

The Crowds Cheered On...

In 1845, it took six months to get a message from the East Coast of the United States to California. By the late 1850s, a half million people had migrated west and were demanding up-to-date news from home. Something had to be done to deliver mail faster and to improve communication in the expanding nation.

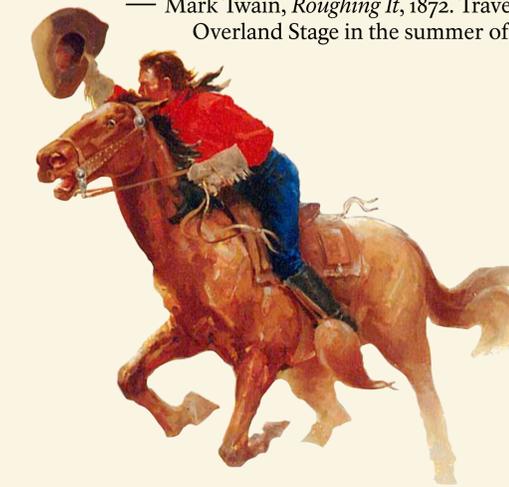
The Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company, a subsidiary of a major freighting company owned by the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, announced the formation of the Pony Express on January 27, 1860. In hopes of attracting a lucrative contract with the U. S. Postal Service, these entrepreneurs developed a proposal to carry letter mail and telegraphs between Missouri and California in only 10 days.

Knowing that a healthy horse could typically run at a gallop for 8 to 12 miles, the developers needed to place stations at strategic locations for its riders to change mounts. Existing stage stations and road ranches on the eastern end of the route would meet their needs, but new relay stations would have to be built in remote western areas. Alexander Majors purchased up to 500 mustang horses, hired 200 men to manage the stations, and signed up 80 riders to begin the first run of the Pony Express on April 3, 1860.

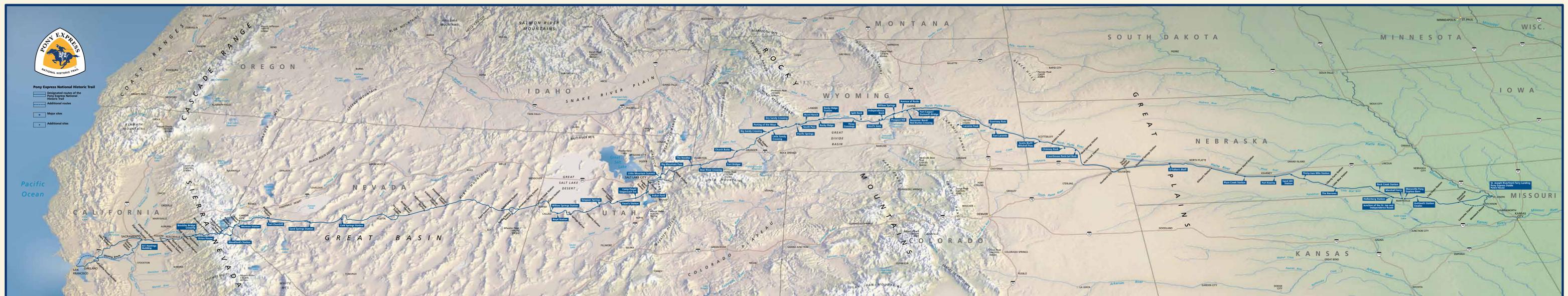
Although the Pony Express captured the admiration and hearts of people around the world, it was a financial disaster for its founders. Eighteen months after the Pony Express began, it ended with the completion of the First Transcontinental Telegraph on October 26, 1861.

“Every neck is stretched, and every eye strained . . . Across the endless prairie a black speck appears . . . In a second or two it becomes a horse and rider, rising and falling . . . sweeping toward us — growing more and more distinct, and the flutter of hoofs comes faintly to the ear — another instant a whoop and a hurrah from our upper deck, a wave of the rider’s hand, but no reply, and man and horse burst past our excited faces, and go winging away like a belated fragment of a storm.”

— Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, 1872. Traveling on the Overland Stage in the summer of 1861



Charles Hargen's *First Ride of the Pony Express*
Pony Express National Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri



The route of the Pony Express ran from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco, California. Home stations were located every 75 to 100 miles. These were often

existing overland stage stations, hotels, or substantial ranches along the route. Each rider would begin his run at a home station and change horses six or eight times at

relay stations. At the next home station, he would turn the mail over to the next rider.