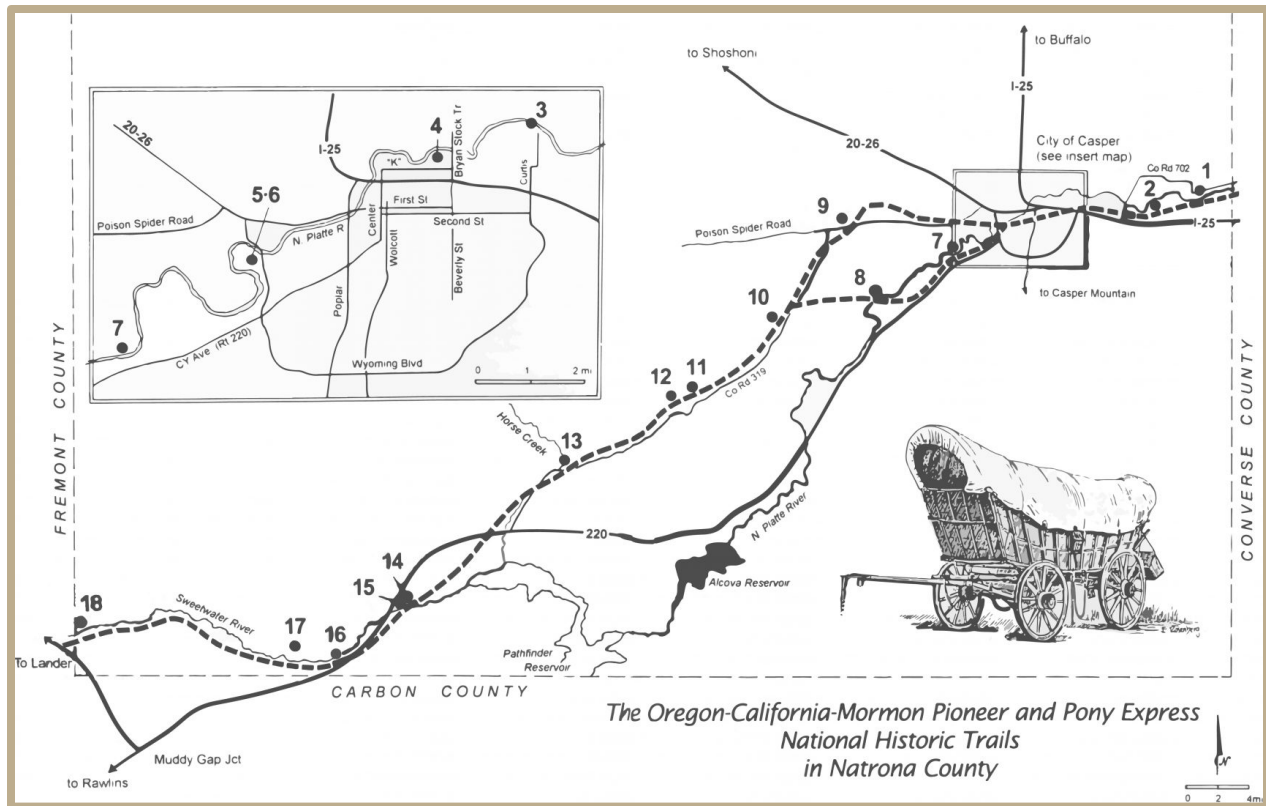


Welcome to the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express National Historic Trails in Natrona County. By following this tour, one can trace the paths of some 500,000 pioneers who pulled up stakes back east and headed out to find riches or a better life in Oregon, California, or Utah between 1841 and 1869. The first emigrants to use the trail in this time period were primarily farmers whose goal was Oregon, where land was fertile and cheap. The great Mormon migration to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah began in Winter Quarters in 1846 with the movement westward in 1847, and of course the famed forty-niners made tracks for the California gold mines starting in 1849. The trail migration represents the largest unforced migration of peoples ever witnessed.

Introduction: The emigrants followed the Trails System westward during the great 19th-century migration to what is now Oregon, California, and Utah. Farmers bound for the fertile valley, and bound for the Salt Lake Valley, and adventurers bound for the California gold fields all ventured across the plains and mountains by way of the Trails System. This route was also used for the first transcontinental telegraph, the Overland Mail service, and the Pony Express. From Independence, Missouri, to western Oregon, a wagon traveled 1,932 miles. For a journey of such magnitude, emigrants needed dependable sources of water and grass and a passable grade through the mountains. The low topographic relief of the Continental Divide at South Pass provided a "gentle" passageway across the mountains. It became the favored route of the emigrants. Travelers followed the same "Emigrant Road," to just beyond South Pass, where, at the "Parting of the Ways," the trails diverged. Here travelers bound for the Salt Lake Valley in Utah, or beyond to California, headed southwesterly while most of those bound for Oregon turned to the northwest. Although "Oregon Trail" is the name often used today, emigrants who followed it commonly called it "the road."





Origins of the Trail

The Oregon Trail was originally blazed by fur trappers and traders who were following the well-worn trails of the Native American Indian. To exploit the rich fur country of the Pacific Northwest, the American fur Company established a trading headquarters in 1810 at Astoria near the mouth of the Columbia River. Wilson Price Hunt led the company's first overland expedition to Astoria in 1811. He crossed the Wind River Range by way of Union Pass and the Teton Range via Teton Pass, then followed the Snake and Columbia Rivers to Astoria. A return expedition in 1812 was led by Robert Stuart, who followed the Columbia and Snake Rivers and crossed Teton Pass, then crossed the Wind River Mountains over South Pass, and continued east on the Sweetwater and North Platte Rivers. In November 1812, Stuart established a winter camp in the vicinity of Red Buttes on the North Platte River. Stuart not only "discovered" South Pass, but also traveled west to east along a large portion of what would become the Oregon Trail.

England claimed Oregon as its territory, but after the War of 1812, the United States attempted to curb British interests by encouraging American settlement and competition with the Hudson Bay Company. The federal government later offered free land to emigrants willing to make the trip. This incentive, as well as economic hardship and social upheaval, induced emigrants to go west and start anew.



Stop 1: Grave of Quintina Snoderly. Viewed to the west..

Stop 1: An Oregon Trail Burial - Quintina Snoderly

Grave of Quintina Snoderly Location: From Interstate 25, take exit 182 north. Travel north on Highway 256 for approximately 3.2 miles to Country Road 702 (Geary Dome Road) and turn east (right). Proceed to the fork in road, approximately 2.5 miles, and bear left, remaining on Country Road 702 for approximately 2.3 miles. Turn right (south); proceed through gate for 0.10 mile. Quintina Snoderly's grave lies to the east, (on the left) on top of the hill, just beyond owners, the body of Quintina Snoderly was reburied here in 1987 by members of the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA). The grave site is enclosed by a wooden fence and marked by a plaque identifying the grave as that of an Oregon Trail traveler.

History: Quintina Snoderly died June 25, 1852 in a river crossing accident. The discovery of this burial dispelled some popular opinions that Oregon Trail burials were casual, quick and shallow. This was in no way the case of Quintina Snoderly.



Stop 2: View of the north bank of the North Platte river from Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park

Stop 2: Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park

View of the north bank of the North Platte river from Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park

Location: From Interstate Highway 25, turn north at exit 182. Travel approximately 0.5 mile to Highway 20-26, turn right and travel east for approximately 2.2 miles to park entrance. A small day-use fee is charged.

History: A cultural resource survey of the park was conducted in 1984, indicating no visible evidence of the Oregon Trail within the park boundaries, but that evidence was located north and south of the park boundaries. The south bank of the North Platte River lies one-half mile north of the park entrance building. The Council Bluffs Road (Childs Route) of the Oregon Trail lies several hundred feet to the north of the river's channel. It follows along the south edge of the steep bank which adjoins the floodplain on the north. The main route of the Oregon Trail lies approximately 250 feet to the southeast of the turnoff from Highway 20-26 into Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park. The incised ruts of the Oregon Trail cannot be seen from the highway; they are hidden from view behind the embankment of the abandoned highway that was the predecessor of the modern highway. The Oregon Trail ruts parallel the modern highway.



Stop 3: Replica of Richard's (Reshaw's) Bridge

Stop 3: Richard's (Reshaw's) Bridge and Trading Post

Replica of Richard's (Reshaw's) Bridge Location: The site of Richard's (Reshaw's) Bridge is located in the town of Evansville, just east of Casper. It can be reached by turning north from Exit 185 on Interstate 25 onto Curtis Street. Travel north for approximately 1.2 miles to the entrance (on the left) to the Reshaw Bridge Park. History: In 1851 John Baptiste Richard (commonly pronounced "Reshaw") build a log toll bridge over the North Platte River about one mile west of Deer Creek near today's Glenrock. After this bridge was washed out in the spring of 1852, he and eight other partners built a sturdy, twelve-arch wooden toll bridge at a site near present-day Evansville. The structure was 835 feet long and 18 feet wide and was constructed of hewn timbers bolted together. It rested on 23 piers of cribs of hewn timbers filled with stone. By charging emigrants as much as five dollars a wagon during high water, the partners made \$40,000 by the end of June 1853. This bridge ended the necessity of fording or ferrying what could be a very dangerous river. Richard bought out his other partners in a few years and operated the toll bridge sporadically from 1852 to 1865, serving emigrant trains and other travelers. This bridge put the Mormon Ferry out of business in 1853.



Stop 4: Mormon Ferry Probable Second Site at Platte River Parkway footbridge across the North Platte River

Stop 4: Mormon Ferry, Probable Second Site

Sign located approximately one-half mile south of the Probable Second Mormon Ferry crossing of the North Platte River Location: North Casper Park, Casper. Take Exit 186 from Interstate 25, turn north onto Bryan Stock Trail to "K" Street, turn west and travel 0.4 mile to the park, which is a baseball/soccer complex. There is a large interpretive sign commemorating the ferry just east of the baseball grandstand. To visit the locale of the Mormon Ferry Second Site, turn right at the easternmost (first) entrance to the baseball/soccer complex. Travel in a northerly direction along a winding park road for approximately one-half mile. You will arrive at a Platte River Parkway footbridge across the North Platte River. You are now in the vicinity of the Mormon Ferry Probable Second Site.

History: When Brigham Young's Pioneer Company left the "Last Crossing" on June 19, 1847, Young detailed nine men to remain behind to run the ferry during high water for emigrant traffic. However, they soon moved the ferry downstream about five miles to compete with a rival outfit that had begun ferrying emigrants. The Mormon Ferry may have been moved several times during its six years of operation, but in 1849 the mileage records of Captain Howard Stansbury of the Corps of Topographical Engineers document it at this site.



Stop 5: Monument in Memorial Park commemorating the site of the first probable crossing of the North Platte river by the Mormon Ferry. (Actual ferry site is on the river ½ mile south of marker)

Stop 5: Mormon Ferry, Probable First Site

Monument commemorating the site of the first probable crossing of the North Platte river by the Mormon Ferry. Location: The historical marker commemorating the first Mormon Ferry was erected by the Utah Pioneer Trails and Landmark Association in 1932 and is located in Mills at Memorial Park. The park lies on the east side of Wyoming Boulevard and Highway 20-26. The actual ferry location was about one-half mile south of the marker. There is also a replica of a ferry on the grounds at Fort Caspar.

History: Brigham Young's pioneer Mormon party established the first commercial ferry on the North Platte River in early June 1847. An advance party experimented with a "revenue cutter," a large leather boat with wheels that could carry up to 1800 pounds of cargo. Brigham Young arrived on June 12 with the rest of his 72-wagon company; provisions were taken across the river in the leather boat, and the empty wagons were ferried across. When only 23 wagons were safely on the other side of the river by the end of the day, Young realized the need for a better system and commissioned some of his men to construct a larger ferryboat.



Stop 6: Fort Caspar reconstructed buildings.

Stop 6: Fort Caspar

Fort Caspar, replica of portion of the Guinard Bridge. Location: This is a City of Casper Park and a National Register Place consisting of the reconstructed fort bridge and site. It is located on the west side of Casper in a bend of the North Platte River. It can be reached by traveling south on Wyoming Boulevard for 1.6 miles from its junction in the town of Mills with Highway 20-26. Fort Caspar lies just to the right (west) of the junction of Wyoming Boulevard and 13th Street. History: Trader Louis Guinard constructed a sturdy toll bridge across the North Platte River here in 1859 with the first emigrants using it in 1860. He also established a log trading post on the south side of the river. The post was also used as a stage stop and a Pony Express Station. Emigrants who crossed to the north side of the river here followed the northern variation, generally considered the primary route of the Oregon Trail. Their next landmark was Emigrant Gap (Stop No. 9), while those who followed the south side of the river crossed at Bessemer Bend (Stop No. 8).



Stop 6: Fort Caspar replica of Guinard Bridge..



Stop 7: Battle of Red Buttes Monument.

Stop 7: Battle of Red Buttes

Battle of Red Buttes monument Location: Battle location approximately four and half miles west of Fort Caspar on the north side of the North Platte River; exact location unknown. Site indicated by a historical marker at the paved turnout on the north side of Highway 220 about 0.6 mile west of Robertson Road, or three miles southwest of the intersection of Highway 220 and Wyoming Boulevard. **History:** On July 21, 1865, a military wagon train left Platte Bridge Station (Fort Caspar) to carry rations and cargo to Sweetwater Station, the next post to the west. The return trip on July 26 was under the command of Sergeant Amos Custard, who had been warned that there were hostile Indians in the vicinity. That afternoon, the train of three wagons was attacked on the north side of the North Platte by a large party of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians.



Stop 8: Bessemer Bend/Red Buttes Crossing.

Stop 8: Red Buttes Crossing

Bessemer Bend/Red Buttes Crossing. Location: Bureau of Land Management interpretive site with six plaques, located at the Bessemer Bend of the North Platte River. Near Mile Marker 106 on Highway 220, turn north onto county Road 308 (Bessemer Bend Road) and follow for 1.5 miles, turn right at intersection, continue to bridge and cross, turn right and continue 0.1 mile to Bureau of Land Management Interpretive Site. The total distance from Highway 220 to Stop No. 8 is 2.2 miles. History: Bessemer Bend, known to pioneer travelers as Red Buttes because of the nearby rock formations, represents the last crossing of the North Platte River for emigrants on the south bank. Fur traders pioneered it. Robert Stuart and his party built a cabin near this spot in November 1812 on their return trip to St. Louis from Astoria, Oregon, intending to stay the winter. Although fear of Indian attack led them to abandon the cabin, it represents the first Euro-American structure in Wyoming. Early Oregon Trail emigrants used this crossing when the water within the Platte was low.



Stop 9: Emigrant Gap. (Interactive pullout on right side of photo)

Stop 9: Emigrant Gap

Emigrant Gap area, looking southwest. Location: emigrant Gap is located along the northern trail variation about 10 miles west of Mills. Emigrant Gap can be accessed from Stop No. 8 (Bessemer Bend) by following County Road 308 west then north to Poison Spider Road; turn right (east) following Poison Spider Road about three miles to the site, where there is a Bureau of Land Management interpretive pullout. Emigrant Gap can also be reached from Mills. From Route 20-26; turn southwest onto Poison Spider Road, follow road for about 10.2 miles to the interpretive pullout.

History: At present-day Casper, the Oregon Trail briefly divided into three routes. Many pioneers followed the more northerly route, passing through Emigrant Gap after crossing the North Platte river via the ferries or bridges in the vicinity of present-day Casper. The two southern variations followed the north and south banks of the North Platte River; emigrants who stayed on the south bank crossed at Bessemer Bend (Stop No. 8). Some of those who had crossed the river near Casper followed the north bank, rejoining the south bank emigrants at Bessemer Bend. By the 1850s, most of the emigrants took advantage of the ferries and bridges down river rather than fording the river at Bessemer Bend/Red Buttes and utilized the most northern route. The Bessemer Bend route therefore fell into disuse due to alternative safer crossing points, and most of the emigrant traffic passed through Emigrant Gap. The two routes converge about eight miles to the west.



Stop 10: Avenue of Rocks (view to southwest)

Stop 10: Avenue of Rocks/Devil's Backbone/Clayton's Slough

Avenue of Rocks, view looking southwest. Location: Stop No. 10 is located on County Road 319. To reach Stop No. 10 from Stop No. 9 (Emigrant Gap), travel west from the Bureau of Land Management Interpretive Site for 1.4 miles to the intersection with County Road 12. Turn right (north) and travel westerly for 1.8 miles to the intersection with County Road 319. Turn left and proceed southwesterly for 7.2 miles to Stop No. 10. About two miles before reaching Avenue of Rocks there is a Bureau of Land Management concrete marker on the east side of the road, indicating the convergence of the two Oregon Trail variations (the Bessemer Bend route and the Emigrant Gap route). Clayton Slough lies approximately two miles beyond Avenue of Rocks.

History: Sir Richard Burton, world traveler and adventurer, in 1860 said, ...we descended a steep hill, and were shown the Devil's Backbone. It is a jagged, broken ridge of huge sandstone boulders, tilted up edgewise, and running in a line over the crest of a long roll of land...like the vertebrae of some great sea-serpent. This site was a conspicuous landmark on the Oregon Trail where the road ran between a ridge and a ragged ridge of rock. This feature was often described in emigrant diaries, not only because it was an imposing sight, but also because of the difficulty of crossing the hogback with wagons.



Stop 11: Willow Springs. (View to the west).

Stop 11: Willow Springs

Willow Springs area, marked by cluster of willows in center of photograph. View looking west from road ascending to Prospect/Ryan Hill road. Location: Approximately 8.5 miles southwest of Avenue of Rocks (Stop No. 10) on county Road 319.

History: The sparkling cold water at Willow Springs made this spot one of the emigrants' customary camping sites and was the landmark most often noted by travelers between crossing the North Platte River and Independence Rock at the Sweetwater River. Here emigrants enjoyed the first "good water" since leaving the North Platte River, and they generally camped at the lower springs near the trail. There were also other springs about one mile up a draw that were used when traffic was heavy.



Stop 12: Prospect Hill. View of entrance to BLM interpretive site.

Stop 12: Prospect Hill/Ryan Hill

Ryan Hill (County Road 319) Location: Approximately 16 miles southwest of the intersection of Poison Spider Road and County Road 319 (Oregon Trail Road); summit is located about 1.5 miles southwest of Willow Springs.

History: After leaving Willow Springs, emigrants toiled up the 400-foot ascent of Prospect/Ryan Hill along a sharply crested ridge. The name "Prospect Hill" may have originated with William Clayton, who described it in his 1848 guidebook, *Prospect Hill (Summit)*. "Pleasant view of the surrounding country to the SweetWater Mountains." the name was also acknowledged by J. Goldsborough Bruff in his diary in 1849, In one mile from the last camp (Willow Spring) we ascended a high hill, from the summit of which is a grand prospect of the surrounding country, and hence it is named 'Prospect Hill'.



Stop 13: Horse Creek/Greasewood Creek. (View to the north).

Stop 13: Horse Creek (Greasewood)

View of Horse Creek (Greasewood), looking northwest. Location: On County Road 319 (Oregon Trail Road) ten miles southwest of the summit of Prospect/Ryan Hill; near the junction of Horse Creek and fish Creek about three miles northeast of Highway 220. History: To emigrants on the Trails System, this small stream was known as both Sage Creek and Greasewood Creek. When a Pony Express stop was established here in 1860, it became known as Horse Creek. It was also the location of a stage stop. Brigham Young's company was camped about 1.5 miles downstream when party members Wilford Woodruff and John Brown disappeared. It was later learned that the missing pair stumbled upon a group of pioneers from Missouri and accepted an invitation to spend the night at that camp. Wilford Woodruff subsequently wrote about this experience.



Stop 14: Saleratus (Playa) Lake. (View to the south)

Stop 14: Saleratus (Playa) Lake/Sweetwater Pony Express Station

Saleratus (Playa) Lake Location: Approximately 8.5 miles southwest of the intersection of the Oregon Trail Road(County Road 319) and State Highway 220; about 1.6 miles northeast of Independence Rock. The lake is located on the north side of the Oregon Trail and almost one mile southeast of the highway.

History: The alkali deposits at Saleratus Lake provided the Mormons with a raw form of baking soda. William Clayton advised emigrants in his 1848 Guide to gather "saleratus" but noted that the water was poisonous. One emigrant party in June 1847 noted that "the efflorescent white bicarbonate of soda" made bread of a "suspiciously green cast" if not used in moderation. Sir Richard Burton described Saleratus Lake during his travels in 1860.



Stop 15: Independence Rock.

Stop 15: Independence Rock

Independence Rock, view looking south. Location: At mile marker 63 on State Highway 220; approximately ten miles southwest of the intersection of Oregon Train Road (County Road 319) and State Highway 220. A large rest area complex is present along Highway 220 at Independence Rock. The complex contains an interpretive center, within a kiosk, that concerns the history of the Oregon Trail and Independence Rock. A paved footpath leads from the kiosk to Independence Rock. Well-preserved ruts of the Oregon Trail lie along the pathway, just beyond the kiosk. The ruts lie beneath a wooden foot bridge that was built to protect them.

History: This was the most noted landmark on the Oregon Trail west of Fort Laramie. Emigrants endeavored to reach this spot by July 4 in order to complete their journey before winter. Many believed that Independence Rock marked the halfway point to Oregon, but they were actually well short of that mark. It was a traditional camping spot, and hundreds of pioneers carved their names on the large turtle-shaped rock.



Stop 16: Devil's Gate. (view to the north).

Stop 16: Devil's Gate

Devil's Gate, view to the north. Location: Near mile marker 57 on State Route 220, about 60 miles southwest of Casper and 12 miles northeast of Muddy Gap. There is a Bureau of Land Management interpretive pullout on the north side of the highway, 5.8 miles southwest of Independence Rock.

History: The Sweetwater River has carved a narrow cleft 370 feet deep and 1500 feet long through a rocky ridge that is part of the Sweetwater Rocks. Wagons were forced to travel around the cleft, but the emigrants often stopped to hike among the rocks and inscribe their names. Several emigrant graves are also located in the area. John c. Fremont viewed Devil's Gate on August 2, 1842, and noted, The name Devil's Gate apparently was quite new. Father DeSmet went to the mountains in 1840 without mentioning it, but on his second journey, in a letter dated 16 August 1841, he said that "travelers have named this spot the Devil's Entrance."



Stop 17: Martins Cove. (Viewed north across the Sweetwater River)

Stop 17: Martin's Cove

Martin's Cove, view looking north across Sweetwater River. Location: Approximately two to three miles northwest of Devil's Gate. The Mormon Handcart Visitor Center is located three miles east of the actual site of Martin's Cove, but visitors can hike to the cove for the best view of Devil's Gate and can also hike to the entrance of the "gate" on newly constructed pathways. The road to the Mormon Hand Cart Visitor Center exits Highway 220 at a point located 0.75 mile southwest of the entrance to the Bureau of Land Management's interpretive center at Devil's Gate. The distance from highway 220 to the Mormon Hand Cart visitor Center is approximately one mile. The Visitor Center is located at the former headquarters of the Sun Ranch. A pathway leads from the Visitor center to Martin's Cove. The round trip on the pathway is approximately five miles. Handcarts are available so visitors can relive the experience of traveling the trail with one of the two-wheeled carts.

History: In early 1856, Mormon converts from England sailed from Liverpool, then traveled across America by train, wagon, and handcart to a new home in Salt Lake City. A handcart was a two-wheeled wooden wagon, similar in design to an oversized wheelbarrow and could carry 400-500 pounds of provisions. "Handcart pioneers" could make the entire trip from Liverpool to the Salt Lake Valley for less than \$45, in weeks less time, and with fewer casualties than those using costly covered wagons. Ten handcart companies composed of 2962 pioneers (four percent of the total Mormon migration) journeyed to Salt Lake City between 1856 and 1860.



Stop 18: Split Rock.

Stop 18: Split Rock

View of Split Rock from Bureau of Land Management interpretive site. Location: The formation called Split rock is located in Natrona County near the Fremont County line. The Bureau of Land Management interpretive pullout for Split Rock is actually located in Fremont County on the north side of US Route 287/789 about 8.5 miles northwest of Muddy Gap (Highway 220).

History: Split Rock, a massive, northeast trending granite outcrop, rises 1100 feet above the adjacent Sweetwater River. A very conspicuous, approximately 150-foot deep, narrow cleft, is present at its summit. Split rock was the westernmost of the three granite landmarks along the Sweetwater River. The others are Independence rock and Devil's Gate. Emigrants viewed Split Rock for a day while approaching it and for two days after passing it. Judge William A. Carter remarked on Split Rock in his diary on November 5, 1857, "Our camp was near what is called the split in the rock, a remarkable cleft in the top of the mountain which can be seen a great distance from either direction." Good grass and water were available here, and wagon ruts are still visible just west of the pullout.