Route for the Overland Stage
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Published by Utah State University Press

Petersen, Jesse G.
Route for the Overland Stage: James H. Simpson's 1859 Trail Across the Great Basin.
Utah State University Press, 2008.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9419.

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Roberts Creek to Middlegate

Camp 19-W. The campsite was near the buildings of the Roberts Creek Ranch. “This evening I ascended, with Messrs. Jagiello and McCarthy, the high peak to the northeast of our camp.”

MAY 23, 1859
Roberts Creek to Middlegate

May 23, Camp No. 19, She-o-wi-te, or Willow Creek.—The guide reports two passes, one north of west, and the other west of south. Neither is in the most direct line of approach to our ultimate point, but the latter is much the nearer of the two and therefore we take it, bearing off, however, still more southwardly in order to certainly reach water within a reasonable distance. (We found, however, the next day that we could have taken a more direct course (southwest,) as laid down on the map, and have saved about 10 miles. Wagons should take this latter course, which they will find practicable.)¹

The expedition’s direction of travel this day illustrates how the need for water influenced Simpson’s decisions about the route. Apparently unaware that there was a good source of water to their southwest, they headed almost due south toward a place where the guide knew they would find a running stream. This was one of a few instances in which Simpson later decided that they had gone the wrong way. A glance at the map will show that if they had traveled southwest from the camp on Robert’s Creek, they could have gone directly to the Dry Creek area, which is where they ended up three days later.

The Chorpenning company, and then the Pony Express and the Overland Stage, took this southwest route when their routes were established through this area, and so did Burton’s party, traveling in their ambulance-style coach. In early 1860, Chorpenning established a stage station at Dry Creek, on the western edge of the valley. A year later, Russell, Majors, and Waddell installed an Overland Stage station at Grubb’s Flat, about halfway between Roberts Creek and Dry Creek.²

August 2001

During my first visit to the Roberts Creek area in 1999, I had been very uncertain about where Simpson had gone after leaving the campsite. As a result, when I left the ranch, I followed the well-marked Pony Express Trail, but I did not follow it all the way to Dry Creek. After about eleven miles, I came to Three-Bars Road, where I turned south to US 50. A couple of years later in August 2001, I was ready to make another attempt to find the expedition’s trail between Camps 19-W and 20-W. By this time, I had figured out that the expedition had headed nearly straight south from the campsite, and on my USGS 30 × 60 minute map, I had located a narrow road that seemed to go in the right direction. The map also showed that I could get to this road by leaving the Roberts Creek Road at a point about two miles south of the ranch, and heading west. It looked like this ranch road would lead to the two-track that followed Simpson’s route south to US 50. This time I was successful, and I was able to follow the expedition’s route across Kobeh Valley.

October 2003

By cutting into the trail from the east in 2001, I had missed the two-mile section of the trail immediately south of Roberts Creek Ranch, so I returned to the spot where I had intersected the trail during that trip. The maps that I had been relying on did not show any trail or road leading from that point to the ranch buildings, so I was prepared to make a hike out of it. Nancy was with me on this trip, and was planning to wait for me in the SUV while I walked to the ranch and back. I climbed over the fence that follows the north side of the access road, and started making my way through the sagebrush toward the ranch. In less than a hundred yards, I came to an old road that seemed to be going where I wanted to go. I immediately turned around and followed the road until I came back to the fence, just a few yards from where we had parked. There is a heavy growth of unusually tall sagebrush in this area, and I had failed to notice the road where it came to the fence. Finding an unlocked gate at this point, I was able to open it and follow the old road all the way to the ranch house. Although we were not on the expedition’s trail, I was quite sure that it was just a few yards to the east, on the far side of the streambed. When Nancy and I reached the deserted ranch buildings, a pickup truck pulled up and stopped. This was when we met Jim Esqueviara, the manager of the ranch. He was friendly enough, but wanted to know what we were doing. I told him about my project and we spent some time in a very enjoyable and enlightening conversation. A
descendent of a Basque sheep ranching family, Esqueviara has spent his entire life in this area. He is quite familiar with the Pony Express Trail through this valley, and always assists the Pony Express Association with their annual re-rides as they come through the ranch. He showed us where he believes the Pony Express station had been located, which is just a few yards north of the ranch house. He also showed us his collection of old horse and ox shoes that he has found near the old station site.

About 4 miles farther cross a wash or creek [Coils Creek] running southeast, the bed of which is 12 feet wide, and which at times must void a great deal of water, though at present it only exists in pools. Bunch-grass along it, but too alkaline for use. Two miles farther, pass, on our right, about a mile off, a mound, in which are some warm springs, one of them so warm as scarcely to admit the hand. The mound is the product of the springs, and is a calcareous tufa. Three and a half miles more brought us to a small spring [Clover Spring], which I call after Private Shelton, of the dragoons, who found it… No grass of any account about the spring, and not a sufficient quantity of water for the animals. They are consequently driven about 1.5 miles to the mountain slopes [Twin Spring Hills]. Day’s travel, 17.5 miles.3

During the first couple of miles of this day’s journey, the expedition was heading just slightly west of south, paralleling Roberts Creek, which would have been a few yards to the west. About two miles south of the ranch house, they came to a place where the streambed was no longer in a deep wash, and at this point they probably crossed to the west side. There would have been no water to contend with at this point, because Simpson had earlier mentioned that the creek sank about a mile below the campsite. At eight miles from camp, they came to a small, willow-lined stream, and traveled parallel to it for a while. This must have been Roberts Creek again. From the campsite, Roberts Creek runs almost due south for nearly eight miles, then turns toward the west for a short distance, then bends to the south again and runs parallel to the trail for a while before emptying into Coils Creek.

After traveling about twelve miles, they reached Coils Creek, which Simpson described as both a wash and a creek, with only a few pools of standing water, which is a good description of what I saw when I came to it. At that point, the expedition was about three miles to the west of a very large knoll that is known as Lone Mountain today, but is labeled as Mt. Lowry on Simpson’s map. Continuing south, they passed about a half mile to the east of what is shown on today’s maps as Hot Springs. After another two and a half miles, they crossed the future route of the Lincoln Highway and today’s US 50.

In his description of the return trip, Simpson mentioned that they crossed this day’s trail at a point about two miles east of a pair of springs he named Twin Springs. Modern maps show a Twin Springs just north of US 50, about nine miles west of Lone Mountain. If we can assume that these are the springs that Simpson was talking about, it gives us a good indication of the point where the routes crossed each other, and also the points where the outbound and return routes crossed US 50.

Simpson indicated that it was 17.5 miles from the camp on Robert’s Creek to the small spring where they set up camp for the night. He called it Shelton Spring, but I am quite certain that it is the spring that is labeled as Clover Spring on modern maps. Although the USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle shows a road leading from US 50 to Clover Spring, that road has been fenced off and abandoned, and I have been unable to drive to this campsite.

August 2000

I parked on the side of US 50 and hiked south until I found what I thought was Simpson’s Shelton’s Spring. I could tell that there had once been some water here, but it was now totally dry and had the appearance of having been so for a long time. From this dry spring, I headed west until I came to a fairly well-traveled road that skirts the eastern base of Twin Springs Hills. I followed this road back to US 50 and my SUV.

Back home, after some additional study of my maps of this area, and after taking some more measurements of the distances involved, it
Camp 20-W. Clover Spring, in the southern part of Kobeh Valley. “Three and a half miles more brought us to a small spring, which I call after Private Shelton, of the dragoons, who found it.”

May 24, 1859
became apparent that I had been at the wrong spring. This hike had been made before I started using GPS and, simply put, I had been lost. The route that I had followed had taken me too far to the east and then too far to the south. I was able to determine that the dry spring I had found was actually Shamrock Spring, which is about a half mile south of Clover Spring, which was where I had wanted to go.

**October 2003**

I returned to the Kobeh Valley area to make another attempt to find Clover Spring. I was now equipped with a GPS receiver, and with its help I was able to go directly to the correct site, where I found a couple small pools of water, each of them about ten to twelve feet in diameter and a couple feet deep.

The slopes to which the animals were driven during the evening that the expedition was camped at Clover Spring must have been on the northeast side of Twin Spring Hills, which are about two miles to the southwest.

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**May 24, 1859**

**May 24, Camp No. 20, Shelton's Spring.**—In consequence of our having made a longer march yesterday than the guide thought we should, our to-day's travel will be only about 7 miles. Our course lay south of west, through a pass at the foot of Antelope Mountain [Monitor Mountain], and continues over the foot-hills on the north side of the same, to a rushing stream [Willow Creek], 3 feet wide and 1 deep, where, at 9.15 A.M., we encamp, in good grass and abundant cedar timber. This stream, which the Diggers call Wonst-in-dam-me (Antelope) Creek, coming from a high mountain, is doubtless constant, and, indeed, the Indians so represent it…. Colonel Cooper’s Peak, on account of its cone-like shape and isolated position, has been all day a very conspicuous object. Journey 7 miles.

When they started out on the morning of May 24, the expedition headed in a southwest-erly direction, and after about two and a half miles, they began climbing toward a low pass in the Twin Spring Hills. After another mile, they crossed the summit of the pass and turned more toward the west. About two miles from the summit, they reached a spot that they would return to during the eastbound journey. From this point at the western base of the Twin Spring Hills, the return trail would leave the outbound trail and veer to the north. It was the return route that would later be used by the early Lincoln Highway. During the return journey, Simpson indicated that this junction of the trails was 1.6 miles east of the campsite on Willow Creek. It is doubtful that the outbound trail between the summit of the Twin Springs Hills and this point was ever used by wheeled vehicles again.

**May 2003**

Leaving US 50 near Twin Springs, I drove south on a fairly well-traveled dirt road that skirts the eastern base of the Twin Springs Hills. About two miles south of the highway, at the point where I believe that Simpson’s route would have crossed this road, I found a seldom-used two-track heading in a southwesterly direction toward the pass. I am certain that this two-track follows the route that the expedition used to cross the Twin Springs Hills. Turning onto this trail, I was able to drive to within about a quarter mile of the summit of the ridge. From there I hiked across the summit and down the western slope. When I reached the spot where the westbound trail intersects with the expedition’s return route, I turned around and headed back across the pass.

At three and a half miles from the summit, the expedition reached Willow Creek, where they probably crossed to the west bank of the stream and set up camp in a small meadow. During the days of the Lincoln Highway, this spot was known as “The Willows.” It is now the Willow Creek Ranch.

There is a minor, but intriguing, mystery connected with this place. In my meager collection of old road maps, I have a couple of Nevada maps that were published in the 1940s, which show this spot as “Willows Station.” The unanswered question is, why was it called a station? In this area of the country, the term “station” is historically associated with the Pony Express, a stagecoach line, or the telegraph line, but I have
found no historical evidence that would indicate that any of these ever came to the Willow Creek Ranch.

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**May 25, 1859**

**May 25, Camp No. 21, Wons-in-dam-me or Antelope Creek.**—Course westwardly, over a shoot or branch of Kobah Valley. In 4.3 miles cross Saw-wid Creek [Kelly Creek], a rapid stream, 3 feet wide and 1 deep, which comes from the Antelope Mountains [Monitor Mountain], on our left, and sinks 500 yards below our crossing…. Colonel Cooper’s Peak still conspicuous…. At 12 m. reach foot of range, on west side of valley, after a journey of 13.7 miles, and encamp on a small creek, which I call Clarke’s Creek, after John Clarke, one of the men…. this stream, or one to the north of it, can and ought to be struck directly by wagons from Camp No. 19, and thus some 10 miles saved.6

When they left the Willow Creek campsite, the expedition followed what is now a fairly well-traveled dirt road for 1.3 miles, where they reached the normally dry wash that comes from Jackrabbit Spring. Simpson did not say anything about this particular spot in his account of the westbound journey, but during the return trip, when they followed a different route to reach this point, he indicated that it was at this spot that they rejoined their outbound trail.7

Simpson’s map shows that from the junction of the two trails, the westbound route followed a straight line in a slightly north-of-west direction. Once I had determined the locations of this junction and the next campsite, all I had to do was draw a straight line across the valley. None of the modern maps that I have been able to study show any indication of a road or trail along this alignment. This did not surprise me, because I doubted that anyone had ever followed the expedition’s westbound route across this valley. However, I later discovered something that caused me to change my mind about this. I was examining some aerial photos of this area when I noticed some faint indications of a trail that seemed to follow the line that I had plotted across the valley. This long-abandoned trail shows up quite well in the area between Jackrabbit Spring and Belmont Road. West of Belmont Road, it shows up occasionally. In the area north of US 50, it is not visible at all.

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**July 2005**

Nancy and I drove to the Willow Creek Ranch, and then turned west on Simpson’s trail until we came to the spot below Jackrabbit’s trail where the outbound route leaves the main road. Using my GPS receiver, I was soon able to find some of the traces of the old two-track that I had been able to see on the aerial photos. I then spent several hours following the old trail on foot. Due to the appearance of this old trail, I am convinced that not only was it Simpson’s route, but it had also been used by many other wagons before being abandoned.

Simpson reported that after crossing this valley, they camped on a small stream, which he named Clarke’s Creek. When I first began to study this section of the route, I assumed that this stream was Dry Creek, which flows eastward out of the Simpson Park Mountains. The maps do show other streambeds or drainages in this area, but Dry Creek is the only one that is significant enough to have a name printed on the maps. Then, one day, as I was re-reading Simpson’s description of the campsite, I noticed a statement about the existence of a second stream in this area. As he was describing the area where they were camped, Simpson said: “As I have before remarked, this stream, or one to the north of it, can and ought to be struck directly by wagons from Camp No. 19” (emphasis added).8 It is quite certain that when Simpson said “this stream,” he was talking about the stream on which they were camped. The phrase “or one to the north of it” has to mean that there was a stream somewhere to the north of the camp. This sent me back to the maps to look for any indication of a stream somewhere to the north of Dry Creek. I found nothing, I then noticed that about a half mile to the south of Dry Creek, there is an unnamed streambed that runs roughly parallel to Dry Creek for some distance, then empties into it about a mile east of the road that leads to the Dry Creek area. I began to wonder if this smaller stream could have been Simpson’s Clarke’s Creek. I then made a measurement from the Willow Creek campsite,
Camps 21-W and 14-E. Located at today’s Willow Creek Ranch: “[traveled] over the foot-hills to a rushing stream, where we encamp, in good grass and abundant cedar timber.”

May 25, 1859
and I found that the trail would have reached this other stream right at the eastern base of the Simpson Park Mountains. This would agree with Simpson’s statement that the camp was at “the foot of range, on west side of valley.” When I measured from this point to Hickison Summit, I found that the distance was very close to the four miles indicated by Simpson. I was able to use Hickison Summit as a reliable reference point because in this area, it is the only practical way to cross the ridge of the Toquima Mountains, which the expedition did the next day.

**June 2004**

At this time, I was still uncertain about the site of Camp 22-W, still thinking that it was somewhere on Dry Creek. Nancy and I left US 50 near the eastern base of Hickison Summit, and followed a two-track road that leads north to the Dry Creek area. It later became evident to me that the expedition had followed this route on their way to Hickison Summit, but being unaware of it at the time, we drove right past the actual campsite without knowing it. When we reached Dry Creek, we got onto the Pony Express Trail, which we followed to the east, stopping occasionally to look for possible campsites along the streambed.

**June 2005**

A year after our 2004 trip, and after I had figured out that the unnamed stream was Clarke’s Creek, Nancy and I returned to the Dry Creek area. I parked on the side of the well-traveled road that leads from US 50 to Dry Creek, and hiked to the west along the south bank of what I believe is Clarke’s Creek. After reaching the site of the camp, which is right on the two-track that we had driven the previous year, I took some photos and GPS readings, and then returned to the car. The streambed was dry that day, but I could see that there had been a good-sized stream flowing through it fairly recently, probably within the previous week or two.

While camped on Clarke’s Creek, the expedition was thirty miles southwest of their camp on Roberts Creek. Since leaving that camp, they had traveled for three days and had covered thirty-eight miles. Simpson commented that future travelers should come directly from Roberts Creek to Clarke’s Creek. A few months later, when Chorpenning’s employees laid out their mail route, they took Simpson’s advice and did just that, establishing a mail-station on Dry Creek, about two miles northeast of the expedition’s campsite. A short time later, when Russell, Majors, and Waddell took over Chorpenning’s contract, they sent the Pony Express riders along the same route. Heading west from Dry Creek, the mail riders took a route that went almost directly west through the Simpson Park Mountains, going past the southern base of Eagle Butte. This route proved to be too steep and rugged for the Overland mail coaches, and they headed south to follow Simpson’s trail across Hickison Summit.

In October 11, 1860, Richard Burton’s party, in their makeshift coaches, left their camp on Roberts Creek and followed the Pony Express route to Dry Creek.

At 6 A.M. we entered the ambulance, and followed a good road across the remains of the long broad Sheawit Valley. After twelve miles we came upon a water surrounded by willows [probably Rutabaga or Coils Creek], with dwarf artemisia beyond; it grows better on the benches, where the subsoil is damper, than in the bottoms…. Resuming our way, after three miles we reached some wells [probably Grubbs Well] whose alkaline waters chap the skin. Twenty miles further led to the west end of the Sheawit Valley, where we found the station on a grassy bench at the foot of low rolling hills. It was a mere shell, with a substantial stone corral behind, and the inmates were speculating upon the possibility of roofing themselves in before the winter. Water is found in tolerable quantities below the station, but the place deserved its name, “Dry Creek.”

The question of where the stage road went after leaving Dry Creek is answered by Burton as he describes his travels during the following day.

Shortly after 8 A.M. we were afield, hastening to finish the long divide that separates Roberts’ Creek Valley from its western neighbour, which, as yet unchristened, is known to the b’hoys as Smokey Valley. The road wound in the shape of the letter U round the impassable part of the ridge.
Camp 22-W. About a mile south of Dry Creek Ranch in the north end of Monitor Valley, the narrow road goes through the usually dry streambed that is marked by the juniper trees: "reach foot of range, and encamp on a small creek, which I call Clarke's Creek."

May 26, 1859
A route that heads south from Dry Creek, over Hickison Summit, around Cape Horn, and then northwest across Big Smoky Valley does indeed make the shape of the letter U. John Townley’s Pony Express Guidebook includes a map that clearly shows the stage road following this route, and a larger map includes the following note: “Cape Horn ‘dogleg’ laid out in June, 1861 for Overland Stage.” It would not have taken much to lay it out; Simpson’s track would have still been clearly visible just two years after the expedition traveled this route.

The Eagle Butte route was a good one for Chorpenning’s mules and the pony riders that came later, but emigrant George Harter’s experience in 1864 shows that taking wagons west from Dry Creek was not a good idea. Harter’s journal does not explain why they decided to go past Eagle Butte, but he does give a vivid description of the problems they encountered.

Next day drove nineteen miles over a level desert and camped at Dry creek. Poor feed. Here we took Fools cutoff, which is all the term implies. Traveled four miles up a steep and rough mountain…. Reached the summit at noon, turned the stock loose on good grass. After dinner hitched the wheel animals to the wagon and started down. After going a little ways we cut down a good sized pine tree and chained it behind on the wagon, and drove down about a mile to a spring and camped.12

It is unlikely that very many wagons ever used this route.

May 26, 1859

May 26, Camp No. 22.—Skirt the foot of the Pah-re-ah Mountains [Simpson Park Mountains]; course, southwardly; the pass immediately back or west of camp, which would shorten the route considerably, not being practicable for wagons, though pack-animals can use it.13

When Simpson mentioned the pass west of the camp, he was talking about the Eagle Butte route, and, as George Harter later learned, it was definitely not a practical route for wagons.

In 2 miles commence turning gradually westward, and in 2 miles farther, up an easy wagon-grade, reach summit of pass [Hickison Summit]…. From this pass the Pe-er-re-ah (meaning Big or High) Mountain [Toiyabe Mountains] appears directly before us, some 12 miles off, trending north and south. The road down the west side of the Pah-re-ah range is carried on the ridge of the spur, which furnishes a passable grade, though that down the canion is not bad, and is entirely practicable for wagons without work though a little sidling.14

When the Lincoln Highway was established through this area in 1913, it followed a pre-existing road that crossed the Toquima Mountains about three miles south of Hickison Summit. In the mid-1920s, it was decided to move the highway to the north, and use Hickison Summit to cross this ridge. Immediately to the west of the summit, a rather shallow canyon extends to the southwest. A paved road runs along each side of the canyon. The one on the west is the now-abandoned Lincoln Highway. Today’s US 50 runs along the eastern slope of the canyon. Simpson said that the expedition could probably have followed the bottom of the canyon, but he decided to stay higher up on the ridge. The problem is, he did not say which ridge they followed. Was it on the eastern side or the western side of the canyon? Mileage measurements will not answer this question, because the distances along both possible routes are identical. Simply because the older automobile road is on the western side of the canyon, my first inclination was to consider that route first. During one of my trips to the area, I hiked the entire length of the western ridge. Not only did I fail to find any indication of any road or trail, I also ran into a couple of places that would have presented some serious difficulties for the wagons. Because of the roughness of the terrain along the western ridge, I have concluded that Simpson was probably talking about the eastern ridge. For the first mile or so, the trail must have been a short distance above US 50; after that, it probably followed the same alignment as the highway until it neared the bottom of the canyon.

After reaching, in 7 miles from summit of pass, the valley called Won-a-ho-nupe [Big Smoky
we turned northwest diagonally across it to the pass, through the Pe-er-re-ah Mountains [Toiyabe Mountains]. In 10 miles from summit of pass, through the Pah-re-ah range [Simpson Park Range], we came to a rapid creek (Won-a-ho-nupe) [another Willow Creek], 8 or 10 feet wide, 1½ deep, and running southwardly between steep sand-banks, 15 feet high. In 4 miles more cross this stream at mouth of cañon, and encamp one-fourth of a mile above on the stream, in good grass and where cedar abounds. Journey 18.2 miles.\footnote{15}

The southernmost tip of the Simpson Park Mountains is known as Cape Horn. US 50 goes through a road cut that is something like a hundred yards north of the tip. Approaching this point from the east, one can look to the north and see a dirt road crossing the ridge about a quarter of a mile from US 50. This was probably the stage road, but I do not believe that the expedition followed this route. It appears to me that this was a shortcut that was developed after the stage line began to operate. The Cape Horn Stage Station was located near the spot where this dirt road reaches the western base of the ridge. A pile of volcanic rocks marks this spot today. As the expedition approached Cape Horn, they were traveling in the flats a short distance south of US 50, and they passed by the southernmost tip of the ridge before turning to the north.

Traveling almost due north for another mile and three-quarters, they came to a stream that was flowing southward in a deep wash. Simpson said the Indian name for this stream was Won-a-ho-nupe, which means willows, and he gave it the name of Willow Creek. Although the upper part of this stream flows through Simpson Park Canyon, it has retained the name that Simpson gave it. The stage road and Simpson’s eastbound trail crossed this stream about two and a quarter miles north of Cape Horn, but during the westbound trip, the expedition remained on its east bank until they reached the mouth of Simpson Park Canyon. Crossing the stream at that point, they continued up the stream for another quarter mile and set up camp in a level area just north of Wes Parson’s ranch.

An entry in William Lee’s journal suggests the possibility that the expedition may have strayed some distance from the path that Simpson reported.

\textit{Thursday, May 26th. Marched 19¼ miles, but going about a mile and a quarter out of the way unnecessarily, it was considered eighteen miles. Saw several antelope to-day. We camped on a fine stream with plenty of wood and grass. Killed a rattlesnake in the tent.}\footnote{16}

A possible explanation for the extra distance that Lee reported would be that when the expedition reached Cape Horn, they may have continued toward the west for some distance before making the turn to the north. This would have taken them out into the flats of Big Smoky Valley, before they realized that the best route would be through Simpson Park Canyon. Since the path they had inadvertently followed would not be a part of the trail that Simpson was planning for future travelers, he would have eliminated it from the official report. This would also explain the mile and a quarter difference between the mileage that Simpson reported in the text, which was 18.25 miles, and the mileage that appears in the table of distances, which is 17 miles. Lee usually reported the distance traveled each day, but his figures frequently varied a little from the figures that Simpson recorded.

\textbf{May 2003}

Today, no road or trail follows the expedition’s outbound route between Cape Horn and the mouth of Simpson Park Canyon. However, there is a dirt road that leads from US 50 to the site of the Cape Horn Stage Station, so I parked there and hiked in a northerly direction toward the canyon. After just a little less than two miles, I arrived at the spot where Simpson came to the stream that was flowing “between steep sand banks 15 feet high.” From there I followed the eastern bank of the streambed for another two miles before returning to my SUV.

\textbf{May 27, 1859}

\textbf{May 27, Camp No. 23, Won-a-ho-nupe Canyon. — Leave at 6.10 a.m. Course westwardly up the cañon…. The road is winding through the}
Camp 23-W. Near the mouth of Simpson Park Canyon. Willow Creek crosses the photo just behind the small juniper tree. "Cross this stream at mouth of cañon, and encamp one-fourth of a mile above on the stream, in good grass and where cedar abounds."

May 27, 1859
Location near the mouth of Simpson Park Canyon is a spot that is shown on some maps as the Givens Ranch, but is now owned by Charles “Wes” Parsons. I have visited with Wes on several occasions, and have found him to be friendly and personable, with an extensive knowledge of the history of this area. I initially met him during my first major trip along the route in 1999. I had crossed Big Smoky Valley on US 50 and turned north on a dirt road that leads to the lower end of Simpson Park Canyon. Nearing the mouth of the canyon, I came to a cluster of ranch buildings, and, as I drove into the yard, I was greeted by a half-dozen furiously barking dogs. Wes came out of one of the sheds and quieted the dogs a little. I introduced myself, and explained what I was doing. When I told him that I was hoping to follow Simpson’s trail through the canyon, he told me that the road was not drivable. He went on to explain that in the past, there had been a good road through the canyon, and it had been maintained periodically by the county. But that had all changed during the wet years of the early 1980s, when the road had been washed out in several places and has never been repaired. Parsons claims that the reason for this is that the Forest Service now controls the land, and their policies do not allow any heavy equipment to be brought into the canyon. At the end of our conversation, Wes gave me some directions on how I could circle around the mountain and get fairly close to the upper end of the canyon. I thanked him and went on my way, but I would be back, several times.

August 2001

My plan during this trip was to drive as far into the canyon as possible, and then hike the rest of the way to Simpson Park. After stopping to visit with Wes for a while, I drove into the canyon until I reached the place where the road now ends. From there, I hiked through the rest of the canyon and across Simpson’s Park. This trip took me past the locations of Camps 13-E, 23-W, 12-E, and 24-W. The problem was that at that time, I was still quite uncertain about the exact locations of these campsites, and I only had a general idea of where to look. When I reached Simpson Park, I found a small lake of perhaps four or five acres. During two subsequent visits to this area, I found no water at all, not even a trickle in the streambed. On my third return to Simpson Park, I found that there was a small amount of water in the lake. By this time I was confident that I had determined the exact locations of the campsites, and, now equipped with a GPS receiver, I made my way to each of them to take photos and obtain on-site GPS readings. During each of these return visits, I reached the park by driving to Grass Valley, and then walking along the Pony Express Trail from the northwest.

May 28, 1859

May 28, Camp No. 24, Simpson’s Park, Pe-er-re-ah range.—Renewed journey at 10 minutes to 6 A.M. Leave Valley of Won-a-ho-nupe Creek and strike west for Simpson’s Pass [Emigrant Pass], which we reach by a very easy ascent in 4.7 miles.... The pass at summit is as much as a mile wide, and both backward and forward the views are beautiful. The mountains near our camp of May 25 are very conspicuously back of us; and ahead of us, limiting Reese Valley, which we are approaching, is a low range trending generally north and south, and beyond them a very high range covered with snow, called by the Indians the Se-day-e or Lookout Mountains [Desatoya Mountains].

The pass that Simpson seems to have named for himself is now known as Emigrant Pass, and it crosses the Toiyabe Mountains a few miles to the north of the town of Austin. Although there are a couple of gates that must be opened and closed, there is a good dirt road across this pass and I have driven it in both directions with no trouble at all.

Descending from the summit of Simpson’s Pass, west side, by not a very steep but sandy grade, and along a short sidling place, near foot of
Camp 24-W. Simpson Park. The author found a small lake here in 1999, but it was gone a year later. “We come to a small lake and the cañon expands into a sort of park about 4 by 3 miles in area.”

May 28, 1859
ravin... in 2.8 miles reach Reese Valley, which, in 3.7 miles more, we traverse to Reese River; this we cross by ford, and in 2.6 miles more up the river, or southwardly, reach our camping ground. Day’s travel, 13.8 miles. Road generally good.

The “short, sidling place” must have been in the lower end of Midas Canyon. Today the road that comes from Emigrant Pass turns south at the upper end of this canyon, while Simpson’s trail continued to the west. This leaves a one-mile section of the trail that cannot be driven.

June 2004

Parking on the side of State Route 305, near a Pony Express Trail crossing marker, I hiked up Midas Canyon until I reached the dirt road that leads to Emigrant Pass. In the lower part of the canyon, I found faint traces of an old trail, but they gradually faded, and had disappeared entirely before I reached the upper road.

The key to figuring out the route across the Reese River Valley was determining where the expedition forded the river.

The text of Simpson’s report does not give much of a description of the spot where the crossing took place, so the only practical way to find it was to measure from the summit at Emigrant Pass, which can be identified with some accuracy. Simpson said it was 2.8 miles from the pass to the valley, and since there is only one feasible route going down the west slope of the mountain, the spot where they reached the valley can be accurately identified. The distance from that point to the ford was 3.7 miles, and Simpson’s map shows that this section of the trail followed a straight line. Thus, the next step was simply to swing an arc of 3.7 miles and see where it intersected the river.

About three miles north of US 50, on the east bank of the Reese River, a low, rounded knoll can be found. Just after flowing past this knoll, the river makes a sharp bend to the east, goes a few hundred yards, and then turns to the north again. When I struck my arc from the “in the valley” location, I found that it hit the river about halfway between the two bends. This would mean that the crossing was on the section of the river...
that flows to the east. As I was plotting my straight line across the eastern half of the valley, I found that it was very close to the route that the USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle identified as the Pony Express Trail.

Leaving the lower end of Midas Canyon, the expedition started across the Reese River Valley. At about two and a quarter miles, they passed the spot where a section of their return route would rejoin the outbound route after having split away from it for a short distance. From this spot, the Pony Express riders and the Overland Stage would veer to the southwest, following Simpson’s return trail. But during the westward journey, the expedition passed this spot and continued almost due west, directly toward the river, which was still about a mile and a half away. It is quite doubtful that anyone else ever followed this section of the outbound trail, and there are no visible indications of a trail through this area today.

**May 2003**

During previous trips to the Reese River Valley, I had made several unsuccessful efforts to find a way to drive into the area between Nevada State Route 305 and the river. Although the maps do show several different roads in this area, I was unable to find a way to get onto any of them. On this day, I drove north from US 50 on SR 305, parked on the side of the highway near the Pony Express crossing, and began hiking toward the river. After reaching the river near the expedition’s westbound ford, I turned to the southeast, and, in about a half mile, I came back to the Pony Express Trail, which at this point is following Simpson’s eastbound route. Turning back to the east, I followed the Pony Express Trail back to my SUV. During this hike, I had followed Simpson’s westbound trail from the mouth of Midas Canyon to the Reese River, and his eastbound trail from the river back to the mouth of the canyon.

After crossing the river near the low knoll, the expedition began following the west bank toward the south. After traveling another two and a half miles, they stopped and set up camp for the night. This campsite is just a little over a mile northeast of the bridge that US 50 uses to cross the river. Simpson noted that the Indian name for the river was Pang-que-o-whop-pe, which he understood to mean Fish Creek. This was one Native American name that he did not attempt to preserve. He gave it the name of Reese River, after the expedition’s guide, who claimed to have crossed it many miles to the north several years earlier when he was traveling with the Huntington party, which was scouting for Colonel Steptoe.

**July 2002**

I had been unable to find a way to drive to the site of Camp 25-W, so I parked near the US 50 bridge, and made my way to it on foot. From the campsite, I continued in a northeasterly direction, following Simpson’s outbound trail along the west bank of the river. At that time, I was still uncertain about the location of the river crossing, and I was looking for a likely spot. When I reached the low knoll, I used an old diversion dam to cross to the east side of the river, and then turned back to the south. I soon came to Simpson’s eastbound route, which I followed back to US 50. On the way back, I passed the place where the Pony Express, the Overland Stage, and the early Lincoln Highway had crossed the river. There is no bridge at this point now, but I did see some large rocks on both banks that probably served as abutments for a bridge.

**May 29, 1859**

May 29, Camp No. 25, Reese River.—Moved at 5 minutes to 6 a.m. Course southwestwardly, to a depression or pass [Smith Creek Summit] of the low range bounding Reese Valley on its west side, which we reach by an easy grade in 13.5 miles.\(^20\)

When the expedition left camp on the morning of May 29, they continued upstream along the west bank, staying fairly close to the river. After just a little less than a mile, they passed the spot where the Pony Express Trail, the Overland Stage, and the early Lincoln Highway would cross the river. From this crossing, the Pony Express Trail and the stage road left the river and continued west for about a mile before turning south. The Lincoln Highway continued straight west. Simpson’s map seems to show that the expedition
Camp 25-W. On the west bank of Reese River, which is a few yards to the right of the photo. This spot is about a mile northeast of where the river is crossed by US Highway 50.

May 29, 1859
remained fairly close to the river for the next two miles, and then merged with the Pony Express Trail once again.

August 2001

The Pony Express Trail is well marked where it crosses US 50, but the right-of-way fence prevents vehicles from leaving the highway at this point. However, about four miles to the west, I was able to find a dirt road marked with a sign that reads “Reese River Farm District.” Heading south on this road for a couple of miles, I came to where it intersects the Pony Express Trail. Turning back to the north on the trail, I followed it until I could see US 50 again. I knew that I was fairly close to where the expedition camped on the Reese River during the return trip. Although I was still quite uncertain about the exact location of the campsite, I parked here and hiked eastward to the river. After taking some photographs, I returned to my SUV, turned around, and followed the trail back to the south. Driving past the farm district, I continued to follow the trail to the south until I reached the point where it starts to climb up the eastern slope of the Shoshone Mountains. At that time, I was thinking that the expedition had probably gotten over these mountains through Railroad Pass, which was still a few miles to the south, so I turned off the trail and made my way to State Route 722, which I followed over Railroad Pass. Later, additional study of the report and the maps of the area convinced me that the expedition had continued along the trail that I had been following, and had crossed the mountain through Smith Creek Summit rather than Railroad Pass.

From summit of pass see another valley to the west of us, ranging generally north and south, and bounded by the Se-day-e or Lookout range [Desatoya Mountains], on its west side. In 2 miles from summit reach west foot of pass in valley by a tolerable descent, and without difficulty. This valley is exceedingly forbidding in appearance. To the south the bottom is an extended clay flat, perfectly divested of vegetation, terminating toward the south in a small lake. In the distance it all looked so much like a sheet of water that I sent a dragoon ahead to examine it; but, with my spy-glass, seeing him gallop over it, I concluded it was passable; so gave the word forward. I struck magnetically S. 60° W., to the green spot across the valley Sanchez pointed out as our camp-ground, and on going to it passed over a portion of the clay flat referred to.

From the western base of Smith Creek Summit, the expedition turned to the southwest, crossed an area of sagebrush and greasewood, and then a large playa where there is no vegetation at all. After crossing this old lake bottom, they crossed another sagebrush flat and came to Smith Creek, a short distance upstream from where it emptied into what Simpson described as a lake, but today is another large and dry playa.

July 2002

Returning to the Reese River Valley, I got back on the trail at the point where I had left it the previous year, and drove across Smith Creek Summit without encountering any problems. Upon reaching the valley, I came to an occasionally-used road, which travels along the western base of the Shoshone Mountains. To the west, I could see the faint trace of the old stage road heading in a southwesterly direction through a heavy growth of sagebrush. I made a short-lived attempt to follow the old road in my SUV, but after a quarter of a mile, I found that further progress was blocked by a deep washout. As I was turning around on the narrow trail, a piece of sagebrush penetrated the sidewall of one of my tires. After changing to one of the two spare tires that I habitually carried with me during my desert trips, I returned to the road at the base of the mountain and headed south until I reached the main road that crosses Smith Creek Valley. Turning to the west, I went about a mile, and then turned to the north onto the first of the old lakebeds. Driving across this dusty and barren playa, I circled back to the northeast until I intersected the old stage road at the point where it comes out of the sagebrush. Parking there, I hiked back along the abandoned road until I came to the place where I had gotten the flat tire.

In 5.8 miles from foot of pass, at 3½ p.m., after a journey of 21.2 miles, came to a creek, where we encamp in tolerable grass. The creek is 5 feet
wide, 2 deep, and, running with considerable rapidity, spreads out in many rills, and sinks in the lake referred to. Abundant grass can be found at the mouth of the cañon of this stream. Both the stream and cañon I call after my assistant, Lieut. J. L. Kirby Smith. This valley [Smith Creek Valley]...I call after Capt. I. C. Woodruff, Corps Topographical Engineers.

The old stage road crosses the main valley road at a point that is three and a half miles from where that road leaves State Route 722 in Railroad Pass. Continuing southwest, the old road is essentially abandoned, but can be easily driven in a high-clearance vehicle. After another two and a half miles, the stage road comes to an old ranch site that is labeled “Old Hay Ranch” on my maps of this area. Here the stage road and the Pony Express Trail turn to the west, heading for Smith Creek Canyon. During the outbound trip, the expedition continued another mile to the southwest, where they came to Smith Creek and went into camp. I have been to this site on four occasions, and have never seen any water in the creek bed. It appears that all of the water is being diverted for use at the Smith Creek Ranch, which is located in the mouth of the canyon.

The expedition remained at the camp on Smith Creek for two days, because the guide had gone missing. Reese had left the camp in Simpson Park on the morning of May 28, at about the time the expedition was breaking camp, telling Simpson that he would meet the expedition the following evening. This meant that he should have come into the camp on Smith Creek sometime during the evening of the twenty-ninth. On the morning of the thirtieth, Simpson noted that Reese had not yet arrived.
His next comment shows that he was not exactly pleased. “And as he is alone, contrary to my orders, which require him always to come in with the last man of his party, I am not gratified.”

Simpson decided to wait where they were for Reese’s return, and the expedition remained in camp that day. While they were waiting, Simpson sent out a small party to reconnoiter Smith Creek Canyon, which could be seen to the west of the camp. Although these scouts reported that the canyon was not practical for wagons, the expedition did travel through it during its return journey. At the end of the day, Reese was still missing. They remained in camp again the next day, and Simpson sent out a search party. The party failed to find the guide, but they did find a promising site for the next camp.

The following morning, although Reese was still unaccounted for, Simpson decided to move the expedition forward after sending out another search party. Shortly after the expedition had departed from the campsite, Simpson was surprised to see someone coming through the sagebrush toward the wagons.

*I noticed apparently an old, decrepit-looking man approaching the train from the west side, and supporting himself by a couple of crutches or sticks. At first I took him for a Digger Indian. On more close scrutiny, however, I found it to be Mr. Reese, our guide, who, as soon as we reached him, sank down exhausted into a sage-bush. His clothes were nearly torn off him, and altogether he presented a most pitiable aspect. As soon as he could collect his mind he informed us that the day before yesterday, when on the other or west side of the Se-day-e [Desatoya Mountains] on our right and the clay flat and small lake of Woodruff Valley on our left. In 1.6 miles from camp cross a fine rapid stream, 5 feet wide, 2 deep, bottom somewhat soft, which I called after Mr. Engelmann, the geologist of my party. It expends itself in the lake. Two and a half miles farther cross another small stream running in the same direction, and after a day's march of 10.2 miles come to a swift creek [Campbell Creek] running east from the mountains, which I call after Lieutenant Putman, Topographical Engineers, one of my assistants.*

As Simpson’s party left the camp on Smith Creek, they were heading in a slightly west-of-south direction. I have been unable to find any information that would indicate that any early travelers ever used the route that the expedition followed on June 1 and 2. In this area, Simpson’s map includes a feature that I have been unable to explain. Although it has no significant bearing on the location of the route or the campsite, it does give rise to questions that remain unanswered. The map shows two separate trails in the area that the expedition traveled during the last half of this day’s march. The distance involved seems to be about seven miles. The trail splits near the second small stream that Simpson mentioned, and the two branches come back together a short distance beyond the spot where they crossed Campbell Creek. The map seems to show that the site of Camp 27-W was closer to the eastern branch of the trail. The only similar situation occurs between Camps 29 and 30 of the return route, and in that case, Simpson explains quite clearly that he wanted to indicate that there was an alternate route that would be preferable to the route they actually followed. But he says nothing at all about the two trails in Smith Creek Valley, nor does he give any indication of which of the branches they actually followed. In visiting this area, I have found that Campbell Creek flows through a deep wash that parallels today’s road.
Camp 26-W. The dry streambed of Smith Creek slants across this infrequently used stockyard. The campsite was probably on the far side of the creek. "Come to a creek, where we encamp in tolerable grass. The creek, running with considerable rapidity, sinks in the lake."

June 1, 1859
It is possible that the wash was between the two trails, but that does not explain why there were two trails. Today the established road is on the west side of the wash, and I have been unable to find any indication of a trail on the east side.

**AUGUST 2001**

My goal for this trip was to cover the expedition’s outbound trail across Smith Creek Valley. After getting into the valley by way of Railroad Pass, I headed west on the main road until I intersected the expedition’s trail. Turning to the southwest on what is now an abandoned two-track, I was able to make my way to the site of Camp 26-W. After crossing Smith Creek’s dry streambed, I continued to the southwest until the old two-track intersected the well-traveled road that runs along the west side of the valley. From there it is a little less than four miles to where that road comes to SR 722, near the mouth of Campbell Creek Canyon.

After setting up camp on Campbell Creek, Simpson made a twenty-four-mile trip to take a look at a pass that he hoped to use the next day. While Simpson was exploring to the southwest, Lt. Putnam was reconnoitering the canyon of Campbell Creek, which leads in a northwesterly direction from the campsite. Putnam reported that this canyon would be too narrow for the wagons, unless a significant amount of excavation was done. His report and Simpson’s description of the route they followed the next day make it quite clear that the expedition did not follow the route of today’s State Route 722 across Carroll Summit. As far as I can determine, there was no road across this summit until 1924, when, at the urging of the Lincoln Highway Association, a road was constructed through Campbell Creek Canyon and Road Canyon.

**JUNE 2, 1859**

**JUNE 2, Camp No. 27, Putnam’s Creek.**—Moved at 5 minutes of 6 A.M. Course southwestward to the base of the Se-day-e Mountain and then generally westwardly through what I call the Gibraltar (or south) Pass, examined by me yesterday. The teams reached summit of pass, 5 miles from last camp, at 10 o’clock, without doubling. The only exceeding steep place is about three-fourths
Camp 27-W. Campbell Creek is on the far side of the road. The campsite was probably on the south bank, near the hay derrick. “Come to a swift creek running east from the mountains, which I call after Lieutenant Putnam, one of my assistants.”

June 2, 1859
of a mile up, where the ravine is left and a minor ridge surmounted to get over into the south branch of Putnam's Creek. The ascent of this minor ridge is steep, and the descent on the west side still more so. To accomplish the latter without accident we had to lock and rough-shoe the wheels.… Two and one-half miles thence up Putnam's Creek by a good grade brought us to summit of pass,… and 3.7 miles more down Gibraltar Creek [Skull Creek] (a small stream) to a point in the cañon [Road Canyon], where, at half past 4, we encamped.… Journey 8.7 miles.26

The route that the expedition traveled this day was one of the most challenging for me to find and travel. By the time I had gotten around to attempting it, I had learned that the route usually followed some sort of existing road or trail. This section would prove to be an exception. The only existing road through this area is State Route 722, which goes up Campbell Creek Canyon, crosses Carroll Summit, and descends through Road Canyon, but Simpson makes it clear that this was not the route they followed. After discarding the Carroll Summit possibility, I took a look at the Buffalo Canyon road, but soon determined that the distance involved was much greater than what Simpson reported. So I came back to the north, and started looking on the maps at what appeared to be a low place on the ridge at the upper end of Skull Creek Canyon. I finally concluded that this unnamed pass, located about a mile south of Carroll Summit, was Simpson's Gibraltar Pass. In order to arrive at this conclusion, it had been necessary to analyze very carefully, item by item, Simpson's description of the route they followed that day.

He started out by saying that from the camp, they headed in a “southwestwardly” direction until they reached the base of the mountain. While describing his scouting trip of the previous day, he mentioned that the foot of the pass was two miles from the camp. While studying the maps of the area, I found a small canyon, the mouth of which is two miles from Campbell Creek. This apparently unnamed canyon leads in a westerly direction into the Desatoya Mountains.

Simpson went on to say that after reaching the base of the mountain, they turned "generally westwardly" and, at a distance of five miles from camp, came to the summit of Gibraltar Pass. He then added that on the way to the summit, “the only exceeding steep place is about three-fourths of a mile up.” He did not bother to explain what, or where, this steep place was up from. After pondering this for some time, I concluded that he probably meant that the steep place was three-quarters of a mile from the mouth of the small canyon. The next part of Simpson's sentence states that in getting to the steep place, “the ravine is left and a minor ridge surmounted to get over into the south branch of Putnam's Creek.”

I have interpreted this as meaning that they got out of the small canyon by climbing over a ridge, then dropping down into another canyon, in which flowed a branch of Putnam’s Creek. As I was studying the map, I noticed that a small tributary stream flows into Campbell Creek at a point about three-quarters of a mile above the mouth of Campbell Creek Canyon. This drainage flows out of the interior of the mountains in an easterly direction, then turns to the north about a half mile before reaching Campbell Creek. This stream can certainly be described as a south branch of Campbell Creek, or Putnam’s Creek as Simpson called it. If you go up the small nameless canyon for three-quarters of a mile, then climb over its north ridge, you will then drop down into the south branch of Campbell Creek, which is exactly what Simpson said they did.

After getting into the canyon of the south branch of Putnam’s Creek, Simpson wrote: “Two and one-half miles thence up Putnam’s Creek [meaning its south branch] by a good grade brought us to summit of pass.” When I measure the distance between the point where they came to the south branch of Campbell Creek, and the summit of the pass at the top of Skull Canyon, I get almost exactly two and a half miles.

From the summit, Simpson said they followed a stream, which he called Gibraltar Creek, for 3.7 miles and camped in the canyon. The only stream that flows westward from this summit is Skull Creek. Measuring from the summit along this stream for 3.7 miles brings you to a point just west of where Skull Canyon opens into Road Canyon. I believe the expedition’s camp was at a small, but fairly level, area in Road Canyon that is now occupied by a roadside rest stop.
That night William Lee made the following entry in his journal:

*Thursday, June 2nd. Marched eight and three-quarters miles over about the roughest road I think white man ever traveled, through a canyon which was very precipitous and steep. We got into camp about four o’clock after a hard day’s work for the mules and men.*

**JULY 2002**

I came to this area prepared to hike the eastern half of the route that I now believed the expedition had followed through the Desatoya Mountains. I parked near a corral that was just off the dirt road that heads south from State Route 722 near the mouth of Campbell Creek Canyon. From there I hiked westward toward the mouth of the nameless canyon, and began following a trail that appeared to have been made by livestock or wild animals. After entering the canyon, I traveled about three-quarters of a mile, and then the trail began turning north and climbing up a ridge. When I reached the summit of the ridge, I could see that the trail dropped down a very steep incline into a larger canyon that came from the west. At the point where I reached it, this second canyon was just entering a bend that took it to the north, in the direction of Campbell Creek Canyon. It was apparent that I was looking into the south branch of Campbell Creek. I am quite certain that as I stood on this first ridge, the steep drop just below me was the place that Simpson was talking about when he said they had to “lock and rough-shoe the wheels.”

When I arrived back at the corral, a rancher was there, unloading some hay for his horses. I asked if he knew the name of the little canyon. He said he had never heard of one. Feeling that I ought to explain why I was parked at his corral, I told him a little bit about my project, and explained that I was convinced that Simpson had taken his wagons over the mountain through this canyon. His response was straightforward: “Well, if he did, he was the silliest son-of-a-bitch I ever heard of.” He went on to suggest that a much more practical route would have been through Buffalo Canyon. I thanked him for his information and headed for Austin to spend the night.

Early the next morning I returned to the area, drove up Campbell Creek Canyon for about three and a half miles, and got onto a seldom-used two-track road that leads to Simpson’s Gibraltar Pass and into the upper end of Skull Canyon. Parking near the summit, I started hiking in a southeasterly direction, down the canyon of the south branch of Campbell Creek. I followed the canyon until I was just below the ridge where I had turned around the previous evening. After returning to my SUV, I drove along the two-track road until I came to a dead end in the upper part of Skull Canyon. This was the second time that I had been on this short section of dirt road.

**AUGUST 2001**

During an earlier trip into the Desatoya Mountains, I had camped overnight in a little side-canyon just below Carroll Summit. When morning came, I drove down Road Canyon, parked near the mouth of Skull Canyon, and hiked up the canyon until I had reached the area near Gibraltar Pass.

After having hiked the entire distance between Camps 27-W and 28-W, it is my conclusion that although it would not have been an easy trail to travel, it would not have presented the wagons with any insurmountable difficulties. It is true that, aside from the short section of two-track road in the upper portion of Skull Canyon, I found no visible indication of a wagon trail, but that is not really surprising, since it is doubtful that anyone else ever traveled this section of Simpson’s route.

Simpson noted that Reese found his mule, complete with saddle and all equipment, somewhere in the vicinity of the Road Canyon camp.

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**JUNE 3, 1859**

*June 3, Camp No. 28, Gibraltar Creek.— Raised camp at 6.15, and continued down Gibraltar Cañon [Road Canyon]. For about a mile it continued rough from isolated rocks; after this no difficulty. Creek sinks 1.7 miles below camp. Five and a half miles farther strike a small creek.*
Camp 28-W. A roadside rest area in Road Canyon. “3.7 miles more down Gibraltar Creek (a small stream) to a point in the cañon, where, at half past 4, we encamped.”

June 3, 1859
and a spring, which might be called an extension or re-appearance of Gibraltar Creek. Half a mile farther pass through a gap or gate between some stupendous rocks of a dark-gray and brown porphyritic character. This defile from the cañon to the valley I call The Gate of Gibraltar [Eastgate]. It is about 50 yards wide, and of champaign character. From this gate, following the course of Gibraltar Creek [Eastgate Creek] (very small), in a southwest direction, we cross in 7.2 miles a valley or plain, and arrive at a second gate or gap [Middlegate] in a low range, running north and south, where, at 4 P.M., we encamp near the sink of Gibraltar Creek.

When they left Camp 28-W, the expedition continued down Road Canyon, following today’s State Route 722 to Eastgate. Eastgate Creek skirts the base of the steep cliffs that make up the Eastgate formation, crosses under SR 722, and begins to flow into a gradually deepening wash. Although Simpson’s map does not give a lot of detail, in this area it does show that the expedition’s trail was north of what is labeled as “Gibraltar Creek.” In his description of the westbound route, Simpson said nothing about which side of the stream they traveled on, or if, and where, they crossed it. However, when the expedition returned to this area during the return trip, he did say something that has a bearing on the westbound route. During the eastbound trip, Simpson indicated that when they left Middlegate, they followed their earlier trail for some distance and then, “After crossing an arroyo, or creek, immediately leave old road” (emphasis added). There can be little doubt that this arroyo was Eastgate Wash, and this statement makes it quite clear that during the eastbound trip, they crossed the wash going from south to north. And since they were traveling on their old trail, it follows that they made this crossing at the same place where they crossed it when they were traveling.
west. All of which indicates that during the westbound trip, they had been on the north side of the wash before making this crossing.

**September 2003**

During a couple of earlier visits to this area, I had spent some time attempting to find a road that could be used to get into the area on the north side of Eastgate Wash. I finally gave up, and concluded that this would be another section of the trail that would require some hiking. Parking where US 50 crosses Eastgate Wash, I began walking east. When I first started out, I was attempting to stay fairly close to the wash, and the path that I followed took me through a dense growth of greasewood. After about a mile, as I was coming out of the greasewood, I came across an old road. I realized at once that I had been moving parallel to it for some time, but had been unable to see it because of the dense vegetation. It was apparent that the road had seen a lot of use in the past. In some places, it was worn down to as much as a couple of feet below the surrounding terrain. But it was also very apparent that it had been abandoned for many years. I began following the road, and it led me all the way to Eastgate, where I turned around and headed back to the west. Then I made what was to me a very important discovery.

Nearing the end of my hike, when I was less than a quarter of a mile east of US 50, where I had parked my SUV, I found a rusty metal post.

What does a rusty post have to do with Simpson’s trail? It provides reliable evidence that an automobile road once followed Simpson’s trail along the north side of Eastgate Wash.

The post that I found is almost identical to other old signposts that I have observed on verifiable sections of the Lincoln Highway in Nevada. All of these posts are made from cast iron pipes with about two inches of thread on the upper end, which means that they were probably used
for some other purpose before being put to use as signposts. They all have faint traces of white paint, and holes drilled into them at locations that would allow the attachment of road signs that were placed along the Lincoln Highway in the early 1920s. These posts have been found on the route of the Lincoln Highway at White Pine Summit near the ghost town of Hamilton, in the Grimes Hills on the east side of Monitor Valley, and near the summit where the early Lincoln Highway crossed the Pancake Mountains. I think that it is quite certain that the abandoned road along the north bank of Eastgate Wash was first traveled by Simpson’s expedition, then used as a wagon road, and then by the early Lincoln Highway. Later, during the mid-1920s, as the final stage of a major construction project, which shifted the Lincoln Highway from New Pass to Carroll Summit, the road between Eastgate and Middlegate was shifted to the south side of Eastgate Wash, and the road on the north side of the wash was abandoned.

The expedition’s campsite for the night was near a gap in a low ridge that is known as Middlegate. This spot is not to be confused with Middlegate Station, which is about two miles farther west, near the junction of US 50 and State Route 361.