



Oregon-California Trail  
Panama Shortcut

# Journey of the Forty-niners

## Around Cape Horn



Suddenly a heavy blow struck the starboard quarter and careened the ship over on her side...A crash was heard overhead--chains rattling and falling, sails madly flapping, yardarms snapping and masts breaking; for a few seconds, the noise was terrific..."

-forty-niner Linville Hall describes a storm at sea from *Gold Dust*, by Donald Dale Jackson

The *Edward Everett* sailed from Boston in 1849, bound for California around Cape Horn, at the tip of South America. The gold seekers on board enjoyed a variety of foods, including cheese and butter, potpies, plum pudding, and applesauce. Scheduled activities included lectures and Sunday church services.



Most forty-niners traveling the 15,000-mile journey around Cape Horn did not enjoy such luxuries. They paid anywhere from \$100 to \$1000 and spent up to 8 months on board ship, packed together into tiny rooms or in the ship's hold.



In good weather, the travelers could enjoy the beauty of the sea. And stops in exotic ports such as Rio de Janeiro in Brazil made life interesting. But as the voyage went on, the boredom could become maddening. To pass the time, gold seekers gambled and played checkers, told stories, and

daydreamed of gold.

Usually, there were two varieties of food--boring and awful. Meats and vegetables spoiled quickly in the hot climate near the equator. Worms burrowed through the bread. The water tasted foul. Some men got scurvy, a disease caused by lack of foods containing vitamin C. Their gums bled and their teeth fell out. A few even died. Diseases such as cholera killed men as well. Dead bodies were wrapped in canvas cloth and buried at sea.

The most dangerous leg of the journey was the sail around the very tip of Cape Horn. Monstrous waves, terrifying winds, and frigid temperatures challenged even the most experienced captains. Some took a short cut through the Strait of Magellan. But that passage was narrow and sometimes deadly.



Still, the Cape Horn route was probably the safest of all the routes to the gold fields. Thousands of men made the trip successfully. But even after their 15,000 mile journey, forty-niners arrived in California with no guarantee of success. Year later, many would return home, no richer than when they'd left for California.



suggested readings