



The Overland Mail Arrives at Vallecito Stage Station, February 24, 2007

One hundred and fifty years ago this year, in August 1857, the first Overland Mail left San Antonio, Texas bound for San Diego, California. Although besieged by formidable terrain, hostile Indians, and lack of dependable feed and water, Isaiah Woods, his drivers, coaches, and several teams of mules brought the mail into San Diego. The first arrived on August 31, 1857, to a raucous celebration of the citizenry. Without doubt, the most arduous and dangerous part of the trip traveled across the Colorado Desert between Yuma, Arizona and Lassiter's Ranch at Vallecito. The San Antonio and San Diego Overland Mail was greeted at Vallecito with as much enthusiasm as the drivers felt at concluding the desert crossing. Along this stretch of the road, Woods transferred the mail from stage coaches to the sturdy mules, who took the rugged cutoff up the mountain trail to Cuyamaca.



In 2007, horse and mule riders from Southern California are reenacting several tracks of this momentous journey. The first of these reenactments took place February 24 with horses, mules, riders, and the mail bags travelling from the Palm Spring Station site in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park to Vallecito Stage Station at Vallecito County Park. The ride was cosponsored by California State Parks, San Diego County

Parks, and Ramona Trails Association. Twenty riders and eleven hikers, representing Ramona Trails Association, Back Country Horsemen (San Diego Unit), California State Parks, and San Diego County Parks traveled the nine miles through the Vallecito Wash, to be greeted at Vallecito Station by bonneted ladies and suspended gents offering cold water and coffee. Riders came for the event from as far away as Sacramento, California and ranged in age from 10 to 60. An additional 40 visitors, on tour of the Overland Mail route from Arizona Historical Society, were also welcomed. The Vallecito Stage Station, a unique sod-block building that is one of the few surviving structures from the 1850s Overland Mail era, was decked in period furnishings for the day. After recovering from the day's desert trek, riders



and guests enjoyed barbeque dinner, Dutch oven desert provided by Back Country Horsemen (San Gorgonio Unit), and a program on the history of the establishment of the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line. Speakers included historians Phil Brigandi and Steve Van Wormer, archaeologist Sue Wade, and mule packer Richard Overturf.



Additional events are planned for 2007 including two horse and mule reenactment rides May 4-6 and June 15-17, a celebration at the Peñasquitos Station site in Peñasquitos County Park June 2, car and hiking tours (March 17 and

June 9) of portions of the route, and a grand arrival of the mail in Old Town San Diego, August 31, 2007. Additional information is available at www.parks.ca.gov/archaeology.