

## Oregon Trail: The Trail Divides

*Compare & Contrast*

Directions: Read the following passage about the Oregon Trail and answer the questions.

### The Journey

The emigrant trails were one of America's true adventures. From 1840-1869, over 400,000 pioneers made the 2,000-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 grass to grow.

The beginnings of the California and Oregon Trails were laid out by mountain men and fur traders from 1811 to 1840 and were only passable initially on foot or horseback. South Pass was the easiest point to cross the Rocky Mountains, with books and guides available for trail information after 1846. Both trails followed the same route until Idaho, where the California Trail veered southwest from Fort Hall. The only help available to pioneers was from their fellow travelers, a few blacksmiths and entrepreneurs running trading posts, and the few Army forts scattered along the trail in Nebraska and Wyoming. It is estimated 10% of the pioneers died from cholera, disease, sporadic Indian attack, or accidents. In 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad made the trail obsolete.



### The Oregon Trail

As the trail developed, it became marked by many cutoffs and shortcuts from Missouri to Oregon. The basic route followed river valleys, as grass and water were essential. The largest obstacles were crossing the Blue Mountains and navigating past the Columbia River. The trail ended near Portland, Oregon, but many settlers branched off or stopped short of this goal, forming businesses along travel routes. There were few towns established in the Oregon Country before the arrival of pioneer families.

### California Trail

California travelers had several route options, the most common was to leave Idaho, cross into Nevada, and follow the Humbolt River. As the river ended, pioneers crossed the perilous Forty Mile Desert, usually with little food or water. Then it was up-and-over the Sierra Nevada mountains into California. Some settlers detoured to the goldfields, while others continued on to towns like Sacramento and San Francisco. Trail traffic greatly increased with the discovery of gold in 1848; however, few women and children were part of the Gold Rush.



Source: Wikipedia.org

Forty-Mile Desert, NV

### Questions:

1. How were the Oregon and California Trails similar? (**≥3 sentences, cite examples**) *They used the same path in the beginning from Independence to Ft. Hall. They both had obstacles, like the Blue Mountains and Sierra Nevada. There was little trail help in case of emergencies, and travelers depended on each other.*
2. What made the California Trail different from the Oregon Trail? (**2 sentences, cite examples**) *The California Trail had the Forty Mile Desert. There was the option to detour to goldfields.*
3. Would you recommend a family of three take the Oregon or California Trail? (**≥2 sentences, use "because"**) *Answers will vary. It may be difficult for a family to cross the Forty Mile Desert, but not impossible.*
4. How did the natural landscape affect the journey? (**≥2 sentences**) *The grasslands provided animals food, and the rivers provided water. Pioneers looked for easier paths or short cuts through the mountains.*
5. Why would traveling in a group be safer than traveling alone? (**List three reasons**) *A group could offer more help if there was a breakdown, tribal attack, or an accident.*
6. Many oxen died crossing the Forty Mile Desert from exhaustion. As a family traveling in a company, how would you handle the situation if your animals perished? (**≥2 sentences**) *Take only the essential supplies and ask to share with others. Offer any valuable possessions as trade items for other pioneers.*

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