

# TRAIL DUST

Newsletter of the Idaho Chapter of the  
Oregon-California Trails Association



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OCTA Convention, Pendleton	July 21-25
OCTA Symposium in Salt Lake City	March 2025
OCTA Convention in Pueblo, CO	September 2025

# Message from the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Winter is finally releasing its hold and spring is on the horizon. It will soon be time to be back on the trails.

OCTA video master Richard Hunt recently accepted the position of Executive Director of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. Richard and I created our first OCTA YouTube video in the summer of 2022 as we worked our way east across Wyoming on the way to the Casper convention. I have enjoyed working with Richard to make several more videos.

He has done a fantastic job getting the OCTA YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@octatrails>) rolling and successful. We should all appreciate his hard work and wish him well in his new endeavor. I'll miss working with him.

Meanwhile, I have recruited a new videographer to work with me to create videos for the Idaho chapter. John McVey has been a long-time member who faded away, but recently let me know he wanted to get more active again. Knowing his strong interest in photography, I twisted his arm to help with the videos. I am sure it will take some time to practice and learn but we will figure it out and John will do a great job. Thanks John!

The Community Education classes I taught in Boise were sold out and overflowing again this year. I had 20-25 people in each class. There was a lot of interest and several new members have already joined OCTA and the Idaho Chapter.



## Upcoming Events



I look forward to taking many of them on the Annual Byway Tour on Saturday, April 27. Everyone is welcome to join the tour. We will have a potluck lunch at the Sweetbriar Winery north of Mountain Home which is always fun. The cost is only \$5 per person which goes to the winery to pay for the cost of the hamburgers and brats they provide. Everyone should bring a side/dessert to share and their drinks. Please RSVP to me if you would like to go.

In May we will have our annual outings at City of Rocks. Unfortunately, our long-time partners at the Reserve, Park Manager Wallace Keck, and Archaeologist/Assistant Manager Tara McClure-Cannon, have recently left the park. This year will be an opportunity to meet new people at the park and share our interests with them. We are planning to unveil the paintings of City of Rocks created by

artist Nicholas Lowe on Thursday afternoon, May 16. The Idaho, Utah, and CANV chapters split the cost of professionally framing the pictures.



*Paintings of Nicholas Lowe*

On Friday, May 17, we will do metal detecting on the California Trail going up Circle Creek Canyon into the park. This is a section of the California Trail we found last year. It has excellent ruts and some rough trails. It will involve a half-mile hike from the main road in the park. Of course, any artifacts found will be tagged, bagged, and given to the City of Rocks people for display in the visitor center.



*California Trail in Circle Creek Canyon*

Interested in coming down to the City of Rocks activities but don't know what to expect? Here is some information to help.

The roads in the park are good gravel roads. Restrooms are not available in the area where we

will be working so people will need to drive to local pit toilets in the park.



I have arranged a discounted rate at the Fairfield Inn in Burley. The rate is \$119 per night, which is \$20 less than the regular rate. Please see the article elsewhere in this edition with details for making reservations with the discount. My thanks to Dave Nebeker and the Burley Fairfield Inn for arranging this rate. Thanks!

Many of the chapter members get together and go to dinner on Thursday and Friday nights in Burley. Traditionally we have gone to Morey's Steakhouse on Thursday and El Caporal Mexican Restaurant on Friday. It is a good opportunity to socialize and make new friends.



The spring chapter meeting will be held on Saturday, May 18, at 10:00 am at the Perkins Restaurant in Burley. Nicholas Lowe will be the guest speaker, talking about his journey on the California Trail duplicating the paintings of James F. Wilkins, an artist on the California Trail in 1849.

## Fairfield Inn Burley IOCTA Rate

The Fairfield Inn in Burley has given us a special room rate of \$119 per night which is \$20 per night less than the normal rate. Please thank them and make your reservations early.

Here's the link you can use to make reservations:

[Book your group rate for Oregon-California Trail Assoc.](#)

You will find the information for your online reservation link below. If you have questions or need help with the link, please do not hesitate to ask. We appreciate your business and look forward to a successful event.

Event Summary:

Oregon-California Trail Assoc.

Start Date: Wednesday, May 15, 2024

End Date: Saturday, May 18, 2024

Last Day to Book: Wednesday, May 1, 2024

## Presentations

I will be speaking to the Malheur County Historical Society in Vale, Oregon, on Thursday, May 9.

I will need to develop a new presentation about the Oregon Trail in their area for the event. I understand they have several very knowledgeable members, so I hope to learn something interesting from them as well.

I will be speaking in May to the residents of Morning Star Senior Living of Boise, one of the largest retirement communities in the Boise area.

In October I will be speaking to the Idaho Genealogy Society for their annual meeting in Boise. We share a love of history and I look forward to presenting the Oregon and California Trails in Idaho to these new groups of potential members.

## Possible Activities

I am currently planning the remaining activities for the summer and fall.

One of the activities I am considering is a tour of the Silver City area in the Owyhee Mountains south of Nampa. Although not on the emigrant trails, this is a very interesting area with a lot of history. The possible tour would go to Ruby City, Silver City, Fairview, and War Eagle Mountain. I used to lead tours of the area and thought it might be interesting to offer this to the chapter. Please let me know if you would be interested in this tour in early June.

A chapter activity that is planned but with no date yet is a preview of the July pre-convention tour. I committed the chapter to lead a pre-convention tour to help the Northwest chapter with its Pendleton convention. I drafted the tour and led several people on the route last fall. Paul Dinwiddie has agreed to lead the tour and will be augmenting the materials and leading a trial run of the tour in June or early July. Details will be available on the chapter website when they are available. Contact Paul for more information.

Another activity being considered is using cadaver dogs to search for a lost grave on the California Trail where Little Goose Creek joins Goose Creek in northern Nevada. The rancher told me his father and a worker found the grave many years ago. It was a flat rock-lined grave with a body inside. Unfortunately, it was lost 75 years ago when the Army built a road across Goose Creek for a defense site in the hills. I have some clues from a book that may help locate the grave.

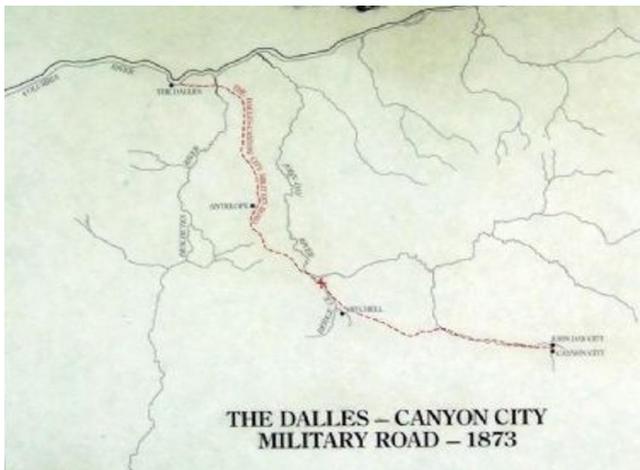
This location is close to Record Bluff which is always an interesting site to visit.



*Names carved in ash sandstone at Record Bluff with recent graffiti.*

We did a tour of the Jeffreys Route in INL a couple of years ago. We would like to go back to see more of the area and possibly find the emigrant graves along the Lost River.

I have been talking with a rancher who lives near John Day, Oregon, about an outing on the Dalles-Boise Military Road from Antelope, Oregon, to John Day/Canyon City.



This would be a remote and challenging trek with 60 miles of backroads but would be very interesting. The old road has an interesting history of fraud and lawsuits. The rancher tells me there are good remnants of the old road.

I have also been talking with BLM people in Kemmerer, Wyoming, about bringing cadaver dogs to check a couple of possible graves they found in the area.

I would also like to do more treks in eastern Idaho, following the Oregon Trail from the Wyoming border to Fort Hall, and make videos of these outings. It has been many years since the chapter went over Big Hill and the West Sheep Creek Hills. That would be a great trek. I have also been talking with my friend, Leo Ariwite, about doing a trip from Chesterfield across the Fort Hall Reservation over Mount Putnam to the original Fort Hall site. That is always a great trip.

It could be a very busy and interesting year. Check the calendar in this issue to see more events for the year and follow the chapter website ([www.IdahoOCTA.org](http://www.IdahoOCTA.org)) calendar page for the latest details. Be sure to check out the chapter Facebook page and the OCTA YouTube channel as well.

See you on the trails.

## **2024 Convention Planning Underway**

By Roger Blair, Convention Chair (extracted from NW Chapter newsletter)

Mark your calendars to attend the 2024 OCTA convention at Wildhorse Resort and Casino, July 21-25, 2024, in Pendleton, Oregon. The resort is operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

Sunday, July 21, will be devoted to the annual board meeting, with an evening welcoming reception. Monday morning will begin with a general membership meeting. Chuck Sams, National Parks Director, has been invited to give

the keynote address, although it has not yet been confirmed. OCTA has a long-standing relationship with NPS, and Chuck is a member of CTUIR. Monday afternoon will be devoted to talks, followed by Authors Night and reception.

Tuesday and Wednesday are tour days, with a choice of three tours. One tour will take you along the general route of the earliest route of the Oregon Trail, from the Blue Mountains to Whitman Mission and on to the site of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River. A second tour will take in CTUIR's Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and end at Whitman Mission. Plans are still in process to include a stop in Walla Walla at the US Army's Fort Walla Walla. The third tour will take those interested to Baker City to visit the newly renovated National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, which will re-open on May 24, after a few years of closure. This tour may also include a stop on the way to walk in trail ruts at Blue Mountain Crossing Park.

In lieu of a longer tour, those interested may take a guided hike along trail remnants near the Mt. Emily interchange along I-84. Alternatively, some may wish to take a Pendleton downtown tour to Pendleton Woolen Mill, Happy Canyon Museum, Heritage Station Museum, and Pendleton Underground. These alternate activities will be limited in number and utilize smaller shuttle vehicles. Also, they will not be offered both

Tuesday and Wednesday, as the longer tours will be. Each will be one day, one on Tuesday and the other on Wednesday.

On Tuesday night a program is planned for a demonstration of local Indian dancing and drumming, followed by a music scholar presenting a musical program based on her book, *Music in the Westward Expansion: Songs of Heart and Place on the American Frontier*, weaving together first-hand accounts and songs of the 1800s American West with musical selections played on the courtship flute, piano, and guitar. Following Wednesday's tour, the evening will conclude with the annual Awards Banquet. Thursday will have morning and afternoon speakers, followed by an evening Farewell Banquet with the always highly anticipated Live Auction.

Throughout the week there will be the usual OCTA table, book room, and raffle. There will also be a pre-convention tour on Sunday, July 21, visiting western Idaho and eastern Oregon trail sites led by the Idaho Chapter. Finally, for those heading home via a westerly route on Friday, July 26, a Pendleton to The Dalles post-convention tour will showcase important trail segments and sites to the west.

## **OCTA Symposium, El Paso, March 12 -16 2024**

John Briggs

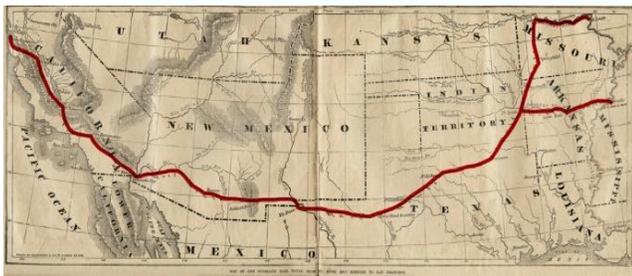
### **The Trails**

El Paso sits at the Crossroads of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and the Southern or Butterfield Overland Mail and Emigrant Trail.

The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro runs from Mexico City, through Ciudad Juarez, El Paso, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe to the San Juan Pueblo in New Mexico.



The Southern Overland Mail and Emigrant Trail (Butterfield) runs from St Louis and Memphis to California.



While we were not able to see any ruts in the long-since built-over urban and suburban areas of El Paso we were able to visit some of the sites important to those routes. The opening reception was held at Abara House - The El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro's National Historic Trail's Oñate Crossing. Oñate's expedition crossed the Rio Grande here in 1598 recommending Spanish 'expansion' into New Mexico as a result. Today the Border Wall runs on the perimeter of the grounds of Abara House.

We were also able to visit three important sites southeast of El Paso.

The Presidio Chapel of San Elizario was the first of these.



The Historic District here also contains a Butterfield Stage Station, though now a private residence.



Two other Missions in this area (El Paso's Mission Trail) that we were able to visit were at Socorro and Ysleta. The Butterfield Trail passed through both.

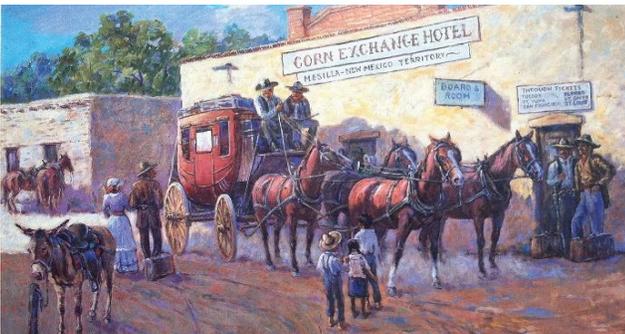
To the north of El Paso lies Mesilla which was also on the Camino Real and the Butterfield.

It was the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 that attracted early settlers to Mesilla. It was established as a colony by the early 1850s, around the time that the United States and Mexico settled the boundary dispute that arose from that treaty. The settlement, known as the Gadsden Purchase, was effectuated on November 16, 1854, in Mesilla by taking down the Mexican flag and raising the United States flag.



In 1861, troops led by Confederate Col. John Baylor captured Fort Fillmore, just outside Mesilla. After defeating the Union troops Baylor named the town of Mesilla as the capital of the new Confederate Territory of Arizona. The Civil War ended in Mesilla in 1862 after Colonel Baylor and the Confederate troops retreated to Texas.

The painting below of the Butterfield Stagecoach at Mesilla is by Cliff Donaldson and features on the web page of Mesilla's La Posta – the same structure known as the Corn Exchange in the 1800s.



La Posta de Mesilla today is a fine restaurant located just off the central Plaza where this information board can be found,



### Billy the Kid

Both San Elizario and Mesilla also feature Billy the Kid. Billy broke into the jail in San Elizario and escaped with his friend, Melquiades Segura. Later he was tried and jailed in Mesilla (the jail was opposite La Posta) before being shot by his one-time friend Sheriff Pat Garret. Note, however, a tintype taken of the Kid in either 1879 or 1880 showed him with his holster and pistol on the left side. That led to a well-known movie starring Paul Newman as "The Left-Handed Gun." However, Billy was actually righthanded; the famous tintype (it sold for \$2.3 million) was reversed!

### The Railroads

The discovery of gold in California led Congress to plan the First Transcontinental Railroad to cross the 'simple' route across what is now Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Ultimately the route through Utah was selected and completed in 1869. Despite that – the Southern Pacific was built from southern California through to Texas. At the same time, The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe built from Kansas, through Colorado to Santa Fe intending to build through to California. This they were able to do in 1881. The Southern Pacific continued building east and in 1883 linked up with the Galveston Harrisburg & San Antonio. Railroad making El Paso a major hub.

### Other Sites visited.

Other visits were to the historical Concordia Cemetery (El Paso's Boot Hill),



*John Wesley Hardin's Grave at Concordia*

the Magoffin House was built by Pioneer James Magoffin in 1875



*A room in the Magoffin House*

and the Chamizal National Memorial celebrating the successful land swap of 1963 that resolved a border dispute that had spanned 100 years.



*Information Center at the Chamizal N.M.*



*The swapped areas.*

We also visited the Tigua Pueblo in Ysleta. At the Cultural Center, we enjoyed an exhibition of Tigua dance. The museum displays artifacts and pottery with photographs and videos representing 300 years of Tigua history since their move here from Albuquerque during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.



Many interesting subjects covered by our lecturers and guides included: Early El Paso, the US-Mexico War, the various surveys seeking a railroad route to California, Fort Bliss, the Salt Wars, and the April 1598 'First Thanksgiving' celebrated when the Onate expedition reached the Rio del Norte near San Elizario.

Cecilia Bell talked about Military Life in the Old SW from a wife's perspective and John Bell spoke on the subject of illness, especially tuberculosis on the Trails. Dan Judkins covered the exciting life of Henry Skillman, Mail Carrier, and Stage Driver. Doug Hocking entertained us with his 'Escape from Mesilla'.

A novel approach to identifying potential Trail remnants presented by Mike Bilbo involved cryptobiotic crusts that, according to research by Jayne Belnap, seem to favor undisturbed historic trails. Different species require different periods of time to develop. You can read more about cryptobiotic soil crusts on the NPS website, <https://www.nps.gov/glca/learn/nature/soils.htm>.

# Diaries Across Idaho

By Jerry Eichhorst

## California Letter

Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children traveled across the country to the gold fields of California. The hope to “strike it rich” drove men to pack up their families and risk death in a struggle across the plains and deserts of the American West. I focus on the diaries of the treks west but occasionally come across something about life in California or Oregon which I find interesting. The following description paints a picture far from the peace and wealth hoped for.

Aaron Abbott wrote a 4-page letter on September 18, 1852, after arriving in California. This letter is held at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. His brother James died along the way to the east of Salt Lake City. While in Salt Lake City, Abbott tried to sell his brother’s possessions.

*While at Salt Lake I disposed of most of James’ clothing and tools to the best advantage that I could... I found no sale for James’ rifle and revolver at S.L. and here they are of no value in market. All that James owns of value is the undivided one fourth of three horses wagon and harness*

*I might speak of the Mortality upon the Plains this year but I hardly know what to say. I have heard different estimations of the number that have died, some setting it as high as 5000 but I think this quite too high. I think one thousand would be a low estimate, perhaps fifteen hundred would be nearer correct.*

*For every nation on earth is here represented. The Chinaman is here with his umbrella hat and loose breeches. The Chilian, the Spaniard, the German. I have seen emigrants from fifteen states while on the road.*

*The Doctor, the Lawyer, the Merchant all had to bear their share of the fatigue and the Preacher too Where is the Preacher I have not seen a Preacher on the Plains nor since I arrived in California*

*I have seen too, more Fiddles than Bibles more Cards than Hymn Books more Dirks and Pistols than Book for the cultivation of morals heard more swearing than Praying heard of several murders and nine cases of lynching in all of which cases the Judges were chosen the jury called the Sheriff appointed witnesses sworn and all the trial conducted with proper order in most of these cases the prisoners have confessed their guilt and then they were hung up by first running two wagons together so as to rear the tongs against each other between which the Prisoners were swung.*

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