

# SANTA FE TRAIL

## Reading Passage & Questions

### SANTA FE TRAIL

The Santa Fe Trail was the first significant trail that ventured west. The 800-900 mile-long trail connected Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, capital of New Mexico. Open in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily used for trading and hauling goods and supplies. The Great Prairie, nickname for the Santa Fe Trail, ran from 1821 to 1880. Along the trail between Santa Fe and Independence, there was only one trading post at Council Grove.

Spaniards opened the Santa Fe Trail in the 18th century. New Mexico gained independence from Spanish settlers in 1821. At this time, William Becknell, a politician, trader, and freight operator, opened the Santa Fe Trail. He placed an advertisement looking for 'men willing to join and invest in a trading expedition to the west'. Becknell was the first American to conduct business in Santa Fe. He was also the first to travel the mountains in New Mexico. Because he established the trade route, he was the "father of the Santa Fe Trail"

The Santa Fe Trail was named for the location, Santa Fe. This route brought silver to the United States. Additionally, the trail connected the New Mexico economy with the rest of the country. Finally, the Santa Fe Trail enabled Americans to venture westward. Exports into Mexico included cloth, hardware, glass, and books. Imports into the United States were Mexican blankets, beaver pelts, wool, mules, and Mexican silver coins.

- The Santa Fe Trail had two primary routes:
- the Mountain Fork leading through Colorado
  - the Cimarron Fork leading through Kansas

The Mountain Fork wove through the Colorado Rockies. This path had rugged terrain, which was difficult for the wagons. The Cimarron Fork through Kansas was 100 miles shorter. However, this passage had very little water. Three-fourths of the travelers chose the Cimarron Fork route.

A trip on the Santa Fe Trail through prairies, deserts, and mountains took about eight weeks. Approximately 300 wagon trains worked the route transporting supplies. Drivers carried weapons due to unknown and often dangerous conditions:

- The trail spread over a foreign country and Native American territory.
- In addition to Native Americans and bandits, drivers had to deal with wild animals, treacherous terrain, and storms.

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What year did the Santa Fe Trail open? \*

- 1821  
 1844  
 1829  
 1802

How many miles shorter was the Cimarron Fork? \*

- 5  
 100  
 500  
 1,000

Santa Fe is the capital of New Mexico. \*

- True  
 False

Oxen, Bison, and horses pulled the wagons. \*

- True  
 False

# SANTA FE TRAIL

The Santa Fe Trail was the first significant trail that ventured west. The 800-900-mile-long trail connected Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, capital of New Mexico. When in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily used for trading furs, skins, and supplies. The Great Prairie, nickname for the Santa Fe Trail, ran from 1821 to 1840. Along the trail between Santa Fe and Independence, there was only one trading post at Council Grove.

Spain had opened the Santa Fe Trail in the 18th century. New Mexico gained independence from Spanish settlers in 1821. At this time, William Beckwethel, a post trader, and freight operator, opened the Santa Fe Trail. He placed an advertisement looking for men willing to join and invest in a trading expedition to the west. Beckwethel was the first American to conduct business in Santa Fe. He was also the first to travel the mountains in New Mexico. Because he established the trade route, he was the "father of the Santa Fe Trail."

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A trip on the Santa Fe Trail through prairies, deserts, and mountains took about eight weeks. Approximately 300 wagon trains worked the route transporting supplies. Drivers carried weapons due to unknown and often dangerous conditions:

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For instance, the Santa Fe Trail crossed part of Comanche Territory. The Comanche were sometimes demanding. They demanded people pay money to access the trail. This is one of many incidents on the trail over 60 years.

Prairie wagons hauled the goods on the trail. Oxen, mules, and horses pulled the wagons. In eastern Kansas, wagons traveled side by side in columns. However, in what was thought to be risky Native American territory, wagons traveled in a single file. At night, the wagons set up camp in a circle.

In 1809, President John Quincy Adams signed the Osage Treaty. This treaty between the Osage and the US government established the Santa Fe Trail as a public highway. Two years later, Pawnee Native Americans wanted the livestock on the wagons. So, they attacked. Afterward, wagons had assistance from US troops to provide protection from Native Americans.

In 1834, Bent's Fort was established in Colorado by the brothers William and Charles Bent. Bent's Fort, also called Fort William, became the first trading post in Colorado along the Santa Fe Trail.

By the 1840s, traffic increased along the trail. Bison herds couldn't reach land to graze on. The bison population suffered, as did the local Comanche. Comanche used nearly all parts of the bison, including horns, meat, and hair. Bison provided food, clothing, shelter, and religious workshop for them.

The increase of travel on the trail in the 1840s led to groups of bandits. John McDaniel was the leader of the groups. He is remembered for robbing Don Antonio Jose Chaves. Ultimately, US troops escorted traders and built forts along the route for security. Eventually, they added a mail and stagecoach service to the route.

In 1848, President James Polk signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the American-Mexican War. Mexico gave the United States Upper California and New Mexico. That totaled 525,000 square miles and a payment of \$15,000,000. With the addition of new California territory, the California Gold Rush began on January 24, 1848. Traffic increased on the Santa Fe Trail again as many headed west searching for gold.

Meanwhile, routes to Wyoming and Colorado were developing. In October 1849, the Jicarilla Apache and Ute approached a wagon train asking for gifts. The wagon train refused. In response, 3 people were held for 30 days. Merchants started hauling their goods on railroad train cars. The Atchafalaya, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad eventually put the Santa Fe Trail out of business.

# MULTIPLE CHOICE

- 1** What state did the Cimarron Trail lead through?  
A. California  
B. Utah  
C. Kansas
- 2** How many primary routes did the Santa Fe Trail have?  
A. Two  
B. Four  
C. Six  
D. None of the above
- 3** What year was Bent's Fort established?  
A. 1884  
B. 1834  
C. 1822  
D. 1829
- 4** How many times did a trip on the Santa Fe Trail take?  
A. Two  
B. Four  
C. Eight  
D. Six
- 5** What year did the Santa Fe Trail open?  
A. 1821  
B. 1844  
C. 1829  
D. 1802
- 6** How many miles shorter was the Cimarron Fork?  
A. 5  
B. 100  
C. 500  
D. 1000

# TRUE OR FALSE

- 7** Santa Fe is the capital of New Mexico.  
TRUE FALSE
- 8** The wagons and horse-drawn wagons.  
TRUE FALSE
- 9** James Polk was president in 1825.  
TRUE FALSE
- 10** John McDaniel robbed Don Antonio Jose Chavez?  
TRUE FALSE
- 11** Bent's Fort was in Colorado.  
TRUE FALSE
- 12** The Cimarron Fork wove through the Colorado Rockies.  
TRUE FALSE
- 13** Bent's Fort was also called Fort Bentley.  
TRUE FALSE
- 14** At night, the wagons set up camp in a circle.  
TRUE FALSE
- 15** John C. Adams was president in 1825.  
TRUE FALSE