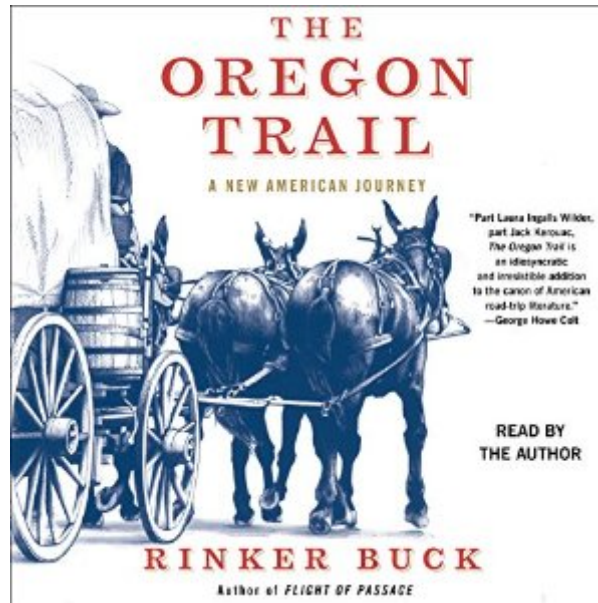


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The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey



Synopsis

In the best-selling tradition of Bill Bryson and Tony Horwitz, Rinker Buck's *The Oregon Trail* is a major work of participatory history: an epic account of traveling the entire 2,000-mile length of the Oregon Trail the old-fashioned way, in a covered wagon with a team of mules - which hasn't been done in a century - that also tells the rich history of the trail, the people who made the migration, and its significance to the country. Spanning 2,000 miles and traversing six states from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, the Oregon Trail is the route that made America. In the 15 years before the Civil War, when 400,000 pioneers used it to emigrate West - historians still regard this as the largest land migration of all time - the trail united the coasts, doubled the size of the country, and laid the groundwork for the railroads. The trail years also solidified the American character: our plucky determination in the face of adversity, our impetuous cycle of financial bubbles and busts, the fractious clash of ethnic populations competing for the same jobs and space. Today, amazingly, the trail is all but forgotten. Rinker Buck is no stranger to grand adventures. The *New Yorker* described his first travel narrative, *Flight of Passage*, as "a funny, cocky gem of a book", and with *The Oregon Trail* he seeks to bring the most important road in American history back to life. At once a majestic American journey, a significant work of history, and a personal saga reminiscent of best sellers by Bill Bryson and Cheryl Strayed, the book tells the story of Buck's 2,000-mile expedition across the plains with tremendous humor and heart. He was accompanied by three cantankerous mules; his boisterous brother, Nick; and an "incurably filthy" Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl. Includes an extended behind-the-scenes conversation with author/narrator Rinker Buck with his brother and trail companion, Nick Buck.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author, who is a self described book worm, history junkie, and control freak decided, basically on a whim, to drive a wagon over the entire Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon in one summer. Although this has been done by others in past years, it has never been done in modern times without support vehicles and an entourage of people meeting the wagon every night. His original goal was to drive, alone, without any support assistance, which would be a first. Eventually, after his brother found out about the trip, he decided to allow his brother to accompany him. And that was still a first. He spent the winter and spring prior to the trip doing research in old journals and historical documents about the trail. He also studied maps to determine where he would have to divert from the original trail to a highway and what obstacles he would face. He and his brother drove, in the late spring, to Missouri where he had purchased an authentic wagon and a team of mules for the trip. His reason for choosing mules is well documented in the book, but you will have to read it to find out why he chose them. The book consists of three parts intertwined with each other. First, most obviously, is a written record of the trip. He describes what was happening, where it was happening and how he and his brother coped with various problems. The second part was from the historical records. He describes, from journals, what the original settlers were going through in various parts of the trail and compares his journey to what the settlers experienced. Finally, he describes some issues he has with his father and tries to reconcile long buried feelings he has towards his father. The book is very well written. The author has a unique way with words, which breathes life into what could have been a very dull book. At times, I could see the mountains and valleys and feel the tug of the mules as they climbed a steep hill. I could also, thanks to his descriptions, imagine what it was like for the people who originally traveled the trail. It did drag a little in several places, especially when he talks about his father. Unfortunately, the issues with his father mesh with the current wagon train stories, so it is sort of hard to skip those parts. If you do, you will lose some of the story from the wagon. In addition, maps are included, but in many of them he is talking about some place that they were that is not on the maps. I would recommend to the publisher that they make the trails that they traveled a wider black line and insure that most of the places he is discussing are on the maps. I would highly recommend this book to anyone. It is very entertaining, as well as educational. I was on the fence between a 4 star and 5 star rating, but I enjoyed it too much to give it only a four.

Rinker Buck and his brother got to live the dream of many a history buff and in doing so wrote a history/travel book that is very enjoyable to read. In doing so he got the chance to learn about life, think back to times with his family and make the history and experiences of the Oregon Trail come alive. This could have been two books. It could have been a history of the Oregon Trail. I learned a lot about what the settlers who traveled on the Oregon Trail faced daily. It could also been a travel book talking about how two brothers learned a lot about the world and themselves while traveling the Oregon Trail. The author does an remarkable job of merging these two books into one and in doing so creating a work that I read in three sittings. I literally did not want to put this down. This book is a rare example of excellent writing combined with a fascinating story about a recreated journey from the past. There have been a number of books written by people who have recreated journeys made by explorers in the past. There are television shows where people live like people did in the past. Most of these fail because they get caught up in the Ægimmick of modern people living in the past. While the premise of this book is that two modern men take an old wagon and three mules on the Oregon Trail, the end result is so much more. What makes this book different is the author is an exceptionally good writer who knows how to write about history as well his journey and I wound up caring both about the history and the journey.

Rinker Buck is an acclaimed author uniting American history with modern adventure. Rinker Buck deserves a Pulitzer for History & Biography. First for providing this delightful pilgrimage through the American spirit; and then second for introducing readers to his brother Nick, a retro-pioneer born of freedom's soil. Expect to come away from "The Oregon Trail" read with a lifetime of American history trivia neatly tucked away in your brain's nostalgic corner. Buck has gone way beyond this expected diary of anecdotes about the brothers' own Oregon Trail. Extensive research to aid in the planning and implementation of this 21st Century trail trek is brought alive for the reader as though he is riding beside the mule driver. Buck even offers modern trail-side wonders that the travelers of 1840s would not even dreamed about. The Buck Boys are as humorous as they are adventurous. This book is as educational as it is entertaining. Not a book to read rapidly, take it at a mules' walking pace, and enjoy every paragraph, it's that good. I really meant it that this should be at least nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Never have I said that before, and it is not stated lightly. Thank you Rink and Nick for sharing your exploit.

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