

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

H. D. WALLEN'S REPORT, 10 DECEMBER 1859
CONCERNING OREGON AND IDAHO PAIUTE AND SHOSHONI BANDS

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Shortly before 1860, an Army effort to locate an improved Oregon Trail route north of Applegate's Cutoff led to a thorough investigation of potential southeastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho (then part of Washington territory) possibilities. Captain H. D. Wallen's report concerning his examination of that area's Indians contains useful information regarding their culture immediately prior to white settlement of that area.

Sir

On my last visit at Portland I had the pleasure of an interview, and promised that I would give you a short description of my trip last summer embracing such points of interest as might be useful to you as superintendent of Indian Affairs.

As but little was known of the Country lying to the South and East from the Dalles I determined before starting out on my last trip, to shape my course in that direction, with the view of mapping the Country, developing its resources and seeing the different Indian tribes who inhabit the valleys of that region. I found the route between the Dalles and Warm Spring Reservation a difficult country for the construction of a good wagon road, but excellent for pack animals; the construction of a road for wheel vehicles between the points named will involve much labor & expense.

The first Indians encountered on my trip, were near the forks of Crooked River, about one hundred and eighteen miles East of the Warm Spring Reservation. These Indians are the Digger Snakes, inhabiting the valley of Crooked River, and the adjacent valleys; sometimes, extending their camps as far North as the headwaters of John Days River, and as far South as the "two buttes" near the head waters of the Des-Chutes River. They subsist almost entirely on roots, insects and fish taken from the numerous cool streams flowing from the mountains surrounding the valley of Crooked River on either side--Crooked River empties into the Des-Chutes about forty miles South of the Warm Spring Reservation. I do not consider these Indians formidable for the reason, that with few exceptions they are armed with the bow and arrow, and as they have no intercourse with the Whites, they are not provided with guns and ammunition. I

am under the impression, that these were the Indians, who not long since made the attack on the Reservation; as they are numerous and being contiguous to it, having their greatest number of lodges, South of the Reservation and between the "Buttes" named above. I am also inclined to think that this act, was in retaliation for the attack made on several of their lodges, near the headwaters of John Days River, by the Reservation Indians not very long preceding their descent upon the Reserve, at the Warm Springs. I consider these Digger Snakes, the most expert thieves, that I have ever met; in other respects they are harmless, except to very small parties travelling through their Country.

The next Indians met, were those living in the "Big Basin," about one hundred and twenty miles farther East. This Basin extends for seventy miles North and South, along the base of the Blue Mountains, and for forty miles in a Westerly direction. Shut in on every side by precipitous mountains, those lying to the Southward being covered with perpetual snow.

Skirting the Blue Mountains and for six or ten miles in width is the most luxuriant grass I have ever seen, capable of supporting numberless herds of Cattle; We saw none however while in this Basin and the presumption is, that these Indians are very poor, being entirely without stock of any kind. We remained there several days, and must have seen their traces had any existed. These Indians are of the same class as the Digger Snakes of Crooked River Valley, clad in skins, and using the bow and arrow. They are very shy of the white man, could not be induced to visit my camps, but communicated with me through friendly Indians.

I sent one white man with the friendly Indians, to act as an interpreter, and to observe their manners and customs. They subsist principally on insects and roots, had very little knowledge of the existence of white people, the white man with them, was more a fiction, or tradition than a reality. A month after I left the Basin, these same Indians numbering a hundred or more, made an attack on two of my Express-riders, capturing two mules with all their provisions and ammunition. They used bows and arrows and must have killed the men, but that the wind was adverse to the flight of the arrows; they were kept from close quarters, by the Rifle and Revolvers of the white man. These Indians cannot be very formidable else they certainly would not have allowed those two men to escape; situated as they were hundreds of miles from assistance.

I know of no place either in Oregon or Washington Territory, so well calculated for an Indian Reservation, as this Basin. It is large in extent, has an abundance of good land, wood, water and grass of the most nutritious character. This valley can be reached with wagons by my new road, (established last Summer) in eleven or twelve days, and in five days on horseback. It is sufficiently extensive for grazing and agricultural purposes, for large numbers of Indians, and the climate must be mild, shut in as the valley

is on every side by lofty mountains. I would recommend this spot to your favorable notice; its remoteness from the settlements separating the Indians from the pernicious influences of the white man makes it particularly desirable for the purposes of a Reservation. It is an established fact, that Indians in their intercourse with the whites imbibe all their vices, but learn nothing that is virtuous or good. Besides this, there are several beautiful valleys between the Dalles and this Basin, soon to be filled up by our population, and it will be necessary to collect all these Indians and place them within certain limits, for the security of both parties. The Basin as a Reservation will be sufficiently near the Military Posts at the Dalles, and Walla Walla for all purposes of protection, it is much better to have the Posts separated from the Reservations by an interval of at least ten or twelve days march, than to have the troops in their immediate vicinity.

The next Indians met, were those fishing at the Salmon Falls, or Snake River East of the Blue Mountains, these were the Bannack Snake Indians, athletic men, well armed and formidable. Doubtless these Indians are in the habit of visiting the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, and derive their supply of arms and ammunition from that source. While on Bear River at the entrance of the valley of the Great Salt Lake, I met a Chief of one of the Bannack Snake bands, his band living in the Goose Creek Mountains, who spoke broken English. He could have learned this no where else, as he has never had intercourse with white people living West of the Blue Mountains. These Bannack Snakes are very numerous and formidable, roving about in bands of sixty or seventy, and not having been impressed with the prowess of the white man, are constantly annoying small parties of emigrants passing through their Country. They extend from Old Fort Boise on Snake River, for several hundred miles along the river both on the North and South side of it; extending their depredations as far South as the California road. During the past Summer, they were particularly troublesome, to those emigrants going to California, and nothing but the presence of General Harney's troops on the Oregon route, prevented similar annoyances, to those destined to this Country. The emigration to Oregon and Washington Territory came through these hostile tribes unmolested from the foresight of the General commanding this department in having his Troops on the route at an early day, to meet them and affording them the required protection to reach their new homes in peace and safety. I would respectfully suggest, that expeditions of a similar character be made every season, having the same object in view. The troops from Utah to be sent to meet the emigration, and turn them over, to the expeditions from this department meeting in Raft or Swamp Creek Valley, where there is an abundance of grass for large encampments. This will supercede the necessity of maintaining small remote Posts, so expensive to Government. My convictions are, that in this way the

emigration can be protected every season in the most perfect manner, and at very little expense; the troops returning to Convenient Winter quarters where they can be cheaply subsisted after this important service is performed. Little Posts occupied by one or two Companies are inadequate to this service, the Commands being small it is not possible to detach many men at one time as an escort to the emigrants. Troops moving about in large bodies inspire the Indians with respect; whereas if they are pent up in small stockade forts, they are not regarded with much fear by formidable maurauding bands of Indians. For the Umatilla and Walla Walla Indians I would suggest the Grand Rond as an excellent site, for a Reservation, much better than their present position. This beautiful valley is twenty miles long and twelve miles wide and from the intimacy of these Tribes by intermarriage and otherwise they would without doubt live harmoniously together. Their present Reservations, are immediately in the white settlements, exerting a pernicious influence on both the whites and Indians.

At the Grand Rond, there is an abundance of wood, water and grass with more arable land than the two tribes will ever want, and their proximity to the Military Posts at Walla Walla and Fort Dalles, five and ten days travel, is all sufficient for their Control.

I am Sir,
Very respectfully
Y. obt Servant

H. D. Wallen,
Capt 4th Infantry
Comdg Expedition

Superintendent of Indian Affairs
for Oregon & Wash Territory