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The Santa Fe Trail (Sandy Carlson, editor)

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## Trail Jargon

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**Sumac in Shadow #2**  
Diana Werts

## TRAIL JARGON

**black snake or bullwhip** a whip that bullwhackers used to drive the oxen, about 16 feet long with an additional 18 inches of buckskin making a whip cracker.

**buffalo chips** dried bison dung or manure picked up on the prairie and plains and used as fuel for fires in areas where wood was not available.

**bullion** silver or gold shaped into bars instead of coins.

**bull train** a caravan of wagons pulled by oxen. They were called bulls because oxen are simply castrated bulls.

**bullwhacker** the driver of a wagon who walked on the left side of the wheeler oxen, controlling them through yells and with a bullwhip.

**cache** a manmade hole in the ground where goods or provisions were stored or hidden.

**Caches** well-known pits dug by James Baird and Samuel Chambers in 1822-1823 to hide supplies and trading goods after their animals died. Bound for New Mexico, the traders' pack train was caught by a blizzard. They later returned and dug

up their materials. The site of the Caches was a few miles west of present-day Dodge City, Kansas, but nothing remains of the pits.

**caravan** a group of traders and their wagons traveling together. Sometimes called a train.

**Concord coach** a stagecoach manufactured by Abbott, Downing and Company, Concord, New Hampshire, beginning about 1827. It was the Cadillac of stagecoaches.

**Conestoga** a large covered wagon first made in Lancaster or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Conestoga Freighter** slightly modified from the Eastern U.S. style of Conestoga wagons.

**contraband** goods not legally allowed to be exported or imported into another country.

**Dearborn** a light carriage, usually covered and curtained, named for General Henry Dearborn. Frequently used for transportation by traders on the trail.



**Evening in October**  
Mary Gordon McFall

**draft animals** animals, usually horses, mules or oxen, used to pull wagons. On the trail, oxen and mules were used almost exclusively to pull freight wagons.

**estanco** the Spanish word for a government trading post or store in the Southwest.

**fandango** a lively Spanish or Spanish American dance in triple time, held in New Mexico.

**follow the tongue** when making camp at night, freighters would spot the North Star and point the tongue of the lead wagon to it in order to move in the right direction the following morning.

**gee** voice command for an animal to turn to the right.

**haw** voice command for an animal to turn to the left.

**lazy board** certain wagons had a plank that could be pulled out to the side from beneath the wagon bed on which the teamster could ride when he was tired of walking.

**mess** a designated number of people who always ate together.

**mosquito bar** a woven square-mesh mosquito net meant to bar mosquitoes from entering, sometimes propped over poles.

**mountain branch or route** a portion of the Santa Fe Trail that runs from present-day western Kansas through LaJunta, Colorado, and then turns south over Raton Pass into New Mexico. This route follows the Arkansas River and then runs along the edge of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to Santa Fe. It rejoined the Cimarron Route near present Watrous, New Mexico, and was one main route from there to Santa Fe.

**mud wagon** a poor man's Concord coach, open-sided, light and low, and simply constructed.

**mule-skinner** the driver of one or more mule teams. Like a bullwhacker, he yelled and used a whip to control the animals.

**Murphy wagon** a large freight wagon crafted by Joseph Murphy in St. Louis for use on the trail.

**narrows** a ridge of land on the Santa Fe Trail running from near present-day Baldwin City, Kansas, nine miles west to Willow Spring. Wagons had to stay on this ridge to avoid rough terrain and muddy ravines.

**nigh** an old term for left. Bullwhackers walked on the nigh side of their wheeler pair of oxen.

**nooning** taking a midday stop on the trail. It was not uncommon on the Santa Fe Trail for teamsters to noon or take a break during which both breakfast and a noon meal were served and animals grazed before a caravan or train continued on its way.

**norther** a sudden winter storm with freezing temperatures blowing in from the north.

**oxen** usually steers (castrated bulls) yoked together to pull freight wagons. Six teams or yokes per wagon.

**ox train** a series of wagons pulled by oxen (as opposed to wagons pulled by mules). Ox trains were sometimes called grass

freight because oxen could survive by eating grass alone.

**Pennsylvania wagon** a Conestoga wagon manufactured in Pennsylvania.

**Pitt schooner** a Conestoga wagon manufactured in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**prairie schooner** a nickname for a Conestoga wagon because of its ship-like profile.

**proprietor** a term used early in the trail's years to describe a trader in a caravan or train who had obtained merchandise to trade or sell.

**railhead** the last point where railroad tracks were laid during the construction of a railroad.

**relief** people of a wagon train who guard the train from dangers.

**rendezvous** a gathering of freight wagons waiting until enough wagons were able to join a caravan.

**running gear** the parts underneath a wagon.

**rut** Over time, the passage of thousands of wagons and tens of thousands of draft animals created linear depressions across the rolling Kansas prairie. These depressions are called ruts or swales.

**Santa Fe Freight wagon** a tall-sided wagon with shorter bows on the top.

**scoop wagon** used to describe a Conestoga wagon with a scoop-shaped wagon bed.

**skin** To skin mules is to drive them.

**sowbelly** bacon preserved with salt, sometimes called salt pork.

**span** a pair of two draft animals that work together.

**Studebaker wagon** a large freight wagon first built by the Studebaker Brothers in 1852 and used on the Santa Fe Trail.

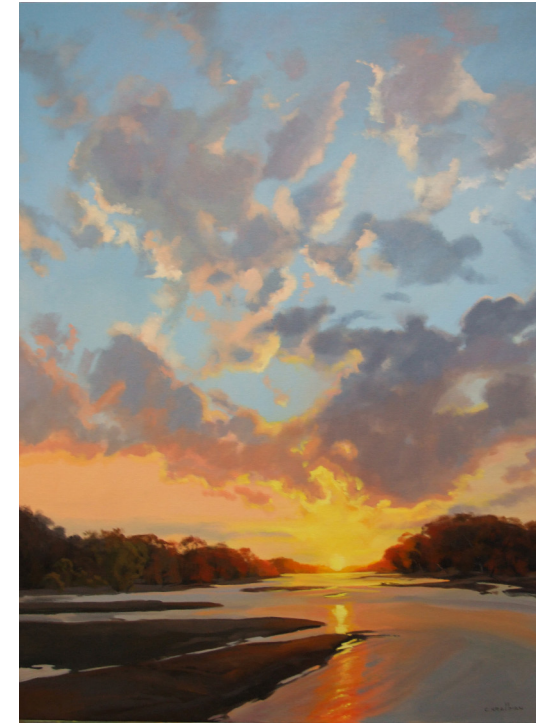
**sutler** a merchant who sets up a store at a fort to sell supplies to soldiers.

**swingers** the pair of draft animals that are hitched just ahead of the wheelers.

**tandem** two or more wagons hitched together and pulled by one team of draft animals.

**trailhead** the beginning of a trail. The Santa Fe Trail had different trailheads at different points of time. These were also called jumping-off points.

**wagon bed** the body of a wagon, sometimes called a wagon box, where cargo is carried.



**My Favorite Things**  
Cally Krallman

**wagon master** the leader of a caravan of wagons or wagon train. Sometimes called the trail boss.

**wheelers** the pair of draft animals directly hitched to a wagon.

**yoke** a wooden beam fashioned for a pair of oxen to enable them to work together to pull a load; the yoke was fashioned from a block of wood four feet in length,

arched on the underside at each end to accommodate the curvature of the ox's neck. Two holes were bored at each end of the yoke, spaced apart about the width of an ox's head to receive the bow which encircled the ox's neck. Most often made of hickory, the bow was bent in the configuration of the letter "U" after soaking it in hot water.