

Oregon and California National Historic Trails Oregon-California Trails Association



Oregon and California National Historic Trails

May 15. We started on our journey. We found the road in a terrible condition . . . We drove thirty-two miles this day.

Mary Rockwood Powers

on the trail to California, 1856

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How far would you
walk for a better life?



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Would you walk over 2,000 miles?

Hundreds of thousands of people did before you!



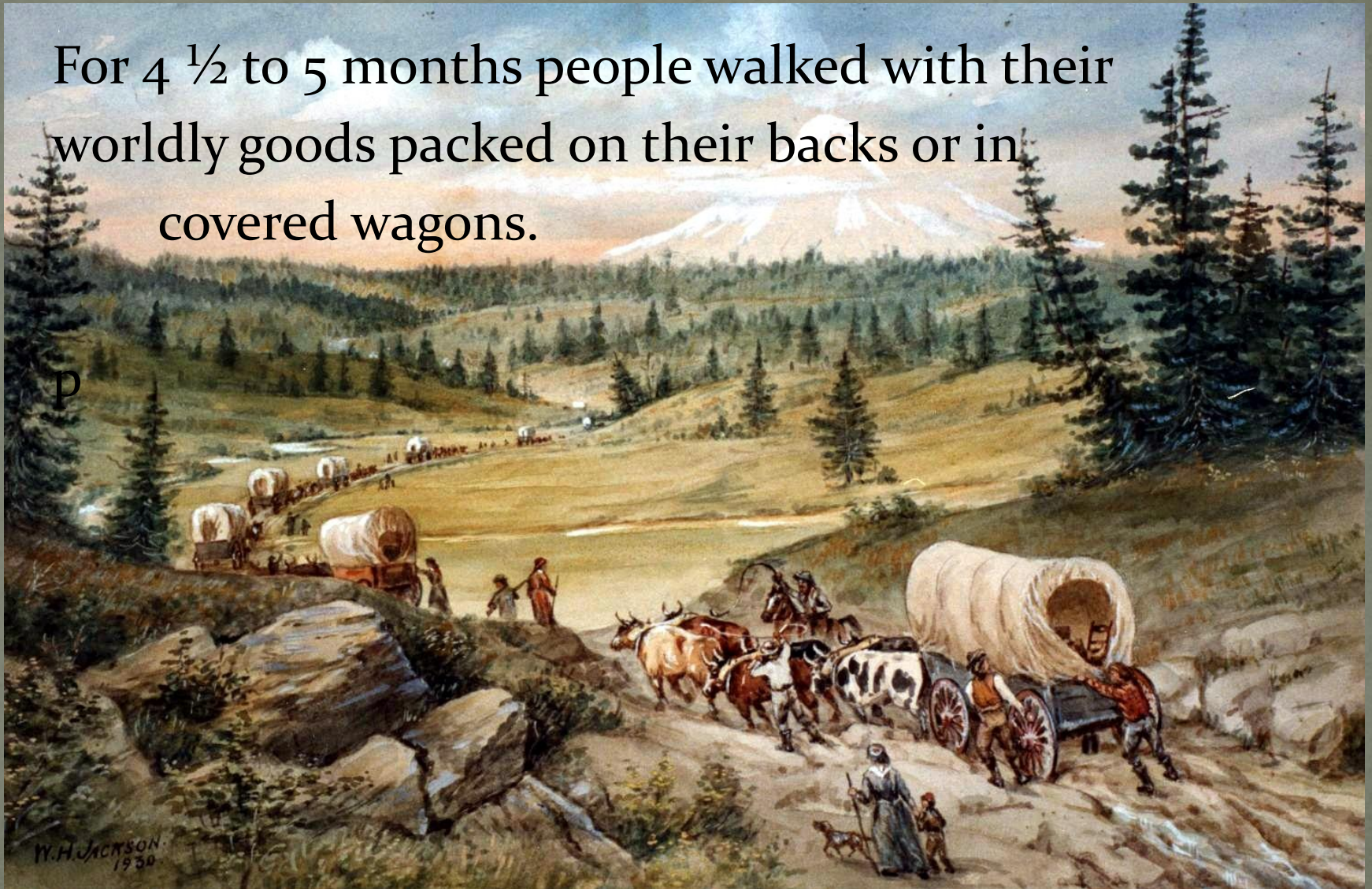
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From the 1840s to 1860s, people walked from the Midwest to Oregon and California – crossing open prairies, waterless deserts and high mountain passes.



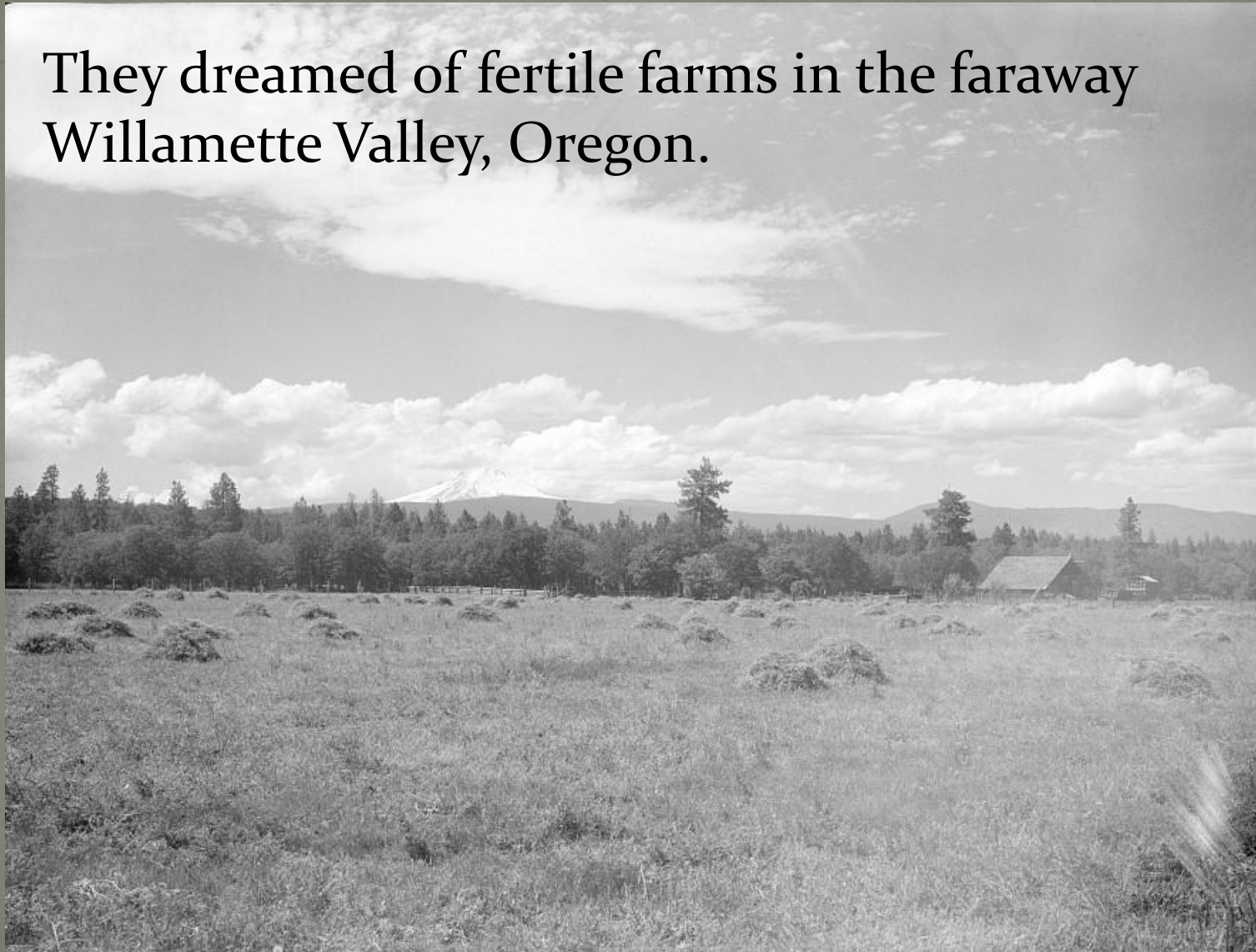
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For 4 ½ to 5 months people walked with their worldly goods packed on their backs or in covered wagons.



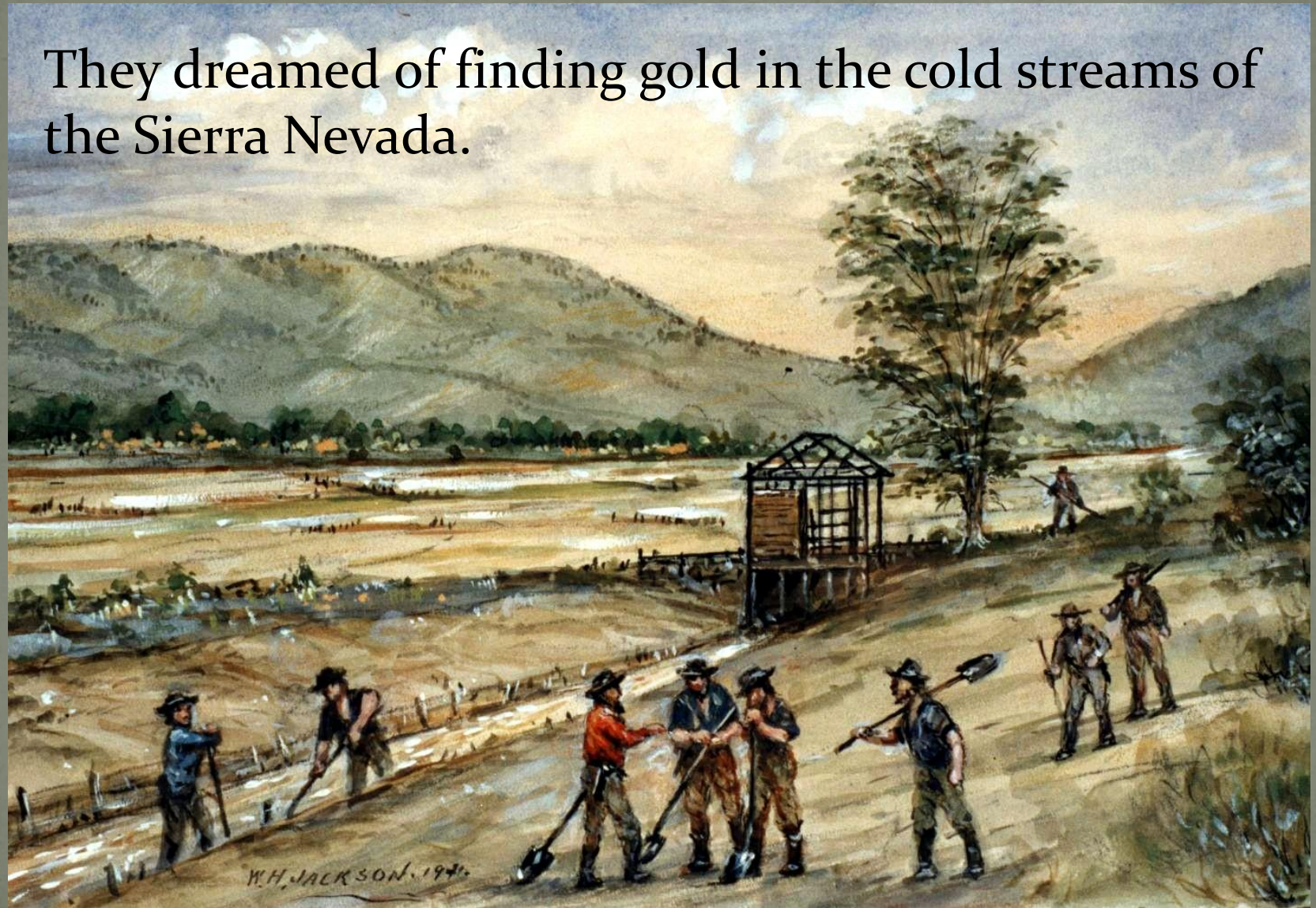
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They dreamed of fertile farms in the faraway
Willamette Valley, Oregon.



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They dreamed of finding gold in the cold streams of the Sierra Nevada.



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They left evidence of their journeys in many ways.

They described their adventures in journals, diaries and letters.

Dearst Mother. We commenced our journey to Wells Wells July 15th 1848
Under the protection of Mr. Andrew, & his company, I have ten miles, in a south west
direction. The Flat Head & his two Indians, & some lodges of the Snake tribe, accompany
myself to Fort Hall. While they are with us, we shall make but one camp in a day.
On the 19th we did not arrive at Wells Wells until ten miles in the same direction, as
on the 15th over many steep & high mountains. On the 21st our course was south east in
the morning, traveled fifteen miles, on the 22nd was a tedious day to go, traveled
about nine & took a high road, with a
too short showers in the afternoon, we
had some oppression, I thought of but
child would, but did not find it a
travelling with them, I have been living, or
with it, I do not know how I shall
can to make one camp in a day, the
for our dinner and two hours rest
ride in the afternoon, our ride to
roads from mine & look at the world
Bill & others and peaceful state of
higher to travel with the horses & cow
hand & pasture in progress for my

West of the Rocky Mountains
A Journal
of "Starr" on a
Trip to California Overland
by P. Decker
Cleveland Ohio
1849

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| From Orr, to Louisville | 1112 Miles |
| To go Buffalo, Ore. at Fort Henry | 1300 |
| " " " " " " " | 250 |
| " " " " " " " | 2700 |
| " " " " " " " | 1100 |

Camp Mountain, on the Bluffs
The Starting Place for California.

Dr. Dick,

I write to inform you of my whereabouts & of the
Company I start with right up and we will be
going out at once and I shall of course, this Company
I am on the way out with 40 people. I shall be
Company at this time, they have sent us word to
be absent to the other company, they to the
Hoffmachers, that we brother others had joined the
other Company and you or, I was the only of our
men in our party, the other two horses & they were
at 20 miles and were the cause of the dissolution
Company, if this party should not prove to be
in my right, I will stop at Fort Laramie, where
I will stay, if I should have time I will write
to you, I leave this Country, you will please
word to my folks at Columbus, the Company go
with 40, I remember me to all, I have not
from any of you yet, I do not know from Columbus,
I will try to write you, and must be off for the
in a few minutes, write this with respect,

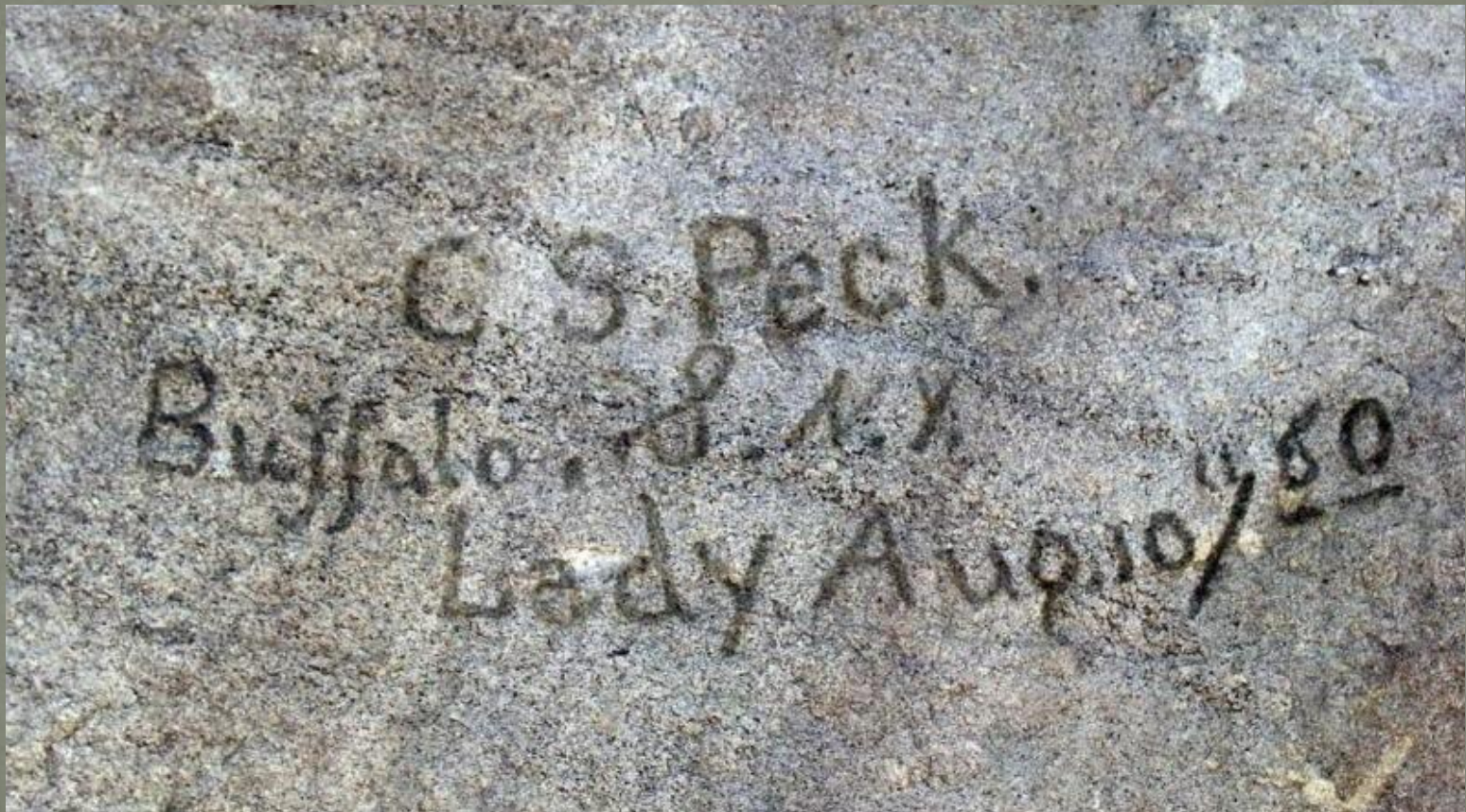
Yours as ever
John W. Starr

Being in town from Camp, I passed the winter place and
planned for my future, but the way is not yet out of
the other end, there is a great deal of the plan, the
largest this Company ever had together.

Columbus April 11, 1849
Monday
Having my traps set, I have
to make a trip to California, I have
decided that I will be engaged in
making traps, preparing for the journey,
& placing my business affairs in a condition
for an anticipated absence of 18 or 20
years, and this (April 11, 1849) is the day
when I am taking a long leave of home & friends,
my many & dear friends, & in home, I
have enjoyed 44 years. A great off
of association with a better father & mother
to be made you can report, I have not
of my father and the best of health,
of unbroken in love. The home of
of hills, you see, those studies, and make
time for the sake of the town, Golden
of you make ready to go, then
I have made myself to connect, in a
for each preparation in case that I
enjoy the participation of a work, which I
rich, desire to make, over
of 18 years, since the birth of the
& California, I have spent 44 years. On
will, I light the year, & be made
you can, I have the year, since I
left the country, I have, I have, I
will have, I have, I have, I have, I

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They painted their names with axle grease to mark their journey.



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They created ruts and swales in the earth as they passed with their oxen and heavy, loaded wagons.



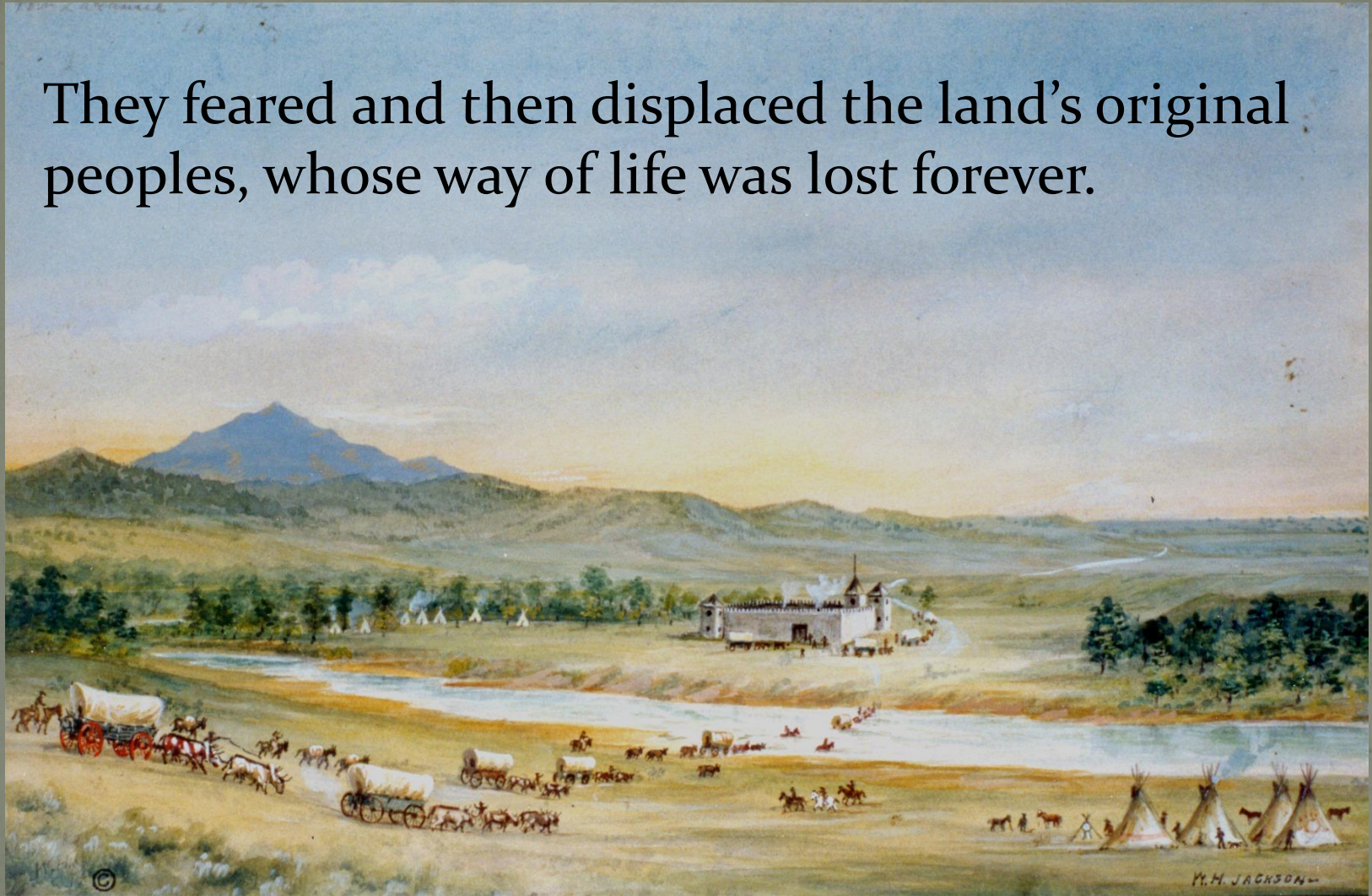
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They died of disease or accidents or in childbirth and were hastily buried alongside the trails.



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They feared and then displaced the land's original peoples, whose way of life was lost forever.



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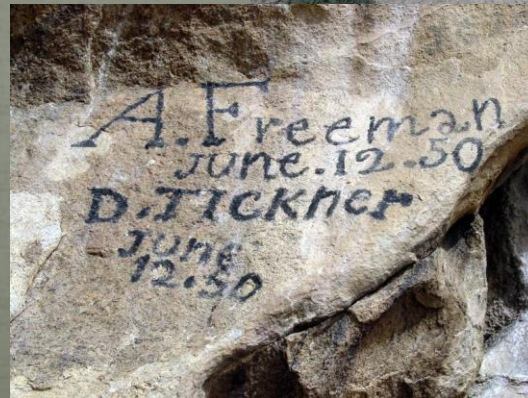
The legacy left by the overland emigrants is visible and touchable.



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Today you can

- see trail landmarks
- walk in wagon ruts
- read emigrant names and dates



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- learn that emigrant interactions with Indian tribes were more often personal and helpful than they were deadly.



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- join with others out on the trails to learn of emigrant strengths and joys, frailties and sorrows



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- walk, hike or bike where emigrants camped or labored



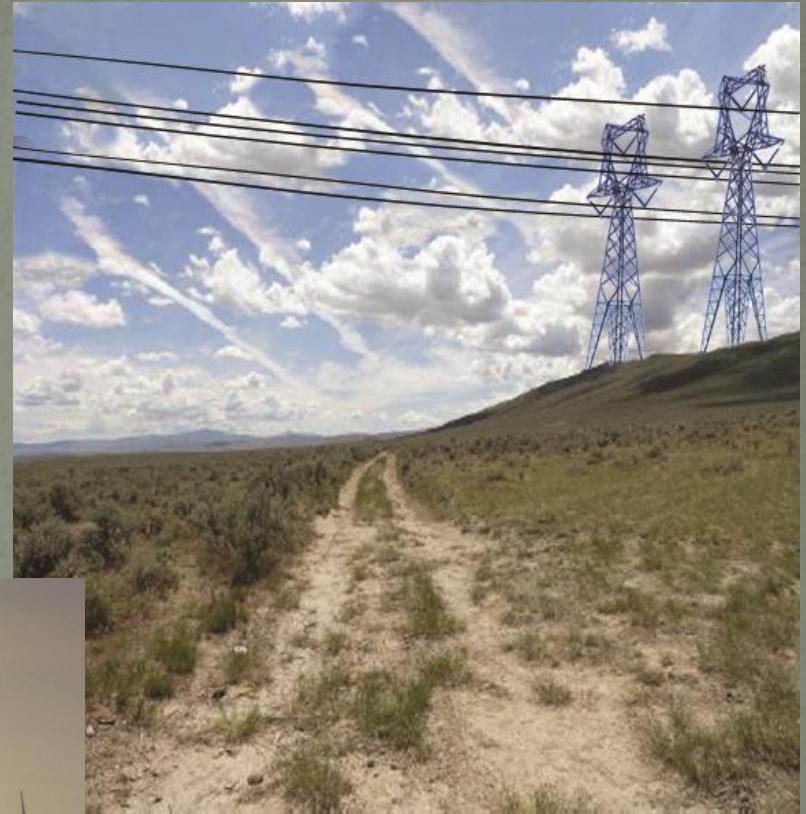
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- help find and protect the trails on public lands through monitoring, archeology, mapping, marking, education or advocacy
- join the national effort to protect the trails



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Many trail sites are threatened by mining, real estate, and energy development throughout the West.



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Join the Oregon-California Trails Association!



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OCTA's mission is to protect the Historic Emigrant Trails legacy by promoting research, education, preservation activities and public awareness of the trails and to work with others to promote these causes.



Oregon and California National Historic Trails

Learn more about the National Trails System, established by Congress in 1968.



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And only you know –
how far would you walk
for a better life?



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Oregon-California Trails
Association

www.octa-trails.org

National Trails System

[www.nps.gov/subjects/
nationaltrailssystem/](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/)



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Text credit:

Powers, Mary Rockwood. *A Woman's Overland Journal to California*. Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1985

Photo credits:

California State Library, Signed letter of John M. Kerr to Dick [Ellis]

Library of Congress

Arthur Rothstein, US Farm Security Administration

Carol M. Highsmith Archive

National Oregon/California Trail Center, Montpelier, Idaho

National Park Service

City of Rocks National Reserve

National Trails Intermountain Region

National Trails System

Scotts Bluff National Monument, William Henry Jackson Collection

Whitman Mission National Historic Site

Oregon California Trails Association

Society of California Pioneers, Peter Decker Diary

US Forest Service, Plumas National Forest, Passport in Time