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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

RAY LYMAN WILBUR, Secretary

OFFICE OF EDUCATION

WILLIAM JOHN COOPER, Commissioner

BULLETIN, 1930, No. 27

NOTES  
ON THE OREGON TRAIL

ARRANGED AS NEW MATERIALS OF INSTRUCTION  
IN GEOGRAPHY, CIVICS, AND HISTORY  
FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

By

FLORENCE C. FOX

ASSOCIATE SPECIALIST IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION



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## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION,  
*Washington, D. C., September 10, 1930.*

SIR: The Oregon Trail Memorial Association has asked this office to assist in interesting the schools of the Nation in commemorating the centenary of the beginnings of a westward migration that was destined to place the heart of the North American Continent under the American Flag. Congress has authorized a commemoration of the stirring events of the year 1830 and the President of the United States has formally requested the people of this country "to commemorate the lives and deeds of the heroic pioneers who won and held the West."

The manuscript transmitted herewith has been prepared by Miss Fox chiefly from secondary source material, some of it difficult of access to the schools and much of it not well known to them. In itself this manuscript furnishes much material from which pupils may dramatize important occurrences. It is likely to prove more important, however, in furnishing teachers, who are little acquainted with this literature, titles and a sufficient sampling of the contents to enable them to decide which books should be selected for their respective school libraries and class shelves.

It may be urged that as a nation matures many events in its history which have seemed at the time of occurrence to loom large become of little moment in the longer view of history. It is probably true that there is slight merit in asking pupils in Florida or Georgia to keep in mind detailed events in the history of Oregon and Washington. There are, however, eternal values in these experiences which generation after generation may review to advantage. Many of those qualities which made up the personalities of these early pioneers—the spirit of adventure, courage in the midst of danger, and fortitude under suffering, privation, and in the face of death—also characterize the pioneers of to-day. They are as essential to the constitution of a Byrd or a Lindbergh as they were to the colonists who first settled our Atlantic seaboard, or to the pioneers who won the West. It is impossible to overemphasize these abiding characteristics. In the in-

terest, therefore, of carrying out the Proclamation of the President of the United States and of emphasizing this aspect of education, I recommend that this manuscript be published as a bulletin of this office.

Respectfully submitted.

WM. JOHN COOPER,  
*Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

## OBSERVANCE OF THE COVERED-WAGON CENTENNIAL

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### A PROCLAMATION

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The Congress by unanimous vote has authorized commemoration of the heroism of the fathers and mothers who traversed the Oregon Trail to the Far West. On April 10, 1830, the first wagon train left St. Louis for Oregon, pioneering the way for the thousands of men and women who settled the Pacific States. On December 29, 1830, Ezra Meeker was born, who carried over into our day the personal memory of this historic epoch. The Oregon Trail Memorial Association, which he founded and which includes men and women in all walks of life in all parts of the country, has sponsored the movement to observe the period from April 10 to December 29 of this year as the Covered-Wagon Centennial, to recall the national significance of this centenary of the great westward tide which established American civilization across a continent.

*Therefore*, I, Herbert Hoover, President of the United States, do call upon our people to employ this fitting occasion to commemorate the lives and deeds of the heroic pioneers who won and held the West.

*In witness whereof* I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

*Done* at the city of Washington this twenty-first day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and thirty, [SEAL] and of the independence of the United States of America, the one hundred and fifty-fourth.

HERBERT HOOVER

By the PRESIDENT:

J. P. COTTON,

*Acting Secretary of State*

## FOREWORD

This bulletin is designed to assist those teachers who desire to observe in some manner the anniversary of the covered wagon. It presents in concrete form new materials of instruction that should be of especial interest to students in the social studies.

A detailed study of the route over which the covered wagon passed, the rivers crossed, the mountains scaled, and the valleys that offered rest and grazing ground for the stock, all these present abundant material for the study of the geography of our western country.

Problems of social adjustments were never more difficult to solve than in the family and community life of the covered-wagon caravan. Family relationships and community welfare were considered from a new viewpoint without precedent in the history of the world. Government was established and authority enforced, discipline maintained and misdemeanors dealt with, and protection from savage enemies secured. These are of vital interest to the student of family and community life.

The pioneers of this western movement have placed their names on the pages of history by their fortitude and courage. They should be remembered as among the bravest heroes of our country, and their deeds of valor should be recounted from generation to generation.

Many authorities have been quoted in the bulletin, and a complete bibliography of these references with others is appended. Through the courtesy of the Interlibrary Loan Service any one of these volumes may be borrowed from the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., provided the request comes through a library in the locality where the applicant lives.

# NOTES ON THE OREGON TRAIL

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## Chapter I

### The Oregon Trail from Independence to Fort Walla Walla

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#### From Independence to Fort Laramie

**B**Y 1832, Independence, Mo., had become the point of departure for nearly all the western expeditions. James Otis, in his *Antoine of Oregon* and *Martha of California*, describes the little frontier town:

"Independence was much like a trading post, save that there were no blockhouses; but the log tavern had the appearance of a building put up to resist an attack, and the brick houses surrounding it were made with heavy walls in which were more than one loop-hole for defense.

"The idea that the settlement was a frontier post was heightened by the number of Indians to be seen, while their scrawny ponies were tied here and there in every available place.

"There were the wretched Kansans, only half covered with their greasy, torn blankets; Shawnees, decked out in calicoes and fanciful stuff; Foxes, with their shaved heads and painted faces; and here and there a Cheyenne sporting his war bonnet of feathers.

"Ellen and I had fancied we would see something very new and wonderful at Independence, and yet, while everything was strange and there was much to attract one's attention, it was not so very different from other settlements through which we had passed.

"There was, however, a constant bustle and confusion such as one could not see elsewhere. Enormous wagons, which Eben Jordan said belonged to the traders who went over the Santa Fe Trail, were coming into town or going out, each drawn by eight or ten mules and accompanied by Spaniards or Negroes, until one could but wonder where so many people were going.

"There were trains, much like our own, belonging to settlers who were going into Oregon, or, like ourselves, into California. Those



were halted just outside the town, until the entire settlement was literally surrounded while among them all, near the wagons of the traders as well as those of the emigrants, lounged Indians, nothing like the people I had imagined the savages to be."

The trail, as outlined by William J. Ghent, in his *The Road to Oregon*, ran as follows:

"The route from Independence, Mo., to the mouth of the Walla Walla was the original Oregon Trail. It ran through a wilderness for there was nothing along the line in 1830, not even a cabin. The real journey began at the settlement on the Missouri known as Independence, the point of departure for those traversing the Oregon Trail.

"From Independence, this frontier town, 10 miles east of the present Kansas City, it followed the Sante Fe Trail through the near-by town of Westport, past the Shawnee Mission, and on to a point near the present town of Gardner, Kans., for 40 miles.

"Here the roads parted. The Oregon Trail ran to the northwest, crossed the Kansas River, and continuing in a northwestward course reached the Platte in the vicinity of Grand Island. Thence it followed the south bank of the Platte to the forks, ascended the South Platte for some miles, crossed it, and ran to the North Platte. Along the south bank of this stream it continued to Fort Laramie.

"Its course was dictated by the contour of the country, the drainage, herbage, and forestation. Ridges must be surmounted on their easiest grades, streams crossed at their safest fords, and at distances averaging from 15 to 25 miles there must be fuel for camp fires, grass for the livestock, and pure water for both man and beast."

Perhaps the most hazardous aspect of all this valiant undertaking was the fording of the rivers. From several sources have been gathered accounts of the dangers and difficulties.

The location of the main ford of the Kansas is disputed. The upper fords would seem to have been more generally used in the earlier days; but after 1844, when a ferry was established at the Topeka site by two half-breeds named Papin, this lower crossing seems to have been the favored one.

"Next morning we reached the Kansas River and found the water already so high that there was nothing to do but to ferry over our wagons in a flatboat. It was a hard task to make the journey back and forth across that muddy stream, which was at least 250 yards wide, when we could carry only one wagon at a time." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

"The ferry boats were nothing more than square, shallow boxes, which the Indians pushed across by poles after the cargo of wagons had been put on board." (Otis: *Martha of California*.)

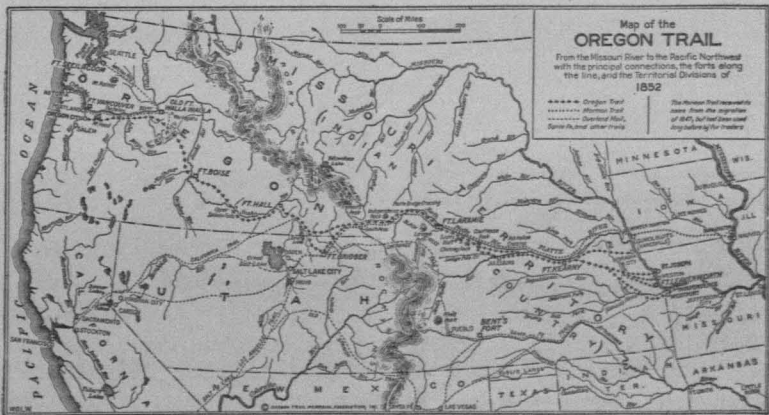


One of the most difficult crossings along the trail was the ford at Big Soldier Creek.

"Crossing the Big Soldier Creek was difficult because the banks are very steep and it is impossible to drive either mules or oxen down to the bed of the stream while attached to the wagon.

"We were forced to unyoke the oxen and unharness the mules, after which we let the wagon down by means of ropes with four men to steer the tongue of the cart.

"The ford was shallow, but on the other side the banks loomed in front of us like the sides of a cliff. In order to get even the lightest wagon to the top, we had to yoke all the oxen in one team, and even then every man of us put his shoulder to the tailboard, pushing and straining as we forced the heavy vehicle straight into the air, as one might say." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)



The Big Vermillion Ford was difficult because the bed of the river was soft and yielding.

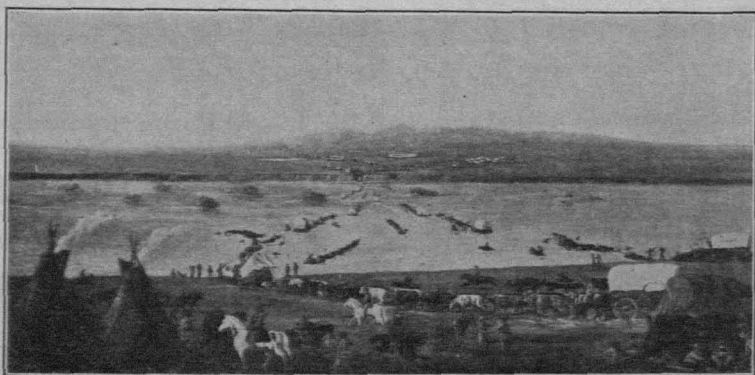
"The banks of this stream were steep and the channel muddy, affording such difficult footing for the animals that we were forced to hew down many small trees and lop off large quantities of branches to fill up the bed of the river before wagons could be hauled across. All this occupied so much time that after arriving at the opposite bank we traveled only 1 mile before it was necessary to make camp." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"At the Big Blue the emigrants found a raging torrent, with a number of large whirlpools. The practice was first to determine the proper landing place on the opposite banks and then to start four or five guides, each on the downstream side of an ox, to lead the way."

"Minto and his ox plunged in, but before the youth could get to the beast's head, a whirlpool sucked them both under. No sooner did the boy come to the surface than he was swept away to the next whirlpool and again carried down. Under the water he felt something touch his side, and reaching for it found it to be the back of his ox. Holding on as he came to the surface, he saw that the animal was now successfully breasting the current, and after being thrice given up for lost he got safely to shore." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

Crossing the Platte River is mentioned in every record as a crucial point in the expedition.

"Along this old stream the Oregon Trail wound its way for nearly 500 miles. The travelers found it in dry seasons a mere trickle of water among sandy shoals and in rainy spells a roaring current of



Crossing the South Fork of the Platte River. Drawn by W. H. Jackson, 1866.  
(Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

muddy liquid. It abounded in quicksands, and therefore was difficult to ford.

"Along the south bank of this river the wagons headed westward. Here the prairie ceased and the plains began." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

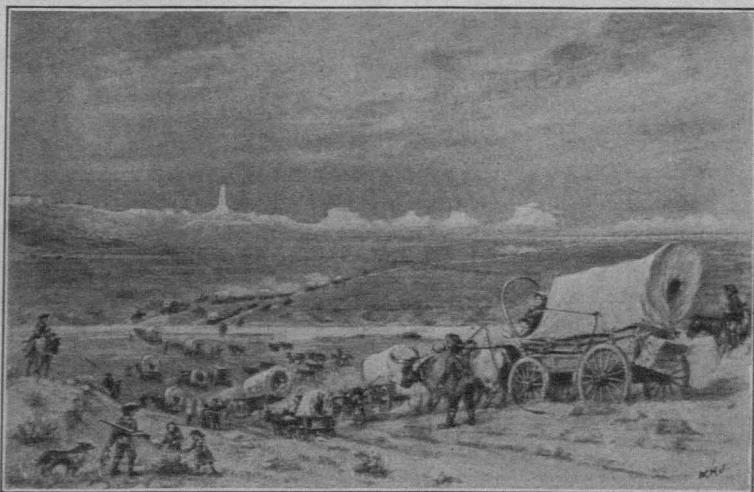
"Fording a river was usually tiresome, and sometimes dangerous. I remember fording the Loup Fork of the Platte with a large number of wagons fastened together with ropes and chains so that if a wagon got into trouble the teams in front would help to pull it out. The quicksand would cease to sustain the wheels so suddenly that the wagon would drop a few inches with a jolt, then down again it would go, up and down, precisely as if the wagons were passing over a rough corduroy road that 'nearly jolted the life out of us,' as the womenfolk said after it was over, and no wonder, for the river at

this point was half a mile wide." (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

Many points of interest along the trail have been recorded by emigrants. Where the Platte cuts through the highlands into the plains, near the present site of Bridgeport, Nebr., the great Court House Rock looms up in that strange conformation of landscape about which all travelers have so much to say.

"Its walls so nearly resemble masonry, and its shape an architectural design, that if seen in an inhabited country it would be supposed to be some colossal edifice, deserted and partially in ruins." (Edwin Bryant: *What I Saw in California*.)

"'It resembled anything more than a courthouse,' wrote Sir Richard Burton, August 13, 1860, 'looking more like an irregular



Approaching Chimney Rock along the North Platte. From a sketch by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

pyramid,' and to Palmer, the matter-of-fact agriculturist, it had the 'unpractical appearance of a haystack with a pole running far above the top.'" (Sir Richard Burton: *English Traveler*. See also Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

"Not long after crossing the Platte we had a first glimpse of that enormous mass which travelers speak of as Court House Rock, which those who have seen both say it looks from a distance not unlike the Capitol at Washington. A few miles farther on we saw another huge pile, called Chimney Rock." (Otis: *Martha of California*.)

Some 10 or 12 miles on from Court House Rock is Chimney Rock, which could be seen 40 miles away. Some of the travelers estimated it to be 300 feet high. Some 20 miles beyond Chimney Rock, near

the town of Gering, Nebr., is Scott's Bluff, now one of the national monuments. It is nestled in the North Platte Valley and has been cut out by erosion from the original rock, just as Court House Rock and Chimney Rock have been. Mitchell Pass runs through the bluff and has been used as a trail for emigrants since the Astor Fur Co. camped near its base in 1812.

"In the bad lands, at its north base, erosion has bared the fossil remains of mammoth turtles, the three-toed horse, the Miocene camel, and various other mammals of prehistoric age." (National Park Service: Glimpses of Our National Monuments.)

When Fort Laramie was reached an important milestone in the journey was noted.

"Fort Laramie, on the banks of the Laramie River, surrounded by the Black Hills and with the beautiful Laramie Peak as a background, seemed to the pioneers a very wonderful place.

"Yet it was made only of adobe; thick walls about twice the height of a man, built in a square about half the size of a city block. Within were several tiny 1-room houses where the chief trader and his clerks lived. There were many lodges of friendly Indians without the fort who swarmed about a caravan of pioneers looking for a chance to trade for food." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"Forty-eight days after leaving Independence we came to Fort Laramie, which is more like a trading post than like a fortification.

"There were scores upon scores of savages, loitering around outside the walls, gambling, racing horses, bartering furs, or gorging themselves with half-cooked meat, while here and there could be seen the noisy trappers, some dressed fancifully after the fashion of the Indians and others decked out in buckskin clothing.

"There were boasting hunters who swaggered around, peering curiously under our wagon covers when we had taken refuge there, and all around, corralled or feeding near at hand, were cattle and ponies without number." (Otis: Martha of California.)

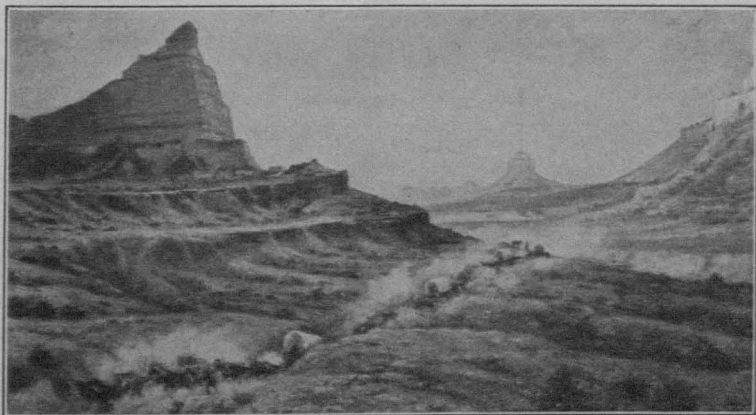
From Fort Laramie to Fort Bridger was the next section of the trail.

"From Fort Laramie the trail diverged somewhat from the North Platte River but reached it again near the present city of Casper, Wyo. Crossing the North Platte it ran southwest to the Sweetwater, which it ascended to the main range of the Rocky Mountains. It traversed South Pass, crossed the Green River, and during the earlier years turned southward to Fort Bridger. Later most of the Oregonians used the Sublette and Lauder cutoffs." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"The famous Oregon Trail was really no trail at all in 1844—that is, after Fort Laramie was passed. Along sandy levels the caravan could follow the ruts made by Doctor Whitman's migration the year before. But when they were led over mountains of broken rock, across boiling rivers gashed out of solid stone, or along some hideous precipice there was no trace left of the precious passing, and each wagon shifted for itself.

"The country west of Fort Laramie was known as the Great American Desert. The trail led for the most part along the North Platte, over ground so rough and alkaline that the cattle all began to suffer from sore feet." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon.*)

"The caravan had now left the Platte River Trail and was actually entering the gigantic rise of the Rocky Mountains. It was a coun-



Scott's Bluff. From a sketch by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

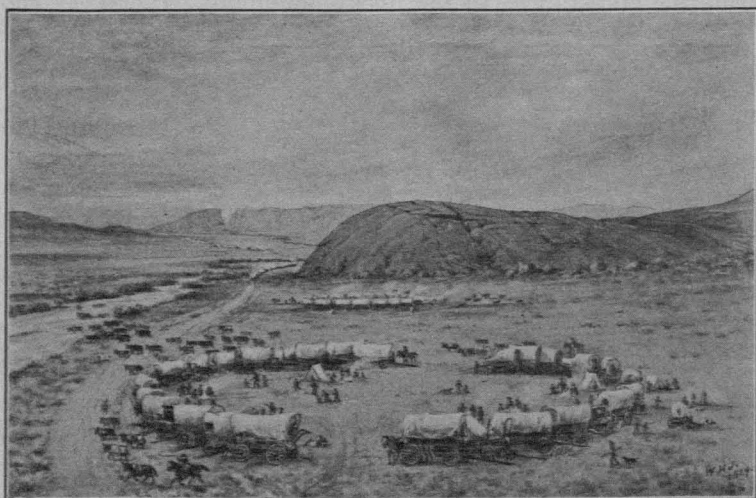
try of marvelous beauty with huge snow-capped peaks lifting their heads, one after another, from the sky line as they pushed ever westward and westward. Awful canyons obstructed the trail. Strange rock forms of every color rose to right and left." (Morrow: *On to Oregon.*)

The trail rounded Independence Rock, one of the most famous natural phenomena in the West. This rock is of gray granite, standing in an open plain. It is one-eighth of a mile long, 6 or 8 rods wide, and rises about 60 or 70 feet above the plain. The beautiful Sweetwater flows along its south side, leaving a strip of some 20 or 30 feet of grassy plain for a roadway. Father de Smet called it, from the number of inscribed names that it bore, the "Great Register of the Desert."



"After leaving Fort Laramie the first thing that particularly attracted my attention was a perfect mountain of rock, fully a hundred feet in height, father told me, which stood near the Sweetwater River, between the ranges of mountains which border the Sweetwater Valley.

"It was an 'imposing work of nature,' so Colonel Russell said; but to me the most interesting thing about it was that the first celebration of the Fourth of July by a company of people bound to Oregon was held at the place. On the rocks, as high up as one can see, are a multitude of names, many, many hundreds, some painted, and others cut into the hard stone by those who had visited the place."



The Sweetwater River and Devil's Gate, at Independence Rock. Sketch by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

"Another thing about Independence Rock which causes me to remember it even more than as 'an imposing work of nature,' was that near it one could pick up all the saleratus he needed, for there are veritable ponds of it, where, so father said, water filled with the salts had evaporated leaving the saleratus itself in pools which looked as if made of milk.

"Next morning we came upon a great gap in the mountain wall, which is called the Devil's Gate; through it flows a beautiful stream, on the banks of which we found wild currants and gooseberries in greatest abundance." (Otis: Martha of California.)

William Clayton, in his journal of June, 1847, describes the Sweetwater River, and Chittenden tells of its flow through Devil's Gate.

"At 12.30 we halted on the main branch of the Sweetwater, having traveled 11 miles. The river here is about 3 rods wide, 3 feet deep, and the current very swift. The water is clear and as cold as the snow which lies on its banks in places 6 or 8 feet deep. This is a lovely place for a camp ground, there being an abundance of good rich grass about 8 inches high and plenty of willows for fuel." (William Clayton's Journal.)

"Up the Sweetwater ran the trail to Devil's Gate and round it to the south. This remarkable feature is a granite ridge through which the river flows. It is about 400 feet deep, with sides nearly vertical and less than 300 feet apart in the widest part. The traveler who takes the trouble to leave the road for a mile or so and walk out to the summit of the Devil's Gate is rewarded with a prospect such as no other point on the trail affords. Beneath him is the tremendous chasm through the solid granite, at the bottom of which courses the gentle Sweetwater." (Chittenden: *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*.)

South Pass was probably considered the most important stopping place along the trail. Here the weary travelers paused for a day or two to rest before entering the region of the Rockies.

"We are now nearing the crest of the continent. The climb was so gradual, however, as to be hardly observable. The summit of the Rocky Mountain, through the South Pass, presents a wide, open, undulating country. The pass offers, therefore, an easy gateway to the West." (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

William Clayton describes it in his journal as follows:

"It is now a certainty that we are yet 2 miles short of the dividing ridge of the South Pass by the road. This ridge divides the headquarters of the Atlantic from those of the Pacific, and although not the highest land we have traveled over it may with propriety be said to be near the summit of the South Pass. Two miles beyond the divide we arrived at the headwaters of the Green River, and although the stream is small we have the satisfaction of seeing the current run west instead of east."

Fort Bridger, which was built to furnish emigrants with supplies and to repair their wagons, was established in 1843. It was located about 400 miles from Fort Laramie in a pleasant dell in the great Green Valley.

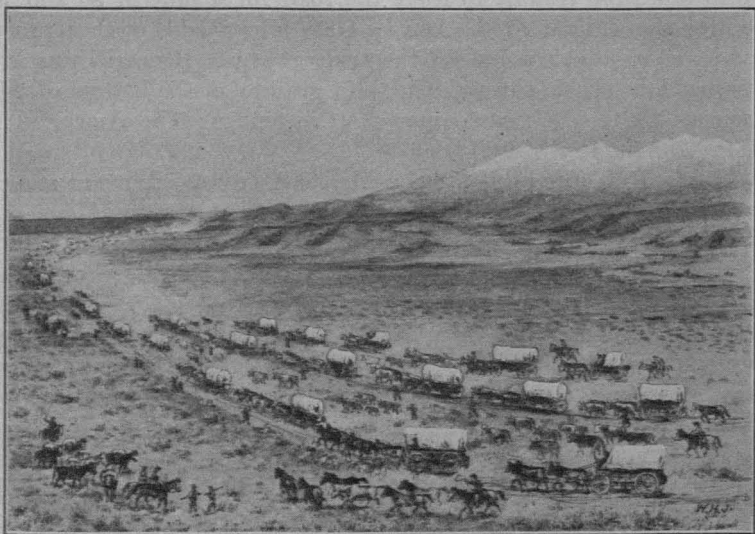
In that year a southern detour from the Oregon Trail was made in order to pass Bridger's newly built trading post. This in later years came to be known as the Overland Trail.

Bridger's establishment was "a shabby concern," writes General Palmer.



"The buildings are two or three unstable log cabins, rudely constructed, and bearing but a faint resemblance to habitable houses." (Bryant: What I Saw in California.)

"Moreover, as the diaries reveal, Bridger was seldom there; his partner, Col. Louis Vasquez, was quite as frequently absent, and at times, even in the height of the emigrant season, the place was totally deserted. The Mormon pioneers of 1847, who had met Bridger going east on the Big Sandy, reached the 'Fort' only to find the blacksmith shop destroyed by fire and apparently nothing being done to restore it. Though the post had been built to furnish the emigrants with supplies and to repair their wagons, the wandering im-



South Pass, the Oregon Trail of 1852. Sketch by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of The Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

pulse of the two owners kept them moving about when they were most needed at home." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"They turned to the southwest toward Fort Bridger, a trading post owned by the well-known trader and guide, Jim Bridger.

"Fort Bridger, a little log building on Black Fork Creek, yielded a scant supply of flour and bacon to the immigrants who stopped there. A saddle horse would buy a scanty supply of flour and bacon.

"This fort, like many another, is little more than a trading post and was built by two old trappers who had turned traders. The largest building was made of adobe and served as a storehouse, while the others were flimsy shelters built from time to time to serve the needs of visitors." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

## From Fort Bridger to Fort Hall

From Fort Bridger the general course of the trail was northward to Soda Springs, Idaho, and then northward to old Fort Hall.

"Soda Springs was a bright and lovely place. The abundance of soda water, including the intermittent gushing of the so-called Steamboat Springs, the beautiful fir and cedar-covered hills, the huge pile of red or brown sinter, the result of fountains once active but then dry, all of these together with the river lent a charm to its wild beauty and made the spot a notable one." (Morrow: *We Must March.*)

"The month of August had well set in when we came to Soda Springs. They are small hills or mounds standing at the right of the trail near a grove of cedars and pines, while the water that has oozed out of them in the past has formed a solid crust of soda for miles around so hard that one may walk on it. The liquid soda is warm and sparkling as it comes to the surface, and when it has been led some distance away where it may be cooled it is as pleasing a drink as one can find in any of the shops in the East, for it is the true soda water made by God himself." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon.*)

"Fort Hall was erected in July, 1834, by Wyeth while on his way to Oregon with the missionaries Jason and Daniel Lee. It was a general refitting and reforming place, and it was also a place where men changed their minds as to their destination. Many of those who had all along thought they were going to Oregon now decided in favor of California, and many of the California bound here decided they preferred Oregon." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon.*)

"At Fort Hall I saw the first establishment in that region of a United States Army post.

"Here at Fort Hall, early in August, 1849, a small garrison was left and the remainder passed on along the trail to Fort Boise and the Grande Ronde, whence it proceeded by the Umatilla and the south bank of the Columbia." (Major Cross, acting quartermaster, in his account of the expedition.)

"They reached the high valley formed by the joining of the Port Neuf with the Snake River. It was dusk when the wagons went into camp within a stone's throw of the 12-foot log stockade that surrounded the fort. It was still early in the evening, and the gates were wide open, with Indians, traders, and immigrants strolling in and out. Many lights shone from the low buildings that surrounded the circular inner court. On the left, as one entered the gate, was the trading store. A long counter ran down the center of the room, behind which stood a couple of white men clad in black suits with brass buttons." (Morrow: *On to Oregon.*)

## From Fort Hall to Fort Boise

From Fort Hall the trail followed the south bank of the Snake to the present Glenn's Ferry in Owyhee County. Crossing the Snake at Glenn's Ferry it ran to the neighborhood of the present Boise River, then down the Boise to its mouth, where it again crossed the Snake at Fort Boise.

"They entered the valley of the Snake River which, runs east to west across what is now the State of Idaho, then turns northward to empty finally into the Columbia. Imagine a very wide valley with mountains to the south and to the north, all topped with snow. Cut through this valley is a mighty chasm or canyon in which flows the Snake River. The walls are not very high at the eastern beginning, but they grow higher and higher, the river flowing deeper and deeper until in places they are actually a mile high.

"The trail kept for the most part on the crest of the canyon but led at length to the edge and then down a difficult trail to the river, which rushed below at a depth of many hundreds of feet. It looked gloomy and dark, but it was sheltered from the winds. There was more light in the river bottom than appeared from the top." (Morrow: On to Oregon.)

"The Snake River flows over three immense cataracts, the American, the Shoshone, and Salmon Falls, one quite as awe inspiring as the other.

"We slept that night with the roaring cataract drowning all other noises, and next morning we were as wet as if we had been exposed to a smart shower. The wind changed about midnight and the spray from the falls was blown into the tents as well as under the wagon covers until we were so uncomfortable that sleep left us at an early hour." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

Ice Springs was one of the great surprises of the trail to the emigrants. As they approached South Pass near the present site of Rongis, Wyo., they came upon a formation of transparent ice slightly below the surface of a piece of swampy ground, which with a little digging they brought to the surface.

"Somewhere in this vicinity was a grassy swamp, where we dug down about 18 inches and came to a bed of solid clear ice. We dug up enough to put into water kegs and enjoyed the luxury of ice water all that hot day while we traveled through the famous South Pass of the Rocky Mountains." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

Another of the surprises that awaited the emigrants in the Snake country were the Hot Springs, which were near a favorite camping place on the trail.

"On the road to the Oregon country within a mile of the trail we found the Hot Springs. There are five or six of these springs,

from which water bubbles up so hot that one may boil meat in it without need of fire. We boiled some pemmican in one of the springs and made up balls of meal dough and lowered them into the water by strands of plaited grass, cooking them as dumplings are cooked in a stew of meat." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"John had clambered half an hour over the rocks when he observed that in spite of the bitter wind the air was warmer. Patches of green grass appeared and low-growing willows. He followed the line of willows, slid over a great black rock, and gasped with surprise.

"He was standing at the edge of a spring, a spring so hot that it sent a blanket of steam up to meet the driving sleet; a spring so hot that the air all about it was that of summer and the sleet was turned to rain." (Morrow: On to Oregon.)

"We arrived at the Grande Ronde, which is a beautiful valley among the mountains where grass can be found in abundance.

"There in that excellent camping place we remained two days, the cattle meanwhile feeding greedily, as if realizing that it was necessary they add to their strength in order to make the journey over the mountains." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

Out of the Grande Ronde Valley the trail led over the Blue Mountains, about a 3-day march from Fort Walla Walla.

"Refreshed by the long halt we began the climb of the Blue Mountains, where the trail led over such steep ascents that it became necessary to yoke up all our cattle to one wagon, pull it a mile or two up what was much like a cliff, and then drive the oxen back for another load, thus winning our advance with greatest difficulty and after the most severe labor, traveling no more than 7 miles in one day." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

#### From Fort Boise to Fort Walla Walla

Ten days of travel from Fort Boise usually brought the emigrants to Fort Walla Walla. Here the trail ended as far as caravans were concerned, for the journey on to Fort Vancouver was made by boat and portage.

"Fort Walla Walla was a much more substantial affair than Fort Hall. It stood near the spot where the Walla Walla River joined the Columbia. The stockade was built of driftwood logs and was oblong in shape, with bastions at the southwest and northeast corners, in which were cannon.

"Within the stockade was a corral for a hundred horses, with several houses, a trading store, and blacksmith shop.

"The houses were single room, thatched-roofed affairs, well floored, with a comfortable adobe fireplace and a glass window." (Morrow: We Must March.)

## From Fort Walla Walla to Fort Vancouver

At the Dalles on the Columbia River the early missions were established. Here the emigrants separated to continue their journey into different parts of the State, there to take up their claims and to settle in their homes.

"On the 29th of September we arrived at the end of our journey, for then we had come to The Dalles, or the Methodist Missions, beyond which no wagon had ever passed. Here the water rushed through a long narrow channel of rock with so swift a current that when the water is high even boats propelled by steam can not stem it.

"The missionaries sent out by the Methodist Church have built a few dwellings, a schoolhouse, and a barn, besides planting the surrounding land to crops by the help of the Indians.

"On leaving Independence there were in our train 30 cows, 40 oxen, 20 horses, and 10 mules. We arrived at The Dalles with 21 cows, 32 oxen, 17 horses, and 6 mules. Every member of the company arrived at the journey's end in good health, which is more than can be said of other emigrants." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

Some of the travelers went on to Fort Vancouver, which was located on a beautiful fertile slope about 2 miles from the Columbia River. A word picture of this fort is given by Morrow in "We Must March."

"Mount Hood stood, a snow-capped sentinel, 60 miles to the east; the wonderful Willamette Valley stretched southward. The fort itself covered about 8 acres surrounded by a log stockade 20 feet high. Inside were over 40 buildings, with the chief factor's house in the center.

"The vice regent of the region was Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the post. Trappers, missionaries, and emigrants found him, while unflinchingly loyal to the Hudson Bay Co.'s policy and interests, most generous and helpful to them in their need. But he steadfastly discouraged American settlement north of the Columbia, and such was the weight of his influence that until 1844 no one attempted to disregard it." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

## Chapter II

### On the Trail

A Day with the Cow Column of 1843

**T**HE EARLY emigrants came from all parts of the country—North, South, East, and Middle West.

They formed a long line of heroic pioneers pressing forward in the face of every obstacle to reach their goal. John Applegate, writing of 1843, the year in which he commanded the cow column of the emigration, thus describes his company:

“No other race of men with the means at their command would undertake so great a journey, none save these could successfully perform it, with no previous preparation, relying only on the fertility of their own invention to devise the means to overcome each danger and difficulty as it arose. They have undertaken to perform with slow-moving oxen a journey of 2,000 miles. The way lies over trackless wastes, wide and deep rivers, ragged and lofty mountains, and is beset with hostile savages. Yet, whether it were a deep river with no tree upon its banks, a rugged defile where even a loose horse could not pass, a hill too steep for him to climb, or a threatened attack of an enemy, they are always found ready and equal to the occasion, and always conquerors. May we not call them men of destiny? They are people changed in no essential particulars from their ancestors, who have followed closely on the footsteps of the receding savage from the Atlantic seaboard to the great valley of the Mississippi.”

No one can enumerate the motives which animated this great exodus, but some of them are easily understood. Under the stress of the panic of 1837, in which many families lost their entire fortunes, a movement westward was determined upon.

Poverty and the opportunity offered for free holdings influenced many. Illness spurred others to try a new climate for their ailments. Young men who longed for adventure and older men who desired a wider field of activity were all attracted to this western country.

Promises of unfailing harvests and the assurance that wheat and peaches would be a sure crop led many tillers of the soil to venture on the trail. Naturally the mother with her children accompanied the head of the household when he decided to join a caravan of home seekers, however much she might deplore the undertaking.

From 1841 to 1848 a vast number of these travelers passed over the trail in large and small caravans, some to Oregon and others to California. Of these the Marcus Whitman train is perhaps most noted, since it is designated in the annals of the trail as the "Great Expedition." Whitman was the promoter and director of the journey, according to Applegate's account, which is quoted by Ghent in *The Road to Oregon* and which is designated as "A Day with the Cow Column."

"It is 4 o'clock a. m.; the sentinels on duty have discharged their rifles—the signal that the hours of sleep are over—and every wagon and tent is pouring forth its night tenants, and slow-kindling smokes begin largely to rise and float away in the morning air. Sixty men start from the corral, spreading as they make through the vast herd of cattle and horses that make a semicircle around the encampment, the most distant perhaps 2 miles away.

"The herders pass to the extreme verge and carefully examine for trails beyond to see that none of the animals have strayed or been stolen during the night. This morning no trails led beyond the outside animals in sight, and by 5 o'clock the herders begin to contract the great, moving circle, and the well-trained animals move slowly toward camp, clipping here and there a thistle or a tempting bunch of grass on the way.

"In about an hour 5,000 animals are close up to the encampment, and the teamsters are busy selecting their teams and driving them inside the corral to be yoked. The corral is a circle 100 yards deep, formed with wagons connected strongly with each other, the wagon in front by its tongue and ox chains. It is a strong barrier that the most vicious ox can not break, and in case of an attack of the Sioux would be no contemptible intrenchment."

"From 6 to 7 o'clock is a busy time; breakfast is to be eaten, the tents struck, the wagons loaded, and the teams yoked and brought up in readiness to be attached to their respective wagons. All know when, at 7 o'clock, the signal to march sounds, that those not ready to take their proper places in the line of march must fall into the dusty rear for the day.

"The company settled down to the business of getting to Oregon with the least delay. It became a good-natured, cheerful, and orderly company. The rules made for conduct were enforced, and a court of elders tried and sentenced the occasional delinquents.

"There are 60 wagons. They have been divided into 15 divisions or platoons of four wagons each, and each platoon is entitled to lead in its turn. The leading platoon to-day will be the rear one tomorrow, and will bring up the rear unless some teamster, through indolence or negligence, has lost his place in the line, and is con-



demned to that uncomfortable post. It is within 10 minutes of 7; the corral, but now a strong barricade, is everywhere broken, the teams being attached to the wagons. The women and children have taken their places in them.

"It is on the stroke of 7; the rush to and fro, the cracking of whips, the loud command to oxen, and what seemed to be the inextricable confusion of the last 10 minutes has ceased. Fortunately every one has been found and every teamster is at his post. The clear notes of a trumpet sound in the front, the pilot and his guards mount their horses, the leading divisions of the wagons move out of the encampment and take up the line of march, the rest fall into their places with the precision of clockwork, until the spot so lately full of life sinks back into that solitude that seems to reign over the broad plain and rushing river as the caravan draws its lazy length toward the distant El Dorado.

"The pilot (a borderer who has passed his life on the verge of civilization and has been chosen to the post of leader from his knowledge of the savage and his experience in travel through roadless wastes) stands ready, in the midst of his pioneers and aids, to mount and lead the way. Ten or fifteen young men, not to-day on duty, form another cluster. They are ready to start on a buffalo hunt, are well mounted and well armed, as they need be, for the unfriendly Sioux have driven the buffalo out of the Platte and the hunters must ride 15 or 20 miles to reach them. The cow drivers are hastening, as they get ready, to the rear of their charge to collect and prepare them for the day's march.

The day's march is over and preparations for the night are made.

"But time passes; the watch is set for the night; the council of old men has been broken up, and each has returned to his own quarter; the flute has whispered its last lament to the deepening night; the violin is silent, and the dancers have dispersed; enamored youths have whispered a tender 'good night' in the ear of blushing maidens or stolen a kiss from the lips of some future bride—for Cupid here, as elsewhere, has been busy bringing together congenial hearts, and among these simple people he alone is consulted in forming the marriage tie. Even the doctor and the pilot have finished their confidential interview and have separated for the night. All is hushed and repose from the fatigues of the day, save the vigilant guard and the wakeful leader, who still has cares upon his mind that forbid sleep. He hears the 10 o'clock relief taking post and the 'all well' report of the returned guard; the night deepens, yet he seeks not the needed repose. . . . The last care of the day being removed, and the last duty performed, he too seeks the rest that will enable him to go through the same routine to-morrow."

## The Outfit

Otis, in his Martha of California, describes an outfit for 30 men, women, and children. There were five well-made carts, with straight bodies and sideboards, and tents in abundance.

"I surely must tell you about that wagon before setting down anything about the journey. It was what is known as a Conestoga, and one may see many of the same kind on the Santa Fe Trail. Imagine a boxlike cart nearly as long as an ordinary bedroom and so wide that I could stretch myself out at full length across the body. The top and sides were covered with Osnaburg sheeting, which is cloth made of flax or tow. . . . It makes excellent wagon covers, for the rain can not soak through the cloth, and it is so cheap that one can well afford to use it in double thickness, which serves to keep out the wind as well as the rain.

"The front of the wagon and a small windowlike space at the end were left open, but could be securely closed with curtains that buttoned at the side. . . .

"Underneath the cart were hung buckets, the churn, lanterns, water kegs, and farming tools.

"Around the inside of the wagon were hung such things as we might need often during the journey. There were pots and pans, towels, clothing, baskets, and two rifles, for father believed weapons might be required when we came upon disagreeable savages or if game was found within shooting distance.

"Our beds were laid in the bottom of the wagon and covered with bedclothes to save them from being badly soiled, as would be likely if we slept upon them at night and cooked and ate and did the housework on them during the daytime."

Five sheet-iron stoves with boilers were carried on a small platform at the rear of each wagon.

"Our cookstove," says Otis, "was set up at the rear end of the wagon, where it could be pushed out on a small shelf fastened to the rear axle when we wanted to use it. . . .

"We did not carry many dishes, and nearly everything of the kind we used was of metal, such as tin or iron. We carried plates, cups, and basins of tinware."

The plainsman's dress was a red flannel shirt with the tails outside of buckskin trousers and a wide leather belt from which a knife was hung. Leather boots to the knees completed the costume. Kit Carson, the famous frontiersman, is thus described by Morrow, in his *We Must March*:

"A white man, his gun across his knees, was approaching at an easy trot. He was a keen-looking man of less than 30, with fine blue eyes beneath level brows and a thin clean-shaven jaw. He wore

fringed buckskins. A string of Indian scalps hung from the pommel of his saddle. He swung easily off his horse as he spoke, 'My name is Kit Carson.'"

Some of the emigrants carried a sufficient amount of food to last the entire journey.

"Our supply of food consisted of flour in a double sack, butter packed in the center of the flour, enough to last 500 miles; fruit in abundance; dried pumpkins; a little jerked beef, not too salt; home-made yeast cakes, for light bread all the way baked in a tin reflector. The butter in part melted and mingled with the flour, yet it did not matter much, as the 'shortcake' that resulted made us glad the mishap had occurred. Besides, did we not have plenty of fresh butter from the milk of our own cows, churned every day in the can by the jostling of the wagon?" (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

"While the men were hewing trees, the women took advantage of the opportunity to churn, and at noon we had fresh butter on our bread, which was indeed a luxury." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

At Fort Laramie the emigrants expected to buy food, but they found the prices exorbitant; flour was \$40 a barrel and sugar \$1.50 a pound.

#### Management of the Expedition

The emigrants chose a court of elders who tried and sentenced delinquents.

"The 'unwritten law' of the plains," says Meeker, "was a tacit consent that all grievances, misdemeanors, or accusations of crime must be laid before a jury of elderly men, and no one should take the law into his own hands—in a word, no mob violence. When a crime was committed, Squire Mulhall soon succeeded in bringing together several of the older pioneers, who resolved to take immediate action; swift and adequate justice was administered, and the incident was almost immediately closed. This code of action prevailed all along the line; no one was punished without a hearing, but there were no delays on technicalities or any appeals. (Meeker: *Kate Mulhall*.)

Almost like a trial in a court of law were the hearings before this tribunal.

"Its sessions were usually held on days when the caravan was not moving. It first took the state of the little commonwealth into consideration, revised or repealed rules defective or obsolete, and enacted such others as the exigencies seemed to require. The commonwealth being cared for, it next resolved itself into a court to hear and settle private disputes and grievances. The offender and the aggrieved appeared before it, witnesses were examined, and the

parties were heard by themselves and sometimes by counsel. The judges being thus made fully acquainted with the case, and being in no way influenced or cramped by technicalities, decided all cases according to their merits.

"There was but little use for lawyers before this court, for no plea was entertained which was calculated to hinder or defeat the ends of justice. Many of these judges have since won honors in higher spheres. They have aided to establish on the broad basis of right and universal liberty two pillars of our great Republic in the Occident. Some of the young men who appeared before them as advocates have themselves sat upon the highest judicial tribunals, commanded armies, been governors of States, and taken high position in the Senate of the Nation.

"To-day an extra session of the council is being held to settle a dispute that does not admit of delay between a proprietor and a young man who has undertaken to do a man's service on the journey for bed and board. Many such engagements exist, and much interest is taken in the manner in which this high court, from which there is no appeal, will define the rights of each party in such engagements. The council was a high court in the most exalted sense. It was a senate composed of the ablest and most respected fathers of the emigration. It exercised both legislative and judicial powers, and its laws and decisions proved it equal and worthy of the high trust reposed in it." (Applegate: A Day with the Cow Column.)

The following instance of the fighting of a duel on the plains is cited by Parker:

"I will relate an occurrence which took place, near evening, as a specimen of frontier life. A hunter, who goes technically by the name of the great bully of the mountains, mounted his horse with a loaded rifle and challenged any Frenchman, American, Spaniard, or Dutchman to fight him in single combat. Kit Carson, an American, told him if he wished to die, he (Carson) would accept the challenge. Shunar defied him. Carson mounted his horse and with a loaded pistol rushed into close contact, and both almost at the same instant fired. Carson's ball entered Shunar's hand, came out at the wrist, and passed through the arm above the elbow. Shunar's ball passed over the head of Carson, and while he went for another pistol, Shunar begged that his life might be spared." (Parker: Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains.)

#### Discomforts, Privations, and Dangers

In the years from 1843 to 1857 the army of emigrants numbered at least 350,000. A column 500 miles long in unbroken ranks moved along the trail during the year of 1852. There were

countless discomforts and privations to be endured from the drought, rain, heat or cold, hunger, thirst, and lack of fuel. The records of their sufferings help us to appreciate the fortitude and courage of this band of pioneers.

"The dust was intolerable. In calm weather it would rise so thick at times that the lead team of oxen could not be seen from the wagon. Like a London fog, it seemed thick enough to cut. Then, again, the steady flow of wind through the South Pass would hurl the dust and sand like fine hail, sometimes with force enough to sting the face and hands.

"When Snake River was reached, and in fact even before that, the heat again became oppressive, the dust stifling. In some places we could see the water of the Snake winding through to lava gorges; but we could not reach it, as the river ran in an inaccessible depth." (Meeker and Driggs: Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail.)

"During the first day's journey the wagon jolted over the roads roughly, making it necessary to hold firmly to the seat lest I be thrown off, and it became wearisome to sit so long in one position.

"Mother, who stretched out upon a bed in the bottom of the wagon when she was tired of sitting upright, did not weary so soon of this kind of traveling." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"The trail was heavy. The rain had so softened the ground that the wagon wheels sank several inches into it, and many times before nightfall we were forced to hew trees and cut large quantities of brush in order to fill in the depressions in the road where the water stood deep and the bottom was much like a bog.

"On the 17th day of July we felt the first frost of the season, and two days after we passed over the dividing ridge which separates the waters flowing into the Atlantic from those which find their way into the Pacific Ocean. That night the air was filled with frost, and we who had been sleeping with blankets over us were glad to wrap ourselves in whatsoever we could lay hands upon to prevent our blood from being chilled." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"May weather had been beautiful, and the caravan had made an average of 15 miles a day. But June came in wet and the bottom soon fell out of the prairie roads. The huge prairie schooners were as helpless in the mud as whales would have been. After three days of downpour the caravan, instead of traveling in close formation, was strung out over 10 miles of oozing road with every driver of a wagon standing helpless beside a helpless team." (Morrow: On to Oregon.)

"The earlier emigrants, who made little provision for the journey, were often forced, when supplies failed, to make use of anything that would sustain life. Horses, mules, and oxen were sacrificed,

even at the risk of safety of the expedition. Along the Snake River salmon could sometimes be obtained from the Indians.

"Bidwell tells the story of a kind of meal sold by the California Indians to Fremont's men in 1845. 'It was rich, spicy, and pleasant to the taste,' he writes, 'and the demand grew until the Indians became careless in its manufacture, and the consumers began to discover in it legs, wings, and heads of grasshoppers. It was simply grasshopper meal.'" (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"The next day's march ended at Rock Creek, and although the traveling was quite as hard for beasts and men we made 24 miles, urged to most severe exertions because our store of food was consumed rapidly.

"I knew we could not hope to find game, and therefore we must go hungry until arriving at the trading post on the Snake River known as Fort Boise, while the animals would have great difficulty in finding grass. The country was stripped as bare of green as though a fire had passed over it, and many were the distressing tales I could have told of emigrants who had perished miserably by starvation while trying to make this portion of the long journey." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"On this night, within about a dozen miles of the Narrows, we came upon Colonel Kearny's soldiers returning from their long march, having come through South Pass. Somewhat of the hardships they had encountered and which we must face could be guessed at by looking at those seasoned troopers who appeared to be completely exhausted by long riding and scanty rations. No less than 20 of the men were on the sick list and at least a hundred others looked as if they soon would be." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"We found our supply of food growing so small that it was decided each person should have at a single meal no more than one slice of bacon and a piece of corn bread as big as a man's hand.

"While we were pressing steadily but painfully westward, and thirsty until my tongue was parched, we heard those who were leading the train shout that we had come upon water in abundance." (Otis: Martha of California.)

Of tempests there was no lack, especially on the prairies. The storms of thunder and lightning were especially frightful because the emigrants were unprotected save for the thin cotton covering over their wagons.

"Such sharp and incessant flashes of lightning, such stunning and continuous thunder, I had never known before. The woods were completely obscured by the diagonal sheets of rain that fell with a heavy roar, and rose in spray from the ground, and the streams rose so rapidly we could hardly ford them.

"The thunder here is not like the tame thunder of the Atlantic coast. Bursting with a terrific crash directly above our heads, it roared over the boundless waste of the prairie, seeming to roll around the whole circle of the firmament with a peculiar and awful reverberation." (Francis Parkman: *The Oregon and California Trail*.)

"Before we could get the tents up and the wagons in place a terrific storm of thunder and lightning was upon us. Instantly, as it seemed, our oxen and cows were stampeded, rushing off across the prairie like wild things, and although I did my best to round them up all efforts were vain.

"Next morning before day had fully come, we saddled our horses and set out in search of the cattle. Not until noon did we succeed in getting all the stock rounded up without losing a single animal." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

The number of deaths on the trail has never been computed, but they are counted among the thousands. During the years of 1849, 1850, and 1852 the cholera was prevalent, and many emigrants succumbed to this disease and fell by the way.

"Worse than all else the dysentery made its appearance in the caravan and the doctor rode up and down the line all day long with a jug of castor oil hanging from one side of his saddle and a jug of peppermint water on the other." (Morrow: *On to Oregon*.)

"The cholera epidemic struck our moving column where the throng from the south side of the Platte began crossing. This, as I recollect, was near where the city of Kearney now stands." (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

"But on the main trail, apart from epidemic years, the record of deaths is astonishingly small. Despite all the discomforts of the journey, it was to many a reinvigorating experience.

"Probably most of those who undertook it were of sound stock, more or less inured to hardship. But there were invalids and semi-invalids among them. The change of scene and the pure, dry air of the higher altitudes wrought marvelous changes in the condition of the ailing and brought many of them to journey's end restored to sound health." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

Of all the fatalities recorded on the trail that of the Donner party is the most tragic.

"The outstanding tragedy of the trail for the year of 1847 was the fate of the Donner party in the Sierras. On the 19th of July the Donners reached the Little Sandy River, just west of South Pass. They reached Fort Bridger on July 25. Here the Donners resolved to take the new route through the Nevada-Utah deserts and around the south end of Great Salt Lake. When they reached



Truckee Lake (since called Donner Lake), snow was falling, and several attempts to proceed were blocked by increasing snowfall.

"As the party was slowly traveling through Nevada the provisions became exhausted. In mid-December a volunteer party of 15 men and women, with six days' rations, started forward to seek relief but were snowbound. At their camp four of their members died and were eaten, and later four others died, but the remainder reached the settlements." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

Beyond the bend of the Missouri River were the Indian reservations, a part of the great Indian country set apart for all time by the Government as a home for its wards.

"Our trail was straight across the Indian lands most of the way. The red men naturally resented this intrusion into their territory; but they did not at this time fight against it. Their attitude was rather one of expecting pay for the privilege of using their land, their grass, and their game." (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

James Otis tells us some of the experiences which the emigrants had in the Indian country.

"At Independence the tents had hardly been set up and the women had just got about their cooking when we were visited by a dozen or more Kansas Indians, who were about as disreputable a looking lot as can be found in the country—dirty, ill-favored red men with ragged blankets cast about them, seeming more like beggars than anything else.

"Any attempt to drive them away was useless, and it was in the highest degree necessary that sharp watch be kept else we would find much of our outfit missing after the visitors had taken their departure.

"There were the wretched Kansans only half covered with their greasy, torn blankets; Shawnees, decked out in calicoes and fanciful stuff; Foxes with their shaved heads and painted faces; and here and there a Cheyenne sporting his war bonnet of feathers." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

"As we rode down to the ford of Big Soldier Creek we saw coming down over a slight incline a band of mounted Indians, who immediately on seeing our company came forward at full speed, brandishing bows and arrows or guns, according as they were armed and yelling furiously.

"Their intention was to stampede the cattle and they rushed by me whooping and yelling in such a manner as caused a panic among our company and a stampede of our beasts.

"The oxen wheeled around in their yokes until they were so mixed up that the most expert would have found it difficult to untangle

them, while the cows, their tails straight up in the air, fled back over the trail, bellowing with fright." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"It was a Pawnee village, and in it there might have been 40 men, women, and children occupying, say, 10 tepees, or lodges, while there were so many ponies and dogs that one could hardly count them.

"The Kansas Indians make their houses about 30 feet wide and build them by sticking hickory saplings firmly into the ground and bending these to form an arch 8 to 10 feet in height. Then the tops of the saplings are bound together by willow twigs. This forms the inner framework, which is covered with bark from the linden trees. Over this another frame of saplings, also tied with willows to bind the whole together securely and prevent the coverings from being blown away during a high wind.

"Each of these lodges has one small door about 4 feet in height and 3 feet wide, while at the top of the hut is an opening for the smoke to pass out when a fire is built in the center of the floor during cold or stormy weather." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"Within an hour of sunset we came to a veritable Indian village, although there were not many of the savages living in it, and Ellen and I took advantage of this first opportunity to see the redskins in their homes.

"There were but four men, with perhaps a dozen women and children, all living in lodges made of smoke-dried skins and looking exceedingly dirty and disagreeable.

"We girls were not inclined to linger there long, although the Indians were willing we should, and when our short visit had been brought to a close they followed us, clustering around our wagons and waiting patiently for food to be thrown to them." (Otis: Martha of California.)

Irving, in Astoria, tells about the horsemanship of one of the Indian tribes.

"The travelers had again an opportunity to see and admire the equestrian habitudes and address of this hard-riding tribe. They were all mounted, man, woman, and child, for the Crows have horses in abundance, so that no one goes on foot. The children are perfect imps on horseback. Among them was one so young that he could not yet speak. He was tied on a colt of two years old, but managed the reins as if by instinct and plied the whip with true Indian prodigality. Mr. Hunt inquired the age of this infant jockey, and was answered that 'he had seen two winters.'"

The wild animals of the plains were always a source of thrilling interest, and among these the buffalo easily took first rank. John Bidwell, of the Western Emigration Society, said in 1841:

"I have seen the plain black with them for several day' journey as far as the eye could reach. They seemed to be coming northward continually from the distant plains to the Platte to get water, and would plunge in and swim across by thousands." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

Meeker gives the following graphic description of a herd of buffalo stampeding in the night:

"Well up on the Platte, but below Laramie, we had the experience of a night stampede that struck terror to the heart of man and beast.

"Suddenly there was a sound like an approaching storm. Almost instantly every animal in the corral was on its feet. The roar we heard was like that of a heavy railroad train passing at no great distance. As if by instinct, all seemed to know suddenly that it was a buffalo stampede. The tents were emptied of their inmates, the weak parts of the corral guarded, the frightened cattle looked after, and every one on the alert.

"In the darkness of the night we could see first the forms of the leaders, and then such dense masses that we could not distinguish one buffalo from another. When daylight came only a few stragglers were left." (Meeker and Driggs: Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail.)

Another stampede is recorded by Hastings:

"As the two divisions were moving along deliberately at ox speed in the usual parallel columns, the drivers were startled by a low sound to the north as of distant thunder. There was no appearance of a storm, however, in that or any other direction, and the noise grew louder and louder and was steady and uninterrupted. It soon became clear that there was a herd of buffaloes approaching and on the run. Scouring anxiously the line of hills rimming the edge of the valley the dark-brown outline of the herd was at length described and was distinctly made out with a telescope as buffaloes in violent motion and making directly for the train. The front of the line was perhaps half a mile long, and the animals were several columns deep and coming like a tornado. They had probably been stampeded by hunters and would now stop at nothing. The only apparent chance of safety was to drive ahead and get out of the range of the herd. The oxen were consequently urged into a run, and the train itself had the appearance of a stampede. Neither were they too quick, for the flying herds of the buffaloes passed but a few yards to the rear of the last wagon and were going at such a rate that to be struck by them would have been like the shock of rolling boulders of a ton's weight." (Hastings: A History of Oregon and California. See also Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

In the following paragraphs descriptions are given by Otis of an approach of buffalo, of a herd of antelope, of a herd of wild ponies, and a village of prairie dogs.

"Before the next day had fully dawned the men who were standing guard aroused the camp by shouting excitedly that we were surrounded by buffaloes. It was not a great surprise that the huge beasts should come so near the camp, for I heard that the buffaloes would often mingle with straggling cows and more than once had emigrants lost their livestock by having the animals literally forced away by these big brutes." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"After crossing the Platte River we rode straight away from the river and within half an hour came upon a herd of from 20 to 30 antelopes feeding less than 3 miles away. The silly animals did not note our approach until we were within half a mile. Then they showed how rapidly they could run.

"I have never seen antelopes in full flight without thinking how nearly alike they are to swallows, both for swiftness and the manner in which they bound over the ground without seeming to touch it. There are not many animals that can come up with this game once the fleet beasts have been aroused." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"There was a noise like distant thunder. A herd of wild ponies overran the camp and passed on at full speed, taking with them every horse, mule, ox, and cow we had among us except one horse which was hobbled.

"Before noon we had overtaken all the cows and eight of the oxen, bringing them back to camp, while the wild ponies circled around the prairie within 7 or 8 miles of us as if laughing to scorn our poor attempts to catch the horses which they had taken.

"Late the next day all the stock save two horses and two mules had been gathered up." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"Even though I say nothing more regarding the remainder of our journey over the Oregon Trail, I must speak of the little prairie dogs which we came upon from time to time.

"They live in villages, sometimes, as father has said, several acres in extent, and their houses are holes in the ground, with a top or extension made of earth which they have pushed up from beneath." (Otis: Martha of California.)

Even the smallest insects proved to be a great source of annoyance. From these little pests there seemed to be no escape.

"One other thing I will speak about now—mosquitoes and tiny flies, which seemed as fierce as tigers, were with us all the time by day as well as by night.

"When we first left Independence, it was difficult for me to sleep at night because of these insects, and during the day I spent the greater portion of my time striving to keep them off my hands or face. As the journey progressed it seemed as if they became less poisonous; but I suppose my body had become accustomed to the wounds, and I gave little heed to them except when the weather was exceedingly warm." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"We had a most disagreeable experience with wood ticks, little insects much like those which worry sheep. They covered every bush as with a veil and lay like a carpet over the ground as far as one could see.

"These ticks fasten themselves to a person's skin so tightly that in picking them off, the heads are often left embedded in the flesh and unless carefully removed cause most painful sores." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

William Clayton describes the buffalo gnat:

"While we were out together I remarked that the buffalo gnat had bitten us very severely. Their bite is very poisonous, and although they are extremely small they punish a person very much with an itching, aching pain like a mosquito bite."

Countless numbers of animals were driven over the plain during these years of emigration. Oxen yoked to the wagons, horses and mules under the saddle, and vast herds of cattle were included in the caravans. Oxen were better adapted to the long journey than horses in fording streams and getting their feed. The Indians could not stampede them easily, which was another great advantage.

"The trail was difficult even for pack horses, and there were many places where it seemed an absolute impossibility to drag the heavy wagons with the teams doubled until we had at times as many as 12 yoke of cattle to one cart.

"Our animals were so nearly worn out with severe work and lack of food that it did not seem possible we could advance another 10 miles.

"The animals moved feebly; twice an ox fell in the yoke, refusing to rise again, and we were forced to leave them behind." (Otis: Antoine of Oregon.)

"During all the long day except for half an hour at noon the patient oxen plodded wearily on amid the rain, oftentimes sinking fetlock deep in the marshy places. Everything was damp and everywhere uncomfortable, and at times it seemed as if I could no longer bear up under the suffering." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"Bull whips were enormous, reaching the whole length of the team, made of plaited rawhide about 20 feet long, a strip of buckskin at the 'popper' end of the lash, a handle some 25 or 30 inches

in length." (Meeker and Driggs: *Oxteam Days on the Oregon Trail*.)

"The professional bullwhacker takes pride in the expert use of his whip and can make that strip of buckskin pop like the report of a pistol, and when directed against an ox that was not pulling it will make him hump up and almost go through his yoke.

"Time made by wagons with nothing to retard them was 2 miles an hour. On good days they made 20 miles. But there were some days when they made but 5 or 10 miles and other days when the company rested and no miles were scored." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

#### Work of the Camp

The women of the caravan were busy from morning to night keeping their families comfortable by supplying them with nourishing food and clean clothing.

"During the rainy spells there could be little laundering and no drying, and when the higher and more arid altitudes were reached the whirling dust clouds often deposited more dirt on the garments hung up to be sunned than had just been washed from them." (Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

"We arrived at the creek about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and within 30 minutes it seemed as if the banks of that small stream were literally lined with fires, over each of which was suspended a kettle filled with water. Tubs were brought out from all the wagons, for the women of our company had decided on making a 'wash day' of the three or four hours remaining before sunset. (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

"At Little Vermillion Creek it was an odd picture which our encampment presented. The women had finished their washing and having no ropes on which to stretch their clothes had hung them on wagon wheels and the tongues of carts—in fact, on everything until the entire place had much the appearance of a gigantic ragged ghost." (Otis: *Antoine of Oregon*.)

"Last night I put my clothes in water and this morning finished washing before breakfast; this is the third time I have washed since I left home, once at Fort William on the Laramie and once at Rendezvous on the Green. (From Mrs. Whitman's Diary, 1836. See Ghent: *The Road to Oregon*.)

Otis, in *Martha of California*, describes a feast of buffalo meat which the emigrants enjoyed, also the making of pemmican.

"Our people had no more than time to skin and cut up the carcasses before dark; on the following morning word was passed around that each family must dry or smoke cure as much of the flesh as possible within the next 4 and 20 hours.

"Straightway every man, woman, and child set about either slicing the meat as thin as it could be cut with sharp knives or putting together racks made of sticks on which the strips of flesh were to be hung and exposed to the rays of the sun, as well as to the smoke of the fires that were to be built directly beneath them.

"Pemmican is made by first drying the very thinnest of thin slices of meat in the sun until they are so hard that it is possible to rub or pound them to a powder.

"A bag is then formed of the buffalo skin and into it is packed powdered meat sufficient to fill it considerably more than half full, after which tallow is melted and poured into the bag until it can hold no more. Then the entire mass is allowed to cool and harden. It is then fit for eating, so father said; but mother, when the time came that we were glad to have our portion of the stuff, always boiled it so it might be served hot.

"Two full days were spent in curing the meat and making pemmican and even then we did not continue the journey immediately, for the work had brought our clothing to such a condition that a day for washing was absolutely necessary. Therefore we remained for another 24 hours." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"What a feast we had that evening! We had buffalo tongues baked in the ovens or in front of small fires which had been built here and there. Then there were what father called hump ribs, steaks, and meat of every kind that could be taken from a buffalo. Each member of the company was eager to learn how every eatable portion of the animal tasted, and therefore cooked two or three times as much as could be used at one meal." (Otis: Martha of California.)

Wild fruits and vegetables were often found and were greatly appreciated by the emigrants.

"On a certain evening father returned with his pockets and hands full of wild onions which he found on the prairie. Because our means had consisted chiefly of corn bread and salted meat I said to myself that now we would have a feast, but, alas, they looked fair before being cooked, but they were so strong to the taste that one nearly choked in trying to eat them.

"It was at this place that a most pleasant surprise awaited us. Colonel Russell's wife found quantities and quantities of wild strawberries near the camping place. As soon as we women and girls arrived, we set about gathering the berries until each family had a good supply of the luscious fruit. Milk was not a poor substitute for cream to us who had been living upon corn bread and salt meat ever since we left the settlement of Independence." (Otis: Martha of California.)



Some of the families on the trail were fortunate in being supplied with flour and yeast cakes so that freshly baked bread was one of the staple foods all the way to Oregon.

"Mother decided that now had come the time when she must bake a plentiful supply of bread, for she was determined not to be put to such straits as we were during the rainstorm, when it was next to impossible to build a fire in the stove, and, of course, I was glad to do whatever I might to aid her.

"Before father had fairly got the stove out of the wagon and set up where it could be most conveniently used, nearly every other woman in the company had decided to follow mother's example, and then came such a scene as was presented when each family did its churning.

"In the rear or at the side of nearly every wagon a stove was set up, and one might see everywhere women rolling or kneading dough, girls running about on errands, and boys doing their share by keeping the fires going." (Otis: Martha of California.)

"I thought I never saw more determined resolution even amongst men than most of the female part of our company exhibited. There was one young lady who showed herself worthy of the bravest undaunted pioneer of the West, for after having kneaded her dough she watched and nursed the fire and held the umbrella over the flame and her skillet with the greatest composure for nearly two hours and baked bread enough to give us a very plentiful supper." (Clyman's Diary, 1844.)

Setting up the camp was very important work.

"All the wagons were drawn up in a large circle so that the tongue of one came close to the tailboard of another, and just inside this ring of vehicles were set up small tents, which many of the company were to use at night because their families were so large that everyone could not be given room in the wagons.

"Inside this row of tents were picketed the horses; but before night came they were fastened out upon the plain where they might eat the grass, while the oxen, cows, and sheep were turned loose with half a dozen men and boys watching lest they stray." (Otis: Martha of California.)

Cooking was not always an easy matter. The question of fuel was often a disturbing one, especially during rainstorms.

"At Bee Creek I believed we should make a long halt, for the country was covered with oak, walnut, and hickory trees, and this would be the last time we could procure timber for wagon tongues, axletrees, and such other things as might be needed in case of accident.

"No one had been sufficiently thoughtful to store beneath the wagon a supply of dry fuel, and the consequence was we had nothing with which to build a fire save a few armsful of watersoaked wood which father succeeded in gathering, for where there are so many immigrants encamped fuel of any kind was indeed scarce.

"Mother and I made our first attempt at cooking while the stove was beneath the wagon cover and the pipe thrust out through the hole in the rear.

"You can imagine what kind of supper we had that night. The inside of the wagon was filled with smoke, and mother tried with tears in her eyes to cook enough bacon to satisfy our hunger.

"Again we strove to do our cooking under the wagon covers, and again we were in need of fuel. Ellen and I, with the skirts of our gowns over our heads for protection from the storm, scurried here and there, picking up twigs and crying out with delight when we came upon a piece of wood as large as one's fist." (Otis: Martha of California.)

## Chapter III

### SOME OF THE EARLY TRAIL MAKERS

#### The Missionaries

THREE trading posts were built along the Oregon Trail in the year 1834—Fort Laramie in the present Wyoming, Fort Hall and Fort Boise in what is now Idaho. The Astor's American Fur Co. was established during this year, and the first missionaries, Jason and Daniel Lee, crossed the continent and established a mission in Oregon.

"The movement of the missionaries was a direct response to an Indian appeal for teachers. The Flatheads and the Nez Perces had heard, probably from men of the Hudson's Bay Co., that their own mode of worship was wrong and that they could learn the right from the whites.

"In 1836 Dr. Marcus Whitman and the Rev. Henry Spaulding, with their wives, under appointment of the Osage Mission, made the journey from Pittsburg to the mouth of the Loup and from there to Walla Walla, under the protection of the American Fur Co." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

#### Marcus Whitman

The first Whitman caravan, known as the Whitman and Spaulding caravan, comprised 2 wagons, 14 horses, 6 mules, and 17 cattle. Whitman determined to take two wagons to the Columbia, but at the Green River he abandoned one wagon and at Fort Boise he left the other. His ambition, aside from the conversion of the Indians, was to aid in the Americanization of Oregon, and this could not be done unless settlements were made there. Settlements meant bringing families in, which was a hopeless undertaking unless wagons could be drawn over the trail.

Mrs. Whitman writes as follows in her diary on July 18, 1832, of this first emigration:

"Husband has had a tedious time with the wagon to-day. It got stuck in the creek this morning when crossing, and he was obliged to wade considerable in getting it out. After that, in going between the mountains, on the side of one, so steep that it was difficult for

horses to pass, the wagon was upset twice; did not wonder at this at all; it was a greater wonder that it was not turning somersaults continually. It is not very grateful to my feelings to see him wearing out with such excessive fatigue as I am obliged to. He is not as fleshy as he was last winter. All the most difficult part of the way he has walked in laborious attempts to take the wagon. Ma knows what my feelings are.

"One of the axletrees of the wagon broke to-day; was a little rejoiced, for we were in hopes they would leave it and have no more trouble with it. Our rejoicing was in vain, for they are making a cart of the back wheels this afternoon and lashing the fore wheels to it—intending to take it through in some shape or other." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

Whitman led a second caravan to Oregon in the year 1843, already referred to in Chapter II, in A Day with the Cow Column.

Leaving his wife in charge of his mission in Walla Walla, Wash., he returned to the East and organized a company of emigrants, which is known as the "Great Emigration" so large and important did it seem at that time in the history of the trail. It included no less than 200 families, numbering 1,000 persons in all. There were 120 wagons, 694 oxen, and 773 loose cattle in the train.

"In 1843, Dr. Marcus Whitman, a missionary who with his wife carried on a thriving mission to the Indians near what is now Walla Walla, Wash., came through Missouri urging families to follow him out to Oregon.

"He told them about the wonderful climate, the vast rich lands, the mineral resources, and he told them over and over that unless hundreds of Americans got out there in the next year and took up land the whole of Oregon Territory would go to the British. But, perhaps most important of all, Doctor Whitman said that wagons could go clear through to the Pacific coast and that the trip was safe for women and children. In fact, he said he would lead a caravan through himself.

"And that spring of 1843 there passed over the road by the Sagers's house the biggest outfit ever seen in those parts—a thousand men, women, and children, with 200 covered wagons, heading for Oregon under Doctor Whitman's leadership." (Morrow: On to Oregon.)

#### The Mormons

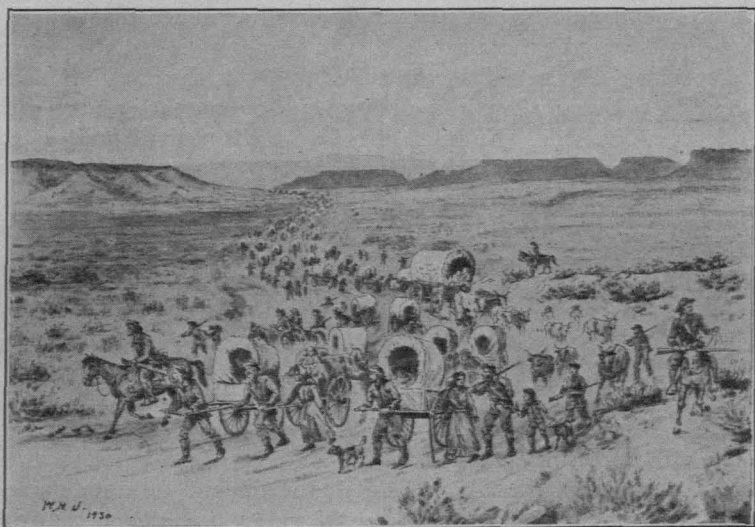
Four years later, in 1847, the Mormon hegira from Illinois to Salt Lake was undertaken. The route passed through Iowa, on the north side of the Platte to Fort Laramie, and then followed the Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger. From Fort Bridger it led by way of Echo Canyon to the Salt Lake Valley, where their settlement was

made. This route, though later used by thousands of emigrants, has been known as the Mormon Trail.

The company was composed of 143 men and boys, 3 women, and 2 children. There were 72 wagons and a large number of livestock, including oxen, cows, mules, horses, dogs, and chickens.

William Clayton gives a graphic description of Echo Canyon in his Journal of July 16, 1847:

"There is a very singular echo in this ravine; the rattling of wagons resembles carpenters hammering at boards inside the highest rocks. The report of a rifle resembles a sharp crash of thunder and echoes from rock to rock for some time. The lowing of cattle and the braying of mules seem to be answered beyond the mountains."



Handcart Emigration. From a painting by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

Of the successful completion of this journey he writes:

"Not a man, woman, or child died on the journey; not even a horse, mule, ox, cow, or chicken has died during the whole journey."

The Mormons were the great colonizers and redeemers of the desert. They found an arid land and by irrigation they made it a fertile one. William Clayton, in his journal, describes the first survey that was made of the land and the plans for irrigation. At a later date he writes as follows of the Mormon settlement in Salt Lake Valley:

"This land is beautifully situated for irrigation, many nice streams descending from the mountains which can be turned in every direction so as to water any portion of the lands at pleasure.

"We can easily irrigate the land at all events, which will be an unfailing and certain source of water, for the springs are numerous and the water appears good.

"We have seen the first band of pioneers arrive in the Salt Lake Valley, July 24, 1847, and have heard Brigham Young's declaration: 'This is the place!'

"About three-quarters of a mile north of the camp we arrived on a beautiful table-land, level and nicely sloping to the west. Here we halted to view it, and the more we viewed the better we were satisfied that it is as handsome a place for a city as can be imagined.

"At the east part there is a considerable creek of clear, cold water descending from the mountains, and just about this place it branches into two forks, one running southwest, the other northwest and the two nicely surrounding this place and so well arranged that should a city be built here the water can be turned into every street at pleasure.

"President Young said they intended to divide the city into blocks of 10 acres with eight lots in a block of one and a quarter acres each, the streets to be wide. No house will be permitted to be built on the corners of the streets, neither petty shops.

"Work began immediately. Every Mormon was a worker. Some went into the canyons to cut down trees, others prepared for building by making adobes, and activity was rife everywhere. By the end of August, 29 log houses were built."

#### The Fur Trappers

Ghent, in his *The Road to Oregon*, gives us the following graphic picture of the trapper and his equipment:

"When the fur trappers invaded the West they found a criss-cross pattern of many trails. The deer, the elk, and the antelope left pathways over the plains and along the valley and among the foothills, and the loftiest heights showed the track of the bighorn sheep.

"The Indian followed, and he also made paths of his own peace trails to the villages of his friends, war trails to the country of his enemies, and hunting trails that intercepted the herds on their immigrations or struck them in their winter retreats.

"The fur trappers were hunting far and wide for beaver, and they searched wherever beaver might be found.

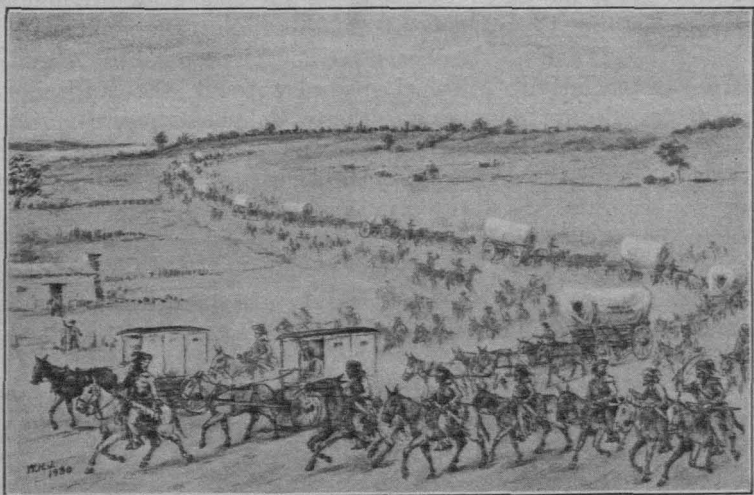
"The trails that later became useful to the emigrants were the paths along which the trappers carried their furs to the frontier capital, St. Louis, or made their way, as some of them occasionally did, between the Columbia and the Green.

"The valley of the Green River, in the present Wyoming, was the strategic center of all the activities of the trappers, and the low gap by which it was entered from the east—South Pass—became the

chief gateway to the Pacific and so remained until the building of the railroads.

"A trapper's equipment . . . is generally one animal upon which is placed one or two saddle blankets, a riding saddle and bridle, a sack containing six beaver traps, a blanket with an extra pair of mocassins, a powder horn and bullet pouch, with a belt to which is attached a butcher knife, a wooden box containing bait for beaver, and a tobacco sack with a pipe and implements for making fire, with sometimes a hatchet fastened to the pommel of the saddle.

"His personal dress is a flannel or cotton shirt (if he is fortunate enough to attain one; if not, antelope skin answers the purpose of over and under shirt); a pair of leather breeches with blanket or buffalo robe; a hat or cap of wool, buffalo, or other skin; his hose are



The first wagon over the Oregon Trail. Sketched by W. H. Jackson. (Courtesy of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association)

pieces of blanket wrapped around his feet, which are covered with a pair of moccasins made of dressed deer, elk, or buffalo skins. His long hair fell loosely over his shoulders. When mounted he carried his rifle before him on his saddle."

#### Famous Explorers and Pioneers

John Jacob Astor in 1810 organized the Pacific Fur Co., and in 1811-12 had determined upon his magnificent venture of setting up an establishment at the mouth of the Columbia. He sent one expedition by sea and chose Wilson Price Hunt to lead another by land.

It was in the early spring of 1811 that Hunt started out with 60 men on his memorable journey through the western wilderness, the

first party of whites known to have journeyed along any section of what was to become the Oregon Trail.

Lewis and Clark did more than journey across the great West and back; they gathered important and vital information concerning the geography, the plant and animal life, and the geology of the new country. In their expeditions from 1803 to 1805 they opened up a vast and unknown territory to settlement and development, and hastened the western expansion of the United States.

"The route of these explorers is virtually paralleled by the great Northern Railway, from the southern bend of the Missouri in North Dakota west of Minot, to Helena; by the Oregon Short Line, for a distance along the Jefferson River near Dillon, Mont.; while the Oregon Railroad & Navigation Co.'s tracks and steamers follow their trail from Lewiston, Idaho, along the Snake and Columbia Rivers to Astoria, Oreg., and the mouth of the Columbia River." (Wheeler: Lewis and Clark. See also Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"They ascended the Missouri, passed through the stupendous gates of the Rocky Mountains, hitherto unknown to white men; discovered and explored the upper waters of the Columbia; and followed that river down to its mouth, where their countryman, Gray, had anchored about 12 years previously.

"Here they passed the winter and returned across the mountains in the following spring. The reports published by them of their expedition demonstrated the practicability of establishing a line of communication across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans." (Irving-Astoria.)

While Lewis and Clark were descending the Columbia River and recrossing the continent from the Pacific coast, Zebulon Montgomery Pike was conducting explorations which were only less important than theirs. Pike was not a westerner by birth; he was the son of an officer in the Revolutionary Army and was born in New Jersey. But his name is indelibly associated with the West. A complete survey of his journeys is given by Roosevelt in his *Winning of the West*, of which the following outline is appended:

"He ascends the Mississippi; encounters the Indians; winters on the headwaters of the Mississippi; councils with the Sioux; hoists the American flag; returns to St. Louis and starts westward.

"Pike's journeys to the Osage and Pawnee villages; the swarms of game; the bison; other game; Indians hunting; Wilkinson descends the Arkansas; Pike reaches Pike's Peak; suffering from cold and hunger; he strikes across the mountains on foot; the party almost perish from starvation.

"Pike reaches the Rio Grande; he is sent home by the Spaniards; his subsequent career."



Throughout his long life Ezra Meeker was devoted to the memory of the trail and sponsored a movement for its recognition as a milestone in the history of our country.

"In 1852, at the age of 21, Ezra Meeker traveled the Oregon Trail with an ox team as a pioneer to Oregon, and in 1906, at the age of 75, fired with the purpose of redefining and commemorating the trail, he made the journey again by ox team. He repeated it with an ox team in 1910, then with an automobile in 1915, and nine years later he flew along its course in an airplane.

"In the summer of 1928, well on toward his ninety-eighth birthday, he started from the East in a Ford car to travel the line once more. On the way he was taken ill, and after two months in a hospital in Detroit he was conveyed to Seattle, where on December 3, he passed away.

"There is little of the old trail that on his later journeys he could have found. Ranches and farms have been laid out across it, and its broad channel has been plowed over and sown to crops. Settlements have sprung up here and there and blotted out all traces of the ox hoofs and wagon wheels. Surveyors have marked off the face of the country into square townships, and the new roadways run, not by winding courses to the camping spots blessed with wood, water, and grass, but by series of right angles from town to town." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

### The Pony Express

The pony express was organized to carry mail from St. Joseph, Mo., to Sacramento, Calif. The route followed the well-defined trail of the covered wagons. It began at St. Joseph and ran to the present site of Horton, Mo. Here it followed the military road from Fort Leavenworth to Atchison, then to Marysville, Kans., by way of Granada and Seneca. At this point it joined the main Oregon Trail, which it followed all the way to Fort Bridger, crossing the South Platte at Julesburg, Colo. From there it followed the regular route to Salt Lake City, where it struck the Chorpennig mail route of 1859, south of the Humboldt River, and then on to Carson City, Nev. From here the route ran south of Lake Tahoe to Placerville and Sacramento in California.

"Riders noted for their courage and hardihood were employed. All of them (pony express riders) had to face the perils of terrific storms, deep snows, flooded rivers, of losing their way, and of being attacked by Indians.

"There is only one record of a fatality from an attack by the savages; though the horse escaped and brought in the mail, the rider was killed and scalped.

"For their labor the riders were paid \$50 a month and board, though a few of them, noted for braving extra hazards, received as much as \$150 monthly." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"At the beginning each horseman rode a distance of from 30 to 50 miles, using three horses and keeping within the maximum of two minutes for each change of mail and mount.

"There was, however, no regularity as to the length of the ride. Whatever the circumstances, the mail had to go forward, east or west. If the arriving rider found the next relayman ill or slain by Indians, he must go forward or return, as the case might be, until relief was available.

"Later the distance traveled on each trip was extended to 75 to 100 miles." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

"On one occasion young William F. Cody, the Buffalo Bill of a later time, made a continuous ride on the western Wyoming stretch of 320 miles, which was covered in 21 hours and 40 minutes—1 mile in 4 minutes—14 miles an hour.

"The best record made from end to end of the route was in the carrying of Lincoln's inaugural address, March, 1861, the total of 1,980 miles in 7 days and 17 hours.

"Relay stations were provided; the numerous stations set up by the stage company between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City were utilized, and new ones erected until there was one for every 12 or 15 miles all the way to Sacramento.

"Some 500 horses were bought, after great care in their selection, for they had to be strong and wiry and fleet enough to outrun any bands of pursuing Indians. Usually two men were maintained at each station to care for the stock and to have everything ready for the relays." (Ghent: The Road to Oregon.)

#### Home-Building Settlers

Not all the early settlements were made along the Oregon Trail. Often a single family would depart from the main thoroughfare and seek a home either north or south of the main highway.

Hamlin Garland, in his *Son of the Middle Border*, writes as follows of his experience in the Dakotas when he decided to take up a claim there:

"The street swarmed with boomers. All talk was of lots, of land. Hour by hour, as the sun sank, prospectors returned to the hotel from their trips into the unclaimed territory, hungry and tired but jubilant.

"Early the very next day, with a party of four, I started for the unsurveyed country where, some 30 miles to the west, my father had already located a preemption claim and built a rough shed, the only shelter for miles around. 'We'll camp there,' said Charles.

"My father, who had planned to establish a little store on his claim, now engaged me as his clerk, and I spent the next week in hauling timber and in helping to build the shanty and wareroom on the section line. As soon as the place was habitable, my mother and sister Jessie came out to stay with me, for in order to hold his pre-emption my father was obliged to make it his 'home.'

"Having erected our pine-board straddlebugs with our names written thereon, we jubilantly started back toward the railway.

"As we had measured the distance from the township lines by counting the revolutions of our wagon wheels, so now with pocket compass and a couple of laths Charles and I laid our inner boundaries and claimed three quarter sections, one for Frank and one each for ourselves. Level as a floor these acres were, and dotted with the bones of bison.

"The straddlebug, I should explain, was composed of three boards set together in tripod form and was used as a monument, a sign of occupancy. Its presence defended a claim against the next comer.

"Night by night it became necessary to lift a lantern on a high pole in front of the shack in order that those who were traversing the plain after dark might find their way, and often I was aroused from my bed by the arrival of a worn and bewildered party of pilgrims rescued from a sleepless couch upon the wet sod.

"Before we were fairly settled my mother was forced to feed and house a great many land seekers who had no other place to stay."

Summer on the plains was a complete disillusionment.

"Meanwhile, an ominous change had crept over the plain. The winds were hot and dry, and the grass, baked on the stem, had become as inflammable as hay. The birds were silent. The sky, absolutely cloudless, began to scare us with its light. The sun rose through the dusty air, sinister with the flare of horizontal heat. The little gardens on the breaking withered, and many of the women began to complain bitterly of the loneliness and lack of shade. The tiny cabins were like ovens at midday." (Hamlin Garland: *A Son of the Middle Border*.)

The winter was more disheartening than the summer and convinced Garland that he preferred the East to a home on the prairies.

"Winter! No man knows what winter means until he has lived through one in a pine-board shanty on a Dakota plain with only buffalo bones for fuel. There those who had settled upon this land with plans to make a home, and many of these, having toiled all the early spring in hope of a crop, now at the beginning of winter found themselves with little money and no coal. Many of them would have starved and frozen had it not been for the buffalo skeletons which lay scattered over the sod and for which a sudden market

developed. Upon the proceeds of this singular harvest they almost literally lived. Thus 'the herds of deer and buffalo' did indeed strangely 'furnish the cheer.'

"Furthermore, like other preemptors I was forced to hold my claim by visiting it once every 30 days, and these trips became each time more painful, more menacing. February and March were of pitiless severity. One blizzard followed another with ever-increasing fury. No sooner was the snow laid by a north wind than it took wing above a southern blast and returned upon us sifting to and fro until at last its crystals were as fine as flour. \* \* \* It filled the air for hundreds of feet above the earth like a mist and lay in long ridges behind every bush or weed. Nothing lived on these desolate uplands but the white owl and the wolf.

"The next fall a hint of winter in the autumn air made me remember the remorseless winds and the iron earth over which the snows swept as if across an icy polar sea. I shuddered as I thought of again fighting my way to that desolate little cabin in McPherson County. I offered my claim for sale. I study night and day and fit myself for teaching." (Hamlin Garland: A Son of the Middle Border.)

## Appendix

### Monuments and Markers Along the Trail

The objectives of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association are:

1. The mapping and charting of the trails themselves, together with the determination of points along them that are fraught with historic significance.

2. The planting of enduring markers and monuments at these strategic points which will give in essence the stories they commemorate and stimulate further study of our history.

3. The promotion, especially among the communities most closely connected with the old trails, of a systematic saving of precious historical documents, relics, pictures, and other first-hand data on which history of the true-to-fact and literature of the true-to-life kind is used.

4. The restoration of historic landmarks that may be deemed of such significance as to warrant their preservation in replica.

5. The erection of a fitting memorial to the pioneers in the National Capitol at Washington, D. C.

The markers along the trail are largely granite shafts, granite boulders, slate slabs, and bronze tablets with inscriptions, one of which has been set into the north and one into the west face of Independence Rock. Lonely graves, wherever it has been possible to identify them, have been marked in an appropriate manner.

Kansas has not been marked.

In Nebraska, at the site of old Fort Kearney, a marker has been placed.

In Wyoming the following locations have markers: At the spot where Robert Stuart and his little band of Astorians camped for several weeks in 1812-13; across the river from Lingle; at Fort Laramie; on the divide east of Badger Creek; on the divide between Cottonwood Creek and the Platte; on the old station grounds at Horse Creek, south of Glencove, at South Hound; at the grave of an emigrant's child close to Big Muddy; at the junction of the trail with a road to Fort Fetterman; a mile and a half west of Casper, for Casper W. Collins killed by Indians July, 1865; in railway station in the city of Casper; at Independence Rock, on the north face; near Devil's Gate and Split Rock; at Three Crossings; at the

site of Burnt-Branch Station; in the South Pass; near Pacific Springs are two markers, one to Mrs. Whitman and one to Mrs. Spaulding, placed by Ezra Meeker; at the point where the trail leaves the Big Sandy; near the Green Crossing; near Fontenelle Creek 5 miles west of the junction with the Green; on Slate Creek, 12 miles west of Fontenelle; at Fort Bridger; at Emigrant Springs; at the crossing of Rock Creek; at Cokeville; near Border where the trail entered Idaho.

In Washington there are the following markers: At Turnwater, on Puget Sound; at Tewino, Chehalis, and Toledo.

In Oregon the following locations have markers: At the Dalles, Pendleton, Meacham, La Grande, Ladds Vale, Baker City, Old Mount Pleasant, Durkee, Huntington, and Vale.

In Idaho are the following markers: At the site of the second Fort Boise, the city of Boise, South Boise, Twin Falls, American Falls, Pocatello, Soda Springs, and Montpelier.

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