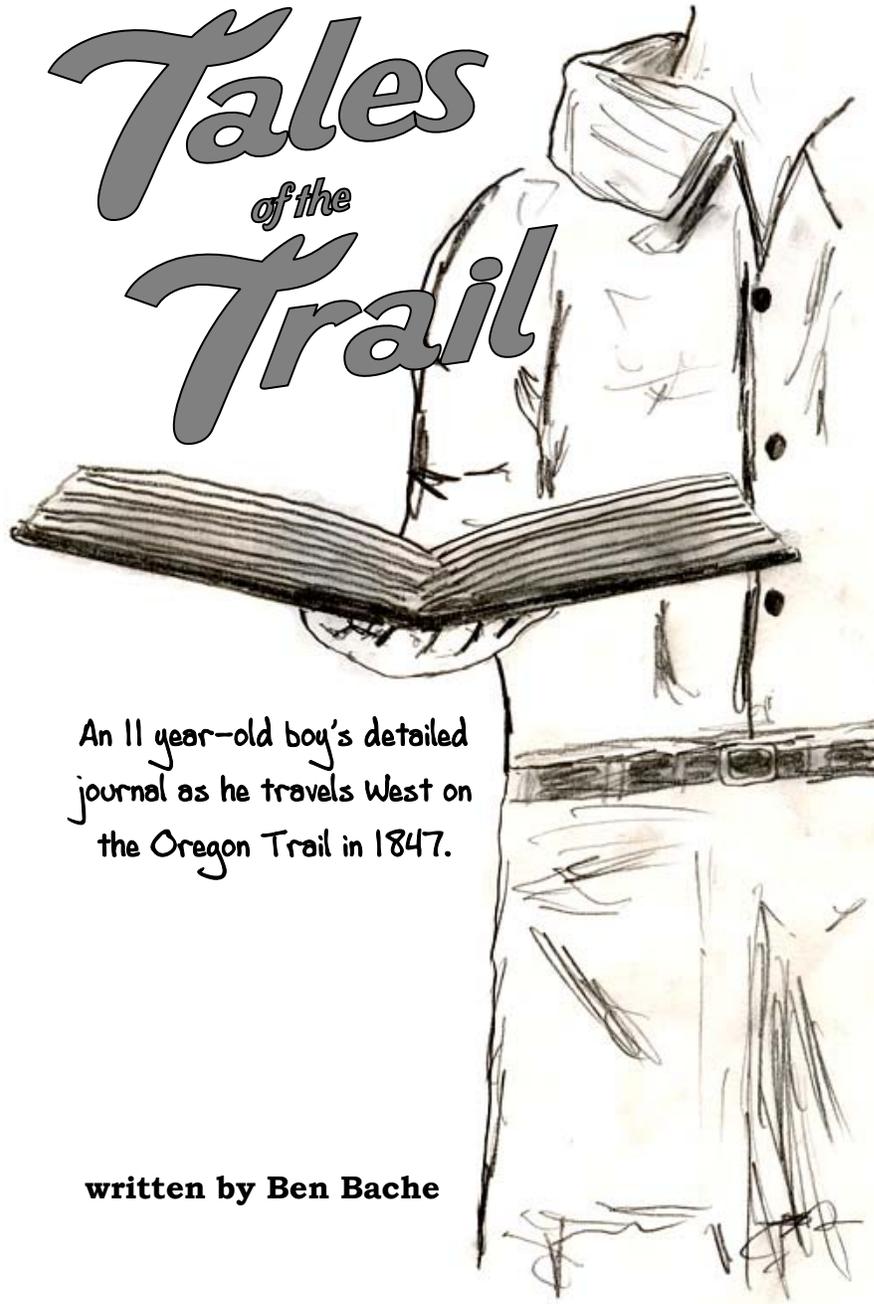


# Tales *of the* Trail



An 11 year-old boy's detailed journal as he travels West on the Oregon Trail in 1847.

written by Ben Bache

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■ Greenville, SC

We began our journey today as we set out from Independence.



April 30, 1847

We left today. As we took our first steps, Pa joked, "From here it's just a 2,000 mile stroll to the Pacific Ocean. Enjoy it."

The rising sun filled the camp with excitement, that's for sure. The emigrants yoked their oxen (some for the first time ever, which was a sight to see) and everyone drove their wagons from the campsite to meet their guides at the head of the trail. We were finally under way.

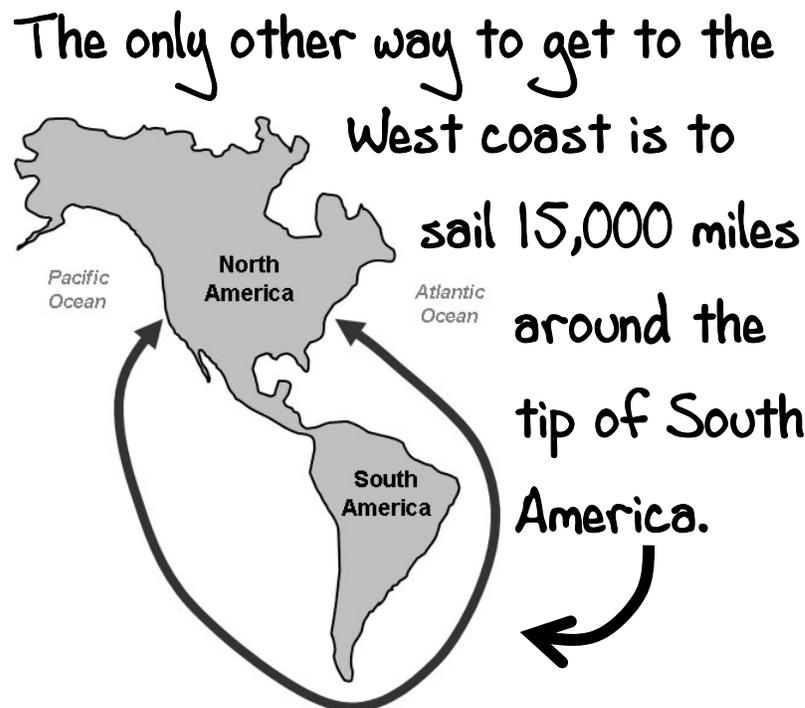
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The good mood began to fade when we traveled just over a mile in about three hours time. All of the wagons were trying to get out of Independence at the same time, and the result was a huge traffic jam. Some of the men couldn't get their livestock to walk in a straight line (city folks, I imagine). Others had packed so much into their wagon that things began to fall out when we started moving.

By lunchtime we had started to move steadily, which is why it was so frustrating when Mr. Colter brought everyone to a halt. "We'll take an hour lunch break every day. Don't forget, your animals have to eat just like you do."

When we tried to start back after lunch, we once again had to deal with animals running in the wrong direction and the traffic jams. Pa didn't have a problem, and neither did the rest of the folks who had spent any time around livestock on a farm. His experience didn't do much good, though, because we still had to wait until everyone caught up.

Even when we did move, it was slow enough to drive you crazy. "Two miles per hour is our goal," Mr. Colter said. I could walk twice that fast. Unfortunately, that's as fast as the oxen were willing to go. They were, after all, pulling wagons



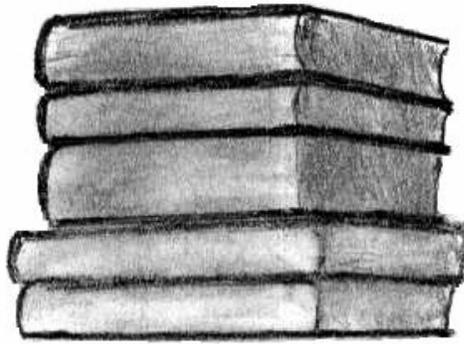
that were stuffed with supplies and weighed over a ton. It made it hard to blame the animals.

As we shuffled along, I asked myself, "Is this really the only way to head West?"

I must have said it out loud because a man walking beside me said, "It's the only *safe* way. The Oregon Trail is your best bet for getting your wagon over the mountains. You can also sail around Cape Horn at the bottom of the South America, but that's more than 15,000 miles. It would take you a year and cost a fortune."

I kept my mouth shut for the rest of the day.

The side of the Trail is scattered  
with unnecessary items (like books)



that people have  
thrown out to  
make room in  
their wagons.

**May 4, 1847**

We've been on the trail for five days now. Everybody's starting to get the hang of it. We travel about fifteen miles a day, which Mr. Colter says is a good pace.

The side of the Trail is littered with chairs, tables, boxes of clothes, picture frames, and about everything else you can think of. I even saw a sewing machine.

Pa said that folks are starting to realize that they don't have room for all of the extra luggage. They have no choice but to dump it on the side of the Trail.

I have to admit that I'm just following the crowd. I really don't know what we're going to find at the end of this Trail—or even where we are now.

I spend a lot of my time thinking about two explorers I learned about in school—Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. They headed West almost fifty years ago, from St. Louis all of the way to the Pacific Ocean. But they didn't have this nice trail to follow.

What amazes me is that there was nothing to mark their way. How did they know where they were going? Not to mention the savage Indians, the thick forests, the bad weather, and the wild animals.

I couldn't imagine making that journey with them. I'm scared enough about the trail that lies ahead of us right now, and hundreds of others have managed to make it across long before we showed up.

Of course, Lewis and Clark weren't alone. They had an Indian guide with them—a woman, in fact. I remember questioning my school teacher about this fact many times, but he insisted that it was true. It was a woman who guided Lewis and Clark over the mountains and through Indian

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territory. I wonder if she knew this area as well as our guide, Mr. Colter.

In some ways, Lewis and Clark had it easier than we do. They didn't have to worry about keeping the party together, or repairing heavy wagons when they ran over a stump. There were no young children on the Lewis and Clark Expedition or — for that matter — bankers and merchants who knew nothing about the outdoors.

Still, I'd take the Trail any day of the week. We have it a lot easier today than they did back then.

I can't imagine how explorers  
Lewis and Clark  
made it to the  
West before  
anyone knew what  
was out there.

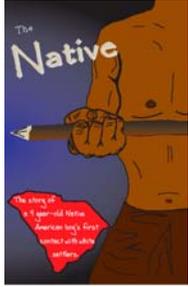




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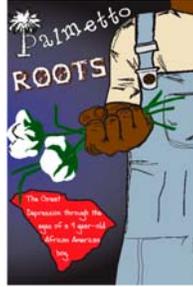
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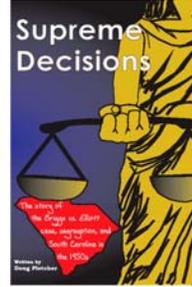
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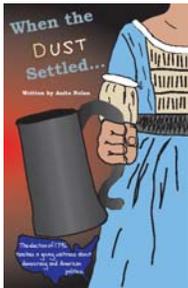
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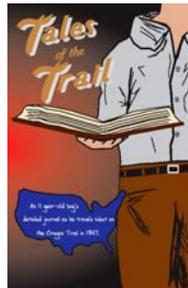
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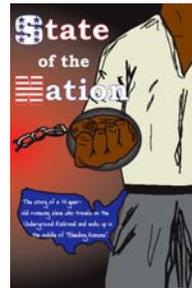
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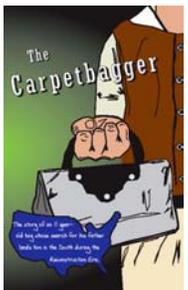
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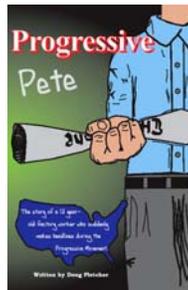
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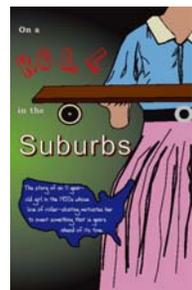
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