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# The Grand Ronde Trail of Tears

Exploring the 1856 Diary of Agent George Ambrose



# Who was Agent George H. Ambrose?

## Background

- Emigrated to Oregon, along with his wife Ellen Frances, in 1850
- They filed a Donation Land Claim Act and settled in Jackson County in 1852
- Took over administration of the Rogue Valley Indian Agency in 1853
- **February 1856** - Following the national policy of removal and relocation, Ambrose set in place the plan of Superintendent Joel Palmer directed the removal of the surviving Native Peoples of the Rogue River Valley

## Journal

- Documents the journey northward via the Applegate Trail
- Fact-centered and displays little emotions
- Shares accounts of inadequate supplies, weather, fear, and deaths
- Describes the pursuit of self-styled executioner Timeleon Love, who was chasing the party in attempt to execute the Native Peoples

# Timeline: 1846-1852

## 1846-1852

- Flood of emigrants via the Applegate Trail into Native homelands\*
- Discovery of gold on Jackson Creek in early 1852 brought more settlers
- Miners and pioneers settled in the region as a result of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act of 1850

**Results:** Ecological disruption and destruction of resources needed for Native Peoples' survival

- Building of fences\*\*
- Suppression of Indian fire ecology necessary for hunting/gathering
- Farm animals feeding on traditional plants
- Increased mud and river disruption, causing detrimental impacts to salmon and eel runs as well as fishing grounds
- Settlers' use of firearms to hunt animals\*\*\*

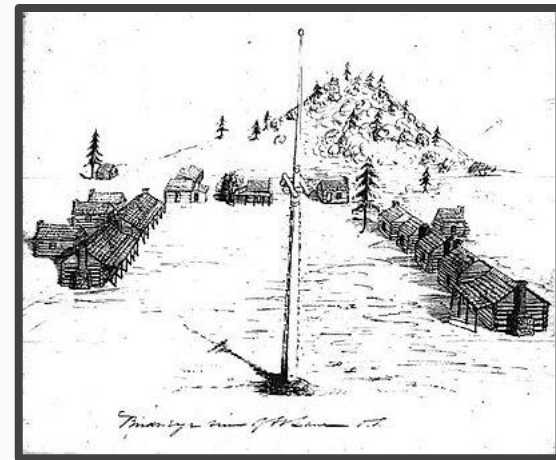


19th Century Gold Mine on Jackson Creek

# Timeline: 1853-1856

## 1853-1856

- **1853** - Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) negotiated treaties with the Native Peoples of the Rogue River Valley and created the temporary Table Rock Reservation
  - Fraction of their original territory
  - Lacked resources
  - Soldiers at Fort Lane proved inadequate to stop trespassers and self-styled “exterminators” who murdered and massacred Native Peoples.
- **Disease:** Along with the removal of land and resources, Native Peoples were also exposed to a plethora of diseases during this removal and relocation
  - Measles, influenza, etc.
  - Killed Native Peoples by the dozen and in some cases, wiped out entire villages
- **October 1855:** Table Rock Reservation attacked by “exterminators” from the Jacksonville Mining Camp. This sparks the beginning of the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856
  - Loss of many lives and the fleeing of many able-bodied Native Americans west into the canyon



Sketch of Fort Lane

# The Journey

The Rogue River and Chasta Tribes were the first to be removed (*taq*) from their aboriginal lands. They were joined by members of other Tribes and bands as the march passed other tribal homelands.

Native people were gathered up near Ft. Lane, at the base of Table Rock (near present day Medford) and forced to march during the wintertime (*khul-ili?i*) months beginning February 23 through March 25, 1856, to the Grand Ronde (*shawash-ili?i*) Indian Reservation.

## TIMELINE:

**February 23, 1856:** 325 Native Americans left the Table Rock Reservation.

**March 25, 1856:** Arrived at the Grand Ronde Reservation around 4PM.

33 days (*sans*)

263 miles

8 deaths (*chaku-hilu*)

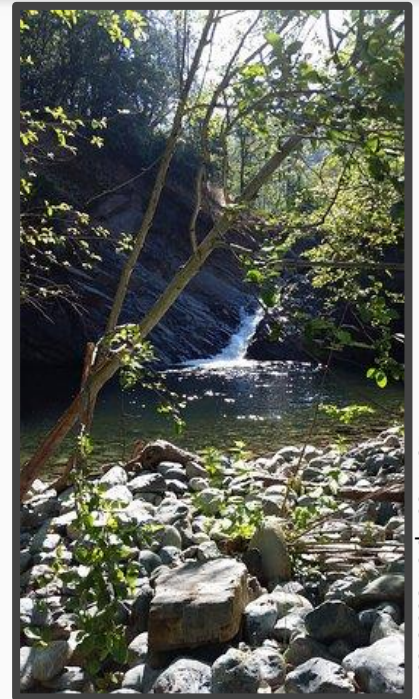
8 births (*t'lap-tanas*)

# February 23rd Saturday (1856)

*“The weather still continues pleasant. **It was found necessary to have more teams than at first contemplated.** I accordingly proceeded to Jacksonville for that purpose, and also to provide some articles, such as clothing and blankets to add to the comfort of the Indians, although the weather is sett down as pleasant. It certainly would be regarded as such, especially at this season of the year, however the nights are quite frosty and the mornings cool, sufficiently so, to render it necessary that they should be provided with **Tents, Blankets, shoes** & such necessities as would tend to promote their comfort while on their journey which being procured the day was spent in distributing the articles among them. **Also two additional teams were secured to convey the sick, aged, and infirm. Our teams now number eight which I fear will not be sufficient.** Thirty four Indians are disabled from traveling by reason of Sickness aside from the aged and infirm, who will as a matter of course have to be hauled.”*

# February 29th Thursday (1856)

*"Frosty and cool again this morning. While about preparing to leave camp some person killed an Indian who had wandered off some distance from camp in search of his horse which had strayed off during the night, which had caused some **excitement** among the Indians as it went to prove the statement previously made by some **evil disposed persons**, to wit: that they would be killed by the way. We learned this morning that a **party of evil disposed persons** have gone in advance of us, as os supposed to annoy us, or kill some friendly Indians. A messenger was immediately dispatched to Capt. Smith at Fort Lane for additional force to escort us to thro[ugh] the Canyon if it should be found necessary. We also learned that an individual by the name of Timeleon Love was the person who killed the Indian this morning and that he composes of the party that had just passed. We drove today a distance of eleven miles and encamped on the bank of Jump Off Jo[e] Creek where we will most probably remain till the arrival of Capt. Smith."*



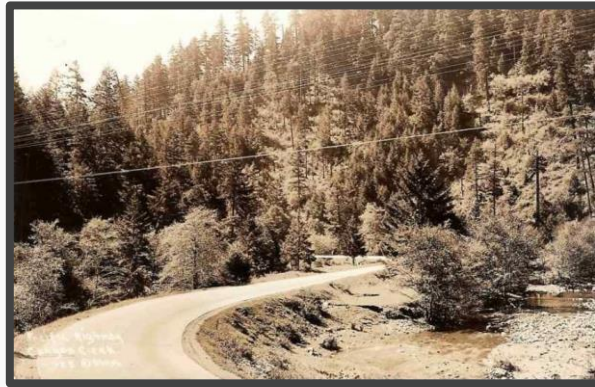
2017: Jump Off Joe Creek



# March 3rd & March 5th (Monday & Wednesday)

## March 3rd

*"The mornings still continue quite cool & frosty; our rout[e] lay almost directly North over somewhat better ground than for two days previous. Our cattle was jaded considerable by our continuous marches, without forage or grass, neither of which could be procured. We drove a distance of seven miles & encamped just within the mouth of the canyon."*



Entering the Canyon from the north, circa 1930

## March 5th

*"The Indians remained in camp today at the mouth of Canyon creek awaiting the arrival of the wagons about three or four o'clock in the evening they made their appearance. The cattle very much jaded & tired as no forage could be had. I secured the best pasture I could find and turned them in that. An Indian girl died this evening. We are now a distance of eleven miles from our camp of the evening of the third being occupied two days in making it. Mr. Love who still continues to follow us was arrested and put under guard."*

# March 7th Friday

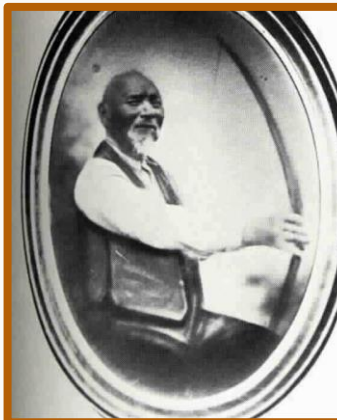
*“The weather still continued cool and frosty of nights and pleasant thru the day. Our road today hilly & in places quite rocky. An Indian woman died this morning & the number of sick increasing. It was found necessary to hire or buy another team. I soon procured one & continued our march. We drove today a distance of ten miles & encamped in Round Prairie on the South Umpqua yet.”*



Round Prairie - Douglas County, Oregon

# March 12th - March 24th

- Weather
- Lost cattle
- Conditions of trail
- Brief mentions of death
- Although not mentioned often by Ambrose, the Native Peoples on the trail faced illness, exhaustion, hunger, and physical injury.
- “It almost makes me shed tears to listen to them as they totter along,” observed Lt. E.O.C. Ord who witnessed one of these removals.



# Final Entry: March 25th Tuesday

*“Clear & pleasant we got an early start this morning and after driving hard all day reach the reservation about four o’clock in the evening after driving a distance of sixteen miles, so ends my journey & journal after a period of thirty three days in which time we traveled a distance of two hundred & sixty miles started with three hundred and ninety-five Indians. Eight deaths and eight births leaving the number the same as when we started.”*

*“Left behind were the bones of parents, grandparents, and ancestors, ages-old villages and fisheries, and a way of life well-tuned to the rhythms of a beautiful land.”*

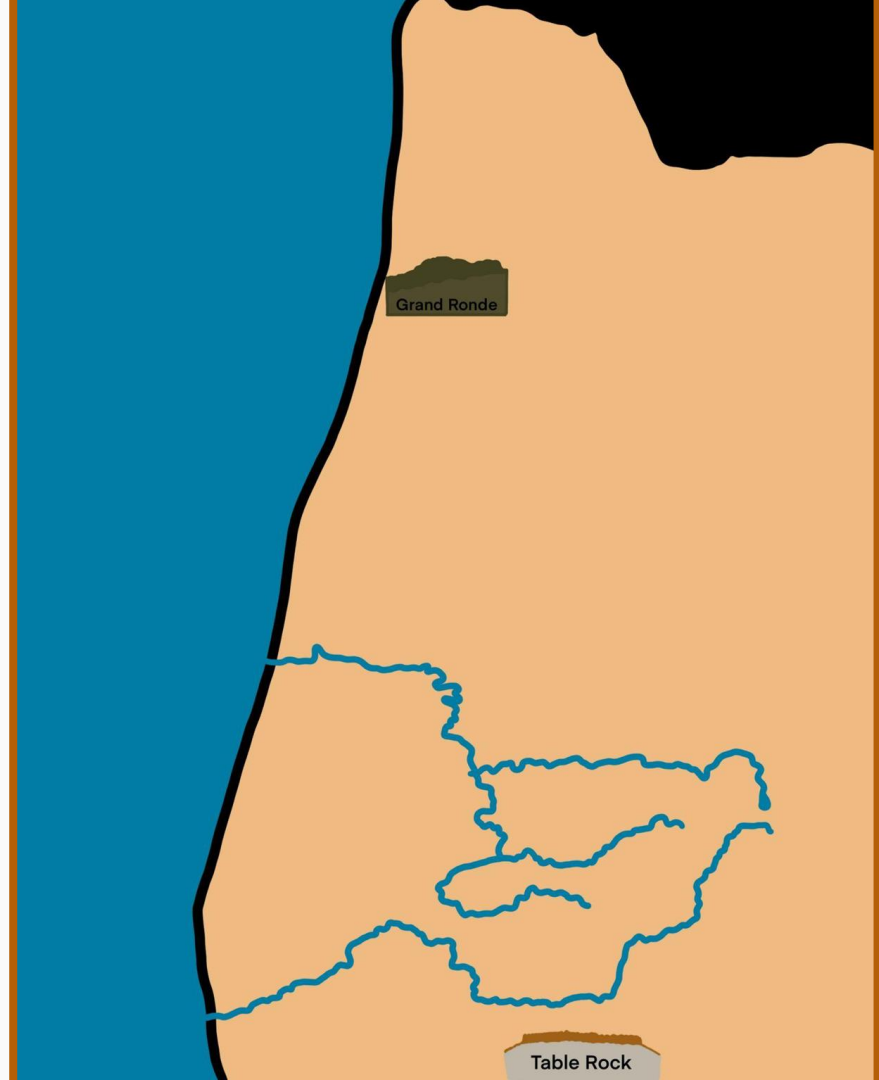
# Activity

The information provided about the Oregon Trail of Tears comes almost entirely from the viewpoint of the White United States Federal Agents escorting the Native Peoples from the Table Rock Reservation to the Grand Ronde Reservation.

What we are missing is the Native American perspective. Based on what you have learned about the trail and the hardships endured by the Native Peoples on the journey, write a journal entry map from the Native American perspective. Use the Trail of Tears map on [Slide 6](#) as an example.

# What to Include:

- Route
- Important Landmarks
- Important Cities
- 8 Journal Entries from the Native American perspective
- **Optional:** Small symbols to identify different events along the trail



# EXTENSION:

## Explore Ambrose's Journal Entries

Visit the website: <https://www.grandronde.org/history-culture/>

OR

Scan the QR Code on this page

- Scroll down to "Our Land"
- Use the slider to read journal entries from dates along the trail

