

150th Anniversary OF THE Overland Mail

BY BRUCE COONS

On Saturday January 27, 2007 the first event was held in the yearlong celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Line. The line was known as the “Jackass Mail” after the mules used to transport the mail over the mountain section of the trail in San Diego’s backcountry. This stage line was the first transcontinental mail route connecting California to the rest of the United States.

Events are a collaborative effort sponsored by several agencies in the southland, including the Colorado Desert Archaeology Society, Anza-Borrego Foundation Institute and numerous historical societies and organizations.

This first event of the year of celebration was organized by the Arizona Historical Society. Beginning in Yuma, a twenty-two car caravan of carpools carrying people from Arizona Historical Society and San Diegans from across the county including myself and, other SOHO members, Melvin and Ellen Sweet, Victor Walsh and Steve Van Wormer to the stage station sites across the border in Northern Baja California.

The stations visited were Cooke’s Well, Gardner’s Well and Alamo Mocho. When we arrived at Cooke’s and Gardner’s it was difficult to get a sense of the past; there were no visible remains and the sites themselves have drastically changed in

appearance. The most interesting of the three stations was Alamo Mocho, named for the cottonwood stump present when the early travelers first arrived. At this place I was able to match up the site with a historic drawing seen here, brought by someone in the group. It was exciting to stand in this historic setting looking at the same view that was seen by these early travelers 156 years ago.

A great series of events has been planned and you are encouraged to participate in as many as you can. Additional events planned for 2007 include 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.



left Alamo Mocho 1851 drawing from *Bartlett’s Narrative Vol. 2*; *right* Alamo Mocho 2007, same scene. *Photo by Bruce Coons*