



# Oregon and California National Historic Trails

## What's New? Spring 2011

We are excited to provide this update on activities since OCTA's last meeting in August 2010 in Elko, Nevada.

## Public Scoping Meetings

NPS will conduct 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.

To locate a meeting near you or comment on the study, visit:

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

## New Faces and Places

The Salt Lake City staff decreased in January when Cookie Ballou transferred to Big Bend National Park in sunny southern Texas. A new interpretive specialist will be hired soon.

Our staff has increased to include four new faces: Mike Elliott, Cultural Resource Specialist; Gretchen Ward, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Lynne Mager, Interpretive Specialist; and Brian Deaton, GIS Technician.

## CCSP Projects for 2011

President Obama's budget proposal for 2011 did not include funding for CCSP. There are no new projects.

Horseshoe Spring  
Hastings Cutoff



California National Historic Trail  
National Trails System

Crossroads Chapter  
Oregon-California Trails Association  
Bureau of Land Management  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## The Great Emigrant Flood of 1849-1854

Historians often compare the 1848 discovery of gold in California to the effect high octane fuel has on a fire. Within the next few years more than 250,000 gold-seekers and farmers scrambled across the Sierra-Nevada in search of fortune or a new life.

The road to California was not a single route. It followed the established Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger before splitting either toward Salt Lake City or to Fort Hall, and eventually the Sierra-Nevada, where it further split into several interior valley destinations. One of the routes through Utah, known as the Hastings Cutoff, rejoined the main California Trail at the Humboldt River in northeastern Nevada.

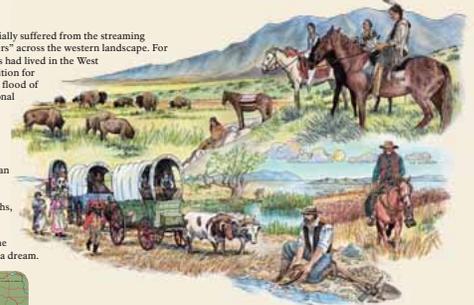
Travel conditions on the cutoff during most years were generally harsh. Grass for livestock, food to eat, and clean water to drink became scarcer as the pioneers advanced westward. Cholera and other diseases took their toll as well.



The California National Historic Trail, and the Hastings Cutoff between Fort Bridger and northeastern Nevada.

American Indians especially suffered from the streaming onslaught of "forty-niners" across the western landscape. For centuries, native peoples had lived in the West without outside competition for resources. However, the flood of pioneers and the additional rivalry for food sources, land, water, and space threatened to destroy their way of life.

Wagon ruts and traces can still be found in the vast undeveloped West — reminders of the triumphs, struggles, and sacrifices made by those who blazed a road through the wilderness in pursuit of a dream.



"We were now thrown entirely upon our own resources. All the country beyond was to us a veritable terra incognita, and we only knew that California lay to the west. Captain Fitzpatrick was not much better informed, but he had heard that parties had penetrated the country to the southwest and west of Salt Lake to trap for beavers, and by his advice four of our men went with the parties to Fort Hall to consult Captain Grant ... to gain information. Meanwhile our depleted party slowly made its way down the west side of Bear River."

— John Bulwell, "The First Emigrant Train to California," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 4:11 (November 1890)

One of six new interpretive exhibits being installed on the Hastings Cutoff this year.

## Exhibit, Research, & Highway Sign Project Updates

### Exhibits:

- Six new interpretive exhibits were completed with OCTA's Crossroads Chapter and will be installed this spring along a portion of the Hastings Cutoff Trail. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has also produced Local Tour Route (LTR) highway signs for installation along SR 196.
- New art and updated designs have been created but not yet finalized for updating four exhibit panels at Donner Spring.
- One of two new exhibits for the Cal-Nev Chapter's Carson Pass project is ready for production. Materials for the second exhibit are being gathered.
- Five new exhibits will be sent to production shortly for the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument's Great Plains Cultural Learning Trail.

### Research:

- Cooperative agreements with three state historic preservation offices are being developed to nominate dozens of trail properties in Missouri, Kansas, and Oregon to the National Register of Historic Places. OCTA subject matter experts will be consulted in the selection and identification of properties.
- A third field season of archeological surveying and testing was completed at South Pass with Central Wyoming College and the Lander Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

### Highway Signs:

- Initial planning is underway for LTR highway signs in southeast Idaho for the Fort Bridger to Fort Hall trail segment.
- Auto Tour Route and Local Tour Route highway signs are being installed by Nevada DOT along the Pony Express NHT and will include California highways along the Walker River-Sonora Route from Silver Springs to Fort Churchill.

## Trail Exhibit Highlights

**Great Plains 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 probed west along the Plains, many experienced their first encounter with the great migrating herds of bison. Properly named the American Bison, bison traveled often on their first bison hunt. Some immediately killed their wagons and reached off on a hunt. Others reported being so up to half a day from the immense bison herds to clear the trail.

Over a period of several decades in the mid-1800s, the once immense herds were reduced to only a few hundred animals. In the 1850s and 60s, Emigrants and Europeans generated an intense demand for bison hides using them as trendy coats and top blankets when riding in sleighs and carriages. Industrial manufacturers also found bison hides useful as drive belts on their machinery. The railroad and military found bison hides to provide meat for work crews and soldiers and millions were indiscriminately killed for sport and trophies.

Bison, once numbering as many as 60 million across the Great Plains and much of North America, were critically important to Plains Indian nations. Many tribes, depending heavily on the bison for their survival, became increasingly reliant on the slaughter and demise of their food supply as the herds of the white man. Their mounting desperation was leading factors leading to the Plains Indian Wars between the late 1850s and the early 1870s. Ultimately, Plains Indian tribes were forced by encroachment and starvation to surrender their independence and settle on reservations — forever altering the lifestyle and culture of the American Indian people.

By 1882, only 541 bison remained in the United States, with several hundred of those protected within Yellowstone National Park. Today, living on preserved and managed lands, the American bison numbers have rebounded to about 20,000 animals.

**Bison and Prairie Relationships**  
It wasn't just the prairie itself that bison made much of the bison world. The sharp hooves of the bison dug into the prairie soil, allowing both water and air to seep deeper into the soil. This, in common with the bison's ability to permanently damage grasses that have died, well-developed root systems.

After a fire, the grasses send out new shoots which encourage the bison to return to the area again. Choosing to keep the prairie, and thus the bison herds healthy, Native Americans in the 1800s often set portions of the prairie on fire, in order to encourage the natural cycle of a growth. Since the bison's growth of the grasses attracted the bison, the bison was an obvious location to hunt.

When the American Indians were no longer on the Plains to set fires, ranching began encroaching. One burning removed the bison, a business species of the prairie, and the introduction of cattle, which pulled different grasses, further changed the grassland ecosystem. Within a matter of decades, both the soil and short grass prairie were in steep decline.

**Showing Bison From The Past** (Frank Leber's Bison Photography) — June 2011, 100% actual size

42" x 24" | March 2011 | 100% of Actual Size | Archway Monument | OREG NHT | Wayside Exhibit 2

## Archway Monument Kearney, NE

Archway Monument took the advice of NPS interpretive staff to design a series of vignettes to tell interpretive stories alongside I-80. The Great Plains Cultural Learning Trail offers six exhibits about the Nebraska prairie.

**Golden Lake**  
Carson Route — West Pass

**Seeing the Elephant**

*"Continuing down the little mountain stream which we camped on last night we again reached Lake Valley at 10,000 feet above sea level... In a few miles we descended into a small valley through which runs a small stream; (Emigrant Valley) following this to its head, we faced another 'elephant'; descending across a pass we descended on other high range of mountains. The summit of this range is said to be higher than the divide we passed yesterday. We walked over some rocky slopes in the afternoon and have lain there for centuries..."*  
— Journal of P.C. Tiffany, Sunday, August 10, 1849

During the Gold Rush many travelers went going to California. "Seeing the Elephant" is a great adventure, the experience of a lifetime, or a moment of a lifetime. Packing all your belongings and heading into the wilderness in a covered wagon was nearly the essence of "Seeing the Elephant".

Navigating the end of a long five months journey the trail and weary travelers find the endless trail of crossing the Sierra Nevada. For many months the "Elephant" Pass this location took the lead to see a rounded mountain range in the distance. The mountain range was the Elephant Back Mountain.

Looking at the Sierra Nevada, south of Golden Lake at an elevation of 10,000 feet, this pass is over two thousand feet higher than 1,000 foot Donner Pass located 50 miles to the north. From the highest pass covered by mountains in the United States until the Sierra Nevada was opened in 1852, its summit is just over 10,000 feet. However, it was not for only two seasons and then abandoned.

As the wagon trains were approaching the Sierra Nevada they knew that there were two seasons — Carson Pass or "The Summit" and the first trail miles east of here, at 8,000 feet elevation and West Pass, or "The Summit". The mountain also knew that they were on a work or on from their California destination.

With Carson Pass and West Pass being so much higher than Donner Pass, why would the bison know that there were two seasons? There were several reasons. First was the most direct and shortest route to the gold fields during the early years of the gold rush. It was a route of over 1,000 miles. In the 1840s, the bison would have to cross the Truckee 22 times over. In the Carson Cañon only three over crossings were required. Next was the over present remnants of the Donner tragedy as 10,000 men did not want to run the risk of falling to the same fate as the Donner's.

**Golden Lake Mountain**, to the left of the lake and to the right of the West Pass. (Frank Leber's Bison Photography) — In the distance center of the West Pass. (Frank Leber's Bison Photography) — In the distance center of the West Pass.

West Pass is located along the Golden Pass before the gates to this pass. (Frank Leber's Bison Photography) — In the distance center of the West Pass.

42" x 24" | February 2011 | 100% of Actual Size | Carson Route | CAL | Wayside Exhibit 6

## Caples Lake Carson Route, CA

The California-Nevada Chapter of OCTA asked for technical assistance to develop seven interpretive exhibits along the Carson Route of the California NHT. The chapter funded the fabrication of all seven exhibits. This exhibit is sixth in the series.

**Utah West Desert**  
Simpson Springs Station

**Strength And Endurance**

*"The worst trips of Saram in the business. The only way I could muster them was to throw them and get a rope around each foot and stake them down, and have a man on the hind and another on the body while I trembled the feet and pulled the skins on... If generally took half a day to show one of them..."*  
— Story of James W. Wadsworth, 1849, as told by a descendant his experience showing half-breed California Mountain men, Saram, Kansas.

Descriptions of the variety and number of horses used by the Pony Express changed throughout history. In general, the type of horse used depended greatly on the region. The more forested through horse worked fine on the central prairie, but the strength and endurance of half-breed mountain men were needed to cross the arid deserts and rugged mountain ranges of the west. Alexander McKay, one of the three founders of the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company's Pony Express, described the mountain "saddle and mountain" as their riders.

As all of these three one-hundred animals spread along the route, riders of horses needed to be kept in excellent numbers to meet the demands of the day. The OC&P&P prepared and the "state-up" of the Pony Express, the company estimated that it would be approximately 70 horses to make the nearly two-thousand mile trip from Missouri to California.

A little more than two months before the first riders left from St. Joseph and Sacramento, Kansas, and the "Wadsworth" purchasing goes to sea of the best horses available — prairie and mountain horses for one week. One of the best horses in the Kansas Lawrence Daily Times, called for "two grey mares, from four to seven years old, and one or two other horses high, well broke to the saddle, and accustomed sound..."

So, just how far and how long can a horse run? A middle-class horse in good shape, can run at a full gallop on flat terrain for miles to the right mile and over the mountainous terrain... in the Sierra Nevada, a horse may be able to cover the miles. Pony Express mountain could travel at a pace of about 10 miles an hour, but at times could travel at a pace of 15 miles per hour. A full gallop, the distance that the horse could travel before becoming exhausted depended on several variables — if it was hot or cold, if it was a mare or a stallion, its health, and when he last had a drink of water.

A good pony carries riders miles to horse at a steady pace and generally galloped the horse only to get to the rider's side. Some were used to ride, but all agreed that in a race for life and mounted in a half-hour morning, the express rider could have danger far behind.

None were easy to ride, but in a race for life the Pony Express rider mounted on half-breed mountain could have danger far behind. (Frank Leber's Bison Photography) — In the distance center of the West Pass.

42" x 24" | March 2011 | 100% of Actual Size | Utah West Desert | P&O&E NHT | Wayside Exhibit 6

## Utah West Desert Simpson Springs, UT

The first phase of an 11 exhibit project was completed in 2006 when four exhibits were designed and installed in partnership between NPS, BLM, and the National Pony Express Association's Utah Chapter. Four more will be installed this summer. The final three will be produced by the end of 2011.

## 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

A seventh Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide for Nevada is currently being drafted. Our office anticipates beginning the layout and design work later this summer, and printing by year's end.

## More Projects Near You

### Connect Trails to Parks

Connect Trails to Parks is a competitive grant program run by the NPS that offers funding for a broad range of possible 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 BLM or USFS lands may be eligible. Contact our office with your ideas to learn more.

### Highway Sign Projects

New local tour route highway signs are being planned for Elko County (Nevada), Sublette, Lincoln, and Uinta Counties (Wyoming), Caribou County (Idaho), and Summit and Salt Lake Counties (Utah).

### Ongoing Projects

- Lander Trail, Wyoming exhibits
- McCoy Park, Missouri exhibits
- National Frontier Trails Museum, Missouri audio guides
- Research report on the experience of African Americans on the emigrant trails
- 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:

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