

# Oregon Trail River Route

## Columbia River Heritage Trail



In 1841, the first emigrant wagon trains entered the sandy and gravel-strewn bottom of an Ice Age flood-lake in North Morrow County.

Narrow metal wheel rims cut into sand and gravel and mired the wagons. Some wagons removed

their wheels, lashed the wheels and wagons to rafts, and navigated down the river.

Wednesday, October 11 “...found a little green grass where we encamped at night near Windmill (Hat) Rock.

Thursday, October 12. *Started in good season, traveled all day over a poor, sandy country. Not a tree in sight all day. We traveled at least twenty-five miles today and encamped a little before sunset, but with little grass for our jaded animals. We passed some rocky rapids today in several places, but at our camp the river is*

*beautiful, broad, clear and placid, but the barrenness of the surrounding affords but a dreary prospect to a man from the Western States.”*

Excerpts from the 1843 journal of James Nesmith, who traveled first to the Hudson Bay Company post at the confluence of the Walla Walla and Columbia Rivers. *Source:* Oregon Trails Coordinating Council, Oregon Historic Trails Report, Upper Columbia River Route - 1841-1851, pp 67-181, May 1998.

After 1847, emigrants traveling through Morrow County did not see the Columbia River. To find firm ground, the Upper Columbia River Route was replaced by the Columbia Plateau Route, which routed trains over the desert far south of the river.

