OREGON TRAIL NOTES

How much land had U.S. settlers occupied by the 1820s?
Settlers occupied almost all of the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. The only place for the settlers to go was farther west. Many didn’t settle in the Great Plains between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains instead they went to the Far West.

What area of North America was referred to as Oregon Country?
The huge area beyond the Rocky Mountains was Oregon Country. It included what is present day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Canada.

What type of soil, vegetation, and climate does Oregon Country have?
The geography of the area has a huge variety. Along the Pacific Coast, the soil is very fertile. The temperature is mild all year around with plenty of rain. Farther inland, you will find a thick forest covering a coastal mountain range. Between this coastal mountain range and the Rocky Mountains is a high plateau. This area is dry and has some desert like areas.

What type of people did the Oregon Country attract? What did the area have to offer each of them?
It attracted farmers and fur traders. The farmers were happy with the great, fertile soil, the mild temperatures, and the rainfall. All of these made it perfect for growing crops. The fur traders enjoyed the thick forests filled with fur-bearing animals such as the beaver.

Several countries believed Oregon Country belonged to them. What were these countries?
United States, Great Britain, Spain, and Russia

Why did the United States believe Oregon belonged to them?
The U.S. believed Oregon belonged to them because they had made several expeditions to the area such as Lewis and Clark.

Why did Great Britain believe Oregon belonged to them?
The British believed Oregon belonged to them because an English explorer, Sir Francis Drake, visited the area in 1579. Also, Fort Vancouver was the only permanent outpost (building) in the area, and it was built by Great Britain.

What agreement did these countries make in 1818 over the ownership of Oregon?
The United States and Great Britain agreed to have joint ownership (they would share ownership) over the area. Citizens of each nation would have equal rights in Oregon (the same rights). Spain and Russia agreed to drop their claim since they had few settlers in the area.

Who were the first type of people to travel to Oregon?
The Fur Traders

What name was given to these men?
The fur traders were called mountain men because they hiked through Oregon’s forests (which were in the mountains) trapping animals and living off the land.
Describe the appearance and personality of a mountain man.

Mountain men were viewed as rugged individualists. They wore shirts and trousers made of animal hides and decorated with porcupine quills. Their hair reached to their shoulders. Pistols and tomahawks hung from their belts.

Describe the dangers of a mountain man’s life.

They had to survive long, cold mountain winters. They risked attacks by bears, wildcats, or other animals. During the winter, they faced starvation so they were forced to eat almost anything.

Describe the relations the mountain men had with the Native Americans.

They got along with most of the tribes. Sometimes they spent winters in Indian villages. They learned many trapping skills from the Indians. Some even married Indian women who taught them how to find their way and survive in the mountains. They did not get along so well with other tribes such as the Blackfeet. The Blackfeet would attack mountain men who trapped on Indian hunting grounds without permission.

Who founded the first American Fur Company and became the richest man in the U.S. at that time?

John Jacob Astor (New Yorker)

What happened to the fur trade in the late 1830s?

By the 1830s, fur trappers had killed so many beavers that the animals had grown scarce. Also, the beaver hat (the latest fashion in Europe) had gone out of style. Therefore, the fur trade just sort of faded away and died out.

What career or job did many mountain men accept or take after they were finished working as a fur trader?

The mountain men’s skills and knowledge of the wilderness became extremely useful. Many became trail guides for settlers traveling to Oregon.

Name some of the people who guided settlers to Oregon Country (4).

Jedediah Smith–route to Oregon
Manuel Lisa–route to Oregon
James Beckwourth–African American who founded a major route to California
Marie Dorian–Iowa Indian woman who was a mountain woman

What type of people were the first white settlers to build permanent homes in Oregon Country?

Missionaries who wanted to convert local Native Americans to Christianity.

Who were Marcus and Narcissa Whitman? Why did they go to Oregon Country?

They were a couple who went to Oregon as missionaries. They setup a mission and a school near the Columbia River where they worked with the Cayuse Indians. Other settlers joined the Whitmans. As more settlers arrived and took Cayuse land, conflicts arose. The new settlers also brought disease that were new to the Indians. IN 1847, an outbreak of measles spread to the Cayuse, and many of the Cayuse children died. Blaming the settlers, a group of Indians attacked the mission. The Whitmans and 12 others were killed. The incident, however, didn’t stop other pioneers or missionaries.
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| What type of stories from the missionaries in Oregon set off an outbreak of “Oregon Fever?” | “Wheat grew taller than a man.”  
“Turnips 5 feet around.”                                                                                                                   |
| How did people travel to Oregon?                                         | People traveled to Oregon by wagon train. You would not travel alone. You would travel with other families heading in the same direction. Each family would by a wagon. Then all the wagon would form a group or a train. The train was then lead by an experience guide. The wagons were used mostly to carry your goods, and the people would walk alongside their wagon. |
| How long was the trip to Oregon?                                        | 2,000 miles; 5 months                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| What were some of the dangers on the trail?                             | Having to float wagons across swollen rivers due to heavy spring rains, extremely heat out on the open trail with no trees for shade, dust and wind storms, early snowstorms blocking the passages, sickness such as cholera, accidental discharges of guns, etc. |
| What were the problems with the Native Americans?                       | There really were no problems with the Native Americans.                                                                                                                                               |
| How many people reached Oregon between 1840 and 1860?                   | 50,000 people                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| How did people feel about the joint ownership of Oregon between Great Britain and the United States now that most of the population of Oregon were U.S. Citizens. | Many Americans began to think that Oregon should belong to the U.S. alone.                                                                                                                                  |