

## Goodale's Cutoff

Number 51

1972

Goodale's Cutoff left the Oregon Trail at Fort Hall, crossed the Snake River plains to Lost River, and then headed west. Camas Prairie provided an approach to the Boise region that stayed north of the broad valley of the Snake. Rejoining the Oregon Trail from Ditto Creek to Boise, Goodale's route again diverged to the north of the main emigrant road. A final reunion with the older trail came on Powder River not far from Baker. The route across Camas Prairie, an old Indian trail, was explored originally in 1820 by Donald Mackenzie.

"A very reliable" mountain trader in the Snake country before Idaho was settled, Goodale knew just about all of the Indian and fur trade trails of the valley and mountain country north of the Snake. His cutoff had been used by fur traders for many years, and emigrant wagons had traversed the eastern section as early as 1852. A manuscript map prepared in Willamette valley, May 4, 1853, identified Goodale's general route from Fort Hall through Camas Prairie as a "New road traveled by wagon first July 20th 1852." A decade later, emigrants traveling on Goodale's Route noticed places along the trail where a trunk had been abandoned in 1853 and names had been carved in 1854 on rocks and trees along the new road.

Then in 1855, Major Granville O. Haller's expedition to retaliate against the Indians who participated in the 1854 Ward Massacre came that way across Camas Prairie. Haller's men preceded north to the upper Salmon, but a special agent, Nathan Olney, continued eastward over the later Goodale route with a small force to Fort Hall to consult with the Indians there. Although traffic on this northern route must have been extremely light until after 1860, Gouverneur K. Warren labeled the eastern portion "Jeffers Road" on his large 1859 map of the west.

Alonzo Leland's 1863 map of the Idaho mining country, used widely at the time, repeated Warren's identification of Jeffers Road and identified Goodale's route across Camas Prairie simply as the "New Emigrant Road." With the Salmon River gold rush in 1862, an Oregon Trail emigrant party prevailed upon Goodale to take them over the northern route west from Fort Hall in the hope that they might approach the new mines more directly. Other wagons followed along. Goodale promised to lead them just as close to Florence as he could. So he used the Jeffers-Camas Prairie route. His party included a number of prominent later Idaho residents who renamed the route for Goodale. That was the name that stuck. (Most of them spelled Goodale's

name in different ways, but Tim and his family used Goodale. They ought to have known.) Setting out from Snake River July 22, 1862, Goodale's wagon trail collected into a large force to avoid Indian trouble.

Near Craters of the Moon Goodale stopped for a day (July 28) to gather up still more wagons. This precaution gave him a force of 795 men, augmented by another 300 women and children. With such a show of strength, his wagons escaped the kind of misfortune of some emigrants who ran into an Indian fight at Massacre Rocks, August 9, on the regular Oregon Trail south of Snake River. West of Boise Basin, Goodale happened to meet up with the prospectors led by George Grimes who had just discovered the Boise mines and were returning to Walla Walla. So Goodale took the combined party on over the western part of his cutoff. Proceeding through the upper Weiser country to Pine Creek and Powder River, they opened the Brownlee ferry route which came into general use late in 1862 with the gold rush to Boise Basin. Brownlee's ferry across Snake River made the western part of Goodale's Cutoff practical, and at the other end, Gibson's ferry operated near Ferry Butte. With these two good Snake River crossings, Goodale's route became a popular one from that time on. Some of the old tracks still are visible in the vicinity of Craters of the Moon.

Idaho State Historical Society • Idaho State Archives • 2205 Old Penitentiary Road • Boise, ID 83712  
Phone: (208) 334-2620 • Fax: (208) 334-2626 • For more information, visit  
[www.history.idaho.gov](http://www.history.idaho.gov)

The ISHS reference series was produced over many years by a number of individuals, some of whom devoted more time to their topics than others. Reference series entries are not updated. The series is designed to be a starting point for research.