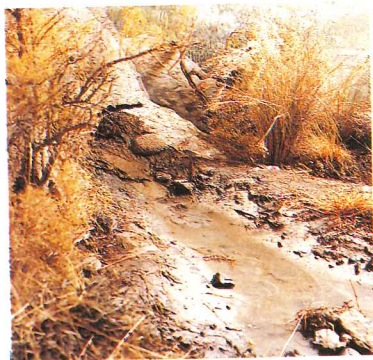




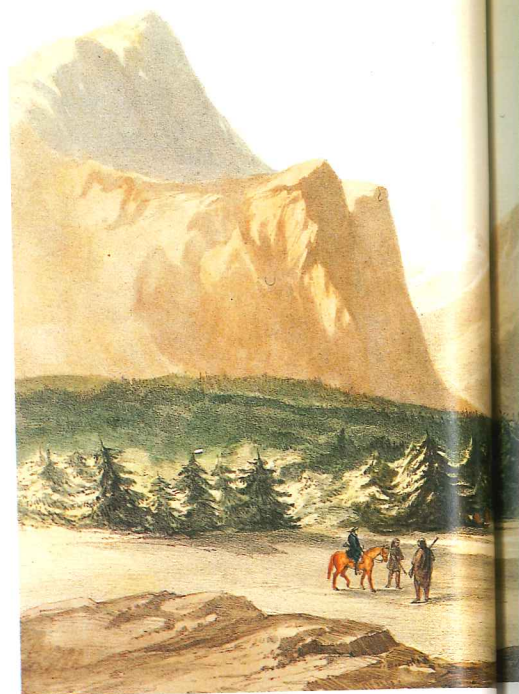
LANDMARKS ON THE TRAIL

For the most part, the “trail” was exactly that: A rough, unimproved track. On difficult terrain, the wagons might follow the well-worn ruts left by previous travelers, some of which can still be seen today, but on easier ground, the trail might spread out over a mile or more. There were a few places where army engineers or private businessmen had laid out proper roads by clearing away the trees and boulders. One of the best-known of these was a good road made by Sam Barlow, who charged the

overlanders a toll to use it. Most of them paid up willingly, as it saved them having to take a dangerous trip down the falls and rapids of the Columbia.



Left: A gulch or small valley. There were many of these along the wagon trail. This gulch originally had a stream running through it, but it has dried out.

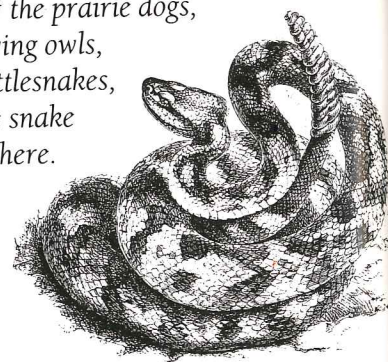


Above: The Rocky Mountains.

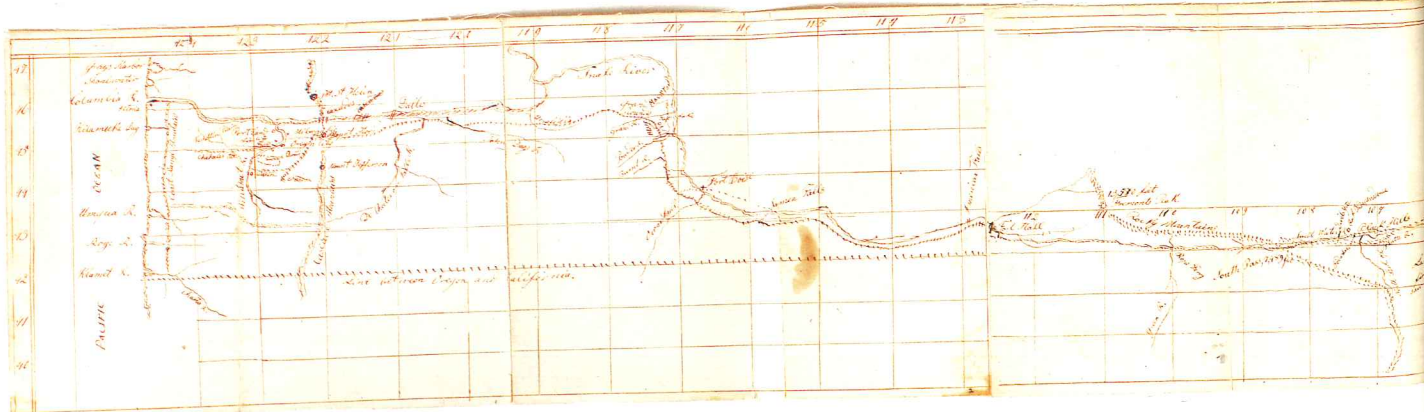


“Today we reached the foot of Chimney Rock. People say that it was thrust up out of the ground, but no one agrees how. One man, who had been a teacher back in Illinois, said that before the Flood the whole land had been as high as that rock.” Rachel Larkin’s Diary

Right: The Larkin children are intrigued by the underground cities of the prairie dogs, burrowing owls, and rattlesnakes, like the snake shown here.



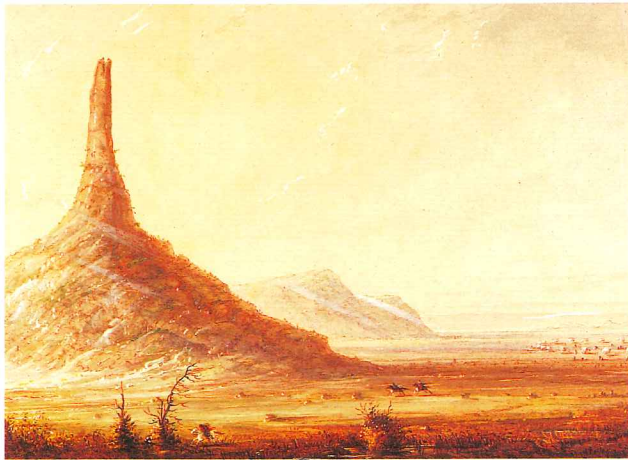
Below: A hand-drawn map of the trail from an overlander’s notebook, with the names of rivers, mountains, and stopping places such as forts.





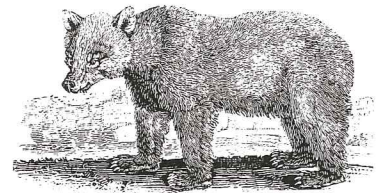
Left: As the Larkins get farther west, they spot many porcupines. The Indians use porcupine quills to decorate buckskin.

The Larkins eagerly await their first glimpse of the trail's best-known landmarks, made famous by guidebook descriptions, magazine illustrations, and paintings: the mountains at Scotts Bluff, Laramie Peak, the mountain called Devil's Gate which was almost split in two by a deep notch, and Courthouse Rock and nearby Jail Rock, so called because their shapes reminded some early overlanders of the St. Louis government buildings. There was also Soda Springs, where the bubbling waters tickled the travelers' noses and the bicarbonate deposits gave them new supplies of



Above: Chimney Rock, painted in 1837.

Right: Brown bears were found throughout the Northern Rockies.



baking soda, and Steamboat Springs, whose puffs and snorts reminded overlanders of river travel back East. Independence Rock was called the "great register of the desert," and travelers climbed it to paint or carve their names. But most famous of all was Chimney Rock (see left), a solitary 500-foot spire of sandstone and clay, rising above the flat prairie.

