

LESSON 5

Settling Oregon Country



GET READY TO READ

START UP


This modern photograph of Oregon shows how the region might have appeared to settlers. In a few sentences tell what a landscape like this would have meant for the new arrivals.

GUIDING QUESTIONS


- What did the frontier mean to the nation in the first half of the nineteenth century?
- What challenges did the Oregon Trail present?
- How did mountain men help settle the Far West?
- What role did missionaries play in Oregon?

TAKE NOTES

Literacy Skills: Summarize

Use the Graphic Organizer in your  Active Journal to take notes as you read the lesson.

PRACTICE VOCABULARY

Use the Vocabulary Builder in your  Active Journal to practice the vocabulary words.

Vocabulary

Oregon Country rugged
mountain man individualist
Oregon Trail

Academic Vocabulary

varied
determination

By the 1820s, white settlers occupied much of the land between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River. Until this time, those lands were considered “the West.” However, families searching for good farmland continued to move even farther west. In front of them were the Great Plains that stretched to the Rockies. Few settlers stopped on the plains, which were considered too dry for farming. Instead, most settlers headed to lands in the Far West. The movement to this distant region changed the meaning of the West for Americans. Now, it stretched all the way to the Pacific coast.

In Search of New Territory

Americans first learned about Oregon Country after Lewis and Clark explored the region in the early 1800s. **Oregon Country** was a huge area west of the Rocky Mountains. Today it includes the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Wyoming, Montana, and western Canada.

Academic Vocabulary

varied • *adj.*, having many forms or types

Wild Country The geography of Oregon Country is **varied**. Along the Pacific coast, the soil is fertile. Temperatures are mild year round, and rainfall is plentiful.

Dense forest covered the Coastal Ranges and Cascade Mountains, which surrounded these lowlands. Beavers and other fur-bearing animals roamed these forests and the Rocky Mountains to the east. Between the Cascade Mountains and the Rockies is a dry plateau.



INTERACTIVE

Oregon Country

Guides to the West Fur trappers searching for beaver and other fur-bearing animals were the first people to enter Oregon Country. They followed American Indian trails through passes in the Rocky Mountains. Later, they used these trails and their knowledge of the land to guide settlers heading west. These men became known as **mountain men**.

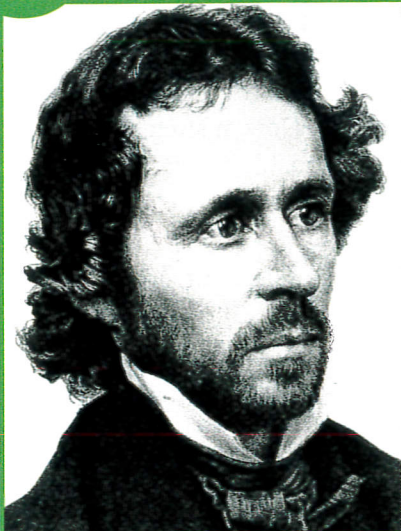
Not all the mountain men were white. Manuel Lisa, a Latino fur trader, founded Fort Manuel, the first outpost on the upper Missouri. James Beckwourth, an African American freed from slavery, was a fur trader and lived among the Crow Indians. Beckwourth discovered a mountain pass that became a major route to California.

The U.S. government also sent expeditions to map and explore the new territories of the West. John C. Frémont (FREE mont), a young military officer, was commissioned to lead expeditions through many areas across the West, from Wyoming to California. The trapper and explorer “Kit” Carson served as a guide to Frémont. Later, Carson guided General Kearny on his campaign to take California from Mexico. Carson became a popular and legendary adventure hero.

5 BIOGRAPHY Things to Know About

JOHN C. FRÉMONT

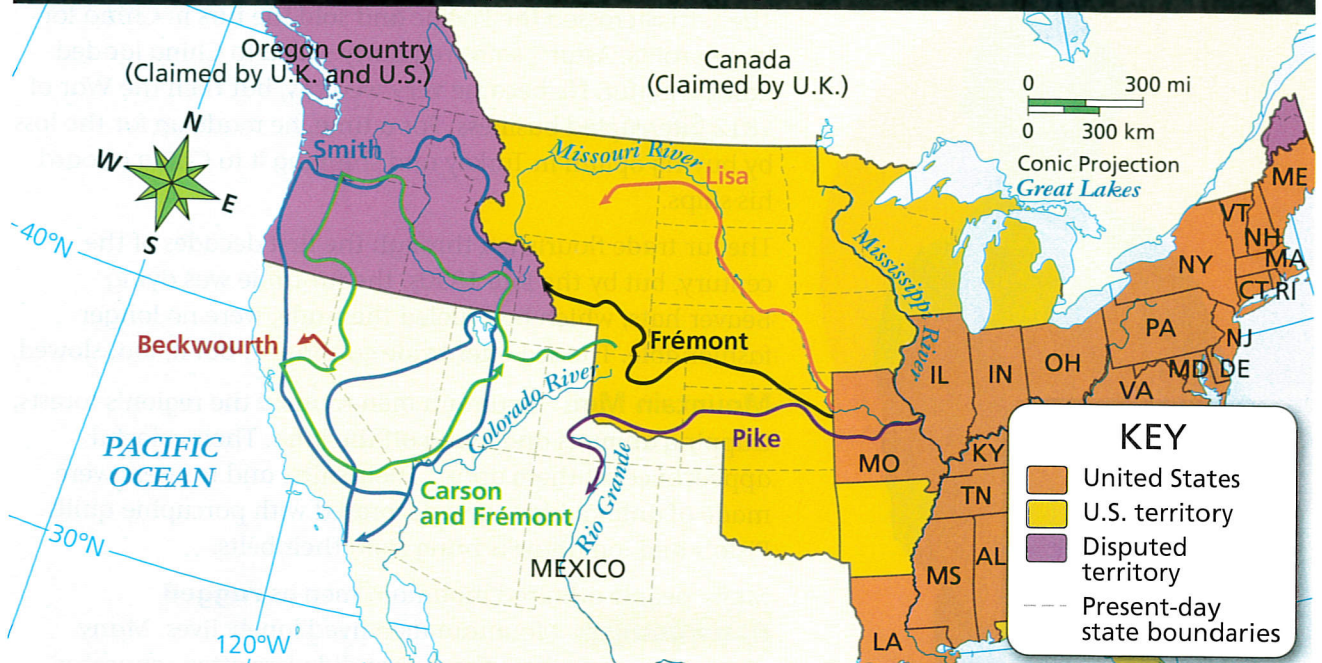
American Explorer (1813–1890)



- As a U.S. Army officer, he led three expeditions to explore the West, mapping much of the land between the Mississippi River and the West Coast.
- On his third expedition, Frémont helped capture California for the United States during the Mexican-American War.
- Frémont accepted the Mexican surrender and then declared himself governor of California. For these acts he was accused of mutiny and court-martialed, but the ruling was later dismissed.
- He became a multimillionaire when gold was discovered on land he had bought in California.
- He ran for President in 1856, but lost to James Buchanan.

Critical Thinking How was Frémont important to the development of California?

Explorers of the Far West, 1807–1850



Nations Compete In the early 1800s, four countries claimed Oregon: the United States, Great Britain, Spain, and Russia. Of course, American Indian groups had lived there for centuries. However, the United States and European nations gave little thought to their rights.

In 1818, the United States and Britain agreed to occupy Oregon Country jointly. Citizens of each nation would have equal rights. Spain and Russia had few settlers there, so they withdrew their claims.

READING CHECK Predict Consequences How might the arrival of many U.S. settlers affect the agreement between Britain and the United States about Oregon Country?

The Far West Fur Trade

The first Europeans and Americans who traveled to Oregon Country were fur traders. Fur was so valuable that it was sometimes referred to as “soft gold.”

Trade in Sea Otter Fur John Jacob Astor was one of the most successful American traders. Astor started his first fur business in St. Louis, selling pelts collected in the American West and Canada to cities in the Northeast and Europe. But the most valuable furs came from sea otters that were hunted off the coast of the Oregon Country.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

Scouts and explorers traveled throughout the West before white settlers arrived from the East.

- Interaction** How were explorers important for westward movement?
- Infer** Why do you think some exploration routes were thousands of miles while others were much shorter?



Analyze Images James Beckwourth was a freed slave who became a fur trader and explorer. Later, he worked for the army and ran his own hotel and store. **Identify Main Ideas** What was the importance of the mountain men for the development of the nation?

Merchants came all the way from New England for the otters. Then, they crossed the Pacific and sold the furs in China for huge profits. Astor's ships regularly sailed to China loaded down with fur. He became very wealthy, but then the War of 1812 interrupted business. For a time, he made up for the loss by buying opium in Turkey and shipping it to China aboard his ships.

The fur trade flourished through the first decades of the century, but by the late 1830s, the fur trade was dying. Beaver hats, which had fueled the trade, were no longer fashionable. The sea otter trade continued, but it, too, slowed.

Mountain Men Mountain men roamed the region's forests, trapping animals and living off the land. Their colorful appearance set them apart. Their shirts and trousers were made of animal hides and decorated with porcupine quills. Pistols and tomahawks hung from their belts.

Many people admired mountain men as **rugged individualists**. Mountain men lived lonely lives. Many did not have families. Those that did were often separated from them for long periods of time. Based in part on the solitary lives of mountain men, a folklore of rugged American individualism developed. Today, it still influences our ideas of what America is and what makes an American.

Mountain men could make fine profits selling their furs, but their lives were hard and dangerous. Injuries, illness, and dangerous animals were a constant threat. Surviving alone, especially through the long, cold winters in the mountains, demanded special skills. "I have held my hands in an anthill until they were covered with ants, then greedily licked them off," one mountain man recalled.

READING CHECK Interpret How did mountain men come to know so much about the Oregon Country?

The Oregon Trail

The first white Americans to settle permanently in Oregon Country were missionaries who began arriving in the 1830s. Among the first of these were Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. In 1836, they set out from their home in New York for Oregon Country, where they planned to convert American Indians to Christianity.

Missionaries Bring Settlers The Whitmans built their mission near the Columbia River and began to work with the Cayuse (kay-YOOS), setting up a mission school and a clinic. Soon, other missionaries and settlers arrived.

Eager for others to join them, the missionaries sent back glowing reports about the Oregon Country. By 1840, more Americans were making the journey west.

As settlers spread onto Cayuse lands, conflicts arose. Worse, the newcomers carried diseases that proved deadly for the Cayuse. In 1847, a measles outbreak killed many Cayuse children. Blaming the settlers, a band of angry Cayuse attacked the mission, killing the Whitmans and 12 others.

INTERACTIVE
The Oregon Trail

Wagons Ho! Despite such incidents, pioneers still set out for Oregon Country. Tales of wheat that grew taller than a person and turnips five feet around touched off a race to Oregon. Americans called it “Oregon fever.” Soon, pioneers clogged the trails west.

Beginning in 1843, wagon trains left every spring for Oregon Country. They followed a route called the **Oregon Trail**. Families heading west would gather at Independence, Missouri, in the early spring. There, they formed wagon trains and hurried to start west by May. Along the way, travelers stopped near settlements where they might buy supplies or get care for the sick or injured.

Timing was important. Travelers had to reach the Oregon lowlands by early October, before the snow fell in the mountains. This meant they had to cover 2,000 miles in five months. In the 1840s, traveling 15 miles a day was making good time.

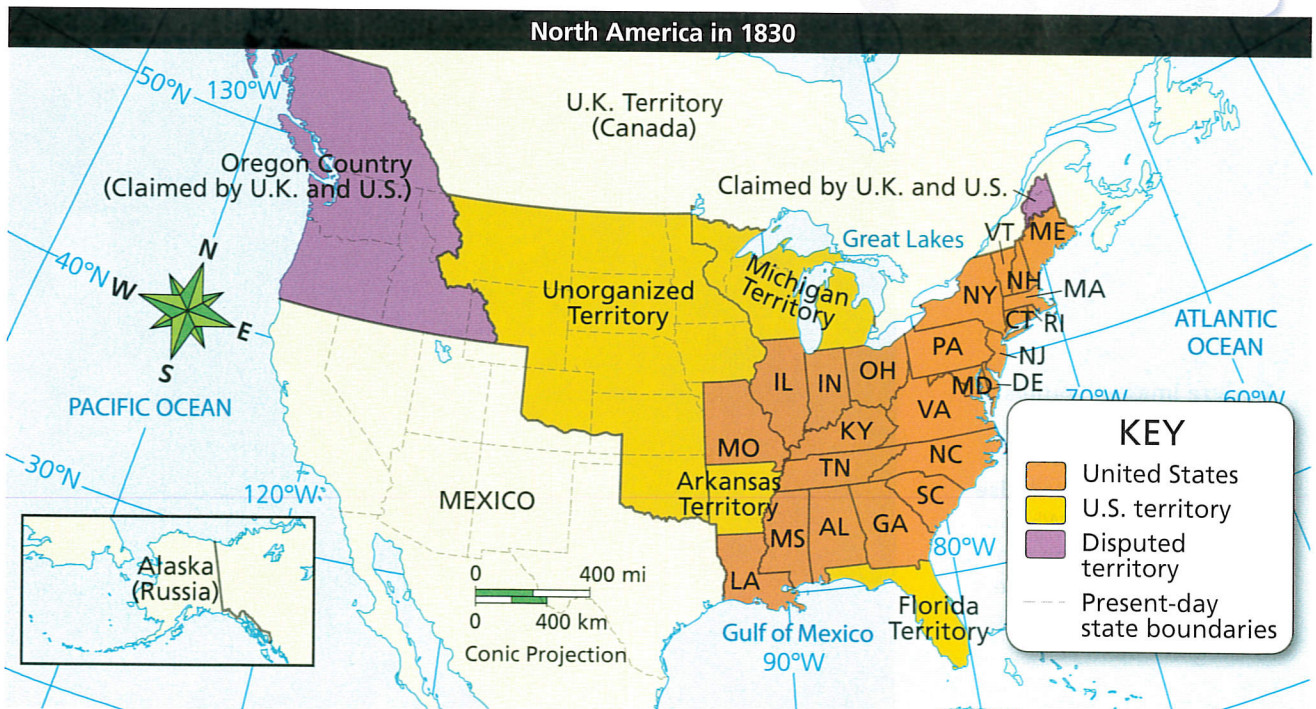
Life in a Wagon Train On the trail, families woke at dawn to a bugle blast. Breakfast was prepared and eaten. Horses and oxen were hitched to the wagons. By 6 A.M., the cry of “Wagons Ho!” rang across the plains.

At noon the wagon train stopped for a brief meal and then continued on until 6 or 7 P.M.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

By 1830, the United States had a claim to part of the Pacific Coast.

- 1. Movement** Work with a partner to estimate the distance from the Oregon Country to the nearest state.
- 2. Express Problems** **Clearly** Considering the distance of states and organized territories from Oregon Country, why might it have been difficult for the United States to control that region?





INTERACTIVE

The Covered Wagon

Men and women took on their usual roles when a wagon train first began its journey. Men managed the teams and hunted. Women cooked, washed, and collected fire wood.

As time passed, though, women began driving wagons, hitching up teams, and loading wagons. Men occasionally even cooked and did other “women’s work.” People did what was needed to get to Oregon.

Daily life was not easy. Meals were cooked over open fires. Fuel for the fires was often scarce and took time to gather. Wind blew sand into people’s food as they ate. At night, most people wrapped themselves in blankets and slept on the ground. If it rained, they got soaked, and the wagons might get stuck in the mud.

The trail west held many dangers. During the spring, travelers risked drowning as they crossed rain-swollen rivers. In summer, water sources dried up. People went thirsty, and livestock might die. The biggest threat was sickness. Cholera and other diseases could wipe out entire wagon trains.

Despite the many hardships, more than 50,000 Americans reached Oregon between 1840 and 1860.



Analyze Images Settlers traveled in wagon trains for mutual assistance on their journey westward. **Use Visual Information** What features of the wagon can you identify that would be useful for settlers traveling to Oregon Country?

Meeting the Locals As they moved west, pioneers met and often traded with American Indians. Hungry pioneers were grateful for the food that the locals supplied in return for clothing and tools. A traveler noted:

Primary Source

"Whenever we camp near any Indian village, we are no sooner stopped than a whole crowd may be seen coming galloping into our camp. The [women] do all the swapping."

—John S. Unruh, quoted in *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1860*

Journey's End By the 1840s, Americans outnumbered the British in Oregon Country. Many Americans wanted Oregon Country for the United States alone. After a long negotiation, the United States and United Kingdom signed a treaty dividing up the Oregon Country. Two years later, in 1848, Congress organized the Oregon Territory.

As the population of Oregon grew, it opened new markets for eastern merchants. But the significance of Oregon was not only economic. The Oregon Trail helped form America's national identity. It took courage and **determination** to complete the journey across the continent. The trail inspired Americans' faith that their nation can achieve anything.

READING CHECK **Identify Cause and Effect** How did missionaries attract settlers?



▲ Settlers encountered many American Indians, such as the Klamath, Chinook, and others who fished on the Columbia River in Oregon Country. **Identify Supporting Details** How did American Indians influence the life of settlers on the frontier?

Academic Vocabulary
determination • *n.*,
personal drive to continue
trying to achieve one's goal

Lesson Check

Practice Vocabulary

1. Why did people go to **Oregon Country**?
2. In what way could **mountain men** be described as **rugged individualists**?

Critical Thinking and Writing

3. **Compare and Contrast** the lives of missionaries and mountain men in Oregon Country.

4. **Identify Main Ideas** Describe how settlers moving to Oregon Country made the trip from Independence, Missouri.
5. **Writing Workshop: Use Narrative Techniques** In your Active Journal, write about an important or unusual event that takes place during your journey west. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, flashback, or figurative language. You will use what you write here in the narrative you will write at the end of the Topic.

Distinguish Verifiable from Unverifiable Information



INTERACTIVE

Identify Evidence

Follow these steps to distinguish verifiable from unverifiable information.

1 Identify statements that could be verified Historical sources may contain facts, or statements that can be proved true. What facts does the writer give you about the Red Buttes?

2 Determine how you might verify these statements Find ways to verify each statement. For example, you could compare a statement to an encyclopedia entry. How can you prove the statements about the Red Buttes are facts?

3 Identify statements that cannot be verified It is not possible to verify something like a person's opinion. Remember, though, that statements can be valuable even though they are not verifiable. Which statements in the journal entry for August 3 cannot be verified?

Primary Source

“July 25.— Since last date we camped at the ford where emigrants cross from the south to the north side of the Platte. . . . We stopped near the Red Buttes, where the hills are of a red color, nearly square and have the appearance of houses with flat roofs. . . . We also passed Independence Rock and the Devil’s Gate, which is high enough to make one’s head swim, and the posts reach an altitude of some 4 or 500 feet.”

“Oregon, August 3. . . . Here the roads were so bad, as we went over the steep hills and clambered over the rocks, I could hardly hold myself in the wagon.

Sometimes the dust is so great that the drivers cannot see their teams at all though the sun is shining brightly, and it a great relief to the way-worn traveler to meet with some mountain stream, meandering through a valley. . . . One day we only made seven miles through a very deep sand. . . .”

“Monday, September 15th. . . . Mount St. Elias is in the distance, and is covered with snow, so you can imagine somewhat the beauty and grandeur of the scene. We are now among the tribe of Wallawalla Indians.”

—Journal of a Trip to Oregon, Elizabeth Wood