

TRAIL DUST



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

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Upcoming Activities

Boise Schools Community Ed Classes	
Oregon Trails Wyoming to Fort Hall	Feb 26, 2025
Main Back Country Byway	Mar 5, 2025
North Alternate of Oregon Trail	Mar 12, 2025
OCTA Symposium in Salt Lake City	April 15 - 17, 2025
Annual Byway Tour	April 19, 2025
City of Rocks	May 15 - 17, 2025
Spring Chapter Meeting	May 17, 2025
OCTA Convention in Pueblo, CO	September 7 - 12, 2025
OCTA Convention in Chico, CA	TBA 2026
OCTA CONVENTION IN BURLEY, ID	2027

Message from the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

In our last issue, I wrote about concerns of damage to the Oregon Trail from the huge Durkee fire in eastern Oregon. The fire burned nearly 300,000 acres including an area with the Oregon Trail north of Vale, Oregon.

On August 29, I toured the burned area north of Vale with Kari Points and Craig Schaefer of the Vale BLM office. It was great to meet two new partners for the Oregon Trail. We had an interesting day and found a new section of the Oregon Trail.

The fall chapter meeting was on Saturday, October 12, at the Idaho Pizza Company in Boise. It was an excellent meeting focusing on preservation, re-election of officers, and beginning to think about the 2027 convention to be held in Burley. I hope that many chapter members and others will volunteer to help with the convention. Having many people involved in the convention will make the workload easier for everyone.

The next weekend I spoke to the Idaho Genealogy Society Annual Conference. There was a lot of interest in the Oregon and California Trails in Idaho and several people told me they were going to join OCTA and the Idaho chapter. Engagements with this type of group are important because we share a love of history and these people are potential new members.

In late October we revisited the lost grave on Little Goose Creek. We brought the cadaver dog back as well as ground penetrating radar to accurately mark the location of the grave. It was a great day with pleasant late fall weather. I have been snowed out of that area on a previous October day.

I am putting the schedule of activities for next year together. The Boise Schools Community Education classes are scheduled for February 26, March 5, and March 12. Registration will open in December at the Community

Education website at BoiseLearns.org. The classes usually fill up quickly.

The annual byway tour will be on Saturday, April 19. We will again have a potluck lunch at Sweetbriar Winery north of Mountain Home. The tour usually has about 40 people and 20 vehicles. It is a lot of fun. Even if you have done the tour before, consider joining it again to share the fun. It is always good to have Idaho chapter members on the tour to talk with the guests.

Our annual City of Rocks activities will be May 15-17. On Thursday, May 15, we will mark the section of the California Trail we found last year in lower Circle Creek Canyon. On Friday, May 16, I will lead a tour of the California Trail from its start at Parting of the Ways on Raft River to Malta. The chapter meeting will be held on Saturday, May 17, at the Perkins Restaurant in Burley. I'll reach out to the Fairfield Inn and Suites to get a special rate in the spring.

I am considering several other activities including

- Marking the section of Oregon Trail north of Vale discovered this fall after the Durkee fire.
- Going over Big Hill in eastern Idaho. This is something the chapter has not done in many years. It would likely include following the Oregon Trail from the Wyoming border to Soda Springs and possibly going over Mount Putnam on the Fort Hall Reservation.
- Exploring the Goodale's North remnants north of Eagle

Please let me know if there are other places you would like to go. Please watch the [chapter website calendar page](#) for details of these and other activities.

I hope you have a great winter. I'll see you on the trails in the spring.

Durkee Fire Impact on the Oregon Trail

By Jerry Eichhorst

When our last issue came out, I wrote about the concerns of damage to the Oregon Trail from the huge Durkee fire in eastern Oregon. The fire burned nearly 300,000 acres including an area with the Oregon Trail north of Vale, Oregon.

On August 29, I toured the burned area north of Vale with Kari Points and Craig Schaefer of the Vale BLM office. Some of the roads we were on may be the Oregon Trail, but the road had been graded and well-traveled for many years. Unfortunately, when the Durkee fire raged at 20+ mph in the area, the road had been used as a firebreak so the sides had been graded to widen the road.



The fire burned up to the Tub Springs site but did not damage the fencing or signs.

One pleasant surprise was finding an excellent section of Oregon Trail ruts, uncovered when the brush was burned off.

I talked with Craig about exploring and marking this newly found section of Oregon Trail ruts next year. It should be an interesting hike on a section of Trail never known about previously.



Kari Points and Craig Schaefer at Tub Mountain swales fenced in site



The road was graded on both sides to serve as a firebreak



Newly found Oregon Trail ruts north of Vale, Oregon

Little Goose Creek Grave Confirmation

By Jerry Eichhorst

In late June, the Idaho chapter traveled to northern Nevada on the California Trail to search for a lost emigrant grave. Lori Blackburn's excellent cadaver dog, Cagney, found a location and indicated human remains.

On Thursday, October 24, several IOCTA members returned to the site near the mouth of Little Goose Creek. Lori and Cagney returned to recheck the area. Travis Thomsen, a Senior Geotechnical Technician and Field Manager for Shannon & Wilson, came out with a ground penetrating radar (GPR) machine. We picked up the rancher, Eric Bedke, and his son, Ryan, in Oakley and headed south on Goose Creek Road. It is always interesting to listen to the ranching stories Eric tells on the drive.



Travis then searched that area with the GPR and confirmed an anomaly in the soil the size of an adult grave at a depth typical for an emigrant grave.



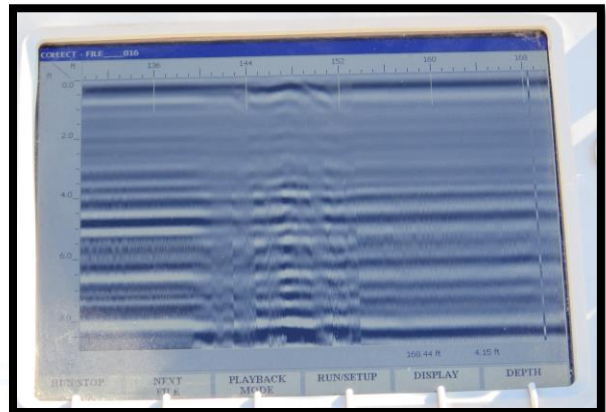
Eric Bedke



Travis Thomsen and Eric Bedke

When we reached the site, I asked Eric to talk about the history of the ranch and tell the story of his father excavating the grave many years ago. I hope to put a video together of the outing for the OCTA YouTube channel with this material over the winter.

Cagney went to work and indicated on the same spot she had done in June.



GPR image showing an anomaly in the soil

The Wake of the Prairie Schooner by Irene Paden (1943) claims the headstone read "Our Jessie." The book Only the Mountains Remain by Nora Linjer Bowman (1958) states there were two little graves, one with small foot- and headstones. The headstone had "OUR JESSIE 184-" chiseled in the rock.

According to Eric, his grandfather first saw the grave about 1905-1912 and the headstone was for "Ira Jesse." His grandfather purchased the Winecup ranch in 1944 but the headstone was gone by then. When Eric's father excavated and opened the grave about 70 years ago, it contained a skeleton of an adult in a coffin made of flat rocks. There are no flat rocks in the area. A search of diaries and a question for Dick Rieck, the emigrant burials

expert, yielded no emigrant references to a burial in the area.

The group then traveled down the California Trail a mile to Record Bluff, an ashen sandstone bluff with emigrant names carved in the sandstone. The bluff is slowly eroding and being damaged by bees so it is always interesting to see before it eventually disappears.

My thanks to Lori and Travis for bringing Cagney and the GPR machine, to Shannon & Wilson for letting Travis do this work on a weekday as part of their community involvement program, and to Eric and Ryan for sharing their ranch and telling interesting stories.

Goodale's North Remnants

By Jerry Eichhorst

In 1862, Tim Goodale led the largest wagon train in Idaho across the state following the Jeffreys Route. When his wagon train reached Boise, they developed a new route which we call "Goodale's North." This route crossed the Boise River at Boise, followed the foothills westward along what is now Hill Road, and turned north in what is now Eagle. The route continued northward to Cambridge, followed the canyon to the Snake River where it crossed the river on John Brownlee's ferry, and built a road out of the canyon on the west side. That road is still visible across from Woodhead Park. The route went over the hills to the Powder River, then turned west to rejoin the Oregon Trail near the Baker City Interpretive Center. Most of the travel on this route ended up being miners heading east to the mines in Idaho.

I spent time with Jim McGill and Wally Meyer many years ago searching for the Goodale's North route. Jim researched Tim Goodale extensively and wrote a book on Goodale, this large wagon train, and this route. Wally is a long-time IOCTA member and former BLM employee who originally marked much of the Oregon Trail in Idaho. He will say he traveled on the Oregon Trail in a wagon during emigrant days but I suspect that is a stretch. Some of the remnants of the Goodale's North route are north of Emmett, near Crane Falls Reservoir and Indian Valley, climbing out of the Snake River canyon, and in the Powder River valley.

The Idaho chapter has been working with the City of Eagle, Idaho, for a couple of years to identify and preserve any remaining ruts of the Goodale's North

route north of Eagle. A large housing development north of the city will soon encroach on the route.

On Wednesday, October 30, IOCTA members Jerry Eichhorst, Paul Dinwiddie, and Dave Price, Alana Dunn and Shanna Dickson of the City of Eagle, and Allegra Ward, a BLM archaeologist, were led by Wally Meyer to see the remnants of Goodale's North route north of Eagle.

We traveled north on Eagle Road and west on the gravel road in Big Gulch to the crossing of Goodale's North. We were able to follow a two-track road to the south to Little Gulch. Remnants of the route were visible from Little Gulch to the north side of the ridge between the two gulches.

There may be additional remnants to the north of the Big Gulch road which may be explored in the future.

My thanks to Wally for showing us these ruts. The rest of us were not aware of these remnants. It is good to share their location for future generations of rut nuts. My thanks also to Alana, Shanna, and the City of Eagle for their interest in preserving these ruts from impending development.

The Idaho chapter will continue to work closely with Eagle to preserve the remnants. Preservation – West officer Dave Price is now involved in the effort for the chapter



Goodale's North remnant in Little Gulch



Goodale's North remnant crossing ridge between Little Gulch and Big Gulch



Diaries Across Idaho

By Jerry Eichhorst

Fires on the Trail

The smoke from large fires in the West blankets Idaho nearly every summer. July through September are often smokey with a red sun and moon. The smoke may clear for a few days, or in a bad fire year, the smoke settles in the valleys and worsens with time. Sometimes the fires affect the Trails, and unfortunately, portions of the Trail have been bull-dozed as a fire break in years past. We now work with the BLM to ensure they know where the Trails are and the information is in their fire manuals to avoid similar situations in the future. Sometimes the fires burn off the brush and expose unknown sections of Trail such as that discovered this year north of Vale, Oregon, after the Durkee fire. Emigrants on the Oregon Trail encountered fires as well.

Tonight we had the magnificent though terrific spectacle of the burning prairie. The country for miles was one continuous sheet of flame borne on by a high wind. We had noticed a dense column of smoke during the day, but it was not until night and its nearer approach that we witnessed the scene in its full splendor. The fire came near to us but we were protected by streams of water. The Fort horse guard by whose carelessness the fire occurred, narrowly escaped with their cattle, taking refuge on an island in the "Portneuf".

*Theodore Talbot, Sept 15, 1843,
near Fort Hall*

In the most places where the grass was thick enough for fire to run, the surface had been burned over and we travel in an odor of scorched willows.

John Minto, Sept 6, 1844, Bear River Valley near Soda Springs

Saw the prairie or river bottom on fire, the first sight of the kind we have seen since leaving the Little Blue river.

Anonymous (Wild Rover), July 9, 1851, near Marsh Creek along Snake River

Fire was raging in the timber all around us, making the air very smoky. At night this could be seen for miles around.

Julius Caesar Merrill, August 5, 1864, Lander Road summit west of Sweetwater River

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IOCTA Officers and Directors

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