

The Pony Express

More than 1,800 miles in 10 days! From St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California the Pony Express could deliver a letter faster than ever before.

In operation for only 18 months between April 1860 and October 1861, the Pony Express nevertheless has become synonymous with the Old West. In the era before electronic communication, the Pony Express was the thread that tied East to West.



Pony Rider Leaving Red Buttes Station
by William Henry Jackson

As a result of the 1849 Gold Rush, the 1847 Mormon exodus to Utah and the thousands who moved west on the Oregon Trail starting in the 1840s, the need for a fast mail service beyond the Rocky Mountains became obvious. This need was partially filled by outfits such as the Butterfield Overland Mail Service starting in 1857 and private carriers in following years.

But when postmaster general Joseph Holt scaled back overland mail service to California and the central region of the country in 1858, an even greater need for mail arose. The creation of the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company by William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell became the answer. It was later known as the Pony Express.

Ad in the Sacramento Union, March 19, 1860

"Men Wanted"

The undersigned wishes to hire ten or a dozen men, familiar with the management of horses, as hostlers, or riders on the Overland Express Route via Salt Lake City. Wages \$50 per month and found.

On June 16, 1860, about ten weeks after the Pony Express began operations, Congress authorized the a bill instructing the Secretary of the Treasury to subsidize the building of a transcontinental telegraph line to connect the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast.

The passage of the bill resulted in the incorporation of the Overland Telegraph Company of California and the Pacific Telegraph Company of Nebraska. While the lines were under construction the Pony Express operated as usual. Letters and

newspapers were carried the entire length of the line from St. Joseph to Sacramento, but telegrams were carried only between the rapidly advancing wire ends.

On October 26, 1861, San Francisco was in direct contact with New York City. On that day the Pony Express was officially terminated, but it was not until November that the last letters completed their journey over the route. Most of the original trail has been obliterated either by time or human activities. Along many segments, the trail's actual route and exact length are matters of conjecture. In the western states, the majority of the trail has been converted, over the years, to double track dirt roads. Short pristine segments, believed to be traces of the original trail, can be seen only in Utah and California. However, approximately 120 historic sites may eventually be available to the public, including 50 existing Pony Express stations or station ruins