

Massacre Rocks State Park

Introduction: Massacre Rocks State Park is situated right next to Interstate 86 that follows the course of the historic Oregon Trail through the park. Perhaps thousands of people drive past the park each day heading both east and west. If you sit quietly in your tent or RV at the park campground, you can here the sounds of these cars and trucks moving about and conducting the commerce of a now continental country. But imagine if you will, the sounds you would hear in the same place about 160 years ago. You would here the sounds of creaking wagons, the slap of leather, the grunts of oxen, and the whinnying of horses. Instead of the traffic moving in both directions, it would all be moving to the west in an effort that would eventually settle lands in Oregon and California and create the continental country we know today. The park is representative of the landscape along the Oregon Trail from Fort Hall to the Raft River. By the time the wagon trains reached what is now Massacre Rocks State Park, the emigrants had traveled over 1200 miles from Missouri. Many considered their trek through the Idaho desert as one of the most difficult parts of the journey.

But there is more here at this park than meets the eye from the Interstate. Although Massacre Rocks is primarily a historic park, it also displays are great deal of scenery in its rock formations, juniper forest, and its steep river canyon. Access to river recreation can also be found here. Fishermen have found that the river conditions of expansive habitat and plentiful food supply have led to a fishery that includes the possibility of catching trophy fish.

So if you think you have seen Massacre Rocks State Park by passing it on the Interstate, you really haven't given it a chance. Get off the Interstate and spend some time in the park, you won't be disappointed. The park consists of two use areas: (1) Register Rock, and (2) the main park

Getting There: Massacre Rocks State Park is indeed easy to find as it sort of has its own Interstate exit. Coming either west bound or east bound, take exit 28. The road the exit leads to is Register Road. If you turn and head north on this road it will lead straight to the entrance of the main park in about 500 feet. If you turn south on this road and continue to follow Register Road for about 2 miles, it will lead you to the Register Rock area of the park.

Major Features:

The Oregon Trail: The Oregon Trail era was between 1840 to 1860. Thousands of Oregon Trail travelers passed through the park on their way to Oregon and California. As they left Fort Hall, they began to traverse the Snake River Plain. The park is representative of this part of their journey. Just downstream from Massacre Rocks is where the Raft River flows into the Snake River. This was the point at which the California Trail left the Oregon Trail and headed south towards the City of Rocks area. There was once a narrow gap in a rock formation located in the park that was known as the Devil's Gate. During the migration period, the Devil's Gate was so narrow that only one wagon could cross through the gap at a time. So it became a major landmark on the trail. Very little of the gap is left today as it was gradually widened by phases of highway construction that ultimately led to the current course of Interstate 86. A massacre of a group of Oregon Trail emigrants in 1862 eventually lead to the renaming of the Devil's Gate to "Massacre Rocks." The historic attractions at the park include: the site where the Devil's Gate

once was along with the massacre memorial, sets of old wagon ruts and remnants of the Oregon Trail, and Register Rock where a multitude of names were inscribed on a large boulder by the emigrants passing through.

The River: The Snake River has its headwaters in Yellowstone National Park. The Snake River is 1,078 miles long and is the thirteenth longest river in the United States. Before it ends at its confluence with the Columbia, it is joined by many of the great rivers of Idaho. It has been said the name of the Snake River came from the name that neighboring tribes called the native Shoshone Indians. The Plains Indians to the east referred to these nomadic bands as the “snake.” In addition, the Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series indicates that the Blackfeet found Shoshone sticks with snake heads painted on them in 1784 which may have contributed to the term “snake.”

The park has about 4 miles of shoreline along the Snake River. There are two islands, Beaver Island and Goat Island, off the middle section of the park. Because of the currents and the depths of the water, swimming is not permitted. However, canoeing, kayaking, and motor boating are all allowed. Fishing in the river is a major activity at Massacre Rocks and fishing docks and a boat ramp are available to enhance this activity.

The Landscape: The eastern part of the park sits atop a high basalt cliff that overlooks the river. The cliff and deep canyon start about at the day use area below the Visitor Center and extend upstream all the way to the Idaho Department of Transportation rest area. The terrain above the cliff is rolling hills that are covered with an extensive juniper woodlands forest. The campground is located in this forest. The western part of the park slopes down towards some sagebrush covered flats. Interspersed among the flats are rock outcroppings covered with mixed brush species. The Register Rock portion of the park sits adjacent to a beautiful water course called Rock Creek.

The Park: The park is about 900 acres in size. About 29,507 visitors come to the park for day use and 6,686 come to camp for a total of 36,193 visitors a year. This makes Massacre Rocks the one of the least visited state park in the Idaho State Park System, yet the park is full of natural and historic features, facilities and there are lots of recreation activities to partake in. The park’s busy season is mid-May to the end of September.

DOT Rest Area: The Idaho Department of Transportation maintains a rest area at the east end of the park. The rest area is essentially an in-holding within the park and as such is surrounded by park land. The rest area has improved restrooms and numerous picnic tables. There is a pavilion at the west end of the rest area that has several interpretive panels that provide information about the Oregon Trail. There is a paved trail that starts from here and connects with the trails in Massacre Rocks State Park.

North Pole Day Use Area: At the end of the gravel road that starts near the Trapper’s Trail Day Use Area, there is a parking lot turnaround with a vault toilet in an area referred to as the “north pole” of the park. This is the trailhead for the Wagon Rut Trail. The Wagon Rut Trail is paved and leads east along the Snake River Canyon rim with great views of the river both upstream and downstream. If you continue to follow the trail to the east, it will connect with the DOT rest area. But if you follow a paved trail that takes off to the right, it will lead underneath both

courses of Interstate 86 and take you to an overlook where you can view the remnants of the old Oregon Trail in the form of wagon ruts. The North Pole trailhead also has a dirt trail called the Canyon Trail that heads west back into the park along the rim of the Snake River.

Canyon View Group Area: along the gravel road leading to the North Pole is the turn off for the Canyon View Group Camping Area. The road into the area splits into two roads each with its own turn around. So it actually can accommodate two groups at a time or one large group. There are four older vault toilets here with a central campfire circle, 16 individual tables and 12 fire rings.

Trapper's Trail Day Use Area: The Trapper's Trail Day Use Area is situated at the end of the paved road in a small side canyon of the Snake River Canyon. It has a paved parking lot, is pleasantly landscaped with a lawn and trees, and has five individual picnic tables. The Trapper's Trail crosses a short bridge and descends a stairway to a fishing dock on the river. The dock is for fishing and scenic/wildlife observation and cliff diving and swimming are not allowed here. The Canyon Trail takes off from here and heads to the east. The river trail heads to the west.

Visitor Center and Memorial Trail Area: The Visitor Center is in the central portion of the park and is visible from the Interstate. It has a nice deck with an expansive view of the location where the Devil's Gate rock formation once existed, but is now the location of the Massacre Rocks memorial area. There are displays about history and natural features of the park in the Visitor Center. There are also a small merchandise area. There are five picnic tables available at the visitor center and one picnic table at the Massacre Rocks memorial. The Pohogwe Nature Trail, the Geology Trail, and the trail to the Massacre Rocks memorial all take off from here.

Campground: The campground includes 41 campsites with water and electric hook-ups. The campground is situated in a juniper woodland. There is an upper loop and a lower loop. Both loops have an improved restroom building with sinks, flush toilets, and showers. The upper loop has some great campsites with expansive views of the river and the surrounding countryside. There are two camping cabins available here. There is a RV dump station nearby. Adjacent to the upper loop is an unusual geological formation called the Devil's Garden. Here you can see some strange miniature rock pinnacles that stick up like knobs on the rocks. The upper loop is the only part of the campground open in the winter months. The lower loop of the campground is a bit more sheltered and there are a few sites with a grassy landscape. The lower loop is closer to the river and offers great access to some aquatic activities and fishing. There are two camping cabins here. There is also access to the river trail that climbs a large hill that overlooks the river below and provides great views of Beaver and Goat Islands.

Program Day Use Area: The Program Day Use Area is called such because it is next to a short trail that leads to the "interpretive program" amphitheater. But at the same time, the paved parking lot here provides great access to the river. Another short trail leads to the area where the IDPR rents canoes and kayaks and there is a dock available for launching and fishing.

Boat Ramp Day Use Area: The Boat Ramp Day Use Area is at the western (or southern) end of the main park and is referred to as the "South Pole." This area has a paved parking lot with pull through spaces where vehicles with their trailers can park. There is a boat ramp with two

courtesy docks available. There are also three fishing docks here. There is one vault toilet and 9 individual picnic tables on a grassy landscape. This area is the western terminus of the River Trail which can be followed to the east leading back to the campgrounds and the main area of the park.

Register Rock Day Use Area: The Register Rock Day Use Area is contiguous with the park lands back to the main park area, however, it is not connected with the rest of the park by the network of park roads or trail. It must be accessed by Register Road from exit 28 on Interstate 86 by heading west for about 2 miles. This is a very beautiful picnic area that is well landscaped with mature shade trees. It is a perfect place for a picnic either as an individual family or with a group. There is a paved parking lot, 2 vault toilets, 2 grills, 2 fireplaces and 15 picnic tables. The pleasant Rock Creek flows through the park area. The center piece of this area is Register Rock where Oregon Trail pioneers had inscribed their names as they passed through. This pleasant spot was actually a popular campsite in the Oregon Trail era.

Geology: The eroded volcanic landscape of Massacre Rocks State Park is part of the Snake River Plain – Yellowstone province, a belt of volcanic rocks that began to erupt about 15 million years ago and now stretches 400 miles from the Idaho-Oregon border to the Yellowstone Plateau. Volcanic tuffs exposed along the southern cliffs of the Snake River canyon record the oldest eruptions in the area of Massacre Rocks State Park.

About 6 ½ million years ago, volcanoes erupted from several vents in the area that is now Massacre Rocks State Park. At the time, rising magma (about 2,000 degrees F.) contacted shallow underground water of the Snake River Plain aquifer, resulting in numerous steam explosions. The yellow-brown volcanic tuff that is exposed over much of the park and especially near the Visitor Center is a product of those explosions. The tuff has many knobs and domes on its eroded surface, since it is more resistant to erosion where it locally has been cemented by the mineral calcite. It contains pieces of older volcanic and sedimentary rock that were ejected along with fresh lava bombs and ash. The original volcanic craters have been eroded away, but the dense lava plug that solidified within the throat of one volcano now forms the Massacre Rocks and nearby pinnacles.

Later outpourings of dark basalt lava now cover most of these ancient volcanoes, forming the broad expanse of the Snake River Plain. The canyon walls across the Snake River from Massacre Rocks State Park are composed of 75,000 year old basalt lava flows. The most recent outpourings on the Snake River Plain occurred about 2,100 years ago along the Great Rift, a line of volcanic vents that begin 20 miles north of the park and extend northward for 60 miles into Craters of the Moon National Monument.

There is an unusual rock formation called the Devil's Garden that is located adjacent to the upper loop of the campground. Here can be seen a unique geologic feature that appears to be knobs sticking up from the surrounding base rock. A possible explanation for these resistant knobs of tuff is that they were produced by the action of gas and steam following an eruptive period of the Massacre Rocks volcanic complex. The escaping gases moved upward through small cylindrical vents in the ash, cinders and other pyroclastic material deposited during the eruptions. Silica carried in solution was precipitated and deposited as the gases neared the surface. The silica acted as a cement, binding the pyroclastic fragments together. Subsequent exposure to erosion caused the removal of the easily eroded un-cemented material from around the vents, leaving the most resistant pinnacles as you see them today.

A remarkable event occurred about 14,500 years ago when an estimated 1,000 cubic miles of water rushed north from Lake Bonneville, through Red Rock Pass, Marsh Valley, the Portneuf Narrows and Pocatello on its way to the Snake River and the Pacific Ocean. The flood probably lasted about eight weeks and was caused by the failure of a natural dam that lowered the level of Lake Bonneville about 400 feet. It is the second largest flood known to have occurred in the history of the world and the estimated volume of water exceeded the total yearly discharge of all major rivers in North America.

The Bonneville Flood greatly changed the Snake River valley, and its effects can be seen along the Snake River as scoured canyons and bars of watermelon sized lava boulders occurring as far west as Hagerman, Idaho. "Lake Channel" is a notch in the upper canyon wall on the opposite (north) side of the Snake River from Massacre Rocks State Park. This feature extends upstream nearly to the American Falls Reservoir and is one of the abandoned channels that were carved during the Bonneville Flood. Many of the automobile-sized, angular lava boulders within Massacre Rocks State Park, were briefly moved during the great flood and are now 50 feet or more above the present river level.

Ecosystems and Plant Communities: Elevation of the park is about 4,400 feet. The park contains five ecosystems/plant communities, including the sagebrush steppe, juniper woodlands, mixed scrub, riparian, and river.

Sagebrush Steppe: The sagebrush steppe covers the open basin floors at the west end of the park. This community originally would have appeared as a mosaic of open stands of big sagebrush, bitter brush, and rabbit brush with an understory of native perennial grasses such as Idaho fescue. The sagebrush steppe vegetation in its natural condition is scarce in Southern Idaho. Continued human and livestock use have modified the community into now-monotypic stands of big sagebrush interspersed with plants of little or no forage value, such as tansy mustard, Russian thistle, cheatgrass, and halogeton which is toxic to livestock. Crested wheatgrass was introduced in the early 1950s range improvement programs and dominates the understory where the range has been improved for livestock.

Juniper Woodlands: Juniper woodlands are located in rocky and rugged terrain on a plateau above the river primarily in the eastern portion of the park. The Utah juniper that comprise the community can grow to 30 feet in height but are generally scrubby, fewer than 15 feet tall, and almost as wide. Utah junipers are sometimes called cedar. They have been used for years locally for fence posts. Historically the dried seeds were used for jewelry, the bark to make sandals, and the wood to make digging sticks. Being a conifer, the many blue "berries" that these trees produce are actually cones.

Mixed Scrub: This visually open community includes such plant species as big sagebrush, snowberry, Utah serviceberry, bitter brush, and skunkbush along with other shrubs, grasses, and herbs. Skunkbush (*Rhus trilobata*) is the keynote species. Skunkbush can be found throughout the park. This member of the sumac family is not a preferred browse plant, but sometimes deer will eat it when nothing else is available. It is also known as sour berry and three-leaf sumac. It is native to western North America from the Great Plains to California and south through Arizona to northern Mexico. It can be found from deserts to mountain peaks up to about 7,000 feet. It closely resembles other members of the genus including western poison oak. The leaves

have a very strong scent when crushed. The odor is disagreeable enough for it to have earned the name skunkbush. The leaves are green when new and turn orange and brown in the fall. It flowers from April to July and produces fruits from June through October. The flowers are borne on small catkins and are white or light yellow. The berries, although sour, are edible. Historically, skunkbush berries were used in food, beverages and medicines. Pliable young stems, along with grass stems, were woven into long lasting baskets that would hold water. Skunkbush forms dense thickets that serve as good hiding and nesting cover for small birds and mammals.

Riparian: Riparian vegetation is limited to a small portion of the park adjacent to the edges of the river and along the stream next to the Register Rock area. Typical species of this plant community include cottonwood, willow, bull rush, cattail, sedges, and golden currant.

River: Much of the Snake River at Massacre Rocks is actually a backwater area of Lake Walcott whose main body is further downstream. So here there is a combination of river and lake type ecosystems. As the snake river churns through Massacre Rocks, the water often drops to more than 20 feet deep within a few feet of the sheer rocky shoreline. The main channel can reach depths of 100 feet. With all that room to roam and plenty of forage, fish of all shapes can reach massive sizes. There are thriving hoards of crayfish to eat and the river is populated with smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, rainbow trout, perch, carp, Utah chubs and white sturgeon.

Wildlife:

Mammals: The mammals present in the park include: mule deer, badger, raccoon, cottontail rabbit, bobcat, coyote, river otters, muskrat, mink, and beaver.

Birds: The birds present in the park include: raven, common flicker, meadow lark, red-winged blackbird, yellow-headed blackbird, western tanager, osprey, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk, Canada geese, western grebe, double crested cormorant, common loon, mallard, bald eagle, pelican, turkey vulture, night hawk, pheasant, great egret, trumpeter swan, burrowing owl, and great blue heron. The western grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) is the keynote animal. The western grebe is also known as the dabchick, swan grebe, and swan-necked grebe. The western grebe is the largest North American grebe. It is 22 to 30 inches long, weighs 1 to 4 pounds and its wingspan is 31 to 40 inches. It has black around the eyes and a straight greenish-yellow bill. Western grebes spend almost all their time on water and are rather awkward on land. It has a spectacular courtship display. Two birds will rear up and patter across the water's surface. The birds dive to feed on carp and small fish, crayfish, and salamanders. They can often be seen at Masacre Rocks State Park swimming in pairs and then they may make a dive and surface many yards away from where the dive began.

Fish: The fish present in the park include: smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, white sturgeon, rainbow trout, perch, Utah chub, and carp.

Cultural History: The Shoshone and Bannock tribes once inhabited the area of Massacre Rocks State Park. There was a specific band of the Shoshone tribe that was called the Po 'hogwe which is a Shoshone word, that means "sagebrush people." These are the people know to have

inhabited the area of Massacre Rocks State Park. These early people utilized sagebrush for many things including a type of footwear resembling sandals and for building material to construct a “wikiup.” A wikiup is a shelter made from hoops of willow with a thatched cover of grass and sagebrush.

Generally, the Shoshone and Bannock tribes subsisted as hunters and gatherers, traveling during the spring and summer seasons, collecting foods for use during the winter months. They hunted wild game, fished the region's abundant and bountiful streams and rivers (primarily for salmon), and collected native plants and roots such as the camas bulb. Buffalo served as the most significant source of food and raw material for the tribes. After the introduction of horses during the 1700s, hundreds of Idaho Indians of various tribal affiliations would ride into Montana on cooperative buffalo hunts. The last great hunt of this type occurred in 1864, signaling the end of a traditional way of life.

Fort Hall was established in 1834 as a trading post. It became a way station for settlers traveling along the Oregon and California trails that cut through tribal lands. Relations between the tribes and the emigrants traveling on the trails were strained, at best. For example, skirmishes with the emigrants in 1862 that would result in the deaths of 10 emigrants would later be characterized as a “massacre” which led to the naming of Massacre Rocks. However, a year later in 1863, white soldiers would kill 200 Shoshone at the Bear River which was an event perhaps more appropriately called a “massacre.”

The Fort Hall Reservation was established for the tribes by an Executive Order in 1867 and the Shoshone and Bannock Tribes were forcibly moved there. Later the Northern Shoshone bands were also forcibly moved to Fort Hall.

History: The earliest white men known to have visited the region were men of the Missouri Fur Company in 1810, and of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company who, under Wilson Price Hunt, passed through in 1811. These were soon followed by trappers and traders operating independently, or as members of the "Horse Brigades" sent out by the North West Company, or Nor'westers, as they were commonly called. In 1821 the North West Company became part of the great Hudson's Bay Company, who continued to send out expeditions until well into the 1830's.

In the early 1830s, Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth become interested in the trade possibilities of the Pacific Northwest and moved westward with men and goods until he reached "The Bottoms" of the Snake River on July 15, 1834. There on the 18th of July he started the construction of a trading post, which he named Fort Hall in honor of the oldest member of the New England company financing his enterprise. On August 4th he finished the log structure and Fort Hall came into existence. By this time, the Hudson Bay Company had already established Fort Boise at the confluence of the Snake and Boise River. A trail route was soon established that roughly followed the Snake River connecting these two forts. In 1836, Missionary Marcus Whitman and his wife Narcissa were the first to traverse the trail with wheeled wagons. In 1837, Wyeth sold Fort Hall to the Hudson's Bay Company.

In 1843, Marcus Whitman returned to the east and then led a train west of about 200 wagons, about 875 emigrants, with hundreds of head of livestock, back to Fort Hall. The train continued past Fort Hall and the emigrants reached the Dalles on the Columbia River firmly establishing the route to Oregon. Fort Hall became the primary resupply location for journeys leading to Oregon and California.

When emigrants first took their wagons west from Fort Hall in 1843, they soon encountered an unfriendly environment: desolation, suffocating dust, swarms of mosquitoes, hot days and cold nights. In many respects, the long trip across the Snake River Plain would be the most difficult part of their journey.

Lieutenant John C. Fremont, along with Kit Carson, made a second western exploration trip in 1843. The purpose of the trip was to scout the route from South Pass in Wyoming to the Oregon Country. On Fremont's return to the east, he would carry a letter from Oregon settler Jesse Looney that was for his brother-in-law in Illinois. In the letter, Looney wrote:

Mrs. Looney says prepare yourselves with good strong clothing for the road or the wild sage will trip you. This shrub is very plentiful and was hard on our teams, especially those that went before, but it will not be so bad on those that come next year, for we have left a plain well beaten road all the way.

Before reaching the Snake River Plain, emigrants encountered problems with alkali dust and numerous mosquitoes along the trail west of Fort Hall, which evoked many dairy entries describing the hardships they endured.

On August 29, 1848, Elizabeth Dixon Smith Geer wrote:

You in the States know nothing about dust. It will fly so that you can hardly see the horns of your tongue yoke of oxen. It often seems that the cattle must die for the want of breath, and then in our wagons, such a spectacle – beds, clothes, victuals and children, all completely covered.

Prior to the discovery of gold, California-bound emigrants followed the main Oregon Trail to Raft River before turning south on the California Trail. Gold seekers soon opened new routes in an attempt to reach their destinations sooner. Hudspeth's Cutoff (1849) directed traffic west from Soda Springs but bypassed Massacre Rocks and Fort Hall. The Salt Lake Alternate (Hensely's Cutoff) (1848) enabled travelers to obtain supplies in Salt Lake City and also

Fort Hall Replica

The original site of Fort Hall is on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in the Snake River bottoms near where the river enters American Falls Reservoir. But a replica of Fort Hall has been constructed in the City of Pocatello and is operated by the Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department. The Old Fort Hall era was one of the most thrilling periods of American history where emigrants passing through Fort Hall grew into the greatest migrations that any nation had known. One of the primary reasons that the Oregon Trail passed through here, was the establishment of Fort Hall in 1834 as a trading post by Nathaniel Wyeth. With Fort Hall in the east and Fort Boise in the west, the Oregon Trail roughly followed the Snake River and connected these two trading posts. These forts were some of the earliest buildings in the State of Idaho. By 1849, many emigrants began to bypass Fort Hall by following the Hudspeth Cutoff to the south. Eventually both Fort Hall and Fort Boise fell into disuse and were abandoned. The original fort was allowed to wither and decay, with the last of its timbers hauled away in 1863 to help build a stage station. Starting in 1916, W. F. and Minnie Howard began a search to locate the original site of Fort Hall. Finally locating the potential site, a small "dig" in one area brought up fragments of pottery (china) and metallic objects, testifying to its long-time occupancy. Minnie Howard would work for more than forty years in an effort to restore the old fort or to build a replica. In 1962, the Bannock County Centennial Committee decided as their project to celebrate Idaho's 1963 Territorial Centennial to build a Fort Hall Replica. Because the original site could not be acquired or built upon, the replica would be built on the upper level of Ross Park. An inventory with dimensions of the fort when it was in the possession of the Hudson's Bay Company served as the basis for this reconstruction. The Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department does an excellent job at interpreting the historic time period and providing the visitor with an accurate experience of the times. You are invited to come and visit the Fort Hall Replica. But it is only open from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

bypassed Massacre Rocks and Fort Hall. These routes then joined the main California Trail in the City of Rocks area.

As their numbers increased, lands along the trail became barren of grass and wood, and water sources often became tainted. In August 1851, Elizabeth Wood wrote:

Sometimes the dust is so great that the drivers cannot see their teams at all though the sun is shining brightly, and it is a great relief to the way-worn traveler to meet with some mountain stream, meandering through a valley, after traveling for miles over these rough and dusty roads, through a country where every blade of grass has been dried up, with the drouth that generally prevails here at this time of year, except in the bottoms along the river banks, where we can yet get feed for our cattle.

While some emigrants wrote in diaries or letters, others just merely left their mark along the trail at such places as Register Rock. The Register Rock area became a popular campsite on the Oregon Trail because there was good grass and water from Rock Creek. The rock itself was a large basaltic rock that had been polished by the great Bonneville Flood. The rock was approximately 7' high and 15' in diameter and became the target for emigrants to write their names. The emigrant inscriptions were both incised and painted. Some names painted in axle grease in 1849 are still visible. The Indian head and preacher head carved on the rock is dated 1866 and is the work of J.J. Hensen at age 7. He was a young traveler on the Oregon Trail with his parents. In 1908, after becoming a sculptor, he returned to review his work. During this visit he again dated the rock under the Indian carving.

Steep lava cliffs and canyon lands almost blocked passage except for a few narrow openings. During the Oregon Trail period, the emigrants gave names to some of the narrow gaps in a rock formation, calling them "gate of death" and "devil's gate" as only one wagon could pass through at a time. It is said that they gave the name "Devil's Gate" to the narrow passage through the rocks, because this area looked like a natural place for an Indian attack against emigrant wagons.

Indeed, as the numbers of emigrants increased and the resources along the trail diminished, the Native Americans became increasingly disturbed by their passing through. This would lead to occasional skirmishes between the two cultures. Many years later, the phrase "massacre rocks" would replace the name of "devil's gate" because of a serious set of skirmishes that happened in 1862 that some would call a "massacre."

The story of this massacre would emerge from emigrant diary entries. In recalling the event, Charles Harrison recorded in his diary on August 11, 1862:

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.

The actual event had happened two days earlier on August 9, 1862. On that day, several wagon trains approaching the massacre rocks area from the east. They were the Smart Train, the Adams Train, the Kennedy Train and the Wilson Train. The Smart Train was attacked first at a location about a half mile east of Massacre Rocks. Then the Indians happened across the Adams Train when returning to their camp. Five white men were killed in these two attacks. Then on the following day (Sunday, August 10), Captain Kennedy and 35 men started in pursuit of the Indians to recover their stolen property. They came upon the Indian camp but desperately had to fight on the move for about three miles as Captain Kennedy and his men tried to retreat. In this

skirmish, two more white men were killed, several wounded, and one presumed dead. This brought the total of white men killed to nine. The wounded daughter of Captain Adams died on the evening of August 11 and was buried the next morning, so a total of ten emigrants were killed. Five of the men are believed to have been buried at the Massacre Rocks. They were: A.J. Hunter, Masemo Lepi, George Adams, Charles Bulwinkel, and George Shepherd.

Around the turn of the century, the pass in the rocks was still known as the devil's gate. Early roads passed through it but the gap in the rock had not been widened and little had been done to improve the roadway. By 1906, there had been some improvements made to the road through the Devil's Gate, but at this time the gap in the rock formation still had not been widened significantly.

The current name of "Massacre Rocks" was bestowed upon this area in 1912, based on the 1862 attacks on westward bound emigrants. Although, the skirmishes had taken place east of the park and not at Devil's Gate as commonly believed.

Highway 30 was designated through Idaho in 1925 and efforts began to improve the road including demolition work on the Devil's Gate. This automobile highway followed closely upon the old Oregon Trail route. Although the highway had not yet been paved.

The granite marker at the Massacre Rocks memorial was dedicated by the Sons of Idaho on July 4, 1927. This would reinforce the use of the name Massacre Rocks for the rocks that surrounded the old Devil's Gate. The marker would later be removed for the construction of the interstate highway and it would be repositioned by the IDPR, 153 feet northwest of its original location on October 8, 1997. The rock outcrop here continues to stand guard over the final unmarked resting place of untold pioneers who perished near here.

There was a stage stop/road house business at Massacre Rocks that was owned and operated by Faris J. and Violet Cullimore from the mid - 1920s until they sold the business in 1956. The original business was a café and bar with a gas pump in the front. The kitchen in the building served both the Cullimore family and the customers.

Julius "River Joe" Winter moved to Massacre Rocks in 1934, where he lived in a tent along the river trapping and gold mining. About 1936 he built a house across the river. For 25 years he hiked to the top of the cliffs where he served as a summer fire lookout at Moseby Butte. In the summer, Joe crossed the river by boat, but for winter travel he built a sled with twelve-foot wooden runners and a barrel at either end to hold him up if the ice broke. Faris Cullimore who then owned the Massacre Rocks property, would watch to see that he crossed safely.

By the 1940s, Highway 30 had been paved and the Devil's Gate gap had been significantly widened. There at the rocks, a large parking lot next to highway provided an informal rest area and access to the Massacre Rocks stage stop.

In 1956, John and Mary Roy purchased the old Massacre Rocks Stage Stop property from Farris and Violet Cullimore. The new owners finished construction of a new 8-room motel and bar/café buildings several months after taking over the operation. The bar/café building was divided and operated separately.

Efforts to improve the roadway and widen the gap continued into the 1980s when Interstate 86 was completed through American Falls/Raft River area in 1983.

Park History: It was reported on December 21, 1967, that the Massacre Rocks café, bar, and motel, in operation for more than 50 years was soon to be closed. The owners, John and Mary Roy sold the approximate 20 acre property to the IDPR for development as a state park. The sale would not be final until 1970.

Massacre Rocks State Park was created by the Idaho Legislature in 1968, when state senator Var Meadows and Rep. Ernest Permann lead the way as part of the states' Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The anticipated cost of development of the initial 550 acre park was \$587,869 when it was created.

At about the same time, the Idaho Department of Transportation began acquiring stripes of land approximately ,000 feet on either side of the existing highway for a future interstate highway resulted in a purchase of about 330 acres. The purchase was made under the Federal Highway Beautification Act and was not only for construction of the interstate but also a long range state program to restore five miles of land along the Snake River. The project was coordinated with the IDPR in supplementing and expanding on the scenic preservation that would result in acquiring additional land and providing camp and recreational sites along the Snake River.

The IDPR acquired about 548 acres on January 23, 1969 from the BLM under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. Later that year, construction of the new park was well underway. Massacre Rocks State Park was opened to the public in 1970. Register Rock was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 24, 1978. Interstate 86 through the park was completed in 1983 and resulted in such a great widening of the old Devil's Gate that the feature is now lost to history. The Department of Transportation open the Massacre Rocks rest area at the east end of the park on November 11, 1987.

Recreation Activities:

History Study: The main purpose of the establishment of Massacre Rocks State Park is to commemorate the Oregon and California historic trails. The main sites to see are Register Rock, the Devil's Gate Memorial, and the Historic Wagon Ruts. Information about these sites are available at the visitor center. Register Rock is accessible by motor vehicle. The Devil's Gate Memorial is just a short walk from the Visitor Center. The Historic Wagon Ruts must be accessed via a very interesting trail that goes along the Snake River Canyon rim and then goes through two tunnels under the interstate to an overlook. This is an often missed feature in the park, but it is definitely a "must do!" Information about these sites is available at the Visitor Center. There are also displays and exhibits at the Visitor Center that can further your understanding of the history that happened here.

Camping: There are 41 campsites with water and electric hook-ups available. There is one standard campsite available. The main campground has improved restrooms with flush toilets, sinks, and showers. There are four camping cabins available for rent in the campground. There is also the Canyonview Group Area that had lots of room for at least two groups or one large group. However, there are no hook-ups available there. There are four vault toilets there. This group area has a central campfire circle, 16 individual tables and 12 fire rings. This group area is not on the reservation system, so call the park office to reserve.

Picnicking: There are 51 picnic tables available for individual day use. The picnic areas are at the Trapper's Trail Area, the Boat Ramp Area, and the Register Rock Area. There are also a few tables at the Visitor Center.

Boating: There is a boat ramp with courtesy dock available at the west end of the main park.

There is a paved parking lot here where vehicles with trailers can park in pull-through spaces. The boating is on the Snake River in an area that is the upper “backwater” of Lake Walcott.

Canoeing: the IDPR rents canoes and kayaks at the end of a small trail off the Program Area parking lot. There is a dock there for launching. You can bring your own canoes and kayaks, but you will find the boat ramp to be a more convenient place to launch. A potential activity would be to paddle around Goat and Beaver Islands.

Disc Golf: The park has a disc golf course that is perhaps one of the most challenging in terms of elevation changes and terrain. The course starts at the Visitor Center.

Fishing: The river provides a fine fishery for smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, white sturgeon, rainbow trout, perch, Utah chub, and carp. There is a 2 bass limit.

Nature Study/Birding: Besides its historical significance, Massacre Rocks provides an outstanding natural setting as well. The geologic formations here are noteworthy, especially the Devil’s Garden. Hiking in the juniper woodlands or along the river provides views of great natural landscapes. There is a nature trail and a geology trail that start at the Visitor Center. Massacre Rocks State Park is on the Idaho Birding Trail.

Bicycling: The park has a network of paved roads for the street bicyclist to ride on, however these roads must be shared with motor vehicles. A ride can also be made all the way to the Department of Transportation rest area and/or the Wagon Rut Trail.

Mountain Biking: Several of the trails are open to mountain biking. But please remember to do you best to stay on the trails and not take shortcuts, as the soils and vegetation at the park are fragile.

Trails: Surprisingly enough for a historical park, there are a total of about 8 miles of trails in the park. Hiking the entire River Trail from the North Pole to the South Pole is recommended.

Visitor Center: The Visitor Center has displays, exhibits, a public counter, and an area for sales

Please Remember

- There is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee required for access to the park. This is required even though there are no entrance stations operated by the park.
- Campfires are only allowed in the provided fire rings.
- Dogs must be on a leash at all times and are not permitted in the buildings.
- Motor vehicles are to stay on established roadways unless directed otherwise.
- Swimming or cliff jumping/diving is not permitted.
- Camping is only allowed in the designated sites. All other areas of the park are day use only.
- All historic resources are protected by state laws and regulations. Please do not disturb, deface, or remove these artifacts.
- Personal floatation devices are required for any water craft on the river.
- All watercraft must display a current invasive species decal.

of books, souvenirs and disc golf supplies. The deck in the front has a great view of the gap in the rocks where the interstate passes through that was once the Devil's Gate. There are scheduled interpretive programs during the summer season.

Resource Management Issues:

Invasive/Noxious Weeds: Vegetation in and around the park likely differs from pre-settlement conditions because of past grazing, farming, fire, and other disturbances. Often these influences result in the introduction and establishment of invasive plants or noxious weeds in disturbed areas. The most common plants in this category include cheatgrass, Russian thistle (tumble weed), Russian olive, poison hemlock, spotted knapweed, and crested wheat grass.

Suggestions for the Future: Those recommendations that represent very favorable enhancements for the park are as follows:

- The IDPR should consider re-surfacing and paving all the park roads and parking lots. There are big potholes in the Visitor Center and Program Area parking lots. This should include paving the gravel roads to the Canyonview Groups Area and the North Pole Day Use Area.
- Consideration should be given to developing a paved bicycle trail that runs parallel to the River Trail.
- IDPR should consider upgrading the 1970s campground, especially the electrical system.
- IDPR should examine the possibility of enlarging the park through acquisition of property at the east end of the park and across the river. Since much of this land is BLM land, it may be possible to do this through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. The development of private lands for wind energy to the south of the park is beginning to represent an encroachment to the historic viewshed. At least when visitors take in the view to the north, the landscape still looks somewhat as it did in historic times, but to preserve this may, at a minimum, require agreements with the BLM and BOR to prevent development of those lands for wind energy.
- Consider upgrading the old vault toilets at Canyonview Group Camp to CXT style.
- The current boat lot is too small as it holds only 25 to 30 vehicles with boat trailers. The lot is full for most of the season. IDPR should consider enlarging it, perhaps as part of a paving and re-surfacing project.