

## Oregon Trail: The Journey

### Main Idea

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions.



### I. Heading: Overview

The Oregon Trail was one of America's true adventures. From 1840-1869, over 400,000 pioneers made the 2,170-mile journey. They traveled 15 miles a day for 4-6 months. Each spring, eager pioneers gathered at Independence, MO to organize a company and wait for the grass to grow. The trail ended near Portland, Oregon, but some settlers detoured to California along the way. In 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad made the trail obsolete.

### II. Heading: The Beginning

The Oregon Trail was laid by fur trappers and traders from 1811 to 1840, but it was only passable on foot or horseback. By 1836, when the first migrant wagon train was organized in Independence, Missouri, a wagon trail had been cleared to Fort Hall, Idaho. Wagon trails were cleared increasingly farther west, and eventually reached all the way to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Improvements were continuously made on the trail in the form of new bridges, cutoffs, ferries, and roads.

### III. Heading: The Challenges

In 1839, a group of eighteen men from Illinois set out with the intention of colonizing the Oregon country on behalf of the United States. In 1842, the second organized wagon train left with more than 100 pioneers. The party was led by Elijah White. The group broke up after passing Fort Hall with most of the single men hurrying ahead and the families following later. The "Wagon Train of 1843", with 700 to 1,000 emigrants, paid their guide, John Gantt, \$1 per person to lead them to Fort Hall.

Pioneers encountered hundreds of thousands of bison on the Great Plains, which they used for fresh meat and dried jerky. The prairie grass in many places was several feet high, with only the hat of a traveler on horseback visible. Firewood was scarce on the prairie, so pioneers gathered dried cow dung to cook their meals. With pioneers and animals sharing the same water sources, contaminated sewage led to deadly cholera bacteria killing hundreds of travelers.



**Oregon Trail Landmark**  
Chimney Rock, NE

The biggest obstacle pioneers faced was the Blue Mountains of Oregon, where they had to cut and clear a trail through heavy timber. The wagons were stopped at The Dalles, Oregon by the lack of a road around Mount Hood. Wagons were disassembled and floated down the treacherous Columbia River, while animals were herded over the rough Lolo Trail to get past Mt. Hood.

### IV. Heading: The Trail Ends

In 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed, providing faster, safer, and cheaper travel. The journey now took seven days and cost as little as \$65 (\$1,100 in 2016 dollars). Only remnants of the trail remain today. Modern highways, such as Interstate 80 and Interstate 84, follow parts of the same course westward and pass through trail towns like Casper, Pocatello, and Baker City.

Source: Wikipedia

### Questions:

1. Create a heading for each section. (see above)
2. What is the author's purpose in the first paragraph? (≥1 sentence) **The purpose is to provide a quick overview.**
3. Summarize the passage's main idea. (exactly 11 words) **Oregon Trail pioneers were a unique group and showed great determination.**
4. What are two examples from the passage showing the journey's dangers? (≥2 sentences) **Pioneers faced contaminated water sources. They also had to disassemble their wagons at the Columbia River.**
5. What do you think were the most difficult parts of this 4-6 month journey? (≥3 sentences) **Answers will vary (clean water, food, problem solving...)**

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