

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

MASSACRE ROCKS

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Named in 1912 as a successful local promotional device, Massacre Rocks was a dramatic Oregon Trail site for many years. A narrow road passage through a high lava rock barricade there had been opened to wagon traffic that soon would be replaced by automobiles moving along US 30, which followed close to Oregon Trail tracks that had traversed that area for more than six decades. Impressive because of its narrow opening--barely wide enough for a highway--through towering lava cliffs, that site looked like a suitable spot for an Indian massacre. But Massacre Rocks actually had served a half-century earlier as a good protective location for members of an emigrant party who had escaped in 1862 from such an attack about two miles further back where their Oregon Trail route went through a natural trap recognized as its most dangerous point anywhere in Idaho. That 1862 battle actually had little relationship to a decision in 1912 to name Massacre Rocks, but Massacre Rocks State Park includes both sites.

After interstate highway legislation provided for major road improvements in 1956, a wide four-lane route replaced the narrow gorge that had been a spectacular obstacle to traffic. Massacre Rocks was removed to achieve that improvement, but actual Oregon Trail options to get past those lava cliffs were left intact. Steep Oregon Trail grades descending and arising from a deep hazardous ravine that had menaced Oregon Trail emigrants two miles away in 1862 also were preserved adjacent to interstate highway construction at Hunt's Point. So Massacre Rocks State Park preserves exceptional opportunities to visualize Oregon Trail features in that interesting area.

(This information has not been edited.)

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