



Concho Valley Archeological Society Newsletter

November 2012

THE CVAS THAT THE MEETING WILL BE AT OFFICERS QUARTERS #8 AT FORT CONCHO, NOVEMBER 15TH 7:00 PM. WE WILL BE DOING THINGS DIFFERENT AT THIS MEETING. WE WILL NOMINATE AND VOTE FOR OFFICERS THAT NIGHT AND HAVE THE RESULTS AT THE CVAS CHRISTMAS PARTY.

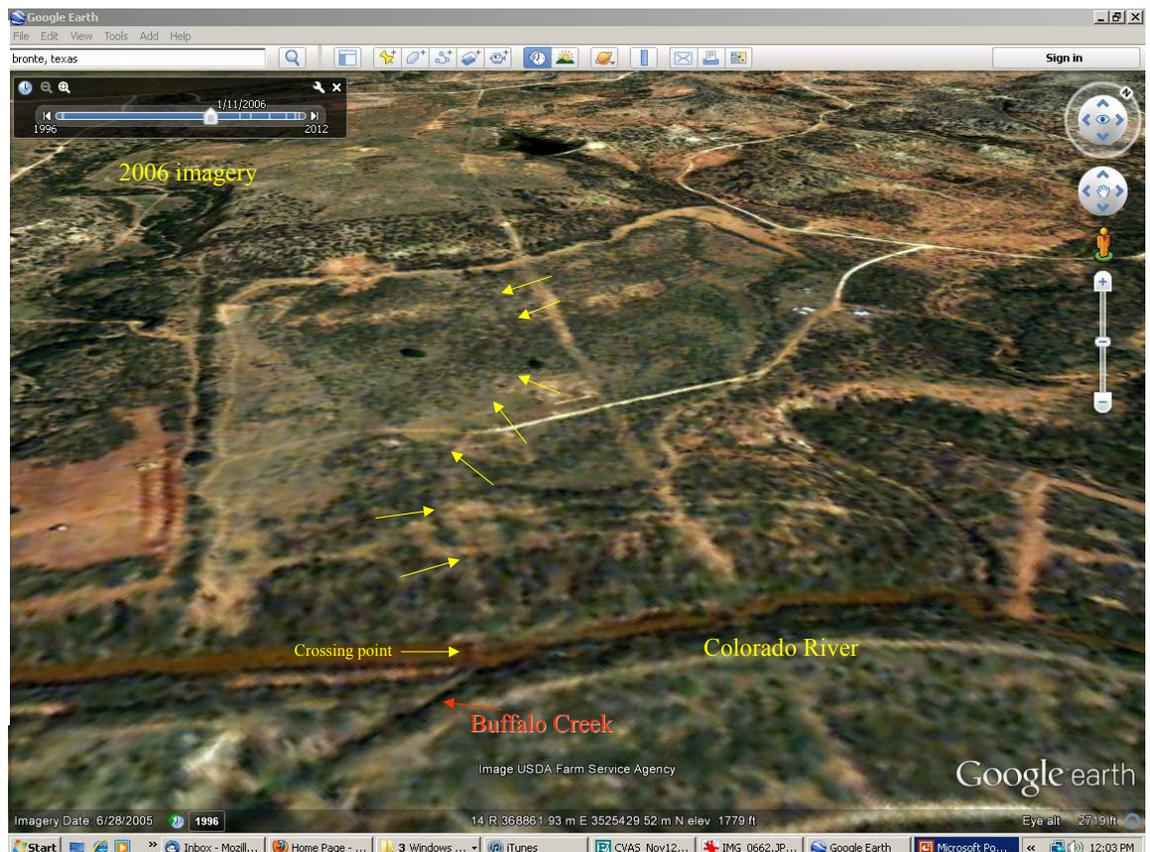
The early Butterfield Stage Colorado River Crossing

By Tom Ashmore

If you've been following my research into the Butterfield Overland Mail route from Fort Chadbourne heading west you may remember I reported that there were actually two trails that ran from Fort Chadbourne to the Colorado River—an early trail, which followed the old military road and a later trail that ran close to what is now Bronte and crossed just southwest of Bronte. The early trail is the one reported by Conkling in his famous book on the Butterfield Overland Mail and is also the one that is marked on the highway heading between Bronte and Robert Lee. I reported on the later route and subsequent crossing, which appeared to be built as a more straight and level road, in the March 2010 and March 2011 newsletters, which can be found on our website.

I would like this time to discuss the earlier crossing reported by Conkling. This route ran more westerly after leaving Fort Chadbourne, passing through the hills and ending up at the Colorado River, where Buffalo Creek runs into it from the south. Some of the older Google Earth imagery shows the route fairly clearly as it heads to the river from the north.

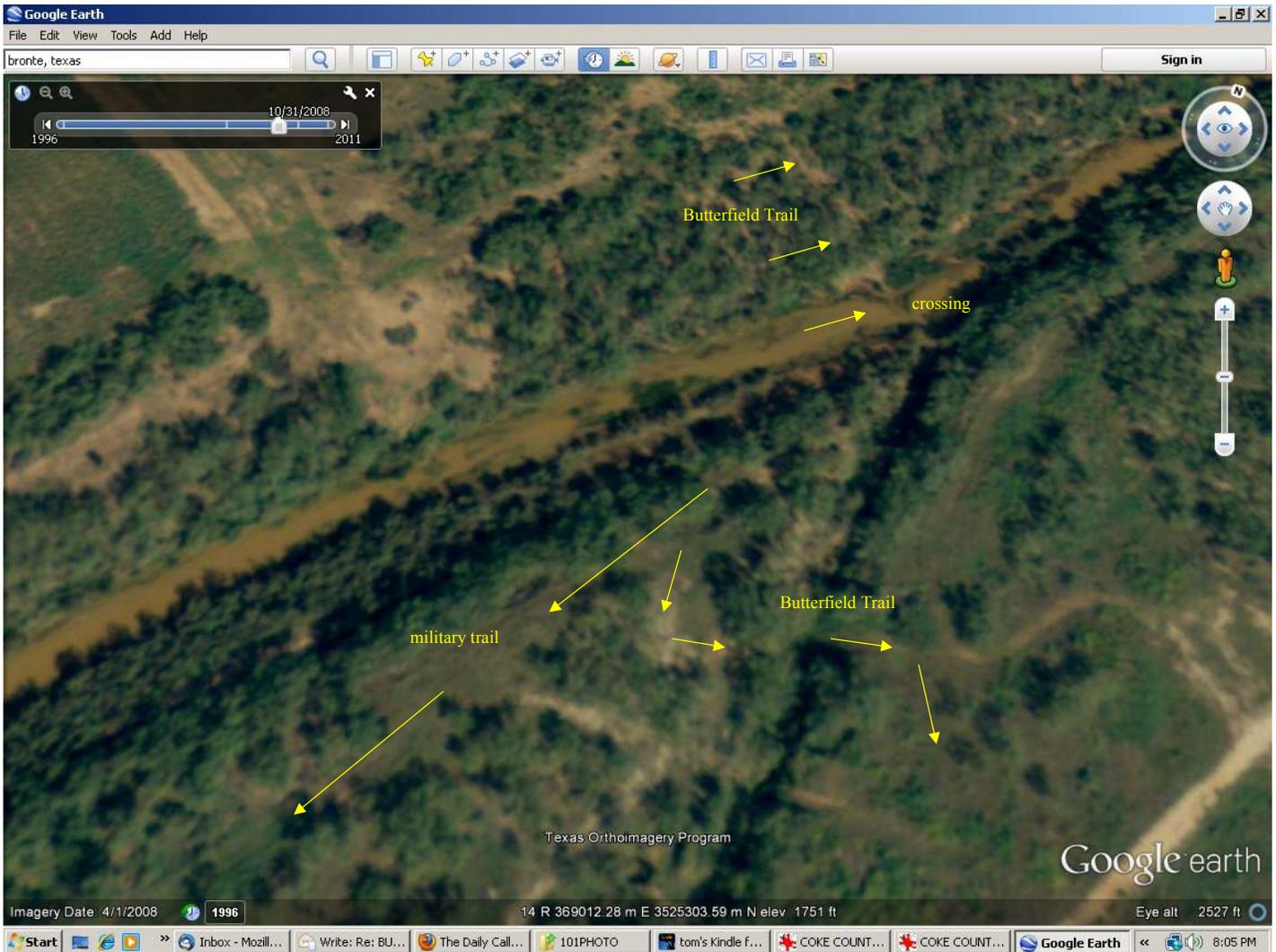
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The early Butterfield Stage Colorado River Crossing

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Once across the river the trail actually split and headed in two different directions. This is because the trail was originally a military trail that came from the Camp Johnston area, near today's Carlsbad. However, the Butterfield line needed to take a different route in order to set up a stage stop at the proper distance they had determined for changes of mule teams and apparently there were no good locations on the original military route. That stage stop was to be the Grape Creek Station, probably chosen for its access to water for the animals. So the Butterfield route diverged from the military route just after crossing the river. The military route headed SSW and the Butterfield route headed SSE. In the next image from 2008 you can see a clear picture of the two routes diverging and the Butterfield route crossing through Buffalo Creek. (The straight line cutting through the creek is a modern cut.)



Now, one thing I reject from the Conkling assessment concerns the possibility of a Colorado River station. Conkling admitted, "This station is not reported on the early time-tables," but then goes on to address a station, basing it entirely on a story from a traveler in Sept 1859. The story went like this. When they got to the river, it was in the middle of a storm and the river was too high to cross. Conkling continues, "He and the other passengers were compelled to pass the night in the mail wagon during a deluge of rain. Breakfast, consisting of mesquite beans and pork was served the following morning in the adobe hut station."

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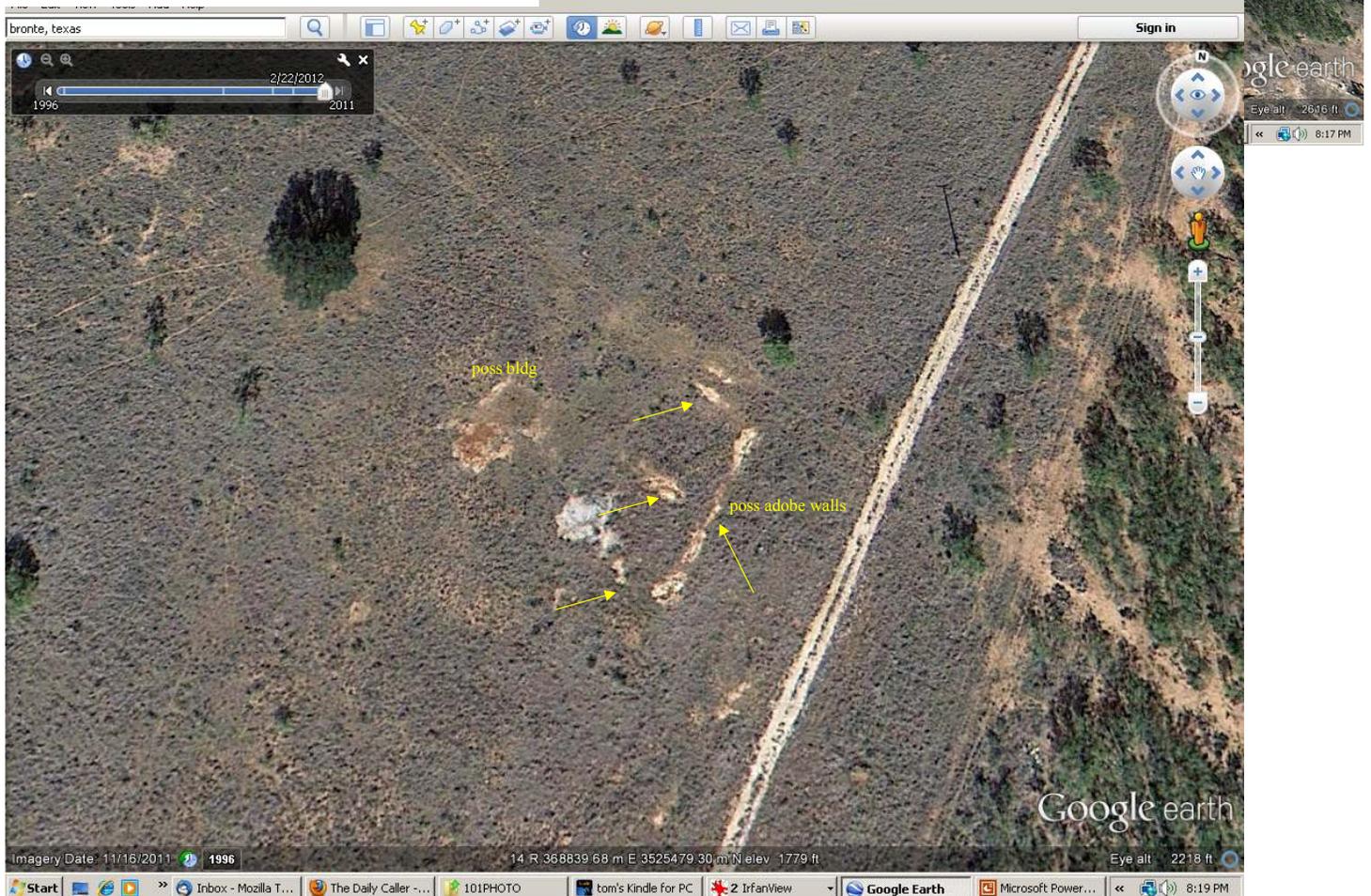
The early Butterfield Stage Colorado River Crossing

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In my opinion, there was an adobe hut at the river, but I don't think it was a formal stage station. If it was, you would have to ask yourself why were the passengers were forced to spend the night in a deluge of rain inside the wagon? During the first running of the Butterfield, in which the newspaper reporter Ormsby discussed his trip, he mentions both Grape Creek and Johnson's Station (on the Middle Concho), but nothing when they crossed the Colorado. It also doesn't make sense based on the distance. The distance between stations was based on a 26 - 30 mile separation. When the driver was asked at Ft Chadbourne how far it was to the next station, which was Grape Creek, the driver told him it was 30 miles. Via the original route to the Colorado River it is 17 miles—about half the proper distance.

But to step back, let's look at the idea that there was an adobe hut near the river where the travelers were provided a breakfast while they waited for the river to recede enough to cross. Well, in the 2011 imagery we can see what appears to be the possible remains of just such a place.

This location would be the proper distance to be up and away from the river, on flat terrain. Although you cannot be sure until actually physically working an area, there appears to be remains of what may have been an adobe wall for a corral and an area for at least one building. Nearby there is a large tree that may also indicate a location for a former clean water source.



November Meeting Presentation—15 November

Brownie Roberts and Arnetta Cooper will give this month's presentation on their experiences at the Texas Archeological Society Field School. The following article will give a good big-picture overview of the work done.

Archeologist speaks about Devils River

itemonline.com, By Tori Brock, Oct 10, 2012

A new area acquired by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has yielded the discovery of undocumented rock shelters and cave art.

Archeologist Luis Alvarado spoke Wednesday night at the Walker Education Center on a recent survey of the south portion of the Devils River State Natural Area near Del Rio. The 38,000-acre State Natural Area consists of two units, Del Norte, the north unit, and Big Satan, which is the recently-acquired south unit. The south unit is closed to the public, but is expected to open sometime in 2013. TPWD is working on a public use plan with proposals for hiking, biking and river uses in the area.

"The interior is not going to get a whole lot of development," Alvarado said. "We're going to put our money into developing the river corridor."

The Devils River is one of the most ecologically intact rivers in Texas and has been supporting communities of settlers since at least the early archaic period, according to Alvarado. During the survey, the Texas State Archeological Society Field School located 58 rock shelters on the property along with many undocumented burned rock middens, or areas of fire-fractured limestone where cooking took place. The field school was given one year to survey the area, 12 miles south of the north unit, before it opens to the public.

The property, patented in the 1880s, was primarily used for raising goats and sheep. In 1995, a Texas man consolidated 17,000 acres into one parcel. He sold the land in 2006 to another man who then offered it to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 2010.

"We conducted a reconnaissance survey – a look-see," Alvarado said. "We needed to cover as much ground as possible. We really made an effort to locate any previously unrecorded rock art sites. We're going to offer guided and non-guided tours of the rock art sites."

More than 260 people were part of the field school, 43 of them children. Approximately 900 acres were surveyed per day during the week-long school for a total of 6,250 acres surveyed. Different groups located rock shelters, burned rock midden sites and rock art sites. Open camps with burned rock midden sites were excavated to find charcoal and macro-botanical remains in order to help date the sites. Burned rock middens located inside rock shelters were not excavated because of the possibility of finding human remains. One crew discovered historic graffiti inside a rock shelter, written in Spanish. The signature was that of a previous landowner.

"It was a verse of the Mexican National Anthem," Alvarado said. "It was proof (the owner) was on the property. It was a great example of history and archeology coming together."

Sites date back to the early, middle and late archaic periods as well as the late prehistoric.

"We want to fully record and document rock art before it's gone," Alvarado said.

Of the 58 rock shelters discovered, nearly all were along the river leading Alvarado to speculate the river drew people to its amenities.

"The prehistoric people were being selective of which sites they chose based on the availability of timber, water and food resources," he said. "We made a new discovery of a rock shelter with crosshatch marks on the ceiling associated with water seeps from the ceiling. For now, we have no idea what they are or what they represent."

More than 5,000 artifacts, including projectile points, were discovered during the survey.

The Nebra Sky Disc: (Astronomical Artifact)

<http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk>

This artifact was for a long time considered a fake. It is now accepted as a genuine artifact describing the night sky. It is a bronze disc about 32 centimeters in diameter with a diagram of the heavens embossed onto it in gold. It shows representations of the sun, moon, Pleiades and three other crescents, two presumed to be horizon lines and the other a possible 'Solar Barge' at the bottom.

The disc was found on top of a mountain (The Mittelberg) in Germany, along with a horde of other 'Bronze-age' relics, from which it is dated circa 1,600 BC. The disc was made by a race of people that lived in Europe before the arrival of the Celts, and is said to be one of the oldest chart of the heavens in the world.

On the left and right sides are two long arcs. These span about 80 degrees each. The difference between sunrise on the summer solstice and on the winter solstice is 82.7 degrees at this latitude, as is the difference between the sunsets on the two solstices. The two arcs are said to represent the portions of the horizon where the sun rises during the year. (The gold coating on the left arc, representing sunset, has fallen off and is lost).

Between the two arcs are a full circle and a crescent. The crescent obviously represents a crescent moon, while the large circle may be the sun or a full moon. (The gold on the sun/full moon circle is damaged). Considering recent conclusions of its original function (see below) it is likely that this is a sun symbol. In the background are 23 stars dotted in an apparently random pattern, and one group of seven stars which represent the Pleiades star cluster (the Seven Sisters or M45). X-Rays indicate that under the gold of the right arc are two more stars, so it is likely that the two arcs were added some time after the other features.

The Function of the Nebra Sky Disc:

It has been variously proposed that the disc was intended as an astronomical tool, and that through comparison of the skies and a visual display of the extremes of the rising and setting positions of the sun along the horizon (As presented by the arcs on each side), that with the disc in a horizontal plane, it could be used to determine the time of year. In addition, it is proposed that it was used to calculate the difference between the solar and lunar cycles in the form of adding a 13th lunar month, something which is required every two or three years). It is perhaps relevant that the cache site was found on the top of a hill, a good place for observing the suns movements. The site was surrounded by an artificial low bank, which could be used for measuring the position of the sun on the horizon.



Unlike the solar calendar, which indicates the position of the earth as it revolves around the sun, the lunar calendar is based on the phases of the moon. A lunar year is eleven days shorter than the solar year because 12 synodic months, or 12 returns of the moon to the new phase, take only 354 days.

The sky disc of Nebra was used to determine if and when a thirteenth month -- the so-called intercalary month -- should be added to a lunar year to keep the lunar calendar in sync with the seasons. According to the ancient Babylonian rule, a thirteenth month should only be added to the lunar calendar only when one sees the constellation of the moon and the Pleiades exactly as they appear on the Nebra sky disc.

CVAS Editor's Note: Intercalary calculations were known and used before Babylonian times by the Sumerians and ancient Egyptians. It was needed to accurately designate the festivals, many lunar related, to venerate their "gods." This is direct evidence of the abrupt migration out of the Mediterranean region into Europe circa 2,000 B.C.

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT
CVASSANANGELO.ORG

Meeting Location

Please remember that our meetings are now in the classroom at the Fort Concho Living History Stables, **236 Henry O. Flipper St.** We enter through the side door.

2012 Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

Cell _____

Family members _____

Email _____

I pledge I will not intentionally violate the terms or conditions of any current or future state or local statute concerning cultural resources or engage in the practice of buying or selling artifacts for commercial purposes, or engage in the willful destruction of archeological data, or disregard proper archeological field techniques

Signature _____ Date _____

Mail to: CVAS, 4063 Green Meadow Dr., San Angelo, TX 76904

Individual	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student or military N/C		<input type="checkbox"/>

(active military only)