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Review of *Historic Sites along the Oregon Trail* By Aubrey L. Haines

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BOOK REVIEWS

Historic Sites along the Oregon Trail. By Aubrey L. Haines. Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press, 1981. Foreword, introduction, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. xii + 439 pp. \$19.95.

Of all western themes, none quickens the pulse or captures the imagination more than "the Oregon Trail." The Santa Fe Trail was more exotic. The California Gold Rush Trail had more feverish excitement and carried ten times the traffic. But the Oregon Trail remains the preeminent symbol of American pioneer virtues, evoking the image of the young family in a covered wagon braving hardships and dangers to seek a new home in the fabled Northwest. Aware of the sales value of this theme, publishers have been grinding out "Oregon Trail" books ever since Francis Parkman's classic of that name, about his 1846 journey to Fort Laramie, first appeared in 1849. Among modern publishers, none have been more vigorous than Gregory Franzwa of the Patrice Press in turning out books capitalizing on a revival of the old pioneering wanderlust. His *Oregon Trail Revisited* has become the standard mile-by-mile guidebook. Aubrey Haines's *Historic Sites along the Oregon Trail* is a more ambitious effort, unreeling the live panorama of the surviving Oregon Trail by focusing on 394 identifiable forts, campsites, graves, trail remains, and landmarks.

Haines, who has the rarely combined skills of engineer and historian, was selected by the National Park Service to make its initial Oregon Trail survey in 1972. Since then Congress has given this trail official status as a "National Historic Trail." Recognizing public interest in the subject, Franzwa got permission from the park service to publish an enlarged version of the scarce official report. This he has done in a beautiful format, with twenty-four original

maps and over a hundred sharp photographs by Haines and his family assistants, detailed site descriptions supported by eyewitnesses and authorities, an excellent bibliography, a colorful jacket picture of Register Cliff, Wyoming, and a spirited preface by the National Park Service Director, Russell Dickenson. For the benefit of the growing cult of "trail hounds" there is even a checklist of available U.S. Geological Survey quadrangles and where to get them at what cost. This is an excellent and unusual example of a federal research project brought to full fruition on the popular level by private enterprise.

The route described is the major route of the Oregon emigrants from 1841 to 1848, from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City—the basic Oregon Trail without its later branches, cutoffs, and curlicues. It is difficult to imagine a better antidote to today's cynicism and moral confusion than a vacation designed to follow the old Oregon Trail with guidebooks, like this one, of certified scholarship. An auto is not a covered wagon and most of the trail has been obliterated by agriculture, highways, dams, and whatnot. However, the plains, deserts, and mountains are still largely intact, Chimney Rock still points to the heavens, Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger have been revived, the ghosts of Rachel Pattison and Rebecca Winters still haunt their graves, the trail is still grooved through South Pass—and westward, where the land is bright, lies Oregon!

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