

## **The Dominguez and Escalante Expedition Background Information**

In 1776 two Catholic priests, Antanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante left Santa Fe, New Mexico in search of a route to the newly established Spanish missions of California. Although they failed to reach California, they explored much of what is now the Southwestern United States, including parts of Utah. The journal they kept provides valuable information about the people and lands of Utah in 1776. Historians have used their journal and maps they created to retrace their route. In this activity, students will use excerpts from the journal of the expedition and a map they created to retrace their route by identifying the lake Dominguez and Escalante labeled Laguna de los Timpangos (and similar spellings). Which modern lake were they describing? The following background information will help students as they work with the documents.

The Spanish settled the region of Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1598, setting up the capital of Nuevo Mexico near an Indigenous pueblo. In 1680 the Pueblo Indians revolted from the oppressive Spanish rule, temporarily driving the Spanish out of New Mexico. The Spanish reconquered the territory in 1692 and continued to have mixed interactions with the Pueblo people, though trade increased between the two cultures.

The Spanish settlers of Santa Fe became increasingly curious about the resources of the American Indians who lived north of New Mexico, especially their silver. Spanish officials were worried about the expansion of other European nations in North America. In 1765 two expeditions led by Juan Maria Antonio Rivera traveled north from Santa Fe to learn more about the region's peoples, to find the legendary Colorado River, and to watch for rival European intruders. The first expedition explored as far as the Dolores River in southwest Colorado before returning. With the help of Ute guides, the second made their way into modern-day Utah and forded the Colorado River near present Moab.

In 1769 Catholic priests began to create a string of missions along California's coast. Friar Junipero Serra established a mission at San Diego and Monterrey and other California sites. At the time of their founding, these missions had no direct contact with the established settlements in New Mexico.

In 1776 two Catholic priests, Antanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante left Santa Fe, New Mexico in search of a route to the newly established Spanish missions of California. Rumors of cannibalistic Indians to the west, led them to choose a more northern route, roughly following River's trail, passing through the lands of Utes who had been friendly toward Spanish traders and explorers in the past. Traveling with them was Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, a talented artist and mapmaker, seven other Spaniards and three Ute guides. The expedition made its way through eastern and central Utah, but the approaching winter led to the decision to return to Santa Fe. Dominguez and Escalante turned south then east, crossing the Colorado with great difficulty and returning to Santa Fe. Although they had failed to blaze a route to California, they had learned a great deal about the people and geography of Utah. And they created a record and maps that are valuable to historians today.

The Rivera Expeditions and the Dominguez and Escalante Expedition blazed a route that others would extend. In the 1830s their route became part of the Old Spanish Trail, linking Santa Fe in New Mexico with southern California.

On September 23, 1776, before making the decision to return to Santa Fe, Dominguez and Escalante camped for three days with a Ute village at the side of a lake they called Laguna de Los Timpangos. They wrote about this lake in their journal and drew pictures of it on the maps that they created.