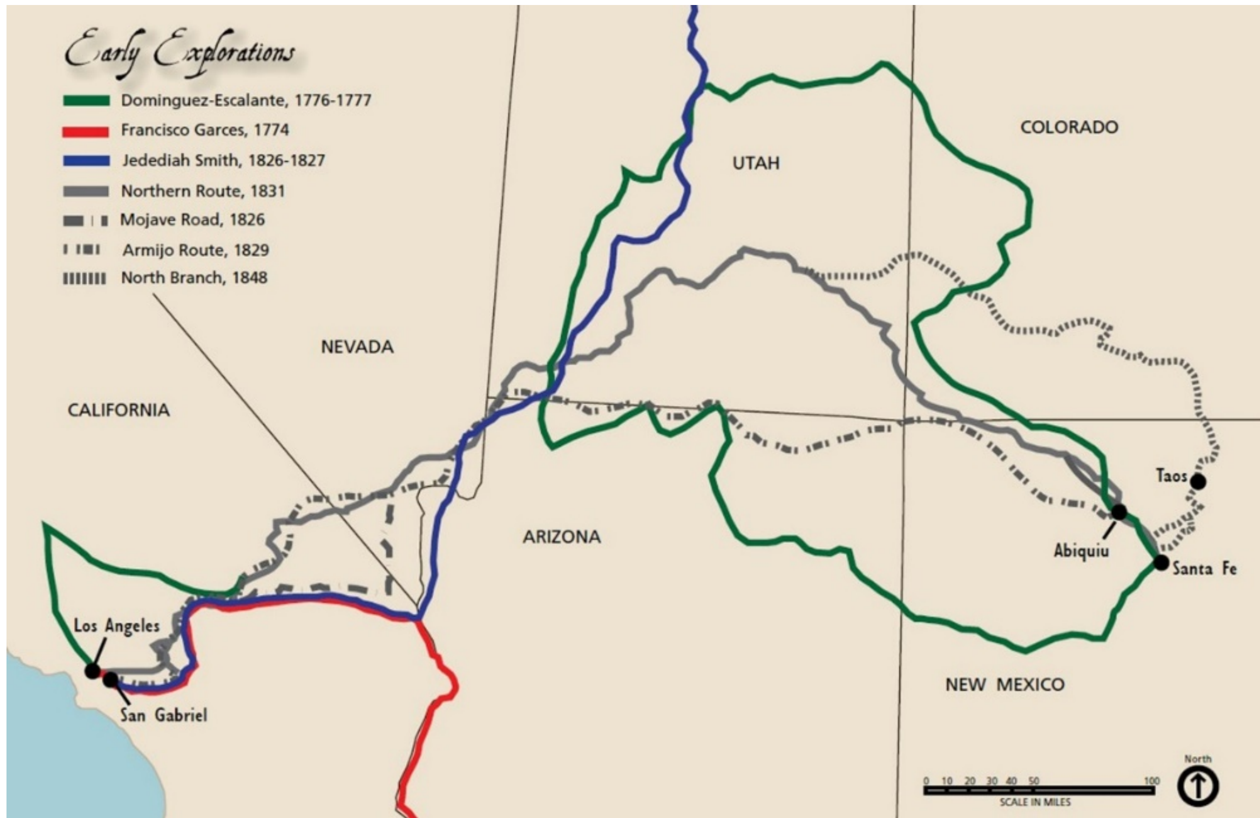
Several landmarks associated with Smith's 1826 journey appear on the road, listed here from east to west: the Colorado River (mile 0); Piute Creek and Piute Spring (mile 23); Lanfair Valley (mile 34); Marl Spring (mile 70); and Soda Lake and Soda Spring (mile 97), among others, including a few showing sites on Smith's 1827 expedition through the area.

Of special note, though unrelated to Smith's trek, is the Mojave Road Mail Box (mile 74) where visitors may sign their names (but not actually mail letters).

Manix Wash (mile 133) is the exit point.

The map on the next page shows that the Mojave Trail taken by Garcés and then by Smith was actually the southern part of a larger system of trails to become known as the Old Spanish Trail.[40] History reminds us that before Garcés and Smith made their heroic journeys, the Indigenous people had established a route for them to follow—the Shell Trade Highway.

One trail thus leads to another . . . and another . . . and another . . .



Old Spanish Trail-
US National Park Service, May 1, 2012
(image in public domain)

1. Lizzie Wade, "Footprints Support Claim of Early Arrival in The Americas." *Science* 373, no. 6562, American Association for the Advancement of Science (Sept. 23, 2021): 1426, DOI: 10.1126/science.acx9159. *Ice Age Footprints*, NOVA, PBS, season 49, episode 9, May 25, 2022, 53 min. Interviewed for the NOVA program, scientist Kathleen Springer said, "We were able to document that humans were in White Sands National Park between 23,000 years ago and about 21,000 years ago."

2. For a discussion of the Chumash and the shell trade, see David D. Earle, "The Mojave River and the Central Mojave Desert: Native Settlement, Travel, and Exchange in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2005): 12.

3. The Mojave Indians are Pipa Aha Macav, which means "The People by the River." The tribe's official website can be found at About Us – Official Tribal Website (fortmojaveindiantribe.com).

4. Damien Bacich, "Native Americans of the California Coast: The Chumash." The California Frontier Project, Early California Research Center, 2023. Native Americans of the California Coast: The Chumash (californiafrontier.net). While barter was the most common method of exchanging goods, says James T. Davis, ". . . a monetary system based primarily upon lengths of strings of clam shell disc beads, was perhaps the next most common method of obtaining desired articles." See Davis, "Trade Routes and Economic Exchange among the Indians of California." *Reports of the University of California Archaeology Survey No. 54* (Mar. 31, 1961): 7. Archaeologist Lynn Gamble suggests that perhaps 2000 years ago the Chumash may have used shell beads, not for barter, but as currency. See Jim Logan, "An Ancient Economy." *The Current*, UC Santa Barbara (Jan. 28, 2021). An Ancient Economy | The Current (ucsb.edu).

5. Terrence Bradley Luevano, "A GIS Model of Shell Exchange between Coastal Southern California and Northern Arizona." Master's thesis, University of Arizona, 2022. Michael Greshko, "Early Native Americans Imported Exotic Parrots, DNA Reveals." *National Geographic* (Aug. 13, 2018). Early Native Americans Imported Exotic Parrots, DNA Reveals | National Geographic. See also NPS, "History and Culture." Feb. 24, 2015. www.nps.gov/chcu/learn/historyculture/index.htm. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The high incidence of storage areas indicate[s] the probability that the Chacoans played a central economic role" for at least 400 years. See "Chaco Culture." 1992-2023, Chaco Culture - UNESCO World Heritage Centre. See also Bacich, "Native Americans of the California Coast: The Chumash."

6. Erina Gruner, "Black, Red, and Green: Abalone Shell Trade in the Ancient Southwest." Desert Archaeology, Aug. 3, 2020, Black, Red, and Green: Abalone Shell Trade in the Ancient Southwest – Desert Archaeology, Inc. | Full-service Cultural Resources Management. See a complete analysis in Erina P. Gruner, "Ritual Assemblages and Ritual Economies: The Role of Chacoan and Post-Chacoan Sodalities in Exotic Exchange Networks, A. D. 875-1300." PhD diss., Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2019.

7. Anyone wishing to understand the significance the shell trade should consult Michael Merrill, "Increasing Scales of Social Interaction and the Role of Lake Cahuilla in the Systemic Fragility of the Hohokam System (A.D. 700-1100)." PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2014. According to Merrill, "Shell artifacts were a major exchange item in the Hohokam system and Hohokam shell may have been the principle [sic] exchange item for dried fish from Lake Cahuilla. Shell artifacts were also a major exchange item within and among southern California societies" (59). The Hohokam culture existed in Arizona, US, and Sonora, Mexico.

8. NPS, "The Mojave Road and the Old Spanish Trail." Oct. 27, 2021, The Mojave Road & The Old Spanish Trail (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

9. NPS, "Mojave Tribe: Culture." Feb. 13, 2015, Mojave Tribe: Culture - Mojave National Preserve (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov). See also Donald D. Brand, "Aboriginal Trade Routes for Sea Shells in the Southwest." *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geography* 4 (1938): 3-10; and Earle, "The Mojave River and the Central Mojave Desert," 13.

10. Mark Gutglueck and Ruth Musser Lopez. "Francisco Garcés—Explorer, Discoverer, Missionary & Martyr." *San Bernardino County Sentinel* (Jan. 23, 2015), Francisco Garcés – Explorer, Discoverer, Missionary & Martyr | SBCSentinel. A detailed narrative of Garcés' explorations appears in Raymund F. Wood, "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California." *Southern California Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (Sept. 1969): 185-209. See a brief biography at "Servant of God Francis Garcés and Companions." Catholic News Agency, 2023, www.catholicnewsagency.com/.

11. An excellent description of Garcés' five entradas appears in Harlan Hague, "The Search for the Overland Route to California." *California Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 150-161. Garcés' missionary work was part of an effort by the Franciscan College of the Holy Ghost at Quertaro to explore the Southwest, contact the Natives, teach them about Christianity, and establish missions. The Franciscans replaced the Jesuits, who had been expelled from New Spain in 1768 by the Spanish King. See Henry F. Dobyns, *Spanish Colonial Tucson: A Demographic History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976), 26-35.

12. In 1773 Sebastián Tarabel stayed at Mission San Gabriel for several months but disliked life there and escaped with his wife and a third person. Phil Valdez, Jr., writes that Sebastián was "Garcés' companion on his many travels throughout the Southwest. But . . . he disappeared from the annals of history never to be heard from again." See Valdez, "Sebastián Tarabal: Indian Guide, Alias *El Peregrino."* Sebastián Tarabal | Anza Society, Inc. Garcés' "Brief Account" of his 1774 journey to California is included in Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Anza's California Expeditions: Opening a Land Route to California, Diaries of Anza, Diáz, Garcés, and Palóu,* vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930), 363-372.

13. Wood, "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California," 185; Hague, "The Search for the Overland Route to California," 153.

14. National Park Service, "The Mojave Road & The Old Spanish Trail." Last updated Oct. 7, 2021, The Mojave Road & The Old Spanish Trail (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov). See also A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*. 1919. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 78 (Washington: GPO, 1925), 611-619.

15. Wood, "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California," 191.

16. The shell trade route extended from the Pacific Coast in the region of Los Angeles to the Rio Grande, according to Harold Sellers Colton: "This old trail was in active use in 1776, for Father Garcés saw abalone shells from the Pacific Coast. . . ." See Colton's "Prehistoric Trade in the Southwest." *The Scientific Monthly* 52, no. 4 (Apr. 1941): 308. Garces was not the first non-Native to witness of the Shell Trade. Sometime in the late 1600s or early 1700s, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, in a letter to the Viceroy of New Spain, reported that he was "already carrying on a friendly trade with the natives of Upper California, who send Cutor bring me many blue shells [abalone] from the opposite coast on the South Sea, the annual trade route of the Philippine or China galleon." See Cutter, Donald C. "Plans for the Occupation of Upper California: A New Look at the 'Dark Age' from 1602 to 1769." *The Journal of San Diego History* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1978), sandiegohistory.org.

17. Francisco Tomas Hermenegildo Garcés, *On the trail of a Spanish pioneer; the diary and itinerary of Francisco Garcés (missionary priest) in his travels through Sonora, Arizona, and California, 1775-1776; translated from an official contemporaneous copy of the original Spanish manuscript, and ed., with copious critical notes*. Trans. Elliott Coues, vol. 1 (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1900), 244. In chapter 6 of Coues, Garcés narrates the story of his journey on the Mojave to San Gabriel, March-April 8, 1776. A website, "Garcés' Mojave Crossing" at On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer (mojavedesert.net) also includes this quotation from Garcés and says that at the time he was probably near the confluence of Deep Creek and the Mojave River near today's Silverwood Dam in San Bernardino County. This website offers a stage-by-stage itinerary of Garcés' journey in the Mojave Desert.

18. Wood, "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California," 191-192.

19. Garcés in Coues, vol. 1, 254-255.

20. Garcés in Coues, vol. 1, 248.

21. Garcés in Coues, vol. 1, 278. Coues' note suggests that Garcés was near "the latitude of Kern and Buenavista lakes." 278n. Wood says that Garcés was near Greenfield in "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California," 194-195.

22. Wood, "Francisco Garcés Explorer of Southern California," 192, 196-197; Hague, "The Search for the Overland Route to California," 155.

23. LeRoy R. Hafen, "The Old Spanish Trail, Santa Fe to Los Angeles." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Feb. 1948): 150.

24. NPS, "Mojave Road National Preserve California." Last updated Jan. 4, 2022. Mojave Road 4-Wheel Drive Route - Mojave National Preserve (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

25. George R. Brooks, ed., *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California 1826-1827* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1977; rept., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 79n99. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and The Opening of the West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953; rept., University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 200. The page numbers here and elsewhere refer to the reprint editions of both books.

26. Barton H. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith: No Ordinary Mountain Man* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 96.

27. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, 199; Brooks, *Southwest Expedition*, 66n72.

28. Jed's motivations for his Southwest expeditions of 1826-28 continue to intrigue historians. See Sheri Wysong, "Jedediah Smith's Search for Melish's River." *The Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal* 17 (2023): 28-57.

29. Brooks, *Southwest Expedition*, 36-37. All statements by Jed are taken from this source. I have retained Jed's errors of spelling, punctuation, etc.

30. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith*, 106-110.

31. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and The Opening of the West,* 200

32. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith,* 114.

33. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and The Opening of the West,* 200.

34. Barbour writes, "Around November 20 the trappers walked down a rocky creek bed for roughly ten miles and at last left the mountains behind. In delightful contrast to the grueling desert march on short rations, they discovered 'sure evidences of Civilization' [Jed's words]. . . ." *Jedediah Smith,* 115.

35. See Rogers' *Daybook 1* in Brooks, *Southwest Expedition*, 218, 221. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith, 203*. See also Wood, "Jedediah Smith, a Protestant in Catholic California." *Pacific Historian* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 268-279. Wood writes, ". . . when the Protestants, Smith and [his clerk Harrison] Rogers, met with Catholic Spaniards in California, and remained among them for nearly half a year, they touched and abraded each other at many points, and had many differences of opinion. Yet basically they were in agreement . . ." 277.

36. Harrison Rogers' *Daybook 1* provides this date; see Brooks, *Southwest Expedition*, 96n126, 215.

37. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith,* 120-121.

38. Dennis G. Casebier, *Mojave Road Guide: An Adventure through Time*, 4th ed. (Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association, 2010). This updated edition contains maps with GPS. Casebier's efforts to preserve the Mojave Road and its history are legendary. See Len Wilcox, "Dennis Casebier: The Mojave Road and Goff, CA." 1996-2023, Dennis Casebier and the Mojave Road - DesertUSA.

39. National Park Service, "Mojave Road 4-Wheel Drive Route." Last updated Jan. 4, 2022, Mojave Road 4-Wheel Drive Route - Mojave National Preserve (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

40. The name Old Spanish Trail may have been used by the 1830s according to Barbour, *Jedediah Smith*, 74. However, public familiarity with the name likely resulted from John C. Fremont's report for the US Topographical Corps. See *A Report of an Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* by Brevet Captain John Charles Fremont, of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, under the orders of Col. J. J. Abert, Chief of the Topographical Bureau (Washington, DC: Senate of the United States, 1845. Gales and Seaton, printers. 28th Cong., 2nd Sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 174, Serial 461), 248. Fremont does not use the phrase "Old Spanish Trail," but merely "Spanish Trail." On this topic, see Elizabeth von Till Warren, "The Old Spanish National Historic Trail." 2023, Old Spanish Trail Association. Rept. from *Pathways Across America, a Newsletter of the Partnership for the National Trail System, (Summer 2004)*: "Frémont took the Spanish Trail across to Utah. People called the route by various names, but he called it the 'Spanish Trail' in his Report, and that is the name that has been used ever since."

José Bandini's *Description of California in 1828* and the Dispute between José Maria de Echeandia and Jedediah Smith

by Joe Green

History offers at least four perspectives for understanding the social, legal, and political challenges Jedediah Smith faced when he entered Alta California: one, Smith's own words as recorded in his journals; two, the words of Governor José Maria de Echeandia and other officials as found in documents and letters; three, the words in contemporary historical accounts by those who possessed a firsthand knowledge of Mexican California; and, four, the words of scholars who have—from the vantage of time—analyzed and reflected upon the circumstances of Smith's difficulties.

The story of Smith's conflicts in California is vast and complex, and to deal effectively with all four perspectives, and their interrelationships, requires an in-depth book-length treatment well beyond the scope of this study.[1]

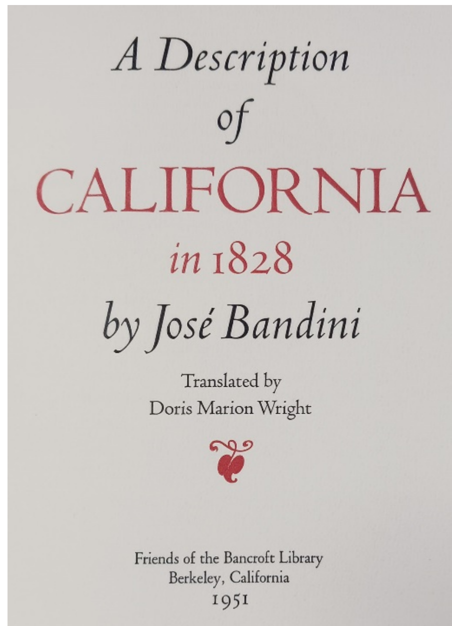
Accordingly, this note is limited to a single small and rare text—one that has not received the attention it deserves: José Bandini's *Description of California in 1828 (Descrision de l'Alta California)*.[2]

The English title is misleading because it may suggest that Bandini is describing Alta California in only 1828. This date was not part of the title of the original Spanish manuscript; it was added by translator Doris Marion Wright. Bandini actually looks at Alta California through a six or seven-year window in time, beginning in either 1821, when Mexico gained its independence from Spain, or in 1822, when Alta California officially became a territory. Bandini first visited the region in 1818 and lived mostly in San Diego from 1822, the year of his retirement, until his death in 1841.

Wright says that Bandini's appraisal of Alta California began as a September 1828 letter to British Vice-Counsel Eustace Barron, who was stationed in Tepic, the present-day capital of the Mexican state of Nayarit. Apparently, Bandini was responding to a request from Barron for more information about California. Shortly after he penned the letter, Bandini expanded it into the full manuscript we have today.

Two years after publication of Bandini's full text, his son Juan used a modified version as a governmental report.[3] Wright speculates that Bandini's letter may also have informed Alexander Forbes' English-language book *California*, published in 1839.[4] Forbes does not cite Bandini, but he does address some of the same topics and expresses some of the same views, especially about commerce, both foreign and domestic. Chapter 22 of Edwin Bryant's *What I Saw in California*, published in 1848, quotes nearly all of Bandini's manuscript—an indication that it may have enjoyed a wider audience than has hitherto been acknowledged.[5]

Somehow the manuscript survived until 1897 when, states Wright, it found its way into the Cowan Collection at the University of California. There, it languished in neglect until 1951 when it was published as *Description of California in 1828* by the Friends of the Bancroft Library in a limited English-Spanish edition of 400 copies distributed solely to the organization's members.[6]

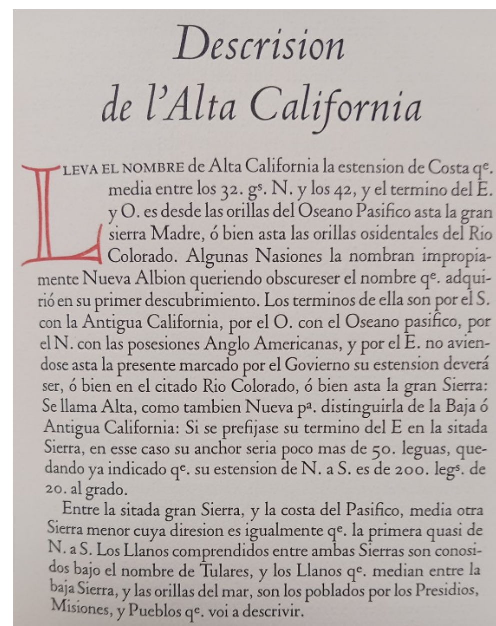


A Description of CALIFORNIA in 1828

by José Bandini

Translated by
Doris Marion Wright

Friends of the Bancroft Library
Berkeley, California
1951



Descrision de l'Alta California

LLEVA EL NOMBRE de Alta California la estension de Costa qe. media entre los 32. gs. N. y los 42, y el termino del E. y O. es desde las orillas del Oseano Pasifico asta la gran sierra Madre, ó bien asta las orillas osidentales del Rio Colorado. Algunas Nasiones la nombran impropiamente Nueva Albion queriendo obscureser el nombre qe. adquirió en su primer descubrimiento. Los terminos de ella son por el S. con la Antigua California, por el O. con el Oseano pasifico, por el N. con las posesiones Anglo Americanas, y por el E. no aviendose asta la presente marcado por el Govierno su estension deverá ser, ó bien en el citado Rio Colorado, ó bien asta la gran Sierra: Se llama Alta, como tambien Nueva pa. distinguirla de la Baja ó Antigua California: Si se prefijase su termino del E en la sitada Sierra, en esse caso su anchor seria poco mas de 50. leguas, quedando ya indicado qe. su estension de N. a S. es de 200. legs. de 20. al grado.

Entre la sitada gran Sierra, y la costa del Pasifico, media otra Sierra menor cuya diresion es igualmente qe. la primera quasi de N. a S. Los Llanos comprendidos entre ambas Sierras son conosidos bajo el nombre de Tulares, y los Llanos qe. median entre la baja Sierra, y las orillas del mar, son los poblados por los Presidios, Misiones, y Pueblos qe. voi a descrivir.

Bandini's *Description* raises a number of preliminary questions.

Why would he honor a request from Barron, an Englishman? Did Bandini merely wish to inform Barron of conditions in California? Or did he have some other, more significant, purpose in mind? Born in Spain, he had played an active role in the Mexican War for Independence, which ended on August 24, 1821, with the signing of the Treaty of Córdoba. Perhaps what Bandini subsequently observed from his retirement home in San Diego did not satisfy his expectations. If he were upset with the aftermath of the rebellion against Spain, what were his reasons? Was he disappointed that the war had not created a better life for the people of Alta California? Was his brief essay also intended, as Wright wonders, for Governor Echeandia, who lived in San Diego at the time Bandini was writing?[7] Was Bandini's essay a quiet way of challenging the governments of Alta California and Mexico?

Bandini begins his essay with a matter-of-fact statement about the geographical features of Alta California (also known as Nueva California) and continues mostly in this factual vein for several pages. He organizes his text methodically—an introduction followed by ten subtopics marked with subheadings: Government, Presidios, Missions, Pueblos, Ports and Commerce, Revenue, Kingdoms of Nature, Rivers, Tulares, and Islands. These subheadings, developed in a succinct, detailed fashion, create the impression of a writer proficient in the informative mode. Ultimately, however, Bandini cannot resist pointing out the faults of his society, and the tone of his writing, by his own admission, moves deliberately from factual description to reproach. By the end, his writing will exhibit a clear argumentative edge.

His conclusion—the longest section in his essay—begins with this declaration of his overriding motive: "Now that the extent of Alta California has been shown, as well as her present circumstances and her potentialities, I shall spend no more time in describing her condition, but *her critical situation forces me to make some observations* [my emphasis]." Wright notes that Bandini augmented his original letter to include a section "on the sad plight of California's commerce."[8]

This addition suggests that he has a pecuniary interest in admonishing the government. As we discover, Bandini's interest in Alta California's economy subsumes all other concerns.

More specifically, Bandini asserts that Alta California should promote rather than limit trade. To validate this thesis, he points to the observable consequences of an inadequate economy.

For one, he notes that the presidios (fortified military settlements) are no longer needed, poorly located, dilapidated, and cramped. He praises private ownership of houses *outside* the presidios, declaring that it portends "substantial towns" in the future. For Bandini, however, a thriving economy requires more than privately-owned housing.

It also requires a fundamental change in the role of the twenty-one missions in Alta California, a controversial topic Bandini does not hesitate to raise. He knows full well that a move toward secularization had been occurring for at least fifteen years. [9] As early as 1813, the government of New Spain had proclaimed its desire for partial secularization; and independence from Spain in 1821 had brought about republican calls for privatizing the vast lands of the Church. Bandini is a crusader for secularization: he maintains that the missions are designed "to prevent private ownership of land" and that the padres "do not need all that they possess." History is one his side, for despite the reluctance of the Franciscans to give up control of the missions, secularization became law by 1833.

For a reason that seems unrelated to his thesis at first, Bandini also writes about the Indigenous people who populate the missions. In this regard, he demonstrates an overt racism today's readers would find offensive. For example, he perpetuates the common stereotype that Indians possess an "innate slovenliness" and a "greatly limited" understanding. He adds that ". . . their true character is one of vengeance and timidity . . . treachery . . . and ingratitude." Bandini then reaches a prejudicial low point in his crass praise of the missions for doing "everything possible" to replace Indians who die from venereal disease so that agricultural output can increase. For Bandini, the Indigenous people are important only if they can help to achieve his goal of economic development.

Bandini's essay now embraces the global capitalist model. He points out that the government has mandated "that Monterey must be the sole port of entry for foreign vessels." However, this mandate, he says, has already been compromised by trading in the ports of San Diego, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco, "and if this were not so, there is no doubt that all trade with California would be brought to an end. . . ." If the law has already been compromised, then why should the government of Alta California even attempt to restrict port access. It should welcome all trade.

Bandini clearly favors a relaxation of the policy on foreigners, but he wants the territory to go farther. He further argues that Alta California needs to circulate more money, something it was not prepared to do at the time because production and exports did not generate sufficient income. He considers the current profit from hides and tallow to be "negligible" and says that production barely allows "her [the territory] to buy what is essential for her own use."

This situation, he claims, will cause several problems in the future. Vessels will no longer visit the coast; there will be a scarcity of necessary goods; insufficient exports will sink the people into their "old indigence"; and foreigners "will abandon a country that offers only misery" and slow colonization. Most important, ". . . if all the ports are closed and only Monterey remains open to

foreigners, the territory will inevitably be ruined and will revert to its former state of oppression." Bandini advocates unlimited trade because he believes a monopoly by "some active and pernicious foreigner" would increase the cost of imports. Another key to expanding the economy is to collect more revenue—even if doing so means ending the missions' exemption from paying tithes and taxes.

Bandini does mitigate his negative view of Alta California by pointing out that "nature has looked with favor upon the territory." The production capabilities of the Animal and Vegetable Kingdoms "cannot be surpassed," he says, and the Mineral Kingdom—in words more prescient than Bandini could ever know—at least warrants "mentioning." Additionally, the rivers and the runoff from the Sierra can be diverted to make the plains fruitful, and even the islands can provide "much profit."

As a globalist, Bandini holds that "all nations are dependent on one another" and that "mutual exchange is a benefit for all." Formerly a sea captain who fought at Trafalgar in 1805 and helped to protect Monterey from the pirate Hippolyte Bouchard in 1818, Bandini would understand the need for countries to defend against foreign aggression. Yet, his mindset defines him as an aggressive capitalist who believes isolation is economically self-defeating.

Significantly, Bandini penned his ideas about Alta California at the time when Echeandia and Smith were embroiled in a contentious political and legal controversy.

We know that Smith twice traveled through Alta California, but Bandini never met him and never mentions him, though he may have heard of his arrival in San Diego in December 1826.

Neither did Bandini ever meet with Echeandia, as far as we know, though we do have some reason to believe the governor may have read Bandini's document. Bandini never refers to Echeandia by name, but his title—*comandante general*—appears more than once in the manuscript; both men lived in San Diego; Bandini was famous in the territory for his military exploits; and his son Juan had promulgated his father's ideas in a government report. However, given the date of Bandini's *Description*, 1828, Echeandia could not have read it until after Smith had left California.

Nevertheless, Bandini's comments on Alta California shed light on the dispute between Echeandia and Smith. Their dispute had its roots in Spanish rule and served as a harbinger of dramatic changes in the region long after Jed had escaped Echeandia's authority. If Echeandia and Smith performed on stage, the audience would see them as foil characters in a dramatic enactment, a microcosm, of the issues presented in Bandini's text.

First to take the stage in this nineteenth century play of ideas is Echeandia, whose xenophobia would prove so troublesome to Smith. When he became governor in 1825, Echeandia inherited a long-standing Spanish policy that closely guarded "dependencies" like California from outsiders. Charles Willard writes that "neither China nor Japan, in the years of the greatest exclusiveness, was more tightly closed to outsiders than was California in the years of Spanish rule."[10] This strict isolationist policy was compromised after 1808 when Spain no longer had enough ships to supply California, and those living north of San Diego had to rely increasingly on non-Spanish merchants. Beginning in 1814, a succession of foreign ships violated the "rule of absolute exclusion," as Willard calls it.[11] Even though a new economic paradigm was clearly emerging in California by 1821, the year of Mexican independence from Spain, the Republic of Mexico adopted the traditional Spanish

exclusion policy, slightly changed, and later implemented other trade policies as well, including a tariff law forbidding raw cotton and yarn imports, regulations aimed at limiting foreign shipping, and military posts created to prevent smuggling. [12] However, as more Americans settled in Alta California and more American ships traded for goods, particularly for hides and tallow, restrictions on foreign trade were not vigorously enforced. But few Californians seemed to mind: there was great wealth in the offing.

We might conclude, then, that Echeandia faced a serious dilemma: that he would have to choose between enforcing a restrictive policy on foreigners or promoting economic development. Alta Californians, as John Groarty points out, "were at this time in such a state of mind that they viewed the presence of foreigners, and particularly Americans, with the utmost suspicion and distrust," but Echeandia, an autocrat with unbridled authority in the territory, was lax in enforcing the exclusion policy. Intentionally or not, says David Lavender, Echeandia was thereby able to "stimulate foreign trade and foster home agriculture." [13] Even the missions had been building local trading agencies in Monterey.

So, for a while, any serious conflicts between politics and economics mostly lay dormant. Until 1826.

In that year Echeandia had to face an interloper from the East—a man who had overcome what the Spanish had once considered the impenetrable barriers of rivers, hostile Natives, scorching deserts, and the Sierra Nevada.

Jed Smith's entrance was a tipping point of sorts, for Echeandia now found himself in a serious quandary. On the one hand, he could accept Jed's claim that he was a businessman, a beaver hunter. If he had sufficient imagination, Echeandia might even have come to view Smith in a positive light—as the first of many American traders to follow, as an intimation of an expansive trade with the United States. On the other hand, Echeandia could fall back on the old law—a law he was compelled to enforce as the territory's highest ranking official. And, as Lavender says, that "law was clear. The intruders were operating outside the system and were subject to arrest and deportation to Mexico City." [14] Dale Morgan states that Jed's "bursting on the California scene announced to Mexican authority the disintegration of a historic [legal] barrier." [15] Echeandia would move to stop this brazen American newcomer.

The law may have been clear, but, adds Lavender, the governor's "ideological position was as fuzzy as a mad cat's back." [16] And, so, Echeandia interrogated Smith, then vacillated, prevaricated, and delayed before threatening to send him to Mexico City. When three ships' captains (and three others) signed an endorsement and a bond on Smith's behalf, Echeandia relented, allowing Smith to leave with the caveats that he follow the same route by which he had arrived and refrain from creating any more maps. [17] Then, upon learning that Smith had deviated from the prescribed route, Echeandia reversed course and ordered Smith's arrest; soldiers subsequently followed his trail to the Stanislaus River—but too late.

Echeandia's ultimate decision to arrest this young Yankee trespasser may have been intended to appease authorities in Mexico City, but why then had Echeandia overlooked the foreign ships in port? If he viewed the foreign ships as a tolerable imposition, did he fear, to the contrary, that Smith would unleash a flurry of immigration from the East that would enable the Americans to usurp his

power and take control of the territory? [18] Morgan contends that he did: ". . . Echeandia saw more realistically than Jedediah the significance of the young American's arrival in his province." [19] Regardless of whether Echeandia pondered the broader issues of geopolitics, we do know that his treatment of Smith proved to merely delay the inevitable. A great army of Americans was about to march into California. They would be relentless.

Smith writes that he began his journey into the Southwest to determine if the land was favorable to trapping and trading. He hoped the country "was well stocked with Beaver as some [of] the waters of the Missouri, which was as much as we could reasonably expect."[20] Finding beaver was, of course, Smith's job. He was a partner in the newly formed company of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, and he was obligated to do his part. But Smith also had loftier aims: ". . . I followed the bent of my strong inclination to visit this unexplored country and unfold those hidden resources of wealth and bring to light those wonders which I readily imagined a country so extensive might contain . . . I wanted be the first to view a country on which the eyes of a white man had never gazed and to follow the course of rivers that run through a new land." Ever the businessman *and* the explorer, Smith felt no compunction as he moved into lands controlled by the First Mexican Republic. If he discovered "hidden resources of wealth" in the places he visited, he would certainly "bring the news of his discoveries "to light" when he returned.

At the time of his August 1826 departure from the Bear Lake rendezvous, Smith did not have Alta California on his mind, as far as we know. But when he reached the region of the Mojave in mid-October and realized there was "no beaver worth trapping," he decided to go West, having been informed that he could reach California in about ten days: "I determined to prepare myself as well as possible and push forward to California where I supposed I might procure such supplies as woul[d] enable me to move on north. In that direction I expected to find beaver and in all probability some considerable river heading up in the vicinity of the Great Salt Lake." This passage is meaningful for at least two reasons. For one, it implies, says Brooks, that California was not Smith's original goal. [21] For another, it iterates the two goals Smith set down early in his journal —to find beaver and to explore. The first goal—to trap beaver—is purely economic, of course, but the second—to explore—may go beyond curiosity. [22] If so, was Echeandia right to consider Smith a threat? Would Smith observe the richness of the land he explored and infer the probability of even more riches, then share his observations with other Americans? Was Echeandia correct in considering Jed a "spy" who would use the information he gathered to further the capitalist and imperialist aims of the United States? Did Smith sense a national or perhaps international benefit in his explorations? Just how cognizant was he of the larger implications of his journey into Alta California?

A telling moment occurs when Smith reflects in his journal on the kindness of fellow American, Captain William H. Cunningham, who arrived in San Diego at about the same time Smith was ordered there by Echeandia, December 8, 1826. A trader in hides and tallow, Cunningham was one of the three ships' captains who signed the certificate and bond for Smith. [23] He also granted Smith passage on the *Courier* as far north as San Pedro. Smith writes, "Meeting in a distant country by routes so different gave an instance of that restless enterprise that has lead and is now leading our countrymen to all parts of the world that has made them travelers on every ocean until it can now be said there is not a breeze of heaven but spreads an american flag." The meeting of Smith and Cunningham, two traders both far from home, is an occasion Smith deems worthy of the loftiest

language. American "enterprise"—Smith's word—is a heavenly power so great that its effects are ubiquitous. The words might be called Jedediah Smith's Speech on Manifest Destiny.

When Smith returned to Alta California in 1827, the list of his transgressions had grown longer: Smith's earlier failure to leave as instructed, his failure to notify officials of his presence upon returning, rumors that his men were spreading distrust among mission Indians, reports of weapons and mapmaking, and news that his men were camped on the Stanislaus. As Barton Barbour points out, "All of this persuaded the governor to issue an [another] arrest warrant. . . ." [24] Once again, though, Smith was fortunate to have supporters: on this occasion four ships' captains who designated John Rogers Cooper to sign a bond on Smith's behalf. [25] After overcoming additional political and legal hurdles, Smith would travel north, leaving California in late June 1828—never to deal with Echeandia again. [26]

During his two expeditions Smith witnessed great misery and poverty among the Natives in Alta California, and he also discerned the territory's potential for great wealth. His March 21, 1828, journal entry presents this troubling juxtaposition. Smith brings together a description of the Natives (probably the Maidu) who live near the Feather River *and* his thoughts on the bountiful land in which they live. [27] "A great many of these Indians," he reports, "appear to be the lowest intermediate link between man and the Brute creation . . . degraded ignorant as these Indians must be and miserable as the life appears which they lead it is made more apparent by a contrast with the country in which they are placed a country one would think rather calculated to expand rather than restrain the energies of man a country where the creator has scattered a more than ordinary Share of his bounties." The implication of this passage is noteworthy: the Indians in this region are not capable of taking advantage of the fecund lands around them. But if not the Indians, then who is? Smith implies the answer: the considerable bounty of California has been "scattered"—read, "provided"—by the Creator for whites, those superior people who possess the intelligence and the will to put the fruitful land to good use. In this instance at least, Smith's bigotry mirrors Bandini's. Smith's comment also embodies a belief held by many Americans at the time: God had sanctioned westward expansion.

Sadly, history has shown us the tragic consequences of acquiring wealth at the expense of others—in Alta California and in America.

With Bandini, Echeandia, and Smith we thus reach the intersection of a triple crossroad.

Though we can never be certain, it is not unreasonable to believe that if Bandini had been in Echeandia's position, he would have welcomed Smith to Alta California, approved of Smith's business interests, and used his arrival as a catalyst for improving trade with the United States. Of course, such congeniality would have come much more easily for the retired Bandini, for unlike Echeandia, he would not have been risking the scorn of Mexican officials.

This speculative scenario gets us nowhere, however. What we can say with certainty is that Bandini argued for a progressive economic policy that he believed would save the territory. Ending the antiquated mission system, increasing imports and exports, and exploiting the territory's vast resources would ensure a more productive and, thus, better place to live. Though not in the way Bandini hoped, the forces of history would confirm the gist of his argument. Economic prosperity was a priority, Bandini said, and unbeknownst to him thousands of Americans in the ensuing

decades would echo that principle and use it as justification for a vast westward migration. [28] In a perfect illustration of historical irony, it would be outsiders who would strengthen the economic fabric of Alta California.

For Echeandia, the quandary in which he found himself was partly his own making, but mostly the making of forces beyond his control. Powerful figures in Mexico City felt that political autonomy was paramount. The eyes of Russia, Great Britain, and the United States were on California. If Alta California fell to these formidable foreign powers, what would happen to the other vast lands held by Mexico? Regardless of his motivations or questions of his competence, Echeandia attempted to forestall that possibility. In the end, his attempt to repel foreigners proved futile.

Alta California—which fought a war to achieve independence and which covered all of the modern states of California, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico when it became a territory of Mexico in 1824—was powerless to contravene the coming of the rapacious Americans.

The first United States citizen to come overland to Alta California, Jedediah Smith embodied one the great paradoxes of American history: how an insatiable desire for wealth can gain so much—and yet cost so much, too. Granted, there was more to Jedediah Smith's character than his passion for profit, but, for better or worse, he applied Bandini's argument to his bitter end on May 27, 1831.

1. Fortunately for the scholar who assumes this formidable task, several sources will prove helpful. Among them are Smith's journals in Maurice Sullivan's *Travels of Jedediah Smith* and in George Brooks' *Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*; we also have letters by Echeandia and Smith as well as ones by Luis Antonio Arguella, Juan de Dios Canedo, Capt. William Cunningham, William Dana, Narciso Durán, J. Lennox Kennedy, Ignacio Martinez, and Joel Poinsett; additionally, we have a few informative contemporary historical accounts, including Alexander Forbes' *California: A History of Upper and Lower California*, Alfred Robinson's *Life in California During a Residence of Several Years in That Territory*, Antonio María Osio's *History of Alta California*, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's *Recuerdos: Historical and Personal Remembrances Relating to Alta California 1769-1849*, and the selections in Part IV of *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846*; finally, we have several later works that share valuable details and insights on Alta California. Among them are Dale Morgan's *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, Barton Barbour's *Jedediah Smith: No Ordinary Mountain Man*, David Weber's *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846* and *The Californios versus Jedediah Smith, 1826-1827*, David Lavender's *California: Land of New Beginnings*, and David Langum's *Law and Community on the Mexican California Frontier*.

2. José Bandini, *A Description of California in 1828 (Descrision de l'Alta California)*, trans. Doris Marion Wright (Berkeley, California: Friends of the Bancroft Library, 1951). All quotations and paraphrases of Bandini's words come from, or are based upon, his *Description*. The brevity of his text obviates the need for further page citations to Bandini. Bandini's *Description* is also anthologized in *Mexican California*. Introduction by Carlos E. Cortés. (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

3. Doris Marion Wright, "Introduction" to Bandini, *Description*, viii.

4. Alexander Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California*, etc. (London: Smith, Elder, 1839). See chapter 7, in particular.

5. Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California: Being the Journal of a Tour*, etc. 3rd ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1848), chapter 22, 278-285. \

6. Wright, "Introduction," vi-viii.

7. Wright, "Introduction," viii.

8. Wright, "Introduction," vii.

9. According to David Weber, ". . . land ownership was just beginning to shift into private hands in the late 1820s." See Weber's "Here Rests Juan Espinoza: Toward a Clearer Look at the Image of the 'Indolent Californios'." *Western Historical Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (Jan. 1979): 66. The emergence of private land ownership occurred for a variety of reasons: changing demographics, the waning power of the missions, and the desire of wealthy and influential citizens to own land, among others. Perhaps Bandini's words contributed to, or at least reflected, this shift.

10. Charles Dwight Willard, *The Herald's History of Los Angeles City* (Los Angeles: Kingsley-Barnes and Neuner, 1901), 158.

11. Willard, *Herald's History*, 158.

12. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, vol. 6, in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, vol. 14 (San Francisco: History Company, 1888), 538-545.

13. John S. McGroarty, *California: Its History and Romance* (Los Angeles: Grafton, 1911), 168-169. David Lavender, *California: Land of New Beginnings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 80.

14. Lavender, *California,* 84.

15. Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 205-206.

16. Lavender, *California*, 80.

17. Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829* (originally published as *The Ashley-Henry Explorations*, etc. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1918; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 209.

18. See Josephine E. Nadeau, "Ripon: Ethnic and General Development." *The Pacific Historian* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 53.

19. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 205.

20. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations or paraphrases of Smith's comments are taken from the reprint editions of George R. Brooks, editor. *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey into California 1826-1827* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1977; rept., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and Maurice S. Sullivan, *The Travels of Jedediah Smith: A Documentary Outline, including the Journal of the Great American Pathfinder* [1827-1828] (Santa Clara, California: Fine Arts Press, 1934; rept., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

21. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 193, notes that Harrison Rogers' daybook includes "no intimation that California figured in the plans for the year's hunt."

22. Smith repeated these two goals when he began his second southwest expedition: "I of course expected to find beaver, which with us hunters is a primary object, but I was also led by the love of novelty common to all, which is increased by the pursuit of its gratification." Quoted in Sullivan, *Travels*, 26.

23. Barton H. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith: No Ordinary Mountain Man* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 130.

24. Barbour, *Jedediah Smith,* 172.

25. Sullivan, *Travels*, 172n84.

26. Morgan says that Jed "unknowingly" entered Oregon three days after crossing today's Smith River, meaning that Jed entered Oregon on June 23, 1828. See Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 264. A day later, says Barbour, Jed camped on Oregon's Chetco River. See Barbour, *Jedediah Smith*, 216.

27. Barbour suggests that these Indians may have been the Wokodot or Pan-pakan bands of the Maidu. See *Jedediah Smith*, 199.

28. See Robert Glass Cleland, "The Early Sentiment for the Annexation of California: An Account of the Growth of American Interest in California, 1835-1846." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (July 1914). Cleland argues that in the decade following Jed's expeditions into California, a "well-defined movement for the annexation of California was developing in the United States" (1). That movement would reach a crescendo in the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 and culminate in California statehood on September 9, 1850.

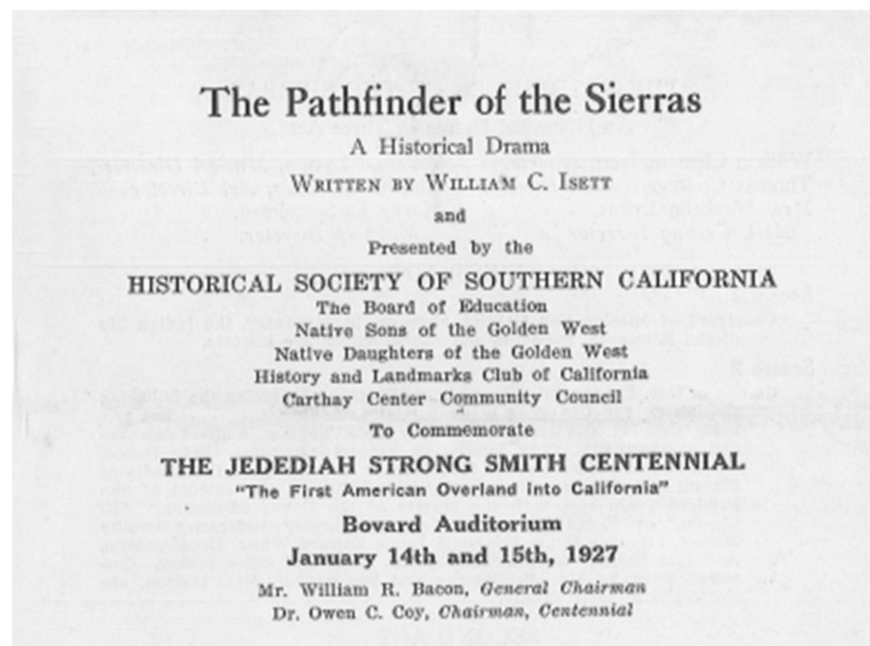
We recently asked our readers for help in locating a playbill or script of The Pathfinder of the Sierra*s, a musical pageant about Jed Smith staged in the Bovard Auditorium at the University of Southern California in 1927. Jim Auld and member Joe Molter promptly responded to our request by sending the playbill, photos, and newspaper clippings. These materials, combined with a little more research, gave us everything we needed for a brief account of this curious pageant.*

Dancing the Fandango with Jedediah Smith

For two evenings on January 14 and 15, 1927, *The Pathfinder of the Sierras: A Historical Drama* celebrated Jed Smith's 1826 entry into California. Presented principally by the Historical Society of Southern California, this musical pageant in three acts mounted a huge cast of over 70 actors with James Orr Ryan in the leading role as Jed.

James Orr Ryan as Jed Ryan may have been the same actor who later performed in the 1929 Broadway version of *Hot Water*. Photo, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 22, 1927. Provided by Joe Molter.

Others in the cast also portrayed historical figures, including Jed's clerk Harrison Rogers, Alta California Governor José Maria de Echeandia, and, from Jed's party, Robert Evans, Daniel Ferguson, and James Reed. Students of Jed's history will also recognize the names of ship's Captain William H. Cunningham, and Padres José Bernardo Sanchez and Narciso Durán.



The Pathfinder of the Sierras
A Historical Drama
Written by William C. Isett
and
Presented by the
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
The Board of Education
Native Sons of the Golden West
Native Daughters of the Golden West
History and Landmarks Club of California
Carthay Center Community Council
To Commemorate
THE JEDEDIAH STRONG SMITH CENTENNIAL
"The First American Overland Into California"
Bovard Auditorium
January 14th and 15th, 1927
Mr. William R. Bacon, *General Chairman*
Dr. Owen C. Coy, *Chairman, Centennial*

Partial image from the program.
Smith/Bacon Family Collection, 1821-1947, Holt-Atherton Dept. of Special Collections,
University Library, University of the Pacific.
Provided by Jim Auld.

The source for Rev. William Isett's pageant may have been J. M. Guinn's "Captain Jedediah S. Smith: Pathfinder of the Sierras" published in the *Historical Society of Southern California* in 1896.[1] Isett, who had a penchant for history, may have known of Guinn's essay. [2]

Regardless of his source, Isett apparently was convinced that Jed was important enough for a stage play—and what a fascinating and strange performance it must have been.

Act One comprises two scenes. The first, set in a courtyard of Mission San Gabriel, attempts to depict Indian life in the mission and employs, it claims, historic conversations. Jed sojourns at this famous mission for a few days before continuing his journey. The second scene shifts to Governor Echeandia's home in San Diego. Here, the governor holds a beauty contest, an event which includes a soprano solo and Spanish dancing "in the custom of one hundred years ago."

Photo, *Los Angeles Examiner*, Jan. 15, 1927. Provided by Joe Molter.

To introduce the pageant's romantic theme, Act 1.2 ends with a couple dancing to "La Paloma" ("The Dove"), a famous Spanish-language song that became very popular in Mexico. The authenticity of this dance impressed a reporter from the *LA Examiner*: "Reita Fisher and Ernest Hood, technical directors, presented the Spanish fandango as it was done in the days when this state was under Mexican rule." [3] Accompanying this comment was this photo of the happy dance couple.

Act Two returns to the courtyard of San Gabriel Mission with a joyous wash-day picnic. Things now get "couriouser and couriouser" as Scene 2 begins with a solo performed by the Chief Yowlache of the Yakima Indians in Washington.

As the chief sings, Jed is attempting to cross the desert and move northward. His odyssey is briefly interrupted when he and his companions attack and defeat a large party of Indians in the desert before returning to Mission San Gabriel. Once there, Jed becomes enamored of Isabella, the governor's daughter.

The final act transports the audience once again—this time to Mission San José de Guadalupe. The playbill does not indicate which incident from Jed's travels is reenacted here, but Isett did confess to the anachronism: the stay at Mission San José, he admitted, actually "happened during Smith's second visit to California, but is introduced here for dramatic effect." Historical pageants frequently require that an audience suspend its disbelief. Act 3.2, which remains at Mission San José, culminates in festive dancing.

Isett said, "In dramatizing the story of Jedediah Strong Smith . . . I have adhered to the historical facts very rigidly . . . yet I have taken some dramatic liberty." [4] Overlooking the play's egregious historical incongruities, a reporter for the *LA Times* considered the play successful "from the time the curtain rose." [5]

1. J. M. Guinn, "Captain Jedediah S. Smith: Pathfinder of the Sierras." *Historical Society of Southern California* 3, no. 4, (1896): 45-78.

2. The word *pathfinder* may also have been suggested to Isset by either or both of two other articles published just a year before his play was staged: John C. Parrish, "Jedediah Smith—Pathfinder." *Annual Publications of the Historical Society of Southern California* 13, no. 3 (1926): 267-269; or George Wycherley Kirkman, "Jedediah Smith, Pathfinder, Amazing Adventures of the American Who Blazed the Overland Trail." *Los Angeles Times* (Mar. 14, 1926): 13-14, 22.

3. "Pioneer Days." *Los Angeles Examiner*, Jan. 15, 1927. In the Smith/Bacon Family Collection, 1821-1947. MSS 20, Box 1:11. Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University Library, University of the Pacific.

4. William Isett, "Author's Note." Playbill. *The Pathfinder of the Sierras: A Historical Drama* (Jan. 14-15, 1927).

5. "*Pathfinder of the Sierras* Drama Scores Success at Bovard Auditorium." *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 22, 1927). Collected in *Jedediah Strong Smith Centennial 1826-1926*, compiled by Charlotte M. Brown, librarian, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1927.

Meet Our New Executive Secretary

Peter G. Meyerhof was born on March 5, 1951, and grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he attended Dalhousie University. He studied cell biology, obtaining a PhD at the University of Toronto. He later obtained a DDS at the University of California, San Francisco, and has practiced dentistry in Sonoma, California, since 1992.

During the last thirty years he has used his spare time to do historical research and to present new information on several topics relating to both the history of dentistry and the history of Northern California, especially Sonoma County. He currently serves on the boards of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, the Institute of Historical Study, and the Academy of the History of Dentistry. He was the 2020 recipient of the Campbell Augustus Menefee Scholastic Award from the Sonoma County Historical Society in recognition of his many significant research projects.

Dr. Meyerhof is a member of the California Missions Foundation, the California Historical Society, the Society of California Pioneers, the Sonoma County Historical Society, the Sonoma County Heritage Network, the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation, the Sonoma/Petaluma State Historic Parks Association, the Santa Rosa Historical Society, the Benicia Historical Society, the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society, and the Oregon-California Trails Association.

Over the past ten years he has presented his original research on, "The Hastings Overland Party of 1845 and the Genesis of the Cut-off" to the Oregon – California Trails Association Annual Conference in Elko Nevada; "The Leese – Walker Party: From Sonoma to Oregon in 1843" to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society; "General Vallejo's Efforts to Establish a Mission in Santa Rosa in 1839" to the Sonoma Petaluma Parks Association; "Dr. Peter Campbell—Pioneer on the Chapman Property" to the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation; "Solomon Schocken-Sonoma's Pre-eminent Jewish Entrepreneur" to the Institute for Historical Study; "The Role of a Mission Indian in Establishing Sonoma's Wine Industry" to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society; "A New Theory on the Location of the Missing Sonoma Mission Cemetery" to the California Missions Foundation; "A Virtual Tour of the Sonoma Mission in 1834" to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society; "General Vallejo's Printing Press and its Significance in California History" to the Sonoma State Parks Association; "Joseph Hooker and his Sonoma Valley Ranch" to the Native Sons of the Golden West; and other topics.

Some of these have been published, including most recently "Significance of Johnson's Ranch to the Arrival of the Hastings' Party in 1845 and to Subsequent Events in Early 1846" in the summer 2023 issue of *Trail Talk* of the California-Nevada Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association.

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Publishing in *Castor Canadensis*

We welcome articles on topics related to Jed—his historical, geographical, religious, economic, or political milieu; and his interactions with others, including the Indigenous people, the HBC, and Mexican Californians.

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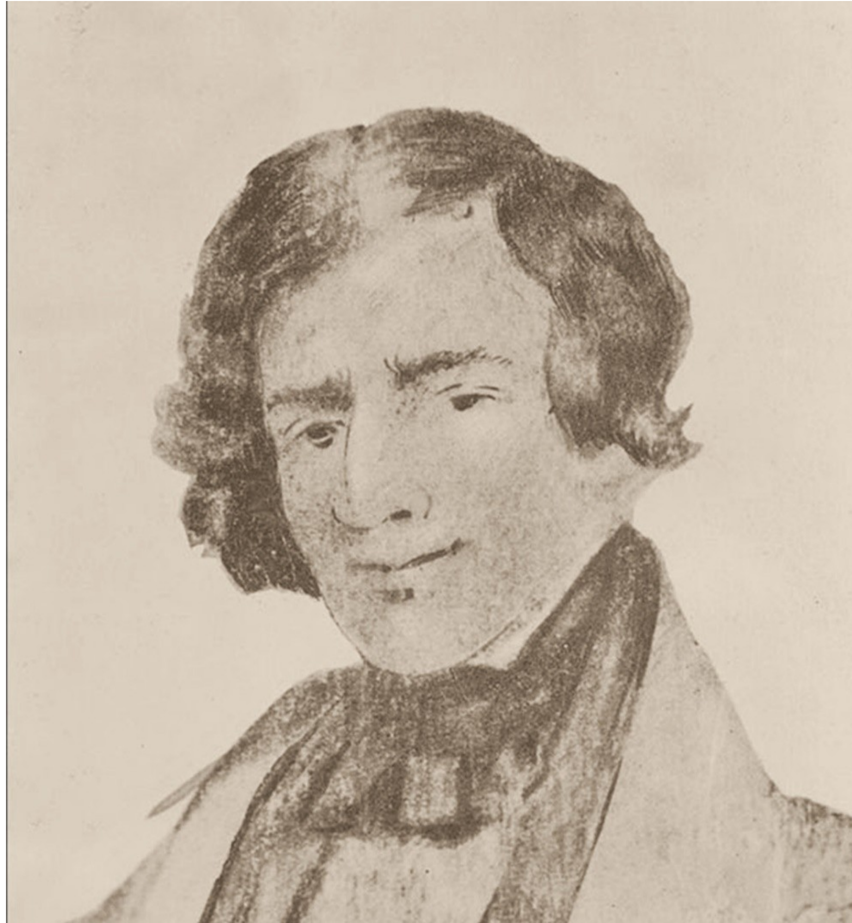

An early drawing of Jedediah Smith,
ca. 1835.
According to Jed Smith biographer Dale Morgan, “This portrait is the only one known with any claim to authenticity. It is said to have been done from memory by a friend after Jed died,” as indicated by the date above.
See *The Pacific Historian* 11, no. 2 (Spring, 1967): 36.
See also Daryl Morrison,
“Images of Jed,” JSS website.