

“The Santa Fe Trail Lives On!”

Commemorating the 200th Anniversary, 1821-2021

In 1821, on June 10, William Becknell published a notice in the *Missouri Intelligencer* newspaper soliciting participants for a trip **“to the westward for the purpose of trading for Horses & Mules, and catching Wild Animals of every description, that we may think advantageous.”**



At the age of 33, Becknell led five other men from Franklin, Missouri and crossed the Missouri River at Arrow Rock, then headed to the southwest on September 1, 1821. Meanwhile, Captain Pedro Ignacio Gallegos, leading 400 troops, had been sent to investigate the plunder of San Miguel by Comanches. On November 13, 1821, these two groups met at Puertocito, on Piedra Lumbre Creek, just south of present Las Vegas, NM. After locating someone who could act as a translator, Becknell’s party learned of Mexican Independence from Spain and, hence, of the lifting of trade restrictions. With Becknell’s arrival in Santa Fe on November 16, 1821, successful

trading contact was initiated and the first legal commerce with New Mexico took place. With this successful trading trip from the United States in 1821, followed by another trip by Becknell the following year, this time with wagons loaded with trade goods, William Becknell became known as the Father of the Santa Fe Trail between Missouri and New Mexico. This set in motion over a half a century of commerce and cultural exchange between New Mexico and eastern trade centers and contributed to the acquisition of the region by the United States during the Mexican War, as well as changes for the inhabitants of the region along the historic Santa Fe Trail.

In 1987, the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of this route, and its role in the development of the United States by adding it to the National Trails System as the Santa Fe National Historic Trail and designated the National Park Service to administer it. Formed in 1986, the Santa Fe Trail Association has carried forth its mission to “protect and preserve the Santa Fe Trail and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with it.” As an official partner of the National Park Service, the Santa Fe Trail Association works cooperatively to reach the shared goals for the Santa Fe National Historic Trail.

