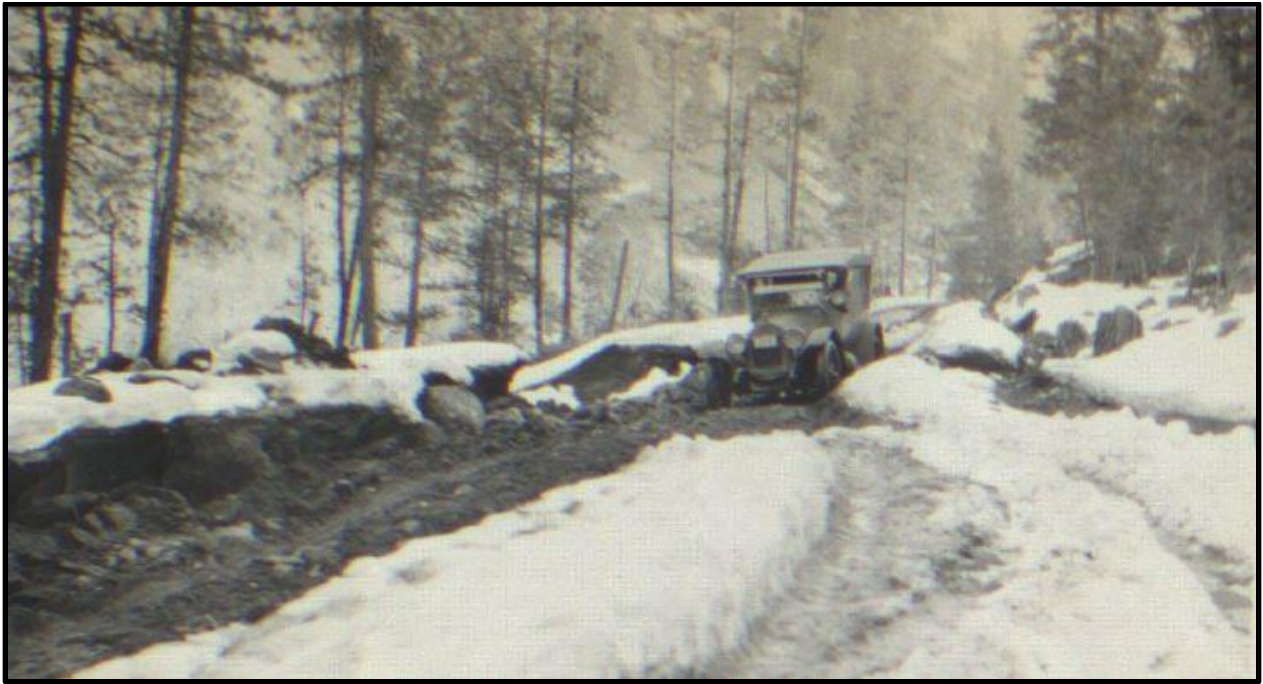


“Road of No Return”

The Story of Travel Through the Little Salmon River Canyon



By Amalia Baldwin, M.S., and Jennifer Stevens, Ph.D.

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This report on the history of travel in the Little Salmon River corridor has been prepared as Section 106 mitigation for the loss of the historic Little Salmon River Bridge, which was replaced in 2017. Research funding came from the Idaho Transportation Department.

Introduction

From the early 1800s, the impenetrability of Idaho's central interior posed challenges to European settlement and development. Characterized by rugged mountains, deep canyons, and swift rivers, west central Idaho's economic growth was stunted by its geography, even as more accessible areas to the north and south, such as Lewiston and Boise, participated in the nation's western expansion through settlement and growth. As the century progressed, however, Idaho citizens insisted on opening this vast interior territory, providing better access to its precious metals and fertile agricultural and grazing lands, while connecting the state's two political centers. Their greatest challenge was finding a suitable route. The history of travel between north and south Idaho is a tale of difficult geography, regional competition and grievances, native displacement and United States military forts, and Idaho's overall economic evolution. It is a region that was traversed first by Native Americans, then by pack trains, and eventually by wagons and private stages that carried people, goods, and mail. Finally, in the mid-1920s, a road built for automobiles tapped the coffers of territory, county, state, and federal governments and connected north and south Idaho through one of the most stunning regions of the state.

In west central Idaho, mountain peaks climb to elevations of nearly 10,000 feet, while rivers course through narrow valleys, making their way to the Snake River. It is in this rugged interior that the Little Salmon River rises to the surface, flowing north and gathering tributary waters such as Goose Creek, Boulder Creek, and Rapid River. The river flows north through the Meadows Valley, where today's New Meadows is situated, before it enters a narrow gorge at the north end of the valley, and merges with the Salmon River approximately 50 miles downstream from New Meadows near the town of Riggins. The Salmon River continues a northward flow, flanked by the Seven Devils mountain range and Hells Canyon Wilderness on the west and the mountains of the Payette National Forest on the east. Many tributaries contribute their flows from both the east and west banks, serving as conduits of the annual snowmelt from the area's towering peaks, before the Salmon empties into the Snake River upstream from Lewiston.

Today this region is accessed by U.S. Highway 95 (U.S. 95). This is the story of one particular section of U.S. 95: the stretch between what became the logging town of New Meadows and the frontier town of Riggins. Between the two towns, the gentle grade along the Little Salmon and Salmon Rivers promised a pathway of travel through the rugged and steep Salmon Mountains. The route, however, was fraught with obstacles. The region's topography slowed settlement, hampered government, restricted commerce, and challenged engineers. For generations, people tried and failed to build a suitable road linking north and south Idaho through this corridor. The task, first proposed in the 1870s as a possible Fort Boise to Fort Lapwai Military Wagon Road, was not satisfactorily completed until the mid-1920s. In the intervening half century, it was known by many names, including the Little Salmon River Wagon Road, the Idaho-Pacific Highway, the North-South Highway, State Route 1, and eventually U.S. Highway

95. As it was built, the road influenced Idaho's mining and recreational history, elucidating the role that trails and roads play in shaping American history.

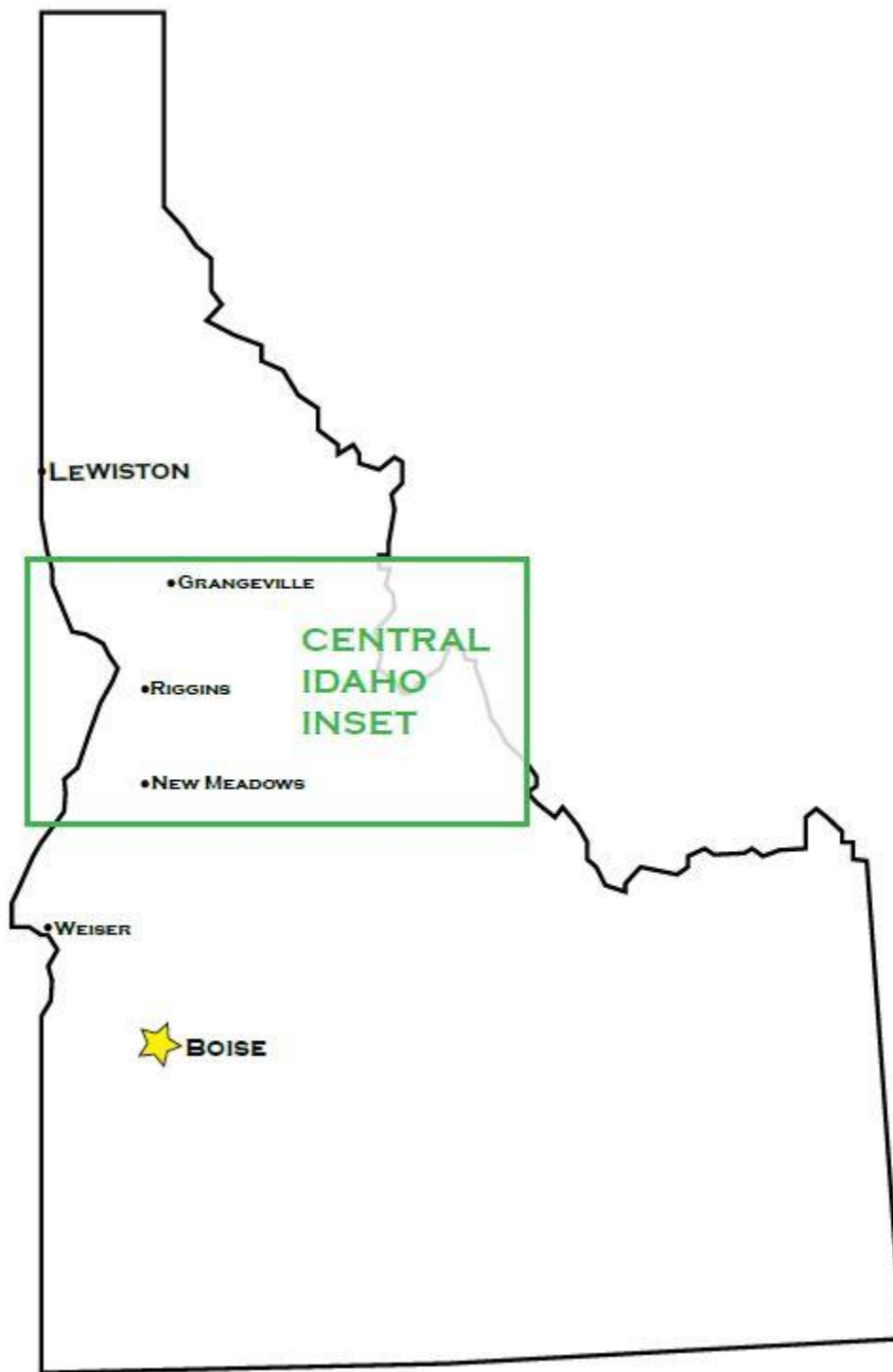


Figure 1 Map of Idaho showing inset of Central Idaho

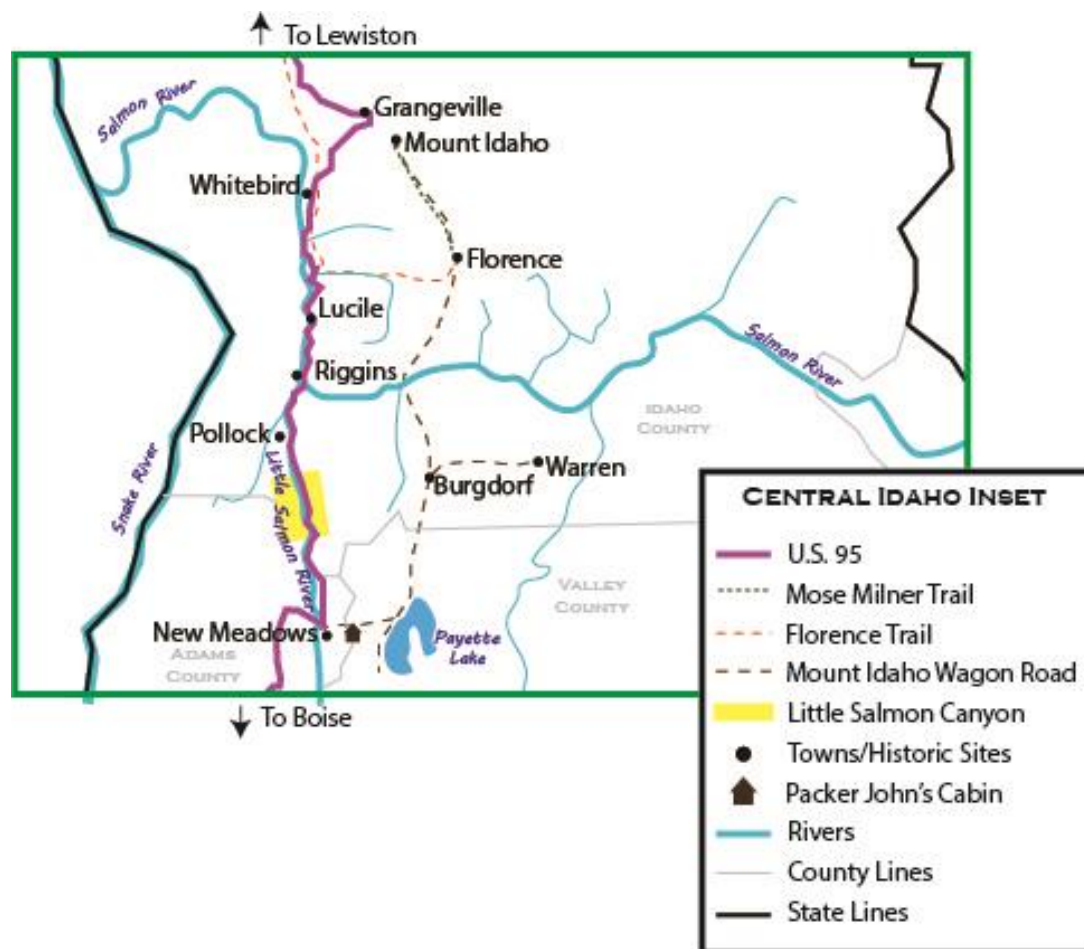


Figure 2 Central Idaho

Early Travel in West Central Idaho, to 1885

Long before European Americans arrived in central Idaho, the Little Salmon River Basin lay at the heart of the Nez Perce people's homeland. Scholars have estimated the tribe's aboriginal territory to have been as large as 27,000 square miles, with a density of 5 to 12 people per 100 square miles. As one of the Plateau tribes that was influenced by contact with Great Plains peoples after approximately 1700,² the Nez Perce depended heavily on fishing and tuberous roots for their food base, supplemented by big game hunting. They undertook seasonal migrations on horseback in search of food sources, moving from river valleys in the spring to higher lands by late summer, and sometimes wintered with fellow tribes in what is known as Montana today. The Nez Percés' renowned horsemanship permitted them to travel annually to the Great Plains for buffalo and antelope hunting over major trails such as Lolo Pass in northern Idaho.³ Other trails used by the Nez Perce in their seasonal migrations crisscrossed their tribal lands, and were noted and used by the Euro-Americans who first entered this territory in the early 1800s.

In 1846, Great Britain and the United States settled on a permanent boundary between the British province of Canada and the United States through signing of the Oregon Treaty. This treaty ended the joint occupation of the Pacific Northwest and created additional sovereign territory for the new country.

The territory encompassing Nez Perce land and today's state of Idaho became a part of the United States as a result, and the discovery of gold in 1860 accelerated its development and changed the course of the state's history. Several of the state's earliest gold rushes took place on the ancestral land of the Nez Perce tribe. Particularly notable was when prospectors struck gold in summer 1861 on lands south of the Clearwater River in Salmon River country, and despite efforts to maintain secrecy regarding the Florence basin discovery, a "stampede" over the mountains from the northern towns of Oro Fino and Pierce, Idaho took place by October. By the following spring, 10,000 miners had arrived in Florence, and during the course of the next several months, the boom moved south, first to Warrens, and then to Idaho City and the Boise Basin.⁴ Soon, central Idaho was swarming with prospectors, and mining towns sprung up to serve the new citizens.



Figure 3 Pictographs along the Little Salmon River⁵

Prospecting on Nez Perce land, of course, had been prohibited by the 1855 (ratified in 1859) treaty that recognized the tribe's historic use and occupation of the land. But stopping the white prospectors proved to be a low priority for a country in the midst of civil war. The Nez Perce, whose country stretched over millions of acres, depended on the lands for subsistence. But instead of defending the original treaty and keeping the white prospectors out of these lands as originally promised, the United States negotiated a new treaty – opposed by many tribal members – in 1863 (ratified in 1867), which ceded 90% of the tribe's original treaty lands to the United States, and effectively opened the lands to the public.⁶

By the mid-1860s, two routes existed to get to Florence, the hotbed of mining, from the north. The first brought travelers south from Lewiston across the Camas Prairie, over White Bird Hill, and down the Salmon River to Slate Creek, where they turned up into the mountains to access Florence. The other route turned east from a point much further north on the prairie near what is now the town of Grangeville, and headed over Mount Idaho via the "Mose Milner" trail, constructed by Moses Milner in

1862.⁷ Both routes charged users a \$1 toll per pack or saddle animal.⁸ Getting to Florence and the rest of mining country from the south posed more of a challenge. From the Boise Basin or the Snake River near Fort Boise, travelers had no way to reach the mining camps of Florence without leaving Idaho Territory and heading into Oregon. They could get as far as Meadows¹ on the west or Warrens on the east, but had no means other than trails of ascending the final stretch through the very rugged terrain. Some of these trails had been worn by native use and were shown on later General Land Office plats of the area. (See Figure 4.) Meadows, then, served as a jumping off point for many travelers from the south.

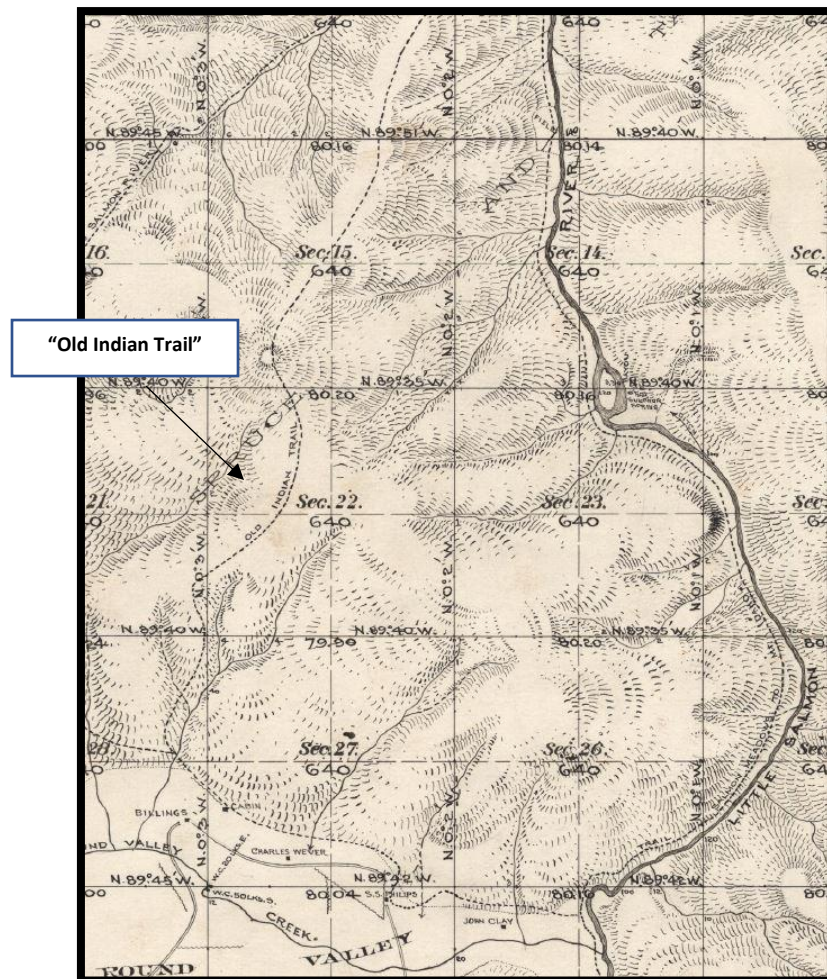


Figure 4 General Land Office Survey Plat of Township 21 North, Range 1 East showing several trails in the Little Salmon Region, including one labelled "Old Indian Trail."⁹

¹ The town of Meadows, which was once referred to as "Little Salmon Meadows" or the "Meadows Valley," was replaced as an area of commerce by "New Meadows" when the Pacific and Idaho Northern terminated its rail line less than two miles west of the original town center in 1911. For simplicity, the town is referred to as "Meadows" until 1910 and "New Meadows" thereafter.

It was in these early mining days that “Packer” John Walsh constructed a cabin (still visible today) in the meadows near Goose Creek, a tributary to the Little Salmon River. From here, Packer John staged the mail between the Boise Basin and Lewiston.¹⁰ In 1863, Idaho Republicans held their first territorial convention meeting at his home, arriving by horseback with pack animals.¹¹ This excursion probably left little doubt in the leaders’ minds of the challenge they faced connecting the northern and southern parts of the new territory, and roads and trails were no doubt part of the solution. By year’s end, the new legislature, which met in Lewiston, passed an act making all roads “public,” and enabling counties to create road districts and assess taxes.¹²



Figure 5 "Packer John" Cabin ca. 1922¹³

With surging populations and the establishment of postal routes, it was becoming clear to those in the north that they needed a reliable and passable route between Lewiston and the population centers to the south. And, when the 1864 Territorial Legislature met in Boise instead of Lewiston, it was clear that a competitive spirit between the two sections of the territory had developed, a rivalry that some believed could only be cured with a physical connection between them.¹⁴ Recommendations on a route were first made in 1872, when Washington town (in today’s Washington County) postmaster C.A. Sears proposed a joint stock company to construct a toll road from Boise to the head of the Weiser Valley, then down the Little Salmon River to the site of old Goff’s Ferry,¹⁵ situated at the mouth of Race Creek, approximately six miles below the town of Pollock, near modern-day Riggins. Presumably, a traveler could connect to other trails there and get to Florence. However, a new competition soon arose in the quest to unite north and south Idaho, one that pitted one rough route against another. While residents of Warrens desired the construction of a wagon road to their camp further east, which would then

connect over several mountainous divides to Florence via a rough trail, residents of the Weiser and Meadows areas believed that traversing the Little Salmon River canyon was the more logical way to proceed. Neither was ideal, though, thanks to the rough terrain, steep mountains and canyons, and the raging rivers.

Territorial leaders nevertheless recognized both the importance of the link as well as the impossibility of sparsely populated and poorly funded counties independently taking on the task of construction. In January 1874, the *Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman* first reported that the Idaho congressional delegation was advocating a military wagon road between Fort Lapwai in the north and Fort Boise in the south, traveling along the Little Salmon River from Goff's Ferry, down the Weiser River valley and into the Snake River valley to Boise. According to the paper, there was "already a trail over this whole route," and the paper urged the bill's passage to improve communications between north and south Idaho and to quiet northern rumblings regarding dividing the territory into northern and southern portions. The 1879 General Land Office surveys in the area show a trail along the Little Salmon River as well as another trail, coming up the Weiser River Valley, and connecting with the Little Salmon trail. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Furthermore, the paper argued that branch roads to this route – including to Warrens – could be constructed to allow for easier travel to the mining areas in the Salmon Mountains and for the introduction of machinery to the mines, which would bring additional revenues. This road would also shorten the route between from Boise to Lewiston from the existing 400 miles to a mere 260.¹⁶

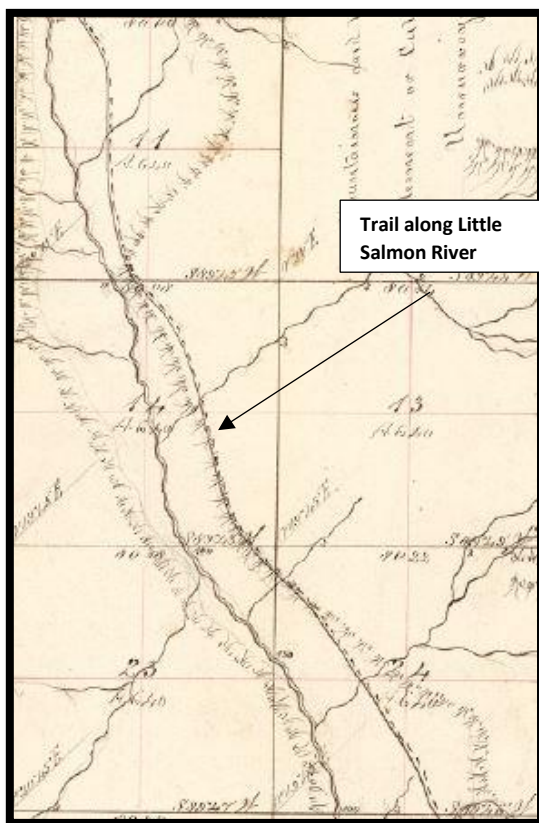


Figure 6 Survey Plat of Township 20 North, Range 1 East showing a trail (dotted line on right) ascending and descending the steep walls of the Little Salmon Canyon. The Little Salmon is the river at the bottom of the canyon.¹⁷

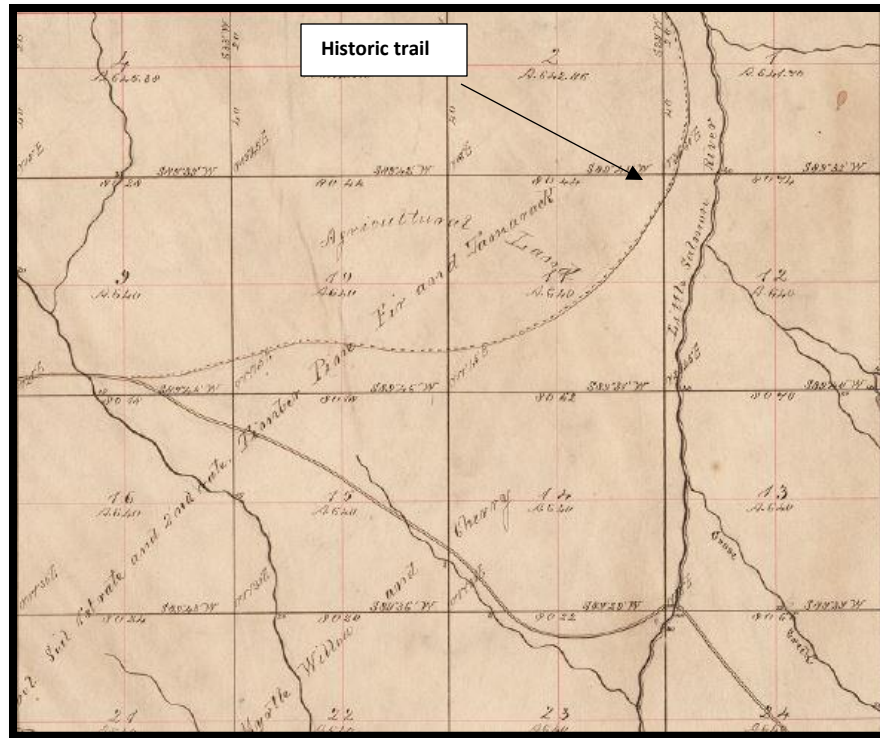


Figure 7 Survey Plat of Township 19 North, Range 1 East showing a trail leaving the Little Salmon River and meeting up with a travel route heading west to Weiser.¹⁸

The *Statesman* reported nothing further on the north-south route until January 1877 when the Territorial Legislature passing a memorial for a military road between Fort Boise and Fort Lapwai, in which Idaho's governing body reiterated the \$80,000 request to Congress to build the segment of military road from White Bird Creek to the head of the Weiser River Valley (in Meadows). The *Statesman* reported that roads already existed between Fort Boise and the Upper Weiser and from White Bird to Fort Lapwai, which left only the construction of the 90-mile stretch along the Salmon and Little Salmon to complete a road between northern and southern portions of the territory.¹⁹

The year of the memorial also marked the tragedy and violence of the Nez Perce war, which was fought across this region and put many white settlers on edge. Not surprisingly, discussion of the road peaked the following winter. A public meeting about the road preceded a petition, sent to the Idaho congressional delegate and printed in the *Statesman*, which urgently requested the road and claimed it to be a necessity for three primary reasons: it would cut the distance between north and south Idaho significantly, it would open up settlement in the areas that it traversed, and it would protect citizens of the state from further Indian attacks, "such as our people experienced last summer."²⁰ Colonel R.F. Bernard of Fort Boise travelled the route of the proposed road, wrote the petition, and testified in its favor.²¹ In late January 1878, the *Statesman* reported that House Bill No. 885, "making appropriation for a military wagon road from Fort Boise to Fort Lapwai" was referred to the committee on military affairs.²²

Although it seemed as though momentum was on the road's side, there were detractors from the effort. Northern Idahoans were less enthusiastic than their southern counterparts. On two occasions during 1877, the editors of *The Teller*, published in Lewiston, Idaho, had argued against the military wagon road. First, the paper argued that the proposed road would be neither a military route nor a commercial thoroughfare as there was little need for communication between the two regions of the Territory. Northern Idaho had a natural outlet for its products via the Columbia River and southern Idaho had a natural route for its products via the Central Pacific Railroad. The article stated that the only benefit of the proposed road would be for localized settlement for stock raising. The article instead argued for a road from Fort Lapwai or Camas Prairie to Warrens, in order to expand the mining potential of that region.²³ Furthermore, Lewiston complained that the military road's proponents were motivated by the idea of "checkmating the desire of the people of North Idaho for sloughing off to Washington Territory."²⁴ In January 1878, the *Statesman* criticized the Lewiston *Teller* for seeking "to throw cold water upon the enterprise of building a military wagon road," noting that the *Teller's* views were "short-sighted" and "selfish" and that its proposal of an alternative road, to Warrens via Florence, was "too absurd to merit attention." Both mining towns could, in the *Statesman's* opinion, more practically be reached by branch roads from the proposed military road.²⁵

The 1878 elections took the territorial representative's attention away from obtaining congressional funding for the road, but the *Statesman* urged its readers to "try, try again."²⁶ In April 1879, the *Statesman* reported on the formation of Washington County, which, it argued, gave new life to the military wagon road effort. The paper opined that the road would spur settlement, which was necessary for the new county to support itself. The best way to encourage that, according to the article, was through the construction of the military wagon road.²⁷ The *Statesman* did not report on the subject again. In 1884, Fort Lapwai was abandoned as a primary post and was turned into an outpost for Fort Walla Walla.²⁸

The North-South Wagon Road, 1885-1901

With the option of a military wagon road off the table, the territorial government turned to other funding mechanisms to finance a north-south road.²⁹ The threat of annexation and Indian uprisings remained, as did the desire to improve access to mining districts in the Salmon River region. From 1885 to 1889, the government could find no way to adequately finance a road through the mountainous heart of the territory. The *Idaho County Free Press* and the *Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman* discussed the merits of various proposals to connect Lewiston and Boise in 1887 and 1888, but it wasn't until February 1889 that a proposal gained traction.³⁰



Figure 8 Meadows, Idaho ca. 1897³¹

On February 5, 1889, the Idaho Territorial Legislature passed the Mount Idaho to Little Salmon Meadows Wagon Road Act financed by \$50,000 in 20-year bonds. The act provided for state financing to cover the cost of the route's initial construction, but required counties to continue maintenance.³² The press lauded the legislation, but the proposed route was controversial.³³ The approved route originated at Idaho County's Mount Idaho, the county seat, and travelled south via Florence and Warm Springs Resort (Burgdorf), then west to Little Salmon Meadows (Meadows) in Washington County, bypassing the Little Salmon River entirely.² (See Figure 2 for the town's location.) The state intended for this route to open more areas to settlement, connect the two regions of the territory, and provide easy transport of military supplies and troops in the event of Indian uprisings.³⁴ But detractors felt that this mountainous route was far less sensible than the course of the proposed military road, which would have meandered lower along the Little Salmon River.³⁵ Some felt that Governor Norman Willey's experience as a prospector in Warren, a town more easily accessed by the mountain route, had unduly influenced the route selection.³⁶

² When Adams County was established in 1911, Meadows fell within the new county's boundaries. Meadows, now known as New Meadows, remains in Adams County today.



Figure 9 Warren, Idaho ca. 1907³⁷

Despite the controversy, the U.S. Congress ratified the Idaho territorial wagon road legislation in May 1890. Following Idaho's admittance to the Union on July 3, 1890, the state legislature began taking bids for what came to be called the Mount Idaho-Little Salmon Meadows Wagon Road or hereafter the Mount Idaho Road.³⁸ This route traveled from Payette Lake up and over Secesh Summit, past Burgdorf, and down to the Salmon River's confluence with French Creek, well above the river's confluence with the Little Salmon. Here, it crossed the Salmon River and continued north to Florence.³⁹ Work on this road commenced immediately and continued to push through the ridges and valleys east of the Little Salmon River for the next few years.⁴⁰

As road construction progressed up in the mountains, advocates for the alternate route along the Little Salmon River did not give up their cause. The Mount Idaho Road did open rough access to mining areas (though it was incomplete), but the state still needed a road that easily facilitated settler access, and, perhaps more importantly, would remain open even during winter and inclement weather.⁴¹ In January 1893, the State Legislature debated wagon road legislation that included a provision to connect Meadows with Riggins via a branch road along the Little Salmon.⁴² Riggins itself was already connected to Mount Idaho by the Salmon River Road. The measure passed, but required Idaho County to supply some of the funding.⁴³ As Idaho County stalled, the state completed surveys of new state wagon routes, including a road that would connect the Salmon River Road with Meadows via the Little Salmon River rather than the mountains. The State Wagon Road Commission began advertising and awarding bids for construction of the road from Riggins south towards Meadows.⁴⁴ By February 1894, however, Idaho County still had not supplied any funds and the State Wagon Road Commission let half the contracts go.⁴⁵ Road building stopped near Pollock, leaving the canyon along the Little Salmon River still untouched. The road gap between Meadows and Riggins had narrowed, but transportation between the two towns still required travelers to brave an incomplete road through the mountains. [This gap is represented on figure 2 above as the yellow area labeled "Little Salmon Canyon."] In 1895, private parties took it upon themselves to connect Meadows and Pollock with a trail along the surveyed Little

Salmon River wagon route. The trail allowed travel along the west bank of the Little Salmon River (see figure 6 above), but was not wide enough to be a road.⁴⁶

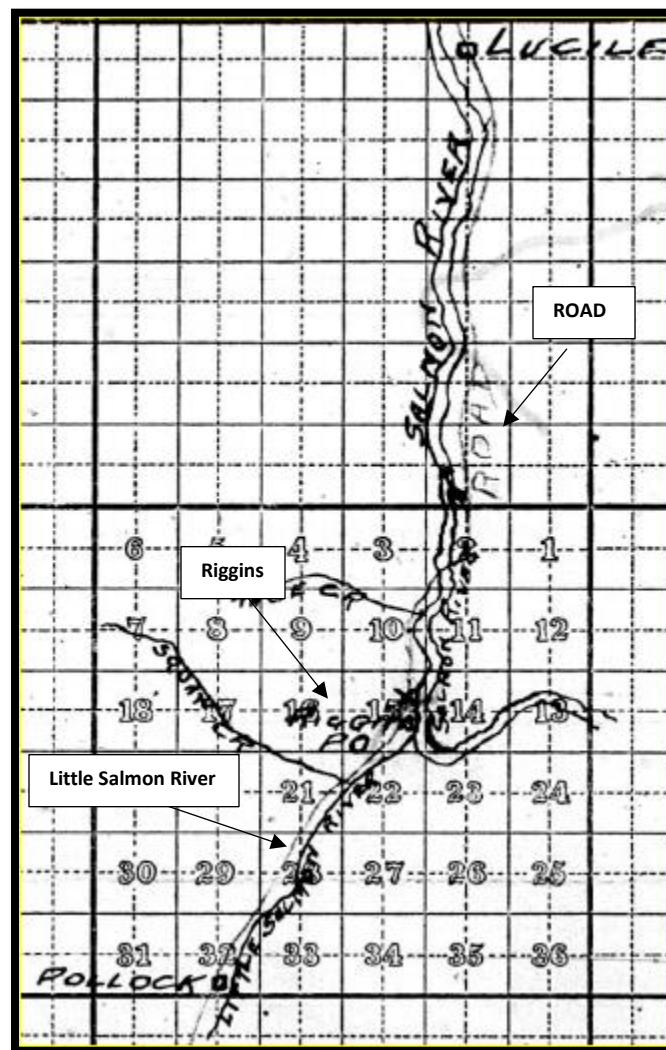


Figure 10 1916 Post Office Diagram for Riggins Site⁴⁷

At this point it was clear to many in Idaho that the mountainous north-south route had been a mistake. The rugged terrain and wild water the Mount Idaho Road was supposed to traverse challenged engineers and the high elevation near Florence on the north side of the Salmon River and Warrens on the south meant long winters, which hampered road building. The state's impassable route between north and south Idaho permitted the divide between the two regions of the state to persist. Settlement in the north followed the Salmon River Road from Mount Idaho as far south as Pollock. This road facilitated regular travel between Lewiston in the northern part of the state and the settlements along the Salmon River.⁴⁸ The road allowed for easy travel between new post offices at towns along the Salmon – including Lucile and Riggins - and led to an increase in homestead patents in the region.⁴⁹ Separately, in the south, an improved road from Weiser to Meadows linked Meadows to Boise and encouraged increased settlement and commerce in the Meadows Valley.⁵⁰ Most travel to Warrens came

via a travel-worthy road from Meadows rather than from the north. In effect, north Idaho extended as far south as Pollock, and south Idaho extended as far north as Meadows. Despite improved infrastructure, the state was more divided than ever. During this time, the *Idaho Daily Statesman* repeatedly published articles arguing that Idaho was losing emigrants to Washington and Oregon by not having a viable north and south route.⁵¹

Continued postponement by a sluggish legislature and ambivalent constituents did not stop adventurous travelers from making the connection between north and south via the Little Salmon. Despite an 1897 bill to appropriate money to the cause, the Little Salmon River branch of the State Wagon Road was indefinitely postponed amidst arguments that the people who would benefit most from it had not contributed to the road financially, nor had they communicated their desire for the road to the Legislature.⁵² Meanwhile, travelers who braved unimproved travel through the Little Salmon Canyon were thrilled by its beauty and its danger. In summer 1899, E.W. Johnson, proprietor of Boise's Overland Hotel, completed a trip along the Little Salmon River route. Johnson described the canyon as one of the most scenic and picturesque in the United States, yet: portions of the trail alongside the river were, in Johnson's words, "very high above the river and exceedingly rough and dangerous. The bodies of five men had been found in the eddy below, also several dozen pack animals, some with their packs still on, that had gone over the precipice." Johnson opined that this section should have a state wagon road and connect north to south Idaho, and it would have a "great future."⁵³

Finally, in January 1901, the road issue moved forward again with Whitebird's Statehouse Representative Andrew W. Moore's introduction of a bill to appropriate \$12,000 for the completion of the Little Salmon River Wagon Road.⁵⁴ After much discussion about the misuse of past wagon road appropriations throughout the state and the need for more accountability on the part of road commissioners, the Idaho House and Senate passed the bill,⁵⁵ and Governor Frank Hunt signed it into law on March 6, 1901.⁵⁶

After such a delayed start, the government wasted little time making the road a reality. Just 11 days after signing the Little Salmon bill, Governor Hunt appointed three men to the Little Salmon Wagon Road Commission, all three from areas where the road would traverse or to which it would connect. One – R.E. Lockwood – was the editor of the *Weiser Signal*. It was their responsibility to fill contracts for the road work up to \$10,000.⁵⁷ The first contract for the work was assigned to W.H. Harkin of Weiser for construction of the southernmost six miles of work, including all the heavy rock work in the canyon; the two bridges over the Little Salmon River; the bridges over Rapid River and Boulder Creek; and a section of the road across a bank which was constantly slipping toward the river. The contract with Harkin also granted him three more miles of heavy work to be determined by the commissioners. His total bid was for \$9,200, leaving just \$800 in the budget for the remaining 18 miles of work. Despite this imbalance, the commission accepted Harkin's bid under the rationale that the heaviest and most difficult work would be completed, including the bridges over what were unfordable rivers and the "heavy work," which would leave the road passable even if the remaining work was not done.⁵⁸

As Harkin began the challenging work of opening the canyon and building bridges, it seemed possible that budget would, indeed, prevent the official completion of the road. The *Statesman*, however, was not the only voice advocating for a strong north-south link for increasing immigration and settlement.

Having conducted their own canyon surveys, the Pacific and Idaho Northern Railroad and the Oregon Short Line saw the benefit of the Little Salmon River Road, and in 1901 each agreed to contribute \$3,000 for its completion.⁵⁹ With the infusion of an additional \$6,000, the road work continued. By mid-August, just five months after Governor Hunt had signed the appropriation bill, the Little Salmon River Road was travelable. Though not officially open, residents and emigrants were reportedly using the road and making big plans for future use.⁶⁰ By September, the Oregon Short Line and Pacific and Idaho Northern railroads claimed that they were already seeing an increase in freight business on their lines as mining, cattle and sawmill equipment orders came through from customers who could now connect via road from the rail station in Council to the Grangeville depot on the Camas Prairie. In fact, the Oregon Short Line claimed that increased orders had already made up for the \$3000 it spent on the road. The railroads (and others) planned to put stage coaches along the route as soon as it was officially open, and hoped to follow the stages with new rails.⁶¹

After years of thwarted efforts, stalled financing, and costly construction on the ultimately unusable mountainous portions of the Salmon River Road, Idaho finally got its north-south link in September 1901. Governor Hunt travelled the new 28-mile stretch and declared the road “one of the best

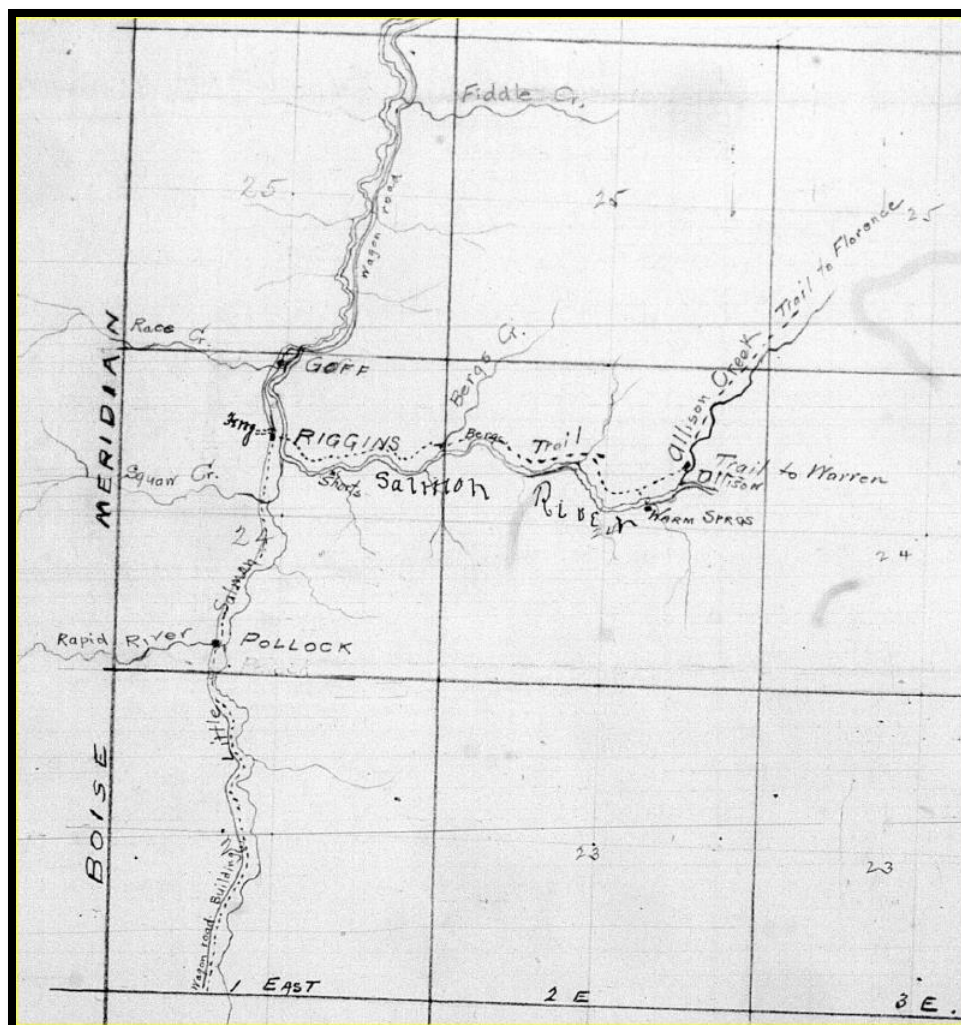


Figure 11 1901 Post Office Diagram for Riggins Site

investments the state ever made.”⁶² The road was more than a north-south corridor helping to hold the state together politically; it was also a passage for settlement, an inducement to miners for increased prospecting, a channel for mail and travelers, and a scenic wonder.⁶³ Road commissioners were so pleased with their feat that they planned to issue a commemorative “pass” as a souvenir marking the opening of the long-awaited Little Salmon Wagon Road. The pass was engraved to the holder, “in consideration of his very worthy qualities” and was issued with several conditions attached, including:

The person accepting this free pass over the Little Salmon river wagon road assumes all risk of over-enthusiasm or exaltation of soul on beholding the inspiring scenery along the route. He will not hold the giver of this pass responsible for excess of joy and exhilaration while he, the holder, is viewing the towering mountains, the inviting forests, the dashing cataracts and foaming waterfalls, the moss-grown cliffs, the limpid streams and soothing, shaded parks along the way.⁶⁴

The pass celebrated the road’s completion, but it also suggested the road’s bright future. The Little Salmon River Wagon Road was completed just as a new technology, the automobile, entered the scene. Americans’ love affair with the automobile soon transformed expectations for roads. The freedom and independence offered by the new technology led to an increase in recreational travel and demand for good roads that could lead them into the great outdoors.



*Figure 12 Riggins, Idaho ca. 1916*⁶⁵

A Highway is Born, 1902-1924

A flurry of settlement followed the Little Salmon River Road's completion. In the year following its opening, the General Land Office finished surveying the townships in the canyon, allowing settlers to file land claims along a greater stretch of the river.⁶⁶ A regular stage line and daily mail service also facilitated travel between Grangeville and Meadows.⁶⁷ With homesteaders, stage lines, and mail wagons putting the road to use, it fell into disrepair. In this, it was not alone. Residents and the state government recognized the challenge of maintaining the new state wagon roads, and despite legislative efforts in 1905 to pass this role on to counties and local road districts, little came of the measure. Many counties lacked the tax base, the knowledge, and the political will to maintain roads. As a result, Idaho established a State Highway Commission in 1907 to take charge of the maintenance of all roads, bridges, and trails that had been constructed with state funds. Nevertheless, this commission did not have the political backing and financing to move forward with any major maintenance projects.⁶⁸ As the state equivocated over how to maintain its roads, the Little Salmon River Road's condition continued to deteriorate. In the years since construction, the road had become barely passable through sections of tortuous canyons and steep grades, some of which exceeded 30 percent, and a large portion of the road was entirely submerged during periods of high water.⁶⁹ The road was certainly in no state to carry the growing number of automobiles entering Idaho.

In 1913, Idaho boasted 2,000 registered cars, while the total across the United States was one million.⁷⁰ To ready Idaho for the automobile, the Idaho State Legislature finally supported the new State Highway Commission by giving it clearly defined responsibilities and reliable funding. In its infancy, the State Highway Commission set about defining the most important travel corridors in the state on which to focus its maintenance and construction efforts. Although the Little Salmon River Road had been completed for only 12 years, the state placed it on the list tagged with "an urgent need" for improvement.⁷¹ Though they knew maintenance and repair would be difficult, the State Highway Commission nonetheless recognized the critical nature of maintaining an intra-state passageway between Boise in the south and Lewiston in the north.⁷² The state planned to share road costs with the counties through which the roads passed, and expected the counties' contributions to come in the form of grading and constructing culverts.⁷³

Not surprisingly, road work progressed slowly on the stretch of road along the Little Salmon River. The same topography that had severely hampered initial construction continued to challenge the engineers of the early 20th century. In 1913 and 1914, State Highway Commission surveyors delineated a route for 800 miles of what they called the "North-South Highway," the "Idaho Pacific Highway," or simply "State Route No. 1," including the 70-mile stretch between the recently developed rail station town of New Meadows³ and Whitebird through the Little Salmon River and Salmon River Canyons. The strenuousness of surveying the actual route between the two towns was such that the crews averaged less than a mile of survey a day. The route presented engineering problems that made it difficult to hold the maximum grade to 5%. Crews determined that a few areas might require a grade of 6-8% to make financing the

³ The Pacific and Idaho Northern Railroad reached the Meadows area in 1911. Rather than take the rail line all the way into Meadows, the company terminated its line about 2 miles west of the town at a new townsite it called New Meadows. Over time, Meadows commerce moved to New Meadows.

road possible.⁷⁴ While the survey crews labored through the Little Salmon region, the State Highway Commission itself spent much of 1914 in meetings with counties to negotiate the highway's funding.⁷⁵

The inter-jurisdictional meetings revealed that the financial difficulties that were responsible for the road's sluggish start would again rear their heads. While settlement had certainly increased following the completion of the wagon route, improving both Adams and Idaho Counties' tax bases, they nevertheless remained sparsely populated and burdened by huge parcels of land that were tied up in federal forest reserves. The tax base remained so low and the difficulty of the work so high that the state could see no way of financing the road through a split of state and county funds alone.⁷⁶ The State Highway Commission made several funding suggestions, including asking the Forest Service to contribute, as well as passing a resolution that recommended using convict labor as a way to reduce costs.⁷⁷ Even with these contingencies, the State Highway Commission estimated that the cost of grading and widening the road between Weiser and Lewiston (which included the section between New Meadows and Whitebird) would require \$100,000 from the state and \$55,000 from the counties through which it passed.⁷⁸

In 1915, the financial problems facing the North-South Highway were, at least temporarily, insurmountable. In March, Idaho's new Democratic governor, Moses Alexander, vetoed the bill that would have purchased road equipment for use by convict laborers.⁷⁹ A month later, the *Idaho Free Press* reported that Adams County was not prepared to vote on a bond issue for building the highway and Idaho County did not think that it could bear the expense of its contribution. Work on the highway slowed to a virtual halt (just 50 convict laborers conducted rock work on the road, by hand, to the north in the Whitebird area) until commissioners could find the funds necessary to proceed.⁸⁰ The public was not happy.⁸¹

As the automobile's growing place in American life was revealed, the need for federal government assistance and guidance on road planning and construction grew more evident. As such, the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 and recognition amongst state officials that certain roads in Idaho deserved attention regardless of financial contributions from counties, picked the North-South Highway back up again. The 1916 legislation was the first federal aid program for financing highway construction, and provided matching funds of up to 50% for the construction and improvement of roads used for "free rural mail delivery."⁸² Idaho's share of the federal funding was approximately \$907,000 during a five-year period ending June 30, 1921. The State Highway Commission used this infusion of funds as leverage in arguing for an increase in state funding for road construction. In its 1916 report, the State Highway Commission recommended that the state be liberal in providing funds for roads that added great value to the state both at the present time and into the future. The report noted that the section of the North-South Highway between New Meadows and Whitebird was an excellent example of a highway that the state should invest heavily in.⁸³

With the public's support, the State Highway Commission's interest, and federal funding available, it seemed possible that the North-South Highway would progress quickly.⁸⁴ But the path forward remained long. Though grading and bridge construction did indeed move forward on certain portions of the highway in the 1917-1918 biennium, the heart of the road stood idle. Following difficult survey work conducted by two crews in the summer and fall of 1917, the State Highway Commission estimated that

the stretch of road along the Little Salmon and Salmon Rivers between New Meadows and Whitebird was going to be the most costly and grueling highway work in the state. The State Highway Commission estimated that grading work in this canyon might run as high as \$45,000 to \$50,000 per mile.⁸⁵ By 1919, two of the most challenging segments of the North-South Highway remained incomplete, including the stretch between New Meadows and Pollock. These segments were home to sheer canyon walls that dropped to roaring rivers and left little to no space for travel.

Little Salmon Railroad

In addition to constant discussion over the potential road, rail was another possibility considered by territorial leaders and private enterprise in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While north and south Idaho were eventually connected by a road for automobiles, a north and south rail line was never completed, despite early indications to the contrary. As early as 1899, the Pacific and Idaho Northern Railroad (PIN) saw an opportunity to meet a transportation need and decided to take a stab at a north-south connection. On August 19, 1899, the *Idaho Daily Statesman* reported that the PIN had surveyed a railroad route north from Meadows, down the canyon of the Little Salmon, over the Salmon River and north to the Camas Prairie.⁸⁶ In 1911, the PIN rail line reached New Meadows, connecting it with Weiser and increasing traffic on the stage line that ran from Meadows to Grangeville.⁸⁷ The following year, the PIN filed plats showing the intent to carry their line from New Meadows down the Little Salmon Canyon as far as Riggins. Idaho's Public Utilities Commission was in favor of the rail line from New Meadows through to Lewiston. The *Statesman* quoted a Commission report in 1913: "a rich country would be opened and developed by the construction of such a [rail]road." Connecting to Lewiston would provide the southern part of the state with access to "Idaho's only seaport," and spur "great development" in the "rough and precipitous" country along the Snake and Salmon River Canyons. In fact, the Commission appeared to favor the construction of a rail line over the construction of a road. In the 1913 report, the Commission noted its support for improvement of the state highway between New Meadows and Grangeville wherever it could be done "without conflicting with the location of the proposed railroad."⁸⁸ In the following years, however, the scale began tipping in favor of the automobile. Between 1914 and 1915, the number of vehicles registered in Idaho jumped 111% from 1,263 to 3,728.⁸⁹ Each year thereafter the number of autos climbed and support for the railroad gradually dwindled. While there was public support for a rail line through the remainder of the decade,⁹⁰ by 1920 the project had fallen out of favor with the railroads. Construction down the Little Salmon Canyon would cost at least "one hundred thousand dollars per mile" and would face high maintenance costs, the railroads argued. Moreover, the rail line was, according to the railroad companies, "not required in the interest of public convenience or necessity." Rail lines served both northern and southern Idaho and the two regions were connected by rail through Washington and Oregon.⁹¹ The North-South Highway became the link that connected Lewiston and Boise.



Figure 13 New Meadows Station⁹²



Figure 14 Photo taken along the Little Salmon River showing the challenges for road construction⁹³

Salvation for these stretches came in the form of a new approach to road management and building in the state. In 1919, at Governor D.W. Davis' urging, the legislature approved the reorganization of state government into a variety of state departments including the Department of Public Works. Responsibility for roads was given to the Bureau of Highways within this department, and the State Highway Commission was abolished. The state funded the new agency but also received proceeds from a new property tax that was intended to finance state highway work and estimated to yield around \$2 million during its first biennium.⁹⁴ With this change, the old localized system of road building was a thing of the past, giving way to the systematized co-operative method of pooling federal, state, county, and district funds for construction.⁹⁵

With funding identified and just weeks left as an agency, in March 1919 the State Highway Commission was compelled to breach the natural barriers of the Little Salmon and Salmon Rivers to complete the remaining segments. With more than \$350,000 in state and county funds assigned to the project and the possibility of a federal match up to 50%, the commissioners instructed the State Engineer to begin

letting contracts for the most challenging road stretches in the state.⁹⁶ The Federal Bureau of Roads confirmed in April that it would match half of the project funding through the "worst sections of the road between New Meadows and Whitebird," under Federal Aid Project 9. With that, bidding for the project began.⁹⁷ That same month, the new Bureau of Highways took over the state's roads.⁹⁸

The Department of Public Works received four bids on August 23, 1919 from vendors wishing to construct the 31.5 miles of road between New Meadows and Whitebird. However, none of the bids were affordable; the lowest bid amounted to \$779,758.44, nearly \$100,000 more than the \$680,000 in available funds. In response, the Bureau of Highways collaborated with the contractor to reduce the project scope, eliminating construction on certain sections of the road.⁹⁹ At long last, in fall 1919, work on the Little Salmon and Salmon River portions of the road began.

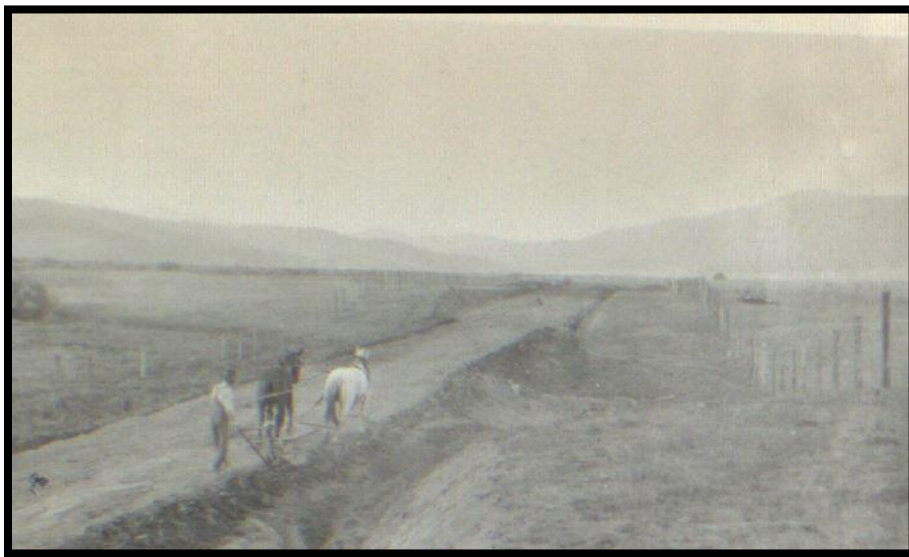


Figure 15 Plowing a grade on the North-South Highway, 1922¹⁰⁰

From 1920 through 1923, stretches of the road between New Meadows and Whitebird were widened and graded. Contractors covered portions of the road with crushed rock and constructed steel and concrete truss bridges.¹⁰¹ Even as the road was constructed it had to be reconstructed as rock slides, water damage, and deep rutting continued to present new obstacles.¹⁰² Funding challenges continued, as well. The initial federal funding for the project ended in 1921, but a new Federal Highway Act that same year again infused money into the North-South Highway project. Federal Aid Project 9 was reopened, and Federal Aid Project 51 filled in needed construction gaps along the New Meadows to Riggins corridor.¹⁰³

Though far from complete, by 1921 the road was passable enough in good conditions to allow the first auto-stage to travel between Grangeville and New Meadows.¹⁰⁴ Private automobiles were driving it regularly by 1923, and on July 9, 1924 the North-South Highway was officially dedicated at a ceremony in Grangeville.¹⁰⁵ At the ceremony, State Highway Department official Captain E.F. Ayers "presented" the highway to Governor C.C. Moore, who stood as representative of the public. In speeches marking the event, officials adopted a resolution to continue supporting road improvements.¹⁰⁶ Despite its

dedication, the “highway” was primarily dirt and did not meet the road standards of the day through many stretches including the Little Salmon Canyon.¹⁰⁷ One 23-mile segment between New Meadows and Grangeville referred to as the “neutral zone” still had not been touched by road engineers.¹⁰⁸ Although the highway needed more improvements to adequately facilitate the travel and commerce that promoters dreamed of, the opening was still a victory—a connection between north and south Idaho and a remarkable engineering accomplishment.

Bridging the Rivers



Figure 16 First crossing of the Little Salmon River, ca. 1925¹⁰⁹

Engineers working on the North-South Highway between New Meadows and Riggins faced many challenges. Chief among them was managing steep canyon walls and many fast-moving rivers. To be a passable route, the Little Salmon River Road required nine substantial bridges and many more culverts and ditches. Many of the bridges were reconstructed one or more times to accommodate increasing traffic and an unstable river.

The following is a description of the bridges constructed with federal funding in the first half of the 20th century. New Meadows was Station 0 and Riggins Station 1848 by Federal Aid Project 9 labelling.¹¹⁰

River Name	Station	Approx. Length	Construction material	Construction date	Funding Source
West Fork Goose Creek	31	43 feet	Concrete	1922	FAP 51
East Fork Goose Creek	87	63 feet	Steel Pony Trestle	1922	FAP-51
Little Salmon River	594	138 feet	Steel Pony Trestle	1922	FAP-51
Little Salmon River	712	81 feet	Timber	1919, 1932	FAP-9A, FAP-9A reopened
(same)	(same)	70 feet	Concrete Arch	1939	FAP-ER-F-4
Little Salmon River	838	54 feet	Timber	1919, 1932	FAP-9A, FAP-9A-reopened
(same)	(same)	120 feet	unknown	1939	FAP-ER-F-4
Boulder Creek	941	36 feet	Timber	1919, 1932	FAP-9A, FAP-9A-reopened
(same)	(same)	40 feet	unknown	1939	FAP-ER-F-4
Little Salmon River	1175	94 feet	unknown	1925	FAP-9E
Little Salmon River	1374	94 feet	unknown	1925	FAP-9E
Rapid River	1400 (approx.)	Unknown	T-Beam Concrete	1927	FAP-9G



Figure 17 North-South Highway, ca. 1925¹¹¹

As soon as visitors from outside the region began using the route, their reports of the spectacular scenic beauty of the road also created forward momentum on the project. The Little Salmon River was long a physical obstacle, but from the first reports of non-native travelers using the trail alongside the river, to those who travelled it by wagon stage, and finally, to those who travelled it by auto, the route was stunning enough to be worth the trouble. Florence Campbell, who travelled the route by stage in 1914, described Meadows Valley as the Gem of the Mountains, with its emerald valley set against forests of pine and fir trees. As she headed north, she described the Little Salmon Canyon, where the road narrowed. With a rock cliff to one side, and the powerful river on the other, the road abounded with beautiful views: “The scene is far beyond description: you look up at the frowning cliffs, you look beside you at the lovely roses and syringas in full bloom....You look down at the river, rushing and foaming and beating against the rocks in its bed, throwing up glittering spray and swirling into eddies and whirlpools.”¹¹² Truly, Campbell argued, the road deserved its title, “The Scenic Route of Idaho.”¹¹³ Idaho promotional travel articles of the time agreed, claiming that the link between Whitebird and New Meadows on the “North-South Highway” would rival the famous Columbia River Highway for scenic grandeur and difficulty of location.¹¹⁴

Caught up in the scenic automobile touring frenzy that was sweeping the country,¹¹⁵ photographer and travel writer Otto Jones set out in summer 1919 to explore the Little Salmon River segment of the North-South Highway in his automobile. He published his photos and his memories of the trip in the *Idaho Daily Statesman* in September, recalling that the trip was so rough, “one has that feeling of relief and satisfaction as the result of an arduous task completed.” Despite the jostling he experienced, Jones loved the adventure: “It is like driving into a wilderness to be lost in its vastness for a period and then to emerge again miles away into a land totally different, where one almost expects to hear a new and strange language spoken.” Jones spotted fishermen and campers along the drive, who were clearly enjoying the scenery and hot springs of the Little Salmon Canyon.¹¹⁶ Like Florence Campbell and others who travelled the road, Jones believed it was poised to be a major destination route once it was improved: “the Salmon River route with a real highway will be one of the most scenic drives in the northwest.” He could see, however, that there would be endless challenges with building and maintaining the road. He was held up on his own drive by washouts on the road, and he could see that “with such great expanses of steep, unbroken watersheds, this entire country is more or less in a position to court disaster at any time in the neighborhood of its ravines or depressions from waterspouts or excessive rains.” Still, he argued, Idaho deserved its own north and south route and he was enthusiastic about the survey work and road building he encountered.¹¹⁷

Jones was not alone. An increasing number of travelers began braving the road, and their reports revealed a North-South Highway in need of improvements. The stretch along the Little Salmon River was the worst: “There are many places where the road is just barely wide enough for a car, grades of 40 to 50 per cent [sic] with a ‘jack-knife turn’ at the top and an equally steep grade coming down again,” wrote one tourist in a letter to the *Idaho Daily Statesman* urging other tourists not to travel the road in 1921.¹¹⁸ Former editor of the *Lewiston Tribune*, A.H. Alford, concurred. He argued in a 1923 *Statesman* article that the effort to improve the highway from its wagon road origins had actually had the opposite effect. Engineer’s attempts to reduce grades and re-route troublesome sections through the Little Salmon and Salmon River region actually made the road less complete than it had been as a wagon road and “cut off the north from the south and rendered unavailable to the tourist the 180 miles of ‘perfect road’ from Boise to the mountain country on one side and the similarly good road from Lewiston to Whitebird on the other.”¹¹⁹ With the North-South Highway officially opening in 1924 and the increasing popularity of automobile-based nature vacations, the Bureau of Highways anticipated that travel along the North-South Highway would continue to increase rapidly.¹²⁰ To accommodate the volume of traffic, however, the Bureau needed to spend more resources on the challenging New Meadows to Whitebird corridor, a region that some had started to call “the road of no return.”¹²¹

A Road Worth Travelling, 1924-1960s

The remainder of the 1920s saw additional and significant improvement to the North-South Highway, particularly in the Little Salmon and Salmon River regions, using a combination of federal, state and county money. Indeed, work had been constant since the 1919 effort to complete the road through this section, despite the dedication ceremony and sustained financial strain. Just as in previous eras, the Bureau of Highways continued to have difficulty finding large sums of money at one time and instead

worked on the road on a segment-by-segment basis, often under county direction, as funding came through.¹²²

In 1923, the state set to work on completing the road through the neutral zone. With \$20,000 from a state allotment and an additional \$5,000 from the gas tax pledged to the project, the Bureau of Highways moved forward with re-grading, blasting and building “‘sight to sight’ turnouts” (likely scenic pullouts) along the Little Salmon and Salmon Canyons. The Bureau also put in temporary bridges to help traffic move more smoothly until permanent structures could be put in place.¹²³ By 1924, state funding was exhausted until the next budget, but federal aid with county match continued to push improvement forward.¹²⁴ The funding went further at this time too, as contractors began using machines to move earth at much faster speeds than older methods of horse and wagon.¹²⁵ The mid-1920s saw the introduction of the steam shovel and dump truck to the Little Salmon Canyon and by 1925, the route from New Meadows north to Riggins had improved so much that travel between the two towns had been cut to a few hours.¹²⁶ For the first time, the Riggins hotel had the opportunity to order in ice for the Fourth of July.¹²⁷



Figure 18 Clearing the road near Falls Creek, ca. 1925¹²⁸

In 1926, ten years after the federal government had first given aid to Idaho for this road, the state finally completed major road-building work in the Little Salmon and Salmon River Canyons between New

Meadows and Riggins. The Bureau of Highways spent more than \$100,000 to eliminate the steepest grades, build new roadbed along the river, and construct two new bridges over the Little Salmon River.¹²⁹ The road remained dirt throughout its length,¹³⁰ but was seeing increasingly heavy traffic.¹³¹ The Bureau of Highways estimated that between 100 and 125 cars a day travelled the stretch between New Meadows and Riggins.¹³² The Bureau of Highways held heated debates over the naming of U.S. highways during the mid-1920s, and ultimately decided on a numbering system in which north-south highways would be given odd numbers.¹³³ As a result, in 1926, the North-South Highway officially became U.S. 95, a part of the federal highway system.¹³⁴

Work in the canyons was far from done after the initial road-building ended. As it had since the first road entered its canyon, the Little Salmon River continued to present enormous obstacles to the Bureau of Highways and the affiliated Highway Districts. A flood in the canyon in spring 1926 put sections of U.S. 95 in the Little Salmon Canyon under six to eight feet of water,¹³⁵ while rock and landslides repeatedly blocked stretches of the highway until they could be dug out.¹³⁶ The earth surface of the road meant that every time it rained, the road became slippery and deep ruts formed in the wake of every passing car.¹³⁷ Ice and snow made the road “practically impassable in winter.”¹³⁸ Bridges needed near-constant repair.¹³⁹ The cash-strapped Bureau of Highways could do little to improve the road during the remainder of the 1920s and left the maintenance of “unimproved” roads, including most of U.S. 95, to the highway districts.¹⁴⁰



Figure 19 Sections of the North-South Highway under 6 to 8 feet of water¹⁴¹



Figure 20 Rock slide and shoulder slough along the Little Salmon River¹⁴²

By the end of the 1920s, most of U.S. 95 between New Meadows and Riggins remained earth-surfaced. Despite the wide availability of bituminous treatments by 1928, Idaho was slow to implement the hard surface outside of major population centers. The Village of New Meadows funded the half the cost of oiling the road in the town's vicinity,¹⁴³ and crushed rock covered the road north to the Idaho/Adams County line,¹⁴⁴ but most of the road did not see gravel until the mid-1930s.¹⁴⁵ Bituminous cover finally reached the New Meadows to Riggins corridor at the end of the 1930s but the road was not completely surfaced until the 1940s.¹⁴⁶

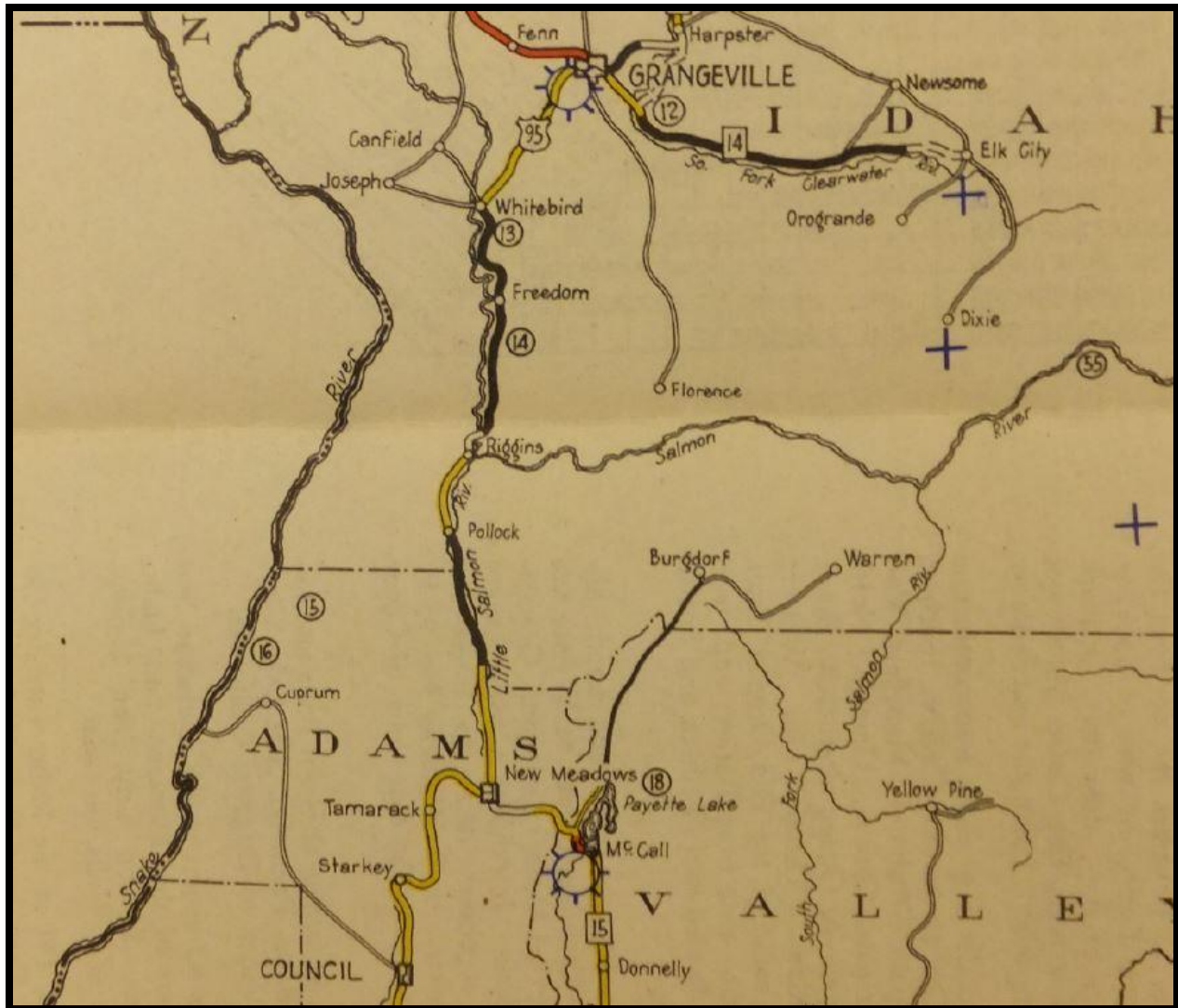


Figure 21: 1931 Idaho Highway Map showing road surfacing material type. Black sections are graded earth, yellow are crushed rock or gravel, and red are paved.¹⁴⁷

Roadwork in the Little Salmon River Canyon stretch of U.S. 95 did not end with hard surfacing. Spring break-ups and heavy rainfall repeatedly turned the Little Salmon River into a torrent of road destruction, most notably in 1948 and 1955.¹⁴⁸ During those extreme events, huge segments of the road were torn off the side of the canyon and landslides buried the road. With every flood, the road closed, sometimes for days at a time, forcing travelers to double back and take roads through Washington and Oregon to reach the other half of Idaho. Each flood also caused the Bureau of Highways, and later the Department of Highways, to reconsider the location of the road.¹⁴⁹ In 1949, and again in 1956, Idaho received Federal Emergency Relief Funds to rebuild and reroute portions of U.S. 95 in the Little Salmon Canyon.¹⁵⁰ Other realignments occurred in the most challenging locations of the highway, including approximately four miles of the highway near Pollock located south of the Rapid River Bridge between 1959 and 1961.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, a group called the U.S. Highway 95 Association began to appear in the historic record in

the late 1950s, coming before the State Highway Board to advocate for work on various segments of the road.¹⁵²

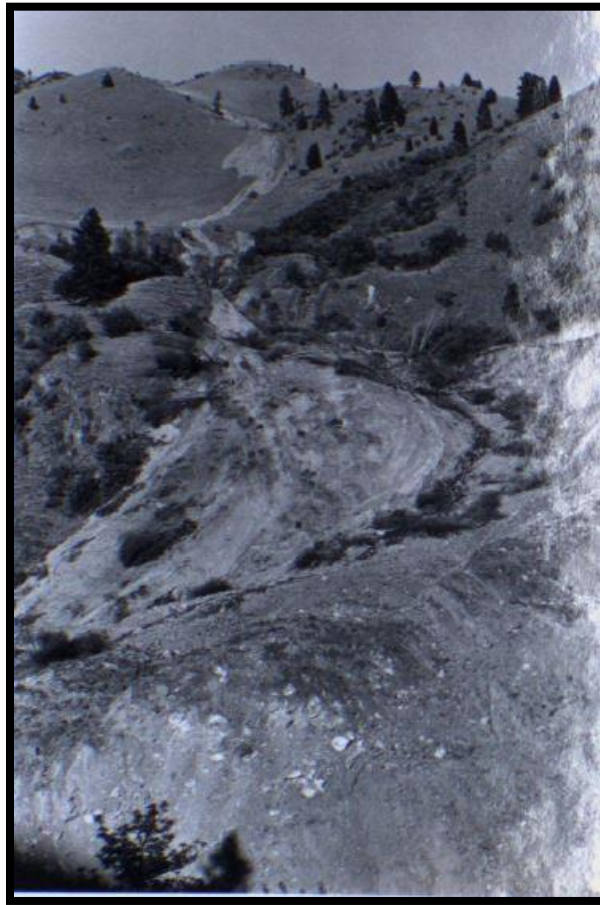


Figure 22 Landslide across U.S. 95 near Pollock, 1974¹⁵³

Still, the difficulties continued. Even though the State Highway Commission, followed by the Bureau of Highways, had been working on the North-South Highway in the Little Salmon Canyon more or less continuously since 1913, with brief pauses when funding ran dry, the road consistently failed to meet the standards of the time. At first the steep grades and narrow lanes frustrated drivers, then it was the dirt roads that persisted long past the time that others roads were surfaced with pavement. In the 1960s, the slow speeds and winding route allowed Cecil Andrus to run for governor on the issue of converting the “goat trail” of U.S. 95 into a proper highway.¹⁵⁴ While the issues have changed, the root of the difficulties has remained the same. In order to connect north and south Idaho, a road had to travel through the rugged heart of the Salmon Mountains. The Little Salmon and Salmon Rivers provided the natural route to accomplish that task, but presented challenges of their own. From the first wagon road to today’s modern highway, the progress of the highway has always been tied to the geography that surrounds it and the funding required to overcome the same.

Appendix A: Meadows to Riggins Travel Timeline

Prehistory

Nez Perce traveled throughout the Little Salmon River Basin, migrating seasonally for their food supply.

1855 The first Nez Perce treaty was signed.

1860 Prospectors discovered gold in Idaho, and Florence became a town of 10,000 overnight.

1861 Negotiations with Nez Perce took place at Slate Creek regarding use of their reservation for mining

1862 Population at Florence peaked, and settlers left to prospect in Boise Basin or Warrens.

Residents of Florence and others had built two trails into the settlement. One trail travelled from Camas Prairie to White Bird and Slate Creek and then up into the mountains. The other travelled from Mount Idaho across the mountains to Florence, called the Mose Milner Trail.

1863 A post office was established at Slate Creek.

The first Idaho Territorial Legislature was held in Lewiston and established public roads.

1864 The Idaho Territorial Legislature was held in Boise instead of Lewiston.

A trail that ran between Lewiston and Idaho City followed the Salmon River, cut through the Meadows area and then headed down the Payette. The first cattle drive used the trail in 1865. The trail appeared on the General Land Office Survey plat of the Meadows area surveyed in 1879.

1871 The postmaster in Washington County proposed a toll road to the head of Weiser Valley, and then down the Little Salmon River to Goff's old ferry, near present day Riggins.

1872 The Idaho Territorial Legislature asked U.S. Congress for a military wagon road between Fort Lapwai in the north and Fort Boise in the south, to run along the Little Salmon River. The requests were repeated through 1879 with no results.

1874 Travel by horseback or foot on any given route remained the only viable means of getting from north to south Idaho and the route over the mountains was challenging in winter. Residents recognized that a route down the Little Salmon Canyon would reduce the impact of snow on travel.

1875 The Idaho Territorial Legislature authorized a wagon road to travel from White Bird up the Salmon River as far as John Day's Creek, downstream of the Little Salmon and Salmon Rivers confluence.

1878 The first white settlement of Meadows began, though the area was not yet connected to the rest of the state by reliable travel routes.

- 1879 The U.S. General Land Office began surveying the lands in the Meadows area.
- 1881 The Idaho Territorial Legislature prohibited new toll road franchises, and declared all publicly used thoroughfares to be county roads.
- 1883 Calvin White submitted an application to establish a post office at Meadows. Settlement was increasing rapidly in the area as a wagon route from Weiser developed.
- 1885 The Territorial Legislature began discussing a north/south wagon road but did not know how to finance it.
- 1889 The Territorial Legislature passed the Mount Idaho to Little Salmon Meadows Wagon Road Act, which used bond issues for financing. The route was to travel over the mountains, following the Mose Milner Trail, rather than down the Little Salmon River Canyon.
- 1890 Idaho is admitted to the Union as a state on July 3.
- 1892 The Pollock Post Office was proposed near the mouth of the Rapid River.
- 1893 The Idaho Legislature passed the State Wagon Roads Act, authorizing the establishment of a system of state wagon roads and providing for construction of a branch wagon road to travel down the Little Salmon River, linking Meadows with the Mount Idaho Road at Slate Creek. It required Idaho County to fund part of the road.
- 1894 Idaho County failed to raise enough money for its contribution to the Little Salmon River Branch Road and the project stalled. Routes were surveyed, however.
- 1895 Private groups completed a trail along the Little Salmon River to connect Meadows with Pollock along the surveyed route of the Little Salmon River Branch Road.
- 1901 The Idaho Legislature passed a bill to appropriate funds to complete the construction of the Little Salmon River Branch Road. The north-south road over the mountains was completed as was the Little Salmon River Branch Road.
- A post office opened in Riggins.
- 1903 The U.S. General Land Office finished surveying the lands along the Little Salmon River for settlement.
- Settlement picked up in the townships north of Meadows along the Little Salmon and Salmon River Canyons and continued until approximately 1910.
- 1907 Idaho established a State Highway Commission to take control of all roads that had received state funding. The commission was not given official duties or power until 1913.
- 1911 The Pacific and Idaho Northern Railroad reached Meadows Valley and created a new town named New Meadows two miles west of Meadows.

- 1913 The State Highway Commission began survey work for a lengthy state highway called the Idaho Pacific Highway, the construction of which would include replacing the segment of wagon road between New Meadows to Lewiston. It was a priority route.
- 1916 The Idaho Pacific Highway was officially re-designated the North-South Highway.
- The Federal Government passed the Federal Aid Road Act, which provided much-needed funding to the North-South Highway project.
- 1917 Surveyors estimated that the stretch of road between New Meadows and Whitebird would be very costly, perhaps \$45,000-\$50,000 a mile.
- 1919 The State Highway Commission was replaced by the Bureau of Highways in the Department of Public Works.
- Construction on the North-South Highway between New Meadows and Whitebird began, with funding that included federal aid dollars.
- 1921 The first auto-stage route on the North-South Highway between New Meadows and Grangeville started.
- 1924 The North-South Highway was officially dedicated at a ceremony in Grangeville.
- 1926 The North-South Highway became U.S. 95 as part of the introduction of a federal route numbering system.
- 1926 Road building in the Little Salmon Canyon was complete.
- 1939 The Riggins to New Meadows road segment was finally covered with bituminous surfacing.
- 1948 Higher than average precipitation caused flooding in the Little Salmon Canyon, causing landslides and road destruction.
- 1949 Idaho received federal funding to repair the portions of U.S. 95 that were destroyed the previous year. Specifically, the funding was earmarked for channelizing and rip rapping sections of the Little Salmon River, constructing new sections of road in the channelized areas, and removing old sections of road after the new sections were completed. Some funding also went toward improving the Squaw Creek Bridge.
- 1955 Higher than average precipitation caused flooding in the Little Salmon Canyon, causing landslides and road destruction.
- 1956 Federal and state funds were used to repair the portions of U.S. 95 that were destroyed during 1955 flooding. Specifically, federal funding went towards repairing a concrete bridge over the Little Salmon at Hazard Creek and state emergency funds went toward building new sections of road at higher elevations than previous stretches.
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1974 A landslide covered parts of U.S. 95 in the Little Salmon River Canyon.

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¹⁵² As just one example, see Idaho Transportation Department Commissioner Meeting Minutes, Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Idaho Board of Highway Directors, Oct. 15, 1963.

¹⁵³ "74-5.49/a,b Landslides, Landslide Which Covered U.S. 95 near Pollock, Idaho," June 1, 1974, Vertical Files, General Subjects, Landslides, Idaho State Archives.

¹⁵⁴ Lewis, *Idaho's North and South Route: Its Significance and Historical Development Since Territorial Days*, 8, 165–66.