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GOODALE'S CUTOFF FROM BOISE VALLEY TO POWDER RIVER

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Few mountain men of Idaho's fur trade era could compare with Tim Goodale in his geographical knowledge of vast tracts of western lands. He had spent a lot of time in parts of Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming, and had gained gold rush experience in California after a decade of western travel following his migration westward from Illinois in 1839. He did not turn up in Colorado until most Rocky Mountain trappers had given up beaver hunting to enter other occupations. Even though his experience as a guide dated from a later era, Goodale had covered many old trapping areas thoroughly. Before 1860, he had covered all of southern Idaho as well, and his reputation for geographical information exceeded that of nearly all professional guides to western lands. His association with Jim Bridger and Kit Carson enhanced his standing. As a result of his extensive travel in southwestern Idaho prior to 1862, Goodale was identified in an Idaho City newspaper (*Idaho Times*, published from September 11, 1866 to March 12, 1867) as an "old trapper of Snake river and its tributaries, who has, perhaps, covered every trail in what is now known as Boise, Alturas, and Owyhee counties. . . ." Somehow he had not noticed any valuable gold or silver properties in all that country, mainly because those existing trails did not happen to pass through rich mining areas.

When a rush to Idaho's Salmon River mines attracted eager gold seekers in 1862, Goodale had no difficulty in persuading a large emigrant company to accompany him over an Idaho route from Fort Hall to Lost River, Wood River Valley, and Camas Prairie. Discovered by Donald Mackenzie in 1820, that old Indian route had become a popular fur trade trail. Emigrant parties had tried it out in 1852 and 1854, but had concluded that no sane wagon drivers would come that way anymore. Spectacular lava fields, more suited for a national park than an emigrant road, made it a truly difficult passage.

Goodale, however, had some persuasive arguments to counteract its disadvantages. Traffic that way would avoid military opposition offered by Pocatello's Shoshoni band that destroyed a party near Massacre Rocks that chose not to accompany Goodale that season. Grazing resources essential for oxen that hauled emigrant wagons over Pocatello's route had been ruined by two decades of Oregon Trail traffic--a problem that Goodale's cutoff avoided in many places. Although Goodale pointed out that no one actually could reach a fabulous array of gold mines at Florence from his cutoff, he promised to take them over a trail that came as close as possible to their objective. That elusive attraction carried a lot of weight with many of his followers.

Goodale's success in getting emigrant wagons to an Oregon Trail junction about twenty miles before Boise valley gave him some well-deserved prestige. From then on, that route was known as Goodale's Cutoff. Northwest of Boise valley, he needed a continuation of his cutoff to

Powder River--scene in 1862 of a gold rush to new mines that followed a much greater excitement at Florence. Regular Oregon Trail wagons west of Boise came by those new Powder River mines, but Goodale's people showed far more interest in Salmon River and Florence instead. So Goodale continued to take his customers as close to Florence as he could guide them. He started that phase of his 1862 cutoff by taking wagons from later Eagle to Emmett by way of Freezeout Hill. On that part of his trip, he encountered what was left of George Grimes' Boise Basin discovery party. Grimes' new gold field proved far more valuable than Florence, and Goodale's cutoff would have served a more useful purpose by going there instead of trying to get closer to Florence. But that information was suppressed until late in 1862.

From Payette valley on, Goodale and his eager miners faced overwhelming problems. Indian trails from later Emmett to Upper Weiser valley could not accommodate wagons, and Goodale knew enough about that country to avoid any traps there. So he took his gold hunters down Payette valley to Snake River. Then to appease his clients who insisted upon going to Upper Weiser, he took them there. To get from Lower Weiser to Upper Weiser valley, they took an old Indian trail approximately along modern US 95, because Weiser River winds through a series of canyons unsuitable for travel.

Some of them even tried to go from there to Salmon River, although Goodale knew that country well enough to guarantee that they could not succeed. Those adventurers proved that Goodale was correct and had to return. Other scouts connected with John Brownlee, who needed help to get a wagon road opened to a Snake River ferry that he was installing to serve an old Indian trail that continued to Powder River. He offered free ferry service if they would convert that trail into a wagon road from Upper Weiser valley (modern Cambridge) to his crossing. After they got there, they learned that they would have to build another wagon road so that they could get out of Snake River's formidable canyon to Pine Creek. Once they had entered Brownlee's trap they had to build his entire road to escape.

After they crossed to a less-obstructed trail over higher country near Pine Creek, their route took them over Powder River divide. Here they could follow a good natural road until they reached a rather steep (but not unreasonably difficult) grade down to a Lower Powder River valley. There a somewhat circuitous route took them to a rim where they could descend to a satisfactory Powder River ford. Rising beyond that stream, their Indian trail wound through another series of natural barriers from which they finally emerged into relatively open country dissected by a number of streams that offered inconvenient but surmountable obstructions. After traffic to areas like Idaho's Seven Devils mines required better routes, new road grades were constructed through that area after 1890. But earlier wagons at least could ascend from Powder River to an Oregon Trail reunion below Flagstaff Hill. At that point, Goodale's emigrants had to cross a relatively open valley for only a few miles to reach Auburn--a new mining camp for Oregon's Powder River placers. Aside from not being their preferred destination at Florence, where they would have been too late to locate any fabulous claims anyway, Goodale's followers at least had reached some Oregon Trail mines. But they might have accomplished that a lot faster, and with a great deal less work, if they had simply gone west from Boise along their established emigrant road. They had seen a lot of spectacular scenery and had come as near to Florence as they could. But Goodale's western cutoff (or actually detour) via Brownlee's ferry did not attract too many more west-bound emigrant wagons.

Goodale's western route, however, carried a considerable volume of traffic right after it

became passable. An 1862 Boise Basin gold discovery--by prospectors that Goodale's group had met on their westbound trip--transformed travel patterns in that area. Late in 1862, a gold rush to Boise Basin attracted a mining stampede to Goodale's route. Publicity for Brownlee ferry, made convincing because Goodale's wagon train had constructed a road that way, diverted many miners from other Oregon Trail alternates. Unencumbered by wagons, many of those who chose Goodale's cutoff could make a substantial saving by following a trail from Upper Weiser valley to Upper Payette valley. That route, which Goodale's wagons could not use, improved his cutoff greatly. So Brownlee's ferry flourished for a couple of years.

Having completed his Oregon Trail assignment after reaching Powder River in 1862, Tim Goodale settled for a winter's recuperation on a ranch at North Powder. Then he returned to his Lower Powder River crossing where he spent another winter. Then in 1864, when John Brownlee concluded he would do better in Boise Basin from then on, Goodale moved into Brownlee's Snake River home. By that time, he had been away from his Kansas City home (where he had based his western operations sometime before 1856) for quite a while. But he retained his reputation as a knowledgeable Idaho and Oregon--as well as Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, and California--guide. Yet by 1864, so much of all that country was being settled that guides no longer were needed. His Idaho and Oregon operation provided a fitting climax to a long, important career. Eventually he was honored for that achievement, when--at an advanced age--he was recognized for his help to John C. Fremont's efforts.

Unlike Jim Bridger, who never had bothered to learn to read and write, Goodale came from a well-educated Huguenot family. His father--a Presbyterian minister--may have regarded Tim as something of a black sheep, but his family was enchanted by his western adventures. They had a lot to be proud of, although they did not see him too often.

(This information has not been edited.)