



Northwest Trails

Newsletter of the Northwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association

Volume 39, No. 3

Summer 2024

NW OCTA Fall Meeting September 28, 2024 Fort Borst Park, Centralia, Washington

When I think of Borst Park in Centralia, I think of Joyce Bolerjack, Chuck and Suzanne Hornbuckle, and so many other rut-nuts who came together in the past for the chapter fall meetings. Lively discussions, educational sessions, and just plain fun was had by the attendees. We will be meeting in Kitchen #1 or #2. Watch for the balloons I will use to mark the spot.

More information and an agenda will be coming out nearer the meeting date.

Directions from I-5

From North or South I-5, take exit 82 toward Factory Outlets

From I-5 South turn right onto Harrison Road

From I-5 North turn left onto Harrison Road

Turn left onto Johnson Rd

Entrance to the park is on your right

Looking forward to greeting and meeting all of you,

Wendell Baskins, NW OCTA Vice President

503-313-5778

webaskins@gmail.com



Fort Borst Blockhouse at Fort Borst Park.

NW Chapter Leaders

President

Susan Doyle

Vice President

Wendell Baskins

Treasurer

Glenn Harrison

Secretary

Jenny Miller

Directors

Sherrill Beck

Polly Jackson

Dave Welch

Chapter Website

Sharon Brown

Communications Chair

Marley Shurtleff

Mapping Chair

Robin Baker

Membership Chair

Sallie Riehl

Preservation Committee

Dave Welch, Wendell Baskins,

Jenny Miller

41st OCTA Annual Convention Next Week at Pendleton, Oregon

OCTA's annual convention is almost here. Convention chair Roger Blair and many chapter members have been working hard on last minute details to make this year's convention a success. The exceptional speakers and bus tours will highlight the theme, the *Shifting Legacy* of the Oregon Trail and its impact on Indigenous Peoples on the Columbia Plateau, as well as the significant developments of the Oregon Trail in this area.

Convention registration is nearing 240, an increase over the past few years. There are 51 first timers registered, which is a much higher percentage than usual. Even though the 1998 OCTA convention was held in Pendleton, new perspectives and research will be presented this year. All in all, this promises to be another exciting convention.

*Susan Doyle,
Chapter president*

3rd Quarter NW OCTA Finances April 1 – June 30, 2024

On April 1 we received a \$650 check dated March 24 from OCTA for chapter dues received in October through February, making our balance \$18,545.28 on April 1.

In early June we paid \$100 for travel expenses and \$103.37 for making a trails quilt from donated OCTA t-shirts. The quilt will be auctioned, and the proceeds paid to the chapter.

In addition to our chapter account, we are receiving donations that will be used for a scholarship to pay the expenses for a deserving new member to attend the convention in Pendleton. Donations to the chapter or our scholarship fund may be mailed to Glenn Harrison, 1132 30th Place SW, Albany, OR 97321. So far we have received \$775 and paid out \$340 for convention registration. The balance will go toward lodging expenses, of which the remainder has been paid by a donation. The current fiscal year extends through September 30.

Our current bank balance is \$18,765.90, with recent donations yet to be deposited and convention registration to be deducted.

Glenn Harrison,
NW OCTA Treasurer

The Northwest Chapter is offering a one-day tour of the Cowlitz Trail scheduled for the day after the annual fall meeting in Centralia. This is an excellent opportunity to tour the Cowlitz Trail with experts.

Oregon-California Trails Association 2024 Cowlitz Trail Auto Tour September 29, 2024

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chuck Hornbuckle researched the route of the Cowlitz Trail between Fort Vancouver and Tumwater, WA. He published an auto tour guide and conducted tours over the route. On September 29 we will reprise Chuck's tour and see how things have changed in the intervening twenty-plus years. We will also see some new finds. The route has been recommended for addition to the Oregon National Historic Trail.

The tour will be led by Dennis Larsen, Karen Johnson, and Dave Welch. Dennis is a retired history teacher and has been writing on Northwest pioneers since retiring. He is particularly known for his research and writings on Ezra Meeker. He is a longtime member of OCTA and has written numerous articles for its publications.

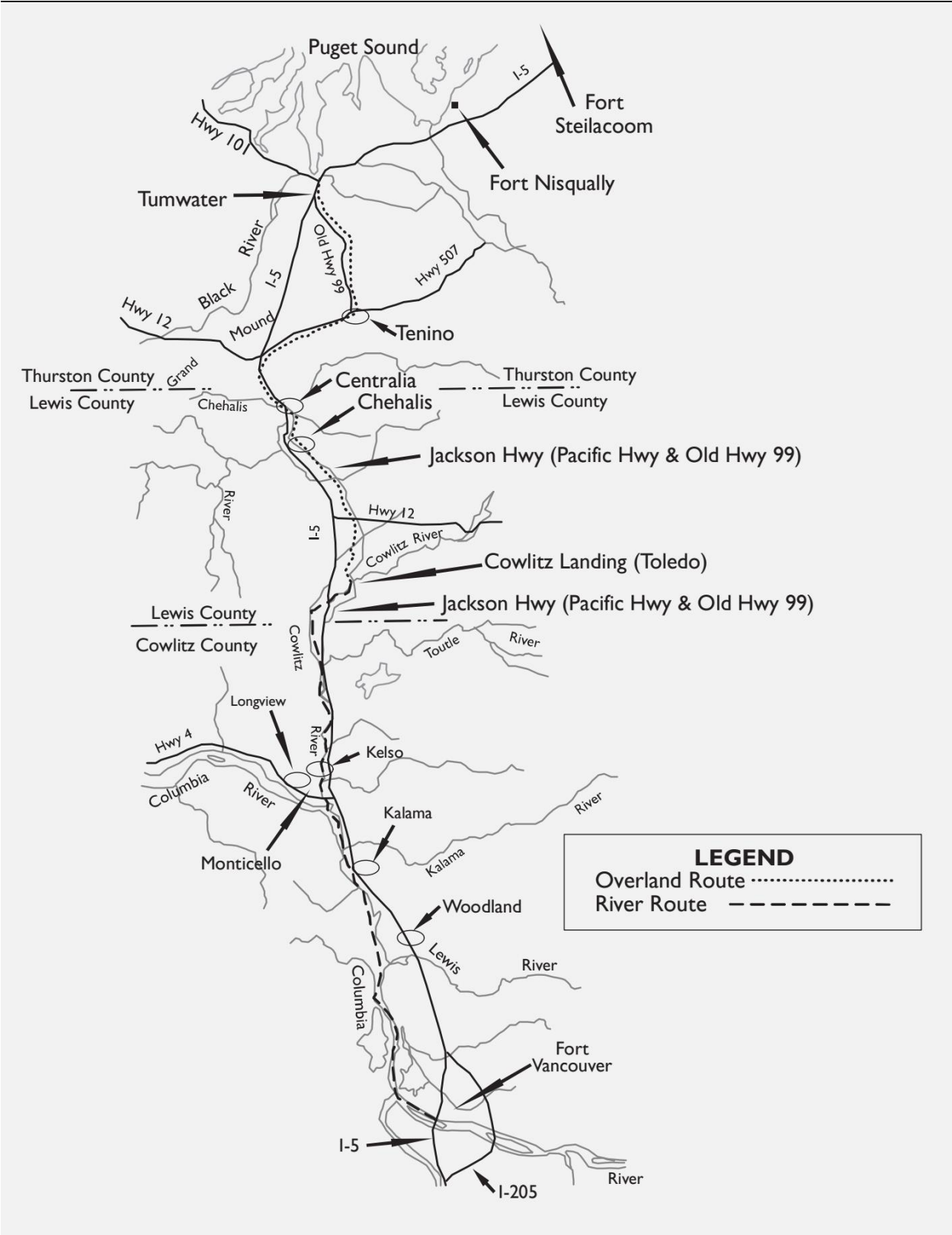
Karen Johnson worked with Chuck on his original work and assisted in organizing events celebrating the Cowlitz Trail. She has worked as a volunteer, assistant director, director, and curator at several museums in southwest Washington. She has participated in installing two Oregon Trail markers, making an eight-part documentary video about the Cowlitz Trail, and organizing two stagecoach runs between Olympia and Longview. Karen currently serves as the curator at the Schmidt House, owned by the Olympia Tumwater Foundation.

Dave Welch assisted Chuck in his early research. He is currently the chair of OCTA's mapping committee. Along with Robin Baker, he updated Chuck's maps to take advantage of technology that was not available to Chuck.

We will be starting at Kalama on Sunday, September 29, and we will end at Tenino the same day. High clearance or 4WD is not required. We plan to leave Kalama at 9:30 am. The Fall Chapter Meeting will be held on Saturday, September 28. Travelers will need to make their own overnight reservations in Centralia, Chehalis, or Kalama.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Dave Welch at welchdj@comcast.net. Please join us! We are very fortunate to have Karen and Dennis guiding and interpreting our journey.

Cowlitz Tour Map



A Trail Hike

By Jenny Miller

On March 23, I had a former scout call to say “Hey, Jenny! I’m coming home for spring break with a bunch of college friends, and we want to hike on the Oregon Trail!” When I asked him how much hiking he had in mind, he said 5 miles! After a bit of discussion, we narrowed down possibilities and made our plans.

The next day, on the 24th, everyone came to my house, and then we headed out to Corral Springs. We hiked up to the top of the hill in the trail, with lots of questions and wonderings flying about. We then followed the fence line down the side to connect with the other segment back down the hill to stop at the T-Rail that a fellow scout had installed a couple of years earlier.

The next stop was the Koontz grave at the edge of Echo. After that, we headed to the Fort Henrietta site to look at things there, and to talk about the river crossing. We had a quick stop at the site of St Andrew’s Church and chanced upon the caretaker, so we had an unexpected guided tour of the church. It was a fun surprise.

The last stop was the BLM site past Echo where we hoofed it pretty quickly to the ruts. All the boys loved the hiking and learning about the trail. Most had heard of it but felt this experience really helped their understanding and appreciation.



Photos courtesy of Jenny Miller.

Oregon Trail Sign on Highway 207

By Jenny Miller

On May 9, Kristi Smalley and I went to the sign at the crossing of highway 207 by the trail. Years before, John Edmiston was primarily instrumental in getting the sign placed and felt a personal responsibility in keeping the area cleaned up. As he's gotten older, he felt the need to pass that job on to others. I've gone out a couple of different times to weed.

Kristi is John's daughter and heard about the sign a lot from her dad and wanted to know where it was. When I mentioned that it was badly in need of weeding, she volunteered to come along and then give a report to her father. It was decided that the two of us would go out and clean out the area and spruce it up. I also took along a rag and some water to clean off the sign itself. It didn't take long to make everything look so much better. We were happy, and Kristi's dad was quite impressed, saying that we were much more thorough than he'd ever been!



Jenny Miller.



Kristi Smalley.

Photos courtesy of Jenny Miller.

Blue Mountain Explorations May 2024

By Robin Baker

The May 2024 Blue Mountains Oregon Trail explorations were very successful. We completed the exploration of the Meacham Brothers Toll Road west of Meacham on the Staebler property.

We explored Airway Beacon Hill north of the Mt. Emily freeway interchange and west of the I-84 freeway rather extensively over a several-day period. While we found no significant wagon ruts, we did find a few OCTA Carsonite markers showing where Chuck Hornbuckle and crew had mapped the Oregon Trail in 1997–2000.

We walked the Meacham Brothers Toll Road south of Meacham down to the Mt. Emily interchange, discovering 3-foot-deep wagon ruts between Highway 30 and Airway Beacon Hill.

We explored the portion of the Oregon Trail on the east side of the I-84 freeway, discovering OCTA markers but no significant wagon ruts.

We hiked the wagon ruts at the Forest Service's Blue Mountain Crossing Interpretive Site, walking south for 2 miles onto the Furst property to an OCTA T-Rail marker, then walking north nearly to the Umatilla Forest boundary. Here there are multiple wagon ruts representing the Oregon Trail as well as the "Stage/Freight Road."

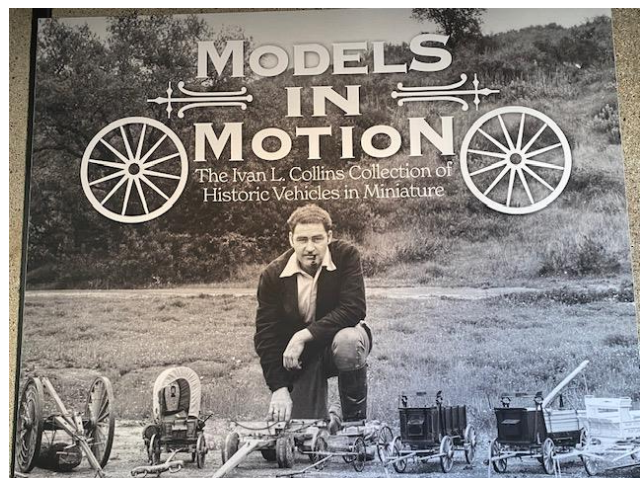
On our final day, we completed the descent of the Oregon Trail on Ladd Hill, from the top down to the Grande Ronde Valley, involving several sections of private property. Joining us were the owners of that property: the Prices, the Beckers, and the Fagers. Wagon ruts here were obvious, though OCTA Carsonite markers have never been placed.

We did ten days of hikes. For the most part, it was just Jenny Miller and me. Mark Mulvihill joined us on four of the days. Bob Camp joined us on the final day (Ladd Hill). We had no other NW OCTA members join us.

Models in Motion: The Ivan L. Collins Collection of Historic Vehicles in Miniature **January 26 – September 8, 2024** **Oregon Historical Society**

Ivan L. Collins (1906-1971) created historically accurate models of horse-drawn vehicles using painstaking research to ensure that every detail was authentic. Built at one-eighth scale with tools of the same scale, these models represent transportation technology before the automobile, from wagons used in Euro-American westward migration to those used in industry and for personal use. Collins saw this work as more than a hobby; his models were a way to preserve history for future generations. This exhibition showcases a majority of the wagons that Collins made during his lifetime.

Continued on last page.



In Memoriam

Ronnie Lee Allen

***La Grande Observer:* “Oregon Trail advocate Ronnie Allen dies at age 83”**

By Dick Mason, General assignment reporter, April 6, 2024, Updated April 29, 2024

LA GRANDE — Time is a bandit, a thief that Ronnie Allen, a local Oregon Trail historian, often stopped quickly in its tracks. Allen spent much of the past three decades restoring fading elements of the Oregon Trail in Union County and raising the public’s awareness of it. “What he did was amazing,” said Stu Spence, the head of the city of La Grande’s parks and recreation department.



Ronnie Allen examines an old wagon wheel Dec. 26, 2023, at his home. The wheel is similar to some used by pioneers on the Oregon Trail. La Grande Observer.

Sadly, the same Father Time who Allen confronted so successfully on the Oregon Trail front caught up to him on Wednesday, April 3. He died at age 83 at Grande Ronde Hospital. With his passing, La Grande lost a man many may remember more for his generous nature than the remarkable things he did to preserve the Oregon Trail in Union County.

A member of the Oregon-California Trails Association, Allen was devoted to helping protect the Oregon Trail in northeast Oregon. The Northwest Chapter of OCTA gave Allen its Distinguished Service Award in 2019 for his work. The OCTA plaque saluted Allen for “exceptional efforts to preserve and promote the Oregon Trail.”

Interpretive Site

Allen died about three months after his latest triumph. He stepped up to make sure that a theft decades ago would no longer impact efforts to recognize the old Oregon Trail in Union County.

Two signs marking a portion of the route the Oregon Trail took along what is now Foothill Road were replaced under Allen’s direction, after being stolen in the early 1990s. “It is important that we added the signs back because we do not want the Oregon Trail forgotten,” Allen said after the signs were installed Dec. 5, 2023.

A third sign, one that was not a replacement, was also installed under Allen’s watch in early December, about 100 feet south of the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive site on Hot Lake Lane, 1.5 miles east of Hot Lake. The interpretive site is one of Allen’s crown jewels, which he created with major help from his good friend Dale Counsell. Allen’s Oregon Trail site, officially completed in July 2020, features artifacts that are educating visitors, including a portion of a wagon that crossed the Oregon Trail in the 1800s.

The Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive Site is located in an area where Oregon Trail pioneers often camped after coming into the Grande Ronde Valley. It was popular because there was water and grass nearby for oxen. A 6-inch immovable sight tube at the interpretive site is one of its understated features. People looking through the sight tube see the surroundings from the eyes of the pioneers. “This lets viewers see what the pioneers did 170 years ago when they were coming down the hill,” Allen said in 2021.



Ronnie Allen looking through a sight tube in 2020 to view the Oregon Trail descent down Lower Ladd Canyon Hill at the interpretive site near Hot Lake Lane. La Grande Observer.

Many of Allen’s projects were completed with assistance from professionals in the community who provided resources and labor at no cost. Spence credits Allen’s persuasive skills to his genuineness. “He was so earnest. That was one of his endearing qualities,” Spence said. He said if Allen had an Oregon Trail project he wanted help with, he was not one to expect others to do the work. “He would show up with solutions,” Spence said.

Admiration for Pioneers

Allen never wrote a book about the Oregon Trail, but if he did he could have filled it with a wealth of stories about the arduous challenges pioneers faced coming down into and then climbing out of the Grande Ronde Valley. His admiration for the pioneers who endured trials ran deep. “The hardships they faced were unbelievable,” Allen said. He often spoke of how difficult it was for pioneers to travel downhill in Ladd Canyon, noting that many tied their wagons to trees with rope to control the descent.

Allen probably could have also penned another work about his colorful experiences as an officer for the Elgin Police Department in the early 1970s. He noted that the police department did not have a machine to test drivers who had been pulled over for suspicion of driving under the influence of intoxicants. This meant Allen often had to transport individuals suspected of being intoxicated into La Grande to have their blood alcohol level tested. Allen said this sometimes made his job as a police officer entertaining but also challenging.

Allen’s likable nature undoubtedly served him well as a police officer as well as in his Oregon Trail ventures, including those that involved his favorite historical figure — Ezra Meeker, who made several journeys across the United States to commemorate the Oregon Trail.

In 1906 Meeker, who lived in Puyallup, Washington, set up 35 stone markers commemorating the Oregon Trail including one near Walnut Street and B Avenue in La Grande—one of three he set up in Union County. The one near Walnut and B was believed to contain a time capsule, but when it was opened in 2022, it was found not to have one.

Before the marker was reinstalled Allen put a time capsule in it that was sealed. It included a \$1 bill, two N95 face masks, an iPhone, and a silver medallion of Meeker. The historian left written instructions stating that the time capsule is not to be reopened until 2122. “His legacy will live on after they open that time capsule,” Spence said.



The empty cavity underneath the 1906 Meeker monument in La Grande in June 2022. Roger Blair photograph.



Dennis Larsen, right, talking to Ronnie Allen at the Meeker monument time capsule event in June 2022. Roger Blair photograph.



A sign Allen placed on the route of the Oregon Trail outside La Grande. It and a second identical sign were installed in December 2023 along Foothill Road, replacing signs that were stolen in the early 1990s. La Grande Observer.



Dale Counsell, left, and Ronnie Allen talk on Feb. 8, 2021, next to a 120-year-old wagon they restored to resemble those the pioneers used while coming across the Oregon Trail. Allen provided the materials, and Counsell did the labor. La Grande Observer.

Northwest Trails

Editor

Susan Badger Doyle
524 NW 3rd St
Pendleton, OR 97801
541-969-7660
sdoyle@oregontrail.net

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY, SUBMISSIONS DUE
January 1, April 1, July 1, October 1

Material may be submitted via email, on disk, or as email attachment in Word or Text format. Pictures (JPG format) may be sent via email, on disk, or originals for scanning. **Please send pictures separately from text document.**

MASTHEAD: Replica of *The Old Oregon Trail* bronze relief sculpture created in 1924 by Avarad Fairbanks for Oregon Trail monuments.



41st Annual OCTA Convention

Shifting Legacy

**July 21-25, 2024
Pendleton, Oregon**

Oregon Historical Society Models in Motion



Visit <https://www.ohs.org/museum/exhibits/models-in-motion-ivan-collins-miniature-vehicles.cfm> to view a selection of Collins's exquisite models.