

**Palace of the Governors  
New Mexico History Museum  
News**

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**Old Spanish Trail: A Conduit For Change  
An exhibition celebrating the early trading route  
between Santa Fe and Los Angeles**

**May 25, 2008 – October 26, 2008**

**Santa Fe, NM**—Called “the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule train in the history of America” by Colorado historian Leroy R. Hafen, the Old Spanish Trail is both one of the nation’s least known trails but one of the most important pack mule trading trails in this region.

This exhibition traces the trail’s history through illustrated wall panels and many artifacts. The trail (there were several) traces its origins to the indigenous people of the region who used them to hunt, relocate camps, and raid. When the Spanish signed a peace treaty with the Ute in 1670 they began to use these trails to cross between the territories of New Mexico and California.

The Old Spanish Trail was primarily a horse and mule pack route linking the village of Santa Fe to the Pueblo of Los Angeles. The trail evolved from a network of indigenous trade routes and exploratory routes that crossed the modern states of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California.

Forged in 1829 by Hispanic traders, the Old Spanish Trail was the first successful Hispano trading effort to connect the Mexican frontier provinces of New Mexico and

California. This overland trail linked the burgeoning ranch economy of the Pacific communities to pastoral villages of the inter-mountain Southwest.

In the early 1800s, the Old Spanish Trail was a vital economic trade route that linked New Mexico and California. The trail symbolized much more than just a line on a map; it became a conduit for change throughout the vast, arid, expanse of the American Southwest. Its origin did not owe allegiance to nationalism for the trail was neither Spanish, Mexican, nor American.

The arrival of the Euro-Americans to the west irrevocably transformed the indigenous population. The horse gave the Ute, Shoshone, and Plains Indians unprecedented mobility and greater economic power. The ensuing economic trade along the Old Spanish Trail brought native people regular contact with the non-Indian world.

In time, the trail enabled an international network of commercial trade and social interaction between former Spanish/Mexican colonies and a fledgling American republic. The US acquisition of Mexican territory in 1848 – the consequence of war between neighbors – was perhaps one inevitable outcome of the multi-ethnic convergence that took place on the Old Spanish Trail.

Ultimately, Santa Fe became the center of a crucial commercial network consisting of the Santa Fe Trail to the east, the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro to the south, and the Old Spanish Trail to the west.

Highlights of the exhibition include a violin and bow that were handmade in New Mexico, an 18<sup>th</sup> century black glass Baptismal Bottle made in Spain but found in Socorro, New Mexico, a 19<sup>th</sup> century man's Black Californio Suit (it is a formal outfit of an urban California gentleman designed to show wealth and social status), a rare New Mexican traveling retablo of Our Lady of Sorrows with leather case (it was intended for individual use, and sometimes taken along on journeys).

After Mexico ceded the Southwest to the US in 1848, the trail was modified in places and commercial goods were hauled by wagon. The Old Spanish Trail as a pack mule route was abandoned.

This is a traveling exhibition organized by the Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado and is funded in part by a National Park Service National Historic Trails Cost Share Grant.

The Old Spanish Trail Association will hold their 15<sup>th</sup> National Conference in New Mexico at San Juan Pueblo June 6 – 8, 2008. For more information visit their web site at [www.oldspanishtrail.org](http://www.oldspanishtrail.org).

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*The Palace of the Governors, built from 1609 to 1610, is the state history museum for New Mexico and is housed in the oldest continuously occupied public building in the United States. The museum's collection of more than 17,000 historical objects documents the Spanish Colonial, Mexican, American Territorial, and recent eras in New Mexico history. Items date from the time of the earliest Spanish explorations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and chronicle 223 years of Spanish administrative control, 25 years as part of Mexico, 66 years as a territory of the United States, and from statehood in 1912 to the present. The Palace also administers the Fray Angélico Chávez History Library and Photo Archives, The Palace Print Shop & Bindery, and the Portal Program.*

The Palace of the Governors is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

**Information for the Public:** The Palace of the Governors is located on the Plaza in Santa Fe at 105 W. Palace Avenue. Call 505-476-5100 for more information, or visit [www.palaceofthegovernors.org](http://www.palaceofthegovernors.org)

Summer Hours Memorial Day through Labor Day:

Monday through Sunday, 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. Open Free on Fridays, 5:00— 8:00 P.M., with the exception of major exhibition openings.

During all other seasons, the museum is closed on Mondays.