

Independence Rock

Named for a fur trader's Fourth of July celebration in 1830, this huge rock became one of the most famous of all Oregon Trail landmarks. Independence Rock is a large, low granite mass resembling a giant turtle and covering about five acres of prairie. It is 1,900 feet long, 700 feet wide and 128 feet high.



The site was a popular camping site and resting place for travelers along the trail. The abundance of grass next to Independence Rock made it a welcome stopping point for every train.

Independence Rock is most often noted landmark west of Fort Laramie for the names inscribed on its face—the names and dates of people who passed by this place in search of a new life in the frontier. Called the "Great Register of the Desert", more than 5,000 names of early emigrants were carved on this boulder. Emigrants found many fur trappers' names already drawn on the rock and added their own names. Axle grease made of pine tar and hog fat was used to paint some names. In 1860 Sir Richard Burton calculated that there were between 40,000 and 50,000 names written in one way or another on Independence Rock.

Starting the trail in the early spring, emigrants along the Oregon Trail hoped to reach Independence Rock by July 4, Independence Day. If they had not arrived by then, they knew they were behind schedule and might beat the winter snows before they reached Oregon.

