

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SNAKE RIVER VIEW OF OREGON TRAIL COUNTRY FROM I84

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Although I84 crosses Snake River a number of miles north of Fort Boise and its Oregon Trail fords and ferry, some landmarks of its route into Oregon can be seen from there. From Canyon Hill at Caldwell to Parma and beyond toward Fort Boise, Oregon Trail emigrant wagons came very close to following US20 for more than ten miles. This is Idaho's best example of that kind of conversion of Oregon Trail routing to a modern highway grade. Tourists who prefer to drive down part of a primary Oregon Trail segment that continues as a major highway can be encouraged to leave I84 to take US95 to US20 and continue to Caldwell and a return to I84 if that fits their route.

Fort Boise's functions as an Oregon Trail station need to be emphasized, but its fur trade importance should not pass unnoticed. That area's significance as an Indian trade and cultural center had a major impact upon Oregon Trail traffic. John Reid's disaster there in 1814 and Donald Mackenzie's problems in 1819 at that same site forecast later difficulties in trying to conduct fur trade and emigrant road activities in that sensitive area that extended north a long way past Snake River viewpoint.

Emigrant traffic generally reached Fort Boise somewhat later than that area's salmon run commenced, so Indian concerns were less great over Oregon Trail impact than they would have been each July. But problems like Alexander Ward's trouble in 1854 still became important. Salmon availability at Fort Boise helped Oregon Trail emigrants gain needed supplies, as did gardens there. Another aspect of this area's history of interest there is Marie Dorion's difficult Oregon Trail trip of 1814--long before emigrant wagons showed up--but she and her two children need to be presented as outstanding Oregon Trail pioneers.

(This information has not been edited.)

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