

VALLEY COUNTY

Submitted to Dr. Paul Link, professor of Geology,
Chairman of the “Landmarks and Displays Committee”
History, Geology and Tree Walk
Idaho State University

Information to accompany the granite rock:

1. *Location*
2. *Historical Significance*
3. *Geology, Geography and related issues of Land Use*
4. *History of Valley County – General Overview*

1. The location this rock was taken from is called the Long Valley Ambush Site, located northwest of Cascade, Valley County, Idaho, on Vista Point Boulevard 0.75 miles west of mile marker 116.46 on State Highway 55. The name “Vista Point Boulevard” may be misleading to many, as it sounds as if it is a major paved boulevard. In fact, it is a portion of the now abandoned railroad bed, recently opened as a public road and is unpaved and not often used. A map is attached which marks the exact spot by “X” and also provides the GPS coordinates of the location.
2. The Long Valley Ambush occurred in 1878 when transportation was by horseback along trails. The site is located on what became the Van Wyck Trail, which led to the old town of Van Wyck, now covered by water under Lake Cascade (formerly Cascade Reservoir).

The story goes that while hunting stolen horses on August 20, 1878, William Monday, Jake Groseclose, Tom Healy and “Three Finger” Smith were ambushed in a rocky basin, which is this location.

Monday and Groseclose were killed immediately and Healy wounded; Smith “being a man of experience in such matters”, fled. He made it 40 miles to Salmon Meadows. Infantrymen buried the 3, marked the spot, and took up the Indian trail. Smith estimated there were 75 Indians; army trackers finally concluded there were only 5, but they never caught them. (This information is taken directly from the historical marker that was erected years ago, located in the town of Cascade).

The pursuit involved two units of the U.S. Calvary. One came from the Grangeville area and one from the west. The pursuit of the Calvary covered two or three years and ranged over a wide area. The Indians involved belong to the Sheepeater Tribe, called the Ghost Tribe of the West. During the conflict they gained support from certain members of the Bannock Tribe. The conflict affected white settlers in the area. Homes were burned and lives were lost. There are many other stories related to this event that cover the area of Big Creek and the South Fork Salmon River, as well

as Burgdorf-Warren area which is located primarily in Idaho County, right across the county boundary lines from Valley County.

The site has been accessible to only the hardy and adventurous, as extremely steep terrain had to be negotiated. Now that the old railroad bed has been taken over as a public road maintained by Valley County, the site is readily available to anyone that can walk, bicycle, or ride a vehicle along the public road. A plaque was placed at the site in 1929. During the winter months, it is more difficult to access the site due to heavy amounts of snowfall in the area. Plans are now underway to improve the site considerably by adding more interpretive signage and a kiosk for visitors to more fully learn about the area and its colorful history.

3. The steep and varied topography is a result of glacial and water erosion of the underlying geology. Idaho Batholith granite underlies most of the county, but a few areas are underlain by basalt or other rocks. Faults often controlled erosion of the underlying rocks, resulting in the north-south trend visible in the valleys, canyons, and rivers.

Fluvial and glacial erosion resulted in many of the County's characteristic landforms. Warm and Payette Lakes, for instance, are dammed by deposits dropped by glaciers. Many of the County's steep canyons are the result of water erosion. And broad valleys are filled with water-deposited sediment.

Valley County's 3,670 square miles lie in the mountainous heartland of Idaho about 60 miles north of Boise. Three incorporated communities – Cascade, the county seat, McCall and Donnelly – serve as centers of commerce and industry. Unincorporated communities include Lake Fork, Yellow Pine and Smiths Ferry. All of these communities except Yellow Pine lie on State Highway 55, one of the main north-south routes from Boise to Spokane. Most of the mountainous part of the County is publicly owned and sparsely populated. This land offers a wide variety of uses, from recreation to timber and range resource development. The population centers are grouped into long narrow valleys that run north-south along the west side of the county. Much of the land within the valleys is privately owned and is urban and agricultural. Of the 2,354,000 acres of land, 88% is federally owned, 3% is state owned and the remaining 9% privately owned. About one-fourth of the private land is owned by Boise Cascade Corporation.

Elevation ranges from 4500 feet at the south edge of the county to over 9,300 feet in the mountainous regions. The climate ranges in the extremes, from –50 degrees F in the winter to 104 degrees F in the summer. The usual daytime summer temperatures range from approximately 70 to 90 degrees with cool nights. Frost can occur during any of the summer months. Frost-free days number between 70 and 90 days. Most of the precipitation comes in the form of snow in the winter. Annual precipitation varies from an average of 24 inches near Cascade to 32 inches or more in some of the

mountainous areas. Average snowfall in inches/feet falls between 5 feet to 16 or more feet.

The recreation opportunities offered in Valley County continue to offer increasingly significant means of economy for the residents and area. The area attracts more water recreationists than any other area in Idaho, and provides an important function as one of the playgrounds for Idaho's largest population center, the Boise Metropolitan area. Year-round recreational activities include fishing, hunting, hiking, backpacking, boating on the area's many lakes, and trips into the River of No Return Wilderness. Winter activities include alpine skiing at the area's resorts, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and ice fishing.

4. Nomadic Native Americans used the area both prehistorically and historically. They used the land following seasonal patterns of harvest, staying only for short periods of time. Salmon, huckleberries, camas, and mammals were probably some of the major resources they came for.

The first non-indigenous people entered this area to harvest beaver pelts. Hudson Bay Company trappers first trapped here in the early 1800s. Aside from names like Payette, the trappers left little evidence of what must have been thorough exploration and knowledge of this area.

The second wave of non-indigenous people came for gold – the first ones in the 1860s. For forty years, prospectors scrambled over Valley County's mountains and miners mined out the rich veins. Conflicts between miners and Native Americans during the early mining years resulted in the Sheepeater Indian War of 1879, when the U.S. Cavalry forced scattered Native Americans onto reservations.

The valleys were first settled during the 1880s. By 1890, according to census figures, 750 people lived in Valley County. Land use activities at this time included timber, grazing, farming and mining. Crops included peas, oats and wheat, and livestock.

Up until 1890, land use patterns reflected use of open, unclaimed land. During this time, ranchers annually brought large herds of cattle from the south to graze in Long Valley. The homesteaders resented this intrusion and retaliated on several occasions by slaughtering cattle. This tension existed until the U.S. Forest Service began to regulate grazing.

Between 1890 and 1910, Long Valley and Round Valley were completely claimed as a result of the Homestead Act, a federal government program. By 1910, towns, one-room schoolhouses and farms sprinkled the landscape.

Mining at Thunder Mountain started in 1902. As many as 3,000 miners swarmed into the region. The boom was short lived, however, and by 1908 most of the miners had moved on, leaving a few people behind in communities like Yellowpine and on isolated bars along the rivers.

In 1914, the Union Pacific completed its track from Emmett to McCall. Towns distant from the railroad lost their vitality and died. Towns near the railroad, such as Cascade, Donnelly and McCall, thrived and became the population centers of the county. Commercial logging joined farming and ranching as economic mainstays of Long Valley. In 1917, Valley County was established and named for Long Valley.

In the valleys, agrarian population patterns remained much the same until the 1970's. When Cascade Reservoir was constructed in 1947, a few towns were flooded, and populations shifted from them into Cascade and Donnelly. Since then, populations in the County have remained fairly stable, with slight declines during the 1960's.

(Much of this information comes directly from the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System pamphlet, Linda Webb and Lucy Chronic, 1996. For further information, contact Valley County Extension, P.O. Box 501, Cascade, ID 83611, (208) 382-3249).

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