

# Your Guided Tour of the Willamette Valley Relay

## A Brief Lesson on the History and Geography of Oregon's Willamette Valley

The Willamette Valley makes up just 11% of the state's area, yet three-quarters of Oregon's population resides there. The Willamette Valley Relay takes you off the oft-traveled, well-pounded pavement of I-5 into the valley's scenic, easy-paced rural areas.

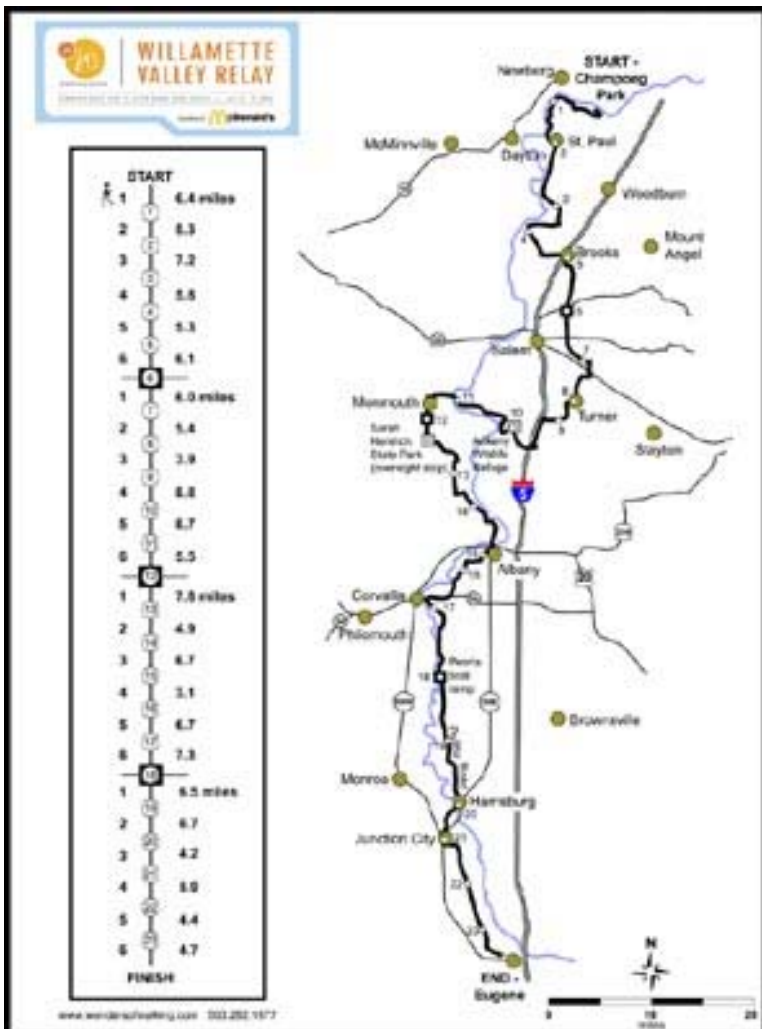
The Willamette Valley is an area 60 miles wide by 180 miles long, formed by gently rolling grasslands, dotted with small hills, hemmed in on the west by the Coastal Mountain Range and on the east by the Cascade Mountain Range, and seamed with the Willamette River, one of two rivers in Oregon that runs south to north. (The other river is the Deschutes.) The valley is also

home to more covered bridges than anywhere else west of the Mississippi.

In addition to grasses, the valley is Oregon's prime berry-producing region, and one of the most important berry-producing regions in the world. Nearly all temperate berries can be produced in the valley, where the climate is similar to that of the Mediterranean: warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters.

Grapes are included among those berries, and Oregon's Willamette Valley is quickly becoming known for some of the finest wines in the New World. Oregon ranks fourth for US production, producing more than 40 varietals with an even split between red and whites. Dominant varietals include pinot noir, pinot gris and chardonnay.

**Kalapuya** tribes were the valley's original inhabitants. The Kalapuya were semi-nomadic people who lived in permanent winter homes and migrated through the summer months, trading regularly with Molalla, Cayuse and other Native American tribes. Once more than 10,000 strong, those who were not killed by small pox or malaria



The map provided here is intended as a reference of the area. Please see the driving guide for more accurate directions and distances.

eventually were relocated to Grand Ronde reservations in the 1850s and became part of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon. The Grand Ronde Community includes more than 20 tribes and bands from western Oregon and northern California. Despite decimation by European Americans of their once-prosperous way of life, the Kalapuya peoples are considered staunch preservationists of their spiritual traditions and ceremonies.

### On course ....

The Willamette Valley Relay fittingly starts at **Champoeg Park**, arguably the start of Oregon statehood. Champoeg Park resides where the town of Champoeg, once the center of governance and commerce, thrived. This is where Oregon's first provisional government began in 1843 when, despite contrary instructions, two of the 52 Canadians representing Hudson's Bay Company's interests changed their votes and sided with 50 American settlers to form an independent government. A monument in the park marks the site where the vote was taken. Interestingly, the only survivor to attend the marker's dedication in 1901 was F.X. Matthieu, the Canadian who convinced his friend to vote with him in favor of the government's formation.

Champoeg Park lies 15 miles southwest of Portland on the Willamette River. Known to Native Americans as "Champooick," the area was discovered in 1811 by fur trappers, who came for the plentiful beaver, and in 1831 the first permanent homes were established.

One of those homes belonged to **Robert Newell**, whose house – or at least the reconstruction of the original built in 1852 – is located west of the entrance. Robert Newell, one of three men to lead the first wagon train to Oregon, was also one of the state's first legislators, and assisted in drafting the three early Oregon state constitutions. The Robert Newell house was one of only three structures in Champoeg to survive the 1861 flood, which devastated the town in a matter of hours.

The relay passes through **St. Paul** (leg 2), home of the St. Paul Rodeo, held every July 4th. The area was first settled by French Canadians as early as the 1830s and named by Archbishop Francis Norbert Blanchet for the Apostle Paul. Blanchet established the St. Paul Mission in 1939, but it wasn't until 1901 that the town was founded. Near the center of town, which has been designated a national historic district, lies the St. Paul's Old Cemetery in which lies William Cannon, the only confirmed  
**2** Revolutionary War veteran buried in Oregon.

The small community of **Fairfield** (leg 3), was the site of the northwest's first Catholic church. The Feast of Epiphany Church was a crude log structure built after retired Hudson's Bay Company employees sought a Catholic Priest to tend to their spiritual needs. The church sat for three years on the banks where the Willamette River and Fairfield Slough met before a priest arrived.

Along leg 4, relay participants pass near the **Jason Lee Mission Historical Marker** (near the intersection of Matheny Rd. NE and Wheatland Rd. NE), though it won't be visible from the road. Ontario-born Lee in 1834 established the first mission for Native Americans at Mission Bottom, now the site of Willamette Mission State Park. In the school's first year, seven of the 14 students died and five of them ran away. In 1836, 16 of the 25 students fell ill. Only one student ever converted to Christianity, and by 1842, nearly all the Willamette Valley Native Americans were dead from diseases brought west by European Americans. Despite his "flock" being nearly wiped out, Lee remained unwavering in his resolve to teach the Native Americans religion as well as farming, and in 1840 he began a second mission. Lee and his missionaries built a house and a mill. They also built a literary and religious institute of learning that they called the Oregon Institute, which they financed by laying out a town and selling lots. Though "Chemetaka," which is a Kalapuya word meaning "place of rest," was suggested for the town name, the missionaries preferred a biblical name, and the town was christened "**Salem.**" The Oregon Institute shifted its focus from educating Native Americans to educating European American children who arrived in Oregon as part of the great emigration of 1845, and the Oregon Institute became **Willamette University**, which was chartered in 1853. Oregon Institute was the first school west of the Mississippi to teach European American children, and Willamette University is the first college in Oregon territory.

**Hopmere**, the single-stop community shortly before Brooks (leg 5), was an early station on the Oregon Electric Railway and once enjoyed heavy travel at hop harvest. Hops, for which this berg was named, is a key ingredient in beer. Salud!

One of the reasons early settlers were attracted to the Willamette Valley included the **vast, open prairies** with deep, fertile soil that required little other than plowing and planting to produce bountiful crops. These grassy lands, contrary to the settlers' assumptions, were not natural, but a product of the Kalapuya's late summer fire-setting. The Kalapuya knew that game thrived on grass, and that the fires killed the brush while encouraging growth of the

wild, lush grasses. These fires may have been the source of destruction that stalled **David Douglas'** botanizing in the area. Douglas, who was not a college-trained botanist, baffled local Native Americans with his occupation and his unorthodox method of collecting samples. Native Americans were accustomed to trappers and appreciated the value of beaver skins, but could make no sense of Douglas' collection of twigs, flowers and pine cones, which he collected by shooting them down with a rifle.

Interestingly, today's grass growers have used fire to annually burn 65,000 acres of grass seed crop and cereal grain residues within the Willamette Valley. Growers in the valley produce 60% of the world's cool season grasses and 90% of the world's annual rye-grass. These grasses, which include ryegrasses, bent grasses, fescues and orchard grass, are used in lawns, parks, pastures and golf courses.

The **Ankeny Wildlife Refuge** (staging area 10) protects the wintering habit of dusky Canada geese. The refuge is home to nearly 200 species of wildlife, including herons, hawks, vultures, quail, shorebirds, woodpeckers and multitudes of song birds. You may also spot red fox and black-tailed deer.

**Independence** (leg 12) was incorporated in 1885 by merging two competing towns with similar names into one. Henry Hills' Town of Independence was founded in 1867 by – you guessed it – Henry Hill. After abandoning his one-square-mile donation land claim on the west bank of the Willamette River, Hill returned from the California gold mines 20 years later and platted 40 acres for the town. In 1866, Elvin Thorp founded North Independence. Thorp had once been a resident of Independence, Missouri, the starting place of the Oregon Trail. The first act to incorporate Independence included only Henry Hill's Town in October 1884. However, the city charter included both towns in February the following year.

**Monmouth** (leg 12) is home to Western Oregon State College, which claims to be the oldest liberal arts college in the Oregon State System of Higher Education. Monmouth was settled in 1853 by pioneers who hailed from Illinois. Lacking creativity or merely fond of the home they left behind, the settlers named their new town in Oregon after their departed home in Illinois. These settlers moved to Oregon with the sole purpose of creating a Restoration College for educating on the science of living and religion. Monmouth University, as the school was called, in 1856 merged with nearby Bethel College, when the church that supported both schools could no longer sustain them both.

Just south of Monmouth, **Sarah Helmick State Park** (past Fir Crest Cemetery at staging area 12) provides a

much-deserved respite to weary travelers and relay participants alike. Sarah and her husband Henry traveled by wagon train along the Oregon trail from Iowa to this site, staking their claim in 1846. In 1922, Sarah, or "Grandma Helmick," donated 5 acres of the original Helmick claim to the state for use as a park. The donation was the first land deeded to the Oregon State Highway Commission for such purposes. Subsequent acquisitions from family enabled the State to increase the park size to more than 30 acres. The park lies along the Luckiamute River flood plane, where visitors can breathe the fresh scents of Douglas fir, grand fir, maple, ash, Port Orford cedar and cottonwood.

The romance of **sternwheelers** isn't limited to the Mississippi River or Mark Twain novels. Sternwheelers were an important means of travel from the 1850s through the 1870s, providing the primary method of transportation through the valley. These boats were capable of navigating shallow waters, as they required water only slightly deeper than a foot to propel them against the current and less to propel them with the current.

**Albany** (leg 15) was founded in 1848 by brothers Walter and Thomas Monteith, who named the town after their home state capital, Albany, New York. The Monteith's purchased two adjacent claims then built a single-room home that straddled the claims so each could claim he lived on his own land. The brothers built Albany's first frame house, which stands today at 518 Second Ave., and is now a museum open to the public. In 1851, Albany was designated the county seat, and the Monteiths donated 10 acres to be used as the courthouse site so Albany would continue to be the county seat. That courthouse, a two-story, octagonal building, was completed in 1853. That same year, residents convinced the Territorial Legislature to rename Albany "Takenah," a Kalapuyan word used to describe the deep pool at the confluence of the Calapooia and Willamette Rivers. Some people translated the word to "hole in the ground," which many felt was a name unworthy of the growing county seat, and in 1855 the Provisional Legislature reversed the name to Albany.

Albany served as the Willamette Valley's transportation hub. In 1860, it was a stopover point for daily stages traveling from Portland to Sacramento, CA. The **California Stage Company**, the first major stage in the west, offered the 710-mile trip, which was the longest stage trip in the nation, taking 6 days and 5 hours and requiring four- or six-horse teams, depending on the season. A trip from Portland to Albany cost \$10. The first steamboat, the "**Multnomah**," arrived soon after the Albany

Magnolia Flouring Mill started operations in 1852. The boat was built in New York City, shipped in pieces around Cape Horn and reassembled in Oregon City. In 1870, one could take a steamboat from Albany to Portland for \$1. Albany businessmen raised \$50,000 to bring **the railroad** through their town, and in 1871 the first locomotive arrived. As a faster method of transportation, the train soon replaced stagecoaches and steamboats. The Albany-Corvallis run featured the world's longest wooden railroad drawbridge, which was built in 1888, and by 1910 28 passenger trains departed daily from Albany.

The **500 Chinese laborers** brought to the valley to build the railroad also dug the Santiam Canal, which was completed in 1874 and by 1875 powered 15 manufacturing plants. Water power from the canal first generated electricity in 1887.

The US Dept. of the Interior lists three **Albany Historic Districts** in the National Register of Historic Places. The original downtown and residential neighborhoods remain virtually intact. Many architects and historians claim the historic buildings are Oregon's most varied collection, including styles from the 1840s through the 1920s, all concentrated in an area approximately 100 blocks square.

**Corvallis**, founded in 1845, was purchased from the Kalapooya who camped at the site. Settlers first named the town Marysville but changed it two years later to its current name, which means "heart of the valley." The town was established at roughly the same time and directly across the river from rival town **Orleans** (note the historic Orleans cemetery on leg 17). Orleans, while not being wiped out, suffered irreparable damage from the 1861 flood, the same flood that wiped out Champoeg. Today, the historic site where Orleans once sat is now a park.

J.C. Avery, one of Corvallis' first settlers, built the first home on the present city limits in 1846, and established a canoe ferry to shuttle goods and people across Mary's River. Growth rapidly escalated in Corvallis with the discovery of gold in the Jackson Creek area near Roseburg. Corvallis became a shipping center for supplies to the gold fields when several Benton County residents joined the rush by trading their plows for pans. In 1855, Oregon's capital moved briefly to Corvallis, but returned to Salem, the effect of the one bill the Territorial Legislature passed that year. Although the Corvallis shipping industry slowed when the southern Oregon gold rush didn't pan out, Corvallis continued to thrive. The city was incorporated in 1857, and just 6 months later in January 1858, Corvallis College was founded. Under the Morrill Act of 1862, signed into law by President Lincoln, Corvallis College

became Oregon State Agriculture College, now known as Oregon State

University. Go Beavs!

**Harrisburg** (staging area 20) seems to be a town with an identity crisis. Called Prairie City in 1852, it was renamed Thurston in 1853 and incorporated in 1866 as Harrisburg, after Pennsylvania's capital. So far, the name has stuck. The 1861 flood changed the course of the Willamette River here, shifting it ½ mile east, and wiping out competitor community Lancaster, putting Harrisburg on the river's banks.

**Eugene**, home of the University of Oregon (Go Ducks!), was settled in 1846 by Eugene Skinner. The settlement, called Skinner's, was first formed at the foot of the small rounded peak now known as Skinner's Butte. However, the original site of Skinner's settlement had its disadvantages. Because the land where Skinner's originally sat was so low, it became a muddy quagmire after heavy rains, earning the town the name Skinner's Mudhole. To avoid the continued use of such a name, a revised plat placed the town on higher ground, and the town was renamed Eugene City. Two years after its incorporation in 1862, the name changed to City of Eugene.

Hilyard Shaw dug a millrace in the channel of an old slough to provide power to local mills along the banks of the Willamette River. On many warm spring days U of O students have enjoyed "surfing the mill-race."

Eugene, now the state's second largest city, may not have grown to its size were it not for the railroad or the University of Oregon, both of which barely came to fruition. Ben Holladay extorted cash from local businessmen by threatening the railroad's bypassing of Eugene. In the early 1870s, Eugene promised the State to provide a suitable building for a state university. Because rural voters opposed using tax dollars to build the university, Eugene residents were forced to rely on remedial techniques – including wheat donations and school fund-raisers – to raise sufficient funds to build such a building.

**Alton Baker Park** marks the final destination for the Willamette Valley Relay. The park was named after the Eugene Register-Guard's co-founder, and is Eugene's largest developed park. The park features a running course suggested by Steve Prefontaine, a U of O runner who held seven American track records, and designed in part by Bill Bowerman, U of O track coach, and the Oregon Track Club.

**Congratulations! You've finished!**

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