

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### THOUSAND SPRINGS

Number 966

January 1993

A magnificent discharge of water from porous underground lava channels above Hagerman is only part of a long series of major springs that issue from Snake River's north wall from Niagara Springs to Malad Gorge. With water sources ranging from remote areas to immediate irrigation drain ditches, all those springs have gained 40 percent in volume after reclamation projects contributed to their supply. But even before supplemental water increased their magnitude, places like Thousand Springs impressed Oregon Trail travelers along with anyone else who happened to come by.

More of Thousand Springs' water comes directly from Snake River where plains lava eruptions covered its older channels and bowed its course from a point northwest of Rigby millions of years ago. A substantial part of Snake River flows underground through buried lava channels, advancing about a mile a year toward Hagerman Valley and similar outlets where well over a century later it emerges back into its large surface channel. Other distant sources (Lost River, Little Lost River, and Birch Creek, primarily) contributed another 15 percent of Thousand Springs nineteenth-century discharge. Snake plains precipitation supplies a substantial addition to all those sources. Thousand Springs, therefore, includes a mixture of water--old and new--that all goes back to atmospheric sources that range back to 160 years or more ago. Storms that early emigrants saw provided water that now issues from Thousand Springs.

Early twentieth-century power plants utilized much (but by no means all) of Thousand Springs water production. On that account, their attraction was reduced considerably.

Aside from survival of natural scenic attractions, Thousand Springs has Oregon Trail remnants for an item of interest in that area. Recent power plant improvements and contemporary environmental concerns also have contributed to a revival of Thousand Springs as a jewel in its area of Snake River wonderland.

(This information has not been edited.)

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