

Youth Finds a Way

He was just a youngster by today's standards—only 25 years old. Antonio Armijo led 60 men and a pack string of 100 mules across little-known desert and mountains for 1,200 miles.

He and his men traded wool to the *Californios* for horses and mules. They herded them all the way back home, where he sold them at a solid profit.

He started a big trend by returning to the pleasures of California. Several Old Spanish Trail traders joined them as neighbors.

He died young, in 1850. The former Armijo ranch now has grown luxury housing surrounded by fairways and bunkers.



Indian Threats?

Armijo's diary referred to the Paiutes they met as "docile and timid" people. He encountered various Utes, Navajos, and Paiutes, reporting "no problems".

The year of his trip was one of peace, especially with the Navajos. Later in 1830, the old enmity between Navajos and the Spanish reawakened. Future caravans went in a northern loop away from Navajo country.



Armijo camped below Church Rock in the Navajo Nation on Nov. 27, 1829

Sources / Further Reading:

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Old Spanish Trail Profile

Antonio Armijo
*pioneered trade on the
Old Spanish Trail*



**New Mexico to
Southern California
and Back, 1829-1830**

Old Spanish Trail Association

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Predecessors

Armijo didn't go blindly into the arid country west of Santa Fé and Abiquiu. His predecessors included Utes, Paiutes, Navajos, Fathers Gárces, Dominguez and Escalante (part-way), trappers, and gold-seekers including Rafael Rivera, one of his guides.

What was different about Armijo was his huge cargo of woolen goods and his mission to sell or trade them in towns and missions near the California coast. His persistence and determination probably played a role.

He Found a Route

The "Armijo Route" cuts a pretty straight line westward, from Abiquiu down Cañon Largo to the Four Corners, through the Navajo Nation, to Kanab, Pipe Springs, and Hurricane UT, near Las Vegas, NV, across the Mojave Desert to Cajon Pass and down into the Los Angeles basin.

It was a tough route. They waded through the Colorado River at the rugged "Crossing of the Fathers" where men carried the mule packs up steep cliffs cut with footholds. They ate a lot of dust and a few mules as they crossed the arid Mojave.

He Opened Trade

Antonio Armijo proved that riding from New Mexico to California could produce a profit. He brought New Mexican outposts into regular contact with the Alta California villages. His succinct report described hunger and thirst but "few problems" in crossing the arid land.



Armijo's guides found a way through maze-like Tsegi Canyon in today's northern Arizona.

He Improved a Rural Economy

Armijo led in transforming northern New Mexico from an isolated hardship area, dependent on Mexico City and Chihuahua, into a trading force. His finished products brought good prices.

He acquired low-cost California horses and mules (1 for 2 blankets) and found a profitable market for them in Santa Fé.

Traders Became Emigrants

Young Antonio surely learned the trading business from his father. José Francisco Armijo had gone to and from Missouri as early as 1821 as one of the first New Mexican traders on the Santa Fé Trail, while Antonio minded the store in Santa Fé.

After Antonio came home from California in 1830, he took his parents back there to live. They ranched in the San Francisco Bay Area, then in 1840 got a grant of 13,000 acres in Solano and Napa Counties (Rancho Tolenas). The Armijo name appears on a high school in Fairfield, CA.

On April 30, 1831, Antonio married Dolores Engracia Duarte y Peralta, daughter of one of the big California ranchers. He had met her during his first (1829-30) trip. They had seven children between 1832 and 1844.



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