



# Northwest Trails

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

Volume 39, No. 1

Winter 2024

## Annual Chapter Membership Meeting Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, The Dalles, OR March 2, 2024

For countless generations, Crates Point just west of The Dalles, Oregon, has witnessed the events taking place on the river at its foot. The river has many names given to it by the peoples who have lived on its shores for eons of time. It is the river, now called the Columbia.

Crates Point has witnessed the tribal dugouts and travelers moving up and down the Columbia. It also has witnessed the great loads of furs and trade merchandise moving along the river. In 1805 it witnessed the coming of the Corp of Discovery, which stayed on a rocky island below. In the 1840s the Americans with their covered wagons loaded on rafts and launched at the mouth of Chenoweth Creek began to move down the Columbia to the Willamette Valley.

In 1997 The Columbia Gorge Discovery Center was built and opened on the eastern slope of Crates Point, and that brings us to now.

On March 2 NW OCTA will gather at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center on Crates Point to hold its annual meeting. Please plan to attend to gain information about upcoming NW OCTA events and enjoy the well-done exhibits at the Discovery Center. More information will be coming out in early February.



## NW Chapter Leaders

**President**

Susan Doyle

**Vice President**

Wendell Baskins

**Treasurer**

Glenn Harrison

**Secretary**

Jenny Miller

**Directors**

Andy Anderson

Polly Jackson

Dave Welch

**Chapter Website**

Sharon Brown

**Communications Chair**

Marley Shurtleff

**Mapping Chair**

Robert Baker

**Membership Chair**

Sallie Riehl

**Preservation Officer**

TBA



## President's Message

I am honored to greet you as incoming president of the Northwest Chapter of OCTA. I look forward to the Zoom programs, outings, chapter meetings, and the OCTA national convention in Pendleton planned for this year.

I gratefully thank Sallie Riehl for her dedication, hard work, and outstanding leadership over the past four years as president. Sallie also deserves the chapter's thanks for heading the committee to store, sort, and distribute members' collections donated to the chapter. With the considerable help from Becky Peterson and Rich and Phyllis Herman, the project was concluded last October at the fall membership meeting. Sallie will continue as Membership Chair, an essential position to ensure the viability of the chapter.

Wendell Baskins made the arrangements for the chapter annual meeting at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles, Oregon, on March 2. We will meet in the large room downstairs and will have an opportunity to view the exhibits on the main floor. The program and call for raffle items will be in the detailed flyer that will be emailed in February.

Dave Welch, our excellent Zoom host, has arranged a series of Zoom programs through June that I hope you will be able to attend. Online programming has made it possible to enhance our chapter activities with a wide range of informative and interesting programs.

A primary focus of the chapter this spring is planning for the annual OCTA convention in Pendleton this July as OCTA returns to the Pacific Northwest for the first time since the Oregon City convention in 2013.

I hope to see you in our chapter's event-filled year.

*Susan Doyle,  
Chapter president*

## First Quarter NW OCTA Finances

**October 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023**

We started our fiscal year on October 1, 2023 with \$18,258.30. By November 1 we had gained \$555 from dues, donations, and selling some items from the storage unit. During that same time, we spent \$834.64, mostly for the fall meeting, our half of the expense of a time capsule in La Grande, and our usual expenses. That left us with \$17,978.66.

Since then, NW OCTA gained from dues and items sold and paid some travel expenses, leaving us with \$18,331.46 on December 31, 2023.

*Glenn Harrison  
Chapter Treasurer*

# NW OCTA 2024 Save the Date Calendar

*By Wendell Baskins*

The following dates are confirmed dates for 2024. There may be more to come as we move forward. I will send any new dates out as soon as they are established.

**March 2** NW OCTA Annual Meeting at the Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles. More information will come.

**May 16 to 19** Blue Mt. Exploration led by Robin Baker. For further information contact Robin Baker at [robinbaker1927@gmail.com](mailto:robinbaker1927@gmail.com).

**June 22 and 23** Cowlitz River Trip led by Dave Welch. For further information contact Dave Welch at [welchdj@comcast.net](mailto:welchdj@comcast.net).

**July 21 to 25** National OCTA Convention in Pendleton, OR. More information will come out as it is available.

**September 28** NW OCTA Fall Meeting at Borst Park in Centralia, WA. More information will be coming out as it is available.

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## Future Northwest Chapter Zoom Meetings 2024

*By Dave Welch*

**Feb 10, 2024 1:00 pm** Dave Nicandri, “Captain Cook and the Northwest Passage: A Cartographic History”

**Mar 9, 2024 10:00 am** Leta Neiderhiser, “Cynthia Applegate”

**Apr 13, 2024 10:00 am** Caroline Gilson, “The 1864 Travel Diary of Ernest John Heinen: Nebraska to California via the Overland Trail”

**May 4, 2024 10:00 am** Robin Baker, “Upcoming Hikes and Explorations in the Blue Mountains.” Also, Preservation Update and Convention Plans.

**June 8, 2024 10:00 am** Dave Welch, “Emigrant Trails of Umatilla County”

Please consider making a presentation. Topics may include trail history, trail research, family history, local history, or preservation. Contact Dave Welch ([welchdj@comcast.net](mailto:welchdj@comcast.net)) for additional information. Each meeting will also include a short business meeting and an update on tours and explorations.

# 2024 Convention Planning Underway

*By Roger Blair, Convention Chair*

Mark your calendars to attend the 2024 OCTA convention at Wildhorse Resort and Casino, July 21-25, 2024, in Pendleton, Oregon. The resort is operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

Sunday, July 21, will be devoted to the annual board meeting, with an evening welcoming reception. Monday morning will begin with a general membership meeting. Chuck Sams, National Parks Director, has been invited to give the keynote address, although not yet confirmed. OCTA has a long-standing relationship with NPS, and Chuck is a member of CTUIR. Monday afternoon will be devoted to talks, followed by Authors Night and reception.

Tuesday and Wednesday are tour days, with a choice of three tours. One tour will take you along the general route of the earliest route of the Oregon Trail, from the Blue Mountains to Whitman Mission and on to the site of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River. A second tour will take in CTUIR's Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and end at Whitman Mission. Plans are still in process to include a stop in Walla Walla at the US Army's Fort Walla Walla. The third tour will take those interested to Baker City to visit the newly renovated National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, which will re-open May 24, after a few years closure. This tour may also include a stop on the way to walk in trail ruts at Blue Mountain Crossing Park.

In lieu of a longer tour, those interested may take a guided hike along trail remnants near the Mt. Emily interchange along I-84. Alternatively, some may wish to take a Pendleton downtown tour to Pendleton Woolen Mill, Happy Canyon Museum, Heritage Station Museum, and Pendleton Underground. These alternate activities will be limited in number and utilize smaller shuttle vehicles. Also, they will not be offered both Tuesday and Wednesday, as the longer tours will be. Each will be one day, one on Tuesday and the other on Wednesday.

On Tuesday night a program is planned for a demonstration of local Indian dancing and drumming, followed by a music scholar presenting a musical program based on her book, *Music in the Westward Expansion: Songs of Heart and Place on the American Frontier*, weaving together first-hand accounts and songs of the 1800s American West with musical selections played on the courtship flute, piano, and guitar.

Following Wednesday's tour, the evening will conclude with the annual Awards Banquet. Thursday will have morning and afternoon speakers, followed by an evening Farewell Banquet with the always highly anticipated Live Auction.

Throughout the week there will be the usual OCTA table, book room, and raffle. There will also be a pre-convention tour on Sunday, July 21, visiting western Idaho and eastern Oregon trail sites led by the Idaho Chapter. Finally, for those heading home via a westerly route on Friday, July 26, a Pendleton to The Dalles post-convention tour will showcase important trail segments and sites to the west.

Plans are still being firmed up, but for sure, there will be a great need for chapter members to volunteer and make this a successful conference. There are plenty of opportunities to work, from helping with registration, checking bus rosters and chaperoning tours, organizing the raffle, manning the bookroom, and many other jobs. NW OCTA is the host chapter; let's make it the best ever. Contact Roger Blair at [rblair@oregontrail.net](mailto:rblair@oregontrail.net) to help.

# Ezra Meeker Oregon Trail Marker in La Grande Moved

*By Dick Mason*

*La Grande Observer, November 22, 2023*

LA GRANDE — The Ezra Meeker Oregon Trail marker in southwest La Grande is possibly safer now than it has been at any time in its 117-year history.

The heavy stone marker at Walnut Street and B Avenue was moved 6 feet east on Tuesday, November 21, by a city of La Grande public works crew. The move took the marker off private property and on to a public right of way along B Street owned by the city.

The move was made to protect the marker, and the contents of its time capsule in case the private property the marker was on was ever sold, according to Ronnie Allen, a La Grande historian. Allen said if the property owner changed there was a chance the marker and its time capsule would be lost.

A public works crew, using heavy equipment including a backhoe, moved the Oregon Trail marker in about 40 minutes. Allen was very pleased with how the move went. “There was no damage whatsoever to the marker or its base,” said Allen, the volunteer leader of a drive to protect the marker and its time capsule. A new concrete foundation for the marker will soon be poured, according to Stu Spence, director of La Grande Parks and Recreation.

The stone marker was placed in the B Avenue and Walnut Street area in 1906 by Oregon Trail pioneer Ezra Meeker. The marker was believed to contain a time capsule from 1906, according to a Meeker journal entry. However, when it was opened in 2022 the inside space was empty. Allen said the marker reportedly had been moved several times in the Walnut Street neighborhood since it was first installed, due to building projects, and during the transfers the contents of the time capsule may have fallen out.

After the historical marker was opened in 2022, a new time capsule was filled with items and then sealed into the marker. A silver 2022 Ezra Meeker necklace medallion is one of the items included in the time capsule.

A sign has been created that will be placed next to the Oregon Trail marker stating that the time capsule inside is not to be opened by the city until June 25, 2122. The sign, which cost \$900, was purchased with money donated by the Oregon-California Trails Association and by Allen. The Oregon-California Trails Association was represented by Allen and Roger Blair at the site of the moving work conducted on November 21. Blair said the move was a good one because it will allow the city to protect the marker and the time capsule. Still, he knows that there is no guarantee the time capsule will be opened in 2122. “Hopefully, the city will still be around a century from now,” Blair said.



*The Ezra Meeker stone marker being moved 6 feet from private property onto public right of way. Roger Blair photo.*



The stone marker is among at least 35 that Meeker set up along the Oregon Trail during three journeys he made across the United States to promote efforts to preserve the overland route. Meeker put up two other historical markers in Union County, at the lower and upper ends of Ladd Canyon.



*The Ezra Meeker Oregon Trail marker and sign after being moved onto the public right of way. Dick Mason photo.*

*Roger Blair photographing the sign and marker after they were moved. Dick Mason photo.*



*Sign placed next to the Ezra Meeker Oregon Trail marker. Dick Mason photo.*

# Two new Oregon Trail signs installed on Foothill Road

*By Dick Mason*

*La Grande Observer, January 1, 2024*

LA GRANDE — A local historian has stepped up to make sure that a theft decades ago will 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 have been replaced after being stolen in the early 1990s. The new signs were installed under the direction of Oregon Trail historian Ronnie Allen, of La Grande. "It is important that we added the signs back because we do not want the Oregon Trail forgotten," said Allen, who had the signs installed Dec. 5.

The metal placards, which read Oregon Trail on top and National Historic Trail on the bottom, are about 2-1/2 miles southeast of La Grande. The signs are on a 10-foot high metal post set in concrete. One sign faces southeast and the other southwest. Similar signs were in the same area three decades ago but were on separate posts about a half mile apart when they were stolen. Allen said it is not known who stole the signs and they were never recovered.

The historian installed the new signs after being encouraged by Dennis Larson, of the Oregon-California Trails Association, which is dedicated to protecting and recognizing the Oregon Trail. Allen is also a member of the organization.

The addition of the signs means there are now at least five Oregon Trail heritage signs along Foothill Road, a 7-mile stretch of road that runs east from Gekeler Lane to Interstate 84.

The two signs Allen added along Foothill Road are among three he recently put up. A third, also installed in early December, is about 100 feet south of the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive site on Hot Lake Lane, 1-1/2 miles west of Hot Lake. The sign, a 5-foot stake shaped Carsonite placard, is making it easier for Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive site visitors to see exactly where pioneers traveled coming into the Grande Ronde Valley.

The sign is aligned with an immovable sight tube at the Oregon Trail interpretive site. People looking through the sight tube see the sign that is positioned to guide viewers to look southwest and see what pioneers did. "This lets viewers see what the pioneers did 170 years ago when they were coming down the hill," Allen said.

The Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive site is located in an area where Oregon Trail pioneers camped after coming into the Grande Ronde Valley. It was popular because there was water and grass nearby for oxen. The site is on land owned by Dale Counsel, a rancher who helped Allen create the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail Interpretive site. Allen and Counsel have been developing the site, which has been open to visitors for no charge since 2017.



*Ronnie Allen, of La Grande, examines an old wagon wheel on December 26, 2023, at his home. Allen is devoted to helping protect the Oregon Trail in northeast Oregon as a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association.*



*Two new Oregon Trail signs have been installed on Foothill Road marking a portion of the route the Oregon Trail took along what is now Foothill Road. The new signs replace ones that were stolen in the early 1990s.*



*Oregon Trail Carsonite markers have been installed next to the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail interpretive site alongside Hot Lake Lane.*

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## **A History Spotlight from the Oregon Historical Society**

*By Executive Director Kerry Tymchuk*

OHS maintains a robust variety of digital assets where you can learn about Oregon history, including the *Oregon History Project*, *Oregon TimeWeb*, *Oregon History Wayfinder*, and *Dear Oregon* (OHS's blog). You can also explore OHS's collections through OHS Digital Collections and the OHS Museum Collection Portal. OHS's most visited digital asset, however, is the *Oregon Encyclopedia* (OE), which receives well over a million hits annually. I recently received a report on the very eclectic list of OE entries that received the most visits in 2023.

The number 1 most visited site on the *Oregon Encyclopedia* in 2023 was the essay "Oregon Trail" by William L. Lang. View the "Oregon Trail" essay at [oregonencyclopedia.org](https://oregonencyclopedia.org)



THE OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## *Northwest Trails*

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**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**

*A Shifting Legacy*

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

## **2024 Election Results**

Thank you to all chapter voters for casting your votes for 2024 chapter leadership positions. The new officers who began their terms January 1, 2024, are:

President: Susan Doyle  
Vice-president: Wendell Baskins  
Treasurer: Glenn Harrison  
Secretary: Jenny Miller

Two director candidates were elected to office:

David Welch  
Polly Jackson  
Current director Andy Anderson continues to fill out his current term.

Again, thanks to each voter for expressing your confidence in our new leaders. Every chapter member can help to assure the success of NW OCTA programs by supporting these officials and volunteering to help them in their efforts to move the chapter and its programs in the upcoming years.