

The Oregon Trail Hike

"In recent years we Americans have enjoyed the excitement of watching men conquer the thresholds of outer space. Perhaps because of these wonders, it is difficult to comprehend that just over a century ago Oregon and California seemed as remote as the moon does today. Americans once ventured to the western edge of the continent as they do now into space. But they did not merely pause and return. They stayed and populated the land, and they helped to build America. It took courage to venture into a strange and forbidding land, drawn only by the promise of a better life. Pioneers on the Oregon Trail faced many obstacles- climate and terrain, distance, Indians, hardship and sickness, scarcity of food and water, to name only a few. Amateurs in the wilderness, they profited by their experience, buried their dead- more than 30,000 still lie along the trail- and pushed on to build the comfortable America their descendants have inherited. It was mile on mile of toil, pain, adventure and hope. As you hike the trail, pause and reflect on the qualities that shaped America, especially the perseverance and courage of ordinary citizens who created a nation out of a strange wilderness." by George B. Hartzog Jr. Quoted from the book *The Oregon Trail Revisited*.



The Oregon Trail is an integral part of the history of our state. The names of cities, rivers, parks businesses and mountains come from pioneers who made this journey. The Oregon Trail was actively used for almost thirty years until travel by railroad to the northwest was made possible. The students in our schools actively study the Oregon Trail. No matter how much you study the history of the trail and visit museums, nothing you do will ever give you a deeper understanding of the trail than hiking, sometimes in 150-year-old wagon ruts, and camping over the trail in an authentic pioneer manner. . Many times civilization will be just over the next hill but when you can no longer see asphalt roads, power lines and towns, the deeply moving experience of being in the wilderness will be the same for you as it was for the emigrants 150 years ago. Visit <http://www.octa-trails.org/> for more information.

The Boy Scout hike over the Oregon Trail will be one of the pinnacles of a Scouts scouting experience, tying together trail history with the actual experience of hiking and camping on the trail. As a leader, you can make this more authentic by camping in the same manner as pioneers (without gas stoves and lanterns) by providing authentic meals (you can buy buffalo meat at some stores) and using pioneer cooking methods. You can make and wear (buckskin clothing) or purchase authentic period clothing. You will also be able to replenish your water supply in many places from the same springs the pioneers did. To complete the requirements for a bronze medal and patch, a Scout must hike two twenty mile segments of the official Oregon trail Hike (the Barlow Trail may be used as one segment) and canoe for twenty miles on the Columbia or Willamette between the Oregon border and Oregon City. A silver medal is earned by completing 100 miles and a gold medal is earned for completing 200 miles of hiking and canoeing combined. I have plotted seven trail segments plus the Barlow as close as possible to the actual Oregon Trail using actual trail segments and existing roads near the trail. I suggest you follow the trail segments exactly as described. Many of the segments cross private property, Indian reservation property or may end abruptly leaving you to navigate cross-country through plowed fields. All the trail segments are at least 20 miles long, with one segment covering 56 continuous miles and some are connected so you can start in the middle of one and finish in the middle of another so you can still hike the required 20 miles. Crossing the ford of the John Day River is the highlight of one segment.

Segment 1: Nyssa to Vale, actual trail ruts about 7 miles into the hike. Segment 2: Vale to Farewell Bend campground. Segment 3: Pleasant Valley to Baker. Segment 4: The Emigrant Hill Scenic Road to Meacham. Segment 5: Meacham to Pendleton across the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the actual Oregon Trail. Segment 6: Echo to Cecil over the actual Oregon Trail and through the Boardman Bombing range. Segment 7: Cecil to Wasco, fording the John Day River. Section 8: The Barlow Trail Hike.

I Have discovered a great video "West to Oregon Along the Oregon Trail " at The End of The Oregon Trail interpretive Center in Oregon City. This video will give your Scouts a real sense of what the Oregon Trail was all about. It will also give them a feeling of hiking in the pioneers footsteps when you are on the trail. Your Scouts will have much more enthusiasm for this historical reenactment than they will just hiking twenty miles anywhere else.

Listed on the following pages are the official segments for the Scouts to hike. For a scout to earn the Oregon Trail medal and patch, he will have to hike two twenty mile segments and canoe one twenty mile segment covering 60 miles altogether. The Barlow Trail Hike can be used as one of the segments. I have plotted trail segments as close a possible to the actual Oregon Trail. Some segments involve hiking in 150 year old wagon ruts made by the original pioneers. All the trail segments will be at least 20 miles long. I used the "Oregon Atlas and Gazetteer" to plot the trail along with the map book written by Gregory Franzwa.

The Boy Scouts will be expected to either hike the full twenty mile segments in one day (hiking merit badge requirement) with just light day packs or as two ten mile segments on continuous days with full backpacks (backpacking merit badge requirement) to earn a medal and a patch. The twenty mile sections fulfill the final requirement for Hiking Merit Badge. You can set up water and meal stops for the Scouts about every five miles, except for a seven mile section on the Boardman Bombing Range where there is only a foot trail. I have been asking the Scoutmasters for trail reports after they hike a segment so I'll be able to pass these along to you also. All page and section map references will be from the Oregon Atlas and Gazetteer topographical maps. (available at REI Co-op, sometimes at Costco and Bi Mart)

Segment #1. The Oregon portion of the trail starts on the Snake River at the three island crossing in the town of Nyssa. Go south out of Nyssa on Clark, Blvd. the road winds around after this, watch for Succor Creek Highway and go South. Watch on the right far an Oregon Trail Interpretive kiosk Turn left here and go under a railroad bridge, get as close as you can to the river before you drop your Scouts off to start the hike. Head out from the river along Klamath Blvd until you get to Lytle Blvd. The original trail will be within a few hundred yards of Lytle Blvd. on either side all the way to the town of Vale (approx 20 miles away). You will begin seeing wagon ruts on the hills about seven miles into the hike. This hike is all on paved roads with Lytle Blvd. having very little traffic. Page 79 section A8.

Segment #2 This starts in the town of Vale on east 6th Street and Dry Gulch Road right off Hwy 26 and heads straight north, then east then north again over the actual Oregon Trail past Love Reservoir onto Lockett Rd. for about a mile and then back on the actual Oregon Trail northbound ending on the Snake River at Farewell Bend State Park (The last look at the Snake for the pioneers) Farewell Bend State Park is a great place to camp for hiking sections one and two they have hot showers and flush toilets. There are small campsites for a fee with picnic tables and fire rings or there is a group camping overflow area that is a little more Spartan. Bring your own firewood or buy some high priced firewood from the campground as there isn't any lying around. Past this point the trail basically runs along I-84 and would not make for a very exciting hike. Page 83 Section D8

Segment #3 This part of the trail takes off just west of the pleasant valley exit (315) and goes straight north on White Swan Road then goes into Virtue Mine Road then on to Baker Copperfield Highway and into the town of Baker, home of the Oregon Trail interpretative center. After this section the trail runs along highway I-84 through LaGrande until Hilgard Junction State park. Page 83 sections A6 and B6.

Segment #4 This section is a hike along the Emigrant Hill Scenic Road. Start at exit 249 from I-84 hike N.W. through Meacham to the Scenic Road's end at Kanine Rd. Page 86 section C3.

Section #5 Start at the junction of Old Emigrant Hill Scenic Road and Kanine Rd. (close to exit 228 from I-84) Hike north (the actual Oregon Trail) to the town of Cayuse Then head west on Mission Cayuse road to the town of Mission: There you will pick up the Old Emigrant Hill Scenic Highway again all the way into Pendelton Page 86 section B2.

Section #6 This section starts 2 1/2 miles west of Echo and crosses the Boardman Bombing range over it's fifty plus mile length. This is the real and actual Oregon Trail now used as an unimproved road. (Get off I-84 at exit 188 and go south to the town of Echo. Then head west on Lexington Echo Highway. Watch far the trail on the right heading almost due west about 2 1/2 miles out of town I have received reports from several troops that this segment was a great hike. The real trail goes through the bombing range with several natural springs along the way. This section ends at Squaw Butte on immigrant road near the town of Cecil. (I am working on a procedure for contacting the Navy far permission to hike across the range, it is open to the

public most of the time) page 85 sections BS and B6.

Section #7 Start at the junction of Cedar Springs Road and Blalock Canyon Road. Hike North on Blalock Canyon road to its juncture with Turner Butte Road. Hike west on Turner Butte Road to the Blalock airstrip. Take an unimproved road SS'W to its juncture with Lower Rock Creek road. Take Lower Rock Creek Road NW and ford the John Day River at this point just as the original pioneers did. After you cross the river pick up Klondike-John Day River Road. Hike straight west down this road to the Wasco County airport or until you have hiked 20 miles. page 84 sections B2 and B3.

Section #8 Canoe any 20 miles of the Columbia River (downstream) or Willamette River (upstream) between The Dalles and Oregon City. Follow all BSA safety afloat rules.

Section #9 The official Barlow Trail Historical Hike. This section is a 22 mile section of the actual Barlow Trail that is still completely intact and as it originally was. Start where gate creek crosses NFD 3530 and hike along the trail until it intersects Highway 35 at the Pioneer Woman Grave Site. Or hike backwards starting at the Pioneer Woman gravesite (you will lose 1500 ft. of elevation this way)(Our troop has designed a Medal and Patch for the Barlow Trait Hike, you can hike The Barlow Trail, earn the medal and patch for it, and use it as one of your sections for The Oregon Trail. Page 63 section C5 and page 62 section C4 and B3.

When your Troop has completed hiking the sections you have selected, complete the registration form indicating how many medals and patches you wish to purchase. Adult leaders can also purchase and wear the awards. I will order and attempt to keep in stock USGS 7.5 minute maps for each section of the trail as they become popular, call for current availability.

I have designed the trail medal award to be a symbolic representation of Oregon Trail landmarks, significant dates and representations of the activities Scouts must complete before earning the medal and patch awards. The medal is based on the State Seal of Oregon, behind the covered wagon is Chimney Rock on the right. Chimney Rock is a visible landmark where many widely scattered trails converged into one trail, testament rock is a nearby landmark that immigrants carved their names and dates into before beginning the journey. The Oregon City Falls, the official end of the trail is pictured to the left behind the wagon and team. 1924 Miles is placed on both sides of the Oregon Trail obelisk. These obelisks mark the official trail through many parts of Oregon. 1924 miles is the commonly accepted official length of the trail. The boot mark and canoe paddle with roman numerals represent the amount of miles a Scout will cover in earning these awards. The medal will hang from a dark purple ribbon drape in remembrance of the many pioneers who perished on the trail. The 60 mile award will be Bronze a Silver 100 mile award and a Gold 200 mile award are also available. The motto on the back of the medal is self explanatory.

"THE COWARDS NEVER STARTED AND THE WEAK DIED ON THE TRAIL. A PIONEER IS BURIED ON THE AVERAGE OF EVERY 80 YARDS ALONG THE TRAIL"

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The Oregon Trail: A Pioneer Remembers

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....who are these pioneers we wish to, honor? Where is this old Oregon Trail?

In 1843 nearly a thousand men, women and children crossed the Missouri River, traversed the Platte valleys, crossed the Rocky Mountains through the South Pass, thence to and down Snake River to the Columbia and to tidewater in the old Oregon country - the first wagon train that ever reached the Pacific Coast, and the first real migration of home-builders to the Pacific Slope.

Like a gathering storm of a summer day, these people had come together on the eastern border of the Indian country from widely scattered districts of the United States and pitched their tents near the buffalo herds on the western border of civilization.

The Oregon question was unsettled, but hung in the balance. The British ruled Oregon, if not with an iron hand certainly with firmness Such were the conditions when this first wagon train of home-builders arrived in Oregon.

These people had, figuratively speaking, burned their bridges behind them. And yet a more formidable task lay in their path. They were intensely American in the highest sense that word implies. Go under the British rule they would not, and so, before the roofs were complete on the cabins of many of them, an American provisional government was formed, and, what is more remarkable, in less than two years the British rule was ended and Oregon became independent American territory..

It is these pioneers as a class we are striving to honor, not particular individuals.

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*Ezra Meeker, pioneer of 1852 From Covered-Wagon Centennial - by Howard R. Driggs,
1931*

TO EMIGRANTS.

The undersigned, having been for two years past connected with Government Escorts for protection of emigrants on the road to Oregon, and Washington Territory, and being detailed by the secretary of War for similar service this season, would take this method to advise persons intending to emigrate, as to outfit, time of starting, &c., &c.

None but good, new, medium-sized wagons, with iron axletree or thimble skein, should be used. Wagons should not be loaded to more than half their estimated capacity. Mules or oxen should be used for teams. Horses will not do to depend upon for service. The cheapest and best team is medium-sized, active, young oxen. No kind of stock will pay to take over on speculation, and emigrants should avoid taxing themselves with too much labor. An ordinary two-horse wagon, with eighteen hundred weight, good double cover, and three yoke of light, active cattle, are the best outfit a man can have. A few extra animals, in each company, would be an excellent precaution against accidents, and extra shoes and nails should be provided for horses and mules. Plenty of wagon grease should be provided and freely used.

The time required from the Missouri River, to the Settlements, will not vary much from one hundred days, with teams.

Each person should take at least 250 pounds of provisions; one-half of which should be flour, fifty pounds bacon, and the balance in sugar, coffee, tea, rice, dried fruit, &c., &c. There should be at least two men to each wagon, as the labor of driving, and taking proper care of a team and wagon, is more than one man can perform, in addition to other camp labor. Each man should be armed, and keep his gun convenient, and ready for use on the shortest notice. No furniture or extra baggage of any kind should be carried; nothing but what is actually required on the journey.

Before leaving the Settlements, companies should be organized in parties of no less than thirty or more than sixty wagons. One of your number should be chosen Captain, and one for Train Master. Your officers should then make a vigilant examination and inspection of every man's wagon, team, arms, ammunition, provisions &c., and no man should be allowed to join a company unless properly outfitted, otherwise you will have persons in your company unable to keep up, or otherwise deficient, which deficiency will have to be supplied by the company, or the persons left destitute on the plains. Your Captain should decide and, order when to start, when, and where to camp, and his orders should be implicitly obeyed. He should also decide all questions or disputes arising in your company, and his decision should be final, whether right or wrong.

Your Train Master should travel always with the train, and see that those in the lead do not travel too fast, or those in the rear fall too far behind. He should look for the best crossings of streams and bad places in the road, and give directions for doubling teams at bad hills. By having one thus to direct, if he is promptly obeyed, much time will be saved. At the end of a days' travel, the Captain, having selected the camp, the Train Master should direct where the herd are to be watered, and where the best grass is to be found. Each driver should see that his team has plenty of water, and drive them to grass as soon as possible after arriving in camp. The Captain and Train Master should be relieved, at the expense of the company, from giving any special attention to their own teams, while on the march, and from guard duty. For guard duty the men of your company should be equally divided into three divisions or squads, one of which is constantly on duty, under the direction of an officer, selected by the Captain, who for convenience, may be called Sergeant. These squads should be equally divided, and these sub-divisions relieve each other during the twenty-four hours they are on duty. The herd should never be left, day or night, without guards, and a guard should also be kept in camp nights. The firing of guns in camp should be strictly prohibited, and the report of a gun or pistol after dark, should be a signal for all hands to rally with arms.

Take no dogs along, for they are a continual source of annoyance, and seldom live to get over the barren country along Snake River.

The escort under my charge will consist of about fifty armed men. I shall leave Omaha about the 20th of May, or as soon after as possible. My route will be up the Platte River, thence up the Sweet Water, over the Lander Road, leaving that road and crossing Snake River a short distance this side of old Fort Hill. There will doubtless be a ferry established for the convenience of emigrants, in that vicinity. With the road on the north side of Snake River, I am not personally acquainted, but am well satisfied that it is much better than the old route, on the south side, my information being based upon representations of emigrants who traveled that road last season.

This road will lead emigrants directly to the Boise mines, which will be found about 300 miles from the crossing of Snake River. This road will be preferable as well to those desiring to go to the unsettled portions of Oregon and Washington Territory as to those going to the mines, as there is a well traveled road from these mines to Walla-Walla.

As friendly Indians often visit Emigrant camps, for trade, care should be taken not to encourage too much familiarity. They should not be allowed inside the camp. If you have business with them, transact it outside.

After leaving the Platte River, no person should leave camp alone, and it is dangerous for small parties to be far from the camp or train.

Be sure to drive slow in the start. Your teams should pass the first Eight Hundred miles without losing either flesh or spirits. This escort is intended to protect emigrants, as far as possible, against Indian depredations, but unless emigrants will use the necessary precaution to insure their own safety, they are liable to suffer in spite of any assist-

ance I shall be able to render them.

By organizing, in this manner, and observing these simple rules, you will avoid most, if not all, the difficulties and losses to which emigrants are usually subjected.

MEDOREM CRAWFORD, Capt. A Q M,

Commanding Emigrant Escort.