

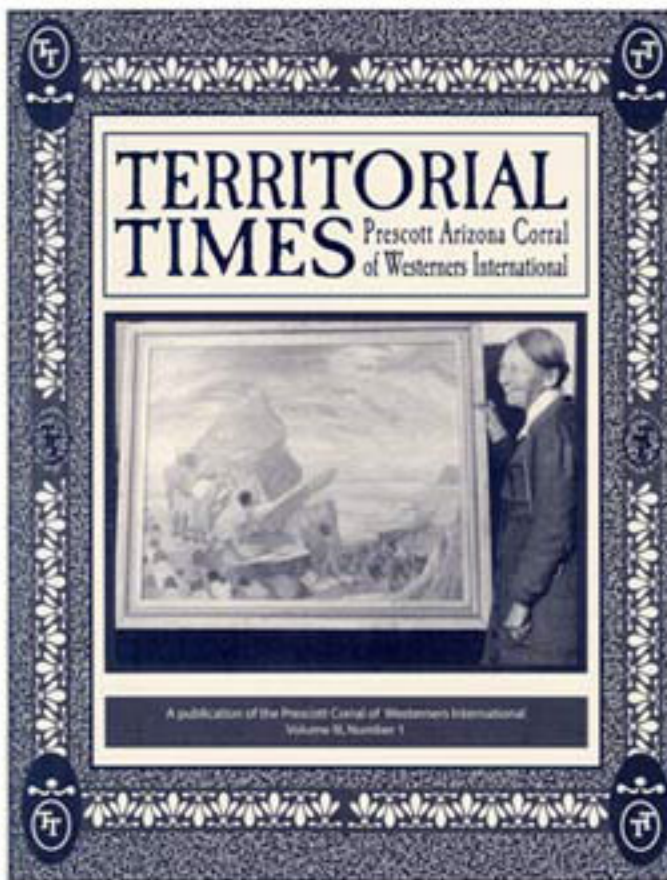
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by Tom Jonas

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FORTY-NINERS OVER THE MOGOLLON RIM

By Tom Jonas

On August 17, 1849, James Collier, first Collector of the Port of San Francisco, set out from Santa Fe, New Mexico, bound for California. He had been accompanied to Santa Fe by about thirty staff members along with Army Lt. Edward G. Beckwith, acting as his personal aide. A company of the First Dragoons under command of Capt. Herman Thorn escorted them.¹

Collier and his assistants were so eager to reach their lucrative government jobs on the Pacific Coast that the Collector decided against following the usual road south down the Rio Grande to join Cooke's Wagon Road to the Gila River. He determined instead to go as directly as possible from Zuni Pueblo to the Gila. Because the proposed route would take him through the little known Mogollon Mountains of western New Mexico, he engaged at Santa Fe an experienced mountain man, John L. Hatcher, as guide. Several groups of emigrants also attached themselves to Collier's train, forming a party of 150 or so. Pack mules carried all the baggage.²

Little is known about the trail that Hatcher guided them over, except for a dotted line on Lt. Amiel W. Whipple's 1855 United States Pacific Railroad Survey (USPRRS) map labeled "Lieut. Beckwith in 1849." Whipple put Beckwith's name on this map because that officer took command of the escort near Yuma after Captain Thorn drowned crossing the Colorado River. Regardless of the exact path followed by this group, it is obvious that Collier's party crossed northern Arizona over the Mogollon Rim – the only Gold Rush party known to have taken this route to California.³

Whipple's map shows Beckwith's trail beginning at Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico and coursing directly southwest to the vicinity of modern Phoenix. Rather than following an established trail along the Zuni River on the first few days, Beckwith is shown by Whipple

heading southwest cross-country and reaching the Little Colorado River about four miles below the mouth of the Zuni River.⁴

Apart from the USPRRS map, there are few other sources for Collier's journey across the Rim. Lt. Beckwith kept a diary, as did two civilians with Collier, William Brisbane and Dr. Andrew Randall. (Only the first half of Randall's diary has surfaced and that ends at Santa Fe.)⁵ Brisbane's account seems to support the route shown by Whipple. Both Brisbane and Beckwith state that the pack train left the Zuni Valley the first morning, August 17, and describe their heading over the next two days as "more westward" and "southwest." Neither diarist mentions the Zuni River again, which appears consistent with Whipple's map. A closer look at this route, however, presents serious problems.

First Camp of the Collier Party

Beckwith and Brisbane cite 18 and 20 miles respectively for the first day's travel out of Zuni. Beckwith describes "fine springs of water in a valley" at their first camp and gives the campsite's name as "deer springs." He also relates that there is another equally good spring named "Coal Spring" four miles farther along on the same trail; that is, 22 miles from Zuni. Brisbane relates simply that they "encamped near fine springs of water under a large rock." A course of march straight southwest from Zuni would have taken them away from the Zuni River and into the watershed of its tributary, Hardscrabble Wash. If we are to believe Whipple's dotted line,

Beckwith's "deer springs" and "Coal Spring" must both be along Hardscrabble Wash.

The USPRRS map shows these two springs seemingly located on different arms of Hardscrabble Wash, with the first one, Deer Spring, about 18 miles from Zuni by Whipple's map scale. To the author's knowledge there are no springs shown on any modern or historic map in the Hardscrabble Wash watershed near the 18-20 mile point from Zuni. There are a few modern wells and stock tanks in the area. The first spring that appears to be significant along this route is Prospect Spring, about 34 miles from Zuni.

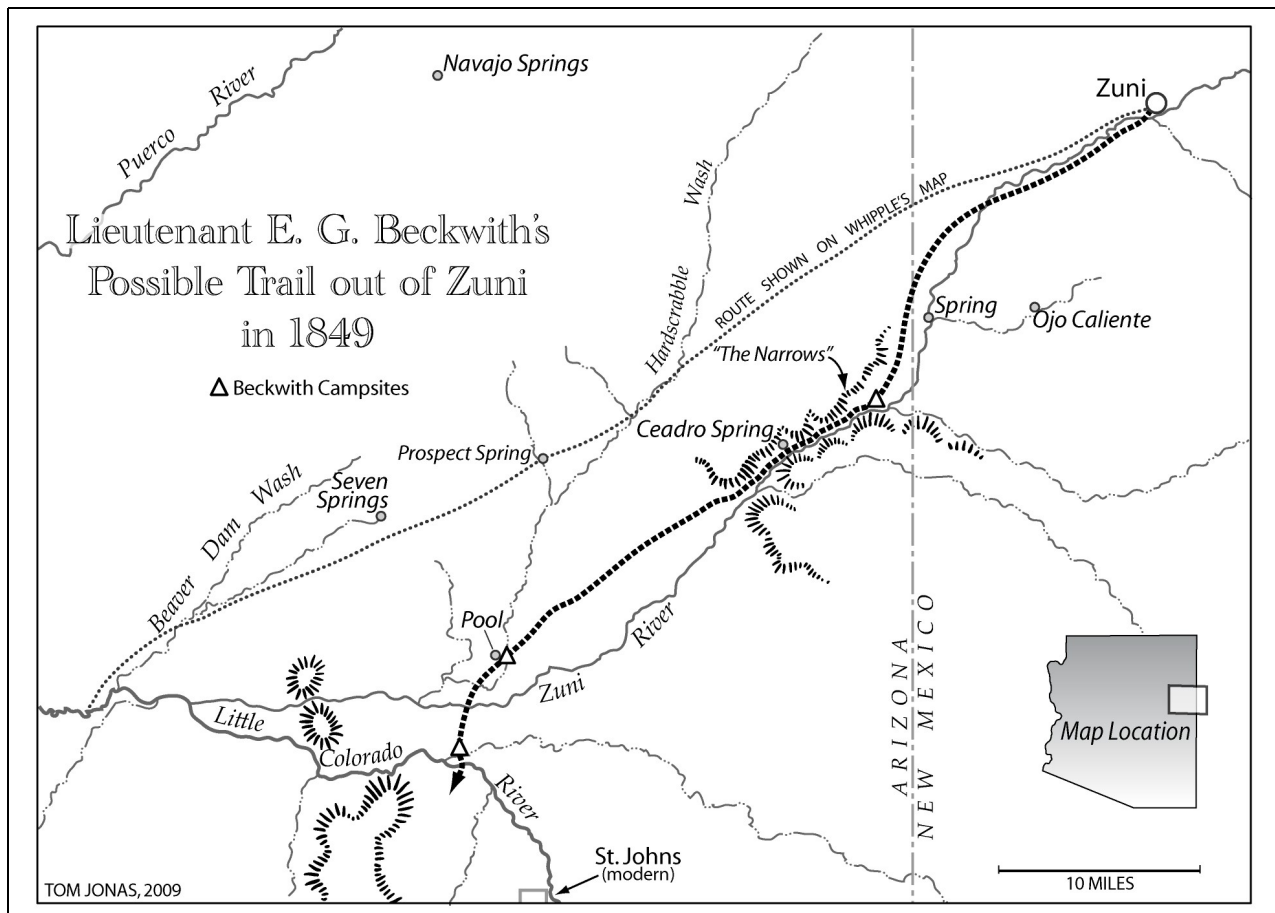
To plot the Collier party's course along Whipple's line, one must assume there were two copious springs in this barren plain at the 18 and 22 mile points that no longer exist and

were never recorded on a map.

Second and Third Camp

On August 18 Lt. Beckwith notes, "At as late an hour as yesterday [after 10:00 a.m.] we were again on the road & passing Coal Springs struck off southwest for Red River [Little Colorado]." Beckwith's "on the road" comment suggests that they had been following an existing trail here, but beyond Coal Spring they left it to go "southwest." After 24 miles he describes their camp at an ephemeral muddy pond he calls "chocolate pool."

To reach the "chocolate pool" on the USPRRS map would require a march of 35 miles from the Deer Spring according to Whipple's map. Such a long march would not have been impossible but is very unlikely. Two things argue against it. First, the late hour of their



departure would have greatly reduced their available daylight travel time and further hints that they were not expecting to make a long march that day. Second, Beckwith says they “made but [only] twenty four miles” that day. This suggests that he did not consider the journey to be unusually long.

On the third day, August 19, they had an easy walk of six miles from Chocolate Pool to the Little Colorado River, where they remained for two more days. The USPRRS map shows this path following the drainage of Beaver Dam Wash from the pool to the river. This would be about four miles below (west of) the mouth of the Zuni River and not far from where there is a modern bridge over the river on US Highway 180. As the ground upriver from the modern bridge is low and marshy, the bridge site may mark an earlier fording place, an idea that is further reinforced by the nearby place name “Rock Crossing Windmill.”

Mileage

A quick look at the mileages given by Lieutenant Beckwith on his previous trip over a well known trail from Albuquerque to Zuni show that his distance estimates are fairly accurate. For the trip from Zuni to the Little Colorado, Beckwith gives a total of 48 miles for the three-day journey. Civilian William Brisbane estimated two more miles than Beckwith on the first day but did not cite distances for the next two days. The distance of the trail as measured on Whipple’s railroad survey map is 59 miles. This agrees with a measurement of the same path on a modern map, but is 11 miles more than the distance given by Beckwith. For these reasons, it seems logical to conclude that the line shown on the USPRRS map is in error and the Collier party followed a different route to the little Colorado. But which one?

The Old Salt River Trail

The valley of the Zuni River is part of an old and well-used trading route between Zuni and the Indian Nations to the south along the Salt and Gila Rivers. It was the path used by Capt. Lorenzo Sitgreaves on the first four days of his exploring expedition in 1851. This road is the obvious alternative to the cross-country route considered above.⁶

If Collier’s track is plotted along the Zuni River, eighteen miles would bring them near the point where the Zuni River crosses the modern Arizona-New Mexico boundary. Two more miles would take them to the upper end of a canyon sometimes called “the Narrows.” This twenty-mile distance is a little over Beckwith’s estimate but agrees with Brisbane’s.

As noted above, both diarists mention a flowing spring at their first camp. There are no springs shown on modern maps at this point but aerial photos show that pools of water begin to appear here in the Zuni River bed, which is dry further upstream. Beckwith’s characterization of this place as “fine springs of water in a valley” may hint that this spring was indeed located at the beginning of the Narrows where there are bluffs with a gradual slope on the east and a steep 350-foot high ridge capped by lava on the west side. Before this point the river is located in the middle of a shallow valley from one to two miles wide. In the Narrows the river bottom is only about a thousand feet wide and the bluffs close in to about one half mile summit-to-summit. This may explain Beckwith’s “valley” comment. William Brisbane says they camped “near fine water under a large rock.” Perhaps his large rock was the abrupt cliff above them on the east side of the canyon.

About two years later the Sitgreaves Expedition would make their second camp at this place. Captain Sitgreaves’ diary entry will be

of interest here as he writes, "We encamped on the banks of the [Zuni] creek, near some abrupt rocks, beneath which gushes out a fine spring. Fragments of packsaddles and broken boxes gave evidence of a former encampment of white men, probably the party of Lieutenant Thorn, who escorted Mr. Collier to California in 1849."⁷ It has already been noted that on August 18, 1849, Beckwith recorded in his diary that there was another equally good spring four miles ahead called "Coal Spring." This intelligence was almost certainly provided by his guide, John L. Hatcher, who probably had been on this trail before.

Second Camp on the Zuni

The following day the Collier party set out again following the narrow canyon that they had camped at the head of. Before the five-mile point in their march, they would pass an excellent spring named Ceadro Spring on modern maps. An 1883 General Land Office township survey map shows a bed of coal near this spring, making it likely that this was Beckwith's "Coal Spring."⁸

Beyond Coal Spring, Lieutenant Beckwith says they "struck off southwest for Red River." After exiting the lower end of the Narrows they could save a little distance by leaving the river to their left and heading cross-country to the southwest. This would take them up on the gentle ridge that bounds the west side of the Zuni Valley.

Twenty-four miles of travel would bring them to a point about two miles above and northeast of the mouth of Hardscrabble Wash. For several miles in this area, the nearly level Zuni Valley is pockmarked with small intermittent pools. One of these could be Beckwith's "Chocolate Pool." At about the 24-mile point, there is a fairly large depression west of Hardscrabble Wash that appears to contain water on modern aerial photos.⁹

To the Little Red

The modern pool mentioned above is only six miles from the Little Colorado River. On the third day they would have continued southwest, over the ridge that separates the Zuni from the Little Colorado, and arrived at the Little Colorado in the vicinity of modern Zion Reservoir. The entire route proposed to this point conforms rather closely to the one used by the Sitgreaves Expedition in 1851 and to the old Salt River Trail. It would be the most likely route for Hatcher to follow, as it provided a known trail and dependable water sources.¹⁰

The statements by Beckwith and Brisbane that they left the Zuni valley may simply mean that they left the wide area where the pueblo is located. Perhaps they didn't mention the Zuni River afterward because it was a dry and insignificant stream along most of their route.

Is Whipple in Error?

Why is Whipple's 1855 map drawn with the trail reaching the Little Colorado downstream from the mouth of the Zuni? By this time, Lieutenant Whipple had access to Sitgreaves' report and the Richard Kern map that accompanied it. Before 1853 he had only a tracing of the map. In fact, some of Whipple's topography is copied from the Sitgreaves map, with minor changes. Neither Captain Thorn nor Lieutenant Beckwith were assigned to study the country they traveled over, so they took no readings of geographic coordinates and apparently made no map.

A cursory reading of Beckwith's diary will indeed lead a reader to conclude that he did not follow the Zuni River, but struck off cross-country to the southwest, reaching the Little Colorado below its confluence with the Zuni. It is possible that Whipple's line was based purely on a reading of Beckwith's diary. The first two days of the diary state that the Colli-

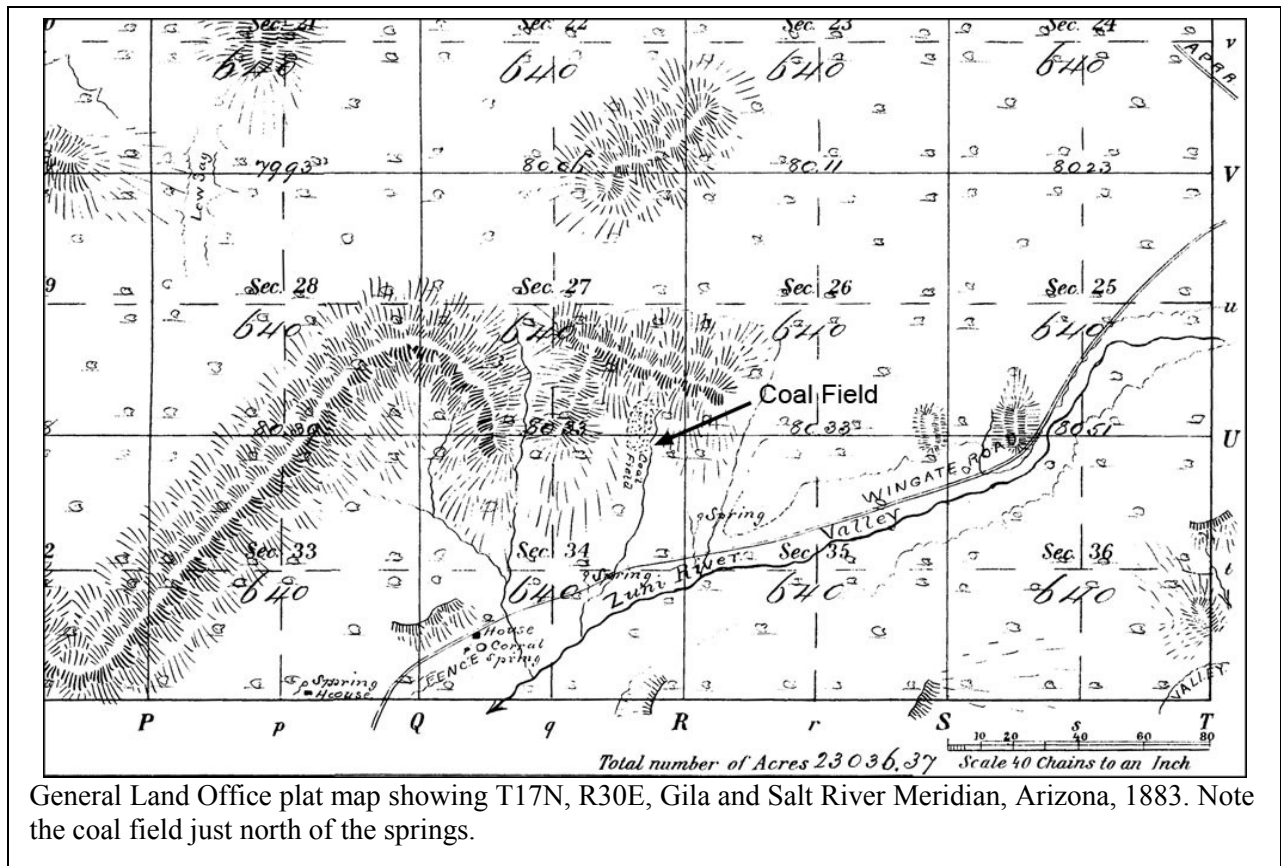
er party left Zuni and headed southwest. Perhaps Whipple plotted his line toward the southwest in a general way because he lacked any precise data on the actual route. In this case the dotted line on the map would have little value in determining Beckwith's course between Zuni and the Pima Villages.

A fact that argues against this general line theory is a significant jog in the fairly straight line below the Mogollon Rim. If Whipple was showing an approximate trail to the southwest, what is this jog? It seems to correspond to modern roads in the same area, suggesting that Whipple's mostly-straight line may be more accurate than it first appears. That route would send the Collier party over the Mogollon Rim near Linden and down Limestone Ridge to Carrizo Creek – an extremely rugged and unlikely path.

Another possibility arises if the Collier party actually reached the Little Red near modern

Zion Reservoir. From that point they would have been in position to head south along Big Hollow Wash and over the Mogollon Rim closer to modern Show Low.

Which way did they go? More study of Whipple's diary while he prepared his railroad survey report in 1855–1858, and some reconciliation of the USPRRS map with the map published by Sitgreaves in 1853, may yield a more definitive trace on the ground. But is it possible that Captain Thorn, as commander of the escort, kept a diary of this journey? Perhaps it was lost when he drowned in the river crossing in October 1849, but maybe it is filed in an archive somewhere waiting to be found. There may be as yet undiscovered diaries kept by other soldiers or civilians, perhaps even the second part of Dr. Randall's diary. Until more documentation of this trip comes to light, many questions must remain unanswered.



NOTES

¹ Grant Foreman, *The Adventures of James Collier, First Collector of the Port of San Francisco* (Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1937) 23. Lt. Edward G. Beckwith (1818–1881) fought with the 3d U.S. Artillery regiment in the Mexican War. Still recovering from yellow fever caught two years earlier in Mexico, he was on extended sick leave and assigned to assist Collier to San Diego. Lt. Herman Thorn (1823–1849) received a brevet promotion to captain in the 3d Dragoons for his conduct in the Mexican War in 1847, but next year when his regiment was disbanded he reverted to being a lieutenant of the 2d Infantry. He arrived in Santa Fe with a column of troops en route to New Mexico, just ahead of Collier and Beckwith, whereupon he took command of 25 men of the 1st Dragoons to escort the Collier party. Michael J. Brodhead, “Edward Griffin Beckwith: Explorer of the Central Routes,” in *Kansas and the West* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1976) 35-36. George A. McCall, *New Mexico in 1850: A Military View*, ed. R. W. Frazer (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1968) 152-53.

² James Collier (1789-1873) served in the War of 1812 and later became a lawyer in Ohio. Nominated in Feb. 1849 by President Zachary Taylor to be Collector, and quickly confirmed in the Senate, Collier probably set out in May from Ft. Leavenworth behind Thorn’s marching column of infantry. He arrived in Santa Fe on July 11. Grant Foreman, *Marcy & the Gold Seekers* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1939) 314. Foreman, *Adventures of James Collier*, 25-26. Patricia A. Etter, *To California on the Southern Route, 1849: A History and Annotated Bibliography* (Spokane, Wash.: Arthur H. Clark, 1998) 65.

³ Until diary accounts of the journey emerged a few years ago, there was no clear evidence that Collier’s party went through northern Arizona. As late as 1940 Grant Foreman believed they had gone from Zuni south to Cooke’s Road. See below, note 5. John Hatcher, Collier’s guide, was born about 1812 in Virginia and went west as a young man to trap beaver. In the 1840s he worked for Bent’s Fort and at other enterprises in southeast Colorado. It seems likely that he previously traveled the trail on which he proposed to lead Collier, possibly as a trapper with Ewing Young before 1834. Amiel Weeks Whipple (1817–1862) served on the U.S. and Mexico Boundary Survey in 1848-51 and later commanded the expedition that conducted the 35th Parallel survey of the USPRRS in 1853-54. Beckwith later served with Whipple on the boundary survey in 1852 and on the railroad surveys where he was with the 41st Parallel expedition. The map discussed here is “Map No. 2, From the Rio Grande to the Pacific Ocean” in Vol. 11, *Explorations and Surveys for a Rail Road Route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean* (War Department, 1855-60).

⁴ A glance at the map drawn by Richard H. Kern in 1852 for the Sitgreaves report reveals that Whipple (who had a copy of this map with him during the 35th Parallel survey) copied Kern’s topography covering the Mogollon Rim and White Mountains. This suggests that Beckwith did not communicate anything to Whipple after the latter returned to Washington in 1854. I believe, however, that he had access to Beckwith’s diary; see note 5 below. As for Hatcher, he had moved permanently to California by 1853. Harvey L. Carter, “Kit Carson,” in Leroy R. Hafen (ed.) *Mountain Men and the Fur Traders of the Far West: Eighteen Biographical Selections* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1982) 185.

⁵ The diaries of William Brisbane (1823-1880) and Dr. Andrew Randall (c. 1816–1856) have not been published. They are in the Princeton Univ. Library and the California State Library, respectively. Beckwith’s unpublished journal is in the Huntington Library, San Marino, Cal. Dr. David H. Miller, emeritus professor of history at Cameron University, kindly loaned me his typescripts of the Beckwith and Brisbane diaries. Etter, *To California on the Southern Route*, 62, 65, 97-98.

⁶ Capt. L. Sitgreaves, *Report of an Expedition down the Zuni and Colorado Rivers* (Washington, 1853; reprint by Rio Grande Press, Chicago: 1962) 5-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ General Land Office map of Township 17 North, Range 30 East, Gila and Salt River Meridian [Arizona], 1883. Ceadro Spring is located at N34°49' 16" W109° 9' 4."

⁹ A candidate for Beckwith’s Chocolate Pool is visible on Google Earth (USDA Farm Services Imagery, 2007) at geographic coordinates N34° 40' 42" W109° 25' 00." See <http://earth.google.com/>.

¹⁰ Andrew Wallace and Richard Hevly, *From San Diego to Texas in 1851:*

The Overland Journal of Dr. S. W. Woodhouse, Surgeon-Naturalist of the Sitgreaves Expedition (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007) 102-103.

