



THE FIFTY-NINER

Newsletter of the
Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter
Oregon-California Trails Association
www.octa-colorado.org
Winter/Spring 2017



WELCOME TO OUR NEW CHAPTER MEMBERS:

- Brock and Levida Hileman – Cheyenne, Wyoming
- Kevin Kucera – Plymouth, Indiana
- Bill Winn – Denver, Colorado
- South Platte Valley Historical Society – Ft. Lupton, Colorado

Upcoming Event

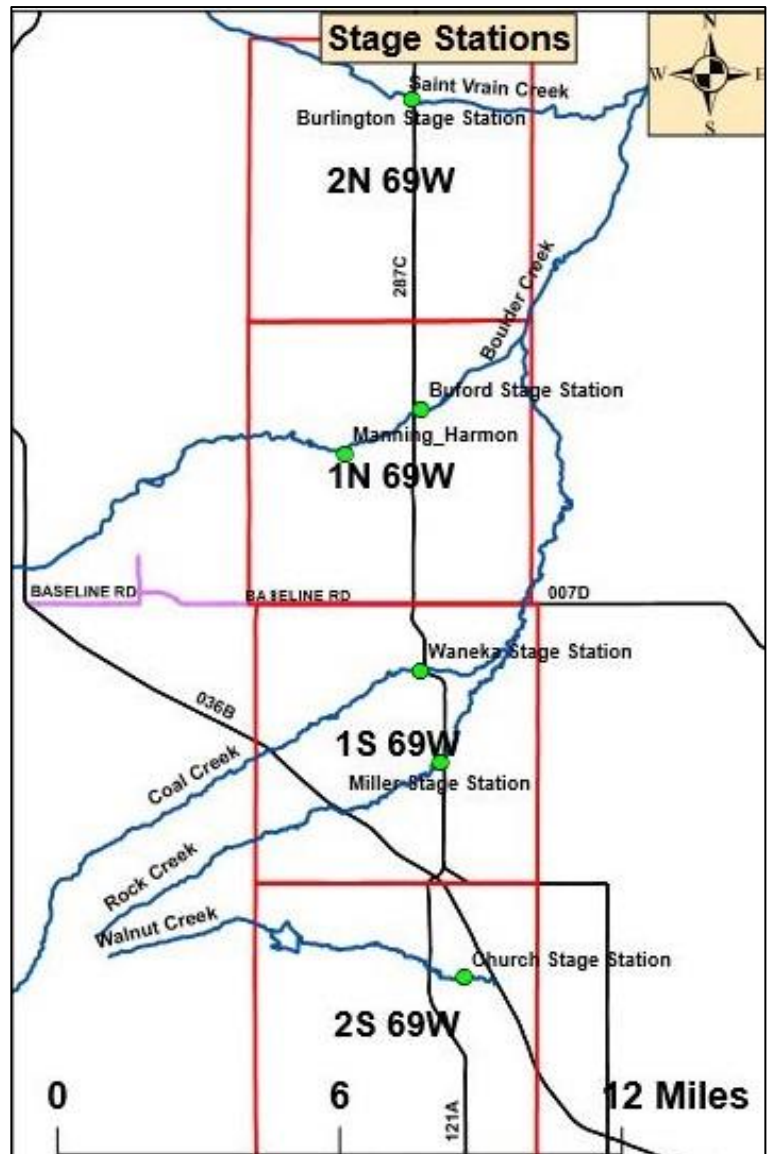
May 20, 2017 - 10:00 a.m.
Overland Trail Tour
Lafayette to Longmont

Meeting place: Miners Museum
108 East Simpson Street, Lafayette

By Mark Voth
Chapter President

Our next chapter event will be an auto tour of the Overland Trail from Lafayette to Longmont on Saturday, May 20. The tour will begin at 10:00 a.m. and follow the Overland Trail route, visiting the Buford, Burlington, Manning, Waneka and Miller stage stations. Most of the station sites have adequate parking, but little remains of these once thriving locations. The tour will take about three hours and upon our return, we will have lunch in OldTown Lafayette. Following lunch we will visit the Miners Museum which opens at 2:00 p.m.

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- **Mark Voth**
President
markvoth@gmail.com
- **Berl Meyer**
Past President and webmaster
webmaster@octa-colorado.org
- **Vice President**
Vacant position
- **Ginny Dissette**
Secretary
vdissette@gmail.com
- **Peggy Watson**
Treasurer
bgwatson@comcast.net
- **Richard Deisch**
Mapping Committee Chair
radskd@mesanetworks.net
- **Camille Bradford**
Newsletter Editor
bradford@usa.net
- **Gary Dissette**
Event Coordinator
gdissette@hotmail.com



Miners Museum

www.cityoflafayette.com/463/Miners-Museum

The Miners Museum, built in 1890, was originally located at the Gladstone Mine northeast of Lafayette, where it was occupied by miners. After the mine closed in the early 1900s it was moved to Lafayette and occupied by a family until 1975. It was acquired by the Lafayette Historical Society and became the Miners Museum in 1976. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The tour has been organized by Seth White, a member of the Lafayette Historical Society and Lafayette Historic Preservation Board. Many thanks to Richard Deisch for his help in organizing this event and for creating the map on page 1. Additional maps and route information will be distributed prior to the start of the tour.

If you plan to attend this event, please RSVP to Mark Voth:

- markvoth@gmail.com
- Cell: 720-829-7860

If you RSVP by e-mail, please include your cell phone number.

TRAIL TURTLES

By Bruce Watson

The Southern Trails Chapter has a mapping group known as "Trail Turtles," that has been actively mapping emigrant trails since the early 1990s. This group is considered one of the best, and has received awards for its exemplary work. Since Peggy and I winter in Arizona, I have become interested in participating in the activities of this group.

The Trail Turtles decided to publish all their mapping data so that it would be available to future generations of trail researchers. This included their trip reports, waypoint data, maps, trip photographs, and much additional information collected over almost twenty-five years of trail mapping and related activities. This collection of information is known as the Trail Turtles Archive. It is an entirely digital archive, over 22 gigabytes in size. A copy of the Trail Turtles Archive is available at OCTA headquarters in Independence, Missouri as well as at several research libraries.

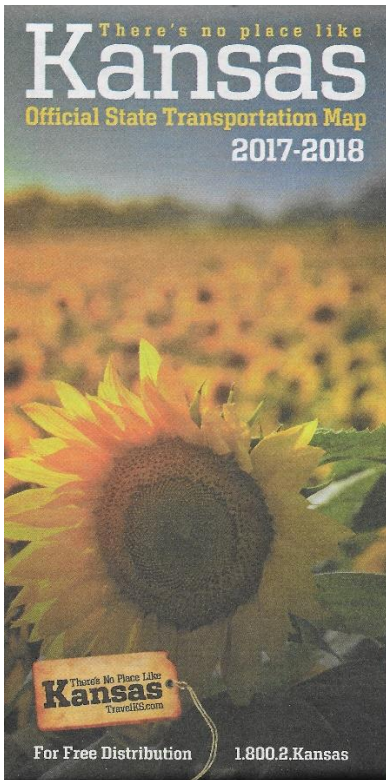
Since the national OCTA de facto mapping software is Terrain Navigator Pro, they wanted their efforts also stored in that format. However, their mapping members don't use TNP, and don't have possession of the same. Therefore a coordinated effort was established between the national mapping Chair, Dave Welch, and one of the Trail Turtles main mapping members, Tracy DeVault. Since I had TNP's state of Arizona, I was asked to participate, and have done so.

The procedure worked out by Tracy and Dave was quite involved, and the effort took considerable time to complete. Because the Trail Turtles mapping trips included both Arizona and New Mexico, I was provided with the state of New Mexico as well. Their efforts also included California, and Dave Welch did all the conversions for that state. This effort has been completed and resides at both the national level, and the Southern Trails Chapter. The total waypoint count for just Arizona and New Mexico GPS coordinates was 12907; impressive!

I participated in the activity of the Trail Turtles on March 13th, and followed them to the desert location to start their mapping efforts. These members were Rose Ann Tompkins, Greg McEachron, Mike Volberg, Tracy DeVault, and Ken and Pat White.

Their methods are far more detailed than our own. Obviously they have GPS coordinates from original surveys as starting points, but their terrain is considerably more difficult. For the most part, it consists of raw desert, and swales, ruts, and identifiable trail traces as we are fortunate to experience, isn't available to them. They minutely cover the "trail corridor", closely examining the ground for rust on rocks, and anything that suggests a hint of trail evidence. They also extensively use metal detectors, which is an extremely valuable tool in locating artifacts which help identify both a time frame and trail location.

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Congratulations and thanks to the Friends of the Cherokee Trail group in Kansas through whose efforts the trail is now identified on the new state highway map.

Special thanks to Linda Andersen for keeping in touch with Berl Meyer regarding this project.

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I worked with Tracy on this day's mapping. He first took me to a location where they had previously mapped and identified positive trail evidence. Tracy said this location was more readily visible than what we would experience later. I took a picture (left) and I defy anyone to see trail traces, but to their experienced eyes it stood out plainly. I believe we in Colorado are spoiled! In this picture, Tracy DeVault is squarely in the trail path, identifying a rock with rust traces.

We then proceeded to the desired mapping location, and since I have never used a metal detector, he briefed me on its use. Soon after we started, I was surprised to hear the detector sound off loudly. Tracy carries a hand-held pick for digging at the detector's location, and he soon uncovered a horse shoe, or possibly a mule shoe (right)!



NATIONAL DAR HISTORY AWARD PRESENTED TO LEE WHITELEY

By Camille Bradford



L-R: Jane Whiteley, Lee Whiteley and Janet Beiner.

Congratulations to Lee Whiteley, who has received the National History Award and Medal from Daughters of the American Revolution. The award was presented by Front Range Chapter Regent, Janet Beiner, in a ceremony on February 11 in Thornton, Colorado.

Excerpts from remarks of Janet Beiner:

This is a very prestigious award intended to honor an individual whose study and promotion of American history on the local, regional or national level has significantly advanced our understanding of our nation's past. The criteria for this award are strict, including at least three recommendation letters from professionals closely associated with the study of history who are in a position to evaluate seriously the historical contributions of the nominee. I am pleased to announce that National approved our nomination of Lee Whiteley for the prestigious DAR History Award.

Lee Whiteley is a fourth-generation Coloradoan who grew up listening to stories his father and grandfather would tell of his great-grandfather, John Gaspar Rhudy, driving freight wagons across the plains from St. Joseph, Missouri to Colorado. In 1884 John Gaspar Rhudy homesteaded in Elbert County, Colorado and, as Lee grew to adulthood in the same area, he was always fascinated by the pioneer trails that actually crossed and were still visible on the land that his great-grandfather farmed. Over the years, Lee read anything he could find that told stories of the pioneer trails and described their locations and landmarks.

Lee met Jack and Patricia Fletcher in 1991 and learned of their long quest to find diaries relating to the Cherokee Trail. Lee took early retirement and, with the enthusiastic support of his wife, Jane, devoted himself to working with the Fletchers to travel and map the trails described in old diary pages. Lee walked the trails, took photographs and drew maps of the areas, many of which became part of the *Cherokee Trail Diaries, Volumes I and II*, published in 1999 by the Fletchers, with Lee as co-author. Lee also published his own book that year, *The Cherokee Trail: Bent's Old Fort to Fort Bridger*. In 2001 he published *The Yellowstone Highway: Denver to the Park, Past and Present*. In 2003 Lee and Jane published *The Playground Trails*. Lee and Jane were also associate producers of the PBS documentary *Paving the Way, The National Park-to-Park Highway*. Lee is a dedicated scholar who has done meticulous research and spent more than two decades documenting and preserving the history of the pioneer trails. His personal experiences, photographs and maps tell the story of how our ancestors traveled, and his books document the distances, routes, landmarks, stone markers, DAR markers and stores. His words honor the fortitude of our ancestors in traveling and settling the West.



UPDATE ON VIRGINIA DALE STAGE STATION RESTORATION

Message from Sylvia Garofalo, President, Virginia Dale Community Club:

I am excited to report to you and your group that after the “leap of faith” fundraiser we conducted at the Hilton Hotel in June 2016, we were able to hire Restoration Specialist, Bill Bailey to continue the restoration work on the 1862 Virginia Dale Stage Station!

He has completed the outside work on the East and North walls, including framing and caulking of new reproduction windows on those walls. By the end of December, he had just about completed the whole ceiling inside with bead board—individual pieces, not sheets. He had also re-aligned a couple of logs on the front, South wall, and repaired the front door. We are so excited to finally see so much work being completed after fund raising for so long.

It is also thanks to organizations like yours for your interest and donations. We have been having a very cold winter and below freezing temperatures for several days now. Bill has a small home-built “trailer” he stays in on site since he lives in Westminster, CO. We supply the wood for the one wood stove in the Stage Station for his heat. He will be making it possible for us to add a pellet stove to the opposite end of the Stage Station for additional heat. A new one was donated that he will install for us.

We will have a celebration upon completion of the Restoration and will keep you posted, as your organization will also be recognized for your participation.

JANE LECHE TO APPEAR AT GRAND ENCAMPMENT MUSEUM ON JULY 22



Jane Leche, a member of our chapter, will be participating in the Living History Day of the Grand Encampment Museum in Encampment, Wyoming on July 22. Jane is a Public Affairs Specialist for the USDA Forest Service and will be at the Museum’s guard station and lookout. She will greet visitors and help explain life in the Forest Service in its early days, through story-telling and song. Further information is on the Museum’s website:

<http://gemuseum.com/museum-events/>.

Jane Leche

TAKING THE LONG WAY THROUGH WYOMING

By Lee Underbrink



Lee Underbrink

Most Wyoming students learn about Robert Stuart and his party of Astorians with their winter camp at Bessemer Bend in 1812. This group of men has been credited with discovering the Oregon Trail and South Pass, only backwards.

In 1811 John Jacob Astor sent two groups of men to begin a fur trading post at the mouth of the Columbia. One group, under Wilson Price Hunt, went overland and traveled through Wyoming from the Black Hills, along the southern end of the Big Horns, across Union Pass to Jackson Hole and Teton Pass. The other group sailed on the ship Tonquin around Cape Horn to the mouth of the Columbia River. Both groups succeeded finding the Pacific Ocean.

While pursuing their settlement, the destruction of the Tonquin by native Americans left the Astorians without a means of communicating to John Jacob Astor their success of founding his fur trading post near what is now Astoria, Oregon. So it was decided to send a small group of men, under Robert Stuart, overland to get the news back to Astor in New York.

Stuart's route was typical: up the Columbia, along the Snake River, cutting over to the Bear River, until the border of what is now Wyoming. Here Stuart made his first mistake by not continuing south, or upstream, along the Bear. He was searching for the Green River. His party found the Salt and Greys River and followed them north, ending up at today's Alpine Junction, where the Greys River joins the Snake.

He followed the Snake back into Idaho, almost halfway to Idaho Falls, before he realized his mistake, turning back to Wyoming at Teton Pass. Then he was back on Wilson Price Hunt's route that he was trying to find – right?

Wrong! Here he mistakenly took the Hoback River route, which led him to what is now Pinedale. The party was then set to discover South Pass. They arrived at Pacific Springs, but for some reason went between Oregon Buttes. This put them on a route in back of Crook's and Green mountains. The Stuart party probably did not even go by today's marked South Pass.

The party got lucky when they decided to follow Muddy Creek north through Muddy Gap. They discovered the Sweetwater near Devil's Gate. The Sweetwater took them to what is now the Pathfinder Reservoir area where they marveled at what is now Fremont Canyon. Below present-day Alcova, they crossed the North Platte to the right-hand bank and followed it through the Bessemer narrows.

Approximately one mile downstream from where Poison Spider Creek enters the North Platte, the Stuart party built their first cabin in Wyoming on November 2, 1812, as their winter quarters. They described Bessemer Bend as having plenty of wood, buffalo and shelter.

On Highway 220, you can see a long hogback ridge extending from the Goose Egg turnoff to the river. Most believe the Stuart cabin was at the far end of this hogback in a beautiful grove of trees along a curving bank of the river.

Bessemer Bend also had something that made the Stuart party move on from their newly constructed quarters – a band of Arapahoe Indians on a war party. Although the Arapahoe did not attack, they evidently appeared to Stuart as reason enough to clear out. Stuart followed the North Platte on the right-hand side to where Douglas now is. There he crossed to the north side and followed it to the Scottsbluff area.

Winter had then descended, and Scottsbluff had no trees or game. As we all know, Wyoming is more hospitable than Nebraska, so Stuart decided to retrace his path back to the Torrington area where there was wood and game to keep the group through the cold in Stuart's second Wyoming cabin. In early spring they followed the Great Platte River Road to the Missouri and St. Joseph. Astor was notified of the success of his fur post establishment.

Stuart's detour north to find Hunt's route added approximately 400 miles to his Wyoming trip. His travel behind the Green and Crook's mountains added probably 50 miles. To put this into perspective, Wyoming is only 365 miles wide on a straight line.

Young Robert Stuart and his party sure saw a lot of our state, and he surely discovered South Pass in an odd way.