



THE WAY WEST

**A Historical Context of the
Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express
National Historic Trails in Wyoming**

2014



Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office
ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.
Wyoming Department of State Parks & Cultural Resources

COVER PHOTO

The Oregon Trail at Prospect Ridge. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

The traveler who flies across the continent in palace cars, skirting occasionally the old emigrant road, may think that he realizes the trials of such a journey. Nothing but actual experience will give one an idea of the plodding, unvarying monotony, the vexations, the exhaustive energy, the throbs of hope, the depths of despair, through which we lived.

Luzena Stanley Wilson - '49er

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ACRONYMS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
GPR	Ground-penetrating radar
GPS	Global Positioning System
ISHS	Idaho State Historical Society
LDS Church	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
MET	Mapping Emigrant Trails
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NPEA	National Pony Express Association
NPS	National Park Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NHT	National Historic Trail
OCTA	Oregon-California Trails Association
OHV	Off-Highway Vehicle
PETA	Pony Express Trail Association
RMP	Resource Management Plan
State	State of Wyoming
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USFS	United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
WYSHPO	Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office



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well as valuable expertise.

Robert Rosenberg authored the historic overview for a previous document, which has been modified to include some additional material prepared specifically for this context. He and Betty Lu Rosenberg edited a draft of the document as it neared completion.

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"Westward America" detail, by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Wyoming is exceptional in the prevalence of its significant historic trails. Wyoming contains more miles of National Historic Trails (NHT) than any other state — approximately 1,730 miles. These important trails include the Oregon National Historic Trail, the California National Historic Trail, the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail, and the Pony Express National Historic Trail. Much of a fifth National Historic Trail, the Nez Perce, presently remains unidentified on the ground in Wyoming and is therefore not addressed in this context. Several other notable historic trails that parallel or branch off from this major east-west trail corridor include the Bozeman Trail, the Bridger Trail, the Overland Trail, the Cherokee Trail, and the Chief Washakie Trail. These have not to date been designated as National Historic Trails, though the Overland and Cherokee Trails have been proposed

for National Historic Trails status. A historic overview specific to newly designated National Historic Trails would be needed to provide background for making these determinations. The framework for evaluation of condition and National Register eligibility presented in this context may be applied to other significant historic trails in Wyoming.

Under the National Trails System Act of 1966, the United States Congress designated the National Park Service as the overall administrator of the trails system, including the National Historic Trails. About one-third (521 miles) of Wyoming’s National Historic Trails and associated resources are located on public lands, and these are managed by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through the Wyoming State Office and five field offices. This context study covers those segments of trail located on BLM-administered lands.

APPROXIMATE LAND OWNERSHIP OF TRAIL MILES IN WYOMING

Bureau of Land Management	520
Bureau of Reclamation	111
Department of Defense	14
National Park Service	3
Fish and Wildlife Service	13
USDA Forest Service	50
Private	940
State of Wyoming	127
TOTAL	1,728

This document presents a historical overview of four National Historic Trails in Wyoming (Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express). It establishes a framework for assessing the condition of the trails, or segments of the trails, along with their historic settings, and classifying segments of the trails based upon condition assessments. The classifications are intended to identify those segments of the National Historic Trails that are in excellent or good condition and for which the setting is also in excellent or good condition versus trail segments that have been seriously compromised or no longer exist.

These determinations should assist with decisions relating to management of trails, trail segments, and trail-related resources. This document will identify trail segments that have good to excellent integrity and for which efforts should be made to preserve these resources with minimal intrusion for the public benefit. This document will also identify portions of trails that may be at risk for significant impairment of physical/visual integrity so that attention may be directed to methods of reducing or eliminating such risks.

Table 1. Miles of Trail by Segment

MAJOR TRAIL SECTIONS AND NUMBERED SEGMENTS	MORMON PIONEER NHT	OREGON NHT	CALIFORNIA NHT	PONY EXPRESS NHT
	Total Miles (Miles of BLM)	Total Miles (Miles of BLM)	Total Miles (Miles of BLM)	Total Miles (Miles of BLM)
Segment 1: Nebraska State Line to Fort Caspar	486 (8.5)	486 (8.5)	486 (8.5)	486* (8.5)
Segment 2: Fort Caspar to Independence Rock	125 (13.2)	125 (13.2)	125 (13.2)	125* (13.2)
Segment 3: Independence Rock to Ice Slough	79 (22.9)	79 (22.9)	79 (22.9)	79 (22.9)
Segment 4: Ice Slough to Burnt Ranch	74 (41.3)	74 (41.3)	74 (49.1)	74 (41.3)
Segment 5: Seminole Cutoff	46 (41.2)	0	46 (41.2)	46 (41.2)
Segment 6: Burnt Ranch to Buckskin Crossing	0	42 (33)	42 (33)	0
Segment 7: Buckskin Crossing to Highway 191	0	16 (9.8)	16 (9.8)	0
Segment 8: Highway 191 to Bridger-Teton N.F.	0	48 (23.7)	48 (23.7)	0
Segment 9: Parting of the Ways to Green River Crossing at Names Hill	0	57 (47.2)	57 (47.2)	0
Segment 10: Green River Crossing at Names Hill to Idaho State Line	0	199 (80.5)	199 (80.5)	0
Segment 11: Burnt Ranch to False Parting of the Ways	24 (18.7)	24 (18.7)	24 (18.7)	24 (18.7)
Segment 12: False Parting of the Ways to Parting of the Ways	11 (10)	11 (10)	11 (10)	11 (10)
Segment 13: Parting of the Ways to Green River Crossing at Lombard Ferry	44 (16)	44 (16)	44 (16)	44 (16)
Segment 14: Gasson Bridge to Hams Fork	36 (7.8)	36 (7.8)	36 (7.8)	36 (7.8)
Segment 15: Slate Creek/Kinney Cutoff Variants	0	97 (23.5)	97 (23.5)	0
Segment 16: Lombard Crossing to Hams Fork	0	0	58 (14.7)	58 (14.7)
Segment 17: Hams Fork to Fort Bridger	32 (6.5)	32 (6.5)	32 (6.5)	32 (6.5)
Segment 18: Fort Bridger to Idaho State Line	0	134 (66)	134 (66)	0
Segment 19: Fort Bridger to Utah State Line	88 (14.6)	0	88 (14.6)	88 (14.6)
Segment 20: Blacks Fork Cutoff (Hams Fork) to Cumberland Gap	0	34 (14.9)	34 (14.9)	0
Segment 21: Hams Fork Cutoff (Granger) to Hams Fork Plateau	0	No. of miles is uncertain – aerial reconnaissance revealed no evidence of trail	No. of miles is uncertain – aerial reconnaissance revealed no evidence of trail	0
TOTAL	1045 (200.7)	1538 (443.5)	1730 (521.8)	1103 (215.4)

* Not all variants were Pony Express NHT

1. Total miles of National Historic Trails in Wyoming (excluding Nez Perce NHT) = 1,730 miles
2. Total miles of National Historic Trails in Wyoming managed by BLM = 521.8
3. Total all trails (all ownership) = 5,416 miles (includes cumulative overlapping mileage)
4. Total all trails on BLM = 1,381.4 miles (includes cumulative overlapping mileage)

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED

The primary guidance for creation of historic contexts is provided in “Archaeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines,” *Federal Register*, Vol. 48, No. 190 (1983). The guidelines define a historic context as “...an organizational format that groups information about related historic properties, based on a theme, geographic limits and chronological period. A single historic context describes one or more aspects of the historic development of an area, considering history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture; and identifies significant patterns that individual historic properties represent.” A more concise definition is the “patterns or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning (and ultimately its significance) within history or prehistory is made clear. Historic contexts are established by theme, time period, and geographic limits.” In other words, it is the organization of information about our prehistory and history according to stages of development occurring at various times and places.

For the land manager, a historic context should provide a tool to facilitate the consultation, planning, and implementation of various actions on public lands. It provides important information to the land manager for making decisions about managing the resource. Therefore, the historic context is an information document designed for use by Federal, State, and local agencies and the public to assist

in directing management and regional research concerns, and to assist in coordinating and prioritizing management of the most significant properties located in a specific management area.

A historic context may have the following objectives:

1. aid in the identification and evaluation of archeological, sacred, or architectural sites discovered in a specific management area
2. provide information that will assist in making decisions about management and treatment of historic properties of the management area
3. assist in setting priorities for treatment and project funding within the management area

It is the purpose of this document to provide a tool for land managers, project proponents, and cultural resource specialists, so they will understand the existence and significance of National Historic Trail resources within their management and project areas. It is intended to provide a convenient source for evaluating the quality of the physical remains and associated setting of historic trail segments. Due to constantly changing conditions, it is important to bear in mind that as future projects near trails corridors are considered, detailed assessments of the trail segments and associated setting will be needed. It is expected that use of this document will result in better planning and decision-making so that National Historic Trails can be managed more effectively.



Figure 1.1. Wagon train. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

“Upon the beaten trail are emigrants wending their way, their household goods packed in long covered wagons drawn by oxen, mules, or horses; speculators working their way to some new town with women and children . . .” (Fanny Kelly 1891:7-8)

Five elements of the National Historic Trails (NHT) system are located in Wyoming. Four of these are the Oregon NHT, the California NHT, the Mormon Pioneer NHT, and the Pony Express NHT. These trails enter Wyoming on the east from Nebraska and follow a corridor along the North Platte and Sweetwater rivers west to South Pass, where they cross the north-south trending Rocky Mountain chain. Historian Bernard DeVoto aptly described South Pass as “...the gate through which the United States would reach its empire....” (DeVoto 1947:54). West of the pass, the four trails split into several cutoffs and variants across the Green River Basin, then exit present-day Wyoming bound for Oregon, California, and the Salt Lake Valley.

The Nez Perce Trail is the fifth NHT in Wyoming. Unlike the four emigrant trails, it commemorates the 1877 route used by the Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph, as they fled from the U.S. Army toward Canada. To date, the specific route of this trail has not been identified on the ground, although some specific locations associated with events along the trail are known. The BLM manages only a small portion of the trail in northwestern Wyoming near Yellowstone National Park.

The four trails in Wyoming that are the focus of this study traverse more than 1,700 miles, including the main trail routes, major cutoffs, and several

lesser variants. About 500 miles of trail segments are located on lands administered by the BLM. The remainder of the trail segments are located on private and state lands or on lands administered by other federal agencies. Numerous historical and archaeological sites associated with these trails have been located and recorded on public lands managed by the BLM, as well as the other entities mentioned. More than three dozen interpretive markers and monuments have been placed along the trail corridor to aid visitors in understanding the historical significance of the trails. In addition to these interpretive structures, hundreds of markers of various kinds delineate the trail routes across the state. Since the turn of the twentieth century, numerous studies, management plans, and interpretive efforts by state and federal agencies have addressed Wyoming’s historic trail system. This study is intended to provide a context and framework for evaluating the condition of individual trail segments and trail-related resources on BLM-managed lands.

Although this study focuses primarily on resources managed by the BLM, it also recognizes the variety of trail resources located on non-BLM lands. This study builds on the foundation of the *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement for the California and Pony Express National Historic Trails and Management and Use Plan Update for the Oregon*



Figure 1.2. Oregon Trail marker at Names Hill. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails (NPS 1999) for the four NHTs. It is intended to provide a broad framework that may assist BLM decision-making in implementation of the 1999 NPS plan.

The network of the National Historic Trails sites and segments are among those special areas managed by the BLM pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 because of their recreational, cultural and historical values. Congressional action, in designating National Historic Trails, recognized the trails' significance to the American people. Wyoming retains the most complex and well-preserved network of National Historic Trails segments in the United States.

Because not all segments of the trails retain physical integrity, management strategies must address both historical significance and physical integrity to effectively protect trail resources. A defined strategy must be developed to protect and

enhance these trails within BLM's framework for managing open space.

The FLPMA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) both indicate that the management of public lands must be carried out in cooperation with local communities and be compatible with the communities' aesthetic and economic interests. It is important to recognize that the present land use patterns in Wyoming are a historical phenomenon and cannot be easily separated from the resources found within Wyoming's landscape. This is true not only for the state's natural resources, but also for its cultural resources.

Absent archaeological or specific documentary information, it is sometimes impossible to differentiate trails that have resulted from Wyoming's settlement and economic development (e.g., ranching and mining) from those that accommodated emigrants bound for Oregon, California, or Utah. Similarly, the complex of historic routes relates to many historic themes beyond those for which the National Historic Trails were designated. For instance, many routes and sites throughout the Intermountain West are associated with the expansion of settlement, ranching/agriculture, and commerce within the region. Such historic properties may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, but they may not relate to the major emigration of people west to Oregon, California, or Utah.

Planning is needed now to ensure that the wide-open vistas that define the American West are not lost forever as more people visit or settle in Wyoming to enjoy its outdoor resources. The increasing recreational and commercial use of public lands is a challenge for the agencies tasked with managing historic trail resources.

One of the most difficult challenges for the BLM is that the trail resources managed by the agency are not contiguous, but are broken up by a fragmented land ownership pattern that includes lands under state and private ownership or under the jurisdiction of other federal agencies. This mixed jurisdiction should not dissuade governmental agencies from pursuing cooperative actions that will enhance and protect the trails and promote the public's appreciation and enjoyment of this valuable resource.



Figure 1.3. View of the Tom Sun Ranch (now the Mormon Handcart Visitor Center) and the Sweetwater River from on top of Devil's Gate, looking west. Landownership in this area is a mix of federal and private. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

Because of the predominance of private land east of Casper, this study focuses on the historic trails west of that point. However, many fine trail segments remain in that region, and private landowners both east of Casper and across Wyoming are to be commended for recognizing the significance of the trails and for preserving them for nearly a century prior to federal involvement in historic trail preservation.

Pioneer emigrant Ezra Meeker must be recognized for bringing the importance of historic trails to the nation's collective consciousness and initiating commemoration of the trails. His passion for the trails was borne of his own experience traveling the trail to Oregon as a young newlywed in 1852. The story of Meeker's preservation efforts is summarized

in Mike Jording's book, *A Few Interested Residents: Wyoming Historical Markers and Monuments* (1992). Other prominent citizens who later joined Meeker's efforts included the famed western photographer William Henry Jackson and Wyoming's Captain H. G. Nickerson and Grace Raymond Hebard.

Grace Hebard early on recognized the importance of historic preservation in Wyoming (Hebard 1809-1947). She organized a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution that erected many interpretive signs and markers along Wyoming's trails and at other historic sites. Inspired by these efforts, the State of Wyoming created the Wyoming Historic Landmark Commission. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Commission erected numerous interpretive signs under the leadership of former Governor Bryant B.



Figure1.4. Photograph of camp at Split Rock in 1870, taken by William Henry Jackson. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Brooks, Joe Weppner, Warren Richardson and others. The efforts of private citizens, landowners, and state officials helped to recognize and preserve the historic trails of Wyoming long before their significance was recognized by any agencies of the Federal Government.

An early version of the Wyoming State Historical Society was formed in 1923-1924, and this group soon began a series of treks to historic sites across the

state, including sites along what are now the National Historic Trails. By the 1930s, these treks were held at roughly ten-year intervals along virtually every segment of Wyoming's trail system. As a result, the Society systematically located and documented many of the state's historic trails prior to the recent intensive energy development.

Today, a new generation of scholars continues to conduct research and fieldwork that build upon the contributions of the past. Additionally, the BLM's National Historic Trails Interpretive Center in Casper and organizations such as the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA), the Pony Express Trail Association (PETA), and the National Pony Express Association (NPEA) have made significant contributions to the research and interpretation of Wyoming's historic trails. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church) has also adopted portions of the National Historic Trails as places sacred to its religious history and beliefs.

Threats to Wyoming's trail system have increased as the American West has transformed from a rural, sparsely-populated, agricultural sanctuary to a land of multiple uses, including energy production, mineral extraction, and increasing vehicle

Figure1.5 The Oregon Trail with Split Rock in the background. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.



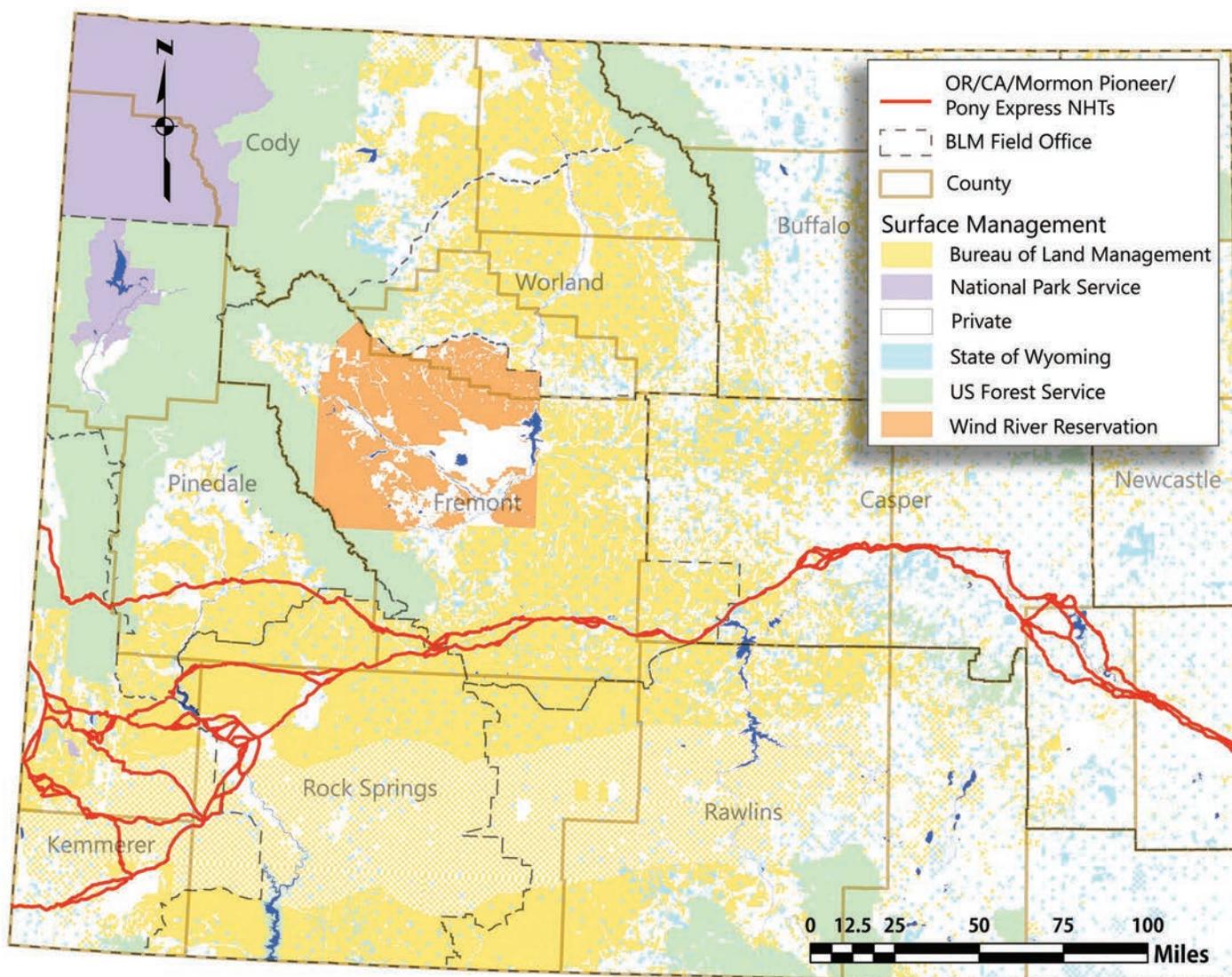


Figure 1.6. The four National Historic Trails in Wyoming discussed in this context.

recreation. In addition, the West provides corridors for communication systems, powerlines, and oil and natural gas pipelines. At the same time, more traditional uses of the land, such as grazing, continue.

This study attempts to provide perspective on less tangible environmental and historical aspects of the trails' settings that are so critical to management of the trails as parts of the western landscape. The *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement* (NPS 1999) notes that adequate management of the NHTs requires more than just the protection of the trail ruts and sites. The plan specifically emphasizes that, "Maintaining

the physical integrity of the trail landscape would be essential to preserving the overall context of the trails' history and ensuring a rich and evocative visitor experience" (NPS 1999:68).

The National Park Service recommends trail management that is not specifically restricted to a one-half mile wide corridor:

This alternative would employ a flexible accordion approach (varying widths) in establishing appropriate widths for management corridors along

designated high-potential segments. The widths for individual trail sections would be determined by factors such as type of ownership, viewshed, level of integrity, documented kinds of historic use of the trail and surrounding landscape, compatibility with existing resource uses, social values, and other considerations (NPS 1999:68).

Over the past 20 years, BLM's objective was to manage a one-half mile wide trail corridor through controlled surface use in order to preserve trail resources. This approach is insufficient to adequately address effects to important landscapes in Wyoming that convey the character of this historic period.

In commenting on recent land use planning documents, the public has overwhelmingly expressed the desire that the BLM allow multiple use, including commodity production, on public lands, while at the same time protecting the open spaces and landscapes that define the West. Therefore, adaptive and flexible strategies with defined goals for future desired landscape settings must be developed by federal land managers in cooperation with local and state interests. Given the fragile nature of landscape resources, management plans can work only with local support.

The BLM is cognizant of its limitations to manage these panoramic settings because of the mixed land ownership in Wyoming. The BLM must exercise good will and a willingness to achieve just compromises if it is to contribute to maintaining the physical character of the American West. The BLM's challenge is to determine what is feasible as procedures are developed for management of Wyoming's historic trail resources and the settings that define them.



Figure 2.1. An imaginary conception of what it may have looked like at Westport Landing, Missouri, about 1850. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

CHAPTER II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE OREGON/ CALIFORNIA/MORMON PIONEER/PONY EXPRESS NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS IN WYOMING

INTRODUCTION

The Journey

“One afternoon when the sun seemed to be about three hours high, and we were traveling along at an ox-team gait over a level prairie, John East, a good, honest man, also from Missouri, who was walking and driving his team, was told that we were then crossing the Missouri line, whereupon, he turned about facing the east, pulled off his slouched hat, and waving it above his head shouted, “Farewell to America!” (Applegate and Porter 1989: 25).

In the early nineteenth century, the United States began to look for new territory west of the Mississippi River. Americans residing in the fledgling nation, leavened by a tide of immigrants from around the world, had quickly settled the East. New territory was needed to provide farmland for private ownership. The people of the East looked hopefully toward the West. Could the West really be a land of opportunity?

The reasons that emigrants forsook hearth and home to make a new life in an unknown land were varied. Desires for wealth, independence, religious freedom, elbow room, adventure, and escape all played roles in emigrants’ decisions. Emigrants by the thousands ventured forth through seas of grass and sage to their destinations.

The journey the emigrants faced was the test of a lifetime. Large numbers of emigrants never completed the journey but fell to old age, child birth,

disease, accidents, cold, starvation, and murder. Emigrant diaries suggest that thousands of graves must line the trail system, most of which remain unmarked and undiscovered. Many emigrants chronicled the journey within the thousands of surviving documents they collectively created. The narrators of these documents recognized that they were involved in something extraordinary and sought to preserve memories of the migration.

Emigration was a seasonal event. Livestock such as oxen, mules, and horses powered the journey and were dependent upon grasses available along the route. Accordingly, the journey had to be timed between the development of grasses on the plains and the arrival of snow in the mountains of the West.

Life on the trail was difficult, even in the best of conditions. All aspects of life, including birth, death, marriage, child rearing, and illness, were carried out in the context of a mobile society. Beyond the



Figure 2.2. Emigrant Wagon Train in the vicinity of Chimney Rock on the Oregon Trail. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

sheer effort of walking, or for some, riding, 12 to 15 miles each day were the chores associated with day-to-day living. The emigrants could not hope to carry sufficient food for the journey in their wagons. They had to hunt, fish, and gather food along the trail. They brought livestock with them to provide meat, eggs, and dairy products, all of which had to be carried or herded from one campsite to another. The livestock also had to be cared for and protected from theft, loss, or injury. Cows and goats needed to be milked. Food along the trail was unprocessed, making it necessary to butcher, churn, mill, grind, dry, and salt various items. Fuel for cooking and washing was not carried but was gathered each day.

Each morning began with the care of livestock and preparation for the day's journey. Breakfast was cooked. Animals had to be gathered and harnessed to the wagons. Children needed to be dressed and fed.

Tents, bedding, and equipment had to be carefully placed in the wagons before the wagons could be gathered together and formed into traveling order.

Once on the move, the emigrants had to care for children and livestock. Much schooling was done en route. The emigrants were alert to a chance encounter with game, the discovery of a valuable commodity (such as ice, snow, or saleratus), and the potential for finding food (abandoned boxes of bacon, berries, eggs, etc.). The travelers had to be aware of potential danger from bandits, hostile Indians, or nature. Riders often were sent ahead to scout the trail and find the next campsite. The slow and steady plodding of the wagon train through rough terrain continued for several hours before a "nooning" break was held. Women typically unpacked the cooking gear and prepared a meal for the family. If water was available nearby, livestock could be watered and rested for the

final pull of the day.

After the nooning, the emigrants arranged the wagons and proceeded to the next campsite. That evening, the campsite was transformed into a small community. Kitchens were established and dinners prepared. Fuel was often scarce, so women accustomed to cooking with wood substituted dried animal dung and brush. The pungent smoke added to the difficulty of cooking over an open fire. Fuel and water were gathered. Livestock and other animals were cared for. Children were supervised in a variety of tasks. Much of the evening was occupied with the repair of equipment and clothing. The emigrants also found time to explore the areas around camps, socialize, educate the children, write diaries and letters and even have an occasional dance. The livestock required tending and guarding during the night. With the coming of dawn, the cycle started over again.

Events such as unusual weather, childbirth, death, illness, or accidents often upset the daily routine. Abigail Jane Scott describes such an event in her diary entry for July 5, 1852:

Last night we were visited by a tremendous wind storm which upset two tents, made the wagons rock from side to side, and caused the cattle to stampede. We had last evening omitted the usual custom, of tying up our cattle around the wagons, in order to give them time to graze... We crossed the Sweet Water in the afternoon for the last time and encamped for the night in a ravine one half mile from the banks of the river. We find tolerably good grass at this place and use the wild sage for fuel- passed four graves (Holmes and Duniway 1986: volume v: 82.)

Emigrants were often unprepared for the geographic features of what was then called the Great American Desert. The sea of grass characteristic of much of the plains seemed endless and the horizon appeared to retreat in the distance. Grass gave way

to sagebrush. Dust choked the emigrants in drier areas. The availability of fodder for the livestock became unpredictable. Potable water became scarcer. Summer snowstorms slowed travel and hordes of biting insects filled the air around wetlands. The emigrants gasped in the thin air as they attempted to work their way around and through the towering mountain ranges.

The new landscapes inspired some emigrants. On June 15, 1838, Mary Walker described her feelings about the scenery near Independence Rock: "Rock Independence forms the entrance some say to the Rocky Mountains, others say not... The scenery has been beautiful & magnificent & with me the pleasure of beholding it has relieved in great measure the weariness of the way" (Drury and Carson 1963: 93).

Emigrants traveling with oxen averaged less than 12 miles per day. Most people walked beside their livestock, leaving the animals to haul food and belongings essential to the journey and necessary for starting new lives. By necessity, the emigrants had to bring almost everything they needed with them. In the early days of emigration, there were no trading posts to replenish supplies along the way. By the end of the emigration period, trading posts could still be hundreds of miles apart. The emigrants often used any one of a number of published emigrant guides to help them with their planning. Emigration was not an undertaking for many poor people but required substantial capital. The following is an estimate prepared by Joseph E. Ware in *The Emigrants' Guide to California* (1849). When he wrote his guide, Ware had not traveled the route but worked from published sources. The following estimate is for three adults with ox teams but does not include the cost of a wagon (Ware 1849:8).

(Note that commas were used rather than decimal points in monetary values.)

Four yoke of oxen	at \$50,	\$200,00
One wagon cover, &c.,		100,00
Three rifles,	at \$20	60,00
Three pair pistols	at \$15	45,00
Five barrels of flour,	1080 lbs,	20,00



Figure 2.3. Independence Rock. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

Bacon,	600 “	30,00
Coffee,	100 “	8,00
Tea,	5 “	2,75
Sugar,	150 “	7,00
Rice,	75 “	3,75
Fruit, dried	50 “	3,00
Salt, pepper, &c.,	50 “	3,00
Saleratus,	10 “	1,00
Lead,	30 “	1,20
Powder,	25 “	5,50
Tools, &c.,	25 “	7,50
Mining Tools,	36 “	12,00
Tent,	30 “	30,00
Bedding,	45 “	22,50
Cooking utensils,	30 “	4,00
Lard,	50 “	2,50
Private baggage,	150 “	
Matches,		1,00
One mule,		50,00
Candles and soap,	<u>50 “</u>	<u>5,30</u>
	2,583 “	\$600,00

Most emigrants traveled in the company of others. They formed various kinds of associations and companies that ranged from loosely associated family

groups to highly organized traveling communities. Some of these associations had strict contracts or charters to govern the group. Some were organized around the authority of religious leadership. Most were mobile democracies, electing their own leaders and making their own rules as they traveled. The paucity of law enforcement west of the jumping off places in Missouri forced the emigrants to develop their own court systems and legal framework when faced with crime among the company. Companies subdivided and came together based upon the whims of their members. A wagon company starting from Independence, Missouri, with 100 wagons might arrive at its destination as several smaller wagon companies, augmented by emigrants who had joined along the route.

The emigrants brought the cultural norms of Victorian society with them. People of similar social classes, religions, and ethnic backgrounds tended to travel together. Wealthy and influential individuals most often were elected to positions of authority in the group. Though the demands of day-to-day life tended to level the differences between classes while the journey was in progress, those differences emerged in certain circumstances. Emigrants brought slaves with them and hired servants. The patriarchal society of the Victorians created well-defined gender and class roles that were violated at great risk.

The emigrants attempted to carry all kinds of possessions with them. As wagons broke and beasts of burden expired on the journey, possessions hauled lovingly for hundreds of miles were discarded. Francis Parkman (1849) describes a scene he witnessed:

the shattered wrecks of ancient claw-footed tables, well-waxed and rubbed, or massive bureaus of carved oak. These, some of them no doubt the relics of ancestral prosperity in the colonial time, must have encountered strange vicissitudes. Brought, perhaps, originally from England; then with the declining fortunes of their owners, borne across the Alleghenies to the wilderness of Ohio or Kentucky; then to Illinois or Missouri; and now at last fondly

Diary of Sallie Hester: “July 2 (1849): Passed Independence Rock. This rock is covered with names. With great difficulty I found a place to cut mine. Twelve miles from this is Devil’s Gate. It’s an opening in the mountain through which the Sweetwater River flows. Several of us climbed this mountain-somewhat perilous for youngsters not over fourteen. We made our way to the very edge of the cliff and looked down. We could hear the water dashing, slashing and roaring as if angry at the small space through which it is forced to pass” (Holmes 1983:238-239).

stowed away in the family wagon for the interminable journey to Oregon. But the stern privations of the way are little anticipated. The cherished relic is soon flung out to scorch and crack upon the hot prairie.

The trails were sometimes described or drawn as a giant refuse dump, covered with carcasses of livestock, graves of emigrants, discarded items, broken wagons, camp refuse, and excrement (Watkins 1987). While unpleasant to the travelers, the littering of the trails with so many items from the nineteenth century creates the potential for fruitful archaeological research.

Emigrants often tried to discover a better route to the West, creating a complex trail braid of shortcuts. Some shortcuts, such as the Greenhorn Cutoff and the Hastings Cutoff, actually added length to the journey.

Entrepreneurs vied for commerce with the emigrants and attempted to funnel traffic along routes advantageous to business. When the Sublette Cutoff reduced emigrant traffic through Fort Bridger, famed mountain man Jim Bridger supported the unproven Hastings Cutoff as a way of attracting more emigrants to his trading post. The Donner Party paid dearly for Bridger’s fabrications about the suitability of the

Hastings route when they became snowbound in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California.

The popularity of routes varied with the season and the weather. In a wet year, a given segment of trail that was suitable in dry soil conditions but boggy in wet conditions might be avoided in favor of a longer but less muddy route. Weather variants account for much of the complex braid of trails. A temporary blockage of the trail created by an accident might be responsible for the development of a braid around the choke point. Steep hills with difficult soils might develop a veritable spider web of trail variations as multiple members of the same train tried to pick their way up the difficult slope at the same time. As old tracks were captured by drainages or otherwise degraded, it was simple enough to replace them with a new, adjacent track.

Emigrant Trails Become National Historic Trails

In 1968, Public Law 90-543 (“National Trails System Act”) created the National Trails System. In 1978, Congress added “National Historic Trails” as a category for inclusion in the National Trails System and authorized the designation of the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails among the first group of trails recognized under the new category. The California and Pony Express Trails



Figure 2.4. Wagon Train near Split Rock. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

received the same designation in 1992 (NPS 1999:v). Together, the Oregon, California, and Mormon Pioneer Trails formed the principal east-west travel corridor for the great nineteenth-century westward migration to the Pacific Coast and Utah. The Pony Express Trail shared much of its route with these migration routes. The emigrant trail corridor traverses Wyoming from east to west, and numerous trail-related sites, landmarks, trail ruts and segments remain across the state. Early fur trappers and traders followed the well-worn trails of the Native Americans utilizing South Pass, the principal mountain gateway for the coming migration, and proving the trail's suitability for wagon travel. Missionaries followed the fur trappers west along the trails to live among and Christianize the Indians.

From 1841 to about 1869, between 300,000 and 350,000 emigrants followed the emigrant trail corridor westward to Oregon (about 50,000), California (about 200,000), and Utah (about 70,000).

Farmers bound for the fertile valleys of Oregon, Mormons bound for the Salt Lake Valley, and adventurers bound for the California gold mines all ventured across the plains and mountains by way of the emigrant trails.

The emigrant route was also used for the First Transcontinental Telegraph, the federal Overland Mail service, and the Pony Express. From Independence, Missouri, to western Oregon, a wagon traveled an average of 1,932 miles. Since most emigrants had to travel a substantial distance to reach the jumping off places in Missouri, the overall trip was much longer. For a journey of such magnitude, emigrants required dependable sources of water and grass and a passable grade through the mountains. The emigrant trails, crossing the mountains at the gentle South Pass in Wyoming, satisfied these requirements and became the pathways of commerce, settlement, and development.

Traveling on June 28, 1849, Alonzo Delano

recorded his impressions of South Pass:

On our right, twenty or thirty miles distant, the Wind River Mountains, extending beyond the South Pass into Oregon, were mingling their snow-white crests with a rich drapery of clouds. On our left, and partly behind us, as the road momentarily changed our direction, lay the granite cliffs of the Sweet Water, fading away in the dim distance, while east of north, a broad undulating plain spread out for many miles, with occasional buttes or solitary hills, rising from its surface. Before us lay the hills which still marked the course of the valley of the Sweet Water, while on the elevated plains were piles of rock and stones, thrown up by volcanic forces, as if they had been gathered by the hand of man. Occasionally, in the hollows heaps of snow glittered in the sunlight, and as we gathered it we found it most refreshingly cool, while perspiring in the sultry heat of the day. The ascent to the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains is so gradual that we perceive no difference in the road; and had we not been assured by mathematical demonstration that such was the fact, we could scarcely have believed that we had been ascending since leaving Missouri. The rarification[sic] of the air, which now began to be apparent in our short breathings, on going[sic] over hills, was often attributed by those unacquainted with the true cause, to some unaccountable failure of strength (1857:110-111).

Most travelers followed the same “Emigrant Road” though Wyoming with only minor variations at Fort Bridger in the southwest corner of the state. There the Mormon Pioneer Trail diverged to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah. The California-bound travelers branched off from the main route near Fort Hall, Idaho. Although “Oregon Trail” is the name most commonly used today, emigrants who followed the

trail often called it “the road.” Along this corridor, gold was discovered at South Pass and cattlemen first learned that livestock could successfully winter on the high plains grasses of Wyoming; thus, the emigrant trails helped spawn what would become Wyoming’s two most important industries, mining and ranching. This corridor and the associated north-south secondary transportation routes emanating from it (the Bozeman and Bridger trails) opened the interior of Wyoming to eventual exploitation and settlement. The trail corridor continued to serve as a main transportation artery even after the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, carrying emigrants, cattle, sheep and horses, and regional and local traffic into the early twentieth century.

ORIGINS OF THE TRAILS

The Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806) explored the vast territory of western land obtained by the United States from France in 1803 as the Louisiana Purchase. The expedition’s route lay far to the north, from the headwaters of the Missouri River overland to the Columbia River, and proved unsuitable as a major emigration route. However, reports and journals published by the expedition drew the attention of the American people to a vast western region of virtually untapped and seemingly unlimited natural resources. The expedition also established a claim for the United States that would prove valuable in later negotiations with Britain concerning the Oregon country, the early goal of westward migration.

To exploit the rich fur country of the Pacific Northwest, in 1810 the American Fur Company established a trading headquarters at Astoria near the mouth of the Columbia River. The company’s first overland expedition to Astoria in 1811 was led by Wilson Price Hunt, who attempted to find a more southerly alternative to the route taken by Lewis and Clark to avoid the Blackfoot. Hunt’s route crossed the Rocky Mountains by way of Union Pass and Teton Pass, and followed the Snake and Columbia rivers to Astoria (Larson 1977:18-19; Scott 1958:9).

More important to future westward expansion was a return expedition in 1812 led by Robert Stuart. His

party followed the Columbia and Snake rivers and also crossed Teton Pass, but then took a circuitous route along the Bear River, Greys River and back down the Snake River, attempting to avoid a party of Crow. A Shoshone told Stuart of a better crossing of the Wind River Mountain Range to the south—a trade and travel route that had been used for millennia by Native Americans (Bagley 2012a:15). His party detoured south and crossed the Continental Divide through a gap between the Central and Southern Rocky Mountains known today as South Pass. These Astorians finished their campaign through the south of the Sweetwater valley, a large portion of the route that would eventually become the Oregon Trail (Rollins ed. 1935:181).

After its initial “discovery” by the Stuart party, South Pass remained in obscurity until 1823-1824, when it was rediscovered by fur trappers employed by William H. Ashley and led by Jedediah Smith who were looking for a westward crossing of the Wind River Range in winter. Thereafter, the pass was commonly used by mountain men and fur traders. In 1830, Smith, David E. Jackson and William L. Sublette led a caravan of wagons loaded with trade goods along the eastern portion of the Oregon Trail as far as South Pass. They demonstrated that the route was feasible for wagon migration to that point; then, in 1832, Captain Benjamin L.E. Bonneville led the first wagons across South Pass into the Green River Basin, proving the practicality of the pass for wagon travel (Hurlburt 1930:20-21; Scott 1958:26).

Great Britain claimed the Oregon country as its territory, but after the War of 1812, the United States attempted to curb British interests by encouraging American competition with the Hudson’s Bay Company, a British fur trading venture in the Pacific Northwest and much of modern-day Canada. As a provision of the Treaty of 1818, the Oregon country was opened for joint occupation by both British and American citizens. Spanish and Russian claims to the Oregon country were relinquished by the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 and the Russo-American Treaty of 1824, respectively. In 1821, the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company, a rival trading venture, merged under the charter and name of the former to form a colossal fur empire.

The resulting British monopoly used cutthroat competition to dislodge American fur interests in the Oregon country. Nevertheless, the proximity of the United States and its territories allowed hundreds of American citizens to enter the Oregon country, either overland by the Oregon Trail or by sea in the late 1830s and early 1840s. By the mid-1840s, American settlers outnumbered the British. In 1846, Oregon became a territory of the United States (Merk 1978:311-312; Wishart 1978:12; Pierce 2012).

PIONEERS OF THE JOURNEY

In 1836, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were sent to the Oregon country by the American Board of Foreign Missions to establish a Christian mission among the tribes of the Northwest. The Whitmans left the annual trappers’ rendezvous held that year at the confluence of the Green River and Horse Creek near present-day Pinedale and traveled by wagon on a laborious route to Fort Hall, Idaho. The wagon was converted into a cart that was finally abandoned at Fort Boise. In 1840, “Doc” Newell, a mountain man, and his party took three wagons from Fort Hall to the Willamette Valley, reaching the Whitman mission that fall. The following year, Newell proceeded down the Columbia River with his wagon and is credited with completing the first wagon trip to reach the Pacific Ocean (Haines 1981:4).

In 1841, the Bidwell-Bartleson Party left Westport Landing, Missouri, guided by Thomas Fitzpatrick. The Bidwell-Bartleson Party is generally credited as the first emigrant party to travel the entire length of the Oregon Trail, although the emigrants abandoned their wagons at Fort Hall, Idaho, and completed the journey with pack animals.

Exploring for the Corps of Topographical Engineers, John C. Fremont traveled a large portion of the emigrant road in 1842, guided by Kit Carson and Lucien Maxwell. He made the first accurate map of the Oregon Trail to South Pass, his turnaround point. He also issued a narrative that acted as a guidebook for travelers. The Elijah White Party also took the route during the 1842 season and, like the Bidwell-Bartleson Party, left its wagons at Fort Hall.

Narcissa Whitman, on being at the 1836 Rendezvous in Wyoming: “This is a cause worth living for—Wherever we go we find opportunities of doing good—If we had packed one or two animals with bibles & testaments, we should have had abundant opportunity of disposing of them to the traders & trappers of the mountains who would have received them gratefully... We have given away all we have to spare.” (Drury 1986:206-207).

Haines estimated the total number of Oregon-bound emigrants in that year at 197 (Fremont 1845; Haines 1981:4).

In 1843, the first large party of Oregon-bound emigrants rolled westward from Independence, Missouri. The group consisted of 135 men, 130 women, and 610 children. Accompanying the party was the same Marcus Whitman who had established a mission in the Oregon country in 1836. Due to the large number of emigrants and mixed demographics of the emigrant party, many historians regard “The Great Migration of 1843” as the true beginning of westward migration. Lacking a road around Mount Hood, the party was forced to negotiate its wagons through the Dalles of the Columbia River. It was not until 1846 that Samuel K. Barlow opened a toll road around the southern flank of Mount Hood that allowed wagons to reach the Willamette Valley without fording the Dalles (Haines 1981:4; Mattes 1969:13).

In 1844, four separate emigrant parties bound for Oregon left from Bellevue, St. Joseph, Westport, and Independence, Missouri (Mattes 1969:14). The total number of Oregon-bound emigrants in 1844 has been estimated at 1,750 (Haines 1981:4). That same year, the Stevens-Murphy Party pioneered the California Trail, driving their wagons up the Truckee River, over the Donner Pass, and into the Sacramento Valley. This accomplishment opened the way for increased migration to California and ultimately the California

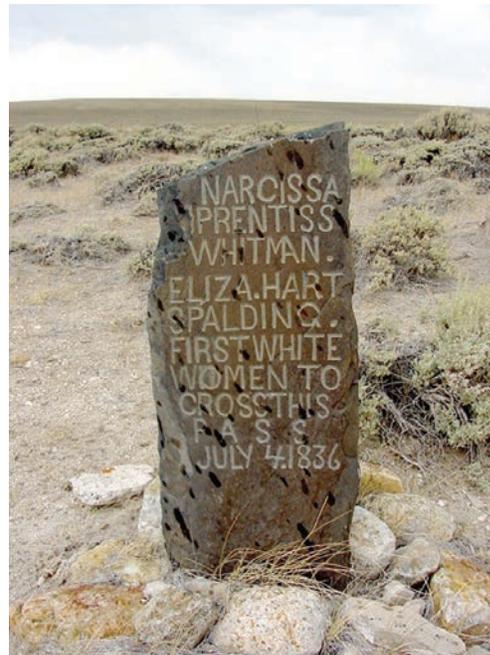


Figure 2.5. The Whitman and Spalding monument near the crest of the South Pass in Fremont County. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

gold rush (Unruh 1979:351).

The migration expanded considerably the following year to over 5,000 people. More families comprised the emigrant parties. In 1845, the first U.S. military expedition journeyed up the Platte River, guided by Tom Fitzpatrick. Colonel Stephen W. Kearny led five companies of Dragoons along the emigrant trails as far as South Pass to gather information, protect emigrants, and impress the Indians with U.S. military power (Bagley 2010:215). On the return trip, Kearny held a “grand parley” with

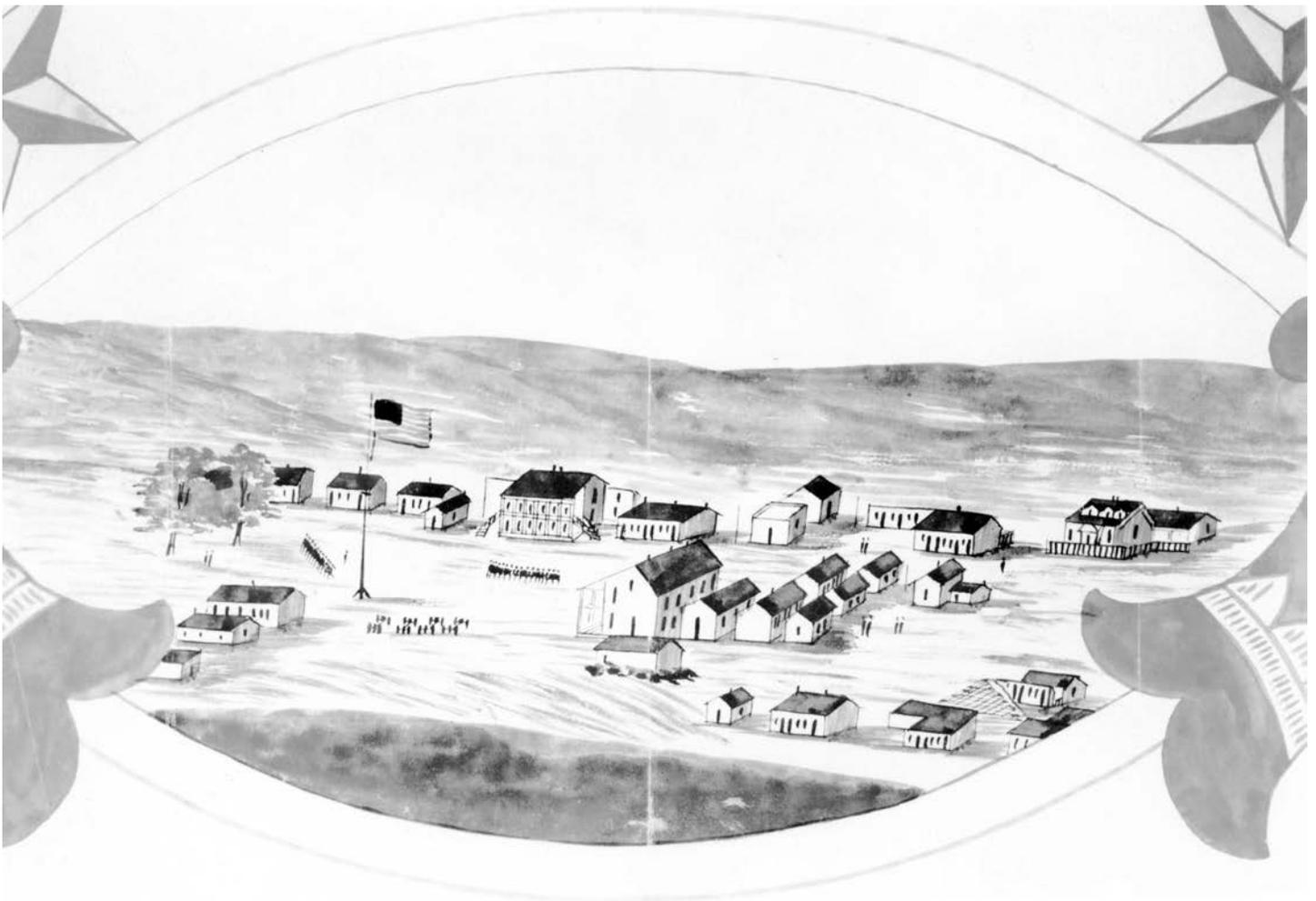


Figure 2.6. Fort Laramie 1864, unidentified artist. Image from the Bretney Collection, courtesy Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

the Sioux near Fort Laramie (Mattes 1969:14; Stewart 1962:88-89).

In 1846, the number of emigrants using the trail decreased to 1,500. The United States was engaged in a war with Mexico over lands in the southwest, including California, which may have affected emigration. Emigrant trail historian George Stewart estimated that during the 1846 season, 200 wagons were bound for California and 300 hundred for Oregon (Stewart 1962:151). During this season, the Donner Party made a disastrous late crossing of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and was trapped by snow. The young writer Francis Parkman traveled west and wrote a vivid account in his book *The Oregon Trail*. He traveled as far as Fort Laramie, not as an emigrant but as an observer of the Native Americans

(Parkman 1964).

James Clyman also traveled the emigrant trails in 1846, beginning in California and moving east. Clyman observed on this trip:

It is remarkable how anxious thes [sic] people are to hear from the Pacific country and strange that so many of all kinds and classes of People should sell out comfortable homes in Missouri and Elsewhere pack up and start across such an emmence [sic] Barren waste to settle in some new Place of which they have at most so uncertain information but this is the character of my countrymen (Clyman 1928).



Figure 2.7. Mormons Nearing Fort Bridger. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

On his journey east, Clyman encountered a steady stream of emigrants, noting a total of 321 westbound wagons by the time he reached Fort Laramie. Joel Palmer, another eastbound emigrant in 1846, counted 541 wagons. Historian Dale Morgan estimated five emigrants per wagon to calculate a total of 2,700 bound for Oregon and California. Aubrey Haines estimated 1,500 bound just for Oregon (Haines 1981:4; Morgan 1963, Vol.I:57-67, 116).

MIGRATION OF THE SAINTS

In 1847, the first Mormons emigrated across Wyoming to the Salt Lake Valley. The Mormons were driven out of Nauvoo, Illinois, in February 1846. They pioneered a route across Iowa and established the settlement of Winter Quarters near

the site of Omaha, Nebraska (NPS 1999:41). More than 3,700 Mormons gathered at Winter Quarters and in communities in Iowa. In the spring of 1847, Brigham Young led a party of 149 Mormons west along the trail, guided by maps issued by John C. Fremont in 1845 and 1846 from his explorations in the early 1840s. The earliest Mormon emigrants traveled on the north side of the Platte River as far as Fort Laramie, then crossed the river and generally followed the main trail along the south bank of the Platte. From Fort Bridger to the Salt Lake Valley, they followed the path hewn through the brush by the Donner Party on the Hastings Cutoff using the Lansford Hastings map that was hand-copied by Thomas Bullock, "Clerk of the Camp of Israel." When Brigham Young's party arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, the end of the Mormon Pioneer Trail, they established a Mormon colony. Some 70,000



Figure 2.8. Mormon wagon train entering the Salt Lake Valley, Utah. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

Mormon converts from England, Scandinavia, and the United States made the long overland journey to the Salt Lake Valley on the Oregon/Mormon Pioneer Trail (Bagley ed. 1997; Hill 1996:23-26, 38-43; NPS 1981a:10).

The Mormon migration continued through 1847 and 1848, with subsequent parties improving the road and establishing mileposts, toll ferry crossings, and camping spots. William Clayton, who served as assistant to Thomas Bullock, official recorder of the migration, was assigned to carefully record the journey in order to prepare a much-needed guidebook. Clayton made the return journey eastward, again measuring and describing the route, which resulted in his book, *The Latter-day Saints' Emigrants' Guide* (1848). The Mormons initially published 5,000 copies, and the guide was enthusiastically used by emigrants outside the faith as well as Mormons (Hill

1996: 52-56; Clayton. 1983 [1848]).

William Clayton believed that most travelers tended to overestimate the number of miles traveled on an average day. Charged with the responsibility of keeping an accurate account of distance to help guide subsequent Mormon emigrants, Clayton was not satisfied with estimates. He measured one of the wagon wheels and discovered that 360 revolutions equaled exactly one mile. He tied a piece of red ribbon to the wheel and spent one whole day counting revolutions. At the end of the day, he determined that the wagon train had traveled 11-1/4 miles, whereas other emigrants estimated the day's travel at 13 or 14 miles. The leaders of the wagon train allowed Orson Pratt, a mathematician, to devise and build a "double-ended screw" that was attached to a wheel and could record up to 30 miles at a time. Thereafter, Clayton had an accurate means of determining the

miles traveled each day as well as distances between readily identifiable geographic points (Hill 1996:52-56; Clayton 1983 [1848]:4). (A working model of a “roadometer” is on display at the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center in Casper.)

In the fall of 1849, the Mormon Church established the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company to “promote, facilitate, and accomplish the Emigration of the Poor” (Arrington 1958:78). The Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which was chartered as a corporation, relied on church members to make voluntary donations and on its beneficiaries to continually replenish the fund after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley (Arrington 1958:78). In 1855 and 1856, crop failures, grasshopper infestations, and loss of cattle from a severe winter resulted in meager donations to the fund, and those who had previously benefited from the fund could not pay back their loans. In response to dwindling donations, Brigham Young proposed that “the poor brethren in foreign countries” travel cross-country using handcarts. By using handcarts instead of wagons, Mormons could travel much more cheaply and quickly than wagon parties. For under \$45, immigrants could sail from Liverpool to America, then proceed across the country by train or stage and finally on foot with handcarts. The typical handcart company consisted of 400 to 500 people and was further divided into groups of 100, each led by a sub-captain. Each hundred received five round tents that held 20 persons to a tent, 20 handcarts (one to every five persons), and one “Chicago” wagon manufactured by the Peter Schuttler Wagon Company of Chicago which was drawn by three yoke of oxen to haul provisions and tents (Arrington 1958:156-57; Hafen and Hafen 1960:29-31, 93; Hill 1996: 29-30; Idaho State Historical Society [ISHS] 1981:130).

In 1856, two Mormon handcart companies and their accompanying wagon trains were caught in a series of violent October snowstorms prior to crossing the Continental Divide. The Willie and Martin handcart companies had not left Liverpool, England, until May 4 of that year and did not leave Florence, Nebraska, until August 17 and August 27, respectively. Members of the handcart companies and church leaders in Iowa and Nebraska were divided on whether the emigrants should attempt a late crossing to the Salt Lake Valley. Some emigrants chose to

winter in Nebraska, but many others continued west. A small party of missionaries passed the slower handcart companies on the trail and reported the emigrants’ plight to church leaders when they reached Salt Lake City. When Brigham Young learned, in early October, that the parties were still out on the trail, he sent rescue parties east from Salt Lake City to assist them; the first left Salt Lake City on October 7 and several more followed throughout the month.

The Martin Company, unable to afford the toll at Reshaw’s Bridge, chose to ford the North Platte in bitterly cold weather. The next day, on October 19, the first snowstorm struck the region dropping between 12 and 18 inches of snow. The temperatures fell well below zero. That same day the rescuers found the stalled and starving Willie group camped in the snow on the Sweetwater River near South Pass. Half the rescue party stayed with the Willie Company. The other half pushed on, and on October 28 three scouts for the rescue party found the Martin Company about 100 miles further east, at Red Buttes on the North Platte. In the nine days since the freezing river crossing, the Martin Company, exhausted and nearly out of food in the bitter cold, had moved only a few miles. One of the scouts later noted that 56 people in the Martin Company died during that desperate time (Hein 2013).

The rescue party got the Martin Company moving again 60 more miles to Devil’s Gate. There, the rest of the rescuers waited for them at an abandoned trading post called Seminoe’s Fort. On November 4 the Martin Company was forced by winter conditions to leave the exposed position at Devil’s Gate to find better protection from the winds and firewood elsewhere. The emigrants pushed westward a little over two miles to the Sweetwater River, crossed to its north bank, and found shelter in a cove (Junge 1976:15).

Four rescue wagons finally reached the emigrants at Three Crossings on November 12 and on November 16 ten more wagons of supplies from Salt Lake City met the company at Rocky Ridge. Two days later still more wagons with food and clothing reached them. On November 39, three months after their departure from Florence, Nebraska, the Martin Company finally reached Salt Lake City, although the last members of the wagon trains did not arrive until

When some the survivors of this disaster arrived in Salt Lake, Brigham Young preached to his audience: “Some [of the survivors] you will find with their feet frozen to their ankles, some are frozen to their knees and some have their hands frosted. They want good nursing...I want the sisters to go home and prepare to give those who have just arrived a mouthful of something to eat, and to wash them and nurse them up. You know that I would give more for a dish of pudding and milk, or a baked potato and salt, were I in the situation of those persons who have just come in, than I would for all your prayers, though you were to stay here all the afternoon and pray. Prayer is good, but when baked potatoes and pudding and milk are needed, prayer will not supply their place” (Roberts 2008:317-318).

December 15 and 16 (Junge 1976).

Exhaustion, exposure, and lack of food had weakened the emigrants of both the Willie and Martin companies, and many died even after rescue efforts had begun. The Mormon Handcart Disaster was the largest single loss of life in the history of the emigrant trails. Nearly one-fourth of the 576 members of the Martin Company died before the company finally arrived in Salt Lake City on November 30, 1856. In spite of this disaster, the Mormons continued to use handcarts until 1860. Between 1856 and 1860, 10 handcart companies composed of 2,962 pioneers and 655 handcarts (three percent of the total Mormon migration) journeyed to Salt Lake City (Hill 1996:29; ISHS 1981:130).

The site of the trading post at Devil’s Gate, known as “Seminoe’s Fort” or “Seminoe’s Trading Post,” was the object of an archaeological investigations by the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist in 2001 (Walker 2009). Seminoe’s Fort was constructed in 1852 by Charles Lajeunesse, who also known as “Seminoe”, and his business partners. The trading post was operated until 1856 when decreases in



Figure 2.9. Reconstructed Seminoe Trading Post, now part of the Martin Handcart Visitor Center. Photo by Danny Walker, courtesy of the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist.

emigrant and native trade, along with the threat of native hostilities led to abandonment of the post just prior to the Martin handcart disaster (Walker 2009:1, 27-28). The post served as a mail station into 1857, at which time it was destroyed by the Mormons as they



Figure 2.10. Martin's Cove monument. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

retreated to Utah ahead of Federal troops during the Mormon War (Walker 2009:54)

A 600-acre rectangular parcel of land within Martin's Cove, believed to be the place in which Captain Martin and his group of handcart emigrants found shelter, was enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places on March 8, 1977. As stated in a more recent recording of the Cove by archaeologist Richard Talbot (1996):

The only evidence linking this particular hollow to the actual events surrounding the Martin's Handcart Company is oral tradition, part of which has resulted in the labeling of this cove on the topographic map as Martin's Cove. There is some inconsistency and room for questioning about site placement. Journal entries suggest that the handcart company traveled three miles west of Devil's Gate before turning north and seeking shelter in a hollow. The current Martin's Cove is

only about two miles west of Devil's Gate. On the other hand, there is much to be said about oral tradition, and in particular within Mormon culture, where continual remembrance and celebration of important historical events such as the Martin's Company tragedy do not usually allow for significant misinterpretations of place.

Further investigation of the cove is needed to identify the exact location of the campsite and graves of the Martin Handcart Company of 1856.

By the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, an estimated 42,800 emigrants had reached the Mormon settlements on foot, walking alongside covered wagons or pulling handcarts. The Mormon seed colony gradually spread in all directions, including east into southwestern Wyoming. The Mormons maintained several ferry sites at the Green River crossings of the emigrant trails (ISHS 1981:129-130; Wyoming Recreation Commission 1976:82-83).

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

In 1839, Swiss emigrant John Sutter settled in California, established the colony of “New Helvetia” at the junction of the American and Sacramento rivers, and constructed Sutter’s Fort. John Marsh, another early settler, owned a large land tract on the San Francisco Bay, where he established a sizable ranch. Both places became destinations for emigrants prior to the California Gold Rush of 1848 and 1849. Travelers used Sutter’s Fort and the Marsh ranch as supply depots and as base stations for rescue missions seeking stranded emigrants, including the Donner Party of 1846 (Hill 1993:6-7).

Although other emigrant parties traveled to California between 1841 and 1843, the first group to bring wagons the entire distance was the Stephens-Murphy Party in 1844, using Joseph Walker’s route down the Humboldt River, then crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains via what later became known as Donner’s Pass. In 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico, and in June, American settlers in California instigated the Bear Flag Revolt, a rebellion against Mexico within the territory of Alta California, and seized the Mexican garrison at Sonoma. When the U.S. Army arrived to occupy the garrison, the rebels disbanded. Some joined the U.S. forces under the command of Major John C. Fremont. The Bear Flag Revolt ushered in U.S. control of the Pacific Coast. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally ended the war with Mexico, and the land that would become the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah was ceded to the United States. California became a state in 1850 (Hill 1993:15-21; NPS 1999:30, 33; Stewart 1962:185; Unruh 1979: 351).

A major turning point in the California migration occurred on January 24, 1848, when James Marshall discovered gold in the tailrace of John Sutter’s newly constructed mill on the American River. Although Sutter attempted to keep Marshall’s find a secret, rumors spread until his discovery was announced to the world in San Francisco on May 8, 1848. Immediately, a gold rush began in California. In August, the *New York Herald* became the first major newspaper on the East Coast to report the discovery

of gold. On December 5, 1848, President Polk confirmed the discovery in an address to Congress. A world on the verge of an economic depression sprang into action.

During the 1849 season, the California Trail migration swelled to fifty times the usual number of people and livestock on the emigrant trails. Emigrant demographics also changed. The huge influx of emigrants was at first composed chiefly of younger males bound for the gold fields (Hill 1993:20-24).

Before 1849, records show that 12,764 emigrants traveled the emigrant trails bound for Oregon, Utah, and, to a lesser extent, California. However, when news of gold discoveries in California spread across the country, the number of emigrants suddenly swelled to as many as 32,000 in 1849 and from 45,000 to 55,000 in 1850. These figures were obtained from trail registers kept at Fort Kearny (Nebraska) and Fort Laramie; it was customary for emigrant parties to sign the register, listing the number of men, cattle and wagons in the train. Numbers of wagons were multiplied by three to four occupants per wagon and added to estimates of packers (those who did not use wagons) taken from contemporary diaries. Unfortunately, the registers from both forts have since disappeared. These numbers are corroborated by Dale Morgan (editor of James Pritchard’s diary), who quoted estimates for the 1849 season of roughly 30,000 emigrants bound for California, 400 to 500 bound for Oregon, and 1,400 bound for Utah (Pritchard 1959:17). Emigrant Henry Stine viewed the register at Fort Laramie on July 5, 1850, and recorded in his diary counts of 31,171 men, 803 women, 1,094 children, 7,472 mules, 30,616 oxen, 22,742 horses, 8,998 wagons, 5,270 cows, and 257 deaths. It is not known whether these figures also included the previous season (1849) or if a new register was used each year (Mattes 1969:16-17; 30-31; 498, 502-503; Stewart 1962:231-232).

California-bound emigrants used a variety of routes to reach the gold fields. Affluent travelers could sail around Cape Horn or opt for an intermediate land crossing of Panama, Nicaragua, or Mexico. Of those traveling overland on the California Trail, many Forty-Niners chose to take the Sublette Cutoff west of South Pass; soon a number

of other cutoffs were developed south of the Sublette Cutoff to accommodate the increased traffic and to save time (see discussion under cutoffs west of South Pass) (Hill 1993: xviii-xx; Stewart 1962:130-141).

In general, gold-seekers followed the main emigrant trail corridor or various cutoffs to Fort Hall, Idaho, then traveled west along the Snake River until they diverged from the Oregon Trail in the vicinity of the Raft River and crossed over to the Humboldt (or Mary's) River. Later, many emigrants took the Hudspeth (or Myers) Cutoff, leaving the Oregon Trail before reaching Fort Hall. Others tried the Hastings Cutoff from Fort Bridger, continuing southwest through the Salt Lake Valley, then westward to the Humboldt River. Emigrants used a variety of routes to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains, including Lassen's Trail, the Truckee Route, or the Carson Route. Mountain men such as Joseph Walker and Kit Carson pioneered the various routes (Hill 1993:4-5).

Joseph E. Ware published a guidebook in early 1849 that was written specifically for the Forty-Niners. However, Ware had not personally traveled the route. Instead, he relied heavily on John C. Fremont's previous reports and maps. Ware added some new information, but from Fort Laramie to the Bear Valley of California, he merely copied William Clayton's 1848 guide. Ware's guidebook proved quite accurate and remained the best guide overall until Child and Horn published their guidebooks based on personal experiences in 1852. Ware finally traveled the emigrant trails in 1850, but he grew ill and was abandoned by his companions. He died on the trail just east of Fort Laramie (Ware 1932: vi, xiv, xviii).

In 1850, cholera epidemics swept the trail, thus lowering the number of travelers the following season. By 1852, the number of travelers rose once again, and some 50,000 emigrants took to the trails. The number of women and children immigrating to California increased as the state's warm climate and agricultural virtues became more fully recognized. After 1852, the gold rush traffic began to ebb, and once again the majority of emigrants headed for Oregon (Hill 1993:26-31; Mattes 1969:16-17, 30-31; Stewart 1962: 297-318).

EMIGRANT TRAIL VARIANTS EAST OF SOUTH PASS

Before 1850, most emigrants followed the south bank of the North Platte River east of Fort Laramie. The fort was located about 1.6 miles upstream from the mouth of the Laramie River on a rise on the north bank. Mormon emigrants generally followed the north bank of the North Platte River and crossed to the south bank at Fort Laramie. Substantial numbers of non-Mormons used this route as well. The Mormons established a ferry that was in use through 1849. Afterwards, the U.S. Army established a ferry about 1,000 feet downstream.

Plateau and River Routes

After leaving Fort Laramie, emigrants selected one of two routes on the south side of the North Platte River. The southernmost route was known as the Plateau or Hill (Black Hills) Route and utilized higher ground south of the river, apparently in pursuit of a firmer roadway preferable during the spring thaw or wet weather (Marcy 1859:270). The second route was the River Route, which followed the south bank of the North Platte River in closer proximity to the river than the Plateau Route. These two routes converged a short distance west of the present Converse - Platte county line, about 50 miles west of Fort Laramie (Franzwa 1990:107-115; NPS 1981b: Sheets 118-128). There were also several alternates and connectors immediately west of Fort Laramie where the two routes ran closely parallel. The greatly increased volume of traffic during the gold rush years likely forced emigrants to use both major routes and minor alternatives in order to find suitable campgrounds, firewood, and forage. Some emigrant trains diverged many miles from the trail to find sufficient forage for livestock (Stewart 1962:236). It is also reasonable to assume that the time of the year often dictated the use of the Plateau Route and River Route. Those traveling in the early part of the emigrant season might choose the higher, drier Plateau Route to avoid the spring thaw, while those traveling later might choose the River Route when water was scarcer. Of course, conditions could also vary from year to year or within an emigrant season.



Figure 2.11. Crossing the River at Fort Laramie. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

The NPS considers the River Route to be the primary route of the Oregon Trail. The agency used the years 1841- 1848 when determining the primary route in order to avoid confusion with the route of the Forty-Niners to California. The NPS looked at the entire route from Missouri to the West Coast; the “primary” route was chosen by a team of consultant historians (NPS 1981b:xi and Sheets 188-128).

This report finds that there is not enough documentary evidence to firmly establish whether the Plateau Route or the River Route received the most use by emigrants prior to 1849. It is known that the 1847 Mormon migration used the Plateau (Hill) Route; specific place names located on that route such as Porter Rock and Heber Springs are mentioned in Clayton’s 1848 guidebook, written primarily for Mormon use. Major Osborne Cross, who was in charge of the supply train for the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, took the Plateau (Hill) Route in 1849, as did Captain Howard Stansbury of the Corps

of Topographical Engineers (Cross 1940:40-41, 125; Stansbury 1988 [1852]).

Child’s Route

Child’s Route, also sometimes called Child’s Cutoff or Chile’s Route, was a third variant of the emigrant trails tested by Andrew Child during the 1850 migration. Child later described the route in a guidebook that he authored in 1852. Although the Mormon migration of 1847 stayed on the north side of the North Platte River east of Fort Laramie, the emigrants crossed to the south side of the river at the fort. The north bank was reputed to be difficult if not impassable for wagons and more dangerous due to hostilities with the tribes. The early guidebooks advised against traveling on the north side of the river, although fur trappers had followed that route. U.S. soldiers perpetuated the notion of difficult travel among emigrants because the soldiers profited from the ferry, charging travelers on the north bank of the

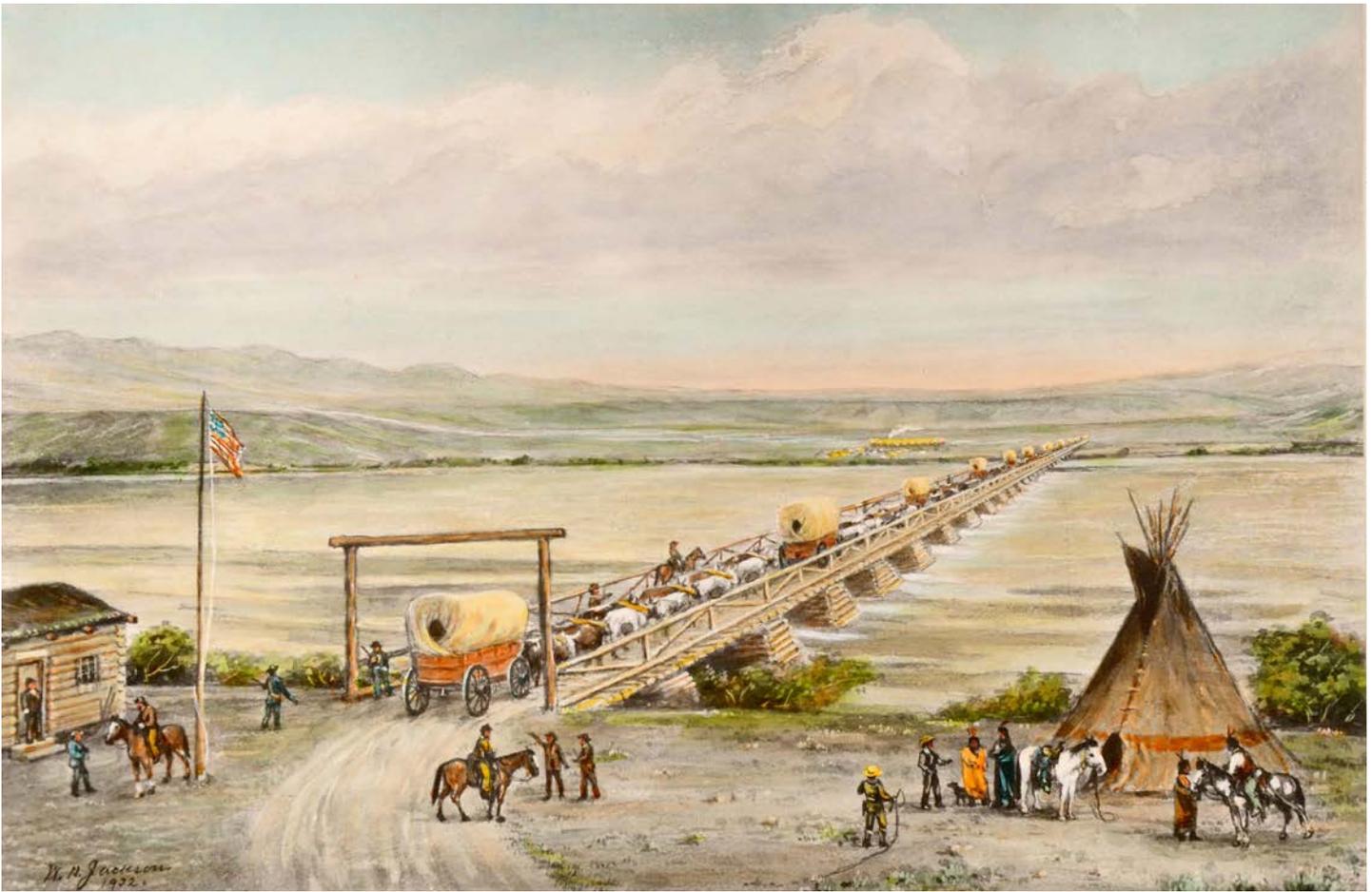


Figure 2.12. “Old Platte Bridge, Wyo.” William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

river to cross to the south side (Mattes 1969:507).

The Child Party apparently used Child’s alternate route to escape a cholera epidemic running rampant among the emigrants during the 1850 season. In his guidebook, Child stated: “By traveling thence on the north side of the Platte River, the emigrant will secure an abundance of grass for his stock, and escape the many diseases incident to the south side of the river.” Child also mentioned that his party gained two days on emigrants following the south bank and also avoided crossing the North Platte River twice and “. . . the dreaded Black Hills of the south side” (Child 1852:20-21,78).

Horn’s Emigrant Guide, written in 1852, mentions Child’s Route on the north bank of the North Platte River. Horn also favored the north bank, but indicated that it had long received traffic; therefore, it is likely that Child actually rediscovered the north

bank route rather than pioneered it. Guide books and emigrant diaries attest that some emigrants began using the north bank route in 1850, following Child’s lead (Phillips ed., 1932; Pritchard 1959). Child’s Route diverged northwest from the North Platte River west of Fort Laramie, passing through Hartville Canyon, then northwest through Rocky Pass, across Long’s Canyon, and up Emigrant Hill, where there are well-preserved wagon ruts and emigrant graves within the boundaries of modern-day Camp Guernsey State Military Reservation. The route turned north to avoid the steep side canyons associated with the North Platte River and followed Box Elder Creek through hilly country. It gradually headed northwest, following Box Elder Creek, and then crossed Cottonwood Creek. A portion of the trail is now inundated by the waters of Glendo Reservoir, and other sections to the west have been obliterated or are



(Left) Figure 2.13. Rocky Ridge portion of the trail. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.



Figure 2.14. Modern Two-track with original Seminole Cutoff wagon rut to the right. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

closely paralleled by the Chicago and North Western and Burlington Northern-Santa Fe railroads. Child's Route continued west to present-day Casper, where the Mormon Ferry crossing is generally recognized as the end of this variant (NPS 1981b: Sheets 119-121, 132-137). No information is available as to the number of emigrants who used Child's Route; however, emigrant graves and physical remnants of the trail exhibiting multiple ruts and swales indicate heavy usage.

In 1990, trail historian Gregory Franzwa referred to Child's Cutoff as "Chiles's Route"; however, the original guidebook was written by "Andrew Child of Wisconsin" and bears that spelling on its cover. Franzwa labeled the route as "Council Bluffs Road" on his maps (see Franzwa 1990:108-111, Maps 44-47). The route depicted by Franzwa is the same as Child's Cutoff as depicted by the NPS (1981b: Appendix II). The NPS considers the Council Bluffs Road to be a variation that started at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and terminated at Fort Laramie, where it joined the primary Oregon-California Trail on the south side of the North Platte River (NPS (1999:37). Because the route was located on the north side of the North Platte River, Franzwa may have retained the term

"Council Bluffs Road" to describe Child's Cutoff route west of Fort Laramie.

Emigrant Gap and Bessemer Bend Routes

From the future site of Casper, emigrants could follow two variants of the emigrant trails. Those who crossed the North Platte River from the south side to the north side via ferries or bridges could take the northern variant that passed through Emigrant Gap, a shallow pass through a ridge now called the Emigrant Gap Ridge, or they could follow the north bank of the river past Red Buttes. Those who traveled the south bank of the river west of Casper crossed to the north bank at Red Buttes, later called Bessemer Bend, and rejoined travelers who had remained on the north side of the river. All of these variations converged several miles west of Casper near the Avenue of Rocks. The NPS recognizes the Emigrant Gap Route as the primary trail and Bessemer Bend as an alternate route that fell into disuse after 1850, once ferries and bridges were established downstream. However, those who were unable or unwilling to pay ferry and bridge tolls continued to use the Bessemer Bend Route. The Pony Express used this route in 1860 and 1861, and Red Buttes was one of the Pony Express stations

(Godfrey 1994:147; NPS 1981b: Sheets 137-141).

Seminole Cutoff

The Seminole Cutoff diverged from the main trail about 30 miles west of Split Rock and southwest of the Ice Spring Slough. The cutoff trended southwest, staying well south of the Sweetwater River. Fur trapper and trader Charles Lajeunesse, also known as “Seminole”, probably pioneered the route about 1854; it received moderate emigrant use after that date. By taking this cutoff, emigrant parties could avoid numerous crossings of the Sweetwater River, as well as the difficulties of the Rocky Ridge portion of the trail (Franzwa 1990:138-143; ISHS 1981:78; NPS 1999:37).

EMIGRANT TRAIL VARIANTS WEST OF SOUTH PASS

Sublette Cutoff

West of South Pass, travelers blazed a number of significant trail variants or cutoffs to shorten the journey and to avoid or limit waterless stretches in the Big Sandy Desert. Many of these cutoffs were opened in the 1850s, but the most significant opened in 1844 when the Stephens-Murphy Party, guided by Caleb Greenwood, blazed the Sublette or Greenwood Cutoff. Trail historian Mary Hurlburt Scott believed that William Sublette discovered the famous cutoff in 1832. In 1840, David Burr drew a map that vaguely depicts the “Sublette Route” in the vicinity of the cutoff and appears to verify an earlier origin for the route (Scott 1958:27-28). Fur trappers (and undoubtedly the Native American’s before them) likely knew of such a route long before the westward migration, but it may be impossible to credit a single individual or establish a date for the blazing of such a trail due to the scant written evidence left by the mountain men. In his Master’s thesis Ross Lynn Jensen (1975) suggested that the route was known as the Greenwood Cutoff prior to 1849, and that “Sublette Cutoff” came into more popular usage when Joseph Ware referred to it by that name in his 1849 guidebook entitled *The Emigrants’ Guide to California*. As previously stated, Ware

had never been west prior to writing his guide, and he relied heavily on earlier reports (Ware 1932: vi, xiv, xviii). He also used information supplied by Solomon P. Sublette about trail variants west of South Pass. However, what Ware described as Sublette’s Cutoff was actually the yet established route of the Lander Cutoff farther north, confusing travelers and historians (Jensen 1975:53-55). A contemporary traveler, J. Goldsborough Bruff, caught the error in Ware’s guidebook and wrote the following in his journal for August 2, 1849:

It is call’d by the emigrants [sic], very improperly, “Soublette’s [sic] Cut-Off,” but was discovered by another mountaineer,—Greenwood; and should be called “Greenwood’s Cut-off”. Soublette had discovered and travelled a short cut higher up, from near the base of “Fremont’s Peak”, to Fort Hall, which is only practicable for mules, and now probably nearly obliterated (quoted in Jensen 1975:55-56).

In conclusion, Jensen stated: “As to what part a Sublette, either William, Andrew, Milton, or Solomon, played in blazing the trail, there is little supporting evidence and much conjecture” (Jensen 1975:47-56).

The Sublette Cutoff diverged from the main emigrant trails at the “Parting of the Ways (approximately 18 miles southwest of South Pass) and crossed the Little Sandy and Big Sandy rivers, the latter at the southern end of modern-day Big Sandy Reservoir. This marked the beginning of a waterless stretch from the Big Sandy River to the Green River, considered the most treacherous portion of the cutoff. Emigrant James A. Pritchard described the segment in his 1849 diary:

The general appearance of the face of the country lying between Big Sandy and Green River is level [sic], slightly undulated, no timber, but plenty of wild sage, and in places the grass is very good. The road is very firm and until you get within 15 miles of Green River, is very fine and easy to travel. From there on to



Figure 2.15. Oregon/California/Pony Express/Mormon Trail ruts diverging at Parting of the Ways. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

the river the country is cut up very much by deep ravines (Pritchard 1959:95).

The trail paralleled the present Sweetwater-Sublette county line on the Sweetwater side, then turned southwest and descended to the various ferry crossings on the Green River south of La Barge. Some emigrant parties used this shortcut in 1845, 1846, and 1847, pausing to commemorate their passage by chiseling their names and the date on rocks at Names Hill and Holden Hill. By 1848, the Mormons had established ferries on the Green River, indicating that there was sufficient traffic to make this

venture worthwhile (Morgan 1960:52).

After crossing the Green River, the emigrants began the second leg of their journey on the Sublette Cutoff. The trail headed southwest over Holden Hill, followed Fontenelle Creek westward, and crossed over Oyster Ridge, where it converged with the more southerly Slate Creek Trail at Rocky Gap. The emigrants then crossed Hams Fork at one of three different crossings, all of which converged on the west side of the river near the base of White Hill. The road then reached the Hams Fork Plateau by ascending White Hill, a rise in elevation of about 500 feet. From White Hill, the emigrants began a gradual

Diary of Elizabeth Dixon Smith: “August 9 (1847): made 16 miles. Encamped at Fort Bridger. This is a pretty place to see in such a barren country. Perhaps there is a thousand acres of level land covered with grass interspersed with beautiful stony books and plenty of timber such as it is quaking asp.” (Holmes 1983:123).

climb toward Dempsey Ridge, passing Emigrant Springs, a favored campground and watering spot. The trail then crossed over the top of Dempsey Ridge. The trail was rugged from there to the Bear River Valley and posed many problems for the emigrants; many wagons were lost due to the roughness of the terrain. In all, the Sublette Cutoff from its beginning at the Parting of the Ways to the Bear River extended over 100 miles (Gardner 1983:16; Larson et al 2004a:14-16).

Emigrants passed several graves located along a short stretch of trail about three miles west of White Hill. These graves are mentioned in several diaries and include the names of Alfred Corum, Margaret Campbell, and Nancy Hill. Although the Corum and Hill graves are marked with headstones, research by Reg Duffin, OCTA historian, (1983, quoted in Larson et al. 2004a) suggests that the graves do not contain these individuals and that their remains may be located about one mile to the west of the marked graves. Duffin’s research took into account factors such as replaced headstones, and order and distance between graves as described by emigrant diarists. Recent ground penetrating radar (GPR) and metal detector surveys were carried out at the marked Alfred Corum gravesite located on the south side of the Sublette Cutoff. In addition to the three marked graves, as many as 11 unmarked graves may have been detected; however GPR probes are not necessarily positive proof of buried remains (Larson et al. 2004a:30-41).

Primary/Bridger Route

Although the Sublette Cutoff was an important and heavily used cutoff, the BLM recognizes that the route of the emigrant trails that passed through Fort Bridger is acknowledged as the main or primary route (BLM 1986:3). The Bridger Route turned southwest from South Pass at The Parting of the Ways and followed the Big Sandy River to the Green River ferry crossings, and beyond to Fort Bridger at the Blacks Fork tributary. There the trail turned northwest, followed Little Muddy Creek, crossed the Bear River Divide to the Bear River, and continued west into what is now Idaho. This portion of the emigrant trails formed a crude “V” with Fort Bridger at its base. The Sublette Cutoff closed the top of the V and saved travelers almost three days and 60 to 70 miles. However, the Sublette Cutoff had two major drawbacks: it lacked the supply facilities available at Fort Bridger, and it crossed a waterless stretch of country estimated by guidebooks and journals as 34 to 53 miles (actually about 50 miles) before reaching the Green River (Gardner 1983:16; Rosenberg 1990:25-26). Nevertheless, the Sublette Cutoff became popular with impatient gold seekers during the California Gold Rush. In 1849, an estimated 65 percent of travelers used the route, and by 1850, an estimated nine out of every 11 teams took the Sublette Cutoff (Ware 1932:26; Hill 1993:12; Morgan 1960:200). In 1854, J.M. Hockaday pioneered the Dempsey-Hockaday Trail, a cutoff of the Sublette Cutoff that eliminated several miles where the Sublette Cutoff dipped southward near the Hams Fork drainage north of modern-day Kemmerer (U.S.



Figure 2.16. Old Fort Bridger, Wyoming. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

Congress, Senate 1859:31).

Slate Creek/Kinney Cutoff Variants

Several new shortcuts were discovered in the early 1850s that avoided the 50-mile desert crossing on the Sublette Cutoff and soon reduced traffic on the cutoff's eastern portion. These shortcuts were located south of the Sublette Cutoff and generally cut across the triangle of land formed by the convergence of the Big Sandy and the Green rivers. The Kinney Cutoff, the Baker and Davis Road, and the Mormon Road, shortcuts on the east side of the Green River, converged on the west side of the river into one trail that followed the Slate Creek drainage westward, then joined the main Sublette Cutoff at Rocky Gap on Oyster Ridge north of modern-day Kemmerer (Jensen 1975:70-79; NPS 1999:38; Rosenberg 1990:2).

Emigrant diaries from the 1852 and 1853 seasons invariably used the general term "Kinney Cutoff" to

describe all of the southern shortcuts located on the east side of the Green River. The names "Baker and Davis Road" and "the Mormon Road" (both trails on the east side of the Green River) appear to have come into use after 1853.

Those emigrants following the Baker-Davis Road and/or Kinney routes diverged from the main emigrant trails in the vicinity of the Big Timber Station. Others continued a few more miles to the vicinity of the Lombard Ferry over the Green River, then followed what has been termed by former BLM archaeologist Dean Decker, the East Bank Kinney or the West Bank Kinney (Mormon Road) (Rosenberg 1990:10). Emigrants generally made camp about 10 miles west of the Green River. Emigrant Springs, a camping and watering spot, was located another 10 miles west, then nine miles to the junction of the Slate Creek Cutoff and the main Sublette Cutoff. A short variation along the route followed the Middle Fork of



Figure 2.17. Lander Cutoff near the Sweetwater River. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

Slate Creek, which passed Johnson Scout Rock, then turned north to Emigrant Springs (Rosenberg 1990:2-13).

Lander Road/Cutoff

The Lander Cutoff was one of the last east-west emigrant trails to be established. Its construction occurred during a series of new roads and improvements to old routes made under the Pacific Wagon Road program in the late 1850s. The goals in constructing the Lander Cutoff were to speed mail delivery to the West Coast and to provide safer and easier roads for emigrants (Branch 1930:175-176).

The Lander Cutoff was the central division of a

wagon road stretching from Fort Kearny, Nebraska, to Honey Lake, California. The road followed the existing emigrant trails to the vicinity of South Pass, but due to the myriad of cutoffs west of the pass, some debate existed concerning which route to improve in the area (Jackson 1964:195-196).

Frederick William Lander was appointed chief engineer for the wagon road, and he sent surveying teams into the region in the summer of 1857 to examine the various cutoffs. Lander also traveled some 3,000 miles on horseback and blazed a more northerly alternative to the existing shortcuts. This route avoided the long desert crossing and alkaline water and afforded better forage and wood than the



Figure 2.18. 1859 Bierstadt photo of Buckskin Crossing. Image courtesy of Clint Gilchrist and the Sublette County Historical Society.



Figure 2.19. Buckskin Crossing in 2013. Photo by Dave Vlcek.

existing routes. The new road diverged from the main emigrant trails several miles east of South Pass near the last crossing of the Sweetwater River. The site of the last crossing of the Sweetwater was also variously known during the emigrant era as the “9th Crossing of the Sweetwater”, “Gilbert’s Station”, “Upper Sweetwater Station”, “South Pass Station”, and/or “Camp Highland” (WY SHPO n.d.). The road then angled northwest along the base of the Wind River Mountain Range and then bore westerly

across the New Fork River and Green River. The road followed South Piney Creek and crossed the Wyoming Range via Thompson Pass and the Salt Range via Wagner Pass. It then turned north through the Star Valley and continued westward to Fort Hall, Idaho (Ecelbarger 2000:32-55; Franzwa 1990: 143; Leland et al. 1993:61-102; Wight 1993:21-38).

Lander improved his new route in 1858 by hiring Mormon laborers, and skilled lumbermen and bridge builders from the State of Maine. He also constructed Piney Fort, a blockhouse that included a blacksmith shop, near the head of South Piney Creek. When completed, the Lander Cutoff was 345.34 miles long and connected Gilbert’s Station east of South Pass to City Rocks (also known as City of Rocks), a point west of Fort Hall near the present Idaho-Utah border. The following winter, he wrote and published his *Emigrant’s Guide* to be used for the 1859 season (Branch 1930:183; Jackson 1964:198-199; Larson et al. 2004b:18-21; Leland et al. 1993:103-120; U.S. Congress, House 1859:48-51, 62; Wight 1993:39-51).

Lander returned during the 1859 season to find that disgruntled traders were posted at South Pass discouraging travelers from taking the new route. The traders had been making a good living off emigrants on the old routes. To counteract this, Lander stationed a member of his party at Gilbert’s Station Trading Post to inform travelers of the advantages of the new road and to present them with a guidebook. Also in 1859, Lander discovered that the crossings at the New Fork and Green rivers could be treacherous to travelers due to swift currents and shifting sand bars. He requested but never received additional funding from the Federal Government to build a bridge over the Green River (Branch 1930:186; Jackson 1964:213; Leland et al. 1993:121-150; U.S. Congress, House 1861:3-4).

Lander gathered some enlightening statistics about westbound emigrants, providing one of the few accurate accounts of the migration in later years. He estimated that 13,000 emigrants used the Lander Cutoff during the 1859 season and 10,000 in 1860. He obtained 9,000 signatures for his petitions praising the route. About the 1859 migration, Lander concluded:

... three out of every four emigrants

were headed for California, only one for Oregon. The previous residence of most had been Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, though many also came from Missouri, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. A train of ten wagons was large, but a few with nineteen wagons and one with twenty-seven passed by. The average group was composed of nine emigrants, young and old. Exceptionally large herds of stock were driven west over the new road. Quite often a drover had several hundred head, and some controlled as many as eight hundred to a thousand (Jackson 1964:214; U.S. Congress, House 1861:1-27).

Lander's figures indicate impressive usage of the Lander Cutoff, considering that the river crossings were never improved and that the Sublette Cutoff and the Bridger Route of the emigrant trails had the advantage of years of usage and a tradition of proven travel. The impending American Civil War diverted federal attention from this and other western road-building projects. Lander resigned as superintendent, joined the Union Army, and died on March 2, 1862, possibly from complications related to a wound received during a small skirmish at Edward's Ferry, Maryland, on October 22, 1861, or from a respiratory disease (Branch 1930:187; Ecelbarger 2000: 275-288; Larson et al. 2004b:8-9; Leland ed. 1993:233-234).

Wagon emigration continued on the Lander Cutoff long after the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. In 1888, John Vible and Louis Broderson decided to locate their store on the New Fork River close to the Lander Cutoff to take advantage of wagon traffic and the growing settlements on the upper Green River (Rosenberg 1986). Mary Hurlburt Scott related numerous accounts of wagon travel over the Sublette Cutoff and the Lander Cutoff in the 1880s, 1890s, and well into the twentieth century. In 1888, L.H. Hennick and a Mr. and Mrs. Mott traveled eastward on the Lander Cutoff from Idaho, and the Motts settled on the Green River where the Lander Cutoff made its crossing. Mr. Mott set up a ferry and a store to take advantage of the traffic (Scott 1950:56-59).

Today, visitors can still find Lander Cutoff trail ruts, swales, and gravesites in Wyoming. Cleared roadways with rock berms still exist on the more intact portions (accessible only by foot) between the La Barge Guard Station and the old Smiths Fork Guard Station (Rose 1986; Wight 1993:52-53). The Forest Service has marked and fenced several emigrant graves along the gravel access road paralleling South Piney Creek. Other graves are located at the Buckskin Crossing of the Big Sandy River (Larson et al. 2004b:27).

In 2003, a Class III Cultural Resource Inventory was conducted by LTA, Inc. on the section of the Lander Cutoff between U.S. Route 191 and the Muddy Creek Overlook. A metal detector survey yielded numerous artifacts possibly related to emigrant use, including an ox shoe, a late-nineteenth century U.S. Navy "anchor" cuff button, a U.S. Army Civil War-era four-hole tin trouser button with paper backing, and a U.S. Army 1833-Civil War Line Eagle Device infantry cuff button (Horstmann and Sons, PHI.) (Larson et al. 2004b:36-42).

Hams Fork and Blacks Fork Cutoffs

Other less traveled variants west of South Pass consisted of the poorly documented Hams Fork Cutoff and the Blacks Fork Cutoff. The first route diverged from the main emigrant trails at Hams Fork (modern-day Granger) and followed it upstream to its crossing of the Sublette Cutoff, north of modern-day Kemmerer. Hams Fork Cutoff is associated with the Trappers' Rendezvous of 1834, which was held along the Hams Fork River. The month-long event stretched for 10 miles along the river at four major campsites (Gowans and Campbell 1975:123). When Nathaniel Wyeth and his party left the rendezvous, they continued up Hams Fork to its intersection with the Sublette Cutoff. The Wyeth Party was likely following a trail already well known and used by the mountain men of that era (Scott 1950:51-52).

In 1857, President James Buchanan ordered Alfred Cummings to replace Brigham Young as governor of Utah Territory and sent a military force of over 2,000 men, commanded by Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, to establish a post in that territory. Colonel E.B. Alexander organized Camp Winfield, located about thirty miles northwest of Fort Bridger.

The exact location of this encampment has never been determined, but it was situated somewhere between the modern-day Moxa and Nutria ditches. Brigham Young sent word to Alexander that his troops would not be permitted to enter Utah Territory, but could winter over on Blacks Fork provided the troops turned in their weapons and left in the spring. Alexander could not comply, and thus began the so-called “Mormon War,” more recently referred to as the Utah War. The Mormons evacuated Fort Bridger and Fort Supply and burned them. They started a campaign of guerilla warfare in which they burnt Army supply trains and the grass and forage along the army’s path and stole hundreds of head of livestock (Furniss 1960:108-111; Gowans and Campbell 1975: 95, 103).

Alexander attempted to enter the Mormon country from the north, marching up Ham’s Fork, but a blizzard halted his seven-mile long caravan on October 17. During the 35-mile, 15-day march, the Mormon cavalry harassed Alexander’s army. Colonel Johnston took command of the combined U.S. forces in early November, but by this time the command was hampered by a lack of supplies, animals, and the early onset of winter. “Johnston fortuitously arrived at Camp Winfield and, appalled by its exposed position, recalled the army into winter quarters at Fort Bridger” (ISHS 1981:134). There they found the buildings in and around it had been burned to the ground by the Mormons. The following summer, a peace agreement was reached, and Cummings was installed as governor. Federal authority was asserted, and Camp Floyd was established 40 miles southwest of Salt Lake City (Gowans and Campbell 1975:106, 113).

The Blacks Fork Cutoff proceeded due west from Granger, following a portion of the Blacks Fork and Little Muddy Creek. It bypassed Fort Bridger and rejoined the main trail east of Cumberland Gap. No emigrant diaries or guidebooks have been located describing this route, and the primary evidence for this trail is the General Land Office survey plats dated 1874. One source states that Mormon emigrants used the Blacks Fork Cutoff extensively during and after the Utah War of 1857 in order to avoid federal troops (ISHS 1981:123).

NATIVE AMERICAN CONFLICTS AND MILITARY PROTECTION

The character of the westward migration on the emigrant trails gradually changed through the trails’ decades of use. In 1849, the Mounted Riflemen, a detachment of the U.S. Army under the command of Colonel William Loring, established a number of military posts along the emigrant trails to protect emigrants. The “police force of the Gold Rush,” as the detachment was called, left Fort Leavenworth (modern-day Kansas) on May 10, 1849, bound for Fort Laramie (Mintz 1987:119). Fort Laramie was strategically located at the intersection of the established route to the western trapping grounds along the North Platte River and the Trappers Trail that ran south to Taos, New Mexico. William Sublette and Robert Campbell had built Fort William at the site in 1834, and Lancaster Lupton built a rival fort known as Fort Platte in 1840. As a result of this competition, Fort William was rebuilt in 1841 and named Fort John; however, it became more popularly known as Fort Laramie. The U.S. Army purchased Fort Laramie in 1849 and gradually rebuilt it with wood frame buildings. The original adobe fort stood at the south end of the parade grounds and was demolished in 1860. According to emigrant guidebooks, Fort Laramie was 664 miles west of St. Joseph, Missouri, and about one-third of the way to Sacramento, California. It represented the end of travel through the Great Plains and provided a good “turning back” place for disheartened emigrants (Hafen and Young 1938; Mattes 1969:480-521).

The Mounted Riflemen continued westward along the Oregon Trail but bypassed Fort Bridger by taking the Sublette Cutoff. Loring established a military post at Fort Hall, Idaho, to help emigrants prepare for the long desert crossing to California. The Riflemen reached Fort Vancouver (present-day Washington) in October, becoming the first military expedition to travel the Oregon Trail in its entirety (Mintz 1987:119; Cross 1940).

Captain Howard Stansbury of the Corps of Topographical Engineers arrived at Fort Leavenworth too late to accompany the Mounted Riflemen; his party was forced to travel alone several weeks behind



Figure 2.20. Fort John was the structure many of the Oregon/California Trail emigrants associated with Fort Laramie. It was the impressive structure seen at the south end of the parade ground throughout the early years of overland migration. As such, many travelers sketched this structure. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

them. Stansbury's expedition was more scientific than military in nature and involved detailed mapping and data gathering in the Salt Lake Valley. He passed through Bridger's post on Blacks Fork in August 1849, and recommended the location as ideal for a military post. Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez had constructed Fort Bridger in 1842 and 1843 as a trading post. In 1853, Mormons seized the post and occupied it until the Utah War of 1857, when the Mormons abandoned and burned Fort Bridger. In 1858, the remnants of the fort became a U.S. military installation that remained in service until 1890 (ISHS 1981:106; Gowans and Campbell 1975). Emigrants had two major supply points along the emigrant trails in present-day Wyoming (Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger), as well as additional protection from patrolling soldiers.

Emigrant-Tribal relations were fluid throughout the migration period. Hostile acts and violent confrontations, although they did exist, have been overemphasized by media and some historians. During the early migration period in the 1840s,

confrontations were few, and there are many recorded instances of Native Americans helping the emigrants at treacherous river fords, giving directions, conducting peaceful trading, and providing food. "In the case of footwear, overlanders quickly discovered that their hard-soled and ill-fitting shoes were inadequate to the demands of the trail... word quickly spread that Indian moccasins were well designed for the rigors of travel and they could be secured for modest prices from virtually any Sioux village along the Platte River Trail (Tate 2006:42)." The native population does not appear to have immediately recognized any threat from the small numbers of westward-bound emigrants. Chief Washakie and the Shoshone and Eastern Snake were particularly well known for their kindness and assistance to emigrant parties (Unruh 1979:156-162).

Increased numbers of emigrants during the California Gold Rush may have marked the beginning of ill feeling and openly hostile acts between the two cultures. The large number of emigrants disturbed movements of game herds upon which the Indian



Figure 2.21. "The Corral at Old Fort Bridger," by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

depended. Livestock overgrazed the range, and travelers cut all the available wood within the trail corridor. As emigrant numbers increased, the odds of confrontation steadily increased. The emigrants highly resented paying tributes to cross tribal lands. The cavalier attitude of some of the emigrants toward the Indians and incidents of begging and thievery on the Indians' part exacerbated the problem (Unruh 1979:163-170).

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 represented a belated stop-gap measure to avoid violence. The terms of the treaty paid the participating tribes an annuity of \$50,000 in goods. In return, the tribes recognized the right of the United States to establish roads and posts in tribal territories. Rough tribal boundaries were established to prevent fighting among the tribes (Larson 1978:14-15; Utley 1984:61).

The Grattan Fight on August 19, 1854, is representative of the pattern of reprisal that instigated

the Plains Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s. It developed from a dispute over the killing of an emigrant's cow near the Bordeaux Trading Post southeast of Fort Laramie. The fight is summarized by Miller (2012:58):

Naïve about Indian military tactics and eager to establish himself as a skilled officer, Lieutenant John Grattan had enthusiastically gone to bring in the Indian who killed the cow. When he arrived at the village, he deployed his men in a single rank along with two artillery pieces about sixty yards from a cluster of Indian lodges, unaware that concealed warriors were gathering in a nearby dry slough along the river in a flanking maneuver (McChristian 2009:77-78). Negotiations to arrest the



Figure 2.22. Indian Village near Fort Laramie. Image from the Bretney Collection, courtesy of Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

Indian failed so Grattan ordered a volley fired from two howitzers and the infantry's muzzle-loaded rifles. Indians immediately closed on the outnumbered detachment before many soldiers could reload. The battle soon resulted in the deaths of the impetuous Grattan, his entire command of 29 men, and one inebriated interpreter who may have significantly contributed to the tension during negotiations (McCann 1956:8). Conquering Bear, a Brule Lakota, also was killed in the action.

The following year, the U.S. military responded with a retaliatory campaign led by Colonel William S. Harney. On September 3, 1855, Harney's troops attacked a camp of Brule on the Blue River near Ash Hollow, Nebraska, resulting in the deaths of 86 of the Brule and seven enlisted men. Often knowing little of Plains Indian culture, U.S. military commanders sought revenge on any available group of Indians. Once established, this pattern of reprisal

was practiced by both cultures, resulting in the killing of innocent emigrants and Indians (Larson 1978:16; Michno 2003:34-35; Unruh 1979:170-177).

The most dangerous portion of the emigrant trails, contrary to popular legend, was not on the Plains but in the region west of South Pass. Native Americans attacked emigrants along the Snake River in Idaho and the Applegate Trail in northern California and southern Oregon. However, estimates of casualties compiled by historian John Unruh for the years between 1840 and 1860 show that the Native Americans suffered heavier losses than the emigrants. Only 362 emigrants were killed by Indians during the 20-year period. Large emigrant trains were seldom attacked, and most casualties resulted when individuals strayed from the group while hunting or exploring. An emigrant was much more likely to die from disease, being trampled by a wagon or in a stampede, accidental shooting, or drowning while fording a river (ISHS 1981:111; Unruh 1979:185).

In 1849 and 1850, Asiatic cholera raged from one end of the trail to the other. Cholera struck without warning and killed just as quickly, although

some victims lingered in extreme pain for several days. Rats carried the disease on ships to New Orleans, Louisiana, then by river steamer to St. Louis, Missouri, and up the Missouri River to emigrant jump-off towns. The disease seemed to abate west of Fort Laramie, which was attributed to the drier air and higher altitude, although deaths from cholera continued to occur west of this point. Mortality estimates were about six percent in 1849 with 1,500 to 2,000 burials between Independence, Missouri, and Fort Laramie. In 1850, mortality estimates were placed at 2,500 (Mattes 1969:82-88)

In early 1861, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for protection of “the Atlantic Slope and the California and Oregon and Washington frontier” (Cameron 1899:460). The government proposed to raise a dedicated force of 50 to 100 men to provide security for the emigrant trails. Emigrant trains were to be gathered at common jumping off points and kept sufficiently close together so that the security force could protect them. The escort was expected to guard the emigrants against hostile Indians, starvation, and other dangers. Accordingly, the force was to carry large amounts of supplies and equipment suited to those tasks. As parties split off after South Pass, the escort was required to splinter and continue west with the emigrants along multiple routes. The start of the American Civil War terminated this program and the regular U.S. military and militias were tasked with protecting the trails.

By the 1860s, conflict with Native Americans had worsened, and open warfare erupted on the plains. The U.S. military had already established a line of small posts along the emigrant trails to protect emigrants, the U.S. mail, and the newly constructed Transcontinental Telegraph. Roving patrols rode the trail between the outposts. In 1862, Ben Holladay moved his stage line south of the main emigrant trail corridor to the Overland Trail in an effort to avoid Indian attacks, but the Indians also raided his new route. The most sustained period of attacks occurred in 1865, when the Sioux and Cheyenne retaliated against the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado. Two significant engagements were fought along the emigrant trails near the future site of Casper. On July 22, 1865, a military wagon train left Platte Bridge Station to carry rations and cargo

to Sweetwater Station, the next post to the west along the emigrant route. The return trip on July 26 was under the command of Sergeant Amos Custard, who had been warned of the Indian threat. That afternoon, the train of five wagons was attacked on the north side of the North Platte River by a large party of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. Although the members of the military train fought for over four hours, the wagons were overrun and all of the soldiers were killed. However, three of the five men who had been sent ahead of the wagon train before the Indians appeared were able to reach Platte Bridge Station on foot. By about 4:00 p.m., the smoke of burning wagons and total silence indicated the end of the battle. Tribal losses were estimated at 210 (McDermott 1993:66-70).

Earlier in the day, Lieutenant Caspar Collins had been dispatched to escort Custard’s wagon train safely to the fort. A force of over 1,500 warriors attacked his party as soon as it crossed the bridge on the north side of the North Platte River; Collins and four of his 25 men were killed (McDermott 1993:69-69). The following year, the Platte Bridge Station became Fort Caspar and the Transcontinental Telegraph line was moved south to the Overland Trail due to constant destruction of the line by the tribes (ISHS 1981:156).

The great westward migration along the emigrant trail corridor precipitated the Plains Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s. The Federal Government had made no serious preparations for dealing with the indigenous peoples of the West during the early stages of the migration. The policy of Manifest Destiny, the idea that the American nation was destined to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, expressed the mood of the country at the time. Many Americans felt that the tribes had no right to western lands and stood in the way of the expansion of the American Empire. The U.S. military arrived in the West too late and in insufficient numbers to adequately protect either the emigrants or the Native Americans.

FREIGHTING, THE PONY EXPRESS, AND THE TELEGRAPH

The emigrant trails were also used as a major



Figure 2.23. Drawing of an unidentified Pony Express station, n.d. Image courtesy of Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

freight route to supply the growing Mormon settlements in Utah. As early as 1849, Ben Holladay had undertaken serious freighting on the emigrant trails by taking 50 freight wagons to Salt Lake City and subsequently to California. During the Utah War of 1857, the firm Russell, Majors, and Waddell conducted a large freighting operation to supply the U.S. military expedition. The Mormons also developed their own freight lines after 1850 (ISHS 1981:137).

In 1850, the Federal Government began to contract mail service to the growing western settlements via the emigrant trails. Samuel Woodson obtained the first contract for monthly mail service from Independence, Missouri, to Salt Lake City, Utah. A.M.F. Magraw succeeded Woodson in 1854

and continued mail and passenger service to Salt Lake City and California. Both efforts met with mixed success due to harsh weather and conflicts with Native Americans. In 1856, the Mormons succeeded Magraw and began to systematically develop relay stations using mule teams. However, the Utah War of 1857 suspended overland mail service for about a year. Mail service to California continued on the more southerly Butterfield Route through Missouri, Arkansas, Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma), Texas, New Mexico Territory, and California. In 1858, John M. Hockaday was awarded the mail contract for the central route over the emigrant trails.

On May 11, 1859, Hockaday sold out to the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express Company (L. & P.P.), a company formed by William H. Russell and

John S. Jones to take advantage of the Pike's Peak Gold Rush. The firm purchased Hockaday's semi-monthly contract to transport U. S. mail between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Salt Lake City, Utah. Russell was also a partner in the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. That entity later assumed the debts and assets of the L. & P.P. Express Company and used Hockaday's old route along the emigrant trails, building additional stations along the route (Godfrey 1994: 37-42).

This firm was responsible for establishing the famous but short-lived Pony Express, initiated in 1860. Relay riders averaging 250 miles per day carried the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in 10 days, charging \$5 an ounce. Some historians believe that Senator William W. Gwin of California originated the idea and convinced William H. Russell that if Russell could deliver mail more quickly by the shorter central route along the emigrant trails, Russell could procure a daily mail contract that might increase emigration, and perhaps a transcontinental railroad would soon follow. Russell's firm, then known as the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company (C.O.C. & P.P.), agreed to take the risk and constructed 190 stations spaced about 10 to 15 miles apart along the central route between St. Joseph and Sacramento. Each station was furnished with men, horses, supplies, and other equipment. The L. & P.P. Express Company already had stage stations along the route, but intermediate stations were needed for the Pony Express. In Wyoming, the stations lay within the two divisions: Joseph A. Slade supervised the division between Fort Kearny and Horseshoe Station and James E. Bromley supervised the division between Horseshoe Station and Salt Lake City (Godfrey 1994:35-47).

The C.O.C. & P.P. hired 80 riders and 200 station keepers. On April 3, 1860, the first Pony Express rider left St. Joseph at the east end of the route. As the relays continued across the route, the first mail from the east arrived in Salt Lake City at 6:45 p.m. on April 9. The mail reached Carson City, Nevada, about 2:30 p.m. on April 12. Riders continued to Sacramento, where the state legislature adjourned to celebrate the event. The first Pony Express mail sent eastward from San Francisco and Sacramento reached Salt

Lake City on April 7, 1860, and St. Joseph on May 14 (Godfrey 1994:51-56).

According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Pony Express riders had to be "young, good horsemen, accustomed to outdoor life, able to endure severe hardship and fatigue, and fearless" (Settle and Lund 1955:42). Riders included men and boys of varied backgrounds. The riders were later romanticized in novels and movies, as their work was inherently dangerous. Most of the danger stemmed from riding accidents, rough trails, weather, and river and stream crossings. Each rider was limited to no more than 12 to 15 pounds of mail carried in a specially designed leather mail pouch called a *mochilla* that fit over the saddle with a slit for the saddle horn. The pouch could be easily removed for relay to another mount, and the rider sat upon the mail bag. Horses were changed at relay stations spaced 12 to 15 miles apart depending on the terrain, and each rider covered between 75 and 100 miles before they were relieved (Corbett 2003:81-88; Godfrey 1994:60-63).

The federal mail/passenger contract from St. Joseph to Sacramento paid about \$260,000 per annum; yet Native American depredations along the route and high maintenance and repair costs made it difficult for the C.O.C. & P.P. to make a profit. During the winter of 1860-1861, severe storms from Fort Laramie all the way to the Sierra Nevada Mountains forced the company to reduce the Pony Express schedule. Without a line of stagecoaches daily breaking trail, a lone horseman could not negotiate the deep snows. To further complicate matters, owner William Russell was involved in a bond scandal that ruined the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Although the C.O.C. & P.P. Express Company was a separate corporation and continued to function, it was to be short-lived (Godfrey 1994:69-79, 82-86).

Because of their compromised financial situation, Russell, Majors, and Waddell did not win the federal mail contract in 1861. Instead, the Overland Mail Company, which had been forced to abandon its Texas line because of the American Civil War, transferred its stage service to the central route. On March 2, 1861, the Overland Mail Company won a federal contract worth one million dollars to provide the overland



Figure 2.24. “Pony Express Rider,” by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

mail and semi-weekly Pony Express service. The Overland Mail Company subcontracted with Russell, Majors, and Waddell to operate the eastern portion of the line, while the Overland Mail Company ran the western half of the central route between Salt Lake City and Placerville, California. On April 28, 1861, William Russell was forced to resign as president of the C.O.C. & P.P. Express Company because of the bond scandal.

On June 16, 1860, about ten weeks after the Pony Express began operations, Congress authorized a bill instructing the Secretary of the Treasury to subsidize the building of a transcontinental telegraph line to connect the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast.

The passage of the bill resulted in the incorporation of the Overland Telegraph Company of California and the Pacific Telegraph Company of Nebraska. The Overland Telegraph Company began constructing the First Transcontinental Telegraph in June 1861 at a rate of five miles a day. The Pacific Telegraph Company, a subsidiary of the Western Union Telegraph Company, constructed the line from

Omaha, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City in less than four months. While the lines were under construction the Pony Express operated as usual. Letters and newspapers were carried the entire length of the line from St. Joseph to Sacramento, but telegrams were carried only between the rapidly advancing wire ends. On October 26, 1861, San Francisco was in direct contact with New York City. Russell, Majors, and Waddell announced the end of the Pony Express in a press release on October 25, but the riders continued delivering mail until the last man arrived in San Francisco on December 4. During its short tenure, the Pony Express delivered 34,753 pieces of mail. Its riders made 308 rides each way, traveling a total of 616,000 miles (Godfrey 1994:91-94,225; Mattes and Henderson 1989:4; McDermott 1993:24-25, 28-29; Thompson 1947:361).

The route of the Pony Express through Wyoming generally followed the main emigrant trail corridor. East of South Pass, the Pony Express followed the south bank of the North Platte River through Fort Laramie to present-day Casper, where riders followed

the Bessemer Bend Route, crossed the North Platte River at Red Buttes, and then passed over Ryan Hill. The route continued along the Sweetwater River past Independence Rock, Devil's Gate, and Split Rock, then crossed South Pass to Fort Bridger via the main route instead of the cutoffs; from Fort Bridger it diverged southwest to Salt Lake City over the Mormon Trail (Dicerto 2002:118-126, 208-209; Godfrey 1994:138-159).

The Pony Express did not prove successful in providing a reliable mail service across the country, nor was the service a successful business venture. The service did contribute to the transportation and communication history of the United States by increasing the speed of mail delivery between the East and West coasts. The Pony Express also provided a critical communication service to and from the West Coast during the American Civil War, conveying the announcement of Abraham Lincoln's election and inauguration and his declaration of a "state of insurrection" at the onset of the Civil War (Godfrey 1994:230-235).

In 1862, Ben Holladay received the \$1,000,000 federal mail contract by forcing the C.O.C. & P.P. to sell out to him for \$100,000 to settle outstanding debts. Although he purchased the stagecoach line, he had no intention of resurrecting the Pony Express. Holladay established regular stage stops all along the emigrant trail corridor in present-day Wyoming, using most of the existing Pony Express and stage stations. However, he soon moved his line southward to the Overland Trail in an attempt to avoid harassment by Native Americans. From 1862 until the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, the federal mail was carried via the Overland Trail, which stayed south of the emigrant trail corridor until it rejoined the main route about three to four miles northeast of modern-day Granger (Hafen 1926:213-227; Root and Connelley 1901:47). As a result, the U.S. military acquired a new route to guard. The Overland Mail Road was the highest strategic value asset in the area and the Lincoln Administration saw protection of this vital communication route as a necessity. The U.S. military was ordered to protect the route whatever the cost. Already stretched to the breaking point, the military scrambled to send troops to guard the new stations, most of which were in place by 1862.

Each station became a small military base, having a garrison that included a handful of privates and a non-commissioned officer. Since major emigrant traffic still followed the other emigrant trails, the military struggled to guard multiple routes within an increasingly hostile area of operations.

Two major north-south trails that branched off from the main emigrant trail corridor to the Montana gold fields developed in the 1860s. Neither route has yet been designated as a National Historic Trail. The Bozeman Trail evolved from its earliest use as a Native American migration and inter-tribal warfare route. These early pathways were subsequently used by fur traders and then explored by the Federal Government and U.S. military. John M. Bozeman and John M. Jacobs pioneered the route for wagon travel in 1863, although the first wagon train was unsuccessful in following the entire route due to intervention by Cheyenne and Sioux warriors (Lowe 1999:85). In 1864, four large wagon trains took the new route, leaving from the lower Platte Bridge near modern-day Evansville. The wagon trains proceeded in a northwesterly course through the Powder River Basin, passing by the present-day towns of Buffalo and Sheridan on the way to Montana (Doyle 1998:6-7 and 2000 Vol. I: 2-4, 52-58).

This intrusion into the last major Plains Indians' stronghold allowed gold seekers to take a shorter route from the emigrant trails to the Montana goldfields. However, as Indian hostilities spread along the Bozeman Trail, the U.S. military closed the route to civilian use during 1865. In 1866, emigrants were once again allowed to use the trail, but it had become a more easterly route blazed by the Connor Expedition in 1865. A chain of military posts with telegraph communications soon fortified the trail. On December 26, 1866, the Sioux killed 81 soldiers under the command of Captain William J. Fetterman near Fort Phil Kearny, proving that the U.S. military could not adequately protect itself or emigrants from Indian attacks. As a result, no more than an estimated 1,000 emigrants (out of a territorial population of 20,000) chose the route of the Bozeman Trail between 1864 and 1868 (Doyle 2000 Vol. 2:423-439; Smith 1981:28-34). The 1866 Sioux victory and constant raids by the tribes effectively closed the Bozeman Trail and led to the Fort Laramie Treaty of



Figure 2.25. Drawing of Fort Fetterman from C.G. Coutant's History of Wyoming. Image courtesy of Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

1868, which conceded the region to the Indians. The Federal Government abandoned its forts and forbade Americans to travel along this route (Lindmier 2002:50).

Fort Fetterman was established near the junction of the Child's Route of the Oregon Trail and the Bozeman Trail in July 1867 near modern-day Douglas. A period of relative peace on the northern plains lasted until 1876. Fort Fetterman was the only U.S. military post that remained open, and it became the staging point for several military expeditions into the Powder River Country during the Plains Indian Wars of the 1870s. The military used the Bozeman Trail to move into the heart of Indian territory on these expeditions. Hostilities ceased in the Powder River Country with the signing of the Treaty of 1876,

by which the Sioux ceded the Black Hills and all rights to lands to the west. This treaty opened the region to white settlers, and the growing Wyoming cattle industry soon filled the vast rangelands north of the North Platte River (Larson 1978:105-106, 166; Lindmier 2002:69-87).

In 1864, Jim Bridger laid out a shorter alternative route that bypassed the Powder River Country and utilized the Bighorn Basin west of the Big Horn Mountains. Bridger's route left the Oregon Trail at Red Buttes, headed westerly along Poison Spider Creek, then turned northwest and passed through desolate sagebrush country in the vicinity of present-day Waltman and the Lysite-Lost Cabin area. The trail crossed the Bridger Mountains to the Wind River and headed north through the Bighorn Basin and

beyond. The Bridger Trail received only limited emigrant use after 1864, but it served an important role as a regional freight and stage route in the post-Civil War settlement period (Lowe 1999:88-92, 213-214).

END OF THE TRAIL MIGRATION ERA

By the 1860s, the emigrant trails had become more than an emigrant corridor. Auxiliary trails, like the Bozeman and Bridger, diverged from the established route to open new regions. The First Transcontinental Telegraph, the Overland Mail and the Pony Express, and freight traffic to the Salt Lake Valley settlements and beyond all utilized this route. Stage and Pony Express stations had been established at regular intervals along the route, as well as U.S. military installations. The Pacific Wagon Road program and the Montana gold rush traffic had allowed for new trail variations and improvements. Travel along the emigrant trails had become very different from the pioneer wagon trains of the 1840s. The emigrant trails had become the lifeline of a continent and bridged the sparsely populated territory between the United States and the far western settlements.

Moderate use of the emigrant trail corridor continued throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Emigrant travel diminished dramatically after the California Gold Rush, but the discovery of gold in Colorado caused a surge in traffic in 1859, when 30,000 emigrants used the trail. Traffic again subsided during the American Civil War, but gradually increased to 25,000 emigrants in 1865 and 1866 (Mattes 1969:23).

The First Transcontinental Railroad was completed on May 10, 1869, and the immediate result was the demise of the Overland Mail via stagecoach. Farsighted Ben Holladay had sold out to Wells Fargo Company in 1866, leaving Wells Fargo to suffer heavy losses when the railroad was completed earlier than assumed. Thereafter, the federal mail was carried by the railroads (Hafen 1926:319).

In Wyoming, the Union Pacific Railroad chose a right-of-way that paralleled the route of the southerly

Overland Trail, rather than the longer emigrant trails. Stage and freight routes were developed along north-south lines emanating from the mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad. The railroad encouraged settlement along its tracks, partially due to the granting to Union Pacific of a 40-mile wide swath of land along the right-of-way, and because of the dependence of infant industries on rail transportation to distant markets (Sheldon 1936:98). The land grants made government gifts of public land to the railroad companies in exchange for laying track in designated areas. Standard procedure was to distribute land by alternate sections along the proposed railroad line, one section going to the company and the next kept by the government. As land values increased, both the railroads and the government gained. Railroad companies then sold their newly profitable lots and used the proceeds to pay for materials and labor to continue their expansion. In this way, railroad construction became interwoven with land sales, which provided much of the capital needed to finance future undertakings.

Heavy advertising by the railroads in the United States and Western Europe encouraged land sales. Both immigration and westward migration were thus accelerated by railroad development. Trainloads of immigrants arrived at the various towns, sometimes alone, sometimes as part of a group, all looking to fulfill the American dream, to build new lives, new farms and new communities along the railroad line. Railroad towns such as Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, Rock Springs, and Evanston sprang up along the mainline far south of the emigrant trails. These towns became the early commercial centers in Wyoming Territory, and north-south freight and stage lines gradually spread from one or more of these points. The Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Route was built to the Black Hills gold and silver mines in 1874-1875. Farther west, the Rawlins-Fort Washakie Road connected the Wind River Indian Reservation with the Union Pacific Railroad to supply the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes with goods. Several routes were developed to connect the Sweetwater Mining District at South Pass with the railroad, including the Point of Rocks-South Pass City Road and the Bryan-South Pass City Road. The Transcontinental Railroad replaced the emigrant trails as the chief east-west



Figure 2.26. Pony Express and Stage Station at Red Buttes, Wyoming. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

transportation corridor in Wyoming Territory and the West.

Most of the emigrants who crossed what would become Wyoming Territory regarded the country as a series of obstacles to be overcome in order to reach more attractive destinations in the Salt Lake Valley, Oregon and California. To many emigrants, Wyoming's climate did not appear to be suited to agricultural pursuits. However, the Transcontinental Railroad provided the needed impetus for the development of the fledgling cattle industry in Wyoming, which had heretofore been limited to a small number of road ranches serving the emigrant traffic and the U.S. military. The Texas Trail drives northward during and after the American Civil War provided the cattle, Wyoming supplied the grazing land to fatten the beef, and the railroad provided the means of transportation to Midwestern and Eastern markets. Wyoming was soon recognized as a great grassland empire ideally suited for pastoral pursuits.

As a result, great trail drives were also organized from points west where substantial herds had already been established, and the stock was driven eastward over the emigrant trails in Wyoming (Cassity 2011:35).

A second impetus to the development of agriculture in Wyoming was the 1867 discovery of gold deposits along the emigrant trails near South Pass. The proximity of the trail and the large number of emigrants and experienced miners going to and from the California gold fields probably resulted in the discovery of gold at South Pass much earlier than would have otherwise occurred, given South Pass' remote location from the railroad and established settlements. The historical significance of the mines is derived from the influx of hundreds of gold seekers to the region and the impact on the economic development and eventual settlement of this portion of Wyoming. Transportation routes were built from the Union Pacific mainline to serve the mines and aided in opening the region to settlement. In addition,

many enterprising settlers established homesteads in the nearby Wind River Valley to supply the miners with meat and produce.

The initial gold rush at South Pass was one of the factors that helped to hasten plans for the removal of the indigenous tribes to reservations. In the Fort Bridger treaty of 1863, the U.S. government gave the Eastern Shoshone the southwest portion of Wyoming until that region became important land for railroad development. The Eastern Shoshone then agreed to move to the Shoshone Reservation in 1868 as negotiated in the Fort Bridger treaty of 1868 which defined the reservation boundaries (U.S. Congress 1863; Madsen 1980). The creation of a reservation for the Shoshone acted as a buffer between the mines and the more aggressive Sioux Nation to the east (Spencer 1916:24; Knight 1901:4-5; Righter 1977).

Trail historians generally use the year 1869 to mark the end of the traditional covered wagon migration, as well as the pre-settlement period throughout the emigrant trail corridor. With the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad and the beginning of the settlement within the territories, the character of western emigration changed. However, wagon travel continued for those emigrants who could not afford rail or stage transportation, or who were traveling shorter distances between or within territories (Haines 1981:5; Mattes 1969:23; Stewart 1962:319-320; Scott 1958:87).



Figure 3.1. A wagon train along the Oregon Trail. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy Scotts Bluff National Monument.

CHAPTER III. SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CONTEXTUAL STUDIES

“Long stretches of the trail were lost by the march of improvement; the farmer took no note of it in sentiment and plowed over it; city builders have erected brick blocks over where the Trail once ran, and so, what with great irrigation ditches destroying it with other like factors at work, small wonder we should call it the “Lost Trail” (Meeker 1915).

The accumulation of knowledge about the National Historic Trails has been an ongoing process since the trails’ active use in the nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1930s and continuing to the present, a series of trail treks led by the Wyoming State Historical Society has gathered and passed on information about the location of these trails and their variants.

Scores of scholarly works have been written about the westward emigration trails through Wyoming and across the American West. This study does not intend to compete with those works or even to summarize them.

A number of studies have previously been completed on specific segments and sites of the historic trails complex. Prior to formally designating the complex as National Historic Trails, the NPS prepared feasibility studies that identified many resources and prescribed general maps of the trails at a 1:100,000 scale (NPS 1981a; 1999). Among the findings of the NPS feasibility studies was the following:

All historic sites identified in this report (e.g., the feasibility study) which are on Federal lands should immediately be given protective status under existing authorities.

A protective corridor should also be established along cross-country segments on Federal lands. The width would vary according to the need to protect scenic and historic values, but would likely average one-half mile (NPS 1981b: 92).

The NPS was the first to suggest a one-half mile width as a management corridor for the National Historic Trails.

In 1981, the Idaho State Historical Society (ISHS), with funding from the NPS, conducted a study of the trail corridor from Fort Caspar, Wyoming, to Fort Boise, Idaho. The study included 1:24,000 scale quadrangle maps and mylar overlays that detailed trail resources and recommendations for managing them. The ISHS study considered various trail variants and recommended those that the NPS should manage as part of the historic trails system. The study also discounted several potential trail variants, considering them to be historic roads used for purposes other than the westward emigration, such as routes that connected railroad corridors to mining and ranching communities (ISHS 1981: Preface page 1).

In 1984, the Wyoming Recreation Commission developed the *Wyoming Historic Trails Management Plan*, which recognized the recreation potential of

the trail corridor and prescribed a one-half mile wide management strategy. The study also identified many potential interpretive sites. Because some of these sites were located on private land, the study did not specifically locate or describe them, but did establish a contextual framework for trails management (Wyoming Recreation Commission 1984).

In 1986, the BLM developed and implemented a trails management plan for the Oregon/Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails that identified goals for management of many specific sites and outlined general guidance for the management of the trail trace. The plan recognized that a one-quarter mile corridor on each side of the designated trail should be protected (BLM 1986).

The NPS, the BLM and the State of Wyoming have used the above studies and plans when determining which trails should be included as part of the NHT system and how those trails should be managed.

A number of studies for specific trail segments have been conducted, especially within developing natural gas fields (e.g., Moxa, Jonah, and Fontenelle). These studies have defined contributing and non-contributing portions of trails (with regard to the National Register of Historic Places criteria) in limited areas. The primary purpose of these studies was to protect contributing trail segments (those segments retaining the physical integrity of the trail trace) within the one-quarter mile controlled surface use stipulation recommended in the 1986 BLM trails management plan.

In 2005, Robert of Rosenberg Historical Consultants wrote an updated historical overview of the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, California, and Pony Express National Historic Trails (Rosenberg 2005).

In 2006, the Bureau of Land Management Lander and Rock Springs Field Offices in partnership with the National Park Service Long Distance Trails Office combined efforts to conduct the most comprehensive study of a portion of the trails corridor within Wyoming to that date. Starting with a detailed historical study of the South Pass area by historian Will Bagley (2012a), an area between Ice Slough and the Little Sandy crossing was examined in a research

program that combined mapping, photographing, and measuring the physical traces of the trail. Global Positioning Satellite information was post-fitted into current aerial photographs to create the most accurate map of trails in the area to date. Hundreds of photographic stations were established to monitor the condition of the trail and its setting for years to come. Thousands of base line digital images were produced. The study attempted to find archaeological evidence of historic sites suggested in primary sources such as journals and letters. The research was integrated with a metal detector survey of important points and trail segments. The study resulted in the mapping of 110 miles of trail including roughly 18 miles of previously unidentified trail braids. Locations of documented emigrant campsites were confirmed and one previously unknown military campsite was found (Sievers and Del Bene 2006).

The most recent trail studies consist of a series of landscape level inventories funded or required by the BLM for planning purposes. LTA, Inc., conducted studies on two segments of the Lander Road for the Pinedale Field Office and one segment of the Sublette Cutoff for the Kemmerer Field Office (Larson et al. 2004a/b). This study focused on short trail segments and included such diverse research methods as the use of metal detectors to locate trails-era historic artifacts (Lander Road) and the use of ground-penetrating radar analysis to locate buried features such as graves (Sublette Cutoff). In 2006, during the 123 square-mile Lake Ridge seismic exploration project, Kail Consulting used similar remote sensing techniques and historical research to record 22 segments along 7.75 miles of the Lander Road in the BLM Pinedale Field Office and Bridger-Teton National Forest (Crowley et. al. 2006) Recently, the Sublette County CLG contracted Pinedale historian Ann Noble to document all of the segments of the Lander Road across private property in Sublette County. This work has been completed and the report is in preparation.

Previously unrecorded segments of emigrant trails are still being located as historical research and on-the-ground inventory of proposed undertakings occurs. In 2009, during research related to natural gas development in the Pinedale Anticline along a



Figure 3.2. Oregon/California/Pony Express/Mormon Trail ruts near Ice Slough. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

known portion of the Lander Road, Bureau of Land Management archaeologists identified a previously unrecognized segment of the Lander Road (now known as the Wagner Variant of the Lander Road). This segment, which includes a crossing of the New Fork River, has been inventoried, mapped, and recorded (Crowley 2009; Crowley and Drucker 2009). As a result of this discovery and as mitigation for continuing development in the area, a segment of the Lander Road at the New Fork River crossing has been acquired for permanent preservation and public interpretation of the Lander Road and is being managed as a public historical park by the Sublette County Historical Society. Dr. Kenneth Cannon of Utah State University conducted two seasons of

fieldwork at the New Fork Crossing Historical Park in 2011 and 2012 (Cannon et. al. 2012) This work included metal detecting, magnetometry, resistivity, ground penetrating radar, and block excavations. Artifacts recovered during these investigations have confirmed the historical significance of this property and lend support for a National Register nomination.

In support of the Lander Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision, the Lander Field Office evaluated the condition of nearly every segment of combined Oregon/Mormon/California/Pony Express National Historic Trails (NHTs) within the field office (BLM 2011). Segments were driven or walked, photographs taken every mile, and both the physical ruts/swales and visual settings around the trail were evaluated. Prior to



Figure 3.3. New Fork River Historical Park. Photo courtesy of Sublette County Historical Society.

the Lander study, the Kemmerer RMPEIS (BLM 2008) classified all of the known segments of the Oregon/Mormon/California/Pony Express NHTs in that field office. The Kemmerer study was based on helicopter flights over the trails, aerial imagery, and extensive documentation from previous studies to evaluate conditions of all trail segments. The evaluations were classified under BLM's Trail Classification System discussed below in the General Management Policy

section of this document.

Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc. performed an inventory of trail segments in 2011 in the Rock Springs, Lander, Casper, and Kemmerer Field Offices (Rockwell et al. 2012). Inventory resulted in the documentation of 206 trail segments, 130 sites, and 64 isolated resources (Rockwell et al. 2012:15).

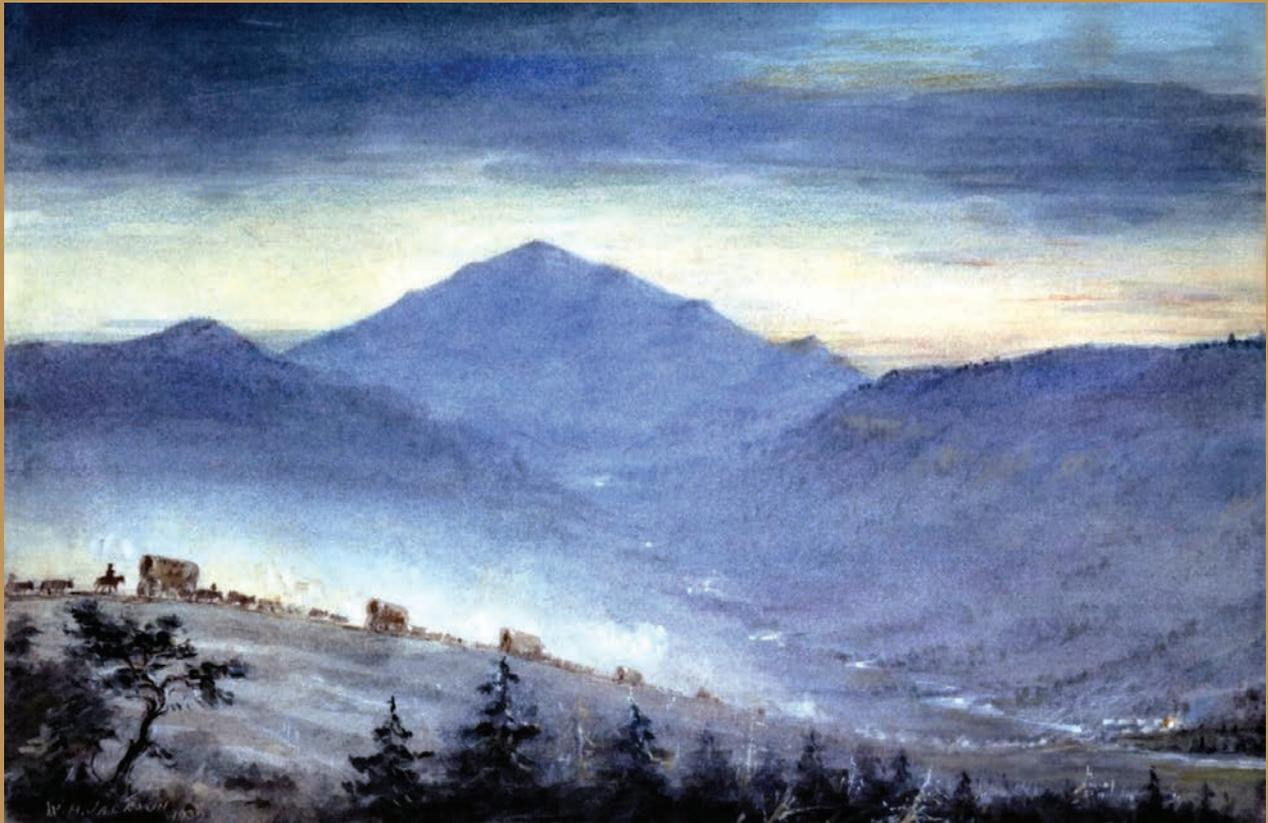


Figure 4.1. A wagon train moves toward a steep valley on the Oregon Trail. La Bonte Creek is in the valley and Laramie Peak is in the distance. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

CHAPTER IV. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

GENERAL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Management objectives have been identified over many years of trails management and have been included in various BLM and NPS feasibility studies and planning documents. These objectives remain relevant as desirable goals for the National Historic Trails in Wyoming. The following management objectives and constraints are abstracted from the *Oregon/Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails Management Plan* (BLM 1986: 9-10):

1. The BLM will adopt and utilize consistent general statewide trail management guidelines for the historic sites and trail segments on public lands in Wyoming.
2. The entire length of the primary trail routes and major cutoffs and alternatives will be identified by the placement of uniform trail markers on BLM administered lands.
3. All historic sites and cross-country segments of the trails on BLM lands will be managed to protect and interpret their historic values.
4. This plan encompasses not only the primary routes of the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails, but also other heavily used or well-known cutoffs and alternatives. Even though these cutoffs and alternatives are not certified national historic trails, their historic values will nevertheless be safeguarded. Portions of these alternatives or related historic sites will be considered for certification as components of the National Historic Trails System.
5. A continuing inventory and study program will be organized by the BLM, the State of Wyoming, and the NPS to complete the

knowledge of the trails and trail-related sites. This information will be used to assist in the protection and interpretation of the trails.

6. All planning and programs for marking the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails and protecting and interpreting their sites and segments will be coordinated with NPS, the State of Wyoming, and affected private landowners along the trails.
7. Existing land uses within the sites and segments identified in this study that are compatible with historic preservation and public use will be continued. Existing land uses that may be incompatible with historic preservation of sites and trail segments will be monitored and, if necessary, modified to make them as compatible as possible.
8. Special consideration will be given to the uses permitted along fragile trail resources. Some trail remains are too fragile to withstand any use by vehicle or foot travel. Others are more durable. The kinds and extent of uses permitted will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Use of trail resources will be monitored to determine if adjustments are needed.
9. Certain sites and segments along the trails will be considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.
10. Trail sites and segments will be managed in a manner that protects the resource as well as the health and safety of visitors.
11. Trail management will not restrict authorized land uses or activities that existed within the trail corridors at the time of their designation



Figure 4.2. Trail marker near Independence Rock. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

as National Historic Trails, unless these uses are or become incompatible with trail preservation or protection.

12. Attempts will be made to stabilize fragile trail remains and historic structures along the trails so that they can be used and enjoyed by future generations. Ruts may be stabilized through seeding, construction of natural appearing water bars, restricting uses that promote erosion, or other appropriate measures.
13. Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use guidelines will be identified commensurate with public access needs, the capability of the trails to withstand vehicle use, and other resource use needs.
14. After appropriate protection measures have been completed, most sites and segments will be accessible and available for public use and enjoyment, to the extent that such accessibility does not impact historical values.
15. Actions that facilitate or enhance the public use of the sites and segments identified in this study will not be carried out until adequate management capability has been implemented to assure their protection. For example, public access will not be improved and areas will not be popularized if the results will damage trail resources and historic sites.
16. Every effort will be made to ensure that the visiting public is aware that private property rights along the trails are to be respected.
17. A selection of maps and user brochures and other materials interpreting the trails and their component sites and segments will be made available by electronic means when possible, by mail, at BLM offices, and at conveniently located points along the trails. These will be developed in cooperation with the State of Wyoming and the NPS.
18. The trails will accommodate hiking, horseback riding, pleasure driving, limited recreational vehicle use, camping, picnicking, and sightseeing, where compatible with historic and natural resources, intermingled private lands and interests, and resource management plans. A continuous route may be identified for trekking purposes on the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails. The route need not always follow the trails, especially in areas of predominately private land or fragile trail resources. It could follow other roads or other appropriate detour routes.
19. Public use areas may be identified along the trails. Such facilities may include campsites, interpretive sites, access points, etc. Public use facilities will be simple in design and kept to a minimum, consistent with sound carrying capacity principles, and planned and located so as to harmonize with their surroundings. Facilities will be cost effective and constructed only when resource protection needs, safety hazards, and significant public use justifies the expenditure.
20. User data will be systematically collected so that the BLM is aware of use patterns and trends along the trails. Monitoring use

will allow the BLM to respond to problems quickly with management actions.

7. The BLM has a limited capability to monitor use and enforce laws on the public lands.

8. Some portions of the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails have been altered by private and governmental management, farmlands, roads, urban setting, energy development, utility lines, and other evidence of modern development and no longer convey a sense of the historic period of use.-

9. Protection, interpretation, development, and management are to be based on the cultural, historical, natural, and recreational values found along the trails.

MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS

A management constraint helps determine or guide BLM management. It is a limitation on what the BLM can do in terms of trail management.

1. The intensity of management will be directly related to funding levels.
2. The pattern of land ownership, private land intermingled with federal lands, precludes the establishment of a continuous trekking route on the actual trail within Wyoming from Torrington to Farson. This land pattern also precludes access to certain historic sites. Generally, sites and segments on private lands are listed in this study and identified as being under private ownership, but the landowners are not identified. Federal officials and trail users should be aware that private property rights along the trails are to be respected.
3. Historic preservation laws will constrain to some degree the development and use of the trails.
4. The potential for vandalism will place some limits on the type and extent of development that can be carried out along the trails.
5. Public input and local concerns will affect management decisions for the trails. Trail management will incorporate consideration of local concerns such as effects on private lands, level of use, access, economic development concerns, etc.
6. The historic sites and trail segments are very fragile and nonrenewable resources. Excessive development and improper use could cause irreparable harm to the resources.

MANAGEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The BLM has accomplished most of the goals for interpretation of the historic trails set forth in the 1986 management plan. All of the interpretive signs and other items listed in that plan have been completed (see BLM 1986: 41-43, Table 6). The only issues that have not been addressed involve field investigations to determine the exact location of such sites as the Big Timber Pony Express Station and the Martin's Pony Express Station, stabilization and protective fencing at the Holden Hollow inscription site, and acquisition of 240 acres of land at Burnt Ranch.



Figure 5.1. Where the trails enter Wyoming from Nebraska there are a series of parallel ruts and swales as the trail approaches a small hill where pioneer Henry Hill's grave is located. This area is just east of Torrington, Wyoming. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

CHAPTER V. GENERAL MANAGEMENT POLICY

The following general management policy is essentially drawn from the *Oregon/Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails Management Plan* (BLM 1986:11-21) and constitutes standard operating procedures for managing National Historic Trails in Wyoming, unless superseded by Resource Management Plans or other planning processes, including public review under the National Environmental Policy Act. If a statewide trails management plan is developed in the future, decisions in that plan would naturally supersede the policies expressed herein. This general policy is designed to be flexible to ensure that unforeseen problems or circumstances can be handled without major policy changes.

LIMITATIONS OF THE MANAGEMENT POLICY

This management policy is limited to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming. State, private, and other federal lands are not included in the BLM's management program for these trails, except where exchanges, acquisitions, or easements are planned.

Management of surface resources is constrained by split ownership of the surface and mineral estates. Mineral estate and surface management responsibilities will be closely coordinated to minimize impacts on the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails when private surface owners are willing to cooperate. The specific policy is as follows:

Where federal minerals occur below non-federal surface, the BLM is required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to consider effects of BLM authorized actions on sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, regardless of surface ownership. Where non-federal minerals occur under federal surface, the BLM, as surface manager, cannot reasonably prohibit development

of mineral resources. However, because BLM authorizes the activity on federal surface, the same legal requirements must be met.

TRAIL CORRIDOR CONCEPT

The *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement California National Historic Trail/Pony Express National Historic Trail/Management and Use Plan Update/Final Environmental Impact Statement Oregon National Trail/Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* (NPS 1999) recommended a "corridor" approach to management. The document noted that adequate management of the NHTs requires more than just the protection of the ruts and associated sites, and specifically emphasizes that, "Maintaining the physical integrity of the trail landscape would be essential to preserving the overall context of the trails' history and ensuring a rich and evocative visitor experience" (NPS 1999: 68).

The concept of evaluating emigrant trails as "historic transportation corridors" is one that has emerged over time in historic preservation management. The principle was significantly defined at the International Historic Transportation Corridors Conference in Natchitoches, Louisiana, in 1992, and the results of that conference were published as the *Historic Transportation Corridors Thematic Issue of CRM*, Vol. 16, No. 11, 1993. In that publication E. Blaine Cliver, then Chief of the Preservation Assistance Division of the NPS and Acting Director of the new National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, described historic transportation corridors as "a new and dynamic element of heritage preservation." Cliver stated:

Historic transportation corridors are composed of varying elements: buildings, landscapes, bridges, that may represent diverse periods of time, and have differing states of integrity as well as being controlled by numerous owners

and contained in many legal jurisdictions. To treat a corridor in the manner that a structure is treated, in terms of integrity and preservation, would be a mistake. With a corridor, it is not a single physical entity that needs to be protected, but an experience that is represented through the physical elements that are encountered in space and time.

The emigrant trails, as historic transportation corridors, are the sum total of all the tangible physical resources and ambient qualities that can be directly linked to the historic context of the emigrant migration. The physical resources include trail ruts and swales, campsites, graves, and artifact scatters associated with emigrant activities. They also include stream crossings, rocky ridges, and other features of the landscape that challenged the emigrants. Finally, these physical resources include the natural landmarks frequently documented by the emigrants in journals and diaries. The ambient qualities are those intangible elements that relate to the emigrant experience and are among the more difficult aspects to preserve. They include the sounds and smells of the prairie, the feel of the wind, the look of open spaces, and the sense of isolation in the vastness of the surrounding landscape. Landscape and natural setting play a significant role in developing a historic context for the emigrant trail corridors. Many emigrants recorded observations about the landscape through which they passed in diaries, journals, and letters (NPS 1999: 31); therefore, the associated landscape is an important element of the historic context for emigrant trails.

PHYSICAL PROTECTION OF TRAIL RESOURCES

A corridor having a width of one-quarter mile on either side of the trail is recommended to physically protect the trail trace. Generally, this half-mile wide corridor will encompass associated sites such as campsites, graves, forts, ferries, and stage stations. Where braided trails occur, the corridor is defined

from the outermost traces. The protective corridor applies only where physical trail trace is present. Generally, the protective corridor will be managed for no surface occupancy or for controlled surface use. The protective corridors should be established by the respective field offices through the BLM's land use planning process.

The following guidelines are recommended for specific types of actions that may be proposed within the corridor. (Note: All of the undertakings discussed below also require compliance with the State Protocol between BLM and WYSHPO.)

Fences: In order to meet the management objectives, new fences should be designed to cross the trail at the least visible angle (often right angle) to minimize the length of fence per mile within the corridor. Gates, and in some cases cattle guards, should be installed in the fence at existing trail crossings. Fence crossings should avoid fragile or intact trail ruts.

Range Improvements: In order to meet management objectives, range improvement projects should be designed so they do not adversely affect the trail resources or the trails' natural settings. Because of the cumulative effects of livestock congregating at critical point sources, improvements such as salt licks, water troughs and stock reservoirs should be placed outside the corridor.

Rights-of-Way: All right-of-way crossings of the trails should be designed to minimize surface disturbance in the protective corridor. Crossings should occur in areas where trail ruts have been modified by modern uses, where previous crossings exist, or where new corridor crossings would not damage trail remains. All crossings should avoid fragile trail resources. Crossings should be made at right angles to the trail and corridor unless they follow a previous crossing, in which case they may deviate from a right angle. Vegetative species indigenous to the protective corridor should be used to rehabilitate right-of-way related surface disturbance. Any disturbance area should be returned to a natural contour.

Minerals: With appropriate prior analysis, the BLM



Figure 5.2. A segment of the Lander Road winds over Sand Hill through the old Reuben Oil Field, west of Big Piney, WY. This oil field was developed in the 1950s, before the National Historic Preservation Act and National Trails System Act required protection of the Emigrant Trails. This portion of the Lander Road was flat-bladed and used as an oil field road into the 1960s. Some of the original Lander Road ruts are still visible along the left side of the bladed road. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

will continue to issue mineral leases on public lands where both the surface and/or mineral estate are in public ownership. The leases will contain notices of no surface occupancy or controlled surface use to prevent disturbance of trail resources in the corridor. Access to mineral resources such as oil and gas may be available through off-site drilling or directional drilling. Leasing along specific trail segments may be prohibited if decisions not to lease have been made in field office resource management plans (RMPs). Applications for sand and gravel removal may not be appropriate for authorization within the protective corridor, depending on trail condition.

Trail marking: The BLM will adopt a uniform system to mark trails on BLM managed public lands

statewide. Marking of the trail should not detract from the historic character of the trail and its setting. Trail marking should be coordinated with other affected agencies and interested parties.

Recreation Activities: Trails receive significant visitation through casual use. The BLM has developed a program to manage this type of activity, which includes the following elements:

- Monitoring recreational use through the use of volunteers or seasonal employees patrolling trails and historic sites; may include visitor contact and live interpretation as time and budget permit
- Placement of visitor registers at all interpretive

- sites and areas that serve as trailheads
- Placement of traffic counters at developed sites
- Monitoring condition of trails and related resources annually; photographic documentation to determine trend information

The BLM uses the Special Recreation Permit Policy, 43 CFR 8560, to authorize all commercial use of the trails. Permits are also required for noncommercial groups exceeding 10 people or five vehicles in size. Permits may be required for individual use if special circumstances or conditions warrant. The permits are administered by the respective field offices. For events or tours involving more than one field office, only one permit is required. It will be issued by one field office and coordinated with other field offices through which the tour will pass. Compliance with permit conditions is the responsibility of affected field offices. Permittees are required to coordinate the tour with affected private landowners as a condition of the permit.

The protective corridor should not be designated as “Open” for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR TRAIL SETTINGS

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires that provisions in the current Wyoming BLM/SHPO Protocol regarding identification, evaluation, and protection of historic settings be followed. The BLM should use standard measures to reduce the visual impact of proposed actions within trail settings.

Historic properties, such as the National Historic Trails, for which setting is a contributing aspect of integrity, in both the direct and indirect APE of an undertaking, will require assessing the affects to the setting when the undertaking will be visible from the historic property. The BLM cultural resource specialist or archaeological consultant with GIS capabilities will run a viewshed analysis as needed to determine whether a proposed undertaking will potentially be seen from the historic property.

The purpose of a setting assessment is to determine what physical features of a proposed undertaking will be visible from a historic property for which setting is an important aspect of integrity. Visibility of undertakings will vary. The scale of visual analysis should be commensurate with the scale of the undertaking. In many cases, undertakings will not be seen beyond five miles. Some undertakings may be seen beyond five miles if they are unusually large or are skylined on the horizon, such as wind turbines, large transmission lines and communication towers. The indirect APE is the area of assessment.

Standard treatment measures should be used as stipulations or conditions of approval in leases, permits, etc. Standard treatment measures or best management practices for reducing the visibility of proposed actions include, but are not limited to:

- Consolidating project facilities among oil and gas developers – this also facilitates cumulative analysis.
- Develop coordinated road and pipeline systems.
- Reduce the amount of surface development by consolidating facilities (e.g., develop bottom-hole wells using directional drilling from a single surface well location).
- Use low profile facilities.
- Design projects to blend with topographic forms and existing vegetation patterns by using location to maximize topography and vegetation to screen development.
- Use environmental coloration or camouflage techniques to break up visual intrusion of facilities that cannot be completely hidden.
- Use broken linear patterns for road developments to screen roads as much as possible. This can include feathering or blending of the edges of linear rights-of-way.



Figure 5.3. Camouflage paint technique used to reduce visual impacts to the setting of the Lander Trail, Sublette County. Photo by Dave Vicek.

- For livestock control, use electric fencing with low-visibility fiberglass posts and environmental colors (e.g., sage green).
- Design linear undertakings to run parallel to KOPs rather than perpendicular.
- Modify the orientation of undertakings to lessen a visual impact (e.g., several tanks lined up so that one obscures the visibility of the others).

CLASSIFICATION OF TRAIL SEGMENTS

While classification of trail condition is inevitably subjective, this section presents a standardized classification definition based upon a set of generally applicable traits for evaluation. The descriptive terms developed by NPS Historian John Latscher and others to describe trail appearance in *Mapping Emigrant Trails* (Oregon-California Trails Association 2002:2, 16) form the basis for classification. A four-level classification system was developed by the Wyoming BLM in which the best trail segments are assigned

a Class 1 trail status and the poorest are assigned a Class 4 trail status. Any trail segment must first be physically discernible and of sufficient length to apply management objectives. Short segments lacking trail trace, such as at stream or road crossings, should be classified with adjacent larger segments. If the trail trace cannot be observed, then the distance between the observable trail points is classified as Class 4. Usually when no trail is visible today, this is a result of modern development or natural erosion processes having supplanted the trail remnant. Where the trail is visible, the condition of both the trail and the surrounding setting is considered. Setting may serve to elevate or lower the classification of a trail segment if the trace itself has not been significantly compromised. Trail classification may require periodic re-evaluation if the condition of the trail trace or setting changes. Exercise caution when evaluating undertakings that may introduce permanent intrusions into settings in which existing developments have limited life spans.

In keeping with the corridor concept, the following provides a method for quality assessment and characterization of relative trail significance based on a four-tiered classification system.

Class 1 Trails: Undiminished Trail and Setting

Under this category, the trail trace and associated sites all retain integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. Class 1 segments are the best examples of trail in Wyoming because they convey the historic sense of the period of the trail's significant use. The area of potential effect must include consideration of any visual intrusion to the setting. If important historical events occurred within a particular trail segment, they are considered to be supplemental values but are not necessary for a Class 1 designation.

Class 2 Trail: Good Trail and Setting

Under this category, the trail trace and any related sites retain integrity of location and association, and the historic setting of the trail trace is generally uncompromised by modern visual intrusions. There may be some modern intrusions on the landscape, but for the most part, they do not dominate the setting sufficiently to detract from the feeling or sense of

the period of the trail's significant use. The area of potential effect must include consideration of any visual intrusion to the setting. Topography, project size, and distance from the trail should be considered when defining the area of potential effect. Under a Class 2 Trail designation, proposed activities would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine the extent of the visual effects. If important historical events occurred within a particular trail segment, they are considered to be supplemental values. Such documented events could raise a Class 2 trail segment to a Class 1 designation.

Class 3 Trail: Compromised or No Extant Historic Setting

Under this category, the trail trace and any related sites retain integrity of location and association, but the historic setting is severely compromised by modern intrusions that detract substantially from the feeling or sense of the period of the trail's significant use. Under these conditions, preservation of the trail's trace is what is important, along with any associated cultural resources. Generally, all contributing elements to the trail segment would be within one-quarter mile of the trail trace, and the historic setting beyond one-quarter mile would no longer retain sufficient integrity to be given consideration. As long as these conditions exist, the area of potential effect of any undertaking along the area defined by these segments would be limited to the actual physical footprint of the proposed activity. Any activities proposed outside of the one-quarter mile protection zone would generally have no effect on the preservation or management of the trail trace or associated sites (unless associated sites could be demonstrated to exist outside the one-quarter mile corridor). Generally, the setting would not be considered an important aspect of integrity. However, trail classification may require periodic re-evaluation if the condition of the trail trace or setting changes. Exercise caution when evaluating undertakings that may introduce permanent intrusions into settings in which existing developments have limited life spans. If important historical events occurred within a particular trail segment, they are considered to be supplemental values. Such documented events could,

in rare cases, elevate a Class 3 trail segment to a Class 2 designation, superseding the physical integrity of the trail trace.

Class 4 Trail: No Extant Trail

Under this category, the trail trace no longer exists. Regardless of the condition of the surrounding landscape, the historic setting is no longer relevant to these trail corridor segments insofar as historic trail is concerned. However, because the trail did once exist within these trail corridor segments, the presence or absence of trail related properties must be determined. If such properties exist, the area of potential effect may include the associated setting. If no trail related properties exist within the area defined by a Class 4 corridor segment, the area of potential effect of any undertaking would be limited to the actual physical footprint of the proposed activity.



Figure 6.1. The Oregon Trail Ruts near Guernsey are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Wagon wheels crossing the soft sandstone gradually carved a depression five feet deep in the rock. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

CHAPTER VI. NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION

NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Historic Trails are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Selected sites (e.g. Fort Bridger) and segments (e.g. Oregon Trail Ruts near Guernsey) of the National Historic Trails may be individually nominated for listing in the NRHP. Alternately, a thematic nomination for the NHT routes across Wyoming could be developed cooperatively among all agencies involved with management of the trail resources (BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, NPS, State of Wyoming).

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The importance of properties, such as NHTs, is evaluated by applying the National Register criteria found in 36 CFR Part 60.4 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA):

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values,

- or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

APPLICATION OF NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA TO NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS/RELATED RESOURCES

Criterion A

To be eligible under Criterion A, the property must be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of American history. The NHTs are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they commemorate important aspects of American history in the nineteenth century. “They facilitated the settlement of a large portion of the western United States, fostered commerce, and encouraged the development of a transportation and communication network that brought the country closer together” (NPS 1999:v). In addition to settlement, commerce, transportation, and communications; exploration, religion, military, social history, and cultural conflict are also important themes for NHTs under this criterion.

Criterion B

To be eligible under Criterion B, the property must be associated with a person or persons significant to the past. Criterion B is a demanding criterion to apply because two conditions must be satisfied. The first condition is that the significance of the individual must be established. Significance is usually measured in some form of recognition that the person attained, either during or after his or her life, for accomplishments during the period of historic significance. There is no clear and automatic qualification for a significant individual; it is the

duty of the evaluator to demonstrate that significance (Cassidy 2007:370). The second condition is to prove that the property best demonstrates that person's accomplishments when compared to other properties associated with the individual. This criterion is generally restricted to properties that illustrate rather than commemorate a person's important achievements: a home, for instance, or a place of work, as opposed to a commemoratively named route (e.g. the Sublette Cutoff). This criterion is rarely employed for transportation related properties because important persons associated with the development of transportation routes are generally more appropriately included under Criteria A or C (Fraser 2006:310). This criterion is sometimes misapplied to include important people who have traveled on the emigrant trail. The fact that Brigham Young, for instance, traveled on the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail does not imbue that trail with any degree of Criterion B significance.

Criterion C

To be eligible under Criterion C, the property must meet at least one of the following requirements: embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; or possess high artistic value. Generally for NHTs, the first requirement would be most relevant if extant trail features or associated sites were engineered or constructed in a manner that embodied distinctive characteristics of nineteenth century roads, military facilities, trading facilities, etc. Research would be required to justify that a property represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic value.

Criterion D

To be eligible under Criterion D, the site must be shown to contain important information that contributes to our understanding of trail history. Generally, discrete locations would be most likely to meet these requirements and could include emigrant campsites, graves, military posts and stations, and inscription sites associated with the NHTs. Other locations of documented trail related events may meet requirements for listing under Criterion D. For the purpose of this historic context, Native American

campsites must be demonstrated to be directly related to, and temporally associated with, the period of trail use.

Assessment of Integrity

"Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. To be listed in the NRHP, a property must not only be shown to be significant under the National Register criteria, but it also must have integrity" (NPS 1997:44). In accordance with 36 CFR Part 60.4 of the NHPA, the seven aspects of integrity are (1) location, (2) design, (3) materials, (4) workmanship, (5) setting, (6) feeling, and (7) association. These aspects are used to evaluate the integrity of trail segments within the NHTs corridors. According to the NPS, "To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance" (NPS 1997:44). In assessing the integrity of historic trails and their associated property types, the aspects of location, setting, feeling and association have the most influence on evaluating integrity. "The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they related to its significance" (NPS 1997:44)

Location

"Location is the place where a historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred" (NPS 1997:44). A trail trace and associated site types identify the corridor in which the historic event of the nineteenth-century westward migration occurred. If historic documents suggest that a property type was situated along a specific trail segment but the specific location cannot be identified, then that property has low integrity of location. If physical features cannot specifically identify a trail segment, the trail segment lacks integrity of location.

Design

"Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the

original conception and planning of a property . . . and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture” (NPS 1997:44). Because trail traces generally did not result from “conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning,” but are the cumulative result of many individual decisions based upon topography, availability of resources, and other factors, design would apply only to trails or portions of trails that were consciously planned and engineered. Design may apply to related man-made structures if they are sufficiently intact to convey a planned design.

Setting

“The setting is the physical environment of a historic property” (NPS 1997:45). In order to possess integrity of setting, the property must retain “the character of the place in which the property played its historical role” (NPS 1997:45).

The primary question that must be answered with regard to the setting of a specific trail segment is to what degree the current landscape looks like it did during the significant period of use of the trail and how dominating or distracting are any contemporary intrusions. . . . Since knowing what the original landscape looked like is important to assessment of the setting, historical documentation that describes that setting is particularly useful, particularly documentation of prominent landscape features such as topography, landmarks, and vegetation (Fraser 2006:25).

Materials and Workmanship

“Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. . . . Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory” (NPS 1997:45). These elements most often relate to properties eligible under Criterion C. Generally, they do not apply to historic trail

segments except where the trace may have been physically improved, such as at stream crossings or in particularly difficult terrain. (For instance, in present-day Idaho, a ramp was constructed by emigrants down the Boise Bluffs so that wagons could more easily traverse the steep slopes.) Materials and workmanship may also be considered for some trail-related property types such as graves, inscriptions, or engineered structures (Fraser 2006:26).

Feeling

“Feeling is a property’s expression of aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time” (NPS 1997:45). The physical features, when taken together, help to convey the property’s historic character. As observed by Fraser (2006:26):

. . . this is certainly one of the most subjective elements in conveying a property’s significance, since feelings are very personal to an individual’s own experience. Most often, a property’s integrity of feeling must be considered in combination with its setting in order to determine whether it conveys a historic sense of how it must have been during its period of significance. . . . [T]he landscape and viewshed play an important role in terms of capturing how it must have felt to be an emigrant traveling along one of the historic trails.

Modern intrusions with associated visual and auditory effects serve to lessen the integrity of feeling.

Association

“Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property’s historic character” (NPS 1997:45). A property eligible under Criteria A and/or B “retains the essential features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with



Figure 6.2. Along the Sweetwater River near Split Rock. William Henry Jackson watercolor, courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

the important event, historical pattern, or person(s)” (NPS 1997:46). It is important to note that “because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention *alone* is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register” (NPS 1997:45).

HISTORIC THEMES

The pattern of events is reflected in the historical themes with which the NHTs are associated. The following themes are based on those identified in the NPS Comprehensive Management and Use Plan (NPS 1999:31-33).

- Historical continuity of corridor use
- Exploration
- Location of the corridor governed by natural environment
- Transportation corridor uniting a continent
- Settlement of the West

- Communication route
- Cultural interaction, conflict and change
- Shared emigrant experience

TRAIL-SPECIFIC SUB-THEMES

The following discussion of trail subthemes is quoted directly from the *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement for the California, Pony Express, Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails* (NPS 1999:33).

Oregon National Historic Trail

The Oregon Trail was the harbinger of America’s westward expansion and the core of one of the largest and longest mass migrations in U.S. history. In 1836 when Presbyterian missionaries Marcus Whitman and Henry Spaulding took their wives over the Oregon Trail to establish Indian missions in the Oregon country, they proved the feasibility of moving families and wheeled vehicles across an area

previously perceived as impassable. The waves of migrations to Oregon strengthened U.S. claims to the Pacific Northwest. By 1846, when the treaty with Great Britain established the northern boundary of the United States at the 49th parallel, more than 5,000 emigrants had settled in the fertile Willamette Valley.

California National Historic Trail

Between 1841 and 1860, more than 200,000 Americans traversed the California Trail to escape economic adversity, obtain better farmlands, or get rich quick in the gold rush. Although most of the overland emigrants to Oregon and California through 1848 sought to establish farms and permanent homes, a majority of the forty-niners were single young men, hoping to make their fortunes in the goldfields of the Sierra Nevada and return home to the East. The California Trail emigrants represented various cultures, ethnic groups, religious denominations, educational backgrounds, and economic interests. The rapid influx of Americans along the California Trail influenced national politics, international relations and boundaries, and U.S. policy toward American Indians. Settlement was so rapid that California became a state in 1850.

Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail

The migrating Mormons were bound together by a common faith and a desire for religious freedom in the face of intolerance and persecution. This was a movement of an entire people, an entire religion, and an entire culture driven by religious fervor and determination. Unlike other elements of the westward expansion, the cohesive Mormon companies showed clear lines of authority and a sense of community. The Mormons did not hire professional guides. Instead, they followed existing trails, used maps and accounts of early explorers, and gathered information from travelers and frontiersmen they met along the way. Through the construction of bridges, ferries, and supply stations, the Mormons improved conditions and communications along the trail for travelers moving both east and west. The Mormon community funded the migration of poor church members and converts from Europe. About half of all Mormon emigrants came directly from foreign countries.

Pony Express National Historic Trail

The Pony Express offered the fastest transcontinental mail service of its day, providing a vital, all-season communication link between the east and west during a critical period in American history. The organization and implementation of this complex system required the contributions of hundreds of people – among them district superintendents, clerks, station keepers, stock tenders, and riders – a stark contrast to the popular image of the solitary express rider. The route of the Pony Express had to reconcile requirements for favorable topography and water sources with the need to minimize distance. With the completion of the transcontinental telegraph, the Pony Express discontinued operations after only 19 months in service. Yet the trail proved the feasibility of a central overland transportation route and played a vital role in aligning California with the Union just before the Civil War.

HISTORIC TRAIL PROPERTY TYPES

Within the transportation corridor of the National Historic Trails are various types of sites or properties directly associated with the use of these trails. Each property type can be assessed on its own merits, but each cumulatively contributes to the overall understanding and value of the trail corridor.

Trail Trace

A “trace” is a general term for any physical remnants left by historic wagon traffic on the modern landscape. The authenticity of a particular trace may be established by applying the standards developed by the Oregon-California Trails Association in *Mapping Emigrant Trails (MET)* manual (OCTA 2002:4-11) in conjunction with other historical information and environmental factors. The *MET* manual offers practical advice for locating and verifying trail traces and defines and illustrates typical trail characteristics.

The characteristics of trail traces may appear as depressions, swales, ruts, erosional features, scarring, and two-tracks. The physical characteristics of a trail segment result from a number of environmental and



Figure 6.3. Trail ruts incised into the bedrock west of Split Rock. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

historical factors and are considered when evaluating integrity of location and association.

The trace is important because it allows observers to see the physical mark left on the land by overland emigration. The trace is the ribbon that connects the associated property types as part of a corridor of emigration-related activity. While the condition of the trace generally does not reflect specific historic events, the trace is associated with the historical significance of the overall emigration.

Trail Variations

Most historic trails follow various routes. Routes are well-defined major variants of a historic trail. Differing routes may result from divergent starting and destination points; changes in water,

feed, and weather conditions; or the simple human desire to find a better, faster, and easier route. The Independence Road and St. Joe Road are examples of routes related to the California National Historic Trail (Bagley 2012b:52. These routes began in different cities on the Missouri River and then converged in Marysville, Kansas. Routes frequently divide into braids. Trail braiding occurred when travelers found different routes around natural obstacles such as buttes. At creek and river crossings, braids developed at numerous fords depending on the season, weather, and water level. Braids tend to run parallel to one another and are usually in proximity (within two miles). When trail data is recorded at ground level, there may be multiple parallel swales in proximity. Multiple swales resulted from travelers spreading



Figure 6.4. Independence Rock. Watercolor by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

out whenever the terrain allowed to avoid the dust of other wagons or because old swales became deeply rutted and muddy.

The trail traces are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they are the physical remnants of important events in American history during the nineteenth century.

Emigrant Campsites

The identification of camp locations represents one of the major data gaps in the information collected about the National Historic Trails. Many pioneer journals described campsites; for instance, large numbers of emigrant parties camped in the Names Hill area on the Sublette Cutoff between 1849 and 1855. Campsites were commonly sited near water sources and trail junctions.

Emigrant camp locations were not randomly located along the trail corridor. Water for livestock was the primary factor in selecting campsites. Although enough water for emigrant use could be

hauled in barrels, livestock had to be watered morning and evening from larger nearby sources. Journal accounts indicate that any water source might attract the attention of emigrants. The small springs and ephemeral streams and ponds were quickly used up after the start of each season's migration and often became stagnant or alkaline and dangerous to people and livestock. Therefore, permanent water sources that could accommodate large emigrant groups were the preferred locations for camps.

The Platte River Crossing, Willow Spring, Bessemer Crossing, Sweetwater River Crossing, and Green River Crossing are examples of major pioneer camp locations in Wyoming. Smaller and less reliable water sources such as Pacific Springs and Sand Springs also attracted large numbers of emigrants, especially since such water sources were located within otherwise dry trail segments.

Pioneer journals and records from early twentieth-century trail researchers indicate that these camp locations contained discarded goods, dead livestock,

and many human graves. As late as the 1970s, large amounts of wagon iron and other artifacts could be found at some locations like the Green River Crossing of the Sublette Trail near Names Hill, where hundreds of emigrants camped each summer. Unfortunately, most of that evidence has since disappeared, and most of the land in this area is under private ownership. However, archaeological evidence of pioneer camps should be present at river crossings, springs, and other water sources along the trail corridor.

Historical records indicate that there was a blacksmith shop located near the Pine Grove on the Sublette Cutoff. Such a facility would naturally attract people to camp in this location while waiting for repairs. Campsites were also located near military sites such as Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger.

Finally, two patterns of circular vegetation anomalies were observed near Jeffrey City during helicopter reconnaissance for this study. These circles, situated at the Split Rock/Three Crossings area, did not appear to be related to any modern impacts. Rather, they resembled the circular arrangement made by freighting teamsters when they corralled their teams and cargo for protection during night encampments.

Further research should be conducted at river crossings where historic documentation indicates the presence of large campsites. These locations should contain archaeological deposits including temporally and functionally diagnostic artifacts and faunal remains that could augment the written record concerning the nineteenth-century emigrant experience, including such questions as the social organization of pioneer parties. Test excavations and/or remote sensing studies of potential camp locations should be undertaken if any activities or developments are proposed near water sources within the trails corridor. The following list identifies several known and probable emigrant camp locations but is by no means a complete list of such sites. There are certainly many that have not yet been identified.

1. Fort Laramie (NPS)
2. Register Cliff (State)
3. Deer Creek (Private)

4. Bessemer Bend (Private, BLM)
5. Willow Spring (Private)
6. Independence Rock (State, BLM, Private)
7. Split Rock Area (Private, BLM)
8. Burnt Ranch (Private)
9. Twin Mounds (BLM)
10. South Pass Summit (BLM)
11. Pacific Springs (Private)
12. Dry Sandy Crossing (Private)
13. Little Sandy Crossings (both Sublette and main trail crossings) (BLM, Private)
14. Big Sandy Crossings (BOR, BLM, Private)
15. Sand Springs (Private, BLM split estate)
16. Simpson's Hollow (BLM)
17. Sublette Crossing (Private, State, BLM)
18. Lombard Crossing (USFWS)
19. Gasson Bridge (BLM)
20. Mormon Crossings (USFWS)
21. Names Hill (State)
22. Various other Green River crossings (mostly Private or USFWS)
23. Holden Hill (BLM)
24. Emigrant Springs on Slate Creek (BLM)
25. Pine Grove (BLM)
26. Emigrant Springs on Dempsey Ridge (BLM)
27. Fort Bridger (State)
28. Parting of the Ways (BLM)

Verified emigrant campsites are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity.

Native American Campsites

Many Native American encampments were also mentioned in pioneer journals. La Barge Bluffs Petroglyphs may represent the interaction between Euroamerican and Native cultures (Keyser et al 2004:129-151; Tanner 2002). Pioneer J. Goldsbrough Bruff (1949) wrote extensively about the cultural milieu around places such as the Green River Crossing of the Sublette Cutoff near Names Hill, four miles south of the petroglyph site. Furthermore,

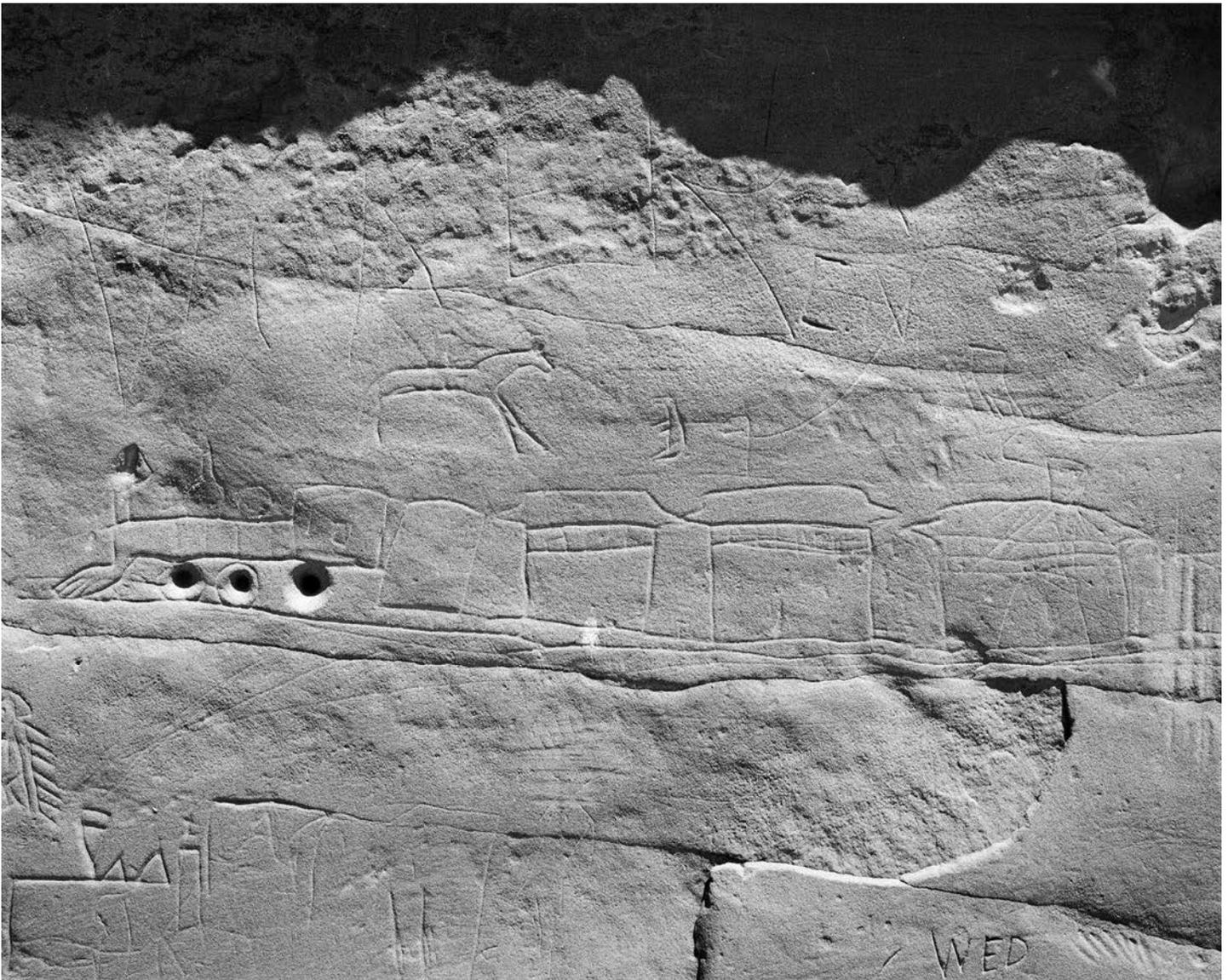


Figure 6.5. A realistic passenger train is the focal point of Panel 1 at the La Barge Bluffs Petroglyph site. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

diarist I.N. Ebey (Ebey 1997) documented Native American drawings among the pioneer inscriptions at Names Hill. The barely visible petroglyphs were documented in a report (Southworth et al. 1991). Emigrant accounts also described a large Native American trading camp located at the Hams Fork crossing of the Sublette Cutoff near White Hill, where emigrants and the Shoshone Indians conducted commerce. Today, most of this land is under private ownership. Native American camp and trading sites may be located at any important stream or river

crossing along the trail corridors in conjunction with pioneer campsites. Evidence may include temporally diagnostic artifacts associated with the period of trail use.

Native American campsites may be eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A if their association with the trails can be demonstrated, and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity.

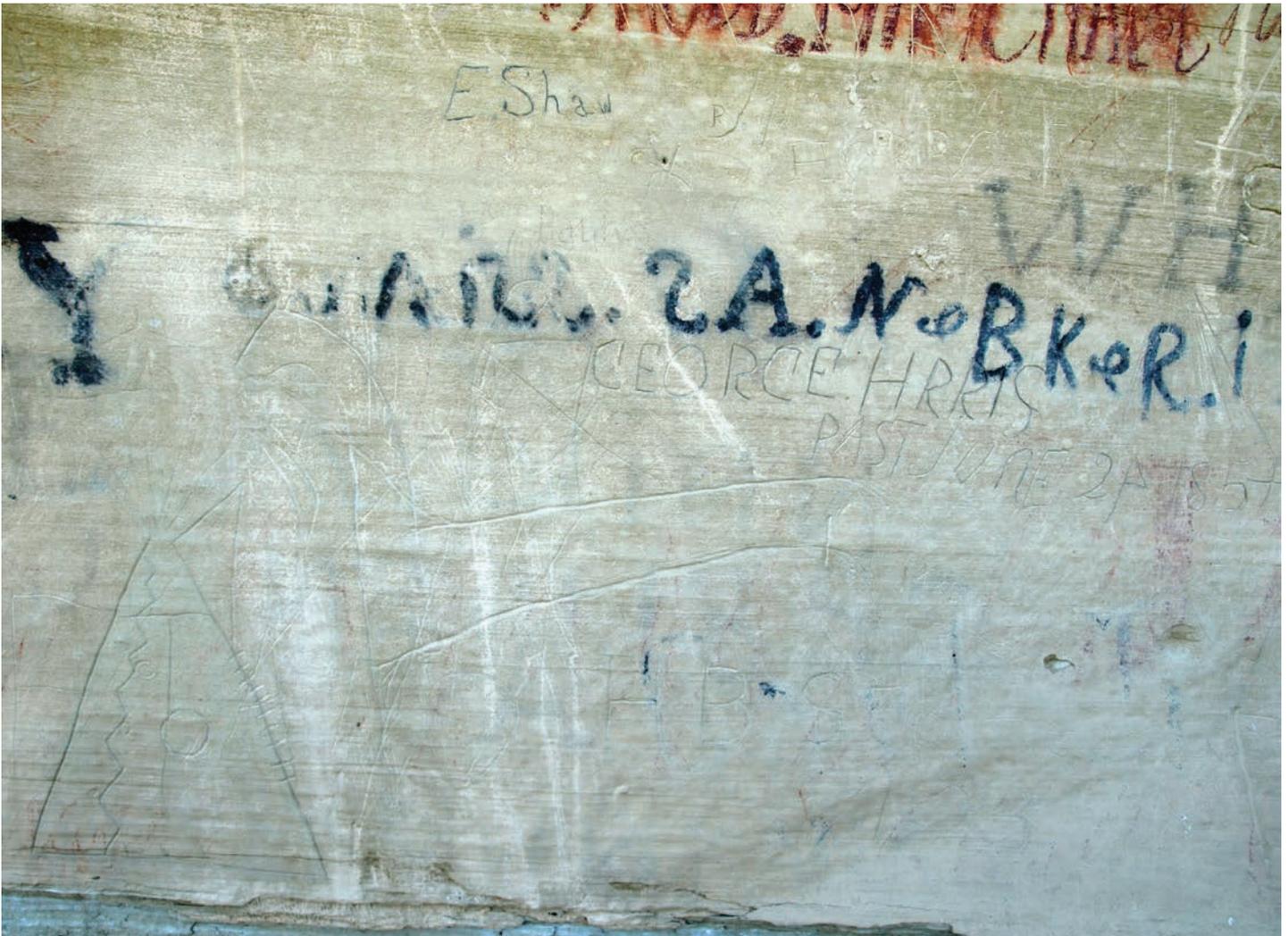


Figure 6.6. Historic inscriptions, including both painted and incised names and dates, were superimposed over native rock art at Names Hill. Photo courtesy of Dave Vlcek.



Figure 6.7. "Deer Creek Station," by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

Military Posts/Stations

During the early years of westward migration along the National Historic Trails, there was no direct military presence other than occasional military reconnaissance and mapping expeditions. During the 1860s and 1870s, there was a strong military presence along portions of the National Historic Trails. However, much of it consisted of military campaigns directed against the Sioux and Cheyenne in regions to the north of the NHTs.

John C. Fremont's expedition along the Oregon Trail for the Corps of Topographical Engineers in 1842 provided emigrants with important information and maps for their long journeys to Oregon and



Figure 6.8. The remains of historic foundations at Burnt Ranch. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

California. Although it was not their primary duty, military contingents traveling the emigrant routes for a variety of reasons did provide a modicum of protection for pioneer wagon trains.

From 1848 to 1862, the military presence consisted of garrisoning stagecoach and Pony Express stations to protect vital communication links between the eastern United States and the western territories. Stations such as La Bonte, Deer Creek (now Glenrock), Sweetwater Station (near Independence Rock), and Burnt Ranch (just east of the summit of South Pass) also served as important military sites. Stations were often constructed like forts with palisade walls, and Sweetwater Station had small blockhouses at its opposing corners.

Beginning in 1857, Frederick W. Lander of the Corps of Topographical Engineers established the South Pass to Honey Lake Wagon Road, also known as the Lander Road or Cutoff. The Lander Road was

the first federally-funded road constructed west of the Mississippi River. Frederick Lander's primary headquarters were located at the South Pass or Upper Sweetwater Station (also called Gilbert's Station or Mormon Station). Today the site of Lander's headquarters is known as Burnt Ranch and is privately owned. Two archaeological sites on private land in the vicinity of Burnt Ranch may be related to Frederick Lander's operations. Piney Fort, one of Lander's other provisioning points, is located on South Piney Creek within the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Fort Laramie, Fort Caspar, and Fort Bridger are the primary military posts located along the National Historic Trails in Wyoming. All are enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places. The Fort Laramie National Historic Site is a unit of the NPS. Fort Caspar is owned and operated as a historic park and museum by the City of Casper. Fort Bridger is a

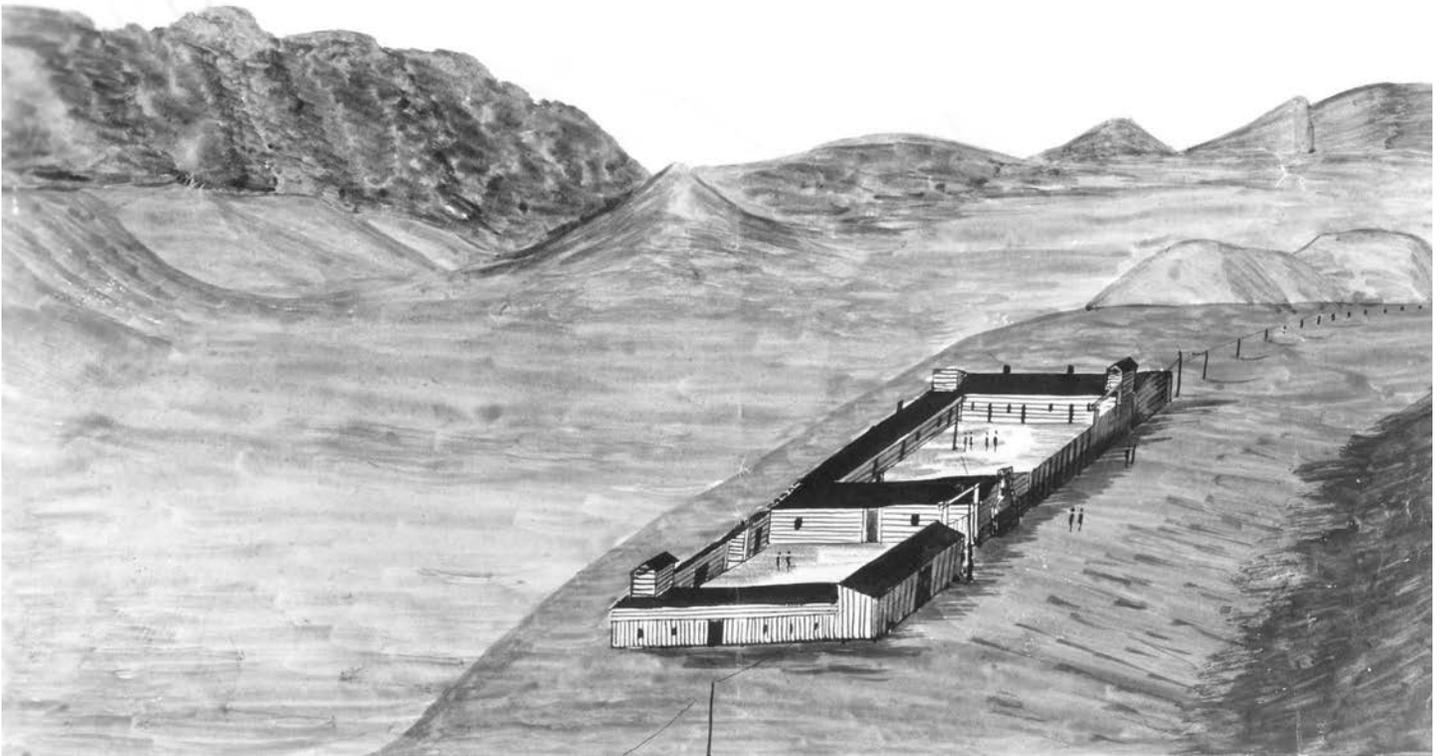


Figure 6.9. Drawing of Sweetwater Station, n.d. Image courtesy Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

Wyoming State Historic Site.

The lesser stations and posts along the National Historic Trails in Wyoming are located on both public and private lands, and some are State Historic Sites. Several of the sites have no remaining structures, but the historic archaeological record remains an uninvestigated component. Sweetwater Station was photographed during the 2002 aerial reconnaissance by BLM personnel, guided by OCTA volunteer Randy Brown.

While the location of Sweetwater Station is known, the vegetation anomalies revealed by the aerial photographs may prove valuable should future archaeological studies be undertaken at that location. Aerial photographs may identify similar characteristics at other military post locations in association with stage stations and Pony Express stations that also retain historic

archaeological evidence.

Military-Indian skirmishes were uncommon in Wyoming during the emigration period. Most of the major military battles occurred during the Plains Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s along the Bozeman Trail in the Powder River Basin. In the vicinity of the trails corridor, the Grattan Fight took place on August 19, 1854 as a result of a dispute over an emigrant cow near Fort Laramie. The Battle of Platte River Bridge and a series of related skirmishes occurred on July 26, 1865 near modern-day Casper.

These events are detailed in the historical overview section of this report. Evidence of military operations could be expected anywhere along the trails corridor. Military sites may be identified by temporally diagnostic artifacts, including percussion caps, lead bullets and datable parts from military accouterments. Hastily constructed fortifications such as the Cold Springs Rifle Pits near Guernsey may also



Figure 6.10. Aerial view of the Fort Laramie National Historic Site with Laramie Peak in the background. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

be found.

Substantial and verifiable evidence of major or notable military operations along the trails, whether related to the emigration period or to the Plains Wars of the late 1860s and 1870s, should be considered eligible for listing in the NRHP. Military facilities are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity.

Stage Coach and Pony Express Stations

Several companies operated stagecoach, mail and freighting operations along the emigration trails corridor between about 1848 and 1860. While the general locations of individual stage and mail stations are known from the historic record, many of the sites have not been definitively identified on the ground,

nor have their physical layouts been verified. Stations associated with these operations were located at such well-established facilities as Fort Bridger and Fort Laramie, but intervening stations were generally less formal in organization and construction. Therefore, the physical composition of stage station sites will vary considerably depending on the importance of their locations, proximity to major drainages, and whether they acted as relay, swing or home stations. Relay or swing stations provided fresh horses and minimal passenger services for short stops while a fresh team of horses was hitched to the coach. At home stations, meals for travelers were provided and repairs could be made to the coaches. In addition, fresh horses were supplied (see Hafen 1926; Godfrey 1994).

In 1860, the company of Russell, Majors and Waddell expanded their stage, mail and freight operations to include the innovative Pony Express



Figure 6.11. “Three Crossings Station,” by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

mail service. The Pony Express was in operation only from April 1860 through October 1861. During that time, a total of 35 Pony Express stations were established in Wyoming (Godfrey 1994:138-159). The Pony Express utilized existing facilities whenever possible, but because of the need to change horses frequently, the company also built new relay stations as needed. The precise locations of some of the lesser known relay stations such as Hams Fork and Church Butte, as well as many other Pony Express facilities, remain unknown. Archaeological investigations are needed to identify these stations on the ground. Like stage stations, the physical composition of the sites will vary depending upon the type of station. Home stations were established about 75 to 100 miles apart (sources vary on the distances) and provided accommodations for riders to rest before returning in the opposite direction to their starting point on the route (Godfrey 1994:48). “Home stations were usually associated with a previously established stagecoach station. . . . Normally, home stations had an agent or stationkeeper in charge of five or six boys” (Godfrey 1994:58). Relay rider or swing

stations provided fresh horses for riders who changed horses and continued their ride without a rest stop; these stations normally had a single caretaker for the horses (Godfrey 1994:59).

Sites found along the National Historic Trails with verifiable physical evidence of stage station and Pony Express operations may qualify for the NRHP under Criteria A and D. Sites with standing structures or substantial foundations are uncommon and therefore should be considered more significant. Artifact scatters that can be temporally related to the mid-nineteenth century may indicate the presence of such sites.

Following is a list of stations and ownership (NPS 1999). Additional stagecoach and Pony Express stations may be identified in future studies.

1. Cold Springs (Private)
2. Verdling’s Ranch (Private)
3. Fort Laramie (NPS)
4. Nine Mile House (Private)
5. Cottonwood (Private)



Figure 6.12. “Rocky Ridge Pony Express Station,” by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 6. Horseshoe (Private) | 27. Rock Creek (BLM) |
| 7. Elkhorn (Private) | 28. South Pass/Upper Sweetwater/Burnt Ranch (Private) |
| 8. LaBonte (Private) | 29. Pacific Springs (Private) |
| 9. Bed Tick (Private) | 30. Dry Sandy (Private) |
| 10. LaPrele (Private) | 31. Little Sandy (BLM) |
| 11. Box Elder (Private) | 32. Big Sandy (Private) |
| 12. Deer Creek (State) | 33. Big Timber (BLM/ BOR; location questionable) |
| 13. Little Muddy (Private) | 34. Green River (USFWS) |
| 14. Bridger (Private) | 35. Michael Martin’s Station (BLM; location questionable) |
| 15. North Platte (City of Casper) | 36. Hams Fork (Private; location questionable) |
| 16. Red Butte (BLM) | 37. Church Buttes (location questionable) |
| 17. Willow Springs (Private) | 38. Millersville (Private) |
| 18. Horse Creek (Private) | 39. Fort Bridger (State) |
| 19. Sweetwater Station (BLM) | 40. Muddy (location questionable) |
| 20. Devil’s Gate (Private, BLM) | 41. Quaking Aspen (Private) |
| 21. Plante’s Station (Private) | 42. Bear River (Private) |
| 22. Split Rock (BLM) | |
| 23. Three Crossings (Private) | |
| 24. Ice Springs (BLM) | |
| 25. Warm Springs (Private) | |
| 26. Rocky Ridge/St. Mary’s (BLM) | |

Stagecoach and Pony Express Stations are eligible for



Figure 6.13. Site of Seminoe's Trading Post excavated by archaeologists from the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity.

Trading Posts/Commercial Services Sites

Trading posts associated with the trails include commercial establishments situated at Forts Laramie, Caspar, and Bridger, and Fort Supply, the latter used specifically by the Mormon emigrants (Pierce 2012). Another known trading post is the recently excavated site of Seminoe's Trading Post near Devil's Gate. J. Goldsborough Bruff and other diary accounts (see Jensen 1975:184-186) describe a wagon repair facility in the vicinity of the Pine Grove on the Sublette Cutoff. This area appears to have substantial deposition, and archaeological investigations in this area may verify the location. Evidence may include

structural remains associated with commercial items such as trade beads, metal artifacts, and money.

These types of commercial services sites are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity.

Pioneer Inscription Sites

Emigrants carved or wrote their names on rock faces at several sites along the trail. The inscriptions generally consist of the person's name, the date, and occasionally the person's place of origin or other information. The inscriptions were either carved or chiseled into the rock with sharp instruments, or written on the face of the rock with paint, axle grease, or some other durable substance.

Major known inscription sites include Register

Cliff near Guernsey, Independence Rock west of Casper, Names Hill at the Green River crossing on the Sublette Cutoff, and Emigrant Springs on the Slate Creek Cutoff east of Kemmerer. Each of these sites includes hundreds of inscriptions still visible today. There are also smaller inscription sites at Devil's Gate and at Name Rock, southwest of Church Buttes in Uinta County. Single inscriptions or clusters may be found along the trail wherever suitable stone faces are present.

While some of the smaller inscription sites have never been documented, most of the larger examples have been recorded and are considered eligible for listing in the NRHP. Known inscription sites include the following:

1. Register Cliff (State)
2. Avenue of Rocks (State)



Figure 6.14. Register Cliff, located south of present-day Guernsey, Wyoming, rises more than 100 feet above the North Platte River Valley. The area was the first night camp west of Fort Laramie for Oregon Trail travelers. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.



Figure 6.15. Inscriptions at Register Cliff. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.



Figure 6.16. Oregon Trail graves near South Pass discovered in 1930. Grave on the left - 1844, grave on the right - 1845. Image courtesy of Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

3. Independence Rock (State)
4. Rattlesnake Pass (near Devil's Gate) (BLM)
5. Split Rock area (BLM/Private)
6. Names Hill (BOR, BLM, State)
7. Holden Hollow (BLM)
8. Fontenelle Creek Crossing (BLM)
9. Emigrant Springs on Slate Creek, including Johnston Scout Rocks (BLM)
10. Name Rock (Private)

Pioneer inscription sites are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century. Emigrant inscriptions may be eligible under Criterion D because they may provide information about ethnicity and place of origin, destinations, and when the emigrants were there.

Pioneer Graves

Death on the trail was a major part of the



Figure 6.17. Charlotte Dansie Grave near South Pass. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

emigration experience and was chronicled by emigrants in numerous diaries. While a number of graves are recorded in Wyoming, there are others that have not been discovered. Emigrant journals and diaries indicate that graves should be anticipated almost anywhere along the trails. Physical evidence of graves may include clusters of rock or headstones. Graves are often not evident on the surface; however, potential grave sites are commonly located using

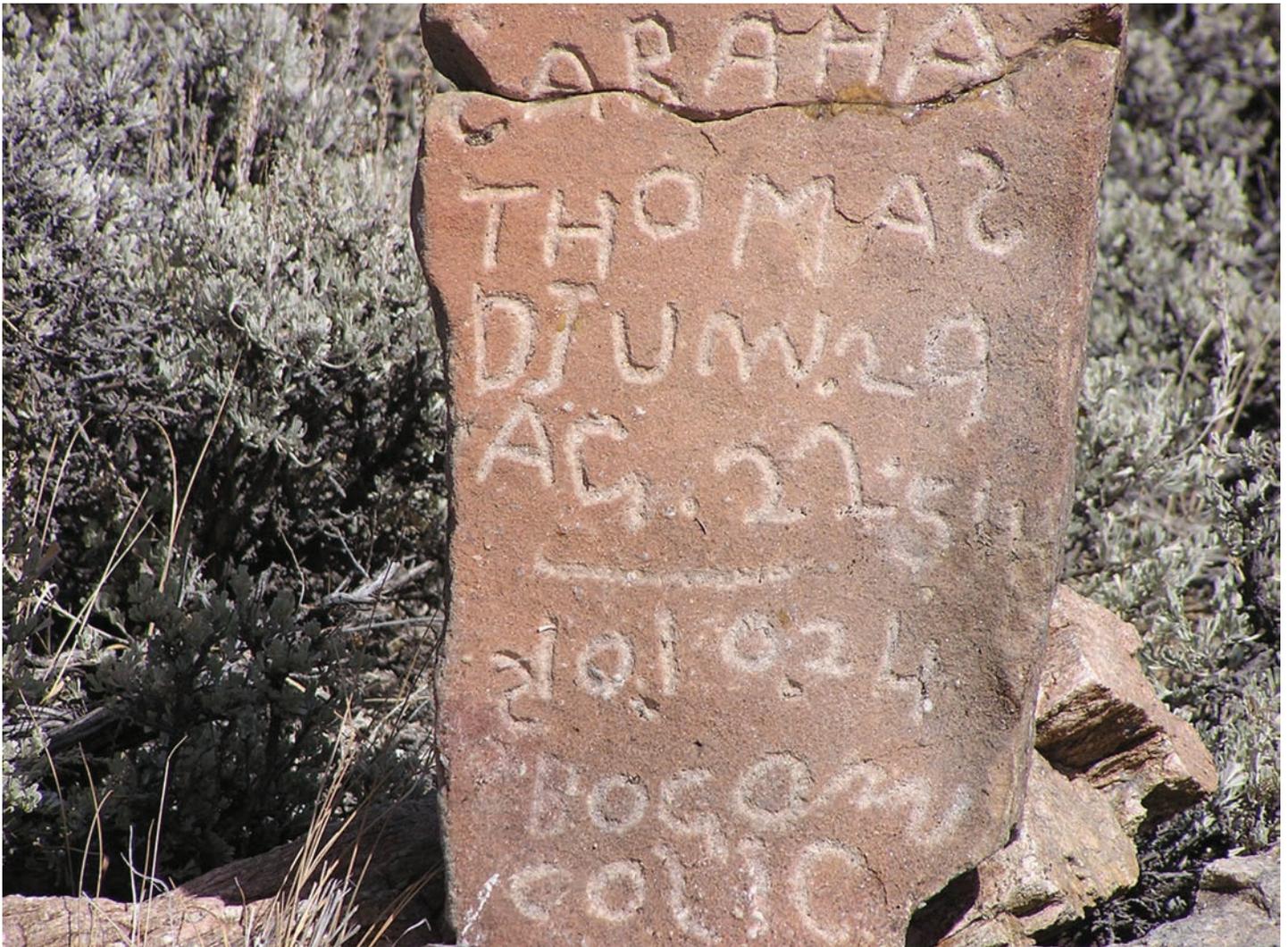


Figure 6.18. Sarah Thomas grave along the Seminoe Cutoff. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

historical records. Remote sensing techniques such as ground penetrating radar have been used successfully to identify graves with no surface expression.

The multiple deaths of Mormon emigrants at Martin's Cove, Willie's Handcart Disaster Site, and the sites of other well-known tragedies along the trail are all examples of historic events associated with the trails that created pioneer graves. Known gravesites occur at the Sublette Cutoff crossing of the Green River near Names Hill, at Buckskin Crossing where the Lander Road crosses the Big Sandy River, and on the bluffs overlooking the Green River near present-day Fontenelle Reservoir.

Emigrant graves might also be considered eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion D

for the scientific information human remains could provide in the study of health and disease issues and causes of death among emigrants. In cases where pioneer graves are threatened by erosion or otherwise displaced and damaged, scientific excavation may be pursued as a part of the process for managing grave sites. If at all feasible, graves should be stabilized without removing the human remains.

According to the NPS, ordinarily graves are not eligible for the NRHP (NPS 1997:2; 32). However, they may qualify under the following category:

A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no other appropriate site or building directly



Figure 6.19. Split Rock was a well-known natural landmark that helped to guide emigrants along the trail. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

associated with his or her productive life. (Criteria Consideration C)

Recorded graves in Wyoming include the following:

1. Grave (Private)
2. Charles B. Bishop Grave (Private)
3. William Clary Grave (Private)
4. Mary Elizabeth Homsley Grave (Private)
5. Elva Ingram Grave (Private)
6. Mily/Millie Irwin Grave (Private)
7. Joel Hembree and Ralston Baker Grave Sites (Private)
8. Mary J. Hurley [Kelly] Grave (Private)
9. Alvah Unthank Grave (Private - access prohibited)
10. Martin Ringo and J.P. Parker Graves (Private)
11. Ada Magill Grave (Converse County road right-of-way)
12. Quintina Snodderly Grave (Private)
13. Frederick Richard Fulkerson Grave (State)
14. Bennett Tribbett Grave (Private)
15. Charles Hatch Grave (Private)
16. Daniel Lantz Grave (BLM)
17. Lucinda B. Wright Grave (BLM)
18. Nancy Jane Hill Grave (BLM)

19. Elizabeth Paul Grave (BLM)
20. Alfred Corum Grave (BLM)
21. Charlotte Dansie Grave (Private)
22. David Bond Grave (USFS)
23. William Durham and I.M. Mead Graves (USFS)
24. Graves near Buckskin Crossing (Private)
25. Rattlesnake Pass graves (near Devil's Gate) (BLM)
26. Sarah A. Thomas grave (on Seminoe Cutoff) (BLM)

Natural Landmarks

A number of natural features along the emigrant trails have been identified in numerous emigrant journals as navigational landmarks, milestones, and places at which important events occurred. Landmarks such as Split Rock helped to guide emigrants along the trails corridor. Independence Rock and Church Butte served as landmarks but are more important because of historic events or activities that occurred there. South Pass was a notable milestone on the trail where the Continental Divide was crossed. All three types are well documented in the historical record. In order for a natural landmark to be eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A, it should be described in a number of journal entries and emigrant guidebooks and maps. It is difficult to determine the area around a natural landmark that contributes to the NRHP eligibility of the feature under Criterion A. However, the relative importance of the landmark within view of the historic trail should raise the level of visual resource management consideration.

The natural landmarks in Wyoming include the following:

1. Laramie Peak (majority USFS)
2. Emigrant Gap (BLM)
3. Red Buttes (BLM, State, Private)
4. Avenue of Rocks (BLM)
5. Prospect Hill (BLM)
6. Independence Rock (State)
7. Devil's Gate (BLM, Private)



Figure 6.20. Devil's Gate, an important natural landmark, is seen in the left background of this photograph. The LDS Church's Martin's Cove Visitors Center facility is located near the center. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.



Figure 6.21. Close-up view of Devils Gate. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.



Figure 6.22. The Oregon Buttes. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

8. Split Rock (BLM)
9. Continental Peak (BLM)
10. Oregon Buttes (BLM)
11. Rocky Ridge (BLM)
12. South Pass (BLM, Private, State)
13. Twin Mounds (BLM)
14. Plume Rock (BLM)
15. Pilot Butte (BLM, Private)
16. Mormon Knolls (USFWS)
17. Rocky Gap (BLM)
18. The Rock Slide (BLM)
19. Church Butte (Private)
20. The Needles (BLM)

River Crossings

Although pioneers were often able to ford some rivers unaided, depending on the season and climatic conditions, enterprising individuals and groups such as the Mormons established ferries, and later bridges, to assist pioneers at many of the most treacherous river crossings. Emigrant camps were

also located near major river crossings, and often small communities grew up around them, such as at Sublette's Crossing. Permanent settlements such as Casper also developed at major river crossings. This site type often lacks any physical evidence due to the forces of water erosion, but the locations of ferries and fords were described in detail by trail journalists and can be relocated today.

In cases where diary accounts precisely locate a river crossing, and where the integrity of setting remains relatively intact, river crossings should be considered eligible for listing in the NRHP. However, where the integrity of setting has been greatly compromised, the site would not be eligible unless intact physical remains exist at the site. River crossings are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A because they represent important events in American history during the nineteenth century and under Criterion D because they may yield important information if they retain sufficient integrity of association.



Figure 6.23. “Crossing the South Platte,” by William Henry Jackson. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

The known major river crossing sites include the following:

1. Fort Laramie Military Bridge (North Platte River at Fort Laramie; NPS)
2. Richard’s/Reshaw’s/Richaud’s Bridge (North Platte River at Reshaw Bridge City Park, Evansville; Natrona County)
3. Mormon Ferry, probable second site (North Platte River, North Casper Park; City of Casper)
4. Mormon Ferry, probable first site (North Platte River, Memorial Park; Town of Mills)
5. Old Platte Bridge/Guinard’s Bridge (North Platte River at Fort Caspar; Natrona County)
6. Bessemer Bend (North Platte River west of Casper; BLM/Private)
7. First Crossing (Sweetwater River between Independence Rock and Devil’s Gate; Private)
8. Three Crossings (Sweetwater River, west of Split Rock; Private)
9. Sixth Crossing (also Seventh and Eighth Crossings, Sweetwater River, Fremont County; Private)
10. Burnt Ranch/Ninth (Last) Crossing (Sweetwater River, near junction of Lander Road; Private)
11. Buckskin Crossing (Big Sandy River, Lander Road; Private)
12. New Fork Crossing (New Fork River, Lander Road; BLM/Private)
13. Green River Crossing (Green River, Lander Road; BLM/Private)
14. Sublette’s Crossing/Names Hill (Green River, Sublette Cutoff; Private/BOR/BLM)
15. Lombard Ferry/Mormon Ferry Crossing (Green River; BOR/USFWS/BLM)
16. Robinson Ferry Crossing (Green River; location not verified)
17. Palmer Ferry (Green River, south of Lombard and Robinson ferries; BOR/USFWS/ BLM)
18. Case Ferry (Green River, Baker-Davis Road;



Figure 6.24. Green River crossing at the Case Ferry location. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.



Figure 6.25. Ezra Meeker commemorative marker at the South Pass summit. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

BOR)

19. Kinney/Dodge Ferry (Green River, Kinney Cutoff; BOR)
20. Dodge Ferry (Green River, Kinney Cutoff; USFWS/Private)
21. Holden Ferry (Green River, Kinney Cutoff; BOR/USFWS)
22. Hams Fork Crossing (near Granger; State)

Commemorative and Interpretive Markers

Efforts to recognize, mark and interpret the trail routes began as early as 1906, when pioneer Ezra Meeker returned to Wyoming to locate and mark the trail he had followed to Oregon as a young man. Wyoming historian Grace Raymond Hebard, Lander citizen H. G. Nickerson, and others also took an early interest in commemorating Wyoming's historic trails. Many of the interpretive signs and markers



(Left) Figure 6.26. H. G. Nickerson's marker. This marker is located in Fremont County, eleven miles from Hwy 287 by way of the Hudson-Atlantic City Road (about .5 mile north of the Sweetwater River), on private land. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.



Figure 6.27. 1930s-era Oregon Trail marker placed by the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

from this era are now historic properties. Examples include the granite boulder engraved by Meeker in 1906 and placed at the summit of South Pass, and a similar marker commemorating the journey of Eliza Spaulding and Narcissa Whitman placed at South Pass in 1913 by H. G. Nickerson. Several 1920s-1930s vintage markers and brief interpretive signs are located in eastern Wyoming, all on private lands, as well as markers on state land at Names Hill and on BLM land near Holden Hill. Some of these markers and signs are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A, because they are examples of early patterns and traditions in historic preservation.

Some of these markers and signs may also be eligible under Criterion C as important works of art, for example, the bronze plaques attached to a number of the 1930s-era markers placed at sites on private and state land by the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission. One of the plaques depicts a covered wagon sculpted by James and Laura Gardin Frazer. Another plaque, depicting a Pony Express rider, was sculpted by an artist named Alexander Phimister Proctor (Nardone 2005: 6B; Underbrink 2005: 2). Both are now recognized as works of art.



Figure 6.28. 1930s-era Pony Express markers placed by the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.



Figure 7.1. Wagon train re-enactment. Photo by Richard Collier, courtesy of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

CHAPTER VII. NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS IN WYOMING

GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

The following discussion of geographic regions is quoted directly from the *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement California, Pony Express, Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails* (NPS1999:32).

The Platte River

Fort Kearny marked the end of the tallgrass prairies and the start of the Great Plains. The flat, treeless horizon stretching endlessly before them shocked many emigrants, perhaps causing them for the first time to realize the enormity of the journey ahead.

The Platte and North Platte Rivers across Nebraska and Wyoming provided a broad natural avenue, made to order for ox- and mule-drawn covered wagons. This corridor headed west in exactly the right direction and provided all the necessities for overland travel – water, forage, and a level road to follow.

In the western reaches of the Great Plains, west of Fort Laramie, the country begins to break up into deepening ravines and steeper ascents. Traveling continually in the shadow of Laramie Peak – the emigrants' first view of the western mountains – and knowing the trail would soon become more difficult, the emigrants began to lighten the loads in their wagons as much as they dared.

The Rocky Mountains and the Continental Divide

At Casper, Wyoming, the character of the trail changes dramatically and begins the gradual ascent over the high range country toward South Pass and the Continental Divide. Quitting the North Platte River, the emigrants became more aware that their trek was a race against the approach of winter and pushed on as rapidly as they could across this “hell's reach” of bad campsites, poor water, scarce grass, alkali flats, and rocky, steep terrain.

South Pass was the key to the entire emigrant trail corridor, for only at South Pass could wagons

be taken up its broad, gentle grade over the 7,550-foot backbone of the Rocky Mountains. South Pass marked the emigrants' arrival at the frontier of the Oregon Territory, the end of the long ascent over the Continental Divide, and the halfway point of their journey west.

At the Parting of the Ways, emigrants had to make a series of hard decisions regarding the risks of taking shortcuts. The decision to risk a cutoff – based upon water sources; the condition of livestock, people, supplies, and equipment; the time of year; grass conditions; and their final destination – sometimes meant a life or death gamble.

TRAIL SEGMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Since trail conditions, setting, land use and land ownership vary considerably along the length of the National Historic Trails across Wyoming, this study divides these trails into twenty-one segments based on geographical and administrative boundaries to facilitate management (see Map 2). These segments are as follows:

1. Nebraska State Line to Fort Caspar
2. Fort Caspar to Independence Rock
3. Independence Rock to Ice Slough
4. Ice Slough to Burnt Ranch
5. Seminoe Cutoff
6. Burnt Ranch to Buckskin Crossing
7. Buckskin Crossing to Highway 191
8. Highway 191 to Bridger-Teton National Forest
9. Burnt Ranch to Parting of the Ways
10. False Parting of the Ways to Parting of the Ways
11. Parting of the Ways to Green River Crossing at Names Hill



7.2. Aerial view of the trail between Devils Gate and Split Rock. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

12. Green River Crossing at Names Hill to Idaho State Line
13. Parting of the Ways to Green River Crossing at Lombard Ferry
14. Gasson Bridge to Hams Fork
15. Slate Creek/Kinney Cutoff Variants
16. Lombard Crossing to Hams Fork
17. Hams Fork to Fort Bridger
18. Fort Bridger to Idaho State Line
19. Fort Bridger to Utah State Line
20. Blacks Fork Cutoff (Hams Fork) to Cumberland Gap
21. Hams Fork Cutoff (Granger to Hams Fork Plateau) supplemental

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