

# NEWS FROM THE PLAINS

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## Oregon Trail in Idaho Damaged

# Artifact Seekers Dig Holes in Trail

*By Candy Moulton  
NFP Editor*

Individuals damaged sections of the Oregon Trail in Idaho this summer after they were allegedly using metal detectors to illegally search for artifacts, and then using shovels to dig in the trail corridor.

The Associated Press reported on the trail damage in late August.

"It is the BLM's responsibility to protect and preserve any sections of the Oregon National Historic Trail under its jurisdiction," said Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Burley Field Office Archaeologist Suzann Henrikson.

"The recent damage to the trail near Burley has resulted in a significant loss of history for the American public."

The BLM is seeking information on who did the digging.

"Although owning a metal detector is not illegal, be aware that using this device on lands under federal management may result in a crime," Henrikson said. "If you sink a shovel in an archaeological site on public land, you could be convicted of a felony."

Upon learning of the trail damage, OCTA responded with a series of letters of protest to

the producers of three television programs – including "Diggers" on the National Geographic Channel – which encourage amateur treasure hunters and apparently are behind a disturbing trend in this kind of vandalism on historic sites.

Preservation Chairman Jere Krakow, Idaho chapter president Jerry Eichhorst, OCTA Association Manager Travis Boley, and National President John Krizek coordinated the response in league with the BLM, which reported about 400 holes dug along several miles of the trail, near Burley, ID.

The holes are located within the ruts of the wagon trail, according to the federal officials.

"Television shows like 'Diggers,' 'American Diggers,' and 'Dig Wars' encourage theft on public lands," Boley said. "We'll see more and more theft of our national cultural heritage because of these shows. It was recently reported that the producers of 'Dig Wars' contacted the BLM in Utah about possibly digging at a Pony Express station. And now miles of the Oregon Trail in Idaho are potted with holes dug by 'treasure hunters.' Please respect our historic and archaeological



*BLM employees Suzann Henrikson and Shauna Robinson assess damage to the trail as a result of individuals apparently digging for artifacts. (BLM Photo)*

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# Trail Damage in Idaho

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resources and teach others that it is a crime to do such things on public lands.”

The damage in Idaho occurred near the Milner Dam sometime between late June and early July. Henrikson says she had gone to the site for a project they were working on and discovered the damage and theft.

Henrikson says she has never seen an incident this severe in her five years working for the Burley BLM Field office. Henrikson says she believes thefts such as this are on the rise thanks to TV programs such as “Diggers.” It’s a program where the shows pay property owners money to dig up possible artifacts. However this incident happened on federal land. Taking artifacts, such as an arrow head, from federal lands can be considered a misdemeanor. Henrikson says crews will repair the damage done to the trail but cannot do anything to recover any artifacts that may have been taken.

OCTA Member Kimberly Kropf reported that in late September federal officials along with a southern Idaho Boy Scout troop began restoration efforts on the damaged trail section.

The trail artifacts are protected by the Archaeological Resource Protection Act. Anyone convicted of taking trail artifacts could face fines of up to \$20,000 and a year in prison, even for first-time offenders.



*Idaho BLM employees Suzann Henrikson and Shauna Robinson. measure a stretch of trail that has multiple holes dug in it. Restoration of the trail has already begun by BLM with aid from Boy Scouts. (BLM Photo)*

## Volunteer Hours, Miles, and Expenses Needed

*By Bill and Jeanne Watson*

Many thanks to those of you who send in your volunteer hours, miles and expenses through your Chapter coordinator or directly to us. They were very successful in minimizing the impact on our Federal Agency Partners’ budgets. Please keep them coming.

We urgently need these reports from all members to help preserve funding for your Trail Projects. Please email your estimated or actual volunteer

hours, miles and expenses reports by month to us at [BillJeanneWatson@att.net](mailto:BillJeanneWatson@att.net), to Headquarters at [KComway@indepmo.org](mailto:KComway@indepmo.org), or to Jere Krakow, OCTA’s representative to the Partnership for the National Trails System, at [jlkrakow@msn.com](mailto:jlkrakow@msn.com).

