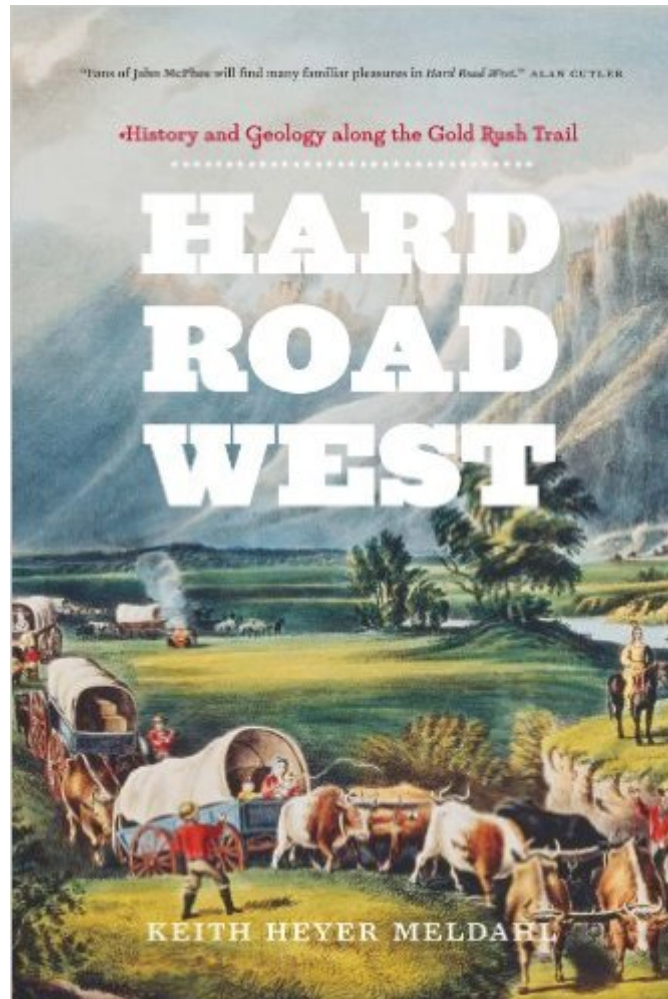


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Hard Road West: History And Geology Along The Gold Rush Trail



Synopsis

In 1848 news of the discovery of gold in California triggered an enormous wave of emigration toward the Pacific. Lured by the promise of riches, thousands of settlers left behind the forests, rain, and fertile soil of the eastern United States in favor of the rough-hewn lands of the American West. The dramatic terrain they struggled to cross is so familiar to us now that it is hard to imagine how frighteningâeven godforsakenâits sheer rock faces and barren deserts seemed to our forebears.ÂÂÂÂÂÂÂ Hard Road West brings their perspective vividly to life, weaving together the epic overland journey of the covered wagon trains and the compelling story of the landscape they encountered. Taking readers along the 2,000-mile California Trail, Keith Meldahl uses the diaries and letters of the settlers themselvesâas well as the countless hours he has spent following the trailâto reveal how the geology and geography of the West directly affected our nationâs westward expansion. He guides us through a corrugated landscape of sawtooth mountains, following the meager streams that served as lifelines through an arid land, all the way to California itself, where colliding tectonic plates created breathtaking scenery and planted the gold that lured travelers west in the first place.ÂÂAlternates seamlessly between vivid accounts of the 19th-century journey and lucid explanations of the geological events that shaped the landscape traveled. . . . The reader comes away with both an appreciation for the arduous cross-continental wagon journey and an understanding of the events that created such a vast and difficult landscape.ââLibrary JournalÂÂ[Meldahl] draws on his professional knowledge to explain the geology of the West, showing how centuries of geological activity had a direct effect on the routes taken by the travelers. . . . Meldahl provides a novel account of the largest overland migration since the Crusades.ââScience News

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition (September 15, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226519627

ISBN-13: 978-0226519623

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂÂSee all reviewsÂ (50 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #331,251 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #154 inÂBooks > History >

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Customer Reviews

Starting out, I wasn't quite as thrilled with this book as I later became. I wasn't quite what I was expecting. I was thinking it was going to cover the journey of the gold seekers, but it could have just as easily been the migration of any group of people as it was generic in this sense. Actual historical gold rushers weren't even mentioned until the last chapter. But once I got over the fact that it wasn't tackling the subject in the way I was expecting, I really grew to love it. M. gives us a step by step overview of the California trail and all the geology encountered along it. It's more a general geology review of the geologic provinces they traveled through (they- being any west bound emigrant) explaining the concepts behind the fold and thrust belt, the basin and range, the Snake River plain, the Sierra uplift, etc. The book is speckled though with writings of actual emigrants, and their observations of these features along the trail. Although most of the geology was old hat, I was happy to have learned a few things. Most notably, I never quite grasped why the eastern Rockies, the stuff clear over in eastern Wyoming and Colorado were really there. I was happy to find the cause in these deep basement uplifts of the Laramide Orogeny. Hmmm, I wonder that we ever covered that in school? Also, surprised that I had never heard of the exhumation of the Rockies. All in all I feel like I better grasp why the Rockies are, excepting now I am wondering what the Ancestral Rockies are. I also learned the sources of the gold that the 49's were after. I had never realized that they were blasting down old "fossil" stream channels that had drained Nevada before the Sierra had risen.

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