

## THE FIFTY-NINER

Quarterly newsletter of the  
Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter  
Oregon-California Trails Association  
September 2008

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### UPCOMING CHAPTER EVENT:

Saturday, November 8:

- 10:00 a.m.: Convention planning meeting at the First National Bank Exhibition Building in The Ranch - Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex, Loveland.
  - Lunch at Nordy's Bar-B-Que & Grill.
  - 1:30 p.m.: Chapter meeting at the First National Bank Exhibition Building. Election of chapter officers will take place at this meeting.
  - For further information and to RSVP, contact: Ernie Witucki, Convention Chair: [ewitucki@msn.com](mailto:ewitucki@msn.com) or 720-323-8458.
  - The Ranch is located east of I-25, Exit 259. Further directions and a map of facilities within The Ranch complex are on the chapter website: [www.octa-colorado.org/calendar.htm](http://www.octa-colorado.org/calendar.htm).
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### *On to Loveland!*

The recent convention in Nampa, Idaho went well and many congratulations are due to Roger Blair and Jim McGill, the Co-Chairs, and to the members of the Northwest and Idaho chapters who helped organize it.

The Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter had a table at the convention to distribute information on the 2009 convention and travel brochures on the area, and to sell convention t-shirts and caps.

Ernie Witucki, the 2009 Convention Chair (left), manned the table and was assisted by various chapter members, including Peggy and Bruce Watson (center and right).



## *Welcome to our new chapter members:*

- Ruth Hall – Indianola, Iowa
- Berl Meyer – Fairdale, Kentucky
- David Serr – Denver, Colorado
- Frank and Mary Ann Tortorich – Pine Grove, California

## *Midwinter Historic Trails Symposium*

*Yuma, Arizona ▪ January 16-18, 2009*

**By Travis Boley**

Be sure to mark your calendar and save the dates of January 16-18, 2009 for OCTA's Midwinter Historic Trails Symposium, which is being held at the Yuma, Arizona Shilo Inn. Great speakers and tours are planned, and OCTA's midyear board meeting will precede the festivities. Start making your plans to attend now!

Paper registrations will be included in a special four-page insert in the next issue of *News From the Plains* (due out in October), but you can register online now at the Yuma Symposium Registration page on the OCTA website: [www.octa-trails.org](http://www.octa-trails.org). If you're already pre-registered, be sure not to pay the registration fee again. Space at the symposium will be limited, and tour spots will be even more limited. If you're pre-registered, you are guaranteed a spot on one of the tours.

Because we had such a strong pre-registration at the Nampa Convention, tours are already half full. So don't delay. Register immediately to ensure your spot at the symposium and on the tour of your choice!

### AGENDA:

#### Thursday, January 15

09:00 am - 11:00 am: New board member orientation at the Shilo Inn

02:00 pm - 06:00 pm: OCTA Board Meeting at the Shilo Inn

#### Friday, January 16

08:00 am - 04:00 pm: OCTA Board Meeting at the Shilo Inn

03:00 pm - 06:00 pm: Symposium Registration/Information at the Shilo Inn

06:00 pm - 09:00 pm: Welcome reception hosted by the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area at Old St. Paul's Church (1550 S 14th Ave., Yuma, AZ 85364) in the Historic District of Old Yuma

#### Saturday, January 17, 2009

07:00 am - 10:30 am: Registration/Information at the Shilo Inn

08:00 am: Welcoming Remarks and Introductions

08:30 am: Don Garate speaks on 'Fr. Kino, the Jesuits, and the Discovery of the Route From Sonora to Yuma'

09:00 am: Joe Myers speaks on 'Juan Bautista de Anza and His Treks During the 1770s'

09:30 am: Mark Santiago speaks on 'Fr. Garces and the 1781 Yuma Massacre'

10:00 am: Break

10:30 am Patricia Etter speaks about 'On the Roads to Yuma: An Incredible Cast of Characters'

11:00 am: Tom Jonas speaks on 'Alamo Mocho Well and the Mexican War Trails of Kearny & Cooke Through Baja California'  
11:30 am: David Miller speaks on 'Emigrants Confront the American Nile'  
12:15 pm: Luncheon, featuring Representatives of the National Park Service National Historic Trails Offices  
01:30 pm: Yuma historian Tina Clark offers her slide show on historic Yuma  
02:00 pm - 05:00 pm: Tour of local Yuma sites  
06:00 pm - 09:30 pm: Banquet, featuring Keynote Speaker Dr. Paul Hutton of the University of New Mexico

Sunday, January 18, 2009

08:00 am - 05:00 pm: Southern Emigrant Trail Tour East Along the Gila River  
08:00 am - 03:00 pm: Historic Colorado River Boat Tour  
10:00 am - 05:00 pm: Historic Colorado River Boat Tour

*Notes from the President*

**By Camille Bradford**

November 8 meetings:



Please plan to attend the November 8 meetings in Loveland. Plans for the 2009 convention are well under way and our Convention Chair, Ernie Witucki, will report at the morning meeting upon new developments since the last meeting on September 14 (left). Mary Ann Tortorich, who will be in charge of registration at the convention, will be at this meeting. Mary Ann lives in Pine Grove, California and has been in charge of registration at past OCTA conventions. We are pleased to have her in this role for the 2009 convention and look forward to the many

suggestions that she will be able to offer based upon her experience at the past conventions. Following lunch, we will have a regular chapter meeting which will also include the election of officers. If you are unable to attend the meeting and are interested in holding one of the chapter offices, or if you would like to nominate other chapter members for any of these positions, please contact me.

Convention Raffle Committee

My role in the convention is limited to serving as the Raffle Chair. In this capacity, I will be actively seeking donation of items suitable for the raffle, silent auction and live auction. Please notify me of any items you would like to donate. My contact information is at the end of this newsletter.

Newsletter articles and photographs

I always welcome your contributions to the newsletter. Please contact me with regard to any articles or photographs that you would care to submit. In addition, I welcome "Letters to the Editor" and any suggestions you might have as to newsletter content.

Membership

The most recent report from Duane Iles, OCTA’s national Membership Chair, showed a decline in memberships to 1,660 in August 2008 from 1,687 in August 2007. The report was accompanied by a message from Duane indicating that the membership contest will begin again, and encouraging all members to participate in the recruitment of new members.

There is no question that increasing the number of members will strengthen the organization and I encourage you to recruit new members who share our passion for the preservation of the trails. Nevertheless, the membership contest conducted over the past year did not achieve the outcome that had been hoped for and it is no less important to focus upon *total membership revenue*, which can be enhanced significantly by existing members upgrading their memberships to a higher category.

As you will note from Duane’s table below, the vast majority of memberships are at the *Emigrant* (individual) and *Pioneer* (family) levels, where the dues are \$45 and \$60 respectively. If you are able to do so the next time you renew, please give serious consideration to upgrading to one of the higher levels – *Trail Patron* (\$125), *Merrill Mattes Society* (\$250) or *Life Member* (\$1,000). A suggestion I have made to Duane to promote life memberships is to allow the cost to be paid in installments – perhaps over two or three years. If you have any suggestions on how to increase membership and membership revenue, please contact Duane directly: [96cruisin@embarqmail.com](mailto:96cruisin@embarqmail.com).

2007-2008	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Corporate	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Emigrant	1,040	1,018	1,017	1,016	1,014	1008	991	1,010
Pioneer	439	422	417	428	425	412	413	417
Institutional	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
Libraries	59	62	62	62	63	59	60	64
Life/Meeker Life	74	74	74	74	73	73	75	75
Trail Patron	42	42	46	42	41	44	45	48
Students	16	15	14	14	14	14	14	14
Educator	6	6	8	8	7	7	8	8
Merrill Mattes	6	6	5	7	7	6	6	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1687</b>	<b>1652</b>	<b>1648</b>	<b>1657</b>	<b>1650</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>1618</b>	<b>1648</b>
2008-2009	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Corporate	3	3	3	4	4			
Emigrant	1,011	1,007	1,004	1,009	988			
Pioneer	415	415	420	415	413			
Institutional	5	6	6	5	6			
Libraries	62	61	61	62	61			
Life/Meeker	75	75	75	75	75			
Trail Patron	50	52	54	54	54			
Students	16	18	19	43	39			
Educator	9	10	10	12	12			
Merrill Mattes	7	7	7	8	8			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1651</b>	<b>1,652</b>	<b>1,657</b>	<b>1,685</b>	<b>1,660</b>			

## *Volunteer Hours*

**By Bruce Watson**

Effective immediately, we as a chapter would like to start accumulating monthly volunteer hours, expenses, and mileage, the yearly aggregate to be forwarded to the national OCTA for the reasons listed below. The following excerpts are from the folks at the national level who accumulate and compile the numbers for an annual report to Congress. The reasons for compiling this information are very beneficial to OCTA, as noted below. Since we are currently involved with both trail research/mapping and convention planning, our contribution to the national organization will be valuable; let's get credit for it.

*"The value of OCTA volunteer hours, expenses and miles driven are based upon a Congressional formula that has no bearing on what the IRS allows member to deduct on their income tax forms. Congress gives us credit as if our volunteer activities were done by federal employees. Then they partially match that value of our volunteer contribution in increased funding for our federal agency trail partners and for Challenge-Cost-Share Projects.*

*Beginning with this Fiscal Year 2008, Congress increased the base line funding for the National Park Service - Salt Lake City trails office by \$260,000. This increase, like earlier increases, is due to our significant volunteer contributions in recent years and the very effective ways that these federal funds are being utilized. This special increase carries forward to future year budgets.*

*Northwest Chapter has a Volunteer Hours & Expenses Coordinator who receives and summarizes their individual/family reports to develop Chapter Totals which are emailed to us, their president and their chapter bulletin editor. Their approach is easier on us and other chapters may want to do the same. We will take this information anyway we can get it. All reports must be received by mid-January to be included in OCTA's Annual Report to Congress.*

*"Hours" include planning time for activities, travel time and actual trail meeting/activity time. Include Challenge-Cost-Share Program volunteer hours used as OCTA's match for these projects. The actual or estimated hours reported can exceed eight hours a day for planning time and long field trips, etc. In late December, we will send you the estimated rate per hour to develop the estimated value of these hours.*

*"Unreimbursed Expenses" include out-of-pocket expenses for ground & air travel (exclude gas & oil purchases if you report Miles), food & meals, lodging or RV/camping fees, parking fees, tolls, materials/supplies purchased for meetings, trail activities, etc. When a bus or rental vans are used for an OCTA activity, those charges are also included. Do not report any federally reimbursed expenses for these activities.*

*"Miles Driven" are reported separately and valued by Congress at the IRS's "business travel expense" rate which we can provide to you in December. Our OCTA annual report to Congress, adds these dollars to the other Unreimbursed Expenses. We also report the Miles Driven as a separate item."*

The form for reports is an Excel spreadsheet that was previously circulated to chapter members by e-mail. It is also contained on the chapter website. Please fill out the spreadsheet for each month (this year) you can legitimately claim volunteer hours, expenses, and mileage, and forward to me at this e-mail address: [bgwatson@comcast.net](mailto:bgwatson@comcast.net). If you need assistance, give me a call: 303-400-9502. Please note that travel to, and attendance at the national convention qualifies for all the categories.

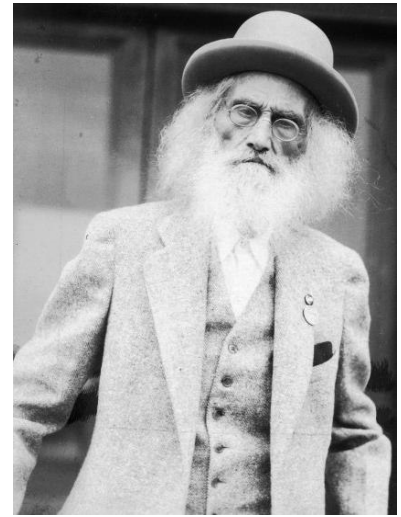


## *Restoring the Lost Trail*

**By Ezra Meeker**

But the work of restoring the Oregon Trail was unfinished. Only a beginning had been made – seed planted from which greater results might follow. There were encouraging signs that the seed had not been sown in vain.

Since 1906, when I began my first trek eastward by ox team, a great change had come over the minds of the American people. Numerous organizations had sprung into existence for the improvement of the roads and for the perpetuating of the old trails and of the memory of the pioneers who had worn them wide and deep. Even on my first trip across the continent by ox team I had secured from a Congressional committee favorable report on a bill appropriating Federal money to mark the Oregon Trail. To carry the measure through, it was necessary that public sentiment for it be kept alive and growing. It was essential also that some practical questions be definitely answered: Where did the old Oregon Trail actually run? What would it cost to mark the historic highway? Where should the markers be placed? What spots along the pioneer way should be preserved as historic shrines?



To secure historical data that would be helpful in meeting these and other practical questions sure to arise, I determined to make another trip with my ox team, not to erect markers but to chart the old trail from the Missouri River to the Pacific. Dave and Dandy were “seasoned” now and ready to go; so on March 12, 1910, off we started again eastward to map definitely the pathway of the pioneers.

How swiftly the hand of time erases the story of the past! This thought was impressed upon me repeatedly as I traveled along over the old trail. I had imagined that nothing could efface the old way to the West, yet for hundreds and hundreds of miles it was completely obliterated. The spreading of farms and towns over the plains, the building of railroads and highways, together with the ravages of wind and rain, had in many places changed the face of the land completely.

Fortunately, some records had been kept that helped in locating the trail. At the state capitals of Idaho, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Kansas tracings of the surveys of townships through which the trail was known to have run were obtained. The surveyors had noted all trails or roads crossing the section or township lines; yet in attempting to put these together to get a complete map of the trail I found a puzzling problem. Some trails were indicated on several section lines in succession, while others would appear on one line and then not be shown again for many miles. Also, of course, it was not always known by the surveyors which was the Oregon Trail, which were later trails, which were merely buffalo and Indian trails.

The problem was met in the spirit of the pioneers, and encouraging results began to come from our efforts. If we could pick up a known point on the Oregon Trail, noted on the surveyors’ maps, and then find another known point, even though many miles distant, we had the general direction, and following this we could locate the intervening points. To make sure we were on the right track, it was necessary to discover visible marks of the old trail itself. Here the earlier settlers and sometimes the Indians gave us valuable help in retracing the parts of the trail we had charted.

This search for the "lost trail" grew more and more fascinating as the work progressed. Almost every day brought the joy of some new discovery. Once I remember finding a remnant of the historic highway running under two fences that lined a new road; the rest of the old pioneer trail had been wiped out by the grading and the plowing of the farms. Again I discovered in an undisturbed sandy stretch where the trail by actual measurement was fully fifteen feet deep and seventy-five feet wide. Through the sage-covered lands I soon learned to recognize the old trail by its countenance, as one might say. The trampling of the sage and other rough vegetation had made it take on a slightly different color from the rest of the country; the hue was unmistakable when one learned to recognize it.

Thus piece by piece the trail of the pioneers was found and charted. It took nearly two years and a half to do the work. I made a round trip over the Oregon Trail with side trips along its various branches. We went down into Texas, where we camped in the Alamo, adjoining that historic spot where David Crockett had been killed. At one time we encountered a veritable cloudburst in the Rocky Mountains in which we nearly lost the entire outfit; I did lose almost all my books and other effects in the roaring torrent that followed the rain. In order to preserve for future generations one of the common pioneer experiences, I crossed over the Loup Fork of the Platte River, about a quarter of a mile wide, while a moving-picture camera recorded the scene. On this trip I had the great misfortune to lose Jim and never get him back. The journey was ended on August 26, 1912, at my home in Puyallup.

All in all this was a more strenuous trip than the previous drive to the national capital, and from a historical point of view it was more prolific in its results. At the end of the journey, during which I passed my eightieth birthday, I had plotted sixteen hundred miles of the historic highway. A map of it nearly forty feet long has been made with painstaking care. The plan was to have this map painted on the inside of a glass case, and on this to show all the markers that have been erected along the trail. Photographs of the markers now erected at various points along the trail have been made with the intent to number and display them in their proper places on the map. It is my hope that such a complete map of this most famous trail of all history may yet be made and placed on view in our national capital as part of a memorial to the pioneers.

As for Dave and Dandy, my faithful oxen, and the old prairie schooner, whose creaking axles and wheels had borne me thrice over the old trail, I determined to give them an honorable shrine, where they might do their part in the perpetuating of history. When the second trip was ended, the state of Washington gladly assumed the responsibility of preserving the pioneer outfit in the State Historical Building at Tacoma. Today the oxen, mounted by a skillful taxidermist, stand in the great glass case as natural as life, under the yoke and hitched to the old covered wagon they had drawn for thousands of miles along the pathway of the pioneers.

But we must not think that the great work of memorializing the old trail was done. It still was only just well begun. There were yet many historic spots along the way to preserve; and I soon learned that finding some of these was a task quite as difficult as the charting of the trail. It was astonishing how some of the famous old landmarks had so entirely disappeared.

Fort Hall is a notable example. This old trading post, planted in 1834 by that enterprising Bostonian, Nat Wyeth, on the Snake River, about ten miles northward from Pocatello, Idaho, was for years a place of rest and refuge for the trail-weary emigrants. On the forty thousand or more acres of rich pasture lands that bordered the river, now covered mostly by the American Falls Reservoir, the travel-worn oxen could feed, while the pioneers rested to gather strength themselves for the hardest part of their journey over lava and sage plains and deserts that stretched on toward the coast. Thousands upon thousands of pioneers like myself had paused at this place; yet when I first returned to find the old post, there was seemingly not a vestige of it left.

Whatever had happened? What could have occurred to wipe out all traces of that old trading post? In 1852 I remember clearly that it stood out there, with its high walls and buildings, and about it were hundreds of abandoned wagons, piles of furniture and other articles cast aside by the emigrants to the West. The old post was not deserted until later years, yet on my return to it during my ox-team trip eastward, the place where it stood was just an expanse of native grasses. I could hardly believe my eyes.

We started an earnest search for the old fort site. It was a baffling hunt at first. No one seemed to know anything about the place. Not far away from where it was supposed to stand were the remains of an old stage station, the chimney of which had been built, someone said, from adobes taken out of the walls of old Fort Hall. From another old settler came a story that explained rather satisfactorily how the rest of the abandoned post had been swept away. According to this pioneer, the Snake and Blackfoot rivers, whose junction is not far north from where the fort stood, had got on a high-water rampage one spring during the sixties, and old Fort Hall had gone down with the flood.

But there surely must be something that remained. I was certain that the site of the post could be discovered, and we went to work at the problem. From descriptions given by one old man, whose sight had failed but whose memory was clear, we were able to locate a spot where it was thought the original Fort Hall had stood. A monument was provided by the people of Pocatello and sent out to mark the place; but the man who was employed to erect it could not get on to the actual fort site because of high water and so left the stone at the old stage station. Before the monument was finally erected, some confusion had arisen in the minds of the people as to the actual site of the old post.

I wanted to gather some more substantial evidence, so I visited the spot again with interested citizens of Pocatello. On this second exploration we had with us an Indian, Joe Rainey, who as a boy had lived with his parents near Fort Hall. Knowing the skill of the red men, I left our Indian guide to his own resources. He took a look over the meadowy stretch and then struck straight for some tall wheat grass that rose above the other grasses. At this spot he stopped and signaled to us to come on.

His quiet remark when we reached the place was, "Wheat grass grow high where white man been. Trading post stood here."

Although he had led us to the very spot previously discovered, we began eagerly to search for evidences to corroborate the red man's decision. The raised ground in rectangular form gave indication of the fort walls; but I wanted further proof. So, taking a spade we had bought, I went to one corner of the supposed fort site, where I thought the blacksmith shop might have stood, and began to dig. It was not long before bits of charcoal, rusted nails, and bits of scrap iron began to appear. We unearthed also some fragments of early-day crockery. More than one hundred such relics, now preserved in a museum in the state of Washington, were discovered at this time. The lost Fort Hall we felt certain had been found. A movement is now on foot to mark this old pioneer post for all time.

- Reprinted from *Covered-Wagon Centennial and Ox-Team Days, Oregon Trail Memorial Edition*, 1931, published for Oregon Trail Memorial Association by World Book Company. *Restoring the Lost Trail* appeared as Chapter 25 in *Ox-Team Days*.
- Photograph of Ezra Meeker courtesy of Howard R. Driggs Collection, Gerald R. Sherratt Library, Southern Utah University.

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