

The 1846 Applegate Trail—Southern Route to Oregon

The perilous last leg of the Oregon Trail down the Columbia River rapids took lives, including the sons of Jesse and Lindsay Applegate in 1843. The Applegate brothers along with others vowed to look for an all-land route into Oregon from Idaho for future settlers.

In 1846 Jesse and Lindsay Applegate and 13 others from near Dallas, Oregon, headed south following old trapper trails into a remote region of Oregon Country. An Umpqua Indian showed them a foot trail that crossed the Calapooya Mountains, then on to Umpqua Valley, Canyon Creek, and the Rogue Valley.

They next turned east and went over the Cascade Mountains to the Klamath Basin. The party devised pathways through canyons and mountain passes, connecting the trail south from the Willamette Valley with the existing California Trail to Fort Hall, Idaho.

In August 1846, the first emigrants to trek the new southern road left Fort Hall. With Levi Scott acting as guide, Jesse Applegate and others traveled ahead to mark the route. The trailblazers opened a wagon road through nearly 500 miles of wilderness, arriving in the upper Willamette Valley in November.

The Applegate Trail, part of the California National Historic Trail, contributed significantly to settlement of southern Oregon and remains a tribute to the 15 hardy explorers and brave settlers who traversed it in 1846.

"Father and Uncle Jesse, seeing their children drowning, were seized with frenzy, and dropping their oars, sprang from their seats and were about to make a desperate attempt to swim to them. But Mother and Aunt Cynthia cried out, 'Men, don't quit your oars! If you do, we'll all be lost!'"
-Lindsay Applegate's son Jesse

"Our hearts are broken. As soon as our families are settled and time can be spared we must look for another way that avoids the river." -Lindsay Applegate

