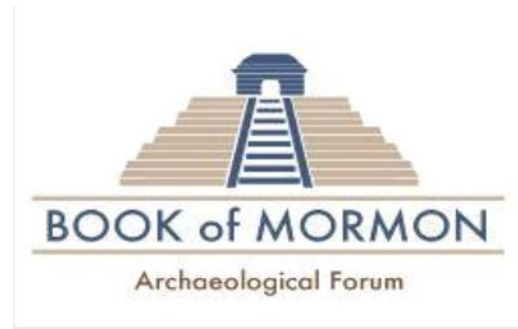




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Book of Mormon Objective Geographic Standard No. 1: Relationships among Zarahemla, Minon, Gideon, and River Sidon

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Abstract: This article is the first of a series of articles that will provide readers and students of the Book of Mormon with specific and scripturally supported geographic standards without reference to any real-world geography. The specific standard identified in this article will be referred to hereafter as Geographic Standard No. 1 and will focus on the relationships among Zarahemla, Minon, Gideon, and the river Sidon. Following a discussion of this objective standard, currently proposed models will be compared with this standard, and the areas where this standard has not been followed will be shown and discussed.



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Book of Mormon Objective Geographic Standard No. 1: Relationships among Zarahemla, Minon, Gideon, and River Sidon

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This article is the first of a series of articles that will provide readers and students of the Book of Mormon with specific and scripturally supported geographic standards without reference to any real-world geography. The specific standard identified in this article will be referred to hereafter as Geographic Standard No. 1 and will focus on the relationships among Zarahemla, Minon, Gideon, and the river Sidon. Following a discussion of this objective standard, currently proposed models will be compared with this standard, and the areas where this standard has not been followed will be shown and discussed.

Joseph Smith stated that the Book of Mormon (1) “was the most correct of any book on earth”¹ and (2) “that it says what it means and means what it says.”² Surely it was not translated by revelation so that only “scholars” could understand it. It shouldn’t take intricate chiasmic structures—although they are fascinating and helpful—to understand it. It was translated into the English language by Joseph Smith so that unsophisticated readers could understand it. The Book of Mormon, including its geography, should be able to be understood by even the ordinary, reasonable reader.

In the face of so many divisive and vastly different models, maps, books, etc. that seem to be increasing exponentially regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon, what seems to be helpful—for those intent on locating the lands of the Book of Mormon—are some objective geographic standards that are specifically described in the Book of Mormon. All proposed models would then have to conform to these standards or be deemed invalid when applied to that particular standard. Several of these specific geographic standards are described in the Book of Mormon.

Any average reader of the Book of Mormon, knowing that Nephi correctly knew that the east side of the Red Sea ran in a “*south-southeast*” direction (1 Nephi 16:13), should reasonably believe that the writers of the Book of Mormon knew and correctly used cardinal directions. Even more importantly, the average reader would also reasonably believe that the Lord would not allow Joseph Smith to deceive people by using the direction of east and secretly mean north. In other words, the Book of Mormon contains no deception even in its use of cardinal directions throughout the text.

This Geographic Standard No. 1 must apply—give or take a couple of miles and directional variations of a few degrees—regardless of where any analyst geographically places the city of Nephi or which direction the river Sidon flows.

In the discussion that follows, all Book of Mormon scriptures are italicized, and emphasis is shown via bolding.

One day's travel by a marching army will be deemed to be about ten air miles. (In that respect, see Joseph and Blake Allen's and Kirk Magleby's excellent explanations.)³

Relevant Objective Geographic Facts from the Book of Mormon

Following are relevant geographic facts and provable conclusions associated with the relationships among Zarahemla, Minon, Gideon, and the river Sidon including the approximate distances between them as expressed in the Book of Mormon:

1. The city of Zarahemla must be located on the west side of the river Sidon (Alma 2:34; Alma 2:15).
2. Gideon must be located
 - a. on the east side of Sidon (Alma 2:34),
 - b. higher in elevation than Zarahemla (Alma 2:15), and
 - c. less than a day's travel from the city of Zarahemla (Alma 2: 25-26).
4. The distance from Gideon to Zarahemla must be about the same distance as Minon is from Zarahemla (Alma 2:24–27) because both armies could have reached the city of Zarahemla from Gideon and Minon within less than one day.
5. Both the army of the Nephites in the land of Gideon and the combined army of the Amlicites and Lamanites in the land of Minon could have reached the city of Zarahemla within less than one day because the spies said that if the army of the Nephites hurried, they could reach the city in time to save "*our fathers, and our wives, and our children*" (Alma 2:25). And they did.
6. Therefore, the greatest distance to Zarahemla from Gideon or Minon must be less than about ten miles and is more likely about six to seven miles because of the time it took to wage a tremendous battle the afternoon of the second day starting on the west bank of Sidon.
7. Minon must be located
 - a. higher in elevation than Zarahemla (Alma 2:24),
 - b. southward from Zarahemla and in the path to Nephi, which was located southerly from Zarahemla (Alma 2:24, 27), and
 - c. less than a day's travel from Zarahemla—the same distance from Zarahemla as Gideon (Alma 2: 24-27).
8. The distance between Gideon and Minon cannot be more than a half night's march by the tired and beaten Amlicite army (Alma 22:22–27).
9. Therefore, the greatest distance between them must be about four or five miles.

The following additional facts are readily provable from the Book of Mormon: ⁴

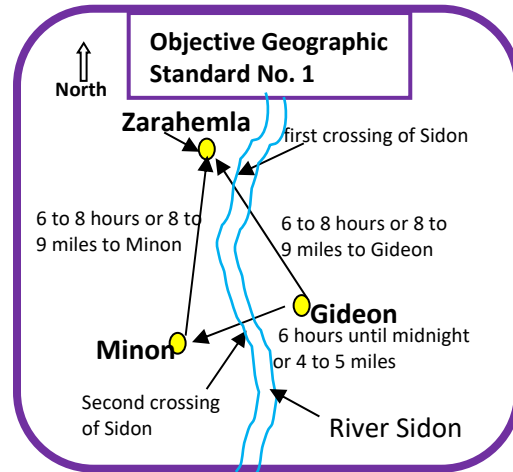
1. The river Sidon flowed between Gideon and Minon; therefore, Minon must be located on the west side of Sidon. The Amlicite army started the battle on the east side of the river Sidon, and the next morning, they were located on the west side of Sidon. Had Minon been located on the east side of Sidon, within four miles or so, then the Amlicite/Lamanite armies, with their almost innumerable numbers, and the people fleeing from Minon, "*with their flocks, and their wives, and their children,*" would all

have met Alma and the Nephite army on the east side of Sidon before arriving at the crossing, and this did not happen.

2. During the nocturnal Amlicite march from Gideon to Minon—and within about four miles—the Amlicites had to have crossed the river Sidon before midnight of that first day.
3. The spies of Alma must have crossed the river Sidon twice that night as they followed the remnant Amlicite army until the spies “saw” them join the Lamanite army at Minon (Alma 2:24) and then returned to Gideon by early morning.

If we use a reasonable estimate of distance traveled in a day to be about ten miles, then the distance between Zarahemla and Gideon must be less than ten miles. The same distance applies for Minon because both armies attempted to reach the city of Zarahemla before the other. Clearly, both could have made it to the city of Zarahemla in less than a day. They both started their marches that next morning about the same time. The Lamanite/Amlicite armies arrived at the west side of the first crossing—located near the city of Zarahemla—slightly ahead of Alma. The Lamanite army attempted to keep the Nephite army in the river, but Alma forced his way upon the west bank. A tremendous battle ensued that afternoon wherein the Lamanites were routed and scattered first west then north from the first crossing of river Sidon (Alma 2:36).

Geographic Standard No. 1, therefore, looks graphically approximately like the following:

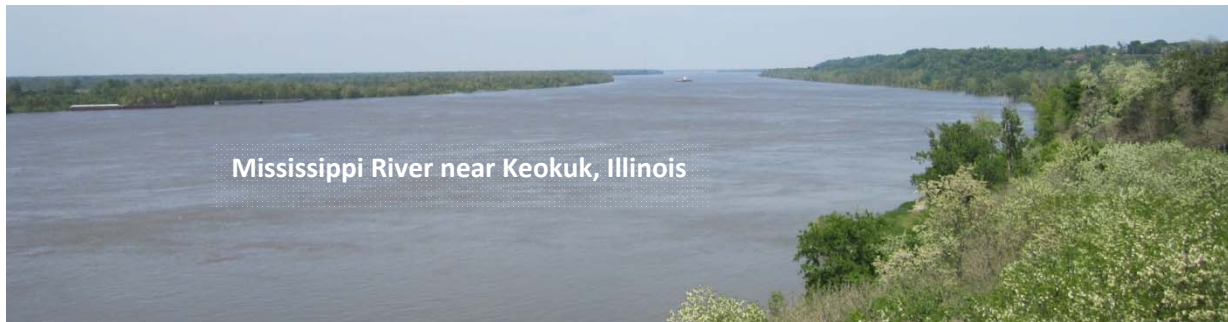


Any proposed model, map, or theory that does not place these four areas in the respective relationships approximately as shown above—as described in the Book of Mormon—will render the proposed model invalid as to this Book of Mormon Geographic Standard No. 1.

Applying this standard to various proposed models or maps results in the following analysis and conclusions:

The Heartland Theory⁵

In the Heartland Model for Book of Mormon geography, the Mississippi River is the river Sidon, and the city of Zarahemla is located across the river from Nauvoo, Illinois, at Montrose, Iowa. Therefore, Alma and his army would have to have crossed the first crossing of the Mississippi River at or just south of Montrose—an impossibility because the Mississippi River is too wide and too deep at that location to have been crossed on foot, as can be seen in the photo below. Then, while Alma and army camped for the night at Gideon, the tired remnant Amlicite army would have to have crossed the Mississippi from east to west to Minon before midnight. This second crossing had to have been located about eight to nine miles—less than a day’s march—south of Montrose, another impossibility because the Mississippi is also too wide and too deep to cross on foot there. The scouts of Alma would have to have crossed the Mississippi at the second crossing two times during the night while following the remnant Amlicite soldiers to Minon where they “saw” them join the Lamanite army and then return by morning. Imagine all of this happening at a location like that shown in the following photo of the Mississippi River near Keokuk, Illinois.



These events of Alma 2 could not have happened on the Mississippi River. Therefore, the Mississippi is not the river Sidon, and the Heartland Model violates the requirements of Geographic Standard No. 1.

The Sorenson Model⁶

The Sorenson model places the city of Zarahemla on the west side of the Grijalva River at a ruin called Santa Rosa (elevation 1,800 feet). It places Gideon at Comitan (elevation 5,100 feet), twenty-five miles north and east instead of about ten miles southerly from Santa Rosa. This would make the distance from Comitan to Minon—which should have been located on the west side of the Grijalva—about twenty-six miles instead of five miles. There is no possible way that the tired remnant Amlicite army could have traveled twenty-six miles to Minon—climbing down a mountain 3,300 feet and crossing the Grijalva River in the process—and doing it in half a night. This is especially true when we consider that during the previous twelve hours, the Amlicites would have been fighting and fleeing uphill 3,300 feet to an elevation of 5,100 feet. In Sorenson’s model, either Gideon is misplaced, Zarahemla is misplaced, or the Grijalva is the wrong river—or possibly all three are wrong.

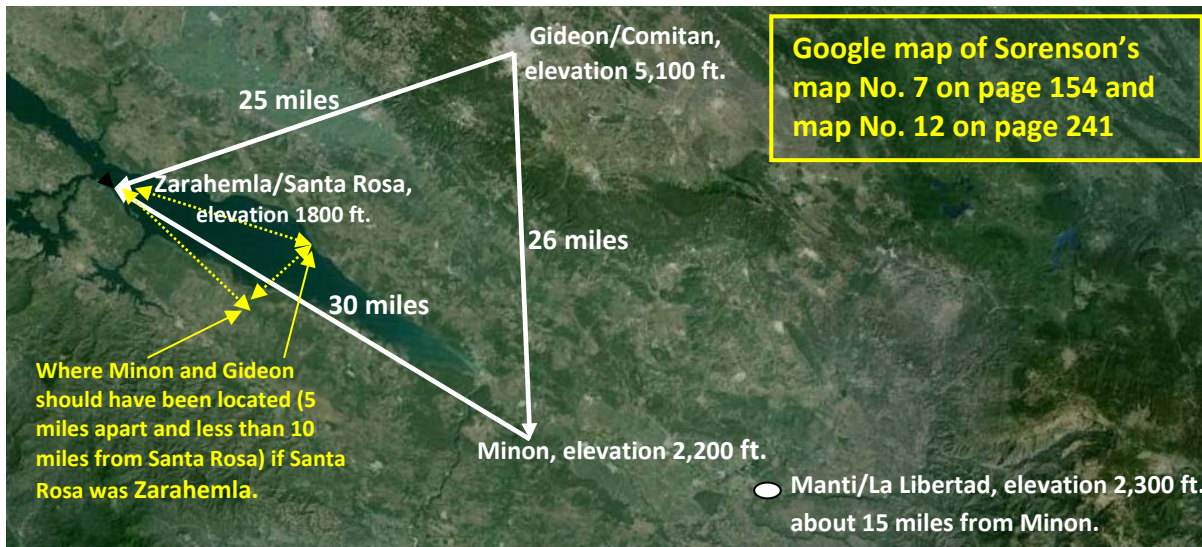
The following photo shows the mountains that the Amlicites and the scouts of Alma would have to have crossed in half a night to get to the area of Minon. Minon would have to have been located west of the Grijalva River. How could Alma’s scouts—who had also fought and marched from the hill Amnihu to Gideon the entire first day—have possibly made the trek from Comitan

to Minon (twenty-six miles) and back that same night—including climbing up and down that mountain at night while following the Amlicite remnant army? Impossible!

The Sorenson model does not conform to Geographic Standard No. 1.



The following is a Google map showing Sorenson's proposed geographic relationship of Santa Rosa to Comitan and Minon, indicating directions, terrain, elevations, and distances.

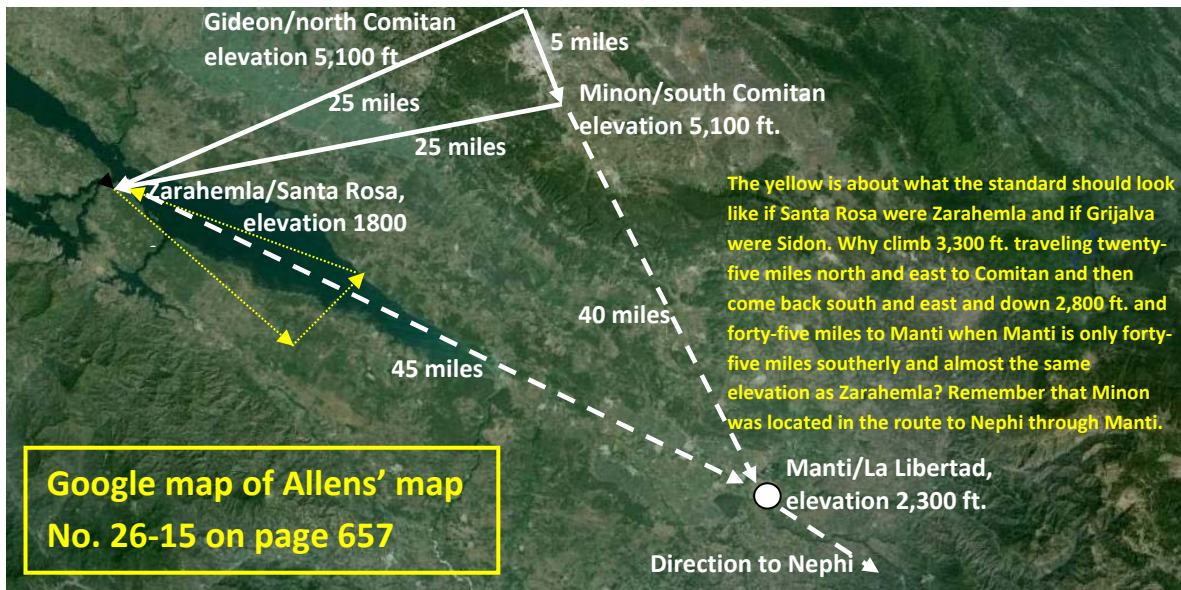


The Amlicite remnant army could never have traveled from Comitan to Minon (twenty-six miles) in half a night, let alone the scouts of Alma traveling that same route twice in one night.

The Model of Joseph and Blake Allen⁷

Joseph and Blake Allen also place Zarahemla at Santa Rosa; however, their locations for Gideon and Minon are slightly different than Sorenson's.

This model is erroneous for the same reasons as Sorenson’s model. The Allens’ model also further violates the standard of reasonableness because instead of having Minon located on a route or course southerly toward Nephi, as described in the Book of Mormon, it takes a very circuitous and difficult route north and east of Santa Rosa twenty-five miles and up 3,300 feet to Comitan. Then, the route continues southwestward within the Comitan valley about five miles or so to Minon. Then, the route continues southwestward back down the mountain 2,800 feet westward twenty-five miles to Zarahemla or from Comitan/Minon southward down the mountain about forty-five miles to La Libertad (Manti). Those geographic outcomes make no sense at all and certainly are not in accord with the requirements stated in the Book of Mormon.



Garth Norman’s Map⁸

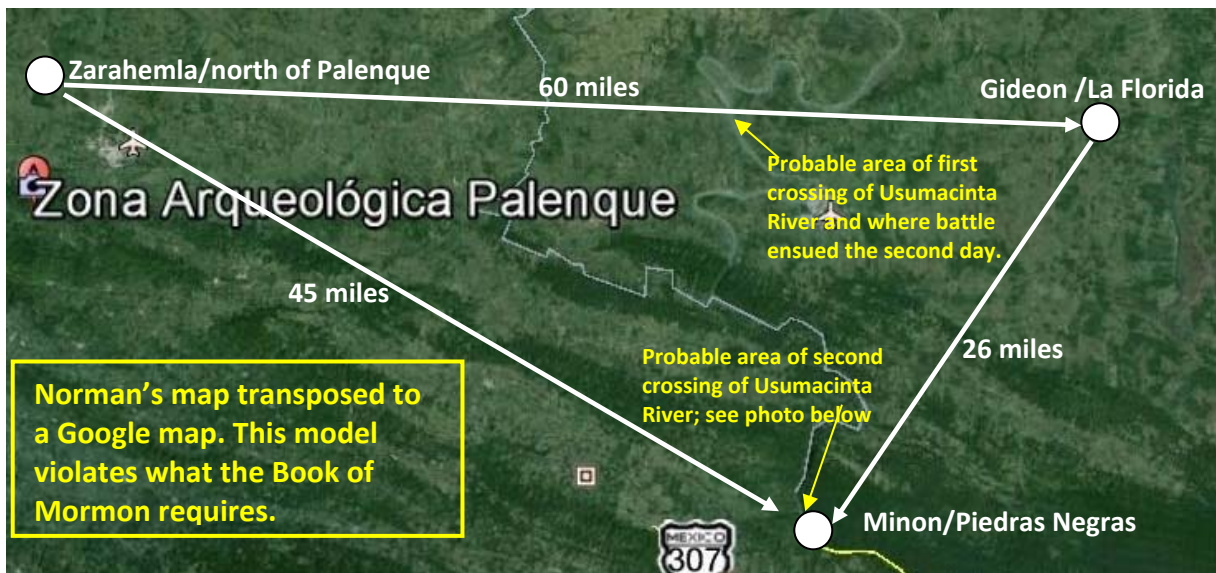
The map proposed by Garth Norman is inaccurate because if he places Zarahemla in the area of Palenque, as shown on his map and explained in his descriptions on pages 28–32, then the following outcomes result:

- Minon (Menon) cannot be forty-five-plus miles (four days) from Zarahemla—Palenque to Piedras Negras. It cannot be more than about ten miles.
- Minon must be located west of the Usumacinta, not east.
- Gideon cannot be sixty-plus miles from Zarahemla. It cannot be more than about ten miles.
- Minon cannot be twenty-six miles from Gideon. It must be not more than a half night’s march from Gideon, about five miles.
- The Amlicite army could not have crossed the river Usumacinta on foot, near Piedras Negras (pictured below), let alone at night.
- Alma’s scouts could not have crossed the Usumacinta twice during the same night.

- Alma and his army could not have crossed the Usumacinta at the first crossing that second day about noon with the Lamanite/Amlicite armies keeping them in the river near the west bank.



The following information is taken from Norman’s map and from information located on pages 28 to 32 of his booklet and is transposed to a Google map.



The remnant Amlicite army could never have traveled this route—twenty-six miles—from La Florida to Piedas Negras in half a night, let alone the scouts of Alma traveling that same route twice in one night. Alma and his army could not have traveled sixty air miles from La Florida to Palenque that next morning. His troops could not have crossed the Usumacinta River on foot during that next morning. In addition, why would the Lamanite/Amlicite armies have marched due north to attack Alma at the first crossing when the distance to Zarahemla was fifteen miles shorter—more than a day’s distance—than for Alma to have arrived at Zarahemla?

As shown in the photo above of the Usumacinta River near Piedras Negras, this river would have been even larger at the area where they would have crossed it—the first crossing—the afternoon of the second day, as shown in the photo below. The Lamanite/Amlicite armies could never have

traveled the forty-five air miles from Piedras Negras to north of Palenque in about half a day. Therefore, this model is erroneous.



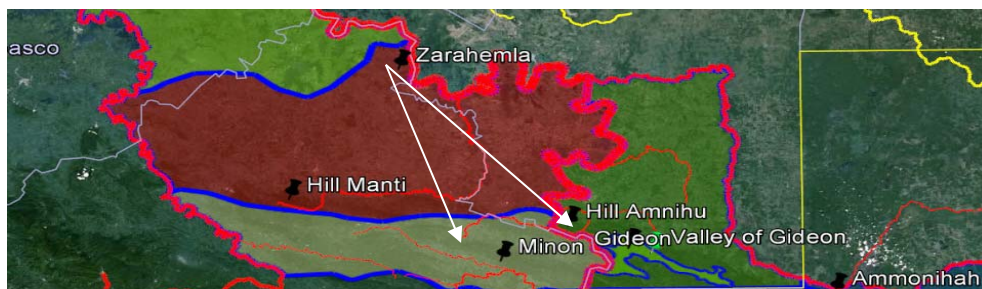
Usumacinta River between la Florida and Palenque. Alma and his army could not have crossed this river on foot the afternoon of the second day.

Kirk Magleby's Model⁹

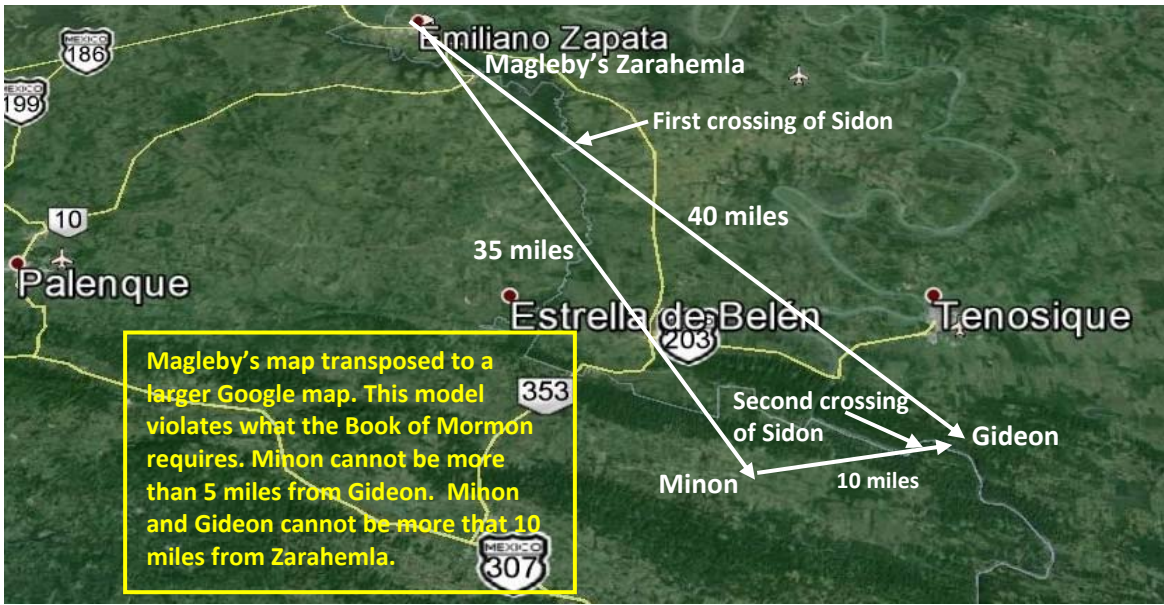
Kirk Magleby places Zarahemla at Emiliano Zapata, twenty-five miles north of Palenque.

In addition to his model being defective for the same reasons as Norman's, Magleby places Minon and Gideon each about forty miles (four days, by his own calculations) from Zarahemla, an impossible distance for both the Amlicite and Nephite armies to have reached near Zarahemla in about half a day. If the crossing of Sidon and subsequent battle on the west bank would have been near Tenosique, as indicated on the following map, then when the Nephites chased the Lamanites west and north, they would have chased them right into the city of Zarahemla instead of into Hermounts.

Readers must remember that the objective of the Lamanites was to take the city of Zarahemla; therefore, according Magleby's map, they would have been five to ten miles closer to Zarahemla and would not have to have crossed the Usumacinta River. Why divert their objective by marching at least ten miles out of their way? This model not only defies the Book of Mormon Objective Standard No. 1 but also challenges the reasonableness required of the Book of Mormon.¹⁰

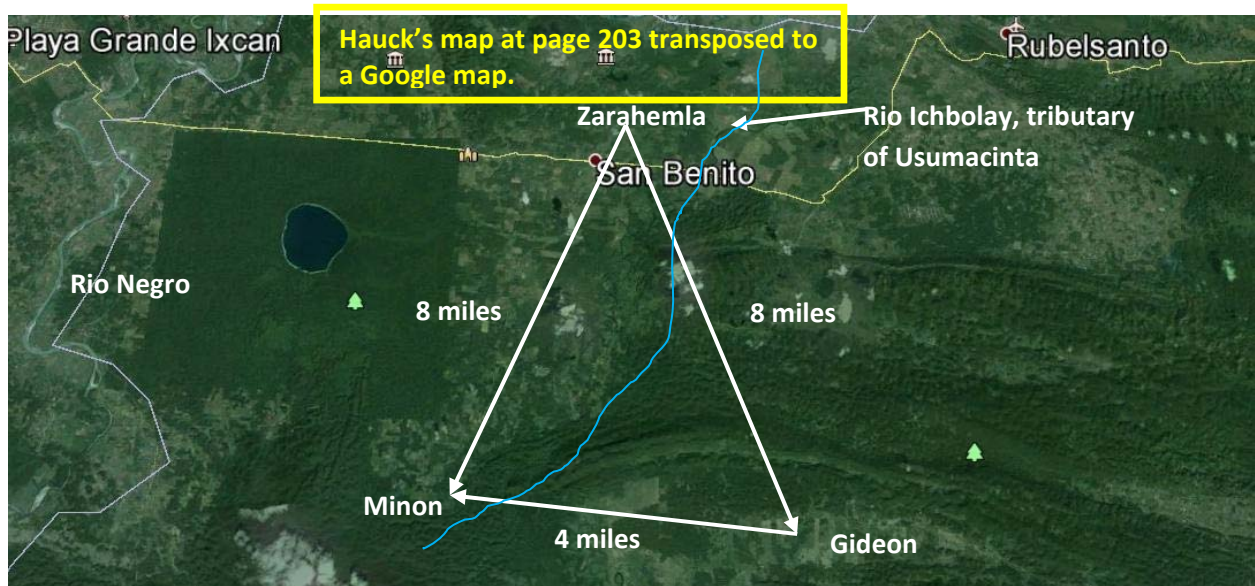


The information on this map is transferred to a larger Google map so readers can more easily identify the geographic locations and distances.



Richard Hauck's Map¹¹

The map proposed by Richard Hauck more accurately follows Geographic Standard No. 1 than any other model.



Notes

1. "Introduction," *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

2. Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), under "Scriptures."

3. According to Joseph and Blake Allen, "In the Nephite measuring system," a day's travel is equal to about eight miles. (Joseph Lovell Allen and Blake Joseph Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. rev. [American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011], 412)

According to Kirk Magleby, "We can say with confidence that 10 air (straight line) kilometers [6.2 miles] per day are on the low end of what we would reasonably expect from Book of Mormon journeys. Fifteen air kilometers [9.3 miles] per day are probably typical of Book of Mormon travels led by well-informed guides, and 20 air kilometers [12.4 miles] per day (or more) are not unreasonable." (Kirk Magleby, "Land Southward Travel Times," Book of Mormon Resources Blog, <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2011/10/land-southward-travel-times.html>, [accessed October 19, 2015])

4. See Joe V. Andersen, "FootPrint of Zarahemla, Article One," http://www.bmaf.org/footprint_zarahemla_one__andersen.

5. See Jonathan Neville, *The Lost City of Zarahemla: From Iowa to Guatemala and Back Again*" (Rochester, NY and Cottonwood Heights, UT: Legends Library Publishing, 2015), 332.

6. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

7. Joseph Lovell Allen and Blake Joseph Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. rev. (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011).

8. V. Garth Norman, *Book of Mormon—Mesoamerican Geography: History Study Map*, 3rd ed. (American Fork, UT: ARCON with Ancient American Foundation, 2008).

9. Kirk Magleby, "Gideon," Book of Mormon Resources Blog, <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2011/12/gideon.html> (accessed October 20, 2015).

10. Magleby, "Gideon," <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2011/12/gideon.html>.

11. Richard F. Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 203.