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Route for the Overland Stage

Jesse G. Petersen

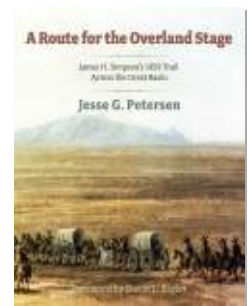
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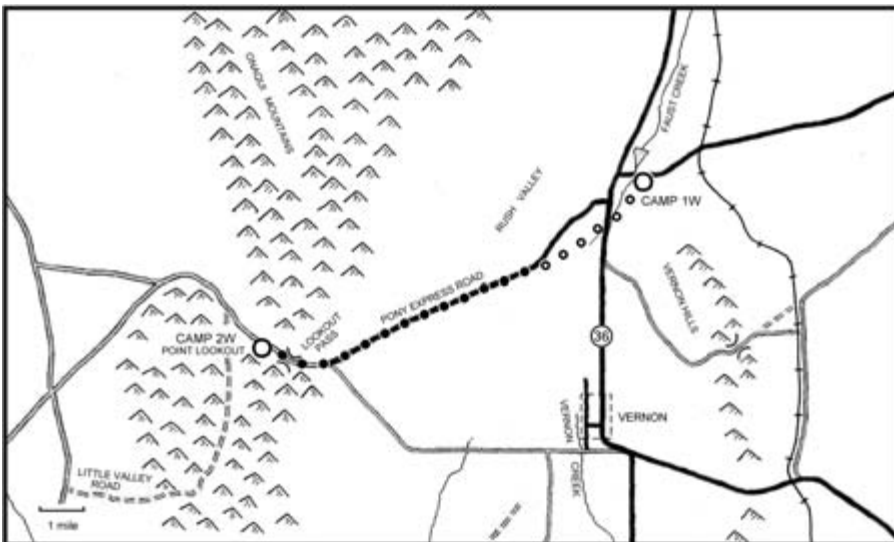
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Three

FAUST CREEK TO PLEASANT VALLEY



Camp 1-W. The expedition's first campsite was at the left, on the east bank of Faust Creek, which was known as Meadow Creek in 1859.



MAY 3, 1859



Looking southwest across the southern end of Rush Valley toward Lookout Pass: *“our course lay nearly southwest, seven miles to east foot of General Johnston’s Pass.”*

MAY 3, CAMP NO. 1, ON MEADOW CREEK.—*Follow up Meadow Creek a mile, and then cross just above old adobe corral....About half a mile above the crossing the mail company has a station, at present consisting of a Sibley tent, and a cedar picket corral for stock is being made. From this station our course lay nearly southwest, seven miles to east, foot of General Johnston’s Pass [Lookout Pass], which I discovered last fall, and which I called after the general commanding the Department of Utah.*¹

LEAVING THE CAMPSITE on Faust Creek, the party moved southwest, heading upstream along the east bank of the stream. After traveling about a mile, they forded the small stream near where it now crosses under Utah State Route 36. Heading west from the ford, the expedition began crossing a flat, meadowlike area. After another half mile, they passed the spot where

Simpson and his smaller force had camped the previous October 27, when they were returning from the reconnaissance trip. At this location, the Chorpenning employees had established a mail station. At the present time, the area to the west of the highway is owned by the city of Tooele, and is being leased by the operator of a sod farm. Joe Nardone, who is regarded by many as the foremost authority on the location of the trail and the stations, has determined that the Faust Pony Express station was located at the site now occupied by a large equipment shed. The earlier Chorpenning station was probably located at this same spot, as it seems doubtful that Russell, Majors, and Waddell would have moved the station when they took over Chorpenning’s operation in 1860.

“Doc” Faust was working for George Chorpenning as the manager of the Pleasant Valley mail station when Chorpenning made the switch to the central route in late 1858. It was there that

Simpson made Faust's acquaintance when the expedition reached Pleasant Valley on May 9. About five or six months later, the Chorpenning company discontinued the Pleasant Valley section of the route and started going through Callao and Deep Creek, which is now known as Ibapah. When this change took place, Faust and his family moved to Deep Creek, where he operated the new mail station.² His time at Deep Creek was short; within a few months he had moved to Rush Valley, where he was placed in charge of the station on Meadow Creek. When the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell initiated the Pony Express and took over Chorpenning's operation, they hired Faust, and he continued to manage the station. At about this time, Faust homesteaded 160 acres and began a ranching operation in the grassy area surrounding the station. Since that time until the present, the area around the station has been intensely cultivated, and sometimes used as pasture. When the station was in operation, it was on the creek's western bank, but sometime during the intervening years, the channel has been changed and it now passes to the north and then circles to the west of the station site.

After passing the mail station, the expedition continued across the open meadow in a southwesterly direction for a mile and a half, where the route then merged with today's Pony Express Road at a prominent bend in the road.

APRIL 2006

After determining that the expedition's route followed the east bank of Faust Creek between Pony Express Road and SR 36, I looked for, but failed to find, a road or trail that could be driven through this area. Deciding that I would have to cover this section of the route on foot, I asked my friend Jim Hall to go along. This was one of the rare occasions that I had company during one of my hikes along the trail. Jim was living in Rush Valley at that time, and was researching the early history of the area. Starting from the site of the expedition's camp, we headed south along the east bank of Faust Creek. Although the stream is at ground level in the vicinity of the campsite, we found that the channel quickly becomes much deeper. In less than a quarter of a mile, the banks become as much as eight to ten feet high, and

this continues until the stream is about a tenth of a mile from SR 36. The height of the banks would have made it impossible take the wagons across the stream at any point before reaching the place where they did make the ford. When Jim and I reached SR 36, we crossed the stream and the highway, and then continued across the meadow until we reached the point where the expedition's route comes back to Pony Express Road.

*In about a mile more, by a good grade, you reach the top of the pass, and thence, in three-quarters of a mile, by a steep descent, which, for a portion of the way, teams going east would have to double up, you attain to a spot where is a patch of grass, and where we encamped. There is a small spring near us, on the north side of the pass, which, however, our animals soon drank dry, and which doubtless is dry during the summer. Road today good. Journey, 9.9 miles.*³

The expedition's second campsite was located in a relatively level area about three-quarters of a mile below and to the west of the summit of Lookout Pass. On the north side of the road there is a large Pony Express monument made from native rock. The meager spring that Simpson mentioned is in the shallow canyon just to the north of the monument.

*The California mail-stage passed us on its way to Camp Floyd. Cho-kup, chief of the Ruby Valley band of Sho-sho-nees, was a passenger, on his way to see the Indian agent.*⁴

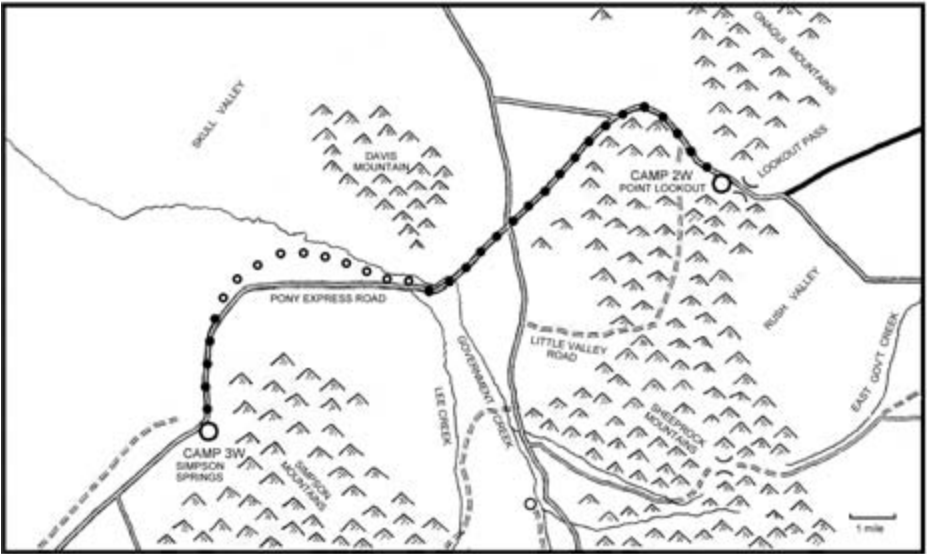
Although Chorpenning's mail company had previously relied on pack mules to carry the mail, Simpson's comment about the "California Mail-Stage" points out that by this time the mail company had improved the road enough so that it could be used by a wagon or coach of some type. This mail-stage was probably the type of coach that was known as a mud wagon.

MAY 4, 1859

MAY 4, CAMP NO. 2, THREE-QUARTERS OF A MILE BELOW GENERAL JOHNSTON'S PASS.—*This morning at daylight we found that a driving snow-*



Camp 2-W. Near the Lookout Pony Express station, three-quarters of a mile west of Lookout Pass.
 The campsite was probably near the center of the photo.



MAY 4, 1859



*storm had set in from the west and about six inches of snow had fallen. The Sibley tent occupied by some of the assistants had become prostrated, under the combined effects of the snow and wind, and when I saw it its occupants were still under it. Lieutenant Murry reports the spring full again this morning.*⁵

WILLIAM LEE was one of the assistants who were sleeping in the tent when it collapsed. His journal entry for the day reads: "On awakening this morning found the tent laying over me, and was hemmed in on all sides by canvas."⁶

*Moved camp at 10 minutes after 7 A.M., our course being westwardly down General Johnston's Pass into Skull Valley, and thence southwestwardly, in a somewhat tortuous direction to avoid a low mountain, to a spring which I discovered last fall, and which I called, in my last report, Pleasant Spring, but which now, I find, goes by the name of Simpson's Spring. This spring is on the base and north side of some mountains [Simpson Range], which I call after Captain Stephen Champlin, of the United States Navy. Journey, 16.2 miles.*⁷

Traveling west from the camp, the expedition continued to follow Pony Express Road until they crossed Government Creek. Simpson's use of the phrase "a tortuous direction" seems a little overblown, but in order to get around Davis Mountain, the route they followed did have to bend to the left, then back to the right, and then back to the left again. A careful examination of Simpson's map indicates that after crossing Government Creek, rather than following today's road in a straight line to the west, the expedition followed the south bank of the usually dry streambed for some distance before turning to the south again. They rejoined Pony Express Road about three miles north of Simpson Springs.

OCTOBER 2005

Since no roads or trails of any type can be found along the south bank of Government Creek and then back to Pony Express Road, it would have to be covered on foot. I parked on the side of the road and began hiking along the route that I had previously plotted on the map.

Following the south bank of Government Creek for about two miles, I then left the streambed and began curving back toward Pony Express Road, joining it again where it makes a sharp bend toward Simpson Springs. In making this hike, I found that this is one of the rare sections of the route where no indications of the trail can be found. The curve to the north was entirely unnecessary, and subsequent travelers must have straightened the bend within a short period of time. The stage road through this area was just a few yards to the north of today's Pony Express Road, and is still visible in some spots. In his report of the previous fall's reconnaissance, Simpson indicated that the springs that became known as Simpson Springs were "in an arroyo pretty well up the bench of the mountain."⁸ This description seems to place the campsite a short distance to the east of the spot that is generally accepted as the site of the Pony Express station. When Simpson and his reconnaissance party had camped here the previous October, he had given it the name of Pleasant Spring. In his 1859 report, he indicated that it was now being called Simpson's Spring. When Sir Richard Burton traveled through this area a little over a year later, his observations were as follows:

*At "Point Look Out," near the counterslope of divide, we left on the south Simpson's route [referring to the return route], and learned by a sign-post that the distance to Carson is 533 miles. The pass led to Skull Valley, of ominous sound.... Passing out of Skull Valley, we crossed the cahues and pitch-holes of a broad bench which rose above the edge of the desert, and after seventeen miles beyond the Pass reached the station which Mormons call Egan's Springs, anti-Mormons Simpson's Springs, and Gentiles Lost Springs.*⁹

Somewhere near the springs, Chorpenning's employees had established a rudimentary mail station and were working on the construction of a small reservoir that was intended to collect the slowly seeping water. John Reese was waiting here for the expedition to arrive, after having gone ahead to scout the country to the southwest. He reported that he had been unable to locate a route across either the Dugway or the

Thomas Mountains that would be any better than the pass that Simpson had reconnoitered the previous fall.

MAY 5, 1859

MAY 5, CAMP NO. 3, SIMPSON'S SPRING.— *My party moved at quarter to six. Course nearly southwest, across desert...to "Short Cut Pass" [Dugway Pass], in a mountain range, which I call Colonel Thomas's range, after Lieut. Col. Lorenzo Thomas, assistant adjutant-general of the Army. Through this pass Chorpenning & Company, the mail-contractors, have made a road, but it is so crooked and steep as to scarcely permit our wagons to get up it....Encamp 1.3 miles west of summit of pass, where there is little or no grass, and no water. Journey, 23.2 miles.*¹⁰

BETWEEN SIMPSON SPRINGS and the long and narrow depression in the valley floor known as Old Riverbed, the expedition's route was a short distance to the north of today's Pony Express Road. Although it is getting quite faint, there are places where the old Overland Stage road can still be seen. Simpson said nothing about Old Riverbed in his report of the 1859 expedition, but in his report of the previous year's reconnaissance, he includes a brief description of this area.

*At the foot of the mountain which we are skirting on our left, at about 8 miles from our last camp [Simpson Springs], I notice a great deal of bunch grass. At this place the bottom of the valley is broken, and there is quite a low vail, or arroyo, where, if anywhere, water might be possibly got by digging. Indeed, the indications are that there has been water here recently and the green grass in places show that it might probably be got not far below the surface.*¹¹

In the bottom of Old Riverbed, a short distance north of today's road, a Pony Express monument can be found. This monument is probably located on, or near, the old Overland Stage road. Near the western side of the depression, a very faint trail leaves today's road and climbs up the steep bank to the south. At the top of

the slope, the trail turns to the southwest and remains some distance from today's road, until the trail and the road merge together again at the foot of Dugway Pass.

Along this faint, but still visible, track are several small concrete Pony Express Trail markers and a large stone monument that is believed to be located near the site of the Dugway Pony Express station. In the area between the Dugway Station monument and the base of the mountain, the trail is very faint, but when I hiked this section of the route, I came across several places where it can still be seen.

During his exploration of the previous fall, Simpson and some of his men had ridden their horses to the top of what he called Shortcut Pass, leaving the wagons at the eastern base of the mountain. Simpson called it Shortcut Pass because it was "the shortest route to the Goshoot mountains," but it soon became known as Dugway Pass.¹² When Simpson saw this pass in 1858, he could tell that it would present some problems for wagons.

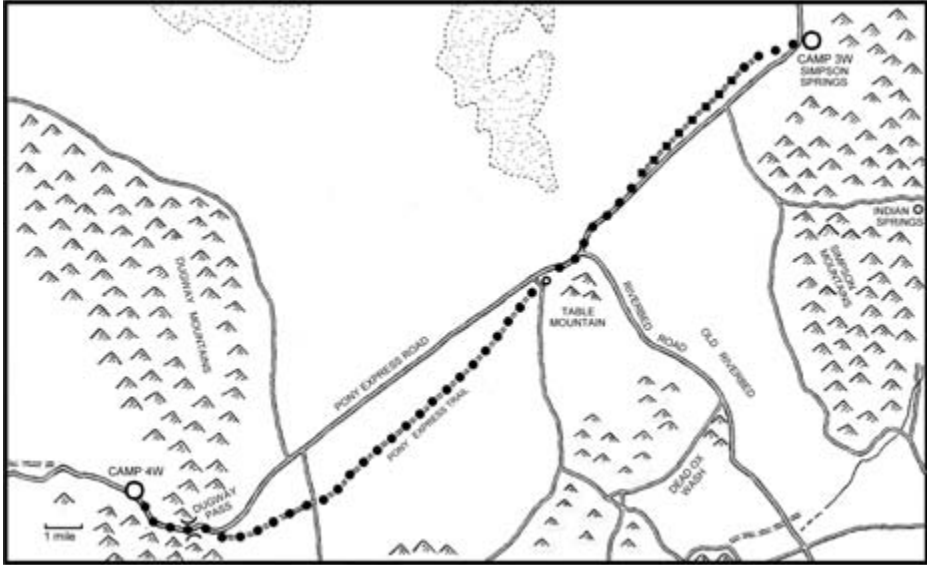
*On account of the steep ascent of the pass, it looks very much as if our expedition had come to an end. We could, by unpacking our wagons and carrying everything up by hand, and doubling the teams, probably be enabled to get over, but this would consume so much of the day that we would not be able to reach the spring before late in the night.*¹³

In 1859, Simpson sent Reese ahead of the expedition to look for another pass which, for some reason, he believed to be about five miles to the north. Reese either failed to find it or did not like the looks of it, and the expedition used Shortcut Pass to get over the Dugway Mountains.

We do not know the exact alignment of the route that the expedition followed as it ascended the eastern side of Dugway Pass, but it was probably not the route that is used by today's road. If you look about a hundred feet or so below today's road, you can see an abandoned roadbed. Even this old road may not have followed Simpson's trail, because it is almost certainly the road that was constructed six years after the expedition made its way over the pass. The records of the Utah territorial government show that in 1865



Camp 3-W. Simpson Springs, looking to the west from near the springs. The campsite was in the foreground.



=====
 MAY 5, 1859





The east approach to Dugway Pass, called Shortcut Pass by Simpson. Today's road is marked by a faint line that slants upward from right to left near the center of the photo. *"The mail-contractors have made a road, but it is so crooked and steep as to scarcely permit our wagons to get up it."*

the Overland Mail Company was granted the right to construct a toll road over Dugway Pass.¹⁴

After crossing the summit of the Dugway Mountains, the expedition dropped down the western slope and made a waterless camp at the first relatively flat area that they came to.

MAY 6, 1859

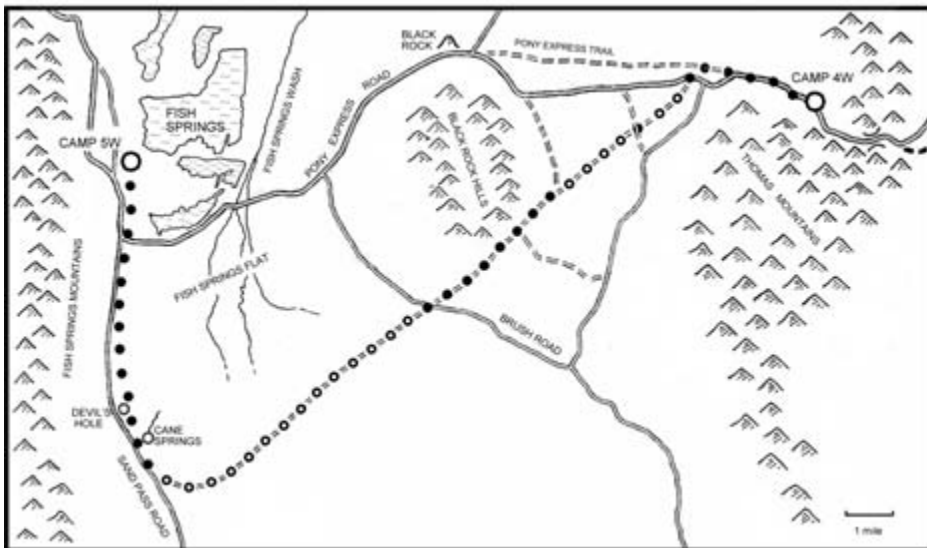
MAY 6, CAMP NO. 4, SHORT CUT PASS.—1.3 miles west of summit. The grass at this camp being very scant, and it being important to reach water as soon as possible, the expedition, under charge of Lieutenant Murry, left at twelve midnight on its onward march, myself remaining behind with a small party to look at the country by daylight. I with my party moved at twenty-five minutes after

*five.... The road we are following for one mile continues down the pass north of west, and then turns more southwardly, Thomas's range flanking us on our left, or to the east, and the desert on our right.*¹⁵

SIMPSON MADE a few errors in his mileage figures for this day's travel. Although the distance figures that Simpson included in his report were usually quite accurate, errors did creep in occasionally. It is doubtful that these mistakes were attributable to the odometers, but probably came from misreading, miscalculations, misunderstandings, or mistakes in copying the numbers. During the course of my research, whenever I ran into distance figures that seemed to be wrong, I always spent a lot of time attempting to figure out where and why the error had



Camp 4-W. This campsite was at the first level area to be found west of Dugway Pass. *“Encamp west of summit of pass, where there is little or no grass, and no water.”*



MAY 6, 1859



been made. In many cases I discovered that the confusion was mine, but there were a number of instances when I ultimately had to conclude that Simpson, or possibly one of his assistants, had simply gotten it wrong. The fact that the wagons that were equipped with the odometers were traveling well ahead of Simpson during this day's journey may have contributed to the errors. Whatever the reason, the mileage figures simply do not fit with the terrain that he described. The first error came when he indicated that he followed the road for one mile and then turned "more southwardly." He did begin to turn toward the west at one mile from camp, so he might have been mistaken in the direction rather than the distance. Whichever it was, one thing that is certain is that the steeply rising slopes of the Thomas Mountains would have made it impossible to turn south until they had rounded the northern point of the mountain, and that did not occur until they were three miles from the camp. At this three-mile point, Simpson left the route that would later become the Pony Express Trail, and turned in a southwesterly direction into the little valley that lies between the Thomas Range on the east, and the Black Rock Hills on the west.

In 6 miles you enter Cedar Valley, made by Thomas's range on your left, and a short range [Black Rock Hills] on your right. Threading this, in 3 miles you emerge from it, and cross a valley 9 miles wide, which, on your right, is a salt-spring marsh and boggy, and therefore forces the road to the south, as indicated on the maps.¹⁶

Simpson's second error came when he indicated that he entered the valley at six miles. The most logical place to say that you are entering this valley would be at four miles from the campsite. At six miles from the camp, he would have been more than halfway across the little valley, rather than just entering it. He seems to have made another minor error when he said that he emerged from the valley at three miles from where he entered it. The place that would logically fit the description of emerging from the valley would be when he crossed the ridge that divides his "Cedar Valley" and Fish Spring Flat.

The actual distance from where he entered the valley to where he crossed this ridge is four and a half miles.

The final error that he made this day shows up in the Table of Distances, Altitudes, and Grades that appears in the appendix to the report. The entry that follows Camp 4-W reads "Foot of slope," and the distance from the camp is given as 12.6 miles. There is clearly something wrong with this. Either he got the distance wrong, or he mislabeled the point that he was describing. Throughout the journey, Simpson made numerous notations of the mileage at places that he referred to as "foot of slope" and "in the valley." I am quite certain that in this instance the entry should read "in the valley," rather than "foot of slope." When he was 12.6 miles from the camp, he would have been out in the flats, about two and a half miles from the base of the Black Rock Hills. The other possibility is that the distance figure should have been 10.6 rather than 12.6.

Since leaving the summit of the Dugway Mountains, the expedition had been following a trail that had been established by the Chorpenning mail company sometime between the previous October and May. Three months later, Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Times*, who was traveling in one of Chorpenning's mail coaches, said that on the way to Fish Springs, he passed by a "salt well" that was probably Devil's Hole.¹⁷ This shows that the stage was following the trail through Simpson's Cedar Valley. However, sometime during the next few months, this route was abandoned in favor of a route that circled around the northern end of the Black Rock Hills.

Slightly over a year after the Simpson expedition, on September 29, 1860, Sir Richard Burton's party decided to take the new route and ran into some serious difficulties. He described his experiences on this section of the trail as follows:

After roughly supping we set out, with a fine round moon high in the skies, to ascend the "Dugway Pass" by a rough dusty road winding round the shoulder of a hill, through which a fumara has burst its way....Arriving on the

summit we sat down, whilst our mules returned to help the baggage wagons....In honour of our good star which had preserved every hoof from accident we "liquored up" on that summit, and then began the descent.

Having reached the plain the road ran for eight miles over a broken surface,...then forked. The left, which is about six miles the longer of the two, must be taken after rains, and leads to the Devil's Hole.... We chose the shorter cut, and after eight miles rounded Mountain Point, the end of a dark brown butte falling into the plain. Opposite us and under the western hills, which were distant about two miles, lay the station, but we were compelled to double, for twelve miles, the intervening slough, which no horse can cross without being mired. The road hugged the foot of the hills at the edge of the saleratus basin.... We then fell into a saline, resembling freshly-fallen snow.... After ascending some sand-hills we halted for the party to form up in case of accident, and Mr. Kennedy proceeded to inspect whilst we prepared for the worst part of the stage—the sloughs.... The tule, the bayonet-grass, and the tall rushes enable animals to pass safely over the deep slushy mud, but when the vegetation is well trodden down, horses are in danger of being permanently mired.... Beyond the sloughs we ascended a bench, and traveled on an improved road.¹⁸

JULY 1999

During my first major trip along Simpson's Route, I turned off Pony Express Road just after passing the northern end of the Thomas Range. At this time, I was quite uncertain about the actual location of the trail, but I soon found that wherever it was, I would not be able to follow it in my SUV. Finding a seldom-used two-track road that headed directly south along the western base of the Thomas Mountains, I followed it for about four and a half miles and came to another one that headed west. By following that track, I was able to intersect Simpson's route near the southeast corner of the Black Rock Hills. From that point Simpson's trail follows a two-track that leads in a southwesterly direction to the eastern edge of Fish Springs Flat.

JULY 2001

After some further study of the wording of the report and some maps of the area, I decided to attempt to follow the trail across the little valley on foot. I enlisted the help of Louis Dunyon, my father-in-law, and we drove to the area and got onto the narrow two-track that heads south along the east side of the valley. At about two miles south of Pony Express Road, I got out of the vehicle and started walking across the valley in a southwesterly direction. Lou continued to follow the two-track until he came to the southwest corner of the valley, where he stopped and waited for me. I saw no indication of a trail during this hike, and further research has shown that the route I had followed that day was to the south of Simpson's trail. Since that time, by studying aerial photos, I have located an abandoned road that crosses the valley in an almost straight line between the point that Simpson entered it and the place where he emerged from it.

MAY 2006

Returning to the little valley, I hiked across it again, this time following the old road that I had found on the photos. By using the latitude and longitude tools that are available on the Google Earth program, I was able to determine a number of checkpoints along the route. Then by programming these checkpoints into my GPS receiver, I was able to go to each of them with an accuracy of a few feet. This time I knew exactly where the trail was, and had no trouble in following it across the valley. Although essentially abandoned for somewhere around one hundred and forty-six years, the trail can still be seen almost all of the way. I did come across a few short sections where it has become very faint, but as I continued to walk, it would soon become visible again.

After crossing the valley, the trail dropped down the southern slope of the Black Rock Hills and came to the eastern edge of Fish Springs Flat. From here, the trail headed out into the flats in a southwesterly direction. I wanted to continue to follow the route across the flats, but was unable to find any kind of a road that would let me drive through this area.

JULY 2001

This was the first of many hikes that I would eventually make along the undrivable sections of the expedition's route. In preparation for this hike, I enlisted the help of Jay Banta, the manager of the Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, which is a few miles north of the area where I needed to walk. I parked my vehicle on the west side of Fish Spring Flat, near Cane Springs. Jay then gave me a ride to the east side of the flats, near the base of the Black Rock Hills, where I started hiking toward the west.

During my hike across Fish Spring Flat, I found nothing that would even suggest a trail or wagon tracks, and I was satisfied that whatever trail had been here, had long since disappeared. I was wrong about this, and it took me a long time to learn that the trail is still there. When I first learned about the aerial photos on the Terraserver website, this was one of the first places I looked at. However, at that time, the photos of this particular area were of such poor quality that I was unable to see any evidence of a trail. Early in 2006, I decided to take another look and was pleased to find that the poor-quality photos had been replaced with better ones, and a trail could now be seen. It is quite faint, and almost disappears in some areas, but it can be seen, and when I measure along it, the distance between Camp 4-W and Camp 5-W matches the distance that Simpson listed in his report. I am convinced that the trail that can be seen in the new photos is Simpson's route. When I hiked across the flats in 2001, I had probably traveled almost parallel to the trail, but slightly to the north.

This valley crossed, the road takes a sharp turn to the right, and, running northwestwardly, skirts a range of highly-altered calcareous and slaty rocks on your left, and in 1.5 miles passes by Devil's Hole, and in 5.5 miles more reaches Fish Springs, where Lieutenant Murry and command are encamped. Whole journey, 25.3 miles.¹⁹

The natural well that is still known as Devil's Hole is found next to the road that runs along the eastern base of the Fish Springs Range. It is about twelve feet in diameter, and the level of the water varies significantly. I have seen it when the

surface of the water was nearly at ground level, and at other times, it has been as much as six feet lower. William Lee described it as "a singular formation, being a perfect well about ten feet to the water and the water being twenty-eight feet deep and tasting like soap and water."²⁰ This pool's importance to Simpson's route is that it shows how far south the expedition had to go in order to avoid the boggy ground in the northern part of Fish Springs Flat.

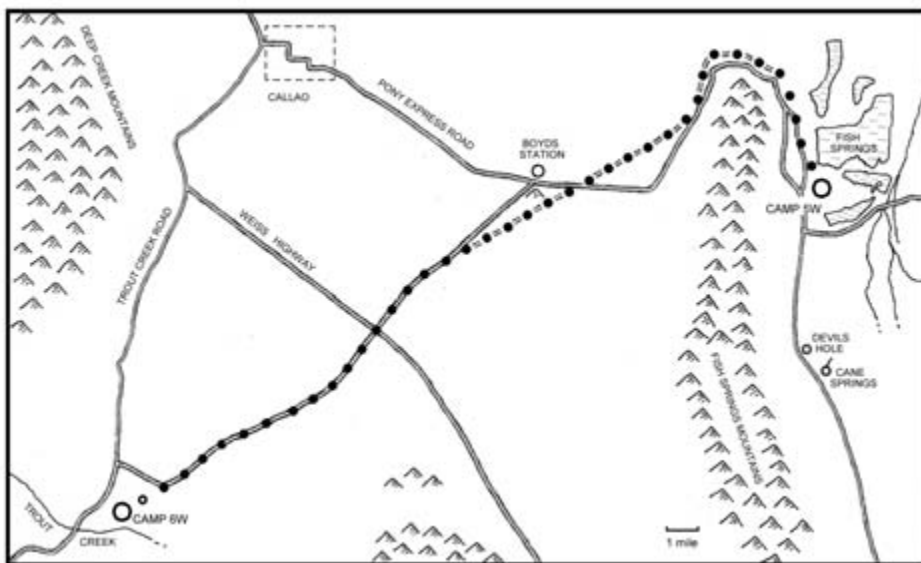
I had narrowed the probable location of the Fish Springs campsite down to about a half-mile area, but was still uncertain about the exact spot until I found William Lee's journal. The biggest problem I had been having was that Simpson's report gives three different figures for the distance they traveled that day. His incremental distances add up to exactly twenty-five miles, his end-of-day figure in the text was 25.3 miles, and the figure in the table of distances is 25.5 miles. When I read Lee's description of the day's journey, I found a clue that helped me get a lot closer to the true location.

Friday, May 6th. Marched until ten A.M., coming to camp at Warm Springs after marching twenty-five miles.... The water of Warm Springs is slightly tintured with sulphur and is pleasantly warm for bathing.²¹

This information at least told me that the campsite was near a pool of water that was large enough and deep enough for bathing. My first assumption was that this would narrow it down considerably. However, when I took a look at the map again, I found that there are no less than five springs within the half-mile area in question. Realizing that I needed more information, I contacted Jay Banta to see if any one of these springs would fit Lee's description any better than the others. He said that there are two pools that would fit the description quite well, Thomas Spring and South Spring. After visiting the area again and taking some more measurements, I have concluded that South Spring is the most likely candidate. By measuring along the trail, this spring is 4.9 miles from Devil's Hole; Simpson said it was five miles. Another factor is that South Spring is the first pool that the expedition would have



Camp 5-W. Located about a half mile southeast of the Fish Springs Wildlife Headquarters, this pool is called South Spring. It would have been the first spring that the expedition reached after crossing Fish Spring Flat.



MAY 7, 1859



come to after making their long and waterless trek that day. Why would they have gone any farther? The final factor is that South Spring turns out to be exactly six miles from the northern tip of the Fish Springs Mountain, which is the distance reported by Simpson the next day.

While camped at Fish Springs, Simpson talked to the Chorpenning employee who was in charge of the station. The mail-agent confirmed that it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to bring the wagons directly across the flat rather than making the loop to the south. The agent stated that this area would "scarcely allow animals with packs to cross." The next morning Reese came in and reported that he had just come directly across the flats, and he had "been obliged to unpack his animals to get over the marsh."²²

By 1913, when this northern route across the flats was adopted as a part of the Lincoln Highway, two bridges had been built across the main drainages of Fish Springs Wash,²³ but the road across the flats still presented serious challenges to automobile travel. Several road guides from the early automobile period noted the presence of a large sign on the east side of the flats, advising motorists that if they got stuck, they should build a large fire and the owner of the Fish Springs Ranch would bring a team of horses to pull them out.

It was at the south side of the Fish Springs Wildlife Refuge that Simpson's route and the route of the Lincoln Highway first came together, but the joining would be brief. Twelve miles farther west, at Boyd's Station, the routes would separate again and would not rejoin for another fifty miles.

During his westward trek, Simpson occasionally mentioned his plans to return by a route that would be some distance to the south. He made one such statement while camped at Fish Springs, when he reported that John Reese had been looking for water in the country to the south of Devil's Hole. That search had been unsuccessful, but an Indian they encountered at Fish Springs claimed to know that there was water in that area of the country. Upon hearing this, Simpson instructed Reese to take the Indian and look again. He then commented that

"if water is found there, I shall change the road accordingly on my return from Carson Valley."²⁴ Four days later Reese caught up with the expedition in Pleasant Valley and reported that they had found some water, but it was well beyond the area he had explored during his first scouting trip.

MAY 7, 1859

MAY 7, CAMP NO. 5, FISH SPRINGS.—*Took up march at 6 ¼ o'clock. In 3.5 miles pass Warm Spring and a mail-station. Soon after starting it commenced to rain, which softened the road at the outset so much as to cause the wagons, 6 miles from Fish Springs to stall occasionally in a distance of one-quarter of a mile. Detained an hour on this account.*²⁵

FROM THE FISH SPRINGS campsite, the expedition headed north along the eastern base of the Fish Springs Range. Their trail would have been along the edge of the flats, rather than up in the foothills where Pony Express Road is located. At six miles from camp, they would have reached the northwest point of the mountain.

*At this point, the road doubles the point of the range along which we have been traveling, and continues on the plain of the desert toward the Go-shoot or Tots-arrh Mountains [Deep Creek Range], meaning high mountain range.*²⁶

Leaving today's road about two miles south of the northwest tip of the mountain, Simpson's route cut across the flats in a southwesterly direction, passing Boyd's Station about a mile to the east. This section of Simpson's route became the route of the Overland Stage, the Pony Express Trail, and the Lincoln Highway. Later, a better road was built, which followed the base of the mountain for another three miles before turning west and heading straight across the flats, and the older road was abandoned. I drove this abandoned section in 1995 while exploring the Lincoln Highway.

The expedition was still following Chorpenning's mail route at this time, but about five or six months later, the mail route changed. The



The northern tip of the Fish Springs Mountains. *“At this point the road doubles the point of the range.”*

trail around the south end of the Deep Creek Mountains was dropped in favor of a new route that headed west from Boyd’s Station, to go through Callao and Ibapah.²⁷ When the Pony Express began operating in April 1860, it followed the new route, as did the Overland Stage and the Lincoln Highway. The Simpson expedition continued in a generally southwesterly direction, following Chorpennig’s original trail down the length of Snake Valley to the area of Trout Creek.

*After making a journey of 29.7 miles, and coming for the first time to grass, the mules beginning to give out, we were obliged about sundown to encamp without water, except that in our kegs. I however found water 2.5 miles ahead, to which we will move to-morrow.*²⁸

Simpson reported that for most of the day, the expedition had been heading toward the

“Go-shoot” or “Tots-arrh” mountains, and he noted that many of the peaks were covered with snow. He then added that about seventy miles from their position; “quartering to the left from our camp may be seen a towering one, which I call Union Peak, on account of its presenting itself in a doubled and connected form.”²⁹ It appears that Simpson considered the Deep Creek Mountains and the Snake Mountains to be one single mountain range, which he referred to as the “Go-shoot or Tots-arrh Mountains.” His Union Peak is today’s Wheeler Peak, which is a part of the Snake Range, and is actually about fifty-five miles southwest from Trout Creek.

Simpson does not give us much of a description of the area where the camp was located, and the only thing Lee had to say about it was that there was no water.³⁰ However, by measuring from the Fish Springs campsite, it appears that it was in a roadless area, about a mile northeast of Trout Creek.

AUGUST 2002

I drove to the Trout Creek area with the intention of hiking to the sites where I believed Camps 6-W and 7-W had been. Leaving my SUV next to the road about two miles northeast of Trout Creek, I began to follow the route that I thought the wagons may have used. Making my way through growths of unusually tall sagebrush and greasewood that were replaced occasionally by completely barren playas, I came to the site of Camp 6-W. After taking some photographs and GPS readings, I headed for Camp 7-W. A couple of years later, after making some additional measurements on the maps and studying aerial photos of the area, I decided that I had picked the wrong spot for Camp 6-W. The new site was about half a mile to the northwest, and I needed to make another short hike.

JULY 14, 2005

Returning to the Trout Creek area, I hiked to the spot that I now believed to be a more accurate location for Camp 6-W. This point turns out to be a lot closer to the main road, and is much easier to reach.

During the evening that the expedition spent at Camp 6-W, a Ute Indian, who was known as Black Hawk, came into the camp and visited with them for some time. In spite of the fact that Simpson had earlier stated that he had seen Chief Cho-kup near Lookout Pass and had talked to an Indian at Fish Springs, he made the comment that Black Hawk was the first Indian he had seen since leaving Camp Floyd. Throughout the remainder of the journey, he frequently mentioned the Indians that they encountered, describing at length their appearance, their living conditions, and their habits. At a time when the humane treatment of Indians was not a very popular concept, especially among career army officers, Simpson included the following observation in his official report:

I have made it a point to treat the Indians I meet kindly, making them small presents, which I trust will not be without their use in securing their friendly feelings and conduct. A great many of the difficulties our country has had with the Indians, according to my observations and experience, have grown out of the bad treatment they have received at

*the hands of insolent and cowardly men, who, not gifted with the bravery which is perfectly consistent with a kind and generous heart, have, when they thought they could do it with impunity, maltreated them; the consequence resulting that the very next body of whites they have met have not unfrequently been made to suffer the penalties which in this way they are almost always sure to inflict indiscriminately on parties, whether they deserve it or not.*³¹

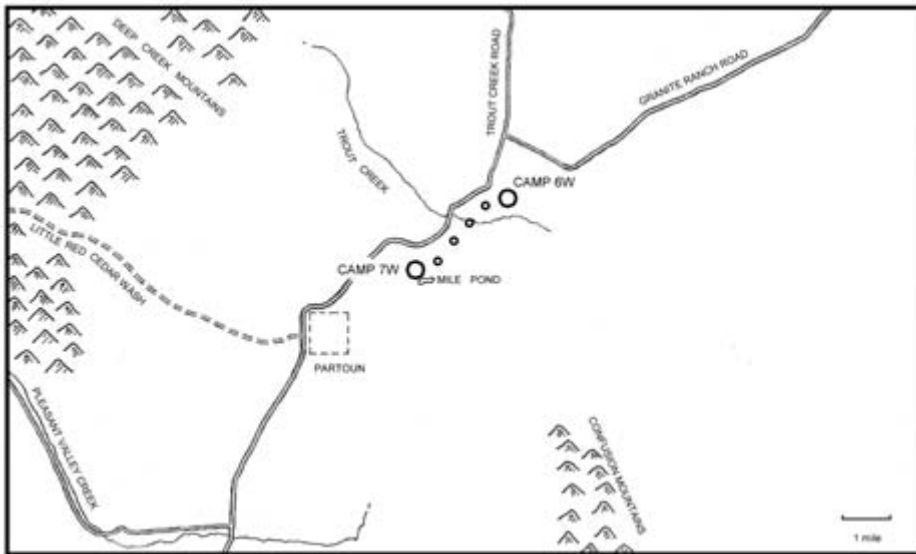
The members of the expedition experienced difficulties with Indians on only a single occasion. While they were in camp one afternoon, one of the cooks became irritated with a couple of Indians who were hovering around the food he was preparing. In an effort to persuade them to leave, the cook pointed to the revolver he was carrying at his side. The Indians immediately took the hint and departed in a huff, shooting an arrow into one of the expedition's animals as they were leaving. When questioned, the cook reluctantly admitted to what he had done, and Simpson promptly issued orders.

*I have given orders to the effect that if the like indiscreet act should be committed again the perpetrator would be held to a strict account for it, and should be punished to the extent of his crime. As I have before stated, my policy with the Indians has always been one, so far as it could be, of peace and good-will toward them; and I have never found anything but good resulting from it.*³²

Simpson wanted to maintain good relations with the Indians, but he was not above having a little fun with them. On one occasion, he allowed a few of them to attempt a mule ride. Their efforts met with little success, and Simpson noted that the mules were "so much frightened at their rabbit-skin dress as to cause them to run off with them."³³ Simpson was quite impressed with one Indian, who went by the name of Cho-kup and was the chief of a band of Shoshones. Simpson had first encountered him near Lookout Pass on May 3, when Cho-kup was traveling to Camp Floyd to meet with the Indian agent. Simpson not only named a pass in the Diamond Mountains for this chief, he also wrote a letter of introduction that vouched for his character.³⁴



Camp 6-W. In the alkali flats at the foot of the Deep Creek Mountains, about a mile and a half northeast of Trout Creek: *“the mules beginning to give out, we were obliged about sundown to encamp without water.”*



MAY 8, 1859



On the other hand, Simpson showed that he could get a little irritated with some of the Indians' behavior. On one occasion, he admitted that he found some of the natives to be "a little impudent," and he had reacted by giving "some significant evidences of displeasure."³⁵ Simpson was also a practical man, and his goodwill had certain limits. He mentioned once that he did not allow any Indians, other than those attached to the party, to stay overnight in the expedition's camps. He did make one exception to this policy during the return trip. This involved a crippled Indian named Quah-not, who led them to a much-needed spring. In his appreciation for this Indian's help, Simpson named the spot Good Indian Spring. There will be more about this experience later.

MAY 8, 1859

MAY 8, CAMP NO. 6, GREAT SALT LAKE DESERT.—*Moved at half past five. In one mile, pass on our left an alkaline spring. Water not drinkable. In 1.2 miles more, come to a sulphur spring, where there is an abundance of water and grass, and where we encamped. It being Sunday and the animals and party requiring rest, we have only made this short march of 2.5 miles to get feed and water. The water, though sulphurous, is quite palatable to man and beast.*³⁶

THIS CAMPSITE WAS LOCATED about a mile south and slightly west of Trout Creek. When Simpson traveled through this area, the vegetation was low-growing greasewood, mixed with some sagebrush, and some grassy areas near what little water existed. Today the entire area is overgrown with Russian olive trees. During my visit to this area in 2002, I hiked along what I then felt was the expedition's route between the two campsites. Along the way, I looked for the small alkaline spring that Simpson mentioned, but found no sign of it. As I approached the site of Camp 7-W, I made my way through the thick growth of thorny trees and came to a grassy clearing. Maps of the area show this clearing as a small lake called Mile Pond. I found that the clearing was filled with grass, and not a drop of water was to be seen, clearly a result of the

several-year drought that the Great Basin region had been experiencing during the time that I was traveling Simpson's trail. During my explorations, I came to many places where Simpson reported the existence of water, but I found them to be completely dry. Although there was no water in Mile Pond when I was there, the presence of the Russian olive trees is a clear indication that there is a certain amount of sub-surface moisture in this area.

MAY 9, 1859

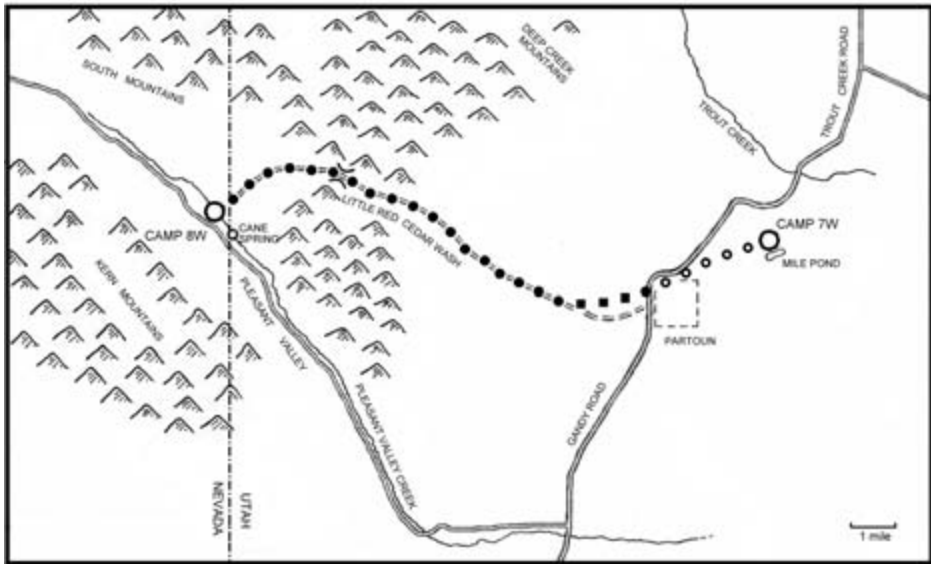
MAY 9, CAMP NO. 7, SULPHUR SPRING.—*Resumed march at 25 minutes of 6, and shaped our course south of west for a wide pass through the Go-shoot Mountains [Deep Creek Range], which we commence ascending in 4.5 miles.*³⁷

HEADING SLIGHTLY SOUTH-OF-WEST from the campsite, the expedition would have crossed today's road just north of the small community of Partoun. After traveling four and a half miles from the campsite, they came to the lower end of Little Red Cedar Wash. This usually dry streambed comes out of a shallow canyon about five miles north of the southern tip of the Deep Creek Mountains. A fairly common misconception is that Chorpenning's mail route and the Simpson trail went all the way around the south end of the Deep Creek Mountains. The trail did get fairly close to the southernmost tip of the mountains, but not quite. Simpson's description of the route makes it clear that he was following Chorpenning's route when he used Little Red Cedar Wash as a shortcut to Pleasant Valley.

In 6 miles more you reach the east summit, by a tolerable grade, and thence, in 2.5 miles, descend, by a good grade, to Pleasant Valley, where we find an abundance of grass and plenty of water. A mile more brought us to a spring, the copious source of the stream which runs eastwardly through the valley into a large valley, which I call Crosman Valley [Snake Valley], after Lieut. Col. George H. Crosman, deputy quartermaster-general and chief of the quartermaster's department in the Military Department of Utah. This stream (Pleasant Valley Creek) has a width of 12 feet, is 5 feet in depth, of



Camp 7-W. On the edge of what the maps show as Mile "Pond": "In 1.2 miles more, come to a sulphur spring, where there is an abundance of water and grass." For at least the last ten years, this area has been a grass-covered clearing, surrounded by a dense growth of Russian olive trees.



MAY 9, 1859



*sandy bottom, and has a rapid current. Near the spring we encamp after a march of 13.4 miles. At this point is a mail-station, a log house. The mail company has done a great deal of work in the pass we have just come through, in removing rocks, filling up gullies, and making side cuts.*³⁸

During my first extensive trip along Simpson's route in 1999, I drove to Partoun and then started up the narrow two-track trail that goes over the pass. It soon became evident that it was going to take much more time than I wanted to spend that day, so I returned to the main road, and got into Pleasant Valley by driving around the southern point of the Deep Creek Mountains.

SEPTEMBER 2000

Returning to the Snake Valley area, I headed west from Partoun and drove all the way up Little Red Cedar Wash and down the west side of the ridge into Pleasant Valley. The trail was very faint, and for about a mile on each side of the summit, I found it necessary to use four-wheel drive. At the bottom of the western slope, I had to go through three gates and then found myself in the backyard of a ranch house. I stopped there and knocked on the door to get permission to drive through the

yard. The rancher, whose name is Bill Henroid, and I were soon engaged in a rather lengthy conversation about the history of Pleasant Valley. He had never heard of James Simpson, but he knew all about the trail over the pass and told me that he had traveled it several times.

The spring near which the expedition camped that night is located next to the creek, about a mile and a half northwest of the Henroid ranch and Utah-Nevada state line. There is a bridge across the creek today, but a locked gate prevents access to the road that crosses the creek and heads eastward into the foothills of the Deep Creek Mountains.

Horace Greeley was quite impressed with Pleasant Valley. He was particularly pleased to find some good water to drink.

*We drove rapidly down its [the mountain's] western declivity, and, a little after 5, P.M., reached our next station in "Pleasant Valley," a broad ravine, which descends to the south-west. Here we found water—bright, sweet, pure, sparkling, leaping water—the first water fit to drink that we had reached in a hundred miles; if Simpson's Spring ever dries up, the distance will then be at least a hundred and twenty.*³⁹