

OREGON TRAIL NEAR WESTMINSTER WOODS

This short article by Gregory Franzwa, and an accompanying map, describe the Oregon Trail near Emigrant Springs State Park and Westminster Woods. It was taken from a book called *Maps of the Oregon Trail* by Gregory M. Franzwa (1990; The Patrice Press, St. Louis, Missouri; 292 p.; isbn:978-0935284836).

“Emigrant Springs is another sylvan state park. The springs which attracted the nineteenth century travelers became victims of pipeline construction many years ago, but several smaller springs still rise within the park.

Jack Evans, who has done a thorough job of mapping the trail through the Blue Mountains (*Powerful Rocky: The Blue Mountains and the Oregon Trail, 1811-1883*; 1991; Pika Press, Enterprise, OR; 374 p.; isbn:0-9626772-0-5), has verified the rut swales on this panel. Deadman Pass marked the end of the climb out of the Grand Ronde, and the last stretch through the Blue Mountains.

In 1990, Evans wrote the author: “The trail is clearly visible on the north side of the freeway at the point where the latter crosses it, though not obvious. Where it continues westward, on the south side of the freeway, it crosses an open field into a patch of timber and is clearly visible from 1-84. Near the exit of the east-bound rest area there is a little gate installed by the Boy Scouts that is not marked but does provide access to a fine stretch of ruts. There are about four separate rut swales in this little patch of timber. East of the timber the trail crosses an opening – a scab patch – and is clearly visible on the rocky ground. The total distance of this piece is a hundred yards or so. Between that point and the last point where it can be seen from the freeway there is a private residence. The trail crossed Deadman Pass right through the middle of the interchange, but is of course no longer visible between the two rest areas or in them. As you exit the westbound rest area, there is a left turn past an RV dumping station that then leads back to the freeway. Just before making the left turn, there is a dirt/gravel road going up the hill to the west (don’t confuse it with the other dirt road that goes north across the reservation). Right beside this road, just to its left (south), there are several good rut swales leading up the hill. They aren’t marked.”

From the summit, a mile northwest of the rest stop, the emigrants were able to view the valley of the Umatilla – a thrilling sight indeed. At the bottom of the slope a branch of the trail turned north to the Whitman Mission, which is west of present Walla Walla, Washington. The route had long been lost, having been abandoned after the brutal Whitman massacre in 1847, until Steve Randolph of Pendleton discovered documentation for wagon roads to the Walla Walla Valley, in the process of checking the map panels for this book. The road could be the route taken by the emigrant wagons prior to the massacre. A half-day visit to the Whitman Mission is encouraged.”

