

The

WILD WEST

People and Events That Shaped the American West



Wagon Trains

Settlers of the American West often travelled in wagon trains. The pioneers' covered wagons were usually made of canvas stretched over a frame of hickory or other hard wood. The wagons were drawn by horses, oxen or mules. A wagon could only carry about 2,000 pounds, including the weight of the family it carried, so settlers could only bring a few belongings for the journey. Hooks hung from the hardwood hoops, where weapons hung at the ready.

Why did the travelers need to have weapons at hand? The journey could be very dangerous. Some Native American tribes, fearful of losing more of their land or even their lives, were hostile. Livestock might be attacked by wild animals, and marauding robbers might have been waiting around every corner.

There were many natural dangers on the journey as well. Rivers were deep, fast-moving, and dangerous to cross. The travelers often had to blaze their own trails through uncharted territory. New homes and new opportunities awaited those who reached their destinations, but many lost their lives along the way.

Fun Fact:

The most common form of covered wagon, the Conestoga wagon, was named for Conestoga, Pennsylvania, where the first ones were built.

Would you have wanted to join a wagon train heading West? Why or why not?
