

THE OREGON TRAIL

This was the main route used by settlers during the Great Migration to the American West (1840–60). From its starting point in the city of Independence, Missouri, and stretching over more than 1,800 miles (3,000 kilometers), the trail crossed mountains, rivers, and extremely arid areas. Its destination was the promised land of Oregon.

THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

In 1803, the US president, Thomas Jefferson, sent Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark on the challenging mission of exploring the unknown territory of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. Calling themselves the Corps of Discovery, Lewis and Clark (and the 50 other members of the Corps) took two years to get to the Pacific Ocean and back.

Without the help of Sacagawea, a Native American woman of the Shoshone tribe, they would never have made it. She introduced Lewis and Clark to her people, served as their interpreter, and procured horses for them. On their journey, they met other tribes, handed out gifts, and promised to continue trading in peace.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

The Great Migration from east to west began in about 1843. That year 1,000 people, traveling in a caravan of more than 100 wagons, set off in search of a new home, taking ample provisions with them. Both the US government and the fur traders assured them that they would find more fertile and abundant land in the west. Over the next 40 years thousands of farming and merchant families made the journey.

OREGON: THE PROMISED LAND

When the first settlers arrived in Oregon, they were able to claim the land without paying a cent, with married couples entitled to larger parcels of land than single people. From 1854 onward, settlers had to pay a small sum for every acre.



THE NATIVE AMERICANS

The main Native American tribes inhabiting the area around the start of the Oregon Trail were the Cheyenne and the Pawnee. The settlers feared being attacked, but in fact there are numerous accounts of native people helping them lift wagons that had tipped over, rescuing their horses, and bringing them food. The new settlers traded with them, exchanging clothing, tobacco, or weapons for food or horses.

THE TRAIL OF TEARS

For 20 years (1830–50), Native Americans were forced to migrate from their ancestral lands in the southeastern United States to regions west of the Mississippi River. One of the reasons for the relocation was the discovery of gold by the American settlers and the ensuing gold rush that attracted speculators, leading the US government to seize these lands and open them up to settlement. Many native people fell ill and died during the relocation.

- ✦ **TYPE OF ROUTE** Migration
- ✦ **MODE OF TRANSPORTATION** Ox cart or mule and horse
- ✦ **YEAR** Mid-1800s
- ✦ **DISTANCE** Over 1,800 mi (3,000 km)
- ✦ **STARTING POINT** Missouri
- ✦ **END POINT** Oregon City, Oregon
- ✦ **EST. TIME TO COMPLETE** 5 months

