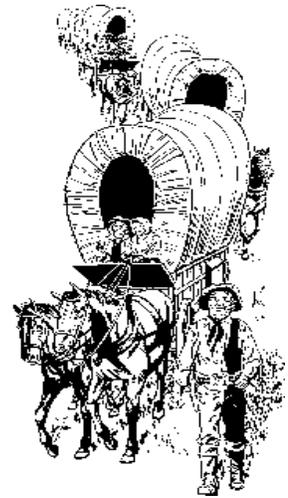


Trail Dust

Newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, Idaho Chapter

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2023 Upcoming Activities

March 1, 8, 15 - Boise Community Education courses on the Oregon Trail in Idaho

March 30 to April 2 - “Journey to the West”, OCTA Historic Trails Symposium in St. Joseph, Missouri

April 15 - Annual spring byway tour with potluck lunch at Springbriar Winery

May 11 to 13 - City of Rocks activities and spring chapter meeting

July 25 - July 29 - “We Do Old in a New Way”, OCTA Convention in Gering, NE

Message From the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Our long, hot summer has finally come to an end and fall is in the air. The weather has been beautiful so far in October, but is soon going to change and turn cooler with rain coming after many dry months. It is hard to imagine the emigrants trudging across the Idaho desert when temperatures were near 100 for many months this summer, just as it would have been for those brave souls.

The Idaho chapter had a good year overall although it seemed rather disjointed as we had several activities in the spring, and then none for a couple of months through the heat of summer. The OCTA convention in Casper led to more activities with an informal tour across Wyoming, many interesting activities and sites during the convention, and more sites in Wyoming on the way home.

September and October became very busy. I led a caravan tour for the Idaho Heritage Trust Board of Directors, which was very interesting, then attended the Idaho's Heritage Conference in Pocatello the next week and led a bus tour of the Oregon Trail west of Fort Hall. Jim Hardee, friend, Idaho chapter member, and noted fur trapper authority, offered to help me on the tour which I quickly accepted. The tour participants were treated to five hours of information and stories as Jim and I talked about the fur trappers and trail travelers in eastern Idaho. Thank you, Jim, for helping make such a memorable tour! The next day I participated in a panel discussion on preserving history on the trails while Jim gave a presentation on early trappers and explorers in Idaho the following day.

A few days later, John Briggs and I went to Pocatello for two days of Jeffreys-Goodale outings. Those outings were very interesting. Thanks again to John and the INL staff for arranging the tour and leading us through the INL.

Finally, our fall chapter meeting was held a few days ago. It proved to be very enjoyable as the potluck lunch led to much more socialization which is an important part of the chapter. A new member and several members who joined this year attended so it was good to get to know them better.

It is now time to start doing more trail research and writing. It seems like there are so many projects that I want to do and so little time to work on them. Fortunately, I will finally be retiring at the end of the year so maybe I will have more time.

The Boise Community Education classes will be held again in February and March. The annual spring byway tour is tentatively planned for April 15 with the annual trip to City of Rocks tentatively planned for May 11-13.

I hope all of you have a wonderful fall and winter. Please join me on the trails again in the spring.

Thoughts on the Casper Convention

By Jerry Eichhorst

Casper, Wyoming, is a small city with a lot of history. The annual OCTA convention visited Casper in late August this year to learn about that history and the history of the numerous emigrant trails in the area. An opening night reception was held at the trail center on the hill above town which is typical of such trail-related locations with lots of interpretive displays and short films. I think Boise should have such a center. Monday was packed with excellent speakers, but unfortunately there were two presentations at a time so one had to choose which to attend. Tuesday was the first of the bus tour days. Bus tours are always an adventure for me as I historically have bad luck with bus breakdowns and being stranded in the desert. This time, the problem was not quite as serious – only the air conditioning and the toilet on the bus did not work on my tour of the Bozeman Trail.



Bozeman Trail bus tour at the lunch stop in 100-degree heat. No shade, no tables, no chairs, no AC, no restrooms, and several long-winded presenters.

More excellent speakers gave presentations on Wednesday with a BBQ at Fort Caspar that evening featuring a simulated exchange of mail by Pony Express Association riders.



Pony Express exchange riders at Fort Caspar

Thursday was another bus tour day. Unfortunately for the people on the Bozeman Trail tour on Thursday, the bus broke down and they had an adventure getting two hours back to the hotel. Meanwhile, another bus had mechanical issues and limped back to Casper while a third ended up being an hour late returning. Stragglers were coming into the awards banquet that night long after it had started. I decided to tour local sites on my own and ended up following a bus tour for part of the morning which allowed me to learn at their stops and see other sites they skipped.



Bus heading towards quadruple swales west of Prospect Hill



Quadruple swales west of Prospect Hill

On Friday I participated in a post-convention tour which traveled from the sixth crossing of the Sweetwater River to Burnt Ranch. The day consisted of a lot of rough trail driving and long talks about the Mormon hardships encountered. After the tour ended, I led a small group another 8 miles west on the trail to South Pass, then continued west past Pacific Springs to the highway. It was another long day which was very interesting.



Rocky Ridge, an incredibly rough section of trail



Post-convention tour extension group at South Pass

A Trek on the Trails in Reverse By Jerry Eichhorst

The annual OCTA convention was in Casper, Wyoming, this year. A two-day drive from Boise, I decided to visit sites along the Oregon/California/Mormon Trail through Wyoming on the way to Casper. Noted Wyoming trails authority Randy Brown worked with me to plan a route across central Wyoming for the day before the convention. I spread the word of my trek and soon had several people going with me on an informal pre-convention tour.

One interesting aspect to the trek was the addition of Richard Hunt to the group to shoot video of the day as part of OCTA's new effort to build a video library of trail sites. I assured Richard I was not an expert of the Wyoming sites, several of which I had never been to before, but we were going to shoot video anyway.

The drive to Kemmerer, Wyoming, included heavy thunderstorms on the drive and an adventurous night at the local Best Western where they gave me the wrong room key and I barged in on another family. We left Kemmerer early in the morning on Saturday, August 27, on a trek on the trails in reverse. Our first stop was a BLM interpretive site at the crossing of the Green River on Highway 28.



Green River

Several signs and a replica of a ferry adorn the site. Heading east again, we passed through Farson, too early in the morning to stop for their famous ice cream. Leaving the highway 16 miles east of Farson, we traveled for 7 miles to Parting of the Ways where the Sublette Cutoff branched from the main trail to Fort Bridger. This was a site I had always wanted to see.

Devil



Oregon/California/Mormon Trail heading west to Parting of the Ways

We returned to the highway and stopped at "False Parting of the Ways" where the highway department has a pullout with the same interpretive sign as at Parting of the Ways. Fortunately, an OCTA sign notes the real location of the separation.



Parting of the Ways – main trail to Fort Bridger goes left, Sublette Cutoff goes right

Continuing east, we attempted to reach South Pass on the trail from the east. We stopped at Pacific Springs to view the old buildings but were unable to continue east on the trail itself due to sloppy mud from the storms of the day before. We then returned to the highway and arrived at South Pass from the east. South Pass is another of the sites I had never been to and wanted to visit. It was inspiring to think of

the thousands of people who passed by this site on their journeys to the Pacific Ocean.



Markers at South Pass

Already behind in our schedule, we now traveled a long distance on Wyoming highways, skipping several sites along the way, to Devil's Gate on the Sweetwater River.



Devil's Gate on the Sweetwater River

We walked to the rock formation which was very impressive up close before heading for Casper. It was a fun day with some famous historic sites. The videos turned out far better than expected and will be available

on OCTA's YouTube library. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5CyC-R68Izhvww1f57V-yQ>). Please be sure to hit the Subscribe button to follow the channel.

Jeffreys-Goodale Outings By Jerry Eichhorst

After many months of arrangements and coordination by John Briggs working with the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) staff, we were able to tour the Jeffreys-Goodale route through part of the INL on Saturday, October 1. INL archaeologists and visitor guides led us in two of their large vans for the day. We drove to the southern edge of the INL to where the Jeffreys-Goodale route entered the INL a few miles from the north side of Big Butte. A clear trace was visible, and a possible grave was found. We then visited the route where it reached the Lost River, the first real water the emigrants found after 35 miles of travel across the desert. Excellent trail ruts were visible along the river.

Discussions with INL are already in progress to continue the trek next fall as there appear to be more excellent ruts west of where we stopped on Saturday. And of course, we will need to get cadaver dogs out to check the possible grave which was found.

The next day, John Briggs and I led a trek across the desert following the Jeffreys-Goodale route from its origination crossing the Snake River below the mouth of the Blackfoot River to Big Butte. The first 20 miles were on paved roads, but the last 35 miles were on rough dirt of the route itself for much of the way. Most of the dirt road was winding through volcanic areas, dry

and dusty, just as it was for the emigrants nearly 170 years ago. After several rough hours we finally reached the south side of Big Butte, our target for the day. We replaced many Carsonite trail markers along the way with Gary Makey doing most of the work. Thanks Gary! It was a fun outing on a stretch of trail which the chapter had not been to in several years.



Saturday's group with Big Butte in the background

My thanks to John Briggs for making the arrangements and the INL team for sharing the trail with us. I look forward to seeing more of the INL route next year.



Start of the dirt portion of the trek along the Jeffreys-Goodale route to Big Butte, shown 35 miles in the distance.



The Sunday trek group with Big Butte in the background



A final view of Big Butte

Fall Chapter Meeting By Jerry Eichhorst

The Idaho chapter meeting was held on Saturday, October 15, at the Sweetbriar Winery north of Mountain Home. We had stopped at the winery for lunch on the annual spring byway tour in April and had a potluck lunch. It was so much fun that I wanted to do it again for the fall meeting.

Eighteen people attended the meeting with Don Wind and Jim Hardee coming from eastern Idaho. The draw must have been the potluck lunch. Don and Dave Price provided an update on the many wind power, solar power, and transmission line projects being developed in Idaho. Chapter elections were held for officers and two director positions. The current chapter officers were reelected for another two-year term. Shannon Gorrige and Gary Kaufman were elected to director positions for three-year terms. They replace Gar Elison, and Lynn and Margie Houdyshell. The rest of the meeting involved discussions on future activities for national and the chapter, and a review of activities for the year.

Tamara Mackenthun, President of the Mountain Home DAR chapter, and our host along with her husband Mike, then talked for a few minutes about the DAR. Their group was also meeting at the winery in order to go with us on our activity after lunch.

A shared potluck lunch was delicious with our host, Mike, cooking hamburgers and brats, while everyone else brought side dishes and desserts. It was a beautiful fall day so sitting outside on the patio was very pleasant.

The winery is located on Rattlesnake Creek, a common camping area on the Oregon Trail. Diary accounts note the presence of 10-13 graves in the area. There have been several houses developed along the creek, so I have often wondered if any of the graves were unearthed. After lunch we crossed the creek and searched a rocky hillside to see if any possible graves could be found. I felt it was unlikely, but in the search, I found what I believe to be six possible graves. Our next step will be to bring out the cadaver dogs to

check the possible graves for human remains.

In the meantime, I am already planning to have a potluck lunch at the winery for next spring's byway tour, tentatively planned for April 15.

My thanks to the people who have served and those now serving the chapter. We are blessed to have so many people willing to help. And my thanks to Tamara and Mike for hosting the meeting.



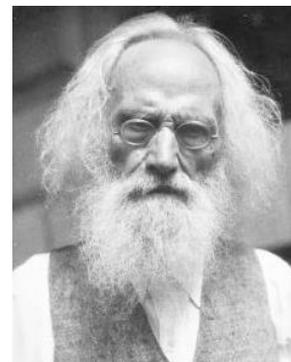
A possible grave at Rattlesnake Creek



Diaries Across Idaho

By Jerry Eichhorst

Ezra Meeker at Fort Hall



As railroads and the horseless carriage replaced covered wagons, new routes were developed across the country. Fort Hall was abandoned and faded into the Snake River Plain as the Oregon Trail was seldom used. Ezra Meeker, who crossed the plains in 1852 on his way to Washington, was concerned about preserving the Oregon Trail. In the early 1900's, he started an effort to save the memory and the locations of the Oregon Trail. Traveling the trail multiple times, he raised money for monuments commemorating the trail and met with politicians and presidents about saving the trail. His preservation efforts are one of the core tenants of OCTA to this day. On July 27, 1921, Meeker gave a speech at the old Fort Hall site. His original note cards are in the Idaho State Archives. Portions of that speech follow.

It is an inspiration, and I consider it a high privilege to meet you on this historic spot upon the occasion of the 87th anniversary of the first sermon preached west of the crest of the Rocky Mountains; the spot where Nathaniel J. Wyeth selected to plant the American flag and challenged the supremacy of Great Britain, who, through the instrumentality of the Hudson Bay Company were attempting, by a possessory right, to claim eventual ownership of the Oregon country.

In the lapse of years as like with the greater part of the Oregon Trail the landmarks pointing to the site of Ft Hall had disappeared, while others were forgotten and passed out of memory as the pioneers one by one passed on to their reward. So, when I drove with my ox team into Pocatello in May of 1906, on my way over the Oregon Trail searching for suitable spots upon which to erect monuments, I naturally first queried to ascertain the site of Fort Hall, which I then and do now consider the most important historic point on the great trail. It was here the early pioneer must need abandon their wagon and proceed on their weary journey as best they could; some on horseback, some afoot, some with oxen or

cows packed while the unfortunate pioneer trudged along behind, covered with dust and in many instances enduring parched lips of thirst! As we have seen, the fort was built in 1834 and until 1843 this condition continued with an accumulation of vast numbers of abandoned wagons and other property.

Fort Hall was an integral part of the Oregon Trail, the greatest trail of history, that has contributed largely to the development of the nation by safeguarding its Pacific possession and that is destined to play a greater role in the future of preparedness for defense. It is destined to become the great thoroughfare from river to river from the great Missouri to the greater Columbia, from the Mississippi valley to the Pacific Ocean.

I do not expect to live to see it, but there are people within the sound of my voice that will, when the whole will be paved, when the passage of the trackless car will compete with the railroads both for passengers and freight. But time forbids pursuing this interesting subject further.

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IOCTA Officers and Directors

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