

In a Cloud of Dust, the Mail Gets Through

By Gerald Hasty, N7YQQ

Ranked among the most remarkable feats to come out of the 1860's American West, the Pony Express was in service from April 1860 to November 1861. Its primary mission was to deliver mail and news between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco.

The Great Salt Lake Desert was a major obstacle facing travelers to California. Most California emigrants took the California cutoff of the Oregon Trail north of the Salt Lake. That trail offered water and feed for livestock, but was closed by snow in the winter and did not serve the need for a year-round communications route between California and the East. Early efforts to find a route across the desert ran afoul of salt, heat, and lack of water. Finally, a trail was pioneered that skirted the worst of the salt desert, going from spring to spring, "following the moistures". The route was poor in feed, extremely isolated, muddy in the spring and fall, dusty or cold otherwise, and plagued by Indians. In spite of these drawbacks, it served the communication needs and became famous as the Overland Route.

Sir Richard Burton, English adventurer-writer, provided a would be traveler to the West with a comprehensive report of his Western tour in 1860. The starting point of Burton's tour was the railhead of St. Joseph, Missouri. His stagecoach followed the Overland Route through Salt Lake City to San Francisco. Burton's travels were reported in "The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California" originally published in 1861, and provided detailed accounts of the Pony Express stations that he visited.

Today the National Pony Express Association keeps the spirit and memory of the Pony Express alive. The NPEA will once again conduct a Re-ride of the Pony Express Trail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The dates of this adventure are from the 12th of June to about the 22nd of June. Leaving St. Joseph, Missouri Sunday about 4:00 P.M., the 1,966 mile route will be over the Pony Express National Historic Trail. This trail runs through these eight states: Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and California. Arriving in Sacramento, California at about 2:00 P.M. the 22nd of June, to the hoopla of all onlookers. As a piece of trivia, in 1860, the Pony Express passed through only two States of the Union. The rest of the trail went through territories of the United States.

It is the longest event held annually on a historical trail in the nation, even surpassing the famed Iditarod. The event commemorates the Pony Express of 1860-1861. The Central Overland and California Pikes Peak Express Company carried letters and telegrams for nineteen months to prove the Central Route through Salt Lake passable year round. The owners hoped to win a federal mail contract on that route. The Pony Express history is preserved in the federally designated Historic Trail, administered by the National Park Service; in

museums, Pony Rider monuments, books, and the annual re-creation by the National Pony Express Association, NPEA. Riders will carry Commemorative Letters in a mochila, Pony Express style. The mochila will carry cachets of these Commemorative Letters, honoring the history of the Pony Express. There will be a special US Postal Service cancellation used.

Since the ride takes several days, and proceeds day and night through much undeveloped and uninhabited territory, communications are needed to help coordinate the riders so that transfers can be made in a timely fashion and contacts can be made in case of an emergency. In 1989 the local amateur radio club S.I.E.R.A., Sierra Intermountain Emergency Radio Association, started providing communications for the Pony Express Re-ride across the state of Nevada. SIERA has been providing this service every year since. This year DCARC, Davis County Amateur Radio Club, is picking up the challenge of SIERA and will co-ordinate communications through the State of Utah.

Following the lead of SIERA, we are seeking volunteer operators. A communications team chief for each Pony Express Re-ride captain will be needed. Additional operators will be solicited to act in other capacities that will enable a continuous line of communications from the rider to the net control operator. The net control operator will provide real time Internet updates of the progress of the mochila. Around Saturday, 2:00 A.M., the 18th of June, the mochila will pass from the Wyoming/Utah state line out of Evanston, Wyoming.

By the 19th of June, around 5:30 A.M. the mochila will pass from the Utah/Nevada state line near Ibapah, Utah. The 'mail' should move through Utah around the speed of ten miles per hour. Murray Park in Salt Lake City is expected to be an exchange point. This exchange at the park should to take place around 11:00 A.M. Of course the actual time at any given point along the trail can be a plus or minus two hours. It is amazing how the riders can make up for lost time. The exchange station at Fairfield, Utah is expected to be the site of ceremonies. This exchange will take place about 2:00 P.M..

We are seeking volunteers to fill these positions for two to four hour shifts per position. Much of the trail passes through very difficult terrain and remote areas of the desert. Those with appropriate vehicles will be welcomed to help at those stations along the trail. Training will be provided before the event and a "Communicators' Handbook" will be available, outlining the responsibilities of the radio operators. Primarily, VHF frequencies, FM and Packet, will be used with HF in key points. The central duty will be to provide updated information to the Captain at the next exchange point.

I hope we have interested you into coming out and supporting this event. To volunteer, contact **Dave**

Harris, K7PDW, at 801.775.8405 or by Email, at woody1122@earthlink.net. Alternatively you may contact Gerald Hasty, N7YOQ, at 801.775.0272 or also by Email at ve7yoq@earthlink.net. Additional information can be found on the Internet at www.xphomestation.com for the National Pony Express Association and www.siera-amateur-radio.org for the Sierra Intermountain Emergency Radio Association. We

wish to thank Tom Crews of NPEA and Will Lewis, KD7NIR, of SIERA for the information appearing in this article. And we thank you, the reader. Your help will provide a safe and informative ride across Utah and Nevada through some of the most uninhabited stations along the Pony Express Historic Trail. The mail must get through.