



# Oregon and California National Historic Trails

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## Public Scoping Meetings

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NPS conducted public scoping this spring and summer for the Four Trails Feasibility Study to evaluate the addition of 64 routes to the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express national historic trails.

We held 16 public meetings in: Denver, CO; Casper & Rock Springs, WY; Tahlequah, OK; McPherson & Topeka, KS; Independence, MO; Lincoln, NE; Des Moines, IA; Salt Lake City, UT; Boise, ID; Walla Walla & Vancouver, WA; The Dalles, OR; Carson City, NV, & Sacramento, CA.

The public scoping comment period ended on July 30, 2011

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/FourtrailFS>

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## New Faces and Places

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Landscape Architects Coreen Kolisko and Kristin Van Fleet joined the National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) office in on June 6, 2011.

Interpretive Specialist Kimberly Finch joined the NTIR office on July 3, 2011.

Interpretive Specialist Chuck Milliken will retire in December 2011 after more than 40 years of service and 10 years with the NTIR.

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## CCSP Projects for 2011

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There are no new Challenge Cost Share Projects for 2011.



**Draft concept sketch for orientation and wayside exhibit space at McCoy Park in Independence, Missouri.** *Stephen B. Rhoades illustration.*

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## Exhibit, Research, & Highway Sign Project Updates

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### Exhibits:

- Four out of five wayside panels have been written and designed for McCoy Park in Independence, Missouri. NTIR staff will visit the exhibit site in August to plan the fifth panel and to coordinate site planning.
- Bureau of Land Management work group resumed Lander Trail interpretive planning and design after a four year hiatus for five exhibits on the Middle Crest Road near Pinedale, Wyoming.
- Initial planning is about to begin to develop an interpretive trail on the Lander Trail at the New Fork River Crossing Park, owned and managed by Wyoming's Sublette County Historical Society with up to eight new interpretive exhibits.

### Research:

- NTIR and Oregon SHPO signed a cooperative agreement to develop a statewide Multiple Property Documentation Form and several site nominations. A similar agreement to nominate trail properties in Missouri is in development, and an agreement with the Kansas SHPO has been in place and work underway for a year. OCTA subject matter experts will be consulted in the selection of properties to be nominated.

### Highway Signs:

- Sign plan standards will be available online by spring 2012 for the Oregon and California national historic trails.
- A new memorandum of understanding with the Idaho Transportation Department to install new ATR/LTR highways signs throughout southeast Idaho is being drafted and reviewed. Funding for the production of nearly 290 new highway signs along U. S. highways 30, 89, & 91, I-15, I-86, state routes 27, 34, 36, & 77, and the county road along the Oregon Trail from Soda Springs to Chesterfield and Fort Hall are included in this phase.

## Trail Exhibit Highlights

**Great Platte Cultural Learning Trail  
American Bison Area**

**Fate Of The American Bison**

*"Let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo is exterminated, as it is the only way to bring lasting peace and allow civilization to advance."*  
— General Philip Sheridan

As emigrants in covered wagons pushed west along the Platte River many experienced their first encounter with the great migrating herds of bison. Properly named the American Bison. Eastern travelers often saw their first bison near here. Some immediately killed their wagons and cooked off a bison. Others reported having to wait up to half a day for the immense bison herds to clear the trail.

Over a period of several decades in the mid-1800s, the once numerous herds were reduced to only a few hundred animals. In the 1870s and 180s, Easterners and Europeans generated an immense demand for bison when using them as steady coast and leg blankets when riding in sleighs and carriages. Industrial manufacturers also found bison hides useful to drive belts on their machinery. The railroads and military bison hides hunters provided meat to work crews and soldiers and soldiers were indiscriminately killed for sport and trophies.

Bison, once numbering in the millions across the Great Platte and much of North America, were critically important to Plains Indian nations. Many tribes depending heavily on the bison for their survival, became increasingly resentful of the slaughter and demise of their food supply at the hands of the white man. Their mounting desperation was a leading factor in causing the Plains Indian Wars between the late 1850s and the early 1870s. Ultimately, Plains Indians who were forced by encroachments and starvation to surrender their independence and seek an reservation — forever altering the lifestyle and culture of the American Indian people.

By 1882, only 545 bison remained in the United States, with several hundred of those preserved within Yellowstone National Park. Today, bison are protected and cared for, the American bison members have increased in number to 200,000 animals.

When the American Indians were no longer on the Platte to set fires, weevils began infesting bison. Over having removed the bison, a key species of the prairie, and the introduction of cattle, which produced different plants, further change of the grassland ecosystem. Within a matter of decades, both the wild and about gone prairie were in steep decline.

**Sign and Panel Relationship**

A bison and the prairie made the bison as much as the bison made the prairie. The sharp hooves of the bison dug into the prairie soil, allowing both water and air to seep deeper into the soil. This, a common visitor to the grasslands, is critical to permanently damage prairie that has deep, well-developed root systems.

After a fire, the grasses tend not to grow, which encourage the bison to return to the area to graze. Doing so kept the prairie, and thus the bison, healthy. Native Americans in the 1800s often set portions of the prairie on fire, in order to encourage the natural cycle of growth. Since the fresh growth of the grass attracted the bison, the bison was an obvious location to hunt.

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## Archway Monument Kearney, Nebraska

There will be a dedication and program for new wayside exhibits at the Great Platte River Archway on September 15th at Kearney, Nebraska.

**Caples Lake  
Carson Route — West Pass**

**Seeing the Elephant**

*"Carleton drove the first mountain stream which we crossed on a line right to right reached Lake Valley a little before noon. Caples Lake... In a few miles we descended into a small valley through which ran a small stream. It appeared finally following this to be a lake, we found another (Elephant), doubling back again we ascended an other high range of mountains. The summit of this range is said to be higher than the divide on a good part of the way. We walked over some today supposed to be 40 feet deep, and have been there for centuries..."*  
— Journal of P.C. Tiffany, Sunday, August 10, 1849

South of Elephant Rock at an elevation of 6,000 feet, in West Pass, there is a view 1200 feet higher than 1200 feet. The West Pass summit is just over 10,000 feet. It was used for only two centuries and then abandoned.

An emigrant approached the Sierra, they knew that there were two summits — Carson Pass, or "The Sierras" just four trail miles east of here at 4,000 feet elevation, and West Pass, or "Second Summit." The pioneers also knew that they were just a week or so from their California destination.

With Carson Pass and West Pass being much higher than Donner Pass, why would the first summit be the route? First, it was the most direct and shortest route to the goldfields during the early years of the gold rush. Second, it was a well-defined route of travel — in the Truckee River Canyon below Donner Pass, the pioneers would have to cross the "Snake" 27 times or more. In contrast, the Carson Canyon had only three river crossings. Next, the well-trodden trail of the Donner party in 1846. Many emigrants did not want to run the risk of falling to the ground.

Elephant Rock Mountain to the left of the tall trees in this image is a well-known landmark of the West Pass route.

## Caples Lake Carson Route, California

A new wayside exhibit about the Second Summit has been sent out for production to go with the existing exhibits placed along the Carson Route of the California Trail. The wayside should be available for installation by early September.

**Desert Oasis**

During the gold rush, many travelers said going to California was "going to see the Elephant." The term pointed to the gold rush and to some people to meet — at great adventure, the experience of a lifetime, or a moment of understanding. Packing up your belongings and heading into the wilderness in a covered wagon was only the essence of "going to see the Elephant."

Nearing the end of a long, five month journey, the tired and weary travelers found the advanced tent of crossing the Sierra Nevada. For many the mountain range represented by "Elephant" from this book, look to this tent to see a renowned mountain named Harshaw Peak Mountain.

## Donner Springs Hastings Cut-off Trail, Utah

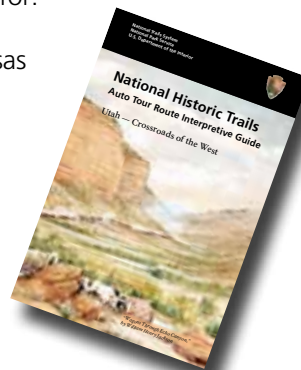
Four new waysides for the Donner Springs area will be shipped from the vendor by the end of this month. They will be installed over the next few months. We partnered with the Utah Crossroads Chapter of OCTA for this project.

## Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide Series

Through congressional funding obtained by the Partnership for the National Trails System, six of the nine interpretive guide series have been developed for the four northern national historic trails. These include guides for:

1. Northwestern Missouri and Northeastern Kansas
2. Iowa
3. Nebraska and Northeastern Colorado
4. Wyoming
5. Idaho
6. Utah

NTIS has created a draft layout for the seventh Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide for Nevada. Our office anticipates printing by the end of the calendar year.



## More Projects Near You

### Connect Trails to Parks

Connect Trails to Parks is a competitive grant program run by the NPS offering funding for a broad range of projects—from traditional waysides and interpretive programs to innovative educational and outreach programs. Trailhead access and facility upgrades are also eligible, as are special events, when jointly planned and designed to attract new visitors to trails and parks.

Projects must have a connection between the Oregon or California national historic trails and a federal land entity. Projects on Bureau of Land Management or USDA Forest Service lands may be eligible. Contact our office with your ideas.

### Highway Sign Projects

New local tour route highway signs have been installed in the following Nebraska counties: Dawson, Kearney, Adams, and Clay counties. We plan to install signs in Nebraska counties Nuchols, Phelps, and Gosper sometime in October. New highway signs are also being installed along the Pony Express Trail and portions of the California Trail across Nevada.

### Ongoing Projects

- Lander Trail, Wyoming exhibits
- McCoy Park, Missouri exhibits
- Implementation of the Long-Range Interpretive Plan

### National Trails Intermountain Region

*The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.*

### Comments? Contact:

National Trails Intermountain Region  
324 South State Street, Suite. 200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84111  
ntsl\_interpretation@nps.gov

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