

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

ABRAM ROBERSON'S CAVE

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Ice houses (often built of local rock) and dugouts that stored ice, meat, and vegetables frequently were used in frontier times before other varieties of refrigeration became available. In places where they could be dug, caves provided convenient forms of cold storage shelters. Essential ice could be preserved through hot summers in such installations, and cool areas for food products thus became available. Isolated early ranchers could live in such rock shelters and dugouts until they could obtain resources to build conventional houses.

In Bruneau Valley, John and Emma Turner who came from London (with a very different climate) started their ranching career living in a Bruneau hillside dugout near a spring adjacent to a site where they built their house. Abe Roberson (August 9, 1819-1899), a native of Indiana who had moved to Iowa in 1833 and to California in 1851, and who had returned to Iowa in time to bring a large wagon train to Boise in 1864, decided to develop a Bruneau Valley ranch in 1869. By that time he had gained enough experience as a Boise farmer and fruit raiser to know how to develop his Bruneau cattle ranch with apple and honey production as well. Abe and Martha Roberson brought five sons with them when they came to Boise, and with other relatives following their move to Bruneau, they had a substantial family settlement there.

Abe Roberson developed friendly relations with their Bruneau Shoshoni neighbors, but he (like most settlers in scattered ranching areas) was always aware of hazards of Indian warfare. So he designed a dugout in a high adjacent bench that could be used as a community shelter as well as a storage area. With a long hall and four rooms and an interior ceiling vent, his cave went far beyond an ordinary cold storage facility. It also had portholes from which rifles could be fired.

When Bruneau John came to warn local ranchers that Buffalo Horn's band were headed their way from Glenn's Ferry early in June, 1878, Roberson's Cave provided shelter for everyone in that area. It is Idaho's best example of that kind of settlers' fort, and still survives with surprisingly little deterioration. (Practically all other similar emergency forts are only abandoned sites.) As a Bannock war historic site, Roberson's Cave is Owyhee County's primary location.

(This information has not been edited.)

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