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The Jeffreys Route Across Idaho and Attacks on Wagon Trains in 1854

PART 1 ✨ A NEW ROUTE AND IMPENDING VIOLENCE

BY JERRY EICHHORST

They opened fire on us, shooting my father, my uncle, Mr. Lake and the young man Empson Cantrell, my father's teamster. Mr. Kirkland then called to his son to get their guns, which he did, and then fired on the Indians, who retreated until out of range of the guns, but remained near, trying to stampede our stock, for several hours.¹

So wrote Oregon Trail emigrant Mary Anna Perry about an attack on her wagon train on August 19, 1854, when she was nine years old. It turned out to be a precursor of problems to come for wagon trains traveling a new alternative route of the Oregon Trail across the Idaho desert opened that year by John Thomas Jeffreys.² The new wagon route's opening, the trains traveling the new route in 1854, and rising tensions between the emigrants and Native peoples will be reviewed in this article. Part 2, which will appear in the next issue of *Overland*

Journal, will recount the documented Indian attacks upon two of the wagon trains in August of that year, and a possible third attack that remains obscured by time.

THE ROUTE

Jeffreys was an entrepreneur who planned numerous schemes through the years to augment his income. Although living in the Willamette Valley at the time, he opened his new route across Idaho as a means to make money by charging travelers to cross the Snake River on his ferry. He promised a shorter trip with excellent water and feed for the animals to convince people to try his route.

Jeffreys' new route followed traditional Indian migration trails across Idaho. The route started on the Snake River plain near the current town of Fort Hall, as a fork in the road to the original Fort Hall trading post, and went north nine miles

¹ Mary Anna Perry Frost, "Mrs. Mary Anna Frost, Father Murdered and Ward Massacre," Idaho State University Library Special Collections Department. This referenced version was published in *Told by the Pioneers; tales of frontier life as told by those who remember the days of the territory and early statehood of Washington*, Vol. 1 (1937–1938), 101–5. It provides more detail than the version published in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1916): 123–25.

² For more information on Jeffreys, see Jerry Eichhorst, "John Thomas Jeffreys: Fortune Seeker or Criminal?" *Overland Journal* 36, no. 4 (2018): 133–45.



MAP 1. Trails across Idaho. MAP BY AUTHOR.



MAP 2. The Oregon Trail approaching Jeffreys' Ferry. MAP BY AUTHOR.

around Ferry Butte to the Snake River. Roads in the area on the southeast side of the Snake River were often confusing to the emigrants with many travelers missing the turn, getting lost, and having to backtrack to find Jeffreys' ferry. Deep sand made the roads in the area difficult to travel.

The Snake River in the area of the ferry flows from the northeast to the southwest. The Oregon Trail came from the southeast to the Soda Springs area. At Sheep Rock the trail turned north up the Portneuf River valley before turning northwest then west across the mountains into the Snake River Valley.

Jeffreys' route crossed the Snake River on a ferry that he built just downstream from the mouth of the Blackfoot River, then traveled southwest a few miles to Danilson Spring and turned northwest across the desert, past Big Southern Butte to the Lost River. There, the route turned west along the northern edge of the large lava field now part of Craters of the Moon National Monument and continued southwest and west across the Camas Prairie. Upon reaching the western end of the prairie, the route wound through hills and crossed the Little Camas Prairie before following an old Bannock Indian trail over the Danskin Mountains and down Ditto Creek to rejoin the main Oregon Trail about 30 miles southeast of Boise. Map 1 shows the paths of Jeffreys' route and the main Oregon Trail across southern Idaho.

The route was explored by Donald McKenzie in 1820 and used by trappers for many years. This route was still used in the 1850s and '60s by traders with pack trains. Wagon trains followed the route in 1854 and again heavily in 1862 and beyond. Even though John Jeffreys initially established the route for wagon travel, I believe he has not received appropriate credit for the route that is generally referred to as "Goodale's Cutoff" because of a large wagon train Tim Goodale led across the route in 1862. Although longtime OCTA and Idaho chapter members Fred Dykes and James McGill wrote articles and books discussing "Jeffrey's Cutoff," the common name of the route remains "Goodale's Cutoff" to most people and on historical marker signs in Idaho.³ Dykes and McGill even misspelled the Jeffreys name.

3 Fred W. Dykes, "Cold, Hard Facts About Jeffrey's Cutoff," *Overland Journal* 14, no. 4 (1996–1997), 4–16; Fred W. Dykes, *Jeffrey's Cutoff: Idaho's Forgotten Oregon Trail Route (now known as Goodale's Cutoff)* (Pocatello, Id.: F. W. Dykes, 1989); Fred W. Dykes, *The Jeffrey's Cutoff: From the Fort Hall Townsite to the Mouth of Ditto Creek Canyon Part of the Jeffrey/Goodale Cutoff, A Final Recap* (Pocatello, Id.: F. W. Dykes, 2010); James W. McGill, *Rediscovered Frontiersman Timothy Goodale* (Independence, Mo.: Oregon-California Trails Association, 2009).

Army surveyor Gouverneur Kemble Warren was assigned the task of compiling a general map of the region west of the Mississippi River in 1854.⁴ The map he produced was printed by the U.S. War Department in 1858. It labeled the eastern section of the new trail across Idaho "Jeffere's Road." Map 3 displays a detail portion of this map, showing the new route going north out of Fort Hall past the Three Buttes, reaching "Godins River" [Big Lost River], then turning west across the "Kamas Prairie."⁵

There is confusion about when John Jeffreys built his ferry to cross the Snake River and initiated emigrant travel on this route across central Idaho. According to the Idaho State Historical Society, "emigrant wagons had traversed the eastern section as early as 1852. A manuscript map prepared in the 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.'"⁶ Unfortunately, the society's document provides no detail source information about the referenced map. As of this date, a research request for source information about the map made to the Oregon State Historical Society has yielded no results, and the map has not been located.

I suspect that the year referenced on the manuscript map is incorrect. The first documented crossing of the Snake River on the Jeffreys route in emigrant diaries was by the Elisha C. Mayhew train, which crossed the Snake River on July 20, 1854, exactly two years to the day later than the unfound map indicates.⁷ I have found no accounts of travelers on Jeffreys' route prior to 1854, and several of the travelers of 1854 considered this to be a new route.

Confirmation of the year the new route opened is found in a letter Jeffreys wrote on July 22, 1854, at Fort Boise, and later

4 Henry L. Abbot, 1883. *General G. K. Warren* [obituary prepared by U.S. Army], <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/14767630.html>.

5 "Map of the territory of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean; ordered by Jeff'n Davis, Secretary of War, to accompany the reports of the explorations for a railroad route," Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, G4050 1858 .W34, online maps <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4050.ct001205>.

6 Goodale's Cutoff, Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series, #51, 1972. Available online at <https://history.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/0051.pdf>.

7 Elisha C. Mayhew, "Sketches of a Trip Across the Plains," manuscript diary, July 20, 1854, page 13, Merrill J. Mattes Research Library, Independence, Missouri; Mary Stone Smith, "Travel Account of Journey from Indiana to Washington," Western Historical Manuscripts collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, MS 3415.



Big Southern Butte was a landmark noted in many diaries. It could be seen from the mountains east of Fort Hall. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

printed in the *Weekly Oregon Statesman* in Salem, Oregon. His letter, delivered with other documents to the newspaper by C. H. Prout, claimed the new route to be four days faster than the traditional route along the south side of the Snake River and crossing at Three Island Crossing.

Fort Boise, July 22, 1854

Mr. Editor,—I send you a certificate which I want you to publish, if you deem it proper, as it may be of some importance to the immigration. It will be seen that a new road has been cut through from Fort Hall to Fort Boise, which avoids nearly all the former travel on Snake River. The first nineteen wagons that came through on the cut-off, arrived here four days in advance of those who descended Snake River by the old route; stock in better condition than when at Fort Hall; the immigrants had no sickness whatever. The trip on the new road can be made under ordinary circumstances, from Ft. Hall to Ft. Boise, in twelve days.

The immigration will probably be large but late. There is an immense amount of stock on the road. Much excitement prevails among the immigrants in relation to the new mines on Burnt river. A thorough examination will be made of the mines; at present, every symptom speaks favorably.

Humason is here trading, and seems to think a fair prospect ahead.

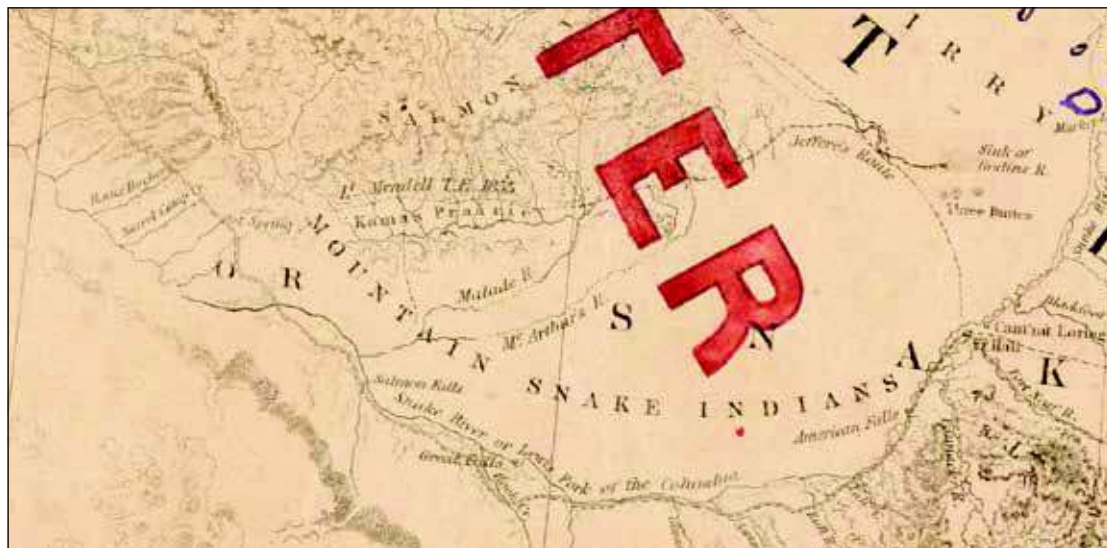
Yours, respectfully,
J. T. JEFFREYS.⁸

A certificate attesting to the claims of the new route signed by a number of people who traveled the route was also printed in the paper with Jeffreys' letter.

We the undersigned (pioneer train upon Jeffreys' and McArthur's cut off) hereby certify the route to be a good one, and possessing as we believe, the advantage of being shorter, and having abundance of grass and water the whole distance—stock being entirely free from the diseases common on the routes down Snake River. We therefore, unqualifiedly, recommend this road—which crosses Snake River at Black foot Bute, and unites again with the old road near Fort Boise, to all emigrants to Oregon and Washington Territories:—

8 John T. Jeffreys, "Letter from Fort Boise, From the Plains," *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, Salem, Oregon, August 22, 1854, 2.

MAP 3. A detail from G. K. Warren's *Map of the Territory of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, 1854*. Published 1858. "Jeffere's Route" is shown running north from Fort Hall, then turning west to cross "Kamas Prairie." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, [HTTPS://BIT.LY/2IB3ROO](https://bit.ly/2IB3ROO).



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|------------------|-----------------|
| J. K. Montgomery | W. M. Morrow |
| Lavina Fisher | A. G. Walling |
| Christ. Lunley | H. Anderson |
| B. F. Cooper | W. N. Ayres |
| Milton Wallone | J. Kutthy |
| J. M. Cline | Thomas Hughes |
| M. Chambers | T. J. Hannah |
| Henry Conn | John Gail |
| Samuel Johns | J. W. Ruben |
| J. Cassada | Thomas B. Young |
| S. Gullihier | J. W. Shuttuck |
| T. Hannah | C. H. Prout |

Little information has been found about the members of the "Certificate train," nor is it known when the members signed the certificate.⁹ The people who signed apparently did not record their journey with diaries. They are significantly incorrect on where Jeffreys' route rejoins the main Oregon Trail, as this reunion point is 70 miles east of Fort Boise.¹⁰

9 Henry Conn settled along the Umpqua River with his wife and eight children. He was listed in subsequent census reports near Roseburg, Douglas County, Oregon. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67094636/henry-conn>.

10 Jeffreys may have personally guided the train of 19 wagons from his ferry to Fort Boise, where he wrote the letter. If so, they would have crossed the Snake River at least two weeks before the first documented emigrants crossed on

THE PLAN

Although there was no fee to use the new route, Jeffreys planned to make money by charging emigrants to cross over the Snake River on his ferry. Jeffreys marketed his cutoff to emigrants heading towards Fort Hall by sending men along the Oregon Trail east of the Snake River to tell them about the ferry and his new route.

This new Road is Called "Jeffrey's Cutoff" from Jno. T. Jeffreys, who located it. A Great many "Runners" of the Road, & Ferry have been Continually exhorting us to go the "Cutoff" while Capt Grant & other old traders, Say "Keep [to] the Old Road."¹¹

July 20 and would have left a well-worn road. I suspect that portion of his letter is not truthful. If the people traveling in the "Certificate train" had actually completed their travel on Jeffreys' route before writing the certificate, they would have known where it rejoined the main Oregon Trail. Therefore, I believe the certificate train signed the certificate long before completing the Jeffreys route, possibly when they met John Jeffreys along the route as he returned to the ferry, with C. H. Prout agreeing to deliver the certificate and letter waiting at Fort Boise to the newspaper in Salem.

11 Winfield Scott Ebey, *The 1854 Oregon Trail Diary of Winfield Scott Ebey*, ed. Susan Badger Doyle and Fred W. Dykes (Independence, Mo.: Oregon-California Trails Association, 1997), July 30, 1854.

Jeffreys' marketing efforts apparently succeeded. Of 20 traveler accounts to Oregon in 1854 whose route across Idaho can be identified, 13 traveled the Jeffreys route.¹²

Captain Richard Grant was a long-time Hudson's Bay Company employee then working on his own. After retiring in 1851, he had moved to Cantonment Loring, a few miles upstream from Fort Hall, and supplied Oregon Trail emigrants.¹³ Both Captain Grant and his son Johnny traveled to Oregon in summer 1854, Johnny following the Jeffreys route with pack horses, and Captain Grant using the main Oregon Trail.

Jeffreys appears to have still been trying to make money with his ferry the next summer. Wilhelm Keil traveled with a wagon carrying his recently deceased son in a lead-lined casket filled with whiskey to preserve the body. Keil wrote a letter on October 13, 1855, in which he described being approached by a trader to take the new route. Keil had maintained good relationships with the Indians along the trip by treating them kindly and giving them food and tobacco, so he chose to use the old road along the Snake River.¹⁴

no lack of water and grass on the old road, we should go that way, as I was not afraid of the Indians. We departed for Solomons Falls on the Snake river.

Keil's wagon train was one of only a few wagon trains going to Oregon in 1855. Jeffreys appears to have abandoned his ferry early that summer, probably due to the drastically reduced number of emigrants that year. I have no documentation of anyone traveling the Jeffreys route in 1855. In fact, there is no documented usage of the route again until 1862, when Tim Goodale led a large wagon train on the route.

After a long journey we reached Fort Hall, and camped there two days. A trader brought me a letter, which was written by the Indian agent, wherein he informed me that he had been to the Solomons [Salmon] Falls. That the Indians had threatened to kill all the whites, who went by the old road through their land. He, therefore, advised all emigrants to take the new road over the Snake river at Fort Hall. Stauffer [member of the wagon train] remarked that it was in the interest of these men for us to take the new road, for they wanted to get the ferry money from us. So many had gone by way of the old road, hence we could also get through. I responded that if there was

12 Based on author's analysis of his personal collection of emigrant accounts.

13 "Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries," in Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1854-1860* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1988), 7:84.

14 Wilhelm Keil, "From Bethel, Missouri, to Aurora, Oregon: Letters of William Keil, 1855-1870," trans. William G. Bek, *Missouri Historical Review* 48, no. 1.

Members of OCTA's Idaho Chapter explore the Jeffreys Route southwest of Arco, Idaho, in the summer of 2019. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.



EMIGRANT ACCOUNTS

There are a limited number of diary accounts and reminiscences available from travelers on Jeffreys' route in 1854. Available accounts include Elizabeth Austin, Winfield Scott Ebey, Anna Maria Goodell, Harvey Jones, Elisha C. Mayhew, and Mary Stone Smith. Reminiscences and letters are available from Sarah Cannon, Eliza Jane Jones, Harvey Jones, James Alfred Masterson, Mary Anna Perry, Newton Ward, and William Ward. From these accounts, there are a number of passages that describe the new route and the interaction with Jeffreys. There are several extensive accounts and newspaper stories of the time describing Indian attacks that occurred in August against wagon trains that travelled the Jeffreys route.

The men operating the Jeffreys ferry ran low on supplies in July 1854 and were willing to purchase needed items from emigrants. "The men in charge of the Ferry are out of provisions, & are very anxious to purchase of us; & willing to pay extravagant prices for any thing we have to Spare."¹⁵

The charge for the ferry was \$5 for a wagon and 25¢ for each head of stock. Many emigrants swam their stock across the Snake River to save money. Names were painted on a rock bluff on the east side of the Snake River.¹⁶ Travelers often camped on the west side after crossing the Snake.

¹⁵ Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, July 31, 1854.

¹⁶ Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, July 30, 1854, 136.



Mary Stone Smith was a member of the Mayhew train, the first documented emigrant crossing of the Snake River on Jeffreys' ferry on July 20, 1854. Smith noted in her diary "we traveled over a new road and it was very rough being grown up with sage."¹⁷ This is an indication that the road had not been used prior to 1854. A few days later Mayhew writes, "it was now dark and the road being new was some what difficult to find."¹⁸

On July 24 at Big Lost River, the Mayhew train overtook another party who had been three days ahead of them.¹⁹ The overtaken wagon train was possibly the Certificate train, but nothing is known of them. Being three days ahead of the Mayhew train, this unknown train would have crossed the Snake River on July 17, but there is no documentation of this crossing.

The Alexander Yantis wagon train crossed the Snake River using the Jeffreys ferry on July 25, while Winfield Scott Ebey and his wagon train followed a week later on August 1. Ebey writes, "The road is dusty, & new, & we had to pull through the half broken sage bushes all day."²⁰

In late July, John Jeffreys returned to his ferry from Fort Boise, where he had left his letter to the newspaper describing his new route. Jeffreys' return trip from Fort Boise was nearly two weeks in duration. He met several of the emigrant wagon trains along his return route. Smith met Jeffreys on Camas Prairie:

[July] 30 traveled 23 miles over the high mountains and came to a large prairie and camped on the Madlade [Big Wood] river met Jeffreys at night which is the proprietor of the new road he says we are to have a fine road and plenty of grass and water²¹

Elisha Mayhew describes the encounter on Camas Prairie as well:

the 1st of August . . . I will mention that we met Mr. Jeffrey and he gave me a guide to his cut off and says we are now passing over what is called Cammass prairie. The name originated from the large quantities of cammass that is dug on it. Mr.



Winfield Scott Ebey. PHOTO COURTESY OF ISLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ACCESSED THROUGH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WEBSITE FOR EBEBY'S LANDING NATIONAL HISTORICAL RESERVE, [HTTPS://BIT.LY/2H1YDK7](https://bit.ly/2H1YDK7).

Jeffrey intends putting in several thousand acres of this land under cultivation and Building a tunge mill and establishing a Fort on showshonee Creek.²²

The Camas Prairie was a summer camping area for local Indians who dug the camas bulbs for food. Homesteading and pig farming in the area in the late 1870s would contribute to the Indian uprising known as the Bannock War of 1878.

At Danilson Spring, ten miles southwest of Jeffreys' Snake River ferry, Ebey met Jeffreys, who had just crossed 35 miles of desert from the Big Lost River:

Mr Garner, & a Spaniard called "Don Jose," Came out from the ferry going to meet Mr Jeffrey, who they are expecting from Fort Boisse. Late in the afternoon Mr J—[Jeffrey] got in tired, & worn out. He had walked across the Desert, & could scarcely stand, when he reached the water; the Day had been dry, & hot, & he had almost suffocated for water. He gave me a New Guide, which I suppose is correct.²³

John G. Garner, a trader from Olympia, Washington Territory, was working with Jeffreys at the ferry. Ebey first met Garner on July 31 at the ferry and noted that Garner was well acquainted with his brother, Isaac N. Ebey.²⁴

17 Smith, "Travel Account of Journey," July 21, 1854.

18 Mayhew, "Sketches of a Trip," July 25.

19 Mayhew, "Sketches of a Trip," July 24.

20 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 3, 1854.

21 Smith, "Travel Account of Journey," July 30, 1854, 14.

22 Mayhew, "Sketches of a Trip," August 1, 1854, 24.

23 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 3, 1854, 140.

24 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, July 31, 1854, 138.

WAGON TRAINS OF 1854

Wagon train composition changed often during the summer migrations along the 2,000-mile journey. Members left a wagon train due to personality conflicts, disagreements about travel speeds, distances to travel, and resting days. Trains split at numerous “Parting of the Ways,” where some members took one route and others continued on a different route. Trains gathered new members as emigrants leaving their old trains connected with others. Despite company fluidity, from the emigrant accounts available it is possible to determine some information about the wagon trains and a few of their members that traveled the new Jeffreys route in July and August 1854.

The sidebar on pp. 100–103 contains a partial list of the membership of wagon trains as they crossed Idaho in the summer of 1854 at the time of the Indian attacks in late August. Some members left these initial trains and took a route to California, and so are not listed here. Some members of the wagon trains may have previously shifted from one train to another. They are identified in the order that they began travel on Jeffreys’ route. Those trains not following Jeffreys’ route are shown at the end of the list. This list is based upon the diary and emigrant accounts at hand. The route across Idaho cannot be identified for all wagon trains due to a lack of documentation from members. Not all members of the wagon trains are identified. Names that are unclear from the diarists may be noted with slashes indicating possible variant spellings of the same person.²⁵

INDIAN TEMPERAMENT IN 1854

According to information provided by noted trails-death authority Dr. Richard Rieck, Idaho had the greatest number of identified emigrant deaths due to Indians in the years 1843–69. Idaho suffered 114 deaths due to Indians, Nevada had 98, and Nebraska had 94 during that time.²⁶

In the years 1843–53, Idaho had 21 identified emigrant deaths due to Indians. Ten of these deaths were on the California Trail, generally in the area of City of Rocks in southern Idaho. The remaining eleven deaths were on the Oregon Trail and North

Alternate Oregon Trail, scattered across the state with six in the eastern half of the state. One death each was recorded in both 1843 and 1845, 1851 had six, 1852 had one, and 1853 had two.

Julius Augustus Stratton, traveling on the south side of the Snake River in the summer of 1854, was very aware of potential problems with the local Indians:

The Snake Indians at this time were not openly hostile, but they were notoriously treacherous, and so long as we were in their country all the precautions were taken which would have been necessary against tribes avowedly hostile. Firearms were kept carefully loaded and within convenient reach, guards were strengthened, and the cattle after nightfall were either driven into the corral or were strongly guarded.²⁷

Another emigrant, Thomas Jefferson Kirkpatrick, traveled the North Alternate Oregon Trail route. He passed the area where the Ward party would be attacked one day before the tragedy:

We traveled on until we came in sight of Boise River. Before we got there we looked off ahead to our right and up on a high ridge about one mile from us we saw five or six hundred Snake Indians along the top of the hill watching us. We crowded on down the hill and got as far away from them as possible.²⁸

This would have been in the area of Bonneville Point, a few miles southeast of today’s Boise.

Another wagon train also encountered Indians in the area near Fort Boise. Freeman D. Bevens, whose parents and brother were in a wagon train ahead of the Yantis train, provided the following account.²⁹

The party had one brush with the Indians somewhere near the Snake River in Idaho [east of Fort Boise]. When the Indians were not strong enough to attack a train they would try to stampede the cattle in the hope of being able to cut off one or two in the confusion. One day as they neared the Snake

25 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, 16–19, 210–12; and Donald H. Shannon, *The Boise Massacre on the Oregon Trail: Attack on the Ward Party in 1854 and Massacres of 1859* (Caldwell, Id.: Snake Country Pub. 2004), 65, for lists of wagon train members.

26 Rickard Rieck email conversations with the author, March 16 and 17, 2020, and later.

27 Julius Augustus Stratton, “Recollections,” Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Mss 1048.

28 Thomas Jefferson Kirkpatrick, *The Kirkpatrick Story* (Orlando, Calif.: Orlando Register, 1954).

29 Freeman D. Bevens, interview in WPA Historical Records, Benton Co., Oregon, accessed in <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orbenton/wpa/IntervB.html#Freeman%20D.%20BEVENS>.

WAGON TRAINS CROSSING

Wagon trains on Jeffreys' route

CERTIFICATE TRAIN The only information regarding members of this train is the 24 names on the certificate published in the newspaper previously cited. They were possibly the first train to cross the Snake River on Jeffreys' ferry.

MAYHEW TRAIN This is the first documented train to cross the Snake River on Jeffreys' ferry and complete the new route. The train split on July 21 with Halparn, Ervin, Hunting, Bozakin, and Justice making another train. Bozakin and Justice rejoined the original train within a few days, July 24 and 27, respectively. Mayhew arrived in The Dalles, Oregon, on September 10.

- Elisha C. Mayhew (diary), a 22-year-old widower traveling from Indiana with an infant daughter
- Mary Stone Smith (diary), age 51, traveling from Hanover, Indiana
- Matthews
- Dick Huntington / C. R. Huntington
- Bunting / Hunting
- Doctor Bozakin / Boyakin
- J. Firestine
- Halpain / Halparn
- Ervin
- Justice

YANTIS TRAIN A wagon train led by Alexander Yantis of Missouri, who led the small group that attempted to rescue the Ward party during the attack of August 20. The Yantis wagon train was overtaken by Ebey in September near Walla Walla, Washington. This train traveled over Natches Pass into western Washington.

- Alexander Yantis, wife Sarah, and 9 children
- Harvey Jones (diary and letters), wife Eliza Jane (letters), and three children from Wisconsin who joined the Yantis train on July 16 on Bear River east of Thomas Fork
- Arnold Marsh
- David Neely, wife, and two sons
- Sylvester Amon, traveling with his widowed mother and other siblings, was a member of the initial rescue party led by Alexander Yantis during the Ward Massacre when he was shot and killed by Indians



IDAHO IN AUGUST 1854

EBEY TRAIN The Ebey train was fairly large by the time it reached the Snake River. A small train from Wisconsin joined them on May 23. Another small train from Vermilion, Ohio, joined them on June 19 along the Platte River.

On July 3 the train split into California-bound and Oregon/Washington-bound units. Winfield Scott Ebey was elected captain of the Oregon/Washington-bound train on July 6. The Ebey train traveled over Natches Pass into western Washington.

According to Mary Anna Perry, this train was split into three smaller trains on August 15. The smaller trains split out were the Ward train and the Kirkland train, both victims of Indian attacks within a week. Ebey does not mention such a split.¹

- Winfield Scott Ebey (diary), his parents and family
- Recently widowed Nancy North Burr and children from Wisconsin
- Thomas and Sarah Ann Headley, their child, and two drivers from Wisconsin
- Henry and Margaret Whitsell and five children from Wisconsin
- George King, wife, and family
- Bozarth brothers
- Samuel Cannon and family including daughter Sarah (reminiscence) from Iowa heading to Oregon
 - Elizabeth Austin (diary), age 27, from Ohio heading west to marry Henry Roeder who was already in Washington Territory
 - Anna Maria Goodell (diary), age 23, with husband, William Bird Goodell, infant son Frederick Augustus, and William's parents and siblings from Ohio
 - George Wesley Beam
 - Ebenezer Hardy
 - Charles P. and Louisa Judson and their children, Emeline, Holden, and Lucretia, joined the Ebey train on June 19
 - Charles and Mary Ann Van Wormer and children

¹ According to historian Donald Shannon in *The Boise Massacre on the Oregon Trail*, the Yantis train was the large train that was split into the Ward, Ebey, and Kirkland trains. Shannon goes on to say that Yantis and Ward were part of the first group after the split, but the Wards fell behind the leaders. However, this version of the wagon train membership and splits conflicts with the accounts of Perry and Ebey. Both participants indicate Ebey became the captain of his Oregon-bound wagon train after July 6 when the California-bound members branched off. Ebey, however, does not mention the Yantis train until he overtakes them at Grande Ronde Valley on September 3.

WARD TRAIN A small wagon train from Missouri consisting of 5 wagons and about 20 people, mostly Ward family members. According to Mary Anna Perry, this small train was the first train split out from the Ebey train on August 15. The Ward party may have traveled for some time with the Yantis train, but appears to have fallen behind Yantis a few days before the fateful attack they suffered on August 20.

- Alexander Ward, wife Margaret Masterson, and eight children, including Newton (reminiscence) and William (reminiscence)
- Elizabeth Masterson White, 30, and son George, 8, were going to join husband and father William White in Oregon
- French Canadian driver of White's wagon
- Dr. Thomas Adams and his brother Charles Adams, from Michigan
- William Babcock, a lawyer from Vermont
- Samuel Mulligan from Lexington, Missouri
- John Frederick Schultz and Rudolf Schultz, two German brothers from Wisconsin
- James Alfred Masterson (reminiscence), his wife Vilinda, and brother Robert traveled in a separate wagon and went ahead of the Ward train early on the morning of the attack

KIRKLAND TRAIN This small train was the third of the trains split out from the Ebey train on August 15.² It was under the command of Moses Kirkland,³ although it is sometimes referred to as the "Lake and Perry" train, likely because that is how Ebey referred to them when they caught up to his train on August 22.⁴ At that point, Lake was already dead and Perry was mortally wounded. The Kirkland train joined the Yantis train near Powder River, Oregon, and continued on into Washington Territory.

- Moses and Nancy Kirkland and extended family from Jackson County, Louisiana
- Walter G. and Harriet Perry and family, including daughter Mary Anna (reminiscence)
- Empson Cantrell, teamster for Walter Perry
- George Lake, wife Elizabeth, and three children. Lake was Walter Perry's brother-in-law.

² Mary Anna Perry Frost, "Mrs. Mary Anna Frost, Father Murdered and Ward Massacre," 1.

³ R. R. Thompson to Joel Palmer, September 6, 1854, Letter #92 in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1854* (Washington, D.C.: Printed by A. O. P. Nicholson, 1855), 280.

⁴ Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 22, 1854, 159.



Wagon trains taking other routes

SUTTON TRAIN A large train from Illinois led by John Sutton composed of a number of Sutton, Stewart, and Chapman family members. John's wife Sarah wrote a detailed diary of the trip west, but failed to reach the end of the journey as she died in Tygh Valley, east of Mount Hood, Oregon. This wagon train followed the main Oregon Trail on the south side of the Snake River to Salmon Falls, where they ferried across the river and followed the North Alternate Oregon Trail. The Sutton train crossed the Snake River at Fort Boise on August 4, well ahead of the Indian conflicts two weeks later.⁵

CONDIT TRAIN A small, Presbyterian wagon train led by Sylvanus Condit, consisting of mostly family members, followed the main Oregon Trail on the south side of the Snake River to the crossing at Three Island. Instead of fording the river, they stayed on the south side of the Snake River on what is known as the South Alternate. Philip Condit's diary indicates they reached the Snake River across from Fort Boise on August 9.⁶

NOBLE TRAIN A train led by John F. Noble which was ahead of the Yantis train near Fort Boise. Little information is available on this train, including which route the train took across Idaho. Noble returned to Fort Boise to lead the recovery effort and burial of the victims after the Ward attack.

BELL TRAIN A train led by John Colgate Bell that was ahead of the Noble Train, also with little information available. A few members of this train went back to Fort Boise to assist with the recovery and burial after the Ward attack.

⁵ Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women*, 7: Sarah Sutton, "A Travel Diary in 1854."

⁶ Philip Condit diary, 1854, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, mss 922.

River my brother, who was fifteen years old, was riding a mule and driving the loose stock. He saw an Indian show himself in the brush along the way, wearing a red blanket. When the cattle saw the man and began to show alarm he began waving the blanket and all the stock stampeded, including the oxen drawing the wagons. Mother was in one of the wagons with the young children and she got them to the back of the wagon and dropped them one by one into the dust of the road. One wheel of the wagon was smashed against a boulder and the weight of the dragging axle slowed down the runaways.

My brother on the mule was near the Indian when he stampeded the cattle. Although he was only a boy he gave chase and forced the Indian to drop the blanket and flee naked. My brother lashed him with the heavy stock whip and he said that at every blow he could see the man's skin whiten and crack under the lash like it had been burned with a hot iron.

As soon as father could get the cattle stopped and gathered up he hastened to corral the wagons. The Indian who had been flogged told his story to his friends and soon a crowd of hostile savages was threatening the party. A trader at a nearby post [Fort Boise] appeared and finally persuaded the Indians to withdraw. The next day when they were swimming the stock over the Snake River the trader in a canoe struck one of the mules with his paddle, causing it to drown. The body drifted down to an Island below the ferry and soon the Indians were seen dressing it for food. Afterward, my parents concluded that the trader had promised to secure food for the Indians if they would not attack the immigrants. There seemed no other way to explain his act. This happened near where the Ward party was massacred two days later.

There was a large band of Nez Perce Indians camped around Fort Boise at the time; they were friendly with the trader who kept the fort and were known to be friendly to the emigrants.³⁰

Alexander Yantis, an emigrant from Brownsville, Missouri, and his wagon train were a day ahead of the Ward wagon train. According to the history written about Yantis,

It was known that the Indians were near and acting ugly. Indeed, the night before the fort [Fort Boise] was reached, the emigrants of Mr. Yantis' party could see a band of the enemy dancing a war dance in a bottom of land close to the camp.

Their horrid yells and vehement brandishing of their guns and bows filled the whites with terror, which was not abated when an Indian buck came dashing up to Mr. Yantis' wagon and asked him to sell his little daughter, Sarah, to him. The Indian offered his horse for the child, and when refused by the parents, rode off in a rage. The night was spent in anxious watchfulness, but the Indians evidently concluded that the party was too strong for them to risk an attack on, so left them unmolested.³¹

The Ward train encountered problems with Indians shortly before they suffered the actual attack. According to James Alfred Masterson, a member of the train who had gone ahead on the fateful day, an Indian came into camp begging and encroached on the cooking space of Tom Adams, who then threw hot ashes on the bare feet of the Indian. Problems were averted for the day, but Indians were known to seek vengeance. Masterson confuses the Boise River with the Snake River in his account.

While we were traveling down the Snake [Boise] River, in August, we camped one night near an Indian village. Next morning some of the savages came to our camp to beg for food. Three of them stopped at the fire where Tom Adams and two other men were preparing their breakfast. One of the Indians stepped too near a pan of frying bacon to suite the fastidious taste of Tom Adams and he thoughtlessly and cruelly threw a shovel of hot ashes and fire on the bare feet of the red man. It was a reckless and unkind thing to do, exposed as we were to the barbarous Indians. We were helpless to defend ourselves against even a small number. They are an inhuman race and never leave a wrong unavenged. Women and children are sought as victims of torture. Men are soon disposed of.

The Indian bore the pain in silence, but there was vengeance in his eyes. He made known to his people how he had been abused by the white man and without cause. They talked excitedly together a few moments and would have killed Tom Adams then, but we prevented them from doing so. They went sullenly to their wigwams and did not return as we fully expected them to, but were seen following after us for several days, watching for an opportunity to kill Adams.³²

31 Mrs. George E. Blankenship, *Early History of Thurston County, Washington* (Olympia, Wash.: 1914), 189–94.

32 Martha Gay Masterson, *One Woman's West: Recollections of the Oregon Trail and Settling the Northwest Country*, ed. Lois Barton (Eugene, Ore.: Spencer Butte Press, 1990), 96.

30 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 25, p. 163.

Johnny Grant and some Indians passed the Ward attack site on his return to Fort Hall, camping on a ridge to the east of the site. The next day, he learned from a group of Indians that his party had been stalked the night before and were only allowed to live because they were speaking the Indian language. Grant was told the Indian version of the Ward attack:

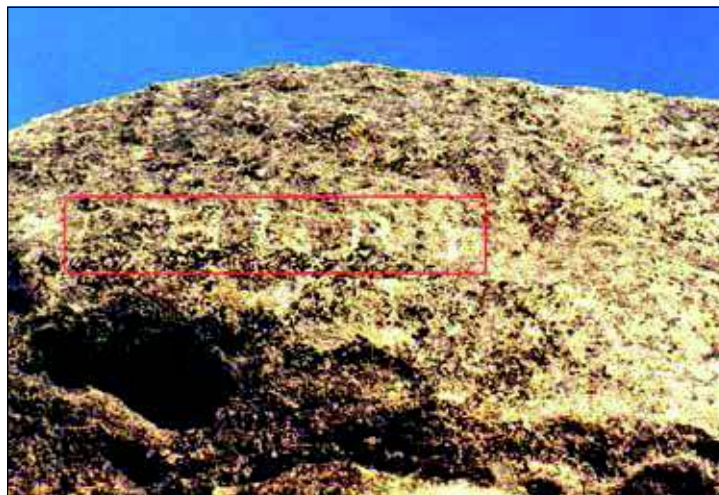
The story, as they told it, was that an Indian had stolen a horse from an immigrant train. Next day two others were riding behind the wagons of the immigrants, as all friendly Indians do, when one of the immigrants turned around and shot at an Indian and killed him. The other escaped back to the camps and soon nine warriors returned and killed nearly every one of the immigrants, twenty-five in all, men, women, and children. Just one boy got away in the bushes.³³

Indian Agent R. R. Thompson described an environment where the Indians were becoming more aggressive:

From what I can learn, there is a determination on the part of the Snakes to kill and rob all who may fall into their power. They say that the Americans have been continually telling them that unless they ceased their depredations, an army would come and destroy them; but no thing has been done, and that the Americans are afraid of them, and say that if we wish to fight them, to come on.³⁴

Oregon merchant Henry P. Isaacs, an emigrant of 1852, was at Fort Boise for much of the summer and fall of 1854. He wrote a letter in October 1854, providing several examples of problems with the Indians that may have been precursors to the Ward attack. Isaacs took care of the Ward boys who survived the attack:

In June last, some time previous to the coming of the first immigrants, accompanied by a Kanaka from the fort, I made a trip up Boise River. Near the scene of the present depredation we found a large party of Indians fishing. They were very impudent and annoying; so much so that we left as soon as possible. On the return he said, "They wanted to know if



Castle Rocks is a landmark on Jeffreys' Route just east of today's Little Camas Reservoir. The author found this name scratched on one of the rocks at the camping site. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

you were not an American. I told them you were one of the company's men (Hudson's Bay Company). Had they known you were an American they probably would have killed you."

Another instance. Mr. Tappam, an immigrant, had four horses stolen from him near this spot. He came to the fort and procured the services of a half breed named Tababoo to return with him and endeavor to obtain the horses. Another immigrant accompanied him. They got the horses by paying the Indians—and after their return Tababoo stated to me that the Indians were very angry, and would have killed the white men had he not been with them. Furthermore they wanted to fight, and would kill Americans.

Again: Archibald McIntyre, who was in charge of Fort Boise last year, made a trading trip among the same Indians in June last. On his return to Boise, he stated, as his opinion, that the Indians would be troublesome this year. They having told him they would have revenge for two of their tribe who were killed last year.

These facts, in connection with the statement of the eldest Ward, viz: "The Indian was in the act of shooting Mr. Adams, who being a little the quickest, shot Mr. Indian" are sufficient, I should think, to satisfy any reasonable mind, that the outrage was premeditated; and they only waited a fitting time and place for its commission.³⁵

33 Johnny Grant, *Very Close to Trouble: the Johnny Grant Memoir*, ed. Lyndel Meikle (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1996), 48.

34 R. R. Thompson to Joel Palmer, September 3, 1854, Letter #91 in *Annual Report of the Commissioner Indian Affairs, 1854*, 278–80.

35 Henry Isaacs, "Letter," *The Weekly Oregonian*, Portland, October 28, 1854, 2.






Later that fall, the *Weekly Oregon Statesman* of November 14 reported that the local Indians were preparing to attack Fort Boise.

THREATENED ATTACK UPON FORT BOISE BY THE INDIANS

From Mr. Sims, of the Dalles, we learn the following concerning a threatened attack upon Fort Boise by the Wis-nes-tas Indians:—Just before he left the Dalles Neil McArthur, an old mountain man . . . with four or five others, started for Fort Hall. In a little time they met an express rider, with a letter from Mr. Charles Ogden, in command of Fort Boise, to Major Haller, stating that he had learned from the barracks that the Wis-nes-tas had collected in the mountains, near by, for the purpose of making a descent upon the Fort—murdering its inmates, stealing the property, and driving off the stock; and requesting Major Haller to send ten or twenty men to guard the Fort; adding that he feared that would be the last letter he would ever write. There were but three men at the Fort. There was a large quantity of ammunition, which Major Haller had left there on his return from the recent expedition against the Snakes, not wishing to take it back to Fort Dalles.³⁶

The ever-increasing number of emigrants was a significant threat to the local Indians. Damage to the environment and physical assault and killing of Indians over the previous decade had set the stage for trouble and revenge. Arrogant actions such as that by Tom Adams in throwing hot coals on an Indian's foot compounded desires of revenge. By 1854 troubles had reached an explosive level and violence was imminent.

Part 2 of this study, to appear in the next issue of *Overland Journal*, will tell of the Indian attacks against the Kirkland and Ward trains, and the possible destruction of another wagon train. 

³⁶ *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, Salem, November 14, 1854, 2.

Jeffreys' route on top of the ridge nearing the junction with the main Oregon Trail. Numerous oxen shoe nails have been found along this stretch. PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR.