

## Oregon Trail

1. Learn about the history of the Oregon Trail, answering the following questions:
  - a. Around what year was it created, and by whom?
  - b. How many miles long was it?
  - c. Where did it start, and where did it end?
  - d. What was the highest point on the trail?
  - e. What is the estimated number of people who used the Oregon Trail?
2. Trace the Oregon Trail on a map. What states did it cross?
3. Who is known as the Father of Oregon? Why?
4. Why did pioneers choose to travel west? With your instructor, create a list of items that the pioneers would have taken with them on the Oregon Trail.
5. Answer the following questions about the covered wagons used to travel the Oregon Trail:
  - a. What types of wagons could travel it?
  - b. About how much did they weigh, and how were they pulled?
  - c. How much could be carried in them?
  - d. How much did they cost back then? Today?
  - e. How many miles could be covered in a day?
6. What diseases did the pioneers face along the way? Compare and contrast how they were prevented and treated, and how we prevent and treat diseases today.
7. Discuss the opportunities or dangers that each of the following could cause the Oregon Trail pioneers:
  - a. Weather
  - b. Animals
  - c. Native American Tribes
8. What type of food was available?
9. The Oregon Trail was only one of the many trails used by pioneers to travel west. What other trails were there? Trace them on a map.
10. Why did pioneers stop immigrating west on the Oregon Trail?
11. Choose and research an Oregon Trail pioneer missionary, and give a short presentation about their work to a group.
12. Do one of the following:
  - a. Create a song, poem, story, or skit about the Oregon Trail pioneers.
  - b. Create a display of pictures, articles, and information about life on the Oregon Trail.
  - c. Visit a section of the Oregon Trail and write or discuss what you saw with your instructor.
  - d. Participate in a conservation project for the preservation of the Oregon Trail.
  - e. Earn the Pioneering honor.
13. Find three stories in the Bible about a pioneer immigration. Share one of them in a creative way with your group.

# *The Oregon Trail*

Upper Columbia Conference Honor Pilot

The Oregon Trail played a vital role in the development of the western states. Between the years 1840 and 1860, up to half a million settlers loaded everything they owned into covered wagons and began the 2,000-mile journey from Missouri and other Midwestern states, headed for a new life in the sparsely populated territories of what now are the states of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, California, and Utah. Along the way, the pioneers faced many hardships and hazards and many died before they completed the journey, but the early travelers of the Oregon Trail helped to establish the rich culture and history of the American West!



Pioneers usually traveled in groups called wagon trains, often consisting of dozens of wagons and hundreds of pioneers. Larger groups were safer and could depend on help from other travelers when in trouble.<sup>1</sup>

Background: [https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-DwwFbic44DU/VONPww7zHII/AAAAAAAAAKKY/Mgkgb9Svf1o/s1600/Chimney\\_Rock\\_Nebraska\\_ritebook.in-001.jpg](https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-DwwFbic44DU/VONPww7zHII/AAAAAAAAAKKY/Mgkgb9Svf1o/s1600/Chimney_Rock_Nebraska_ritebook.in-001.jpg)

(1) <https://i.pinimg.com/1200x/7b/3f/cb/7b3fcbbf0f4995be7db1d24f4a29945b.jpg>

## *History and Route*

The Oregon Trail was first created by trappers and fur traders sometime between the years 1811 and 1840 as a footpath. It began in present-day Missouri in the city of Independence, stretching for 2,170 miles, passing through the northeastern corner of Kansas, southern Nebraska, Wyoming and Idaho before heading north to northern Oregon, ending in Oregon City, Oregon.

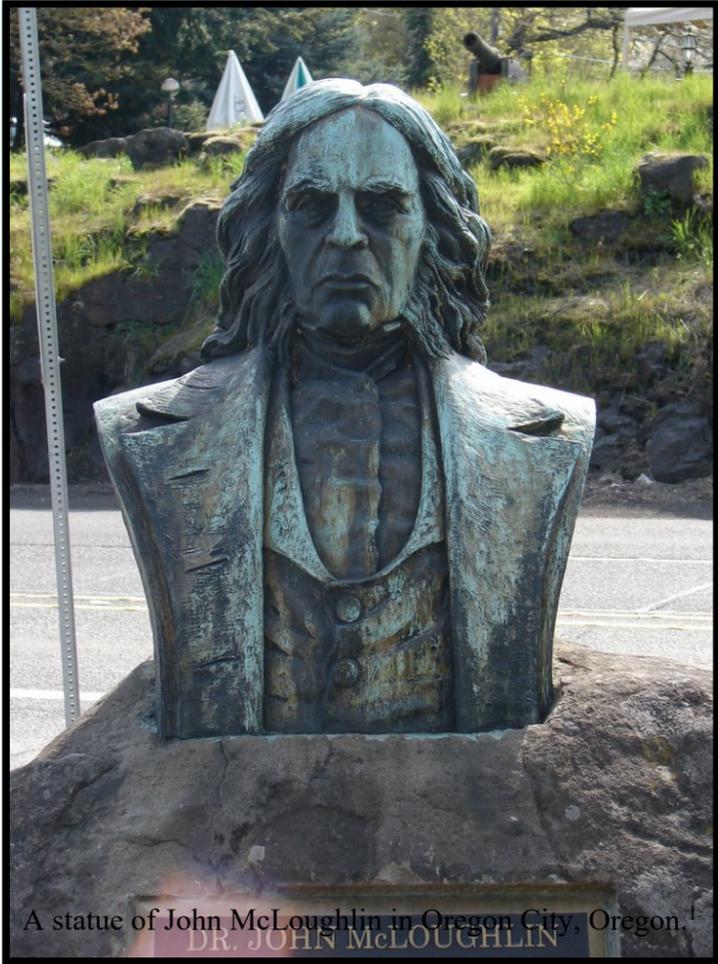
Other starting points for the Oregon Trail existed such as Kansas City, Missouri, and in reality, the ending points could be just about anywhere! For example, settlers could choose to travel south to California or Salt Lake City, Utah, North to Bozeman, Montana, or just find a settlement or a spot on the side of trail to plant their roots.

In 1978, part of the Oregon Trail was named a National Historic Trail.



(1) <https://i0.wp.com/jdawgjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/oregontrail.gif>

# *The Father of the Oregon Trail*



A statue of John McLoughlin in Oregon City, Oregon.<sup>1</sup>

John McLoughlin, the French-Canadian head of the Hudson Bay Company's trading post at Fort Vancouver (now Vancouver, Washington). In Oregon City, he helped the newly immigrated pioneers, who were poor,

exhausted, nearly starving, and threatened by the onset of winter. He did this even though it was against the orders of the Hudson Bay Company, who was worried that settlers would hinder their fur trade. He gave them or helped them find jobs, loaned them money, gave them medical care, shelter, clothing, food, supplies, seed, and whatever else they needed to start new lives in the western territories. He became a United States citizen in 1849 and the mayor of Oregon City in 1851.



The gravestones of John McLoughlin and his wife Margarite, built into the foundation of St. John's Catholic Church in Oregon City, Oregon.<sup>2</sup>

(1) <https://portlandpublicart.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/dsc01798.jpg>

(2) [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/media/uploads/headstones\\_for\\_john\\_and\\_margarite\\_st\\_johns\\_catholic\\_church.jpg](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/media/uploads/headstones_for_john_and_margarite_st_johns_catholic_church.jpg)

# *Reasons for Traveling West*

The pioneers chose to travel west for a great number of reasons. Missionaries, such as the Whitman family, were some of the first to travel the route in the iconic covered wagon, headed to the western territories to preach Christ to the Native Americans and the scattered settlers there, but it wasn't until about the end of this time, around 1840, that wagons began to consistently use the trail.



When gold was discovered in California and other western states, hundreds of settlers moved west hoping to become rich.<sup>1</sup>

Other pioneers went to look for gold hoping to become rich, often traveling in waves known as a gold rush.

Others went seeking fertile land in the hardly-inhabited West. Some followed the exaggerated stories about life in the West, and some



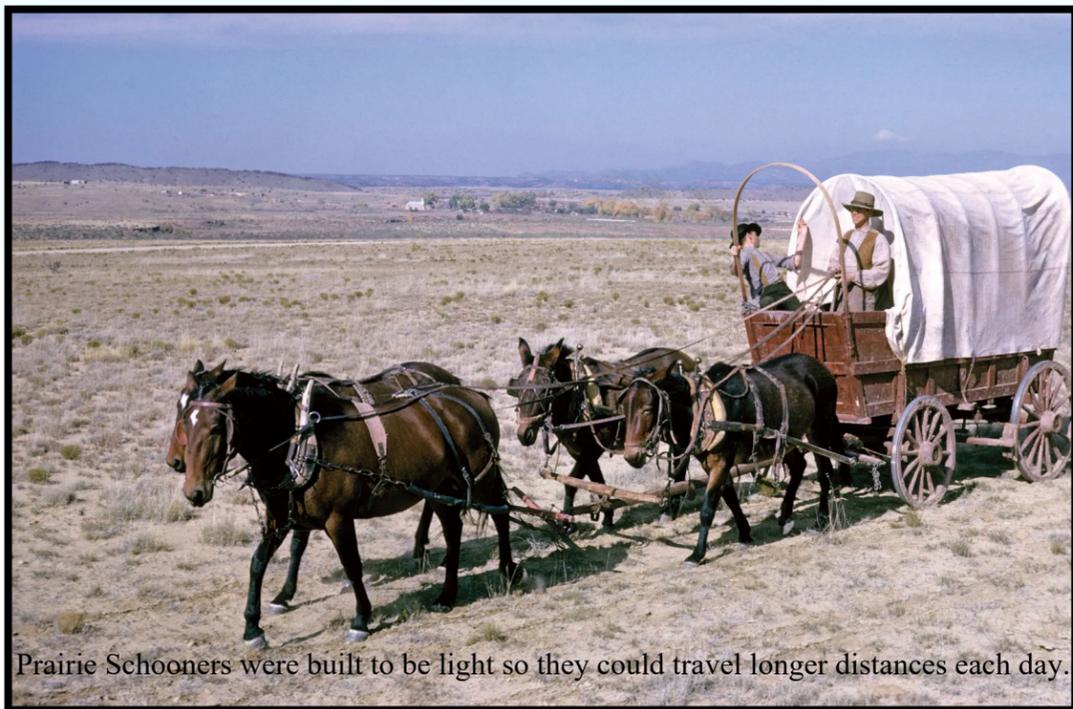
Many pioneers moved West to take advantage of the inexpensive or even free land being given to farmers.<sup>2</sup>

went West to escape religious persecution that they experienced in the eastern United States.

(1) [https://gray-wbtv-prod.cdn.arcublishing.com/resizer/NSkPqiZYgYDZ3ZE7i\\_k2-kk7v60=/1200x675/smart/filters:quality\(85\)/cloudfront-us-east-1.images.arcublishing.com/gray/GOC6VBOZ35FPVPTGLN7N6INLTA.jpg](https://gray-wbtv-prod.cdn.arcublishing.com/resizer/NSkPqiZYgYDZ3ZE7i_k2-kk7v60=/1200x675/smart/filters:quality(85)/cloudfront-us-east-1.images.arcublishing.com/gray/GOC6VBOZ35FPVPTGLN7N6INLTA.jpg)

(2) [https://www.iowapbs.org/sites/default/files/iowapathways/artifact/2021-12/a\\_000096\\_large.jpg](https://www.iowapbs.org/sites/default/files/iowapathways/artifact/2021-12/a_000096_large.jpg)

# Wagons and Teams



Prairie Schooners were built to be light so they could travel longer distances each day.

Most pioneers used farm wagons or light covered wagons called “prairie schooners,” which were light, only 1,300 pounds unloaded, and 2,000 pounds loaded, pulled by 10-12 horses or mules, or six oxen. A prairie schooner and a team to pull it cost around \$400, about \$12,000 dollars in today’s money, and could travel around 2 miles an hour, covering 15-20 miles in a day.

Unlike popular belief, the iconic Conestoga wagon was not typically used. Even though pioneers could fill it



Conestoga wagons were far too big to travel the Oregon trail! This one is so big it has been repurposed as a miniature house!<sup>2</sup>

with up to 12,000 pounds, it needed more oxen or horses to pull and was too heavy and clumsy for the trail, especially when crossing the South Pass of the Continental Divide in Wyoming at a height of 7,412 feet, highest point along the trail.

(1) <https://cdn.britannica.com/56/119356-050-445C57FB/reenactment-prairie-schooner-wagon-horse-team-plains.jpg>

(2) <https://conestogawagonco.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/home-page-glass-door-1500x1000-2-1024x683.jpg>

## *What to Bring*

Pioneering required special equipment and tools to be able to survive the journey and to set up a new home upon arrival at the end of the trail. Those who took the journey had to choose what they would take carefully, since they could only take a few hundred pounds worth of equipment. Some of the items needed along the trail would be wagons and horses, oxen, or mules to pull them, food and clothing, a gun for protection and hunting, farming tools, seeds, and household articles for setting up house at the end of the trail.



Wagons were packed with all sorts of necessities for the trail, as well as items for their new homes. Heavy items often got left behind on the trail.<sup>1</sup>

(1) <https://www.californiatrailcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/covered-wagon-whats-inside.jpg>

## *Disease Along the Trail*

Diseases were the number one cause of death on the Oregon Trail, not Indian attacks as is commonly seen in movies or books. Cholera, dysentery, Typhoid Fever, measles, and diphtheria were some of the largest killers.



Pioneer graves alongside the Oregon Trail. About one out of every ten pioneers died during the journey.<sup>1</sup>

Now, we can treat such diseases with medicines or vaccines, a quick trip to the doctor, and isolation to keep the disease from spreading. Back then, even the water was often contaminated, spreading the disease, and personal cleanliness was hard, with little chance to wash. Also, since the groups had to stay together to stay safe, it was almost impossible to keep the sick person away from others, letting the disease spread quickly!

(1) <https://www.wyohistory.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/seminoecutoff4.jpg?itok=6aW3aLgC>

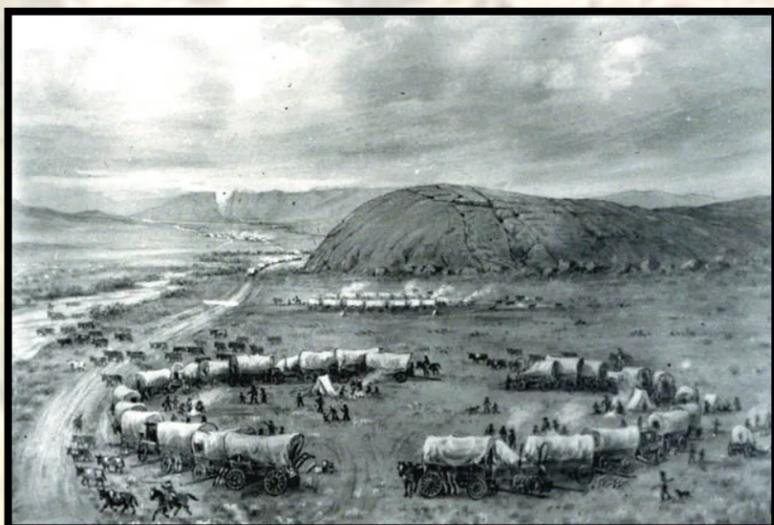
# Challenges and Opportunities

Pioneers faced many obstacles that could be both a challenge or an opportunity. Good weather meant that the pioneers could travel more quickly. However, if the weather was too hot, the oxen would have to travel slowly to avoid overheating. Rain provided safe drinking water, but made the trails muddy and difficult to travel, and snow in the mountains could be deadly.

Animals were great for food, to eat with the edible wild plants or food the pioneers had brought

However, animals could also be dangerous. Predators

picked off the livestock of the pioneers, and huge herds of bison could stampede, destroying everything in their paths. In spite of the stories about bloody massacres along the Oregon Trail,



Circling the wagons helped provide a temporary fortress from predators and enemies.<sup>2</sup>



Artist's depiction of a bison stampede through a wagon train.<sup>1</sup>

Native Americans were not responsible for many attacks on the pioneers. Instead, they served as guides and even traded for much-needed supplies.

(1) [https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/images/SCBL\\_153.jpg](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/images/SCBL_153.jpg)

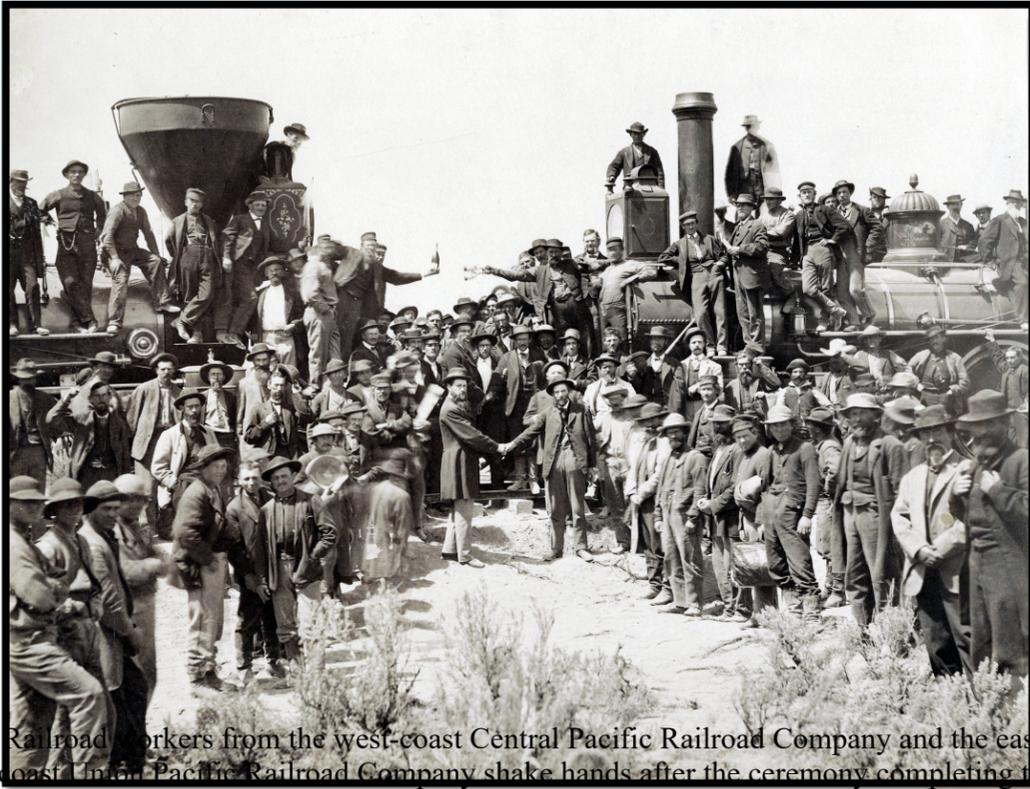
(2) <https://i0.wp.com/www.bendablelight.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/circle-the-wagons.jpg>

## *Other Pioneer Trails West*

Two other major trails, the California Trail and the Mormon Trail, started in Missouri. These trails used the same trail as the Oregon Trail for a while until they crossed the South Pass. From there, the Mormon Trail turned south to Salt Lake City, Utah, and soon after, the California Trail turned south as well, splitting into several trails that ended at various points in California. Also, several trails ran along what is now the southern United States. An example is the Santa Fe trail, from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico. From there, this trail became the Gila Trail, which crossed southern Arizona and even into Mexico, ending at Los Angeles, California.



# *The End of the Oregon Trail*

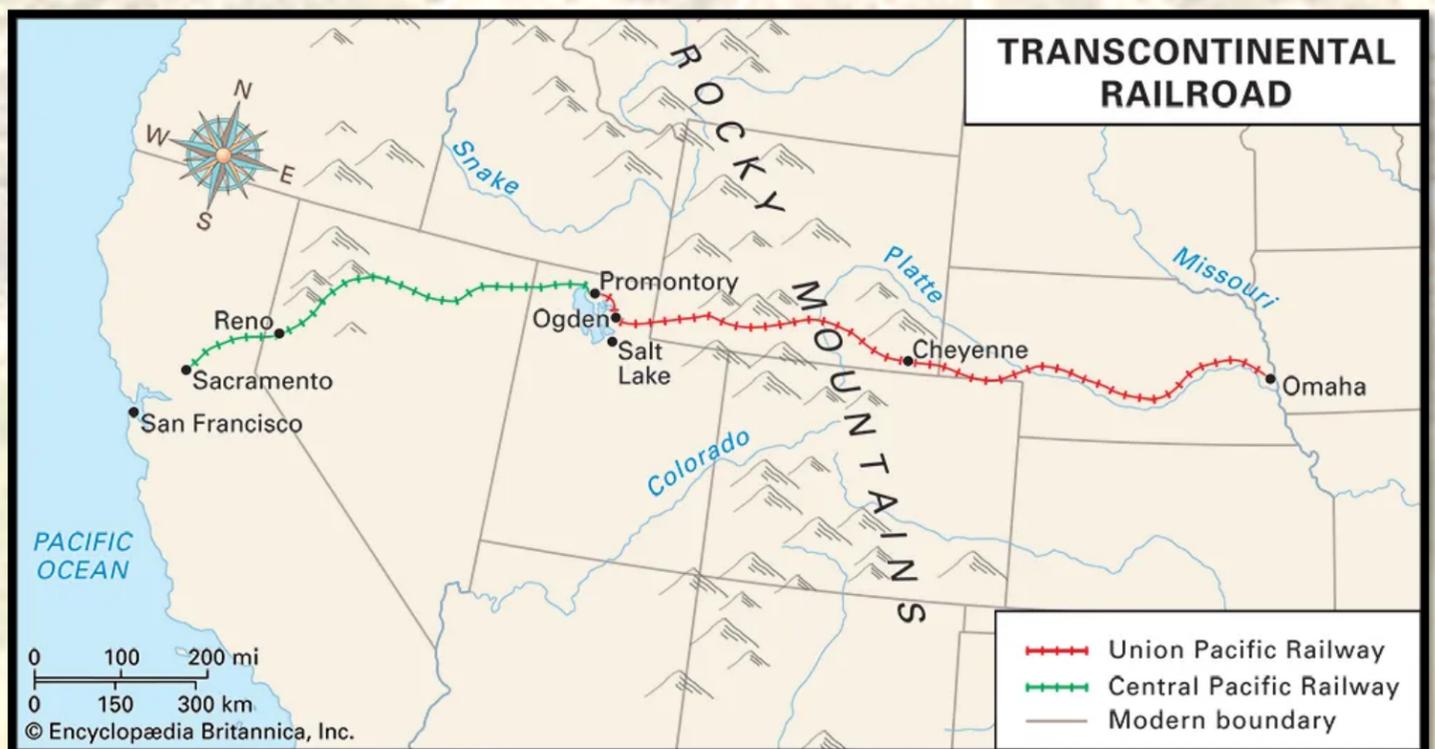


Railroad workers from the west-coast Central Pacific Railroad Company and the east-coast Union Pacific Railroad Company shake hands after the ceremony completing the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory Point, Utah.<sup>1</sup>



The original ceremonial golden spike, presently displayed at Stanford University in California.<sup>2</sup>

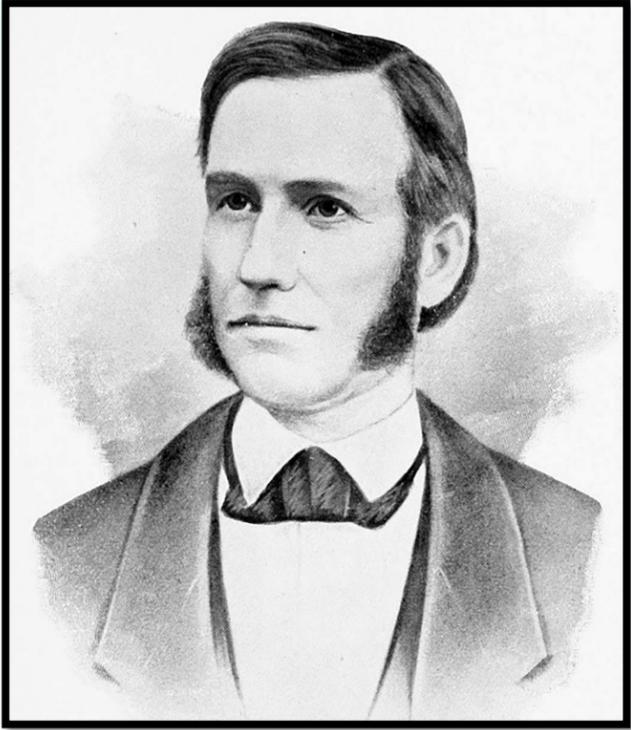
Pioneers used the Oregon Trail consistently right up until 1869. On May 10, 1869, a ceremonious golden spike was driven, marking the completion of a 6-year project by three railroad companies to connect the east and west coasts of the United States. The Transcontinental Railway made traveling west much cheaper, faster, and safer. The trail was used into the 1890s, but not nearly as often.



A map of the completed Transcontinental Railroad.<sup>3</sup>

(1) [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/East\\_west\\_shaking\\_hands\\_by\\_russell.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/East_west_shaking_hands_by_russell.jpg)  
 (2) <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ec/The-Golden-Spike-7Oct2012.jpg>  
 (3) <https://cdn.britannica.com/93/163993-004-DCD76800.jpg>

# *Missionaries to the West*



Marcus<sup>1</sup> and Narcissa<sup>2</sup> Whitman.



There are many missionaries to choose from who went west on the Oregon Trail. Probably the most famous of these missionaries is the Whitman family. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were some of the earliest pioneers to take covered wagons on the Oregon Trail, settling near what is now Walla Walla, Washington. In fact, Narcissa Whitman was one of the first two white women to travel the Oregon Trail! They were tragically massacred on November 29, 1847. Other missionaries along the Oregon Trail include Reverend Jason Lee, and Margaret Jewett Smith Bailey.

Entrance to the Whitman Mission in Walla Walla, Washington, now a National Historic Site.<sup>3</sup>



(1) <https://www.historylink.org/Content/Media/Photos/Large/marcus-whitman-1802-1847-illustration-ca-1895.jpg>

(2) <https://bloximages.chicago2.vip.townnews.com/fltimes.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/3/fe/3fe5283a-42e9-5be0-bfd4-4d65b6f7d71f/5c742a547d605.image.jpg>

(3) <https://www.nps.gov/whmi/planyourvisit/images/Entrance-sign-Directions-page.JPG>

# *The Oregon Trail Today*

Many sections of the Oregon Trail have been destroyed, covered, or built over. Those who want to recreate the pioneer's journey by traveling over the route they took would find the trail blocked by busy highways, cities, and even private property, but some sections can still be visited, and many are even close to Gillette, Wyoming! You could also visit well-known pioneer history sites such as Independence Rock in Wyoming while you're at it for a cool field trip! If you go for a visit, check in with the National Park Service or one of the several other agencies caring for a piece of the Oregon Trail and ask what you can do to help preserve this part of American history!

Parts of the Oregon Trail are now designated as National Historic Trail.<sup>1</sup>



(1) [https://www.nps.gov/oreg/getinvolved/images/CALI\\_MOPI\\_OREG\\_POEX\\_WY\\_Lander\\_SouthPassTrailRuts\\_20030514\\_nps-2\\_2.JPG?maxwidth=650&autorotate=false](https://www.nps.gov/oreg/getinvolved/images/CALI_MOPI_OREG_POEX_WY_Lander_SouthPassTrailRuts_20030514_nps-2_2.JPG?maxwidth=650&autorotate=false)

(2) <https://www.ocregister.com/wp-content/uploads/migration/ldl/ldl80g-b78733692z.120101217113705000gu0s3tgo.1.jpg?w=620>

## *Biblical Pioneering*

The Bible is full of stories of pioneering and long journeys. Abraham traveled to the Promised Land after God called him to leave his home to find a new land full of opportunities for God's people. Later, after Joseph was sold into slavery according to God's plan to save his family, his father Jacob and his family immigrating to Egypt to be with Joseph. Hundreds of years later, Moses was called by God to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land, and journey that ended up taking 40 years! Hundreds of years later, after the Israelites had been taken captive because they forgot God, they immigrated from Babylon back to their land in Israel after 70 years of captivity!

What other Biblical parallels about pioneering and long journeys can you make from what you know about the Oregon Trail?



An artist's depiction of Moses leading the people of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

(1) <https://news.kehila.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/0919-Top-Sinai-Israel.jpg>



Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Oregon Trail

## 1. Fill in the blanks:

The Oregon Trail was a \_\_\_\_\_-mile long trail that up to \_\_\_\_\_ hundred thousand pioneers used to travel west between the years \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The trail began in the city of \_\_\_\_\_, Missouri and ended in the city of \_\_\_\_\_, Oregon, crossing over the Continental Divide at \_\_\_\_\_, the highest point in the trail. Most pioneers stopped using the trail around the year \_\_\_\_\_, because it was easier and cheaper to travel on the \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Who is known as the Father of the Oregon Trail? \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Trace the Oregon Trail on the map:

## 4. Draw the following cities and landforms on the map:

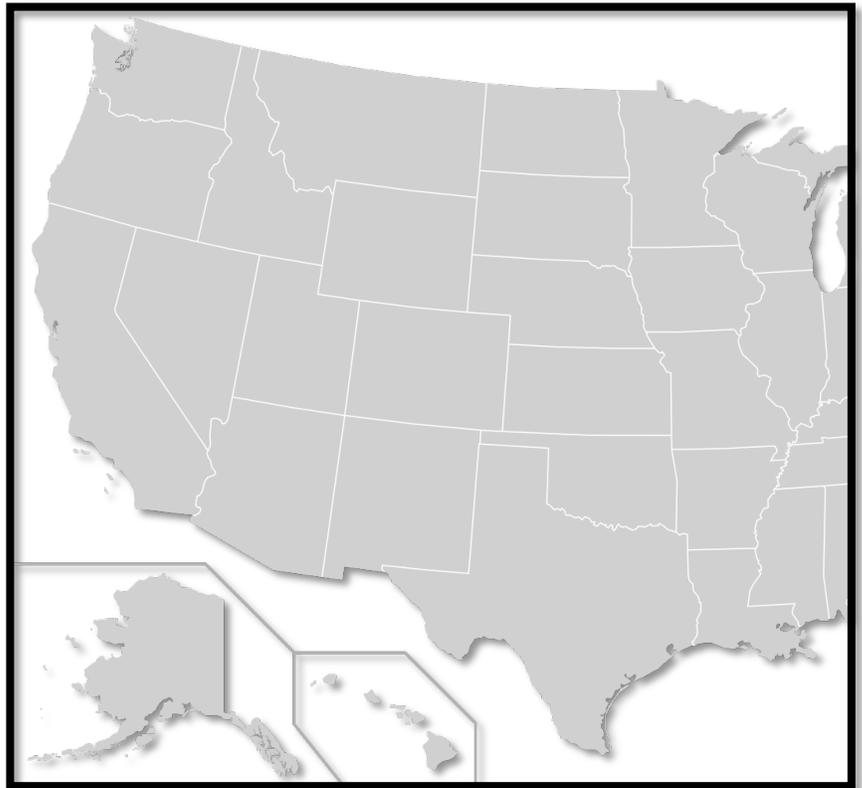
- Independence, Missouri
- Oregon City, Oregon
- Independence Rock
- South Pass
- Chimney Rock

## 5. True or false:

The wagon most commonly used by pioneers on the Oregon Trail was the Conestoga Wagon.

## 6. True or False:

10% of the pioneers who started the journey on the Oregon Trail died before they reached Oregon.



## 7. Draw or write a spiritual lesson you learned while earning this honor:

