

EL CAMINO REAL IN 1850

PARRY'S JOURNEY BY MULE FROM SAN DIEGO TO MONTEREY



JAMES LIGHTNER

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Cover photograph: Man with Mules, 1880s (unattributed).

Figure 1 (facing page): Charles C. Parry (1823-1890) c. 1865, courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society WHS-46969

Also from San Diego Flora:

San Diego County Native Plants, 3d ed. (2011). A comprehensive color field guide to native and naturalized plants of San Diego County, incorporating the latest taxonomy from *The Jepson Manual*, 2d ed.

Parry's California Notebooks 1849-51 (2014). A transcription of the notebooks of Charles Parry, also including letters to Dr. John Torrey, more than 200 historical and scientific footnotes, appendices, and detailed index.

San Diego County Native Plants in the 1830s, The Collections of Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, and HMS Sulphur with George Barclay and Richard Hinds (2014). Accounts of the visits of UK naturalists to San Diego County in the 1830s, with detailed footnotes and historical background.



San Diego Flora
1220 Rosecrans Street, suite 293
San Diego, CA 92106
www.sandiegoflora.com



Figure 1. Dr. Charles C. Parry (1823-1890). Photo c.1865.

Since around 1900 Californians have referred to their state's principal north-south road during the Spanish and Mexican periods (1769-1848) as *El Camino Real*. For nearly as long the term has been denigrated as simplistic and romantic, but the idea behind it is important. Overland travel occurred frequently up and down the length of *Alta California*, and there must have been a preferred route between San Diego and Monterey - a best-developed, most-followed, or fastest way that *californios* took. Identifying that route, and knowing such things as its physical condition, the services available to travelers including food, water and pasture, the frequency of the trail's use and the proportion of what we would today call commercial traffic, enlightens various historical disciplines.

The notebooks of Dr. Charles C. Parry from 1850 are a newly discovered source describing *El Camino Real*. Parry was a skilled botanist, geologist and medical doctor who rode on a mule from San Diego to Monterey in March and April 1850 and recorded notes each day of his journey. His text is significant for several reasons. He was an educated American scientist writing in English, so his style is factual and trustworthy. While other accounts described California before and after the Mexican-American War, Parry's scientific perspective was somewhat rare for that time. He was traveling before California's statehood and before Americans became the majority of the population; the land, people and customs still resembled the Mexican period. He traveled the distance from San Diego to Monterey taking few days of rest and with few significant detours from what he called the "main road". He accompanied persons who knew the favored route. Perhaps most importantly, he noted the locations where he camped each night and the distances in miles gained each day.

For readers interested in California's natural resources, Parry's text provides other unique insights. He described the landscape - the botany and geology en route - before that landscape was permanently transformed.

The text of Parry's entries for his journey to Monterey is included in the new book, *Parry's California Notebooks 1849-51* (San Diego Flora, 2014). The book is an annotated transcription of Parry's hand-written notes from the twenty months he spent in the state and includes his letters to Dr. John Torrey, a famous plant-taxonomist and professor of medicine, botany, and chemistry in New York.

Figure 1 is a photograph of Parry in 1865. He came to San Diego in July 1849 when he was 26. *Parry's California Notebooks* starts with a letter he wrote to Torrey in January 1849, in which he tells Torrey he intends to join a wagon-train to California if he can't get a job with the government to go there. Like so many Americans, Parry was attracted to California by word of the Gold Rush and the fertile land and climate.

Torrey arranged a position for Parry with the US-Mexico Boundary Commission. Parry traveled by ship to Panama then crossed the Isthmus overland, then took another ship up to California, arriving in San Diego on July 13, 1849. The Commission's task was to mark the new border. Parry's

superior was Major William Emory of the Army's topographic corps.

The Boundary Commission needed to find two points, one at the coast and one at the Colorado River, then mark the line between them. **Figure 2** is a close-up of Emory's map from the Commission's Report of the 1850s, showing the two points and the line. The first point was 3 miles south of San Diego Bay, on the south side of the Tijuana Rivermouth. The second point was at the junction where the Gila River flows into the Colorado River. The Colorado carried a great deal of water in those days before dams, intensive agriculture and the development of the Southwest.

Parry surveyed the initial point of the boundary south of Imperial Beach and was part of the expedition that traveled to the Colorado River in the autumn of 1849 to mark the Gila-Colorado junction. Many emigrants were moving west across the desert at the time. In October, while camped near Yuma, Parry met an old friend and colleague, Andrew Randall, who was traveling west with Col. James Collier's party on his way to work as a U.S. customs inspector in Monterey.

Parry returned to San Diego in December 1849. After US and Mexican Commissioners agreed on the end-points of the California segment of the boundary, the Americans conducted astronomical surveys to find the azimuth and mark the line. Parry was not as involved in that part of the work or in setting monuments in the mountains and desert. As he had time for exploring, he decided to travel north to visit Randall in Monterey.

Emory granted Parry three months leave. Early in March 1850 Parry rode out of Old Town San Diego to a staging area known as "Mule Camp", in San Clemente Canyon, a mile east of the present junction of Interstate 5 and Highway 52. After several days of preparation, on March 11, 1850 he and a party of fellow travelers set off north. Parry was the only one in his group headed to Monterey. He arrived at his destination on April 8, 1850, 28 days after leaving Mule Camp.



Figure 2. 1850s Boundary Commission Map showing new boundary line.

San Diego to San Juan Capistrano

Day 1 (Tues., March 5, 1850). Start: Old Town San Diego. End: San Clemente Canyon or Upper Rose Canyon. Parry's distance: 8 miles.

Parry's journey began in Old Town San Diego. On March 5, 1850 he rode across the waist-deep San Diego River and rejoined the main road on the eastern edge of False Bay, then entered the valley of present Rose Canyon at its southern end. The road followed the valley's stream, crossing it "9 times in the course of 2 miles". About 7 miles north of Old Town Parry left the main trail and rode up a "branch valley to the east about 1 mile". The valley was either San Clemente Canyon (*la Cañada de las Yeguas* - valley of the mares) or Upper Rose Canyon (*la Cañada de San Buenaventura*). Parry called the grassy camp-site "Mule Camp", indicating a settlement where horses and mules were boarded; the old Spanish name for San Clemente Canyon suggests such a use.

Day 2 (Mon., March 11, 1850). Start: San Clemente Canyon or Upper Rose Canyon. End: San Dieguito Rancho. Parry's distance: 10 miles; actual distance may have been closer to 13 miles counting detours.

Parry stayed at Mule Camp 6 nights. Departing on a Monday morning his party consisted of an unknown number of persons with mules and one wagon. They joined the main road near the present junction of I-5 and SR-52 and ascended the hill to the north/northeast. The road then descended into the Soledad Valley or present Sorrento Valley, steeply at the end. They followed the Soledad Valley northwest toward the ocean, crossing Penasquitos Creek within a mile of the beach. The main road then wound north over hills of present Del Mar Heights and descended to the San Dieguito River, probably crossing near the low point of today's El Camino Real (S-11). The main road followed the river upstream a short distance before continuing north. The party followed the river further east to Rancho San Dieguito of Jesús Machado. They camped within sight of the historic Osuña adobe in present Rancho Santa Fe.

Day 3 (Tues., March 12, 1850). Start: Rancho San Dieguito. End: near San Luis Rey Mission. Parry's distance: 19 miles.

Parry's party crossed northwest over the hill of present Rancho Santa Fe and descended into the valley of Escondido Creek (*el Cajon de Alijo*, or upper San Elijo Lagoon) to rejoin the main road north. Between Escondido Creek and San Marcos Creek (Batiquitos Lagoon) the road followed approximately the course of today's El Camino Real while crossing the Los Encinitos Rancho with its grassy hills and plentiful livestock; the ranch's adobe was visible to the east near present San Marcos Creek. "Soon after noon" the road neared the adobe of Juan María Marrón along Buena Vista Creek, located just east of today's El Camino Real in Carlsbad. The group camped in the "adjoining valley", probably along Loma Alta Creek in Oceanside, which Parry described as treeless with Wild Oats covering the hills. From their camp they heard bells of the San Luis Rey Mission.

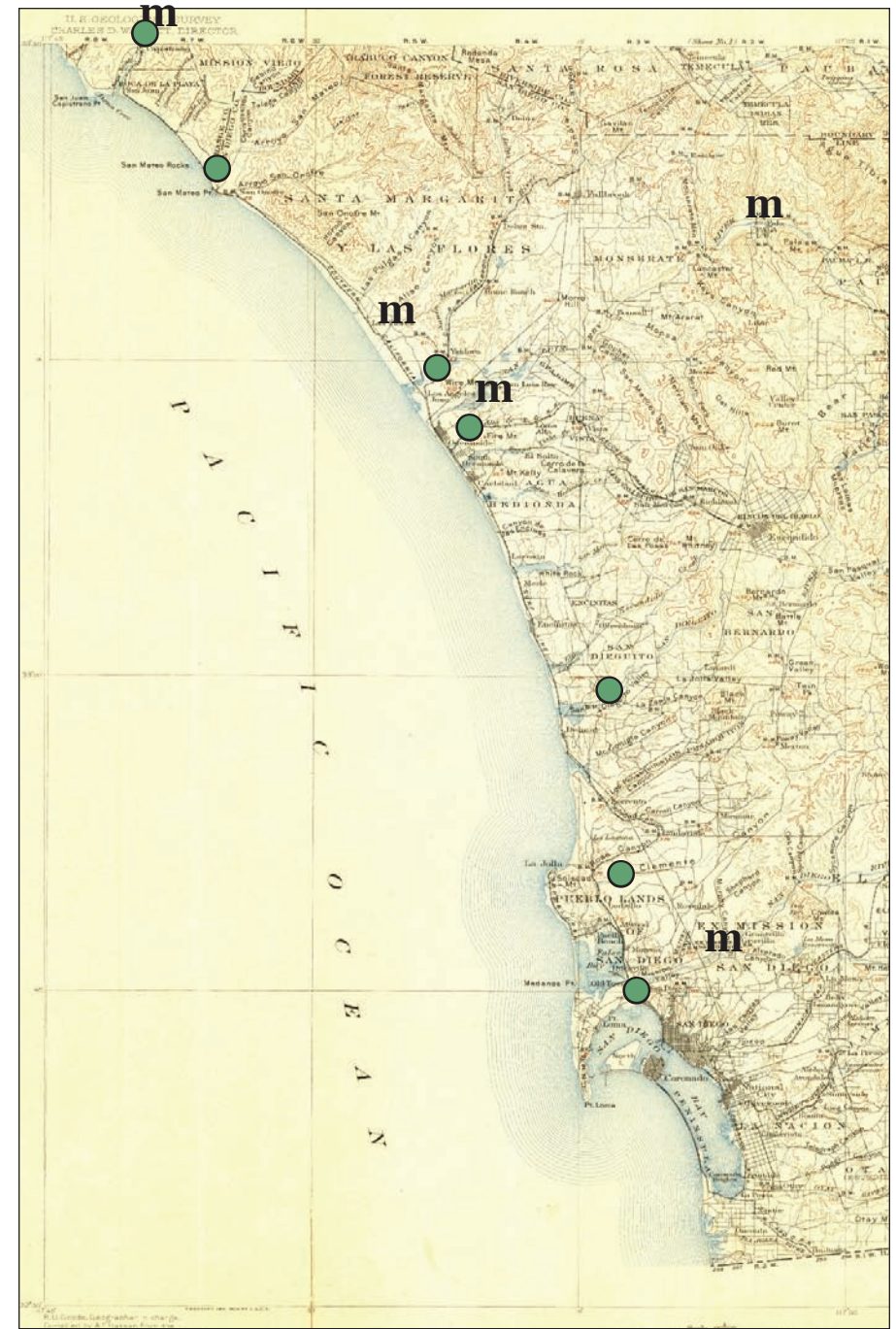


Fig. 3. Camp locations in San Diego County, marked in green on 1904 USGS map. Missions and known *asistencias* are marked with symbol **m**.

Day 4 (Wed., March 13, 1850). Start: near San Luis Rey Mission. End: Ysidora, Santa Margarita River valley. Estimated distance: 5 miles.

Parry spent much of the day at the San Luis Rey Mission, formerly among the most prosperous settlements in *Alta California*. The party required the aid of oxen to cross the waist-deep San Luis Rey River north of the mission compound. The road “proceeded up a gorge onto the tableland and in about 3 miles descended into the lower part of the Santa Margarita River valley, in which a cluster of ranches owned by Pico.” The group camped on the southern side of the river, probably around the settlement later known as Ysidora.

Day 5 (Thu., March 14, 1850). Start: Ysidora, Santa Margarita River valley. End: near San Mateo Point. Parry’s distance: 18 miles.

The party “passed in safety the river of Santa Margarita” and ascended the northern bank to a highpoint with views of the ocean. The road crossed west over a mildly sloping plain, joining the coast at the deserted *asistencia* of Las Flores. From there it followed mostly flat ground parallel to the beach until crossing present San Onofre Creek. The road then passed variable terrain before following San Mateo Creek down to the beach. The party camped by a “fine corral and deserted ranch” on the bluffs near San Mateo Point, in today’s town of San Clemente.

Day 6 (Fri., March 15, 1850). Start: near San Mateo Point. End: San Juan Capistrano Mission. Parry’s distance: 9 or 10 miles.

Because of high tide the group followed the road above the beach crossing variable topography for 3 miles before descending to a wider stretch of beach beneath “high beetling cliffs, some 80 feet” tall. They continued along the sand 4 miles to the mouth of San Juan Creek near today’s Dana Point harbor; the composition was compact enough for the wagon to roll. The road then followed up the river 3 miles northeast to the grounds of the San Juan Capistrano Mission, where Parry was welcomed as a dinner guest of John Forster and his wife Ysidora Pico. The party camped in “an outside court attached to the Mission.”

San Juan Capistrano to Santa Barbara

Day 7 (Sat., March 16, 1850). Start: San Juan Capistrano. End: Yorba ranch on Santa Ana River. Parry’s distance: 27 miles.

From San Juan Capistrano the road proceeded due north along Oso Creek in today’s I-5 corridor, 9 miles to the Rancho Cañada de los Alisos in present Lake Forest. The road then turned northwest into “a continuous plain stretching as far as the eye can reach, shut out from the sea by hills and bounded on the east by mountain ranges. Its entire surface was spotted with herds of cattle & horses...” About 15 miles on it crossed Santiago Creek and came to the main settlement of the Yorba family’s Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana on the east bank of the Santa Ana River in the present city of Orange. The group camped there.



Fig. 4. Camp locations around Los Angeles, marked on 1904 USGS map. The party did not visit the San Gabriel or San Fernando Missions.

Day 8 (Sun., March 17, 1850). "Remain[ed] camped to rest & recruit the animals."

Day 9 (Mon., March 18, 1850). Start: Yorba ranch on Santa Ana River. End: Just south of Los Angeles pueblo. Parry's distance: 24 miles.

The party crossed the 200-foot wide Santa Ana River with some difficulty, as "its channel was bedded with quicksand through which our mules flounder[ed], the water reaching to the saddle skirts." The road crossed the present city of Anaheim (founded 1857) through a series of flats and "muddy gullies" before rising to a "rolling ground of hard gravelly soil and good road" leading after 18 miles to the San Gabriel River, south of the present Whittier Narrows, with the San Gabriel about as wide as the Santa Ana and "marked by a line of trees". At the time there was only one significant watercourse at Parry's location, referred to then as the Río de San Gabriel (rather than Rio Hondo), which merged with the present Los Angeles River above San Pedro. Parry mentioned a ranch which may have been Rancho Santa Gertrudes. The party crossed the river and continued 6 more miles to camp at the next ranch, probably Rancho San Antonio of Antonio Lugo, "in sight of the city of angels... at the base of hills and overlooking a low plain, with pools of water and fenced off, set with fruit trees, etc." On this day Parry omitted mention of the 1847 Battle of Río San Gabriel or the site of that crucial battle, and his party did not detour east to the San Gabriel Mission.

Day 10 (Tue., March 19, 1850). Start: Just south of Los Angeles pueblo. End: Rancho Los Encinos. Parry's distance: 21 miles.

They crossed the present Los Angeles River, "a small dashing stream... probably a branch of the San Gabriel", and entered a "suburb" of Los Angeles where Parry noticed an Orange tree, then crossed the town on horseback, apparently in a northerly direction. Leaving town the road passed "undulating hills" in a westerly course with views of the ocean, crossed the plain of present Hollywood and entered a "pretty defile", surely the Cahuenga Pass. On the north side of the pass Parry's party continued on the main road west along the northern side of the present Santa Monica Mountains, choosing not to visit the San Fernando Mission, visible 6 miles across the valley. They camped at "a ranch called Encino", or Rancho Los Encinos, with hot springs.

Day 11 (Wed., March 20, 1850). Start: Rancho Los Encinos. End: Oak grove on Rancho El Conejo. Parry's distance: 28 miles.

Departing Encino the main road followed a westerly course all day, most of it through "hilly country" with ascents and "some rather steep pitches" as well as "upland valleys and plains". The route may have approximated the present route of U.S. 101 between Encino and Thousand Oaks. Toward the end of the day Parry's party "failed to obtain accommodations" for its animals at a ranch, likely José de la Guerra's Rancho El Conejo, and camped in a mixed-oak woodland. De la Guerra owned numerous *ranchos* and was likely absent.

Day 12 (Thu., March 21, 1850). Start: Rancho El Conejo. End: Santa Clara River, 6 miles southeast of the San Buenaventura Mission. Parry's distance: 12 miles.

Descending from the central valley of Rancho El Conejo to today's Oxnard plain near sea-level the party passed an "almost perpendicular" slope dropping 500 feet of elevation, where the wagon "had to be let down by hand", suggesting they traveled on the northern side of Conejo Mountain in the vicinity of present Conejo Grade rather than Long Grade Canyon

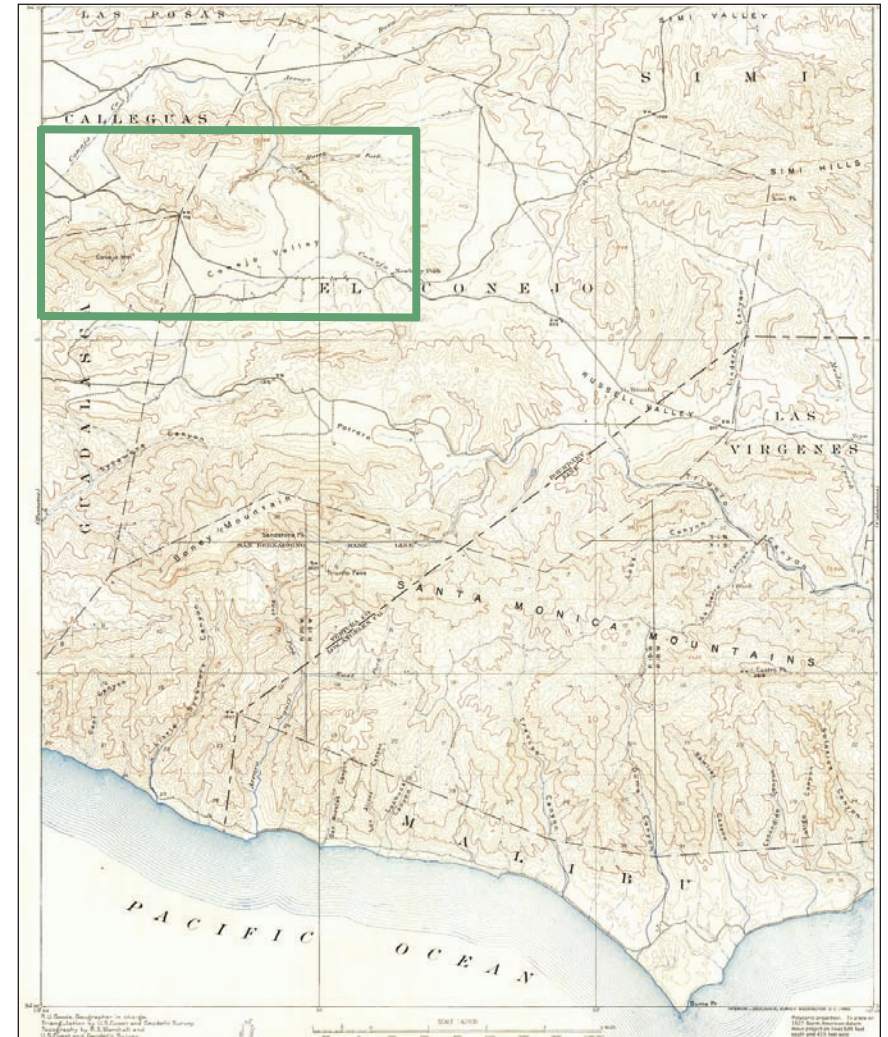


Fig. 5. Area of camp for the night of March 20, 1850, at Rancho El Conejo in present Ventura County, 1900 USGS map. Leaving camp March 21 Parry's party descended to the Oxnard plain passing an "almost perpendicular" hill 500 feet high. The wagon "had to be let down by hand."

farther south. From the base of Conejo Grade the road continued on a northwesterly course another 9 or 10 miles to the south bank of the Santa Clara River where there was "quite a cluster of new ranches and several good corrals"; possibly the settlement eventually named El Rio. The party camped there, about 6 miles southeast of the San Buenaventura Mission by Parry's calculation.

Day 13 (Fri., March 22, 1850). Start: Santa Clara River, 6 miles from San Buenaventura Mission. End: Carpintería. Parry's distance: 18 miles.

After crossing the Santa Clara River and mounting the "caving bank of earth" on its northern side, the group proceeded about 6 miles to the San Buenaventura Mission, which Parry found in good condition, surrounded by a thriving settlement. Leaving the mission they crossed the Buenaventura River and turned down to the beach, "closely hemmed in by high perpendicular hills 300 ft." They followed the beach some 15 miles passing the three main points north of Ventura - Pitas Point, Punta Gorda and Rincon Point; the passes had "to be made during low tide as

high water washes the perpendicular cliffs". The tide was rising as they finally crossed the "fine clear stream" of "knee-deep" Rincon Creek. They camped "on a rise overlooking the sea" in present Carpintería, away from marshy areas; Parry called the site "ocean camp".

Day 14 (Sat., March 23, 1850). Start: Carpintería "ocean camp". End: Santa Barbara. Parry's distance: 12 miles.

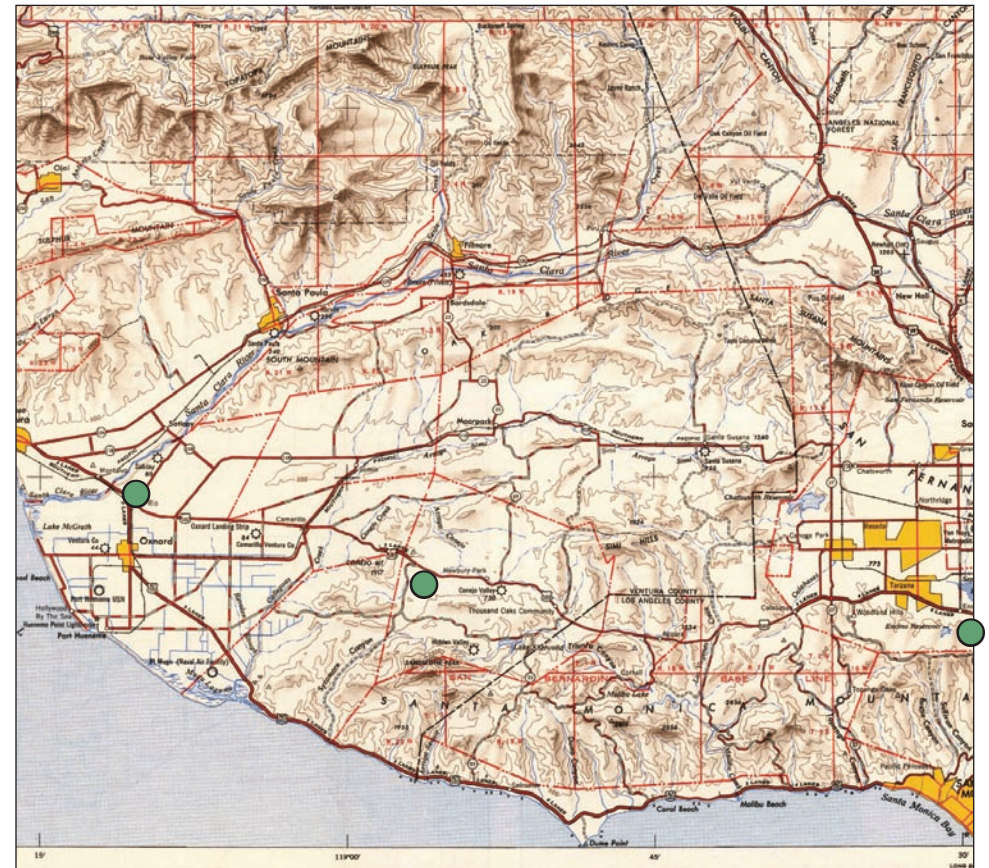
Leaving ocean camp the road to Santa Barbara rose in elevation, providing views of the town and Cape Concepcion, before descending again close to the beach, probably at present Summerland. It then crossed a "dense grove" of Live Oak, and winding toward town passed "one ranch" on the right before entering the central district. The ocean made "several inlets" to form a bay; the Mission was situated half a mile above town.

Day 15 (Sun., March 24, 1850). Rest at Santa Barbara.

Parry visited the Mission and as usual examined the grounds and agricultural activities. He also met a few established residents of the town and "was shown a Spanish book history of the Missions of California".



Fig. 6. Camps around Ventura and Santa Barbara marked on 1949 USGS map.



The beach trail between Ventura and Carpinteria was passed at low tide.

Santa Barbara to Santa Margarita

Day 16 (Mon., March 25, 1850). Start: Santa Barbara. End: Rancho Dos Pueblos. Parry's distance: 15 miles.

Following the road west from Santa Barbara Parry remarked on the number of Live Oaks and their size; he measured an 11-foot circumference for one tree's trunk. After 6 miles the party passed "a cluster of ranches on a rich bottom". At 9 miles they reached Rancho la Goleta of Daniel Hill, with its main settlement on the north side of the road away from the extensive marshes of the area today called Isla Vista. They continued another 6 miles over variable topography to Rancho Dos Pueblos of Hill's daughter and his Irish son-in-law, Nicholas Den, and camped there.

Day 17 (Tue., March 26, 1850). "Remain[ed] camped to recruit our animals..." Parry explored the neighboring mountains on foot.

Day 18 (Wed., March 27, 1850). "Remain[ed] in camp; day hot...swim in the surf. Name of the place Dos Pueblos."

Day 19 (Thu., March 28, 1850). Start: Rancho Dos Pueblos. End: Las Cruces. Parry's distance: 22 miles.

The party woke at 01:30 in the morning to prepare and pack mules, finally departing at 04:00 to "take advantage of the low tide" and full moon. They galloped 5 miles along the beach before taking "up a gorge to the tableland", a narrow coastal strip marked by a series of ravines with streams and "strong descents". About 18 miles from Dos Pueblos they turned north up a canyon, surely Gaviota Canyon, following it up "till it enter[ed] the mountains by a pass, perfectly hemmed in by rocks on all sides except the narrow entrance". The road followed a rocky, wooded stream, entered a grassy area, continued with "confusion" through another twisting canyon, passed into an upland valley and led to the settlement of Las Cruces around 400 feet elevation, where the party camped.

Day 20 (Fri., March 29, 1850). Start: Las Cruces. End: Rancho Los Álamos. Parry's distance: 24 miles.

The junction at Las Cruces offered the choice to head northwest toward La Purisima Mission or northeast toward Santa Ynez Mission; Parry's party chose Santa Ynez. The road continued upstream to Gaviota Pass and mounting the pass dropped into a grassy basin. It then veered east up to another pass after which the Mission was visible in the distance. The group descended north along Alisal Creek by "another steep and very tortuous hill, winding like a spiral staircase" to the Santa Ynez Valley below. Once in the wide valley the party crossed the Santa Ynez River, "a swift current running over a pebbly bed", and soon entered the grounds of the Mission, "the people occupied in the Lent festival". From there the group did not continue up the valley to the orchards of Los Olivos; instead they moved west a mile or so, then cut north over a ridge, possibly following La Zaca Creek. After a "steep and gullied descent" to Zaca they turned sharply west and rode to Rancho Los Álamos to camp.



Fig. 7. Camp locations at Dos Pueblos (off map), Las Cruces, Rancho Los Álamos, and Rancho Nipomo (top) marked on 1905 USGS map. Parry did not detour to the La Purisima Mission nor to the farms around Los Olivos.

Day 21 (Sat., March 30, 1850). Start: Rancho Los Álamos. End: Rancho Nipomo. Parry's distance: 20 miles.

See Parry's full text on facing page. From Rancho Los Álamos the party followed San Antonio Creek downstream (west) crossing wetland areas before turning north into a "branch valley", surely the valley of Harris Canyon and Graciosa Canyon, where the present SR-135 runs. The settlement of Graciosa, at the north end of the valley, south of present Orcutt, in Parry's time is thought to have included the main buildings of William Hartnell's Rancho Todos Santos y San Antonio; Parry probably rode near the settlement. Highway 1 presently traverses the same valley over 4 miles; Highway 101 also did until 1933. Passing north through the area of present Orcutt Parry remarked on the "sandy hills... in places drifting", indicative of the extensive sand dunes around Guadalupe nearer the coast. The party then crossed the 5-mile wide Santa Maria valley and its "broad shallow river". Passing into a ravine with a "clean stream", certainly Nipomo Creek, they mounted up to a plain above the western bank of the creek and rode on to the Rancho Nipomo of Captain Dana, with the creek and "narrow fertile valley below". The party camped there.

Day 22 (Sun., March 31, 1850). Remained at Rancho Nipomo. Parry wrote that the sandy plain to seaward had a fine variety of native plants.

Day 23 (Mon., April 1, 1850). Start: Rancho Nipomo. End: Rancho Pismo, valley of Arroyo Grande. Parry's distance: 12 miles.

The party continued down the Nipomo valley on a northwesterly course through "country scattered with Live Oak", most likely following approximately the course of present Los Berros Road to the wide mouth of the Arroyo Grande valley. They faced difficulties crossing Arroyo Grande Creek. "The bottom [was] of a marshy character and thickly wooded... We had much trouble in passing the arroyo, getting stuck in mud holes, and had to be lifted out." Probably due to those difficulties they progressed only 12 miles over the day. Crossing to the northern side of the muddy valley they camped on the ranch of John Price in present Pismo Beach or possibly Grover Beach.

Day 24 (Tue., April 2, 1850). Start: Rancho Pismo, Arroyo Grande valley. End: Santa Margarita. Parry's distance: 21 miles.

Leaving the Price ranch and Arroyo Grande valley, the first mile or so of road apparently mounted a hill east of Pismo Creek and Price Canyon before descending into that "narrow valley" north of its mouth. The road then followed up Pismo Creek to its summit, "a gravelly hill which commands an extensive view of bare & wooded peaks with the Mission of San Luis Obispo in the distance". The plain between present Edna and San Luis Obispo was "cut up with deep trenching streams... in one of which our wagon upset". They reached the San Luis Obispo Mission 12 miles from the Price ranch. Leaving the Mission they followed San Luis Obispo Creek high up to its summit before descending after Cuesta to the Santa Margarita valley. They camped near the old Santa Margarita *asistencia*.

Parry's California Notebooks 1849-51 (San Diego Flora, February 2014) lacks Charles Parry's entry for March 30, 1850, when he was traveling near present Santa Maria on the Central Coast. The original hand-written pages for that date were located in December 2014 and the text is transcribed below. This text belongs on **Page 66** between the existing entries for March 29 and March 31, 1850.

March 30 - Left camp at 8 enveloped in fog which hung about us for 2 hours. Passed over the Álamos valley crossing some bad sloughs, [before turning north and] following up a branch valley lying in our course of a stiff clay with marshy spots now drying up, with rushes growing of which the Indians make a nice basket. The hills on our left to seaward are sandy and covered with peculiar shrubbery, among others the shrubby *Psoralea*. Saw also the Papaveraceous plant *Platystigma*, closely resembling the allied *Platystemon* from which it is distinguished by its narrow radical leaves & habit choosing a clayey soil [94b].

Passing out of the valley we come upon a series of sandy hills, the sand light and in places drifting. On each side the ground is completely variegated with a profusion of plants representing every variety of colour, blue and yellow predominating (for species see collection).

Passing over this we come on a wide plain valley, soil light and vegetation comparatively scant. The plain is a succession of 3 steps. At the extremity of the last is a broad shallow river spreading out in a variety of channels about knee deep [94c]. To our left the line of beach is visible in broken sandy knolls. We cross the plain about 5 miles diagonally and entering a ravine down which comes a clean stream mount up to the tableland on this side overlooking the stream in steep caving bluffs. The tableland is of the light sandy character & vegetation earlier described but less barren. We soon come on to Dana's Ranch on the brow of the sandy plain and a narrow fertile valley below. Mr. Dana is an old American resident. Distance 20 miles.

[94b] *Platystigma* = *Hesperomecon linearis*, Narrow-leaf Queen Poppy (also formerly classified as *Meconella l.*).

[94c] Santa Maria River.



Fig. 8. Camp locations in San Luis Obispo County marked on 1900 USGS map. Parry was thrown from his mule after leaving San Luis Obispo.

Santa Margarita to Monterey

Day 25 (Wed., April 3, 1850). Start: Santa Margarita. End: San Miguel Mission. Parry's distance: 25 miles.

Leaving Santa Margarita, a few miles north the road entered the upper end of the Salinas River Valley. With few significant grades it remained west of the river at elevation around 1000 feet, through a landscape of pines and *Ceanothus*, until descending to the edge of the river where it curved at the junction of Paso Robles Creek. A few more miles north the party came to "the pass called Paso Robles", where they entered the river to get around the "steep caving banks", then crossed back to visit the "stirring settlement" of Paso Robles, "quite a collection of houses... a store, bakery & blacksmith shop". Continuing north the topography became more mild and rolling. Around 4 o'clock they stopped to camp at the San Miguel Mission, deserted and vandalized. Parry remarked on the murders of the Reed family that occurred there 16 months earlier.



Fig. 9. Camp locations of the upper Salinas River valley and San Antonio River marked on 1947 USGS map. San Miguel at center; Jolon at top left.

Day 26 (Thu., April 4, 1850). Start: San Miguel Mission. End: San Antonio River valley near present Jolon. Parry's distance: 30 miles.

From the San Miguel Mission the main road turned west, leaving the Salinas River valley, following approximately the route of today's West 10th Street to Bee Rock Road, rising gradually in elevation and reaching in about 6 miles the Nacimiento River, "a clear swift stream... knee-deep". Crossing the river the road continued west over a grade and descended to the San Antonio River, then continued up along the south bank of the San Antonio on a northwesterly course in the direction of the San Anto-



Fig. 10. Camp locations of the lower Salinas River valley marked on 1948 USGS map. Jolon is at bottom, Monterey Customs House at top left.

nio de Padua Mission. (Miles of the trail were submerged on creation of the San Antonio Reservoir in 1967.) The party camped among oaks 6 or so miles southeast of the Mission on a ranch Parry identified as San Benito; most likely it was actually Rancho Los Ojitos near present Jolon.

Day 27 (Fri., April 5, 1850). Start: San Antonio River valley near present Jolon. End: Rancho Poza de los Ositos. Parry's distance: 24 miles.

Parry's party cut north out of the San Antonio River valley to rejoin the Salinas River valley following approximately the route of today's Jolon Road on its path through Quinado Canyon to King City. From the summit, presumably the present Jolon Grade, Parry "look[ed] down again upon the broad valley of the Salinas". Descending at points steeply to the western bank of the river they passed a "deserted ranch" which Parry identified as San Bernardo; more likely it was Rancho San Bernabé. On the western side of present King City the road followed the "steep caving bank of the river-bottom", thick with riparian trees, before leading on to "El Posso", probably Rancho Poza de los Ositos. The party camped there.

Parry's erroneous nomenclature may be attributed to members of his traveling party who lacked expertise in state-wide geography.

Day 28 (Sat., April 6, 1850). Start: Rancho Poza de los Ositos. End: Gonzalez ranch, eastern bank of Salinas River. Parry's distance: 25 miles.

The party continued north along the western side of the Salinas River, descending gradually toward the bottom then crossing the "wide valley" of the Arroyo Seco where it merged into the larger stream. Farther on as the valley of the Salinas narrowed the party came to the Soledad Mission, also on the western side, 15 miles north of the previous night's camp. At the Mission the road forked; the direct road to Monterey, "40 miles" on, continued on the left bank while the other route which Parry's party took crossed the river to the eastern side, where the plain was more fertile and wider. They camped at a ranch "2 miles off the road on the banks of the Salinas", probably the ranch of the Gonzalez family.

Day 29 (Sun., April 7, 1850). Start: Gonzalez ranch, eastern bank of Salinas River. End: Rancho Buena Vista. Parry's distance: 15 miles.

At the ranch where camped Parry hired a vaquero to guide him to Monterey, separating from the rest of his party. They rode north on the eastern side of the river, crossing to the left bank after 12 miles, past Chualar. The river was about 200 feet wide and "breast-deep", with oak woodland on the left bank. After it began to rain they stopped to camp at a "cluster of ranches", probably on land of the Rancho Buena Vista.

Day 30 (Mon., April 8, 1850). Start: Rancho Buena Vista. End: Monterey Customs House. Parry's distance: 12 miles.

Starting on a westerly course the pair soon turned south up the valley of Toro Creek, following the same route as present SR-68. Ascending to where the road curved west Parry saw "the harbor & town of Monterey" ahead. They wound through pine forest and over a sandy flat into the town, where Parry joined Randall at the Customs House.



Fig. 11. Remains of church at Mission San Luis Rey in present Oceanside, California, c. late 1800s. Parry visited it on March 13, 1850.

Parry's Contribution

The daily account of *El Camino Real* in *Parry's California Notebooks 1849-51* (San Diego Flora, 2014) confirms much that historians have known or suspected about the historic route and principal stops along the way. In many parts of the state today streets and highways labeled "El Camino Real" indeed follow sections of the road Parry took.

Much of the variation between Parry's route and the present is due to demands of civil engineering over intervening years. One of the persistent themes in Parry's account is how waterways affected the journey. Hardly a day passed without his party getting soaked to their chests fording rivers and streams, or having to extract their wagon from "quicksand" and messy bogs. Wetlands and tidal changes affected their progress in places by the coast. Bridges have helped us overcome such obstacles, just as tunnels and asphaltic roads have moderated mountain-grades. But good engineering has often required realignment of roads.

By 1850 Parry's *El Camino Real* served mainly to connect secular settlements such as towns and ranches rather than grounds of the Catholic missions - the original settlements. Parry made no mention of the San Gabriel Mission, one of the richest establishments of the Hispanic period; rather, his immediate destination was the *pueblo* of Los Angeles.

As late as March 1850, as Americans streamed into the territory and the Gold Rush reached its peak, the hospitality of *ranchos* was still customary all along the way. Each afternoon the party headed for a ranch where simple services were readily obtained. Parry made no mention of paying for a place to camp or use of water and pasture or help with the mules and wagon or fresh produce, fruits, beans, bread and meat. While he does not name his traveling companions, they no doubt included *californios* who spoke Spanish and knew well the people and the route. The only time Parry mentioned making payment was when he had to hire a *vaquero* for the last leg near Monterey. The ranchos' hospitality extended to English-speaking proprietors as well as those who spoke Spanish.

In this short article it has not been practical to discuss Parry's observations of the plants and natural landscape he saw en route to Monterey. As he was a trained botanist and skilled geologist, much of the text of the *Notebooks* refers to habitats and species of plants, soil-types and geological formations. For readers interested in such things his text in some places recalls a long-lost time. It can be quite strange today to read of Sagebrush along a narrow dirt road over open, endless plains between Irvine and Los Angeles. While Parry himself was fascinated by the native habitats and plants he had never seen, he was also very much a 19th-century man who looked at ranches, farms and orchards with an eager and appreciative eye. It did not bother him that miles and miles of rangeland were covered with introduced Wild Oat and the omnipresent Filaree. Unlike many Californians today, he saw no end of space for all activities.