



The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

January, 2006



Stagecoaches

In the mid 1800's, the discovery of gold inspired thousands of people to head Northwest in search of riches and new opportunities. Travel through this wild country could be long and treacherous. Prospectors didn't have many choices in transportation. They could walk, ride a horse or mule, or risk their lives boating the wild Columbia and Snake Rivers. As the region's population grew, some ambitious settlers saw that they needed a better means of transporting people and supplies across the land. Stagecoaches roared into the Northwest around 1850-60 and within ten years had a huge impact on the landscape and the economy of the area now known as Idaho,

Montana and Oregon. Often referred to simply as a "stage," the stagecoach could be any form of wagon or sleigh that moved people, supplies, mail, or gold from one place to another. In many cases, a single stage would carry all these things at once.

One of the most traveled roads in the region ran from Salt Lake City to Pocatello and then on to Boise City. Around 1865, a man named Ben Holladay controlled and improved this route by building stage stations along the way. There were two kinds of stations. The "home station" kept fresh horses, food and other supplies needed for the journey. It took about 7 days to travel the distance from Salt Lake to Boise and traveling at night was

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From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors!

Lucky Noah is home sick with the flu so he left this month's issue to me, his mule. I know what you're thinking, how can a mule write a good newsletter? Well, although I have a little trouble typing, putting together a newsletter is not that hard. All you do is pick something you're really passionate about and the research and writing comes easy. You know what I'm passionate about? Stagecoaches!

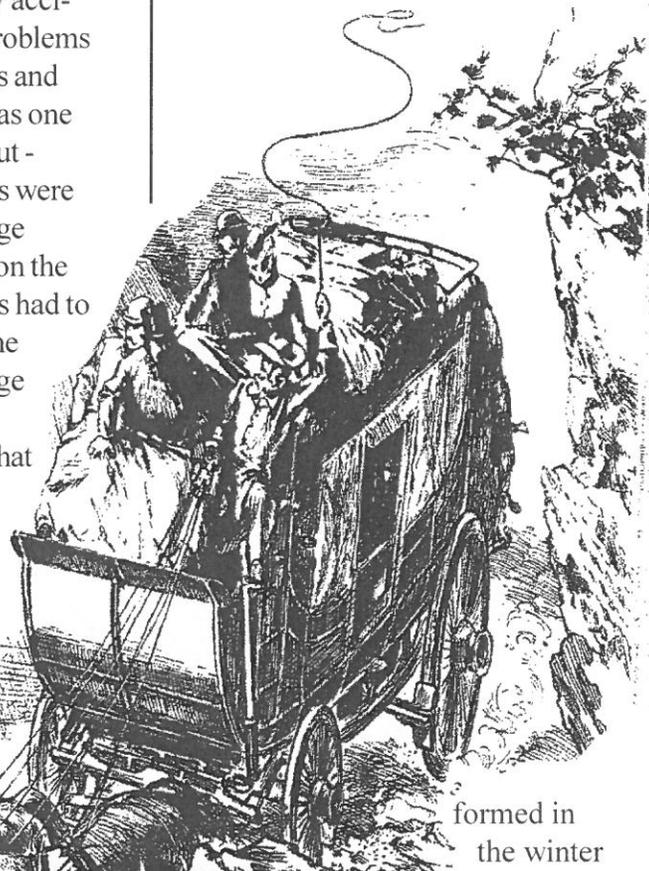
Stop laughing, it's true. Think about it. What was a mule's job before stagecoaches came along? Back then I had to carry all of the supplies, gold, and sometimes the Prospector himself. The stagecoach saved me from all of that work. Now I've got a cushy office job with all the doughnuts and coffee I can eat. It's paradise.

Stagecoaches Continued

very difficult. Therefore these stations had to be large enough for the passengers to sleep and eat in and also had to be sturdy enough to protect them from winter storms. The other kind of staging station was called a "swing station" where just a fresh horse or two was kept but no food or supplies. Because the home stations housed food and supplies the owner of the stagecoach line had to hire people to stay there full-time. Otherwise, it would be easy for someone to break in and steal the station's valuable supplies.

Stagecoaches ran throughout the state during the 1870's, when the gold rush was in full swing. Some lines lasted for several years, eventually becoming permanent roads, and others lasted only as long as gold kept coming out of the mountains. In Northern Idaho, around the Lewiston area, Bacon's Express ran to Elk City carrying mail, supplies and passengers who didn't mind a very bumpy ride. The Dwight Brothers ran a service from Lewiston to the Salmon River

District. This was a really dangerous road that caused many accidents. Among the many problems that the stagecoach owners and drivers faced, the worst was one they could do nothing about - winter. The winter months were harsh and always piled huge amounts of ice and snow on the routes. Many of the stages had to cross rivers of ice during the winter. There was one stage line going from Boise to Walla Walla, Washington that had to cross the Snake River on a bridge of ice. Bridges that we take cars over today were not around in the 1870's so the travelers had to use the natural ice bridges that



formed in the winter months.

Another problem was robbers on the highway. These bandits were called "highwaymen" whose illegal actions would become legendary in the Wild West.

From 1860 to 1890 a stagecoach was probably the best way to get from one place to another. Eventually though, a new form of transportation swept the stagecoach into the dustbin of history. As the cities in the west grew, railroads began to stretch across the West. Although early rail travel could also be long and uncomfortable, it was faster and more efficient than the aging stagecoaches. ♦

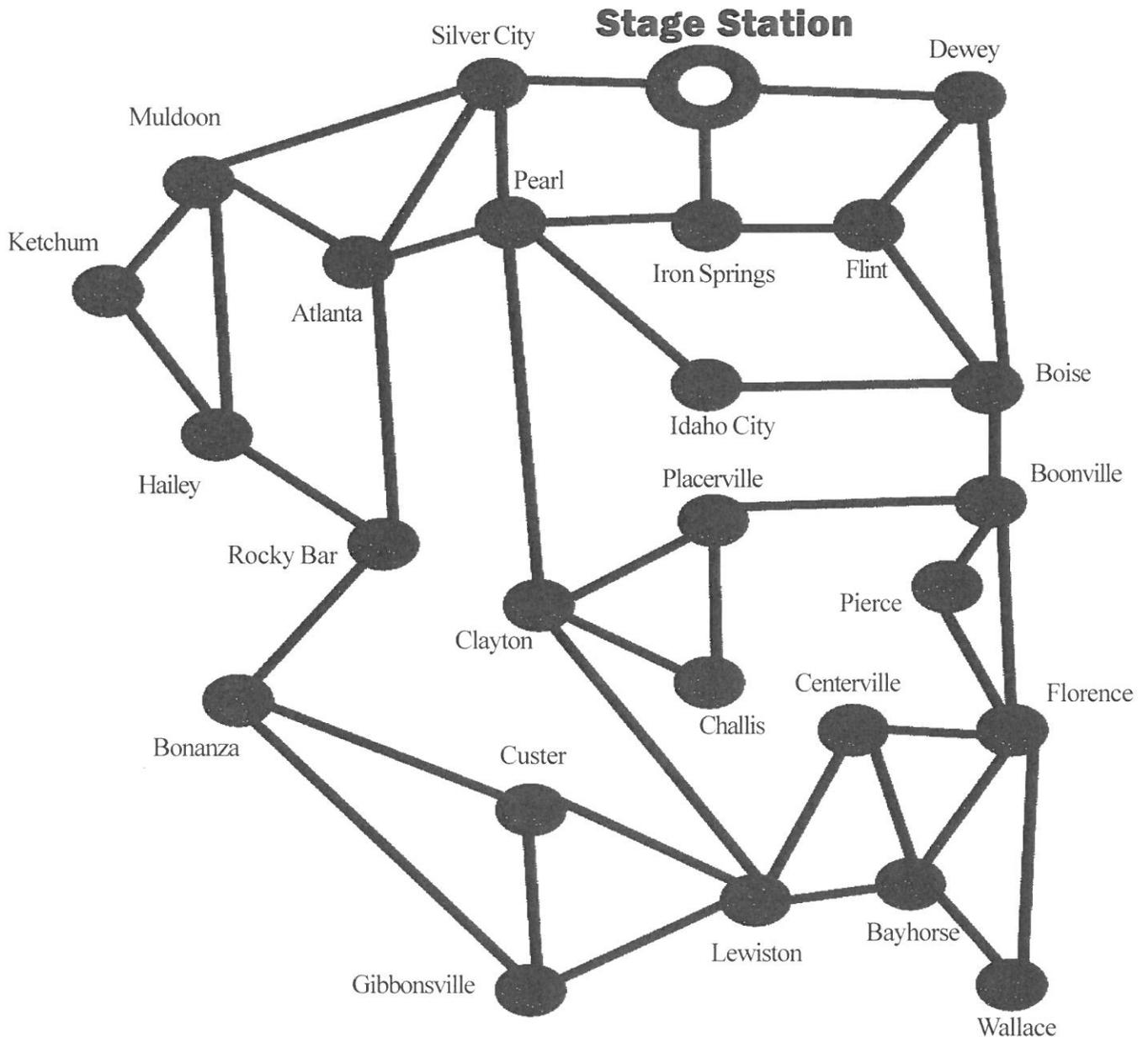
By Glenn Newkirk



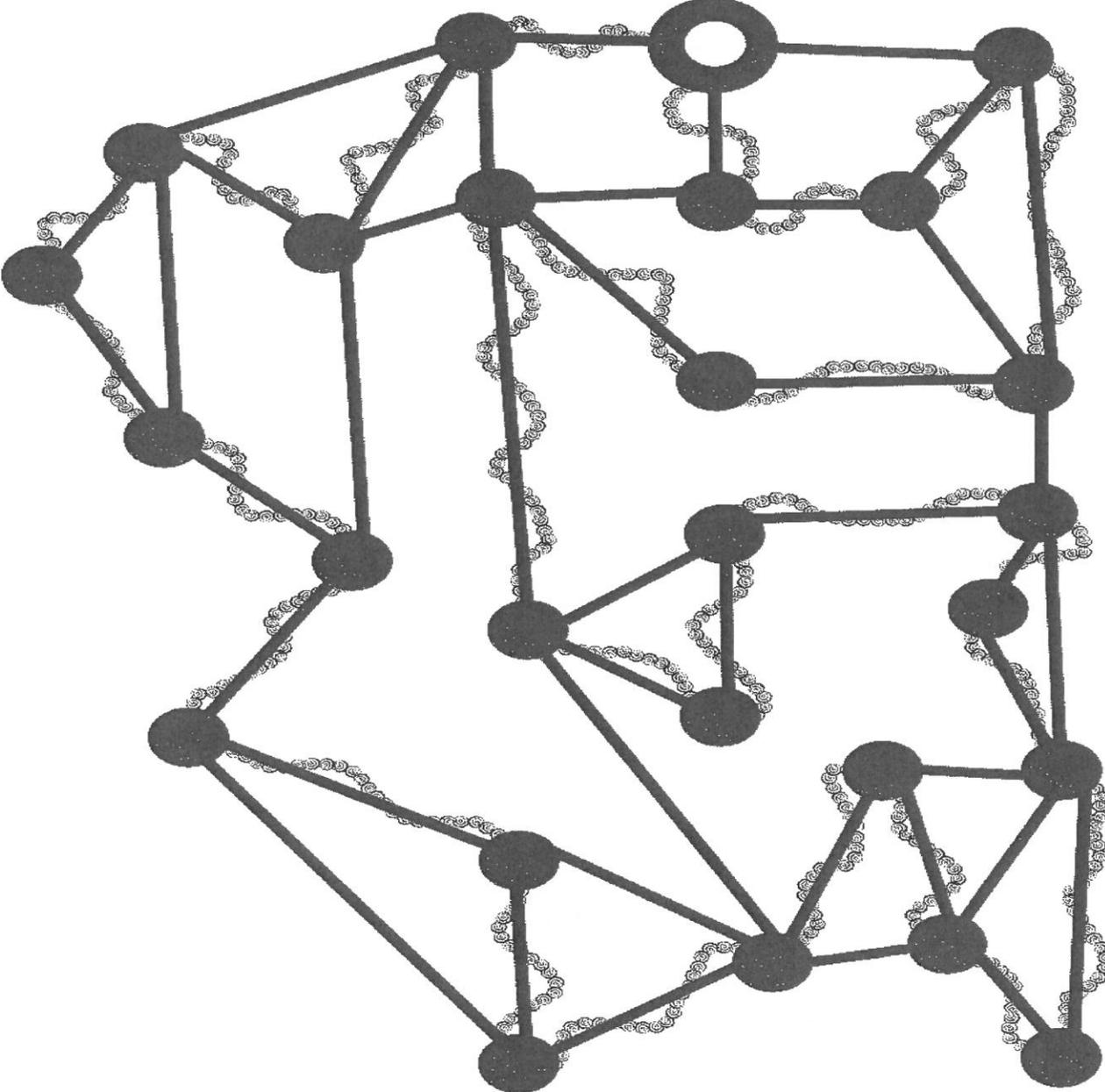
The Fun Page

A stagecoach driver had to be efficient. In order to deliver his supplies and passengers on time, he had to pick the fastest route between cities. As a new stage driver in the Northwest it's your job to pick the correct route. Start at the stage station and make one stop at each city before

returning back to where you began. Here's the catch - to be efficient you can use each of the roads only once. If you travel on the same road twice or enter a city for a second time, start over and try a new route. Can you do it?



Solution





Next Month's Activities

Well, we've told you the basics about stagecoach history in the Northwest, but we need your help so that we can learn more. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own stagecoach project and send it in to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, where you're from, and the name of your Prospector chapter. We can't wait to see what you send in!

Road Songs: Unlike the car and airplane trips of today, travel by stagecoach could take a long time. There wasn't much to do on the endless journeys but talk to the other passengers and look out the window. Sometimes a passenger got lucky and had a lively driver. These interesting men might tell stories or sing songs to keep everyone entertained. Pretend you are a driver on a long journey across Idaho. Write a song or poem about the trip that would interest the rest of the riders in the

coach. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

A Better Stagecoach: Western roads were hard on a stagecoach. All the bumps and ruts and river crossings could shake a fragile vehicle to pieces. You are the new design engineer for a stagecoach

travel more interesting for the passengers? What innovations do you have for the problems of river crossing and bandit attack? Draw a picture of your new design and we'll feature it in next month's issue.

Bandits!: Since stagecoaches often carried gold and other valuable

supplies they were often a target for thieves and bandits. Pretend you are a passenger on a stagecoach in the 1870's that is suddenly attacked by bandits. The rest of the passengers panic, but you keep calm. Tell us the story of how your clever thinking defeated the dastardly stagecoach bandits.



Send in your work by February 15th to:

Prospector Club/
Lucky Noah

company. Your job is to completely rebuild the stagecoaches to help survive the brutal West. What extra features will you add to make the stagecoaches stronger? What luxuries will you design to make

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