

Eagle Rock Ferry

Number 71

1982

T3N, R37, Section 12.

In May 1863, Harry Rickard and William Hickman began construction of a ferry across the Snake River a few miles above the present town of Idaho Falls. Rickard left Hickman to complete the ferry and proceeded to explore a new route to Soda Springs. They hoped to gain the upper Missouri gold miners' traffic by opening a new and shorter trail. They also thought they might receive a portion of the westward traveling emigrant traffic. Rickard was successful and returned from Soda Springs with three wagon trains that he had induced to try his new route. Two of the trains were emigrants; the other was freighters. James Stuart, a well known Montana pioneer, came along as a guide. The three trains arrived at the ferry on June 18, 1863. However, the ferry was not yet finished and the initial crossing could not be made until June 20, when over 200 persons crossed on the new ferry. Since eagles nested on a juniper tree located on a lava rock island nearby, the ferry site was known as Eagle Rock.

In May 1863, General Patrick E. Connor was interested in finding a more direct route to the ferry from Soda Springs. He dispatched Lieutenant Clark and a detachment of forty-five men to locate the shortcut and in his report dated June 3, 1863, said, "This expedition was eminently successful, finding a good pass for a road along the base of the triangle mentioned above, striking Snake River seventy miles above and east of the present ferry. At this point a ferry has been established, and in a short time a good boat will be in running order..." (War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, p. 228.)

Since both Rickard and Connor's men were in the field at the same time searching for a new route, it is probable that they joined forces in locating the new road.

In the summer of 1864, James Madison Taylor came through the area building stage stations for Ben Holladay's Overland Stage line, a branch of which ran from Salt Lake to Virginia City, Montana. He located a station at Eagle Rock ferry, which he purchased from Rickard and Hickman. At this point, Matt Taylor joined with Edgar M. Morgan and William F. Bartlett to form the Oneida Road, Bridge, and Ferry Company. They were granted a bridge and ferry franchise by territorial legislative act of December 10, 1864. Toll rates authorized for the ferry were:

For a man and a horse, .50

For a horse and a carriage, \$3.00
For a wagon and two horses, or two oxen, \$4.00
For each additional pair of horses or cattle, \$1.00
For each animal with a pack, .50
For loose animals, other than sheep or hogs, .25
For sheep and hogs, each, .15
(Idaho Session Laws, 1864, p. 477.)

The next summer, Matt Taylor constructed a bridge across the Snake River at Idaho Falls, as authorized by his legislative franchise. The bridge was known as Eagle Rock bridge, after the ferry it had replaced. The community that grew up there also was named Eagle Rock. Toll rates on the bridge were the same as on the ferry. Taylor's bridge thus replaced the ferry, but the ferry had adequately served its purpose by accommodating many travelers and in serving a new route from Soda Springs to the Montana gold fields.

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