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OWYHEE COUNTY BANNOCK WAR SITES

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A long sequence of troubles between Buffalo Horn's Bannock peoples and southern Idaho settlers who had flooded into their traditional lands after an 1862 gold rush to Boise Basin erupted into a widespread war in 1878. United States government officials insisted that Northern Shoshoni and Bannock groups become self-sufficient farmers on a rather extensive reservation located at one of their traditional living centers around Fort Hall. That area contained no large scale gold and silver resources, and aside from emigrant and mining roads, intrusion of settlers could be avoided with relatively little effort. Yet any such plan had no prospect for success. Shoshoni and Bannock peoples were not adapted for such a drastic cultural transition even if federal funding to support it had actually been used for that purpose. Buffalo Horn's associates continued to travel over their migratory routes to Camas Prairie and to buffalo hunting areas, but buffalo were disappearing and intruders were disturbing their camas fields.

Based upon his experience in 1877 with a group of Bannock scouts who joined General Oliver Otis Howard's Nez Perce campaign, Buffalo Horn concluded that United States Army forces could not operate effectively against his people either. So when a Bannock band got into a war with settlers on Camas Prairie in May 1878, Buffalo Horn knew how to elude military pursuit. He and his Bannock people decided they could seek safety in their original eastern Oregon homeland. (Bannock bands simply were Northern Paiute travelers who had left their ancient eastern Oregon and northern Nevada homeland to join Northern Shoshoni bands that had obtained horses that enabled them to go on a long seasonal migratory cycle that included spring camas digging, summer salmon fishing, and fall buffalo hunts.) To accomplish that objective, Buffalo Horn's associates left Camas Prairie to cross Snake River by capturing Glenn's ferry, which they proceeded to send down Snake River after they were through. In that process they eventually sank Glenn's ferry a considerable distance downstream.

Continuing westward, Buffalo Horn's Bannock people had to cross Owyhee country. This they managed in scattered parties that army forces and settlers' volunteers would have difficulty in finding. Where they came to friendly ranchers whom they had known for a long time, they maintained pleasant relationships, and neither side posed any threat. But most settlers felt they had good reason to fear trouble, and they were fortunate to have Bruneau John--a prominent Bruneau Shoshoni friend--come by in advance to warn them of danger. Settlers who lived in scattered areas at great distance from Nez Perce and Bannock campaign routes collected to establish temporary forts to protect themselves from military hazards, and all Bruneau valley ranchers assembled at Abram Roberson's cave for that purpose. Silver City and Flint were large

enough not to be threatened, but a small force of volunteers went out to attack Buffalo Horn's group in a skirmish north of South Mountain. That became Owyhee County's only Bannock War battle. It followed, however, a loss of Fletcher Hawes (a rancher who felt that Buffalo Horn's band would be friendly) at Big Springs, where he had a dugout.

After a considerable campaign in eastern Oregon, Idaho's Bannock people returned in a series of mostly small bands. In Owyhee County they had a campsite on Sinker Creek about seven miles before they reached their Snake River crossing. Those sites gained importance as concluding phases of Bannock War interest. Then, after hostilities had come to an end, Paddy Cap's band of Northern Paiute people was exiled to a new home on Duck Valley reservation. There they settled permanently, marking a final feature of Idaho's Bannock War. During that entire episode, Owyhee County was part of a broad expanse of territory stretching from central Oregon to western Wyoming where military activities occurred. Of a number of Owyhee County participants in that affair, Bruneau John gained national recognition for his service in protecting ranchers from disaster: President James A. Garfield eventually gave him a silver medal in honor of his success there.

(This information has not been edited.)