

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

Activity Oregon Trail Play



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Oregon Trail Play

by Susan Frantum

Cast:	Mr. Jim Roberts	Peter Burnett
	Mrs. Mary Roberts	1st man
	Molly	2nd man
	Sam	3rd man
	Michael	1st trapper
	Anna	2nd trapper
	John	3rd trapper
	George	Merchant
	Lydia	Banker
	Mr. Smith	Sarah
	Nesmith	Mrs. Smith
	Other Pioneers	

Jim:

Mary, have you heard the news about the gathering tonight to discuss plans to go West?

Mary:

No, I hadn't. Are you going to the meeting?

Jim:

Yes, I think this could be an opportunity for us to start a new life in Oregon.

Mary:

But Jim, what about our house and the farm and what about the children? So many people have died along the trail.

Jim:

Mary, I know this is a sudden thought, but let's think about the challenges and opportunities before we decide. I'll be back late this evening and we'll discuss it then.

Mary:

O...K

Jim:

Goodbye, I'll see you later.

Narrator:

Later that evening at the mill....

(Men assemble)

Burnett:

Good evening gentlemen. We are meeting tonight to discuss the journey to the far off land of Oregon.

1st man:

But Don, why would we leave our homes to go to a land of uncertainty?

Group:

Yeah!

Burnett:

That is a good question, but let me tell you about Oregon. This new land has acres and acres of fertile soil to build our homes on. The mountains are clothed with timber and rivers filled with fish. The valleys provide a great abundance of pastures for livestock. The climate is moderate with a good growing season for our crops.

(Group ooh & ahhs)

2nd man:

Yeah, that sounds great but what about the long journey?

Burnett:

It will be a long journey but it will be worth it when we reach the land of promise.

3rd man:

But what about the Indians? I hear they're mean ones!

Burnett:

Yes, there are some that do not like the white men, but most of them are friendly just like the trappers. And if we stick together we can make it! The journey will take perseverance and a lot of hard labor. We can do it ---can't we?

(Group cheers)

Burnett:

We will leave May 22nd. First, I will inspect the wagons for safety and those that can withstand the journey will be a part of the wagon train.

(Men depart to go to their homes.)

Jim:

Mary, are you still awake....Mary, Mary.

Mary:
(sleepily) Jim?

Jim:
Would you like me to tell you the details about the trip?

Mary:
(getting up) Just a minute and I will get us a cup of coffee.

Jim:
(excited) In Oregon there are acres and acres of fertile soil, lots of fish and rivers...

Mary:
(enters with coffee) Just a minute Jim - slow down.

Jim:
Sorry! It is just that I'm so excited! The wagon train leaves May 22nd.

Mary:
But what about the long trip and the Indians?

Jim:
The trip is about 2,000 miles long and most of the Indians and trappers are friendly. Mr. Burnett expects us to reach Oregon in about four and a half to five months.

Mary:
What about selling our farm and our house. We are just starting to get it fixed up.

Jim:
I know this will be a big change Mary but I know we can do it.

Mary:
What about the supplies we will need...and the wagon and the CHILDREN?

Jim:
If I begin tomorrow I can have the wagon ready by May 22nd and you and the children can begin gathering the supplies.

Mary:
What supplies do we need?

Jim:
(Gets out his list and begins reading)

140 lbs of flour per person, coffee, 40lbs of bacon per person, sugar, cornmeal, dried fruit, jerky, vinegar, salt, dried beans, tea, rice, tin plates and cups, iron forks and spoons, a few books, clothing, blankets, the fiddle and kazoos, seeds and tree seedlings, an axe, saw, shovel, rope, guns and ammunition, churn and iron frying pans.

Mary:

(looks frustrated) But Jim -- we can't afford even half of those items.

Jim:

We can sell our farm to the bank and then we will have enough to buy everything and still have some left to buy supplies at Fort Hall.

Mary:

What about the children? Sam is 12 and Molly's 8, they need to go to school and get an education. And what about little Michael? This is going to be too hard on him.

Jim:

Sam and Molly will get more out of this trip that they would ever get out of one of those school books. Michael can ride in the wagon.

Mary:

Jim, do you really want to do this?

Jim:

I know we can make it. You know I'd never be in favor of this trip if I thought we couldn't.

Mary:

(hugs Jim) Ok -- we will begin tomorrow.

(Both leave to go to bed)

(Music -- Home Sweet Home)

Narrator:

Early the next morning...

Jim:

Mary, are you awake?

Mary:

Jim, what time is it?

Jim:

Oh, it is 4:00 a.m., let's go wake the children up and tell them our plans.

(gets up and goes with Jim to wake the children)

Jim:

Sam, Molly, Michael wake up. We have something to tell you.

Children:

(moan) What is it?

Jim:

(helping them sit up) On May 22nd we are going to leave Independence and go west to Oregon. We will be traveling by wagon train with about 100 other families.

Sam:

I'll help you dad with the wagon and the animals.

Michael:

I can help too! Will there be real Indians?

Molly:

But I don't want to leave our house here!

Jim:

We may see real Indians and I know it will be a big adjustment, but we are going to the land of promise for all of us. Your mom will need you all to help her get our supplies ready.

Jim:

I need to go now and start working on our wagon.

Children:

Bye dad! Mom what can we do?

Mary:

First, let's look at the list of supplies your dad gave to me. Sam, you gather the ax, saw, shovel, rope and take them to your dad and then help Molly.

Molly, pack the eating utensils and a couple of frying pans in that crate. Then start packing blankets and clothing.

Michael, you come with me and we will check how our dried fruit and jerky is.

(all exit)

Narrator:

The Roberts worked very hard that day to start getting ready for the long journey.

(early the next morning)

(Music: Oh Susanna!)

Jim:

Mary, I'm going to the bank now to see about selling our house and then I need to get some parts for the wagon.

(curtain closes)

Banker:

Good morning, Mr. Roberts and how are you doing this fine day?

Jim:

I was wondering if you would be interested in buying my farm? You have seen how much work we have put into the house.

Banker:

But Jim, you are the 75th person this week to come in and try to sell his farm. I can't figure out why anyone would want to sell his farm and try to make such a long journey.

Jim:

I know it seems a little absurd but Mary and I are willing to try. Would you like to buy our farm?

Banker:

Well, let me see. (writes some figures down) I can give you this much.

Jim:

(In disbelief) But I was sure it would bring at least \$20 more.

Banker:

I'm sorry but that is all I can afford now.

Jim:

(Starts to get up and then sits back down)

Alright.

(Signs the paper and then gets paid)

(Jim goes to the mercantile)

Merchant:

I heard you're going west.

Jim:

Yeah, and I need a pound of nails, a good wagon sheet and a new harness for the oxen.

(Merchant goes to the back room and gets articles. Jim pays him.)

Merchant:

Good luck to you and your missus.

Narrator:

Meanwhile Mary and the children are gathering up a few trinkets.

Mary:

We must save some of these for trading with the Indians. Let's take these down to Sarah's to trade for more staples.

Molly:

Can't I take this China doll?

Mary:

I am sorry honey, but we won't have room for it.

(They leave to go to Sarah's)

Sarah:

How good to see you. Come in and have some freshly baked cookies.

Mary:

Oh, thank you Sarah. Now children---one a piece.

Sarah, we were wondering if you would be interested in trading some staples, especially dried fruit and jerky for these trinkets. I am sorry we don't have anything else.

Sarah:

I hate to see our best neighbor leave, but let's go look and see what I have. Children, go ahead and have another cookie.

(Children eat another cookie and they gather food items.)

Mary:

Goodbye Sarah. I will always remember you.

Sarah:

Good luck and please write to me Mary.

(They embrace)

Narrator:

The next day they pack the wagon.

Jim:

I think we may need to leave a few items. Mary go through the clothing and take only the items necessary.

Mary:

I didn't realize there were so many things. OK, let me go through our clothing once more.

(The wagon is packed. Curtain closes.)

Narrator:

The next day...

Jim:

Come on let's get going. Today is May 22nd. Sam bring Tilly and Bessy.

Narrator:

Burnett is inspecting wagons.
The Roberts pull their wagon in behind the last one and wait.

Burnett:

Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, ready to go west?

Jim:

Yes we are!

Burnett:

(Looking about the wagon) Looks like you did a good job getting your wagon ready. The bucket of tar will be especially useful crossing the rivers. We will be leaving in about an hour.

Jim:

Mary, do you have any regrets? We still can stay if you really don't want to go.

Mary:

Oh no, I am looking forward to going now!

Burnett:

(Hollering) Wagons ho!

(Music: "Ho Westward Ho")

(Curtain Closes)

Narrator:

The wagons crossed Captains Creek, Little Wakarusa and Coon Point. Outside Coon Point at Big Springs...(Curtain opens)

Anna:

Oh John, look at all of the green grass for the oxen and cattle. And fresh water for washing our clothes and baths!

John:

Jim and I are going to go into the woods and look for deer.

Anna:

Be careful, but first come and have some bacon and biscuits I've made in the bacon drippings.

John:

These are sure delicious.

Anna:

I am going to make some butter in the churn so we can have biscuits and butter for dinner tonight.

Jim and Mary:

Hi John and Anna.

Jim:

Come on John let's get going. We'll see you later.

Mary:

I've brought my wash so we can wash early so they can dry.

Anna:

And I told the children after they milked the cows they could come and play with George and Lydia.

(The women exit.)

(The children enter.)

George:

Lydia here comes Molly, Sam and Michael.

Sam:

Let's play hide and seek.

(Children play hide and seek and then exit.)

Narrator:

The next day they left the campsite and traveled until they reached the Kansas River. Burnett and the men began ferrying wagons across the river. Wagons were first patched with tar and often they removed the wheels so that the wagons would float like boats. Rules were made but the plains brought out the worst in a man.

Mark:

Burnett, Burnett! Thomas Smith stole our only cow. He says it was wandering about and it is now his.

Burnett:

Come along. Smith, where did you get this cow.

Smith:

I found it and now it is ours.

Burnett:

You know we have rules and you didn't adhere to them. You will have to leave the wagon train.

Smith:

I can't! Our baby needs milk and we didn't have any. Our cow died!

Burnett:

If you would have asked I'm sure Mark would have shared, but you didn't. We will give you milk but you will have to turn back now.

Narrator:

The pioneers were troubled with occasional cloudbursts. After supper the elders gathered in groups and talked while the children danced to the music of a fiddle.

(Dance with children to Pat A Cake Polka)

Narrator:

The wagons rolled across Nebraska. Pioneers were entering buffalo country. Traveling was slow because of sandy soil. Wood was scarce so buffalo chips were used instead. Women gathered the chips in their aprons to keep the fires going. It was here they met the Sioux and Pawnee and Arapaho Indians.

(Indians enter the camp trying to run off the livestock)

Men:

(Hollering) Get out of here! Get away from our cattle!

(Shots ring out and Indians scatter)

Jim:

Mary, they scared Tilly off. We'll try to find her in the morning but they will probably get to her first.

Mary:

Jim, what will we do.

Jim:

We still have Bessy. It will be alright. Go to sleep now Mary.

Narrator:

It was a hot July day!

Anna:

(Rushes to Mary) Did you hear? Pennington's just had a baby girl.

Mary:

Maybe we can stop for a break and go and help her.

Burnett:

Wagons Ho! Keep moving.

Narrator:

New arrivals or deaths did not keep the wagons from moving. Emigrants passed by the famous Chimney Rock. Mid-July they arrive at Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

Mr. Nesmith:

Welcome to Ft. Laramie we'd like you to rest a couple of days and tomorrow night we will have a dance.

Burnett:

Thank you for your hospitality. Our travelers are tired and would look forward to a day of relaxation.

Narrator:

The pioneers welcomed the dance!

(Song, "Turkey in the Straw")

(Dance, "Virginia Reel")

Anna:

Mary, let's go to the trading post.

Mary:

Surely you are not going to trade that beautiful clock?

Anna:

Yes, we are short of money and we have only 150 pounds of flour left as it got wet crossing the last river.

(Women go to trading post)

Soldier 1:

May I help you ladies?

Anna:

How much flour could I get if I traded this clock?

Soldier 1:

Well, we don't have much use for a clock. Flour is 25 cents a pound and so I could give you 15 pound...Oh, make that 20 pounds.

(Women look at each other in disbelief)

Anna:

OK. (they trade) Come on Mary we need to finish our mending.

Narrator:

Although water, grass and woods became more plentiful the land was becoming rockier and rougher. Sickness became prevalent.

Jim:

Anna could you look after Mary? She's running a high fever and Burnett says keep moving.

Anna:

I'll get her comfortable in the wagon and keep cool cloths on her.

Narrator:

Mary got better in a few days. The wagons were troubled with wind and rain storms. Late July the wagons reached Independence Rock outside of Casper, Wyoming. The pioneers had crossed 840 long miles.

Burnett:

Hey John...this place is called Ice Slough. Watch.

(Burnett begins to dig.)

John:

What is that...ice! It can't be. It is 100 degrees outside.

Burnett:

It is...hey bring your water casks and we'll fill up with ice cool water.

Narrator:

The wagons stopped briefly at Bridger's Fort to make repairs and do a little trading before moving on to Idaho.

After climbing hills they arrived at Montpelier and ventured onto Bear River. Trappers called the waters "Bear Springs".

(Trappers sitting around singing, "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes")

Trapper 1:

Look we've got company.

Trapper 2:

Come join us and we'll share our springs and also do some trading. The Indians will be here shortly to trade.

Trapper 3:

We've got beaver skins, bear skins, and deer skins. We could use cooking utensils and flour, sugar, rice and beans.

(Indians enter)

(Indians exchange greetings with trappers and travelers)

(Indians do dance)

Burnett:

Let's sit down and discuss the trades.

(Men and trappers and Indians trade.)

(Curtain close) (Indian Round Dance)

Narrator:

The next day the pioneers travel on.

Michael:

Mom, I am so tired...can't we go home?

Molly:

We do have so many blisters on our feet. Can't we rest?

Mary:

I know you are so tired and I keep wondering myself if we will ever make it but we must be strong for dad. This is his dream and we all must help it to come true.

I know we are getting closer.

Burnett:

OK, let's make camp.

Mary:

Now come get into the wagon

(Song "Hush Little Baby)

Narrator:

August came and they reached Fort Hall, Idaho. The fort was over 15 feet high and was built of cottonwood logs.

John:

Anna, I am afraid we are going to have to use almost all of our savings to repair our wagon. We had to leave most of our trading items when crossing the last range.

Anna:

Don't worry John. The children and I will help others with their washing and mending in exchange for food. The prices here are too high. But buy what we need.

Narrator:

A few days later the pioneers left Fort Hall with a new slogan...on to Oregon.

(Song, "On to Oregon")

It wasn't long before the trail became rough.

John:

I am going to have to cut our wagon down and Lydia is ill. Could she and a few of our belongings ride in your wagon.

Jim:

Of course she can. I'll send Sam with you and George and Anna can come back with us.

John:

You are a true friend.

(Burnett and men assemble)

Narrator:

The pioneers passed by Twin Falls, Idaho to reach Shoshone Falls. Shoshone Falls is 45 feet higher than Niagara Falls. It is over 1,000 feet in width and 1,200 feet in depth. What a spectacular sight!

The pioneers entered Oregon near Nyssa and then headed North to Farewell Bend where they parted ways with the Snake River forever.

Mary:

Look Anna!

Anna:

The view is gorgeous!

John:

What is that lone tree doing out in the middle of that valley. They should name the valley Lone Pine Valley.

Burnett:

Let's camp by that tree tonight.

(Jim, John, Anna and Mary gather.)

Anna:

Lydia is so weak from this trip.

Mary:

This is the most beautiful place I've ever seen!

John:

Did you see those mountains covered with timber. Good for building homes!

Jim:

And those rivers are filled with fish.

John:

Did you see the valley? We could grow our own food and have pastures for our livestock.

Jim:

Are you saying you would like to leave the wagon train and settle here?

John:

Well...I guess so.

Mary and Anna:

Can't we?

Jim:

Well...we have been so lucky and we still have quite a bit left...maybe we could buy a few more staples and a cow or two from another wagon as they are almost to Fort Walla Walla.

John:

I'll pay you back as soon as I can!

Jim:

That's fine, we wish you our best and good luck.

(John makes arrangements to separate from the party and begins to make arrangements for the settling in Baker Valley.)

("Oregon State Song" and "America the Beautiful")

The End



National Historic Oregon Trail Center at Flagstaff Hill