Oregon and California National Historic Trails
Oregon-California Trails Association
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
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!
From the 1840s to 1860s, people walked from the Midwest to Oregon and California – crossing open prairies, waterless deserts and high mountain passes.
For 4 ½ to 5 months people walked with their worldly goods packed on their backs or in covered wagons.
They dreamed of fertile farms in the faraway Willamette Valley, Oregon.
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.
They painted their names with axle grease to mark their journey.
They created ruts and swales in the earth as they passed with their oxen and heavy, loaded wagons.
They died of disease or accidents or in childbirth and were hastily buried alongside the trails.
They feared and then displaced the land’s original peoples, whose way of life was lost forever.
The legacy left by the overland emigrants is visible and touchable.
Today you can

* see trail landmarks
* walk in wagon ruts
* read emigrant names and dates
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
Many trail sites are threatened by mining, real estate, and energy development throughout the West.
Join the Oregon-California Trails Association!
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.
Learn more about the National Trails System, established by Congress in 1968.
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/
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    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