

LIFE AS A PIONEER

WITHOUT THEM, WHERE WOULD WE BE?

According to the National Parks Service:

1. The pioneers walked the Oregon Trail, but have you ever thought how many shoes were worn out by the time they reached Oregon? According to the diary of May Ellen Murdock Compton, an 1853 emigrant, she started from Independence with ten brand new pairs of shoes and wore all of them out except the last pair. She saved this pair for the Oregon Country by walking barefoot over the last miles of her journey.
2. Some wagon trains painted their wagon canvas covers a bright red or blue. This way the individual wagons would know to which group of wagons they belonged.
3. Pioneers had what they called a "Roadside Telegraph." Pioneers would write messages on anything that was available to communicate with other wagon trains. "Anything available" meant cloth scraps, animal skulls, rocks, bark, leaves, etc.
4. It took roughly \$800-\$1,000 to obtain a proper outfit (wagon, food, clothing, etc.) and enough supplies to live a whole year without planting or harvesting a crop. Some families saved for three to five years before being able to begin their trip west.
5. Toilet facilities were, for the most part, not mentioned in journals written along the Oregon Trail. But, according to emigrant Charlotte Pengra, one trail-side rest area looked more like a communal ditch. There are suggestions that the full skirts worn by most ladies acted as shields or "curtains of modesty" for this purpose. Obviously, bloomers would not provide this advantage.
6. Portraits and photographs of dead family members, particularly infants and young children were highly cherished. This became a way of holding onto a life too soon snuffed out. In fact, it was not uncommon for a parent to pose with a dead infant in their arms and later place this picture on their mantle or table.
7. Over 60 percent of all male heads of households traveling the trail were farmers. Physicians, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals made up about 12 percent, while craftsmen and merchants made up about 20 percent.
8. In many wagon train groups, once every couple of weeks the women spent a full day doing the wash. As one emigrant woman wrote, "Camilia and I both burnt our arms very badly while washing. They were red and swollen and painful as though scalded with boiling water. I do not see that there is any way of preventing it, for everything has to be done in the wind and sun."



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