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RICHERS TO RAGS: Clothing on the Oregon Trail, a Special Exhibit on Pioneer Clothing at National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center opens June 29.

Baker City, Oregon - - - The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City, Oregon will feature a special exhibit on pioneer clothing June 29 through September 1, 2008. Riches to Rags: Clothing on the Oregon Trail, the title of this original exhibit, will be held in the Flagstaff Gallery inside the Interpretive Center. Kelly Burns, Visitor Information Specialist at the Center, created this detailed look at the 1800's trail era fashions that includes clothing, historic images, and quotes.

Looking at clothing and styles from any historical time period is an enlightening way to learn about technology and society in another time and place. "Riches to Rags" is just such a learning opportunity, with an assortment of actual historical pieces to be displayed along with reproduction clothing.

The display depicts typical fashions of pioneers "before" leaving on their journey, and how they had to abandon conventional fashion and personal style for the practicality and durability of survival on the dusty trail. Ms. Burns shares that the exhibit portrays how "clothing went from fashion to function...as the harsh realities of the journey were imposed upon the men, women, and children day after difficult day."

The exhibit explains the reasoning behind some of the fashions that look so odd and foreign to modern Americans. Why did women want voluminous dresses with yards of fabric in long, billowy skirts, and tight bodices? Why would a man feel underdressed if he had to appear in public without his vest or jacket? Were children overly encumbered in their play and chores wearing small versions of the adult clothing?

Even though styles were mostly generic, it is interesting to note that resourceful pioneer women, both for looks and durability, often customized clothing. Different designs and shapes were created with changeable collars and cuffs and with various trims using crochet, embroidery and piping.

Most Americans in the mid-19th century owned only one to two sets of clothing, along with one to two pairs of shoes. Pioneers on the trail had no laundry facilities other than a bar of handmade soap in a cold river.

The exhibit will include reproduction versions of historic clothing styles which visitors will be allowed to touch. Children will have the fun opportunity for a hands-on activity to try on smaller versions of pioneer outfits.

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, operated by the Bureau of Land Management, is located 5 miles east of Baker City, Oregon on Highway 86. Take Exit 302 from I-84. The Center is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Admission for adults is \$5. Seniors are \$3.50. Children 15 and under are free. Federal passes are accepted. Visit oregontrail.blm.gov for more information about the Center, or call 541-523-1843 for updates on programs and events.

