

Smith's Ferry Area History

Smith's Ferry, ID



Smith's Ferry stage
Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society

Before the state of Idaho built the wagon road up the North Fork of the Payette River in 1911, a network of older roads on the ridge west of the river linked communities such as Payette, Emmett, and Horseshoe Bend with settlers living in Long Valley.



The Idaho Northern Railroad's train depot at Smith's Ferry
Courtesy ISHS

This road, reportedly built by loggers working for the Oregon Short Line, descended onto the North Fork of the Payette River at what was later known as Smith's Ferry. In 1887, Clinton Meyers established a ferry on the North Fork to transport livestock en route to summer pasture in Round and Long Valleys across the river.

The ferry was also popular with freighters. Meyers sold the enterprise to Jim Smith in 1891, hence the name Smith's Ferry.



Greeting the first train to arrive in Smith's Ferry, 1913
Courtesy ISHS

In 1911, the Oregon Shortline began construction on the Idaho Northern Railroad from Emmett to Long Valley.

Two years later the first train pulled in to Smith's Ferry.



Wagon train near the ferry
Courtesy ISHS

Logging

In 1881, the Oregon Short Line, a Union Pacific subsidiary, built a railroad across southern Idaho to Huntington, Oregon. The demand for railroad ties prompted Coe & Carter, who ran tie yards for Union Pacific in Wyoming, to set up logging camps along the North Fork of the Payette River. The company set up camps at Smith's Ferry and Long Valley, and hired three hundred men to cut and float ties down the river.



Splash dam on the North Fork of the Payette, below Smith's Ferry

Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society

In 1913, the company merged with Barber Lumber, a Wisconsin outfit working in Boise Basin, to form the Boise-Payette Lumber Company.

Boise Cascade Corporation, one of the world's largest forest production companies, traces its origins to the 1957



Camping party on the splash dam
Forest Service photograph

In 1902 the Payette Lumber & Manufacturing Company, a Minnesota firm, acquired thirty thousand acres of state timber in Long Valley. The company built a large splash dam below Smith's Ferry to control the passage of logs downriver to mills in Payette.



Boise-Payette Lumber Company chute greasers, Dry Buck Summit area

Courtesy ISHS

merger of Boise-Payette Lumber Company with the Cascade Lumber Company of Yakima, Washington.

Lumber companies used greased chutes to transport logs from remote areas of the forest. In 1924 a fire on Murray Creek, located about a mile south of the dam on the west side of the North Fork, consumed eleven miles of new chutes.

Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association (SITPA)

Guy B. Mains was the first supervisor of the Payette National Forest. He was born in Wisconsin to a family of lumbermen. According to Mains, Wisconsin's forests had "vanished" by the time he was of age, so he followed the timber industry as it moved west to California and Washington. He was working for Barber Lumber Company in Idaho when the Forest Service held the first examination for forest supervisor positions in the state. From 1925 to 1940, Mains was the supervisor of the Boise National Forest.



Guy B. Mains
Payette National Forest
Supervisor
1908-1925
Forest Service photograph

Harry Shellworth moved to Boise in 1890, working as a messenger and later as a page for the state's first legislature. After extensive travel, Shellworth returned to Idaho in 1904. He worked as a land agent for the Payette Lumber & Manufacturing Company.



Harry Shellworth
Forest Service photograph

In 1905, the Boise Lumber Company, Barber Lumber Company, A. W. Cook Timber Company, and the Payette Lumber and Manufacturing Company began pooling their woodsmen (timber cruisers and compass men) in fighting forest fires on their respective lands. Their efforts marked the beginning of what later became known as the Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association (SITPA).

One hot day in July 1908, Shellworth was fighting a small fire on Dry Buck Summit above the confluence of the North and South Fork Payette Rivers when he encountered another man doing the same. "He was soot-blackened and fire-grimed," Shellworth later recalled, but instantly recognizable as Guy B. Mains, supervisor of the "old" Payette National Forest.

After putting the fire out, Shellworth and Mains sat down to discuss the need for a cooperative fire prevention organization to oversee the private, state, and federal lands in the area. This was the beginning of a gentleman's agreement to protect the forests of the Boise and Payette River watersheds. This agreement launched the formal organization SITPA.



In 1913, Barber Lumber Company merged with the financially stronger Payette Lumber Lumber & Manufacturing Company to become the Boise-Payette Lumber Company. Harry Shellworth continued as land agent for the new company, and as the long-time secretary for SITPA.

SITPA Headquarters, Smith's Ferry, ID
Forest Service Photograph