

Plank Road Activity – San Diego Automotive Museum

Curriculum Guide The Old Plank Road

This Informal Curriculum Experience (ICE) is geared for high school students grades 10-12. The California Standards-based areas covered and suggested teaching elements are:

History (history of transportation and how it built cities, communities, and culture)
Geography (the history and topography of the California desert)
Critical Thinking (how one might navigate a plank road today)
English/Writing & Composition (imaginary diary of a plank road traveler)
Math (calculating time and expense to drive the Old Plank Road in 1922)

Goals: Students will learn about plank roads as early highway systems in the United States. Of particular interest is the Old Plank Road that ran from Yuma, Arizona to Holtville, California. The students will study the history of the development of the road that eventually became Interstate 8 and its importance to the Imperial Valley.

Objectives:

Students will be able to identify Yuma, Arizona and Holtville, California on a map.

Students will be able to name the key developers of the Old Plank Road.

Students will be able to list at least three challenges the Old Plank Road presented to designers and those who traveled the road.

Students will be able to identify the progressions in the Old Plank Road until it became today's Interstate 8.

Students will correctly identify the location and discuss the importance of Gray's Well to the development of the roadway.

Students will correctly list three reasons for building the Old Plank Road and the impact that had on the development of San Diego as a West Coast city of importance.

Writing Assignment

Most information you need to give your students is included in the pre-visit materials. It is also covered extensively in the interpretive exhibit on the museum floor. A writing assignment is a good way to tie all the curricular elements together. After watching the oral histories on the exhibit video, your students will have a better idea of what it was like for early users of the road.

Have your students prepare a "diary" entry of an imaginary trip on the Old Plank Road. Encourage them to use everything they have learned about the challenges along the way, Gray's Well as a stopping point, sand storms, etc. What is their reason for traveling the road? Are there any surprises? How has San Diego changed since they made the trip?