



Vol. XVI Issue 1 February 2004

James McGill, President/Editor
208 467 4853/ Cell 250 6045

jwmcgill@pobox.com

WATER FOR GOODALE CUTOFF EMIGRANTS—WEBB SPRINGS

The Emigrant Trail that is now called the Jeffery/Goodale Cutoff of the Oregon Trail system had been used long before Tim Goodale led his wagon train across the desert area of central Idaho in July 1862. The early travelers needed water, especially sought after when they had crossed the first 40 miles of the difficult and waterless route from near the present Springfield, ID, to Big Southern Butte. The spring that supplied water from the NW corner, just below the abrupt rise of the upper part of the Butte, would eventually be named Webb Spring.



WEB SPRING IN THE ASPEN TREES, NE SIDE OF BIG BUTTE

Reaching Big Butte, the Trail crossed about half way up the huge sloping delta of geologic debris that had eroded from the Butte on that NW corner. But the water outlet was nearly a mile above the Trail. During diminished flows no water reached the road. Written diary accounts tell of going up under the steeper part of the Butte to find the water. Though Webb Spring has now been almost dry for many years, a wash is still evident which shows that at times the water flowed all the way down the side of the Butte, over the delta to the flat desert land below.

This spring was a critical water supply. Without sufficient water there emigrants and other travelers had to go many miles out of the way, about 10 miles on northerly to the Lost River, with only a hope that it was not then also “lost” or dry as it was during dryer times!

At times travelers dug down to better open the Spring, and later people who dwelt near the base of the Butte

Began to install devices to help reach more water and/or to get most of the water to flow all the way down to the McTucker Road area at the bottom. That was where Big Butte Stage Station would eventually be built and improved upon, existing in 1879 until 1901. The history of the Spring and some of the work that was done on it is of interest, but has been a subject of disagreement. Most notable was the person(s) and time of completion of the complicated *wooden pipe system* that brought the water nearly two miles to the Station for many years.

When Fred Dykes began writing about the Jeffery-Goodale route and Big Butte Station in the 1980s, he recounted much of the history of Webb Spring. He quoted journal accounts of travelers and brought together a lot of historical information. At one point he had quoted from another writer who in 1932 wrote a book about Fort Hall and the Trail. She had written that Alex Toponce had “put in the water line,” around the time he began his stage line in 1879. Jennie Broughton Brown included nono documentation in her book to support that claim. The best evidences now indicate that Toponce’s water system was probably an open trough system, and not the later wooden pipeline.

During research for *Big Butte Stage Station Pioneers*, this writer had found a legal *Water-Right* document, filed at Hailey, ID, in 1891, the County seat of Alturas County, by James C. Murray. James was the second and last long-time proprietor of the Station (1891-1901). The document was the first legal claim of any kind that addressed the land use and water system at the Station. Murray had not only first filed for all right to the water,

but specified that the plan and “right of way [was] for the purpose of *laying a pipe* or running a ditch” from the spring to the Station. The mention of building a “ditch” brings a question about a previous trough system, but there is other supportive information for this trough.

The completion of this story owes thanks to one descendent of Frances Elvira and James C. Murray, Carolee Osborne of Durham, NC! She was the main source for the beginning of the Murray family story when this writer wrote the *Big Butte* Book. Later, in summer of 2003, she found in the files of the *Arco Advertiser* a 1941 story about the pipeline. Clay Vance of the Vance family, who first ran the Station for Alex Toponce (1880-91?), wrote a letter in 1941, to the *Advertiser* writer with information about the Station.

The Vance family had been hired to run the Station in early or mid 1880. Clay was only 8 years old when he said the Vance family first visited the Station in 1879, traveling from Utah to the Lost River Valley. Writing sixty years later, some of Clay’s dates seemed to a bit inaccurate when compared to other research information formerly discovered in preparing for the Book. But he did remember that when the family came to the Station there had already been what he called a “crude wooden trough” that brought the water down from the spring!

He guessed that the *Webb* family, from whom Webb Spring was named, had some time before built the trough. They had lived at the site before Toponce took over in 1879, and before Alex’s helpers probably did improve the system with the trough. (Paul Thomas and Anton Voso were Toponce’s workers that did his work.)

Clay verified that during the Vance years there had not been a wooden pipe system in place. He thought that the pipe system may have been built by some operators who later moved “their mid-desert station from Powell to Big Butte.” However, the mail-stage route was changed by the Powell family in mid 1890’s. Research has shown that during this intervening time the *mail contract* was bought away for three years from the two partners, Gilmer and Salisbury, who had purchased the stage line from Toponce in 1881. After those three years the mail was brought back to the Murray’s at Big Butte. But stage riding passengers continued to pass through Big Butte all the years until 1901. That Station remained open.

It seems now to be apparent from the *Water Right* that James Murray built the wooden pipe system about 1891. (Murray worked for years before 1891, as an experience-trained mining engineer at the largest/richest silver mine west of Ketchum, up Warm Springs Cr., the Tenbrook.)

It is unknown when the huge cistern was built that still exists at the site. Whether the present metal pipes had



115 YEAR OLD DRILLED WATER PIPE, HELD BY THE HIRED MAN AT FRENCHMAN’S CABIN ON THE PRESENT RANCH

been originally cemented into the cistern, or if these were added later when a metal pipe system was installed from the Spring is also known. It is possible that the cistern was built by Toponce’s men. Clay did not give any information about the cistern and a series of water troughs that were at sometime placed below the cistern!

Since the time of the 1850s when wagon trains began to use the Goodale, and maybe even before that when explorers and other travelers use that route, efforts to increase the available water at Big Butte had continued. Animals still find a little water today, but only at the opening of the Spring during part of better water years.

TWO MONTHS----BACK ON THE TRAIL

Winter waiting is difficult for one who enjoys the Trails. An almost summery day, February 19, but with a little mud from melted snow and rain, called your Editor and Patti out to some worthwhile sites! Our December report had indicated that the South Alternate marking was almost finished with only a short section of Trail ruts to be checked near Guffey Butte, NW of Murphy. A little research had led to one more section of spectacular ruts.



SOUTH ALTERNATE SW OF GUFFEY BUTTE, RIGHT, WALTERS BUTTE IN THE DISTANCE ON THE LEFT

The mile and one-quarter section near Guffey required some new markers and decaling of some old markers, but it was a good trip out to one favorite place. Then upon arriving at the second almost one mile of ruts five miles south of Marsing, ID, and the only ruts left on the last 40-42 miles of Trail from Guffy to the Oregon line,

the visual-dessert for that day was rich and satisfying.

In the sandy soil high above the Snake River we found only one old marker with extremely faded BLM decals. The ruts are 4-5 feet deep almost the whole distance, split for about 100 yards with a pair of deep-worn roads, and with a great view of the River, Liberty Butte, and the massive evidences of the Bonneville Flood deposits.



DEEP SOUTH ALTERNATE RUTS SOUTH OF MARSING, ID
(Bonneville was the second largest fresh water flood in the world, less water only than the Missoula Flood that inundated and scoured across the panhandle of northern Idaho--the only State to have been touched by and geologically changed over such wide areas by both Floods! Patti and your Editor have studied the effects of both of these floods for many years, but we are still awed at the extreme evidences of erosion and changes by such huge volumes of water! The early emigrants crossed many of these features, sometimes commenting in journals on what they saw. They could never have understood the great forces that so change southern Idaho all across the State, along the Snake River.)

This minimal marking completed about 25 miles of all remaining ruts of the S.A., and finished one of the most important 2003 chapters of I-OCTA work.

Two days later we were privileged to enjoy some rich frosting on the cake. While photographing some of the ruts in the same area we met two property owners with land between the separated sections of BLM land, east of Highway 78, from Murphy to Guffey. Some fine ruts across their land had never been marked.



SPLIT TRAIL RUTS APPROACH THE DAVENPORT HOME, ONCE CROSSING THE RIDGE ON WHICH HOME STANDS

Bob and Sue Davenport and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Steiner allowed us to place carsonite markers on their ruts, which effectively united two divided sections into a nearly continuous 5 mile stretch of ruts. The appreciation by Patti and your Editor, the Idaho Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, and National OCTA is here given to these "Friends of the Trail!"

OPEN LETTER TO OCTA MEMBERSHIP

(The following is part of a letter sent out in early February by OCTA President, Dick Pingrey. It bears repeating! I-OCTA can be somewhat satisfied that we have already strengthened our preservation work, and begun a new chapter in a cooperative work with BLM!)

Dear Friends,

Occasionally there are matters of great concern to an organization that demand urgent attention. Such a situation exists at the present time in OCTA. The enclosed material will shed much more light on the present situation and my concern.

The primary mission of the Oregon-California Trails Association is trail preservation. [Editor's emphasis]

Even though we all believe in this mission we have failed to commit both the time and the resources to this effort, and we are losing the battle to protect and preserve the trail in far to great many places. At the national level we commit a very small percentage of our budget to trail preservation efforts. Our preservation staff at the national level consists primarily of one person, Preservation Officer, David Welch. . . .

I believe that now is the time to change our focus and emphasis so that trail preservation is our number one priority. I feel confident that the majority of OCTA members share my belief. **Trail preservation needs to be our number one goal.** [Ed.] We need to expand and adequately fund our national preservation staff so as to be able to promptly identify threatened trail segments. We need to insure that all chapters have trained and active preservation officers that work closely with the national staff. We need to strengthen our partnership with the National Park Service, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. We need to make certain that all segments of the trails are monitored, mapped and marked. . . .

Let the board and officers at the national level and your chapter officers know that you support preservation by letters, e-mails and by telephone. **Get involved by becoming active in preservation efforts.** [Ed.] We are always short of volunteers and now is a critical time for us in finding people willing to donate a few hours to help preserve the trails. As your president I ask for your support. Working together we can make a difference.

Richard H. Pingrey, President [OCTA]

(NOTE Your President/Editor was appointed by Dick Pingrey, February 10, 2004, as National Trail Mapping Committee Chairman, to work closely with Dave Welch, National Preservation Officer, and other Chapters in a renewed effort to complete the mapping of the Trails across the U. S. This responsibility must be supported by so many great Trail people who *know much more than this new comer and novice*. Let's do our part in Idaho!)

BLM/I-OCTA COOPERATIVE UPDATE

Since our December 2003 invitation to the January 10, combined meeting of BLM and I-OCTA people, at Twin Falls, there has been good progress.

First we had a very successful meeting, attended by 29 people from across the State. There were 5 BLM people, 11 I-OCTA members, 6 members of historical societies and other groups interested in Trail preservation, and 7 private persons who had Trail interests!

Many Trail related concerns and needs were discussed, and the BLM representatives affirmed their own resolve to help reestablish a Memorandum of Agreement between their offices and I-OCTA. At present your President and Stan McDonald, BLM State Cultural Resources Program Director, are reviewing an old MOA, which expired in 1999. This will be revised and updated to assist our partnership in Trail marking and preservation with the BLM representatives.

Three regional groups of 3-4 I-OCTA members each and one BLM field representative were formed for the three Idaho-BLM areas of Boise, Twin Falls-Burley, and Pocatello-Idaho Falls, to plan and begin/increase preservation activities across the State. Groups were encouraged to reach out and invite others in their areas, individuals and other groups who have demonstrated an interest and common preservation goals. Communications have begun within and between groups to facilitate information needed for ordering necessary Trail marking supplies for 2004.

Soon I-OCTA leaders will meet in Boise (Feb. 25), with invitations to other persons, to plan the I-OCTA , 2004 Calendar, and other cooperative activities. These activities will be Field Trips, work/marketing days, and regular I-OCTA Board and Membership meetings.

And we have news that Jerry Eichhorst, I-OCTA member from Boise, is working on an Internet Web Page for our Chapter, which could be adopted by our Board and Membership! That will also be reviewed and considered during the planning meeting.

Preliminary communications will continue with the BLM and shared with others who met at Twin Falls, as

we work out a productive and successful working relationship for Trail preservation and mapping.

Members, we welcome your input and eventual participation as we move into what is hoped to be a very productive year. **We will need volunteers, whether for short, close to home trips or some overnight travel across the State to accomplish our work ahead.** Every contribution of time and effort, no matter how small, will give our total efforts good results.

Please send your names by mail, email, or phone (208 467 4853) and the extent of your help if you plan to participate. This will aid us in planning all summer. Help is welcomed from I-OCTA members and non-member visitors. Give information on the following possibilities:

1. Available only for one-day trips on Trail ruts
2. Available for over-night trips
3. Can you hike 2-3 miles on some trips? (not required)
4. Do you have a high clearance vehicle to use?
5. Would you like to ride with someone else?
6. Do you enjoy seeing historical sites and great outdoor Idaho weather?

See the I-OCTA schedule below to help you plan!

Do share these possibilities with friends and reach out to people you know. One of OCTA's basic goals is to share with the public the information about Trail sites and resources, and help make them available for "appreciation and enjoyment!" Reach a friend to help us in our preservation efforts so that we will always have all of Idaho's miles of ruts available for enjoyment--and bring Grandma some time for a great ride along!

OCTA CONVENTION---IDAHO IN 2007?

The August 2007 place for the National OCTA Convention is open, and we have been asked by several OCTA Members if I-OCTA would like to sponsor the meeting again in Idaho! This needs discussion at the planning, Board, and Membership meetings soon. We are not obligated, but need to consider the possibility for that meeting. We would need a lot of help to make it work.

It appears that somewhere in the Boise Valley would be a good place, and even Nampa/Caldwell, centrally located and with Nampa the second largest city in Idaho now, can be considered. When it was seen last year that Manhattan, KS, a town comparable to the size of Nampa, had their own successful Convention, your Editor was encouraged about the possibilities.

We need facilities for upwards of 500-600 possible attendees. We shall see this year how many attend at Vancouver, WA, and that should help us to know more about possible numbers.

We hope many helpers would get involved. The last time the Convention was in Boise, Idaho the BLM, State Historical Society, and others assisted I-OCTA people very much to make that meeting possible.

Your President believes that not only some of the above people would help I-OCTA, but that local Historical Societies, Genealogical Societies, and others, as well as the Cities of Nampa and Caldwell, would work with us. Other Boise-based preservation and Trail interested groups are even now working on Trail related projects, including an AARP group that is producing a Trail hiking book for Seniors! (Cheryl Tussey, Director of the AARP State group in Boise, is an I-OCTA member!) We have been in contact with many of these related groups, and have met with them on Trail projects.

We have great Trail related resources available all across Idaho, and many possible field trips could be planned to share those resources with people from across the Nation. Attendees from many eastern States and other countries is a common OCTA Convention occurrence!

At Manhattan, tours were bussed more than 100 miles or more to see the remaining ruts and historic sites. We have available so many places in southern Idaho, and even into eastern Oregon, such as the continuing sites of the Utter Disaster. Places for trips to go to share in experiencing the Trail sites, Cutoffs, and Alternates are numerous and accessible.

Feedback, discussions, and any other support *or opposition reasons* are welcome. Please send comments and/or information to this Editor by email, mail, or phone. I-OCTA may need to give at least some preliminary/possible acceptance in August 2004.

We hope an inquiring introductory and informational letter can be prepared from I-OCTA, to be sent to many other groups soon. Feed back from others who may be glad to be involved can be crucial to making a decision.

Some people who receive this newsletter do represent separate preservation and Trail related groups. We would appreciate any contact from you indicating your interest in this possible Convention in the Boise Valley.

NEW I-OCTA INTERNET WEB PAGE

Jerry Eichhorst, I-OCTA member from Boise has begun work on a web site for the Idaho Chapter. It was given interim approval on February 25, at the planning meeting but must be approved by the full Board. Jerry demonstrated the site to the planning group, and it already looks very good. He will proceed with the process of getting it on line soon. It will then still continue in the building process

with more information added as made available. Jerry can be found at jeichho@mail.com for input and suggestions when the page soon comes on line. The web address will be IdahoOCTA.org. Besides much Idaho Trail information on its pages it will be linked to many other Trail related sites and groups.
PLAN TO GO TO THE AUGUST 9-14, 2004, OCTA CONVENTION AT VANCOUVER, WA! ENJOY A FEW DAYS OR THE WHOLE WEEK!
PRE & POST CONVENTION ACTIVITIES ALSO

I-OCTA 2004 ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

The following is the tentative schedule of summer work days and activities, which must be approved by the I-OCTA Board, meeting at Twin Falls, ID on March 27, 2004. The **Trail ruts marking days** are suggested as goals for all three groups of BLM/I-OCTA leaders who were organized at Twin Falls in January—1) Boise area, 2) Twin Falls/Burley, and 3) Pocatello/Idaho Falls. Please use or change these days as they work best for your group. Let's set a goal of at least one Trail marking day each month.
March 27—**I-OCTA Board meeting**, Twin Falls
April 3 or 10—**Trail work*** if markers are available
April 24—**Spring I-OCTA Membership meeting**, at Burley—P.M., Milner ruts Field Trip [FT]
May 8—**Trail ruts marking***
May 22—North Alternate, King Hill to north FT
June 5—**Trail ruts marking***
June 19-20—Big Hill FT, Montpelier, ID
July 10—**Trail ruts marking**
July 24—Granite Pass or Goodale Cutoff, Springfield to Big Southern Butte FT
Aug. 9-14 OCTA Convention, Vancouver, WA
Aug. 28—**Trail ruts marking** (Hot weather?)
Sept. 11—**Trail ruts marking**
Sept. 25—North Alt., partial hike, Teapot Dome FT
Oct. 9—**Fall Members meeting**, Mountain Home, ID, Danskin Peak-Goodale ruts FT
Oct. 23-24—Hudspeth Cutoff ruts marking trip
***President will visit other areas to help in marking and mapping, work accomplished report for OCTA.**
+++There will also be a **Field Trip/ rut marking day on the North Side Alternate** near Shoshone Falls, which may replace one of the dates above.
Our final schedule will be approved on March 27.
REMINDER!!! I-OCTA MEMBERSHIP DUES IN APRIL. CHECK YOUR TRAIL DUST LABEL TO SEE IF IT INDICATES APRIL 2004 DATE!!

I-OCTA OFFICERS

James McGill - - President/Editor, *Trail Dust*

Douglas Jenson - - Vice-President

William Wilson - - Treasurer

Afton Patrick - - Secretary

Walter Meyer - - Trail Preservation

Jerry Eichhorst - - Webmaster, IdahoOCTA.org

Board of Directors

Peggy Cristobal, Filer, ID--**Fred Dykes**, Pocatello

Don McCarter, Boise--**Clair Ricketts**, Jerome

Gil Wyllie, Boise

James McGill, Interim Editor

Idaho Chapter of OCTA

305 Melba Drive

Nampa, Idaho 83686