

# **Off to Oregon!**

**Penn Mullin**

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**Cover and Interior Illustrations: Carol Heyer**  
**Cover Design: Jill Zwicky**

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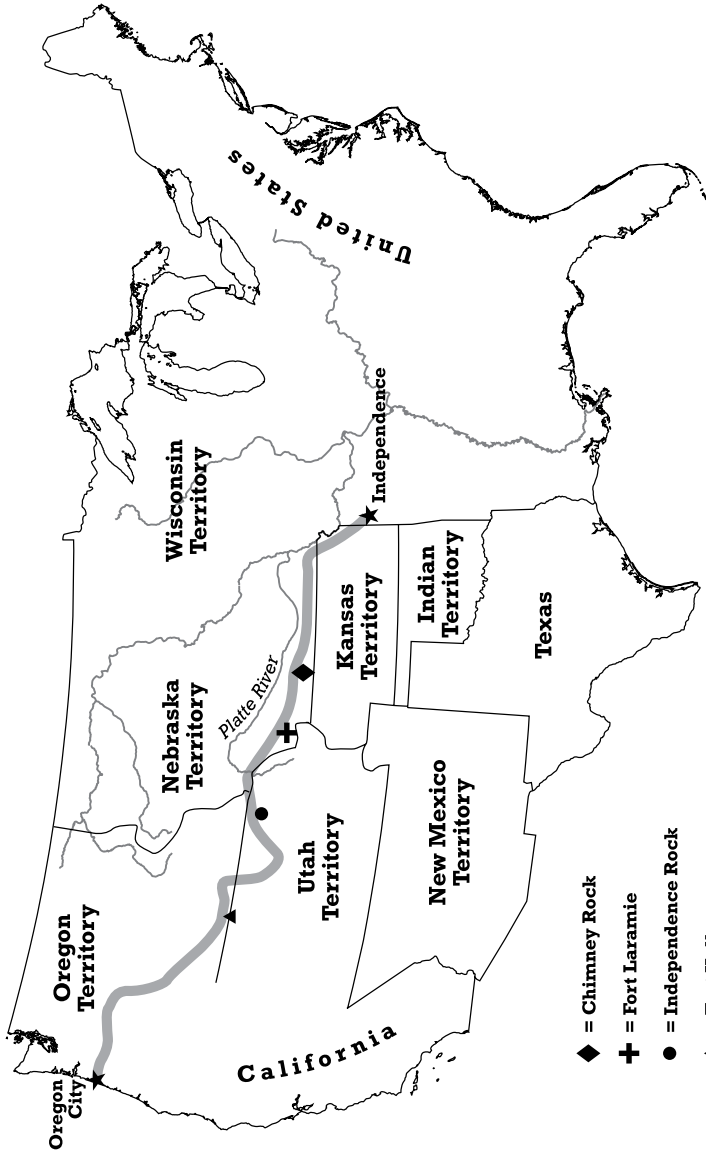
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- ◆ = Chimney Rock
- ⊕ = Fort Laramie
- = Independence Rock
- ▲ = Fort Hall

## THE OREGON TRAIL

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A Fresh Start**

“Ben, how would you like to go west to Oregon?”

Pa asked.

Ben stared at his father. “Go to Oregon? You mean leave our home and leave the store?”

Pa owned a big store here in busy Independence, Missouri. It was where the trail to Oregon began in 1851. People came down the Missouri River and got off here. Then they bought supplies and wagons for the long trip. Pa and Ben were always busy in their store for the day.

“Each day I sell flour and beans to men going to Oregon. I hear them say how rich the land is there. They say you can get 640 acres *free!*”

“What about Ma and little Ann?” Ben asked.

“Does Ma want to go?”

“Yes and no,” Pa said. “She will miss her friends and Gram and Gramps. But she wants to have our own farm. A wagon train leaves next week. They have room for us.”

“But that’s so soon! Can we get ready by then?” Ben asked.

“We have to. Time is short. It takes five months to get to Oregon. This is May. We must be off the trail before the snow comes,” Pa said. “I’ve heard awful tales of people trapped all winter.”

“Do we have a wagon yet?” asked Ben.

“I will buy one today and oxen to pull it. We must sell this store to get money for the trip. Two men want to buy it,” Pa told Ben. “We are lucky. It will cost a lot of money to get the food we need.” He took out a long list.

Ben read over his shoulder. “Seventy-five pounds of bacon for each of us? Two hundred pounds of flour! Do we really need that much?”

“Five months is a long time,” Pa said. “Oregon is two thousand miles away. We’ll work hard and get hungry. The food will go fast. Well, I’m off to see about our wagon now. Oh, I thought you’d like to know this. The Wood family is going to Oregon, too. So you’ll have

Tom with you to enjoy all the new sights.”

“Tom is coming! Good!” Ben watched Pa leave the store. Now he was alone. He felt strange. My whole life just changed, he thought. I’m going to Oregon. It’s all decided. I might never come back here. I might never see Gram and Gramps again.

What about the *Indians*? I’ve heard that some of them are friendly. But some are not. They are afraid of losing their lands. Sometimes they attack wagon trains. What if Ma or little Ann were captured? Maybe Pa will let me have a rifle! I’ll be twelve soon. Tom and I could help guard the wagon train. There was so much to think about! Ben couldn’t wait to see Tom.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Wagons Roll!**

Dust was all over. It was in your mouth, hair, eyes. People yelled. Dogs barked. Cows bellowed. Whips cracked. The wagon train was about to leave.

Ben stood by his family's big wagon. He held tight to his dog. And he held the reins for Pa's horse. Pa was up in the driver's seat with Ma and Ann. The team of six new oxen were "yoked up" to the wagon. Five milk cows were tied behind. They would walk to Oregon. They would

give fresh milk and butter along the trail.

Ben looked for the Woods' wagon. He and Tom planned to meet at lunch time. It felt good to have Tom on the trip. They were going to fish and hunt. But they had to get rifles first. Soon Ben would ask Pa.

A man called Frank Wade was captain of the wagon train. The people had chosen him that day. He was a tall, strong man. But he did not seem friendly.

A scout named Jed would help the captain. He wore buckskin clothes and rode a fast horse. Scouts knew how to get along with Indians. This was why wagon trains hired them. Ben wondered when they would see their first Indians.

Suddenly there was a loud gunshot. It was time to go! People cheered. Pa cracked his whip. The wagons began to roll. They were off to Oregon! Ben felt his heart pound. He looked up at Ma. She had tears in her eyes as she held tight to Ann. Last night they had said good-bye to Gram and Gramps. Maybe forever. It was a hard time. But this morning was better. Ma was smiling now. She waved at Ben as he walked beside the wagon. Ann held her old cat in her lap.

The wagons rolled in a long line of twenty-five. Ben's family was tenth in line. Each day they got a new number. In this way people took turns being in back with the dust.

Ben felt proud of their wagon. How did they

get it all packed in just one week? There was not a bit of room left inside. Huge sacks of rice, beans, sugar, flour, and bacon were piled up. And Ma's spinning wheel and trunks, too. Her best dishes were packed in big barrels.

The wagon was covered on top with strong white canvas. The wagon "box" was made of wood. There were four large wooden wheels, too. A toolbox hung on the side. A feedbag for the cows was on back.

It's like a little house, Ben thought. All the things we need are right here. Tonight we'll camp out. This is going to be fun! Maybe Tom can share my tent!

The wagons rolled along the trail through

green fields and woods. The sun was warm. People were glad to begin the trip.

“Nooner!” the cry soon went up. The wagons stopped. People got out boxes of food. They sat down in a grassy meadow.

“I’m sure hungry!” Pa said. He put on some coffee to boil. “Good fire, Ben!”

Ben smiled. He knew the fire would be one of his big jobs on the trip.

“Ginger snaps!” cried Ann. She reached for a red tin box.

“Not until you eat your beans and beef,” Ma said. “Just like at home.”

Ben took a slice of bread. “Will you still bake out here?” he asked Ma.

“Of course! I’ll bake in a big pot over the fire,” she told him.

“Bread in a *pot*?” Ben asked.

“Yes! You’ll love it!” Ma said.

“And roast rabbit, too,” said Pa. “We’ll have to shoot a lot of our meat.”

Maybe this is a good time to ask about the rifle, Ben thought.

“Can I help hunt, Pa?” he asked. “I’m going to be twelve soon.”

“We’ll see. You might be good with a rifle. And I might need your help. We don’t know what’s ahead,” Pa said.

“You mean *Indians*?” asked Ann.

“No, no, Ann. Now don’t you worry.” Pa got

up and poured his coffee. Then he walked down to the stream.

Well, he didn't say no about the rifle, Ben thought. But he is worried about Indians. I can sure see that.

“Chain up!” The captain yelled. Break was over. Frank wanted to make fifteen miles a day. “No rest days,” he said. Ben knew Frank would be a tough leader. He would push them hard.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Pawnees!**

The prairie! They were on it now. It was like an endless wide green sea of long grass. The blades of grass moved like waves in the wind.

“Look at that!” Pa said. “Now we’re really in the West. It sure is pretty land.”

Ben felt great. He was driving the team with Ma. Pa was riding beside the wagon. The trail had changed. This land was not like home at all. There were no trees anywhere.

Ma took off her big sunbonnet. “I want to



see it all. This old hat lets me just look straight ahead!” she laughed.

It felt good to see Ma laugh. Ben knew she missed home. But she was happy today. This was all new land. It was a new world.

All of a sudden Ben's friend Tom rode up. “Indians!” He pointed. They could see four men ride to meet the wagons. The wagons stopped. Frank and the scout, Jed, rode up to the men. They all got off their horses. The Indians and wagon men handed things back and forth.

“They’re Pawnees. They have come to trade,” Pa said. “I hear they’re friendly. Ma, get out one of your mirrors. They might like it.”

Soon the Pawnees were right up close. They



*All of a sudden Ben's friend Tom rode up.  
"Indians!" He pointed.*

looked strong, with bare chests and deerskin pants. Their long hair was tied behind their backs.

Pa got off his horse and put out his hand. The Pawnees all shook it and smiled. Then they pointed to Pa's red shirt. They held out a thick robe made of buffalo fur.

“Pa, they want your shirt!” Ma said. “Give it to them. I'll make you a new one. That robe looks so warm!”

Pa took off his shirt and gave it to the Pawnees. They were so happy. Each one wanted to wear it. They gave Pa the robe and Ma and Ann some blue beads.

“I'll give them the mirror,” Ma said. She held it up, and the Pawnees let out a yell. All

their hands reached up for it.

Then the Pawnees gave Ben and Tom two bear claws on strings.

“Look at the size of this claw!” Tom said.  
“Must be from a grizzly bear!”

The boys put on their gifts and shook hands with the Pawnees. Ben looked down at the bear claw he wore. He did not want to forget this day. Now he did not feel afraid of the Indians. He saw that they were people just like him. For the first time he thought, this is *their* land. Why are they treating us so well?