

Importance of the oregon trail

[History](#)



In 1846 a compromise was worked out with Britain and a treaty signed that gave the United States rights to the land south of the 49th parallel and Britain the land north for 49th to 54th 40'. The Whitmans were instrumental in the establishment of the Oregon Trail. Mrs. Narcissa Whitman and Mrs. Eliza Spalding demonstrated that women could make the overland journey. Dr. Marcus Whitman strongly promoted the ability of wagons to complete the journey. The Whitmans' mission at Waiilatpu provided necessary aid and supplies to the weary travelers.

Narcissa and Eliza became the first white women to make the journey across the continent. Articles about this trip appeared in eastern newspapers. These two women became role models for the women and families who would eventually travel the Oregon Trail.

Ironically, although the Whitmans helped to establish the Oregon Trail, they themselves were not able to bring their wagons to their mission site. Even though his initial attempt failed, Marcus never lost faith that wagons would eventually make the trip. In 1842 Marcus traveled east to speak directly with members of the American Board about decisions they had made concerning the Oregon Country missions. Marcus traveled home with the large wagon train of 1843, "The Great Migration." Under his guidance, this wagon train became the first to take their wagons all the way to the Columbia River.

Following in the footsteps of the fur trappers, a number of missionary families ventured into the Oregon Territory by overland routes in the 1830s for the purpose of ministering to the native tribes. Marcus and Narcissa

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Whitman established their mission in the Walla Walla Valley in 1836, an endeavor that eventually ended in tragedy. Early missionaries were important in providing information and assistance to later migrating families.

The Oregon Trail was not a single path to the West, but a series of trails leading to the Columbia River and the Willamette Valley. The point of origin was in Missouri, frequently from Independence and sometimes from Westport and St. Joseph. The main trail pushed across present-day Kansas and Nebraska, following the North Platt River to Fort Laramie.

This journey was a real test of the settlers' perseverance. Threats were posed by severe weather conditions, both extreme heat and cold; by the disease with cholera a particular concern; by deprivation since supplies of both food and water were uncertain; and by other natural disasters such as landslides, flooding, and prairie fires.

The most intense use of the trail was in the mid-1840s, but wagon trains continued to use this conduit for another 10 years. The coming of the railroads to the West ended the importance of the Oregon Trail as a major transportation route by wagon train.