

Young Pioneers

培生
英语阅读

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◆ 季沙·汉密尔顿 著

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For Bruce Coville, who showed me the way



Chapter

1

WAGONS WEST

Can you imagine walking hundreds of miles across the United States? That's what the children of the pioneers did in the mid-1800s. That was when people started moving in long **wagon** trains from the eastern part of North America to the western part. In these trains, children mostly walked beside the wagons along with the adults.



A wagon train travels west.

In the 1830s, the United States was mostly a nation of farmers. Most Americans made their own clothes, grew their own food, and built their own homes. There were few factories or businesses in the southern states. Even in the northern states where there were cities like Boston and New York, there were not many big factories making goods and products.

In 1837, the country began having problems. The farmers had trouble with their crops and could not sell their corn and wheat. Bankers would not lend them any money. Families were hungry, and, unlike today, they could not go to the **grocery** store to buy what they needed.

In the 1840s, the United States greatly expanded its territory.



Also in the 1830s, most of the United States lay east of the Mississippi River. All the rest of the land that would become the United States today was still open territory. The farmers began to hear about land in the western part of this territory where they could take their families and start a new life. They heard that the land was free. Some people said there was gold to be found in the ground. All they had to do was go there and build a new home.

The first people to move from the East to the

West called themselves **emigrants** because they were leaving the United States to travel to a new land. They later became known as **pioneers** because they were the first to do something.



A big part of the open land was **prairie** covered with tall, thick grass. Many people did not think this was a place where they wanted to live because there were so few trees and little rain. People knew the land in the far west was different. They had heard from others that it was rich and **fertile**.

Most news about the West came from people who had gotten a letter from relatives who had made the journey, or people who had heard from others about pioneers who had gone west. Some people who had made the trip wrote guidebooks that were sold in the East. These books tried to **convince** people to head west.

Not all of the guidebooks were truthful about what new **settlers** would find in the West. The guidebooks usually told only about the good things, such as the beautiful land, the rich soil, and the plentiful wildlife. They said little or nothing about the long stretches of trail with no water, how hard it was to cross the mountains, and the diseases that killed many pioneers.

Where the Mississippi River meets the Missouri River was the starting place for all the westward trails. The Missouri River was important because the pioneers could travel west by boat for many miles.

Rough **frontier** towns sprang up all along the river as more and more people headed west. These towns were known as the jumping-off places where the pioneers had to leave the boats and start traveling by wagon.

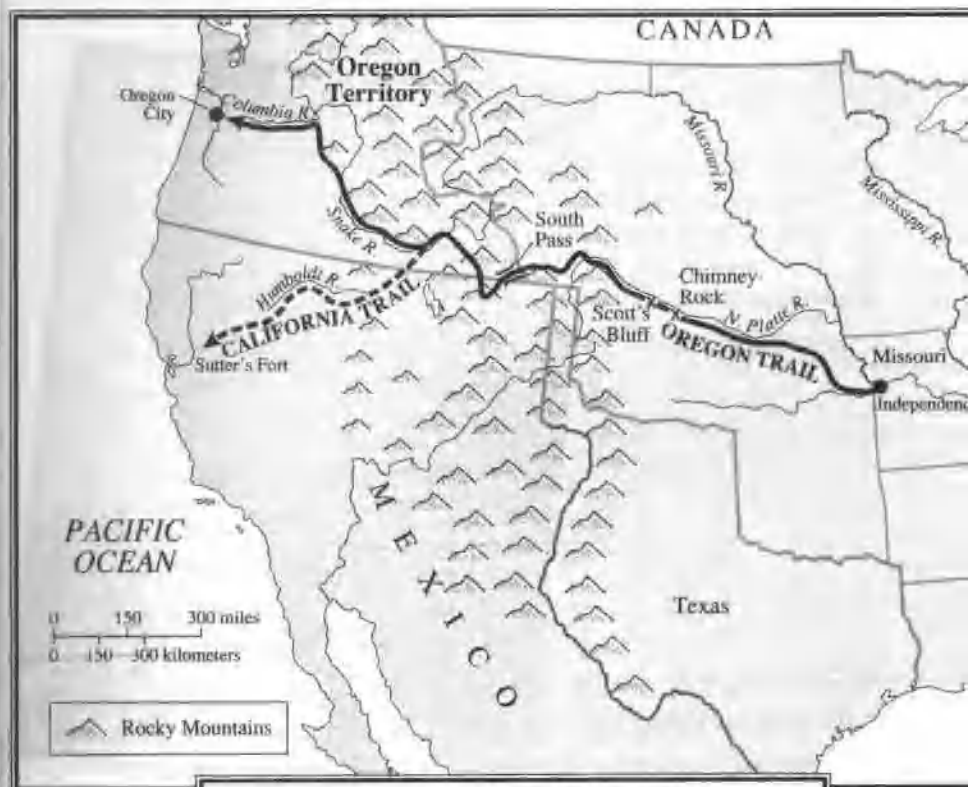


This 1858 print shows a jumping-off place on the Missouri River, one of the last places pioneers could buy supplies.

Families who wanted to go west usually would **arrange** to join a wagon train in one of these river towns. A wagon train was a group of wagons that traveled together in a long line. Some of the first wagon trains were big. One train had more than 1,000 people in hundreds of wagons. Many trains were smaller, with 35 to 50 wagons. In later years the wagon trains were much smaller. Sometimes just two or three wagons traveled together.

Timing was very important. Wagon trains left in late April or early May. If a family started out too early, the spring grasses would not have grown by the time they got to the prairie. This meant that the mules, oxen, horses, and other animals the pioneers brought with them would not be able to **graze**. Without fresh grass to eat, the animals would get sick or even die.

If a family started out too late, they might not reach the California or Oregon territories before winter came in October. They could **get stuck** in the western mountains, with fierce winter storms and deep snow swirling around them. Many families were **stranded** in this way. Some people died.



The Oregon Trail and the California Trail were two of the main trails into the western lands.

There were a number of trails the pioneers could take. Most people used the Oregon Trail, which was the best-known **route**. The trail ran for 2,400 miles over prairie grass, mountain rocks, and desert sand. After passing through the Rocky Mountains, the pioneers came to the halfway point. Here the trail divided. The northern part continued into Oregon. The southern part went into California.

Pioneers carved their names and the date in rocks.



Sometimes pioneers left signs for people who came after them.

Many of these signs were warnings about bad water. Other signs marked places where people had died and were buried. Some signs pointed the way to routes that claimed to **cut** miles **off** the usual route. Many pioneers also carved their names and dates in rocks to show that they had gotten that far.

Most wagon trains had a **captain**, or someone to lead the way. Each family in the wagon train gave money to help pay the train captain. He would decide where to cross rivers, when to hurry, and where to stop.

No matter what route the pioneers chose, the trip took a long time. A wagon train usually had to travel four to five months to get to Oregon. The pioneers were willing to make the long trip. They wanted to get to the land they had been dreaming about so they could start a new life.

Old West Fact

In some places in Wyoming, you can still see the wagon wheel ruts worn in the ground by the pioneers' wagons.



Wagon wheel ruts worn into sandstone



MILES
to Go

Before a family started west, they would buy a wagon, or they would fix their farm wagon. The pioneer wagons were called covered wagons because of the heavy cotton **canvas** that was stretched over bent wooden poles on the top.



The pioneers traveled in covered wagons.

A new wagon might have been painted bright blue, with a yellow front seat and bright red wheels. The canvas covering was clean and new. After a few weeks on the trail, the same wagon had chipped and peeling paint and mud splatters from one end to the other. Its canvas covering might have been torn. It was certainly worn and **stained** with dirt.

Yet this covered wagon was the closest thing to home that the pioneers would have on their journey. It was filled with clothing, furniture, tools, and supplies the pioneers needed to make the trip and to start their new homes in the West.

Most wagons were four feet wide and ten feet long. Packed inside there might have been a bed, a table and chairs, heavy wooden chests, and a china cupboard. There would probably have been a set of dishes, **utensils**, and pots and pans. There might have been large sacks of flour, sugar, potatoes, dried corn, bacon, and hard biscuits. There were also tools to fix a wagon wheel or anything else that might break. Tied to the outside of the wagon would have been a water barrel.



Along the trail the wagons sometimes got stuck in mud, or they had to be pulled up a steep mountainside or floated across a deep river. While crossing the desert, the animals sometimes became so weak from the dry, hot weather that they could no longer pull the heavy wagons. Then the pioneers had to take things out of their wagons and leave them on the trailside to **lighten** the load.

Deciding what they could get along without was based on what was needed to safely finish the journey. Tools and food were necessary. Heavy furniture and **fancy** china were not.