National Trails System
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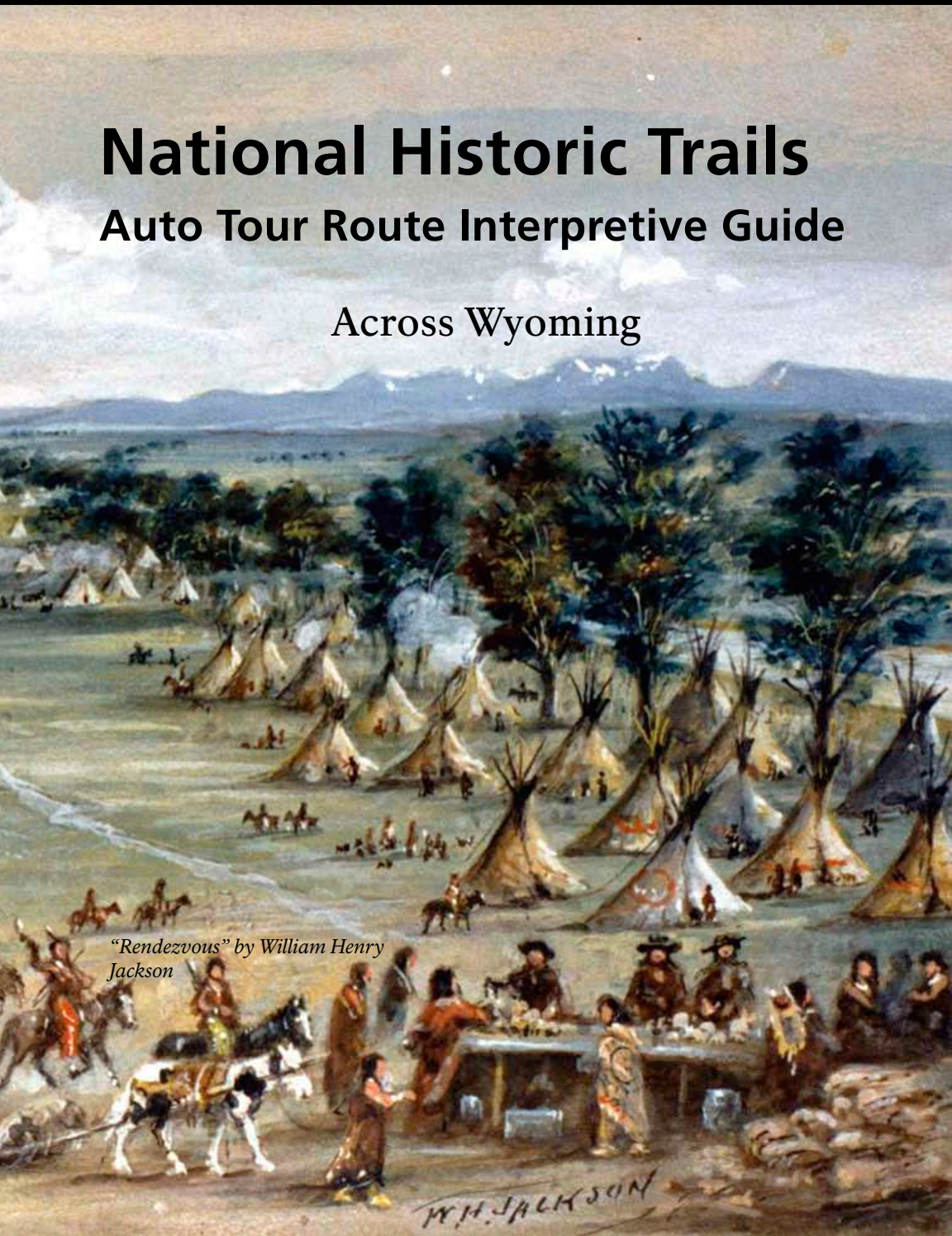
National Historic Trails

Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide

Across Wyoming



"Rendezvous" by William Henry Jackson

"Emigrants Crossing the Rocky Mountains." Image is courtesy of the Library of Congress.

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS

AUTO TOUR ROUTE INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

Across Wyoming

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Many of the pioneer trails and other historic routes that are important in our nation's past have been designated by Congress as National Historic Trails. While most of those old roads and routes are not open to motorized traffic, people can drive along modern highways that lie close to, or parallel, the original trails. Those modern roads are designated as Auto Tour Routes, and they are marked with highway signs and trail logos to help today's travelers follow the trails used by the pioneers who helped to open the American west.

This interpretive publication guides visitors along the Auto Tour Routes for the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails as they cross the state of Wyoming from east to west. Site-by-site driving directions are included, and an overview map is located inside the back cover. To make the tour more meaningful, this guide also provides an historical overview of the four trails, shares the thoughts and experiences of emigrants who followed those routes, and indicates how the westward expansion impacted native peoples of the Intermountain West.

Individual Auto Tour Route interpretive guides such as this one are in preparation for each state through which the trails pass. In addition, individual National Park Service interpretive brochures for the four national historic trails are available at many trail-related venues, and can be requested from the National Trails System Administrative Office at 324 South State, Suite 200, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111. These brochures include a map of the entire trail and provide an overview of information about each of the trails. Additional information about each trail also can be found on individual trail web sites. Links are listed on the "For More Information" page of this guide.

Eastern view of the Sweetwater River Valley from atop Independence Rock, by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of the Brigham Young University Online Collection.

GATEWAY TO THE WEST

History is geography set into motion.
--Johann Gottfried Herder, 18th century philosopher of history

The Rocky Mountains stretch like a jagged spine between Alaska and Mexico, splitting North America into East and West. The Continental Divide is not a simple line of peaks, easily threaded by tracks and roads, but a complex of overlapping mountain ranges and treeless sagebrush steppe, hundreds of miles wide. In the days of covered wagon travel, the Rockies were an imposing barrier to the movement of people, commerce, and communications.

Early explorers probed the Northern Rockies looking for the fabled "Northwest Passage" that would open an easy route for transcontinental traffic. The men of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery finally put that myth to rest in 1805, when they nearly perished crossing Montana's Bitterroot Range at Lemhi Pass. But the Absarokas (Crows), Shoshones, and other tribes knew of a much easier gateway through the mountains some 400 miles farther south, in today's Wyoming.

A small band of traders from the Pacific Fur Company discovered their secret in 1812. Robert Stuart and his men left Fort Astoria, a company post on the Columbia River, in June of that year to carry business dispatches overland to New York. Misfortune nipped their heels from the start: one man attempted suicide, mosquitoes were a constant torment, and a Shoshone guide ran off with Stuart's horse. But before disappearing, the guide told the Astorians of a shorter route through the central Rockies, and they decided to look for it on their own. Three months into their journey, snarling fate turned vicious: as the traders approached the Teton Range near today's Idaho-Wyoming border, an Absaroka war party captured all their horses. Now Stuart's men were afoot in unfamiliar country, a thousand miles from any settlement, without supplies and on the sharp edge of a Rocky Mountain winter. The desperate men were picking their way eastward when they struck an Indian trace that led them south of the Wind River Range and through a broad pass over the Great Divide. They had found the Shoshone's "shorter route," but still were deep in unfriendly wilderness. After a hungry winter spent

huddled on the eastern plains of Wyoming, Stuart's tough little band finally reached St. Louis in April 1813, bringing news of the southern pass that could open the continent to wagon travel.

Their news was drowned out by the commotion of conflict with England, the War of 1812. The great southern pass was forgotten until friendly Absarokas directed a small party of mountain men, which included the legendary Jedediah Smith, James Clyman, and Thomas Fitzpatrick, through the gap in 1824.

Then, at last, geography "set into motion." Trappers and pack-mule caravans began carrying supplies over South Pass to the annual fur trade fair, or Rendezvous. Mountain man William Sublette took the first wagons to Rendezvous in 1830, but stopped just east of the Continental Divide. Although Sublette showed that loaded wagons could make the trip into the mountains, the "fur trace" was so rough that he returned with pack mules the next year. Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, leading a 20-wagon supply train, blazed the first wagon

Historical marker on South Pass recognizing the first "white" women to make the trek to Oregon in 1836.

track over South Pass in 1832, and more carts and wagons followed. Soon other travelers began joining up with the annual fur caravans for safe overland passage. Missionaries Marcus & Narcissa Whitman and Henry & Eliza Spalding crossed the Rockies with the fur brigade in 1836, proving that women were not too delicate for the trials of the trail. Four years later, emigrants Joel and Mary Walker, with four children and two covered wagons, joined the last supply caravan heading to the very last trappers' Rendezvous. They reached Oregon in September 1840, and in January Mary gave birth to a daughter. The Walkers showed that even children and mothers "in a family way" could make the 2,000-mile overland trip. Their example helped open the floodgates of the emigration.

First a trickle, then a stream, and finally a torrent of humanity, livestock, and technology poured through South Pass over the next three decades. Government survey parties and soldiers, missionaries, emigrant wagon and handcart companies, hopeful gold-seekers and adventurers, countless stage and mail coaches, commercial freight wagons, riders of the Pony Express, and the transcontinental telegraph — all funneled through that 20-mile-wide passage through the Continental Divide. So many hooves and wheels cut into the earth that the ground in places is still scored with ruts.

South Pass was the gateway to the West. Without that accident of geography, there would have been no Oregon Trail, no California Trail, no Mormon Utah, and perhaps no United States stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

South Pass - Gateway to the West.

And it comes forcibly to mind that this passage in the great Rocky Mountains was fashioned by the supreme ruler to aid the progress of the American people in their westward march to the Pacific Ocean.

— Joseph Buffum, 1849
California emigration

BLAZING THE TRAIL

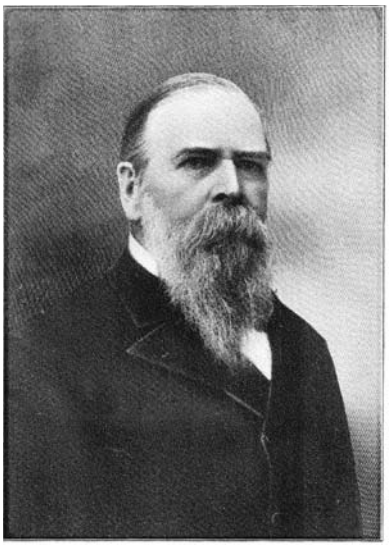
The first emigrant wagon train bound for California, known as the Bidwell-Bartleson Party, struck out from Independence, Missouri, in the spring of 1841. *"Our ignorance of the route was complete,"* admitted John Bidwell, a 21-year-old Pennsylvania schoolteacher who lent his name and leadership to the wagon company. *"We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge."*

That was the extent of most everybody's knowledge. The trail in 1841 was barely a track worn along the Platte River by the pack-mule and cart caravans of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Hopeful greenhorns would have no beaten wagon road to follow over plain and mountain to California or Oregon. No useful map of the route existed. Emigrants would find no road signs, no bridges or ferries at river crossings, and no place to replace exhausted oxen and food supplies. The 68 souls who first set out with John Bidwell into that arid unknown have been praised as bold visionaries and spurned as risk-taking fools.

"Pilgrims of the Plains," by Alfred R. Waud, Harpers Weekly, December 23, 1871. Illustration is courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Whatever they were, they were lucky. A few days out of Independence, they managed to join up with Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, who was already guiding a company of missionaries to the Pacific Northwest. The famous mountain man agreed to take the emigrants along the Platte and through the Rockies as far as the Fort Hall area in today's Idaho. From there they would have to find their own way. Amazingly, they did.

The way Fitzpatrick took his pilgrims—on the old trappers' route up the North Platte River into central Wyoming, up the Sweetwater, and over South Pass— became the corridor of the combined Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express Trails. Government maps of the route published in 1843 and 1845 gave others the confidence to set out for the West. Within a few years, a rising stream of emigrant wagons had beat the old "fur trace" into a road that the greenest tenderfoot could follow.



John Bidwell

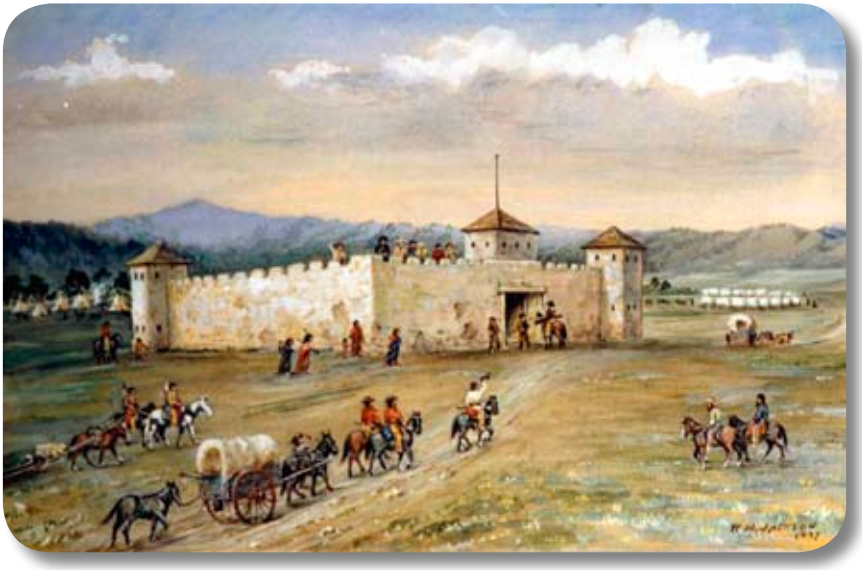
To all of my acquaintances and friends who may be in bad health I would recommend a trip to California.

— John Bidwell, 1841
California emigration

APPROACHING THE ROCKIES

Most emigrants agreed that the easiest part of the overland trail was the 500-mile stretch that followed the Platte River across Nebraska's prairie. The country grew rougher and the scenery more wonderful as the wagons rumbled up either side of the Platte's north fork, past Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff, and into Wyoming. In the vicinity of today's town of Lingle, the trail crossed an undistinguished grassy flat where an 1854 shootout between Sioux and soldiers—the Grattan Fight—would unleash the bloody Plains Wars. A shallow mass grave and grisly artifacts marked the battle site for the continuing emigration.

By the time travelers reached that sober milestone, they had been six to eight weeks on the trail. Their enthusiasm for wayside points of interest was dampened by the weary rhythm of the road: rise before dawn, cook, clean up, repack, gather and yoke the oxen. . .and then plod through the dust all day to set up another camp about 12-15 miles up the road. Fort Laramie, 50 miles west of Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, provided a welcome break from the tedium.



"Old Fort John," renamed later as Fort Laramie, by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of Scotts Bluff Nat'l. Monument.

In 1841, when the Bidwell-Bartleson Party stopped in for a two-day layover, the fort (then called Fort John) was a simple adobe trading post bustling with fur traders, trappers, Plains Indians, and adventurers. Eight years later, the U.S. Army purchased the establishment for a military post to protect and help re-supply the ever-increasing overland traffic. Fort Laramie soon grew into a busy community of soldiers, army wives, laundresses, children, servants, and quartermaster employees. Teepee encampments settled in around the fort, which became a multi-ethnic "travel plaza" on the overland highway. There, emigrants could post their mail, repair wagons, shoe livestock, and shop for necessities (and liquor) at the post sutler's store. They also could visit and trade with the fort's Indian residents — a thrill that many emigrants recorded in their trail journals.

Many of these [Sioux] women, for regularity of features and symmetry of figure, would bear off the palm of beauty from some of our most celebrated belles. . . . The men are powerfully made, and possess a masculine beauty which I have never seen excelled.

— Edwin Bryant, 1846 California emigration

I remember with what terror I saw the Indians come out from Fort Laramie. They looked so naked and wild. The men got out their guns but all the Indians wanted was to see us to see if we would give them anything.

— Lucy Ann Henderson Deady on crossing the trail at age 11, 1846 Oregon emigration

We were visited. . .by about two hundred Cheyennes and Sioux, who danced a little, stole a little, eat a great deal, and finally went on their way rejoicing.

— "Nebraska," anonymous newspaper correspondent at Fort Laramie, 1849

Most travelers approached Fort Laramie from the main Oregon and California roads along the south bank of the North Platte River. This required fording a tributary, the Laramie River, just east of the fort. Today, dams have tamed the Laramie, but in the mid-1800s the river's spring current sometimes toppled wagons and drowned emigrants and livestock. Looking for the safest places to ford, travelers used at least nine different crossings of the Laramie, and bridges and ferries eventually served some locations.

In the early years of the emigration, the terrain on the north side of the river was thought to be impassable west of Fort Laramie. Mormon emigrants and others entering Wyoming on the north-bank road were forced to ford the deep, swift North Platte near the fort. Starting in 1850, north-side emigrants had the option of loading their wagons onto a ramshackle flatboat and pulling the contraption along a rope stretched across the river — unassisted, and at the outrageous fare of $1 per wagon. The price of passage drove some offended emigrants to blaze a new trail, Child's Cutoff (also called Chiles's Route), which continued west on the north side of the river. Travelers who stayed on the north bank via Child's Cutoff could avoid crossing the North Platte altogether, while those following the original south-bank road had to cross upstream, near today's city of Casper. By 1852, most wagons arriving on the north side continued up Child's Cutoff, though many travelers still crossed the river to visit Fort Laramie. A graceful iron military bridge, built in 1875, still spans one of four emigrant crossings of the North Platte near the fort. Sparkling placidly beneath the bridge, the river strikes today's summertime visitor as a mere pleasant wade, unlike the fearsome mountain torrent of 150 years ago.

For travelers north or south of the river, Fort Laramie was a major milestone, sitting at the edge of the western plains where the land begins to lift toward the slopes of the Rockies. West of the fort rose the blue-gray beacon of Laramie Peak, looking "like a dark cloud on the western horizon," according to John Bidwell. The steepest, roughest, driest, and most dangerous stretches of road lay ahead. Travelers paused to lighten their wagons by selling unnecessary items—tools, books, clothing, furnishings, even wagons and food—at Fort Laramie, but buyers were scarce. Most disappointed sellers simply destroyed or dumped their possessions along the trail

and moved on. Forty-niner J. Goldsborough Bruff saw *"bacon in great piles, many chords* [cords] *of it"* and a *"diving bell and all the apparatus"* among the items abandoned in the Wyoming dust.

On the road from the fort.... I saw a wagon—tolerable good but heavy—bacon, beans, stoves, chairs, iron wedges, crow bar, soap, lead, ovens and many other articles all laying about in the prairie. They could not use them and they could not carry them, and the only alternative was to leave them.

— Israel F. Hale, 1849 California emigration

Merchandise that in the States has cost thousands upon thousands is thus disposed of by sufferers whose life is still of the most value.

— Edward C. Harrow, 1849 California emigration

Wagons are worth nothing. We frequently cook our suppers with the spokes of a better wagon than half the farmers in St. Louis county own.

— "R.H.D.," newspaper correspondent, 10 miles west of Fort Laramie, 1859

Ten miles northwest of the army post, travelers on the south side of the river reached their next campsite, called Sand Point, near today's Guernsey, Wyoming. (In 1860-61, the Centre Star Pony Express station was located there, too.) Some paused between endless camp chores to carve their names into the soft stone face of Register Cliff.

Pioneer emigrant signatures etched in the soft sandstone of Register Cliff.

A few miles beyond, the wagons fell into single file for a hard pull up a rock ridge, avoiding boggy ground nearer the river. Thousands of iron-shod hooves and wagon wheels gradually cut a vertical-walled channel deep into the stone there, at a site now known as the Guernsey Ruts, or Deep Hill Ruts.

The trails followed the arc of the North Platte River deep into central Wyoming. Once wagons started taking Child's Cutoff, profit-minded men established toll bridges and ferries at several locations between Fort Laramie and today's city of Casper. These allowed wagons to zigzag back and forth across the river to avoid sand hills and other difficult spots. At Casper the river curved southwest across the emigrant route, forcing those on the south side to make a final crossing there or a few miles farther west near Red Buttes (now called Bessemer Bend).

And that was the end of the Platte River lifeline that had conducted the emigration across hundreds of miles of prairie and plain. Now the need for water and grass would become a nagging worry.

A short distance beyond the last crossing of the North Platte at Red Buttes, all the trails came together for the hot, hard haul over Devil's Backbone (also called Avenue of Rocks) to the next good water at

It is considered by all to be the worst camping ground we had had on the journey. Its banks are so perfectly soft that a horse or ox cannot get down to drink without sinking immediately nearly overhead in thick, filthy mud, and [it] is one of the most horrid, swampy, stinking places I ever saw.

— William Clayton on Clayton's Slough, 1847 Mormon emigration

. . . but oh my poor pony . . . no grass no grass . . . but he is a fine fellow & deserves a better fate than to starve.

— Charles B. Darwin at Willow Spring, 1849 California emigration

Willow Spring. Along this stretch, travelers on all the trail variants and cutoffs of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Pioneer trails merged for the first time onto the same road. Now their teams faced a long pull up Prospect Hill, where wagon wheels wore multiple ruts and swales that still are visible. Two miles farther was the next watering hole for the thirsty oxen: an odorous alkali marsh called Clayton's Slough, jokingly named after an 1847 Mormon pioneer who had nothing good to say about the place. Hardworking oxen (and people) that drank too deeply of alkaline water often died of digestive upsets and dehydration. Good water was available about four miles farther west at Horse Creek, where a Pony Express station stood in the 1860s. From there the road stretched another 10 dry miles to the Sweetwater River. Grass was scarce all along the route.

This leg of the trip, Emigrant Gap (today sometimes called the Poison Spider Route), was a bitter introduction to what lay ahead: long stretches of hot, hilly trail with little feed for the animals, punctuated with stinking, toxic alkali waterholes. That poisonous 30-mile stretch between the North Platte and lovely Sweetwater Valley would kill many an ox and emigrant through the overland trail years.

All the air is strongly impregnated with effluvia from dead oxen it is like walking over a field of battle after three hot suns have [beat] upon the thousand dead.

— Charles B. Darwin on the Emigrant Gap segment, 1849 California emigration

Here [at Poison Slough, west of Willow Spring] are the graves of some five or six persons who drank of the water and died in a few minutes. Notices are stuck over the graves and at the road side… "He drank of this water and died." "Drank at this spring and died." "This water is poison." "Death!" "Poison!" "Beware! For God's sake do not taste this water! Happy is the man who can read!"

— James W. Evans, 1850 emigration

SWEETWATER TO SOUTH PASS

The great granite loaf of Independence Rock signaled temporary relief from the thirsty barrens, for it stands where the emigrant trail meets the Sweetwater River. Trail tradition held that reaching this milestone by the Fourth of July meant the emigrants would arrive safely in Oregon or California before early blizzards blew. People often paused here to rest their livestock and explore the formation, probably the most famous landmark on the combined Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express routes. Many travelers chiseled or painted their names on the outcrop, turning Independence Rock into a permanent memorial to the passing emigration.

Came to independence rock about ten o clock this morning I presume there are a million of names wrote on this rock
— Lydia Allen Rudd, 1852 Oregon emigration

Names! Names! Are every where upon its surface to be seen. names of the young & the old, of the man & his gentle mate, of the learned traveler & the yellow ideaed gold hunter.
— Charles B. Darwin, 1849 California emigration

"Independence Rock," by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of Scotts Bluff Nat'l. Monument.

Independence Rock also marked the beginning of South Pass, for the pass was not just the single point where the trail crested the Continental Divide. It was, in the minds of emigrants, the entire 100-mile climb up the Sweetwater to the divide. Emigrants and oxen on this uphill stretch would have good water—and lots of it, as they would cross the cold, meandering Sweetwater nine times. Even here, though, in peak emigration years, grass was scarce and livestock went hungry.

People, as well, suffered along this stretch of trail. In the Sweetwater Valley, many travelers began taking sick with a mysterious, aching ailment they called "mountain fever." They blamed their illness on mosquitoes, altitude, and the alkali dust, but doctors today think it was a tick-borne disease such as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. And as they climbed toward the mountain pass, emigrants regretted having abandoned warm bedding and clothing along the trail. High elevations can bring chilly summertime winds, freezing nighttime temperatures, and the threat of snowstorm in July. In fact, weather in this mountain country has been known to deliver disaster to the unprepared. In 1856, an October blizzard trapped four late-departing Mormon handcart and wagon companies, with nearly 1,400 men, women, and children among them, in the Sweetwater Valley. Despite the heroic efforts of rescuers from Salt Lake City, many of the emigrants —historians' counts range from about 170 to over 300 — did not survive the ordeal.

Sweetwater Valley near Devil's Gate, Wyoming.

Mountain-rimmed Sweetwater Valley can be cold and merciless, but it is also a place of sublime natural beauty. Despite the hazards they faced there, some awestruck 19th century emigrants paused to write poetically of this segment of trail.

The Sweet Water flows through the flat below us in many a graceful curve, looking like a huge serpentine silver thread in the rich emerald green. Before us, behind us, all around us, are mountains piled on mountains. . . .

— Nellie Phelps, 1859
California emigration

I had many pleasing reflections while traveling alone in this sequestered and remote part of the earth where the footprints of a white man is seldom seen and all nature appears as though nothing had been molested since it rolled out of the Hands of the Creator.

— Henry Lunt, 1857
Utah emigration

As they trekked up the Sweetwater Valley, travelers passed several notable trail milestones. First was Devil's Gate, a natural curiosity that puzzled many an emigrant: what caused the Sweetwater River to chew a channel through the ridge instead of flowing around it? Then came Split Rock, a "gun-sight" notch in the Rattlesnake Range that aimed travelers directly toward South Pass, some 75 miles distant. At Ice Slough, astonished emigrants dug clear, sweet ice—a treat!—from beneath the turf in mid-summer. Barren, wind-slapped Rocky Ridge, a 700-foot climb through broken rock, was always an ordeal for wagons and teams, and particularly so for Mormon emigrants pulling loaded handcarts. Finally, the trail threaded between Twin Mounds, two low hills that marked the final approach to the Continental Divide. Through the years of the emigration, this Sweetwater-to-South Pass stretch also became dotted with trading posts, Indian and army encampments, and Pony Express, stage, and telegraph stations.

Devil's Gate on the Sweetwater River, Wyoming.

Came to the Ice Springs, which certainly are remarkable…in cutting through a wet grassy strip, we came to solid ice, which was eagerly gathered and eaten by our delighted and astonished selves. Some Doubted its being ice,—but it looked like ice, smelt like ice, tasted like ice, felt like ice, and—I believe it was ice.

— Nellie Phelps, 1859
California emigration

To the northwest bared the ferocious, snow-covered sawteeth of the Wind River Range, which fretted many an emigrant. It was needless worry, as the trail passed south of the Wind Rivers, not through them. The grade up and over South Pass, about 7,550 feet in elevation, is so gradual and mild that most travelers never knew exactly when they crossed the Continental Divide. In his journal entry of July 18, 1841, John Bidwell noted casually, *"Crossed the divide which separates the water of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans."*

There we saw the far famed south pass, but did not see it until we had passed it for I was all the time looking for some narrow place that would almost take your breath away to get through but was disappointed.
— Amelia Hadley, 1851 Oregon emigration

What is called the Pass in the Rocky Mountains is not as most persons suppose, a narrow passway through frightful over-hanging mountains with wild streams dashing down their acclivities, but on the contrary it is a scarcely perceptible ascent, and when the summit is reached the traveller is not aware of it and frequently asks where is the Pass?
— William A. Carter, sutler at Fort Bridger, 1857

South Pass still looks much as it did during covered wagon days.

The long-anticipated crossing of the Great Divide was a letdown! But travelers to Oregon and California were still less than halfway through their journey. More serious challenges lay ahead.

BEYOND THE GREAT DIVIDE

After sharing a common broad corridor through Nebraska and Wyoming, overland traffic burst up and over the Continental Divide like spray from a hose. Three main trunk routes, linked by a snarl of alternative cutoffs, fanned out across western Wyoming: the Lander Road, the Sublette Cutoff, and the Fort Bridger route.

The Lander Road, the only wagon road in the overland trail system built with federal funds, was the last of the three routes to be opened. Frederick W. Lander, a government engineer with the Department of the Interior, surveyed and built the road in 1857-59 to improve transportation to the western states. Lander saw that many travel problems, including the suffering of the oxen, arose from *"the extreme dryness and heat of the artemisian* [sagebrush] *deserts,"* so he routed his cutoff on the northern side of South Pass through cooler, higher areas with more grass and water. The Lander Road forked off the main trail at the ninth crossing of the Sweetwater, just east of the Continental Divide, and angled northwest. It crested the divide north of today's Highway 28, entered Idaho west of today's Auburn, Wyoming, and rejoined the main Oregon and California road near Fort Hall, Idaho. This northerly route stayed well clear of Utah, where troubles were then brewing between the federal government and the Mormon followers of Brigham Young. For awhile, though, the Lander Road was a preferred stalking ground of "white Indians" —white men disguised as Indians— who lured emigrant families away from the main road and cruelly murdered them for their belongings. White criminals were responsible for several particularly brutal incidents on the Lander after it opened in 1859.

The main trail on the southern side of South Pass headed toward the bright green marsh of Pacific Springs, just west of the Continental Divide. Cattle would mire themselves at this swampy campsite if their owners did not take care, but Pacific Springs provided the last good water and abundant feed they would find for a couple of days. From here travelers entered a grassless, gray-green ocean of sagebrush, starvation country for the weary oxen. Next water was about 10 miles ahead at Dry Sandy Crossing, a miserable spot where alkali pools fatally poisoned several oxen belonging to the Donner-Reed Party

in 1846. Loss of those animals contributed to their problems farther down the trail.

About 20 miles west of the Continental Divide, the main road forked at a spot called Parting of the Ways—a point of decision. From there, travelers could either follow the Lander Road, or the Sublette Cutoff heading due west toward the trading post at Fort Hall, or take the original, better-watered route southwest toward Fort Bridger and Utah.

The descent on the western slope is more gradual than on the East spreading out into a vast desert plain covered with sage, which gives it more the character of sterility than if it had no vegetation at all upon it.

— William A. Carter, sutler at Fort Bridger, 1857

Avoid this place, poison in the water that stands in pools at the [Dry Sandy] Crossing.

— James Frazier Reed of the Donner-Reed Party, 1846 California emigration

You have no idea of the confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the emigrants as to which was the best route to take. . . .Some said you had to buy the land in California while in Oregon it was free. . . . Some advised us to take the short cut across the 45-mile desert, avoiding going to Fort Bridger.

— Lucy Ann Henderson Deady on crossing the trail at age 11, 1846 Oregon emigration

The Sublette (also called the Greenwood-Sublette Cutoff) was blazed in 1844. Until the Lander Road opened 15 years later, most emigrants to California and Oregon chose the Sublette Cutoff because it was about two days faster than the Fort Bridger route. But the Sublette Cutoff crossed 45 miles of pitiless desert between the Big Sandy River and Green River. Emigrants filled up every container (not the big barrels of folklore, though—nobody lugged heavy barrels across the country) at the Big Sandy and started toward the Little Colorado Desert in the cool of the evening. Dawn would catch them with many

The country was in most places so perfectly destitute of all vegetation, that it is doubtful whether even a cricket could live in such a desert. . . . During the day I gave to each of the oxen one quart of water, and two quarts to one that seemed to suffer most.

— J. Quinn Thornton on the Sublette Cutoff, 1846 Oregon emigration

My heart aches at the thought of leaving these noble animals behind. They have been so brave and uncomplaining, all through this heart-breaking trip. Their staring eyes, their moans at night, and their gaunt bodies haunt me continually. It is almost more than I can bear.

— Esther Belle Hanna on leaving oxen on the Sublette Cutoff, 1852 Oregon emigration

burning miles yet to go. Once over the desert, travelers still had to cross the dangerous Green River, said to claim a life a day, and climb several ridges. Some of the ridges are over 8,000 feet in elevation — higher than South Pass. The Sublette was the shorter way, but it was an ox-killer.

The Fort Bridger road was dry and torturous, too, but at least the cattle could water at the Big Sandy at the end of each day. This was the original Oregon-California route, which continued southwest from Parting of the Ways, paralleled the Big Sandy River to the Green River crossings, and went on to Blacks Fork and Fort Bridger.

Nothing for the stock to eat. As far as the eye can reach it is nothing but a sandy desert and the road is strewn with dead cattle, and the stench is awful. One of our best oxen is too lame to travel. . . . Have to yoke up our muleycow in the ox's place.

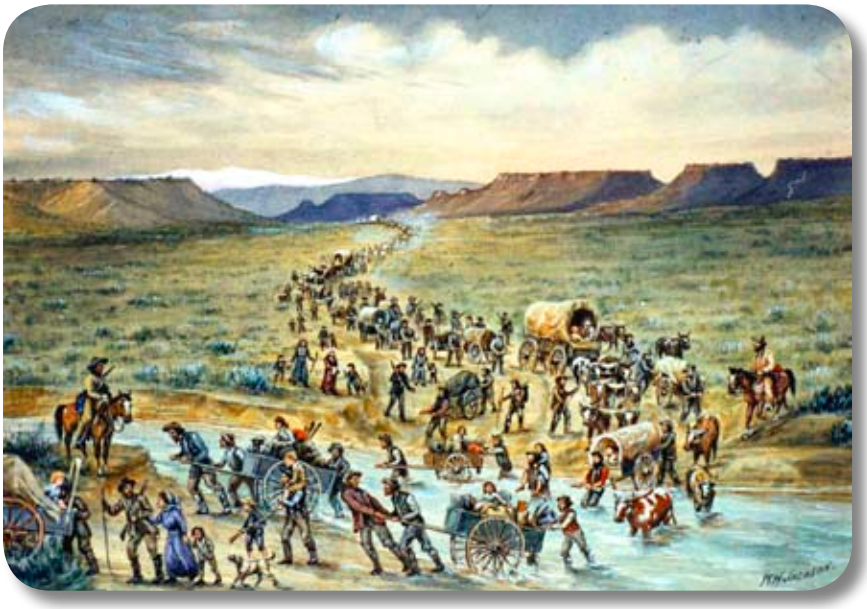
— Amelia Stewart Knight on the road to Fort Bridger, 1853

Oregon emigration

Fort Bridger, built by mountain men Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez as a trading post in 1843, was another place of decision for emigrants. They could pause at the fort to rest and re-supply, and then turn northwest again and rejoin the Sublette and Lander Road traffic east of Fort Hall. Or, after 1846, those bound for Utah and California

could continue southwest from Fort Bridger on the Hastings Cutoff, named for California promoter Lansford W. Hastings. This was the infamous "shortcut" that the Donner-Reed Party painfully punched through the Wasatch Range, into the Salt Lake valley, and across the Great Salt Desert. For them, the Hastings Cutoff was a shortcut to disaster.

For others, it was a blessing. The very next summer, Brigham Young and his followers took that same hard-won track out of Fort Bridger toward the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.



"Mormons Nearing Fort Bridger," by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of Scotts Bluff Nat'l. Monument.

LEAPFROGGING ACROSS WYOMING

After suffering years of violent conflict in Missouri and Illinois, leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) planned an organized exodus of their people over the Rocky Mountains. Brigham Young led the first phase of the Mormon emigration from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Winter Quarters (Omaha), Nebraska, in 1846. Following a hard prairie winter that took many lives, Young started across Nebraska in April 1847 with an advance group of 143 men, three women, and two children. They were heading to the Great Basin, a region then controlled by Mexico, to prepare a safe refuge for their church and its people.

To avoid more trouble—particularly with old enemies from Missouri who were moving to the Oregon Country—Young kept his followers on the north side of the Platte River, away from the main emigration on the south bank. Even so, their movement up the Platte ignited rumors that the Mormons were robbing other emigrants and inciting Indian attacks.

Brigham Young must have worried about what lay ahead, beyond the Fort Laramie crossing. The Mormons would have to cross the North Platte there and merge with the Oregon and California traffic. Sure enough, when Young and his pioneers arrived at Fort Laramie on June 2nd they learned there was an express company of 20 emigrant wagons from Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois coming up the south bank just three miles distant. Another 600 to 700 wagons were on the way.

We could not get any kind of accommodations if we were [thought] to be Mormons. Some would tell us the Mormons will rob you before you get half way through; but we are not afraid of them. We tell them there is a great deal done on their credit.

— Phoebe Stanton, 1847
Oregon emigration

These emigrants were from two states that had violently expelled the Mormons—and their large wagon trains would compete for grass, water, campsites, and priority at river crossings. The Latter-day Saints had to stay in front, and the competition lit a fire under them. Young

sent out a road crew to clear the road ahead so that his wagons could move more quickly, and they started averaging 16 ½ miles a day.

About four days west of Fort Laramie, mountain men told the Mormons of a big leather boat they had stowed up ahead at the last crossing of the North Platte, and invited Young's party to use it if they could find it before the "Missourians." Young sent 19 wagons express to the crossing. They arrived and claimed the mountaineers' boat just two hours ahead of the competition. More Oregon emigrants were not far behind, and the main Mormon party was on its way, too. But the North Platte was raging that spring, 100 yards wide and some 15 feet deep. Neither the Mormons nor the Missourians could cross quickly, each group was leery of the other, and the setting was ripe for trouble. Instead of fighting, though, they worked out a deal: the Mormon crew used the mountaineers' boat and one of their own to ferry the Oregon-bound vanguard over the river, in return for a fee paid in flour. Everybody was happy—for the moment.

The next afternoon a thunderstorm added more runoff to the swollen torrent. Brigham Young set a team to building a cottonwood ferry large enough carry two loaded wagons with teams across the current, and they rafted the entire Mormon party over the North Platte. Meanwhile, wagons from Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois continued arriving. Young left behind a small crew of ferrymen to earn money helping those emigrants across. Initially suspicious of each other, the Mormon men and their customers soon set aside their differences, helped each other out, and even shared meals and friendly conversation.

From the crossing, long known as Mormon Ferry, Brigham Young's company struck out overland and spent an uncomfortable night at Clayton's Slough. Now, though, the Latter-day Saints were crowding some of the Missourians they had helped back at the river.

> *When the* [Mormon] *brethren first commenced ferrying for* [the Missourians], *they were armed with Bowie Knives & Pistols, but before the brethren had finished their work the men had put them all away and having put away their fears also, were very civil and kind. . . .*
>
> — Thomas Bullock, 1847
> Mormon emigration

Mormon pioneer William Clayton complained that men from the other wagon train appeared along the trail disguised as Indians to scare the Mormons away from a good campsite they did not want to share. With goodwill now clearly out of play, Mormons and Missourians leapfrogged each other all the way up the Sweetwater Valley and over South Pass.

West of the Great Divide, the Latter-day Saints met Jim Bridger on the trail and asked the mountain man if the Salt Lake region would support settlement and agriculture. In a rambling response, Bridger allowed that the area south of the Great Salt Lake had good soil, clover for the livestock, and timber, fish, and minerals. On the other hand, he cautioned, the valley was subject to "excessive cold nights" and frost, and might not be suitable for growing corn enough to support a settled population. The mountain man would surely like to know, himself, if it could be done. In fact, Bridger told the pioneer band he would give $1,000 to know that an ear of corn could be raised in the Salt Lake Valley.

And if the Mormons cared to accept the challenge, Bridger observed, they could follow the Donner-Reed track from Fort Bridger to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.

Once the Mormon pioneers turned off the Oregon Trail at Fort Bridger and started southward on the Hastings Cutoff, their race with the Missourians was ended. But their difficulties were not over: near today's Wyoming-Utah border, Brigham Young fell deathly ill. Mountain fever had plagued the company since South Pass, and Young was its latest miserable victim. Not wanting to halt the company's progress, he ordered several scouts to ride ahead and sent the main wagon company along after them. A few companions stayed in camp for three days to nurse Young, who was suffering high fever, pain in his limbs, and wracking

There are some in camp who are getting discouraged about the looks of the country, but thinking minds are not much disappointed and we have no doubt of finding a place where the Saints can live, which is all we ought to ask or expect.
— William Clayton
on the Hastings Cutoff, 1847
Mormon emigration

chills. As he lay in his trailside sickbed, his people entered their Promised Land without him. But the Mormon leader arrived a few days later, ending the 111-day trek from Winter Quarters to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake on July 24, 1847. Another 2,200 Latter-day Saints were even then on their way to help establish an independent, church-governed commonwealth—and to show Jim Bridger that the Salt Lake Valley could, indeed, support settlement.

Barely five months after the Saints' arrival, sharp eyes discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in California. A month after that, Mexico gave up the Southwest and Great Basin, including Utah, to the United States. Within three years, the proposed Mormon State of Deseret would become Utah Territory, with Brigham Young appointed as territorial governor.

Latter-day Saints who had fled the U.S. were once again part of it, and they had built their busy new capital right on the treasure road to California.

"Fort Bridger on the Black's Fork of the Green River," explorer Jim Bridger's trading post. Image is courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Collection, Yale University.

HO FOR CALIFORNIA! \ OREGON OR BUST!

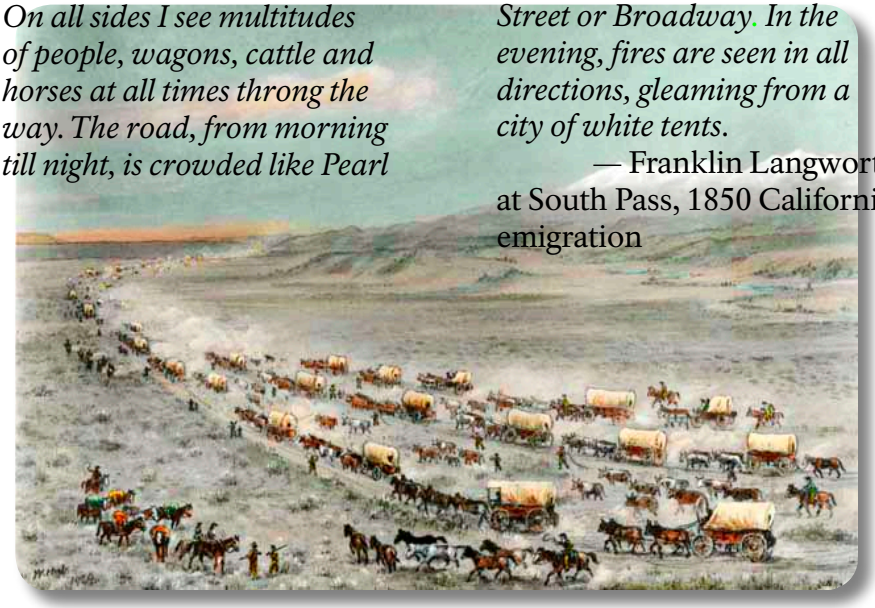
Between 1840 and 1848, fewer than 15,000 emigrants crossed the plains for the west coast, and most of them were bound for the Oregon Country (which included today's Washington and Idaho). But traffic exploded in 1849 as some 25,000 adventurers headed west to find their fortune in the California gold fields. Only 450 set out for Oregon that year.

The next spring, 50,000 travelers hit the road, and 44,000 of those were going to California. Overland traffic peaked in 1852, when 60,000 men, women, and children started for the west coast —and another 10,000 Mormon converts joined them on the road across Wyoming.

Picture it: 50,000 to 70,000 souls, an endless caravan of white-topped wagons, countless braying and bawling livestock, all swarming up the road in a moving, mooing mob. It was a rolling disaster. Finding no grass along the way, starving oxen dropped dead in the road and

On all sides I see multitudes of people, wagons, cattle and horses at all times throng the way. The road, from morning till night, is crowded like Pearl Street or Broadway. In the evening, fires are seen in all directions, gleaming from a city of white tents.

— Franklin Langworthy at South Pass, 1850 California emigration



"Over South Pass along the Wind River Range," by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of the Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.

rotted there. Wagon traffic often waited for days at fords, ferries, and bridges, awaiting a turn to cross. Crowded campsites, filthy with garbage and human waste, buzzed with flies, gnats, and mosquitoes. Abandoned possessions littered the roadside. Worst was the sickness that often followed such camps. Asiatic cholera chased the emigrants along a thousand miles of trail, from the "jumping off places" on the Missouri River all the way to Fort Laramie. Cholera, unknowingly spread through contaminated water by infected emigrants as they moved from campsite to campsite, claimed thousands of lives during the Gold Rush years. Based on emigrant reports of deaths from disease, accident, and violence, historians estimate that the number of graves averaged 10 per mile along the 2,000 miles of trail by the end of the emigration era.

The road from Independence to Fort Laramie is a graveyard.
— Dr. T. McCollum, 1849 California emigration

Any man who makes a trip by land to California deserves to find a fortune.
— Alonzo Delano, 1849 California emigration

The gold rush created friction between Mormon settlers and the overlanders who poured through Salt Lake City on their way West. While many travelers enjoyed their layover in the Mormon capital, others complained of unfair fines and nuisance lawsuits filed against them as they passed through Utah Territory. More significantly, federal officials serving in Utah found themselves increasingly in conflict with Utah's Mormon-dominated government. Over a six-year period, those officials filed dozens of letters and reports that variously accused the Mormons of treason, harassment, unlawful imprisonment of non-Mormons, preferential court treatment of Mormons, incitement of Indians against the U.S., and even several murders.

In response to these charges, and without notifying Acting Territorial Governor Brigham Young, U.S. President James Buchanan in 1857 sent U.S. troops to replace Young with a non-Mormon appointee. News of the army on the march inflamed the Latter-day Saints, who had been driven at gunpoint from Missouri and Illinois not many years earlier. Governor Young declared martial law, severed East

from West by closing the California Road, and prepared the Utah Territorial Militia to resist the coming "invasion." The Utah militia harassed approaching U.S. troops and burned down the supply post at Fort Bridger (which Young had purchased from Bridger and Vasquez) to make it useless to the army. Militiamen also destroyed a military supply train at Simpson's Hollow, near today's Granger, Wyoming, destroyed a second supply train west of Farson, and ran off a thousand head of government cattle. U.S. troops spent a miserable winter camped near the ruins of Fort Bridger. By spring, both sides stepped back from civil war, and a new territorial governor was installed with the consent of Brigham Young—who still wielded the real power in Utah. The little-known "Utah War" was quickly over, but the threat of armed conflict had stifled overland emigration for a time. The lure of the West was strong and traffic quickly resumed on the California Road.

Other conflicts along the trail were not so easily resolved. Sioux, Cheyenne, and other native peoples along the "white man's Medicine Road" at first were mostly curious about the passing emigration, but became horrified by what they saw during the gold rush years. Emigrant livestock ate up the grass that Indian ponies needed to survive. Emigrant axes cut down stands of timber that sheltered Indian teepees and fed their winter campfires. Emigrant rifles took the buffalo, American soldiers and settlers took the land, and white man's diseases took Indian lives. Where the two cultures rubbed together, there was heat. Soon there would be fire.

"Indians on the Wagon Trail," by Charles M. Russell. Image is courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library , Yale University.

FIRE ON THE PLAINS

Travelers mostly met members of the Lakota (Sioux), Cheyenne, Arapaho, Absaroka, and Shoshone nations along the overland roads through Wyoming—and most of those encounters were peaceful. Emigrants and Indians enjoyed observing each other's strange dress and behavior, trading goods, and sharing meals. But relations soured as wagon traffic surged and buffalo herds dwindled.

Wild foods, grass, and timber are not scattered evenly across the plains, but cluster near water. Plains people needed those limited resources to survive the winter; emigrants needed them, too, while crossing the plains in summer. Native people tried to keep emigrants' cattle out of their pony pastures and demanded payment for the grass, game, wood, and water the pioneers used up. Figuring they had equal rights to nature's unfenced bounty, most pioneers refused to "pay tribute" to the tribes. Insulted warriors resorted first to petty pilfering, then to livestock raids and armed face-offs with the emigrants. Travelers, in turn, resented Indian harassment, and rumors of wagon train massacres made them fearful and trigger-happy. A few simply assumed any approaching Indian people were up to no good,

"Planning the Attack," by Charles M. Russell. Image is courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

and shot them on sight. The victims' relatives avenged those deaths on the next emigrant straggler. A low level of give-and-take conflict underlay tense but generally nonviolent relations between Indians and emigrants.

To keep those tensions from exploding into open warfare, the U.S. government called for a treaty conference to be held near Fort Laramie in September 1851. More than 10,000 members of eleven different Northern Plains tribes gathered at Horse Creek, about 30 miles southeast of the fort, to join in the "Great Smoke." Over the next few weeks, native leaders and government representatives pounded out an agreement, the Fort Laramie (or Horse Creek) Treaty of 1851. Under the terms of the treaty, the U.S. government promised to give the tribes annual payments of "merchandise, domestic animals, and agricultural implements" for the loss of their resources. In turn, the tribes agreed to let emigrants pass in peace and to seek peace among themselves.

The long-term peace was shattered just three years later. In August 1854, a lame cow from a passing emigrant train strayed into a Brule Sioux encampment about eight miles east of Fort Laramie. The Sioux were hungry and tired of waiting for their overdue treaty provisions, so they slaughtered and ate the beef. The cow's owner, a Danish emigrant on his way to Utah, lodged a complaint at Fort Laramie later that day. He stubbornly rejected all offers of payment for his lost animal, but demanded that the offenders be punished.

Lieutenant John Grattan, an inexperienced young officer with a prickly sense of honor, led a detachment of soldiers into the Indian camp to make an arrest for the theft of the cow. Drunken taunts from Grattan's interpreter, a local trader, aggravated the tense standoff between soldiers and warriors. For reasons still unclear, a nervous trooper fired his weapon, bringing down a hail of arrows from the furious Lakota. The fight wiped out Lt. Grattan's 31-man command, killed the respected Brule leader Conquering Bear, and destroyed the fragile peace along the overland trails.

It will be an expensive cow.
— Senator Sam Houston as U.S. prepares for war against the Plains Indians, 1855

A year later, U.S. Army troops under General William Harney punished the Sioux for Grattan's defeat by destroying Little Thunder's Brule village in western Nebraska. That and other heavy-handed military actions against the Plains Indians over the next several years launched a cycle of attacks and counter-attacks known as the Plains Wars. The Sioux and their allies, the Arapaho and Cheyenne, struck settlements, forts, railroad and telegraph lines, army posts, and isolated homesteads and stage stations across the plains through the 1860s. In Wyoming, Shoshones and Bannocks disrupted the overland trail in March 1862 by attacking every stage, mail, and telegraph station between Platte Bridge Station (later renamed Fort Caspar—today's City of Casper) and northern Utah. Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho fighters struck the Platte Bridge Station in July 1865, hoping to destroy the bridge and sever the overland road. On the same day near Red Buttes, several miles west of Platte Bridge Station, the combined Indian forces wiped out a government supply train approaching from the west. They resisted further trespass into Sioux and Cheyenne territory by killing travelers on the branch roads to the newly opened gold fields in Montana and Colorado.

Emigrants on the overland trails naturally were increasingly fearful of Indians during the years of the Plains Wars, although most encounters remained nonviolent. Meanwhile, game grew scarcer and the situation more desperate for the proud Plains nations. To some

At night we placed our weapons of defense by the sides of our beds in our tents. I claimed the ax for mine, and always saw that it was close to me, but I never had occasion to use it on an Indian.

— Nancy Cotton Zumwalt Hunt, 1854 California emigration

This country was once covered with buffalo, elk, deer and antelope, and we had plenty to eat. . . . But now, since the white man has made a road across our land, and has killed off our game, we are hungry, and there is nothing for us to eat. Our women and children cry for food and we have no food to give them.

— Chief Washakie of the Eastern Shoshone, 1855

Our country for hunting game has become very small. We see the white men everywhere; their rifles kill some of the game, and we are no longer able to find any game; our little children are crying for food.... We wish to live.
— Chief Medicine Man of the Arapaho, 1859

"The Buffalo Hunt." Image is courtesy of theLibrary of Congress.

Indian leaders, resistance seemed the best path to survival. Others chose a different path. Chief Washakie, for example, worked hard to keep his Eastern Shoshone band at peace during the Plains Wars. He was able to do it by shifting his band's activities away from the hot-zones of conflict, and by commanding the continuing respect of his young warriors. Chief Washakie cooperated with the U.S. Army against their mutual enemies, the Sioux, Arapaho, and Cheyenne people. While other Shoshone bands attacked travelers along the overland trails, his people aided emigrants and permitted construction of the Lander Road across their lands. The great chief was an admired and accomplished politician, and received from the federal government much of what he demanded on behalf of his people —including the beautiful Wind River Reservation, near Lander, Wyoming.

The Sioux, Arapaho, and Cheyenne people, defeated at last by the destruction of the great buffalo herds, were forced onto reservations in the 1870s. Of those three tribes, only the Northern Arapahos, sharing the Wind River Reservation with the Eastern Shoshones, live in Wyoming today.

'GOD SPEED TO THE BOY AND THE PONY!'

Briefly skirting the Plains troubles were the tough young riders of the Pony Express. "The Pony" was launched in April 1860 and closed down in November 1861, shortly before the worst of the Plains conflicts began.

The Pony Express was a horse-and-rider relay that carried mail east and west between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, California. In those days, mail going to California by ship or stagecoach could take one to six months to arrive. For a hefty fee of $5 (about $85 per half-ounce in today's money), the Pony could carry mail across half a continent in just ten to sixteen days, depending on weather conditions and the season. The Pony Express route followed the combined Oregon & California trail across northeastern Kansas, Nebraska, and most of Wyoming, but split off at Fort Bridger to take the Mormon road into Salt Lake City. From there, it crossed the Great Basin into California. Along the route were Pony Express "home stations," placed 75 to 100 miles apart. Riders relayed the mail both east and west along their assigned segments between two home stations.

The Pony rider headed out with the mail pouch, called a mochila (Spanish for "knapsack," and pronounced "mo-che-la"), as soon as it arrived at his home station, year-round and at any time of the night or day. He switched to a fresh mount at "swing," or relay, stations every 10 to 15 miles along the way, leaving his tired horses in the care of the station-keepers. On arriving at the home station at the end of his run, the rider passed the mail to his relief rider for the next leg of the route. He then could enjoy a well-deserved meal and a bed at the station (which often was a stage station that served overland coach passengers, too) while waiting for the next inbound mochila.

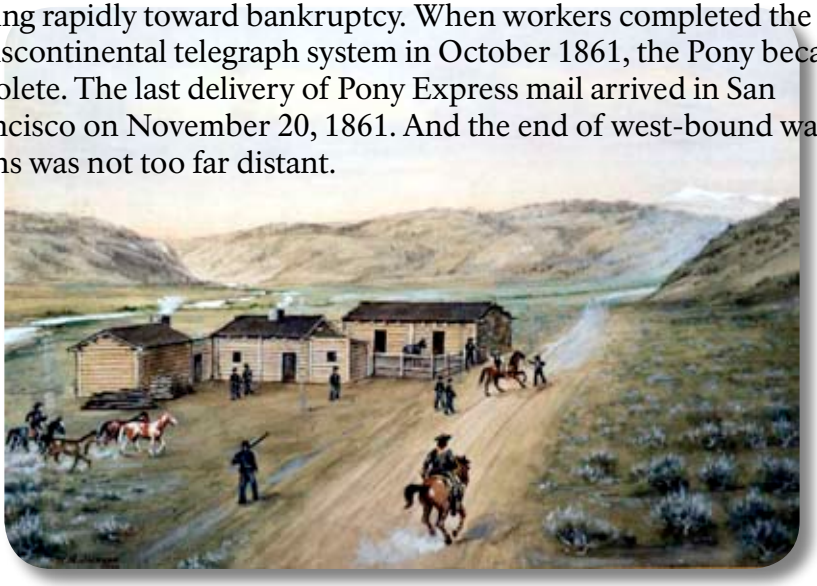
Lone riders on the trail made easy targets, and although no Pony Express riders were killed in Wyoming during the Plains conflicts, they had reason to worry about the possibility. Rider Henry Avis, for example, reported carrying the mail west along his relay from Horse Creek to Horse Shoe Station, only to find his relief rider there afraid to leave the station for fear of the Sioux. Avis himself took the mochila on to Deer Creek Station, where the arriving eastbound rider refused to continue to Horse Shoe Station on the same stretch of

trail Avis had just crossed. Avis mounted up once more and carried the eastbound mail back to Horse Shoe, for a ride totaling 199 miles. Danger was far worse across western Utah and Nevada, where three riders were killed by Indian fighters, several narrowly escaped ambush, and a number of employees perished in attacks on Pony stations. Violence there in the Great Basin was unrelated to the Plains Wars but had the same causes: destruction of native food resources and mistreatment of Indian people along the overland trails.

No danger or difficulty must check his speed or change his route, for the world is waiting for the news he shall fetch and carry…. 'God speed to the boy and the pony.'

— Western Journal of Commerce, Kansas City, Aug. 8, 1860

During its 18-19 months of operation, the Pony Express provided a critical and fast link between East and West. Its carriers delivered to eager California crowds the news of President Buchanan's farewell address, Lincoln's election and inauguration, and early battles of the Civil War. But the enterprise was expensive, and the Pony's struggling parent company, the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, & Waddell, was sliding rapidly toward bankruptcy. When workers completed the transcontinental telegraph system in October 1861, the Pony became obsolete. The last delivery of Pony Express mail arrived in San Francisco on November 20, 1861. And the end of west-bound wagon trains was not too far distant.



"Rocky Ridge Pony Express Station," by William Henry Jackson. Image is courtesy of Scotts Bluff Nat'l. Monument.

THE END OF THE TRAIL ERA

In its heyday, the wagon corridor across Wyoming was a buzzing multi-lane highway that carried traffic of all kinds both east and west. Emigrants and gold-seekers followed, and sometimes abandoned, their dreams along that highway. Bullwhackers, like today's interstate truckers, used the road to haul commercial freight across the country. More than 70,000 Mormon converts took the route with handcarts and wagons to join their fellow Latter-day Saints in Utah. Soldiers and their supply trains followed the highway toward their posts in the western territories. Drovers from as far away as Texas pushed great herds of cattle and sheep up the road to meat-starved cities on the west coast. Stagecoaches with passengers and mail, Pony Express riders with important dispatches, surveyors, writers, artists, and adventurers joined other travelers on that busy corridor.

But the summertime stream of traffic dwindled and mostly dried up after 1869. People continued moving West, but the transcontinental railroad, completed that year, offered a faster, easier way over 2,000 miles of mountain and plain. Steel and steam replaced wooden wheels and muscle-power. A difficult, dangerous trek of several months was now an easy ride of several days.

Some of Wyoming's modern highways parallel the timeworn wagon route over South Pass. Trail traces—deep ruts, two-tracks, and faint, sinuous lines where the sagebrush refuses to grow— are visible from those highways. Long segments of original trail still serve Wyoming's backcountry traffic. South Pass remains sage-scented and edged by the magnificent Wind River peaks, little changed since the emigration era.

All told, nearly 500,000 pioneers poured through that gap in the Rockies and claimed a continent. South Pass, accident of geography and Gateway to the West, helped set a new nation on its feet.

Geography is destiny.
— attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte

SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

A word about driving in the West…

Wyoming's wide open spaces offer limited opportunities to purchase food and fuel. Before starting out, consult a road map to plan your fuel and refreshment stops. Once on the road, fuel stops are often farther apart than travelers might realize. And watch for livestock and wildlife on the highways, particularly at dawn and dusk when many animals are most active.

This Auto Tour Route guide will direct you over paved highways and a few well-maintained dirt roads. However, at times it describes opportunities to make side-trips on unpaved back roads closer to, and sometimes on, the original Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express Trails. Some of these optional routes cross public lands where there are no houses and little traffic. Cell phone coverage is spotty all across Wyoming. If you choose to drive back roads, do not count on summoning help in case of emergency. Go prepared. Check your tires, carry a spare and a road map, leave pets at home, take food and water, and be ready to hike back to the highway, if necessary.

For more guidance on visiting National Historic Trails in Wyoming, log onto the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) website at http://www.wy.blm.gov/historictrails/etiquette for a short Microsoft PowerPoint slide show. Individual BLM field offices also can advise you in planning trips along more remote stretches of historic trail, and they can provide detailed maps of the backcountry road networks. See the last page of this booklet for contact information.

Driving backcountry historic trails is a thrilling—and usually quite safe—experience. But like the pioneers of the covered wagon days, you are on your own out there.

And now, Westward, Ho! Begin your auto tour at the Nebraska/Wyoming state line on U.S. Highway 26, east of Torrington.

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT A: NEBRASKA STATE LINE TO CASPER
(Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, & Pony Express Trails)

The trail corridor through eastern Wyoming followed the North Platte River past Fort Laramie to Fort Caspar.

A-1. Henry Hill Grave (vicinity of Torrington, WY) is the burial place of an emigrant who died while on his way to California with his family in 1852. Wagon swales are nearby. Site is on private land, but Property Manager Gary Nickal will guide visitors to the grave. Make arrangements several days before your visit by calling him at (307) 532-4770. If no answer, leave a message. *High-clearance vehicles only.*

Site of the Henry Hill grave near Torrington.

A-2. Cold Springs Camp Monument (U.S.-85, south of Torrington) commemorates an emigrant campground on the Oregon and California Trails, a Pony Express relay station, and an Overland Stage station. The site itself is on private property not visible from the monument. **Directions:** From U.S.-26 in Torrington, turn south on U.S.-85. Monument is about 1.5 miles from the junction, a short distance beyond a railroad crossing of the highway, on the east side of the road. After your visit, return to westbound U.S.-26.

Historic marker at the Cold Springs Campsite near Torrington.

A-3. Rawhide Creek Wayside Exhibit (U.S.-26 near Lingle, WY) Many emigrant journals and diaries from the 1840s to 1860s mention experiences such as "nooning," camping for the night, crossing over,

or burying a loved one on the banks of Rawhide Creek. Of these experiences, death and disease were common. It's been estimated that there is an average of ten graves to every mile along the emigrant trails. An exhibit overlooking Rawhide Creek provides historic trail experiences on these subjects. *Note that this "rest area" was deactivated by Wyoming DOT in 2006.*

Rawhide Creek rest area along U.S. 26 near Torrington.

Directions: From the U.S.-26/ U.S.-85 junction in Torrington, drive west toward Lingle on U.S. 26 for about 8.5 miles. Pullout is on north side of road.

A-4. Grattan Fight Monument (WY-157, south of Lingle) stands near the site of the Brule Sioux camp where Lt. John Grattan's detachment was destroyed in a fight over an emigrant's cow in 1854. *The actual battle site is on nearby private ground; please do not trespass.*

Historic stone marker at the site of the Grattan battle, near Torrington.

Directions: From U.S.-26/85 in Lingle, turn south on WY-156, then almost immediately bear west onto WY-157. After 2 miles, cross the North Platte River and continue another mile. Watch for the brown highway sign at County Road 27. Monument is just ahead at the northwest corner of the intersection.

Western History Center near Lingle.

A-5. Western History Center (U.S.-26, west of Lingle) offers

trail-related exhibits, a children's activity area, and more. Open summers Mon.-Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun. 1-4 p.m.; winter hours variable. Free.
Directions: From the Grattan Fight Monument, continue west on WY-157 for 1.7 miles. Here the road curves sharply to the right. The south-side emigrant trails climb the bluffs to your left. Go north 2 miles, cross the North Platte River, and continue 1 mile to U.S.-26. The Western History Center is across the highway to your right.

A-6. Fort Laramie Information Center (Town of Fort Laramie, WY) includes an Oregon Trail monument and a Mormon pioneer monument. A historical sign provides information about the Mormon pioneers at Fort Laramie.
Directions: Continue into the town of Fort Laramie on westbound U.S.-26. The center is in the middle of town on the north side of the highway, across the street from the post office.

Fort Laramie Information Center on U.S. 26.

A-7. North Platte River Crossing Site (west of Town of Fort Laramie) is where north-bank emigrants crossed the river to Fort Laramie. An interpretive panel tells the story of the nearby military bridge. The site, which is within the boundary of Fort Laramie National Historic Site, has a 1.5-mile riverside hiking trail.
Directions: At the Town of Fort Laramie, turn west on WY-160 and cross the railroad tracks. Continue about a mile to the North Platte River, cross the bridge, and turn left on County Road 15. Park at the south end of the 1875 military bridge and walk approximately 50 yards east on the "confluence trail."

Stone monument at site of the North Platte River Crossing.

A-8. Fort Platte Monument (southwest of Town of Fort Laramie) marks the probable location of an 1841 trading post, often noted by passing emigrants. The site itself is on private land; please do not trespass.
Directions: From the North Platte River crossing site, continue west a short distance on WY-160. Monument is a few hundred yards from the bridge, on the north side of the road.

Historic marker for the Fort Platte trading post.

A-9. "Greatest Ride" Monument (southwest of Town of Fort Laramie) salutes a horse and rider who made a long, risky wintertime run from Fort Phil Kearney, in northeastern Wyoming, to summon help from Fort Laramie following a Sioux attack.
Directions: From the Fort Platte monument, continue southwest on WY-160 (which becomes Gray Rocks Road) for 2.5 miles. Watch for the monument pullout on the north side of the road at a 90-degree curve.

A-10. Fort Laramie National Historic Site (965 Gray Rocks Road, Fort Laramie) once stood sentinel over the Oregon, California, and later Mormon emigration trails, was a stop on the Pony Express route, and served as a staging ground for both peaceful and hostile dealings with Plains Indians. Its association with important figures (including Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse) and historic events makes Fort Laramie an icon of the American West. The one-time Army post, now managed by the National Park Service, looks much as it did 150 years ago. Allow several hours for your visit. Grounds are open dawn to dusk every day of the year. Fort museum and Visitor Center are open May-Sept.

Parade grounds and sutlers store at Fort Laramie.

daily, 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; and Oct.-April, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., daily except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Go to www.nps.gov/fola for schedule of special events and more information. Admission $3 adults, 15 and under free. Interagency Annual, Senior, and Access cards accepted. Audio-tour devices available for $3 rental at the visitor center in the old Commissary Storehouse.
Directions: Continue west on WY-160/Gray Rocks Road and follow signs to Fort Laramie National Historic Site, about 3 miles from town.

A-11. Mary Homsley Grave (west of Fort Laramie National Historic Site) is the final resting place of an 1852 Oregon-bound emigrant who died following a wagon accident in the North Platte River. An interpretive sign tells the story. Grave is on private ground, but owner allows public visitation.

The Mary Homsley grave.

Directions: *Visitors with low-clearance vehicles should be prepared to walk a short distance over rough ground to reach the site*. From Fort Laramie National Historic Site parking, return to Gray Rocks Road eastbound and drive toward town. In 1 mile, turn left on County Road 92, a maintained gravel road suitable for low-clearance vehicles. Go through the gateway and drive 1.2 miles, watching on the right for a brown directional sign for the Homsley grave and Oregon Trail ruts. Turn right there and continue 1.2 miles, watching for a second small, low directional sign on the left. *Visitors in low-clearance vehicles should park near the sign and walk approximately 0.2 mile to the grave*. High-clearance vehicles can turn left at the sign and enter a two-track, which crosses a patch of deep, loose sand, and continue to the white concrete monument ahead. ***Caution – do not drive past the monument. The track below the grave ends at an unfenced irrigation canal. Keep away!***

A-12. The Bedlam Ruts (west of Fort Laramie National Historic Site) are a fine stretch of wagon ruts and swales that visitors can walk. The trail segment is on undeveloped public lands jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

On-site interpretive signs tell the story. Setting is natural and quiet.
Directions: *This site is accessible to low-clearance vehicles. Be prepared to walk a short distance from parking to the ruts.* From the Homsley grave, follow the two-track back to County Road 92 and the directional sign, and turn right. Drive 0.4 mile. Site is on the north (right) side of the road. From here, return to U.S.-26.

Interpretive exhibits at site of Old Bedlum Ruts.

A-13. North Platte Valley/ Olinger Point Overlook (U.S.-26 east of Guernsey, WY) is a highway rest area with interpretive signs providing information about 10 important trail-related sites and landmarks in the area. Sighting holes in the wooden posts next to the signs will direct your eye to the site – but visitors may need a boost, because the holes are up high! Binoculars are helpful, too, as the sites are distant.
Directions: Drive west on U.S.-26 for about 10 miles. Rest area is on the south side of the highway at milepost 17.80, about 2.5 miles east of Guernsey.

Interpretive site at the Guernsey rest area on U.S. 26.

A-14. Oregon Trail Ruts State Historic Site and National Historic Landmark, also called the Guernsey Ruts and Deep Rut Hill (vicinity of Guernsey) boasts some of the deepest, most-photographed wagon ruts of the overland trails. Here,

Deeply carved wagon wheel ruts near Guernsey.

thousands of iron-shod wheels and hooves chewed tracks five to six feet deep into solid rock. Paved walkway and informational signs lead visitors in a loop tour along the trail. Walk is steep in places, and may be difficult for wheelchair access. Open sunrise to sunset daily, year-round, weather permitting. Free.
Directions: Route to historic site is clearly marked—*do not follow signs to Guernsey State Park*. After entering Guernsey westbound on U.S.-26, turn left (south) onto South Wyoming Avenue. From the turn, drive 0.9 mile, crossing the North Platte River, and then turn right (west) onto a county-maintained dirt road (suitable for low-clearance vehicles). A brown directional sign marks the turn. In 0.5 mile, turn left (south), pass through a gate, and continue to parking.

A-15. Lucinda Rollins Grave (vicinity of Guernsey) is the burial place of an 1849 emigrant. A white concrete monument, visible from Deep Rut Hill, marks her grave. The original headstone that was once encased in the monument was stolen by vandals. From the monument, look back toward Deep Rut Hill to see a long stretch of wagon swales descending toward the river.

Lucinda Rollins grave near Guernesy.

Directions: From the Oregon Trail Ruts State Historic Site, drive north up the gravel entrance road toward town for 0.3 mile. At the intersection, turn left and follow the unpaved road up the hill to the monument.

A-16. Register Cliff State Historic Site (vicinity of Guernsey) is a soft rock face where many emigrants carved their names. The cliff is defaced with modern graffiti, but the historical inscriptions at the east end (left, as you face the cliff)

Register Cliff interpretive site south of Guernsey.

are protected by a tall wire fence. A pioneer cemetery with at least 3 graves is at the west end. Open year-round, sunrise to sunset. Free.
Directions: Watch for cattle as you approach this site, as this is open range country. From the Rollins grave, return to S. Wyoming Avenue/ S. Guernsey Road and turn right, onto the pavement. Follow the road 1.7 miles as it swings eastward, and watch for a brown directional sign to Register Cliff. Turn north (left) there and continue to parking.

A-17. Sand Point Stage and Pony Express Monument (Guernsey) marks the approximate location of a Pony Express and stage station. Monument includes a plaque and Pony site marker, but no historical signs.
Directions: Leaving Register Cliff, watch for a white monument on the north side of the road. From there, return to Guernsey and U.S.-26.

A-18. Cold Springs & Rifle Pit Hill Monument (U.S.-26 west of Guernsey) is a reminder of both the comforts and the dangers of the trek west. Cold Springs was a popular emigrant campsite; Rifle Pit Hill is a ridge crest where soldiers dug five 2-feet-deep holes and stacked rocks along the rims. Researchers think that these were defensive structures to protect soldiers guarding the Oregon Trail, which passes below the ridge. Sites are on private property; please view from roadside pullout and do not trespass.

Stone monument at the Cold Springs camp area on U.S. 26.

Directions: From Guernsey, drive west on U.S.-26 for about two miles after crossing the river on the west side of town. Pullout is on the north side of the highway.

A-19. Bitter Cottonwood Creek Camp (west of Guernsey) was a shady, comfortable rest stop for travelers along the emigrant trails, and the site of a Pony Express station.
Directions: From the Cold Springs pullout, continue west on U.S.-26 for about ¼ mile to the next unpaved road and turn right, onto

Wendover Road. You are following the corridor of the original emigrant trail. Follow the road around a farmhouse and up a hill, and continue northwestward. In 3.7 miles you will see a granite Oregon Trail monument that was erected by the State of Wyoming in 1913. Continue another 2.6 miles to a T-intersection. Straight ahead, across the cattle guard and to the right, is a trail monument. Continue on across the railroad tracks to see the emigrant campground area at Cottonwood Creek. The Pony Express station site is marked with a steel post approximately 0.3 mile east of the track. From here, you may return via the same route to U.S.-26 and continue west about 12 miles to Dwyer Junction and the Laramie Peak viewpoint.

Mormon Pioneer camp area at Bitter Cottonwood Creek.

OR, for a true trail experience in dry weather only, you can follow a dirt road approximately 15 miles to I-25 just south of Glendo. *(This route bypasses stop A-20, Laramie Peak viewpoint, described below.)* For this backcountry adventure, go back across the cattle guard and turn southwest (right) onto Cottonwood Road. Stay on the main road near the railroad tracks. In 2.8 miles, the road crosses the railroad tracks, turns northwest and then west, and heads straight toward Laramie Peak. In 2.7 miles you will see a rock outcrop to your right and. At the bottom of the hill is a Y in the road; bear left on Dyer Road. Do not go through the large ranch gate to the right. Continue only 0.1 mile and look for another road to your right. This is a continuation of Cottonwood Road. Turn right onto this road and go through the second large overhead ranch gate and head due west toward Laramie Peak. Watch for cattle, as this is open range and private land. At 5.5 miles after the ranch gate, you will intersect I-25. There is no access to the interstate here, so turn north (right) on the access road and continue 3.6 miles to the Cassia Road interchange. Get on the interstate and head north toward Douglas.

A-20. Laramie Peak Viewpoint (Dwyer rest area at junction of U.S.-26 and I-25) offers a paved walkway to a shady gazebo where visitors can view Laramie Peak, an important overland trail landmark. Interpretive signs tell the story.
Directions: Rest stop is located at the intersection of U.S.-26 and I-25 at Dwyer Junction. From here, enter I-25 northbound and drive toward Douglas.

State historic marker at the highway rest area on U.S. 26 near Dwyer Junction.

A-21. Wyoming Pioneer Memorial Museum (400 W. Center, Douglas, WY) offers a variety of exhibits related to the emigrant and Pony Express trails, as well as a large gallery of Native American objects. Designated as a Great Experience for Members (GEM) destination by AAA. Open summers, Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sat. 1-5 p.m.; winters Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Free.
Directions: Leave I-25 at Exit 140 at the west end of Douglas and drive east into town on Yellowstone Highway. Watch for the Wyoming State Fair Park sign and entrance on the right, shortly after crossing the river. Turn into the fair park; the museum is on the left, near the park entrance. Drive around the building to the museum entrance.

Pioneer Memorial Museum near the state fairgrounds at Douglas.

A-22. Fort Fetterman State Historic Site (752 Hwy 93, Douglas) was built on the Bozeman gold rush trail to Montana in 1867 to support military action against Plains Indians, who were trying to halt travel across their lands. The park offers museum and interpretive exhibits, self-guided tours of the grounds and buildings, and various outdoor recreational activities. Visitor center and ordnance building open daily, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Memorial Day – Labor Day Weekend;

grounds are open sunrise to sunset. Site is closed the rest of the year, but visitors may park at the gate and enter the fort on foot. A modest admission fee is charged.

Entrance to Fort Fetterman State Historic Site west of Douglas.

Directions: From Wyoming Pioneer Memorial Museum, turn west onto Yellowstone Highway, then north (right) onto South Riverbend Drive. Almost immediately, turn west (left) onto WY-93; ***OR***, if starting from I-25 westbound, take Exit 140 on the west end of Douglas. Turn left at the end of the exit, then make an immediate left onto WY-93. Follow signs 7 miles to the fort. From the fort, return to I-25.

A-23. Ayres Natural Bridge Park (Natural Bridge Road, west of Douglas) features a natural stone bridge spanning sparkling LaPrele Creek. Many emigrants visited the scenic landmark, although it is more than a mile from the wagon trail. An interpretive sign tells the story. This pleasant county park also offers picnicking, camping (with permission of the caretaker), and playgrounds. *No pets allowed in park!* Free. Open April -October, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. For more information, call (307) 358-3532.

The stone bridge at Ayres Natural Bridge Park.

Directions: From I-25, take Exit 151 (Natural Bridge Exit) and turn south (left) onto Natural Bridge Road (County Road 13), going beneath the overpass. Follow signs 4.75 miles to park.

The route into the park follows nearly 5 miles of paved road, which becomes narrow and winding as it approaches the park. May be difficult passage for very large recreational vehicles. Return to I-25 westbound, then merge onto U.S.-20/26/Business Loop I-25 at Exit 160 to Glenrock.

A-24. Oregon Trail Park (E. Oregon Trail & Pioneer Place, Glenrock, WY) is a tiny neighborhood playground with a short stretch of shallow wagon ruts and an interpretive marker located at its west end. Trail ruts are rarely preserved in residential settings such as this.
Directions: Enter Glenrock westbound on U.S.-20/26 (road becomes Birch Street) and turn right (north) at the high school onto Box Elder Trail. At the north end of the high school campus, turn left (west) onto E. Oregon Trail. Park is 5 blocks further, past the high school athletic fields.

Monument at the Oregon Trail Park in Glenrock.

A-25. Deer Creek Crossing/ Glenrock Town Park (U.S.-20 & Town Park Road, Glenrock) offers a short paved trail along Deer Creek, two historical signs, and picnicking and playground facilities.
Directions: Continuing into town westbound on U.S.-20/26/ E. Birch Street, the highway makes a broad, gentle curve. Shortly after the curve, watch for Town Park Road (unsigned) on the north side of the highway, just before the bridge over Deer Creek. Turn right and enter the park.

Several interpretive exhibits provide historical information about the Deer Creek Crossing area.

A-26. Deer Creek Station Site (Glenrock) has two commemorative monuments and a historical sign showing the layout of the Deer Creek Station military post. An emigrant campground, trading post, stage stop, telegraph, and Pony Express station (burned by Indians in 1866) once stood near this location.
Directions: Continue west on E. Birch Street. Turn right on N. Third Street and continue 1 long block north to Center Street. Site is on the southwest corner of N. Third and Center.

A-27. The Rock in the Glen (U.S.-20/26, Glenrock) is a geological landmark where John C. Fremont and Kit Carson once camped, and where emigrants carved their names. The feature is heavily defaced with modern graffiti, making emigrant inscriptions hard to spot. Even so, the Rock in the Glen is fun to climb and explore. It is accessed by a rough, unpaved trail from the parking area. Open sunrise to sunset. Free.

The Rock in the Glen park, west of the community of Glenrock.

Directions: Continue westbound through town on U.S.-20/26. Pullout is past the west end of Glenrock, on the south (left) side of the highway just past the Lutheran church.

A-28. Ada Magill Grave (U.S.20/26, west of Glenrock) is the burial place of an emigrant child who died in 1864. An interpretive sign tells the story, and a Pony Express marker is here, as well.

Ada Magill grave site and Pony Express marker west of Glenrock.

Directions: On U.S.-20/26, about 5.2 miles west of Glenrock, watch for a brown directional sign for the Big Muddy Bridge Public Access. Turn north (right) there onto a gravel road and drive about 0.2 mile to the next road to the right, opposite an oil derrick. Turn right there. Grave is a .25 mile ahead, on the north (left) side of the road. From here, return to U.S.-20/26 westbound to Casper.

PROCEED TO AUTO TOUR SEGMENT B

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT B: CASPER TO SEEDSKADEE
(Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, & Pony Express Trails)

Beyond Fort Caspar, travelers left the Platte River lifeline to strike out for the Sweetwater, which would take them to the Continental Divide at South Pass. Once in the Pacific watershed, the main trail followed smaller drainages to the Green River, west of today's Farson.

From Casper it is 145 miles to Lander, your next sure opportunity to refuel.

B-1. National Historic Trails Interpretive Center (1501 N. Poplar, Casper, WY) offers a fun and informative introduction to the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails across Wyoming. Visitors are greeted by center staff for personal orientation to the facility, where they can enjoy multimedia presentations, dioramas, simulated covered wagon and stagecoach rides, interactive exhibits, and more. Allow 2-3 hours to visit the center's 7 galleries. Open daily April-Oct., 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; Nov.-March, Tues.-Sat. 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Closed New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Admission is $6 adults, $5 seniors, $4 students, $3 youth ages 6 to 17, $1 children ages 3 to 5, and free for those under age 3. This Bureau of Land Management center also accepts federal Golden Age, Golden Eagle, and Golden Access passes. For more information, go to http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/NHTIC.html or call (307) 261-7700.

Orientation exhibits at the entrance to the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center.

Directions: Entering the east side of Casper on U.S.-20/26, turn left onto WY-253 and merge onto I-25 westbound. Take Exit 189 and bear right (north). Take the next right onto N. Poplar Street and follow directional signs to the center.

Interpretive Center entrance to historic Fort Caspar.

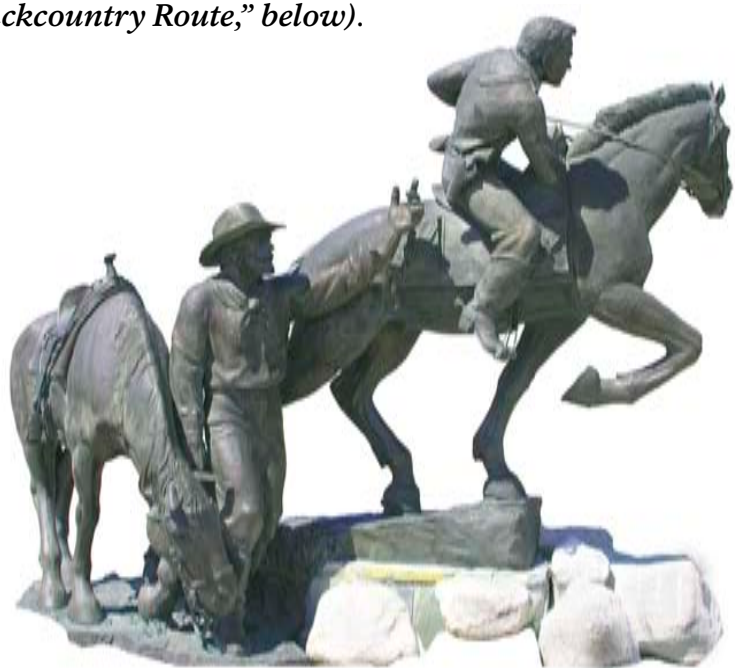
B-2. Site of Fort Caspar/Platte Bridge Station, Fort Caspar Museum, 1847 Mormon Ferry, and Guinard Bridge (4001 Fort Caspar Road, Casper) was a focus of 19th century emigration, commercial, and military activity. In 1847, Brigham Young's Mormon pioneer party made a difficult crossing the North Platte River near this location, then left behind a small party to establish a ferry service there. Later, a toll bridge, trading post, Pony Express relay station, and telegraph office were built nearby. In 1862, the Army established a small military post at the station. The Fort Caspar Museum now provides on-site orientation and self-guided tour brochures for the reconstructed fort. The fort grounds are open May through September; admission is half price when the fort buildings are closed. Fort Caspar Museum is open Jun.-Aug., Mon-Sun. 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sept. & May, Mon.-Sun. 8 a.m.-5 p.m..; and Oct.-April., Tues.-Sat. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is $2 adults, $1 youth ages 13-18, free for those 12 and under.
Directions: From the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, drive south on Poplar Street, pass under the freeway, and cross the railroad tracks. Turn right (west) onto Collins and continue straight to the museum.

Interpretive exhibits along walkway at Bessemer Bend on the North Platte.

B-3. Red Buttes Crossing/ Bessemer Bend (south of Casper) is one of the places where travelers forded the North Platte River—then 300 yards wide—for the last time, and started the push toward the Sweetwater River. This crossing was used mostly in the early years of the emigration because after 1847, ferries were available

between Casper and Glenrock (Deer Creek). The Red Buttes Pony Express station and an Overland Stage station also were located in this vicinity. Wayside exhibits at this BLM site tell the story. While visiting the crossing, look toward the east to see the Red Buttes, the noted emigrant-era landmark that gave the crossing its name.
Directions: From Old Fort Caspar, turn right onto Wyoming Boulevard. Drive 1.1 miles and bear right onto CY Avenue. Continue 7.9miles on CY Avenue, which becomes WY-220. Near mile marker 106, turn right on County Road 308/Bessemer Bend Road. In 1.5 miles, the road turns 90 degrees to the right onto "Bessemer Bend South." Continue around the curve to the left and cross the river. The interpretive site is on your right just after you cross the river.

From Red Buttes Crossing/Bessemer Bend, you can return to WY-220 and continue on the paved Auto Tour Route to Independence Rock ***(skip to entry "B-4. Independence Rock"); OR*** *you can follow a 33-mile backcountry route over well-maintained dirt roads that closely parallel and sometimes overlie the original Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer and Pony Express Trails between Emigrant Gap and Horse Creek Station* ***(see "Optional Backcountry Route," below)****.*



Optional Backcountry Route: Emigrant Gap to Horse Creek Station

This backcountry route passes over maintained crowned-and-ditched dirt roads, washboard in places, but otherwise suitable in dry conditions for passenger sedans and other low-clearance, 2-wheel-drive vehicles. This is a fair-weather road that can become impassible when wet! Do not enter if rain threatens or the road is muddy. Road may be closed in winter. There is no opportunity to buy gas or food along this route.

To begin the Optional Backcountry Route: From the Red Buttes Crossing/Bessemer Bend site, turn right onto County Road 308/ Bessemer Bend Road. The road, which is unpaved, immediately curves to the west. Continue straight (west) past the junction with Twelve Mile Road. Take the next right, heading north (look for county historic trails sign), staying on County Road 308/Bessemer Bend Road. In 2 miles, the road makes a 90-degree turn to the west, then in another mile it intersects with County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road. At this intersection, look for wagon ruts going west and two fading tracks approaching from the east. Here and elsewhere along County Road 319, all the westbound traffic merged onto a single road for the first time on the overland route.

From here, set your trip-odometer and continue with directions below.

- **Avenue of Rocks** is a jagged spine of rock jutting out of the otherwise rolling rangeland. Wagons wound their way through the formation, which emigrants nicknamed "The Devil's Backbone." There are no interpretive signs, but wagon ruts are clearly visible. This is state-owned land, so get out and explore! Watch your step, though – this is rattlesnake and cactus country.

Jagged spine of the Avenue of the Rocks.

Directions: At the intersection of County Road 308/Bessemer Bend Road and County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road, turn left (southwest) onto County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road. In 5.4 miles, look on the right for white posts marking original trail swales. In 5.8 miles, watch for a Bureau of Land Management trail sign on your right as you crest a hill and approach the jutting spine of rock. Ruts and swales where wagons once descended the ridge can be seen along the right side of the road, which overlies part of the historic trail.

From here, the old trail winds back and forth across the modern county road. As you continue your drive, watch on both sides of the road for white trail markers and BLM concrete posts along the original trail, and look for swales and two-tracks worn into the earth by the passage of thousands of covered wagons. Much of the land west of Avenue of Rocks is unfenced private property, however. Please do not trespass.

- **Poison Spring/Clayton's Slough** is a low, wet spot about 2 miles west of Avenue of Rocks. Brigham Young's 1847 pioneer party camped here, and member William Clayton described it as "one of the most horrid, swampy, stinking places" he ever saw. *Site is privately owned; please view from road.*
  Directions: From Avenue of Rocks, continue southwest on County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road for about 2 miles. Watch for white post marking the site on the right side of the road.

Wetland area known as Poison Spring.

Continue watching for white posts marking trail ruts on both sides of the road. About two miles west of Poison Spring, the county road directly overlies the trail.

- **Willow Springs** provided the first cool, sweet water west of Casper, and so became a popular emigrant campsite. Many draft

animals died for lack of grass and water along this stretch of road before reaching the springs. A Pony Express station, now long gone, was also located nearby. *Private property; please observe from the road and do not trespass.*
Directions: Continue southwest from Avenue of Rocks on County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road for about 6.5 miles. The extensive springs area is on the right side of the road.

- **Prospect Hill/Ryan Hill** was a difficult 400-foot climb, but from the top, travelers could see several sub-ranges of the Rocky Mountains. The expansive view, or "prospect," gave the hill its original name. Several members of the Martin Mormon handcart company died near here during a blizzard in late October 1856. Today, the BLM provides a hilltop viewing area with interpretive exhibits. Here, visitors can take in the landscape, which is virtually unchanged since covered wagon days, and walk wagon ruts and swales on public land.
Directions: Drive southwest a mile from the Willow Springs area. In 0.8 mile, about halfway up the hill is a pullout with a good view of the swales cutting the slope. Near the top of the ridge, 1.4 miles from Willow Springs, watch for a BLM directional sign and a gravel road on the right. (The sign often is knocked down by cattle.) Turn onto the road, which leads back about ¼ mile to the BLM interpretive site.

View of Laramie Peak and the trail after climbing Prospect Hill.

- **Horse/Greasewood/Sage Creek** was a Pony Express and stagecoach stop. This is also where the Martin handcart company, struggling west through early blizzards, first met rescue wagons from Salt Lake City.
Directions: From the summit of Prospect Hill, continue southwest on County Road 319/Oregon Trail Road for about 9.5 miles. Where the road curves left and another road intersects from the right at the Murphy Ranch sign, look directly across the

road toward Horse Creek for a steel post marking the location of the Pony Express stop. *Site is on private property; please view from the road.*

From here, continue southwest about 3 miles to WY-220 and turn right (west) to rejoin the designated Auto Tour Route to Independence Rock.

B-4. Independence Rock (west of Alcova, WY) was the most-noted landmark of the wagon trails west of Fort Laramie. Thousands of emigrants camped at the foot of the looming outcrop, and many carved their names into the granite. Today the site is a National Historic Landmark and a state historic site, managed for the public by the State of Wyoming. Interpretive exhibits tell the trail story, and historic inscriptions are visible from footpaths around the rock. As you follow the path from parking to the site, watch for nearby trail ruts and note the deep wagon swale passing beneath the footbridge. Free.

State historic marker at Independence Rock.

Directions: Continue westbound on WY-220 to milepost 63, watching for the highly visible and distinctive granite outcrop in the distance. Follow signs to the Independence Rock rest area and historical site complex, on the left side of the highway.

B-5. Devil's Gate (west of Independence Rock) is a deep cleft cut through a rock ridge by the Sweetwater River. Many an emigrant puzzled at the geological oddity: why would the water chew directly through the rock instead of flowing around it? Today's visitors can ponder that and other questions at a BLM interpretive pullout on the

The Sweetwater River flows through Devil's Gate.

north side of the highway. Pullout has paved walkway, interpretive exhibits, and trail ruts. For a closer look at Devil's Gate, continue west to the Mormon Handcart Visitor Center and follow directions to Rattlesnake Pass (see entry B-6, below).
Directions: From Independence Rock, turn left onto WY-220 and continue west for about 5.5 miles to the pullout on the north side of the highway.

B-6. Rattlesnake Pass, Pioneer Inscriptions, and Frederick Richard Fulkerson Grave (west of Independence Rock) are along the old highway that overlies the original wagon trail at Devil's Gate. Fulkerson was an 1847 emigrant who died while on his way to Oregon. Rattlesnake Pass is where the wagon trail passed around (not through) Devil's Gate. An interpretive sign at the grave tells the story. Look for a wagon swale east of the Fulkerson Grave where the road curves to intersect the highway.

View of Rattlesnake Pass at Devil's Gate.

Directions: From the BLM pullout for Devil's Gate on WY-220, continue west for 0.75 mile and turn right onto the entrance road to the Mormon Handcart Visitor Center. Drive 0.8 mile to the visitor center. There you can park and follow a hiking trail east to Devil's Gate; or to drive, continue through the parking area and past a residence, toward the visitor center. Turn east (right) on the old highway and drive through a gateway and up to Rattlesnake Pass, where the old wagon trail crossed the ridge. Park at the small pullout on the right at 0.6 mile from the visitor center, where the road curves, to visit the grave. Walk back a few yards to the rock formation closest to the road on the north side and look for emigrant inscriptions. After your visit, return west along the highway to Martin's Cove.

B-7. Mormon Handcart Historic Site & Visitor Center, Fort Seminoe, and Tom Sun Ranch (47600 West Wy-220, Alcova, WY), operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, are open to the public, free of admission. Handcarts were not used by

the 1847 Mormon expedition led by Brigham Young, but later Mormon handcart pioneers shared this stretch of road with thousands of other emigrants on the Oregon and California Trails. Handcarts are available for loan at the visitor center, which also tells the Mormon stories relating to nearby Martin's Cove and Devil's Gate. Free tours, handcart treks, and overnight camping may be scheduled; call (307) 328-2953 or fax (307) 324-5218 for more information. Near the visitors' center is reconstructed Fort Seminoe, a trading post dating to the 1850s. This area later became part of the 14-square-mile Tom Sun Ranch, now a National Historic Landmark. Tom Sun, a frontier rancher, drove cattle eastward along the Oregon Trail from the Oregon Country to this location in the 1870s. Site facilities are open summers Sun.-Sat. 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; and winters Sun.-Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Reproduction Mormon handcarts like those used by Mormon emigrants in the 1850s.

Directions: From the BLM pullout for Devil's Gate on WY-220, continue west for 0.75 mile and turn right onto the entrance road to the Mormon Handcart Visitors' Center. Drive approximately 1 mile to the visitor center.

B-8. Martin's Cove (west of Devil's Gate) is named for the Martin Handcart Company, a party of Mormon emigrants who took shelter there during a blizzard in 1856. Many of the company died of exposure in their storm-battered camp while awaiting the arrival of rescue wagons from Salt Lake City. Although the site is strongly associated with this sad event in the Utah emigration, Oregon and California pioneers passed this way, as well. Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints leases the cove from the Bureau of Land Management and offers site

Trail leading to the Martin's Cove area near Devil's Gate.

orientation at the nearby Mormon Handcart Visitor Center (see entry B-7, above). The cove is open to the public free of charge. Interpretive signs provide information along the public hiking trail (5-mile round trip) into the cove. *Handcart Center staff will transport mobility-impaired visitors to the cove in a vehicle, without charge, upon request.* A monument commemorating the Martin Company tragedy is on the north side of the old highway about 2 miles southwest of the handcart center.

Directions: From Rattlesnake Pass, return to the handcart center and park. From there, follow signs directly to the hiking trail, or go first to the visitor center for orientation and to request the use of a Mormon handcart to take with you into the cove. To drive to the Martin monument, continue west for 2 miles on the old highway.

From here, return to U.S.-220 and drive west. Watch for Split Rock in the distance.

B-9. Split Rock (east of Jeffrey City, WY) is a "gun sight" notched landform that guided emigrants directly toward South Pass. Bureau of Land Management interpretive exhibits tell the story.

Split Rock along U.S. 287 east of Jeffrey City.

Directions: Return to WY-220 and drive west toward Muddy Gap Junction (intersection of WY-220 with U.S.-287). At the junction, turn right onto U.S.287/WY-789 westbound. Approximately 8 miles beyond Muddy Gap is a BLM interpretive pullout/rest area on the right (north) side of the highway. From this angle, though, the cleft in the rock is not visible. Return to the highway and turn west. The old emigrant trail merges with the highway at the road cut at the top of the hill. About 3.2 miles beyond the pullout is Split Rock Monument, on the right side of the road. Pull over there for a good view back toward the landmark. Look southwest across the highway, beyond the power poles, to see the small, craggy rock formation the emigrants dubbed "Castle Rock." It becomes more visible as you continue west along the highway.

B-10. Ice Slough (west of Jeffrey City) was a fun rest stop for trail-weary emigrants, who enjoyed digging ice out of the marshy ground. Ground water, insulated by a layer of earth and vegetation, often remained frozen well into July. Conditions have changed, though –no buried summertime ice is found there now. *Site is on private property; please view from the public pullout and do not trespass.*

State historic marker pullout for Ice Slough along U.S. 287.

Directions: Drive west on U.S.-287 through Jeffrey City, then continue 9.5 miles to the Ice Slough pullout, on the right side of the road.

B-11. Willie Handcart Historic Site (Sweetwater Station Junction, WY) is a visitor center, operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, near one of numerous emigrant fords on the Sweetwater River. The area is best known for its association with the rescue of the 1856 Willie Handcart Company, caught in the same deadly blizzard that trapped the Martin Company. The Oregon, California, Pony Express, and 1847 Mormon Pioneer Trails crossed the Sweetwater here, too. From the center, visitors can drive back roads to the Willie rescue site, Rocky Ridge, and a number of other trail-related sites on public lands. Center staff can provide driving directions and help plan handcart treks and hikes. The center also offers free loan of handcarts and public camping, though it is best to call ahead to make arrangements. Open free to all visitors mid-May to Labor Day, daily, 8 a.m.-7 p.m., and Labor Day to mid-May, daily, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Office complex and information center for Mormon handcart treks.

Directions: Drive 9.1 miles west from the Ice Slough pullout on U.S.-287/WY-789. Site is on the left (south) side of the highway.

The Lander Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management also provides guidance for accessing these and other backcountry trail sites along the Sweetwater River emigrant trail corridor. Contact the Lander Field Office for information.

From Sweetwater Station, continue west for 30 miles on U.S.-287 to its junction with WY-28. For the nearest food and gasoline, turn right at the junction and follow U.S.-287 nine miles north into Lander. Otherwise, turn south (left) onto WY-28 and continue on the Auto Tour Route. Limited services and gasoline are available 70 miles south at Farson. Restaurants, but not fuel, are available at Atlantic City; drive 18.8 miles south on WY-28, turn left onto the Atlantic City Road, and continue 2.5 miles to town.

Also of Interest: **South Pass City State Historic Site.** Miners used the emigrant trails to enter the South Pass area during a brief gold rush that began there in 1867. South Pass City sprouted overnight, but fell into decline as the boom went bust. Today the old ghost town is partially restored and open to visitors. Visitor center and building exhibits are open May 15-Sept. 30, daily, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; grounds are open sunrise to sunset year-round, weather permitting. A modest admission fee is charged. **Directions:** Drive south on WY-28, continue past Atlantic City turnoff to milepost 43.49, and turn left onto smooth crowned-and-ditched gravel road. Follow signs to South Pass City Historic Site. After your visit, return to WY-28, or to avoid backtracking, continue west through South Pass City on the gravel road. The road south of South Pass City can be rough but the route is scenic, with excellent views of the Oregon Buttes (a noted overland trail landmark) to the south.

South Pass City State Historic Site.

B-12. Lander Road "Point of Interest" (WY-28, south of South Pass City) is a highway pullout with historical information about the only wagon road built by the federal government to support the westward emigration.
Directions: Continue south on WY-28 from South Pass City. Pullout is on the left, 0.6 mile past milepost 38.

State historic marker on state road 28 south of South Pass City.

B-13. South Pass Rest Area (south of South Pass City) is a State of Wyoming facility with interpretive signs about the pass and local wildlife.
Directions: Rest area is north of milepost 34 on WY-28, on the northeast bank of the Sweetwater River.

Information facility at the rest area along state road 28.

From here, you can continue on WY-28 to South Pass Overlook, a Bureau of Land Management interpretive site with a panoramic view of the South Pass region (skip to entry "B-14. South Pass Overlook"); OR, visitors can follow the old wagon trail itself a short distance to South Pass National Historic Landmark, arguably the most historically significant spot on the combined trail corridor (see "Optional Backcountry Side-Trip," below).

Optional Backcountry Side-Trip: South Pass National Historic Landmark

This optional side-trip follows about 3 miles of maintained county roads and less than 1 mile of original two-track wagon trail to the South Pass interpretive site at the Continental Divide. ***Auto Tour Route visitors are advised to turn around at that site and return to WY-28.*** *The old wagon trail continues west and rejoins WY-28 about 5 miles beyond the South Pass exhibits, but the trail is extremely rough and often is impassible. Proceed at your own risk.*

High clearance vehicles recommended. Do not attempt to turn onto the original wagon trail segment when the road is wet or when rain threatens. Road is closed in winter. Detailed maps of the area are available from the Rock Springs and Lander Field Offices of the Bureau of Land Management.

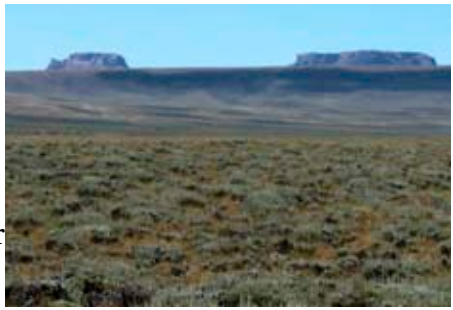
- **South Pass**, a 20-mile wide, gently sloping gap in the Rocky Mountains, opened the west to emigration by providing a good wagon route over the Continental Divide. Everyone who followed the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express Trails crossed the mountains here—and scars left by thousands of wagon wheels and hooves are still visible. Today, South Pass is a National Historic Landmark managed by the BLM, and the area is open free to the public.
  Directions: From South Pass Rest Area, continue south on WY-28 for 0.7 mile, watching on the right for a sign indicating the Big Sandy entrance to the Bridger Wilderness. *Do not follow the sign*, but instead continue another 0.2 mile on the highway and turn left (southeast) onto Oregon Buttes Road. Zero your trip odometer, then continue southeast across the cattle guard and

Ezra Meeker stone marker at South Pass.

under the power lines. Cross a second cattle guard and continue to odometer reading 2.8 miles, slowing where the road begins curving to the right. Look for the old wagon trail crossing Oregon Buttes Road at the curve; it can be hard to see when approaching from the north. Turn right (west) onto the two-track. If the two-track appears too rough for your vehicle, park here and hike about a mile to the South Pass monuments.

You are now on the original corridor of the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails at South Pass. The two-track you are driving is original wagon trail that has been slightly modified by modern vehicle traffic.

- **The Oregon Buttes**, the dark landform on the horizon to your left after turning onto the trail, roughly marked the emigrants' entry into the Oregon Territory. **Directions:** After turning west onto the trail two-track, pull over at the BLM interpretive exhibit just ahead on the left.



Oregon Buttes as seen in the distance south of South Pass.

As you continue west on the trail, keep to the main two-track and watch along both sides for trail markers and parallel ruts and swales. Those intact wheel ruts, created where wagons spread out to avoid the dust kicked up by those ahead, have not been altered by modern vehicle traffic. For a great trail experience, park on the two-track and explore those original wagon ruts on foot – do not drive on them!

- **South Pass Wayside and Monuments.** On the right side of the road at odometer reading 3.6 miles is a BLM interpretive exhibit about South Pass. A short distance

BLM Interpretive exhibit east of the South Pass summit.

beyond, on the right, stands a small monument commemorating Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding, missionary women who crossed the pass with their husbands in 1836. (Historians now agree that the missionaries actually crossed the divide near the Little Sandy on what became the Lander Road route.) Also nearby is a stone monument erected by Ezra Meeker, a covered-wagon emigrant who returned years later to mark and promote protection of the Oregon Trail.

From here, turn your vehicle around and pause to look in front of you to the east: the road you are driving is in the bottom of a broad, deep swale created by multi-lane wagon traffic. Now return to WY-28 the way you came. Turn left (west) onto the highway and continue to stop B-14, below.

B-14. South Pass Overlook (west of South Pass City) is a BLM interpretive site with views of several trail landmarks, along with historical signs that tell their stories.
Directions: The overlook is 5.3 miles southwest of South Pass Rest Area on the east side of WY-28. The alternative backcountry route described above leaves the wagon trail and rejoins the highway here.

BLM interpretive site for several landmarks in the South Pass area along state road 28.

B-15. "False Parting of the Ways" (east of Farson, WY) is a highway pullout with information about the split where the main trail went southwest toward Fort Bridger and the Sublette Cutoff continued directly west. Historical signs mistakenly suggest that the Parting of the Ways was right here (which is why the site is called "False Parting"). The actual Parting of the Ways is several miles northwest of the pullout.
Directions: Continue west for 5.1 miles past the South Pass Overlook. Pullout is on the right. From here, continue southwest on WY-28 toward Farson.

B-16. Big Sandy Pony Express Station (U.S.-191, Farson), burned by Indians in 1862, stood a short distance south of the Big Sandy Crossing. The site, on private property, can be viewed from a pullout. *Please do not trespass*. Commemorative monuments tell about the station and the place to the east where the first Pony Express riders crossed the Big Sandy.

Historical markers for the Big Sandy Pony Express station in Farson.

Directions: At Farson, turn right on U.S.-191 and make an immediate left into the pullout at the northwest corner of U.S.-191 and WY-28.

B-17. Little Sandy Crossing (WY-28, Farson) was a fording place for travelers taking the southerly route toward Fort Bridger. A monument near the highway junction recounts a legendary 1847 conversation between Brigham Young and mountain man Jim Bridger about the advisability of settling in the Great Salt Lake Valley. *Property beyond the pullout is privately owned; please view from the road.*

Mormon trail monument for the Little Sandy Crossing west of Farson on state road 28.

Directions: At Farson, follow WY-28 southwest across its intersection with U.S.-191. Continue across the bridge and turn right into the pullout approximately ¼ mile past the intersection.

From here, you can skip to "Auto Tour Segment C: The Lander Road" and turn north on U.S.-191 toward Pinedale; OR you can continue on to Simpson's Hollow and the Lombard/Mormon Ferry site, listed below.

B-18. Simpson's Hollow (southwest of Farson) is a military skirmish site where Mormon militiamen, harassing U.S. Army troops on their way to Utah in 1857, captured and burned 22 army supply

wagons. Hostilities between Utah Mormons and the federal government—known as the Utah War— are blamed for the drop in emigration traffic that year. BLM waysides tell the story.

Directions: Continue southwest from Farson on WY-28 for about 10 miles. Pullout is on the right side of the highway near milepost 118. Hike the dirt footpath for about 200 yards to the concrete marker. Here you can walk the actual trail as it descends into Simpson's Hollow.

Granite memorial at the site where U.S. military wagons and soldiers were ambushed.

B-19. Pilot Butte Pullout (southwest of Farson) is a BLM interpretive site that tells of tragedy and difficulties on the trail.

Directions: From Simpson's Hollow, continue southwest on WY-28 for 2 miles. Pullout is on the left side of the highway near milepost 116.

This pullout along state road 28 provides a distant view of Pilot Butte.

B-20. Lombard Ferry/Mormon Ferry (Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge) was the main crossing of the treacherous Green River (called Seedskadee, or "Prairie Chicken River," by the Shoshone people). Mormons operated a commercial ferry service here but some travelers opted to save the fare and brave the current themselves. Many drowned at the Green River crossings. BLM interpretive exhibits

Interpretive area near the Lombard Ferry site on the Green River.

tell the story. Walk down the short, paved, path from the parking lot to see a replica ferry.
Directions: From Simpson's Hollow, continue southwest on WY-28 for about 18 miles. Before crossing the Green River, watch for the refuge sign and, after crossing the bridge, turn left into the parking area and interpretive site near milepost 102.

At the intersection of WY-2 with WY-372 at Seedskadee, turn right (north) to continue through Kemmerer and on toward Idaho (skip to Auto Tour Segment D); ***OR*** *turn left (south) toward the city of Green River to continue to Utah (skip to Auto Tour Segment E).*

The Wind River Range appears today much as it did to the pioneer emigrants in the 1840s-60s.

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT C: THE LANDER ROAD
(Oregon & California Trail Variant)

Auto Tour Segment C is a loop route that goes north from Farson for 36 miles on U.S.-191, then turns west on state road 351 to parallel 24 miles of the Lander Road. At U.S.-189, the tour route turns south again and continues 67 miles to Kemmerer. From Kemmerer, you can follow the Oregon & California trails west toward Idaho, or go southwesterly to follow the Mormon Pioneer, Pony Express, and California trails to Utah. To follow Auto Tour Segment C, turn north on U.S.-191 at Farson.

C-1. Lander Road (from U.S. 191 south of Pinedale, WY) was a government funded shortcut that saved emigrants five days of travel – and it avoided a stretch of desert, winding instead through an area of abundant water and wood. Here, the old wagon road lies a short distance north of, and parallels state highway WY-351.

Lander Road west of Big Sandy along state road 351.

Directions: At Farson, turn north on U.S.-191 and drive 36 miles to WY-351. Turn left (west) onto WY-351 and continue 24 miles to the junction with U.S.-189. At the junction, turn left (south) to continue the tour.

Also of Interest: **Green River Rendezvous Area**. *Turn north on U.S.-189 for approximately 18 miles to the Green River Rendezvous area where trappers and explorers frequently met each spring to trade their fur pelts for supplies and goods. Several locations just south of Daniel, WY, offer historical monuments and interpretive exhibits; including*

Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding monument near Daniel.

Father Pierre DeSmet, who conducted worship services here in July 1840, and Marcus & Narcissa Whitman and Henry & Eliza Spalding who attended the Green River Rendezvous on their way west in 1836. Pinedale, WY, is about another 11 miles east of Daniel if you need gasoline or food.

C-2. Lander Road & Sublette Cutoff Interpretive Pullout (Marbleton, WY) tells of those two variants of the Oregon and California Trails.
Directions: Pullout is on the west side of U.S.-189 at mile marker 109.38. Watch for signs to fur trade-era sites in this area, as well.

Granite marker for historic trails between South Pass & the Bear River.

C-3. Names Hill (west of Fontenelle Reservoir), located at the Sublette Cutoff crossing of the Green River, was a popular emigrant campsite and general gathering place. Mountain men operated a ferry here. The hill takes its name from the names carved in its sandstone face by passing trappers, emigrants, government surveyors, and others. American Indian petroglyphs are found there, as well as modern graffiti. The old trail crossing is now submerged under Fontanelle Reservoir.
Directions: Pullout is on the west side of U.S.-189, about 3.5 miles south of the interpretive pullout described above. From here, continue south to Kemmerer.

Granite marker for Names Hill on U.S. 189 south of La Barge.

From Kemmerer, follow Auto Tour Segment D to go to Idaho. To go to Utah, skip to Auto Tour Segment E.

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT D: SEEDSKADEE TO IDAHO STATE LINE

(Oregon & California Trails)

There are no interpreted trail sites along this short segment of the auto tour route between Kemmerer, Wyoming, and the Idaho border — but go this way if you plan to follow the Oregon Trail along the Bear and Snake rivers through Idaho.

From the Lombard/Mormon Ferry site at Seedskadee, turn right onto WY-372. Drive 22 miles and turn left (west) on U.S.-189 toward Kemmerer. Those joining Auto Tour Segment D on U.S.-189 from the Lander Road tour should continue on U.S.-180 to Kemmerer, as well. Drive 19 miles from the junction of WY-372 and U.S.-189, turn left (south) on WY-233, and then turn right (west on U.S.-30). Follow U.S.-30 through Sage, Wyoming. West of Sage, turn right (north) on U.S.-30 to go to Montpelier, Idaho and on toward Fort Hall. The route from Montpelier will be described in the Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide for Idaho and Utah.

Also of Interest: **Fossil Butte National Monument**, *located about 10 miles west of Kemmerer, is one of the richest fossil localities in the world. Entrance is free. A driving map to a nearby segment of the Sublette Cutoff is available upon request at the visitor center.*

AUTO TOUR SEGMENT E: SEEDSKADEE TO UTAH STATE LINE

(Mormon Pioneer, Pony Express, Oregon, & California Trails)

To continue to Fort Bridger from the Lombard/Mormon Ferry site at Seedskadee, continue west on WY-28 to the intersection with WY-372 and turn left (south). Continue 26.4 miles to I-80, watching along the way for roadside concrete markers showing where two trail variants intersect the highway. At I-80, turn east to visit the Sweetwater County Museum (entry E-1, below), ***OR*** *turn west to continue toward Granger (entry E-2).*

Sweetwater County Museum.

E-1. Sweetwater County Historical Museum (3 East Flaming Gorge Way, Green River, WY) offers exhibits of trail relics and Lakota artifacts. Open Mon.-Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Closed holidays. Free. **Directions:** From I-80, take Exit 91 at Green River and merge onto Flaming Gorge Way. Museum is at the corner of Flaming Gorge Way and North Center Street. From the museum, return to I-80 westbound and proceed to Granger.

Stage Station at Granger.

E-2. Granger Stage Station State Historic Site/Ham's Fork Pony Express Station Locale (Granger, WY) was an original stagecoach station built by the Ben Holladay Stage Company in 1862. It later was purchased by Wells Fargo and continued to function as a stage station through the early 1870s. A Pony Express marker commemorates the long-gone Ham's Fork Pony Express station that stood about a half-mile away, south of the river. Open daylight hours year-round. Free.

Directions: From westbound I-80, take Exit 66 (Kemmerer/Pocatello exit) onto U.S. 30. After about 5 miles, take the turnoff on the left to WY-375 and Granger. Continue another mile toward town. In Granger, follow signs to the stage station (right on Banks Drive, left at First Street, and left on Spruce Street).

E-3. Mormon Monument (I-80 Rest Stop, Lyman, WY) is a classic, an obelisk topped with a beehive that symbolizes old Mormon Deseret and today's state of Utah. This one commemorates the 1847 Mormon pioneer trek. **Directions:** From I-80, take Lyman Exit 41 to the rest area. Monument is near parking area.

Mormon Pioneer Monument at Lyman rest area.

E-4. Fort Bridger State Historic Park (Fort Bridger, WY) is another touchstone of trail history. Mountain men, Indian traders, Oregon and California emigrants, Mormon pioneers and militiamen, the 49ers, Pony Express riders, stagecoach drivers, U.S. soldiers, and railroad men all figured in its past. Today's state park offers self-guided tours of the fort, living history demonstrations, open archeological excavations, museum exhibits, a civilian cemetery, and the grave of a heroic and beloved dog. Special tours and events—including the biggest Mountain Man Rendezvous reenactment in the West—are also available. Grounds are open year-round, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; exhibit buildings are closed after Labor Day weekend through May 31. Museum/visitor center is open daily May 1- Sept. 30, and open weekends only in Oct. and early Nov. and also from mid-March until April 30. Hours vary seasonally. For admission, schedule, and events calendar, call the park at (307) 782-3842.

Commanding Officer's quarters at Fort Bridger.

Directions: From I-80, take Exit 34 and follow business loop about 2.5 miles into Fort Bridger. Watch for park entrance on south side of the street after entering town.

E-5. Bear River State Park (601 Bear River Drive, Evanston, WY) mostly offers wildlife exhibits, but is a good place to pick up information on other historical sites and trail-related activities in the area. Information center and day-use areas are open year-round, daily, 8 a.m. -10 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. Free.
Directions: From I-80, take Exit 6 at Evanston. Turn left at the end of the exit onto Bear River Drive and enter the park.

E-6. Uinta County Museum (36 Tenth St., Evanston) will have permanent exhibits on historic trails, the Lincoln Highway, and the railroad once its construction project is completed in spring 2008. Meanwhile, it remains open. Hours are Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays. Free.

Unita County Museum.

Directions: From I-80, take Exit 5 into Evanston, Turn right (north) onto Front Street and proceed to Front and 10th Streets.

Follow I-80 west to continue to Castle Rock, Utah. The Mormon Pioneer and California Trail routes from there will be described in the Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide for Idaho and Utah.

This ends the Auto Tour Route of the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails across Wyoming.

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Oregon NHT
www.nps.gov/oreg
California NHTY
www.nps.gov/cali
Pony Express NHT
www.nps.gov/poex

Wyoming Tourism
http://www.wyomingtourism.org/
Oregon & California Trails Assoc.
http://www.octa-trails.org
Nat'l. Pony Express Association
http://www.xphomestation.com
Mormon Trail Association
http://www.mormontrails.org

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Regional ATR Map - Wyoming

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