



Trains, Tracks and Historic Trails

As the United States developed from a fledgling country and westward expansion continued throughout its history, the Great American West was firmly entrenched in the timeline of human migration. Go back in time as you experience the triumphs and tragedies of the old west by following one of the many historic tracks and trails in the American West.

Lewis & Clark Trail

In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out at the behest of President Thomas Jefferson to explore the massive new "Louisiana Territory" which had just doubled the size of the United States. For the next two and a half years, Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery party traveled 8,000 miles through present day Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The results of the mission "opened up" the American West and did much to define the nation's character and destiny.

Ascending the Missouri River through present-day **South Dakota** they had their first encounter with the Great Sioux Nation. The expedition wintered in **North Dakota**, then set out up the river in the spring of 1805. They forged westward through country "on which the foot of civilized man had never trodden" in present-day **Montana**, reaching the headwaters of the Missouri River near Three Forks.

With aid from Sacajawea and her Shoshone people, the party crossed the Bitterroot Mountains into present-day Idaho and secured the services of a Lemhi-Shoshone guide and actually followed portions the northern route of the Nez Perce trail (the trail was an Indian trail before it was the Lewis and Clark Trail). When the Expedition encountered the Nez Perce, Lewis and Clark's men were cold, starving and sick. The Nez Perce fed them, nursed Expedition members back to health and spared their lives.

Navigating down the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia Rivers, the explorers reached the Pacific Ocean in November 1805. On their return, the party resided with the Nez Perce Indians, waiting for the snow to melt in the Bitterroots. The party then split near present day Missoula, Montana with Lewis exploring the Blackfoot, Sun and Marias Rivers in Northern Montana and Clark heading southeast to the Yellowstone. They met again at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers and continued back east.

Modern day explorers can follow the Lewis and Clark route through, South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana by car, water, hiking trail or by horseback. Most of the trail is well marked, and there are many interpretive sites, many located within National Forest Boundaries.

In South Dakota, near today's city of Yankton. The Lewis & Clark visitors center at Gavin's Point Dam has exhibits covering the Missouri River and the expedition. The Lewis & Clark recreation area offers canoe and boat rentals, and hiking trails. Moving west, Chamberlain has one of the finest collections of Lakota art and artifacts. Lower Brule offers tipi stays through the tribal office and heart of the Sioux Nation tours. In Pierre, visit the Cultural Heritage Center and the "Oyate Tawich'an" exhibit that explores American Indian culture. A Jefferson Friendship Medal, which the explorers gave to the tribes they met, is also on display.

The North Dakota Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center located in Washburn, north of Bismarck provides an overview of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, with special emphasis on the time spent at Fort Mandan during the winter of 1804-1805. The Interpretive Center's Bergquist Gallery showcases the art of Karl Bodmer, one of only four galleries in the world to house a complete collection, rotating the prints on a seasonal basis.

The reconstructed Fort Mandan rests in the riparian forests of the Missouri River and features refurbished rooms filled with the equipment of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. On-site interpreters provide programs and year-round tours of Lewis & Clark's 1804-1805 wintering post. The Headwaters Fort Mandan Visitor Center, inspired by a Mandan earthlodge, provides modern restroom facilities, a welcoming orientation area, gift shop and classroom center complements the cottonwood bottomlands near Fort Mandan.

In Montana, the expedition covered more miles than any other state. Today, you can paddle the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, preserved as the Corps saw it. In Great Falls, the Lewis And Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center tells the story of the entire 8,000 mile journey with special emphasis on the Indian people they encountered along the way. In Helena, the "Gates of the Mountains" of the Missouri River can be seen via a commercial boat tour, with hiking, history and wildlife viewing available. Travelers Rest State Park, outside Missoula, contains what is believed to be the camps used by the expedition in September 1805 and July 1806. East of Billings, at Pompeys Pillar is the carved signature of W. Clark, the only physical evidence along their journey.

Oregon Trail

From Courthouse Square in Independence, Missouri to Oregon City on the Willamette River, the Oregon Trail was the first road west for Americans migrating from the east 150 years ago. The length of the trail was 1,923 miles, and it was used from 1843 to 1868. The trip took five to six months to complete, and most emigrant wagons traveled at an average speed of 12-20 miles per day.

The highest point of the Oregon Trail was at 7,500 feet at South Pass near Lander, **Wyoming**. Over 350,000 people are estimated to have traveled the Oregon Trail during its working days, making it the greatest mass migration in human history. As many as 35,000 people perished along the route. The Trail allowed the United States to expand west through Oregon and achieve its national "Manifest Destiny" to reach from "sea to shining sea" by sheer force of population.

History has left its mark, carved into the stoney hills just outside of Guernsey, WY. Although many remnants of the trail can be seen in Wyoming, the Oregon Trail tracks here are notable because they were cut into solid rock. A short trail leads uphill to four-foot deep gouges cut by the wheels of thousands of wagons. Register Cliff, located two miles southeast of Guernsey provided travelers with a "chalkboard" where they placed their names.

For a first-hand feel of emigrant travel, climb aboard the wagon at the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center in Casper, WY. Bump along in an ox-drawn wagon as you ford the North Platte River at its last crossing. Also visit Fort Caspar to see a replica of a ferry used by emigrants to cross the river before the first bridge in this area was constructed. From Casper take Wyoming Highway 220 west in an hour-long drive to Independence Rock (the most noted landmark on the Oregon Trail) and then visit the nearby Handcart Visitor Center at Devils Gate, where you can push and pull an actual Mormon handcart.

To continue following the trail west to Fort Bridger, travel north on U.S. 287, west on Wyoming Highway 28, south on Wyoming Highway 372, and then west on Interstate 80. It will take you about five hours to drive from Independence Rock to Fort Bridger without stops, but you can break the trip up with an overnight stay along the way.

Fort Bridger, an important trail supply point built "in the road of the emigrants" in 1843, was operated by mountain man Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez and later became a U.S. Army post. Today you can stock up on 19th-century goods at the recreated Fort Bridger Stockade and explore the military-era buildings.

Nez Perce Trail

One of the most tragic and heroic chapters of the American West occurred in the summer and early fall of 1877, when Chief Joseph's band of 750 "non-treaty" Nez Perce Indians were ordered to turn over their land in the Wallowa country of north-eastern Oregon and move onto a small reservation. Conflict ensued and the Nez Perce engaged in an epic flight, by foot and horseback, through present-day Idaho, **Wyoming and Montana** in a futile effort to escape to Canada.

The Nez Perce had only 250 warriors among them but fought in some 20 battles and skirmishes against a total of more than 2,000 soldiers aided by numerous civilian volunteers and Indians of other tribes. Their route went

through three states, dictated by topography and skillful strategy. The Nez Perce traveled over 1,500 miles before they were trapped and forced to surrender at Montana's Bear Paw Mountains in October of 1877. They were stopped just short of the Canadian border where safety awaited them. General William Tecumseh Sherman called the saga of the Nez Perce "the most extraordinary of Indian wars."

Surviving Nez Perces were sent to several years of exile in present-day Oklahoma before they were allowed to return to reservations in the Northwest, where their descendants still live.

Starting in present-day Spalding, The Nez Perce National Historic Park visitor center features a museum, movie and tours to better acquaint the visitor with the Nez Perce Culture. Near present-day Kamiah, visitors can observe the significant cultural site of the "Heart of the Monster." The actual trail loops and cuts northeast across the Idaho panhandle along the Lolo Trail on the banks of the Lochsa River (U. S. Hwy 12) and enters Montana through Lolo Pass near present-day Missoula. The band turned sharply south, fleeing down the Bitterroot River Valley until they encountered Col. John Gibbon's troops and fought a battle that is commemorated by the Big Hole National Battlefield Monument and Visitor's Center, Route 43 near Wisdom.

Entering Yellowstone Park from the west, the Nez Perce encountered some of the earliest tourists and prospectors and two white men were killed. The Nez Perce exited Yellowstone two weeks after they entered, narrowly missing an encounter with their enemy, General William Tecumseh Sherman, East of Yellowstone, the Nez Perce plotted a masterful escape from two columns of Army forces. They feinted up the Shoshone River near present-day Cody, WY and escaped along a route that took them straight up the narrow Clark's Fork Canyon. Highway 296 northwest from Cody now bears the name, "The Chief Joseph Highway." Yellowstone's Nez Perce Creek, which feeds the Firehole River, is named for this desperate bid for freedom.

The band entered present-day Montana along the Clark's Fork and ventured north until engaging in the Canyon Creek battle against U.S. Cavalry General Sturgis. The site of the battle is 7.5 miles north on Secondary Highway 532 and is now the location of the Chief Joseph Statue and Canyon Creek Battlefield Marker. South of Chinook, the Bear Paw Battlefield is now a National Park and the final stop on the Nez Perce National Historic Park. A self-guided trail marks the Battlefield, while the Blain County Museum in Chinook serves as the interim Visitor Center for the National Park Service.

Trains & Tracks

The building of the transcontinental railroads to allow access into the American West ushered in a new era of settlement and development and led to the population and development of the region as we now know it. And whether by Amtrak, museums or historic steam trains, the legacy of the Iron Horse lives on in the Great American West.

In **Cheyenne, Wyoming** visit a variety of railroad attractions. Big Boy #4404, on display at the Holliday Park, is known as the largest successful steam locomotive built. At Lions Park, another display portrays the heritage of the railroad in the west. The Wyoming Transportation Museum, housed in the historic Union Pacific depot, is a must for train buffs. Gillette, WY is home to the Rockpile Museum, a Burlington Northern Caboose display. To enhance the visit, the museum also provides general history on the railroads.

The Black Hills Central Railroad, located in the **Black Hills of South Dakota**, offers a 32 km (20 mile) train ride between Hill City and Keystone along an old mining route once used by settlers. While traveling through the breathtaking scenery offered by the Black Hills, passengers also step into the past and experience the history of the region. The Adams Museum in Deadwood offers visitors a chance to see the first locomotive in the Black Hills region.

The Peter Yegen Jr. Yellowstone County Museum in **Billings, Montana** offers visitors a peek into the past with the American locomotive the #1031 on display. Further north, the Sheridan Depot proudly displays a locomotive that was ahead of its time. This locomotive made the trip from Aurora, IL to Savanna, IL in 1957 with a 12-car excursion train in 1 hour and 11 minutes. The Izaak Walton Inn was built on the Burlington Northern mainline, and today hosts activities for railroad enthusiasts of all personalities...including an overnight stay in a restored caboose. Hike, cross-country ski or snowshoe into Glacier National Park.

Anaconda, MT is home to the Copper King Express. Ride the rails from Anaconda to Butte and see historic sites and natural beauty or enjoy a dinner or play, all from the comforts of these newly refurbished train

cars. During the weekends, Virginia City features the 1911 Baldwin steam locomotive and offers visitors a chance to journey between the historical mining towns of Virginia City and Nevada City. While in Lewistown hop aboard the popular Charlie Russell Chew Choo and enjoy a classic dinner excursion.

In **North Dakota** you can visit the state railroad museum in Mandan and experience Railroad Days every summer. The Fort Lincoln Trolley outside of Bismarck is where you can ride a restored 1890s streetcar that ran along Fourth Street in Bismarck in the 1920s. For a real thrill, check out the Highline Bridge. At 3,860 feet long and 162 feet above the riverbed, it is one of the longest and highest single-track railroad bridges in the United States.