



UPCOMING CHAPTER EVENTS:

- April 26: Meetings and lunch – Greeley
 - June 2: Convention planning meeting – Loveland
 - June 14-15: Preservation Training Workshop – Castle Rock
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April 26 events in Greeley:

- 9:30 a.m.
Special meeting regarding 2009 convention
Island Grill, 801 9th Street
Ernie Witucki, Chair of the 2009 convention, and Travis Boley, OCTA's national Association Manager, will hold a special meeting to discuss plans for the 2009 OCTA convention in Loveland. If you have already volunteered or are interested in working on any of the convention committees, please plan to attend this meeting. All chapter members and guests are welcome.
- 11:30 a.m.
Lunch
Island Grill, 801 9th Street
- 12:30 p.m.
Chapter meeting
Greeley History Museum, 714 8th Street.
The Smoky Hill Trail will be the topic of the afternoon meeting being planned by Dorman Lehman. Lee Whiteley will speak about his new book project on this historic trail. Dorman will have the latest USGS maps showing the trail and he will discuss the new Smoky Hill Trail Association. There is no charge for admission to the Museum.
Museum website: www.greeleygov.com/Museums/GreeleyHistoryMuseum.aspx



RSVP by April 21:

Camille Bradford: bradford@usa.net or 303-460-0371.

Please indicate each of the events that you plan to attend.



Welcome to our new chapter members:

- Sharon Brown – Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Eleanor Craig – Kansas City, Kansas
- Charles and Mary Martin – Richmond, Indiana
- Jeannie Mitchell – Elbert, Colorado
- Richard and Shirley Trevallee – Dewey, Arizona

New life member:

The Douglas County History Research Center in Castle Rock, Colorado has become the second life member of the Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter. We appreciate this generous support of our chapter.

June 2: Convention planning meeting in Loveland

Ernie Witucki and Travis Boley have organized this meeting for further discussion of convention plans with leaders of local organizations who have offered assistance. They are also inviting other local organizations to attend this meeting and become involved in planning for the convention.

Jack and Pat Fletcher will be present to discuss the pre- and post-convention tours.

All chapter members and others interested in the convention plans are welcome to attend this meeting.

- Date: Monday, June 2
- Time: 9:30 a.m.
- Location: Best Western Crossroads Inn and Conference Center, 5542 East U.S. Highway 34, Loveland – at I-25 Exit 257B.
- RSVP to Ernie Witucki: ewitucki@msn.com or 303-987-0158

June 14-15: Preservation Training Workshop in Castle Rock

This two-day training program begins with a classroom session on the first day, followed by a one-day field trip on the Cherokee Trail. Dave Welch, OCTA's national Preservation Officer, Leslie Fryman, California-Nevada Chapter Preservation Officer, and Jim McGill, OCTA's National Historic Trails Mapping Chair, will conduct the Workshop. Chapter member Lee Whiteley has planned the route for the field work on the second day, which will include Russellville, Blackfoot Cave, Running Creek depressions, "County Line" ruts, and Point of Rocks.

OCTA's preservation training program covers three aspects of trail preservation: mapping, marking and monitoring (the 3Ms). OCTA's Mapping Emigrant Trails (MET) Guide is the basis for the mapping portion of the program. The MET guide describes techniques for identifying, classifying and documenting emigrant trails. In the field session, the lessons learned in the classroom are tested in the field. Participants map and classify a trail segment applying MET techniques and establish marking and monitoring plans. Complete information about the program is available on the OCTA website: www.octa-trails.org/preservation/training.html.

Saturday, June 14: Classroom

Douglas County Library, 100 South Wilcox Street, Castle Rock.

- 9:00 Introductory Remarks
- 9:30 Trail Monitoring
- 10:15 Break
- 10:30 Trail Monitoring (Continued)
- 11:30 Trail Mapping – MET Techniques
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Trail Mapping – Continued
- 2:30 Break
- 2:45 Trail Marking
- 3:15 Break
- 3:30 Challenge Cost-share Grants
- 4:00 Plans for Saturday

Sunday, June 15: Field Work

- 8:30 Meet at TBD
- 9:00 Field Work: Mapping, Marking and Monitoring
- 12:00 Lunch in the field
- 1:00 Field Work: Mapping, Marking and Monitoring
- 4:00 End of session

- Please RSVP at your earliest convenience to Camille Bradford, bradford@usa.net or 303-460-0371. There is no charge to OCTA members for participation in this program, which is supported by a Challenge Cost Share Grant from the National Park Service's National Trails System Office. Lunch for the first day will be Dutch-treat at one of the restaurants near the Library. Bring lunch for the second day in the field.

***Message from Bill Hill, Chair
OCTA Educational Awards and Publications Committee:***

Our Education committee would appreciate it if you could continue to assist us and spread the word about our 2008 projects and encourage participation by your members.

The deadline for nominations/applications for our Outstanding Teacher Awards is March 31, 2008. Copies of the application can be obtained from headquarters or on OCTA's website: www.octa-trails.org/learning_center/index.html. There are categories for teachers from different levels and also institutions - museums, historical sites. Part of the award includes \$250.00. Perhaps there is a deserving museum or teacher from your area.

The deadline for our "Animals along the Emigrant Trails" 2009 calendar project is April 15, 2008. This is open to primary/elementary age children. A notice with information, rules, etc. is also available through OCTA's website: www.octa-trails.org/images/western_calendar_2009.pdf. The child whose work is selected will receive \$50.00 and a copy of the calendar. If your chapter members have young children, please encourage their participation or their teachers' participation.

We also encourage your chapter to present a selected local school or class with a set of one of OCTA's educational activity books. We know some chapters have done so in past years and have already done so this year. We encourage all chapters to do this.

Thank you once again for your past assistance. Happy Trails.

- For further information, contact Bill at: HillHouseW@aol.com or 631-585-2592.

May 3: A Road Rally of Historic Proportions
By Bill Petersen



The Nebraska Chapter of OCTA will host a Road Rally on May 3, 2008. The Rally will begin at 11:00 AM with registration in the Oregon Trail Park in Oak, Nebraska. There will be a \$5.00 registration fee with proceeds to OCTA-NE for Chapter projects. Participants will be in two classes, OCTA members and general public.

The objective is not a speed or timed contest but the course needs to be completed by 5:00 p.m. Each registration will include map sheets from *Maps of the Oregon Trail*, Gregory Franzwa. Contestants will follow the trail, as nearly as possible, on public roadways and fill-out an answer sheet of questions concerning information found on trail markers and other signage along the way. The questions will be in logical sequence so if information is found on a question down the line you will know you missed something and can go back to find it.

Basically the rally will run from Kiowa Ranch, east of Oak, to Ft. Kearny on the Platte, a total of about 100 miles. Any vehicle with a working odometer can be used. However, most of the travel will be on

gravel or non-surfaced roads so 4WD may have benefits. In good weather these roads can be traveled with a standard passenger car.

The prizes in each class will be awarded to the registrants completing the most answers correctly and traveling the least distance. In case of a tie the winner will be determined by drawing lots. All prizes have not yet been determined as more sponsors are expected before registration.

As of March 20 we have sponsorship from The Archway Monument, Harold Warp Pioneer Village, Oregon-California Trails Association, OCTA-NE, Chimney Rock Visitors Center, and North Platte Valley Museum.

Organization and planning by Bill Petersen, OCTA-NE Preservation Officer and Trails Guide.
Phone: 308-832-2211, e-mail: bilancy@hotmail.com.



A Lengthy Introduction

By Ray Schoch

I'm a Charter Member of OCTA, but last August's 25th Anniversary gathering in Gering, Nebraska, was my first OCTA convention. I'd been in Gering three times previously, a long time ago, and though I only spent a day at the convention, that single day in trail country brought back a host of memories from previous decades.



Basically, the Oregon Trail was my introduction to the American West. In the early 1970s, I taught a

class titled "Frontier America" at the suburban St. Louis high school where I spent 25 years. One problem with the assignment was that, as an adult, I'd never been west of Kansas City except by airline to the west coast, and what I knew about western geography and geology had come exclusively from books. "It might be useful," I thought, "to have some 'on-the-ground,' personal experience with the West if I'm going to talk about the frontier."

How to acquire that experience? I could have done typical tourist-type travels – a trip to the Grand Canyon, for example – but at a bookstore one day I came across a small paperback titled *The Oregon Trail Revisited*. I read it four times from cover to cover, gradually convincing myself a little more with each reading that the author wasn't completely crazy, and that it might be possible to take my family on a trip retracing the emigrant journey of the mid-19th century, and even to enjoy it. To my amazement, the author, Gregory Franzwa, lived within half an hour's drive of my house. I got in touch



with him, and Greg graciously shared everything he had — which was quite a lot — on the Oregon Trail. I spent dozens of hours at the Franzwa household over the next year, making a pest of myself while I faithfully copied the trail route from his maps to mine. In between map sessions, my job and family, I read everything about the western trails I could get my hands on.

Research completed, in June of 1975, I set out with my family to retrace the Oregon Trail from Independence to Oregon City. I'd never seen any of the country along the trail route before, and I wanted to experience it "new," just as emigrants had done in the mid-19th century. We usually covered no more than 150 miles a day, because I was stopping the car every 5 minutes, it seemed, to get out and take yet another photo.

In 1975, many of the markings and exhibits that today's Oregon Trail traveler encounters didn't exist, and I relied on *The Oregon Trail Revisited*, a Boy Scout compass, my own sense of direction, and a bulky roll of county road maps with the Oregon Trail carefully copied onto them, mostly at 1/2"-to-the-mile scale. When seen from ground level for the first time, the West was a revelation to me. For one thing, I'd lived my whole life in St. Louis humidity, and western Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and eastern Oregon and Washington represented a semi-arid climate I'd never before encountered.

I liked it.

In fact, I was hooked. We arrived in Oregon City, then made a giant scenic loop through California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado and Kansas before returning home after more than 8,000 miles and several weeks on the road.

Ironically, having made the trip and taken hundreds of photos, I was not assigned to teach "Frontier America" the next fall. The following year, however, it showed up on my schedule again, as well as a multidisciplinary American Studies class. In both cases, I made good use of the many slides I'd taken.

There were a few places I hadn't been able to get to because the weather refused to cooperate in 1975. Among those places was iconic South Pass, so, in June of 1978, I set off again, this time jumping off from St. Joseph, Missouri, with family in tow and the roll of maps close at hand. The Wyoming weather cooperated this time, and the faithful old car was able to negotiate the twin ruts of the trail to South Pass, and visit some other spots that played significant roles in frontier history, too, though they weren't directly connected to the Oregon or California emigrations. The return in 1978 was somewhat less rambling than the first trip, and the mileage total was only in the neighborhood of 6,000 or so.





Six years later, I was selected to take part in a Summer Seminar sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Titled "Classics of the American Frontier Experience," and led by author and Professor W. Turrentine Jackson, it was to be held at the University of California-Davis. After the trip of 1978, I'd sold my old car and purchased a 4-wheel-drive International Scout specifically to negotiate some of the more obscure places along the trail route. Once I was appointed to the Summer Seminar, another trail trek was a foregone conclusion.

True to that line about "The best-laid plans...," this third trek along the emigrant route turned into what I usually refer to as "The Disaster of '84."

Things began to break and go wrong from our first night on the prairie. A side mirror broke off. A Coleman lantern broke. I'd never gotten stuck anywhere on the trail with my old 2-wheel-drive car, but the 4-wheel-drive Scout I'd acquired proved unable to negotiate muddy Nebraska roads, and we were stuck not once, but twice in one day. Fortunately, friendly (or tolerant) Nebraska farmers were nearby to tow us out of the mess, but those kinds of annoying misfortunes continued throughout the journey. We awoke in the middle of a thunderstorm outside Kearney, Nebraska to find our little tent flattened against our faces by gale-force winds and surrounded by several inches of water. Things we needed broke or got lost, and had to be replaced. A side trip in Wyoming to Grand Teton National Park found our paid-for and previously-reserved campsite under water, and the road to Yellowstone National Park was closed the next day because 8 inches of snow fell overnight while we slept very uncomfortably in the back of the Scout.

Abandoning thoughts of Yellowstone, I drove south to pick up the trail again. The Scout had proved itself so undependable that, after we'd crossed Idaho and reached the stretch of trail in eastern Oregon northwest of Vale which had stopped me twice before, the same perennial mud puddle convinced me that discretion was the better part of exploration, especially with the nearest house 10 miles behind us. I turned around and found an alternate route.



When we arrived in Oregon City, I discovered that miscommunication had messed up our housing arrangements with the university. We had to wait for that situation to be corrected, and then drove south to spend the summer in Davis, California. Literally upon our arrival, the Scout broke down completely, and virtually all the money I had with me to pay for our summer expenses instead went into repairing the vehicle. Fortunately, friends and relatives helped us out, but we lived on the tightest budget I've ever endured while we were there.



The Summer Seminar itself was among the highlights of my teaching career, but outside the classroom, things continued to go wrong. I'd planned several weekend excursions before we left St. Louis, and each one ended up having some sort of minor mishap. In short, by the time my third trek along the Trail was complete, I could identify with the trials of the emigrants much more readily than before.

Travel annoyances aside, however, three trips along the Oregon Trail, including a journey approximating the Donner Party's route from Salt Lake City to California, spread out over nearly a decade, provided me with a wonderful, not-always-guided tour of the American West that I'm sure I would never have undertaken without the motivation of following the emigrants. Not counting hundreds of Trail-based historical sites, those trips along the Trail also bought me to a dozen National Parks, many state parks and historical sites, and literally dozens of communities I'd never have encountered had it not been for the Trail.

I liked the Western climate and geography so much that, when I retired from teaching, I sold my house in suburban St. Louis and moved to Colorado's Front Range. I lived in Loveland (on the Cherokee Trail, and the site of OCTA's 2009 convention) for five years, where I served on the city's Planning Commission, and in 2006 moved to Lakewood, Colorado, a western suburb of Denver, where I once again serve on the Planning Commission. I've turned into an avid hiker, and usually cover 100 miles or more in Colorado high country each summer.

Photographs by Ray Schoch:

- *Page 5: Alcove Spring, 1984*
- *Page 6: Fort Hall, 1975 (above); Fort Hall, 1978 (below)*
- *Page 7: Chimney Rock, 1978 (above); Chimney Rock, 1975 (below)*
- *Page 8: Mitchell Pass, 1975*

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION
Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter • www.octa-colorado.org
Camille Q. Bradford, President
11515 Quivas Way • Denver, CO 80234 • 303-460-0371
bradford@usa.net