

Collection #
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BV 2692–2693
OM 0108

PRAIRIE TREK EXPEDITIONS RECORDS, 1926–1982

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Processed by

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1988

and

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August 2007

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION:

Manuscript Materials: 45 document cases; 3 oversize folders; 2 bound volumes

Visual Materials: 3 boxes of photographs; 1 box of color photographs; 2 folders of oversize photographs (OVB); 1 folder

oversize color photographs (OVB); 21 boxes of slides; 1 video tape; 5 boxes of 4x5 acetate negatives; 4 4x5 color acetate negatives; 4 bins of 120 mm acetate color transparencies/negatives; 2 bins of 35 mm acetate color/black-and-white negatives,

COLLECTION DATES: 1926–1982

PROVENANCE: John Howie, Columbia, Missouri, January 1988

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NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Prairie Trek is a summer camping activity in the American Southwest which combines camping with educational experiences in natural science, crafts, and archeology.

The Trek began in 1926 when Hillis L. Howie, Scoutmaster of Indianapolis Troop 18, with the assistance of another adult, led nine Boy Scouts on a tour of the American West. Early expeditions consisted of approximately sixteen boys, ages 13–18, and three adult leaders. The group would leave Indianapolis by station wagon and truck, and drive nearly 5,000 miles through Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, before returning to Indianapolis. During the trip, the boys were expected to take responsibility for setting up camp, cooking and clean-up. There were opportunities for hiking, mountaineering, bird-watching, and exploring ghost towns and deserted Indian cave-dwellings and pueblos. The boys were encouraged to pursue a particular interest on the trip; this could include any of the natural sciences, special crafts, archeology, or photography. The expeditions were always run as educational trips, and in 1930, the Children's Museum of Indianapolis began commissioning the Trek as a field expedition to bring back specimens, photographs, and movies.

In 1934 Mr. Howie began to expand and institutionalize the Trek's activities. A separate girl's expedition, called the Turquoise Trail, began under the leadership of Mrs. Donald Jameson; it became a regular feature after 1940. In 1934 Mr. Howie purchased a 500-acre tract of land near Thoreau, New Mexico (Cottonwood Gulch) to serve as a base camp. In the following year the Trek was organized as a non-profit educational institution under the name of the Cottonwood Gulch Foundation, and the Thoreau property was deeded to the foundation. In 1960 a program for younger campers was started and was named the Little Outfit.

Mr. Howie continued as the director until 1970. In the winters he worked in various educational positions, including headmaster of Orchard School (1932–1938) and the Community School in Clayton, Missouri. In 1970 he “passed the torch” of the directorship to Thomas M. Billings, Jr., but he continued to serve as a trustee of the Foundation until his death in June 1982.

Prairie Trek and the Cottonwood Gulch Foundation continues to serve as a pioneer program in educational summer camping; now serving the entire United States from its offices in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Sources:

Information supplied from an unpublished history by Charles Latham, Jr. in 1983.

Prairie Trek Web Site: <http://www.cottonwoodgulch.org/expeditions/pt.php> (accessed 11 April 2007).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The first series contains organizational material regarding the Cottonwood Gulch Foundation. Items include negotiations for purchase of the property in 1934; organization of the Foundation, 1935; and board meetings and correspondence. There also are correspondence with the Foundation’s lawyers, particularly John E. Perry of Gallup, New Mexico and material on obtaining tax exempt status from the IRS, the State of New Mexico, and McKinley County. There are records dealing with additional land acquisition, the construction of new buildings, and rental arrangement for property use by outside groups. In addition, there are records regarding the obtaining of permits from the ICC to operate the Foundation’s trucks in the four-state area covered by expeditions; insurance; the handling of accidents involving campers; and various forms used in administration.

The second and largest series of manuscript materials contains the papers of the director. Records include efforts to recruit campers including trips around the country and correspondence with camp agencies, and advertising and brochures; methods employed in organizing summer camps such as the logistics for getting the campers and staff to the base camp and opening the camp; organizing activities for trekkers while at base camp and on expeditions; arranging for cooks and meal preparation; obtaining supplies and maintaining relations with other camping organizations, especially the American Camping Association; and keeping account of the day to day expenses of outfits and campers.

The third series involves the recruiting and training of qualified camp personnel. Materials include correspondence with staff members; evaluations by staff of their summer’s work; applications; and methods used for training.

Series four contains camper applications and material regarding “Outstanding Trekkers,” 1957–1977.

Series five contains historical information regarding Prairie Trek. Each outfit kept a log, and an account of the year’s experience was sent to each participant. In addition, some trekkers wrote papers of their experiences. There also is one scrapbook of clippings that presents a running history of the first twenty-five years of the organization.

Series six contains an enormous amount of visual materials documenting the organization and its participants. These are mostly unidentified black and white slides showing the activities of Prairie Trek and Turquoise Trail from approximately 1927 through 1976. There is also one VHS format tape with footage copied by staff members from Howie’s 16 mm home movies of Prairie Trek and Turquoise Trail. Henry L. Berman of Boston, copied the original film to video. More recently, Larry Barker assisted Director Monty Billings in editing the raw footage and putting a sound track to the edited material.

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Posed Groups, 1938	Photographs Box 2, Folder 6 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1940	Photographs Box 2, Folder 7 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1941	Photographs Box 2, Folder 8 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Gleason's Turquoise Trail, 1941	Photographs Box 2, Folder 9 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Group, 1947	Photographs Box 2, Folder 10 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Howie Gold Rush Posed Group, 1948	Photographs Box 2, Folder 11 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Howie Posed Group, 1949	Photographs Box 2, Folder 12 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1950	Photographs Box 2, Folder 13 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1951	Photographs Box 2, Folder 14 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1952	Photographs Box 2, Folder 15 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Posed Groups, 1954	Photographs

	Box 2, Folder 16 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Group I, Don and Dot Simpson, Sam dry, Harry Thayer, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 17 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 18 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 19 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 20 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 21 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 22 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 23 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 24 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Picture Post Cards, 1946	Photographs Box 2, Folder 25 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted, 1938–40 and n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 26 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 27 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 28 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Monument Valley	Photographs Box 2, Folder 29 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives

Assorted, n.d.; Northwest Territory, 1973	Photographs Box 2, Folder 30
Assorted, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 31
Assorted, n.d.; Copy of Logo; Copy of Article from Editors	Photographs Box 2, Folder 32 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted, 1937	Photographs Box 2, Folder 33
Assorted, 1940	Photographs Box 2, Folder 34
Assorted, n.d.	Photographs Box 2, Folder 35
Identified Individuals, Allen–Yazzie	Photographs Box 3, Folder 1
Assorted Views, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 2
Studio Portraits of Individuals, Asten–Woodward	Photographs Box 3, Folder 3 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted Views, 1952–77	Photographs Box 3, Folder 4 and 4 x 5 Acetate Negatives
Assorted Views, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 5
Assorted Views, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 6
Assorted Views, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 7
Olmstead’s Group, 1947–Ice Caves, Pueblo Ruins, Rushmore	Photographs Box 3, Folder 8
Unidentified, Taken by Harlan King, 1949?	Photographs Box 3, Folder 9
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 10
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 11
Unidentified, n.d.	Photographs Box 3, Folder 12;

	4 x 5 and 35 mm Acetate Negatives
Boy and Horse	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 1
Grand Canyon	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 2
Desert Scenes	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 3
Man and Horse (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 4
Man and Horse (2)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 5
Man Viewing Barren Land	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 6
Campers and Horses	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 7
Man on Horse (3)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 8
Man on Horse (4)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 9
Man on Horse (5); Several Horsemen	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 10
Chapel in Desert (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 11
Chapel in Desert (2); Pueblo	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Envelope 12
Campers with Horses in Corral	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 1

Campers and Staff with Horses in Corral (1); Mushroom Cloud	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 2
Campers and Staff with Horses in Corral (2)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 3
Campers and Staff with Horses in Corral (3)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 4
Campers, Staff Instructing	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 5
Campers Among Sage; Camp Truck	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 6
Tourists/Campers at Overview "It's a Beautiful Country"	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 7
A Budding Botanist	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 8
Horse and Rider Leaving Cabin; Chow Time (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 9
Chow Time (2); Butte and Horses	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 10
"You Can See Forever!" (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 2, Envelope 11
Camper Viewing Mountains	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 1
Rugged Country (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 2
Rugged Country (2); Campers by Stream	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 3
Playing on Hillside	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 4

“You Can See Forever” (2)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 5
“You Can See Forever” (3); “Now Do You Understand?”	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 6
Campers Viewing Horizon (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 7
Campers Viewing Horizon (2); Supply Vehicles	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 8
Rugged Country (3)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 9
Butte in Semi-Desert; Longview of Trucks, Cars, and Landscape	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 10
Supply Train (1)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 11
Pondering an Inscription	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 3, Envelope 12
Supply Train (2)	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 4, Envelope 1
Camping on the Sage; Mountain Climbing	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 4, Envelope 2
Tromping in the Wild	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 4, Envelope 3
Writing a Letter as Friends Watch; Working with Rocks	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 4, Envelope 4
Steam Tractor; Grand Canyon	120 mm Color Acetate Negatives Bin 4, Envelope 5
<i>The Prairie Trek Expedition</i> <i>Turquoise Trail Expedition</i> <i>The Early Years: 1927–1958</i>	Video Storage

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0390).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.