

# OCTA Trail Scout



Young People Today Preserving Yesterday's History for a Greater Tomorrow

Summer 2011

Volume 1, Issue 2

## Summer in Wyoming

### Editorial Board

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Summer is a good time to visit trail sites in Wyoming, and this year you have a chance to get involved in activities that will be fun and where you might learn something, too.



Historic Trails Center,  
Casper, Wyoming

The emigrants traveled across Wyoming trying to be certain that they had passed Fort

Laramie and made it to Independence Rock by the Fourth of July. It wasn't that they wanted to have a big celebration for the holiday, but they knew that they still had a long journey ahead of them, and they needed to be that far down the trail by early July in order to reach their destination before snow closed the mountain passes to the west.

One good place to visit and learn about the trail is at the National Historic Trail Interpretive Center in Casper, Wyoming, where you can see a film about the trail. You can climb in a wagon that "crosses" the river making you feel as if you are truly fording. You can also ride a stagecoach that takes you on a journey from one frontier station to another.

You can also get the experience of pulling a Mormon handcart at the trail center. If you want, you can travel west of Casper

to the Handcart Ranch near Devils Gate and pull an actual handcart along the trail.

For another fun event travel to Green River, Wyoming on August 13, 2011 to participate in History Day at

Expedition Island. For History Day you will find many activities related to pioneer

heritage. There will be a sheep wagon, covered wagon, Pony Express rider, Mormon handcart, the Wells Fargo stagecoach, a jail or prison wagon and a tipi. Some of the cast for the film *In Pursuit of A Dream* along with their wagons will be on the island doing demonstrations during the day.

There also will be skits by persons portraying characters from trail life. "Ellen" will tell the story of "a day in the life" of a woman on the trail. "Fanny" will give an interesting story about a woman and her adopted niece, Mary, who were captured by the Indians.

In addition, there will be demonstrations of hand quilting, spinning, beadwork, crocheted rugs, and Dutch oven cooking.

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### Upcoming Showing of *In Pursuit of a Dream*

August 12—Rock Springs, Wyoming, OCTA Convention

7 p.m.; \$2 admission

## Places Along the Trail—Wyoming

### Independence Rock

Emigrants along the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails needed to arrive at Independence Rock by the Fourth of July in order to reach their mountain destinations before the first snowfalls. Independence Rock is an Archean granite rock that is approximately 130 feet high. Legend has it that Independence Rock got its name from a party of mountain men who celebrated the Fourth of July there in 1830. Independence Rock is located south west of Casper, Wyoming.



*Independence Rock was an important landmark. Travelers wanted to be at the site by the Fourth of July in order to be certain they would have time to travel across the mountains to the west before snow closed the passes in the fall.*

### Brian Larson's Account of Independence Rock

During our travels on the Oregon Trail, we stopped at Independence Rock. This rock was huge. The lady who owned the land said she thought it looked like a whale, but I thought it looked like a blob. We all climbed the rock that day and watched the lightning light up the sky and listened as the thunder rolled across the plains. To one side of the rock was our camp and the way we came in and to the other side of the rock was the Sweetwater river which later on we all got to take a shower in. The water was sure cold, but of course it was nice to actually get a shower after not having one for so long. The weather at the rock was cloudy and rainy. It was actually nice to have some rain because we were hot for so long as we went down the trail. The land was wide open and by the Sweetwater river it was nice and

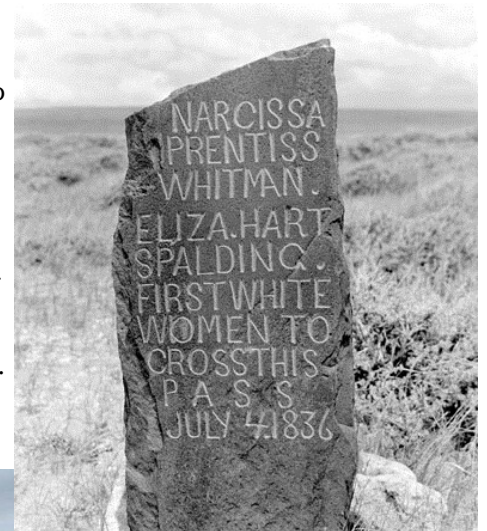
green. This was one of the stops that I liked along the way.



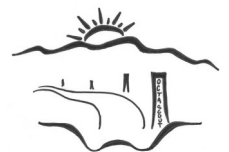
### South Pass

South Pass provided an easy route over the Continental Divide for emigrants on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails.

Without this there would have been no trail across Wyoming. South Pass is a twenty-five-mile-wide plateau with a landscape of sagebrush, sand dunes and no trees.



*Trail Markers, at South Pass  
(Candy Moulton Photos)*



## *Alkali Flats*

*By: Mikalya Larrow*

As the end of the school year comes about we dream about our summer vacation. It is what has been keeping us going throughout the year, and now we want to travel, have fun, and hang out with friends.

Amongst the vacation wish list is probably some area of the world or US that has sand and water. Well leading up to Independence Rock in Wyoming is a beach...sorta. The place is called the Alkali Flats. It's truly more of a mini desert then it is a beach. It has the annoying stick in your sock grass, cacti, and little toad things. In certain areas there is water but I wouldn't drink it if I were you.

The Flats have to be a couple miles wide and on a hot summer day it's a pain in the rear to walk across. Your shoes sink in and each foot feels as if it's had an additional 10 pounds added. The sun is blinding as it reflects off the sand and you're doing your best not to step on any cacti. Along with all of this you're trying to keep pace with a wagon you're not allowed to ride in.

For me though this experience would have been about 10 times better then what pioneers had to go through. Unlike me most of them didn't have shoes to wear for the journey...or the shoes fell off really quick. Could you imagine how tough their feet must have been after those 2,000 miles? For me though I was able to drink as much water as I wanted without having to worry about where the next clean water supply would be.

The water itself in the Flats is undrinkable. When pioneers would take their oxen to drink the water the oxen would die from the water.

To truly understand the flats I would highly suggest a visit to the Flats. We'll never be able to understand the true emotions and turmoil the pioneers went through but we can definitely try to see what it was like. Go for just a day and take a walk in their footsteps.



*Crossing Playa Lake area on the Oregon-California Trail in Natrona County, Wyoming. (Lincoln Morrison Photo)*

## *Journal Entry: July 1, 2008—Horse Creek to Independence Rock*

There were horny toads every where? At first I wasn't for sure about picking one up, but in the end I had them crawling all over me! LOL) I LOVE horny toads!!! The grass was such a pain today! Omg! I have billions of thorn like grasses in my socks! I swear they should call this Devil's pasture. LOL) It's really sandy right now and it isn't easy to walk through sand. This trip has made me more thoughtful and I think maybe I can understand how and what people going west felt like. I have enjoyed this day a lot.

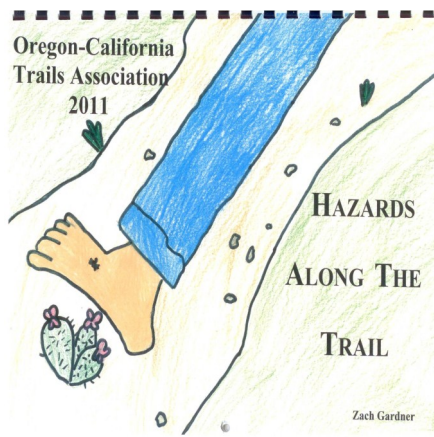
*-Candace Manley*

## Student Calendar Highlights Trading Posts and Forts

By: Bill Hill

Each year OCTA produces a calendar that features artwork by students. The 2012 calendar is available this summer. The theme is "Trading Posts and Forts along the Trail." For the calendar students could submit drawings of any of the many posts and forts that were found on the variety of trails used by the emigrants as they moved and settled the West.

In addition to receiving a copy of the calendar, the students whose artworks are selected also receive a check for fifty dollars. The contest is open to elementary students through fifth grade. While teachers are encouraged to involve all



their students, an individual child can also participate on their own.

Copies of the 2012 calendar are available for only \$5. Get your copy by contacting OCTA Headquarters at 888-811-6282.

There also are still a few copies of the 2011 calendar, "Hazards Along the Trail" available.

Later this fall planning will begin for the 2013 calendar. All elementary school student artists in kindergarten through fifth grade can participate. Watch the *Trail Scout* for the announcement of the 2013 Calendar theme, and then submit your own drawing.

## Geocaching and the Trails

By: Matt Ivory

Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game where you use a handheld GPS device to find "treasures" hidden by others. Geocaching has become a worldwide phenomenon, and is especially participated in here in the United States. There are geocaches being placed along the trails by OCTA members. If you or your family want to go on a treasure hunt along the trail, you can search out some of the geocaches.

Learn more about this at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com), or e-mail Matt at [fly\\_fisherman5261@yahoo.com](mailto:fly_fisherman5261@yahoo.com)



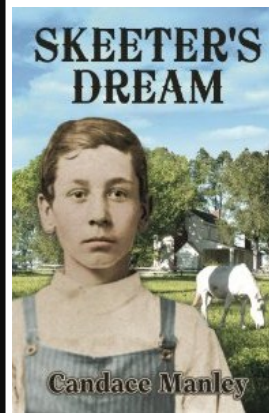
Traveling down the trail is a dusty adventure.  
(Photo by Candy Moulton)

## Activities of Trail Scouts

~ Ana Merchant of Casper, Wyoming, won the 2010 Young OCTA award, for her efforts to Promote the trail and particularly trail music at events in Wyoming and Idaho. She provided trail music prior to a showing of *In Pursuit of a Dream*, in May in Casper, Wyoming.



(Candy Moulton Photo)



~ Candace Manley of Powderly, Texas has published her first novel, "Skeeter's Dream," the story of a young boy's efforts to have his own dream following the death of his father in the Civil War. The book is published by La Frontera Publishing.

## How to get Involved

Do you want to become a Trail Scout and work on a project related to the trails? It's easy, contact the Oregon-California Trails Association headquarters with your name and contact information and they will forward it on to the chapter nearest to you. You can reach OCTA at 888-811-6282 or send an email to Association Manager Travis Boley at [tboley@indepmo.org](mailto:tboley@indepmo.org).

If you have traveled on the trail, or visited any trail sites, please write about your experiences and send them to us for publication in the *Trail Scout*. Perhaps you have not yet visited the trail, but you want to. That's cool. We'd love an article about a site you want to visit! Send articles and photos to [octascout@gmail.com](mailto:octascout@gmail.com).