

Subject: Travalong 2015

‘Wagons West’

By: Travalong Directors, Jim & Barb Turner

With Campvention 2015’s theme being ‘Wagons West,’ the 2015 Travalong followed the western movement as the early pioneers did, sort of. As each unit made their own reservations, the program promoted ‘drop in/drop out’ along the route. Several did just that. It worked well. Twelve families participated. Two nights was the shortest stop, 4 nights was the longest, with 3 nights at most stops.

The Travalong began in Ft. Scott, KS which was established and garrisoned by the U.S. Army from 1842–1853. Soldiers at Fort Scott assisted with the protection of the Permanent Indian Frontier. By 1853 other forts had been established for protection of travelers west. The buildings were sold, and the town of Ft. Scott was established. The Travalong explored the historic city as well as newer additions. The Gordon Parks Center for Culture & Diversity displaying the life of native Gordon Parks who was an African-American photographer, musician, writer and film director was visited by the group. He is best remembered for his photographic essays for Life magazine and as the director of the 1971 movie ‘Shaft.’ The Lowell Milken Education Center was an important stop. The center works with schools around the world to teach respect and understanding among all people by developing projects about unsung heroes whose actions promote these values, regardless of race, religion, and creed. The Irena Sendler Project was the impetus for founding the center. Irena Sendler was an unsung hero of the Warsaw Ghetto. Three students of Uniontown, KS High School ‘discovered’ her. Read ‘Life in a Jar’ to discover their story with Irena. We were privileged to attend the 351st performance of ‘Life in a Jar.’ What a profound impression it made on our group.

The next stop was St. Joseph, MO, situated on the Missouri River and was the ‘jumping off place’ as it was the last supply point for the pioneers going west to the Oregon Territory. It was also the westernmost point in the United States accessible by rail until after the Civil War. And, it was the eastern terminus of the short-lived Pony Express. (April 1860 to October 1861) The Travalong group toured historic St. Joe and envisioned the rowdy frontier town of the mid-1800s. The Patee House Museum was fabulous. The Pony Express Museum was very informative about the short-lived company.

For a ‘change of pace,’ the next stop was Belleville, KS to visit the Boyer Museum of Animated Carvings which thoroughly captivated the group. The imagination of Paul Boyer and his creations are mechanical wonders. The MarCon pies in nearby Washington, KS intrigued the group and whetted their appetite for pie. The company was started by two ladies in their kitchens as a means of making extra money. The popularity of their pies grew from their kitchens to a converted garage and with subsequent additions. The day our group was there they had made 380 pies that had been ordered by restaurants and groceries. That was a slow day. Kearney, NE was the next stop where the group visited old Ft. Kearney, an outpost along the Oregon Trail to protect the settlers moving west. Of interest, also, in Kearney was Archway Museum which is built in two levels across I-80. What an amazing museum with wonderful

technical visuals that placed us in the middle of a buffalo stampede as well as watching the Pony Express rider coming across the plains to the station, switching horses, and going on his way. On the 'off' day several toured other museums, including the Pioneer Village at nearby Minden. Sidney, NE was the next to last stop of the Travalong. Sidney is the home of Cabela's, an outfitters supply store chain. The group enjoyed parking in the Cabela's RV Park next to the store. Yes, store visits! We visited the two original buildings of Ft. Sidney which in the mid - 1870's became a major strategic point as the initial supply depot on the Sidney-Black Hills Trail. Throughout the mid -1870's supplies and passengers traveled the trail to the Red Cloud Indian Agency and beyond to the Black Hills gold fields. The group also enjoyed the car show/festival in nearby Potter, NE, population 337.

The final stop of the Travalong was the Pony Soldier RV Park, Lingle, WY near historic Ft. Laramie, the Oregon Trail wagon ruts, and Register Cliff. Ft. Laramie was a significant 19th century trading post and diplomatic site located at the confluence of the Laramie River and the North Platte River. Founded in the 1830s to service the overland fur trade during the middle 19th century, it sat at the bottom of the long climb leading to the best and lowest crossing point at South Pass into western descending valleys and so was a primary stopping point on the Oregon Trail. The pioneers rested and re-supplied before the next phase of their journey west. As the pioneers did, we left the fort with our next stop west to the Oregon Trail Wagon Ruts, a preserved site of wagon ruts of the Oregon Trail on the North Platte River. The Oregon Trail here was winding up towards South Pass. Wagon wheels, draft animals, and people wore down the trail about two to six feet into a sandstone ridge here during its heavy usage from 1841-1869. The half-mile stretch is the best-preserved set of Oregon Trail ruts anywhere along its former length.

The last stop was Register Cliff (about 12 miles from the fort), a sandstone cliff and featured key navigational landmark prominently listed in the 19th century guidebooks about the Oregon Trail and a place where many emigrants chiseled the names of their families on the soft stones of the cliff. It was one of the key checkpoint landmarks for parties heading west along the Platte River valley west of Ft. Laramie which allowed travelers to verify they were on the correct path up to South Pass and not moving into impassable mountain terrain. It is notable as a historic landmark for 'registering' hundreds of emigrants on the Oregon. An estimated 500,000 emigrants used these trails (Oregon, California, Mormon Trails) from 1843-1869, with up to one-tenth dying along the way, usually due to disease.

The Travalong followed the western trails toward Oregon from the Missouri River to the Ft. Laramie area where it stopped to turn north to Gillette and Campvention 2015. As Travalong Directors, we want to thank those families who traveled with us. It was a pleasure to have you on our 'Wagons West' adventure to Campvention 2015.

Link to Travalong pix:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/107910190450964016753/Travalong2015?authkey=Gv1sRgCMqD1ubOk8-naQ>