

Lander Trail

New Fork River Crossing Historical Park

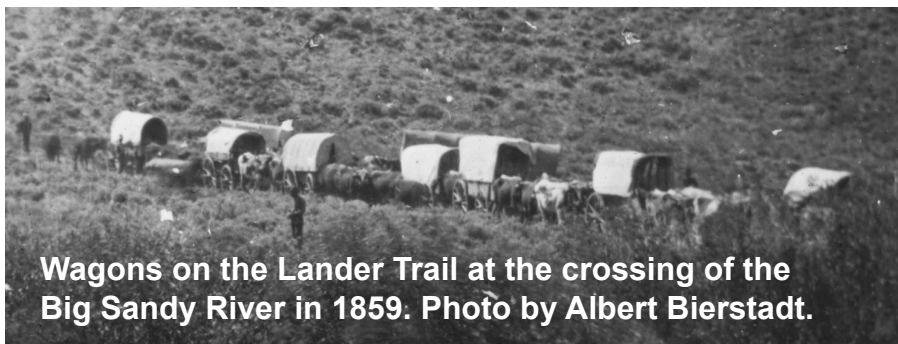


WELCOME! Explore the Lander Trail crossing of the New Fork River and a once-bustling emigrant campsite.

Walk the park and imagine what life was like for emigrants 150 years ago. This site has remained mostly undeveloped since the first wagon trails passed through here. The 100-acre park is currently under development. Visitor improvements are scheduled to be completed for a grand opening summer 2014.

This park is owned and managed by the Sublette County Historical Society, parent organization of the Museum of the Mountain Man in Pinedale, Wyoming. We hope you enjoy your visit!

Expanding the Nation, One Wagon at a Time



Wagons on the Lander Trail at the crossing of the Big Sandy River in 1859. Photo by Albert Bierstadt.

OREGON & CALIFORNIA TRAILS

From 1841 to 1869 about 350,000 people emigrated west on wagon roads—the largest voluntary mass migration in US history. To appease public outcry for improved transportation to the Pacific Coast, Congress passed the Pacific Wagon Road Act in 1857. Twelve years later, with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, fewer emigrants used these trails.

THE LANDER TRAIL

The Pacific Wagon Road Act funded a 256-mile cutoff between South Pass, Wyoming and Fort Hall, Idaho. This new segment was designed to improve the existing California Trail. In 1858, Frederick Lander supervised the construction of this new road—one of the first federally funded roads in the West. Emigrants could save up to seven days travel while avoiding long desert crossings. Tens of thousands of emigrants traveled the Lander Trail from 1859 to 1869.

NEW FORK RIVER

Emigrants risked losing supplies, livestock, and even their lives here at the New Fork River—one of the most difficult river crossings on the Lander Trail. Despite these challenges, lush grass and cottonwood trees provided a brief oasis for weary travelers who had just crossed over the Continental Divide. Good camping and the bottleneck at the river crossing made this place one of the busiest on the trail.

Step Back in Time . . .

This natural setting provides a unique opportunity to explore an emigrant river crossing and imagine what the pioneers experienced here in the mid-1800s.

Recommended Activities

- Walk the self-guiding, rustic, .8-mile trail to experience an emigrant setting and learn about their experiences here. *30-60 minutes roundtrip*



- Follow the one-tenth mile ADA path to an overlook of the park. *10-15 minutes roundtrip*

- Picnic in the grass under cottonwood trees or in the picnic area.

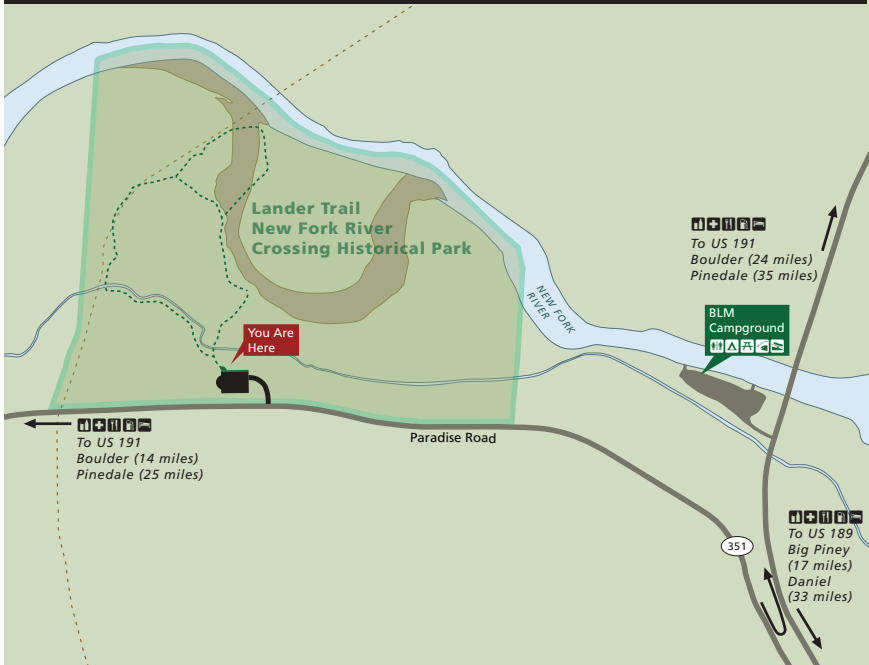
- Enjoy 1/2 mile of New Fork River access for fishing, swimming, or playing with your dog.

- Look for wildlife including moose, deer, raptors, and song birds.



Know Before You Go

New Fork River Area Map



Follow all park regulations.

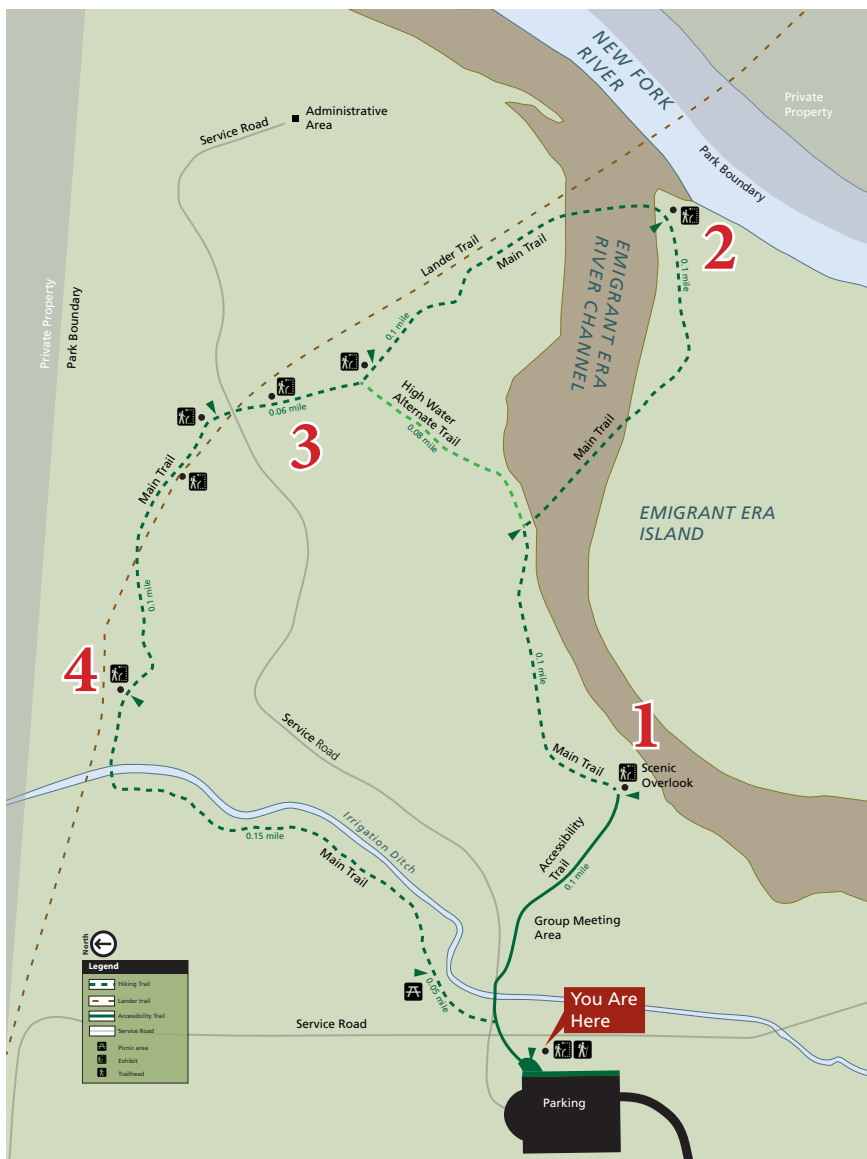
- The park is open dawn to dusk during the summer.
- No overnight camping, campfires, digging, or hunting.
- No motorized vehicles or bicycles on trails except for electric wheelchairs to the overlook.
- Pack it in. Pack it out. Please leave the park clean for the next visitor.
- Do not trespass on adjacent private property.
- A pit toilet is available at the BLM campground. See map above.

Have a Safe and Enjoyable Visit



- Swim at your own risk. Use caution during high water.
- Fishing requires a Wyoming State License.
- Do not approach or feed wildlife. Do not allow pets to chase wildlife. Moose are dangerous; give them plenty of room.
- Beware of mosquitoes: bring insect repellent especially during late June and early July.
- Check yourself and pets for ticks after exploring the park. Ticks may transmit diseases to you and your pets.

For more information or reservations for the administrative area and accessibility questions, contact the Sublette County Historical Society at the Museum of the Mountain Man in Pinedale, (307) 367-4101.



Walk the trail by following the flags, markers and mowed areas. The park and trail are still under development. Points of interest include: 1. Scenic Overlook 2. River Crossing 3. Emigrant Camp 4. Emigrant Swale.

MAIN TRAIL DISTANCE: 0.8 mile

HIGH WATER ALTERNATE TRAIL LOOP DISTANCE: 0.6 mile

ACCESSIBILITY TRAIL (ONE WAY) TO SCENIC OVERLOOK: 0.1 mile



Stop 1 – **Overlook**

Since emigrant times, the New Fork River has changed course. An old river channel spreads out in front of you. The large cottonwood grove marks the emigrant era island across the channel.

If you were here in the late 1860s, this quiet setting would be alive with noises from livestock, people, wagons, and water. With half their journey behind them, most emigrants arrived here between mid-June and mid-August; arriving any earlier or later caused hardships at the start or end of the trip. Most arrived in July.

During this short season, several hundred emigrants crossed and camped here each day. Most stayed for only one day. During high water the crossing could take a wagon train party two or three days.

“[R]eached East Green River [New Fork] which took us until 9 o'clock at night hear was hundreds of Emigrants camped and making preparations for crossing.”

- James McClung, July 19, 1862

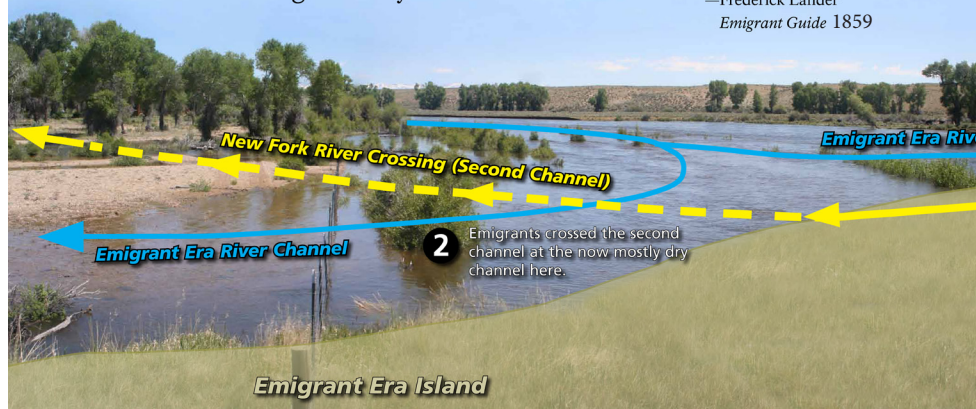
As you continue along the trail, imagine the sights and sounds of busy emigrants crossing the river and camping here.

Crossing the New Fork River

Frederick Lander carefully chose this place for the trail to cross the New Fork River. An island once split the river in two channels, allowing emigrants to ford without a bridge or ferry.

There is a large island in the centre, and the stream on each side is from twenty to thirty yards wide. In the spring it is from three to four feet deep. You had better raise the beds of your wagons. Timber on island and west bank.

—Frederick Lander
Emigrant Guide 1859



Stop 2 – River Crossing

You are standing on the emigrant-era island that once divided the New Fork River into two channels. The river has since changed course to run through the middle of the island. The west half is located on park property. Water levels vary significantly depending on season and weather in any given year. Unfortunately, high water due to spring runoff usually occurred in July when most emigrants had to make this crossing.

During low water years or late in the season emigrants could often ford the river with little problem. But for most, the New Fork crossing was one of the most challenging on the Lander Trail.



High water - July 2, 20



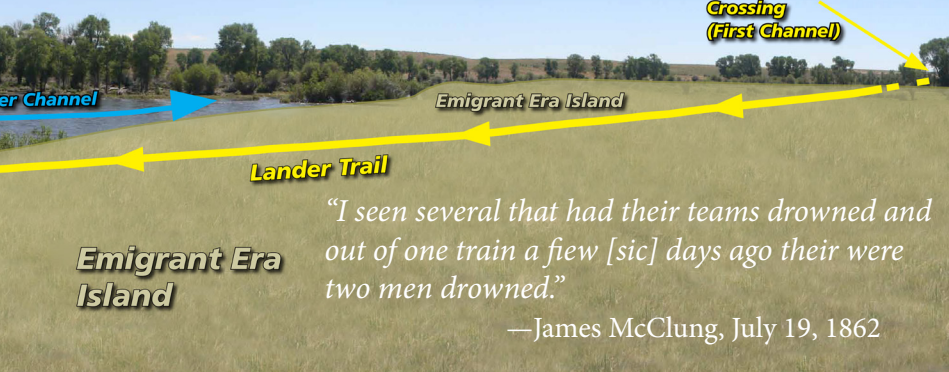
Low water - August 1

"... examined all our wagon-beds, selected two of the tightest and best made, took them off the axles, caulked them as tight as possible, and otherwise made them fit for boating, and then put them in the water. The next morning they were soaked tight.... A wagon was taken in pieces and put in one boat, and baggage put in the other, and rowed over... nearly 40 wagons were taken over that day." — Sherlock Bristol, July, 1862

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Emigrants crossed the first channel onto the island here at the base of the ridge just beyond the cottonwood trees.

New Fork River Crossing (First Channel)



Emigrant Era Island

"I seen several that had their teams drowned and out of one train a fiew [sic] days ago their were two men drowned."

—James McClung, July 19, 1862



"All of the wagon beds were blocked up to the top of their standards and lashed down to their running gear. A rope was tied to the rear axel of each wagon and manned by a dozen men, eased down by a like number, and when afloat, to hold it from drifting down the current, another rope was attached to the tongue and carried between the lead mules, handled by a crew of twelve on the opposite shore. When the lead mules were out of site under water, with the aid of the rope the men on the west shore hauled them to a sand bar where they found their footing. The leaders towed the wheelers along on the sand bar, and the wagon followed to the shore in safety."

—John Collins, May 16, 1864

Stop 3 – Emigrant Camp



Emigrants arrived at the New Fork River after an 18 mile desert crossing. Even with the challenges of crossing the river, it was a welcome site and most emigrants camped here.

Some used the abundant wood, grass, and water as an excuse to stay an extra day to catch up on things that needed to be done such as hunting, cooking, washing clothes, shoeing livestock and repairing equipment.

Today the park is a quiet, serene setting. One hundred and fifty years ago these open spaces would have been filled with wagons, tents, livestock and people, and the hustle and bustle of many emigrant camps. Lander reported 13,000 emigrants used his new trail the first year, 1859. The first five years probably saw similar use.

Given the short season, on average there would have been more than 200 emigrants camped here each day in July up and down the river on both sides. Records from 1859 indicate livestock outnumbered emigrants ten to one.

“The next day being the Fourth of July we were disposed to have a celebration and sat up late making plans... A wagon pole was turned up and the flag fastened to the tip... The remaining feature of our program was a grand dinner. For meat we had buffalo and antelope and a pie made of sage hens. After dinner we had speeches and then we put all remnants of the feast into a gold pan and called some Indians to finish up what was left.”

– Charles Hull, July 4, 1859

“Laying by to day shoeing cattle, we have a blacksmith along in the company who has a small anvil and some of them have a small bellows. So we went to work and put up a forge, burnt coal. built a frame to shoe the oxen in and iron can be had by picking up anywhere, so we made our oxen shoes and nails and are shoeing the cattle. Some of the boys went fishing with a spear and torch last night, they got a fine lot of suckers.”

–James Brown, July 30, 1859

“Toward night the men played ball and appeared to enjoy it very much. It seemed like old times.”

– Jane Gould, July 20, 1862

Stop 4 – Emigrant Swale

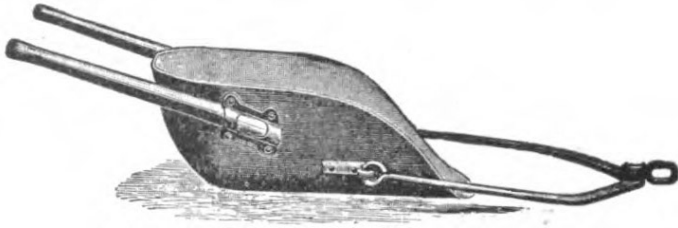


Most of the Park property lies in the river flood plain and most of the physical remnants of the emigrant era have been washed away. However, trail ruts can be seen approaching the river from the east and leaving the river to the west.

The swale (dip) running crosswise (right to left) in front of you is a remnant of the old Lander Trail where wagons leaving the New Fork River pulled up out of the river flood plain onto the sagebrush bench. The trail continued west past the Bertram Canal which was built in the early 1900s blocking the old trail. The swale could have been created by repeated wagon use or might have been excavated during construction of the road.

Unlike all previous western emigrant trails, which evolved from use of older Indian trails, the Lander Trail was surveyed, engineered and constructed. It is better classified as a wagon road.

The swale is hard to see from the ground, but easily seen on aerial photos, as shown above.



DRAG SCOOP SCRAPER

A crew of 115 men constructed the 230 miles of new Lander Trail in the summer of 1858. They moved more than 62,000 cubic yards of dirt and rock. That is equal to about 6,000 modern dump truck loads.

This would have been done with animal and man power using techniques learned from building railroads in the east. Hard dirt, like at this swale, would have first been broken up with mule or oxen drawn plows and then moved with a mule or oxen drawn buck or scoop scrapers. Men with picks and shovels would have helped in rocky patches. Two-wheel carts or wagons would have been used to move dirt longer distances when fill was needed.

Advance parties cleared 23 miles of heavy timber and 11 miles of willow in the Wyoming and Salt River mountain ranges to the west. Laborers were paid \$30 per month. Besides engineers, teamsters and clerks brought from the east, Lander's reports indicate the labor force included 47 "chiefly Mormons" from Salt Lake City, "lumbermen and bridge builders hired from the State of Maine", and "destitute men who we met along the road" that Lander felt "compelled to feed and shelter".

By the time excess supplies and equipment had been sold in the fall, the summer's work had cost just \$40,260 for 230 miles of new road, and was under budget and ahead of schedule.

To the north is the Bertrum homestead cabin built in the early 1900s, likely located purposely along the old Lander Trail which was used in later years for travel both west and east. The homestead is on private land. Please do not trespass.



Preservation Through Partnership

After the emigrant era, river corridors were prized homestead sites. Therefore, nearly all major emigrant river crossings now lie on private land altered by agricultural development. Minimally developed, this property remains much like the emigrants experienced it in the 1860s.

The Lander Trail New Fork River Crossing Historical Park became preserved in 2010 thanks to agreements by the Bureau of Land Management, SWEPI LP (Shell), Ultra Resources, Inc., and PacifiCorp and was donated to the Sublette County Historical Society.

Park Partners

Thank you to all our park partners for making contributions to the Lander Trail New Fork River Crossing Historical Park.

- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- Alliance for Historic Wyoming
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Lander Trail Foundation
- M&N Equipment
- National Park Service
- Olson 3-H Ranch
- Oregon-California Trail Association
- PacifiCorp (Rocky Mountain Power)
- Shell Oil Company
- Sublette County Historic Preservation Board
- Sublette County Historical Society
- Sublette County Road and Bridge
- Sublette County
- Ultra Petroleum
- USU Archaeological Services
- Wyoming Archaeological Society (Upper Green Chapter)
- Wyoming Community Foundation (Sublette Community Found.)
- Wyoming Conservation Corps (University of Wyoming)
- Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund
- Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office

The Lander Trail-New Fork River Crossing historical park is a long-term, growing project. We welcome volunteers who are interested in helping with the park interpretation and maintenance. Financial donations of any amount are always very much appreciated to help support this park. Donations are tax deductible.



Lander Trail - New Fork River Crossing Historical Park

is maintained by

Sublette County Historical Society
PO Box 909
Pinedale, WY 82941

We are a 501(c)-3 corporation. Donations are tax deductible.

The Lander Trail is an important segment of the California
National Historic Trail.

*Front and back cover photos by Derek Farr. Other park photos courtesy of
PinedaleOnline.com.*