

# ACROSS THE PLAINS, MOUNTAINS, AND DESERTS

*A Bibliography of the Oregon-California Trail,  
1812–1912*



Will Bagley

*This bibliography of the Oregon-California Trail was compiled for the National Trails Intermountain Region office of the National Park Service in support of a Historic Resource Study of the Oregon & California National Historic Trails. It provides access to and finding information about some 2,500 primary accounts of crossing the plains and almost 2,000 secondary sources. It includes books, magazine and newspaper articles, government documents, maps, and manuscript collections describing life on the trail.*

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Salt Lake City, Utah  
for the  
National Park Service  
National Trails Intermountain Region  
Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Salt Lake City, Utah  
Under the terms of CA 1530-00-001

Cover art: Charles M. Russell, "The Wagon Boss," 1909.  
Title Page: "'Bull Trains' Crossing the Plains,"  
from William A. Bell, *New Tracks in North America*, 1869.  
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January 2014

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For A Historic Resource Study of the  
Oregon & California National Historic Trails



## PREFACE

As Matthew Joseph Bruccoli noted, "Publication is the essential act of scholarship, but all bibliographies are works in progress." This one is no different.

The primary purpose of *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts: A Bibliography of the Oregon-California Trail* is to support the Historic Resource Study of the Oregon and California National Historic Trails I began long ago for the National Park Service (NPS). This study involved research and writing "to further the planning, development, operation and protection of the Oregon and California National Historic Trails, authorized by Congress as components of the National Trails System in 1978 and 1992." It sought to "synthesize the research material for a comprehensive narrative of the trails" and "assemble a body of research materials in electronic and hard copy format." The information will be included in the database the NPS and other federal agencies use to administer and manage the trails, and components will be "available to visitors, researchers, writers, publishers, and students of the trail."

Over time, the "comprehensive narrative of the trails" grew like Topsy, along with my vision of what such a comprehensive history should look like. The single report called for in the original Cooperative Agreement expanded into three parts: a research report; a chronological narrative, "'The Long and Arduous Journey': The Story of the Oregon & California Trails, 1840 to 1870"; and a social history, "'A Long, Rugged, and Weary Road': Life on the Oregon & California Trails, 1840 to 1870." I submitted a 144,000-word draft of the social history in March 2006, but it only included six chapters, and the 225,000-word draft of the narrative history submitted in July 2006 only covered up to 1850. (The drafts of the social and narrative histories are now up to 600,00 words.) I delivered documentation of the research component of the study, with contributions by Lesley Wischmann and the late Bob Wier of East Texas State University, to the NPS in 2007 (and updated it in 2011) as "'The Change Time Has Wrought': The Legacy and Historic Resources of the Oregon & California National Historic Trails." I delivered a corrected master

of this bibliography, which had been ably copy edited by Nicky Leach, to the Park Service in June 2008.

Since then the University of Oklahoma Press has published two volumes of this comprehensive trails narrative in its “Overland West: The Story of the Oregon and California Trails” series, which will ultimately consist of four volumes. A secondary purpose of this bibliography is to support the Overland West series. *So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California, 1812–1848* appeared in 2010; and *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West, 1849–1852* in 2012. The last two volumes, “The Long and Perilous Journey: Trails Transform the West, 1853–1860” and “The War for the Medicine Road: Trails, War, and Conquest, 1861–1912” are in process. Another University of Oklahoma Press volume, *South Pass: Gateway to a Continent*, will appear in March 2014 and covers the years from 1853 to 1870 in considerable detail.

This bibliography contains citation information for every work cited in the Historic Resource Study of the Oregon and California National Historic Trails study and the Overland West series. It provides separate listings for primary sources and secondary sources such as books, articles, and dissertations. (Complete citations for most newspaper articles are provided in the text of the study.) *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts* owes a tremendous debt to historian Merrill J. Mattes’s masterwork, *Platte River Road Narratives: A Descriptive Bibliography of Travel over the Great Central Overland Route to Oregon, California, Utah, Colorado, Montana, and Other Western States and Territories, 1812–1866* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Mattes listed 2,082 documents describing yearly travel along the Platte River over the Oregon, California, and Mormon National Historic Trails between 1812 and 1866. Regarded as the definitive annotated overland trails bibliography, *Platte River Road Narratives* helped inspire renewed interest in overland trails to the Pacific. For a quarter century it has informed all of us who love the story of our nation’s past, and it will stand as the foundation for any scholar seeking to understand the essential role overland trails played in the creation of today’s American West.



Thanks to the ongoing work of Western history libraries and archives, the good efforts of the Oregon-California Trails Association and the Merrill Mattes Library, and the explosion of material on the Internet, the documentary record of America's overland wagon roads has grown dramatically since Mattes completed *Platte River Road Narratives*, which itself tripled the number of catalogued overland sources. *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts: A Bibliography of the Oregon-California Trail* lists almost 2,500 primary narratives of overland travel. I have examined and have copies of most of the sources included in *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts*. Some entries list the number and rating (for example, "Mattes 999, 2 stars") assigned to it in Merrill J. Mattes's magisterial *Platte River Road Narratives*. When the entry includes such a note, it indicates I have not seen the item.

The scope of *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts* is not limited to civilian travelers bound to Oregon or California in the nineteenth century. It encompasses the primary accounts of anyone going "The Plains Across," to use the phrase Noah Brooks applied to his 1902 recollection of his 1859 trek, which John D. Unruh Jr. gave new life as the title of his definitive social history, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*, in 1979. This bibliography does not discriminate against fur traders, Frenchmen, soldiers, expressmen, merchants, miners bound for Pikes Peak or Montana, or Mormons bound for Utah. If a man, woman, or child left an account of their experiences crossing the northern overland route across the Great Plains, whether going of east or west, I hope it appears here. The glaring exception to this is *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts'* random selection of sources from the California Trail's southern route, whose exploration is so ably chronicled in Harlan Hague's *The Road to California: The Search for a Southern Overland Route*. (Glendale, Calif: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1978). Elliott West's "Foreword" and Patricia A. Etter's annotated bibliography, *To California on the Southern Route 1849: A History and Annotated Bibliography* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1998), help mitigate this omission.

This bibliography uses several terms to identify the nature of its sources. I sometimes use "journal" and "diary" as interchangeable terms, especially if the author identified their work as one or the other, but like Mattes, I regard a

true diary as “a narrative that was composed, normally on a daily basis, while the traveler was en route. It is, in other words, the original field book.” A journal, on the other hand, “is a detailed progressive account, usually not on a straight daily basis, written soon after the journey, and sometimes based on an actual diary or field notes, as well as recollections.” If an item inaccurately calls itself a diary or journal, I try to identify it as a recollection, reminiscence, or autobiography. I generally use the term “recollection” to identify an account written relatively close to the experience, say within twenty years, while less-reliable reminiscences and autobiographies are often written much, much later. Contemporary sources—letters, diaries, and newspaper reports—are typically more accurate and historically valuable, but as Mattes observed, all recollections and even reminiscences recalled late in life “have some degree of value, and some of them are surprisingly accurate and readable.”

For the last fourteen years I have been engaged in a great adventure: seeking out the historic resources of the Oregon and California National Historic Trails—the narratives, histories, government documents, maps, works of art, newspaper and periodical articles, folk songs, and physical remnants that constitute the historic record of America’s overland wagon roads and form a significant part of our nation’s legacy. It has been a dream assignment, but it is also intimidating and disheartening, since the more one understands the size and complexity of that record, the less one can ever hope to master it. I am painfully aware of this work’s faults and limitations as a trail bibliography; for example, it does not include every relevant article from *Overland Journal*, the foremost magazine of trails scholarship, or every source cited in *Platte River Road Narratives*. For a much more comprehensive resource of one period, see the online “The Gold Rush of California” bibliography by Librarian and University Archivist Robert LeRoy Santos at California State University. You can access digital copies at <http://www.library.csustan.edu/bsantos/goldrush/GOLDCHP1.HTM> and <http://www.library.csustan.edu/bsantos/goldrush/GOLDCHP2.HTM> [15 January 2014]

Those who believe consistency is the bugaboo of small minds will find *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts* wonderfully broadminded. The best a

historian can hope is to contribute to our understanding of this legacy and hope to create a work that will inspire and assist anyone interested in learning more about this remarkable period.

The study of the overland trail and its scholarly resources is a work in progress, and so is this bibliography, which is far from being a comprehensive list of trail narratives and sources. These documents contain detailed and specific information on the Indian nations that called the trail home, the historic landscape and trail sites, alternate trail routes, scenery, vegetation, weather, and wildlife that is invaluable to understanding and comparing the state of trails in the mid-nineteenth century with today's National Historic Trails. Overland narratives tell the stories and bring to life the men, women, and children who pushed our nation's frontier to the Pacific during the mid-nineteenth century and transformed the region, themselves, and the lives of the Native peoples. Every account adds something to this epic story that did so much to forge the American West we know today. "Each overland journal is a reflection of a folk experience and a time spirit," historian Dale L. Morgan said at Santa Fe in 1961. "In their journals westering Americans set down a collective national self-portrait, a mosaic in words. The mosaic can never be altogether filled in, never amount to a final creation. Each journal that is found alters some detail, and gives fresh play to our imagination as well as our understanding. It is rather wonderful to think that this can go on forever."

—Will Bagley

Salt Lake City, 15 January 2014

## PRIMARY SOURCES EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

The primary sources section of *Across the Plains, Mountains, and Deserts* consists of four separate elements: the first lists narratives—letters, diaries and journals, and recollections and reminiscences—by people who crossed the Oregon-California Trails and wrote about it; the second section includes guidebooks and gazetteers from the main trail era; the third consists of post-1870 overland wagon travel sources; and the fourth lists modern trail accounts. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between trail accounts and guidebooks, so there is considerable overlap between the sections. The bibliography contains links to some 825 full-text versions of these firsthand overland narratives. Sites such as the Library of Congress, the Digital Public Library of America, Google Books, and the Internet Archive provide access to many other online overland narratives that are cited but not linked in this bibliography. The Church History Department and Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has full text versions of more than 3,500 trail sources available on its website, Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868, at <http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/> [10 January 2014].

The names of authors begin each entry, along with information to identify the nature of the source, that is, whether it is a letter, diary, or recollection, and the archive or publication where a scholar can find it. Wherever possible, when the title of the source does not specify the date of the overland account, the date is provided in brackets: [Date]. These citations incorporate several personal preferences, notably the use of a single colon in place of a period and colon. Page ranges appear at the end of the entry but before Internet links. Where applicable, page ranges appear at the end of the entry but before Internet links. Newspaper citations contain the place they were published, the information needed to locate them, and are to page/column: 2/3, when such data is available. Book titles are in italics, while article, thesis, and dissertation titles are in plain text with quotation marks. Manuscript citations appear without quotation marks. The bibliography preserves the grammar, spelling, and diction of the original. Underlined text is italicized. [*Sic*] is used sparingly. Brackets enclose added letters, missing words, and conjectural

readings. Internet addresses and links indicate the date the site was accessed in brackets: [16 January 2007]. I have tried to insure that all the links are “live,” but given the transitory nature of the Internet, a few sites may no longer be active. Such sources can often be located with a simple search of the author or title of the narrative. Sources published before 1923 are in the public domain, and the full text of many of them can be found online. The phrase “Digital copy formerly at” identifies inactive links, and the note “copy in possession of author” indicates I have a copy I would be happy to share.

## ABBREVIATED ARCHIVAL REFERENCES

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library   | Springfield, Illinois<br>(formerly the Illinois State Historical Library).   |
| Allen Library:                         | Special Collections, Allen Library, University of Washington.  |
| American Heritage Center:              | American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.   |
| Bancroft Library:                      | Bancroft Library, the University of California at Berkeley.  |
| Bieber Collection:                     | The Ralph P. Bieber Research Collection (in process)<br>The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.   |
| Beinecke Library:                      | Western Americana Collection,<br>Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.   |
| Bentley Library:                       | Michigan Historical Collections,<br>Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.   |
| BYU Library:                           | Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young Univ.  |
| Clarke Historical Library:             | Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University,<br>Mount Pleasant, Michigan.   |
| Clements Library:                      | William L. Clements Library,<br>University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.   |
| Covered Wagon Women:                   | Kenneth L. Holmes, ed. <i>Covered Wagon Women:<br/>Diaries &amp; Letters from the Western Trails, 1840–1890</i> , 11 vols.<br>Glendale, Calif. and Spokane, Wash: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1983–93.                            |
| Daughters of Utah Pioneers:            | Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum,<br>Salt Lake City, Utah.  |
| Eastern Washington Historical Society: | Joel E. Ferris Research Library and<br>Archives, Cheney Cowles Center, Spokane, Washington.  |
| Family History Library:                | Family History Library,<br>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.  |
| Henderson Collection:                  | Paul and Helen Henderson Oregon Trail Collection.<br>Formerly at the American Heritage Center and<br>North Platte Valley Museum, now at the Legacy of the Plains Museum,<br>2930 Old Oregon Trail, Gering, Gering, Neb., 39641 |
| Huntington Library:                    | The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.   |
| Indiana Historical Society:            | William Henry Smith Memorial Library,<br>Indiana Historical Society.   |
| Journal History:                       | Journal History of<br>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.   |

LDS Archives: Church History Department and Library,  
 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.  
 Marriott Library: Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, Univ. of Utah  
 Mattes Library: Merrill J. Mattes Research Library,  
 National Frontier Trails Center, Independence, Mo.  
 Missouri Historical Society: Missouri Historical Society Library and Archives,  
 Saint Louis, Missouri.  
 Montana Historical Society: Montana Historical  
 Society Archives, Helena, Montana.  
 National Archives: National Archives and Records Administration,  
 Washington, D.C.  
 NFTC National Frontier Trails Center, Independence, Mo.  
 Oregon Historical Society: Oregon Historical Society Research Library,  
 Portland, Oregon.  
 Society of California Pioneers: Alice Phelan Sullivan Library, The Society of  
 California Pioneers, San Francisco, California.  
 UCLA: Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles Library.  
 Western Historical Manuscripts: State Historical Society of Missouri  
 Western Historical Manuscript Collection,  
 Ellis Library, University of Missouri-Columbia.  
 University of Oregon Library: Special Collections & University Archives,  
 University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.



## PART I: PRIMARY SOURCES, 1812–1912

### A

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# ACROSS THE PLAINS, MOUNTAINS, AND DESERTS

A Bibliography of the Oregon-California Trail,  
1812–1912

## PART II: SECONDARY SOURCES

For a Historic Resource Study of the  
Oregon & California National Historic Trails

Will Bagley



## SECONDARY SOURCES EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

The listings of secondary sources are divided into sections for Books; Fiction; Periodicals, Essays, and Chapters; Theses and Dissertations; Newspaper Articles; Manuscript Collections; Government Documents, Reports, and Studies; Web sites and on-line articles; Maps; and Bibliographies. Each entry begins with the name of its author (or authors), followed by the work's title. Citations for books list the place, the publisher, and the date of publication. It uses the abbreviations for U.S. states found in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, not the two-letter U.S. Postal Service abbreviations. If this information is unavailable, it is omitted. These listings incorporate several personal preferences, notably the use of a single colon in place of a period and colon, a habit acquired from working with the venerable Arthur H. Clark Company. Where applicable, page ranges identify the location of the overland material and appear at the end of the entry but before Internet links. Newspaper citations contain the information needed to locate them and are to page/column: 2/3, when such data is available. Book titles are in italics, while article, thesis, and dissertation titles are in plain text with quotation marks. Manuscript citations appear without quotation marks. The bibliography preserves the grammar, spelling, and diction of the original. Underlined text is italicized. [Sic] is used sparingly. Brackets enclose added letters, missing words, and conjectural readings.

Please send updates, additions, and corrections to  
[wlbagley@xmission.com](mailto:wlbagley@xmission.com)

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