

REFERENCE SERIES



IDAHO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
610 N. JULIA DAVIS DRIVE
BOISE, IDAHO

NUMBER 51

GOODALE'S CUTOFF

Goodale's Cutoff left the Oregon Trail at Fort Hall, crossed the Snake River plains to Lost River, and then headed west. Camas Prairie provided an approach to the Boise region that stayed north of the broad valley of the Snake. Rejoining the Oregon Trail for 40 miles or so from Rattlesnake Creek to Boise, Goodale's route again held to the north of the main emigrant road. A final reunion with the older trail came on Powder River not far from Baker.

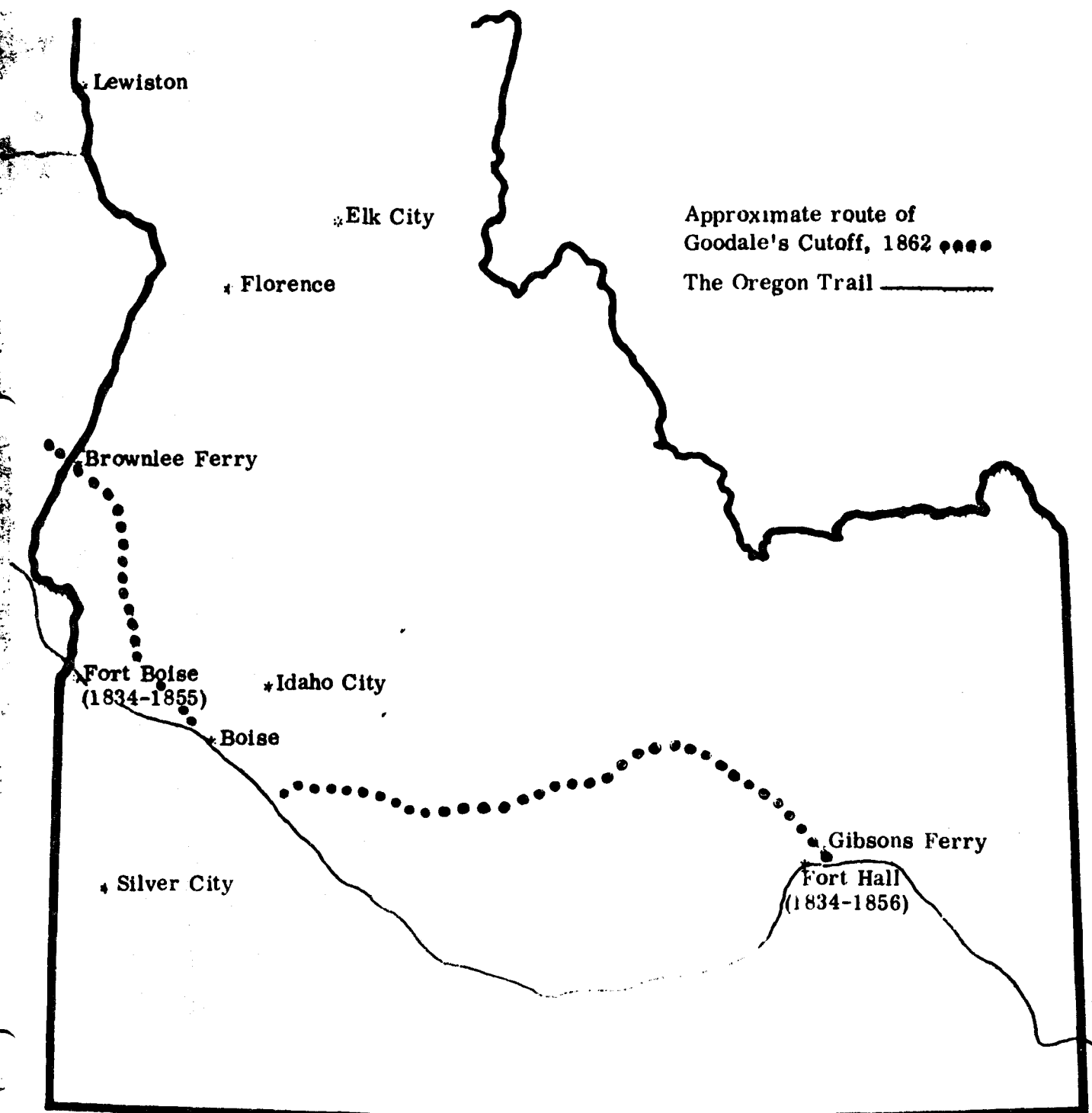
"A very reliable" mountain trader in the Snake country before Idaho was settled, Goodale knew just about all of the Indian and fur trade trails of the valley and mountain country north of the Snake. His cutoff had been used by fur traders for many years, and emigrant wagons had traversed the eastern section as early as 1852. A manuscript map prepared in Willamette valley, May 4, 1853, identified Goodale's general route from Fort Hall through Camas Prairie as a "New road traveled by wagon first July 20th 1852." A decade later, emigrants traveling on Goodale's Route noticed places along the trail where a trunk had been abandoned in 1853 and names had been carved in 1854 on rocks and trees along the new road. Then in 1855, Granville O. Haller's expedition to retaliate against the Boise Indians who participated in the 1854 Ward Massacre came that way across Camas Prairie. Haller's men preceded north to the upper Salmon, but a special agent, Nathan Olney, continued eastward over the later Goodale route with a small force to Fort Hall to consult with the Indians there. Although traffic on this northern route must have been extremely light until after 1860, Gouverneur K. Warren labeled the eastern portion "Jeffers Road" on his large 1859 map of the west. Alonzo Ieland's 1863 map of the Idaho mining country, used widely at the time, repeated Warren's identification of Jeffers Road and identified Goodale's route across Camas Prairie simply as the "New Emigrant Road."

With the Salmon River gold rush in 1862, an Oregon Trail emigrant party prevailed upon Goodale to take them over the northern route west from Fort Hall in the hope that they might approach the new mines more directly. Other wagons followed along. Goodale promised to lead them just as close to Florence as he could. So he used the Jeffers-Camas Prairie route. His party included a number of prominent later Idaho residents who renamed the route for Goodale. That was the name that stuck. (Most of them spelled Goodale's name in different ways, and perhaps Goodale did too--assuming he could spell at all. Partly Indian and partly white, Goodale may have been quite unimpressed with consistency in spelling.) Setting out from Snake River July 22, 1862, Goodale's wagon train collected into a large force to avoid Indian trouble. Near Craters of the Moon Goodale stopped for a day (July 28) to gather up still more wagons. This precaution gave him a force of 795 men, augmented by another 300 women and children. With such a show of strength, his wagons escaped the kind of misfortune of some emigrants who ran into an Indian fight at Massacre Rocks, August 9, on the regular Oregon Trail south of Snake River.

West of Boise Basin, Goodale happened to meet up with the prospectors led by George Grimes who had just discovered the Boise mines and were returning to Walla Walla. So Goodale took the combined party on over the western part of his cutoff. Proceeding through the upper Weiser

country to Pine Creek and Powder River, they opened the Brownlee ferry route which came into general use late in 1862 with the gold rush to Boise Basin. Brownlee's ferry across Snake River made the western part of Goodale's Cutoff practical, and at the other end, Gibson's ferry operated near Ferry Butte. With these two good Snake River crossings, Goodale's route became a popular one from that time on.

Revised February 1966 on the basis of information supplied by John Hussey.



Goodale's Cutoff

by Betty Burnett*

Goodale's Cutoff from Fort Hall to just south of Boise was actually in use a decade before mountain man Tim Goodale led a party of wagons over it in 1862. It was first identified as a route in an 1853 manuscript as a "New road traveled by wagon first July 20th 1852" — at a time when Goodale was in California. Emigrants traveling the route in 1854 noted that names had been carved in rocks and trees along the route.¹ Apparently the cutoff received the Goodale name because travelers in the 1862 train were grateful to him, feeling he was responsible for their not being attacked by Indians.

Tim Goodale (also Goodell and Goodall) was a man who didn't like to stay in one place. His biographer said he was "A good example of a certain class of white trappers who might be called social dropouts from their own society."² He was born in Illinois and probably came West in 1839. Solomon P. Sublette wrote his brother William from Bent's Fort on May 5, 1844, "T. Goodell who had been in the country more than three years a-trying to get some [sheep and antelope] has gone on the other side of the mts. for the same

business."³ During the next twenty years, Goodale was reported as being seen throughout the West — in Pueblo, Taos, Ft. Bridger, Hard-scrabble, Fort Laramie, and California. Between 1854 and 1856, he operated a ferry over the Green River. He spent the winter of 1859 at the Louis Vasquez farm near Westport, Missouri, and in 1861 he was the guide for Major E.L. Berthoud's military survey of the mountains west of Denver.

In 1862 gold was discovered in the Salmon River. The same year a brush fire in Burnt River Canyon destroyed the little forage that was there. An emigrant party asked Goodale to take them over a northern route west from Fort Hall in the hope that forage would be better and so that those dreaming of gold might approach the new mines more directly. The party set out from the Snake River on July 22, 1862. The train was large to begin with, and still more wagons joined up at Craters of the Moon. By July 28, the train included 795 men and 300 women and children. Apparently the size of the train discouraged Indian attacks, for attacks had been frequent at that time along the Oregon Trail.

According to the Samuel P. Hearing journal, at one point along the Goodale cutoff that year, "a friendly old Indian" approached Hiram Hearing and dipped his "dirty old hand" and "dirty old cup" into Hiram's pail of fresh water. Angry at the intrusion, Hiram "kicked a little harder than he intended to" and broke the Indian's neck. That, of course, made the Indian's friends angry. They left, but promised to be back shortly. After a very nervous night, the emigrants found at daybreak that they were indeed encircled by

1. Idaho Historical Society, Reference Series 51; Harvey L. Carter, "Tim Goodale," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. by LeRoy Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1969), p. 149.

2. Carter, "Goodale," p. 153.

*Dr. Betty Burnett, the assistant editor of the *Overland Journal*, is also a charter member of OCTA.

3. Ibid., p. 148.

Indians. But without a sign of overt hostility, they rode off. Perhaps Goodale's influence had something to do with their change of heart.

A little later, an Indian chief visited the wagon train and became enchanted with the blonde, five-year-old niece of Eliza Hearing. He offered two of his best horses for her, thinking she'd make a good wife for his young son. Not taking no for an answer, the chief offered three horses the next day. Eventually he offered twenty horses, and when that offer was refused, he gave up. At the age of 87, Eliza recalled that her niece "slept in the same wagon with me and the 'old muzzle-loading shotgun' was right beside me at all times."⁴

Goodale had a reputation as a competent guide who had an extensive knowledge of the West. But there is conflicting testimony about his character. Apparently he was a heavy drinker and somewhat quarrelsome. Some in his party must have appreciated his leadership, since the route was named in his honor, but at least a few were not pleased. Rollie Pierce in the *Pine Valley Echo* recalled (at the age of 92) that some men in the party became suspicious of Goodale after a hazardous descent at Brownlee. There was talk of a five dollar ferry fee to get across the Snake River, but once on the other side, the road ended. The *Pine Valley Echo* continued:

The hard look on the men's faces was the only message Goodall needed, it was recounted, and he left quick, before suffering punishment by the pioneer's wrath.

The day following Goodall's departure the pioneers built a zig-zag road up the mountain side, and a few days later camped in the lower end of Pine Valley.⁵

Larry Jones, historian with the Idaho Historical Society, agreed that "most members of the Goodale train did not hold their leader in too high esteem. They were especially upset when he got them lost just west of Cambridge." After leaving the train, Goodale apparently gave up the guide business. In 1864 he retired to the Bitterroot Valley of Montana, where he died some years later.

The "five-dollar ferry fee" was not charged by ferry-owner Brownlee, who offered to waive the fee (which was probably less than five dollars to begin with) if the emigrants would build a road

from Cambridge to the Snake River, so that people could easily reach his year-old enterprise. He then "offered \$2.50 a day in gold to each able-bodied man with team and plow if they would build a road up Brownlee Canyon to the top of Zig Zag Hill."⁶ Many of the emigrants accepted the offer and the road was built.

Once the road was completed and the crossing of the Snake River made relatively easy, Goodale's cutoff became a popular route west. The Idaho Historical Society reports that some of the old tracks are still visible in the vicinity of Craters of the Moon National Monument.

A Description of the Road

The most detailed description of Goodale's Cutoff comes from pp. 23-24 of *The Story of Hells Canyon*, written in 1977 by Gerald J. Tucker:

... they went down the east side of the Snake River to the mouth of the Weiser River, then to the Northeast alongside the Weiser River to Middle Valley, now called Midvale, then up the Weiser River to Upper Valley, now Salubria Valley near Cambridge, Idaho....

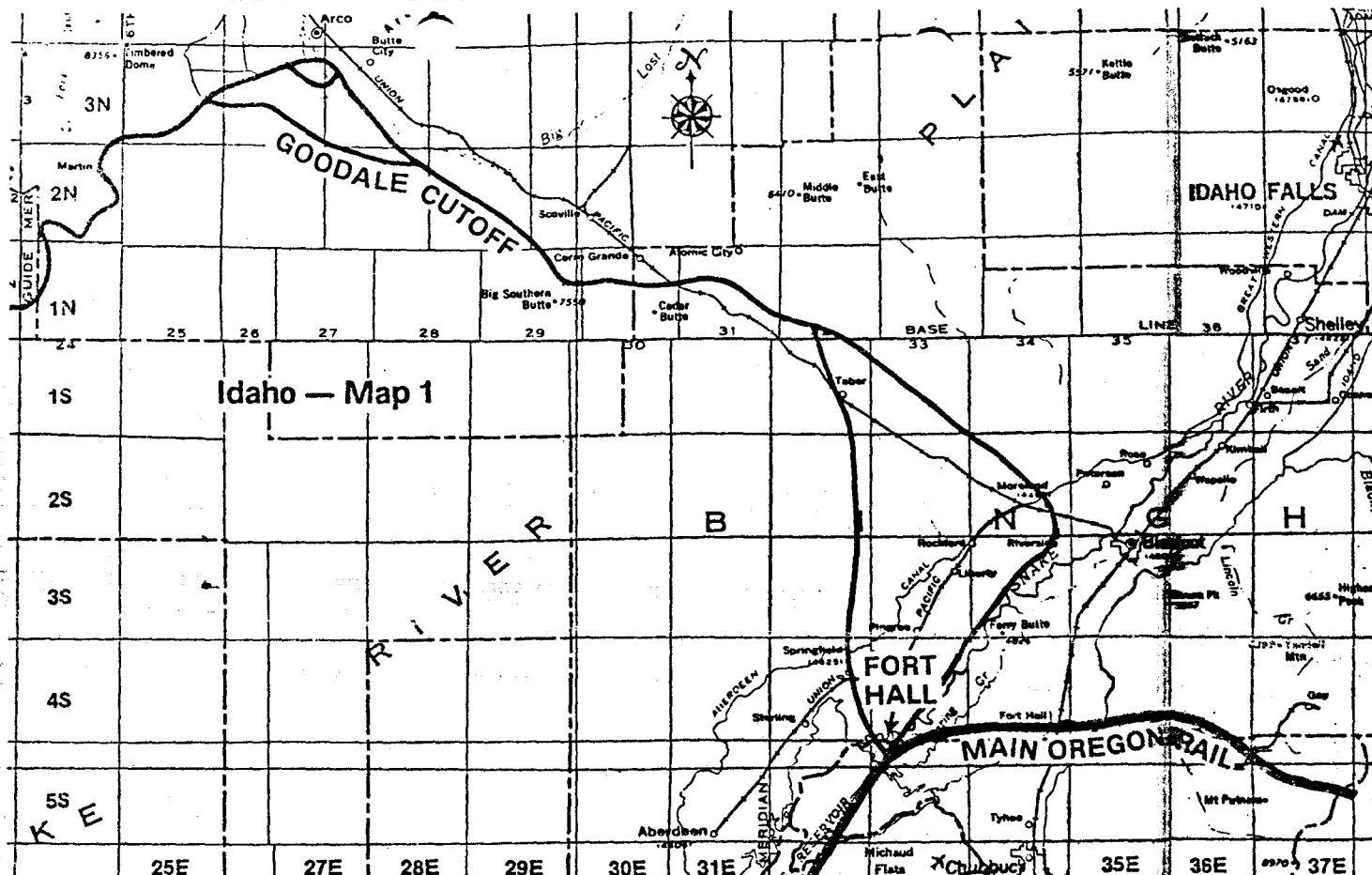
[Once over the newly built road across the Snake] the wagon train then passed ... into Pine Valley, coming into the valley at the southeast edge. They went west across the valley, up the hill to the top of the ridge, traveled around the rim of Posey Valley to the south side, crossed a gulch coming in from the west, then went southwest to China Spring Crossing. From there it was down-grade for quite a ways and easy traveling. The wagon train passed to the east side of Red Rock Hill and came into Eagle Valley at the mount of Immigrant Gulch. They then crossed Powder River. From there they followed the south side of Powder River to the west, rejoining the Old Oregon Trail in Powder Valley.

A letter from Jennette Wright of La Grande, Oregon, prompted the above story. Jennette and her mother Viola Baum, also of La Grande, have been researching the Goodale Party of 1862 and trying to find the graves of Jennette's great grandparents, Samuel K. and Susannah Hearing, both of whom died near the Snake River of mountain fever while with Goodale.

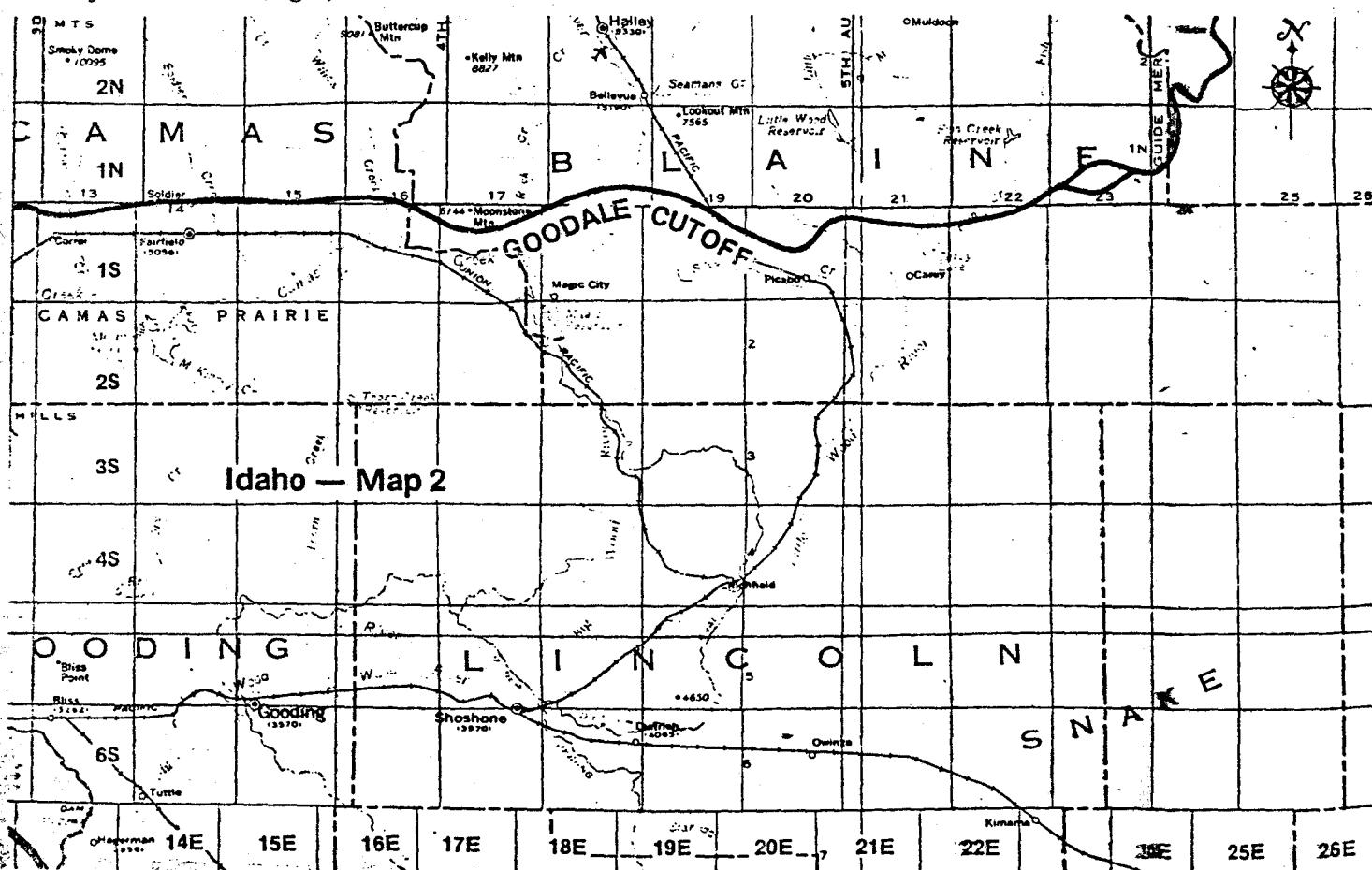
4. Jeannette Wright, "Samuel and Susannah (Helmick) Hearing," (unpublished manuscript)

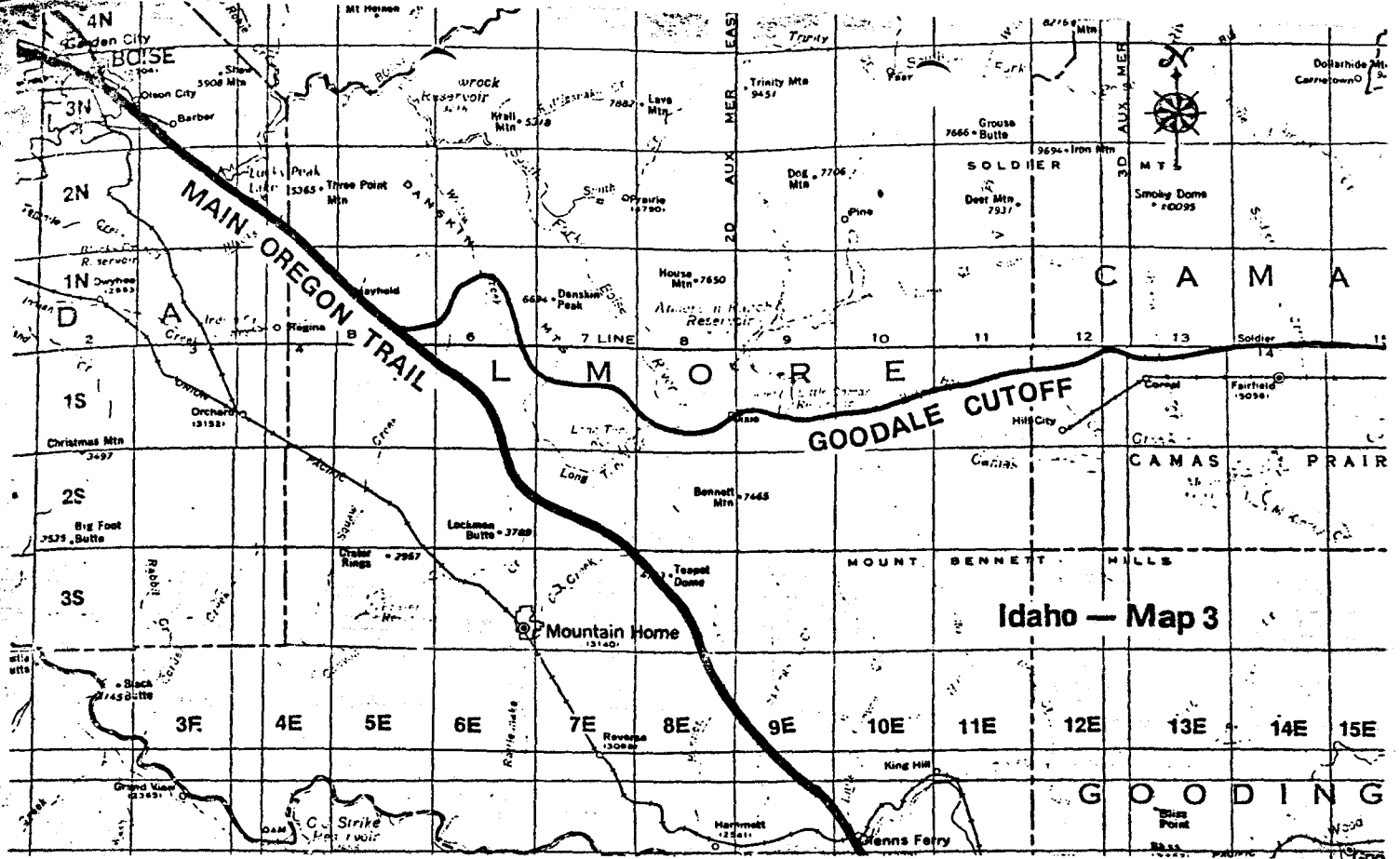
5. *Pine Valley Echo*, Vol. II (n.d.), p. 26.

6. Gerald J. Tucker, *The Story of Hells Canyon* (n.p., 1977), p. 24.



The scale on the four Idaho map panels is different from the two Oregon panels. In the Idaho case, each square represents a township, or 36 square miles. The numbers on the Idaho maps represent township and range, not sections. The Goodale Cutoff begins at the site of Fort Hall, on the Snake River, shown in Map 1. There are slight overlaps in these map panels. The travelers were moving from the east (right) to the west.





The map below, representing the northward leg of the Idaho segment, is canted sideways — north is to the left. The Goodale Cutoff is shown leaving Idaho on the left edge of this panel, crossing the Snake River at Brownlee Creek. The Oregon Trail, at the right edge of this panel, is about to cross the Snake at the site of old Fort Boise, west of present-day Parma.

