

NEBRASKA TRAILBLAZER



No. 3

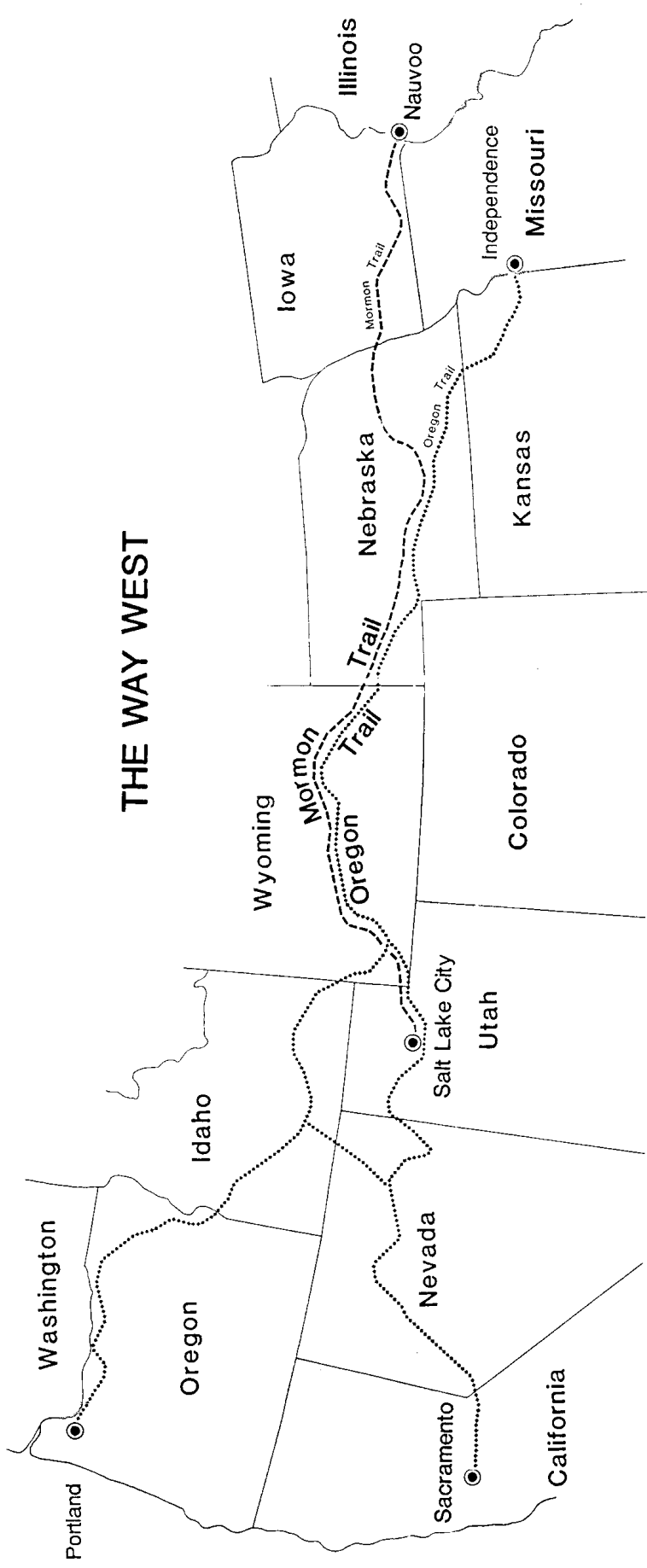
Oregon Trail



Chimney Rock

Chimney Rock was one of the best-known landmarks on the Oregon and Mormon Trails. These trails were first used by fur traders. In the 1830s missionaries bound for Oregon began to accompany them. In 1836 a party included two women, the first to make the trip. Settlers began moving west in the early 1840s in search of free land and a chance for a better life. Then, in 1847, Mormon pioneers began their trek to Utah to escape religious persecution. Two years later gold was discovered in California, and thousands of "Forty-niners" rushed across the continent. About 350,000 pioneers passed by Chimney Rock. In 1867, a railroad was built across Nebraska, bringing an end to wagon travel.

THE WAY WEST



Most of the pioneer families who followed the two great trails across Nebraska carried all of their possessions in wagons which were only about ten feet long and four feet wide. They were called "prairie schoolers" because the canvas cover did look a little like a ship's sail. Most wagons were pulled by oxen. These animals were preferred because they were dependable and inexpensive, costing about \$50 each.

The pioneers traveled in groups called trains. A wagon train could average about 16 miles per day. It took nearly one month to cross Nebraska and four months to make the 2000 mile trip to either California or Oregon.

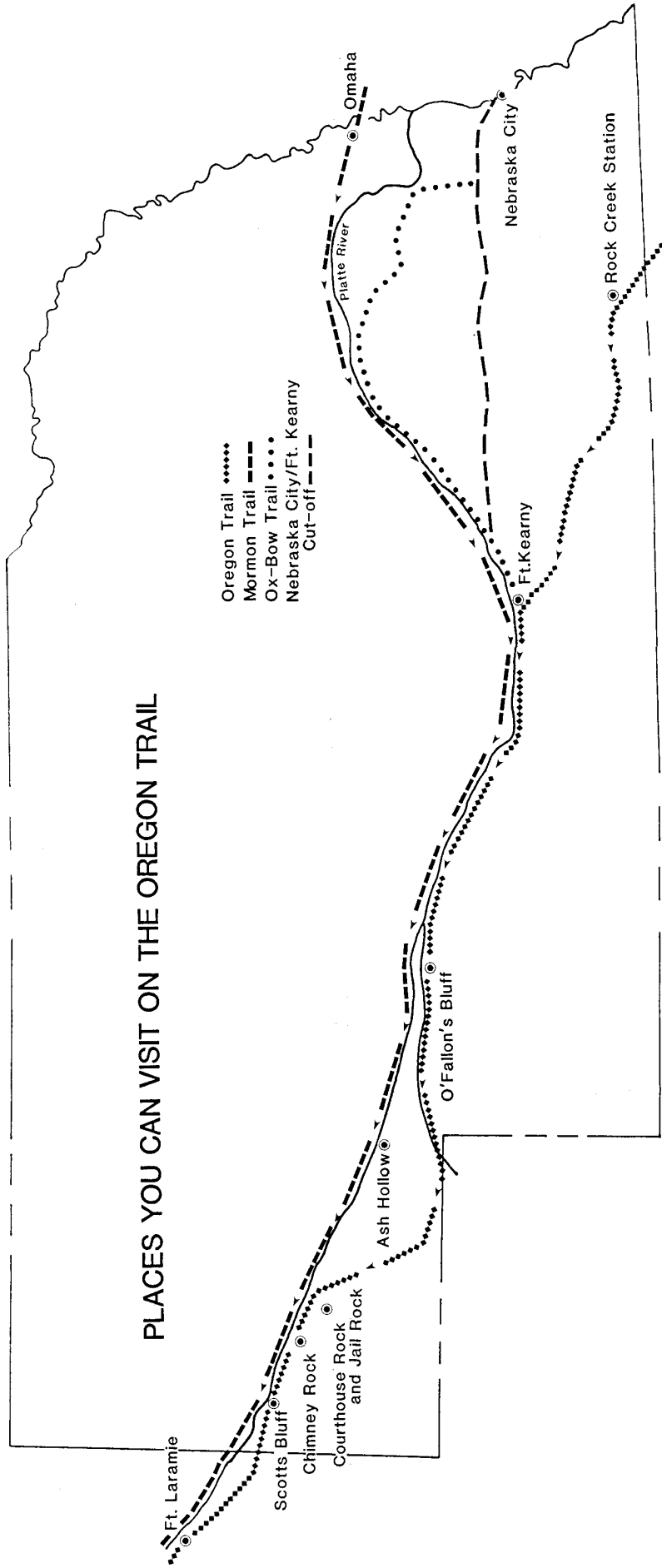
With thousands of pioneers on the trails each summer, wild game became scarce. Food for the trip had to be carried in the wagons. A meal might consist of coffee,

bacon and beans. A bread substitute, called fried cakes, was usually served. It was made of water and flour fried in bacon fat. Sometimes there was a dessert of dried fruit.

Although Indian attacks did occasionally occur, a more serious threat was from illness and accidents. A cholera epidemic swept through the trains in 1850, and hundreds died. Many other illnesses took a heavy toll. There were also an alarming number of accidents, including gunshot wounds, burns and broken bones. A few people were even run over by wagons since nearly everyone walked beside the prairie schooners. Despite the many hardships, thousands of people walked half way across the continent in search of a brighter future.

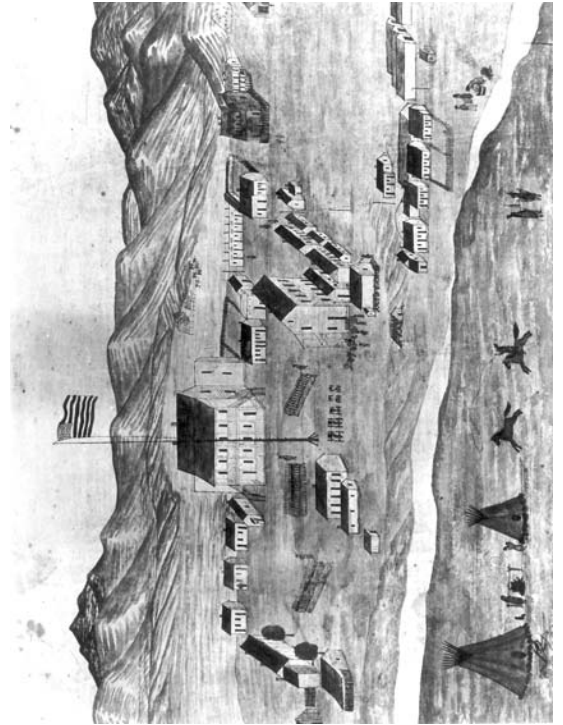


Making Camp On the Trail: Along the Platte River



Fort Laramie

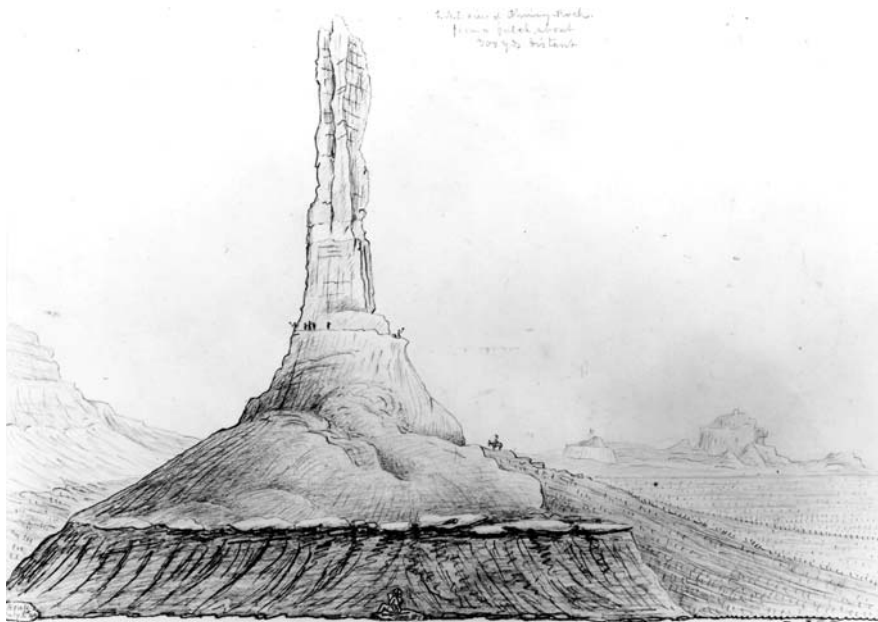
Fort Laramie was a fur trading post which the U.S. Army purchased in 1849. One Forty-niner described it as “an extensive rectangular structure of adobe. It forms an open area within — houses and balconies against the walls.” Travelers had to be at the fort by mid-June or they might be caught in early snowstorms in the mountains to the west. Many of the old buildings have survived and are open to the public.



Scott's Bluff

Scott's Bluff was named for Hiram Scott, a fur trapper, who died there in 1828. He was injured or became ill near the bluff and when he was unable to travel, his partners abandoned him.

Scott's Bluff is a range of high, rugged, broken hills along the banks of the North Platte River, and the Oregon Trail travelers had to make a long detour around the south side of the bluff. By 1851 a road was made through a gap in the bluff called Mitchell Pass. Today a road leads from the museum to the top of the bluff.

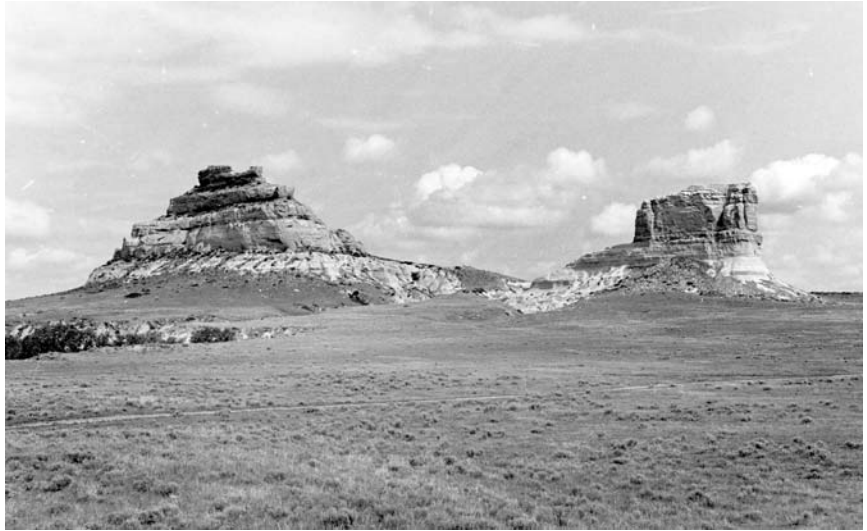


Chimney Rock

Nearly all of the travel diaries describe Chimney Rock. One traveler wrote that it was the “most remarkable object that I ever saw and if situated in the states would be visited by persons from all parts of the world,” while another thought it was “well worth a visit across the Plains to see.” This sketch was made in 1849. Now there is a museum nearby..

Court House Rock

One traveler wrote that Courthouse Rock “presents a grand & imposing appearance. I should call it a castle as it is mainly round & looks as if it might be fortified. Its size must be immense.... It rises abruptly out of the rolling country & stands entirely alone with the exception of a smaller rock... called the Jail.” This landmark is now a public park.



Ash Hollow

Ash Hollow is a sheltered valley in the bluffs of the North Platte River. Here pioneers welcomed the “springs of delightfully cold and refreshing water” after drinking muddy Platte River water for so many days.

The only way into Ash Hollow was down a dangerously steep place called Windlass Hill. “It must be seen for one to fully understand how steep is the hill,” wrote one traveler. Today you can drive to this hill and take a hiking trail to the top. Be sure to visit the wonderful museum nearby.

O’Fallon’s Bluff

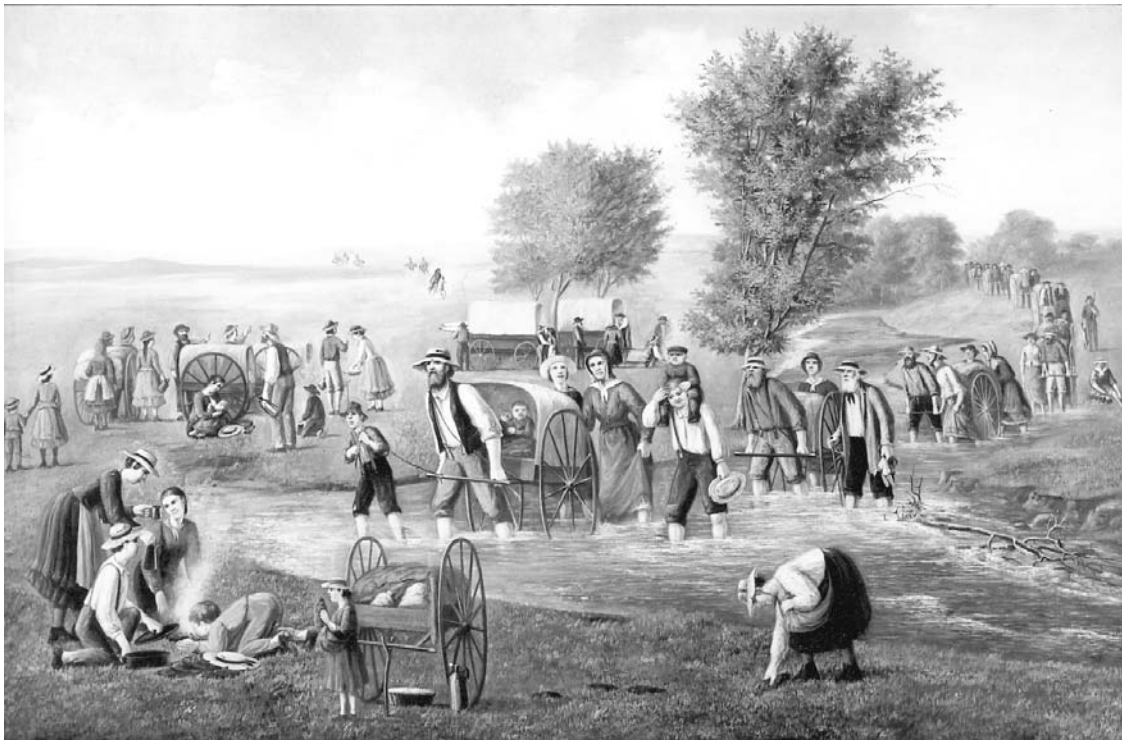
In Oregon Trail days O’Fallon’s Bluff had a bad reputation, for there were rumors that travelers had been killed there by Indians. The bluff was very close to the South Platte River, and the narrow trail would have been a good place for an ambush. Wagon ruts can be seen at the eastbound Interstate 80 rest stop near Sutherland.





Fort Kearny

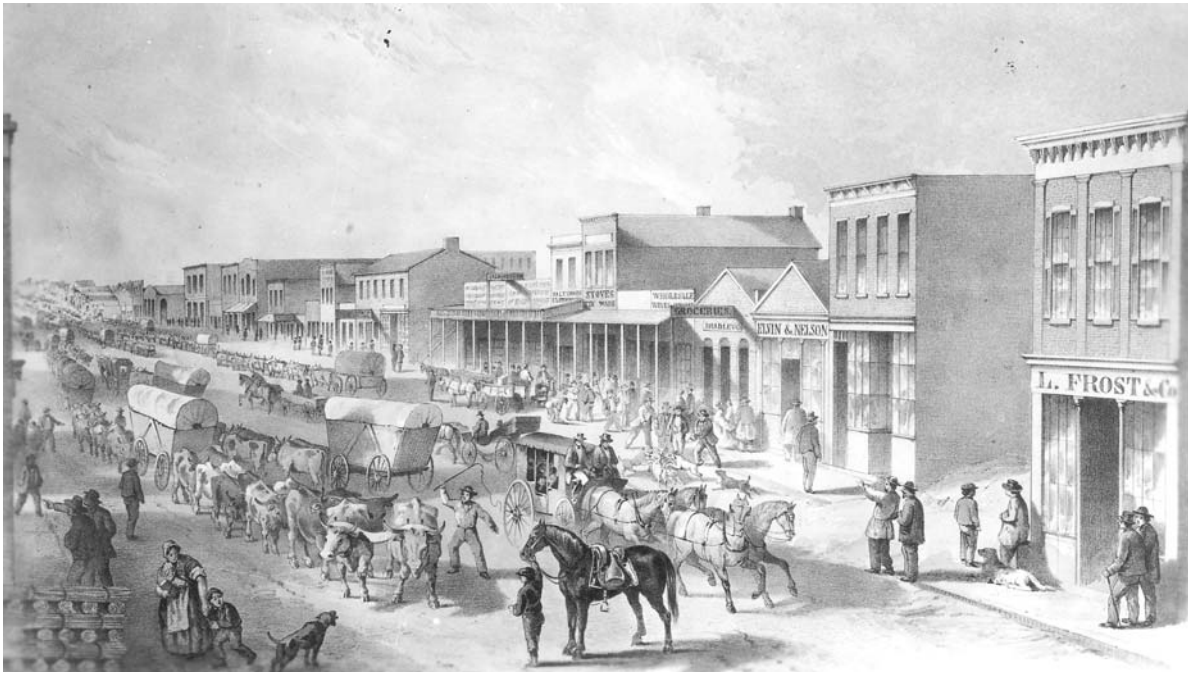
Contrary to many TV and many movie Westerns, Indians almost never attacked wagon trains, but the pioneers were afraid and some livestock was occasionally stolen. In 1848 the U.S. Army founded Fort Kearny. Today you can visit the site of Ft. Kearny near the city of Kearney and see a museum about the Oregon Trail.



Mormon Handcarts

Hand carts were used by some of the Mormon pioneers in 1855 and in 1856. Although the carts were very inexpensive, pulling one was such backbreaking work that their use was discontinued.

During the winter of 1846-47 the first Mormon pioneers gathered at Winter Quarters, a hastily built city of several thousand people at present-day Florence, north of Omaha. The town was abandoned in the spring when the pioneers left for their new homeland in Utah. There is a large cemetery that you can visit in North Omaha where hundreds of Mormon pioneers are buried.



Nebraska City

Nebraska City became one of the popular starting places for Oregon Trail travelers. Here a pioneer could buy everything that was needed for a trip to the far West. Freight companies began operating out of Nebraska City in 1858. Huge wagons pulled by 10 or 12 oxen carried all kinds of goods and supplies to the new communities as far west as Salt Lake City.



Rock Creek Station

Rock Creek was a favorite campground because there was good water and abundant wood. In 1858 a stage coach line was established from Atchison, Kansas, to Denver and Salt Lake City. Stage Stations like this one at Rock Creek were built about every 12 miles along the trail. The buildings in this picture have been rebuilt at a state park near the city of Fairbury.



Starting at 1, wind your way across Nebraska following the “Oregon Trail.” Avoid the delays caused by box canyons and other pit falls so you can get to Oregon before winter begins! Exit at 12.

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Enter Nebraska | 7. Rattlesnake bite, 1 day delay |
| 2. Late winter storm, 1 week delay | 8. Lost supplies fording stream, 1 day delay |
| 3. Creek flooded, 1 day delay | 9. Alkali-poison water, 1 day delay |
| 4. Illness (dysentery!), 1 week delay | 10. Lame oxen, 2 days rest |
| 5. Broken wheel, 1 day delay | 11. Wagon struck by lightning, 1 day delay |
| 6. Child lost, 1 day delay | 12. ON TO OREGON!! |

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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