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GOODALE'S CUTOFF NORTH OF TIMMERMAN HILL

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Nine years after he had explored routes near Snake River that later were used as Oregon Trail emigrant roads, Donald Mackenzie discovered a more direct route across Wood River Valley and Camas Prairie in 1820. At that time he was leading an expedition of Canadian fur hunters whose home base was in Montreal. Searching for beaver resources, he found an old Indian road that finally became an Oregon Trail segment known as Goodale's Cutoff after 1862.

Because of its advantages as a short route to important beaver streams and a major fur-trade base at Fort Hall, Goodale's Cutoff became a regular Hudson's Bay Company supply road between Fort Boise and Fort Hall. British trappers used pack trains rather than supply wagons, so they had no trouble getting through rough stretches of lava flows that discouraged travel between Lost River and Wood River. When Oregon Trail emigrants brought wagons to Fort Hall, they were directed to travel along Snake River away from regular Hudson's Bay Company trails unsuitable for ox teams and vehicular traffic. But after a decade of heavy use of more than one Oregon Trail variant across Idaho, new roads were needed. Too many horses and oxen had overgrazed a rather broad zone anywhere near existing Oregon Trail routes, so southern Idaho's desert lands had become a serious obstacle to emigrant travel. So on July 20, 1852, John J. Jeffrey set out with an Oregon Trail wagon train to follow Mackenzie's 1820 route that other emigrant parties had not been reckless enough to try. His wagons managed to get past lava formations and other hazards that had intimidated earlier pioneers. In 1854, another emigrant party followed Jeffrey's Cutoff. Both Winfield Scott Ebey and Harvey H. Jones, who kept good accounts of their 1854 trip, complained against Jeffrey's route as an emigrant wagon road. For a decade after Jeffrey came that way, his road had little or no appeal as an Oregon Trail route, although military escorts coming from western Oregon to protect annual emigrant parties from Indian hazards regularly came that way to reach Fort Hall.

Finally in 1862, Tim Goodale, who had long experience as an emigrant guide, made Mackenzie's 1820 route through Wood River Valley and Camas Prairie into a practical emigrant wagon road. By that time, other Oregon Trail routes across Idaho had lost much of their attraction. Indian resistance to their use continued to make them dangerous. An exceptionally severe winter early in 1862 brought enormous river floods that spring and summer, so that crossing Snake River at Fort Boise took a month instead of an hour or two. A fabulous Salmon River gold rush to Florence made mines there a primary attraction, so plenty of Oregon Trail emigrants wanted to go there in 1862. Goodale knew all that country well, and while he assured everyone that they could not reach Florence from any Oregon Trail route before they got to Oregon, he could take them closer to that destination. He was able to get most of that year's

Oregon Trail traffic to come with him over an old route that was known as Goodale's Cutoff from then on. Moreover, he got their ox teams and wagons past vast lava obstructions to Wood River Valley.

As a result of Goodale's efforts, most Oregon Trail emigrant wagons traveling west from Fort Hall crossed Wood River Valley north of Timmerman Hill. Goodale's Cutoff suddenly became Idaho's most important Oregon Trail route, and a year later, seven out of every ten Oregon Trail wagons came that way. Goodale's Cutoff retained its popularity in 1864, when Indian resistance had been supplanted by exposure to southern Idaho's large mining population. By that time, Idaho City was larger than Portland, and a new transportation network had been developed to meet Idaho's mining needs. Goodale's Cutoff continued to attract a lot of emigrant wagons, but stage and freight traffic generally employed other roads. Mining travel remained heavy on Goodale's Cutoff for many years, with a variety of destinations that shifted regularly depending upon which gold rush happened to be underway. From 1880 on, a new Wood River lead-silver mining excitement brought a totally different orientation to traffic that flooded into new camps at Bellevue, Hailey, and Ketchum. Rail service followed quickly, although emigrant wagons continued in use until automobiles displaced them after 1900.

Nineteenth century emigrant wagons that followed Goodale's route from Snake River near Fort Hall northwest to Wood River Valley had to cross barren deserts and lava fields around which inconvenient detours could not be avoided. A modern highway has been blasted through areas that wagons could not traverse. But emigrants who came past rock formations that became Craters of the Moon National Monument in 1924 had to bypass most of that attraction. They had to cross a considerable ridge from Little Wood River to Silver Creek, where their road tracks still can be seen north of U.S. 20 west of Carey. They also wound through some interesting granite formations west of Camas Prairie. By following Goodale's Cutoff, they had a much more scenic route than that experienced by earlier Oregon Trail travelers who descended Snake River Valley. But they had to go to a lot of extra effort to achieve that gain.

(This information has not been edited.)

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