

Explore the Oregon Trail

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The proposed scenic byway east of Boise is a Sunday drive with a history lesson

Streams of dust floated off the Oregon Trail Scenic Byway, and you could only imagine how it was for pioneers to travel this hot, dusty and rugged route across Idaho.

The route goes on pavement and gravel from Glens Ferry to Bonneville Point east of Boise.

It gives you a vivid picture of how tough it was for immigrants - although you're in the comfort of an air-conditioned car. Get out and hike and you'll really get a dose of historic reality.



Teapot Dome, which can be seen from the Oregon Trail near Mountain Home, was a landmark for pioneers.

"This route provides the traveler with excellent access to the ruts created 160 years ago in a setting that has not changed much since," said Jerry Eichhorst, who has been marking the Oregon Trail for six years and wrote a guidebook about the byway.

"People can hike on the trail, climb the hills and choke on the dust in the heat of the summer," said Eichhorst, who has been a member of the Idaho Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association for about 12 years.

Eichhorst has been working on the byway with the trails association and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management for about two years.

The state Scenic Byway Review Committee gave its approval for the route this spring, and the Idaho Transportation Department has to make a final decision, Eichhorst said. He expects it to be approved. Designation is a formality.

Posters will be developed for the Blacks Creek and Bliss rest stops along Interstate 84. Other interpretative signs and maps will be posted in Glens Ferry and along U.S. 20.

The guidebook, which is key to driving the byway was a cooperative effort between the trails association and the BLM.

Even though the byway's status is not finalized, you can drive the scenic route.

Along the way, you'll see wagon ruts carved 2 feet deep into sagebrush-covered hills; Teapot Dome, a mountain north of Mountain Home that was a landmark for the pioneers; the remnants of old buildings; and creeks that were important watering holes.

You'll feel the hot sun beating down on you and curse the incessant wind.

You'll know why - after all of the hardships on the trail - one woman pioneer refused to budge after coming all the way across the country. They say she got mad and burned one of her husband's wagons.

The byway definitely gives you a taste of the Oregon Trail and a history lesson close to Treasure Valley.

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