FORT BOISE TO THE BLUE MOUNTAIN CROSSING

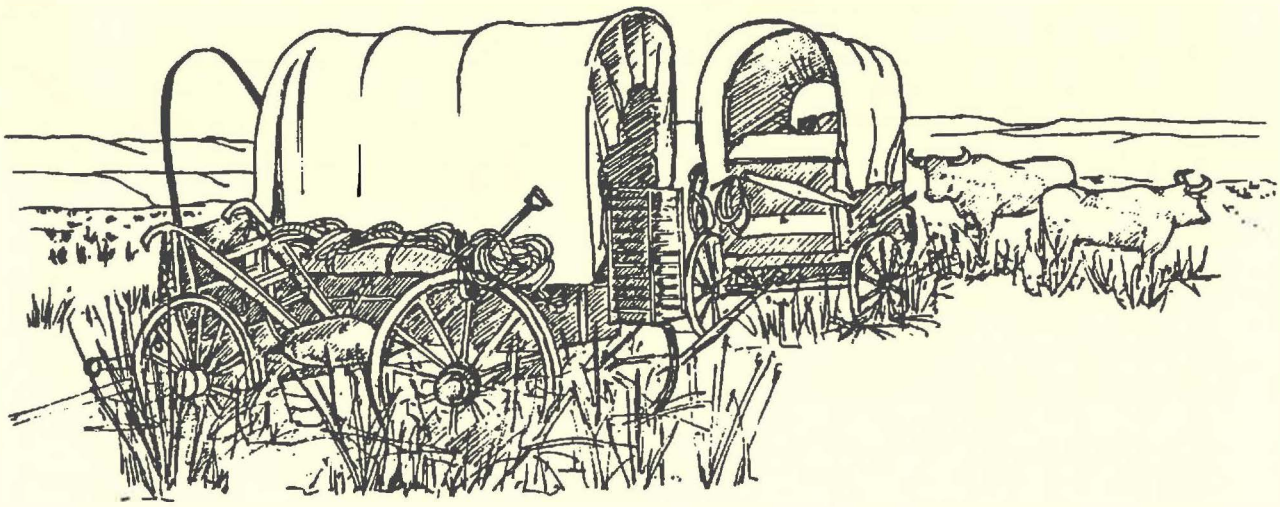
TOURS ON THE OREGON TRAIL

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

11TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

BAKER CITY, OREGON

1993



"Tis the long road that has no end." and some of us are almost inclined to think that it is a long way to the end of this.
Samuel Handsaker, 1853

The Oregon Trail in Oregon

Within the present day borders of Oregon, the emigrants traveled about 400 miles to reach the Willamette Valley. The Oregon Trail enters the state on the northern and southern alternate routes, which merge on the west bank of the Snake, opposite the site of Fort Boise.

As they progressed west, the emigrants left the northern edge of the Great Basin and entered the Blue Mountains and Columbia Plateau physiographic province - areas strikingly different from that of their lengthy trek across the sagebrush covered Snake River plain. Well-watered valleys and timbered mountains came into view. The valleys brought to mind the bounty and promise of Oregon, giving some encouragement to the emigrants that they were nearing the end of their journey. In little more than one month they would arrive at their destination, the Willamette Valley -"the Garden of the World".

Most of the route followed by the emigrants across Oregon is generally paralleled by Interstate 84 today. The Oregon Trail remained a principal travel corridor after the passing of the emigrants. The land along the original route was taken up by early settlers, and in places the Oregon Trail became improved stage and freighting roads. Eventually, parts of the Oregon Trail became the Old Oregon Trail Memorial Highway in Oregon. Towns, farms, and road improvements were placed on the old Oregon Trail. Remnants of the Oregon Trail in Oregon are a scarce and valued resource.

Today, the longest cross country segments of the Oregon Trail on public land in Oregon are located on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in the forested Blue Mountain crossing; on the Barlow Road through the Cascades in the Mount Hood National Forest; and the crossing the Columbia River uplands in eastern Oregon in an area withdrawn by the US Navy for the Boardman Bombing Range. These cross country segments were documented and mapped by the National Park Service, in the 1981 Comprehensive Management and Use Plan for the Oregon National Historic Trail.

Numerous intact Trail segments and sites are located on private lands in Oregon, and on the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation are presently working toward development of a culture heritage center which will tell the story of the Oregon Trail from the perspective of Indian people.

The state of Oregon and the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council have developed Oregon Trail interpretive kiosks at all safety rest areas on the Interstate 84 across the state. All safety rest areas have new interpretive panels which were installed during the spring of this year, for the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial celebration. The Oregon Trail Coordinating Council arranged for the new interpretation, using research of emigrant journals performed by Dr. Stephen Beckham. Funding for the journal research was a joint venture by OTCC and other agencies, including the BLM. The new interpretive panels have exciting full color illustrations by Sea Reach, Ltd. of Rose Lodge, Oregon.

Several communities across the state have erected new interpretive signs or kiosks for the Sesquicentennial. New kiosks are found at Vale, and south of Nyssa - communities founded on agriculture and stock raising. A new Oregon Trail Agricultural Museum has opened in

Nyssa, including an exhibit on the Hudson Bay Company. A contemporary interpretation of the Oregon Trail, in sculpture and art, has been developed at Birnie Park in La Grande.

The Sesquicentennial has inspired fresh interpretations and renewed awareness of the importance of preservation of the Oregon Trail at the local, state, and federal levels.

The Northwest Chapter of OCTA has been actively placing trail markers and interpretive signs at many locations on state or private lands. Most recently the Northwest Chapter marked the Oregon Trail ruts at the summit of the Sisley to Swayze Creek route.

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest has been working on the completion of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Park, which provides access to discovery trails and interpretation of the Blue Mountain cross-country segment of the Oregon Trail. The Blue Mountain segment is remarkable, the intact ruts climbing through lovely pine and fir forests and mountains meadows are astounding.

The Burns Paiute Indians are generously providing a special program, in the Blue Mountains, for the OCTA convention. The Oregon Trail emigration brought changes to the native Indian people of Oregon, as well as changing the face of the land through settlement. The valleys and mountains of eastern Oregon were home to several Indian tribes for thousands of years.

Intact segments of the Oregon Trail are interpreted at 8 sites on BLM lands across the state: in Vale, Prineville and Salem Districts. The two sites on Prineville District are Fourmile Canyon and the John Day River Crossing. The site on Salem District is Wildwood on the Barlow Road.

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center at Flagstaff Hill is located in the Vale District, Bureau of Land Management. In addition, the Vale District manages four interpretive waysides on the Oregon Trail: at Keeney Pass, Alkali Springs, Birch Creek, and Echo Meadows. Seven locations of the Oregon Trail in the Vale District are designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Keeney Pass is on the National Register of Historic Places. Short stretches of the Oregon Trail cross scattered BLM land at four other locations (not readily accessible) in the Vale District, including a short segment in the Blue Mountains. The route of the Oregon Trail on BLM land is marked with carsonite posts, or the older obelisks that marked the Trail for the 1976 Bicentennial.

Fort Boise to Farewell Bend

Fort Boise (Hudson Bay Company)

I-84 Reference: The Oregon Trail crossed the Snake River about 12 miles south (upstream) of where the Interstate crosses the Snake River at Ontario today.

The emigrants had crossed hundreds of miles of sand, sagebrush, and rock in their journey along the Snake River plain at the northern edge of the Great Basin. Poised to leave the Great Basin, emigrants who took the northern route of the Oregon Trail would cross the Snake River for the last time at Fort Boise.

The first attempt at EuroAmerican occupation of the area was a winter post established by John Reid in 1813, about one mile south from the Fort Boise site. Reid's fort and contingent was destroyed by an Indian attack in January 1814. Donald Mackenzie of the Hudson Bay Company also tried to establish a post in 1819, but was not successful. Fort Boise was first constructed by Thomas McKay for the Hudson Bay Company in 1834. According to historian Stephen Beckham, the first Fort was constructed upstream on the Boise River, and a second fort was constructed in 1838 on the east bank of the Snake River, one mile below the Boise River mouth.

In 1836, Marcus Whitman brought a wagon as far as Fort Boise, where the missionary party then took to horses to complete the rest of their journey. In 1840, a group of trappers and their families brought a wagon through from Fort Hall to the Whitman Mission - the first wagon to cross beyond the banks of the Snake River.

Thomas Farnham, traveling by horseback in 1839, described the Fort as it appeared in that year:

> "This Fort stands on the eastern bank of the Saptin...It consists of a parallelogram about 100 feet square, surrounded by a stockade of poles about 15 feet in height. It is constructed of logs, and contains a large dining room, a sleeping apartment and kitchen. On the north side of the area, in front of this, is the store; on the south side, the dwellings of the servants; back of the main building, an out-door oven; and in the northeast corner of the stockade is the bastion. This was Fort Boisais in 1839. Mons. Payette was erecting a neat adobe wall around it. He expected soon to be able to tear away the old stockade..".

Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank described the Fort as it appeared in 1852:

> "It is built of unburnt brick, a large yard inclosed by a wall some 12 feet high and 2 buildings of the same about 14 feet square and one story high. It is tenanted by a rough looking Scotchman and a few indians and squaws. -It is a station of the Hudson's Bay Co."

INSIDE VIEW OF FORT BOISSE ON SNAKE RIVER.

William Henry Tappan, 1849
March of the Mounted Riflemen - Major Osborne Cross

Fort Boise was the first place where agriculture was practiced in the region. Many forts cultivated small plots of vegetables. The first clerk, Francois Payette, was an gentle man, providing food and information to early travelers. According to Farnham, Mr. Payette's Fort trapped 12-15 packs of beaver a year, and during salmon season they procured and dried salmon to supply other fur posts.

> Mary Richardson Walker, August, 1838: "Last night we encamped opposite Boisie. Had milk & butter for supper...Today had salmon, boiled pudding, turnip sauce for dinner. One cow at the fort gives 24 quarts of milk a day. Have pumpkins too."

> Medoram Crawford, September, 1842: "At the Fort we tasted musk mellon but of a very indifferent quality. They raise corn and a few other vegetables in small quantities."

By the early 1850s, the Fort was neglected as the Hudson Bay Company was withdrawing from the region. Abigail Scott wrote that the Fort was in the possession of traders, in August, 1852. Emigrants were not impressed by the sight of its rude mud huts and decayed appearance. Traders in the 1850s occupied the site and emptied the pockets of emigrants needing food and ferry assistance in crossing the river. Charlotte and Bynon Pengra paid $17 to cross two wagons and one horse by ferry at Fort Boise in 1853.

Emigrants who chose to cross the Snake River at Three Island Crossing faced a second hazardous crossing at Fort Boise, where some would drown. Celinda Hine's father drowned at the crossing, in August, 1853. Although the Indian people made an attempt to recover his body, they were unsuccessful. Celinda wrote: "It seems Pa had a presentment that something was to happen as he had often spoken of his dread of crossing at this crossing."

> Joel Palmer, September, 1845: "At this place the road crosses the river; the ford is about four hundred yards below the fort, and strikes across to the head of an island, then bears to the left to the southern bank; the water is quite deep, but not rapid..."

> Amelia Stewart Knight, August, 1853: "...have just reached Fort Boise, and campt, our turn will come to cross sometime tomorrow, there is one small ferry boat running here, owned by the Hudson Bay company, have to pay 8 dollars a wagon, our worst trouble at these large rivers, is swimming the stock over...however, there are indians who swim the river from morning till night. it is fun for them, there is many a drove of cattle that could not be got over without their help, by paying them a small sum...this fort Boise is nothing more than three mud buildings, its inhabitants, the Hudsons bay company, a few french men, some half naked indians...."

At Fort Boise the early emigrants might encounter the "Sandwich Islanders" (Pacific Island people or Hawaiians) who were in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. More often they met the Northern Paiute, or perhaps the Shoshonne-Bannock people who came to the Snake River to procure salmon. The confluence of the Boise and Snake Rivers was an important salmon fishing station and meeting place for the tribes. The Paiute Indians traded salmon to the emigrants, and assisted in the river crossing.

To emigrant eyes, the Indian people who occupied the Snake River region were scantily clothed, unwashed, materially impoverished, and ill fed folk who plagued the emigrants with offers to trade. Rarely did the emigrants appreciate the native people and their culture that had met the challenge and imperative of living in this arid land for thousands of years.

> Sarah Sutton, August, 1854: "...here is a low sod establishment they call the fort. that is all the building there is, with 1 covered wagon and 3 cloth tents, and 7 or 8 indian willow wigwams and the poorest dirtyest looking tribe we have yet seen. several are entirely naked."

On the west bank of the Snake River, the emigrants would camp to prepare for the dusty, dry journey over the hills through Keeney Pass to the Malheur River - a distance of about 16 miles. Those who had pursued the South Alternate route (following the south bank of the Snake, rather than crossing at Three Island crossing) would cross the Owyhee River about one mile upstream from its confluence with the Snake. Often, the south route emigrants camped on the west bank and rested their cattle, or went across the river to visit Fort Boise.

By the early 1860s an number of ferry enterprises had been established at this crossing of the Snake River. Captain Jonathan Keeney operated a ferry here in 1863. Fort Boise itself was eventually destroyed by neglect and the numerous floods of the Snake and Boise rivers.

Owyhee River

One of the many interesting places which, unfortunately, we do not have time to visit, is the location of the southern route Oregon Trail crossing of the Owyhee River.

Emigrants who followed the southern route stayed on the south side of the Snake River, following it around a huge bend where the river turns north, and eventually arriving at the Owyhee River crossing. The Owyhee crossing is 2 and 1/2 miles south of the Fort Boise's location on the east bank of the Snake. At the Owyhee River crossing, the survivors of the 1860 Indian attack on the Utter-Van Orman wagon train encamped waiting for a rescue.

On September 9, 1860 the 44 member Utter-Van Orman wagon train was attacked in Idaho near Castle Butter (the Sinker Creek Massacre). The 33 survivors abandoned their wagons. They struggled for 70 miles and 10 days over the south alternate route, through to the mouth of the Owyhee River, where members encamped beneath a knoll hoping for a rescue. From the Owyhee camp a portion of the group, Van Ormans and Utters, went forward on the Trail and were attacked and killed on the emigrant road between Farewell Bend and the Burnt River.

Young brothers Jacob and Joseph Rieth decided to go ahead on foot to seek assistance, arriving 24 days later on October 2 at the Indian Agency on the Umatilla River. Word was sent, and a military rescue expedition was dispatched under Captain Dent. The troops arrived to find the last survivors at the Owyhee River on October 24, 1860. By the time help arrived, the Owyhee party had run out of any substantial food, and was starving. Only twelve survived at the Owyhee camp. Some had resorted to cannibalism of the dead members of the encamped group. According to survivor Emiline Trimble's story of horror, the survivors became frantic and mad with hunger, and ate the bodies of the dead children.

Keeney Pass Wayside

Lytle Boulevard to Vale: When the cattleguard is crossed begin looking for visible ruts of the Oregon Trail on the both sides of the county road, where the Trail is marked with brown carsonite posts on BLM land. Eight miles of the Trail route crosses BLM land, where remnants of the Oregon Trail are visible.

As we enter Cow Hollow, we leave behind the intersection between the South and North routes of the Oregon Trail. From the crossing of the Snake River at Fort Boise, the emigrants headed north over the hills to the Malheur River - a journey of about 15 miles from the Snake River. The journey would take them up a hollow to a low pass, then descending another hollow to the Malheur River.

The Oregon Trail is interpreted at the BLM's Keeney Pass wayside. Deep, double swales mark where the wagons climbed the summit.

Today the low pass through the hills is known as Keeney Pass. The pass did not have this name historically, during the years of emigration. It was named by the Malheur Country Historical Society, in honor of Captain Jonathan Keeney. Keeney brought his family over the Oregon Trail in 1846, and later returned to settle in Vale and establish the ferry at Fort Boise in 1863. In fall of 1863, he acquired some land and built a log cabin wayside inn on the banks of the Malheur River, at present day Vale. Keeney sold his property in 1870 to Louis B. Rinehart. In 1872, Rinehart replaced the log structure with a stone house which became known as the Vale Inn, and served as a stage station. The stone house stands today in the town of Vale - it is Italiante or Villa style, constructed of locally quarried stone.

The Oregon Trail at Keeney Pass, with its several miles of wagon ruts, is listed on the National Register as a Historic District. The route from the Snake River to the Malheur River was a one day trek, with no water except what was carried from the Snake. Only a few emigrants made

a dry camp along the road. Emigrants arrived at this point in their journey generally in late summer or August: it was hot, dusty, dry, and windy, and littered with dead cattle. The conditions at Keeney Pass were similar to those encountered for most of the Oregon Trail journey across Idaho.

> Medorem Crawford, September, 1842: "Left camp at 11 o'clock & traveled briskly over a sandy country suffered considerable for water as the day was exceedingly hot..."
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> Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank, September 1852: "Proceeded about five miles against an increasing west wind over a very dusty road till it became so bad that we could not see our teams or hardly breathe and were obliged to heave to for a season."
>
> Amelia Knight, August 1853: "...the roads have been very dusty, no water, nothing but dust, and dead cattle all day, the air filled with the odor from dead cattle."
>
> Sarah Sutton, August 1854: "... come 15 miles without water across the most dusty dry and hot bare desert that any person ever travers'd and campt for the night on the creek Malheur."

Henderson Grave

Alongside the route of the Oregon Trail to the Malheur River, on a pullout west (left) of the county road is a large stone outcrop bearing a legend to mark the grave of John Henderson, who died August 9, 1852. The rough inscription is carved into the native stone, and undoubtably marks a genuine grave in the vicinity. Stories about Henderson dying of thirst within sight of the Malheur River appear to have no foundation in known records.

Malheur River Crossing and Hot Springs (Vale)

The city of Vale is located on the route of the Oregon Trail, where the emigrant road crossed the Malheur River and emigrants would pause to rest near the Malheur River hot springs. Emigrants stopped on the Malheur River to camp and rest at the end of their day's journey from the Snake River. Peter Skene Ogden, of the Hudson Bay Company, referred to the "Unlucky" or "Unfortunate" River in journals kept while trapping for furs in the region in the 1820s.

Hot springs erupted from the riverbank, where some emigrants washed themselves and their clothes. In 1843, Captain John Fremont measured the temperature of the springs at 193 degrees, where the ground was "too hot for the naked foot". The Malheur River campground provided abundant water, plenty of grass for the cattle if it was not all eaten off by earlier trains, and willow for fuel. In the 1853, emigrants found a trading post, run by a Mr. Turner, on the banks of the Malheur River. It was as hot as an oven, and the emigrants did not look forward to the next day's journey toward Farewell Bend on the Snake.

> P.V. Crawford, August 1851: "Our camp this night was on the Malheur creek...here we found a rock bottom, with springs of hot water boiling up in the bottom of the ford. At this place, there is a large butte of red lava that looks like it had not got cool

yet, and one would hardly suppose it had, from the number of hot springs along its base."

Meek Cut-Off (Vale)

From the Malheur River, on August 23, 1845, 200 emigrant families left the Oregon Trail to try a route unproven for wagons, west across central Oregon's desert on the Meek Cut-off. Trapper Stephen Meek, perhaps overconfident in his knowledge of the route as a horse trail, led about 1000 emigrants off the main road. They became lost in the arid desert. Exhausted, thirsty and ill, many of the Meek Wagon Train died on this perilous journey that took them to Harney Basin, Wagontire Mountain, and a descent along the Deschutes River. Dissention and confusion led some emigrants to threaten Stephen Meek with death. The company split near the Maury Mountains, finally struggling to The Dalles.

> John Herren, September 3, 1845: "We are making slow headway, the country here is so broken and rocky that we cannot get along fast, and we are rather doubtful that our pilot is lost...Some talk of stoning and others say hang him."

Somewhere on the journey of the Lost Meeks, emigrants discovered gold nuggets as they dug in a stream for water. Meek train emigrant William Herren remembered that the bright pebbles were found while his father was digging for water in the dry bed of a creek. A later account of the event reported that the emigrants filled a blue bucket with nuggets, leaving the bucket on the ground where they crossed the creek.

> Such stories gave rise to the legend of the "Blue Bucket Mine", and encouraged hundreds to seek its still unknown location in the mountains of eastern Oregon. In October, 1861, a party of prospectors seeking the Blue Bucket Mine discovered gold on a tributary of the Powder River. A gold rush ensued to the Powder River Mines, and the boom town of Auburn was erected overnight.

Other alternate routes across central Oregon were proposed. The Free Emigrant route was promoted in 1852. In 1853, the Elliot Wagon Train, and in 1854 the Macy Wagon Train followed the first part of the Meek route across central Oregon, then proceeded over the Cascades to arrive in the Willamette Valley near Eugene. The central Oregon routes were never popular with emigrants, who had heard the story of the lost Meek wagon train.

> Samuel Handsaker, September, 1853: "A new road leads off from here which is supposed to be a nearer route to the south part of Oregon, but as we cannot hear for certain that any persons has ever traveled the road through, we think it imprudent to take it."

Alkali Springs

From the Malheur River the emigrants would travel north for 22 miles, over level terrain and low rolling hills, to Birch Creek and Farewell Bend on the Snake River. Midway on the journey the emigrants would stop to noon or camp near Alkali Springs.

> From Vale, Alkali Springs is located 10 miles due north. From Highway 26, several

miles north of Vale, turn right on 5th Avenue onto a county road out to Alkali Springs. The unimproved, unmarked road is not recommended for passenger vehicles. The Vale District office of the BLM (at 100 Oregon Street, in Vale) can provide information, detailed directions, and advice for travelers to Alkali Springs.

I-84 Reference: Proceeding north from Ontario, the Oregon Trail is located about 6 miles to the west, over the hills, from the Interstate exit at Moore's Hollow.

The Oregon Trail route travels north from the Malheur River, over relatively level terrain in the broad valley of Willow Creek, then turns slightly east up a valley to Alkali Springs. From Alkali Springs it heads north over the western slope of Tub Mountain, then down a dry ravine to Willow Springs and over a ridge to Birch Creek. The Oregon Trail through this area, shown on General Land Office maps, was used in the 1870s as a freighting road. Most of it is today a county road.

About 9 miles of this 22 mile stretch is located on BLM land, and is marked with carsonite posts. The BLM has developed an interpretive site at Alkali Springs. The country at Alkali Springs gives a sense of the desolation of the landscape as it might have been experienced by the emigrants. The springs well up in an alkali plain, forming an island of green tucked away in the golden bunchgrass-covered hills. Today, as in Oregon Trail days, the road is dusty in the extreme. Fine, loose silt - up to 6 inches deep in the roadbed- billows up in enormous, choking clouds to surround traveling vehicles. And, when it rains, the muddy road becomes greasy and treacherous, even for four wheel drive vehicles.

The emigrants referred to the spring as Sulphur Springs, and found it unfit for human consumption but palatable for cattle. Some emigrants camped near Alkali Springs, but most headed to a camp on Birch Creek. The trek was a hot one in the August sun, so many emigrants opted to travel in the evening.

Abigail Scott, August 1852: "We halted at this place until three o'clock when we yoked up and drove on to Sulphur springs, then miles, and encamped...this valley appears fertile, being covered with grass. Leaving this bottom we struck sand hills and traveled through a very dusty ravine until ten o'clock...The evening was very pleasant and we were favored with a beautiful moonlight. The water of these springs is not very palatable, it being strongly impregnated with Sulphur."

John Zieber, September 1851: "...after traveling 13 miles we unexpectedly came to several springs on left which, from the appearance of the ground and grass round them and the smell near them, we supposed were hot springs, but they were cold. There was some doubt about the quality of the water, as there was a white substance on the surface of the ground which some persons took to be alkali....the water was slight brackish."

Esther Belle McMillan Hanna, August 14, 1852: "Travelled until nearly dark last night, when we stopped to get supper. This done, we started on again, intending to go as far as we could, but the wind rose very high, whirling the dust about so that we could not see the road. We were obliged to stop by the road side and tie up our cattle as there was no grass. There was a sulphur spring near but it was not fit to drink."

Birch Creek (southwest of Farewell Bend)

I-84 Reference, Milepost 354: About a mile south of the Farewell Bend exit, Birch Creek may be quickly glimpsed to the west of Interstate 84, as a narrow gap in the hills where the creek comes into the Snake.

Birch Creek BLM Wayside: Between Birch Creek and Farewell Bend, one-half mile of wagon ruts crosses an isolated 160 acre parcel of BLM land. BLM has marked the ruts here, and developed a small interpretive pullout. To reach the wayside, take the Farewell Bend exit, turn to the west onto a county road. Follow the county road to the top of the bluff, where the roads fork. Stay on the right hand fork and follow the road to a small parking pullout on BLM land, about 3/4 mile from the fork. Beyond the BLM land, the Birch Creek crossing and emigrant camping area is on private land for which there is no public access.

> At the place where the roads fork at the top of the bluff, is the site of an emigrant grave which was uncovered during Interstate 84 construction, and later reburied. The grave was of a man and woman buried in a wagon box. According to Bob Rennells, a fragment of the woman's dress, and the heel of the man's boot were found, but the wagon box was decayed. The reburial site is marked with a post and a pile of rocks in the fork.

At the end of the long trip from the Malheur River, emigrants often camped near the Birch Creek Crossing, only a few miles southeast of the Snake River at Farewell Bend. Birch Creek was given its name by French-Canadian fur trappers. Despite its name, emigrants wrote that only willows were to be found growing where the emigrant road crossed the banks of Birch Creek.

Here the emigrants were beginning to pass through country where elevations would continue to increase until they reached the summit of the Blue Mountains, about one hundred miles ahead. The landscape was a dramatic change from the Snake River plain that the emigrants had traversed across Idaho.

> Riley Root, August 1848: "From Sulphur Spring the road ascends rapidly to its highest point, a mile or two father on, where the country can be viewed for a considerable distance all around. Reflecting upon such a wonderful scenery as is here on every side displayed, the mind can hardly appreciate the amount of dynamics adequate to displace and disrupt the surface of the earth so immensely. It appears like a great harrow, fit only for Hercules to use in leveling off the surface of some planet."

In 1851, emigrant John Zieber recorded the names of several emigrants whose graves were found on the west bank of the creek, and one grave about halfway between the creek and Farewell Bend. These graves have not been located today. Emigrants who camped at Birch Creek traveled 3-4 miles to Farewell Bend and then proceed on to the Burnt River.

Farewell Bend

Here, where the Snake River begins to enter the canyon, the river is wide and deep. A sharp eye can spot a faint swale of wagon ruts, descending a low hill on the west side of the

Interstate exit, on a direct line (from Birch Creek) toward Farewell Bend.

From their camp at Birch Creek, emigrants proceeded four miles to the Snake River. This was the last place they would see the Snake River on their journey, hence the name "Farewell Bend".

> William Watson, August, 1849: "Starting at six o'clock, three miles brought us to the Snake river, where was a good camp. Here we bade adieu to Snake River, which is said henceforth to pursue its course amongst impracticable mountains where there is no possibility of traveling with animals. We ascended a long and somewhat steep hill, and crossing the dividing ridge, one and half miles to Burnt River, which here looks like a hole among the hills."

At Farewell Bend the Snake River flows into a deep canyon, which only becomes more precipitous and rugged as it proceeds north to Hells Canyon.

> Wilson Price Hunt's 1811 Astorian party made an attempt to follow the Snake River through to the Columbia, and discovered the difficulty. Hunt himself followed a path through the Burnt River and across the Blue Mountains which was pointed out to him by the Indians. Thus the Oregon Trail through this area was a trail known to the Indians, who revealed its importance as a route for passage through the mountains to the Columbia River. A few Oregon Trail emigrants who tried to boat their way down the Snake, by turning their wagons into ships, had to abandon the attempt when they encountered the rapids and vertical canyon walls of the Snake.

Emigrants camped at Farewell Bend, if they had not established evening camp at Birch Creek. At Farewell Bend in 1843, Captain John Fremont wrote in his journal about the geographic character of the Great Basin - the first explorer to recognize its nature as a large area of internally confined rivers. In 1834, naturalist John Kirk Townsend wrote that the wide, deep river seemed "perfectly navigable for steamboats, or even larger craft."

During the years of the 1860s gold rush to Idaho and eastern Oregon, ferries were established near Farewell Bend. R.P. Olds established a ferry here in 1862. Now, emigrants could follow an improved route from the Boise basin to Olds Ferry across the Snake. As settlements grew up in the area, some steamboats were set to operation on this portion of the Snake, but they were never very successful.

Farewell Bend to Huntington

Visible traces can be seen where the Oregon Trail climbs the hill at Farewell Bend and descends from the summit toward the Burnt River, at the present town of Huntington. Here the story of the Utter-Van Orman wagon train continues.

> According to emigrant and military accounts, the bodies of 8 members of the wagon train were found, two miles from the Burnt River, by a rescue party under the command of Lieutenant Reno, one of Captain Dent's men. Scouting for survivors along the Burnt River, Lieutenant Reno found two nearly naked men of the party: Muson and Chafee. Continuing his search, Reno discovered the massacre of five Van

Ormans, Charles and Henry Utter, and Sam Gleason. The bodies were lying in the sagebrush a short distance from the road. Four Van Orman children were missing, possibly taken by the Indian people. Military accounts indicate that the 8 deceased emigrants were buried in a mass grave at the discovery site, before the troops proceeded on to the Malheur and Owyhee in their search for survivors.

On the descent toward Huntington, a small cross is seen located on a sagebrush covered flat in the hillside to the west (left) of the road (on private land) - about 1/4 mile past the summit. The cross is sometimes adorned with a wreath. This is the "possible" battle site, described by Aubrey Haines (Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail, 1981: p. 349).

The cross marks the place where a Mr. P.D. Wood of Huntington searched for the mass grave by auguring. Mr. Wood claimed to have discovered the body of Mrs. Van Orman in one of his augur holes, and concluded that he had located the site of the mass grave. The cross is thus said to mark the grave of the Van Ormans and Utter group that were killed here.

Huntington

The Oregon Trail marker set by Ezra Meeker in 1906 is located on a small pullout at the west end of the main street through Huntington. We follow segments of Highway 30 - the old Oregon Trail Memorial Highway, back to Baker City. Huntington was the site where the Oregon Short Line and Oregon Railway and Navigation Company railroads were joined in 1884, to complete a transcontinental link to the northwest.

Burnt River Canyon to the Powder River Valley

Burnt River Canyon

I-84 Reference: The route of Interstate 84 through the Burnt River Canyon passes over most (but not all) of the Oregon Trail route from Farewell Bend to the Burnt River Valley at Durkee. Even today, we can appreciate the difficulty the emigrants encountered during the passage of the Burnt River canyon.

Short segments of Oregon Trail ruts are found at several different locations on BLM land in the Burnt River canyon. These are located in the hills to the east of the Interstate, where the Trail occasionally left the river canyon on short detours. Most of these sites are not accessible due to intermingled private lands.

From Farewell Bend, emigrants took five to six days to travel about 60 miles up the Burnt River, and then cross over hills to the Powder River valley. The Burnt River canyon was rugged, with the twisting stream hemmed in by the hills. The route through the canyon was according to most emigrant accounts a difficult, rough road. Journals enumerate many record-breaking stream crossings in one day, as the wagons followed the twisting river back and forth between canyon walls, or traveled in the bed of the river itself.

The first emigrant wagons in the 1840s had to move rocks and blaze a way through dense

riparian thickets along the stream - cottonwood, aspen, willow, chokecherry, hawthorn. The passage of the Burnt River canyon was a trial to the emigrants - a difficult road for days on end when they were already exhausted from their journey. Many were still sick from fever and dysentery, and oxen gave out in the yoke as the emigrants struggled up the canyon. Emigrants were so struck by the rugged canyon that several took time to describe its "slatey rock", "stoney places enough to hide all despairing sinners", and hills of "limestone stratum".

> James Nesmith, September 1843: "Trailed ten miles over the roughest country I ever saw, the Burnt River being hemmed in by hills on both sides."

> Joel Palmer, September 1845: "The road is up Burnt river, and the most difficult road we have encountered since we started. The difficulties arise from the frequent crossings of the creek, which is crooked, narrow and stony...The creek and road are so enclosed by the high mountains, as to afford but little room to pass along...along the creek is found...brush and briars, so impenetrable as to preclude ingress.. At first view this road appeared to us impassable, and so difficult of travel, as almost to deter us from the attempt..."

> Samuel Wilson, August, 1851: "12 miles very crooked rough dusty up-hill and down-hill road. Crossed Burnt River 11 times and camp on a small creek between mountains."

> Martha Read, September, 1852: "Saw 20 dead cattle to day. It looks like misery along here. The cattle are dying off and people are getting out of provision and a great many sick and some are dying."

Sisley Creek to Swayze Creek

At Weatherby Rest Area, Sisley Creek enters the Burnt River from the east. Emigrant journals clearly indicate that a detour was taken away from the Burnt River. The Oregon Trail turned up Sisley Creek, crossed the hills, and then descended via Swayze Creek at the south end of the Burnt River valley. The route became known as the Gold Hill Cutoff. BLM obelisks mark the Oregon Trail on BLM land.

> Benjamin Cleaver, August, 1848: "we here left the river & took up a hollow in many places. we traveled in the Mountains for about 6 miles & came to a fine camping place of grass & water. we then continued down this Branch to Burnt River. here we had any quantity of grass of the Best kind."

The route ascended Sisley Creek to a point approximately two miles upstream, opposite Chicken Creek. The trail then turns into the hill and ascended to the summit overlooking the Swayze Creek drainage. At the summit, visible ruts are seen to the right of the current county road, coming down the ridge. The Northwest Chapter of OCTA has recently marked these ruts with the landowners permission. As the Trail descends Swayze Creek, Gold Hill is the prominent peak to the left, overlooking the Burnt River Valley. Thus the Trail returned to the Burnt River, in Durkee Valley.

Before they departed from the Burnt River valley, the Scott family lost their youngest member,

four year old Willie, to "Cholera Infantum". Willie's mother had died near Fort Laramie, and the death of the young boy was yet another terrific blow to the family. Young Abigail Scott (his sister) writes of their grief on August 27, 1852:

> "Two months and seven days this morning since our beloved mother was called to bid this world adieu, and the ruthless monster death not yet content has once more entered our fold & taken in his icy grip the treasure of our hearts! Last night our darling Wille was called from earth, to vie with angels around the throne of God: He was buried today upon an elevated point, one hundred and fifty feet above the plain in a spot of sweet seclusion...A beautiful cedar waves its wide spread branches over his tomb, and here beneath its shade I have wandered in remote seclusion to be alone with Wille and his God."

Abigail Scott Duniway became a writer and leader in the women's suffrage movement in Oregon. According to Kenneth Holmes' notes on the Scott family journal, twenty years later members of the Duniway family returned to the site and removed some bark from the solitary juniper at Willie's grave (Holmes: Covered Wagon Women, 1986, Vol V, p. 117). Willie's father, Tucker, had carved the boy's name on the tree. Harriet Scott (age 11 at the time) remembered that the grave was cut out of the rock of "Burnt River Mountain." Perhaps Burnt River Mountain is Gold Hill.

Burnt River Valley at Durkee

Ezra Meeker set an Oregon Trail monument at Durkee in 1906. The monument is located in front of the old stone building on the old Oregon Trail Memorial Highway. The Burnt River enters the Burnt River valley from the west, exiting from a canyon even more precipitous than the lower reaches of the Burnt river. That canyon and the rugged mountains were impassable and so the emigrants did not follow the Burnt River west. Durkee was first known as Express Ranch.

Emigrants left the Burnt River at the north end of the Durkee Valley and ascended Alder Creek. Interstate 84 follows the route of the Oregon Trail, north from the Durkee Valley, paralleling Alder Creek to Pleasant Valley.

Iron Mountain

Milepost 328: North of Durkee (east side of I-84), is a peak with notable fingers of volcanic rock. On the east side of the Burnt River Valley may be seen a striking geologic feature, known today as Iron Mountain. Iron Mountain is the remnant of a volcano, or volcanic neck, remaining after millennia of erosion. Only a few emigrants took note of this feature. Perhaps they'd had enough of remarkable and difficult landforms.

> Absalom Harden, 1847: "We traveled this day 12 miles, to the right of our camp some 5 miles you will discover a peak above all the rest, we call it burnt river peak, it looks as tho they was chimbleys to it, tho we suppose it to be rock. this is the most mountainous countery I ever saw be fore, the mountains on sweet water was very high but thay are not to be Compared with these burnt river mountains."

Straw Ranch

The route of the Oregon Trail leaves Alder Creek at a place known as Straw Ranch, a few miles south of Pleasant Valley. Straw Ranch is opposite the mouth of Kitchen Creek - the "probable" 1860 wagon train destruction site listed by Aubrey Haines (Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail, 1981, p. 350).

Leaving Alder Creek, the emigrants climbed over the hills (to the east of the Interstate) to descend to Virtue Flat (south of Flagstaff Hill). The trek over the hills to Virtue Flat, thence to the Powder River slough, was a long journey of 18-20 miles. Some emigrants claim the day's trek was without water, others provide details of springs found along the road, and the crossing of Virtue Flat.

> Robert Renshaw, August, 1851: "The road at length turns to the right, up a steep hill, running close by a lone tree. Two or three miles from this place we came to a spring; here we nooned and camped, having traveld up Burnt River 4 miles over Rough road the most of the way...Left the waters of Burnt River this morning, and traveld about nine miles to the far edge of a flat, and nooned. No water, but plenty of grass. From thence we descended a long slant of hill..."

There are wagon traces in the hills on the route from Straw Ranch to the summit above Virtue Flat; however, the place where the emigrants left Alder Creek needs further research and field inventory. Most of this route crosses private land. On this passage over the hills, only a few short traces of wagon ruts may be found, and distinguishing the Oregon Trail from many 1860s-70s gold rush roads between Alder Creek and Virtue Flat is difficult.

The Blue Mountains and Powder River Valley

As you approach Baker City on the Interstate, you catch your first glimpse of the Blue Mountains, just as the pioneers did 150 years ago, except they saw them sooner - from the top of the ridge on the hills to the east of I-84.

With mixed emotions, the emigrants first saw the Blue Mountains, the range visible on the west and north of the Powder River valley. Some were thrilled to at last see mountain slopes covered with the tall timber for which Oregon was famous. The Blue Mountains obtained their colorful name due to their timbered slopes, which take on a blue appearance when seen in summer's faint haze.

> John Fremont, Oct 17, 1843: "There is snow yet visible in the neighboring mountains, which yesterday extended along our route to the left, in a lofty and dark-blue range, having much the appearance of the Wind river mountains. It is probably that they have received their name of the Blue Mountains from the dark-blue appearance given to them by the pines."

Emigrants took note of the time of the year and were worried about getting over the Blue mountains (and the Cascades 250 miles west) before the snow came. All knew that the crossing of the Blues would be a challenge. At the same time, emigrants were pleased with their view of the Powder River valley, and some noted that it had agricultural potential.

Taken together, the mountains clothed in dense timber and the well watered grassy valley signaled to the emigrants that they were nearing the end of their journey - here they had a peek at the bounty of the Oregon Country.

Despite the attractions of the area, there were no settlements in the eastern Oregon area during the principle years of emigrant travel. Indian conflicts kept most people from stopping in the hinterlands, until gold discoveries launched travelers and settlers toward these reaches of Oregon and Idaho.

Gold! In the Blue Mountains

Gold, in sufficient quantities to excite the imagination, was discovered in the Blue Mountains in October 1861, on gulch located about 4 miles southwest of Baker City. Within one year the gold rush town of Auburn sprang up. It is said to have had a population of 5000. Many who continued arriving over the Oregon Trail could now stop to settle in the Powder River country. Some of the earliest descriptions of gold come from the journals of travelers who crossed this country in the years following the discovery of gold in California. Osborne Cross heard about gold in the Blue Mountains from the Indians of the area.

> Major Osborne Cross, Sept 7, 1849: "From all the information I can obtain, gold can be found on the headwaters of Powder River, but the Indians are unwilling to risk themselves in that vicinity, as they would come in contact with hostile Indians who reside in the mountains."
>
> Lucia Williams, Aug 8, 1851: "Came to Powder River. The sand and mud were full of shining particles which some took to be gold. There were some so eager to wash gold that they could not eat."
>
> Sarah Sutton, Aug 10, 1854: "...noon'd on burnt river. met 3 men with about 20 pack horses and mules packed with flour and other eatables, and materials for gold digging on burnt river. they had been out here prospecting and we heard they found as much as 10 dollars per day and had gone back for provisions. our boys have prospected some, and found gold."
>
> Evan S. McComas, September, 1862: "Come 8 miles to where the emigrants separate, those going to the mines turn to the left, those going to Willammette and Wallah Wallah Valleys to the right. Here was a grand division. Some men who had come together from the States, one would want to go on and the other would want to go to the mine. Things were thrown around in all shapes. Some were going through with packs, some without. Here was a general shaking of hands and bidding good bye... Our team turned for Auburn. Found it a town of about 200 houses. Saw a man hung, miners at work, etc. etc." (The place where the roads separate is below Flagstaff Hill).

Flagstaff Hill

The distant mountains northeast of Flagstaff Hill are the Wallowas, or Eagle Caps, forming the western border of Hells Canyon. With difficulty, Captain Bonneville crossed these mountains to the Imnaha River, during the winter of 1834.

> Joel Palmer, September 9, 1845: "At their summit they are entirely destitute of vegetation: some of these are very lofty, their peaks present a lustrous appearance, resembling the snow mountains. This shining, dazzling appearance they possess, is derived I think from the material of which they are composed, being a kind of white clay."

The large basin to the south of Flagstaff Hill is Virtue Flat. On private land, wagon ruts can be seen crossing Virtue Flat. They are particularly visible from the top of Flagstaff Hill - appearing as a trace etched through the sagebrush.

Powder River Valley to Grande Ronde Valley

Powder River Valley to North Powder

From a summit above the Burnt River, emigrants caught sight of the Blue Mountains, and of the promise of Oregon. The mountains were covered with "winter green" trees, and their tall peaks seem like a "resting place for the clouds". As they descended beneath the crest of Flagstaff Hill, the grass covered Powder River valley came into view, and the beaten path of the Oregon Trail stretched ahead, running diagonally across the valley floor. Propelled by feelings of urgency, and anticipation that Oregon is just around the corner, the emigrants moved across the Powder River valley with renewed enthusiasm.

Finally, it began to look like they were getting somewhere.

The Lone Pine Tree in the Powder River Valley: Milepost 299

Early travelers through the Powder River valley could spot the Lone Tree, a large ponderosa pine standing all alone in the eastern valley. The tree was located at the place where the emigrant road first crossed Baldock Slough (east of Baker City's airport). It was a landmark on the trail, and a campground for those who had completed the 18-20 mile passage over the hills from Burnt River.

> Medoram Crawford, September, 1842: "Below us was a large plain and at some distance we could discover a tree which we at once recognized as the 'lone tree' of which we had before heard. We made all possible speed and at 7 o'clock the advance party arrive at the Tree nearly an hour before the cattle. The tree is a large pine standing in the midst of an immense plain entirely alone. It presented a truly singular appearance and I believe is respected by every traveler through this almost Treeless Country. Within a few yards we found pleanty of water and we soon made ourselves comfortable by a good fire."

Sadly, the tree was felled by an emigrant of the first wagon train in 1843, who found it too green to burn for fuel. Peter Burnett, emigrant of 1843, describes looking back on the trail, when suddenly the tree disappeared. Burnett discovered that the Lone Pine had met its demise by the "vandal hands of man". Captain John Fremont came across the fallen tree, as he followed the 1843 wagon train. For years after, the valley was known for this landmark. Emigrants continued to refer to the Lone Tree valley, Lone Stump or Fallen Tree.

As late as the early 1860s, however, some accounts indicate that the fallen tree was still to be found. Fred Warner's great-grandmother, Nancy Parker, was a pioneer of 1864. Nancy recalls seeing the Lone Pine tree, laying next to the stump, when her family arrived in the Powder Valley. Nancy remembered the tree was 50 feet long and 4 to 5 feet in diameter.

Oregon Trail Route: Milepost 298

The Oregon Trail crosses the Interstate just about one half mile beyond the Highway 203 Exit. The Trail is heading diagonally, northwest, to a second crossing of the slough. At the second

slough crossing Mr. McMahon's House was erected in the early 1860s (on the Charles Colton property). Later, a way station known as the "Slough House" was constructed (on the Fred Warner property), one half mile south of the slough crossing.

Baldock Slough Crossing: Milepost 297

As we cross Baldock Slough, to the west is the second slough crossing. At this second crossing the Coltons have erected markers to identify the still visible ruts of the Oregon Trail on the north side of the slough. George Belshaw, emigrant of 1851, wrote about the second slough crossing, and said "here is the best grass I saw between Indiana and Oregon 3/4 miles to left of road." From here the Oregon Trail route is on the west side of the Interstate in the bottom of the valley below us, until we arrive at the crossing of the main Powder River.

Powder River Crossing of the Oregon Trail: Milepost 290

Approaching the main Powder River, the Oregon Trail has crossed from the west side of the Interstate, to the east (right) side. Here the trail will avoid the river and the marshy ground immediately beneath the bluff to the east. Traces of the Oregon Trail can be seen climbing a low hill, at the edge of a "bowl" formed in the bluff to the east. After crossing the Powder River, the Trail is located on the east side of the Interstate. Emigrants camped in the vicinity of this crossing of the Powder River.

> Elizabeth Goltra, September 2, 1853: "A beautiful road today for 10 miles when we struck a fork of Powder River then crossed a rough point of bluff and down the valley and crossed the (first) fork, drove on to the last fork and camped, there are 3 forks about 2 miles apart, came 15 miles today..."

North Powder Crossing to Ladd Canyon Summit

The Oregon Trail route crosses through the present day town of North Powder, just a few blocks from the Interstate Exit. About 4 miles east of town, on Highway 237, a marker commemorating Marie Dorian has been erected. Marie Dorian was traveling with Wilson Price Hunt's Astorian party through the valley in the winter of 1811, when she gave birth to a child. The child died a few days later.

> Relying upon information obtained from the Indian people occupying the Snake River near Weiser, Wilson Price Hunt followed an ancient Indian trail through the valleys and mountains to the Columbia. The following summer Robert Stuart backtracked over this trail on his return to the east in 1812 - upon that journey Stuart discovered South Pass through the Rockies. Thus Wilson Price Hunt and Robert Stuart established a route through northeast Oregon, that route would become the Oregon Trail many decades later.
>
> But when Wilson Price Hunt passed this way in 1811, his party was struggling on low provisions through winter snows. In the vicinity of the crossing of the Powder River, Madame Dorion - the Indian wife of fur trapper Pierre Dorion - halted to give birth to a child, and caught up with the Hunt party in the Grande Ronde valley. In the Grande Ronde Valley, Hunt encountered a small encampment of "Chochoni" Indians, from

whom he procured much needed food. Hunt was perhaps the first EuroAmerican to enter the Grande Ronde valley, where his group celebrated New Year's Day, 1812, before traveling over the mountains to the Columbia.

At North Powder, the main Powder River makes a huge U turn. It turns to the south and flows into Keating Valley, then turns east to flow to the Snake River. From North Powder the River enters a rocky canyon, flowing toward the Keating Valley and thence on to the Snake River. In 1834, the naturalist John Kirk Townsend traveled through the Powder River canyon. Townsend was traveling with Nathaniel Wyeth, who lost the trace of the main trail and wound up in the canyon. Townsend described the canyon as "the Cut Rocks" - a defile so precipitous and narrow that one could "throw a biscuit" across it.

Wolf Creek Oregon Trail Crossing: Milepost 284/285

Wolf Creek, a tributary of the North Powder, comes in from the west. The Oregon Trail is located east of the Interstate.

Sixteen Mile Stage Station, Clover Valley: Milepost 280/279

The Oregon Trail ascends Clover Creek Valley, a place favored by the emigrants on account of its abundant native grasses. As we begin to approach the base of Ladd Mountain, to the west (left) is seen a small knoll, accompanied by a substantial clump of willow trees. On top of the hillock are visible some lower timbers of a collapsed structure. The structure is located at a spring site and stage station, known as the Sixteen Mile House, established in the 1860s on the Oregon Trail.

Ladd Mountain: Milepost 277-275

The Oregon Trail climbed mountain to a natural pass between the Powder and Grande Ronde valleys. At the base of the hill, the Oregon Trail crosses the Interstate, and is located on the westside. It proceeds due north away from where the Interstate makes a curve to the east. At Milepost 275 look back southwest, beyond the meadow to where the Oregon Trail entered Marshmeadow. The Trail is located where the scar from a natural gas pipeline comes into the meadow.

The summit of the pass between the two valleys was an important ancient Indian travel route. Archaeological excavations conducted for mitigation of the pipeline through this area indicate that the Ladd Canyon vicinity was occupied by Indian people over the past 6000 years. In the Grande Ronde Valley, and at these upland meadows, the Indian people procured camas - an important root food. They also quarried a high quality basalt toolstone from the outcrops at the summit.

Ladd Canyon Exit: Milepost 273

At the Ladd Canyon exit the Oregon Trail route separates from the route of the Interstate, which turns northwest. The Oregon Trail here crosses to the east of the Interstate, heading north. The trail ascends the summit to the north, while the highway plunges down through Ladd Canyon. Along the Oregon Trail at Ladd Canyon on this private land, is one of the few

known emigrant inscriptions in Oregon - on a rock yellowed with lichens is the name of D. Dodge and the date 1855. Local information indicates several emigrant graves are located at the head of Ladd Canyon, and at the base of Ladd Hill.

Grande Ronde Valley to Blue Mountain Crossing

Ladd Hill to Foothill Road (Ladd Marsh)

Ladd Hill: Milepost 269 (Charles Reynolds Safety Rest Area)

Look back at Ladd Hill beyond the rest area to see where the Oregon Trail descended the steep slope, east of the pipeline scar. Although they are faint, the route of the wagons descending Ladd Hill can be discerned near a line of three pine trees. The wagon ruts are especially visible during the early spring; or winter, when dry snow drifts into the rut swale across the face of the hill. From Ladd Creek, the hill a bench on the hill is visible down which the wagons traveled. The Ladd Hill descent is "sidling" and steep, but it seems even more so when seen from the bottom. Evan McComas (1862) said the hill was "two miles long, and 10 steep."

William Henry Tappan, 1849
Ladd Hill, March of the Mounted Riflemen - Major Osborne Cross

" An oasis in the desert", a "gem", the "enchanted" Grande Ronde Valley excited the imagination of emigrants, explorers, fur traders, and the Indian people who called the valley Cop Copi - place of the cottonwoods. Certainly the view from the top of Ladd Hill was unparalleled for beauty along the route of the Oregon Trail. As many of the emigrants were farmers heading to the Garden of the World in the Willamette Valley, they knew good farm land when they first saw the Grande Ronde valley. They noted the rich dark soil, the abundant fields of native grasses, the moist meadows and cool streams flowing from the

mountains, and the thick timber clothing every mountain slope, and trees and shrubs to garland every stream and river. Almost without exception, every emigrant was compelled to note the beauty of the valley with words of enthusiasm in their journals.

> Peter Burnett, October 1, 1843: "We this day came to the 'Grand Round", the name of an immense valley, one hundred miles in circumference, which will vie in fertility with the valley of the Missouri, or indeed, with any spot in the world. Trees of all kinds are sprinkled throughout its surface; shrubs, flowers, books and singing birds, meadow lark, and other winged game, diversify it, with many other of the attractions of more lavish regions, and its general temperature is guaranteed by the evidence of its prodigal vegetation. The Grand Round is nearly circular in its form and lies embosomed in the Blue Mountains... The bottom of this magic circle is rich, level prairie land, trelliced with crystal springs issuing from its surrounding mountain border..."

But getting down to the valley was another matter! Ladd Hill was the most difficult descent the emigrants had yet encountered on the Emigrant Road, and would only be surpassed in difficulty by Laurel Hill on the Barlow Road. The road was, as Absalom Harden wrote, "powerful rocky", the dust was enough to hide the team at the head of the wagon, trees were cut for drag weights behind the wagons as they were lowered down the hill. Aubrey Haines notes that a snubbing tree with rope burns was located on the hill. Most emigrants write about the difficulty of making this descent. If folks had not yet begun to see the elephant, they would surely see it at Ladd Hill.

> Benjamin Cleaver, August 18, 1848: "we continued west until we came in sight of the Grand Ronde Bottom. we here had a long hill to go down. Say about one mile. it is not very steep. But there is a good number of loos stones on the Road."

> P.V. Crawford, August 20, 1851: "We traveled down the valley three or four miles, and over a sidling, stony ridge, to the top of the Grande Ronde hill, then down a long, steep-sidling to Grande Ronde valley. Here we found and passed some of our advanced company repairing a broken wagon."

> Enoch Conyers, August 28, 1852: "We came up the valley about one-half mile, and then we traveled three miles more over hills and hollows, and a very rough and rocky road. And dust! Well, we have become so used to the dust, which generally is from two to six inches deep, that we do not think of making any mention of it."

In the Grande Ronde valley, the emigrants met the Indian people who assembled every year in the valley to trade and gather camas for winter storage. The camas fields at Ladd Marsh supplied the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla and Nez Perce with one of their staple foods. The valley grasses supported their herds of a thousand ponies. The Indian people probably also assembled near Hot Lake - a hot spring feeding into a lake located three miles to the east at the base of the mountain. Robert Stuart (1812) and other early travelers visited Hot Lake, which was located on the old trappers route through Pyles Canyon between the Powder and Grande Ronde valley. In 1864, James Pyle built a toll road from Union through the canyon.

Short on provisions and famished for fresh vegetables, in this valley the emigrants frequently

traded with the Indian people. The Whitmans had taught and encouraged the tribes to plant small crops in the Umatilla and Walla Walla Valleys. So the Indian people could offer potatoes, peas, pumpkins, and corn to the hungry emigrants whose provisions were exceedingly low. Flour ground at the Whitman mission was also available. Native foods, such as salmon, camas, and berries were traded. The willingness of the Indian people to trade, and often to guide emigrant groups, was their salvation on this part of the Oregon Trail, and friendly relations characterized these interactions during the early years. Even in the years following the fall of 1847 Cayuse attack on the Whitman Mission, emigrants found the Indian people more helpful than threatening.

> Harriet Buckingham, September 8, 1851: "Came down the mountain into Grand Ronde valley...The descent was made with difficulty - the wagons being chained & let down with ropes much of the way....Thousands of horses - many of them curiously spotted feed upon the mountain side. Hundreds of Indians of the Nez Percies tribe, are camped here...The women are all dressed in native costumes of dressed antelope skins - fringed and ornamented with moccasins on their dainty little feet...Their long black hair is braided into two long plaits that hand down & on top of the head is a gay little hat shaped like a flower pot - made of woven grass -- it serves to pick berries in or to drink out of, as it holds water being so closely woven. Brass rings are to be seen on waist and ankle. they have an air of maidenly reserve that wins respect...The men are all fine specimens of physical development, & have not yet become contaminated with the vices of white men...Grass was tall & luxurious in this Indian Paradise."

Foothill Road to La Grande

As one travels along scenic Foothill Road, the Oregon Trail is located between the Interstate and Foothill. The ponds of Ladd Marsh Wildlife Refuge are visible, where camas still blooms in spring. Ladd Marsh supports a wide variety of waterfowl and wildlife. From Foothill Road, one can look back toward Ladd Hill, and visualize the emigrants descent and arrival in this valley paradise.

> Isaac Stevens and Joel Palmer negotiated the treaties of June, 1855, with the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce Indians. The treaty set aside reservation lands from the Blue Mountains to the Umatilla Valley. One of the boundary points for the reservation was Lee's Encampment, located on the Oregon Trail in the Blue Mountains. These lands and subsistence rights to traditional use locations (from the Grande Ronde to the Tucannon River in Washington) were reserved by the tribes - the nations of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla - who became known as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla. The large reservation was subsequently reduced in size, much to the disadvantage of the tribe. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla have their headquarters at Mission, where the Oregon Trail forks - one road going to the Whitman Mission, the other heading west down the Umatilla River.
>
> Joel Palmer, emigrant of 1845, was Superintendent for Indian Affairs for the Oregon Territory at the 1855 Treaty negotiations. In the Grande Ronde valley, Palmer was visited by a Chief of the Cayuse Indians, Aliquot, who upon observing Palmer playing cards, admonished him for unchristian behavior.

Joel Palmer, September, 1845: "At this spring branch we pitched our camp, and while here, were visited by great numbers of Indians, including men, squaws and papooses...They brought wheat, corn, potatoes, peas, pumpkins, fish, etc. which they were anxious to dispose of for cloths, calico, nankins and other articles...they had good horses, which they offered in exchange for cows and heifers..."

La Grande (Birnie Park)

Looking west one can see the route taken by the emigrants, ascending Table Mountain to cross an open plateau above the Grande Ronde River. The transit of the plateau would take 2-3 days, before they descended to the Grande Ronde River at Hilgard. At the base of Table Mountain on B Street is one of Ezra Meekers markers, located in the front yard of a private home.

Birnie Park is located on the route of the Oregon Trail, which is B Street in La Grande. After stopping to rest, or camp, at the base of the hill, emigrants began their climb of Table Mountain. Climbing the mountain often required double teaming. John Glenn, emigrant of 1852 claimed that it took 18 oxen (9 yoke) to pull his wagon up this hill. Joel Palmer (1845) called for 6 yoke or more to be attached to the wagon.

In the 1850s, two routes went up the mountain. The main route ascended up the north side of Mill Creek to a bench on the side of the mountain. After traveling across the bench, the emigrants headed straight into the hill of the upper slopes. The second route, perhaps an easier one, continued north on the aforementioned bench, and then went up Deal Canyon to reach an emigrant campground at the head of Deal Creek. Deal Canyon is the large defile that appears to be bisecting the hills above the center of La Grande.

The second route added a mile to the journey, but was an easier grade. According to the journal of emigrant Robert Robe (1851), the second route was opened by the Cayuse Indians, as a Toll road: "In the afternoon ascended the hill to the left which is long and difficult. The Indians have here opened a new route for two miles for which they charge toll $1 per wagon." Today the route, which crosses private lands, is accessible only by four wheel drive, and requires the permission of the landowners. Although the Interstate follows the Grande Ronde River, emigrants did not follow the river because the canyon was too rugged for the passage of wagons, until it was improved in the 1860s.

La Grande History

Following the 1861 discovery of gold on a tributary of the Powder River, settlers began to move into the Powder and Grande Ronde Valleys. Prospectors traveled to supply stations in Walla Walla, and entrepreneurs began to take up land to grow cattle and crops to supply the mining camps that sprang up overnight. The first permanent settler in the Grande Ronde Valley in 1861 was Benjamin Brown. From the Umatilla, Brown brought 20 settlers with him to the valley. They built five log cabins and spent the winter of 1862.

La Grande became a thriving town during the gold rush. Once the settlement of the interior of Oregon had begun, the General Land Office sent surveyors to eastern Oregon to lay out legal divisions on the land. The General Land Office was reorganized along with the Grazing

Service and other offices in 1946, under the "Organic Act", to become the Bureau of Land Management. Much of our information about the route of the Oregon Trail and other roads comes from these first detailed records and surveys of the lands that were made available for settlement. In September, 1863, Surveyor D.P. Thompson wrote this description of La Grande:

> "The town of Lagrand in Section 7 was laid out about one year ago by Green, Arnold, Daniel Chaplin and Ben Brown. It now contains about 80 houses...Sawmill in course of erection, 25 stores, 4 blacksmith shops, one wagon maker shop, three hotels, three restaurants, one turning lathe, one furniture shop, six carpenter shops, one butcher shop, Wells Fargo & Co express office, a post office and ten liquor shops where liquors are retailed by the drink. The town of Lagrand was laid out in the fall of 1862 at the foot of the Blue Mountains at the intersection of the Emigrant Road and Grand Rond Valley and bears evidence of great prosperity, and does a large trade with the newly discovered gold mines in Idaho Territory and Eastern Oregon."

La Grande to Grande Ronde River/ Fox Hill

Fox Hill: Milepost 260 (Old Highway 30 approaching Interstate 84)

Perhaps, in 1843, the first wagon train to cross the valley may have followed an early trappers route - the same as used by the Whitmans and Spauldings, according to some accounts. Jack Evans (author of Powerful Rockey: The Blue Mountains and the Oregon Trail) suggests that instead of climbing the hills to the west of La Grande, the first wagon train emigrants took a route up Fox Hill, to begin crossing the Blue Mountains. Early on, the route was known as the Walla Walla trail. Whatever route was taken, crossing the Blue Mountains was a chore and a challenge.

> Overton Johnson and William Winter, September 1843:"From the Grande Ronde we bore to the left, and began the ascent of the Blue Mountains. It was long, but gradual. After reaching the summit, the road was generally passable, excepting some deep ravines, which were frequently steep and rocky. A great portion of these mountains are covered with dense forests of lofty pine."

> William Newby, October 1843:"We crawsed over a bad mountain & down it to a creek, the hill very bad to go down. These is hills of the Bliew Mountain."

Grande Ronde River Crossing at Hilgard State Park

By 1844, the route we know as the Oregon Trail today was well established - the emigrants climbed Table Mountain west of La Grande, descended to the Grande Ronde River at Hilgard, and then climbed the Blue Mountains. On the plateau above the river, a native stone monument on the Foster Toll Road bears the inscription "Oregon Trail 1856" (or perhaps 1858). The monument is located on BLM land. F.A. Foster, a iocal resident, was secretary of the Blue Mountain Consolidated Wagon Company. The Foster Toll Road intersected the emigrant road on the plateau, as shown on the 1867 General Land Office map.

At Rock Creek (Milepost 252, south of I-84), the Oregon Trail descends a steep, timbered

slope down to the Grande Ronde River, opposite the mouth of Five Points Creek at the Hilgard Exit. Here, on the east side of Rock Creek, wagon ruts may be found on state land.

> Abigail Scott, September, 1852: "Eight miles from Grand Round brought us to the crossing of the Grand Round river; The descent of the mountain down the river bottom was down the most dangerous looking place we had yet come down, but we reached the river without accident; After crossing we halted & prepared our dinner, and took a long rest, as our cattle were very tired in consequence of very hard roads..."

The bottomlands at Five Points Creek and Hilgard served as a camping ground for thousands of emigrants, who rested here, before turning up the mountains. Emigrants then ascended the large hill on the north side of the Interstate. The ascent of the mountain required double teaming. Two routes climbing the nose of the hill opposite the State Park have been proposed. The left hand one climbs nearly opposite the campground area, where the State Park is today. The right hand route ascends from the mouth of Five Points Creek.

Blue Mountain Crossing

From the Grande Ronde River Crossing, the Oregon Trail heads up over the Blue Mountains toward Meacham, Emigrant Springs, Deadman's Pass, and then descends to the Umatilla River valley. Here the Oregon Trail brought emigrants to the Blue Mountain crossing, for most it was the first timbered mountain crossing encountered on the trail.

> Pristine Oregon Trail traces are found on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, and on private lands, east of the freeway between Hilgard and the Mount Emily Road. The traces often parallel and cross the old stage road from La Grande to Pendleton.
>
> East on the Mount Emily Road, about one mile of wagon ruts may be clearly seen in the north road cut bank, traversing the property of Pendleton Cattle Company. The Northwest Chapter of OCTA has marked Oregon Trail where it crosses private lands at the Mount Emily Road. The Chapter also marked the route of the Oregon Trail on the Daryl Stewart property south of the Mount Emily Road. The Stewart Family requires that permission be obtained, in advance, by persons wishing access to the Oregon Trail across their property. The Stewarts hope that people who are given permission will treat their property with respect for the Trail and the environment.

The transit of the Blue Mountains required 3 to 5 days to travel about 30 miles. Many emigrants found the forest disorienting and the night cries of "panthers" (mountain lion) alarmed others. Grass for livestock was relatively abundant for the first travelers, although those crossing during the latter part of a season considered the feed to be sparse. In the thick timber, people got turned around and lost, and cattle disappeared only a short distance from camp. Water was found in creek bottoms, but was generally scarce between the Grande Ronde River and Emigrant Springs. Downed trees and dense timber had to be cut and removed along the route. Forest fires, ignited by late summer lightening storms, engulfed some travelers in smoke as they crossed the mountains.

> William Newby, October 4, 1843: "The timber is so thick in meney places that you coldant see a man 10 steps."

Absalom Harden, September 2, 1847: "...traveled 10 mils over rocks the greater part of our time and when no rocks the dust was just like ashes a nuff to Stifel man and beast and the road was very hilley. it is the worst road the length of it that we have traveled. you will take care to fill your Caggs in the morning for you will not find a drop for 10 mills."

Loren Hastings, October 7, 1847: "While we were hunting cattle today, on lady (Mrs. Thatcher) was discovered walking very briskly in the thick timber and asked which way she was traveling, she said she was going to the wagons and wondered what was the reason she could not see them; but when told that she was one-half mile from the wagons and going in a contrary direction, she was not a little surprised..."

P.V. Crawford, August 22-23, 1851: "This day our road has been very rough, first up a long hill, where we had to double teams, then down a long ridge to a dry branch, then up another long ridge and down a steep hill to another dry branch. Here we had to double teams again, to get only the next ridge along the side of which we traveled five miles...We are now in the Blue Mountains and find it very rough country. Much more so than the Rocky mountains, and our worn-out teams seem to appreciate the difference equal to ourselves."

From the summit of the Blues, the emigrants could spot Mt. Hood, which they knew to be near the journey's end. They concluded their transit of the Blue Mountains with these observations.

Peter Burnett, October, 1843: "On the 6th we descended the Blue Mountains, by an easy and gradual declination over an excellent road, and encamped on the banks of the Umatilla River near a Kiuse village."

Honore-Timothee Lempfrit, September, 1848: "We emerged from the lovely fir forests at about 2 o'clock and at last left behind us the long range of mountains. Ahead of us the country was quite flat. Now we had a new horizon."

Charles Brandt, September, 1851: "We came down a hill 4 miles long into Umatilla Valley. From the top of the hill we had a splendid view. Such as Pilgrims to oregon only are permitted to behold. We could see the snow capped peak of the Blue Mountains far behind us. 29 miles brought us to the foot of the mountains where we camped."

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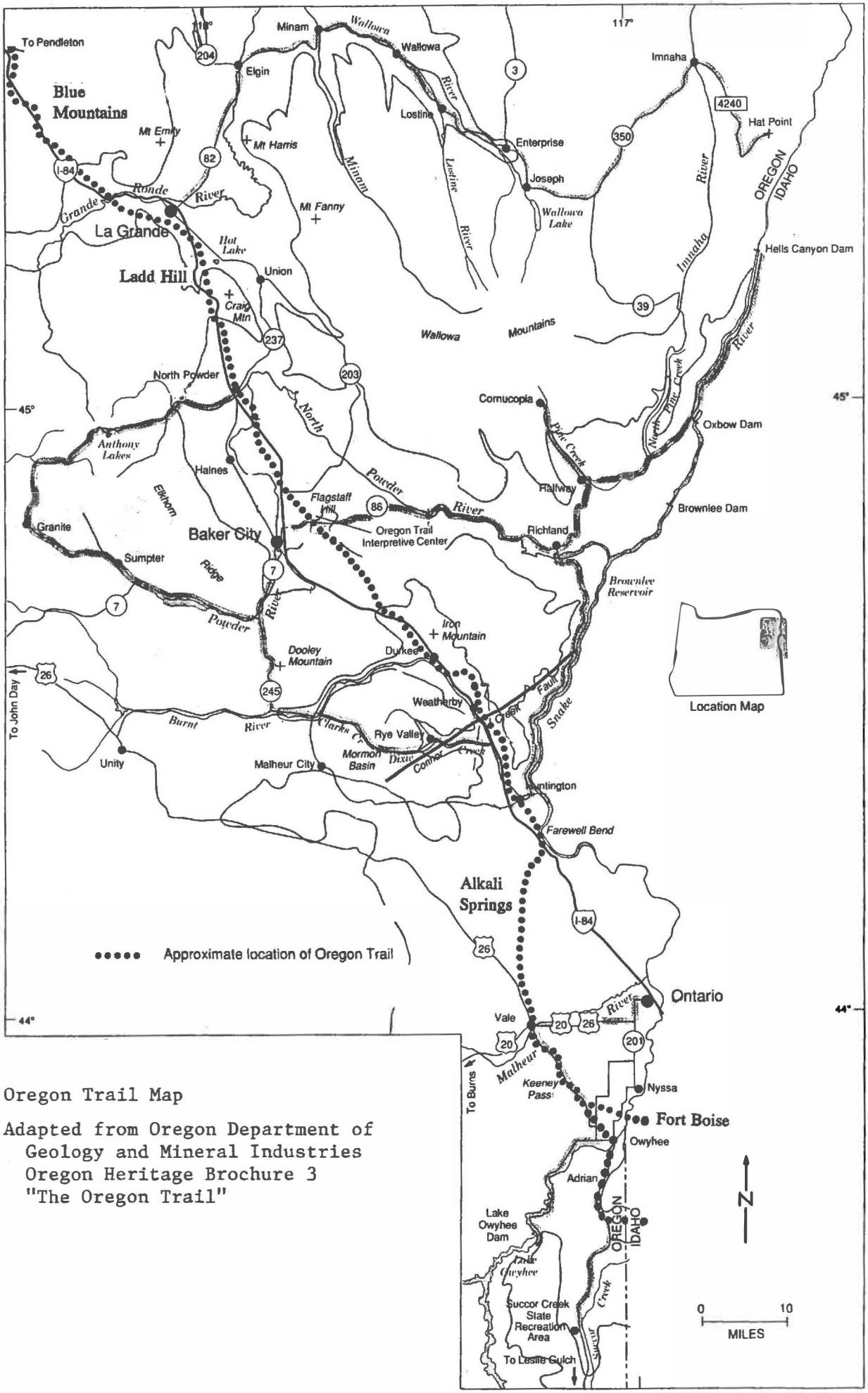
1990 Powerful Rockey: The Blue Mountains and the Oregon Trail. Eastern Oregon State College.

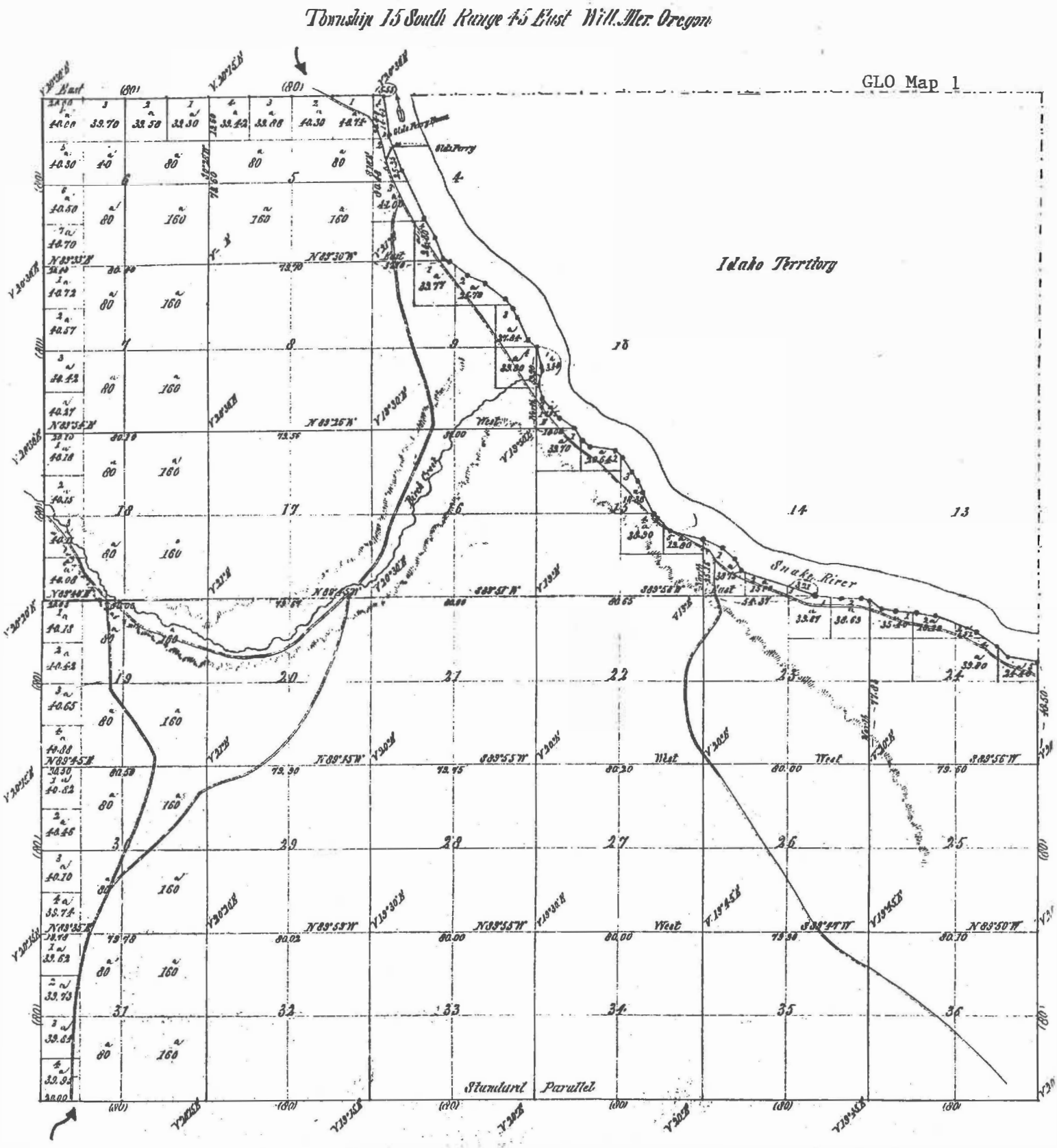
Haines, Aubrey
1981 Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail. The Patrice Press.

U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management
n.d. Oregon Trail and General Land Office Maps and Files.



Oregon Trail Map

Adapted from Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries Oregon Heritage Brochure 3 "The Oregon Trail"



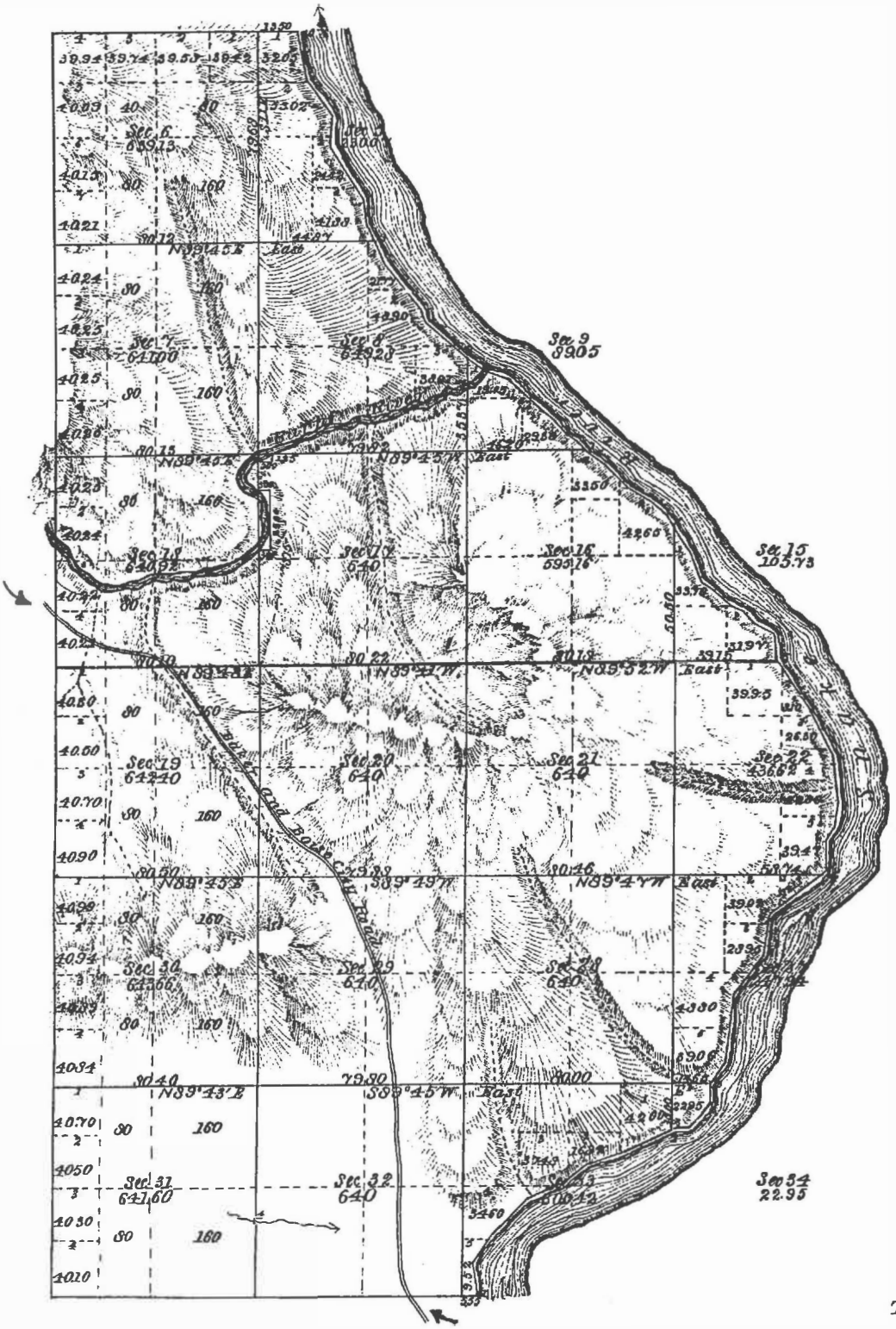
Contractor	Contract No	Contract Date	Amount Surveyed Miles	Chains	Links	Commenced	Completed
Drum	204	July 3d 1874	45	12	19	July 30th 1874	August 4th 1874
			5	56	29		
		Total	50.	68	48		

The above Map of the subdivisional lines of Town
Oregon is strictly conformable to the original fi
been examined and approved.
U.S. Surveyor Generals Office.
Portland Oregon June 23d. 1875

1874 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Birch Creek to Farewell Bend
Olds Ferry on the Snake

Township No. 14 South **Range No. 45 East** ***Willamette Meridian, Oregon.***

GLO Map 2



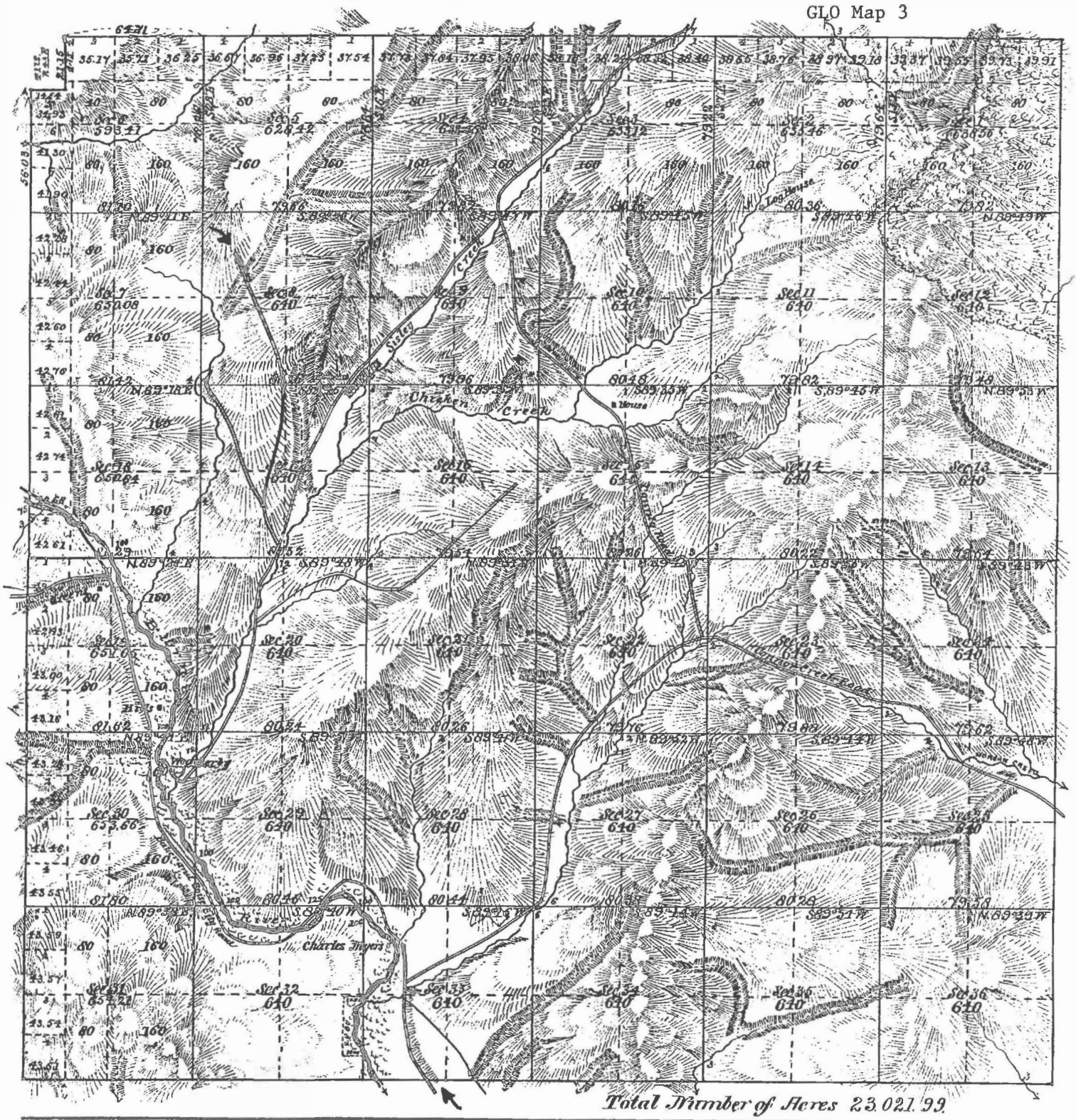
Total number of acres 10.265.93

SURVEYS DESIGNATED.	BY WHOM SURVEYED.	NO.	DATE OF CONTRACT.	AMOUNT OF SURVEYS. Miles.	Chains.	Links.	WHEN SURVEYED.	MEAN DECLINATION.
Township Lines	George Henderson	102	July 8.1881					
Subdivisions	Herman D Gradon	428	Dec 16.1881	27	68	77	April 2d to 7 1882	21°E
Tenders	do do do	do	do do do	8	00	25		

1882 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Farewell Bend to Huntington

Township No. 12 South *Range No. 14 East* *Willamette Meridian, Oregon.*

GLO Map 3



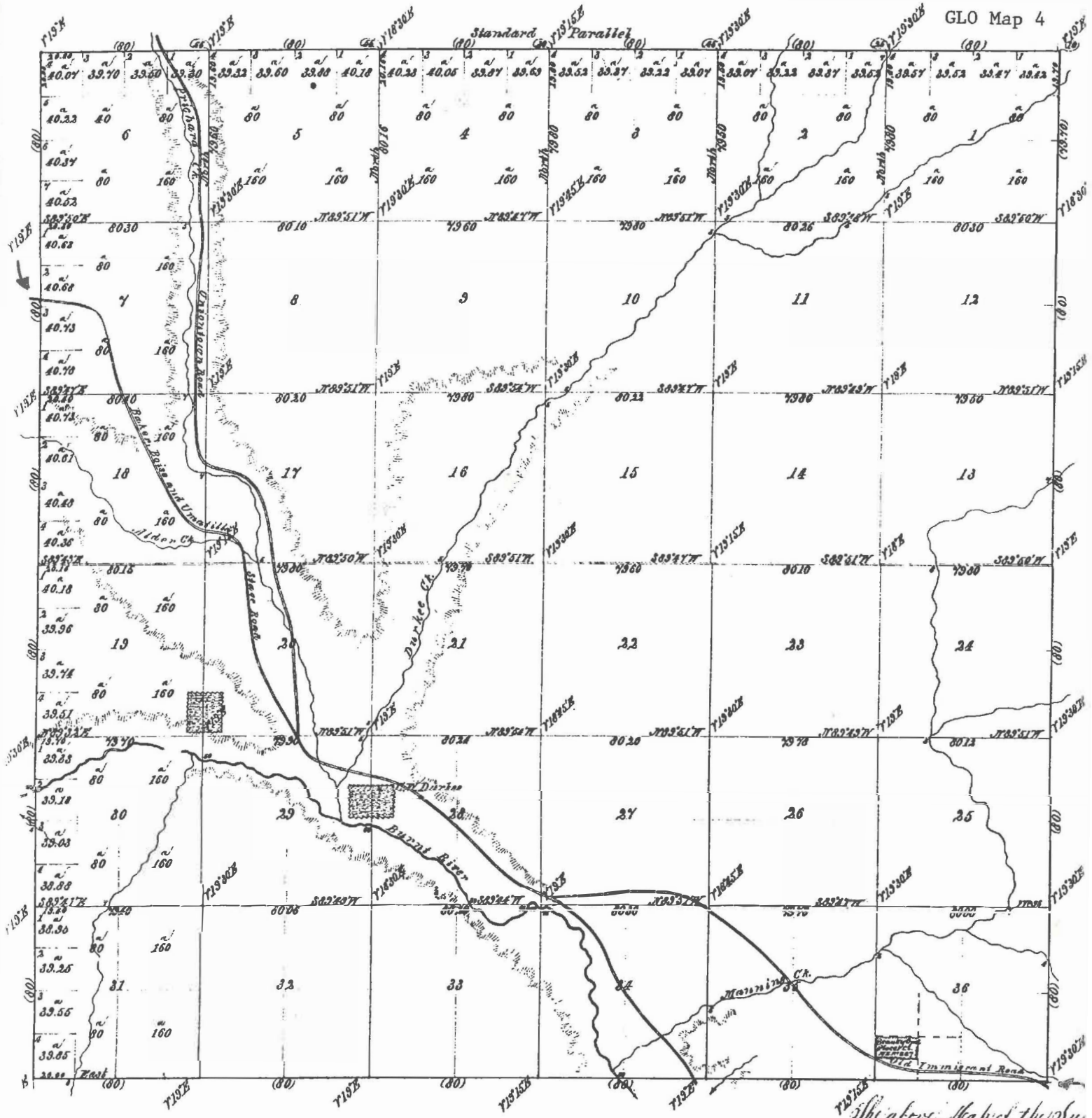
Total Number of Acres 23,021.99

SURVEYS DESIGNATED.	BY WHOM SURVEYED.	NO.	DATE OF CONTRACT.	AMOUNT OF SURVEYS. Miles.	Chains.	Links.	WHEN SURVEYED.	MEAN DECLINATION.
...nship Lines	George Henderson	402	July 8 1881	60	02	75	May 15 to 25 1882	20° 22' 30" E
...divisions	Herman D. Gruden	428	Dec. 16 1882					
...tions	do do do	do.	do do do		21	15		

1882 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Weatherby, up Sisley Creek

Township 11 South, Range 43 East, Will. Mer. Or.

GLO Map 4

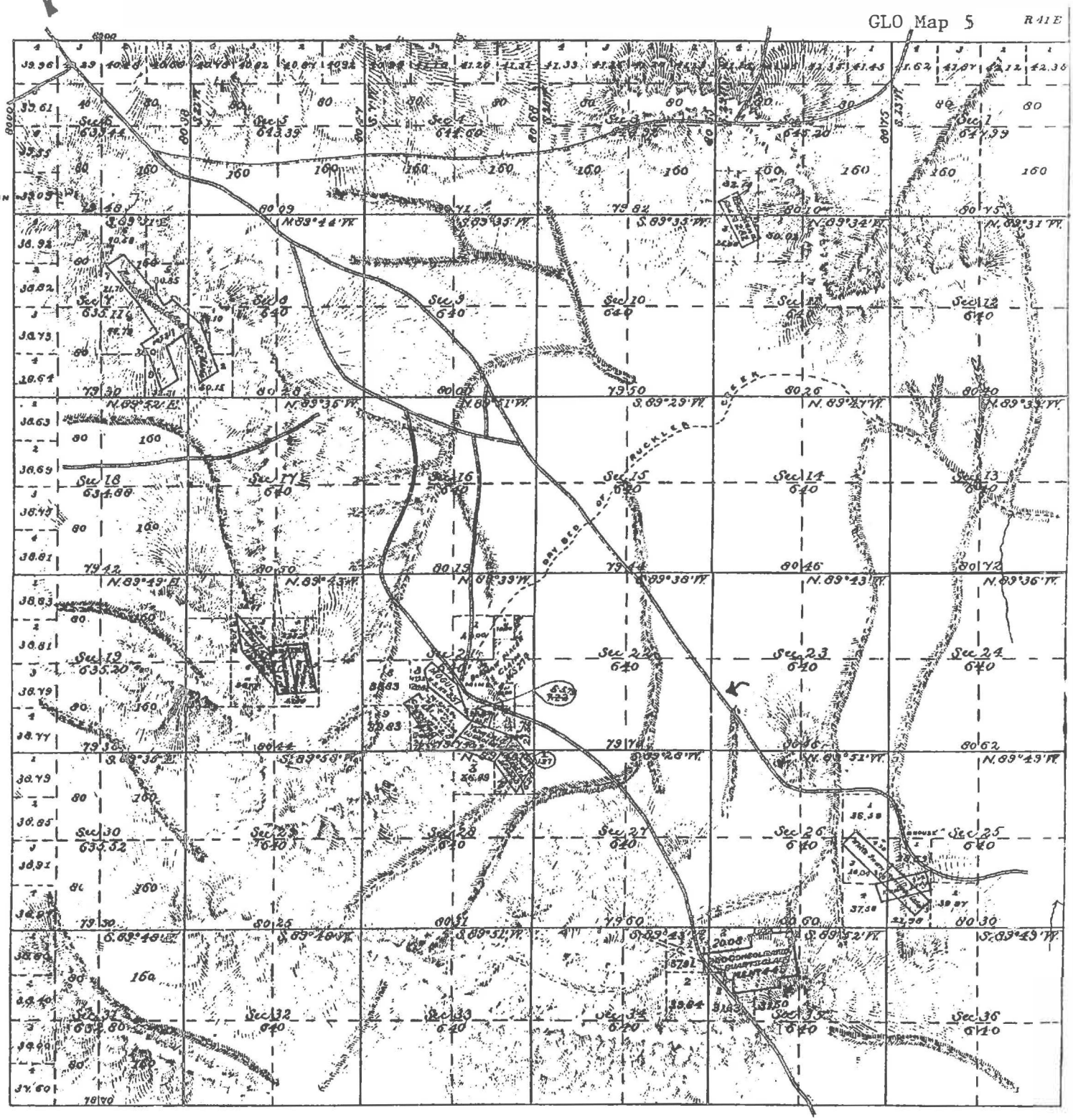


Contract No.	Date	Amount Surveyed Miles	Chains	Links	Commenced	Completed
211	July 14, 1874	59	77	09	Sept. 25th 1874	Oct. 3rd 1874
			02	20		
	Total	59	79	29		
	July 15, 1873					

The above Map of the Sur[illegible] South, Range 43 East, Will. [illegible] to the original field notes of [illegible] Office which have been exa[illegible] U.S. Surveyor General's Office Eugene City, Oregon, March 31st 1[illegible]

1874 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Swayze Creek to Durkee to Alder Creek

Township No. 9 South **Range No. 41 East** **Willamette Meridian, Oregon.**



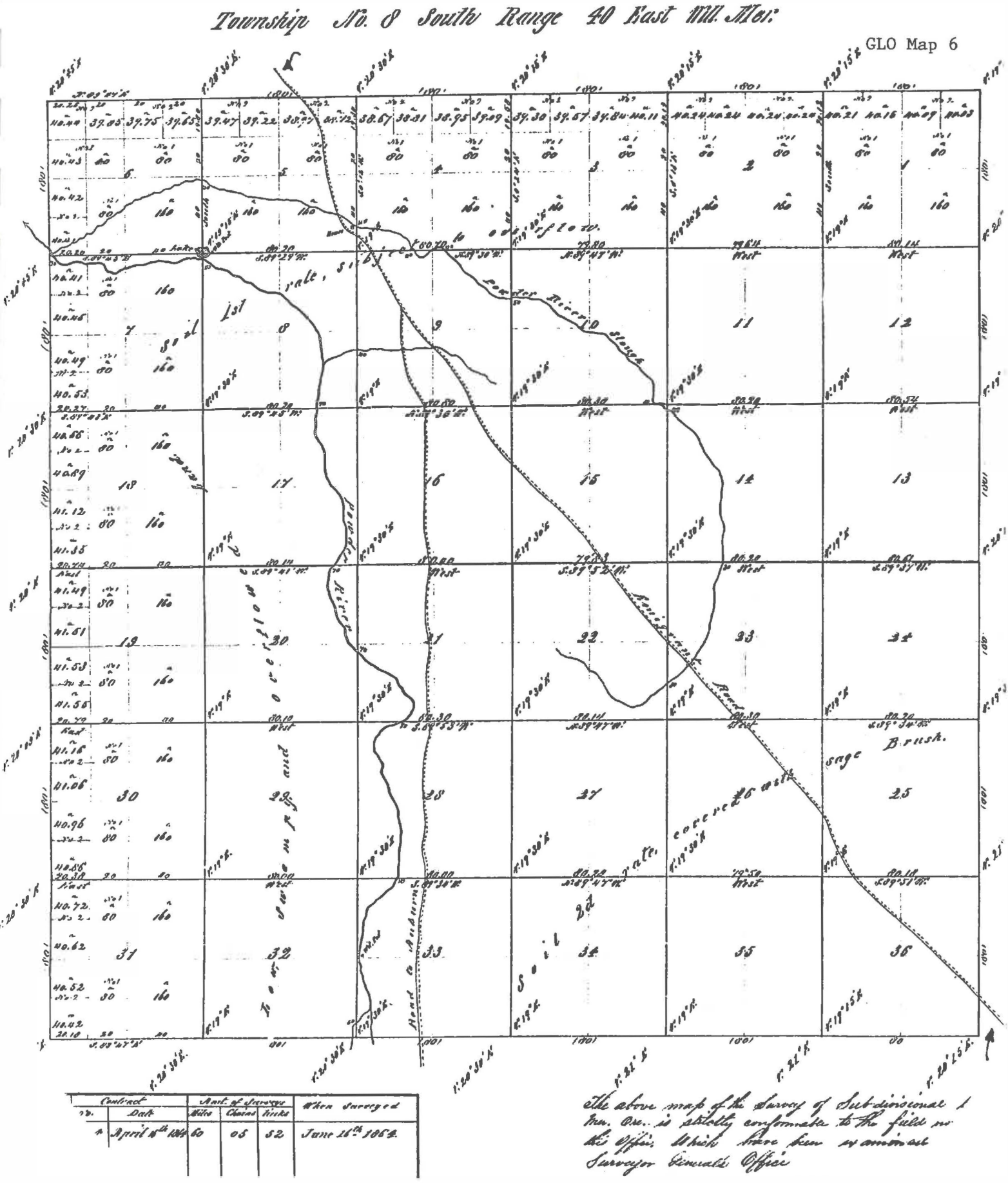
Total number of Acres 23.03905

SURVEYS DESIGNATED.	BY WHOM SURVEYED.	NO.	DATE OF CONTRACT.	AMOUNT OF SURVEYS.			WHEN SURVEYED.	MEAN DECLINATION.
				Miles.	Chains.	Links.		
Township Lines Subdivisions	W. B. Barr	413	May 23. 1882	60	04	76	Oct. 31 to Nov. 13. 1882	20°52'30" E.

Scale, 40 Chains to an Inch.

1882 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Virtue Flat to Flagstaff Hill
Gold Mines on Virtue Flat

GLO Map 6

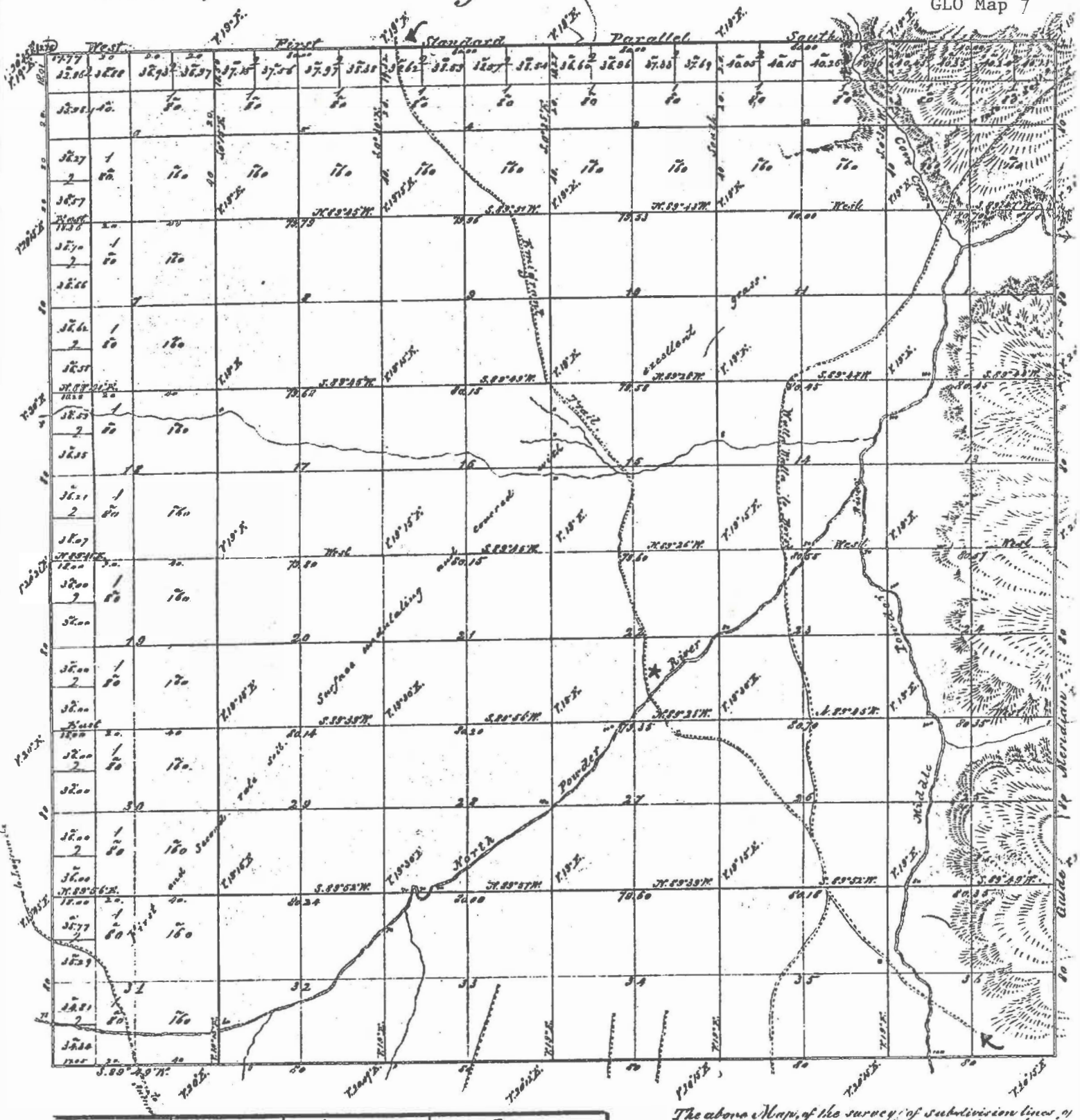


Contract		Amt. of Surveys			When Surveyed
No.	Date	Miles	Chains	links	
4	April 18th 1864	60	05	52	June 16th 1864.

1864 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Flagstaff Hill to Baldock Slough

Township No. 6 South Range No. 39 East Willamette Meridian.

GLO Map 7



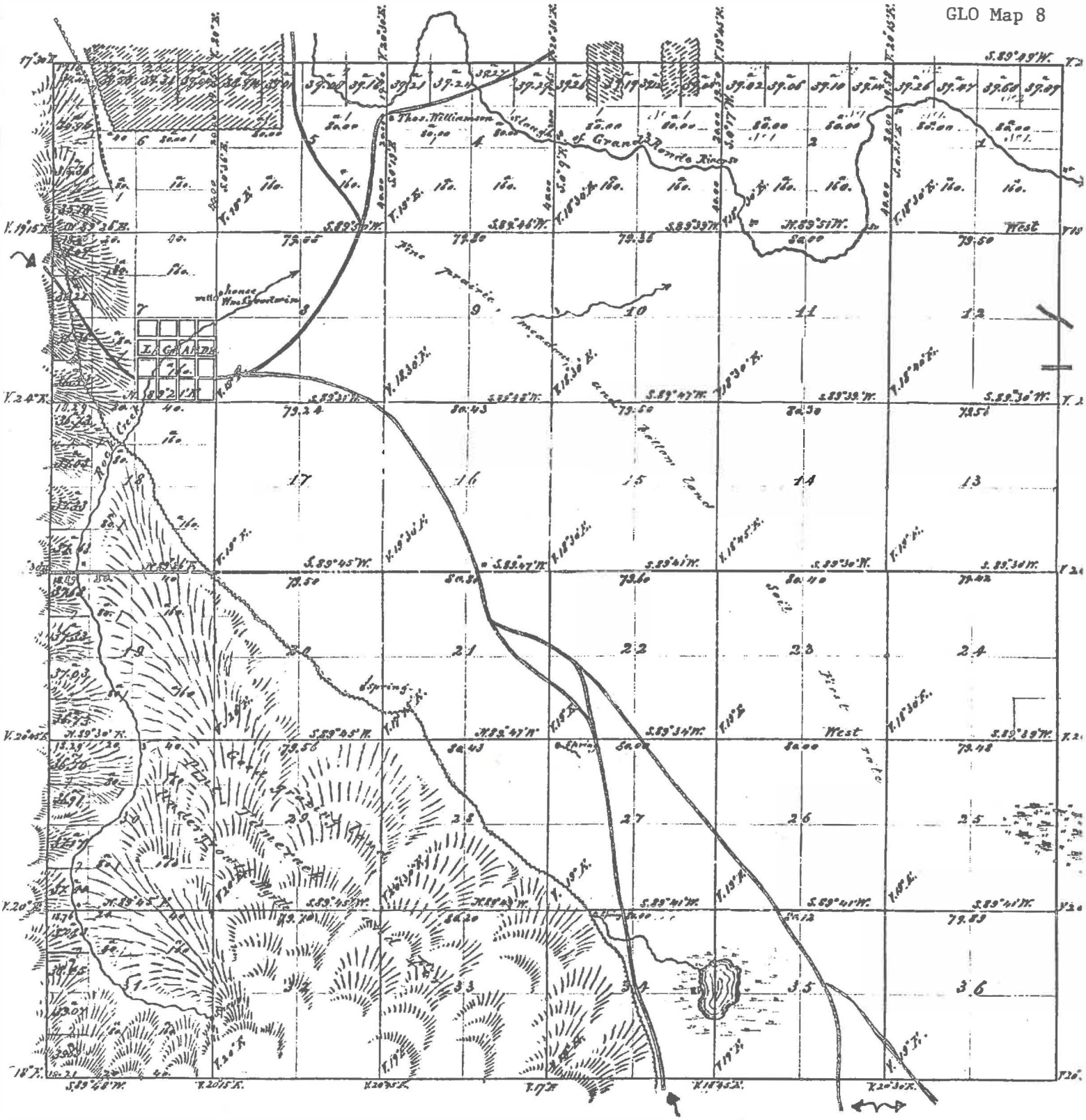
By whom surveyed	Contract No.	Contract Date	Aml. of Surveys Miles	Chains	Lks.	When Surveyed
Thompson	103	Sept 3 1863	59	70	01	November 4th 1862
			5	77	77	

The above Map of the survey of subdivision lines of is strictly conformable to the field notes of the su which have been examined and approved.
Surveyor Generals Office
Eugene City Feb 1st 1864

1863 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from North Powder to Clover Valley

Township No. 3 South Range No. 38 East Will. Mer.

GLO Map 8



By whom Surveyed	Contract No.	Contract Date	Amt. of Survey Miles	Chs.	Links	When Surveyed
B. F. Thompson	108	Sept. 5th 1863	59	65	00	Sept. 25th 1863

The above Map of the Survey of Subdivisions of Range No. 38 East Will. Mer. Oregon is hereby approved, on file in this office

Surveyor General's Office

Eugene City Feb. 15th 1881

1863 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from Ladd Marsh to La Grande

GLO Map 9

Township No. 3 South Range No. 37 East of the Willamette Meridian Oregon

Grande Ronde River

Land High

Emigrant Road

Soil 2nd Rate

good grazing

Total number of Acres 22394.96

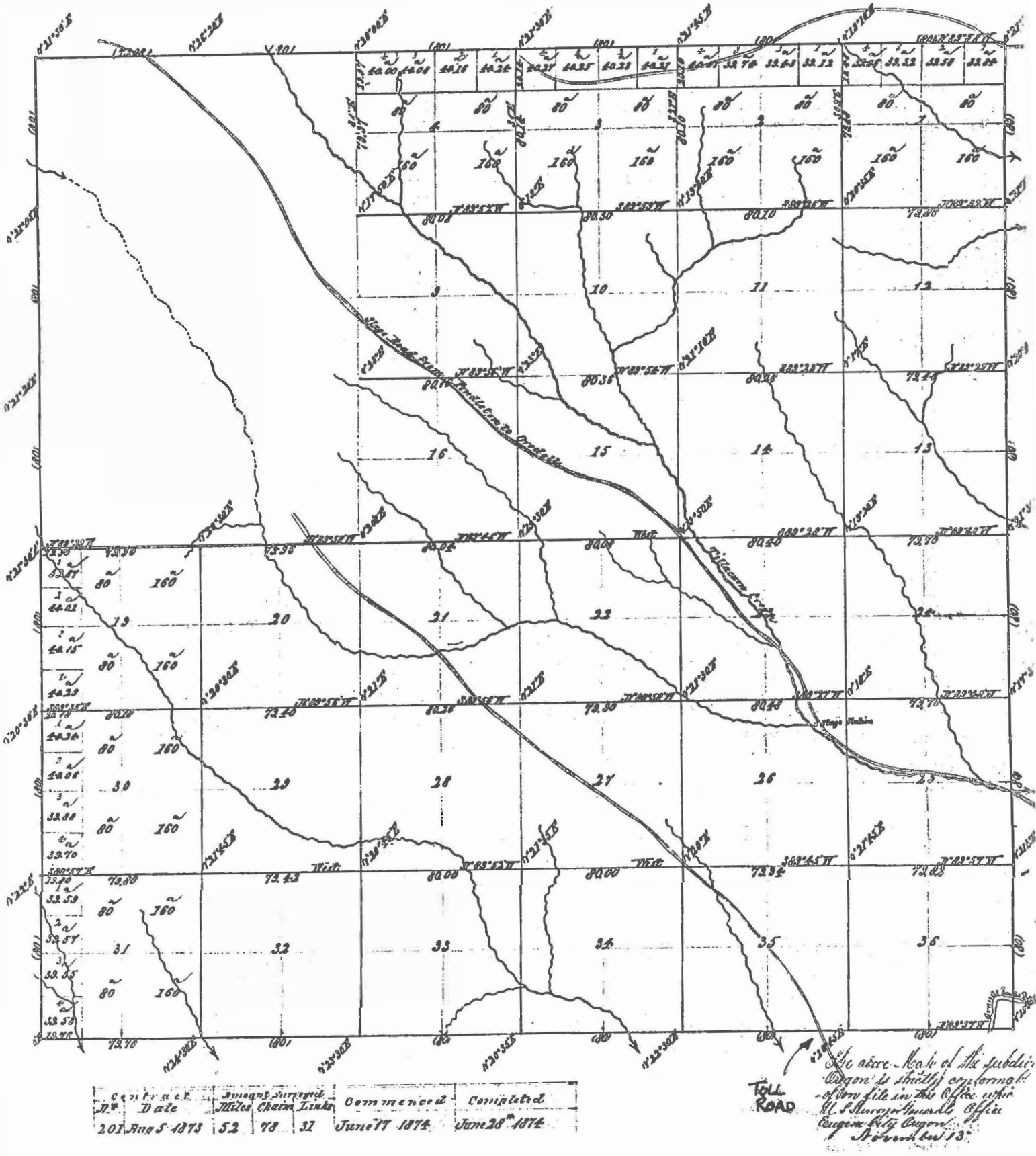
[illegible]uted	By Whom Surveyed	Date of Contract	Amount of Surveys M. Ch. Lk.	When Surveyed	No. of Contract
	Odell & Gray	May 27, 1867	60. 02. 92	July 11, 1867	120

The above Map of Township No. 3 South Willamette Meridian Oregon [illegible] notes of the survey thereof on file in this Office

Surveyor General's Office.

Eugene City Feby 7 – 1868

1867 General Land Office Survey: Oregon Trail from La Grande to Hilgard



1874 General Land Office Survey: Stage Road from Hilgard up Pelican (Tillacum) Creek