



Northwest Trails

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

Volume 39, No. 2

Spring 2024

Annual Chapter Membership Meeting Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, The Dalles, OR

Twenty-three people attended the chapter's annual meeting on Saturday, March 2, at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles, Oregon. The Gorge interpretive center is located at Crates Point, which overlooks where Oregon Trail emigrants in the 1840s loaded their covered wagons on rafts and launched down the Columbia River to the Willamette Valley.

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m. with a social hour followed by a business meeting with reports and announcements. After a bring-your-own lunch, Roger Blair gave an interesting program on "Ninevah Ford: Contentious Early Pioneer." Ford was a leader in the 1843 Oregon Trail migration and became known for not only being first in many endeavors but also as a contentious settler in the Willamette Valley and eastern Oregon. The meeting ended with our always popular raffle.

Thank you to Vice-President Wendell Baskins for arranging the enjoyable meeting at this important Oregon Trail location.



President Susan Doyle and speaker Roger Blair.

NW Chapter Leaders

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Susan Doyle

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Wendell Baskins

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Robin Baker

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Sallie Riehl

Preservation Committee

Dave Welch, Wendell Baskins,

Jenny Miller

President's Message

Northwest Chapter started 2024 with a successful annual meeting in March at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center at The Dalles. Wendell Baskins made all the arrangements and has scheduled the annual fall meeting for September 28 at Fort Borst Park, Centralia, Washington. Many chapter members enjoy the opportunity to get together in person at these two annual membership meetings.

The Zoom programs that started during Covid provide exceptional programming not otherwise possible for our geographically widespread chapter. Dave has one more Zoom program scheduled for May and would welcome a program for June as well as ideas for next year's programs.

In May Robin Baker will lead a team in exploring trail evidence in the Blue Mountains for the fourth year in a row. The aim of the explorations is to unravel the myriad overlying and interwoven transportation routes across the Blue Mountains to ultimately determine the original Oregon Trail in this significant segment. The project is progressing well with Robin's impeccable maps and research material that complement the ground exploration. An article about Robin and his team that appeared in eastern Oregon newspapers is included in this newsletter.

The focus of the chapter this spring is preparing for the 2024 OCTA convention in July at Wildhorse Resort and Casino in Pendleton, Oregon. Convention Chair Roger Blair is working with a convention planning committee of Northwest and Idaho Chapter members to make this a highly successful event. The speakers conference and bus tours are in keeping with the theme, the *Shifting Legacy* of the Oregon Trail and its impact on Indigenous Peoples on the Columbia Plateau.

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

Susan Doyle,
Chapter president

2nd Quarter NW OCTA Finances January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024

We started the 2nd Quarter of the NW OCTA Fiscal Year with \$18,331.46 on January 1, 2024. There was no change during January. On February 11 we paid the Discovery Center \$459 for room rent, food, and drinks for the annual meeting and ended February with \$17,872.46. Then on March 2 at the annual meeting the expenses that Wendell Baskins had incurred for the meeting was reimbursed, but we gained \$170 from the raffle and donations. On March 31 we had \$18,295.56.

Glenn Harrison
Chapter Treasurer

NW OCTA 2024 Save the Date Calendar

By Wendell Baskins

- May 16 to 19** Blue Mt. Exploration led by Robin Baker. For further information contact Robin Baker at robinbaker1927@gmail.com.
- June 22 and 23** Cowlitz River Trip led by Dave Welch. For further information contact Dave Welch at welchdj@comcast.net.
- July 21 to 25** National OCTA Convention in Pendleton, OR.
- September 28** NW OCTA Fall Meeting at Fort Borst Park in Centralia, WA. When I think of Borst Park in Centralia, I think of Joyce Bolerjack, Chuck and Suzanne Hornbuckle, and so many other rutnuts who came together for the chapter fall meetings. Lively discussions, educational sessions, and just plain fun was had by the attendees. Please reserve the date and come and join in the fun. More details will be coming out nearer to the date.
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Northwest Chapter Zoom Meetings Spring 2024

By Dave Welch

May 4, 2024 10:00 am Robin Baker, "Upcoming Hikes and Explorations in the Blue Mountains." Also, "Northwest Chapter Preservation Update" by Dave Welch and a convention update from Roger Blair.

June 8, 2024 10:00 am Presentation needed. Contact Dave Welch (welchdj@comcast.net).

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

Blue Mountains Hike

By Robin Baker

The Blue Mountains hike agenda is Thursday-Saturday, May 16-19, with the main hike at Blue Mountain Crossing being Thursday the 16th. This hike will be a "dry run" for the convention hike I will be leading in July. Friday and Saturday will be more rugged explorations on Airway Beacon Hill northwest of the Mt. Emily freeway interchange. People should contact me (robinbaker1927@gmail.com) for more information.

A New Approach to Chapter Preservation Activities

By Dave Welch

A primary mission of OCTA is the preservation of the Oregon and California Historic Trails. Preservation is always a challenging task, but it is especially so in the current era emphasizing renewable energy sources, aka wind turbines, solar panels and their supporting infrastructure. Oregon and Washington have been particularly aggressive in their development of these energy sources to the detriment of the trails.

Every project has an approval process through which it must pass. The process is lengthy and complex. Government agencies and developers have tens of people involved in each project, a resource level that we cannot match. Additionally, we are the only advocate for the preservation of the emigrant trails. What can we do?

First, we need to be very selective in which projects we become involved. Two criteria relate to this selection: (1) is there a direct impact to the trail and (2) are there other significant intrusions already present?

Second, we should not become deeply involved in the bureaucratic processes that are part of the approval process. We should focus on identifiable trail impacts and their resolution through the application of preservation regulations like Section 106.

To implement our scaled down, focused approach the Northwest Chapter has formed a Preservation Working Group (PWG). The group as a whole will function as a “chapter preservation officer.” The plan, which will evolve, will begin with a review of projects considered by the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC). They publish a list each month of each project and their activities. Our chapter PWG will review and discuss the list each month via a Zoom meeting. Initial members of the PWG are Dave Welch, Jenny Miller, and Wendell Baskins. Chapter president Susan Doyle is an ex officio member.

Would you consider joining the group? Your only commitment initially is to observe and learn. Hopefully that will lead to a desire to expand participation.

For more information, contact *Dave Welch* at welchdj@comcast.net



Northwest Chapter Research & Mapping

Researchers use the latest technology to more accurately map the Oregon Trail over the Blue Mountains

By Trish Yerges for the *East Oregonian*

La Grande Observer, February 22, 2024; *East Oregonian*, February 24, 2024

PENDLETON — Since the first major migration to Oregon in 1843, Oregon Trail ruts have become the growing fascination of thousands of historians, authors, teachers, and students across the nation. But none are more dedicated to protecting this legacy than the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA), which will hold its national Historic Trails Conference July 21-25 at the Wildhorse Conference Center.

OCTA is divided into chapters, and the Northwest Chapter of OCTA is led by its president Susan Badger Doyle. The chapter covers Oregon and Washington. A sub-set of four members from this chapter is currently conducting field research by walking the trail ruts, documenting what they see, taking photographs, and for the first-time using GPS tracking technology to map the trail with the greatest accuracy ever incorporated into a map of the Oregon Trail.

Among those researchers is Intermountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill of Pendleton, who for half the year spends weekends in the Blue Mountains from Ladd Canyon to Pendleton, researching the ruts with his colleagues Jenny Miller, Robin Baker, and Bob Camp. “I joined them about three years ago because I’ve always had an interest in history and the Oregon Trail, and especially the Blues,” Mulvihill said.

The scope of their research includes the Ladd Canyon summit area, Clover Valley, North Powder, all the way through the Grande Ronde Valley, over Hilgard and to Poker Jim Hill, to the descent to the Cayuse on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. “We use everything from pioneer diaries to the highway reports, the Hornbuckle survey, to Jack Evans who was a professor at Eastern Oregon University. We’re basically building on the work of everyone ahead of us with modern technology,” Mulvihill said.

To create the most accurate maps, Mulvihill said they have overlaid all the older maps and put them on their phones using Caltopo map software. With this tool in their hands as they hike, they can find the remnants of the trail in the Blue Mountains and map them. The older maps were created without modern technology, so the researchers wondered how accurate the older maps are. They soon found out.

“When we actually got out there, we found there’s no way the Oregon Trail went through where they had it marked,” Mulvihill said. Sometimes the trail was placed in three or four different spots according to these older maps. “A lot of those cartographers never got out of their cars if they were even in that area with a car,” he said.

Other challenges they face finding the trail ruts were attributed to soil disturbances caused by livestock grazing, soil erosion, overgrowth of vegetation, land development for the interstate and years of cultivation and farming. The search is further complicated by the construction of other early roads like toll roads, wagon roads, and freight roads. Those routes left ruts that crisscross each other and the Oregon Trail through the Blue Mountains.

“This has become a multi-year field project exploring trail remnants and probable routes on the ground,” said Doyle, current Northwest Chapter president and a 39-year member of OCTA. “The Blue Mountains project is indefinite and will continue until an accurate map and all documentation is compiled.”

Despite the confusion, the researchers are helped by remembering that the 1843 Oregon Trail pioneers always took the easiest way west, following earlier trails like game trails, Native American trails, fur trappers' trails, and early explorers' paths. It was the best route then, and today's Interstate 84 follows it closely. "In our field research, we're never very far from the interstate," Mulvihill said.

Mulvihill likened their search for Oregon Trail ruts to a treasure hunt, where the researchers use clues from pioneer diaries, including descriptions of the landscape using measurements in terms of chains (22 yards) and rods (5.5 yards). The trail can be elusive at times — evident for a stretch and then missing and then picking up again.

To Mulvihill the hunt for ruts is a test of scholarly analysis, piecing together diary clues, and looking at the terrain from new perspectives until they finally find the ruts. With this methodology, they have been frequently rewarded. "It's a lot of fun really," Mulvihill said.

The Mapping Master, Robin Baker

In his field exploration over the Blue Mountains, Mulvihill works with Robin Baker of Beaverton, who has deep ancestral roots in Northeast Oregon. He joined the Northwest Chapter of OCTA in 2015, and in 2021 he became the mapping chairperson for the chapter. He has been mapping the Oregon Trail for going on four years.

Baker said that their approach to research and field exploration is heavily dependent upon the General Land Office plat maps and especially the early surveyor's notes, both available now on the Bureau of Land Management's website. "We also utilize GPS tracking and photo location to determine where we have explored and where our photos have been taken," Baker said.

There were previous Oregon Trail researchers, such as Earl Bickmore of the Oregon State Highway Department in 1956-1958; the BLM's Percy Brown, and the National Park Service's Aubrey Haines in the early 1970s, as well as John W. "Jack" Evans in the 1980s. Evans was an OCTA member and author of *Powerful Rokey: The Blue Mountains and the Oregon Trail*, 1991. They each made maps, but as trail researchers, they didn't have the advantage of search engines, Google Earth, and archival records on the Internet, as Baker has today. "They did not have easy access to General Land Office plat maps and surveyor's notebooks, which were then only available in paper form; nor did they have the advantage of GPS to track where they had explored and where their rut discoveries were to a high degree of accuracy," Baker said.

When Earl Bickmore of the highway department worked on the project, he wrote an interdepartmental correspondence dated Jan. 26, 1959, to Mr. P. M. Stephenson, assistant state highway engineer in Salem, stating, "The general route of the 'trail' was of common knowledge, but its exact location was our problem." Baker said that the engineers were tasked with mapping the Old Oregon Trail from the Snake River to The Dalles, and their deadline was before the 1959 Oregon statehood Centennial. They weren't allowed to work on the project during regular work hours, so, according to Bickmore, the project was carried on almost entirely on weekends and holidays for two years.

The highway department mapped the Oregon Trail west of Meacham and west of Emigrant Springs State Park, which was the toll road, not the Oregon Trail. "Right there is a perfectly good set of ruts that go for about three miles from near Emigrant Springs State Park to Ross Road. That's the toll road, and the later surveys bear that out," Baker said.

Being in a bit of a hurry, though, and without the advantages of modern technology, the maps were "pretty good," Baker said, but not as exact as GPS tracking technology and field research can make them. That's what Baker wants to achieve. Already, Baker and his associates have identified some mapping corrections to the previous maps of the Oregon Trail route. Baker shares his maps with other OCTA members and would like to make them available to the interested public with Jenny Miller's assistance.

Spreading awareness through education

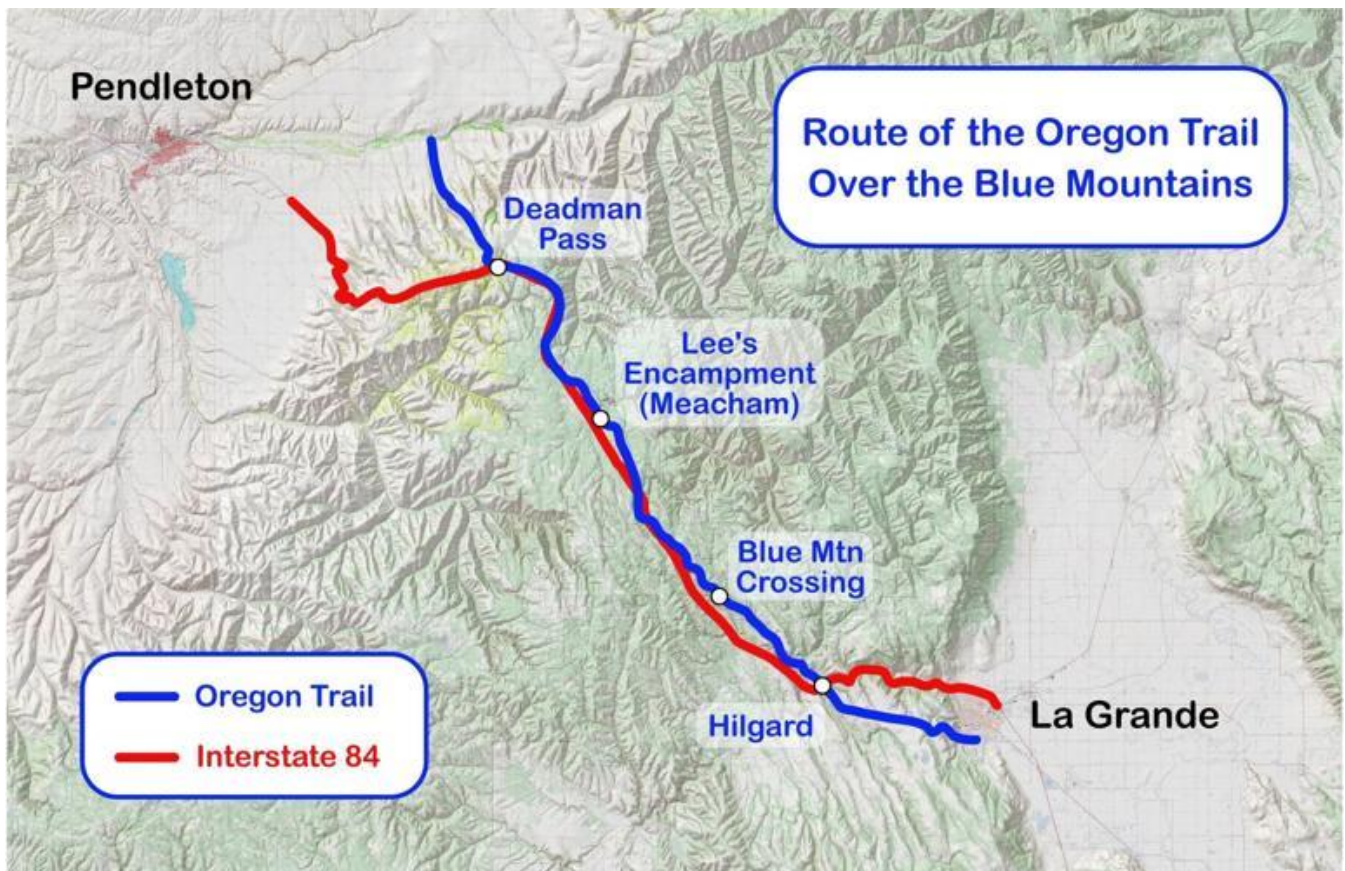
Longtime Oregon Trail enthusiast Jenny Miller, of Hermiston, joined in 1998 and has been recently elected to the national OCTA Board of Directors for a three-year term. “I’ve been on a lot of the trail from Independence, Missouri, to Champoeg State Park in the (Willamette) valley,” Miller said.

Now that she is on the board of directors, Miller’s focus will be on increasing public awareness of the Oregon Trail history and sites. As a retired elementary school teacher, she’s interested in getting instruction materials and auto tour maps out to teachers. “We have a board meeting in March and will start talking about putting materials online because it’s easier for educators to access this way,” Miller said. Additionally, the National Park System has published driving guides for states traveled across by the Oregon and California Trails: Missouri, Kansas, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon. The driving guides are available free to the public for people to see the big picture of the Oregon Trail.

She is also focused on marking the trail over the Blue Mountains. “Three summers ago, trail markers were placed along Foothill Road by the Schmutz farm southwest of La Grande and one on the side of Morgan Lake Road,” she said. “The last one we put in was at Corral Spring Oregon Trail Site. Most people don’t know about that one, but it’s beautiful.”

Miller enjoys showing people Oregon Trail ruts between Pendleton and Echo because it’s close to where she lives. She warmly invites people to attend the national OCTA Historic Conference at Wildhorse Casino in Pendleton in July. “We would like people to come for part of it or for field trips to learn what they have in their own backyard,” she said.

To become a member of OCTA, visit the OCTA website, octa-trails.org, or Facebook page. Also check the YouTube channel on their website every Tuesday and Friday to view the latest new video on the Oregon Trail.



Map by Robin Baker

Baker Cabin Historical Site

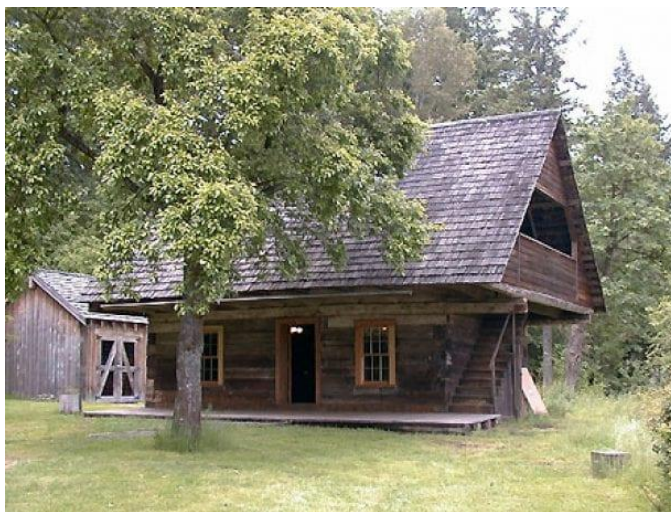
Carver, Oregon

From *bakercabin.org*

Baker Cabin Historical Site

The cabin historical site was accepted to the National Registry of Historic Places in 1976. The site has two historic structures — the 1856 Baker Cabin sitting on its original site, and the 1895 Pioneer Church, moved to the site in 1967 from Upper Logan (Springwater).

Horace and Jane Baker traveled west from Illinois in the second wagon train from Independence Missouri in 1846. This was the first wagon train to cross the new Barlow Road from The Dalles to Oregon City. The Barlow Trail bypassed the treacherous ride on rafts down the Columbia River.



Horace Baker cabin, 1856.

Pioneer Church

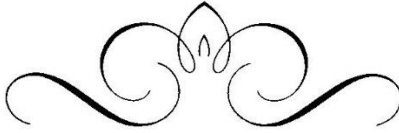
The 1895 German Methodist Church was acquired by the Society 1967. Originally built by a German community in Logan it was abandoned in 1920. It is said that all sermons were preached in German. Slated for demolition, the church was salvaged by a group of community members led by Ernest Heinrich, who moved it to the Baker Cabin Historical Site.



Pioneer Church, 1895.

Beautifully restored, the Pioneer Church, in its tranquil wooded setting, has become a popular venue for weddings and nondenominational church services at Easter Sunrise, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Wedding or concert rentals are available and help to defray the costs of maintaining the site.

While the Baker Cabin Historical Site is located in Carver, Oregon, formerly known as Stone, Oregon, its address is 18005 S Gronlund Rd, at the corner of South Hattan & South Gronlund Roads, Oregon City.



Upcoming Events at the Baker Cabin Historical Site

April 20 – Open House and Evening Concert

Open House, 11 am - 2 pm – free to the public. Open House days at Baker cabin give us an opportunity to share site history with visitors and demonstrate pioneer skills to those who stop in and see the buildings. The original log cabin and the historic Pioneer Church, located in Carver, Oregon, will be open.

Our staff will give visitors a taste of pioneer life here in Oregon. We'll have a Pioneer Skills School table with supplies for bird house and tool kit crafting (\$5 charge for supplies), local books on display and available for purchase, a display about the Kenn Lantz Exhibit by the Clackamas Historical Society, and docents walking the grounds ready to answer your questions.

Specific presentations are going to be offered:

12:00 pm – A talk about the unique architecture of the Baker Family log cabin. Meet on the porch of the Baker Cabin.

12:00 pm – A guided hike on the Baker Cabin Trail, Baker Cabin Quarry. Meet in front of the Pioneer Church. Wear sturdy shoes.

1:30 pm – Pioneer Skills Demonstration – Shake splitting. Meet by the grape arbor in front of the Baker Cabin.

6:00-7:00 pm – Evening Concert. Oregon's New History Minstrels is an a cappella singing organization of youth and adults who celebrate the natural history, settlement history, and key figures in Northwest history. Programs are performed in 4-part barbershop harmony and celebrate the northwest through song and word. There is no charge for attending this concert. Come to the Pioneer Church for a fun and light-hearted look at our area's origins.

May 11 – Spring Spruce Up

May 11, 9:00-11:00 am – Workday at the Baker Cabin Site – Here's an opportunity to volunteer by helping at the site for a little cleanup work – planting flowers, putting picnic tables out on the grounds, getting ready for spring, and summer festivities. Many hands make light work!

Visit the website for the Baker Cabin Historical Site at bakercabin.org

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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**

Call for Convention Help

By Susan Doyle

We will need chapter members to work at several activities during the convention. Roger and I have heard from many of you already, and now I am compiling lists for the various tasks. If you can work in any of the following areas, please email me with your preference and what times you could work at *sdoyle@oregontrail.net*:

Registration Center
Raffle Room
Live Auction
Door Monitor at Tuesday Evening Entertainment
Tour Bus Loading
Tour Bus Guide
Lunch Line Monitor, Monday/Thursday

Thank You!