



Wagons West: The Epic Story of America's Overland Trails

Frank McLynn

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In all the sagas of human migration, few can top the drama of the journey by midwestern farmers to Oregon and California in the years 1840-49. Seeking the promised land, these travelers trekked two thousand miles by covered wagon from Missouri to their destinations on the Pacific coast. Although they used mountain men as guides, they went almost literally into the unknown, braving dangers from hunger, thirst, disease, drowning, and Native Americans. The early migrants got through only after herculean efforts, but later in the decade complacency set in, and the result was disastrous, especially in the case of the Donner party, marooned in the snow and reduced to cannibalism. Using original diaries and memoirs, Frank McLynn underscores the incredible heroism and dangerous folly on the overland trails. His well-informed and authoritative year-by-year narrative includes many thematic investigations: the events leading up to the opening of the trails, the wagons and animals used by the pioneers, the role of women, relations with Native Americans, and much else. The narrative builds to a climax with the dreadful tale of the Donner party but achieves closure with the triumphant story of Brigham Young and the Mormons. Sandwiched between the era of the fur trappers and the post-1849 gold fever, this account of the pioneering years in the overland trails abounds with high drama, tragedy, and triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. It also brilliantly chronicles one of the principal chapters in the conquest of the North American continent, and the creation of the United States as we know it today.

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