

The Southern Trails Chapter to embark on a major effort to receive National Historic Trail Designation for the Southern Trail.

On August 19, 2009 the Southern Trails Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association received formal approval from the Board of Directors to initiate the work required to gain National Historic Trail status for the Southern Trail. The project to be called "The Southern Trails to California Project" will be launched on November 13, 2009 at a chapter meeting in Fort Mojave, Arizona.

Following is a summary of the project.

Introduction

The Southern Trails Chapter of Oregon-California Trails Association is committed to the goal of obtaining National Historic Trail Status for the Southern Trail under the National Trails System Act of 1968 and amended to include National Historic Trails in 1978. Currently there are 19 trails in the United States that have obtained National Historic Trail status under this federal act.

Two of these historic trails led Spanish colonists and American emigrants to California and the Pacific Coast. We strongly believe that there was a third, the Southern Trail, equally important that led emigrants to California. In fact the first two American emigrants known to have settled permanently in California came over the Southern Trail in 1831 and 1832.

In addition to leading emigrants to California the Southern Trail was also the victory trail of the Army of the West. In 1846 Col. Phillip St. George Cooke under Gen. Kearny, and his Mormon Battalion, forged sections of The Southern Trail, through the mountains, into a wagon road in order to get supply wagons to California and engage in the Mexican-American War. This road soon became available for emigrants to use to get to California.

The Army of the West, and The Southern Trail that lead them there, were instrumental in America's victory that resulted in California becoming a part of the United States. This make the American Migration movement to California possible regardless of the trail emigrants chose to get there.

The Southern Trail sometimes referred to as "Cooke's Wagon Road" became the first wagon road in the United States to extend to the Pacific Ocean.

When considering the requirements to become a National Historic Trail the Southern Trail qualifies in every regard. The fact that we have ignored its value to American history for so long does not diminish the facts, only spurs our effort to correct the mistake

The Southern Trail played just as vital a role in getting emigrants from the southern parts of the United States and northern Mexico to California as the northern route (California Trail) did from the northern states, and which is now a National Historic Trail. By including the Southern Trail as a National Historic Trail we can then tell the complete story of all three historic trails used to get to California and the Pacific Coast.

Background

This is not a new issue within the Southern Trails Chapter or within OCTA. Our chapter under its former name Southwest Chapter, along with two other OCTA Chapters, sought and received in 1994 OCTA's support for National Historic Trail designation for what they called under their proposal the Southern Route.

Despite OCTA's initial support for the 1994 proposal it was never carried out to completion.

All the same reasons the 1994 proposal gave to encourage OCTA's support still exists today, about the only difference is the Southern Trail has been ignored for an additional 15 years.

We feel there is a valuable lesson to be learned from the 1994 failed project. We believe a strategy based on this lesson can turn failure to success on another attempt if OCTA would once again offer their support.

The 1994 proposed Southern Route was made up of ten different trails. One of those ten trails, The Old Spanish Trail, is a National Historical Trail today. Analysis of why one of the trails eventually obtained National Historic Trail status and the other nine still lay ignored is the lesson that we can learn from.

The Old Spanish Trail is a National Historic Trail today because a group of people, apart from us, chose to dedicate and commit themselves strictly to that one single trail. They were focused on one trail, used for one purpose (commerce) and during a specific period of time. With this single minded concentration and ability to gather the proper legislative support they were able to get the job done in a relatively short period of time.

Our strategy is based on this model of a single trail (The Southern Trail), one purpose (emigration), and during a specific time period (1846-1862). Our focus will be solely on the Southern Trail and the historic role it played in leading emigrants to California between 1846 and 1862.

The appeal and motivation is the trail, not geography.

In addition to OCTA's previous interest in supporting the 1994 proposal for National Historic Trail status of southern trails. We also found it encouraging to learn the

National Park Service supports further study, in its 1999 California Historic Trail Management Plan, for the Southern Trail to California.

Strategy

The single most critical issue in obtaining this goal for The Southern Trails Chapter will be commitment from both Chapter leadership and membership. In order to assure that level of commitment the goal must be structured in a manner all view as reasonable and obtainable.

The earlier attempt mentioned to obtain National Historic Status for what they called the Southern Route (**see map I**) was initiated by three OCTA Chapters. Their strategy called for a number of significant trails in the southwest be grouped together under the title of the Southern Route. There were ten distinct trails, many with more than one name that had been in use by Europeans for over 470 years, and used for a multitude of purposes from early Spanish exploration and colonization, trading, fur trapping, and later American emigrants to California. There was no common theme or focus on a certain time period. All of these trails making up the Southern Route would, of course, have to be studied and mapped in order to prove compliance with the criteria necessary for National Historic Trail status. An undaunting task for even three OCTA Chapters.

Our strategy is considerably different and calls for a breakdown of the Southern Trails Route approach to a separate, single trail.

This single focus will be the Southern Trail from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Warner's Ranch in southern California with forks extending on to San Diego and Los Angeles, during the emigration period of 1849-1862. One trail, one purpose, during one period of time (**see map II**).

The Southern Trail, originally blazed for wagon use, by Col. Cooke with his Mormon Battalion in 1846 and modified by Maj. Graham in 1848 became the route of the Army of the West to California and almost immediately became the major route used by Emigrants and Gold Rushers from the southern United States and from northern Mexico to California. Also included are the Gila Pack Trail Alternate, and the Apache Pass Cut-off. Both important side routes of the Southern Trail.

The Southern Trail has the advantage of a single name, recognized by many authorities as the primary emigrant route to California from the southern States. By focusing solely on the Southern Trail as identified here, the Southern Trails Chapter will have the commitment and resources to obtain the necessary historical documents to support its historical significance, the capability of verifying trail resources by mapping and identification, as well as identifying key access points for recreation and public use along its course, which will meet the three major requirements of a future feasibility study required for Nation Historic Trail Designation.

A 12X18" map incorporating all three of these criteria in a brief and general way has been prepared as a visual summary of this project.

To insure complete satisfaction of these three major criteria for Historic Trail designation and acquire necessary legislative support we will organize the project on a foundation of three committees, one responsible for each of these critical functions. The committees and chair persons are as follows:

Historical Significance Committee,

Chaired by Patricia Etter

Trail Resources Committee,

Chaired by Albert Eddins

Legislative and Potential for Public Use Committee,

Chaired by Reba Wells Grandrud

The strategy behind this approach for the Southern Trail from Santa Fe to Los Angeles and San Diego, as described, is several fold.

First and foremost it is something we believe to be attainable and can be successfully achieved with the current resources of our chapter. In past years the Southwest Chapter (former name) has done considerable work in mapping and identifying this trail, greatly aiding in a future feasibility study. Relatively speaking this trail passes through primarily Federal Lands, providing necessary access and future potential for public use. From Santa Fe we are dealing with a single trail, with one alternate and one cut-off which we believe, no doubt will qualify for National Historic Trail designation. All trails coming east of Santa Fe tie into the Southern Trail at Santa Fe or points south along the Rio Grande River and then on to California using this trail.

This does not mean we do not recognize the historic importance of the "feeder" routes coming in from Fort Smith, Oklahoma and Texas.

The plan is that the Chapter, with present resources, stays focused on Santa Fe to California. The hope is that once we get the project rolling members in Texas and Oklahoma will get inspired and want to start working on the trails in their area.

A brochure has been designed for the specific purpose of raising people's interest in working on historic trails to help us grow membership. This is the reason for the pictures of people doing fun and interesting things on the trail and fewer lines of text.

If it develops that enough people will step up and get serious about these other trails it could be possible that we package them-up and include them with the initial submission requesting National Historic Trail status.

If not we would continue on until we achieve National Historic Trail status on the Southern Trail as we have identified it here.

Hopefully, at some point, interest and resources will be there to start working on all trails that fall under our chosen theme "**Southern Trails to California**". By choosing this as our theme we are leaving the door open to include any significant southern trails that eventually end up in California.

Potential candidates could include:

Fort Smith-Santa Fe Trail 1849: From Fort Smith to Rio Grande River, 800 Miles

Fort Smith-El Paso Trail 1849: From Fort Smith to the Upper Road, 600 miles

Upper Road 1849: From San Antonio to El Paso, 600 miles

Lower Road 1849: From San Antonio to El Paso, 600 miles

Beale Road-Mojave Road 1857 & 1859: Albuquerque to Los Angeles, 800 miles

Naturally, this strategy will be adjusted as we obtain additional input from OCTA, Federal agencies, Chapter membership consensus, and other Trail authorities.

The Southern Trails Chapter will keep our primary focus on the Southern Trail until we achieve its rightful place in the history of the Great Migration West. That will be accomplished by achieving National Historic Trail recognition for the important role The Southern Trail played in that historical American movement.

Timeline

(To be extended as specific goals and objectives are established.)

July 6, 2009 Initial planning meeting with R. Grandrud, RA. Tompkins, P. Etter, T. Jonas, A. Eddins Phoenix, AZ
(COMPLETED)

July 27, 2009 Planning meeting with B&J Watson's, D Buck and A Eddins in Orinda, CA
(COMPLETED)

Aug 18, 2009 Request support of OCTA board of directors, Loveland, CO
(COMPLETED)

Nov 14, 2009 Roll out completed plan and assignments to Chapter membership at Fort Mojave meeting

Jun 30, 2010 Obtain necessary pledges for congressional support