

# Autograph Rock

Looking at the three-hundred-plus inscriptions on Autograph Rock and the wagon ruts from yesteryear that remain visible on the ground today, one can only stop and wonder what happened to all those who passed by on The Santa Fe Trail. Ruts vary from well-defined to nonexistent. The grassed-over depressions, four across, leave a lasting impression of all that took place and helps spur the imagination.

Nowadays, the Sharp family owns the Oklahoma ranch, on which both Cold Springs and Autograph Rock are located, and where there are visible Santa Fe Trail remnants to this day. The ranch is just west of Boise City.

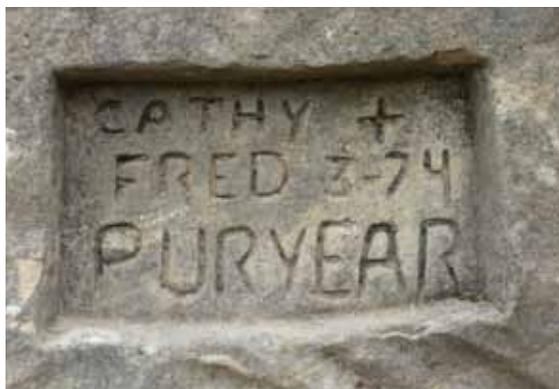
The Sharps are committed to historic preservation and continue to allow visitors onto their property to view some of the rich heritage of the area. This family has won several awards for their effort in preservation.

For pioneers moving west, the Santa Fe Trail was a nine-hundred-mile trek that began in Franklin, Missouri, and ended at Santa Fe. The “road” proceeded from Franklin through Kansas to Boise City, Oklahoma, where travelers found Cold Springs Creek, an area of spring water located in the Oklahoma Panhandle. William Becknell and others discovered that path was suitable for wagons in 1821.

In the 1840s, the Santa Fe Trail split into two paths — the Cimarron Route and the Mountain Route. The Cimarron Route continued to follow the traditional route established in 1821. However, the Mountain Route, the second arm of the Santa Fe Trail, looped northward, following the Arkansas River, into Colorado to Ft. Bent before turning south again through the Raton Pass

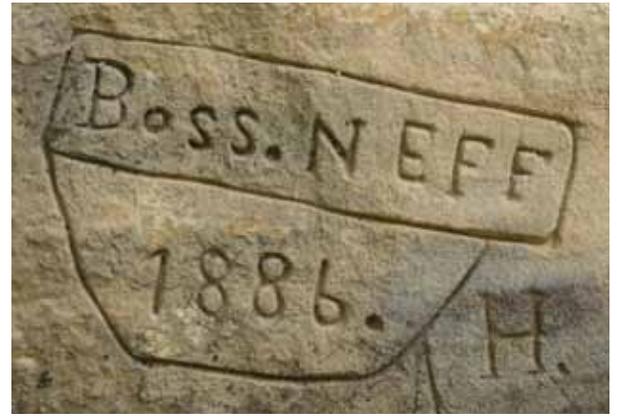
to Santa Fe. The northern route offered pioneers more water than did the Cimarron Route, for travelers of which, Boise City’s Cold Springs Creek was the last major water source on their journey. Both roads were prey to attack from Comanches and Apaches

Cold Springs Creek is a tributary to the Cimarron River. The main asset of this drainage on the open prairie is that live surface water can be found year-round. This has always been important to human life



***Cathy and Fred Puryear carved their names after making a rectangular indentation in the rock in March 1874.***

in a semi-arid plains environment. The presence of Indians around the springs is evidenced by projectile points dating back several thousand years which have been found in the area. These springs flow from the Dakota aquifer with the protection of small sandstone bluffs. The amount and quality of the water at Cold Springs influenced the location and development of the international road through here. There is archaeological evidence that the Santa Fe Trail followed, more or less, older Indian trails from one reliable water source to another.



***Boss Neff, 1886***

A German physician, Frederick A. Wislizenus, traveled the Trail in 1846, and his journal, including a map showing the location of Cold Springs, was published by the U.S. government. Wislizenus stopped his ox-pulled covered wagon to camp there in 1848. He wrote about the “best water since the Arkansas. . . . Beyond Cold Springs the scenery is beautiful where mountains and prairie meet.”

Wislizenus apparently expressed a common opinion. The area around Cold Springs was a well-known campsite where travelers could rest, care for lame animals, mend broken wagons, and prepare for further travel. Over the years, it became a novelty to some of those who could write to chisel their names in the nearby sandstone bluffs.

These inscriptions came from a variety of people, including soldiers, teamsters, merchants, gold seekers, and adventures trying to regain their health in an arid land. The oldest dated name found so far is “T. Potts 1806” The most popular name is F. B. Delgado. He was one of the principal owners of a mule and ox train that freighted on the Trail, and he left his signature many times.

The Oklahoma Historical Society and the Oklahoma Science and Arts Foundation, in 1960, conducted a study of the autographs on the area rocks and compiled 323 names. The majority of the names are at two locations. Autograph Rock and Signature Rock, located on Cold Spring Creek, are about a mile apart. There are also numerous signatures scattered around the springs, over a two-mile area, and the exact number is unknown.

***Autograph Rock is now part of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. Although it is located on private property, visitors may view the carved names and immediate area at certain times. For permission and arrangements to visit the site, contact the Boise City Chamber of Commerce, Boise City, OK 73933.***

