

TRAIL DUST



Newsletter of the Idaho Chapter of the
Oregon-California Trails Association

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Upcoming Activities

City of Rocks Activities

Convention Tour Training	Wednesday, May 20, 2026
Circle Creek survey with NPS	Thursday, May 21, 2026
Circle Creek survey with NPS	Friday, May 22, 2026
Spring Chapter Meeting in Burley	Saturday, May 23, 2026
OCTA Board of Directors Meeting, Chico, CA	Monday, September 14, 2026
OCTA Convention in Chico, CA	September 15-18, 2026

Message from the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

A very strange winter has come and gone. Here in Boise, we only received a skiff of snow. A record-setting low snowpack was received by the mountains, pointing to a record low of water available through the summer, and potentially a volatile fire season. A record wet spring is trying to make up the difference, but it is too late to truly help. Thinking ahead to next year and thinking the pendulum will likely swing, I just bought a big, new snowblower.

My Boise Schools Community Education classes were sold out again. They are always a lot of fun to share the emigrant stories with over thirty new people. I am adding another class to the series for next year.

I was host for three people from the NPS Trails Office in early March. I showed them the Fort Boise site they helped develop the interpretive signs for. I then showed them Oregon Trail sites in eastern Oregon. Sandwiched in between was a meeting of relevant parties at the Keeney Pass interpretive site to discuss the plans for rebuilding the site. We will be needing labor to implement the plans because the BLM is short-staffed. If you know of someone or a business that might help, please let me know. It is always good to see our friends and partners from the NPS. We do a lot of work with them.

We also helped the BLM clean up the Birch Creek interpretive site near Farewell Bend. It appears someone dumped a storage unit of household goods on the Oregon Trail. Members of the Idaho and Northwest chapters cleaned up the trash in record time. My thanks to all who helped with the cleanup.

I spoke to the Meridian Historical Preservation Committee and the national conference of the Professional Trail Builders Association last month. I will be speaking at the Owyhee County Museum in May.

In the last issue, I wrote about helping the BLM obtain windows and doors for the refurbished Canyon Creek Stage Station. I am pleased to announce that the Idaho chapter has raised over \$6000 for this effort. Thanks to all who contributed to this worthy cause.

I recently attended Randy'L Teton's presentation on The True Story of Sacajawea. Randy will be giving this presentation as the Keynote Speaker for our convention in Burley next year. It was a very interesting talk which shared the history of Sacajawea, Shoshone customs, and Randy's experiences being the model for the Sacajawea dollar coin. I think it will be well-received at the convention.

The Annual Byway Tour was held on Saturday, April 18. Details of this fun event are available in another article in this issue.

We have some great things planned for our annual activities in May at City of Rocks. I will be leading a training tour of the tour leaders for one of the pre-convention tours on Wednesday, May 21. The reserve has been able to purchase the Circle Creek Basin which was the major California Trail camping area at City of Rocks. On Thursday and Friday, we will be assisting a team of NPS archaeologists in conducting a survey of the new area with metal detectors and cadaver dogs. I will lead tours of other California Trail sites in the area while the searches are going on. I am excited to see what we will find. The group will typically go out to dinner on Thursday and Friday nights.

Our chapter spring meeting will be on Saturday, May 24, starting at 10 am at the Perkins Restaurant in Burley. We will have a short business meeting and then focus on next year's convention.

I have spent a lot of time working on a grant application for the Idaho Humanities Council to help cover the costs of the convention speakers. I now understand why some people

get paid good money to submit grants. Please let me know if you have other grant sources and would like to help with the applications. I am trying to plan activities for the rest of the year. I expect the annual Model A tour will be

in June. We will likely do training runs of the convention tours throughout the summer. Please let me know if you have any requests for places to go. I hope to see you on the trails soon.

Lander Road

By Jerry Eichhorst

The Lander Road, also known as the Lander Trail or Lander Cutoff, was developed as the first US government sponsored road to benefit emigrants heading to California. The government was seeking a means to keep western emigrants away from the Mormons in Utah after the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1856. Visionaries were also looking for a northern railroad route to the Pacific.

Frederick W. Lander, an engineer from the Department of Interior, supervised construction of an alternate road for the Oregon Trail from South Pass to rejoin the regular Oregon Trail at Ross Fork, above Fort Hall. Congress funded the project in February 1857, with construction taking place in 1858 and 1859. The route was part of the Fort Kearny, South Pass, and Honey Lake Wagon Road.

In 1857, Lander traveled 3,000 miles, scouting sixteen passes for the best route across the mountains. He selected a northern route to obtain better grazing, water, fuel, fish, and game for emigrant travelers.

Construction of the basic route was completed by November 1858. Lander reported that 62,310 cubic yards of earth were excavated, one mile of rock removed, eleven miles of willows cleared, and twenty-three miles of pine timber removed from the roadway in making a level road of 256 miles from South Pass to Fort Hall.

Lander wrote a guide for his new route during the winter of 1858-9, then resumed construction in the spring. He spent most of 1859 improving the road from South Pass to City of Rocks and negotiating with Indians along the route for the peaceful passage of emigrants. He returned to the road in 1860, working on the section in the Honey Lake area of northeast California.

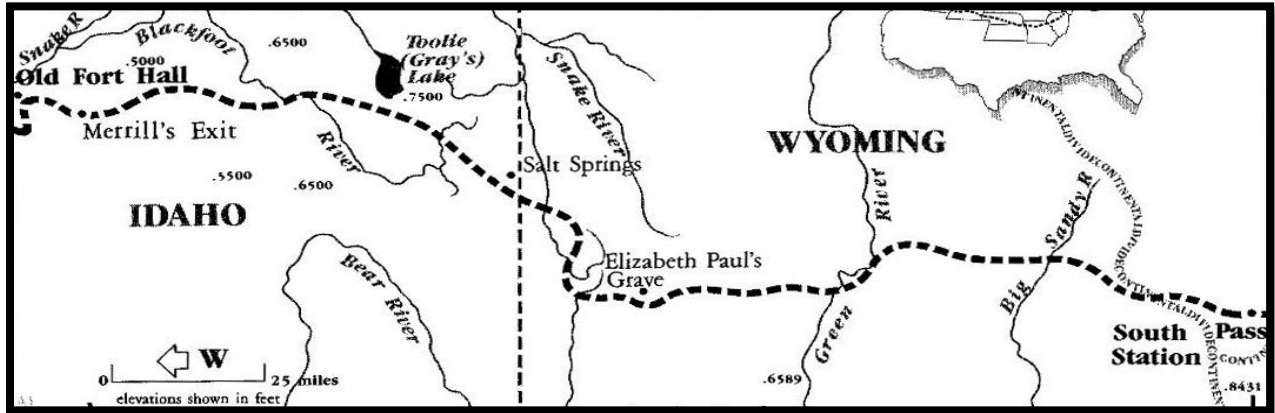
Lander joined the Civil War effort as a General and led a cavalry charge at the Battle of Bloomery Gap on February 14, 1862, in what is now West Virginia. Unfortunately, Lander died of pneumonia on March 2, 1862.

His route branched from the Oregon Trail at Burnt Ranch/Gilbert Station near South Pass, then went west across Wyoming. The Lander Road enters Idaho near Afton, Wyoming, travels northwest and west, before rejoining the original Oregon Trail at Ross Fork, a few miles from Fort Hall. The Lander Road then followed the Raft River route of the California Trail before turning northwest to follow the Applegate Trail into southern Oregon.

Emigrants began using the route while Lander was still building the road. As the gold rush developed in Montana and Idaho in the 1860s, Lander's road became a major route for miners heading to the gold fields. In the 1870's and beyond, large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep traveled over the Lander Road in both directions.

One of the most famous sites on the Lander Road is the grave of John W. Lane. Captain of a wagon train following the Lander Road, he became sick on the trek west near the Wyoming/Idaho border. He passed away a few days later in eastern Idaho. The wagon

train held a burial service complete with a procession and a large headstone carved by a stonecutter in the train. Excellent remnants of the Lander Road exist along much of the route.



Lander Road from Burnt Ranch near South Pass to Fort Hall

Gary Makey has created an excellent Lander Road Tour Driving Guide (Wyoming/Idaho border to Fort Hall) which can be found on the Idaho Chapter website or at the link below.
<https://idahoocta.org/images/routes/lander-road/Lander-Road-driving-tour.pdf>

Annual Byway Tour

By Jerry Eichhorst

On Saturday, August 18, forty-one people and eighteen vehicles followed me across the southwest Idaho desert on the annual byway tour. This event has been occurring for at least 15 years and is always a lot of fun.



The 18 'Wagons' on the Trail (Paul Dinwiddie)

It was very cold and windy when we met in southeast Boise. By the time we got to Mountain Home, it had warmed a little. We stopped at three locations to walk in Oregon Trail ruts, view where the North Alternate Oregon Trail joined the Main Oregon Trail and view the hot springs site.

We then headed to Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery for a potluck lunch. Sitting on the back lawn in the sunshine, sheltered from the wind, was very comfortable. Mike and Tamara host the group, providing hamburgers, hotdogs, and brats. Everyone brings a side dish and/or dessert to share. With a sample of excellent wine to go with lunch, it has become a highlight of the tour.

My special thanks to Kent Schaufelberger for bringing his huckleberry cobbler.



Photo by Paul Dinwiddie

In the afternoon, we visited Canyon Creek to explore the rebuilt stage station, Ditto Creek to view the inscription rock, Bowns Creek to view another inscription rock, and Mayfield.

I always enjoy leading the tour, sharing the stories of the emigrants through the areas, and making new friends. My thanks to Mike and Tamara for hosting lunch and Sarah Damele for giving us access to the Ditto Creek inscription rock.

Next year's tour will be on Saturday, April 17. If you have not been on the tour, or want to share the fun again, come out and join me. It is always a lot of fun.

Trails to Rails Symposium April 17 – 19 2026, Independence, MO By Mike Anselme

Most of my life I have had a connection to America's historic trails, as my family did their own Westward migration in 1980 from Freeport, IL to Arco, ID (our wagon was a Ryder truck). I've been fortunate to explore many of the old traces and historical sites in Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, and Nebraska, yet until recently I hadn't seen where the trails began in Kansas and Missouri. Attending the Trails to Rails Symposium in Independence, MO from April 17-19, 2026, finally gave me the opportunity to experience these origins firsthand.

My eleven-year-old daughter, Serenity, and I travelled 1,324 miles to participate, making memories together. The guided tours provided a stress-free way to see the historic landmarks, allowing us to focus on learning and enjoying the journey. We visited the Missouri River landings, the

original town of Kansas, and explored areas from Westport to Independence, each site offering a unique glimpse into the past.



'President Truman' is seen here with Mike and his daughter (photo by Roger Blair).

The symposium featured an engaging mix of tours, presentations, and hands-on

activities, immersing us in the rich history at the start of America's westward trails.

Serenity was thrilled to stand at the Independence Square sign, marking the beginning of the Oregon California Trails, was glad the Kaw Nation recovered their sacred stone and enjoyed riding the KC Trolley system to Union Station and back. She also had the opportunity to meet

Independence 'celebrities' President Harry Truman and Pony Express founder Alexander Majors.

I was amazed by everything we saw and felt inspired to return and discover even more. Kudos to Travis Boley and his team for organizing such an insightful and memorable weekend!

Trails to Rails Symposium By John Briggs

After OCTA Board meetings on the 16th and 17th we were finally able to join the Symposium tours on the afternoon of Friday the 17th. First call was the 'new' National Frontier Trails Museum and then the 1879 Chicago & Alton Railroad Depot (now a railroad museum) located next to the OCTA offices.



However, the tours on Friday were impacted by a Level 4 storm that blew through Kansas City and Independence, with wind speeds up to 90 mph.

The oncoming storm caused many of the intended tour sites to close early, but the organizers were great at re-scheduling as

much as possible. The rain and wind started late in the afternoon, but by then we were all sheltered in the Depot.



At the Independence depot on the right are Idaho Chapter members Nancy Briggs and Jenny Miller - sheltered from the storm

We were grateful the threatened tornadoes did not come near us, but there were 29 tornadoes in 9 states that night from this vast storm.

Dinner, and lectures the following day, were held in the theatre of the Missouri Model Railroad Museum with Keynote Speaker Jerry Enzler covering the full and adventurous life of Mountain Man Jim Bridger. Details can be found in Jerry

Enzler's book *'Jim Bridger: Trailblazer of the American West'*. Little known fact (to me) - Jim Bridger was actually one of the original figures proposed for Mount Rushmore National Memorial when the idea was first conceived. Before the project shifted to featuring U.S. Presidents, the proposal was to honor Western pioneers and icons like Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, and Red Cloud!

Jim Bridger started out as a teenage apprentice with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and grew into a legendary scout, who could navigate wild country long before maps caught up. He is credited as one of the first Euro-Americans to lay eyes on the Great Salt Lake and the landscapes of Yellowstone. He set up Fort Bridger as a supply stop on the Oregon and California Trails and throughout his life, built deep ties with several Native American communities, living among them, which made him an important cultural go-between during a turbulent era. His legacy persists through his contributions to mapping the American frontier and the numerous geographical landmarks that still bear his name.

Speakers on Saturday included Craig Crease, Charlie Childs, Gary Hicks (as Alexander Majors), and John Pritchard (as Harry S Truman.) President Truman asked me if I had voted for him, but I had to confess that I had not for two reasons. In the first case I was not yet born, and in the second that when I was born it was in a different country. All kidding aside – we should recognize the important role Truman played in supporting the Historic Trails, through his Presidency and support of the National Old Trails Road Association (NOTRA).

Craig Crease talked about the evolution of Missouri landing points and impact on the Trails emphasizing that the three trails (Santa Fe, Oregon and California) followed the same route for some 40 miles SW of Kansas City, to present day Gardner. Here the 'Sublette Trace' formed part of the route for the Oregon and California Trails.

(Jim Hardee of the Idaho Chapter covered Sublette's Trace in a talk at the Museum of the Mountain Men 2021 Green River Rendezvous which you can find on YouTube).



Charlie Chiles talked about the evolution of the Railroads from Chicago to St Louis and the development of the Chicago and Alton line west which established Kansas City Railhead and the development of that City.

Over lunch Gary Hicks told the history of Alexander Majors, probably best known as one of the founders of the Pony Express but, through his various freight company activities, also known as an important contributor to the growth of Kansas City. He is celebrated in 'The Pioneers Monument' in Westport.



The Pioneers Monument in Westport, Kansas City. Alexander Majors on the left, John Calvin McCoy in center and Jim Bridger on the right

After lunch we started our tour at Case Park and the Corps of Discovery Bronze sculpture commemorating the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It features Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Sacajawea holding her son Jean Baptiste, York, and Seaman, Lewis's Newfoundland dog.



In the photo Lewis and Clark are in the center with Sacajawea on the left and Seaman on the right.

The tour continued in the old Industrial area of the West Bottoms including the site

of the original Union Station, and the Western Union telegraph office of 1920. The telegraph reached Kansas City in 1858. Then in 1865 Western Union established an office. This was a turning point because it coincided with the city's emergence as a major railroad center. This combination of rail and wire technology made Kansas City a "media center" in several key ways.

Kansas City's central geographic location made it a natural relay point for news traveling between the East Coast and the expanding West.



The 1920 Western Union Telegraph Office

The city eventually became a distribution point for the Western Newspaper Union, which provided "ready-print" pages to hundreds of smaller community newspapers throughout the Midwest and Great Plains.

We then visited the Kansas City Livestock Exchange Building which is 114 years old. At the time it was finished, it was the largest livestock exchange building in the world and the largest office building in

Kansas. It served as the headquarters for the Kansas City Stockyards, which was once the second-largest stockyard in the United States (after Chicago). A unique feature inside the lobby is a tile line marking the border between the States of Missouri and Kansas!



Our final stop in the Bottoms was at the Charles P. Shipley Saddlery and Mercantile Company building established in 1885 and in which, I learned, there had been a steel foundry with metal melting furnaces on the top floor! Not a place I would want to work or even shop!



We moved on to the nearby Rock Island railroad bridge built in 1905 to span the Kansas River and carry livestock to the Kansas City stockyards.

After the Rock Island Railroad was liquidated in 1980, the bridge sat dormant for over 40 years. It became a rusting heap of no apparent value because it wasn't worth the cost of demolition! Now, though, it is a novel entertainment and restaurant venue!

We concluded our Tour at Kaw Point Park in Kansas City, Kansas, at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. Kaw Point is a historic site which serves as a memorial honoring the Lewis and Clark expedition, which camped here, and the Native American tribes of the area, particularly the Kaw (or Kansas) tribe who called this area home. James Pepper Henry, Vice Chairman of the Kaw Tribe, spoke to us about the history of his tribe. They were forced to move from Kansas to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) in 1873. This expulsion followed decades of treaties that systematically reduced their homeland from roughly 20 million acres to just 80,000.

And so it was that on June 4, 1873, approximately 553 members of the Kaw tribe left their Kansas reservation near Council Grove. They arrived in what is now Kay County, Oklahoma, about two weeks later, settling on a 100,000-acre tract purchased from the Osage Nation. The new headquarters was established at Washunga, named after the last full-blooded Kaw chief. In the late 1960s, the tribe faced another major displacement in Oklahoma. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers used eminent domain to seize

Kaw land for the construction of Kaw Lake. This project flooded the town of Washunga, the tribal council house, and the tribal cemetery, forcing the Nation to relocate once again, eventually to Kaw City, Oklahoma. Despite these difficulties and a population that once dwindled to fewer than 200 people, the Kaw Nation has revitalized and now numbers over 3,600

Mr. Henry also spoke of the 2024 relocation of the tribe’s Sacred Red Rock, taken from the Kaw tribe almost a century ago. After years of advocacy, the 28-ton Siouxan quartzite boulder was returned to its Kaw stewards and installed in

Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park near Council Grove. The boulder had been removed from Robinson Park in Lawrence, Kansas, where it had stood since 1929 as a monument to white settlers! A celebration was held honoring the stone's return to Kaw land—the first time in over 150 years that it resided on land stewarded by the tribe.

This was followed by time in the Missouri Model Railroad museum itself and dinner with ‘President Truman’.

Thanks to Travis Boley of OCTA HQ and to Mike Smith and the Trails Head Chapter for an excellent Symposium



In this photo OCTA tour participants at Kaw Point have adopted the Lewis and Clark ‘stance’ pointing up the Missouri River on the left. The Kansas River is on the right and Kansas City, Missouri in the background.

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