

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Life On the Trail

By Mary Lynn Bushong

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk across a whole country? Many of the pioneers who moved west did just that. Even those with wagons walked most of the way because it was easier than being in the wagon.

Mornings on a wagon train started early. People were up before sunrise. Breakfast was often coffee, bacon, and dry bread. If the family had a milk cow, they might have milk for the small children to drink. Extra milk could be put in a crock in the back of the wagon. The wagon would bounce so much on the trail that it could churn the milk into butter.

By 7:00 in the morning, the wagons were repacked with bedding and cooking things. The oxen or horses would be re-hitched to the wagons. Then the wagons would be pulled into line for the day's march.

Very few people rode in the wagons. Few wagons had springs. This meant that every rock or hole in the trail would make the wagon bounce and shake. Everyone who could walk alongside.

Sometimes people became sick while they traveled. They could not walk and had to ride in the wagons.

As the people walked, they kept their eyes open for food. They brought along some things like salt, flour, coffee, bacon, and dried beans with them. Eating just those things would get boring. Fresh greens and berries tasted good. They also helped keep people healthy.

The wagon train moved slowly. This gave hunters plenty of opportunity to look for game animals. Those included squirrels,



rabbits, geese, ducks, deer, antelope, bison, and others. These formed an important part of the pioneers' meals.

At noon, the wagons would stop again. This gave everyone a chance to rest and eat. The meal was often coffee with cold beans and some kind of meat that had been cooked at breakfast time. As soon as they were done, they would pack up and start moving again.

Toward the end of the afternoon, they could stop for the night. There was a lot of work to do before it got dark. The wagons were pulled into a circle and the animals unhitched. Men took care of the animals and made any needed repairs.

Women would build fires and cook supper. Meals would have some kind of meat or fish and rice or beans. Water would be fetched to cook with and make coffee.

After supper the children would have school lessons. It was important for them to learn to read and write. They also needed to know math. They would need it to measure their land, build a home, and keep track of money. Before going to their beds under the wagons, they would sing, dance, and tell stories around the fires.

Some wagon trains traveled every day. Some rested on Sundays. A rest day meant that the animals got a break. That meant the animals could spend a whole day eating. Women could wash and mend clothes in nearby streams.

Sometimes people got married or had babies on the trail. Even though they were traveling, life kept going on. Many people also died on the trail and were buried along the way.

Traveling along the trails was hard. People wanted new and better lives. They were willing to take chances in order to have them.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



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## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When did the day start for people on a wagon train?
- A. before sunrise
  - B. at sunrise
  - C. at 8:00 a.m.
  - D. at 7:00 a.m.
2. Why would the settlers put extra milk in a crock in the wagon?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What kinds of foods did the pioneers eat?
- A. bacon
  - B. beans
  - C. bread
  - D. all of the above
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What needed to be done in the mornings before they could move on?
- A. Everyone had breakfast.
  - B. Bedding and cooking things had to be repacked in the wagons.
  - C. all of the above

5. What needed to be done at the end of the day?

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6. Why did pioneers look for greens and fruit?

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Children didn't have to worry about school work on the trail.

- A. true
- B. false

8. How was life on the trail like life where they came from?

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**What would you think if your family was moving and you had to do it walking with wagons?**

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