

Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes

by

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Around 1810, French fur trappers and traders came down into the area, and finding the Native People to be shrewd traders, gave them and their lands the name Coeur d'Alene "*sharp bargainers with hearts as hard as the point of an awl.*" The Schitsu-umsh people had been living and traveling through the area regularly on hunting trips into Montana. They had been traveling on the trails of their ancestors for thousands of years. Schitsu-umsh means "*Those who are found here.*" The Schitsu-umsh people believe that the creator owns the land, water, plants, animals, and that the creator put them here to be stewards of those gifts. These aboriginal people were not nomadic; fish and game as well as a wide variety of edible plants allowed them to live in permanent settlements.

In 1842, Father DeSmet came through the area to make contact with the natives so that he could teach them about his religion. DeSmet named the rivers that flowed into Coeur d'Alene Lake, naming the southernmost the Saint Joseph, and naming the other Saint Ignatius. The Jesuits (Black Robes) built their first Mission on the St. Joe and later, due to flooding, moved it up onto the St. Ignatius to the spot where the Cataldo Mission still stands, and holds status as the oldest building in Idaho. The Mission of the Sacred Heart was opened for services in 1852.

The Coeur d'Alene Indians were up in arms during most of the 1850's in protest of white settlers coming in as well as the threat of the Mullan Road. By September of 1858, the army had things under control and a treaty was signed at the Mission on the St. Ignatius. This enabled John Mullan to begin work on the road through the St. Regis and St. Ignatius, now known as the Coeur d'Alene, valleys. John Mullan worked on the road with the help of a hundred men clearing it to about twenty-five feet wide.

The first reported gold was found in 1866 by a black man in the area now known as Mullan. The Prichard party first struck gold near Eagle in the summer of 1883 and by fall, the rush was on. During the years 1883-1885, most major

ore discoveries were found in the Coeur d'Alene Mining District, creating a major demand for goods, services, and machinery, as well as a way to get the ore to a smelter.

During the years 1884-1886, a small settlement started with the simple building of a cabin. This cabin was built where five creeks come together by Colonel W.R. Wallace, and soon the town of Placer Center came into being. At that time, the trip from the Mission to Placer Center took two days in a wagon fording the river fourteen times. In 1886, Colonel Wallace's wife Lucy was the postmistress of Placer Center, when the U.S. Postal Service made her shorten the name. She changed it to the name it carries today, Wallace ID, 83873. Idaho became the 43 State in 1890.

In 1886, D.C. Corbin, Sam T. Hauser, Anton Esler, S.S. Glidden, James Wardner, and James Monaghan formed the Coeur d'Alene Railway & Navigation Company. In November, 1886, forty pound steel rails were laid with narrow, three foot, gauge from the Mission Landing to Wardner Junction. Having been in a hurry to get done, the rail bed had not been ballasted. One engine was sunk in the mud between Pine Flat and Mud Prairie, another between Kingston and the Mission. By March of 1887, CR&N had the trains up and running from the Mission to Wardner Junction. Later in 1887, D.C. Corbin contracted the Willamette Iron Works to build a new steamer that could break ice in the winter, thereby maintaining the link with the rail heads in Coeur d'Alene and the rail head at the Mission. By December 12 of 1887, when the Kootenai was launched for the CR&N, their "Chippy" trains (narrow gauge) reached into the mouth of Canyon Creek. December 13, 1887, was the first rail shipment coming from east of Wardner Junction to the Mission.

In 1886, three days before the CR&N was formed, George W. Truax, Horace F. Stratton, Julius Galland, Isaac Cooper, and Warren Sayre formed the Washington & Idaho Railroad, and by October 1886, had surveyed to the Mission. By May of 1888, Congress had passed laws granting right-of-way across the Coeur d'Alene reservation and the franchise was transferred to the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company (OR&N). In late December, 1889, the first round trip offered from Wallace to Spokane Falls by the OR&N would set you back about \$6.50. This track followed the same route that our present day rail trail follows into Plummer. The Swing Bridge dates back to that time. In December, 1910, all Union Pacific (UP) spur lines in North Idaho joined with OR&N to form Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Company (OWR&N), and in 1936, UP took over the lease.

In late December, 1890, the Northern Pacific (NP) completed broad gauge from Missoula to Mullan, and by August, 1891, broad gauge had replaced the narrow gauge between Wallace and Mullan. That left the only “Chippys” in the valley running between the Mission and Wallace, and on up into Burke. During this time, Bunker Hill began shipping concentrates via “Chippy” trains to Wallace. The concentrates would then be transferred to the broad gauge train and sent on to Helena to be smelted. In October of 1888, NP took over the CR&N and by March of 1898, started removing rail from the Mission toward Wallace. By 1902 the “Chippys” were all gone. The NP operated trains over Lookout Pass for over 80 years with winter being their worst problem. In 1970, NP was taken over by Burlington Northern (BN), and ten years later on September 2, 1980, the last freight train hauling 26 cars, three loaded with \$1,000,000 worth of concentrates each, but with all the rest empty, headed for Missoula. The following summer, BN removed the rail from Haugan to Mullan, and UP took over the rail from Wallace to Mullan, completing their line from Mullan to Plummer.

Because of their inherent love of the land, and after years of watching their beloved river run milky white, killing all natural life, the Coeur d’Alene Tribal Council decided in 1991 to file a lawsuit to force cleanup in the Coeur d’Alene Drainage and Lake. Later that same year, they filed a second lawsuit over ownership of the Lake. The tribe feels that they are “the last best hope for the future health of the lake and, therefore, the economy of the region.” In 1996, the Justice Department filed a similar lawsuit against the mining companies and the UP. UP settled and put up 30 million dollars for the cleanup of the rail corridor. In 1997, the tribe gained control of the lower third of the lake, and in 2002, won Proposition 1 and may, therefore, keep the gaming they have.

In 1989, the first action in the valley by the EPA was in conjunction with the Idaho Citizens Network, and in 1994, the 21 square mile box of Superfund was established, making Kellogg the center of the nation’s second largest Superfund Site. Yard remediation is still in progress in Kellogg and Pinehurst. The EPA is in the process of negotiating for the remediation of the drainage from the Idaho-Montana border to the Spokane River and beyond.

In the spring of 2000, two companies, Envirocon out of Missoula, MT, and Klammert Railroad Salvage Co. out of Silesia, MT, started pulling rail from the Lucky Friday down toward Wallace. All rails and ties had to be decontaminated, so seven impound areas were set up: Golconda, Silverton, Enaville, Latour Creek, Bull Run, Harrison, and Heyburn State Park. After 200,000 or so ties were washed and shipped out, the job of cleaning up the contamination began. Anywhere from

six inches to eight feet of the old contaminated rail-bed was removed, depending on the amount of contamination. Twelve-ounce felt fabric was then laid out with new fill on top, effectively capping any remaining pollutants. The trail was completed in late 2002 with a continuous strip of asphalt ten feet wide stretching from Mullan to the Swing Bridge on Lake Coeur d'Alene. Paving from the Swing Bridge to Plummer, and conversion of the Swing Bridge to a raised stationary bridge for bikes and foot traffic will be completed by fall 2003.

The trail will be managed by the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Park Rangers will be on patrol riding bicycles or four wheelers. They will refrain from driving full size vehicles on the trail during high use times. **This trail is Non-Motorized and Free**, so come on over to ride, walk, run, roller blade, or picnic. Naturally, the trail will also be open for fishing access. In fact, Ranger Dave Landrom told me he saw a guy riding a bike towing a trailer with a canoe on it. There are interpretative sites all along the trail informing people about the history of the area, along with warnings about mine waste being present nearby. Parks and Recreation can be reached at (208) 682-3814. Please enjoy our trail.

For more reading on the region:

Coeur d'Alene Diary by Richard G. Magnuson.

Beneath These Mountains by Lester Harrison and Russell Bankson.

Uncle Bunker by Ray Chapman.

Railroads through the Coeur d'Alenes by John V. Wood.

All are available at the Kellogg and Wallace Public Libraries.