

WAGON TRAIN

Various Sources

CMG Archives

<http://www.campbellmgold.com>

(2013)

--()--

In 1852, 52,000 people passed through the City of Rocks on their way to the California goldfields. Between 1843 and 1882 over 240,000 emigrants travelled through City of Rocks. Wagon trains such as shown above were common place here and there are ruts worn into the rocks from the countless iron rimmed wheels passing over which to this day bear witness to their arduous migration.



“Early start down the valley southward.... Saw numerous trains moving westward on a trail away to the south of us. It enters a gap in the mountains [Emigrant Canyon] south of the one our trail enters.”
(*Bernard J. Reid, Aug. 11th 1849*)



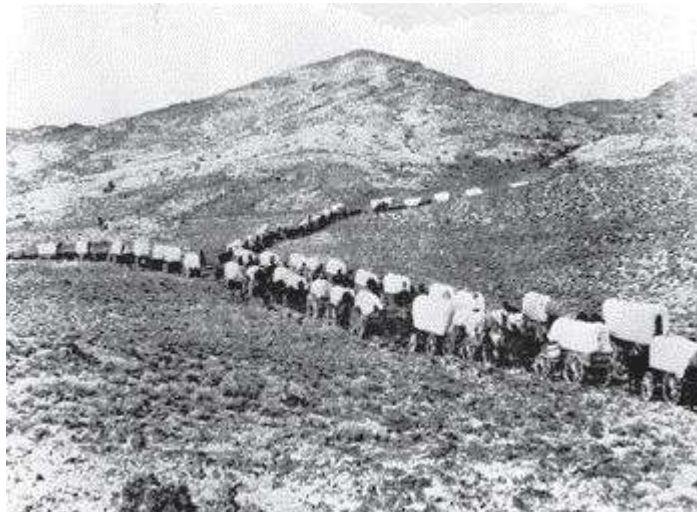
Early Wagon Train

Nothing contributed more to the success or failure of a Western wagon trek than the wagons that carried the pioneers across 2,000 miles of jolting wilderness. Pioneers needed wagons strong enough to haul people and supplies for five months or more. To outlast the rugged trail and months of wear, the wagon needed to be constructed of seasoned hardwood. Most pioneers used the typical farm wagon with a canvas cover stretched over hooped frames. A family of four could manage with a single wagon. It would be very tight on space since supplies would take up almost the entire space within the wagon. If they could afford it, many families took more than one wagon. Most emigrants on the trail went West in their farm wagons, modified to take the punishment, while others bought rigs specifically built for the one-way journey.

A wagon had to be light enough to not over tax the mules or oxen that pulled it and strong enough not to break down under loads of as much as 2,500 pounds. For these reasons wagons were constructed of such hardwoods as maple, hickory and oak. Iron was used only to reinforce parts that took the greatest beating such as tires, axles and hounds. An emigrant wagon was not comfortable to ride in, since wagons lacked springs and there was little room to sit inside the wagon because most space was taken up with cargo.



An unidentified Mormon pioneer family



Though the shorter Jornada Route, also called the Cimarron Cutoff, provided less water, it saved the travelers ten days by cutting southwest across the Cimarron Desert to Santa Fe. The Cimarron Desert route was shorter and easier for the wagon parties than the mountainous Raton Pass, but travellers risked attacks by Native Americans in addition to shortages of water. Despite the hazards, the shorter route would end up carrying 75% of the Santa Fe Trail pioneers.

End

--()--

<http://www.campbellmgold.com>

