

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BUFFALO HUMP STAGE LINES

Number 794

1985

The discovery of rich quartz at Buffalo Hump in August 1898 created an immediate need for adequate transportation routes. Miners and suppliers had the choice of a few pack trails for reaching the area, but a passable wagon road wasn't forthcoming until 1900. The inaccessibility of the district and long winters hindered the growth of the area and the efforts of stage companies to adequately service the various mining communities. Buffalo, Callender, Concord, Hump, and Laketown at one time competed for the business of the miners. A telephone service was extended into the area in 1903 and proved a valuable link to outside communities. The long winters made it difficult for supplies and mails to reach the district, and more than a few miners found themselves running short of supplies every spring. In the winter and early spring packers and mail carriers found it necessary to equip their horses with snowshoes in order to reach the camps. The horse snowshoe was made eight inches in diameter and circular in form by placing two-inch boards with the grain at right angles, which increased its strength. Tenents were cut in the top surface, into which calks were fitted. Bolts then passed through the boards on each side of the hind calks to which a strap was connected that passed over the front of the hoof. The strap could be tightened by means of nuts on the underside. The Free Press noted: "When first these snowshoes are put on it is an amazing sight to watch the maneuvers of the horse; it takes some little time for him to get used to them. But it is surprising to note the effect it has on the ordinary animal. He walks along with as much confidence as the average Norwegian would on his skees, and really lifts his foot to have it put on, seeming to understand the necessity of their existence. With these shoes good loads can be packed over quite soft snow." (January 2, 1902, p. 2, c. 1) In February 1899 the Genesee News reported: "Dick Ruddy plans to put in an extensive stage line this summer. He says it is all nonsense for people to rush in before May as the mountains are covered with 6 or 8 feet of snow." (Idaho County Free Press, February 24, 1899, p. 1, c. 3) Frank Coston, owner of the Grangeville-to-Florence stage line, started a line to the Hump in July 1899. His stage made tri-weekly trips and took a day and a half each way. "The first day, starting from the general stage office at the Jersey House [Grangeville] at 5 a.m., Slate Creek is reached about 3 p.m. A transfer of

passengers and baggage is made to horses and a short ride of 8½ miles brings both to Kunz's station on Wind river. Express and baggage are carried for 7¢ a pound and passengers for \$10 single and \$18 round trip." (Ibid.., July 21, 1899, p. 2, c. 6) The Free Press on February 3, 1899 (p. 3, c. 2) made note of the new stations being built along the route, "The Florence-Buffalo Hump trail will soon be supplied with plenty of stopping places. Chris. Arnold, Frank Kunz and Henry Ruff are putting up cabins at the foot of Umbrella butte, and Tom Hopwood has established a camp at Anchor Meadows."

A regular mail service was granted on December 1 when the postal department created route 70,283 between Florence and Buffalo. The mail left Florence on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 6 a.m. and arrived in Buffalo the same days at 6 p.m.

The return mail left Buffalo on Tuesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 6 a.m. and arrived in Florence the same days at 6 p.m. Mail service between the two points had previously been a special, operated by Frank Coston. Stages were not utilized on the route until a year later when a wagon road was opened. Mail and passengers reached the Hump country by saddle horses until that time. (Ibid.., November 10, 1899, p. 5, c. 2) In January 1900 the mail contract was let for \$900 a year but the contractor made no effort to fulfill his obligation and the service was relet. (Ibid.., January 12, 1900, p. 1, c. 5) By March tri-weekly service was once again available for the residents in the Hump country. However, it was not a direct service as the mail went first to Florence, and Hump residents soon began petitioning for direct delivery. (Ibid.., March 30, 1900, p. 1, c. 5) By June the people of Stuart (Kooskia) had raised enough funds by subscription to start an independent tri-weekly stage line between Stuart and Buffalo Hump by way of Clearwater, Harpster, Newsome, and Elk City. (Lewiston Tribune, June 28, 1900, p. 3, c. 2) Ben Dowell of Stuart, became the proprietor of the line and in July ran his stages by way of Elk City and the Badger mine to Buffalo Hump. Until the completion of the road into Buffalo Hump, the Badger mine remained the terminus of the line. The fare between Stuart and the Badger mine was six dollars, one way.

(Idaho County Free Press, July 6, 1900, p. 3, c. 3) In August the Free Press noted: "A tri-weekly stage will begin running Monday [September 3] from Stites, the present terminus of the Clearwater Short Line to Callender, the Charles Sweeney syndicate town at Buffalo Hump. The Idaho, Nevada and California Stage Co. will operate the new line. The company now has six day service between Grangeville and Stites using six-horse Concord stages. They also have a daily service from Grangeville to Florence, a saddle horse line three times a week between Adams Camp and Buffalo Hump and a tri-weekly between Grangeville and Elk City."

(Lewiston Tribune, August 29, 1900, p. 3, c. 5) By the following month two lines were running into Buffalo Hump, one by way of Elk City and the other from Grangeville. On the latter route, the

stage went as far as Moore's and from there saddle horses were used the rest of the way. Stages, though, were able to reach Callender by way of Elk City over the recently completed wagon road constructed by Charles Sweeney, the main Buffalo Hump promoter. (Idaho County Free Press, September 22, 1900, p. 1, c. 5) On October 15 the first wheeled vehicle arrived in Hump over the just-completed Grangeville and Buffalo Hump road. (Ibid., October 19, 1900, p. 1, c. 5) In August 1902 tri-weekly service was still available; the stage left Grangeville on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 6 a.m. and arrived in Buffalo Hump the next day. (Ibid., August 7, 1902, p. 3, c. 3) On Saturday, September 5, 1903, the stage was robbed at Moore's Station while the driver and passengers were at dinner. The house was about one hundred yards from the barn, and when the driver returned to the coach, he found the registered mail pouch cut open and the contents missing. (Ibid., September 10, 1903, p. 1, c. 5) By the spring of 1900 J. C. Moore was operating his station, which was located halfway between Adams Camp and Buffalo Hump. (Ibid., May 18, 1900, p. 3, c. 3) After the excitement of the robbery subsided, Moore put his teams back to work procuring an extra supply of hay and grain to meet the heavy demands of travelers during the winter season, when horse feed was scarce. (Ibid., October 29, 1903, p. 4, c. 3) In December Moore found it necessary to temporarily vacate his station on account of ill health. He spent a few months in Missouri and then returned to his place in April 1904. (Ibid., December 17, 1903, p. 4, c. 4; April 14, 1904, p. 4, c. 1) In September 1904 J. F. Ruckman, of Stites, leased the stage route between Adams Camp and the Hump from the California, Idaho, and Nevada Stage Company, which continued to provide stage service between Grangeville and Adams Camp. (Ibid., September 1, 1904, p. 1, c. 3) In the spring of 1906 the mail contract between Elk City and Concord via Orogrande was awarded to U. G. Kinkaid of Elk City. The contract took effect on July 1, and after that date the route between Adams Camp and the Hump was discontinued. (Ibid., April 26, 1906, p. 4, c. 2) The initial rush into the Hump area provided some excitement for a few years, but as the value of the ore diminished miners began looking elsewhere for new bonanzas. Hump miners came to realize that it was impossible to make any profits with low-grade ores and high transportation costs. A few miners stuck it out until around 1920, but the majority left before 1910. The district eventually produced about \$540,000, but not much of this figure can be considered a profit due to the high operating costs.

*Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428*