The Oregon Trail

By Dr. Francisco J. Collazo

March 11, 2014

Acknowledgement

All information is derived from the cited bibliography. I want to acknowledge Billie Foster, Director of Administration, for editing this report.

Scope: The Oregon Trail Report is comprised of Annex A and B. Annex A addresses the exploration, development and establishment of the Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon. Annex B outlines the chronology of the Oregon Trail development.

Annex A: History of the Oregon Trail

Introduction

The Oregon Trail reference is in Figure 1. It is the overland pioneer route to the northwestern United States. About 3200 km (about 2000 mi) long, the trail extended from Independence, Missouri to the Columbia River in Oregon. Part of the route followed the Platte River for 870 km (540 mi) through what is now Nebraska to Fort Laramie in present-day Wyoming. The trail continued along the North Platte and Sweetwater rivers to South Pass in the Wind River Range of the Rocky Mountains. From there, the main trail went south to Fort Bridger, Wyoming, before turning into the Bear River valley and north to Fort Hall in present-day Idaho.

In Idaho, the Oregon Trail followed the Snake River to the Salmon Falls and then went north past Fort Boise (now Boise). The route entered what is now Oregon, passed through the Grand Ronde River Valley, crossed the Blue Mountains and through a small portion of present-day Washington before reaching the Columbia River.

Figure 1 - Oregon Trail

Originally, like many other main routes in the United States, sections of the Oregon Trail had been used by Native Americans and trappers. As early as 1742, part of the trail in Wyoming had been blazed by the French Canadian explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes and Sieur de La Vérendrye. The Lewis and Clark Expedition, between 1804 and 1806, made more of it known.

The German American fur trader and financier John Jacob Astor, in establishing his trading posts, dispatched a party overland in 1811 to follow the trail of these explorers. The first emigrant wagon train was headed by American pioneer physician Elijah White, who reached Oregon in 1842. The first emigrants to make the trip were Marcus and Narcissa Whitman who made the trip in 1836. Later, mountain men such as James Bridger, who founded Fort Bridger in 1843, contributed their knowledge of the trail and often acted as guides.

However, the first mass migration did not occur until 1843 when approximately 1000 pioneers made the journey at one time. The trip took the early pioneers four to six months, a journey fraught with much hardship resulting from poor equipment, illness, and attack by the Native Americans, for whom the growing number of pioneers on the trail was an ever-constant threat. At first, the termination point of the Oregon Trail was Oregon City, Oregon; later, settlers continued south to the fertile and valuable land in the Willamette Valley.

This trail was the only feasible land route for settlers to get to the West Coast. From 1843 until 1869 when the first transcontinental railroad was completed, over 500,000 people made the trip in covered wagons pulled by mule and oxen. Some went all the way to Oregon to farm and others went to California to search for gold. The trip usually took 4-6 months by wagon traveling 15 miles a day whereas the only other route to the west, by sea, took a full year.

By the middle of the 19th century, the Oregon Trail had become the main route to the American Northwest. Thousands traveled the route, which took six months by covered wagon. Deeply rutted roads cut by wagon wheels can still be seen today in many places along the trail.

Explorer of the Oregon Trail

John C. Frémont (1813-1890), American explorer, army officer, and politician, was noted for his explorations of the Far West. John Charles Frémont was born on January 31, 1813 in Savannah, Georgia and educated at the College of Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1838, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army. During the following year Frémont was a member of the expedition of the French explorer Joseph Nicolas Nicollet that surveyed and mapped the region between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Between 1842 and 1845, Frémont led three expeditions into the Oregon Territory. During the first, in 1842, he mapped most of the Oregon Trail and ascended, in present-day Wyoming, the second highest peak in the Wind River Mountains, afterward called Fremont Peak (4185 m/13,730 ft). He completed the survey of the Oregon Trail in 1843 to the mouth of the Columbia River on the Pacific coast. The party, guided by the famous scout Kit Carson, turned south and then east, making a midwinter crossing of the Sierra Nevada

Mountains. Frémont made his third expedition in 1845, further exploring both the area known as the Great Basin and the Pacific coast.

During the Mexican War (1846-1848), Frémont attained the rank of major and assisted greatly in the annexation of California. He was appointed civil governor of California by the U.S. Navy commodore Robert Field Stockton, but in a conflict of authority between Stockton and the U.S. Army brigadier general Stephen Watts Kearny, Frémont refused to obey Kearny's orders. He was arrested for mutiny and insubordination and was subsequently court-martialed. He resigned his commission after President James Polk remitted his sentence of dismissal from the service.

In the winter of 1848 and 1849, Frémont led an expedition to locate passes for a proposed railway line from the upper Río Grande to California. In 1850, he was elected one of the first two senators from California, serving until 1851. In 1856, he was the presidential candidate of the newly formed Republican Party, but was defeated by James Buchanan. During the American Civil War Frémont was appointed a major general in the Union Army and held several important but brief commands. He resigned his commission in 1862 rather than serve under General John Pope. In 1864, Frémont was again a presidential nominee; he withdrew, however, in favor of President Abraham Lincoln. He served as governor of the territory of Arizona from 1878 to 1883. In 1890, he was restored to the rank of major general and retired with full pay. He died in New York City on July 13, 1890.

Lewis and Clark Expedition

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson issued the following instructions to Meriwether Lewis: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river and such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado and/or other rivers may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce." Although Lewis and William Clark found a path to the Pacific Ocean, it was not until 1859 that a direct and practicable route, the Mullan road, connected the Missouri River to the Columbia River.

Figure 2 - Oregon Trail Reenactment at Scotts Bluff

During 1804-1806, the first land route across what is now the United States was partially mapped by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Lewis and Clark initially believed they had found a practical overland route to the west coast; however, the two passes they found going through the Rocky Mountains, Lemhi Pass, and Lolo Pass, turned out to be much too difficult for wagons to pass through without considerable roadwork. On the return trip in 1806, they traveled from the Columbia River to the Snake River and the Clearwater River over Lolo pass again. They then traveled overland up the Blackfoot River and crossed the Continental Divide at Lewis and Clark Pass and on to the head of the Missouri River. This was ultimately a shorter and faster route than the one they followed west and had the disadvantage of being much too rough for wagons, and was controlled by the Blackfoot Indians.

Even though Lewis and Clark had only traveled a narrow portion of the upper Missouri River drainage and part of the Columbia River drainage, these were considered the two major rivers draining most of the Rocky Mountains, and the expedition confirmed that there was no "easy" route through the northern Rocky Mountains as Jefferson had hoped. Nonetheless, this famous expedition had mapped both the eastern and western river valleys (Platte and Snake Rivers) that bookended the route of the Oregon Trail (and other emigrant trails) across the continental divide. They just had not located the South Pass or some of the interconnecting valleys later used in the high country. They did show the way for the mountain men, who within a decade would find a better way across, even if it were not an easy route.

Astorians Expedition

In 1810, fur trader, entrepreneur, and one of the wealthiest men in the US, John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company, outfitted an expedition (known as the Astor Expedition or *Astorians*) under Wilson Price Hunt to find a possible overland supply route and trapping territory for fur trading posts. Fearing attack by the Blackfoot Indians, the overland expedition veered south of Lewis and Clark's route into what is now Wyoming and in the process passed across Union Pass and into Jackson Hole, Wyoming. From there they went over the Teton Range via Teton Pass and then down to the Snake River in Idaho. They abandoned their horses at the Snake River, made dugout canoes, and attempted to use the river for transport.

After a few days travel, they soon discovered that steep canyons, waterfalls and impassable rapids made travel by river impossible. Too far from their horses to retrieve them, they had to cache most of their goods and walk the rest of the way to the Columbia River where they made new boats and traveled to the newly established Forst Astoria. The expedition demonstrated that much of the route along the Snake River plain and across to the Columbia was passable by pack train or with minimal improvements, even wagons. This knowledge would be incorporated into the concatenated trail segments as the Oregon Trail took its early shape.

In early 1811, the supply ship Tonquin left supplies and men to establish Fort Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River, and fort Okanogan at the confluence of the Okanogan and Columbia rivers. The Tonquin then went up the coast to Clayoquot for a trading expedition. There it was attacked and overwhelmed by the indigenous Nuu-chah-multh before being blown up, killing all the crew and many natives.

American Fur Company partner Robert Stuart led a small group of men back east to report to Astor. The group planned to retrace the path followed by the overland expedition back up to the east following the Columbia and Snake rivers.

Fear of an Indian attack near Union Pass in Wyoming forced the group further south where they luckily discovered South Pass, a wide and easy pass over the Continental Divide. The party continued east via the Sweetwater River, North Platte River (where they spent the winter of 1812–1813) and Platte River to the Missouri River, finally arriving in St. Louis in the spring of 1813. The route they used appeared to potentially be a practical wagon route, requiring minimal improvements, and Stuart's journals provided a meticulous account of most of the route. Because of the War of 1812 and the lack of US fur trading posts in the Oregon Country, most of the route was unused for more than 10 years.

Establishment of the North West Company/Hudson's Bay Company

Figure 3: The first Fort Laramie as it looked prior to 1840. Painting from memory by Alfred Jacob Miller.

In August 1811, three months after Fort Astor was established, David Thompson and his team of British North West Company explorers came floating down the Columbia to Fort Astoria. He had just completed a journey through much of western Canada and most of the Columbia River drainage system. He was mapping the country for possible fur trading posts. Along the way, he camped at the confluence of the Columbia and Snake rivers and posted a notice claiming the land for Britain and stating the intention of the North West Company to build a fort on the site. Astor, pressured by potential confiscation by the British navy of their forts and supplies in the War of 1812, sold to the North West Company their forts, supplies and furs on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The North West Company started establishing more forts and trading posts of their own.

By 1821, when armed hostilities broke out with their Hudson Bay Company (HBC) rivals, the North West Company was pressured by the British government to merge with the HBC. The HBC had nearly a complete monopoly on trading (and most governing issues) in the Columbia District, or Oregon Country as it was referred to by the Americans, and also in Rupert's Land (western Canada). That year the British parliament passed a statute applying the laws of Upper Canada to the district and giving the HBC power to enforce those laws.

From 1812 to 1840, the British through the HBC had nearly complete control of the Pacific Northwest and the western half of the Oregon Trail. In theory, the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812, restored the U.S. back to its possessions in Oregon territory. "Joint occupation" of the region was formally established by the Anglo-American Convention of 1818. The British through the HBC tried to discourage any U.S. trappers, traders and settlers from doing any significant trapping, trading or settling in the Pacific Northwest.

The War of 1812

A conflict between the United States and Britain, which began in 1812, lasted until early 1815. President James Madison requested a declaration of war to protect American ships on the high seas and to stop the British from impressing or seizing U.S. sailors. U.S. ships were being stopped and searched by both Great Britain and France, who were fighting each other in Europe. President Madison also wanted to prevent Britain from forming alliances with Native Americans on the American frontier. His decision was influenced by Americans in the West and South, who hoped to expand the United States by seizing control of both Canada and Florida. Critics called the War of 1812 "Mr. Madison's War," but others saw it as a "second war of independence," an opportunity for Americans to defend their freedom and honor in the face of European disrespect. Neither Britain nor the United States was particularly well prepared to fight this war, and the conflict eventually ended in a stalemate.

Causes of the War

France and Britain, Europe's two most powerful nations, had battled almost continuously since 1793, and their warfare directly affected American trade. Hostilities began during the French Revolution (1789-1799) when England joined other European nations in an unsuccessful attempt to restore the French monarchy, and then continued as Britain led the efforts to stop French expansion under Napoleon I. American presidents from Washington to Madison tried to keep the United States impartial during these conflicts, but both France and Britain flagrantly disregarded the rights of neutral countries.

For the Americans, the greatest irritant was Britain's practice of impressments, or the seizure of American seamen for service in the British navy. The British government claimed that it only seized subjects of the Crown who sailed under the American flag to avoid wartime service in their own navy. In fact, the British seized not only their own deserters, but also impressed a sizeable number of United States citizens—estimates suggest 6000 or more.

Westward Movement

This geographic knowledge opened the way for ordinary citizens to move across the country to the Far West. The area immediately west of the farming frontier, the Great Plains, offered little to farmers who were used to working on land with plentiful rainfall and having trees to build houses. Settlers traveled across the Great Plains to get to the Pacific Northwest, and then called the Oregon country, which by the 1840s had a reputation as an agrarian paradise, where soil and climate would nearly guarantee a settler's health and prosperity. The central valleys of California were pictured in the same way. Oregon and California, however, were more than

2000 miles from Missouri, on the other side of plains, deserts, and the nation's two tallest mountain chains.

Great American Desert

Figure 4 - Trail Ruts near Guernsey, Wyoming

Reports from expeditions in 1806 by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike and in 1819 by Major Stephen Long, described the Great Plains as "unfit for human habitation" and as "The Great American Desert." These descriptions were mainly based on the relative lack of timber and surface water. The images of sandy wastelands conjured up by terms like "desert" were tempered by the many reports of vast herds of millions of Plains Bison that somehow managed to live in this "desert."

In the 1840s, the Great Plains appeared to be unattractive for settlement and was illegal for homesteading until well after 1846—initially it was set aside by the U.S. government for Indian settlements. The next available land for general settlement, Oregon, appeared to be free for the taking and had fertile lands, disease free climate (yellow fever and malaria were prevalent in much of the Missouri and Mississippi River drainage then), extensive uncut, unclaimed forests, big rivers, potential seaports, and only a few nominally British settlers.

Fur Trappers

In the fall of 1823, Jedediah Smith and Thomas Fitzpatrick led their trapping crew south from the Yellowstone River to the Sweetwater River. They were looking for a safe location to spend the winter. Smith reasoned since the Sweetwater flowed east, it must eventually run into the Missouri River. Trying to transport their extensive fur collection down the Sweetwater and North Platte River, they found that after a near disastrous canoe crash the rivers were too swift and rough for water passage.

On July 4, 1824, they cached their furs under a dome of rock they named Independence Rock and started their long trek on foot to the Missouri River. Upon arriving back in a settled area, they bought pack horses (on credit) and retrieved their furs. They had re-discovered the route that Robert Stuart had taken in 1813—eleven years before.

In 1825, the first significant American Rendezvous occurred on Henry's Fork of the Green River. The trading supplies were brought in by a large party using pack trains originating on the Missouri River. These pack trains were then used to haul out the fur bales. They normally used the north side of the Platte River—the same route used 20 years later by the Mormon Trail. For the next 15 years, the American rendezvous was an annual event moving to different locations, usually somewhere on the Green River in the future state of Wyoming. Each rendezvous, occurring during the slack summer period, allowed the fur traders to trade for and collect the furs from the trappers and their Indian allies without having the expense of building or maintaining a fort or wintering over in the cold Rockies. Jedediah Smith was killed by Indians around 1831. Thomas Fitzpatrick was often hired as a guide when the fur trade dwindled in 1840.

Figure 5 - The Exploration of the West by Jedediah Smith

Up to 3,000 mountain men were trappers and explorers, employed by various British and United States fur companies or working as free trappers, who roamed the North American Rocky Mountains from about 1810 to the early 1840s. Trapping took place in the fall when the fur became prime. Mountain men primarily trapped beaver and sold the skins. Some were more interested in exploring the West.

In only a few weeks at a rendezvous, a year's worth of trading and celebrating would take place as the traders took their furs and remaining supplies back east for the winter, and the trappers faced another fall and winter with new supplies. In 1830, William Sublette brought the first wagons carrying his trading goods up the Platte, North Platte, and Sweetwater rivers before crossing over South Pass to a fur trade rendezvous on the Green River near the future town of Big Piney, Wyoming. This established that the eastern part of most of the Oregon Trail was passable by wagons.

In the late 1830s, the HBC instituted a policy intended to destroy or weaken the American fur trade companies. The HBC's annual collection and re-supply Snake River Expedition was transformed to a trading enterprise. Beginning in 1834, it visited the American Rendezvous to undersell the American traders—losing money but undercutting the American fur traders. By 1840, the fashion in Europe and Britain shifted away from the formerly very popular beaver felt hats, and prices for furs rapidly declined and the trapping almost ceased. Fur traders tried to use the Platte River, the main route of the eastern Oregon Trail, for transport but soon gave up in frustration as its many channels and islands combined with its muddy waters were too shallow, crooked and unpredictable to use for water transport.

The York Factory Express

The York Factory Express established another route to the Oregon territory, evolved from an earlier express brigade used by the North West Company between Fort Astoria and Fort William, Ontario on Lake Superior. By 1825 the HBC started using two brigades, each setting out from opposite ends of the express route—one from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River and the other from York Factory on Hudson Bay—in spring and passing each other in the middle of the continent. This established a "quick"—about 100 days for 2,600 miles (4,200 km) one way—to resupply their forts and fur trading centers as well as collecting the furs the posts had bought and transmitting messages between Fort Vancouver and York Factory on Hudson Bay.

Figure 6 - The HBC's York Factory Express Trade Route (1820s to 1840s)

In 1824, the HBC built a new much larger Fort Vancouver slightly upstream of Fort Astoria on the north side of the Columbia River, hoping the Columbia would be the future Canada–US border. The fort quickly became the center of activity in the Pacific Northwest. Every year ships would come from London to the Pacific (via Cape Horn) to drop off supplies and trade goods in their trading posts in the Pacific Northwest and pick up the accumulated furs used to pay for these supplies. It was the nexus for the fur trade on the Pacific Coast; its influence reached from the Rocky Mountains to the Hawaiian Islands, and from Russian Alaska into Mexican-controlled California.

Fort Vancouver was the main re-supply point for nearly all Oregon Trail travelers until US towns could be established. In 1825, The HBC established Fort Colville on the Columbia River near Kettle Falls as a good site to collect furs and control the upper Columbia River fur trade. Fort Nisqually was built near the present town of DuPont, Washington and was the first HBC fort on Puget Sound. In 1843, Fort Victoria was erected and became the headquarters of operations in British Columbia, eventually growing into modern-day Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia.

When the fur trade slowed in 1840 because of fashion changes in men's hats, the value of the Pacific Northwest to the British was seriously diminished. Canada had few potential settlers who were willing to move more than 2,500 miles (4,000 km) to the Pacific Northwest, although several hundred ex-trappers, British and American, and their families did start settling in Oregon, Washington and California. They used most of the York Express route through northern Canada.

In 1841, James Sinclair, on orders from Sir George Simpson, guided nearly 200 settlers from the Red River Colony (located at the junction of the Assiniboine River and Red River near present Winnipeg, Canada) into the Oregon territory. This attempt at settlement failed when most of the families joined the settlers in the Willamette Valley, with their promise of free land and HBC-free government.

Iowa

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson obtained from France the Louisiana Purchase for $15 million (equivalent to about $230 million today) which included all the land drained by the Missouri River and roughly doubled the size of US territory. The future states of Iowa and Missouri, located west of the Mississippi River and east of Missouri River, were part of this purchase. On the 1805-1806 expedition, the Lewis and Clark Expedition stopped several times in the future state of Iowa to the west coast.

A disputed 1804 treaty between Quashquame and William Henry Harrison (future ninth President of the US) that surrendered much of the future state of Illinois to the US enraged many Sauk (Sac) Indians and led to the 1832 Black Hawk War. As punishment for the uprising, and as part of a larger settlement strategy, treaties were subsequently designed to remove all Indians from the Iowa Territory. In 1833, some settlers started drifting into Iowa.

On July 4, 1838, President Martin Van Buren, signed a US Congress law establishing the Territory of Iowa. Iowa was located opposite the junction of the Platte and Missouri rivers and was used by some of the fur trapper rendezvous traders as a starting point for their supply expeditions.

In 1846, the Mormons, expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois, traversed Iowa (on part of the Mormon Trail) and settled temporarily in significant numbers on the Missouri River in Iowa and the future state of Nebraska at their Winter Quarters near the future city of Omaha, Nebraska. The Mormons established about 50 temporary towns including the town of Kanesville, Iowa, which was, renamed Council Bluffs in 1852, on the east bank of the Missouri River opposite the mouth of the Platte River. For those travelers to Oregon, California, and Utah who were bringing their teams to the Platte River junction, Kanesville and other towns became major "jumping off places" and supply points.

In 1847, the Mormons established three ferries across the Missouri River and others established even more ferries for the spring start on the trail. In 1850, the census showed there were about 8,000 mostly Mormons tabulated in the large Pottawattamie County, Iowa District 21. The original Pottawattamie County was subsequently made into five counties. By 1854 most of the Mormon towns, farms and villages were largely taken over by non-Mormons as they abandoned them or sold them for not much and continued their migration to Utah. After 1846, the towns of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Omaha and other Missouri River towns became major supply points and "jumping off places" for travelers on the Mormon, California, Oregon, and other trails west.

Missionaries

In 1834, The Dalles Methodist Mission was founded by Reverend Jason Lee just east of Mount Hood on the Columbia River. In 1836, Henry H. Spalding and Marcus Whitman traveled west to establish the Whitman Mission near modern day Walla Walla, Washington. The party included the wives of the two men, Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Hart Spalding, who became the first European-American women to cross the Rocky Mountains.

En route, the party accompanied American fur traders going to the 1836 rendezvous on the Green River in Wyoming and then joined Hudson's Bay Company fur traders traveling west to Fort Nez Perce (also called Fort Walla Walla). The group was the first to travel in wagons all the way to Fort Hall, where the wagons were abandoned at the urging of their guides. They used pack animals for the rest of the trip to Fort Walla Walla and then floated by boat to Fort Vancouver to get supplies before returning to start their missions. Other missionaries, mostly husband and wife teams using wagon and pack trains, established missions in the Willamette Valley, as well as various locations in the future states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

Early Emigrants

On May 1, 1839, a group of eighteen men from Peoria, Illinois, set out with the intention of colonizing the Oregon country on behalf of the United States of America and drive out the HBC operating there. The men of the Peoria Party were among the first pioneers to traverse most of the Oregon Trail. The men were initially led by Thomas J. Farnham and called themselves the Oregon Dragoons. They carried a large flag emblazoned with their motto "*Oregon or the Grave.*" Although the group split up near Bent's Fort on the South Platte and Farnham was deposed as leader, nine of their members eventually did reach Oregon.

In September 1840, Robert Newell, Joseph L. Meek, and their families reached Fort Walla Walla with three wagons that they had driven from Fort Hall. Their wagons were the first to reach the Columbia River over land, and they opened the final leg of Oregon Trail to wagon traffic.

In 1841, the Bartleson-Bidwell Party was the first emigrant group credited with using the Oregon Trail to emigrate west. The group set out for California, but about half the party left the original group at Soda Springs, Idaho, and proceeded to the Willamette Valley in Oregon, leaving their wagons at Fort Hall.

On May 16, 1842, the second organized wagon train set out from Elm Grove, Missouri, with more than 100 pioneers. The party was led by Elijah White. The group broke up after passing Fort Hall with most of the single men hurrying ahead and the families following later.

Idaho Oregon Trail

The first Roman Catholic mission in Idaho was established in 1842 among the Coeur d'Alene people. The Native Americans and the missionaries built the Cataldo church, the oldest standing building in Idaho. In 1855, Mormons founded a mission at Fort Lemhi on the Lemhi River in

eastern Idaho. The Mormons abandoned their settlement in 1858 because of conflict with the Native Americans.

Great Migration of 1843

In what was dubbed "The Great Migration of 1843" or the "Wagon Train of 1843", an estimated 700 to 1,000 emigrants left for Oregon. They were led initially by John Gantt, a former US Army Captain and fur trader who was contracted to guide the train to Fort Hall for $1 per person. The winter before, Marcus Whitman had made a brutal mid-winter trip from Oregon to St. Louis to appeal a decision by his Mission backers to abandon several of the Oregon missions. He joined the wagon train at the Platte River for the return trip. When the pioneers were told at Fort Hall by agents from the Hudson Bay Company that they should abandon their wagons there and use pack animals the rest of the way, Whitman disagreed and volunteered to lead the wagons to Oregon. He believed the wagon trains were large enough that they could build whatever road improvements they needed to make the trip with their wagons.

The biggest obstacle they faced was in the Blue Mountains of Oregon where they had to cut and clear a trail through heavy timber. The wagons were stopped at The Dalles, Oregon by the lack of a road around Mount Hood. The wagons had to be disassembled and floated down the treacherous Columbia River and the animals herded over the rough Lolo trail to get by Mt. Hood. Nearly all of the settlers in the 1843 wagon trains arrived in the Willamette Valley by early October. A passable wagon trail now existed from the Missouri River to The Dalles. In 1846, the Barlow Road was completed around Mount Hood, providing a rough but completely passable wagon trail from the Missouri River to the Willamette Valley, about 2,000 miles (3,200 km).

Oregon Country

In 1843, settlers of the Willamette Valley drafted the Organic Laws of Oregon organizing land claims within the Oregon Country. Married couples were granted at no cost (except for the requirement to work and improve the land) up to 640 acres (2.6 km^2), a section or square mile, and unmarried settlers could claim 320 acres (1.3 km^2). As the group was a provisional government with no authority, these claims were not valid under United States or British law, but they were eventually honored by the United States in the Donation Land Act of 1850. The Donation Land Act provided for married settlers to be granted 320 acres (1.3 km^2) and unmarried settlers 160 acres (0.65 km^2). Following the expiration of the act in 1854, the land was no longer free but cost $1.25 per acre ($3.09/hectare) with a limit of 320 acres (1.3 km^2)—the same as most other unimproved government land.

Missouri

Initially, the main "jumping off point" was the common head of the Santa Fe Trail and Oregon trail-independence, and Kansas City. Travelers starting in Independence had to ferry across the Missouri River. After following the Santa Fe Trail to near present day Topeka, they ferried across the Kansas River to start the trek across Kansas and points west. In 1843, another busy "jumping off point" was St. Joseph, which was established as an outpost.

In its early days, St. Joseph was a bustling outpost and rough frontier town, serving as one of the last supply points before heading over the Missouri River to the frontier. St. Joseph had good steamboat connections to St. Louis and other ports on the combined Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi River systems. During the busy season, there were several ferry boats and steamboats available to transport travelers to the Kansas shore where they started their travels westward. Before the Union Pacific Railroad was started in 1865, St. Joseph was the westernmost point in the United States accessible by rail. Other towns used as supply points in Missouri included Old Franklin, Arrow Rock, and Fort Osage.

Mormon Emigration and Mormon Trail

Following persecution and mob action in Missouri, Illinois, and other states in 1844, and the assassination of their prophet Joseph Smith, Mormon leader Brigham Young was chosen by the leaders of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) church to lead the LDS settlers west. He chose to lead his people to the Salt Lake Valley in present day Utah.

In 1847, Young led a small, especially picked fast-moving group of men and women from their Winter Quarters encampments near Omaha, Nebraska and their approximately 50 temporary settlements on the Missouri River in Iowa including Council Bluffs. About 2200 LDS pioneers went that first year as they filtered in from Mississippi, Colorado, California, and several other states. The initial pioneers were charged with establishing farms, growing crops, building fences and herds, and establishing preliminary settlements to feed and support the many thousands of emigrants expected in the coming years. After ferrying across the Missouri River and establishing wagon trains near what became Omaha, the Mormons followed the northern bank of the Platte River in Nebraska to Fort Laramie in present day Wyoming.

The Mormons initially started out with trains of several thousand emigrants in 1848, which were rapidly split into smaller groups to be more easily accommodated at the limited springs and acceptable camping places on the trail. Organized as a complete evacuation from their previous homes, farms, and cities in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, this group consisted of entire families with no one left behind. The much larger presence of women and children meant these wagon trains did not try to cover as much ground in a single day as Oregon and California bound emigrants did, typically taking about 100 days to cover the 1,000 mile (1,600 km) trip to Salt Lake City. The emigrants averaged about 15 miles (24 km) per day. In Wyoming, the Mormon emigrants followed the main Oregon/California/Mormon Trail through Wyoming to Fort Bridger, where they split from the main trail and followed (and improved) the crude path established by the ill-fated Donner Party of 1846 into Utah and the Salt Lake Valley.

Between 1847 and 1860, over 43,000 Mormon settlers and tens of thousands of travelers on the California Trail and Oregon Trail followed Young to Utah. After 1848, the travelers headed to California or Oregon resupplied at the Salt Lake Valley and then went back over the Salt Lake Cutoff, rejoining the trail near the future Idaho–Utah border at the City of Rocks in Idaho.

In 1855, many of the poorer Mormon travelers made the trek with hand-built handcarts and fewer wagons. Guided by experienced guides, handcarts—pulled and pushed by two to four people—were as fast as ox-drawn wagons and allowed them to bring 75 to 100 pounds (34 to 45

kg) of possessions plus some food, bedding, and tents to Utah. Accompanying wagons carried more food and supplies. Upon arrival in Utah, the handcart pioneers were given or found jobs and accommodations by individual Mormon families for the winter until they could become established. About 3,000 out of over 60,000 Mormon pioneers came across with handcarts.

Along the Mormon Trail, the Mormon pioneers established a number of ferries and made trail improvements to help later travelers earn much needed money. One of the better known ferries was the Mormon Ferry across the North Platte near the future site of Fort Caspar in Wyoming, which operated between 1848 and 1852, and the Green River ferry near Fort Bridger, which operated, from 1847 to 1856.

Oregon Treaty Settlement

In 1846, the Oregon Treaty ending the Oregon boundary dispute was signed with Britain. The British lost the land north of the Columbia River they had so long controlled. The new Canada–United States border was established much further north at the 49th parallel. The treaty granted the HBC navigation rights on the Columbia River for supplying their fur posts, clear titles to their trading post properties allowing them to be sold later if they wanted, and left the British with good anchorages at Vancouver and Victoria.

It gave the United States what it mostly wanted, a "reasonable" boundary and a good anchorage on the West Coast in Puget Sound. While there were almost no United States settlers in the future state of Washington, the United States had already demonstrated it could induce thousands of settlers to go to the Oregon Territory, and it would be only a short time before they would vastly outnumber the few hundred HBC employees and retirees living in Washington.

Utah

Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers departed from the Oregon Trail at Fort Bridger in Wyoming in 1847, and followed (and much improved) the rough trail originally recommended by Lansford Hastings to the Donner Party the previous year through the Wasatch Mountains into Utah. After getting into Utah, they immediately started setting up irrigated farms and cities—including Salt Lake City.

In 1848, the Salt Lake Cutoff was established by Sam Hensley, and returning members of the Mormon Battalion provided a path north of the Great Salt Lake from Salt Lake City back to the California and Oregon trails. This cutoff rejoined the Oregon and California Trails near the City of Rocks near the Utah–Idaho border and could be used by both California and Oregon bound travelers.

Located about half way on both the California and Oregon trails, many thousands of later travelers used Salt Lake City and other Utah cities as an intermediate stop for selling or trading excess goods or tired livestock for fresh livestock, repairs, supplies or fresh vegetables. The Mormons looked on these travelers as a welcome bonanza as setting up new communities from scratch required nearly everything the travelers could afford to part with.

The overall distance to California or Oregon was very close to the same whether one "detoured" to Salt Lake City or not. For their own use and to encourage California and Oregon bound travelers, the Mormons improved the Mormon Trail from Fort Bridger and the Salt Lake Cutoff trail. To raise much needed money and facilitate travel on the Salt Lake Cutoff, they set up several ferries across the Weber, Bear, and Malad rivers, which were used mostly by travelers bound for Oregon or California.

Idaho

The main Oregon and California Trail went almost due north from Fort Bridger to the Little Muddy Creek where it passed over the Bear River Mountains to the Bear River valley. It followed northwest into the Thomas Fork area where the trail crossed over the present day Wyoming line into Idaho. In the Eastern Sheep Creek Hills in the Thomas Fork valley, the emigrants encountered Big Hill. Big Hill was a detour caused by a then impassable cut the Bear River made through the mountains. It had a tough ascent, often requiring doubling up of teams, and a very steep and dangerous descent. (Much later, U.S. Highway 30, using modern explosives and equipment, was built through this cut).

In 1852, Eliza Ann McAuley discovered, and with a lot of help, developed the McAuley Cutoff that bypassed much of the difficult climb and descent of Big Hill. After about 5 miles (8.0 km), they passed present-day Montpelier, Idaho, which is now the site of the National Oregon-California Trail Center. The trail follows the Bear River northwest to present-day Soda Springs. The springs here were a favorite attraction of the pioneers who marveled at the hot carbonated water and chugging "steamboat" springs. Many stopped and did their laundry in the hot water as there was usually plenty of good grass and fresh water available.

Just west of Soda Springs the Bear River turns southwest as it heads for the Great Salt Lake, and the main trail turns northwest to follow the Portneuf River valley to Fort Hall, Idaho. Fort Hall was an old fur trading post located on the Snake River. It was established in 1832 by Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth and Company and later sold in 1837 to the Hudson's Bay Company. At Fort Hall nearly all travelers were given some aid and supplies if they were available and needed. Mosquitoes were constant pests, and travelers often mentioned that their animals were covered with blood from the bites. The route from Fort Bridger to Fort Hall was about 210 miles (340 km), taking nine to twelve days to travel.

Oregon

Once across the Snake River ford near Old Fort Boise, the weary travelers went across what would become the state of Oregon. The trail then went to the Malheur River and then past Farewell Bend on the Snake River, up the Burnt River canyon and northwest to the La Grande valley, before coming to the Blue Mountains.

In 1843, settlers cut a wagon road over these mountains making them passable for the first time to wagons. The trail went to the Whitman Mission near Fort Nez Perces in Washington until 1847 when the Whitmans were killed by Native Americans. At Fort Nez Perce some built rafts or hired boats and started down the Columbia; others continued west in their wagons until they

reached The Dalles. After 1847, the trail bypassed the closed mission and headed almost due west to present day Pendleton, Oregon, crossing the Umatilla River, John Day River, and Deschutes River before arriving at The Dalles. Interstate 84 in Oregon roughly follows the original Oregon Trail from Idaho to The Dalles.

Arriving at the Columbia at The Dalles and stopped by the Cascade Mountains and Mount Hood, some gave up their wagons or disassembled them and put them on boats or rafts for a trip down the Columbia River. Once they transited the Cascade's Columbia River Gorge with its multiple rapids and treacherous winds, they would have to make the 1.6-mile (2.6 km) portage around the Cascade Rapids before coming out near the Willamette River where Oregon City was located. The pioneer's livestock could be driven around Mount Hood on the narrow, crooked and rough Lolo Pass.

Several Oregon Trail branches and route variations led to the Willamette Valley. The most popular was the Barlow Road, which was carved though the forest around Mount Hood from The Dalles in 1846 as a toll road at $5 per wagon and 10 cents per head of livestock. It was rough and steep with poor grass but still cheaper and safer than floating goods, wagons and families down the dangerous Columbia River.

In 1861, in Central Oregon, the Santiam Wagon Road was established. It roughly paralleled Oregon Highway 20 to the Willamette Valley. The Applegate Trail was established in 1846, cutting off the California Trail from the Humboldt River in Nevada, and crossed part of California before cutting north to the south end of the Willamette Valley. US Route 99 and Interstate 5 through Oregon roughly follow the original Applegate Trail.

Snake River Cut-Off

Figure 7 - Snake River

The Snake River winds south through Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park before flowing westward into Idaho. The river's path forms part of Idaho's border with Oregon and Washington before it empties into the Columbia River. Randy Wells Photography.

The north side of the Snake had better water and grass than the south. The trail from Three Island Crossing to Old Fort Boise was about 130 miles (210 km) long. The usually lush Boise River valley was a welcome relief. The next crossing of the Snake River was near Old Fort

Boise. This last crossing of the Snake could be done on bull boats while swimming the stock across. Others would chain a large string of wagons and teams together. The theory was that the front teams, usually oxen, would get out of the water first, and with good footing, help pull the whole string of wagons and teams across. How well this worked in practice is not stated. Often young Indian boys were hired to drive and ride the stock across the river—they knew how to swim, unlike many pioneers.

Today's Idaho Interstate 84 roughly follows the Oregon Trail until it leaves the Snake River near Burley. From there Interstate 86 to Pocatello roughly approximates the trail. Highway 30 roughly follows the path of the Oregon Trail from there to Montpelier.

Starting in about 1848 the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail, also called the Snake River Cutoff, was developed as a spur off the main trail. It bypassed the Three Island Crossing and continued traveling down the south side of the Snake River. It rejoined the trail near present-day Ontario, Oregon and hugged the southern edge of the Snake River canyon. It was a much rougher trail with poorer water and grass, requiring occasional steep descents and ascents with the animals down into the Snake River canyon to get water. Travelers on this route avoided two dangerous crossings of the Snake River. Today's Idaho State Route 78 roughly follows the path of the South Alternate route of the Oregon Trail.

California Gold Rush-California Trail

James Marshall discovered a small nugget of gold in the American River in 1948, sparking the California Gold Rush. It is estimated that about two-thirds of the male population in Oregon went to California to cash in on the early gold discoveries. To get there, they helped build the Lassen Branch of the Applegate-Lassen Trail by cutting a wagon road through extensive forests. Many returned with significant gold, which helped jump-start the Oregon economy. Over the next decade, gold seekers from the Midwestern United States and East Coast of the United States started rushing overland and dramatically increased traffic on the Oregon and California Trails. The "forty-niners" often chose speed over safety and opted to use shortcuts such as the Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff in Wyoming that reduced travel time by almost seven days but spanned nearly 45 miles (72 km) of desert without water, grass, or fuel for fires.

1849 was the first year of large-scale cholera epidemics in the United States, and thousands are thought to have died along the trail on their way to California—most buried in unmarked graves in Kansas and Nebraska. The "adjusted" 1850 US Census of California showed this rush was overwhelmingly male with about 112,000 males to 8,000 females (with about 5,500 women over age 15).

Women were significantly under-represented in the California Gold Rush, and sex ratios did not reach essential equality in California (and other western states) until about 1950. The relative scarcity of women gave them many opportunities to do many more things that were not "normally" considered "women's work" of this era. After 1849 the California Gold Rush continued for several years as the California miners continued to find about $50,000,000 worth of gold per year at $21 per ounce. Once California was established as a prosperous state, many thousands more emigrated each year for the opportunities there.

When the Panama Railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was completed, paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships, often heavily subsidized to carry the mail, provided rapid transport to and from the east coast and New Orleans, Louisiana, to and from Panama to ports in California and Oregon.

Over the years many ferries were established to help get across the many rivers on the path of the Oregon Trail. Multiple ferries were established on the Missouri River, Kansas River, Little Blue River, Elkhorn River, Loup River, Platte River, South Platte River, North Platte River, Laramie River, Green River, Bear River, two crossings at the Snake River, John Day River, Deschutes River, Columbia River, as well as many other smaller streams. During peak immigration periods, several ferries on any given river often competed for pioneer dollars. These ferries significantly increased speed and safety for Oregon Trail travelers. Ferries also helped prevent death by drowning at river crossings.

In April 1859, an expedition of US Corp of Topographical Engineers led by Captain James H. Simpson, left Camp Floyd, Utah, to establish an army supply route across the Great Basin to the eastern slope of the Sierras. Upon return in early August, Simpson reported that he had surveyed the Central Overland Route from Camp Floyd to Genoa, Nevada. This route went through central Nevada (roughly where US Route 50 goes today) and was about 280 miles (450 km) shorter than the "standard" Humboldt River California trail route.

Cholera on the Platte River

Figure 8 - Platte River

The shallow Platte River begins in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and flows through Nebraska until it empties into the Missouri River near Omaha. Craig Aurness/Woodfin Camp and Associates, Inc.

Because of the Platte's brackish water, the preferred camping spots were along one of the many fresh water streams draining into the Platte or the occasional fresh water spring found along the way. In 1849-1855, these preferred camping spots became sources of cholera classified as in the epidemic years, as many thousands of people used the same camping spots with essentially no sewage facilities or adequate sewage treatment. One of the side effects of cholera is acute diarrhea, which helps contaminate even more water unless it is isolated and/or treated.

The cause of cholera, ingesting the *Vibrio cholera* bacterium from contaminated water, and the best treatment for cholera infections were unknown in this era. Thousands of travelers on the combined California, Oregon, and Mormon trails succumbed to cholera during this period. Most were buried in unmarked graves in Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming. There are many cases cited involving people who were alive and apparently healthy in the morning and dead by nightfall.

Wyoming-Emigrant Trail in Wyoming

After crossing the South Platte River, the Oregon Trail follows the North Platte River out of Nebraska into Wyoming. Fort Laramie, at the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers, was a major stopping point. Fort Laramie was a former fur trading outpost originally named Fort John that was purchased in 1848 by the U.S. Army to protect travelers on the trails. It was the last army outpost till travelers reached the coast.

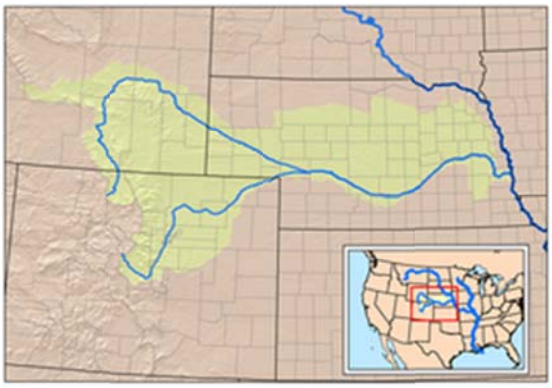

Figure 9 - Map showing the Platte River Watershed, including the North Platte and South Platte tributaries

Fort Laramie was the end of most cholera outbreaks, which killed thousands along the lower Platte and North Platte from 1849 to 1855. Spread by cholera bacteria in fecal contaminated water, cholera caused massive diarrhea, leading to dehydration and death. In those days its cause and treatment were unknown, and it was often fatal—up to 30 percent of infected people died. It is believed that the swifter flowing rivers in Wyoming helped prevent the germs from spreading.

Figure 10 - Independence Rock, Wyoming

After crossing the South Platte, the trail continues up the North Platte River, crossing many small swift flowing creeks. As the North Platte veers to the south, the trail crosses the North Platte to

the Sweetwater River valley that heads almost due west. Independence Rock is on the Sweetwater River. The Sweetwater would have to be crossed up to nine times before the trail crosses over the Continental Divide at South Pass, Wyoming.

From South Pass, the trail continues southwest crossing Big Sandy Creek—about 10 feet (3.0 m) wide and 1 foot (0.30 m) deep—before hitting the Green River. Three to five ferries were in use on the Green River during peak travel periods. The deep, wide, swift and treacherous Green River, which eventually empties into the Colorado River, was usually at high water in July and August, and it was a dangerous crossing. After crossing the Green, the main trail continues on in an approximate southwest direction until it encounters the Blacks Fork of the Green River and Fort Bridger. From Fort Bridger, the Mormon Trail continued southwest following the upgraded Hastings Cutoff through the Wasatch Mountains. From Fort Bridger, the main trail, comprising several variants, veered northwest over the Bear River Divide and descended to the Bear River Valley. The trail turned north following the Bear River past the terminus of the Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff at Smiths Fork and on to the Thomas Fork Valley at the present Wyoming–Idaho border.

In 1844, two major heavily used cutoffs were established in Wyoming. The Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff was established and cut about 70 miles (110 km) off the main route. It leaves the main trail about 10 miles (16 km) west of South Pass and heads almost due west crossing Big Sandy Creek and then about 45 miles (72 km) of waterless, a very dusty desert before reaching the Green River near the present town of La Barge. Ferries here transferred them across the Green River. From there the Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff trail had to cross a mountain range to connect with the main trail near Cookeville in the Bear River valley.

Colorado

A branch of the Oregon Trail crossed the very northeast corner of Colorado if they followed the South Platte River to one of its last crossings. This branch of the trail passed through present day Julesburg before entering Wyoming. Later settlers followed the Platte and South Platte Rivers into their settlements there (much of which became the state of Colorado).

Kansas

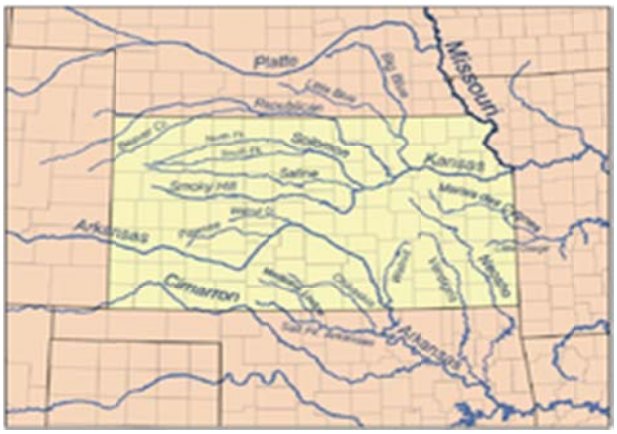

Figure 11 - Map of Principal Rivers in Kansas

Starting initially in Independence, Missouri, or Kansas City in Missouri, the initial trail follows the Santa Fe Trail into Kansas south of the Wakarusa River. After crossing Mount Oread at Lawrence, the trail crosses the Kansas River by ferry or boats near Topeka and crossed the Wakarusa and Vermillion rivers by ferries. After the Vermillion River, the trail angles northwest to Nebraska paralleling the Little Blue River until reaching the south side of the Platte River. Travel by wagon over the gently rolling Kansas countryside was usually unimpeded except where streams had cut steep banks. There a passage could be made with a lot of shovel work to cut down the banks or the travelers could find an already established crossing.

Nebraska

Figure 12 - Chimney Rock, Nebraska

Those emigrants on the eastern side of the Missouri River in Missouri or Iowa used ferries and steamboats (outfitted for ferry duty) to cross into towns in Nebraska. After 1855, several towns in Nebraska were used as *jumping off places* with Omaha eventually becoming a favorite. In 1848, Fort Kearny is about 200 miles (320 km) from the Missouri River, and the trail and its many offshoots nearly all converged close to Fort Kearny as they followed the Platte River west. The army maintained fort was the first chance on the trail to buy emergency supplies, do repairs, get medical aid, or mail a letter. Those on the north side of the Platte could usually wade the shallow river if they needed to visit the fort.

Nebraska and Wyoming

In the spring, in Nebraska and Wyoming, the travelers often encountered fierce wind, rain and lightning storms. Until about 1870 travelers encountered hundreds of thousands of bison migrating through Nebraska on both sides of the Platte River, and most travelers killed several for fresh meat and to build up their supplies of dried jerky for the rest of the journey. The prairie grass in many places was several feet high with only the hat of a traveler on horseback showing as they passed through the prairie grass.

Through many years, the Indians fired much of the dry grass on the prairie every fall so the only trees or bushes available for firewood were on islands in the Platte River. Travelers gathered and ignited dried cow dung to cook their meals. These burned fast in a breeze, and it could take two or more bushels of chips to get one meal prepared. Those traveling south of the Platte crossed

the South Platte fork at one of about three ferries (in dry years it could be forded without a ferry) before continuing up the North Platte River valley into present-day Wyoming heading to Fort Laramie.

Before 1852, those on the north side of the Platte crossed the North Platte to the south side at Fort Laramie. After 1852, they used Child's Cutoff to stay on the north side to about the present day town of Casper, Wyoming where they crossed over to the south side. Today much of the Oregon Trail follows roughly along Interstate 80 from Wyoming to Grand Island, Nebraska. From there US Highway 30, which follows the Platte River, is a better approximate path for those traveling the north side of the Platte. The National Park Service (NPS) gives traveling advice for those who want to follow other branches of the trail.

Later Emigration and Use of the Trail

After 1855, the trail was still in use during the Civil War, but traffic declined when the Panama Railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was completed. Paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships, often heavily subsidized to carry the mail, provided rapid transport to and from the east coast and New Orleans, Louisiana, to and from Panama to ports in California and Oregon.

An expedition of the US Corp of Topographical Engineers in April 1859, led by Captain James H. Simpson, left Camp Floyd, Utah, to establish an army supply route across the Great Basin to the eastern slope of the Sierras. Upon return in early August, Simpson reported that he had surveyed the Central Overland Route from Camp Floyd to Genoa, Nevada. This route went through central Nevada (roughly where U.S. Route 50 goes today) and was about 280 miles (450 km) shorter than the "standard" Humboldt River California trail route.

Alternative West Trails

There were other possible migration paths for early settlers, miners, or travelers to California or Oregon besides the Oregon Trail prior to the establishment of the transcontinental railroads.

From 1821–1846, the Hudson Bay Company twice annually used the York Factory Express overland trade route from Fort Vancouver to Hudson Bay then on to London. James Sinclair led a large party of nearly 200 settlers from the Red River Colony in 1841. These northern routes were largely abandoned after Britain ceded its claim to the southern Columbia River basin by way of the Oregon Treaty of 1846.

The longest trip was the voyage of about 13,600 to 15,000 miles (21,900 to 24,000 km) on an uncomfortable sailing ship rounding the treacherous, cold, and dangerous Cape Horn between Antarctica and South America and then sailing on to California or Oregon. This trip typically took four to seven months (120 to 210 days) and cost about $350 to $500. The cost could be reduced to zero if you signed on as a crewman and worked as a common seaman. The hundreds of abandoned ships, whose crews had deserted in San Francisco Bay in 1849–50 showed many thousands chose to do this.

Panama Route

Other routes involved taking a ship to Colón, Panama (then called Aspin wall) and a strenuous, disease ridden, five to seven-day trip by canoe and mule over the Isthmus of Panama before catching a ship from Panama City, Panama to Oregon or California. This trip could be done from the east coast theoretically in less than two months if all ship connections were made without waits and typically cost about $450/person.

In 1852, catching a fatal disease was a distinct possibility as Ulysses S. Grant learned when his unit of about 600 soldiers and some of their dependents traversed the Isthmus and lost about 120 men, women, and children. This passage was considerably sped up and made safer in 1855 when the Panama Railroad was completed at a terrible cost in money and life across the Isthmus. The once treacherous 50-mile (80 km) trip could be done in less than a day. The time and the cost for transit dropped as regular paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships went from ports on the east coast and New Orleans, Louisiana, to Colón, Panama ($80–$100), across the Isthmus of Panama by railroad ($25) and by paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships to ports in California and Oregon ($100–$150).

Nicaragua Route

In 1849, Cornelius Vanderbilt established another route across Nicaragua. The 120-mile (190 km) long San Juan River to the Atlantic Ocean helps drains the 100-mile (160 km) long Lake Nicaragua. From the western shore of Lake Nicaragua, it is only about 12 miles (19 km) to the Pacific Ocean. Vanderbilt decided to use paddle wheel steam ships from the US to the San Juan River, small paddle wheel steam launches on the San Juan River, boats across Lake Nicaragua, and a stage coach to the Pacific where connections could be made with another ship headed to California, Oregon, etc. Vanderbilt, by undercutting fares to the Isthmus of Panama and stealing many of the Panama Railroad workers, managed to attract roughly 30% of the California bound steamboat traffic. All his connections in Nicaragua were never completely worked out before the Panama Railroad's completion in 1855. Civil strife in Nicaragua and a payment to Cornelius Vanderbilt of a "non-compete" payment (bribe) of $56,000 per year killed the whole project in 1855.

Acapulco, Mexico Route

Another possible route consisted of taking a ship to Mexico, traversing the country and then catching another ship out of Acapulco, Mexico to California etc. This route was used by some adventurous travelers but was not too popular because of the difficulties of making connections and the often hostile population along the way.

Gila Trail. Arizona

The Gila Trail going along the Gila River in Arizona, across the Colorado River and then across the Sonora Desert in California, was scouted by Stephen Kearny's troops and later by Captain Philip St. George Cooke's Mormon Battalion in 1846 who were the first to take a wagon the whole way. This route was used by many gold hungry miners in 1849 who later suffered from

the disadvantage that you had to find a way across the very wide and very dry Sonora Desert. It was used by many and later as a winter crossing to California, despite its many disadvantages.

Butterfield Stage Line

Running from 1857 to 1861, the Butterfield Stage Line won the $600,000/yr. US mail contract to deliver mail to San Francisco, California. As dictated by southern Congressional members, the 2,800 mile (4,500 km) route ran from St. Louis, Missouri through Arkansas, Oklahoma Indian Territory, Texas, New Mexico Territory and across the Sonora Desert before ending in San Francisco, California. Employing over 800 at its peak, it used 250 Concord Stagecoaches seating 12 very crowded passengers in three rows. It used 1,800 head of stock, horses and mules and 139 relay stations to ensure the stages ran day and night. A one-way fare of $200 delivered a very thrashed and tired passenger into San Francisco in 25 to 28 days. After traveling the route, *New York Herald* reporter Waterman Ormsby said, "I now know what Hell is like. I've just had 24 days of it."

Canada Express Route

Other ways to get to Oregon were using the York Factory Express route across Canada and down the Columbia River, ships from Hawaii, San Francisco, or other ports that stopped in Oregon, and emigrants trailing up from California, etc. All provided a trickle of emigrants, but they were soon overwhelmed in numbers by the emigrants coming over the Oregon Trail. The ultimate competitor arrived in 1868, the First Transcontinental Railroad, which cut travel time to about seven days at a low fare (economy) of about $60 (economy).

Pony Express

During 1859-1860, the Army improved the trail for use by wagons and stagecoaches. Starting in 1860, the American Civil War closed the heavily subsidized Butterfield Overland Mail stage southern route through the deserts of the American Southwest.

In 1860–61, the Pony Express, employing riders traveling on horseback day and night with relay stations about every 10 miles (16 km) to supply fresh horses, was established from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The Pony Express built many of their eastern stations along the Oregon/California/Mormon/Bozeman trails and many of their western stations along the very sparsely settled Central Route across Utah and Nevada. The Pony Express delivered mail summer and winter in roughly 10 days from the Midwest to California.

John Butterfield, who since 1858 had been using the Butterfield Overland Mail, also switched to the Central Route to avoid traveling through hostile territories during the American Civil War. George Chorpenning immediately realized the value of this more direct route, and shifted his existing mail and passenger line along with their stations from the "Northern Route" (California Trail) along the Humboldt River.

In 1861, the First Transcontinental Telegraph also laid its lines alongside the Central Overland Route. Several stage lines were set up carrying mail and passengers that traversed much of the

route of the original Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger and from there over the Central Overland Route to California. By traveling day and night with many stations and changes of teams (and extensive mail subsidies) these stages could get passengers and mail from the Midwest to California in about 25 to 28 days.

These combined stage and Pony Express stations along the Oregon Trail and Central Route across Utah and Nevada were joined by the First Transcontinental Telegraph stations and telegraph line, which followed much the same route in 1861 from Carson City, Nevada to Salt Lake City. The Pony Express folded in 1961as they failed to receive an expected mail contract from the US government, and the telegraph filled the need for rapid east–west communication. This combination of wagon/stagecoach/pony express/telegraph line route is labeled the *Pony Express National Historic Trail* on the National Trail Map. From Salt Lake City, the telegraph line followed much of the Mormon/California/Oregon trails to Omaha, Nebraska.

Transcontinental Railroad/Telegraph Service

After the First Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, telegraph lines usually followed the railroad tracks as the required relay stations and telegraph lines were much easier to maintain alongside the tracks. Telegraph lines to unpopulated areas were largely abandoned.

As the years passed, the Oregon Trail became a heavily used corridor from the Missouri River to the Columbia River. Offshoots of the trail continued to grow as gold and silver discoveries, farming, lumbering, ranching, and business opportunities resulted in much more traffic to many areas. Traffic became two-directional as towns were established along the trail. By 1870 the population in the states served by the Oregon Trail and its offshoots increased by about 350,000 over their 1860 census levels. With the exception of most of the 180,000 population increase in California, most of the people living away from the coast traveled over parts of the Oregon Trail and its many extensions and cutoffs to get to their new residences.

Even before the famous Texas cattle drives after the Civil War, the trail was being used to drive herds of thousands of cattle, horses, sheep and goats from the Midwest to various towns and cities along the trails. According to studies by trail historian John Unruh, the livestock may have been as plentiful or more plentiful than the immigrants in many years.

In 1852, there were even records of a 1,500-turkey drive from Illinois to California. The main reason for this livestock traffic was the large cost discrepancy between livestock in the Midwest and at the end of the trail in California, Oregon, or Montana. They could often be bought in the Midwest for about 1/3 to 1/10 what they would fetch at the end of the trail. Large losses could occur and the drovers would still make a significant profit. As the emigrant travel on the trail declined in later years and after livestock ranches were established at many places along the trail, large herds of animals often were driven along part of the trail to get to and from markets.

The first transcontinental railroad, which was completed in 1869, providing faster, safer, and usually cheaper travel east and west. The journey took seven days and cost as little as $65. Some emigrants continued to use the trail well into the 1890s, and modern highways and railroads

eventually paralleled large portions of the trail, including U.S. Highway 26, Interstate 84 in Oregon and Idaho, and Interstate 80 in Nebraska.

Contemporary interest in the overland trek prompted states and federal government to preserve landmarks on the trail including wagon ruts, buildings, and "registers" where emigrants carved their names. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, there have been a number of re-enactments of the trek with participants wearing period garments and traveling by wagon.

Portland Oregon Trail

The city named Portland, Oregon is the seat of Multnomah County and the largest city in the state. Portland is the business and transportation hub for much of the Pacific Northwest and a growing center for electronics manufacturing. The city has a striking natural setting and rich cultural resources. Portland residents refer to their city as the City of Roses.

Wagons

The Oregon Trail was too long and arduous for the standard Conestoga wagons commonly used at that time in the eastern United States and on the Santa Fe Trail. Their 6,000-pound (2,700 kg) freight capacity was larger than needed, and the wagons required for these large teams (8 to 10 animals) could not navigate the tight corners often found on the Oregon Trail.

This led to the rapid development of "prairie schooners." This wagon was approximately half the size of the larger Conestoga, weighed about 1,300 pounds (590 kg) empty with about 2,500 pounds (1,100 kg) of capacity, and about 88 cubic feet (2.5 m^3) of storage space in a box 11 feet (3.4 m) long, 4 feet (1.2 m) wide, and 2 feet (0.6 m) high. These wagons could easily be pulled by four to six oxen or six to ten mules. Extra animals were often recommended because animals could stray or become injured or die on the trip.

Often late in the trip, mixed teams that included dairy cows and riding ponies were sometimes hitched up to make a usable team. The wagons were manufactured in quantity by companies like Studebaker, with new wagons costing between $85 and $170. The cotton canvas covers of the wagons were doubled and treated with linseed oil to help keep them out of the rain, dust and wind, though the covers tended to leak rain and dust eventually.

The typical wagon with 40 to 50-inch (100 to 130 cm) diameter wheels could easily move over rough ground and rocks without high centering and even over most tree stumps if required. The wooden wheels were protected with an iron rim typically about 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) wide. These iron tires were installed hot so they would shrink tightly onto the wood wheel when they cooled. Nevertheless it was advisable to soak the wheel in water periodically as the desert air could dry the wheel so much that the iron tire would fall off.

In practice, it was found that the standard farm wagon built by a company or wagon maker (Wainwright) of good reputation usually worked almost as well as "prairie schooners" and had only to be fitted with wooden bows and a canvas cover to be ready. Wagons were generally reliable if maintained, but they sometimes broke down and had to be repaired or abandoned

along the way. Broken axles and broken wagon tongues were two of the most common problems. Abandoned wagons were typically scavenged for needed parts. One wagon could carry enough food for six months' travel for four or five travelers as well as a short list of household and luxury items including clothing and ammunition.

It is estimated that about 70 percent of the wagons traveling west were pulled by oxen; mule teams were a strong second choice at 20 to 30 percent, and initially there were almost no horse-pulled wagons. This was true for many reasons. An ox team was about 10 percent slower than a mule or horse-pulled wagon—about 2 to 3 miles per hour (3 to 5 km/h). However, they were cheaper to buy ($25 to $85 per yoke versus up to $600 or more for six horses), easier to train, could pull more, survived better on the sparse grass often found along the trail, did not require oats or grain, and were often tamer and easier to handle after they were trained. Novices could usually learn to handle a trained ox team in about a week.

Oxen could usually be turned loose at night and easily rounded up in the mornings. Mules and horses typically required herding day and night and often had to be staked out on a rope or hobbled. Oxen were usually easier to find and catch, and the Indians were usually less interested in stealing them. Mules were the second choice. They were about as fast as a horse and could survive well on the grazing found along the way and worked well when trained. Trained mules were hard to find, and mules were difficult to handle until trained by an experienced mule skinner, which could take two months. In later years, horses were chosen more often because they were about 10% faster, and the oats and grain required to keep them fit for months of continuous work be bought along the way.

The oxen drivers walked alongside the left side of their oxen team and used the voice commands "gee" (right) and "haw" (left) and a whip to guide them. Mules were often guided by riding one that was hooked to the wagon (typically the left hand wheel mule) and handling the reins from there. Whips were seldom used to actually whip the animals but were used to get the animal's attention by snapping them in the air.

Food Carried on Wagons

The recommended amount of food to take per person was 150 pounds (68 kg) of flour, 20 pounds (9.1 kg) of corn meal, 50 pounds (23 kg) of bacon, 40 pounds (18 kg) of sugar, 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of coffee, 15 pounds (6.8 kg) of dried fruit, 5 pounds (2.3 kg) of salt, half a pound (0.25 kg) of saleratus (baking soda, baking powder leavening mix), 2 pounds (0.91 kg) of tea, 5 pounds (2.3 kg) of rice, and 15 pounds (6.8 kg) of beans. These provisions were usually kept in water-tight containers or barrels to minimize spoilage. The usual meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner along the trail was bacon, beans, and coffee, with biscuits or bread. The typical cost of food for four people for six months was about $150.

The amount of food required was less if beef cattle, calves or sheep were taken for walking food supply. Before the 1870s, there were vast herds of buffalo in Nebraska, which provided fresh meat and jerky for the trip. In general, wild game could not be depended on for a regular source of food, but when found it was relished as a welcome change in a monotonous diet. Travelers

could hunt antelope, buffalo, sage hens, trout, and occasionally elk, bear, duck, geese, salmon and deer along the trail.

Most travelers carried a rifle or shotgun and ammunition for hunting game and for protection against snakes and Indian attacks. When they got to the Snake River and Columbia River areas, they would often trade with the Indians for salmon. The Indians in Oregon traded potatoes and other vegetables they had learned to grow from the missionaries. Some families took along milk cows, goats, and chickens penned in crates tied to the wagons. Additional food like pickles, canned butter, cheese or pickled eggs were occasionally carried, but canned goods were expensive and food preservation was primitive, so few items could be safely kept for the four to six month duration of the trip.

Cooking along the trail was done over a campfire. Fuels used were wood, buffalo chips, willow or sagebrush. Flint and steel were used to start fires. Some carried matches in water-tight containers. Fire was borrowed from a neighbor for ease of starting. The necessary cooking utensils required were available. Some brought small stoves, but these were often jettisoned along the way as being too heavy and unnecessary. Wooden or canvas buckets were brought for carrying water, and most travelers carried canteens or water bags for daily use. A ten-gallon water barrel was needed, but it was usually kept nearly empty to minimize weight. Some water had to be kept in it to prevent drying out and losing water tightness. It was only filled for long waterless stretches. Some brought a new invention, an Indian rubber combination mattress and water carrier.

Clothing and Equipment

Tobacco was popular, both for personal use and for trading with Indians and other pioneers. Each person brought at least two changes of clothes and multiple pairs of boots (two to three pairs often wore out on the trip). About 25 pounds of soap was recommended for a party of four for bathing and washing clothes. A washboard and tub were usually brought for washing clothes. Wash days typically occurred once or twice a month or less, depending on availability of good grass, water and fuel. Most wagons carried tents for sleeping, though in good weather most would sleep outside. A thin fold-up mattress, blankets, pillows, canvas or rubber "gutta percha" ground covers were used for sleeping. Sometimes an unfolded feather bed mattress was brought for the wagon if there were pregnant women or very young children along. The wagons had no springs, and the rides along the trail were very rough. Despite modern depictions, almost nobody actually rode in the wagons; it was too dusty, too rough, and too hard on the livestock.

Figure 13 - Wagon Oregon Trail by Albert Bierstadt, circa 1863

Travelers brought books, Bibles, trail guides, and writing quills, ink and paper for letters (about one in 200 kept a diary).

Belt and folding knives were carried by nearly all men and boys. Awls, scissors, pins, needles and thread for mending were required. Spare leather was used for repairs to shoes, harnesses, and other equipment. Some used goggles to keep dust out of the eyes. Storage boxes were ideally the same height so they could be arranged to give a flat surface inside the wagon for a sleeping platform.

Saddles, bridles, hobbles, and ropes were needed if the party had a horse or riding mule, and many men did. Extra harnesses and spare wagon parts were often carried. Most carried steel shoes for oxen, mules or horses. Tar was carried to help repair an injured ox hoof.

Goods, supplies and equipment were often shared by fellow travelers. Items that were forgotten, broken or worn out could be bought from a fellow traveler, post or fort along the way. New iron shoes for horses, mules and oxen were put on by blacksmiths found along the way. Equipment repairs and other goods could be procured from blacksmith shops established at some forts and some ferries. Emergency supplies, repairs and livestock were often provided by local residents in Oregon, California, and Utah for late travelers on the trail who were hurrying to beat the snow.

Non-essential items were often abandoned to lighten the load, or in case of emergency. Many travelers would salvage discarded items, picking up essentials or leaving behind their lower quality item when a better one was found along the road. Some profited by collecting discarded items and hauling them back to jumping off places and reselling them.

In the early years, Mormons sent scavenging parties back along the trail to salvage as much iron and other supplies as possible and haul it to Salt Lake City, where supplies of all kinds were needed. Others would use discarded wagons, wheels and furniture as firewood. During the 1849 gold rush, Fort Laramie was known as "Camp Sacrifice" because of the large amounts of merchandise discarded nearby. Travelers had pushed along the relatively easy path to Fort Laramie with their luxury items, but discarded them before the difficult mountain crossing ahead and after discovering that many items could be purchased at the forts or located for free along the way. Some travelers carried their excess goods to Salt Lake City to be sold.

Professional tools used by blacksmiths, carpenters, and farmers were carried by nearly all. In general, as little road work as possible was done. Travel was often along the top of ridges to avoid the brush and washes common in many valleys.

Statistics

Overall, some 268,000 pioneers used the Oregon Trail and its three primary off-shoots, the California, Bozeman, and Mormon trails to reach the West Coast in 1840-60. Another 48,000 headed to Utah. There is no estimate on how many used it to return east. Reference is made to Table I below.

Some of the trail statistics for the early years were recorded by the US Army at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, from about 1849 to 1855. None of these original statistical records have been found—the Army lost them or destroyed them. There are only some partial written copies of the Army records and notes recorded in several diaries. Emigration to California spiked considerably with the 1849 gold rush. Following the discovery of gold, California remained the destination of choice for most emigrants on the trail up to 1860, with almost 200,000 people traveling there between 1849 and 1860.

Travel diminished after 1860 as the Civil War caused considerable disruptions on the trail. Many of the people on the trail were fleeing the war and its attendant drafts in both the south and the north. Trail historian Merrill J. Mattes has estimated the number of emigrants for 1861–1867 given in the total column of the table. But these estimates may well be low since they only amount to an extra 125,000 people, and the 1870 census shows that over 200,000 additional people (ignoring most of California's population increase which had excellent sea and rail connections across Panama by then) showed up in all the states served by the California/Oregon/Mormon/Bozeman Trail(s) and its offshoots. Mormon emigration records after 1860 are reasonably accurate as newspaper and other accounts in Salt Lake City give most of the names of emigrants arriving each year from 1847 to 1868. Gold and silver strikes in Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and Montana caused a considerable increase in people using the trails, often in directions different from the original trail users.

Though the numbers are significant in the context of the times, far more people chose to remain at home in the 31 states (reference is made to Table II, Demographics during the Civil War). Between 1840 and 1860, the population of the United States rose by 14 million, yet only about 300,000 decided to make the trip. Many that went were between the ages 12 and 24. Between 1860 and 1870, the U.S. population increased by seven million, with about 350,000 of this increase being in the Western states. Many were discouraged by the cost, effort and danger of the trip. Western scout Kit Carson reputedly said: "The cowards never started and the weak died on the way." According to several sources, 3 to 10 percent of the emigrants are estimated to have perished on the way west.

Table I – Emigrants Estimated California, Oregon, Mormon Trails

Year	Oregon	California	Utah	Total
1834–39	20	–	–	20
1840	13	–	–	13
1841	24	34	–	58
1842	125	–	–	125
1843	875	38	--	913
1844	1,475	53	–	1,528
1845	2,500	260	–	2,760
1846	1,200	1,500	–	2,700
1847	4,000	450	2,200	6,650
1848	1,300	400	2,400	4,100
Total	**11,512**	**2,735**	**4,600**	**18,847**
1849	450	25,000	1,500	26,950

1850	6,000	44,000	2,500	52,500
1851	3,600	1,100	1,500	6,200
1852	10,000	50,000	10,000	70,000
1853	7,500	20,000	8,000	35,500
1854	6,000	12,000	3,200	21,200
1855	500	1,500	4,700	6,700
1856	1,000	8,000	2,400	11,400
1857	1,500	4,000	1,300	6,800
1858	1,500	6,000	150	7,650
1859	2,000	17,000	1,400	20,400
1860	1,500	9,000	1,600	12,100
Total	**53,000**	**200,300**	**43,000**	**296,300**

Table II – Demographics during the Civil War				
Year 1834–60	**Oregon**	**California**	**Utah**	**Total**
1861	–	–	3,148	5,000
1862	–	–	5,244	5,000
1863	–	–	4,760	10,000
1864	–	–	2,626	10,000
1865	–	–	690	20,000
1866	–	–	3,299	25,000
1867	–	–	700	25,000
1868	–	–	4,285	25,000
Total	**80,000**	**250,000**	**70,000**	**400,000**

Demographic Data of 1860 and 1870 Censuses

These census numbers show a 363,000 population increase in the western states and territories between 1860 and 1870. Some of this increase is because of a high birth rate in the western states and territories but most is from emigrants moving from the east to the west and new immigration from Europe. Much of the increase in California and Oregon is from emigration by ship as there were fast and reasonably low cost transportation via east and west coast steamships and the Panama Railroad after 1855. The census numbers imply at least 200,000 emigrants (or more) used some variation of the California/Oregon/Mormon/Bozeman trails to get to their new homes between 1860 and 1870.

Table III: Census Population of western States			
State	**1870**	**1860**	**Difference**
California	560,247	379,994	180,253
Nevada	42,491	6,857	35,634
Oregon	90,923	52,465	38,458
Colorado	39,684	34,277	5,407

Idaho	14,990	–	14,990
Montana	20,595	–	20,595
Utah	86,789	40,273	46,516
Washington	23,955	11,594	12,361
Wyoming	9,118	–	9,118
Totals	**888,792**	**525,460**	**363,332**

Travel Costs

The cost of traveling over the Oregon Trail and its extensions varied from nothing to a few hundred dollars per person. Women seldom went alone. The cheapest way was to hire on to help drive the wagons or herds, allowing one to make the trip for nearly nothing or even make a small profit. Those with capital could often buy livestock in the Midwest and drive the stock to California or Oregon for profit. About 60 to 80 percent of the travelers were farmers and as such already owned a wagon, livestock team, and many of the necessary supplies. This lowered the cost of the trip to about $50 per person for food and other items. Families planned the trip months in advance and made many of the extra clothing and other items needed. Individuals buying most of the needed items would end up spending about $150–$200 per person. As the trail matured, additional costs for ferries and toll roads were thought to have been about $30 per wagon.

Demographic Data Death/Casualties

Reference is made to Table IV below. The route west was arduous and with many dangers, but the number of deaths on the trail is not known with any precision. There are only wildly varying estimates. Estimating is difficult because of the common practice of burying people in unmarked graves that were intentionally disguised to avoid them being dug up by animals or Indians. Graves were often put in the middle of a trail and then run over by the livestock to make them difficult to find. Disease was the main killer of trail travelers; cholera killed up to 3 percent of all travelers in the epidemic years from 1849 to 1855.

Indian attacks increased significantly after 1860 when most of the army troops were withdrawn and miners and ranchers began fanning out all over the country, often encroaching on Indian territory. Increased attacks along the Humboldt led to most travelers taking the Central Nevada Route. The Goodall cutoff was developed in Idaho in 1862 which kept Oregon bound travelers away from much of the Indian trouble nearer the Snake River. Other trails were developed that traveled further along the South Platte to avoid local Indian hot spots.

Other common causes of death included hypothermia, drowning in river crossings, getting run over by wagons, and accidental gun deaths. Later, more family groups started traveling as well as many more ferries and bridges were being put in, and fording a dangerous river became much less common and dangerous. Surprisingly few people were taught to swim in this era. Being run over was a major cause of death, despite the wagons only averaging 2–3 miles per hour. The wagons could not easily be stopped, and people, particularly children, were often trying to get on and off the wagons while they were moving—not always successfully.

Another hazard was a dress getting caught in the wheels and pulling the person under. Accidental shootings declined significantly at Fort Laramie as people became more familiar with their weapons and often just left them in their wagons. Carrying around a ten-pound rifle all day soon became tedious and usually unnecessary as the perceived Indian threat faded and hunting opportunities receded.

A significant number of travelers were suffering from scurvy by the end of their trips. Their typical flour and salted pork/bacon diet had very little vitamin C in it. The diet in the mining camps was also typically low in fresh vegetables and fruits, which indirectly led to early deaths of many of the inhabitants. Some believe that scurvy deaths may have rivaled cholera as a killer. Miscellaneous deaths included death by homicides, lightning strikes, childbirth, stampedes, snake bites, flash floods, falling trees, and kicks by animals. According to an evaluation by John Unruh, a 4 percent death rate or 16,000 out of 400,000 total pioneers on all trails may have died on the trail.

Table IV: Demographic Data Death/Casualties (Oregon-California-Morman Trail Deaths)

Cause	Estimated Deaths
Disease	6,000–12,500
Native American attack	3,000–4,500
Freezing	300–500
Run over's	200–500
Drowning	200–500
Shootings	200–500
Miscellaneous	200–500
Scurvy	300–500
Total	**9,400–21,000**

Legacy

One of the enduring legacies of the Oregon Trail is the expansion of the United States territory to the West Coast. Without the many thousands of United States settlers in Oregon and California and thousands more on their way each year, it is highly unlikely that this would have occurred. The western expansion and the Oregon Trail in particular inspired many songs that told of the settlers' experiences. "Uncle Sam's Farm" encouraged east-coast dwellers to "Come right away. Our lands they are broad enough, so do not be alarmed. Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm." In "Western Country" the singer exhorts that "if I had no horse at all, I'd still be a hauling, far across those Rocky Mountains, goin' away to Oregon."

The story of the Oregon Trail inspired a popular educational computer game of the same name, *The Oregon Trail*. The game became widely popular in the 1980s and early 1990s. Several sequels to the game were also released, such as *The Oregon Trail II*, *The Yukon Trail*, and *The Amazon Trail*.

The Oregon Trail was a television series that ran from September 22 through October 26, 1977, on NBC. The show starred Rod Taylor, Tony Becker, Darleen Carr, Charles Napier, and Ken Swofford. Although the show was canceled after six episodes, the remaining seven episodes were later aired on BBC 2 in the United Kingdom. In June 2010, the entire series was released on DVD in the USA by Timeless.

Summary

The Oregon Trail is the overland pioneer route to the northwestern United States. About 3200 km (about 2000 mi) long, the trail extended from Independence, Missouri, to the Columbia River in Oregon. Originally, like many other main routes in the United States, sections of the Oregon Trail had been used by the Native Americans and trappers. As early as 1742, part of the trail in Wyoming had been blazed by the French Canadian explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, and Sieur de La Vérendrye.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson issued the following instructions to Meriwether Lewis: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, and such principal streams of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado and/or other river may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce."

During 1804-1806, the first land route across what is now the United States was partially mapped by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In 1810, fur trader, entrepreneur, and one of the wealthiest men in the US, John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company, outfitted an expedition (known as the Astor Expedition or *Astorians*) under Wilson Price Hunt to find a possible overland supply route and trapping territory for fur trading posts. Although Lewis and William Clark found a path to the Pacific Ocean, it was not until 1859 that a direct and practicable route, the Mullan road, connected the Missouri River to the Columbia River.

President Thomas Jefferson obtained from France in 1803, the Louisiana Purchase for $15 million (equivalent to about $230 million today) which included all the land drained by the Missouri River and roughly doubled the size of U.S. territory. The future states of Iowa and Missouri located west of the Mississippi River and east of Missouri River were part of this purchase.

From 1812 to 1840, the British through the HBC had nearly completed control of the Pacific Northwest and the western half of the Oregon Trail. The War of 1812 was a conflict between the United States and Britain that began in 1812 and lasted until early 1815. President James Madison requested a declaration of war to protect American ships on the high seas and to stop the British from impressing or seizing US sailors. In theory, the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812, restored the US back to its possessions in Oregon territory.

"Joint occupation" of the region was formally established by the Anglo-American Convention of 1818. In 1836, the first emigrants to make the trip of the Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon were Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. Between 1842 and 1845, Frémont led three expeditions into the Oregon Territory. However, the first mass migration did not occur until 1843 when

approximately 1000 pioneers made the journey at one time. This trail was the only feasible land route for settlers to get to the West Coast.

From 1843 until 1869 when the first transcontinental railroad was completed, there were over 500,000 people who made the trip in covered wagons pulled by mule and oxen. By the middle of the 19th century, the Oregon Trail had become the main route to the American Northwest. The French explorer Joseph Nicolas Nicollet surveyed and mapped the region between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Up to 3,000 mountain men were trappers and explorers, employed by various British and United States fur companies or working as free trappers, who roamed the North American Rocky Mountains from about 1810 to the early 1840s. Trapping took place in the fall when the fur became prime. The York Factory Express, establishing another route to the Oregon territory, evolved from an earlier express brigade used by the North West Company between Fort Astoria and Fort William, Ontario on Lake Superior.

In 1834, the Dalles Methodist Mission was founded by Reverend Jason Lee just east of Mount Hood on the Columbia River. In 1836, Henry H. Spalding and Marcus Whitman traveled west to establish the Whitman Mission near modern day Walla Walla, Washington. On July 4, 1838, President Martin Van Buren signed the US Congress law establishing the Territory of Iowa. The first Roman Catholic mission in Idaho was established in 1842 among the Coeur d'Alene people. The Native Americans and the missionaries built the Cataldo Church, the oldest standing building in Idaho.

Settlers of the Willamette Valley drafted the Organic Laws of Oregon in 1843, organizing land claims within the Oregon Country. Married couples were granted at no cost (except for the requirement to work and improve the land) up to 640 acres (2.6 km^2) (a section or square mile), and unmarried settlers could claim 320 acres (1.3 km^2). In 1843, another busy "jumping off point" was St. Joseph, which was established as an outpost. In its early days, St. Joseph was a bustling outpost and rough frontier town, serving as one of the last supply points before heading over the Missouri River to the frontier.

In 1844 following persecution and mob action in Missouri, Illinois, and other states, and the assassination of their prophet Joseph Smith, Mormon leader Brigham Young was chosen by the leaders of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) church to lead the LDS settlers west. He chose to lead his people to the Salt Lake Valley in present day Utah. After getting into Utah they immediately started setting up irrigated farms and cities—including Salt Lake City.

The Mormons, expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois in 1846, traversed Iowa (on part of the Mormon Trail) and settled temporarily in significant numbers on the Missouri River in Iowa. The Oregon Treaty ending the Oregon boundary dispute was signed with Britain. The British lost the land north of the Columbia River they had so long controlled. The new Canada–United States border was established much further north at the 49th parallel. The Applegate Trail was established, cutting off the California Trail from the Humboldt River in Nevada and crossed part of California before cutting north to the south end of the Willamette Valley.

The Mormons established three ferries across the Missouri River and others established even more ferries for the spring start on the trail. Between 1847 and 1860 over 43,000 Mormon settlers and tens of thousands of travelers on the California Trail and Oregon Trail followed Young to Utah. In January 1848, James Marshall discovered a small nugget of gold in the American River, sparking the California Gold Rush. It is estimated that about two-thirds of the male population in Oregon went to California to cash in on the early gold discoveries.

Fort Laramie was a former fur-trading outpost originally named Fort John that was purchased in 1848 by the US Army to protect travelers on the trails. It was the last army outpost till travelers reached the coast. A branch of the Oregon Trail crossed the very northeast corner of Colorado if they followed the South Platte River to one of its last crossings. This branch of the trail passed through present day Julesburg before entering Wyoming. After 1849 the California Gold Rush continued for several years as the California miners continued to find about $50,000,000 worth of gold per year at $21 per ounce.

The Mormons founded a mission at Fort Lemhi, on the Lemhi River in eastern Idaho in 1855, when the Panama Railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was completed. After 1855, the trail was still in use during the Civil War, but traffic declined when the Panama Railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was completed. Paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships, often heavily subsidized to carry the mail, provided rapid transport to and from the east coast and New Orleans, Louisiana, and to and from Panama to ports in California and Oregon. In 1858, the Mormons abandoned their settlement because of conflict with the Native Americans. In 1861, in Central Oregon, the Santiam Wagon Road was established, which roughly parallels Oregon Highway 20 to the Willamette Valley.

Interstate 84 in Oregon roughly follows the original Oregon Trail from Idaho to The Dalles US Route 99, and Interstate 5 through Oregon roughly follows the original Applegate Trail until it leaves the Snake River near Burley. From there Interstate 86 to Pocatello roughly approximates the trail. Highway 30 roughly follows the path of the Oregon Trail from there to Montpelier. From there US Highway 30, which follows the Platte River, is a better approximate path for those traveling the north side of the Platte. Today's Idaho State Route 78 roughly follows the path of the South Alternate route of the Oregon Trail. Today much of the Oregon Trail follows along Interstate 80 from Wyoming to Grand Island, Nebraska.

Annex B: Chronology of the Oregon Trail

Introduction

The Oregon Trail is a 2,000-mile (3,200 km) historic east-west large wheeled wagon route and emigrant trail that connected the Missouri River to valleys in Oregon. The eastern part of the Oregon Trail spanned part of the future state of Kansas and nearly all of what are now the states of Nebraska and Wyoming. The western half of the trail spanned most of the future states of Idaho and Oregon. The following is a sequential summary of how the trail was developed and allowed the early explorers to reach the Pacific Ocean.

1742: As early as 1742, part of the trail in Wyoming had been blazed by the French Canadian explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, and Sieur de La Vérendrye.

19th Century: By the middle of the 19th century, the Oregon Trail had become the main route to the American Northwest. Thousands traveled the route, which took six months by covered wagon. Deeply rutted roads cut by wagon wheels can still be seen today in many places along the trail.

1803: President Thomas Jefferson obtained from France the Louisiana Purchase for $15 million (equivalent to about $230 million today) which included all the land drained by the Missouri River and roughly doubled the size of US territory. The future states of Iowa and Missouri located west of the Mississippi River and east of Missouri River were part of this purchase.

1804: A disputed 1804 treaty between Quashquame and William Henry Harrison (future ninth President of the US) that surrendered much of the future state of Illinois to the US, enraged many Sauk (Sac) Indians and led to the 1832 Black Hawk War.

1804-1806: The Lewis and Clark Expeditions were launched under the auspices of Thomas Jefferson. The first land route across what is now the United States was partially mapped by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Lewis and Clark initially believed they had found a practical overland route to the west coast; however, the two passes they found going through the Rocky Mountains, Lemhi Pass, and Lolo Pass turned out to be much too difficult for wagons to pass through without considerable road work.

1805: The expedition struggled around the Great Falls of the Missouri, searched for a pass over the Continental Divide, and was stunned not to find a water passage direct from present-day Idaho to the ocean. Instead, the party labored in deep snow over the Lolo Trail, crossing the border of present-day Montana into Idaho, where they encountered the Native American tribe known as the Nez Perce. The Nez Perce taught them how to eat camas roots and assured them that the rivers ahead were navigable. The explorers then traveled on the Snake River into present-day Washington before finally reaching the Columbia River. By the time Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Ocean in November 1805 and built Fort Clatsop, their winter residence near present-day Astoria, Oregon, they had a much clearer sense of the continent's geographic complexity.

1805-1806: The Lewis and Clark Expedition stopped several times in the future state of Iowa on their 1805–1806 expedition to the west coast. On the return trip in they traveled from the Columbia River to the Snake River and the Clearwater River over Lolo pass again. They then traveled overland up the Blackfoot River and crossed the Continental Divide at the Lewis and Clark Pass and on to the head of the Missouri River. This was ultimately a shorter and faster route than the one they followed west. This route had the disadvantage of being much too rough for wagons and controlled by the Blackfoot Indians.

Reports from expeditions in 1806 by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike and in 1819 by Major Stephen Long, described the Great Plains as "unfit for human habitation" and as "The Great American

Desert." These descriptions were mainly based on the relative lack of timber and surface water. The images of sandy wastelands conjured up by terms like "desert" were tempered by the many reports of vast herds of millions of Plains Bison that somehow managed to live in this "desert."

1810: Fur trader, entrepreneur, and one of the wealthiest men in the US, John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company, outfitted an expedition (known as the Astor Expedition or *Astoria's*) under Wilson Price Hunt to find a possible overland supply route and trapping territory for fur trading posts. Fearing attack by the Blackfoot Indians, the overland expedition veered south of Lewis and Clark's route into what is now Wyoming and in the process passed across Union Pass and into Jackson Hole, Wyoming. From there they went over the Teton Range via Teton Pass and then down to the Snake River in Idaho. The expedition demonstrated that much of the route along the Snake River plain and across to the Columbia was passable by pack train or with minimal improvements, even wagons. This knowledge would be incorporated into the concatenated trail segments as the Oregon Trail took its early shape.

1810-1840's: Up to 3,000 mountain men were trappers and explorers, employed by various British and United States fur companies or working as free trappers who roamed the North American Rocky Mountains.

Early 1811: The supply ship Tonquin left supplies and men to establish Fort Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River, and Fort Okanogan at the confluence of the Okanogan and Columbia rivers. The Tonquin then went up the coast to Clayoquot for a trading expedition. There, it was attacked and overwhelmed by the indigenous Nuu-chah-multh before being blown up, killing all the crew and many natives.

The German American fur trader and financier John Jacob Astor, in establishing his trading posts, dispatched a party overland in 1811 to follow the trail of these explorers.

Three months after Fort Astor was established, David Thompson and his team of British North West Company explorers came floating down the Columbia to Fort Astoria. He had just completed a journey through much of western Canada and most of the Columbia River drainage system. He was mapping the country for possible fur trading posts. Astor, pressured by potential confiscation by the British navy of their forts and supplies in the War of 1812, sold to the North West Company their forts, supplies and furs on the Columbia and Snake River. The North West Company started establishing more forts and trading posts of their own. During this period, the Oregon Trail was laid by fur trappers and traders and was only passable on foot or by horseback.

1812-1813: The Lewis Clark expedition party continued east via the Sweetwater River, North Platte River (where they spent the winter of 1812–1813) and Platte River to the Missouri River, finally arriving in St. Louis in the spring of 1813. The route they had used appeared to potentially be a practical wagon route, requiring minimal improvements, and Stuart's journals provided a meticulous account of most of the route. Because of the War of 1812 and the lack of US fur trading posts in the Oregon Country, most of the route was unused for more than 10 years.

1812-1840: The British through the HBC had nearly complete control of the Pacific Northwest and the western half of the Oregon Trail. In theory, the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812 restored the US back to its possessions in the Oregon territory. "Joint occupation" of the region was formally established by the Anglo-American Convention of 1818. The British through the HBC tried to discourage any US trappers, traders and settlers from doing any significant trapping, trading or settling in the Pacific Northwest.

Fur trappers, often working for fur traders, followed nearly all possible streams looking for beaver in the years the fur trade was active. Fur traders, besides discovering and naming many of the rivers and mountains in the Intermountain West and Pacific Northwest, often kept diaries of their travels and were available as guides and consultants when the trail started to become open for general travel. The fur trade business wound down to a very low level just as the Oregon Trail traffic seriously began around 1840.

1821: By 1821, when armed hostilities broke out with their Hudson Bay Company (HBC) rivals, the North West Company was pressured by the British government to merge with the HBC. The HBC had nearly a complete monopoly on trading (and most governing issues) in the Columbia District, or Oregon Country as it was referred to by the Americans, and also in Rupert's Land (western Canada). That year the British parliament passed a statute applying the laws of Upper Canada to the district and giving the HBC power to enforce those laws.

1821–1846: The Hudson Bay Company twice annually used the York Factory Express overland trade route from Fort Vancouver to Hudson Bay, then on to London. James Sinclair led a large party of nearly 200 settlers from the Red River Colony in 1841. These northern routes were largely abandoned after Britain ceded its claim to the southern Columbia River basin by way of the Oregon Treaty of 1846.

Fall of 1823: Jedediah Smith and Thomas Fitzpatrick led their trapping crew south from the Yellowstone River to the Sweetwater River. They were looking for a safe location to spend the winter and try to transport their extensive fur collection down the Sweetwater and North Platte River. They found, after a near disastrous canoe crash, that the rivers were too swift and rough for water passage.

1824: By overland travel, American missionaries and early settlers (initially mostly ex-trappers) started showing up in Oregon. The HBC built a new much larger Fort Vancouver slightly upstream of Fort Astoria on the north side of the Columbia River (they were hoping the Columbia would be the future Canada–U.S. border). The fort quickly became the center of activity in the Pacific Northwest.

Every year ships would come from London to the Pacific (via Cape Horn) to drop off supplies and trade goods in their trading posts in the Pacific Northwest and pick up the accumulated furs used to pay for these supplies. It was the nexus for the fur trade on the Pacific Coast; its influence reached from the Rocky Mountains to the Hawaiian Islands, and from Russian Alaska. They cached their furs under a dome of rock they named Independence Rock and started their long trek on foot to the Missouri River. They had re-discovered the route that Robert Stuart had taken in 1813—eleven years before.

1825: The HBC established Fort Colville on the Columbia River near Kettle Falls as a good site to collect furs and control the upper Columbia River fur trade. Fort Nisqually was built near the present town of DuPont, Washington and was the first HBC fort on Puget Sound.

By 1825, the HBC started using two brigades, each setting out from opposite ends of the express route—one from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River and the other from York Factory on Hudson Bay—in spring and passing each other in the middle of the continent. This established a "quick"—about 100 days for 2,600 miles (4,200 km) one way—to resupply their forts and fur trading centers as well as collecting the furs the posts had bought and transmitting messages between Fort Vancouver and York Factory on Hudson Bay.

The first significant American Rendezvous occurred on Henry's Fork of the Green River. The trading supplies were brought in by a large party using pack trains originating on the Missouri River. These pack trains were then used to haul out the fur bales. They normally used the north side of the Platte River—the same route used 20 years later by the Mormon Trail.

For the next 15 years the American rendezvous was an annual event moving to different locations, usually somewhere on the Green River in the future state of Wyoming. Each rendezvous, occurring during the slack summer period, allowed the fur traders to trade for and collect the furs from the trappers and their Indian allies without having the expense of building or maintaining a fort or wintering over in the cold Rockies.

Figure 14 - HBC's York Factory Express trade route, 1820s to 1840s. Modern political boundaries are shown.

1830: William Sublette brought the first wagons carrying his trading goods up the Platte, North Platte, and Sweetwater rivers before crossing over South Pass to a fur trade rendezvous on the Green River near the future town of Big Piney, Wyoming. He had a crew that dug out the gullies and river crossings and cleared the brush where needed.

The HBC instituted a policy intended to destroy or weaken the American fur trade companies. The HBC's annual collection and re-supply Snake River Expedition was transformed to a trading enterprise.

1831: Jedediah Smith was killed by Indians around 1831.

1832: Fort Hall was an old fur trading post located on the Snake River established by Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth and Company and later sold in 1837 to the Hudson's Bay Company. At Fort Hall, nearly all travelers were given some aid and supplies if they were available and needed. Mosquitoes were constant pests, and travelers often mentioned that their animals were covered with blood from the bites.

1832-1834: There were several US government sponsored explorers who explored part of the Oregon Trail and wrote extensively about their explorations. Captain Benjamin Bonneville on his expedition during this period explored much of the Oregon Trail and brought wagons up the Platte, North Platte, and Sweetwater route across South Pass to the Green River in Wyoming. He explored most of Idaho and the Oregon Trail to the Columbia.

1833: Some settlers started drifting into Iowa in 1833.

1834: The American Rendezvous tried to undersell the American traders—lost money but undercut the American fur traders. By 1840, the fashion in Europe and Britain shifted away from the formerly very popular beaver felt hats, and prices for furs rapidly declined and the trapping almost ceased.

1834: The Dalles Methodist Mission was founded by Reverend Jason Lee just east of Mount Hood on the Columbia River.

Nathaniel Wyeth, the original founder of Fort Hall, writes in his diary that they found a ford across the Snake River 4 miles (6.4 km) southwest of where he founded Fort Hall. Another possible crossing was a few miles upstream of Salmon Falls where some intrepid travelers floated their wagons and swam their stock across to join the north side trail. Some lost their wagons and teams over the falls.

1836: Henry H. Spalding and Marcus Whitman traveled west to establish the Whitman Mission near modern day Walla Walla, Washington. The party included the wives of the two men, Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Hart Spalding, who became the first European-American women to cross the Rocky Mountains. The group was the first to travel in wagons all the way to Fort Hall, where the wagons were abandoned at the urging of their guides. They used pack animals for the rest of the trip to Fort Walla Walla and then floated by boat to Fort Vancouver to get supplies before returning to start their missions.

By 1836, when the first migrant wagon train was organized in Independence, Missouri, a wagon trail had been cleared to Fort Hall, Idaho. Wagon trails were cleared further and further west, eventually reaching all the way to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. What came to be called the Oregon Trail was complete, even as improved roads, "cutouts", ferries and bridges made the trip faster and safer almost every year. From various "jumping off points" branched in Missouri, Iowa or Nebraska Territory, the routes converged along the lower Platte River Valley near Fort Kearny, Nebraska Territory and led to rich farmlands west of the Rocky Mountains.

1838: Fremont was commissioned second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army. During the following year, Fremont was a member of the expedition of the French explorer

Joseph Nicolas Nicollet surveyed and mapped the region between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers. The account of Captain Benjamin Bonneville's explorations in the west was published by Washington Irving.

July 4, 1838: President Martin Van Buren signed the U.S. Congress laws establishing the Territory of Iowa. Iowa was located opposite the junction of the Platte and Missouri rivers and was used by some of the fur trapper rendezvous traders as a starting point for their supply expeditions.

1839: John C. Fremont was a member of the expedition of the French explorer Joseph Nicolas Nicollet that surveyed and mapped the region between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

A group of eighteen men from Peoria, Illinois, set out with the intention of colonizing the Oregon country on behalf of the United States of America and drive out the HBC operating there. The men of the Peoria Party were among the first pioneers to traverse most of the Oregon Trail. The men were initially led by Thomas J. Farnham and called themselves the Oregon Dragoons.

1840: The HBC had three forts, Fort Hall (purchased from Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth in 1837), Fort Boise and Fort Nez Perce on the western end of the Oregon Trail route, as well as Fort Vancouver near its terminus in the Willamette Valley. With minor exceptions they all gave substantial and often desperately needed aid to the early Oregon Trail pioneers.

When the fur trade slowed in 1840 because of fashion changes in men's hats, the value of the Pacific Northwest to the British was seriously diminished. Canada had few potential settlers who were willing to move more than 2,500 miles (4,000 km) to the Pacific Northwest, although several hundred ex-trappers, British and American, and their families did start settling in Oregon, Washington and California. They used most of the York Express route through northern Canada. Thomas Fitzpatrick was often hired as a guide when the fur trade dwindled in 1840.

Thousands of American settlers arrived and soon greatly outnumbered the British settlers in Oregon. These new emigrants often arrived in Oregon tired, worn out, nearly penniless, with insufficient food or supplies just as winter was coming on. McLoughlin would later be hailed as the Father of Oregon.

Robert Newell, Joseph L. Meek, and their families reached Fort Walla Walla with three wagons that they had driven from Fort Hall. Their wagons were the first to reach the Columbia River over land, and they opened the final leg of Oregon Trail to wagon traffic.

This geographic knowledge opened the way for ordinary citizens to move across the country to the Far West. The area immediately west of the farming frontier, the Great Plains, offered little to farmers who were used to working on land with plentiful rainfall and having trees to build houses.

Settlers traveled across the Great Plains to get to the Pacific Northwest, and then called the Oregon country, which by the 1840s had a reputation as an agrarian paradise, where soil and

climate would nearly guarantee a settler's health and prosperity. The central valleys of California were pictured in the same way. Oregon and California, however, were more than 2000 miles from Missouri, on the other side of plains, deserts, and the nation's two tallest mountain chains. At its pinnacle, Fort Vancouver and its Factor (manager) watched over 34 outposts, 24 ports, 6 ships, and about 600 employees.

When American emigration over the Oregon Trail began in earnest in the early 1840s, for many settlers the fort became the last stop on the Oregon Trail where they could get supplies, aid and help before starting their homestead. Fort Vancouver was the main re-supply point for nearly all Oregon Trail travelers until U.S. towns could be established.

The Great Plains appeared to be unattractive for settlement and was illegal for homesteading until well after 1846—initially it was set aside by the U.S. government for Indian settlements. The next available land for general settlement, Oregon, appeared to be free for the taking and had fertile lands, disease free climate (yellow fever and malaria were prevalent in much of the Missouri and Mississippi River drainage then), extensive uncut, unclaimed forests, big rivers, potential seaports, and only a few nominally British settlers.

1840-1860: The population of the United States rose by 14 million, yet only about 300,000 decided to make the trip. Many that went were between the ages 12 and 24. Though the numbers are significant in the context of the times, far more people chose to remain at home in the 31 states.

1841: James Sinclair, on orders from Sir George Simpson, guided nearly 200 settlers from the Red River Colony (located at the junction of the Assiniboine River and Red River near present Winnipeg, Canada) into the Oregon territory. This attempt at settlement failed when most of the families joined the settlers in the Willamette Valley, with their promise of free land and HBC-free government.

The Bartleson-Bidwell Party was the first emigrant group credited with using the Oregon Trail to emigrate west. The group set out for California, but about half the party left the original group at Soda Springs, Idaho, and proceeded to the Willamette Valley in Oregon, leaving their wagons at Fort Hall.

1842: The second organized wagon train set out from Elm Grove, Missouri, with more than 100 pioneers. The party was led by Elijah White. The group broke up after passing Fort Hall with most of the single men hurrying ahead and the families following later.

The first emigrant wagon train, headed by the American pioneer physician Elijah White, reached Oregon. The trip took the early pioneers four to six months, a journey fraught with much hardship resulting from poor equipment, illness, and attack by the Native Americans, for whom the growing number of pioneers on the trail was an ever-constant threat. At first, the termination point of the Oregon Trail was Oregon City, Oregon; later, settlers continued south to the fertile and valuable land in the Willamette Valley.

The first Roman Catholic mission in Idaho was established among the Coeur d'Alene people. The Native Americans and the missionaries built the Cataldo Church, the oldest standing building in Idaho.

1842-1845: John C. Fremont led three expeditions into Oregon Territory. During the first, in 1842, he mapped most of the Oregon Trail and ascended, in present-day Wyoming, the second highest peak in the Wind River Mountains, afterward called Fremont Peak (4185 m/13,730 ft).

1843: Later, mountain men such as James Bridger, who founded Fort Bridger, contributed their knowledge of the trail and often acted as guides.

1846: John C. Fremont of the U.S. Army's Corps of Topographical Engineers and his guide Kit Carson led three expeditions during this period over parts of California and Oregon. His explorations were written up by him and his wife Jessie Benton Fremont and were widely published. The party turned south and then east, making a midwinter crossing of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Fort Victoria was erected and became the headquarters of operations in British. Columbia, eventually growing into modern-day Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia.

In what was dubbed "The Great Migration of 1843" or the "Wagon Train of 1843", an estimated 700 to 1,000 emigrants left for Oregon. They were led initially by John Gantt, a former US Army Captain and fur trader who was contracted to guide the train to Fort Hall for $1 per person. The winter before, Marcus Whitman had made a brutal mid-winter trip from Oregon to St. Louis to appeal a decision by his Mission backers to abandon several of the Oregon missions.

When the pioneers were told at Fort Hall by agents from the Hudson's Bay Company that they should abandon their wagons there and use pack animals the rest of the way, Whitman disagreed and volunteered to lead the wagons to Oregon. He believed the wagon trains were large enough that they could build whatever road improvements they needed to make the trip with their wagons. The biggest obstacle they faced was in the Blue Mountains of Oregon where they had to cut and clear a trail through heavy timber. The wagons were stopped at The Dalles, Oregon by the lack of a road around Mount Hood.

The settlers of the Willamette Valley drafted the Organic Laws of Oregon organizing land claims within the Oregon Country. As the group was a provisional government with no authority, these claims were not valid under United States or British law, but they were eventually honored by the United States in the Donation Land Act of 1850.

Initially, the main "jumping off point" was the common head of the Santa Fe Trail and Oregon Trail—Independence, and Kansas City. Travelers starting in Independence had to ferry across the Missouri River. After following the Santa Fe Trail to near present day Topeka, they ferried across the Kansas River to start the trek across Kansas and points west. Another busy "jumping off point" was St. Joseph—established in 1843

Settlers cut a wagon road over these mountains making them passable for the first time to wagons. The trail went to the Whitman Mission near Fort Nez Perces in Washington until 1847 when the Whitmans were killed by Native Americans. At Fort Nez Perce some built rafts or hired boats and started down the Columbia; others continued west in their wagons until they reached The Dalles.

After 1847, the trail bypassed the closed mission and headed almost due west to present day Pendleton, Oregon, crossing the Umatilla River, John Day River, and Deschutes River before arriving at The Dalles. Interstate 84 in Oregon roughly follows the original Oregon Trail from Idaho to The Dalles.

1844: Following persecution and mob action in Missouri, Illinois, and other states, and the assassination of their prophet Joseph Smith in 1844, Mormon leader Brigham Young was chosen by the leaders of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) church to lead the LDS settlers west. He chose to lead his people to the Salt Lake Valley in present day Utah.

Over time, two major heavily used cutoffs were established in Wyoming. The Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff was established in 1844 and cut about 70 miles (110 km) off the main route. It left the main trail about 10 miles (16 km) west of South Pass and heads almost due west crossing Big Sandy Creek and then about 45 miles (72 km) of waterless, very dusty desert before reaching the Green River near the present town of La Barge. Ferries here transferred them across the Green River.

1845: Fremont made his third expedition, further exploring both the area known as the Great Basin and the Pacific coast.

1846: The Oregon Treaty ending the Oregon boundary dispute was signed with Britain. The British lost the land north of the Columbia River they had so long controlled. The new Canada–United States border was established much further north at the 49th parallel.

The treaty granted the HBC navigation rights on the Columbia River for supplying their fur posts, clear titles to their trading post properties allowing them to be sold later if they wanted, and left the British with good anchorages at Vancouver and Victoria. It gave the United States what it mostly wanted, a "reasonable" boundary and a good anchorage on the West Coast in Puget Sound.

While there were almost no United States settlers in the future state of Washington in 1846, the United States had already demonstrated it could induce thousands of settlers to go to the Oregon Territory, and it would be only a short time before they would vastly outnumber the few hundred HBC employees and retirees living in Washington.

The Barlow Road was completed around Mount Hood, providing a rough but completely passable wagon trail from the Missouri river to the Willamette Valley, about 2,000 miles (3,200 km).

The Mormons, expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois, traversed Iowa (on part of the Mormon Trail) and settled temporarily in significant numbers on the Missouri River in Iowa and the future state of Nebraska at their Winter Quarters near the future city of Omaha, Nebraska.

The towns of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Omaha (est. 1852) and other Missouri River towns became major supply points and "jumping off places" for travelers on the Mormon, California, Oregon, and other trails west.

Several Oregon Trail branches and route variations led to the Willamette Valley. The most popular was the Barlow Road, which was carved though the forest around Mount Hood from The Dalles in 1846 as a toll road at $5 per wagon and 10 cents per head of livestock. It was rough and steep with poor grass but still cheaper and safer than floating goods, wagons and family down the dangerous Columbia River.

The Applegate Trail was established, cutting off the California Trail from the Humboldt River in Nevada, crossed part of California before cutting north to the south end of the Willamette Valley. U.S. Route 99 and Interstate 5 through Oregon roughly follow the original Applegate Trail.

The Gila Trail going along the Gila River in Arizona, across the Colorado River and then across the Sonora Desert in California, was scouted by Stephen Kearny's troops and later by Captain Philip St. George Cooke's Mormon Battalion who were the first to take a wagon the whole way. This route was used by many gold hungry miners in 1849 and later, but suffered from the disadvantage that you had to find a way across the very wide and very dry Sonora Desert. It was used by many in 1849 and later as a winter crossing to California, despite its many disadvantages.

1846-1848: During the Mexican War, Fremont attained the rank of major and assisted greatly in the annexation of California. He was appointed civil governor of California by the US Navy commodore Robert Field Stockton, but in a conflict of authority between Stockton and the US Army Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny, Fremont refused to obey Kearny's orders. He was arrested for mutiny and insubordination and was subsequently court-martialed. He resigned his commission after President James Polk remitted his sentence of dismissal from the service.

1846-1869: From the early to mid-1830s and particularly through the epoch years 1846–1869 the Oregon Trail and its many offshoots were used by about 400,000 settlers, ranchers, farmers, miners, and businessmen and their families. The eastern half of the trail was also used by travelers on the California Trail (from 1843), Bozeman Trail (from 1863), and Mormon Trail (from 1847) before turning off to their separate destinations.

1847: Young led a small, especially picked fast-moving group of men and women from their Winter Quarters encampments near Omaha, Nebraska, and their approximately 50 temporary settlements on the Missouri River in Iowa including Council Bluffs. About 2,200 LDS pioneers went that first year as they filtered in from Mississippi, Colorado, California, and several other states. The initial pioneers were charged with establishing farms, growing crops, building fences and herds, and establishing preliminary settlements to feed and support the many thousands of emigrants expected in the coming years.

After ferrying across the Missouri River and establishing wagon trains near what became Omaha, the Mormons followed the northern bank of the Platte River in Nebraska to Fort Laramie in present day Wyoming. They established three ferries across the Missouri River and others established even more ferries for the spring start on the trail.

Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers departed from the Oregon Trail at Fort Bridger in Wyoming and followed (and much improved) the rough trail originally recommended by Lansford Hastings to the Donner Party in 1846 through the Wasatch Mountains into Utah. After getting into Utah they immediately started setting up irrigated farms and cities—including Salt Lake City.

After 1847, the trail bypassed the closed mission and headed almost due west to present day Pendleton, Oregon, crossing the Umatilla River, John Day River, and Deschutes River before arriving at The Dalles. Interstate 84 in Oregon roughly follows the original Oregon Trail from Idaho to The Dalles.

1847-1856: The Green River ferry near Fort Bridger operated from 1847 to 1856. The ferries were free for Mormon settlers while all others were charged a toll of from $3 to $8.

1847-1860: Over 43,000 Mormon settlers and tens of thousands of travelers on the California Trail and Oregon Trail followed Young to Utah. After 1848, the travelers headed to California or Oregon resupplied at the Salt Lake Valley, and then went back over the Salt Lake Cutoff, rejoining the trail near the future Idaho–Utah border at the City of Rocks in Idaho.

1848: James Marshall discovered a small nugget of gold in the American River, sparking the California Gold Rush. It is estimated that about two-thirds of the male population in Oregon went to California in 1848 to cash in on the early gold discoveries. To get there, they helped build the Lassen Branch of the Applegate-Lassen Trail by cutting a wagon road through extensive forests. Many returned with significant gold, which helped, jump-start the Oregon economy.

Over the next decade, gold seekers from the Midwestern United States and East Coast of the United States started rushing overland and dramatically increased traffic on the Oregon and California Trails.

The "forty-niners" often chose speed over safety and opted to use shortcuts such as the Sublette-Greenwood Cutoff in Wyoming, which reduced travel time by almost seven days but spanned nearly 45 miles (72 km) of desert without water, grass, or fuel for fires.

1848: The first "decent" maps of California and Oregon were drawn by Fremont and his topographers and cartographers about this time.

The Mormons initially started out in 1848 with trains of several thousand emigrants, which were rapidly split into smaller groups to be more easily accommodated at the limited springs and acceptable camping places on the trail. Organized as a complete evacuation from their previous

homes, farms, and cities in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, this group consisted of entire families with no one left behind.

In Wyoming, the Mormon emigrants followed the main Oregon/California/Mormon Trail through Wyoming to Fort Bridger, where they split from the main trail and followed (and improved) the crude path established by the ill-fated Donner Party of 1846 into Utah and the Salt Lake Valley.

After crossing the South Platte River, the Oregon Trail follows the North Platte River out of Nebraska into Wyoming. Fort Laramie, at the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers, was a major stopping point. Fort Laramie was a former fur-trading outpost originally named Fort John that was purchased in 1848 by the US Army to protect travelers on the trails. It was the last army outpost till travelers reached the coast.

The Salt Lake Cutoff was established by Sam Hensley and returning members of the Mormon Battalion providing a path north of the Great Salt Lake from Salt Lake City back to the California and Oregon trails. This cutoff rejoined the Oregon and California Trails near the City of Rocks near the Utah–Idaho border and could be used by both California and Oregon bound travelers.

Starting in about 1848, the South Alternate of Oregon Trail (also called the Snake River Cutoff) was developed as a spur off the main trail. It bypassed the Three Island Crossing and continued traveling down the south side of the Snake River. It rejoined the trail near present-day Ontario, Oregon and hugged the southern edge of the Snake River canyon and was a much rougher trail with poorer water and grass, requiring occasional steep descents and ascents with the animals down into the Snake River canyon to get water. Travelers on this route avoided two dangerous crossings of the Snake River. Today's Idaho State Route 78 roughly follows the path of the South Alternate route of the Oregon Trail.

1848-1849: Fremont led an expedition to locate passes for a proposed railway line from the upper Río Grande to California.

1848-1852: One of the better known ferries was the Mormon Ferry across the North Platte near the future site of Fort Caspar in Wyoming, which operated during this period.

1849: It was the first year of large scale cholera epidemics in the United States, and thousands are thought to have died along the trail on their way to California—most buried in unmarked graves in Kansas and Nebraska.

During the 1849 gold rush, Fort Laramie was known as "Camp Sacrifice" because of the large amounts merchandise discarded nearby. Travelers had pushed along the relatively easy path to Fort Laramie with their luxury items, but discarded them before the difficult mountain crossing ahead and after discovering that many items could be purchased at the forts or located for free along the way. Some travelers carried their excess goods to Salt Lake City to be sold.

The California Gold Rush continued for several years as the California miners continued to find about $50,000,000 worth of gold per year at $21 per ounce. Once California was established as a prosperous state, many thousands more emigrated each year for the opportunities there.

On the main trail about 5 miles (8.0 km) west of Soda Springs, Hudspeth's Cutoff was established 1849 and used mostly by California trail users took off from the main trail heading almost due west, bypassing Fort Hall.

Another route established by Cornelius Vanderbilt was across Nicaragua. The 120-mile (190 km) long San Juan River to the Atlantic Ocean helps drains the 100-mile (160 km) long Lake Nicaragua. From the western shore of Lake Nicaragua, it is only about 12 miles (19 km) to the Pacific Ocean. Vanderbilt decided to use paddle wheel steam ships from the US to the San Juan River, small paddle wheel steam launches on the San Juan River, boats across Lake Nicaragua, and a stage coach to the Pacific where connections could be made with another ship headed to California, Oregon.

Vanderbilt, by undercutting fares to the Isthmus of Panama and stealing many of the Panama Railroad workers, managed to attract roughly 30% of the California bound steamboat traffic.

1849-1850: The hundreds of abandoned ships, whose crews had deserted in San Francisco Bay, showed many thousands chose to do this.

1849-1855: Because of the Platte's brackish water, the preferred camping spots were along one of the many fresh water streams draining into the Platte or the occasional fresh water spring found along the way. These preferred camping spots became sources of cholera in the epidemic years (1849–1855) as many thousands of people used the same camping spots with essentially no sewage facilities or adequate sewage treatment. One of the side effects of cholera is acute diarrhea, which helps contaminate even more water unless it is isolated and/or treated.

The cause of cholera, ingesting the *Vibrio cholera* bacterium from contaminated water, and the best treatment for cholera infections were unknown in this era. Thousands of travelers on the combined California, Oregon, and Mormon trails succumbed to cholera between 1849 and 1855. Most were buried in unmarked graves in Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming. There are many cases cited involving people who were alive and apparently healthy in the morning and dead by nightfall.

Fort Laramie was the end of most cholera outbreaks, which killed thousands along the lower Platte and North Platte from 1849 to 1855. Spread by cholera bacteria in fecal contaminated water, cholera caused massive diarrhea, leading to dehydration and death. In those days its cause and treatment were unknown, and it was often fatal—up to 30 percent of infected people died. It is believed that the swifter flowing rivers in Wyoming helped prevent the germs from spreading.

Some of the trail statistics for the early years were recorded by the US Army at Fort Laramie, Wyoming. None of these original statistical records have been found—the Army lost them or destroyed them. There are only some partial written copies of the Army records and notes recorded in several diaries. Emigration to California spiked considerably with the 1849 gold

rush. Following the discovery of gold, California remained the destination of choice for most emigrants on the trail up to 1860, with almost 200,000 people traveling there between 1849 and 1860.

1850: The census there were about 8,000 mostly Mormons tabulated in the large Pottawattamie County, Iowa District 21. (The original Pottawattamie County was subsequently made into five counties and parts of several more.)

The "adjusted" 1850 US Census of California showed this rush was overwhelmingly male with about 112,000 males to 8,000 females (with about 5,500 women over age 15). Women were significantly underrepresented in the California Gold Rush, and sex ratios did not reach essential equality in California (and other western states) until about 1950. The relative scarcity of women gave them many opportunities to do many more things that were not "normally" considered "women's work" of this era.

1850-1851: Fremont was elected one of the first two senators from California, serving until 1851.

1852: There were even records of a 1,500-turkey drive from Illinois to California. The main reason for this livestock traffic was the large cost discrepancy between livestock in the Midwest and at the end of the trail in California, Oregon, or Montana. They could often be bought in the Midwest for about 1/3 to 1/10 what they would fetch at the end of the trail. Large losses could occur and the drovers would still make significant profit. As the emigrant travel on the trail declined in later years and after livestock ranches were established at many places along the trail, large herds of animals often were driven along part of the trail to get to and from markets.

The Mormons established about 50 temporary towns including the town of Kanesville, Iowa (renamed Council Bluffs in 1852) on the east bank of the Missouri River opposite the mouth of the Platte River. For those travelers to Oregon, California, and Utah who were bringing their teams to the Platte River junction Kanesville and other towns became major "jumping off places" and supply points.

Before 1852, those on the north side of the Platte crossed the North Platte to the south side at Fort Laramie. After 1852 they used Child's Cutoff to stay on the north side to about the present day town of Casper, Wyoming, where they crossed over to the south side.

Eliza Ann McCauley found, and with help, developed the McCauley Cutoff, which bypassed much of the difficult climb and descent of Big Hill. About 5 miles (8.0 km) on they passed present-day Montpelier, Idaho, which is now the site of the National Oregon-California Trail Center. The trail follows the Bear River northwest to present-day Soda Springs.

There were only a few places where the Snake River was not buried deep in a canyon and few spots where the river slowed down enough to make a crossing possible. Two of these fords were near Fort Hall, where travelers on the Oregon Trail North Side Alternate were established.

1854: Most of the Mormon towns, farms and villages were largely taken over by non-Mormons as they abandoned them or sold them for not much and continued their migration to Utah.

1855: Those emigrants on the eastern side of the Missouri River in Missouri or Iowa used ferries and steamboats (fitted out for ferry duty) to cross into towns in Nebraska. Several towns in Nebraska were used as *jumping off places* with Omaha eventually becoming a favorite.

Mormons founded a mission at Fort Lemhi, on the Lemhi River in eastern Idaho. The trail was still in use during the Civil War, but traffic declined after 1855 when the Panama Railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was completed. Paddle wheel steamships and sailing ships, often heavily subsidized to carry the mail, provided rapid transport to and from the east coast and New Orleans, Louisiana, to and from Panama to ports in California and Oregon.

Over the years many ferries were established to help get across the many rivers on the path of the Oregon Trail. Multiple ferries were established on the Missouri River, Kansas River, Little Blue River, Elkhorn River, Loup River, Platte River, South Platte River, North Platte River, Laramie River, Green River, Bear River, two crossings of the Snake River, John Day River, Deschutes River, Columbia River, as well as many other smaller streams. During peak immigration periods, several ferries on any given river often competed for pioneer dollars.

Many of the poorer Mormon travelers made the trek with hand-built handcarts and fewer wagons. Guided by experienced guides, handcarts—pulled and pushed by two to four people—were as fast as ox-drawn wagons and allowed them to bring 75 to 100 pounds (34 to 45 kg) of possessions plus some food, bedding, and tents to Utah. Accompanying wagons carried more food and supplies. Upon arrival in Utah, the handcart pioneers were given or found jobs and accommodations by individual Mormon families for the winter until they could become established. About 3,000 out of over 60,000 Mormon pioneers came across with handcarts. Along the Mormon Trail, the Mormon pioneers established a number of ferries and made trail improvements to help later travelers and earn much needed money.

All his connections in Nicaragua were never completely worked out before the Panama Railroad's completion in 1855. Civil strife in Nicaragua and a payment to Cornelius Vanderbilt of a "non-compete" payment (bribe) of $56,000 per year killed the whole project.

1856: Fremont was the presidential candidate of the newly formed Republican Party but was defeated by James Buchanan. During the American Civil War, Fremont was appointed a major general in the Union Army and held several important but brief commands.

1857-1861: The Butterfield Stage Line won the $600,000/yr. US mail contract to deliver mail to San Francisco, California. As dictated by southern Congressional members, the 2,800-mile (4,500 km) route ran from St. Louis, Missouri through Arkansas, Oklahoma Indian Territory, Texas, New Mexico Territory, and across the Sonora Desert before ending in San Francisco, California. Employing over 800 at its peak, it used 250 Concord Stagecoaches seating 12 very crowded passengers in three rows.

Other ways to get to Oregon were using the York Factory Express route across Canada, and down the Columbia River, ships from Hawaii, San Francisco, or other ports that stopped in Oregon, and emigrants trailing up from California, etc. All provided a trickle of emigrants, but they were soon overwhelmed in numbers by the emigrants coming over the Oregon Trail.

1858: The Mormons abandoned their settlement because of conflict with the Native Americans. At Soda Springs was one branch of Lander Road established and built with government contractors, which had gone west from near South Pass, over the Salt River Mountains and down Star Valley before turning west near present-day Auburn, Wyoming, and entering Idaho.

1858-1859: During this period, The Lander Road, formally the Fort Kearney, South Pass, and Honey Lake Wagon Road, was established and built by US government contractors. It was about 80 miles (130 km) shorter than the main trail through Fort Bridger with good grass, water, firewood and fishing, but it was a much steeper and rougher route, crossing three mountain ranges.

1859: 13,000 of the 19,000 emigrants traveling to California and Oregon used the Lander Road. The Lander Road departed the main trail at Burnt Ranch near South Pass, crossed the Continental Divide north of South Pass and reached the Green River near the present town of Big Piney, Wyoming. Although Lewis and William Clark found a path to the Pacific Ocean, it was not until 1859 that a direct and practicable route, the Mullen Road, connected the Missouri River to the Columbia River.

An expedition of US Corp of Topographical Engineers led by Captain James H. Simpson left Camp Floyd, Utah, to establish an army supply route across the Great Basin to the eastern slope of the Sierras. Upon return in early August, Simpson reported that he had surveyed the Central Overland Route from Camp Floyd to Genoa, Nevada. This route went through central Nevada (roughly where US Route 50 goes today) and was about 280 miles (450 km) shorter than the "standard" Humboldt River California trail route.

1859-1860: During this period, the Army improved the trail for use by wagons and stagecoaches. Starting in 1860, the American Civil War closed the heavily subsidized Butterfield Overland Mail stage Southern Route through the deserts of the American Southwest. Travel diminished after 1860 as the Civil War caused considerable disruptions on the trail.

1860–61: The Pony Express, employing riders traveling on horseback day and night with relay stations about every 10 miles (16 km) to supply fresh horses, was established from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The Pony Express built many of their eastern stations along the Oregon/California/Mormon/Bozeman trails and many of their western stations along the very sparsely settled Central Route across Utah and Nevada. The Pony Express delivered mail summer and winter in roughly 10 days from the Midwest to California.

1860 - 1870: During this period, the US population increased by seven million, with about 350,000 of this increase being in the Western states. Many were discouraged by the cost, effort and danger of the trip. Western scout Kit Carson reputedly said, "The cowards never started and

the weak died on the way." According to several sources, 3 to 10 percent of the emigrants are estimated to have perished on the way west.

Indian attacks increased significantly after 1860 when most of the army troops were withdrawn and miners and ranchers began fanning out all over the country, often encroaching on Indian Territory.

These census numbers show a 363,000 population increase in the western states and territories. Some of this increase is because of a high birth rate in the western states and territories but most is from emigrants moving from the east to the west and new immigration from Europe. Much of the increase in California and Oregon is from emigration by ship as there were fast and reasonably low cost transportation via east and west coast steamships and the Panama Railroad after 1855.

1861: John Butterfield, who since 1858 had been using the Butterfield Overland Mail, also switched to the Central Route to avoid traveling through hostile territories during the American Civil War. George Cho penning immediately realized the value of this more direct route, and shifted his existing mail and passenger line along with their stations from the "Northern Route" (California Trail) along the Humboldt River.

The First Transcontinental Telegraph also laid its lines alongside the Central Overland Route. Several stage lines were set up carrying mail and passengers that traversed much of the route of the original Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger and from there over the Central Overland Route to California. These combined stage and Pony Express stations along the Oregon Trail and Central Route across Utah and Nevada were joined by the First Transcontinental Telegraph stations and telegraph line, which followed much the same route in 1861 from Carson City, Nevada to Salt Lake City.

The Pony Express folded in 1861 as they failed to receive an expected mail contract from the US government and the telegraph filled the need for rapid east–west communication.

1861-1863: Many of the people on the trail during this period were fleeing the war and its attendant drafts in both the south and the north, Trail historian Merrill J. The 1870 census shows that over 200,000 additional people (ignoring most of California's population increase which had an excellent sea and rail connections across Panama by then) showed up in all the states served by the California/Oregon/Mormon/Bozeman Trail(s) and its offshoots.

Mormon emigration records after 1860 are reasonably accurate as newspaper and other accounts in Salt Lake City give most of the names of emigrants arriving each year from 1847 to 1868. Gold and silver strikes in Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and Montana caused a considerable increase in people using the trails, often in directions different than the original trail users.

1862: Fremont resigned his commission rather than serve under General John Pope.

The Goodale's Cutoff was established which crossed the Snake to travel on the north side. Established on the north side of the Snake River, it formed a spur of the Oregon Trail. This

cutoff had been used as a pack trail by Indians and fur traders, and emigrant wagons traversed parts of the eastern section as early as 1852.

1864: Fremont was again a presidential nominee; he withdrew, however, in favor of President Abraham Lincoln.

1865: There were several ferry boats and steamboats available to transport travelers to the Kansas shore where they started their travels westward. Before the Union Pacific Railroad was started, St. Joseph was the westernmost point in the United States accessible by rail.

1868: The ultimate competitor arrived in 1868, the First Transcontinental Railroad, which cut travel time to about seven days at a low fare (economy) of about $60 (economy).

1869: Use of the trail declined as the first transcontinental railroad was completed, making the trip west substantially faster, cheaper, and safer. Today, modern highways such as Interstate 80 follow the same course westward and pass through towns originally established to service the Oregon Trail.

After the First Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, telegraph lines usually followed the railroad tracks as the required relay stations and telegraph lines were much easier to maintain alongside the tracks. Telegraph lines to unpopulated areas were largely abandoned.

As the years passed, the Oregon Trail became a heavily used corridor from the Missouri River to the Columbia River. Offshoots of the trail continued to grow as gold and silver discoveries, farming, lumbering, ranching, and business opportunities resulted in much more traffic to many areas. Traffic became two-directional as towns were established along the trail.

The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, providing faster, safer, and usually cheaper travel east and west (the journey took seven days and cost as little as $65).

The Central Pacific established Kelton, Utah as a railhead and the terminus of the western mail was moved from Salt Lake City. The Kelton Road became important as a communication and transportation road to the Boise Basin.

1870: The population in the states served by the Oregon Trail and its offshoots increased by about 350,000 over their 1860 census levels. With the exception of most of the 180,000 population increase in California, most of these people living away from the coast traveled over parts of the Oregon Trail and its many extensions and cutoffs to get to their new residences.

Until about 1870, travelers encountered hundreds of thousands of bison migrating through Nebraska on both sides of the Platte River, and most travelers killed several for fresh meat and to build up their supplies of dried jerky for the rest of the journey. The prairie grass in many places was several feet high with only the hat of a traveler on horseback showing as they passed through the prairie grass. In many years the Indians fired much of the dry grass on the prairie every fall so the only trees or bushes available for firewood were on islands in the Platte River.

The amount of food required was lessened if beef cattle, calves or sheep were taken for a walking food supply. Before the 1870s, there were vast herds of buffalo in Nebraska, which provided fresh meat and jerky for the trip. In general, wild game could not be depended on for a regular source of food, but when found it was relished as a welcome change in a monotonous diet. Travelers could hunt antelope, buffalo, sage hens, trout, and occasionally elk, bear, duck, geese, salmon and deer along the trail. Most travelers carried a rifle or shotgun and ammunition for hunting game and for protection against snakes and Indian attacks.

1878-1890: Fremont was restored to the rank of major general and retired with full pay. During this period, he served as governor of the territory of Arizona.

1890's: S some emigrants continued to use the trail well into the 1890s, and modern highways and railroads eventually paralleled large portions of the trail, including U.S. Highway 26, Interstate 84 in Oregon and Idaho and Interstate 80 in Nebraska.

July 13, 1890: Fremont died in New York City of unknown causes.

1906: Oregon Trail pioneer Ezra Meeker erected this boulder near Pacific Springs on Wyoming's South Pass. As the trail developed it became marked by many cutoffs and shortcuts from Missouri to Oregon. The Oregon Trail's nominal termination point was Oregon City, at the time the proposed capital of the Oregon Territory. However, many settlers branched off or stopped short of this goal and settled at convenient or promising locations along the trail. Commerce with pioneers going further west helped establish these early settlements and launched local economies critical to their prosperity. Many other trails followed the Oregon Trail for much of its length, including the Mormon Trail from Illinois to Utah, the California Trail to the gold fields of California, and the Bozeman Trail to Montana. Because it was more a network of trails more than a single trail, there were numerous variations with other trails eventually established on both sides of the Platte, North Platte, Snake, and Columbia rivers.

Note 1: Portland, city in northwestern Oregon, the seat of Multnomah County and the largest city in the state. Portland is the business and transportation hub for much of the Pacific Northwest and a growing center for electronics manufacturing. The city has a striking natural setting and rich cultural resources. Portland residents refer to their city as the City of Roses.

Note 2: Mountain men primarily trapped beaver and sold the skins. A good beaver skin could bring up to $4 at a time when a man's wage was often $1 per day.

Note 3: This established that the eastern part of most of the Oregon Trail was passable by wagons.

Note 4: The wagons had to be disassembled and floated down the treacherous Columbia River and the animals herded over the rough Lolo trail to get by Mt. Hood. Nearly all of the settlers in the 1843 wagon trains arrived in the Willamette Valley by early October.

Note 5: Married couples were granted at no cost (except for the requirement to work and improve the land) up to 640 acres (2.6 km^2) (a section or square mile), and unmarried settlers could claim 320 acres (1.3 km^2).

Note 6: The Donation Land Act provided for married settlers to be granted 320 acres (1.3 km^2) and unmarried settlers 160 acres (0.65 km^2). Following the expiration of the act in 1854, the land was no longer free but cost $1.25 per acre ($3.09/hectare) with a limit of 320 acres (1.3 km^2)—the same as most other unimproved government land.

Bibliography

American Settlement in Oregon, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Astorians Expedition, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

California Gold Rush-California Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Cholera on the Platte River, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Clothing and Equipment for the Oregon Trail Expedition, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Colorado, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, John C Fremont, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Fur Traders, Trappers and Explorers, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Great American Desert, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Great Migration of 1843, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

History of the Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Iowa, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Idaho Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Idaho, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

John C. Fremont Contributions, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Lewis Clark Expedition, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Kansas, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Map of the Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Migration of the Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Missionaries, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Missouri, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Mormon Emigration-Mormon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Nebraska, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Oregon Country, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Oregon, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Oregon Trail, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_Trail

Oregon Trail Wagons, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Other West Trails, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Portland Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Routes, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Snake River, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Statistics of the Oregon Trail, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007 © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The War of 1812, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Trail Decline, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Utah, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Wyoming-Emigrant Trail in Wyoming, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.