



BLACK ROCK DESERT
HIGH ROCK CANYON
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

CHILDREN ON THE TRAIL

Children on the Trail Interpretive Skit

Narrator:

Hello, my name is Beatrice, and I am here to tell you about what it was like when my family took that long wagon trail all the way from Philadelphia, where I came up, out to Pleasant Valley, Oregon. We left Philadelphia in March of 1847 and arrived in Independence, Missouri at the end of May. We visited my aunt and stocked up on supplies before leaving Independence about a week later and heading west for a stretch of the Oregon Trail called the Applegate Trail.

I want to tell you about a day that sticks out in my mind. It was the highest point in August and I was about 14, and my brother, Dennis, was about 10. So let's start with my diary entry from that morning....

Focus should turn from narrator to the "set" where Beatrice is sitting outside her wagon leaning against the wheel using a candle for light to write in her diary, she suddenly stops and reads out loud to herself:

Beatrice:

Aug. 14th 1847
3:30am
Antelope Springs, Applegate Trail

Yesterday we left the Humboldt River and headed out west about 13 or 14 miles to Antelope Springs. I can't figure why, but Mother and Father decided that this "Applegate Trail" would be the best way for us to strike out towards Oregon. But to me, it seems to be difficult to find water. It's only been one day, but it seems like the land is as parched as my lips. The day started out rather easy on the road across Lassen's Meadow, where we spent the evening before. About 10 miles in the road became much harder as we entered the gap in the mountains. Lucky for us, we only had to travel about three or four miles until we found Antelope Springs. We were all plum tuckered from the day's travel and did not know how far the next water hole would be, so we waited in line for water, and when it was our turn, found barely enough to water the thirstiest oxen and our cow, Betty.





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As she finishes reading her entry we hear a single gun shot signaling that it is 4 a.m. Beatrice rushes to get her things in order and places them in the back of the wagon before she goes to wake up her brother who was sleeping next to her under the wagon.

Beatrice:
Dennis.

She shakes him.

Dennis. Wake up, it's almost ten after four, and we need to get all set up!

Dennis stirs, and rubs his eyes.

Dennis:
Sis, I was in the middle of a dream about home! I'm sick of getting up so early!

Beatrice:
I know, I know! But we have to! And besides we only have another month or so before we get to Oregon, and Uncle John is already there waiting for us. I bet you he throws us a bid ol' feast when we get there....

During this time Beatrice and Dennis are gathering up their bedding, putting on their shirts and shoes, and generally just cleaning up all of their stuff (candles, books and Dennis' most precious possession: his teddy bear).

Dennis:
(Imagining the feast.)

With a mess of turkey and potatoes and ham and beans and I've got a hankering for pie!

Beatrice:
Cherry pie and blueberry pie and pumpkin pie!

Mother:
BEATRICE! Can you milk Betty for me? I want to have more than just a dollop of but-



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ter by night! And tell your brother that his father is hollerin' for him to help with the oxen.

Beatrice:

You better find Father, Bub. I'm going to go and find the milk can. Bye.

Dennis:

Bye, Sis.

Beatrice leaves Dennis tying his shoes on a rock on the far side of the wagon, and heads around to the back to rummage through their stuff to find the milk jug. As she turns around to the front of the wagon, milk can in hand, she hears her mother and father talking while Mother is preparing flapjacks.

Mother:

We don't know how far the next water source is, and the water here is ever so scarce!
Oh for land's sake, I cannot wait for this trip to be over!

Father:

I know it's hard, but this is what we wanted for the children. It will be better there. Uncle John is there and I am sure that he has already bought us a plot of land that is at least a hundred acres. And I know it will be beautiful, with thousands of towering trees, and little flowing springs—oh can't you just see it?

Mother:

I've heard it from you about a hundred times, but I find it hard to think on the end when we are in the middle of a desert. I mean really now, it was a hundred degrees yesterday if you was to ask me. Here we are in the middle of nothing with so little water, I hope it's a bit cooler today.

Father:

Don't worry, it will all be OK! Beatrice is here, and I'm going to go and rustle up Dennis and get the oxen hitchin' done. DENNIS!

Narrator:

Father went to go and find Dennis. That morning was a might rare as it only took them about twenty minutes to hitch the oxen to the wagon, a lot of times it took





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longer than that because the oxen would be ornery and not want to cooperate.

Mother:

Betty is over by the Johnson's wagon chewin' up all kinds of things. B, will you bring her over here, and milk her for me? I need enough butter for breakfast and dinner to-night.

Beatrice:

Yes, Mother.

She hesitates.

Mother, are we going to have enough water to get through the desert?

Mother:

Oh honey, I did not mean to make you feel all-overish. I am sure we will be fine. Your father has everything all figured out. Go on now child, I need that milk.

Beatrice walks over to the Johnson's wagon, about three wagons down, and pulls Betty back over to their wagon. As she is milking Betty, Dennis pops up and scares her.

Dennis:

BOO!

Beatrice:

Darn it, Bub! You're crazy as a loon! And you're lucky that you didn't scare Betty here, she would have stopped giving milk if you had!

Dennis:

Chuckles.

I know, but you was lookin' so bored! Anyways, I need you to help me collect cow chips when you are done so Mother can cook breakfast.



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Beatrice:

Okay well let me just tote this milk to Mother, and set out the butter churn. Do you know where the dasher is?

Dennis:

I think it's aside the rice in the wagon, but I dunno, you should ask Mother!

Beatrice:

Okay, give me a moment and I'll be right out to help.

Narrator:

Well, just in case you were wondering, cow chips are actually cow droppings. Cow chips burn up a sight better than most of the other things you find on the trail. And a dasher is the handle to a butter churn. When you attach it to the wagon it functions like a plunger, mixing the milk as the wagon a rumbles and bumbles along the road, turning it into butter.

Beatrice runs over to the wagon and looks inside. Having found the dasher next to the rice, she closes the churn and attaches it to the wagon.

Beatrice:

Mother, I've got the milk on the wagon for when you need it, there should be plenty now! I'm going with Dennis to collect cow chips.

Mother:

Okay, hurry back, and don't go far!

Beatrice looks around to find Dennis behind a wagon two down from the Johnson's, having found a large collection of cow chips. Beatrice picks one up lazily.

Beatrice:

Hey Bub, want to play?

Dennis:

Sure, but not for long, I'm hungry and those flapjacks sound mighty tasty!

Dennis runs out into the desert a small ways and Beatrice throws the cow pie as if it





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were a Frisbee. They continue to play catch with it for two or three more tosses.

Narrator:

Wow, I remember tossing the cow chips; it was one of my favorite games back then. It was sort of like a frisbee, I think that is what they call it these days. Well anyways, back to where I was in the story!

Father:

BEATRICE, DENNIS! Let's eat, and then get your bodies out here, or we're going to be late!

Beatrice and Dennis:

Coming.

Beatrice and Dennis, gather up the cow chips and hurry on over to the wagon where breakfast is ready, and Mother and Father are almost finished eating. Beatrice and Dennis pick up plates, and begin to eat.

Beatrice:

Father, you think we'll be headin' far today?

Father:

I'm not sure honey, but I do know that we're headin' over to that mountain pass. Take a gander—you think we'll push to it?

Dennis:

That one over there? But that is so far away! We will never make it today!

Beatrice:

Don't be so loud Bub; you're going to wake up the baby and it's not only a quarter 'til five, you know.

Mother:

Its OK Dennis, I have to feed him up soon anyways, before we head out at five.



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Beatrice:

Anyways Father, I see it, and I have to agree with Bub, we will never make that today!

Father:

We have to do what we have to do. If we don't make it then we don't make it, but we have to try. So why don't we get our things together, and get on the road! Let's make today a good day! Shall we?

Beatrice and Dennis:

YES FATHER!

Narrator:

So after breakfast we packed up the rest of our gear, and around five o'clock in the morning, we headed off for Rabbit Hole Springs!

By noon time we were in need of stopping for lunch. We picked an area that was as flat as we could find, but it was near impossible as we had been traveling through a ravine all morning. Luckily we came to a sloping plain of sage, and the wagon train stopped for a rest. The sun was strong by this time of day, and you could see the weariness in the faces of the other travelers. This was easily the most difficult pass we had encountered on our trip thus far.

Beatrice:

Bub, Father is looking for you to unhitch the oxen from the wagons. I warrant he will be mighty upset to see that you have not done it yet.

Dennis:

For aught I know, Father has already unhitched them. I will go see if I can spy him. Is there much left to smack on? The walk this morning has left me pretty tired and as hungry as a Massachusetts criminal. I may need to shake the dust off and rest in the wagon before we set off from hence.

Beatrice:

I do believe there is plenty of lunch, if the heat has not spoiled it. Let's see... Bread, bacon, and some dried fruit. It is powerful warm for cooking today! The butter will not be ready until we stop tonight at Rabbit Hole Springs.





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Dennis:

Shall I spread out some blankets and buffalo robes by the wagon?

Beatrice:

That would be fine. See if you cannot find shade under the wagon—I will gather the rest of the children and set them down.

Narrator:

After a rest for lunch, some of the travelers would nap and then gather up the mules and oxen to continue on the journey. The animals, not having been freed from their yokes, were easily assembled. As the wagon train moved on, the older children would get back to their chores on the trail.

Beatrice:

Mother, shall I tote the little one for this afternoon's journey?

Mother:

Yes daughter, I reckon it would be best for you to take him today. I am feeling a might off today and need to rest in the wagon for part of the journey. Here is the basket—strap the baby to your back, and remember to watch out for the other children. Don't let them too near the wheels of the wagon.

Beatrice:

I won't, Mother. We have already lost one child during this trip, and I do not intend to lose another.

Narrator:

Often times, the wagon was a useful place to rest for the youngest children and the ill. We would move the flour sacks and blankets to create a comfortable bed. However, most of the children stayed out of the wagon. Why, my younger brother walked most of the trail and he was only 10 years old! But don't be too fooly, it could be quite dangerous for the small children to leave the wagon. They would jump out when they were bored of sitting, but it so happened that as they were trotting alongside the wagon, they might get tripped up and be crushed under a wheel. This happened during our trip, and it was real difficult to witness.



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Father:

Send Dennis to the wagon. He will have to hold the reins today as I need to take over a wagon farther back in the train. Mrs. Granger is giving birth to her little one today and we don't have a moment to stop.

Beatrice:

Yes, Father. What shall I do this afternoon?

Father:

Gather your brothers and sisters to load-up cow chips for the campfire tonight. Also, make sure that your mother is comfortable; I hope she will be well enough tomorrow to walk again.

Beatrice:

Father, yesterday I found some plants that I never sawed in Philadelphia. I collected the seeds—might I be able to send them home to Grandsire and Grandma'am when we reach Pleasant Valley?

Father:

Yes, Beatrice. Give them to your mother to hold, and I am sure we will be able to send them back east after we have completed this long journey.

Narrator:

On this particular day on the trail, we had the good fortune of running into some Paiute Indians while we were crossing the sage plain. After we arrived in Pleasant Valley, my brother was kind enough to read to me what he wrote in his journal about our encounter that day.

Dennis:

(Reading from journal)

Today was a real day! Father let me hold the reins on the oxen for a good hour on our journey, but as we traveled our team was approached by some members of the Paiute Indian tribe. Some of the men were in need of trading for food, and the Paiutes were obliged to trade our team some fish called Agi, (Lahontan Cutthroat Trout) for tobacco.



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But the best part of the day was handing off the reins of the wagon to an older boy, so that I might run ahead and play with the young son of one of the Paiute Indians. He was able to teach me some words in his native tongue, Numu:

Su-mu-u : One

No-be : House

Tad-sah : Summer

Pah-gue : Fish

Afterward, we ran up ahead of the wagon train to play with my hoop and stick. Some of the other children came to play also, and as we waited for the wagon train to catch up, we played a game of Blind Man's Bluff. The next time we get to play, I hope that we will get to try out some of them stilts or play Hide the Button, my favorite game.

Narrator:

It was an exciting day for my brother. I did not get to play as I was up n' tending to the younger children and Mother, but Blind Man's Bluff was certainly my favorite game and I was sorry to have missed it. But at that point I was near fifteen years old, too old to play games with the children, and an adult in the eyes of many on the wagon train. I remember there was even a romance on the trail, between my dear friend Sophie Clark and William Noble. Once they arrived in Oregon, they hitched themselves together quicker than a wagon train and had a big ol' family. In fact, it was not unusual at all for young people to find love on the trail.

By the time 4 o'clock rolled around we was powerful tired. See, everyday we had been stopping late in the afternoon to set up camp. That day, as I remember it, I heard my father hollering and carrying on while talking to the man from the Jessup family while they were circling the wagons about when we were going to stop. Mr. Jessup said we should push further because if we didn't tomorrow was going to be awful hard, what with it being over 22 miles to the next spring. Usually we only went about 15 miles a day. That extra seven miles may not sound like too much, but when you're with 40 other wagons and no one's got a drop of water to their being, things can get a tad cranked up. I was pretty afear'd, but then Father came and talked to me.

Father and Beatrice come out on stage.

Father:

Beatrice, I'm terrible sorry you had to hear that spat between me and Mr. Jessup. Don't





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worry about a thing, honey. After all the hollering he finally agreed that we should just leave early in the morning, and let all of us get a little rest.

Beatrice:

Why did he want to keep heading tonight, Father?

Father:

Well, tomorrow is going to be a really hard day and I guess he just wanted to cut it as short as possible.

Beatrice:

But the guide said we should stop at the watering holes. Plus, it ain't safe to keep going when it's pitch dark. You don't know what's in front of you or behind you. Mr. Jessup don't....

Father:

Don't worry. I talked the sense into him. We agreed that we'd get up tomorrow and set out a little earlier than usual, about half past 2. That way we can put on some miles before the day gets too hot and too much time gets away from us.

Beatrice:

Don't tell the other kids, but I'm skeered, Father.

Father:

You don't got nothing to be skeered of girl. We've come this far. But seeing as you're scared, I'll tell you something. When we left, I was a little scared too. But what made me calm was seeing you and your mother taking such care of each other and the family. I know we're strong...I see it everyday from all of the people in this long wagon train. We're going to be the people who see the rest of this land while the people at home just see out their windows. We're going to be the people who touch two seas. We're going to be the people who make it together.

Beatrice:

Thanks, Father.

They hug.





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Father:

Now go help your Mother with dinner. I'm going to go get Dennis to help me and the others circle the wagons and bring in the animals.

Beatrice and Father leave.

Narrator:

I really was scared, but what Father said was true. We were going to make it and even though I missed the other kids back in Philadelphia, I knew I was apart of something important. Something that was going to change our whole little world. But there was no time to think about that now. I had to help Mother with dinner.

Beatrice and Mother enter with plates and pans.

Mother:

Can you figure what we're going to have for dinner tonight? I'll tell you. Bacon, beans, and cornmeal.

Beatrice:

That's what we always eat.

Mother:

That's because it's what we've got. It's the only thing that lasts long without spoilin'.

Beatrice:

I thought it lasted a long time because no one wanted to eat it.

Mother laughs and slaps Beatrice's hand with a spoon.

Mother:

Actually, my girl, we're really havin' some of that Lahontan Cutthroat trout meat that we traded for today. I wanted it to be a surprise, but seeing as yer helpin' you'd prolly see it sooner or later.

Beatrice:

Oh! SAKES ALIVE! That's wonderful.





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Mother:

Hush. Just you get to work. After your father and brother get back from puttin' the animals in the wagon circle, we're going to be eatin'.

Mother and Beatrice mime prepping dinner while the Narrator begins to speak.

Narrator:

We had a wonderful dinner that night and we talked about all the things that we'd seen that day. After we finished eating, me and Dennis were the one's who had to wash up the dishes. While we was doing it, he told me that he was scared too.

Dennis and Beatrice begin miming washing up.

Beatrice:

What's the matter? You seem awful quiet tonight.

Dennis:

I heard Father and a couple of the other people talking'. They said that while they was bringing' in some of the animals they found a bunch of dead stuff near one of the springs. There ain't too much water here anyway, and now there are dead things in some of it.

Beatrice:

I'm sure it's okay. I saw some other water that didn't have no dead animals in it.

Dennis:

I'm afeared that I'm going to be dead in a hole one day.

Beatrice:

Oh, go on. Yer too young to be worrying about things like that. We ain't going to die out here. For sure, tomorrow is going to be hard, but think how far we've come already. Tomorrow is going to be a snap Dennis. Father promised me we'd make it. He said "We are going to be the people who touch two seas. We're going to be the people who make it together."

Dennis:



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Thank you, Sis!

Violin music starts to play in the background.

Beatrice:

See? Father's playing the fiddle, that always means things are good!

Dennis:

Oh yeah!

Father comes on stage playing. Mother comes on dancing.

Father:

You kids know this song, right.

They sing and dance to the Pioneer tune "Old Susanna." They all encourage the audience to sing along and clap.

As they are singing and dancing, the Narrator rejoins them.

Narrator:

That night we sang and danced until about eight o'clock. After that we filled our water, cleaned up and got ready for bed. We laid out blankets on the ground, Father and me took turns telling stories to the rest of the kids. We told'em fairy stories and tall tales. Soon they were asleep. As I crawled into bed, Father and Mother both told me that they was very proud of me and that they loved me. As I drifted into sleep, I thought about how hard it was going to be. Tomorrow we were going to wake up at two-thirty and be pressing hard all day. But for right now that didn't matter one huckleberry. 'Cuz we were together tonight, and by golly together we were going to make it *all* the way!