

Tracing Different Branches of the Upper Emigrant Road Through The Concho Valley and West Texas

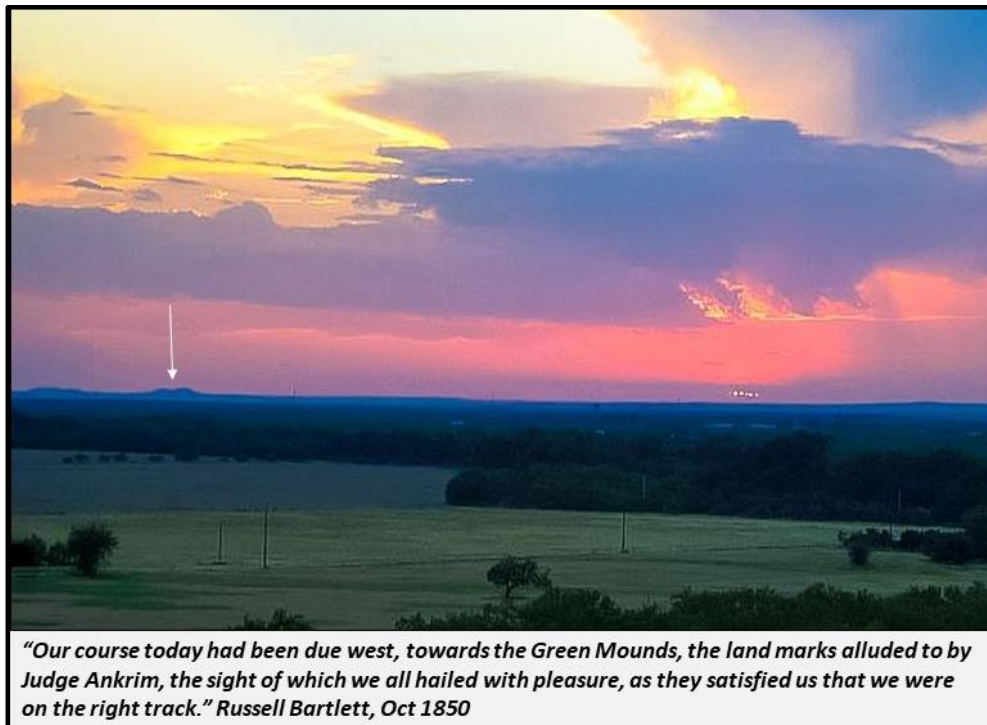
Tom Ashmore

December 2024

In 1849, emigrants made great haste to get to California to take part in the great Gold Rush announced through the newspapers. Many believed they would have a chance at riches if they could make it to California before the gold riches ran out. Others were looking for new land to settle.

One of the roads that opened in 1849 was the Upper Emigrant Road. The road ran from San Antonio up to Fredericksburg, then to the San Saba River, on to the Concho River, and finally heading out to Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River via the trail that eventually became the Butterfield Trail. However, most don't know that this road crosses through Dove Creek and Spring Creek, just west of San Angelo, Texas. Dove and Spring Creeks run from west to east into the Middle Concho River.

Two documented expeditions made it through this area in 1849 and 1850. One was journaled by a man named John Russell Bartlett who was on an expedition to El Paso for the U.S. Boundary Commission. His expedition blazed their own trail through the area, using information passed to him by former explorers, giving him directions of creeks, rivers, and geographic features to follow, one of them being the distinct 'Green Mounds,' now known as Lopez Peaks. It's interesting to note that they called the South Concho "the South Fork of the Boiling Concho," and they called Spring Creek "Good Spring Creek." Several maps of the time show the roads used.

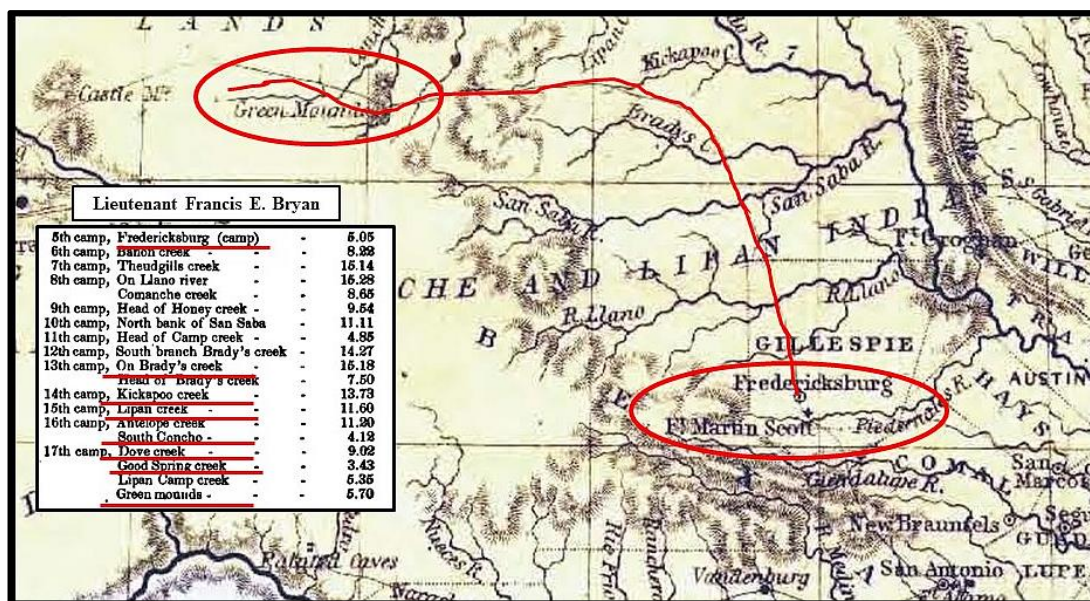


A more detailed account comes from The Reports of The Secretary of War, Reconnaissance of Routes from San Antonio to El Paso, dated July 24th, 1850. This report covers all expeditions and routes. Lieutenant Francis T. Bryan headed the expedition that came through our area in June 1849. The unique aspect of this journal is the level of detail he included. It included the distance traveled between rivers and creeks.

"Five miles from camp, came to the South Concho quite a large stream, with a gentle current. Crossed here easily after clearing the brush from the banks. Still continuing west for eight miles, we crossed Dove Creek. Crossing effected without any difficulty, after cutting out the brush from its banks. Both of these streams have heavy timber on their banks, but no further. The water of both is good and runs gently, in a northern direction. Grazing is only tolerable, the grass being old and dry. Pecan timber of large size is found.

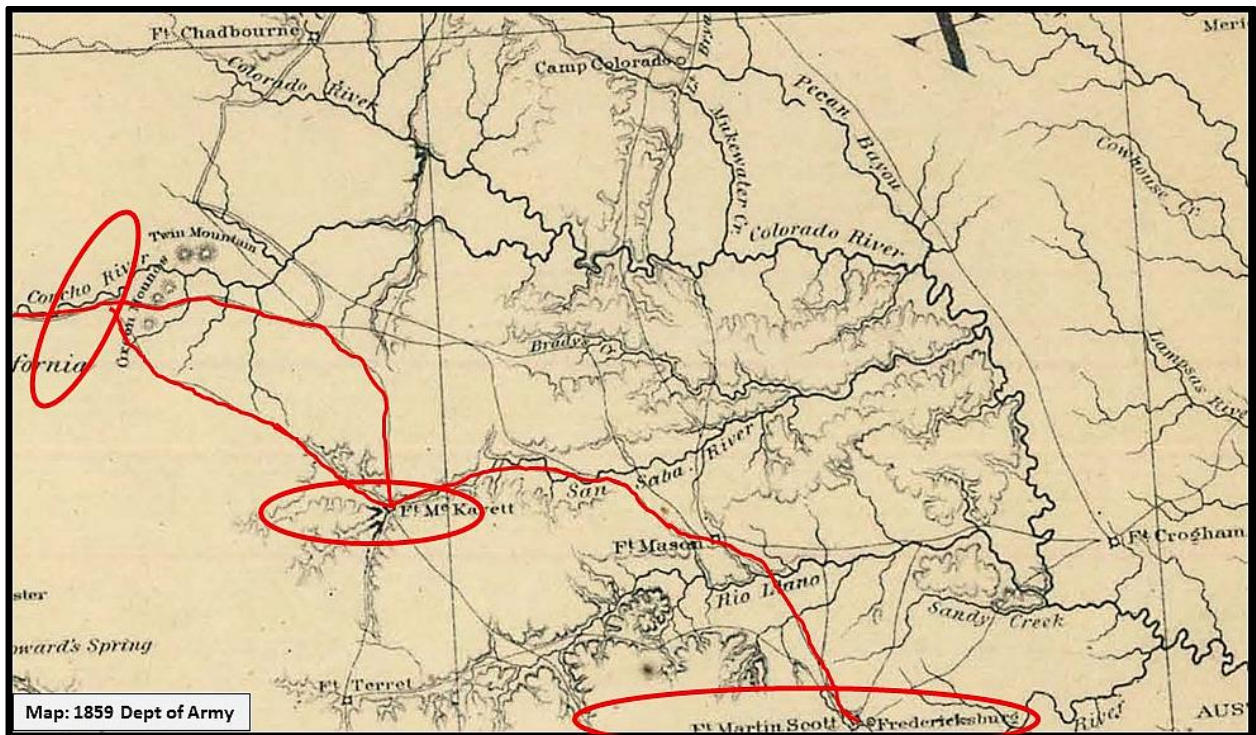
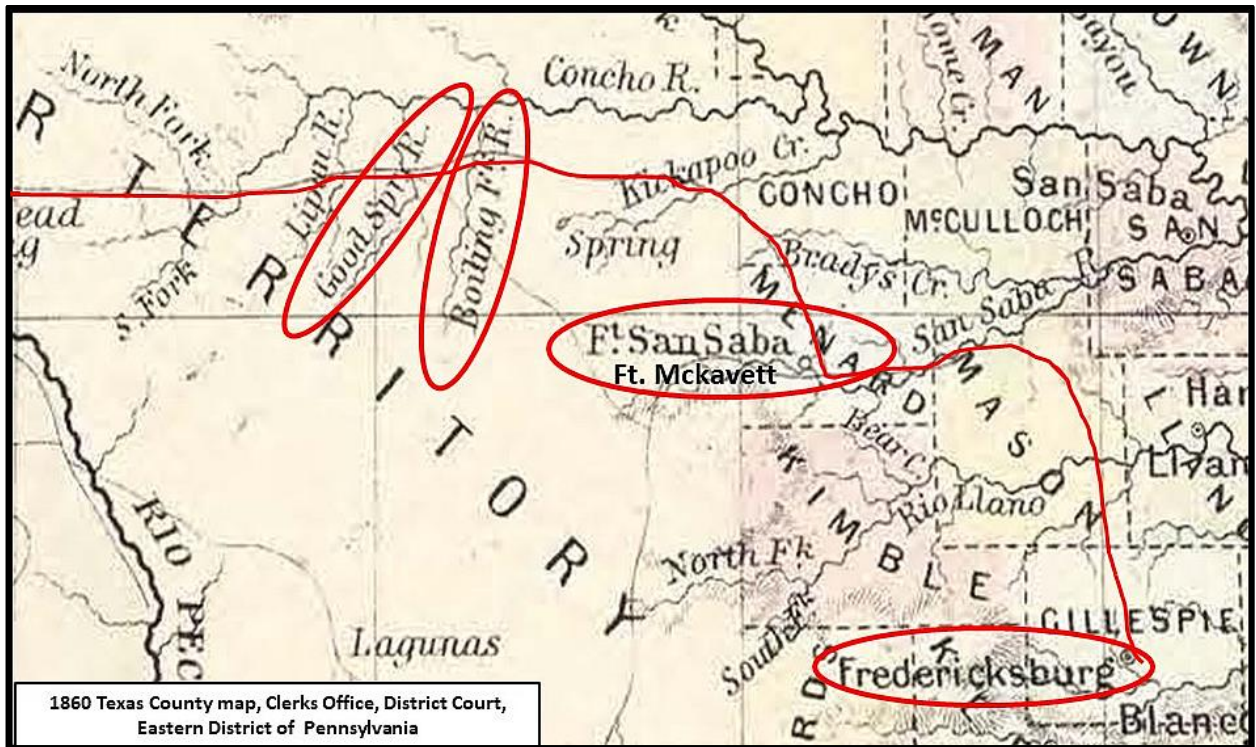
July 3, twentieth day. Left our camp on Dove creek this morning at 6 o'clock, and rode about three miles to a small branch, which crosses the trail. This was Good Spring creek; the water was pure and very cold."

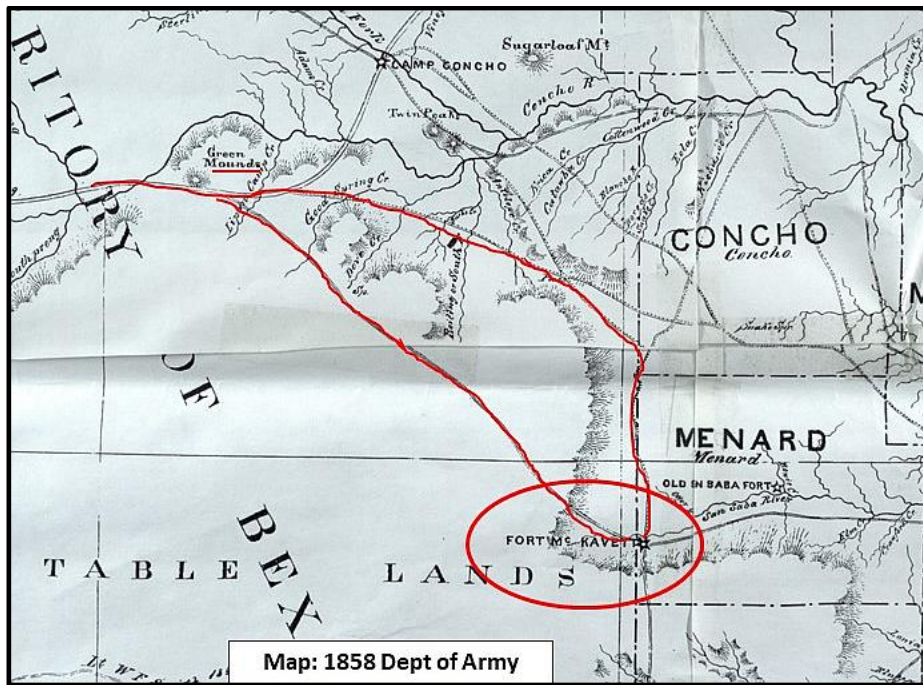
This trail followed published by Bartlett and Bryan became the Upper Emigrant Road, and although it is faint, in several areas it can still be seen by overhead imagery leading up to the Dove Creek and Spring Creek area. It continues past the Green Mounds and on to the Middle Concho, where it merged into the trail that became the Butterfield Trail. I found the trail using the documented distances between the South Concho, Dove Creek, and Spring Creek crossings.



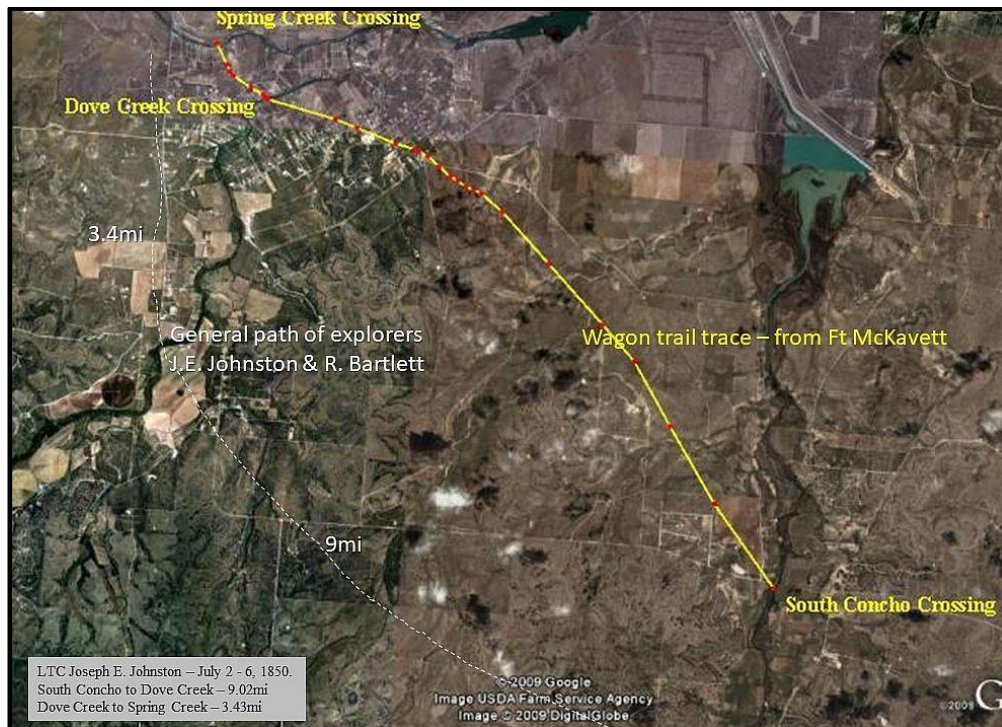
Lieutenant Bryan's Route

Each of the following maps show the general routes, first going through Fort Mason to Fort McKavett, and the later one heading straight to Fort McKavett. The later maps also show two roads leading from Fort McKavett up to the Middle Concho River and passing the ‘Green Mounds.’



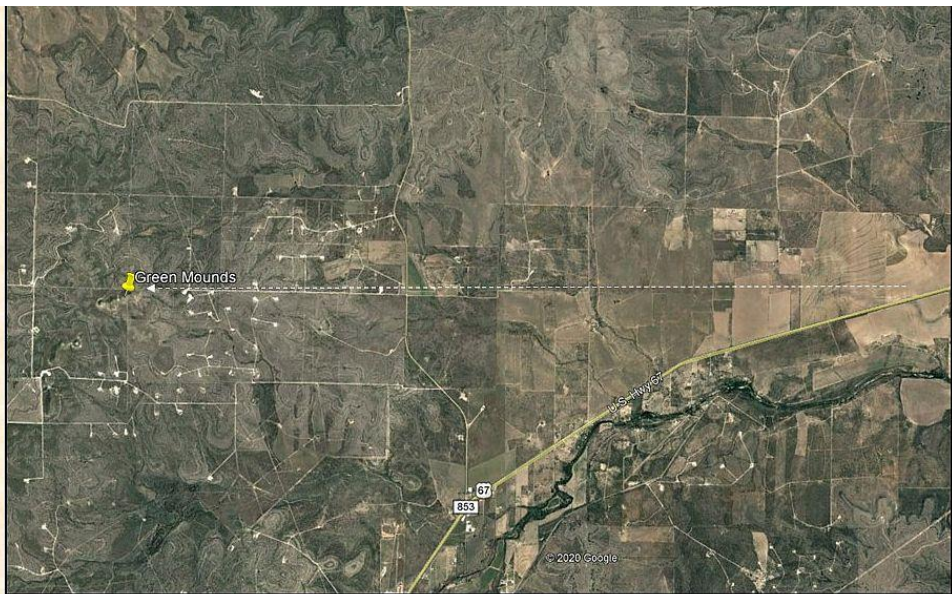


Finally, we come to the Google Earth tracing of the old road going through the geographic points discussed in the reports and shown on the maps. It can be seen in certain spots. The detailed distances provided by Lieutenant Bryan's expedition are the validation to the tracing of the old road being correct. This next series of images are self-explanatory. It starts at the South Concho and works across the two creeks, past Green Mounds (Lopez Peaks), and then across the Middle Concho River to head west to the Pecos River.





Green Mounds
After crossing Spring Creek, looking due West



"Our course today had been due west, towards the Green Mounds, the land marks alluded to by Judge Ankrim, the sight of which we all hailed with pleasure, as they satisfied us that we were on the right track." Russell Bartlett, Oct 1850

Green Mounds: "They lie northeast and southwest from each other."

