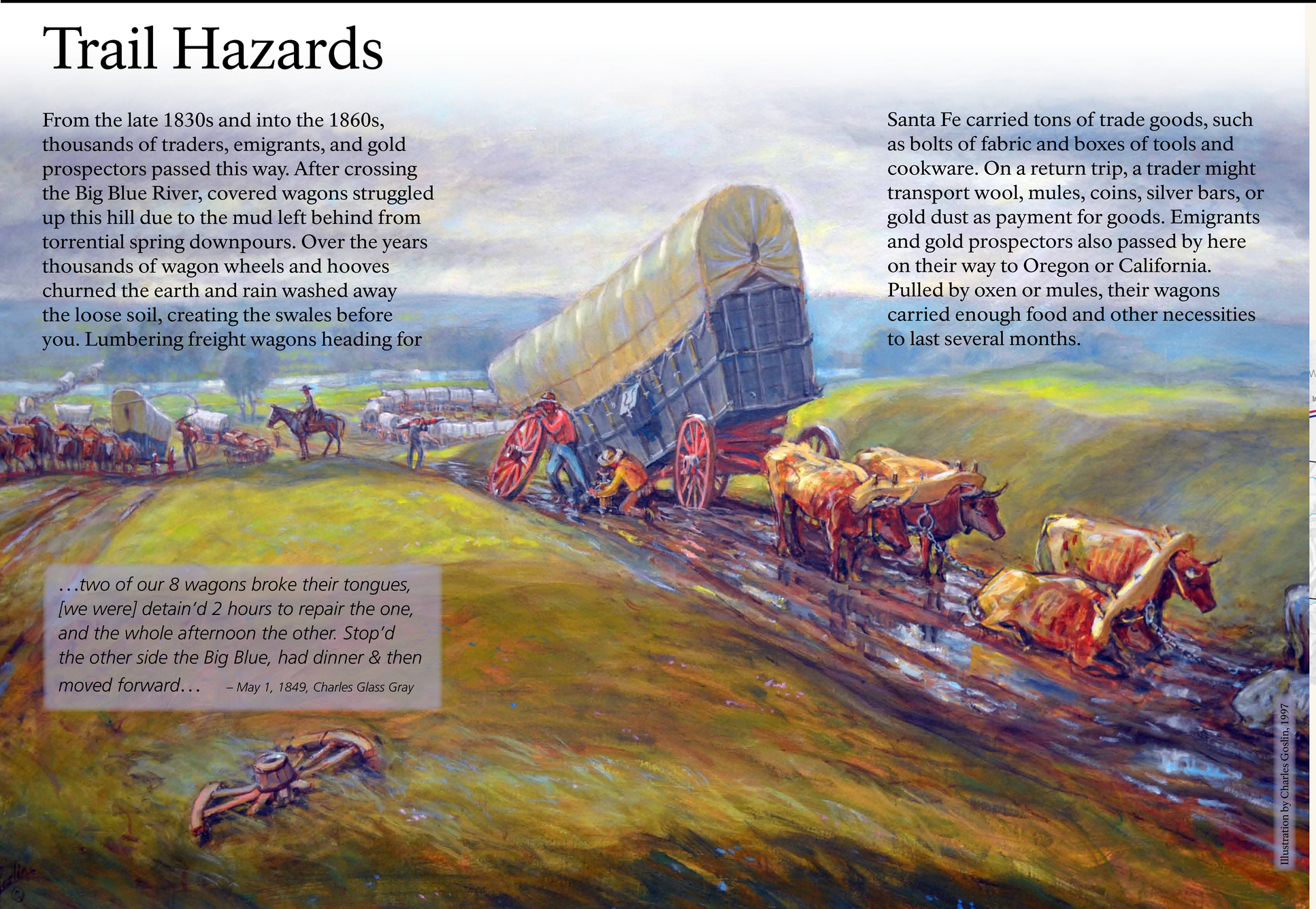
Santa Fe, Oregon, and California
National Historic Trails
National Park Service

3-Trails Corridor: Minor Park Segment
Board of Parks and Recreation
Commissioners, Kansas City, Missouri
Santa Fe Trail Association
Oregon-California Trails Association

Trail Hazards

From the late 1830s and into the 1860s, thousands of traders, emigrants, and gold prospectors passed this way. After crossing the Big Blue River, covered wagons struggled up this hill due to the mud left behind from torrential spring downpours. Over the years thousands of wagon wheels and hooves churned the earth and rain washed away the loose soil, creating the swales before you. Lumbering freight wagons heading for Santa Fe carried tons of trade goods, such as bolts of fabric and boxes of tools and cookware. On a return trip, a trader might transport wool, mules, coins, silver bars, or gold dust as payment for goods. Emigrants and gold prospectors also passed by here on their way to Oregon or California. Pulled by oxen or mules, their wagons carried enough food and other necessities to last several months.



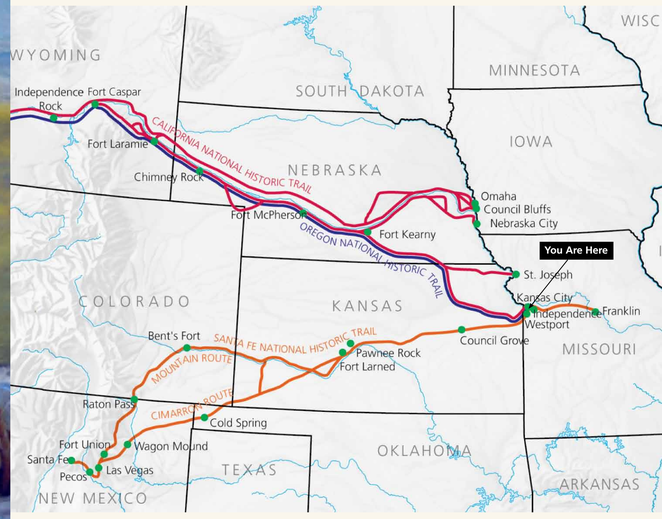
…two of our 8 wagons broke their tongues, [we were] detain'd 2 hours to repair the one, and the whole afternoon the other. Stop'd the other side the Big Blue, had dinner & then moved forward… – May 1, 1849, Charles Glass Gray

Illustration by Charles Goslin, 1997

Three Trails at Minor Park

The Oregon and California trails provided pathways to the Pacific for fur traders, gold seekers, missionaries, and emigrants. From 1841 to 1861, more than 300,000 emigrants followed this route from the Midwest to fertile Oregon farmlands or California gold fields—trips that took five months to complete.

From 1821 to 1846, the Santa Fe Trail was an international road for American and Mexican traders. In 1848, the Mexican-American War ended and the United States added much of the present-day American Southwest. The trail became a national road for commercial and military freighting, stagecoach travel, emigration, and mail service.



Crossing the Big Blue River before a bridge was built in 1859 was hard on people, animals, and equipment. Before crossing, wagon travelers might camp while waiting for others to cross or for swollen waters to recede. Once across, they had to stop to dry out and rearrange their loads. And with the jostling and wrenching by swift currents, their wagons often needed repairs.