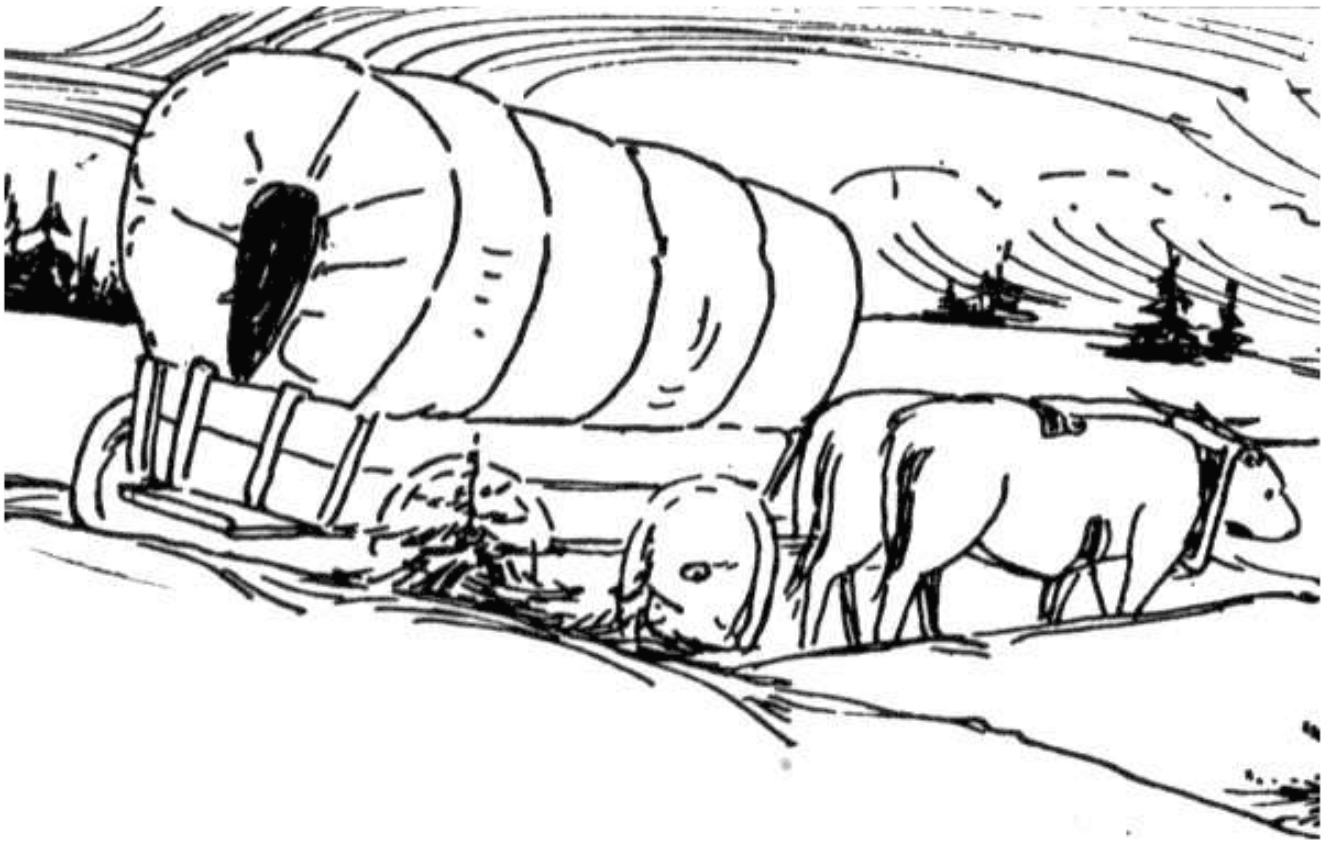


The Oregon Trail



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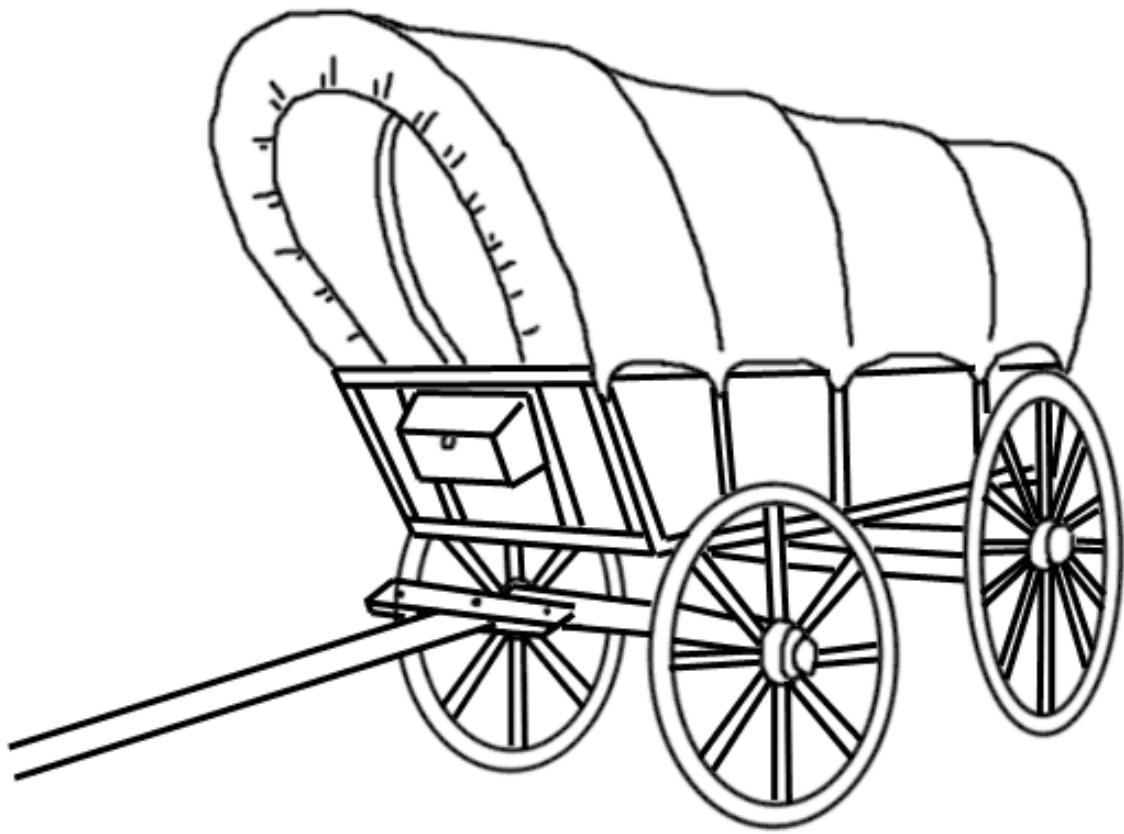
The westward movement across America began in the early nineteenth century. Westward migration was encouraged by the political phrase "Manifest Destiny." This phrase simply meant that expansion was evident, or "manifest," and it was bound to happen, or our "destiny." The phrase was used by American politicians to justify claims of additional territory for the United States.



One of the direct results of this “Manifest Destiny” thinking was the creation of the Oregon Trail. The Oregon Trail began in Independence, Missouri, and followed the Santa Fe Trail across present day Kansas into what is now Nebraska and across the Rocky Mountains. It followed the Snake and Columbia Rivers into Oregon City and places nearby, where pioneers made their new homes.



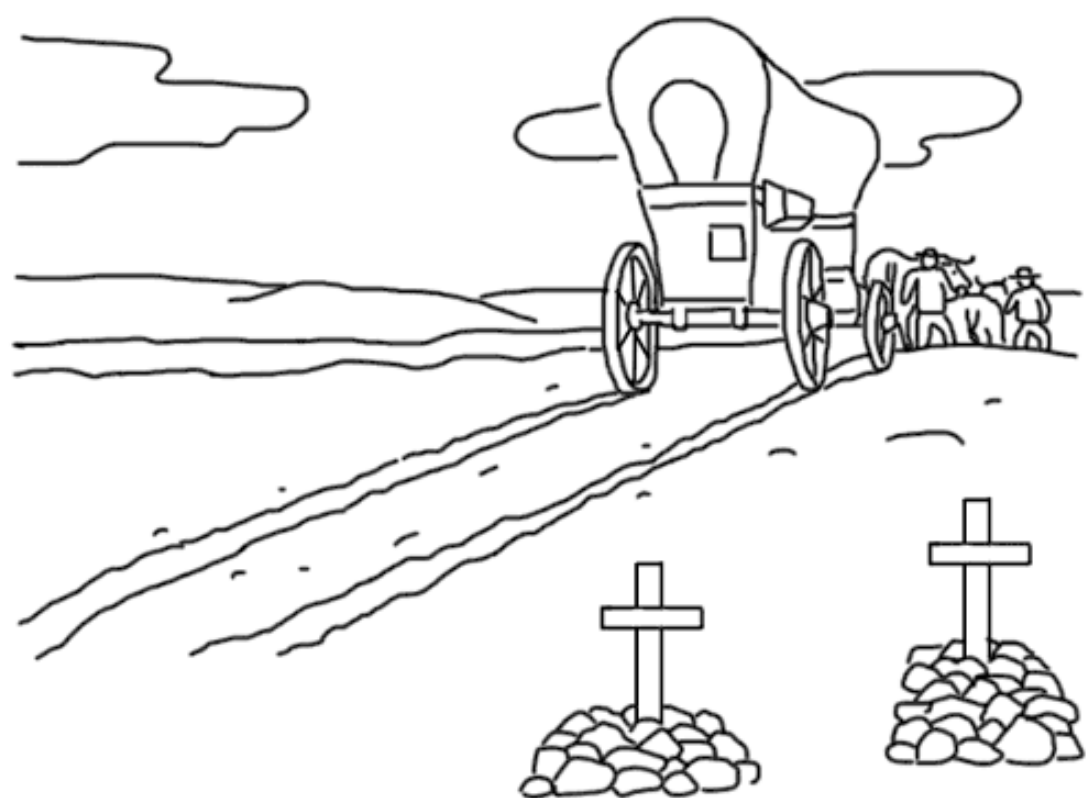
The Oregon Trail was a wagon trail leading all those who were willing to travel it over two thousand miles across the Rocky Mountains into Oregon Territory. The first emigrant train left Independence, Missouri, on May 1, 1841, and arrived in California on November 4, 1841. By 1843, married couples that made it into the Oregon territory could claim 640 acres of free land as their own.



Conestoga wagons were found to be too large to use on such a difficult journey. Some of the earliest pioneers who tried it had to abandon all their belongings and take only what could be carried or dragged to their destination. This led to the development of a wagon called the prairie schooner. This wagon was about half the size of a Conestoga wagon and was much easier for teams of animals to pull.



Horses were not used on the journey because they could not survive eating just the prairie grasses along the way. Instead, mules or oxen were used to pull the wagons. Oxen were slower than horses, so it took longer to complete the journey which usually began in April. With oxen a wagon made only fifteen miles a day, and the journey took six months.



Life on the trail was more than harsh. The river crossings were extremely dangerous. In 1850 alone there were thirty-seven drownings as a result of trying to cross the Green River. Rain, thunderstorms, and lightning slowed the wagons, too, and there was no shelter from the unpredictable weather along the trail. Finally, an illness called cholera was considered the biggest problem. It could strike at any time, and the person could be dead before the end of the day.

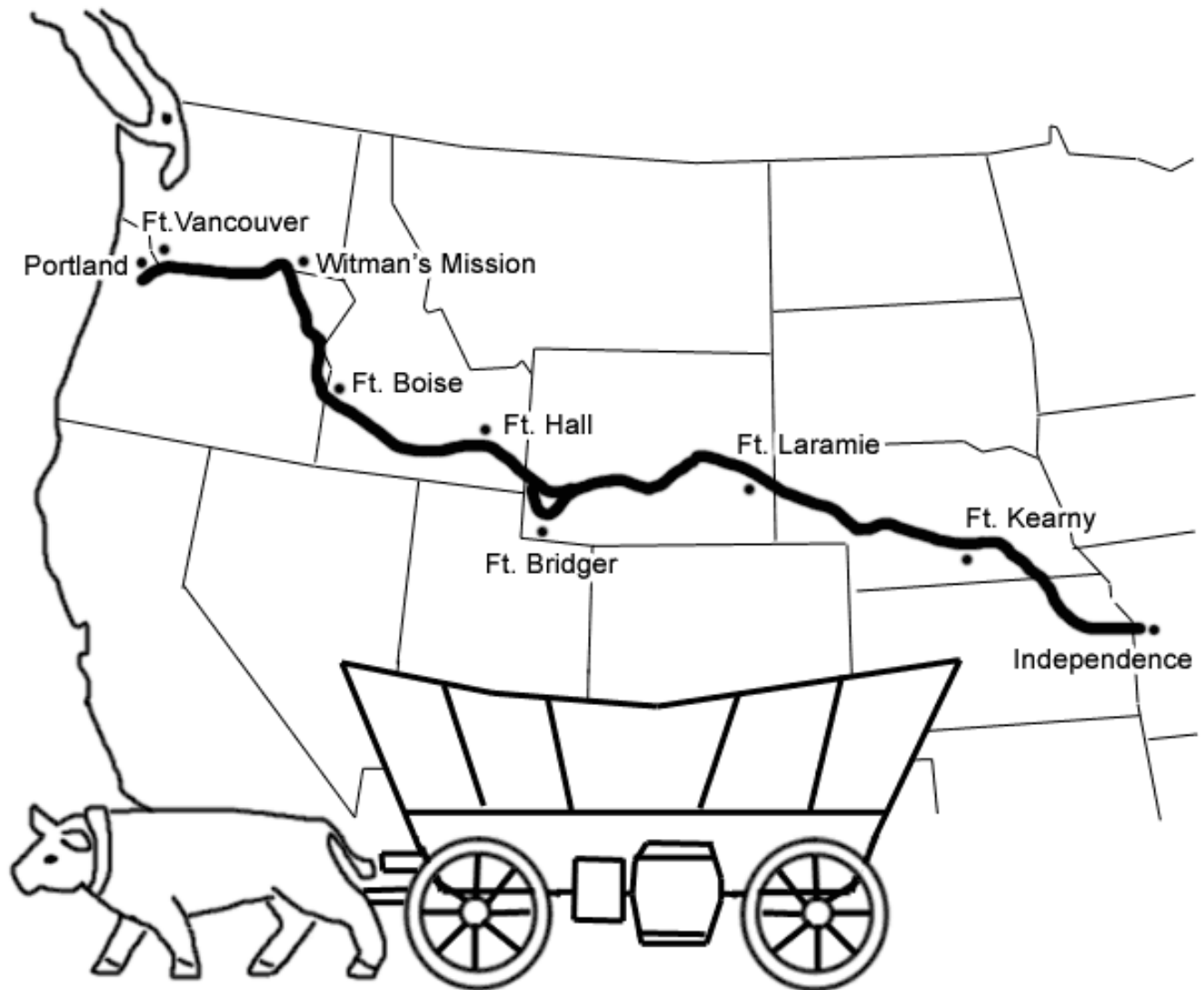


The pioneers' fears of being attacked by Native Americans were generally unfounded. Most of the encounters with natives along the trail were often simple exchanges of horses for clothes, tobacco, or food. There were even instances of Native Americans helping the emigrants with stuck wagons or rounding up cattle.



All along the Oregon Trail, the grassland had been overgrazed, all available firewood had been burned, and the wild buffalo that once roamed the grasslands had been killed for sport. Not surprisingly, this left a bitter taste in the mouths of the natives.

This, and other incidents caused by the flood of emigrants into the land that once was populated only by natives, led to several wars, killing both natives and pioneers.



The great migration west which was brought on by the creation of the Oregon Trail is considered by historians to be one of the ten most important events in American History.

1. What does the phrase "Manifest Destiny" mean?
 - a. Expansion was evident and was bound to happen anyway.
 - b. There is an important man in everyone's future.
 - c. The oxen were getting too fat for the wagons.

Answer: _____

2. What could a married couple get at the end of the Oregon Trail?
 - a. free houses
 - b. free food
 - c. free land

Answer: _____

3. Where did the Oregon Trail begin?
 - a. at the Columbia River
 - b. in Independence, Missouri
 - c. in Nebraska

Answer: _____

4. What type of wagon was used to make the journey on the Oregon Trail?
 - a. a Conestoga wagon
 - b. a red wagon
 - c. a prairie schooner

Answer: _____

5. Why didn't the pioneers use horses to draw their wagons?
 - a. Horses could not survive the journey.
 - b. Horses could not be eaten.
 - c. Horses would not cross the rivers.

Answer: _____

6. What was the biggest problem to pioneers on the Oregon Trail?

- a. bugs
- b. cholera
- c. rain

Answer: _____