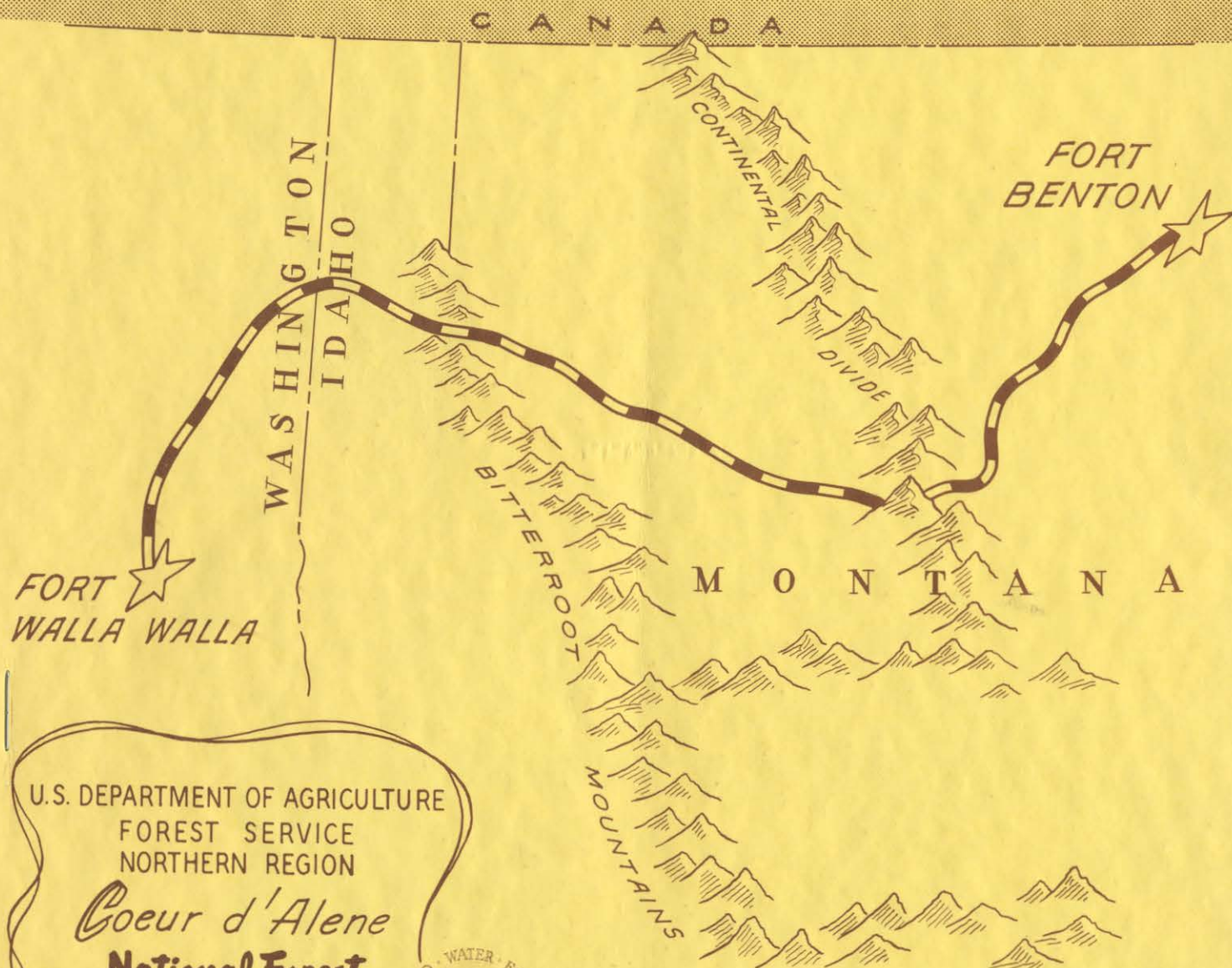


MULLAN ROAD

Across the Bitterroots



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
NORTHERN REGION

Coeur d'Alene
National Forest

COEUR d'ALENE, IDAHO



In 1853, Governor Isaac Stevens of Washington Territory conducted an exploration party from St. Paul, Minnesota to Puget Sound. The purpose of the trip was to explore a northern route for a transcontinental railroad. Lt. John Mullan of the Army Topographical Engineers was in command of a portion of Stevens' party, and remained in the northern Rockies over winter securing data and determining the feasibility of various routes. He was also specifically charged with the job of selecting a route for a wagon road between Fort Benton, Montana, and Fort Walla Walla, Washington.

Congress appropriated funds for the construction of the wagon road in 1858. Lt. Mullan was placed in charge of the work. Indian troubles in Washington Territory interrupted the job very shortly after it began. In 1859 work was started in earnest, and was essentially completed in 1861.

Captain John Mullan
(Historical Society of
Montana photo)



Cantonment Wright, Captain Mullan's winter quarters, 1861-62.
(Historical Society of Montana photo)



ROUTE OF THE MULLAN ROAD OVER THE BITTERROOT DIVIDE

by

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The "Mullan Road" is the popular name of the military road between Fort Walla Walla, Washington and Fort Benton, Montana. The road was built under the supervision of Lieutenant, later Captain, John Mullan, U.S. Army, in 1858-1861. It was an important access route to and across northern Idaho for many years. Much of its route parallels U.S. No. 10 and the new Interstate No. 90.

Through the years a misconception has grown regarding the route of the Mullan Road over the Bitterroot Mountains between Mullan, Idaho and Saltese, Montana. For some unknown reason, this seems to be more prevalent in Montana than Idaho. The misconception is unfortunate, since the record is so clear that there would seem to be no room for error.

Some records suggest that the original road was from Mullan, Idaho up the main stem of the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, over the present Mullan Pass and down Randolph Creek to the St. Regis River and Saltese, Montana. The fact that the pass on the Bitterroot Divide is now called Mullan Pass has perpetuated the error. Recently the United States Geological Survey Saltese quadrangle, dated 1956, compounded this error; it labels the road up Randolph Creek as the Old Mullan Road.

The route of the Mullan Road is easterly up the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene to the locality now known as Shoshone Park, where Mullan's party had one of their work camps. There the road turns almost due south, crossing the Bitterroots at the pass shown on Mullan's map as Sohon's Pass, but now known as St. Regis Pass. That this pass has also sometimes been called Mullen Pass does not help clarify matters. It is a short drop from this pass into the head of the St. Regis valley. The road follows the St. Regis River past the mouth of Randolph Creek and on to the Saltese area.

Records showing the correct route of the road are:

1. Mullan's report and maps, 1863.
2. The Idaho-Montana Boundary Survey, 1904-1905.
3. United States Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 62, 1908.

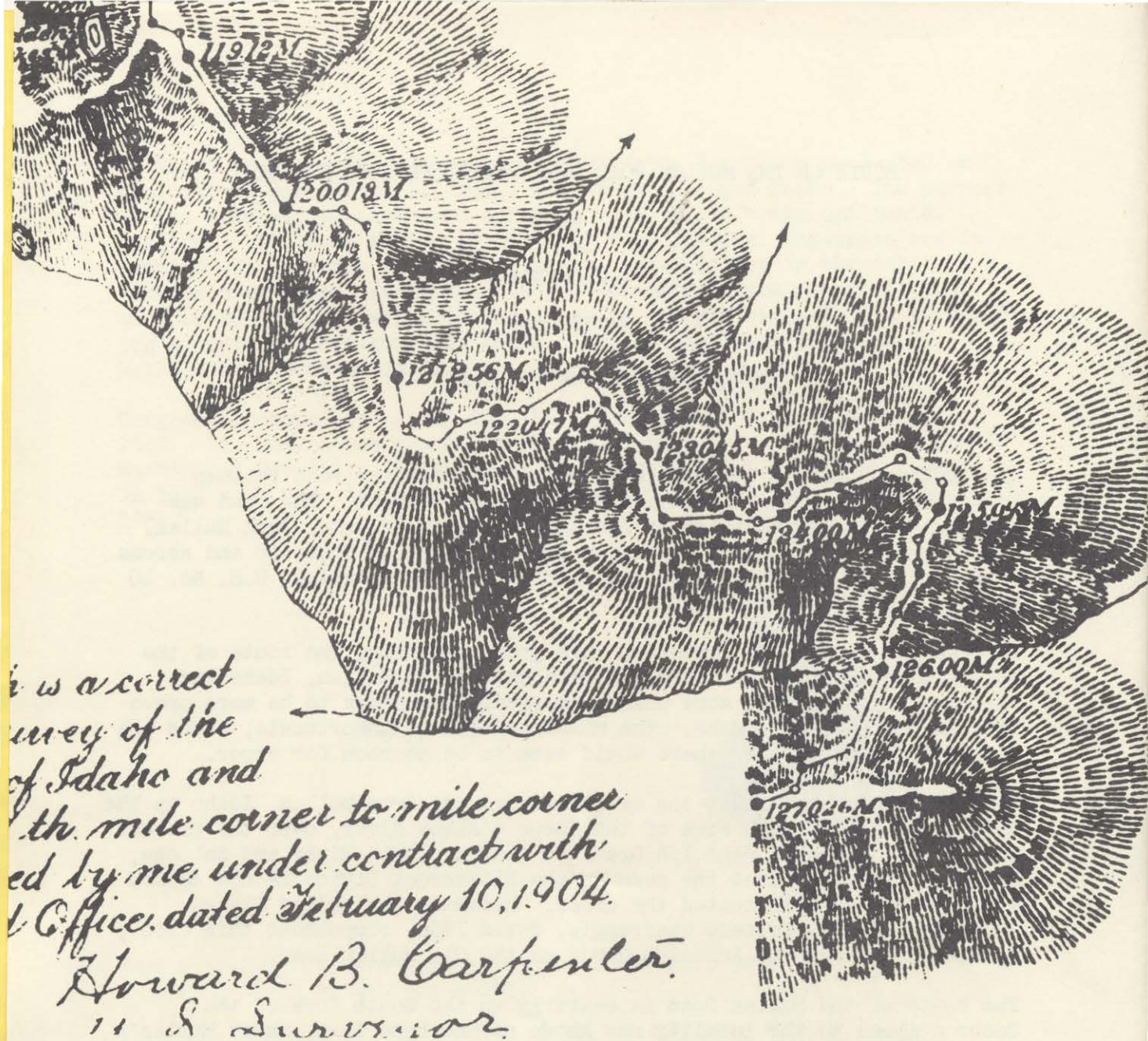


Illustration No. 1

The present Mullan Pass at M.P. 126 of Idaho-Montana Boundary Survey. No road or trail shown. This picture is of a portion of a map prepared by Howard B. Carpenter, U.S. Surveyor, for the General Land Office. Carpenter's map is based on a 1904-1905 survey.

4. General Land Office surveys, field notes and maps, 1899, 1911, 1914, 1916.
5. Coeur d'Alene National Forest map of 1911.
6. United States Geological Survey maps, five editions, 1908 - 1956.

MULLAN'S REPORT

The full title of this is "Report on the Construction of a Military Road from Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton" by Captain John Mullan, U.S.A. The report was published by the Government Printing Office in 1863. It includes four maps. The last of these is of the mountain section of the road, roughly from Lake Coeur d'Alene to Missoula, showing clearly that the Mullan Road leaves the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene several miles west of the head of the river and runs south to Sohon's Pass and the head of the St. Regis valley. Stevens Peak, named by Mullan, is accurately shown on this map at the head of the St. Regis River and Sohon's (now St. Regis) Pass. Randolph Creek, while unnamed, is identifiable on the map. Lakes on the head of the St. Regis River are also shown.

Text of the report simply confirms the map. On page 31 Mullan describes the betterment and reconstruction work done in 1861 easterly from Fort Walla Walla: "We built twenty heavy bridges on this river (The Coeur d'Alene) which, together with the repairs in its valley, occupied us until the 15th of September when, crossing the summit of the Bitterroot Mountains, we reached the head sources of the St. Regis Borgia river, on which a similar system was initiated." Surely an explorer of Mullan's ability, with the assistance he had, knew the difference between the head of the river and one of its minor tributaries.

W. W. Johnson, Civil Engineer and assistant to Mullan, studied the route from the standpoint of constructing a railroad. His report to Mullan is on pages 118-123. Johnson states, "The summit of the divide of the Coeur d'Alene or Bitter Root Mountains at Sohon's Pass is four thousand nine hundred and thirty two feet above the level of the sea, . . . and thirteen hundred and fifty three feet above the last crossing of the Coeur d'Alene river; which last height is attained in an air line distance of one and five hundreths miles . . . The descent of three hundred and ninety two feet from the summit, to the first crossing of the St. Regis Borgia is made in seven tenths of a mile, in nearly a direct line, over the natural surface of the mountain . . . There are two passes to the north and east of Sohon's Pass; the first two miles to the north . . . the second is some ten miles distant . . . The St. Regis Borgia river has its rise in a small bowl-like lake 500 feet in diameter, carved by nature out of the steep rocky walls of one of the spurs of Steven's Peak. After leaving this spring it tumbles down 300 feet in a quarter of a mile, through a narrow, rocky channel; after which it flows through a valley a tenth of a mile in average width, to the first crossing."



Illustration No. 2

The present St. Regis Pass near the head of St. Regis River - also from the boundary survey. The road is shown. This illustration is also from Carpenter's 1904-1905 Idaho-Montana boundary survey for the General Land Office.

Johnson is off about 90 feet in his elevation at Sohon's (St. Regis) Pass. However, the statement as to the two passes north and east is very good, the nearer being the present Lookout Pass, the second the one now called Mullan Pass, between the head of the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene and Randolph Creek. If he had been at this second pass, no statement as quoted above could have been made, as there are no passes into the St. Regis drainage from the Coeur d'Alene north of Mullan Pass. The statement in regard to the source of the St. Regis is also conclusive; there are no lakes in the Randolph Creek drainage.

Also in the report, beginning on page 309, are notations on a number of meteorological observations at Sohon's Pass, frequently with comments regarding the weather. For October 27, 1859, it states, "No snow among the timber until 1000 feet above the pass. Steven's Peak, 2000 feet higher, only a few snow patches near bushes . . ." Stevens Peak is not visible from any point in Mullan Pass.

THE IDAHO-MONTANA BOUNDARY SURVEY, 1904-1905

A contract was executed by the General Land Office February 10, 1904 for the survey of the boundary line between the states of Idaho and Montana by Howard B. Carpenter, U.S. Surveyor. The survey began June 6, 1904 and was completed September 13, 1905. Notes are on file in the Boise office of the Bureau of Land Management.

Carpenter worked from north to south. At the 126th mile post he reached the present Mullan Pass, and his notes read:

"set an iron pipe 3 ins. dia. 4 ft. long with flanges at the bottom 2 ft. in the ground for 126th mile cor. A brass cap on top of the pipe has raised letters MONT on E., IDA on W., a raised x in the center and stamped 126M on N. Dug pits 36x36x18 in N., S., E., and W. of the corner 5 ft. dist. Raised a mound of earth 3 ft. base 1-1/2 ft. high around the post."

He then describes four witness trees and continues:

"This corner stands in dense timber and brush in pass. Elevation 5350 ft. head of Coeur d'Alene River on W., course SW. Head of Creek on E., course NE. Land mountainous. Soil sandy and stony, 3rd rate. Vegetation, pine, fir, spruce and hemlock, undergrowth of same with snowbrush, huckleberry and service berry brush.

July 5, 1904"

Note that there is no mention of a road, or even a trail, through this pass. Further on he comes to the present Lookout Pass. An iron pipe similar to the one at mile 126 was set, this one being stamped 129.342 on the NE, on the east side of the railroad. Then the notes read:

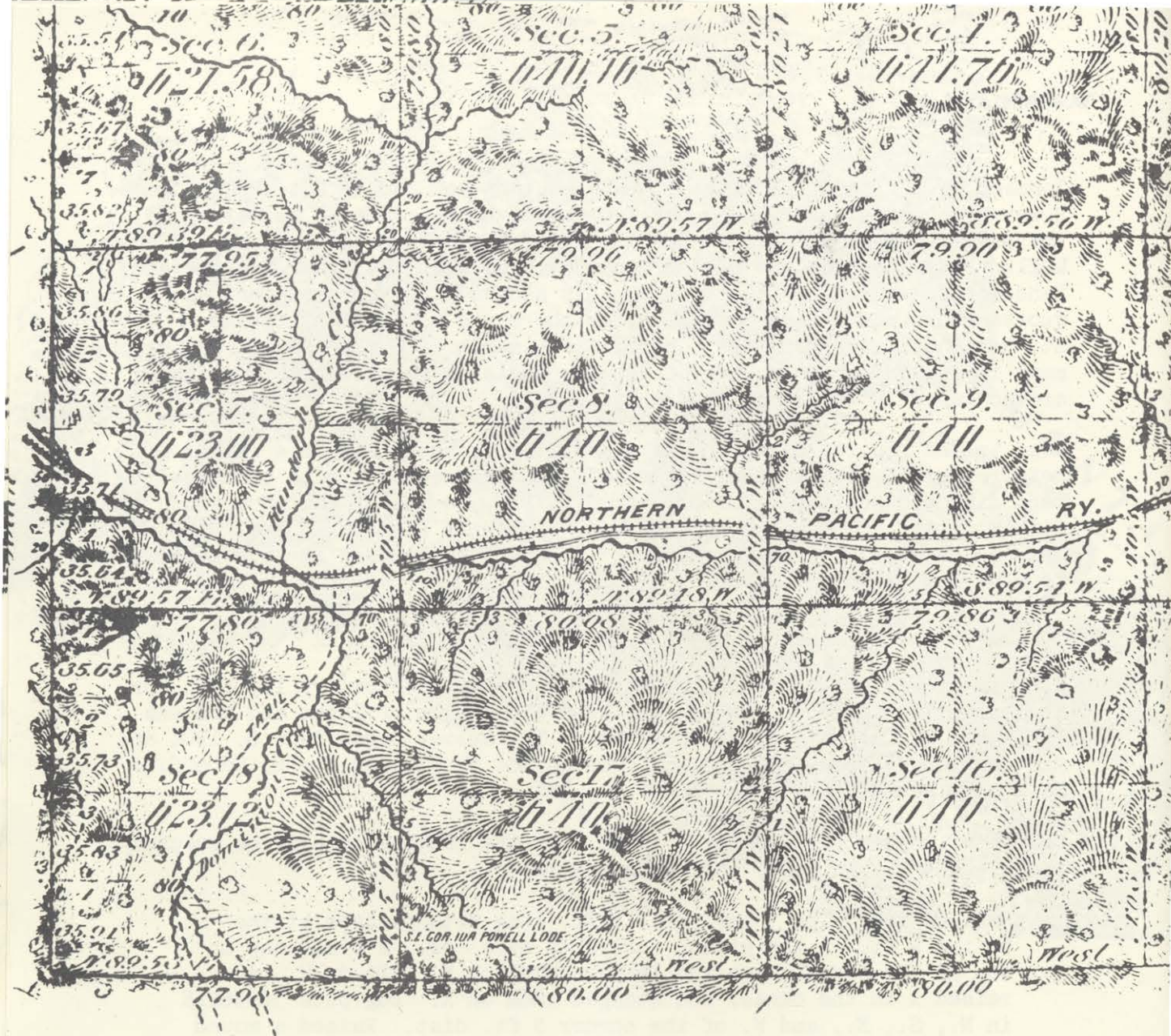


Illustration No. 3

The Mullan Road at the mouth of Randolph Creek. GLO plot for Township 19N, R31W. Note that the road does not go up Randolph Creek. This illustration is from U.S. General Land Office township plat, based on fieldwork done in 1889. The map was approved and published in 1899.

"No trees within limits suitable for bearing trees.

Thence on same course.

Center of track NPRR bears N. and S. Lookout station house about 4 chs. S."

No question about the identification of this point. On July 9 he set an angle post east of a pass. Then:

"July 10th. I examine the solar transit and find it in adjustment, compare the steel tapes with the standard and find them of correct length.

At 6 hr m. A.M., 1 m.t. I set off 47 degrees 27-1/2' on the Lat. arc and 22 degrees 17' on the decl arc and

Thence

Wagon road in Mullan Pass. Elevation 5000 ft. Road bears NW and SE from Saltese, MONT., to Mullan, IDA. Gulches head on each side. One on N. course to Coeur d'Alene River. One on S. course SE to St. Regis River.

Ascend, enter dense timber and brush."

While the surveyor used the name Mullan Pass, which may have been rather common at that time, there is no doubt as to where he was and that he was referring to what is now called St. Regis Pass and that the road was the Mullan Road.

To further verify the surveyor's notes, the plats prepared by Carpenter as part of the survey do not show a road at MP 126, the present Mullan Pass. They do show the railroad at Lookout Pass, and the wagon road, so labeled, at Mullan (present St. Regis) Pass. This cannot be just an oversight. The roads at Thompson Pass and Glidden Pass further to the north are shown. Between mileposts 138 and 139 further south he refers to a "trail from Saltese to some mining prospects" in his notes. We can hardly think that Carpenter identified and platted these other roads, the railroad and even trails, but overlooked a road in Mullan Pass, particularly a road as well known as the Mullan Road.

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, PROFESSIONAL PAPER 62

The complete title of this publication is "The Geology and Ore Deposits of the Coeur d'Alene District, Idaho" by Ransome and Calkins, published in 1908. On page 78 of this report Ransome gives a brief history of the area and refers to the road built by Mullan and his party. After a brief description of the route west of the town of Mullan he states, "Thence it ascended the main stream and South Fork to a point about 3 miles east of the present town of Mullan. Here it turned southward, crossed the divide through the Sohon or St. Regis Pass, and continued down St. Regis River . . . Roughly constructed as it was, this highway, now familiarly known as the 'old Mullan road' was for many years the only line of travel into the region . . . The section of the old road that crosses the divide east of Mullan is still in occasional use and is shown on the accompanying topographic map (Pl. 1, in pocket)."

The road is shown on the map as stated, and the route coincides very well with Mullan's original map. Fieldwork for this map was done in 1900-1901.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE SURVEYS, MAPS & FIELD NOTES

In Montana the route of the Mullan Road in the St. Regis valley is clearly shown and labeled by name in many cases on the General Land Office township plats. The plats involved in this particular area are:

Township 19 North, Range 31 West, Montana Meridian Approved 1899.

In this township the Mullan Road crossed Randolph Creek in the southeast quarter of Section 7. The road is clearly plotted going up the river not up Randolph Creek. Fieldwork for this was done in 1898.

Township 19 North, Range 32 West, Montana Meridian Approved 1916.

This plat shows the Mullan Road going up the St. Regis past Borax and Sildex stations on the NPRR. It leaves the township in Section 6.

In Idaho the portion of the Mullan Road being discussed is on two township plats.

Township 47 North, Range 6 East, Boise Meridian Approved 1914.

A road is shown entering Idaho from Montana in the approximate center of Section 5, which is the location of St. Regis Pass. On this plat it is labeled Mullan Pass, but the road is shown as Mullan - Saltese.

Township 48 North, Range 6 East, Boise Meridian Approved 1911.

The present Mullan Pass between the head of the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and St. Regis River via Randolph Creek is in Section 36. The road shown on the plat coming easterly up the river from Mullan ends near the west edge of Section 35, so no road is shown for 1-1/2 miles. In Section 32, a road is shown turning south at the site of Mullan's camp, the area now known as Shoshone Park. This road connects up with the one from St. Regis Pass shown on T.47N., R6E., as described above. Clearly this was the through route, and the location agrees with both Mullan's map and the map in the USGS Prof. Paper 62.

The various surveyors' notes again confirm the plats. As is standard practice, the notes refer to streams, road or trail crossings, or other features along the line run. In Idaho these surveys were not made until 20 or 30 years after intensive mining development had begun. There are consequently many references to road and trail crossings, mines or other human activities. The Mullan Road is not referred to by name. However, as stated above, a road is shown going through St. Regis Pass, called Mullan Pass. The notes confirm this.

In locating the line between Sections 34 and 35, T48N, R6E., the surveyor refers to a road crossing just north of the quarter corner. The plat shows this as ending at a mine near the west edge of Section 35. In locating the line between Sections 35 and 36, which is just west of the present Mullan Pass, there is no reference to a road, but there is reference to a trail, which also shows on the plat. This trail does not go through the pass, but turns north in the western part of Section 36.

In Montana where there was not the extent of development and the surveys were also made earlier, the Mullan Road is usually referred to by name, and its course could be roughly traced without the plats. For example, while locating the line between Sections 14 and 15, T19N., R31W., the surveyor noted that he crossed the Mullan Road 73.10 chains north of the section corner. In this same township, in locating the lines between Sections 6 and 7 and between 5 and 6, the surveyor noted that he crossed Randolph Creek three times, referring to it by name in each instance. There is no reference to a road at any of these three crossings, and as stated earlier, no road is shown going up Randolph Creek on the plats.

In Township 19 North, Range 32 West, which lies west of Randolph Creek, the surveyor also notes crossing the Mullan Road. In locating the line between sections 11 and 12, he notes that he crossed the Mullan Road 49.90 chains south of the section corner. Similarly between Sections 2 and 3, these and other references to the Mullan Road in the township west of Randolph Creek should be conclusive information as to where the road went without all the other supporting information.

THE COEUR D'ALENE NATIONAL FOREST MAP OF 1911

This map is part of President Taft's Proclamation of June 29, 1911 establishing the St. Joe National Forest. Up to this time the area had been part of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest. The map itself was probably prepared at least a year earlier. It shows a road over the Bitterroot Divide and down the St. Regis River at what is St. Regis Pass and no road or trail over the present Mullan Pass.

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY MAPS

A series of Geological Survey maps of the area portray the changes in roads over the years and explain some of the misconceptions as to the original route.

U.S.G.S. Prof. Paper 62 shows the Mullan Road going over St. Regis Pass. Fieldwork for this map was done in 1900-1901; the Prof. Paper is dated 1908.

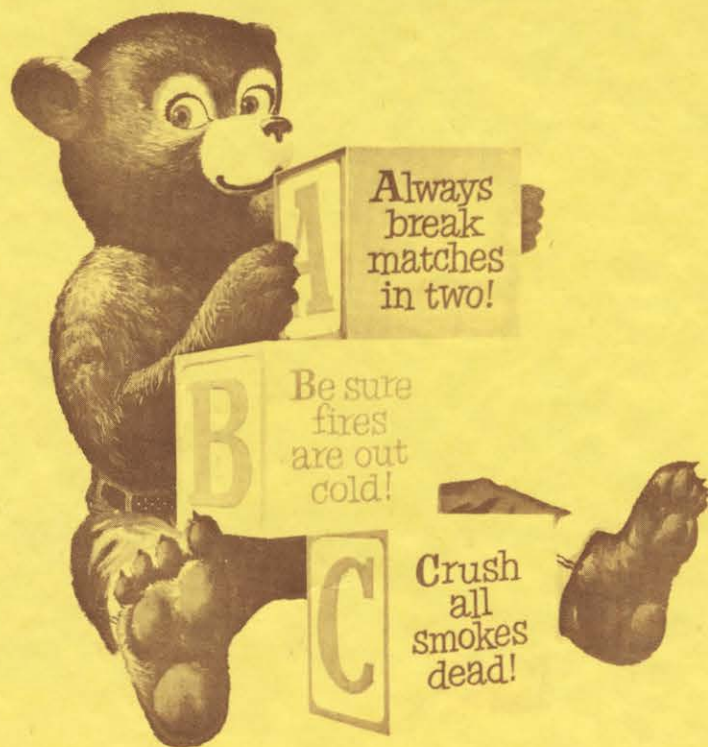
An "Idaho - Montana Coeur d'Alene Special Map" printed in 1906 and reprinted in 1916, shows a road over St. Regis Pass. It also shows a secondary road - dashed symbol - up the South Fork toward Mullan Pass. Unfortunately, the map stops just west of the pass. It cannot be determined whether this road actually went into or through the pass or not.

A third map, the Avery quadrangle, edition of 1917, shows roads over both passes.

An advance sheet of the Pottsville and vicinity, Idaho - Montana Map, prepared in 1939, shows a trail over St. Regis Pass. This map does not include Mullan Pass, but it is known that there was a road over Mullan Pass before 1939, so this road would undoubtedly have been shown if the map had extended that far.

The last in the series of maps is that for the Saltese Quadrangle, Idaho - Montana, published in 1956. This map shows a road over Mullan Pass and not even a trail over St. Regis Pass which is correct as of the present time. The unfortunate feature of this map is that the road up Randolph Creek and over Mullan Pass is incorrectly labeled as the Old Mullan Road. Since these maps are printed at infrequent intervals, this error will be carried forward for many years. Because these maps are, generally, accurate this error is given a high degree of authenticity.

It is hoped that in future map publications and in any historical articles about the area, the location of the original Mullan Road will be correctly portrayed. More positive action would be the correction of the plates for the Saltese quadrangle by the U.S.G.S. This is the source from which the error is most apt to be perpetuated. Erection of historical markers at appropriate points would also help.



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