

NORTHWEST

In response to Ray Egan's recent article in the *Overland Journal* about the "myth" of killing three oxen to make rope out of their hides for lowering wagons down a cliff on Naches Pass in 1853, Dave Welch, Ray Egan and Dennis Larsen ventured up to this famous site.

The goal was to GPS the route down and compare those findings with the descriptions left by the 1853 pioneers. In researching *A Yankee on Puget Sound*, Dennis Larsen had walked the route five years ago.

At that time there was a distinct Forest Service trail from FR 70 down to the Greenwater Lakes trailhead. There was a sign both at the top of the "cliff" and at the bottom of the trail telling the story of that 1853 wagon train.

On September 29, we started down the trail taking readings. Near the top of the "cliff" the trail was clear and distinct. Below that it quickly became obvious that no maintenance had been done on the trail since it was last walked.

Climbing over downfall, trying to sort out what was trail from animal tracks, we slowly made our way down. Eventually, all signs of the old trail disappeared and the trek became a brush bash. From the "precipice" to the Greenwater Lakes trailhead is a drop of 710 feet. The average grade is 30 percent, but there are places where the grade is 45 to 50 percent. The trio walked 1.4 miles to cover a straight-line distance of 0.4 miles. Our conclusion is that the terrain really doesn't match the pioneers' descriptions. The descent into the Hilgard camping area near LaGrande, Oregon is similar with an average grade of 25 percent with short sections of 45 percent or more. However, as Dave noted, that section of the trail did not seem to attract similar dramatic reminiscences from the 1853 travelers.

A new Oregon Trail diary

Four years after OCTA published *Our Faces Are Westward: the 1852 Oregon Trail Journey of Edward Jay Allen* the co-authors of that book, myself and Karen Johnson, received an e-mail from a woman who identified herself as a direct descendant of Jacob Resser who traveled west with Allen from Pittsburgh in 1852. The descendant told us she had a copy of the diary Resser kept while on that journey and she kindly sent us the same, including her efforts at transcribing it. Both will shortly be on their way

to the Mattes Library in Independence. This diary supplies information missing in Allen's voluminous writings. For instance, we named the wagon train the Wapello Train, after the county in Iowa from which many of the immigrants departed. Resser informed us it was called the Dahlenega train after a township in Wapello County. Resser's diary also enabled us to more accurately pinpoint the death of David Koontz in today's

Echo, Oregon, as September 5 or 6, 1852. The diary clears up a mystery about the inscriptions at Names Hill, Wyoming. Many of those inscriptions have the date July 7 attached to them, but Allen's writings clearly state he left the Green River on that date leaving no time to do the inscriptions. Resser makes it clear that the majority of the wagon train took a rest day at Names Hill. And to our chagrin we got the date of Allen and Resser's departure from Pittsburgh incorrect. They left the smoky city on Saturday,



Ray Egan and Dave Welch at Naches Pass "cliff" April 17, 1852.

Refurbishing 1916 Oregon Trail markers

In 1916 eleven concrete markers each with a bronze inscribed plaque were placed along the Cowlitz Trail branch of the Oregon Trail that extended from the Oregon border to the south end of Puget Sound. Ten of them read "Oregon Trail 1844 Marked by the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution in the State of Washington 1916." The eleventh, a "unique" marker, was placed in Vancouver, Washington. After one hundred years the bronze plaques were in serious need of refurbishing. The Sacajawea Chapter of the DAR took the lead in this project. On September 27 the City of Toledo and the DAR sponsored a re-dedication ceremony of their marker near Cowlitz Landing, the place where the immigrants ended their river travel north and went overland to Puget Sound. The city landscaped the area around the monument and hosted a gathering of more than 50 people, many dressed in period attire. The event concluded with local fourth grade school children placing rocks on which they had written their names at the base of the monument. Unbeknownst to the planners, having school children place rocks at the base of the Oregon Trail markers is exactly what Ezra Meeker did during his marker dedications along the trail between 1906 and 1912.

-- Dennis Larson