

Tales of the Trail



Weekly programs bring Oregon Trail and local mining history to life

Bureau of Land Management/Contributed photo
A ranger points out the wagon ruts during the program “Oregon Fever” at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center outside Baker City.

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

BAKER CITY — Although the doors remain closed at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, rangers are offering special outdoor programs Thursday through Sunday.

Admission is free. The center

is located 5 miles east of Baker City on Highway 86.

Visitors can discover the unique history of mining in Eastern Oregon at “Going for Gold,” which begins at 9:30 a.m. This 30-minute program covers Auburn, where gold was first discovered in Baker County.

“They were looking for the lost Blue Bucket Mine. And found gold,” said Casey Taylor, a ranger at the center.

Taylor and Ranger Glenn Reynolds take turns presenting

“Going for Gold.” Taylor focuses on the historical perspective — who prospered, and how the discovery of gold led to the rise of Baker City.

“The mission of the BLM here at the center is to tell these stories, and preserve the history,” Taylor said.

(The BLM — Bureau of Land Management — manages the center.)

When Reynolds presents “Going for Gold,” he takes on a different persona.

“I assume a character — a has-been, a bent and broken gold miner,” he said.

A second daily program called “Oregon Fever” describes the emigrant experience along the Oregon Trail. This can be seen twice a day, at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Taylor, Reynolds and Ranger Deb Wessler take turns presenting “Oregon Fever,” and each brings their own interpretation to the program.

“It’s aspects of the Oregon

Trail,” Taylor said. “Basically — why? Why would you want to pack up and move West?”

He talks about the fur trader, and how those traders then “sold the West” to entice pioneers.

“And how it relates to today — that same American dream,” he said.

Reynolds begins the program by sharing his background, then encourages his audience to share their own stories. Everyone, he said, can identify with those emigrants who headed for the Oregon Territory.

“In a sense, emigrants are constant — hoping to leave one place for another,” he said.

When Wessler presents “Oregon Fever,” she talks about the history of the Oregon Trail from the 1840s to present-day Baker City, as well as the reality versus Hollywood versions of the Old West.

“I like to dispel some of the myths for those of us who grew up with Westerns,” she said.

These two programs will continue through Sept. 30.

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