

THE LANDER ROAD

PRECONVENTION TOUR

AUGUST 10-12

Oregon-California Trails Association
15th Annual Convention
August 13 - 16, 1997

TOUR GUIDES

IRV SUTTON

PAUL SCHERBEL

TOM McCUTCHEON

ROSS MARSHALL

.....THE FIRST
FEDERALLY FUNDED
ROAD CONSTRUCTED
WEST OF THE
MISSISSIPPI RIVER.....



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I. ORIGIN OF THE LANDER ROAD

The Lander Road as we refer to it these days was a shortcut for the wagon trains bound for Oregon and California across the Rocky Mountain and Continental Divide areas of western Wyoming. But when it was constructed in the 1857-58 period, it was part of a surveyed and 'improved wagon road' to the Pacific Ocean and was actually called the Pacific Wagon Road. It also at various times has been known as 'Lander's Cutoff' or just simply as the 'Lander Trail'. This shortcut saved five to seven days over the other routes.

The construction of this road was an outgrowth of repeated calls, including petitions to Congress, for an easy and safe wagon road for the continuing emigration to the Pacific shores. Similar to the political pressure for improved streets and highways today, this need became part of the politics of the day and eventually became a plank in the party platforms of each candidate for President in 1856; John C. Fremont, of the new Republican Party, and James Buchanan, Democrat and eventual winner.

Beginning with the Donner-Reed tragedy of 1846-47 and continuing through the Gold Rush years of 1849 and following, the hazards of trail travel were the subject of ongoing public and political concern. A further development was the increasingly 'unreasonable' cost of trail travel, particularly west of South Pass, due to the entrepreneurs of the area continually raising prices for ferries, bridges, livestock, pasturage, and for supplies at trading posts.

In addition, travel through Utah Territory (created as part of the California Compromise of 1850) became increasingly less attractive. Not only were some of the Utah routes desert and somewhat longer, but the trails were more and more on private property in the Salt Lake area. Also the 'Mormon Problem' was a growing concern for emigrants. In addition to the traditional bias toward the Mormons and the reluctance on the part of gentile and Mormon emigrants to mix, by 1857 open hostility existed between the United States government and Utah Territory. 2500 U. S. Army troops were sent to the Territory under the command of General Albert Sydney Johnston (who fell in 1862 at Shiloh as the commanding Confederate General.....but that's another story).

Much of the background information for the text of this Lander Road booklet was gleaned from two principal sources and the reader is advised to consult them further:

- Jermy Benton Wight, Frederick Lander and the Lander Trail (Bedford, WY: Star Valley Llama, 1993).
- Peter G. Harstad and Max G. Pavesic, Lander Trail Report (A Lander Trail Survey carried out by the Idaho State University Museum under a contract with the United State Forest Service, Contract #50-381), 1966.

Even though small in number, nearly half of the standing army of the U. S. eventually ended up in Utah Territory. Peace was negotiated without war breaking out, but trail travel through the Territory during this period was dangerous, if not impossible.

The need for a better 'shortcut' from the South Pass area of western Wyoming to the Fort Hall area of eastern Idaho continued to exist. The Sublette Desert, the Salt River Range, and the Commissary and Dempsey Ridges of the Bear River Divide had always presented barriers to the emigrants, resulting in the roundabout main trail down to Fort Bridger or the difficult Sublette, Kinney, Slate Creek, and Baker-Davis cutoffs.

After the national elections of 1856, with the new President James Buchanan and the 34th Congress in place, all of whom had supported this idea of better wagon roads to the Pacific, the stage was set for the advent of The Lander Road.

II. FREDERICK W. LANDER

Frederick Lander was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1822 into a family of prominence, where both parents were descended from wealth and influence. Under these favorable circumstances, he received an excellent education and became a professional civil engineer. He was a tall fellow, six feet four (same as Abraham Lincoln), sturdily built, of noble stature and was a natural leader. No surprise that his life was one of accomplishment.

His engineering career began with railroads. By 1853, he was offered the position of Chief Engineer with the Northern Pacific Railroad's Survey Team to search out a route to the North Pacific. Not being satisfied with the results of this survey, he financed his own survey party expedition in 1854. After spending the year in the Rocky Mountains, in the area of the later Lander Road, he returned to Washington D.C. and wrote a widely disseminated publication of his findings. Frederick Lander had made his mark and was not only recognized as an authority on western routes, but became an overnight celebrity in the Washington D.C. social circles. His star had risen at the right time.

III. CONSTRUCTION OF THE LANDER ROAD

As the 34th Congress convened in January, 1857, one of the first agenda items was to deal with an appropriations bill for a Fort Kearney-South Pass-Honey Lakes Wagon Road. After the usual partisan wrangling and pork-barrel amendments, the measure was enacted in February which appropriated \$300,000 for construction and improvements for this route. Almost immediately, the fledgling Department of Interior hired Frederick Lander to be the Chief Engineer.

Lander's first assignment was to survey the practical routes west of South Pass to Soda Springs and Fort Hall. He submitted survey details on sixteen different potential routes through the mountain passes, but drawing on his experience from his 1854 reconnaissance

work, he focused on a new route further north from the Sublette Desert across the New Fork of the Green River. At the end of that season, he returned to Washington and wrote up his report.

In January of 1858, Lander was hired by the Secretary of the Interior as the Superintendent for the construction of the Fort Kearney-South Pass-Honey Lakes Wagon Road. Specifically, the assignment was to complete the South Pass to City of Rocks segment during this construction season. In fact, the project name was commonly known as the South Pass Wagon Road. Lander's party passed overland from Independence through Fort Leavenworth, Fort Kearney, and Fort Laramie and arrived at South Pass on June 14.

Ironically, the Lander Road, that intended to bypass Salt Lake City, was built by a work force of up to 100, substantially made up of recent Mormon converts from Europe hired in Salt Lake City! It turned out to be a win-win deal for both Lander and Brigham Young, because it provided some badly needed employment for this new converts.

Unavoidably, some emigrants began to use the road before the west end was completed, as testified by a letter written from Fort Hall on July 15 by William Glaze of Missouri. He was accompanied by fifty-nine other men and they claimed it was as good as any road they had used back home 'in the States'.

By the end of the season in late September, the road had been completed to its junction with the main Oregon-California Trail near Fort Hall. In the process, 230 miles of road had been constructed, over 62,000 cubic yards of dirt and loose rock had been excavated, and 34 miles of trees had been cleared from the roadway. No small feat!

IV. FREDERICK W. LANDER (conclusion)

Lander returned to Washington and spent the winter writing his report to the Department of the Interior. This report dated January 20, 1859, contained a detailed 'EMIGRANT GUIDE' which gave mileages and descriptions of all points along the road, and we will occasionally quote information from this guide. In 1859, Lander returned to the Road and did some final touch-up work on the west end.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Lander became an aide to General McClellan. Soon after, in August of 1861, he was commissioned a Brigadier General and became a divisional commander. During these months, he composed several patriotic poems of the Civil War. While engaged in a series of engagements against Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign in early 1862, he became ill with a 'congestive chill' and died on March 2. He was buried in the Broad Street Burial Ground in Salem, Massachusetts. In his short forty years, Lander had been an engineer, an explorer, a General, a poet, and a hero. His wife, Jean Davenport, was an English Actress who had been an early day Shirley Temple. They had married in 1860 and actually honeymooned by traversing the Lander Road, west to east. She continued to delight audiences in Europe and America for forty years.

LANDER ROAD TOUR SITES

Special thanks to Fred Dykes, OCTA member of Pocatello who, after the route and site information had been assembled, prepared the copy- ready color map we are using. The following are some of the sites we will be seeing on the Lander Road Tour:

BURNT RANCH --- This location is the ninth and last crossing of the Sweetwater River on the main Oregon-California Trail. The Seminoe Cutoff from the east rejoined the main trail here on the south side of the river. It is also the beginning point for the Lander Road which headed west-northwest from here toward Fort Hall. All of the main routes and alternates went on to the southwest from here.

This site was known variously as Gilbert's Station, Gilbert's Fort, or Gilbert's Store, named after the store proprietor H. L. Gilbert, who, according to Lander's *Emigrant Guide*, would show people how to get onto the Lander Road. It was later known as U. S. Mail Station #31, the Upper Sweetwater Station, and South Pass Station. It served as a stagecoach station, a Pony Express Station and a telegraph relay station. For a time, there was a Mormon mail station on the south bank. From 1862 to 1868, a unit of the 11th Ohio Volunteers was garrisoned at this site to protect both the Oregon-California Trail and the Lander Road. A sketch of the military quarters here was made by Lt. Caspar Collins sometime before his death in 1865, which showed the rooms, stables, parade ground, and telegraph installation. Shortly after the troops left, it was burned by Indians. Later rebuilt as a ranch house, it was burned again. Thus the enduring name of 'Burnt Ranch'.

Frederick Lander stationed one of his trusted men, Charles H. Miller, at Gilbert's Station in 1859 to promote the advantages of using Lander's new cutoff. Mormons and others who owned toll bridges, ferries, and trading posts also stationed representatives at this site to promote their sites on the main trail. This competition resulted in a quarrel and Miller was shot and killed the next year. He is buried on the high ground north of the site.

This was a popular campsite and many diary writers mentioned this site by its various names, including O. Allen in 1858, Sir Richard Burton in 1860, Henry R. Herr in 1862, and William H. Jackson in 1866. A slate marker was erected here in 1913 and is inscribed "BURNT RANCH, OREGON, CAL TRAIL 1913". It is in an enclosure just west of the existing buildings.

Burnt Ranch is on private property and is owned by the Hellyer family of Lander, WY. They have very generously allowed us to visit this site during our tour.

NOTE: For more information on Burnt Ranch, see *Historic Sites along the Oregon Trail*, by Aubrey L. Haines (Patrice Press, Gerald, Mo., 1981), p. 226-231.

LANDER CUTOFF MARKER - HIGHWAY 28 --- Erected by the BLM and the Sublette County Historical Society, it tells the story of F.W. Lander's improved wagon road as a shortcut to the Snake River, also avoiding the deserts to the south and providing more wood, water, and forage.

SWEETWATER CROSSING --- As our maps state, this is the ninth crossing of the Sweetwater for the Lander Road emigrants, as the crossing at Burnt Ranch was the ninth crossing for emigrants on the main trail. Lander Creek enters it just downstream and we will cross Lander Creek about 1½ miles west of here. As we will discover, the crossing may not be as exciting as the descent down to it from the plateau. Lander's *Emigrant Guide* said this crossing was 16.02 miles from Gilbert's Station (Burnt Ranch).

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE --- As imperceptible as at South Pass, the continental divide in this area fits tightly in between Lander Creek and Little Sandy Creek about twelve miles west of the Sweetwater Crossing.

BUCKSKIN CROSSING --- Used as early as the fur era and by Bonneville and Fremont, this crossing of the Big Sandy River may have been named for Buckskin Joe, who according to local legend, used this site for a cabin for his family. The Big Sandy was named by William Ashley in 1825. Lander's *Emigrant Guide* says "Hard pitchy road. A steep pitch to go down to the river", and "5.00 miles from the Little Sandy crossing and 39.6 miles from Gilbert's Ranch".

SAND SPRINGS --- This BLM- Sublette Co. H/S marker on the west side of highway #191 about a mile north of highway #351 notes this site on the trail which was called "Grass Spring" by Lander's *Emigrant Guide*. The *Guide* also said that it was 8.15 miles from Big Sandy and 47.75 miles from Gilbert's Station. A Lander Cutoff monument is on the East Side of the highway.

NEW FORK RIVER CROSSING --- Also called the First Fork of the Green River or the East Fork, this was the first major river crossing on the Lander Road, just north of highway #351. The crossing used a large island in the center of the river, and the *Guide* said the river was twenty to thirty yards wide on each side of the island. It further suggested that wagon beds may need to be raised on their bolsters, because in the spring the river may be three to four feet deep. 18.56 miles from Grass Spring and 66.31 miles from Gilbert's Station.

GREEN RIVER CROSSING --- 5½ miles from the New Fork, this was also a major crossing. Lander, by 1859, collected emigrant's signatures on a petition for a bridge here, but was not successful in convincing the Department of the Interior. The crossing site is not easily accessible and the river is spread out across the valley in several meanders.

LANDER ROAD MARKER --- The Lander Road crossed here at the intersection of highways #351 and #189 at the fairgrounds. The marker is identical to the one on highway #191 at Sand Spring. Marbleton and Big Piney villages are two or three miles south of here.

End of the first day

PINEY CREEKS --- The trail for the first twenty miles west of highway #189 crosses many branches of the North, Middle, and South Piney Creeks. All these creeks run into Green River just southeast of the village of Big Piney.

PINEY CANYON --- For the next 7 or 8 miles we will be in this canyon through which courses South Piney Creek, which flows generally east. We will cross the creek several times. This was the first extensive construction work on the Lander Road.

EMIGRANT GRAVES --- Many grave sites exist through this canyon, several of which have been marked by the Sublette County Historical Society, and are noted on the tour maps.

FORT SNYDER --- At the head of Piney Canyon was the staging area in 1858 for much of the construction materials and equipment used for the Lander Road. A crude structure was built called Fort Snyder, which was named after James Snyder, Lander's Commissary Officer. This site was also called Fort Piney.

THOMPSON PASS --- Named for Jacob Thompson, Secretary of the Interior in Buchanan's administration who was Lander's boss. There are several miles of good hiking along the trail in this area, which is still visible because it was used well into this century, even with automobiles.

ELIZABETH PAUL GRAVE --- The 32-year-old wife of Thomas Paul, who died in childbirth in 1862. The extended Paul Family Party was from Indiana and had joined up with the Kennedy Party for the trek west. This wagon train would later be involved in the Massacre Rocks Indian attack on the Snake River, as they went to the aid of the attacked trains. None of their group was killed, but some were wounded in the running battle.

LaBARGE MEADOWS --- A popular camping place. The William Smedley wagon train likely camped here before they found the remains of trader John Campbell and his wagons after an Indian attack in 1862.

WAGNER PASS --- Named for William H. Wagner, topographer, meteorologist, engineer, and physician for Lander's 1858 party. The pass is elevation 9025 feet which is not the highest point on the Lander Road. Just a few miles west the elevation reaches 9113 feet.

SALT RIVER VALLEY --- The trail descends into this beautiful valley and runs generally north for about twenty miles, crossing the Salt River in the process. Many diaries record the beauty of this peaceful valley and after the hard going of previous days this valley became a time to gather strength for challenges yet to come. The *Guide* says the Salt River Crossing is forty miles west of Fort Piney. In this century it has been called Star Valley.

End of the second day

ONEIDA SALT WORKS --- In the northwest corner of the Salt Creek Valley, the trail crosses the Idaho border and turns to the west up Smoky Creek (now called Stump Creek,

named for the prominent part-owner of the Oneida Salt Works, John H. Stump) and Red Willow Creek (now called Tygee Creek) for about ten miles to the area where the Oneida Salt Works was in the 1860's and 1870's. Lander's *Guide* says "Surface of ground in many places white with pure and excellent salt. A good laying up place to salt your stock". A salt brine still flows from the ground across several acres of a rocky flat area, which when evaporated yields nearly pure table salt.

TERRACE CANYON --- We will backtrack from here, because there is no road over Terrace Canyon, and pick up the trail on the other side of the mountain near Lane's Grave. The trail route up Terrace Canyon is very steep and difficult; hiking it is possible, although strenuous. There are some interpretive markers along the way which show the rock ledges and aspen carvings that remain. Strangely, Lander's *Guide* makes light mention of this difficult climb.

LANE'S GRAVE --- Enclosed in a fenced area adjacent to the ranch house of Lane's Creek Ranch which is near Lane's Creek. J. W. Lane died July 18, 1859 at about 50 years of age. Little else is known. The current owner of the ranch is the Lloyd family who have very generously allowed us to visit the grave site and their ranch.

BLACKFOOT RIVER CROSSING --- The trail crosses the north end of the present Blackfoot Reservoir. The actual crossing is just west of the reservoir. On the East side of the reservoir is where the road to Montana went toward Idaho Falls and carried salt to the miners in Montana in the 1860's. This crossing is 199 miles from Gilbert's Station and about 52 miles from the Salt River. Lander had a staging camp near here on his 1859 trip to do the final touch-up on the work on the west end of the Lander Road.

PORTNEUF RIVER CROSSING --- Lander's *Guide* said "Aspen grove and good grass at the crossing". The crossing is sixteen miles from the Blackfoot River Crossing.

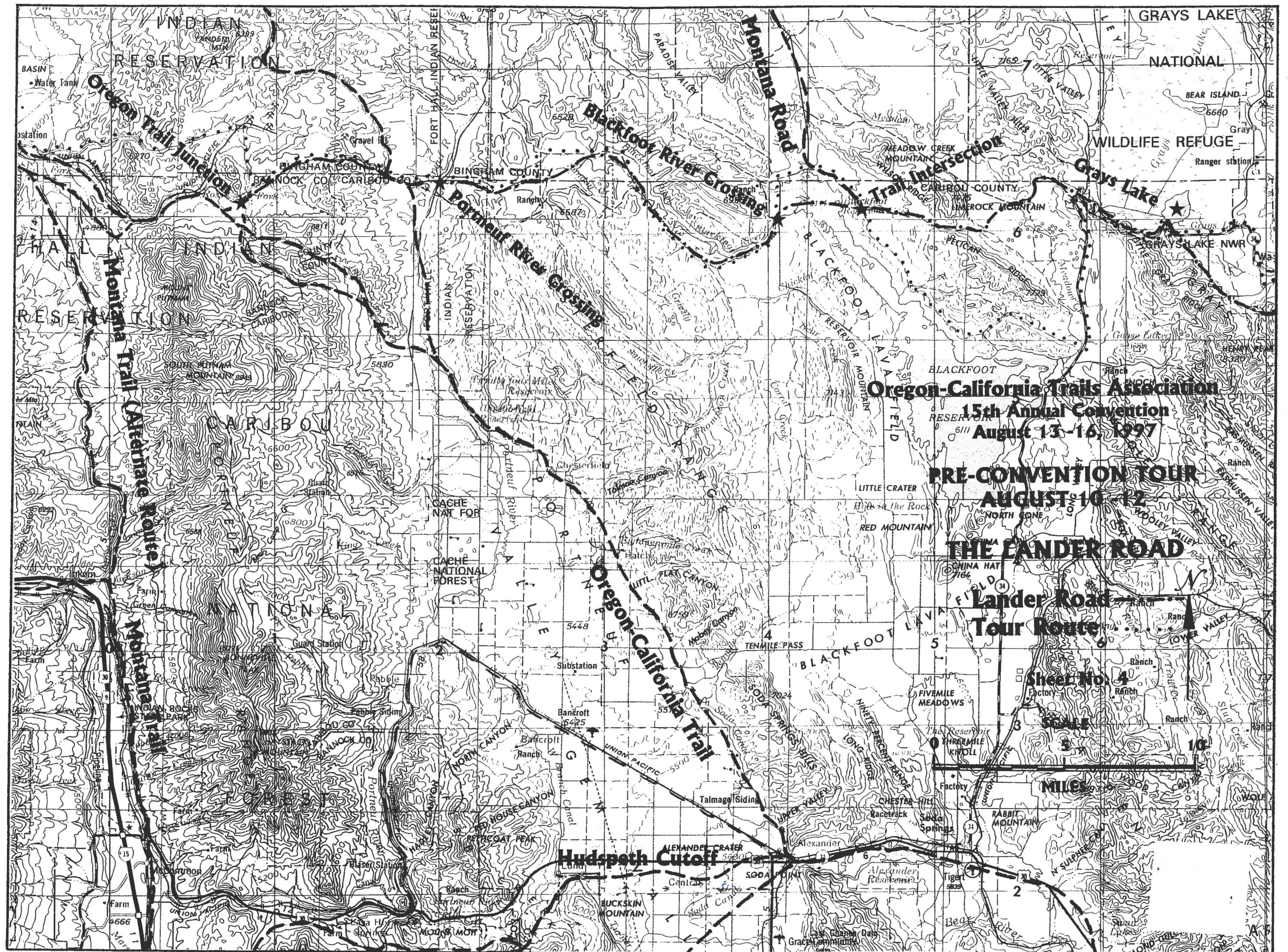
OREGON TRAIL JUNCTION --- This is the main trail that comes from Soda Springs and is fourteen miles from the Portneuf River according to the *Guide*. Fort Hall was now only about twenty-five miles away. This junction is 229.46 miles from Gilbert's Station per the *Guide*.

FORT HALL --- One of the most important sites on the entire Oregon-California Trail, it was first erected in 1834 by Nathaniel J. Wyeth on the east bank of the Snake River. It was sold to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1837 and later remodeled, but by 1849 when the fur business had long passed away, it was only serving the emigrant traffic. Abandoned in 1856.

This concludes the Tour

All of us who worked on this pre-convention tour of the Lander Road sincerely hope that it has been enjoyable and educational. We also hope that the tour has enhanced your appreciation of this chapter in the Westward Movement.

Ross Marshall



Oregon-California Trails Association
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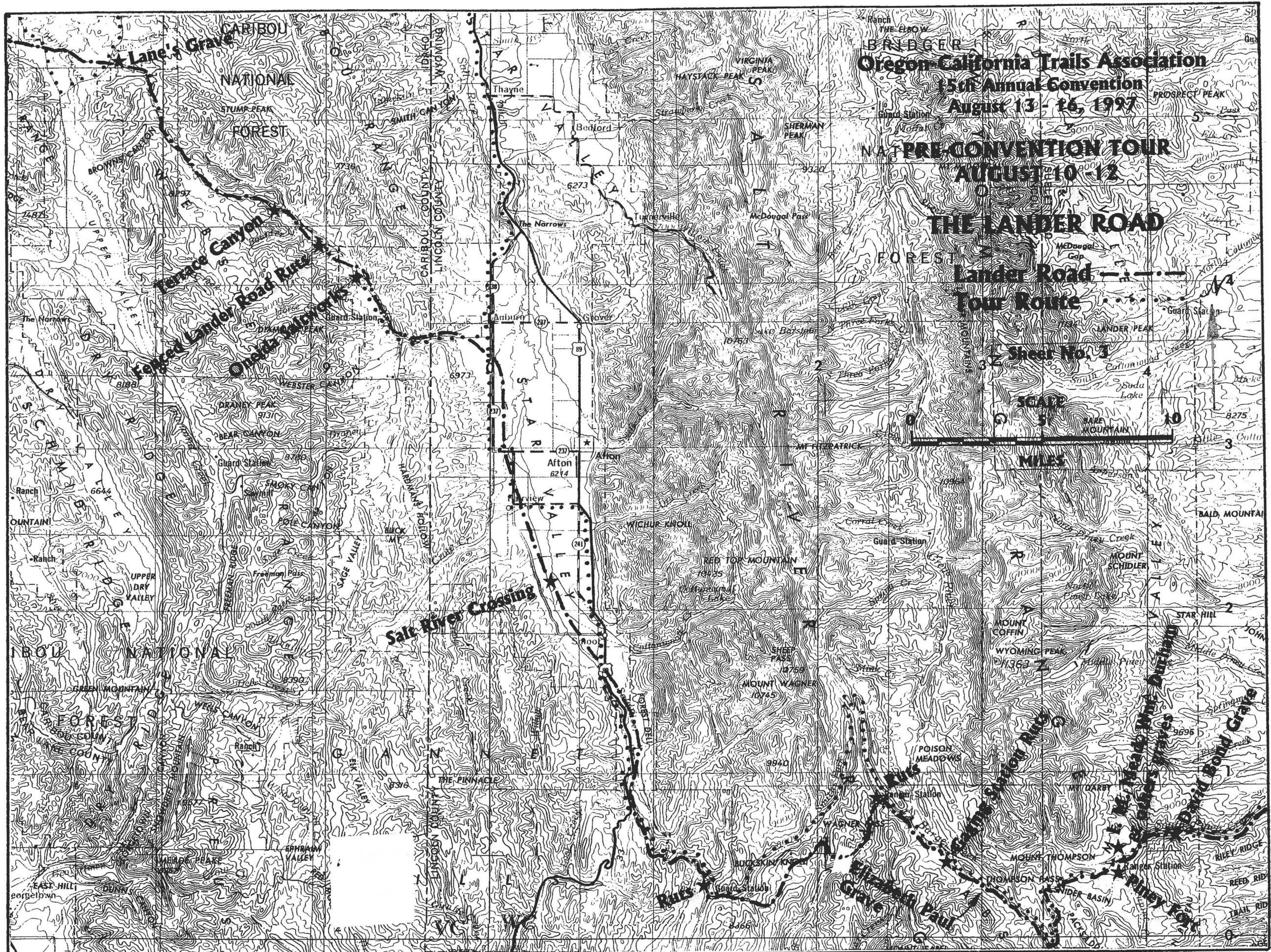
THE LANDER ROAD

Lander Road
Tour Route

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NAT PRE-CONVENTION TOUR
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THE LANDER ROAD

Lander Road
Tour Route

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SCALE

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