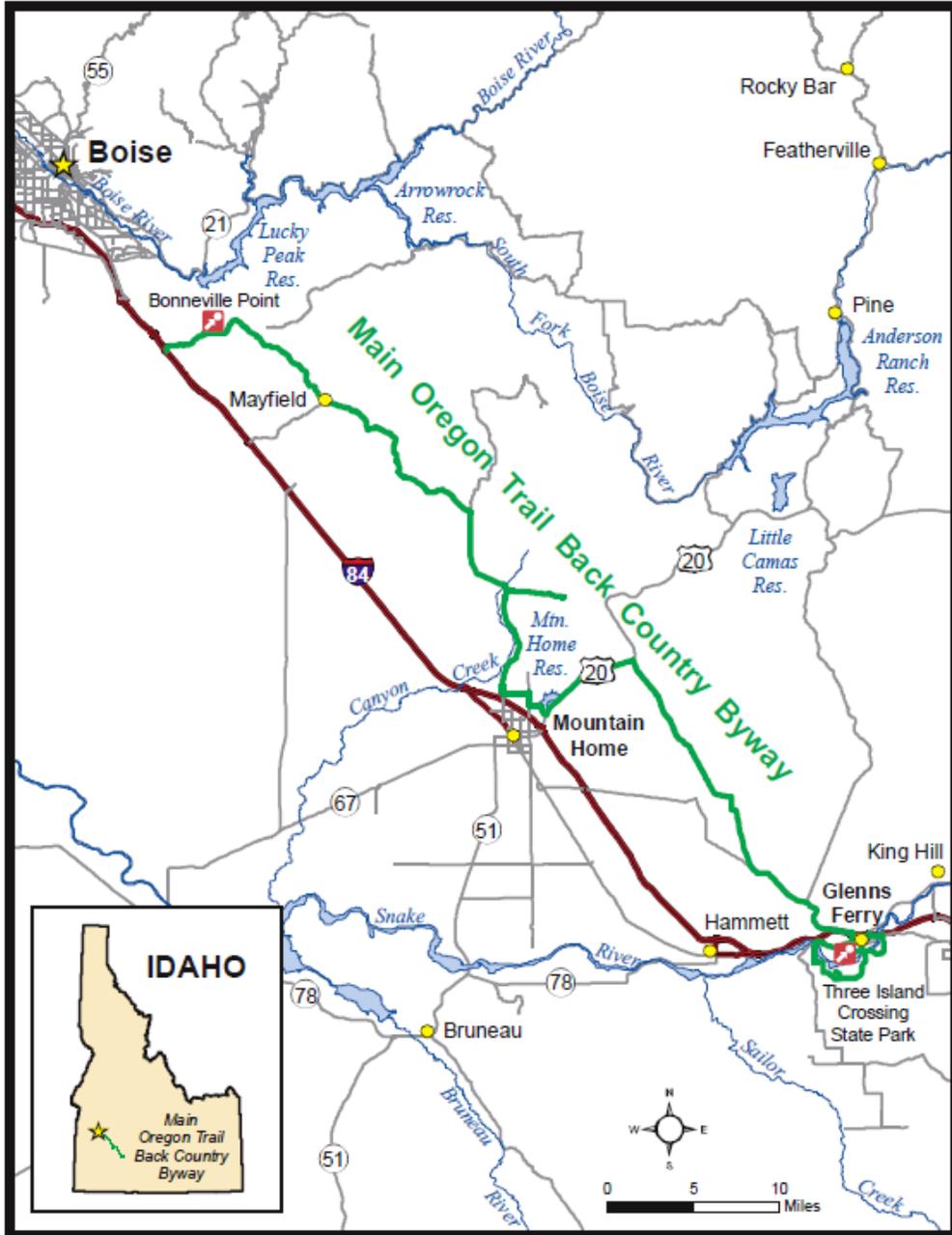


# Main Oregon Trail Back Country Byway

By Jerry Eichhorst

The Main Oregon Trail Back Country Byway closely follows the Oregon Trail from Three Island Crossing near Glens Ferry to Bonneville Point near Boise. In the era of COVID-19 and the associated self-isolation, social distancing, and lack of public outings, it is still possible to enjoy the Oregon Trail close to Boise by driving the byway route.



Byway map

The Main Oregon Trail Back Country Byway can easily be driven in a day from Boise. Passenger cars can make the journey on paved, gravel, and dirt roads. Be sure to get a copy of the byway booklet for maps, directions, and interesting emigrant diary quotes along the route. The byway booklet is available at BLM offices in Boise, on Development Avenue east of the airport and on South Vinnell Way just west of the Walmart on Overland Road in Boise. The booklet should also be available at Three Island Crossing State Park. You can find the guidebook online at the Idaho OCTA chapter website ([http://idahoocta.org/MOTBCB\\_Booklet.pdf](http://idahoocta.org/MOTBCB_Booklet.pdf)) and on the NPS and BLM websites.

The byway begins at Glens Ferry in southern Idaho with a loop around to the south side of the Snake River overlooking the islands at Three Island Crossing. Excellent trail ruts are marked in this area. A number of interpretive signs are available at the overlook. You can still see the route of the trail as it turned out in the flat and curved back to cross the first channel. The trail then crossed the next channel and went to the upstream tip of the second island before crossing the main portion of the river heading slightly upstream. The third island was not used in the crossing.



Three Island Crossing from the overlook on the south side of Snake River

On the north side of the Snake River is Three Island Crossing State Park. The first part of the byway will continue around a loop to the park's History and Education Center where an excellent display of artifacts and information is available. Be sure to stop at the Fudge Factory Grill and Ice Cream shop on Commercial Street for a treat or at the golf course restaurant for lunch and wine tasting.

The second part of the byway heads northwest from Glens Ferry on Old Oregon Trail Road. This road is generally less than a mile south of the Trail. There are several places indicated along the byway where the Trail crosses local roads. Be sure to turn around and return to Old Oregon Trail Road at these locations as some of the directional signs indicating a U-turn have been stolen. Interpretive signs along the route add information at key locations. At the interpretive sign for the Teapot Dome Hot Springs, the dirt road can be followed 100 yards north to the site of the hot springs. These springs have been dried up since wells were sunk for agricultural purposes, but the red stain from the iron-laden water is still visible in the dry creek beds.



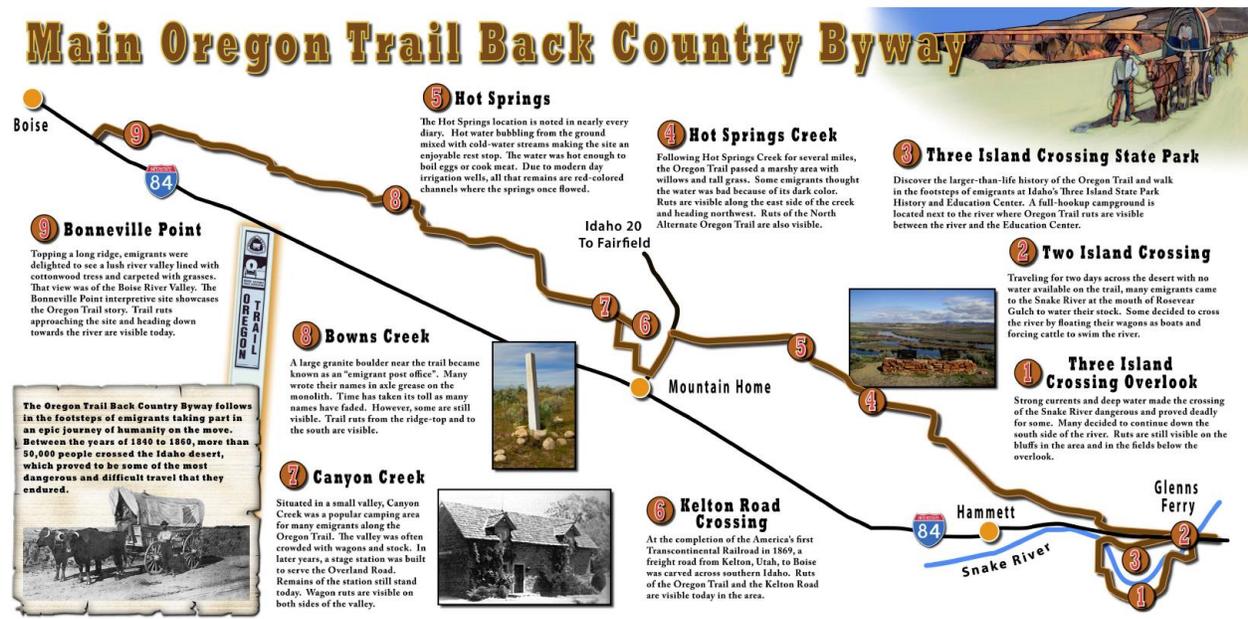
Dry creek beds at Teapot Dome Hot Springs site with Oregon Trail coming down the hill

Continuing northwest a few miles, the byway reaches Highway 20. Mountain Home is only 8 miles to the south with restroom facilities, food, gas, and other necessities.

Just south of Mountain Home Reservoir, the third part of the byway heads through residential areas of northwest Mountain Home to Canyon Creek Road and then turns north back into the desert. At the intersection with Immigrant Road, the byway turns east for a few miles to where the Kelton Road crosses Immigrant Road. The Kelton Road was a freight road nearly used in the late 1860's and 1870's to transport goods and materials from the railroad at Kelton, Utah, to the Boise area. It followed the Oregon Trail and North Alternate Oregon Trail in many places but branched off the old trails in this area to avoid a very rocky section of road.

Returning to the west, the byway drops down the hill into the valley of Canyon Creek. A heavily used camping area along the Oregon Trail, this location was later a stage stop. The old stage station is on the right of the road. It was given to the BLM a few years ago by the Norstebon family which owns the valley. The BLM has been restoring the station for several years. The Idaho chapter partnered with the Idaho Heritage Trust to get the perseveration effort rolling several years ago.

The byway continues to the northwest, much of it through private property. Interpretive signs along the way describe points of interest. Trail remnants can be seen along the road in places, especially where the road turns west at Danskin Mountain Road. The old townsite of Mayfield is passed with another rock stage station. It is located on private property and trespassing is not allowed.



Byway mapboard panel

The byway winds through the foothills until the road becomes Blacks Creek Road and is paved. The road to Bonneville Point branches to the right. From the interpretive center at the end of the road, the Boise River valley can be seen. The Oregon Trail heads down the hill towards the river valley.

Returning to Blacks Creek Road and turning right, Interstate 84 is soon reached as is the end of the byway. If continuing west on I-84, a side trip can be taken by exiting at Gowen Road and heading east for a couple of miles to the Ada County Oregon Trail Center. There are excellent trail ruts coming down the hill as well as a ramp to the lower river level.

The Idaho chapter conducts a tour of the Main Oregon Trail Back Country Byway every spring. The tour will take the group to pristine trail ruts and some sites on private property that are not available to the general public. It usually occurs in mid-April. Watch the chapter website, [www.IdahoOCTA.org](http://www.IdahoOCTA.org), for details about the tour.



The byway follows Mayfield Road along the base of the foothills.