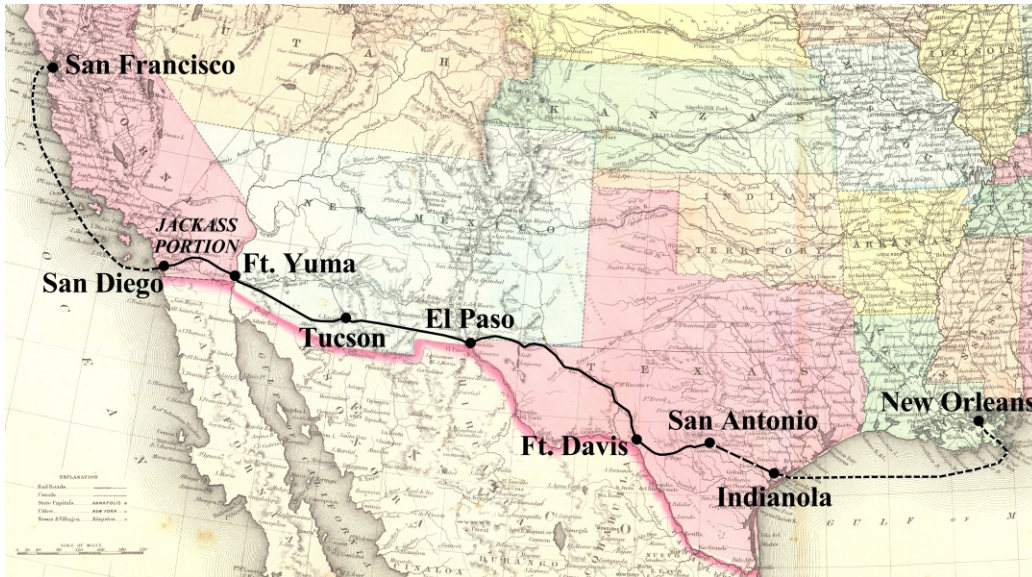


1857 San Diego to San Antonio (Jackass Mail) Route



The first overland mail route to California to be operated under a single contract was officially known as route #8,076, or the San Antonio to San Diego route. Mail transportation across the Colorado Desert lying between Fort Yuma and San Diego utilized mules for carrying mail and lent the "jackass mail" moniker to that portion of the route. From the eastern terminus at San Antonio, there was a daily stagecoach mail to Indianola which connected with five-times a week steamers to New Orleans. From the western terminus at San Diego, the California Steam Navigation Company steamers operated to San Francisco, albeit only semi-monthly.

A mail contract was awarded to James Birch on June 22, 1857, effective for four years, from July 1, 1857. The contract for route 8,076 called for two trips per month between San Antonio, Texas and San Diego, California at \$149,800 per annum. The 1476 mile route was to be accomplished in thirty days. With connections onward from both termini to the major points in both California and the East, it was hoped that this route would be both faster and less costly than other routes available.

The first westbound mail under the Birch contract departed San Antonio on July 9, 1857. The first and second mails arrived at San Diego together on August 31, 1857. The first eastbound trip departed San Diego on August 9, 1857. The route was soon fragmented in into separate sections as shown on the map and the portion east of Ft. Yuma later became part of the Butterfield Southern mail route. The original Birch route was modified on October 27, 1858 when a portion of the service was discontinued. Service over the "jackass mail" portion of the route between San Diego and Ft. Yuma was discontinued from April 1, 1860.

Covers carried on the Jackass Mail route were to be endorsed "via San Diego and San Antonio" or similar. There are ten recorded covers, emanating from just three correspondences, which are endorsed to be carried on the portion of the route between San Diego and Yuma.