

Pike's Trail to the Rockies - A historical perspective By Allan Vainly

The Pike National Historic Trail follows in the footprint of Zebulon Pike and many historic persons, routes and trails- American, French, Native Americans, and Spanish. The explorers and trappers followed paths on which they could survive. They were often guided by Native Americans, who used paths where they found their necessities.

These historic corridors are natural corridors. Explored early, water routes provided for the necessities for life. Game tended toward water sources for food (and water.) Trappers, explorers & pioneers found ready supplies of water, grazing for livestock, wood for shelter and fuel, and game for food. Today, interstates tend to follow old highways, built on or near where dirt roads and trails were located, generally, following Native American paths for game and the lay of the land.

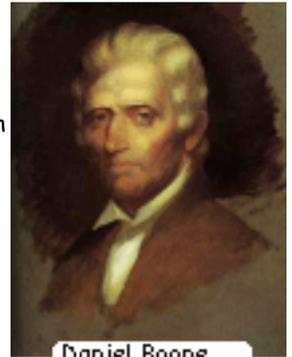
I would like to turn your attention to Pike's route from St. Louis to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, with attention to who preceded and followed Zebulon Pike.

"The federal government appropriated funds for comprehensive natural history surveys as part of its mission to occupy the trans-Mississippi West. ...it sent Lewis and Clark over the Rockies to the Columbia River. They were followed by other soldier-explorers--Zebulon Pike, Stephen Long, and John Charles Frémont-- all of whom kept an eye open for flora and fauna as well as American geopolitical interests. Frémont led no fewer than five expeditions across the Great Plains between 1842 and 1853, ..."[Source #12, p. 61]



The KATY trail (a Rail-to-Trail using the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT) Railroad, built in the 1870s) follows Pike's route along the Missouri River, a flyway used by migrating songbirds and waterfowl.

Daniel Boone lived near Defiance, MO, from 1799 until he died at 85 on Sept. 26, 1820. In fact, west of St. Louis, the **Pike/KATY/L&C/ADT Trails** pass under the Daniel Boone Bridge on US 40 at Weldon Spring. Boone's youngest son, Nathan (Capt.), served under Col. Henry Dodge in the United States Regiment of Dragoons in 1833. I found no record that Pike and Boone met.



Daniel Boone
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Along the Missouri, Pike from July 15 to 28, 1806 followed Merriwether Lewis and William Clark (May 17, 1804 and in Sept. 1806) from St. Charles to the Osage River/today's Osage City some 100 miles.

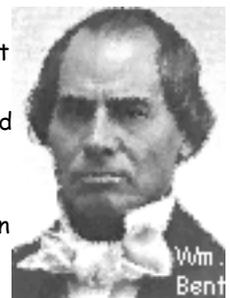
The **American Discovery Trail** follows Pike from St. Charles to the Osage City/River for 100 miles; from Great Bend, KS on the Arkansas River to Cripple Creek, CO (10-27 to 12/11/1806) for 489 miles and then again for 36 miles from Buena Vista to Leadville, CO on their Bike Route. All in all, the ADT follows Pike for 625 miles.

Pike used the Osage and Pawnee guides using their paths through Missouri and Kansas.

From Great Bend, KS to LaJunta, CO, the **Santa Fe Trail** is near or on 346 miles of the Pike route. Pike is given credit for the establishment of the Santa Fe Trail. Charles and William Bent



with Ceran St. Vrain [Ceran de Hault de Lassus de St. Vrain] and others of the 7 Bent brothers established their business [Bent, St. Vrain & Company] in Independence and Westport, MO; 4 forts north and east of Pueblo with two on the mountain route of the Santa Fe Trail, and stores in Santa Fe and Taos NM. They traded glass, cloth, hardware, and tobacco for furs, silver, horses, and mules. During the Mexican War in 1846, Bent's Old Fort {between LaJunta and Las Animas, CO} served as a staging ground for Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny's "Army of the West." Charles Bent, the first American governor of New Mexico, was assassinated in his home in Taos in 1847.



Wm.
Bent

The route of the PNHT west of Great Bend along the Arkansas River follows not only the Santa Fe Trail and the ADT but it also follows many other American explorers: Williams 1812-14, René Auguste Chouteau 1815 (cofounder of St. Louis 1764), Stephen Harriman Long 1820, Pattie 1826, Henry Dodge 1835, Frederick Adolph Wislizenus 1839, Farnham 1839, Lt. Col. John Charles Frémont 1844, 1845, 1848, Parkman 1846, Gen. Steven Watts Kearny 1846, Beck & Ralston 1850, Maj. Gen. Edwin Vose Sumner 1857, Kellogg 1858, Easter 1858, and Russell 1858.

As Pike approached the Rockies, three fourteen thousand foot mountains as viewed. Pikes Peak, Mt. Evans, and Longs Peak. Pike tried to climb the peak that now is named for him. Emma and John Wesley Powell successfully climbed it in July 1867 and the next day climbed Mt. Lincoln, 125 feet higher.

René Auguste Chouteau was an American fur trader and cofounder with stepfather Pierre Liguist of St. Louis in 1764. The two men built a prosperous fur trade, which Chouteau later expanded. By 1794, he had a monopoly on the trade with the Osage

and helped finance most of the fur-trading companies in Louisiana Territory. He became the largest landowner in St. Louis and their unofficial banker.

Stephen Harriman Long explored and scientifically observed much of the "Great American Desert" we now call the Great Plains as well as the border with Canada. He is noted for his developments in the design of steam locomotives. Longs Peak in Colorado is named for him. After 1827, he worked as a consulting engineer for railroads, and surveyed railroad routes. In 1861 he became Chief of the topographical engineers.

Henry Dodge served as colonel in the newly formed United States Regiment of Dragoons. In the summer of 1834, Dodge engaged on a series of long marches and made successful contact with the Comanches. He was a renowned Indian fighter, most noted for his 1835 peace mission commissioned by President Andrew Jackson, who had called out the U.S. Dragoons to assist. He declined a nomination for the Presidency of the United States in the 1844 Democratic National Convention.

We step in **Brevet Col. John Charles Frémont's** many footprints. Aside from his name for locations on the Arkansas River, in Colorado and California, he followed and expanded Pike's exploration three times all the way to San Francisco- 1844, 1845 and 1848. To boot his guide all three times was Kit Carson. It seems they loved the Pueblo CO area, especially Hardscrapple, an long gone settlement 20 miles west of Pueblo, today in the county named for him.

Maj. Gen. Edwin Vose Sumner In 1857, once Ft. Leavenworth commander, led an expedition against the Cheyenne Indians, and in 1858 he commanded the Department of the West.

John Wesley and Emma Powell- In July of 1867, John Wesley (then a geology prof.) and Emma Powell brought students on a field trip to Colorado from Illinois Wesleyan College. They returned during successive summers with students to study the physical geography, flora and fauna in South Park CO where Pike discovered the headwaters of the Platte River.

Pike crossed the **French** paths of **Paul and Pierre-Antone Mallet** In the spring of 1739, the Mallet brothers started from Fort de Chartres, near present Prairie du Rocher, IL, and headed up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. With Pawnee guides they headed up the Platte River to the Rockies. In June 1739, they had crossed the Arkansas on their way to Santa Fe.

Pike also crossed the earlier Spanish paths-

In 1720, Lieutenant General Pedro de **Villasur** (pronounced vee-yah-SOOR) was appointed by Governor Valverde in Santa Fe, to lead a Spanish army from Santa Fe into Nebraska to determine French activities. His force went down the Arkansas from today's Manzanola (Rocky Ford, La Junta) to Las Animas and then toward Grand Island NE. At dawn on August 14, 1720, a huge force of Oto and Pawnee warriors, possibly with French traders, attacked the Spanish camp near Grand Island on the Platte River. General Villasur was killed in the attack.

Juan Bautista de Anza Bezerra Nieto (Governor of New Spain) in 1779, led a punitive expedition against the Comanche who had been repeatedly raiding Taos, crossing the Arkansas near today's Pueblo, CO. (In 1776, he led 200 families through Yuma and the Anza-Burrage Desert to settle San Francisco and Monterey, CA, for which there is a National Historic Trail.)

Lt. Facundo Melgares was sent to intercept Lewis & Clark as well as Pike. His troops preceded Pike from the Pawnee Village to near Cañon City by a month. Later Melgares escorted Pike through New Spain [Mexico] where the two became very good friends and fellows. Melgares became acting Governor of New Spain in 1819.

"I have never been lost, but I will admit to being confused for several weeks."- DANIEL BOONE

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"For the first time in the voyage I found myself discouraged."

Pike Jan. 24, 1807 Muddy Creek Wet Mtn. Valley CO.

My wife, Laura, and I had the opportunity to spend the Fourth of July weekend at a friend's home in Westcliffe, Colorado. This very small town (population is about five hundred) sits in the Wet Mountain Valley and is nestled between the Sangre de Cristo and Wet Mountain ranges. It is a very quiet rural area, removed from the noise and stress of city life. As we sat on the bank of Lake DeWeese (the location of the annual fireworks show) and watched the sunset, we began to think of what Zebulon Pike and his men must have experienced just over two-hundred years ago while in this very area.



Let me go back and set the scene. Westcliffe and neighboring Silver Cliff were bustling towns in the late 1800s. This was due to the silver mines on nearby Round Mountain and the Bull Domingo Hills. When the mines were emptied, the towns began to diminish in population. Today, this is primarily a ranching area, and due to the decreased size of the towns, it is easy to imagine what it might have looked like from January 15th to the 27th, 1807. Obviously, there would have been no signs of civilization. The views of the valley to the north and south seem immense. The mountains to the east and west are quite impressive. Even now, this area can seem primitive and foreboding.

Pike left Cañon City and his Arkansas River camp on January 14, 1807, following what he called Branch Creek, now known as Grape Creek. We imagined them following the creek into this valley, where they first saw the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains. They were entering what the Spanish considered New Spain, and Pike was contemplating crossing over the high snow covered Sangres into what he thought was the headwaters of the Red River watershed. He and Thomas Jefferson would have considered to be part of America, since the Red River drains eventually into the Mississippi (part of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase.) As it turned out, he crossed into New Spain into today's Rio Grande watershed.

They, however, had to find a pass, firewood, food, etcetera in below freezing temperatures and three to four feet of snow. While they did find buffalo and other game, there was no firewood to be found on the east side of the valley. Therefore, they had to cross over to the west side, and this meant crossing a flowing Grape Creek with air temperatures of under thirty-two degrees. Their already lacking clothing had to be soaking wet, and many of the men got frostbite. In fact, two of them had to be left behind later sending Pike missing toes. Perhaps they hoped of getting help from the Spanish. I can only imagine some of their thoughts. It had to be miserable. During the fireworks display, one of the individuals handling the explosives was apparently injured when one went off too close to the ground. We overheard someone in the crowd say that the nearest hospital was an hour away in Cañon City. As we watched the ambulance speed off, I could not help but think of how much Pike would have been ecstatic to have had such close medical facilities.

John Murphy, noted Pike expert, has researched and recorded encampments (E- counted from Cañon City) at the west side of Grape Creek (January 17th to 21st, E4), 3 miles to Horn Creek (January 22nd, E5), 3.75 miles to Colony Creek (January 23rd, E6), 7.7 miles to Grape Creek's entry into the valley from the Sangres, 8.5 miles to the Promitory Divide (a hill at the south end of the valley), and 11.3 miles to the Muddy Creeks (January 24th to 26th, E7) where Pike decided to climb the Sangre pass at Medano. John repeatedly reminds us that Pike's journal indicates that he spent the most discouraging day at Horn Creek, discouraged and concerned for his men. John Sparks and Thomas Daugherty could go no farther and had to be left at Horn Creek on January 22nd. They were finally rescued February 26th.

During these difficult and trying days, Pike had to discipline one of his men for complaining. We occasionally might grumble if the nearest Walmart is too far away (the closest one to Westcliffe is once again in Cañon City). The comparison really makes me consider what mettle and resolve Mr. Zebulon Pike and his men were truly made of.

The Pawnee Challenges By Allan Vailly

Two parts of Pike's mission during the Southwest Expedition was to return Osage to their villages in western Missouri and to establish peace on the Great Plains among various tribes. He accomplished the first task and established peace between the Osage and Kans, and the Osage and Pawnee.

As important, he authenticated the United States on the Great Plains and recorded population data-

Osage: Grand, Little, Arkansas: 4000 individuals; Kans: 1565 individuals; Pawnee: Republican, Grand, Loup: 6200 individuals; and Comanches (Tetan in New Mexico): 8200 individuals.

His greatest challenge was with the Pawnees.

The **Pawnee** are a Native American tribe that lived in 3 or 4 areas along the Platte, Loup and Republican Rivers in today's Nebraska and Northern Kansas. The earliest historic mention of a Pawnee concerns the riches of Quivira allured and finally led Coronado, in 1541, from New Mexico over the plains as far as Kansas, where some Pawnee visited him.

In the 18th century, they were allied with the French and played an important role in halting Spanish expansion onto the Great Plains by defeating the Villasur expedition decisively in battle in 1720 [See separate mention in Historic Foundations of the Northeastern PNHT.]

In 1806, Lt. Facundo Melgares was sent by the Spanish to intercept the American Exploration teams of Lewis & Clark; and Pike. Before Pike arrived at the Republican Pawnee village, he established Spanish presence with 400 troops, and gained assurances from them and ran the Spanish flag up their flagpole. [See earlier issues for how Pike handled the flag issue.]



There was a second and third encounter with the Pawnee. One occurred before Pike departed the Pawnee village and one near Pueblo. [Dave Philipps will bring to mind the third incident in our next issue.]

Wed., Oct. 1, 1806

"Paid a visit to [Pawnee] town and had a very long conversation with the chief [probably White Wolf or Rich Man], who urged everything in his power to induce us to turn back. ... that he had promised the Spaniards [Lt. Facundo Melgares] to act as he now did, and that we must proceed no further, or he must stop us by force of arms. My reply was, 'the I had been sent out by our great father to explore the western country, to visit all his red children, to make peace between them, and turn them from shedding blood; that he might see how I had caused the Osage and Kans to meet to smoke the pipe of peace together, and take each other by the hand like brothers; that as yet my road had been smooth, with a blue sky over our heads. ... he must know that the warriors of his American father were not women, to be turned back by words; that I should therefore proceed, and if he thought it proper to stop me, he could attempt it; but we were men, well armed, and would sell our lives at a dear rate to his nation; that we knew our great father would send his young warriors that to gather our bones and revenge our deaths on his people, ...'"

Pike's men, on being told by their Kans friends of the threat, " was productive of many singular expressions from my brave lads, which called for my esteem at the same time that they excited my laughter."

Oct. 7- "we marched at 2 p.m.; we made every arrangement to make him pay as dearly for the attempt as possible." "The village appeared all to be in motion, but soon saw there was no serious attempt to be made."

Ten Reasons Pike's gun was bent on his birthday-

1. He had been using it as a walking stick.
2. His traveling companions tried using it as the candle on his birthday cake.
3. He tried using it as a crow bar to dislodge ice in the Royal Gorge.
4. He was expecting a new one for his birthday.
5. His Red Ranger was his backup, so he was not too bothered.
6. Dr. Robinson had used it as a crutch.
7. Colt used iron instead of steel.
8. Army issue just wasn't like it is today.
9. Guns make great tent stakes.
10. His Great, Great, Great Grandnephew- Monty, in Salida, played with it.



Pike National Historic Trail Association

10060 Blue Sky Trail
Conifer CO 80433

