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REFERENCE SERIES

BROWNLEE FERRY

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In the fall of 1862, after Timothy Goodale had taken "an emigrant train of seventy wagons" over his cutoff via Freezeout Hill to Powder River, John Brownlee owned a ferry on Snake River at the crossing of Goodale's route. Goodale's Cutoff in Oregon came out of Grand Ronde Valley along the divide between Eagle Creek and Powder River, struck north just before the mouth of Eagle Creek to Pine Creek, and after following a short way down Pine Creek crossed a high summit and descended to Snake River at Brownlee's Ferry.

East of the ferry, Goodale's Cutoff went ten miles up Brownlee Creek to the drainage of the Weiser, and reached Middle Valley on the divide between Pine Creek and Rush Creek. Then it crossed some hills to the Payette just west of Black Canyon, from which Goodale's route ascended Freezeout Hill.

During the gold rush to Boise Basin (for which Brownlee established his ferry) a fair number of pack trains and saddle trains came that way. In the winter of 1863-1864, the ferry boat was lost down the river while Brownlee was mining in Boise Basin.

So he put in another good boat in the spring of 1864, anticipating that the main freight and stage road from the Columbia River to Boise Basin would come his way. Brownlee neglected improving the wagon route, however, and spent his time mining in the basin instead. When he found that the stage lines and freight wagons were using Old's Ferry and others farther up the river, he abandoned his ferry altogether late in 1864.

Tim Goodale occupied Brownlee's fine log house at the site for a time after Brownlee left, but except for a skiff operated by Ike Powell to accommodate occasional traffic that way, the ferry business at Brownlee did not amount to anything until discovery of the Heath mines not far from the ferry. Then in the summer of 1876, William A. West improved a road from Heath to the ferry (which he started under a new charter) and on west to Pine Valley in Oregon.