

# Massacre Rocks



By the time the wagon trains reached what is now Massacre Rocks State Park, the emigrants had travelled over twelve-hundred miles from Missouri. Many considered their trek through the Idaho desert as one of the most difficult parts of the journey. Today, cars and trucks speed down today's Interstate highway with few realizing how the pioneers struggled to cover the same ground.

"The Oregon Trail here essentially is in the middle of the interstate. The emigrants for the most part followed right where highway 30 was and then when the interstate went through the interstate just simply took out more of the Devil's Gate. The Devil's Gate or the Gate of Death is still there. It's just slightly larger than it was during the Oregon Trail era. When the Oregon Trail was going that gap through the rock was only wide enough for one wagon to go through. Even though no attacks of



emigrants happened there to the emigrant's point of view whenever they had to go through a very narrow gap of rocks or through trees or a canyon they were always concerned about being attacked. The actual Indian skirmishes that happened in 1862 happened further east of what people termed the Massacre Rocks even though that name never came about until much later."

--Kevin Lynott, Ranger, Massacre Rocks State Park

The attacks that took place on August 9th and 10th of 1862 occurred along the trail east of the rocks. They claimed the lives of ten emigrants and involved a total of four different wagon trains.

"Mr. Hunter, who was captain of our little train gave orders to get ready their firearms and prepare for fight, and right speedily was the order obeyed, considering the surprise in which we were taken, together with the fact that not one of us had ever been called upon to defend our lives or property by the use of such weapons."

--Charles Harrison, Aug. 11, 1862

Visitors who stop at the state park today can learn more about the attacks and also get a close up look at some well preserved ruts or swales.



"Here the more common term is swales. Ruts are what you consider of twin wagon wheels shown in rock. Here, because it's highly erosive ground what you have is more of a ditch effect. Unless they had no option whatsoever to bypass rocks you very seldom see ruts per se. You see swales across Idaho for the most part."

--Kevin Lynott, Ranger, Massacre Rocks State Park

A few miles west of the swales, the names carefully etched into Register Rock reach back to the days when this area was a prime camping spot on the Oregon Trail.



"Register Rock was one of the more popular camp sites in the area and that was principally because Rock Creek was emptying into the Snake River there so there was better feed and it just happens that the Bonneville Flood had rolled a huge boulder right in the middle of their camp ground and so early on the emigrants, where ever they could, left their mark. Sometimes it was just a pencil drawing on an oxen skull but where there was rock and where they had time they actually chiseled their names into the rocks and there are several hundred here. Some have been lost just through erosion through the years but you can still see quite a few names."

--Kevin Lynott, Ranger, Massacre Rocks State Park