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George Starrh's Ferry

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As a placer miner of Snake River fine gold, George Starrh worked claims in what emerged as Cassia County in 1879. Then when a major mining rush to Wood River attracted a large number of freight wagons from railroad depots like Kelton to Bellevue in 1880, he selected a good ferry site that he knew about four miles west of later Burley as an appropriate Snake River crossing for a new road to Wood River. He and his brother Tom operated a river current cable ferry there for a quarter century. (George wanted to return to Snake River mining, so his brother took over.) Their main problem came from frequent severe winds that often forced them to suspend ferry service, sometimes for days. Such winds blew their boat in a direction that did not allow it to take advantage of downstream currents to push their boat. Sometimes they substituted horses and mules for power, but that system did not work too well.

Their heavy freight wagon traffic lasted only for two years, until rail service reached Shoshone in 1882 and Hailey a year later. But enough local traffic continued that Starrh's Ferry could keep going until local irrigation development changed settlement patterns and introduced new roads, bridges, and river channel conditions. After 1904, when construction of Milner Dam left Starrh's Ferry in a reservoir with no current to provide operating power it went out of business. A modest community grew up there, though, with a general store and farm and ferry buildings. A post office also served that community from June 26, 1909 to March 15, 1912. Some occasional private ferry service continued during those years, when irrigated farms spread throughout that area.