

Rice and Porter Toll Road

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A rush of prospectors to the South Boise region in 1863 and the discovery of promising quartz lodes created a feeling of high expectations for the new area. The miners eagerly awaited the completion of Julius C. Newberg's road from Little Camas Prairie to Rocky Bar so that heavy equipment and supplies could be brought to the mines. There was great rejoicing among all concerned when Newberg opened his road for traffic on September 5, 1864. The road made it possible for wagons to reach the area, and the miners looked forward to good times. There still was a need, however, for a more practical route between Little Camas Prairie and the Overland Road. Miners, packers, and travelers followed the route of Timothy Goodale's 1862 emigrant-trail cutoff from Little Camas to where it joined the main thoroughfare near Ditto Creek. Although this route seemed practicable to the emigrant, the grades at Syrup, Willow, and Ditto creeks proved difficult and slow to heavily-laden animals and wagons.

On October 3, 1867, E. P. Rice published a notice in the Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman announcing his intention to construct a toll road between Little Camas Prairie and the emigrant road near the Canyon Creek stage station. (p. 2, c. 4) On January 6, 1868, he presented his proposal to the Alturas County Commissioners. He reported that his route would follow a line commencing at Little Camas Prairie thence on the most practicable route to the head of Bennett Creek. Thence in a Southwest direction to Rattlesnake Creek. From thence on same line to Sage Brush plains. Thence along the foothills westwardly to Salmon Falls road. Connecting with said road about three miles from Dry Creek. The distance being about eighteen (18 miles) miles. There being three passes, one from Camas, one from Dixie, and one from Long Tom, would like the privilege of choosing the best & most practicable one, and the road may be a little varied from above description but the initial points are Camas Prairie & the Salmon Falls road. The object being to connect the two by a more easy, safe - low-graded road than the present one, and thereby avoiding the steep & heavy passage over the Syrup Creek Mountains, and the hills beyond. Your petitioner believing that the construction of said road will greatly subserve the interests of the traveling public & the community at large. The present road by Syrup Creek will be left open & all can travel that who desire to do so. Your petitioner desiring no toll gate on the old road or anywhere near it, but placing the toll gate between the old Emigrant road & the Salmon Falls road, where he has built & opened an entire new road...(Folder 1, Box 2, Alturas County Commissioner's Records, Idaho State Archives, Boise)

On May 9, 1868, the Statesman reported that Rice had been granted the right to construct his road by the commissioners at their April session. The article also stated that the "road is progressing rapidly and will soon be completed by Messrs. Rice and Porter. Most of the grading is done and the teams have already passed over it. Chandler's Express travels it now. This road is a vast improvement over the old road. There are no steep hills or heavy grades and it is several miles shorter. It avoids Syrup Creek hill and the steep hill this side going up from Squaw Creek. Toll will not be collected until it is completed and viewed by the Commissioners." (P. 2, c. 3) Toll charges for the road were \$1.50 for a two-horse wagon or buggy, one way; 50 cents for each additional span; 50 cents for a saddle horse; and 50 cents a head for pack animals. The toll road began at Mud Flats, where it joined the Overland Road, and proceeded southeast to Canyon Creek; thence northeast to Tollgate. From there it closely followed the current grade of Highway 20 to Dixie summit; thence near the old highway grade down to Dixie and over the summit to Little Camas Prairie, where it connected with the South Boise toll road.

On March 18, 1870, Rice sold his interest in the toll road to James A. Porter for \$4,000. (Alturas County Deed Book D, p. 111.) Four days after selling his road, Rice took ill while visiting a friend and died. He was forty-two years old and a native of Oswego County, New York. (Capital Chronicle, March 30, 1870, p. 3, c. 1) Rice had also owned a one-half interest in the South Boise toll road, which he and B. F. Nichols had purchased from Newberg in 1868. Nichols purchased Rice's interest at his estate sale on April 6, 1871, for \$500 and with his son S. N. Nichols continued to operate the road until the charter expired in 1887. (Alturas County Records, Miscellaneous Records Affecting Real Estate, Book 1, pp. 90-91.)

After he became the sole owner of the road, Porter continued to improve the road and the facilities at his tollgate station. His residence became a favorite stopping place for persons going and coming from the South Boise area. A Capital Chronicle correspondent in October of 1869 noted, "Our next stopping place was at Mr. Porter's where, for a good supper, fine breakfast and comfortable lodging, the treatment was perhaps quite as well as we deserved." (Capital Chronicle, October 6, 1869, p. 1, c. 4) W. C. Tatro utilized Porter's as a halfway station when he started a stage line to Rocky Bar in 1870. At that time, Porter extended a portion of his road down Rattlesnake Creek to intersect the Overland Road at Rattlesnake Station.

In September of 1874, William A. Goulder, the traveling correspondent of the Statesman, remarked: "With a fresh team we soon sped '20 miles away' to Porter's where we arrive sometime before sundown. No better accommodations can be found anywhere than at Porter's.

Mr. Porter owns the toll road from the Overland to Little Camas, and keeps it in splendid condition. They keep a Dairy and make butter, have utilized a water power to do their churning and washing. The reputation of their butter is not unsurpassed in any country." (September 8, 1874, p. 2, c. 1)

In 1875, Tatro changed his overnight stop to Rattlesnake Station in order to better meet the needs of Overland travelers desiring to take his stage to South Boise. The move meant a loss of business for Porter, but his popularity and reputation as a congenial host lessened the impact of Tatro's move and he continued to receive the patronage of knowledgeable travelers.

In October of 1875, after spending an uncomfortable night at Rattlesnake Station, a correspondent for the Owyhee Avalanche wrote: "After passing an uncomfortable night at the station where the stage is taken for Rocky Bar, it is pleasant to make even a brief stay at Porter's, five miles beyond where everything externally and internally betokens home comforts." (Owyhee Avalanche, October 16, 1875, p. 2, c. 1)

The Avalanche correspondent expanded his description on October 23, 1875. "Porter's Station. This station, located about five miles from the Overland Road on the Rocky Bar route, is a very pleasant resort and is kept in tip-top shape by Mr. and Mrs. Porter. Owing to the fact that the newly christened 'Bedbug Station,' at the nearest point on the Overland, is not kept in such condition as to warrant public patronage, travelers in this direction frequently walk to Porter's for the purpose of sojourning overnight and luxuriating in a comfortable bed. Besides the man who keeps the 'Bedbug' inn is totally unfitted for his business and deserving the contempt of all decent men." (p. 2, c. 2) Apparently the correspondent and the station-keeper, Marion Daniels, did not strike up a lasting friendship during the former's stay at Rattlesnake station.

The Statesman, on October 21, 1875 (p. 2, c. 2), called the description a gross misstatement and defended the capabilities of Mr. and Mrs. Daniels. Nevertheless, many travelers did opt to walk the five miles and stay at Porter's. In 1879, William A. Goulder once again passed the station on his way to Rocky Bar and noted: "A morning's drive of five miles brought us to Mr. Porter's place where we noticed some important changes and improvements since our former visit. Mr. Porter has a good location on the route of the daily stage line between Mountain Home and Rocky Bar, surrounded by the finest stock range in the country, with many fertile spots along the little creek that flows past his house, which he has fenced and where he raises grain, hay and vegetables." (September 16, 1879, p. 2, c. 2) Tragedy struck the Porter household in the summer of 1882. "Robert Porter, 10 years old, son of the keeper of Porter's

station, near Mountain Home, was run over by a heavily loaded wagon last Wednesday [June 21] sustaining injuries which it is feared will result fatally. He was on the wagon with a companion his own age. They disputed as to who should drive, and in their struggle for possession of the reins, Robert was pushed, or fell from the wagon. One of the hind wheels passed over his body. No bones were broken, but internal injuries of the most dangerous nature must have been caused..." (June 27, 1883, p. 3, c. 2) The young man's injuries did prove fatal and the Statesman reported his succumbing on June 25, 1882. (June 29, 1882, p. 3, c. 3) Shortly after the death of their son, Mr. and Mrs. Porter sold the toll road and their station to Captain George W. Hill. On April 10, 1886, D. B. Ethell represented Hill and wrote the following letter to the Altruas County Commissioners:

Gentlemen Mr. Hill requested me to write you in regard to the purchase of his toll road he as I understand offers to sell his road for twenty five hundred dollars and agrees to keep the road in repair for two years. In regard to your purchasing his road and the price he asks I do not feel like offering any advice yet I would like to see some arrangement made with him to make it a free road. Should you do so I think Mr Hill would be a good man to appoint to take charge of the road as he lives about the center of the line of the road that is from Mountain Home to the east end of the road and it would be better to make one district of the whole of it Another matter allow me to call your attention too. There is a piece of road lying between the Hill and South Boise Roads that gets very bad in the Spring and requiring some work and two small bridges across Camas and Cat Creeks The Hill road terminates at Little Camas Creek according to the original charter but Nichols only claims and works to the northern end of Camas leaving about seven miles of Road that he does not work and it is pretty bad travailing over it in the Spring for the want of a little work and from Camas Creek to Hills Road is about one mile making in all 8 miles that requires some work in the Spring I would suggest that you make a Road District there and appoint Fred Cooper who lives on Little Camas Road Supervisor he is a good man and there is timber not a great ways off that can be got to put in the bridges which can be built at a small cost and are badly needed in the Spring and also in the fall after they begin to freeze I would respectfully ask of your honorable body to give the Road matter due consideration the whole road from Rocky Bar to Mountain Home If you can consistently do anything for us we would like it very much. (Box 2, folder 3, Incoming Letters to the County Commissioners, Alturas County, Idaho State Archives, Boise.)

Within the next two years the county commissioners purchased both the Hill and the Nichols road and made the route between Mountain Home and Rocky Bar a free public

thoroughfare. Hill retained the ownership of his station and resided there until leasing the operation to Matt Casey in the fall of 1892. Casey continued the tradition of offering excellent service to the traveling public until moving with his family to a farm outside Boise in December of 1893. (Elmore Bulletin [Rocky Bar], October 30, 1892, p. 3, c. 1 and December 23, 1893, p. 3, c. 3) In 1894 Hill sold the property to Will Calloway, who continued to run the station for a number of years. After selling his holdings, Hill lived for a time in both California and Boise before retiring to a ranch located seven miles east of Mountain Home. In the summer of 1897, he constructed a new dwelling on his ranch and resided there until his death on June 30, 1898. (Elmore Bulletin, April 14, 1897, p. 3, c. 2)

Andrew Baker, the road supervisor between Mountain Home and Dixie from 1908 to 1912, put in a new grade above Tollgate and improved the road at Devil's Dive. This latter section of road can still be viewed by the passing motorist. It is located about four miles above Tollgate, just north of Highway 20. Another section of the original toll road, situated west of Tollgate, can still be traveled to its junction with a county road east of Canyon Creek. Fruit trees and a vegetable garden continue to flourish along Rattlesnake Creek, and a rustic way-station, known as Tollgate, operates at the site of the original station. The proprietors of Tollgate dispense food and drink to modern-day travelers with the same hospitality that made it such a popular stop over a hundred years ago.

Recent highway construction has greatly improved the grade between Rattlesnake Station and Little Camas Prairie, but the scenic qualities of the route remain much the same as those viewed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century stage coach patrons.

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