

## When History Becomes Real

Its ten minutes after nine in the morning, and my wife and I have just pulled into the Marsing High gym parking area. There are three long lines of vehicles, and folks are milling about. I get out of the Suburban, just in time for voices and engines to fire up and proclaim it's time to go!

Thirty vehicles make a pretty impressive site as we all head out towards our first stop in the Owyhee Desert; the Poison Creek Stage Station south of Marsing. Only a dozen miles or less into the desert and we are transported over one hundred years into the past.



There are people all around the rock structure, looking, taking photos, and thinking. An older lady, supported by the arm of another, is making her way slowly thru the new green grass that has sprung up all around the old building. She smiles at me, and speaks, "My name is Bertha Hudson. I'm 94 years old. My grandfather built this house." I stare, speechless, as history becomes real before my very eyes. "I spent summers here, working, my Grandmother had me clean the rugs, empty the pots from the bedrooms. That window was the kitchen, that one the dining room" she points with her arm.



I spend a lot of time in the Owyhee Desert. I have been fortunate to visit, to see, touch, many many interesting things and places. River canyons, Indian petroglyphs, plants, animals, and a never ending array of ever worsening roads and trails. But nothing has prepared me for this. Standing in front of someone who was THERE! I'm not reading about it, not looking out over it, no, I'm standing in front of a live person who was there when it happened. This is why I come to these field trips that the Owyhee County Historical Society hosts.

The stories go on. "The stones on the front were carved from the quarry behind there" Bertha points again, "there was an Englishman who was an expert stone mason who did the work. There were 9 bedrooms upstairs. The freighters would take a whole day to haul one wagon up to the top of the grade on the way to Silver City." The circle of listeners soak up the dialogue like a sponge wiping off a wet counter.



We are on the move again, driving up the aforementioned grade, down through Sands Basin, finally coming to a stop at the “Rocks”, another stage stop that was also built by the Proud family, Bertha’s grandfather. All that is left is a vague depression in the dirt, littered with bits and pieces of stone. Lying in the sage is an old bullet riddled car hood. When the hood is pulled aside, a rock walled well is uncovered. “This is the old well, almost all the wells were hand dug, and weren’t that deep.” The speaker is Mike Greeley, the grandson of another Owyhee homesteader. Mike’s grandfather began on the Owyhee River, and Greeley Bar is a well known landmark to all who boat the river. Now as a third generation rancher, Mike leads us on into the small community of Rockville, regaling us with stories of his Buckaroo grandfather, and the ranching history of the area. Again, I am enthralled by the feeling of how connected we are as we listen to these folks who are speaking from first hand experiences.



The crowd is gathered at the Rockville School, where 7 students are enrolled. Tables are set, and chairs are unfolded in the small outdoor play area. The traditional pot luck lunch is in full swing, and as the incredible array of delicious food continues to grow, Mike continues to share, to answer questions about the area, his family, and others who helped form our history.

Bellies full, we straggle back to our rides, heads filled with too much information, thoughts, thinking about the past. But it’s not the past, it’s right now, and it’s real.