

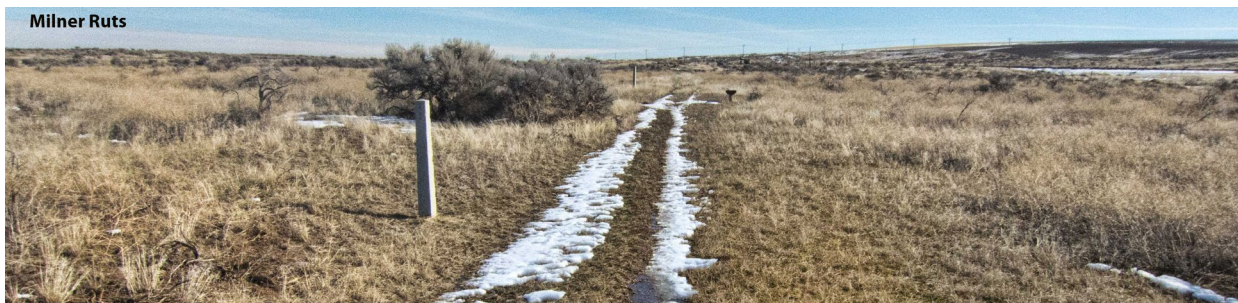
TRAIL DUST



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

Vol. XXXVIII Issue2 John and Nancy Briggs, Editors, Summer 2026

Milner Ruts



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Upcoming Activities

Annual Model A Oregon Trail Tour	Saturday September 12th
OCTA Board of Directors Meeting, Chico, CA	Monday, September 14, 2026
OCTA Convention in Chico, CA	September 15-18, 2026
IOCTA Fall meeting in Boise	Saturday October 24th 2026
OCTA Symposium in Omaha	April 9-11, 2027
OCTA Convention in Burley, Idaho	September 13 – 16, 2027

Message from the President

By Jerry Eichhorst

Every day, Microsoft OneDrive sends me an email with pictures which were stored on my computer on this date in years past. Normally they are of the grandkids or travel. Sometimes they are of IOCTA outings. Today's email brought a smile to my face as it was a cake decorated like a wagon wheel from when I spoke last year at the Walmart in Meridian, Idaho.



IOCTA member Mark Seyb is the Store Manager and asked me to speak on an Employee Appreciation Day. We have since set up the process to use Walmart's Program Good where Walmart employees help volunteer organizations and the organization gets a donation from Walmart. I need to set up a marking outing to start using such a generous program. Thanks Mark!

I spoke to the Owyhee County Historical Society in May. Eriks Garsvo is the museum's Director. He has been doing an incredible job in growing the museum and its collections. He was recently gifted a huge wrench collection and the Mike Hanley wagon collection. Mike has been building and restoring historic wagons for many years and has a collection of over 30

wagons, buggies, and sleighs. IOCTA member Mike Gurr and I helped Eriks and a crew of about 10 other volunteers move eleven of the wagons to the new wagon barn at the museum. It will be an incredible display when it is completed. I encourage you to visit the museum. For more information, visit <https://owyheemuseum.org/>.



Owyhee County Museum Wagon Barn

The chapter had an amazing four days in southern Idaho on the California Trail. Details are available in another article in this issue. The activities and dinners were a lot of fun. If you missed it this year, plan on going next year since it is an annual event. We created a great video of the activities which is available on the OCTA YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S83jwXZRjtc>

I encourage you to watch this video and give it a "Like."

The spring chapter meeting was on Saturday, May 24, in Burley. About 25 people attended the meeting, including OCTA Manager, Travis Boley, who was visiting to see the Burley Inn Convention Center and meet with the Convention Center Manager.

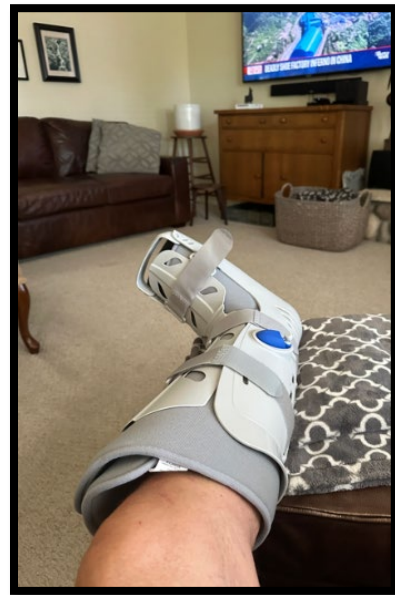
The annual Model A Oregon Trail tour was scheduled for Saturday, June 27. It was postponed due to inclement weather, which was a good thing as we had strong winds and torrential rain all weekend. The tour has been rescheduled for Saturday, September 12. We will be meeting at the Fort Boise Replica in Parma at 8:30 am and touring the Fort Boise site and Oregon Trail sites in the area up to Vale, Oregon. Lunch will be in the Vale city park. Touring with antique cars is always fun.



Model A cars at Mayfield on 2024 tour

I recently took several members of the BLM and Idaho SHPO out to view emigrant graves in the Mountain Home area. We have had a lot of turnover in both organizations so it is important to let them know where these burials are located. It is always good to improve our relationships with our partners. Our local BLM partners posted the

day on their Facebook page, and it went all the way to the [Department of Interior's page](#). The post was also picked up by several newspapers and online news services. Many have referenced the cadaver dog video we created a couple of years ago. [Grave Dogs!](#)



Unfortunately, we are not having our usual monthly activities this summer because I am dealing with a broken foot and unable to get out on the trails for a few months. Please have patience and come out and join us when activities resume this fall.

Please watch the chapter calendar page (<https://idahoocta.org/calendar>) for more information.

Preservation Summary

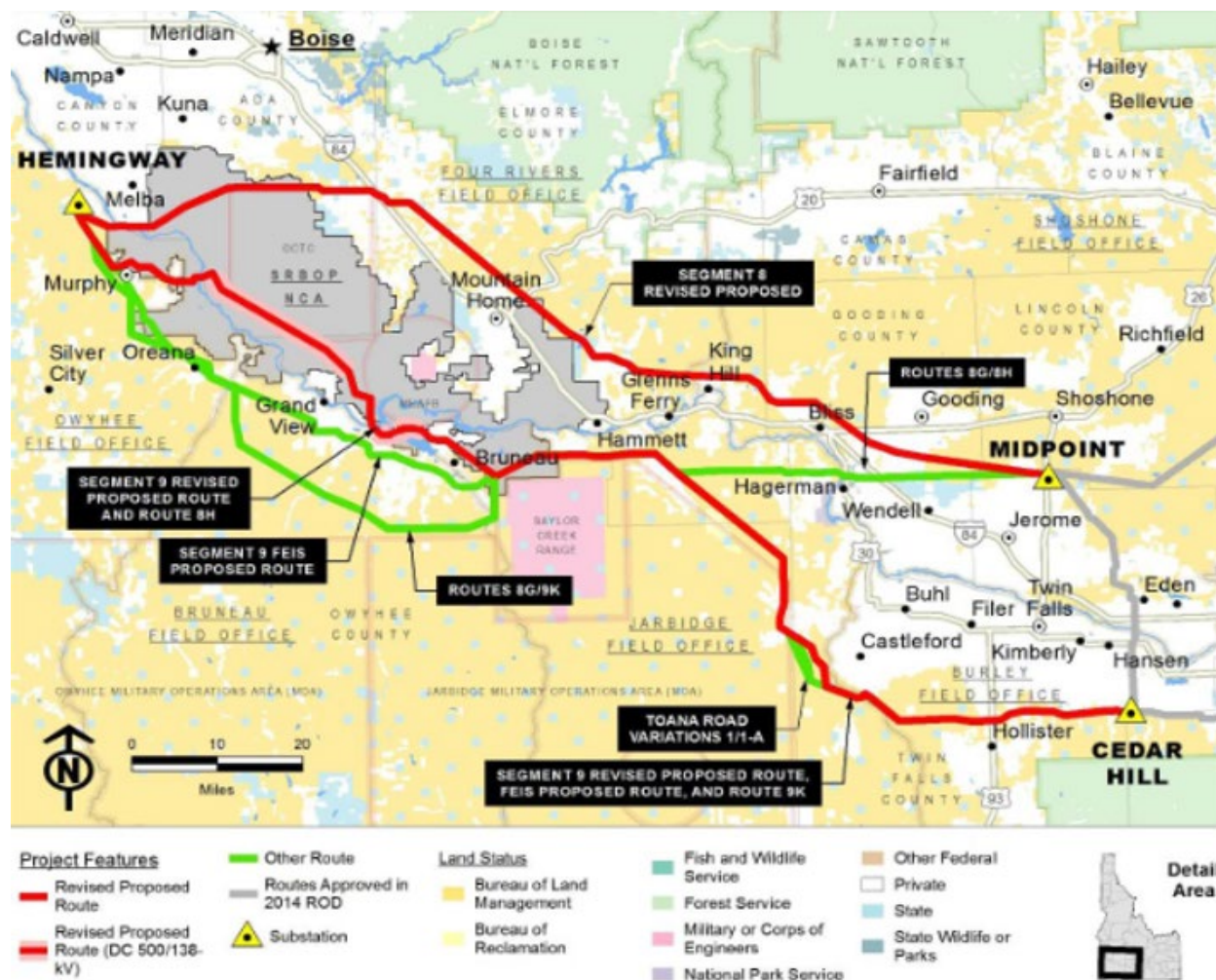
By Jerry Eichhorst

Preservation projects are a major concern for OCTA and the Idaho chapter. We are blessed to have two preservation officers, Don Wind and Dave Price, who do a fantastic job in

reviewing and commenting on a multitude of projects. Dave has been working on the B2H (Boardman to Hemingway) transmission line project with Dave Welch of the Northwest

chapter for several years. They negotiated a precedent-setting mitigation agreement which will benefit OCTA, the Idaho and Northwest chapters, and tourists visiting the interpretive sites in the future. The next phase of the mitigation is to add to or improve Oregon Trail interpretation from the Fruitland Rest Area on I-84 to Vale and on to Farewell Bend. Thanks to all our preservation people for your many years of dedicated hard work.

There are numerous other projects the chapter is involved with as well. One of the biggest is the Gateway West transmission line project which will continue the B2H transmission line east from the Hemingway substation near Murphy, across Idaho and into Wyoming. I led a tour in June of BLM, Idaho Power, and PacificCorp people to show them the Oregon Trail and North Alternate Oregon Trail sites which will be impacted by the transmission line.



Gateway West Map

We are also involved with the Bluebird Solar project which will involve a large solar farm close to the Oregon Trail northwest of

Bonneville Point outside Boise. The developer has graciously moved the solar panels away from the Oregon Trail at our request. We appreciate this kind of

cooperation. We are still working on the mitigation agreement and hope to be able to fence some pristine Oregon Trail ruts near Bonneville Point.

Another large project is the Southwest Intertie Project which will transport power from the Twin Falls area to near Elko, Nevada. Both projects have impacts on the Oregon Trail, California Trail, alternate routes, and freight roads along their corridors. There are many more solar, wind, and geothermal projects which may impact the trails as well.

Support from the chapters is critical to assist the National Preservation team. Trail preservation efforts within the Idaho chapter have always been a team effort. Additional help is always welcome. Dave and Don will be happy to help you learn the ropes and bring you up to speed.

Please let me know if you are interested in being part of the team to help with these preservation projects.

Devastating Threat to Preservation

By Jerry Eichhorst

Congress and the House of Representatives are currently developing bills which would dramatically change how projects would be reviewed and potentially allow such historic features as emigrant trails to be destroyed without involving state and local governments, Tribes, interested parties, or the public in the discussions and project reviews.

"The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is the only federal agency whose sole mission is promoting preservation of America's historic places. We help guide federal agencies in reviewing and addressing the effects of federal actions on historic properties. The ACHP also advises the President and Congress on historic preservation policy and fosters public awareness of the benefits of historic preservation." This is a quote from the home page of the ACHP website, <https://www.achp.gov/>.

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 ensures that state and local governments, State Historic

Preservation Offices, interested parties such as Tribes and OCTA, and the public are included in discussions and reviews of undertakings with a federal nexus.

However, the ACHP is currently pursuing a comprehensive revision of Section 106 with the intent to streamline the administration and approval process. In this revised process, the federal government agency such as the BLM, will no longer be required to include outside entities in the review process. They MAY include them if they choose to but will not be required to include them.

In addition, the ACHP proposal would drastically shrink the scope of reviews for historic properties to those which "include, or has included at some point in the past, tangible human improvements", and is "geographically compact". According to the ACHP proposal, "noncompact, unimproved natural features such as mountains, valleys, bodies of water, or landscapes, including ethnographic landscapes, do not qualify as

[historic] properties for the purposes of section 106.”

This means that all visual, atmospheric, and audible effects will be eliminated from consideration. Emigrant trail viewsheds are one of the primary concerns that OCTA considers for projects we get involved with. These would no longer be considered under the new proposal and thus OCTA would no longer be part of the consultation and review process.

Reasonably foreseeable cumulative effects would no longer be considered either. This is a huge factor for the Idaho chapter as we have dozens of transmission line, solar, geothermal, and wind projects potentially affecting the emigrant trails across our state, many in close proximity to others. Yet failure to consider the cumulative effects of these projects could be disastrous for the historic trails.

The ACHP proposal also potentially guts the involvement of State Historical Preservation Offices (SHPO). Formerly, SHPO organizations were tasked by the NHPA Statute to

(5) advise and assist, as appropriate, Federal and State agencies and local governments in carrying out their historic preservation responsibilities;

(6) cooperate with the Secretary, the Council, and other Federal and State agencies, local governments, and private

organizations to ensure that historic property is taken into consideration at all levels of planning and development;

In the new proposal, State Historic Preservation Offices MAY have a consultative role in the section 106 process for those limited historic properties which fall into the new scope, but the federal agency is not required to include them.

The same situation applies to local governments, Tribes, and interested parties such as OCTA. They MAY be included in the consultation but are no longer required to be included in the process.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (<https://savingplaces.org/>) is leading the effort to ensure that this legislation does not gut the ability to preserve America’s historic sites. I encourage you to visit their website for more information. They have recorded webinars discussing this legislation.

Although the legislation has not yet been passed, this is a potential threat which needs to be actively challenged. It has the potential to eliminate the ability to preserve the Oregon and California Trails, as well as other alternate routes and freight roads.

OCTA is watching the legislation closely and will produce an organizational response once the legislation is completed. Please be ready to contact your Senators and Representatives to encourage them not to make these ACHP changes.

Annual City of Rocks Activities

By Jerry Eichhorst

The Idaho chapter has a long partnership with the City of Rocks National Reserve (COR) in southern Idaho. We have visited COR every year for at least 10 years, exploring the California Trail sites, discovering and

marking the California Trail, metal detecting camping areas and stage station sites, and searching for emigrant graves with cadaver dogs. There is a lot of interesting Trail history in the area with hundreds of emigrant names

written on the numerous granite rock formations.



Emigrant name on Chicken Rock which will soon be available to the public

This year, May 20th – 23rd, was an exceptional outing. COR recently purchased the Circle Creek Basin, a major California Trail camping area.



Part of Circle Creek Basin

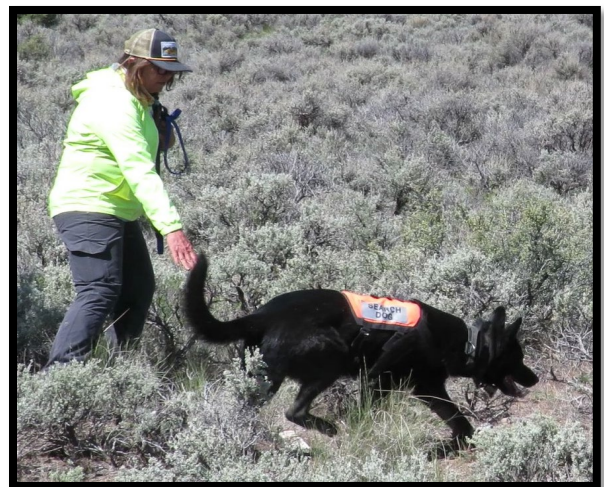
The area had been an island of private land in the center of the reserve.

I recruited about ten metal detectorists from the Treasure Valley Metal Detectors club, and three cadaver dog handlers.



Metal detectorists getting instructions from NPS archaeologists before searching Circle Creek Basin

Together with five National Park Service archaeologists, teams searched much of the south side of the basin, helping conduct a survey of the area which COR is required to conduct on the purchased land.



Deborah Hurlburt with her search dog at work

Several ranching and farming artifacts were found, as well as a section of hand-forged chain, possibly from California Trail days. Several possible human burials were found or confirmed by the search dogs. I hope we will have the opportunity to continue the survey in the future.

I led a training tour on Wednesday, May 20th for one of the pre-convention tours for next year's OCTA convention in Burley.



May 20th tour group at DUP Where Trails Meet Marker

The next day I led a tour of California Trail and Salt Lake Alternate sites in the City Of Rocks area.

On Friday, I led a training tour for the COR bus tours for the convention. It is good to get the training work done early to not be scrambling next year.



Discussion of the day's activities

Aldis Garsvo, a friend of mine I worked with 15 years ago to develop the interpretive signs for the Main Oregon Trail Back Country Byway, is now doing video production and creating some great videos for the Western Heritage Association and the Owyhee County Museum. He filmed our tours and days at COR. He got some great interviews with the NPS and COR staff and the activities and tours. All of it was melded together through creative editing to create a great video of our COR activities. The video is now available on the OCTA YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S83jwXZRjtc>

Diaries Across Idaho

By Jerry Eichhorst

Goose Creek Mountain

Author's Note: The Diaries Across Idaho feature is resuming with this issue, but changing in scope. Since the Idaho chapter will be hosting the National OCTA convention in September 2027, we will be featuring areas from some of the tours which will be offered in an expanded Diaries Across Idaho until the convention. See the [Spring 2025 issue of Trail Dust](#) to

read about Parting of the Ways on Raft River which will be on one of the pre-convention tours and the Oregon Trail from the East bus tour.

After the California Trail emigrants left City of Rocks, they were joined by emigrants on the Salt Lake Cutoff at the upper end of Emigrant Canyon. The route then turned

southwest and climbed a gentle grade up the Goose Creek Mountains to Granite Pass.



Granite Pass looking east toward City of Rocks

A small spring still exists near the top of the pass. A long, steep, and dangerous descent followed as the California Trail wound around the mountains to a final descent sometimes referred to as “Devil’s Grave.” Deep swales from the wagons can be seen in many places on the west side of Granite Pass.



Granite Pass looking west toward Goose Creek Valley



Deep California Trail swale going down from Granite Pass

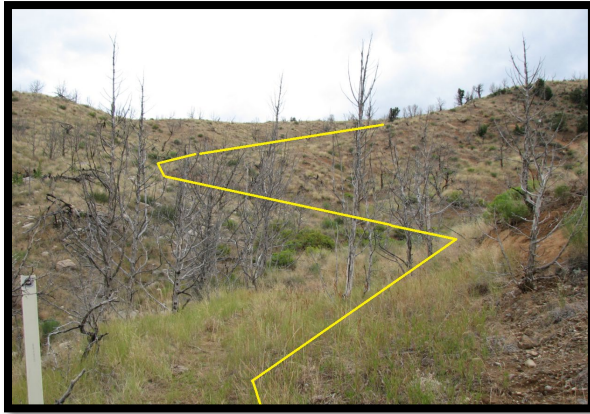
As they neared the final portion of the descent, many emigrants used ropes tied around juniper trees to lower their wagons to the Birch Creek valley below.



Rope scars on juniper tree trunk

The rope scars are still visible on several tree trunks at the top of the final descent. Other emigrants simply turned their wagon loose and hung on for a wild ride to the bottom.

They would cross Birch Creek valley and another small hill before reaching Goose Creek which they would follow upstream for several days.



Later zig-zag route down the final descent

A pre-convention tour and a post-convention tour will visit Birch Creek and the Devil's Grave descent.

Diary Entries

Friday, August 14 - Traveled today 16 miles, some part of the way bad road through ridges of Snake River Mountains, and camped at a spring in a narrow gap of the mountains with knobs ahead of various shapes and form. 16 miles.

Saturday, August 15 – Traveled 7 miles over very broken ground and road rough to Goose Creek...

Virgil Pringle, 1846

...drove over bad hills had to let our waggons down with ropes. encamped on Goose Creek Saturday

Dr. warren Hough, June 29, 1850

We was on the start at half past five. All well. We suppose we have traveled 28 miles today. The roads has been very

tedious and crooked and one of the wildest looking countries I ever saw. We passed this morning 2 small creeks and passed a fine spring on top of a mountain at an elevation of a thousand foot high. About 3 miles from this spring, we had to come down 2 very steep plains[?]. Some of the teams had ropes to steady the wagons down. We came 15 miles and took our nooning at Goose Creek.

George Bonniwell, July 9, 1850

...came on three miles and watered at steep hill creek a clear beautiful mountain stream this runs between t[w]o very steep hills though the ascending quite short good wood and grass here desended a long hill and and[sic] gained the top of another still longer which disclosed to view the most ragged rugged mountains but what I had previously seen was merely a prelude and now we are trying the realities of the rocky mountains after wending our wagons over hills and rocky defiles we came to a steep mountain called the devils grave we had the good fortune to reach it before dark and reached the bottom in safety which is not the fortune of all this is a place where three year[s] ago the emigrants were obliged to let thier wagons down with ropes and it is not to be wondered at to gudge[sic] from its condition now as it is worse than all the bad places put together that we have found on the road it is perpendicular in places twenty feet besides being deeply gullied and the wagons look as if they would turn bottom up on the horses came to a small creek [Birch Creek] at the foot of a hill...

Caroline L. Richardson, August 3, 1852

Had some very rough road today. Came near getting our wagons smashed coming

down the mountain to Goose Creek. Traveled fifteen miles today and camped on Goose Creek. Good grass and water.

Elizabeth Ann McAuley, August 10, 1852

About noon we commenced crossing the Goose Creek mountains, ascent gradual and easy but the descent very long with steep pitches. One place was so steep that many had let their wagons down with ropes. We however locked all our wheels and slid down without difficulty and camped upon Goose Creek a stream of good water about 10 ft wide and 2 ft deep This being a main camp ground the grass is very much eaten off

William Henry Hart, 1852

We are now passing through the Goose Creek mountains, and the formation of the mountain tops is so entirely different from anything we have seen that we almost forget that this is not our first view of wildness and beauty, but how can I describe scenes so strangely varied?

...we emerge from a narrow pass through which we have been toiling and an entirely new scene is presented...The tops of these mountains, instead of terminating as they usually do, in a conical or pointed form, appear as if a giant mason has used his trowel and a broad, smooth plate of table land lies spread before us like a beautiful green meadow interspersed with cedars.

But these mountains afford us anything but good roads and indeed in some places they seem almost impassable. At one steep, craggy, winding hill I looked down with perfect horror and remarked to Mr. White that this hill seemed to say, "So far shall thou go and no farther." He said, "No indeed, it would surely take something worse than that to stop us." And so it proved, for soon, with wheels locked and ropes attached to the heavy wagons, we were all safely landed at the bottom; but sure am I that no traveler, having once descended this hill, will ever forget it.

Harriett Sherrill Ward, 1853
Reminiscence



Looking down one of the final descent routes

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