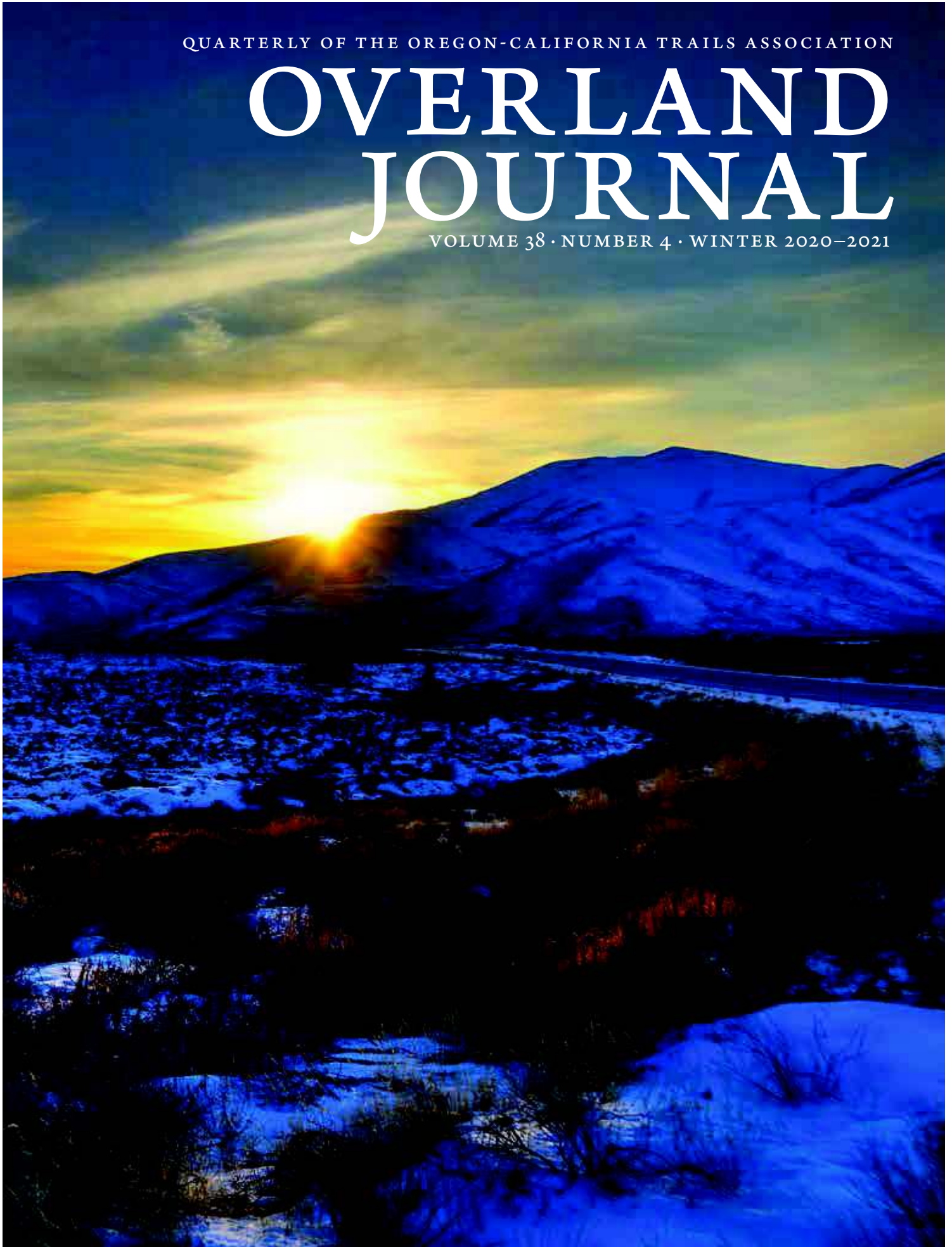


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# The Jeffreys Route Across Idaho and Attacks on Wagon Trains in 1854

PART 2 ✨ INDIAN ATTACKS OF 1854 IN IDAHO

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*Part 1 of this study (Overland Journal 38, no. 3) reviewed the new Oregon Trail route opened by John Jeffreys in 1854 across southern Idaho. Diary and newspaper accounts were used to verify the opening date of 1854 and provide information about the route. Background information about the wagon trains and persons, Indian temperament, and the precursors to violence were summarized. This second part examines the Indian attacks on the Kirkland and Ward parties of late August 1854, and a possible third attack that destroyed another wagon train.*

**I**NTERACTIONS BETWEEN EMIGRANTS AND Indians on the Oregon and California Trails in Idaho had been generally uneventful in the 1840s through July 1854, although 21 emigrants had been killed by Indians up to that time.<sup>1</sup> Indians would frequently assist emigrants in fording the Snake River by showing them the best route across the river. Indians often came into camps wanting to trade salmon for guns and powder, clothing, and trinkets, or seeking food. Occasionally, they would attempt to steal items out of wagons or run off some of the cattle and horses.

One of the deadliest attacks prior to 1854 was the Clark attack described by David Newsom in 1851 along the Snake River just below American Falls. A few people leading a herd of 25 horses ahead of their wagon train from Illinois were attacked by Indians and the horses stolen. The men from the train gathered to go after the Indians only to find a sizable group of Indians led by white men in a fortified location. The Indians had a large number of stolen oxen and horses. Three members of the wagon train were killed in the attack and pursuit of the stolen horses.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rickard Rieck email conversations with the author, March 16 and 17, 2020, and later.

<sup>2</sup> David Newsom, "Letter from Salem, Oregon Territory, December 15, 1851, Battle Between Illinoisians and Indians on Lewis River," *Quincy (Ill.) Weekly Herald*, March 22, 1852 (v. 18, no. 28), 3.



Trails across Idaho.  
MAP BY AUTHOR.

By 1854 overgrazing by the emigrants' cattle and draft animals, plus the stresses along the trail caused by the thousands of people traveling west, including the loss of game, trees, and sagebrush, and the introduction of diseases, all combined to create tension between the emigrants and Indians. Serious problems developed in western Idaho by August 1854, when a local band of Indians began to attack small wagon trains.<sup>3</sup>

The first written mention of 1854 Indian problems was Winfield Scott Ebey's noting that a guard claimed an Indian shot an arrow at him on the night of August 13. Two days later Ebey encountered burned grass on the western portion of the Camas prairie: "One mile further is a good spring [Arnold Spring] to left of road, but the grass is burned off."<sup>4</sup>

Mary Anna Perry also noted the burned grass in her reminiscence. According to Perry, "After having traveled three or four months we came to where the Indians had burned the grass for the purpose of starving the stock of the emigrants."<sup>5</sup>

3 Ward Massacre Park interpretive sign, "Peaceful Trading Turns Hostile," identifies the Indians as "Winnestats." The sign has recently been removed due to vandalism.  
 4 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), August 15, 1854.  
 5 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,

Perry states the burned grass caused their large train to split into three smaller wagon trains. The Ward family comprised the first group, Ebey and the Vermillion train were in the second group, and Perry was in the third group, called the Kirkland train, consisting of the Kirkland, Lake, and Perry families:

Confronted with this condition, the train was divided into 3 sections, the foremost being designated as the Ward train, from the fact of it being composed almost entirely of the Wards and their relatives, while the second section constituted the largest train, and we brought up the rear with four wagons.<sup>6</sup>

This split may have encouraged Indian attacks on the first and third sections, which were much smaller than Ebey's middle section, or the Yantis train that was further ahead.

Table 2 (pages 156-57) shows a timeline of late July and August 1854 with the important events happening for these wagon trains. Indian problems are highlighted in bold font.

no. 2 (1916): 123-25.  
 6 Ibid. Ebey does not mention the train splitting. Although his diary recorded several times when groups joined his train, Ebey does not mention the Ward, Kirkland, Lake, or Perry families joining. When they left this camping site on Wild Horse Creek, they separated in order to make camping and feeding their animals easier.

### ATTACK ON THE KIRKLAND TRAIN

The first documented attack in 1854 on travelers who had taken the new Jeffreys route occurred on Saturday, August 19. The third section of what had been the Ebey train, the small Kirkland train, suffered the attack, and three emigrants and two Indians died. Mary Anna Perry remembered what happened:

Our last camping place where we were to all meet alive was at a creek, designated in the guide book as White Horse Creek. I think it is in Idaho, and think it was then about the last of August, perhaps later. Starting on our journey the next morning, we had traveled perhaps an hour when we discerned in the distance to our left, Indians coming up out of a canyon in great numbers, the foremost ones being on foot, and who looked to be unarmed. They were followed by mounted Indians, armed with guns in sheaths made of deer skins. At this time a young lady, daughter of Mr. Kirkland of our party, was riding on horse back, ahead and apart from the rest of the train. Her horse took fright at sight of the Indians and, becoming unmanageable, she dismounted and tried to hold the horse by the reins, but it jerked away from her. The Indians then surrounded and captured the horse, but Miss Kirkland made her way on foot to the train unharmed. After capturing the horse the Indians advanced on the train, and coming up squarely in front of the ox teams, held out their arms and stopped them, but appeared friendly and shook hands with the members of our party and asked for whiskey, but they were told that we had none. Thereupon they began to talk of trading a pistol for a pony. 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. It was finally thought that they wanted our horses, and it was arranged to surrender them to the Indians if they would let us pass without further trouble, and when this was proposed by Mr. Kirkland, the Indians readily consented. The horses were then turned loose, and the Indians were compelled to follow us several miles before they could catch them all.

When the Indians fired on us Mr. Lake fell dead, with the words, "I am a dead man." Empson Cantrell was shot through the abdomen, and after being shot asked my mother for father's gun, which he snapped several times at the Indians,

but it would not go off. He lingered in great agony until the following morning, when he died. My father was shot through the right lung, and lived until the evening of the fourth day, when death relieved him of his terrible sufferings.

The wagon that carried the shovels and other implements, known as the "tool wagon," was with the big train, and we had nothing with which to dig graves for the dead, nor did we care to stop to bury them right away, as we were afraid of another attack from the Indians. Hence we carried the bodies until the third day after the attack, when there was such a stench that we had to keep fires around the "dead wagon" to keep the wolves off. As the bodies had to be disposed of in some way, wooden spades were improvised with which a hole was dug, and both bodies (Mr. Lake and Empson Cantrell) were buried in it. We overtook the big train on the afternoon of the following day and my father died about 10 o'clock that night, after having suffered untold agonies for four days, and begging many times to be killed and put out of his misery. We dared not stop and the jolting of the wagon was almost unendurable to him. He was buried on the following morning near the emigrant road.

On the day following the attack by the Indians, two Spaniards passed us and in conversation stated that our men had shot two of the Indians, who were sure to die.<sup>7</sup>

The survivors and their small train caught up with the larger Ebey train four days later along the Boise River, where Ebey wrote what he had heard of the attack.

Tuesday August 22d 1854

Just as we were Starting this morning—the train of M[ess]rs Lake & Perry of Iowa hove in Sight They had camped at the foot of the Big Hill [Bonneville Point] without water & pushed on to join us. At "Valley Spring" they were attacked by the Snakes & had three men shot & had lost 5 horses. Messrs [George] Lake [Walter G.] Perry & [E. B.] Cantrell were Shot. L[ake] & C[antrell] died immediately. Mr [Walter G.] Perry is still living, but is Shot through the body, & Cannot possibly recover It seems that the Indians Came up in a friendly manner, Shook hands & when they rode off turned & fired on the Party & Drove off the Horses—Mr [Moses] Kirkland an old Gentleman from Lousiana who is in the train then fired his Revolver at the Indians some 70

<sup>7</sup> Frost, "Mrs. Mary Anna Frost."

TABLE 2. TIMELINE OF LATE JULY AND AUGUST 1854

JULY 20	• Mayhew train crosses Snake River on Jeffreys ferry	AUGUST 12	• Mayhew train travels downstream and camps on the east side of the Boise River at the main Oregon Trail crossing of Boise River north of present-day Caldwell, Idaho • Ebey train camps at Big Wood River
JULY 22	• Jeffreys writes letter at Fort Boise		
JULY 23	• Mayhew train camps on Big Lost River		
JULY 24	• Mayhew train overtakes trains ahead of them on Big Lost River • Mayhew camps on Big Lost River	AUGUST 13	• Mayhew train loses road and camps at previous camp site • Ebey train camps at Willow Creek on Camas Prairie • Ebey train visited by two Indians at Willow Creek on Camas Prairie • <b>Ebey train guard Samuel Cannon has an arrow whiz by his head while on guard duty that night</b>
JULY 25	• Yantis train crosses Snake River on Jeffreys ferry		
JULY 28	• Mayhew train camps on Coral Creek • Another train also camps on Coral Creek, possibly the Certificate train		
JULY 29	• Yantis train camps at Big Lost River	AUGUST 14	• Mayhew train crosses Boise River and follows the main Oregon Trail downstream to Fort Boise • Ebey train camps at Three Mile Creek
JULY 30	• Mayhew train meets Jeffreys at Big Wood River • Mayhew train camps on Big Wood River		
AUGUST 1	• Ebey train crosses Snake River on Jeffreys ferry	AUGUST 15	• Mayhew train crosses Snake River at Fort Boise and continues onward • <b>Ebey train passes Arnold Spring where grass has been burned off</b> • Ebey train camps at Wild Horse Creek and splits into three separate groups
AUGUST 2	• Arnold Marsh dies in Yantis train		
AUGUST 3	• Ebey train meets Jeffreys at Danilson Spring		
AUGUST 7	• Mayhew train reaches the end of Jeffreys route on Ditto Creek and continues on the main Oregon Trail	AUGUST 16	• Yantis train camps on Boise River • Ebey train passes Castle Rocks • Ebey train camps at Dixie Creek
AUGUST 8	• Mayhew train reaches Boise River	AUGUST 17	• Yantis train camps on Boise River • Ebey train camps at Crown Creek summit • Ebey train meets Johnny Grant on his way to Oregon City
AUGUST 9	• Mayhew train rests and remains camped on Boise River • Mayhew visited by three Indians from Oregon	AUGUST 18	• Yantis train camps on Boise River • Ebey train camps at Willow Creek in Danskin Mountains • <b>Ebey has arrow whiz past him while on guard duty</b>
AUGUST 10	• Mayhew train travels downstream and camps on Boise River		
AUGUST 11	• Mayhew train travels downstream and camps on Boise River in company with many Indians who bring salmon to trade • Ebey train camps at Silver Creek on Camas Prairie		

- AUGUST 19 • Yantis train camps on Boise River
- Indians steal a cow from Yantis train
- **Kirkland train attacked near Little Camas Creek**
- Ebey train reaches the end of Jeffreys route on Ditto Creek and continues on the main Oregon Trail
- Ebey train camps at Soles Rest Creek
- Richard Grant camps near Ebey train on his way to Oregon City
  
- AUGUST 20 • Jones notes Indians acting very bold and saucy
- Yantis train camps east of Fort Boise
- **Ward train attacked near present-day Middleton along Boise River**
- A few Yantis train members go back to find stolen cow and encounter Ward attack
- Ebey train camps at Boise River east of present-day Boise
  
- AUGUST 21 • Yantis train reaches Fort Boise
- Ebey train stays in camp on Boise River east of Boise where it is visited by two Indians
  
- AUGUST 22 • Yantis, Noble, and Bell train members go back to Ward attack site
- Kirkland train survivors catch up to and join Ebey train
- Ebey train camps along Boise River
- Walter Perry dies at night
  
- AUGUST 23 • Ebey train buries Walter Perry
- Ebey train receives letter from Grant describing Ward attack and urging caution
- Yantis train crosses Snake River at Fort Boise
- Ebey train travels downstream and camps southeast of Middleton
  
- AUGUST 24 • Ebey train travels downstream and passes Ward attack site, buries more victims, then crosses Boise River and camps east of present-day Parma
  
- AUGUST 25 • Ebey train arrives at Fort Boise and crosses Snake River

yds distant hitting one [and] hit another & his Son fired his Shot Gun; The Indians rode off but the train heard from Other Indians that they both died. this was some consolation After their trouble the train fell in with Mr Jno. G. Garner coming in from the Snake river ferry with five men & some 8 or 10 horses Packing They joined Company & pushed on to overtake us<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Ebey had met Garner on August 3 when Garner and Don Jose rode out from the Jeffreys ferry to meet John Jeffreys as he returned from Fort Boise. R. R. Thompson, Indian agent for Middle Oregon at the time, wrote the following account in his report of the incident to Joel Palmer, superintendent of Indian Affairs.

Grande Ronde, September 6, 1854

Sir: The murder of the three men referred to in my communication of the 3d instant is fully confirmed. It occurred on the 19th ultimo, about ninety-five miles east from Fort Boise, on the Jeffers road. The train consisted of five wagons, under command of Moses Kirkland, from Louisiana. They were met by eleven Indians, who accosted them in the most friendly manner by shaking hands. Three men who were in the rear of the wagons, after speaking with the Indians, turned to go on, and were fired at—one killed, another wounded; the wounded man has since died. Their names were Geo. Lake and Walter G. Perry. They were from Iowa; both left families, who are now on their way to Washington Territory. The whites fired and killed two of the Indians. The Indians now retired to a distance, still continuing their fire. At the distance of three hundred yards they wounded a young man from Illinois by the name of E. B. Cantrel, who died from his wounds several days afterwards. The whites in their fright gave up their horses (five in number), upon which the Indians retired.<sup>9</sup>

There is disagreement and confusion about the actual location of this attack. Perry notes their last camping location as “White Horse Creek,” which is what many emigrants called the stream known as Indian Creek today. Located about 20 miles southeast of present-day Boise, a stage station and the

8 Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 22.

9 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.

small community of Mayfield would later develop on Indian Creek.

An analysis of the location of the Ebey train provides clues to the actual location of the attack. When the large Ebey train was split into three smaller trains, the Kirkland train did not have a diarist, so their camping locations cannot be identified. Ebey, however, wrote a detailed diary that has been published with excellent analysis indicating the camping locations. With the split occurring on August 15 and the Kirkland attack occurring the morning of August 19, some indications of the attack location can be determined based upon where the Ebey train camped on August 18.

Ebey was ahead of the Kirkland train. He camped on Willow Creek in the Danskin Mountains on August 18.<sup>10</sup> That night while on guard duty, an arrow whizzed by his head. The next day, August 19, Ebey and his train crossed the mountains and descended Ditto Creek, camping on Soles Rest Creek, still five miles east of White Horse Creek/Indian Creek.<sup>11</sup> The Kirkland train was behind the Ebey train, so the attack site could not have been near White Horse Creek/Indian Creek. The attack site would have to be east of the Ebey train camp site for August 18, Willow Creek in the Danskin Mountains.

Some Idaho trail authorities believe the attack occurred at Wild Horse Creek near the western end of the Camas Prairie. The name is similar to White Horse Creek, the name Mary Anna Perry wrote for the location in a reminiscence, not a diary. This opens the possibility that Perry confused the name of the location. This location is not likely, however, as the combined Ebey train camped at Wild Horse Creek on August 15, four days before the attack. It was at this location that the train divided into three sections, and all sections would have traveled well beyond this location by the time of the attack.

When the Kirkland train caught up to the Ebey train, they told Ebey and the others about the attack. Ebey described the attack occurring “at Valley Spring.” He used the term “Valley Stream” to name what is now known as Little Camas Creek, which drains a small valley, Little Camas Prairie, in which Little Camas Reservoir may be found today.<sup>12</sup> The Jeffreys route crossed the valley in the often dry, southern end of today’s reservoir.

Agent R. R. Thompson placed the attack site “about ninety-five miles east from Fort Boise, on the Jeffers road” in his report of the incident 2 weeks later.<sup>13</sup> Little Camas Creek is 95 miles east of Fort Boise via the Jeffreys route and would have been a common camping area.

Because of the Valley Spring/Stream location specified by Winfield Scott Ebey and the distance of 95 miles from Fort Boise specified by R. R. Thompson, I believe that the Kirkland train had camped at Little Camas Creek on the night of August 18.

The Kirkland train traveled for one hour on the morning of August 19 before the attack. Perry indicates that the Indians came out of a canyon to the left of the road. With so few clues, the exact location will likely never be known. The area about one mile west of Little Camas Creek, however, is a strong possibility (see Map 3). After leaving Little Camas Creek, the route crosses a small ridge called Windy Gap and winds down the east side of the valley with the canyon curving to the left. I believe this is the area where the attack on the Kirkland train occurred.

#### ATTACK ON THE WARD TRAIN

Alexander Ward of Lexington, Missouri, and his party of 20 emigrants including many Ward family members, also traveled the Jeffreys route in 1854. They were the lead group after the split of the large Ebey wagon train into three groups on August 15. They had completed the Jeffreys route and continued on the main Oregon Trail toward Fort Boise. In recent days they had picked up a pair of German brothers and another wagon with the Adams brothers. Their party was attacked along the Boise River in the afternoon of August 20, the day after the Kirkland train was attacked. Eighteen members of the Ward party were killed in the attack. Only sons Newton and William Ward survived the attack.

This attack took place south of present-day Middleton, Idaho, along the Boise River, 23 miles east of Fort Boise. According to Newton Ward,

a party of two white men and three Indians fell in with us and tried to trade for one of the three horses we had. Not being able to make the trade, the three Indians made a sudden rush

<sup>10</sup> Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 18, 1854.

<sup>11</sup> Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 19, 1854.

<sup>12</sup> Ebey, *Oregon Trail Diary*, August 16, 1854.

<sup>13</sup> R. R. Thompson, Letter #92.



Suspected site of the attack on Kirkland wagon train.  
PHOTO BY AUTHOR.



upon them and drove the horses off. Fearing further trouble, we started corralling the wagons and preparing for an attack.<sup>14</sup>

Late in the afternoon, Indians attacked the wagon train, which defended itself for nearly two hours. As the men were killed, the Indians took the wagons, women, and children into the brush and across the river to the Indian camp. The women were brutally tortured and raped; the children tortured and burned to death in front of their mother. Two of the Ward sons, Newton and William, managed to avoid death after being wounded by hiding in the brush and appearing dead.

Alexander Yantis and six men were back-tracking to the east from Fort Boise that day to find a missing cow. Hearing the commotion, they raced towards the attack only to have one of their party, Sylvester Amon, shot and killed. They reached the attack site and rescued Newton Ward. William Ward awoke the next day and wandered down the Boise River, eventually reaching Fort Boise four days later with a gunshot through a lung and an arrow through his side.

A group of 18 members of the Yantis, Noble, and Bell trains returned to the attack site on August 22 to find the perpetrators, but the Indians had abandoned their camp and headed for the mountains. The group buried many of the Ward victims.

Much has been written on the Ward attack, often called the “Ward Massacre.” The emigrant accounts and newspaper stories of the era describe a gruesome scene of death, torture, rape, mutilation, and burning of the emigrants.<sup>15</sup> The accounts are too graphic to repeat in detail here. This attack was unusual in the use of torture and mutilation to kill the women and children. Two prior incidents of torture by Indians have been documented. George Hinshaw was beaten, scalped, and tortured with fire on the northside of the Snake River at Three Island Crossing in 1845. The victims of the 1859 Miltemore attack in the Massacre Rocks area were also tortured.<sup>16</sup>

Maj. Granville O. Haller, with a group of 43 Army



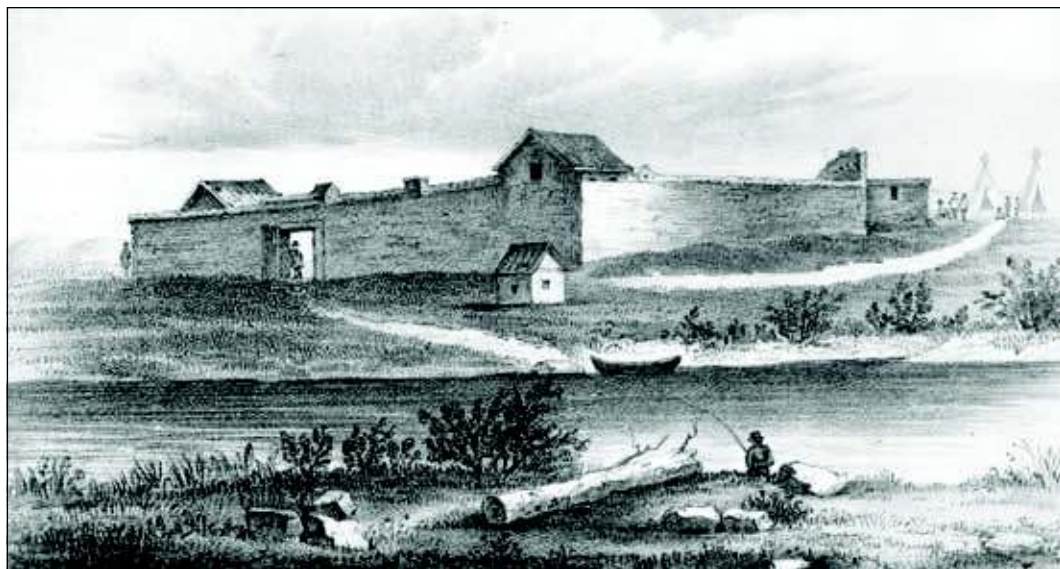
(TOP) Little Camas Prairie was a popular camping area on the Jeffreys route. The Kirkland wagon train camped here before being attacked an hour west of the creek. The route crossed in the foreground of the picture. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

(BOTTOM) Jeffreys route west of Little Camas Creek. MAP BY THE AUTHOR.

14 Rufus Wood, “The West and What It Cost,” *Wenatchee Daily World*, March 13, 1925.

15 This summary of the attack on the Ward party is based on the accounts left by Elizabeth Austin and Anna Maria Goodell (“Vermillion Wagon Train Diaries, 1854,” in Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women, Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails* [Spokane, Wash.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1983], 7:79–130), Winfield Scott Ebey (*Oregon Trail Diary*), O. Humason (*Oregon Statesman*, Sept. 19, 1854), John F. Noble (Idaho State Historical Society Library, mss 2-0602), R. R. Thompson (Letter 92).

16 Donna M. Wojcik, *The Brazen Overlanders of 1845* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1992), 205. On Miltemore, *Deseret News*, Sept. 21, 1859, p. 3, col. 1.



Fort Boise. Lithograph from E. Weber and Company. [HTTPS://IDAHP.GENEALOGYVILLAGE.COM/CANYON/HISTORY-FTBOISE.HTML](https://IDAHP.GENEALOGYVILLAGE.COM/CANYON/HISTORY-FTBOISE.HTML).

cavalry members from The Dalles, 37 Oregon volunteers led by Capt. Nathan Olney, Indian Agent R. R. Thompson, and about a dozen Cayuse and Nez Perce Indians, arrived at Fort Boise in early September. Their mission was to protect the remaining emigrants and to find the Indians responsible for the attack on the Ward party. By the time they arrived, all emigrant trains had passed the area. Haller held a council with the local Bannock Indians to establish expectations in dealing with the Winnestas, perpetrators of the Ward attack. Haller then moved to the Payette River, where he found an abandoned Indian camp with many items from the Ward wagon train. Haller found another abandoned Indian camp on the Boise River near the attack site. A number of Indians were taken prisoner; a few not involved with the Ward attack were killed. After accomplishing little more than reburying the attack victims, the campaign returned to The Dalles in early October. Meanwhile, reports were received that the attackers had travelled to the Salmon River near the Nez Perce area in northern Idaho.<sup>17</sup>

The following year, 1855, Major Haller led a much larger army expedition with the purpose of protecting the emigrants and punishing the Indians responsible for the Ward attack. Another council was held with the local Bannock Indians. Four Winnestas Indians attended the council and were spotted

by the interpreter. Haller arrested the four and brought them before a military council the next day. One of the Winnestas confessed his role in the attack and implicated the other prisoners as participants in the attack before he bolted to escape. He was shot and killed. The remaining three prisoners were found guilty of the Ward murders and sentenced to be hung over the grave of the emigrant victims. The next day, July 18, the army marched to the Ward attack site, reburied the Ward victims again and built a gallows above the mound of the grave. The prisoners admitted that it was right for them to die for their part in the attack, but claimed the women of the tribe had tortured and killed the women and children. The three Winnestas were hanged at sunset and buried the following morning at the foot of the gallows.

The gallows were left standing for 40 years as a deterrent to the Indians. J. B. Wright, an immigrant of 1864, wrote many years later about seeing the site:

On the trail about four miles east of Caldwell I saw a gallows made by setting two posts in the ground about 10 feet high and 10 feet apart with a crossbeam on top, which was used to administer the death penalty to some Indians who had taken part in the murder of a family, so I was told.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> R. R. Thompson, Letter, *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, Salem, Marian, Oregon, October 24, 1854, page 2.

<sup>18</sup> J. B. Wright, "Pioneer Wright Corrects Trail Route in Idaho," *Idaho Statesman*, April 10, 1921, 2.

Haller proceeded to the Camas Prairie with detail patrols searching the central Idaho mountains, Salmon, and Snake River areas. Several Indians were found who had been part of the Ward attack. Three Indians were shot and killed, only one of whom was involved in the Ward attack.<sup>19</sup> Another Indian involved in the attack was hanged. Haller returned to The Dalles in early September.

A small county park was dedicated June 17, 1928, near the site of the attack to commemorate the Ward attack south of Middleton. Monuments and interpretive signs there tell the story of the attack. Walter Whitney, whose relatives lived in the area, described the location of the attack:

the site of the massacre as beginning where the railroad crosses the property to the northeast of the monument, just over the bluff from the memorial park, and extending eastward back of the present Jack Harris place and thence back of the old Whitney barn on the east side of the railroad.<sup>20</sup>

The gallows where the Indians were hanged over the graves of their victims was beyond the brow of the hill, slightly to the right and back of the monument.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE SAME GROUP?

A small group of two white men and a few Indians may have instigated the attacks on both the Kirkland and Ward trains. Mary Anna Perry stated that two white men with painted faces, hands, and feet were involved with the Kirkland train attack.

I might say here that I never entertained a doubt that the two men who led the Indians in the attack, were white men as their manner, dress and talk indicated it. They wore good clothes and had their hands and faces and feet painted, which the Indians did not.<sup>22</sup>

Newton Ward also stated that two white men were involved with the attack on the Ward party the next afternoon.

I believe it would have been unusual for two white men to be with one group of Indians, let alone two groups. With a distance of about 70 miles from the site of the Kirkland attack to the Ward attack, it is possible that the same group of two white men and Indians made both attacks, traveling quickly for a day between locations.

#### A THIRD ATTACK?

We traveled slowly down through Big Camas through Little Camas down Ditto Creek, and camped about a mile below where Robert Sproat now lives. Here we found the remains of about twenty wagons that had been burned and the people all murdered by Indians eight years before.<sup>23</sup>

The reminiscence of Oliver B. Slater records seeing the remains of an apparent wagon train attack near the junction of the Jeffreys route and the main Oregon Trail when he passed by in 1862. Slater was a member of a large wagon train led by Tim Goodale in 1862, crossing Idaho on the Jeffreys route. There is no written record of travel on the Jeffreys route after 1854 until Goodale's wagon train eight years later.

Oliver's sister, Nellie Slater, was also in the Goodale train and kept a diary of her trip. She wrote of seeing the remains of the wagon train attack on August 9, 1862, as she reached the end of the Jeffreys route near the junction with the main Oregon Trail in southwest Idaho: "Traveled to the Old Oregon road at the place of the massacre of '53. There is one grave here and a great many bones of persons as well as bones of animals, also wagon irons." She provides a date of 1853, which appears to be incorrect, since the first documented travelers on the Jeffreys route were in 1854.<sup>24</sup>

A third emigrant in the Goodale train, Dunham Wright, provides multiple accounts through the years of his trip and the massacre remains he encountered near the end of the

19 Lyndel Meikle, *Very Close to Trouble: The Johnny Grant Memoir* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1996), 55-57.

20 Walter Whitney, Interview from August 5, 1975, The Ward Massacre, Pioneers of Canyon County. H. M. Whitney, Walter's father, gave the land for the Ward Massacre Park.

21 Albert and Jane Salisbury, *Here Rolled the Covered Wagons* (Seattle, Wash.: Superior Pub. Co., 1948), 57.

22 Frost, "Mrs. Mary Anna Frost."

23 Oliver B. Slater, "Reminiscences of O. B. Slater," Idaho State Archives, MSS 766 Box 4, Folder 5. Robert Sproat lived about a half-mile up Ditto Creek from the small valley.

24 Nellie Slater, "Travels on the Plains in Eighteen Sixty-two," Denver Public Library, transcript available from Idaho State Archives, MSS 766, Box 4, Folder 5, entry of August 9, 1862.

Jeffreys route. They are included here to provide as much information as is known about this site. Again, Wright's stated date of 1852 appears to be incorrect. It is unknown how the Slaters or Wright determined the dates of the attack provided in their accounts. Wright's first account of the attack site was published in the *Idaho Statesman* in March 1919:

Our road was through big and little Camas prairie and struck the old Oregon Trail at the massacre grounds, where a whole train was massacred in '52. This route had not been traveled since.

The wagon irons were lying in circular shape in the tall rye grass; the wagons had been burned, and human skulls were lying in the grass also.<sup>25</sup>

In 1923 Wright described the possible massacre site:

We made the road through big and little Camas prairie and intersected the old Oregon trail at the massacre grounds of 1852. Those lay in a circle shape, great quantities of wagon irons and many bones of humans and animals were scattered through the tall rye grass. Many human skulls were on the ground. One man picked up one and put in his wagon, which made me shudder, as he picked it up the tall grass had grown up through the eye holes. I told him I would as soon put a rattlesnake on my wagon.<sup>26</sup>

In July 1929 Wright wrote a third account:

This was in the last days of August, 1862, 67 years ago this coming August, it being a party of a train of 300 wagons crossing Snake river 10 miles above old Fort Hall, making a road via Lost river, Big and Little Camas prairies to the intersection of the original Old Oregon trail, where there had been a large emigrant train massacred by Indians 10 years before. Since this time there had been no travel on this old trail, as the Indians had decided not to allow travel to pass down the north side of Snake river and had declared war on our train.



Monument to the Ward Wagon Train. PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR.

25 Dunham Wright, "Old Timer Tells of Privations in Real Early Days," *Idaho Statesman*, March 2, 1919, 5.

26 Dunham Wright, "Wagon Tires Mute Reminders Of Unsuccessful Gold Hunt," *Idaho Statesman*, October 28, 1923.



AREA OF THE SUSPECTED THIRD ATTACK

A local farm road through the center of the picture. Jeffreys' route remnants are to the right of this road. Round rifle balls were found near the base of the rocks to the right of the trail. It is possible that the Indians attacked from behind the rocks as the wagons slowed going up the ridge. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

Our train stopped some time at this massacre ground, groping through the tall rye grass, seeing a great circle of wagon tires and irons and many human skulls [*sic*], and human and animal bones which caused a shiver to creep over a person to think what a place of human butchery and suffering that place had once been.<sup>27</sup>

Wright had yet another account published in the *Idaho Statesman* in March 1942:

From Camas prairie we crossed over the high mountains and intercepted the original Oregon Trail where the great massacre of the train of 1852 had taken place. Judging from the number of wagon tires lying in a circular shape it must have been a great train. The ground was literally covered with big and little wagon irons, animal bones and human skulls and skeletons. Although I was but 20 years old at the time, the thought came to me of what a scene of mental anguish, human butchery and suffering this place had been.<sup>28</sup>

Members of wagon trains of 1864 following the Jeffreys route also noted the remains of a wagon train attack near the junction of the Jeffreys route and the main Oregon Trail. Harriet A. Loughary called the location “Massacre Creek”:

Reached at noon Massacre Creek, a beautiful grove on the banks of a small stream. It seems that a large emigrant train was in camp here a few years since when in the night the whole train was massacred leaving not one to tell the tale.<sup>29</sup>

Another emigrant of 1864, Murdoch M. McPherson, provided information about a possible source of the attack. McPherson had met a man named Hurd who captured an Indian:

He [Hurd] claimed that he knew the [captured] Indian very well and that he was one of a party of Indians who massacred an immigrant train on a creek a little way ahead of us (if I remember rightly it was called Indian Creek), where they tortured women and children, cutting little children’s fingers and feet off a piece at a time with their tomahawks, and killing every man, woman and child in the party. . . .

When the roads became passable we pulled out and sometime afterwards came to the creek where this massacre took place. The Indians ambushed the emigrants in a narrow canyon hid behind large rocks on each side of the road within easy range of the wagons. After disposing of the emigrants they took everything of value to them, together with their horses and burned the wagons, so that we found it a pile of charcoal and wagon tires and all kinds of wagon irons. It must have been a large train as the pile of tires and charcoal extended for some distance.<sup>30</sup>

A possible clue about the massacre remains which these emigrants of 1862 and 1864 saw is contained in a report of the Ward attack published September 5, 1854, in the *Weekly Oregon Statesman*. There were numerous accounts of the Ward attack published soon after the event, with newspapers often sharing articles. The *Statesman* reprinted an article from the *Portland Standard* about the Ward attack with an added statement from a local resident: “Mr. Robb states that it was thought that *another train had been murdered* [emphasis added], from information obtained from two Indians.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1937, Lewis F. Graham responded to a request for information about a possible massacre east of Boise in the early 1850s:

Mr. Harrington, State House, Boise, Idaho

Seeing your request for information in regard to a train that was massacred in the early fiftys about fifty miles south east of Boise. The place was called Souls Rest for a long time, it is near Ditto Creek. My father and another man gathered old irons from the wagons that were burnt and sold them to blacksmiths

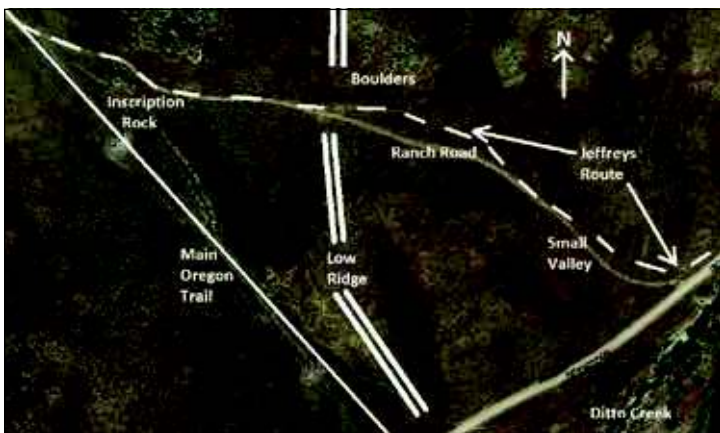
27 Dunham Wright, “Sole Survivor of Trek of ’62 Tells His Tale,” *Idaho Statesman*, July 7, 1929, 18.

28 Dunham Wright, “Veteran of Western Trails Retells Idaho Adventures,” *Idaho Statesman*, March 1, 1942, 8.

29 Harriet A. Loughary, “A Brief Journal of the Travels and Incidents of an Emigrant Ox Train Across the Plains and Mountains from Burlington, Iowa, on the Mississippi River, to the Willamette Valley on the Columbia and the Pacific Ocean—In the Year of 1864,” University of Oregon Manuscript Collection, MS 1147, entry of July 27.

30 Harold C. Vedeler, “The Reminiscences of Murdoch M. McPherson,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1996): 254.

31 “Indian Outrage,” *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, Salem, September 5, 1854, 3



(TOP) Twin ruts climb the ridge out of the Ditto Creek valley towards the junction with the main Oregon Trail. A local farm road is visible behind the ruts. This is the area of the suspected third attack. PHOTO BY AUTHOR.

(BOTTOM) Map of the Ditto Creek area where the suspected third attack may have occurred. MAP BY THE AUTHOR.

in Boise. My father said there was quite a few skulls and bones there at that time. He also stated that they dug a grave, picked up all of the bones that they could find, placed them in the grave, covered them up and placed a row of rock all around the grave.<sup>32</sup>

Idaho trail researcher and author Jim McGill believes the remains seen near the junction of the Jeffreys route and the main Oregon Trail were from the attack on the Kirkland train, which killed George Lake, Walter G. Perry, and Empson Cantrell.<sup>33</sup> This cannot be the case, however, as the bodies of the deceased Lake and Cantrell were taken with the Kirkland wagon train to be buried several days later, and Perry did not die until the train was along the Boise River near Middleton. In addition, the Kirkland train lost no wagons in the attack and the distance from Fort Boise does not match that reported by Indian Agent R. R. Thompson.

### THE SEARCH

Emigrant and newspaper accounts confirm the remains of another massacre and provide clues to the attack location. The Slaters and Wright in 1862, as well as Loughary and McPherson in 1864, viewed the remains of a destroyed wagon train with the bones of many people and animals when they reached the end of the Jeffreys route. A captured Indian and a statement in a newspaper article indicate a third attack occurred. Clues to the location of the attack can be gleaned from some of the accounts.

I have been searching for this possible third massacre site for many years. Numerous searches of suspected areas using trained search dogs, metal detectors, and ground-penetrating radar have yielded artifacts such as round rifle balls, bullets, oxen shoe nails, and animal bones.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis F. Graham, letter to Mr. Harrington, June 7, 1937, Idaho State Archives MSS 2-0338. It is unknown if the Mr. Harrington to which the letter is addressed was Fred Harrington, an Idaho state representative from Canyon County, or Joel A. Harrington of the Idaho State Historical Society, soliciting information about Idaho history for a pageant to be performed in Boise later that month.


<sup>33</sup> James W. McGill, *Rediscovered frontiersman: Timothy Goodale* (Independence, Mo.: Oregon-California Trails Association, 2009), 79.

The Jeffreys route followed Ditto Creek downstream, then turned northwest in a small valley separated from the main Oregon Trail by a low ridge. I believe the attack site was in this small valley near the end of the Jeffreys route, less than a quarter mile from where it rejoined the main Oregon Trail. It would have been natural for emigrants to camp in the small valley before turning away from Ditto Creek.

As the Jeffreys route climbed the low ridge, it came close to a formation of large granite rocks. It is possible that Indians attacked from behind these boulders. Round rifle balls, common ammunition for the emigrants in 1854, were found near the base of these boulders. Even though it was only a short distance from the main Oregon Trail, the suspected attack site and remains would not have been visible from the main trail because the small valley is hidden from the main trail behind a low ridge and was covered in long grasses. This location is between the sites of the first attack on the Kirkland train and the second attack on the Ward train.

#### A THEORY

John Thomas Jeffreys first opened an alternative route of the Oregon Trail across Idaho in 1854, and he has never received appropriate credit by seeing his name broadly applied to the route. Two documented Indian attacks on emigrant wagon trains traveling this new route occurred in August 1854. A possible third attack may have occurred near the end of the Jeffreys Route.

I believe that a small band of Indians led by two white men attacked the Kirkland train on the morning of August 19, then traveled west and attacked the Ward train the next afternoon along the Boise River. Upon fleeing the Boise River valley using their normal route to the Camas Prairie, they encountered the final wagon train of the year on the Jeffreys Route along Ditto Creek near the junction with the main Oregon Trail and attacked it as well, probably on the night of August 20 or morning of August 21. Since there were no following travelers that year, and the Jeffreys route was not used again for eight years, the attack was not discovered until 1862. It is hoped that further research and continued pursuit of evidence regarding this possible third attack may help to complete the story. 



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