

NOTES ON SUPERSTITION MOUNTAINS

As a background to the logistical problem of the Peralta Party, we should consider Coronado's expedition in 1540. Reference "Coronado" by Herbert E. Bolton.

The muster at Culiacan (now in Southern Sonora) indicated the following:

336 Spaniards

300 Indians (about)

636 Total men (plus a few women)

1500 horses and mules

An unknown number of cattle and sheep

The real "Last port of call" was Corazones (now in Central Sonora) which was a Yaqui village containing maize, beans and calabashes. The distance from here to "Cibola" or Tiquex (near Taos in New Mexico) was about 600 miles. Most of this distance was on good water and part of it was thru Indian rancheros where they could provision, probably at the point of their swords. Coronado had a difficult time in subsisting his expedition. Every pound of food the Spaniards obtained for two years was taken from Indians except for a relief expedition later bringing 500 cattle and 1000 sheep to the Tiquex area (Pueblo Indians).

Let us now turn to the Peralta expedition and use Storm's first book, "Trail of the Lost Dutchman", published in 1939 as reference:

1845 Miguel Peralta left Chihuahua City for Santa Fe and eventually located Salt River to the west (alone?).

1846 Pedro Peralta, with two brothers and six men, relocated the Salt River and its placer bars.

1847 Pedro Peralta returned with 68 men and 200 mules. This expedition resulted in total massacre by Apaches, September, 1848.

I will now attempt to assume the position of Pedro Peralta while in Chihuahua City and try to think as he did in the winter of 1846-47: (I have 600 miles to

travel, as did Coronado, from a different point, and over tougher terrain.)

"What drawbacks will I encounter? I have the inheritance of 200 years of raids and warfare by the Comanches, catastrophic on the Rio Grande, but extending deep into Chihuahua. My peons have lost half of their sons and daughters and the wives of their bosom, either dead or as slaves. The economy and moral of the entire state of Chihuahua is still reeling from two wars with the Texans and the few coins in circulation went to Santa Ana's tax collectors. There are few real fighting men in the area to draw upon."

"What points do I have in my favor? The promise of gold and the proof of same from the results of the 1846 expedition. I also notice new immigration into the city, men escaping the poverty and insurrections of the Southern Mexican States; young, poor, inexperienced, but seeking new opportunities. These, with my few dependables, are the ones I will draw upon as they will work and fight better than my spiritless neighbors."

"How many men should I consider? I need a strong party because of the Apache threat on the last expedition. I must be careful not to take too many due to the great expense. However, with my share of the Salt River gold in hand and the further backing of, say, three local Dons or Merchants (who are in for 50% of the net profit, greedy!@!!) I can buy 200 mules and afford the cost of muskets and supplies for about 50 men. Dry stores must be taken. We cannot live off of the country as there is little big game and no cultivation. Nor is there food of any great volume in nature."

"With 200 mules, (assuming all walk, but me, of course) at 150 lbs per mule, I can pack 30,000 pounds. 20,000 lbs of this must be food and the balance to be tools, powder, clothing and miscellaneous. This amounts to 400 lbs of dry food per man for two years. I will spoil or lose 20% for a net of 320 lbs per man. As two years equals 730 days this means but 1/2 lb. of food per man per day. DIOG MIO! I must reconsider! It is probable I will lose 20% of my men thru sickness and accident. That will help. Then possibly I can get by with but 18 months. Si! (If only I

were wealthy as was Coronado!) However, it is getting warm and I must siesta. Therefore, rather than go thru all this thinking again, I will take the 200 mules (loaded at 200 lbs) but only 40 men. This means more food for all and it will cost much less. The men must also be paid and share in the profit. After all, I must consider myself! I did it before with only 9 men."

"In what direction will I travel? I must not circle about thru Santa Fe as did my father. There is lots of water but there is the possibility of a large Comanche raiding party and there is little or no mining country enroute. I think I will go west to the Sierra Madras, then north (on the east side) to the Salt River. It is closer; it will be high and cool; I will cross many streams running to the east; there is much mining country to explore enroute; there is the possibility of shooting a few deer and there is less danger from hostile Indians until arrival. I know all this because this is the route by which I have just returned and my people now trust me."

✓ In having fun at Pedro's expense I still recognize the Peraltas as a very courageous and unusual family. However, to recap; Coronado was a wealthy Spanish noble, even by today's standards. His 1540 expedition cost him his fortune and indirectly, his life. Naturally, we cannot really compare his expenses with that of Peralta, only his food problem. Besides, Coronado really departed from Compostela."

What was the cost to Pedro Peralta? In 1847, the peso was worth about 20¢ in United States currency (I'm guessing). Assume labor at 2 pesos per manday. This figure must be established because normally the food and other supplies are equal to the labor cost.

Labor:	540 days x 2 x 40 men	=	43,200
Mules:	200 x 200 pesos	=	40,000
Food & Supplies		=	<u>43,200</u>
			126,400 pesos

The men need only an advance of 10% to purchase clothing and personals with the balance to be held in trust in Chihuahua City against their return (which the backers may

cheat them out of.) Thus, the initial cost is about 80,000 pesos (say, \$16,000). This is not too expensive and with much of it provided by the merchants, Pedro was successful in organizing his party. Had Pedro this total amount already he would be quite wealthy by 1847 standards, therefore little need for more wealth thus less motive to form an expedition.

The \$18,000 recovered by C. H. Silverlock at the Massacre site in 1914 represents a very poor return if there were 68 or even only 40 people in the party for over a year. If this were all of the gold, it would tend to deflate the claims of great richness whether it was in placer gold or in hard rock.

Storn assumed that much more which was buried due to the pending Indian threat. Burying the gold seems irrational to me. In "1000 fine" gold, \$18,000 represents but about 57 lbs. If placer, or even if ore concentrates, the foreign material with the gold would about double the weight so it would weigh, say, 114 pounds. This is only about 1/2 of a mule load.

I don't think the Peraltas would take the time to bury the gold. It would be a simple chore to pack it. They had consumed most of their food and thus had plenty of spare mules and pack frames for the return trip. Also, they needed every ounce of gold they could carry to Chihuahua City. It is far more likely that another mule (or mules) carrying concentrates "spooked" from the massacre site under the pressing Indian attack. If captured by Apaches later, they could have been miles away and these concentrates lost forever. I wonder if anyone has ever considered or developed this point.

I don't believe that the Peralta expedition consisted of anywhere near 400 men. If it were so it would have proved very expensive but the party would have succeeded in returning home. 400 men with firearms could have defeated any combination of Apaches brought to bear upon them. History records examples of this upon several occasions.