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REFERENCE SERIES

RANCHING AND MINING IN THE BRUNEAU COUNTRY

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Gold and silver discoveries beginning in 1862 brought farmers and ranchers, as well as miners and merchants, to southern Idaho. Herds of cattle came to Idaho's mining camps during the gold rush, and most of the better rangeland was stocked not long after. In the process, arrangements were made to remove most of the Indians to the country around Fort Hall, away from white settlement. After a treaty negotiated on April 12, 1866, in Bruneau Valley with Governor Caleb Lyon went unratified by the United States Senate, some of the Bruneau Shoshoni were affected by this removal policy. (Lyon's treaty would have left most of the Bruneau country for the Indians. Only the lower valley would have been relinquished to white ranchers.) But as a result of Lyon's efforts to treat them decently, Bruneau John and some of his associates remained friendly to white ranchers who began to settle in Bruneau Valley after 1870.

In 1875, a small part of the upper Bruneau was included in the Duck Valley Reservation, set aside from Western Shoshoni and Northern Paiute bands. Some of the Bruneau Shoshoni used this reservation as well. During the Bannock War of 1878, Bruneau John went to a lot of trouble to warn Abram Roberson (who had dug out a large cave house for settlers into his cave until the war swept on by. Roberson and the other settlers remained grateful to Bruneau John and President James A. Garfield sent Bruneau John a silver medal in 1881 for his service.

Thousands of cattle grazed in the Bruneau country without too much competition until sheep herders began to move in as well. By the spring of 1887, much of the upper Bruneau desert was overgrazed by sheep and ruined for cattle, and extremely dry years in 1888 and 1889 made matters worse. At the same time, good cattle markets in the Great Plains (a result of severe winters in 1887 and 1888 that wiped out most of the plains cattle herds) led to considerable export of southern Idaho cattle to Montana and Wyoming. Finally a terrible winter (December 1889 to February 1890) devastated cattle ranches in southern Idaho, although some of the Bruneau holdings fared somewhat better. But large cattle enterprises began to give way to smaller ranch operations in the Bruneau country. At the same time, John Wilkins began to develop a small band of horses into a large herd that enabled him to supply important national horse markets on a big scale. His daughter, Kitty, gained a national reputation as the "Horse Queen of Idaho" after taking over the enterprise.

Basque sheepmen also entered Bruneau Valley after 1890. Frank Ypariaguire expanded northward from Elko into the Bruneau and Snake River plains in 1891, and others soon followed. At the same time, placer mining at Rowland in the Upper Bruneau drainage brought in still another element. By 1900 the Bruneau region had a more diverse economy.

A major gold discovery in July, 1909, led to one of the West's last gold rushes up the Bruneau River. Unlike earlier Idaho mining stampedes, this one featured Model T Fords. The mines at Jarbridge (a river that flows into the Bruneau) proved to be productive, although--as usual in such circumstances--most everyone who joined the rush failed to find anything. Located in Nevada a few miles south of the state line, these mines attracted around 1,500 people early in the spring of 1910. By May the camp had declined to around 300, but during the active production of the camp (1916 to 1932) the population stabilized not much below that level. A 73-mile power line was built into Jarbridge from Thousand Springs on Snake River, and after 1920 this became Nevada's main gold camp. A short revival in 1936-1937 brought production there to a total of over \$10,000,000. After the depression, the camp became a ghost town populated mainly by deer hunters each fall. But irrigated farming in the lower Bruneau Valley, and ranching in the country above, still retain their earlier importance. A few tourists manage to find their way to Bruneau Canyon, but on the whole, the country still has much of the atmosphere of the Old West.