

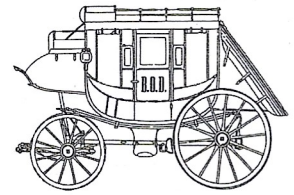
OVERLAND DESPATCH

SMOKY HILL TRAIL ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY

VOL. V No. 3

REMEMBER THE SMOKY HILL TRAIL

Autumn 2012

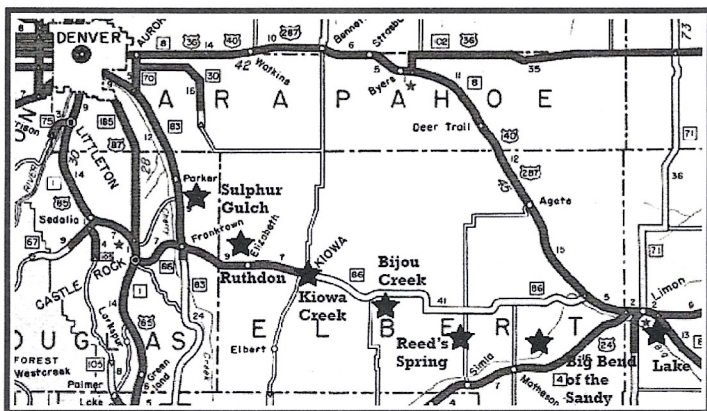


COLORADO HIGHWAY 86: "THE SCENIC ROUTE TO DENVER AND THE ROCKIES"

by Lee Whiteley

[Lee Whiteley, Centennial, CO, is a retired member of the SmHTA Board, an authority on the historic trail and the modern roads which follow it, and a frequent contributor to Overland Despatch. He is writing a series about the trail in Colorado to prepare everyone for the 2013 conference there.]

THE Smoky Hill Trail in central and western Kansas followed the Smoky Hill River. Near the headwaters of the river in extreme eastern Colorado, the trail turned southwest to Big Sandy Creek. The trail followed this waterway northwest to present-day Limon. The later Kansas Pacific Railway and U.S. 40 roughly paralleled the trail. But at Limon, the railroad and highway continued northwest, then due west to Denver. Near Limon, the trail established in 1865 by David Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) turned west then northwest to



Smoky Hill Trail South Branch stage station locations (noted by the stars) and station names have been added to the 1953 Colorado Department of Transportation map.

Denver. This route would become known as the Smoky Hill Trail South Branch.

Colorado Highway 86

While Interstate 70 follows the railroad and old U.S. 40, it is Colorado Highway 86 that follows the Denver-bound goldseekers traveling the BOD. A trip along this scenic back-country two-lane treasure provides scenery enjoyed and anticipated by the Rocky Mountain-bound travelers.

Colorado Highway 86 runs west 59 miles from Interstate 70, exit 352, eight miles northwest of Limon, to Interstate 25 at Castle Rock. It is the first 45 miles from Interstate 70 through Kiowa to Elizabeth that roughly parallels the Smoky Hill Trail

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TRAIL AWARDS PRESENTED AT ABILENE

A highlight of every Smoky Hill Trail conference is the presentation of awards to individuals and organizations to recognize significant contributions to the preservation, protection, and promotion of the historic trail. The recipients at the 2012 conference in Abilene are:

Award of Merit

David Clapsaddle, Larned KS, for research and publications about railhead towns on the Smoky Hill Trail and the roads connecting to the Santa Fe Trail.

Gear County Historical Society and Museums, Junction City KS, for exhibits and programs about the historic trail.

Heritage Center of Dickinson County, Abilene KS, for exhibits and programs about the historic trail.

Smoky Hill Museum, Salina KS, for exhibits and programs about the historic trail.

Heritage Preservation Award

Philip Ranch near Hays KS, for preserving historic trail remnants and making those available to the public.

Howard C. Raynesford Lifetime Achievement Award

Dorman Lehman, Greeley CO, for research and publications, especially the story of the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express Company.

Donna Malsom Memorial Ambassador Award

Mike Baughn for his many years of research and promotion of the Smoky Hill Trail and his leadership and service as president of the Smoky Hill Trail Association.

Congratulations are extended all the recipients. Members are reminded that they may nominate individuals and organizations for these awards.

RON HARRIS

Ronald Lee Harris, Junction City, KS, a charter member of the Smoky Hill Trail Association and chair of the National Historic Trail Committee died December 5, 2012, at age 74. He made arrangements for the SmHTA conference held in Junction City in 2009. He is survived by Kathleen Moore Harris, his wife of 51 years and his son Brian Keith Harris and his fiancée Dana Farmer, who live in Lawrence, Kansas. Ron and Kathleen had two other children: David Glenn Harris and Jennifer Beth Harris, both deceased.

A native of Chanute, Ron graduated from Arkansas City Community College in 1959 and earned a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education from Emporia State College in 1961. He began his

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

SEASON'S Greetings to everyone! We have entered our new SmHTA year after experiencing another great conference in Abilene. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to serve again as your president.

Enough cannot be said about our 6th annual Conference as it was another in a line of successful and educational gatherings of those interested in preserving the history and legacy of the Smoky Hill Trail. There are many to be thanked for their dedication and work in presenting the conference program, but our Secretary Jody is deserving of special thanks! The planning and the last-minute change of venue were skillfully tackled by our hard-working secretary. We are fortunate to have her conference organizational and planning skills working for us.

On a personal note, I was humbled and surprised to be named the recipient of the Donna Malsom Memorial Ambassador Award, and my congratulations to the other SmHTA Award recipients.

Ending the conference with a ride on the Smoky Valley and Abilene Railroad was a special treat. The engineer was a master in plying the steam whistle and its plaintive notes brought on waves of nostalgia. When I was a small boy we lived on Twelve-Mile Creek near its junction with the Smoky Hill River in Logan County, KS, some 15 miles south of the Union Pacific Railroad. When weather conditions were just right we could hear the sound of the steam locomotive's whistle wafting in on the breeze and hearing it again was a gratifying experience.

As I traveled to Colorado Springs for Thanksgiving, I took US40 to Limon, retracing the route we used in pre-I-70 days in going to Denver. On the way I reflected on what those utilizing the Smoky Hill Trail must have experienced as they ventured westward. I also thought of how the Plains Indians must have felt as they watched the incursion into their traditional buffalo-hunting grounds. We must continue to catalogue documentation of their experiences for inclusion in our archives at Fort Hays State University's Forsyth Library.

Planning for our 7th Annual Smoky Hill Trail Association Conference has already begun and we look forward to greeting you at "trail's end" in the Denver area.

As our Association continues to grow in membership, I encourage each of you to invite others into our organization. The sharing of Trail history and lore merely compliments the friendships that will be garnered as we meet to share our mutual interests in the history of the American West.

REMEMBER THE SMOKY HILL TRAIL!

-Mike Baughn

Keep track of the Smoky Hill Trail Association on our website:

<http://smokyhilltrail.com>

USS SMOKY HILL RIVER LSM(R)/LFR 531

by Mike Baughn

HAVE you ever heard of the good ship the *USS Smoky Hill River*? I hadn't either until someone at the SmHTA board meeting at Bent's Old Fort mentioned it. My curiosity aroused, I hopped on the Internet but have not been able to find much concerning the ship. I am sure there is other information available, but I haven't been able to locate any other than what follows.

The *USS Smoky Hill River* was an amphibious assault ship laid down 2 June 1945 at Brown Shipbuilding Co., Houston, TX, and launched, 7 July 1945. She was commissioned *USS LSM(R)-531* on 25 September 1945, her first commander being Lt. James W. Macky, USN. She displaced 758 tons fully loaded, had a length of 206'3", a beam of 34'6" and had a speed of 13 knots. Her armament consisted of

OVERLAND DESPATCH is the official publication of the Smoky Hill Trail Association, Inc., a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), corporation chartered in the State of Kansas. Primary missions of the Association are to preserve, protect, promote, and interpret the Smoky Hill Trail for the benefit of present and future generations, and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with remnants and locations that represent the historic trail and Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) and its successors as well as the railroad that replaced the overland trail. Letters and articles are welcome, and they become the property of SmHTA and may be edited or abridged at the editor's discretion. All rights reserved.

Membership in the Association is open to all individuals, families, institutions, and businesses. Annual dues are \$25.00 for individuals, \$30.00 for families, \$40.00 for nonprofit organizations, \$50.00 for businesses, and \$100.00 for patrons. Life membership, individual or family, is \$500.00. Membership fees should be sent to Smoky Hill Trail Association, PO Box 322, WaKeeney KS 67672. Annual memberships are for the calendar year and expire on December 31. Other donations are always welcome.

Editor: Ann E. Liston, 1301 MacArthur Rd, Hays KS 67601, 785-628-8323, <aliston@fhsu.edu>

President: Mike Baughn, PO Box 159, Brewster KS 67732, 785-694-2278, <prairie_lawman@yahoo.com>

Vice-President: Kay Homewood, 1223 N Front St, Russell KS 67665, 785-483-4796, <khomewood@ruraltel.net>

Secretary: Jody Zeman, 714 Easter Ave, WaKeeney KS 67672, 785-259-0725, <jodyzeman@ruraltel.net>

Treasurer: Sam Chestnut, PO Box 313, Quinter KS 67752, <schest@ruraltel.net>

Directors:

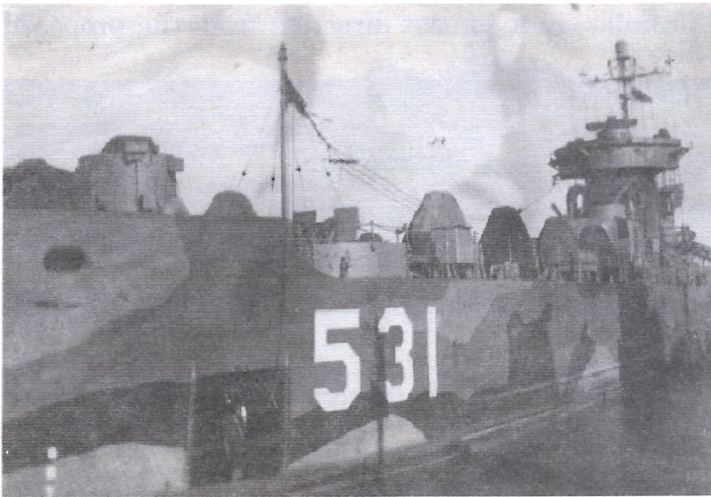
Elton Beougher, 2608 B Augusta Lane, Hays KS 67601, 785-625-5703, <Ebeoughe@fhsu.edu>

Roger Hanson, 12958 N Sierra Circle, Parker CO 80138, 303-805-1538, <rhanson@pcisys.net>

Jim Gray, PO Box 62, Ellsworth KS 67439, 785-472-4703 <kansascowboy@kans.com>

Lem Marsh, PO Box 263, Grinnell KS 67738, 785-824-3957, <smht1865drifter@st-tel.net>

Joanne VanCoevern, 4773 N Wasserman Way, Salina KS 67401, 785-825-8349, <jvancoevern@juno.com>



This photo of the USS Smoky Hill River LFR 531 shows only the midsection of the ship. Date of photo unknown.

1-single 5⁷/₃₈ dual purpose gun mount; 2-twin 40mm gun mounts; 4-twin 20 mm gun mounts; 10-twin continuous loading 5" rocket launchers, and 4-4"2 mortars. She was powered by 2 General Motors (non-reversing with airflex clutch) diesel engines, with twin screws and had an endurance of 3,000 miles at 13 knots.

She was manned by six officers and 137 enlisted men and sailed from Houston to Galveston, then to Charleston, SC, for yard availability. Her shakedown cruise was conducted from 1 November to 7 December 1945.

While at Little Creek, VA, she received orders on 8 January 1946 to proceed to Green Cove Springs, FL, for inactivation. In March, 1946 she joined the 16th Fleet and was decommissioned 29 May 1946. At Green Cove Springs, FL, she was laid up in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet, Florida Group.

On 1 October 1955, she was named the *USS Smoky Hill River LSM(R)-531* (Landing Ship Medium (Rocket)), and on 1 January 1969 she was redesignated the *USS Smoky Hill River LFR-531*, (Inshore Fire Support Ship).

Struck from the Naval Register, 1 May 1973, the *USS Smoky Hill River LFR-531* was sold to Max Wender, Detroit, MI, 25 April 1974. Wender resold her, 14 March 1975, to Panama where she was commissioned in the Panamanian Navy from which she was decommissioned in 1988 or 1989 and sold for commercial service.

Her fate is apparently unknown.

It would be interesting to know how she received her designation as the *USS Smoky Hill River* and if any Kansas boys ever served aboard her. Perhaps someone in our SmHTA membership with a naval background would find researching further information about "our" ship worth pursuing.

If anyone has or finds more information about this ship, please send it to Mike Baughn.

The information on the *USS Smoky Hill River* was taken from <www.navsource.org/archives> and <www.history.navy.mil>.

RON HARRIS

(continued from page 1)

39-year teaching career in Junction City, KS, including one year at Jefferson Elementary on Fort Riley and 38 years at Fort Riley Junior High School, where he taught social studies. He also coached football and basketball. After he retired from teaching, Ron served as Historic Site Manager for the Geary County Historical Museums from 2002 until his death. He was a member of the board of the Partners of the First Territorial Capitol of Kansas. He portrayed a character from the Kansas Territorial period, Martin F. Conway. He had a special interest in the history of American Indians and the American West. He was an active member of SmHTA and will be greatly missed.

Sincere condolences are extended to his family and many friends. Memorial contributions have been designated to the Partners of First Territorial Capitol, PO Box 2122, Fort Riley KS 66442.

COLORADO HIGHWAY 86

(continued from page 1)

South Branch.



The major trail landmark of Pikes Peak looms above Colorado Highway 86 at milepost 51, eight miles west of Interstate 70.

BOD Stage Stations

The BOD stage station, Big Bend of the Sandy, five miles south of Highway 86, was located on Big Sandy Creek, a tributary of the Arkansas River. The trail then crossed the "Arkansas/Platte Divide" to creeks running north to the South Platte River. Reed's Spring Station was located three miles south of Highway 86, on Reed's Spring, a tributary of East Bijou Creek. Bijou Creek Station was located on Station Creek, a tributary of West Bijou Creek. The station was a mile south of Highway 86. Kiowa Creek Station was located on Kiowa Creek, at present-day Kiowa. Here the Smoky Hill Trail crossed to the north side of the highway. Ruthton Station, also known as Running Creek Station, was located on Running Creek two miles north of the highway and the town of Elizabeth. The trail then turned in a northwest direction and veered away from the highway. Sulphur Gulch Station was located at present-day Parker, on Cherry Creek. The trail then followed Cherry Creek to Denver.



Reed's Spring was a stop on the 2010 Smoky Hill Trail Association's Conference bus tour.

The Move to the North Branch

Bayard Taylor, traveling the BOD in 1866, recorded: "The view from the divide near Kiowa Creek is considered one of the finest in Colorado." He also noted: "From Hedinger's Lake to Denver, a new cut-off has recently been made, shortening the distance twenty miles. Ours was the last coach which passed over the old road, the stations and stock being taken up behind us, and transferred across the country to the new positions." Ben Holladay, the "Stagecoach King," purchased the BOD in March 1866. He moved his stage line to what would be called the North Branch of the Smoky Hill Trail. From present-day Limon, this road would follow the approximate route of Interstate 70 through Deer Trail and Bennett. Holladay also shortened the trail between Cheyenne Wells and Limon, by eliminating the swing southwest to Big Sandy Creek. Holladay sold his operations to Wells Fargo in November 1866.



Traces of the Smoky Hill Trail are visible near West Bijou Creek, east of Kiowa.

Kiowa's Post Office Application

Taylor's "old road," the BOD route, would be used by the United States Express Company, as noted in Kiowa's post office application of February 1868. It read in part:

"It will be on or near route No. 14260, being the route from Denver to St Louis Mo, on which the mail is now carried seven times per week.

"The contractor's name is United States Express Co.

"Will it be directly on this route? Yes-within twenty yards.

"The name of the nearest office to the proposed one, on the same route, is Denver its distance is forty three miles, in a no west direction from the proposed office.

"The name of the nearest office on the same route, on the other side, is Fort Wallace Kan its distance is

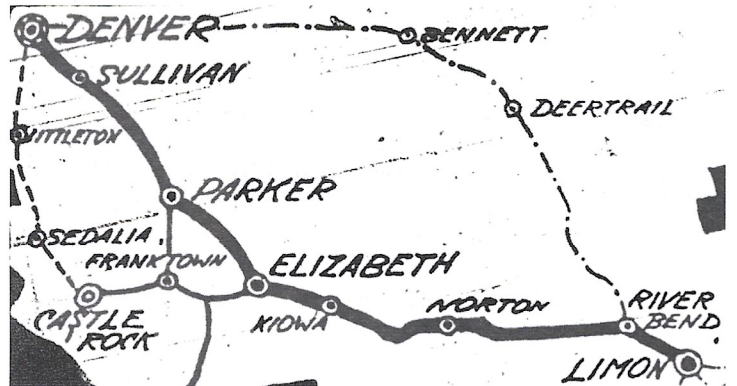
175 miles, in a so east direction from the proposed office."



Hand-carved dioramas by Hank Gentsch will be the focal point for a Smoky Hill Trail exhibit planned for the summer of 2013 at the Elbert County Museum in Kiowa.

The Midland Trail

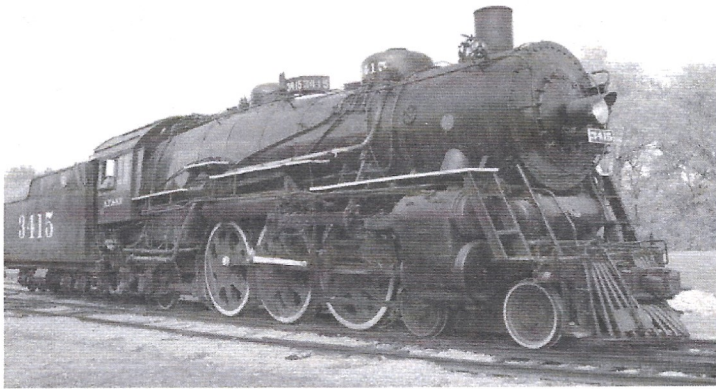
The transcontinental Midland Trail, a 1916 "auto trail," followed the Kansas Pacific from Limon to Denver. Isolated Kiowa, never served by a railroad, was ready and anxious to attract motorists to their town. Five hundred Elbert county residents in 136 automobiles descended on Denver on July 19, 1916. Banners on the first 13 cars stated the purpose of their visit: **Connect-Denver-With the-Midland-Trail-By Road-Thru-Elbert-County-To Limon-The Only-Logical-Route.** The members of the Elbert County Motor and Good Roads Club hoped that even if their proposed route was not incorporated into the Midland Trail, the road should be improved so as to attract motorists traveling east to the Midland Trail at Limon. Highway 86 was not included in the Midland Trail system and has remained a little used alternative to Interstate 70 between Denver and Limon.



The map of Elbert County's proposed Midland Trail also represents the general course of the South Branch of the Smoky Hill Trail.

Following the Trail Today

The 1916 Kiowa booster's map, although not to scale, provides the modern-day motorist with the best all-weather road along the Smoky Hill Trail South Branch. Riverbend, near the east end of Highway 86, was a bustling cattle-shipping siding on the Kansas Pacific. Nothing remains at the site of Norton except the cemetery. At Elizabeth, turn north on Elbert County Road 13 for four miles. Turn west on County Road 158. The road will turn northwest on Hilltop Road to Parker. Colorado Highway 83 (Parker Road/Leetsdale Drive) follows Cherry Creek to Denver.



The Abilene and Smoky Valley Railroad restored AT&SF locomotive 3415, on the National Register of Historic Places, provided a ride for SmHTA participants during the Abilene conference in October. Photo courtesy of



Roger Hanson, new SmHTA board member, watches as train approaches river crossing. Photo courtesy of Jere DeBacker

KANSAS FORTS AND THE INDIAN WARS PRESENTED BY EDWARDS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2013

A series of programs on Kansas Forts and the Indian Wars, funded in part by the Kansas Humanities Council, will be presented by the Edwards County Historical Society, January-May, 2013. Project Director Joan Weaver, Kinsley Public Library, will coordinate the programs and handle registrations. Leo E. Oliva will serve as the project scholar.

The schedule:

January 13, City of Kinsley Meeting Room

February 10, Fort Larned NHS

March 10, Fort Dodge Soldiers Home

April 14, Fort Hays State Historic Site

May 5, City of Kinsley Meeting Room

Each session will include discussion of assigned readings, presentation by Dr. Oliva, a guest speaker, and refreshments. There will be a small registration fee. Those registering do not need to attend every

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session if they have a conflict, but only those who register will be able to participate in the series.

Among the books to be discussed is Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*, considered by many historians to be the best novel written about the era of the Indian wars. Other readings will include Dr. Oliva's booklets on the forts visited.

Topics and guest speakers include "Cheyenne Warrior Culture" by Ken Weidner, "Life and Equipment of a Frontier Cavalryman" by Greg VanCoevern, "Life and Equipment of a Frontier Infantryman" by Rex Abrahams, "Letters of Isadora Douglas at Fort Dodge" by Joanne VanCoevern (SmHTA board member), "California Joe' Milner: Army Scout" by Mark Berry, and special presentation by Dr. Henrietta Mann, President of Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribal College in Weatherford OK on "Traveling the Cheyenne Road of Life."

Complete details and registration information are available at Kinsley Public Library, online at <<http://www.kinsleylibrary.info>>.

In May the Fort Larned traveling exhibits will be located at the Edwards County History Museum to complement these programs.

This series provides an opportunity for anyone interested in Kansas forts, Plains Indians, and Indian/white relations on the Kansas frontier to learn more and visit historic sites. Tours of the forts visited will be part of the programs.

TRAIL TREASURES

-DOCUMENTS-

Hints for Plains Travelers

(Mike Baughn found this item. In 1877, the Omaha Herald published these "Hints for Plains Travelers.")

- The best seat inside a stagecoach is the one next to the driver with back to the horses, which with some people, produces seasickness, but in a long journey this will wear off, and you will get less than half the bumps and jars than on any other seat. When any old "sly Eph," who traveled thousands of miles on coaches, offers through sympathy to exchange his back or middle seat with you, don't do it.

- Never ride in cold weather with tight boots or shoes, nor close-fitting gloves. Bathe your feet before starting in cold water and wear loose overshoes and gloves two or three sizes too large.

- When the driver asks you to get off and walk, do it without grumbling. He will not request it unless absolutely necessary. If a team runs away, sit still and take your chances; if you jump, nine times out of ten you will be hurt.

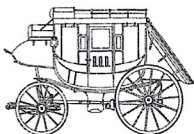
- In very cold weather, abstain entirely from liquor while on the road; a man will freeze twice as quick while under its influence.

- Don't growl at food at stations; stage companies generally provide the best they can get. Don't keep the stage waiting; many a virtuous man has lost his character by so doing.

- Don't smoke a strong pipe inside especially early

Smoky Hill Trail Association
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WaKeeney, KS 67672

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in the morning. Spit on the leeward side of the coach. If you have anything to take in a bottle, pass it around; a man who drinks by himself in such a case is lost to all human feeling. Provide stimulants before starting; ranch whiskey is not always nectar.

- Don't swear, nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping. Don't ask how far it is to the next station until you get there.

- Never attempt to fire a gun or pistol while on the road, it may frighten the team; and the careless handling and cocking of the weapon makes nervous people nervous. Don't discuss politics or religion, nor point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed.

- Don't linger too long at the pewter wash basin at the station. Don't grease your hair before starting or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable "tater" patch.

- Tie a silk handkerchief around your neck to keep out dust and prevent sunburns. A little glycerine is good in case of chapped hands.

- Don't imagine for a moment you are going on a picnic; expect annoyance, discomfort, and some hardships. If you are disappointed, thank heaven.

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The Caves at Cheyenne Wells

There is an interesting summary of the caves on the Smoky Hill Trail at Cheyenne Wells, CO, online at <<http://cogenweb.com/cheyenne/caves.htm>>.

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Snow on the Plains, 1863

[From the Smoky Hill and Republican Union, Junction City, December 5, 1863.]

Heavy Snow.—From Salina to Fort Larned the whole country is covered with snow to the depth of fifteen inches. The coach left Fort Larned last Sunday morning, and the Santa Fe mail had not arrived then. The snow is worse beyond Larned, and as the

team driving out of Larned runs one hundred and fifty miles without changing, it may be presumed that the passengers are in a rather undesirable fix. The coach coming in past through snow seven and eight feet deep, and all the ravines are drifted to a level. The buffalo will all die off if it does not soon melt away. We hear that many hunters have suffered terribly in consequence—many having their feet so badly frozen that they may lose them, while there are others out who have not been heard from, and fears are entertained for their safety.

NEW SmHTA MEMBERSHIPS

New members since last issue.

BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP

Abilene CVB, Glenda Purkis, 200 NW 2nd, Abilene KS 67410

INSTITUTION MEMBERSHIP

Chapman Area Preservation Society, Donna Relihan, PO Box 577, Chapman KS 67431

FAMILY MEMBERSHIP

R. W. & Cathy Lucas, PO Box 873, Sublette KS 67877

Bert & Patricia Meyer, 10707 Coogle Lane, Fairdale KY 40118

D. C. & Patricia Phillips, 23015 Hwy 283, WaKeeney KS 67672

Ron & Sharon Sheets, 4360 Fruita Dr, Loveland CO 80538

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

Charles Andrews, PO Box 66, Kanopolis KS 67454

Doris Hoover, 110 S Campbell St, Abilene KS 67410

Curtis Parke, 16021 U Rd, Collyer KS 67631

EDITOR'S REQUEST

ALL SmHTA members are reminded that articles for *Overland Dispatch* are welcome any time. Please contact Editor Ann Liston at <aliston@fhsu.edu>. The deadline for the next issue is **February 1, 2013**.