

Payette National Forest
Heritage Program
Cultural Resources

Moose reference at Chamberlain
circa 1906 (actually 1902 or 3)
Big Horn Sheep on Ramey Rdg. (pg 189)

You asked for it. Here it is, a reprint of
the revised edition of "River of No Return."
I hope you will find it just as valuable as the
original printing.

The Publisher

No. 1740

River of No Return

(The Great Salmon River of Idaho)

A Century of Central Idaho and Eastern
Washington History and Development

Together with the Wars, Customs, Myths, and
Legends of the Nez Perce Indians

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Revised Edition

By Robert G. Bailey
Nez Perce County Historian for the Idaho State Historical Society

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R. G. Bailey Printing Company
Lewiston, Idaho-1935-1947

Directly east from Adams Camp, about ten miles distant, there is a conical mountain which rises abruptly from the backbone, which was a beckoning landmark to all comers. M. Reese Hattabaugh, a member of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, writes me a very interesting letter telling how this conical eminence obtained its name of "Gospel Moun-



Adams Camp. This was a noted stopping place on the old Mose Milner Trail. To the left may be seen Gospel Mountain.

tain," due to a sermon that was delivered there in 1899. Mr. Hattabaugh gives as his informant Israel Harris, who at the time of the Buffalo Hump rush was freighting over the Gospel Mountain road. The story was later confirmed by Charles Miller and the Galloway boys, who were in the mountains and listened to the sermon.

In September, 1899, Rev. W. N. Knox was on his way to the mountain country, when he met with a man by the name of Shannon. The latter invited Mr. Knox to camp with him. At this time they were near the top of this outstanding landmark. Several surveyors were camped near by, as well as a large number of prospectors, miners, and freighters who were headed for the Hump. As the full moon arose in all its majesty over the tree tops the camp site was bathed in a halo of soft, silvery light. It was a scene to inspire awe and reverence. Mr. Knox was of a highly religious turn of mind, and before he was fully aware of what he was about he had begun an address to a small group of the campers which soon attracted the attention of all within the sound of his voice. For some time the gentleman talked on the goodness of God and the necessity of remembering His commands to live an up-

right life. The talk of Mr. Knox was heralded far and wide, and as Mr. Hattabaugh says, "he may have sown a seed which bore fruit even in that small group." From that time to the present day the hill has been known as "Gospel Mountain."

Mr. Hattabaugh bears a very high testimonial to the worth of the Reverend Knox, characterizing him as "one of the most exemplary citizens of Idaho Country; a man of considerable humility who indeed practices the precepts of the lowly Nazarene." The wife of Mr. Knox, now deceased, was a daughter of that Mrs. Manuel who was either murdered or carried into captivity by members of Yellow Bull's band of Indians during the Nez Perce Indian war of 1877. A sister of Mrs. Knox was that small child carried on the back of Pat Brice from Whitebird to Mount Idaho during the Indian depredations along the Salmon River. This sister is married to William Bowman and lives at Butte, Montana. Mr. Knox is now (1933) living at Grangeville. He is clerk of the district court. He is the pioneer Baptist minister of Idaho County. During his life work in Idaho County, Reverend Knox has so endeared himself to all that even the children call him "Billy."

Thunder Mountain Mining Boom

WHEN a national weekly of high standing published a series of articles stating in effect that a gold strike had been made in central Idaho which was so rich that all one had to do was to go into the camp with a coal scuttle and a shovel, aided by the prospector's friend, the gold pan, stay a few days and return home with enough of the yellow metal to live ever after in ease and comfort, the lure was too great and, a short time after reading the articles, I was returning to the West as fast as a speeding limited train could take me. I didn't stop to reason, to think, or to use the knowledge gained in the many years I had followed the mining camps in Montana. The urge was in my bones and the wanderlust asserted itself with compelling force.

I had previously returned to the East to an easy position in the Government Printing Office at Washington, in the belief that I had seen all the West I wanted, and was willing to settle down to the prosaic life of the East in peace and contentment. But that pen picture of the alleged gold strike

in the wilds of the West had a fascination which was irresistible. Pooling my resources with those of a few other adventurous spirits who had the call but were tied down with families and other responsibilities and could not make the trip, I was soon on my way to line up with other thousands who were answering the call of the wilds.

The magazine story, as I remembered it, was entitled "At the Foot of the Rainbow, or Gold at Thunder Mountain in Unlimited Quantities for the Taking." It held out wonderful possibilities. In fact, in promises it was similar to what a story now (1932) running in a national magazine says were actual accomplishments in Thunder Mountain during the stampede. Fiction writers are far from being historians. The writer of the magazine articles certainly did not err upon the side of conservatism.

I went directly from Washington to Lewiston, Idaho, a train-trip of nearly three thousand miles; thence by stage coach to Grangeville, another 80 miles, which was the nearest outfitting point if one approached the mining camp from the north or west. Here I bought several pack horses, two saddle animals, hired a man familiar with some of the country over which I would have to travel, loaded the pack string to capacity, and headed for the unknown. The first leg of our journey was over the old Nez Perce Indian Trail (then a much traveled road) to Elk City, a distance of about sixty miles. From there the next 28 miles brought us to Dixie, and the end of all semblance of a road. Twelve miles down precipitous trails landed us in the very bowels of the earth, where we crossed the Salmon River on a crude boat, at Campbell's Ferry. Ascending the steep sides of the canyon another 15 miles brought us to Chamberlain Basin; here there were hundreds of acres of high mountain meadows, a most enticing spot, with big game to be had in abundance.

Our outfit was not the only one on the trail. There was much travel in both directions. It was early in the spring, and the highlands evidenced much snow. In one place we had crossed snow which was fully six feet deep. In the Chamberlain Basin there was an abundance of food for the horses and all outfits stopped over to rest and refresh their animals, which had been existing on very meager rations. No food, for the animals was carried along, dependence being entirely on what the country afforded.

A few days ahead of us on the trail was a very large outfit consisting of several men, a number of women destined for the redlight district and the dance halls, a complete bar,

and a plentiful assortment of liquors of various kinds. We were informed that the outfit had pulled out a couple of days ahead of us, although minus its leader. At the time of the Thunder Mountain rush there were yet in the Salmon River watershed numbers of moose. They had never been



In the early history of Central Idaho transportation was entirely by pack animals. Much of this territory is today without wagon roads, and pack trails are still the dependable movers of freight.

very plentiful in this section, as the country was not particularly suited to them. But there was a small band of these animals which made its headquarters in the Chamberlain Basin. These animals had been seen by many of the people who were stampeding for Thunder Mountain, but no one had molested them. The average mountain man and prospector does not kill wild life except for food, and then selects such animals if possible which fill his requirements and will not be wasted. Matured moose weigh from five hundred to thousand pounds, and, with plenty of smaller animals available, men used to the mountains did not kill them. Another reason in this particular case why the animals were not molested was that they were coming out of a very severe winter were extremely poor in flesh, and very little of the carcass was valuable for food.

The leader of the questionable pack train was a city man, a gambler by profession, and cared little for the conventions of civilization. He had been told about the moose. A couple of days before his outfit was ready to move, he had gone to a hill overlooking the willow swamp where the moose were yarded up, concealed himself where the animals could not

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see him or get wind of his presence, and deliberately slaughtered five of them. Without even going to the spot to ascertain if the moose were dead or only lying in misery badly wounded, he came back to camp and bragged about his deeds to everyone who would listen.

The better element among the campers was indignant and that evening held a meeting, where the sentiment of the gathering was the man's absence was more desirable



Dave Lewis, noted central Idaho trapper. This picture was taken at his camp near Maloney Creek, in the Chamberlain Basin country.

than his company. A committee was selected to offer him his choice of immediately backtracking or sharing the fate he had meted out to the moose. One day's journey before we reached Chamberlain Basin we met a man heading for civilization who was not at all sociable when he passed us on the trail. We were told this was the said person who had been invited to leave the country and never return.

From Chamberlain Basin we headed south over what was known as the Crooked Creek Trail. This was an old Indian trail which had been cut out and put in travel condition by Government troops in the late seventies when the Sheepstealer war was on. And the trail did not belie its name. It was indeed crooked and tortuous. In one place it followed several miles down stream through meadows in which beaver in al-

most uncounted numbers were at work on their houses and dams, only to turn sharply almost paralleling its course to follow up stream on the other side of a high ridge. Farther along we climbed to what was known as Ramey Ridge, a high divide, 8,000 feet in altitude, and with the marks of many wind-swept winters to be seen on the stunted trees. Drift snow was piled up high in many places. In spite of the forbidding aspects of the country, prospectors were in evidence everywhere and several of them had nice specimens of gold-bearing quartz to show for their efforts.

We descended from Ramey Ridge to Big Creek, a large band of Big Horn sheep being encountered, enroute. The animals were very shy and scattered before we had come very close to them. Along Big Creek there were many prospectors at work, though the ore was base and held out little hope of being successfully treated in that faraway place. What development had been done seemed to indicate permanency of the veins, with the ledge matter highly impregnated with copper. From Big Creek we headed directly south up Monumental Creek, going about twenty miles to reach the purported rich strike at Thunder Mountain. As we traveled up Monumental Creek we passed the monument from which the stream takes its name. This is a column 70 feet high. It is only three feet in diameter at its base. On the top of the column rests a large boulder, seemingly detached, and ready to fall at the first puff of a strong wind. A number of other columns are to be seen, but none of them of special importance. By actual count we crossed and recrossed Monumental Creek seventy-two times. It was in this creek bed near the mouth of the stream that the detachment of United States soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Catlin narrowly escaped annihilation in 1878 at the hands of the Sheepstealer Indians. Tiring of the eternal stream crossing, we ascended the mountain side to the west and attempted to continue up the "hog-back" ridge. This nearly proved our undoing. When crossing loose shale rock, without warning the whole mountain side began to slide. There was nothing we could do. This evidently was not the first time our sure-footed ponies had faced a like situation. Not a struggle did they make. As the slide started, the horses braced their forelegs, squatted on their haunches and, like a small boy coasting on snow, slid along with the avalanche apparently as unconcerned as if it were an everyday occurrence. When the bottom of the canyon was reached, aside from bruises, the animals did not seem to have suffered any hardships. However, after

that I was careful not to lead the pack string across loose rock if there was any way of getting around it.

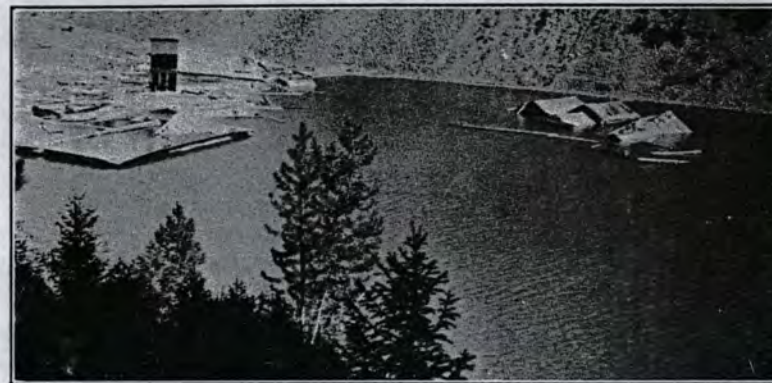
Arriving at Thunder Mountain we found that hundreds of prospectors had preceded us and in every direction gleaming squared tree trunks proclaimed that all available land had been located, regardless of whether placer or quartz ground had been found. The object was to locate before the other fellow and then proceed to prospect. For some reason I was not impressed by the district, and though I prospected diligently in many directions I made no locations whatever. On one of the earlier locations, and one which had much to do with the stampede, there was a peculiar stunt pulled, which perhaps helped to confirm my growing suspicions that all was not well. At the mouth of the tunnel ore bunkers had been erected and a man day and night with a rifle on his shoulder patrolled the ground and would permit no one to touch, examine, or take away any of the ore specimens. This meant one of two things. Either the ore was fabulously rich or there was a "nigger in the woodpile" and it was not desired that the real value of the strike be known.

Thunder Mountain provided mining sharks a splendid opportunity to locate ground and sell millions of dollars worth of stock on the strength of the purported rich strikes which had been made, only to leave the stockbuyers holding as their only asset pieces of prettily lithographed paper. There was vastly more money mined from the public than ever was taken from the ground in the Thunder Mountain district.

Several boom towns had a mushroom-like growth and, for a time, had a lurid existence. Most of the people who came into the district seemed to have money, and saloons and kindred resorts did a flourishing business. Only two of the towns lived long enough to even get on the map—these being Thunder City and Roosevelt. Town lots in this latter were sold to outsiders. I had a friend in Butte, Montana, who wrote me he had invested in two of the town lots and asked me to advise him as to their value. I found both of them located in the bed of a stream and worthless even if the town had amounted to anything. Eventually the whole mountain slid into the valley and buried the remnants of Roosevelt under water many feet deep. The townsite is now a lake bed.

Credit for discovery of the Thunder Mountain gold outcroppings is generally given to the Caswell brothers. Ben and Dan Caswell went there in the late nineties, and subsequently were joined by another brother, as well as W. T. Richie and

a Mr. Huntley. These men mined in the district for seven years prior to the 1902 stampede. It is said they took out in excess of \$20,000. There was no placer ground in the generally accepted sense. A huge porphyry dike crossed the country. This had become considerably eroded and slacked. It was from this decomposed dike that the gold was washed,



Courtesy Byron Defenbach

The abandoned town of Roosevelt. In 1909, a landslide below town caused a lake to form.

by the use of extremely crude apparatus. These prospectors located the dike and did considerable prospecting on it. Col. W. H. Dewey, a millionaire of Southern Idaho, learned of the operations of the Caswells, obtained an option on the claims for \$100,000, sent in engineers to examine the property, and as a result of their report paid the agreed price several months before the time of the option expiration. Colonel Dewey organized a company among Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, capitalists and proceeded at once to run several hundred feet of tunnels and crosscuts. At the time I went to Thunder Mountain, a 10-stamp mill had just been packed in for the Dewey mine and great were the expectations of what was to be accomplished. These expectations were never realized.

Satisfying ourselves that Thunder Mountain held out no prospects to poor men, we headed southward to Cape Horn Hot Springs, where we had been told there were splendid prospects for mining in placer ground. Our way led over the trail by which travel from Boise came to Thunder Mountain. The route was over a high range of mountains, with a trail steep and winding. It ascended over a continuous series of switchbacks. In the most difficult part of the trail we en-

countered a mule train packing in the stems and stamps for a 40-stamp mill which was to be erected on one of the group of mines. These mules were performing a service which seemed impossible. The steel stems each weighed 1,800 pounds and were packed tandem between two mules. It was impossible for the animals to make a turn at the switchbacks. They were led as far forward as possible to the end of the "V." Other mules followed with supports which were placed under the load. The mules were led from under the load, two fresh animals faced in the opposite direction and the load fastened to them. This operation had to be repeated at each switchback, and so it was a slow and laborious operation. Even on better going the load had to be shifted to fresh animals every mile or less, owing to the extreme weight. The normal load for a mule is not over 400 pounds.

In Penn Basin, one of the upland meadows near the headwaters of one branch of the Salmon River, we witnessed the destruction of a 36-mule pack train of supplies destined for Thunder Mountain. The trail followed a benchland several hundred feet above the floor of the basin proper, and then descended a series of switchbacks. We were in the lowlands and had not started up the benchland trail. Looking toward this upland we saw a train of mules in wild stampede. Something had alarmed them and they were completely out of control. When the leader arrived at the brink of the hill, instead of following down the winding trail he lunged straight ahead, with the other animals following close behind. The way was over large boulders and through thick jack pines. Not an animal reached the floor of the basin without falling down many times, and many of them rolled most of the way. Some of the animals were badly injured and the pack loads were for the most part complete wrecks.

From the Salmon River watershed we crossed the divide to the headwaters of the Payette River, here coming to the end of the trail and contacting the wagon road over which supplies were being hauled in for Thunder Mountain. There were literally train loads of machinery and supplies piled up at the end of the road. It was being hauled in from the railroad and, as no facilities were available for storing the machinery, it piled by the roadside without any protection from the elements. Some of this machinery never reached its destination, as the boom collapsed before it could be hauled in. The crop of sucker stock buyers had been harvested more for the benefit of the promoters than for mine development.

Fabulously Rich Lost Mines

LIKE the proverbial "biggest fish that ever was caught was the fish that got away," so in the same sense are the "lost" mines the richest ever discovered. There is not a mining district or camp in the West which has not a legendary "lost" mine. The details as to how these mines were discovered and then lost differ, but all unite in the "statement of fact" that the lost mines were the richest ever. There are dozens of such traditions regarding central Idaho discoveries. Eugene Burton, of Nezperce, has caught the spirit in which these legends are related, and in an interesting article relates the story of one of them which is a fair sample of the stories as a whole. The article is here used by his permission. Mr. Burton spends each summer in the wilds of Idaho prospecting, fishing, and camera hunting. He has a wealth of interesting data regarding these subjects, and he has a collection of wild life photographs which tell a wonderful story. Here is the story Mr. Burton tells regarding the Indian Postoffice on the Lolo Trail and a legendary lost mine said to have been discovered near that place:

"Crafty prospectors, whose search for the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow has taken them into strange lands and strange places, are again searching for the lost mine of Indian legendry. Nuggets of rare richness are reputed to have been taken from the creek bed, yet for years the location of the mysterious treasure chest has been lost except in tradition and the spoken word whispered around campfires and on hunting expeditions. Intimately associated with tales of the lost gold mine are the anecdotes of the historic Indian Postoffice.

"Deep in the Idaho mountains on the winding Lolo Trail is the 'postoffice' once used by Indians and prospectors. Its legendry dates back hundreds of years. As a trysting place for redskinned sweethearts, as the spot where messages were left for passing prospectors and tokens were exchanged between roving bands of warriors and huntsmen, it became known to hundreds throughout the central Idaho country. No records were kept. There was no collection of box rent. There was no published list of unclaimed letters. It was a pile of rock off the side of the trail and it still bears the name: 'Indian Postoffice.'

"The mound of rock is indicated on government maps of the old Lolo Trail system. The trail itself has been out of use for years because of the construction of better routes by