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MASSACRE ROCKS HISTORIC CONTEXT

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Named in later years because they looked like a good natural place for an Indian attack against emigrant wagons, Massacre Rocks actually provided protection to travelers on their way to Oregon or California during a time of conflict there. More than a century ago, steep lava cliffs extended across canyon lands along Snake River, almost blocking passage for road traffic there. So Idaho's primary Oregon and California Trail route had to pass around that obstacle's northern end. When an automobile highway penetrated that series of rock obstructions, a narrow opening in those high cliffs was enlarged enough to let a two lane road get through. That spectacular feature naturally became a remarkable attraction along that area's major route (US 30), where tourists always were impressed by that passage through Massacre Rocks.

Early Oregon Trail emigrants generally did not get into Indian battles, but in later years they began to face hostility.

Much of their problem came when grazing lands, essential for oxen and other livestock, were wiped out by too much traffic. Shoshoni travelers, whose trails were being traversed by emigrant wagons, also were ruined. By 1862, Pocatello's people were prepared to fight. But Massacre Rocks is about two miles west of a deep canyon that provided their best spot to attack. No other Oregon Trail military hazard was so dangerous for emigrants. But, after meeting with a disaster there, Oregon Trail survivors went on to Massacre Rocks, where they had an excellent location to defend themselves. So Massacre Rocks had an important connection with a notable skirmish, but as an emigrant defense camp rather than a battle site.

(This information has not been edited.)

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