

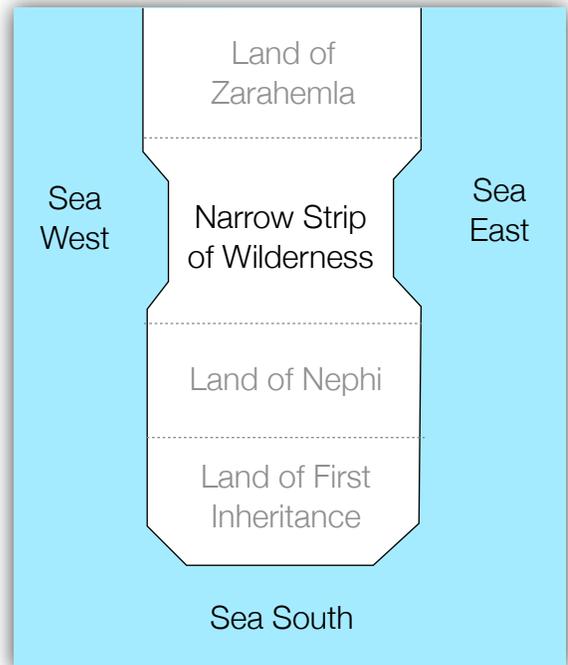
The Narrow Strip of Wilderness

Spatial Features, Orientation and Recorded Journeys

Lynn and David Rosenvall, November 2009

The *narrow neck of land* between the land northward and the land southward is possibly the most prominent geographical feature in the mental maps of Book of Mormon readers. Next in prominence could well be the *narrow strip of wilderness*, centrally located in Mormon's description of the Book of Mormon lands between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla (Alma 22:27-35). Mormon states that the Lamanite king's land (the land of Nephi) "was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west" (Alma 22:27). This statement specifically places the narrow strip of wilderness in a location extending from the land of Nephi on the south to the land of Zarahemla on the north and in a setting which was bordered on the west by the sea west and on the east by the sea east (See our topic article, *From the Sea West to the Sea East*).

This wilderness area was the location of Alma's travels from the waters of Mormon to the land of Helam and on to the land of Zarahemla and also the journeys of Ammon and Zeniff and others. The following analysis examines the features, shape, location and orientation of the narrow strip of wilderness, as described in the Book of Mormon record. We then match these descriptions to a north-south trending, narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California. Lastly, we outline and map the 13 recorded journeys of Alma, Zeniff, Ammon and others through the narrow strip of wilderness.



The narrow strip of wilderness separated the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla. It was bordered by a sea on the west and a sea on the east.

Spatial Features of the Narrow Strip of Wilderness

The narrow strip of wilderness is not given the distinction of a proper name in the Book of Mormon, only a three-word descriptive phrase indicating its form as “narrow,” its breadth relative to its length as a “strip,” and its visible landscape feature as a “wilderness.” Each of these three descriptive words, however, has helpful and precise meanings.

A “Narrow” Land Area

According to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, “narrow” as an adjective refers to something “of small width.” Narrow also refers to a landform that is shorter in width relative to the breadth of adjacent areas. In this case, the narrow strip of wilderness would have less width or breadth than the land of Nephi to the south and the land of Zarahemla to the north. Narrow can also describe something that is “restricted” or “limited in extent, amount, or scope.” Using its older English roots, the word narrow indicates something that is “strait” or “confined,” a situation characterized by a specified degree of trouble or difficulty, or “dismal” and “unpleasant.”

A “Strip” of Land

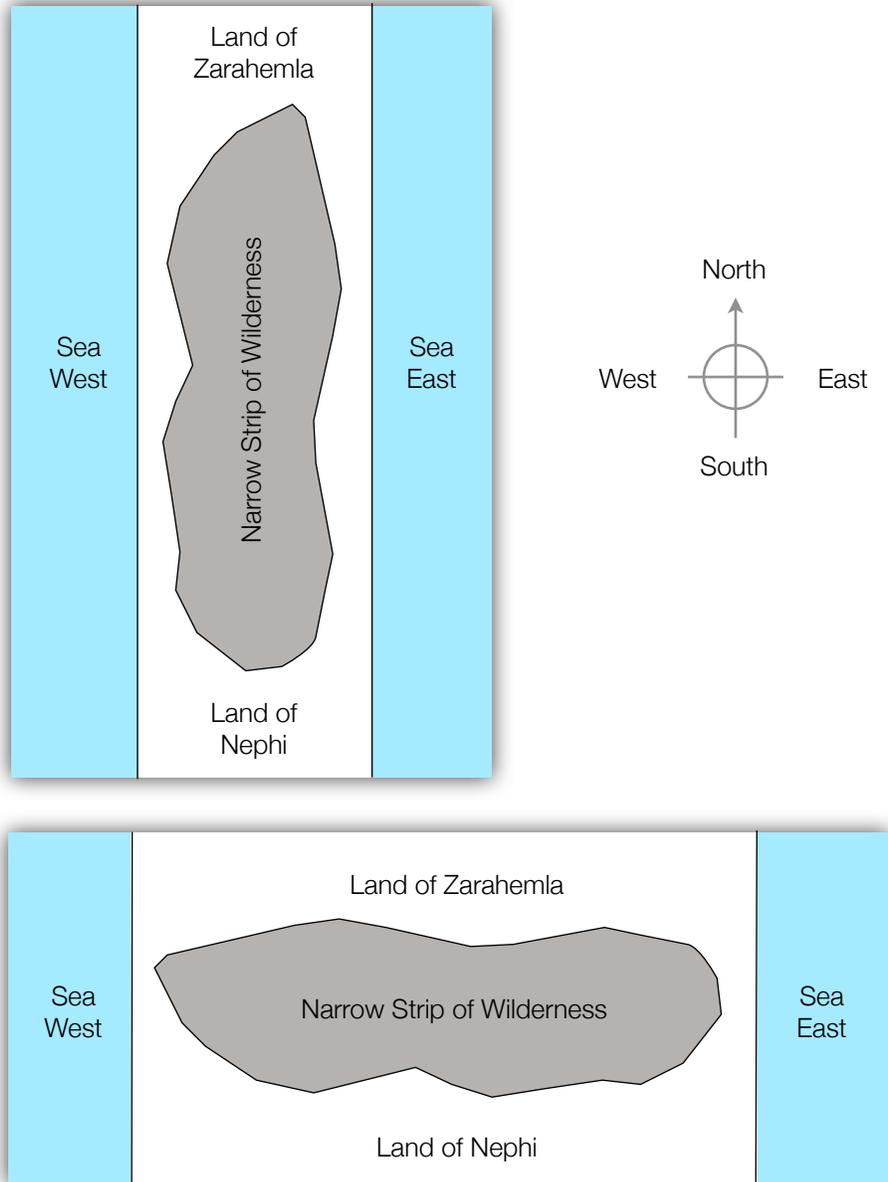
The dictionary meaning of a “strip” of land refers to a long, narrow piece of terrain “of approximately uniform breadth,” or “the same width throughout its length,” such as the Gaza Strip, a long, narrow strip of land in Palestine along the eastern Mediterranean Sea between Israel and Egypt. A strip of land, by definition, has a length greater than its width. In contrast, a narrow land area could have a width equal to its length.

Narrow and *strip* when used together describe a long, narrow area of land that is approximately uniform in breadth throughout its length, with the terrain characteristics of being strait or constrained as well as unpleasant or dismal, and within a width that is shorter than the breadth of adjacent land areas. The Book of Mormon account describes several journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness along “strait” or difficult routes through unpleasant territory (See below for an analysis of 13 journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness).

The Spatial Orientation of the Narrow Strip of Wilderness

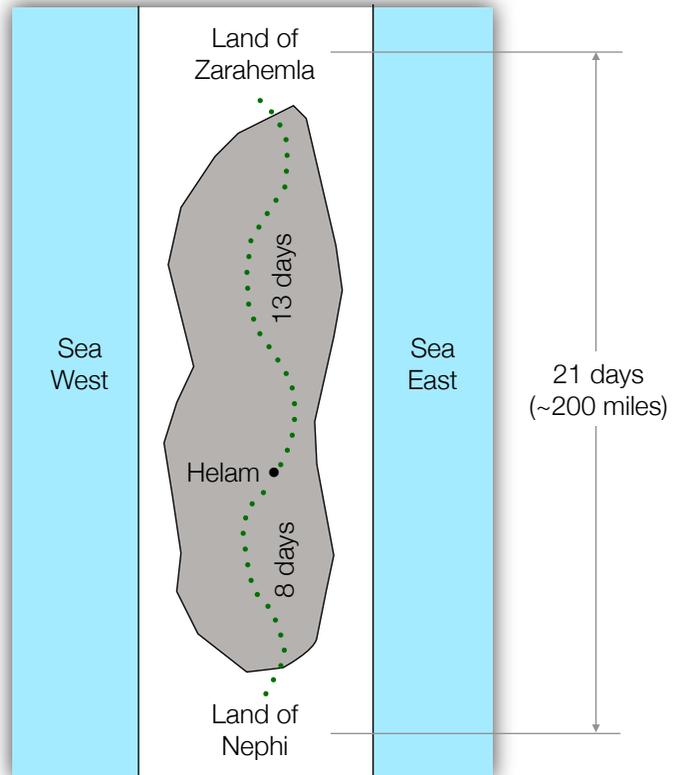
Mormon does not state if the long dimension of the narrow strip of wilderness extends north to south, from the land of Zarahemla on the north to the land of Nephi on the south,

or if its long dimension extends west to east, from the sea west to the sea east. Nearly all models of Book of Mormon geography depict the long dimension of the narrow strip of wilderness as stretching from west to east. This west to east (horizontal) orientation might be a more natural expectation when considering the words *narrow* and *strip*, rather than a north to south (vertical) positioning. But a west to east horizontal orientation is not based on any direct description or statement within the Book of Mormon account.



A north-south orientation of the narrow strip of wilderness compared to an east-west orientation.

We can logically calculate, however, that the narrow strip of wilderness has its long dimension oriented north to south and not east to west. Indeed, it can be shown that a north to south orientation is the only rational option given all that is known of Book of Mormon geography from the record itself. This conclusion is based on the geographical implications of actual travel times of recorded journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness by Alma, Zeniff, Ammon and others (See *The Scale of the Book of Mormon Lands* in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography* and the analysis of these 13 journeys below). For example, one can calculate the north to south length of the narrow strip of wilderness to be approximately 200 miles. This is based on the time-span of Alma's discontinuous journey from the waters of Mormon in the land of Nephi, at the southern end of the narrow strip of wilderness, to the land of Zarahemla on the northern border of this same wilderness. Alma's group travelled north eight days from the waters of Mormon to the land of Helam (Mosiah 23:3) and then some years later travelled one day from the land of Helam to the valley of Alma and the next day journeyed north an additional 12 days to the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 24:20-25). These three sequential journeys totaled 21-days travel through the narrow strip of wilderness. At an average speed of 9-10 miles per day, the south to north length for the narrow strip of wilderness calculates to some 200 miles. The relatively slow speed of the combined journeys is required for the movement of families, supplies and belongings, and their flocks and herds of animals through a challenging wilderness landscape.

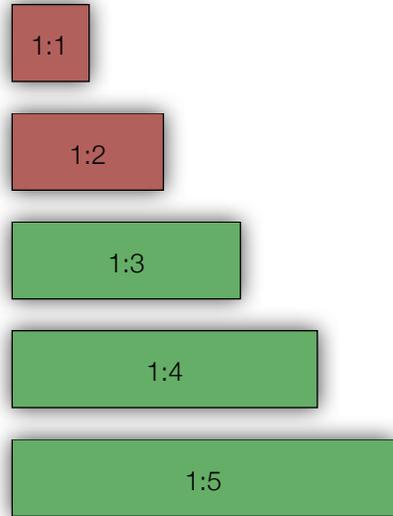


Alma's combined journeys from the land of Nephi to the land of Helam and then from the land of Helam to the land of Zarahemla.

Calculating the west to east distance of the narrow strip of wilderness is not as straightforward. One would first need to ascertain the ratio of width to length for this land feature. Based on the reality of a north to south distance of some 200 miles, this ratio

would then allow us to calculate the approximate distance from west to east. Unfortunately, this ratio is not known and can only be inferred. We do know, however, that in order to be a *narrow strip* the breadth of the landform has to be less than its length. But is this a ratio of width to length of 1:3, 1:4, 1:5. or even 1:8 or more?

Starting with a 1:4 ratio, which creates a reasonable, strip-like shape, we can calculate the area in square miles of such a landform when oriented with its long length north to south. We can then calculate the area of a same-shaped strip when oriented with its long length east to west. In both orientations the north to south distance would need to remain constant at the calculated length of 200 miles, the approximate 200-mile journey of Alma, through the narrow strip of wilderness, from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.



Examples of various shapes and their associated aspect ratios. (The red ratios, 1:1 and 1:2, do not qualify as a proper “strip”)

A North to South Orientation

A north to south oriented narrow strip of wilderness with a width to length ratio of 1:4, and a length of 200 miles north to south, would produce a width of 50 miles east to west. This yields an area enclosing some 10,000 square miles (50 x 200).

An East to West Orientation

If we rotate the orientation of the narrow strip of wilderness 90 degrees, placing its longest dimension extending from the sea west to the sea east, but with the same fixed north to



Relative width and area of a north-south oriented strip compared to an east-west oriented strip with a fixed north-south dimension of 200 miles.

south distance of approximately 200 miles, and with the same width to length ratio of 1:4, we create a west to east extent that lengthens significantly from only 50 miles to some 800 miles.

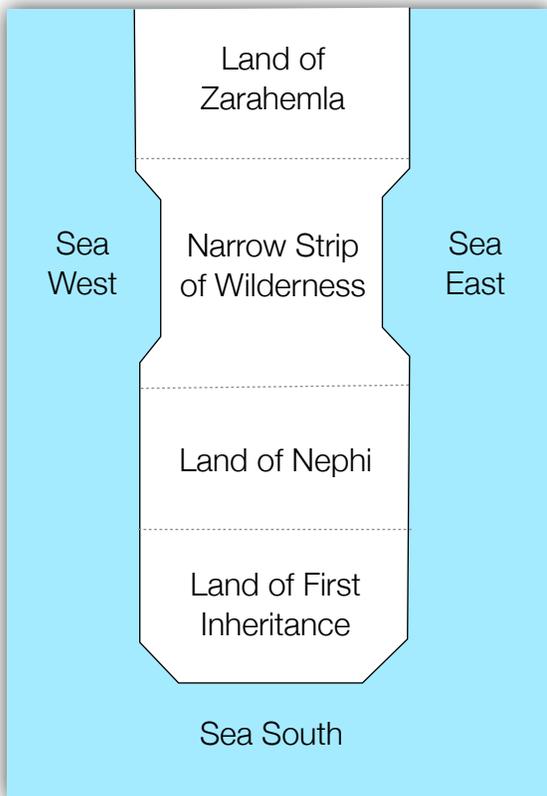


Overlays of a 50-mile-wide strip compared to an 800-mile-wide strip in North America.

This yields a shape enclosing some 160,000 square miles (200 x 800) and creates an area some 16 times larger than a shape with the same ratio of width to length, but with a north to south orientation. An area this large is far beyond the scale of the Book of Mormon lands within almost any Book of Mormon model. And, surprisingly, an area of 160,000

square miles is nearly as large as the combined areas of the seven countries within Central America (some 202,000 square miles). A narrow strip of wilderness with these dimensions would leave insufficient space for the other sizable Book of Mormon lands such as the land of Nephi, the land of Zarahemla, the land of Bountiful, the narrow neck of land and the land of Desolation.

An area this extensive would completely engulf the state of New York (54,555 square miles) or all the area of Baja California, and most areas proposed as the Book of Mormon lands. And even if we reduce the ratio to 1:3 (a shape with a ratio less than this would be difficult to claim as a strip) it still yields an area of 120,000 square miles. But if the ratio is set higher, say, 1:20, it creates a formidable strip of land, with a width of 200 miles and a long dimension of 4,000 miles, extending west to east, and enclosing some 800,000 square miles, equalling one-quarter of the area of the contiguous United States.



Schematic representation of the narrow strip of wilderness relative to the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi.



The location of the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California.

Based on the above analysis, we maintain that the narrow strip of wilderness would have to have its long dimension extending north to south between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla and its shorter width between the two seas, the sea west and the sea east. This orientation also conforms with the scale of all the lands described in the Book of Mormon account and matches the proposed wilderness area of Baja California.

A Wilderness Landscape

In our spatial analysis we must not forget that the narrow strip of wilderness is a “wilderness” landscape, with all that implies. The dictionary meaning of wilderness is an “uncultivated, uninhabited and inhospitable region.” It is a land inhabited by wild animals: the “wild” in the word wilderness refers to wild animals. Wilderness in its Biblical meaning is “not a barren desert but a district or region suitable for pasturing sheep and cattle; an uncultivated place” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

These definitions match the descriptions of the wilderness areas in the Book of Mormon. And in the major Book of Mormon lands there are wilderness areas almost everywhere, some 250 scripture references to wilderness altogether, starting with the wilderness immediately outside of Jerusalem when Lehi and his family leave their homeland (1 Ne. 2:2-6). Wilderness was encountered at the place of their first landing in the new land (1 Ne. 18:25), in the land of Nephi (2 Ne. 5:5-7), and, of course, the narrow strip of wilderness. There were four wilderness areas surrounding the land of Zarahemla (See our



God commanded Moses to bring the Israelites to the mountain, where He would give them His law. This photo shows a traditional wilderness site of Mount Sinai.



Judean wilderness and the Dead Sea. The Savior went to the wilderness to commune with his Father.

topic article, *The Directional Flow of the River Sidon*). The land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation contained wilderness areas (Alma 22:31; see also the numerous references to wilderness in verses 27-34). All the Book of Mormon cities, towns and villages had wilderness close by.

The Book of Mormon does not describe wilderness areas with jungle-like, tropical landscapes. It portrays a wilderness landscape with open vegetation such that one can see approaching armies coming for some distance, unlike thickly treed, tropical areas (Mosiah 19:6; 20:8). It is a landscape where traveling groups get lost in spite of its open vegetation (Mosiah 7:2-4; 8:8; 23:30). It is a landscape where one cannot follow the tracks of others, unlike a path through heavy tropical vegetation which leaves broken branches as



Wilderness areas south-east of the location of the land of Zarahemla in Baja California.

obvious signposts along the exit path (Mosiah 22:11-12,16). It is a dry landscape where travelers suffer from thirst (Alma 17:5). And it is a landscape containing thickets of small trees that provide places to hide (Mosiah 18:5) and some forested areas (1 Ne. 18:5; Enos 1:3; Mosiah 18:30). These Book of Mormon references describe a Mediterranean-type landscape that is characterized by woodlands, scrublands, some forested areas at higher elevations, with areas of open,

semi-arid or steppe plant communities (See “Mediterranean Climate” in *Wikipedia*). Hugh Nibley discusses the character and role of Book of Mormon wilderness areas, such as described above, in his article, “The Nature of Book of Mormon Society,” published in his work, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. It should be noted that both the land of Jerusalem and the Book of Mormon lands have a similar climate, topography and natural vegetation (See *The Nature and Location of Mediterranean Climates* and *The Ecology of Planting Seeds* in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography*). It is our intent to write an extended article on the topic of wilderness in the Book of Mormon, as portrayed within the 250 scriptural references to wilderness.

Book of Mormon Settlements within the Narrow Strip of Wilderness

There are only two settlements within the narrow strip of wilderness mentioned in the Book of Mormon account. One was the small, temporary refuge settlement of Alma's group in the land of Helam. Here some 250 or so people built a small city in an oasis area of pure water (Mosiah 23:1-29). The other was Amulon, also a small, temporary refuge settlement, founded as a hiding place by the priests of king Noah (Mosiah 23:31-32). In both wilderness locations the people tilled the land (Mosiah 23:5, 25, 31). The role of these two, temporary settlements is described in more detail below.



"Fountain of pure water" near the proposed location for the land of Helam in Baja California.

The Narrow Strip of Wilderness in Baja California

A satellite picture of Baja California clearly shows a narrow strip of wilderness precisely where it is required within the relative positions of the major Book of Mormon lands. This wilderness feature is distinctly demarcated, not only from space but on drawn maps. It is positioned between areas that match the land of Zarahemla on the north and the land of Nephi on the south, and between the Pacific Ocean (the sea west) and the Sea of Cortez (the sea east). Its size measures some 200 miles north to south and approximately 50-60 miles west to east. This orientation of its longest dimension is required by the travel accounts in the Book of Mormon, as outlined above. And its configuration is "narrow" and a "strip." Its narrow dimension is also narrower than the adjacent lands on the north and south, which is required to render it a narrow area.

This narrow strip is the most difficult topography in all of Baja California. It consists of rugged canyons (*arroyos* that are hidden from view until they are stumbled upon), mesas, and steep, high peaks that range to 7,000 feet in elevation, only a few miles from the sea coast. The climate of the area is semi-arid to arid, but the rainfall is significantly affected by elevation, with more precipitation at the higher elevations. Its plant cover also varies by elevation—some forested areas at the higher levels and more open Mediterranean-like

(chaparral) vegetation in the lower reaches—and with no jungle-like tropical growth. And at any elevation the terrain is difficult for humans or pack-animals to traverse.

The narrow strip of wilderness is an area where groups get lost. In Baja California this is not difficult because the wilderness region is a rugged area of uncoordinated drainage where surface water is not found in continuously flowing rivers but in intermittent seasonal



The narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California with the locations of Helam, Amulon, land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla.

streams that often do not flow overland but disappear underground and do not provide a tributary drainage systems such that a disoriented group could readily follow rivers to the sea or to a downstream location. This wilderness area is the least populated region of Baja California with only a few ranches and a handful of oasis settlements.

We are often asked how the Book of Mormon people would know that the narrow strip of wilderness was “narrow” given their lack of sophisticated measuring devices, precise satellite maps and triangulation technology. The best answer is provided by the Jesuit fathers who in the late 1600s scaled a peak along the mountain crest (near the proposed location of the Book of Mormon city of Helam) just west of their mission base in Loreto on the Sea of Cortez (the sea east). They recorded that they could

see both the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Sea of Cortez on the east from this single vantage point. Certainly the Book of Mormon people could have done the same. The other narrow feature, the “narrow neck of land” to the north of the land of Zarahemla, also has high peaks where one can also see both sea coasts simultaneously.

Today there are only three small settlements of any size in the area of the narrow strip of wilderness. Within the distance of an eight-day journey from our proposed location for the land of Mormon, these settlements are in valleys that match the description of the land of Helam. These valleys, in the southern extent of the narrow strip of wilderness, have springs of pure water, areas of tilled land, and places for flocks. The Jesuit fathers in the late 1600s and early 1700s established missions and built settlements in the three wilderness valleys: *Misión La Purísima Concepción de Cadegomó* (La Purísima); *Misión San Jose de Comondú* (Comondú); and *Misión San Francisco Javier de Viggé-Biaundó* (San Javier). All of these valleys were occupied by the



Pools of water found in the *arroyos* of the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California.

indigenous people when the Jesuits arrived and are still occupied today. The three oasis towns are in areas where not only the city of Helam (Alma's group) but also the city of Amulon (the priests of king Noah) would need to be located.

Travel Routes through the Narrow Strip of Wilderness in Baja California

There are three historic and contemporary travel routes for traveling north and south through the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California:

1. *Center of the Peninsula (Mountainous Divide)* Many early trails of the indigenous people and the Jesuits fathers went through the center of the peninsula along the crests of the mountains near the highest elevations. These were rugged routes and could only be traversed by walking or by mules or horses. These trails had the advantage of being the shortest and with cooler average temperatures because of the higher elevations. Water sources were few and far between, but sufficient when their sparse locations were known. These simple and basic trails were part of the *El Camino Real (The Royal Road or The King's Highway)* which extended from Loreto on the south to San Diego, California, on the north, and later beyond to San Francisco. These routes are not used today, but parts of the trail are still visible.

2. *West Coast (Pacific Ocean)* This route is possible but longer than the central route because of the many crenulations, embayments and land extensions along the rugged coast line. Today there is an unpaved dirt route along its length, following close to the coast, but it would be next to impossible to traverse by passenger vehicles. Temperatures are the coolest of the two coasts. Infrequent water sources are available, and the ocean would provide sources of food for early travelers. The slopes from the coast to the mountain crests are less steep than on the eastern side of the divide. This unpaved route is seldom used today, except by the most adventurous.

3. *East Coast (Sea of Cortez)* This route, like the west coast route, follows a highly crenulated and circuitous coastline and is the longest of the three routes. The slopes from the coast to the crests of the mountainous divide are extremely steep because of the close proximity of the divide to the ocean. The ocean and mountain vistas are spectacular, and the temperatures on average are much higher because of the warmer waters of the Sea of Cortez. Today, this is the only paved travel route through the narrow strip of wilderness.

Designated Highway 1, it extends some 800 miles from Tijuana on the north to Cabo San Lucas on the far southern tip of the peninsula. This major coastal highway was built in the 1970s along this rather difficult



Narrow strip of wilderness in the center of Baja California.

and longer eastern route because of the need to connect the small but significant coastal cities of Santa Rosalia (copper-mining town), Mulegé (fresh water estuary) and Loreto (site of first successful Jesuit mission in 1697). It should be noted that these coastal cities are focused more toward the sea and not to inland areas of the narrow strip of wilderness that function as hinterlands. The terrain of this eastern route is exceptionally rugged and remarkably scenic, with infrequent water sources. To the

north, Highway 1 follows a more western coastal route, but through the narrow strip of wilderness the highway is diverted to this east coast location. To the south it changes again to a more western coastal position.

It would appear that the Book of Mormon people followed three routes through the narrow strip of wilderness that correspond to the three historic and contemporary routes noted above — west coast, central and east coast. This three-route pattern of travel is based on the accounts of 13 journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. These numerous journeys are outlined below in chronological order, with comments on their location within the matching areas of Baja California.



Three distinct routes from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla through the narrow strip of wilderness.

Journeys through the Narrow Strip of Wilderness

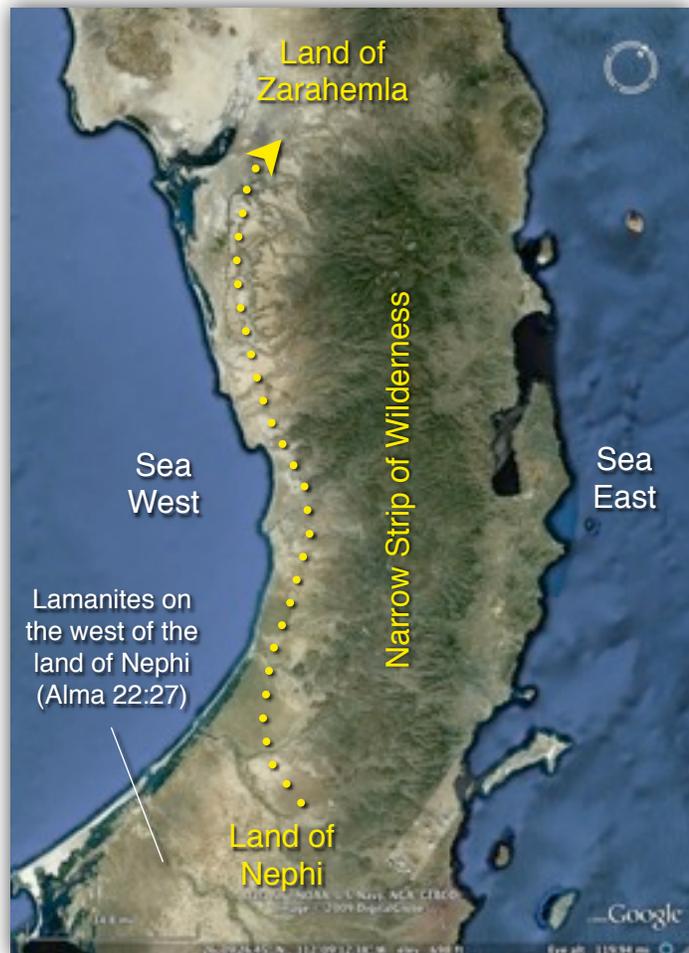
There are 13 journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness recorded in the Book of Mormon, spanning 80 years from about 200 to 120 B.C. It is difficult for a reader to mentally sort through these rather complicated travel accounts unless provided with an actual geographical context, complete with maps, routes, dates and relative locations. The three historic and contemporary north-south routes through the rugged wilderness of Baja California—west coast, central and east coast—provide the required physical and

spatial settings for unraveling the relative details of these 13 Book of Mormon journeys, as recorded in the books of Omni and Mosiah.

The more righteous Nephites migrate north from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla and join with the people of Zarahemla

Omni 1:5-19 (about 200 B.C.)

After living nearly 400 years in the land of Nephi, “the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed” (Omni 1:5), and the more righteous Nephites left their homeland under the direction of king Mosiah (the first), the father of king Benjamin, and departed into the wilderness (Omni 1:12). During this migration the people “were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which [was] called the land of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:13). This is the first recorded journey through the narrow strip of wilderness and apparently the first encounter of the Nephites with the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites). The loss of the 116 pages of Mormon’s abridgment of the Book of Lehi (see the heading to Doctrine and Covenants 10), which spanned the first 400 years of the Nephite history in the land of Nephi, presumably denies us more geographical details than provided by the less-secular small plates of Nephi covering the same time period (First Nephi to Omni), including possible accounts of earlier journeys through the narrow strip of wilderness.



The route of this northward migration is not explicitly recorded. But based on the fact the Lamanites later pursued

Possible route of the Nephites lead by king Mosiah (the first) on the west of the narrow strip of wilderness (Omni 1:12).

the Nephites to the land of Zarahemla along this same route (Omni 1:24), and Lamanites eventually occupied the western coastal area of this same wilderness, it would suggest a western route. Mormon states that the idle Lamanites “lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents; and they were spread through the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore” (Alma 22:28). Mormon also indicates that the land of Nephi “was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west, and which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness,” (Alma 22:27). This suggests that the Nephites, led by the “voice of the Lord” (Omni 1:12-13), would have taken a route that followed the lowlands near the sea on the west of the peninsula through the narrow strip of wilderness, the same area later occupied by the idle Lamanites. Because the narrow strip of wilderness divided the land of Zarahemla from the land of Nephi (Alma 22:27), the people would have had to travel the entire length of this rugged and challenging wilderness area until they could find a sustainable location with water and fertile soil for growing food. This location was on the west of the river Sidon, in an area the people of Zarahemla (Mulekites) called the land of Zarahemla. This also would suggest that the land of Zarahemla was on the western side of the watershed divide of the peninsula of Baja California.

The people of Zeniff journey south, back to the land of Nephi

Omni 1:27-30; Mosiah 9:1-9 (about 180 B.C.)

Soon after the more righteous Nephites, under king Mosiah (the first), arrived in the land of Zarahemla, “a certain number ... went up into the wilderness to return to the land of Nephi; for there was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance [the land of Nephi]” (Omni 1:27-30; Mosiah 9:1-2). This breakaway group eventually returned to the land of Zarahemla after “a contention among them;” and “they were all slain, save fifty, in the wilderness” (Omni 1:28). They later “took others to a considerable number, and took their journey again into the wilderness” to the land of Nephi (Omni 1:29). This group was led by an “over-zealous” man named Zeniff who, “after many days, [wandering] in the wilderness,” arrived in the land “which was near to the land of our fathers” (Mosiah 7:21; 9:4). Notice the numerous references to wilderness as they journeyed south to the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla. It appears to be wilderness all the way.

Zeniff’s journey took place during the lifetime of Amaleki, the record keeper (Omni 1:12-30), suggesting it happened soon after the Nephites (including Amaleki) first arrived in the land



Zeniff and his followers return to the land of Nephi after a failed attempt due to strife among the people (Omni 1:29).

of Zarahemla. This is also corroborated by the fact that the grandson of king Mosiah (the first), who was also called king Mosiah, and king Limhi, the grandson of Zeniff, both reigned at the same time—Mosiah in the land of Zarahemla and Limhi in the land of Nephi. Because many in Zeniff’s group would have been among those who had previously travelled from the land of Nephi under Mosiah (the first) to the land of Zarahemla, we believe they would have returned to the land of Nephi following the same route that they had earlier forged on the western borders of the peninsula through the narrow strip of wilderness.

It is important to note that Zeniff’s group wandered in the wilderness and “were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God” (Mosiah

9:3). This would suggest that the route they followed was not in a desirable location for obtaining food and water. It also suggests the narrow strip of wilderness was rugged and difficult to traverse.

Some Lamanites soon follow the Nephites and migrate north to the land of Zarahemla

Omni 1:24 (about 180 B.C.)

There are a few statements on the locations the Lamanites occupied after the righteous Nephites moved north to the land of Zarahemla under the direction of king Mosiah (the

first). We know that in “the days of king Benjamin [the son of king Mosiah (the first)], a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites” occurred in the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:24). This statement indicates that some of the Lamanites were in the vicinity of the land of Zarahemla just a generation later (20-40 years) during king Benjamin's reign. We suspect the route they followed from the land of Nephi in the south would have been the same route king Mosiah (the first) forged, because the Lamanites soon after occupied the coastal locations “on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore” (Alma 22:28). This western coastal route appears to have been easier to traverse than the central and east coast environments and, therefore, became the main travel route for the Lamanites between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla.



The Lamanites follow the Nephites and settle to the west of the land of Zarahemla (Alma 22:28).

Alma and his people depart into the wilderness and settle in a land they call Helam

Mosiah 18; 19:1 (about 148-145 B.C.)

Alma (the first) was part of the second generation of Zeniff's group, suggesting he was born in the land of Nephi. After listening to Abinadi's warnings in king Noah's court, Alma repented and secretly established a church near the city of Nephi in a place “called Mormon, ... being in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts” (Mosiah 18:4). Given that the Lamanites would have been living to the west of the land of Nephi and to the south in the land of their father's (Lehi) first inheritance (Alma 22:28), we propose the land of Mormon would have been either to the east or north

of the city of Nephi, “in the borders of the land” (Mosiah 18:31). Alma’s location also included a “forest,” a “fountain of pure water,” and a “thicket of small trees” (Mosiah 18:5, 30). This would suggest the land of Mormon was in a more rugged wilderness location at a higher elevation, inland from coastal areas. The land of Mormon, in the “borders of the land,” was possibly only a day’s journey from the city of Nephi (Mosiah 18:1-4). This would also suggest that the city of Nephi was in close proximity to the narrow strip of wilderness, near its southern border (See *The Land of Nephi* in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography*).

Alma baptized 204 people in the land of Mormon, but the newly-converted members were soon threatened by the army of king Noah and “took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness” (Mosiah 18:34; 23:1). The direction they traveled is not recorded, but because they were most likely in a central wilderness environment in the land of Mormon, we believe they went north to an unoccupied and uncharted part of the same central wilderness land where the king’s army could not find them, as they “searched in vain” (Mosiah 19:1). We believe this area would have been within the southern end of the narrow strip of wilderness in a rugged central location where Alma’s people could hide.



Alma and his followers flee the land of Nephi and establish the small settlement of Helam in the southern extent of the narrow strip of wilderness (Mosiah 23:3).

The record states that Alma’s group “fled eight days’ journey into the wilderness” with their flocks and families (Mosiah 23:3). We estimate they would have traveled some 50 to 80 miles northward during this eight day journey (See *The Scale of the Book of Mormon Lands* in our main article, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon Geography*) and settled in “a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water” (Mosiah 23:4). Because the people of Alma were never found by the king’s army, even though they were probably less

than 80 miles away, it would suggest that their wilderness location was very rugged with uncoordinated drainage patterns, multiple twisting canyons and *arroyos* that were hidden from view. The Jesuit fathers often mentioned the isolated and hidden valleys in this area of Baja California that could not be seen until they were stumbled upon.

Alma and his people named their new location, the land of Helam. Here in “a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water,” they “began to till the land, and began to build buildings” (Mosiah 23:4-5). They lived in the land of Helam for over 20 years before being discovered by a “lost” Lamanite army. We propose the wilderness mission site and valley of *Misión San Francisco Javier de Viggé-Biaundó* (San Javier) as the land and city of Helam. This isolated Spanish mission was founded by the Jesuits in 1699. The valley is located some 60 miles—a difficult eight-day journey—to the north of the land of Mormon and some 170 miles—a less arduous 13-day journey—to the south of the land of Zarahemla. Today, San Javier has a population of over 100 in a beautiful valley of pure water, flocks, and tilled land. The route in from the surfaced highway, however, is a 35-mile rough and winding dirt road, crossed by several spring watercourses, with no bridges. Still, hundreds of tourists visit this isolated historic town every year.

King Noah and his priests retreat north into the wilderness

Mosiah 19:2-23 (between 145 and 122 B.C.)

Soon after Alma’s group fled into the wilderness to escape the army of king Noah, the neighboring Lamanites attacked king Noah’s people in the land of Nephi. In response, king Noah “commanded the people that they should flee before the Lamanites, and he himself did go before them, and they did flee into the wilderness, with their women and their children” (Mosiah 19:9). While the people of king Noah were fleeing, the Lamanites “did overtake them, and began to slay them” (Mosiah 19:10). This would suggest that the wilderness they fled to was close to the city of Nephi where the people of king Noah lived, and probably in a location to the north, because the Lamanite locations were south and west of that city.

King Noah, showing little concern for his people, “commanded them that all the men should leave their wives and their children, and flee before the Lamanites” (Mosiah 19:11). This group of cowardly men, led by king Noah and his priests, escaped farther into the wilderness where they were able to hide, suggesting again that this area of the narrow strip of wilderness was a rugged and canyon-like landscape, with many hidden *arroyos*.

The distance king Noah and his fleeing people traveled is not recorded, but they would have had to journey far enough to hide from their attackers, likely in a location that was not previously or widely known. Within days, king Noah and his priests and some of the men who followed him began to fight amongst themselves over the situation of leaving their



King Noah and the men of the land of Nephi flee from the Lamanite army. The priests of king Noah then retreat further into the narrow strip of wilderness, to a place they call Amulon (Mosiah 19:2-23).

families to fend for themselves. During this infighting, king Noah was burned at the stake, just as Abinadi had prophesied, by the angry and disgusted men that followed him into the wilderness (Mosiah 19:20 and footnote). The priests, fearing their fate would be like king Noah's punishment, eventually "fled from them farther into the wilderness" where they lived a secluded life in a place they called Amulon (Mosiah 19:2-23; 23:31-32).

We propose the wilderness mission sites and valleys of *Misión La Purísima Concepción de Cadegomó* (La Purísima); *Misión San Jose de Comondú* (Comondú) as possible secluded locations for the fleeing priests of king Noah. These isolated

Spanish missions were founded by the Jesuits in the early 1700s. The valleys are located some 60 miles to the north of the proposed land of Mormon and some 25 miles—a two-day journey—to the north of the proposed location for the land of Helam (San Javier). These distances match the Book of Mormon account and the locations and travel routes in Baja California. Today, both La Purísima and Comondú have a population of several hundred people in beautiful secluded valleys of pure water, flocks, and tilled land. These three mission sites are the only settlements within this wilderness area of Baja California, and in the Book of Mormon account only a few Nephite settlement areas were located within the southern extent of the narrow strip of wilderness.

Priests of king Noah return south to the land of Nephi to kidnap Lamanite daughters

Mosiah 20; 21:1-21 (between 145 and 122 B.C.)

The sequestered priests of king Noah, under the leadership of Amulon, devised a plan to return to the land of Nephi to kidnap some of the Lamanite daughters and bring them to their settlement of Amulon, hidden within the narrow strip of wilderness (Mosiah 20:1-5).

The priests of Noah would have known the location of the land of Nephi to the south and the spot where the daughters of the Lamanites would gather to sing. Using an opportune time, they kidnapped the Lamanite daughters and “carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness” (Mosiah 20:5).

The priests of king Noah returned multiple times to the land of Nephi, to pillage food and supplies from the Nephites, living under the rule of king Limhi, but who were also in bondage to the Lamanites (Mosiah 21:20-21). Because the Lamanites were mainly located along the western side of the peninsula, this would suggest that the priests of Noah and the kidnapped Lamanite daughters were hidden in the more centrally located highlands of the narrow strip of wilderness.

The priests of king Noah would have had to hide their tracks and any evidence of where they were hidden, and yet multiple times “they had come into the land of Nephi by night, and carried off their grain and many of their precious things,” and the people in the land of Nephi, “laid wait for them” (Mosiah 21:21). Tracking the raiding priests of king Noah would



The priests of king Noah return multiple times to the land of Nephi to kidnap Lamanite daughters, as well as pillage food and precious things (Mosiah 21:21).

not be a problem in a jungle-like environment. This would also suggest that they were within a several-days journey of the land of Nephi, probably in a more semi-arid desert setting with an open chaparral landscape, again providing evidence that the narrow strip of wilderness of the Book of Mormon people would match the suggested location in Baja California.

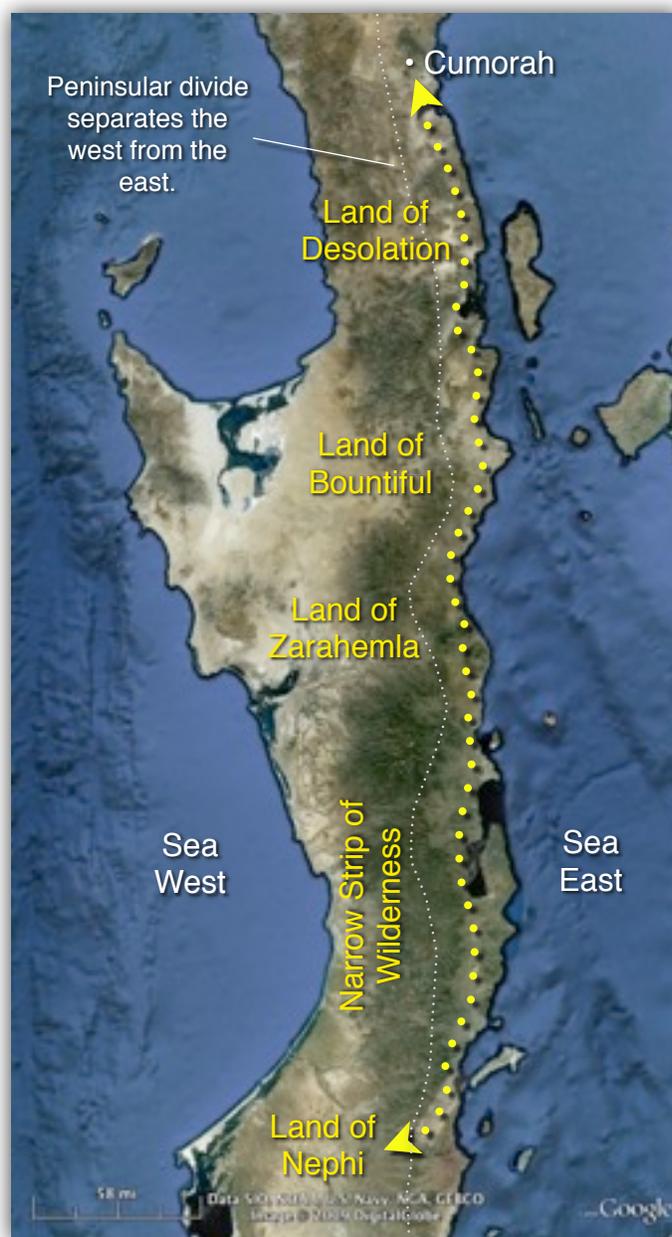
King Limhi secretly sends a search party north to find the land of Zarahemla and obtain help to free his people from bondage

Mosiah 21:22-32 (about 121 B.C.)

The people of Nephi, serving under Limhi their Nephite king, were in bondage to the Lamanites and paying “one half of all they possessed” as tribute to the Lamanite king (Mosiah 19:15). During this trying time, king Limhi secretly sent a “small number of men” northwards, “to search for the land of Zarahemla,” and also to obtain help for freeing his people from bondage.

The exact route of the search party, and the number of days of their journey, is unknown, but there are several key elements in the record to help determine where they may have traveled. The search party, who were all the third generation from the time Zeniff’s group first arrived in the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla, obviously did not know from first-hand experience where the land of Zarahemla was precisely located, and they possibly did not even know which side of the watershed divide the land of Zarahemla was situated, nor where to cross the divide. But they would have known that the land of Zarahemla was north of the land of Nephi. They also knew that the area of the original western coastal route used to travel south to the land of Nephi was populated by Lamanites.

To protect their secret expedition, we can assume they were trying to avoid any contact with the Lamanites. We suspect they wanted to move quickly by avoiding the central highlands and the difficulties in traveling through the more rugged parts of the wilderness. This would then leave the eastern side of the narrow strip of wilderness as an easier and safer travel route. The search party’s plan appears, therefore, to focus on merely traveling northward along an east coast route until they found the land of Zarahemla, “but they could not find it, and they were lost in the wilderness” (Mosiah 21:25).



Not knowing where to cross the peninsular divide to find the land of Zarahemla, Limhi's search party continued northward until they found the desolated land of Cumorah (Mosiah 21:25).

Nephi, having arrived in the borders of the land not many days before the coming of Ammon" (Mosiah 21:26). The search party probably returned along the same eastern coastal route they had taken northward. During the expedition, king Limhi's men discovered a "record of the people whose bones they had found" (Mosiah 21:27), on 24 gold plates which king Mosiah later translated and Moroni subsequently abridged into the Book of Ether, as the record of the same Jaredites that they mistakenly assumed to be the

After traveling through the eastern side of the narrow strip of wilderness (the eastern coast of central Baja California), the search party continued northward until they found numerous bones within the desolate land of a destroyed civilization—the Jaredite people. The Jaredites most likely would have perished within some 100 years or so of the search party's arrival, because bones and other evidence, such as breastplates and swords of a destroyed people were still recognizable (Mosiah 8:10-11; 21:26). It is important to note that the hill Cumorah (same hill as the hill Ramah where the last battle of the Jaredites took place) is described as being located on the eastern side of the land near the seashore, again suggesting the search party's route followed the eastern side of the peninsula along the seashore (Ether 9:3; 15:11).

The search party mistakenly assumed that the remains they found of a destroyed civilization were associated with the people of Zarahemla—because they knew nothing of the Jaredites—and "returned to the land of

people of Zarahemla. It is noteworthy that our proposed land of Zarahemla in Baja California is on the western side of the peninsular divide and a search party, such as king Limhi's, traveling along the eastern coast, would have completely missed the settlements in the land of Zarahemla because of the high mountain ranges of the peninsular divide located between the land of Zarahemla and any eastern coastal route. This mountainous, line-of-sight barrier is evident when traveling the same route today.

King Mosiah (the second) sends Ammon's group south from the land of Zarahemla to inquire about the people of Zeniff in the land of Nephi

Mosiah 7-8; 21:22-24 (about 121 B.C.)

Sometime during the expedition of king Limhi's search party, king Mosiah (the second), the grandson of the first Mosiah who initially led the people out the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla, sent "sixteen of their strong men," led by Ammon, to find the people of Zeniff who had journeyed to the land of Nephi (also known as the land of Lehi-Nephi) during the reign of his grandfather (Mosiah 7:2). Ammon's group "knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander" (Mosiah 7:4). It would appear that Ammon's group forged an unfamiliar route to complete their arduous 200-mile journey. Knowing there were Lamanites on the western side of the narrow strip of wilderness, we assume that Ammon's group would have either followed an eastern route or a route down the center of the land. Given the extended length of time that was taken to get to the land of Nephi, we assume they



Avoiding the Lamanites on the west, Ammon and others journeyed 40 days to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:4).

followed an unfamiliar central route through the more difficult and rugged terrain of the narrow strip of wilderness.

When Ammon's group arrived in the land of Nephi, after journeying 40 strenuous days, they were greeted with open arms and rejoicing by the people of Zeniff and questioned as to the status of their families in the land of Zarahemla they had not seen for more than two generations. King Limhi "caused that Ammon should stand up before the multitude, and rehearse unto them all that had happened unto their brethren from the time that Zeniff went up out of the land even until the time that he himself came up out of the land. And he also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them" (Mosiah 8:2-3).

King Limhi's people in the land of Nephi escape north to the land of Zarahemla

Mosiah 21:33-36; 22 (about 121 B.C.)

After observing the plight of king Limhi's people living in bondage in the land of Nephi, Gideon, a leader among the people, devised a plan to "deliver this people out of bondage" from the Lamanites (Mosiah 22:4). The exact route they followed northward to the land of Zarahemla is not known, but we can logically extrapolate some possibilities.

The search party that king Limhi had previously sent to find the land of Zarahemla returned to the land of Nephi just days before the arrival of Ammon's group from the land of Zarahemla. The search party's newly-acquired knowledge of the eastern route could have helped to determine the escape route planned by Gideon, especially if the route were unknown to the Lamanites. The returning search party would have known about locations of water, potential areas for camps and sites for the grazing of animals. This information could have been compared with the knowledge of the difficult route Ammon's group followed through the center of wilderness. Ammon and his group's first-hand knowledge of the general area surrounding the land of Zarahemla, would have made it possible for king Limhi and his escaping people to know exactly where to cross the mountainous divide to the west of the eastern coast and eventually arrive at the land of Zarahemla. Not knowing the location of this east to west route through the divide—or even not knowing the need to cross the divide—had caused Limhi's search party to completely miss the land of Zarahemla located on the west. Highway 1 in Baja California today crosses this same divide from the centre of the peninsula at San Ignacio (the head of the river Sidon in the

land of Zarahemla) to the copper-mining town of Santa Rosalia on the coast of the Sea of Cortez.

Using a stratagem of getting the Lamanite guards drunk, the people of king Limhi, with the Lord's help, were able to "depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their



Limhi's people, along with Ammon, escape from the land of Nephi and return to the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:11).

herds, and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren" (Mosiah 22:11). A "bent" course appears to describe their rather sharp change of direction after first traveling eastward from the land of Nephi and then "bending" northward. This change of direction is required by the rugged and elevated terrain in this particular location of Baja California. The people took "all their gold, and silver, and their precious things, which they could carry, and also their provisions with them, into the wilderness; and they pursued their journey" through the night to obtain a head start along their route to safety in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:12). There must have been hundreds of people and potentially numerous flocks and herds of animals that would have embarked on this journey.

After traveling many days in the wilderness, king Limhi's people successfully "arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and joined Mosiah's people, and became his subjects" (Mosiah 22:13). King Mosiah received them with joy, and "also received their records, and also the records which had been found by the people of Limhi" (Mosiah 22:14).

The Lamanite army pursues king Limhi's people and becomes "lost" in the wilderness

Mosiah 22:15-16; 23:30 (about 121 B.C.)

When the Lamanites "found that the people of Limhi had departed out of the land by night, ... they sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them" (Mosiah 22:15). It is important to note that after the army "had pursued them two days, they could no longer follow their tracks" (Mosiah 22:16), therefore, the army was "lost in the wilderness for many days" and decided to return to the land of Nephi without finding the escaping Nephites (Mosiah 23:30).

The concept of a pursuing army getting lost is puzzling because one must assume the army could have easily retraced their tracks and returned home. It is also curious to contemplate how an army could have lost the trail of hundreds of people and animals during their pursuit. This unexpected situation suggests the search route must have been in an open, yet complicated, landscape such as chaparral in a semi-desert setting and not a heavily treed jungle-like region, or a grasslands setting that would have left obvious tracks from a sizable group of fleeing people. (See article by Hugh Nibley, "The Nature of Book of Mormon Society," published in his work, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*). Attempting to cope with unknown terrain could have also confused the Lamanite army, leading to their "lost" situation.



After two days of pursuing the people of Limhi, the Lamanite army gets "lost" in the wilderness (Mosiah 22:16).

After the Lamanite army abandoned their search for king Limhi's people, the army curiously selected a different route back, either because their outward route was much too difficult for quickly returning (this would be the case if they had traversed very steep canyons or ravines as they traveled through to the eastern side of the narrow strip of wilderness) or

they felt there was possibly a less difficult and, therefore, quicker route through territory unknown to them. If the Lamanite army were “lost” on the eastern side, and they had come from the south—but determined not to return the same way—we believe they probably turned west and traversed through another east to west pass as they crossed the watershed divide of the narrow strip of wilderness within unknown territory. For either reason, the route they followed led to their being “lost” in the wilderness. All of this is possible within the rugged and unpredictable terrain of the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California.

The “lost” Lamanite army finds the people of Amulon (priests of king Noah) hidden in the wilderness

Mosiah 23:30-35 (about 121 B.C.)

While attempting to return along a different route to the land of Nephi, after being lost, the Lamanite army “found [the] priests of king Noah” hidden in a land “they called Amulon; and they had begun to possess the land of Amulon and had begun to till the ground” (Mosiah 23:31). Both the Lamanite army and the priests of king Noah would have been surprised to see each other. It appears the Lamanite army would have destroyed this group of Nephites had it not been for the wives of these priests of Noah who were Lamanite women kidnapped from the land of Shemlon. These wives, to protect their families, pleaded “with their brethren, that they should not destroy their husbands,” even though their husbands were Nephite men and not Lamanites (Mosiah 23: 33).



After becoming “lost” in the wilderness, the Lamanite army attempts to return to the land of Nephi through a different route and finds the priests of king Noah in Amulon (Mosiah 23:31).

After negotiating with the Lamanites for their lives and their wives, “Amulon and his brethren did join the Lamanites,” and agreed to lead the “lost” Lamanite army through “the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi” (Mosiah 23:35). The route they followed, however, appears not to have been the normal route traveled by the priest’s of king Noah when returning to the land of Nephi to kidnap the Lamanite daughters and pillage food from the people of Limhi, because they were “searching” for the land of Nephi (Mosiah 23:35).

We suspect that Amulon, the leader of the priests of Noah, forged an unknown, but intentionally alternate route, in hopes that he might find an opportunity to escape from the Lamanite army. Remember, the people of Amulon had kidnapped the daughters of the Lamanites and probably feared for their lives if they returned to the land of Nephi and faced the king of the Lamanites. We believe this unfamiliar route would have been in a southward direction because the Lamanite army would have most likely known they were north of the land of Nephi when they became “lost.”

The Lamanite army led by Amulon travels south along an unfamiliar route and finds the people of Alma in the land of Helam

Mosiah 23:20-39 (about 121 B.C.)

While traveling southward, the Lamanite army being led by Amulon, probably along an intentionally unfamiliar route, stumbled upon the people of Alma “in the city of Helam, while tilling the land round about” (Mosiah 23:25). The people of Alma “fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of Helam; and they were much frightened because of the appearance of the Lamanites” (Mosiah 23:26). This unexpected encounter suggests a number of things. First, if the army of the Lamanites were traveling south, the secluded and hidden land of Helam would have had to be located between the land of Amulon and the land of Nephi. This relative location would be supported by the fact that the people of Alma would have known the southern orientation of the route back to the land of Nephi, the land which they had fled from, and would have probably placed their fields on the opposite or northern side of their city of Helam, farther removed from the more vulnerable route approaching from the south. This way their fields would have had more protection from pillaging by providing an early warning of any advancing group from

the expected southern direction. Given this assumption, it provides a logical reason why Alma's people working in their fields were so surprised to find a Lamanite army approaching from the north.

As an appeasement, "the Lamanites promised unto Alma and his brethren, that if they would show them the way which led to the land of Nephi that they would grant unto them their lives and their liberty" (Mosiah 23:36). But after Alma had shown them the route back to to the land of Nephi, "the Lamanites would not keep their promise; but they set guards round about the land of Helam, over Alma and his brethren" (Mosiah 23:37).



Amulon unknowingly leads the Lamanite army to Helam and surprises the people of Alma (Mosiah 23:25). Alma directs the lost Lamanite army back to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 23:36).

The people of Alma escape from the land of Helam and travel north to the land of Zarahemla

Mosiah 24:8-25 (about 120 B.C.)

While still in bondage to the Lamanites, Alma prepared his people, under the direction of the Lord, to escape from the city of Helam and travel north to the land of Zarahemla. The people "in the night-time gathered their flocks together, and also of their grain; yea, even all the night-time were they gathering their flocks together" (Mosiah 24:18). In the morning, and while "the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites," the people of Alma "departed into the wilderness; and when they had traveled all day they pitched their tents in a valley, and they called the valley Alma, because he led their way in the wilderness" (Mosiah 24:19-20).

Once the guards became aware of the escape, they pursued the fleeing people of Alma. But the Lord warned Alma of the approaching Lamanites, and "they departed out of the valley, and took their journey into the wilderness" (Mosiah 24:24). "And after they had

been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla,” where they were welcomed by king Mosiah (the second) “with joy” (Mosiah 24:25).



Under the direction of the Lord, Alma leads his people out of bondage in Helam to the land of Zarahemla in 13 days (Mosiah 24:24).

This divinely-led escape provides a number of possible insights into their selection of a travel route. The people of Alma would have had to follow a route that avoided the Lamanites located on the western side of the narrow strip of wilderness. Alma also would have most likely avoided the route to the land of Amulon occupied by the priests of king Noah, which was probably north, suggesting that their best option was to travel eastward to the coast and then northward along an eastern coastal route. Under the direction of the Lord, Alma’s people would have known the best travel route for food, grazing and water, including where to cross the mountainous divide into the land of Zarahemla, unlike the unsuccessful search party that king Limhi had previously sent along the same eastern route to find the same land (Mosiah 21:26).

As we have noted, the travel time from the land of Helam to the land of Zarahemla was thirteen days (Mosiah 24:20, 24-25). Combined with the eight days that Alma originally traveled from the land of Nephi to the land of Helam (Mosiah 23:3), results in a total travel time of 21 days from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. Alma’s group consisted of hundreds of people of all ages and all their flocks and herds and belongings. This would require a slow travel speed of approximately 8-10 miles per day through rugged terrain. This yields an approximate distance of 200 miles from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla, through the narrow strip of wilderness from south to north. This journey

matches the corresponding distances and travel routes within the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California.

Matching the narrow strip of wilderness in Baja California to the Book of Mormon travel accounts

As we have shown, all 13 of these journeys can be matched to locations in the narrow strip of wilderness of central Baja California, while conforming to the scale and shape of the land, the orientation to the cardinal directions of north, east, south and west, the nature of the wilderness terrain and the vegetation and climate characteristics as portrayed in the Book of Mormon. The corresponding travel routes are not only physically challenging, but with the same difficulties as described in the Book of Mormon accounts. And travelers can get “lost” and disoriented in the rugged terrain. This wilderness presented trials and adversities for the Jesuit fathers when they created trails connecting their small mission settlements, not unlike those faced by the Book of Mormon people. And this area of Baja California is wilderness all the way from north to south and east to west.

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