**Background on National Historic Trails**

Explanation of NPS Trail System:

National trails are officially established under the authorities of the National Trails System Act (16 USC 1241-51). There are several types:

National scenic trails are 100 miles or longer, continuous, primarily non-motorized routes of outstanding recreation opportunity. Such trails are established by Act of Congress.

National historic trails commemorate historic (and prehistoric) routes of travel that are of significance to the entire Nation. They must meet all three criteria listed in Section 5(b)(11) of the National Trails System Act. Such trails are established by Act of Congress.

National recreation trails**,** also authorized in the National Trails System Act, are existing regional and local trails recognized by either the Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior upon application.

The National Historic Trails are a part of the National Park System, and their existence has been recognized by the U.S. and designated by congress. National Trails Intermountain Region works with partners across nine national historic trails, one historic highway, 24,000 miles, and 25 states to protect, develop, and promote these special places.

Our staff of interdisciplinary experts works with community groups, private landowners, nonprofit organizations, tribes, and federal, state, county, and local agencies to identify the resources, provide site planning and design, map the trail on the ground, and develop educational opportunities. Often times, you will find our signage, visitor centers and waysides along major auto routes and historic sites. Students should be made aware of the fact that National Historic Trails belong to the American people, and are funded through taxpayer support. National Historic Trails are created through the same process by which National Parks are created. Our historic trails are inclusive and welcoming of all walks of life; We encourage all visitors to attend!

Trail Descriptions for Teacher:

Note: These descriptions could also be used as a scaffold or support for students with individual education plans and reading interventions.

**Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail**

The Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail spans across five states, where 70,000 Mormons traveled from 1846 to 1869 to escape religious conflict. The Pioneer Company of 1846-1847 established the first route from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Salt Lake City, Utah, covering about 1,300 miles.

**Pony Express National Historic Trail**

From St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California the Pony Express could deliver a letter faster than ever before. In operation for only 18 months between April 1860 and October 1861, the Pony Express nevertheless has become synonymous with the Old West. In the era before electronic communication, the Pony Express was the thread that tied East to West.

**Oregon National Historic Trail**

In 1800, America's western border reached only as far as the Mississippi River. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 the country nearly doubled in size, pushing the nation's western edge past the Rocky Mountains. Yet the wilderness known as Oregon Country (which included present-day Oregon, Washington and part of Idaho) still belonged to the British, a fact that made many Americans eager to settle the region and claim it for the United States. Miles of trail ruts and traces can still be seen along the Oregon National Historic Trail in six states - reminders of the sacrifices, struggles, and triumphs of early American settlers.

**California National Historic Trail**

250,000 emigrants traveled to the gold fields and rich farmlands of California during the 1840s and 1850s - the greatest mass migration in American history. Miles of trail ruts and traces can still be seen across 10 states on the California National Historic Trail.

**Trail of Tears**

This trail commemorates the path of the Cherokee people, who were forcibly removed from their homelands in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee to live in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. They traveled by foot, horse, wagon, or steamboat in 1838-1839.

**Old Spanish Trail**

There was money to be made in transporting New Mexico serapes and other woolen goods to Los Angeles, and in wrangling California-bred horses and mules back to Santa Fe. But a viable overland route across the remote deserts and mountains of Mexico’s far northern frontier had to be found.

It took the vision and courage of Mexican trader Antonio Armijo to lead the first commercial caravan from Abiquiú, New Mexico, to Los Angeles late in 1829. Over the next 20 years, Mexican and American traders continued to ply variants of the route that Armijo pioneered, frequently trading with Indian tribes along the way. And it was from a combination of the indigenous footpaths, early trade and exploration routes, and horse and mule routes that a trail network known collectively as the Old Spanish Trail evolved.

**Santa Fe Trail**

Between 1821 and 1880, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily a commercial highway connecting Missouri and Santa Fe, New Mexico. From 1821 until 1846, it was an international commercial highway used by Mexican and American traders. In 1846, the Mexican-American War began. The Army of the West followed the Santa Fe Trail to invade New Mexico. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war in 1848, the Santa Fe Trail became a national road connecting the United States to the new southwest territories. Commercial freighting along the trail continued, including considerable military freight hauling to supply the southwestern forts. The trail was also used by stagecoach lines, thousands of gold seekers heading to the California and Colorado gold fields, adventurers, fur trappers, and emigrants. In 1880 the railroad reached Santa Fe and the trail faded into history.

**El Camino Real de los Tejas**

El Camino Real de los Tejas connected a series of Spanish missions and posts, from Mexico City to Los Adaes (first capital of the Texas province), now in northwestern Louisiana. Routes used by Spanish explorers that became the camino real followed established Indian trails and trade routes; the road's development had irreversible impacts on the native people of Texas and Louisiana. It linked a variety of cultural and linguistic groups, and served as an agent for cultural diffusion, biological exchange, and communication.

**El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro**

This artery of commerce and travel was known as El Camino Real, which meant Royal Road or King’s Highway. Of the great highways leading north, this was the oldest, having been extended by segments throughout the 16th century. For a time, it also enjoyed the distinction of being the longest road in North America.

Some of El Camino Real had its earliest beginnings as Indian trails. Later, sections of the route were traversed by Spanish conquistadors and colonizers. Finally, with the coming of Juan de Onate's expedition in 1598, the full length of the trail was defined. During the subsequent 300 years, it witnessed increasingly varied traffic as quantities of trade goods and representatives of different cultures traveled it, bringing with them currents of change that would forever alter the face of this land.