

Assessment of the Miller Report on the Route of the
Domínguez-Escalante Expedition, for the dates
August 27, 1776 – September 2, 1776
By David Bradford

The Hotchkiss-Crawford Historical Society (HCHS) was asked to assist in an evaluation of “*The Route of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition 1776-77: A Report of Trail Research Conducted under the Auspices of the Domínguez-Escalante State/Federal Bicentennial Committee and the Four Corners Regional Commission*,” edited by David E. Miller and published in 1976. Generally referred to as “The Miller Report.” The reason for doing the re-evaluation is that there is a project known as the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition Education Project or DEEEP. This project is developing a website that can be used by educators and anyone with an interest in the expedition in time for the 250th anniversary of the expedition in 2026. The Historical Society put out a call for volunteers to assist in the project. Sheila Maki, a Delta County native, and HCHS officer; David Bradford, retired Forest Service range management specialist and amateur historian; Joe Oglesby a Delta County native, cowboy and amateur historian; and Hank LeValley another Delta County native, rancher and amateur historian volunteered to assist in the evaluation.

The evaluation was to focus on the route and campsites used by the expedition from August 27, 1776 – September 2, 1776. This portion of the journey traveled from a campsite on the Uncompahgre River, several miles north of Olathe, north-northeasterly across the adobies to a campsite on the Gunnison River, near Austin; then easterly across the adobies to a campsite on Leroux Creek, near Hotchkiss; then continuing east-northeast up the North Fork of the Gunnison River to Hubbard Creek and a campsite somewhere on the Grand Mesa, near Hubbard Canyon; then northerly through Hubbard Park, where they met a group of 80 Ute warRíors, then continuing north to a large Ute campsite near where they set up their camp; then after securing a guide for the trip into Utah, they traveled west and north into Mule Park, where they set their last camp for this part of the expedition; then passed over the Buzzard-Muddy Divide into the Colbran area and out of our survey area.

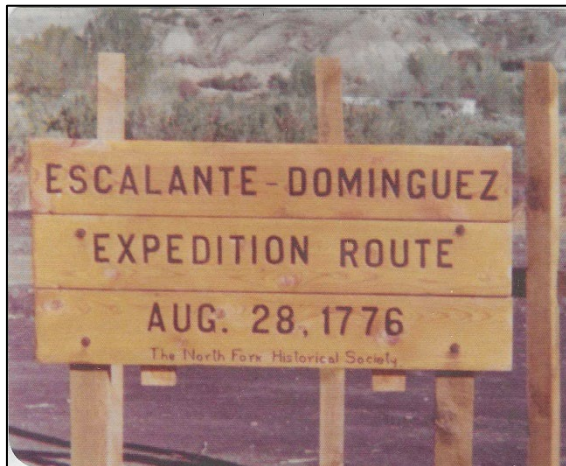
Our first meeting was held at the end of April, when we began discussing what we would need to complete the project. We began to gather maps and photograph the existing interpretive signs. The first full meeting of the group was at the end of June 2023 to discuss the project and develop a plan for completing the evaluation. The group or individuals worked approximately 14 days over the next four months to complete the evaluation. The following is our evaluation of the Miller Report for the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition in 1776-1777, for the peRíod of August 27 – September 2, 1776.

Interpretive Signs

The Domínguez-Escalante Expedition was celebrated as part of the 1776/1976 Bicentennial/Centennial celebration. The North Fork Historical Society had six signs constructed and placed along the route of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition through upper Delta County. The six signs were installed by volunteers in 1974 and 1975. Five of the six signs are still in place. We photographed the existing signs and have placed those photographs on the following pages, 3-5, along with a copy of an original photograph of each sign. The signs are mostly still readable in spite of being nearly 50 years old, though they are definitely showing their age

1. Expedition Route August 28, 1776 sign, near Austin – This sign was located west of Austin along Colorado Highway 92 (SH 92) on the north side of the highway (0.4 miles west of the bridge across the Gunnison River.) The sign is no longer there. We only show the original photo of the sign on a following page. This was a routed and painted wooden sign.
2. Leroux Creek Campsite sign – Located on pullout on west side of SH92, just west of the Town of Hotchkiss on the grade up to Roger’s Mesa. View to the east on the other side of the highway overlooks Leroux Creek. Routed and painted wooden sign.
3. Historical Information Sign – Located at a pullout on the east side of the intersection of Paonia’s Grand Avenue (formerly Colorado State Highway 187) and SH133. Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) deeded the former SH187 to Delta County approximately 10 years ago and the state highway designation was dropped and renamed as an extension of Paonia’s Grand Avenue). Routed and painted wooden sign.
4. Hubbard Creek Sign – Located on south side of old Highway 133. That road is now called the Bowie Road. The sign is located approximately 1.8 miles from the west junction with the current location of SH133. The CDOT rerouted SH133 around 1981 and moved the highway to the south, through this Bowie area. Routed and painted wooden sign.
5. West Muddy Campsite Sign – Located on the north side of Forest Service Road (FSR) 265, aka the Buzzard-Muddy Divide Road, where it crosses West Muddy Creek. Routed and painted wooden sign.
6. Balm of Gilead Park Campsite Sign - Located on the south side of FSR 265, aka the Buzzard-Muddy Divide Road, right at the Buzzard-Muddy Divide, next to the Ted Erickson Corrals. Routed and painted wooden sign.
7. Midway sign – Domínguez-Escalante Trail Marker. Located on pullout on south side of Colorado Highway 133 (SH133), halfway between the Towns of Hotchkiss and Paonia. Metal sign in a stucco panel erected on August 30, 1976 by Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial Commission, Towns of Paonia and Hotchkiss and the State Highway Department. The original trail marker panel was destroyed by a car crash. It’s been replaced by mounting the sign and trail symbol on a metal post.

Photographs of Signs:



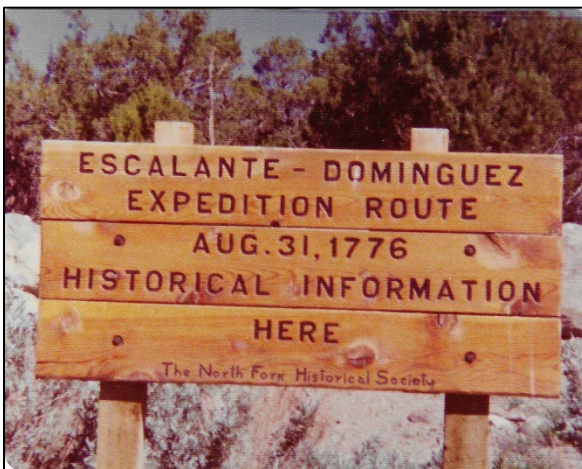
Sign 1 – Expedition Route August 28, 1776 sign, west of Austin. Placed 1975.



Sign 2 Leroux Creek Campsite sign. 1975.



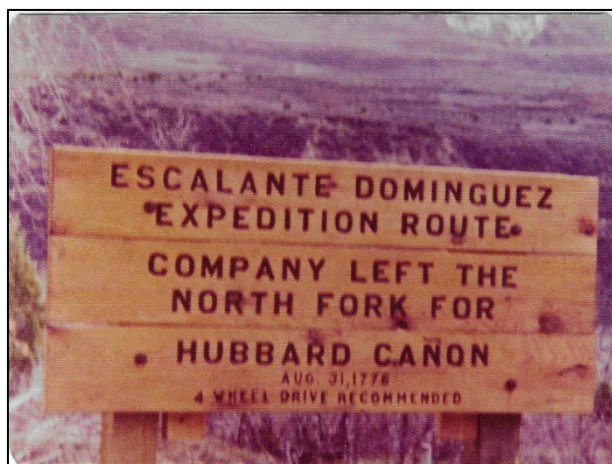
Sign 2 Leroux Creek Campsite sign. 6/21/2023.



Sign 3 Historical Information sign near Paonia 1975.



Sign 3 Historical Information sign near Paonia August 29, 2023.



Sign 4 Hubbard Cañon sign near Bowie 1975.



Sign 4 Hubbard Cañon sign near Bowie May 18, 2023



Sign 5 West Muddy Campsite sign 1975.



Sign 5 West Muddy Campsite sign June 23, 2023.



Sign 5 Balm of Gilead Park sign 1975.



Sign 6 Balm of Gilead Park sign May 26, 2020.



Sign 7 Original Trail Marker, erected August 30, 1976. This marker was destroyed by a car crash sometime in the past 20 years.



Sign 7 Replaced trail marker – mounted on a metal post with trail symbol above June 21, 2023.



Sign 7 Closeup view of plaque on trail marker June 21, 2023.

The Domínguez-Escalante Expedition

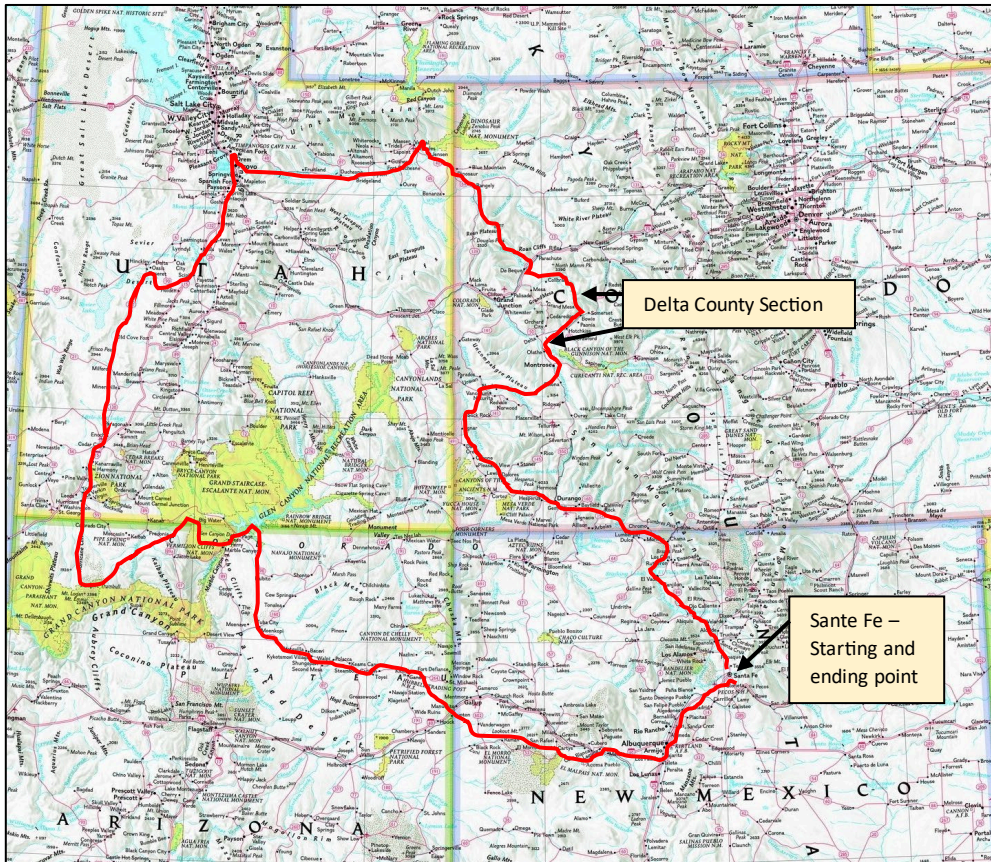
To provide some context for this report it's probably best to start with some background information on the expedition itself. The Domínguez-Escalante Expedition was an effort by the Spanish government and the primary religious order in Mexico – the Catholic Franciscans to locate a land route from their New Mexico colony to the newly-established missions in Alta California and determine the potential for additional missions in the lands to be traveled. The expedition was led by two Franciscan friars – Padre Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Padre Fray Silvestre Vélez Escalante. They were originally joined by eight companions. As the expedition proceeded five additional individuals joined so that at its largest there were 15 individuals. The expedition began in Sante Fe, New Mexico on July 29, 1776 and returned to Sante Fe on January 2, 1777.

Dr. David E. Miller supervised the trail evaluation in 1975 and completed the final, above mentioned, report. Dr. Miller was a well-known historian and professor at the University of Utah. For the portion of the trail that traveled through Delta County, Dr. Miller recruited Dr. Floyd A. O'Neil and Gregory Thompson. Dr. O'Neil was another University of Utah professor of history and Gregory C. Thompson was student at the University of Utah and is currently an Adjunct Assistant Professor of History at the University of Utah. These men were well-qualified to conduct the route evaluation of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition. Miller described the purpose of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition in the preface in the following way:

“In July 1776, while George Washington 'was attempting to prevent superior British forces from capturing New York City, two Catholic Fathers- Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante--set out from Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the head of a ten-man missionary exploring party bound for California. Before completing its work, that expedition had accomplished one of the most remarkable explorations in the history of the United States. It had penetrated deeply into the vast, as yet unknown, interior region of the great American West. The padres intended to follow a fairly well known trail northwestward from Santa Fe into present-day western Colorado before swinging to the west. Such a route would avoid the deep canyons of the Colorado River and hopefully bring the expedition into contact with new Indian tribes--likely subjects for conversion to the Christian faith.' Thus, the two major objectives of the expedition would be achieved: (1) to open a line of communication between the New Mexico settlements and Monterey, newly established capital of California; (2) to take Christianity to the natives with the expectation of laying the groundwork for establishing missions among them. As it turned out, neither objective was achieved. Although numerous friendly Indians were encountered during the five-month trek, not one was baptized (various brief contacts did not allow sufficient time for true conversion), and no mission was established among them. From a point in present

southern Utah, far short of its Monterey goal, the Company was forced to turn back to Santa Fe.”

The route of the expedition is shown on the map below. The expedition traveled more than 1,700 miles in five months (an average of about 11 miles per day.) As noted above,

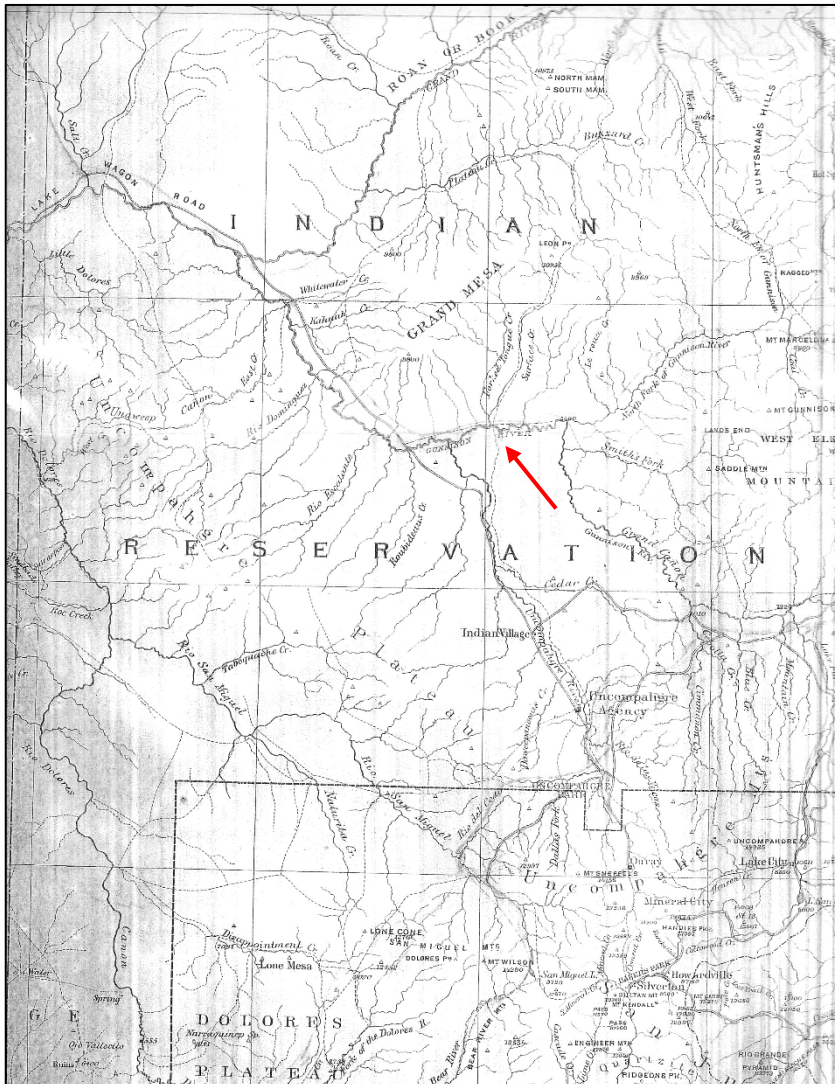


there were a total of 15 individuals who participated in the expedition. The members of the expedition were:

Padre Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Padre Fray Silvestre Vélez Escalante - leaders of the expedition (Domínguez was in charge, he was Canonical Visitor to the New Mexico Province from Mexico City, sent to inspect the missions and lead the expedition; Escalante was his assistant and keeper of the journal, he was the minister and priest for the Zuni Pueblo), Don Juan Pedro Cisneros (Chief magistrate of Zuni Pueblo), Don Bernardo Miera y Pacheco (Retired captain of militia, the map maker), Andrés Muñiz (Interpreter and guide from Bernalillo), Lucrecio Muñiz (brother of Andrés) , Lorenzo Olivares (citizen of El Paso), Juan de Aquilar (Citizen from Santa Clara), Simon Lucero (Servant of Don Juan Pedro Cisneros), Felipe (A Spanish-Pueblo Indian from Abiquiú), Juan Domingo (A genizaro from Abiquiú), Atanasio (A Tabehuachi Ute who joined as a guide on the west side of the Uncompahgre Plateau on August 24, 1776) , Francisco (A Laguna Ute who joined the expedition on August 30, 1776 as a guide to Utah), Joaquin (A Laguna Ute boy who joined the expedition on September 2, 1776). Now, you know a bit about the expedition. For more information see the many publications listed in the Bibliography, at the end of the report.

Evaluation of the Route and Campsites

The approach the group took was to first look at the Chavez translation of Escalante's Journal focusing on the descriptions of the campsites. We broke each description down to individual characteristics in order to best match the campsite descriptions with the actual landscape. We reviewed current topographic maps as well as the 1881 F.V. Hayden Atlas of Colorado (which showed geographic features and existing trails that were identified by the Hayden Survey in 1873 - 1875, map shown below). We then drove to the areas and surveyed the sites with the perspective of looking at the route and campsites from a horseman's perspective, based on our collective experiences with horses. All in all, we believe the Miller Group did a fairly accurate description of the route, with some deviations in the route and in the campsite locations. The following is our evaluation for each day of the expedition, from August 27 to September 2, 1776. The evaluation was difficult because of all the human development that has occurred over the past 250 years. Road-building, development of farms, ranches, orchards and other private properties as well as increased growth of woody vegetation has created challenges in locating the route and campsites. However, we tried to focus on the basic landforms and hopefully that has resulted in an accurate evaluation.



F.V. Hayden's U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories

Geological and Geographical Atlas of Colorado and portions of Adjacent Territory, 1881 edition.

Red arrow indicates Indian trail from Olathe to Austin. See August 28-29, 1776 write-up.

August 27, 1776 – San Agustín Campsite, 2½ miles north of Olathe, Colorado.

“We continued our day’s march through the meadow (La Ciénega de San Francisco, just south of Montrose, CO) and, after trekking two leagues and a half to the northeast, crossed the river and dense leafy grove of poplars and other trees which its banks bear hereabouts. We went up a small incline, entered a plain of no pasturage but of very minute stone and, after going all the way downstream for three and a half leagues northwest, halted on another meadow of the same river (The Uncompahgre River), which we named San Agustín. It is large and has on either side of it abundant pastures and a great deal of black poplar (Fremont cottonwood trees).”

- A) Traveled Northeast 2½ leagues.
- B) Crossed from the West side of the Uncompahgre River to the East side.
- C) Encountered a dense grove of poplars and other trees along the banks.
- D) Went up a small incline.
- E) Entered a plain of no pasturage but very small stones.
- F) Traveled 3½ leagues in a Northwest direction.
- G) Halted at a large meadow along the Uncompahgre River with lots of black poplars (Fremont Cottonwoods).
- H) Traveled 6 leagues or 15.7 miles.

In checking this campsite out, I found it difficult to delineate the exact site where the campsite would be located, as there are numerous locations along the Uncompahgre River that could be the location. Miller’s description seems accurate, so I used his basic location. I mapped the location as T.51N, R.10W, SE¼NW¼ S.33, NM P.M. or 38°38’33” N, 107°59’46” W. This is near the intersection of the North River Road and Blossom Road.



August 27, 1776 San Agustín Campsite

August 17, 2023 by David Bradford

The photograph is taken at the intersection of the North River Road (right side) and Blossom Road (left side), using a panorama view. The possible campsite is marked with the red arrow. This is approximately 2½ miles north of the Town of Olathe and where the Uncompahgre River splits into several branches, as described in the Miller Report. Note, the Grand Mesa (Escalante’s La Sierra del Venado Alazán or

Mountain of the Sorrel Deer) lies on the far horizon. The group's journey would head in that direction the next day.

August 28-29, 1776 – Santa Mónica Campsite, near Austin, Colorado.

“On the 28th we set out northward from La Vega de San Agustín, already leaving El Río de San Francisco (The Uncompahgre River), and after half a league of travel we continued three leagues a half north-northeast over loose dirt and without stone and arrived at the already mentioned Río de San Francisco Xavier (among the people, San Xavier) – Tomichi by another name (The Gunnison River) -which is made up of four little rivers coming down from the northernmost point (of La Sierra de la Grulla – the Mountains of the Cranes or the San Juan Mountains). It is as bounteous in water as El Norte (the Río Grande El Norte or the Great River of the North – the Río Grande River), runs west and at the western point of La Sierra del Venado Alazán (Mountain of the Sorrel Deer – the Grand Mesa) it joins the San Francisco (the Uncompahgre River), as we already said. Its banks hereabouts are very sparse of pasturage.

By a bend of it, where we found some pasture for the mounts and named it Santa Monica.”

On the 29th, about ten in the morning, five Sabuagana Yutas, yelling loudly, let themselves be seen on top of some hills on the other side (of the river, I believe).”

- A) Traveled North ½ league, traveling along the east bank of the Uncompahgre R.
- B) Traveled 3½ leagues North-Northeast over loose dirt without stone and arrived at the Gunnison River.
- C) The banks are sparse of vegetation.
- D) By a bend of the river, they found some pasture for the horses.
- E) The next morning a group of Utes on hills on the other side started yelling.
- F) Traveled four leagues – 10½ miles.

The Hayden Map shows an Indian trail that appears to follow the same route that the Domínguez-Escalante expedition followed. The trail crosses the Gunnison River at a big north-trending bend then continues northward to the east of Surface Creek and crosses the Grand Mesa. We believe this is the same route followed by the expedition. We also believe the campsite was located near this big bend, which is approximately ½ mile west of the location identified by Miller, et al. This site is just west of the bridge on SH92. Besides matching Escalante's description and aligning with the trail as identified on the Hayden map, we believe this is the site, as where the Miller campsite was placed, the river banks of the river are steep and 8-10 feet tall. Our site also lies close to the river level and is sub-irrigated by the river which would allow vegetation to grow – “by a bend of it (the river) we found some pasture for the mounts”. The site also has a good crossing of the river. Note, river flows are much reduced from the past with the construction of the Blue Mesa, Morrow Point and Crystal dams on the main fork of the Gunnison and Paonia Reservoir Dam on the North Fork of the Gunnison. We identify the site as being located in T.15S., R.95W., NE¼SW¼ S.1, 6th P.M. or 38°46'42” N, 107°57'43” W. This site is currently owned by Grand Headwaters LLC out of

Boulder, CO. The distance from San Agustín to the Santa Mónica campsite is 9½ miles, as measured with the measuring tool on the Delta County GIS website.

Photographs of the August 28-29, 1776 Santa Mónica campsite, near Austin, CO.



Photo taken September 1, 2023 by David Bradford
View is to the east, taken on the edge of SH92.
Note Smith Mountain in background, right,



Photo taken September 1, 2023 by David Bradford
View is to the south. Note adobe hills in background,
on right side.



Photo taken September 1, 2023 by David Bradford
View of Gunnison River just east of campsite. Note low banks allowing easy crossing by horses. Smith Mountain in background on right.

August 30, 1776 – Santa Rosa de Lima Campsite, near Hotchkiss, Colorado.

“This afternoon we left Santa Mónica (Camp at Austin), crossed El Río de San Xavier (Gunnison River), in which the water reached well above the shoulder blades, climbed a hill, and, over broken terrain but tractable and without stone, traveled upstream and east-northeast for two leagues; then after going another two northeast over country not quite as broken up but with some sagebrush, a lot of prickly pear cactus, and finely ground black lava, we halted at the edge of a little river which we named Santa Rosa (Leroux Creek). It rises in La Sierra del Venado Alazán (Grand Mesa), on the southern flank of which we now find ourselves, and enters into that of San Xavier (Gunnison River). Here it has a medium-sized meadow of good pasturage and a scenic grove of white poplar and scruboak. Today four leagues.”

- A) Crossed to the North Side of the Gunnison River, from the Santa Mónica campsite.
- B) Climbed a hill.
- C) Traveled East-Northeast two leagues over broken terrain.
- D) Traveled Northeast two more leagues over less rough country with sagebrush, prickly pear cactus and finely ground black lava.
- E) Halted at Sant of a Rosa River (Leroux Creek).

- F) Located on the southern flank of La Sierra del Venado Alazán (Grand Mesa).
- G) Traveled four leagues – 10½ miles.

Our group spent August 19, 2023 scouting and evaluating this route and campsite. We believe the Domínguez-Escalante expedition followed the basic route of the current SH92 at least to Roger's Mesa where they trended to the northeast and dropped down to Leroux Creek where the IX Gulch comes in. This is based on item D and the fact that it was difficult to drop into Leroux Creek from Roger's Mesa before the roads were constructed - current SH 92 and J80 Road, the original road into Hotchkiss. In addition, since Domínguez and Escalante believed that Leroux Creek flowed into Río San Xavier (Gunnison River), they must have traveled high enough that they could not see the Gunnison coming in from the south in the Gunnison Gorge. Even today, it is not readily apparent even from SH92, unless you are looking for it. Today, the drop into Leroux Creek from Roger's Mesa near where IX Gulch enters is traversed by 3300 Road. However, the slope into the drainage would be easily negotiated by horses, especially upstream a bit from 3300 Road. We believe the campsite was located on the east side of the creek near where IX Gulch comes in. We identify the site as being located in T.14S., R.93W., SE¼NW¼ S.25, 6th P.M. or 38°48'27" N, 107°44'25" W. This site is currently owned by Kelly Lyon of Hotchkiss, CO. The distance from the Santa Mónica campsite to the Santa Rosa de Lima campsite on Leroux Creek following this route, is 13 miles, as measured with the measuring tool on the Delta County GIS website.

Photographs of the August 30, 1776 Santa Rosa de Lima campsite, near Hotchkiss, CO.



Photo taken on October 9, 2023 by David Bradford
View of “broken terrain but tractable and without stone”, looking east, towards Mt. Lamborn and Lands End Peak of the West Elk Mtns. Note the railroad and SH92 on the right. Red arrow indicates the direction



Photo taken on October 9, 2023 by David Bradford
View of old road or trail that may be the route followed by D-E and other early travelers. This site is located just west of the intersection of Shamrock Road and SH92.



Photo taken on October 25, 2023 by David Bradford
View of Leroux Creek, just south of where 3300 Road crosses the drainage. Photo is taken from east edge of Roger’s Mesa. Photo shows confluence of IX Gulch and Leroux Creek. Believe this is the campsite. Mt Lamborn (R) and Lands End Peak (L) of the West Elk Mtns. on the skyline.



Photo taken on October 9, 2023 by David Bradford
View of Leroux Creek, just south of where 3300 Road crosses the drainage. Photo is taken north of where IX Gulch enters Leroux Creek. View is looking south. This is actually a bit north of the actual campsite, but it shows the general site.

August 31, 1776 – San Ramón Nonato Campsite, above Hubbard Canyon.

“On the 31st we set out from El Río de Santa Rosa de Lima (Leroux Creek) toward the northeast, went a league and a half over good country, and arrived at another medium-sized river, which comes down from the same sierra like the previous one and with it enters into San Xavier, and we named it Río de Santa Maria (North Fork of the Gunnison River) in the leas and bends of which there is all that is needed for the founding and subsistence of two settlements. We went to the northeast four leagues and a half upstream, over those meadows and through the groves which it also has, crossing it once. We turned north, crossed the river again, entered a woods of juniper, and a great deal of rock, which lasted for about three miles; then we continued by going up La Sierra del Venado Alazán (Grand Mesa) along the slope of a very deep narrow valley (Hubbard Canyon?), breaking through dense clumps of scruboak; then, after going four leagues northward also, we stopped at a perennial water source, which we named San Ramón Nonato (Grouse Spring Creek).”

- A) Set out from Leroux Creek to the Northeast.
- B) Traveled a league and a half over good country – 3½ miles.
- C) Arrived at a medium-sized river – North Fork of the Gunnison.
- D) Went Northeast 4½ leagues upstream – 11 miles.
- E) Crossed the North Fork River once – North to South?
- F) Turned North.
- G) Crossed the North Fork River again, South to North?
- H) Entered the juniper woods with a great deal of rock for about 3 miles.
- I) Traveled up the Grand Mesa along the slope of a very deep narrow valley – Hubbard Canyon?
- J) Breaking through dense clumps of scruboak.
- K) Traveled North for 4 leagues – 9.8 miles.
- L) Stopped at a perennial water source?
- M) Traveled 9 leagues or 22 miles.

Our group spent a considerable amount of time trying to understand this route. Why did Domínguez and Escalante think that Leroux Creek flowed into the Gunnison River? Why did they not realize they were now following the North Fork of the Gunnison River until they had traveled “a league and a half over good country”? Why did the expedition cross the North Fork River, twice? Then finally what did Escalante mean saying “we continued by going up La Sierra del Venado Alazán (Grand Mesa) along the slope of a very deep narrow valley”? Well, we believe we were able to answer those questions.

First question - When the expedition climbed out of Leroux Creek, at IX Gulch, they were over a mile north of the confluence of Leroux Creek and the North Fork River. We believe they could not see the river and that they had not observed that the main fork of the Gunnison River had

come in from the south, through the Gunnison Gorge, eight miles downstream. So, they climbed out onto Barrow Mesa traveling northeast. They “went a league and a half over good country” over the agricultural fields of Barrow Mesa then crossed Short Draw onto Hansen Mesa dropping down to the valley floor along Jay Creek. This 4-mile stretch brought them to the North Fork of the Gunnison River, which they now realized was a tributary of the main Gunnison River.

Second question - They continued traveling northeast for 4½ leagues or approximately 12 miles. As you follow the North Fork upstream there appears no reason to cross from the north side of the river to the south side, until you reach Garvin Mesa. This mesa comes all the way down to the edge of the North Fork. The road cut that was made on the south side of the mesa obscures the fact that this side of the river was untravellable before the road (Currently SH133) was constructed. So, they crossed to the south side of the river, probably near the current Orchard Valley Farms and Black Bridge Winery, continuing upstream for approximately 1 mile, near where the railroad crosses the river. And for the same reason – the shale bluff that comes off the northwest flank of Lennox Mesa and blocks further travel upstream on the south side of the river. They continued up the North Fork on the north side of the river, through “a woods of juniper and a great deal of rock.”

Third question - This brought them to the mouth of Hubbard Canyon nearly 12 miles from where they came down off Hansen Mesa to the valley floor of the North Fork River. At this point, they continued going up Hubbard Creek to the north, which flows south off the Grand Mesa (La Sierra del Venado Alazán). Miller, et al believed the expedition traveled all the way up Hubbard Canyon to a meadow one mile north of the confluence of Hubbard Creek and Willow Creek. The Forest Service maintained a road up Hubbard Canyon up until the early 1980’s when a landslide closed the road. The Miller researchers, Floyd O’Neill and Gregory Thompson, likely traveled up this road in 1975. Ranchers have continued to use this route to trail livestock up and down the canyon. However, landslides continue to plague the canyon, making it nearly impossible to travel. While I have ridden up the canyon many times in the 20-years I worked on the Paonia Ranger District, around 2008 I attempted another ride up the Canyon, but had to abandon the trip due to a recent landslide that horses could not cross. It is a narrow, deeply incised canyon, with slopes so steep there is no travel “along the slope of a very deep narrow valley.” We don’t believe the Domínguez-Escalante expedition traveled up Hubbard Canyon. We believe they traveled up Hubbard Creek to where Sheep Corral Gulch comes into Hubbard from the west. They traveled up this oak-brush covered slope, traveling northward for 4 leagues, approximately 10 miles, they arrived at Grouse Spring, “a perennial water source which they named San Ramón Nonato.” The distance from the confluence of Hubbard Creek and the North Fork River is approximately 9 miles. Since the route up Hubbard Canyon does not allow traveling along the slope and the site identified by Miller, et al does not have a perennial water source and the Grouse Spring site is a very good campsite and falls within the four-league distance that Escalante described, we believe this is the route and the campsite used by the Domínguez-Escalante expedition. This was a long and

probably very difficult day. We identify the site as being located in T.12S., R.91W., SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ S.22, 6th P.M. or 39°01'10" N, 107°32'36" W. Elevation 7,800 feet. This site is currently owned by Dinah & Leonard Wiggins of Paonia, CO. We spent numerous days evaluating this route and campsite. The distance from the Santa Rosa de Lima campsite on Leroux Creek to the San Ramón Nonato campsite at Grouse Spring, following this route, is nearly 23 miles, as measured with the measuring tool on the Delta County GIS website.

Photographs of August 31,1776 travel to San Ramón Nonato Campsite at Grouse Spring.



Photo taken on 10/23/2023 by David Bradford
View of North Fork Valley between Hotchkiss and Paonia. Red arrow indicates direction of travel for the D-E Expedition.

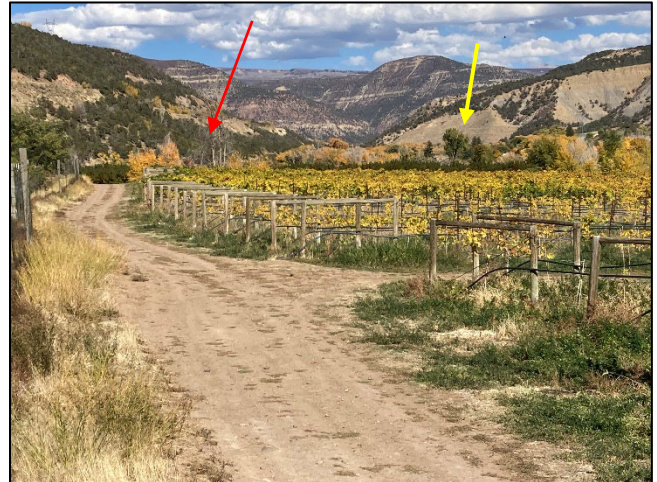
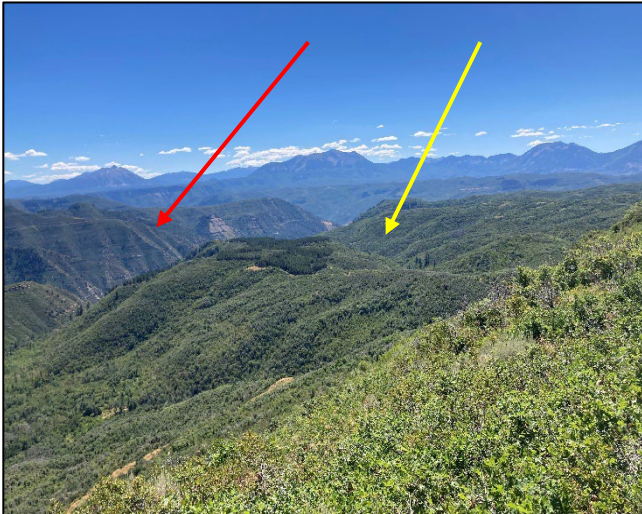


Photo taken on 10/23/2023 by David Bradford
View of upper North Fork Valley. Red arrow shows south slope of Garvin Mesa. Yellow arrow indicates shale bluff on side of Lennox Mesa.



View shows oakbrush covered slope above Hubbard Canyon (Red arrow) and Sheep Corral Gulch (Yellow arrow).



Photo taken on 8/29/2023 by David Bradford
View shows the type of “dense clumps of scrub oak” encountered by the D-E expedition as they traveled to the San Ramon Nonato Campsite.

Photographs of August 31,1776 San Ramon Nonato campsite at Grouse Spring.



Photo taken September 12,2023 by David Bradford
View shows Grouse Spring (Red arrow) and large grassy meadow lying below the spring. Electric Mountain lies to the north on the skyline.



Photo taken September 12,2023 by David Bradford
View shows large grassy meadow lying below the spring. View is looking east. Pilot Knob lies on the skyline.

September 1, 1776 – San Antonino Mártir Campsite, North of Electric Mountain

“On the 1st of September we set out, headed north from San Ramón and after going three leagues through small narrow valleys of abundant pastures and thick clumps of scruboak we came upon eighty Yutas....

We kept going with only the Laguna, descended a very steep incline, and came into a very pleasant narrow valley, in which there was a small river and all along its bank a spreading grove of spruces, very tall and straight, among them certain poplars which seem to ape the erectness and height of the pines. Through this narrow valley we traveled eastward for a league and reached the encampment, which had numerous people and must have had thirty tents. We stopped a mile down from it by the edge of the river mentioned, naming the site San Antonio Mártir. Today four leagues – 199 in all.”

- A) Headed North from San Ramón.
- B) Traveled three leagues through narrow valleys of abundant pastures and thick clumps of scruboak.
- C) Descended a very steep incline.
- D) Came into a very pleasant narrow valley.
- E) In which there was a small river,
- F) Along its bank a grove of tall and straight spruces,
- G) Mixed with certain poplars (aspen) which ape the erectness and height of the pines (spruces).
- H) Traveled eastward for a league and reached the encampment of numerous people and 30 tents (teepees).
- I) Traveled a mile further downstream to set up their camp.
- J) Traveled 4 leagues or 10½ miles.

This route and campsite also gave us some difficulty, especially locating the two campsites. From the San Ramón Nonato (Grouse Spring) Campsite, we believe the expedition traveled northward through the scattered parks and oakbrush until they hit Hubbard Creek, which they followed up into Hubbard Park. They traveled north through the park until they reached the northeast corner, near where Electric Mountain Lodge is located. Here they met the group of 80 Ute warriors. Other than starting out from Grouse Spring, instead of the meadow 1 mile north of the confluence of Hubbard Creek and Willow Creek, our assessment of the route follows the route identified by Floyd O’Neil and Gregory Thompson. It is in the next section where we believe there are some differences.

We believe the expedition rode out of the northeast corner of Hubbard Park, following a trail that drops 1,000 feet down to Fawn Park. We believe the Indian camp was located in the north-central part of Fawn Park. This area has all the requirements for a large encampment – a large fairly flat area that would allow for 30 teepees, water in Fawn Park and forage for a large number of horses.

The area described by O'Neil and Thompson will not allow for camping. Where Fawn Creek joins Cow Creek the drainage is very narrow and incised and barely allows for a trail along Cow Creek. The campsite used by the Domínguez-Escalante expedition might be located along Cow Creek to the east of the Fawn Creek and Cow Creek confluence. I drove up to Electric Mountain Lodge and hiked to the area I believe is the Fawn Creek Indian campsite. I believe the Indian Camp was located in T.11S., R.91W., NE¼SE¼ S.16, 6th P.M. or 39°06'1" N, 107°33'17" W. Elevation 8,700 feet. I did not make it to the Domínguez-Escalante campsite. But looking at the County GIS maps we believe it may have been located at nearly 1 mile below the Indian Camp in T.11S., R.91W., SW¼NW¼ S.15, 6th P.M. or 39°06'0.5" N, 107°32'19.9" W. Elevation 8,600 feet. This area matches Escalante's description in the journal. And it does not differ greatly from location described by O'Neil and Thompson in the Miller Report. The distance from Grouse Spring to the Domínguez-Escalante Campsite on Cow Creek, following this route, is 10½ miles, as measured with the measuring tool on the Delta County GIS website.

Photographs of the September 1, 1776 San Antonino Mártir campsite in Fawn Park.

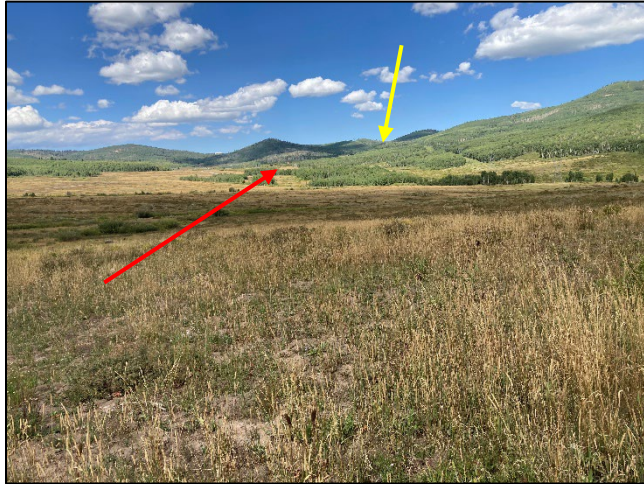


Photo taken September 12, 2023 by David Bradford View is looking north across Hubbard Park where the D-E expedition met the 80 Ute warriors (Red arrow). The saddle that the expedition crossed to make the steep descent to Cow Creek and Fawn Park is indicated by the Yellow arrow.



Photo taken September 16, 2023 by David Bradford View is of trail that descends 1,000 feet from the saddle on the northwest flank of Electric Mountain down to Fawn Park.



Photo taken September 16, 2023 by David Bradford View is of Fawn Park, looking to the east. Photo shows the area that would easily support 30 teepees and their inhabitants. Fawn Creek is located to the right, out of the photo. The top of the Raggeds are visible in the top right of the photo.



Photo taken September 16, 2023 by David Bradford View is to the south, showing Fawn Creek, conifers and aspen trees and the north slope of Electric Mountain. The trail that descends 1,000 feet from the saddle on the northwest flank of Electric Mountain down to Fawn Park crosses the saddle on the right of Electric Mountain and is indicated with a Red arrow.

September 2, 1776 – San Atanasio Campsite – Mule Park

“ Pursued our own travel plan and, after tracing back a league toward the west of San Antonino, we took another trail; we traveled less than a league and three-quarters northwest and more than a quarter west-northwest and halted in a short valley of good pastures near a rivulet of good water, which we named San Atanasio. Today traveled three leagues over good terrain and through a poplar grove and clumps of scruboak but advanced two leagues only. Tonight it rained heavily.”

- A) Traveled a league West from San Antonino.
- B) Traveled Northwest a league and $\frac{3}{4}$,
- C) Traveled a quarter of a league West-Northwest.
- D) Halted in a short valley of good pastures near a rivulet of good water.
- E) Traveled three leagues or 8 miles but only advanced 2 leagues or 5 miles.

This was one of the easier routes and campsites to evaluate. It appears that the O’Neil and Thompson description in the Miller Report is fairly accurate, if a bit sparse. We believe that the expedition traveled northwest up Cow Creek for a league and three-quarters or approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Approximately where the Overland Reservoir Road, FSR 705, connects to the Steven’s Gulch Road, FSR 701. They turned northwest, crossing over to Dyke Creek and following it northwesterly to just past Chimney Rocks, or approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles. They turned north crossing the pass over into Mule Park. They traveled west-northwest through Mule Park for another $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles stopping on the fork of West Muddy Creek that runs just south of the “Balm of Gilead” Grove (See the sidebar on the “Balm of Gilead” Grove.) This puts the campsite right next to the grove. We identify the site as being located in T.11S., R.92W., NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ S.1, 6th P.M. or 39°07’47” N, 107°36’43” W. Elevation 9,000 feet. The distance from the San Antonino Mártir campsite on Cow Creek to the San Atanasio campsite along West Muddy Creek in Mule Park, following this route, is just over 5 miles, as measured with the measuring tool on the Delta County GIS website.

Photographs of the September 2, 1776 San Antanasio campsite in Mule Park.



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
View is taken on site, where we believe D-E camped.
Trees to the north are the south end of the “Balm of Gilead” grove. This stand is actually a grove of native Balsam poplars. See the sidebar on the “Balm of Gilead” Grove for more information.

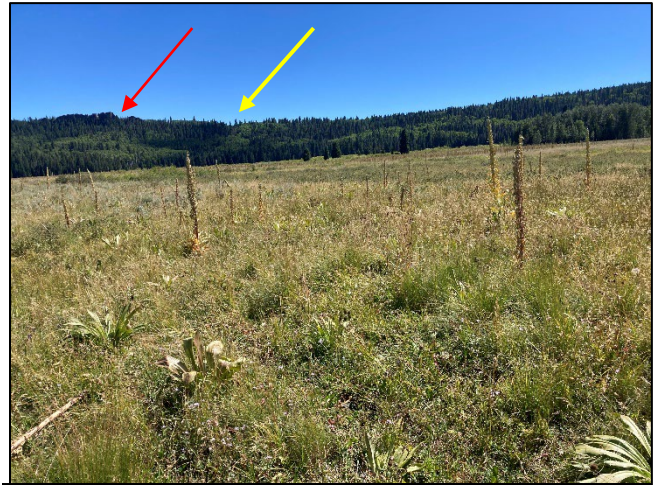


Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
View is taken on site, where we believe D-E camped.
This view is to the south, showing the west end of the Chimney Rocks (Red arrow) and the pass that the expedition crossed from Dyke Creek to come into Mule Park (Yellow arrow)



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
View is taken on site, where we believe D-E camped.
This view is to the west, showing Chalk Mountain on the skyline.



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
View is taken on site, where we believe D-E camped.
This view is looking southeast, across Mule Park. The creek is part of the headwaters of West Muddy Creek. The mountains on the skyline are part of the Elk Mountains.

The “Balm of Gilead” Trees in Mule Park

This grove of trees in Mule Park has a long history of being called Balm of Gilead trees. When I came to the Paonia Ranger District in 1993 there were local histories, including some written by Forest Service rangers in the 1940’s talking about the “Balm of Gilead” trees in Mule Park. Those histories told a story about a group of pioneers from the Carolinas on their way to the Grand Valley in 1882. They got delayed in the area and rather than see their cuttings of the Balm of Gilead trees die, they planted them next to the corral beside West Muddy Creek on the west end of the park. This was the conventional wisdom about this uncommon grove of trees. I began to question whether this was a true story when I was doing range analysis in the area in 1997 and I found additional stands of the tree scattered throughout the park. I did some research and there are many trees called Balm of Gilead. The literature shows at least four different trees are listed as “Balm of Gilead” trees - *Populus balsamifera var. subcordata*, *Populus candicans*, *Populus x gileadensis*, and *Populus x jackii*. There are others as well. But what it amounts to is that these trees have buds in the spring that exudes a resin that has been labeled “balm of Gilead”. It has been used traditionally as an ointment to relieve chest congestion. Sometimes the undersides of the leaves will also exude the orange resin. It is also flammable, so the twigs are useful for starting fires. I found that balsam poplar is very widespread, crossing North America from Alaska to eastern Canada and as far south as Colorado. It is a boreal species – meaning it is northern and occurs in habitats that have a sub-arctic climate. In Colorado balsam poplar is found in northern and central mountains with this type of climate. I felt this stand of trees was likely a stand of native balsam poplars. Other physical characteristics supported this thesis.

Balsam poplar leaves are a dark shiny green on top but much lighter underneath. The leaves are 3 to 7 inches long, 1 to 4 inches across with fine-toothed leaf margins. The petiole or leaf stalk is round, not flattened like aspen and Fremont cottonwoods. (The flattened petiole causes the leaves of aspen to flutter or quake in a breeze, the basis of the name “quaking aspen” or in the local parlance – “quakers”.) The bark of balsam poplar is greenish-gray and smooth but becomes deeply furrowed and gray as it matures. It is not considered a long-lived tree, but may live up to 200 years. (See the photos on the next page) Colorado is considered the southern-most extension of the species, but it is widely scattered in northern and central Colorado. The stand of Balsam poplars lies in the west-central part of Mule Park, near the end of FSR 265.3C, on the south side. The legal location is T.11S., R.92W., NE¼SW¼ S.1, 6th P.M.

I believe that the stand of trees in Mule Park that has long been called the “Balm of Gilead” trees are actually balsam poplars. They are certainly uncommon in this area, so they probably developed a mystique. But like many of the myths in our area, they aren’t supported by fact. So, I think we call them balsam poplars and admire them for their uncommonness. The name Mule Park came from when an individual named Parsons, was summering about 400 mules in the park and breaking for sale to the Army in 1891. While breaking mules he was bucked into the side of a corral and killed from the injuries.

Photographs of the “Balm of Gilead” or Balsam Poplar trees in Mule Park:



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
Leaves of the “Balm of Gilead” trees or Balsam
Poplars in Mule Park. Showing the dark green top-
side of the leaves, the lighter under-side and the



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
Young “Balm of Gilead” trees or Balsam Poplars in
Mule Park. Showing the grayish bark of the younger
trees.



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
Older “Balm of Gilead” trees or Balsam Poplars in
Mule Park. Showing the deeply furrowed bark of a
much older tree. I did not have an increment borer
to get a core from this tree, to age it. But it certainly
looks like a very old tree.



Photo taken September 7, 2023 by David Bradford
View of the “Balm of Gilead” trees or Balsam Poplars
in Mule Park. Note the two taller trees – these are
the older trees, the one on the right is the tree in the
photograph to the left. Note the variety age classes in
the grove.

Conclusion

We believe that the basic premise of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition traveling easterly up the Gunnison River into the North Fork Valley and up the North Fork Canyon to Hubbard Creek, then on up to the Grand Mesa and on over it to the Plateau Valley is correct. We believe we have identified a more accurate route that the expedition followed, and more accurate locations of some of the campsites. Although, you cannot be absolutely certain, due to all the changes that have occurred over time. The human developments of cities and towns, farms and orchards, roads and dams have modified the landscape so that following the exact route is virtually impossible. It is also made more difficult by the vegetative changes on the landscape. Work done over the past 25 years, using repeat photography, shows there has been a significant increase in woody vegetation on nearly all parts of this landscape. Increases in density and the size of cottonwoods along the rivers, combined with invasive species like tamarisk and Russian olive trees; increases in Utah junipers along the foothills; increases in oak brush and increases in aspen and conifers in the montane regions make following the expeditions exact route extremely challenging. The following-pair is one set of hundreds of such photos, collected by the Paonia Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service. This photo-pair is one of 75 used in the 2004 publication *When the Grass Stood Stirrup-high: Facts, Photographs, and Myths of West-Central Colorado* by David Bradford, Floyd Reed and Robbie Baird LeValley. These photographs and the reassessment of the Miller Report on the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition show what an incredible journey and journal, the Expedition made. It was truly amazing. David Bradford for the HCHS DEEEP Committee.

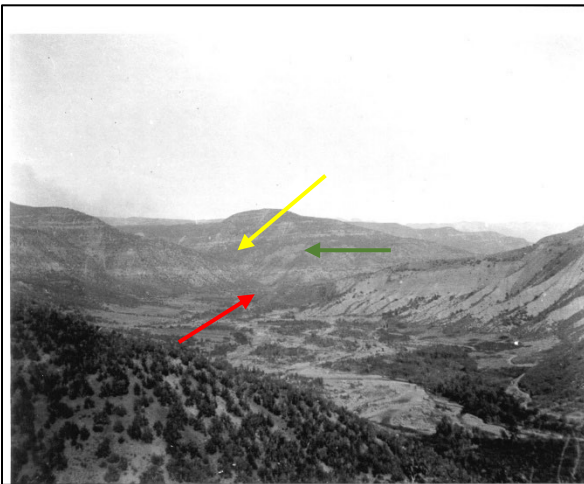


Photo taken 10/5/1898 by G.B. Sudworth
View of the North Fork River, from east flank of Garvin Mesa. Note braided channel of the river and cottonwood density. This shows the area the D-E expedition traveled through (Red arrow) on their way to Hubbard Creek (Yellow arrow).



Photo taken 10/2/2004 by David Bradford
Note increase in cottonwoods along the river and the river channel has merged into one main channel. Fire Mountain Canal and Stewart Ditch were constructed in the early 1900's. Agriculture was also developed. State Highway 133 was reconstructed in early 1980's. The Load-out for the Bowie Mine was constructed in 1998. The fire scar (Green arrow) on the slope of Fire Mountain, that was visible in the 1975 photo taken by Floyd A. O'Neil and used in the Miller Report, is visible in both photos.

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