The Barlow Trail Hike

In 1845 Sam Barlow arrived in what is now The Dalles, Oregon. He was a member of one of six wagon trains that came to the Oregon Territory that year. To avoid the perilous, expensive and often deadly journey on river rafts through the Columbia River rapids, Sam decided to blaze a trail around the south side of Mt. Hood. The journey was a difficult one. Part way through the trip the wagons had to be left while Sam Barlow and Joel Palmer scouted a trail to Oregon City. On December 9, 1845 Sam Barlow petitioned the provisional government of the Oregon Territory for permission to build and operate a toll road from The Dalles to Oregon City. The bill passed by a 8 to 2 vote on December 18, 1845. In the spring of 1846 Sam blasted and hacked away bushes, logs and anything else necessary to clear the trail. He also built bridges across rivers that couldn't be forded. In 1846 a series of tollgates were erected and Sam Barlow opened up the road for business.

Today, many sections of the Barlow trail are under pavement or have been obliterated by farming and construction. There is one stretch however that is still intact in its original form. This section, which has been designated as the official Boy Scout hike, begins at the site of tollgate number one and ends twenty four miles later at the Pioneer Womans' gravesite where the Barlow Road joins with Highway 35. You and your scouts can travel back through time and hike this section just like it was one hundred and fifty years ago. The Trail is clearly marked on the Mt. Hood National Forest map.

Before you hike the trail, I suggest that you tour the End of the Trail Museum located in the basement of the senior citizens center in Oregon City. There is an outstanding display of wagons, pictures, documents and movies to see about the Oregon Trail and The Barlow Trail. I also suggest you purchase the book "Barlow Road" which was compiled by the Clackamas and Wasco County historical societies and is available at the Clackamas County Historical Society building (up the hill just south of the Oregon City Falls). You can read excerpts from the "Barlow Road" to your scouts on rest stops to set the mood of your hike and enhance the pioneer experience.

I have set up this trail so that your scouts can complete the 20 mile hike requirement for hiking merit badge or a two day 10 mile a day hike for backpacking merit badge. There are many access roads where drivers can meet the hikers with food, water and camp gear. When you are ready to hike the trail, send in your completed registration form and I'll send you your medals and patches along with information on which maps will help you follow the trail better and suggested camping spots. I am also working on arranging service projects for the boys to complete so they can also qualify for the Historical Trails Award Patch on their hike.
Barlow Trail Hike and Camp Information Sheet

The official Barlow Trail Historical hike is a 24 mile section of the original Barlow Trail from Tollgate number one to the Pioneer Woman's gravesite. The trail starts at an elevation of 2200 ft. and ends at an elevation of 3700 ft. You can start at the Gales Creek Crossing of the Barlow Road, where tollgate number one once stood (see Map) and hike uphill or you can start at the Pioneer Woman's Gravesite and hike downhill. The Pioneer Woman's Gravesite is off highway 35 just a little east of its junction with Hwy 26. It is well marked with signs and has a small parking area. The jumpoff point for hiking uphill is where NFID 3530 crosses Gales Creek about three miles southwest of the Rock Creek Reservoir just off highway 48. The trail downhill is easy hiking all the way except for the climb out (600 feet of elevation in one mile) of the White River Canyon between White River and Forest Creek Campgrounds and a 400 ft. climb out of Forest creek campground. At this spot you will be able to still see trees with rope burns on them where they were used to lower wagons. The trail is NFID 3530, from Barlow Pass east the trail is marked along it's complete length with square cedar posts that have a wagon wheel mark, Oregon Trail mark and/or tollgate mark burned into them. If you go more than 1/4 mile without seeing one, you're off the trail.

There are a number of maps that can be used, the Mt. Hood National Forest map,(pretty good) the Oregon Atlas and Gazetteer (page 62 and 63)(lacks alot of detail) or a series of 7.5 minute maps obtainable on your medal order form. The 7.5 minute maps are the best maps to use, they show greater detail, all the little side trails that can lead you astray, and some details not shown on larger maps. The particular 7.5 minute quadrangles are, Mt. Hood South, Wapinitia Pass, Post Point, Rock Creek Reservoir and Wamic (only get Wamic if you are starting at Gate Creek).

There are many areas to camp before you hike or along the trail. You can camp at any of the established campsites on the Barlow Trail,(all are vehicle accessible) White River Camp would allow you to serve your Scouts lunch at the halfway point of the trail without moving your camp. Forest Creek is a very nice camp and easily accessible from Hwy 48. If you camp at Forest Creek, your boys will have two more hours on the trail so you can start dinner for them when they pass through as they will be tired and hungry when they finish the trail. There are many unimproved campsites along the White river between Barlow Crossing and the White River Campgrounds. Water is obtainable from the White River if you purify it. If you can camp at Trillium Lake, Frog Lake or Clear Lake, if starting at the top or Rock Creek Reservoir and Pine Hollow Reservoir, if starting from the bottom. You can also stay at the Boy Scout lodges on Mt. Hood (Nanitch and White River) the night before hiking the trail. If you are coming from out of town you can camp at Scouters Mountain. Contact the Cascade Pacific Council service center at 503-226-3423 for reservations.

On the trail there are a number of campgrounds and natural springs. Faith and Charity Springs are on the top of the hill after you leave the White River Camp and are piped directly to the road. Immigrant springs is more difficult to find, it is located 300-500 feet East of the small BLM owned section of land where you encounter signs "leaving National Forest" and "entering National Forest" after you round a corner you will encounter a gully with large fallen trees in it. The two springs are located at the base of the two largest trees that have fallen.(directions from John Polos T475) Plan on meeting your boys every five miles or so to refill their canteens with ice cold drinks (I like gatorade or any similar drink that replenishes salts and electrolytes) change socks and check their feet.

If you want to do a service project while on the trail, contact the Bear Creek Ranger Station before your hike (328-6211). The Forest Service is trying to rebuild and restore many of the old building sites and areas of interest on the Barlow Trail.

I will ask for trail reports from each Troop that hikes the trail so I can inform you ahead of time about any particular problems or thing to watch for. If I can be of service to you in any other way with this hike, please call me. 503-625-6892
Barlow's mountain road brings pioneers 'home'

BY LINDA McCARTHY
Correspondent: The Oregonian

Pioneer Samuel Kimbrough Barlow caught his first glimpse of Mount Hood in September 1845 when the wagon train he and his family had joined six months earlier emerged from the Blue Mountains. Barlow had been on the Oregon Trail for nearly six months with a group of more than a dozen other wagoners. Barlow didn't think much about the majestic mount-tain off in the distance until the wagon train reached The Dalles. It was there that wagons were loaded onto barges and floated down the Columbia River into Oregon City. The trip was not free. The settlers, weary after months on the trail, often had to pay $50 to $100 per wagon. Before 1845, no wagon had ever been driven past The Dalles.

By the time the Barlow group reached the end of the overland route, the village along the river was jammed with pioneers waiting for a boat ride. When Barlow learned about the delay and what it would cost for the trip, he started thinking about that view of Mount Hood again. In the days that it took to go from the Blue Mountains to The Dalles, Barlow had noticed a notch in the mount-tain skyline. The picture was etched in his memory. It took Barlow and a group of determined settlers three months to find a way around Mount Hood, cutting the time and cost of the trip into Oregon City for the thousands of pioneers who would follow.

The 80-mile route would take on the name of the man who blazed the first overland trail into Oregon City. Barlow Road stretched from the western edge of Tygh Valley, following an Indian trail to within 10 miles of Mount Hood, into Oregon City, where it ended at Abernethy Green.

William Barlow, Samuel's son, played a big role in carving out the trail with his father. His description of what they found along the way is included in the 1889 book "History of the Pacific Northwest, Vol. II, Oregon and Washington," which was published by the North-west History Co. of Portland. "Here, all traces of human footsteps or wild animal trails disappeared; and here on to Philip Foster's, the first settlement, the road was made through thick forest, fallen logs crossed and re-crossed upon each other, rocks, creeks, canyons or barriers of some kind," the young Barlow wrote.

On Sept. 26, within days of their arrival at The Dalles, Samuel Barlow, his family and a few others decided to strike out over the mountain with the hopes of making it to Oregon City before the winter snows.

It was a decision that came easy for Barlow, a determined man of Scottish ancestry who was born Jan. 14, 1785, in Nicolas County, Ky. Samuel Barlow moved to what was then the territory of Indiana and married Susannah Lee, whom he had met in 1817. The Barlow's had five boys and two girls.

In 1836, they moved to Illinois, where they stayed until 1845, when Barlow got Oregon fever. The group headed out March 30 and spent the next six months on the trail. After making the decision at The Dalles to find an overland route, they began their adventure and were joined Oct. 2 by Joel Palmer and his group. Palmer decided to track down Barlow after he, too, became discouraged at The Dalles.

Before taking off on their trip, Barlow was advised by Indians at The Dalles that there were a couple of trails, used mainly for cattle, which crisscrossed the lower slopes of Mount Hood. The group made camp at Tygh Valley the first day. Before Palmer joined the Barlow's group, Barlow and William Rector had set out on foot to scout the trail ahead. When they returned several days later, camp broke and some followed the newly blazed trail. Some went back to The Dalles for supplies; others stayed to guard what provisions were left at Tygh Valley. By Oct. 10, Barlow and Palmer reached the crest of the Cascades. In the following days, the scouts would face deteriorating weather and treacherous terrain. At times, they were not sure they would be able to blaze the trail they had dreamed about. Palmer moved on with a companion Oct. 13 to explore a gap that Palmer had seen from high on Mount Hood a few days earlier. But they knew they would be unable to finish the trip before the winter snows, so a decision was made to build a cabin near the mouth of Barlow Creek on the White River, which they called Fort Rector.

While Barlow and Rector set out on foot for Oregon City to get food and supplies, most of the others stayed behind. It took the five days to reach Philip Foster's farm in Eagle Creek, where they staggered in, exhausted and hungry. The Fosters helped the weary travelers, who rested before heading on to Oregon City. When they got there, they were denied credit at the American and Methodist Mission stores. But British-owned Hudson's Bay Co. came to their rescue.

Barlow and Rector made it back to Fort De-pot by the end of October. Most of the pioneers wintered there, but Barlow, Palmer and several others continued the trip through the winter snows into Oregon City, arriving on Christmas Eve in 1845. Their arrival marked the first time that settlers had conquered Mount Hood.

While on the journey, Barlow noticed areas where swamps could be stripped with wood to make a passable road. He approached the Territorial Assembly in 1846 with plans to build a toll road. With Foster as a partner, he was given permission to build the road. He planned to have it open as soon as melting snow would allow. Barlow figured it would cost $4,000 to build the road. Toll charges of $5 per wagon and 50 cents for each loose animal helped defray the cost of building and maintain-ing the first Mount Hood highway. At times through the years, the road became impassa-ble because of mud and snow. The worst stretch of the Barlow Road - and the entire Oregon Trail - was fabled Laurel Hill. Just west of Government Camp, the hill was a straight drop-off. Some took their wagons apart and slid the pieces down; others lowered wagons on ropes wrapped around tree trunks. One technique to conquer Laurel Hill was to attach a large tree to the back of a wagon and drive it down in a zig zag pattern. The tree had to be about 10 inches in diameter and the branches pointed forward for friction.

The Barlow Road was transferred from private owner-ship to the state in 1919. Today, wagon ruts still are visible in some areas along the road, and trees still show the rope scars.

This story, part of a series on the Oregon Trail, appeared in The Oregonian May 10, 1991.
"In recent years we Americans have enjoyed the excitement of watching men conquer the thresholds of outer space. Perhaps because of these wonders, it is difficult to comprehend that just over a century ago Oregon and California seemed as remote as the moon does today. Americans once ventured to the western edge of the continent as they do now into space. But they did not merely pause and return. They stayed and populated the land, and they helped to build America. It took courage to venture into a strange and forbidding land, drawn only by the promise of a better life. Pioneers on the Oregon Trail faced many obstacles—climate and terrain, distance, Indians, hardship and sickness, scarcity of food and water, to name only a few. Amateurs in the wilderness, they profited by their experience, buried their dead—more than 30,000 still lie along the trail—and pushed on to build the comfortable America their descendants have inherited. It was mile on mile of toil, pain, adventure and hope. As you hike the trail, pause and reflect on the qualities that shaped America, especially the perseverance and courage of ordinary citizens who created a nation out of a strange wilderness." by George B. Hartzog Jr. Quoted from the book The Oregon Trail Revisited.

The Oregon Trail is an integral part of the history of our state. The names of cities, rivers, parks businesses and mountains come from pioneers who made this journey. The Oregon Trail was actively used for almost thirty years until travel by railroad to the northwest was made possible. The students in our schools actively study the Oregon Trail. No matter how much you study the history of the trail and visit museums, nothing you do will ever give you a deeper understanding of the trail than hiking, sometimes in 150-year-old wagon ruts, and camping over the trail in an authentic pioneer manner. Many times civilization will be just over the next hill but when you can no longer see asphalt roads, power lines and towns, the deeply moving experience of being in the wilderness will be the same for you as it was for the emigrants 150 years ago.

The Boy Scout hike over the Oregon Trail will be one of the pinnacles of a boys scouting experience, tying together trail history with the actual experience of hiking and camping on the trail. As a leader, you can make this more authentic by camping in the same manner as pioneers (without gas stoves and lanterns) by providing authentic meals (you can buy buffalo meat at some stores) and using pioneer cooking methods. You can make and wear (bucks skin clothing) or purchase authentic period clothing. You will also be able to replenish your water supply in many places from the same springs the pioneers did. To complete the requirements for a bronze medal and patch, a Scout must hike two twenty mile segments of the official Oregon trail Hike (the Barlow Trail may be used as one segment) and canoe for twenty miles on the Columbia or Willamette between the Oregon border and Oregon City. A silver medal is earned by completing 100 miles and a gold medal is earned for completing 200 miles of hiking and canoeing combined. I have plotted seven trail segments plus the Barlow as close as possible to the actual Oregon Trail using actual trail segments and existing roads near the trail. I suggest you follow the trail segments exactly as described. Many of the segments cross private property, Indian reservation property or may end abruptly leaving you to navigate cross-country through plowed fields. All the trail segments are at least 20 miles long, with one segment covering 56 continuous miles and some are connected so you can start in the middle of one and finish in the middle of another so you can still hike the required 20 miles. Crossing the ford of the John Day River is the highlight of one segment.

Segment 1: Nyssa to Vale, actual trail runs about 7 miles into the hike. Segment 2: Vale to Farewell Bend campground. Segment 3: Pleasant Valley to Baker. Segment 4: The Emigrant Hill Scenic Road to Meacham. Segment 5: Meacham to Pendleton across the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the actual Oregon Trail. Segment 6: Echo to Cecil over the actual Oregon Trail and through the Boardman Bombing range. Segment 7: Cecil to Wasco, fording the John Day River. Section 8: The Barlow Trail Hike.
I have discovered a great video "West to Oregon Along the Oregon Trail" at The End of The Oregon Trail interpretive Center in Oregon City. This video will give your boys a real sense of what the Oregon Trail was all about. It will also give them a feeling of hiking in the pioneers footsteps when you are on the trail. Your boys will have much more enthusiasm for this historical reenactment than they will just hiking twenty miles anywhere else.

Listed on the following pages are the official segments for the Scouts to hike. For a scout to earn the Oregon Trail medal and patch, he will have to hike two twenty mile segments and canoe one twenty mile segment covering 60 miles altogether. The Barlow Trail Hike can be used as one of the segments. I have plotted trail segments as close as possible to the actual Oregon Trail. Some segments involve hiking in 150 year old wagon ruts made by the original pioneers. All the trail segments will be at least 20 miles long. I used the "Oregon Atlas and Gazetteer" to plot the trail along with the map book written by Gregory Franzwa.

The Boy Scouts will be expected to either hike the full twenty mile segments in one day (hiking merit badge requirement) with just light day packs or as two ten mile segments on continuous days with full backpacks (backpacking merit badge requirement) to earn a medal and a patch. The twenty mile sections fulfill the full requirement for Hiking Merit Badge. You can set up water and meal stops for the boys about every five miles, except for a seven mile section on the Boardman Bombing Range where there is only a foot trail. I have been asking the Scoutmasters for trail reports after they hike a segment so I'll be able to pass these along to you also. All page and section map references will be from the Oregon Atlas and Gazetteer topographical maps. (available at REI Co-op, sometimes at Costco and Bi Mart)

Segment #1. The Oregon portion of the trail starts on the Snake River at the three island crossing in the town of Nyssa. Go south out of Nyssa on Clark, Blvd. the road winds around after this, watch for Succor Creek Highway and go South. Watch on the right far an Oregon Trail Interpretive kiosk Turn left here and go under a railroad bridge, get as close as you can to the river before you drop your boys off to start the hike. Head out from the river along Klamath Blvd until you get to Lytle Blvd. The original trail will be within a few hundred yards of Lytle Blvd. on either side all the way to the town of Vale (approx 20 miles away). You will begin seeing wagon ruts on the hills about seven miles into the hike. This hike is all on paved roads with Lytle Blvd. having very little traffic. Page 79 section A8.

Segment #2 This starts in the town of Vale on east 6th Street and Dry Gulch Road right off Hw 26 and heads straight north, then east then north again over the actual Oregon Trail past Love Reservoir onto Lockett Rd. for about a mile and then back on the actual Oregon Trail northbound ending on the Snake River at Farewell Bend State Park (The last look at the Snake for the pioneers) Farewell Bend State Park is a great place to camp for hiking sections one and two they have hot showers and flush toilets. There are small campsites for a fee with picnic tables and fire rings or there is a group camping overflow area that is a little more Spartan. Bring your own firewood or buy some high priced firewood from the campground as there isn't any lying around. Past this point the trail basically runs along I-84 and would not make for a very exciting hike. Page 83 Section D8.

Segment #3 This part of the trail takes off just west of the pleasant valley exit (315) and goes straight north on White Swan Road then goes into Virtue Mine Road then on to Baker Copperfield Highway and into the town of Baker, home of the Oregon Trail interpretative center. After this section the trail runs along highway I-84 through LaGrande until Hilgard Junction State park. Page 83 sections A6 and B6.

Segment #4 This section is a hike along the Emigrant Hill Scenic Road. Start at exit 249 from I-84 hike N.W. through Meacham to the Scenic Road's end at Kanine Rd. Page 86 section C3.

Section #5 Start at the junction of Old Emigrant Hill Scenic Road and Kanine Rd. (close to exit 228 from I-84) Hike north (the actual Oregon Trail) to the town of Cayuse Then head west on Mission Cayuse road to the town of Mission: There you will pick up the Old Emigrant Hill Scenic Highway again all the way into Pendelton Page 86 section B2.

Section #6 This section starts 2 1/2 miles west of Echo and crosses the Boardman Bombing range over it's fifty plus mile length. This is the real and actual Oregon Trail now used as an unimproved road. (Get off I-84 at exit 188 and go south to the town of Echo. Then head west on Lexington Echo Highway. Watch for the trail on the right heading almost due west about 2 1/2 miles out of town I have received reports from several troops that this segment was a great hike. The real trail goes through the bombing range with several natural springs along the way. This section ends at Squaw Butte on
immigrant road near the town of Cecil. (I am working on a procedure for contacting the Navy far permission to hike across
the range, it is open to the public most of the time) page 85 sections BS and B6.

Section #7 Start at the junction of Cedar Springs Road and Blalock Canyon Road. Hike North on Blalock Canyon road
to its juncture with Turner Butte Road. Hike west on Turner Butte Road to the Blalock airstrip. Take an unimproved road
SS'W to its juncture with Lower Rock Creek road. Take Lower Rock Creek Road NW and ford the John Day River at this
point just as the original pioneers did. After you cross the river pick up Klondike-John Day River Road. Hike straight west
down this road to the Wasco County airport or until you have hiked 20 miles. page 84 sections B2 and B3.

Section #8 Canoe any 20 miles of the Columbia River (downstream) or Willamette River (upstream) between The Dalles
and Oregon City. Follow all BSA safety afloat rules.

Section #9 The official Barlow Trail Historical Hike. This section is a 22 mile section of the actual Barlow Trail that is
still completely intact and as it originally was. Start where gate creek crosses NFD 3530 and hike along the trail until it
intersects Highway 35 at the Pioneer Woman Grave Site. Or hike backwards starting at the Pioneer Woman gravesite
(you will lose 1500 ft. of elevation this way)(Our troop has designed a Medal and Patch for the Barlow Trail Hike, you can
hike The Barlow Trail, earn the medal and patch for it, and use it as one of your sections for The Oregon Trail. Page 63
section C5 and page 62 section C4 and B3.

When your Troop has completed hiking the sections you have selected, complete the registration form indicating how
many medals and patches you wish to purchase. Adult leaders can also purchase and wear the awards. I will order and
attempt to keep in stock USGS 7.5 minute maps for each section of the trail as they become popular, call for current
availability.

I have designed the trail medal award to be a symbolic representation of Oregon Trail landmarks, significant dates
and representations of the activities Scouts must complete before earning the medal and patch awards. The medal
is based on the State Seal of Oregon, behind the covered wagon is Chimney Rock on the right. Chimney Rock is a
visible landmark where many widely scattered trails converged into one trail, testament rock is a nearby landmark that
immigrants carved their names and dates into before beginning the journey,
The Oregon City Falls, the official end of the trail is pictured to the left behind the wagon and team. 1924 Miles is placed
on both sides of the Oregon Trail obelisk. These obelisks mark the official trail through many parts of Oregon. 1924 miles
is the commonly accepted official length of the trail. The boot mark and canoe paddle with roman numerals represent
the amount of miles a Scout will cover in earning these awards. The medal will hang from a dark purple ribbon drape in
remembrance of the many pioneers who perished on the trail. The 60 mile award will be bronze a Silver 100 mile award
and a Gold 200 mile award are also available. The motto on the back of the medal is self explanatory.

"THE COWARDS NEVER STARTED AND THE WEAK DIED ON THE TRAIL. A PIONEER IS BURIED ON THE
AVERAGE OF EVERY 80 YARDS ALONG THE TRAIL"

Jim Brossard
Oregon Trail Historical Hike Coordinator Phone 503-625-6892

jimbrossard@yahoo.com