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The Oregon Trail: America's Most Famous Path to the Western Frontier

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures.
*Includes accounts of people who traveled on the Oregon Trail.
*Includes a bibliography for further reading.
*Includes a table of contents.

"My greatest pleasure in travelling through the country is derived from the knowledge that it has seldom been traversed, or at least never been described by any hackneyed tourist, that everything I see or look upon has been seen by me before it has become common by the vulgar gaze or description of others." – Dr. James Middleton

The westward movement of Americans in the 19th century was one of the largest and most consequential migrations in history, and among the paths that blazed west, the most well-known is the Oregon Trail, which was not a single trail but a network of paths that began at one of four "jumping off" points. The eastern section of the Oregon Trail, which followed the Missouri River through Kansas, Nebraska, and Wyoming, was shared by people traveling along the California, Bozeman, and Mormon Trails. These trails branched off at various points, and the California Trail diverged from the Oregon Trail at Fort Hall in southern Idaho. From there, the Oregon Trail moved northward, along the Snake River, then through the Blue Mountains to Fort Walla Walla. From there, travelers would cross the prairie before reaching the Methodist mission at The Dalles, which roughly marked the end of the Trail.

The Trail stretched roughly half the country, and hundreds of thousands of settlers would use it, yet the Oregon Trail is famous not so much for its physical dimensions but for what it represented. As many who used the Oregon Trail described in memoirs, the West represented opportunities for adventure, independence, and fortune, and fittingly, the ever popular game named after the Oregon Trail captures that mentality and spirit by requiring players to safely move a party west to the end of the trail.

Perhaps most famously, the game that helped popularize current generations' interest in the Oregon Trail highlighted the obstacles the pioneers faced in moving West. Indeed, as all too many settlers discovered, traveling along the Trail was fraught with various kinds of obstacles and danger, including bitter weather, potentially deadly illnesses, and hostile Native Americans, not to mention an unforgiving landscape that famous American explorer Stephen Long deemed "unfit for human habitation." And while many would look back romantically at the Oregon Trail over time, 19th century Americans were all too happy and eager for the transcontinental railroad to help speed their passage west and render overland paths like the Oregon Trail obsolete.

The Oregon Trail: America's Most Famous Path to the Western Frontier comprehensively covers the history of the Trail and the settlers who moved west along it, including descriptions of the Trail in accounts written by settlers. Along with pictures depicting important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Oregon Trail like you never have before.

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