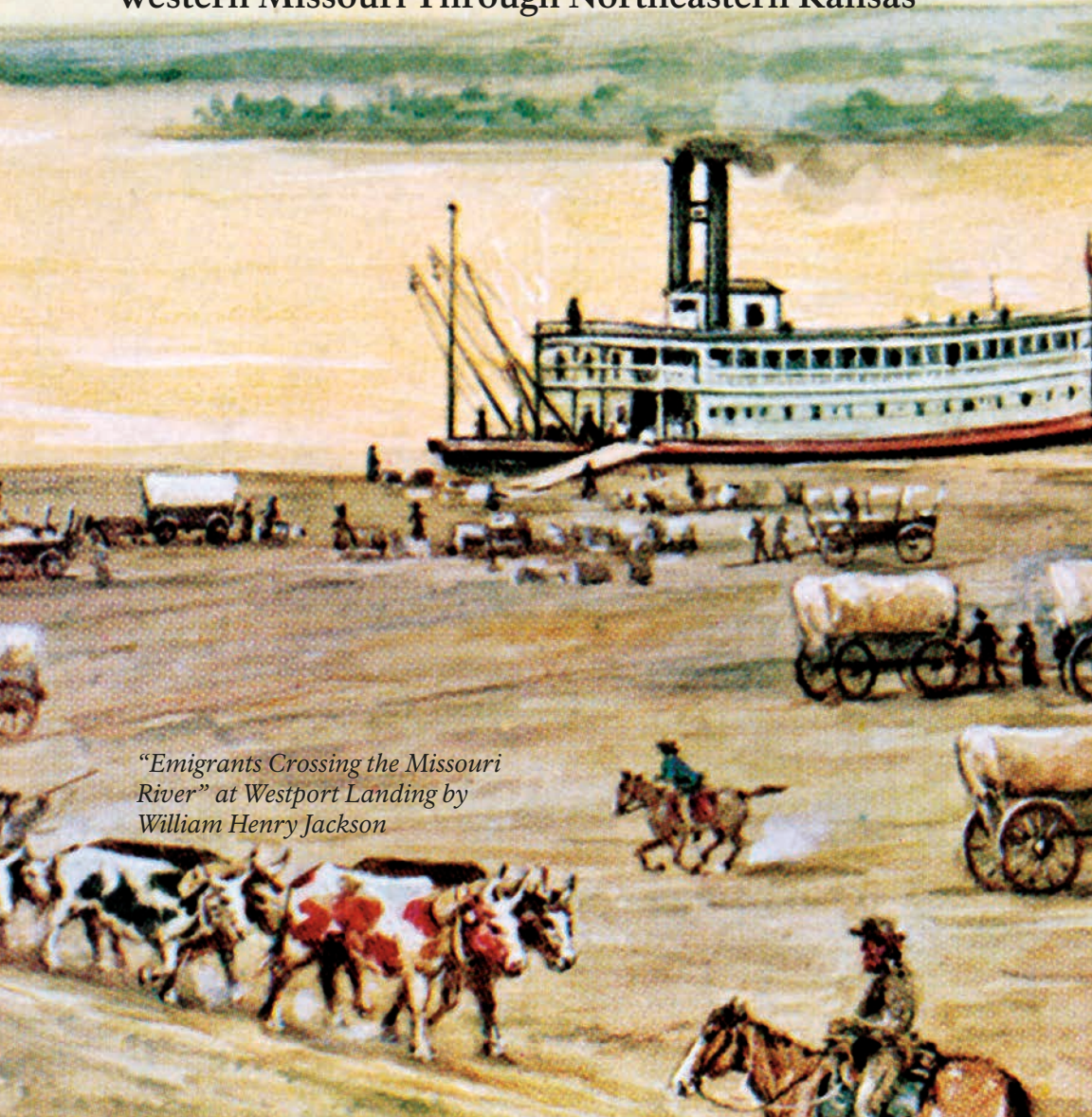




National Historic Trails

Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide

Western Missouri Through Northeastern Kansas



*"Emigrants Crossing the Missouri
River" at Westport Landing by
William Henry Jackson*



"Junction of Oregon Trail with Overland Trail", near Hanover, Kansas.

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS AUTO TOUR ROUTE INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

Western Missouri Through Northeastern Kansas

Prepared by

National Park Service
National Trails Intermountain Region
324 South State Street, Suite 200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

Telephone: 801-741-1012

*www.nps.gov/cali
www.nps.gov/oreg
www.nps.gov/poex
www.nps.gov/mopi*

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INTRODUCTION



Roadside Auto Tour Route signs mark the general routes of the Oregon, California, and Pony Express national historic trails through western Missouri and northeast Kansas. Actual wagon wheel ruts, emigrant camps, Pony Express stations, and other places of interest can be visited

at the sites listed in this guide. Driving directions to the sites are provided from major highways and nearby towns. To follow overland trail routes between sites, consult the overview map at the end of this publication. Generally, local brochures and guides are also available. Entrance and parking fees may be charged at some locations, and hours may vary at the discretion of site administrators. Large groups are encouraged to make prior arrangements for tours, where tours are available. Please respect private property by staying in public areas, and help protect our national heritage by leaving trail resources undisturbed.

A large, dark, irregularly shaped rock stands in a grassy field. The rock has white text carved into it. The text reads 'OLD OREGON TRAIL' in large, capital letters, and '1843-57' in smaller, capital letters below it. The rock is surrounded by smaller rocks and patches of grass.

*We cross the prairie as [in days] of
old The pilgrims crossed the sea*
— John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-
1892), *From The Kansas Emigrants*

ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI

The story of the American West is not simply a tale of pioneer courage and vision — of prairie schooners swaying westward to the strains of heroic music. Rather, it is a complex weave of plots and subplots, of romance and religion, of politics and money, and of personal and national tragedy.

Traces of the people, livestock, and wooden wheels that were part of those stories can still be found on the landscape. There are traces, too, of native peoples whose lives were changed by emigration. This guide takes you to those historic places — to wheel ruts cut into soft stream banks and over rolling prairie, to lonely trailside graves, to American Indian missions, Pony Express stations, and more.

Pioneers gathered to prepare for their journey at Independence and St. Joseph, Missouri. From there, they would embark across the wide and muddy Missouri River into a strange, windswept land of unfamiliar wonders —and dangers.



Ox yoke — used on teams of oxen pulling emigrant wagons— forced the team to pull together equally. — Circa 1840s

.... I, like every other pioneer, love to live over again, in memory those romantic months, and revisit, in fancy, the scenes of the journey.
— Catherine Haun, California emigration of 1849

ON THIER OWN

Not fit for farming, too windswept and exposed to attract homesteaders, the “Great American Desert” that unrolled west of the Missouri River was seen as landscape to be crossed on the way to a better place. That crossing, travelers of the mid-19th century knew, would be exhausting and exhilarating, and tedious and terrifying. Emigrants’ excitement and anxiety mounted as they prepared to launch their ox-drawn prairie schooners from St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri, bustling river ports at the frontier’s edge. To them, the great, gray ribbon of the Missouri was the western shore of civilized society. Once their wagons rolled off the ferry onto the Kansas side, emigrants embarked into unfamiliar country — trespassers on Indian lands, and beyond the protection of the government. On the trail there were no markets, no hospitals, no laws, and no second chances.

From there until they reached trail’s end some 2,000 miles later, the pioneer emigrants were on their own.

Here we were, without law, without order, and without restraint; in a state of nature, amid the confused, revolving fragments of elementary society! Some were sad, while others were merry; and while the brave doubted, the timid trembled!
— Lansford W. Hastings, Oregon emigration of 1842, *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California*

In the winter of 18 and 46 our neighbor got hold of Fremont’s History of California and . . . brought the book to my husband to read, & he was carried away with the idea [of emigrating] too. I said O let us not go! — Mary Jones, California emigration of 1846

DANGER, DEATH, AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Most emigrants lived in fear of Indian attack. Rumors of —even hoaxes about— traiside massacres drifted back to Eastern newspapers, and many travelers packed a virtual arsenal to protect themselves on the road. For the most part, though, their fears were unfounded. Historians conclude that more Indian people than emigrants were killed in clashes along the Oregon and California trails.

A more serious threat to those gathering at the congested jumping-off places along the Missouri River was a mysterious killer that could be neither seen nor fought: cholera. In the mid-19th century, no one realized that this virulent and painful intestinal infection was caused by bacteria. Spread unknowingly from waterhole to waterhole by sick travelers, the disease dogged emigrants from the Missouri trailheads to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, some 600 miles down the road. Many died before even crossing the river into Kansas — active and well at breakfast, and in the grave by noon.

There were many more worries, too. Accidents, emigrants knew, were common on the way West. Heavy wagons crushed children who slipped beneath their iron-clad wheels; men were killed in gun accidents, often by their own hand; and women died from complications of pregnancy while on the trail. People and irreplaceable livestock were swept away during treacherous river crossings, and some perished in terrifying summer thunderstorms that stabbed the plains with lightning. And of course, the sufferings of the Donner Party, trapped by early



"Emigrants Crossing the Plains", Library of Congress.

*The heart has a thousand misgivings,
and the mind is tortured with anxiety,
and often as I passed the fresh made
graves I have glanced at the side
boards of the wagons, not knowing
how soon it would serve as a coffin for
some one of us. — Lucy R. Cooke,
California emigration of 1852*

snowfall in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1846, must have weighed heavily on the minds of many travelers who followed their wheel-ruts toward the Pacific.

To avoid the fate of the Donner Party, emigrants outfitted themselves carefully before leaving Missouri. They preferred lightweight farm wagons over heavy Conestogas, and most hitched up sturdy oxen to take them safely across countless river fords and rugged mountains. They chose foods that would keep — flour, bacon, rice, beans, sugar, coffee— and just enough of those to see them through four to six months of travel. They packed the tools and hardware they would need to replace fractured wagon axles, shoe oxen, dig out of mud holes, cook meals, and build shelter. Prudent travelers left behind most of their personal belongings, including books, furnishings, heirloom china, and cherished mementos, to spare their draft animals the extra weight. The success of the trip depended on it. If the cattle started flagging, the contents of the wagon would be tossed out along the road: sometimes, the wagon itself might be cut down to make a simple cart. The loss of oxen could force travelers to turn back for Missouri on foot. Some emigrants, in fact, turned back by choice, even after reaching Oregon or California. Their “Promised Land,” it seems, was less than they had dreamed.

With all the uncertainties, why did people set out at all? Adventure, wanderlust, gold fever, hunger for land, escape from debt or prejudice or legal problems, a fresh start under a new name — all were compelling motivations. And, in fact, the emigrant death rate on the trail was no worse than that of eastern cities, where disease and poverty ran rampant. Hope wrestled with fear as Americans started out across the Kansas prairies — and hope generally won out.

*Out in Oregon I can get me a square
mile of land . . . Dad burn me, I
am done with this country, Winters
it's frost and snow to freeze a body;
summers the overflow from Old
Muddy drowns half my acres; taxes
take the yield of them that's left. What
say, Maw, it's God's country. — Peter
Burnett, Oregon emigration of
1843*

*In the first place they have no bees
there [in Oregon]; and in the second
place, they can't raise corn, and whar
they can't raise corn they can't raise
hogs, and whar they can't raise hogs
they can't have bacon, and I'm going
back to old Missouri what I can have
corn bread, bacon and honey! —
“Grant,” a back-traveler on the
Oregon Trail, to Ralph C. Greer,
Oregon emigration of 1847*

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Native Americans harbored hopes and fears, too, as they watched the swelling tide of foreign humanity and hungry livestock surge into their territory. For centuries before Western emigrant trails — or even the United States — were established, native societies had been disrupted by the introduction of European diseases, horses, and weaponry. Eastern tribes displaced by European settlers pressed westward, pushing other tribes out of their native farmlands and hunting grounds, and onto the plains. By the 1820s, the U.S. government began forcibly removing Indian people from their homes to make room for settlers, eventually relocating over 10,000 people from more than 20 East Coast and Ohio Valley tribes to “Indian Territory” west of the Missouri River. When emigrant wagons rolled westward out of St. Joseph and Independence between 1841 and 1869, they passed the reservations of Eastern tribes such as the Shawnees, Delawares, Sauks and Foxes, Kickapoos, Wyandots, and Potawatomis. Those reservations, in turn, were carved out of the original homelands of the Kanza (also called Kaw) and Osage peoples.

As trains of wagons moved over their land and camped by their springs, the Indian residents of eastern Kansas often offered assistance and shared their resources. They returned lost livestock, sold fresh vegetables, carried mail, and pulled wagons from the mud and ferried them across streams. Tragically, the travelers sometimes left behind more than wagon ruts and trade goods as they continued on their way: cholera, smallpox, measles, and other infectious diseases spread from the emigrant camps into Indian communities, taking many more lives.

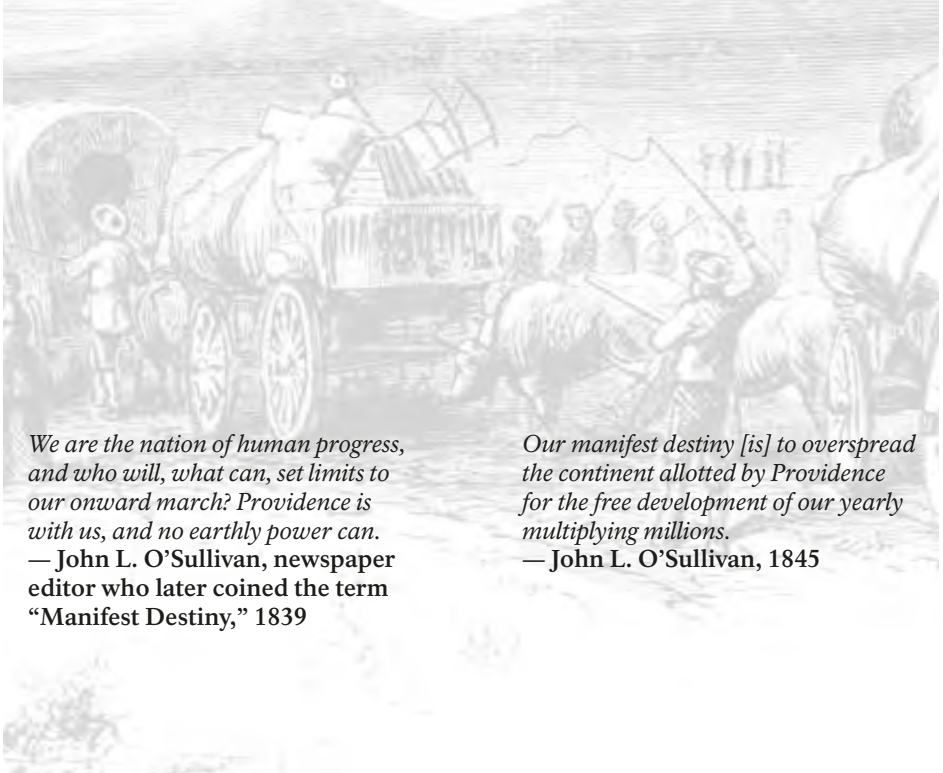
The Indians have all left the road at every settlement contiguous to the roadside, on account of the cholera. I noticed at Bull creek, Kaw river and Willow springs . . . that they had all run off, and left their houses and gardens, with vegetables growing, to the mercy of travelers. — “Veni,” correspondent to New York Daily Tribune Supplement, 1849

White men tell us we will be driven out . . . but we like this place and want to stay. — Is-ta-la-she, Kanza Chief, 1863

. . . You whites treat us Kan-zey like a flock of turkeys. You chase us to one stream, then you chase us to another stream, soon you will chase us over the mountains and into the ocean. — Al-le-ga-wa-ho, Kanza Chief, 1872

POLITICS AND MANIFEST DESTINY

Emigration pressed on, in part because of the dreams and desires of individual pioneers, and in part because of continental politics. The United States was as yet a young nation, and ambitious. Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803 had roughly doubled the size of his country, adding 800,000 square miles of territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Great Britain, however, continued to control the continent west of the Rockies; and Mexico ruled California, which then included most of the Southwest. Americans wanted these lands for the United States. Many claimed that such was God's plan — the Manifest Destiny of the nation. The flow of Americans across international boundaries into California and Oregon in the 1840s set that plan in motion. War and the threat of war then made it a reality: Britain gave up Oregon in 1846 and Mexico was forced to cede California to the United States in 1848. Discovery of gold in California the winter of 1848 triggered a frantic new rush to the West in the following spring.



We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can.
— John L. O'Sullivan, newspaper editor who later coined the term "Manifest Destiny," 1839

Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.
— John L. O'Sullivan, 1845

IN A RECORD TEN DAYS' TIME

As settlement continued, a distinctive frontier culture began to evolve and differences in politics, ideals, and ways of life wedged a crack between East and West. The crack was widened by slow communications in the days before telephones and telegraphs. Legal instruments, financial documents, news dispatches, and love letters alike took an agonizing 24 days to go from Tipton, Missouri, to San Francisco by the main stagecoach line.

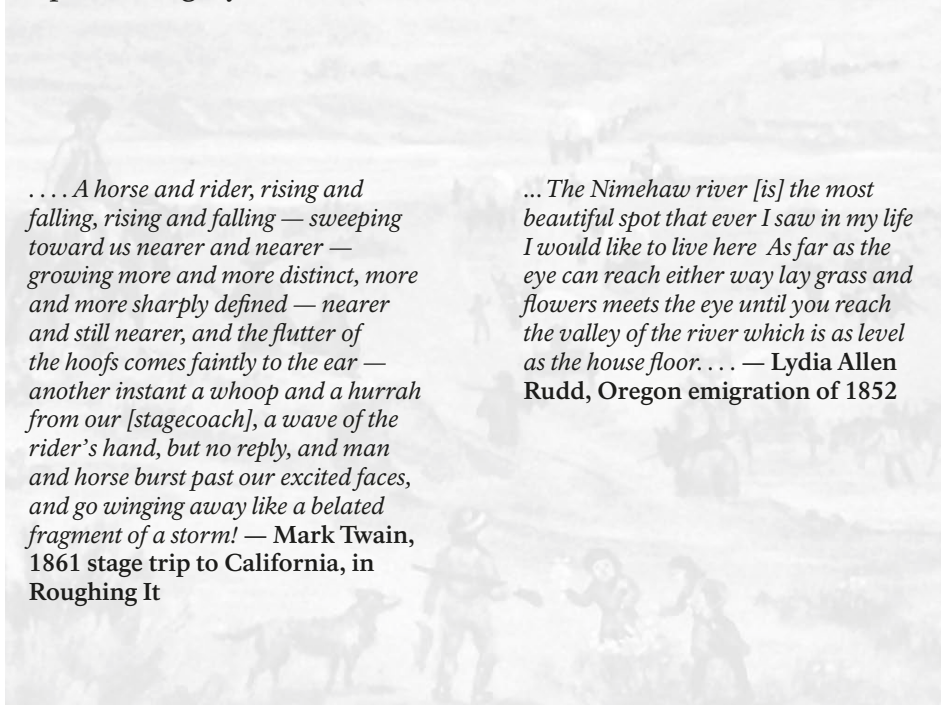
William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Bradford Waddell, already in the freighting business, proposed a solution: a fleet of over 500 fast horses and 80 young riders to run the mail between California and Missouri. The first two riders, starting toward each other from opposite sides of the country, galloped out of St. Joseph and San Francisco on April 3, 1860. Each horseman would change to a fresh horse at relay stations about 22½ miles apart and finally pass his mailbag (called a mochila) to the next rider some 70 miles down the road — after nearly 11 hours in the saddle. In that way, westbound mail would be relayed from St. Joseph, across the Great Plains, over the Rocky Mountains at South Pass, through the Great Basin, and over the Sierra Nevada to Sacramento and finally San Francisco. In their first month of operation the Pony Express delivered the mail in about 10 days but soon settled down to an average of 12½ days during the non-winter months of 1860–61. Mail runs were made weekly, increasing to twice weekly on June 30, 1860.

The scheme worked, setting a new standard for transportation and communication in the development of the frontier. It connected East to West, and carried some of the century's most urgent news dispatches across the continent. Even so, the Pony Express shut down after 19½ months of operation. Money problems, worsened by Indian attacks on Pony Express stations and riders, plagued the enterprise — and then the Civil War erupted. Completion of the transcontinental telegraph in October 1861 struck the final blow, making the pony relay obsolete. The last Pony Express delivery arrived in San Francisco on November 20, 1861.

SEA OF GRASS, WAVES OF GRAIN

During the covered wagon era, the West Coast had filled with settlers, bringing statehood to California in 1850 and to Oregon nine years later. Settlement of Kansas lagged behind that of the coastal states, but land-hungry pioneers quickly recognized that its windswept grasslands were much more than barren “desert.” The rich soils that had supported Indian gardens for centuries could be as easily carpeted with domesticated grasses —wheat, oats, barley, corn — as with wild bluestem and buffalo grass.

Settlers began leaving the trails to homestead on the prairie, often illegally “squatting” on Indian reserves. Settlement surged in 1854 as pro- and anti-slavery groups competed to sway the newly established Kansas Territory to their own side of the slavery debate. Continuing improvements in farming tools and practices drew more emigrants to the prairie through the years. By the early 1870s, many Indian tribes — including the Kanza, for whom the state is named — had been forced out of Kansas and relocated in Oklahoma. Their stories, too, have shaped the legacy of the overland trails.

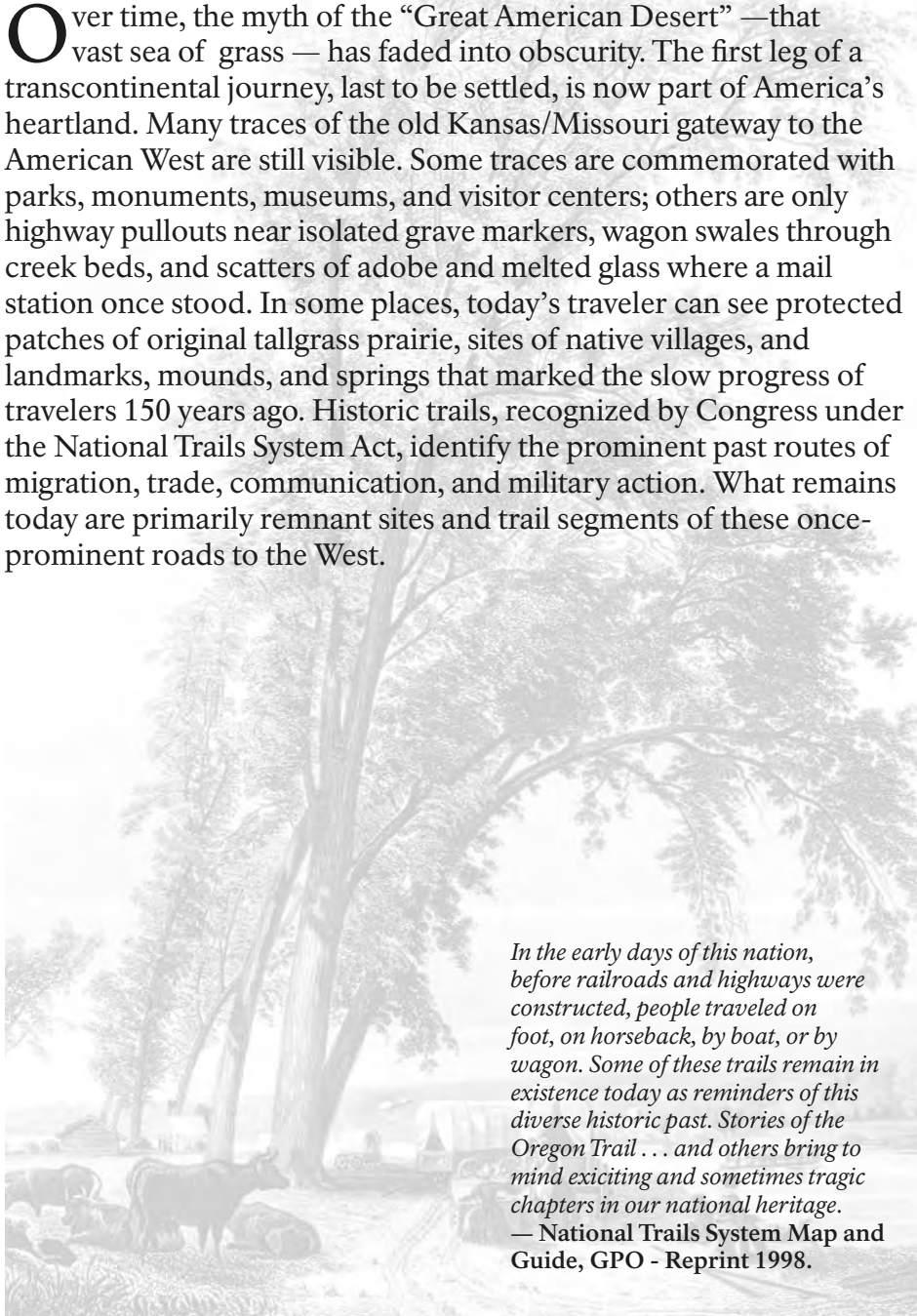


*... A horse and rider, rising and falling, rising and falling — sweeping toward us nearer and nearer — growing more and more distinct, more and more sharply defined — nearer and still nearer, and the flutter of the hoofs comes faintly to the ear — another instant a whoop and a hurrah from our [stagecoach], a wave of the rider's hand, but no reply, and man and horse burst past our excited faces, and go winging away like a belated fragment of a storm! — Mark Twain, 1861 stage trip to California, in *Roughing It**

... The Nimehaw river [is] the most beautiful spot that ever I saw in my life I would like to live here As far as the eye can reach either way lay grass and flowers meets the eye until you reach the valley of the river which is as level as the house floor. . . . — Lydia Allen Rudd, Oregon emigration of 1852

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS PROGRAM

Over time, the myth of the “Great American Desert” —that vast sea of grass — has faded into obscurity. The first leg of a transcontinental journey, last to be settled, is now part of America’s heartland. Many traces of the old Kansas/Missouri gateway to the American West are still visible. Some traces are commemorated with parks, monuments, museums, and visitor centers; others are only highway pullouts near isolated grave markers, wagon swales through creek beds, and scatters of adobe and melted glass where a mail station once stood. In some places, today’s traveler can see protected patches of original tallgrass prairie, sites of native villages, and landmarks, mounds, and springs that marked the slow progress of travelers 150 years ago. Historic trails, recognized by Congress under the National Trails System Act, identify the prominent past routes of migration, trade, communication, and military action. What remains today are primarily remnant sites and trail segments of these once-prominent roads to the West.



In the early days of this nation, before railroads and highways were constructed, people traveled on foot, on horseback, by boat, or by wagon. Some of these trails remain in existence today as reminders of this diverse historic past. Stories of the Oregon Trail . . . and others bring to mind exciting and sometimes tragic chapters in our national heritage.

— National Trails System Map and Guide, GPO - Reprint 1998.

SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Independence, Missouri, To Hanover, Kansas

1. National Frontier Trails Museum (318 West Pacific, Independence, Missouri) offers a trails museum, theater, research library, and bookstore (with detailed trail guides available for purchase). Open Monday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; Sunday 12:30–4:30 p.m. Modest admission charged.



The National Frontier Trails Center.

Directions: From I-70 in

Independence, take Exit 12 to Noland Road northbound and drive approximately 3 miles. Turn west onto East Walnut Street and continue 5 blocks to Osage Street. Turn south on South Osage Street to West Pacific Avenue; then turn west. Center is on north side of street.

2. Upper Independence Landing (East Kentucky Road and North River Boulevard, Independence, Missouri) was the Missouri River landing closest to Independence for emigrants arriving at the jumping-off point via steamboat. Public access to an overlook above the river is provided by Lafarge Cement Company, which owns the site.



Upper Missouri River Landing - Lafarge Cement company.

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, Missouri, take I-435 north toward Des Moines. Take Exit 59 east onto U.S.-24, Winner Road. After approximately 3 miles, at the traffic light on the west end of the Turman Library turn north onto North River Boulevard, which follows the old trail route from the landing. In approximately 1.5 miles, the road splits at Kentucky Road; keep to left on River Boulevard. At next split, where the Wayne City

marker is located, continue on the main road north toward the cement plant. Continue about a block to the gravel turnaround. Overlook is on the embankment.

3. Independence Courthouse Square (Lexington

Avenue and Liberty Street, Independence, Missouri) is the official start of the Oregon Trail, where wagons were outfitted through much of the emigration era. Open year-round; business hours vary.

Directions: From I-70 in Independence, take Exit 12 to Noland Road northbound and drive approximately 3 miles. Turn west onto East Walnut Street; then north onto Liberty and continue 2 blocks to Lexington Street. Several emigration-era buildings are located 1 block north, along Maple Street.



Courthouse at Independence Square.

4. Santa Fe Trail City Park (2900 South Santa Fe Road, Independence, Missouri) is a 45-acre park preserving one-quarter mile of ruts and swales.

Directions: From I-70 in Independence, take Exit 11 to U.S.-40 eastbound. Continue 0.5 mile and bear east onto East 43rd Street South, then immediately turn north onto South Chrysler Avenue. Drive 1.6 miles and turn east onto West 31st Street South. Turn north onto South Santa Fe Road, continue for 0.33 mile, and turn east into the park. Continue for 0.2 mile; the road will curve to the south. Before completing the curve, watch for a grove of trees in a depression to the right. A remnant of original trail goes through the grove.



Emigrant wagon wheel ruts.

5. Rice-Tremonti Home

(8801 East 66th Street, Raytown, Missouri) is an 1844 farmhouse with an associated 1830s-era slave cabin. It is mentioned by many Oregon and California-bound diarists as a popular campsite and a place where they could purchase food. The property owner offers public access, interpretation, tours, and events. Open May–September, Saturday and Sunday only and by appointment. Call 816-333-3586 or go to www.rice.tremonti.com.



The Rice-Tremonti home. emigrants.

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, Missouri, take ramp to I-435 southbound toward Wichita. Continue 3.2 miles to Exit 66 and take ramp onto MO-350 (Blue Parkway) eastbound toward Lee's Summit. Continue 1.7 miles and turn right onto ramp toward Blue Ridge Boulevard; drive 0.1 mile and turn north onto Blue Ridge Boulevard, which follows the original Oregon Trail route from Independence Square. Continue for 0.3 mile to Rice-Tremonti Home.

6. Eighty-Fifth & Manchester Ruts

(7558 East 85th Street, Kansas City, Missouri) are the grassed-over evidence of three trails, which is rare in an urban setting.



85th Street ruts.

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita. Continue 6.8 miles and take Exit 69 to 87th Street; turn east on 87th. Drive 1 mile; turn north onto Oldham Road. Drive 0.3 mile and turn east onto East 85th. Drive 0.2 mile to Manchester Avenue. The Oregon, California, and Santa Fe Trails cut through a corner of 85th and Manchester.

7. Schumacher Park (6601 East 93rd Street, Kansas City, Missouri) offers interpretive wayside exhibits near an undefined trail route planted in native prairie grasses and wildflowers. Although the park has no evidence of ruts or swales, it does provide a good example of how the Kansas prairie appeared to 19th century emigrants.



Schumacher Park.

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita. Drive 6.8 miles; at Exit 69, turn east on East 87th Street. Drive 0.3 mile and turn south onto Hillcrest Road. Drive 0.8 mile and turn east onto East 93rd. Continue for 0.5 mile to the park.

8. Hart Grove/Marion Park (Interchange of I-435, I-470, and U.S.-71, Kansas City, Missouri) was used as a campground by travelers on the Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trails. Exhibits include interpretive panels and stone markers delineating the trail corridor along Hart Grove Creek.



Interpretive exhibits along Hart Grove Creek.

Directions: From I-435, exit and go west on Bannister Road. (A mall is just east of this intersection) At the second light, turn south on Marion Park, then turn west on Hickman Mills; continue 1 block to the park.

9. Minor Park/Blue River Crossing (Red Bridge Road, Kansas City, Missouri) is a 27-acre city park that preserves the most dramatic swales at this end of the trail. The site was a principal river crossing, mentioned in many diaries through the 1840s and 1850s. (An original wagon ford was located 300 yards north of the bridge.)

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 South for 11.4 miles. Take Exit 74, and turn south onto Holmes Road, continuing to intersection with Red Bridge Road. Turn east on Red Bridge Road. Drive approximately 1 mile and turn right at the second Minor Park entrance; park in the south-facing lot.

Several swales and a historic marker are nearby.



Minor Park swales.

10. New Santa Fe (State Line Road and Old Santa Fe Trail, Kansas City, Missouri) is an 1840s village site where thirsty emigrants could purchase their last whiskey before entering Indian Territory and wagons could be repaired at the blacksmith shop. A cemetery with faint trail swales, privately owned by the New Santa Fe Cemetery Association, is all that remains of the village.



New Santa Fe Cemetery.

Directions: From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita and continue 11.4 miles to Exit 74. Exit the highway and turn south onto Holmes Road. Drive for 2.1 miles to intersection with Old Santa Fe Trail Road. Turn west. Follow the road as it curves west for 1.2 miles. The cemetery site with historic markers is 0.1 mile east of State Line Road.

11. Westport Landing (terminus, North Main, Kansas City, Missouri) is where many eastern emigrants ended the first leg of their journey via riverboat and launched preparations for their long overland haul. Site provides an overview of the Missouri River and the original landing, interpretive signs, and a walking/biking trail.

Directions: From I-70 westbound in Kansas City, Missouri, take Exit 2D toward Main-Delaware/Wyandotte Street. Road will merge onto Independence Avenue; move to right lane and turn north onto Delaware Street. Turn east on Third Street, then north on Main Street and drive 1 block to pedestrian bridge.



Westport Landing and Riverfront Park.

12. Pioneer Park (traffic island at Westport Road and Broadway, Westport, Missouri) is an interpretive site that includes 18' terrazzo map of trails, exhibit signs, and sculpture.

Directions: From Kansas City, Missouri, take I-35 southbound toward Wichita for 1.4 miles. Take the Southwest Trafficway exit (Number 1-A, on the left) merge onto the trafficway, and drive approximately 1.5 miles. Turn east onto 39th Street, continue a short distance and then turn south onto Broadway approximately 3–4 blocks to Westport Road. Park is at north end of traffic island.

13. Shawnee Methodist Mission (Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site, 3403 West 53rd, Fairway, Kansas) is a 12-acre state park and National Historic Landmark that preserves a Methodist mission, established in 1839 for the instruction of Shawnee, Delaware, and other Indian children. Also a popular overland trail campground. Closed Mondays. Call 913-262-0867 for hours. Modest admission charged.



1954 painting of Shawnee Methodist Mission by Jim Hamil.

Directions: From I-35 in Kansas City, Kansas, take Exit 233 to Mission Road/Southwest Boulevard. Turn south onto Mission

Road and continue for 2 miles; turn west onto 53rd Street.
Continue 0.2 mile to Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site.

14. Prairie Village Ruts (Prairie View Park, 7727 Delmar, Prairie Village, Kansas) is a four-acre city park with shallow wagon swales and interpretive signs.

Directions: From I-35 in Kansas City, Kansas, take the 232BC exit onto 18th Street Expressway southbound and drive approximately 4 miles. The road name changes to West Roe Boulevard and then to Roe Avenue. Turn east onto West 75th Street and continue 0.2 mile, and then south onto Delmar Street for 0.3 mile to Prairie View Park. Turn left into the park. Ruts are southeast of the covered pavillion.

15. Moses Grinter House and Ferry (1420 South 78th Street, Kansas City, Kansas) was the site of an 1831 ferry established by Moses Grinter to carry emigrant wagons over the Kansas River. The Grinter Place State Historic Site is open with limited hours. Call 913-299-0373 for further information and tour information. Modest admission charged.



Historic Moses Grinter House.

Directions: From Kansas City, Kansas, head southbound on I-435. At Exit 9, take the ramp to KS-32/Kansas City/Bonner Springs. Turn east onto KS-32 (Kaw Drive). Continue 1.9 miles and turn north onto South 78th Street. Drive 0.1 mile to Grinter Place (on the west side).

16. Flat Rock Creek Crossing/Park (103rd Street and Hauser, Lenexa, Kansas) commemorates an emigrant campground used by Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trail travelers. Site includes interpretive signs and original creek crossing.

Directions: From Kansas City, KS, take I-35 southbound approximately 8 miles toward Lenexa, Kansas. Take the 95th

Street Exit (Number 224) and turn west onto West 95th Street. Drive approximately 0.5 mile and turn south onto Pflumm Road. Continue for 1 mile and turn east onto West 103rd Street for a short distance to Hauser Street.

17. Lone Elm Campground (167th and Lone Elm, Olathe, Kansas) is where many Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trail travelers spent their first night west of the Missouri. Now, a 160-acre city park encompasses the wagon trail corridor and campground.



Lone Elm Campground.

Directions: From Kansas City, Kansas, drive I-35 southbound to exit 215. Take US-169 South/KS-7 south toward Paola, and continue for 2.16 miles. Turn west onto 167th Street (portions unpaved) and continue approximately 1 mile to park.

18. Parting of the Trails — Gardner Jct. (U.S. 56 and 183rd Street, Gardner, Kansas) is where the Oregon and Santa Fe trails split. The approximate location of the site is indicated by a historical marker, though no physical traces of the junction remain. A roadside park on U.S.-56 provides interpretive information.



Interpretive exhibits at Gardner Junction.

Directions: From I-35 in Olathe, drive south and take Exit 210 to U.S.-56 and Gardner. Turn west onto U.S.-56 and continue through Gardner. The roadside park is near the junction of U.S.-56 and 183rd Street, on the west side of the highway.

19. Potawatomi Baptist Mission (Kansas History Center, 6425 Southwest 6th Avenue, Topeka, Kansas) operated from 1848 to 1861, as a boarding school for children of the Potawatomi Indians,

an eastern tribe that was relocated to Kansas in the 1830s. Site is near a branch of the Oregon-California Trail. Includes original building, museum exhibits, and mission-period classroom. (Kansas Museum of History also on site — see following entry.) Closed Mondays. Call 785-272-8681 for hours. Modest admission charged.



Former Potawatomi Baptist Mission building pictured on the right.

Directions: From I-70 westbound in Topeka, take Exit 356 and turn north onto Wannamaker. Drive 0.1 mile and turn west onto Southwest 6th Avenue. Follow signs to Kansas History Center and the mission.

20. Kansas Museum of History (Kansas History Center, 6425 Southwest 6th Avenue, Topeka, Kansas) offers exhibits on trails, forts, and American Indian history. (Potawatomi Mission also on site — see previous entry.) Open Tuesday–Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Modest admission charged.



Kansas Museum of History.

Directions: From I-70 westbound in Topeka, take Exit 356 and turn north onto Wannamaker. Drive 0.1 mile and turn west onto Southwest 6th Avenue. Follow signs to Kansas History Center.

21. Union Town/Herbert Reinhard Green Memorial Wildlife Park (Gilkerson Street, Willard, Kansas) was an Oregon Trail village from 1848–1859. More Oregon and California trail emigrants ferried the Kansas River to avoid crowded conditions near Topeka’s ferry. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks administers the 83-acre park, which preserves an Oregon Trail trace, pioneer graves, and

restored bluestem prairie and native woodlands. Open daily, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Directions: From Topeka, take I-70 west to Exit 346. Turn north on Carlson Road for 1.5 miles north to Willard. Turn east on 2nd Street and drive 0.3 mile east to Gilkerson Road. Turn south on Gilkerson and continue 0.8 mile (past cemetery). Green Wildlife Area is on the west side of the road.



Near emigrant ferry across Kansas River.

22. St. Mary's Mission and Oregon Trail Nature Park (U.S.-24, St. Marys, Kansas) was established in 1848 by Jesuits as a Catholic mission to the Potawatomi Indians, who had been re-settled in Kansas. The mission became an important stopping point for emigrants. Today, the site is private property owned by St. Mary's Academy and College, but across the highway from the campus entrance is a public rest stop with Oregon Trail interpretive exhibits. Also nearby is the Oregon Trail Nature Park, located along U.S.-24 between St. Marys and Belvue, Kansas. The park, owned by Westar Energy, Inc., is on the Oregon Trail route, and offers nature trails and a view of the winding road that overlies the old Oregon Trail. The nature park is open to the public May 1–September 30, 7 a.m.–9 p.m.; and October 1–April 30, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.



St. Mary's Academy and College, formerly St. Mary's Mission.

Directions: From I-70 in Topeka, take Exit 358A to U.S.-75 northbound. Drive 2 miles, then turn west on U.S.-24. Continue through Silver Lake and Rossville. Along this stretch of road, the highway follows the original Oregon Trail, which stayed north of the Kansas River. Continue to St. Marys. The mission complex/

campus is located on the east edge of town, on the north side of the road. View it from the roadside park on the south side of U.S.-24. Continue westbound on U.S.-24 for approximately 5 miles; turn north on Schoeman Road to Oregon Trail Nature Park.

23. Indian Pay Station

Historic Site & Museum (St. Marys, Kansas) Listed on the National Register of Historic Sites, this small stone structure was built in 1857 to serve as the office for the Potawatomi Indian Agency. It was designated as the location for meeting the terms of the 1861 Treaty with the Potawatomi Indians. The treaty stated that the Potawatomi would receive payment in exchange for their lands. The original building was a two-room stone structure, which is now part of St. Mary's Historical Society Complex.



Site of former Potawatomi Indian Pay Station at St. Marys, Kansas.

Directions: From I-70 in Topeka, take Exit 358A to U.S.-75 northbound. Drive 2 miles, then turn west on U.S.-24. Continue through Silver Lake and Rossville. Along this stretch of road, the highway follows the original Oregon Trail, which stayed north of the Kansas River. Continue to St. Marys. Just west of the St. Marys Academy and College, turn north on 1st Street and then east on East Mission Street to the parking area.

24. Red Vermillion Crossing/Vieux Cemetery(near Belvue, Kansas) is the site on the Red Vermillion where Louis Vieux, a Potawatomi Indian, established a toll bridge in 1847. In 1849, a large wagon train encamped on the east side of the creek was struck by cholera, which left 50 emigrants dead within a week.



Historic Louis Vieux Family Cemetery.

They were buried nearby. The Vieux family cemetery is also in the vicinity. Exhibits interpret the sites.

Directions: From Belvue, Kansas, take U.S.-24 westbound for 5 miles to Onaga Road. Turn north and continue for 3 miles. Turn west on Oregon Trail Road and drive 0.5 mile to James Road. Turn south on James and follow toward the river. The Vieux Cemetery is north of the road and east of Red Vermillion Creek.

25. Scott Spring (Scott Springs/Oregon Trail Park, KS-99 at Westmoreland, Kansas) was another favorite campsite for emigrants. Although the spring itself is on private property, there is a roadside pullout just south of the site and a public park with sculpture and historic signs is nearby.



Scott Spring Oregon Trail Park.

Directions: From Belvue, Kansas, take U.S.-24 west toward Wamego. Turn north on KS-99 and drive approximately 12 miles toward Westmoreland. Watch for state historic site highway turnout on the west side of KS-99; proceed approximately 0.25 mile beyond, to the park on the east side of the highway.

26. Lower Crossing on the Big Blue (Blue Rapids, Kansas) is believed to be an alternate crossing used in later years. This crossing is not mentioned in emigrant diaries and journals; however, numerous journal entries reference other crossings of the Big Blue. An interpretive exhibit at this site tells how emigrants used to make river crossings when they encountered steep embankments. *Warning! This is private property and a cattle pasture. Livestock may be grazing in the vicinity. Please respect the property so*



Lower Crossing interpretive exhibits.

that others may also enjoy this site.

Directions: From Blue Rapids, follow U.S.-77 south approximately 3.2 miles. Watch for stone marker on north side of highway that reads “Fawn Creek School District,” and turn north on gravel township road, 7th Road. Follow 7th Road north for 2.9 miles. A latched, iron gate in the fence on the east side of the roadway provides access into the pasture. The interpretive exhibit can be seen across the pasture and identifies the site where the wagon ruts are found.

27. Alcove Spring (near Marysville and Blue Rapids, Kansas) has been called the most significant historic site on the Oregon Trail within the State of Kansas. The scenic spring was a popular campsite, mentioned in many emigrant journals. Also at about this location, emigrants left the tallgrass prairie of eastern



Naomi Falls at Alcove Spring.

Kansas and entered the shortgrass plains. Access to this privately owned site is provided by the Alcove Spring Historical Trust.

Directions: From south of Marysville, at the junction of KS-9 and U.S.-77, turn north on U.S.-77 for approximately 1 mile. Then turn west on the county gravel road, East River Road, and follow signs for 6 miles to Alcove Spring.

28. Pony Express Barn (106 South 8th Street, Marysville, Kansas) is a stone barn, constructed in 1859, that was used as a Pony Express livery stable. It is now a privately owned museum. Open April–October (closed during winter months). Call 785-562-3825 for hours. A Pony Express monument is located along the



Original Pony Express barn and Home Station, Marysville, Kansas.

south side of U.S.-36 on the west side of town.

Directions: From U.S.-36 in Marysville, turn south onto 8th Street and follow the signs for 1 block.

29. Marshall's Ferry

(Marysville, Kansas) was one of three major river crossings on the St. Joseph Road to California. Francis Marshall established the first ferry here on the west edge of Marysville in 1852. A roadside park near the location offers interpretive panels and a reconstructed wagon ferry.

Directions: The park is in Marysville, east of the Big Blue River and accessible from U.S.-77. Inquire locally for more precise driving directions.



Replica of Rope Ferry used in Marysville to cross Big Blue River.

30. Hollenberg Station (2889 23rd Road, Hanover, Kansas) is a seven-acre state park and National Historic Landmark that boasts the only Pony Express station in Kansas remaining in its original location. It was initially built in 1857 as a waystation to serve emigrant traffic on the Oregon and California trails. The site also offers a picnic area, nature trail, museum, historical markers and monuments. Open April–October. Call 785-337-2635 for hours and to arrange group tours.



Original Hollenberg Pony Express Station.

Directions: From Marysville, drive west on U.S.-36 and turn north on KS-148. Drive 4 miles and turn east on KS-243 and follow signs to site.

31. Pony Express National Museum (914 Penn, St. Joseph, Missouri), is the original Pike's Peak stable, built in 1858 to accommodate horses used by a local freight and stagecoach company. In 1860, the building was purchased for Pony Express horses, but is not where riders stayed. Open Monday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 1–5 p.m.; closed during winter holidays. Modest admission charged. A Pony Express Monument is located nearby at 10th and Francis Street.



Pony Express Stables in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Directions: From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 10th Street exit onto 10th Street northbound. Drive 0.5 mile to Penn Street and turn left.

32. Patee House (12th and Penn Street, St. Joseph, Missouri), a 140-room hotel built in 1858, once was the most luxurious hotel west of the Mississippi River at the time. Its first floor housed the Pony Express Company's eastern terminus, and mail carriers would ride into the building on their horses



Historic Patee House, photo courtesy of Patee House Museum.

to receive the westbound mail. The building, a national historic landmark, is now a museum operated by the Pony Express Historical Association. Open April–October, Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 1–5 p.m.; November–March, Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Sunday, 1–5 p.m.

Directions: From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 10th Street exit onto 10th, northbound. Drive north for 0.5 mile and turn right onto Penn Street. Drive 0.2 mile. Patee House is at the corner of 12th and Penn.

33. St. Joseph Riverfront Landing (Francis Street, St. Joseph, Missouri) is where emigrants and Pony Express riders boarded a ferry to cross the Missouri River into Kansas. The site, on the west edge of St. Joseph, is now a small city park in an industrial area, with historical monuments and interpretive signs.



Missouri River Landing where emigrants and Pony Express riders crossed over.

Directions: From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 9th Street exit. Drive north for 1.3 miles, and turn west on Francis Street. Continue for 9 blocks until Francis Street terminates at the riverfront.

34. Iowa, Sac, and Fox Presbyterian Mission (near Highland, Kansas) was established in 1846 to serve three Eastern tribes that were relocated to Kansas reservations. A 30-yard swale of the nearby overland trail is still visible east of the mission building. In 1849, cholera spread into the Indian community near the mission, and a smallpox epidemic took more lives the following year. Grounds open dawn till dusk. Free.



Museum exhibits provide insight to local Indian culture and traditions.

Directions: From St. Joseph, drive west on U.S.-36 for approximately 25 miles into Kansas. Turn north on KS-120 (South Kansas Street) and continue into Highland to East Main (Old U.S.-36). Turn east and drive for approximately 2 miles. Turn north for approximately 0.5 mile on county road, and then turn northwest to mission.

This ends the Auto Tour Route of the Oregon, California, and Pony Express National Historic Trails from Western Missouri through Northeastern Kansas. To continue west along the auto tour route, follow interpretive guide for Nebraska and Northeastern Colorado.



For More Information:

National Park Service

National Trails System Office
324 S. State Street, Suite 200
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Email:

ntsl_interpretation@nps.gov

California NHT

www.nps.gov/cali

Oregon NHT

www.nps.gov/oreg

Pony Express NHT

www.nps.gov/poex

Missouri Division of Tourism

www.visitmo.com

Kansas Travel and Tourism

www.travelks.com

Oregon-California Trails Association

www.octa-trails.org

National Pony Express Association

www.xphomestation.com

CREDITS:

Research & Text: Lee Kreutzer, Cultural Resources Specialist,
National Trails Intermountain Region

Layout/Design & Graphics: Chuck Milliken, Lead Interpretive
Specialist, National Trails Intermountain Region

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