

A Trip Over the Old Oregon Trail in 1862

AN ACCOUNT OF THE TRIALS THAT RESET A TRAIN OF PIONEERS, AS RELATED BY ONE WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE PARTY

The forty even played an important role in the cause of advancing civilization on the wagon loads of brave pioneers were drawn across the plains and over the Old Oregon Trail by the plodding oxen.

The well-worn Indian trails that stretched from Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and other states of that section played a prominent part in guiding the "Star of Empire" on its long, arduous journey westward to "Where the Oregon and she bears no sound save her own dashings."

Along the well defined trails the first immigrant trains made their way to Oregon—the trails charted the course of the first and the most successful parties. Even though slight deviations were made the route remained practically the same. With that caution, characteristic of the Indians, they had mapped a route that offered the least resistance to travel. The white man improved upon this and the sturdy pioneers who crossed that great expanse of country from the early forties to the late sixties traversed the same route, in many instances becoming historically and geographically known as the Old Oregon Trail.

The story will be presented as briefly as possible. The facts appearing were supplied by Mrs. C. J. Norval, and have been substantiated by Mrs. Jane Terwilliger-Gilmore. Mrs. Norval has been a resident of Sunnyside and the north end of Union county since 1862. Mrs. Gilmore, who is an aunt of Mrs. Norval, has been a resident of La Grande for the past several years and has resided in Union county 50 years. The two brave women crossed the plains over the Old Oregon Trail in the same train. The ages of the two are 71 and 52, respectively. When that historic trip was made Mrs. Norval was 11 and Mrs. Terwilliger (her name at that time) was 25. At present both are enjoying good health, a blessing given most of the sturdy men and women who braved the journey across a greater part of the continent.

The Departure.

"It was during the early part of May, 1862, that the members of our train gathered in or near Pleasantville, Iowa," said Mrs. Norval. "My recollection of our departure is as fresh as the day following our leaving from the old Iowa home. All was in readiness for our departure the evening before. Early the next morning last farewells were spoken. Tears dimmed the eyes of those who made up the train but no more than the dear ones who were to remain behind. I remember distinctly hearing my grandfather call to my father, 'Terry, take us we started! Good-bye, Terry. If we never meet again on earth I know we will meet on the other side.' But the command was given for the wagons to fall in line. Hands clasped, in many instances, for the last time, and the train moved onward, headed for the great West. 'Arrived' was to have been our

destination, but an act of fate, particulars of which will be revealed later, placed us in Oregon.

Billy Glenn Was Captain.

"Billy Glenn was elected captain of our train, which consisted of 70 wagons. Among the members of the train were Captain Billy Glenn, his wife and children, among the latter being T. T. Glenn, for many years a resident of Union county—Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Leona and family, Mr. and Mrs. Tins and children, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Glenn, Mr. and Mrs. A. Terwilliger and children, Dr. Payson, Dr. Williams, Otto Rekersley—now a resident of Cove—and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Glenn, Carl Rhodes and family, Mr. and Mrs. Edith Kuhn—who live in Union county until removed by death a few years ago—Harvey Terwilliger, Joe and Jim Harrison, my father, and three brothers, John, Adlin, and Dave. There were many others whose names I do not recall, including five wagon loads of men from Wisconsin. The wagons from Wisconsin were all drawn by horses. I recall that Capt. Glenn had three ox teams and one mule team. Thos. Glenn had two ox teams and one horse team, and my father had two yoke of oxen and two of cows hitched to one wagon.

Five Trying Months.

"We were on the road five months and a few days. For the first few days the novelty of the trip appealed to many of us, but soon that disappeared and the days seemed to drag into weeks, and the months into years.

"During the first few days of the journey we all became accustomed to camp life. At the beginning there was plenty of food, such as it was. Cooking utensils were not plentiful. Many times at noon the head of the family would allow a long strip of fat bacon for each. The bacon was pierced with a sharp stick and held over the fire until cooked, or presumably so. We would at least hold the strips of bacon over the fire until the grease ran freely from it. Then the bacon was placed on a piece of bread and the meal was ready. For most meals, however, we had coffee, and syrup or honey was also served quite regularly.

"The first weeks that carried us across the prairies were uneventful. I do recall that each wagon took its regular turn in leading the train. The wagon that led one day would be permitted to bring up the rear the succeeding day. We reached Green River without any serious mishaps.

Pete Takes a Hand.

"When we left Iowa it was with the avowed intention of going to California. At Green River the road forked, one leading to California and the one to the north going to Oregon. We had barely arrived at Green River when we were informed that serious Indian outbreaks were occurring along the road to California. A consultation was held and it was decided to take the northern route, hence

Oregon became our destination. A few wagons of our train were determined to reach California and left over that route. We never heard of them afterward. They may have reached their destination, or they may have been killed by the Indians.

Obstacles Multiply.

"By far the most difficult part of the journey was from Green River. As we began to ascend the Rocky roads became worse and in places all but impassable. After passing over the mountain barrier the trip became even more difficult, due to the long distance between water, the weak condition of the cattle and the general decline in health of many members of the party. Although the men always endeavored to make it a point to camp where water could be obtained, we were frequently compelled to make dry camps. Usually we carried sufficient water to take us over for a night, or at least enough for cooking purposes and to satisfy the women and children. But when we passed water and failed to fill our canteens, thinking we would find plenty ahead, and as a result many nights were spent with barrels a drop in camp. Often the faded and weakened cattle and men were compelled to go without water.

First Indian Scare.

"Horses stood the trip better than the cattle and as we were ascending the Rockies the horse teams began to travel a great deal faster than the cattle. One day Captain Glenn and all Terwilligers attempted to keep up with the horses but after a few hours I realized that it was impossible, but while in advance of our train they saw a band of Indians a considerable distance from the road. They turned back and met us and imparted the information concerning the Indians. We never thought of finding water and immediately made camp at a spot where the timber was quite dense. The wagons were hastily drawn into a circle; horses and cattle were securely tied to trees, and every preparation made to ward off an attack from the savages. The reserve containers had not been filled with water during the day and there was not a drop in camp. The horses stamped impatiently and the oxen bellowed because of the thirst. Children cried and there was sufficient noise to have attracted the Indians from miles around. The men would guard all night, expecting an attack momentarily, but dawn came and the expected attack never occurred. It was well along the next day before we reached water. In the meantime cows were milked and an attempt made to quench the thirst of the children with milk, but it relieved them but little.

Five Killed by Indians.

"As we reached the summit of the mountain the attention of those in the van-guard of the train was directed to a flock of crows at a point near the trail. The train halted and although it was the opinion that the crows were feeding on the carcass of a dead animal it was decided to investigate. A number of the men walked over to the spot but instead of finding the carcass of an animal they found the remains of a man. The venturesome birds had picked out the eyes and otherwise mutilated the corpse until it barely resembled a man. I took one glance at the remains and that was enough to stay with me for months afterward.

"The men of our train dug a shallow grave and buried the remains. We resumed travel but had gone only a short distance until we met a small detachment of U. S. cavalry—men, who informed us that the dead man we had found was one of a party of five, who had fallen victim to the Indians. About four miles from where we found the dead man the soldiers had found and buried the other four.

"Before reaching Salt Lake we came upon the remains of another unknown man. At a point where the trail circled, a number of men, who were walking, took a short cut and some two or three hundred yards from the train found the corpse. A bullet hole was found in close proximity to the heart and apparently the unfortunate man had been dragged a considerable distance by a horse, after receiving the fatal wound. From all appearances he had been dead only a few days. The train was halted until a grave was dug and made to hold the remains of another unknown who sacrificed life, love and home for the new West.

Cattle Die in Tracks.

"That part of the trip from the western slopes of the Rocky mountains and through Utah and Idaho was a succession of heart-rending events that sorely tried even the strongest of the men. As each day passed the cattle gradually became poorer and weaker. Although we rested from 24 to 48 hours at convenient watering places cattle continued to die from exhaustion and lack of forage. We never stopped for a rest but in some cases and many dropped in their tracks along the trail. My father lost two steers

and two cows half the number with none for two days. The cattle and horses had not a drop for that period of time. The heat rays of the sun, together with the clouds of dust that rolled up from the road, became all but unbearable for the cattle. As they plodded along with eyes turned toward the water, which was a hundred yards down the sheer banks, they emitted bellows that told of suffering that was threatening the remainder of them. Finally the train halted for a now frequent rest and my father found a place where he was able to descend to the water's edge. I then assisted him in carrying water up to the cattle, and although we made eight or ten trips down the steep embankment, the amount did not satisfy one ox, yet it helped.

"The funeral services over my father's body were performed on that perilous trip I am almost inclined to believe that the men and women of that day were blessed with harder constitutions than those of the present generation. My aunt, Mrs. Terwilliger, was the mother of a week-old babe when we left Iowa. While crossing the plains two babes were born, and despite the days spent being in uncomfortable beds, with all the attendant jolting of the wagons, the babes and mothers clung to life and won against great odds a most successful fight.

"Patience Disappears. "As time wore on, as the supply of food diminished, as members of the party were buried in graves by the side of the trail the patience and

Along the Beautiful Wallowa River.



The above is a scene in the Wallowa Canyon, on the La Grande-Joseph Highway. Beauty runs rampant there.

which he started.

"A Double Funeral. "We reached Sarah's river and halted for a rest. While there my little brother, Dave, was suddenly stricken with illness and died after a few hours. The little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Tins also died within a few hours following the death of my brother. Burials were removed from the bottom of wagon boxes and little coffins were made with the few crude tools available. The coffins were lined with some white cloth that mother had packed and laid at a point near the road. A detachment of cavalry was camped with us and funeral services were conducted by a chaplain of the detachment.

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extra hearing of the men and women vanished. Not only did the men grow impatient and in many cases ill-tempered, but the effects of the trip were also telling on the women and children. Many evenings in camp, after a long hard day on the road, if some trivial event would occur some of the men could be heard swearing like troopers; children became difficult to manage and ill-natured mothers not only scolded but used the rod brutally. Some evenings there would be an intermingling of curses from the men, scolding from the women and crying from the children. It detracted nothing from the character of the sterling men of the party to say that on a few occasions they came to blows. There had to be a vent for emotions that became pent up through the harrowing months.

"Despite the outburst of temper that prevailed occasionally during the latter part of the trip, good order prevailed throughout. Captain Glenn was supreme in his command and with the exception of the division that took place at Green River, the train remained intact to the last.

"Religion and Dancing. "Barely a Sunday passed that religious services of some kind were not held. Many of the brave men and women of our train were devout Christians, and the harrowing experiences only served to make them more steadfast in their devotion. "After a time fear of Indian attacks vanished. There was danger

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