

Name _____



How the Colonists Traveled

By Sharon Fabian

The early colonists didn't travel much, not nearly as much as we do now. Their everyday trips were short. They didn't travel far for work. They didn't visit distant friends often. They didn't take vacations either.



When they needed supplies, colonists who lived in town walked. The towns were small, so it was a short walk to the store. Some colonists lived further out. When they needed to go into town, they hitched up a wagon. Horses pulled the wagon. The family rode into town. They bought supplies and loaded their wagon. Their horses pulled the wagon home.

Settlers didn't commute to work. Some lived and worked in town. They could walk to work. Many worked on their own farm.

Sometimes, the men needed to do business in another town. The best way for one man to travel was on horseback. This was the fastest way. Messengers traveled on horseback too. Postriders carried mail on horseback.

Sometimes settlers visited a neighboring farm. If it was a few miles away, they might walk. One or two people might go on horseback. A family might go in their farm wagon. In winter, they might hitch up their horses to a family-size sled.

Visits to far-away towns were rare at first. Later on, stagecoaches carried people from place to place. With stagecoaches, more people could travel. They could travel further too. But, it was not a comfortable ride. A stagecoach had hard wooden benches. It had no springs, so the ride was bumpy. The roads had ruts, rocks, and tree stumps. The stagecoach bounced over every one. When it got stuck, the passengers had to get out and help.

Horseback was not the only way to travel fast. There was one other way. That was by water. The rivers were the best and smoothest routes to travel. Many towns had grown up along a river. Settlers could travel from town to town by canoe.

Settlers could travel across a river by ferry. Ferries were used to carry goods across a river too. Towns on both sides of a river could trade using the ferry.

When goods needed to be moved over land, pack animals did the job. Pack horses and mules carried supplies. Farm wagons and two-wheeled carts carried bigger loads. Strong animals pulled these wagons and carts too. A team of oxen could pull a heavy load.

Sometimes a longer trip was planned. Maybe an explorer was going to see new places. Maybe a family was going to settle on new land. These travelers were going into unknown territory.

Some of them chose to travel on foot. They followed trails. They took a Native American guide to show the way.

A large group might have loaded up a Conestoga Wagon. This was a big wagon. It could hold all of a family's belongings. It was covered too. That gave some protection from the weather.

Travelers had to be ready for anything. If a horse went lame, they had to take care of it. If a wagon lost a wheel, they had to fix it. If they got lost, they had to find their own way back. Traveling was not easy in colonial days.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Colonists traveled by _____.
- A. foot
 - B. horseback
 - C. wagon
 - D. all of the above

