

# ALONG THE BEALE TRAIL

A Photographic Account of Wasted Range Land

*Text by*  
**H. C. LOCKETT**

*Photographs by*  
**MILTON SNOW**

A Publication of the Education Division, U. S. Office of Indian Affairs  
Edited by Willard W. Beatty, Director of Education

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# ALONG THE BEALE TRAIL

A Photographic Account of Wasted Range Land

Based on the Diary of Lieutenant Edward F. Beale, 1857

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## INTRODUCTION

Lieut. Edward Fitzgerald Beale, Indian agent and trail blazer who knew the Southwest as well as any man of his day, was commissioned by the War Department to survey a wagon road from Fort Defiance, Arizona, to the Colorado River. The Beale party, using camels for the first time in the United States as beasts of burden, left San Antonio, Texas, June 25, 1857. They drank from the waters of the Colorado River January 23, 1858. Lieut. Beale's day-by-day account of the westward trek was entered in his diary. He knew the importance to early-day travel of grass, water, wood and game, and his description of the country was so vivid that it is possible 81 years later to retrace the footsteps of Beale.

"You will find by my journal," writes the lieutenant, "that we camped sometimes without wood and sometimes without water, but never without abundant grass. . . ." Today much of the Beale Trail is obscured by the shifting sands of the years—years which have taken their toll of the grass, water, wood and game of which he wrote.

With cameras to record the contrast, Navajo Service photographers recently followed the route of the trail-blazer, photographing identical areas which his diary describes as lush with vegetation, where clear narrow streams abound with fish and "grass is belly high to the mules. . . ." The pictures tell a story of wasted

rangeland, crumbling walls of mud, and nature thrown out of balance by man's wanton misuse of his resources.

The photographs in this booklet record conditions along the Beale Trail from the lava beds near Grants, New Mexico, to Flagstaff, Arizona. This segment was chosen because of its close association with the Navajo and his conservation problems. As the Trail crosses range in the vicinity of San Francisco Peaks, where grazing has been controlled for many years, the magic of proper land use becomes evident. This is graphic proof that no cycle of drouth, but man's stupid misuse of nature's resources which made the Beale Trail what it is today.

H. Claybourne Lockett.

*Window Rock, Arizona.*  
1938.

## LAVA BEDS NEAR McCARTYS NEW MEXICO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

“The whole valley is so completely filled with the solid lava as to leave only here and there a narrow belt of meadow: But this is knee deep with the finest and greenest grass, and almost hidden by it, and winding its way through it is the clear, sparkling brook of the Gallo. The stream is quite narrow, in fact nowhere over six feet in width, but the water clear as crystal and very cool. . . . The stream seems filled with fish, and with a proper net an abundance for any number of men might be taken. . . . We found the grass on the other side of the creek best, and our mules are now grazing in it belly deep.”

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

**Terrific erosion has followed years of over-grazing in this area. When plant cover is destroyed there is nothing left to hold the soil in place.**



## NEAR MT. TAYLOR NEW MEXICO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The meadow here embraces, in all, probably two thousand acres of uncommonly fine land, and is covered with a beautiful grass, of a kind I have not met before within this country. It grows quite tall, and is very pleasant to the taste and seemingly nutritious; in color a blue green and very much resembling the blue grass of Jamaica."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Horses, sheep and cattle far exceeding the carrying capacity of the range have gradually ruined this area. Scattered remnants of sod are all that remain of the once rich grass.



## NEAR SOUTH CHAVIS NEW MEXICO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Yesterday's remarks would apply perfectly, without change, to today's travel. We have followed up the same valley, had the same curious range of red sandstone on our right, and finely timbered mountain on our left; the same freshly growing gramma grass; in fact, everything just as yesterday."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

In this area, which has been over-stocked for years, the vegetation is gradually disappearing and large scale erosion threatens thousands of acres of valuable rangeland.



## FORT DEFIANCE ARIZONA (BONITO CANYON)

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Fancy a great mountain range running in an unbroken line for miles and miles, and here rent asunder, so that a road perfectly level passes directly through what would otherwise present an impassable barrier. This cleft is about a hundred yards in width and about three miles in length. Through the centre trickles a scanty stream, which serves to water the gardens of the garrison, which are all made in the cañon, and which seem to be in a most flourishing condition, especially the potatoes."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED



**Concentration of livestock in the area above this canyon has greatly reduced the protective plant cover. Water falling on the land is rapidly carried off in flash floods which have cut this deep arroyo.**



## ON THE PUERCO RIVER ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"On arriving at the banks of this river, we found no difficulty in getting down without locking a wheel."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Thundering walls of soil are dumped into the Rio Puerco with each flood of water. Once a small stream that could easily be crossed, the Rio Puerco has become a barrier cutting the country like a knife. When the grass was gone, the water carried away the soil. Each year more soil is lost. (Note the figure, upper left.)



## TWO WELLS NEW MEXICO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"We encamped at the poses (wells), a grassy vega of about one hundred and sixty acres, where the water and grass are good and timber abundant—cedar and pine."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Giant fingers of erosion stretch out from this water hole, upper left. Livestock, trailing to water for decades, made trails that now are gullies. The grass has disappeared and in its place has come unpalatable snakeweed. Sheet and gully erosion are at work.



## BETWEEN ZUNI NEW MEXICO AND JACOB'S WELL ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The grass was everywhere of good quality. . . . It was all gramma. At six we encamped on good grass, but without water. The high rolling prairie, over which we have travelled today, has good wood, cedar and pine, and plenty of it everywhere. The valley into which we descended was probably five or six miles in width, and bounded by low hills. Crossing this diagonally, and keeping our good ground and westerly direction, we passed over undulating prairie land, covered with grass."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Beale would not recognize this as the area where gramma grass was once so abundant. Now heavily overgrazed, cactus and snakeweed predominate. The wind and sheet erosion which has already begun can continue unchecked.



## JACOB'S WELL ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"This is decidedly the most wonderful place of the kind we have yet met with. The traveller, following the trail on a level plain, comes suddenly to the brink of a perfectly circular hole of about a quarter of a mile in circumference, and a hundred yards in almost perpendicular descent. The sides of this hole slope very steeply nearly to the bottom, where a basin of apparently very great depth, and about sixty yards in circumference, completed the picture. Around the edges of this pool grow rushes and a few small willows and cedars. The water is agreeable to the taste, though a little brackish, and in it are quite a number of fish. It is only accessible by one trail, which follows the nearly precipitous sides, winding gradually down."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Starved plants and exposed soil today mark this spot so enthusiastically described by Beale in 1857. Silt from the surrounding range has nearly filled the water hole which is now only five feet deep. When Beale stopped here, the hole was "almost 100 yards in perpendicular descent."



## SALT SEEP ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

“Left Jacob’s well at 3:20 p. m. and following a westerly course over a rolling prairie, covered with the finest gramma grass.”

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Salt Seep where Beale noted, “good grass and water” is today a barren spot which becomes a bog hole in wet weather.



## PETRIFIED FOREST ARIZONA

**Protected for three years by the National Park Service, this area in the Petrified Forest for years overgrazed, proves that protection will speed recovery. The old Beale trail subsequently used by emigrant wagons is visible down the right center of the picture.**



## JUNCTION OF THE LITTLE COLORADO AND PUERCO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The valley of this river is three miles across, and grass plentiful in the bottom, as well as on the hills, which are quite low. There is abundance of large cotton-wood trees in the bottom, which resembles very nearly the bottom of the Rio Grande."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

The scene today reveals that the top soil has been washed and blown away, exposing the subsoil. The "plentiful grass" has disappeared. The abundant cotton-wood trees are gone.



## BETWEEN HOLBROOK AND WINSLOW ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The soil over which we have passed this evening, is excellent; the grass fully attests that fact."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

A graveyard of the range is this hummock-spotted scene. Thousands of cattle once concentrated in this bottom land where there was an abundance of good grass and water.



## BETWEEN HOLBROOK AND WINSLOW ARIZONA ON LITTLE COLORADO RIVER

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Traveling up the Little Colorado River we encamped, a mile from our old camp, in abundant and excellent gramma and bunch grass at a half mile distance from the river. The little lagoons between this and the mouth were filled with water."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Density of vegetation has here been reduced. The wind eddies around the hummocks and the roots become exposed. Sand is burying the struggling grass.



## ON LITTLE COLORADO RIVER NEAR WINSLOW

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The more I see of the Little Colorado the better I like it. The stream is of the size of the Gila, but to be likened to that fresh water abomination in nothing else. The soil seems fertile and bears good meadow grass in all parts, while the plains, extending from its banks as far as one can see, are covered with rich gramma grass."

---

### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

**A mad stream in periodic flood stages, the Little Colorado river today carries 50 per cent silt. Its banks are stripped of all vegetation and its cutting action is eating into the "meadows" of which Beale wrote.**



## NEAR WINSLOW ON LITTLE COLORADO RIVER

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

“Passed this evening more Indian trails, all going to the northward. Saw much beaver sign, and one fresh dead one, caught by Mr. Coyote last night, and only partly eaten. We saw large fires, Indian signals in the Mogollon mountains this evening. Grass excellent and most abundant, and for water, the whole river. We have seen indications of the greatest abundance of game for the past three days. Elk, antelope, and deer, besides beaver and coyotes in large numbers. . . . Wood, water and grass good, and the weather warm and clear.”

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

The broadening expanse of the Little Colorado sweeps over once fertile grazing land. The jackrabbit, coyote and snake have replaced the antelope, beaver and deer.



## TWO MILES NORTH OF WINSLOW ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"All who are with me, and who have been raised in the south, declare it to be excellent tobacco and cotton land. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the culture of these products to give an opinion, but for stock of all kinds I should say that a better country is not within the United States."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Beale's prophecy came true, for in the intervening years great numbers of cattle, horses and sheep used this range. Gradually the forage was over-utilized. The wind then swept away the unprotected soil, leaving the roots of the hardier plants exposed.



## ON OLD ROAD BETWEEN WINSLOW AND LEUPP ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"The grass throughout the day has been most abundant, and we have constantly exclaimed, 'What a stock country!' I have never seen anything like it; and I predict for this part of New Mexico a larger population, and a more promising one than any she can now boast. The Indians once removed, or kept in check by military posts, this country would be immediately settled with a large population."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Not longer than 30 years ago, settlers cut wild hay from this decaying point along Beale's Trail.



## FIVE MILES NORTH OF WINSLOW

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"We left camp at noon, and following a stretch of country as level as a billiard table, crossed, after coming five miles, a slight elevation, from which we came into a broad, level and beautiful valley, stretching as far as the eye could reach to the westward and southward. In this valley, we found a small stream of running water, but very narrow, scarcely over a foot in width."

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**81 YEARS LATER**—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Beale's "small stream of running water" is today a dry wash.  
Only dead grass roots remain in the torn soil.



## ON THE MESA NEAR LEUPP ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Shortly after leaving the water, we came, by an inclined plain to an immense plain or mesa, which seemed to extend over a radius of twenty miles. The soil was firm clay, well packed with gravel, and the whole covered with a luxuriant crop of gramma grass. Travelling in a direct line across this, in a direction nearly northwest, but a little to the westward, we came in sight of the river, but at a considerable distance. The grass was so tempting that I determined to camp here for breakfast."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Even noxious weeds, which follow overgrazing, have been consumed here by hungry stock. Gone is Beale's "luxuriant crop of gramma grass."



## NEAR LEUPP ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Today nothing has impeded our progress but the grass, and this trail, travelled by one large emigrant train, will make as firm and fine a natural road as could be desired."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Grass impeded Beale's party, but dead Sacaton clumps made travel slow for the photographer. From six inches to a foot of soil have disappeared.



But all this trail of desolation and destruction need not have replaced the verdant plains traversed by Lieutenant Beale. It was not what Nature had planned for these vast areas of open grassland and pleasant streams. Had man not selfishly squandered the bounties provided by Nature—had he merely used them with normal care and foresight—he might have preserved the grass and the water, retained the precious top soil and prevented the destructive erosion. This is not THEORY—it is FACT. Along other sections of the Beale trail, cattle and sheep in controlled numbers have grazed for as long a period as served to produce the wreckage already shown.

**TURN THE PAGE** for photographs of sections of the Beale trail near Flagstaff, where the control exercised by the Federal government, or careful use by private livestock interests has preserved the economic assets first viewed by Beale. **NO CYCLE OF DROUTH MADE THE BEALE TRAIL WHAT IT IS TODAY. IT WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY MAN'S STUPID MISUSE OF NATURE'S RESOURCES.**

## NEAR JUNCTION LITTLE COLORADO AND CANYON DIABLO

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"As we travelled over this mesa, we found it occasionally breaking into gentle valleys and small ravines, but all easy and rolling, and between them level floors of extensive table-land: the whole covered thickly, as far as the eye could reach, with the richest crop of the most luxuriant gramma grass. . . . Altogether the view, the rich green grass, the distant mountains, and our moving camp wagons, sheep, horses, and camels, made up a beautiful picture."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED



**A rare sight along the Beale Trail. This range, properly grazed by white stockmen for 20 years, has changed little since Beale saw it 81 years ago. The ground is covered with black gramma grass and dropseed, ideal stock feed.**



## 15 MILES EAST OF FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"We came to a glorious forest of lofty pines, through which we have travelled ten miles. The country was beautifully undulating, and although we generally associate the idea of barrenness with the pine regions, it was not so in this instance, every foot being covered with the finest grass, and beautiful broad grassy vales extending in every direction."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED



**Because grazing has been controlled for many years by the U. S. Forest Service, this region remains ideal for stock. Every foot remains covered "with the finest grass," just as Beale recorded the scene in his virile diary.**



## 10 MILES EAST OF FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"We travelled rapidly over a lovely country of open forest and mountain valley, which continually drew exclamations of delight and surprise from every member of the party. Even the stoicism and indifference to beauty and scenery so characteristic of the lower class of Spanish population was moved, and as we passed successive vales and glades, filled with verdant grass knee high to our mules, dotted with flowers, and the edges skirted by gigantic pines, they constantly gave vent to their delight in fervent ejaculations of praise!"

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

➤  
**Compare this scene in the National Forest, where the right number of cattle have grazed for years, with the eroded regions along Beale's Trail which have been ruined by too many cattle.**



## 3 MILES NORTH OF FLAGSTAFF ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Following the direction, we crossed a low hill, and found the water rising from a marshy place, and running, or rather trickling through high grass, down a short cañon not over a hundred yards in length or more than fifty in width."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Still in a region protected by the Government for many years, the Beale Trail passed through this pasture land. This is a privately owned ranch and has supported many sheep for years. It is apparent that for years to come it will continue to support an equal number, while those areas where sheep were grazed beyond the capacity of the grass are today destroyed.



## 5 MILES NORTHWEST OF FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

### AS BEALE SAW IT IN 1857:

"Our road for the evening lay entirely through a heavy forest of pine, and was rough with loose stones. The grass, however, was as good as usual and very abundant."

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### 81 YEARS LATER—THE PLACE BEALE DESCRIBED

Without Government control of grazing, this perfect range might easily be transformed into a worthless wasteland. Today it is as Beale saw it, verdant, productive, a symbol of the basic economy of the West. Many cattle continue to be fattened here each year.



**What man's folly has destroyed, man with Nature's help may partially restore. Some of these areas are beyond help, but others where the natural grasses are not wholly dead might gradually revive, if the sheep and cattle now grazing were reduced in numbers to the carrying capacity of the forage. The possibility of such revival is being demonstrated today on controlled areas of the Navajo reservation. The grass is coming back, and fewer, better nourished sheep are producing larger and better crops of wool and mutton.**

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