Oregon and California National Historic Trails

What’s New? Spring 2011

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

Public Scoping Meetings

NPS will conduct public scoping this spring and summer for the Four Trails Feasibility Study to evaluate the addition of 64 routes to the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails.

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

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/FourtrailFS

New Faces and Places

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

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

CCSP Projects for 2011

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

Exhibit, Research, & Highway Sign Project Updates

Exhibits:

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

Research:

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

Highway Signs:

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

The Great Emigrant Flood of 1849-1854

Historians often compare the rapid discovery of gold in California in the 1849 “Great California Gold Rush” to the modern landscape. For the pioneers who traveled west into the Great Basin, however, it was a different experience.

The route to California was not a single route. It followed the Humboldt River in northeastern Nevada, where the Donner Party was trapped and starved to death. It followed the Sierra Nevada, where it further split into several interior valley destinations. One of the routes through Utah, known as the Short Line, joined the main California Trail in the Humboldt River in northeastern Nevada.

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

All along the route, reminders of the triumphs, struggles, and sacrifices made by those who blazed a road through the wilderness in pursuit of a dream.

Monument
text

Washington State and Oregon are still found in the vast arid land of Idaho. Within the next few years more than 250,000 gold-seekers crossed the Sierra Nevada on their way to California. They made their way through the wilderness to achieve their dreams.
Through congressional funding obtained by the Partnership for the National Trails System, six of the nine interpretive guide series have been developed for the four northern national historic trails. These include guides for:

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

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