

Route of the Oregon Trail in the Upper Boise Valley

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In the stretch northwest of Bonneville Point, the Oregon Trail descends some steep grades, particularly in Section 4, T2N, R3E (where most of the divergent tracks coincide in an upper grade) and in Section 31, T3N, R3E, where the earlier, unimproved route came down another bench. When a ferry began operation in the upper end of the valley, a steep grade was constructed through the lava rim west of Diversion Dam in Section 4, T2N, R3E. Another, better grade was built farther northwest to accommodate later stage freight traffic which went by a route that eventually became Boise Avenue.

Early wagons on the Oregon Trail came along the river bottom for a way, but eventually ascended the bench in Section 19, T4N, R1E, to avoid an impassable section south of Eagle Island, where river channel and swamps reached to the bench. (A natural opening near original Valley View school in Section 26, T4N, R1E, or another farther west in Section 21, might have been used, but surveyor's notes and maps of the township survey made in 1867 do not reflect any such route. An alternate road for an emigrant route coming down the Valley View opening and returning to the bench in Section 19 shows in the 1867 survey records, indicating that the earlier trail came up the bench in Section 19.) A tremendous Boise River flood wiped out traces of the original Oregon Trail in the upper valley, and after the flood, a river channel cut off any use of the valley bottom route in sections 9, 10, and 16, at a point below the present Union Pacific depot and past Capitol Boulevard. After 1862, the road pattern also was changed to accommodate traffic through Boise, established on the north side of the river opposite the earlier trail. An emigrant route was re-established south of the river. But from the later intersection of Broadway and Boise avenues, the revised emigrant trail route proceeded northwest to the point where the later Ridenbaugh Canal came onto the bench. From that point on, the new trail ran along near the later sites of South Junior High, Jefferson School, and north close to the edge of the bench. Proceeding northwest, the bench route used after 1862 rejoined the earlier route on the bench south of Eagle Island. When the townships were surveyed in 1867, traces of the original route in the valley had been washed away or covered by the 1862 flood, and the later bench route was the only one noted. The earlier valley route, noted in E. E. Parrish's 1844 diary, was necessary because the hill where the later emigrant trail ascended the bench (along the

route of the later Ridenbaugh Canal) could not be used by wagons without grading that hardly would have been done prior to 1862.

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