

The Oregon Trail

Oregon National Historic Trail



Of all the western trails...

used by fur traders, gold seekers, missionaries, and emigrants, the Oregon Trail was most important. Beginning in 1841 and lasting for over 20 years, it was the route over which many thousands of emigrants traveled the 2,000 miles from western Missouri to Oregon's Willamette River Valley and other locations in the Pacific Northwest. This tide of emigration and settlement caused England to relinquish her hold on Old Oregon Territory in 1846, when it became part of the United States comprising the present States of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, as well as those parts of Wyoming and Montana west of the Continental Divide.

A National Historic Trail

Congress memorialized the vital part the Oregon Trail played in our Nation's history in 1978, when the trail was designated a National Historic Trail. The National Park Service has identified the official 2,170-mile route, which begins at Independence, Missouri, and extends through the States of Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, and into Oregon, where it ends at Oregon City. It is a single route except for two relatively short branchings; one alternate route begins at Three Mile Crossing in Idaho, and the other at The Dalles, Oregon.

One hundred twenty-five historic sites have been selected by the National Park Service to commemorate and interpret important events and landmarks along the trail. There are also seven cross-country trail segments totaling 318 miles; chosen for their historical integrity, these segments offer excellent opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and other appropriate recreational activities. The goal is to preserve these especially significant remnants of the Oregon Trail for the edification and enjoyment of future generations. The 125 historic sites and seven cross-country segments are identified on the opposite map.

Only the 28 historic sites and 190 miles of cross-country segments now on Federal lands comprise the initial components of the Oregon National Historic Trail. The remainder, plus other important remnants not yet identified, may be certified as components by the Secretary of the Interior upon application by the owners.

Public Use

Many of the historic sites identified on the opposite map are for visitor use. The same is true of major portions of the seven cross-country segments. All of the sites which are open to the public can be reached by public roads or by footpaths from nearby roads. The cross-country segments are without roads, but can be reached by road at trailheads.

Some privately owned sites do not have public access and may not be visited without permission of the owners. These are indicated on the opposite map by an asterisk. Portions of the cross-country segments, too, are in private ownership and unavailable for public use without permission of the owners. For information about access and travel conditions along the cross-country segments, visitors should inquire at the following offices:

South Pass Segment, Wyoming
Rawlins District Office, Lander Resource Area
Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 589
Lander, Wyoming 82520
307-332-4220

Blue Mountain Segment, Oregon
LaGrande District
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
Route 2, Box 2108
LaGrande, Oregon 97805
503-963-7186

Boardman Segment, Oregon
Pacific Northwest Region
National Park Service
Westin Building, Room 1920
2001 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98121
206-442-5565

Barlow Road Segment, Oregon
Mount Hood National Forest
19559 S.E. Division Street
Gresham, Oregon 97030
503-963-7186

Sinker Creek Segment, Idaho
Boise District
Bureau of Land Management
3948 Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705
208-334-1582

Bear River Divide Segment, Wyoming
Rock Springs District
Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 1869
Rock Springs, Wyoming 82901
307-382-5350

North Trail Segment, Idaho
Boise District
Bureau of Land Management
3948 Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705
208-334-1582

Fort Hall, north of Pocatello, Idaho, built in 1843, was an important stop-over. (Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA).

The official trail has been pin-pointed on maps, but most of it has yet to be marked on the ground. Long stretches of the Oregon Trail have been eradicated by highways and other developments, or are in cultivation. Therefore, it is not possible to travel the full length of the trail by foot or horseback. Essentially, foot and horseback travel is feasible only along the designated cross-country segments. Those wishing to trace more extensive portions of the trail should plan to travel by automobile between the historic sites and cross-country segments.

Administration

The National Park Service has no direct administrative responsibility for the Oregon National Historic Trail. National Park Service responsibilities include general planning and technical assistance, performing research, processing applications for certification of additional trail components, providing public information, staffing the Secretary's Advisory Council for the Oregon National Historic Trail, and otherwise seeking uniformly high standards of protection, interpretation, and management for the trail. Four of the selected historic sites on the Oregon Trail were already National Park Service areas when the trail acquired National Historic Trail status: Scotts Bluff National Monument in Nebraska, Fort Laramie National Historic Site in Wyoming, Whitman Mission National Historic Site and Fort Vancouver National Historic Site—both in Washington. The rest of the selected historic sites, as well as the seven cross-country segments, are on lands which will continue to be managed or owned and operated by other Federal, State, or local agencies or private citizens.

References

This selected bibliography is by no means a complete listing, but is presented merely as a starting point for those wishing to obtain detailed information about the Oregon Trail. Many States and Federal agencies along the trail offer a variety of public brochures, maps, and travel aids. Inquiries should be directed to the State travel offices or to the Federal offices listed elsewhere in this brochure.

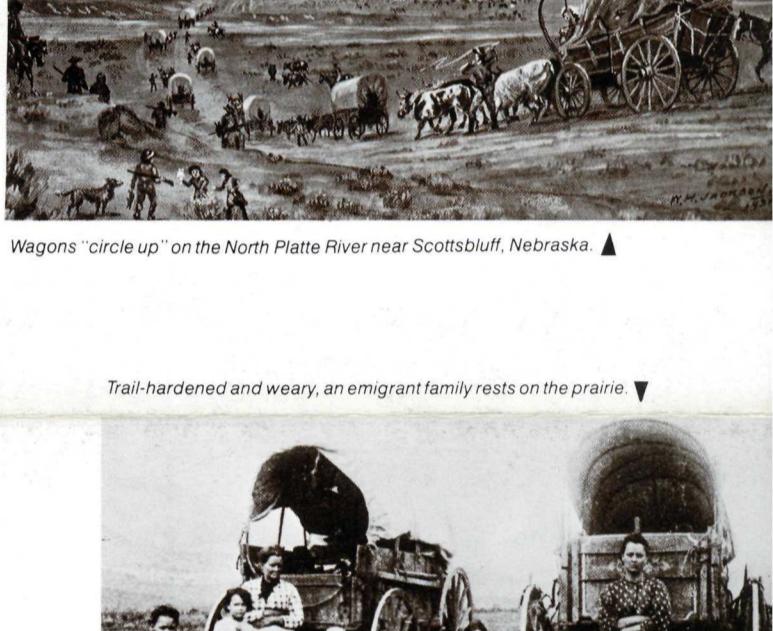
Specific Guides for the Oregon Trail

Franzwa, Gregory M., compiler. *Maps of the Oregon Trail*, Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press (est. January 1982). A reproduction of the route of the trail over a base of county maps.

Franzwa, Gregory M., *The Oregon Trail Revisited*, Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press, 1978. An indispensable travel guide for those who wish to follow the trail by automobile.

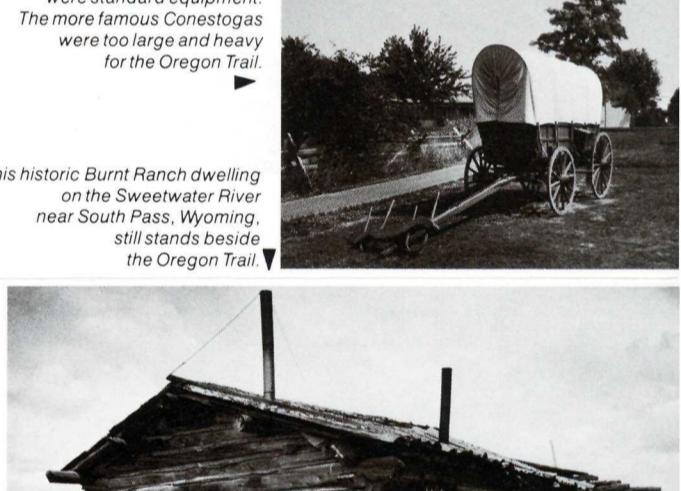
Haines, Aubrey L., *Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail*, Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press, 1981. Brief sketches of 394 historic sites along the trail, with 24 maps, 104 photos, and bibliography.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Wagons "circle up" on the North Platte River near Scottsbluff, Nebraska. ▲

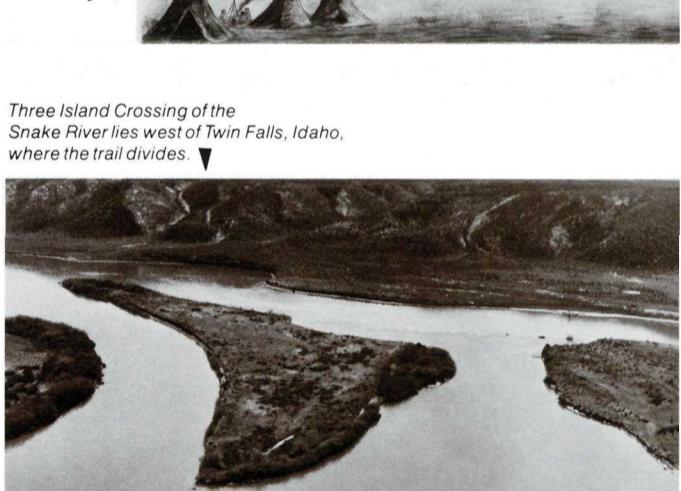
Trail-hardened and weary, an emigrant family rests on the prairie. ▼



Trail wagons like this one were standard equipment. The more famous Conestogas were too large and heavy for the Oregon Trail. ▶



This historic Burnt Ranch dwelling on the Sweetwater River near South Pass, Wyoming, still stands beside the Oregon Trail. ▶



Three Island Crossing of the Snake River lies west of Twin Falls, Idaho, where the trail divides. ▶



Paden, Irene D., *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970, marketed by the Patrice Press, Gerald, Mo. 63037. The adventures of retracing the trail in the 1930s, and 1940s.

General Histories of Western Expansion

Devoto, Bernard. *Across the Wide Missouri*, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947. This classic work establishes the background of the West prior to the emigration years.

Mattes, Merrill J., *The Great Platte River Road: The Covered Wagon Mainline Via Fort Kearny to Fort Laramie*, Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969. As the title implies, this volume exhaustively documents the eastern portion of the Oregon Trail.

Unruh, John D., Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969. The most comprehensive study ever made of overland emigration, this volume is especially useful in its demolition of popular myths and stereotypes of western emigration.

The Overland Migrations: Settlers to Oregon, California, and Utah, Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1980. A short and useful introduction to overland emigrations.

