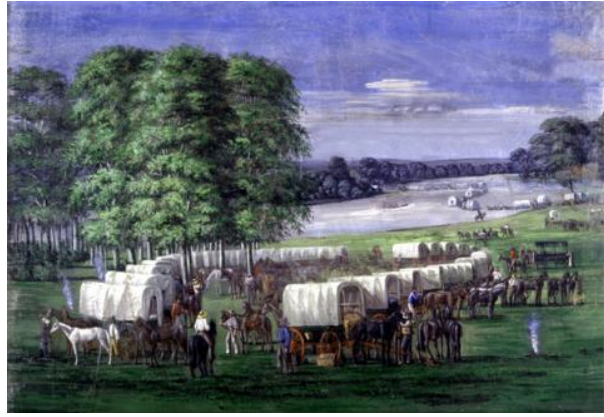


- 0. WAGON TRAINS GO WEST - Story Preface
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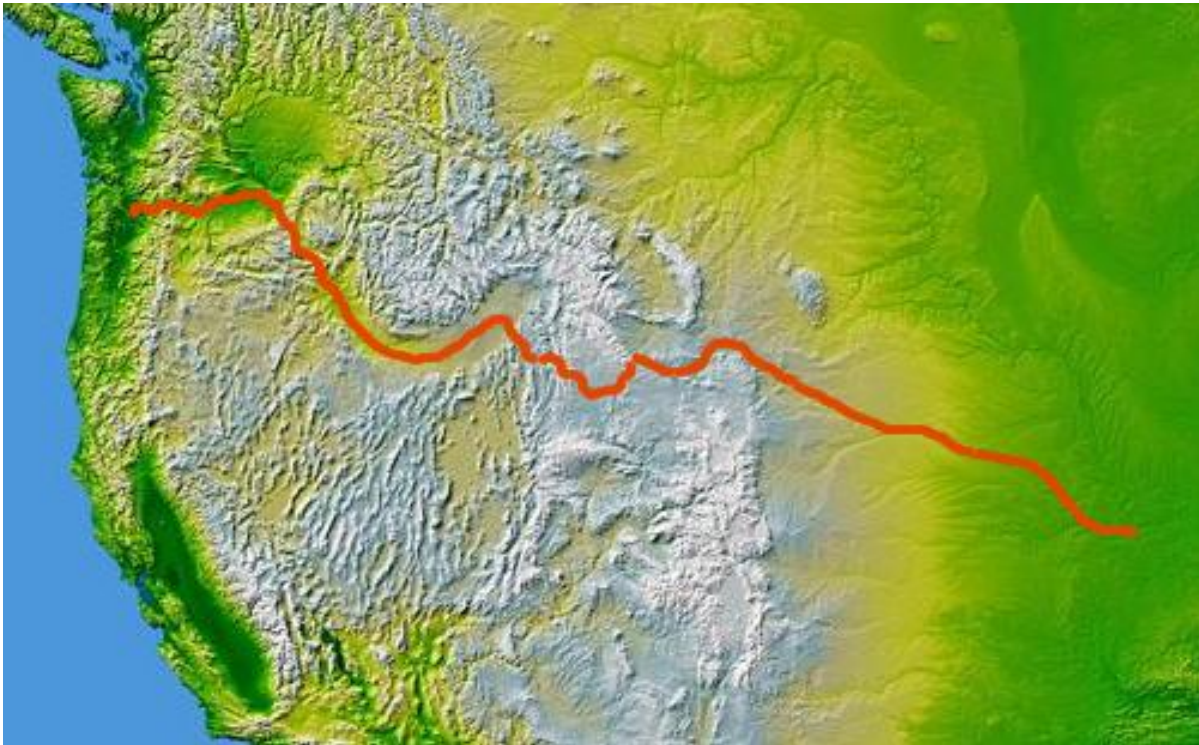


Heading for the Pacific Northwest, the first major "wagon train" leaves Elm Grove, Missouri with about one thousand pioneers. They plan to reach their destination via the Oregon Trail. This image depicts a painting, by C.C.A. Christensen (1831-1912), entitled "Wagon Train: Pioneers Crossing the Plains of Nebraska." The original is maintained by the Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Click on the image for a better view.

Between the 1840s and the 1860s, about 300,000 people set out for a new life in America's western territories. (Gold was discovered in California in 1848).

In the days before railroads connected both coasts, how did these individuals travel? In wagons, drawn by horses, over extremely difficult terrain (like the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails) where conditions were very primitive.

The first major Oregon-Trail wagon train, consisting of a thousand people, left the Missouri town of Elm Grove on May 16, 1843. These pioneers were heading to the Pacific Northwest.



Conestoga Wagons were a popular method of transportation. Invented by the Pennsylvania Dutch in the early 1700s, and named after the Conestoga Valley, they were also called camels of the prairie. Their wheels had broad rims which helped a wagon pass through mud. Without its wheels, a Conestoga could become a boat. Teams of four to six horses pulled them.

The "Prairie Schooner," another wagon which carried families across the undeveloped west, was manufactured

by the Studebaker brothers, among others. Although it resembled the Conestoga, it was smaller, sleeker and required fewer horses. It could even be pulled by mules or oxen.

Pioneers, including African-Americans and women who made the long trip, usually traveled in groups. These "wagon trains" would typically number around thirty, although sometimes as many as two hundred wagons journeyed together.

On average, it took about four to six months for a family to get from Independence, Missouri to Oregon or California.

Some people did not want to go west by wagon train. Until 1868, stagecoaches (like the Concord) followed the Overland Trail. Mark Twain and his brother made that uncomfortable journey in 1861.

Others thought a water route would be better. But in the days before the Panama Canal, there was no good way to sail to America's west coast.

One option - a bad one - was to sail completely around the southern coast of South America. By the time people reached their final destination, they had a year invested in the trip.

Another option - sometimes worse - was to sail on the Atlantic to the Isthmus of Panama, trek across land to the Pacific side and, hopefully, catch a seaworthy boat. For many would-be gold miners, the ships never came or did not have room.



One group of people - the Cherokee - had no plans to go west. The federal government, at the direction of President Andrew Jackson, forced them to leave their own lands for relocation in Oklahoma. Why did this happen?

As European settlers made their way to America, many of them wanted to settle land which belonged to Native Americans. Such was the case in Georgia, where indigenous people of the Cherokee Nation lived. A song which was popular in the 1820's makes the point:

***All I ask in this creation
Is a pretty little wife and a big plantation
Way up yonder in the Cherokee Nation.***

To further complicate life for the Cherokee people, gold was found on their lands in 1830. That same year, the U.S. Congress passed the "Indian Removal Act." Americans who disagreed with the federal government's policies tried to speak for the Native Americans - to little (or no) avail.

Some of the people were forced west over a land route, while others traveled by water.

The Cherokee "Trail of Tears" occurred between 1838-39. It remains a dark chapter in American history.

As pioneers and their loaded wagons were moving west, workers and their railroad bosses were building a better way to travel. In 1869, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific met at Promontory Point, Utah.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WAGON-TRAINS-GO-WEST-Go-West-U.S.-Westward-Expansion>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WAGON-TRAINS-GO-WEST-Go-West-U.S.-Westward-Expansion>

Media Stream



Oregon Trail - by Albert Bierstadt

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Oregon-Trail-by-Albert-Bierstadt>



1849 Gold Rush Map via Sea

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



Oregon Trail Campfire - by Albert Bierstadt

Image described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Conestoga Wagon

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Six Horse Team Pulling a Conestoga Wagon

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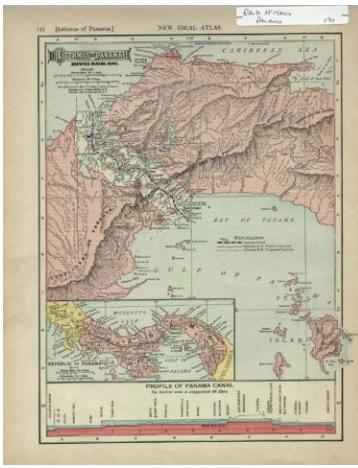


Oxen Pulling A Conestoga Wagon

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Map Depicting the Isthmus of Panama

Image online, courtesy the [gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com) website.

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Drawing - Scene at the Isthmus of Panama

Image online, courtesy the [panamarailroad.org](http://www.panamarailroad.org) website.

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Map: The Cherokee Country

Image online, courtesy the [Perry Castañeda Library](http://www.perrycastañeda.com), the University of Texas at Austin.

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Map: Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Park Service.

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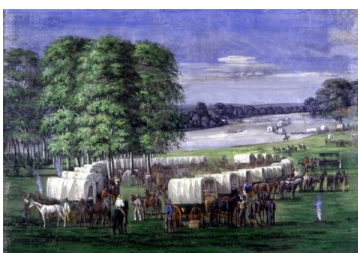


Meeting at Promontory Point

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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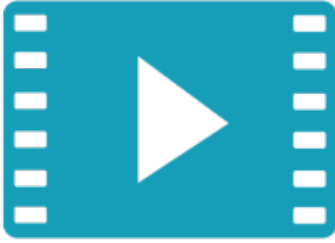
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WAGON TRAINS GO WEST

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Andrew Jackson and the Cherokee "Trail of Tears"

Music video entitled "Andrew Jackson - The Atrocious Saint" by Christopher Hedge, with David Grisman and R. Carlos Nakai. From the PBS documentary: "Andrew Jackson: Good, Evil and the Presidency" (by Carl Byker, Mitch Wilson and KCET Los Angeles).

Online, courtesy Christopher Hedge via YouTube.

View this asset at:

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