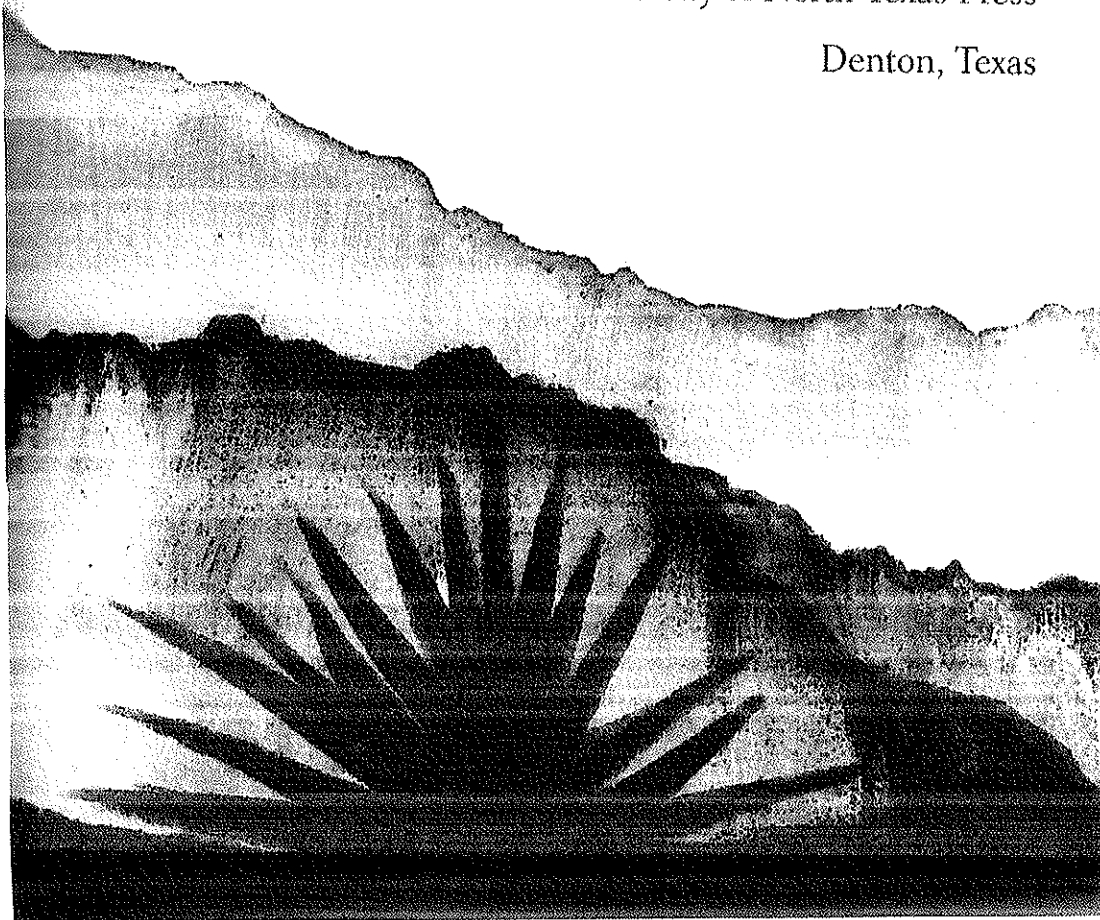


900 Miles on the Butterfield Trail

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From the Clear Fork the Butterfield Trail went southwest along the north bank of Lamshead Creek, today within historic Matthews-Lamshead Ranch. On the ride, passing around and over the low hills of southwestern Throckmorton County, Ormsby noticed two bluffs "whose position reminded me forcibly of East and West Rock as seen on entering New Haven harbor." The stage road also weaved its way between the cavalry post at Camp Cooper (1856-1861) and the hilltop site that would become Fort Griffin in 1867. Entering Shackelford County, the road crossed what is today the J. H. Nail ranch, continuing southwestward to Smith's station. No house had been built there by September 1858, and those at the station were living in tents, cooking on an outdoor fire. "Our supper," Ormsby wrote, "consisted of cake cooked in the coals, clear coffee,

and some dried beef cooked in Mrs. Smith's best style . . . we swallowed supper in double quick time and were soon on our way again." Ormsby recognized that the rolling plains were "covered with good grass" (it is still fine ranch country), but he found it "a sorry landscape, I assure you." The sorry landscape, however, was much enlivened by "Big Dick," the driver "who amused us with accounts of how he was three days on the [Erie] canal and never saw land because he was drunk in the hold."⁴⁶

The name of Chimney Creek, on whose east bank Smith's station was located, was named for the chimney of the Butterfield station. The Conklings state that the name was not applied to the little watercourse until later in the 1860s. Still, some romantics are convinced the name has a mysterious history; that the stream was called Chimney Creek before the Butterfield people started operations there. If this were the case, some surveyor may have fancied he saw a chimney in a rock formation, but nothing in the way of such a natural formation can be found today. When the Butterfield road party under command of Colonel James B. Leach passed through the country in 1857, it camped at a spring where Smith's station was later located. Leach, in his diary, makes no mention of a chimney.⁴⁷ However, when Captain Randolph Marcy passed through the area in 1849, he noted that flat limestone rock is abundant along the creek banks, already cubed "as if prepared by some great Natural Mason."⁴⁸ Shackelford County historians find no evidence that any settler preceded Smith's station on Chimney Creek, but one longs to fantasize that some mysterious mason—a Spaniard from Coronado's 1541 wanderings?—found a way to survive, making friends with the tribal rulers.

The Butterfield crossed a part of what is now the J. H. Nail Ranch, then ten or twelve miles northwest of Albany crossed Bluff Creek at a site marked by the remains of an ancient rock corral—the kind built before barbed wire was introduced. As the trail crosses U.S. Highway 180, about eleven miles directly west of Albany, there is a simple marker at the site. The old Texas Central, later the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad, ran along here out of Albany. Just across the road from the Butterfield monument is a set of pens called Budmatthews, named for Watt's father, the late Judge J. A. (Bud) Matthews of Albany. After 1900, when the railroad built west out of Albany (where it had stopped in 1882), Budmatthews saw thousands of cattle loaded onto the cars to be shipped all over the west. Today, the railroad is long gone, but the pens are preserved, although little shipping is done from here. Regardless, I hear the whistle of the

little Katy steam locomotive when the wind is just right and the automobiles and pickups leave a quiet space on the nearby highway.

After the trail crosses the highway, it enters the ranch known as the Old Conrad place. About a mile inside the ranch the road is easily traced from the air and, thanks to a later owner, you can follow it on the ground. It was here that Bob Green and I and the late historian/playwright Robert Nail actually drove the Butterfield Trail, got our wheels in the ruts and let them guide us. In fact, the car took a sudden lurching thud and we realized we had hit all that was left of Smith's Station on Chimney Creek: a pile of rocks from the chimney. But I wouldn't recommend driving the Butterfield Trail in some low slung sedan of the present; besides, the rock chimney has now been re-erected to commemorate the station site.

The road leading away from Smith's Station is easily followed, albeit on foot, because it is quite distinct, cutting across Chimney Creek where Butterfield's engineers used blasting powder to cut the way through a limestone ledge. The Conklings found the remains of the station's corral, which was gone when we visited the site. A few months after that visit, I was getting gasoline at a station a few miles down Deadman Creek when I mentioned to the proprietor, Grady Smith, about finding the big stone corral was gone. Grady, who had been manager of the ranch, said well, sure, he knew where it went. The state highway department had come along looking for material for their rock crusher while rebuilding the Albany-Abilene highway and he told them to go ahead and use that bunch of old rocks down there at the creek. *Sic transit gloria historia!* I must admit there does seem to be a touch of poetic justice, perhaps, in using the materials of one form of transportation, the stagecoach, to make another superior form of transportation, the modern highway.

The Frank Conrad Ranch house, which is located a mile southeast up Chimney Creek, was thought by many to have been the Butterfield station because of the stalls it supposedly had in the basement to protect the stock from the Indians. The beautiful old stone house sits on the brow of a sharp hill and has a two-story rear

and a single-story front. However, research proved that the Conrad house wasn't built until a decade or more after the Butterfield ceased running.

Chimney Creek was also named after the Butterfield stage stopped running, probably because of the limestone chimney of the fallen station.