



BLACK ROCK DESERT
HIGH ROCK CANYON
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Women in the West

- There are over 800 published diaries entries written by women who traveled the emigrant trails.
- These diaries have shown us that most of the women were determined to be equal to the men, and share the chores each day brought. In addition to the domestic chores of preparing the meals, washing the clothes, and watching over the children, they were also expected to drive the teams, and collect "buffalo chips" for fuel.
- In many wagon train groups, once every couple of weeks the women spent a full day doing the wash.
- The average age for a woman to get married during the mid-1800's was 20, and the average age for men to be married was 25.
- About one out of every five emigrant women was in some stage of pregnancy during the trip and practically every married woman traveled with small children.
- This at a time when there was a definite lack of privacy, and when such topics were taboo. In many of the women's diaries the pregnancy was not even mentioned, they just noted the arrival of a baby.
- Women were considered young ladies when they reached the age of 13 or 14, and it was common for a 15 year old woman to be married.
- 1852 was the "Year of the Bloomer," although few women emigrants wore this new fashion item. The bloomer offered a woman the chance to become more practical in regard to attire during their overland journey.
- Toilet facilities were not typically mentioned in journals written along the Oregon Trail. There are suggestions that the full skirts worn by most ladies acted as shields or "curtains of modesty" for this purpose. Bloomers would not provide this advantage.



Woman at Auburn Ravine (CA).
Photo courtesy California State Library.

Information obtained from the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/whmi/educate/ortrtg/ortrtg4.htm>.

