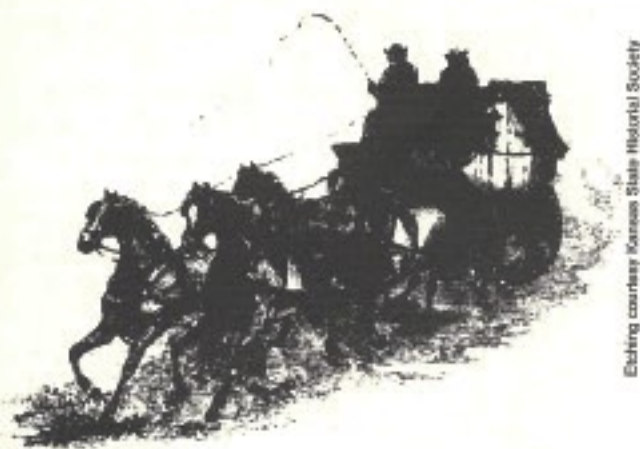


BUTTERFIELD  
OVERLAND MAIL

**The Pinery**

**Guadalupe Mountains National Park**





Etching courtesy Kansas State Historical Society

On the afternoon of September 28, 1858, the conductor of the first westbound Butterfield Overland Mail Coach sounded his bugle to announce the coach's arrival at the Pinery. The station was named for nearby stands of pine. With abundant water from Pine Spring and good grazing, it was one of the most favorably situated stations on the original 2,800-mile Butterfield route. Located at 5,534-foot Guadalupe Pass, the Pinery was also the highest.

After a meal of venison and baked beans and a change of horses, the weary travelers jolted slowly down the pass on their rough-riding stage. Shortly after sunset, near the base of Guadalupe Pass, the westbound coach from St. Louis pulled alongside the eastbound from San Francisco. The excited passengers and drivers exchanged comments about their history-making encounter. For the brief space of a conversation, the ends of the continent were connected. But there was mail to deliver; the stages rolled on as contracted, traveling an average of five miles an hour around the clock, and averaging 120 miles a day. The Butterfield contract called for semi-weekly runs, covering 2,800 miles in a maximum of 25 days. In its two and a half years of operation the Butterfield never broke its contract.

When the conductor, his driver, and their sole passenger made their first call at the Pinery, there was little to see: a stout corral built of pine that had been cut and hauled from the mountains above, and the tents that housed the station keeper and his men. But two months later the station consisted of a high-walled rock enclosure protecting a wagon

repair shop, a blacksmith shop, and the essential replacement teams of fresh horses. Three mud-roofed rooms with limestone walls offered a double fireplace, a warm meal, and a welcome retreat from the dusty trail of the plains below.

Imagine the feeling of isolation experienced by the station masters and their crews, and the sense of excitement and companionship brought by the stages. Between Fort Chadborne and El Paso, a distance of 458 miles, there was no sign of habitation other than the outpost stage stations. The stage route between Fort Smith, Arkansas, and San Francisco, California, passed through only two real towns: Tucson and El Paso. One stretch of route had no settlements for 900 miles; another had no water for 75.

Pinery Station was built of local limestone, in a fortresslike pattern. High rock walls formed a rectangular enclosure with a single entrance. The three mud-roofed rooms were attached, lean-to fashion, to the inside walls, which afforded safety and protection from Indian raids. These walls, built of limestone slabs and adobe, were 30 inches thick and 11 feet high. The station's water supply came from Pine Spring through an open ditch to a tank inside the station. A stockade of heavy pine posts protected the main entrance on the south.

In the southeast corner of the enclosure, a

thatched shelter covered the wagon repair shop and smithy. Livestock were kept in the stone-walled corral on the north end.

There was more activity about this station than one might suspect. The station keeper was Henry Ramstein, a surveyor from El Paso. He supervised six to eight men who worked as cooks, blacksmiths, and herders. Four times a week the distant sound of the conductor's horn announced the arrival of the mail coach with up to nine passengers. Express riders dashed through at all hours, road crews stopped off, and tank wagons filled up at Pine Spring, rolling on to fill water tanks along the dry stretches. Freighters and mule pack trains added to the passing traffic.

There were fearful moments, as when an army scout brought word that Indians were sighted in a nearby canyon. All stock was quickly herded inside the station, bars were secured across the entrance gate, and every man stood ready with his Sharp's rifle. At times, soldiers were garrisoned at the Pinery to guard against Indian attacks, which led to stories that this ruin was once a government fort. There was also news of tragic happenings. On one occasion a rider reported that the three men who had built this station were murdered with axes at a mail station in

Arizona by three of their helpers. Their construction foreman, St. John, was still living, but had suffered an axe blow that severed his arm. On another occasion an express rider brought news of an Apache attack in Arizona which stopped the mail and left the station keeper and a passing emigrant family massacred.

The Butterfield Mail Coach continued to come through the Pinery for 11 months until August 1859, when this route was abandoned for a new road that passed by way of Forts Stockton and Davis. The new route better served the chain of forts along the southern military road to El Paso, and was better protected against Indian attacks. A total of ten stations were abandoned along the Guadalupe route and 16 were added along the "Fort Trail." But long after its abandonment, the old Pinery Station continued to be a retreat for emigrants, freighters, soldiers, outlaws, renegades, and drovers. It is now a fragile remnant of an early endeavor to span the continent with the first reliable transportation and communication system ever attempted.

Pinery Station has the distinction of being the only remaining station ruin standing close to a major thoroughfare—only 200 yards off Highway 62-180, which generally follows the original Butterfield route through Guadalupe Pass. As such, it is accessible to millions who travel a similar route, only at 50 to 60

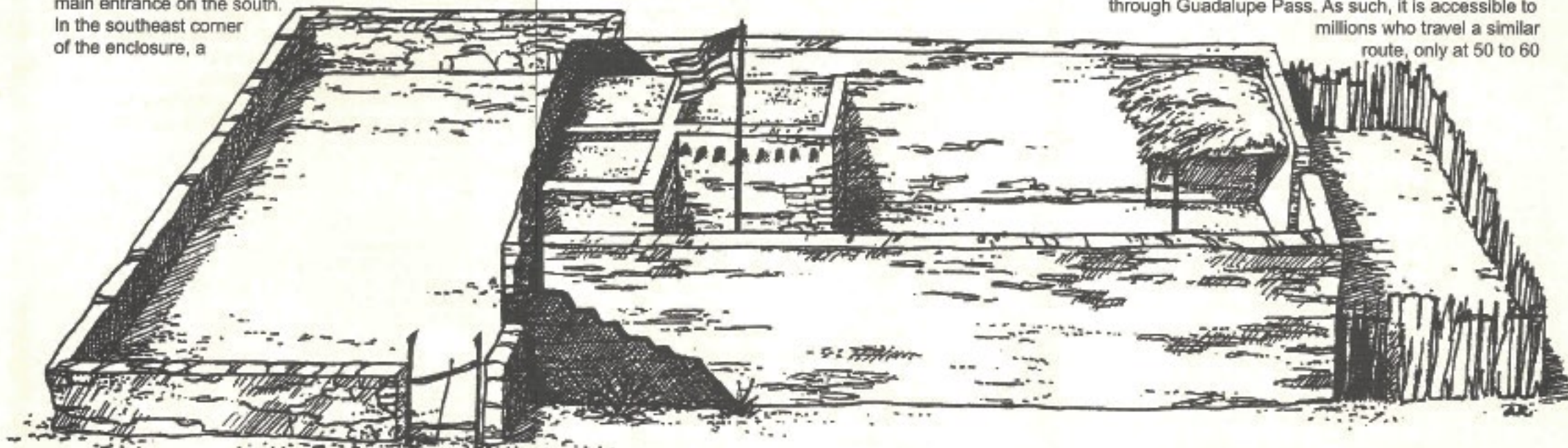
miles an hour instead of five!

The ruin is fragile; climbing on the walls can destroy this piece of history. It is preserved by the National Park Service as a window to the past, in the relatively unchanged, rugged setting that stage riders and Mescalero Apaches saw a hundred and more years ago. With the help of careful visitors to protect it, this historic location will continue to reflect the spirit of courage and adventure which commanded the senses of long-ago travelers, and still stirs in those who ride this route today.

**J**OHN BUTTERFIELD. The New York Times called it a swindle and squander of taxpayers' money when John Butterfield accepted a \$600,000 contract to deliver the St. Louis mail to San Francisco in 25 days. This contract, the largest for land mail service that had yet been given, was authorized by an act of Congress in March 1857. The Pinery Station site commemorates his achievement in transporting the first regular overland mail to California from Missouri in the record-breaking time of 23 days, 23½ hours.

Born at Berne, New York, in 1801, Butterfield grew up on a farm amidst the revolutionary changes of the first steamboat, the Erie Canal, the steam locomotive, and the electric telegraph. His ambition was to become a professional stage driver, which he did at the age of 19. He diligently saved his earnings, and soon owned and operated a livery business. Butterfield convinced Henry Wells and William Fargo to consolidate their express company with the Butterfield Express Company and form the American Express Company which Butterfield then directed. He was a natural organizer, with an incredible memory and a generous spirit to share his success. He filled his life with challenging business ventures that were not only profitable, but that also gained him respect and benefited the public.

Although his appearance was stern, he generated a current of enthusiasm all around him, demanding the highest quality of service from his employees in a just and fair manner. He was reserved except for his fashionable dress, which, particularly on western journeys, set a trend across the country. Butterfield



Artist's conception of Pinery Station by Nawa mi Shigematsu



coats, shirts, boots, and hats became the rage.

In 1857, most prominent men of his day retired from business at about the age of 56, and Butterfield could have enjoyed the same with his great wealth, reputation, and unimpaired health. He must have realized that a stage mail route was doomed, since the locomotive had already appeared and taken over much of the mail and passenger service in the East. However, he was anxious to see a letter move from east to west by means other than a steamship sailing around South America. Perhaps it was his inborn love of horses, the feel of the reins, and the lure of the open road that motivated him to begin the most outstanding achievement of his career—the Butterfield Overland Mail Route.

Butterfield had never been farther west than Buffalo, New York, so he hired St. John, a young man who had made three trips west and experienced the limitless plains, deserts, barren mountains, and the cry of raiding Indians. He instructed St. John and his crew to prepare stations and water storage tanks every 30 miles, because "speed is what we want." He sent a steady stream of coaches west, over this southern route, each carrying 12,000 letters, as well as passengers.

The stress and strain of the venture, the rerouting of the first route, and the cancellation of the Butterfield Overland Mail contract due to the Civil War, caused John Butterfield's physical breakdown at age 59. He then retired to his home in Utica, New York, where he later suffered a paralyzing stroke. He had established an amazing mail route, the longest in the world, which provided a regular line of communication for Americans separated by almost 2,000 miles of undeveloped wilderness.

**W**ATERMAN LILY ORMSBY II. This 23-year-old special correspondent for the *New York Herald* left his home and family in Greenwich Village to become the first person to complete—as sole passenger—the first trip of the Butterfield Overland Mail coach. He understood what the intelligent public wanted in the news: real facts, worldwide scope, and detailed coverage. Because of that understanding and his faith in John Butterfield, Ormsby recorded many

scenes and events in the rocking, swaying Butterfield stage coach well over a century ago.

Ormsby possessed a fearless originality in his writings and in his spirit. "All day and all night the journey went..." and at one point along the trail Ormsby passed out from exhaustion. He was often hungry, as there was little time for a passenger to eat during the brief stops. The stage had to keep moving to fulfill the contract of 25 days. The "skeptics and croakers" who paid little attention to this westward bound adventure often disgusted him. His spirit was boosted in Fort Smith, Arkansas, when at two o'clock in the morning, horns blew, houses lit up, and folks flocked to the station to see the new "celerity coach" and those two first little mail bags. It was at that outpost of 1858 civilization that John Butterfield and his son departed the coach, leaving Ormsby to complete the 2,800-mile adventure through dangerous Indian territory.

Ormsby hailed the Butterfield route as "the second greatest event of the age," the first being the laying of the Trans-Atlantic cable only a month earlier. This route was considered to be "the first practical step toward the Pacific Railroad," and Ormsby greatly admired Butterfield for pioneering the way and solving many of the problems for the railroad that was destined to follow. Ten years after his trip aboard the Butterfield coach, he rode the first westbound Union Pacific train as a guest reporter. In the 74 years of his life, Ormsby played a major role in recording some of the greatest achievements in the progress and development of communication and transportation in this country.

**T**HE CELERITY WAGON. This newfangled coach, named for its swiftness, had a canvas top and three seats that lowered to make a bed. It was pulled by a four-horse team and carried passengers along at an average speed of five miles an hour, 24 hours a day. At one point on the rocky trail, "our driver's ambition to make good time overcame his caution and away we went, bouncing over stones at a fearful rate. To feel oneself bouncing now on one hard seat, now against the roof, and now against the side of the wagon was no joke," Ormsby wrote.

Mules soon replaced the horse teams, since the horse was a great temptation to the raiding Apache. The one drawback to the employment of mules was that often they were nearly wild, just barely broken. As Ormsby described it, they "reared, pitched, twisted, whirled, wheeled, ran, stood still and cut up all sorts of capers. On one occasion the wagon performed so many revolutions that I, in fear of my life, took to my heels." It ended when the mules escaped into the woods, and the top of the wagon was completely demolished. Fortunately, there were 200 Butterfield stage stations which could provide a fresh mule team every 20 miles, and a new coach every 300 miles, so the grueling schedule could be maintained.

This sleeper stage coach, the innovation of John Butterfield, was designed in the coach factory of James Gould in Albany, New York. According to Ormsby, "If there was a full coach, folks took turns sleeping and after several sleepless nights the jolting was soon forgotten."

For the wild experience of the trip and 40 pounds of baggage, a passenger from Missouri to California paid \$150. All valuables went by Wells Fargo steamship, while baggage and mail sacks were tucked underfoot and overhead. For the fare of ten cents a mile, "way passengers" could ride outside if they could find a place to hang on. A traveler needed a Colt pistol, food to be eaten without cooking, and plenty of courage and fortitude for the grueling trip.

**B**UTTERFIELD TRAIL... HIGHWAY 62-180. By the time a full schedule of coaches was traveling westward and eastward, Butterfield's company had spent one million dollars, built 200 way stations, bought 1,800 head of mules and horses, had 250 shiny new coaches, and hundreds of men working day and night to get the mail to its destination. The U.S. Post Office charged ten cents per letter, bringing in \$27,000 in 1858, and \$120,000 by 1860.

The Civil War brought an abrupt halt to the Overland Mail System, as Federal troops stationed at forts along the mail route were recalled, and Secessionists seized many of the stations. In March of 1861, the Butterfield contract was canceled. It had lasted two years, five months, and 17 days. More

than 50 employees had been killed, hundreds of animals stolen, and many stations looted and burned by Indians. As the forerunner of the Pony Express and, ultimately, the transcontinental railroad, the Butterfield Stage Line was a major endeavor leading to the settlement and development of the West.

Here, on a small section of this historic thoroughfare, has passed a thrilling parade of characters and events. Prehistoric tribesmen resting by Pine Spring, moving on in search of food. Spanish conquistadors and missionaries watering their horses. Mescalero Apaches roasting mescal in the shadow of the mountains. Mexican mule trains and, later, creaking ox carts pioneering new trails to habitable lands along the Pecos River. American traders and settlers winding their way through this pass in canvas-topped wagons. Cavalry units enroute to establish forts and to survey the region. Then the Butterfield Overland Mail coach, its mule team dashing over the rocky trail to the call of the conductor's bugle. Suddenly the traffic stops, with the onset of the Civil War. Apaches burn the Pinery, but soon Civil War troops are stopping here. Then the army finally succeeds in removing the Apache from his territory and ranchers settle in with their sheep and cattle.

The old Pine Spring has witnessed our human wanderings for more than five centuries. The Pinery Station saw the start of a transportation and communication system that now connects the world in less time than it took that bumpy mail coach to travel the rugged wilds of a frontier nation. It is good to stand in the shadow of these peaks and remember our beginnings.

The celerity stage, similar to what was later known as a mud-wagon due to its low center of gravity, was well adapted to the rough mountains and desert country. It was either painted or varnished red, or a dark bottle-green. Wire pattern candle lamps provided light inside the leather lined coach. One hundred of these wagons were built in 1857 and placed in the Butterfield Overland Mail service in 1858. They were used exclusively between Springfield, Missouri, and Los Angeles, California, and cost \$1500 each.