comprehensive management and use plan

selected historic sites and cross-country segments

appendix III

august 1981

THIS STUDY WAS UNDERTAKEN TO IDENTIFY THE HISTORIC TRAIL ROUTE, THE RESOURCES ALONG THE TRAIL AND SUGGESTED METHODS FOR PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORIC SITES AND SEGMENTS.

MUCH OF THE TRAIL CROSSES PRIVATELY OWNED LAND. DO NOT TRESPASS. OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM THE LANDOWNERS PRIOR TO ENTERING.

OREGON TRAIL

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL / MO-KS-NB-WY-ID-WA-OR

COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT AND USE PLAN

OREGON NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

APPENDIX III

SELECTED HISTORIC SITES AND CROSS-COUNTRY SEGMENTS STATUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

National Park Service
United States Department of the Interior
August 1981

APPENDIX III
SELECTED HISTORIC SITES AND CROSS-COUNTRY SEGMENTS
STATUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The historic sites and cross-country segments discussed in this appendix are recommended for designation as units of the Oregon National Historic Trail system. Further study and research may reveal additional sites or segments deserving of being certified. Only those sites and segments (or portions thereof) which are located on Federal lands are established as the initial components of the Oregon National Historic Trail. Sites and segments which are not on Federal lands may later become components upon certification by the Secretary of the Interior following submission of an application from a State or local agency or a private owner.

The plans for the selected sites and segments included in this appendix are based on field inspection by the study team, plus discussions with the private owners or agency managers. The plans are conceptual and intended to serve as "blueprints" to help guide the future protection, development, interpretation and management of the sites and segments by the responsible jurisdiction. The recommendations below are designed to be general enough to clearly state the scope and outline of work needed at each site and segment, while being broad enough in nature to allow land managers to exercise their planning options.

Each site and segment discussion addresses the following points, as appropriate:

Historical or recreational significance
Physical description
Location
Present ownership and use
Access
National Register of Historic Places status and potential
Threats to the historical or recreation integrity, existing or potential
Protection and interpretation already offered
Protection and interpretation needed
Proposed management responsibility
Impacts of designation

Each site and segment discussion is keyed to the maps contained in Appendix II, where information concerning the specific locations and boundaries of sites and segments, as applicable, may be found. The sites and segments contained in this Appendix are addressed in geographical order, starting at Independence, Missouri, and ending at Oregon City, Oregon, and an attempt has been made to approach each site and segment as they were seen by the emigrants--another landmark, obstacle, campsite, supply point, or gravesite passed on their long and weary journey west. Except where otherwise noted, all quotations from emigrant journals contained in this Appendix are from Aubrey Haines,

Historic Resource Study: Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail (Denver: National Park Service, 1973). Except where otherwise noted, all photographs are by John Latschar, National Park Service.

MISSOURI

The primary route of the Oregon Trail starts at Independence, Missouri, and runs southwest for 18 miles to the western border of the state at the site of New Santa Fe. In addition to this primary route, numerous alternate routes are in the area, as Westport began to rival Independence as a jumping-off point, and roads were developed between the two towns and the primary route. Four of the six historic sites within Missouri are located on the primary route, with two sites being on the Independence-Westport road, a later alternate route.

All 18 miles of the primary route in Missouri are now within the highly developed urban areas of metropolitan Kansas City. There are virtually no remnants of the trail left, with the exception of two faint traces located in city parks, and there is very little Oregon Trail interpretation offered anywhere in the state. The trail is not marked, although the older Santa Fe Trail, which the Oregon Trail followed through Missouri, has been sporadically marked by local civic groups in several locations.

The lead agency for coordination of historic preservation efforts for the Oregon Trail in Missouri should be the Jackson County Historical Society, for practically all of the Oregon Trail in Missouri is contained within Jackson County. The society has been an active one, and is encouraged to work with and assist the various city and state agencies and private parties within Missouri which actually own the historic sites.

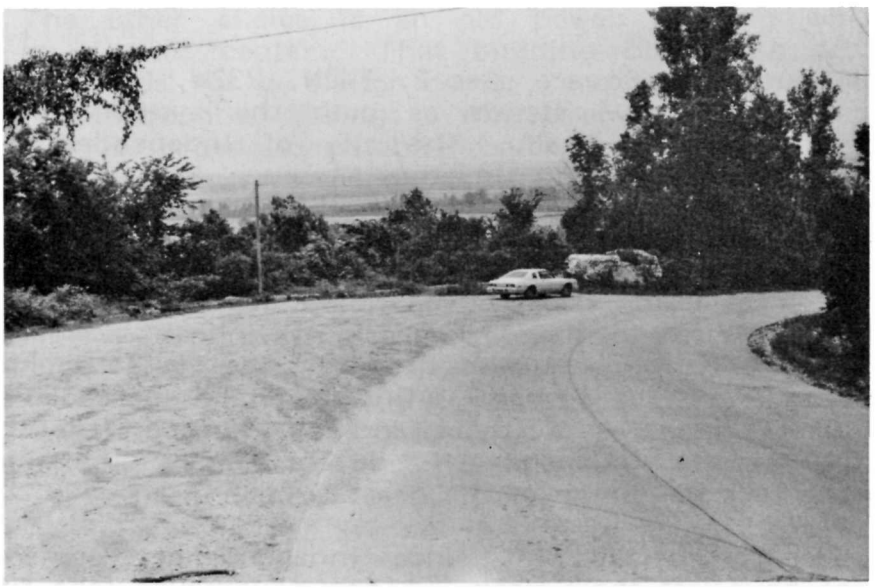
The establishment of a visitor center in Independence, to serve as the focal point of the eastern end of the Oregon National Historic Trail, is considered the highest priority item among the following recommendations for the trail within Missouri.

INDEPENDENCE LANDING

Independence Landing was the major riverboat landing site used by potential Oregon Trail emigrants who utilized river transportation to get to Independence from St. Louis and other eastern cities. This landing was the major disembarkment site for the City of Independence, the first major jumping-off point of the Oregon Trail, and was used as long as Independence remained as a major starting point. From the landing site, emigrants climbed the steep bluffs overlooking the Missouri River and headed for Independence to form up their wagon trains.

Located three miles north of Independence Courthouse Square (Sec 22, T50N, R32W, Liberty map sheet #1, Jackson County), the landing site has been almost totally lost to the meanderings of the Missouri River and industrial development along the riverbanks. On the bluff above the landing site, however, there exists an ideal spot for an interpretive overlook, where visitors may be shown the Missouri River, where the approximate site of the old landing may be pointed out, and where the landing can be interpreted. This site, about one-half mile south of the river, is along the Jackson County River Road, and already has an unofficial gravel turn-off. Although the Oregon Trail has been obliterated by over a hundred years of development in this area, the present River Road approximately follows the original line of the trail from Independence Landing to Independence Courthouse Square.

It is recommended that the Jackson County Highway Department and the Jackson County Historical Society develop this site as an interpretive overlook. Directional signing from Independence Courthouse Square would be necessary to bring visitors to the overlook, and a simple interpretive sign would be sufficient to point out the river, the landing, and its importance. Some prudent trimming of trees along the bluff will improve the view of the river, while still maintaining the vegetative mask which presently shields the overlook from the riverfront industry in the area.



The potential interpretive site above Independence Landing overlooks the Missouri River.

The Missouri River is seen looking down from the proposed overlook site.

INDEPENDENCE COURTHOUSE SQUARE (COMPLEX)

Independence Courthouse Square (Sec 2, T49N, R32W, Independence map sheet #2, Jackson County) stands as both the symbolic and literal beginning of the Oregon Trail. The city of Independence, located conveniently at a major bend in the Missouri River, first gained prominence as the eastern terminus for the Santa Fe Trail. When overland emigration to Oregon began, Independence quickly became the most important jumping-off point for that trail, and remained so until 1849. The center of town, Courthouse Square was surrounded by shops and businesses catering to the tasks of outfitting the emigrants, and wagon trains commonly formed up on the west side of the courthouse to begin the 2000 mile trek to Oregon. Although later superceded by other jumping-off points such as Westport and St. Joseph (Missouri) and Council Bluffs (Iowa), Independence and specifically the Courthouse Square mark the true beginning of the great Oregon Trail.

Over 130 years of development since Independence reigned as an outfitting point have left their mark. A new courthouse (the fifth) now stands on the square, and modern businesses mix with historic buildings in the heart of the city around the square. The area has been designated as a Historic District, and the city is presently in the midst of a long-term effort to restore several of the historic buildings around the square. Buildings in the vicinity which have been restored include the 1859 Jail and Marshal's residence, which are on the National Register of Historic Places, and the original 1827 courthouse which has been nominated to the Register. Several blocks away are the remnants of Independence Spring, a major water source used by emigrants while camping in the vicinity.

Scant efforts to interpret the Oregon Trail and its impact upon Independence have been made. A monument dedicated to the Oregon Trail pioneers stands beside the present courthouse, and Independence Spring has been developed as a pocket park. As a rule, however, the Oregon Trail has been largely neglected in Independence. (The older Santa Fe Trail also receives scant attention.) Independence is already a tourist town of some repute, but the present emphasis is almost totally dedicated to the home and library of Harry S. Truman. Although this dedication is understandable, the City of Independence should look farther back into its past, and begin to commemorate more fully the city's birth and early function as the major trail outfitting point during the momentous period of western expansion.

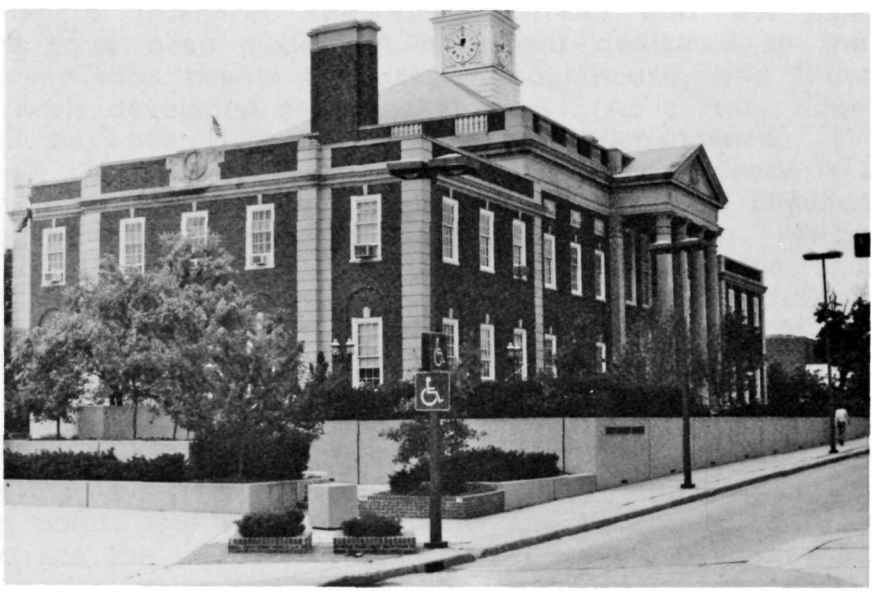
Specifically, Independence needs a major visitor center to anchor the eastern end of the Oregon National Historic Trail. That visitor center should have displays and interpretation covering the role of the city as an outfitting point, and providing guides and brochures for visitors who desire to retrace the trail all or part of the way to Oregon. The visitor center should also cover the role of Independence in the Santa Fe Trail.

Conversations with city officials indicate that the city would welcome such a center, and two possible sites have been identified. The present city offices are scheduled to be vacated in the future, and those offices,

directly east of the courthouse, could easily be converted into a visitor center. The other choice is an old power building which is being restored as a civic center. That building could also accomodate the necessary facilities for a visitor center, and it is conveniently located next to Independence Spring. Whichever is used, the City of Independence is urged to establish such a visitor center, which the National Park Service recommends as the anchor for the eastern end of the Oregon National Historic Trail. High public demand is anticipated for such a facility by those who wish to retrace the Oregon Trail, with the subsequent economic benefits for the City of Independence.

Until such a facility can be provided, the City of Independence is encouraged to extensively increase the present level of interpretation regarding the Oregon Trail. Additional interpretive signs, for example, should be emplaced at the courthouse and at Independence Spring.

Independence Courthouse Square as it looked in 1855. The Oregon Trail began here. (Reproduced from Charles A. Dana's The United States Illustrated, 1855.)



Independence Courthouse Square, 1979, showing the fifth Courthouse.

This monument standing west of the Courthouse represents the bulk of the Oregon Trail interpretation to be found in Independence.

Offices of the City of Independence east of the Courthouse are a possible site for a future visitor center.

Independence Spring, once a major water source for emigrants, is now a feature of a pocket park.

Independence Spring is in the foreground, with the old power plant building in the background. This building is presently being restored as a civic center, and has the potential to serve as the Oregon Trail visitor center.

INDEPENDENCE-WESTPORT CROSSING, BLUE RIVER

From Independence Courthouse Square, the primary Oregon Trail headed southwest towards the Missouri border. In later years, after the rise of Westport, Missouri (10 miles west of Independence) as a rival outfitting town, an alternate branch of the Oregon Trail headed west towards Westport, before cutting southwest to the border. Five miles west of Independence (Sec 13, T49N, R33W, Kansas City map sheet #5, Jackson County), this Independence-Westport road crossed the Blue River, the first major river crossing on this branch of the trail.

That river crossing is now the site of Blue Valley City Park, a unit of the Kansas City, Missouri, Parks and Recreation Department. The park is situated on the west bank of the Blue River, and the area of the park around the crossing site is still undeveloped. Ruins of a 1920s bridge abutment stand at the crossing site, and an old trail leads up the hill from that bridge towards the developed portion of the park. Local experts claim that this short stretch of trail is the unaltered line of the Oregon Trail. This river crossing site and section of trail is the least impacted portion of the Oregon Trail to be found in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Blue Valley City Park is a recreational park, with facilities for sports and picnicking, and a nature trail which utilizes the short section of Oregon Trail. There is no Oregon Trail interpretation in the park, although an old Sante Fe Trail marker is located near the park's boundary, along the line which the Oregon and Sante Fe Trails shared.

The Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Kansas City, Missouri, should interpret, mark and make accessible to the public the Blue River Crossing site and the short stretch of Oregon Trail within the park. Directional markers will be needed from the present parking lot to bring visitors to the trail and crossing site, and interpretation at the parking lot and the crossing site should discuss the significance of the crossing, and the location of the Oregon Trail through this portion of Kansas City. The Santa Fe Trail, which the Oregon Trail followed through Kansas City, should also be interpreted. The short section of the Oregon Trail in Blue Valley City Park is well stabilized, and increased visitor use should pose no threats.

A portion of the short stretch of trail which lies between the Blue River and the developed portion of Blue Valley City Park.

The crossing site of the Independence-Westport road over the Blue River is marked by the old bridge abutment which may be seen on the east bank of the river. This portion of the park is well insulated from the bustle of city life.

WESTPORT

The town of Westport, five miles west of the Blue River on the Independence-Westport branch of the Oregon Trail (Sec 19, T49N, R33W, Kansas City map sheet #5, Jackson County) was first settled in the 1830s, and by the mid-1840s had begun to rival Independence as an outfitting point for the Sante Fe and Oregon Trails. Westport's main advantage lay in a new riverboat landing four miles north of town (Westport Landing), which eliminated the troublesome crossing of the Blue River. The town flourished in the 1850s as a jumping-off point for the Sante Fe, Oregon, and California Trails, but declined in the 1860s when the Civil War interfered with trade and emigration. By the 1880s, Westport had been swallowed up by the growing suburbs of Kansas City.

The approximate boundaries of early Westport have been used to define the Old Historic Westport District by the City of Kansas City, and several old buildings have been preserved. Chief among these is the Boone Store, an establishment operated by Albert Gallatin Boone, grandson of Daniel Boone, who built a thriving business by serving travelers along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails.

The Westport Historical Society has placed an interpretive sign in the middle of Westport, on a small traffic island owned by the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Kansas City, Missouri. That sign is a good start, but does not adequately cover the long and colorful history of Westport. Either the Westport Historical Society or the Parks and Recreation Department should augment the interpretation presently offered in Westport, particularly concerning the Oregon (and Santa Fe) Trail. Specifically, the role of Westport as a rival and successor to Independence needs to be explained, and the various branches and alternate routes of the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails through the area should be pointed out.

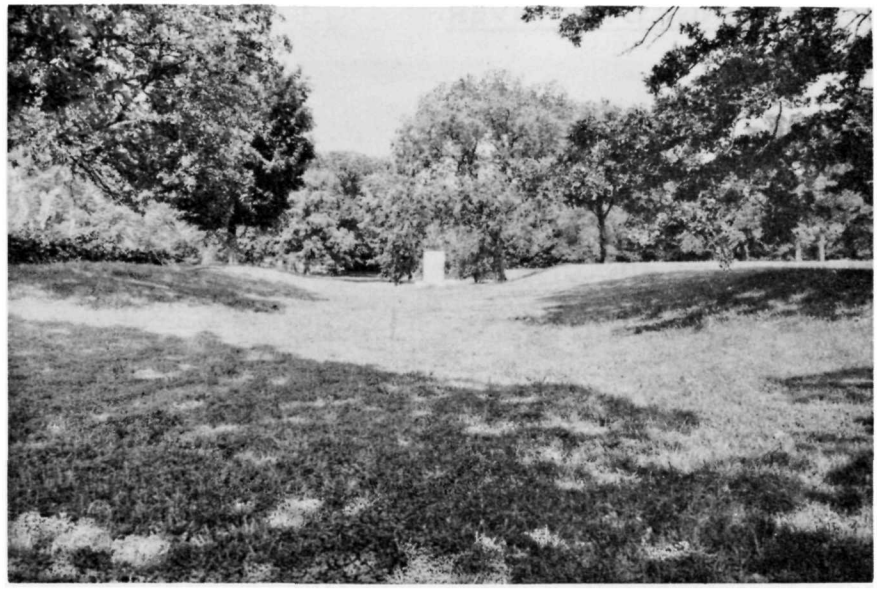
The present interpretive sign at Westport briefly mentions the Oregon Trail.

RED BRIDGE CROSSING, BLUE RIVER

From Independence, the primary route of the Oregon Trail followed the well-established main branch of the Santa Fe Trail southwest towards the Missouri border. Fifteen miles southwest of Independence the emigrants encountered their first river crossing--a foretaste of many rivers and streams to be negotiated on the long journey to Oregon. This was the Red Bridge Crossing of the Blue River (Sec 4, T47N, R33W, Grandview map sheet #4, Jackson County). The crossing was initially a ford--the Red Bridge was not built until 1859.

The crossing site is now on the eastern edge of Minor City Park, a 227-acre unit of the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Kansas City, Missouri. This urban park has both recreational and historic overtones, with a beautiful setting and landscaping. At present, the park has a Santa Fe Trail sign and monument, and the City has plans to develop it as a "Historic Santa Fe Trail Park." The prominent feature of the park is a gentle rut swale which cuts across the landscape, a visible remnant of Santa Fe and Oregon Trail days. The crossing site of the Blue River has been heavily impacted by years of development, and can only be pointed out as a former historic site.

The present plans to eventually turn Minor Park into a Historic Sante Fe Trail Park are enthusiastically endorsed and encouraged. The Oregon Trail should be considered equally with the Santa Fe Trail in the park's future interpretive theme, since the two trails followed the same line through the park. More Oregon Trail interpretation is needed, and the rut swale should be more dramatically marked and identified for visitors.



Above and below: The gentle rut swale of the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails cuts through Minor Park. A granite monument in the photo above commemorates the Santa Fe Trail.

NEW SANTA FE

New Santa Fe, located three miles southwest of the Red Bridge Crossing (Sec 7, T47N, R33W, Grandview map sheet #4, Jackson County), stood at the point where the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails passed over the Missouri line and into Indian Territory. Its essential purpose was the sale of whiskey, which was prohibited further west. The emigrants who left Missouri at this point also passed beyond the limits of law and order--other than their own making--when they went over the line.

The town lasted no longer than the thirst of emigrants and traders who passed through, and never amounted to more than a cluster of small houses and shops. The area is now deserted and the old town plat and cemetery are covered by undergrowth. A Santa Fe Trail marker, at the corner of Santa Fe road and Stateline road, is all that marks the site. Although the ruins of New Santa Fe are still beyond the real suburbs of Kansas City, those suburbs are fast approaching the area, and scattered housing tracts mixed with older farm homes dot the vicinity.

The Jackson County Historical Society, working with Jackson County officials, should more adequately mark and interpret this site. A small parking pull-off from Stateline road is recommended, along with an interpretive sign explaining the reason for New Santa Fe's existance and its particular services rendered to Oregon and Santa Fe Trail travelers.

A Santa Fe Trail marker is located near the deserted site of New Santa Fe.

KANSAS

After crossing the Missouri-Kansas border at the site of New Santa Fe, the primary route of the Oregon Trail followed the older Santa Fe Trail to the southwest for 21 miles. West of the little town of Gardner, the Oregon Trail left the Santa Fe Trail and turned northwest for another 152 miles before crossing into Nebraska. Several major river crossings presented obstacles for the emigrants as they traveled the rolling hills and plains of northeastern Kansas.

With the exception of the metropolitan area of Kansas City, Kansas, and the two urban areas of Lawrence and Topeka, the trail crosses rural lands which are now heavily farmed. There are very few ruts or traces of the Oregon Trail in Kansas, due to this extensive cultivation, and no effort has yet been made to mark the trail.

Oregon Trail interpretation in Kansas is somewhat scattered. Several interpretive signs briefly mention the Oregon Trail when it happens to pass near major highways, but the trail is not consistently interpreted. There are 11 historic sites in Kansas, all of which are accessible to the general public via existing road networks. Ten of the sites are on the primary route of the trail, with one--the Shawnee Methodist Mission--being on the Westport alternate route.

The lead agency in Kansas for coordinating historic preservation and interpretive efforts for the Oregon Trail is the Kansas State Historical Society. That society has broad responsibilities for research, preservation, and interpretation, plus a cooperative program including all county and local historical societies in the state. In addition, the society, together with the Kansas Department of Transportation, is responsible for the preparation and erection of historical markers and interpretive panels along U.S. and Kansas highways. The Executive Director of the society is the Kansas State Historic Preservation Officer.

Acquisition and protection of the Alcove Springs area by the Kansas State Historical Society is considered the highest priority item on the list of recommendations for the Oregon National Historic Trail in the State of Kansas.

SHAWNEE METHODIST MISSION

For those emigrants using Westport as a jumping-off point, the Shawnee Methodist Mission marked the last vestige of civilization encountered before crossing the broad plains of eastern Kansas. Established in 1838 by agreement between the Methodist Church and the Federal government, the Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School was one of the earliest Indian missions in Kansas. Due to the hospitality offered by its founder, Rev. Thomas Johnson, the mission became a popular camping spot for emigrants who wished a last taste of civilization, who needed a forgotten item of supply, or who needed medical attention. Before being discontinued in 1862, the mission at its height had 200 students and 16 buildings. The mission also served as a temporary home for Kansas' first territorial legislature in 1855, and as barracks for Union troops during the Civil War. Shawnee Methodist Mission is now a National Historic Landmark.

Located two miles southwest of Westport (Sec 3, T12S, R24E, Kansas City map sheet #5 and Shawnee map sheet #6, Johnson County), the site of the old mission is now a 12-acre state park, operated by the Kansas State Historical Society. Three of the main brick buildings of the original mission have been restored. One is used as the superintendent's residence, and two have been refurnished with period furniture and artifacts from the 1840s and 1850s. A full-time staff of two handles an annual flow of approximately 12,000 visitors. The mission is well preserved by the Kansas State Historical Society, and an excellent interpretive program is established within the restored buildings. That interpretation, quite naturally, centers around the life and function of the mission and its impact upon the Indian population of the area, although literature at the mission does mention that it was a "way-point on the Santa Fe trail." The mission has excellent access via the city streets of Kansas City, Kansas, and is located in the midst of a pleasant suburban neighborhood.

The Kansas State Historical Society should recognize the importance of Shawnee Mission to early Oregon Trail emigrants by providing interpretation at the mission relating Rev. Johnson's role as a benefactor to many emigrants, and by noting that the site of the mission grounds was a favorite camping spot. Such interpretation could be addressed in a small exhibit in one of the restored buildings, with an appropriate sign outside noting the locality as a preferred camping site.

The west building of the Shawnee Mission, erected in 1839, originally housed the school and the residence of Rev. Thomas Johnson. It is now used as the superintendent's residence.

The east building, built in 1841, originally contained 14 school and living rooms for teachers and students. The interior is now restored and refurnished as museum and interpretive space.

The north building was constructed in 1845 as a school and dormitory for Indian girls. The interior rooms have been restored to look as they did in the 1840s and 1850s.

The Shawnee Mission Cemetery, original burial ground for the Shawnee Methodist Mission and Indian Manual Labor School. The cemetery is several blocks east of the mission, and may be visited with the permission of the superintendent.

LONE ELM CAMPGROUND

Lone Elm Campground, 14 miles southwest of New Santa Fe, was the first major campground on the Oregon Trail. The site, which originally covered about 40 acres, had good wood and water in early days, but the wood was rapidly depleted in supplying emigrant needs--hence the name of Lone Elm. The campground was situated on the primary route of the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, for all the feeder and alternate routes from various jumping-off points in the Independence-Westport area had now come together to form the main branch of the trail.

Although this site was 32 miles out of Independence, the expanding suburbs of the metropolitan Kansas City area are fast approaching it. The campground, located at the corner of 167th Street and Lone Elm Road (Sec 23, T14S, R23E, Ocheltree map sheet #9, Johnson County), is still several miles south of the suburban city of Olathe. It still has a rural setting, for the area of the campsite is now used as private pastureland, but that setting may be threatened in the future.

The Johnson County Historical Society and the Johnson County Highway Department should mark this site and provide interpretation. At present, there is an obscure Sante Fe Trail marker at the corner of the pasture, but that is wholly inadequate to represent the significance of the first major campsite on the Oregon Trail. Since Lone Elm Road is a commuter route, with fairly heavy traffic traveling at highway speeds during rush hours, the Highway Department should provide a parking pull-off to enable visitors to stop in safety. Eventually, this site will need protection from the encroachments of urban development, in order to maintain its present rural qualities. Johnson County should work with the private landowner to save the site from development so future visitors can continue to visualize wagon trains camped for the night on the plains.

The Lone Elm Campground now has a small Santa Fe Trail marker at the intersection of 167th Street and Lone Elm Road.

SANTA FE TRAIL JUNCTION

Thirty-nine miles southwest of Independence, the Oregon Trail left the older and more established Santa Fe Trail and split off towards the northwest. For a few years, a simple sign stood where the Oregon Trail took a right turn, pointing emigrants on the "Road to Oregon." "Surely," it has been said, "so unostentatious a sign never before nor since announced so long a journey."*

The historic road junction is now located in the midst of a farmer's field, seven miles west of Lone Elm Campground (Sec 27, T14S, R22E, Gardner map sheet #10, Johnson County). No trace remains in that field of either the Santa Fe Trail or the Oregon Trail. One-half mile to the south, however, (Sec 34) the Kansas Department of Transportation has created a small interpretive rest stop off U.S. Highway 56. That rest stop has a standard Kansas historical marker, commemorating the Santa Fe and Oregon trails. The trail junction, the marker states, was "Near here..."--one of the ambiguous "near here" and "in this area" historic signs which frustrate travelers.

The Kansas State Historical Society should upgrade its interpretation at the rest stop with a second marker to more fully explain the location of the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails and their junction point. Visitors should be told where to look to see the land over which the trails passed, and the junction site, which is visible from the edge of the rest stop, should be pointed out. The sign should also clearly state that the junction site is privately owned and trespassers are not welcomed. Like Lone Elm Campground, the Santa Fe Trail Junction will eventually be threatened by encroaching development, and a cooperative agreement should be sought with the private owner to protect the remaining scenic qualities.

Indications are that present maintenance procedures may not always be adequate, for the rest stop was littered and somewhat overgrown. If this problem has not already been corrected, the Kansas Department of Transportation should take steps to clean up and adequately maintain the rest stop.

---

*Quoted from Hiram M. Chittenden by W. J. Ghent, The Road to Oregon (NY: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929), p. 123.

This rest stop off U.S. Highway 56, is one-half mile south of the Santa Fe Trail Junction.

The Santa Fe Trail Junction is located beyond the first row of trees in this view looking north from the rest stop.

No traces of either trail or the junction remain in the field where the Santa Fe and Oregon Trail departed.

BLUE MOUND

Fifteen miles northwest of the point where they left the Santa Fe Trail, the emigrants came to the first of a series of natural landmarks which would guide them across the plains. This was Blue Mound, a prominence which arose 150 feet above the surrounding flat terrain. Best described by Gregory Franzwa as a "great bump on the plain,"* Blue Mound was used by John C. Fremont in 1843 as a signal point, and many an emigrant climbed the mound to survey the scene of the next week's travel.

Blue Mound (Sec 22, T13S, R20E, Lawrence East map sheet #13, Douglas County) is privately owned and relatively unimpacted. The mound is now tree-covered (local tradition holds that it was bare in emigration days), and still stands as a landmark in eastern Kansas. Access is via county dirt and gravel roads. A small abandoned ski run is located on the north side of the mound, but otherwise development has been minimal. Several old trails crisscross the densely vegetated mound, and four old graves of early homesteaders are located near the summit, dating from the 1870s and 1880s. The owner of Blue Mound has indicated that he has no plans to allow development of the mound, and has indicated a general willingness to cooperate with the National Park Service and the State of Kansas in the small-scale development of Blue Mound as an historic site.

The Kansas State Historical Society should interpret Blue Mound in cooperation with its owner. Facilities should consist of an interpretive sign at the base of the mound, a trail to the top, and additional interpretation at the summit. The marker at the bottom should relate the significance of Blue Mound as a landmark to early explorers and Oregon Trail emigrants, and that at the top should point out the general trace of the Oregon Trail to the west. The trail from bottom to top could easily follow present trails, but would have to be marked to keep visitors away from sensitive areas on the mound, such as the owner's vacation home. The pioneer gravesites should be fenced and their markers protected from vandalism and further deterioration (two of the four markers are already unreadable). Selective trimming of trees at the summit would provide a view of the land to the west, giving visitors a comparable view to the one enjoyed by the emigrants. The deteriorating ski lift and lodge should eventually be dismantled. Directional signs from nearby highways will be necessary to lead visitors to the trail head.

Although these recommendations are fairly extensive, Blue Mound should be recognized as both a significant Oregon Trail landmark and as a potentially fine historic site.

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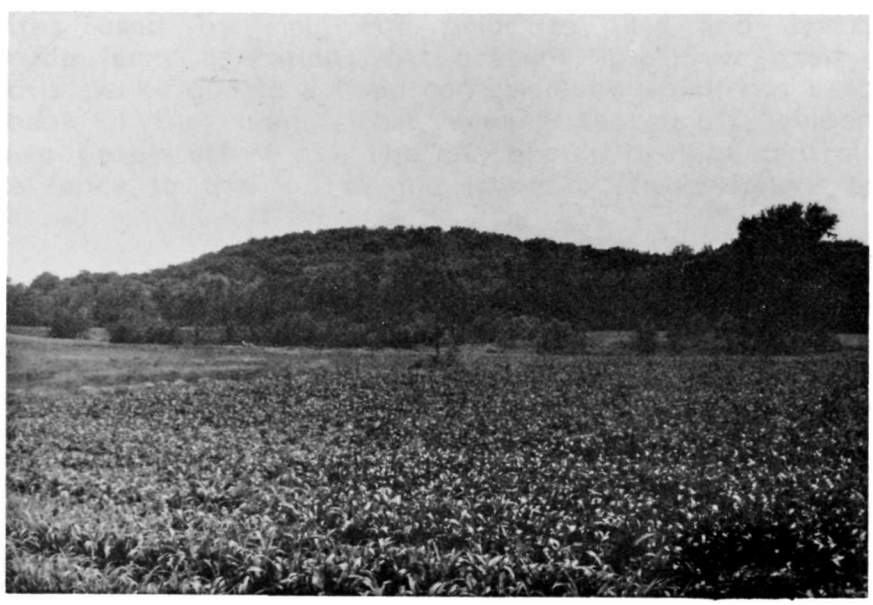
*Gregory M. Franzwa, The Oregon Trail Revisited, (St. Louis: Patrice Press, 1972), p. 139.

Blue Mound may be seen from Kansas Highway 10, three miles to the east.



Blue Mound dominates the horizon from a point one-half mile to the east.

The northern view from the top of Blue Mound is spectacular. With judicious clearing of trees, a similar view may be had to the west.

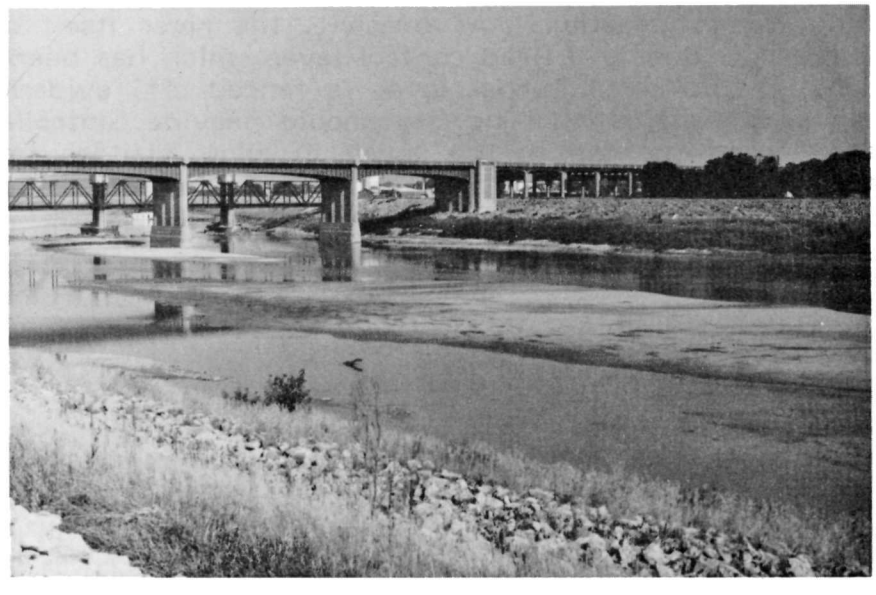
KANSAS RIVER CROSSING

Thirty-four miles west of Blue Mound, the emigrants encountered the first major obstacle of their young journey--the Kansas River. This river was described as being more often in an angry mood than a peaceful one, and attempts to ford it were always fraught with excitement and danger. For several years, various fording sites were located along a 20-mile stretch of the river, none of which held any particular advantage over the others. All were dependent upon the condition of the river, and emigrants often followed its south bank until they found the best ford. In 1844, Joseph and Louis Pappan (sometimes spelled Papin) established a crude ferry operation across the river. Their enterprise consisted of no more than a raft placed on top of two large canoes, with a capacity of two wagons per trip. The whole contraption was then poled across the river. Despite charges of $4 per wagon, 25¢ per mule and 10¢ per man, their assistance in crossing the river proved invaluable, and after 1844 Pappan's Ferry became the preferred crossing site of the Kansas River.

That crossing site is now in the heart of Topeka (Sec 30, T11S, R16E, Topeka map sheet #18, Shawnee County), and has been overrun by industrial development and flood control measures. The Topeka City Park Commission, however, owns a six-acre tract of land on the riverfront just east of the former ferry site. This parcel of land, presently unused, is surrounded by city transit shops, railroad maintenance buildings, and warehouses.

The Topeka City Park Commission should turn the parcel into a pocket city park, with emphasis upon the Kansas River Crossing of the Oregon Trail. Interpretation should be placed in the park, relating the various crossing sites used by emigrants prior to 1844 and describing the Pappans' crude ferry operation. At present, the river itself cannot be seen from this park, due to a flood control levee which has been built up along the bank of the river. That levee is fenced off, evidently in an effort to keep people off of it. The city should provide controlled access through the fence to the top of the levee to allow visitors to see the Kansas River.

This small parcel of undeveloped city park land on the south bank of the Kansas River is just east of the site of Pappan's Ferry. Note the levee in the background, which blocks the view of the river.



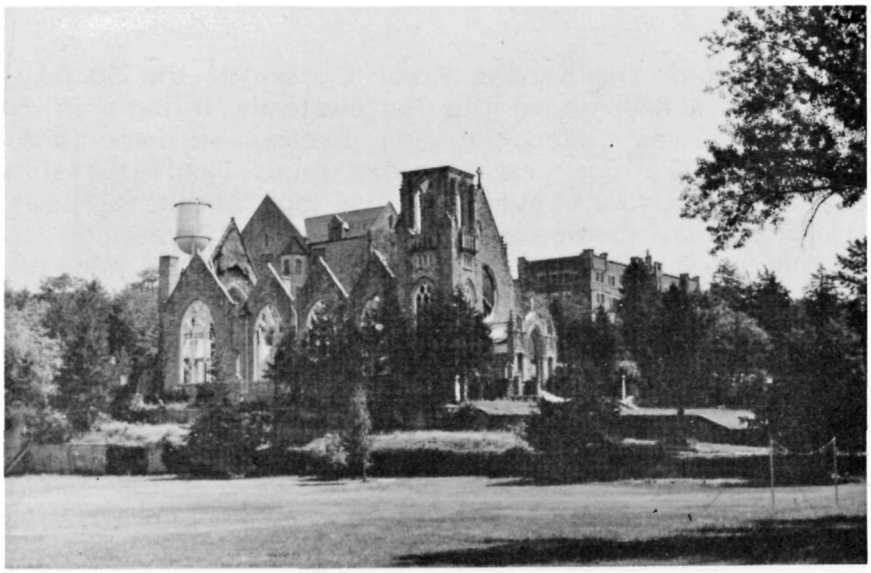
The Kansas River may be seen from the top of the levee. Pappan's Ferry crossing site was just this side of the Topeka Avenue Bridge, seen in the background.

SAINT MARY'S MISSION

Twenty-two miles west of the Kansas River Crossing, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) established a mission to the Pottawatomie Indians in 1848. St. Mary's Mission, as it was called, quickly became an important stopping point on the Oregon Trail, where friendly faces, limited assistance and some medical help was usually available. A log "cathedral" was built in 1849, the first "cathedral" between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains. A manual labor school was operated at the Mission until 1871, and St. Mary's College was chartered in 1869. In 1931 the college became a Jesuit Seminary, before being closed in 1967.

St. Mary's College (Sec 10, T10S, R12E, St. Mary's map sheet #22, Pottawatomie County) is now being restored by the Society of St. Pius X, a historic preservation group of the Catholic Church. Large expenditures have been made to restore and rehabilitate several of the college's eight brick and limestone buildings, which date from 1909 to 1925. The restoration effort is aimed at returning the buildings and college grounds to the way they looked in the 1920s and 1930s. Although a disasterous fire destroyed all but the shell of the chapel in the summer of 1979, the society intends to continue its work, and to reopen St. Mary's College. The 46 acres of the college grounds, situated on the eastern edge of the small town of St. Marys, are beautifully landscaped and well maintained. The college welcomes visitors and contributions to its restoration efforts, but has no plans to include the Oregon Trail in its interpretive scheme. When the college is fully restored, it will open a museum dedicated to the early history of the mission, the Indian school, the Jesuit Seminary, and will offer self-guided tours of the grounds.

Just across U.S. Highway 24 from the entrance to St. Mary's, the Kansas Department of Transportation has a small rest stop with a interpretive sign by the Kansas State Historical Society. That sign details the history of the mission and mentions the Oregon Trail briefly. The sign should be augmented with another offering expanded Oregon Trail interpretation. St. Mary's College has indicated that it would welcome a message at the little rest stop inviting visitors to tour the College grounds and museum.



The chapel at St. Mary's College, built in 1918, was almost completely restored in 1979 when it was gutted by fire. The four-story buildings behind the chapel were constructed in 1925.

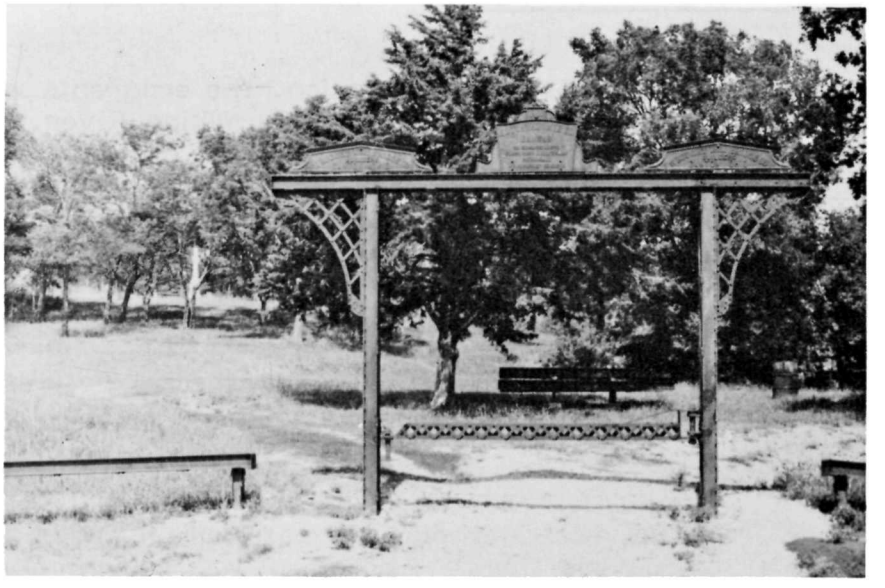
This portion of the college grounds features the oldest remaining building, which was built in 1909.

RED VERMILLION RIVER CROSSING

Ten miles west and north of St. Mary's Mission, the emigrants were faced with the vexing problem of crossing the Red Vermillion River. This was more of a creek than a river, but was a difficult crossing due to the creek's high and nearly perpendicular banks. In 1847 or 1848, Louis Vieux, a Pottawatomie Indian, established a toll bridge at the site, which greatly benefited both Vieux and the emigrants. Although Vieux charged a mere $1 fee for each wagon which crossed his bridge, one emigrant estimated that in 1850 he took in nearly $300 per day. Vieux supplemented this income by selling hay and grain to the emigrants. Due to plentiful water, grass and wood, the east bank of the Red Vermillion River was a favorite camping spot, both before and after Louis Vieux put in his toll bridge. But in 1849 one of the great tragedies of the Oregon Trail occurred. Asiastic cholera struck a large wagon train camped at the river that year, and left 50 dead within a week. The survivors carefully buried the victims, and marked each grave with a slab of limestone upon which the name and date of burial was carved.

The crossing site today has a modern bridge over the Red Vermillion River, where a gravel county road closely parallels the old Oregon Trail. Channel changes in the creek have wiped out much of the old campground area, and the surrounding vicinity is all developed farmland. A small cemetery is located 300 yards east of the river on the county road (Sec 24, T9S, R10E, LaClede map sheet #24, Pottawatomie County). Louis Vieux is buried there, along with two dozen other graves from the 1850s to the 1870s, mostly of the Vieux family. The large percentage of infant graves in the cemetery tells a story of its own. The only remnant of the 50 cholera victims is the T.S. Prather headstone (May 27, 1849), which is located between the cemetery and the river, on the edge of a fenced private farm road. The Prather headstone, one of the most famous burials on the Oregon Trail, has been sadly neglected. It sits in the midst of a tangled patch of weeds and undergrowth, in need of protection from further weathering and possible vandalism. The Red Vermillion River Crossing area, including the Vieux Cemetery, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Pottawatomie County, which owns the Vieux cemetery, should take steps to appropriately mark, interpret and protect this important historic site. The Vieux cemetery needs some care, particularly the older headstones which are beginning to deteriorate badly. An interpretive marker should be placed at the cemetery, relating the story of the Oregon Trail through this area, and the establishment and importance of Louis Vieux's tollbridge. With the cooperation of the private landowner, the Prather burial site should be cleared and fenced and the headstone protected. An interpretive marker near the headstone should point out the area as a favorite camping site until the tragedy of 1849, and should relate the story of that cholera epidemic. Directional signs will be needed to bring visitors to the site from local highways. The Kansas State Historical Society should assist Pottawatomie County as necessary with these recommendations.



The entrance to the Vieux cemetery, which is owned and maintained by Pottawatomie County.

Louis Vieux's grave dominates the interior of the cemetery.

The headstone of T.S. Prather, who died of cholera on May 27, 1849, lies between the cemetery and the river.

The steep banks of the Red Vermilion River made crossing difficult for the emigrants.

SCOTT SPRING

Twelve miles northwest of the Red Vermillion River, near the crossing of Rock Creek, was another favorite campsite for Oregon Trail emigrants. Several springs were located around the hillsides, the most prominent being Scott Spring, which an 1846 emigrant noted had "delicious cold water." Campsites were commonly spread out around the spring during the peak days of emigration, often covering the entire valley floor.

Scott Spring is privately owned, and is located just off Kansas Highway 99 (Sec 3, T8S, R9E, Westmoreland map sheet #27, Pottawatomie County). The spring is on the side of an overgrown hill in the corner of a pasture. It is choked and overgrown with dense brush and extremely difficult to find, even with explicit directions. An unmarked emigrant grave is said to be near the spring.

The Kansas Department of Transportation has a roadside pull-off just south of Scott Spring, and the Kansas State Historical Society has a good interpretive marker at the pull-off. That marker relates the general history of the Oregon Trail through the area, and points out the location of Scott Spring. The spring, located on private land, has only a small flow of water which collects in a stagnant pool.

The present marker for Scott Spring provides sufficient interpretation for the site. If possible, however, travelers should have the opportunity to take a short (180 yards) hike from the highway pull-off to the spring. To provide this opportunity, the Kansas State Historical Society would have to negotiate an easement from the highway to the spring, and clear and mark the trail. The spring should be cleared, and the unlocated gravesite found and marked.

Scott Spring is located in the black hole in the center of the photo, surrounded by dense vegetation.

When visited in September, only a small amount of water was flowing from Scott Spring.

ALCOVE SPRING

Alcove Spring, 33 miles northwest of Scott Spring, is the most significant historic site on the Oregon Trail within the State of Kansas. Although the spring was not named until 1846, it was well-known before then as an excellent water source and a beautiful camping site which offered a rare combination of excellent water, wood, forage and scenery. One emigrant called it "altogether one of the most romantic spots I ever saw." Water cascaded over a rock ledge to form a pool about 10 feet below, and many emigrants took the time to carve their names in the rocks surrounding the spring and pool.

Just west of Alcove Spring was the famous Independence Crossing of the Big Blue River, another extremely difficult river crossing. Unlike the Kansas River and the Vermillion River, no entrepreneur ever appeared at the Big Blue to help the emigrants with a ferry or a bridge, and the river at this point had to be forded or floated with makeshift rafts. Sometimes trains were held up as long as three weeks at Alcove Spring, waiting for the spring floods to subside enough for the Big Blue to be negotiated. An 1850 emigrant described the scene at the crossing site: "Several persons are drowned at this crossing each year...Such horrid noises caused by the braying of the asses, lowing of oxen, screaming of women and children with the fiendish cursing and swearing shouted in all languages by furious madmen was enough to becraze the greatest stoic in all Christendom."*

Alcove Spring had another touch of tragedy, for there is buried Mrs. Sarah Keyes, a grandmother of 70 years who died on May 29, 1846. Mrs. Keyes was the oldest member of the ill-fated Donner party, which was California bound. Later that year, the Donner party was trapped by deep snows in the Sierras, and most of Mrs. Keyes' fellow travelers starved or froze to death in one of the California Trail's most terrible tragedies. Alcove Spring is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Alcove Spring is now privately owned, and may be reached via a county gravel road (Sec 31, T3S, R7E, Blue Rapids map sheet #31, Marshall County). At one time a small local park was created at the spring, but it was later closed due to vandalism and littering. The spring is located in the midst of a wooded area in the broken, hilly farmlands of northeastern Kansas, and is presently used as a pasture. Despite its past misfortunes, the site has all the qualities for a very attractive little park, with meadows, trees, and the spring. A vandalized monument to Mrs. Sarah Keyes stands near the old entrance to the park, and an unmarked footpath wanders back through the trees to Alcove Spring. The water flow of the spring has diminished considerably since pioneer days, and

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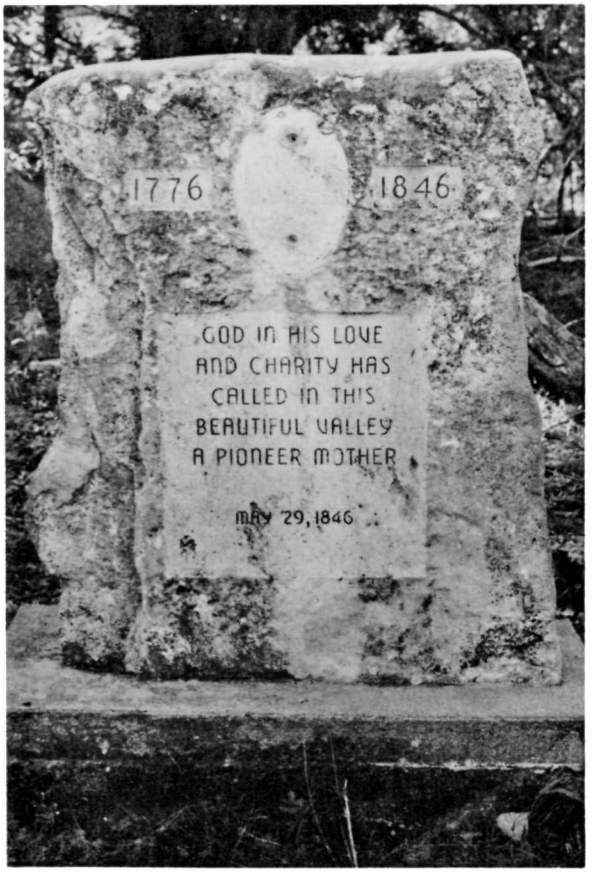
*Quoted in Merrill Mattes, The Great Platte River Road (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969), p. 142.

the spring is now somewhat choked by vegetation. Independence Crossing of the Big Blue River has been flooded by the vast Tuttle Creek Reservoir system and can no longer be seen.

The Kansas State Historical Society should acquire Alcove Spring and develop it as a small (but major) historic park. Approximately 15 acres of land would be necessary to include the spring, the Keyes monument, and appropriate adjacent lands. Protection of this fragile site should be considered the number one priority along the Kansas portion of the Oregon Trail. Specifically, the old rock ledge around the spring is slowly disappearing, due both to vandalism and the forces of nature, and the old names carved in the rock are being lost. The Kansas State Historical Society should take appropriate measures to recover and protect the springs at the earliest opportunity.

The site needs full interpretation, including at least a historical sign near the entrance of the park to explain the significance of the Sarah Keyes monument, and another at the spring to commemorate its significance as a famous Oregon Trail landmark. The shaded meadow in between would make an ideal picnic site or small camping area. To prevent a reoccurrence of past vandalism caused by uncontrolled use of the park, the site would have to be manned, either on a permanent basis or periodically from nearby state recreational areas.

The entrance to Alcove Spring is now closed and guarded by a locked gate.



The Sarah Keyes monument has been greviously defaced.

Alcove Spring still appears much as it did in drawings made by emigrants. Names were carved both above and below the ledge.

Water still flows over the ledge in the spring, but when this photo was taken in September only a small pool remained below.

JUNCTION OF ST. JOSEPH AND INDEPENDENCE ROADS

Fifteen miles northwest of Alcove Spring the emigrants were treated to one of the most dramatic sights on the Oregon Trail. At this point, the Independence Road of the Oregon Trail was joined by the St. Joseph Road. By 1848 St. Joseph--commonly called St. Joe--had begun to rival Independence as a jumping-off point for the trail. By traveling two days farther up the Missouri River from Independence and starting their overland journey from St. Joe, emigrants were able to save two weeks of travel time. The California gold rush of 1849 made St. Joe a boom town, as the downriver jumping-off points were unable to handle the flood of gold seekers, and in the 1850s the St. Joe Road came into its own.

When these two main feeder routes met, emigrants commonly reported a maze of wagons, animals and humanity which stretched to the horizon. An 1849 emigrant counted 100 wagons in sight when he passed the junction. One 1850 emigrant counted 700 wagons in view, while another reported 500 wagons and 2000 men. As an 1849 emigrant wrote, "It would appear from the sight befor us that the Nation was disgorgeing its self and sending off its whole inhabitance."*

No one who visits the site today would ever guess that so many people once crowded and jostled their way across this land. The junction is located amidst an area of isolated farmland (Sec 13, T2S, R5E, Hanover East map sheet #34, Washington County) as viewed from an unimproved county road. The site is privately owned, and has been farmed for decades. Although no traces of either trail or junction remain, a small stone marker has been placed in a wide space by the side of the county road to commemorate the spot.

Washington County should mark and interpret this site. There is no need to mark the precise spot where the two roads joined, since that junction wavered back and forth over the years, and could be correctly placed anywhere within a mile of the present marker. The site, however, should be more appropriately interpreted. For this purpose, a standard historical sign placed next to the older marker would be adequate to explain its significance. Directional signing from U.S. Highway 36, two miles to the south, will be necessary to guide visitors to the site. The Kansas State Historical Society should assist the county as necessary with these recommendations.

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*Quoted in Mattes, The Great Platte River Road, p. 160.

This small marker commemorates the junction of the Independence and St. Joe roads.

The approximate area of the road junction is seen to the northwest of the marker.

HOLLENBERG RANCH

Two miles northwest of the junction of the St. Joe Road, an enterprising rancher built a way-station in 1857 to serve Oregon Trail emigrants. From this building, Gerat H. Hollenberg ran a store and tavern, one of a series of such way stations which gradually grew up along the Oregon Trail and made each year's migration easier than the last. Hollenberg Ranch later served as an Overland Stage station and a Pony Express station. From the glamour of this use comes the building's fame, for it is now identified as "the only unaltered Pony Express station which remains in its original location." The building is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark.

The Hollenberg Pony Express Station (Sec 3, T2S, R5E, Hanover East map sheet #34, Washington County) is now administered by the Kansas State Historical Society. The small seven-acre park contains the building and a picnic area, and is staffed by one full-time employee who lives nearby. Inside the station is a simple museum; several historical markers and monuments stand on the grounds outside. The surrounding territory is rural farmland, with access by way of paved county highways.

Oregon Trail interpretation here is minimal, since emphasis is on the Pony Express days. The Historical Society should increase Oregon Trail interpretation to reflect the original and earliest use of the building. The quality of the museum could be upgraded.

The Hollenberg Pony Express station is essentially unaltered since its days of use.

NEBRASKA

The primary route of the Oregon Trail is 427 miles long across Nebraska. From the Kansas border, the trail heads northwest across farmland and range country for 114 miles before meeting the Platte River at Fort Kearny. From there the trail follows the broad natural highway of the Platte River system into Wyoming. This natural corridor of western expansion, which has been aptly named the Great Platte River Road by Merrill Mattes, was an early fur trading route. After its establishment as a part of the Oregon Trail, the Great Platte River Road was subsequently used by the California Trail, the Mormon Trail, the Pony Express, the stage and freighting lines, and the military. It offered an easy route across the plains towards the Rocky Mountains, but also offered day after day of unchanging landscape and endless boredom. Due to this boredom, the natural landmarks along the Great Platte River Road, such as Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and Scotts Bluff, assumed great significance to early emigrants.

The route across Nebraska changed significantly with the passing years. As travel increased in the 1850s and 1860s, civilization kept pace, and roadhouses and waystations gradually appeared along the trail to cater to the emigrants (and other travelers). While an 1843 emigrant could travel completely across Nebraska without seeing a single sign of civilization, an 1863 emigrant had numerous opportunities to obtain supplies and assistance from the military posts, stage stations and way stations.

The eastern portion of the trail across Nebraska, from the Kansas border to the Platte River, is now extensively farmed. The route along the Platte River system has also been greatly impacted over the years. Modern irrigation methods have changed the arid land of western Nebraska to arable, and the Platte River system still serves as a major transportation route, with Interstate Highways and railroads following many miles of the Oregon Trail. There is little of the Oregon Trail left in Nebraska. Several sections of ruts are still visible but none are lengthy. Some of the remaining sections of ruts, however, are quite spectacular.

Private groups and individuals have made attempts over the past 50 years to mark the Oregon Trail through Nebraska, and some remnants of their efforts can still be seen. No coordinated state-wide effort to mark the trail has yet been initiated. Interpretation of the Oregon Trail is uneven. Nebraska has three state parks along the trail and the National Park Service emphasizes the Oregon Trail at Scotts Bluff National Monument. Numerous roadside markers point out other historic sites, but much remains to be done before the Oregon Trail is thoroughly and consistently interpreted throughout the State. There are 20 historic sites in Nebraska.

Historic preservation efforts in the state are split between the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The State Historical Society plans and implements statewide historic preservation policy and documents and coordinates the marking of historic sites. The Game and Parks Commission, through its State Historic Parks

section, owns and operates historic parks throughout the state, including three along the Oregon Trail.

Protection of California Hill is considered the number one priority for the Oregon National Historic Trail within Nebraska.

ROCK CREEK STATION

Rock Creek Station, 19 miles northwest of Hollenberg Ranch, was another of the way-stations established along the Oregon Trail during the later years of emigration to sell supplies and other services to the emigrants. As the trail grew older, this line of stations gradually spread west, making each year's migration slightly easier than the last. Rock Creek Station was established in 1858, and subsequently served as a stagecoach station for the Central Overland and Pike's Peak Express Company, as a relay station for the Pony Express, and finally as a stage station for the Holladay Overland Mail and Express Company (better known as the Overland Stage). The station was abandoned in 1867, when the transcontinental railroad signaled the demise of the overland stage lines.

Rock Creek has two distinct claims to fame. To the northwest of the old station site is the finest stretch of pristine Oregon Trail ruts left in southeastern Nebraska. These ruts, which cover 1600 feet, have been deepened somewhat by erosion in the past, but are now stabilized by ground cover. The ruts are quite dramatic in appearance and are the first distinct ruts to be seen by travelers following the Oregon Trail.

The station's second claim to fame is more well-known, for it was here that Wild Bill Hickok got his start. Employed as a hired hand for the Pony Express relay station, James B. Hickok shot and killed the owner of the station following an argument. Eastern periodicals, particularly Harper's Monthly Magazine, dramatized and romanticized the incident and the subsequent publicity propelled Wild Bill Hickok into the ranks of American folk heros, and changed forever the life of an obscure hired hand.

The Rock Creek Station buildings have long disappeared. Their general locations are known, however, and recent archeaological excavations have aided in pinpointing the precise sites. In addition to the excellent Oregon Trail ruts, three emigrant graves have been identified near the station and more gravesites are suspected. Rock Creek Station, including the Oregon Trail ruts, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Rock Creek Station is now a State Park administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. This 360-acre park is located amidst rural Nebraska farmlands (Sec 26, T2N, R3E, Endicott map sheet #37, Jefferson County) and is reached by county gravel roads. The park is not fully developed, for the lands were not acquired by the state until 1967 and development funds have only recently been made available. To date, construction has started on a superintendent's residence and a maintenance facility, and archeaological investigations are underway. Other elements of an ambitious master plan will be added as the funds become available. The park is not publicized and receives only a limited amount of walk-in visitation. The Game and Parks Commission plans to publicize the park only after sufficient development has taken place to properly protect the historic resources of the area.

When fully developed, Rock Creek State Park will join Fort Kearny and Ash Hollow as major Nebraska state parks along the Oregon Trail. The master plan includes the construction of a visitor center and full interpretive displays both within the center and around the park. The interpretive scheme will emphasize the Oregon Trail and the stage and Pony Express station. Interpretive trails will lead visitors around the park from both the visitor center and a projected campground. The Game and Parks Commission is considering the reconstruction of the station buildings as a long range possibility, but that would only take place after the park is well established.

The master plan for the development at this park is endorsed. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is commended for its foresight in acquiring the lands to create Rock Creek State Park and for its care and wisdom in slowly developing the park to best protect and interpret its significant historic resources.

The tree on the horizon grows in the middle of the Oregon Trail ruts at Rock Creek State Park. The ruts run northwest from the site of Rock Creek Station.

The Oregon Trail ruts continue to the northwest from beyond the tree seen in the above photo.

GEORGE WINSLOW GRAVE

Nine miles northwest of Rock Creek Station is the George Winslow grave, one of the famous gravesites on the Oregon Trail. Although historians have estimated that 30,000 persons died on the trail between 1842 and 1860 (or an average of 15 per mile), the actual number of marked and identified gravesites which remain today is quite limited. Thus each positively identified and marked gravesite which has survived has become precious. The George Winslow grave is one of these. Winslow died on June 8, 1849, and his grave was marked by others of his company. Winslow's sons returned to Nebraska in 1912 to erect a more permanent monument at the site, and the Winslow family still makes periodic pilgrimages to the grave.

Next to the gravesite, which is located in the midst of a gently rolling hayfield (Sec 21, T3N, R2E, Fairbury map sheet #39, Jefferson County), is a short stretch of a shallow Oregon Trail rut swale. This hayfield is privately owned and has been part of a family farm since 1873. The owners have faithfully maintained the Winslow gravesite for several generations and have kept the adjacent 80 acres as a hay meadow for over 100 years in order to preserve the gentle rut swale. The present owner is personally committed to protecting the historic site, and has taken considerable financial loss considering the higher returns he may have obtained from the land had he plowed and cultivated the field.

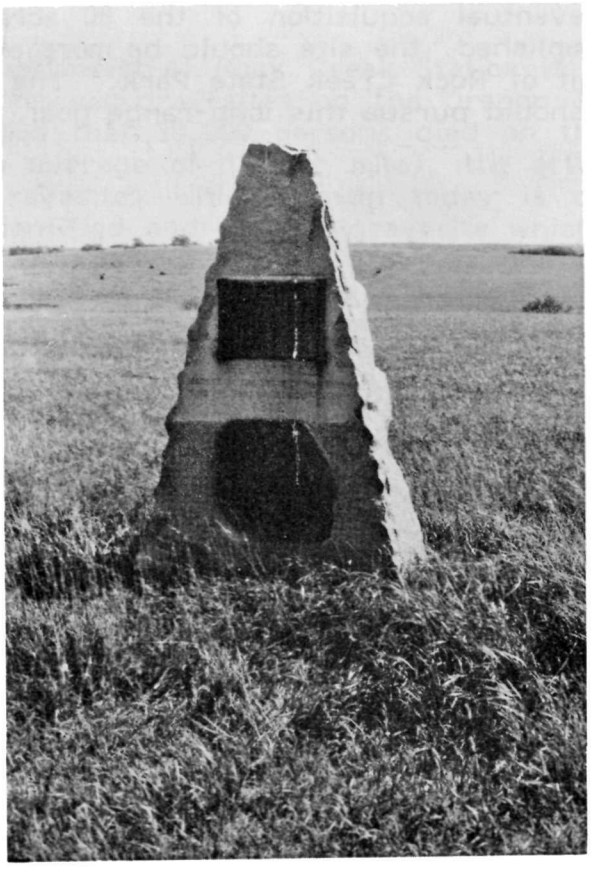
The Winslow grave has no directional signing and no interpretation, but is well known throughout the locality. The owner reports considerable visitation through his hay meadow to view the ruts and monument. So far, this has presented no appreciable problem to the owner, for most visitors are careful to respect private property. The site is a quarter of a mile walk north from a gravel section line road.

One and a half miles east of the Winslow grave is the site of the old Virginia Station (Sec 27), once an Overland Stage and Pony Express station. An interpretive wayside has been created here, along Nebraska Highway 15, including a monument to the Pony Express.

Recommendations for the George Winslow grave and ruts are two-fold. In the short run, the site should be more adequately marked and interpreted. To accomplish this, the Nebraska State Historical Society should place a marker at the Virginia Station highway pull-off, indicating the route of the Oregon Trail (which passed through Virginia Station) and interpretating the George Winslow grave. With the consent of the owner, directions to the gravesite should be given, along with a reminder for visitors to stop when approaching the gravesite and look at the Oregon Trail rut swale, which is best observed from the county section line road southeast of the grave. Visitors, who should be reminded to respect the private property upon which the gravesite is located, would then be able to walk in from the section line road to view the gravesite.

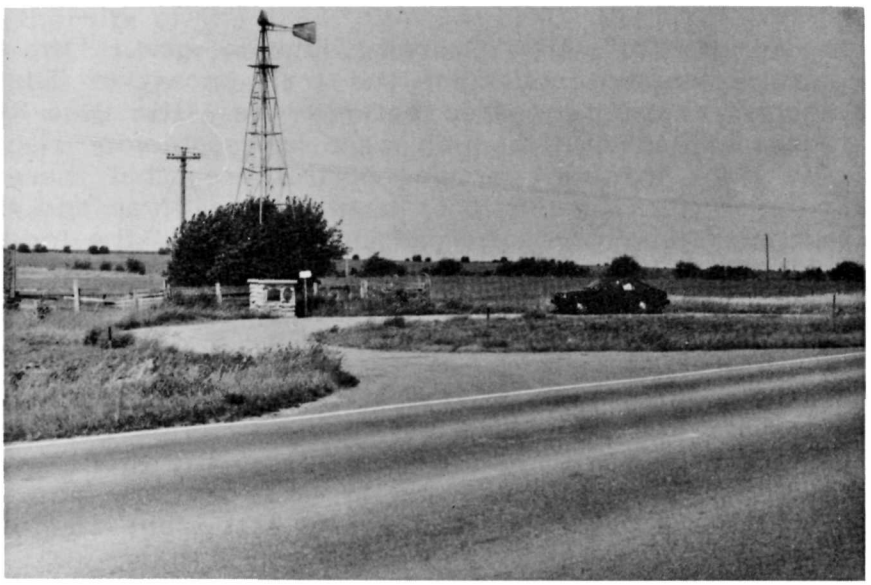
In the long run, the George Winslow grave and ruts should be acquired by the State of Nebraska. Protection of the gravesite and the rut swale

is not a problem as long as the present owner lives, but steps should be taken to arrange for the eventual acquisition of the 80 acres of hay meadow. When that is accomplished, the site should be more extensively developed as a detached unit of Rock Creek State Park. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should pursue this long-range goal.



The George Winslow grave and monument stands in the midst of a hayfield.

The rut swale crosses the hay meadow from east to west. A prominent swale is visible in the left of the picture, leaving the farm pond, and a fainter swale can be seen to its right. The George Winslow monument is behind the tall tree on this side of the pond, up the slope to the right of the fainter rut swale.



The interpretive wayside beside Nebraska Highway 15 is dedicated to the Virginia Pony Express Station site.

THE NARROWS

Forty-two miles west of the George Winslow grave the emigrants approached a troublesome portion of the trail known as The Narrows. Here the Oregon Trail was squeezed between the Little Blue River and a stretch of high, rugged bluffs which were impassable for wagons. The trail became so tight through portions of this area that there was room for only one wagon at a time to pass between the river and the bluffs. The area was only a minor Oregon Trail landmark until the Indian wars of 1864, when suddenly The Narrows assumed a much more sinister meaning, for the geography presented the Indians with an ideal spot to attack emigrant trains, freight wagons, or stagecoachs.

Such an attack was made in August of 1864, when the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians of Nebraska seized the opportunity presented by the withdrawal of federal troops from the west during the Civil War to make a concerted attempt to drive the encroaching white settlers from their land. During August of that year, nearly every settlement and way station between the Big Sandy and Julesburg (400 miles) was attacked. Settlements and isolated farms were abandoned or destroyed, and travel ceased on the Oregon Trail for several months. A local family named Eubanks was attacked at The Narrows that month. Seven members were killed and two women and two children were held captive for several months.

The State of Nebraska marked the site of The Narrows in 1912 with a small monument placed on the bluff above the Little Blue River (Sec 6, T3N, R5W, Edgar map sheet #46, Nuckolls County). Near that monument a wooden stake marks the spot where the Eubanks family was attacked. The site is privately owned, and is on the edge of a large pasture on the bluff overlooking the Little Blue River. It is not interpreted, and there are no directional signs to bring visitors to the site. Access at present is via a three-quarter mile hike across the pasture from a county gravel road. The general vicinity of The Narrows is rural farmlands.

The Narrows presents difficult interpretive problems, due to a combination of restrictive terrain and the lack of access. Alterations in the course of the river and subsequent erosions along the bank have cut into The Narrows and obliterated the Oregon Trail. Dense vegetation now lines the river bank and bluffs, unlike the Oregon Trail days, and there are few vantage points from which travelers may view the regional geography and appreciate the restrictive terrain which forced emigrants through The Narrows.

The best place from which to see The Narrows is located at a point along the Oregon Trail, just off the county gravel road one-half mile west of the small town of Oak. Here, where the road makes a 90 degree turn from the west to the north (Sec 7, Oak map sheet #45), is an unofficial parking area. An Oregon Trail marker (#20) stands there, and by walking a few feet to the west visitors may look down over a steep cliff to the Little Blue River. Nuckolls County should interpret this site by explaining the difficulties the emigrants had in negotiating The Narrows.

Three-quarters of a mile north along the same gravel county road (Sec 6), a foot trail crosses a private pasture towards the State of Nebraska marker and the site of the 1864 Indian attack. Nuckolls County, through negotiation with the private landowner, should secure access to allow visitors to hike to the bluffs above the river. Interpretation should be provided there to relate the story of the 1864 Indian attacks and their effects upon the territory, particularly upon the Eubanks family.

The Nebraska State Historical Society should assist the Nuckolls County Commissioners as necessary in the preparation of the recommended interpretive signs.

The Little Blue River is located below the bluffs beyond The Narrows marker in the center of the photo, but is completely masked by the trees.

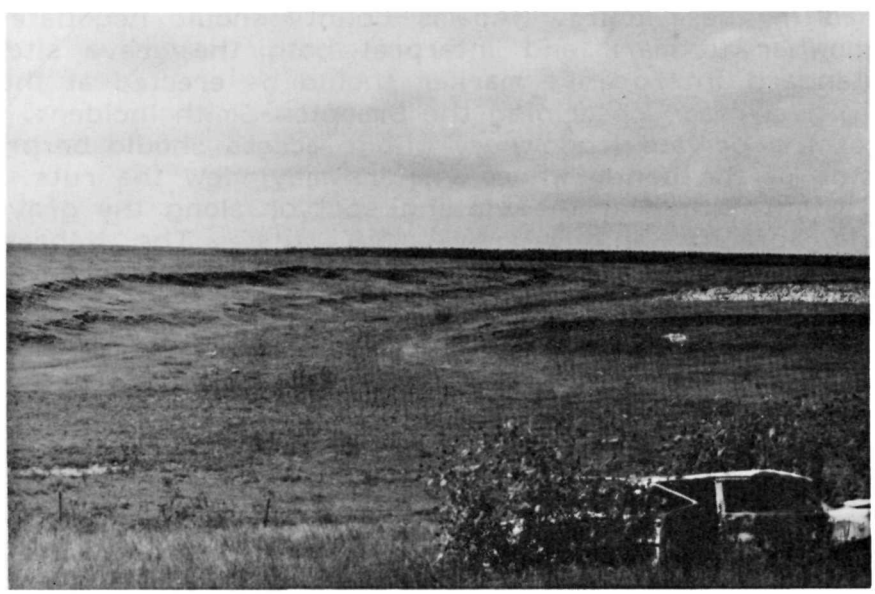
SIMONTON-SMITH GRAVESITE AND RUTS

Thirty-one miles northwest of The Narrows, another wagon train was attacked by Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians during the August, 1864, Indian uprising. This was the Simonton-Smith train, eight wagons and eight men en route from St. Joe to Denver with a consignment of hardware. All eight men were killed during the attack, which took place on August 7th. The bodies and smoking wagons were discovered by two young couples out for a ride from Thirty-two Mile Station, five miles to the west. The riders rushed back to the station and gave the alarm. The dead were evidently buried several days later by troops from Fort Kearny, but as a local historian cautions, "so many have claimed credit for this humane act that it appears beyond any doubt they are the most thoroughly buried people in the vicinity." This is the only known burial site in Adams County of white men killed by Indians.

A simple wooden post now marks the site, which is located on the edge of private farmland, next to a gravel county road less than half a mile from U.S. Highway 281 (Sec 24, T6N, R10W, Ayr map sheet #51, Adams County). Directly south of the grave marker, on the opposite side of a small farm pond, is a short 300-yard stretch of clearly defined Oregon Trail ruts. These ruts have been eroded somewhat in the past but are now well stabilized by ground cover. Although the surrounding acreage is all cultivated farmland, the ruts appear to be in no danger of disturbance, for both the farm pond and the general terrain make the area unsuitable for cultivation. The ruts may be seen by taking a short walk south from the gravel county road along the edge of a field.

The Simonton-Smith site is presently included in historic tours conducted by the Adams County Historical Society, but the Oregon Trail ruts are not mentioned in these tours. Adams County should negotiate with the private landowner to mark and interpret both the grave site and the ruts. A standard interpretive marker should be erected at the edge of the county gravel road, describing the Simonton-Smith incident. With the permission of the private landowner, public access should be provided to the south side of the pond, where visitors may view the ruts. Another interpretive sign, either at the viewing spot or along the gravel county road, should identify and interpret the ruts. The Nebraska State Historical Society should assist Adams County, as necessary, with these recommendations.

The small Simonton-Smith wagon train marker may be seen from the gravel county road. The uncultivated parcel of land contains a farm pond to the left of this photo, and the Oregon Trail ruts are behind that pond.



The Oregon Trail ruts curve to the west from the edge of a field. The farm pond is to the right of this photo, between the ruts and the county gravel road.

THIRTY-TWO MILE STATION

Thirty-two Mile Station, five miles west of the Simonton-Smith burial site, is the site of another of the series of way-stations established during 1858 and 1859 along the Oregon Trail to serve the growing numbers of stagecoaches and freight trains which were joining the emigrant trains along the great road to the west. Named for its distance from Fort Kearny, Thirty-two Mile Station never consisted of more than one long, low log building. In 1860 it became a Pony Express station and in 1861 a "home" station for the Overland Stage, where hot meals were served to travelers. The station was abandoned in August of 1864, following the news of the Simonton-Smith attack. Its proprietors and visitors fled to Fort Kearny for safety, and the Indians burned the station to the ground.

The site of Thirty-two Mile Station (Sec 6, T6N, R10W, Hastings West map sheet #52, Adams County) is now in the middle of a plowed field, just off a county gravel road. A small marker has been placed at the side of that field to commemorate the site, but no other interpretation is present. The site has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places for its archaeological values.

Recommendations for this site are two-fold. First, Adams County should place a more informative interpretive sign at Thirty-two Mile Station, giving the details of its location, significance and destruction. The Nebraska State Historical Society should assist the county, as necessary, with the preparation of the sign.

Second, just west of the plowed field which covers the old station site is Thirty-two Mile Creek. The land around the creek, adjacent to a county paved road, is privately owned but presently unused. As a long range prospect, Adams County should consider this creek-bottom land as a future county park and picnic site. The setting is very pleasant, as the creek wanders beneath the shade of numerous trees. Thirty-two Mile Creek offered no particular difficulties to the emigrants, unless sudden rains caused local flooding, but it does represent a very typical crossing encountered by the emigrants. The combination of scenic qualities, unimpacted land, and the chance to interpret a typical crossing site of the Oregon Trail presents Adams County with a unique opportunity. Approximately 10 acres of land would be sufficient for this proposed interpretive and picnic site.

Thirty-two Mile Station stood in the middle of the plowed field behind the marker in the foreground. Thirty-two Mile Creek flows through the trees seen behind the field.

The west branch of Thirty-two Mile Creek is seen looking south from a paved county road. This parcel of land would make an excellent site to interpret a typical stream crossing on the Oregon Trail.

SUSAN HAIL GRAVE

Susan Hail's grave, 16 miles northwest of Thirty-two Mile Station, is another Oregon Trail gravesite. Susan Hail was a young emigrant wife from Missouri who died suddenly on June 2, 1852, at the age of 34. The speed of her demise led to the legend that she had drunk from a water source poisoned by Indians. A more probable cause is cholera or dysentery caused by drinking water polluted from being too near a campground or a buffalo wallow, for both those diseases can kill rapidly. Her grave was immediately marked, and the same local legend holds that her husband returned all the way to St. Joe, where a headstone was obtained and brought back to the gravesite in a handcart. Ironically, Susan Hail's husband, who ensured that she would not be forgotten, is himself unknown.

The Susan Hail grave now has a more modern monument, surrounded by a protective pipe fence on six acres of land owned by Adams County (Sec 18, T8N, R12W, Denman map sheet #55, Adams County). The site has no interpretation other than the grave marker, and is reached by way of county dirt and gravel roads. It is five miles south of Interstate Highway 80.

In addition to the grave, this site is important for other reasons. Susan Hail is buried at the precise spot where the Oregon Trail broke over a small rise and came within view of the Platte River. This was one of the great moments in the experience of the emigrants, for the first leg of the journey was now almost complete. Arrival at the Platte meant that they were within striking distance of Fort Kearny, the first sign of civilization in this remote country. The Platte River was broad and flat, with little or no timber, quite unlike its appearance today. Perhaps because the broad flat treeless valley during spring flood once resembled a sandy seashore, early travelers called this the "Coast of Nebraska."

Both northwest and southeast of the Susan Hail grave (Sections 18 and 19) are fairly extensive grassed over Oregon Trail traces, made by the passage of thousands of animals and wagons as they descended the low sandy hill towards the river. In 1975, Merrill Mattes, in his "Nebraska State Historic Resources Management Plan," done under commission from the State of Nebraska, proposed this site for the "Coast of Nebraska" State Park. Although that plan has been unofficially approved by several state agencies, adequate funding to implement its recommendations has not been forthcoming. Mattes' proposals, as they affect the Susan Hail grave and the "Coast of Nebraska" State Park, are fully endorsed.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should implement those plans, which call for the acquisition of approximately 30 acres of pasture land containing Oregon Trail ruts around the Susan Hail grave. That land should be developed with an interpretive shelter dedicated to the ruts, the first view of the Platte River, and Susan Hail. Fencing around the area (to keep cattle out), gateways, markers and a short interpretive trail would complete development. This small park would be unmanned and would be administered from Fort Kearny State Park, 15 miles to the

west. This proposal is strongly recommended, for the concept of a "Coast of Nebraska" State Park is an exciting one which would ideally commemorate and interpret one of the most significant sites on the Oregon National Historic Trail.

Recognizing that the development of a new state park is always a long-term affair, the following recommendations are made to more adequately interpret the site in the meantime. Adams County, which is commended for its original purchase and salvation of the Susan Hail gravesite, should work (with assistance from the Nebraska State Historical Society as necessary) to interpret the gravesite more fully. A standard historical marker at the grave would be sufficient for this purpose. The Oregon Trail ruts are visible from the county gravel road which passes the gravesite, and should be pointed out to visitors. The ruts appear to be in no immediate danger, for the land, used as pasture, has sufficient ground cover to prevent damage to the ruts from grazing cattle. With the cooperation of the private owner, the ruts should be marked across the pasture as the trail leads northwest from the Susan Hail grave towards the Platte River.

The Susan Hail grave, with its marker barely visible, sits on a windswept mound.

A twentieth-century marker now serves as a headstone for Susan Hail.

Faint traces of the Oregon Trail can be seen to the northwest from the Susan Hail grave. The Platte River is behind the tree-line in the rear of the photo. The Platte was virtually treeless during emigrant days, and the river was more plainly visible to the emigrants.

A portion of the Oregon Trail ruts are visible just west of the Susan Hail grave, looking northwest.

FORT KEARNY

Fort Kearny, 15 miles west of Susan Hail's grave, was the true "Gateway to the Great Plains." The Fort was established by the U.S. Army in 1848 to protect the growing traffic along the Oregon Trail from the threat of Indian attacks, and was ideally located to do that job. An older Fort Kearny (sometimes called Camp Kearny) had been located on the Missouri River south of Council Bluffs, but that location proved unsuitable and the post was moved farther west. The new site, just below the Grand Island of the Platte River, soon became a major junction of eastern feeder trails. At Fort Kearny the various routes from jumping-off points up and down the Missouri River all came together--the Independence and St. Joe Road, the Nebraska City Road, the Omaha-Council Bluffs Road, and other minor feeder routes. Those routes joined at Fort Kearny and became one broad and vast trail following the Platte River 330 miles west to Fort Laramie, Wyoming. This great route served the Oregon Trail, and in later years the California Trail, the Mormon Trail, the Pony Express, the Overland Stage, the transcontinental telegraph, and was a major freighting route. From the 1840s until the advent of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s this was, as Merrill Mattes has so aptly named it, the Great Platte River Road--the primary route of western expansion across the great plains.

Fort Kearny anchored the eastern end of the Great Platte River Road and was for nearly 20 years the most important military post in Nebraska. It also quickly became the first major resupply point for the Oregon Trail. The fort was an oasis of civilization on the strange and hostile plains, where emigrants could rest in safety, obtain supplies and medical help, trade worn-out stock and even mail letters back to the States. The fort grew to accomodate over 30 buildings during its height of activity in the 1860s, before being abandoned in 1871. The fort also served in intervening years as a Pony Express station, an Overland Stage station and a telegraph station.

Fort Kearny is now a Nebraska State Historical Park, administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The park has 39 acres, located on a paved county highway five miles southeast of Kearney, Nebraska (Sec 22, T8N, R15W, Kearney map sheet #58, Kearney County). None of the original buildings of the fort has survived, although its earthwork fortifications are still evident. The fort had an archaeological survey in the 1960s, and the Game and Parks Commission has constructed a log stockade to interpret the 1864 Indian war period, restored the old log and earth powder magazine, and reconstructed a sod and log and concrete block blacksmith and carpenter shop. The old parade ground has been landscaped and new trees planted to replace the dying old cottonwoods. A modern interpretive center and museum welcomes visitors, who number over 100,000 per year. Fort Kearny is on the National Register of Historic Places.

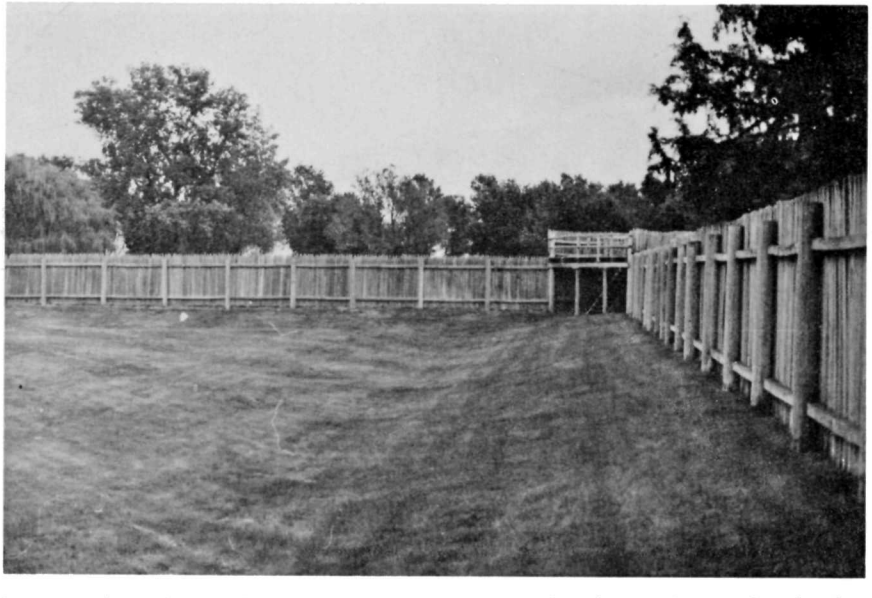
The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has shown care and foresight in its gradual restoration of Fort Kearny, despite funding problems. The commission has plans to eventually expand the size of the state park by

acquiring 40 adjacent acres, the site of several major fort buildings, including the Commanding Officer's Quarters, the Surgeon's Quarters, the Post Office, the stage station, and the hospital. Those plans are endorsed. In the meantime, the commission should take steps to increase the Oregon Trail interpretation offered at the park. Fort Kearny, like most historic western posts, heavily emphasizes the military in its interpretive scheme, while neglecting the reason for the fort's existance. In the case of Fort Kearny, there is no doubt that the post was originally established to protect the overland emigration on the Oregon Trail, and the Game and Parks Commission should expand the park's present Oregon Trail interpretation to reflect that fact.

A modern visitor center functions as the headquarters of Fort Kearny State Park.

Artifacts, exhibits, and interpretive materials are displayed inside the reconstructed blacksmith and carpenter shop.

The old parade ground at Fort Kearny is now developed with walking paths and interpretive markers.



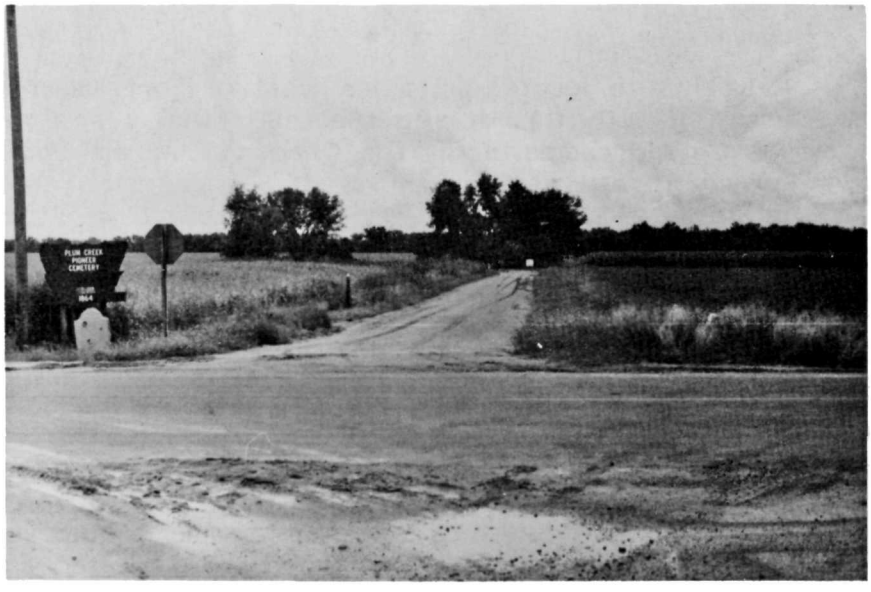
The interior of the Fort Kearny stockade also includes several interpretive panels.

PLUM CREEK

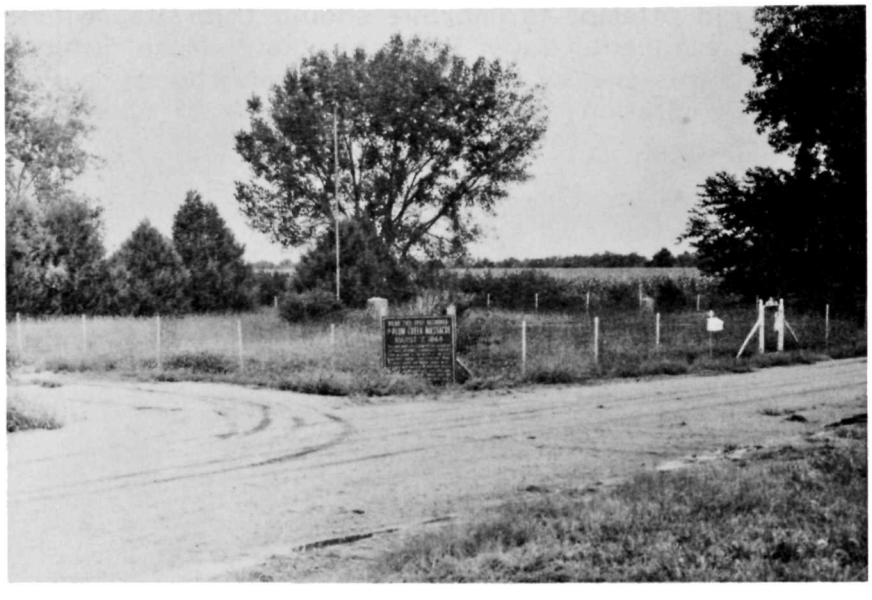
Plum Creek is a small site located 32 miles west of Fort Kearny, but one which saw a variety of activities during the emigration years. Plum Creek was first noted as a good campsite for the Oregon Trail emigrants, and in later years a Pony Express station and an Overland Stage station were located near the creek. On August 7, 1864, a band of Sioux Indians attacked the station and a wagon train camped nearby, killing 11 men from the train and the three occupants of the station. One woman and a boy were captured. A small garrison of troops was stationed at Plum Creek for a short time following the incident, but another stage coach was attacked on November 25, 1864, with two passengers being wounded. During a smaller uprising in August of 1867, another wagon train was attacked at Plum Creek. Sometime shortly thereafter, the station was burned and abandoned.

The victims of the 1864 Indian attack are now commemorated in the Plum Creek Cemetery, an isolated half-acre plot of ground located amongst the fields along the Platte River (Sec 8, T8N, R20W, Overton map sheet #62, Phelps County). (The actual burial site, now lost, is probably one and one-half miles to the east.) The cemetery is owned by Phelps County and is reached by a paved county road. Various brief attempts have been made in the past to commemorate the site, including a pair of monuments erected in the 1930s by Phelps County and a more recent panel installed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The cemetery is also the burial site for Sarepta Fly, a 24 year-old emigrant wife and mother who died in 1865. The cemetery is not well maintained, and is now overgrown with tall grass and weeds. Vandals have damaged two of the monuments.

Phelps County should attempt to improve should this site, which has much to tell regarding emigrant days in Nebraska. More interpretation is needed to relate its history as an emigrant campground, a Pony Express and Overland Stage station, and to tell the story of the 1864 Indian attacks.



The entrance to the Plum Creek Cemetery is seen from a paved county road. The old stone monument below the wooden sign has been defaced by vandals. The cemetery is located in the background, beneath the trees at the end of the short dirt road.



Plum Creek Cemetery has one small interpretive sign placed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The stone monument below the flagpole is dedicated to the 1864 victims.

MIDWAY STATION

Located 32 miles west of Plum Creek, Midway Station was another of the series of road ranches which sprang up along the Oregon Trail in the late 1850s to cater to the ever-increasing emigrant trains passing through Nebraska. Midway Station was constructed in 1858 or 1859 as a simple one-story cabin made of heavy, hand-hewn cedar logs. An addition was built on the station in 1860, when it became a "home" station for the Pony Express. After the demise of the Pony Express, Midway Station continued to serve as a stage station and a supply point for the Oregon Trail until the late 1860s. It was subsequently used as a ranch house, and still stands today.

Midway Station is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is believed to be the only extant Pony Express station in Nebraska standing at its original location. The station is privately owned by the 96 Ranch, whose owners have demonstrated a committment to preserving it through the years. The building has been protected by the construction of a concrete floor underneath it and a shingle roof above, which protects the older cedar and sod roof from deterioration. It is marked by several plaques, and has a modest museum inside. The station is not manned, and the average of six visitors per week who show up are escorted by the wife of the ranch's foreman, who lives next to the station. Access to the site (Sec 35, T11N, R25W, Gothenburg map sheet #69, Dawson County) is via a private ranch road. The station is located directly in the center of the working headquarters of a large ranch, and is surrounded by barns, silos, machine shops, storage sheds and a feed yard.

This site will be difficult to open to the general public, given its private ownership and location. While the present sparse tourist flow is not a distraction to the ranch's operation, any considerable increase in visitors would cause problems. As the area now exists, however, few tourists avail themselves of it.

Nevertheless, Midway Station is significant enough to warrant efforts to make it available for those who wish to see an Oregon Trail way station which subsequently served as a Pony Express and stage station. As a minimum Dawson County, in cooperation with the private owner, should provide an interpretive sign at the station, giving more details concerning its history and operations than are now available. An access agreement should be negotiated with the 96 Ranch to allow visitors to enter the site on private roads, and directional signing provided from nearby county roads and Interstate Highway 80.

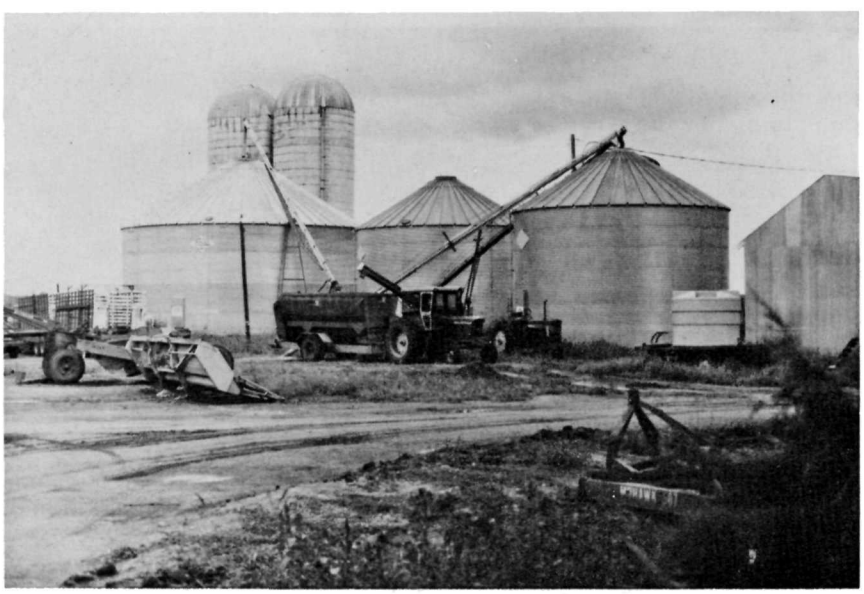
Since the 1960s, when Midway Station was listed as an "Original Pony Express Station" by the National Pony Express Centennial Association and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the Nebraska State Historical Society, some questions concerning its history have been raised. Recent scholarship, while not conclusive, indicates that the well-preserved building at the 96 Ranch may actually be "Smith's West Ranch," while the true Midway Station (no longer standing) was located five miles to the east. Smith's West Ranch was a road house and way station dating from the late 1850s.

In the meantime, until the evidence to the contrary becomes conclusive, and until the Nebraska State Historical Society amends its nomination of Midway Station to the National Register of Historic Places, the structure at the 96 Ranch will continue to be listed officially as Midway Station. Despite the questions concerning its name and history, the structure deserves preservation and interpretation.

Midway Station (right) stands next to the foreman's residence at the 96 Ranch.

Midway Station.

Midway Station (far left) stands in the midst of a busy ranch headquarters area.



Another view of the ranch yard, to the right of above photo, emphasizes its congestion.

FORT MCPHERSON

Fort McPherson, 23 miles west of Midway Station, was established in September 1863, when the U.S. Army foresaw the need for an intermediate military post between Forts Kearny and Laramie on the Oregon Trail. The purpose of the new fort was to protect the emigrants, stagecoaches, freighters, and railroad workers who were traveling the Great Platte River Road in ever-increasing numbers from the potential attacks of the plains Indians who were growing more and more restive as the great funnel of western migration threatened their lands and way of life. The Army's timing could hardly have been better, for the Indian uprising of 1864 followed closely upon the establishment of the fort. Fort McPherson became a camping, resting and refitting spot along the Oregon Trail as well as providing sanctuary during the Indian wars.

Originally named Cantonment McKean, the post was subsequently known as Fort Cottonwood before being renamed Fort McPherson in 1866 in honor of the Civil War General James B. McPherson. The fort was abandoned in 1880, but not before 107 of its acres were rededicated in 1873 as the Fort McPherson National cemetery. Intended as a burial ground for Civil War veterans, the Cemetery also holds the remains of veterans from the Indian wars (including reburials from abandoned posts such as Fort Robinson, Nebraska and Fort Laramie, Wyoming), the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. One monument in the cemetery marks the burial site of 28 soldiers from the Grattan "Massacre" of 1854 (see below), whose remains were moved from Fort Laramie in 1891.

Fort McPherson National Cemetery is still an active cemetery administered by the Veterans Administration, and averages about 100 burials per year. The cemetery is located adjacent to a paved county road in the midst of irrigated cornfields on the south bank of the Platte River (Sec 9, T12N, R28W, Maxwell map sheet #73, Lincoln County). Visitation to the cemetery (excluding funerals) averages about 2000 per year. A one-room visitor center/reception area in the headquarters building of the cemetery offers a pamphlet giving a brief history of the fort and National Cemetery. The pamphlet points out several early burial sites in the cemetery from the Indian war years. The immaculate conditions of the cemetery grounds and the long quiet rows of graves covering a century of military history make this a special place to visit.

One mile southeast of the National Cemetery (Sec 16) is a statue of a soldier erected by Lincoln County in 1928 to mark the center of the old Fort McPherson. This statue has several inscriptions on its sides, and is located at a wide spot in the paved county road. A very faded wooden sign behind the statue has an excellent sketch of the old fort grounds, noting the location of over 40 buildings. That sketch, however, is now practically unreadable due to years of weathering and neglect.

Fort McPherson is in need of more on-site interpretation, and the ideal place would be just outside the entrance to the National Cemetery. The Veterans Administration should place an interpretive sign there, detailing

the history and significance of Fort McPherson and its importance to the Oregon Trail and the settlement of Nebraska, and giving a history of the National Cemetery. This would enable tourists to appreciate the significance of the site, especially when the cemetery is closed to visitors during burial ceremonies. That sign should also point out the site of the old Fort McPherson statue, to ensure that visitors do not overlook it.

Lincoln County should take steps to restore the old statue site. The monument itself is in fairly good condition, but the old wooden sign with the schematic of the fort grounds should be restored. It is too important to let rot away. At present, it is difficult for visitors to park on the steep shoulders of the narrow county road in front of the statue, and Lincoln County should consider widening the road at this site, or providing a small pull-off parking area for a few cars.

The interior of Fort McPherson National Cemetery, as seen from the main entrance, is closed to visitors during burial cermonies.

The monument marks the reburial site of the soldiers killed in the Grattan "Massacre" of 1854. Lieutenant Grattan is now buried at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery, Kansas.

The old Fort McPherson statue was erected in 1928. The wooden sign bearing the outline of the fort and its buildings is behind the tree, hidden from view.

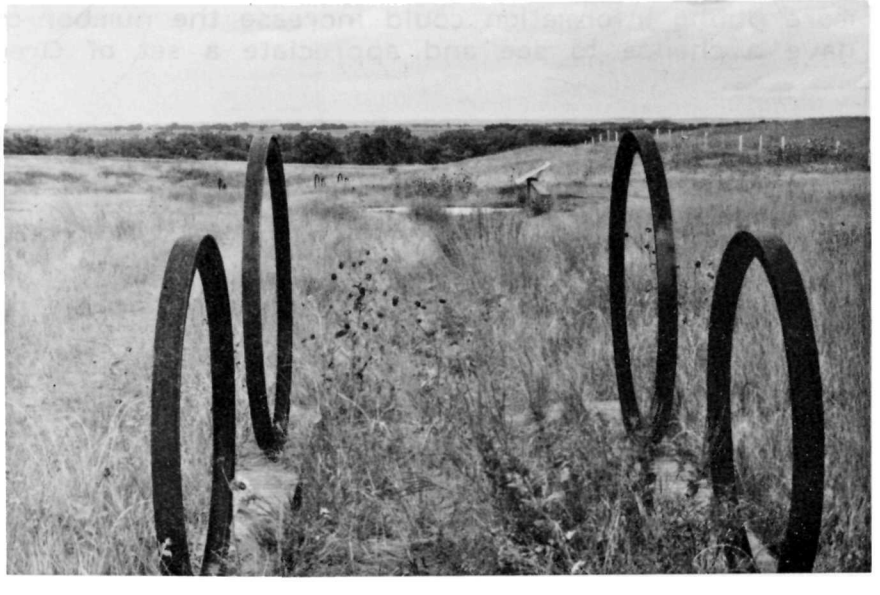
O'FALLON'S BLUFFS

O'Fallon's Bluffs, 26 miles west of Fort McPherson, was a minor landmark along the Oregon Trail, denoting a vexing piece of terrain which had to be negotiated. Here, a series of high, sandy bluffs crowded the south bank of the Platte River, forcing the emigrants to make a wearisome three-mile detour up and over the rolling sandy hills. Compared to the relatively easy going which they had experienced so far along the broad valley of the Platte, O'Fallon's Bluffs represented a time-consuming delay in their journey.

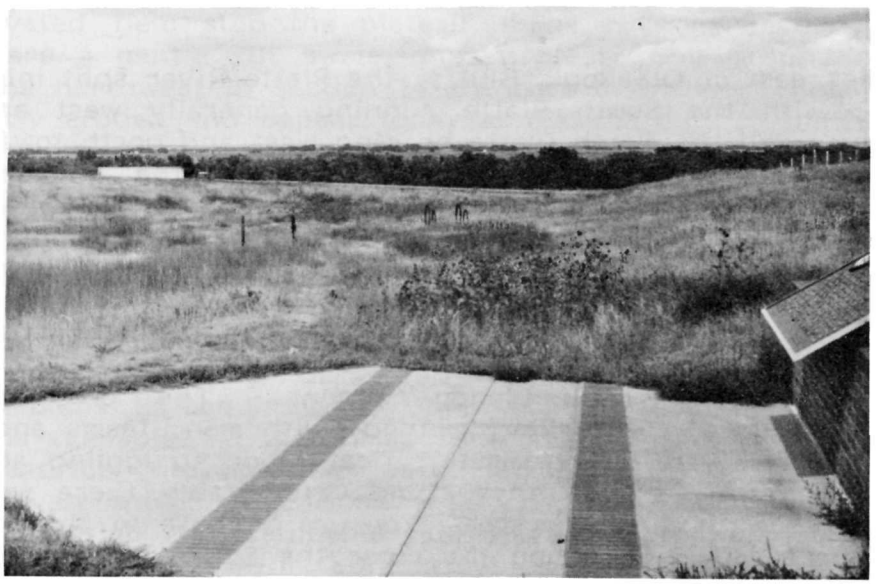
O'Fallons Bluffs is important to us today due to the efforts of the Nebraska Department of Roads, which saved a stretch of Oregon Trail ruts crossing the bluffs during the construction of Interstate Highway 80, which closely parallels the Oregon Trail across much of central Nebraska. The Department of Roads created a rest stop at O'Fallons Bluff (Sec 34, T14N, R33W, Hershey West map sheet #78, Lincoln County), and has erected several interpretive signs to the Great Platte River Road. At the east-bound rest stop, about 1000 feet of a gentle rut swale across the grass-covered terrain has been preserved and marked with iron wagon tires. The rest area also offers a panoramic view of the Platte River valley, which is both historically interesting and picturesque. The stretch of ruts at the eastbound rest area is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Considering the time, cost and effort which went into this excellent interpretive display of Oregon Trail ruts, one question arises. Why is the interpretive site not advertised along the Interstate, to tell travelers that there is something special to see at this particular rest area? The Nebraska Department of Roads should take steps to address this question, for a little more public information could increase the number of visitors who would have a chance to see and appreciate a set of Oregon Trail ruts.

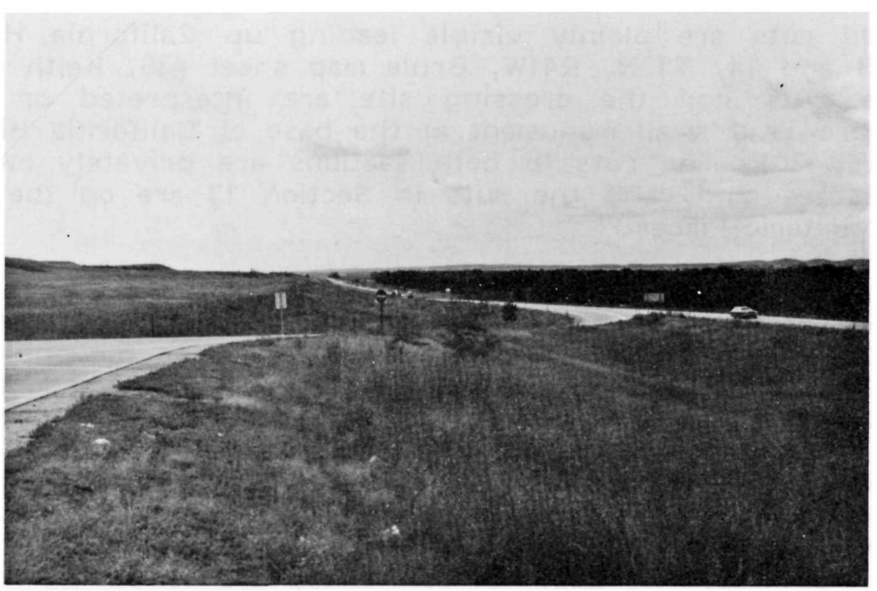
This general view from the picnic and rest room area of the east-bound I-80 rest stop at O'Fallon's Bluffs looks toward the Oregon Trail ruts display. An interpretive sign at the left of the picture is flanked by a series of iron wagon tires marking the ruts.



Looking down from above the interpretive sign, visitors can see the gentle rut swale.



From the interpretive sign visitors can trace the rut swale toward the Interstate. The ruts, which are marked by the darker line of vegetation, are much plainer to the eye than to the camera.



O'Fallon's Bluffs appear on the left in this photo, looking west along the Interstate Highway and the Platte River from the east-bound rest area. Although channel changes in the river and highway construction have altered the landscape somewhat, and the Platte River is now masked by a heavy line of vegetation, the geography of O'Fallon's Bluffs, which forced the emigrants up and away from the Platte River, can still be appeciated.

CALIFORNIA HILL

Fourteen miles east of O'Fallon's Bluffs, the Platte River split into its two major forks, with the South Platte running generally west and south towards Denver and the North Platte heading west and north towards Fort Laramie and Casper, Wyoming. Sooner or later, the emigrants were forced to cross the South Platte in order to reach and follow the North Platte towards South Pass, the gateway to the west. Although several crossing sites were used over the years, the most important one was the California Crossing, 53 miles west of O'Fallon's Bluffs, for that crossing led directly into Ash Hollow, the best approach to the North Platte River. The wide sandy South Platte always presented a formidable obstacle to emigrants and their heavily laden wagons. The crossings were accomplished by the "cold turkey" method, with men, teams and wagons plunging into the river and swimming, floating or struggling across the water and quicksand as best they could. Inevitably there were many wrecks, drownings, and deaths from exposure because in May and early June when the emigrants reached the river the South Platte was swollen from melting mountain snows.

On the north bank of the South Platte River, the emigrants then faced another obstacle, called California Hill. This necessitated a climb of 240 feet in just over a mile and a half, in order to reach the plateau between the North and South Platte rivers. This was the first major grade faced by the emigrants, and it was given perhaps undue notice because they had yet to see any really steep terrain such as they would encounter farther west.

Oregon Trail ruts are plainly visible leading up California Hill today (Sections 13 and 14, T13N, R41W, Brule map sheet #86, Keith County). Neither the ruts nor the crossing site are interpreted or marked, although there is a small monument at the base of California Hill, along U.S. Highway 30. The ruts in both sections are privately owned and used as pasture land, and the ruts in Section 13 are on the National Register of Historic Places.

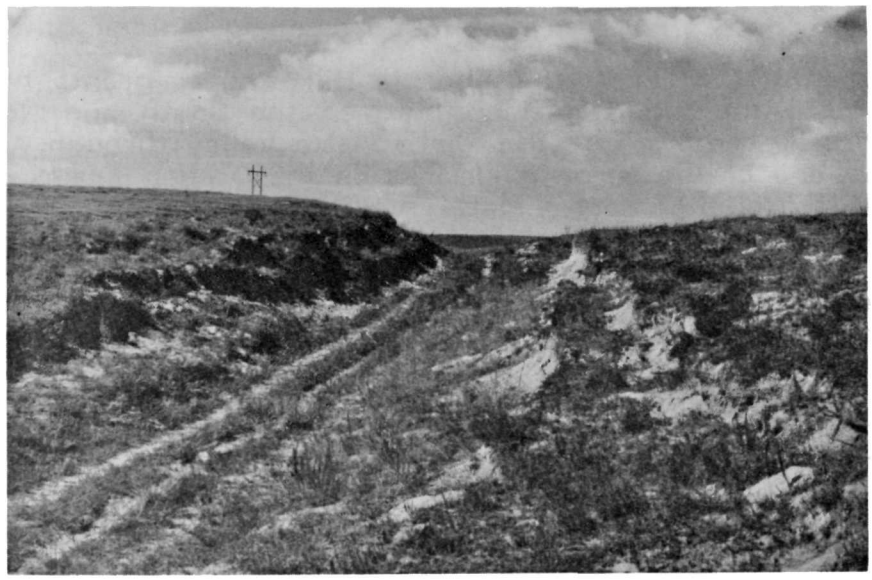
Recommendations for California Hill are two-fold. In the short run, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should negotiate with the private owners of the California Hill ruts to obtain permission for public access and interpretation. The ruts should then be marked and the interpretation provided. The best spot for such interpretation would seem to be along the dirt section line road between Sections 13 and 14, where the Oregon Trail crosses that road. From this point, visitors have a panoramic view back to the southeast down the lower portion of California Hill towards California Crossing. Although the South Platte River now bears little resemblance to its appearance during emigration days, due to vegetation, cultivation and irrigation, visitors will still get an appreciation of the double obstacles presented by the river and the hill. From this proposed interpretive site, visitors should have the opportunity to hike the Oregon Trail ruts in both directions: southeast for almost three-quarters of a mile back down towards U.S. Highway 30,

and northwest for one-half mile across Section 14 until the ruts disappear in a cultivated field atop the plateau. The ruts in Section 13 to the southeast are a gentle rut swale, now protected by ground cover, but those to the northwest in Section 14 are more dramatic. These ruts have been slightly eroded and appear today as distinct cuts in the hillside, up to several feet deep in places. They are some of the best extant Oregon Trail ruts in the State of Nebraska, and should be added to the National Register of Historic Places by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

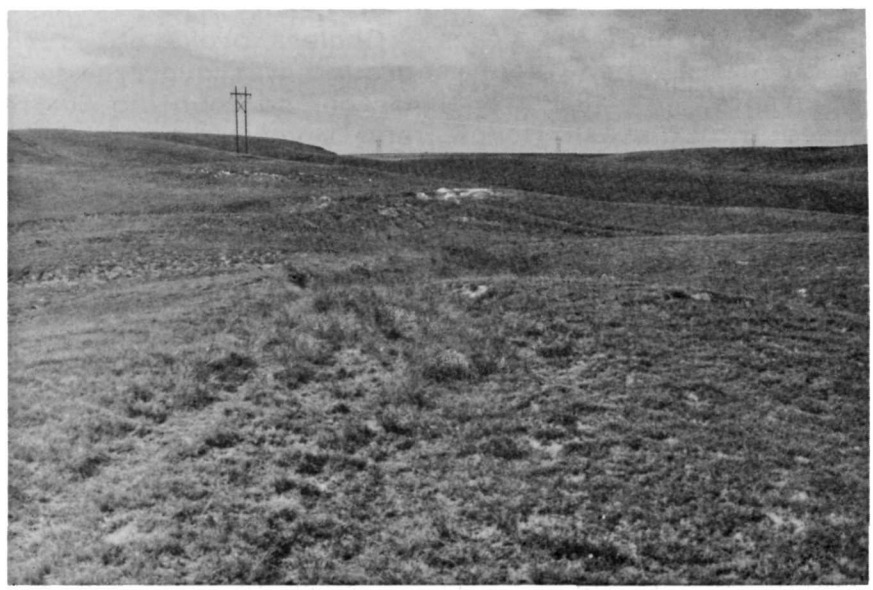
Although there appears to be no danger to the California Hill ruts at the present time, since the land is used for pasture, this site is so significant that it should eventually be added to the state park system of Nebraska. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission should develop long-range plans to acquire the ruts in both Sections 13 and 14 when they become available. At that time, California Hill should be developed as a major historical site, perhaps as a detached unit of Ash Hollow State Park, with an interpretive scheme which fully portrays the story of California Crossing and California Hill. Oregon Trail ruts are extremely scarce in Nebraska, and this superb set of ruts should be preserved at all costs.

From the section line road between Sections 13 and 14, where the Oregon Trail crosses the road, visitors look back southeast down the lower portion of California Hill towards the South Platte River in the distance. The gentle rut swale pictured here is on the National Register of Historic Places, and the South Platte River is marked by the line of trees in the background. The panoramic view offered here makes this an ideal spot for an interpretive site.

A deep cut of Oregon Trail ruts appears in Section 14, as the trail heads northwest.



The Oregon Trail ruts in Section 14 are three to four feet deep, and compose one of the most dramatic sets of ruts in the State of Nebraska.



Northwest of the deep rut cut pictured above, Oregon Trail ruts wind up towards the top of California Hill.

ASH HOLLOW

After negotiating the climb up California Hill, the emigrants traveled for 18 miles across the high tableland between the South and North Platte rivers before descending into the North Platte Valley through Ash Hollow. Ash Hollow, one of the major landmarks on the Oregon Trail, was labeled "The Gateway to the North Platte Valley." In addition to being a physical landmark, Ash Hollow was one of the most famous campsites on the entire trail, for it offered wood, pure water, and grass for the stock. Wood was a scarce commodity on the treeless great plains and made a pleasant change from burning buffalo chips, and the fresh water from Ash Hollow Springs was a special treat after several weeks of obtaining water from the Platte River. In short, Ash Hollow was an idyllic campsite--an oasis of beauty on the generally drab and dreary Great Platte River Road.

Entrance to Ash Hollow was by way of Windlass Hill, where the Oregon Trail dropped from the high tableland between the rivers into the ravine which formed Ash Hollow. This 25° slope of 300 feet length was the first really steep grade encountered on the Oregon Trail, and the impression made upon emigrants was particularly vivid. The hill was usually negotiated by rough-locking the wagon wheels and using ropes to carefully lower the wagons. An 1849 emigrant complained that it took three hours to safely descend the hill. (The name of Windlass Hill post-dates the emigration period, and there is no evidence that a windlass was ever used to lower wagons down the grade.)

Even though Ash Hollow was a spot of beauty, it was also a site of danger and death through the years. Cholera broke out during several peak emigration years when the campground was overcrowded, and took its toll of emigrants. An 1852 traveler reported counting 60 fresh graves when he passed through Ash Hollow, and several other diaries record 20 or more deaths per year in the vicinity. The best known cholera victim was Rachel Pattison, an 18-year old emigrant wife who died in 1849. As her husband poignantly noted in his diary, "Rachel taken sick in the morning, died that night." Rachel and several other emigrants are buried in the Ash Hollow Cemetery (Sec 3, T15N, R42W, Lewellen map sheet #90, Garden County). A startling reminder of the number of unmarked emigrant graves in the vicinity occured in the early 1970s when a local cloudburst washed up a skull in Ash Hollow.

Ash Hollow is now a Nebraska State Park administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Its 1100 acres, which include the 100-acre detached unit at Windlass Hill, make it the largest historic park in the Nebraska system. The park and its surrounding territory are on the National Register of Historic Places. Camping and picnic sites are provided, as well as a superintendent's residence, maintenance shops, and a modern visitor center/museum. The heart of the park is around the main portion of Ash Hollow (Sections 3 and 10, T15N, R42W, Ruthton map sheet #89 and Lewellen map sheet #90, Garden County). The museum's interpretive theme is divided between the archaeological prehistory of the area and the Oregon Trail. The park enjoys a visitation of approximately 15,000 per year. It is staffed with three full-time employees and additional seasonal help.

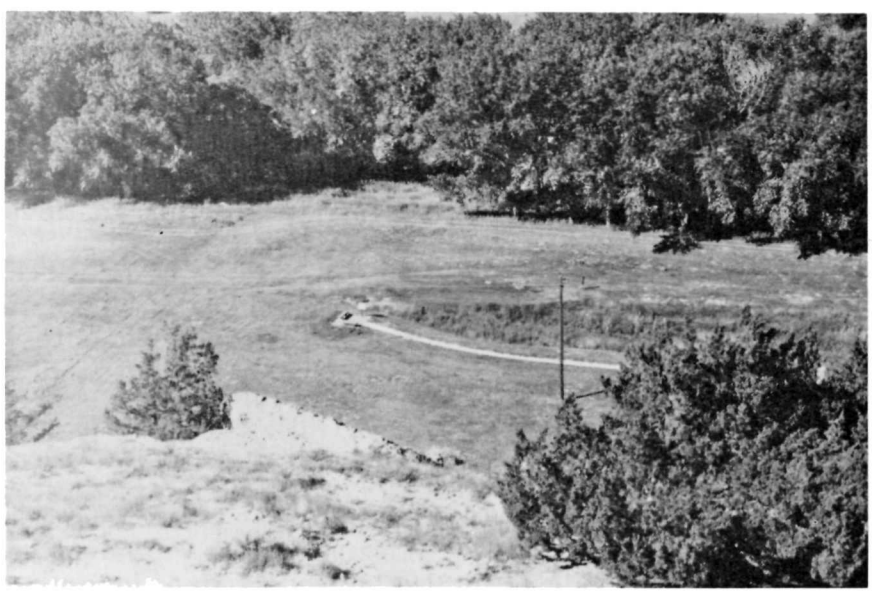
Windlass Hill (Sec. 22, Ruthton map sheet #89), has been tastefully developed, with an interpretive shelter and a walking path up the hill to view the Oregon Trail ruts. Several lines of ruts are clearly visible descending the hill, including one ravine which has been eroded to a depth of twenty-five feet since the emigrant wagons first cut through the sod. Some of the ruts at Windlass Hill are related to recent reinactments of the Oregon Trail period.

The main portion of the park features several automobile and walking trails to interpretive sites, including Ash Hollow Springs, an early schoolhouse, and an early 1850s mail station and trading post site. Short sections of the Oregon Trail are still visible. Visitors are also directed to Ash Hollow Cemetery, located outside the park boundaries and owned by Garden County. Military interpretation is included, for Ash Hollow is nine miles southeast of the famous Blue Water Battlefield, scene of a significant 1855 Indian battle. Fort Grattan, an unofficial army post used briefly for a supply center following the 1855 battle, is located just north of the park boundaries. Only tell-tale contours of the earth remain of Fort Grattan's sod walls--named for Lieutenant Grattan of Grattan "Massacre" fame.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has spent almost 20 years in slowly acquiring the lands and funding to create this park. It is commended for its fine work, and encouraged to continue. Merrill Mattes, in his 1975 report to the State of Nebraska, "Nebraska State Historical Resources Management Plan," made several major recommendations for this park, all of which are endorsed. The Game and Parks Commission has unofficially endorsed Mattes' proposals, and is carrying them out as funds become available. Briefly, these include acquiring more lands around the park in order to expand the interpretive scheme and provide scenic barriers, measures to counter the threat of ever-increasing traffic along U.S. Highway 26 through the park, the expansion of the Oregon Trail interpretation offered throughout the park, and better protection of Windlass Hill. Of these, the protection of Windlass Hill seems the most urgent, for uncontrolled wanderings of visitors across the fragile terrain along the top of the hill poses an erosion threat to the Oregon Trail ruts. The Game and Parks Commission has also acquired 35 acres of land overlooking the Blue Water Battlefield, which it intends to develop as an interpretive overlook.

Even before these recommendations are implemented, however, Ash Hollow State Park stands out as one of the very special historic sites along the Oregon Trail.

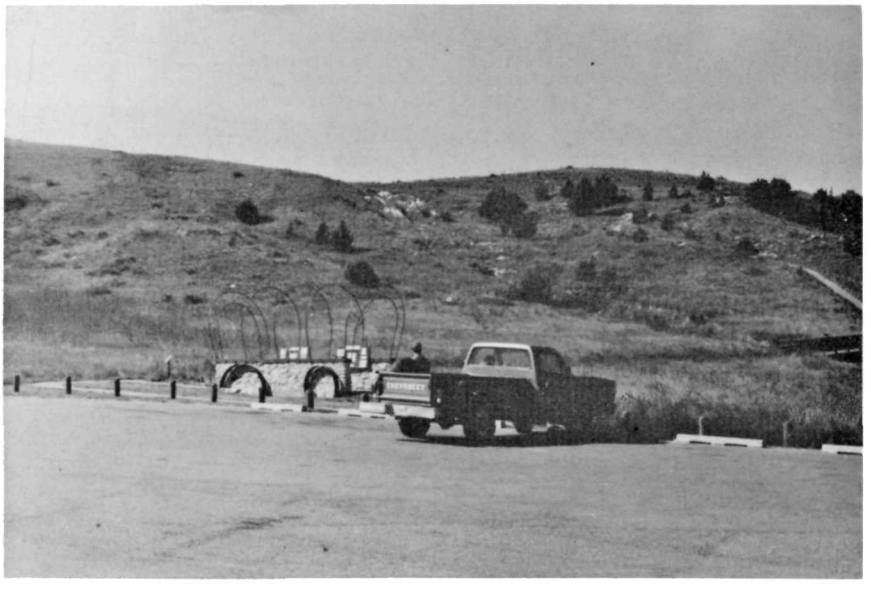
The Ash Hollow State Park visitor center is located on a bluff above Ash Hollow proper.



Ash Hollow Spring is located at the end of the footpath in the meadow below the visitor center.

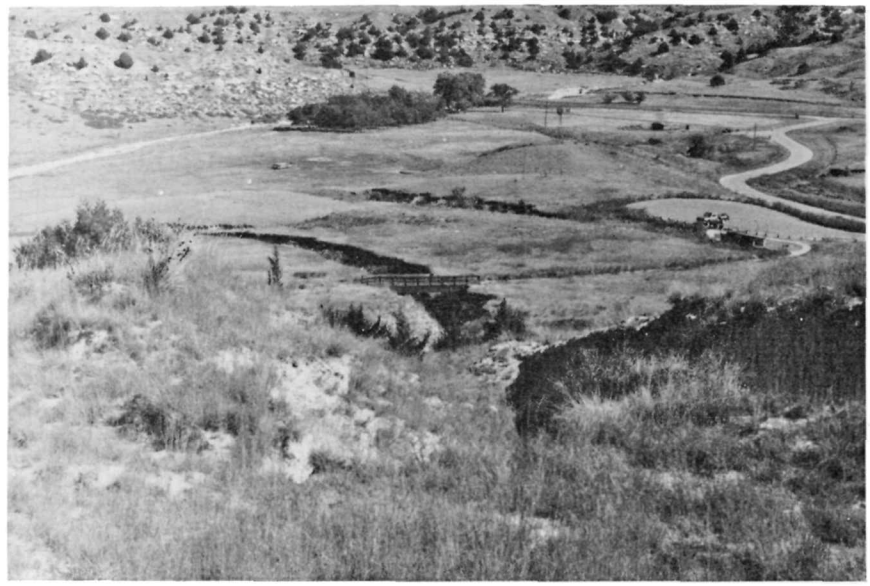
Looking back to the south (left) of the preceeding photo visitors may see the wide ravine of Ash Hollow, down which the Oregon Trail emigrants passed. The trail generally follows the line of trees as it curves to the left out of the top of the photo.

Ash Hollow Cemetery, located just north of the state park, contains Rachel Pattison's grave and monument (center of the photo).



From the bottom of Windlass Hill, the deep eroded rut trough is in the center of the photo, with an uneroded rut trace curving down the hill to its left.

To the left of the above photo, the curving rut trace is now seen at the right, with a third clearly visible rut trace descending the hill to the left.



The deeply eroded rut trough may be seen from a path leading to the top of Windlass Hill. The truck in the parking lot indicates the size and steepness of the hill and ruts.

The same rut trough may be seen from the bridge below (see above photo), looking back up the hill.

AMANDA LAMIN GRAVE

Fifty miles west of Ash Hollow stands the grave of Amanda Lamin, a 28 year old emigrant born in Devonshire, England, who died of cholera in 1850. The grave is marked with the inscription "Amanda, consort of M.J. Lamin," which has given rise to much speculation and several legends concerning Amanda's real status in life.

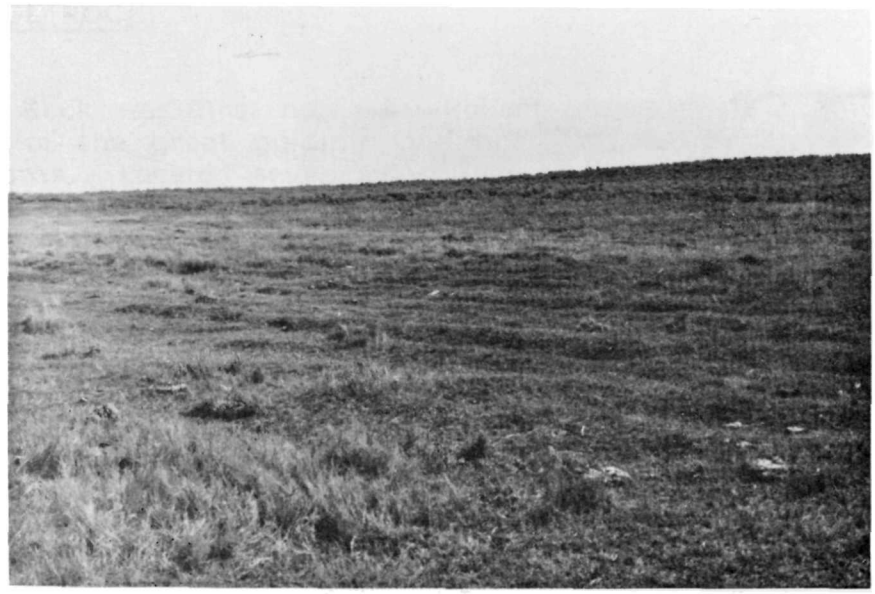
The gravesite stands on the top of a small knoll overlooking the North Platte River (Sec 20, T19N, R49W, Broadwater SW map sheet #98, Morrill County). The grave has a marker erected by the State of Nebraska in 1912, and is in the middle of private pastureland. Access is by a faint farm road across the pasture, or by a half mile hike from Nebraska Highway 92. There are no directional signs or interpretation in the vicinity, and the gravesite can barely be seen from Highway 92.

The Nebraska Department of Roads and Morrill County should jointly develop this site to properly commemorate the gravesite. The Nebraska State Historical Society should provide technical assistance as necessary. A roadside pull-off from Highway 92 should be provided, with an interpretive sign to relate what is known of Amanda's life and death. Through cooperative agreement with the private landowner, visitors should be allowed to walk across the pasture to view the gravesite. At present, visitation to this site averages about six carloads per week.

Interpretation at the Amanda Lamin grave should also alert travelers to look for Courthouse Rock, which becomes visible on the western horizon at a point about one mile west of the gravesite.

One mile east of Amanda Lamin's grave (Sec 21) is a unique set of Oregon Trail ruts crossing private land. These are not dramatic ruts, as seen at Ash Hollow and California Hill, but they have a special quality of their own. Wagon trains spread out almost half a mile in width as they crossed this land, and left a wide swath of shallow ruts which now appear as a series of gentle ripples crossing the pasture,

There appears to be no danger to these gentle ruts in the immediate future, for the ruts are well stabilized by grass and the land is used for pasture. Morrill County, however, should eventually protect and interpret the ruts through an agreement with the owner. An interpretive wayside here (combined with the one for Amanda Lamin's grave) and a short walking trail along the ripples of ruts would introduce visitors to a quite different and rare kind of Oregon Trail ruts. This type of ruts, where wagons spread far out abreast, were once very common along the Oregon Trail, but are fast disappearing, because the lack of dramatic qualities has not inspired preservation efforts.



A portion of the gentle rut traces left in Section 21 may be seen one mile east of Amanda Lamin's grave.

Amanda Lamin's grave can barely be seen by looking north from Nebraska Highway 92. The small monument is almost invisible in the direct center of the photo, just below the horizon.

The State of Nebraska erected this marker at Amanda Lamin's grave-site in 1912.

One mile west of Amanda Lamin's grave, emigrants obtained their first view of Courthouse Rock.

COURTHOUSE ROCK

Courthouse Rock was first noted by Robert Stuart in 1812, and quickly became one of the great guiding landmarks for fur traders and Oregon Trail emigrants. Located seven miles west of Amanda Lamin's grave (Sec 29, T19N, R50W, Courthouse Rock map sheet # 99, Morrill County), it is a massive sandstone monolith south of the Oregon Trail which was variously likened to a courthouse or a castle. A smaller feature just to the east was called the Jail House or Jail Rock. In the words of an 1841 emigrant, "It rises in an abrupt quadrilangular form, to a height of three of four hundred feet, and covers an area of two hundred yards in length by one hundred and fifty broad. Occupying a perfectly level site in an open prairie, it stands as the proud palace of Solitude, amid her boundless domains." Courthouse Rock was the first of several impressive natural landmarks along the trail in western Nebraska, and one which was eagerly awaited by the emigrants, for it marked the completion of another portion of their long journey.

Courthouse Rock is four miles south of the Oregon Trail, but emigrant dairies record many curious and energetic travelers who took the time to visit and climb the rock. From its base, Chimney Rock, the next guiding landmark on the Oregon Trail, is visible 14 miles to the west. Courthouse Rock still appears today much as it did to the emigrants, rising grandly out of the plains. It is protected by the City of Bridgeport and the Nebraska State Historical Society, each of which owns 80 acres of land. The State Historical Society has a seasonal interpretive trailer at the site during the summer months, but provides no interpretation or protection for the site during the long off-season months. Courthouse Rock (and Jail Rock) is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is reached via Nebraska Highway 88.

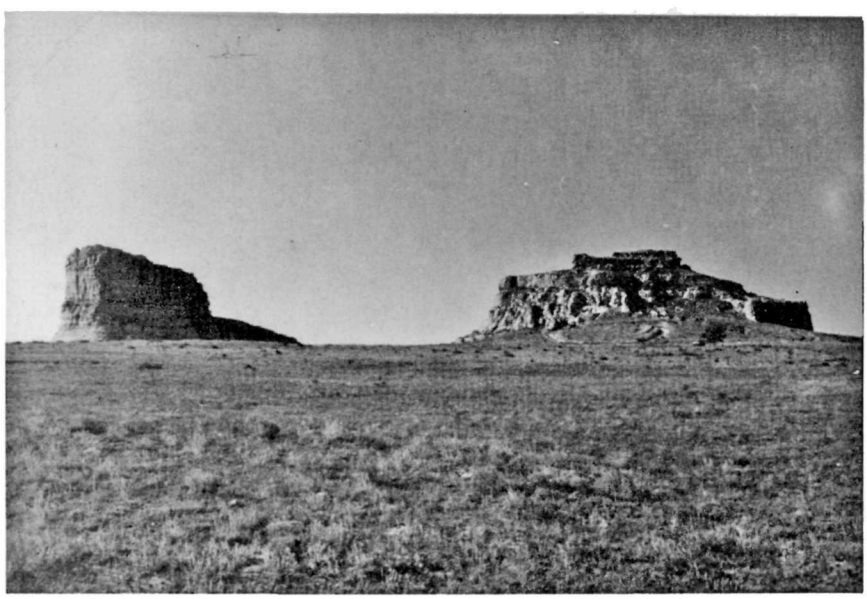
While the City of Bridgeport and the Nebraska State Historical Society are commended for their acquisition of the 160 acres of land surrounding Courthouse Rock, there is much yet to be done. The area is evidently a favorite site for dirt motorcycle riders and four-wheel drive enthusiasts to test their machines. Despite some assistance from the enforcement division of the State Game Commission, a series of eroded paths and trails surround the base of the rock. The simple signs erected in the past to prevent this type of abuse have been destroyed and ignored, and additional measures are now being taken to prevent more vehicle-caused erosion.

Interpretation at the site should also be provided during the off-season months; during three-fourths of the year, this nationally famous landmark has no interpretation at all. The State Historical Society should provide interpretive panels on the site for the benefit of off-season visitors.

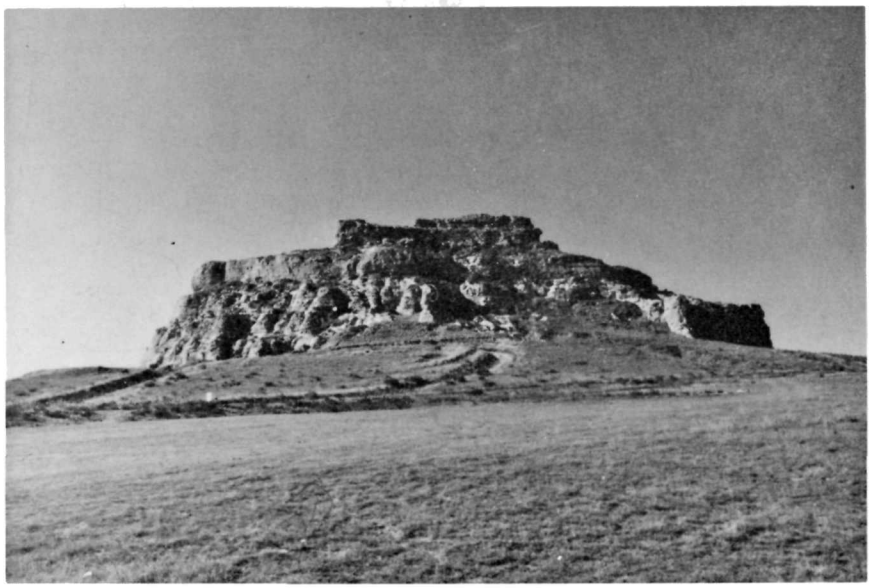
In the long run, Courthouse Rock should become a fully manned state historical park, with year-around protection and interpretation. This long range plan was first proposed by Merrill Mattes in his 1975 report "Nebraska State Historical Resources Management Plan," which has been unofficially approved by the State of Nebraska and the City of Bridgeport. Included in Mattes' recommendations are the acquisition of

more land to protect the scenic surroundings from development, and the development of exhibits, interpretation, hiking trails, and picnicing and camping facilities. The Nebraska State Historical Society has requested the aid of the National Park Service in formulating Mattes' ideas and other proposals into a master plan for Courthouse Rock.

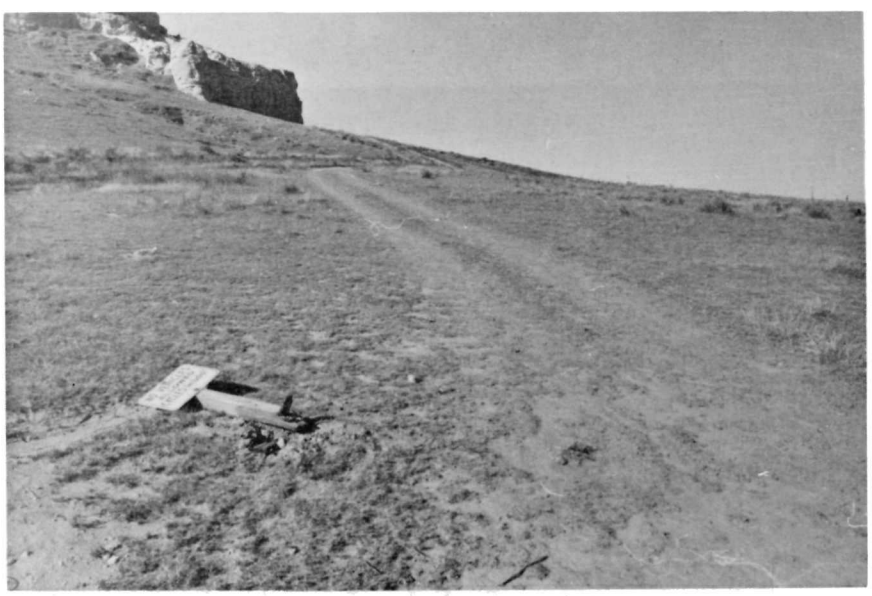
Courthouse Rock, seen looking south from the Oregon Trail, appears much the same today as it did to the emigrants.



Courthouse Rock, on the right, dominates the scene, with Jail Rock on the left.



The State Historical Society's seasonal trailer is located east of the rock, near Nebraska Highway 88, and visitors are allowed to follow a gravel road to a parking area at the base of the rock. The deeply eroded roads at the base of the rock are supposed to be off-limits to vehicles.



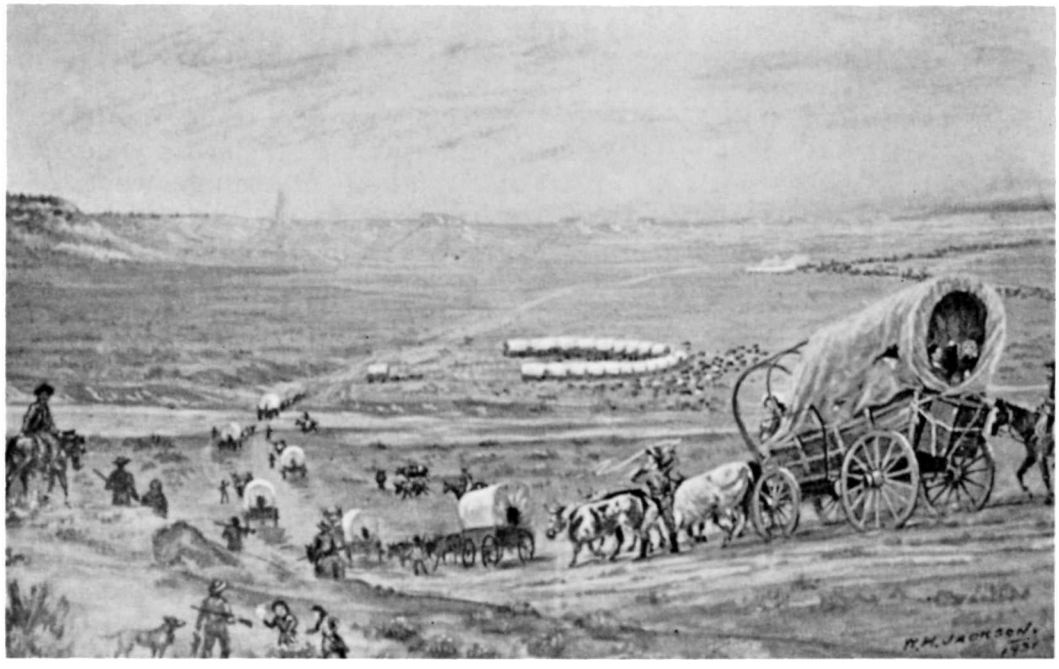
An example of the failure of passive restraints is this road closed sign, which has been run over and ignored. Off-road vehicle users are fond of climbing the soft fan just below the base of the rock, a practice which destroys the fragile ground cover and leads to erosion. Since this photo was taken in the fall of 1979, a more prominent barricade has been placed across the road.

JACKSON PANORAMA

In 1866, William Henry Jackson, a bull-whacker for a freighting outfit using the Oregon Trail, paused on a small knoll 10 miles west of Courthouse Rock, and drew a sketch of the panoramic view of the North Platte Valley to the west, including the famous landmarks of Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff. Jackson later achieved fame as a pioneer artist and photographer of the west, and this sketch, which he turned into a water color painting in 1931, is now one of his most famous.

A small hill exists today, near if not precisely where Jackson made his sketch, and the same panoramic view of the North Platte Valley remains. The hill has seen use as a gravel pit, but that operation long ago ceased. The land is owned by the State of Nebraska, and is just off U.S. Highway 26. This state school land (Sec 24, T20N, R50W, South Bayard map sheet #102, Morrill County) is presently under lease for livestock purposes; the lease expires in 1981. At that time, the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Nebraska State Historical Society should develop the site.

This is an idea proposed by Merrill Mattes, in his "Nebraska State Hstorical Resources Management Plan," released in 1975. Mattes' recommendations call for a unmanned interpretive site including a sheltered panel exhibit, a viewing terrace, a parking area, and perhaps a picnic table or two. From there, visitors may compare Jackson's famous painting (which should be reproduced as part of the on-site interpretive exhibit) with the present landscape. A commanding view can be obtained. It is an ideal place for travelers to pause and contemplate one of the more famous Oregon Trail vistas. Although the North Platte Valley is now farmed and settled, the over-all view is still remarkably the same as it was over 150 years ago.



William Henry Jackson sketched "Approaching Chimney Rock," in 1866 and converted it to a water color painting in 1931. The scene is very typical of an Oregon Trail wagon train in the 1860s. Chimney Rock is clearly visible at the left, and Scotts Bluff is in the distance at the far right. Jackson used some artistic license in drawing those landmarks, for Scotts Bluff is not visible from the site.

The North Platte Valley appears remarkably unchanged in this 1979 photo, taken from approximately the same spot--the proposed Jackson Panorama site. Note that Chimney Rock is far in the distance. The Oregon Trail descended to the right of the hill from which this photo was taken and angled down toward the highway.

CHIMNEY ROCK

Chimney Rock, four miles west of Jackson Panorama and 14 miles west of Courthouse Rock (Sec 17, T20N, R52W, South Bayard map sheet #102, Morrill County), was mentioned in more diaries than any other landmark on the Oregon Trail. Captain Benjamin Bonneville described it in 1832 as a "singular phenomenon, which is among the curiosities of the country. It is called the Chimney. The lower part is a conical mound rising out of the naked plain; from the summit shoots up a shaft or column, about one hundred and twenty feet in height, from which it derives its name. The height of the whole . . . is a hundred and seventy five yards . . . and may be seen at the distance of upwards of thirty miles." Chimney Rock also served as a lesson to emigrants about the decieving distances of the west, for one traveler complained that he rode for four days and never got any closer to it.

In 1969, Merrill Mattes, the authority on the Great Platte River Road, examined over 350 emigrant diaries and found that 330, or 95 percent, mentioned Chimney Rock. Scotts Bluff was a poor second with 80 percent. Visible for miles to travelers of the onstretching prairie, Chimney Rock was more than a wonder of nature. As an oft-described milepost on a journey noted so far for its monotony, the column eased the emigrants' way westward by heralding their progress and recalling the descriptions and sketches of earlier travelers.

Chimney Rock is on the National Register of Historic Places, is a National Historic Site, and is an affliated area of the National Park Service. Eighty-three acres of land surrounding its base are owned by the State of Nebraska, and managed by the State Historical Society under a cooperative agreement with the City of Bayard and the National Park Service. The State Historical Society maintains an interpretive trailer from Memorial Day to Labor Day at a wayside along Nebraska Highway 92, about one and a half miles north of the rock. Fourteen thousand visitors stop there each summer. Chimney Rock is inaccessible from this wayside.

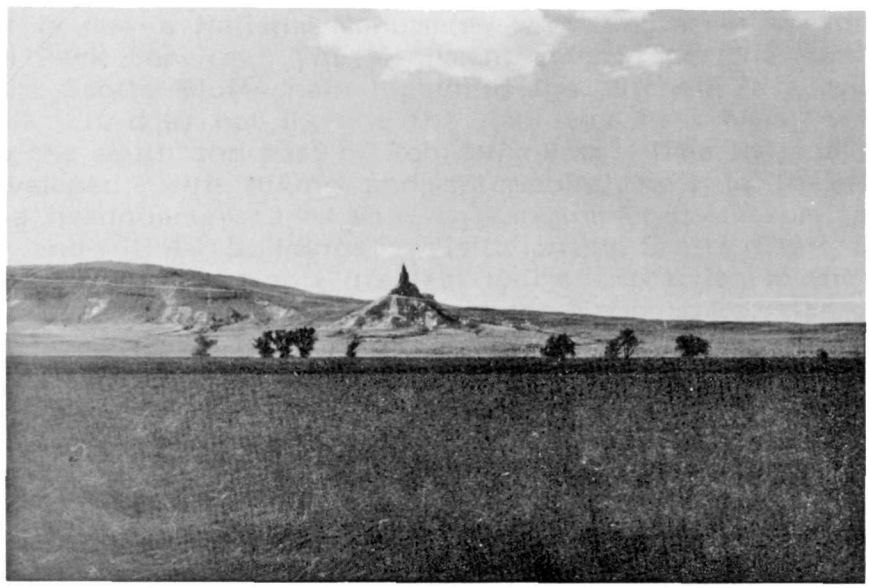
Chimney Rock can be reached from the east via a gravel road leading in from a paved county road to the Chimney Rock Cemetery, one-half mile east of the rock. Visitors who wish to view the site from a closer angle or who wish to walk to the rock must use this unmarked access.

Recommendations for this site are two-fold. In the immediate future, the Nebraska State Historical Society should provide more adequate interpretation at the Chimney Rock wayside on Highway 92 for the benefit of those travelers who do not visit the site during the short summer season. A standard historical sign is all that marks the site during the long off-season. Directions should also be posted here to advise visitors that another access road is available to bring them closer to the site, to avoid the present temptation to cross private and cultivated farm fields between the wayside and Chimney Rock. Interpretation should also be provided at Chimney Rock Cemetery, along with cautions for visitors to treat the site with care and to watch out for rattlesnakes if they decide to hike across the fields to the tower.

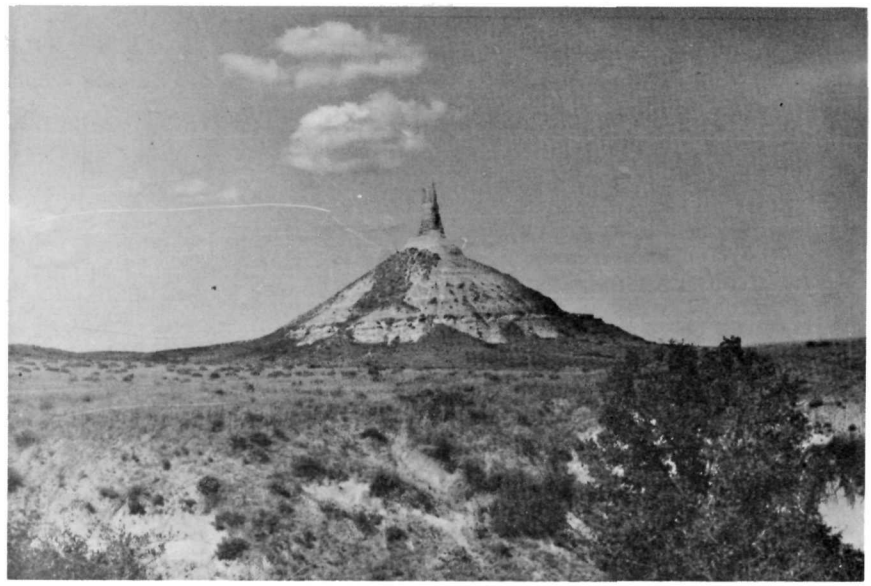
In the long run, ambitious development plans proposed by Merrill Mattes for this site in his 1975 report, "Nebraska State Historical Resources Management Plan," should be implemented. These include the development of a year-around, manned interpretive center near the Chimney Rock Cemetery, appropriate interpretation and exhibits, and a three-mile paved historic and nature trail around the base of the rock. These plans have been unofficially endorsed by the State of Nebraska, which has noted that 10,000 visitors on a controlled pathway around the rock would result in less damage to the site than the present 1000 visitors who hike indiscriminately across the area.

Mattes also proposed that Chimney Rock eventually be included as a detached unit of Scotts Bluff National Monument, 21 miles to the west, as a means of providing the protection and interpretation befitting a National Historic Site. The National Park Service should pursue this proposal in conjunction with the City of Bayard and the State of Nebraska.

This view of Chimney Rock (looking south) is similar to that seen by emigrants on the Oregon Trail, which is just north of the highway in the foreground. The interpretive wayside appears in the center of the photo.



This view of Chimney Rock is available to visitors at the interpretive wayside shown above. This is as close as most visitors are able to get to the site, due to cultivated fields and irrigation ditches between the wayside and the rock.



A closer view of Chimney Rock is available from Chimney Rock Cemetery, one-half mile to its east. As is evident, Chimney Rock is much more impressive from this closer vantage point.

SCOTTS BLUFF

Scotts Bluff is the last of the famous landmarks along the Great Platte River Road in Nebraska. As Merrill Mattes aptly wrote, "to emigrants who had been bored with the flatness and drabness of the Platte scenery, and who would be too exhausted later to appreciate the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, the landmarks along the Platte had a captivating charm. Courthouse Rock and Chimney Rock were the appetizers; Scotts Bluff was the grand climax." An 1849 emigrant with a flair for words left the following description of his reactions as he approached the great landmark: "The bare hills and water-worn rocks on our left began to assume many fantastic shapes, and after raising a gentle elevation, a most extraordinary sight presented itself to our view. A basin-shaped valley, bounded by high rocky hills, lay before us, perhaps twelve miles in length, by six or eight broad. The perpendicular sides of the mountains presented the appearance of castles, forts, towers, verandas, and chimneys, with a blending of Asiatic and European architecture, and it required an effort to believe that we were not in the vicinity of some ancient and deserted town. It seemed as if the wand of a magician had passed over a city, and like that in the Arabian Nights, had converted all living things to stone."*

Scotts Bluff was also an obstacle to western travel, and emigrants were forced to swing south away from the North Platte River to take advantage of Robidoux Pass (see below), a natural gateway through the great bluffs. In 1850, a shorter route was opened via Mitchell Pass, which stayed closer to the river, and eliminated the eight-mile swing through Robidoux Pass. After 1851, Mitchell Pass became the preferred route of the Oregon Trail.

Scotts Bluff is now a National Monument, with 2988 acres administered by the National Park Service. The Monument covers only the northwest end of the entire Scotts Bluff chain including the Mitchell Pass route of the Oregon Trail. It does not include the Robidoux Pass area, or the chain of bluffs to the south and east of Robidoux Pass. The National Monument is fully developed, with hiking and automobile trails to the top of the bluff, and a headquarters area with an Oregon Trail Museum, employees' residences, and utility buildings. Visitation to Scotts Bluff is 220,000 per year, making it the single greatest tourist attraction in the Nebraska Panhandle. The National Monument is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is a National Landmark. It has excellent access via Nebraska Highway 92, and is adjacent to the twin towns of Gering and Scottsbluff (Scottsbluff South map sheet #106, Scotts bluff County).

The National Park Service quite properly presents Scotts Bluff as its monument to the Oregon Trail, and emigrant themes dominate throughout the monument. It has an excellent museum, dedicated to the story of the westward movement, and has a special section devoted to the paintings of

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*Quoted in Merrill Mattes, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Nebraska, (Wash: NPS Historical Handbook Series No. 28, 1958), pp. 25-26.

William Henry Jackson. A short portion of deep and eroded Oregon Trail ruts passes through the Monument via Mitchell Pass, and these ruts have been developed as a walking and interpretive trail. From the top of the bluffs, a magnificent panoramic view is available well into Wyoming. On a clear day visitors can see Laramie Peak, almost 60 miles to the west, the next great guiding landmark on the Oregon Trail. Living history demonstrations show visitors the arts and crafts of pioneer days during the tourist season.

Recommendatons for the improvement of Scotts Bluff National Monument are minor, for the Park Service and the monument staff have done an excellent job of preserving and interpreting this landmark. The most pressing need at this time is the improvement of scenic easements on the east side of the monument, to protect the bluffs' scenic integrity from the ever-approaching outskirts of Gering. At the present time, for example, it is almost impossible for photographers to approach the monument from the east--as the emigrants did--without modern intrusions such as electric power lines spoiling the view.

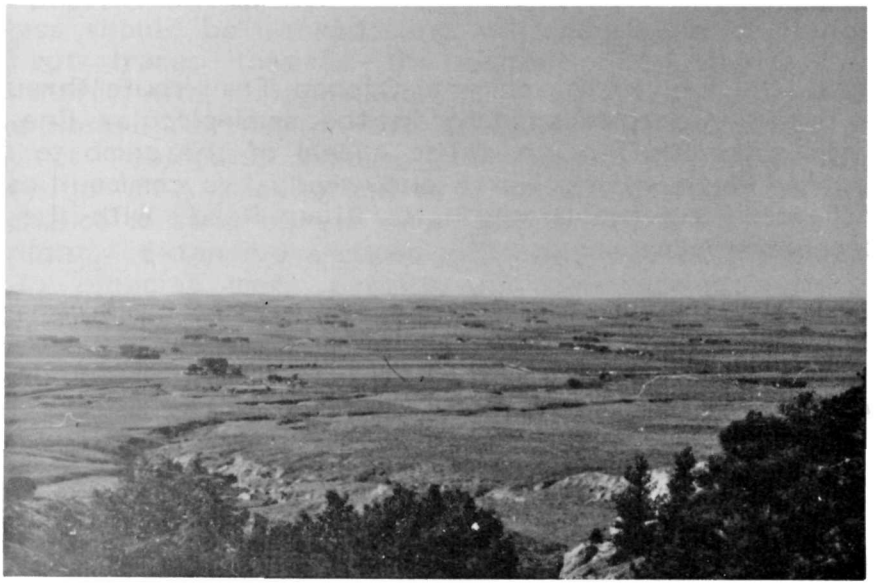
The National Park Service is scheduled to update the Oregon Trail Museum at Scotts Bluff in the near future. That revision of the museum should be restricted only to improvements in the quality and quantity of the exhibits, and the museum's present interpretive emphasis should not be changed.

Scotts Bluff, as it appears looking west from Nebraska Highway 92. The portion of the bluffs in this photo are within Scotts Bluff National Monument, with the entrance to Mitchell Pass showing at the left. Note the modern intrusions which make scenic photography difficult.

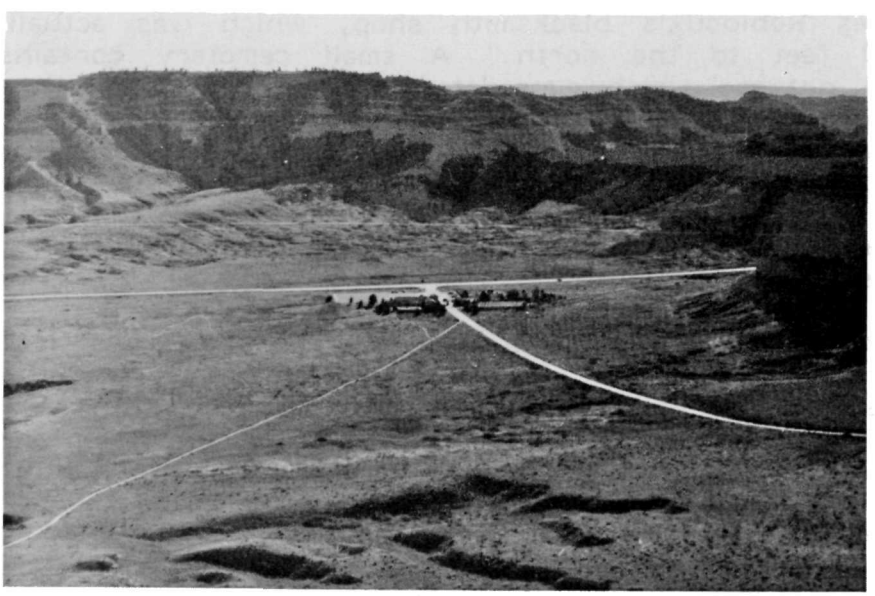
The portion of Scotts Bluff pictured here, to the south of the above photo, are not included in the National Monument. The original route of the Oregon Trail swung around the bluffs in the left of this photo, towards Robidoux Pass. The entrance to Mitchell Pass appears at the right.

This portion of the Mitchell Pass route of the Oregon Trail runs through Scotts Bluff National Monument. The erosion has been stabilized, and the rut swale is now used as an interpretive path.

Another portion of the Mitchell Pass route of the Oregon Trail appears up the hill from the preceeding photo. The ruts are here seen to the left of the paved walking path.



From the scenic overlook at the top of Scotts Bluff, Laramie Peak, 60 miles to the west, was barely visible. The peak is not perceptible in the photograph.



The headquarters area of Scotts Bluff National Monument, as it appears from the south side of the summit.

ROBIDOUX PASS

Robidoux Pass, the key to the original Oregon Trail route through Scotts Bluff, is a broad U-shaped opening in the semi-circular line of bluffs composing the Scotts Bluff chain. The ordeal of the climb to its summit was mitigated by fresh spring water and wood, two commodities that had been quite scarce along the Great Platte River Road, with the exception of the oasis at Ash Hollow.

The pass takes its name from Joseph E. Robidoux (a name remarkable for its variances of spelling), an early trader who established a trading post and a blacksmith shop here in 1848. At that time, Robidoux's post was the first habitation encountered west of Fort Kearny on the Oregon Trail. Emigrants camped there, taking advantage of the plentiful wood and water, and rented Robidoux's blacksmith forge for 75¢ an hour in order to make minor repairs to wagons and equipment and to shoes horses, mules and oxen. Robidoux also offered a small selection of supplies to the emigrants, and whiskey at $5 per barrel. His prices were usually considered exorbitant. After the Mitchell Pass route was established in the early 1850s, Robidoux's trade declined and the post was abandoned.

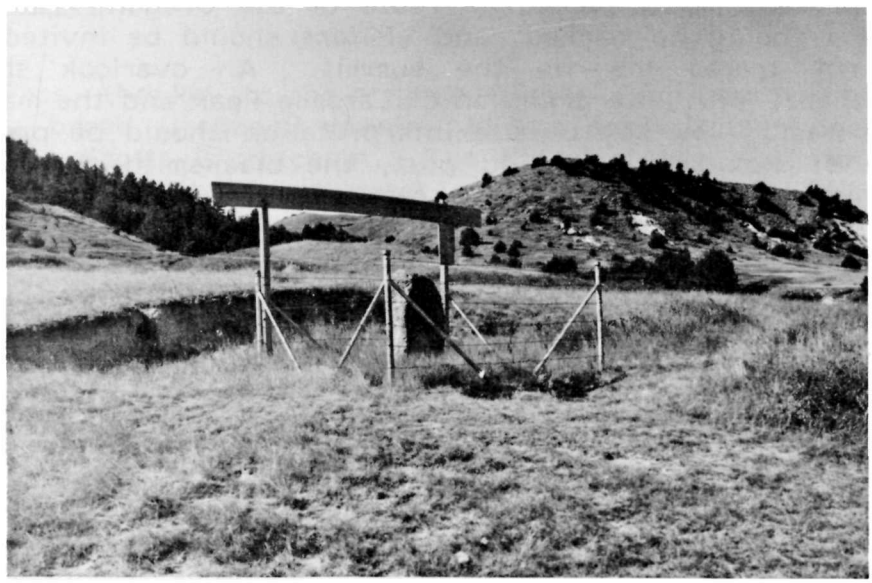
The general area of Robidoux Pass, five miles southwest of Scotts Bluff National Monument (Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16 and 17, T21N, R56W, Roubedeau Pass map sheet #107, Scotts Bluff County), is privately owned and used for cattle range. A county gravel road roughly parallels the Oregon Trail up to the summit of the pass, and good to excellent Oregon Trail rut traces can be seen for almost two miles through the area of the pass. The pass is generally unimpacted, and still retains its scenic characteristics of a century ago, with the exception of a power line traversing the terrain. A granite marker beside the gravel road commemorates Robidoux's blacksmith shop, which was actually located about 1000 feet to the north. A small cemetery contains several unidentified graves, which may date back to 1849, when three burials were recorded at the site. From the summit of Robidoux Pass, today's visitors can still enjoy a magnificent view to the west, where the emigrants obtained their first view of Laramie Peak--their guide for the next week of travel. One hundred-eighty acres of Robidoux Pass are on the National Register of Historic Places, and the pass has been declared a National Historic Landmark.

Robidoux Pass, in the understated words of Merrill Mattes, is "every bit as important historically" as is Scotts Bluff National Monument. Actually, it predates the Mitchell Pass route through Scotts Bluff, and while Robidoux Pass cannot compete in scenic values, its historic and cultural values exceed those of the present monument lands. In his 1975 report, "Nebraska State Historical Resources Management Plan," Mattes recommended that the Robidoux Pass area, approximately 1600 acres, be added to Scotts Bluff National Monument. The State of Nebraska and the National Park Service have been considering the feasibility of that recommendation for several years.

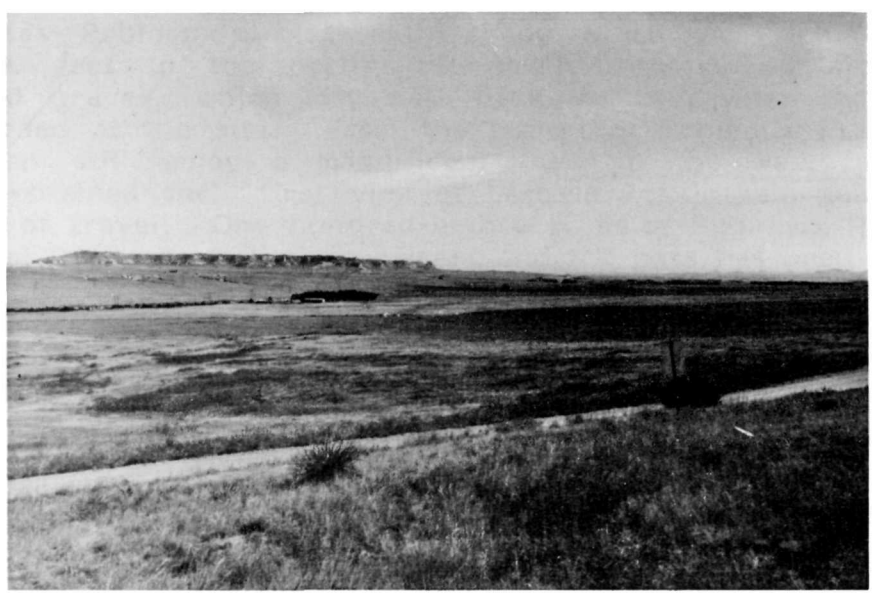
If acquired, Robidoux Pass should be utilized as a low-key interpretive complex, with major interpretation remaining at the Oregon Trail Museum

within the present monument. The route of the Oregon Trail through Robidoux Pass should be marked, and visitors should be invited to walk along the rut traces towards the summit. An overlook should be established there, with interpretation of Laramie Peak and the magnificent view to the west. Low-key on-site interpretation should be provided in the vicinity of Robidoux's trading post, the blacksmith shop, and the emigrant cemetery. A small primitive campground would be ideal, giving visitors a chance to camp on the same ground where many emigrant trains spent the night. Extensive archaeological surveys of the entire area are necessary to pinpoint more exactly the sites occupied by Robidoux's enterprises, and to collect all available data concerning emigrant and other uses of the area.

The National Park Service should continue the long-range planning process to implement these recommendations. There appears to be no immediate danger to the Robidoux Pass area, since it is generally used as cattle range, but the ever-increasing population of Gering threatens to spill into the pass in subsequent years. In the short run, Scotts Bluff National Monument should begin the preliminary work of preservng the scenic and cultural values of Robidoux Pass by negotiating with Scotts Bluff County and the private landowners for permission to mark the Oregon Trail through the area, and to provide preliminary interpretation at the various historic sites.

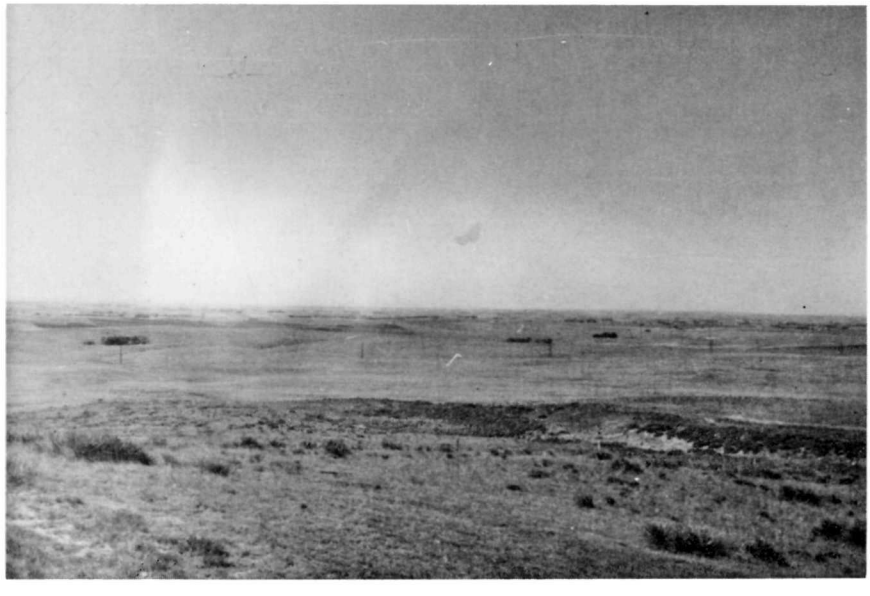


This monument was erected about 1000 feet south of site of Robidoux's blacksmith shop.



To the east from the blacksmith marker, traces of the Oregon Trail may be seen as it approached Robidoux Pass.

Additional traces of the Oregon Trail are visible to the northwest from just beyond the blacksmith marker. The trail can be seen in the immediate foreground, and followed as it crosses the road near the center of the photo and reaches the summit of Robidoux Pass to the right of the road on the horizon.

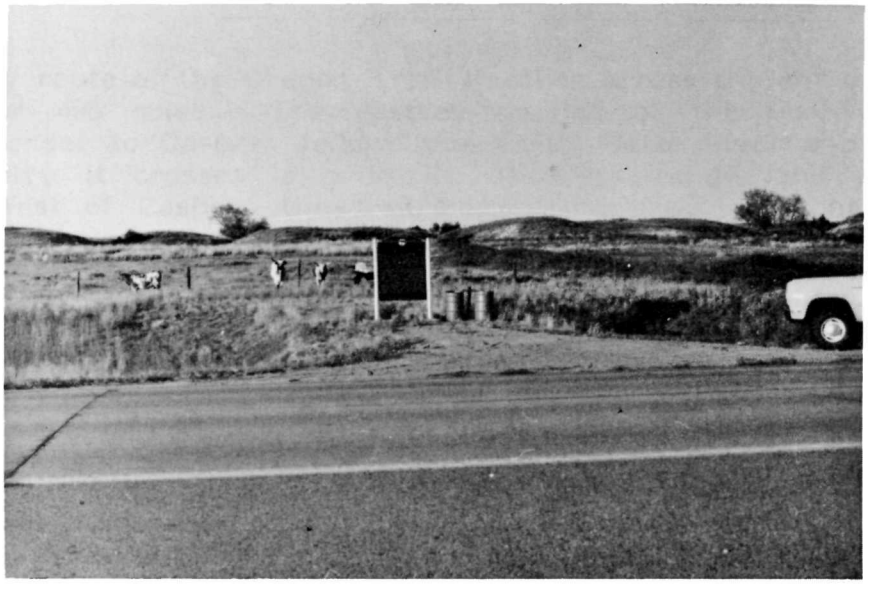


Although normally visible on a clear day, Laramie Peak is obscured by haze in this photo, looking west from the summit of Rubidoux Pass.

HORSE CREEK TREATY GROUNDS

Fourteen miles west of Robidoux Pass, the largest assemblage of Plains Indians in history, approximately 10,000, occurred in 1851. This was a peace council called by the Federal government to protect the traffic along the Great Platte River Road as the Indians became nervous and resentful of the growing number of emigrants on wheels. Most of the plains tribes were represented, to the surprise of the government. Since the huge accompanying horse herd needed forage, the treaty council was moved from its original location at Fort Laramie to the mouth of Horse Creek, where ample grass was available. There the First Fort Laramie Treaty was signed, establishing tribal grounds and giving the emigrants the right to travel the trail unmolested. That right lasted until the Grattan "Massacre", three years later (see below).

All of the treaty and encampment site south of the North Platte River is now irrigated cropland, but the Nebraska State Historical Society has created a small interpretive pull-off from U.S. Highway 26 overlooking the general area (Sec 11, T23N, R58W, Lyman map sheet #112, Scotts Bluff County). A standard Nebraska historical marker gives a brief history of the encampment and treaty, and a view is available of the cultivated fields, where the treaty assemblage was held. Although the marker stands several miles northwest of the actual site, and is on the north side of the river, it has a combination of good public access and high terrain from which to overlook the treaty grounds. Except for cultiviation, the area is relatively undeveloped, and one can still imagine thousands of Indians encamped along the riverside. Additional interpretation, expanding upon that presently provided, would enhance this wayside, but is not a matter of high priority.



The Nebraska State Historical Society has provided a new Horse Creek Treaty Grounds interpretive wayside on U.S. Highway 26. The long-horn steers in the background add a touch of interest to this site.

WYOMING

The primary route of the Oregon Trail streches across the entire width of Wyoming for 495 miles. The eastern portion of the trail, from the Nebraska border to Casper, follows the North Platte River and the high plains country it crosses is primarily used for range land with some farming. West of Casper, the trail begins the gradual ascent over the high range country toward South Pass and the Continental Divide. The trail then extends southwest towards Fort Bridger, where an abrupt northwest turn is made leading over the Bear River Divide, and into Idaho. At Fort Laramie, the Mormon Trail, pioneered in 1847, joined the Oregon Trail. From Fort Laramie to Fort Bridger the Mormons followed the route of the Oregon Trail.

Wyoming is a sparsely populated state--Casper is the only urban area along the trail--and a larger percentage of the Oregon Trail is still evident in Wyoming than in any other state along the route. Particularly west of Independence Rock, long stretches of pristine ruts and two-track traces of the Oregon Trail may be followed over the high ranges. The scenery along this remote portion of the trail is some of the most magnificent to be seen anywhere along the trail. There are two proposed cross-country segments in Wyoming, totalling 156 miles.

The Oregon Trail dramatically changes character at Casper, Wyoming. In the eastern states, and in Wyoming east of Casper, there are few actual trail remnants or ruts, due to extensive farming and other developments that have taken place over the last century. But from Casper west, vast stretches of the Oregon Trail have not yet been impacted by civilization. A large share of these western lands are still in the public domain. In Wyoming, the BLM administers 262 miles of the Oregon Trail, including most of the terrain upon which original trail ruts can still be seen.

There are 29 historic sites in Wyoming, including forts, river crossings, gravesites, ruts, and natural landmarks. Some of these sites, such as Fort Laramie, Independence Rock, and South Pass, are among the most significant sites along the entire trail. Treatment of the trail in Wyoming is uneven, as in most states. Most of the better-known sites are well protected and interpreted, but others need to be included before the trail is consistently interpreted across Wyoming. The BLM has embarked upon an ambitious program to mark the Oregon Trail, and despite some vandalism and cattle damage, most of the trail across BLM lands is marked. Non-federal lands in Wyoming are not as well marked, although some remnants of early marking efforts, dating back to 1913, exist.

The Oregon Trail in Wyoming faces a very distinct threat due to the rapdily growing energy industry throughout the state. Wyoming today contains some of the most significant historic sites along the Oregon Trail, and some of the very best stretches of pristine trail ruts, but these will have to be carefully protected against the escalating threats of development.

The BLM, due to its large land holdings, is the natural federal leader for the Oregon Trail in Wyoming. The Wyoming Recreation Commission and the Wyoming State Archives, Museums and Historical Department are the lead agencies for the State. Happily, the BLM and the two state agencies have compiled an admirable record of cooperation. The Wyoming Recreation Commission administers state parks and other public recreation areas, coordinates the erection of historical markers along public roads with the Wyoming Highway Department, and facilitates historic preservation and interpretive development by private individuals and citizen groups. The State Archives, Museums and Historical Department is responsible for designating for acquisition, naming and supervising the interpretation of all historic landmarks and sites in Wyoming, and provides all historical and interpretive material to be used at historical sites and landmarks. Wyoming has conducted extensive studies of the Oregon Trail in past years, making the trail through the state thoroughly documented. The principal investigatior in this work and the acknowledged expert of the Oregon Trail in Wyoming was the late Paul Henderson, who for many years was employed by the Wyoming Recreation Commission. The Director of the Recreation Commission is the State Historic Preservation Officer.

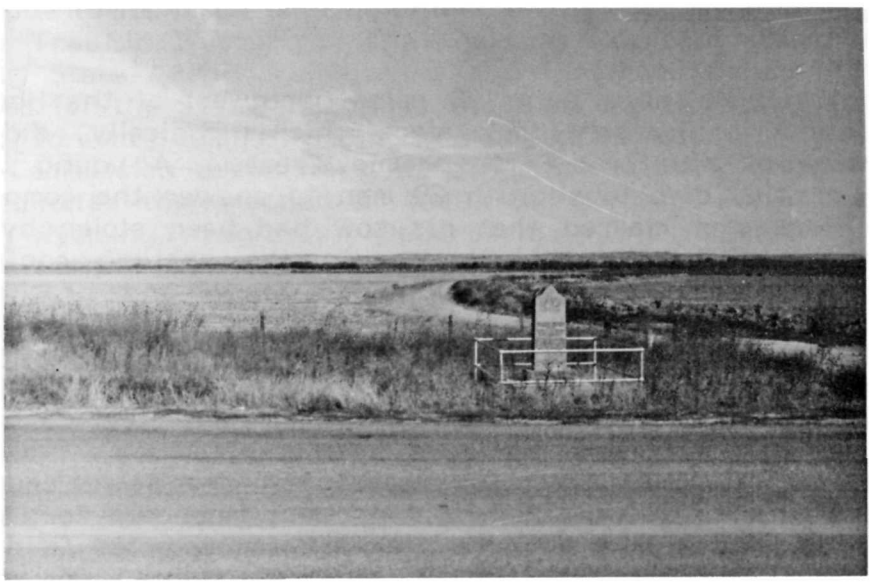
The highest priority for the Oregon National Historic Trail in Wyoming is the protection of the trail corridor--especially along the long stretches of trail ruts--from the potential threats of energy development. This burden falls upon the shoulders of the Wyoming BLM and the State of Wyoming. The highest priority for site-specific action is the protection and interpretation of Burnt Ranch.

Seventeen of the 29 historic sites along the Oregon Trail in Wyoming are also identified as historic sites for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail. In addition, the Mormon Pioneer Trail study team has identified five segments totalling 46 miles of cross-country trails, which are all contained in the South Pass Segment discussed below. The recommendations concerning those joint sites and segments have been coordinated. Wherever possible, interpretation for the Oregon and Mormon Trails should be combined at the sites.

GRATTAN "MASSACRE" SITE

On August 19, 1854, at a point 26 miles northwest of the Horse Creek Treaty Grounds, an incident took place which, ironically, did much to undo the work of the First Fort Laramie Treaty. A young Lieutenant from Fort Laramie, dispatched with 29 men to answer the complaint of a Mormon emigrant who claimed that his cow had been stolen by Indians, came across a band of Brule Sioux. In the ensuing confrontation, apparently brought on by the Lieutenant's youth and brashness, the Indian chief was killed and the Indians retailiated by slaying Lieutenant Grattan and all but one of his men. The wounded survivor made his way back to Fort Laramie, nine miles to the west. This unfortunate incident initiated many years of intermittent hostility along the Oregon Trail.

The incident was promptly labeled a "massacre," despite its causes. The slain soldiers were buried at the site, and later moved to Fort McPherson National Cemetery. A lone monument amidst an irrigated field (Sec 15, T25N, R63W, Barnes map sheet #117, Goshen County) now marks the burial site. That monument is accessible only via a dirt field road along the edge of an irrigation ditch. A second monument is located one-third of a mile to the south, at the edge of a county paved road. Those monuments, which were erected by the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming, should be augmented by a standard Wyoming state interpretive sign, giving more details of the incident and its consequences. That interpretive sign should be placed at the side of the paved county road. If an access agreement can be negotiated with the private landowner, visitors should be invited to walk along the dirt field road to inspect the second marker, closer to the actual site.



The first monument near the Grattan "Massacre" Site is adjacent to a paved county road. Access to the second monument is via the dirt field road seen here.

The second Grattan "Massacre" monument is located at edge of a field, beside an irrigation ditch.

FORT LARAMIE

Fort Laramie, nine miles northwest of the Grattan "Massacre" Site, has a long and rich history, and has been correctly called "the most significant historic site in the State of Wyoming." The fort had its beginnings in 1834, when Robert Campbell constructed a small wooden post to serve as a supply point for the far-ranging Rocky Mountain fur trappers and as a trading post for the Indians. The American Fur Company took over this post, known as Fort William, in 1836, and built it into one of the major Rocky Mountain fur trading centers. Fort William was replaced with a second post (one mile to the west) known as Fort John in 1841. Located one mile above the junction of the Laramie and the North Platte rivers, Fort John was more commonly known as Fort Laramie, and quickly became the first major resupply point along the Oregon Trail. There, early emigrants found the first building since leaving Missouri, and were able to obtain supplies, repair equipment, reshoe animals, rest, and prepare for the difficult trip through the Rocky Mountains via South Pass. Although Fort John was never more than a crude adobe stockade, it served both as a major resupply point and a major landmark on the trail, marking the end of the Great Platte River Road and the beginning of the next stage of the long emigration.

The U.S. Government bought Fort Laramie in 1849, after recognizing that a major military post was necessary to protect the growing tide of Oregon and California-bound emigrants from hostile Indians. With its occupation by the Army, Fort Laramie became the undisputed capital of the vast territory between Santa Fe to the south and the upper Missouri River posts to the north. A building program was initiated and within a decade Fort Laramie had become a major military installation. It was the key military post on the Northern Plains and served as a center of military activities during the Indian wars in the 1860s. In the 1870s and 1880s, ranchers and homesteaders gradually moved into the territory; Fort Laramie was abandoned in 1890.

Fort Laramie was a milepost and a haven for Oregon Trail emigrants. An 1848 emigrant noted that Fort Laramie and Fort Hall (Idaho) were the only buildings he saw between the Missouri and Columbia rivers, and an 1852 emigrant asked "Who can describe his feelings on arrival at this place inhabited by white people 500 miles from the States?"* Arrival at Fort Laramie meant that one-third of the long trip had been completed, and leaving it meant casting off all ties with civilization.

The grave of Mary E. Homsley, a 29-year old emigrant wife and mother who died June 25, 1852, is located one and one-half miles north of Fort Laramie.

Fort Laramie is now a 836-acre National Historic Site administered by the National Park Service (Sections 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, and 29, T26N, R64W, Fort Laramie map sheet #118, Goshen County). Eleven of its 21 buildings have been reconstructed, rehabilitated, or restored, including Old

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* Quoted in Mattes, The Great Platte River Road, p. 502.

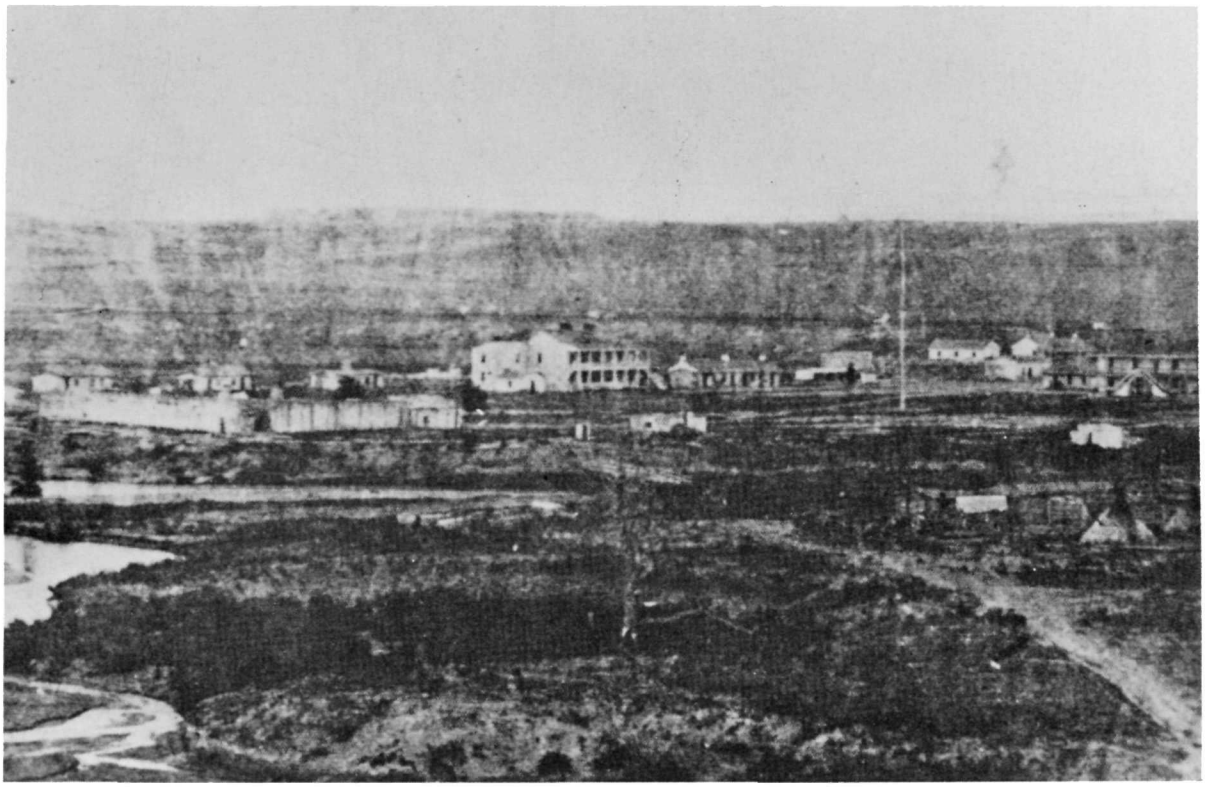
Bedlam--the pride of the Fort--an 1849 structure known as the oldest building in Wyoming. The National Historic Site has a fulltime staff and averages 110,000 visitors per year. The interpretive emphasis is heavily devoted to the military theme, with the majority of the buildings and displays keyed to the height of its military activities in the 1870s. Living history is emphasized during the tourist season, including one living history display of the old fur trappers. The fort is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is one of the showcases of the National Park Service.

Unfortunately, in the excitement and expense of restoring a major military complex, the emigration history of the fort has not been accorded the attention it deserves. The present museum at Fort Laramie has one brief panel depicting the emigrant travel which passed through the fort--and which led to the Government's acquisition of it--but few other attempts are made to interpret appropriately Fort Laramie's exceedingly important role in the Oregon Trail and western migration.

The Fort staff acknowledges this shortcoming, but has no immediate plans to remedy the situation. While the National Park Service will always emphasize the military at Fort Laramie--with Scotts Bluff National Monument as its memorial to the Oregon Trail--Fort Laramie should increase its interpretation of emigration history. A living history display of a covered wagon and emigrant family camped on the grounds to refit, resupply and rest would be ideal. The staff is presently studying several plans to update and improve the museum, wherein emigration history should be much better presented. At some time in the future, a new museum and visitor center will be established on the south side of the Laramie River, which will create the opportunity for increased interpretation of the emigrant campground. Once the Oregon Trail interpretation at Fort Laramie is improved, it will serve visitors following the Oregon National Historic Trail much as it once served the emigrants of old, as the major information center for the Oregon Trail in Wyoming.

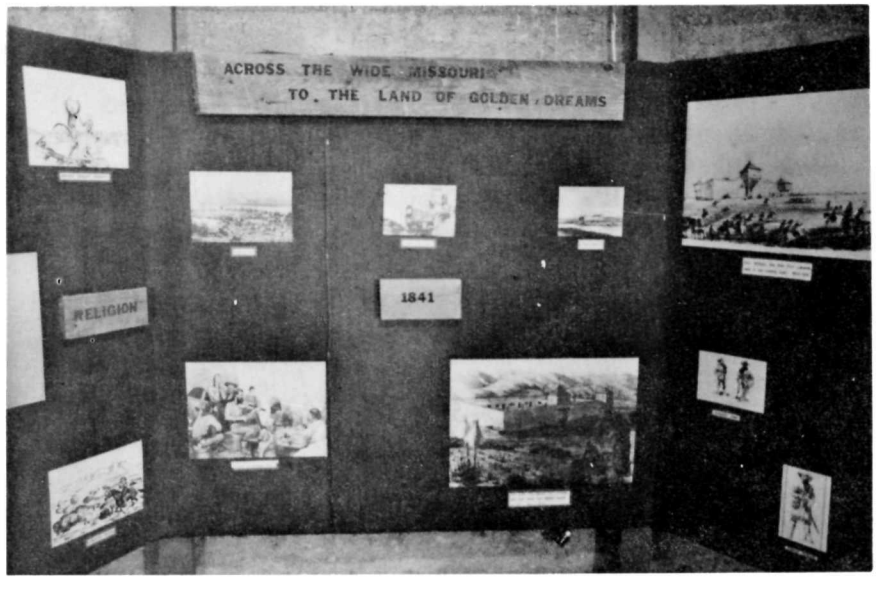
Fort Laramie is one of those rare historical sites where visitors can tangibly sense the history surrounding them. Those lucky enough to arrive early in the morning to watch the sun rise over the plains can almost hear the bugle call reveille and see the soldiers emerging from the barracks for morning formation. It is a very special place to visit, and the provision of more interpretation for visitors who are following the Oregon Trail can only improve it.

Fort Laramie has also been selected as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



The earliest known photograph of Fort Laramie was taken in 1858. Old Bedlam is in the center of the photograph, and the stockade to the left is Fort John. Considerable emigrant traffic still passed through the Fort at the time of this photo. The original photograph is located in the Library of Congress.

This photo of Fort Laramie, taken in 1876, shows the growth of the post as it became a center of civilization and military activity.



The five photos and few words seen in the center of the panel are the extent of the formal interpretation of western migration at Fort Laramie.

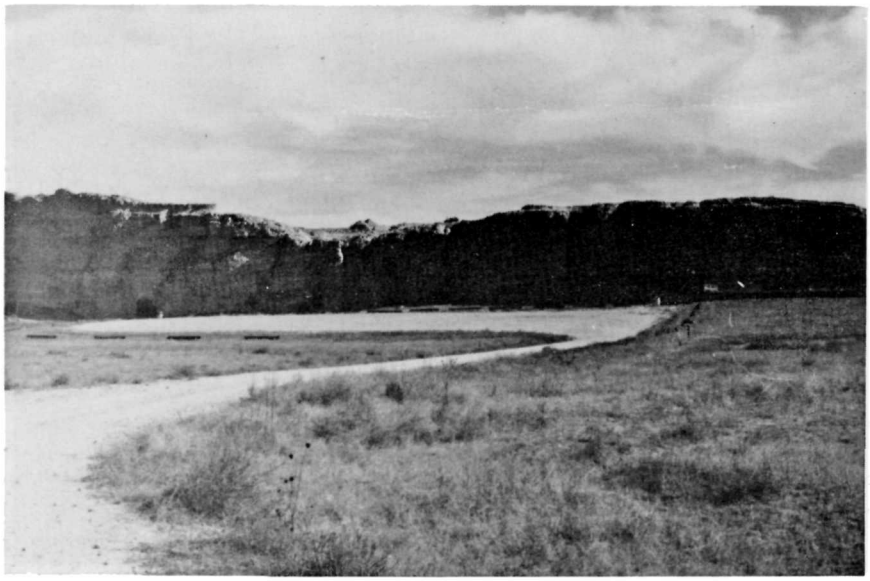
Ft. Laramie National Historic Site is nestled in a shallow valley on the north bank of Laramie River. The meadow in the foreground was a popular camping site for emigrant wagon trains.

REGISTER CLIFF

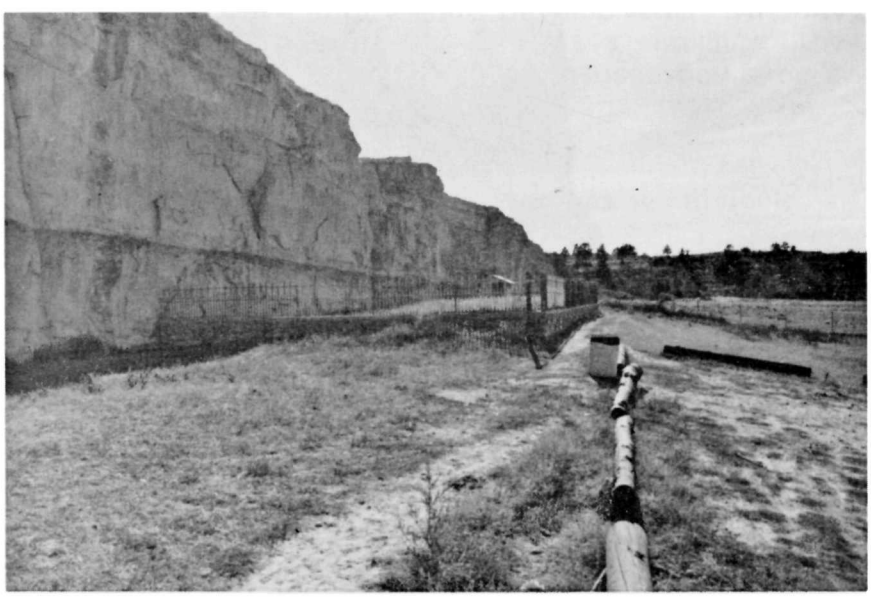
Register Cliff, located eight miles northwest of Fort Laramie, is one of the most famous of the trail registers along the road to Oregon upon which the emigrants carved their names and dates. Although one name etched on Register Cliff dates back to the fur-trading days of 1829, the cliff gained prominence after 1847, when emigrants began the practice of inscribing their names, the date, and sometimes even their place of origin in the rock. As the years passed, more and more emigrants added their names, and literally thousands of names and dates were once visible. Time, vandalism, and weathering have taken their toll, but hundreds of inscriptions are still discernable. Altough Register Cliff was never a famous landmark to the emigrants, the vast number of names preserved on the cliff has made it the best known surviving emigrant register along the trail.

The line of cliffs upon which the emigrants carved their names is over a mile long, and is composed of soft sandstone, a material which made carving easy, but preservation difficult. The most densely inscribed portion of the cliff is now a historic site owned and administered by the State of Wyoming as a part of the Guernsey State Park Recreation Area (Sec 7, T26N, R65W, Register Cliff map sheet #119, Platte County). This small facility of approximately 50 acres has a parking area, rest rooms, and a short trail along the cliff where visitors may view the inscription. A strong chain-link fence partially protects the majority of the names from further vandalism, which includes the continuing desire on the part of visitors to add their names to the cliff. Although an unsightly intrusion, the fence is necessary to protect the carvings. The site includes a pioneer cemetery with three unidentified graves believed to date from emigrant days. Register Cliff has good access via county paved roads, and is interpreted by one sign on the site and another on U.S. Highway 26 east of Guernsey. It is on the National Register of Historic Places. Register Cliff is adequately protected and interpreted by the State of Wyoming.

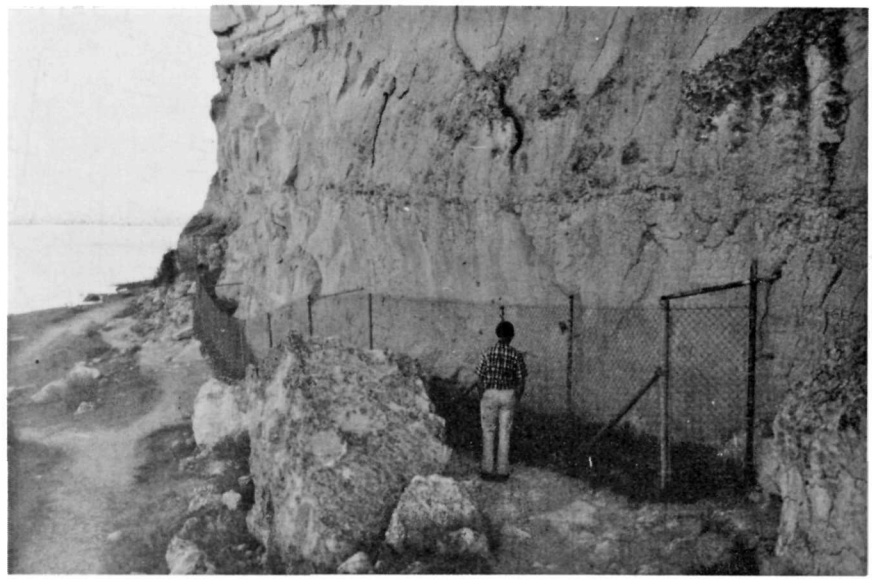
Register Cliff has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



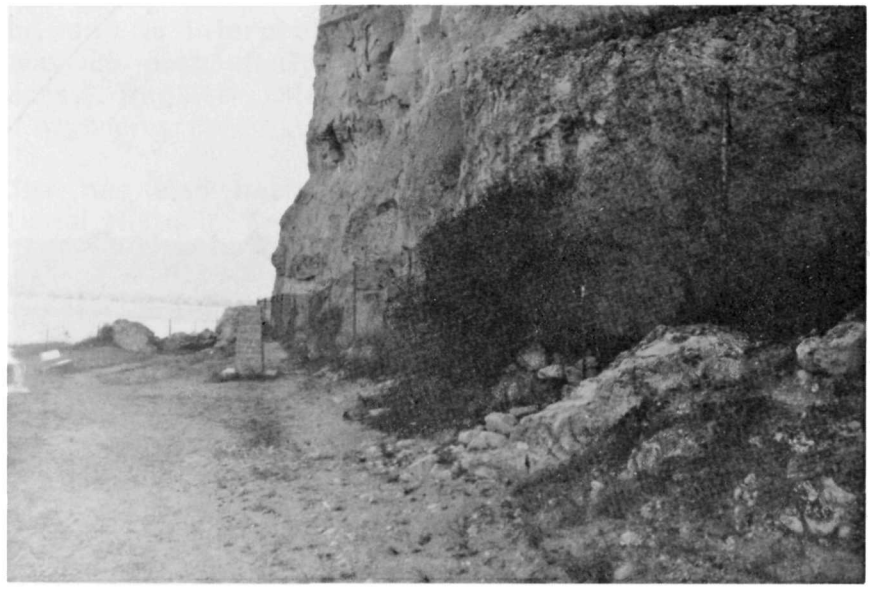
As seen from the entrance to Register Cliff historic site, the pioneer cemetery is to the right and the majority of the emigrant names and dates are carved on the cliffside to the left.



The pioneer cemetery at Register Cliff is enclosed in an iron picket fence.



Portions of the most densely inscribed portion of Register Cliff are seen above and below. A walking path leads visitors along the side of the cliff, and the fence protects the cliff from visitors.



OREGON TRAIL RUTS

Three miles west of Register Cliff, the Oregon Trail crossed a ridge of soft sandstone. Due to the particular geography of the area, practically every wagon which ever went west crossed the ridge at a certain point. As the years passed, and travel became heavier and heavier, an impressive set of ruts was worn in the soft rock. These ruts, called the Oregon Trail Ruts, were eventually worn in places to a depth of five feet, creating the most spectacular set of ruts along the entire Oregon Trail. Visitors here are invariably impressed by the depth of the ruts and awed by contemplating the number of wagons required to wear away the rock to such imposing depths.

The Oregon Trail Ruts (Sec 2, T26N, R65W, Guernsey map sheet #120, Platte County) is a historic site of approximately 30 acres owned by the State of Wyoming as part of the Guernsey State Park Recreation Area. The site is not fully developed, having only a parking area and a short path to the top of the ridge where the ruts are visible. From this point, visitors are free to wander about the area, which has no definite boundaries, and the resulting wear upon the fragile ground cover in and around the ruts threatens eventual erosion of the terrain.

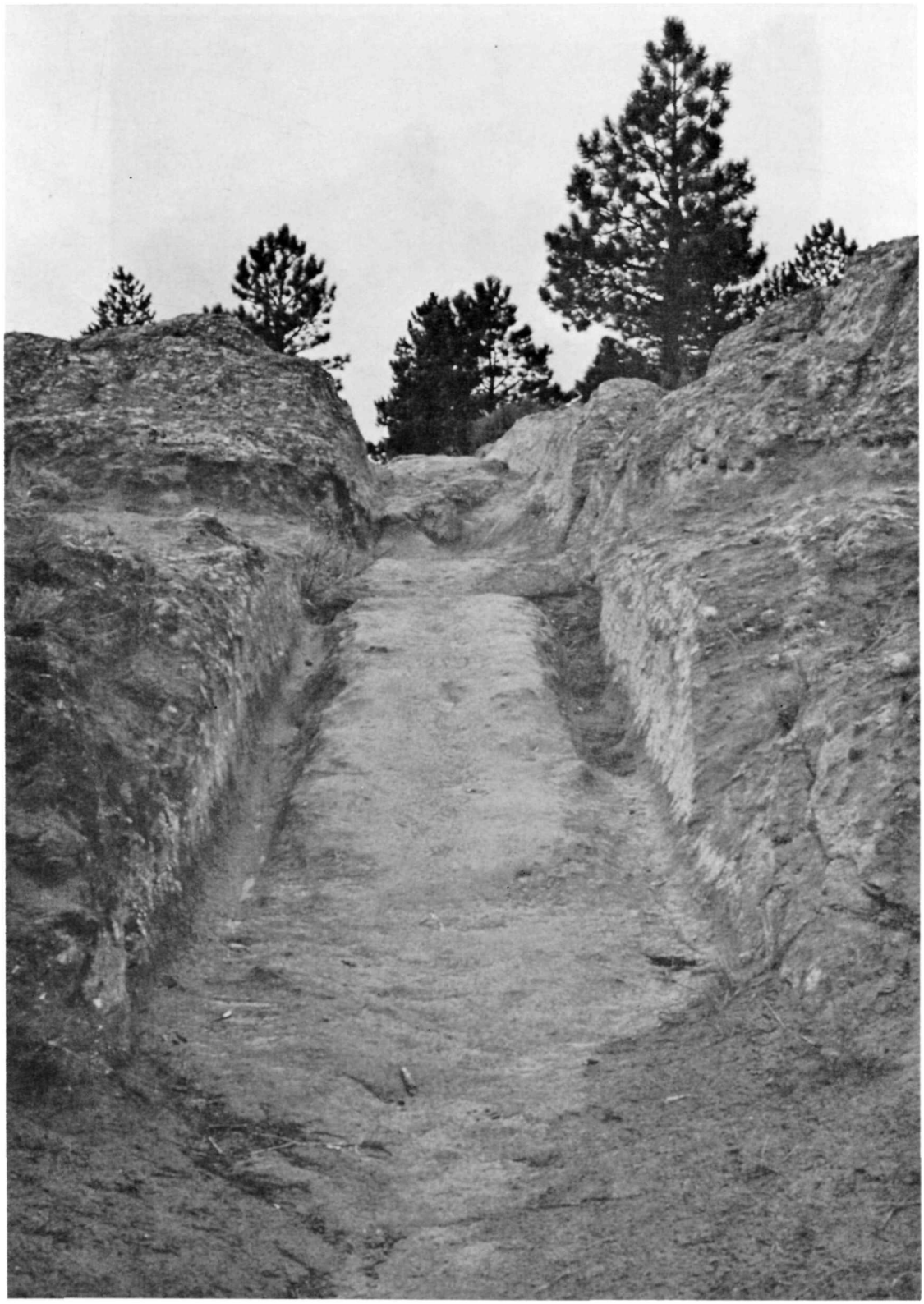
The Oregon Trail Ruts are interpreted by one sign, which contains some rather confusing language. The sign should be improved and replaced when possible. The Oregon Trail Ruts are on the National Register of Historic Places and are a National Historic Landmark. They are accessible via county paved and dirt roads. Near the entrance to the site is the grave of Lucinda Rollins, an emigrant woman who died in June 1849.

This site cries out for more appropriate development. Happily, the State of Wyoming has such plans in the works. At a minimum, the site needs better marking and interpretation, and visitor use should be channeled to protect the ruts and surrounding terrain from the effects of indiscriminant wandering.

The Oregon Trail Ruts are also identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

The Oregon Trail Ruts are located on top of the ridge seen in the background, running from east to west (left to right).

The present interpretive sign at Oregon Trail Ruts is a curiosity in its own right.



The Oregon Trail Ruts near Guernsey are easily the most spectacular set of ruts anywhere along the Oregon Trail. Note that the center of the rut cut has also been worn smooth, as thousands of wagons dragged bottom as they passed through the cut.

The Oregon Trail Ruts are seen from below, looking west towards the top of the ridge.

The Oregon Trail Ruts are here seen looking back to the east from the top of the ridge above the previous photo.

A further set of ruts at the Oregon Trail Ruts site are located west of the deepest cut pictured above.

HEMBREE GRAVE

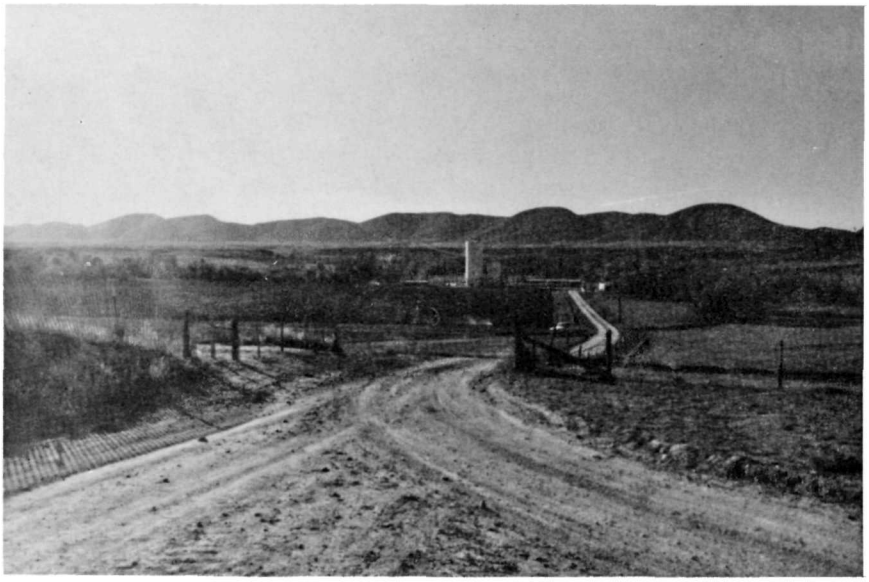
On July 18, 1843, six-year old Joel Hembree fell underneath a wagon wheel and was crushed to death. This was the first fatality of the "Great Migration" of 1843--the year in which large wagon trains first used the Oregon Trail. Dr. Marcus Whitman, leading the wagon train west on his return to Whitman Mission (Washington), presided over the burial. The grave was covered with a mound of stones to prevent wolves from digging up the body, and was marked with a stone inscribed simply "1843. J. Hembree." Joel Hembree's grave is the oldest identified and marked emigrant gravesite on the Oregon Trail.

In 1961, a rancher started moving and collecting rocks for a dam on La Prele Creek, and discovered the gravesite. The grave had to be moved, and was carefully excavated. The preserved skeleton of Joel was found under about three feet of earth, covered by an old oak dresser drawer. It was moved about 1,600 feet west to higher ground and reburied, with the original gravestone. Next to Joel's new burial site is another grave, that of Private Ralston Baker, Company E, 2d U.S. Cavalry, who died May 1, 1867. No further information concerning Baker's death is known. Three hundred feet northwest of the grave is an iron stake marking the former site of the La Prele Station, a Pony Express and stage station of the 1860s.

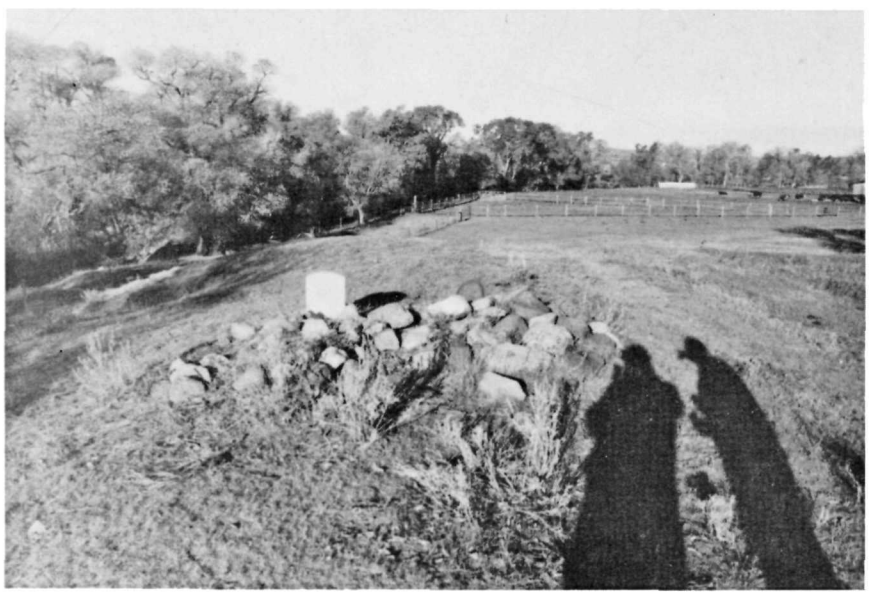
The Hembree Grave, 61 miles northwest of the Oregon Trail Ruts (Sec 10, T32N, R73W, Orpha map sheet #131, Converse County), is privately owned, and is located in the midst of a pasture, south of a feedlot belonging to the Natural Bridge Ranch, Inc. Access is via a dirt ranch road which is posted and fenced. The president of the ranch operation reports approximately 40 visitors each year who seek permission to view the gravesite. The Hembree Grave is not on the National Register of Historic Places, but warrants consideration for such nomination.

Conversations with the president of Natural Bridge Ranch indicate that he is somewhat reluctant to open the site for public access, due to potential interference with his ranching operation. At present, the small number of visitors per year are not considered a problem, but a dramatic increase in the visitor flow would be a matter of concern. In principle, however, he agreed to the following recommendations, which the State of Wyoming should attempt to implement in cooperation with the ranch.

The gravesites and the La Prele station site should be fenced to prevent livestock damage. Public access should be carefully provided in a manner which will not greatly impact upon the daily operations of the ranch. Visitors could enter the ranchyard via the dirt ranch road from the paved Natural Bridge Road to the east, and park to the north of the feedlot. From there, directional signs would direct them approximately 1,500 feet south to the gravesites. A standard Wyoming interpretive panel, located either at the gravesite or out on Natural Bridge road, should be provided to commemorate the oldest known emigrant burial on the Oregon Trail. Additional interpretation could mention the Baker grave and the La Prele station site.

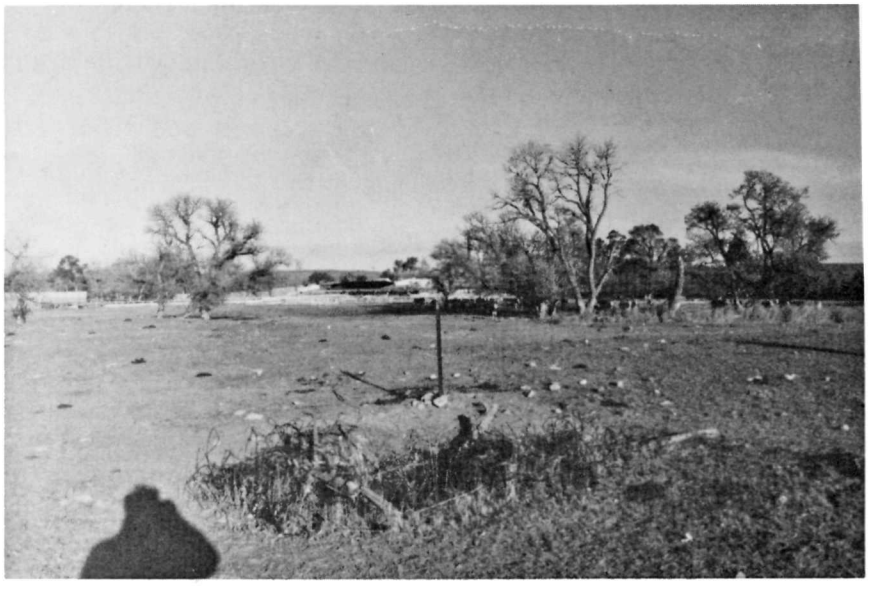


A portion of the Natural Bridge Ranch is seen looking south along the ranch access road. The Hembree Grave is located near the banks of La Prele Creek, which runs along the line of trees seen behind the ranch buildings.



The Baker grave is on the left (with the prominent marker), and the Hembree grave is on the right.

The original grave marker inscribed in 1843 can still be seen at Joel Hembree's gravesite.



The stake in the foreground marks the well of the old La Prele Station. Ranch buildings are in the background.

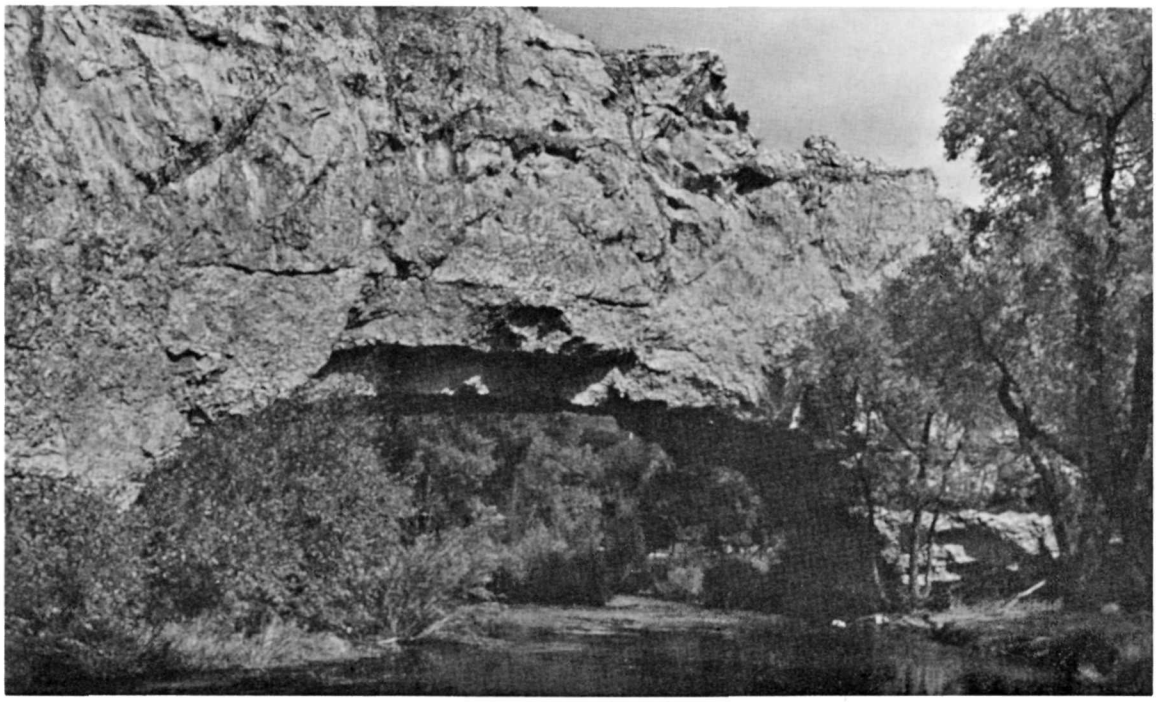
AYERS NATURAL BRIDGE

Located one and one-half miles south of the Hembree Grave (Sec 21, T32N, R73W, La Prele Reservoir map sheet #130, Converse County), Ayers Natural Bridge was a natural phenomenon along the Oregon Trail which was often mentioned in diaries and visited by emigrants, many of whom used the area as a campsite. The natural bridge is in a beautiful, red rock canyon, and offered good water and plentiful forage for animals.

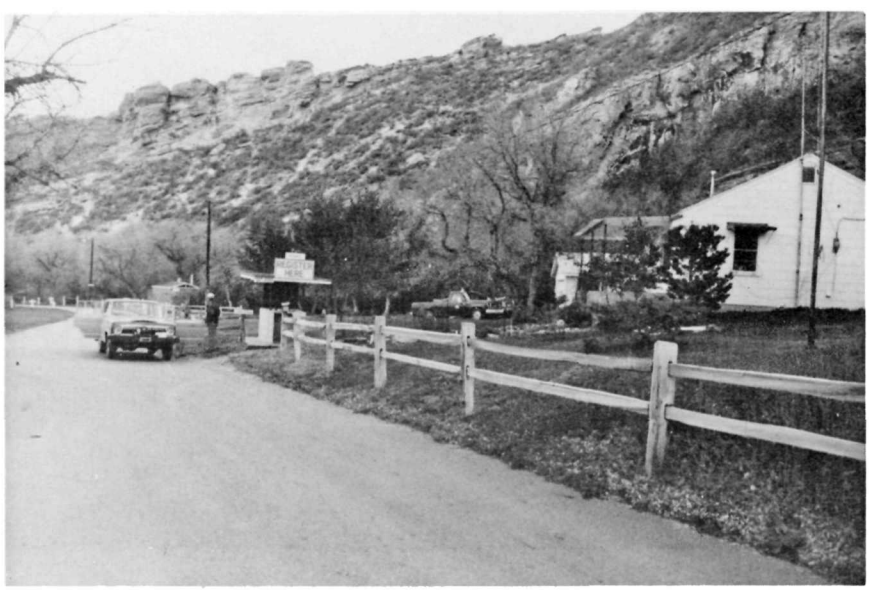
Ayers Natural Bridge is now a small county park of approximately 22 acres, complete with restrooms, picnic tables, and campsites. There is a resident manager. Much as it served the Oregon Trail emigrants themselves, the park offers overnight camping to modern-day followers of the Oregon Trail. The park is owned by Converse County and administered under the direction of the County Commission. There is good access via the paved Natural Bridge Road.

Converse County should improve the interpretation offered at the little park, which is now almost nonexistent. Such interpretation should feature the known beauty of the area, and its use by the Oregon Trail emigrants as a resting and camping spot. The State of Wyoming, if necessary, should assist Converse County in the preparation of such interpretation.

Ayers Natural Bridge has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



Ayers Natural Bridge.



The entrance to Ayers Natural Bridge park shows the manager's residence to the right.

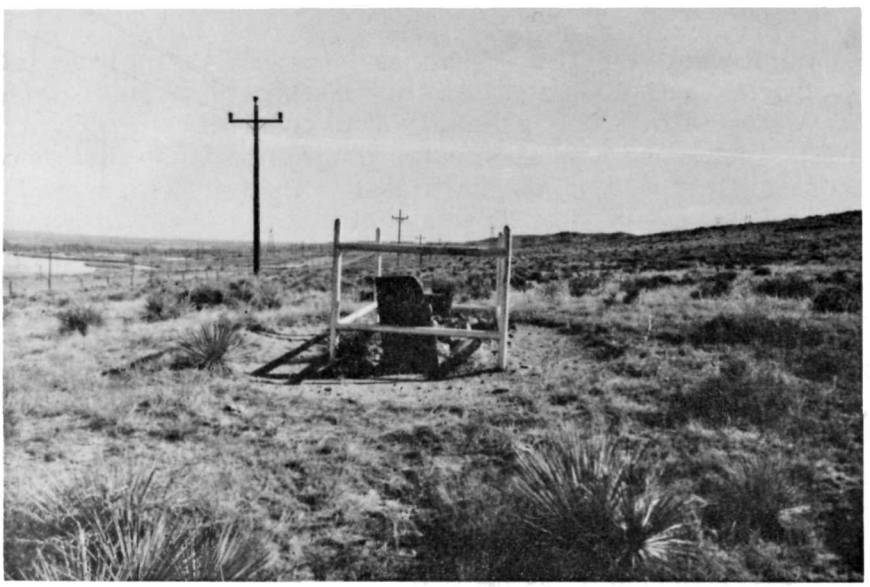
UNTHANK GRAVE

Twelve miles northwest of the Hembree Grave is another significant Oregon Trail burial site. This is the grave of A.H. Unthank, an emigrant from Wayne County, Indiana, who died of cholera on July 2, 1850. Unthank's gravesite has a special poignance, for his name is still visible at Register Cliff, 76 miles southeast. Unthank inscribed his name on the cliff in late June and died a week later.

The Unthank gravesite is on privately owned rangeland (Sec 18, T33N, R74W, Glenrock map sheet #133, Converse County), 200 feet south of U.S. Highway 20-87. Visitors to the site must climb a barbed wire fence to view the grave. The site has no interpretation, although the headstone still marks the grave.

The State of Wyoming should develop this site as a small wayside interpretive area. A widening of the highway will be necessary to allow vehicles to park, and an access agreement is needed with the owner of the land. If it proves necessary to acquire the gravesite in order to provide protection and public access, two acres would be sufficient. The present barbed wire fence is an obstacle for most visitors, and either a gate or a stile should be provided. Interpretation should be provided using a standard Wyoming interpretive sign at the edge of the highway. (Wyoming should also point out the Unthank name which is still visible at Register Cliff.)

The gravesite itself is protected from cattle damage by a pole fence. The headstone, however, was carved on soft brown sandstone, and is sadly deteriorated due to weathering. It will eventually disintegrate through continued exposure to the elements. Measures should be taken to protect the headstone, perhaps by encasing it in a more modern monument, as has been done with several other old and deteriorating Oregon Trail grave markers.



The A.H. Unthank Grave is located just off U.S. Highway 20-87 (visible to the left of the photo).

MORMON FERRY

Twenty-eight miles west of the Unthank Grave, the primary route of the Oregon Trail crossed from the south to the north bank of the North Platte River, and the emigrants finally left the Platte River system, which they had followed ever since Fort Kearny, Nebraska, over 440 miles to the east. This was the site of the Mormon Ferry, established in 1847. Prior to that time, emigrants had crossed the North Platte River in several locations near the vicinity of present-day Casper, chiefly at the Bessemer Bend crossing, 12 miles farther upstream (see below). But crossing the river was always dangerous, whether the emigrants attempted to ford, swim or float it, and accidents and deaths were all too commonplace.

When the Mormon pioneer migration of 1847 reached the area, a substantial raft was constructed, consisting of two 30-foot long dug-out canoes with a plank bed. The Mormon pioneer party crossed the river with relative ease, and an Oregon emigrant train behind them immediately bargained to be carried across. Brigham Young realized the financial potential of establishing a ferry and detailed nine men to stay behind and operate it. It was a mutually satisfactory arrangement. The four to five dollars per wagon charged by the Mormons permitted other emigrants to avoid the constant dangers of an unassisted river crossing, and the money collected through the ferry operation helped finance the new Mormon settlement in the Salt Lake Valley. An Oregon emigrant who arrived at the ferry site on June 10, 1849, reported 175 wagons waiting in line, and was forced to wait three days before crossing. Another train which arrived on July 2d attempted to cross the river on its own, but after two men were drowned it was decided that the risk was not worth the money saved. The Mormon Ferry operated each summer between 1847 and 1852, when the first bridge across the North Platte River was built.

The site of the Mormon Ferry has been a subject of some disagreement over the years, and a monument to the ferry was erected at the site of old Fort Caspar in 1932. Recent scholarship, however, has established the ferry site four miles downstream from Fort Caspar (Sec 34, T34N, R79W, Casper map sheet #137, Natrona County).* There is no marking or interpretation for the Mormon Ferry at its recently determined location. The ferry site is on the north edge of the North Casper City Park, which is administered by the City Parks Department of Casper. The park is partially developed with playing fields and general recreation areas.

Since this site is already owned by the City of Casper, the potential for a small interpretive display commemorating the ferry site is excellent. The City Parks Department of Casper should mark and identify the crossing site, and explain the significance of the Mormon Ferry operation

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*See especially Robert A. Murray, "Trading Posts, Forts and Bridges of the Casper Area--Unraveling the Tangle on the Upper Platte," Annals of Wyoming, XLVII (Spring 1975), 5-30.

to both the Mormons and to the Oregon Trail. Interpretation could be placed at the side of the road circling the north portion of the park, with a short walking trail down to the south bank of the North Platte River. The old monument, now located at Fort Caspar, should be removed. The State of Wyoming, if necessary, should assist the City of Casper in the preparation of the interpretive display.

The Mormon Ferry has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

The Mormon Ferry site is due north (right) of the small building seen in the background. The major portion of North Casper City Park, as seen here, is undeveloped.

The Mormon Ferry crossing site is located just north of North Casper City Park. This photo was taken from the edge of the dirt road seen above, and looks north across the river.

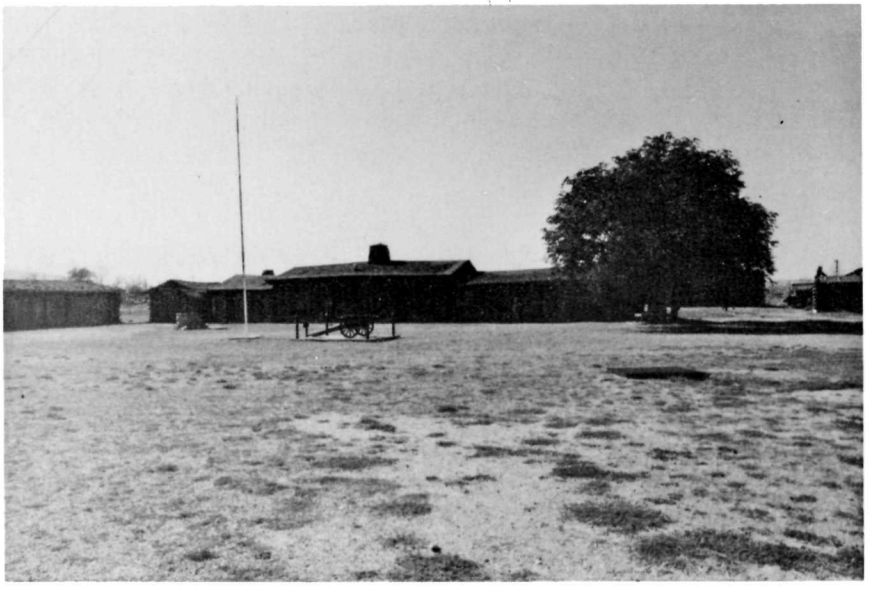
FORT CASPAR

Fort Caspar, located four miles west of the Mormon Ferry (Sec 7, T33N, R79W, Casper map sheet #137, Natrona County), was a military post established along the North Platte River during the latter years of the emigration period. From its beginnings as a two-company post, it was successively known as the Mormon Ferry post, Platte Bridge Station, and Fort Caspar in honor of Lieutenant Caspar Collins, who died in an Indian battle in the vicinity in 1865. The post served to protect emigrants using the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails, and later to protect the Pony Express route, the Overland Stage route, and the transcontinental telegraph line. It was abandoned in 1867 and was almost immediately burned by Indians.

The site is now a city park, administered by the City Parks Department of Casper and the Fort Caspar Commission. Although none of the original buildings have survived, the city has reconstructed the fort. The park includes the fort structures, a superintendent's residence, maintenance sheds, interpretive signs and markers, and the Fort Caspar Cemetery. The fort grounds are attractive, the buildings appear to be authentically restored, and the historic site makes a pleasant visit. The Fort is located on the western edge of the city of Casper, and access is via city roads. Fort Caspar is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The mislocation of the Mormon Ferry site (see above) detracts from the quality of the interpretation offered at the fort. A number of signs and monuments around the fort grounds place the Mormon Ferry site immediately north of Fort Caspar, in conflict with recent scholarship, which locates it four miles downstream. The Fort Caspar Commission and the City Parks Department of Casper should take steps to correct the erroneous signs. The City of Casper is justly proud of its past accomplishments in the restoration and interpretation of Fort Caspar, and is encouraged to continue the good work.

The Fort Caspar Cemetery (foreground) is located just south of reconstructed Fort Caspar (background).



The old parade ground at Fort Caspar is circled on three sides by reconstructed buildings and historical monuments.

EMIGRANT GAP

Eight miles west of Fort Caspar, emigrants who used the Mormon Ferry crossing of the North Platte River passed through Emigrant Gap (Sec 10, T33N, R81W, Emigrant Gap map sheet #139, Natrona County). Emigrant Gap is not impressive in itself, being merely a shallow pass through a ridge west of Casper, but from this point travelers were afforded a grand and sweeping view to the west, the scene of their next week's travel. Although not always apparent at the time to the emigrants, from this spot they began their ascent into the Rocky Mountains which gradually led up and over the Continental Divide at South Pass.

Emigrant Gap is accessible today from Poison Spider Road, an improved gravel road which crosses the gap very near the original line of the Oregon Trail. Near the gap is a 40 acre tract of public land administered by the Casper District of the Wyoming BLM. That office should develop a small roadside interpretive area, to point out the significance of the gap as a minor Oregon Trail landmark, and the location of the trail towards the western horizon. A standard BLM interpretive panel and a pull-off from the road to allow parking for a few cars would constitute sufficient development.

This site is threatened by the expansion west of the City of Casper, which is experiencing the mixed blessings of a tremendous energy boom. As that boom progresses, the outskirts of Casper are steadily encroaching upon the eastern side of Emigrant Gap, and threaten to ungulf the area.

Emigrant Gap has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

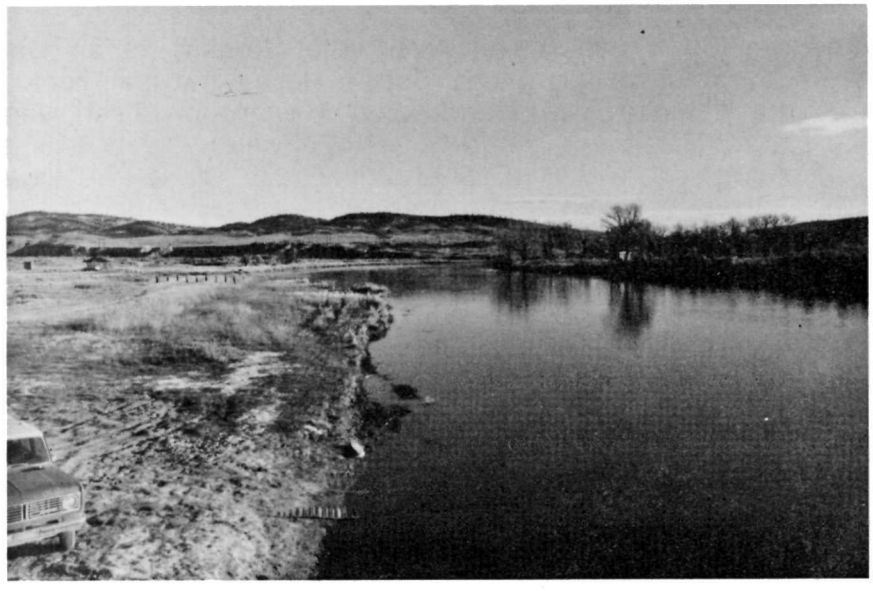
The present gravel road crosses Emigrant Gap very near the original line of the Oregon Trail. This view is very similar to that seen by Oregon Trail emigrants. To date, there is virtually no development to the west of Emigrant Gap, and the terrain looks much like it did during the emigration period.

BESSEMER BEND

Prior to the establishment of the Mormon Ferry in 1847, Bessemer Bend, 12 miles southwest of the ferry, was the preferred crossing site of the North Platte River. Through trial and error over the first years of Oregon Trail travel, this site had been found to be the least dangerous point to cross the unpredictable North Platte. The crossing was either done "cold turkey," with men, wagons, and animals plunging into the water, or by fashioning crude bull-boats or rafts to negotiate the current. The Red Buttes, a physical feature to the south of the river, helped identify this crossing site, and made it a minor landmark on the Oregon Trail. After 1847, most emgirants used the Mormon Ferry, with the exception of those too broke or too thrifty to pay the Mormons' fees, and use of the Bessemer Bend crossing site declined.

The Casper District of the Wyoming BLM has created a small interpretive site at Bessemer Bend. This two-acre site, on the north side of the river (Sec 3, T32N, R81W, Emigrant Gap map sheet #139, Natrona County), has been tastefully developed. It includes a parking area, an interpretive kiosk, and an excellent view of the Bessemer Bend area and the Red Buttes. The interpretive scheme covers the Oregon Trail, the early fur trappers, the Pony Express, and the Goose Egg Ranch, an early ranch site made famous as the locale of Owen Wister's classic western novel, The Virginian. Bessemer Bend is accessible from the south via paved roads and from the north via dirt and gravel roads. It has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The BLM has done an excellent job of interpreting this historic site, which could serve as a model for other small interpretive complexes recommended in this report. The only facility lacking is directional marking from the north. Although most of the local visitation to Bessemer Bend will use the paved highway approaching the site from the south (which is well marked), future visitors who are following the Oregon National Historic Trail will be approaching from the north, via Emigrant Gap. Directional signs are needed to bring those visitors to the site.



The North Platte River at Bessemer Bend (looking east) is now tamed by a series of irrigation and flood control measures. The BLM interpretive site appears on the left bank, in the distance.

ROCK AVENUE

Rock Avenue, sometimes called the Avenue of Rocks, is an Oregon Trail landmark 10 miles west of Emigrant Gap. Here, natural rock formations jut up out of the Wyoming rangeland, and the Oregon Trail was forced to wind down through the rocks. At the end of Rock Avenue is the Devil's Backbone, described by the British explorer and traveler Richard Burton in 1860 as "a jagged, broken ridge of huge sandstone boulders, tilted up edgeways, and running in a line over the crest of a long roll of land . . .like the vertebrae of some great sea-serpent. . . ."

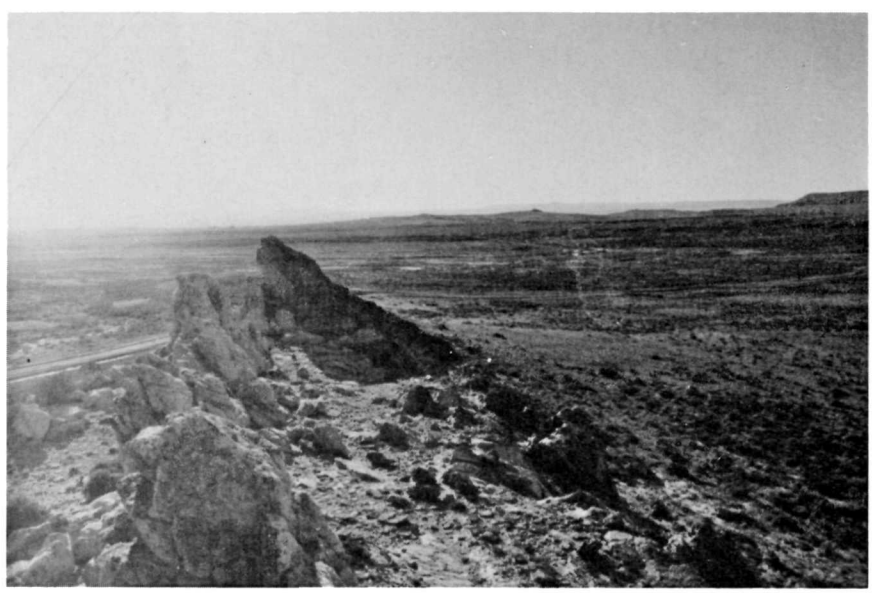
At one time, wagon ruts were visible throughout Rock Avenue, where numerous wagon wheels had cut into the soft rock. However, road and pipeline construction crews have thoughtlessly blasted away large protions of Rock Avenue over the past decade, damaging the formations and destroying the ruts. Rock Avenue can still be appreciated for its geological features, but much of its historic value has been destroyed.

Rock Avenue is accessible via the Oregon Trail Road, a slightly improved dirt and clay road following close to the line of the original Oregon Trail across the high Wyoming range country. The road is passable to normal passenger vehicles only during dry weather. The site is located on Wyoming State school land (Sec 16, T32N, R82W, Clarkson Hill map sheet #141, Natrona County) and should be developed as an interpretive wayside by the State of Wyoming. Minimum facilities necessary there include a parking pull-off and an interpretive sign pointing out the geological features and the significance of the area to the Oregon Trail. Recreational values at Rock Avenue are quite high, for an excellent view of the rangelands is available in all directions, and visitors of all ages will be unable to resist clambering among the rocks. The State of Wyoming should take steps to prevent future construction damage to this landmark.

The original Oregon Trail closely paralleled the present road winding down through Rock Avenue.

Looking southwest along the Oregon Trail from the top of Devil's Backbone, miles of Wyoming's high country rangeland may be seen.

The obstacle presented by Rock Avenue becomes apparent when looking northwest (above) and southeast (below) along Devil's Backbone.



WILLOW SPRINGS

As soon as the Oregon Trail left the North Platte River at Mormon Ferry (or Bessemer Bend), water became an immediate concern. The emigrants had over 50 miles of dry range to cross before reaching the Sweetwater River, and the location of dependable water sources dictated the route of the trail. The first good water west of Casper was Willow Springs, eight miles southwest of Rock Avenue (Sec 9, T31N, R83W, Benton Basin NE map sheet #142, Natrona County). This free flowing spring offered cool refreshing water and nearby forage for animals, and the area quickly became a favored campsite for the emigrants. The springs were well-known even before the emigration days, as they had long been used by fur trappers in the vicinity.

Just west of Willow Springs is a low ridge, called Prospect Hill, where the emigrants gained their first sight of the Sweetwater Mountains to the west. This grand panoramic view provided a hint of what their travel through the Rocky Mountains would entail, and presented the most spectacular (or perhaps threatening) scenery yet seen on the trail.

Willow Springs is privately owned, and is accessible via the Oregon Trail Road, a dirt road which can be negotiated by normal passenger vehicles only during dry weather. Several deteriorating shacks and out-buildings stand in an old ranch yard at the springs, the headquarters of an abandoned high country ranch. The springs still flow, and an old springhouse shelters the site. The area is almost as pleasant to visit today as it was for the emigrants, being an oasis of green amidst the sage-covered range. Willow Springs has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

West of Willow Springs, some excellent ruts of the Oregon Trail climb Prospect Hill. Those ruts have been unimpacted over the years, for the Oregon Trail Road follows another ascent over the ridge. The ruts cross a mixture of state, private, and BLM lands.

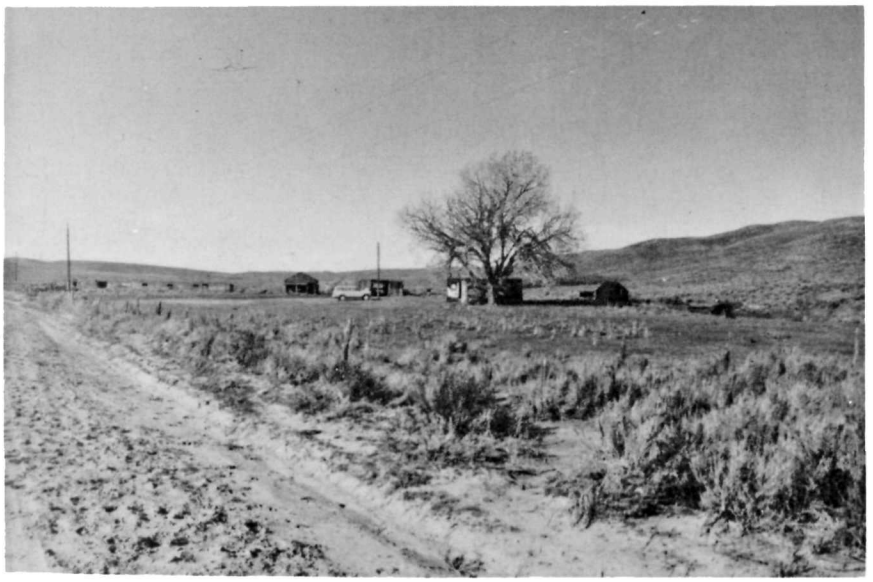
With proper development, Willow Springs and Prospect Hill could become a delightful interpretive and recreational site along the Oregon Trail. The old ranchyard at Willow Springs could be converted into a day-use area, with appropriate interpretation. From there, visitors could hike along the excellent Oregon Trail ruts up Prospect Hill (about one mile to the summit), where the same magnificent view which the emigrants saw awaits them. Very little development has taken place in this isolated range country over the last century. The dirt Oregon Trail Road, fences, and a power line are the only modern intrusions.

From the summit of Prospect Hill, visitors could either return to Willow Springs, or hike one mile down the west slope of the hill to where the Oregon Trail rejoins the Oregon Trail Road. The Oregon Trail over Prospect Hill should be marked, and low-key and unobtrusive interpretation should be placed at the summit of the hill, pointing out the geographical features to the west and the general line of the Oregon Trail. For those who do not wish to make this hike, a similar interpretive panel should be placed where the dirt Oregon Trail Road

crosses the summit of Prospect Hill, providing the same magnificent view to the west.

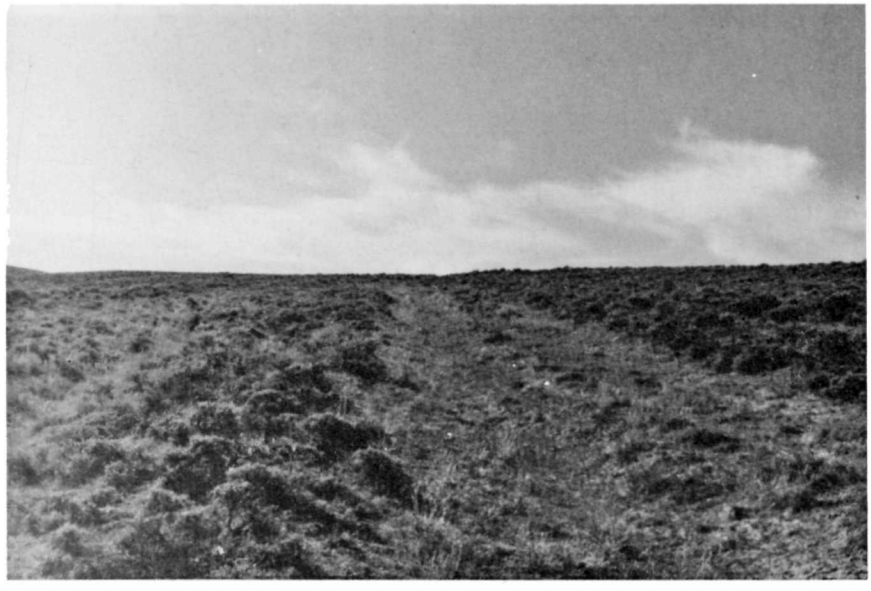
The Casper District of the Wyoming BLM should have the responsibility of implementing these recommendations. Until such time as access agreements across scattered private lands can be obtained, the BLM should provide interpretation on the Oregon Trail Road at Willow Springs and at the summit of Prospect Hill. Depending upon future use, the BLM should adopt measures to protect the Oregon Trail ruts from over-use.

Willow Springs and Prospect Hill are also identified as historic sites for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

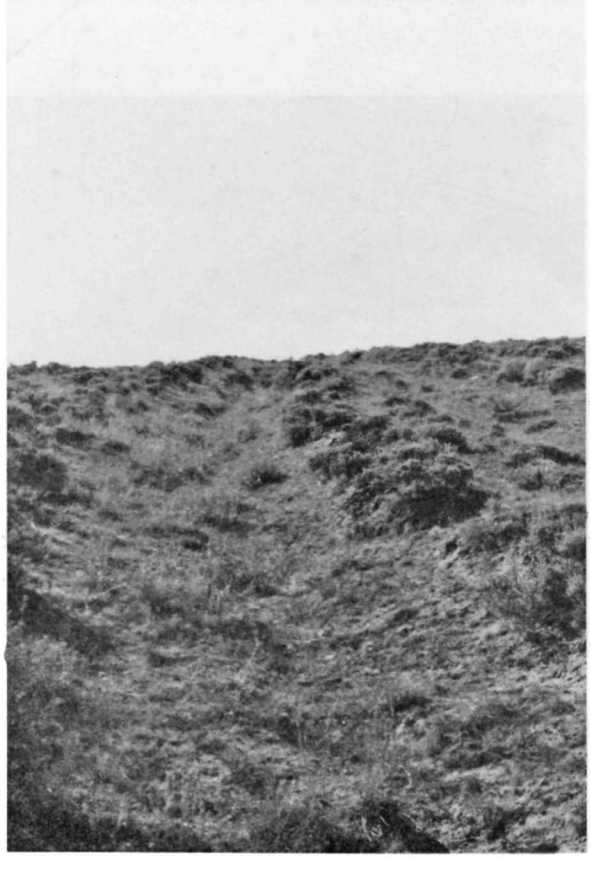


The ranch buildings at Willow Creek, seen looking west from the Oregon Trail Road, are now abandoned.

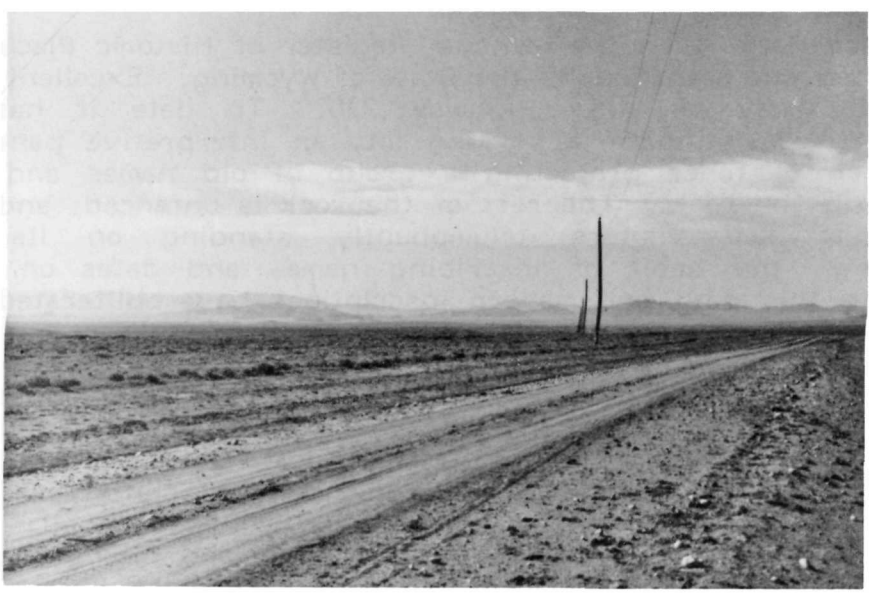
The old springhouse at Willow Springs stands on one of the several spots where water can be seen bubbling out of the ground.



Distinct Oregon Trail ruts may still be seen climbing Prospect Hill.



From the summit of Prospect Hill, the Oregon Trail ruts can be followed back toward Willow Spring to the east.



The Sweetwater Mountains are seen from the Oregon Trail Road as it crosses Prospect Hill.

INDEPENDENCE ROCK

Independence Rock, 23 southwest of Willow Springs (Sec 9, T29N, R86W, Independence Rock map sheet #147, Natrona County), is the most noted landmark on the Oregon Trail west of Fort Laramie. It is an outcrop of granite rock of oval shape, 1,900 feet long and 700 feet wide, and rising 128 feet above the range. From a distance, it resembles a massive turtle. The rock derived its name from a party of fur trappers who camped there and celebrated Independence Day in their own style on July 4, 1824.

Due to its convenient location beside the Oregon Trail, and its smooth inviting sides, Independence Rock became one of the great bulletin boards of the Oregon Trail. It was a place to look for word of friends ahead or leave word for those coming on behind. Beyond these practical uses, it satisfied the human need to be known and thousands of emigrants carved or painted their names on the rock. An 1849 emigrant estimated that several thousand names were already inscribed on the rock when he passed, and Richard Burton, the British explorer and traveler, guessed that 40,000 to 50,000 names could be seen in 1860. An 1847 emigrant party went to the extreme of hauling a cannon to the top of the rock on the 4th of July and firing it in celebration. J.W. Nesmith, who spent three days camped at the rock in 1843, wrote of several emigrants who left their names to posterity: ". . . had the pleasure of waiting on five or six young ladies to pay a visit to Independence Rock. I had the satisfaction of putting the names of Miss Mary Zachary and Miss Jane Mills on the southeast point of the rocks, near the road, on a high point. Facing the road, in all the splendor of gun powder, tar and buffalo grease, may be seen the name of J.W. Nesmith, from Maine, with an anchor."

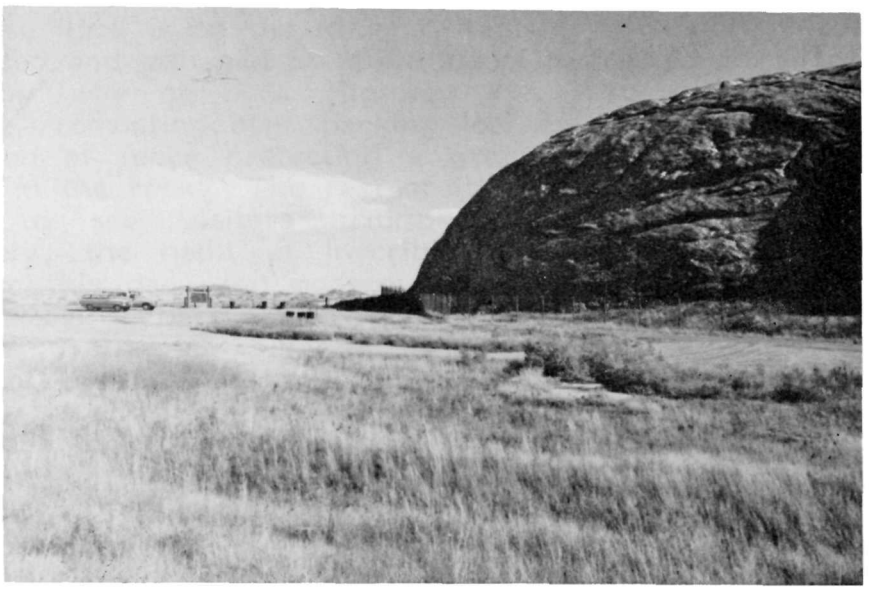
Independence Rock is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is now protected and managed by the State of Wyoming. Excellent access is provided by way of U.S. Highway 220. To date it has minimal development, consisting of a parking lot, an interpretive panel, and a short section of fence protecting a group of old names and memorial tablets set in the rock. The rest of the rock is unfenced, and it is not uncommon to see visitors triumphantly standing on its summit. Unfortunately, the habit of inscribing names and dates on the rock continues to this day, and modern inscriptions have obliterated many of the older names. Others have been lost to weathering.

The State of Wyoming has a recently completed master plan for further development of this significant site. The plan calls for upgrading Independence Rock as a key state historical site, while keeping all developments unobtrusive, with a minimum of facilities. These will include better protection measures for the rock itself, improved interpretation of the rock and its significance, and hiking trails in the vicinity. The plan will be implemented slowly and carefully in deference to nearby ranching interests. The State of Wyoming is commended for its past efforts to protect Independence Rock, and is encouraged to carry out its plans to upgrade it into a major historical site.

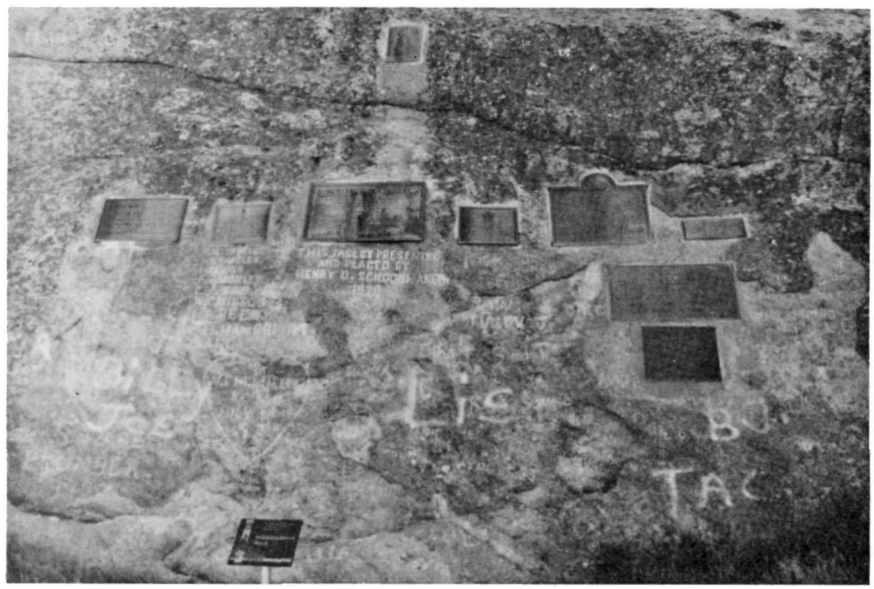
Independence Rock is recommended as the eastern terminus for the proposed South Pass Segment (see below).

Independence Rock has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

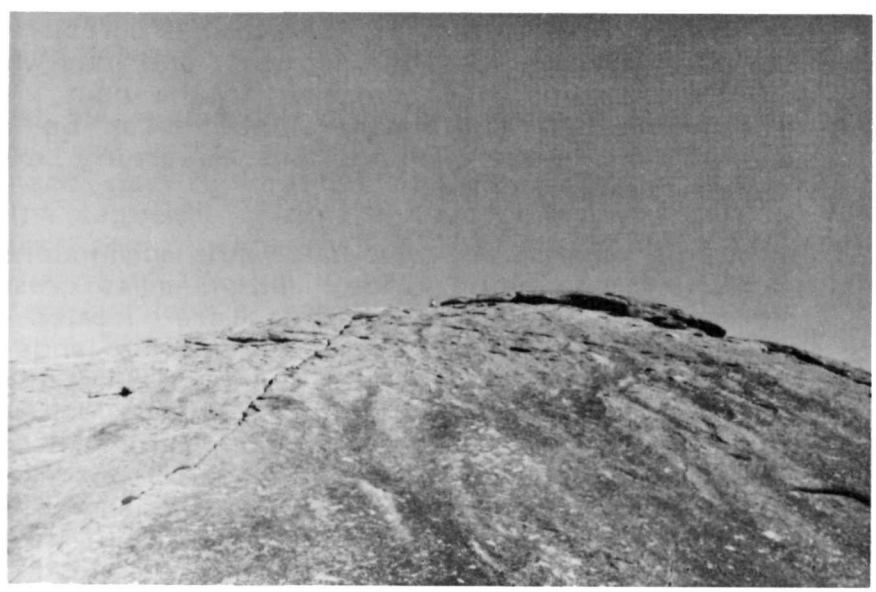
Independence Rock, east of U.S. Highway 220, is seen from the entrance to the site.



The parking area, interpretive sign, and fence which protects portions of Independence Rock from vandalism are seen in this photo, looking north from below the rock.



Numerous memorial tablets have been set into the western face of the rock by civic groups over the past 50 years.



A curious and triumphant visitor (center of photo) stands on the peak of the rock.

SOUTH PASS SEGMENT

The first cross-country segment of the Oregon Trail recommended in this report is also one of the very best stretches of the Oregon Trail left in any of the six states through which the trail passes. The South Pass Segment, which extends from Independence Rock to just west of Parting-of-the-Ways, contains 125 miles of the most unspoiled terrain over which the Oregon Trail passes. Outstanding scenic values are present all along this segment, from the beautiful Sweetwater River valley to the high, wind-swept and magnificent vistas of South Pass, with miles of unbroken Wyoming range lands in between. Most important, the Oregon Trail is virtually untouched by development along this segment. For the great majority of the 125 miles, the trail winds across the Wyoming ranges and mountains, a clearly defined two-track trail which appears much as it did when the wagons rolled across. Portions of the trail are used intermittently today as range roads by BLM officials and private ranchers, but such use along this segment has constituted more of an unofficial trail maintenance program than a potential threat to the trail.

This segment would start at Independence Rock (Sec 9, T29N, R86W, Independence Rock map sheet #147, Natrona County), where the State of Wyoming already has plans to increase its public use facilities. The segment then follows the Sweetwater River near Devil's Gate, past Split Rock, through the Three Crossings area and the Ice Slough, over Rocky Ridge, down across the Sweetwater River at Burnt Ranch, up and over South Pass and Pacific Springs, and across the Dry Sandy to Parting-of-the-Ways, where it would end about seven miles northeast of Farson (Sec 27, T26N, R105W, Eden Reservoir East map sheet #168, Sweetwater County). The trail presently crosses the Sweetwater River seven times within this segment (none of the crossings are bridged), and crosses Wyoming highways in three places. The trail is so clearly defined that the well-prepared hiker can cross this segment, and four-wheel drive vehicles can follow it from one river crossing to the next. However, much remains to be done before the general public can be invited to participate in one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences available on the Oregon Trail.

Seventy-two miles of this segment are on public lands administered by the BLM, 10 miles cross Wyoming State lands, and 43 miles cross private property. The majority of private lands are located between Independence Rock and Ice Slough. Much of the private lands comprise ranches along the Sweetwater River. With very few exceptions, the portions of the trail which cross private lands are already well defined as two-track trails. Public access across private ranch lands will have to be negotiated. The trail passes close by ranch houses, but most of the private lands are uninhabitated and used for livestock purposes. Another major private holding is the Western Nuclear Company's uranium mill at Three Crossings.

The Wyoming State Office of the BLM should have the lead responsibility for this segment. That office should seek to obtain access agreements with the State of Wyoming and the private landowners, and should provide the necessary public use facilities. The BLM has already marked

the Oregon Trail where it crosses public lands in Wyoming with sturdy concrete posts, and it is recommended that it negotiate for permission and provide and erect markers for the trail as it crosses private and state-owned lands throughout this segment. The segment should follow the exact line of the Oregon Trail except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement.

The State of Wyoming should provide the necessary information facilities at Independence Rock, the eastern trailhead for the segment. The BLM should develop a western terminus for the segment at an appropriate point west of Parting-of-the-Ways, possibly in the vicinity of the Little Sandy. The western terminus should coincide with end of the Dry Sandy segment of the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail. Intermediate trailhead facilities may also be necessary, since few users will cross the entire segment at one time. The BLM should develop some of the historic sites included in this segment, such as Split Rock, Ice Slough and South Pass, for dual use as interpretive sites and intermediate trailheads. Other trail facilities, such as water points and rest stops, should be planned and provided by the BLM as the needs become evident.

These recommendations are made with no clear idea of potential trail usage, although past experience indicates that this segment of the Oregon Trail is already one of the most widely used stretches of the trail between Independence, Missouri, and Oregon City, Oregon. The Lander Resource Area of the Wyoming BLM, which administers a portion of this segment between Split Rock and Burnt Ranch, received requests for 10 public use permits by May of 1980 for that summer season. Those requests ranged from simple groups of hikers to organized, commercial outfitters who specialize in guiding wagon train excursions across Wyoming. An increase in such requests can be expected as the Oregon Trail becomes more widely publicized. Trail users are looking for opportunities to experience the trail the way early pioneers did, and the South Pass segment offers a unique setting for such trail re-enactment.

The greatest single threat to this beautiful and almost pristine segment of the Oregon Trail is the rapidly expanding energy industry of Wyoming. Coal, oil, and gas explorations and developments jeopardize the entire length of the segment, as do the support facilities such as access roads, electric lines, and pipelines. The Wyoming BLM, through the land use planning process of its District and Resource Area offices, has begun to protect extant portions of the trail in recent years through a combination of withdrawals from mineral entry and restrictions on surface occupancy and visual intrusions in the vicinity of the trail. The BLM should continue to pursue these efforts to preserve the trail. Significant stretches of Oregon Trail ruts should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The use of vehicles at present is not a threat to the trail generally, although it would only take a few unthinking drivers to tear up portions of the trail. The BLM should not ban all vehicular usage, as this would deny a portion of potential users of the chance to experience the segment. In addition, some vehicular use of the trail appears desirable to maintain it as a definable two-track trail by preventing its overgrowth by vegetation. The BLM should carefully

monitor the walking, horseback, wagon and vehicular use of this segment of the Oregon Trail, and adopt the provisions necessary to best protect the trail, while still making it available to the most potential users.

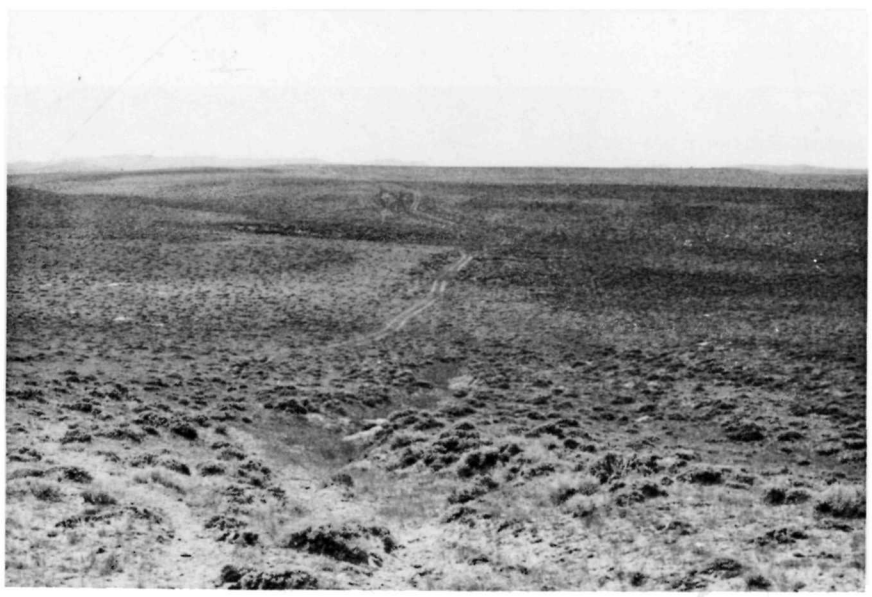
The above recommendations are based upon the eventual establishment of all 125 miles of this segment. It may take some years for the necessary studies, funding requests, and negotiations with the state and private landowners to bear fruit. In the meantime, until the entire segment can become a reality, the BLM should initially designate those portions of this segment which are public lands as available for public use.

South Pass Segment includes five segments totalling 46 miles which have been selected as cross-country segments for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail. Wherever possible, the BLM should coordinate the marking, interpretation, protection, and development of the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails.

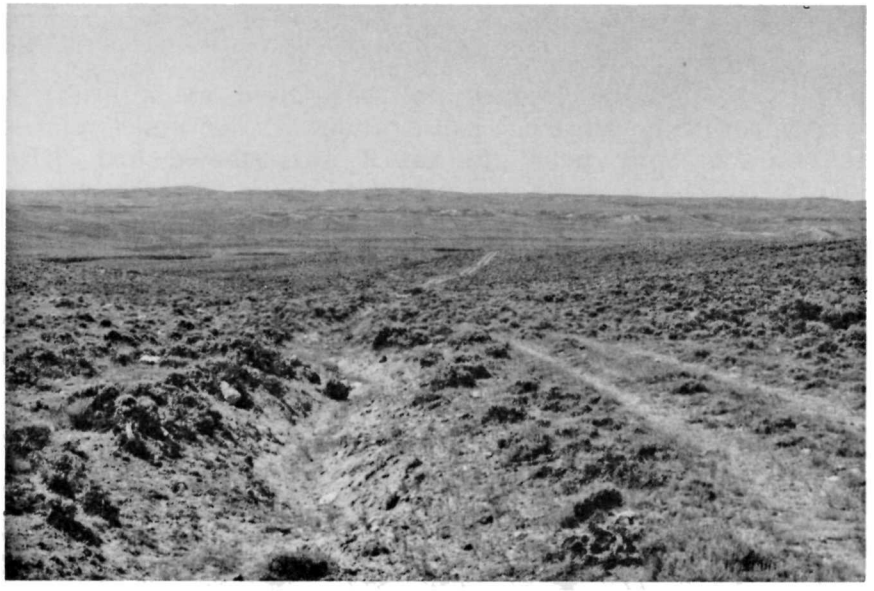
Faint trail ruts cross the Bernard Sun Ranch, west of Devil's Gate.

Oregon Trail ruts are cut in shallow rock on private land west of Split Rock.

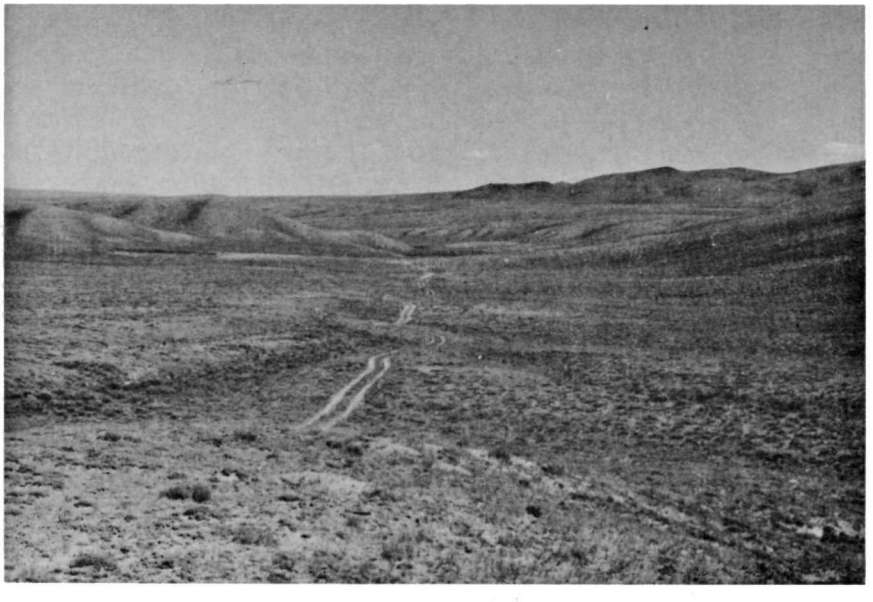
Oregon Trail ruts cross BLM land at a point 12 miles west of Ice Spring.



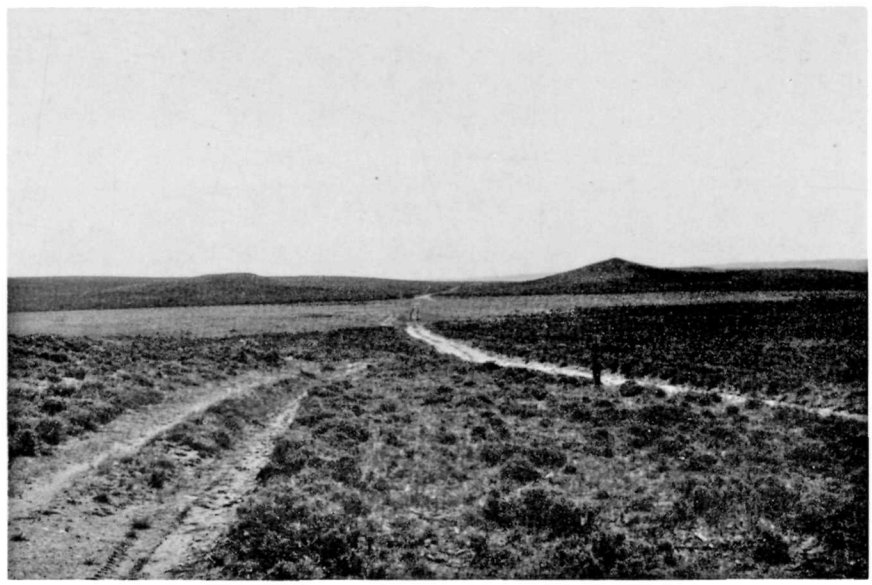
These Oregon Trail ruts are on private land, heading west towards the sixth crossing of the Sweetwater River. The eroded cut in the foreground is the Oregon Trail, which then follows the two-track trail out of the photo in the background.



Oregon Trail ruts cross BLM land three miles east of Rocky Ridge. The eroded cut on the left is the original trail, which is now closely followed by the range road to the right.



The Oregon Trail appears as a two-track trail in this photo, looking east from Rocky Ridge.



Long stretches of the Oregon Trail are visible throughout the South Pass Segment, as seen in this photo, looking east toward the Twin Buttes from just east of South Pass.

Looking west from Parting-of-the-Ways, two distinct routes of the trail are visible. The primary route of the Oregon Trail is on the left, with the Sublette Cutoff on the right.

DEVIL'S GATE

Devil's Gate, five miles southwest of Independence Rock, is one of the most spectacular landmarks along the Oregon Trail. The trail had converged with the Sweetwater River at Independence Rock and was to follow it for the next 90 miles. At Devil's Gate, a narrow cleft about 370 feet deep, 1,500 feet long and only 50 feet wide in places, the Sweetwater River had sliced through a ridge called the Sweetwater Rocks. It was a forbidding place, and violent when the water was high, so a satanic name seemed in order. The Oregon Trail left the Sweetwater River long enough to avoid Devil's Gate by way of another cut through the Sweetwater Rocks about a quarter mile south. The deep cleft of Devil's Gate first became visible from about 15 miles east.

In addition to being a notable landmark and a natural curiosity, Devil's Gate offered a recreational break to some emigrants. An 1843 traveler recorded that after dinner he "attempted the passage of Hell Gate, on a bet with Dr. Tilghman, and after an hour's labor was compelled to return on account of the fright of my mule, but the old hunters who came in far enough to look on acknowledged that the effort was a gallant one." Another emigrant, in 1849, wrote that "Some of the boys clambered up the rocks on the N. side of the Gate, and reached some cavernous places, where they fired pistols, and threw down rocks, pleased with the reverberation, which was great." Such entertainment, however, had a way of suddenly turning into tragedy, as when an 18-year-old girl, while climbing to the top of the Gate, fell to her death in the 1860s. Some emigrants inscribed their names on the side of the cliffs around Devil's Gate, but few of those names have survived.

Although the natural feature itself is the most significant factor at this site, Devil's Gate had a long and colorful history during the western migration period. The BLM estimates that there are over 20 gravesites in the immediate vicinity of Devil's Gate, although only one, that of T.P. Baker, who died in 1864, is now marked and identified. Two trading posts and a stage station were located at Devil's Gate in the 1850s, and Martin's Cove, two miles to the west, was the site of the great Mormon disaster in 1856, when a group of handcart emigrants were trapped by early snows, leading to the death of 145. The Sun Ranch, located just west of Devil's Gate along the Sweetwater River, is one of the first open range ranches in Wyoming. The original ranch house, built in 1872, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

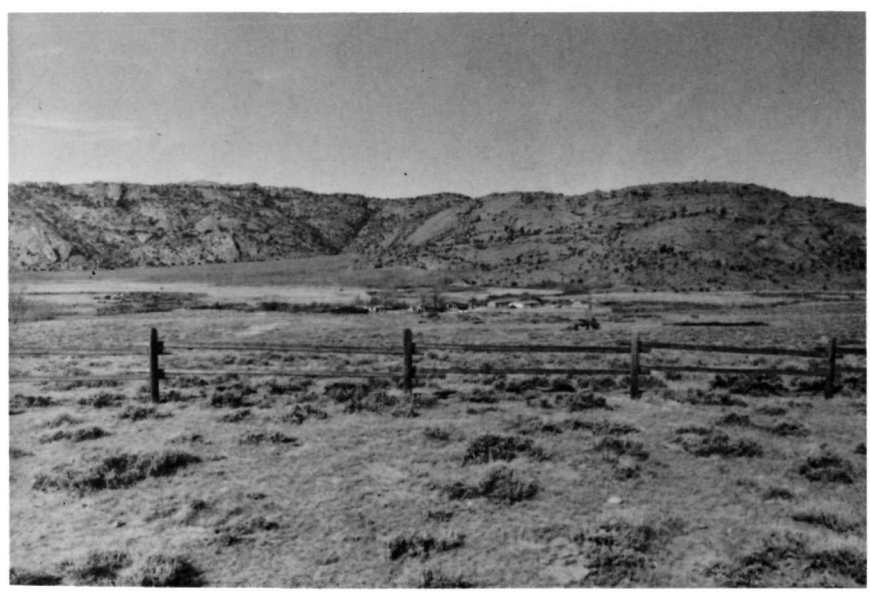
Ownership of this area is mixed. The actual site of Devil's Gate, where the Sweetwater River flows through the rocks (Sec 35, T29N, R87W, Independence Rock map sheet #147, Natrona County), is on public lands administered by the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM. The gap to the south, where the Oregon Trail passed through the rocks (Sec 36), is on Wyoming State school land (as is the T.P. Baker grave). The lands immediately west of Devil's Gate (Sec 35) where the old trading posts and stage station were located, are divided between the Sun Ranch and the BLM. The Oregon Trail, as it passes through the area, crosses state, private, and BLM lands.

The BLM, as part of its Bicentennial program, has created an excellent interpretive wayside near Devil's Gate (Sec 35). This wayside is situated about one mile west of the Gate and south of the Sweetwater River, on a high piece of land offering an excellent view in all directions. Access is via U.S. Highway 220. The site consists of a large parking lot, interpretive panels, and a self-guiding trail leading to further historical panels. The Oregon Trail, the Sweetwater River, Devil's Gate, Martin's Cove and the Sun Ranch are all well interpreted. This site can hardly be improved upon, and exemplifies the interpetive skills of the BLM at their best.

It would be ideal, however, if the BLM and the State of Wyoming could work with the Sun Ranch to provide more opportunities in the area. Specifically, the T.P. Baker grave, which is located beside old highway 220 (which is now a private access road to the Sun Ranch), should be marked and interpreted for those who wished to view it. Several old monuments to the Oregon Trail stand along the old highway, in the midst of the ranch headquarters, and several short stretches of good Oregon Trail ruts can be seen farther west along the old highway. Access to these latter points, however, has a relatively low priority, and negotiations by the state and the BLM with the Sun Ranch should primarily address the implementation of the proposed South Pass segment, as described above.

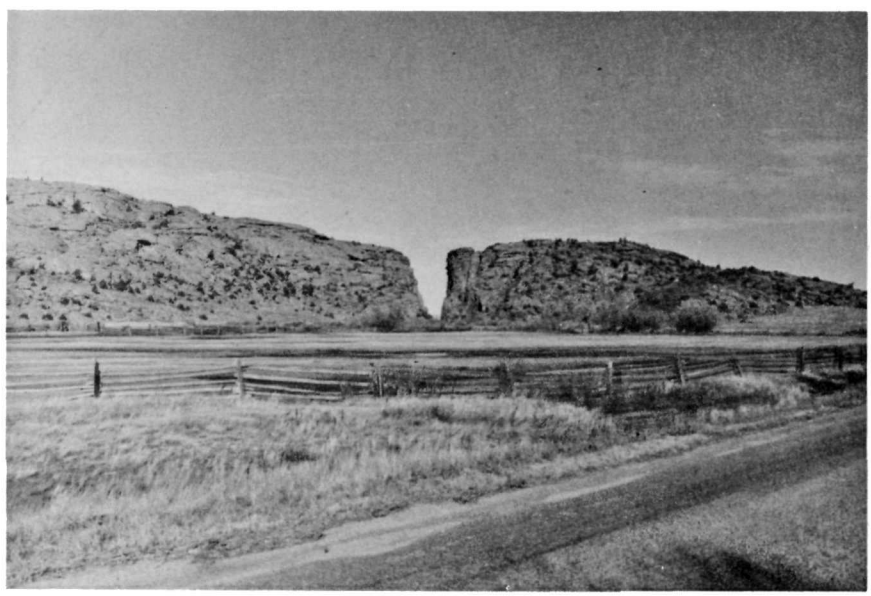
Devil's Gate has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

A half-mile interpretive trail leads down and around from the parking lot, at the BLM Devil's Gate interpretive site.



The Sun Ranch is in the midst of the lush Sweetwater Valley, as seen looking north from the BLM interpretive site. The Oregon Trail ran through the middle of the ranch.

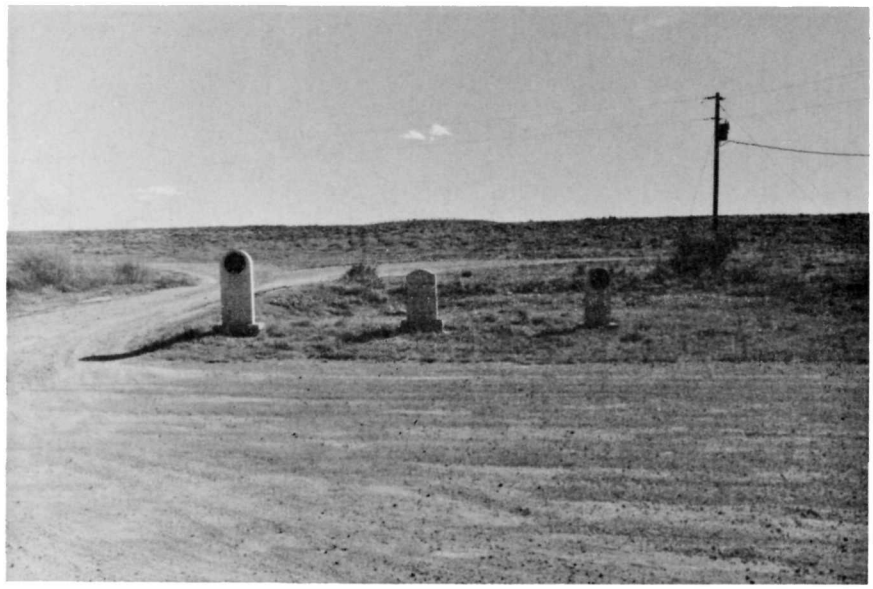
A partial view of Devil's Gate (to the northeast) is available to visitors at the BLM interpretive site.



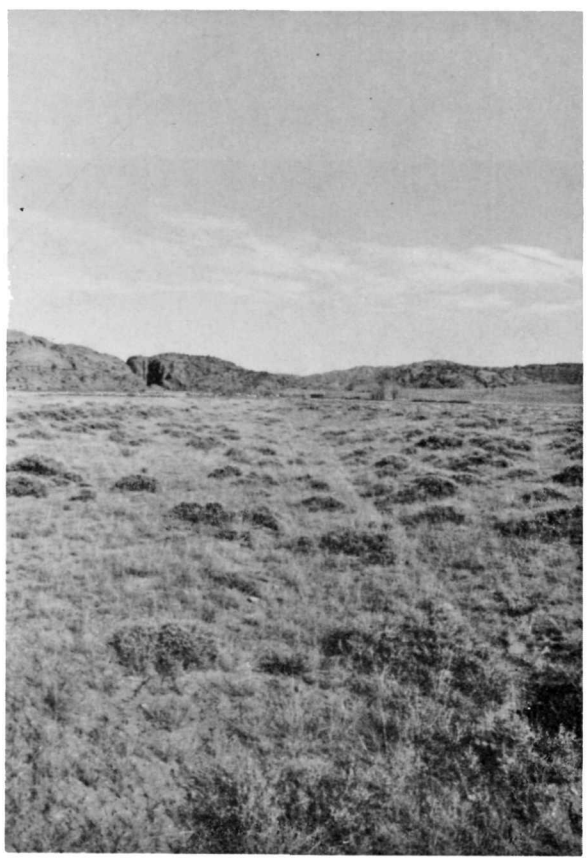
A fuller view of Devil's Gate (to the east) is available from the Sun Ranch below the interpretive site.

Old highway 220, now a private ranch access road, is built directly on top of the Oregon Trail. This view looks west along the highway as it passes through the Sweetwater Rocks approximately one-quarter mile south of Devil's Gate.

The T.P. Baker grave is located along old highway 220. The gravesite is located near the ridge shown in the photo above.



Three old monuments to the Oregon Trail are located on Sun Ranch property along old highway 220 west of Devil's Gate.



Shallow Oregon Trail ruts may be seen beside old highway 220, one-half mile west of the Sun Ranch headquarters. This photo looks east, back toward the ranch and Devil's Gate.

SPLIT ROCK

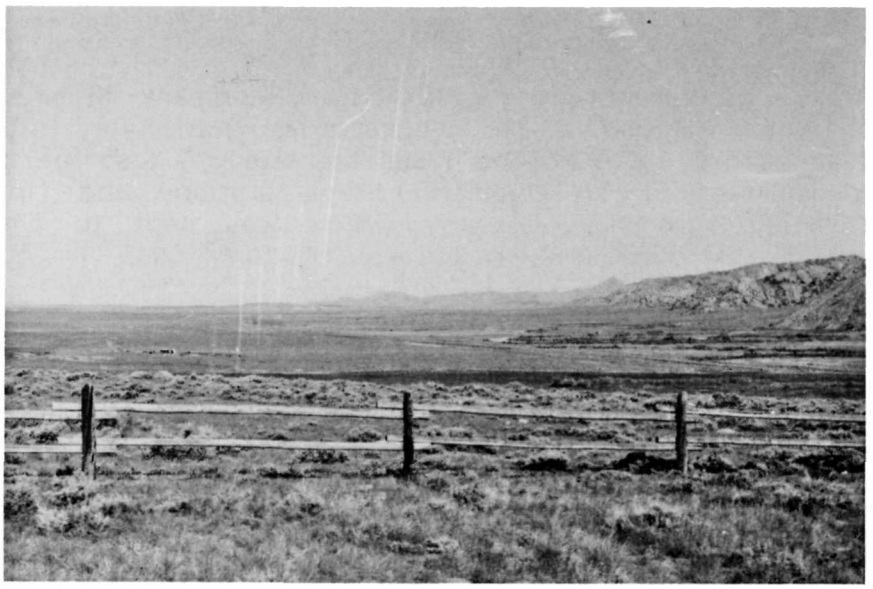
Split Rock was a prominent and highly visible landmark 18 miles west of Devil's Gate which served as a geographical guide for Indians, fur traders and emigrants. During the 1860s the site was also the location of a Pony Express station, an Overland Stage station, and (in 1862) a garrison of the Sixth Ohio Cavalry which was sent to protect the stagecoaches, the telegraph line, and the emigrants.

The BLM now maintains a small interpretive site two miles southwest of Split Rock (Sec 25, T29N, R90W, Split Rock map sheet #150, Fremont County). The interpretive site, which was a BLM Bicentennial project, has excellent access from U.S. Highway 287, and is well equipped with parking, picnic tables, restrooms, and a good unmanned interpretive display consisting of five panels. The BLM site overlooks the Sweetwater River to the north and Split Rock to the northeast, providing excellent views of the River, the Rattlesnake Range, and the former location of the Stage and Pony Express station. There are no physical remains at the station site, which is located in what is now a hay meadow.

Recommendations concerning this site are minor. The major immediate concern is to provide protection for the site, and the Wyoming BLM has recognized this need by applying for a 40-acre mineral withdrawal. The Washington office of the BLM has not yet acted upon this request, and is urged to do so immediately. Oregon Trail interpretation at the site is overshadowed by the Pony Express story, and some of the outdoor interpretive panels have faded from sunlight or have been damaged by vandalism. The BLM should provide additional Oregon Trail interpretation when the displays are renovated. The site is managed and maintained by the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM.

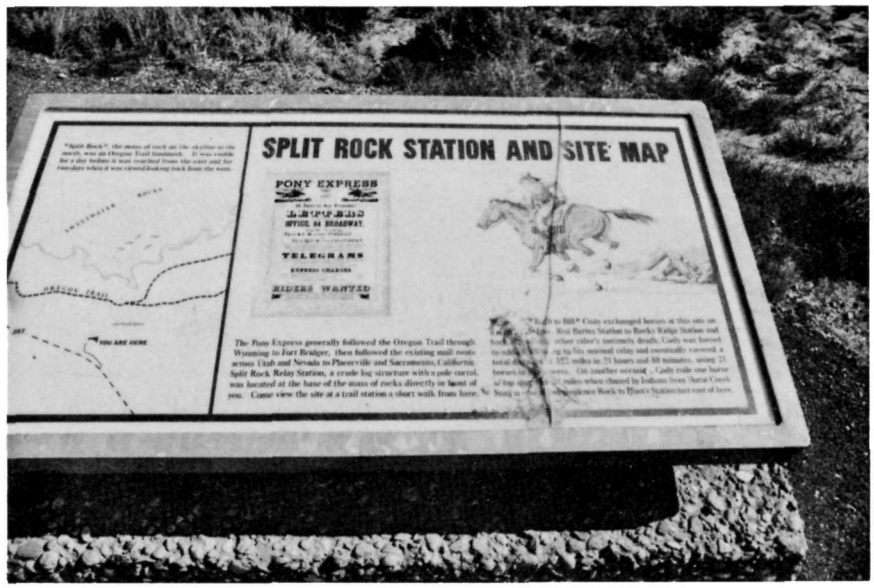
There are two points of interest adjacent to the BLM Split Rock interpretive site. The State of Wyoming has erected a Split Rock monument, located two and one-half miles northwest of the BLM site, along U.S. Highway 287. Visitors to the BLM site should be directed to this marker, since Split Rock is more clearly visible from this location than from the BLM site. In the same vicinity, located on private land, are some very good Oregon Trail ruts, cut through low-lying rock in the Sweetwater Basin. As a long-range recommendation, the BLM should investigate opportunities to acquire this land through exchange or other means, in order to protect and interpret these ruts.

Split Rock has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



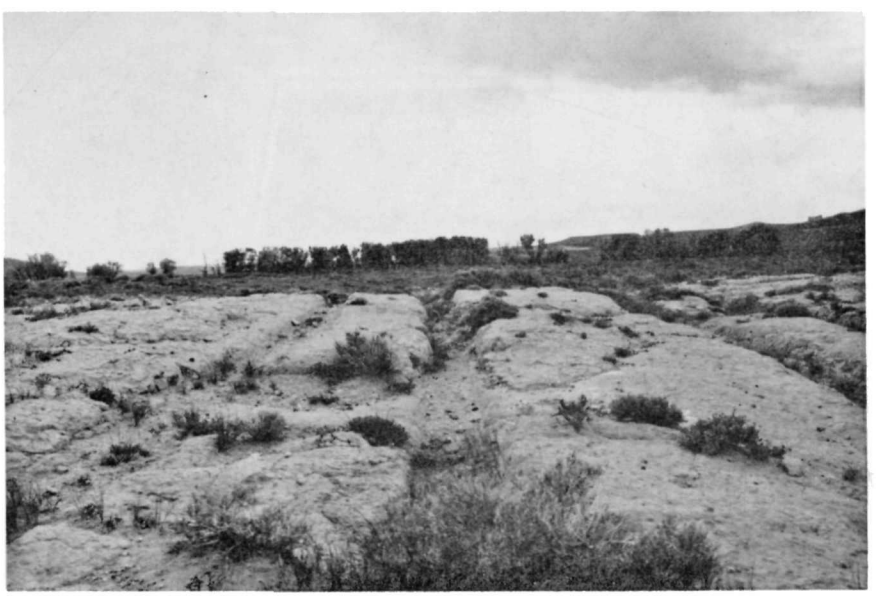
Split Rock may be seen from the BLM Devil's Gate interpretive site, located 15 miles to the east.

The Split Rock interpretive site has a parking area, restrooms on the left, and picnic grounds in the foreground and behind the photographer. A short interpretive trail, which leaves from the far corner of the parking lot, brings visitors to the interpretive panels.



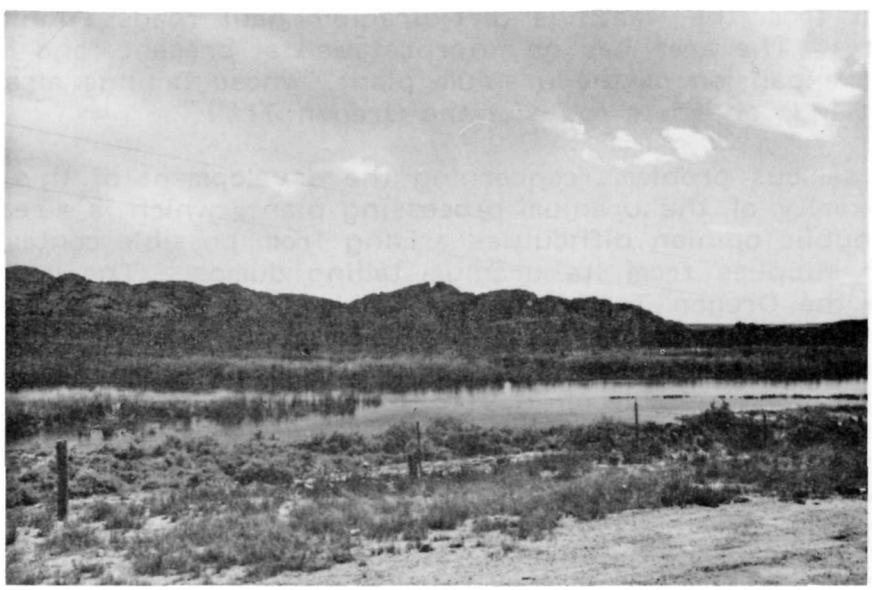
Two of the interpretive panels at Split Rock show problems caused by vandalism and the fading of photographs exposed to direct sunlight.

The Sweetwater River and Rattlesnake Range may be seen by looking northeast from Split Rock interpretive site. Split Rock itself is located in the center of the photo, but unfortunately the actual split in the rock is not visible from the interpretive site. Split Rock Pony Express and Stage Station was located in the hay meadow near the river, but there are presently no markers to pinpoint its site.



Oregon Trail ruts are cut in shallow rock on private land west of Split Rock.

The State of Wyoming's Split Rock marker is located two and one-half miles northwest of the BLM site, along U.S. Highway 287.



Split Rock may be as seen from the above marker, looking back to the east. The cleft of the rock is much more visible here than at the BLM site.

THREE CROSSINGS

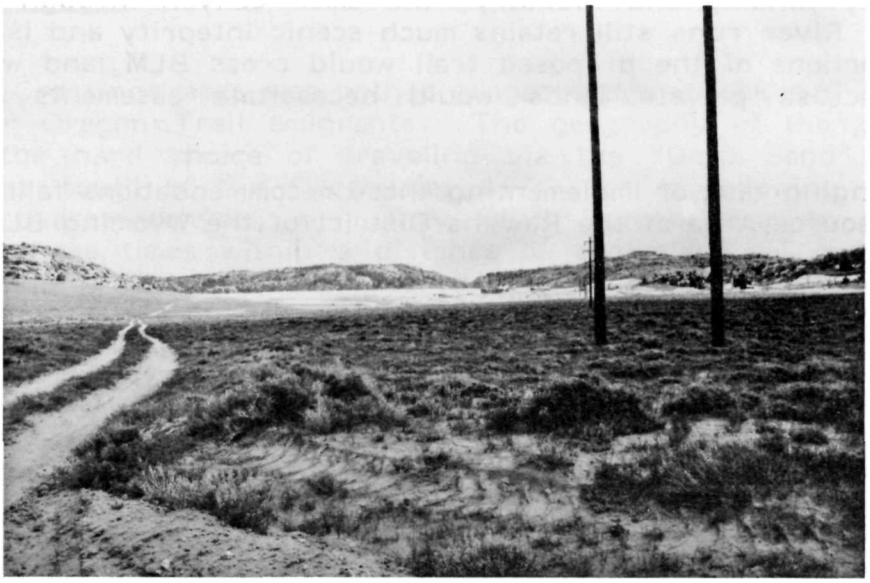
The Three Crossings area was both a geographic landmark and a difficult obstacle for Oregon Trail emigrants. The geography of the area gave emigrants the hard choice of traveling via the "Deep Sand" alternate route to the south of the Sweetwater River, or of following the river through a narrow canyon, a journey which forced them to cross the Sweetwater three times within a distance of two miles. The long hard pull across the deep sand route was so exhausting for their animals that most emigrants chose the latter route. In later years, a Pony Express and Overland Stage station was maintained at Three Crossings, and a company of the 11th Ohio Calvalry was garrisoned there during the Civil War years to protect the station and travelers from the Indians. There are no physical remains of these activities on the ground today, with the exception of some emigrant names and dates painted on the rocks and two isolated burial sites. The names and burial sites are unmarked and may be found only through the assistance of local experts. The Oregon Trail through this area has been obliterated by hay farming on the eastern side and industrial development on the west.

The Sweetwater River frontage is privately owned through the Three Crossings area, which is located 13 miles west of Split Rock (Sections 4, 5 & 6, T29N, R91W, and Sections 31, 32 & 33, T30N, R91W, Black Rock Gap and Stampede Meadows map sheets #152 and #153, Fremont County), although some BLM and Wyoming state lands are adjacent to riverfront land. The majority of the private land in the area is owned by the Western Nuclear Company, which operates uranium mines in the vicinity and an uranium processing plant two miles west of Three Crossings. There is no public access to the area at present, although vehicles can approach it from the west via dirt uranium haul roads running out of Jeffrey City. The area has no interpretation at present, and is crowded by further expansion of the uranium plant, whose tailings already block the "Deep Sand" alternate route of the Oregon Trail.

There are serious problems concerning the development of this site, due to the proximity of the uranium processing plant, which is already facing legal and public opinion difficulties arising from possible contamination of local water supplies from its uranium tailing dumps. The importance of the site to the Oregon Trail, however, makes the effort to resolve those problems worthwhile. The ideal recommendation, which could only be reached through negotiations with Western Nuclear, would call for public access to the western side of the Three Crossings area via the company's dirt road network. This would bring the visitor down to the Sweetwater River near the last of the three crossings. At this point (Sec 31, T30N, R91W) it would be possible for the BLM to establish a small unmanned interpretive site, pointing out the geographic and historical qualities of the Three Crossings area. Once public access to this point has been provided, the BLM could also develop a two-mile hiking trail along the north bank of the Sweetwater to the eastern side of the Three Crossings area. In this vicinity (Sec 4, T29N, R91W, and Sec 33, T30N, R91W) the BLM could interpret some of the emigrant names painted on the cliffs and one of the burials. Although the surrounding lands have been heavily

impacted by farming and industry, the small canyon through which the Sweetwater River runs still retains much scenic integrity and is relatively intact. Portions of the proposed trail would cross BLM land while other portions across private lands would necessitate easements or access agreements.

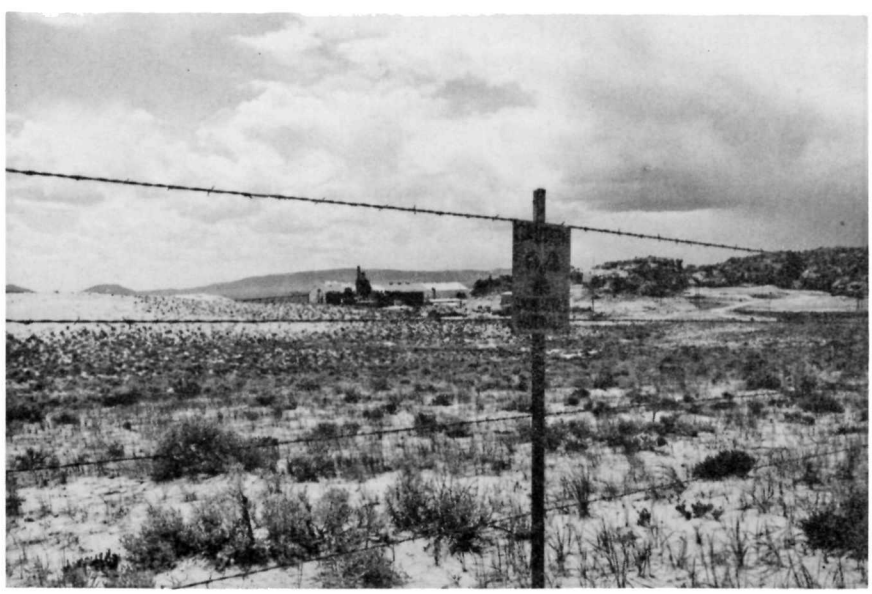
The challenging task of implementing these recommendations falls upon the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM.



The Western Nuclear uranium processing plant and tailings dumps is seen looking east from the company's access road. The dirt track to the left of the photo follows the "Deep Sand" alternate route of the Oregon Trail

Each tire on this truck delivering ore to the uranium plant is approximately six feet in height.

The tailings dump from the uranium plant block the "Deep Sand" route of the Oregon Trail. This photo looks east from the end of the dirt road shown in the top photo, preceeding page.



The uranium plant is to the south of the dump pictured above. The cautionary sign amply portrays the problems associated with development of this site.

The Sweetwater River is pictured, looking east from the west side of the Three Crossings area. The dirt road in the foreground follows the original route of the Oregon Trail, leading towards the approximate location of the last crossing.

The Sweetwater River, again looking east, is seen from a point east of the above photo. The trail through this portion of the canyon has been erased by the Sweetwater River, which has periodically changed its course through the years.

ICE SPRING SLOUGH

Ice Spring, or Ice Slough, in the words of an 1849 emigrant, was "one of the strangest & most singular phenomena in the whole trip," and one which caused comment and admiration from practically every emigrant who kept a diary. The slough formed by the spring was described in 1849 as being almost one mile long and 150 to 300 feet wide. The ice was formed by the freezing of water in winter, and was insulated during the summer by four to six inches of water above the ice, and by rich grassy sod which grew thick enough to bear a man's weight. The emigrants were delighted to find ice by cutting through the sod, and many a wagon train enjoyed an evening of cool refreshment after several long days of hot and dusty travel. The ice, which would last until late summer, now can rarely be found past the spring months due to the lowering of the local water table by irrigation and wells. The site has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

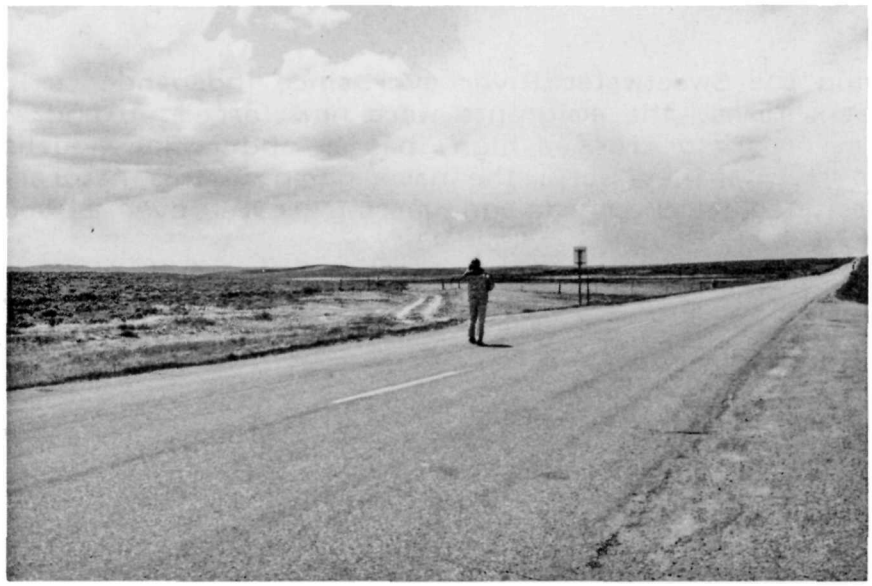
Today the area of land affected by the spring is much smaller, being a quarter of a mile long at best. The spring and slough is located on BLM land (Sec 1, T29N, R94W, Myers Ranch map sheet #155, Fremont County), about 2000 feet southwest of U.S. Highway 287 and 12 miles west of Three Crossings. The site is easily accessible via a two track trail which follows the Oregon Trail, but that trail crosses 40 acres of private land between the highway and the site. The State of Wyoming maintains an interpretive sign at a pull-off from the highway, where the Oregon Trail crosses the road, but there is no on-site interpretaton at the spring. The BLM should utilize the present Wyoming interpretive pull-off as a parking area, develop a short hike along the Oregon Trail to the vicinity of the spring and provide interpretation at a point on the trail overlooking the spring. That short trail would follow the two-track trace of the Oregon Trail, and would provide an excellent opportunity for those visitors who desired a short walk along the trail. From both the parking area and the spring, visitors may view the trail as it crosses Wyoming range lands for several miles in each direction.

About one and one-half miles to the northeast of the Ice Spring, on the opposite (north) side of U.S. 287 (Sec 32, T30N, R93W, Graham Ranch map sheet #154), is the former site of the Ice Slough Stage and Pony Express station, which has often been confused with the site of the spring itself. There are no remnants of the station remaining today, and it is not considered significant enough to the Oregon Trail to warrant any development considerations. The station site is located on BLM land, and, if desired, the BLM could mark it with a simple marker for the benefit of those who are traveling across country along the South Pass Segment.

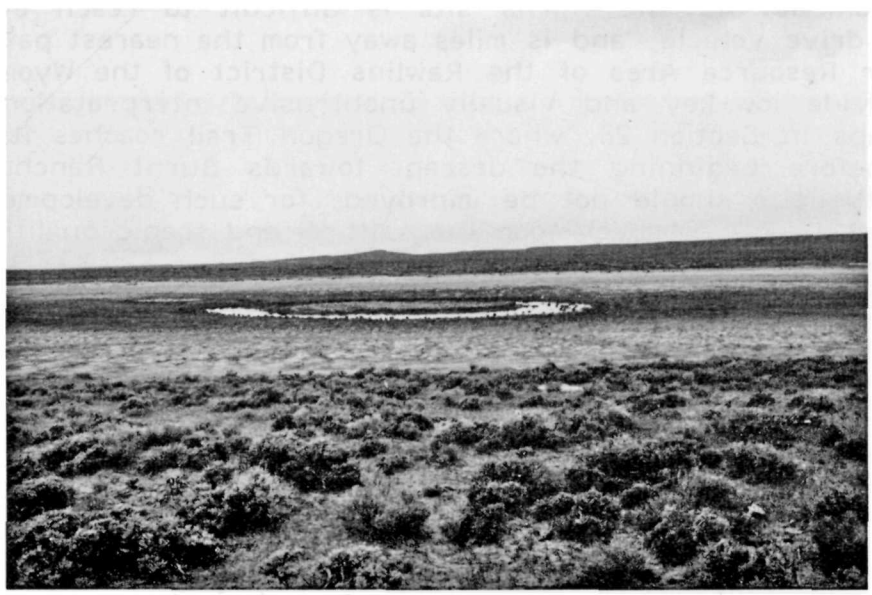
This site is administered by the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM. It has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

The State of Wyoming has an interpretive pull-off on U.S. 287, 2000 feet northeast of Ice Spring.

The interpretive panel at Ice Spring is representative of Wyoming's highway interpretation program.



The two-track trail leaving the highway at the state interpretive site is the Oregon Trail, which leads west toward Ice Spring.



Ice Spring is seen from the Oregon Trail, which runs just south of the slough formed by the spring. The wide streak of land across the middle of the photo is the slough, which varies in width, length and depth according to seasonal precipitation.

ROCKY RIDGE

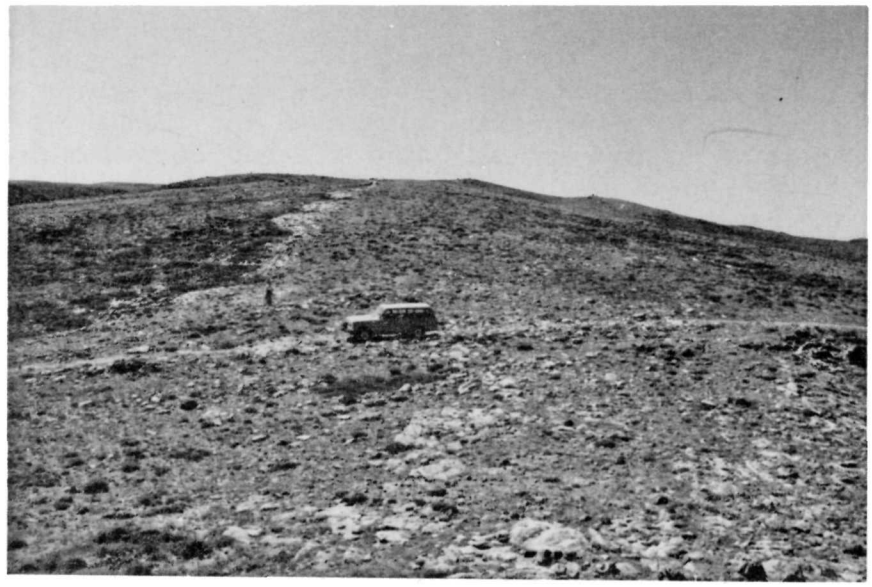
After following the Sweetwater River ever since Independence Rock, and crossing it six times, the emigrants were now forced up and away from the river, in order to cross a high, barren and rocky ridgeline to the north of the river. Inevitably, the name given to this natural obstacle, which necessitated much hard and jarring travel over a rock-strewn landscape, was Rocky Ridge.

There is no specific spot on the ground which can be labeled the Rocky Ridge. The name refers to a geographic area spread over two square miles, where wind and erosion have kept soil from collecting on the ground, and have laid bare a washboard of rock. The summit of this ridge rises 400 to 500 feet above the bed of the Sweetwater river, and is located upon BLM land (Sections 27 and 28, T29N, R97W, Lewiston Lakes map sheet #159, Fremont County), approximately 26 miles west of Ice Spring. Well-defined Oregon Trail ruts still wander over the top of Rocky Ridge, and may be followed on foot, horseback, or four-wheel drive vehicle. Although the summit is in BLM ownership, some scattered parcels of private land are located in the vicinity. The BLM has marked the Oregon Trail where it crosses public lands. The summit of the ridge offers the visitor both a grand wind-swept view of the trail to the east and west, and also a deep appreciation for the countless bumps and bruises suffered by any emigrant who navigated the area in a covered wagon.

Although the BLM has marked the trail through this area, there is no interpretation at the site. The site is difficult to reach even in a four-wheel drive vehicle, and is miles away from the nearest paved road. The Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM should provide low-key and visually unobtrusive interpretation on this site, perhaps in Section 28, where the Oregon Trail reaches its highest elevation before beginning the descent towards Burnt Ranch. Public access to the site should not be improved, for such development would have a great negative impact upon the cultural and scenic qualities of the area. This site should remain one of the special pleasures to reward those traveling across country along the South Pass Segment.

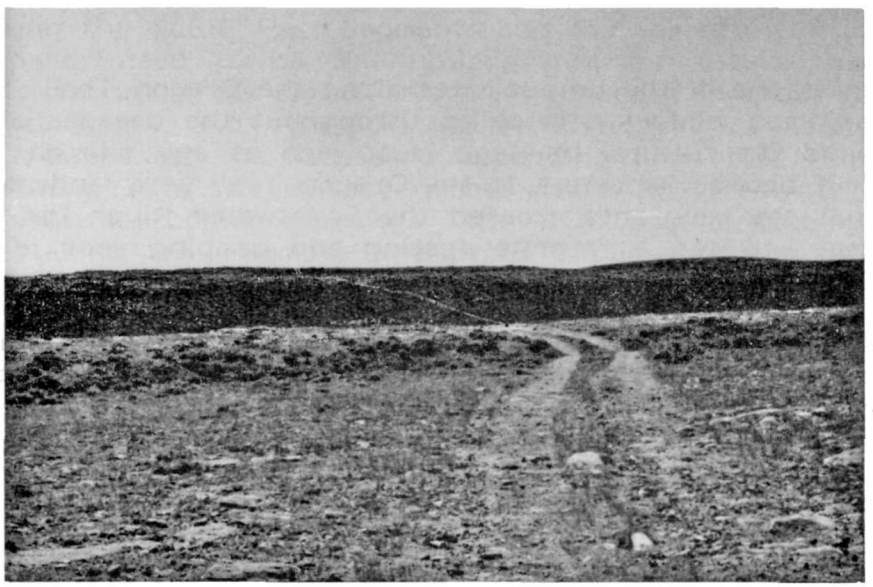
Rocky Ridge, in the background, as seen when approaching from the east. The two tracks of the Oregon Trail are clearly visible throughout this area.

The first, or lower, summit of Rocky Ridge (elevation 7000 feet, in Section 27, T29N, R97W), shows road conditions and the size of the rocks in comparison to a Jeep Cherokee.

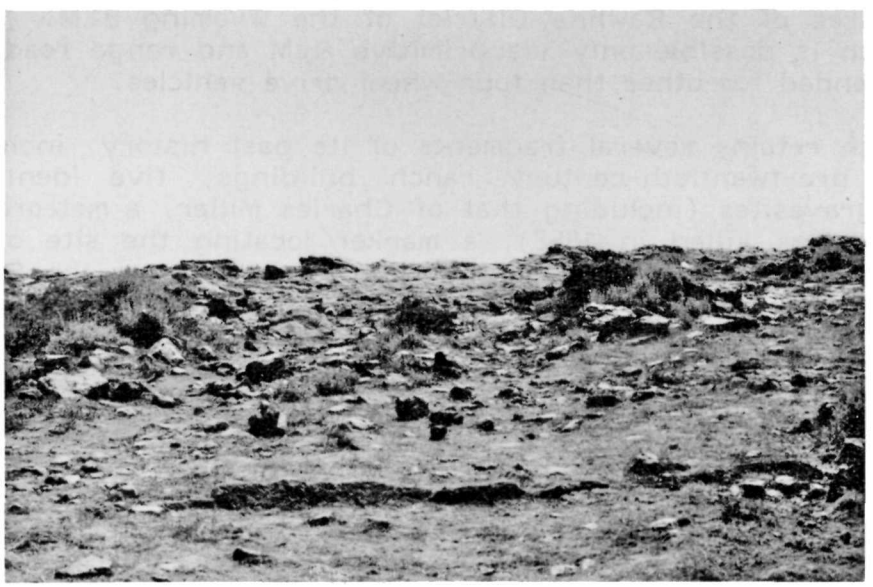


In this photo looking north, perpendicular to the Oregon Trail, at the eastern summit of Rocky Ridge, the rough nature of the landscape is clearly evident.

Looking back to the east from the eastern summit of Rocky Ridge, the clearly defined Oregon Trail is seen as it climbs out of the Sweetwater River valley in the extreme background.



This photo, taken from the same spot as the previous, looks west along the Oregon Trail, towards the second, or western, summit of Rocky Ridge.



A ground-level photo of the western summit of Rocky Ridge (Section 28), shows how it would have appeared to a wagon-bound emigrant. The vehicle shown on the previous page could not negotiate the trail at this point.

BURNT RANCH

Burnt Ranch is one of the unique sites along the Oregon Trail, for it has a long and varied history stretching throughout the decades of western expansion, and its cultural heritage is as rich as any site on the trail. The area first became important to the Oregon Trail as a landmark, for it was here that the emigrants crossed the Sweetwater River for the ninth and last time. It was a favorite resting and camping spot, due to the lush grasses and cool waters which refreshed both man and beast. It was also a burial site for those emigrants who made it no further west, and local experts estimate that several dozen graves may be found in the vicinity. In 1854, the area took on added importance, for Frederick W. Lander chose this point to begin construction of the Lander Road, a major cut-off from the Oregon Trail which eliminated the long loop down to Fort Bridger. A station was later built at the junction of the Oregon Trail and Lander Road which variously served the Pony Express, the telegraph lines, and the stage lines. By 1862, the site had grown into such a key communications and transportation center that a detachment of the 11th Ohio Volunteers was sent out to protect the station and overland travelers from Indian attack. When the soldiers departed in 1868, the Indians promptly burned the station and garrison to the ground, leading to today's name of Burnt Ranch. Subsequently, Burnt Ranch served as the headquarters of a high country Wyoming cattle operation.

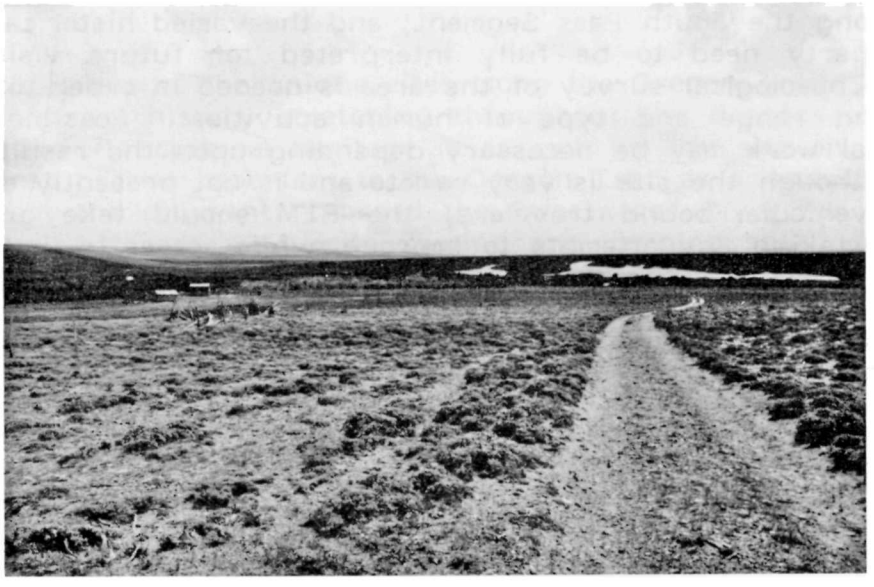
The ranch buildings have now been abandoned, although the lands around Burnt Ranch are privately owned and used for livestock grazing. The site is located 16 miles west of Rocky Ridge (Sec 26, T28N, R100W, Atlantic City map sheet #161, Fremont County), and the Wyoming BLM is presently negotiating to acquire the property. The vast majority of the surrounding territory is public land, administered by the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District of the Wyoming BLM. Access to Burnt Ranch is possible only via primitive BLM and range roads, and is not recommended for other than four-wheel drive vehicles.

Burnt Ranch retains several fragments of its past history, including the abandoned pre-twentieth-century ranch buildings, five identified but unmarked gravesites (including that of Charles Miller, a meteoroligist for Lander who was killed in 1858), a marker locating the site of the old stage and Pony Express station, the lush meadows along the Sweetwater River which attracted Oregon Trail emigrants, and the crossing site of the river itself. The Oregon Trail leading into and out of Burnt Ranch is clearly visible and is marked by the BLM. The Lander Road exiting Burnt Ranch to the northwest is also easily determined. The range and riverfront land at and around Burnt Ranch makes it one of the most scenic and attractive Oregon Trail sites in Wyoming. The site has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The recommendations for Burnt Ranch are extensive, but must wait until the first is carried out. The Wyoming BLM should pursue its efforts to acquire 561 acres which are now privately owned. Once acquired, the gravesites need to be protected and marked; the ranch buildings should

be stabilized, for they would make an excellent back-country shelter for travelers along the South Pass Segment; and the varied historical aspects of the property need to be fully interpreted for future visitors. A thorough archaeological survey of the area is needed in order to pinpoint locations and range and type of human activities. Possible further archaeological work may be necessary depending upon the results of the survey. Although the site is very remote and is not presently accessible to normal vehicular-bound travelers, the BLM should take great care before undertaking any attempts to improve public access to the site, for such development could easily impact the scenic, natural and cultural values now present. The acquisition, protection and careful development of Burnt Ranch is one of the highest priorities for the Oregon Trail within Wyoming.

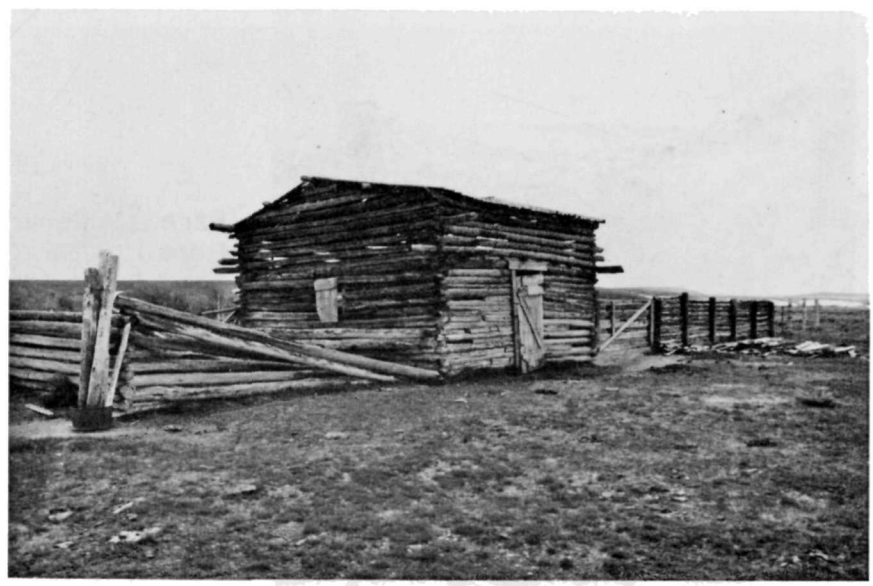
Burnt Ranch has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



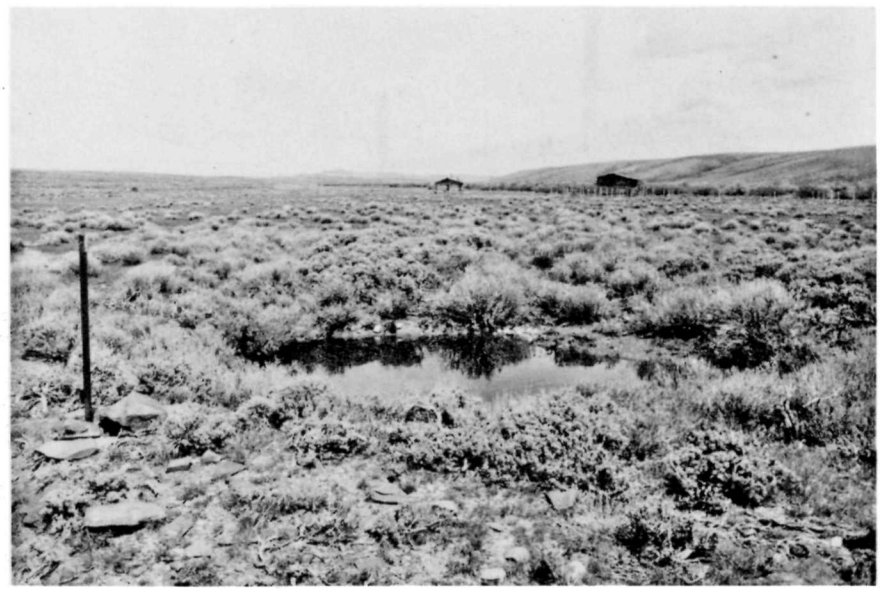
Burnt Ranch is seen from the Oregon Trail, as it turns south toward the Sweetwater River. The ranch buildings are in the left background, the Oregon Trail runs down the right of the photo, and the Sweetwater River runs from left to right in the background, between the low line of vegetation and the snowfields. A small knoll, upon which at least five gravesites have been identified, is to the right of this photo.

Five gravesites, including that of Charles Miller, are located on this small knoll.

The old ranch house of Burnt Ranch is still in relatively good condition. A second building of similar size, with one wall visible behind the ranch house, has no roof and has sadly deteriorated.



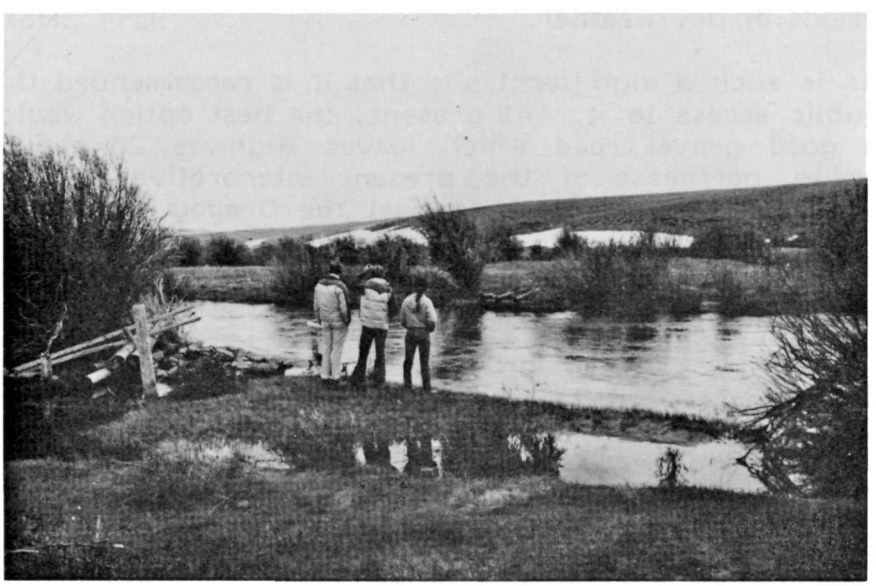
Although still roofed, the old barn at Burnt Ranch is in fragile condition.



The metal stake marks the location of the old Pony Express station, and the sink in the middle of the photo probably marks it foundation. The Burnt Ranch buildings are seen in the background to the north, and the Sweetwater River is behind the photographer.

Ezra Meeker's Burnt Ranch Monument was erected in 1913.

The approach to the Sweetwater River is seen to the south from midway between the Burnt Ranch buildings and the river. The lush meadows along the river front helped make this spot a favorite camping, resting, and grazing site for Oregon Trail emigrants



The Sweetwater River appears in this photo, taken beyond the line of vegetation shown above. Some old bridge abutments remain on either bank of the river, but the old bridge was washed away during flooding in the spring of 1980.

SOUTH PASS

South Pass is perhaps the most important landmark on the entire Oregon Trail. It marked the emigrants arrival at the frontier of Oregon country, the end of the long ascent to the Continental Divide, and the half-way point of the trail, over 900 miles from Independence, Missouri. The discovery of South Pass by fur traders early in the nineteenth century dictated the location of the Oregon Trail, for only via its long and gradual ascent over the Continental Divide was wagon travel possible. South Pass is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark.

As a physical landmark, there is nothing dramatic about South Pass, and many emigrants actually crossed the summit of the Continental Divide and started down the Pacific slope before they realized where they were. South Pass is a wide and flat summit of a long and gradually ascending plateau, with low ridges and hills on both sides, and a wide sage and grass covered saddle between. The actual summit of the pass is now marked by two monuments placed in 1906 and 1913, located on 40 acres of BLM land (Sec 4, T27N, R101W, Pacific Springs map sheet #164, Fremont County), nine miles west of Burnt Ranch. The area surrounding the site is used as high range country, and the BLM has fenced the site to keep cattle from rubbing against and destroying the two old monuments. There is no interpretation at the site, with the exception of a few words inscribed on the old monuments, but the State of Wyoming has a highway interpretive exhibit four and one-half miles to the west, off Wyoming Highway 28 (Sec 10, T27N, R102W). Unfortunately, that exhibit is very brief, and is too far away from South Pass. Public access to South Pass is now possible via dirt and gravel roads, but there are no directional signs, and the roads are passable to normal two-wheel drive vehicles only during periods of dry weather.

South Pass is such a significant site that it is recommended that the BLM provide public access to it. At present, the best option would appear to be via a good gravel road which leaves Highway 28 about four and one-half miles northeast of the present interpretive exhibit (Sec 30, T28N, R101W), and winds south to meet the Oregon Trail at a point less than one mile east of South Pass. No capital improvements would be necessary to make this road passable for normal tourists, although signing would be required to keep visitors from straying off along a maze of range roads.

This proposed access road is on BLM lands, so no access agreements would appear to be necessary. At the point where the access road meets the Oregon Trail (Sec 4, T27N, R101W), a small parking facility should be provided from which visitors would have an easy and pleasant one mile hike to the summit of South Pass, following the clearly defined and marked Oregon Trail. Vehicular access to South Pass itself is not recommended, since the presence of vehicles at the site would detract from its scenic and historic integrity. The BLM should provide extensive on-site interpretation, through the use of low-key and unobtrusive interpretive panels. South Pass is administered by the Big Sandy Resource Area of the Rock Springs District of the Wyoming BLM, and

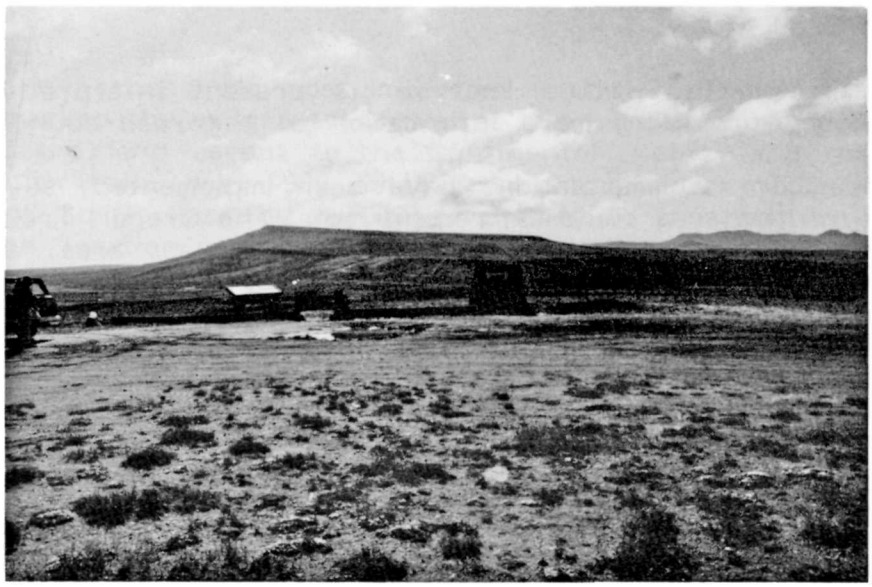
should be considered that District's highest priority for development on the Oregon Trail.

The State of Wyoming should improve its present interpretive site on Highway 28 by providing more information to the road-bound traveler.

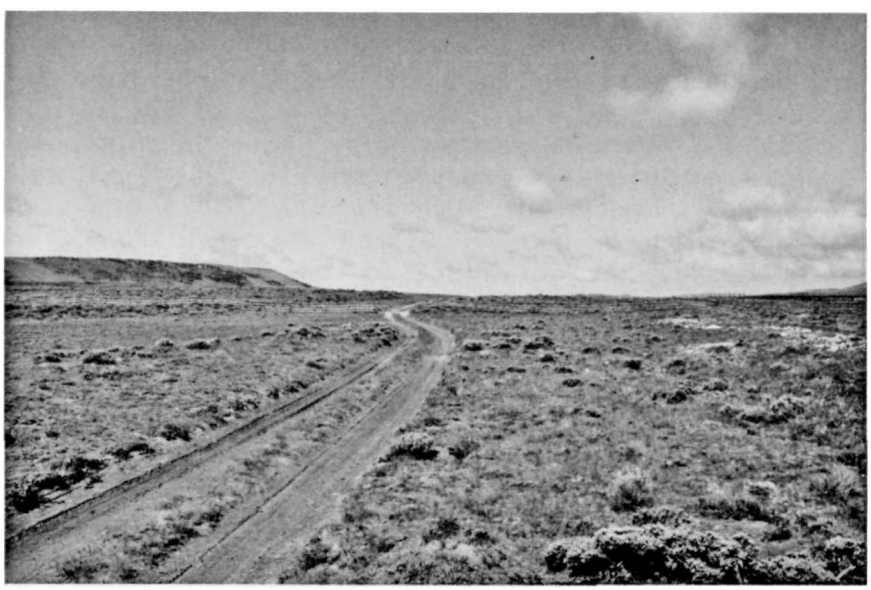
Once these major recommendations have been implemented, several other possibilities of the area could be recognized. The Oregon Trail has been well marked by the BLM throughout the South Pass area, and hikers should be encouraged to explore the trail and the country in both directions from South Pass. Three miles to the east are the Twin Mounds, a well-known geographic feature which marks the eastern gateway to the South Pass area. As the geography of the trail became more certain in the later years of emigration, emigrants knew they were entering the South Pass area when they passed the Twin Mounds. Also visible along the trail between Twin Mounds and South Pass are the Oregon Buttes, a distinctive feature six miles south of the trail. As the name implies, passage of the Oregon Buttes marked the entrance into Oregon Territory. The Oregon Trail between Twin Mounds and South Pass crosses some privately held land, so access agreements would be necessary to allow hikers to follow the trail.

Two miles to the west of South Pass is Pacific Springs (see below), which is located one and one-half miles east of Wyoming's South Pass exhibit on Highway 28. A circular hiking trail could be established, which would lead hikers from the present highway interpretive site through the South Pass and Pacific Springs area and back to the highway. Again, access agreements to permit the crossing of some private lands would be required.

South Pass has been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



The State of Wyoming's South Pass exhibit is located on Wyoming Highway 28, over four miles west of the pass. South Pass is to the left of the photo, but is not clearly visible from this spot.



The entrance to the summit of South Pass is seen looking west along the Oregon Trail toward the 40 acres of land which the BLM has fenced.

Two old monuments stand at the summit of South Pass. The one on the left is in honor of Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding, the first white women to cross the pass in the summer of 1836.

The Oregon Trail descends to the west toward Pacific Springs from the summit of South Pass. The modern railroad crossing the photo from right to left is an intrusion on the otherwise pristine scene.

PACIFIC SPRINGS

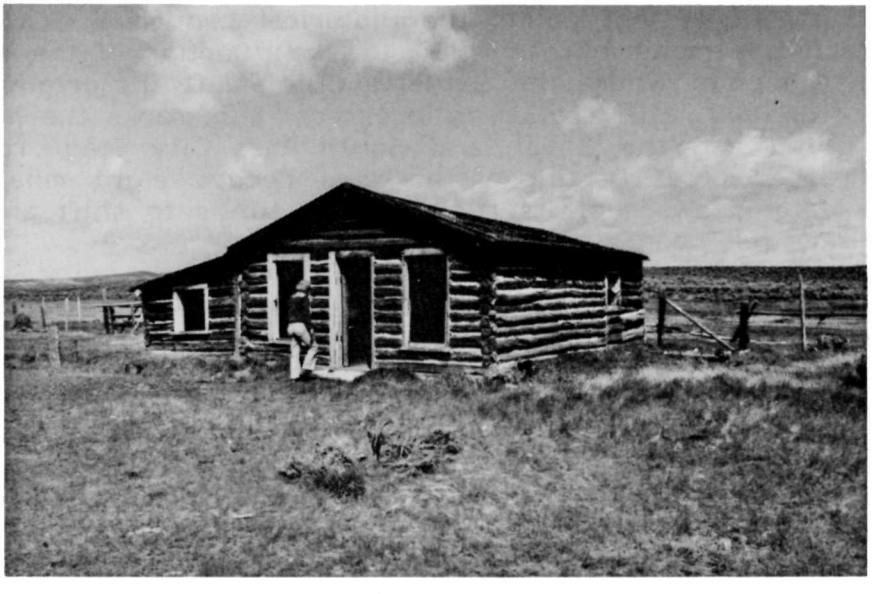
Pacific Springs, located just two miles west of South Pass (Sec 1, T27N, R102W, Pacific Springs map sheet #164, Fremont County), was a landmark faithfully noted by most emigrants. As the name implies, Pacific Springs was the first water source after the Oregon Trail crossed into the Pacific watershed, and many emigrants celebrated this fact, which unofficially denoted that the trip was now half completed. The springs, which are 330 feet lower than South Pass, created an extensive marsh which appeared as a green oasis in the dry landscape. In the 1860s, a Pony Express and stage station stood near the springs, but nothing remains of that station except some suspected foundations.

Pacific Springs must appear much the same today as it did to the emigrants. The land around the springs is privately owned, and was at one time the headquarters of the Old Halter and Flick Ranch. That ranch has long been abandoned, and the four wooden ranch buildings are now deteriorating. The spring continues to flow amidst a marshy and grassy meadow, and visitors can observe the water bubbling up from beneath the surface in several spots. Pacific Springs is accessible during dry weather to normal vehicles using the two-track trace of the Oregon Trail, but most of the year is only accessible to four-wheel drive vehicles or by foot.

The Big Sandy Resource Area of the Rock Springs District of the Wyoming BLM should obtain the necessary access or easements required to allow hikers to follow the South Pass Segment through Pacific Springs. Ideally, the springs should be interpreted by the BLM on the site, but if this is not possible, interpretive signing should be placed just south of the private property, where the Oregon Trail crosses BLM land. Provision for vehicular access to Pacific Springs is not recommended if that would necessitate bringing vehicles down through South Pass, a measure which would largely spoil the qualities of South Pass. As mentioned above, the possibility exists for creating a recreational and interpretive hiking trail loop from the Wyoming State South Pass interpretive wayside on Highway 28 west of Pacific Springs. Such a trail could circle up to South Pass, and back through Pacific Springs, returning to the interpretive wayside. The BLM should consider this possibility, as well as that of providing for cross-country travel along the South Pass Segment.

In the long run, it would be desirable for the Oregon Trail for the BLM to acquire the abandoned ranch property at Pacific Springs. The buildings now standing could then be stabilized and used as a back-country shelter, for the convenience of those following the South Pass Segment. If acquired, the property should undergo a complete archaeological survey, to confirm the existence of the suspected Pony Express station foundations, and to provide data regarding later human uses of Pacific Springs. The acquisition of this property, however, has a relatively low priority for Oregon Trail purposes.

Pacific Springs appears in the foreground, with the abandoned Old Halter and Flick Ranch (to the southwest) in the background.



The abandoned ranch buildings at Pacific Springs are slowly deteriorating.

DRY SANDY

The Dry Sandy crossing, located 11 miles west of Pacific Springs, was both a blessing and a curse to the emigrants. As the first water available west of Pacific Springs, the crossing of the Dry Sandy was a welcome respite, but due to the wet and boggy sands encountered at the crossing, where the river flows more below than above ground (hence the name), many wagons had difficulty negotiating the crossing. In addition, although subsurface water was generally potable, brackish pools of water tended to collect above the ground from time to time, and many emigrants sadly reported the loss of livestock. To obtain good water, emigrants dug holes along the edges of the stream, one of which was described in 1849 as being three feet square, and three feet deep with one foot of good water in the bottom. The possible remnants of several of these water pits are still visible. This site was later the location of the Dry Sandy Stage and Pony Express station. In 1972, Aubrey Haines noted the presence of the 16-foot foundation of the station, but by 1980 it had either been washed away or covered by shifting sands, and nothing remains to mark the site of the station except an iron pole.

The Dry Sandy crossing (Sec 29, T27N, R103W, Hay Meadow Reservoir map sheet #165, Sublette County) is located in the midst of a solid block of BLM lands, but the actual crossing site itself is located on 40 acres of privately owned land. The private land is not fenced or marked. Access to the site is possible by hiking or by following the two-track Oregon Trail in a four-wheel drive vehicle west from Wyoming Highway 28 for three miles. There is no interpretation at the site.

A Wyoming State historical monument is located at the junction of Highway 28 and the Oregon Trail (Sec 25, T27N, R103W), where access to the Dry Sandy would start. At that point, the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming erected a monument in 1956 to the "Parting-of-the-Ways," to commemorate the point where the Sublette Cutoff left the original Oregon Trail. Unfortunately, the location is incorrect, and marks the junction of the Oregon Trail and the Bryan and South Pass City Stage road (from 1868), while the actual Parting-of-the-Ways occurs eight miles farther west. The state is aware of its mistake, but funds to shift and correct the marker have not been available.

The state should take down its present false marker, but retain the present parking area, which should be turned into a trailhead for hikers who wish to visit the Dry Sandy. The BLM has already marked the Oregon Trail in this vicinity, and should provide interpretation near the Dry Sandy Crossing. The three-mile hike to the Dry Sandy would give visitors a taste of the lower Wyoming range country below South Pass, and would take them by the Plume Rocks, an interesting geological feature noted by many emigrants. Access along the Oregon Trail should not be improved to accomodate normal two-wheel drive vehicles, for such an improvement would have a damaging impact upon the Oregon Trail, as well as infringing upon the scenic qualities of the hike.

If and when an access agreement with the private owner is reached, on-site research is necessary at the crossing to locate the lost station

foundations, and to determine if the present water pits along the banks of the Dry Sandy are indeed remnants of the emigrants' efforts, as assumed. If so, steps should be taken to stabilize the pits, for years of heavy precipitation (such as 1980) could easily wash out the remaining pits. The BLM lands in the area are administered by the Big Sandy Resource Area of the Rock Springs District of the Wyoming BLM.

The "False Parting-of-the-Ways" interpretive site is located three miles east of the Dry Sandy Crossing, just off Wyoming Highway 28. It has ample parking for 12 to 15 vehicles.

The misplaced monument at "False-Parting-of-the-Ways" should be removed or corrected.

The approach to the Dry Sandy crossing is seen from the east. The stream itself is located in the background, running from right to left, between the vast stretch of soft sand in the foreground and the vegetation in the background. The Oregon Trail crosses along the line of tire tracks, and continues up the hill in the background.

The Oregon Trail crosses the Dry Sandy from left to right. The deep footprints in the right foreground illustrate the soft, boggy sand which made crossing difficult. One of the BLM's concrete Oregon Trail posts may be seen in the right center, where the Oregon Trail climbs out of the crossing.

The Dry Sandy crossing is seen looking back to the east from the west bank of the stream. The Oregon Trail is to the left and may be seen pointing towards the horizon in the distance. The iron stake in the right center marks the site of the Dry Sandy Pony Express and Stage Station.

The possible remnants of one of the water holes dug by pioneers is located on the west bank of the Dry Sandy.

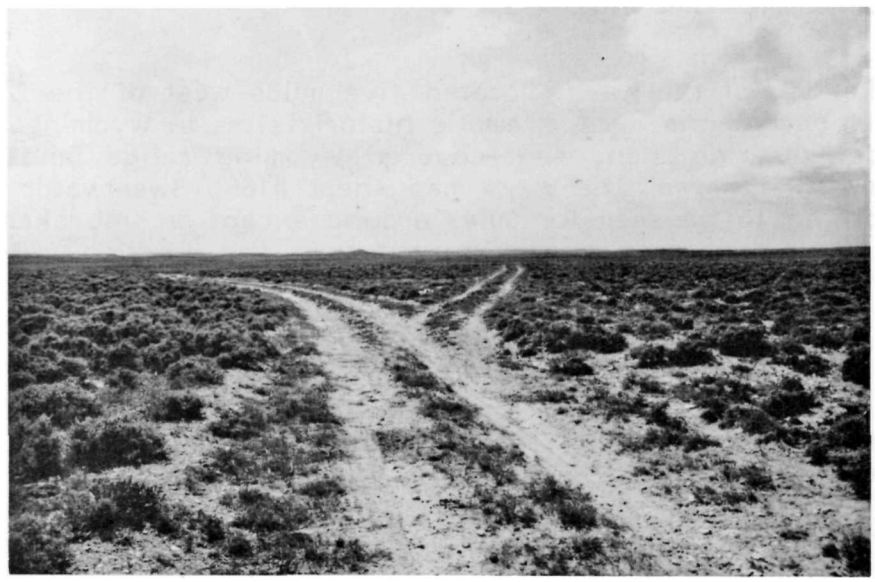
PARTING-OF-THE-WAYS

The true Parting-of-the-Ways, located five miles west of the Dry Sandy Crossing, is one of the most dramatic historic sites in Wyoming. Located in the midst of wide-open, sage-covered Wyoming range lands (Sec 4, T26N, R104W, Parting of the Ways map sheet #166, Sweetwater County), there is nothing to be seen for miles around except an unbroken expanse of land and the two trails branching out from the junction. Both trails are plainly visible, and the eye may follow them for miles towards the horizon.

This was the junction of the original Oregon Trail and the Sublette Cutoff, which was opened in 1844. At this point, emigrants had to make the hard decision whether to save 46 miles of travel by taking the cutoff which bypassed the southern loop through Fort Bridger, but which also offered 50 miles of travel with no water source. The decision was based upon the condition of animals, men, and supplies, as well as grass conditions reported along the Oregon Trail and the cutoff. A sample of 1849 diaries indicates that about one-third took the cutoff, and two-thirds continued on the longer and wetter trail towards the major supply point of Fort Bridger.

Parting-of-the-Ways is located in the midst of a large block of BLM land. Other than the obvious split in the trail, the only interpretation is two small hand-lettered rocks at the actual junction. Neither is permanent or professional. The site is three and one-half miles north of Wyoming Highway 28, and although there are the range roads in the vicinity they have been washed out in several places by floods. Hikers may reach the site by following the well-marked Oregon Trail west from the Dry Sandy crossing. The establishment of vehicular access to the site is not recommended unless the BLM is able to retain the high visual qualities of the area. At present, no intrusions are visible anywhere around the horizon, and the allure of the site is in its isolation. The BLM, however, should provide low-key and unobtrusive interpretation on the site. The BLM should also provide for future protection of the site from oil and mineral development. Preservation of the viewshed and the trails, especially to the west, will also be necessary to protect this site from the increasing prospects of mineral exploration and development. Parting-of-the-Ways would best be kept as one of the special rewards for those who follow the long cross-country South Pass Segment of the Oregon Trail. The public lands are administered by the Big Sandy Resource Area of the Rock Springs District of the Wyoming BLM. Parting-of-the-Ways is the most westerly historic site located along the proposed South Pass Segment.

Parting-of-the-ways has been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



Parting-of-the-Ways offers a vast panoramic view towards the west, as seen from the dramatic junction of the trails. The Oregon Trails leads southwest on the left, and the Sublette Cutoff leads west from the right.

Two hand-lettered signs are all that mark Parting-of-the-Ways. The rock on the left was placed by Paul Henderson and L.C. Bishop.

LOMBARD FERRY

Lombard Ferry, named for its proximity to the Lombard Buttes, was the main crossing of the Green River used by Oregon Trail emigrants, and thus represented a landmark in the travel diaries as well as a difficult crossing site. During low water periods, wagons could ford the river on a shallow sand bar, only 10 feet wide. Divergence led to many a wet wagon and several watery graves. After the initial Mormon trek to Salt Lake Valley in 1847, the Latter Day Saints quickly realized the importance of establishing a ferry operation for following Mormon trains, and the ensuing ferry capitalized upon the Oregon Trail emigrants by charging three to four dollars per wagon. Several other ferry operations followed in later years, and as late as 1943 the site was marked by the ruins of several stone buildings.

Today the Lombard Ferry, located 42 miles west of Parting-of-the-Ways (Sec 18, T22N, R109W, Thoman School map sheet #174, Sweetwater County), has nothing but the Green River and faint traces of the Oregon Trail leading to and from the river to mark its location. Although the ferry site is located wthin the boundaries of the Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge, both banks of the river at the site are still in private ownership. On-site examination of the area proved unable to pinpoint the exact location of the ferry landings, although their general location is well known. Shifting sand bars make the detection of earlier fords impossible. There is no interpretation at the site.

Although the site has no public access, visitors can reach it (with the permission of the private landowners) by taking a short hike in from dirt roads on either side of the river. The private inholdings wthin the wildlife refuge are scheduled to be acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the near future. Once acquired, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sould mark the crossing site, provide interpretation, and improve public access. An archaeological survey along the banks of the Green River should be conducted to pinpoint locations and dates of usage for the various buildings known to have existed near the ferry site in the past.

Lombard Ferry has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

The Oregon Trail crossed the Green River near the center of the photo, from the north (left) bank to the south.

The approximate crossing site of the Green River appears in the center of the photo, as seen from the south bank.

CHURCH BUTTE

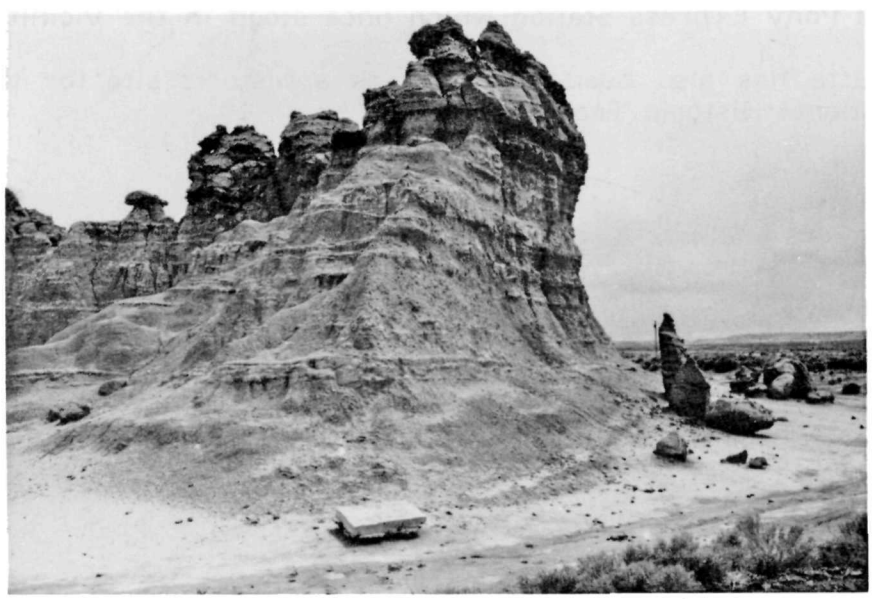
Church Butte, also known as Solomon's Temple, is believed to have been first named by fur traders, and became one of the landmarks along the Oregon Trail which excited the curiosity and comment of many emigrants. An 1843 traveler described it as "a surcular mound of clay and stone of the shape of a large temple and decorated with all kinds of images: gods and goddesses, everything that has been the subject of the sculptor; all kinds of animals and creeping things, etc. A magnificent sight..." In later years, a Pony Express station was built just west of the Butte.

Church Butte is located 33 miles southwest of Lombard Ferry (Sec 25, T18N, R113W, Church Butte map sheet #180, Uinta County), in the Black's Fork valley. The Butte is on private property, and is not as impressive today as it was to the emigrants. Erosion has taken its toll upon the Butte, but man has had a greater impact, for the entire valley is presently undergoing extensive oil exploration and development, which is drastically changing the scene. Access is via an unpaved dirt and gravel road. The Butte was once marked with a cast iron plaque, but that marker fell from its fastenings sometime since 1972, due either to erosion or vandalism.

The visual qualities of this landmark, as well as the entire valley along the Oregon Trail approaching it, has been severely altered by energy development. The only recommendation concerning this site is for the State of Wyoming to erect a more permanent interpretive sign next to the Butte for the benefit of passing travelers. That sign could also take note of the Pony Express station which once stood in the vicinity.

Church Butte has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

Church Butte appears to the southwest from the present unpaved and rutted road which follows the Oregon Trail.



An old iron marker was once attached to the slab of concrete in the foreground, and the concrete slab was in turn fastened to the rock above, on the western end of Church Butte. The iron marker has disappeared.

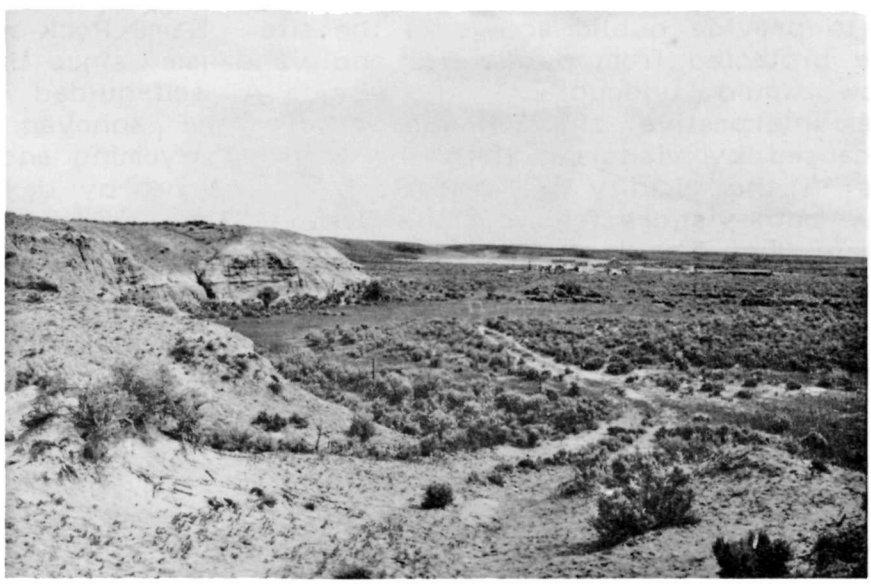
NAME ROCK

Name Rock is one of the more unusual historic sites along the Oregon Trail. It was not important to the emigrants, but has become so to posterity, due to the evidence which the emigrants left behind. Name Rock itself is rather unimposing, being but a short section of cliff about 400 feet long and about 20 feet high, with a natural overhang. On the face of the cliff, which is protected from the weather by the overhang, several dozen emigrants took the time to write their names, dates, and places of origin on the rock, mostly with wagon tar. This method of seeking immortality has proven more durable through the years than has the cutting of names directly into the face, as at Register Cliff, and most of the names and dates there are still clearly visible. The earliest date which appears to be genuine (there has been some vandalism at the site) is 1864, but the site was not exhaustively examined.

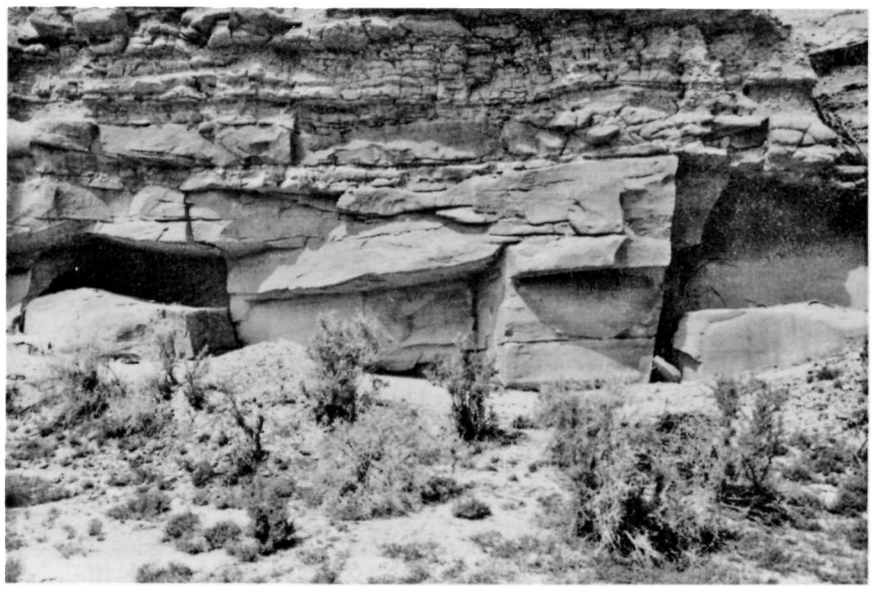
Name Rock is located on private land about 11 miles south of Church Butte (Sec 33, T17N, R113W, Millersville map sheet #181, Uinta County), and is approached via a private gravel road. If access agreements can be neogtiated, the site would be easily accessible, for it is only a few miles northwest of an existing exit from Interstate Highway 80. A road trace which follows the Oregon Trail crosses in front of Name Rock, and the meadows along the banks of Smiths Fork River still offer inviting camping spots, much as they did during emigrant years. There is no interpretation at the site, but a retired couple living nearby direct a dozen or so visitors there each week.

The State of Wyoming should negotiate access agreements with the private landowner to provide public access to the site. Name Rock would then have to be protected from public use and vandalism, since the present visitor flow would undoubtedly increase. A self-guided trail and appropriate interpretive signs would relieve the annoyance to the residents caused by visitors. Both the State of Wyoming and the BLM have lands in the vicinity of Name Rock, and a nearby day-use area would serve both visitors following the Oregon Trail and those traveling via Interstate 80. The inscriptions are in need of protection from the slow natural effects of weather and exposure.

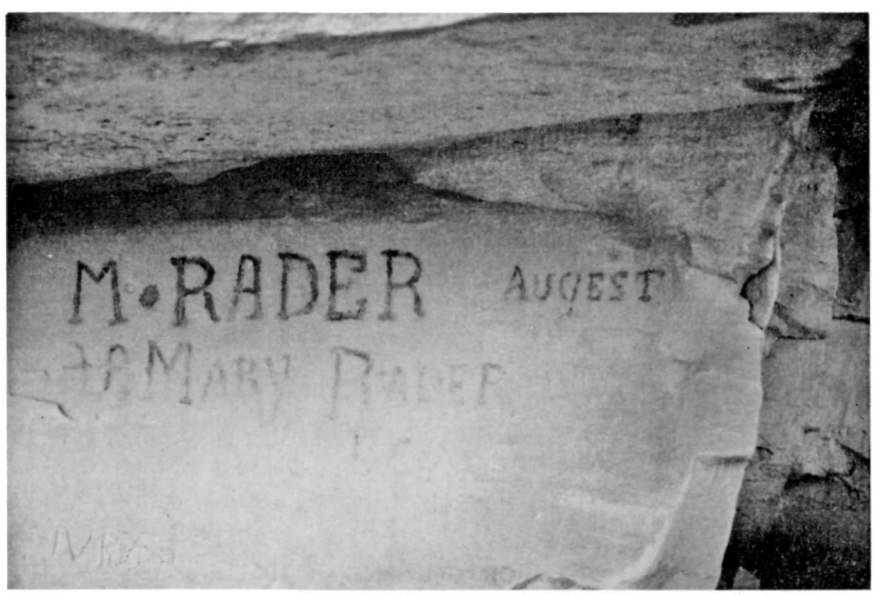
Name Rock, as seen looking north from the private residence, appears as the broken portion of the cliff on the right of the photo. The tracks in the center of the photo follow the Oregon Trail.



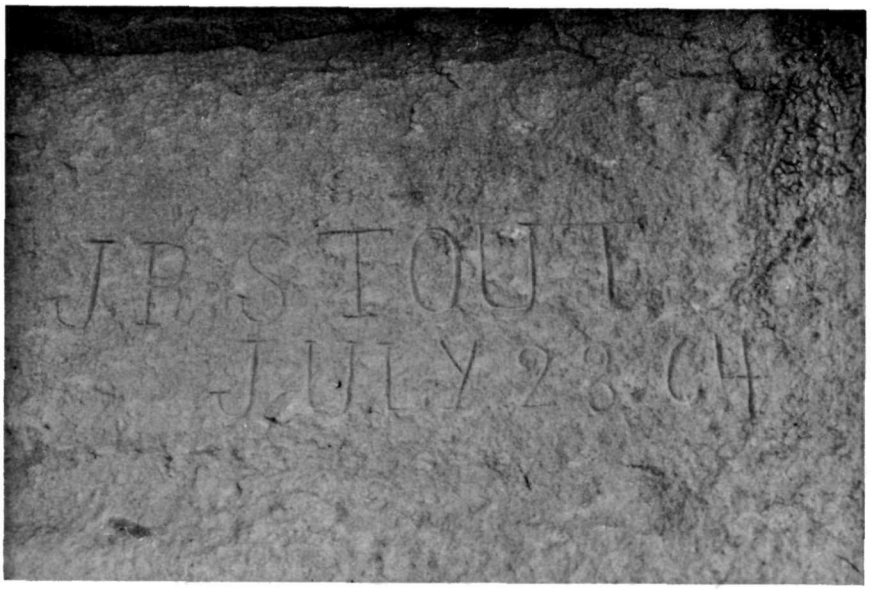
In the opposite of the above view, Name Rock is in the curve of the cliff to the left. Again, the path of the Oregon Trail is plainly visible.



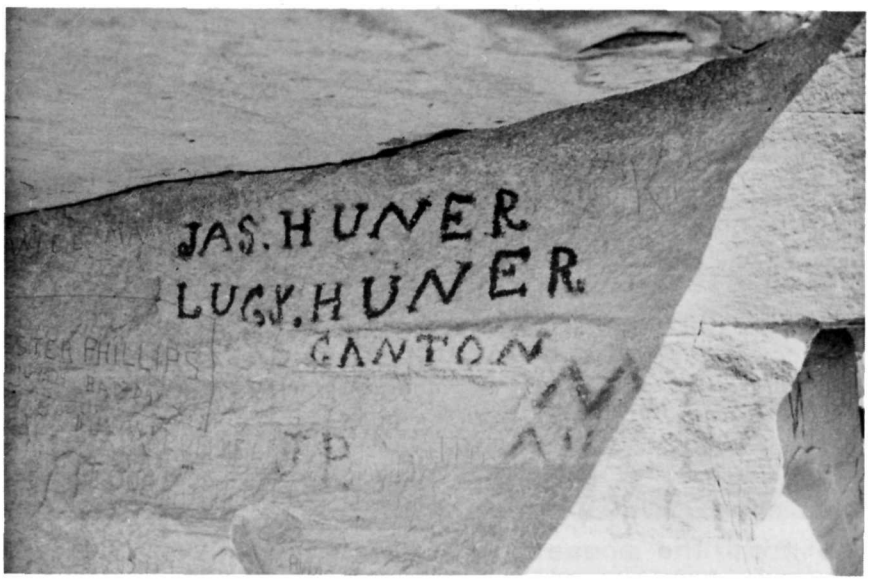
A portion of the cliff forming Name Rock shows the overhang which has protected the names and dates left by emigrants.



In a close-up from the above photo M. Rader's name is clearly visible. Mary Rader's name has been less protected by the rock overhang, and is faded, while the names etched directly into the rock below Mary's are barely visible.



J.R. Stout, the most prominent name on the rock, is one of several dating from 1864.



James and Lucy Huner also decided to inscribe their place of origin, Canton, Missouri, in 1864.

FORT BRIDGER

Fort Bridger anchors the western end of the Oregon Trail in Wyoming much like Fort Laramie anchors the eastern. To the emigrants, arrival at Fort Bridger meant a welcome respite from the rigors of travel, and a chance to obtain supplies, have essential blacksmith work done, and to trade worn-out oxen, horses and mules for fresher animals. Fort Bridger marked the completion of another major leg of the long migration, and the emigrants set out from there refreshed and reinvigorated for their next leg, to Fort Hall, Idaho.

Fort Bridger was first established in 1842 as a fur trading and supply post by Jim Bridger, perhaps the most famous of all mountain men. The post was moved to its present location in the winter of 1843-1844, and soon became a major supply point for the Oregon Trail, as well as the later Mormon and California Trails. After following the same trail for 376 miles from Fort Laramie, the Oregon and Mormon Trails parted there, while the California Trail split, with some California-bound emigrants taking the Salt Lake route, and some following the Oregon Trail toward Idaho. The fort served as a Pony Express, Overland Stage and transcontinental telegraph station in the 1860's, and was garrisoned by the U.S. Army between 1858 and 1890, when it was finally abandoned. Fort Bridger is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Forty-eight acres of the original fort grounds are now included in Fort Bridger State Historic Site, which is Wyoming's third oldest state park. The fort has 10 buildings in various stages of reconstruction and rehabilitation, with plans to reconstruct and rehabilitate several more. It is staffed by two full-time and six seasonal employees, who handle a visitor flow which peaked in 1978 at 76,000 and fell in 1979 to 58,000. The fort is located in the town of Fort Bridger (Sec 33, T16N, R115W, Fort Bridger map sheet #184, Uinta County), eight miles southwest of Name Rock, and has excellent access via U.S. Highway 305. Unfortunately, several tourist-catering businesses crowd the boundaries of the park, impacting greatly upon its visual qualities.

Fort Bridger has several problems, as seen from the perspective of this study. There is very little Oregon Trail interpretation presented at the fort. Like most other western posts, Fort Bridger heavily emphasizes the military occupation of 1858 to 1890, and largely ignores earlier facets of the fort's rich history. Attempts have been made in recent years to interpret the fur trade era, but much more needs to be done. Since this fort is so strongly identified with Jim Bridger, and particularly since Fort Bridger was for so long a most vital link in western expansion, the State of Wyoming should make a major effort to shift the focus of interpretation at Fort Bridger away from the military period and back to the fur trading and western migration years. A state planning team made a similar recommendation in 1975 ("Development Plan for Fort Bridger State Park"), but it has not yet been carried out.

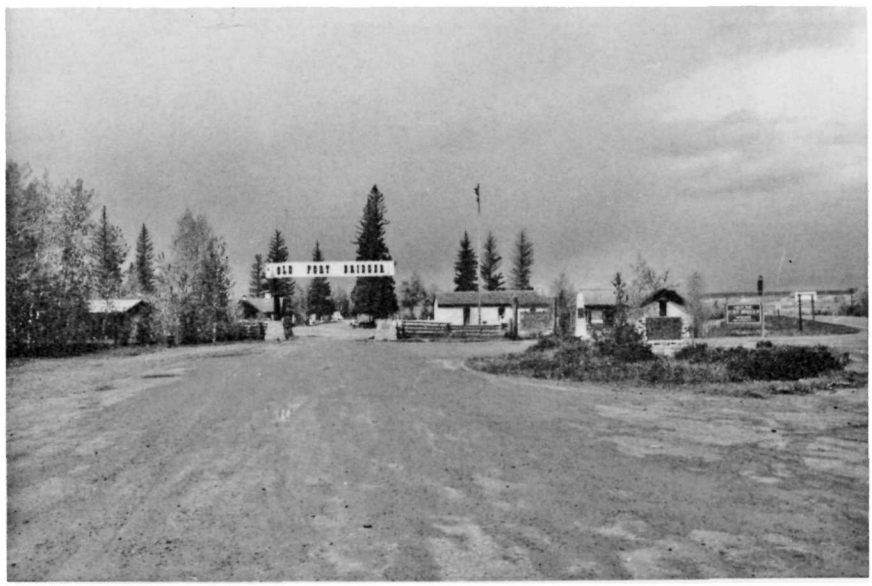
Fort Bridger has a serious security problem, for the fort has no security force and the town of Fort Bridger has no police department. Steps should be taken immediately to protect the buildings and contents from

possible vandalism and theft, and to provide effective protection against fire.

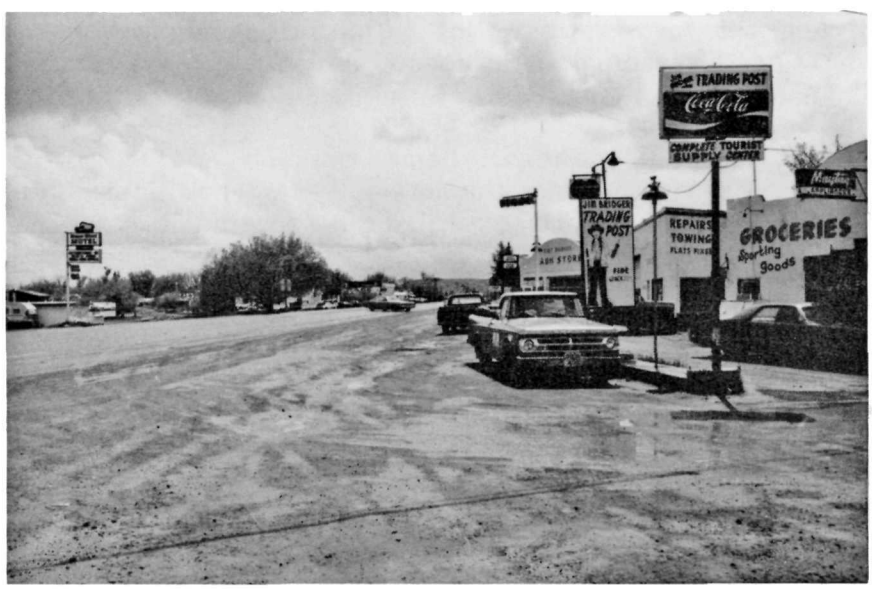
The layout of the town of Fort Bridger detracts greatly from the visual and cultural qualities of Fort Bridger. As a long-range program, steps should be taken for the gradual removal of the tourist businesses from the immediate park boundaries to other locatons. Such measures would only temporarily inconvenience the tourist businesses and would greatly enhance the overall appeal of the park.

Fort Bridger is among the most important historic sites along the Oregon Trail and has the potential of becoming a main interpretive and information center for the Oregon Trail in Wyoming.

Fort Bridger has also been identified as a historic site for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.



The entrance to Fort Bridger State Historic Site is seen from the main street of the town of Fort Bridger.



The town of Fort Bridger crowds directly upon the entrance to the park. The unplanned aspect of the surrounding town detracts seriously from the famous historic site.

Several of the historic structures at Fort Bridger are staffed by seasonal employees in period clothing during the tourist season.

BEAR RIVER DIVIDE SEGMENT

This proposed segment is 31 miles in length, and follows the Oregon Trail as it crosses the Bear River Divide, beginning at a point 22 miles northwest of Fort Bridger. The recommended starting point for the segment is where the Oregon Trail crosses U.S. Highway 189 (Sec 36, T19N, R117W, Cumberland Gap map sheet #187, Lincoln County), with a western terminus where the trail crosses Wyoming Highway 89 (Sec 22, T21N, R120W, Leefe map sheet #191b, Lincoln County). In between the trail climbs over the rugged Bear River Divide, the roughest section of the Oregon Trail in Wyoming.

For about half the length of this segment, the Oregon Trail is a good two-track trace, while the remaining portion follows range roads which have been laid on top of the Oregon Trail. Most of the segment is presently negotiable by four-wheel drive vehicles, with the exception of several stream crossings, where the trail has been washed out. The segment is virtually free from signs of civilization, with the exception of energy developments along the Overthrust Belt near the summit of the divide. The segment offers very good scenic values, with an emphasis on the rugged terrain as the trail crosses wild and broken rangelands crisscrossed by streams.

Sixteen miles of this segment cross BLM lands, seven miles cross Wyoming State land, and eight miles cross private property. All the private land included in the segment is used for cattle range. The Kemmerer Resource Area of the Rock Springs District of the Wyoming BLM should be given the responsibility for this segment. That office should negotiate the necessary access agreements to open the trail, and should mark its entire length. The BLM has already marked portions of the trail on public lands. The segment should follow the exact line of the Oregon Trail, except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement.

The BLM should also develop small trailheads at both ends of the segment. Such facilities, at a minimum, should provide potential users with trail guides, directions, and interpretive materials. There are no historic sites included within this segment, so all interpretation needs may be carried out at the trailheads. Additional public use facilities, such as rest stops and water points, may be necessary as public use increases in future years. The greatest single threat to this segment, as elsewhere in Wyoming, is the rapidly expanding energy industry. The BLM should protect the segment through its land use planning process, by means of mineral withdrawals, restrictions on surface occupancy, and restrictions on visual intrusions, as necessary.

Little information is available concerning the potential use of this segment. Unlike the South Pass Segment, there is now little public demand, but that is expected to change as the Oregon Trail becomes more widely known. At present, the limited vehicular use of the trail, which consists mostly of hunters, BLM personnel, and local ranchers, poses no threat to the trail. The BLM should not totally ban vehicular use of this segment, but should carefully monitor future use of the trail, and adopt regulations as necessary to best protect the Oregon Trail and to make it available to the widest segment of the public.

The Oregon Trail crosses the valley below, on the east side of Bear River Divide.

Distinct traces of the Oregon Trail appear in the valley pictured above.

From the summit of the Bear River Divide, the Oregon Trail descends to the northwest.

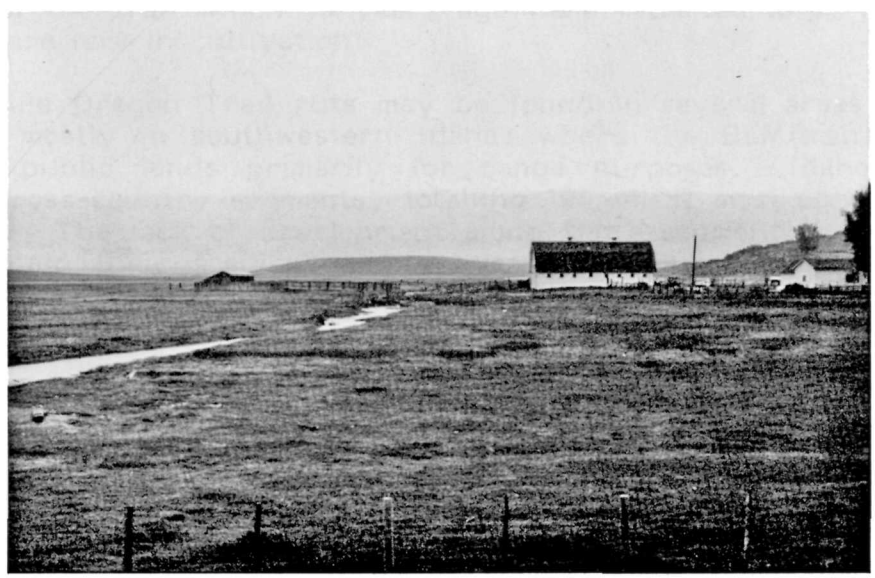
From the valley below the summit of the Bear River Divide, distinct lines of the Oregon Trail may be seen by looking back up the trail to the southeast. The trail may be followed from the two-track trace descending the hill in the right background to the rut trough in the immediate foreground.

WEST END, SUBLETTE CUTOFF

At this point, 72 miles northwest of Fort Bridger, the Sublette Cutoff, which left the Oregon Trail at Parting-of-the-Ways, rejoined the main trail. There is nothing on the ground to indicate the junction of the Oregon Trail and the Sublette Cutoff, for both trails have been erased by subsequent development in this area, but research and map work by various experts has defined the approximate spot where the two trails joined, three and one-half miles south of the town of Cokeville (Sec 28, T24N, R119W, Cokeville map sheet #193, Lincoln County). The Oregon Trail at this point lies beneath Highway 30N, while the area where the Sublette Cutoff once descended Stoffer Ridge to the east is now farmland. The point at which the two trails converged, as seen from Highway 30N, offers a pleasant view back up the Sublette Cutoff towards the ridgetop. There is no interpretation at the site.

The State of Wyoming should create a small interpretive pull-off from the side of Highway 30N at this site, and erect a standard interpretive panel to identify the site for visitors.

The vehicle is parked on the side U.S. Highway 30N, at the approximate junction of the Oregon Trail and the Sublette Cutoff. As is obvious, the pavement would have to be widened here, to allow vehicles to stop safely.



The approximate line of the Sublette Cutoff is seen, looking east from U.S. Highway 30N. The Cutoff descended the ridge in the far background and approached the Oregon Trail through the farmlands in the photo, on the right (south) bank of creek.

IDAHO

The primary route of the Oregon Trail stretches across the southern portion of Idaho for 399 miles. From the eastern border of Idaho, the trail cuts across range and farmland to join the Snake River at the site of Fort Hall, near present-day Pocatello. The Snake River Valley dominates the rest of the trail across Idaho, to the site of Fort Boise, on the western border of the state. At Three Island Crossing, near the town of Glenns Ferry, the trail divides, with the North Trail crossing the Snake River and skirting the edge of the mountain ranges towards Boise, and the South Alternate Trail staying on the south bank of the Snake River all the way into Oregon. The South Alternate Trail is 111 miles long in Idaho and rejoins the north trail 15 miles inside the eastern border of Oregon. Since both trails were equally used, depending upon crossing conditions of the Snake River at Three Island Crossing, both are included as primary routes of the Oregon Trail in this study.

Although Idaho is almost as sparsely populated as is Wyoming, the Oregon Trail has been much more impacted within that state. The Snake River Valley has always been a major transportation and communication route across southern Idaho, and today a line of cities, towns, railroads, and highways follow the river. Much of the Oregon Trail has been lost through such development over the past century. The Snake River is also the principal water source for the expanding agriculture of southern Idaho, and long strips of land to either side of the Snake have been turned from arid rangeland into irrigated fields by water pumped out of the river. This has impacted greatly upon the Oregon Trail, for long stretches of the trail which 10 years ago were reported to be in pristine condition, are now in cultivation.

Still, pristine Oregon Trail ruts may be found in several areas of Idaho. These are mostly in southwestern Idaho, where the BLM manages large blocks of public lands primarily for range purposes. Idaho has two proposed cross-country segments, totalling 101 miles, most of which cross BLM lands. The lack of development along those segments has permitted them to retain their scenic character, making them ideal segments along which to recreate the trail experience.

There are 29 historic sites in Idaho, including the two great fur trading posts of Fort Hall and Fort Boise, and river crossings, "massacre" sites, ruts, gravesites, and natural landmarks. On the whole, the Oregon Trail across much of Idaho was more "primitive" than to the east, for fewer people traveled the trail in Idaho. The Mormons, who had joined the Oregon Trail at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, had departed at Fort Bridger, heading southwest for the Salt Lake Valley. Many California-bound emigrants also left the trail at that point, using the Salt Lake route to California. Other California-bound emigrants left the Oregon Trail via either the Hudspeth Cutoff (Soda Springs, Idaho), or by the main California Trail, which left the Oregon Trail at the Raft River Crossing. The Pony Express, the major stagelines, and the major freight lines also used the Salt Lake route, leaving the Oregon Trail to serve Oregon-bound emigrants only. These emigrants, in turn, had seen their ranks thinned by death as the emigration progressed. Thus the line of

civilization--way stations and supply points--which had grown up along the eastern portion of the trail were not available in Idaho, and the emigrants were on their own.

Interpretation of the Oregon Trail in Idaho is mixed. The BLM has several interpretive sites along the trail, and the State of Idaho has two state parks. Periodic highway signs appear along the trail, when the trail passes close to modern highway systems. Like the other states along the route, however, Idaho has much to accomplish before the Oregon Trail is thoroughly and consistently interpreted throughout the state. Likewise, the trail is only sporadically marked. The BLM has marked portions, but not all, of the trail as it crosses public lands, and a few private efforts have been made over the years to mark the trail in other locations. Again, much remains to be done.

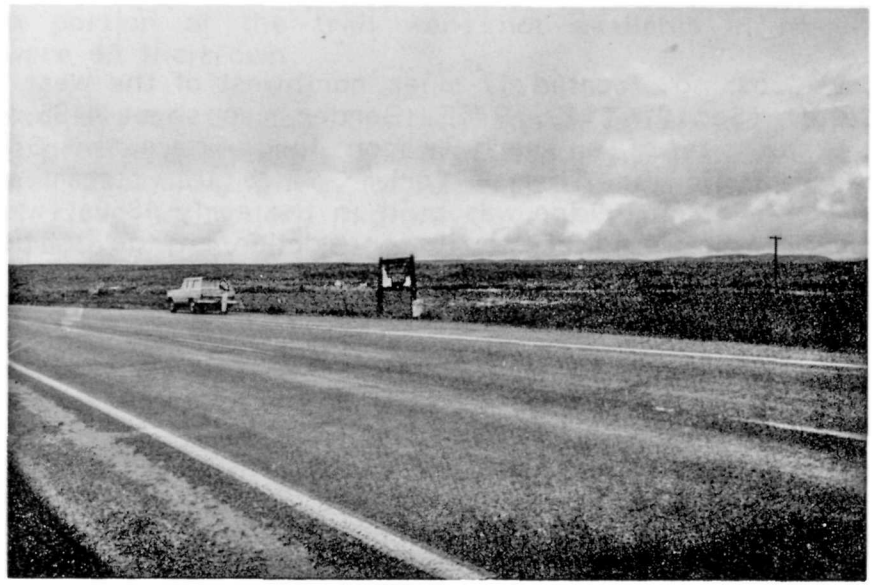
The most distinct threat to the Oregon Trail in Idaho is the continued opening of arid range lands to irrigated cultivation along the Snake River. An alarming proportion of that trail, including many sections of pristine ruts, has been lost through agricultural development over the last decade, and the trend shows no signs of declining. The State of Idaho and the Idaho BLM will be hard pressed in the future to protect and preserve the remaining portions of the Oregon Trail, and this task should be considered the highest priority for the Oregon National Historic Trail within Idaho.

The BLM, due to its large land holdings in the State of Idaho, is the natural Federal leader for the Oregon Trail. The leading state agency is the Idaho State Historical Society, which for many years has demonstrated considerable interest in the trail. The Society has broad responsibilities for research, interpretation, and historic preservation within Idaho, and contains the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer.

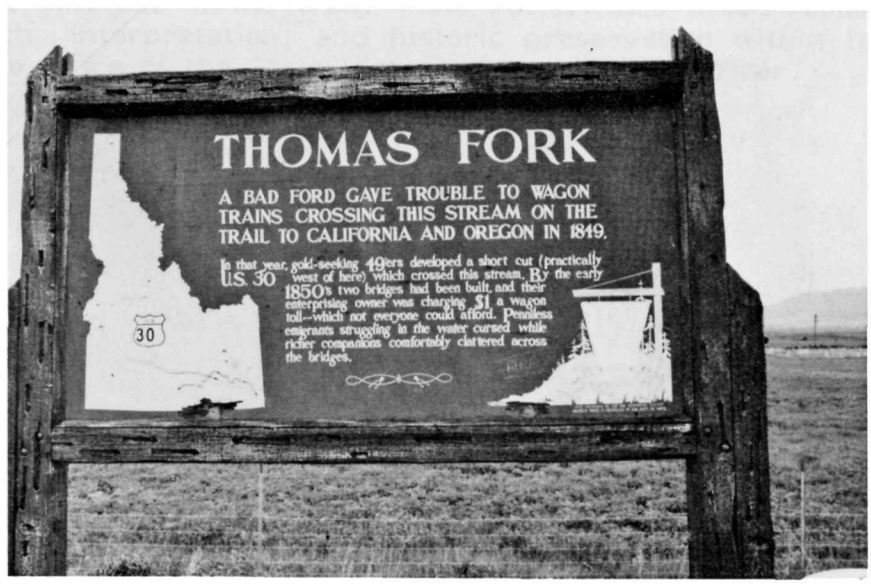
THOMAS FORK CROSSING

Thomas Fork Crossing, located 17 miles northwest of the West End of the Sublette Cutoff (Sec 9, T14S, R46E, Border map sheet #195, Bear Lake County), is the site of an early wagon ford where the Oregon Trail crossed the swift-flowing Thomas Fork. Since the stream was always difficult to cross, a toll-bridge was built in the early 1850s, which served those emigrants who could afford its one dollar charge. There are no remnants of either the ford or the bridge left today, but the surrounding area has an authentic appearance and little development.

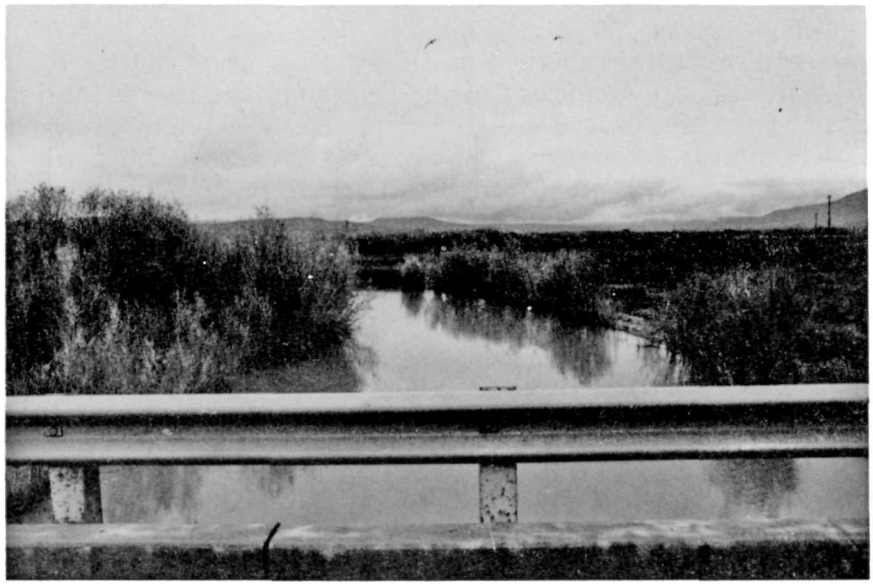
The actual crossing site is privately owned and partially cultivated, but the Idaho Department of Transportation has placed a roadside interpretive panel along U.S. Highway 30N (Sec 10), one-half mile southeast of the site. From there, visitors have a good view of the broad meadows through which the Thomas Fork flows, and can easily imagine the wagons crossing the stream and heading west towards a series of low hills. Interpretation at this site could be increased.



The vista surrounding the Thomas Fork Crossing shows the present interpretive wayside, the meadows in the background through which the stream flowed, and the low hills in the far background. The Oregon Trail crossed the area from right to left, on the far side of the highway.



The text for interpretive panels in Idaho is prepared by the Idaho State Historical Society for the Idaho Department of Transportation.



Thomas Fork is seen from the present bridge on U.S. Highway 30N. The Oregon Trail crossed the stream about one-half mile above this bridge.

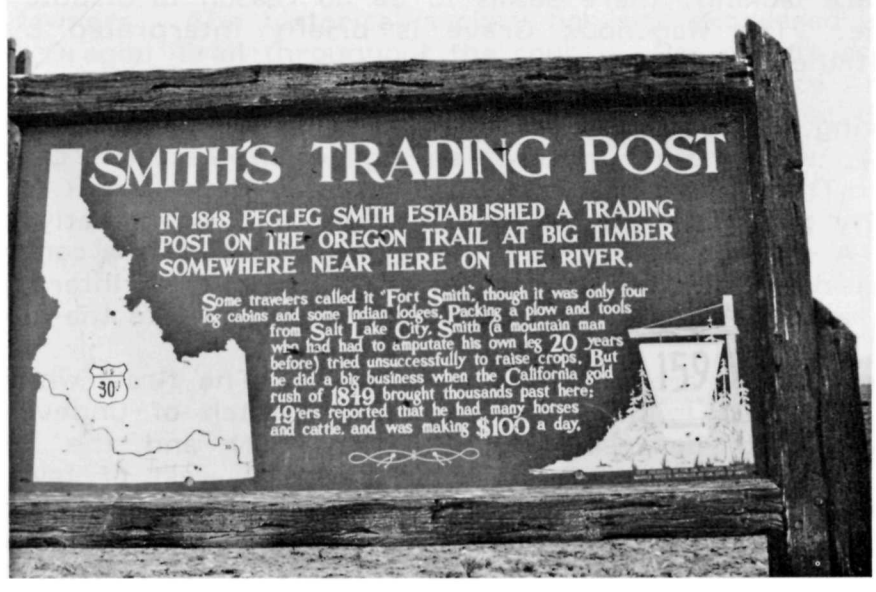
SMITH'S TRADING POST

In 1848, an old mountain man known as Peg Leg Smith--for his wooden leg, the result of an accident and self-amputation--established a small trading post on the east bank of the Bear River, in order to take advantage of trading opportunities brought by the California and Oregon emigrants. The post, which consisted of four log buildings, lasted no longer than 1850 before it was abandoned, but it assisted the emigrants for several years. The actual site of the post is not precisely determined, but it was approximately 11 miles northwest of the Thomas Fork Crossing (Sec 35, T13S, R44E, Montpelier map sheet #198, Bear Lake County).

The Idaho Department of Transportation has established a small interpretive wayside on U.S. Highway 30N near the location, overlooking the Bear River Valley. The scene today is altered somewhat by farms and the Union Pacific Railroad, but it is still easy to picture a lonely post set in a picturesque spot of wilderness.

The present wayside interpretive site should be maintained, and the Idaho Department of Transportation should augment the present interpretive panel to provide more complete information regarding Peg Leg Smith and the Oregon Trail. When possible, the State of Idaho should conduct an archaeological survey of the area, to pinpoint more fully the location and dates of occupation of Smith's Trading Post.

The interpretive wayside off U.S. Highway 30N overlooks the Bear River Valley in the background. Peg Leg Smith's post was located somewhere in the meadows below the road. The present interpretive panel is shown below.



SODA SPRINGS (COMPLEX)

The town of Soda Springs (Soda Springs map sheet #202, Caribou County), located 33 miles northwest of Smith's Trading Post, has a complex of historic sites associated with the Oregon Trail. Included in these are the sites of Steamboat Spring, the Wagonbox Burial, Hooper Spring, and two faint traces of Oregon Trail ruts.

Steamboat Spring was the principal feature of a group of mineral springs (Sec 11, T9S, R41E) which was an important landmark of fur trade and emigration days. Many an emigrant paused to observe and wonder at the plumes of hot water and steam arising from the spring. Unfortunately, Steamboat Spring is now covered by the waters of Soda Point Reservoir, and its location can only be detected on calm days by observing the agitation of the surface of the reservoir. This can best be seen from the Monsanto Pavilion on the Soda Springs Country Club golf course (Sec 10, T9S, R41E), which is privately owned. The springs are interpreted by the Idaho Department of Transportation, which has an interpretive wayside on U.S. Highway 30N, about one-half mile northeast of the springs (Sec 11, T9S, R41E). The springs can not be observed from that wayside.

The Wagonbox Grave is located in the Soda Springs town cemetery (Sec 12, T9S, R41E), on the west side of town. This grave commemorates the "massacre" of an emigrant family, including father, mother and five children, who were killed in the vicinity of Soda Springs in 1861. According to legend, the family was buried together in the box of their covered wagon, which was moved to its present site in later years. Although precise documentation to establish the facts of the "massacre" or the burial are lacking, there seems to be no reason to dispute the story at this time. The Wagonbox Grave is briefly interpreted by a small monument at the gravesite.

Hooper Spring, located one and one-half miles north of town (Sec 36, T8S, R41E), was another mineral spring which attracted Oregon Trail emigrants. The spring was included in the development of a small five-acre city park by Soda Springs in 1937, and was greatly altered at that time. A pavilion now covers the spring, which has a concrete basin and channel directing the flow of water. There is no interpretation at the spring, and no signs in the town to direct visitors to the site.

Two faint rut traces are visible west of town. The first, which has not been greatly altered, winds across a short stretch of undeveloped and unused state land between U.S. Highway 30N and the Soda Point Reservoir (Sec 11, T9S, R41E), about one mile west of town. These ruts, which are approximately 1500 feet in length, can only be approached by walking across a quarter mile of exceedingly marshy ground. The ruts are not marked, protected, or interpreted, and according to local sources, are not well known in the vicinity.

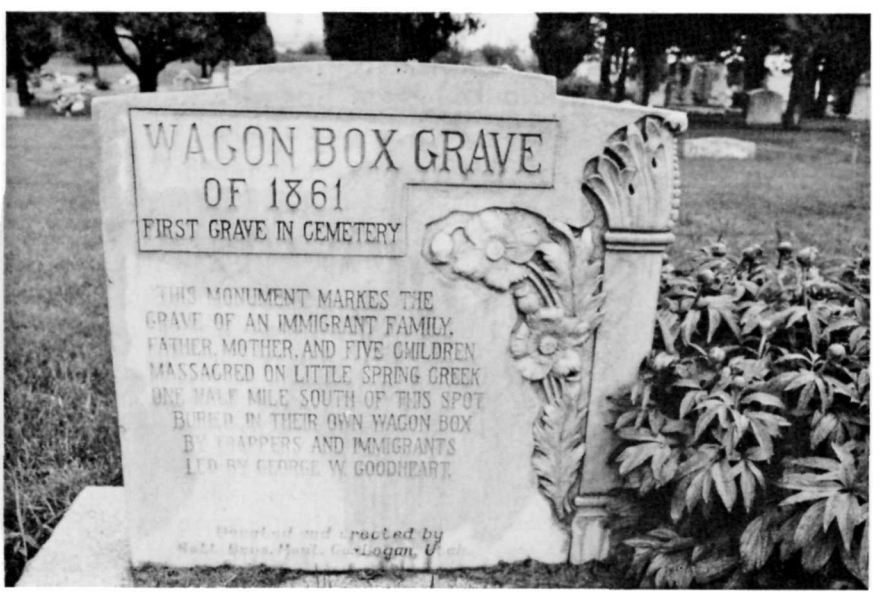
The second is shallow swale of Oregon Trail ruts which stretch across the grounds of the Soda Springs Country Club (Sec 10, T9S, R41E), about two miles west of town. Those ruts were discovered during grading for

the country club and were developed as part of the rolling terrain of the golf course when it was originally laid out. About 1000 feet in length, this rut swale is visible today as it gently crosses the greens and fairways of the golf course. It is well-known around town, and is pointed out on a hand-lettered sign located on the pro shop wall, but is not otherwise interpreted.

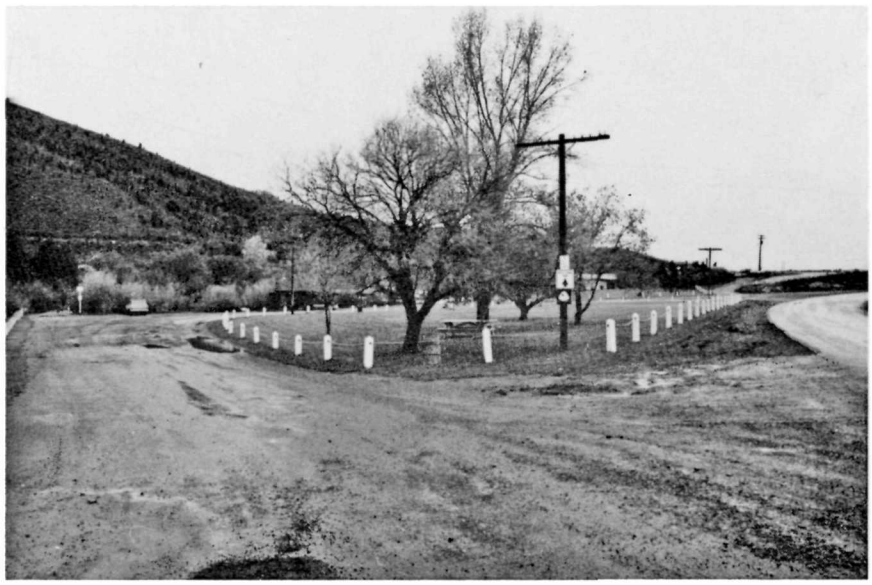
As a rule, the historic sites associated with the Oregon Trail in the vicinity of Soda Springs are not well marked or interpreted, and much remains to be done to realize the historic potential of the area. The City of Soda Springs should provide a central information center, where visitors may obtain directions and information concerning the historic sites in and around town. The city should also provide better interpretation at both the Wagonbox Burial site and Hooper Spring, to more fully explain their history and significance. The State of Idaho, through the cooperation of the Idaho Department of Lands, the Idaho Department of Transportation and the Idaho State Historical Society, should develop the ruts south of the present highway wayside west of town as a historic site. Such development would include protection for the ruts, access from the wayside, and interpretation. The Soda Springs Country Club should provide directional signing to lead visitors across the country club grounds to view the Oregon Trail rut swale, and to lead them out to the Monsanto Pavilion, where Steamboat Springs may be observed on calm days. The City of Soda Springs, or Caribou County, should assist the country club in the preparation and erection of interpretive signs.

The management of the country club, the City of Soda Springs, and Caribou County all seem interested in preserving and making available to the public the area's attractions. To better coordinate this goal, the Caribou County Historical Society should take the lead in marshalling the necessary public support and in promoting the joint efforts of public and private landowners. The historical society has also expressed interest in marking the Oregon Trail throughout the county. Its efforts are heartily endorsed. The State of Idaho and the Soda Springs Resource Area of the Idaho Falls District of the Idaho BLM are encouraged to assist the county whenever possible.

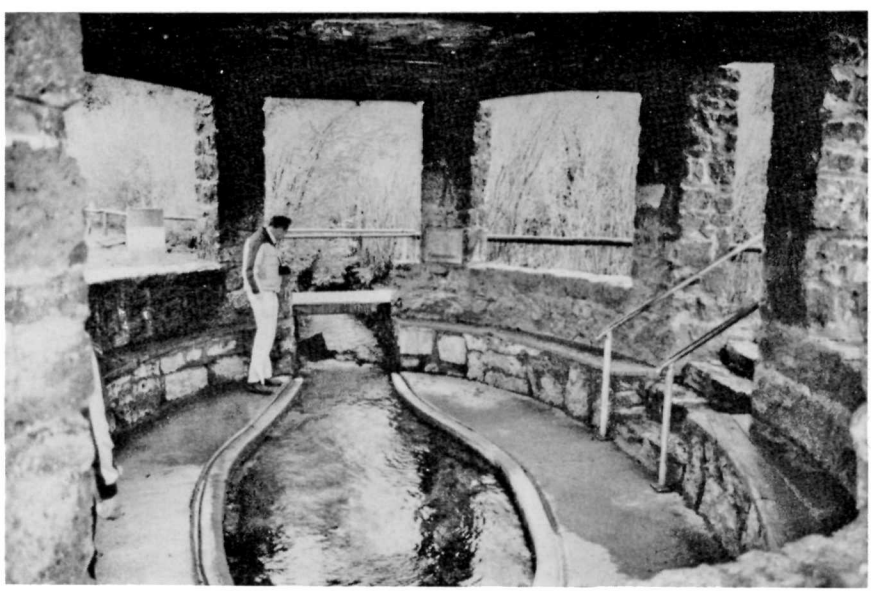
The Wagonbox Burial site (center of photo) is located in Soda Springs cemetery.



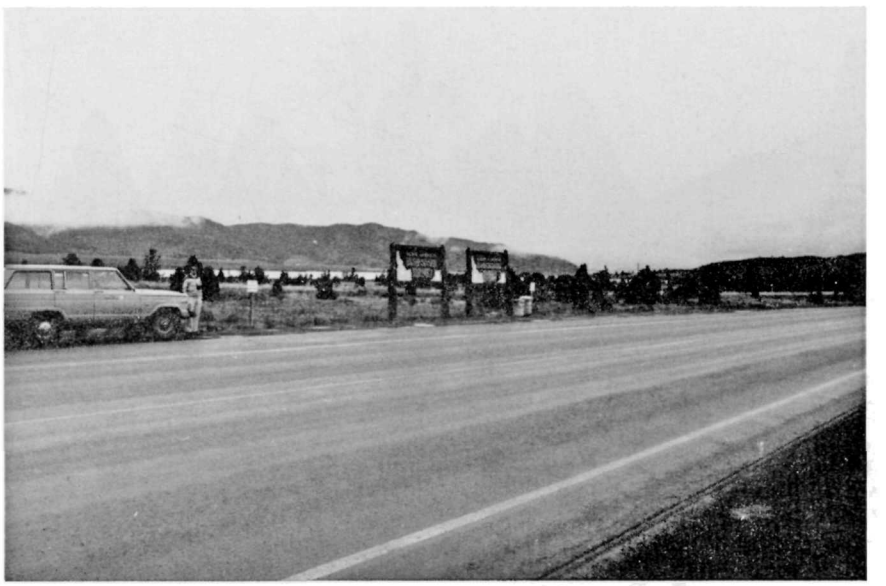
The present monument to the Wagonbox Burial bears the full text of the local legend concerning the "massacre."



Hooper Spring is located in a small Soda Springs city park. The pavilion which covers the spring is visible in the center background.

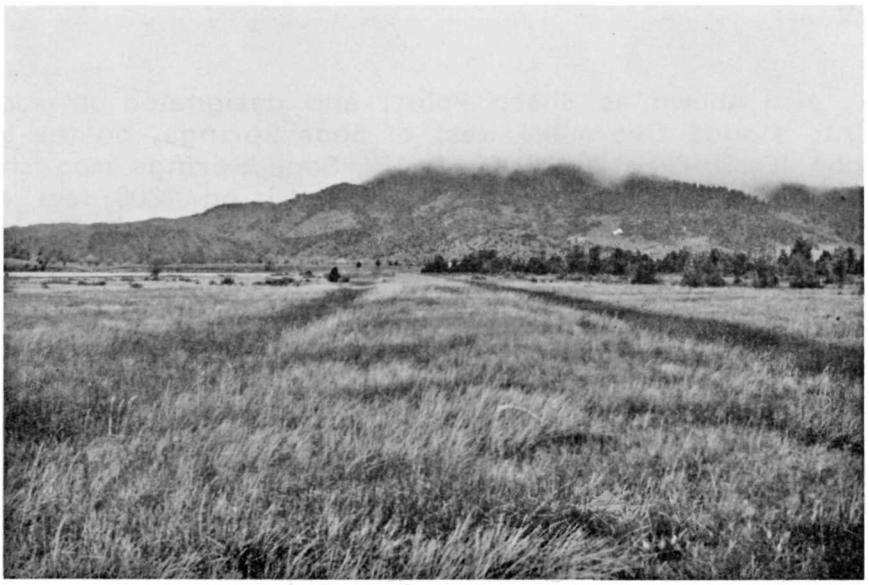


Interior of the pavilion covering Hooper Spring shows the extensive alterations which have taken place at the site.

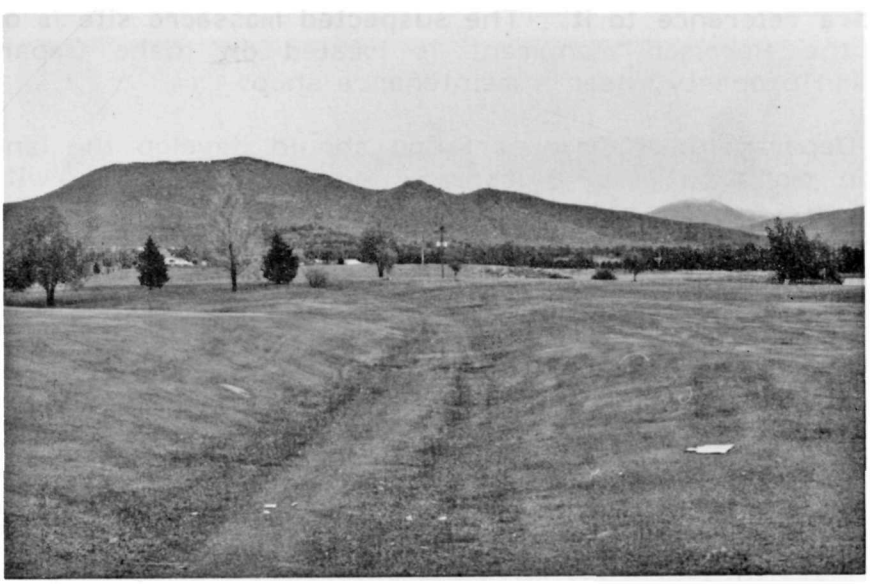


Idaho Department of Transportation has an interpretive wayside, one and one-half miles west of Soda Springs. The ruts on state land, mentioned above and pictured below, are located to the left of the interpretive signs, between the highway and Soda Point Reservoir, which is visible in the left background.

This interpretive sign for Soda Springs and Steamboat Springs is located at the wayside pictured above.



Oregon Trail rut traces cross state land south of interpretive wayside pictured above. Sheep Rock may be seen in the background, to the west.



A portion of the gentle rut swale of the Oregon Trail which crosses the grounds of the Soda Springs Country Club.

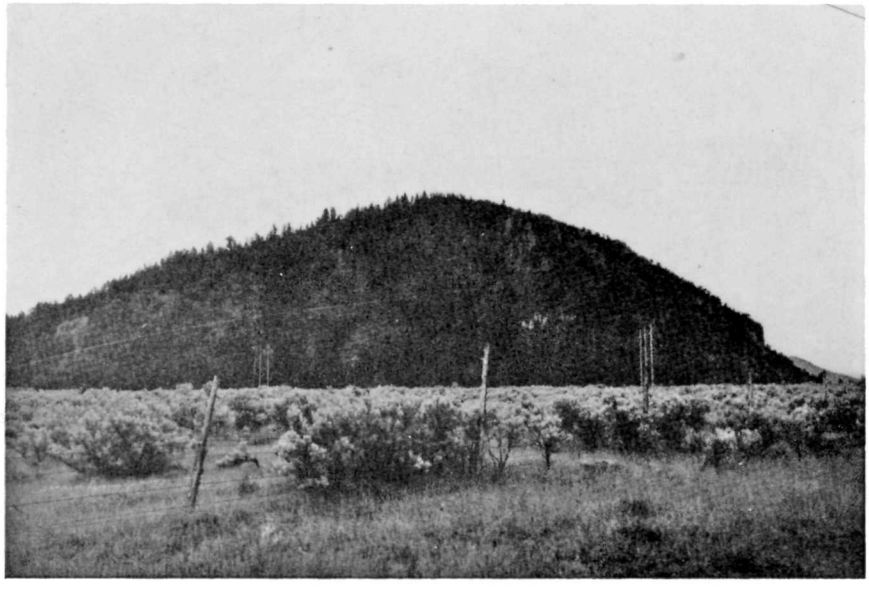
SHEEP ROCK

Sheep Rock, also known as Sheep Point, and designated on modern maps as Soda Point, stands five miles west of Soda Springs, on the south side of the Oregon Trail (sec 20, T9S, R41E, Soda Springs map sheet #202, Caribou County). This tree-covered point, rising 1200 feet above the Oregon Trail, was a prominent landmark to the emigrants. Sheep Rock is plainly visible today from Soda Springs and from U.S. Highway 30N, which follows the Oregon Trail for several miles west from Soda Springs, but is not interpreted.

In 1849, with the beginning of the California Gold Rush, Benoni M. Hudspeth, searching for a shorter route to the California gold fields, pioneered an alternate route towards California, which departed from the main Oregon and California trails just west of Sheep Rock. The Idaho Department of Transportation formerly had an interpretive sign near the junction of the trails, but recently moved it nine miles west (nine miles off the Oregon Trail) during highway construction.

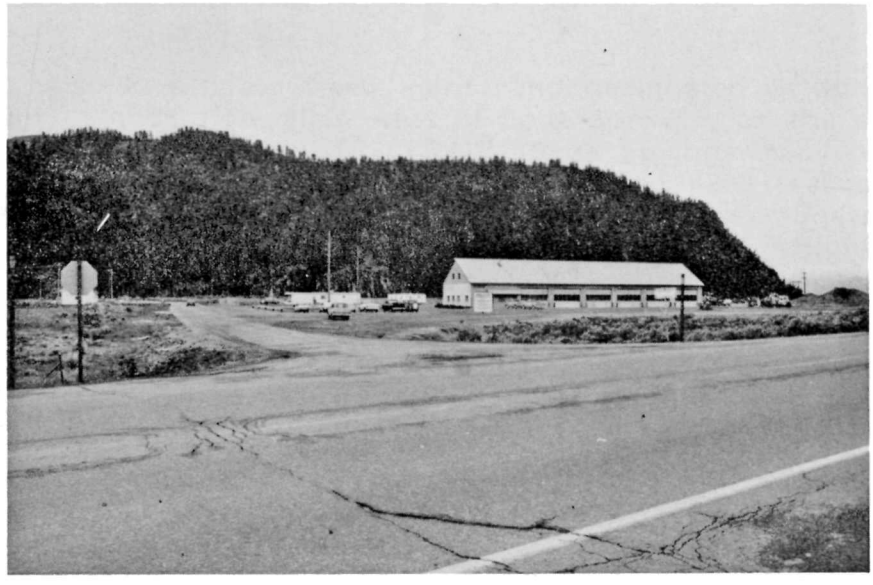
Near the base of Sheep Rock (Sec 8, T9S, R41E) is the locally famous William Henry Harrison monument, erected in 1931 by his niece to commemorate his death on the Oregon Trail in 1850. There is no further documentation concerning Harrison's death or its significance to the Oregon Trail. The monument also makes a reference to the "massacre" of 16 men, women and children in 1860, about one mile to the southwest. In that vicinity (Sec 18, T9S, R41E) a local rancher was able to point out an iron stake driven into the ground, which local legend claims as a marker for the burial site of those victims. This massacre is even less documented than the Wagonbox Burial, and no historian has ever been able to find a reference to it. The suspected massacre site is on private land, and the Harrison monument is located on Idaho Department of Transportation property, near a maintenance shop.

The Idaho Department of Transportation should develop the land around the Harrison monument into a larger interpretive wayside, with a sign pointing out the significance of Sheep Rock to the Oregon Trail. The present Hudspeth Cutoff interpretive sign, which is now nine miles out of place, should be returned to the correct site, or a new sign should be placed there. When possible, the Idaho State Historical Society should conduct an archaeological survey in the area of the suspected massacre burial site to pinpoint the location. In the meantime, until the facts of the case are more thoroughly known, no further references to it would seem prudent.



Sheep Rock (seen looking south) looms over the Oregon Trail.

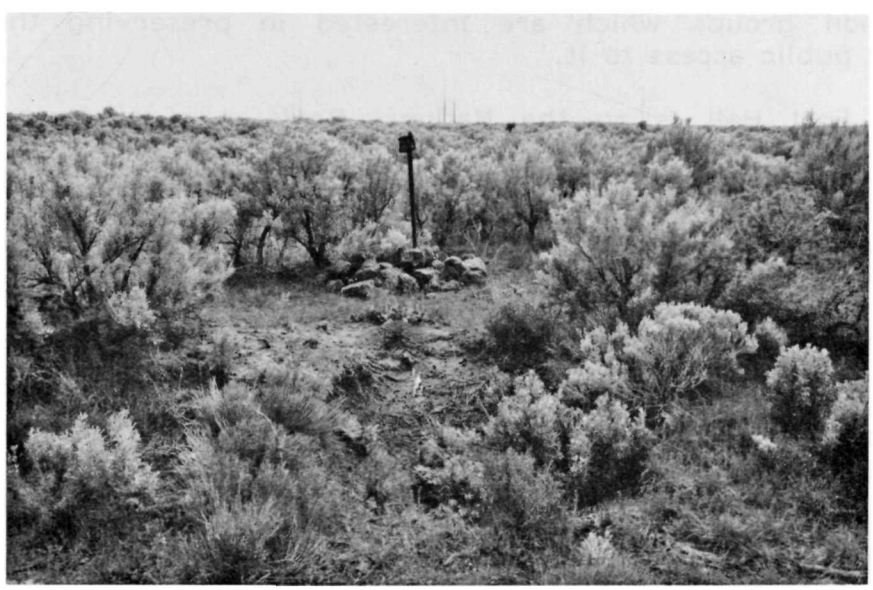
The Idaho Department of Transportation interpretive sign for the Hudspeth Cutoff is located nine miles west of the actual junction of the Oregon Trail and the cutoff.



The Harrison monument is located in the midst of the parking lot to the left of the Idaho Department of Transportation's maintenance shop.

The front of the Harrison monument is dedicated to his memory.

The back of the Harrison monument contains a vague reference to a "massacre" in 1860.



According to local legend, this iron stake marks the former burial site of the "massacre" victims.

FORT HALL (HBC)

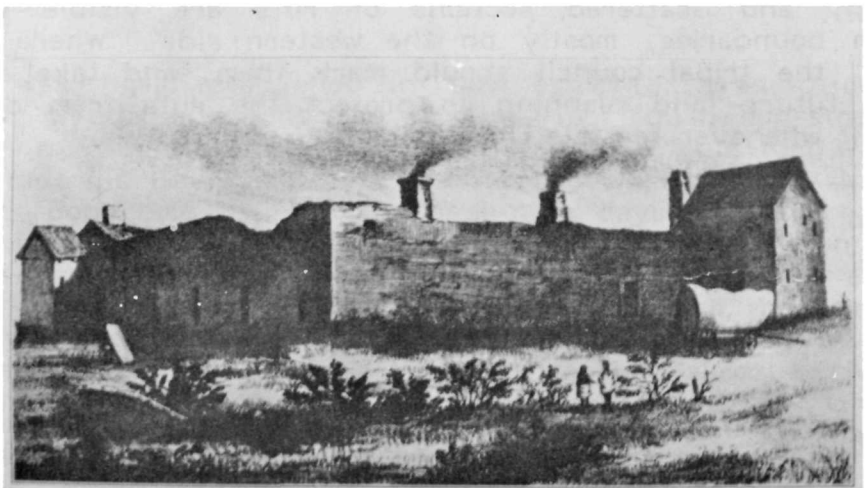
Fort Hall was first established in 1834 as a fur trading outpost by Nathaniel J. Wyeth, and consisted of an 80-foot square log stockade. In 1837, after Wyeth's fur trading enterprises failed, the fort was sold to the rival Hudson's Bay Company, which improved it by encasing the log works with adobe brick. From the beginning days of the Oregon Trail, Fort Hall played a leading role as an important way-station on the trail, and a major source of supplies. For the emigrants, arrival at the fort meant a chance for both rest and refitting, and also the completion of another major leg of their long journey. When the fur trade in the vicinity declined after 1849, Fort Hall was managed almost exclusively by the Hudson's Bay Company as a supply point for the Oregon and California Trails. The site of Fort Hall is now a National Historic Landmark.

Little remains of Fort Hall today. Located on the western edge of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation (Sec 6, T5S, R33E, Springfield map sheet #211, Bannock County), the site of the fort is 59 miles northwest of Sheep Rock, and 197 miles northwest of Fort Bridger. A vandalised stone monument stands near the southwest corner of the old fort, and a low eroded earthern berm can still be traced, marking the outlines of the adobe walls. The fort site is inaccessible to all but four-wheel drive vehicles, as it is located in the midst of a low, marshy meadow adjacent to the Snake River. The land is part of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation and is managed by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council. It is presently part of the tribal grazing grounds and an unofficial wildfowl refuge. Although the road approaching the fort site is graveled, the tribal council is opposed to unrestricted public access to the site, and has been generally unsympathetic towards efforts of local and state historic preservation groups which are interested in preserving the site and providing public access to it.

Although Fort Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places, no measures to protect the remaining evidence of the fort have been taken by either the tribal council or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs should immediately take the proper legal steps to protect the remnants of Fort Hall, and to ensure that the fort site is not further damaged by either human or natural forces. At the minimum, these measures would include a thorough archaeological survey of the site--which has never been done--and further management actions to protect the site, depending upon the results of such a survey.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council should also take appropriate steps to protect the fort and its environs from further impact, through the council's normal land planning procedures. The council should seriously consider opening the area to public access and visitation. A nominal fee charged for such visits could offset the costs involved. At best, such a program would involve upgrading the road to the site, protection of the site from threats posed by increased visitation, stabilization of the area to prevent further erosion, and appropriate interpretation. The council could expect a steady, but not heavy, visitor flow.

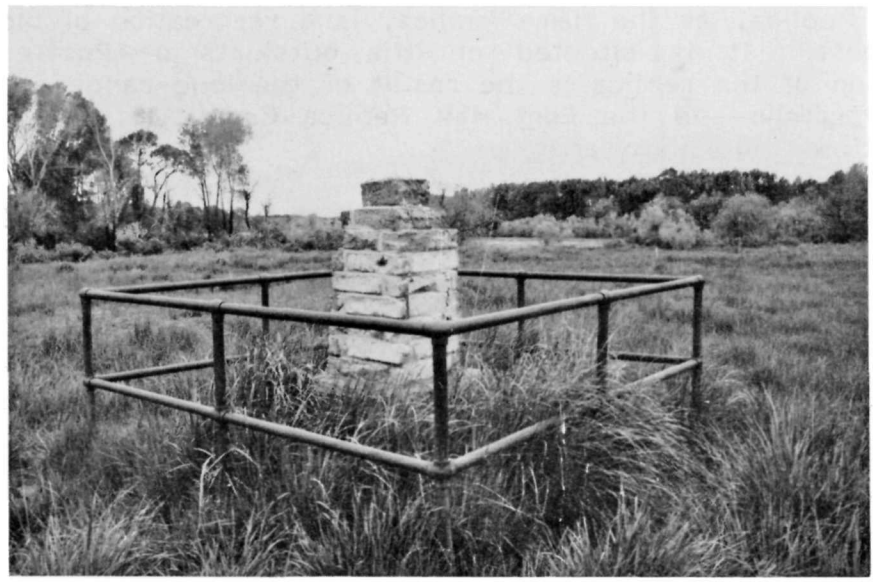
The Oregon Trail crosses the entire width of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, and scattered sections of ruts are visible within the reservation boundaries, mostly on the western side. Where such ruts still exist, the tribal council should mark them, and take appropriate actions in future land planning to protect the ruts from damage and development whenever feasible.



OUTSIDE VIEW OF FORT HALL, 1849

Fort Hall was sketched by Major Osborne Cross in 1849. (Reproduced from Osborne Cross, The March of the Mounted Riflemen. Ed. by Raymond W. Settle (Glendale, Cal: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1940), p. 172.)

The fenced monument stands near the southwest corner of old Fort Hall. In this photo, a portion of the eroded berms, which mark the walls of the fort, may be seen at the left.



The Fort Hall monument was defaced sometime in the past. The Snake River is in the background.

FORT HALL REPLICA

Fort Hall Replica, as the name implies, is a re-creation of old Fort Hall trading post. It is situated on the outskirts of Pocatello, Idaho. Construction of the replica is the result of the long-range efforts of the City of Pocatello and the Fort Hall Replica Committee, a consortium of private citizens and historians.

Plans for construction of the replica began in 1962. Since it was impossible to reconstruct the fort on its original site, 14 miles away on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, the committee decided to build it in Ross Park, one of Pocatello's city parks. Plans for the original Fort Hall, as modified by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1838, were followed as possible during the reconstruction effort. At present, only the addition of two interior buildings are necessary to bring the replica to a condition similar to the original fort. The site is managed by the Fort Hall Replica Committee and maintained by the Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department.

The work done by the Fort Hall Replica Committee did not stop with the construction of the fort, for the replica today also offers one of the best interpretive displays in the State of Idaho. Several large rooms in the interior buildings of the replica are completely devoted to interpretation of the Indian, fur trading, and emigration eras, and together they compose the best Oregon Trail interpretation available in Idaho. The displays are all locally manufactured, so they lack the professional touch, but the extent of information offered, together with a fine collection of maps, photographs, sketches, and artifacts, makes the Fort Hall Replica one of the most complete information centers along the entire Oregon Trail.

The City of Pocatello and the Fort Hall Replica Committee are congratulated for their efforts. Fort Hall Replica is endorsed as a major interpretive center for the Oregon National Historic Trail.

Fort Hall Replica

This partial view of the interior of Fort Hall Replica shows some of the reconstructed buildings. The two log structures on the far side of the photo contain the interpretive displays, and other buildings around the interior of the fort contain artifacts and pioneer equipment.

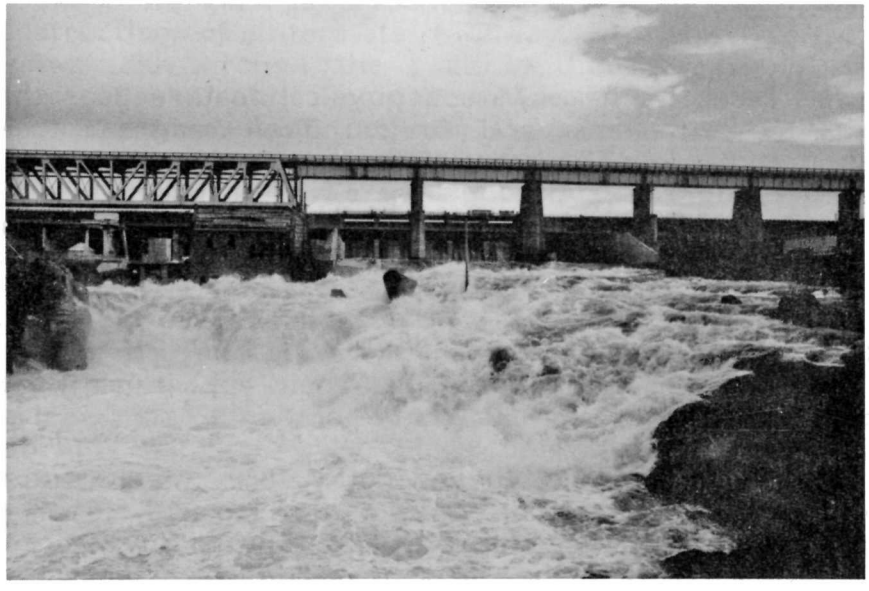
AMERICAN FALLS

American Falls, named in tandem with Canadian Falls (now called Shoshone Falls) farther downstream on the Snake River, was another natural landmark along the Oregon Trail. The roar of the falls, as the river dropped 50 feet, could be heard several miles away. The area below the falls became a favorite camping and resting spot for emigrants.

The falls are tamed today by the construction of the American Falls Dam and Reservoir, which is owned and operated by the Bureau of Reclamation. The Idaho Power Company operates a powerhouse at the dam, and has provided a pleasant little park below the dam, on the eastern edge of the town of American Falls (Sec 30, T7S, R31E, American Falls map sheet #214, Power County), 24 miles southwest of Fort Hall (HBC). From this park, visitors can still appreciate the power of the Snake River as it flows below the dam. A small monument has been placed at the entrance to the park.

The Idaho State Historical Society has provided an interpretive panel in a city park in the town of American Falls, but few besides local residents will ever find it, due to a lack of directional signing.

The town of American Falls, with the help of the Idaho State Historical Society as needed, should provide more adequate interpretation at the city park. Here, visitors could be informed of the importance of American Falls to the Oregon Trail, as well as to the later development of this region of Idaho. The Idaho Department of Transportation should provide directional signing, particularly along Interstate 86, to guide visitors to the site.



The Snake river below the American Falls Dam may be seen from the little observation park established by the Idaho Power Company.

This interpretive panel is located in the center of the town of American Falls.

MASSACRE ROCKS

Massacre Rocks takes its name from a physical feature near the locale of an 1862 skirmish between several Oregon Trail emigrant trains and a roving band of Indians. The actual Massacre Rocks are two rock masses north of the Oregon Trail. Although the site still looks today as an ideal spot for an ambush, the 1862 attack upon the emigrant wagon trains actually took place three to five miles northeast of the rocks. According to local sources, the name of Massacre Rocks was not applied until the 1920s, but that name is now well established through long usage. Massacre Rocks were extensively blasted during the construction of U.S. Highway 30, which considerably changed their appearance, and they no longer seem as ominous as they must have in the 1920s.

The Indian attack, on August 9th and 10th, 1862, involved three wagon trains directly and two more indirectly, and ended with 10 emigrants and an unknown number of Indians killed. The fight was well documented in several emigrant diaries from the wagon trains involved, and marks one of the last hostile actions between emigrants and Indians in this part of Idaho. There are no physical remnants of the fight, which took place over a wide area north and east of the Massacre Rocks.

Massacre Rocks State Park, with its headquarters located just north of the Massacre Rocks (Sec 31, T8S, R30E, Neeley map sheet #216, Power County), is 10 miles southwest of American Falls. The state park has just over 556 acres of land spread out over three detached units, most of which is sandwiched between the Snake River and U.S. Highway 30. The main section of the park, immediately north of Massacre Rocks, has a small visitor center with limited interpretation, primarily devoted to the 1862 Indian fight. This unit of the park is well developed, with facilities for camping, picnicking, boating, fishing and hiking. The park is staffed with two full-time and five seasonal employees, and reports an annual visitation of 100,000.

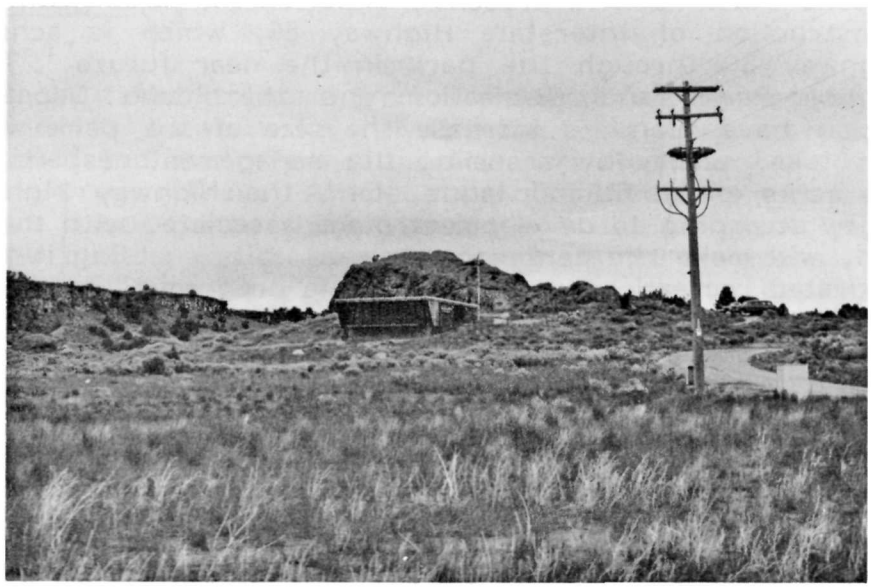
About one and one-half miles northeast, along U.S. Highway 30, is the northern detached unit of the park, which is not yet developed. The main feature of this unit is one-half mile of well-defined Oregon Trail ruts crossing the ridges east of the highway. The park has not yet provided any marking, interpretation or access to these ruts, but has plans to do so as appropriate funding is made available.

The third unit of the park is located two miles southwest of the headquarters (Sec 12, T9S, R29E, Yale map sheet #217, Power County). The key feature there is Register Rock, a half-buried boulder 25 feet in diameter with many names and dates inscribed upon it by Oregon Trail emigrants. This unit has been developed as a day use picnic area, and has a pavilion covering the rock to protect it from weathering and a chain link fence to protect the rock from vandalism. Many notations inscribed on this rock are still clearly legible, making it a particularly good example of the rock-art of the Oregon Trail days. Register Rock is on the National Register of Historic Places, and is very briefly interpreted at the site.

Massacre Rocks State Park is presently experiencing some growing pains, due to construction of Interstate Highway 86, which is scheduled to replace Highway 30 through the park in the near future. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and the Idaho Department of Transportation have plans to increase the size of the park when such construction takes place, by assuming the management responsibility for nearly 500 acres of additional lands along the highway right-of-way. This acreage, according to development plans associated with the highway construction, will make the park a continuous unit, enabling it to develop a more integrated recreational and interpretive program.

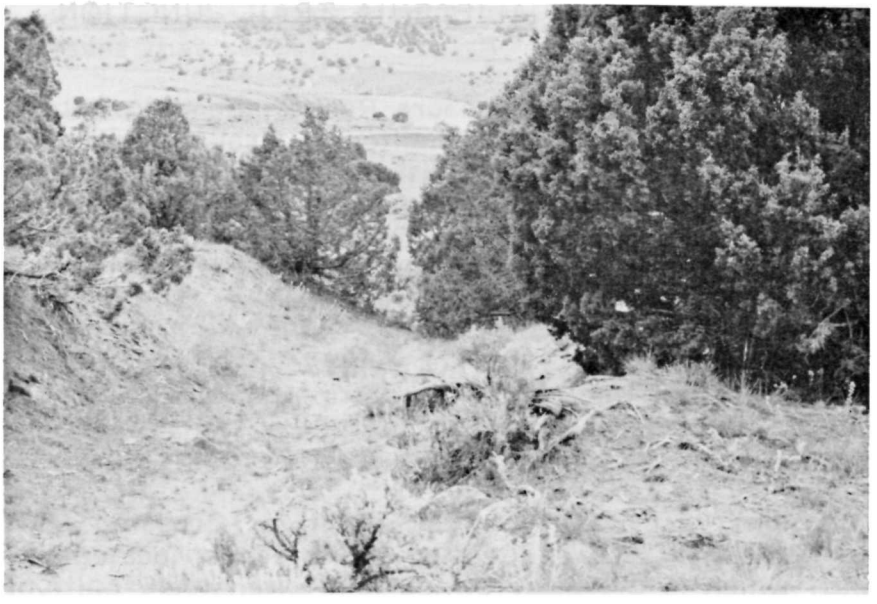
The most valuable historical resources of the park are Register Rock and the excellent Oregon Trail ruts in the north unit. The park and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation are cautioned not to lose sight of these during the excitement and problems encountered during park expansion. Register Rock is well protected, and is facing no immediate threats, but the Oregon Trail ruts are not marked or protected at present and face the threat of eventual destruction. Half of these ruts are within the present park boundaries and half are within the present highway right-of-way. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation will assume management of the latter half following the completion of highway construction.

In the meantime, the park should carry out its present plans to mark, protect, and interpret the ruts within its boundaries, and to establish hiking trails to allow visitors to walk along them. The park also has plans to increase the present interpretive displays and information available in the visitors center and at Register Rock, to more adequately explain the significance of various aspects of Oregon Trail history associated with the area.

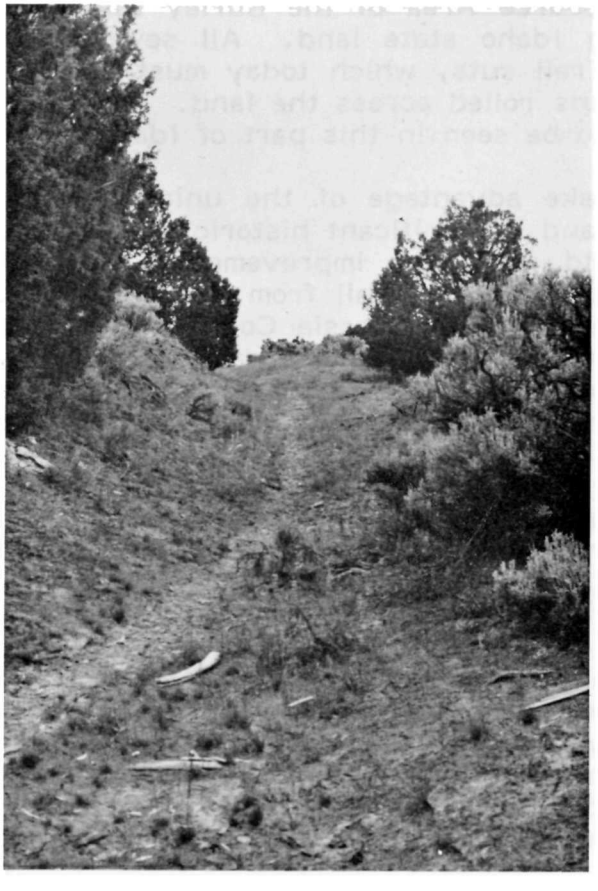


The visitor center at Massacre Rocks State Park is located immediately north of the actual Massacre Rocks.

A protective pavilion covers Register Rock, and a developed picnic area surrounds the site.



A well-preserved rut swale of the Oregon Trail is located at the north unit of the state park. The top photo looks southwest towards U.S. Highway 30 and the Snake River in the background. The bottom photo looks along the trail towards the east, and shows how cattle trails have helped keep the Oregon Trail clear through this area.



RAFT RIVER CROSSING AND CALIFORNIA TRAIL JUNCTION

At this point, 14 miles west of Massacre Rocks, the emigrants reached the final departure of the Oregon and California Trails. After crossing the Raft River, the two main trails divided, with the left fork heading southwest towards California, and the right fork continuing on towards Oregon. Although several alternate routes to California had split from the Oregon Trail farther east--the Salt Lake Route, which left at Fort Bridger, and the Hudspeth Cutoff, which left at Sheep Rock--this was the point at which the main route of the California Trail left the primary route of the Oregon Trail. Strangely enough, many emigrants had traveled this far before they finally made up their minds concerning their final destination, and the emigrant diaries tell of many wagon trains which parted company there.

The trail junction, just west of the Raft River Crossing (Sec 7, T10S, R28E, Yale map sheet #217, Cassia County), is located on low-lying riverbed land, which is privately owned and extensively cultivated. Thus there are no physical traces of this important trail junction left on the ground. The site, however, may be seen from an excellent vantage point one-half mile to the west, atop a ridge which overlooks the Raft River Valley.

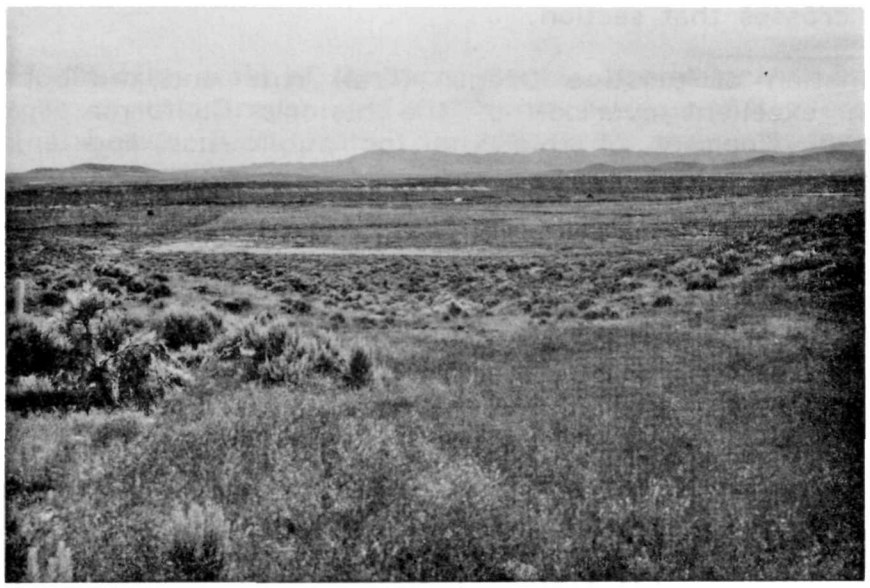
The Oregon Trail climbed this ridge and headed west, over the rolling range lands of southcentral Idaho. Seven miles of the trail directly west of the Raft River are in public ownership, with six miles being part of the Raft River Resource Area of the Burley District of the Idaho BLM, and one mile being Idaho state land. All seven miles have visible and unspoiled Oregon Trail ruts, which today must appear much as they did when the last wagons rolled across the land. These are some of the best Oregon Trail ruts to be seen in this part of Idaho.

The BLM should take advantage of the unique combination of excellent Oregon Trail ruts and a significant historic site by developing the two in tandem. This would entail the improvement of the present access road which approaches the Oregon Trail from the south (Sec 11, T10S, R27E, Lake Walcott map sheet #218, Cassia County). At the point where that access road meets the Oregon Trail, a parking area is recommended, with directional signs to guide potential hikers, and protective measures to keep vehicles off the pristine Oregon Trail ruts. Visitors could then hike one and one-half miles to the east along the clearly defined and well-marked Oregon Trail ruts, to an overlook point (Sec 12, T10S, R27E) where a grand view of the Raft River Valley is available. On-site interpretation at that point should describe the crossing site, point out the general directions of the Oregon and California Trails, and the significance of the trail junction.

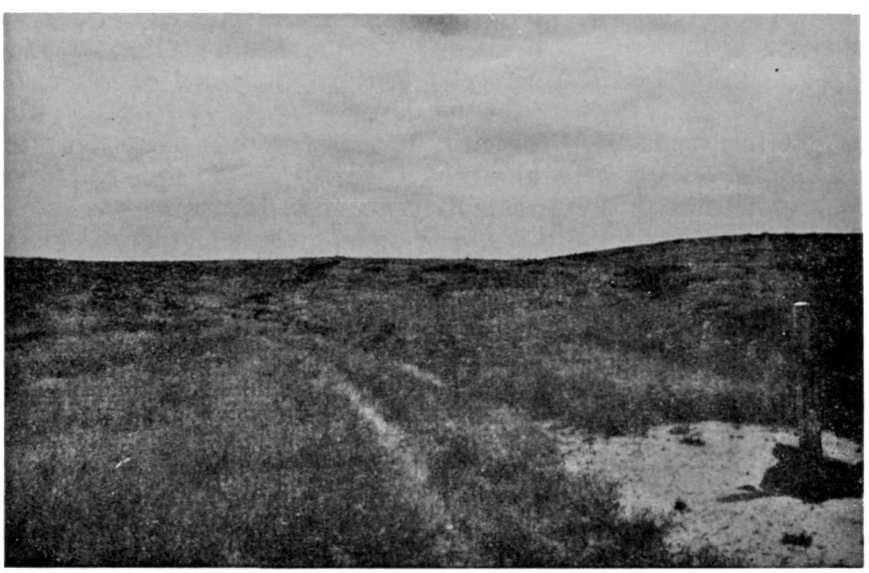
To the west of the parking area, more determined hikers would have the opportunity to hike six miles of the Oregon Trail, all of which are traversed by very visible and pristine ruts. The last one-half mile crosses private land, and the BLM will have to obtain the appropriate access easements or agreements to allow hikers to cross it. The BLM should also make arrangements with the State of Idaho to allow visitors to

cross one section of state land, and to allow the BLM to mark the Oregon Trail as it crosses that section.

The combination of pristine Oregon Trail ruts and the opportunity to provide an excellent overlook of the historic California Trail junction makes the development of this site for public use and enjoyment the highest priority for the Oregon National Historic Trail within the Burley District of the Idaho BLM.



The Raft River Crossing and California Trail Junction is seen from the site of the proposed BLM overlook. The Oregon Trail climbs the hill in the immediate foreground (a BLM marker may be seen at the left of the photo). The trail junction is in the middle of the cultivated field in the center of the photo, with the California Trail crossing the photo from center to right, and the Raft River is in the background, where the line of short vegetation crosses the photo from left to right.

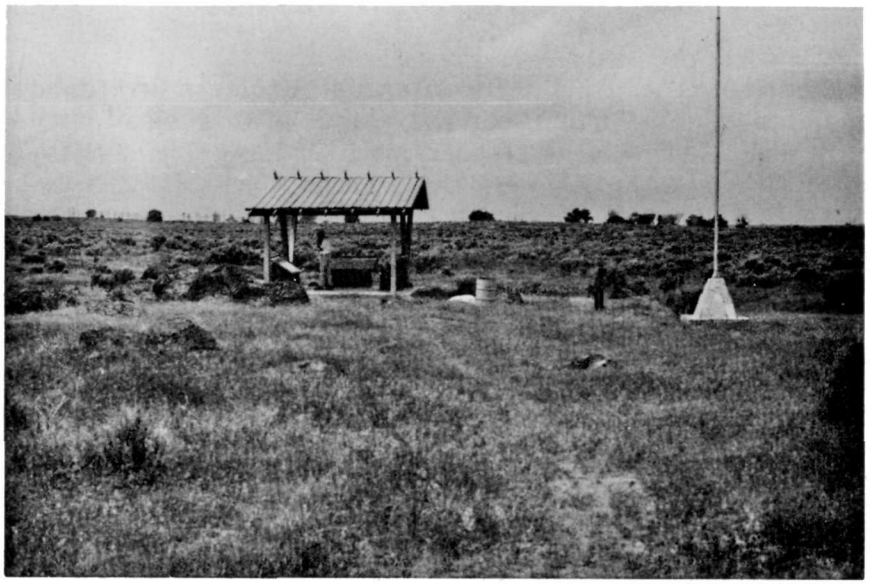


Pristine Oregon Trail ruts may be seen throughout this stretch of BLM land. This photo looks east along the trail, from a point one mile east of the proposed overlook, and shows the trail trace in the foreground, next to the BLM marker, with three distinct rut lines climbing the hill in the background.

MILNER RUTS

This site is one of the BLM's Bicentennial projects in Idaho, and is an excellent example of how much can be done with a small site. The main attraction initially was a stretch of good Oregon Trail ruts which cross several sections of BLM land. But, spurred by the Bicentennial program, and working in conjunction with the Milner Youth Conservation Corps, the Burley District of the Idaho BLM has developed a very attractive interpretive site. Located 41 miles west of the California Trail Junction, (Sec 28, T10S, R21E, Burley SW map sheet #222, Cassia County), the site has a good Oregon Trail interpretive shelter, and a one-mile nature trail with 16 points of interest, two of which are devoted to the Oregon Trail ruts. The trail, which is clearly visible, has been marked by the BLM to the west of the interpretive site, where the nature trail follows it for half mile, but has not been marked on BLM lands to the east of the site. The site has good access via two miles of gravel road off U.S. Highway 30.

The only recommendation to improve this site concerns the trail to the east. Since it is well-defined as a two-track trace across three and one-half miles of BLM land to the east of the present interpretive site, it should be marked for the benefit of visitors who desire a longer hike. The combination of good trail remnants, easy access, pleasant scenery, and the opportunity to hike along the banks of the Snake River makes this portion of the Oregon Trail one with high potential for public use.



The BLM has an interpretive shelter at the Milner Ruts. The nature trail makes a wide loop to the west of this shelter, meeting the Oregon Trail to the left of the photo, and the Snake River, to the right.

The ruts of the Oregon Trail head toward the Snake River in the background. This portion of the trail, to the west of the interpretive shelter, is used as part of the nature trail developed by the BLM.

CALDRON LINN

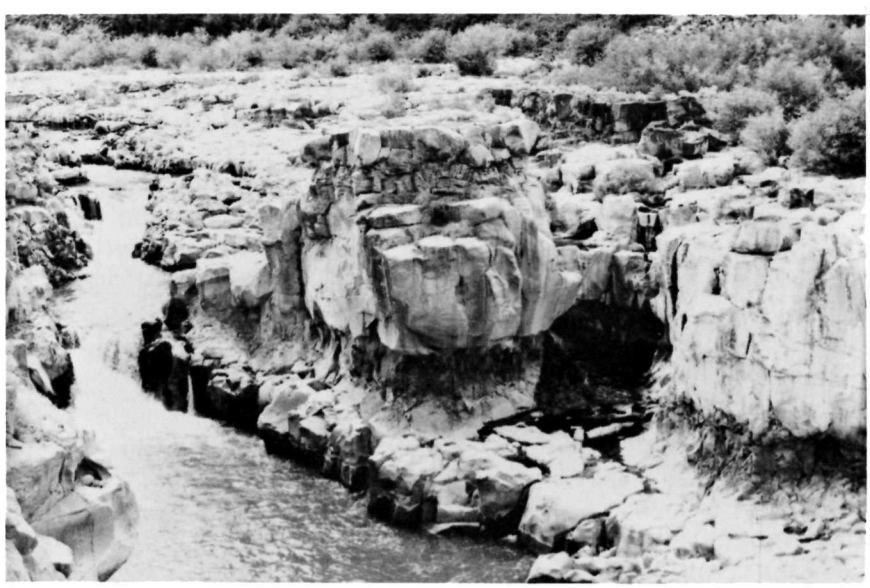
Caldron Linn is a narrow rock walled chute along the Snake River, terminated by a sharp drop of 40 feet. The boiling violence of the waters along this stretch led to the name of Caldron Linn (Linn is a Gaelic word for waterfall) being applied by early nineteenth-century fur traders. To the traders, Caldron Linn was a major disappointment in their explorations of the Snake River, for it effectively prevented water transportation through this part of Idaho. Caldron Linn was less of an attraction for Oregon Trail emigrants, although some of them took the time to visit and comment upon the site. The roar of the water was audible miles away. Today, the Snake River has been tamed by dams and irrigation projects to such an extent that the Linn is much less impressive than it was to the fur traders and emigrants.

Caldron Linn is located seven miles west of the Milner Ruts (Sec 5, T11S, R20E, Murtaugh map sheet #225, Twin Falls County), where the Snake River flows through a narrow bed at the bottom of a steep and wide canyon. Access to the actual site is impassible to normal vehicles at this time, although four-wheel drive vehicles can negotiate a steep dirt road which descends from the north rim of the Snake River canyon. The canyon and the lands adjacent to it are privately owned. There is no interpretation at or near the site.

Since the Caldron Linn has a relatively low level of significance to the Oregon Trail, the only recommendation is that an overlook be provided, whereby travelers could view the site from above. The best possibility for such an overlook appears to be from the south side of the canyon, directly opposite the Linn, but a short access easement will be necessary to allow visitors to cross 300 feet of private farmland. The Idaho Department of Transportation has an interpretive sign for Caldron Linn, located west of the nearby town of Murtaugh, but that sign is far enough away from the site to be almost meaningless. The sign should either be removed to the proposed overlook site, or new on-site interpretation should be provided. The development of this overlook for visitor use would best be carried out by Twin Falls County, with assistance as necessary from the Idaho Department of Transportation and the Idaho State Historical Society.

As a long-range possibility, Twin Falls County should also consider the high potential of the Snake River canyon bottom at Caldron Linn for a county park. Within the canyon, where Caldron Linn may be viewed close up, the boiling waters are quite impressive, even when the water level of the Snake River is low. The canyon bottom is now unused, and has valuable recreational potential. Minimum improvements to turn this area into a county park would include improvement of the access road down the north rim of the canyon, controlled access within the canyon to prevent off-road vehicle use from damaging the fragile environment, on-site interpretation, and an ample supply of signs to warn the public of the danger of falling off the steep cliffs into the Snake River. Although this recommendation is not a high priority for the Oregon Trail, it should be considered as a long-range possibility, due to the area's combination of historic, scenic and natural qualities.

Caldron Linn is see from the proposed overlook site on the south rim of the Snake River canyon. Although this photo, taken with a wide-angle lens, distorts the proportions, it shows the wide bottom of the canyon, with the access road at the top of the photo which descends the north rim, and the narrow chute of the Snake River in the center. Caldron Linn is not directly visible, but is in the exact center of the photo, where the river disappears.



Even when visited during low water periods, Caldron Linn is impressive when viewed from the bottom of the Snake River canyon. Note the heavily eroded rocks above the present water level which indicates the power of the Linn during high water.

STRICKER STORE

The Stricker Store, built in 1863, was the first trading post established on the Oregon Trail west of Fort Hall. Prior to its establishment, the area around the store had been used as a campsite by Oregon Trail emigrants, due to the good water afforded by Rock Creek, which flows just south of the store. After 1863, with the additional lure of supplies available at the store, the site became even more popular. In later years the store served as the Rock Creek Station on the Ben Halliday Stage Line, and now represents the only original stage station remaining from that important line which connected Utah and Idaho in pre-railroad days. The store is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Located nine miles west of Caldron Linn (Sec 14, T11S, R18E, Stricker Butte map sheet #226, Twin Falls County), the store is in private ownership. The store is still relatively intact, although some intrusive adaptations have been made. Screens cover the windows, a tin roof covers the old sod roof to prevent weathering, and a 1940-era outhouse is located behind the store. The interior is in good condition, but has not been cleaned in some time. In general, the property appears to be no longer cared for, and is in danger of eventual deterioration. Two stone cellars, with log and earthern roofs, stand behind the store, and several hand-lettered signs (with some misleading information) interpret the site. The store stands adjacent to a paved county highway, which provides excellent access.

To the west of the store, along the banks of Rock Creek, is a short stretch of good Oregon Trail rut swale, the site of the well-known emigrant campground, and the suspected site of a late nineteenth-century cemetery. These are all located on private range land. A scattering of historic debris is visible in the campground ara, including some broken turn-of-the-century beer bottles.

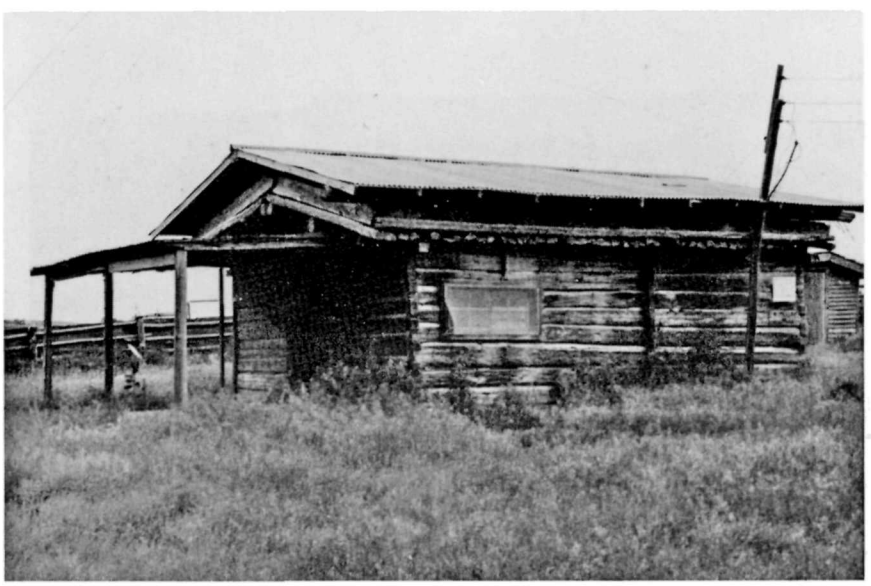
Crowding the store on the east is a farmyard. An interpretive monument is presently located along U.S. Highway 30 in the town of Hanson, six miles northeast of the store, but that monument is far removed from the actual site.

The Stricker Store site, which has a rich and varied history and extensive remains, deserves much better protection and interpretation than is now provided. Twin Falls County should acquire the property, or at least assist the private owner in maintaining the site. The store building and cellars need immediate stabilization work, including the removal of modern adaptations, and the entire site needs full and accurate interpretation. Twin Falls County should also acquire the strip of land to the west of the store, between the county road and Rock Creek, in order to preserve and interpret the Oregon Trail rut swale and campground.

In addition, the owner of the farmyard located immediately east of the site needs to be apprised of its historic importance and fragile condition, and requested to assist in its protection, possibly in a caretaker capacity.

Eventually a modest buffer strip between the site and the farmyard should be acquired. If the above is beyond the means of Twin Falls County, then the Idaho State Historical Society should be given the responsibility. In either case, the Historical Society should conduct an archaeological survey of the store grounds and the campground, to identify and preserve any artifacts or remnants of Oregon Trail days.

The rear of the Stricker Store faces the road in the foreground, with the front facing Rock Creek in the background. The gate to the left is an entrance to a private farmyard.



A tin roof has been built on top of the original sod roof of the Stricker Store.

Two cellars are located behind the store, between it and the road.

An Oregon Trail campground is located west of the Stricker store. Rock Creek runs through the ravine in the middle of the photo.

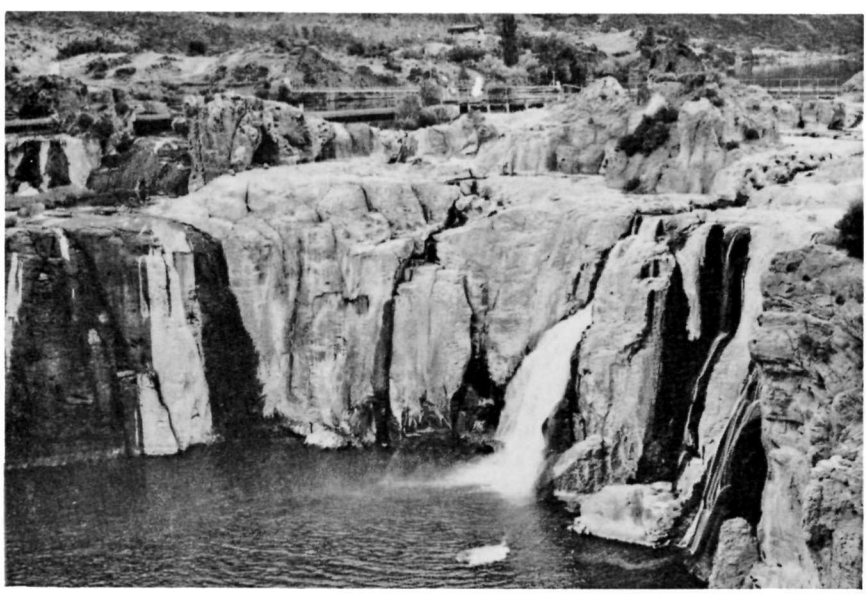
SHOSHONE FALLS

Shoshone Falls was a horseshoe-shaped cataract of impressive dimensions, where the Snake River fell 212 feet, creating a roar which was audible for miles. Although the falls are located five miles north of the trail (Sec 31, T9S, R18E, Twin Falls map sheet #228, Twin Falls County), some emigrants went to the extra effort to investigate the cause of the noise. The falls were originally named Canadian Falls, but the name was changed in 1849.

Today, as in emigration years, Shoshone Falls should be considered as a sight-seeing side trip from the Oregon Trail. Even though the falls has long been tamed by a dam, and has no direct significance to the trail itself, the trip is worth taking. The City of Twin Falls has created a very nice little park next to the south side of the falls, with facilities for picnicking and sightseeing. Only a trickle of water normally escapes the dam, since much water is taken out of the Snake for power and irrigation purposes, but one can still visualize the former power of the river, and see one more reason why the Snake River could never be developed as a transportation route during pioneer days. For those lucky enough to arrive in the early days of spring, a more impressive amount of water is released from the dam.

Twin Falls charges a slight fee to enter its park in order to recover the costs of maintaining the area. The city should use some of those funds to provide interpretation at the overlook, giving visitors an introduction into the history of the falls and its impact upon the surrounding area--from fur trading and emigrant days to the development of the dam. The area is easily accessible from the town of Twin Falls, four miles southwest of the dam.

Shoshone Falls may be seen from above the entrance to the city park. During emigrant days, the entire horseshoe was covered by the falls, from the powerplant at the left of the photo to the dam site at the right. The present city park is tucked below the dam, out of view, in the right center of the photo.



The water outlet from Shoshone Falls dam is seen from the overlook at the city park. During high water in the early spring the entire rock cliff seen in the photo will be covered by the falls.

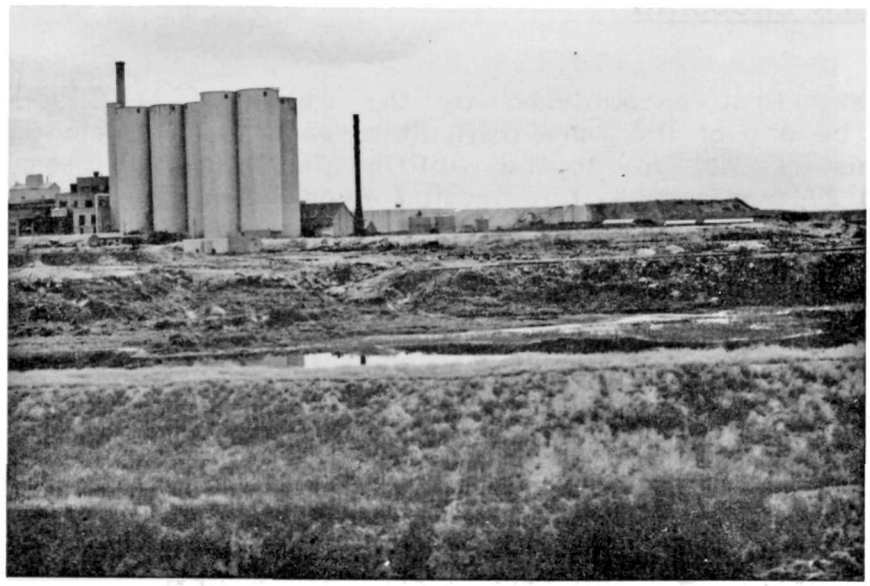
ROCK CREEK CROSSING

Rock Creek, first encountered by the emigrants at Stricker's Store, proved to be one of the more difficult streams to cross along the Oregon Trail. This was not due to the width or depth of the stream, for it was only 15 to 20 feet across, but because Rock Creek had cut a deep chasm through the volcanic rock of the area. The unpretentious stream ran through a narrow canyon, described in 1844 as being from 100 to 200 yards wide and 50 to 100 feet deep, with almost vertical walls. Thus the Oregon Trail was forced to follow the north bank of Rock Creek for almost 11 miles west from Stricker's Store before a cut was found in its bank which permitted negotiation by wagons.

This cut, just south of the town of Twin Falls, (Sec 26, T10S, R17E, Twin Falls map sheet #228, Twin Falls County), became Rock Creek crossing, and it is safe to say that every wagon which passed along the Oregon Trail through Idaho crossed Rock Creek near this point. Unfortunately, the site has been altered almost beyond recognition by a combination of a dump site, land fill, and water treatment facility on the south bank, and a sugar factory on the north bank. Still, on-site examination revealed a gentle rut swale leaving the south bank of the creek, exactly where the Oregon Trail used to cross. The site is privately owned, and is neither marked nor interpreted.

The recommendation for this sadly impacted historic site is for the city and county of Twin Falls to establish a simple highway wayside along the paved county road, where that road crosses Rock Creek, about 1000 feet west of the crossing site. Visitors could there obtain an idea of the geography of the region, which dictated this crossing site, with the benefit of roadside interpretation and a glimpse of Rock Creek.

Although it would take a long-term committment to clean up the crossing site, due to modern impacts, the south bank of the crossing could some day become a very nice little park. The presence of the Oregon Trail rut swale leaving the creek should be significant enough to cause Twin Falls City and County to consider seriously such a long-range proposal.



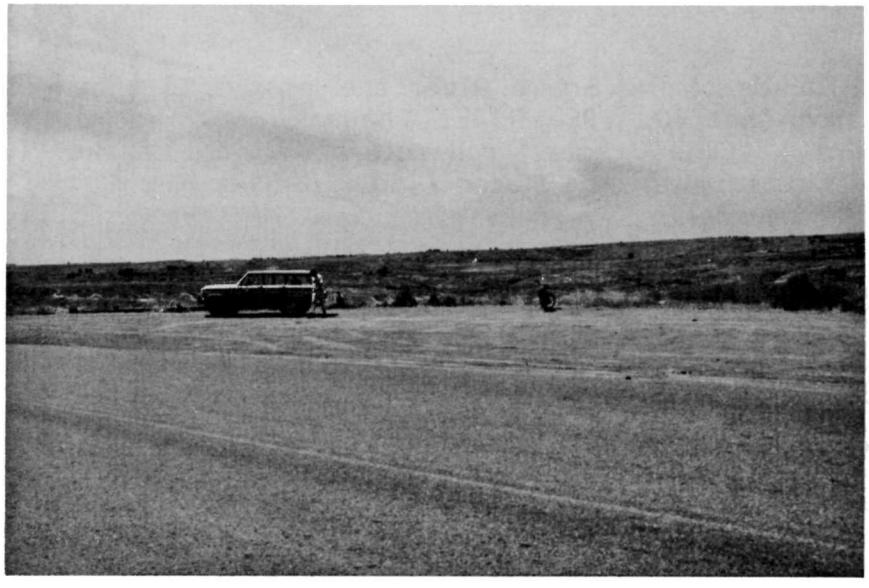
The extensive damage done to Rock Creek crossing site by industrial development is partially visible in this photo. The rut swale pictured below is to the left of this photo.

An Oregon Trail rut swale climbs out of Rock Creek, which flows through the ravine below.

KANAKA RAPIDS

The Kanaka Rapids of the Snake River are located 18 miles west of Rock Creek Crossing (Sec 10, T9S, R14E, Thousand Springs map sheet #232, Gooding County). The Oregon Trail returned to the Snake River there, after having veered away at Caldron Linn. Kanaka Rapids was a welcome sight for most emigrants, for it was the first of several spots along the Snake River where they were able to trade with the Indians for fresh fish. The rapids formed a natural barrier to migrating salmon, and had long been a favorite Indian fishing spot. For a time, the rapids were known as Fremont's Fishing Falls, after John C. Fremont, who first publicized them after his 1843 journey.

The rapids are not so spectacular today, especially when viewed during the summer months when local irrigation demands have siphoned off much Snake River water. A natural overlook already exists, about one-half mile north of the rapids and 300 feet in elevation above the river. Gooding County should take advantage of this natural overlook of Kanaka Rapids and the Snake River. From all indications, the overlook is already a favorite evening parking area, and all it needs to become a nice interpretive overlook is a sign and a guardrail. The railing might help prevent the further use of this area as an unofficial dump, for the cliff below the overlook is now covered with several years accumulation of trash. The Idaho State Historical Society should assist Gooding County, as necessary, with the preparation of an interpretive sign.



This unofficial overlook north of Kanaka Rapids is recommended for development into an interpretive overlook.

The Snake River valley may be seen by looking directly south from the overlook. Kanaka Rapids is in the direct center of the photo.

THOUSAND SPRINGS

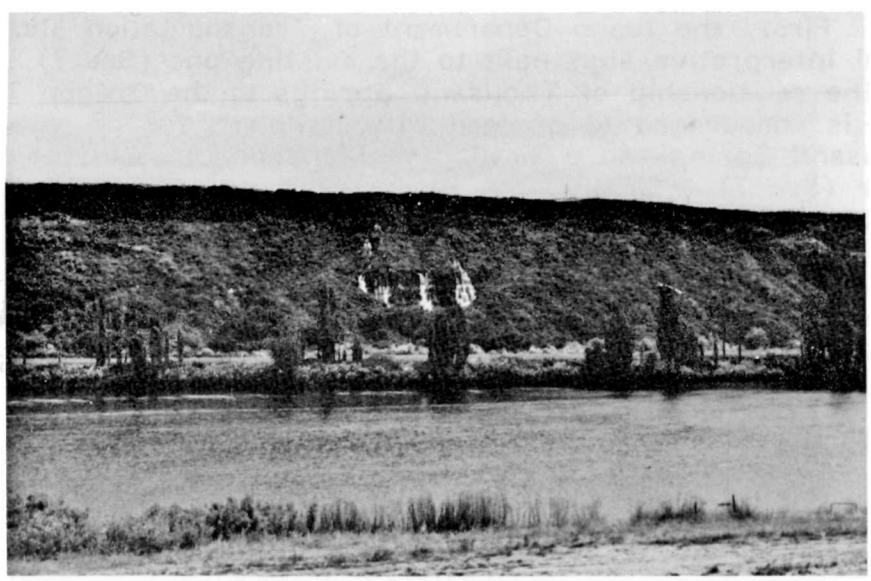
Thousand Springs is a series of streams which gush from beneath the rimrock on the north bank of the Snake River and cascade into the river. They were once numerous enough to merit the name "Thousand Springs," and were a landmark of considerable interest to the emigrants, who are credited with naming the feature. Thousand Springs has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Located seven miles northwest of Kanaka Rapids (Sec 8, T8S, R14E, Thousand Springs map sheet #232, Gooding County), the springs now number less than 100, but are still plainly visible as their waters plummet down. A combination of irrigation demands on the plateau north of the Snake River and the diversion of water for power and other purposes, have all cut the volume of spring water flowing into the Snake River by an estimated 40 percent. The springs are visible for several miles along U.S. Highway 30 on the south bank of the river, and still offer a very attractive scenic view. The Idaho Department of Transportation has provided an interpretive sign for the springs along Highway 30 (sec 7, T8S, R14E, Twin Falls County), but that sign addresses only the geological formation of the springs, and does not mention the Oregon Trail.

A short section of fairly good Oregon Trail ruts are also in the vicinity (Sections 18 and 19, T8S, R14E, Twin Falls County), as the Oregon Trail climbs a low ridge south of the river. Portions of these ruts are upon privately owned lands, and portions are on public land administered by the Boise District of the Idaho BLM. The ruts are accessible from Highway 30, but are not presently marked or interpreted.

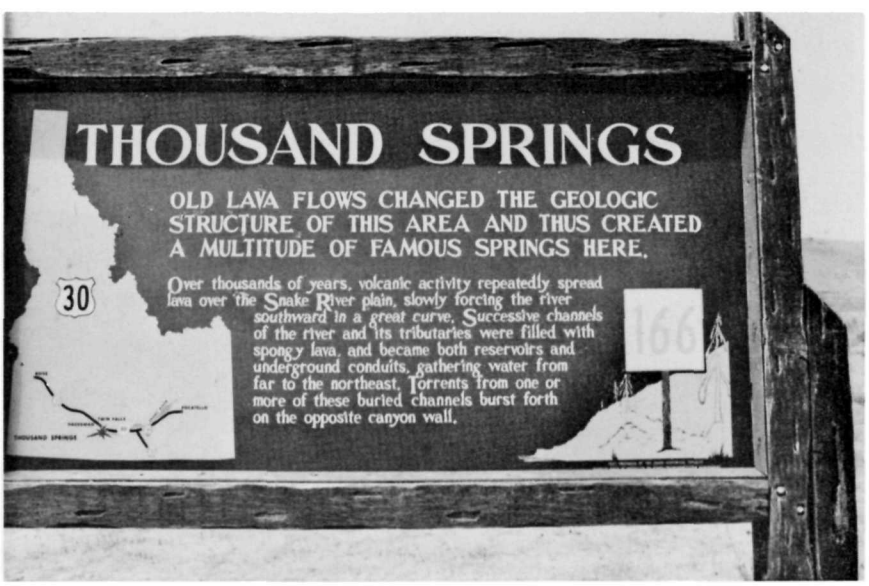
Several recommendations are in order for this area, listed in order of priority. First, the Idaho Department of Transportation should erect an additional interpretive sign next to the existing one (Sec 7), which would explain the relationship of Thousand Springs to the Oregon Trail. Next, the BLM is encouraged to proceed with its plans for an interpretive site for Thousand Springs on a small parcel of land between the highway and the river (Sec 7). Finally, the BLM should open the stretch of Oregon Trail ruts on public land (Section 19) to public use. The ruts are very distinct, and would provide a short hike up the ridge, where a grand view of the Thousand Springs area is possible. The ruts need marking and interpretation, as well as protection from vehicular usage, due to erosion dangers as the ruts climb the sandy hillside.

The Oregon Trail ruts west of Thousand Springs on BLM land are seen here looking east towards the Snake River. The cut in the immediate foreground marks the original path of the trail, which joins the two-track trail in the background. Note the sandy soil, which is easily eroded when over-used by vehicles.



A portion of the Thousand Springs is seen from U.S. Highway 30.

The small parcel of land in the foreground is under consideration by the BLM for an interpretive wayside. More of the Thousand Springs are visible in the background, across the Snake River.



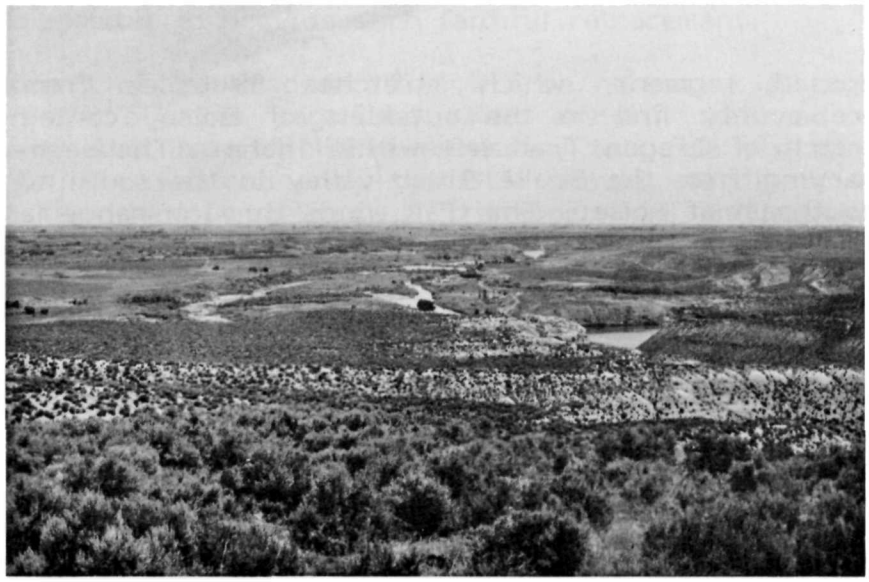
Idaho Department of Transportation's present interpretive sign for Thousand Springs fails to mention the Oregon Trail.

UPPER SALMON FALLS

Like Kanaka Rapids to the southeast, Upper Salmon Falls was a favorite Indian fishing spot, where they gathered to spear the salmon which were so obstructed in their ascent of the Snake River that they could be easily taken. Salmon could be bartered from the Indians, which was a great help to the emigrants, many of whom had by then used up most of the food they brought with them. Like most of the falls of the Snake River, Upper Salmon Falls has been impacted greatly by a dam and power house, resulting in the loss of much of its historic integrity and scenic interest. The falls are located three miles west of Thousand Springs (Sec 2, T8S, R13E, Hagerman map sheet #234, Twin Falls County).

The BLM, however, has a section of land (Sec 32, T7S, R13E) three miles west and overlooking the falls, which would be ideal for a scenic overlook and interpretive wayside. Access to this proposed site is via a paved county road. At that point, the county road, which has been built directly on top of the Oregon Trail, takes a wide curve, and the original Oregon Trail cuts through the inside of the curve, leaving an arc of good Oregon Trail ruts which were not destroyed by highway construction.

The Boise District of the Idaho BLM should combine the Oregon Trail rut swale visible at that location with a scenic and interpretive overlook of the Salmon Falls region of the Snake River valley. An excellent view of the river valley is available, and a short half-mile hike along an original Oregon Trail rut swale would make a pleasant and educational diversion to many travelers. The rut swale would need protection and marking, and on-site interpretation should be provided at the proposed overlook.



This view of Upper Salmon Falls (center of photo) would be available from the proposed BLM overlook.

The Oregon Trail rut swale, looking northwest, is seen from the proposed BLM overlook.

NORTH TRAIL SEGMENT

This proposed segment, which stretches 83 miles from the Twin Falls-Elmore county line to the outskirts of Boise, contains the best overall stretch of Oregon Trail left within Idaho. The segment features scenery varying from the Snake River valley in the south to the broken foothills southeast of Boise. The trail winds through range lands and the foothills, at times passing through beautiful and narrow canyons and along the edges of mountain streams. Over two-thirds of this segment is cross-country and has relatively pristine trail ruts, which have rarely been driven or disturbed in the last 120 years. About one-third of the segment follows dirt range roads which have been laid directly on top of the Oregon Trail, and are used intermittently by local ranchers for access purposes. The entire segment is relatively isolated and free from development, with the exception of several small ranches tucked in the canyons, the town of Glenns Ferry, and the near-deserted town of Mayfield.

This segment would start at the Twin Falls-Elmore county line (Sec 10, T7S, R12E, Indian Butte map sheet #235). It heads northwest across the rangeland, following along line of good trail remnants, passes the Pilgrim Stage Station, and crosses the Snake River at Three Island Crossing. Leaving the Snake River valley, the segment then enters the foothills and passes Hot Springs, Rattlesnake Station, Canyon Creek Station and Register Rock, before peaking at Bonneville Point and heading down towards Boise. The suggested western terminus would meet the alignment of a proposed highway connecting Interstate 84 with Idaho Highway 21 on the eastern edge of Boise (Sec 36, T3N, R2E, Boise South map sheet #244, Ada County).

The trail crosses Idaho Highway 68 northeast of Mountain Home, and Interstate 84 just north of Three Island Crossing. The Idaho Department of Transportation has already provided a pedestrian underpass beneath the Interstate at this point. The trail is clearly defined for most of the segment, either through visible ruts or BLM markers, but is difficult to locate in several places.

Forty-five miles of this segment cross lands administered by the Boise District of the Idaho BLM, six miles cross Idaho state lands, and 32 miles cross privately owned property. The 32 miles in private ownership will require the negotiation of access easements to allow visitors to cross private lands. About eight of the miles across private property are in existing dirt roads. In most cases, these private lands are used for range purposes.

The Boise District of the Idaho BLM should have the lead responsibility for this segment. That office, with the cooperation of the State of Idaho and the appropriate private landowners, should negotiate the required access agreements, and provide the necessary public use facilities. The BLM has already marked four miles of the Oregon Trail as it crosses public lands in this district with sturdy concrete posts and it is recommended that it complete the marking of public lands and negotiate for permission and provide and erect markers for the trail as it crosses private and state-owned lands throughout the segment. The segment

should follow the exact line of the Oregon Trail except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement.

The development of trailhead facilities will be necessary at both the east and west ends of this segment. The eastern trailhead should be developed with the usual facilities necessary to guide visitors along the segment. On the western end, the BLM should coordinate a trailhead facility with the Idaho Department of Transportation, and should negotiate access easements with the private landowners between the trailhead and Bonneville Point. Housing and industrial development on the outskirts of Boise are steadily encroaching upon the western end of the segment, and the development of a western terminus should have a high priority.

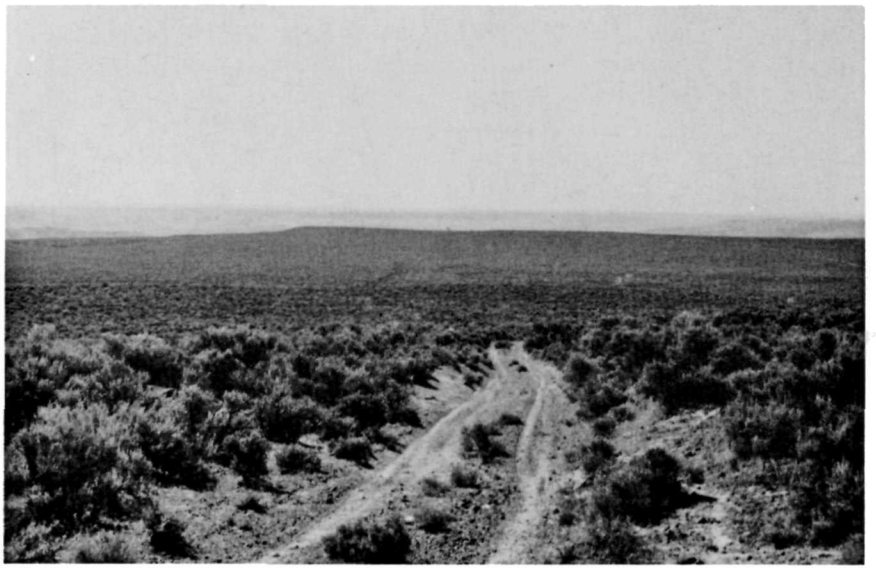
Intermediate trail facilities will also be necessary, for most hikers will not be able to cover the entire segment during one outing. At present, the best spots for such intermediate trailheads would be Three Island Crossing State Park, and the junction of the segment with Idaho Highway 68, about 25 miles west of Three Island Crossing. Other trail facilities, such as rest points, trail heads and water spots, should be developed by the BLM as public use of the segment dictates through the years. These recommendations are made with no clear idea concerning potential trail usage. Three Island Crossing State Park reports many requests for Oregon Trail information at its visitor center, and brisk sales of Gregory Franzwa's The Oregon Trail Revisited indicates that there is some demand for directions to follow the Oregon Trail through this portion of Idaho.

The greatest single threat to this segment of the Oregon Trail is the continuing opening of range land to cultivation, as irrigation methods and abilities improve. More of the Oregon Trail has been lost to agriculture than to any other cause within Idaho over the past 10 years, and there every reason to think this trend will continue. Since the cultivation of lands has a much greater impact upon the visual and cultural qualities of the trail experience than does range use, the BLM should carefully monitor the desert lands entry program to prevent the plowing of lands on or near the trail. A protective corridor for the North Trail Segment would be the ideal management option for protection of the segment. The width of this protective corridor will vary according to geography, but should be maintained at an average of one-quarter mile on either side of the trail.

The use of vehicles at present is not a great threat to the trail, except near Bonneville Point. Those portions of the trail which wind cross country are rarely used, and such use constitutes a form of unofficial trail maintenance, preventing vegetation from filling in the ruts and obliterating them from view. The portions overlain with dirt roads have already been impacted by the grading of the roads. The BLM should carefully monitor the use of the roaded and unroaded portions of the segment, in order to adapt their off-road vehicle plans and regulations to best protect the trail segment.

The above are the ideal recommendations for the implementation of the North Trail Segment. Establishment of the entire segment as recommended will take years of planning, funding bequests, and negotiations with private landowners. In the meantime, the BLM should

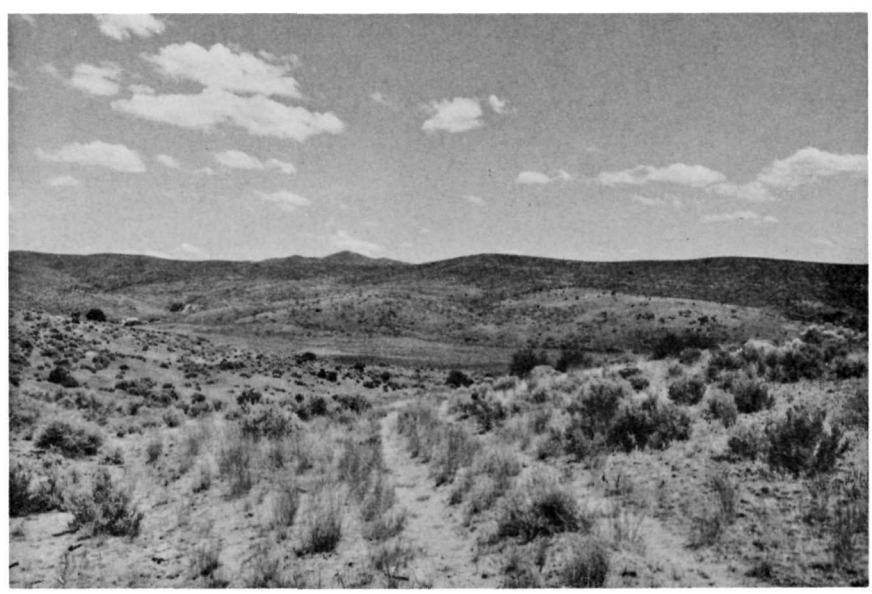
open those portions of the trail to public use which cross BLM lands and are easily accessible and monitored. Opening of such sections of the trail, together with notification of their existance and availability for public use, will go far towards building the desired public constituency and support for the Oregon National Historic Trail.



The Oregon Trail crosses BLM land, heading west from a point three miles north of Three Island Crossing.

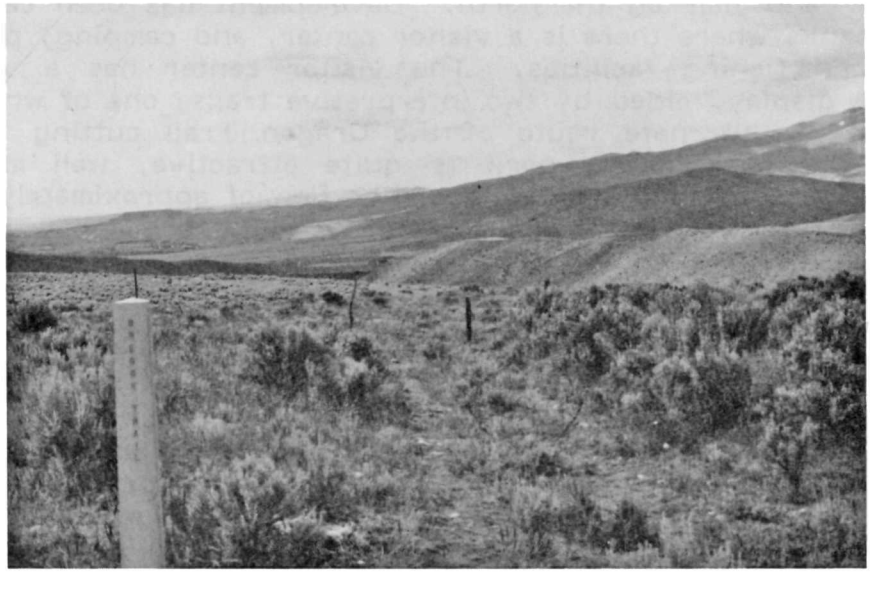
One of the more obvious visual impacts along the North Trail Segment is an unofficial dump.

Faint rut traces cross a section of state land, five miles northeast of Hot Springs.



The Oregon Trail heads west from Register Rock.

This type of Oregon Trail sign is used in Idaho to mark the Oregon Trail where it crosses public roads.



The Oregon Trail descends from Bonneville Point to the Boise Valley below.

THREE ISLAND CROSSING

Three Island Crossing was the most important and most difficult river crossing in Idaho. The crossing was always dangerous, but when the water was low enough to negotiate, everyone crossed who could in order to take advantage of the more favorable north route to Fort Boise. During high water, however, the diaries sadly relate the loss of cattle, wagons, and lives. Most emigrants were then forced to travel along the south alternate route into present-day Oregon--a dry, sandy, dusty and hot trail along the south side of the Snake River, which wore out man and beast. Although exact figures are not available, it appears that during typical years about half the emigrants were able to cross the Snake River at Three Island Crossing, and about half were forced to use the dreaded south alternate trail. Three Island Crossing has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

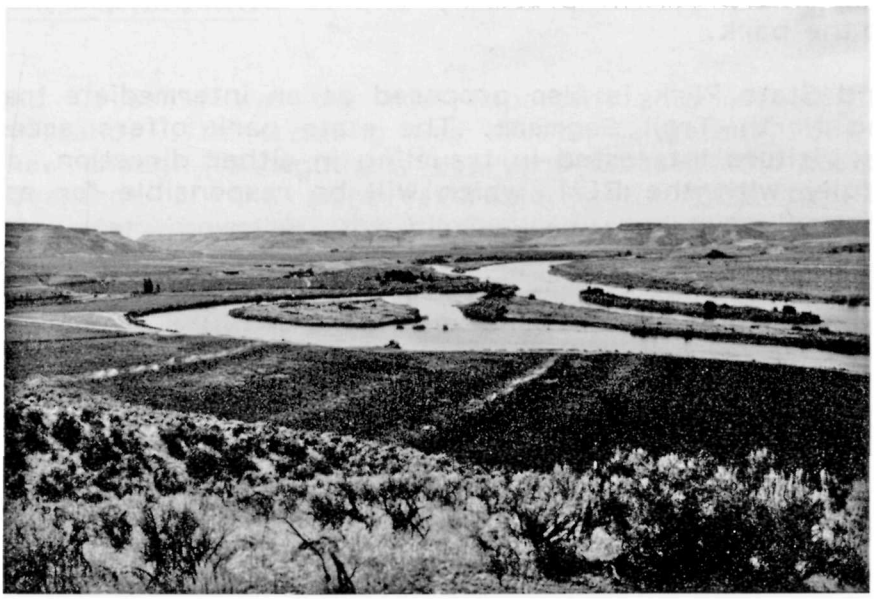
Located 31 miles west of Upper Salmon Falls (Sec 1, T6S, R9E, Glenns Ferry map sheet #237, Elmore County), the three islands appear much the same as they did 150 years ago. Much of the land in the vicinity of the crossing site, however, has been tamed to the plow, as the advance of modern irrigation methods makes possible the cultivation of more and more land every year. The area, though, has great interpretive potential, which has already been partially realized.

Three Island Crossing State Park, a unit of the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, is located on the north bank of the Snake River (Sec 31, T5S, R10E), just outside the town of Glenns Ferry. That park is dedicated to the crossing site and the Oregon Trail, and has the potential to become an outstanding state park. At present, the park consists of a little over 500 acres of land, half on the south bank of the Snake River and half on the north. Development has been centered on the north bank, where there is a visitor center, and camping, picnicking, swimming and fishing facilities. The visitor center has a very brief interpretive display, aided by two interpretive trails, one of which points out ruts of an alternate route of the Oregon Trail cutting through a corner of the park. The park is quite attractive, well maintained, staffed year around, and handles a visitor flow of approximately 1100 per month during the tourist season.

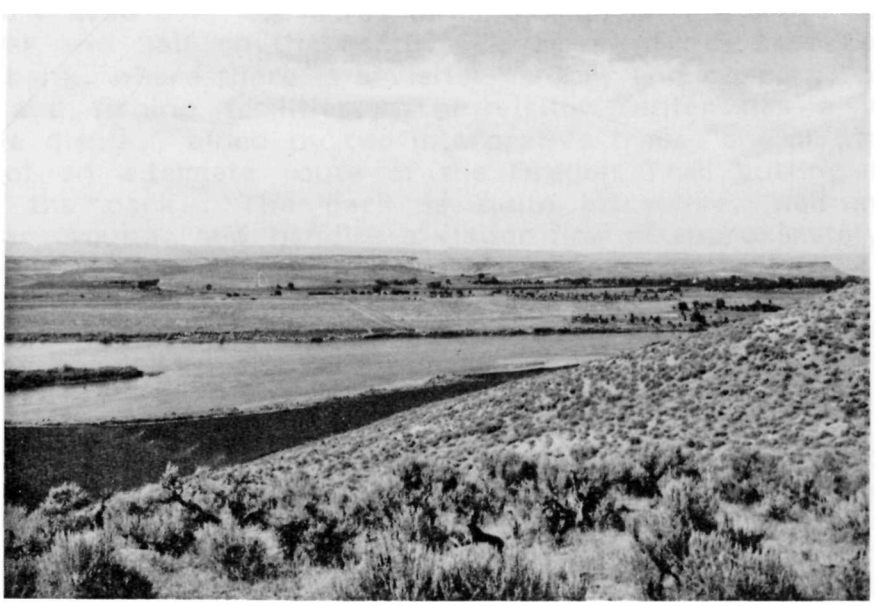
The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation plans to expand the park through the acquisition of approximately 300 additional acres on the south bank of the river, including the three islands. This acquisition program, which is partially complete, will join the presently isolated south half of the park to the rest, making it one contiguous unit. Once this is accomplished, the potential of the park has few bounds. Present plans include providing a boat ride across to the south bank of the Snake River. Visitors will then be able to hike up the ridge along the south bank. Several sets of excellent trail ruts descend from this ridge, marking the alternate routes which the emigrants took to the river crossing. From the top of the ridge, a superb view of the Snake River valley and the Three Island Crossing area may be had, and excellent Oregon Trail ruts may be followed for a mile across the state land. The expansion plans for Three Island Crossing State Park are strongly endorsed. The park is also urged to take steps to expand the level of

Oregon Trail interpretation presently offered at the visitors center and throughout the park.

Three Island State Park is also proposed as an intermediate trailhead for 83-mile long North Trail Segment. The state park offers access to this segment for visitors interested in traveling in either direction, and should cooperate fully with the BLM, which will be responsible for establishing the trail segment.

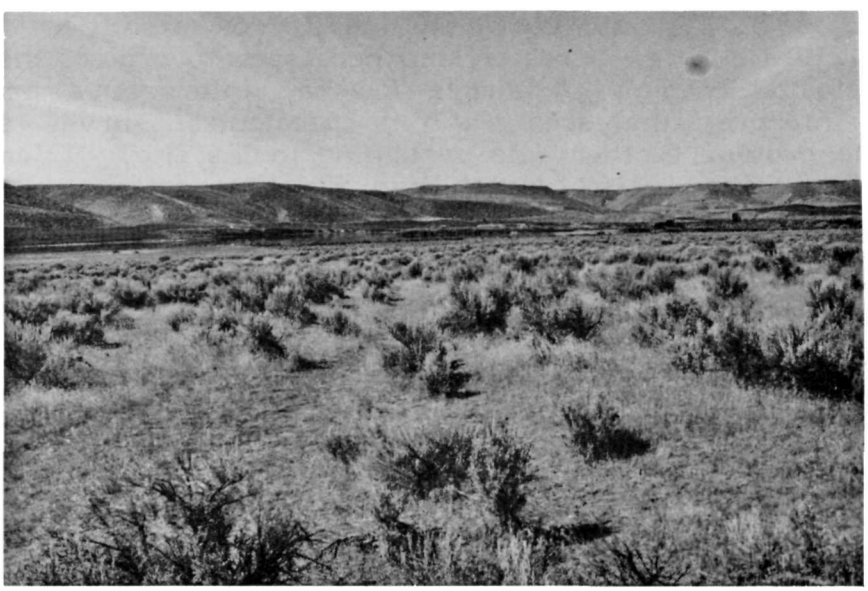


Three Island Crossing is seen from the ridge overlooking the south bank of the Snake River. The lands below the ridge, next to the river, are presently farmed, but the state park has plans to acquire a portion of them.



This photo, which matches to the right of the one above, shows the Three Island Crossing State Park lands, on the right-center of the photo, across the Snake River. Once park expansion plans are completed, visitors would be able to ferry across the river, ascend the ridge and enjoy this view.

A modern visitor center welcomes travelers to Three Island Crossing State Park.



A portion of the Oregon Trail ruts, included within the present boundary of the state park, may be seen leading directly away from the photographer.

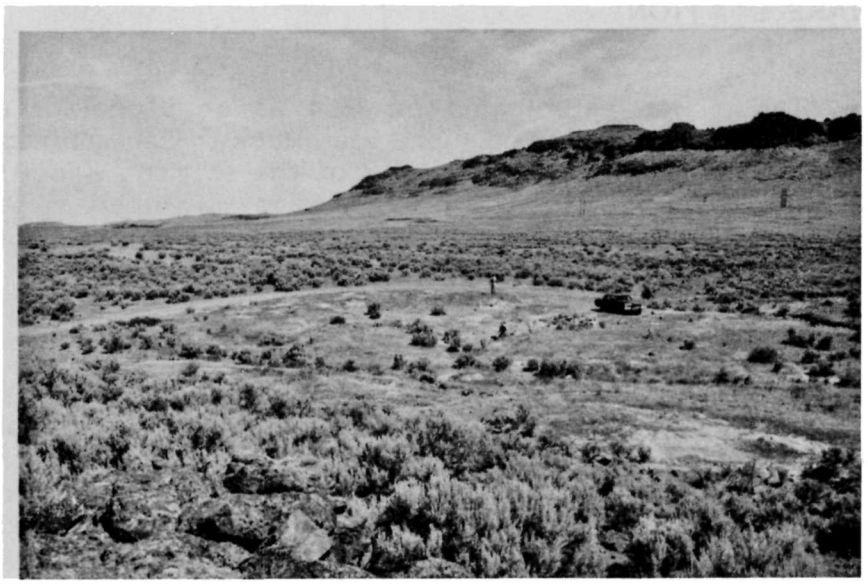
HOT SPRINGS

The Hot Springs were a series of small springs which formed the head of Hot Springs Creek. An 1843 emigrant described them as "hot enough to cook an egg. It runs out at three different places, forming a large branch, which runs off smoking and foaming..." John C. Fremont, the same year, recorded a water temperature of 164°F. Located 20 miles north and west of Three Island Crossing (Sec 20, T3S, R8E, Mountain Home map sheet #239, Elmore County), the springs were a favorite emigrant camping spot. Hot Springs has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The springs no longer smoke and foam. Indeed, they no longer flow at all, except during the wet spring months, due to the lowering of the underlying water table from irrigation and water supply demands. The vicinity of the springs, however, bears ample evidence of its former flow, with a wide area of mineral-marked rock and earth. The springs appear to be located on a corner of BLM land, although it is close enough to the section line to make a survey necessary to establish positive ownership. The adjacent lands are presently used as dry cattle range, and the springs are accessible to passenger automobiles via county and range roads.

A quarter mile east, on private land, is the site of an old spring house, where some forgotten entrepreneur once tried to exploit the hot springs as a spa. That attempt has long been abandoned, and the rustic ruin of the stone spring house is all that remains to mark the spot.

The Boise District of the Idaho BLM should develop the Hot Springs as a small interpretive site, and as a wayside stop along the North Trail Segment. The BLM should positively identify ownership of the spring site, and acquire the few acres of land necessary to protect the site if it is in private ownership. A simple low-key interpretive panel would adequately interpret the area. An archaeological survey should be conducted to provide further data pertaining to the site. If feasible, the old spring-house should also be stabilized and interpreted as a example of later human use of the springs.



The wide, sparsely vegetated area in the center of the photo shows the area over which the Hot Springs once flowed.

The abandoned spring house is located just east of Hot Springs.

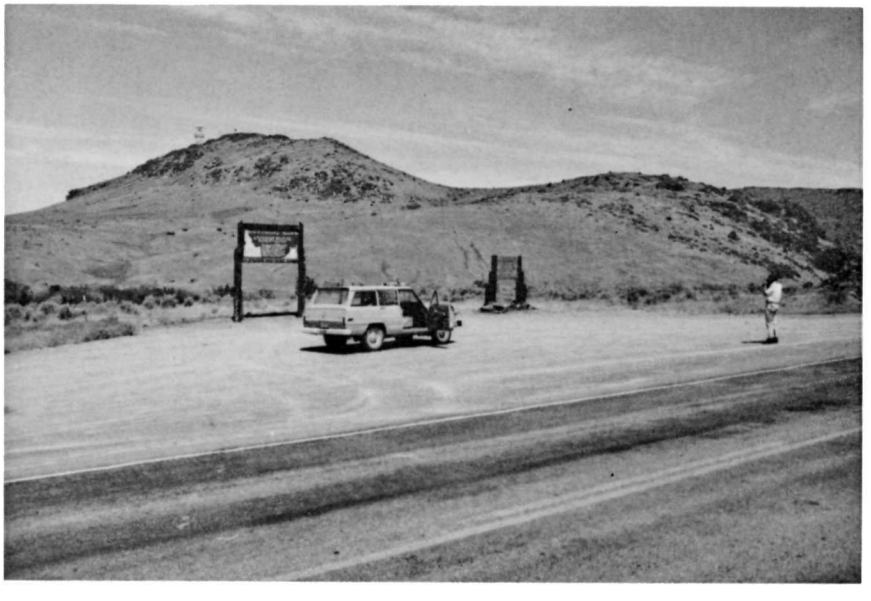
RATTLESNAKE STATION

Rattlesnake Station was established in 1864 as an important stage stop, and later as a freighting stop for the Rocky Bar mining area. A settlement slowly grew up in the vicinity of the station, and its name was changed in 1878 to Mountain Home. The station continued in service until 1883, when the town of Mountain Home was moved nine miles southwest, next to the new Union Pacific railroad tracks. For many years before and after the establishment of the Rattlesnake Station, the general vicinity was used as a campground by Oregon Trail emigrants.

The station has now disappeared, but two stone ruins from the original Mountain Home townsite may still be seen along Idaho Highway 68, near the spot where the highway crosses the Oregon Trail. The townsite and station site are located on private lands, three miles northwest of Hot Springs (Sec 6, T3S, R8E, Mountain Home map sheet #239, Elmore County). The Idaho Department of Transportation has placed a historic panel next to the highway.

The Idaho Department of Transportation should improve the present interpretive wayside by providing more complete information regarding the station and the Oregon Trail in this vicinity. The Idaho State Historical Society should eventually conduct an archaeological survey to include the area of the station, the townsite, and the Oregon Trail campgrounds, in order to collect more data regarding historic human use of the area. Protection of selected sites may then be desirable.

These ruins of an old stone house date from the original Rattlesnake Station (Mountain Home) townsite.



Idaho Department of Transportation maintains a small interpretive wayside for Rattlesnake Station.

CANYON CREEK STATION

Canyon Creek Station was another old stage station whose use concided with the later years of the Oregon Trail. The station is located in a little valley nine miles northwest of Rattlesnake Station (Sec 7, T2S, R6E, Danskin Peak map sheet #240, Elmore County), where the Oregon Trail crosses Canyon Creek. Because of the availability of water and grass, the creek bottoms became a favorite camping spot for emigrants both before and after the establishment of the stage station.

Remains of Canyon Creek Station still stand. The station had been adapted for private use, and was in quite good condition until a recent fire gutted the interior, leaving nothing but the walls. The private owners have attempted to stabilize the walls, and have enclosed the structure in a chain link fence, but additional stabilization is needed. The station is located on a dirt range road (part of the North Trail Segment) next to a private ranch house, and is easily accessible for normal vehicles. The low key ranching operation has helped to preserve the attractiveness of the valley surrounding the station, and good stretches of Oregon Trail ruts are visible nearby.

The Boise District of the Idaho BLM, as part of its development of the North Trail Segment, should provide roadside interpretation for the Canyon Creek Station. The Idaho State Historical Society should assist the private owners to stabilize the station walls, and should consider the eventual acquisition and restoration of the station.

The Oregon Trail follows the range road past the barn, and the stage station is located along that road just west of the barn. Canyon Creek flows from right to left, and crosses the road in front of the barn.

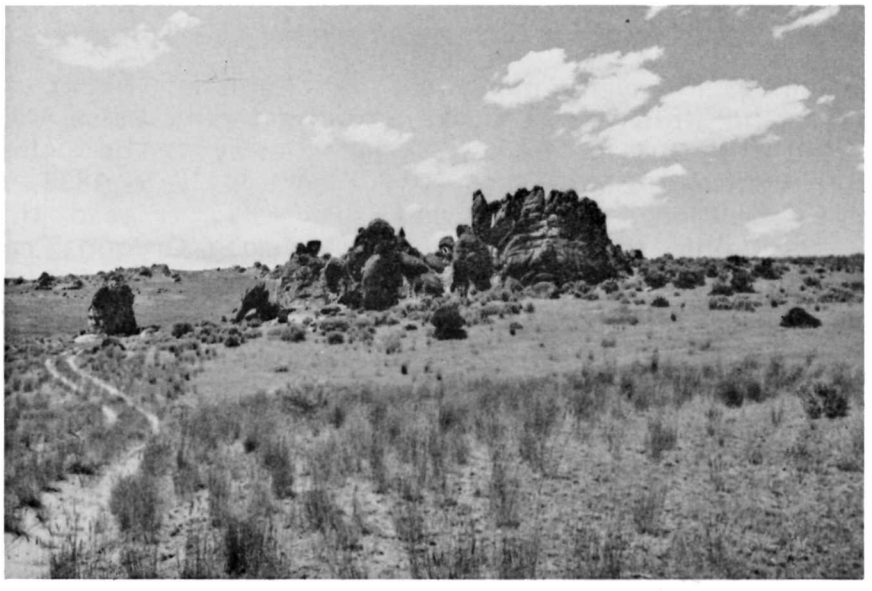
The shell of Canyon Creek Station is all that survived the fire.

REGISTER ROCK

Register Rock, located eight miles northwest of Canyon Creek Station, is one of the smaller and less well-known inscription points along the Oregon Trail. This rock outcropping has names and dates painted on its sides with wagon tar. Although the dates on the rock are not clearly legible, it appears that the earliest names are from the 1860s. The fact that the inscriptions on the rock are not well known to the general public probably accounts for their survival to date, for it has not been vandalized or defaced as were the more well-known Register Cliff, Independence Rock, and Name Rock. The site, however, is unprotected and vulnerable.

Register Rock is located on private land (Sec 1, T1S, R5E, Mayfield map sheet #241, Elmore County), but is adjacent to a block of BLM land. The Boise District of the Idaho BLM should acquire Register Rock through purchase or land exchange, in order to protect and interpret it. Protection is needed both from human threats and from the ravages of the weather, for many of the inscriptions on the rock are quite faded from exposure. Scientific treatment of the rock is necessary to read those inscriptions which are already too faded to read with the naked eye, and to protect the still-visible inscriptions from further weathering.

The Rock is now accessible via a short hike from a local range road. At present, it has no signing or interpretation. The BLM should provide directions to the rock only after it has been adequately protected and interpreted. Due to the vulnerability of this historic site, its protection is of high priority.



Register Rock is the short and isolated column to the left of the photo. The Oregon Trail, visible on the left, winds between Register Rock and the larger rock mass to the right.

A close-up of Register Rock shows some of the names painted in wagon tar. These are among the most legible of the names remaining on the rock, as they are protected from weathering by the natural over-hang of the rock.

BONNEVILLE POINT

Bonneville Point, 15 miles northwest of Register Rock, is a high promontory of land which looks down into the fertile Boise Valley to the northwest, and the City of Boise, 13 miles away. The point is named after Captain Benjamin Bonneville, who ascended it in 1833, while on a fur trading expedition. The Oregon Trail also crossed this summit, before descending into the Boise Valley, and good Oregon Trail ruts are still evident on the site. For the emigrants, arrival at Bonneville Point meant the end of the difficult trip across the northern Snake River plains and foothills. From Bonneville Point, it was an easy pull 59 miles west to Fort Boise (HBC), the next major outfitting stop on the trail. Bonneville Point is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Bonneville Point (Sec 24, T2N, R3E, Indian Creek Reservoir map sheet #242, Ada County) is owned by the city of Boise, but is administered by the Boise District of the Idaho BLM. The BLM, as part of its Bicentennial program, developed the summit of Bonneville Point into a rest and interpretive site, and has marked the Oregon Trail as it descends Bonneville Point to the west, on BLM land. The site is accessible via good gravel roads.

There are no recommendations for Bonneville Point as such, for the BLM has provided adequate interpretation at the site. The Oregon Trail, however, needs protection in the vicinity. Good ruts extend southeast from the site for two miles, but are in private ownership. The BLM should continue its efforts to obtain those ruts through land exchange. To the northwest, the trail has been damaged by excessive vehicular use, which has led to erosion along the trail as it descends the hill. The BLM should take appropriate steps to reverse that trend.

Bonneville Point is the last historic site on the North Trail Segment.

The BLM interpretive site at Bonneville Point was built as part of its Bicentennial program.

FORT BOISE (ARMY)

The Fort Boise army post (not to be confused with the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Boise trading post located 46 miles west) was established in 1863 as a major cavalry post to protect gold miners and Oregon Trail emigrants. Once established, the fort became an important outpost and waystop during the later years of Oregon Trail travel.

Located on the outskirts of Boise, 13 miles west of Bonneville Point (Sec 2, T3N, R2E, Boise South map sheet #244, Ada County), Fort Boise is still active as a Veterans Administration medical center. The present grounds of the medical center are considerably smaller than those of the original fort, but still include many old buildings constructed between 1863 and the 1870s, most of which are still in use. Two buildings constructed in 1863 are on the National Register of Historic Places. An effort has been made since the Bicentennial years to interpret the fort, but the few markers now present on the grounds tap only the surface of the interpretive potential of the complex.

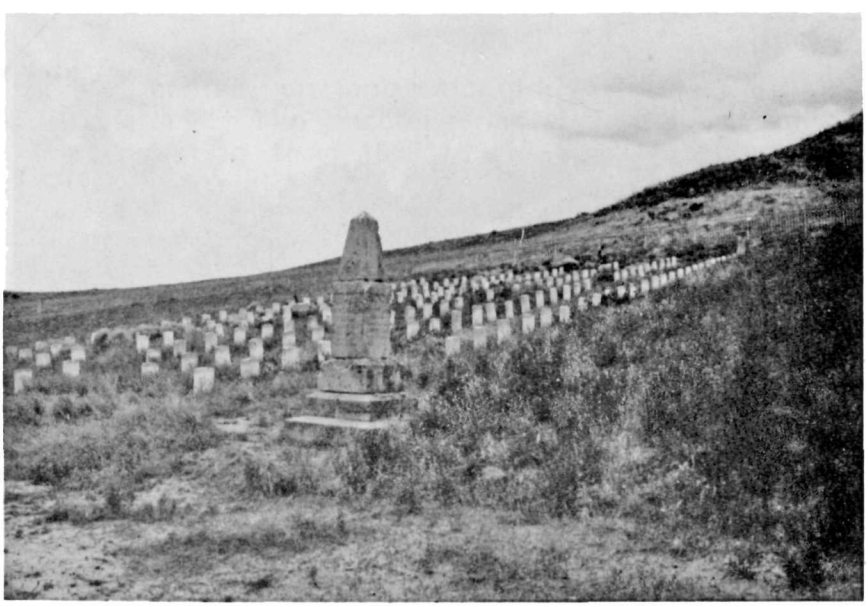
The medical center, however, has a particular problem, since a general invitation for visitors to enter and explore the grounds would seriously threaten the daily care capabilities of the center, and would inconvenience both the patients and the staff who live on the grounds. As a substitute to opening the grounds to the public, the medical center should provide a large interpretive display just outside the main entrance, to explain in detail the role and significance of Fort Boise army post to the Oregon Trail, the Indian Wars, and the settlement of Boise. A smaller interpretive display at the Quartermaster Building, which was built in 1803, is also desirable. The Idaho State Historical Society should assist, as needed, in the preparation of the interpretive display at the main entrance.

Behind the medical center, on land belonging to the City of Boise, is the old Fort Boise cemetery. The cemetery has approximately 200 graves with headstones, mostly dating from 1865 to the 1870s--the most active years of the fort. The cemetery is in need of interpretation and directional signing to guide visitors to its location. The City of Boise should undertake these services. Fort Boise cemetery is an impressive and significant historic site, as well as being a memorial to those soldiers who gave their lives in the settling of the west.

The old Officers Row of Fort Boise is presently used as staff housing. The building to the left was constructed in 1863, as officers quarters.

The old Quartermaster Building, constructed in 1863, is now used as a mental health facility.

The Fort Boise Cemetery is located on the northern outskirts of the city.



A closer view of the cemetery shows the graves dating from 1865 through the 1870s.

WARD MASSACRE SITE

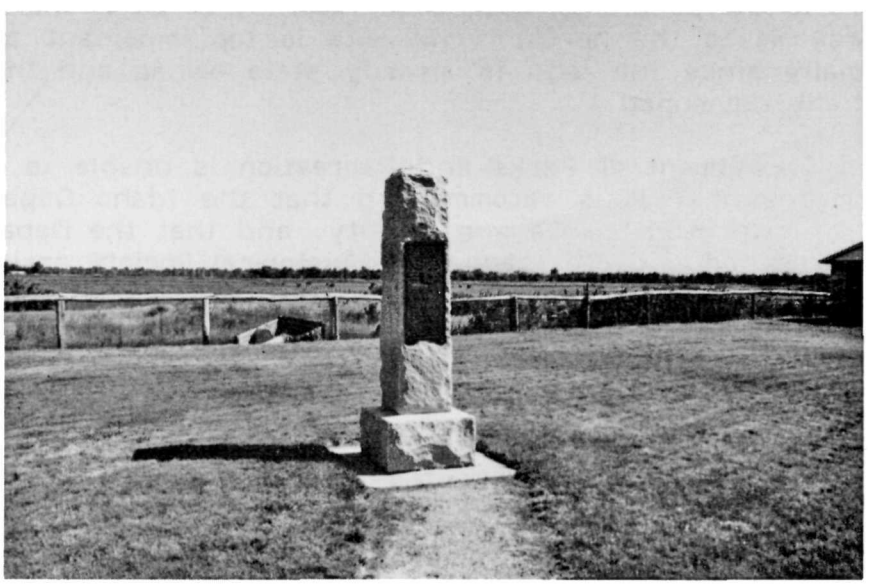
On August 20, 1854, Indians attacked and killed all but two of the 20 emigrants traveling towards Oregon in the Alexander Ward train. The survivors were young boys left for dead--one of whom was rescued by another party of emigrants, while the other made his way to old Fort Boise (HBC). Military retaliation was prompt and severe. Unfortunately, it was also indiscriminate, and included such measures as hanging any Indians caught from poles and leaving them there until the bodies rotted and fell apart. The Indians were enraged, and the ensuing hostilities were severe enough to cause the Hudson's Bay Company to abandon both Fort Hall and Fort Boise. For nearly a decade, travel along the Oregon Trail was extremely risky for small parties of emigrants.

Ward Massacre Site is located 22 miles west of Fort Boise (Army) (Sec 20, T4N, R2W, Middleton map sheet #248, Canyon County). Until recently, the site was a small state park, but budget restrictions caused the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to turn the site over to the Idaho Department of Lands. The small, two-acre park is now locally maintained and has a simple monument listing the names of those killed in 1854. The Idaho Department of Transportation has placed an interpretive panel on U.S. Highway 20-26, one mile south of the park, but there are no directional signs to guide visitors in to the park from the highway. Access to the little park is via paved and gravel roads.

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation should resume managment of Ward Massacre Site. Improvements should include additional on-site interpretation, for neither the monument at the park nor the Department of Transportation's interpretive panel adequately relate the significance of the massacre and its aftermath. Directional signing should be emplaced to guide visitors to the park from both U.S. Highway 20-26 to the south and Idaho Highway 44 to the north. This site is too important to let slip away, especially since the land is already state owned and the park is already partially developed.

If the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation is unable to carry out these recommendations, it is recommended that the Idaho Department of Lands transfer ownership to Canyon County, and that the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Idaho State Historical Society assist Canyon County as necessary in the development of the site.

Ward Massacre Site.



The small monument at Ward Massacre Site lists the names of those killed in 1854.

CANYON HILL RUTS

The Canyon Hill Ruts are located within the City of Caldwell, four miles west of the Ward Massacre Site (Sec 15, T4N, R3W, Caldwell map sheet #249, Canyon County). The ruts descend a short but steep break in the cliff leading down to the east bank of the Boise River. The site is presently unused, due to the terrain characteristics, and the ruts have not yet been enveloped by the surrounding residential and industrial districts. The ruts are approximately 300 feet in length as they descend a natural cut in the bluff between two rock outcroppings, and one can still easily visualize the wagons negotiating the steep slope. At present, they are neither marked, interpreted, nor known to the general public, but are easily accessible through the back streets of Caldwell.

The City of Caldwell should seize the opportunity--which is rare--to preserve and interpret a good section of Oregon Trail ruts which are located in the midst of a metropolitan area. The ruts are privately owned, and the City of Caldwell should acquire the site, which would make an ideal small city park. No more than three acres would be necessary to adequately protect the ruts, and a simple interpretive sign and a walking path along the ruts would constitute sufficient development. Although the general area is now somewhat unsightly, a little work would turn it into an attractive scenic and historic park between the bluffs and the Boise River. As this site is under constant threat of development, immediate action on the part of Caldwell is encouraged.

The Canyon Hill Ruts are seen from below, looking east up the hill. Note the natural cut in the rock cliffs, through which the wagons descended to the river.

The two rock outcroppings flanking the Canyon Hill Ruts are quite prominent when viewed from above, looking west toward the Boise River. Again, the cut in the rock cliffs is visible, and the person in the background is ascending the hill along the ruts.

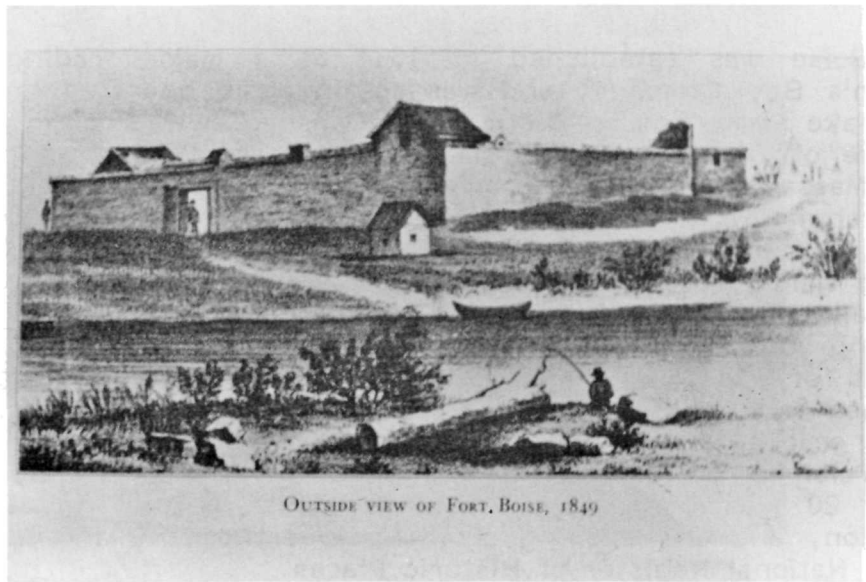
FORT BOISE (HBC)

Fort Boise was established in 1834 as a major trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company, and was continuously operated until 1853, when the Snake River flooded the post and washed away most of its structures. Because of the sudden increase in Indian hostilities which followed the Ward Massacre in 1854, the company decided to abandon the post rather than rebuild it. The fort was originally constructed of logs covered with adobe, much like the Hudson's Bay Company's other post at Fort Hall. During emigrant years, Fort Boise, like forts Kearny, Laramie, Bridger, and Hall to the east, was significant both as another milestone reached on the long journey west, and as a source of supplies, assistance, and an outpost of relative civilization in the wilderness. Company officials stationed at the fort, and Indians who gathered there to trade, often helped emigrants with the dangerous crossing of the Snake river, until a commercial ferry operation was started in 1854. Fort Boise served for almost 20 years as an important factor in the fur trade, western migration, and the opening of Idaho to settlement, and its site is today on the National Register of Historic Places.

Very little remains of Fort Boise. The general area where the fort stood is now a grassy meadow along the banks of the Snake River. No structures or traces of the fort are visible, and only a crudely made statue marks the site. Located 20 miles west of Canyon Hill Ruts (Sec 26, T6N, R6W, Owyhee map sheet #252, Canyon County), the site is now part of a 1365-acre wildlife preserve managed by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Free from development or other modern intrusions, the site is used by fishermen, campers, and grazing cattle.

The site is easily accessible via a good dirt road, but directions to it are confusing. The Idaho Department of Transportation has an interpretive panel on U.S. Highway 20-26-95, three miles east of the site, and several private groups have also placed markers--one on the highway, and another along the access road about one-half mile east of the fort site. None of these interpretive efforts does justice to one of the most significant historic sites along the Oregon Trail in Idaho.

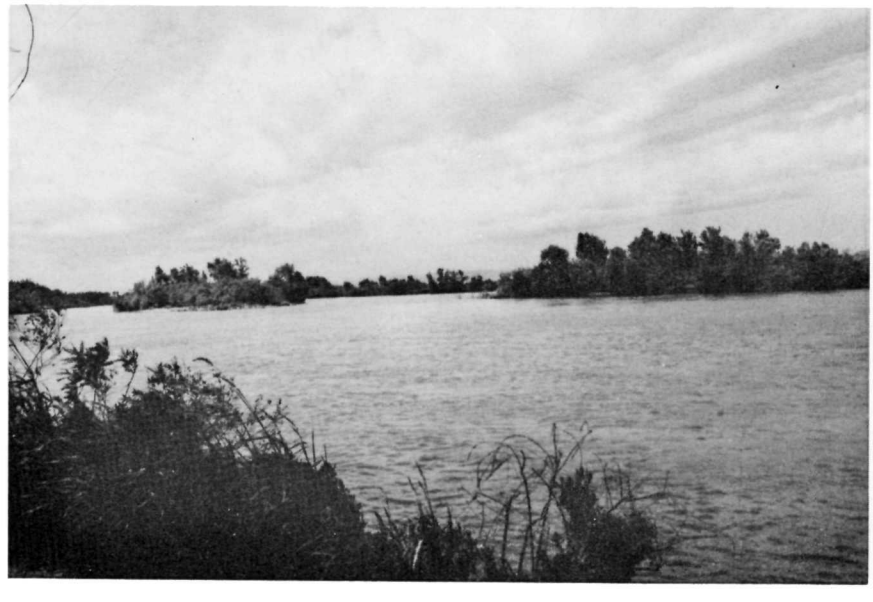
The Idaho Department of Fish and Game, in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Idaho State Historical Society, should improve the Fort Boise site in order to adequately recognize its significance through the early years of Idaho's history. This would include improved directional signing to bring visitors to the site, and improved interpretation at the site to explain the role and significance of Fort Boise to the fur trade and the Oregon Trail. In addition, an archaeological investigation is needed to unearth any remaining data concerning the fort and its years of occupation. The manager of the wildlife preserve foresees no serious problems with bringing visitors into the area to view the fort site, as long as adequate measures are taken to limit travel within the preserve. The Fort Boise Historical Society, a local group, has exhibited interest in preserving and interpreting the site over many years, and its continued cooperation and assistance should be encouraged.



OUTSIDE VIEW OF FORT, BOISE, 1849

Fort Boise, the Hudson's Bay Company post, was sketched by Major Osborne Cross in 1849. (Reproduced from Osborne Cross, The March of the Mounted Riflemen. Ed. by Raymond W. Settle (Glendale, Cal: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1940), p. 206.)

The approximate site of Fort Boise is marked by a unique statue. The Snake River may be seen through the trees to the left.



The Snake River, immediately west of Fort Boise, presented the emigrants with a difficult crossing.

C.J. STRIKE RUTS

Thirty-two miles west of Three Island Crossing, on the South Alternate Route of the Oregon Trail (Sections 2, 11 & 12, T6S, R4E, C.J. Strike Dam map sheet #257, Owyhee County), is a one and one-half mile stretch of distinct Oregon Trail ruts. The ruts have eroded in some places to a depth of several feet, and are quite dramatic in appearance. They bear mute testimony to the hardships endured by those emigrants who were unable to cross the Snake River at Three Island Crossing, for the surrounding terrain is dry rangeland, and visitors can still visualize the difficulties of forcing wagons across the sandy land.

The ruts are located on public land administered by the Boise District of the Idaho BLM. They are located adjacent to Idaho Highway 78, which provides excellent access, and are a short distance south of the C.J. Strike Reservoir, a popular recreation area. The ruts are not marked and no interpretation is provided at the site.

The BLM should develop an interpretive wayside at this site, similar to the Bicentennial waysides already established at various points in Idaho. Such development could be made in conjunction with the BLM Cove Recreation Area at the C.J. Strike Reservoir, which is one mile north of the ruts. The ruts should be marked and interpreted, and provisions should be made to allow visitors to hike along them. Visitors should be directed to the site through highway signs placed in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Transportation, and through information offered at the BLM Cove Recreation Area at the reservoir. The combination of excellent ruts, good highway access, and a high volume of existing recreational use at the nearby reservoir gives this site outstanding potential for public use and enjoyment.

Remnants of the South Alternate Route of the Oregon Trail, at some places quite eroded, appear above and below, just west of the C.J. Strike Reservoir.

SINKER CREEK SEGMENT

Sinker Creek Segment is proposed for the benefit of those who truly desire to recreate the emigrant experience. This 18-mile segment crosses one of the dryest, hottest, and dustiest stretches of the entire Oregon Trail. Emigrants who were forced to travel the South Alternate Route because they could not cross the Snake River at Three Island Crossing invariably complained about this stretch of the trail, and likened their appearance at the end of each day to a man who had been dipped into a flour barrel. Only a few hours of travel by foot or by vehicle was required to leave one completely covered with a fine layer of dust. Trail conditions today are no better than they were last century.

This segment begins just west of Castle Butte, or 22 miles west of the C.J. Strike ruts (Sec 34, T3S, R1E, Castle Butte map sheet #261, Owyhee County), and ends about four miles northeast of the town of Murphy (Sec 11, T2S, R2W, Walters Butte map sheet #265, Owyhee County). The trail crosses the broken and arid mesas which stretch along the south bank of the Snake River, passing by Wild Horse Butte and crossing Sinker Creek Butte. Pristine ruts are still evident for most of this segment, with only a few short stretches where range roads have been developed on top of the Oregon Trail. The trail through this area has remained relatively unimpacted. Nearby is the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area, home to more than 600 nesting pairs of eagles, hawks and owls. The isolation from civilization and development--which is almost total--and the grand scenery of the arid land and rugged buttes makes this segment one of the most memorable of any along the Oregon Trail.

The segment crosses no paved roads, and Sinker Creek is the only water encountered. Thirteen miles of the segment are administered by the Boise District of the Idaho BLM, and five miles are privately owned. The only development is a ranch headquarters in the bottom of Sinker Creek. Other sections of private land along the segment are primarily used as cattle range.

The Boise District of the Idaho BLM should have the lead responsibility for this segment. That office should negotiate the required access agreements and provide the necessary public use facilities. The BLM should mark the entire length of the segment, both on BLM and across private lands with permission of the owners, and should align it to follow the exact route of the Oregon Trail except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement. Access to both the eastern and western trailheads will have to be improved, since the present range roads available for access are suitable only for four-wheel drive vehicles. Small trailhead facilities should be developed.

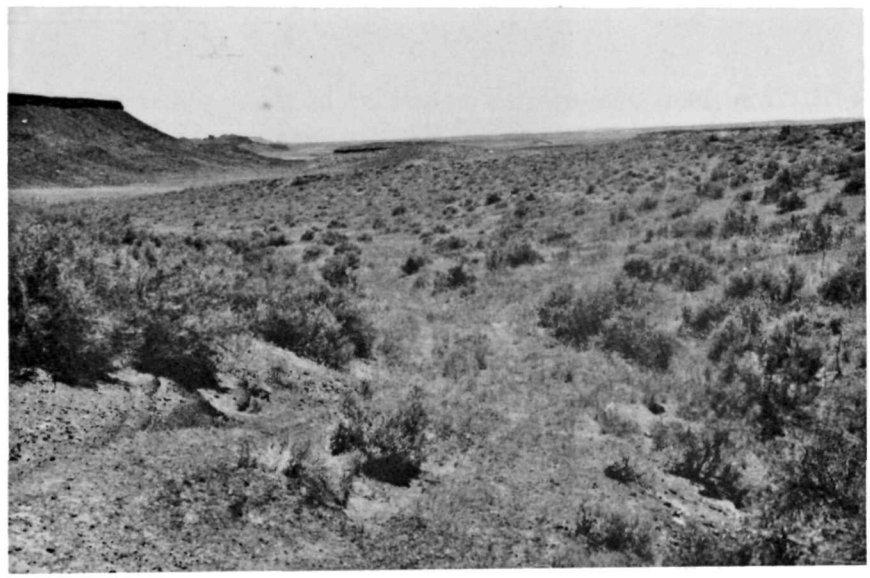
This segment is short enough that intermediate trail facilities will probably not be necessary. Because only the most well-informed visitor will be prepared for the extremely dry and dusty conditions encountered on the segment, the BLM should take care to warn potential users of the need for supplemental water. Although heavy use of this segment is not anticipated, there are those who will welcome the opportunity to experience one of the most desolate and challenging stretches of the Oregon Trail.

Agricultural developments associated with the BLM Desert Land Entry program have occurred adjacent to Oregon Trail remnants at several points along the proposed segment. The potential exists for further developments, particularly along the northern (western) portion of the segment. The BLM should protect the excellent and pristine ruts throughout this segment by providing a protective corridor along the trail.

The use of vehicles is not at present a threat to the trail. Except for the short sections where the trail is underneath dirt range roads, this segment appears to have very infrequent use. Such intermittent use by local ranchers and BLM personnel now serves as an unofficial form of trail maintenance, preventing the slow masking of the trail by vegetation. Recreation use should be restricted to hikers and horseback riders in order to avoid damaging the ruts and raising clouds of dust that would occur with off-road vehicle use. The BLM should carefully monitor use of the segment in coming years, and adopt regulations as necessary for its protection.

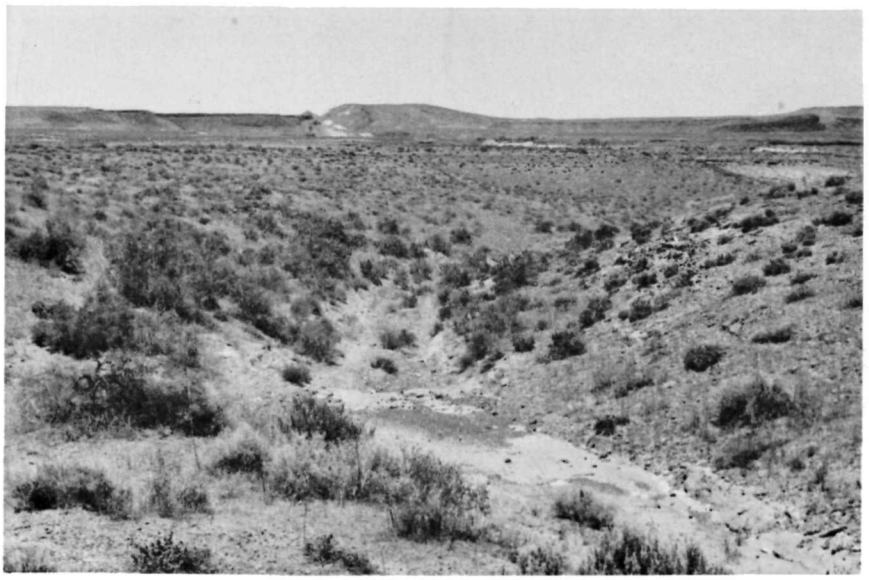
A two-track trace of the Oregon Trail extends to the west from Wild Horse Butte (on the right).

Wild Horse Butte, in the background, overlooks the extremely arid country over which Sinker Creek Segment passes.

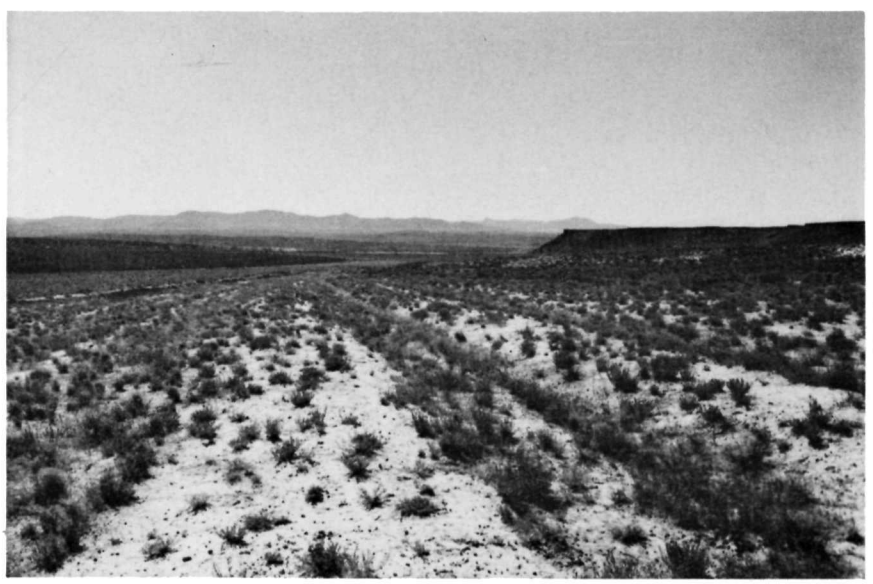


In this photo, looking back to the east along the Oregon Trail, Wild Horse Butte appears on the left.

The opposite of the above photo looks west along the Oregon Trail as it crosses BLM lands.



Pristine Oregon Trail ruts cross BLM land, looking west towards Sinker Creek Butte in the background.



A long line of straight Oregon Trail ruts is located northeast of Murphy, on BLM land.

GIVENS HOT SPRINGS

Givens Hot Springs are located 55 miles northwest of the C.J. Strike ruts (Sec 16, T1N, R3W, Givens Hot Springs map sheet #267, Owyhee County). At one time, a series of hot springs bubbled up from the flat near the south bank of the Snake River. They were first noticed by emigrants using the South Alternate Route of the Oregon Trail in 1843. An 1849 emigrant wrote that the water was too hot to immerse his fingers in, and the present-day temperature is recorded at 138°. The springs were claimed in 1860 by a former Oregon emigrant, who returned to Idaho from the Willamette Valley. Subsequently, a large resort hotel was built at the site, which is locally famous as the oldest "plunge" in the State of Idaho.

The springs are still privately owned, and the old hotel, burned in 1914, has been replaced by a more modest structure. The springs themselves have been extensively modified and capped, to provide hot water for the present-day plunge. The site is directly adjacent to an Owyhee County highway.

East of that highway, between the springs and the Snake River, the Idaho State Historical Society is conducting a large archaeological dig at the site of a prehistoric Indian village. The dig has generated intense interest, since pit-dwellings have been discovered dating back to 2000 B.C., the earliest such pit-dwellings in the region.

The Idaho State Historical Society should provide a simple interpretive panel at Givens Hot Springs, which presently has no interpretation. That panel should briefly relate the story of the springs and the subsequent plunge, and their part in the history of the Oregon Trail and the settlement of Idaho. The prehistoric Indian site could also be recognized, depending upon the Society's determination whether such recognition would pose a threat to the site.

The small resort at Givens Hot Springs serves as a local recreation spot. The pool is located in the low building shaded by trees.

Capped and contained by the owner of Givens Hot Springs, this is all that remains of the former spring.

OREGON

The primary route of the Oregon Trail is 418 miles long in Oregon, from the eastern border of the state to the end of the trail in Oregon City. After crossing into Oregon at Fort Boise (HBC), the trail parted from the Snake River at Farewell Bend, and headed to the northwest. The trail crossed the arid rangelands of eastern Oregon, labored up and over the Blue Mountains, and turned west near present-day Pendleton. The trail then crossed the desert-like terrain of northcentral Oregon, finally reaching the Columbia River at Biggs Junction. At The Dalles, a few miles to the west, the trail split. During early years of travel, emigrants traveled down the Columbia River from The Dalles to Fort Vancouver, and then up the Willamette River to Oregon City--a river journey of 114 miles. After the opening of the Barlow Road in 1846, which utilized an overland route over the south shoulder of Mount Hood, most emigrants preferred to stay on dry land, and the Barlow Road became the primary route of the trail. The Barlow Road swung south from The Dalles, then west over the Cascade Range, and down into Oregon City. Both the early and dangerous Columbia River Route and the later and preferred Barlow Road are included as primary routes in this study. Eastern Oregon also contains 15 miles of the west end of the South Alternate Route.

Oregon is a state of contrasts--both then and now--and the Oregon Trail crosses almost every conceivable type of terrain while passing through the state. The rangelands and deserts of east and central Oregon are contrasted to the forests of the Blue Mountains and the Cascade Range.

Depending upon the type of terrain, various developments have combined to destroy much of the trail--agriculture, highways, railroads, and urban growth. But several stretches of good Oregon Trail ruts still remain, scattered across the state. These are emphsized in the three segments proposed for Oregon (totalling 61 miles) which are primarily located on federal lands. Particularly in the forested area of the Blue Mountains and the Cascades, timely preservation by the U.S. Forest Service has saved several excellent stretches of ruts. Most of these ruts retain their pristine condition, which combined with the beauty of the forests, gives them excellent interpretive and recreational potential.

There are 28 historic sites in Oregon, and two in the State of Washington (Whitman Mission and Fort Vancouver). These sites include river crossings, ruts, early forts and missions, and natural landmarks. As in Idaho, the trail in Oregon always remained rather "primitive" for the emigrants, with very few way stations or supply points to assist those who got into trouble. Interpretation of the trail in Oregon is outstanding in places, but lacking in others. As in other states along the route, much remains to be done before the trail is thoroughly and consistently interpreted. The BLM has made an effort to mark the trail on its lands, as has the Forest Service, but the trail is not consistently marked throughout the state.

The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service are the federal agencies primarily responsible for the Oregon Trail in Oregon. The leading state agency is the Parks and Recreation Division of the

Oregon Department of Transportation. The Parks and Recreation Division has long been actively involved in the study of the Oregon Trail, and is responsible for much of the trail route information contained herein. The Division has made the most thorough effort of any state along the route to interpret the trail consistently, through a series of excellent interpretive kiosks located at rest stops along Interstate Highway 84, which closely follows the Oregon Trail through much of the state. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office is located within the Parks and Recreation Division.

The highest priority for the Oregon National Historic Trail in the State of Oregon is the establishment of a visitor center in Oregon City, to serve as the anchor to the western end of the trail.

KEENEY PASS

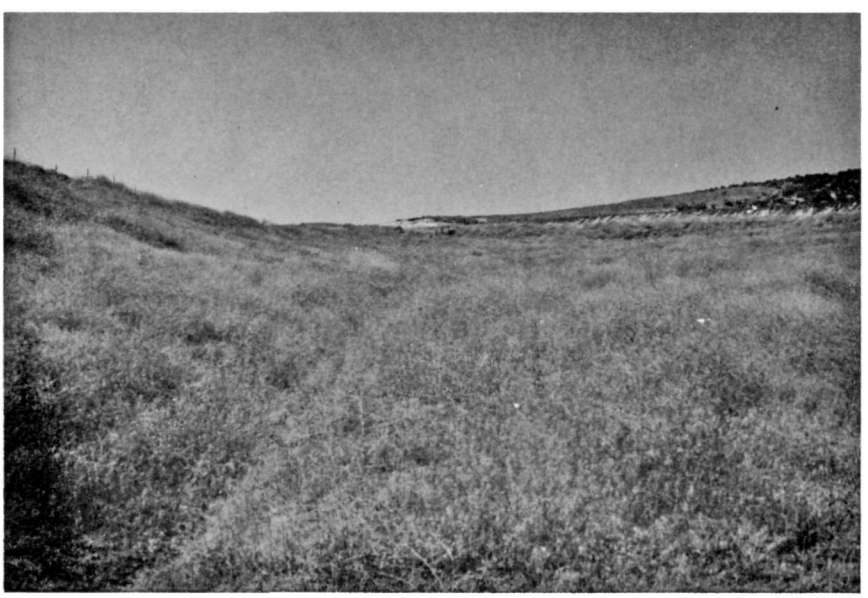
Keeney Pass, 10 miles northwest of Fort Boise (HBC), is a low and relatively flat divide located between the Snake and Malheur rivers. A half-mile of deeply worn ruts are found along the trail as it ascended the summit of the divide. Keeney Pass was named in honor of Captain Jonathan Keeney, who in 1863 established a trading post at the Malheur River, near the present town of Vale six miles to the north.

The Oregon Trail ruts are on land administered by the Vale District of the Oregon BLM, and that District has provided an interpretive site as part of its Bicentennial program. The site has good interpretation, and provides visitors with an excellent view of the ruts. It is readily accessible, being just off a paved county highway (Sec. 14, T19S, R45E, Vale East map sheet #274, Malheur County).

The BLM has done a commendable job with this interpretive site, but there are a few minor recommendations. The ruts in the immediate vicinity of the site are well stabilized by ground vegetation, which protects them from erosion. That vegetation, however, grows so tall in summer that it almost masks the ruts, as well as posing a considerable fire threat. The BLM should consider means of controlling this growth as necessary to bring the excellent Oregon Trail ruts into better relief. To the north of the site, good ruts extend up over the hill; these ruts are somewhat eroded, and need protection.

Finally, in order to expand the experience presently offered to visitors, the BLM should mark a hiking trail along the ruts for a short distance to both the north and south from the interpetive site.

The BLM maintains an interpretive site at Keeney Pass. The Oregon Trail ruts run up the left side of the photo.



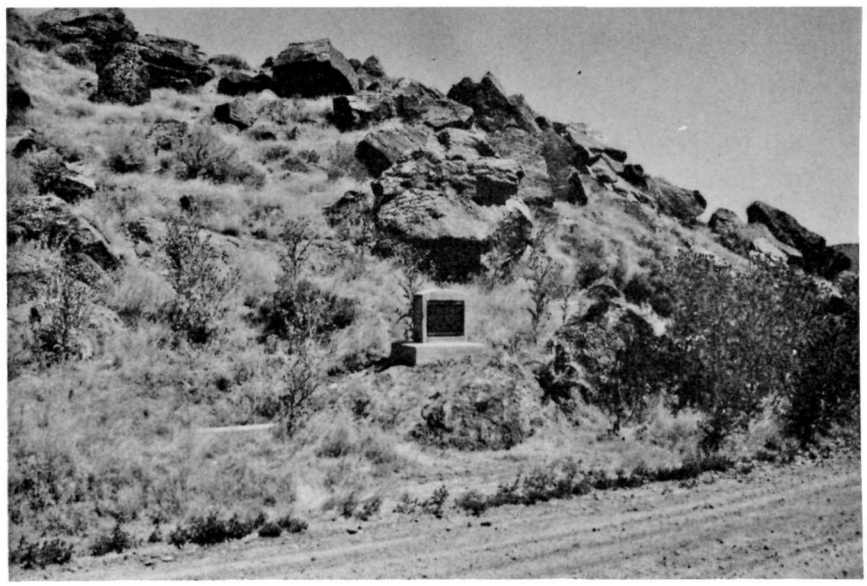
Oregon Trail ruts are seen by looking north from just north of the BLM interpretive site. The ruts are quite deep at this point, but are somewhat masked by the vegetation.

VALE (COMPLEX)

The town of Vale, which grew up where the Oregon Trail crossed the Malheur River, six miles north of Kenney Pass (Sections 19, 20, 29, & 30, T18S, R45E, Vale East map sheet #274, Malheur County), is a complex of historic sites associated with the Oregon Trail. The Malheur River, named by Peter Skene Ogden in 1826, was the first good water source in present-day Oregon, and the first encountered by the emigrants since crossing the Snake River at Fort Boise. That arid 17-mile stretch of dry country claimed at least one victim, for the grave of John D. Henderson is located one-half mile south of town (Sec 29). Henderson died of the black measles in 1852, and a blacksmith from his train chiseled his name and the date on a rock near his grave. A plaque was added in 1956. Just north of Henderson's grave (Sec 29), the Oregon Trail crossed the Malheur River. To the northeast (Sec 20) are the Malheur Hot Springs, a phenomonen noted by many emigrants, and used by them for hot baths and laundry purposes. The general area of the crossing site and the hot springs was a popular campground, as emigrants rested themselves and their stock. Stephen Meek's ill-fated expedition departed from the Oregon Trail on the west bank of the river in 1845 (Sec 20). Jonathan Keeney started a wayside inn there in 1863, and the town of Vale gradually grew up around his establishment. It was replaced in 1872 by the first permanent building in Vale, known as the Old Stone House, built by L.B. Rinehart. That house still stands (Sec 29), and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

All these historic sites are either privately owned, or owned by the town of Vale. All are still unimpacted enough by the town's development to provide excellent interpretive sites, with the exception of the hot springs. Unfortunately, very little interpretation has been provided. The Henderson Grave has a brief inscription on its monument, and there is one professional interpretive panel east of town on U.S. Highway 20-26 (Sec 20) which briefly mentions the Malheur River Crossing. The Malheur Country Historical Society has provided a small sign in a city park just off Highway 20-26 (Sec 20) commemorating the Meek Expedition, and another sign at the Rinehart house. All these sites have good access, via paved and gravel city and county roads.

Much remains to be done. The City of Vale, in conjunction with the Malheur Country Historical Society, should embark upon an ambitious program to appropriately mark and interpret the various facets of the area's Oregon Trail history. The small city park just off Highway 20-26 would seem the ideal place to start, for it will catch most travelers passing through Vale. Interpretation there should be expanded, especially to relate fully the story of the Meek expedition, one of the most tragic episodes on the Oregon Trail. Directional signing or pamphlets should then be provided at the city park, to guide visitors around the area, pointing out the river crossing site, the hot springs, the Henderson Grave, and the Rinehart house. Panels or signs should be erected at each of those locations, providing more extensive on-site interpretation. The City of Vale is encouraged to capitalize on one of the unique historical complexes along the Oregon Trail.



The Henderson Grave and monument is located one-half mile south of Vale.

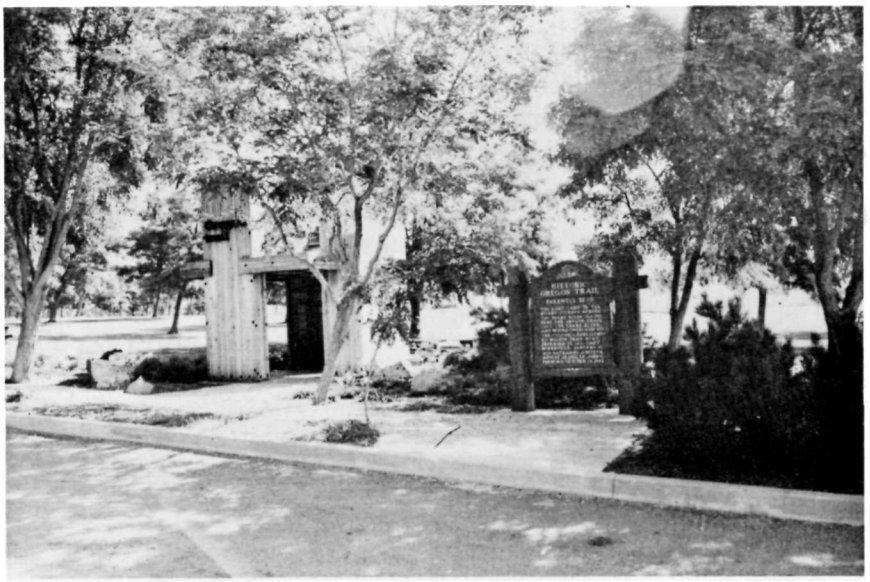
The Rinehart, or old Stone House, is located in Vale.

The small city park, just off Highway 20-26, is proposed as Vale's central interpretive site.

FAREWELL BEND

Farewell Bend, located 25 miles north of Vale, was so named because the Oregon Trail left the Snake River for the last time at this point. Emigrants first encountered the Snake at Fort Hall, and from there had generally followed its course for 350 miles through Idaho and eastern Oregon. Now, the Snake swung north toward its junction with the Columbia, while the Oregon Trail veered northwest. The last view of the Snake River at Farewell Bend was an important milestone on the long journey. The spot also served as a popular Oregon Trail campground.

Farewell Bend State Park (Sec 33, T14S, R45E, Olds Ferry map sheet #277, Baker County) commemorates this departure point. The state park is a pleasure to visit, both for its beautiful grounds and the superb job of interpreting the site. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Division has created a very attractive state park (approximately 50 acres) with facilities for picnicking, camping, boating and swimming. The park features an interpretive kiosk which contains an excellent presentation of the Oregon Trail and Farewell Bend. This is the first of several such kiosks provided by the Parks and Recreation Division along the trail in Oregon.



The Oregon Trail interpretive kiosk at Farewell Bend State Park is packed with photos, maps, and narrative, in total containing about eight times the information usually found on typical interpretive panels, such as the one on the right of this photo.

WEATHERBY REST AREA

The Weatherby Rest Area, 17 miles northwest of Farewell Bend, has no direct Oregon Trail historical significance. The rest area, however, is the site of another of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division's Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks. The rest area is located on Interstate Highway 84 (Sec 30, T12S, R44E, Durkee map sheet #279, Baker County), and is part of the state's design to interpret the Oregon Trail to those travelers utilizing the high-speed highway, which parallels the Oregon Trail through much of Oregon. The kiosk here, like that at Farewell Bend State Park, is crammed full of maps, photos, illustrations and text, all of which do an excellent job of interpreting the Oregon Trail through this part of Oregon. For this reason the Weatherby Rest Area is included as an interpretive site on the Oregon National Historic Trail.

The Oregon Trail kiosk at the Weatherby Rest Area interprets the trail for travelers along the interstate highway.

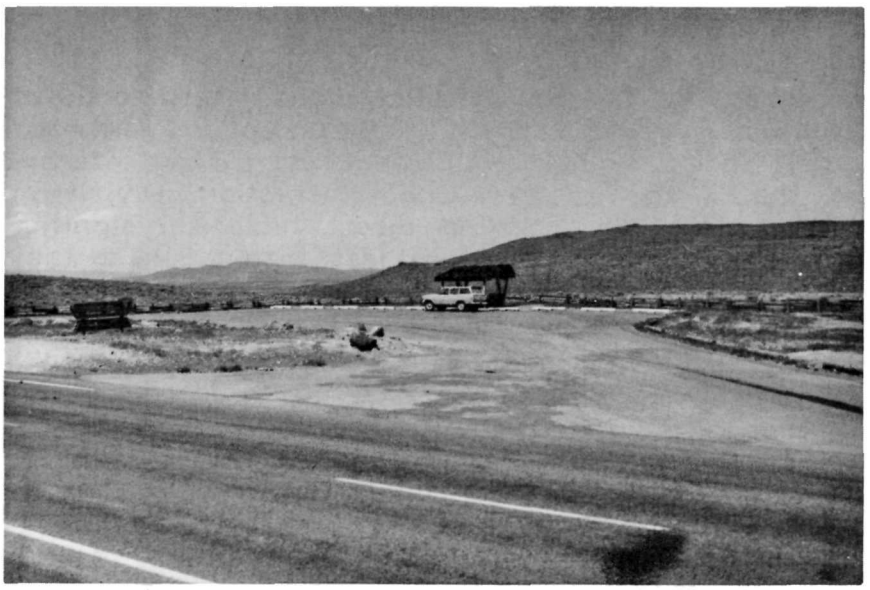
FLAGSTAFF HILL

Located 48 miles northwest of Farewell Bend, Flagstaff Hill marked the culmination of a long, hard pull up through Virtue Flat. From the summit of the hill, emigrants were relieved to find a downward slope for a change, and were excited by their first view of the Blue Mountains visible across Baker Valley. The emigrants had not seen more than a scattering of trees in the same place for several months.

The Baker District of the Oregon BLM has provided an interpretive site there (Sec 6, T9S, R41E, Virtue Flat map sheet #283, Baker County). On a clear day visitors may still obtain an excellent view across Baker Valley to the Blue Mountains, as well as observe a long line of good Oregon Trail ruts ascending Flagstaff Hill to the southeast and descending it to the northwest. Portions of those ruts are in BLM ownership, but most cross private lands. The ruts on BLM land are marked. The ruts were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, but difficulties have kept the nomination from being approved.

The BLM interpretive site is actually located on Oregon Department of Transportation lands, along the right-of-way for Oregon Highway 86, but the site is administered under a cooperative agreement by the BLM. The BLM has provided modest interpretation at the site, as part of the Bicentennial program, but that interpretation could be improved, chiefly by pointing out the nearby Oregon Trail ruts. If one knows where the trail is, the ruts are discernable, but most visitors will not be so well informed. The BLM is in the process of negotiating for land exchanges to acquire and protect more of the ruts in the vicinity. These efforts are encouraged; the BLM should mark and interpret those ruts when acquired.

The Kiwanis Club of Baker erected an obelisk to the Oregon Trail in 1943, one-quarter of a mile west of the BLM site, along Highway 86.

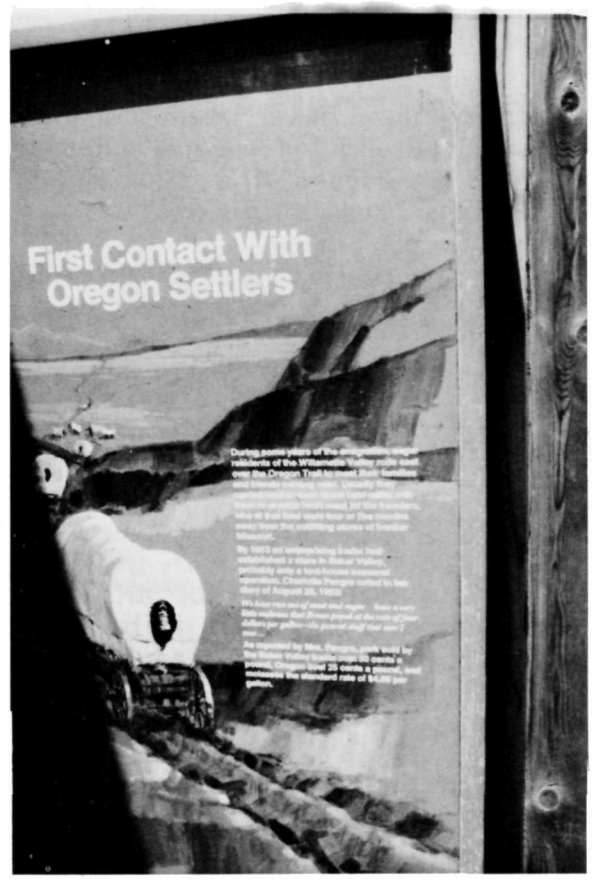


The BLM interpretive site at Flagstaff Hill is located beside Idaho Highway 86, eight miles east of Baker.

The Oregon Trail descended from Flagstaff Hill through the cut in the foreground. The Blue Mountains appear on the west side of Baker Valley.

BAKER VALLEY REST AREA

The Baker Valley Rest Area, located eight miles north of Baker on Interstate Highway 84 (Sec 33, T7S, R40E, Magpie Peak map sheet #285, Baker County), includes another of the Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks erected by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division. Like the Weatherby Rest Area, there is no direct historical significance in the location, although the Oregon Trail is less than a mile to the west of the interstate at that point. The Parks and Recreation Division has interpreted the Oregon Trail as it passes through this area. Undoubtedly such interpretation will reach many travelers, given the high volume of traffic on the interstate system. The kiosk is packed with information, with its focus on the Baker Valley, the Nez Perce Indians, the first white-Indian contacts, and the general trials and tribulations of the emigrants as they continued their long journey. The Baker Valley Rest Area is another of the Parks and Recreation Division's successful efforts to interpret the Oregon Trail for travelers utilizing the interstate highway, and is recommended as an interpretive site on the Oregon National Historic Trail.



The interpretive kiosk at Baker Valley Rest Area contains eight panels similar to the one pictured here.

LADD CANYON RUTS

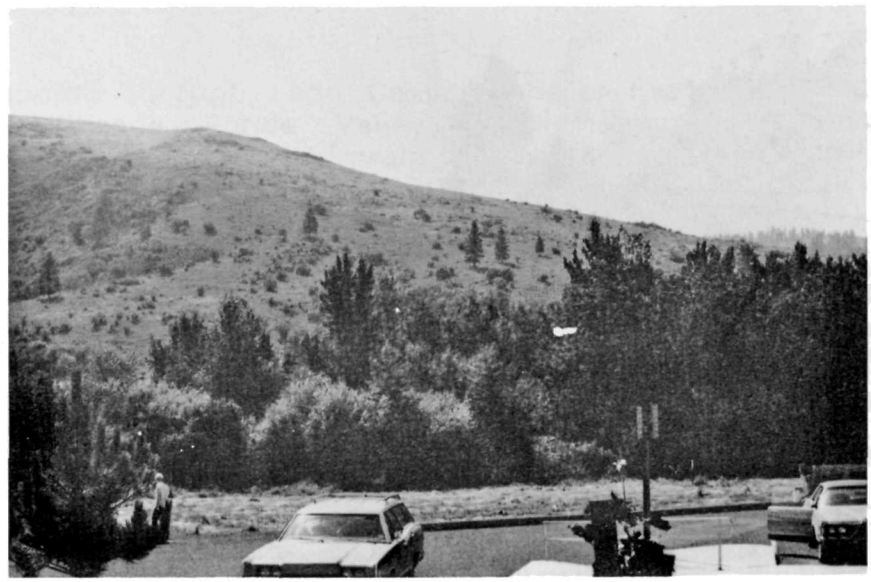
The Ladd Canyon Ruts, which have been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, extend for several miles as they climb up and over a high ridge which overlooks the Grande Ronde Valley to the northwest. As the emigrants crested this ridge, they were greeted with an excellent view of the fertile valley and the Blue Mountains beyond. After enjoying the view, they were then forced to negotiate a difficult descent down into the valley along several switchbacks, for the hill was too steep for a direct descent. The best portion of the Ladd Canyon ruts are cut into the hill where the emigrants descended.

Those ruts, about 500 feet in length, are still clearly visible along the hillside. Located 33 miles northwest of Flagstaff Hill (Sec 12, T4S, R38E, Glass Hill map sheet #289, Union County), the ruts are now privately owned. The hillside where the ruts descend is presently used as pasture land, part of a large farming operation, with the farm yard and house at the base of the hill. The ruts are not threatened by agricultural development, since the hillside is too steep to be plowed. A pipeline was constructed in 1980 west of the ruts. There is no public access to the site at this time, and permission to reach the ruts must be obtained from the owner. The owner reports occasional requests to view the ruts.

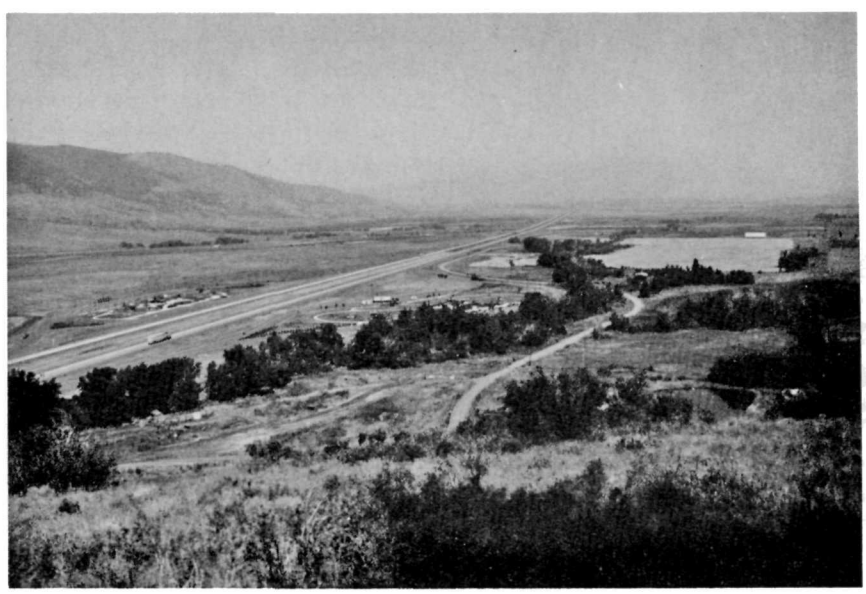
Another of the Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division is at the Charles H. Reynolds Safety Rest Area along Interstate Highway 84, one-quarter mile below the ruts. That kiosk is full of information, and points out the ruts descending the hill.

The Parks and Recreation Division should negotiate an access agreement wth the private landowner, in order to provide public access to the ruts. From the farm yard, a one-mile round trip hike would allow visitors to climb the hill along the ruts, and would present them with an excellent view of the Grande Ronde Valley from the summit. A trail guide could be provided at the present kiosk. Once established, the Parks and Recreation Division should monitor public use of the trail, and take appropriate measures to prevent damage to the ruts from over-use.

Although these recommendations will be difficult to implement, the excellent conditions of the Ladd Canyon ruts--some of the best ruts still available in this portion of Oregon--make the effort worthwhile. The combination of pristine ruts, an excellent view from the top of the ridge, and the possibility of a short hike from a heavily-visited rest stop give this site a very high potential for visitor use and enjoyment.

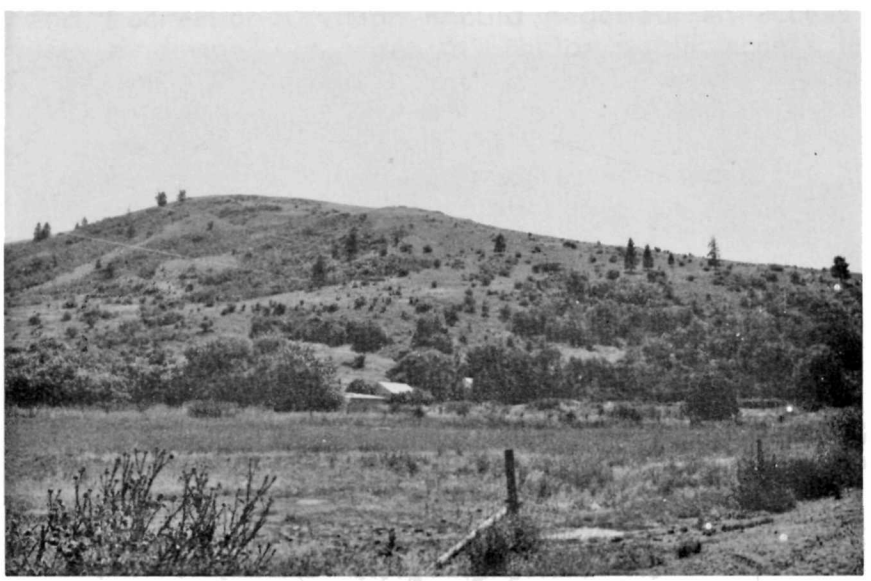


The Ladd Canyon Ruts are seen from the rest stop on Interstate Highway 84. The ruts descend from right to left, just above the tree line.



The Interstate rest stop is seen from the top of the ridge pictured above.

Ladd Canyon Ruts gradually descend the side of the ridge.



The Ladd Canyon Ruts are seen from the private farmland below the hill.

BLUE MOUNTAIN SEGMENT

After descending through Ladd Canyon, the emigrants crossed the wide and fertile Grande Ronde Valley, and finally entered the Blue Mountains--the first forested terrain they had encountered since leaving the rolling hills of eastern Kansas. The emigrants entered the mountains with mixed feelings: the trail became rougher as it wound up and through the forests, but the shade was welcome in the summer's heat, they could look forward to a decided break in the scenery after months of treeless plains and rangelands, and wood and water now became plentiful. Best of all, arrival at the Blue Mountains meant that they had successfully reached another landmark in their long journey.

Although the Grande Ronde Valley is now settled, and highways and railroads cut through the Blue Mountains, several stretches of the Oregon Trail look much the same today as they did a hundred years ago. The best of these stretches, which is proposed as the Blue Mountain Segment, covers 17 miles from the western edge of La Grande northwest to the Mount Emily Interchange of Interstate Highway 84. Most of the segment still retains the forest cover which was so welcome to the emigrants, and includes Oregon Trail ruts which will delight today's visitors as they retrace the trail through the forest.

This segment would start at the western edge of La Grande, eight miles northwest of Ladd Canyon (Sec 7, T3S, R38E, La Grande SE map sheet #290, Union County). From the western suburbs of La Grande, the swale of the Oregon Trail can be seen as it climbs the hills to enter the Blue Mountains. Good trail ruts can be followed for almost seven miles, until the trail dips down to cross the Grande Ronde River at Hilgard Junction State Park (see below). After crossing the modern intrusions along the Grande Ronde River--Interstate Highway 84 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks--the segment again enters the forest. For the next 10 miles, there are excellent ruts through the forest, before the trail crosses the interstate highway again at the Mount Emily Interchange (Sec 31, T1S, R36E, Huran map sheet #293, Umatilla County). The trail is clearly defined through most of this segment, but travelers would have difficulty in distinguishing it from a variety of other forest roads which cross the vicinity. With the exception of several miles on the eastern end, which have been marked through the efforts of local citizens of La Grande, the segment is unmarked.

Seven miles of this segment are managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, and less than a mile of the trail is on state lands, where it crosses Hilgard Junction State Park and the interstate highway right-of-way. The balance is privately owned. The entire length of the segment between La Grande and the state park is privately owned, with at least eight private owners along this seven-mile stretch. Some private owners are interested enough in the Oregon Trail to have already made efforts to mark and preserve it. The Boise Cascade Company, for example, has cooperated with private citizens from La Grande to protect the trail where it crosses Boise Cascade land, and other individuals have marked the trail on their lands. Some private owners, however, have opposed public access across their property.

Portions of the eastern half cross lands presently leased by a local hunting club, which employs riders to keep out the general public.

North of Hilgard Junction State Park, the Forest Service owns the majority of the land. The Forest Service has established a protective corridor along its portion of the trail, making it off-limits to logging, and as a result the trail extends through seven miles of timberland--all of which have excellent ruts. Several inholdings are privately owned along this stretch, including the last two miles between the Forest Service boundary and the Mount Emily Interchange.

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest should have the lead responsibility for this segment, assuming that funding and jurisdictional authority are assured. That office, with the assistance of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, should negotiate the required access agreements and provide the necessary public use facilities to implement the segment. The Forest Service should mark the Oregon Trail as it crosses Forest Service lands, and assist in marking the privately owned portions of the segment as permission is granted. The segment should follow the exact line of the Oregon Trail except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement.

The Forest Service already has close relations with private citizens in La Grande who have demonstrated much interest and provided much public support for the Oregon Trail in this region. The Forest Service should continue to enlist that public support as implementation of this segment proceeds. In particular, citizen support from La Grande will be invaluable in establishing an eastern trailhead in the vicinity of the western edge of La Grande, and in seeking the necessary public access across the private lands between La Grande and Hilgard Junction State Park. A small unmanned trailhead will be necessary at La Grande, with interpretation and trailguides to lead visitors along the trail towards the state park. If the establishment of such a facility should prove infeasible, the Forest Service office in La Grande could serve as an information center.

Private citizens from La Grande were able to point out the sites of several graves and early homesteads between La Grande and Hilgard Junction State Park. Those sites should be protected and marked as access across this section of the segment is attained.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Division should assist the Forest Service in the establishment of this segment, through the provision of intermediate trail facilities at Hilgard Junction State Park, and a trailhead at the Mount Emily Interchange of Interstate Highway 84. Trail guides and informational brochures should be made available at the state park, and a western terminus to the segment should be established at the Mount Emily Interchange. This unmanned facility should provide trail guides for visitors who may wish to follow the Oregon Trail eastward.

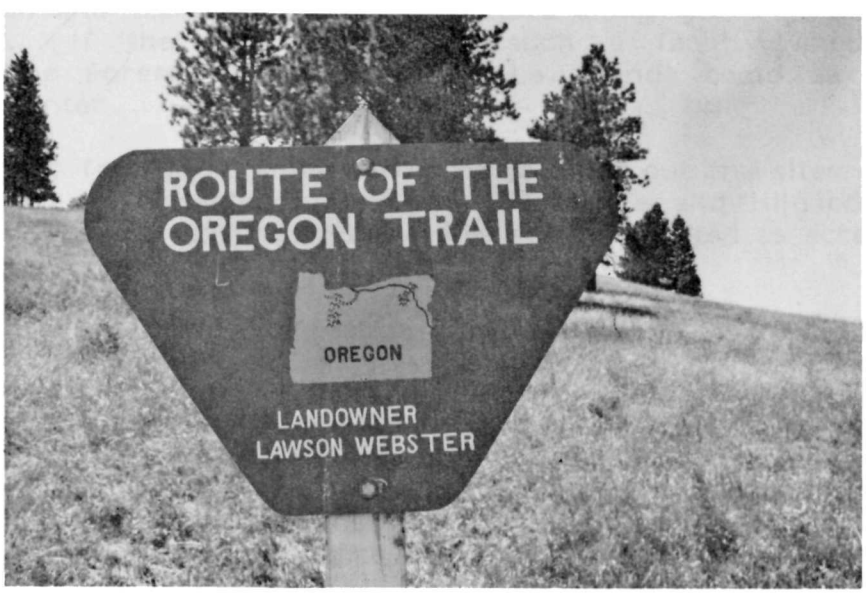
Fairly high public use is anticipated for this segment, given its combination of good Oregon Trail ruts, its relatively unimpacted status, and the excellent scenery as it winds through the Blue Mountains. The trail has no immediate threats along the portion owned by the Forest

Service, thanks to the protective corridor which has already been established, but both the ruts and the trail corridor through private lands are vulnerable to development and logging. Residential neighborhoods are already creeping westward out of La Grande along the trail, and such developments can be expected to continue. Boise Cascade has unofficially agreed not to log along its portion of the trail, but until the other private owners can be persuaded to adopt a similar protective policy, the trail will be endangered.

Vehicular use of this segment is not recommended, due to the potential for damaging the ruts, the costs involved in periodically clearing fallen trees from the trail, the problems anticipated in crossing private fencelines, and the opposition of private owners. In particular, the trail ascends and descends several steep hills in the forest, where the emigrants were forced to snub their wagons to trees, and vehicles negotiating those hills could severely damage the trail.

The Blue Mountain Segment has a number of potential problems which will delay its establishment as a through segment. Recognizing that these problems exist, it is anticipated that it will take the U.S. Forest Service some years to implement the recommendations. In the meantime, the Forest Service should mark and designate its portion of this segment as open to public use and enjoyment.

The deep rut swale of the Oregon Trail passes through the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, north of Hilgard Junction State Park.

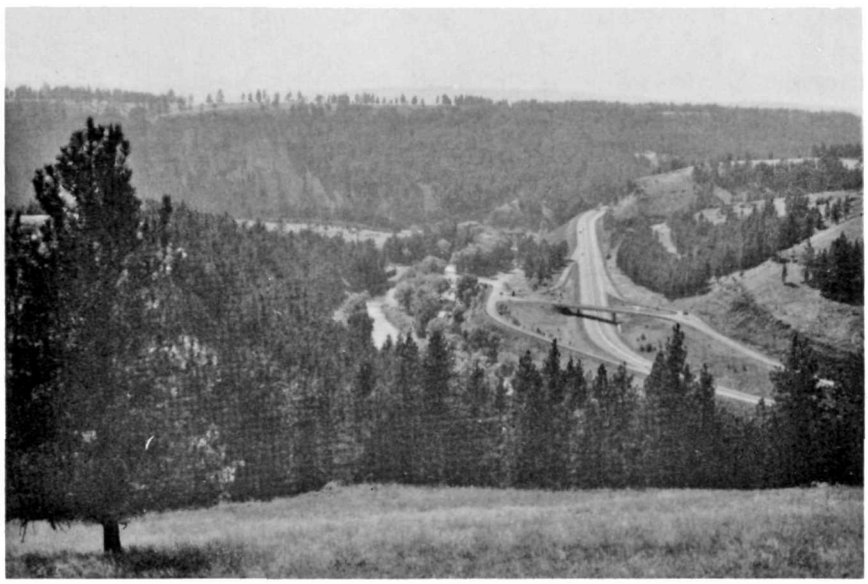


This Oregon Trail sign is an example of those placed along private lands west of La Grande, through the efforts of local citizen groups.

HILGARD JUNCTION

Hilgard Junction State Park is located 15 miles west of Ladd Canyon Ruts (centered in Sec 31, T2S, R37E, Hilgard map sheet #291, Union County), where the Oregon Trail crosses the Grande Ronde River. This site was a favorite camping spot for emigrants, and a welcome rest after they had negotiated the eastern slope of the Blue Mountains and then descended to the river. For the first time in several months, firewood was not a problem around the evening fires, for the Blue Mountains were covered with a thick coniferous forest. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Division has established a small park at the site, complete with another of its Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks. In addition, the state park offers facilities for camping, picnicking and fishing. The park has excellent access, being just off Interstate Highway 84.

To date, the Parks and Recreation Division has developed only those lands on the north bank of the Grande Ronde River, although additional acreage is owned along the south bank. About one-half mile of good Oregon Trail ruts cross park lands on the south bank of the river (SE¼ Sec 31 and SW¼ Sec 32), where the Oregon Trail descends the ridge into the river valley. These ruts are part of the proposed Blue Mountain Segment (see above) stretching from La Grande to the Mount Emily Interchange of Interstate Highway 84. Until that segment is established, the Parks and Recreation Division should mark the ruts and provide an interpretive trail out of the developed portion of the park along this Oregon Trail trace. The one-half mile hike up the hill along the ruts would give visitors an excellent introduction to some of the steep terrain which the emigrants were forced to cross, and would provide a very scenic view of the river valley from the top of the divide.



Hilgard Junction State Park is seen from the Oregon Trail as it crosses the ridge east of the park. The park is tucked between the interstate highway on the right and the Grande Ronde River on the left. The Oregon Trail descends the hill to the direct front, to cross the river near the park.

Oregon Trail ruts descend toward the south bank of the Grande Ronde River.

MEACHAM

The little town of Meacham, which is located 15 miles northwest of Hilgard Junction State Park (Sec 3, T1S, R35E, Meacham map sheet #295, Umatilla County), has several Oregon Trail related sites. An Oregon Trail campsite was located nearby, and several emigration-period graves have been discovered in the vicinity. One of these was uncovered during road construction in the early 1920s, and the three bodies were reburied under a monument inscribed to the "Honor of Those Who Died Blazing the Old Oregon Trail." The townsite got its start in 1848 when Major Henry A.G. Lee of the Oregon Rifles camped there during the Indian hostilities following the Whitman Massacre. The town was later the site of a stage station, and a locally famous resort known as the "Mountain House." Meacham, however, is proudest concerning its claim to be the "Capitol of the United States" for one day in July of 1923, when Warren G. Harding stopped by to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the covered wagon migration of 1843.

Meacham is easily accessible, being just off Interstate Highway 84. The town has one interpretive panel along old U.S. Highway 30, which was erected by the Oregon Department of Transportation. That panel attempts to cover the town's entire history, but contains some errors. As Aubrey Haines aptly put it, that misinformation was probably deliberate on the part of Meacham, for "the town very early capitalized on the colorful events of its . . . past and has done its bit for the legendry of the West."

Meacham deserves more. Specifically, Umatilla County should correct the existing interpretive sign, and more interpretation should be added to adequately cover the area's history. Once that is accomplished, the Department of Transportation should provide signs on Interstate 84, indicating that Meacham is a historic site, and encouraging visitors to make a brief exit from the Interstate to appreciate its history.

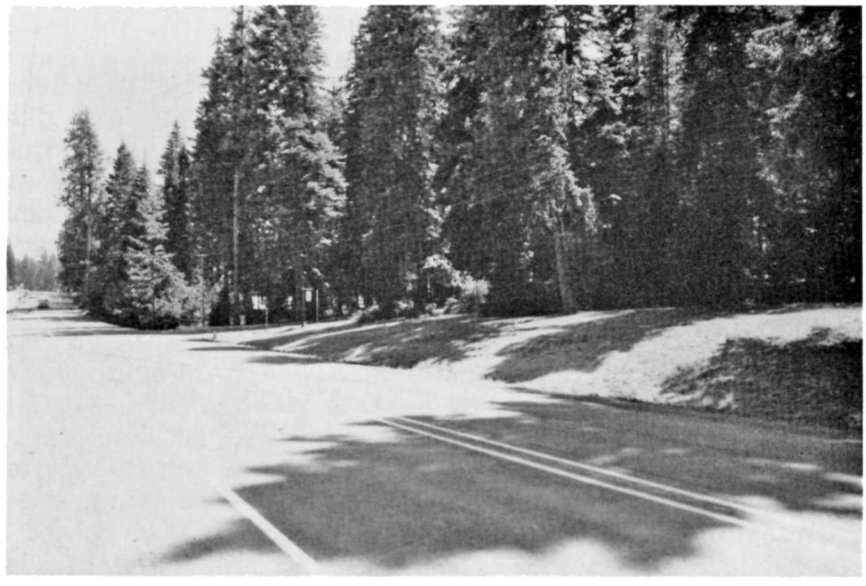
Meacham's present interpretive sign is an example of the old-style signs formerly provided by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

EMIGRANT SPRINGS

Emigrant Springs, located five miles north of Meacham (Sec 29, T1N, R35E, Meacham map sheet #295, Umatilla County), was first discovered in 1834 by Jason Lee, an Oregon-bound missionary. The springs were one of several good water sources in the Blue Mountains which dictated the route of travel and the location of over-night stops. The combination of good water, a plentiful wood supply and pleasant scenery made Emigrant Springs a favorite camping spot throughout the emigration years.

The springs themselves were destroyed in the twentieth century by pipeline and highway construction, but the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division has created a beautiful little state park at the site. The park provides camping, picnicking and hiking facilities for visitors, all under the shade of a magnificent coniferous forest. In addition, the park has an interpretive kiosk which does a superb job of relating the history of the springs and the Oregon Trail through the Blue Mountains. The park also has a facsimile of a covered wagon for the enjoyment of visitors, and a monument dedicated by President Warren G. Harding in 1923 to "The Memory of the Intrepid Pioneers Who Came With the First Covered Wagon in 1843 Over the Old Oregon Trail and Saved the 'Oregon Country' to the United States." The park is located just off Interstate Highway 84.

The combination of beautiful forest scenery and excellent interpretation makes Emigrant Springs State Park a delightful stop along the Oregon Trail. There are no recommendatons for the improvement of this site.



The entrance to Emigrant Springs State Park is on the right, as seen from the access road off Interstate Highway 84.

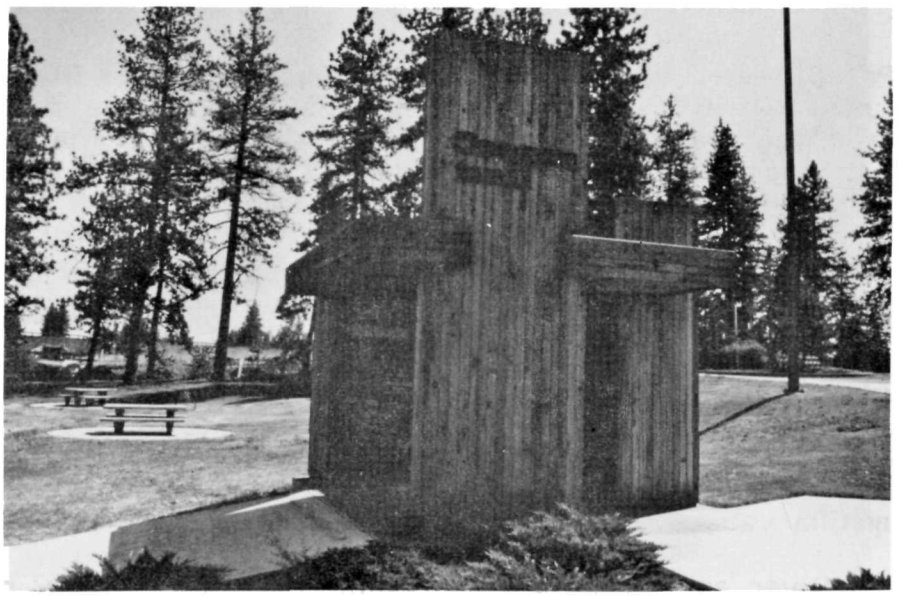
A facsimile of a covered wagon is at Emigrant Springs State Park.

DEADMAN PASS

Deadman Pass, located six miles north of Emigrant Springs State Park, is a narrow pass which served as an essential link in the route of the Oregon Trail over the Blue Mountains. The pass marked the end of that route, for the north end of the pass brought the emigrants to the top of a long sloping hill which led down out of the Blue Mountains and into the Umatilla Valley. The emigrants were now within 200 miles of their final destination. The name Deadman Pass comes from the late emigration period, when seven men were killed in three separate incidents during and following the Bannock War of 1878.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Division has provided an Oregon Trail interpretive kiosk there, at a rest stop on Interstate Highway 84 (Sec 1, T1N, R34E, Cabbage Hill map sheet #296, Umatilla County). That kiosk has excellent interpretation, relating the Oregon Trail to Deadman Pass and the Umatilla Valley.

The Umatilla River and Valley are not visible from the highway rest stop, as the summit of Deadman Pass is about one mile to the northwest. At present, private roads within the Umatilla Indian Reservation lead north to where an excellent view of the river and valley is possible. That view is so worthwhile that the Parks and Recreation Division, in cooperation with the Umatilla Indian Reservation and its private landowners, should negotiate for access rights and provide a short drive from the rest area to the overlook point. From spots at the north end of Deadman Pass, it is still possible to see Oregon Trail ruts leading down the long slope into the Umatilla Valley. An overlook which would provide such a view would be ideal.



The rest area at Deadman Pass includes an Oregon Trail interpretive kiosk. Photo by Stan Young, National Park Service.

Emigrant Hill is seen from Umatilla Valley, looking back up the hill to the southeast. Faint Oregon Trail ruts may be seen towards the top of the hill. Photo by Howard Chadwick, National Park Sevice.

EMIGRANT HILL

After cresting Deadman Pass, the emigrants were faced with the long but relatively gentle descent of Emigrant Hill, which brought them out into the flats of the Umatilla Valley. The culmulative effect of thousands of wagons making this five-mile descent has left its mark on the hillside, and the Oregon Trail is still visible as it comes down the hill. At the bottom of the slope, an alternate trail left the primary Oregon Trail, heading north to the Whitman Mission. Although there were several other trails connecting Whitman Mission with the Oregon Trail, this was the main wagon route used by those emigrants who passed through the mission prior to 1847.

There are no traces left of the wagon route to Whitman Mission, but four miles of good Oregon Trail ruts still descend Emigrant Hill. The land in the vicinity of the trail junction, at the foot of the hill, is privately owned as part of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and has been devoted to agriculture. The reservation should provide an interpretive sign at the foot of the hill, where the Oregon Trail crosses a paved reservation road (border of Sections 8 and 17, T2N, R34E, Cayuse map sheet #297, Umatilla County). From that point, which is one mile northwest of the Whitman wagon road junction, visitors can view the Oregon Trail ruts leading back up Emigrant Hill, and the approximate branching of the Oregon Trail and the Whitman wagon road can be pointed out (see bottom photo, previous page).

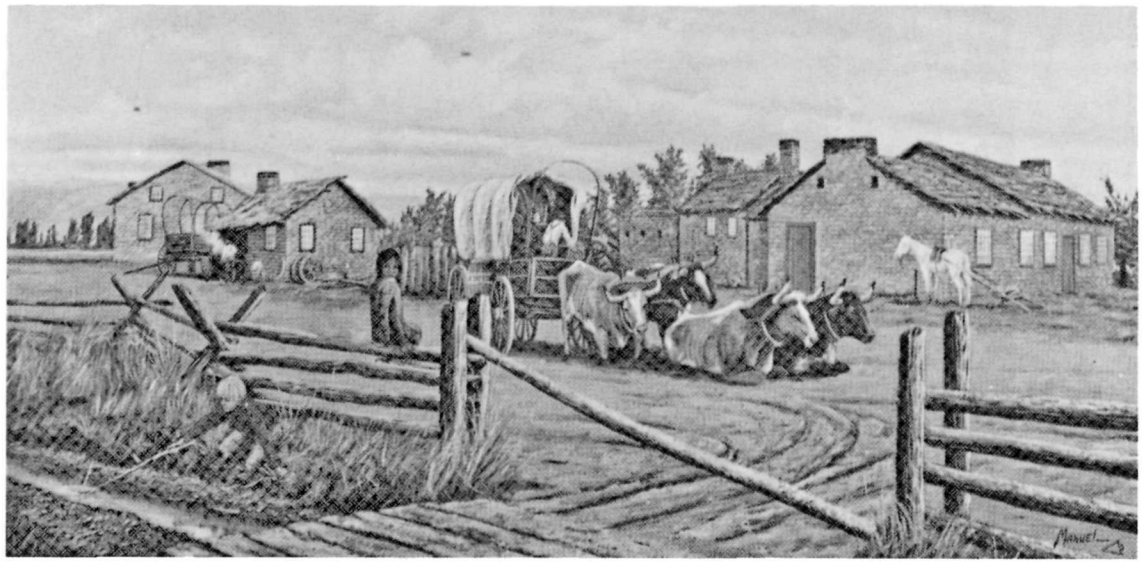
The Umatilla Indian Reservation should also take steps to protect the remaining Oregon Trail ruts descending Emigrant Hill. One mile of ruts near the bottom of the hill has been erased by agricultural development, and the remaining ruts face the same potential threat. At present, the four miles of good ruts cross pasture lands on the side of the hill, and the reservation should maintain those ruts by discouraging cultiviation of the area.

WHITMAN MISSION

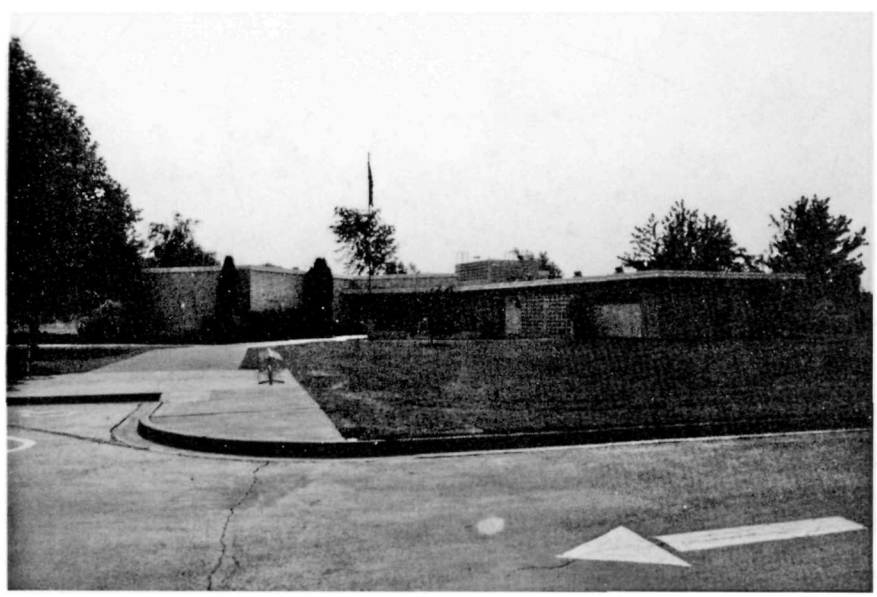
Although Whitman Mission is 31 miles north of the primary route of the Oregon Trail, its history is indelibly tied to the early years of western migration. The mission was established in 1836 by Dr. Marcus Whitman, a Methodist missionary determined to bring religion and civilization to the Indians of the Pacific Northwest. Whitman and his wife Narcissa, along with Reverend Henry and Eliza Spalding, made the long overland journey to Oregon in 1836, helping to blaze what would become the Oregon Trail. They followed a route first used by fur traders and trappers, and their journey helped establish the possibility of using the trail as a major migration route. Mrs. Spalding and Mrs. Whitman were the first white women to travel on the trail, and their party was also the first to successfully use vehicles as far west as Fort Boise (HBC).

Whitman Mission became an important way-station on the Oregon Trail in 1843, when Marcus Whitman, returning from a trip to the East, guided the first great emigrant wagon train to the mission. During 1843 and 1844, the Oregon Trail came through the mission, until a shorter route (this study's primary route) was developed which by-passed it, thus saving several weeks travel. The mission still served as an emergency station, however, for those who needed blacksmithing to restore deteriorated wagons and equipment, and for those who were too sick to travel further, who had run out of food, or who had exhausted their financial resources and hoped for work through the winter to prepare them for the final leg to the Willamette Valley. The mission was abandoned in 1847, when the Indians (alarmed by the increasing numbers of emigrants passing through their country, and goaded by a measles epidemic which was decimating their population) killed Marcus, Narcissa and 11 others. Although the Indians were subsequently punished, the mission was never reopened.

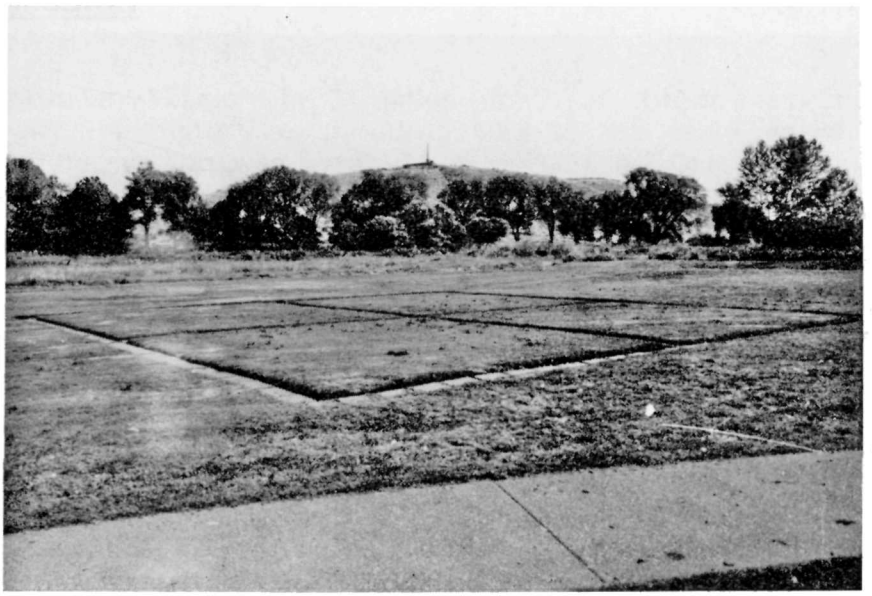
The National Park Service now administers Whitman Mission National Historic Site (seven miles west of Walla Walla, Washington). The site includes 98 acres of land, a visitor center, museum, two self-guided interpretive trails, gravesites, monuments, and an authentically reproduced emigrant wagon. The former mission buildings, none of which remain, have all been archeologically explored, and their sites are marked on the ground. The mission has an extensive and excellent interpretive program, covering all aspects of the Whitmans, the mission, and their importance to the Oregon Trail.



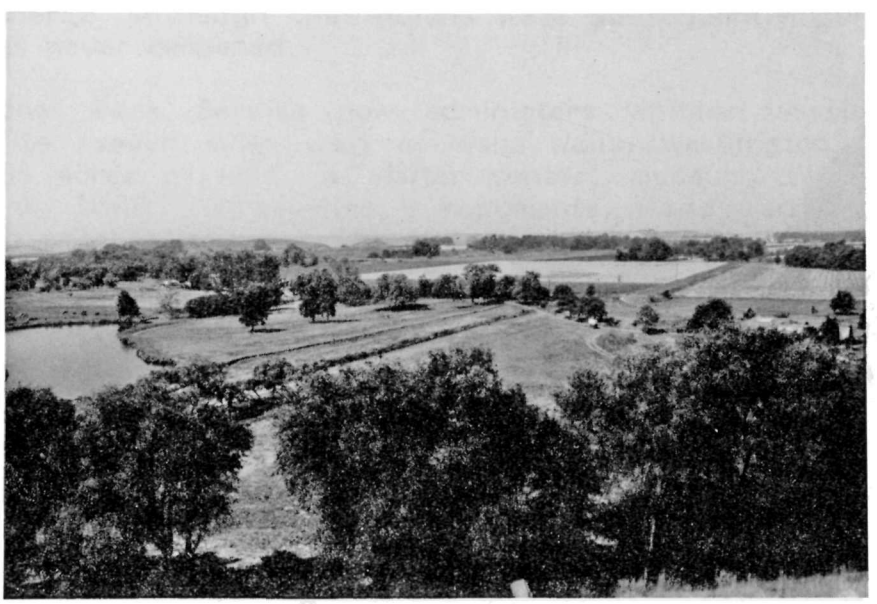
This reproduction gives an artist's conception of Whitman Mission as it appeared in the 1840s.



Whitman Mission National Historic Site includes a modern visitor center and museum.

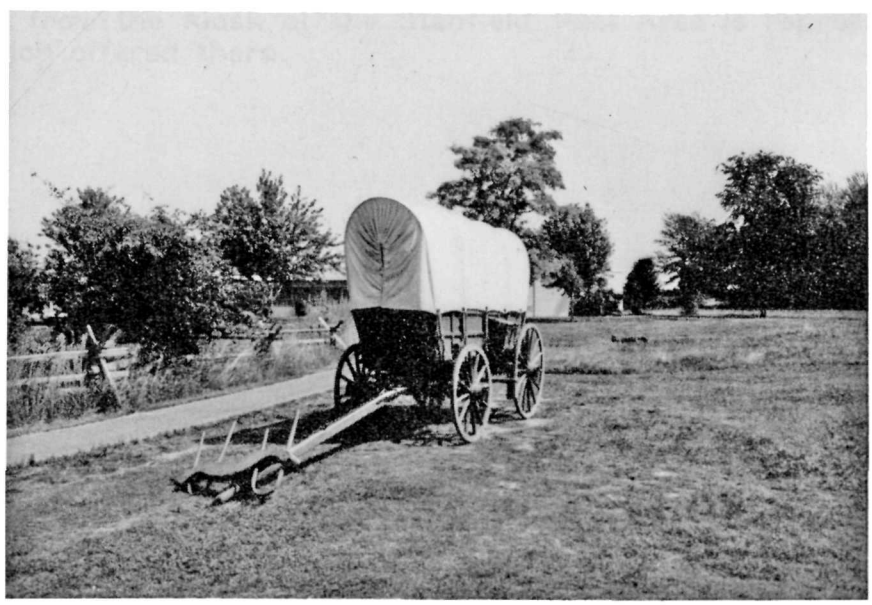


The paving stones in the foreground outlin the walls of the former mission buildings. The Whitman Memorial stands on the hill in the background.



The buildings of the original mission were located in the open space in the center of the photo, as seen from the Whitman Memorial above.

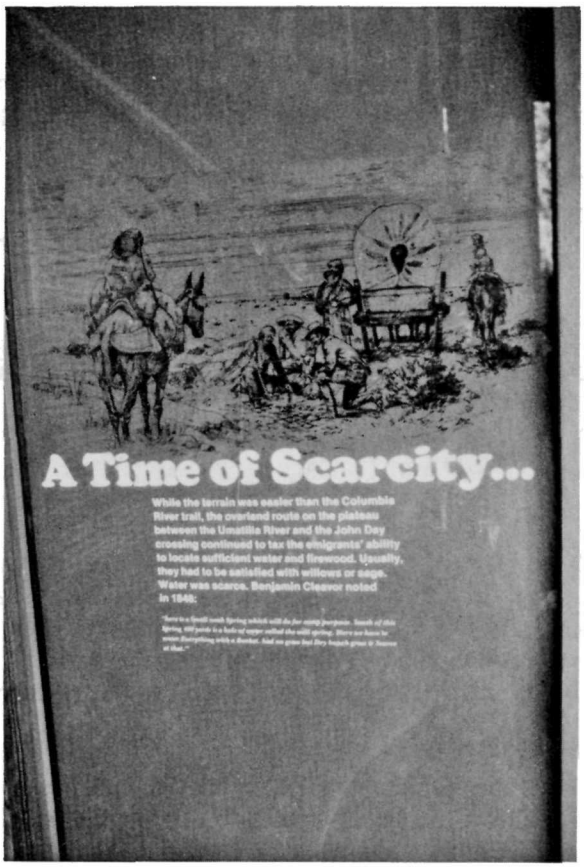
The victims of the 1847 uprising are buried at this spot, known as the Great Grave.



One of the historic site's unique exhibits is this authentically reproduced emigrant wagon. The wagon was built almost totally by hand, following nineteenth-century plans, materials, and craftsmanship.

STANFIELD REST AREA

The Stanfield Safety Rest Area, located three miles west of the Stanfield exit of Interstate Highway 84 (24 miles west of Pendleton), is the location of another of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division's Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks. This kiosk has an excellent interpretive display of maps, photos, illustrations and text, with a theme devoted to the labors and hardships of the emigrants as they crossed the desert ranges of this portion of Oregon. Although the rest area is several miles north of the actual Oregon Trail, the excellent interpretation which is already provided for the benefit of travelers leads to the recommendation of the Stanfield Rest Area as an interpretive site on the Oregon National Historic Trail.



This panel from the kiosk at the Stanfield Rest Area is representative of interpretation offered there.

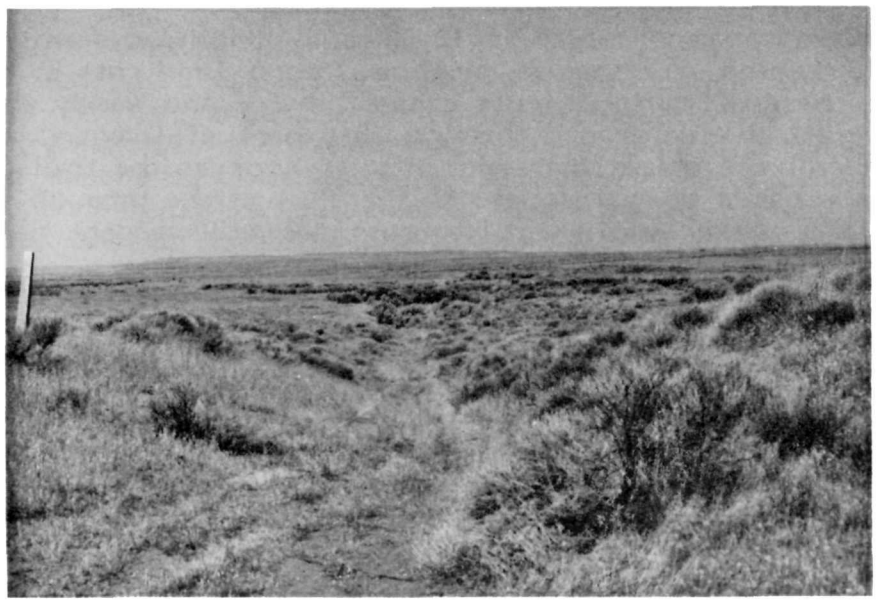
ECHO MEADOWS

After descending Emigrant Hill and passing through the area of present-day Pendleton, the emigrants entered a long and arduous stretch of trail which crossed the dry and sandy desert ranges of north-central Oregon. Most emigrants crossed this stretch of trail between late August and early September, when temperatures commonly exceeded 100° F, making travel across the area one of the most unpleasant experiences they had encountered. Many an emigrant complained about this unwonted trial, so close to the end of the trail.

Starting at a point four miles west of Echo, or 43 miles west of Deadman Pass (Sec 22, T3N, R28E, Service Buttes map sheet #303, Umatilla County), three miles of excellent Oregon Trail ruts still exist, crossing this desert range. The first mile of ruts (Sec 22) is on public land administered by the Baker District of the Oregon BLM, and that district has marked the ruts with the BLM's familiar concrete posts. The second and third miles (Sections 21 and 20) are on private and state land, respectively, and are presently used for range purposes. None of those ruts has public access. Sectons 20 and 21 are fenced, and the only access to the BLM land is via a half mile of private field road. All the ruts are in excellent condition, and all are threatened by eventual cultivation.

The Baker District of the Oregon BLM should develop public access to its half-section of land. The ruts there are so short that there is no need to provide vehicular access along the trail. Instead, the BLM should provide an access road and a parking area near the ruts, from which point visitors would be able to hike the one mile of trail. Unobtrusive interpretation on the site would add to the visitors' appreciation of the ruts.

The BLM should also negotiate with the State of Oregon and the private landowner, to allow visitors to hike the other two miles. If such an agreement can be reached, the BLM should mark the additional trail with its concrete posts. Access should be restricted to hikers, which would have a minimal impact upon the present use of Sections 21 and 20 as range land.



The Echo Meadow ruts cross BLM land, heading west. Note the BLM concrete Oregon Trail marker on the left.

BOARDMAN SEGMENT

This proposed segment, which is 12 miles in length, contains one of the best uninterrupted stretches of pristine Oregon Trail ruts in the State of Oregon. These 12 miles of ruts cross the dry and sandy desert range which plagued the emigrants through this part of Oregon, and visitors today can still appreciate the emigrants' feelings as the trail is retraced. The scenery has a special appeal as the trail winds through and around low hills and sandy washes. The ruts are still largely untouched by development.

The segment starts 16 miles west of Echo Meadows (Sec 13, T2N, R25E, Strawberry Canyon map sheet #305, Morrow County), at the eastern boundary of the Boardman Bombing Range--an aerial gunnery range administered by the United States Navy. The eastern seven miles cross the extreme southern portion of that range (well south of the target zone), and the Navy presently leases the land to local ranchers for cattle grazing. The western five miles cross land leased by the Boeing Company from the State of Oregon. Boeing has a long-term lease, and in turn sub-leases portions of it to ranchers for grazing purposes. The western end of the proposed segment, where the pristine ruts end, should be located at the junction of the Oregon Trail and Immigrant Road, a gravel county road (Sec 20, T2N, R24E, Ella map sheet #307, Morrow County). The trail crosses no paved roads along this segment--nor any other vestage of civilization--but crosses several intermittent streams. The trail is well-defined, and a well-informed visitor would have little trouble following it, even though it is not marked. The seven miles of trail within the Boardman Bombing Range, including the historic site of lower Well Spring (see below) are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Department of the Navy should assume lead responsibility for this segment, with assistance as necessary from the National Park Service. Development needed to implement the segment is rather minimal, given its relatively short length, and includes providing trailheads, and marking, interpreting and protecting the trail. The Navy should negotiate with the Boeing Company to provide access across the land leased by Boeing (Boeing has unofficially agreed to such a proposal). The eastern trailhead should be just inside the eastern boundary of the range, one mile from a paved county highway. Facilities at this point need be no more extensive than a small parking area, and an unmanned interpretive site, with trail guides for the benefit of visitors.

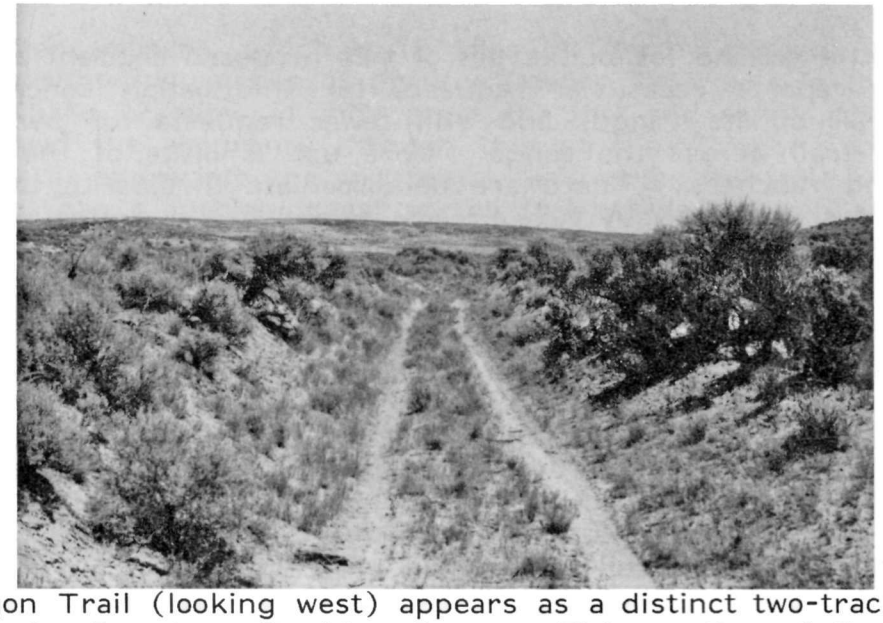
The Oregon Trail should be marked for its entire length within this segment, preferably with the sturdy concrete posts used by the BLM. The segment should follow the exact line of the Oregon Trail, except where it proves absolutely impossible to provide such faithful retracement. The western trailhead, located on Boeing's leased land, should also be provided by the Navy (with necessary assistance from the National Park Service), and should consist of the same type low-key facilities proposed for the eastern end. Due to the short length of this segment, there should be no need for any intermediate facilities. Potential users, however, should be amply warned of the necessity of

bringing adequate water supplies with them, and should check with the Navy's and Boeing's range control headquarters before entering the area.

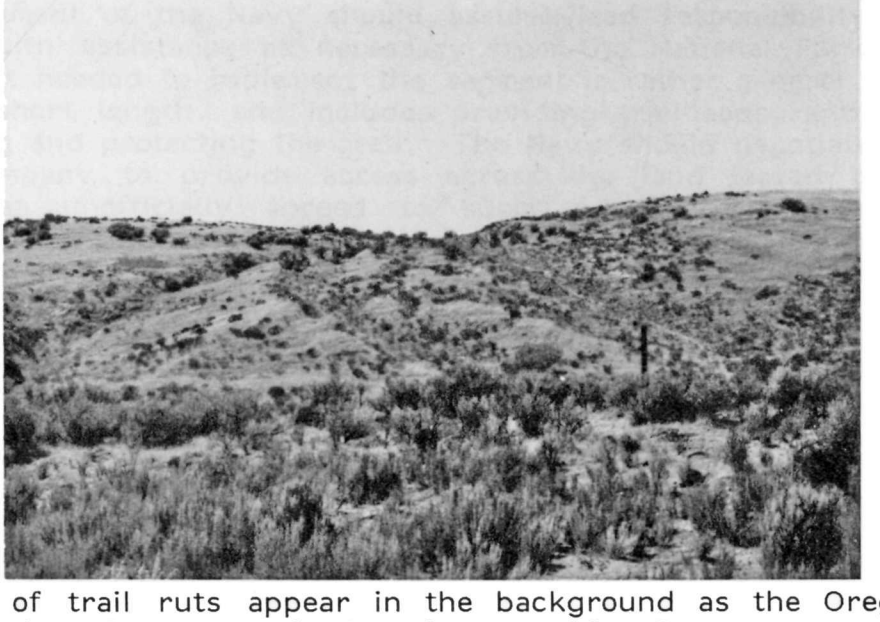
There is little demand for public use of this proposed segment at present. The Navy reports occasional requests for information concerning the Oregon Trail on its range, and still fewer requests for permission to follow the trail across the range. More use is made of the range by hunters and ranchers. There are no immediate threats to the trail on Navy land, since the Navy has already established a protective corridor which extends 200 feet to either side of the trail. The Boeing company is encouraged to establish a similar protective corridor along its portion of the trail. The State Historic Preservation Officer of Oregon should nominate the five miles of trail crossing the land leased by Boeing from the State to the National Register of Historic Places.

For obvious reasons, both the Navy and Boeing have expressed concern about visitor control along this segment, to prevent visitors from wandering into the impact zone of the bombing range or into a rocket testing area operated by Boeing. Very visible warnings should be provided to visitors to keep them on the trail.

Use of the segment should be limited to hikers and horseback riders. Any appreciable off-road vehicle use would be damaging to the ruts.



The Oregon Trail (looking west) appears as a distinct two-track trace as it enters the Boardman Bombing Range. This portion of the trail has been used infrequently by range personnel, local ranchers, and hunters.



Two sets of trail ruts appear in the background as the Oregon Trail crosses Juniper Canyon on the Boardman Bombing Range.

The Oregon Trail (on Boardman Bombing Range) descends southwest towards Well Spring, which is located on the flats below.

The Oregon Trail is seen looking back to the northeast from the same vicinity as the above photo.

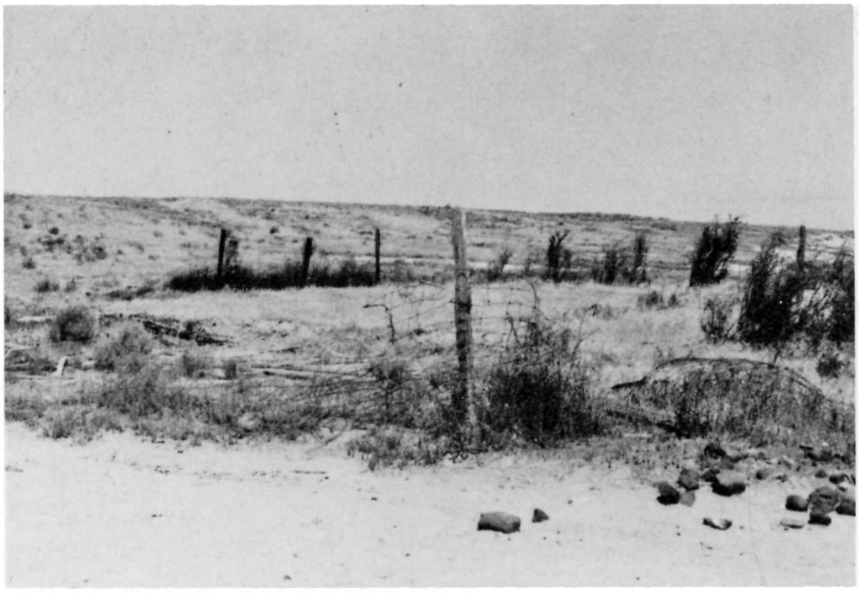
WELL SPRING

Lower Well Spring, located half-way across the Boardman Segment (Sec 20, T2N, R25E, Well Spring map sheet #306, Morrow County), was a water source which made travel across this dry stretch of the Oregon Trail possible. The spring was always a meager source of water, but one which was eagerly sought by the emigrants, since this portion of the trail was usually traveled in late August or early September when all the intermittent streams were normally dry. The spring has been seriously impacted throughout the years, particularly by attempts to improve its water supply for the benefit of livestock. The spring is now virtually dry, due to deep well drilling in the vicinity for irrigation purposes.

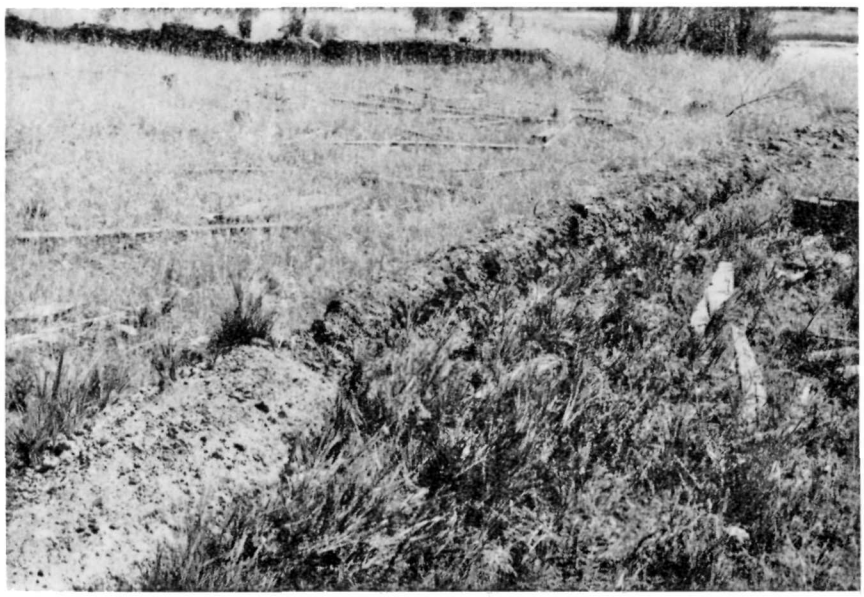
Next to the spring is the site of an old stage station. Remains of that station consist of a stone and cement foundation and scattered lumber and metal. The station has never been examined or surveyed by a qualified historian or archaeologist. Three-tenths of a mile west of Well Spring is a graveyard which dates back to Oregon Trail days. Although most of the burials in the graveyard are unmarked, there is a monument to the memory of Robert Evan Williams who died in 1852, and another to Colonel Cornelius Gilliam of the Oregon Volunteers, who was killed during the Cayuse War of 1848. Well Spring, including the spring, stage station site, and cemetery, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Well Spring area, including the spring, the stage station site, and the cemetery, is administered by the United States Navy as part of the Boardman Bombing Range. The three sites are accessible for normal vehicles via the Immigrant Road, a gravel county road which parallels the southern boundary of the bombing range. The sties are separated from the road by a barbed-wire fence. There is interpretation. The Navy should provide gates or stiles so visitors may walk in from the county road and view the areas. The Navy, with the assistance of the National Park Service as required, should provide interpretation along the gravel road, and should conduct an archaeological survey of the area. The low level of visitor use anticipated for these sites should not pose any particular threat, but the Navy should monitor such use and take steps to counter any future threats which may arise.

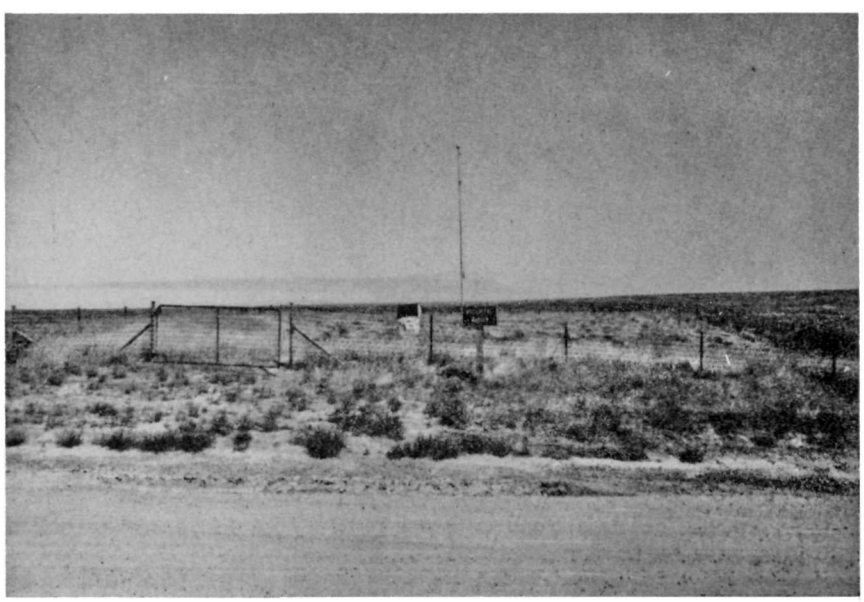
Well Spring is cluttered by debris left behind as a result of efforts to improve the flow of the spring.



A portion of the foundations of the old stage station at Well Spring are visible to the left.



The eroded cement foundations of the old stage station at Well Spring may still be seen.



The pioneer cemetery is located three-tenths of a mile west of Well Spring.

FOURMILE CANYON

After the Oregon Trail passes through the desert-like range along the Boardman segment, it enters a more rolling range country, transected by numerous small canyons. Scattered ruts are still in existance, except where the land has proved suitable for agricultural development. One such stretch of ruts is visible where the trail crosses Fourmile Canyon, 18 miles west of Well Spring. Over a mile of good Oregon Trail ruts may be seen in this vicinity, particularly as the trail climbs the western side of the canyon.

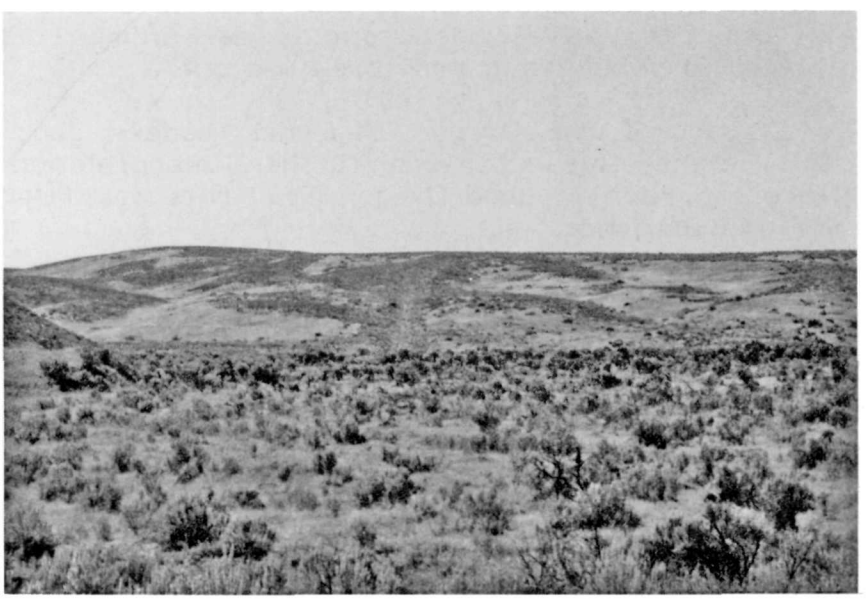
The Prineville District of the Oregon BLM has established an Oregon Trail interpretive site in Fourmile Canyon (Sec 27, T2N, R22E, Hickland Butte map sheet #311, Gilliam County) as part of the Bicentennial program. The interpretive site consists of two panels which address the Oregon Trail in generalities. Adjacent to the site are Oregon Trail ruts on BLM land, but those ruts are inadequately marked, and visitors are not invited to explore them. Access to the site is via an all-weather gravel road.

The Prineville District should upgrade the quality of this site. More specific interpretation is needed to relate the story of the Oregon Trail as the emigrants passed through this part of Oregon. Good ruts extend almost a half-mile to the southeast and to the west of the site on BLM land, and the ruts to the west continue across private range land for another half-mile.

The BLM should mark the ruts on its land and encourage visitors to take a short hike along the trail. The BLM should eventually negotiate access agreements with the private landowner to the west, to enable visitors to follow the ruts across the private land, and to mark those ruts. These ruts are best suited for hiking and horseback use only.

The Prineville District of the Oregon BLM has made a good start by establishing this interpretive site, but further interpretation and the chance to retrace a portion of good Oregon Trail ruts would considerably enhance the visitor experience.

The BLM has a modest interpretive site at Fourmile Canyon.



To the west of the interpretive site, Oregon Trail ruts climb the hill in the background.

Oregon Trail ruts cross private land one-half mile west of the BLM interpretive site at Fourmile Canyon.

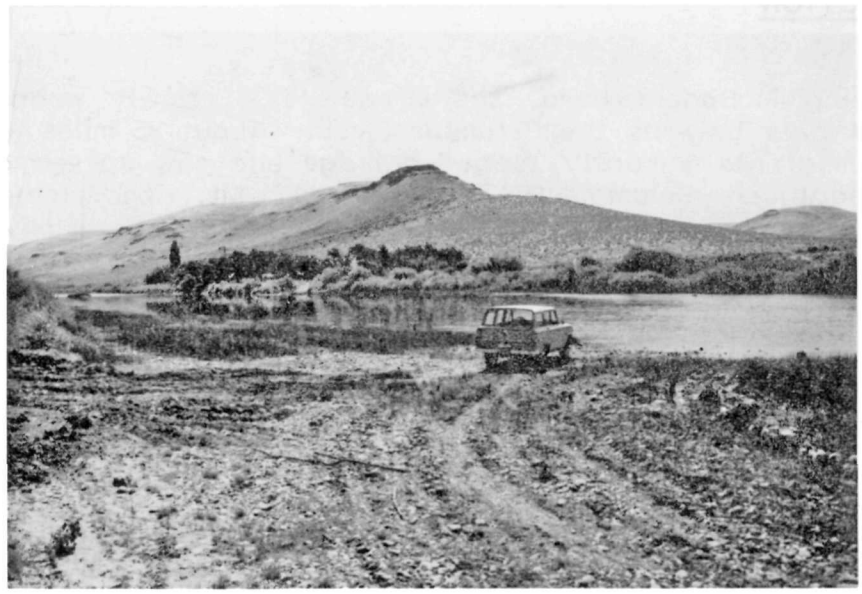
McDONALD FORD

At McDonald Ford, 19 miles west of Fourmile Canyon, the emigrants encountered the John Day River, the first of several major rivers flowing north towards the Columbia River which they had to cross. McDonald Ford was an excellent fording site where the river normally runs only eight to 12 inches in depth during late summer, and the ford has a smooth pebbly bottom. Discovery of this ford changed a potentially dangerous river crossing into one of the easier fords along the Oregon Trail. Even with the ford, however, the John Day River was treacherous at times and the emigrants welcomed the establishment of a ferry in 1858.

The fording site (Sec 11, T1N, R19E, McDonald map sheet #315, Gilliam and Sherman Counties) is privately owned, although there is BLM land in the immediate vicinity. The ford can still be crossed by vehicles during the late summer months when the water level is low. Indeed, for anyone following the Oregon Trail, crossing the ford is almost a necessity to avoid a 50-mile detour. River bottom land along both banks is presently used for farming and ranching, and all historic traces of the ford have been erased. Still, the lack of any intrusive developments around the ford lend it a very historic air. Oregon Trail ruts are visible on the hills above the John Day River on both sides, with most of those ruts being on BLM lands. None of the ruts are adequately marked. The only interpretation at the ford is a small lettered monument on the west bank and an even smaller marker on the east. The ford has good access from both banks via paved and gravel county roads. Landowners on the east side have posted no trespassing signs on some roads, but visitors who stick to the county gravel road should encounter no problems.

The Prineville District of the Oregon BLM, which manages public land on both sides of the ford, should take responsibility for developing this site. The ruts on BLM land should be more adequately marked, and the access roads on each side of the ford should be clearly marked to help visitors avoid problems of unintentional trespass. Interpretation is needed at the site, and the BLM should negotiate with the counties of Gilliam and Sherman to allow interpretive signs to be placed along the county right-of-way on both sides of the river. Most visitors will not attempt to ford the river, for even at its lowest level it looks risky, but the entrance and exit from the ford should be marked to assist those who dare. The Oregon Trail ruts on both sides of the river invite hiking, and the BLM should provide information to assist visitors who wish to hike a short distance along the Oregon Trail. Due to the limited length of existing ruts, the steep terrain, and the great amount of private land in the area, vehicles should not be allowed to travel the ruts. Vehicles users have a wide choice of county and range roads in the vicinity, from which the Oregon Trail may be viewed.

McDonald Ford is still relatively unspoiled today, and excellent scenic values abound in the deep canyon through which the river flows. Due to this and the ford's significance as a major crossing site and landmark on the Oregon Trail, the ford is well worth developing as a historic site.



McDonald Ford is seen from the east side of the John Day River. The ford exits from the river on the far bank about half-way between the vehicle shown and the lone Poplar tree to the left. The four-wheel drive vehicle had no difficulty in fording the river in August.

An Oregon Trail monument is located on the flat above the west bank of the John Day River. This photo looks back to the east across the river.

BIGGS JUNCTION

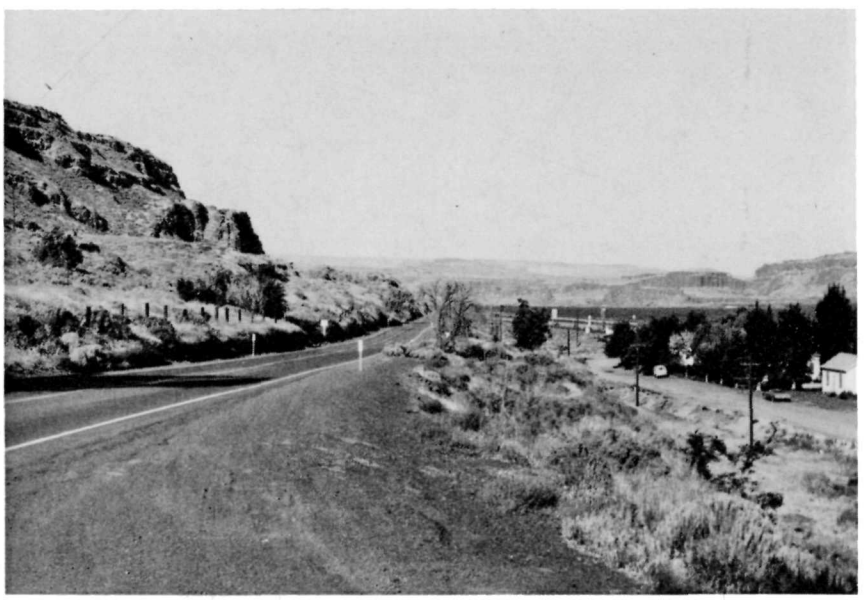
After crossing McDonald Ford, the Oregon Trail slowly wound its way through the hills towards the Columbia Rver. About 25 miles west of the ford, the emigrants abruptly topped a ridge and saw spread out before them the magnificant Columbia River valley, with Mt. Hood rising from the western horizon. This was one of the most impressive and joyful sights along the trail, for the Oregon country was finally beginning to resemble its publicized beauty, and reaching the Columbia River meant that the long overland journey was now almost at an end.

The Oregon Trail has been largely obliterated in this vicinity. Agricultural developments and highway and railroad construction somewhat dampens enjoyment of the scene. Near river level there is a small monument on old U.S. Highway 30 just west of the little town of Biggs Junction (Sec 8, T2N, R16E, Biggs Junction map sheet #321, Sherman County), which commemorates the arrival of the Oregon Trail at the Columbia River. That monument is far from adequate for this historic site. Faint traces of the eroded trail can be discerned from a gravel road up the hill to the southeast of that monument (Sec 17), but there are no directions available to guide travelers to that spot. Just southwest of the monument (Sec 18) there is almost a mile of good Oregon Trail ruts, as the trail crosses a bench above the old highway. This is the only stretch of the Oregon Trail along the Columbia River not destroyed during the course of highway and railroad construction in the past century. A small portion of those ruts is owned by BLM, but most are in private ownership, with the land being used as pasture.

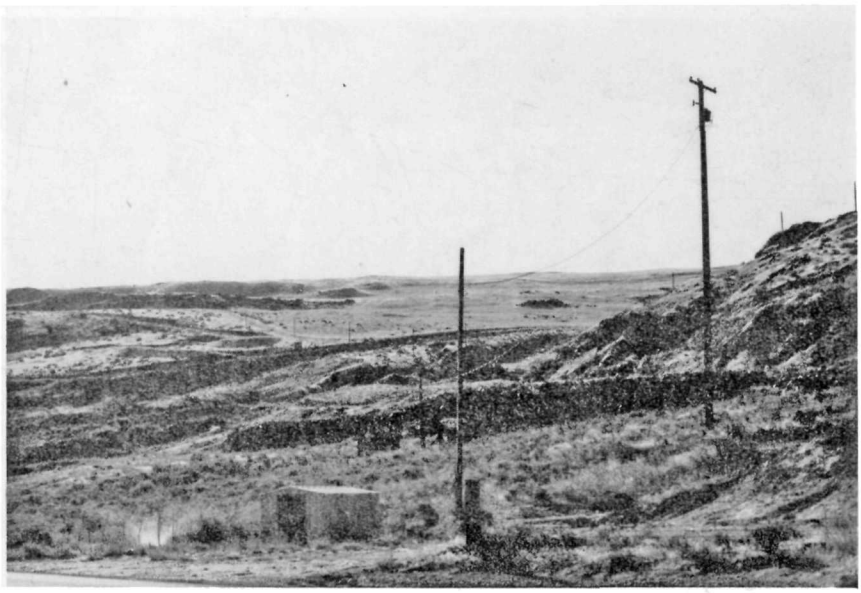
Although development of this area is hindered by powerline, highway and railroad rights-of-way, and a withdrawl for The Dalles Dam power project, the Prineville District of the Oregon BLM should develop an interpretive site on it land (approximately 30 acres), in order to interpret the Oregon Trail and the Columbia River. That site should have extensive interpretation concerning the trail through this part of Oregon, and should depict the great impact of the Columbia upon the emigrants. Directions should be given to guide visitors to the small monument on the old highway, and up the gravel road to where visitors can best approximate the view which greeted the emigrants. The BLM should negotiate with the private landowners for access easements along the Oregon Trail ruts which follow the little bench above old Highway 30. Those ruts should then be marked and protected, giving visitors their only chance to retrace a portion of the Oregon Trail along the scenic Columbia River.

If the Oregon BLM is unable to develop this small detached parcel of land, the Parks and Recreation Division of the Oregon Department of Transportation should be permitted to carry out the above recommendations.

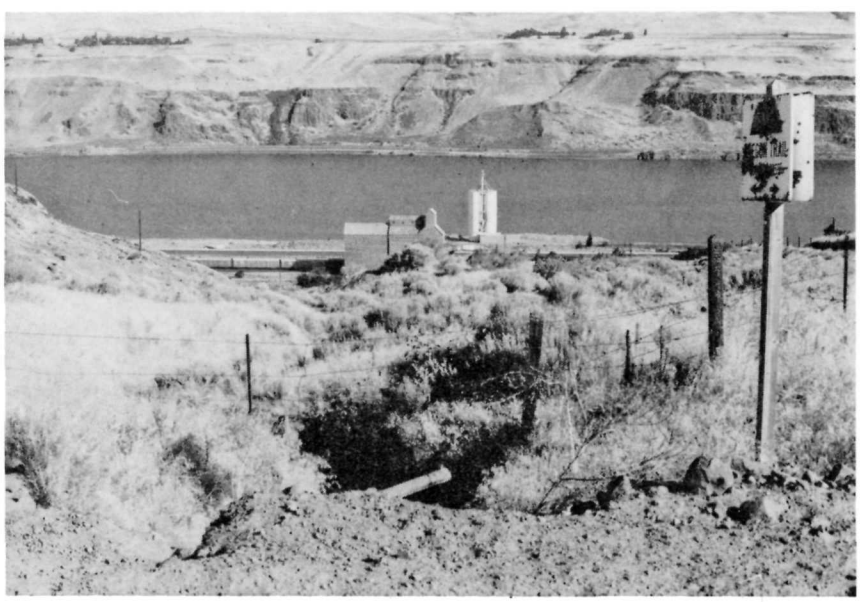
The present Oregon Trail monument is located along old U.S. Highway 30, just west of Biggs Junction.



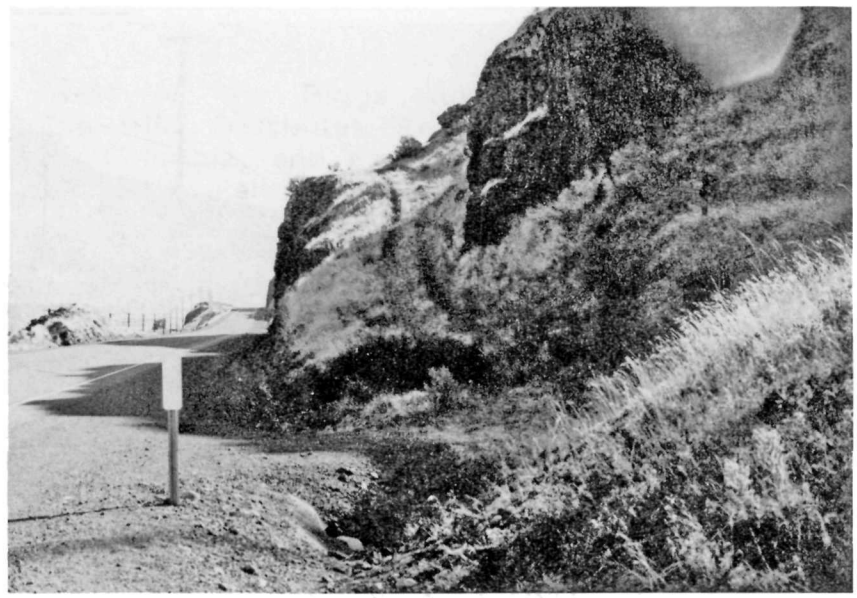
For most of the distance between Biggs Junction and The Dalles, the Oregon Trail has been completely destroyed by highway and railroad construction. As the highway rounds the curve in the distance, however, the Oregon Trail took a higher route along a bench above the highway, where almost a mile of Oregon Trail ruts have survived.



The Oregon Trail descended this hill to reach the Columbia River. As is obvious in this photo taken from the site of the monument, modern development has erased most traces of the trail through this area.

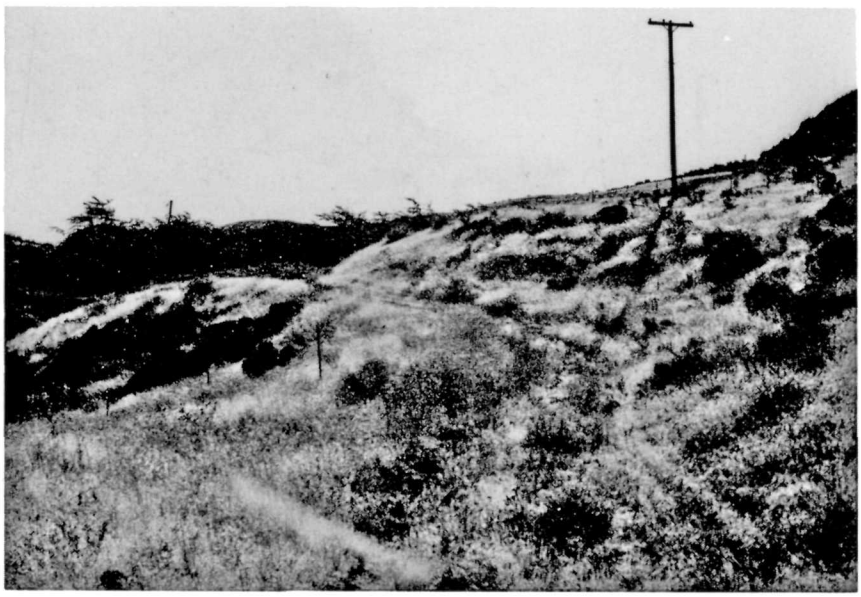


This photo was taken from the gravel road which winds up the hill pictured above. At this point the Oregon Trail crosses the road, heading down towards the river. Note the old and vandalized Oregon Trail sign to the right. Visitors can best approximate the view which greeted the emigrants from this point, which is less than half-way up the hill.



Oregon Trail ruts (looking east from the west end of the ruts) are seen as the trail leaves the bench and disappears under the highway.

Oregon Trail ruts traces appear (looking east) on the bench above the Columbia River.



Another section of Oregon Trail rut traces cross the bench above the old highway and the Columbia River.

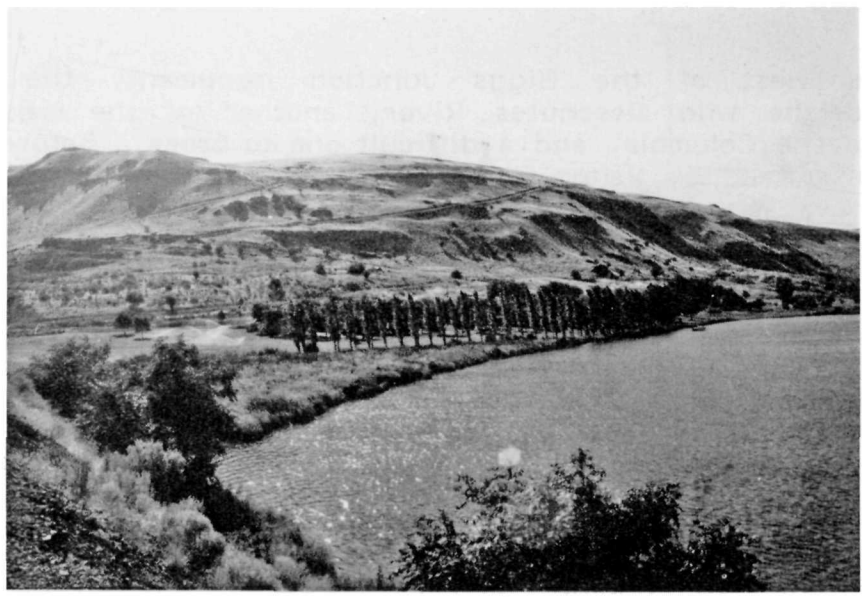
The Oregon Trail rut traces (looking west) descend the bench and disappear under the old highway. Interstate Highway 84 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks are between the old highway and the river.

DESCHUTES RIVER

Four miles west of the Biggs Junction monument, the emigrants encountered the wild Deschutes River, another of the major streams flowing into the Columbia, and a difficult one to cross. Before the river was partially tamed by Pelton Dam, 100 miles upstream, an 1849 emigrant described it as entering the Columbia "with a roar of falls and rapids." The emigrants crossed near the mouth of the Deschutes, using a rocky island as a stepping stone. Wagons were usually floated across, while the animals swam. The Oregon Trail ascends the hill on the west side of the Deschutes River and attains a bench above the town of Celilo. The trail follows this bench for several miles to the west before ascending a hill, heading for Fifteen Mile Creek, and leaving the river.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Division has established a small state park on the east bank of the Deschutes River (Sec 26, T2N, R15E, Wishram map sheet #322, Sherman County). Deschutes River Recreation Area, as the name implies, is primarily devoted to recreational pursuits and has facilities for camping, picnicking, fishing and boating. But the park has another of Oregon's interpretive kiosks, which does an excellent job of discussing the Oregon Trail, the Deschutes River, and the problems the emigrants faced in crossing the river. The park is readily accessible from both old U.S. Highway 30 and Interstate Highway 84. No recommendations are made for its improvement.

The trail remnants west of the Deschutes River are on privately owned lands. The state should seek the cooperation of the private owners in protecting those ruts and permitting visitor appreciation.



Deschutes River Recreation Area is seen from the bridge on old U.S. Highway 30 crossing the Deschutes River.

The Deschutes River, looking west from the state park, still appears as a formidable obstacle.

THE DALLES (COMPLEX)

Fifteen miles west of the Deschutes River, the emigrants reached The Dalles, which for several years marked the end of the overland portion of the Oregon Trail. Until 1846, when the Barlow Road was opened, the emigrants followed the Columbia River Route from The Dalles 83 miles downstream to Fort Vancouver, the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trading empire in the Pacific Northwest. From Fort Vancouver, the emigrants then navigated 31 miles up the Willamette River to the present site of Oregon City, where they scattered to find new homes in the fertile Willamette Valley.

The main point of embarcation for those who used the river route, both before and after 1846, was at the mouth of Chenoweth Creek (Sec 28, T2N, R13E, The Dalles North map sheet #326, Wasco County). Chenoweth Creek offered a small protected harbor, where rafts could be built and boats loaded for the voyage down the Columbia River.

There is no marker or interpretation at this important site. Indeed, it is very difficult to find, and can only be approached via dirt roads on the outskirts of The Dalles. The site has been heavily impacted over many years by riverfront development, and is presently used as a gravel loading area. Although this site is privately owned and impacted by development, the City of The Dalles should seek permission to mark and interpret it. Such measures could be carried out without undue interference with the gravel operations, and would be the minimum possible commemoration deserved by this significant site. Directional signs would be necessary from the main streets of The Dalles to enable visitors to find the site. Despite modern developments, Chenoweth Creek is still somewhat of a scenic location, and a visitor may easily imagine groups of busy emigrants building rafts and preparing for the hazardous journey down the Columbia River.

The City of The Dalles has provided a monument to the Oregon Trail in a small city park at the corner of 6th and Union Streets (Sec 3, T1N, R13E, The Dalles South map sheet #325, Wasco County). A small monument in this park is marked "End of the old Oregon Trail" but that is misleading in several respects. The Oregon Trail never ended at The Dalles. If the city meant to mark the end of the overland portion of the trail, where emigrants changed from land to water travel, then the marker is misplaced, for it should be standing at Chenoweth Creek. Nevertheless, this marker should remain, for it was originally placed by Ezra Meeker in 1906. The city should provide additional interpretation at the park explaining the discrepency on the marker. Although not at the exact point of the junction of the Oregon Trail and the Barlow Road, this city park is also the best place to mark the departure of the Barlow Road from the Oregon Trail, and to recite the story of the Barlow Road.

The Dalles has several other historic sites which are directly related to the Oregon Trail. Daniel Lee, a Methodist Missionary, established a mission here in 1838. In addition to its original function as a mission to the Indians, Lee's mission also served as a stopping place for emigrants until its abandonment in 1847. It was a place of succor for way-worn emigrants similar to Whitman Mission; assistance given there to the

survivors of the unfortunate group of emigrants who left the Oregon Trail at Vale in 1845 and followed Meek's Cutoff probably saved many lives. A settlement slowly grew up around the mission, and evolved into the present city of The Dalles. The mission had five buildings in 1843, but none remain. The site of the former mission is now developed but there is a monument about a half-mile northwest, at the corner of 6th and Trevitt Streets (Sec 4). That monument does not adequately commemorate or relate the history of the mission and its impact upon the Indians and Oregon Trail. The city of The Dalles should provide more interpretation regarding this mission, preferably at the monument site, but elsewhere if necessary.

One remnant of the former mission still exists, an unusual boulder in the middle of the intersection of 12th and Court Streets (Sec 3). This is known as Pulpit Rock for its use by Lee and other missionaries as a platform from which to preach to the Indians. The City of The Dalles has marked the rock and still conducts Easter sunrise services at the site. It would not be feasible to provide further interpretation there, but its history and use should be more adequately covered elsewhere.

After the Whitman Massacre of 1847, a stockade was built at The Dalles by volunteer troops. The stockade was converted into a regular U.S. Army post in May 1850. It was originally called Camp Drum, but was redesignated Fort Dalles in 1853. The fort was originally occupied by two companies of the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, whose purpose was to protect emigrant traffic on the Oregon Trail. Fort Dalles was the center of Army operations in Eastern Oregon during the 1850s--a turbulent period on the Oregon Trail--and it had a complement of eight companies in 1856. At its height, Fort Dalles, which was for a time the only military post on the Oregon Trail between Fort Laramie and Fort Vancouver, had over 12 buildings. After 1861, the fort was mainly a quartermaster's depot until its abandonment in 1867.

Only one building remains of the old fort. This is the former Surgeon's Quarters, located at the corner of 15th and Garrison Streets (Sec 4). The building is owned and operated by the Wasco County-City of The Dalles Museum Commission. It has been restored, and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The museum in the Surgeon's Quarters has concentrated its efforts totally upon the story of Fort Dalles and The Dalles settlement, and has no Oregon Trail interpretation. The Wasco County-City of The Dalles Museum Commission should add at least a paragraph to its interpretive scheme, explaining the original reason for the establishment of the fort--the protection of emigrants traveling the Oregon Trail.

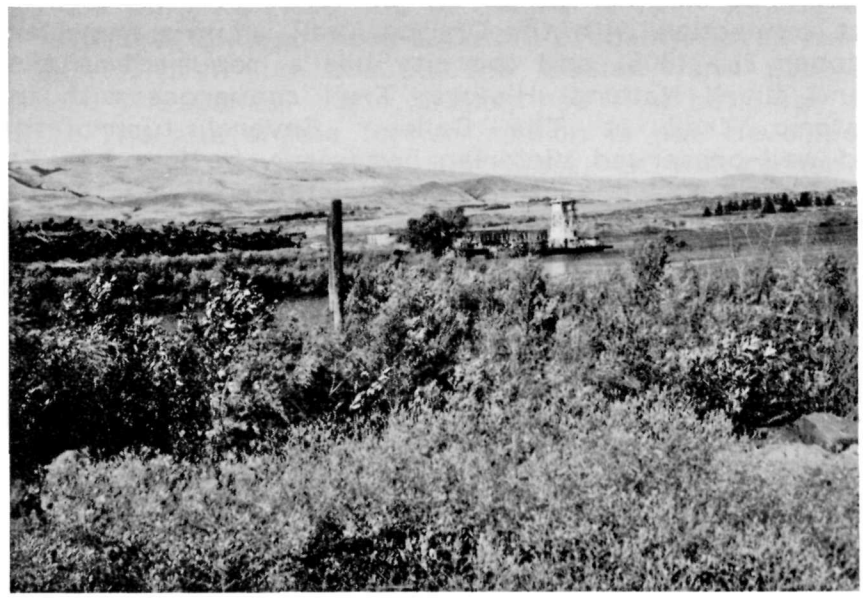
The original Wasco County Courthouse stands on West 2d Street (Sec 4). Built in 1859, at a time when Wasco County was one of the largest counties ever created in the United States (its 130,000 square miles included portions of present Idaho, Montana and Wyoming), the courthouse has been restored and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Considerable local effort has gone into preserving the courthouse with the intent of providing the city with a visitor and information center. That intent does not appear to have been carried out.

The Dalles has several other buildings and sites of historic interest, but of less direct connection with the Oregon Trail. Lewis and Clark camped there on October 25, 1805, and the city has a monument in their honor. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail converges with the Oregon National Historic Trail at The Dalles. Several turn-of-the-century churches and well-preserved Victorian homes may be found in The Dalles. All in all, The Dalles is one of the most richly-endowed historical cities on the Oregon Trail.

Unfortunately, the city has not fully capitalized on its heritage. The city has enough history to captivate the average Oregon Trail traveler for over a day--and to engage normal tourists and history buffs for several days. However, more coordination is needed. Nowhere in The Dalles are visitors able to find a centralized location that could answer all their questions concerning the historic sites available for visiting, the hours of operation, and their locations. What The Dalles needs, in short, is a visitor center where all visitors can be directed to obtain tourist and historic site information. Such a center should provide maps and brochures pertaining to each of the Oregon Trail-related sites mentioned above, as well as other sites of historic and tourist interest in the area. Armed with such information, visitors would then be able to explore the city and its extensive history.

It is strongly recommended that the City of The Dalles establish a visitor center as soon as possible. The original Wasco County Courthouse seems to be the ideal location, particularly since that appears to have been one of the reasons for its preservation. These recommendations are not meant to criticize the city for the efforts which it has made in the past. It is strongly felt, however, that the city needs to redouble its efforts in order to properly commemorate the various facets of its rich historical heritage--and to make its history available for the appreciation of others.

The Corps of Engineers has constructed a new visitor center at The Dalles Lock and Dam just east of town. The Corps should provide space there for appropriate interpretation of the Columbia River route of the Oregon Trail. In addition, the new center should inform visitors of the vast array of historic sites available in town.

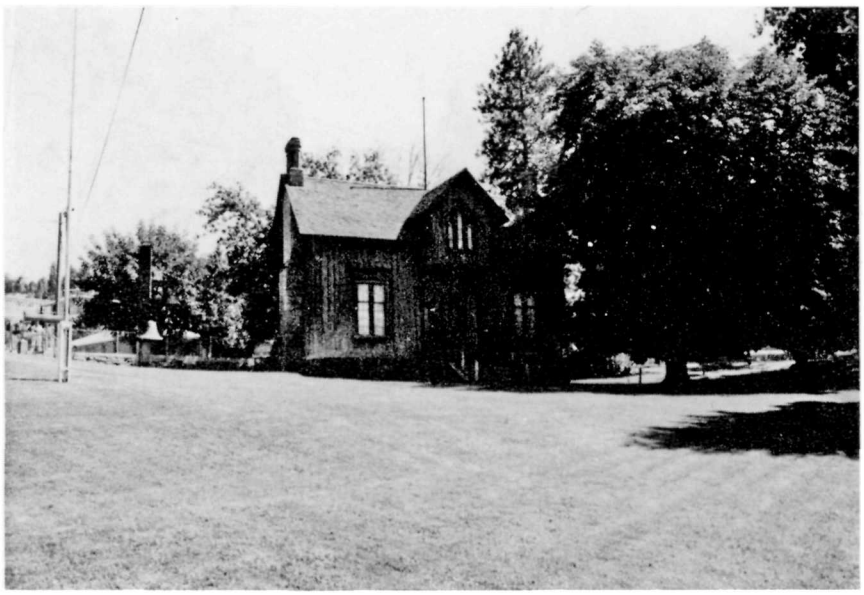


Near this spot, Oregon Trail emigrants prepared for the journey down the Columbia River. Chenoweth Creek, on the left, flows into the Columbia River in the background.

The "End of the Oregon Trail" Park in The Dalles contains a monument placed by Ezra Meeker in 1906.

This monument is dedicated to Daniel Lee's Methodist Mission.

Lee and other missionaries preached to the Indians from Pulpit Rock.



The restored Surgeon's Quarters is the only surviving building at old Fort Dalles.

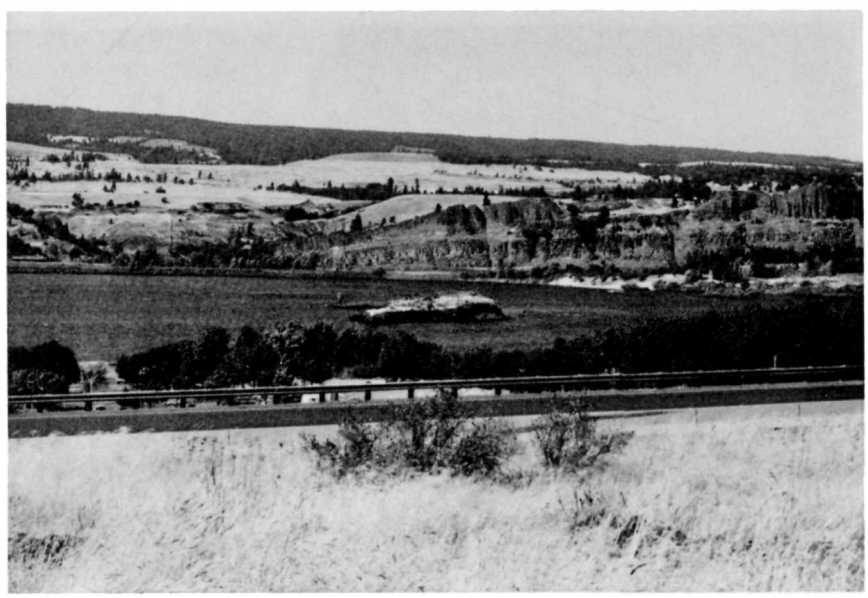
The original Wasco County Courthouse is proposed as the central visitor center for the City of The Dalles.

MEMALOOSE REST AREA

For those who were forced to use the Columbia River Route of the Oregon Trail prior to 1846, and for those who chose to use it after 1846, the river posed extreme dangers due to winds, currents, rocks, rapids, falls, and unwieldly craft. There is no way for modern tourists to relive this experience, for the Columbia has been tamed by a system of dams. Still, today's travelers can drive along Interstate Highway 84 most of the way from The Dalles to Fort Vancouver, enjoying the magificent scenery and imagining the difficulties which faced the emigrants along this portion of the trail.

Several points along the interstate are worth a stop. The first of these is the Memaloose Rest Area, the location of another of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Divisions's excellent Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks. Located eight miles west of Chenoweth Creek (Sec 32, T3N, R12E, Lyle map sheet #327, Wasco County), the kiosk interprets the trials of the emigrants as they passed through Oregon, particularly along the river route of the Oregon Trail. The Memaloose Rest Area is commended to travelers who are following the route of the Oregon Trail down the Columbia River.

This Oregon Trail interpretive kiosk is at the Memaloose Rest Area of Interstate Highway 84.



Memaloose Island, an Indian burial site, may be seen in the middle of the Columbia River from the Memaloose Rest Area.

CASCADES OF THE COLUMBIA

For those who used the Columbia River Route of the Oregon Trail, the last great obstacle on their journey was the feared Cascades of the Columbia. Although the Cascades were occasionally run by loaded craft, that practice was dangerous and wrought with accidents, and most emigrants resorted to a back-breaking portage from three to five miles in length. Local Indians were usually willing to assist the emigrants over this portage, before portage roads were built in the 1850s.

Construction of Bonneville Dam and the consequent filling of Bonneville pool has drastically altered the character of the river in this vicinity, and the great rocks which created the cascades are now submerged. Little of historic value remains at the Cascades, 40 miles downstream from Chenoweth Creek (Sec 14, T2N, R7E, Bonneville map sheet #330, Hood River County), but two interpretive sites are in the area. Both are accessible from Interstate Highway 84.

The first is located at the town of Cascade Locks (Sec 12) where the Port of Cascade Locks now maintains a small park. Centered around the abandoned locks which were rendered obsolete by the Bonneville Dam, that park has a small museum devoted to the history of navigation on the Columbia. However, no mention is made of Oregon Trail emigrants, who were the first large-scale users of the river. This should be remedied.

Downriver at the Bonneville Dam (Sec 21, Multnomah County), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a modern visitor center. While exhibits at that center are primarily devoted to the impact of the dam upon the river system, the Corps has provided a small and well-executed display commemorating early uses of the river by the Indians, Lewis and Clark, fur traders, and Oregon Trail emigrants. The visitor center at the Bonneville Dam is included as an interpretive site along the Oregon National Historic Trail.

The museum at Cascade Locks is dedicated to the history of the Columbia River.

Looking west (downstream) from the abandoned Cascade Locks, the Columbia today bears little resemblance to the treacherous river feared by the emigrants.

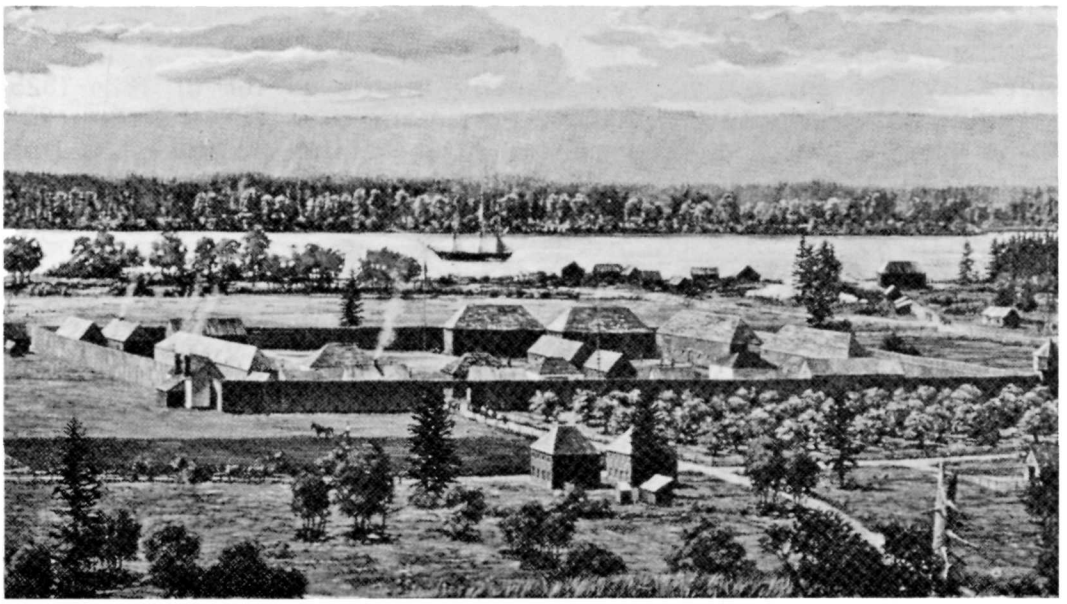
FORT VANCOUVER

Founded by the Hudson's Bay Company in the winter of 1824-1825 as a fur trading post and supply depot, Fort Vancouver for the next 20 years was the most important settlement in the Pacific Northwest. Until his retirement in 1846, Chief Factor Dr. John McLoughlin was in charge of company operations west of the Rocky Mountains, including the present states and provinces of British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. During his years at the post, McLoughlin greatly assisted the exhausted emigrants who arrived at Fort Vancouver, helping them with transportation, lodging, subsistence, and even extending credit for supplies obtained at the post until the emigrants could raise their first crops. The assistance rendered the early emigrants by Dr. John McLoughlin did much to facilitate the settlement of Oregon.

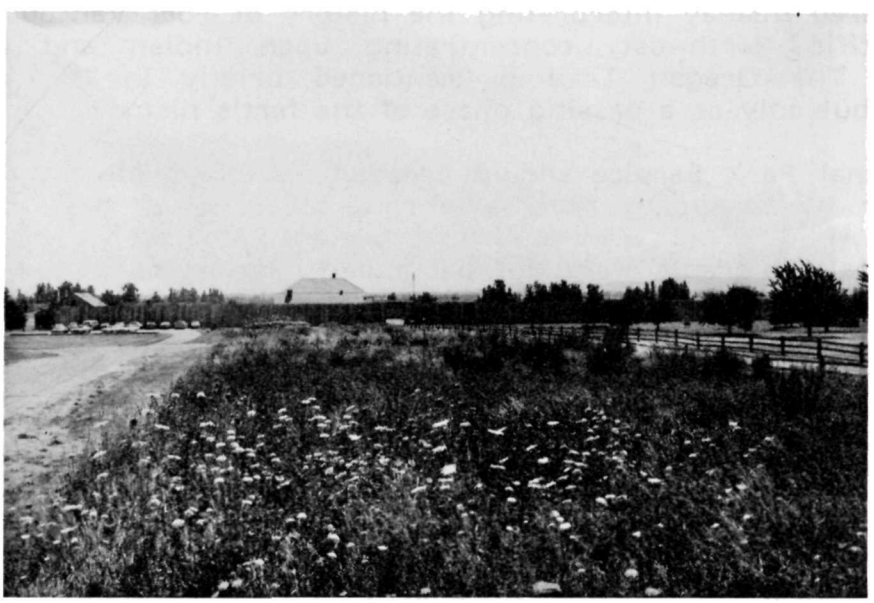
Fort Vancouver became American property in 1846, when the final boundary treaty between the United States and Great Britain was signed. In 1849, the first U.S. Army base in the Pacific Northwest was opened near the post. Trade with Indians and settlers continued until the post's abandonment in 1860. Fort Vancouver is now a National Historic Site administered by the National Park Service. The fort is 40 miles downstream from the Cascades of the Columbia (T2N, R1E, Portland map sheet #335 and Vancouver map sheet #336, Clark County), in the town of Vancouver, Washington.

The National Park Service is presently in its third of five projected phases of restoration of the fort. The grounds have been excavated by archaeologists, and the stockade wall and five of the original buildings have been reconstructed. A modern visitor center and museum has a well-prepared display interpreting the history of Fort Vancouver and the early Pacific Northwest, concentrating upon Indian and fur-trading history. The Oregon Trail is mentioned briefly in the interpretive material, but only as a passing phase of the fort's history.

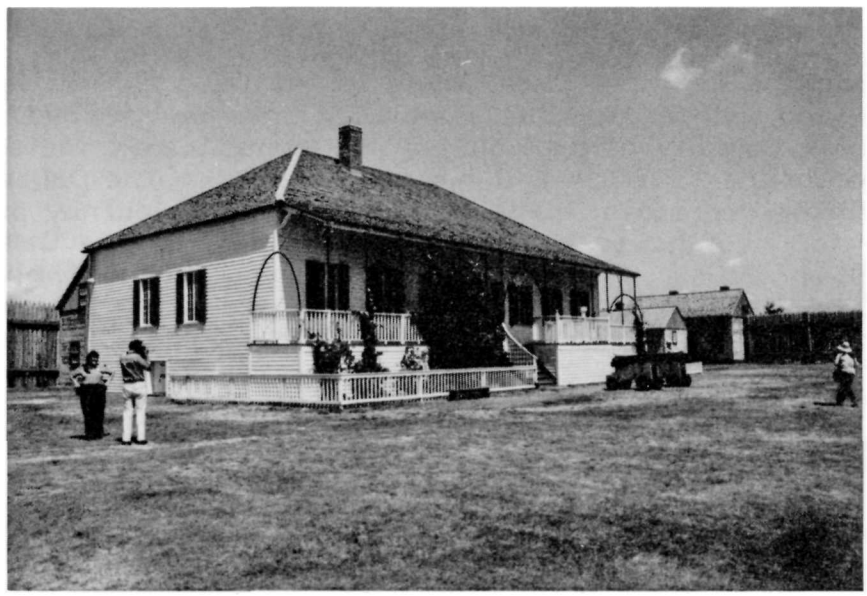
The National Park Service should broaden its interpretive theme at Fort Vancouver by providing more extensive coverage of the Oregon Trail emigration, and Fort Vancouver's importance to the trail. Although Oregon Trail emigrants were not particularly important to the survival of Fort Vancouver, Fort Vancouver was decidedly important to the survival of the emigrants, especially during the years prior to the opening of the Barlow Road, when all emigrants were forced to use the Columbia River Route of the trail. The Hudson's Bay Company had more to do with the survival of the emigrants and the success of the Oregon Trail as a major emigration route than it may have wished. Emigrants had first contacted employees of the company in eastern Idaho at Fort Hall, and had obtained supplies and assistance from the company there and at Fort Boise. To the emigrants, Fort Vancouver represented the last chance to obtain assistance and supplies before scattering out to locate and establish new homes in Oregon Territory. Thanks to the generosity of Dr. McLoughlin, that assistance was forthcoming. Ironically, the very success of the emigrants in settling Oregon Territory led to the loss of the territory to the British and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1846.



This reproduction gives an artist's concept of Fort Vancouver as it looked in 1845.



The fort grounds are seen from the access road approaching from the north. The stockade stretches for the width of the photo, and the Chief Factor's residence is visible in the center.



The reconstructed Chief Factor's house is one of the highlights of the fort.

The reconstructed bakery contains living history demonstrations and interpretation.

TYGH VALLEY

Travel along the Columbia River Route of the Oregon Trail was so slow, expensive--and dangerous--that Samuel K. Barlow decided in 1845 to explore the possibility of providing a continuous wagon route across the Cascade Mountains. Barlow and his party departed The Dalles in the fall of 1845 and headed south. The first portion of his journey presented no problems, for he followed broad valleys south from The Dalles until he reached Tygh Valley. Barlow left the major portion of his train and equipment camped in the valley and headed west on a scouting trip, looking for a feasible wagon route over the mountains. Such a route was found, utilizing an old Indian trail, and a road was roughed out the following year, under a toll-road franchise which Barlow obtained from the Oregon Territorial Legislature. Despite the rough road and the steep grades along the route, and even despite the tolls imposed by Barlow ($5 per wagon, 10¢ per head of stock), the Barlow Road proved quite popular in following years, for it was less expensive, no more difficult and considerably safer than the river route. Barlow and his successors continued to improve the road throughout the years, and after 1846 the Barlow Road became the primary route of the Oregon Trail from The Dalles to Oregon City, and the Columbia River route declined in importance.

The 27 miles of trail from The Dalles to Tygh Valley have been almost completely lost to agricultural development and highway construction, but starting at Tygh Valley traces of the Barlow Road can still be found. One such trace is a short section of ruts (Sec 9, T4S, R13E, Tygh Valley map sheet #343, Wasco County) just west of the town of Tygh Valley, where the road climbed out of the valley. Those ruts are visible from several vantage points in the valley, but are not marked or interpreted.

The Wasco County Highway Department, in conjunction with the Wasco County Historical Society, should mark and interpret the ruts for the benefit of visitors. An overlook from the Wamic Road (a paved county road) leading west from Tygh Valley towards Wamic, would be ideal. From that vantage point the ruts can be seen, a panoramic view of scenic Tygh Valley is available, and the story of the Barlow Party and their use of Tygh Valley as a base camp during exploration and road construction can be told. The ruts ascending the hill do not appear to be in danger at present, but the Wasco County Historical Society should attempt to reach an agreement with the private owner to protect them.

While Barlow explored the mountains to the west, most of his party encamped here in Tygh Valley. Traces of the Barlow Road can be pointed out by local residents as it climbed the ridge in the background.

BARLOW GATE

Barlow Gate, located 11 miles west of Tygh Valley on the Barlow Road, was the first of several tollgates operated along the road to collect fees from the emigrants. This tollgate was in operation from 1846 to 1852, when the great majority of traffic on the road was west-bound. In later years, the tollgate was moved to various other locations along the Barlow Road, as its operators attempted to thwart the continuous efforts of the emigrants to avoid paying toll for the road whenever possible.

The site of Barlow Gate (Sec 35, T4S, R11E, Rock Creek Reservoir map sheet #345, Wasco County) is in the midst of a grassy meadow on the edge of Mount Hood National Forest. Although the area was once homesteaded, it is now deserted, and remains an idyllic meadow surrounded by forest. Some scattered foundations of homestead buildings may be found, and traces of the Barlow Road can be seen entering and leaving the meadow. The site is just off a Forest Service dirt road, and has not been signed or marked.

The site is owned and managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, with the exception of range resources, which are managed by the Barlow Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest. The Forest Service is currently involved in a land exchange effort which may eventually transfer the area to federal ownership. Until these negotiations are complete, the Forest Service should seek an agreement from the state to develop the site. The Forest Service should then provide access to this site, via a short trail from the present forest road, and provide low-key and unobtrusive interpretation on the site, explaining the significance and history of Barlow Gate. The traces of the Barlow Road which enter and leave the meadow should be protected, and the trail should be marked in the vicinity. The area should have an archaeological survey to help pinpoint the actual site of the tollgate, as well as to provide data concerning preceding and subsequent use of the meadow by both Indians and later homesteaders.

Barlow Gate is proposed as the eastern terminus of the Barlow Road Segment (see below). An unmanned trailhead facility would be needed at this point, where the visiting public could obtain information about the Barlow Road, including maps and other guides for those who plan to follow the route.

Although the actual location of Barlow Gate cannot be determined until a thorough archeological examination is conducted, the tollgate is believed to be somewhere in the grassy meadow pictured here.

Looking south from the meadow, traces of the Barlow Road (just to the right of the figures) may be seen as the road leaves the meadow.

BARLOW ROAD SEGMENT

The proposed Barlow Road Segment runs for 32 miles through the Mount Hood National Forest, from Barlow Gate on the eastern edge of the forest, to Barlow Tollgate near the western edge. For the great majority of this distance, the Barlow Road still exists as either a dirt road or a forest trail, offering long stretches of excellent trail ruts and traces and exceptional scenic qualities.

The eastern half of the segment, from Barlow Gate to Barlow Pass, remains a primitive dirt road through the forest, used occasionally by the Forest Service and forest visitors. This half can be traveled by vehicle, but passage is difficult. The Forest Service has provided more modern roads through this area of the forest, in order to keep the use of the old Barlow Road to a minimum, and has established a protective corridor along the old road, permitting no logging in its vicinity and no improvements to the road. For the majority of this eastern section, the old dirt road faithfully follows the original Barlow Road. From time to time in previous decades the dirt road was altered, and pristine sections of the original Barlow Road may be seen diverging from the present dirt road. Superb scenery is found all along this section, as the Barlow Road ascends through the forest towards Mount Hood.

The western half of the Barlow Road, from Barlow Pass to Barlow Tollgate, is less impacted. This section has not been used as a vehicular road since around the turn of the century, when more modern highways were built, and can best be followed on foot or horseback, as the old road--now more of a trail--extends through the forest. There are many stretches of almost pristine ruts, and like the eastern section the scenery is outstanding.

The Barlow Road Segment should start at Barlow Gate (Sec 35, T4S, R11E, Rock Creek Reservoir map sheet #345, Wasco County). From there, the road winds up towards Barlow Pass, just below the summit of Mount Hood. From Barlow Pass, the segment descends the western slopes of Mount Hood, passing the historic site of Laurel Hill and ending at Barlow Tollgate (Sec 11, T3S, R7E, Rhododendron map sheet #349, Clackamas County). In addition to the historic sites addressed below (Barlow Pass, Laurel Hill and Barlow Tollgate), the segment passes other historic sites, including Immigrant Springs, the Cedar Creek ruts, White River camp, and Devil's Half Acre. The trail fords a number of small creeks, crosses several Forest Service gravel roads, and is intercepted by paved highways nine times, mostly in the vicinity of Barlow Pass and the small town of Government Camp. Most of the trail is clearly defined, especially along the eastern half. Portions of the western half are more difficult to locate.

Although this entire segment is within the boundaries of Mount Hood National Forest, several tracts of private land (a total of less than two miles) are encountered along the trail. The town of Government Camp creates a decided break in the Barlow Road of a little over one mile. In order to create a continuous segment, there are few options except to guide visitors down the shoulder of the highway through Government

Camp, or to create a circular trail around the town, rejoining the Barlow Road on the west.

The Mount Hood National Forest should have the lead responsibility for this segment, to mark and interpret the trail, and to provide the necessary public use facilities for potential users. The Forest Service has already begun such a program, and has taken several well-planned steps to protect the trail. In particular, through its visual management system, the National Forest has adopted a policy of providing a protective corridor along the Barlow Road, with a width of 660 feet from each side of the trail, along which no logging or other intrusions are allowed. Portions of the Barlow Road owned by the Forest Service, as well as associated historic sites, will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The eastern half of the segment has been partially marked, and the Forest Service plans to mark it more extensively, especially where the original Barlow Road leaves the present dirt road. From Barlow Pass to Barlow Tollgate, the entire trail needs to be marked.

Trailhead facilities are needed at Barlow Gate and Barlow Tollgate, with interpretation, information and trail guides for visitors. An intermediate facility is recommended at Barlow Pass for those who wish to travel the trail in two outings. Interpretation along the trail is recommended, primarily at the historic sites as described below. The segment should follow the exact line of the original Barlow Road except where it proves impossible to provide such faithful retracement, such as at Government Camp.

Relatively high public use of this segment is anticipated, based upon the already extensive interest exhibited in the Barlow Road by such groups as the Wasco County Historical Society and the Clackamas County Historical Society. The segment should also prove popular to general recreationists, for oustanding scenic values are present along the entire segment as it passes through the forest.

This is one of the few segments of the Oregon Trail which has no major potential threats, thanks to the predominant public ownership and the protective policies which the Forest Service has already implemented. The primary concern at present is over-use of its roaded portions. For the time being, outright banning of vehicular use of those sections is not recommended, since much of the traditional public support for the Barlow Road comes from historical societies and other groups whose members periodically drive along the road. However, unlimited vehicular use should not be permitted, since that would seriously impact the road and may necessiate that the Forest Service maintain or improve it--a practice which the Service has wisely avoided. Vehicular use may eventually have to be discontinued if the Forest Service determines it is too damaging.

Some of these recommendations have already been carried out by the Forest Service, and portions of others are being implemented or are in the planning stages. The present excellent condition of the majority of the Barlow Road through Mount Hood National Forest is due to the efforts and policies already adopted by the Forest Service. It is commended for its care of a valuable and irreplaceable historic resource. Due to the area's proximity to the large population base of Portland and its vicinity, it is anticipated that more visitors will seek out this portion of the Oregon Trail than any other segment.

The Barlow Road, west of Barlow Gate, shows the general condition of those portions of the road which are still used.

The Forest Service's Barlow Road markers are blazed with a wagon wheel and a tollgate.

Ruts of the Barlow Road descend a hill near Cedar Creek.

A portion of the Barlow Road diverges from the dirt road at White River Camp.

The Barlow Road winds between Devil's Half Acre and Barlow Pass.

The Barlow Road crosses a small clearing near Barlow Pass. The road through this area shows extensive clearing and is clearly marked by rocks and boulders removed from the road and left along its shoulders.

BARLOW PASS (COMPLEX)

Barlow Pass, where the Barlow Road crosses the summit of the Cascade Mountains, is a rich historical complex stretching almost three miles from Devil's Half Acre on the east side of the summit to Summit Meadows on the west. Included in this complex are Devil's Half Acre, Barlow Pass, Pioneer Woman's Grave, and Summit Meadows, site of the Baby Morgan Grave. The area of this complex, while within Mount Hood National Forest, includes some private lands. All the sites described below have good access from paved or gravel roads.

Devil's Half Acre, 19 miles west of Barlow Gate (Sec 28, T3S, R9E, Mount Hood South map sheet #347, Hood River County), is a small meadow along the Barlow Road. Its name, according to local historians, was derived from the "devil" of a climb which faced emigrants between the meadow and the summit of Barlow Pass. The site is included here due to the magnificent view of the summit of Mount Hood, which projects above the forest directly in front of travelers. There, visitors may leave their vehicles and embark upon a beautiful three-quarter mile hike along the original Barlow Road through the deep forest, until the dirt road is met again. This pristine wagon road through the thick forest is one of the best sections of the Barlow Road. It is neither marked nor interpreted.

The trail from Devil's Half Acre intersects the dirt road at its junction with the old Mount Hood Loop Highway (Sec 28, border of Hood River and Clackamas Counties) at Barlow Pass, the key to the entire Barlow Road. The actual pass is not spectacular today, but was a landmark of great significance to the emigrants. From Barlow Pass, the road to the Willamette Valley was all downhill. Barlow Pass is marked by a brief interpretive sign. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail crosses the Oregon National Historic Trail at Barlow Pass.

From the pass, the original Barlow Road again cuts through the forest for almost a mile to the site of the Pioneer Woman's Grave (Sec 29, Clackamas County). This grave, a mound of stones six feet wide, 10 feet long and four feet high, marks the burial site of an unknown emigrant woman who died on the Barlow Road. The Forest Service has preserved and marked the gravesite. The Barlow Road, to both the east and west of the Pioneer Woman's Grave, is an almost pristine cut through the thick forest. It would make an excellent hiking trail, but has not been marked.

The trace of the Barlow Road vanishes about a mile west of Pioneer Woman's Grave, due to highway construction, and visitors must follow paved and gravel roads to reach Summit Meadows, two miles west of Pioneer Woman's Grave (Sec 25, T3S, R8½E, Clackamas County). Summit Meadows, as the name implies, was a favorite camping spot for emigrants, with a lush mountain meadow providing feed for the stock, and the impressive sight of Mount Hood immediately to the north providing scenery for the emigrants. Summit Meadows was the site of a tollgate between 1866 and 1870, and was later the site of Perry Vicker's "Summit House," an early recreational resort. Most important, however, is the Baby Morgan Grave, which is located there. This Oregon Trail baby was born near Independence Rock, Wyoming, in June of 1847. Her mother

died during delivery and was buried at Independence Rock. The baby girl was killed on October 24, 1847, when the tailgate of a wagon fell on her. This poignant incident from the early days of the Oregon Trail is commemorated by a monument at the site. Nearby is a small graveyard, containing several burials from a later period.

Mount Hood National Forest should negotiate access easements across private lands as necessary, and increase the present level of interpretation offered throughout the Barlow Pass complex. The Barlow Road should be protected and marked throughout the area, as part of the proposed Barlow Road Segment. In addition, visitors who do not wish to follow the entire segment should be encouraged to take short hikes along the excellent and pristine stretches of the Barlow Road within the complex, particularly between Devil's Half Acre and the Pioneer Woman's Grave. Finally, interpretation should be improved at Devil's Half Acre, Barlow Pass, the Pioneer Woman's Grave, and Summit Meadows.

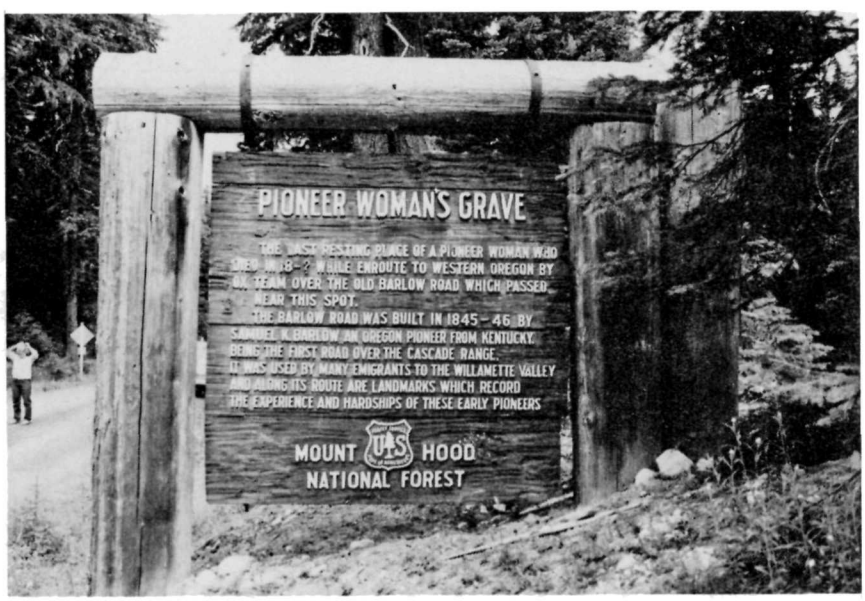
Mount Hood is seen from the Barlow Road at a point just south of Devil's Half Acre.

A pristine stretch of the Barlow Road may be hiked between Devil's Half Acre and Barlow Pass.

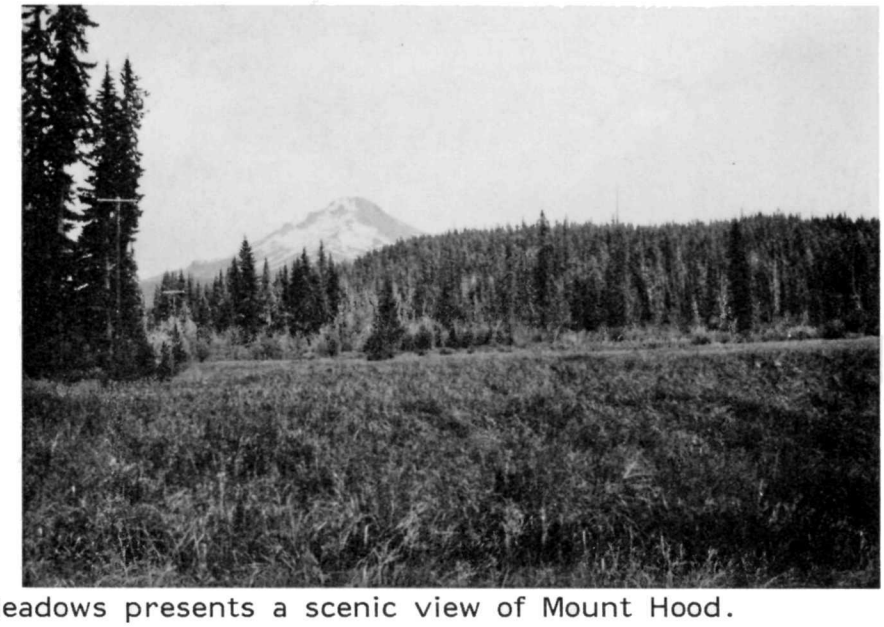
The Forest Service sign at Barlow Pass is characterized by a unique and detailed carving.

A section of the original Barlow Road remains between Barlow Pass and Pioneer Woman's Grave.

The rock gravesite (above) and interpretive sign (below) commemorate the Pioneer Woman's Grave.



A section of the Barlow Road may be followed to the west from Pioneer Woman's Grave.



Summit Meadows presents a scenic view of Mount Hood.

Baby Morgan's Grave and memorial is located at Summit Meadow.

An early pioneer graveyard stands near Baby Morgan's Grave.

LAUREL HILL

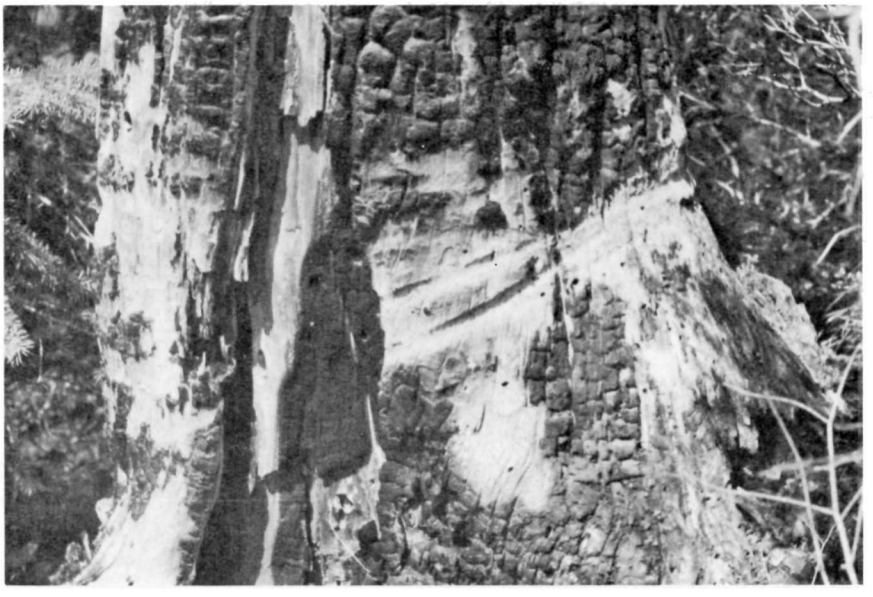
Laurel Hill was the last major obstacle on the Oregon Trail as the emigrants made their way down the western slope of the Cascades. The hill was about four miles long, and an 1853 emigrant described it as "something terrible." The Barlow Road traversed a long, broken ridge down the hillside, where oxen could not hold back the wagons, even when the wheels were rough-locked. Some emigrants took their wagons apart and slid them down the hill, others cut trees to drag behind, and others snubbed ropes around trees, belaying their wagons down the hill. Most emigrants descended the hill safely, but a broken rope or a careless step meant broken wagons and men.

The most dangerous portion of Laurel Hill, known as the chute, is located five miles west of Summit Meadows (Sec 15, T3S, R8E, Government Camp map sheet #348, Clackamas County). There the Barlow Road descended the steepest portion of the hill at a 60-degree angle down a chute of loose rocks. Although the chute has flattened out to "only" 45 degrees today due to rock slides and erosion, visitors can still appreciate the toil and hardship caused by this feature. The chute still appears formidable, and modern visitors will have difficulty believing that anyone attempted its descent. Until recently, an old tree stump which bore the marks of rope burns stood near the top of the chute as visible proof, but that stump has unfortunately rotted away. Laurel Hill has been determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has an old highway sign along U.S. Highway 26 near Laurel Hill, but the Barlow Road through this section of the Mount Hood National Forest has not been marked, and visitors are given no directions to the chute. It is accessible from both above and below, and the Forest Service should mark both access means (in cooperation with the Department of Transportation), in order to bring visitors to one of the most impressive sights on the Oregon Trail. On-site interpretation is needed both above and below the main portion of the chute.

A portion of the Laurel Hill chute is seen from above. The angle of the descent may be detected from the figure climbing the chute.

A view to the west from the top of Laurel Hill gives an indication of the terrain which the emigrants had to negotiate.



A 1972 photo shows the rope-burned tree stump at the top of the Laurel Hill chute. Photo courtesy C.L. Haines.

The same tree stump was photographed in 1980. The side bearing the rope burns has rotted and fallen away in intervening years. This may mark the demise of the last rope-burned tree on the Oregon Trail.

BARLOW TOLLGATE

Barlow Tollgate, located five miles west of Laurel Hill (Sec 11, T3S, R7E, Rhododendron map sheet #349, Clackamas County), was the most recent of four tollgates used on the western end of the Barlow Road. The tollgate was operated from 1879 to 1915, a period more associated with the use of the Barlow Road as a freighting route than for emigration. Nevertheless, the tollgate site is included since Mount Hood National Forest has already provided a reconstruction of the tollgate, and since the site makes an ideal western terminus for the Barlow Road Segment.

The reconstruction at this site was accomplished using photographs of the original structure. The site includes a roadside turn-out off U.S. Highway 26 and a small parking area. No structural remnants of the original toll house exist, although a garbage pit associated with it is located a short distance away. A brief interpretive sign has been placed by the tollgate, and Oregon Trail ruts can be traced east of the site.

The Forest Service should expand its interpretation at this site, and provide the necessary trail guides and other public use facilities for those who wish to retrace the Barlow Road Segment from west to east. The garbage pit should have an archaeological survey to secure data relevant to the tollgate's period of use.

An interpretive site has been provided by the Forest Service at Barlow Tollgate.

A close-up of the reconstructed tollgate, which is open, shows the Oregon Trail passing through it.

OREGON CITY

After nearly 2000 miles on the trail and a journey lasting five months, the emigrants finally came to the end of the trail at Oregon City. As a town, Oregon City did not have much to boast about in the 1840s. An 1843 emigrant described it as a small village of about 100 inhabitants, and the 1850 census showed a population of 697. The town had been started in 1842 by Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, administrator of Fort Vancouver, and benefactor to many an impoverished emigrant. McLoughlin chose the site because of its location next to the falls of the Willamette River, which prohibited water navigation farther south, and which powered his sawmill. Those falls also served to mark the end of the river route of the Oregon Trail for those emigrants who boated down the Columbia River from The Dalles to Fort Vancouver and then up the Willamette River. From there the emigrants, whether arriving by land or water, fanned out across the fertile Willamette Valley to the south in search of the new homes which they had come so far and sacrificed so much to find.

Oregon City is still a small town, but one with great charm and a large endowment of historic sites and buildings. Fully a dozen historic homes and churches may be seen throughout the city, featured by the fully restored 1840s residence of Dr. McLoughlin, which is now a National Historic Site. The end of the Oregon Trail is commemorated by two small monuments in the corner of a field on the northern edge of the city (Sec 29, T2S, R2E, Oregon City map sheet #356, Clackamas County). Those monuments are nice, but are much too brief in their interpretation to properly commemorate such a significant site. Oregon City and the Clackamas County Historical Society should increase the amount of interpretation offered there. In particular, the site should also recognize that Oregon City was the end of the trail for those using the river route, a fact which is now largely ignored.

Oregon City has not yet capitalized upon the rich potential of its historic treasures, for the town has historic sites and buildings enough to absorb history buffs for several days. Yet there is no central location where visitors may obtain the necessary information concerning the city's sites. Specifically, there is no center for information concerning the Oregon Trail, which played such a great role in the city's history.

In short, Oregon City needs a visitor center where all tourists may be directed to obtain information and directions for tours of the city's historic sites. The City of Oregon City and the Clackamas County Historical Society have plans well under way for the erection of such a visitor center and museum in the near future. Present plans call for such a building featuring the history of Oregon City and Clackamas County.

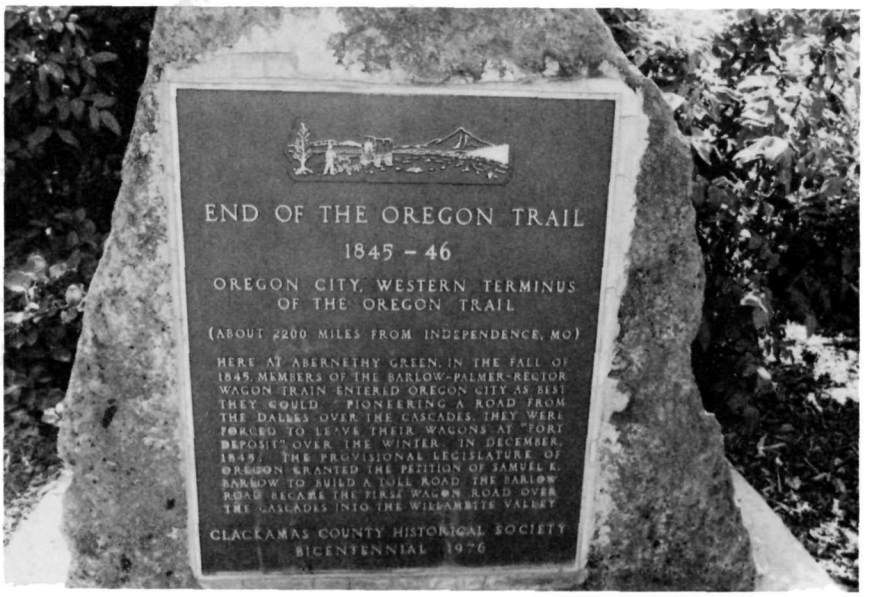
The city and the historical society should dedicate that visitor center and museum in part to the Oregon Trail, and provide facilities therein for the guidance of travelers who will be retracing the Oregon Trail from west to east. The National Park Service should assist as necessary in the provision of maps, brochures and trail guides for such a purpose. Many

of the visitors who will travel all or portions of the Oregon National Historic Trail can be expected to start at Oregon City. Today, numerous descendants of the emigrants reside in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, and their interest in retracing the trail is keen. Thus a large public demand for a major Oregon Trail interpertive center in Oregon City is anticipated where potential users may receive information and material relating to the entire length of the Oregon Trail.

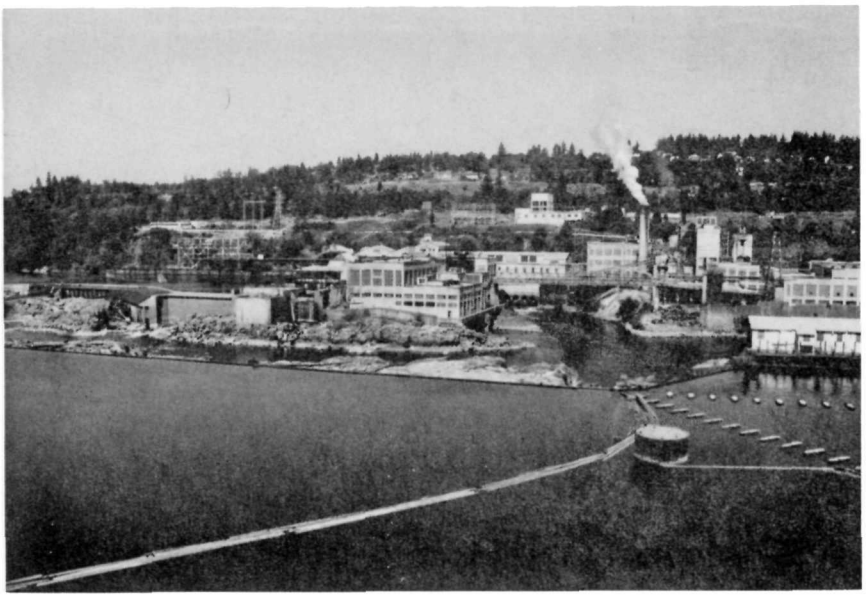
Oregon City, the Clackamas County Historical Society, and other interested groups are commended for the time and energy which they have already devoted to the history of Oregon City and the Barlow Road, and are encouraged to set their sights even higher. They should think of their potential new visitor center and museum not as a local or regional center, but as a national visitor center serving the entire Oregon Trail. The establishment of such a center is the highest priority item for the Oregon National Historic Trail within the State of Oregon.

The restored McLoughlin House is a National Historic Site and an affiliated area of the National Park Service.

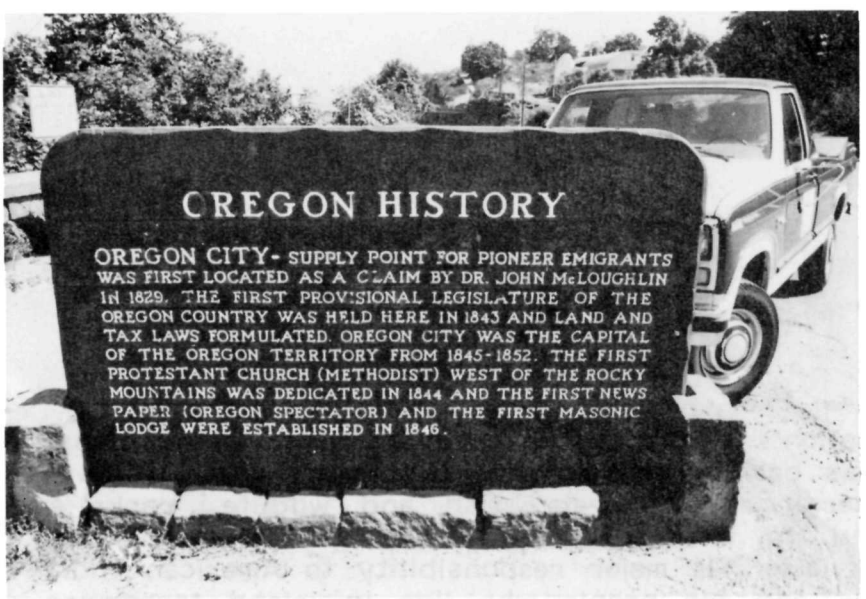
The End of the Oregon Trail monuments are located in a corner of Kelly Field.



These two monuments at Kelly Field commemorate the End of the Oregon Trail.



The falls of the Willamette River are now considerably tamed by power plants, dams, and mills.



An Oregon City interpretive sign is located on the overlook above the falls of the Willamette River.

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility to American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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