

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR IDAHO'S MAJOR EMIGRANT ROAD CONFLICT NEAR
CASTLE BUTTE, SEPTEMBER 9, 1860**

Number 1040

January 1994

Although this incident occurred along Snake River in Idaho, it actually forms part of a long series of Humboldt River California Trail battles in Nevada. These had been going on for almost a decade. They pitted energetic Western Shoshoni bands against gold rush traffic that had disrupted life along emigrant and stage routes that destroyed important traditional economic resources of northern Nevada. Shoshoni resistance to long-term intrusion of their country had proved disastrous to Absolem Woodward and George Chorpensing when they initiated mail route between Salt Lake and Sacramento shortly after California gained state admission; from then on, conflict continued to disrupt travel along major routes that ruined grazing resources essential for people who inhabited that area.

Severe winter tribulations early in 1860 made matters still worse at a time when major mining expansion (particularly Comstock lode) into Nevada's mountain wilderness also brought increased unrest. That summer, many Paiute and Shoshoni people, left with no resources in much of their traditional Nevada homeland, had to head north to avoid starvation. A Western Shoshoni group reached Snake River, where they hoped that emigrant parties could sustain them. But they also had developed considerable experience in fighting stage, freight, and emigrant travelers whom they encountered along roads that crossed western lands. When they met Elijah Utter's party of forty-four emigrants camped near Castle Butte, September 9, they concluded that they had found a good source for supplies. In a battle that developed there, they managed to capture what they needed before they returned to their Nevada base. (See RS 233 for a full account of that episode.)

(This information has not been edited.)

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