

Butterfield Overland Despatch

There were two B.O.D. stage lines across the western United States at the same time in the early 1860's. The southern trail was opened by John Butterfield in 1858, and was the first stage line to carry mail. This trail ran from Springfield, Missouri and Fort Smith, Arkansas, southwest across Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and west from El Paso to California.

The other B.O.D. trail ran across Kansas and Colorado and was opened by David A. Butterfield, who was no relation to John. This Smoky Hill route from Atchison to Denver laid out by David Butterfield was 116 miles shorter than any other route, but was considered the most dangerous crossing of the plains. The other routes followed the Platte River or the Arkansas River.

David A. Butterfield was born in Maine in 1834, moved to Kansas in 1856, then on to Denver in 1862, and to Atchison, Kansas in 1864. He saw how much freight was going overland to Denver and the mining districts, studied the survey maps of the Smoky Hill Road as laid out in 1860, decided much of this road could be used but his road had to be shorter, safer, and faster. He got financial backing from investors in the East, and started the Butterfield Overland Despatch with a capital of \$3 million.

Lt. Julian R. Fitch of the U.S. Signal Corp was detailed to go with the B.O.D. expedition as surveyor. He had been with the surveying crew that laid out the Smoky Hill Trail in 1860, and was familiar with the hazards that lay ahead and hoped to avoid the mistakes incorporated in that trail. Issac E. Eaton was in charge of the expedition that left Leavenworth on June 13, 1865.

Work oxen, in the summer of 1865, cost, in Atchison, \$160 to \$170 a yoke. The company bought for the line 1200 mules, most of them being purchased in St. Louis, then believed to be the best mule market in the country.

The first train sent out (a small one) was on June 24, 1865, (on the heels of the surveying party) and was known as "Train A". It was loaded with 150,000 pounds of freight. The charge for freight was twenty-two and a half cents per pound.

During the summer of 1865, there was also a tri-weekly passenger and express stage line, which charged \$175 per person, not counting meals. The first stage left Atchison on September 11th and reached Denver on September 23, 1865.

The biggest fight with the Indians along the Butterfield Trail came on October 2, 1865, when some 30 Cheyenne warriors attacked a lone stage near Monument Station (SW of the Pyramids). They made a brief stand before unhitching the horses and fleeing back to the east.

Butterfield lost about a million dollars and sold out almost exactly eighteen months after starting the B.O.D. He moved to Mississippi, then to Arkansas where he was fatally shot on March 28, 1875.