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JEFFREY'S CUTOFF

IDAHO'S FORGOTTEN OREGON TRAIL ROUTE



By

Fred W. Dykes

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COVER PHOTO: The Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff winds its way through the lava rock and sagebrush desert between Danielson Springs and Big Southern Butte, a thirty-mile waterless crossing.

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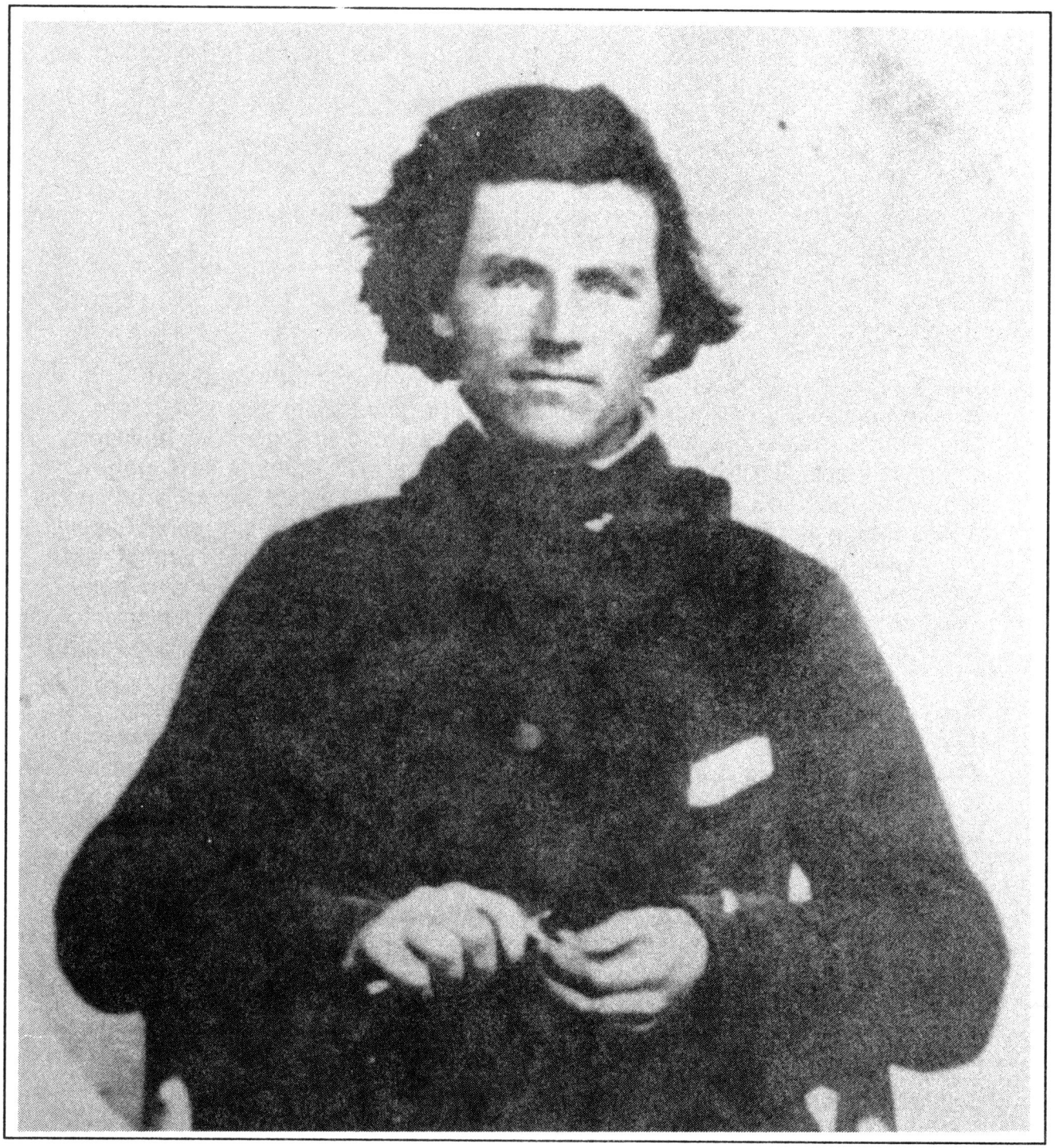
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WINFIELD SCOTT EBEY
1831 - 1865

Captain of the Ebey wagon train that crossed Idaho
in 1854, using the Jeffrey Cutoff

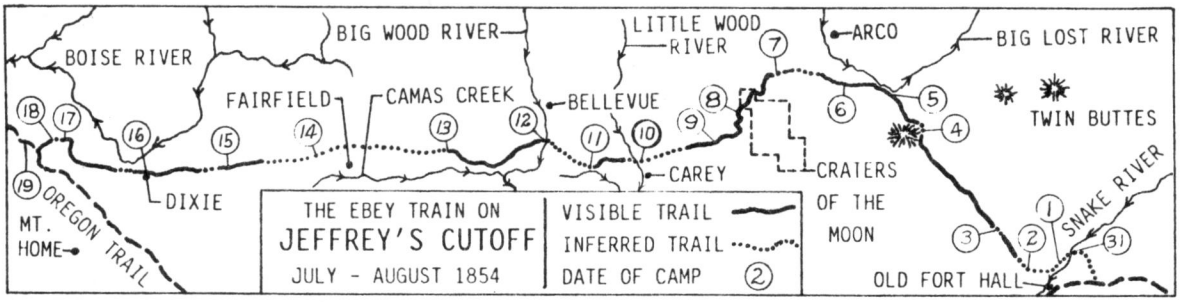
(Photo courtesy of the Island County Historical Society, Coupeville, Washington)

FORWARD

The author's interest in the stage road past Big Southern Butte began in the 1940's with the reading of Carrie Strahorn's book. Further interest was provoked by a map of Craters of the Moon National Monument showing an Oregon Trail Cutoff. The information obtained up to 1985 was put into a brochure for an Idaho Historical Society field trip to Big Southern Butte that year. Since that time, the obtaining of the Ebey journal and the publication of the Mattes bibliography has dramatically increased information about the origin and early use of the Cutoff. It seemed appropriate to make this information available inasmuch as a good part of it does not seem to have been published previously.

Increased interest in the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff seems to have been stimulated by the 1989 Oregon California Trail Association convention in Boise, Idaho. Irving R. Merrill is scheduled to present a paper on Goodale's Cutoff. His book, *Bound for Idaho*, has just been published and is available at the Idaho Historical Society Museum shop. This is an edited version of his grandfather Julius Merrill's diary, which included traveling Goodale's Cutoff in 1864. The BLM is working on a revised version of their informative book, *Emigrant Trails of Southeastern Idaho*, for the convention. This will cover all of south Idaho and include the Jeffrey / Goodale Cutoff. It is also understood that the Idaho Historical Society is revising their Reference Series No. 51 on Goodale's Cutoff. Hopefully, these activities will bring about a change in the forgotten status of this Cutoff.

The author has tried to exercise some restraint when criticizing inaccuracies regarding the Cutoff. However, restraint is not suggested regarding this document. In the belief that historical accuracy is best served by vigorous questioning of data and conclusions, criticism is welcomed. It should be directed to the author, who is solely responsible for the material presented.



The western migration to Oregon and California was a stirring event that has challenged the pens of both the participants and historians. Trail diaries have been studied, routes traced, and books written. With few exceptions, every main trail and significant cutoff has been identified, documented, and located. One major cutoff, a 230 mile Oregon Trail route in Idaho initiated by John J. Jeffrey in 1852, is consistently missing from modern descriptions of the Oregon Trail system. The Jeffrey Cutoff left the main Oregon Trail near the present day Fort Hall, crossing the Snake River and the desert to the Arco area. It then headed westerly, passing through the Craters of the Moon National Monument and the Camas Prairie. The Cutoff rejoined the main Oregon Trail twenty-five miles east of Boise. At times it was seventy-five miles north of the main trail, so by no stretch of the imagination could it be considered a mere variation of the main route.

In rare references to this cutoff, it is usually identified with Tim Goodale, even though early maps had identified it as "Jeffer's Road".[1] It is not unusual for trail segments to wind up with different names than that of their originators, such as the Sublette Cutoff opened by Caleb Greenwood. This article mainly uses the Jeffrey name because the pre-Goodale era (before 1862) is emphasized and the Goodale route into Oregon is not of interest. Goodale was a trapper who in 1862 guided a large group of emigrants on a new route to Oregon. The route followed the Jeffrey Cutoff until it rejoined the main Oregon Trail near Boise, and then left the main trail west of Boise and took a new route into Oregon. A recent article has published a description of the Goodale Cutoff showing the route precisely located on modern topographical maps.[2] The article indicates a different route from the main Oregon Trail to Big Southern Butte than that used by Jeffrey. Inasmuch as there is evidence that the route shown was not opened until 1880, it seems likely that the actual route was that of Jeffrey.[3]

In locating his road, Jeffrey, without question, used existing Indian trails. The fact that the Camas Prairie was a major food source for the Indians guarantees that well-traveled trails existed from the Prairie to the Fort Hall and

Fort Boise areas. George Goodhart and his wife Lizzie traveled these trails several times with Indian companions.[4] Even with Indian trails as a starter, it must have been a difficult task to open a 230 mile wagon road in limited time and with little or no assistance. It is interesting that the road was not established as a toll road per se, but evidently was used as an inducement for business for the Snake River ferry located at the mouth of the Blackfoot River.

Traffic peaked on the Jeffrey Cutoff during the 1854 migration. After that, the route was apparently unused until 1862 when traffic resumed as a result of Indian problems on the main trail to the south. Because the railroad came later to Idaho than it had to California, emigrants used the trails much longer. Eventually, major portions of the Cutoff became stage and freight roads with use continuing, at least in part, well into the 20th century.

A vicious circle seems responsible for the fact that Jeffrey's Cutoff is slighted in Oregon Trail history. Historians find no mention of the Cutoff in their research, and so they produce literature that also does not include it. Thus a body of incomplete trail history grows. In a facetious sense, one might blame Historian Irene Paden for not mentioning the Cutoff, and thus starting the vicious circle. Ignorance of the Cutoff is understandable, since information on the Cutoff is meager and localized in nature. The reason is that there was no notoriety connected with the Jeffrey Cutoff, and so it drifted into obscurity. The road was at least as significant in terms of number of travelers and years of service as the Hastings Cutoff. But there was no salt desert to cross and no Donner party starving to death as in the case of the Hastings Cutoff.

It seems appropriate to list a few examples of recent major publications where mention of the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff would have been reasonable. The intent is not to criticize. Rather, the intent is to chip away at the vicious circle with the perhaps naive goal of correcting some historical perspectives.

Perhaps the most significant recent event concerning the Oregon Trail occurred in 1978 when it was designated by Congress as a National Historical Trail. The National Park Service was given the responsibility of preparing maps of the trail. These maps, with additional material, have been published commercially, and do not include the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff.[5] This seems to imply that this cutoff was not designated a part of a National Historic Trail and may not enjoy the protection that the mapped portion of the trail does. Perhaps based on the mapped trails shown in the publication, the author states that after the emigrants reached Fort Hall, they had no choice but to follow the Snake River through Eastern Idaho.[6] Again, the Jeffrey/Goodale

Cutoff provided an alternate in 1852 and subsequent years. Idahoans probably shouldn't criticize the National Park Service for omitting the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff, inasmuch as the Idaho Bicentennial publication, *Route of the Oregon Trail in Idaho*, also omits it.[7]

According to the publisher, a recent book on the Oregon and California trails has received lavish praise from historians and newspaper reviewers.[8] Even though this book deals with many trail variations, it is not unexpected that there is no mention of the Jeffrey Cutoff. What is surprising is that the South Alternate is shown as the only Oregon Trail route through western Idaho on six maps.[9] As a consequence of this, the location of the Ward massacre is incorrectly shown, and the Three Island Crossing near Glenns Ferry and the Snake River Crossing near Fort Boise are not shown. The author's untimely death makes it impossible to determine if the maps were not intended to be that specific, or if some other explanation exists for the apparent errors.

Although numerous other publications could be listed that do not mention the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff, in many cases it becomes a judgement call as to whether or not the Cutoff lies within the scope of publication.

A monumental bibliography of Oregon and California Trail documents has just been published. [10] This bibliography lists every trail-related document found by the compiler's intensive ten year search. The period covered is from the start of the western migration through the year 1866. A total of 2,082 entries are listed, with a brief abstract of each document's contents and the compiler's assessment of it. The information in this bibliography supplemented by other sources provides an unprecedented opportunity for study of Jeffrey's Cutoff.

Two bibliography abstracts mention Goodale's Cutoff (No. 1484-Harvey H. Jones, and No. 1994-J. B. Wright). The former also mentions Jeffrey's name. The Wright entry refers to Goodale's as "a seldom used cutoff". Harvey Jones' wife, Eliza Jones (Abstract No. 1483), also wrote a diary. She mentions passing the three buttes, which confirms that she was on the Jeffrey Cutoff. Abstract No. 2059 (S.B. Eakin, Jr.) mentions crossing the Snake River on Gibson's Ferry, which was a part of Jeffrey's Cutoff. Four abstracts do not specifically mention the route taken (No. 1475-Anna Maria Goodell, No. 1477-Sarah Johnson Handsaker, No. 1498-Elizabeth Austin Roeder, and No. 1968-Mrs. W.A. Loughary). That the route was Jeffrey's Cutoff is determined from other sources, or by relating the traveler with other emigrants whose route is known.[11]

Four abstracts appear to give misleading information. Winfield Scott Ebey (No. 1469) is listed as taking the Snake River route. More will be said about him later as his journal gives a day-by-day account of a trip across the west, including the Jeffrey Cutoff. Nellie Slater (No. 1860) was a part of the Tim Goodale train that reportedly consisted of more than 1,000 people and several hundred wagons. Because travel on most of the Cutoff in eastern Idaho was restricted to one lane by the lava rock terrain, a train of this size would probably be about ten miles long. The head wagons would be making their noon stop before the last wagons started. This does not seem reasonable. The abstract says that Nellie's father died and was buried while on the Snake River, but another source says it was the Lost River.[12] Nellie's sister, O.B. Slater (No. 1861), was also in the Tim Goodale train, although the abstract says she took the Oregon Trail through Idaho. And finally, in Abstract No. 1973, Julius Caesar Merrill is said to have taken the Oregon Trail to Boise, but he actually took the Jeffrey Cutoff.[13]

This makes a total of twelve emigrants listed that provided some sort of documentation about Jeffrey's Cutoff. One Jeffrey Cutoff journal not listed is that of Woolverton in 1864.[14] There may be other abstracts (such as the final one, No. 2082-Sarah A. Wisner) where the Cutoff was used. Any emigrants after 1862 without a positively identified route, particularly if they used the Lander Trail, may have used the Jeffrey Cutoff. George Forman, when he traveled the route in 1864 from Montana to Boise, called it the "Main Oregon Road coming from Fort Hall and now well traveled".[15] The route had been improved in 1863 by Utah interests as a better access to Idaho's mining districts around Boise, and was thereafter known locally as "The Old Emigrant Road".[16] Hayden in 1872 noted that the old emigrant road crossed the Snake River near the mouth of Ross Fork (actually Blackfoot River) and "thence ran in an almost direct line past the westernmost of the Three Buttes to the foot of the Salmon River Mountains".[17]

As a final look at general use of Jeffrey's Cutoff, the year 1854 provides the best statistics. This was probably the year of most intensive effort by Jeffrey and his associates to persuade people to take the Cutoff. The bibliography lists fourteen journals or other documents of emigrants headed for Oregon that year. Of the fourteen, six used Jeffrey's Cutoff, or a little over 40%. Forty percent of the estimated 6,000 Oregon-bound travelers that year would be 2,400 users of Jeffrey's Cutoff in 1854. Of course, this figure is pure speculation, but has enough validity to firmly establish Jeffrey's Cutoff as a bonafide branch of the Oregon Trail. One might speculate that Jeffrey found he could not make sufficient profit from the ferry, and abandoned his Cutoff promotion activities after 1854. This would account for lack of traffic

from 1855 to 1862. Bad reports about the route could also have been the cause.

Winfield Scott Ebey, twenty-two years old, left Plum Grove Place, Adair County, Missouri, on April 27, 1854. [18] He and his party were bound for Whidbey Island in Puget Sound. His brother, Isaac, had crossed the plains in 1848 and now lived southwest of Coupeville on the island.[19] Isaac was a customs collector at Port Townsend. In addition to Winfield, the Ebey party consisted of Winfield's mother and father and two sisters, sister Mary having two children. Cousin George W. Beam and James J. Wood (relationship unknown) completed the party. This totaled nine people. They had two wagons, ten yokes of oxen, eight cows, and three horses. From the start, Winfield made notes on the journey which he, in 1857, transcribed into a journal. His writing shows education and self-confidence. According to Winfield, when other parties in their train were attempting to obtain supplies or dispose of surplus, the Ebey party did neither because of their superior planning. They also seemed to think that they could take on the entire Indian nation if that became necessary.

The Ebey party went by way of Council Bluffs and joined with other parties to form a train. Winfield nearly drowned swimming the Platte River on June 27.[20] Abstract No. 1475 sounds as though it were a son of Winfield's who got into difficulties, but Winfield was unmarried. The confusion arises because the senior Ebeys were in the party, and Winfield was their son. At Independence Rock on July 2, the California and Oregon parties in the train separated in order to reduce the size of the train. Those in the Oregon (actually Washington Territory) train were the Ebeys, Judsons, Van Normans, Goodills, Headlys, Whitesells, Mrs. Burr (whose husband had died of cholera June 20), and Kings, with a total of nine wagons. On July 5, they were joined by the Cannon party, a widower with two grown sons, two younger sons, and an eighteen year old daughter that caught Winfield's eye. The train elected Winfield captain on July 5, and so from that date could be known as the Ebey train. George E. King was chosen Officer of the Guard, with fourteen men available for guard duty.[21]

As the Ebey train approached and passed Soda Springs, they were met by "runners of the road and ferry" exhorting them to take the ferry and Jeffrey's Cutoff. It seems obvious that the whole purpose of Jeffrey's Cutoff was to secure business for the Snake River ferry located at the mouth of the Blackfoot River. No other commercial enterprise existed for the entire Jeffrey route. Jeffrey was in partnership with a John G. Garner of Olympia, Washington Territory, and perhaps others. On July 30, while camped at Ross Fork, Winfield put the question of which road to take to a vote, although he,

as captain, could have chosen on his own. The majority were in favor of taking the Cutoff, with only the Ebey and Cannon parties voting for the main Oregon Trail.[22] And so, on July 31, at the approximate location of the present day Fort Hall townsite, the Ebey train diverged to the cutoff route.[23] After a nine mile pull through the sand still evident west of the Fort Hall townsite, the train reached the Snake River ferry, also known as the Gibson and the Gibson and Meeks ferry. They went a half mile down the Snake River to find a good camping spot. From there, Winfield rode to Fort Hall and found it deserted.

The next day the train ferried their wagons across the river by 1:00. While they were crossing, a large Hudson's Bay packtrain come in from the west, with Indian trade goods for Fort Hall. Mr. Charles, the man in charge of the packtrain, cautioned Winfield about the Cutoff. In the evening, the Ebey train drove three miles downstream to a large spring for their camp. This spring is locally known as Thorn Springs and is located near a corner on the Caldwell Lane road. In the morning, they continued parallel to the Snake River for two miles to Ferry Spring. From there the train turned west and went eight miles to some more large springs. These are Danielson Springs near Springfield, Idaho. They arrived at noon and remained until 6:00 pm the next day, resting their stock and filling all vessels with water. While they were waiting, Mr. Garner from the ferry showed up to await the arrival of Jeffrey from the desert. Mr. Charles of the packtrain must have informed him of Jeffrey's planned arrival. When Jeffrey got there he was on foot and half dead from heat, exhaustion, and thirst. He gave Winfield additional information on the Cutoff, supplementing what he had already been given at the ferry. Very few of the names provided to Winfield by Jeffrey have endured, so some correlation of distances covered must be made to correctly identify the topographical features listed in Winfield's journal.

That evening, the train drove about ten miles into the desert and camped. At daylight the train resumed its journey over the desert. Winfield rode ahead to locate the water at Fort Hall Butte (Big Southern Butte). He encountered an old Indian who rode with him. When they got to the Butte, Winfield discovered that the water was a very small stream coming down a muddy ravine from a spring (Webb Spring) further up on the Butte. He could see that the water wasn't adequate for their stock, and that they were in for another thirsty night. Although he had ridden twenty miles already, he began to backtrack to the train. It was almost evening when he met the train and had to tell them that the water, what there was of it, was three or four miles further. When the stock reached the ravine with the water, they quickly trampled it into mud, so they could get no water. The wagon train personnel

got enough water to drink by dipping it up in cups. No tents were put up; people took their blankets and dropped to the ground.

Winfield says that it was the hardest day they had seen on the plains. Obviously he considered it worse than the Sublette Cutoff which the train had crossed July 14 and 15. Only someone who has driven this road in August can appreciate what an ordeal this must have been. And yet, because of the abundant grass and good water for the stock before entering the desert, this desert crossing would seem much easier than the Forty Mile Desert confronting the California emigrants at Humbolt Sinks.

In the morning, the train hitched up and drove eight miles to Goddies River (a corruption of Godin's River, now Big Lost River). The next day, August 6, they drove four miles up the river to where the road once more entered the desert. Here they waited until evening and then drove six miles into the desert where they had a dry camp. After an eighteen mile drive the next day, they came to Grass Valley (Champagne Creek). The following day they passed through Craters of the Moon and camped at Mountain Cove Creek (Big Cottonwood Creek). Here the trail they had been following went up a steep canyon and over a mountain pass, while the wagons had to follow the lava rock rim around the hills. According to George Goodhart, the trail up the canyon was an Indian trail to Copper Creek in the Fish Creek drainage, which avoided much of the lava rock country.[24] Indians used the route to travel to Camas Prairie to dig camas roots.

Next day they camped at Coral Creek (Lava Creek). Recent U.S. Geological Survey maps of the area erroneously identify Lava Creek as Copper Creek, and Copper Creek as East Fork of Fish Creek. The following day the train drove to Trout Creek (Little Wood River). Here they stayed until afternoon of the following day while some of the train were cutting down their wagons. Then they drove six miles to Spring Valley Creek (Silver Creek). On August 12 the train arrived at River Malade (Big Wood River). Willow Creek on Camas Prairie was the next stop, the only stream on the trail to retain the same name from 1854 until now. The next evening was spent at Camp Branch (3 Mile Creek), and the next at Pool Creek (Wildhorse Creek). During the day they passed Fort Creek which was probably Chimney Creek, named by early settlers because of the many stone fireplaces along the creek. The next day the train drove to Mountain Brook (Dixie). Passed on the way was Castle Rocks which Winfield called Rock Spring and described as a lovely, romantic spot. The following day Winfield passed several mediocre camping spots looking for a better one. Finally, they got into Syrup Creek canyon and followed it up to "Mountain Top", a dry camp after a very hard day. The train limped two miles the next day to Willow Creek where the day was spent

recuperating. On August 19, they proceeded to the head of Ditto Creek and made their way down it to rejoin the main Oregon Trail.

Only Mr. King had a good opinion of the Cutoff. The rest vented their spleen by writing derogatory notes about Jeffrey's Cutoff on the many bones scattered about. Winfield felt that the distances were about the same at 230 miles, with the Cutoff having the roughest roads and the best grass. Here ends the description of Jeffrey's Cutoff, but the next few days were so dramatic for the Ebey train that a word about them is included.

On August 20 the train did not plan to go far, in order to rest the animals. But, because of a lack of good water, they wound up going all the way to the Boise River. Winfield has ridden alone far ahead to find the way to the river, and then rode back to the train. They didn't get in until dark, and fell asleep without posting a guard. Little did they realize that the Ward Massacre had taken place that day just thirty-one miles ahead of them. The train stayed in the camp the next day. The following day, August 22, the train had just started when the train of Lake and Perry overtook them. Messrs. Lake, Perry and Campbell has been shot by Indians. Lake and Campbell died and had been buried (Abstract No. 1474). At noon that day, the Ebey train voted to admit the wounded train to theirs. Mr. Perry died that night and was buried the next day. The train went fifteen miles down the river and camped. In the evening, an Indian came riding full speed, bringing warning from Fort Boise about the Ward Massacre. (Capt. Grant's packtrain had passed the Ebey train at the Cutoff junction, so Capt. Grant knew they were just behind him). On August 24, the Ebey train came to the massacre site. Six bodies only partially covered were given a decent burial by Winfield and others.

The next day they reached Fort Boise and learned more details of the massacre from the Yantis train which had been a few days ahead of the Ebey train on Jeffrey's Cutoff. Abstract No. 1484 states that the Yantis train heard of the massacre in progress, and some rode back to try to help. Since it was twenty-six miles away and only a few men went back, this explanation doesn't seem too probable. Winfield says seven men of the Yantis train were backtracking to find a lost cow when they stumbled onto the massacre. The Indians retired to a wooded area, taking the Ward women and children (the men had all been killed except two boys who had been left for dead by the Indians). The Yantis party fired into the woods until one of their number was killed. They then returned to the Fort for help. Winfield thought the seven men should have charged the sixty Indians.

On October 12, 1854, Winfield Ebey and his party reached his brother Isaac's home on Whidbey Island. Isaac soon made Winfield a deputy collector of customs. He was admitted to the bar, and took part in the Puget Sound Indian War of 1855.[25] Winfield also became Superintendent of Common Schools. However, the good fortune that followed the Ebeys across the plains did not continue long after they arrived at their destination. Isaac's wife, Rebecca, died at age thirty, in 1853. Because of his prominence, Isaac was murdered by Indians on August 11, 1857, as retaliation for the slaying of an Indian chief by the military the previous year. He was thirty-nine. Winfield's sister, Elizabeth, fell from a bluff and died of injuries in 1862. His mother, Sarah, died in 1859, and his father, Jacob, in 1863. Winfield died February 21, 1865, in Petaluma, California, aged thirty-three years. His cousin George Beam, who crossed the plains with him, died in 1866, also aged thirty-three years. All are buried in the Sunnyside Cemetery which lies between the Jacob Ebey and Isaac Ebey farms. The Ebeys gave their name to a World War II fort on the west coast of Whidbey Island. This is now a state park. Because of the unbroken historical record available, a National Historic Reserve with the name "Ebeys Landing" has been established in central Whidbey Island.[26]

Sometime after the Ebey train's bad experience at Big Southern Butte, a way station was established there and the water supply was improved. Possibly the first operators of the way station were Jefferson Montgomery (Compton) Davis and his wife, Alice West Waddell. Jefferson was a Southern soldier who narrowly escaped execution as a spy in the Civil War. He changed his surname to Davis (in honor of Jefferson Davis?) and came west. A son was born to this couple on October 13, 1867, Peter Winn Davis. The family has always agreed that Peter was born at the Big Butte way station, although later church records of unknown origin give his birthplace as Marsh Valley, Idaho. Jefferson is buried at Marsh Valley.[27] With a better water supply at the Butte, the cutoff route was changed and no longer went to the nearest approach of Big Lost River where Burnett's cabin was located.[28] Instead, the road headed directly from Big Southern Butte to the Arco area. The route intersected Big Lost River where it entered the lava rock desert four miles south of present day Arco. This eventually became the site of "Old Arco", first known as "Junction". Soldiers were on the Cutoff the year after the Ward Massacre, and off and on during the following years. A temporary army camp was established at what became Soldier, near Fairfield, on June 8, 1865.[29] Sometime during this period, Corporal Peter Anderson, Company F, 10th Kansas Infantry, died and was buried at the little cemetery on the banks of Big Lost River. Although the cemetery has in recent years been obliterated by a farmyard, Corporal Anderson's headstone was moved to the

new Arco cemetery where it stands amid those of his comrades-in-arms of later wars.[30]

When the Utah and Northern Railway was built to Blackfoot in 1878, the old Cutoff road was changed in that it then crossed the Snake River at Blackfoot and headed down the river until it joined the original road.[31] In 1879, Alexander Toponce established a stage line from Blackfoot to the Custer mines.[32] This line used the Cutoff route to Old Arco. Toponce made extensive improvements at the Big Butte stage stop, and his employees Paul Thomas and Anton Voso put in the water line from Webb Spring to the station.[33] A little later, Toponce ran stages from Old Arco to Bellevue. This also followed Jeffrey's Cutoff. A stage barn still survives at Old Arco. Lucille Hathaway Hall tells of seventy-five or more emigrant wagons camped at the Little Wood River stage station.[34]

Among the first users of the Toponce stage line were the Strahorns, who later figured prominently in the development of Caldwell, Idaho. Mrs. Strahorn's book describes several stagecoach trips across the desert from Blackfoot to Arco, and once by buggy to Boise.[35] A way station had been established about half way between Danielson's Springs and Big Butte Station. Water had to be hauled here from the Springs. The station was called "Root Hog or Die", generally shortened to "Root Hog".[36] The road was improved somewhat by removing rocks and piling them along the sides. In 1880, a new, shorter road was created by James McTucker.[37] This road ran in a nearly straight line from Blackfoot to Big Southern Butte. A party of dynamiters was sent out to blow out the roadway through a tongue of lava. This dynamiting could only have happened at a point five miles due east of the Big Butte Stage Station, thus locating McTucker's road as running between present U. S. Highway 26 and the railroad to Arco. This is apparently the route shown for Goodale's Cutoff in Reference Two. The new route was about thirty-seven miles long, compared to about fifty miles on the original route. Travelers using the new route would bypass the Root Hog way station, so extra water would need to be carried. In 1988, the three miles of McTucker's road ruts between the lava flow and Big Butte Stage Station site were destroyed by construction vehicles using the road as a shortcut. The construction was a BLM project piping water from Webb's Spring to the desert floor. On June 25, 1887, the Idaho News of Blackfoot reported that "travelers on the Challis Stage Road find Big Butte Station a pleasant place to stop", and also that "Root Hog is as lively as ever".[38] The latter statement was no doubt made with tongue-in-cheek.

Improvements were also made on the western end of the Cutoff, and stage lines operated to the South Boise River mines over part of the Cutoff.[39]

But even though the first traffic through Camas Prairie had been along east-west routes, the first modern road came from Shoshone to the south, as a result of Shoshone merchants' desire to secure the Camas Prairie trade.[40] It was not until the 1960's that U.S. Highway 20 was opened through Camas Prairie on the general route followed by Jeffrey's Cutoff.

In 1901, the Union Pacific Railroad built its Salmon River Railroad across the desert from Blackfoot to Mackay. When the route was surveyed the previous year, it was reported that from Arco to Mackay the line followed the same route as an earlier railroad survey from Kelton to Mackay.[41] This sounds as if the Central Pacific had considered building a branch line to the Mackay mines. According to the Blackfoot paper, the last freight wagons from Custer were in town on September 14, 1901.[42] However, this was not true of all freight routes. As a seven year old boy, Leo Mecham rode with his great-uncles hauling freight past Big Southern Butte in evident competition with the railroad.[43] Leo was along to help with the harnesses. This was in 1907.

By 1915, the Big Butte Stage Station had burned, but the barn and a small house were being used as a cattle camp.[44] Byrd Trego suggests that the new highway to Arco was constructed 40 years after the Cutoff improvements in 1880.[45] This agrees with Idaho highway history, indicating the new highway was planned by 1916 and built by about 1920.[46] With the new highway, Jeffrey's Cutoff faded into history.

Gerald Baydo described Winfield Ebey as one of the "Countless persons who attracted little or no attention and whose names do not appear in the history of the frontier settled Western America".[47] While this was no doubt true at the time it was written, it should not remain so. Ebey's journal of his trip to Washington is a treasure of firsthand information, and should be published so that all who are interested would have better access to its contents. And the Jeffrey's Cutoff that Ebey describes is a unique historical heritage for Idaho. It could be thought of as a private enterprise version of the Lander Road, both being long Oregon Trail cutoffs opened specifically as emigrant roads. Of course, Jeffrey's Cutoff was not remotely as well built as the Lander Road, with no bridges or significant improvements of any kind. And yet, contrary to the Lander Road, use of the Cutoff continued during the stagecoach era and partially into the automobile era. For this reason, the trail was not overgrown and lost. At the same time, when modern roads were built, they were in general built away from the Cutoff and did not obscure it. Much of the Cutoff is located on lava rock desert or similar land not suited for agriculture,and so has not been plowed under and lost. Of the 230 miles that Ebey felt comprised the trail, over 100 miles still exist in recognizable

condition. As Idaho approaches its Centennial Year, the saga of Jeffrey's Cutoff and the Ebey wagon train certainly deserve recognition for the part they played in Idaho history.

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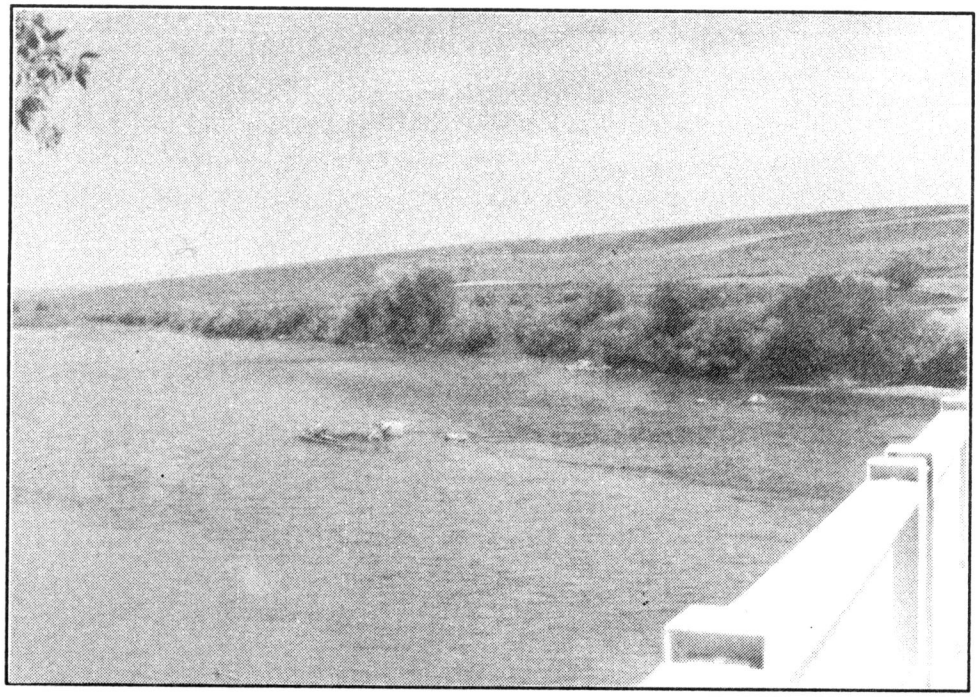


Figure 1. Site of Gibson & Meeks Ferry over the Snake River. East landing was at rocky spit near center of picture. Tilden Bridge & Ferry Butte Road to the right.

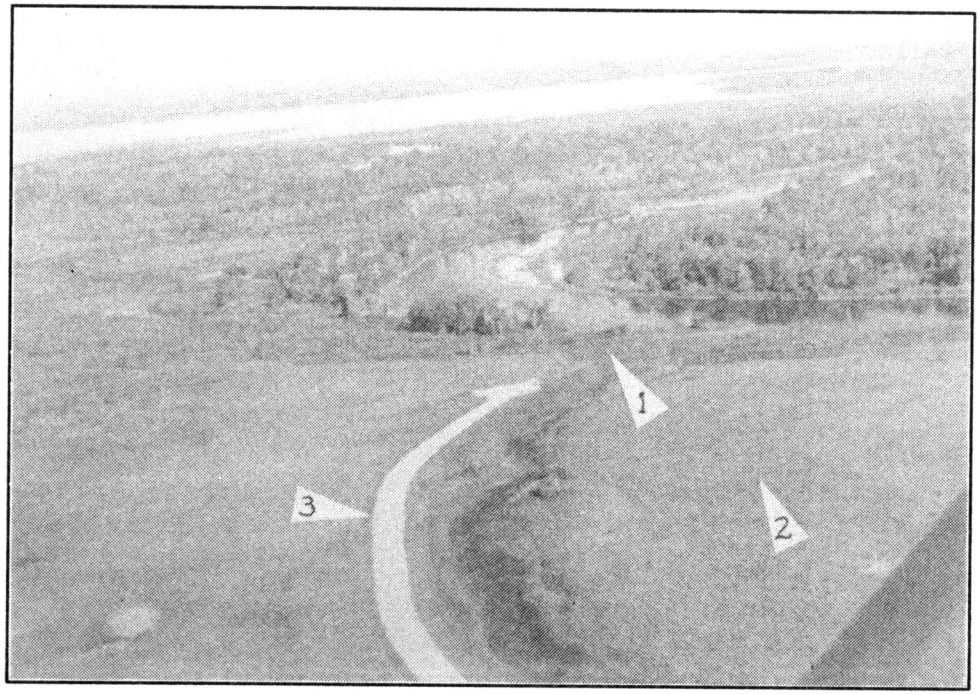


Figure 2. After his wagon train camped on July 31 near the Snake River ferry, Winfield Ebey rode ten miles down the river to Fort Hall, and found it deserted. Monument at Fort Hall site, 1; Possible Oregon Trail swale, 2; Monument Road, a branch of Sheepskin Road on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, 3.

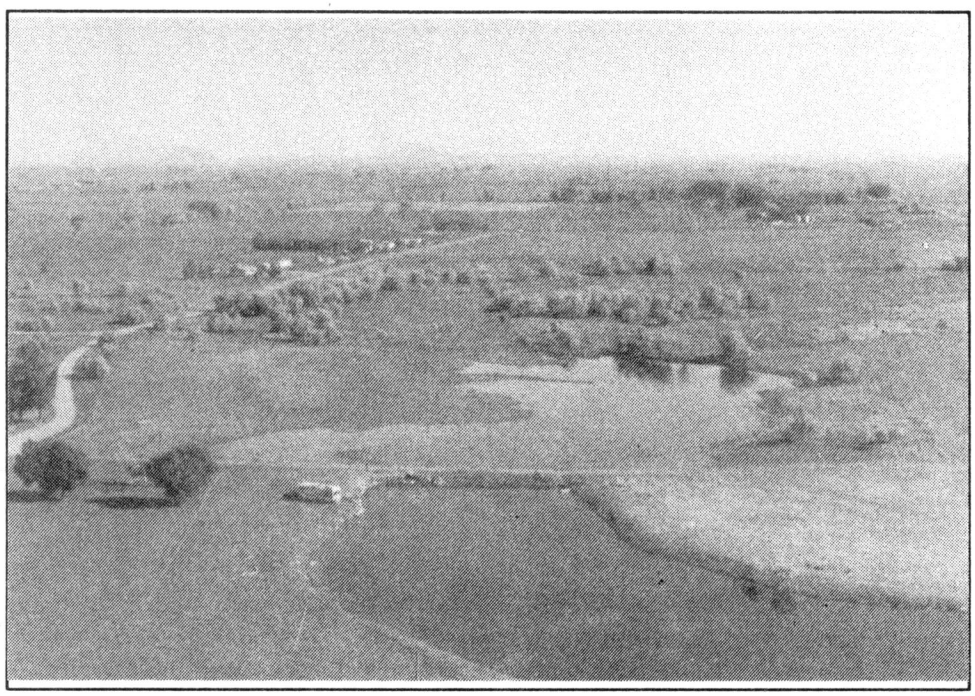


Figure 3. On August 1, after ferrying the Snake River, the Ebey train went three miles down river and camped at this large spring. Some local people say it is Thorn Spring; others say it isn't.



Figure 4. Danielson Springs near Springfield was the next camp for the Ebey train. They spent a day and a half here recruiting for the desert.

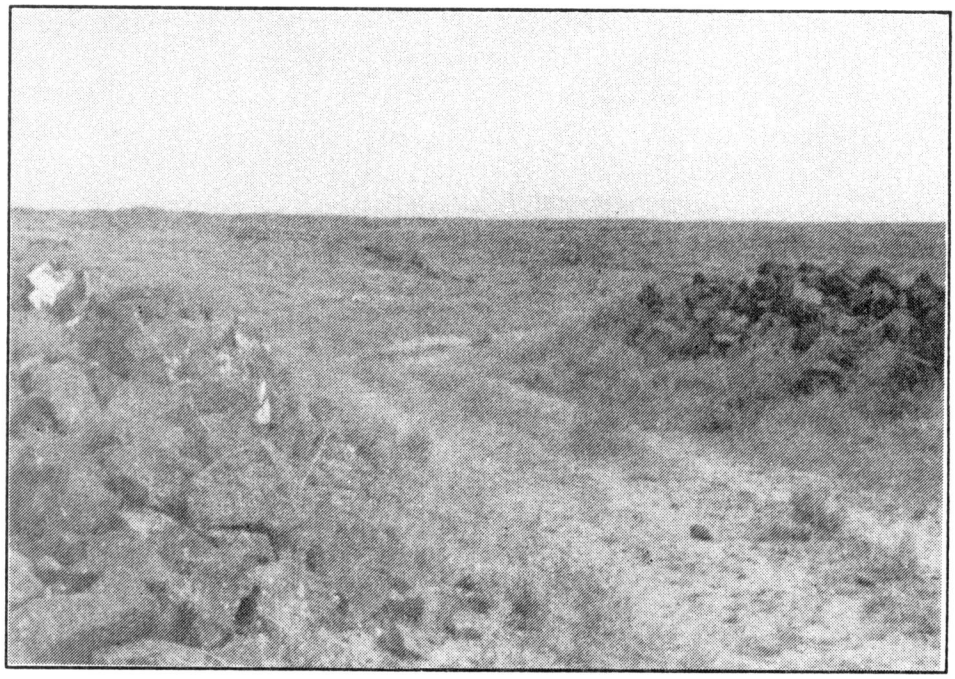


Figure 5. Bulldozers and pneumatic drills did not make this 100-year-old improvement on the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff fifteen miles northwest of Springfield. It and many others like it were all done by hand labor.

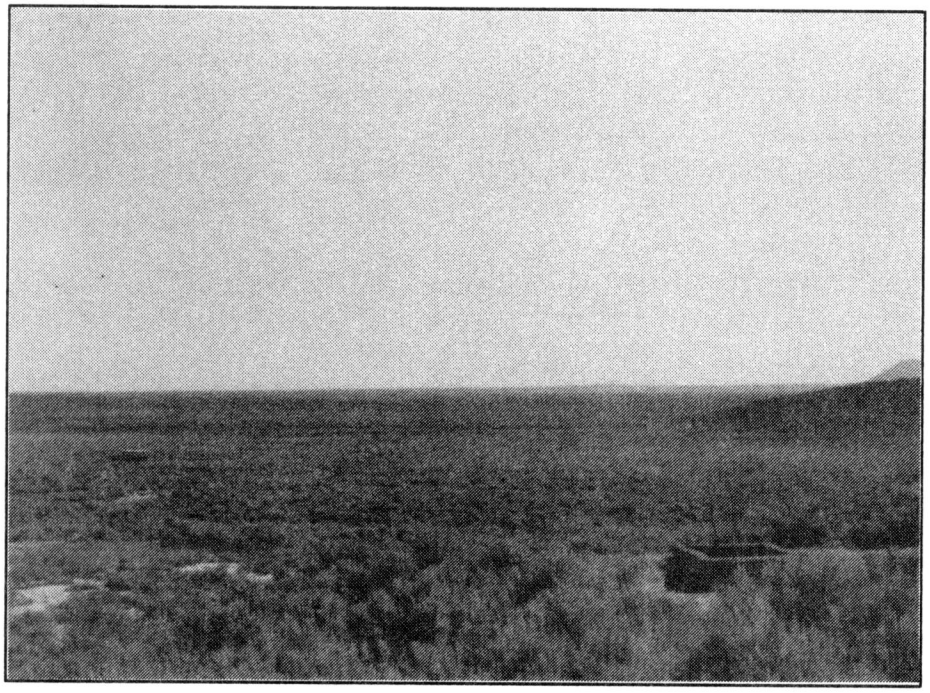


Figure 6. After a thirty mile journey from Danielson Springs, the Ebey train reached the future site of the Big Butte stage station. Unfortunately, the cistern visible was not built until 1879, so there was scant water available for their camp on August 4.

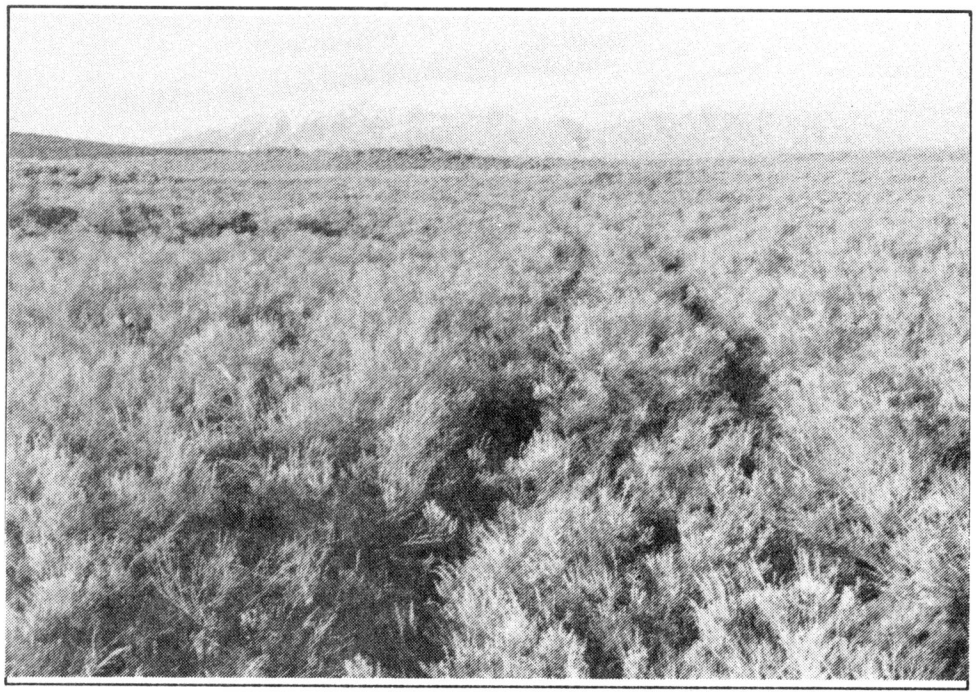


Figure 7. Ruts of Jeffrey's Cutoff located eleven miles west of Arco, just north of Highway 20.

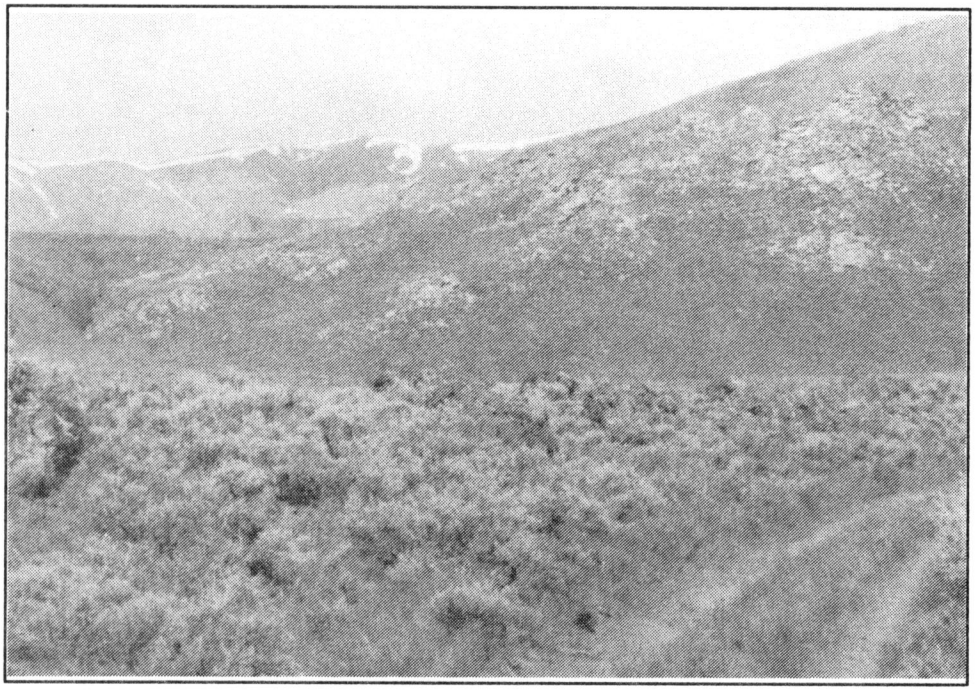


Figure 8. On August 8 the Ebey train passed through Craters of the Moon and approached what Winfield Ebey termed "Bad Hill". This was the ravine at the left side of the picture.

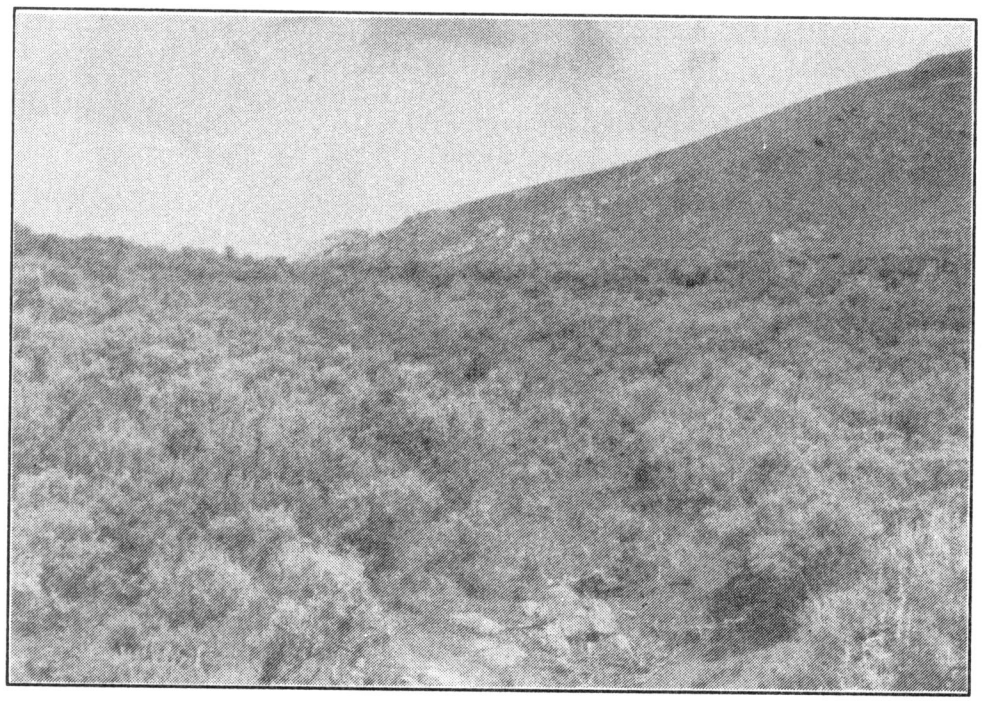


Figure 9. The Jeffrey Cutoff swale near the top of "Bad Hill". Because the road was later changed to follow around this mountain spur (probably in 1863), this swale deserves the overworked term, "pristine".

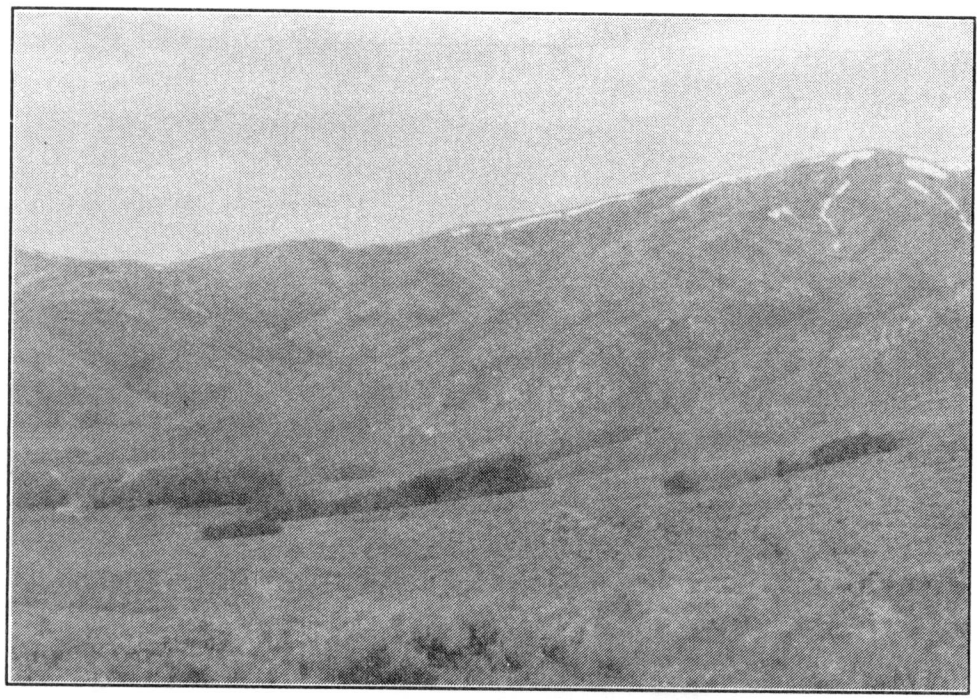


Figure 10. At the top of "Bad Hill", the trees at the spring where the Ebey train nooned on August 8 can be seen at the extreme right of the picture. Their camp that night was one mile further, beyond the mountain spur in the center of the picture. The Indian trail they had been following went over the mountain saddle at the left.

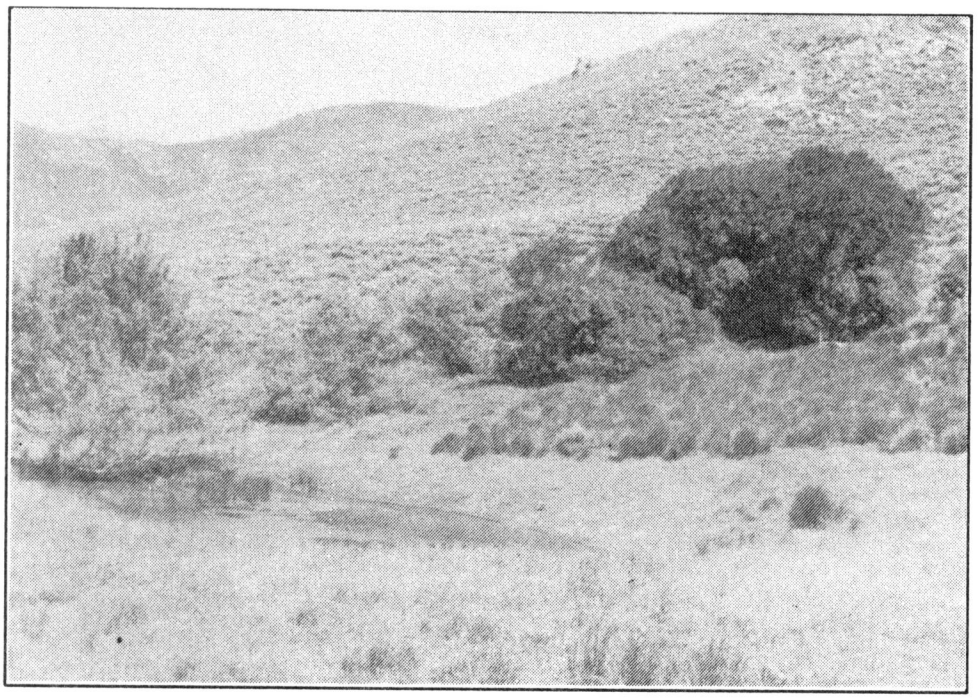


Figure 11. The spring where the Ebey train nooned on August 8. The stock pond is a recent addition.

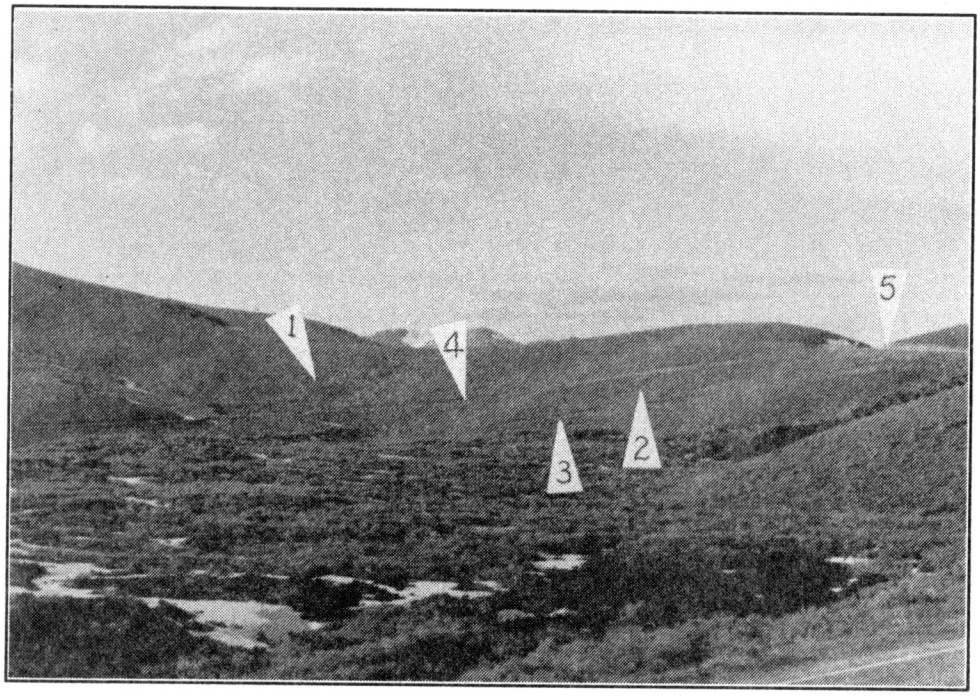


Figure 12. This hill, locally known as "Tom Cat", is about eight miles west of Craters of the Moon. Five roads are visible: Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff, 1; 1863 improvement, 2; 1900's road, 3; 1920's road, 4; and Highway 20, 5.

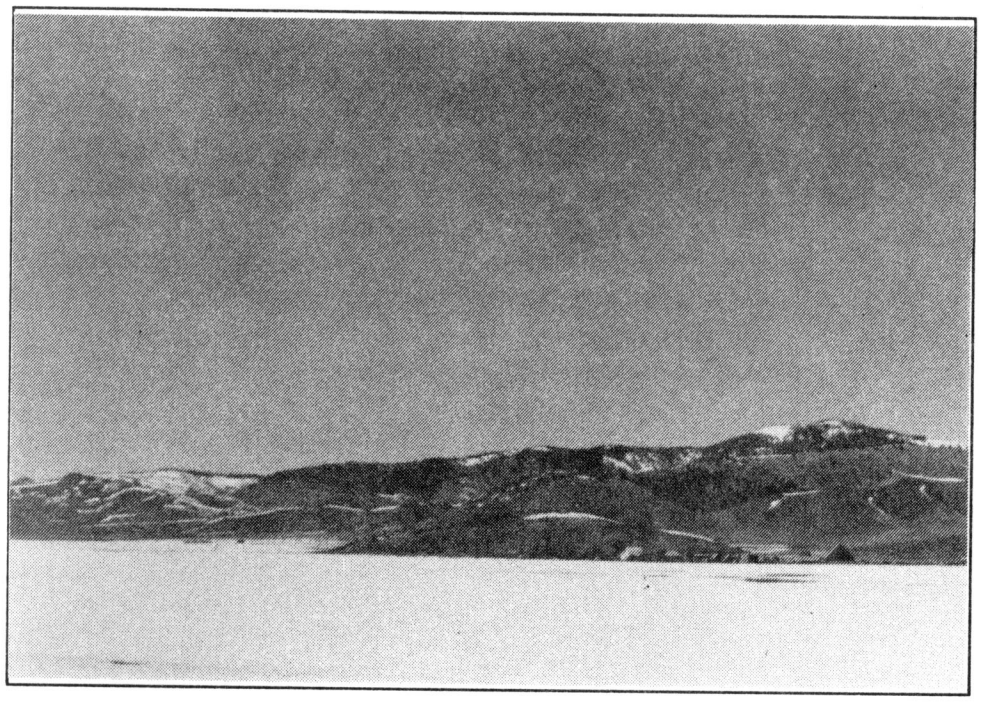


Figure 13. Butte Spring, six miles east of Fairfield, is now the site of a modern ranch. The Ebey train nooned there on August 14.

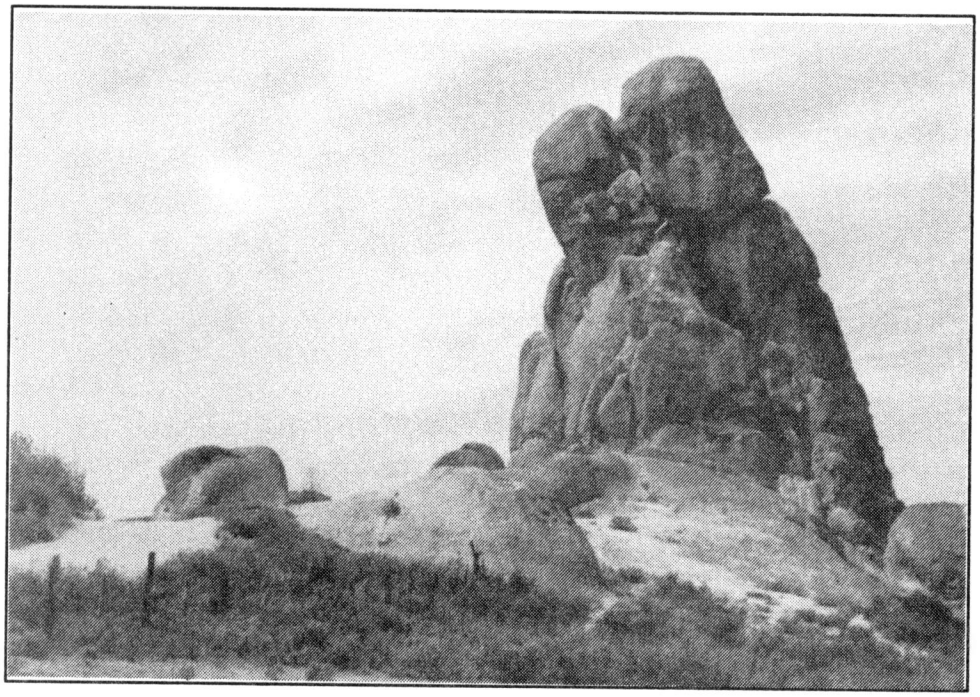


Figure 14. When his train passed through the Caste Rocks area on August 16, Winfield Ebey thought some of the rocks resembled caped, or crowned, pillars.



Figure 15. Winfield Scott Ebey and George W. Beam are buried side by side in the Sunnyside Cemetery near Coupeville, Washington.

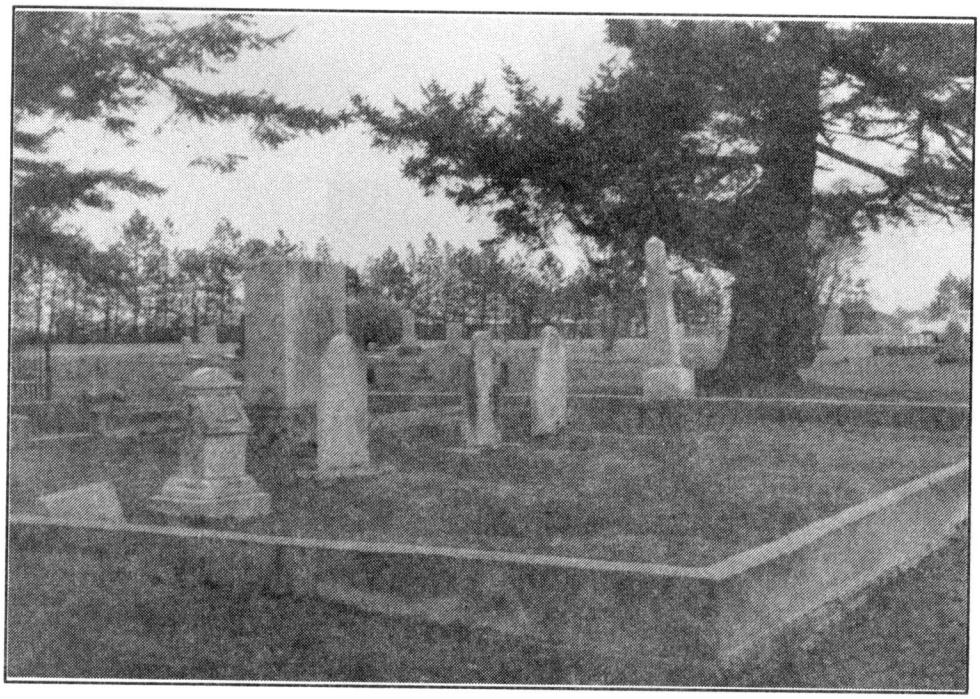


Figure 16. All of the members of the Ebey party from Missouri in 1854 are buried in this plot in the Sunnyside Cemetery, except James J. Wood and Winfield's nephew.

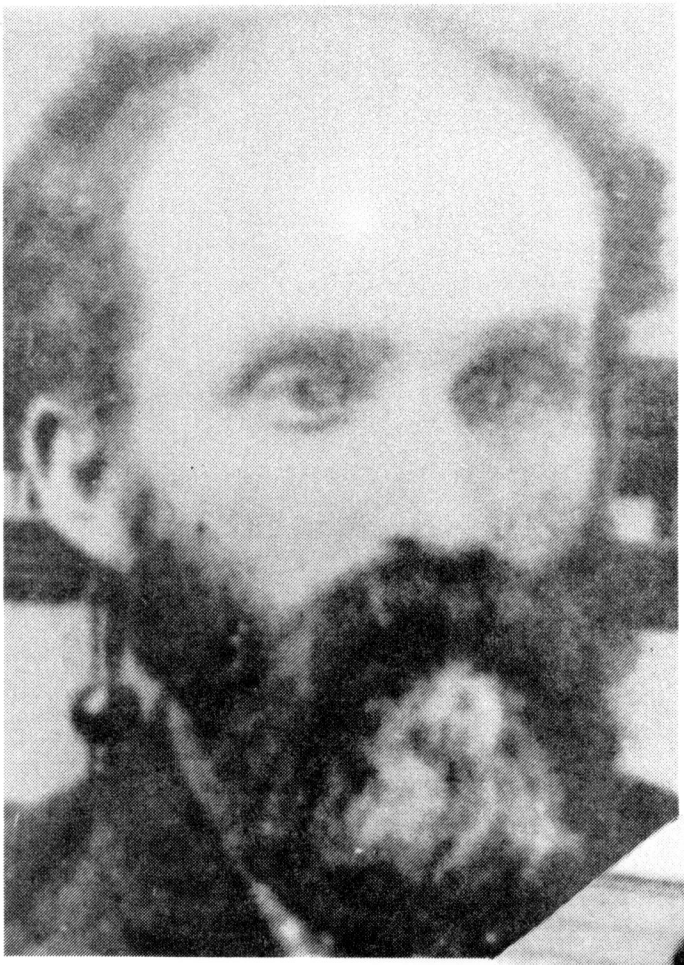


Figure 17. Jefferson Montgomery (Compton) Davis and his wife were among the first to operate a way station at Big Southern Butte. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Reneau)



Figure 18. Alice West Waddell married Jefferson Davis on July 1, 1873, at Corbitt's Station (near Firth, Idaho). After Jefferson's death in 1895, Alice became a cook for railroad executives with a special dining car on the railroad. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Reneau)



Figure 19. Peter Winn Davis was born October 13, 1867. His eldest son and other family members understood that he was born at Big Southern Butte while his parents were operating a way station there. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Reneau)



Figure 20. Corporal Anderson died somewhere near Old Arco, and was buried in the cemetery on the banks of Big Lost River. Although the cemetery has been obliterated, his headstone was moved to the new Arco cemetery.

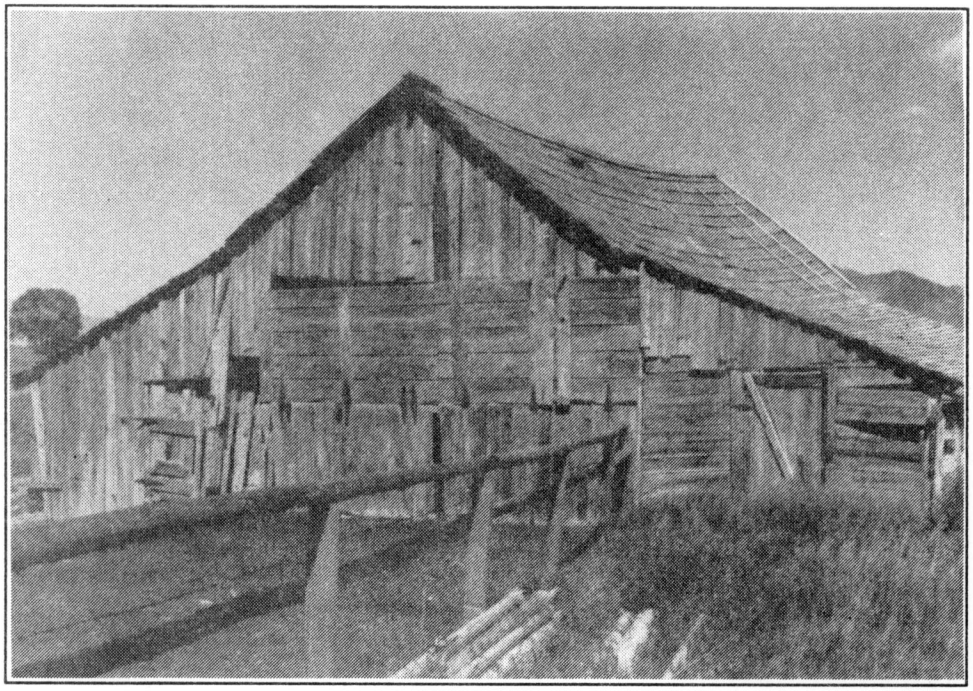


Figure 21. The stage barn at the site of Old Arco. This is located on the Rindfleisch ranch.

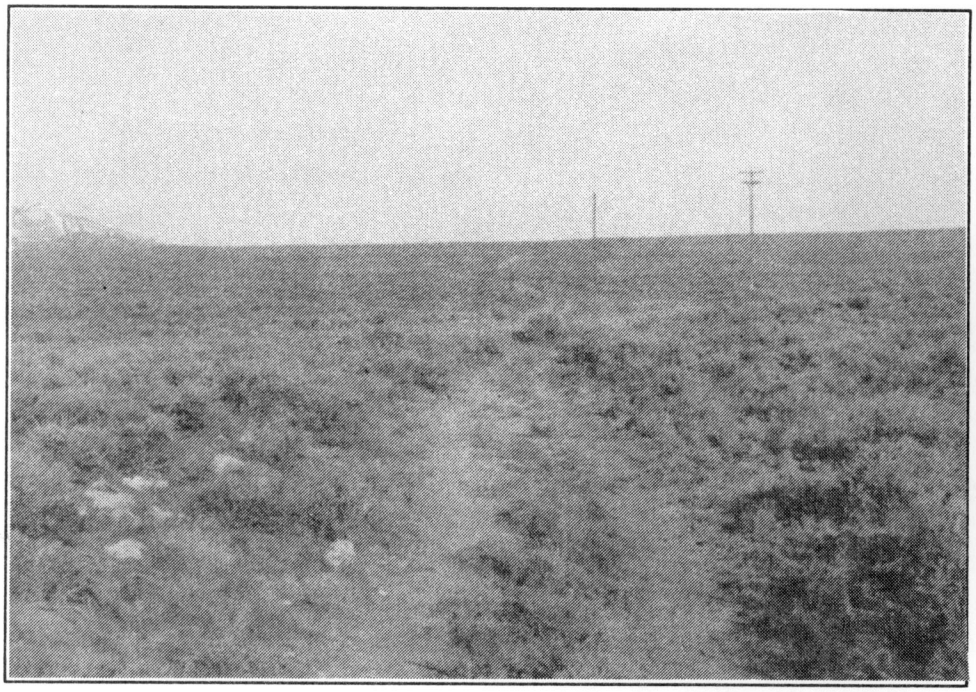


Figure 22. McTucker's 1880 vintage road from Blackfoot to Big Southern Butte. Here the road intersects old Highway 26, eight miles northwest of Tabor, Idaho.