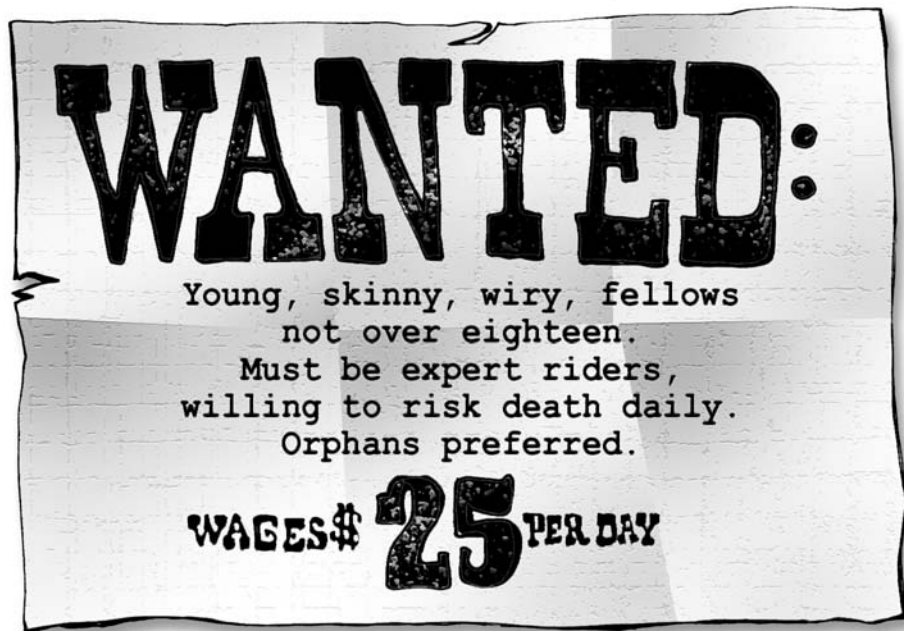


Table of Contents

Resources	5	A Special Mail Bag	18
Cut Off/News from Home	6	Pony Express Mochila	19
Overland Mail.....	7	Heroes/Ready for Trouble	20
The First Real Link.....	8	What Did They Wear?	22
From Freight to Mail	9	The Riders.....	23
Getting Ready	10	Pony Riders Card Game	26
Pony Puppet Pattern	11	Indian Friends and Enemies	27
Riders Wanted.....	12	Station to Station	28
They're Off!	13	Pony Express Station	29
The Way They Went	14	The Beginning of the End	30
Pony Express Trail Map	15	Accomplishments/Pony Express Re-Run.....	31
Pony Express Rider Pattern	16		



Pony Express

Cut Off

When gold was discovered in the Sacramento Valley in 1848, thousands of would-be prospectors began pouring into California to find their fortune. They came from all over the world, but mostly from eastern America, usually by ship. Almost overnight cities popped up and businesses catering to the needs of the miners were started. But the country was still new and there was almost no connection between California and the faraway eastern United States where most people lived. It was easy enough to travel anywhere from the east coast to the Mississippi River. Good roads and trains made passenger travel and the delivery of materials from one place to another fairly simple. However, once you crossed the Mississippi, it was a different story with no railroads or maintained roads. Consequently, Californians felt cut off from the rest of the country. Any eastern goods, as well as mail, had to be transported by ship around the southern tip of South America or through the Isthmus of Panama. Both took about a month if nothing went wrong, six to eight weeks if it did. Both were unreliable since accidents were commonplace. But nobody in his right mind would try to travel overland in less time. That would be dangerous as well as unreliable. So the government gave the mail delivery contract to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. By the time Californians received news of happenings in the eastern part of the country, it was out of date!

Map Activity

Have students look at a United States map to see how far it is from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. Let them use highway maps and rulers to calculate the actual mileage distance between the two towns. Since there were no trains west of the Mississippi, how would a person travel to California? Point out that oxen or mules could pull a wagon 15 to 20 miles on a good day. Challenge students to figure out how many days it would take to go from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, traveling at that speed. How long would it take us today if we traveled that distance by car or truck?

Have students look at a map of the world and trace the two routes ships could take to go from the east coast to the west coast (around the southern tip of South America or through the Isthmus of Panama). Ask students to brainstorm some of the difficulties and dangers of these routes. They can use the computer to find out what the Isthmus of Panama was like before the Canal was built. Direct them to www.panacanal.com to discover this information and much more.

News from Home

The men searching for gold in California were far from home for months or years, separated from family and friends. They longed to hear what was happening and wanted to let their loved ones know of their successes and challenges. Though mail took a month or two to get from the east to California, even then it often did not get claimed for many months. Miners couldn't afford to take the time (about two weeks) to leave their gold claims to travel to the San Francisco post office to pick up their mail. Not only did leaving take time better spent in searching for gold; it also left their claims unguarded and available for dishonest men to "claim jump." Then Alexander Todd, a failed gold prospector came up with an idea to help himself as well as other prospectors. He offered to travel to San Francisco to pick up the mail on a regular basis and return it to the gold fields for the miners. He charged \$2.50 for taking mail to the San Francisco post office and about \$16 (one ounce of gold dust) to pick up mail from the east and bring it to the miners. Hundreds of gold miners signed up for his service, gladly paying his fee, and Todd began making more money than he had ever made looking for gold. He even picked up month-old newspapers for about \$1 each and sold them for \$8 apiece to the prospectors who were eager for any kind of news from the rest of the country. Todd made thousands of dollars with his simple delivery service. Then some store owners asked him to deliver \$150,000 worth of gold dust to a company in San Francisco. He agreed to make the delivery for 5% of the value of the gold dust. Since there was no other way to get the gold to San Francisco

Pony Express

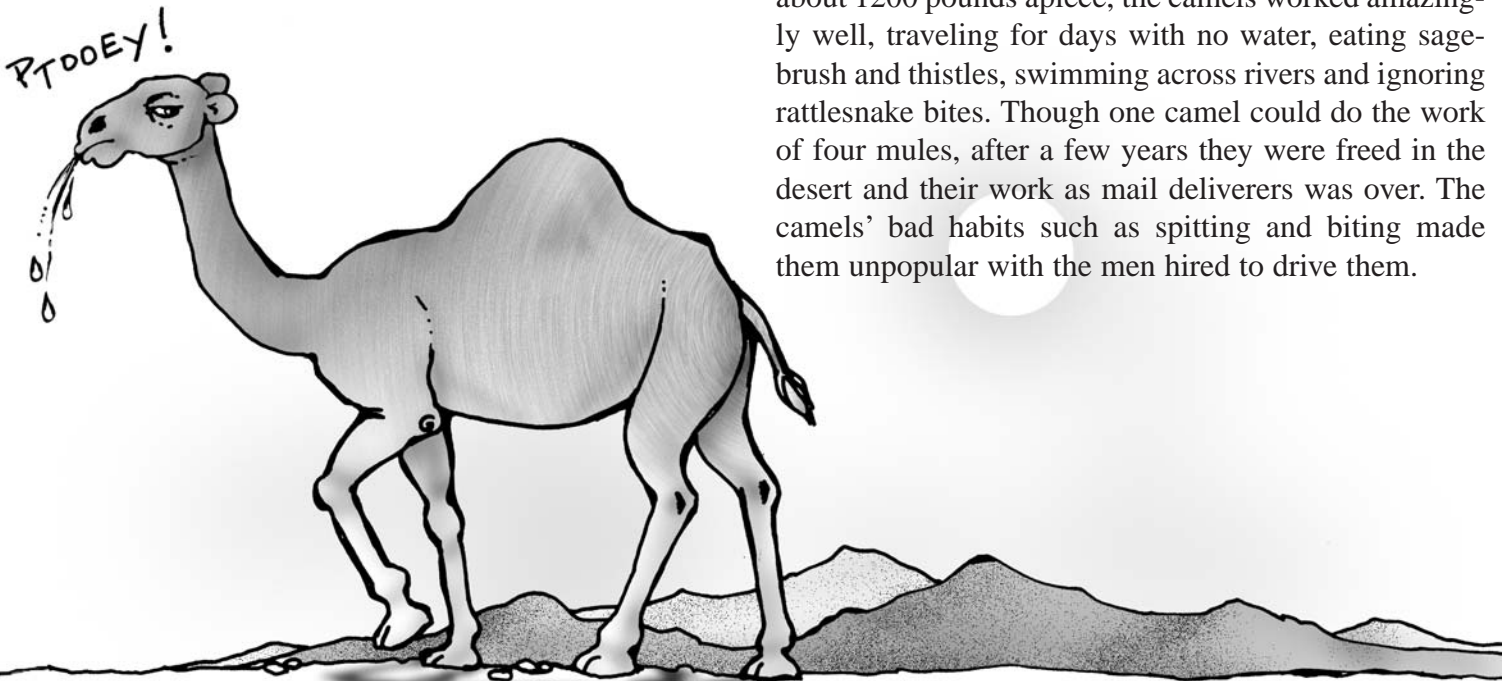
unless they took it themselves, the store owners agreed and paid him \$7500 for the delivery. From then on, Alexander Todd earned an average of \$1000 a day with his expanded delivery service.

Discussion

Why do you think Todd charged so much more for incoming mail than for outgoing mail? If you were away from your home and family for many months or even years, would you be willing to pay that kind of money for mail from home? Why or why not? Do you think Alexander Todd cheated the gold miners or was his service worth what he charged? Did he overcharge the shop owners for the delivery of the gold to San Francisco? What dangers or difficulties might Todd have had to deal with during his delivery trips?

Mail Service Ads

Encourage students to imagine they are Alexander Todd letting gold miners know about his mail service. Challenge them to each design a colorful ad describing the excellent service and prices with advertising copy that will make people want to sign up for the mail service. When the ads are done, mount them on a wall, number them and vote by secret ballot to see which one the students think is the best.



Overland Mail

Alexander Todd's service brought mail and news to California gold miners, but it was still a month or two old when they received it. California complained to the U.S. government, demanding that something be done to improve mail service and speed it up. In 1850 the government awarded the mail contract to Samuel H. Woodson of Missouri. He agreed to move the mail from Independence, Missouri, to Salt Lake City, Utah, on pack animals or wagons within 30 days. However, because of bad weather and other problems, his service was so undependable he gave up the job. Other men tried to devise ways and means of mail delivery in a more regular, timely manner, but bad weather, rough terrain and hostile Indians interfered on a regular basis. Drivers were attacked and killed, and during the winter pack mules froze to death among other mishaps.

In 1855 Congress, desperate for a solution to the mail delivery service, decided to test camels as pack animals. It was believed that they might make it possible to get mail to California in only 15 days. Navy ships brought 34 camels from Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) to Texas, where they were loaded down and driven to California. As they traveled through the desert carrying about 1200 pounds apiece, the camels worked amazingly well, traveling for days with no water, eating sagebrush and thistles, swimming across rivers and ignoring rattlesnake bites. Though one camel could do the work of four mules, after a few years they were freed in the desert and their work as mail deliverers was over. The camels' bad habits such as spitting and biting made them unpopular with the men hired to drive them.

Pony Express

Camel Song

Have children sing this song to the tune of “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again” as they do the actions.

The camels plod across the desert sands all day
(*Plod slowly around with your back humped.*)

To take the mail to California far away.

(*Keep plodding.*)

They never seem to need a drink,

(*Make a slurping sound with your tongue.*)

And snake bites barely make them blink,

(*Kick one foot out.*)

As they plod along just carrying the mail.

(*Plod along.*)

The camels came by Navy ships from far-off lands

(*Move hand up and down like ocean waves.*)

To carry mail across the hot and burning sands.

(*Plod along with your back humped.*)

Sagebrush is the food they eat

(*Chew and smack lips.*)

And thistles are a special treat

(*Lick lips and say, “Yum.”*)

As they plod along just carrying the mail.

(*Plod along.*)

Challenge your students to work together to write a third stanza for the song, perhaps about the bad habits of the camels.

The First Real Link

No matter what the government did, they just couldn't seem to get mail from the east coast to the west coast any faster! In 1856, California Senator John B. Weller delivered to the Senate a petition with 75,000 signatures on it. It demanded that the U.S. government improve the main overland trail to California so stages could travel from the east coast to the west and be able to deliver the mail. For a variety of reasons, including fears that a civil war would soon rock the nation, Congress sidestepped the issue. Instead, a mail contract

was given for a stage line that, as one man said, went “from no place through nothing to nowhere.” Then the man whose company won the contract was killed when his boat sank in a storm on the way to New York. Without his management, his stage line was a disaster that only lasted a year.

In 1857 the U.S. mail delivery contract was awarded to John Butterfield. He had been a stage driver in his younger days and knew what it took to run a stage company. He spent about a million dollars setting up his overland mail company, building relay stations across the route, buying horses and equipment, hiring drivers, etc. On September 16, 1858, two of his coaches, one in San Francisco and one in Tipton, Missouri, headed out for the first overland mail delivery. It took about 24 days, an improvement on all other routes up to that point. His mail coaches also carried passengers. For \$200 a person could travel from Missouri to California by land for the first time if, of course, they were not troubled by hostile Indian attacks, a distinct possibility. President James Buchanan called it “a glorious triumph for civilization and the Union.” It was the first dependable mail service and the first real link between the two halves of the country. As far as Californians were concerned it still took too long.

Originating a Petition

Ask students to explain what a petition is. Start a petition to get something done, such as to set aside a certain day in the school year as a day to honor your principal. See how many people you can get to sign it.

