

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SALMON FALLS (EMIGRANT) FERRY

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Located near the site of the later Owsley Ferry. In 1852 some enterprising mountainmen put in a small ferry a short distance above the Salmon Falls. Emigrants looking for a better water and grass route began utilizing the route. By crossing here, they opened up a northside Oregon Trail alternate that rejoined the main route near Teapot Dome hot springs northeast of present day Mountain Home. The following are emigrant accounts of their crossing here:

To day after traveling 5 miles near salmon falls we came to a ferry and crossed with the expectation of getting better grass . . . We came to camp one mile after crossing . . . (William Cornell diary, August 24, 1852, Oregon Historical Society, [hereafter OHS].)

In three miles we passed some hot springs in the river bank and came to Bannock creek, but found no grass, but found a notice that five miles below was a ferry across the river and plenty of grass on the other side. Went to it--about one mile out of our way--and the ferryman recommended the route as so much shorter and better supplied with grass and water that we concluded to try it. The ferry consists of two wagon boxes lashed together so as to make a boat, and a rope stretched across the river to pull it across, and all they asked was \$3 a wagon for ferrying.

No wind this morning, we ferried over in good season and proceeded on our way. (Cecilia Emily McMillen Adams diary, September 4-5, 1852 entries, OHS.)

Soon after we start we come to the ferry, over a rough, rocky hilly and crooked road. . . . This is a dangerous place to swim beasts as Salmon Falls is about a mile below. . . . [they ferry the river] Went about 1 ½ miles to a large spring that gushed from the rocks. . . . Here we pitched tent. . . . (Henry A. Allyn diary, July 25, 1853, OHS.)

Just above the first falls, the French, Creoles

and Indians have a ferry, they charged four dollars per wagon for crossing, a great many emigrants were crossing and going down the north side of the river, grass is said to be better on the north side.

("Overland from Indiana to Oregon, the Dinwiddie Journal," edited by Margaret Booth. The Frontier, a Magazine of the Northwest [March, 1928], 8:115-130 [July 30, 1853 entry].)

After traveling 4 or 5 miles we reached the second ferry on Snake River a short distance above Salmon Falls. There were a great many waggons before us, but the wind blew so hard that they did not think best to cross, our company were more couragious and took off the cover of the little waggon, got on board and though we rocked a little we were soon landed on the other side. (Diary of Mrs. Byron J. Pengra . . . Kept by Her on a Trip Across the Plains from Illinois to Oregon in 1853 [Eugene, Oregon: Lane County Pioneer Historical Society, 1966] [July 31, 1853 entry].)

Came to the ferry at 12 (Henry's Ferry, Lat. 42 Long. 46) Hundreds of cattle and horses and people are waiting to cross and but one ferry boat to carry them in. The falls are below 1 ½ miles. . . . We cannot go on the ferry to-day there are so many registered before us. Crossed the river about midnight last night. (Maria Parsons Belshaw diary, August 6-8, 1853 OHS.)

We camped near the ferry on Snake river. While our wagons, & the families were being Ferried across the River, Myself, & 5 other men drove our cattle out about a mile where they could get Grass, & about as soon as we though, the rest were across, we drove our cattle to the Ferry, & with more help drove three or four hundred yds' below the Ferry, & swam our cattle over. (Benjamin Franklin Owen. My Trip Across the Plains, March 31, 1853-October 28, 1853. [Eugene, Oregon: Lane County Pioneer Historical Society, 1959] [August 7-8, 1853, entries].)

This morning by daylight our wagons were crossing the river. We had to load and unload our wagons, row the skiff and then pay \$4 per wagon and 50¢ a head for swimming cattle by the side of the boat. By 8:00 O'Clock our wagons were all safely over and the ferryman demanded his ferrage. (Memorandum of Thoughts, Reflections, and Transactions as Transcribed by Basil Nelson Longsworth on His Journey from Washington Township, Guernsey County, Ohio, to Oregon

in the Summer of 1853. [Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1972] [August 8, 1853, entry].)

Went to the ferry, a short distance. . . . Saw at the ferry a horse that had been bitten by scorpions, dying. A short distance below the ferry is Salmon Falls. . . . Crossed the ferry, paying \$6.00 per wagon.

They paid \$10.00 to some men for swimming the cattle over on account of the difficulty of doing so, for the swiftness of the current and the width of the river and also the weakness of the cattle. "Diary of Celinda E. Hines." Transactions of the Forty-sixth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association, Portland, June 20, 1918, 69-125 [August 10, 1853, entry].)

Went to Salmon Falls Against noon in the Afternoon we Crossed the River on A ferry boat in Crossing the river Mr E. Wolford lost one horse by drowning after Crossing the river we went out three miles and Camped on Clar water Creek here there was Some good grass (George N. Taylor diary, August 12, 1853, OHS.)

By Larry R. Jones