

This year's Ash Hollow Pageant tells the story of the Oregon—California Trail in the 1860s, the final years of the trail.

The Pageant is June 14 and 15 at Ash Hollow State Historical Park near Lewellen and features an outdoor performance using pioneer diary quotes and song to depict life on the trail.

The chuck wagon supper, including roast beef, beans, fry bread, and salad, starts at 5 p.m. and the performance at 6:30 p.m. both nights.

There are also many things to do during the day including an art show in downtown Lewellen and self-drive tours of the area exploring Windlass Hill, the old rock schoolhouse, and sod house.

Saturday morning, June 15, we will also be hosting a 5k run/walk event in Ash Hollow Park, registration desk opens at 7 a.m. and run begins at 8 a.m. Come run the trail and check out the pageant!

Old movie images of the Oregon Trail with pioneers circling up their wagons while Indians attacked from over the ridge of a hill have little to do with most pioneers' real experiences on the Oregon-California Trail. However, by the final years of the trail, in the 1860s, there was some truth to those images.

Pioneers first headed to Oregon in 1843. They were terrified of Indian attack but found their interactions to be far more helpful than dangerous. As the pioneers travelled across the plains, diary entries tell of Native Americans helping pioneers ford rivers and sharing game. Some interactions were humorous such as a Native American man trying to buy a woman for his wife.

By the early 1850s cholera plagued the trail and Native Americans learned to avoid disease ridden wagon trains. As more and more pioneers crossed the plains, the Platte River road created a split in the huge buffalo herds and a loss of game.

Some Native Americans started stopping wagon trains and asking for payment for crossing their land, but friendly interactions were still the norm.

Pioneers continued in their fear of encountering Indians and many practiced defending themselves while being attacked. One diary tells of women fainting during a mock attack.

By the 1850s forts were established at Kearny (note early spelling) and Laramie. Treaties were established with the Lakota Sioux to make payment for damage to their land by pioneers crossing through on their way to Oregon, California and Utah. It was at the time that the Lakota had gathered at Fort Laramie for their annual payment that an oxen from a passing train was killed by a visiting Minniconjou. Young brash soldiers went out to arrest the man who killed the cow and started firing when he wouldn't give himself up.

All the soldiers were killed, the Sioux raided the store house of the payment that was to be given to them and left the area. This was a classic case of violence escalating.

The army responded by calling General Harney to lead soldiers to show American dominance resulting in the Blue Water massacre near Lewellen in 1855.

Relations deteriorated from that point on, but pioneers were still relatively safe as they travelled through the area that is now Nebraska and Wyoming. It was when they encountered the Snake tribe in Idaho that they were often raided and sometimes attacked.

The 1860s on the trail were dangerous in the final stretch and wagon trains did circle up at night to corral their animals and protect themselves from attack. An odd part of this story is that some of the diarists tell that they were pretty sure that some of the attackers were white men dressed up as Indians.

The Sioux Wars were in the 1870s in response to the government rounding up tribes to live on reservations and ending with the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. By then Nebraska had been opened up for settlement and homesteaders occupied most of the state.

More information can be found at www.voane.org or you can contact Volunteers of America-Western Nebraska office at (308) 778-5548. All vehicles entering the part will need a state permit, which are sold at the entrance.

Come enjoy a fun filled performance, dinner, and our beautiful Ash Hollow State Park! Friday, June 14 and Saturday, June 15.