

**A PIONEER HISTORY OF THE BARLOW ROAD:
ITS EARLY USE AND BLAZING.**

by

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The Barlow Road was an important route in the early settlement of Oregon (1845-1865). It was an early alternative to dangerous travel down the Columbia River by settlers. By studying the experiences immigrants had on the road, through use of diaries, journals, letters, and newspapers articles, we may more understand the people and the historical significance of the Barlow Road.

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"They rode the ridges into Cloudland,
where the eagle screamed his rage:
they conquered Laurel Hill's steep roadway,
and gave to us-a glorious age!"

"This way they passed
long years ago,
those men of old
whose tale we tell
those sturdy women
bearing babes in arm
to found the state we love so well."

--William J. "Barlow Bill" Williams, 17 July 1943

Mss 1508, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

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Introduction

...at about 10 miles distant we had to go up & down over the ridge called the Summit from its being the dividing Ridge of the Cascade Mountain...we had the wor[s]t Road this day for waggons that I ever traveled before. the road being some hilly & in some places great quantities of Rock. the timber literally covered the Earth & had been poorly cut out of the road. high Stumps & plenty of them & the Road very crooked....¹

The experiences of pioneers coming to Oregon in the early years of the Oregon Trail were ones of hardship and toil. First, emigrants had to uproot themselves from familiar family ties and ways of life, chancing it all on a fresh start in Oregon Territory. Then came the equally uneasy task of preparing for and setting out upon a nearly 2000 mile, 6 month trek across unfamiliar territory and unknown obstacles. Information on routes and conditions could be obtained in the form of guide books, guides, personal letters, diaries, and journals. The more reliable sources tended to be letters and journals published by those who had earlier crossed the "trail". The Oregon Trail in these early days ended at the Methodist Mission at Wascopum (The Dalles).

At the Mission, immigrants had two choices: they could purchase portage down the Columbia River on one of two bateaux the Hudson's Bay Company ran for a fee of \$50 per wagon, or they could "chance it" by building their own raft, disassemble their wagon, stow it upon their raft and head down the dangerous river. The Columbia River at this time was quite perilous for water travellers: rocks, falls, and rapids were just some of the obstacles that made transit to Oregon City and the Willamette Valley treacherous. As one immigrant, John R. McBride, who crossed the Oregon Trail in 1846 reminisced, "The history of this river navigation was one that recorded many a watery tragedy, and was one of peril, and had been the dread of the latter portion of our journey."² Family dreams could be shattered with the loss of everything they had brought across the Plains to the River, including their lives.

An option would soon be available to emigrants wanting to get to Oregon City. This alternative route became known as the Barlow Road. The Barlow Road was hard to blaze, hard to cross, and was promoted in an equally hard manner. Through the use of diaries, journals, newspaper articles, and recollections, this thesis will attempt to show how difficult the experience was for those who were a part of the initial trail blazing, compare the nature of the crossing amongst later emigrants on a chartered tollroad built on the blazed trail, and observe the harsh environment in which the trail was promoted in the press. Through these three factors, this thesis should show the historical significance of the Barlow Road as a great aid to the early settlement of Oregon (as a large portion of its early settlers travelled its course), and how the experience shaped those who went through the ordeal.

Trailblazers

In late Spring of 1845, another group of would-be settlers left Independence, Missouri for Oregon Territory. This particular train of wagons was captained by Samuel Kimbrough Barlow, an immigrant from Kentucky by way of Illinois. Their trip across the Plains was probably just as hard and memorable as those who undertook the same journey before and after them. But these settlers' experiences began to vary greatly from any like those before them when they arrived in Wascopum. When they arrived in September, they were told of the tremendous price immigrants were being charged to be ported down the river, they were told of the equally tremendous wait--at least two weeks. The Hudson's Bay Company was charging \$50, an eighth of the \$400 average it cost to outfit a wagon to make the trip to Oregon,³ so one can imagine how many would have felt when they discovered how much it would cost them to go down the river. They did not want to chance the river by themselves, and they could not afford the Mission store's inflated prices for supplies, even if they could obtain what they needed. With all the other immigrants trapped in the same situation, the changing seasons only proved to hasten their decision.

Barlow began inquiring at the Mission about alternative routes down the river. Barlow was told of two alternative routes to the Columbia River; one was to cross with the stock across the river at The Dalles, and follow the north bank of the river to Fort Vancouver, where they could then re-cross the river, and traced the southern side till they came to the Willamette Valley, and head into it till they came to Oregon City. The other route was an old native trail south of Mount Hood, which he was told was hard to traverse.⁴ After consulting natives and missionaries in Wascopum, and against their advice, Barlow and a group of followers decided to attempt to cross the Cascade range south of Mount Hood using the native/livestock drover trails where possible, while blazing new routes when necessary. On the 25th of September, 1845, Barlow and 7 wagons,

carrying nearly 20 adults, children, and approximately 50 head of livestock, headed south from the Mission, paralleling the Deschutes River in the direction of the Tygh Valley.

Once reaching the Tygh Valley they turned west and headed for the Cascades. Shortly after the "Barlow train's" departure from The Dalles, Joel Palmer, an immigrant from Indiana who would later become a Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, arrived at the Mission and unsurprisingly encountered the same situation that Barlow's train had. Palmer had heard at the mission of Barlow's plan to attempt a crossing of the Cascade range, and after a meeting with his train, decided to join Barlow's effort. By the third of October, Palmer's party of 23 wagons and 15 families found the camp of the Barlow group. From them, Palmer learned that Barlow, William Rector, and a few others, had headed west, two days earlier, into the mountains to scout out a route for the wagons to follow. On the sixth of October, Barlow's small scouting party returned to the camp, "Rifle shots heralded the approach of those whom we awaited."⁵ For a list of the emigrants in the original group, see Appendix A.

The combined camps discussed their options, and decided their best bet was to send their cattle over the livestock trails to Oregon City due to the lack of forage available for their animals. This same group was to also procure supplies and head back towards the trail blazers, meeting them on the way. The next day, another group of men was sent back to The Dalles to acquire supplies for the endeavor of crossing the Cascades.⁶ These precatons of over-accumulating supplies may reflect on how difficult the group realized the task set before them would be; they rightly did not know how long the task would take them or could hypothesize what problems they would encounter, but they did have nearly six months of accumulated survival skills on the edge of civilization and assumed to leave nothing to chance--either group could fail in obtaining supplies, etc. As Palmer put it, "we had forwarded...a request that they would send us provisions and assistance; but as we know nothing of their whereabouts, we had little hope of being benefited by them."⁷

In order to accomplish the creation of the route, Barlow, Palmer, and Rector decided to have a small group go ahead of the main body, blazing and marking the route to be taken. A second group would become the construction crew, clearing the felled trees, rocks, and undergrowth that would hinder the wagons. A third group would attend the camp which consisted of the women, children, wagons and their teams, and supplies. Due to problems with keeping the livestock from getting lost, and "Indian problems" (Palmer notes in his journal natives stealing cattle and horses from the camp), no more than one-third of the men could participate in the road clearing at one time.⁸

As they continued, the party was awed by Mount Hood, "I had never before looked upon a sight so nobly grand. We had previously seen only the top of it, but now had a view of the whole mountain. No pen can give an adequate description of the scene."⁹ While scouting ahead on October 11, Barlow, Palmer, and a "Mr. Lock" set out to ascend Mount Hood to the summit. Once at the summit, they were to spy a route where the wagons could cross the Cascades with "relative" ease. By the next day, only Palmer ascended all the way to the top, wearing out his moccasins and completing the final leg to the top across the glacier in his bare feet.¹⁰

At the top, Palmer discerned that a "low gap seemed to connect this stream [headwaters of the Clackamas River], or some other, heading in this high range, with the low bottoms immediately under the base of this peak. I was of the opinion that a pass might be found between this peak and the first range of mountains...through this gap to the branch of the Clackamis;....could reach the open ground near the Willamette..."¹¹ Barlow remembered seeing a low gap south of Mount Hood when he crossed the Blue Mountains to the east earlier in the season. The next morning, a "consultation" was held. One of the original groups sent out for provisions had already returned, but the group's supplies were still insufficient.¹² Some in the party were beginning to realize, as Palmer put it, the "despair of getting through this season." They determined to send another party (Palmer and a companion) to scout out the route they had surveyed from the mountain

top, and to move the camp closer to where the road was being cleared. Palmer had discover a small "prairie" where the animals they had kept with them could forage and find water.

Palmer at first failed to trace the route he had viewed from the summit, but after one failure, he discovered a native trail that ran through the low spot in the mountains. He and his partner scouted this trail, but by this time Palmer became acutely aware of weather changes, and decided it was his duty to go back and inform the group that they could attempt a crossing at this time, but if the weather worsened, he feared they may become stuck in the mountains, unable to retreat or go forward. He recommended that the group find a suitable site, set up a permanent camp, build a cabin, and store the wagons and their cargo in it, and find someone to be charged with the duty of watching over the goods until the next season, when the road could be completed and the wagons could be rolled out. This site was called Fort Deposit.¹³

On October 15, 1845, the families prepared to pack out of the Cascades. Barlow and Rector proposed to everyone that they would continue working on the road until it was completed to Oregon City, and that they would watch over the property left behind, for a small fee. The next morning Barlow and Rector set out to complete the route to Oregon City, buying more supplies there, and returning to pack out the remaining families. Those who stayed behind, and did not pack out, would commence working on the camp. The next day, the rains started. Palmer left with the families that were going to pack out over the livestock trails, while Barlow and Rector set out to continue blazing their route to Oregon City. Why could Barlow and Rector not just widen the existing native/livestock trail and drive the wagons over it? The reason they did not do this was due to the fact that the native "trail" for the most part was a path that followed the timberline in the high elevations of Mount Hood, where the trees stopped growing. William Barlow, later in his *Recollections of Seventy Years*, describes the native "trail blazings" as such:¹⁴

The Indians always made their trails over the highest ground they could find. Though the distance might be twice as far, they preferred the high land, as tomahawkes and scalping knives were poor tools to cut logs and big trees. When they came to a big log that they could not go around or jump their ponies over, they would hack a notch in it just wide enough to let the pony squeeze through.

It was possible to drive livestock over this route, but would be impossible to do so with them pulling wagons due to the rugged and extremely uneven course of the trail. And because of the trail's high elevation, it was almost always covered with snow.

Meanwhile in the Willamette Valley, word had reached the settlements (via those who drove ahead of the main party with the livestock) that a group was trying to blaze a route across the Cascades, and was in dire need of supplies, "The citizenry immediately donated approximately 1,100 pounds flour, 100 pounds sugar, and smaller portions of coffee and tea. 11 pack horses were secured from an Indian Chief, and Peter G. Stewart, Matthew Gilmore, and Charles Gilmore hastened eastward to relieve the road party."¹⁵ Palmer encountered the relief party on the 18th of October. Half of the relief party escorted the women back to the settlement while Charles Gilmore and an Indian "friend" proceeded with Palmer to bring aid to those up at the camp. They arrived at the camp on the 20th of October to find that "several families were entirely out of provisions, others were nearly so, and all were expecting to rely upon their poor famished cattle."¹⁶

The relief party and all the families, save for three--the Barlows, the Rectors, and the Caplingers, headed down the mountain toward Oregon City. William Berry and William Barlow (Samuel's son) had elected to stay behind (for a fee) and watch over the wagons and goods. Berry was later befriended during his lone vigilance at Ft. Deposit by native people of the area, who brought him salmon and berries throughout the winter.¹⁷ It stopped raining and began to snow. Halfway to Oregon City, Palmer encountered another relief party heading up into the mountain. They still had a rough time coming down the trail, for no relief party could bring them what their animals needed, "The numerous herds of cattle which had passed along had so ate up the grass and bushes, that

it was with great difficulty the horses could procure a sufficiency to sustain life."¹⁸ On the first of November, Palmer's group reached Oregon City.

While Palmer was occupied leading families out of the mountains, and then guiding supply trains back to the camp, Barlow and Rector were trying to carve their way through the dense forests of the southwestern slope of Mount Hood towards Oregon City (they started on the 16th of October). Rector recounts the harrowing experience he and Barlow had in a latter reminiscence, "The second day was heard traveling a light misting rain all day. We had to descend a long way into a kenion to get water, it was getting dark when we got to water, in trying to start a fire the matches was wet and would not make fire....Barlow was disponding believed we would never get out of that kenion. it was very coald and raining and without fire our chance to survive was truly bad..."¹⁹

They stumbled and hacked their way though the underbrush, and on the 20th of October, Barlow and Rector came across two young boys playing in the woods. The two men, nearly exhausted, yelled to the boys for help, the boys being startled by the men, ran away from them. Little did Barlow and Rector know at the time that the boys were running to fetch their father, Philip Foster, who had set up a farm and gristmill in Eagle Creek on a 640 acre claim. Foster had brought his family west in 1844 on a ship via Cape Horn and the Sandwich Islands. Foster took the men in, where they recuperated for a few days before they headed down a road from Foster's place to Oregon City.

Once they were in Oregon City they were faced with a problem in attempting to purchase supplies; they went to the Methodist store as well as the American owned store, and were denied credit by both. Their last hope was the Hudson's Bay Company store, a British-interest company under the directorship of Dr. John McLoughlin. They explained their plight to him and he granted them credit for the supplies they needed. Once they obtained the supplies, then headed back for Foster's and then on to the Ft. Deposit, five miles south of the mountain.

By the 25th of October, Barlow and Rector had made it back up to Ft. Deposit. Rector decided that his wife was too sick to make the journey down the mountain, so he and Mrs. Rector headed back for The Dalles, where they built a raft and went down the Columbia. Snowfall on the mountain was beginning to accumulate, posing a serious problem for those who were intending to cross over to the settlements. As Mary Barlow Wilkins recounts of her progenitors' struggles off the mountain, "their progress averaged from 3 to 6 miles a day; often the advance was only a half mile an hour. Provisions were fast diminishing and rather than eat their faithful dog, the flesh of a horse that had died from eating poison laurel was tested, and as it did not kill, they ate and took courage."²⁰ The route may now have been somewhat easier to traverse than before, but the snow, swamps, thickets, and dwindling provisions were becoming a tremendous hindrance.

They soon found themselves before Laurel Hill; a hill of very steep grade which would later earn a spot in the infamy of the pioneer's memories and diaries. William Barlow remembered that they went down Laurel Hill "like shot off a shovel...and in less time than two hours we had to look back to see snow."²¹ Once down the hill, they crossed the Big Sandy River and found themselves again on the livestock trail. The river had to be crossed, and re-crossed in spots to terrain that was navigable. Twenty-two year old William Barlow and John Bacon were sent ahead to Foster's place to get help for the beleaguered group. Nearly two months after they began to pack out, they are recorded by William as having arrived at Foster's on the 23rd of December, and after a few days rest arrived in Oregon City on Christmas Day... "just eight months and 24 days from Fulton county Illinois..."²² the Barlow's starting point.

The "arrival" date of Barlow in Oregon City, or for that matter at Foster's homestead, becomes problematic when one takes the following into account; Barlow petitioned the provisional legislature on December 9, 1945.²³ If Barlow was supposed to be helping his family get down from the mountain at this time, how could he have petitioned the legislature? He could have ventured ahead of his family and companions

that were packing out of the Cascades, and submitted his proposal. Or, he could have had one of his sons make the initial proposal before the legislature. The petition has the tone of a written letter, and it could be very possible that Barlow simply had the proposal forwarded in a written form to the legislature.²⁴

To the Honorable Legislature of Oregon.

I hereby report that I have viewed and marked by blazing and cutting away bushes and logs, a route or line for a road beginning at the Dalles Mission...to this place no remarks are necessary as there is a wagon road opened--the cost of Making the road is estimated at four thousand dollars in cash, (by me alone) all other persons that have seen the rout make larger estimates than that Given, all of which is respected.

Barlow presented his case in person before the legislature on December 13th.²⁵ He had to arrive ahead of the rest of the party at least once (December 13, 1845); the party may have been close enough to Oregon City that Barlow could have come in, made his petition and then ventured back. If this is the case, why did everyone not come in with Barlow? They were no longer hindered by wagons, but they did have their horses and oxen ladden with packs, and would be slower than a single man on foot carrying little or no load, or a lone man on a horse. It might be more likely to assume that Barlow would have been heading down for supplies and provisions, and killed two birds with one stone. Regardless of how or why Barlow came into Oregon City on the week of the 13th of December, he was successful.

Barlow was given a charter from the territorial government in Oregon City to construct and operate a toll road over the route he blazed, on December 18, 1845, 7 days before he "arrived" in the settlement as recounted by his son.²⁶ For the complete charter, see Appendix B. The charter not only allowed Barlow and associates to create a road and charge toll for the service, it also held them legally responsible to "[operate] a safe and sufficient wagon road". It is not too hard to see why the territorial government would be concerned about giving someone authorization to construct a road and charge toll for its

use, only to find that those given authorization had done little besides build a toll gate and collect fees.

Earlier in 1845, roughly 1000 immigrant families paid \$5 per wagon to Steven Meek to be guided along the what was to become known as "Meek's Cutoff" through central Oregon to the Dalles along the Malheur River. This route was intended to save the immigrants 200 miles, but ended up costing some their lives.²⁷ It seems the route's main problem was that it could not provide sufficient water and resources that the immigrants needed to survive, leading ultimately to their suffering. This must have been in the territorial legislature's mind when they authorized Barlow's charter. They must have considered the fact that the first part of Barlow's venture had been a "success" and had not cost anyone their life, save at the price of a little pain. The trail had been blazed, what it now need was to be cleared and made "safe" and "suitable" for wagon travel.

The territorial government gave Barlow eight months to get the road constructed and in shape for emigrants to use. This just happened to also be the time that most immigrants would have been arriving in The Dalles from the United States; most settlers in the early years of the Oregon Trail left their homes in the east in the spring, spending 6 months on the trail. They often had to wait till then for conditions that were favorable to wagon travel; melted snow packs in elevated areas, water and forage conditions for animals etc. Thus it is understandable why the deadline of September 1st, 1846 was given.

There are some very interesting facets to the original charter given to Barlow. Section 6 is odd in how it relates to section 3. Section 3 states that Barlow may collect toll from "all *white* persons, and *descendants* of the *same*." The implication of this was that Barlow could not charge native persons for using the trail, but he could charge whites and "half-breeds". It is curious if this stems from the fact that parts of the newly created route incorporated pre-existing native trails, and so therefore they could not justify charging the native people for use of their own route? This seems slightly unlikely when taking into consideration the attitudes the general populace had towards native peoples at

that time, and so it is improbable that they would not charge the natives for the use of the road on the basis of morals. It is more likely that they did not mention charging the native people for the use of the route because attempting to do so would more than likely prove troublesome or impossible. But section 6 does stipulate that individuals can not manipulate the wording of the charter to hire native guides to drive their cattle and wagons over the road toll-free, in an attempt to dodge the toll fees they would otherwise be paying without the "Indian exemption." The fact that they even had to include this in the charter is telling of the anxieties individuals had (possibly Barlow) that this very type of event could, or would, occur.

That spring, Barlow started out with 40 men to build the road from Foster's homestead, east into the mountains, until they came to the point where the road building had ended the previous fall. Barlow and Foster must have become somewhat friends during all the time they had contact that previous fall, because Barlow entered into a partnership with Foster for a road company. It probably made perfect economic sense to Foster, as the route ended at his property, so he could supply newly arrived immigrants if he wanted, and would be close to the road if he was ever needed somewhere along its course. His close proximity to the road would allow him to monitor its use. The slow and arduous task of building the road included clearing the route through dense underbrush, streams, and swamps. By July 4, 1846 the *Oregon Spectator* of Oregon City, was able to print this story:

The Mount Hood Road

We are happy to learn from Capt. Barlow, who has just returned from the Cascade mountains, where he has been constructing a road to admit the passage of wagons direct from the Dalls to this place, that the Road is now complete, and that the wagons which were left in the mountains last fall, are on the way, and will reach this place in the course of two days. We have not room in this number to say more of this laudable enterprise.

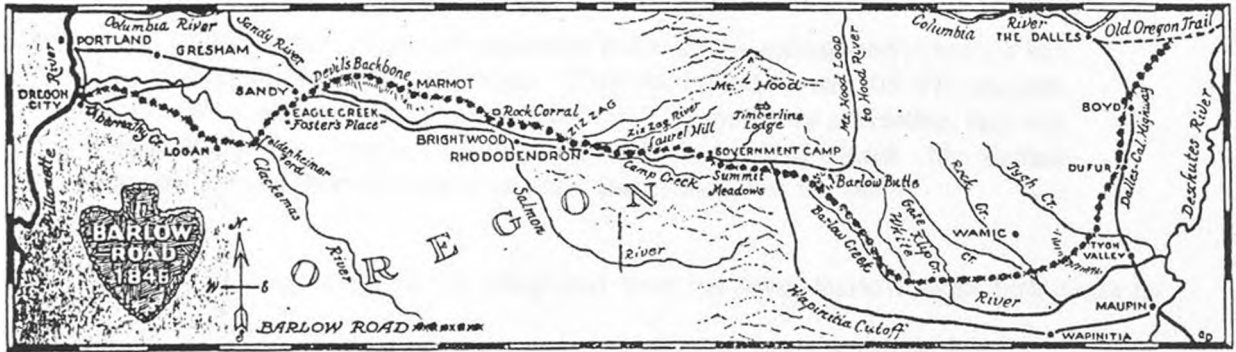
With this being the case, Barlow beat the deadline given to him by the provisional legislature by nearly two months. The families were close behind Barlow, bringing their wagons and possessions down from Ft. Deposit, on their way to Oregon City and the Willamette Valley.

Barlow and Foster built a tollgate at the eastern end of the road, in the Tygh Valley near Wamic, Oregon. The site was chosen because of the good water and range land it offered, so that immigrants could rest and allow their animals to recover before they ventured over the trail, for a fee. To many, the \$5 toll would definitely sound better than the \$50 fee and the unknown wait many would have had to endure to use the services of the Hudson's Bay Company bateaux. McLoughlin unknowingly financed his own competition for emigrant transportation down the Columbia River. If he had not extended Barlow and Rector credit the previous fall, the route would not have been blazed as soon as it had. There were many attempts, and some successes, at blazing routes into the Willamette Valley in 1846-47 (the Applegate Trail that came into the Willamette Valley from southern Oregon via the California Trail), as well as later endeavors (the Santiam Road).

In the fall of 1846, Barlow and Foster petitioned for an eleven month extension of their original charter. In their petition, they stated their reason for the extension as "that your petitioner has opened Said road at a heavy expense and have not realized one half the amount of money expended, and that a large amount must be expended to make the road as good as it should be, and keep the road in repair for the time the charter requires..."²⁸ The petition was granted to them in December of 1846.

Moving west was a major undertaking for those who endured the task in a wagon, during this expansion era in American history. Unfamiliar terrain and experiences were common to all those emigrating. Few knew what awaited them in the west, or how they would start their new life. A small part of their experience would be the crossing itself, but the memories etched in their minds would be remembered forever. A special group of

pioneers added a unique experience to their memory that few would share. They are the trailblazers, those who chose to carve a new route through unfamiliar territory out of necessity. For many of the early settlers to Oregon, the Barlow trail would become a permanent fixture of their memory. Palmer left his legacy in a journal of travels, William Barlow immortalized his experiences in his reminisces. Many more left their emotional donation to history in the form of a diary.



Map from Barlow Road, Walter E. Meacham, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

The Emigration

Some men's hearts died within them and some of our women sat down by the roadside—and cried, saying they had abandoned all hope of ever reaching the Promised Land. I saw women with babies but a week old, toiling up the mountains in the burning sun, on foot, because our jaded teams were not able to haul them. We went down mountains so steep that we had to let our wagons down with ropes. My wife and I carried our children up muddy mountains in the Cascades, half a mile high and then carried the loading of our wagons up on our backs by piecemeal, as our cattle were so reduced that they were hardly able to haul up our empty wagon!²⁹

Immigration over the Barlow trail began in 1846 and was very heavy in the early years of migration to Oregon. The majority of overlanders coming to Oregon in 1846 ventured to the Willamette Valley over the Barlow Road. But, by the mid 1860's, the Barlow Road's use diminished among emigrants with the introduction of steamers on the river, and better, easier wagon routes into the Willamette Valley.

By September 3, 1846, the *Oregon Spectator* was reporting that several families had successfully made a crossing on the Barlow Road and that many others were planning to follow in their wagon tracks. The figures given indicate the large number of settlers who found their way into the Willamette Valley via the route:

Some fifteen or sixteen emigrants have arrived, having performed the last part of their journey with packhorses. They state that between 300-400 waggon must be near the Dalls at this time, and nothing extraordinary preventing, they will probably arrive at Oregon City about the 25th [September] instant. Mr. Barlow has gone to meet them in order to conduct them safely over his road.

More than just wanting to guide the emigrants over his road, Barlow apparently went to The Dalles to tell them of the new route and convince them to pay the \$5 toll.

The emigrants began to arrive sooner than as anticipated by the first families that packed over the route reported in the September 3, *Oregon Spectator*. On September 17, the *Oregon Spectator* had published this successful report on the progress of parties trickling into Oregon City:

Emmigrants--Several families with their wagons have arrived in our city, and appear healthy & cheerful. They traveled over Mr. Barlow's road, over which probably most of the immigration will come. There appears to be a general willingness on the part of the emigration to pay the required toll, only one individual, among a large company, which has traveled over it, having refused to pay. Mr. Barlow is entitled to much credit and gratitude, both from the present emmigration & succeeding ones, for the perseverance he has manifested in surveying out & making this road. Although we are informed that it can and ought to be greatly improved. These imigrants report that the Wagons will probably all arrive in town in the course of 3 weeks.

In this passage can be seen a slight complaint about the condition of the road, a complaint that becomes all too common in the history of the Barlow route. But another curiosity that first surfaces in this article and is seen later is the refusal to pay the toll or an attempt to dodge it all together.

Mark Hatton, a pioneer to Oregon who crossed the Barlow route in its first year, might be the individual mentioned in the article above who refused to pay. From Hatton's own *Some Recollections* there is an admission to refuse to pay the toll because of an economic shortcoming on the part of the emigrant's family:³⁰

...We met Barlow and Foster with a charter for a toll road. They were going to Charge us \$5 for each wagon and a dollar a head for the loose stock. Well, ten dollars was all the money I had in the world, and I didn't know where I was going, and I didn't want to give up that ten dollars very bad. I told 'em I'd pay'em, but I didn't want to do it there. Well they insisted and said they would take it out of our wagon. Not much! says I. I don't allow any man to go into my wagon, and if you do I'll put a bullet thru you. Well they said so much I finally gave them \$5 and we came on.

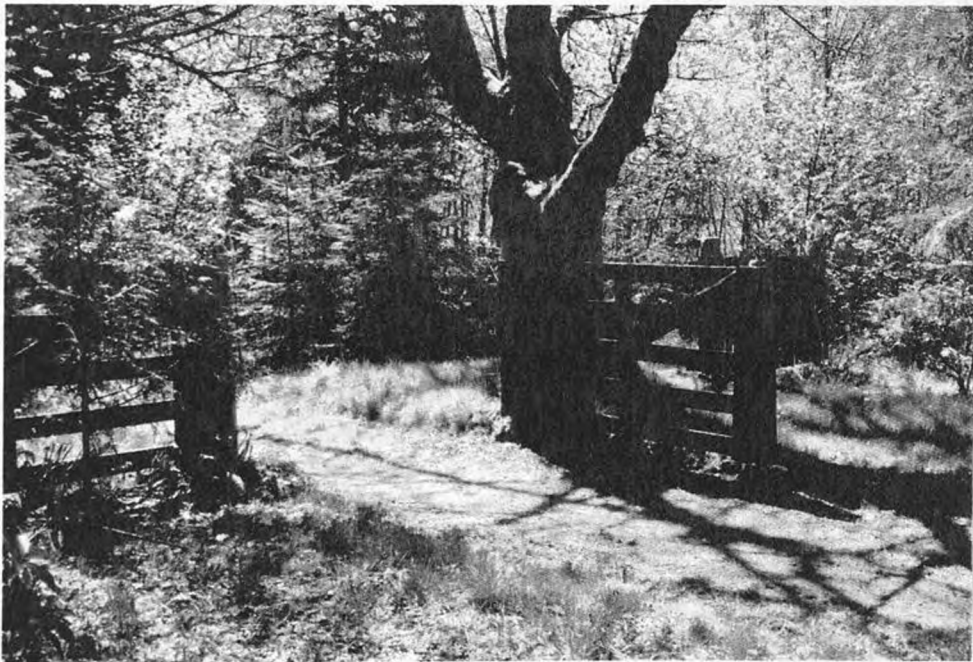
Barlow and Foster were never allowed to charge \$1 per head during their partnership for loose stock. That was 10 times more than the fee they were authorized by the legislature to charge, and their ledgers do not indicate they charged more than \$.10. The inaccuracy probably stems from the fact that Hatton wrote his recollection some time after the event occurred. This event gives insights into the persistence and seriousness that Barlow and Foster had toward the collection of their toll. They had expended an estimated \$4000 in the process of the road's construction, and even at the threat of personal violence, they forced collection of the toll. But as inferred from Hatton's quote, Barlow and subsequent road operators would accept payment in kind rather than in currency, if those using the road could not pay in cash. Some paid there toll with clothing, quilts, suspenders, needles, and worn-out livestock.³¹ Others simply signed off their debts with I.O.U.s, many of which were never collected upon. It is quite plausible that many immigrants could not imagine how individuals could charge for the use of a road. They had not paid any toll-road fees over the overland route thus far to Oregon territory, although they may, and often did pay ferrying fees across rivers.

Hatton was not alone in his complaint of the toll that the emigrants were charged. E. W. Conyers, an immigrant of 1852 wrote bitterly of toll collectors exacting fees from emigrants who were just as worn out as their animals from their overland journey. The

insult was added to injury because of the close proximity the toll road had to their final destination:

We are now camped at the foot of the Cascade Mountains, and three miles from the "Barlow Gate," where toll is supposed to be taken for the great benefit to be derived by the poor emigrant, worn out by his long trip of two thousand miles across the continent with an ox team, who now has the privilege of paying a few paltry dollars for crossing the last range of mountains that lay between him and civilization.³²

Some emigrants were often unprepared for the expense and were nearly wiped out when they paid the \$5 toll in cash. Jephtha Hunt recounted how the toll devastated his grandfather's economic standing, "The five dollars paid for toll on the Barlow Road had left grandfather with only fifty cents in cash to his name, and with a family of six sons and three daughters to provide for. Fortunately, Harrison H. Hunt, grandfather's brother, had crossed the plains in 1843, bringing with him a set of mill irons."³³ Sadly, not all families that arrived destitute in Oregon City had people they could draw economic support from, as in this case.



1. Tollgate near Rhododendron, Oregon, where the tollgate existed in its later manifestations.

But not all emigrants were so deterred by learning that there was a toll; some were just happy to learn that the route existed. Emigrants in 1846 now found themselves with an alternative to the treacherous Columbia river. John McBride, an 1846 emigrant, felt his heart lighten when he learned of the Barlow Road:³⁴

The gratifying news was brought us by him that the [Barlow] wagon road which had been partially constructed the previous autumn across the cascades, South of Mount Hood, had been completed, and that the first party bound for the Willamette on that route was now about 40 miles in advance of our company. this would save us the perils of the trip by canoes down the Columbia River, which had been heretofore taken by all emigrants and required that stock should be driven over the mountains by trail.

First stop for emigrants along the route was the toll gate in one of its various locations during the road's operation. In its early manifestations, the tollgate was located near Wamic, at the western end of the Tygh Valley. Families would rest here, and let the animals forage before they began across the route. Occasionally a merchant would be at tollgate camp making his wares and supplies available for purchase. Diary accounts from this location vary in their detail and content. Travellers who reached the gate learned of the trail's conditions and prepared for them as best they could. They made their wagons lighter (usually by dumping "unnecessary" items from the wagon's load), repaired wagons, assessed and consolidated food stocks, and allowed their animals some well deserved rest. Some are painted with pictures of preparations to cross through the mountains, as in this September 6, 1853 diary account of Amelia Stewart Knight, who "worked" herself sick in the process of preparing for the road:³⁵

Still in camp, washing and overhauling the wagons to make them as light as possible to cross the mountains. Evening--After throwing away a good many things and burning up most of the deck boards of our wagons so as to lighten them, got my washing and cooking done and started on again. Crossed two branches, traveled 3 miles, and have encamped near the gate or foot of the Cascade Mountains (here I was sick all night, caused by my washing and working too hard)

Other accounts near the gate are more descriptive of the scenery in their nature, as is this diary entry from September 8, 1848 of emigrant Benjamin Cleaver, "...there is quite a

forest of pine here & the country seems to be interspersed with timber in Many places. here is the camp of Mr. Barlow & Co. who receive the toll for the Kas Kade Mountain Roud. this is the last year they are allowed to charge for the use of the Road the soil of the face of the country is only tolerable good."³⁶ Cleaver's comment tell that some emigrants were more informed about route conditions than others. He learned somewhere along the way, or possibly at the toll gate, that Barlow's charter on the road would only last through year's end.

Sarah Butler, who rather oddly emigrated over the Barlow Road in 1878, described the area near the gate over 30 years after it was opened, "Come on to the Old Barlow gate, [near Wamic] then up in the mountains 7 mi. camped by a stream. The trees are very large and high and the under brush is very thick we can hardly see 15 feet into them."³⁷

After the pioneers had rested or finished preparing for there crossing, they began their slow ascent into the dense woods. They soon found along the way that conditions of the trail were somewhat wanting, "This day we left Barlows gate & traveled 10 miles over a timbered Country standing very thick in many places making many short turns in the road & some stumps. Also the road this day is quite Rocky..."³⁸ The course they followed would lead them up from the gate and across the Boulder, Cedar, and Deep creeks, which all had to be forded.³⁹ Then came a crossing of White river, and the emigrants traced Barlow creek northwest towards Mount Hood. Esther MacMillan Hanna described the rough road conditions and the many river crossing that were experienced in this stretch of the road that nearly made her cry out in despair:⁴⁰

Saturday 11th: This has been a day replete with trouble, trial and difficulty. Started early. Got along tolerably well for a while, although the roads were miserable. Crossed the Little Sandy [White river], six or seven times. This is a large stream running through the Mountains. The water is white and sandy. Towards noon, our roads became intolerable. I never could have imagined such roads nor could I describe it for it beggars description! Over roots and branches fallen trees and logs, over streams, through sloughs and marshes, up hill and down,—in short, everything that could possibly make it intolerable!

The route was very hard on the oxen, as forage became harder to find the further the emigrants headed up into the mountains. The relatively high, dense ground cover that pines and firs provided to shade and cool the forest floor also blocked the grasses from growing.

Hanna tells in her September, 1853 diary entry, what conditions were like for cattle, and the road conditions through this first stretch of the Barlow Road, which echo the despair she voiced in her earlier entry:⁴¹

We then made our way into the Mountains. We had dreadful roads, up hills, over rocks and stumps, and down again into ravines, across streams and marshes! Yet we travelled about 20 miles. Our poor cattle are almost exhausted and my heart aches for them tonight!

Finding forage for the animals was just as equally hard as the road conditions were themselves. Emigrants were desperate to feed their animals, and were reduced to cutting boughs from trees for the oxen. Hanna continues her diary with this account of the efforts her group went to feeding their teams:⁴²

When we stopped, they had nothing to get but the branches of young maples, which our young men cut for them. Poor feed for starving cattle. We were obliged to stop in the road for the night as there was no room at the side, the trees being so thick and so many fallen trees and logs. It looks like hard times, but we must bear it...

Not all those who crossed this stretch of the road recorded the same bad conditions of the road, or forage shortages for their animals, "Sept 19 Crossing the Sandy fork of the Deschutes the road leads up the valley, crossing it eleven times before reaching the summit, had good road some eight or nine miles after crossing the first time. Camped about six after crossing it the first time, had alder brush for our stock,"⁴³ "Tuesday, September 28--This day we traveled about twelve miles. Road tolerable good; one very bad hill to come down. Our camp was among the pines, near the creek; browse pretty good."⁴⁴ It is ironic how those crossing over the same stretch of road at nearly the same time could have such differing views on conditions of the route. The two accounts in this

paragraph are both from 1853, at the same time when Esther McMillan Hanna crossed and recorded the "intolerable" experiences she had. Perhaps these differences in opinion could be based in the individuals preconceived notions of what the trail was going to be like. If Hanna believed that the Barlow Road was going to be in better shape than when she found it, or had been led to believe its condition to be other than that which she encountered, these factors might explain why her accounts are so different than the two mention above. But Hanna's were not the only entries that found the road in this area, or others, to be wanting. More than likely, the expectations of emigrants had a great deal to do with how they saw the road.

Death to animals was not uncommon along the Barlow trail, either due to accidents or starvation. Sometimes the emigrants themselves could be the cause of their own harm and suffering brought unto their animals.⁴⁵

....there were two horses kiled today belonging to one of our company Isaac Hinkle his wife and daughter were on them some distance ahead of the train when they discovered some watter 30 or 40 yards to the left of the road, so they alighted and hitched there horses it happened there was a large fir tree afire some 50 yards off which they did not notice and while they were gone it fell and kiled both there horses dead. fire gets out in these mountains from the emegrant camps and burns up a great [d]eal of timber I have seen acres of gree fir timber burnt off smoth.

Fire was not the only environmental havoc emigrants unleashed while on the Barlow Road. Large amounts of garbage were thrown from wagons along the way, not to mention the wagons and equipment abandoned on the route, as recorded in the 1851 diary of Mrs. Samuel Hadley, "....road awful hilly and mountainous, exceeding anything yet one hill was 1 mile 1/2 long, and verry steep, plenty of water isueing from the mountains, any quantity of plunder and wagons on the road."⁴⁶ Whether in an attempt to lighten their wagon, or abandon equipment they could no longer maintain or had the means to continue to bring with them, many found themselves disposing of something along the way, "The cattle began to give out, and at noon our company was reduced to the necessity of leaving two wagons! They put what oxen they had left to two of the wagons. Then

they started with the expectation of finding some cross (crossing of the river) five or six miles distant."⁴⁷

The summit was the pinnacle of the climb up from the gate. The summit area was a relatively flat area with meadows, that the road crossed before it's descent down to the western side of the Cascades. Better forage for the animals could sometimes be found in this area because of the abundance of small meadows devoid of large tree cover, which could in turn, support grasses. But these open flat areas, also became very marshy during the rainy season or stayed waterlogged year round. Road conditions appear to have improved little at the summit, as recorded in Amelia Stewart Knight's rather colorful and descriptive diary entry of the "topsy turvy" trail:⁴⁸

...Traveled 14 miles over the worst road that was ever made, up and down, very steep, rough and rocky hills, th[r]ough mud holes, twisting and winding round stumps, logs and fallen trees. Now we are on the end of a log, now over a big root of a tree; now bounce down in a mud hole, then bang goes the other side of the wagon, and woe be to whatever side it is. There is very little chance to turn out of this road, on account of timber and fallen trees, for these mountains are a dense forest of pine, fir, white cedar or redwood (the handsomest timber in the world must be here in these Cascade Mountains) Many of the trees over 300 ft high and so dense to almost exlude the light of heaven, and for my own part I dare not look to the top of them for fear of breaking my neck.

It is of interest to note how Knight could still appreciate the beauty of the forest even though it was the very obstacle she cursed in the same diary entry.

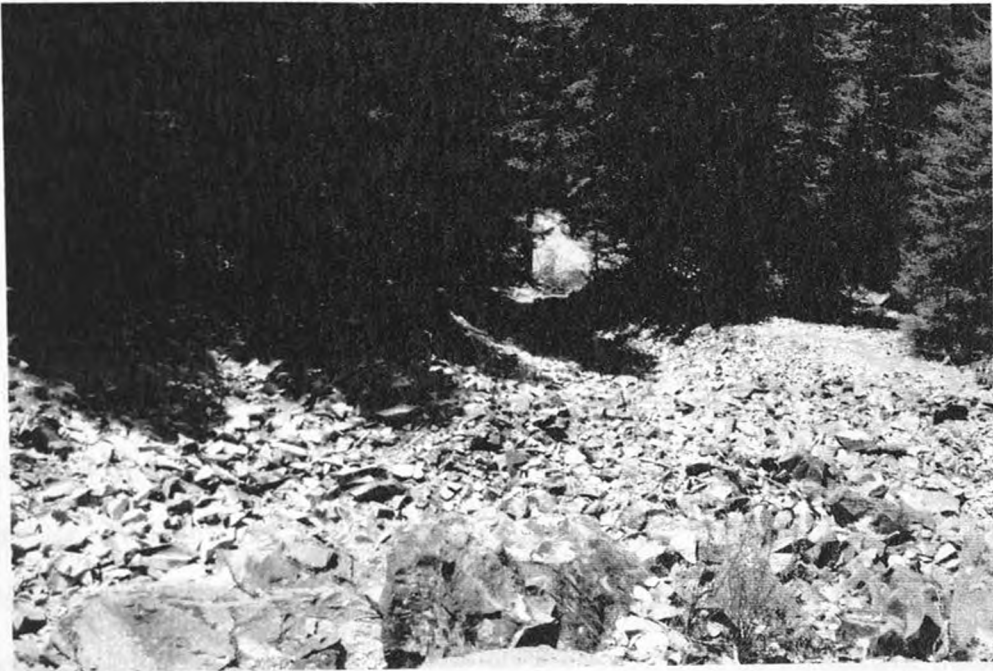
In her entry for the next day, Knight described more rough conditions on the road, but addresses the concerns of the cattle, "The men had driven the cattle a mile off from the road to try and find grass and rest them till morning...."⁴⁹ The men probably had to stay and watch the cattle; one problem emigrants began to have when the forage became hard to find was keeping their animals together. They had to secure their animals at night so that they would not wander off in search of grass and become lost, "found lots of wood & water & grass in amongst the heavy timber...we guard our cattle very closely or we would lose them in the timber laid by the rest of the day to let the cattle get plenty for feed is

scarce in Mountains."⁵⁰ Emigrants would exploit the resources when they could because they did not know of the conditions ahead of them, "...camp to night on a small opening, good grass to night but last night had none, there is little or no grass in these mountains except in spots, and hard to be found."⁵¹

The lack of forage was soon taking a toll on the animals; "there were many wagons abandoned and left a great number of dead cattle which caused a terrible stink all along the way..."⁵² "many are the poor horses, mules, oxen, cows, etc., that are lying dead in the mountains."⁵³ Josiah A. Burnett, who married Lucy Foster, a daughter of Philip Foster, wrote to her after crossing east on the Barlow Road on May 25, 1862, "I saw many horses and cattle also sheep dead on the Route there has been 50 horses killed or drowned in the mountains. The snow extended from Laurel hill to within five miles of Barlows gate the trail is plain and not difficult to follow."⁵⁴

Here too, animals were not the only things littering the roadside, "there is no end to the wagons, buggies, yokes, chains, etc., that are lying all along the road. Some splendid good wagons just left standing, perhaps with the owners names on them."⁵⁵

As mentioned earlier, the most fabled part of the descent from the Cascades was the notorious Laurel Hill. It was down Laurel Hill that Barlow's original party came off "like shot off a shovel."⁵⁶ The steepest part of the decline was about 1 mile in length, with a gradual decline towards the Sandy River of another mile. Abigail Scott Duniway crossed over the Barlow Road in the fall of 1852. She described Laurel Hill as "an almost perpendicular descent of two miles in extent, with 3 benches where teams could stop to rest."⁵⁷ Sarah Butler, an emigrant who oddly (due to the late nature of her immigration) crossed over the Barlow Road in 1878 described the Landscape of Laurel Hill, "[as] a Bluff on the side of mountain. One wagon could not pass another here. Fortunately we met no one. We are far above the tree tops. the Bottom of the c[h]asm is several hundred [feet] below us, and one false move would hurl us to the depths below. Here over rough road began. Rough enough before but nothing to compare."⁵⁸



2. From the top of the steep chute down Laurel Hill, down which wagons were "snubbed."



3. From bottom of chute.

During a season of use, the hill became worse for the wear:⁵⁹

It is something more than half a mile long, very rocky all the way, quite steep, winding, sideling, deep down, slippery and muddy, made so by a spring running the entire length of the road, and this road is cut down so deep that at times the cattle and wagons are almost out of sight with no room for the drivers [those who walk alongside that oxen and guide them on] except on the bank, a very difficult place to drive, also dangerous, and to make the matter worse, there was a slow poking train ahead of us, which kept stopping every few minutes, and another behind us which kept swearing and hurrying our folks on, and there they all were, with the poor cattle all on the strain, holding back the heavy wagons on the slippery road.

Many descending Laurel Hill used various methods to get the weighty wagons down the hill in one piece. Wheel drags and ropes attached to trees are just two such methods. A wheel drag was made by cutting down a tree of small to average size (10 inches across at the base), which was attached to a chain, with the crown (top, thinnest part) of the tree pointing toward the wagon, while the base (bottom, thickest) pointed away. The chain was then attached to the rear axle of the wagon. The team then pulled the wagon down the hill while the tree was drug behind the wagon, slowing it so much that it would act as if the team was pulling an anchor down the hill:⁶⁰

The first thing to be done was to unhitch all teams, except the wheel yoke and send them down first, also the women and children; then cut small fir trees about 6 inches in diameter, cutting the branches off, leaving them about a foot long on the trunk, chain them top first to the hind axle of each wagon, rough-lock both wheels so that the knot of the chain will rest on the ground where the wheel first come in contact, making the greatest amount of resistance....

The other of the more popular methods used ingeniously by the emigrants was tying a rope to the axle of the wagon, then "winching" it around a tree, slowly letting out more rope so that the wagon was allowed down the hill. Obviously the emigrants did not have mile long pieces of rope, but they could use this method in some of the very steep areas:⁶¹

The men passed ropes over the wagons to the lower side, the other end around trees above the road, and slacked away as required by the rope and hauled taut on the front ropes as the wagon passed the point where the road was not safe. This was called "snubbing" but not intended as is generally understood to mean treating with contempt! We succeeded in passing the whole train over this place and down the hill by the time it was dark.

Reportedly, there are still today trees and stumps that bear burn marks from the ropes that let the wagons down nearly 150 years ago.*

Another method used would be simply to lock the wheels of the wagon up and let it slide down the hill as the oxen tried to keep the "sled" from running over them, this would obviously be the least effective and the most dangerous option the emigrants could use to get down Laurel Hill. With soft slippery clay/mud under the wheels of the wagons, and the hooves of the oxen, one could imagine the incidents that could occur, such as this one experienced by Conyers as he descended Laurel, "We locked both wheels and then rough locked with chains, and then came very near killing one of our wheel oxen."⁶²



4. Route down Laurel Hill where drags were used

After the descent of Laurel Hill, and a crossing of the Zig Zag River, the emigrant's course would follow along the north side of the Sandy river. But the hardships for the weary travellers were far from over; they still had rivers, swamps, and other hills, such as "Devil's Backbone" (not as intimidating as Laurel Hill, but still a worthy obstacle) before

* The author was unable to locate any stumps or trees which still retained the burn marks, but the various courses down Laurel Hill could still be seen by their wagon ruts.

finally reaching the sanctuary of Foster's homestead. The last miles of the road were just as dangerous as the rest of the venture had been. The animals were often near exhaustion and starvation, "Our cattle were nearly starved because of the scarcity of the grass...."63 "Traveled 15 miles over a muddy stony road over divideing ridge all the team can do to struggle along."64

The beauty of the western side of the Cascades could still be appreciated by some emigrants even under enduring hardships:65

[September 14, 1852] Three and one half miles down this valley we came to a small creek, which we crossed, and crossed a low ridge 1/2 mile to a small prairie. Here we found good grass, but the most terrible mud we had yet met with during the whole 2,000 miles travel. The weather is most beautiful, but the roads are most desperate.

[September 15, 1852] This day we traveled 5 miles only. The Swamps along the base of Mt. Hood are desperate. We had to assist our poor teams in getting through by wading and pushing the wagons after them, and on some occassions had to pry up and pull the cattle out of the mud.

Arriving at Foster's farm was a sign to emigrants that they had "made it" to Oregon and the Willamette Valley, "Traveled 7 miles to Fosters over a hilly rough road. This ended our journey to Oregon."66 Egbert Foster, a son of Philip Foster, was interview about the Barlow Road in 1944. He described the emotional event that some emigrants underwent when they realized they had made it to the safety of "civilization," "My mother used to tell how some of the women would cry when they saw a house and curtains again [upon arriving for the first time at a home since they left the 'States']".67

Those who crossed the road in later years would not see the journey in the same way, and already saw the earlier crossings as history. These entries from Sarah Butler's 1878 diary show more interest in the landscape then the crossing it self, very much the opposite of earlier crossing accounts. Notice how the landscape near the end of the trail (from the Sandy river to Foster's farm) had changed in over 30 years. In earlier accounts, Foster's farm was the first sign of civilization many had seen since they had left The Dalles.

But Butler notes in her diary several farms and a store before they ever reached Eagle Creek. She also seems more preoccupied with the flora and atmosphere of the road, rather than its conditions.⁶⁸

...Eat dinner near a bridge. Had Bridge for a table. Made a cross and crown out of fir and moss. Moss of several kinds cover and hang from the trees...ferns cover the ground. There are places here where the sun never penetrates. Come to Summit. Here they used to cable wagons down...[reference to "snubbing" on Laurel Hill]

....crossed a sandy bridge, come to a store, got some things....farms all most all along the road...

The trail lapsed after the years of wagon immigration west, into a livestock drovers trail again, as parts of it had been before the 1845 undertaking of the Palmer-Barlow group. Irony restored the trail to its original use; transportation of cattle between the Willamette Valley and eastern Oregon.

At Foster's farm (Eagle Creek, Oregon), emigrants would often camp and recuperate before they headed down a "regular" wagon road to Oregon City. The journey from The Dalles to Eagle Creek could sometimes take anywhere from a little over a week to as little as 4 or 5 days, depending on the season and in which year one crossed. Over the years the route changed and was shortened, with alternate routes being found for Laurel Hill and some of the river crossings. In length the trail was roughly 110 miles overall; approximately 30 from The Dalles to where the tollgate was near Wamic, then another 80 miles from the course of the road through the mountains, till they reached Foster's. So near the end of their journey to Oregon, many emigrants had to endure what they recorded as the hardest part of their 2,000 mile migration. They had to traverse many obstacles with weary animals, near exhausted supplies, and worn-out bodies. For many, it became the most traumatic experience they recalled from crossing to Oregon.

The "War" Between North and South

Samuel Barlow and Philip Foster were not the only ones who were interested in making a route to the Willamette Valley, and charging for the expense. Barlow's intentions, as recorded, were not to make a profit, but to make a route that others could safely use to achieve their goal.⁶⁹ They only charged to pay for the expenses of blazing and building the route. From Barlow's accounts, the venture had not paid for itself by the end of his two year charter.⁷⁰ The most notable and nearest thing to a "rival" Barlow and Foster's operation had was the Applegate Trail, the blazing of which was headed by Jesse and Lindsay Applegate in 1846. Their efforts consisted of connecting the Umpqua and Rogue river valleys to the California Trail near the Humbolt River.⁷¹ Both the Applegates had lost sons a few years earlier when attempting to reach the Willamette Valley on the treacherous Columbia. Psychologically, this could have been one of their reasons for wanting to find a safe overland route for emigrants to use.

The Applegates convinced 500 emigrants to follow their route into the Willamette Valley in 1846. They convinced them that the route was shorter and had better conditions for the animals. By the time the last of the emigrants had reached the valley in early 1847, few had not suffered a great deal on the way. They were flooded, harassed by native groups, starved and sickened, not to mention that the cattle was starved due to insufficient forage. In essence, they had a much rougher trip than they had anticipated or were led to believe. Disgruntled emigrants of the Applegate Trail writing letters to the *Oregon Spectator*, as well as articles that Applegate proponents felt were unfairly pro-Barlow led to a media published mud-slinging contest concerning the two routes.

The letters begin in late November of 1846, when Moses Harris submitted a "tirade" to the *Oregon Spectator*. Moses submitted his letter as a "response" to an article which ran earlier in the *Oregon Spectator*, entitled "The Emigration," of October 29, 1846. The article simply stated how all of the emigrants who had crossed the road the

previous month arrived safely in Oregon City, "Those of the emigrants who have come by way of the Mount Hood road, have all safely reached the valley of the Willamette, and a large portion of them are already on their claims, busily engaged in promoting their comfort & welfare...." Moses was amongst a group of men who were trying to create and promote the Applegate Trail, and somehow took the article as a show of favoritism for the Barlow Road. Both routes served as gateways into the Willamette Valley; and could be seen as competing routes. Emigrants would have to choose if they wanted to use the Barlow Road or the Applegate Trail. Moses' obviously took the article as an endorsement of the Barlow road over the Applegate Trail.

Moses lashed out against the Barlow Road, first stating that more press needed to be given to the endeavours of those to the south, and attempted to factually rip apart the earlier article which ran in the *Oregon Spectator*. Moses did not mention where he learned of the facts that led him to believe the earlier article was untrue; possibly jealousy or envy bent his ear to such rumors. Moses then ended the letter by stating the advantages of the southern route over the northern route, as if he were trying to convince others of its merit:

Mr. Editor:--As the people of the United States as well as those of Oregon, are deeply interested in the success of the company who have lately returned from exploring a southern route from the United States to this valley....it is certainly doing an injustice to those who have been engaged in this important service, to attempt to forestall public opinion, by the publication of such statements as are made in an editorial article headed "The Emigration"....Notwithstanding the "early and safe arrival of all the emigration by the Mount Hood road," it appears that some are as yet in the mountains, and many more beyond, who cannot either *safely* or *unsafely*, arrive by the Mount Hood this season, and those who have succeeded in passing the mountains have suffered losses in proportion to their numbers, full as great, as any previous emigration; some of those last getting through, having lost half, and others whole, of their animals.

Facts, so far from proving favorable to the old road, go to show the decided advantage of the new. The emigrants on the new route, though greatly delayed by sickness, and the opening and breaking the way over timbered mountains and trackless plains, have arrived in the valley west of the Cascade mountains more than *five weeks ago*, and "the families who have abandoned their wagons amount *one only*. This they have done by traveling by traveling a distance

not exceeding that from Fort Hall to Walla-walla, and without meeting a tenth part of the natural obstacles encountered on the old route.....Were you, Mr. Editor to take the trouble to examine the files of your paper, you would find that others, as well as Goff and Applegate, have spent their time and money on the public service, and are equally deserving the praise or censure of the public.....(Nov 26, 1846)

The editor of the *Oregon Spectator*, George L. Curry, wasted no time in responding to Harris' claim. His remarks were published in the same issue. Curry goes on to clarify that the objective of the earlier article was not to promote one route over the other, but instead to inform readers of the status of emigrants who had recently come across the route and had begun to settle in the valley. But Curry did in turn attack Moses on the basis that Moses objected to the factuality of the information supplied in the article. Curry not only backed up his story with information, he countered the claims that Moses made about the Applegate Trail with information cited from sources, something Moses was unable to do in his volley:

"GREAT CRY AND LITTLE WOOL."--In another column will be found an article over the signature of "Moses Harris," in which we are charged with an "attempt to forestall public opinion," inasmuch, as in the discharge of our editorial duties, we had occasion to prepare and publish an article in which we simply gave, in a statement of facts, all the intelligence that we could obtain concerning the emigration, without any reference, in word, or even in thought, as to the comparative merits of the routes by which emigrants have arrived here this season. We do not know, however, that we would have hesitated in giving the information in question, had it actually been necessary to have gone into an argument as to the merits of these routes. We are not easily deterred in the performance of any thing that we esteem to be a duty. As to the charge of forestalling public opinion, we refer our readers with a great deal of pleasure, to the article complained of, and feel well assured that every unprejudiced mind cannot fail to perceive how unfounded is the charge.

....There is no occasion to quibble or use sophistry in this matter. If the emigrants by the southern route "arrived in *the* valley west of the Cascade mountains more than five weeks ago," what then? They might suffer and starve on this side just as easily as on the other;--the settlements, Mr. Harris, what time *did* they arrive at the settlements, their destination? or, have they yet arrived? What's the use of saying "the families who have abandoned their wagons amount to one only? [Curry then goes on to name several families who were reported as having abandoned their wagons on the Applegate Trail]

They did, and we have evidence to establish the same. It is not wise to live in glass houses and throw stones.

We are not aware that there are any emigrants by the Mount Hood road, who are yet in the mountains and unable to get through this season, as intimated by Mr. Harris; on the contrary, we know that there are none. The rearward company, consisting of seven wagons, arrived here during the first of the week in the present month.....

The whole debate over the benefits and qualities of the two trails mainly stemmed from sheer competitiveness between the two routes, but ample ammunition was added to the fight by eager supporters from both camps. Jesse Quinn Thornton, an emigrant who had crossed the Applegate Trail, wrote letters in later 1846 to the *Oregon Spectator*, blasting the Applegate Trail and the information that was reported about it in the *Oregon Spectator*. His letters had little to do with the Barlow route itself, but did a great deal to stir up the rivalry. Thornton's letters, in turn brought counter claims, and an eventual challenge to a duel, which led Thornton (who became a judge in Oregon City after he crossed the Applegate Trail) to carry a knife and pistol with him on the streets of Oregon City. Thornton refused to acknowledge the challenges of James Nesmith. Nesmith even posted handbills defaming Thornton in an attempt to get him to meet his challenge.⁷²

The proponents of the southern route to Oregon believed in a "methodist influence" that had attempted to publicize and promote the northern route over the southern route. The "methodist influence," as described by Jesse Applegate, included missionaries, Oregon City merchants, Barlow, and the lower Willamette Valley settlers.⁷³ It is obvious to see why all the groups mentioned in the "influence" would want to promote the northern route; the merchants would benefit from a greater number of immigrants coming to the area, and Barlow would benefit by collecting more in toll. If he had been expending great amounts of his resources in maintaining and clearing the road, the tolls may have very well been Barlow's means of sustenance. He would hardly have time to tend a farm through the harvest while he was out collecting tolls, or repairing the road during the sewing season. Barlow may have relied on his sons to tend the farm while he tended the road, and vice versa.

The high point in this war of printed words were the letters sent to Green River (a stopping point in Wyoming for emigrants on the Oregon Trail) telling of the horrors (somewhat exaggerated) of the southern route into the Willamette Valley, and a circular signed by the governor of Oregon Territory recommending the use of the Barlow route. The letters contained harsh language in which the emigrants were told to "starve, whip, and even kill any person advising them to take the southern road."⁷⁴ Because of measures like these, few wagons were convinced to try the Applegate Trail in 1847. The backlash from this was the large numbers of emigrants who crossed the old Oregon Trail and the Barlow route at one time, depleting the resources along the route so much it began to have a negative impact that so many were choosing to use that route.

Jesse Applegate himself entered into limelight of the *Oregon Spectator*, but his writings were of a slightly different nature. Applegate wrote a series of articles under the pseudonym "X" in early 1847 about the history of trails, or attempts at trails, into the Willamette Valley. In his article that covered the Barlow Trail's creation of two years earlier. Applegate's comments are more favorable than one might think considering the climate in which he wrote them, but his comments still appear somewhat judgmental in that he stated that the route could be improved little over its present condition. In other words, he implied the Barlow route's condition was as good as it was going to get, but yet the route was incomplete:

....and to its completion it is evident the van of the emigrants of 1846, owe their early and less expensive arrival in the Willamette Valley.

Some little improvements to Mr. Barlow's road over the Cascade Mtns will complete the Northern route to Oregon, and no material improvements upon the ground can hereafter be effected." (*Oregon Spectator*, February 4, 1847)

Remarkably, Barlow himself never contributed any written material to spur the battle on. The fight soon took on a personal nature between Thornton and supporters of the southern route, with the eventual contents of the fight switching from a debate over the better route, to a pro/anti-southern trail debate.

For a brief period in the winter of 1846/47 the Barlow Road became part of a media publicized grudge match between competing overland routes to Oregon. The Barlow route went from being the object which inspired the debate (Harris' letter of November 26, 1846), to being totally neglected and left out when the rivalry turned personal for Thornton and those who supported the southern route. These events were reflective of the tension that existed between the two routes and the people who had put much of their most intense labors and energies into them. Both parties obviously wanted their route to do well, and when supporters of one group felt that their route was being threatened by biased media attention of an alternate route, they "fought" back in the same way they felt they had been wronged--through the media.

Epilogue: Chartership of the Road--1846-1865

1846-1848 Samuel Barlow and Philip Foster

1851 Foster and William G. T'Vault

1852 Sylvester and John B. Hall

1859 Joseph Young

1862 Mount Hood Wagon Road Company

1864 Cascade Road and Bridge Company

As stated earlier, Samuel Barlow and Philip Foster were the original partners in operating the first charter on the Barlow Road. They were responsible for actually creating the original road that Barlow had blazed the previous fall/winter. Their partnership existed in some of the years the road was most heavily used. Unfortunately for Barlow and Foster, their expenses seemed to be greater than the tolls they collected, and they had to file for an extension of eight months on their original charter in the hopes of the venture paying for itself. But in the fall of 1846, Barlow was able to report to the *Oregon Spectator*.⁷⁵

Mr. Editor,—Sir, by your request, I herewith send you the number of wagons and stock that passed the toll-gate on the Mount Hood road. There were one hundred and forty five wagons, fifteen hundred and fifty-nine heads of horses, mules, and horned cattle all together, and one lot of sheep, the number not recollected, but I think thirteen. Yours & c.

Oct 22nd 1846

Saml. K. Barlow

Peter H. Burnett (no know relation to Josiah A. Burnett), an early pioneer to Oregon, who later became a governor of California, wrote east about the various routes to Oregon. In his letter, Burnett wrote a description of the Barlow Road during the partnership of Barlow and Foster. He praised the access it gave emigrants to the Willamette Valley, but had little raves for the conditions of the road:⁷⁶

This road has just been opened, was exceedingly narrow, full of stumps and other obstructions, which makes it much the worst portion of the route from the U. S. to Oregon. It was a serious undertaking to open such a road among the mountains, along dark and dismal vallies and through immense masses of timber, to which the tallest forest in the U. S., will not bear a comparison. This route is susceptible of such improvement as to become at least a practicable way; and Mr. Barlow expects to expend more labor on it during the coming summer. The time occupied in passing from the Dalles to Oregon City with wagons, is generally from ten to fifteen days. The great objection to this route is the scarcity of pasturage upon the way. The grass is only found in small quantities at different points; and where there are many teams to pass, those behind must necessarily suffer much. This road, however, must be of great benefit to emigrating parties; as their loose stock can be driven through in so short a period as not to suffer materially.....

Burnett mentioned two points that often recurred in the history of the Barlow Road; forage and road conditions, both of which were constantly changing. No matter how many times Barlow, or later charter holders, worked on the road, the conditions never seemed to improve a great deal. Stumps and rocks can be pulled out of the road, but weather patterns cannot be changed or predicted; washouts on sections of the road happened, and flat sections of road became mud puddles.

The course of the road over time could be changed to bypass obstacles such as Laurel Hill, treacherous river crossings, and swamps, but one thing that could not be changed was the availability of forage along the road. Emigrants traveled by and large in groups for safety, protection, and mutual support. But this factor could play against emigrants as they passed along grass deficient sections of the road, especially deep in the forest, where grass was already hard for them to find. Traveling in numbers only increased the amount of animals competing for the same limited amount of food. The grasses, when not destroyed in the process, could regenerate and provide forage for latter passing animals, but this factor would be of little comfort to those stuck along the trail with starving animals.

In many of the diary accounts, diarists report of having to stake down their animals for fear that they would wonder off in the night in search of grasses to feed upon when nothing was placed in front of them to eat. Lost animals in the woods soon became a

problem for those whom they had belonged to. It became such a problems that emigrants would often sign off part of their lost stock to the road operator that would find the missing stock and bring them back in. A regiment of U. S. Mounted Rifles crossed over the Barlow Road in 1849, loosing stock, horses and gear. They charged Foster with this order:⁷⁷

The bearer of this Mr. Philip Foster is hereby authorized and empowered to take up and retain for the United States, all the public animals, whether horses, oxen or mules that may have strayed or otherwise escaped from the possession of the Government.

Quarter Masters Office
Oregon City, Oregon Territory
October 20, 1849

D. M. Frost
Lt. Mounted Rifles

The trail was used heavily during the "indian problems" of 1848 for communications between Oregon City and The Dalles. This was the route now Superintended General Joel Palmer used to get to Oregon City from The Dalles, "Communication with the Dalles is now being had by way of the Mount Hood Road, by which route Gen. Palmer arrived on Sunday last, four days from the Dalles. There is considerable snow on the road, near the mountain, but not enough to be any serious impediment to travel."⁷⁸

At the sum of \$25,000, the Mount Hood Wagon Road Company was incorporated to operate the Barlow Road in 1862. The company must have not been too successful because two years later, a new company, The Cascade Road & Bridge Company received a charter to operate the toll road.⁷⁹ They are reported to have greatly improved some of the worse sections of the roads, especially through swamps and across rivers. It is unclear if Foster had a hand in the partnership of Joseph Young, Egbert Alcott, Stephen Coleman, Frederick Sievers and Francis Revenue, whom made up the proprietorship of the Cascade Road & Bridge Company.⁸⁰ But, he was somehow involved in collecting tolls at the time this company was formed, due to the information gleaned from two letters written to Foster by a toll collector on the route:⁸¹

Mount Hood City, May 5, 1864

Mr Foster

Dear Sir

Mr Robbins from the Molallas was here this morning and refused to pay the rates of toll and put his cattle through the timber above the gate, also his hogs and sheep and told me to tell you that if you considered that he had trespassed on your rights that you could bring suit against him. He said if you had not raised the rates of toll from last year he would have gone through the gate. He wanted to make a bargain to go through for less than the present rates. As I had no orders to that effect I would not let him through.

Yours Thomas H. Bell

Bell's letter of two weeks later to Foster echos a complaint about toll collection, but not because the toll prices were too much, but rather that the complaints were a protest against the conditions of the road:⁸²

Mount Hood City, May 18, 1864

Mr Foster D[ea]r Sir

There is a great trouble in collecting toll from the travel from the East side the Mountain Men coming in complain very hard of the mud hole on the summit. I am nearly out of provisions I am well with exception of a powerful weakness no more at present

yours VC

Thomas H Bell

Perhaps due to the fact that the new company was being incorporated during the month these letters were written, might explain why Bell's letters were being sent to Foster and not the others. It also might explain why Bell was nearly out of provisions at the gate house. It Foster knew that someone else was about to be granted the charter for the route, then he would hardly want to expend any effort or resources to assist someone else was about to assume.

Over the pioneer years of the Barlow Roads ownership, few things about the Road changed greatly except for the hands that owned it. Emigrants still complained in their diaries about Road conditions, tolls, and the crossing was still a difficult undertaking.

Conclusion

The early years of the of the Barlow Road carried the seeds that yielded the historical significance later generations can look to. In looking at the creation of the trail, we can understand the determined spirit that drove emigrants to succeed in settling Oregon, regardless of what struggles they had to endure. They did not give in to the long wait and exorbitant fees of the perilous river, instead they created a way around the obstacles presented to them by the environs of Oregon. The struggle may have been equally hard on the emigrants, but it was the one more chose to experience. Through its diaries we can experience their toil, their hardship, and their hopes. They chose to have more control over their fate than the chaos of the river offered them. There were factors about the road they could control; when they crossed, what supplies they brought, and at what rate and with whom they traveled.

Regardless of why more immigrants crossed the Barlow Road in it's first years than alternatives, it is important to record the shared experience of a large percentage of the early settlers coming into Oregon. The experiences humans endure shape the ever changing individuals we become. The Barlow Road helped mold emigrants into determined settlers who would have to live through bad harvests and crop failures, hard winters, failed business ventures, and sickness, to name just a few, in their new home.

Appendix A

Original Memembers of Trail Blazing Party

Samuel K. and Susannah Barlow and family
 Carmey and Margaret Goodrich and family
 John Bacon
 Thomas Hood
 Theophilus and Rachel Powell and family
 Sam and Elizabeth Center
 James R. Poole
 James and Dorcas McDonald
 John S. and Elizabeth Howland
 William Savage
 Benjamin Burch
 Joel Palmer
 William Berry

Albert P. and Sarah (Barlow) Gaines and family
 Reuben Gant
 Andrew and Ann Hood and family
 William Hood
 Mary Center and family
 William and Caroline Buffum
 Jacob and Jane Caplinger and family
 Arthur H. and Miriam Thompson
 James and Esther Taylor and family
 Harrison P. Locke
 Spencer Buckley
 Richard Farwell

As found in The Brazen Overlanders of 1845, Conna M. Wojcik. Portland, Oregon. 1976: 324.

Appendix B

Barlow's Original Charter

AN ACT Authorizing Samuel K. Barlow to lay out and construct a road across the Cascade mountains, and for other purposes. Be it enacted by the House of Representatives of Oregon Territory as follows:

Sec. 1. That Samuel K. Barlow and his associates, their heirs and assigns, be, and they are hereby authorized to lay out and construct a wagon road from Oregon City, on the Willamette river, passing south of Mt Hood to the base of the Cascade mountains, on the east side of the same.

Sec. 2. That Samuel K. Barlow and his associates, their heirs and assigns, be, and are hereby authorized to construct a toll-gate on the said road, at some suitable point, either on the summit or slope of the Cascade mountains.

Sec. 3. That it shall be lawful for said Barlow and his associates, their heirs and assigns, to collect toll from all white persons, and descendants of the same, that may pass to or from the Willamette Valley, for the space of two years, commencing on the first day of January, A. D. 1846, and ending on the first day of January, A. D. 1848, at the following rates, to wit: For each wagon.....5 dollars

For each head of horses, mules and asses, whether loose, geared, or saddled. 10 cents

For each head of horned cattle, whether geared or loose.....10 cents

Sec. 4. That the said Barlow and his associates, their heirs and assigns, shall open, or cause to be operated, a safe and sufficient wagon road from Oregon City to the base of the Cascade mountains, on the east side, on or before the first day of September, 1846, and keep the same in repair for the space of two years.

Sec. 5. That the same Samuel K. Barlow, for himself, his heirs and assigns, shall enter into bond to Oregon Territory, within twenty days from the passage of this act, to be approved by the governor, in the penal sum of two thousand dollars, conditioned for the faithful performance of all that is required of him to be performed in this act.

Sec. 6. That nothing in this act shall be so constructed, to exempt persons from paying toll, who may imploy Indians to drive their cattle, horses, etc. along said road.

H. A. G. Lee, Speaker protem.
 Approved, Oregon City,
 December 18, 1845
 Geo. Abernethy,
 Governor
 Attest: J. E. Long, Clerk

From *Oregon Spectator*, 18 December 1845.

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