

Trail Dust



Newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, Idaho Chapter
Vol. XXVIII Issue 1 *Nancy Briggs, Editor, Feb 2016*

Calendar for 2016

Mar 17 - 19	OCTA Symposium, St George, UT
Mar – Apr	Community Education Classes & Byway Tour
Apr – May	Oregon Trail classes and outings at Osher Institute, BSU
May 7	IOCTA Chapter & Convention Planning Meetings, Fort Hall, ID
Jun 6 – 7	California Trail Days, Elko, NV
Aug 1 – 5	OCTA Convention, Fort Hall, ID

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Other activities:

- Install additional trail route markers as needed
 - Replace missing byway signs
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From the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Convention Planning. Plain and simple, that is what the Idaho chapter is totally engrossed in and will be until the Fort Hall convention in August. I cannot begin to thank everyone enough who is helping with this monumental effort. Let me point out convention chairman John Briggs who is doing a fantastic job of trying to get everything pulled together. I believe this convention would not happen if John had not taken over as convention chairman. He has been putting in full-time effort to make this convention happen. In addition, there are many other people who are doing a great job in putting together buses, finances, speakers, registration, book rooms, activities, hotel and meals, tours, auctions, etc., etc., etc. Their names are too many to list, but my thanks go to all of you. There is so much to do and it requires so much effort for a small chapter to put on. I have been pleading for years that the convention planning process needs to be changed and this effort only reinforces that belief for me.

We still need more volunteers. There are still committees which need a chairman. There is a need for chase vehicles for the Friday bus tours. And of course, there is always a need for donations of items for the auctions. The auctions are some of my favorite convention activities and are only as good as the donations. If you have something interesting you could donate, please contact Marg Houdyshell. These items do not have to be trail related.

Other upcoming activities include

- Boise Community Education classes on March 9 and 16,
- OCTA Symposium, St George, UT from March 17 to 19.
- Osher Institute classes on April 1 and May 13 followed by bus tours the next day,
- a byway tour on April 16, and
- the spring chapter meeting at Fort Hall on Saturday, May 7.
- In addition, we'll be wrapping up the scouting and plans for the convention bus tours.
- Some members will also be attending the Elko, Nevada, California Trail Days celebration June 4-5.

The temperatures are starting to warm up. Winter looks to be almost over. I hope to see you on the trails soon.

In Memory of Tony Varilone

By Jerry Eichhorst

Full of energy, knowledge, and excitement. Friendly, helpful, pleasant. Able to talk for hours sharing his vast knowledge of the history of the Soda Springs area. That's how I'll remember Tony Varilone. Unfortunately, Tony passed away on Monday, December 7, due to an accident at his home.

After a long career with the National Forest, Tony retired in place, but never tired of working on sharing history. He was active in the Caribou Historical Society, helping to write and development many of the fine materials available on the history of the area. He led the effort to put together the Oregon Trail Bear Lake Scenic Byway, installing many of the interpretive signs himself. He contracted with tour bus companies to lead historical tours of the Oregon Trail and other sites in eastern Idaho for area tourists. And he still found time to regularly raft the South Fork of the Snake River for a whitewater adventure.

Tony had always been very helpful to me when working on the Oregon Trail in the Soda Springs area. I had spent many days exploring with him, often seeing sights I was not aware of. We emailed regularly and talked many times on the phone discussing various sites. He led a tour of the byway a few years ago for IOCTA which had nearly 40 people participate.

He was going to lead one of the bus tours for the 2016 Fort Hall OCTA convention. There was no question that Tony was the most knowledgeable person available. His experience ensured that it was going to be a great tour. The only concern I had was that the bus needed to be back to the hotel on time which would require getting Tony to tell more stories on the bus and fewer stories while standing at a site. A pleasant problem to have.

I am grateful that several of us had the opportunity to share two days with Tony this past August as we explored the Oregon Trail and other sites in the area in an effort to firm up the bus tour route. I found it interesting that our last stop at Soda Spring (Sheep Dip Spring) was a site that Tony had never been to. That did not happen often. Tony was a great person to know and I was blessed to consider him a friend. I'll miss you Tony. Farewell.



Fort Hall 2016 OCTA Convention Update

by John Briggs

In August of 2016 the Idaho Chapter will host the OCTA Annual Convention at the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel in Fort Hall with the theme 'Fort Hall: Cultures and Changes'.

Preparing for the Convention continues to provide us all with 'opportunities'.

The contract with the Hotel has been drafted and is now in the process of revision. Because of the relative isolation of the Hotel and its limited restaurant facilities, we have included some additional breakfasts and dinners.

In a recent meeting with Darrell Shay, the Manager of 'The Culture and Language Preservation Department', and some members of his staff we agreed a format for the opening morning. The General Meeting will begin at 8:00 am. The Opening Ceremonies, with the involvement of the Shoshone-Bannock, will begin at 9:00 am. Between 9:30 am and 12 noon four speakers from the Tribe will cover various aspects of their history, culture and the impact of the fur trappers and emigrants upon the Native Americans in the Fort Hall area.

Speakers on Tuesday and Thursday include

- Jim Hardee on Fur Trapper history
- Jerry Eichhorst on Diary references on the trail between Soda Springs and Fort Hall
- Will Bagley on Fort Hall as the Trade Center of a Hungry Land
- Steve Banks on Robert Stuart and the discovery of South Pass
- Tom Blanchard on Goodale's Cut-off
- Clint Gilchrist on the Lander Road
- Paul Link on the geology of the area and how that determined the route the trails took
- Clay Landry looking at Fort Hall trading for the early years of the existence of the Post (1834 – 1836).
- Martha Voght will look at the way the popular press of the time portrayed the Native Americans.
- Dave Welch will review trail mapping with reference to the Fort Hall area.

There will as well be a report by NPS on trail signage, and a dedication ceremony at the Shoshone-Bannock tribal museum for the new trail information boards being displayed there.

Jerry has reworked the tour itineraries in light of the talent we have lost. These itineraries have been submitted to Darrell Shay for permitting.

The committees that are up and running are shown below. Thanks for all the hard work that all our volunteers are putting in.

- Facilities – Travis Boley with John Briggs
- Tours – Jerry Eichhorst with Lyle Lambert, Gar Ellison, Dave and Donna Newberry and Dave Taylor.
- Registration – Jim Green and Cathy Blair-Green with Jean Coupal Smith.
- Sales Promotions – Jeri & Dan Dunne
- Finance – Dan Dunne/Bill Wilson
- Speakers – Alys Webber with John Briggs
- Raffle and Auctions – Lynn and Margie Houdyshell with Jean Coupal Smith.

- Communications – Nancy Briggs
- Publications – John Briggs
- Risk Management – Travis Boley
- Transportation – Travis/Jerry
- Book Room – Jim and Dawna Fazio
- Fort Hall Replica Dinner – Gary and Nancy Makey
- Sponsors – Russ Smerz
- The Exhibition Tables and Volunteers Committees are still without volunteers.

Others who have volunteered to help with programs, tours and facilities include Jim Hardee, Peg Cristobal, Suzann Henrikson, and Michael Courtenay. From other chapters we have John Winner, and Mary Ann Tortorich.

The RV Park, Buffalo Meadows, has been visited. There are only 35 bays for RVs although they are all full hook-up and there are showers on site. Booking is done through the Fort Hall Casino. The Casino was also visited. There are no tables here, just slots. A new casino is due to be built but groundbreaking has not yet started.

The Reservation is dry but beer and wine can be bought from and consumed in the Hotel. We are trying to find out how the Reservation handles firearm regulations.

Solicitation letters and notices have been drafted by the Book Room, Raffle & Auction and Sponsorship teams. A number of letters and notices have been dispatched and some responses received.

Budgets for the Convention and Convention Planning activities have been developed. Seed money has been provided by OCTA at the recommendation of CANVOCTA following their very successful Convention in Stateline.

Scouting and timing of most tours have been done but a few still need to be written up in detail. Tour guides and supporters have been identified but more are needed. Chase vehicle volunteers will also be needed. The planned tours are

- Tour A: Fur Trappers in Eastern Idaho
- Tour B: Oregon California Trail from the East
- Tour C: Oregon-California Trail to the West
- Tour D: Scenic Idaho
- Tour E: Milner Recreation Area Oregon Trail ruts
- There will be a local Tour of the Monument and Ferry Butte as well

The Fort Hall replica has been booked and the Bannock County Historical Museum with it. A supplier for the meal has been identified and a quote obtained.

A new design of Registration badge has been developed and will be tested at the St. George Symposium.

The Bus contract has been approved by OCTA. We are using Holiday Coaches of Idaho Falls.

To and From Fort Hall

By John Briggs

Convention planning trips to Fort Hall mean a round trip drive of 500 miles from Boise, and therefore whenever Dan Dunne and I head there we try to fit in trail related activities. It is fortunate that the northern route, using US 20 and 26 follows the Goodale cut-off and the southern route, especially on US 30, the main Trail.

In the Fall we were able to work on an alternative approach to the post-convention Goodale tour via Atomic City, the McTucker road and the eastern Goodale cut-off to Big Southern Butte and Arco.



Standing on the McTucker Road looking to Big Butte

February, it turns out, is a much more difficult time to explore – but not without some opportunities. At Little Castle Rocks, near Hill City, the snow was deep!



Goodale Cutoff sign above Little Castle Rocks

And at Craters of the Moon the lava fields were entirely snow covered, a site we had never seen before!



Craters of the Moon under snow

But not the time to try to explore Champagne Creek and Martin! On an unplowed road in deep snow and fog we conceded defeat and fled to Fort Hall.

On the southern route we decided to take a look at the Milner Recreation Area. The snow helped provide a clear view of the Trail.



The Oregon Trail in the Milner Recreation Area looking to the West

The western part of the Trail, shown above, is well marked and in good condition. Some work remains to be done further east where the Carsonite markers are in poor condition or missing.

Diaries Across Idaho

By Jerry Eichhorst

Bear River Valley

After descending from Big Hill, the emigrants came into the beautiful Bear River Valley. Bear River flows northwest from Bear Lake until it turns south around Sheep Rock west of Soda Springs and heads toward the Great Salt Lake. Surrounded by mountains, the valley is filled with lush grasses and crossed by several small streams. This valley was a welcome respite after the deserts of Wyoming. Good water, crickets, mosquitoes, berries, and Indians were often noted in this area. Although much of the valley has been farmed for many years, trail ruts remain in the Georgetown Summit area.

August 2. ...The valley of Bear river bears off to the north-west, and can be seen a great distance. From the south comes in a broad valley, up which can be seen Bear Lake. A high range of mountains separates it from the river. The outlet of this lake is two or three miles below the narrows made by this mountain. A high range of snow covered mountains can be seen to the south-west. The road strikes the river two miles from the foot of the mountain, at Big Timber. Here is a good camp. Eight miles brought us to a spring branch. The bottom here is wide; a low marsh prevents driving to the river. The grass is good. There is a little timber on the mountains...

August 3. We traveled about fourteen miles, crossing a number of spring branches, coming in from the mountains. These branches abound in trout. The ground, for a strip of about four miles, was covered with black crickets of a large size. I saw some that were about three inches in length, and measuring about three-fourths of an inch in diameter; but the common size were two inches in length and one-half or five-eighths of an inch in diameter; their legs were large in proportion to the size of their bodies. Some were singing on stalks of wild sage; others crawling in every direction. Our teams made great havoc among them; so numerous were they that we crushed them at every step. As soon as one was killed, others of them would alight upon it and devour it. The bottoms are wide, and covered with grass, and the soil looks well. A few patches of snow were seen upon the mountain some ten miles distant. A portion of the mountain is covered with fine timber. The bottoms are rolling.

Joel Palmer, 1845

June 21st Drove to Ashlies creek 29 miles, Crossed enormous hills, and came again into the valey of Bear River. The mosquitoes are so numerous on horses and cattle as nearly to conceal the color of the animal

David Starr Hoyt, 1849

August Satur 7th

...we again struck the road & encamped on the bank of the [Bear] R. here is the snipe bill musquetoos for god sake here we found hi.n. curns red yellow & black good grass & willow for fuel

John N. Lewis, 1852

Saturday, Aug. 14. Very pleasant this morning. Find a berry resembling the whortleberry, rather larger...The grass hoppers are so thick that they look like snow in the air, coming very fast.

Cecelia Adams, 1852

Sunday 10th we had very good grass and water the crickets were (quite a curiosity here) as thick on the ground as they could be and as large as mice (of a red color the Indians ketch them and dry them pound them to powder mix with beries and bake it for bread) camped half mile from the river

Catherine Amanda Washburn, 1853

Idaho Chapter OCTA
 2908 Whitehaven Place
 Eagle, ID 83616



IOCTA Officers and Directors

Jerry Eichhorst	President	jeichhotrails@gmail.com
Lyle Lambert	VP - East	Lyle.lambert@yahoo.com
John Briggs	VP - West	johnxbriggs@msn.com
Dan Dunne	Treasurer	ltdunne@gmail.com
Paul Dinwiddie	Secretary	pdiny@msn.com
Peg Cristobal	Historian	crispp2@gmail.com
Lyle Lambert	Preservation - East	Lyle.lambert@yahoo.com
Wally Meyer	Preservation - West	wallywanch@q.com
Nancy Briggs	TD Editor	nancylbriggs@msn.com
Jerry Eichhorst	Webmaster	www.IdahoOCTA.org
Dave & Donna Newberry	Director	donteach@juno.com
Dave Taylor	Director	DTAYLOR466@aol.com
Bill Wilson	Director	runofthemillbill@gmail.com
Jim & Dawn Fazio	Director	jfazio@turbonet.com
Lynn and Margie Houdyshell	Director	houdyshell@cableone.net

Visit IOCTA online at www.IdahoOCTA.org