This is the year we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the great migration along the Oregon Trail.

NOTES AND REMINISCENCES OF LAYING OUT AND ESTABLISHING THE OLD EMIGRANT ROAD INTO SOUTHERN OREGON IN THE YEAR 1846
--By Lindsay Applegate

In 1877, thirty one years after their search for an easier route for the immigrants west to follow, Lindsay Applegate wrote from his notes and from memory a description of that trip. It was published in the Oregon Historical Quarterly of March 1921.

Lindsay wrote: "Our immigration of 1843, being the largest that had ever crossed the plains, our progress was necessarily slow, having to hunt out passes for our wagons over rivers, creeks, deep gullies, digging down the banks where nothing but a pack trail had been before, cutting our way through the dense forests before we could reach the valley of the Columbia, and then it appeared as though our greatest troubles had begun; for here we encounter cataracts and falls of the Columbia and the broad and lofty Cascades, with their heavy forests.

At Fort Walla Walla, on the banks of the Columbia river, with our teams about exhausted, we were advised to leave our wagons and animals over winter at that place in the care of the Hudsons's Bay Co. A portion of the immigrants, including my two
brothers' families and my own, accepted the proposition, providing we could secure boats in which to descend the river, as it was supposed we might secure them from the Hudson's Bay Co. Under these considerations we made arrangements with the said Company for the care of the latter through the winter. We failed in our efforts to obtain boats; having a whipsaw and other tools with us, we hunted logs from the masses of drift wood lodged along the river banks, hewed them out, sawed them into lumber, and built boats, and with our families and the contents of our wagons, commenced the descent of the river. Dr. Whitman procured us the service of two Indians to act as pilots to The Dalles. From there we thought we would have but little trouble by making a portage at the Cascades. We did well till we reached The Dalles, a series of falls and cataracts. Just above the Cascade mountains one of our boats, containing six persons, was caught in one of those terrible whirlpools and upset. My son, ten years old, my brother Jesse's son, Edward, same age, and a man by the name of McClellan, who was a member of my family, were lost. The other three who escaped were left to struggle the best they could until we made the land with the other boats. Leaving the women and children on shore while we rushed to the rescue, it was only with the greatest effort that we were able to keep our boats from sharing the same fate. William Doake, a young man who could not swim, held on to a feather bed until overtaken and rescued. W. Parker and my son Elisha, then twelve years old, after drifting through whirlpools among cragged rocks for more than a mile, rescued themselves by catching hold of a large rock a few feet above water at the head of Rock Island. At the time of the disaster it was utterly impossible to render them any assistance for it was only with the greatest skill that we succeeded in saving the women and children from sharing the same fate. The whole scene was witnessed by Gen. Fremont and his company of explorers who were camped immediately opposite, and were powerless to render us any assistance. The bodies of the drowned were never recovered, though we offered a reward to the Indians who searched the river for months". They then reached the Cascades.

The party by carrying most of their things on their backs and
dragging their boats over the rocks were able to make portage around the falls where they then reloaded and proceeded on their way to Vancouver. They ascended the Willamette river to the falls and made another portage around them. Again they reloaded and ascended the river twenty five miles and came to a place called Champoeg. Here they left their boats and traveled across the valley to Lee's Old Mission which was ten miles below where Salem now stands. On December 1, 1843 they entered an old building and remained there all winter, happy to have shelter after twenty days of rain.

The rains continued and the winds howled. It was during this time that the men decided that if they remained in this part of the country they would search out a better route for future immigrants to follow. They started gathering information from old pioneers and the Hudson's Bay Co. and learned the Cascade mountains to the south became very low, or terminated where the Klamath cut that chain. Knowing that the Blue mountains lay east and west they came to the conclusion that there must be a belt of country extending east towards the South Pass of the Rocky mountains with the possibility there would be no high ranges to cross.

After having made arrangements for their families during the time of their absence, a company was organized consisting of: Levi Scott, John Scott, Henry Boygus, Lindsay Applegate, Jesse Applegate, Benjamin Burch, John Owens, John Jones, Robert Smith, Samuel Goodhue, Moses Harris, David Goff, Benit Osborn, William Sportsman and William Parker. Each man had his pack-horse and saddle-horse, making thirty animals to guard and take care of.

So in 1846 this company of men set off into country which at that time was marked on the map "unexplored region". Peter Ogden, an officer of the Hudson's Bay Co. said he had led a party of trappers through that region. Portions of it were desert-like and his company had to climb to the top of a mountain and fill sacks with snow in order to have water to enable them to cross this desert. Ogden also told them that portions of the country they would have to go through was inhabited by "fierce and war-like savages" who would attack any people entering their territory and murder the men and steal everything from them and
because of this, a river was named the Rogue River after the character of the Indians living in the valleys. The idea of any one trying to open a wagon road through such territory as this was deemed preposterous.

The Applegate party thought part of this could be exaggeration on the part of the Hudson's Bay Co. because of its interests on the Snake River route from Fort Hall to Vancouver. One thing which influenced the party to continue to make the search was the need for an escape route in case of war between the United States and Great Britain and the British secured title to the country. It was important to be able to leave the country without going past the forts of the Hudson's Bay Co. and the Indian tribes who were under the influence of the British.

"On the morning of the 20th of June, 1846, we gathered on the La Creole, near where Dallas now stands, moved up the valley and encamped for the night on Mary's river, near where the town of Corvallis has since been built.

June 21—Moved up the valley and encamped among the foothills of the Calapooia mountains.

June 22—This day we traveled along the base of the Calapooias, our course being nearly southeast, passing near a prominent peak since called Spencer's Butte. In a little valley near the butte, on the south side, we discovered Indians digging camas. On perceiving us, most of them secreted themselves in the timber. One of our party succeeded in capturing an old Indian, and representing to him by signs the course we wished to follow, the old fellow preceded us two or three miles, and put us on a dim trail which had been marked by twisting the tops of the brush along the route. It had only been used as a foot-trail and but seldom at that. It led us into a prairie, at the base of the main Calapooia chain. Crossing the prairie, we found the little trail where it entered the mountains with difficulty, and being guided by the broken brush, reached at sundown a little stream on the Umpqua side, where we camped for the night in a beautiful little valley where the grass was good and the ground almost covered with the finest strawberries I had ever seen.

The next morning, June 23, we moved on through the grassy oak
hills and narrow valleys to the north Umpqua River. The crossing was a rough and dangerous one, as the river bed was a mass of loose rocks, and, as we were crossing, our horses occasionally fell, giving the riders a severe ducking. On the south side we encamped for the night.

On the morning of the 24th, we left camp early and moved on about five miles to the south branch of the Umpqua, a considerable stream, probably sixty yards wide, coming from the eastward. Traveling up that stream almost to the place where the old trail crosses the Umpqua mountains, we encamped for the night opposite the historic Umpqua canyon."

On the morning of the 25th, they followed the stream for four or five miles crossing it several times. As the trail they were following up the canyon became more obstructed by fallen timber and brush it finally turned up the side of the ridge and wound its way to the top of the mountain. The trail then turned south along a narrow back-bone of the mountain but the rocks and thickets were so dense on either side that they afforded a good place for an ambush. A party traveling from California across this ridge had been attacked by Indians. One was wounded severely and horses had also been shot with arrows. They found many broken and shattered arrows along this trail and the tracks of a large party of Indians who had passed this way only a few days before. By dark they reached the foot of the mountain and found a small opening on a small stream where they camped for the night.

On the morning of the 26th, they decided to divide their party, part would return to the canyon to explore while the others stayed in camp to guard it and the horses. That night the explorers returned to camp and reported that wagons could be taken through that way. The Indians were around their camp all night trying to catch them off guard and to steal their horses.

The morning of the 27th, they could see how close the Indians had been to their camp. The party cautiously moved out and where the trail passed through cuts, they dismounted, led the horses through with their guns ready in case of an attack. At noon they had made it through very broken country and sharp hills separated
by small streams and came out onto a large creek, a branch of the Rogue, now called Graves Creek, where they rested for a few hours before continuing. During the afternoon their course was over more open country scattered with pine and oak trees. Towards evening the party saw many Indians posted along the mountain and then running ahead of them to watch again. They reached a large prairie that extended down to the bank of the Rogue River about an hour later. A large group of Indians could be seen on the bank of the river where the trail crossed so the Applegate party selected a place to camp as far from the brush as possible and prepared for a night attack making sure their horses were picketed with double stakes. They kept a vigilant watch throughout the night.

The next morning they observed the Indians in the same place as the night before. They ate an early breakfast and fearing that dampness might have effected their flint-locks and muzzle-loaders, they fired them and reloaded before moving forward. They formed two divisions with the pack horses behind. On reaching the river an elaborate plan was executed and they reached the opposite shore safely. Large groups of Indians came out of the bushes and tried to provoke the party as they turned up the river and went in a southeast direction along the bank. The Indians followed on the opposite side of the river. That night the party camped on a little stream about five miles south of the river. Signal fires were visible on the mountains to the east but the party was not molested during the night.

June 29th, they passed over a low range of hills and from the summit had a wonderful view of the Rogue River Valley with its great meadows and groves of oak trees. Traveling all day over rich black soil covered with high grass, clover and pea vine, they camped that night near another company, on a stream now known as Emigrant Creek, near the foot of the Siskiyou mountains. Again the parties were not disturbed by the Indians. Here the two companies parted, the other to follow the old California trail across the Siskiyou's while the Applegate party followed an eastward route through an unexplored region extending several hundred miles.
On the morning of June 30th, they moved along the north bank of Emmigrant Creek and began ascending the mountains to the east. They seemed to have spent time exploring around a stream now called Keene Creek, near the summit of the Siskiyou ridge. The party moved on down through heavy forests of pine, fir and cedar and camped that night in a little valley now called Round Prairie about 10 to 12 miles from the camp of the previous night.

On July 1st, an early start was made. They followed a track of a lone horse thinking it might be some Indian horseman on his way from the Rogue River to the Klamath Country. Loosing the track at a rough rocky ridge, they explored along the ridge northward but found no practical route across it and made camp that night among the pines. July 2nd, they explored the ridge southward as far as the canyon of the Klamath but still found no route across it. The night was spent camped beside a little spring on the mountain side. On July 3rd, a more complete search was made northward than had previously been made and this time they found a practicable pass. Camp was made that night in a rich grassy valley through which ran a little stream. The valley is now known as Long Prairie.

July 4th their route was northward along a ridge. It was rocky but the ascent was gradual but after crossing the summit of the Cascade ridge, the descent in places was very rapid. By noon they came out into a glade where there was grass and water and they were able to see the Klamath River. After noon they traveled about six miles through an immense forest of yellow pine down to the river and up the north bank. Suddenly the whole Klamath country came into view, extending eastward as far as the eye could see. After spending so many days and nights in dense forests and mountains the men were exuberant and their shouting startled an Indian down on the river bank. Running as fast as an antelope he disappeared into the pines after having seen what was probably his first view of white men.

The Applegate party followed the river up to where it leaves the Lower Klamath Lake. Signal fires amongst the Modocs telegraphed their presence. They moved on southward along the shore and found evidence of civilized people having camped there and
what was probably a grave trampled by horses to obliterate the fact so the Indians wouldn't disturb it. This point had been reached by Col. Fremont only a few days before on his way northward when he was overtaken by Lieut. Gillispie of the United States army with an important dispatch telling him to return to Lower California--the Mexican War had begun. (For further details concerning the events that followed see Trumpeter #1 of 1991--West Side Klamath Lake.)

The Applegate party had camped on a little creek now called Hot Creek so on the morning of July 5th they continued along the shore of Lower Klamath Lake which threw them off their course as the lake extended some miles southward of their last camp and they didn't reach the eastern shore until late in the day. They camped there that night and the next morning they climbed a ridge to make observations. At the base of the ridge, on the east, they saw a large lake, perhaps twenty miles in length and looking eastward a timbered butte was spotted about thirty miles distant. There appeared to be a low pass at the base through a mountain range which seemed to encircle the lake. The party decided to try and reach this pass by passing around the south end of the lake. As they descended the ridge they soon found themselves in very rugged country with lots of lava ridges, caves and crevices. Fearing for the safety of their horses and themselves, they retraced their steps to open ground and proceeded to meadow country at the head of the lake to await the return of one of the group. They nooned and allowed the horses to graze for a couple of hours and then repacked and started for the timbered butte. Not more than a mile later they came upon a large stream coming from into the lake (Lost River). The stream was deep with almost perpendicular banks so the group turned northward up the river and soon found an Indian crouching under the bank. By signs they learned of a place to cross the river and following the Indian for about a mile they came to the natural bridge, the famous Stone Bridge on Lost River used by so many travelers. After crossing the bridge the company traveled along the northern shore of this lake surrounded by tules, for a few miles, then finding a spring at the base of the mountains on their left, they camped for the night.
July 7th, they left the valley of Tule Lake to travel eastward over rocky land scattered with juniper trees and toward a timbered butte. This butte is near the State Line, between Clear Lake and Goose Lake and probably about fifty miles distant from the lava ridge west of Lost River although they thought it to be only about thirty miles away. They passed through hilly, juniper country between Langell Valley and Clear Lake without seeing either and camped that night near the base of a timbered hill by a spring.

July 8th, they passed their landmark and traveled nearly eastward over level but rocky country. In the afternoon they came out into a basin of a lake (Goose Lake), apparently forty or fifty miles in length. Along the south end of the lake they found a little stream coming in from the mountains to the eastward where there was plenty of grass and game. Here they camped for the night. They could see a gap in a mountain wall to the southeast and decided to try it the next day.

July 9th, moving up the ridge towards the gap, the party soon entered a little valley of perhaps a hundred acres and extending to the summit of the ridge and fringed with tall mountain mahogany trees. The ascent was very gradual thus making an excellent pass. A spring of cold water near the center of the valley made a perfect camping place. For many years afterwards this place was used by the immigrants after they had crossed the so-called American Desert. This stream is called Lassen Creek for Peter Lassen who led a party of immigrants across the plains in 1848, following this route from the Humboldt through this pass and then down the Pitt River to the Sacramento. The ridge gave a good view. To the north the ridge seemed to widen out, forming several low ranges of timbered mountains. To the south it seemed to rise very high and patches of snow could be seen along the summit in the distance. To the east and south, at the foot of the ridge, was a beautiful green valley, which extended for twenty to thirty miles and contained a small lake. A number of small streams flowed into the valley from the mountain. This valley on the border of the desert became a settlement and was called Surprise Valley.
As the Applegate party stood on the Sierra ridge surveying the vast desert to the east of Surprise Valley, they decided their course. They descended the mountain and came to a stream lined with plum bushes loaded with fruit and a grove of pine trees, the last they would see until the desert was crossed. While they nooned amongst the pines a band of antelope grazed within sight.

After resting they moved eastward across the valley and entered a very sandy district making traveling conditions hard. Next they ascended to a table land which was covered with small gravel. The horses shoes had worn out making their progress through this rocky country very slow. Just at dark they came unexpectedly upon a small spring which they dug out and let fill until they could slake their thirst and water their horses. Here they spent the night on the edge of Black Rock Desert.

July 10th: the basin they had scraped out at the spring was filled with water so all were able to start the trek refreshed but the horses were gaunt from lack of sufficient grass. Before them stretched a vast sandy plain with a few dwarf sage bushes and grease wood. Far in the distance they could see some dark looking ridges. About 3 p.m. they came to a huge volcanic wall with a varying height from twenty to thirty feet to several hundred feet, extending north and south for as far as they could see and with no visible gap through it. Here they separated into two groups to explore it both ways. The group going southward, within a few miles found a stream and meadow at the base of the wall, and flowing through a narrow gateway into the ridge. One of their party was dispatched with this good news and all returned to the meadow where they spent the night. The horses were given a chance to feed and rest while the party explored and found a chasm extending nearly due east. This gateway was about sixty yards in width and the canyon even wider in places but in others only wide enough for a wagon road. It was grassy and almost level and sage hens and rabbits and mountain sheep seemed plentiful but from signs they could see that this was a favorite place for Indians in the cliffs above. They spent the night in the little meadow.

On July 11th, they again entered the gorge, traveling ten or
twelve miles to where the stream formed quite a pool and stopped there at this time of year. Here another canyon came in from the north, and at the junction there was level ground, about two acres of mostly meadow, a good place to stop. They proceeded on their way after noon, following the dry stream bed for about ten miles, coming out on the east side of the ridge to a lake basin. There was little water but much mud suggesting the name of Mud Lake as it is still known, although earlier in the season when the stream flow was better it was probably quite a lake. The country eastward looked very forbidding. Rising above a barren plain, perhaps fifteen miles distant, was a rough rocky ridge extending towards the north for as far as they could see, but it appeared to end abruptly about fifteen miles south of their course. They could see green spots along the base of the ridge towards the end of it which indicated water. After discussing the pros and cons they decided to travel southward toward this point and finding a spring they were able to camp there. It was near this vicinity that Capt. Levi Scott and his troops met with tragedy in 1847 when Indians killed a man named Garrison.

Starting out on the morning of July 12th, the party observed many columns of smoke or steam rising at the extremity of the black ridge. Reaching the ridge a few miles north of its extremity, they traveled along its base passing a number of springs, some cold and others boiling hot. At the end of the ridge were immense boiling springs with steam rising from them like smoke. The cliffs around were formed of masses of black volcanic rock and all around were piles of cinders. This place is known as "Black Rock" and is one of the landmarks on the Humboldt desert.

On the morning of July 14th, they separated into two groups. Eight to go in a southerly direction and seven, including Lindsay Applegate would travel eastward, all searching for the best way to reach Ogden's River or the Humboldt as it is now called. They found lots of alkali but little vegetation. After having traveled about fifteen miles dim rabbit trails were discovered running in the same direction. Continuing on, the trails became more clear and all going in the general direction of a ledge of granite boulders, the first they had seen since leaving the Rogue Valley.
As they approached, a green mound where all the trails converged, was visible. Upon further investigation they found a small puddle of water in the mound. Both horses and men had suffered considerably for want of water, having drank of the alkali water at Black Rock their thirst had been intensified. The horses were unpacked and staked about the bunch grass and the men began digging to enlarge the water hole which filled by dark with good pure water. Rabbits came in abundance so they had fresh meat. This place since that time has been known as Rabbit Hole Springs.

On July 15th viewing the surrounding country from this high granite ledge, they could see clouds of smoke to the east which they later learned were caused by burning peat beds along the Humboldt river which they were trying to reach. Continuing along the ridge they finally found water again about 11 am. but the few gallons the spring held was insufficient for their needs until it had refilled several times.

On the morning of July 16th, after proceeding along the ridge for about five miles they came to quite a large spring but it was so strong of alkali that it was only good for making coffee. At this spring the granite ridge terminated and before them lay the desert sparkling with an alkaline efflorescence in the scorching sun. Not a spear of vegetation was visible. As they progressed out over this desert going eastward, they experienced many optical illusions. As night descended they camped where some sage brush was growing to which they securely tied their horses to keep them from leaving them to find grass and water. All suffered intensely from the heat and lack of water.

July 17th was spent mostly in search of water and by four o'clock they sheltered under a ledge of rock away from the scorching sun. From the top of these rocks they could see a small greenish spot about six miles distant. They rode towards it in search of water, leaving Robert Smith to follow as soon as he felt able to ride. A horseman riding towards them proved to be John Jones, one of the group who had parted from them at Black Rock. In searching for the rest of his party, had found water at the place Lindsay Applegates group was headed for. Filling a
horn with water, two of the party rode back to where they had
left Smith and met him on the way, hanging onto his saddle horn
while the horse followed the trail. By six o'clock all parties
were again together. The warm alkali water didn't set well with
the men but the horses enjoyed it and the grass and reeds about
this little lake while the exhausted men slept.

On July 18th the party followed a course nearly southeast
along the edge of a vast level plain to their right, saw columns
of smoke rising from the peat bog fires. By about 11 o'clock
they arrived at the area. These fires extended for miles along
the valley of the Humboldt River and by noon they were on the
banks of the river they had been searching for. They had traveled
too far south of their course though to please them so the
next thing for them to do was to travel up the Humboldt until
they reached a point nearly east of Black Rock and then to find
a route for the road more directly on their course.

On July 19th, they traveled about twenty miles in a northeast-
erly direction along the river bottom. July 20th, they continued
and made about the same amount of distance. July 21st, by noon
they could see what appeared to be a low pass through the ridge
to the west, through which was a tributary of the Humboldt, now
dry. They camped and sent out a party to examine this country
towards Black Rock.

July 22nd, Levi Scott and William Parker left to follow the
dry stream bed. After about fifteen miles they came to a spring
of pure water and camped the night. July 23rd, they ascended by
a gradual route to the westward and within about fifteen miles of
their camp of the previous night, found a grassy area from which
they could plainly see Black Rock. Carefully exploring the
country around them they found Rabbit Hole Springs.

The line of their road was now complete. They had succeeded
in finding a route across the desert and on to the Oregon settle-
ments, with camping places at suitable distances. Knowing the
source of the Humboldt River was near Fort Hall they knew that
immigrants would be able to reach Oregon late in the season with
far less danger of being snowed in than on the California route
over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Their whole object was to
locate the road direct from near the head of the Humboldt to Bear River, leaving Fort Hall forty or sixty miles to the northward.

The Applegate party camped in the Humboldt Meadows for a few days to rest both men and horses. Their stock of provisions was almost exhausted and it was decided part of the men taking the strongest horses would go to Fort Hall at once for supplies. On the morning of July 25th, Jesse Applegate, Moses Harris, Henry Boygus, David Goff and John Hall left for Fort Hall while the rest of the party would move along slowly making improvements to the road and possibly meeting the returning group at the head of the river.

Being dependent on game for food, Capt. Scott and Lindsay Applegate left the party on the west side and crossed the river to hunt. While pursuing a band of antelope they came upon wagon tracks leading away from the river towards a rocky gulch among the hills. Following this trail to the mouth of the gulch, they found where wagons had been burned, only the ruins remained among the ashes. No human remains were found but the evidence was plain that a small train of immigrants had perished there a short time before by the hands of blood-thirsty captors.

On August 5th, they reached Hot Springs valley, having traveled about two hundred miles along the river. On August 10th, the rest of the party returned from Fort Hall with the much needed supplies. On August 11th, they turned towards home which they judged to be eight or nine hundred miles distant.

Reaching the Cascade chain they had to guard their horses day and night as they worked the road. Indians were continually near by just waiting their chances. By the time they worked their way through the mountains to the Rogue River Valley and then through the Grave Creek Hills and Umpqua chain, they were nearly worn out and their provisions very short. On arriving in the Umpqua Valley they knew that the greatest difficulties in the way of the immigrants had been removed. They proceed to their home in the Willamette and arrived October 3, 1846 after an absence of three months and thirteen days.

Condensed and typed by
Mae L. Smith