

FIRST DRAFT Dominguez and Escalante might've slept here (maybe)

It was just over 242 years ago — Sept. 4, 1776 — that an expedition led by Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Fray Silvestre Vélaz de Escalante camped in a meadow near a cold stream on the northern flank of Grand Mesa.

After almost two and a half centuries, it's hardly surprising that the exact location of that camp site is not known. Even so, people in Collbran have good reason to believe the site was very near where their community was eventually settled.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Furthermore, Barbara and Manny Sanchez, who live near Collbran, can make a reasonable case that the site may have been on their ranch. Barbara's grandfather, John Benjamin Harris, purchased the ranch by 1900.

More than a century before that purchase — on July 29, 1776 — Dominguez and Escalante left Santa Fe, New Mexico, with 10 men and an unknown number of horses, mules and cattle, headed northwest.

They were officially looking for a route from Santa Fe to Monterey, California, although Escalante had written a letter saying he didn't think that could be accomplished with the time and men the expedition had available.

They also planned to make contact with the Ute Indians to the north, to seek religious converts among the natives they encountered, and to explore and map lands north and west of the Colorado River. Additionally, they wanted to determine whether there were bearded men of European descent living on those lands.

Although the small expedition did not reach California, it was successful in other respects. Among other things, it determined that the rumored Europeans were actually bearded Ute and Paiute Indians living near Utah Lake and in southwestern Utah. They returned to Santa Fe in early January 1777.

Escalante kept a journal of the trip, and he gave Spanish names to each of the places the group camped, as well as to rivers, mountains and other landscape features they encountered.

The Sept. 4 campsite was called Santa Rosalia, after a devout 12th century Sicilian woman who is said to have appeared in Palermo, Italy, in 1624 and saved the city from a plague.

The Collbran Town Council last month renamed the town Santa Rosalia for the week of Sept. 1-7, in honor of the campsite.

Escalante offered no reasons for naming the Sept. 4 campsite after the Italian saint. He simply wrote, "We crossed a small stream of very cold water and camped on its bank. We named it and the little valley of good pasture here, Santa Rosalia."

He gave similar names to many other campsites and landscape features they saw during their five-month journey. Only a few of the names have remained, such as Canyon Pintado, south of Rangely.



Photos by BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Barbara and Manny Sanchez, in a meadow at their ranch in the Kimball Creek Valley. The meadow could be the site of the Santa Rosalia campsite of the Dominguez-Escalante expedition.



A Colorado History plaque celebrating the bicentennial of the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition, outside the Ute Museum in Montrose.

In addition to place names, Escalante's journal included descriptions of where they traveled, mileage estimates, and occasional longitude and latitude readings.

Two 20th century authors attempted to track the expedition's travels based on English translations of Escalante's journal. But there are difficulties. For one thing, the longitude-latitude readings are not completely accurate, compared to modern readings.

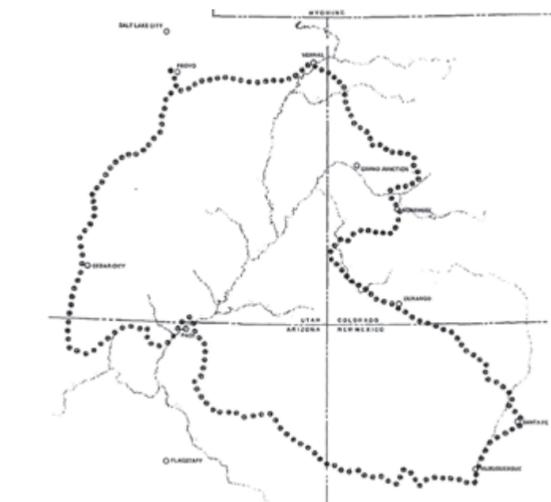
Additionally, members of the expedition measured distance in leagues. A Spanish league in the 18th century was roughly 2.6 miles, but Escalante could only make rough estimates based on the time it took to traverse the rugged terrain.

Uncertainties about such things have led to different estimations of where the expedition stopped each evening, although the general, overall route is the same.

For instance, Utah historian Herbert Bolton translated the Escalante journal and published a book tracing the route in 1951. He determined that the Santa Rosalia campsite was "apparently on Kimball Creek." He also said it was "north of the site of Collbran and northwest of Plateau City."

However, Ted J. Warner, who edited a 1976 version of the journal, based on another translation, suggested the Sept. 4 campsite was "on Jerry Gulch" northeast of today's Jerry Creek Reservoir.

Both Warner and Bolton said the expedition left Santa Rosalia on Sept. 5, headed over the Battlements and then followed Alkalai Creek or Wallace Creek to the Colorado River. That evening, they camped near the Colorado River near the present-day site of the Una



A map depicts the route of the Dominguez-Escalante expedition.

Bridge, between De Beque and Parachute.

Bolton's suggested site of the Santa Rosalia campsite is closer to the Battlements and would have allowed a much more direct route over the Battlements, then down to the Colorado River.

If we accept Bolton's suggested location for the Sept. 4 campsite, then the Sanchez ranch could very well have been the Santa Rosalia site.

The meadow in this photo would likely have had good natural grass for the expedition's animals. And Kimball Creek, which certainly meets the requirement of a stream with "very cold water," is just to the right, out of the frame in this picture.

Furthermore, an old trail, which Harris family oral history has long said to be an ancient Ute Trail, leads north and west toward the Battlements.

The expedition camped at Santa Rosalia after having traversed Grand Mesa from the south side, near Overland Park, to the north. The fathers did so with the assistance of Ute Indians, who would have been familiar with ancient trails such as the one that passed through the Sanchez ranch.

We cannot know exactly where Dominguez, Escalante and their men trod and where they camped on their 1,700-mile journey. But it is likely they passed near Collbran and the Sanchez ranch almost two and a half centuries ago.

Sources: "Pageant in the Wilderness," by Herbert E. Bolton; "The Dominguez-Escalante Journal," edited by Ted J. Warner; The Plateau Valley Historical Society; Barbara Sanchez.

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2 men are found dead in road near Hotchkiss

By ERIN MCINTYRE
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The Colorado Bureau of Investigation is helping investigate two fatalities reported near Hotchkiss early Sunday morning.

Two men were found dead in the roadway around 3 a.m., according to Delta County Sheriff Fred McKee. The person who reported the deaths to law enforcement was headed to work early that morning and came upon the scene at the intersection of 3100 and L roads just west of Hotchkiss, he said.

McKee said investigators responded to the scene and found two men who apparently died from gunshot wounds. Though they were identified by law enforcement, their names were

being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

A vehicle belonging to one of the deceased men was found nearby, McKee said. Sheriff's Office investigators were not seeking any suspects or individuals who might be involved with the deaths on Sunday, he said.

Investigators requested help from the CBI's lab team to process evidence.

The intersection where the men were found is in an agricultural area, with many orchards and fields surrounding it. The scene is located east of Ela Family Farms and just west of Mesa Winds Farm & Winery, north of State Highway 92.

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60.
Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend Delivery includes the following date in 2018: Nov. 22.
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BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Fire put out at retail outlet

Firefighters extinguished a blaze that threatened to burn down a mattress and appliance store on Sunday afternoon.

The fire started behind Mattress Kingdom and Appliance Factory, located at 2463 U.S. Highway 6&50.

According to the Grand Junction Fire Department, crews arrived just after 2:30 p.m.

and store employees were attempting to put the fire out. No one was hurt in the fire, and the cause of the fire the source of ignition was not determined.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

■ A juvenile male was issued a summons Thursday for allegedly possessing marijuana near Central High School.

■ Demarcus Williams, 20, was arrested Friday in the 3200 block of I-70B for an outstanding warrant.

■ Daniel Dyer, 55, was arrested for an alleged restraining order violation Saturday in the 2900 block of Plymouth Road.

The Grand Junction Police Department did not release blotter information Sunday.

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