



An American Tour: 38



America's Oregon Trail

The **Oregon Trail** was one of the main overland migration routes on the North American continent, leading from locations on the Missouri River to the Oregon Territory. The eastern half of the trail was also used by travelers on the California Trail, Bozeman Trail, and Mormon Trail, which used much of the same trail before turning off to their separate destinations. To complete the journey in one traveling season most travelers left in April to May—as soon as grass was growing enough to support their teams and the trails dried out. To meet the constant needs for water, grass, and fuel for campfires, the trail followed various rivers and streams across the continent. In addition, the network of trails required a minimum of road work to be made passable for wagons. People using the trail traveled in wagons, pack trains, on horseback, on foot, by raft, and by boat to establish new farms, lives, and businesses in the Oregon Territory.

The four to six month journey spanned over half the continent as the wagon trail proceeded about 2,000 miles west through territories and land that would later become Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon. Extensions of the Oregon Trail were the main arteries that fed settlers into six more states: Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California, Washington, and Montana. Between 1841 and 1869 the Oregon Trail was used by settlers, ranchers, farmers, miners, and business men migrating to the Pacific Northwest of what is now the United States. Once the first transcontinental railroad by the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific was completed in 1869, the use of this trail by long distance travelers rapidly diminished as the railroad traffic replaced most need for it. By 1883 the Northern Pacific Railroad had reached Portland, Oregon, and most of the reason for the trail disappeared. Roads were built over or near most of the trail as local travelers traveled to cities originally established along the Oregon Trail. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_Trail]

