

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - BOISE PROJECT AND ADJACENT OWYHEE AND LOWER WEISER IRRIGATED LANDS

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Historic-site reports contain information designed to assist in two preservation functions. One is preservation planning at the local level. The other is the work of federal agencies in carrying out their responsibilities to comply with historic-preservation requirements prescribed by federal statutes and regulations. These reports summarize local archaeological, historical, and geographical contexts; existing surveys of historic sites; architectural, engineering, industrial; and other cultural resources; and available maps and literature concerning each area. Natural geographical, rather than governmental, boundaries have been used to identify seventy-two areas that vary greatly in size. Site reports reflect a broad cultural and geographical disparity characteristic of diverse regional components found in Idaho, but the areas are designed to incorporate cultural elements of immediate local significance that need to be taken into account for preservation planning.

1. Geographical context: Originally arid sagebrush valley lands (western Snake plains) with brush and trees bordering stream banks this territory has become irrigated farmland. Some extensive patches of sagebrush rangeland survive at elevations too high to irrigate, although extensive pumping development has reduced those tracts. Elevations vary from less than 2,800 feet at Diversion Dam near Boise to 2,080 feet below Weiser. Very few hills and canyons lend variety to an otherwise flat topography.

2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites: People have inhabited southern Idaho for fourteen thousand years or more. Until about eight thousand years ago they were noted primarily as big game hunters. Since then, they specialized more in camas, bitterroot, and other natural crops and seeds, as well as in smaller game. But they continued to hunt large game that remained after earlier elephants, camels, giant sloth, and other ice age creatures left as climatic conditions changed.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary: Major episodes in Boise and Payette Valley development include:

1. An era of exploration, fur trade, and emigrant road traffic, 1811-1862
2. Early irrigated farming and service centers for nearby mining camps, 1863-1876
3. Irrigation Expansion and rail service, 1876-1904
4. Initial Reclamation Service projects, 1904-1924
5. Supplemental storage development, 1925-1949
6. Industrial expansion

Following a traditional Indian route, Donald Mackenzie and his advance party of fur hunters headed overland toward Astoria, Oregon discovered Boise and Payette valleys in October, 1811. Other trappers followed, but Indian hostility which wiped out John Reid's lower Boise trading post in January, 1814, retarded permanent occupation of that area. Mackenzie brought a substantial trappers' brigade back in 1818 and held an early Boise area fur trade rendezvous to supply his expedition and ship out his furs in 1819. Indian resistance defeated his effort to establish a new North West Company Fort Boise that summer, but unusually rich beaver resources continued to attract Hudson's Bay Company expeditions as well as mountain men based out of Saint Louis. Intense competition and a British effort to limit Saint Louis fur trade expansion created a zone barren of fur resources within another decade. But British trappers continued to patrol both rivers.

5. Historical documentation and literature:
6. Historic sites inventory:
7. Industrial archaeological and engineering sites summary:
8. Architectural resources:
9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Birding Island 1952
 Letha 1971
 Montour (15') 1953
 New Plymouth 1965
 Northwest Emmett 1971
 Nyssa 1965

Parma 1965
Parma SE 1965
Payette 1961
Sand Hollow 1970
Southwest Emmett 1970
Weiser South 1951

10. Cultural resource management recommendations: