

*Imagine it is the late 1860's and you are at the base of Black Butte, having recently spent the night along the banks of Cache Creek. You've just managed to cross the Cascades on the Santiam Wagon Road and now must follow wheel ruts east into the high desert.*

*Ahead of you is a long meadow known as Indian Ford with water and tall grasses for your stock. Beyond the next hill is another meadow called Camp Polk with springs, a creek, and an outpost where you can rest. A day or two later, you plan to head east into the high desert where water and lush grasses are scarce. Continue your journey on the . . .*



## SANTIAM WAGON ROAD

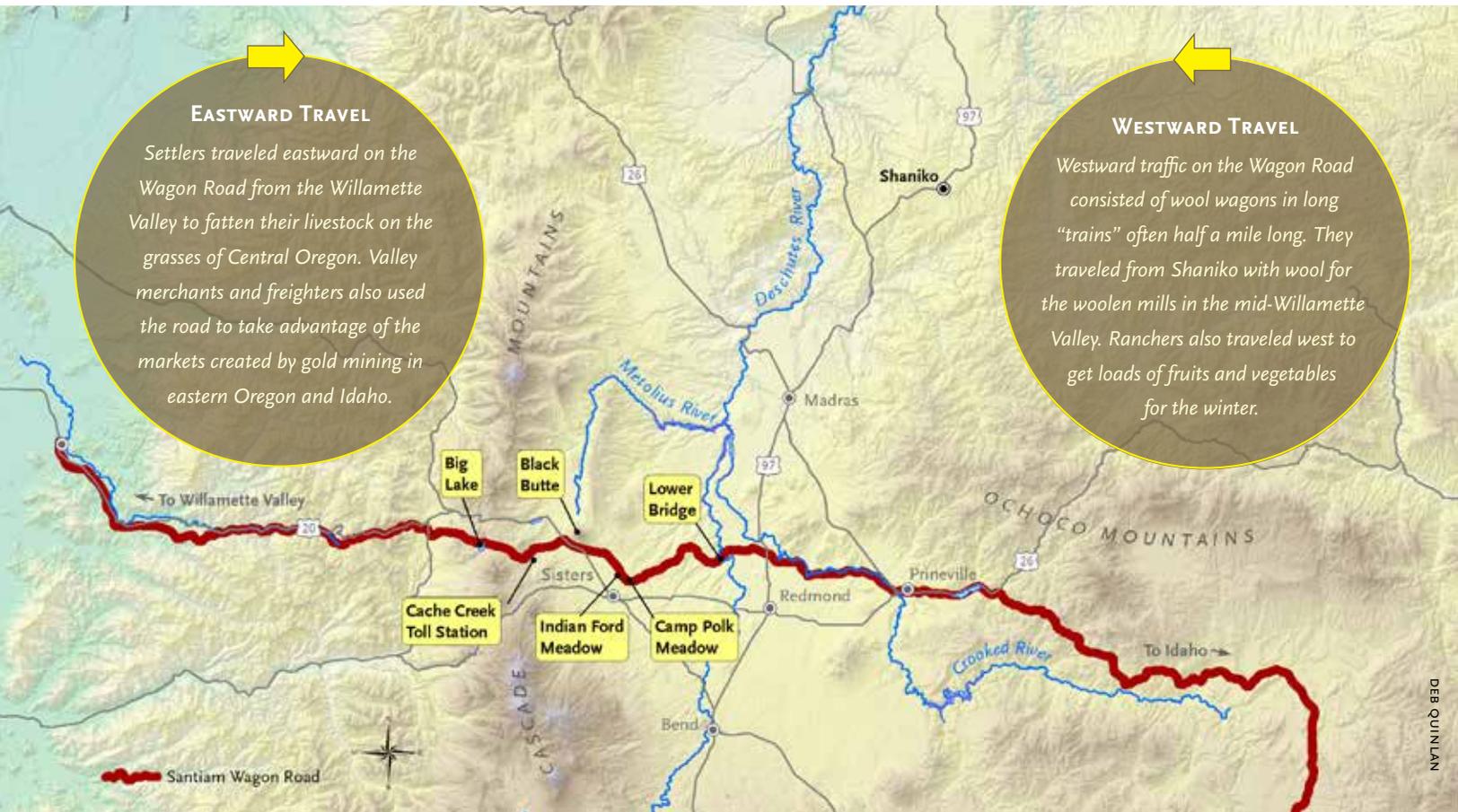


WAGON ROAD TOLL STATION. PHOTO: BOWMAN MUSEUM.

# THE SANTIAM WAGON ROAD

The Santiam Wagon Road was built in the 1860s to connect the Willamette Valley, across the mid Cascades and through Eastern Oregon, to the Idaho border. It was a distance of almost 400 miles and served as a livestock trail and the only freight route over the middle section of the Cascades for most of the 74 years (1865-1939) it was in use.

The Wagon Road passed many sites familiar to Central Oregonians: Big Lake, Cache Creek, Black Butte, Indian Ford Meadow, Camp Polk Meadow, and on across the high desert to Lower Bridge. Unlike many historic wagon roads that were constructed for the purpose of traveling west, the Santiam Wagon Road was built to take travelers east.



**EASTWARD TRAVEL**  
 Settlers traveled eastward on the Wagon Road from the Willamette Valley to fatten their livestock on the grasses of Central Oregon. Valley merchants and freighters also used the road to take advantage of the markets created by gold mining in eastern Oregon and Idaho.

**WESTWARD TRAVEL**  
 Westward traffic on the Wagon Road consisted of wool wagons in long "trains" often half a mile long. They traveled from Shaniko with wool for the woolen mills in the mid-Willamette Valley. Ranchers also traveled west to get loads of fruits and vegetables for the winter.

SHEEP ON SUMMER PASTURE IN CENTRAL OREGON. PHOTO: BOWMAN MUSEUM.



HAULING WOOL FROM SHANIKO. PHOTO: BOWMAN MUSEUM.

## THE END OF AN ERA

By 1900, the Columbia Southern Railroad connected to Shaniko, taking much of the freight traffic away from the Wagon Road. By 1911, the Oregon Trunk Railroad reached Bend, further rerouting traffic. Finally, modern highways over the Cascades opened in the 1920s and '30s bringing automobiles, including the first car (Old Scout, pictured at right), and the end of an era.





FREIGHT WAGON, CIRCA 1900. PHOTO: BOWMAN MUSEUM.

## RECONSTRUCTING THE ROUTE

The Santiam Wagon Road was built in the mid 1860's, so how do we know today the route it followed? Historic surveys are helpful in reconstructing routes. Public land surveyors were required to record local landmarks such as roads, streams, and buildings. J.H. McClung was responsible for the first known surveys of the area in 1870. His maps indicate the route of the road and include natural landmarks and established trails like the Fremont Trail.

Physical evidence, such as old tree blazes or wheel ruts, can also help with reconstruction. Modern LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology clearly shows the path of the wagon road. LIDAR uses lasers to accurately map landform contours beneath any surface vegetation.



JOHN WILLIAMS

## VISITING THE SANTIAM WAGON ROAD

See remnants of the Santiam Wagon Road at the Deschutes Land Trust's Whychus Canyon Preserve. Historic Wagon Road stopping points can also be seen at Land Trust owned Indian Ford Meadow Preserve and Camp Polk Meadow Preserve. Join the Land Trust for a free guided Wagon Road walk. Details: [deschuteslandtrust.org](http://deschuteslandtrust.org).



\* THANKS TO THE BOWMAN MUSEUM IN PRINEVILLE, FOR PROVIDING HISTORICAL PHOTOS \*

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