

Endurance riders race across old Santa Fe Trail

By Frank Buchman

The Great Santa Fe Trail Endurance Race became a reality.

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The race is patterned in principle after the ride that trader Francis X. Aubry made in 1884. "He bet \$1,000 that he could sprint horseback the 800 miles of the trail in six days," noted Gray, when this era's race was first proposed.

"Aubry completed his race in five days and 16 hours," Gray added. Racers on the trail this time went at a much slower pace. Actually, this horse race has similarities to the famed Tour de France bicycle race, of which Gray was a fan.

Racing distance for this Santa Fe Trail race is 515 miles, according to Phillips. "It will take 15 days for our riders to complete the race on Saturday," according to Phillips, last Wednesday at Council Grove, one of the race villages on the trail.

Competition included a series of ten separate approximately 50-mile races along the trail. The horses were trailered between some communities. From Santa Fe, the riders raced to Las Vegas, N.M., on Sept. 3, for an overnight stay; on to Springer, N.M., for the evening of Sept. 4; Clayton, N.M., Sept. 5; and Elkhart, Kan., Sept. 6.

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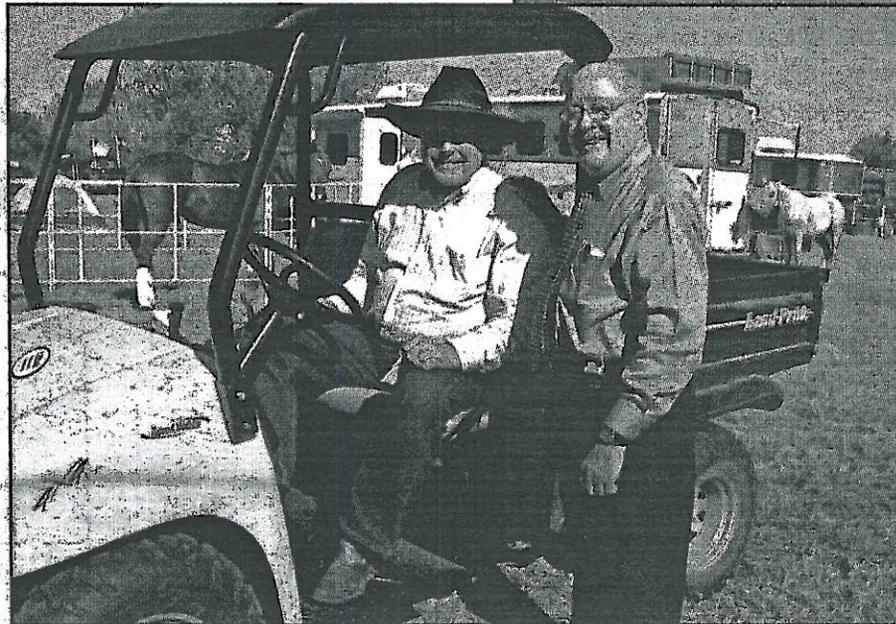
The race continued to Burlingame on Sept. 13, was at Gardner on Sept. 15, with completion on Saturday, Sept. 15, at Independence. At the end of the race, participants went back to Gardner for a concert and concluding events.

"One of the main objectives of the race was to educate the public not only on the national historical Santa Fe Trail, but also to introduce the sport of endurance riding to thousands," Phillips insisted.

When participants in the American Endurance Ride Conference heard about the historic event, officials sanctioned it for members to ride for awards and year-end points.

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Race tests riders' and horses' abilities to recreate history

Continued from page 1

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Expenses to conduct the race were enormous. "However, we have designated The Don Imus Ranch near Ribera, N.M., as the official race charity," Phillips stated. "That working cattle ranch for kids with cancer will be the beneficiary from this event."

Logistics for such a race are mind-boggling. "It has required lots of sponsors and literally hundreds of volunteers to make this happen," Phillips pointed out. Among the major sponsors was the Kansas Lottery.

All of the landowners, highway departments, law enforcement units, and communities along the trail had to be visited with before the riders were contacted. Next, the exact route was selected and overnight locations contracted, along with making arrangements for food and drink for all of the riders, their crews and the horses.

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lunches for the riders each day," Sheila shared.

Providing feed and water for the horses was more complicated. "We made sure that every night stop had ample water supplies, even if we had to haul it," Phillips related. "Most importantly, though, was supplying water for horses during the race. We had water available for horses and riders every five miles along the trail."

Many competitors brought some of their own feed supplies for horses, but they also made purchases in towns on the route. "Finding quality hay has sometimes been a problem," Tribby declared.

Horse health is a major concern for such an event, and all horses had to pass a preliminary qualifying race before entering.

"One of these qualifiers was earlier this summer at Dodge City. It was a one-day, 50-mile race," verified Dr. Patricia Schroeder, Council Grove, a race veterinarian.

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Day before the race, horses were vet checked, cleared to begin the event, and then examinations were made every 15 to 20 miles along the route.

"All horses were checked upon completion of each day's race, and again before they started the next leg," clarified Schroeder. "We have had to pull some horses each day, but that's why we're here: for the health of the horses."

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Coyle was a volunteer at the veterinary headquarters as it was moved ahead of the

horses, riders and crews to each village. "We've sure seen lots of historic things along the trail," she recalled. Several communities even had special stamp cancellations when the race went through.

With the exception of one accident near Canton, in which two horses ran in front of a car and were killed, there had been no other major mishaps during the race by the time it arrived at Council Grove.

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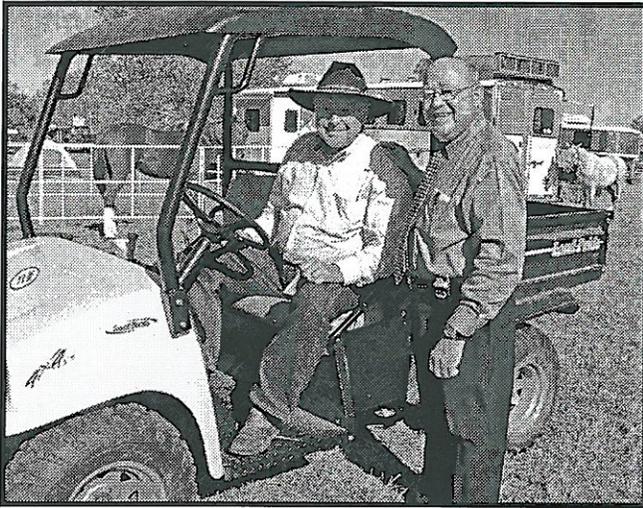
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