

# Trail Dust

Newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, Idaho Chapter

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## 2022 Upcoming Activities

Currently there are no chapter activities scheduled for July and August. After having several activities in April and May, it became difficult to schedule activities for the next two months due to increasingly busy schedules for tour leaders and participants. A tour over Granite Pass was proposed but only one person was able to attend so it was not scheduled.

The OCTA convention will be August 28-September 1 in Casper, Wyoming. Jerry Eichhorst is planning to explore Oregon-California trail sites across western Wyoming on the drive to Casper on Saturday, August 27. Expected sites include Green River, Parting of the Ways, South Pass, Ice Slough, Martin's Cove, Devil's Gate, and Independence Rock. Please contact Jerry if you are interested in joining an informal caravan to visit these sites along the way to Casper.

September and October activities include a possible tour of the Jeffreys-Goodale route in the INL and a tour of the Oregon Trail from Fort Boise to Huntington. Much of the Oregon Trail area northeast of Vale, Oregon, recently burned so access will have to be confirmed with the BLM.

The fall chapter meeting will be held Saturday, October 15, at the Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery. The winery is located 8 miles north of Mountain Home on Highway 20. The meeting will start at 10:30 am. The winery will provide hamburgers and brauts for lunch. Please bring your own drinks and a side dish or dessert to share. Wine will be available for purchase. After lunch we will explore the area along Rattlesnake Creek in search of emigrant graves, then drive east a few miles to reset concrete Oregon Trail posts which have fallen over.

# Message From the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Long-time IOCTA member and friend Bill Wilson came by my house a couple weeks ago to drop off a box of IOCTA paperwork and a trails reference book. It was great to see him and his wife, Mary Alice, again. Bill was the chapter president and treasurer for many years. He and I spent a lot of time in the field searching for Oregon Trail ruts and burial sites. We have had innumerable conversations of theoretical scenarios concerning the possible Ditto Creek massacre site. Bill came to many of my early Community Education classes to serve as an ambassador of the chapter and help talk with the people interested in the trails and membership. It was great to see Bill and Mary Alice again as it has been a couple of years since I have seen them. It brought back many fine memories of the time spent on the trails together.

Another long-time member and friend, Gar Elison, came by a few days later to drop off a box of guidebooks. Some of the best trail outings I have been on have been led by Gar over the Hudspeth Cutoff in eastern Idaho. Gar grew up in the Raft River area and knows the trails in southeastern Idaho better than anyone that I know. You may remember Gar as the convention chairman for the OCTA convention in Ogden a few years ago. He worked tirelessly to make that convention excellent. Gar recently moved to Caldwell, Idaho, to be closer to his family. It was great to see Gar again as, unfortunately, it has been nearly a year since I have seen him.

Thinking of Bill and Gar reminded me of all the times I have been in the field with Wally Meyer. Wally spent a long career with the BLM and marked many of the emigrant trails in Idaho for the first time. He has never been one to attend meetings, but has led great outings for the chapter, most of which had only a few participants many years ago. As with the others, it has been quite a while since I have seen Wally in person.

And finally, I am reminded of Larry Jones. Larry was the trail historian at the Idaho State Historical Society library (later Archives) for many years. He helped develop the collection of emigrant accounts the Archives has, developed the Idaho chapter of OCTA in April, 1985, developed many of the ISHS reference series materials, and led the OCTA Boise convention many years ago. His knowledge of the history of Idaho and the emigrant trails is incredible. We have talked on the phone a few times recently, but I have not seen him in many years.

The Idaho chapter is blessed to have these fine gentlemen be members for so many years. Their combined knowledge of the trails in Idaho is remarkable. I can only hope to learn a portion of all that they know. I wish that everyone in the chapter could meet these gentlemen and learn from them as much as I have been blessed to do so. I hope to see them all again soon and be able to spend more time refreshing old friendships.

Such friendship is just one of the many reasons to be an active member in the Idaho chapter. There are dozens of great people who actively come to outings and meetings. Add in the historical learning and fun activities such as exploring the trails, searching with cadaver dogs, or metal detecting, and it is easy to see why I enjoy the Idaho chapter so much. I thank all of you for your friendship, guidance, and support, and look forward to having you join me on the trail to renew old friendships and start new ones. Happy Trails.

Sadly, I have only just learned and am sorry to have to inform you that one of our 'great guys' Gar Elison, passed away on Friday July 8<sup>th</sup>. He will be missed. Gar was very active in the National Organization and in the Crossroads and Idaho Chapters. More details to follow.

# The People on the Hill

Michael McKenzie, Ph.D.

We were looking for dead people, rugged individualists chasing the dream of free land and a fresh start in the faraway Oregon Country. By the time they had got where we were looking, they had come over 1500 miles from the jumping off points along the Missouri River and had escaped the often-fatal pitfalls of cholera, "river fever and ague" along the North Platte, stupid accidents, and drownings at river crossings—only to end up in shallow graves not long after crossing the Snake River. Like Moses who was allowed to see the Promised Land but not to enter it, these unfortunate immigrants had made it to the Oregon Territory but would never enter the Shangri-La of the green and promising Willamette Valley. But did this particular site actually contain immigrant graves?

I first became aware of this location about twenty years ago, and had even visited a few times, but other projects had gotten in the way of further investigations. But all that changed when I contacted OCTA Idaho chapter president Jerry Eichhorst, and he thought it would be an excellent site to work with cadaver dogs. The location is actually a small, fenced enclosure in a semi-remote area in Northeastern Oregon, so the dogs would have a very specific location to search.



*Fenced gravesite on top of a small knoll*

The morning of May 21 broke clear with occasional puffy clouds, and if rain showers held off, conditions were excellent

for the dogs to detect the odor of human remains. Jerry had publicized the event, and around 10:45 am fourteen of us caravanned to the location. We were very fortunate to have handlers Deb and Joe Hurlburt, Lori Blackburn, and Rose Smarr, but the real stars were the cadaver dogs Archer, Bannock, Cagney, and Josie, and they did not disappoint.



*Lori Blackburn with her dog Bannock marking human remains at the gravesite*

The results were decisive and dramatic. One after the other, the dogs all exhibited the same basic behaviors. They first looped out into the sagebrush and bunch grass, circling the site and the group, then they worked their way over to the enclosure.



*Another of the dogs marking human remains*

Suddenly, within just a minute or two, all the dogs gave their handlers a "Full Final" indication of human remains. When Bannock did his search, his telling barks were echoed by a circling raven whose eerie croaks reminded us that we had found the last resting place of yet more Oregon Trail immigrants who died chasing their dreams. When I talked to the handlers afterward, they all said

the same thing: it was very rare to have all the dogs react so obviously and clearly to the presence of human remains at a location.



*One of the graves in the site*

It was an exciting yet somber moment for all of us. After all, we were not searching for buried treasure, but dead people. The next step will be to match up actual people with the graves, if possible, since that kind of personal identification helps to bring closure for researchers and any potential family members.

Jerry's original plan was after working this site we would then go to the Van Ornum massacre site north of Farewell Bend, then to an immigrant reburial at Birch Creek to work the dogs. But after first visiting the Ezra Meeker marker site in Huntington, by

the time we arrived at the Van Ornum site, a genuine thunderstorm had moved in, so most of the party went home.



*The group at the Huntington, OR, Ezra Meeker marker*

Despite the typical spring fickleness of the weather gods, it was a great outing, and one which was a powerful reminder of what ordinary people endured to make the long journey west.

A short video clip of the investigation can be found on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/V6AQu--m6E>. In the clip you can watch one of the search dogs work the area and mark the presence of human remains.

## Community Education Classes and Annual Spring Byway Tour

Jerry Eichhorst

Photos by Mark Worthen

After a two-year absence due to COVID, I resumed teaching three Boise Schools Community Education classes. All classes sold out with 20-25 participants in each. It was great to be back sharing the trails across Idaho with so many new and interested people, several of which joined OCTA and the Idaho chapter.

Many of the participants joined me on the annual spring byway tour held on

Saturday, April 23. This was the largest byway tour I have led with 45 people and 24 vehicles in the group. The line of vehicles often stretched for about a mile on the dusty roads. The Mountain Home DAR group joined us for the tour and hosted lunch for the group at the small Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery on the Oregon Trail north of Mountain Home. They provided brauts and hamburgers while everyone else brought salads, sides, and desserts to

share. It was a fun lunch and will hopefully become a regular feature of future byway tours.



*Mountain Home DAR group hosted lunch at Sweetbriar Vineyards and Winery*

After lunch, the group headed west to search for several graves along the Oregon Trail and follow the trail west to Canyon Creek and Ditto Creek.



*Byway tour group exploring the Oregon Trail*

The Canyon Creek stage station is looking great after so many years of hard work to restore the structure. Hopefully the BLM can arrange for windows and doors to be installed soon.



*Canyon Creek Stage Station*

The next stop was Ditto Creek where I talked about the possible massacre of a wagon train in the area. We then hiked up the road to Inscription Rock where the Jeffreys-Goodale route met the main Oregon Trail.

Chapter member Mark Worthen, an excellent photographer, had a great picture of some of the rock formations at Ditto Creek (below) enlarged and framed. Paul Dinwiddie joined us as we went out and gave the framed picture to the ranch owner a couple of weeks after the tour.



*Picture framed and given to Ditto Creek ranch owner Steve Damele*

## Annual Southern Idaho Activities

Jerry Eichhorst

Photos by Jeanne Young and Jerry Eichhorst

This year's annual southern Idaho outings and fall chapter meeting were held Thursday, May 12 through Saturday, May 14. On Thursday afternoon, we met at the City of Rocks (COR) National

Reserve Visitor Center then traveled east a few miles to private property on the California Trail. COR Assistant Manager Tara McClure-Cannon and Resources Program Manager Shalene Dickard joined us to do metal detecting on a half mile section of the California Trail. A group dinner was held that evening at a Burley steak and seafood restaurant.



*IOCTA Group metal detecting on the California Trail near Massacre Rocks*

Several small artifacts were found as shown in the following pictures courtesy of Jeanne Young.



*Artifacts found metal detecting on the California Trail*

On Friday, we drove east to American Falls and started a tour of the Oregon Trail from below the dam to Massacre Rocks State Park.



*The monument above, with plaque detail below, was installed in 1915 by the American Falls Woman's Club to mark the Oregon Trail through the area.*



We picked up Oregon Trail remnants a few miles west by the county landfill. A large piece of flint was found in the area showing signs that it had been worked to chip off pieces for making arrowheads.

Continuing westward we searched for possible trail remnants without finding much



until west of Rock Creek Road. This location was shown to me many years ago on a previous IOCTA outing and contains excellent trail remnants climbing over a small ridge as shown in the picture below.



*Oregon-California Trail rut crossing a small ridge*



*Map showing route of Oregon Trail over small ridge where Oregon Trail is labeled*



*Rock grooved by wagon wheels*

Traveling west a few more miles, the group met with Massacre Rocks State Park manager Travis Taylor to do metal detecting at a park location where the trail climbs a ridge. Unfortunately, the area appears to have been excavated for pipelines and other work through the years so historic artifacts were not found.



*Dan Lute, chapter member and expert metal detectorist*



*Oregon Trail and Lander Road ruts with I-86 and the Snake River in the background*

After the metal detecting, I led the group to the Register Rock area and showed where the Oregon Trail crossed Rock Creek and a name on a large boulder which I found several years ago. After a discussion of the Indian attacks in the area, the group headed back to their hotels in Burley and a group dinner at a local Mexican restaurant.

The annual spring chapter meeting was held at Perkins Restaurant in Burley on Saturday morning. There were 17 people in attendance. Dave Price and Don Wind, chapter preservation officers, gave excellent presentations on the numerous wind farm and powerline projects being planned and developed across southern Idaho. Updates were also provided on the Lanes Grave and Fort Boise sign projects. OCTA President and IOCTA member John Briggs provided an update on the national organization and the recent symposium in San Diego. Shalene Dickard provided an update on the projects and restoration work being done at City of Rocks.

Once again, the three days spent in southern Idaho were a great experience for all who attended. I look forward to repeating the fun next May in cooperation with our friends at the City of Rocks National Reserve. The Oregon and California Trail activities, group dinners, and chapter meeting are always a lot of fun. I hope you will join us next year to share the fun and develop friendships.



# *Diaries Across Idaho*

By Jerry Eichhorst

## Fort Hall Later Years

By the mid-1850's, Hudson's Bay Company had abandoned Fort Hall due to spring flooding and problems with local Indians. Trappers continued to work the area well into the late-1860's, but the Fort Hall site was no longer a trading post to replenish the depleted supplies of the Oregon and California emigrants. Frederick Lander bypassed Fort Hall with his road which went directly from Ross Fork to the crossing of the Portneuf River, leaving Fort Hall several miles to the west of the new road. An interesting book about life in the Fort Hall area in the 1860's is [Trails of Early Idaho: The Pioneer Life of George W. Goodhart](#) by Abraham C. Anderson.

This evening I rode forward on the old Fort Hall road to take a look at the old place. I found it deserted & going to decay; Not a Soul was on the premises—The Pickets are all down & an air of desolation reigns around... It is beautifully Situated on the Bank of the Snake, in a delightfull, large & fertile bottom which affords, fine grazing & I think would produce fine crops of wheat, if properly Cultivated... It is Certainly a fine Situation but a few years will See the Place entirely deserted

Winfield Scott Ebey, July 31, 1854

Forts Hall and Boise are among the things that were, having been washed away by the high water this spring.

Edward U. Bliss, July 22, 1862

Learned that Ft. Hall the object of our many enquiries to have been a British trading post of the Hudson Bay Co. and for several years deserted and now not even a cabin left of it—and its site several miles from the Sanders [Lander] Road.

Albert Wakefield, August 2, 1862

About 11 o'clock we passed opposite Fort Hall which [is] a bout 6 miles from the road on our right the Fort is Vacated & some of the buildings de stroyed but will be re paired a gain

J. S. McClung, August 6, 1862

Our road led us down the river a mile to Fort Hall, where we remained for a few days, resting

our teams before we cross the desert and make some changes... We here sold one wagon and all of our cattle and some more flour.

Harriet A Loughary, July 15, 1864  
[preparing to take the Jeffreys Route across Idaho]

We camped at night near Old Fort Hall. There is nothing left but the ruins of several adobe buildings, a few graves, and several bodies (or beds) of old freight wagons. In its palmiest days it must have been a small affair. Had the Indians been hostile, no place could have suited them better for an attack. The stage company has two mowing machines at work cutting hay. We were told they had five hundred tons in stack and were still cutting. A goodly number of stacks was in sight. There appeared to be enough left to last them the whole year were they so disposed.

Julius Caesar Merrill, August 27, 1864

Left Fort Hall some 10 miles to the right. Started down the south side of Snake River.

James Henry White, August 10, 1865

The train left camp as usual. I left at 5 o'clock on the pony, intending to go to Fort Hall for mail. Got to Gibsons Ferry in two hours and a half. Crossed the river to Gibson's Ranch and found that Fort Hall was no more and that Fort Hall Postoffice was at his ranch.

Stewart Bates Eakin, Jr., July 17, 1866

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### **IOCTA Officers and Directors**

|                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
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