

# Pea Ridge

National Military Park

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

*"Nothing on God's earth must stop the United States mail!"*

John Butterfield, 1857

## Butterfield Overland Mail

The same road that Union and Confederate soldiers struggled to control was also part of the nation's first trans-continental stage line: the Butterfield Overland Mail.

Before the Civil War, no formal system of transportation existed west of the Mississippi. People and mail traveling to the gold fields of California sailed south along the east coast to Panama. Here, people and cargo crossed a narrow but rugged piece of land, boarded a second ship on the Pacific side, and sailed north to California.

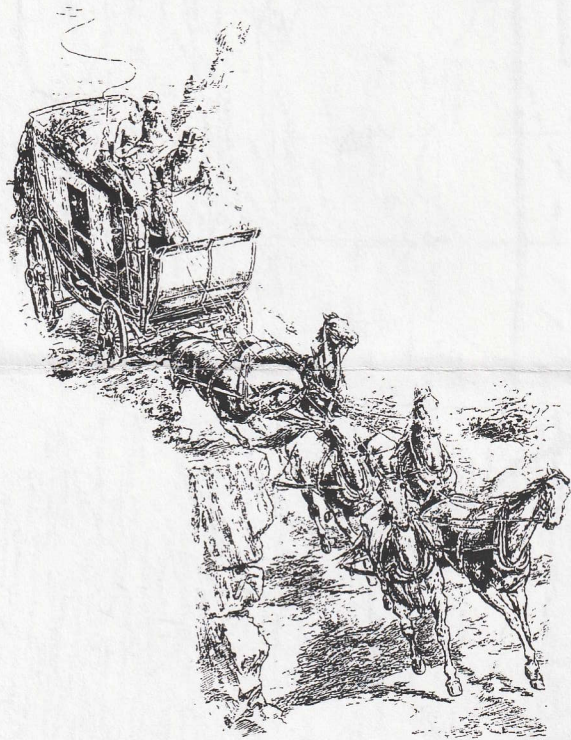
All that changed in 1857 when Congress awarded a \$600,000 contract to New York businessman John Butterfield to carry all letter mail from St. Louis and Memphis to San Francisco. Butterfield

laid out routes, built and staffed stations, purchased livestock, hay and fodder, built coaches, and hired hundreds of employees.

In order to pass through the Rocky Mountains, a southern route was selected. From Tipton, Missouri, the stage passed through southwest Missouri and northwest Arkansas before entering Indian Territory. Passing through west Texas, the route entered New Mexico Territory, including present-day Arizona, then followed the Gila River to California and turned north to San Francisco. The coming of the Civil War put a sudden end to the Butterfield venture, but in its short life, every trip was made within the 25-day contract time.



## Through Arkansas



(This publication was funded by a grant from the National Park Foundation)

The first run of the Butterfield Overland Mail departed St. Louis on September 16, 1858. The Butterfield line was designed primarily to carry mail, but on this first trip, none other than John Butterfield himself made the journey. Traveling with him was New York Herald reporter Waterman L. Ormsby.

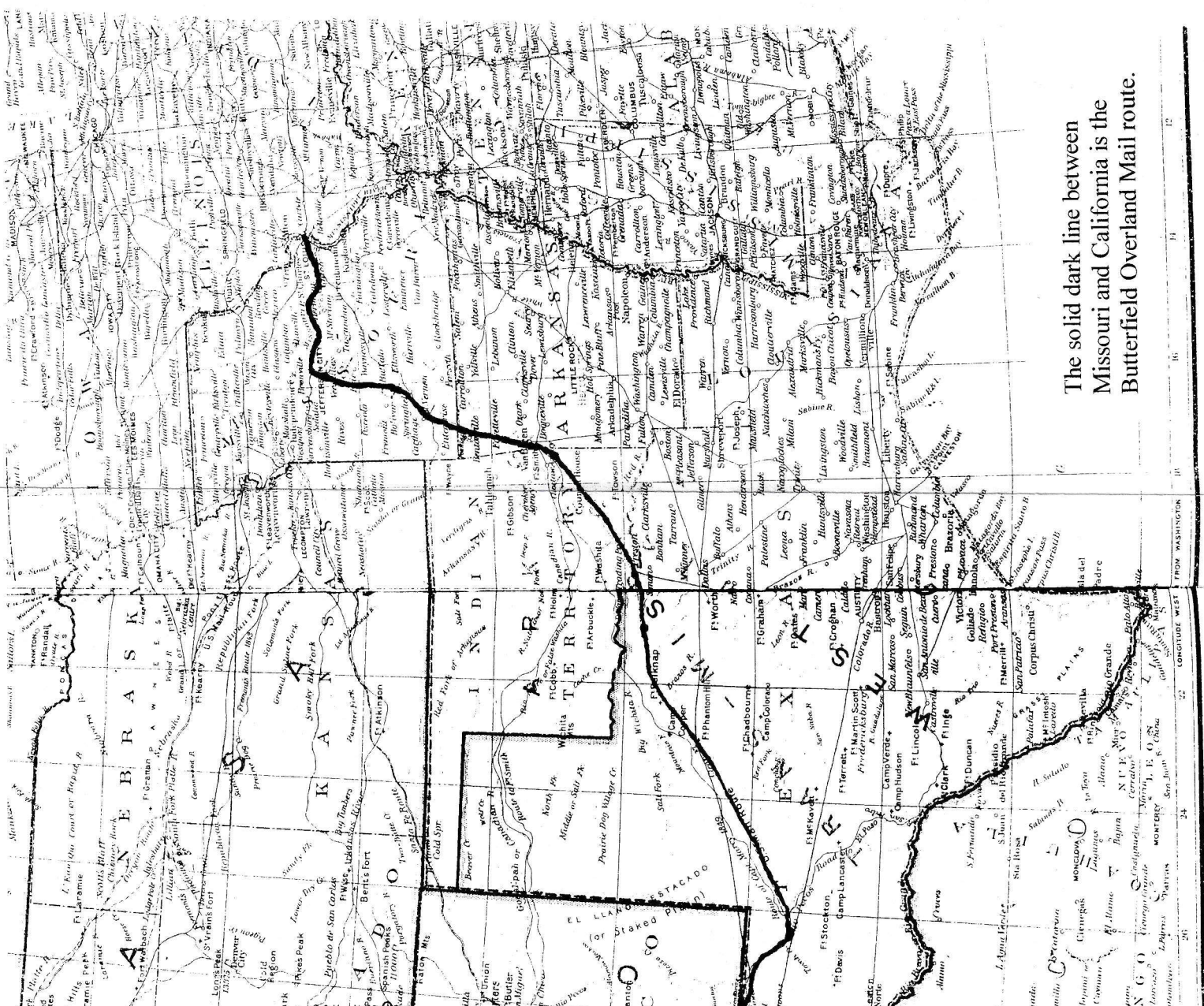
The first official Butterfield stop in Arkansas was Callahan's Station in present day Rogers. It was reached the morning of September 18, 1858. Elkhorn Tavern must have been passed sometime during the night. Though the tavern was never an official Butterfield station, it is possible that brief stops may have been made to rest and water the horses. It is more likely that the tavern was used by local stage lines or by individual travelers.

Ormsby recalled the first journey through Arkansas: "We kept traveling all day and night...our way during Friday

afternoon and evening being through an extremely dusty, hilly, and stony road....This brought us to Callahan's, but twelve miles from Fayetteville....We greased our wagon, changed horses, and got some breakfast – all in an incredibly short space of time – after which we set out for Fayetteville."

Travelers commented mostly about meals and lodging at Butterfield stations. Albert Richardson recalled the "...dining room full of flies...rooms ill furnished...towels missing, pitchers empty and bed and table linen seeming to have been dragged through the pond and dried upon gridirons." Meals typically included bacon or fat pork "floating in gravy" sour milk, cornbread served in "questionable shapes" and coffee.

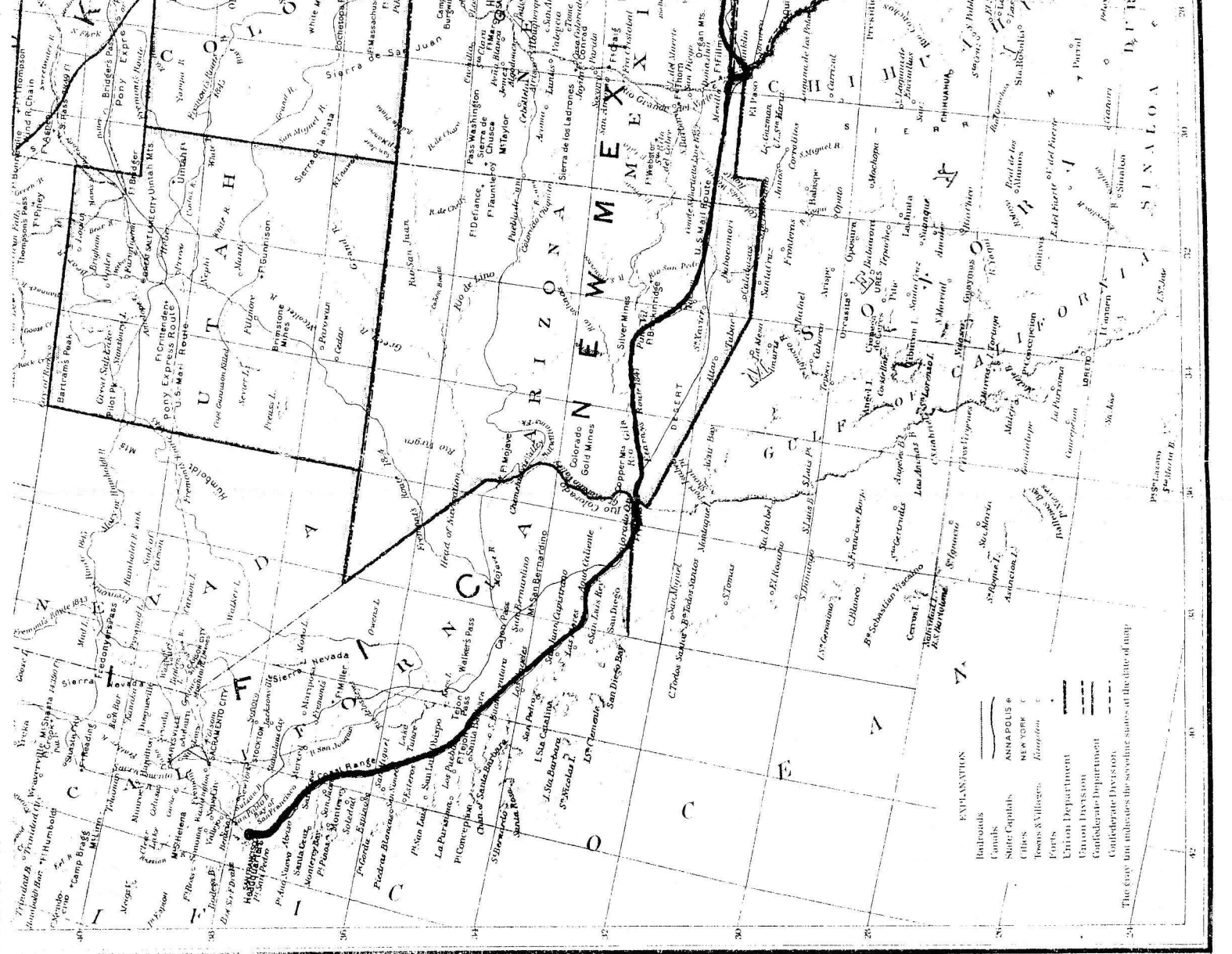
Despite its short life, the Butterfield Overland Mail was the first successful attempt to bridge the nation sea to sea.



The solid dark line between Missouri and California is the Butterfield Overland Mail route.

20 22 24 26 28 30  
 LONGITUDE WEST FROM WASHINGTON

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200  
 Miles



- EXPLANATION**
- Railroads
  - Canals
  - State Capitals
  - CITIES
  - Towns & Villages
  - Ports
  - Union Department
  - Nation Division
  - Confederate Department
  - Confederate Division

The grey line indicates the succeeding states at the date of map