

Prairie Schooner

Covered Wagon



History



History:

- The prairie schooner, or covered wagon, was the mode of transportation for emigrants traveling to the American West in the 1800s.
- The name prairie schooner comes from the white canvas covers which looked like the sails of ships, called schooners, on the ocean.
- Most people walked alongside the wagon because the bumpy trail made a ride in the schooner uncomfortable.
- Over 250,000 people traveled the California Trail, traveling with prairie schooners 2,000 miles west to reach California.

Oxen were the most common animal used to pull prairie schooners, but horses and mules were also used.

**Explore Idaho
with Scout the Fox!**

Scout



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Significance in Idaho

- People moving west on the Oregon and California Trails used prairie schooners to travel through Idaho.
- Idaho marked the split between the California and Oregon Trails. The trails diverged near where the Raft River and the Snake River meet in the southeast part of the state.
- Emigrants following the California Trail came through what is today City of Rocks National Reserve. Many people wrote their names on rocks, and these signatures are still visible today!

COLOR ME





Portals to Parks



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Fun Facts!

- The front wheels of a prairie schooner are smaller than the back wheels to help with turning.
- The main frame of the wagon was about 4 feet wide and 10 feet long and all a family's belongings were stored inside. This meant no space for beds inside, so families slept under the wagon or camped right next to it at night.
- To waterproof the cover, emigrants would paint or oil the canvas.

ACTIVITY TIME

1. Compare how you might plan for a road trip now with how emigrants prepared for a move west in 1850. How do you research the trip? How do you think emigrants "researched" for their trip? What sort of supplies do you need versus the supplies needed for a 2,000-mile wagon journey?

Question 2 on the next page!

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2. Draw items that you would bring along on your westward journey around the prairie schoone in the box below!



VOCABULARY

- **Emigrant:** a person who leaves their own country or region to settle permanently in another
- **Gold rush:** a rapid movement of people to a newly discovered goldfield
- **Manifest destiny:** the belief that the expansion of the U.S. throughout America was both justified and inevitable
- **Oxen:** domesticated cattle trained as draft animals
- **Native Americans:** the indigenous peoples of the United States, who lived here before European colonists arrived and continue to live here today

Thanks to the Encyclopedia Britannica and California Trail Interpretive Center for reference information!