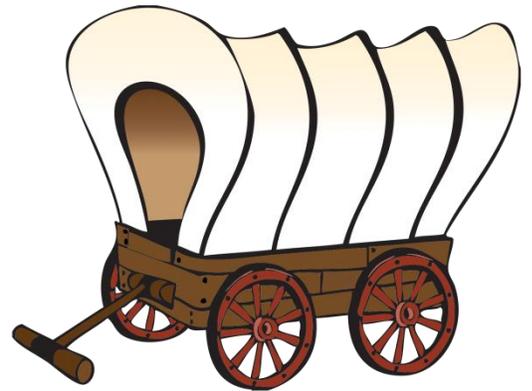


Basic Facts about the Oregon Trail

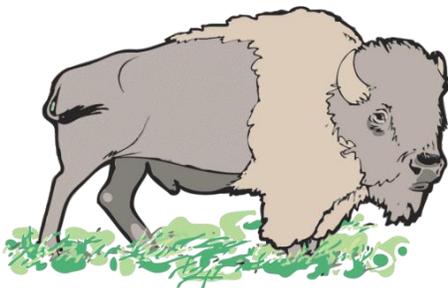
From 1843 to 1869 the largest voluntary migration in history took place on the route we call the Oregon Trail. In the late 1830's and early 1840's people began to hear of free, fertile land in the Pacific Northwest. For many, the promise of a better life in Oregon Country would eventually lead them to undertake this great adventure of traveling overland to their new homes.

Most travelers on the Oregon Trail began their journeys from cities along the Missouri River known as "jumping off towns." These staging areas were places where pioneers could purchase the supplies, wagons, and oxen that they needed for the five to six months of traveling on the trail. The time they spent on the Oregon Trail was some of the toughest hardships that many of these people ever faced.



On a good day of travel a wagon train was able to move up to 20 miles. Prairie storms, heat, hunger, and most of all, dust so thick they could hardly breathe plagued the wagons as they made their way across the plains. Most people, kids included, walked the whole way. If something such as a broken bone or snake bite were to happen, it could mean death.

Many pioneers starting out on the trail feared the Indians that they might come across. However, most times when pioneers met the Native Americans they traded for things that both people found valuable. In many cases, pioneers might not have made it across the Oregon Trail if it had not been for the help of Native Americans. There were attacks on wagon trains, however, but they were very rare. In fact, of the over 20,000 people to die along the trail, only 362 were killed by Indians.



The Trail followed the Platte River through what is today Nebraska and into Wyoming where emigrants crossed the continental divide at South Pass. From there the trail became even more dangerous. Pioneers faced everything from dehydration on the Snake River Plain to drowning in one of the deep and swift river crossings such as Three Island Crossing.

After crossing the Blue Mountains, the emigrants were nearly at their journey's end, but they still had a tough decision to make at The Dalles. They could take a raft and float their wagons down the rapids on the Columbia River to their final destination. Or, the pioneers could take the winding, treacherous Barlow Toll Road around the south slope of Mt. Hood where they faced freezing winds and dense forest.

Arriving at Oregon City and the end of the Oregon Trail did not mean that their journey was over, rather it was just beginning. Now, these settlers had to build a new life for themselves with those few valuable possessions that they brought with them across the Oregon Trail.

Nearly half a million people migrated west during the years of the Oregon Trail. Today we remember those people for their bravery and pioneering spirit, but we also need to remember them for being people like us. They sought a better life for themselves and their families. We can learn from their example and be courageous enough to follow our dreams as well.

