

# Our Public Lands

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**Job Corps Proves Up!**  
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# Reblazing the Lander Trail

By Jack Bryant  
*Resource Utilization Specialist  
Cheyenne, Wyo.*

Wagon wheel ruts carved deep, marked and unmarked graves, names etched in rock—signposts of history left on Wyoming's landscape. Here, within a short generation, the Mountain Man and his Rendezvous became an epoch of the West and the trails were blazed for emigrants to follow. For nearly half a century following the close of the great fur trade in 1841, thousands upon thousands of persons trekked west—and the Oregon Trail, Mormon Trail, Overland Trail, and other travel routes began their march into the history books.

Now, more than 100 years later, public interest in the historic trails that won the West is blazing once again. Efforts to identify and permanently mark these historic pathways are underway, and the Bureau of Land Management is helping, as are other public agencies. The story of the Lander Cutoff of the old Oregon Trail is a good example.

From 1843 onward, the Oregon Trail was trekked by man and beast in ever increasing numbers. From the eastern takeoff points of St. Louis and Independence, Mo., travelers wended their way across the plains of Nebraska Territory into the high country which is now Wyoming. Rough country, treacherous rivers, and hostile Indians were taken in stride.

## Going Was Slow

On leaving famed South Pass in western Wyoming, an easy pathway across the Continental Divide, the trail passed through rolling sagebrush covered hills to the Big Sandy River. From this point to the Green River lay one of the trail's worse sections. Alkaline desert plains stretched for almost 50 miles. Water was scarce and feed for livestock even scarcer. Once the Green River was reached, ferries had to be used, as it flowed swift, wide, and deep. The price for using a ferry was high and the waiting line long. On top of these hard-

*Names like South Pass Station and Burnt Ranch live again as a famous Wyoming route is marked across the public domain!*

ships, the "Mormon Rebellion" made many emigrants uneasy. Safety and time demanded that a more direct route be found to Fort Hall and City Rocks in Oregon Territory.

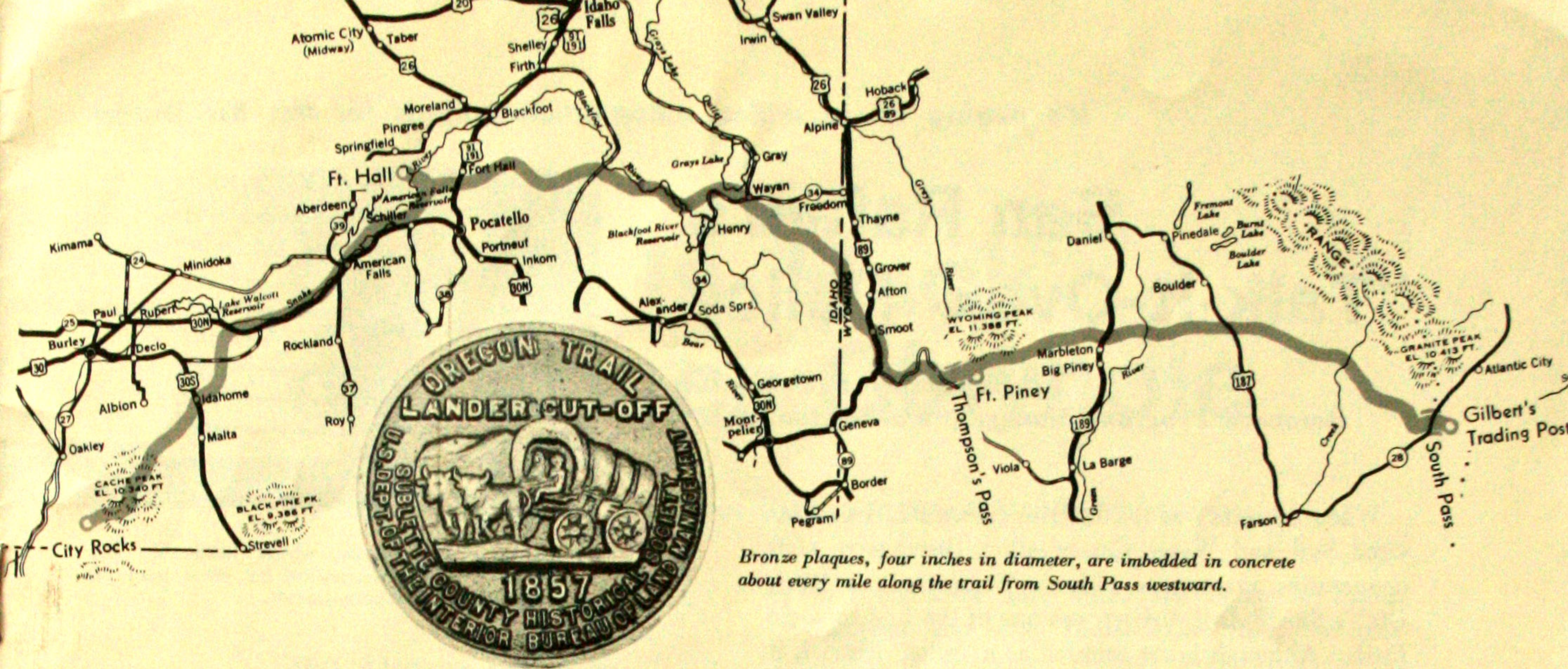
As a result of public sentiment, a post and military road was authorized by Congress in 1856, with Chief Engineer Fredrick W. Lander of the Department of the Interior starting field surveys for the wagon road in the spring of 1857. During the summer months, he explored the old Oregon Trail southwest from South Pass by way of both Fort Bridger and the Sublette Road farther north. Finding these routes not suited to improvement, he surveyed and staked out an entirely new route, heading northwest from South Pass. In all, he traveled some 3,000 miles by horseback, discovered some 16 mountain passes, and charted the Bear River and Salt River Mountain ranges. By the time winter came, Colonel Lander was ready to start roadbuilding.

## Completed in 1858

Early in the spring of 1858, Lander gathered his men, hired more from several Mormon settlements, and started the business of building his new road. First, however, he held a pow-wow with the famous Shoshone Indian Chief Washaki. In a swap for some horses, he



Grave of David Bond, who died on the trail in 1864, lies alongside the Lander Cutoff overlooking South Piney Creek in Sublette County.



Bronze plaques, four inches in diameter, are imbedded in concrete about every mile along the trail from South Pass westward.

secured firearms, ammunitions, blankets, and trinkets, a treaty and right-of-way for the new road from the Sweetwater River to Fort Hall. By the close of September, Lander's Cutoff was completed.

The point of departure of Lander's Cutoff from the Oregon Trail is itself steeped in history. Here, in 1847 Brigham Young and his men, while returning to winter quarters, met a large emigration party and the "Feast in the Wilderness" was held.

**South Pass Station**

Known as Gilbert's Station when Lander started his road, it soon was called South Pass Stage Station, serving as a rest stop for the famous Concord Stages as they rolled westward. The rapid staccato of hoof beats, as the Pony Express rider and his horse arrived and disappeared, were also heard at this historic site. It served as a telegraph station for the first transcontinental line in 1861.

From 1862 to 1868 a unit of the 11th Ohio Volunteers was garrisoned at South Pass Station to protect the emigrant trains and stages using Lander's Cutoff and the Old Oregon Trail. Shortly after the troops abandoned the Station, it was burned to the ground by the Indians. Later rebuilt, it was burned again. Today this site lives in history as the "Burnt Ranch."

Upon completion of the Lander Cutoff, large numbers of emigrants to Oregon Territory made use of it, as did trail herds of livestock. At the close of the Indian Wars in 1877, cattle herds from Oregon moved eastward over the Lander Road to meet the railroad and to stock Wyoming ranges. Among the first outfits to settle along Piney Creek, in what is now Sublette County, Wyoming, belonged to Ed Swan, Otto Leifer, D. B. Budd, Hugh McKay, and A. W. Smith.

With the coming of the first transcontinental railroad in the early 1860's, travel over the Cutoff rapidly declined. The last wagon to take the Lander Road was seen in 1912.

As the years rolled by, the Oregon Trail and the Lander Cutoff became only memories—recalled in history books and western novels. Recently, however, many people began to show interest in preserving the trail. Combined with the knowledge and zeal of primarily one man—Jim Harrower, a past president of the Sublette County Historical Society—things began to happen.

**BLM Pitches In**

Jim Harrower told the story of neglect to the local BLM office in Pinedale, Wyo. He took it up with BLM's National Director, Charles Stoddard, during his visit to the Pinedale area on other matters. Soon, BLM ordered bronze plaques and concrete marker posts.

Harrower and other members of the County Historical Society went over the Lander Cutoff trail on the ground. Where it couldn't be followed, they got the help of BLM men in poring over the public land records. Places to put the markers were spotted and the concrete posts were hauled to nearby sheds or barns. Ranchers, local citizens and all able-bodied men that could be corralled were called on to help put the markers in place.

With hard work and a little dynamite, the project has been completed.

Now, history "buffs", just plain tourists and local residents of western Wyoming can walk in the footsteps of the early pioneer emigrants. They'll find it a most rewarding experience.