

The River Road Review

Oregon-California Trail Association—Nebraska chapter

Winter 2006

Fall Trek Begins at California Hill

by Joe Fairfield and Barb Netherland

Ed. note: Since I wasn't able to make the fall trek, I asked some people to be sure to write something up and send it to me for the newsletter...low and behold, I received articles from two people and decided to put both together into one story. Thanks Joe and Barb.

Seven OCTA-NE folks decked out in coats and hoods, gloves, and heavy socks met at Happy Jacks' in Brule, Nebraska, for a fun day—even though it had to be the *coldest* day in the history of the world. There were initial concerns about rain and snow, and we ran into a bit of that; however, the day turned out to be usual fall trek weather—overcast, cold and windy. The weather forecast did force a change of plans and museums in Julesburg gained favor over the proposed outdoor locations near Ash Hollow. The general consensus seems to be: where there is trail, there is plenty to see and even more to learn.

We started at a marker near Happy Jacks and found that the marker had been moved a bit to the north when the interstate was built. About 3¼ miles west of Brule the terrain rises somewhat to the northwest, and in this area the Old Oregon Trail crosses Highway 30 heading northwest across the Gordon Bunner place on the north side of the road. A large swale ran through the middle of the front yard and could easily be overlooked unless you have a dead on map and an eagle eye gaze.

We backtracked to the edge of a knoll where we were rewarded with a beautiful view of the river and the adjoining flatland where the wagons



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The entrance to California Hill is through a “person gate”, which was in bad repair. Loren Pospisil and Bill Petersen worked on repairing the gate while Barb Netherland, Judie Moorehouse, Nancy Petersen and Lois Fairfield walked up the hill to the trail ruts, shown in the background.

crossed (upper California crossing); we regrouped before heading west up the hill.

The California Hill Nebraska State Historical sign had been torn from its mountings and stolen about a year or so ago (possibly due to its aluminum content). The California Hill site had been purchased by OCTA and then turned over to the Nebraska State Historical Society. Northwest from the entrance one can follow the trail for about three-quarters of a mile and over the hill north for another half mile. The trail is indicated by very evident ruts.

The condition of the entrance to California Hill was in very poor shape and certainly needed a major

repair job. Loren Pospisil, who brought along a hammer and some nails, along with Bill Petersen, did repairs on the gate but it was in such bad shape that a “patch up” was about all that could be done.

At California Hill the guys fixed the fence while the gals hiked the hill for another visual treat of prairie, ruts and swales. We engaged in a “stare-down” contest with cranky cows who didn't seem to care for intruders. Our visit to California Hill was properly recorded for posterity in a journal housed in a mailbox at the entrance gate.

After the visit to California Hill, we drove back south one mile on the county road to the old Highway

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Editor's Corner

Election Results Are In

The ballots have been counted, and we have received the results. Our new officers for 2007 are:

President: Loren Pospisil

Vice President: Carole Meyer

Secretary: Nancy Petersen

Treasurer: Betty Scheinost

Seventy-five ballots were sent out to 39 members' households. Only 29 ballots were returned, and eleven of those were from out of state. This is not a good return (26%), but maybe par for the course considering the voting record at the national level.

There has been some discussions in the past about having different types of memberships in our chapter — subscriptions for those out-of-staters who can't come to our spring or fall treks versus those people who just want to get our fantastic newsletter. Currently a couple joins for the same price as a single member, but the couple get two votes for the price of one. Is this fair? Is it fair that voting takes place at meetings where only a handful of chapter members are present? If you want a say in any of this, please send us your input.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all.

~Carole Meyer

The Oregon-California Trails Association—Nebraska chapter

President: Loren Pospisil

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Secretary: Nancy Petersen

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Newsletter Editor: Carole Meyer

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Letters to the editor are printed as space is available and may be edited.

Letters to the Editor

I have attended a meeting on November 14 in interest of the wagon train in which I am involved. Ben Kern. I did some preliminary work with The Farm & Ranch Museum in Gering to house the wagon train in Gering during the convention and with Keith County Visitors' Center for the start of the train at Ogallala around July 28. Nothing is set in concrete as waiting on scripting for the movie. Check out *News From the Plains*, Fall 2006, p. 3 for more information.

~Bill Petersen

I am a very new member of the Nebraska chapter of OCTA. While I am very interested in the NE chapter, I am a "displaced" Nebraskan and live in CA. As such, I do want to participate in whatever way I can be productive from a distance. I'm looking forward to the meeting in August.

~Charlotte Glinski

Articles Needed for River Road Review

Please share your knowledge with us and send your scholarly articles, photos, trail news, and upcoming trail-related events to the editor:

Carole Meyer

1118 N. Minnesota Avenue

Hastings, NE 68901

In e-mail use **OCTA** as the subject:

cmartist@inebraska.com

Chapter Dues

Send your chapter dues of \$10 directly to the treasurer:

Betty Scheinost

2760 36th Avenue

Columbus, NE 68601-2342

Convention Update

Information has been received from the Convention committee for the 25th Anniversary OCTA Convention scheduled for next summer. The tentative schedule is as follows:

Pre-convention Tours:

- August 5-6: Henry to Ft. Laramie to Glendo with Randy Brown
- August 5-6: Oregon Trail Wagon Train with Ben Kern
- August 5: Sutherland Ruts with Linda Tacey
- August 6: California Hill, Brule, Julesburg with Joe Fairfield

Registration: Gering Civic Center

August 7: Board Meeting, Wagon Train 3-Hr Tour and viewing at Chimney Rock, visit local museums, program and supper at Scottsbluff Monument

August 8: Chapter Presidents' breakfast, flag ceremony, general business meeting, parade, keynote speaker Gregory Franzwa, other speakers, chapter meetings, authors night social, OCTA band

August 9: Bus Tours to Ash Hollow, Scotts Bluff/Morrill County, and Ft. Laramie, supper on your own, workshops

August 10: Paper presentations, awards luncheon, memory CD with Becky McMillan, speakers, BBQ at Five Rocks Amphitheater, Ash Hollow Pageant

August 11: Bus Tours to Ash Hollow, Scotts Bluff/Morrill County, and Ft. Laramie

August 12: Non-denominational service at Kiowa Creek, 24-Hr Oregon Trail Wagon Train tour at Bayard

Silent auction and raffle items are needed for the convention. Contact Barb Netherland at npvm@earthlink.net or PO Box 435, Gering, NE 69341 for more information.

30 and crossed it. At this point we drove the county road (old Lincoln Highway) south for about three-quarters mile; it winds around to the southwest five miles to Big Springs, Nebraska. We arrived there about 10:30 A.M., making a “pit stop” near the mid town railroad crossing. The route south from old Highway 30 was the one taken by the original Lincoln Highway. In town the route was marked by Old Lincoln Highway signs.

The trail led down along the railroad tracks to the southwest of Big Springs, where we stopped at the South Platte Pony Express Station marker.

We drove on into the town of Julesburg, Colorado. When we first arrived, we visited a downtown antique mall (just off Highway 30), then went to the recently created Fort Sedgwick Museum which is still under construction, although it contained a great display of old Fort Sedgwick artifacts. The Historical Society folks greeted us kindly, provided very interesting tours and offered a place for us to eat our sack lunch. Their hospitality included homemade muffins, breads and cookies. Yum.



South Platte Pony Express Station between Big Springs, Nebraska, and Julesburg, Colorado.



The group at the Fort Sedgwick Museum, Julesburg, Colorado, left to right: Barb Netherland, Bill Peterson, Nancy Peterson, Loren Pospisil, Judie Moorehouse, and Joe Fairfield, in front.

A photograph of our group gathered around a cannon made the Julesburg newspaper, and a photo of Loren Pospisil in a buffalo coat should make the cover of *Godey's Ladies' Book* or some such fashion conscience publication.

A little later we visited the Julesburg Railroad Depot Museum down the street west of the Fort Sedgwick Museum. From there we drove back to the overpass east of Julesburg and headed south toward Interstate 76, but turned off west on a paved county road about one-quarter mile or so north of it. Just west of this turn-off is an impressive Julesburg Visitors Center built within the last few years. Nice grounds and building, great Pony Express statue, free (donations only) coffee—Colorado sure says “howdy” in a fine way!

West of the Center a few miles on the paved county road, we came to the site of Italian Caves and Devil's Dive. The Italian Caves were constructed by a mysterious fellow named Uberto Gibello, an Italian well-digger and stone cutter. Built beginning in 1887, the homestead grew to include three houses made of stone, a vineyard and irrigation system. There was also one-half

mile of tunnels and underground rooms (not safe to enter), the purpose of which remains speculation.

Devil's Dive was named by stagecoach drivers who used it around 1905. Located next to Italian Caves, passengers usually got out and negotiated the “Dive” on foot while the stage driver crossed the wash at a full run. Freight wagons often detoured south to avoid the “Dive”.



Loren Pospisil demonstrates a sheep skin coat, the type worn by soldiers at Old Fort Sedgwick.

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A few miles west from the old Italian Cave ruins on the paved county road is the original site of old



Oregon Trail monument just east of Ovid, Colorado.

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Julesburg, Colorado. There were four Julesburg town sites—named after the notorious trading post operator Jules Beni, who was later killed by the equally notorious Jack Slade. Westward about 1½ miles from the original site of old Julesburg is the site of old Fort Sedgwick. The area surrounding the Julesburg sites as well as the site of Ft Sedgwick were the backdrop for the Indian raids of 1865.

Immediately west of the original old Julesburg site, the Oregon Trail heads northwest and crosses the South Platte River. On the north side of the crossing, it is in the vicinity of the sugar factory at Ovid, Colorado.



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Monuments mark the original site of old Julesburg.

The auto tour brochure was informative and easy to follow, except that one of the directional signs to Julesburg #3 was missing, and sleuths, Lois, Joe and Loren, never did find the site.

After bidding adieu to each other, we headed home. As always, we saw much, learned much and met some fine people.

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