

Experiences recalled along The Oregon Trail

(Ed. note - This is another in a series of winning history essays by Kings Mountain students in the Colonel Frederick Hambricht Chapter DAR-sponsored contest.)

by ALAN GIBSON
Eighth grader
KM Middle School

Hello, my name is William Lewis and I'm going to be recalling some of my experiences on the Oregon Trail. This trail was a settlers road and my family were farmers from Missouri.

We were looking for land with a long growing season and had heard tales that Oregon was an earthly paradise. We also knew that if enough settlers made it to Oregon it might become American territory.

It was the year 1843 and we were getting ready to leave Independence, Missouri on March 2. We had a very strict and organized Captain who wanted to stay beside the Missouri River as long as he could so we would not have to cross the river.

The reason the Captain didn't want to cross the river was because it took several hours to get across and because we would have to unload and reload the wagons.

Our Captain knew we would be on the trail from four to six months. He said, "each adult should take 200 pounds of flour, 30 pounds of bread, 75 pounds of bacon, 10 pounds of rice, 5 pounds of coffee, 2 pounds of tea, 25 pounds of sugar, half bushel of dried beans, one bushel of dried fruit, 2 pounds of baking soda, 10 pounds of salt, and half a bushel of cornmeal. He also advised us to take a water keg, a Dutch oven, and a churn.

There were boxes built onto the wagons holding books, clothing, blankets, and often a feather bed. Most of the covered wagons weighed between 3,000 and 7,000 pounds. The smaller wagons weighed about 2,500 pounds. The wagon ride was very bumpy because it had no springs. Many times we would hit large rocks and a wheel was broken.

On March 10 we encountered our first hardship. It happened when we had to cross a small creek that was about five feet deep. All the wagons made it across when the last wagon wheel hit a rock and the wagon collapsed. In the wagon was a family of five. Unfortunately there was a one-year-old child in the wagon who was tossed and swept down the river. That

was our first death on the trip. We also lost two of the 10 horses pulling that wagon but fortunately everyone brought two or three extra animals to pull the wagons in case something happened to the other ones. Most people brought oxen for reserve, even though oxen are slower they can live on poorer grazing land.

We had a large number in our group and that was good because it meant safety from the Indians. We also had our problems. One was that some of our party could travel faster than the other. We split into two

groups, those with few animals went first. They could travel faster. This was called the light column. The cow column came slowly behind. Men could walk beside the wagon and the women and children would ride in the wagons. I was very lucky because I was 14 years old and my Dad let me ride my horse.

At night we would make a ring of wagons. The children had to gather buffalo chips for fuel. We built a fire and the women would cook salt meat, freshly baked bread and coffee. We loved to sit around the campfire and tell stories and

sing. As soon as it got dark, we all went to bed except the guards. My father was one of these and had to stay up all night.

A bugle call was given at 6 a.m. We then prepared for the long day's march which was 15 to 20 miles long. We always tried to reach good pasture land and water before sundown. We stopped at Fort Laramie which was one of the most important trading posts. We stayed there for a few days and washed our clothes and stocked up on fresh supplies.

After we left Fort Laramie I

can remember the trail got really bad. It was very narrow and it was difficult for the wagons to pass through. A man named Marcus Whitman led the way through a very rocky wilderness.

It was so hot and the oxen's feet would bleed from walking over sharp rocks. The slopes were so steep I was afraid our wagon was going to turn over.

At last we reached a mission on the Columbia River which led us to the Willamette Valley. It was there we marked off our farm and remained for the rest of our lives.



ALAN GIBSON

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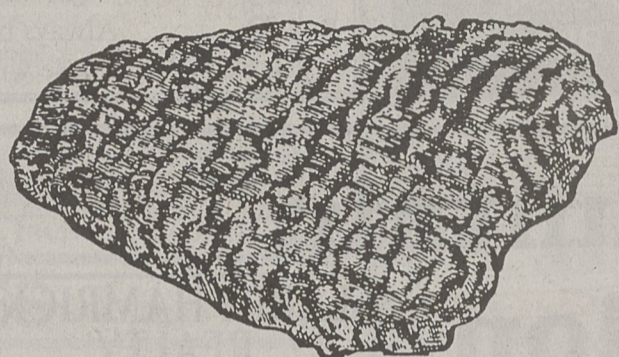
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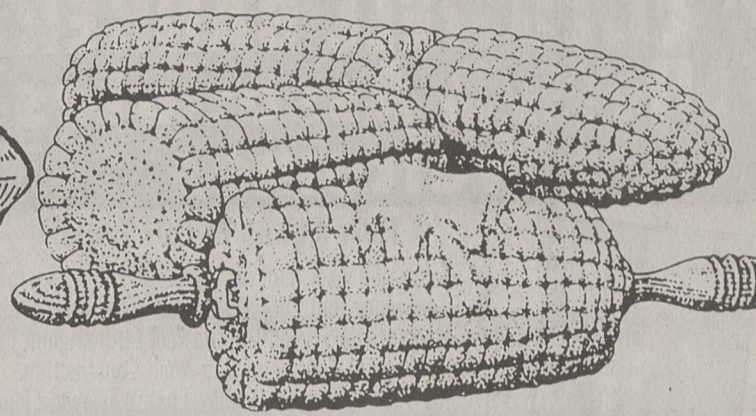


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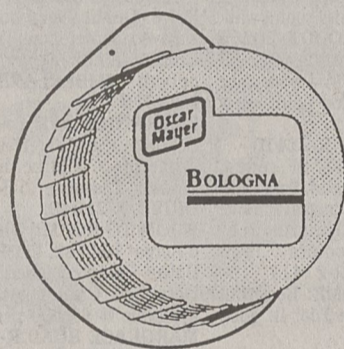
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