



THE FIFTY-NINER
Newsletter of the Colorado Chapter
Oregon-California Trails Association
Winter 2006

Upcoming events

- July 15: Day trip from Laporte, Colorado along the upper portion of the Cherokee Trail into Wyoming. This trip will begin at Vern's Place in Laporte for a short business meeting and election of officers.
- October – Columbus Day weekend: Overnight trip beginning at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site in La Junta.

New members

Welcome to our new chapter members:

- Joyce Everett and Jim Allison – Loomis, California
- Lloyd Gundy – Arvada, Colorado
- Timothy Kelly – Broomfield, Colorado
- Vern and Carol Osborne – St. George, Kansas
- Lethene Parks – Vancouver, Washington
- Bernie and Janet Rhoades – Edgewood, Washington
- Lynn Wodell – Centennial, Colorado. Lynn is the Open Space Manager for Arapahoe County, Colorado and its representative as a new institutional member of OCTA.

Chapter activities

As a result of the membership questionnaire circulated with the Fall issue, a meeting was held on January 28 at which committees were formed to expand the activities of the chapter. Further participation by chapter members is welcome and if you are interested in serving on any of these committees, the contact information is noted below:

- Preservation: Ernie Witucki, Chair; Gail Campbell, Chuck Lowrie, Sharon and Hal Manhart, Carolyn Moree, Bruce Watson. *Contact: ewitucki@msn.com*
- Event planning: Winnie Burdan. *Contact: wburdan119@aol.com*
- Membership development: Nancy Houtz, Chair; Sharon and Hal Manhart. *Contact: njhoutz@comcast.net*
- Publicity: Carolyn Moree. *Contact: cmoree1@netzero.net*
- Newsletter and website: Camille Bradford. *Contact: bradford@usa.net*

Election of chapter officers

By Camille Bradford

As noted above, we will hold elections for chapter officers at the July meeting in Laporte. The OCTA Bylaws provide for each chapter to have a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. I have been the Acting President and Treasurer since the reactivation of the chapter last year. While I have enjoyed doing so, I hope that

other chapter members are interested in holding either or both of these positions. Please notify me by June 1 if you are interested in any of the chapter offices or if you wish to nominate any other individuals. I will send out ballots prior to the July meeting so that those who are unable to attend will be able to vote by mail.

Event planning

By Winnie Burdan

I volunteered to be the event coordinator for the chapter at the first meeting in 2005. My husband and I retired here to Denver 25 years ago after his 30 years in the Air Force. We have always had an interest in the west, and we were fortunate to be able to join the Ghost Town Club of Colorado and the Denver Posse of the Westerners where we have been members of both clubs for many years. We have been over the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to Santa Fe and the Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon, and there are still many places that we have never seen.

When we met in January, it was decided that since we will be the Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter we should concentrate this year on exploring the Cherokee Trail here in Colorado. The objective is going to be identifying and installing signage where possible along the Cherokee and other trails that traveled through Colorado. These trails are becoming very fragile with all of the building going on, and we shouldn't lose track of our western heritage, which is disappearing rapidly. We want to work with local and the State historical societies very closely to preserve these places.

Last year our first trip was very successful as we traveled up to the three forts along the South Platte River. The museums are doing wonderful things with interesting plans in the making and if you haven't been to Ft. Lupton or Ft. Vasquez, you need to take time to visit them.

As the Event Chairman, I am not planning on choosing or leading all of our trips and explorations. I am hoping that all of you know people and places throughout the state that would be of interest to us. The most important part would be if you would be willing to work on these trips with me, and would be willing to share this information with the chapter. I will help anyone who can lead a trip. They do not have to be for a week, but perhaps we could do a picnic at a historical spot, or explore places close by Denver for the day etc. Most important, do you know someone who has a farm or ranch where there are wagon tracks still visible? An event coordinator can't do it all without help and support from other members.

With this in mind, Ernest Witucki volunteered to lead a trip this spring/summer from Laporte, Colorado along the upper portion of the Cherokee trail into Wyoming. He will be sending out information about it later. The second trip planned for October will be either a two or three-day trip down to Bent's Old Fort near La Junta. The Cherokee Trail joined the Santa Fe Trail northwest of Wichita and then turned northwest at Bent's Fort on up to Wyoming. Everything is in the planning stages as yet, so if any of you can contribute information about this area, I would appreciate it.

It is amazing to realize just how many historical trails and branches came through Colorado. There was the Santa Fe Trail, the Taos/Trappers Trail, Cherokee Trail, Oregon trail and the Smoky Hill Trail plus the many branches and even the numerous cattle trails that came up from Texas to Montana. We also tend to forget that Zebulon Pike explored Colorado in 1806 and do you know where he was camped at Christmas here in Colorado? His centennial is being observed in 2006-07, so it would be interesting to follow his trail through the state. We do have many fascinating and interesting trips we can travel, we just need to know what everyone is interested in doing and how many of you will be able to help with them. We are looking forward to seeing all of you on the trail to somewhere this year and most importantly helping our chapter to grow.

Change of chapter name

As noted in the Fall issue, various members of the national board have suggested including "Cherokee Trail" in the chapter name in order to recognize its significance and route through Colorado. At the January 28 chapter meeting a resolution was adopted to change the name to "Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter." This resolution requires final approval by the national board at its next meeting, March 17-19 in Phoenix.

Candidates sought for national board

By Glenn Harrison

Serving on the OCTA Board is a great opportunity to serve the members and the organization. Each year the members vote on candidates for four of the twelve three-year positions. The board meets twice a year. The meetings for 2006 will be in Phoenix in March and in connection with the OCTA Convention in August. There is partial support for expenses for the midyear meeting.

In August 2006 terms expire for David Vixie, Glenn Harrison, Lethene Parks, and Frank Tortorich. Frank is completing his second term, so is not eligible to run this year. Glenn is now the Vice President and chooses not to run for the board. Dave and Lethene are eligible to run for a second consecutive term.

If you are interested in serving on the board, be sure to apply. If you know someone who would be a good board member, encourage them. OCTA Board members serve at-large, so the location of residence or chapter affiliation is not a requirement. Candidates need to submit:

1. Information about the nominee's trail qualifications and experience and the extent to which the person has participated in the affairs of OCTA.
2. A written endorsement from three (3) additional OCTA members.
3. A written statement from the member being nominated indicating his or her willingness to serve actively on the board if elected.
4. A brief statement (approximately 100 words) of what you would like to see the board accomplish in the next three years and how you will help OCTA reach its goals.
5. A photo of the candidate which could be used in publicity.

You may contact a chapter president or one of the members of the Nominating and Leadership Committee for further assistance. All nominations should be mailed or e-mailed by April 1 to:

Glenn Harrison, Chair
Nominating and Leadership Committee
1132 30th Place SW
Albany, OR 97321-3419
541-926-4680
harrison@cmug.com

Call for national award nominees

By Donna Fisher

It is time to think of those whom you feel should be nominated to receive awards at the annual meeting in St. Joseph, Missouri. It is important we each take time to nominate our fellow members or those who have contributed in the preservation of the trail and the promotion of OCTA's goals. Below is a list of the awards and qualifications for each award. If you have questions please contact me and I will be happy to help you. The success

of OCTA is due to the many dedicated volunteers who work to improve and strengthen the organization, preserve existing trail ruts and historic resources, and educate the public about OCTA and America's historic trails. OCTA's awards program is a small way to recognize and thank these individuals for their dedication. Deadline for submission of nominations is June 1. Please send, fax or email your nominations to:

Donna Fisher
740 West 47th Street
Casper, Wyoming 82601
Fax: 307-472-4331 • Phone: 307-265-6890
E-mail: dfishr1@bresnan.net

- **Meritorious Achievement Award** - the highest award OCTA can give to recognize long-term and significant contributions to OCTA. Only members can qualify for Meritorious Achievement.
- **Distinguished Volunteer Award** - bestowed on OCTA members who contribute significantly to achieving OCTA goals and projects. Only OCTA members can qualify for Distinguished Volunteer.
- **Distinguished Service Award** ~ granted to organizations, businesses, government agencies, individuals, or others who contribute or participate in furthering OCTA's programs directly or provide substantial support in a non-affiliated way to trail preservation and education.
- **Friend of the Trail Award** - presented to groups, individuals, or organizations that have direct ties to lands over which historic trails pass. Neither property ownership nor current residence on trail property is required, but emphasis is placed on preservation of trail remnants, education of the public about their historic resources, and allowing responsible public access to the historic resources.
- **National Certificates of Appreciation** - presented to individuals and organizations that have made a particular effort in achieving a short-term OCTA goal. These certificates are for efforts of national scope; more regional or local efforts should be recognized by appropriate chapters.
- **Young OCTAN Award** - presented to children and youth between the ages of six and twenty-one who have demonstrated particular interest in OCTA and the history and/or preservation of historic emigrant trails. The nominee will have demonstrated this interest by an activity in the field or via a school or class project in such a manner that is considered outstanding and far above the typical field or school project. The project may also be an outstanding personal endeavor undertaken on the nominees own initiative. An entire class or group of school-aged children may be nominated as one aggregated nominee. Qualifying standards would include participation in OCTA meetings, outings, and/or work projects over an extended period. OCTA membership is not a requirement.

Raffle items needed for national convention

Calvin and Sandy Smith, chairpersons of the raffle for the national convention in August, are seeking donation of items for the raffle. Items to be donated can either be mailed to them in St. Joseph by June 1 or brought to the convention. If you would like to make a donation, please contact them either by e-mail: mrcls@stjoelive.com or by regular mail: 2509 Shirley Drive, St. Joseph, MO 64503.

Smoky Hill Trail landmark designation

The City Council of Aurora, Colorado voted on February 6, 2006 to erect a landmark for the Smoky Hill Trail to recognize the significance of the route of the trail. As reported in the *Denver Post*, the proposal for the landmark designation was presented by Gordon Davis, Executive Director of the Aurora History Museum, whose great-grandfather traveled on the trail in the 1860s. The article (see page 5) also noted the work of Clarice Crowle and the Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society in connection with seeking recognition of the trail by the National Trails System. Clarice is also a member of OCTA and our chapter.



Karl Getring | The Denver Post

Gordon Davis stands on a hilltop in eastern Aurora near where he wants a sign to commemorate the Smoky Hill Trail. The historic trail came directly to Denver and was more hazardous than the Oregon or Santa Fe trails. It was heavily used from 1850 to 1870.

A route to remember

Wagon-wheel ruts are gone, but a sign is sought to mark the Smoky Hill Trail

By Jeremy Meyer
Denver Post Staff Writer

Aurora — Not long ago, Gordon Davis could scale a small dirt hill in southeastern Aurora and point out marks of history carved into the ground almost 150 years ago by wagon wheels on the Smoky Hill Trail.

Those 140-year-old ruts are gone, wiped away recently either by erosion or from heavy machinery working in the fast-developing region.

Davis hopes a sign on Smoky Hill Road stating the historic significance of the trail will become a lasting reminder of the route that brought thousands of settlers into Denver during the mid-19th century.

"If we can provide a little bit more information to those thousands of people who use that road every day, it might make commuting a little more pleasurable," he said.

Davis, executive director of the Aurora History Museum, proposed that a Smoky Hill Trail landmark be erected across from the southern entrance of the new Southlands Mall. The sign would stand a grasshopper's leap from where the old wagon ruts could be

seen about a year ago. That was before Smoky Hill Road was widened. The ruts couldn't be saved anyway, Davis said, because they were on private property.

Nevertheless, the landmark designation would be the first meaningful recognition in Colorado of the Smoky Hill Trail, said Clarice Crowle of the Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society.

"That's the main thing, something to say you are on the Smoky Hill Trail," she said.

Crowle has been working on getting the trail recognized by the National Trails System, which protects and officially commemorates historic routes throughout the United States.

"Historically, (the trail) is extremely important," she said. "We had the Oregon Trail and the Santa Fe Trail, but this one came directly to Denver. ... The Smoky Hill Trail was the most direct one, and it was the most dangerous."

The Smoky Hill Trail, which began in Leavenworth, Kan., according to Kansas Historic Trails, split into three routes at Limon, coming into Denver on what is now East Sixth Avenue, Smoky Hill Road and South Parker Road.

It was shorter than the Oregon Trail or Santa Fe Trail, but it also had fewer water sources

and bisected vast Indian hunting grounds, resulting in more attacks, according to "The Smoky Hill Trail," by Kansas historian Betty Radcliffe Jackson.

Nevertheless, settlers, supply wagons and overland mail services regularly traveled the route from 1850 to 1870, until the Kansas-Pacific Railroad connected Denver to the Eastern United States.

The Aurora Historic Preservation Commission last summer began looking into a landmark site designation.

Davis presented the idea to the City Council at a study session this month. The city's attorneys were asked to examine whether a sign would impede future development. It won't, said City Attorney Charlie Richardson. The council will vote whether to approve the sign at its Feb. 6 meeting.

Davis has a bit of personal history invested in the project. His great-grandfather Wilber Fiske Stemmons traveled the trail in the 1860s, on his way from Missouri to Central City — where he failed to strike it rich.

Staff writer Jeremy Meyer can be reached at 303-820-1175 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com.

Oregon Trail quilt



*Photograph courtesy of Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, Golden, Colorado.
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Members interested in quilting as well as trail history will be interested in a beautiful quilt in the Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum. The quilt, entitled *South Fork of the Oregon Trail*, was created by Pat Hubbard, for which she received a 2000 Artist Fellowship Award from the Colorado Council on the Arts.

Ms. Hubbard, a Colorado artist, was one of 332 artists who applied for an award and the quilt placed first in the Folk Arts category.

Her interest in creation of the quilt was inspired by her great-grandparents, who moved to the Colorado Territory in the 1800s and lived on the prairie near the Pawnee Buttes. The South Fork of the Oregon Trail went past the Pawnee Buttes.

The Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum is located at 1111 Washington Avenue, Golden, Colorado 80401.
www.RMQM.org

Oregon-California Trails Association • Colorado Chapter • www.octa-colorado.org

Camille Q. Bradford, Acting President
11515 Quivas Way • Denver, CO 80234
303-460-0371 • bradford@usa.net