



BLACK ROCK DESERT
HIGH ROCK CANYON
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

THE PLAYA

- Emigrants traveled a waterless 22 miles on the Playa while traversing the Applegate/Lassen Trail.
- The trail from Rabbit Hole Spring to Black Rock Spring was probably the cruelest segment of the journey for the Applegate-Lassen Trail travelers.
- Most of the emigrants passed through this portion of the trail during August and September; as it was necessary to arrive at the Sierra's before the winter snowstorms made the mountains impassable. "Without the merest hillock or bush for shade, the heat was blistering and unmerciful. Some trains resorted to taking their bearings by the stars and traveling the route by moonlight (1)."
- "We came to the determination that we would wait till near sunset, as the cattle could travel better without water in the night than by daylight.... We started about six o'clock, with anxious hearts and sad forebodings on our perilous journey. We were on a level plain of ashy earth, where nothing grew but a few stunted sage and greasewood brushed, with barren mountains shading the horizon in the distance on the north and south.... (Alonzo Delano, August 16, 1849)."
- Thousands of cattle and oxen died along the route due to the effects of the intense heat and lack of water.
- Wagons bogged down in the soft sand and personal belongings were thrown out to lighten the load and ease the burden on the already overtaxed oxen.
- "Periodically, water flows in the bed of the Quinn River which the emigrants crossed enroute to Black Rock Springs. However, generally, in the summer months it is in a dried out state. Presumably the Quinn River was not flowing during the summer of 1849 when the emigrants traversed its bed as no reference of it is made in any of the journals that were studied (1)."
- Once the emigrants reached Black Rock Springs they dug wells for the animals to drink from and boiled their coffee and cooked their meat in the hot water.
- The trail though the playa continued as emigrants traveled another 21 miles from Black Rock Springs to the nearest known water source; Mud Meadows.

Possible Questions:

- Why would emigrants choose to travel in such rough terrain?
- How long did it take most emigrants to voyage from Rabbit Hole Spring to Mud Meadows?
- What is the temperature on the playa during August and September?

1. McGuckian Jones, Peggy. "Emigrant Trails in the Black Rock Desert." Reno, NV. 1980.

