



\$ SITE FEES & HOURS

Free Admission. Open year 'round, sunrise to sunset daily.

✓ PLEASE REMEMBER

- Please keep vehicles on existing roads.
- Obey posted signs and traffic barriers.
- firearms and fireworks are not permitted.
- Pets must be on a leash at all times.
- Please dispose of trash in containers provided.
- Overnight camping is not permitted.
- Digging is prohibited.
- Use of metal detectors is not allowed.

For a complete listing of State Park rules and regulations, visit Park Headquarters at Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park.



Pioneers traveling to Oregon, California and Utah, as well as Pony Express riders carrying mail across the nation, all know Independence Rock as one of the most important landmarks on the journey west.



Independence Rock State Historic Site is administered by the Division of State Parks, Historic Sites and Trails; Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

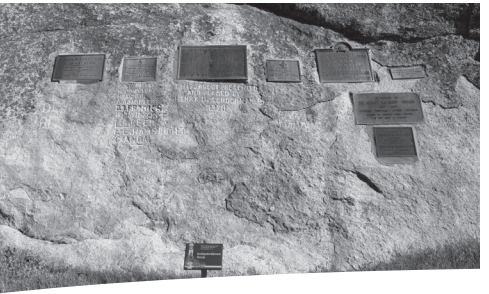


Photo by Jeremy Theis

🕒 HISTORY

This granite monolith is one of the more famous landmarks along the Oregon Trail and has served as a meeting place since the area was first inhabited. Independence Rock was an important place for the Indians, who first lived here.

This giant igneous formation of feldspar and mica found its way into many native legends, and later, into the diaries of many westbound pioneers. The first Europeans to visit the rock were members of Robert Stuart's expedition in 1812. It is Stuart who is generally credited with discovery of the route, which became known as the Oregon Trail. Stuart's diary indicated that he visited the site on October 30, 1812.

Stuart, however, did not name this giant rock. That honor is credited to William Sublette, who held an Independence Day celebration here on July 4, 1830, as he led the first wagon train to cross the new overland route. Before an audience of 80 pioneers, he christened the rock in honor of the birth date of the United States.

Independence Rock is most famous for the names inscribed on its face: the names and dates of people who passed by this place in search of a new life in the frontier. It was the

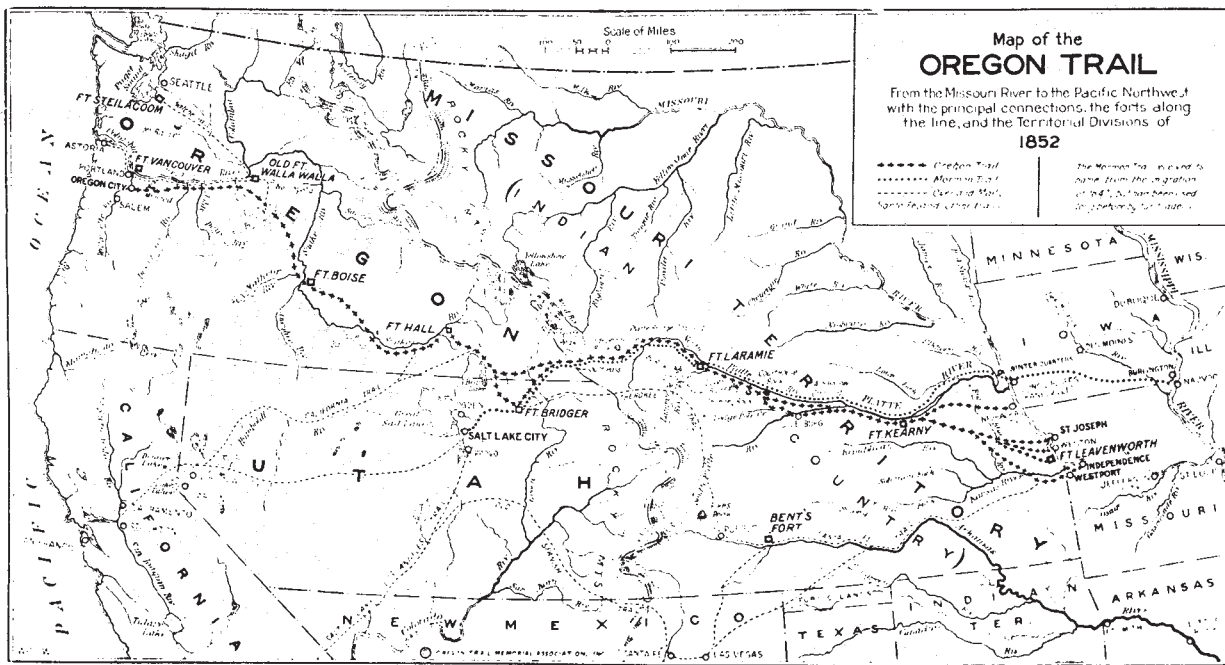
names carved in stone here that caused Father Peter J. DeSmet to appropriately name this place "The Register of the Desert" in 1840. As you walk around the rock, you will see hundreds of names carved or chipped into the surface. Possibly one of the earliest signatures to be found here is that of "M.K. Hugh, 1824." Other early names include "Hanna Snow, 1844," "G. Gingham, 1846," "J. Bower, 1847," "Milo Ayer, age 29, 1849," "W.H. Collins, July 4, 1862," and "V.D. Moody, July 24, 1849."

🌟 WELCOME

Many of the travelers left their names on this rock, either carved or painted in axle grease. We ask you as modern day travelers to help us protect this historic landmark. Feel free to walk around the site and even on top to appreciate the view the pioneers would have seen as they passed through this area. But please do not take away the historical significance of this site by placing your signature on the rock or destroying the ones that are still visible. It's up to all of us to help save what remains here for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

📍 LOCATION AND HOURS

Located off Hwy. 220, 55 miles southwest of Casper, Independence Rock provides a view of the names of past travelers carved on the dome-shaped rock along the Oregon Trail.



Charted Routes of Pioneer Days

➤ **MORMON PIONEER TRAIL**

The initial movement of the Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the valley of the Great Salt Lake occurred in two segments – one in 1846 and one in 1847. The first leg of the journey across Iowa to the Missouri River covered about 265 miles. The second leg, from the Missouri River to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, covered about 1,032 miles. The second leg of the journey began on April 5, 1847, and ended on July 24, 1847.

This part of the trip went smoother than the previous year’s journey because of better organization, better provisions and beginning when the trail conditions were optimal. The lead pioneer party left with 148 people (143 men, 3 women and 2 young boys), 72 wagons, 93 horses, 66 oxen, 52 mules, 19 cows, 17 dogs, and some chickens. This hand-picked group was organized into two large divisions and further split into companies of 50 and 10. This organizational

structure was based on Brigham Young’s plan for migrating West, and included details on camp behavior and devotional practices to be followed.

At Fort Laramie, the Mormons crossed to the south side of the river and joined the Oregon Trail. At Fort Bridger State Historic Site, they struck out on their own and followed the faint older tracks of the ill-fated Donner-Reed party. The last 116 miles took 14 days to complete and were very demanding because of difficult terrain, weary travelers, worn wagons and weakened livestock. Upon arriving at the Valley, this first party began planting late crops, laying out streets, building shelters and preparing for winter. Mormon emigrants continued to arrive during the remaining weeks of summer and fall.

Approximately 1,650 people spent their first winter in the valley. The next 20 years would see 70,000 Mormons traveling by wagon and handcarts over the Mormon Pioneer Trail.

➤ **ROCK HARD FACTS**

Independence Rock stands 6,028 feet (1,808.3 m) above sea level. The rock’s tallest point is 136 feet (40.8 m) above the surrounding terrain. The distance around the base of this rock is more than a mile, or 5,900 feet (1.8 km). Independence Rock’s mass is equal to an area of 24.81 acres (9.924 ha).

Many people believe that the shape of this highly polished round outcropping was created by glaciers. Actually, a process known as “exfoliation” is how the rock got its sleek, round form.

As Independence Rock was slowly uncovered by erosion, the immense pressures of the weight of overlying rock were gradually lessened. The rock then expanded outwardly, shedding its surface layers like an onion. Layers of granite gradually broke off and formed the now rounded shape.

Windblown sand and silt have grooved the rock and polished it to a high gloss in a process called “windfaceting.” This smooth surface enabled the pioneers to carve their names into the rock.

➤ **A POPULAR STOP**

Trappers, emigrants, traders, religious leaders, followers – and just about everybody else who passed this way – walked around and all over this turtleshell-like outcropping of granite. That means that just about every person of the 550,000 or so now estimated to have used the Oregon Trail marveled at this unique formation.

➤ **GETTING THERE ON TIME**

Each wagon train heading west tried to time its start so the spring grass would be sufficient to support the animals without delaying too long to risk the early snows in the mountains. Consequently, everyone was on the trail at the same time.

The emigrants used the race to arrive at the rock by the Fourth of July. A huge celebration would then take place upon their arrival with sounds of gunfire, boisterous drinking and patriotic oration.

➤ **NATIVE HOSTILITY**

One of the myths of the Oregon Trail was that groups of hostile Indians preyed upon emigrants. Out of all the wagon trains that traversed on the trail, only 350 people out of many hundreds of thousands were killed by Indian attacks.

Why the natives did not bother the pioneers at Independence Rock is only a guess. The area seemed to be a “neutral zone,” even though diary accounts of pioneers relate tales of wandering bands of Indians who would trail by the rock at times.

➤ **PROMINENT FEATURES**

To the west are several prominent natural features once used as emigrant trail guides. Following Wyoming 220 South to your right you will notice the Sweetwater River making an abrupt turn. At the point where the river flows through a granite ridge is the location of Devil’s Gate. The river here has cut a chasm 330 feet deep. It is 400 feet wide at the top, but only 30 feet wide at the bottom.

Twenty miles south of Independence Rock is the Muddy Gap intersection. Turn north on Wyoming 789/US 287 and eight miles down the road you will find another famous landmark, known as Split Rock. Its summit is 7,305 feet. The notch resembles a gun sight when viewed from either the east or west, and it is visible for more than 50 miles.

➤ **CROSSING THE RIVER**

Heading north on Wyoming 220 takes you past Emigrant Gap and into Casper, a distance of 40 miles. In southwest Casper along the banks of the North Platte River sits Fort Caspar (accessible via Wyoming 258). It is here where many emigrants crossed the river and continued on their journey toward South Pass and Oregon. A Mormon Ferry operated here as early as 1847.