On the Trail of the Pioneers in Oregon

‘Rut nuts’ will be among those marking the 150th anniversary of the great trail
By SUSAN G. HAUSER

They call themselves rut nuts. These are the people who love the Oregon Trail, what's left of it, and probably wish they had been among the 300,000 pioneers who rode (actually, most walked) almost 2,000 miles to find the promised land in Oregon. Now that the 150th anniversary of the first wave of emigration over the Oregon Trail is approaching, rut nuts are popping up everywhere.

In Oregon, you are bound to meet up with at least a few of them anywhere along Interstate 84, which runs along or over the old trail route. They are attracted by new Oregon Trail information kiosks at most of the freeway rest stops, where they can read segments of pioneer diaries and details of the arduous journey.

If there is a landmark 5, 10 or even 20 miles off the main road, the rut nuts will beat a path to whatever it is — a grave holding one or more of the 30,000 people who died en route, a spring where the weary pioneers watered their livestock and replenished their stores, or, best of all, a rut.

SUSAN G. HAUSER is a fourth-generation Oregonian.

The wagon wheel ruts are vestiges of the largest voluntary migration in history. Although trappers and missionaries had been trickling across the plains since fur traders blazed a trail eastward from Astoria, Ore., in 1812, it was not until 1843 that tales of the land of plenty inspired a mass movement of people and their possessions. More than 1,000 left the Missouri trailhead that year for the lush Willamette Valley in Oregon.

The trip usually lasted from three to six months. Each wave of pioneers encountered grim reminders of earlier expeditions: discarded possessions once valued so highly that they were packed with care, but later were too heavy for the oxen to haul; carcasses of livestock that expired from exhaustion or dehydration, and graves, enough to average 15 a mile.

Now, 150 years later, most of the Oregon Trail is long gone, plowed under or paved over. Only about 10 percent of the original trail remains, mostly just bits and pieces here and there along the six-state route. Trail buffs who wish to set foot in real ruts in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon will be stymied by private ownership of much of the land. Certainly not all property owners will welcome the hundreds of thousands of Americans expected to come down with trail fever during the sesquicentennial.

But occasionally a rut will come across a long, almost pristine segment of the trail that lies on public land and is open to hiking. Several such segments are in Oregon, where the Bureau of Land Management has marked the trail and erected information kiosks.

Nothing stirs the imagination more than standing in a rut. Listening to the long grass rustle in the wind, or perhaps a solitary deer or jack rabbit bound through the sagebrush, you might also hear the creaking of wood, the grinding of metal-rimmed wheels over rocks, the bellowing of thirsty oxen, and the weak complaint of a pioneer child trudging next to...
The Oregon Trail

Continued From Page 8

The Oregon Trail, a dust-covered wagon road, is one of the best spots to stand in a meadow near the foot of Flagstaff Hill near Baker City, about 300 miles east of Portland and not far from the Idaho border. Looking out over the 16-mile stretch of ruts in the $10 million, 20,000-square-foot National Historic Oregon Interpretive Center, which opened in May 1992 in anticipation of the 1993 celebrations.

The wagons followed the hill to the actual trail: parallel lines of dirt reddling the sagebrush that seems to spread everywhere but in the ruts. After more than a century of disease, these roads are still the main ones used today.

Some 75,000 wagons, hundreds of thousands of humans, and livestock filled these paths for all time. Many more ruts are along the Horace Trail near Mount Hood (now P.C. 30), which some pioneers took over the Cascade Mountains instead of following the Columbia River, and a stretch near north, in the parched flatslands of central Oregon.

A view of Mount Hood from the trail crossing the Cascades.

In the land of the wagon train, on trail and off

Museums
The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City is open every day except Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. Summer hours are 9 A.M. to 6 P.M., winter hours 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. Admission is free.

Three more interpretive centers are either under construction or in the planning stage at the Umatilla Indian Reservation, near Pendleton, which will portray how Northwest tribes helped the pioneers by guiding them and bartering for supplies; at the Dalles, 54 miles east of Portland, where pioneers chose either to head south over the Cascade mountains or to raft down the Columbia River; and at Oregon City, the terminus of the Oregon Trail, just south of Portland.

None will be ready this year. However, Pendleton will have a continuing living history display on the Pendleton Roundup, or rodeo, grounds. The Dalles will have a similar exhibit ready by summer, and Oregon City expects to have a “preview center” open by the end of June.

Call the Oregon Tourism Division for more information and for a copy of the “Oregon Trail Self-Guided Tour,” which pinpoints all ruts sites and trail landmarks throughout Oregon and gives brief histories of each; (800) 547-7462.

Motels in Baker City are the usual small-town kind. The Best Western Sunridge Inn ($48-86) has an outdoor pool and indoor hot tub, (800) 233-2368; The Eldorado Inn ($33-86) has an indoor pool and hot tub, (800) 537-5728.

Restaurants
For dinner, even the boosters at the visitors’ bureau suggest you leave town: Go 10 miles north on Highway 30 to Haines where the Haines Steak House. (803) 836-3303, is reputed to be one of the best in the state. Steak, seafood, chicken and burgers cost $11 to $26. The restaurant is open for dinner every night except Tuesday. For lunch try the Front Street Cafe in Baker City, (503) 523-7530, at 184 Main St. The cafe, which is open every day for breakfast and dinner too, offers 14 kinds of salads as well as sandwiches and burgers. Lunch prices range from $3.50 to $5.95. They’re open every day for breakfast and dinner.

Tours
Near Baker City are ghost towns that are reminders of the gold rush that followed the 1861 discovery of gold in Baker County. The Baker County Visitor and Convention Bureau, (800) 523-1235, has maps and brochures for self-guided driving tours and for walking tours of the town, which has more than 135 buildings on the National Historic Register. Also nearby is the Baker and Western Railroad which has a chairlift and cross-country trails, (800) 856-2377.

Wagon Roads
All the wagon roads are part of the commemorative wagon trail, which were laid up, but if you would like to ride along on your own horse call Metropolitan Events in Portland to make arrangements, (503) 233-3299 Jerry Schubert’s annual wagon train, which is sponsored by the Pendleton Roundup Association, will be held for the 11th time starting July 2, but Mr. Schubert won’t be there. He’ll be on the big one, going through on July 24, if you’re interested in hooking up your own covered wagon and draft horses, or riding your own saddle horse, call the Pendleton Roundup office for information, (971) 276-2353. The cost is $150 last year. Your horse oversees all the horses, covers food for you and your animals.

For information on how to become a covered wagon or draft horse you might call the Oregon-California Trail Association (OCTA), P.O. Box 1019, Independence, MO 64050-0109, (816) 232-2793. The association has been instrumental in preserving what’s left of the Oregon Trail and other migrations to the West.

S. G. H.
The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is a world-class facility featuring self-guided exhibits that incorporate state of the art audiovisuals with life-size trail scenes.

CPC-0923

Photography by Eric Sines

Post card produced by Trail Tenders, Inc.
Ware’s Guide to Emigrants

Six Month’s Supplies Needed for Oregon Trail Journey

Recommended Supplies for Family of Four:
- 800 pounds flour
- 200 pounds lard
- 25 pounds salt and pepper
- 200 pounds beans
- 700 pounds bacon
- 100 pounds dried fruit
- 75 pounds coffee
- 2,000 pounds total

*No more than 2,400 pounds should be taken in one wagon. This caused many families to take more than one wagon.*

Cooking Utensils
Guns and Ammo
Eating Utensils
Clothing & Personal Items
*Furniture (if weight and room allowed)*

*Note: Most furniture items were eventually discarded to lighten the heavy load as the animals wore out and died.*

Animals Needed
- 4 to 6 oxen at $25.00 each
- 3 teams or 6 oxen were typical
- Or:
- 8 to 10 mules at $75.00 each

'Oxen were preferred since they were much gentler, steadier and in case of dire need could be eaten.'
“Ware’s Guide to Emigrants” — During the big rush West on The Oregon Trail, a man named Ware compiled a list of supplies pioneers would need for the trip. This depicts an authentic example of Mr. Ware’s suggestions.
AREA MAP

LEGEND

== Oregon Trail

Hiking Trail Difficulty
- Easy (barrier free access)
- Moderate (barrier free access)
- Difficult

HIKING HINTS
- total distance, round trip, is over 4 miles,
- allow at least 2 hours
- wear warm clothes and hiking shoes
- the Ascent Trail is quite steep with a rough surface, it is easier to go down and up the Panorama Trail
OPPORTUNITIES AT FLAGSTAFF HILL

The Oregon Trail Center draws visitors into one of the major events in American history. Overland emigration was of national significance. It helped shape the course of development of the western third of the country. Flagstaff Hill overlooks an important segment of well-preserved Oregon Trail ruts. Its setting is the great sagebrush steppe between the Rockies and the Cascades. The place and programs invite visitors to feel, see, and learn about the past.

Exhibits, audio-visual programs, artifacts, films, a trail system, and living history, where center staff and volunteers play the parts of pioneers, tell the story of the Oregon Trail. Flagstaff Hill is a point for gaining understanding. It is a place of the present with a long vantage into time.
THE OREGON TRAIL

Lure of the West

The Oregon Country had a magic ring to it in the mid-1800s. Americans stirred to the fur riches, potentials for missions, and prospects of fertile land. They read the narratives of Lewis & Clark, John C. Fremont, and Washington Irving. Both scientific accounts and travel literature spoke of lofty forests, lush meadows, runs of fish, and a healthy climate. Drawn by adventure, the prospect of a new beginning, escape from debt and creditors, or selling out from good real estate speculation—pioneers had a mix of motives in responding to the magnetism of the frontier.

Westward Ho!

Thousands came west. Some said it was Manifest Destiny and the will of God that America should expand from sea to sea. Others saw it as opportunity. The Indians viewed the whole affair as trespass. Whatever its course, westward migration was of consequence. Between 1841 and 1850 nearly 10,000 outfitted their wagons, secured teams, and set out over the Oregon Trail. And others continued coming by wagon for several more decades.

Grouping and reorganizing, some emigrants set up military-like companies, discussed the routes and distances, and in April and May gathered at “jumping-off” points along the Missouri River frontier. When all was ready, they turned toward the setting sun for a journey across the continent.

Travel Between the Rockies and Cascades

At South Pass, 864 miles west of Independence, Missouri, emigrants entered the great, arid interior of the American West. The next 1,000 miles tested teams and tenacity. Beset by hot days, chilly nights, swirling dust, and Indians eager to barter for clothing, tools, and food, the emigrants had to cope with an environment unlike anything they had previously known. Residents of the meadows and woodlands of the eastern United States, they found no place to hide in the great sagebrush plains.

The Snake River tantalized travelers. Sparklingly clear and filled with fish, it cut through a deep canyon hundreds of feet below the trail. At fords, its swirling waters took a terrible toll, drowning hapless emigrants. Northeastern Oregon, however, hinted at the promises luring emigrants westward. The majestic Blue Mountains, stands of pines, and the well-watered bottomlands along the Powder River confirmed the value of the trip.

And some stayed. The discovery of gold in the Blues in 1862 sparked a major rush and widespread settlement. A new frontier grew in the mountainous interior of the West.

Those who pushed on crossed the Blues, the Columbia Plateau, and finally the Cascades. Those who could afford it or were willing to risk it descended the Columbia Gorge by water. Beyond lay the fertile valleys of western Oregon and Washington.
This errata sheet accurately places Scotts Bluff and Chimney Rock in Nebraska.
Interpretive Center
The Interpretive Center contains both permanent and changing programs. It houses a theater, meeting rooms, a gift shop, restrooms, and administrative offices.

Amphitheater
This outdoor facility uses Baker Valley and Blue Mountains as a backdrop for special programs. Events and times are posted at the Interpretive Center.

Encampment
The pioneer encampment, operating on a seasonal basis, is a point of living history interpretation. It brings to life everyday experiences and adventures from the era of overland emigration.

Lode Mine
This lode mine, another seasonal living history site, illustrates the important role of mining in the development of northeastern Oregon. The lode mine includes accurate mining structures, ore carts and tools.

Interpretive Trail System
A total of 4.2 miles of interpretive trail systems beckons to visitors who want to explore the great sagebrush-steppe confronting the pioneers. Interpretive sites await those taking the 2.3 mile, 1 hour and 15 minute Main Loop Trail walk to and from the original ruts of the Oregon Trail.

Services in the Area
The Information Desk in the Interpretive Center has brochures on lodging, food services, special features and local attractions.

For additional information contact the Baker County Visitors and Convention Bureau, Baker City, Oregon, 97814.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Fees & Hours
Open: 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM daily
Fees: For fee information write or call the Interpretive Center

Address & Telephone Number
National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center Bureau of Land Management Post Office Box 987 Baker City, Oregon 97814 (503) 523-1843

Volunteers
Volunteers assist the Oregon Trail Center staff. You, too, can join the effort and help bring history alive at Flagstaff Hill.

Parking
Parking lots can accommodate cars, pickups, motor homes, and trailers up to a combined length of 49’. No overnight parking is permitted.

Safety
Smoking is not permitted in the Interpretive Center. Smoking is permitted in designated areas outside the Center.

The primary trail system is designed for barrier-free access with a 5% slope maximum. Elevational relief from the Interpretive Center to the Oregon Trail ruts is 372’. Average elevation is 3,700 feet above sea level.

Summer temperatures sometimes exceed 100° F; in winter, the temperature may fall below 0° F. Plan clothing and use of trail system in light of the elevation and season.

Insects can be bothersome; ticks can be dangerous. Stay on the trail. Check yourself for ticks following your visit. They are particularly prevalent in spring and early summer. Be alert for scorpions and rattlesnakes.
For more information, write or call:

National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
Bureau of Land Management
Post Office Box 987
Baker City, Oregon 97814
(503) 523-1843
OREGON TRAIL IN IDAHO

AND OTHER EMIGRANT TRAILS
Established Attractions and Events

SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO

Attraction: Smith's Trading Post, Big Hill, Wells C. Stock Park
Trails: Oregon Trail
Facilities: Park – Picnic Area/Shelter & Restrooms. Full Services Visitors Services
Contact: (208) 847-3717. Bear Lake Chamber
Reference: See narrative Southeastern Idaho. paragraph 2. see map number 1

Special Oregon Trail Rendezvous
Event: Pageant, Friday closest to July 24, annually
Trail: Oregon Trail
Activities: Butch Cassidy Bank Robbery, Dutch Oven Dinner. Live Action Pageant and Dance
Location: US 30 south from Montpelier – 5 miles, turn northeast on county road, follow signs
Contact: (208) 945-2072 Bear Lake Visitors Bureau
Reference: See map number 1

Attraction: Hooper Springs City Park, Wagonbox Grave
Trail: Oregon Trail
Location: Soda Springs on US Hwy 30
Contact: (208) 547-2600. Soda Springs Chamber/City Hall
Reference: See narrative Southeastern Idaho. paragraph 5, see map number 2

Attraction: Historic Chesterfield
Trails: Oregon Trail
Special: Historic Chesterfield Homecoming.
Event: Memorial Day, annually
Location: 12 miles east of Soda Springs, US Hwy 30, north on county road to Bancroft. Continue 10 miles north.
Contact: (208) 648-7625 or 547-2151 (please call before visit)
Reference: See map number 3

Attraction: Hot Pools — “Dempsey’s Bath Tub”
Trails: Natural Hot Springs, Idaho’s World Famous Hot Pool Complex (winter/summer hours)
Location: Lava Hot Springs US Hwy 30. 11 miles east of I-15. Use exit 47.
Contact: 1-800-429-8597
Reference: See narrative Southeastern Idaho. paragraph 6. see map number 4

Attraction: City of the Rocks National Reserve
Trails: California Trail, Salt Lake Alternate, Kelton Road
Facilities: Campsites, Restrooms, and Fire Areas
Location: I-84, exit 216 or Sublet exit to Hwy 77 to Almo, follow signs. I-84, exit 208 to Hwy 27 to Oakley. 16 miles south, follow signs. (Oct. 15 to June 15 call for road conditions.)
Contact: (208) 824-5519
Reference: See narrative – South Central Idaho. paragraph 3, see map number 9

Attraction: Milner Historic Recreation Area
Trail: Oregon Trail, wagon ruts visible
Facilities: Interpretive/Picnic Area. Boating. I-84, exit 208 to Hwy 30 west, follow signs
Location: See narrative – South Central Idaho. paragraph 5, see map number 10

Attraction: Rock Creek Stricker Store
Trail: Kelton Road, Oregon Trail
Facilities: Interpretive Site, Picnic Area.
Location: I-84, exit 182 to Hwy 50, near Kimberly follow 3600 E. Rd, or 3800 E. Road to 3200 N Road.
Contact: (208) 423-4000
Reference: See narrative South Central Idaho. paragraph 6, see map number 11

Special Event: Iron Horse Roundup: 3rd weekend in June, annually
Activities: Celebrating coming of rail transportation to Oregon Trail.
Facilities: Camping, Restrooms, RV Sites
Location: Shoshone, 30 miles north of Twin Falls on Hwy 93.
Contact: (208) 886-3234 or 866-2058
Reference: See map number 12

Attraction: Hagerman Fossil Beds
Trail: Oregon Trail near by.
Facilities: Visitor Center in Hagerman, call for tours. Fossil on display at Hagerman Museum.
Location: Call for site directions. Museum – downtown Hagerman. Hwy 30
Contact: Park Service (208) 837-4793 or (208) 837-6288
Location: Museum (208) 837-6288
Reference: See map number 13

Attraction: Ward Massacre Site
Trail: Oregon Trail
Facilities: Battle Site Commemorative Sign.
Location: Near Middleton, I-84, exit 29, turn east on Hwy 20 (Franklin Rd), turn north on Middleton Rd, go 1 mile and turn east on Lincoln Rd., 1/4 mile to the park.
Contact: (208) 467-7611
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 9-10. see map number 18

SOUTHWESTERN IDAHO

Attraction: Three Island Crossing State Park
Trail: Oregon Trail, South Alternate Oregon Trail
Special: Three Island Crossing Reenactment. 2nd weekend in August, annually. Historical River Crossing.
Facilities: Visitor Center. 50 Unit Campground, Restrooms. Shower. Dump Station. Hiking, Swimming, Fishing. (Open year-round, call for center hours.)
Location: I-84, exit 120, follow signs to park.
Contact: (208) 366-2394
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 13, see map number 15

Attraction: Bruneau Dunes State Park
Trail: South Alternate Oregon Trail
Nearby Trail Markers, Visitor Center. 48 Unit Campground, Restrooms, Showers. Dump Station, Picnic Area. (Open year-round, call for center hours.)
Location: 18 miles south of Mountain Home. From route 51 turn east on route 78 just south of the Snake River. Go two miles and turn south to the dunes. From I-84 westbound, exit 112, 15 miles on route 78 to the dunes road. Follow signs to the park.
Contact: (208) 366-7919
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 4, see map number 16

Attraction: Bonneville Point Interpretive Site
Trail: Oregon Trail
Facilities: Marked Oregon Trail, Interpretive Sign.
Location: I-84, exit 64, follow signs.
Location: (208) 384-3000
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 6, see map number 17

Attraction: Idaho State Historical Museum
Trail: Oregon Trail, Kelton Road.
Goodale’s Cutoff
Idaho State and Oregon Trail Artifacts (Open year-round, call for hours.)
Location: In Boise. I-84, exit 53, turn north on Vista Ave. (which becomes Capital Blvd) for 2 miles. Turn right on Battery St. into Julia Davis Park.
Contact: (208) 334-2210
Reference: See map number 17

Attraction: Malad Gorge State Park
Trail: North Alternate Oregon Trail, Kelton Road
Interpretive Site, Picnic Area
Location: I-84, exit 147, follow signs.
Contact: (208) 334-2154
Reference: See map number 14

Attraction: Giveins Hot Springs
Trail: Oregon Trail
Location: I-84, exit 28, south on 10th Avenue to route 55 westbound (Karcher Rd.) to Marsing. Located 30 miles south of Marsing on route 78.
Location: (208) 495-7139
Reference: See map number 21

Attraction: Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area
Trail: Oregon Trail
Facilities: Historic signs denote the actual site of Hudson Bay Company’s Fort Boise.
Contact: (208) 722-5138
Reference: See narrative – Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 10. see map number 19

Attraction: Fort Boise Cutoff
Trail: Goodale’s Cutoff
Facilities: Site of emigrant ferry crossing.
Location: In Weiser. I-84, exit 3. Hwy 95 north 20 miles to Weiser. Turn left on Main St. (Oregon Trail plaque located in park.) Continue on Main, turn north on Hwy 70 (Jonathan Street/Weiser Flats Hwy). Eight miles to the Olds Ferry Area.
Contact: (208) 549-0452
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 11, see map number 22

Attraction: Ow耶e County Historical Museum and Complex
Trail: South Alternate Oregon Trail
Nearby Oregon Trail Markers. Trail Maps & Display. Local History. (Open year-round, call for hours.)
Location: In Murphys. I-84, exit 28, south on 10th Avenue to route 55 westbound (Karcher Rd.) to Marsing. Located 30 miles south of Marsing on route 78.
Contact: (208) 495-7139
Reference: See map number 21

Attraction: Malad Gorge State Park
Trail: Oregon Trail
Facilities: Battle Site Commemorative Sign.
Location: Near Middleton, I-84, exit 29, turn east on Hwy 20 (Franklin Rd), turn north on Middleton Rd, go 1 mile and turn east on Lincoln Rd., 1/4 mile to the park.
Contact: (208) 467-7611
Reference: See narrative Southwestern Idaho. paragraph 5, see map number 22

Note: Attraction and Event numbers correspond with location numbers on trail map.
Reduced by tales of land, gold and a new life, more than 300,000 Americans migrated on the Oregon Trail system during a twenty year period, beginning in 1841. Stretching from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City, Oregon, the primitive route promised a difficult journey. Emigrants battled unforgiving terrain, extreme weather, poor equipment, illness and occasional conflicts with the Indians.

The year 1993 marks the sesquicentennial—or 150th anniversary—of the first wagon train’s arrival at the Oregon Trail’s end. Idaho played a substantial role in the history of this massive westward migration.

Today, although major highways bisect Idaho’s Oregon Trail country, much of this land looks as it did during the great expansion west. More than 1,700 miles of emigrant trails, including all cutoffs and alternate routes, stretch across southern Idaho, and over 580 miles of remnants still exist today. Many landmarks, historical sites and other hints of the pioneers’ legacy remain in southern Idaho, ready for modern-day explorers to discover.

**Southeastern Idaho**

When pioneers entered present-day Idaho on the Oregon Trail, many had already traveled more than a thousand miles. The way was littered with abandoned wagons, dashed dreams and graves. Still, a great deal of the pioneers’ journey remained ahead, and almost immediately, the emigrants faced new obstacles.

"The ascent is very long and tedious, but the descent is still more abrupt and difficult." —Theodore Talbot, 1843

In August 1862, several wagon trains were attacked and 10 people were killed in a skirmish with Indians southwest of American Falls. The incident gave name to what is now Massacre Rocks State Park. Today, the park features a historical display and marked trail on which wagon ruts are still visible. Also nearby is Register Rock, a 20-foot-high stone where many emigrants carved their names or wrote them in axle grease.

**South Central Idaho**

Once they crossed Raft River, the pioneers had to make a choice: continue on to Oregon and its fabled verdant valleys or take the trail’s left fork toward California and its gold.

Those who set off to the southwest came upon a wondrous sight, a stone village known as the City of the Rocks, not far from where Hudspeth’s Cutoff joined the California Trail.

Located south of Burley, near Almo, the City of Rocks attracts sightseers, history buffs and rock climbers eager to scale the formations, some of which reach 60 stories above the desert floor.

Many gold rushers followed the Mormon Trail, located near the City of Rocks, into Utah and settled there. From Salt Lake City, others in search of gold traveled the Salt Lake Alternate north into Idaho to join the California Trail. This trail was part of the Kelton Road, a major stage line from Kelton, Utah, to Boise.

Back north on the Oregon Trail, modern travelers will find the Milner Ruts Interpretive Site on the south side of Milner Reservoir located west of Burley. Several miles of wagon ruts are marked. Here it is easy to imagine the hardships suffered by the emigrants, who endured July and August temperatures of 90 to 100 degrees or more.

As more emigrants passed over the Oregon Trail, businessespeople saw opportunities to provide goods and services to the pioneers. Built in 1864, the Rock Creek stage station became the first emigrant trading post along the Oregon Trail west of Fort Hall. Purchased by Herman Stricker in 1876, the Stricker Station is still intact, and today is a good place to picnic.

Approximately 1 1/2 miles north of Twin Falls on U.S. Highway 93, the Tule Creek Stage Station was built in 1860 and operated until 1868. The Tule Creek Station is a small frame building that is open for visitors.

**Southwestern Idaho**

Near what is now Glenns Ferry, the emigrants faced another difficult choice. They could attempt the Three Island Crossing to reach a shorter, easier route north of the Snake River, or they could stay on the dry, rough Oregon Trail South Alternate.

About half the emigrants decided to attempt the treacherous crossing. Many diaries mention the loss of livestock, wagons and human lives at this, the Oregon Trail’s most difficult river crossing. Today, the site is part of Three Island Crossing State Park, where a crossing reenactment is staged each August.

East of present-day Mountain Home, pioneers came upon Teapot Dome, a well-known trail landmark. At its base was a soothing hot spring, and this became a popular camping spot for weary travelers who had just survived the rigors of Three Island Crossing.

Those who remained on the river’s south side saw several outstanding natural features that are still very visible today, including the Bruneau Sand Dunes, highest in North America, and the spectacular Bruneau Canyon.

Not everyone who traveled the emigrant trails chose to settle at the trail’s end. In 1879, one couple, Milford and Mattie Givens, discovered and fell in love with the area that now bears their name—Givens Hot Springs, located southwest of Marsing. From Bonneville Point, where an interpretive site marks several visible wagon ruts, emigrants traveling north of the Snake River saw a welcome sight that marked the end of their difficult trip across Idaho’s dry and dusty plains.

"...When we arrived at the top we got a grand view of the Boise River Valley...."

—Cecilia M. Adams, September 15, 1852

Fort Boise was established as an Army cavalry post in 1863 to protect Oregon Trail wagon trains and gold miners. The city of Boise grew up around this military post.
Oregon Trail, many had already traveled more than a thousand miles. The way was littered with abandoned wagons, dashed dreams and graves. Still, a great deal of the pioneers’ journey remained ahead, and almost immediately, the emigrants faced new obstacles.

"The ascent is very long and tedious, but the descent is still more abrupt and difficult." — Theodore Weld, 1843

First, they came upon Thomas Fork, where steep, muddy inclines in and out of the stream made crossing most difficult. Soon after, the pioneers traversed a high ridge that became known as Big Hill, which many emigrants thought was the steepest, longest hill they'd yet encountered.

Once in the Bear River valley, near what is now Montpelier, travelers found a trading post established by Thomas L. "Peg Leg" Smith, who in 1849 sold gold-seekers, rushing to California, supplies totaling $100 per day.

Both the Big Hill and Smith Trading Post sites are just southeast of Montpelier, the first major community on the Oregon Trail in Idaho. Today, the Oregon Trail Rendezvous Pageant is held on the Trail near the "Big Hill."

Soda Springs was another major attraction in the Bear River country. Here, pioneers marveled at springs and geysers. One spring regularly gave off a smell like that of a steamboat. Visitors can still taste the water of another notable landmark, Hooper Spring. Soda Springs also is home to Camp Connor, established as an Army post in 1863, and the Wagonbox Grave, which commemorates the burial of an emigrant family of seven who were killed nearby in 1851.

At a landmark called Sheep Rock, also known as Soda Point, some emigrants left the main trail and struck west for California on the Hudspeth's Cutoff. This old Indian route became popular in 1849 as it lead the pioneers to "Dempsey's Bath Tub" hot springs, now Idaho's world famous hot pools at Lava Hot Springs.

Another major alternate route, the Lander Road, also crossed eastern Idaho. The road was built after Congress appropriated funds in 1857 to improve emigrant wagon trails. When the Lander Road opened in 1859, it saved five days of travel.

Fort Hall, near Pocatello, was established in 1843 as a fur-trading post, and it later became an important resting spot for the emigrants. At a Fort Hall replica, in Pocatello, today's visitors can glimpse into the frontier life and witness what this bustling trade center was like.

Goodale's Cutoff left Fort Hall to wind past what is now Craters of the Moon National Monument. It then extended through Boise and on to the Payette and Weiser River Country and then further north into Oregon. This trail became a popular route after gold was discovered in the Idaho batholith in 1862.

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"...When we arrived at the top we got a grand view of the Boise River Valley..."
— Cecilia E. M. Adams, September 15, 1852

Fort Boise was established as an Army cavalry post in 1863 to protect Oregon Trail wagon trains and gold miners. The city of Boise grew up around the post and became an important stop during later years of trail use. Deactivated in 1913, the fort site is now a city park.

The Hudson Bay Company (HBC) had established another Fort Boise much earlier. In 1834, near what is now Parma. Among its early visitors were the famous missionary Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, who were the first party to bring a wagon west in 1836. Their adventure proved that both women and wagons could make the trip west.

Fighting between emigrants and Indians forced HBC's Fort Boise to close in August 1843. When 18 emigrants were killed in the Ward Massacre near present-day Middleton. Travel along the Oregon Trail remained extremely hazardous for the next decade.

The Ward Massacre site now includes a commemorative marker and picnic area. To see what the fort must have looked like, visit the Old Fort Boise Replica located in Parma.

As the trail neared Oregon, emigrants traveling an alternate route made use of Olds Ferry to cross the Snake River near what is now the town of Weiser. Near the ferry site sand dunes and badlands resemble those near Nebraska's Scotts Bluff National Monument, among the most famous Oregon Trail sites.

The Oregon Trail existed from about 1841 to 1870, but the paths paved by the hardy pioneers did not disappear. These roads were later used by stagecoaches and rail trains. Even today, many Main Streets and interstate highways follow the same routes blazed by our forebears.

Idaho invites you to revisit the Oregon Trail and its alternate routes. Surround yourself with our high desert plains, majestic mountains and expansive sky, and get a taste of the Old West... a West that lives on here, in southern Idaho.
Southwest Idaho Travel Association  
P.O. Box 2106  
Boise, Idaho 83701  
1-800-635-5240

Boise District Bureau of Land Management (208) 384-3300  
Bruneau Dunes State Park (208) 336-7979  
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Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (208) 327-7444  
Idaho State Bureau of Land Management (208) 384-3000  
Idaho State Historical Museum (208) 334-2120

Idaho State Historical Society.  
Library & Archives (208) 334-3756  
Payette Chamber of Commerce (208) 642-2662  
Three Island Crossing State Park (208) 336-2394  
Three Island Crossing Committee (208) 336-7486  
Weiser Area Chamber of Commerce (208) 549-0452

South Central Idaho Travel Committee  
858 Blue Lakes Blvd. North  
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301  
1-800-255-8946

Burley District, Bureau of Land Management (208) 678-5514  
City of Rocks National Reserve (208) 824-5519  
Craters of the Moon National Monument (208) 527-3257  
or (208) 527-3207

Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument (208) 837-4793  
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (208) 733-8398  
Malad Gorge State Park (208) 837-4505  
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National Park Service (208) 837-4793  
Sawtooth National Forest (208) 737-3200  
Shoshone District, Bureau of Land Management (208) 886-2206  
Stricker Ranch, Old Rock Creek Store (208) 423-4000

Southeastern Idaho  
Pioneer Country Travel Council  
P.O. Box 668  
Lava Hot Springs, Idaho 83246  
1-800-423-8597

American Falls Chamber of Commerce (208) 226-7214  
Bear lake Convention & Visitors Bureau (208) 945-2072  
Blackfoot Chamber of Commerce (208) 785-0510  
Bureau of Land Management, Pocatello Resource Area (208) 236-6860  
Caribou National Forest (208) 236-7500  
Cherry Creek Visitor Center near Malad (208) 766-4788  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum/Fort Hall (208) 237-9791  
Fort Hall Replica, Pocatello City Parks Dept. (208) 234-6237  
Idaho's World Famous Hot Pools (208) 423-8597  
Malad Chamber of Commerce/City Hall (208) 776-4010  
Massacre Rocks State Park (208) 548-2672  
Pocatello Chamber of Commerce (208) 233-1525  
Prenton City Hall (208) 852-1817  
Shoshone-Bannock Indian Festival & Rodeo/ Ft. Hall (208) 238-3700  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes/Fort Hall (208) 238-3700  
Soda Springs Chamber of Commerce/ City Hall (208) 547-2600

For additional reading information on the Oregon Trail contact a local  
Idaho Visitor Center, local Idaho State Park, or your local library.

For more information about Idaho and Special Events in Idaho contact:

Idaho Travel Council  
700 W State Street  
Boise, Idaho 83720  
1-800-VISIT-ID

Idaho State Bureau of Land Management  
(208) 384-3000  
1-800-635-7820

Illustration and Design by  
WILD HORSE STUDIO

This publication made possible, in part, by Idaho Travel Council grants  
and funding from the U.S. Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management. Printed in the USA for  
ITC/IDC: ITCG-91-V-1; 150m.