

6-1-1876

Military wagon road

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Recommended Citation

H.R. Rep. No. 616, 44th Cong., 1st Sess. (1876)

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MILITARY WAGON ROAD.

JUNE 1, 1876.—Committed to a Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. JOHN REILLY, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 180.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the above-named bill, would respectfully report as follows :

The route proposed for the road was discovered by Capt. W. A. Jones in 1873, in making surveys in Wyoming Territory. The road will pass the military posts of Camp Stambaugh and Camp Brown, and the Shoshone Indian agency to Fort Ellis, beyond which is Fort Shea, Camp Baker, and the Blackfeet and Crow Indian agencies. The military and Indian supplies for all points in the vicinity and south of Fort Ellis would pass over this route, saving to Fort Ellis 250 miles in railroad-transportation, and, with the estimated distance to Fort Ellis from Corinne, (480 miles,) 39 miles of wagon-transportation. The Acting Quartermaster-General estimates the saving in railroad-transportation alone, of troops and Army supplies, at \$5,000 per annum to the posts in Montana. This does not include the Indian supplies, in the movement of which there would be a proportionate saving. The distance saved to Yellowstone Lake, in the Great National Yellowstone Park, is 555 miles, 305 of which is by stage and 250 by rail. The following letter of Captain Jones describes fully the route and its advantages to the Government and the country through which it passes :

WASHINGTON, D. C., June 12, 1874.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this date upon the subject of a proposed military wagon-road in Wyoming.

The road proposed by this bill is over the line discovered by me last year while making the reconnaissance of Northwestern Wyoming. I consider it a perfectly practicable project, which can be attained at a reasonable expense.

The road will leave the Union Pacific Railroad near Green River City, Wyo., at such a point (probably Point of Rocks) as will give the shortest distance from the railroad to the mouth of Wind River Valley. This valley is followed up to its head, where there is a pass over which the grades are perfectly easy and practicable. It is probable that this pass will be practicable for winter travel, as it lies in such position that the prevalent winds are intercepted by neighboring mountain-ranges, and cannot reach it with sufficient force to drive the snow into drifts that will be serious obstructions. It is the testimony of miners, freighters, and others in the Territories, that winter roads can easily be maintained in the mountains, provided the snow does not drift badly. Whether this should prove true or not, the proposed road would remain open as long as the present route via Corinne, and longer than the Missouri River route.

From this pass the road will proceed northerly to Yellowstone Lake, following down its eastern shore, and thence down the Yellowstone River, passing the Great Falls and along the crest of the Grand Cañon, and by the Mammoth Hot Springs on Gardiner's River to Fort Ellis, Bozeman City, and the Crow Indian agency. From here there are good roads to the principal cities and mining towns of Montana. The route traverses the Wind River Valley, (avoiding the present mountain-road between Camp Stambaugh and Camp Brown,) where the soil is quite well adapted to agriculture and grazing, as has been proved by experience, and the climate is exceptionally mild; the Teton Basin, a thoroughly well-watered and well-timbered area of country, where the soil is quite rich, and rain falls with sufficient equability to render irrigation unneces-

sary probably; the Yellowstone National Park, passing all of its wonderful phenomena except the geyser basins, which can be reached by a short side road, and a stretch of country in Yellowstone Valley, north of the park, which is now cultivated with success.

Gold, (in veins and diggings,) coal, coal-oil, iron, and gypsum occur in the Wind River country, fine coal in the Teton Basin, and gold, (in veins and diggings,) lead, and silver in the Yellowstone region.

It will thus be seen that this road will open up and develop a country of considerable and varied resources.

It will also furnish the shortest and a most agreeable route to the Yellowstone National Park.

The present approaches to Montana from the east are only two: viz: (1.) The Missouri River route, which involves wagon-transportation from Fort Benton, or from Carroll, over a desolate country. This latter affords about the same wagon-road distance to Fort Ellis as the one from Fort Benton, and, should it prove available, will supersede it. (2.) The land-route via the Union and Central Pacific Railroads to Corinne, Utah, and thence to Montana by wagons.

The road proposed by the bill is an improvement upon this, as will be seen from the following tables, and will thus bring the two main routes into a closer competition, giving the mining and agricultural interests of Montana an improved outlet and better competing lines of land and water travel, and affording all of the attendant advantages in the transaction of business, settlement of new country, and the shipment of Army and Indian supplies. It is fraught with lasting benefit to the people of Montana and Northern Idaho, and will hasten the utilization of the Yellowstone National Park as a place of summer resort.

Tables.

		<i>Miles.</i>
I.	By rail:	
	Omaha to Corinne, Union Pacific Railroad.....	1,055
	Omaha to Point of Rocks, Union Pacific Railroad	805
	Distance saved by rail.....	250
a	Omaha to Yellowstone Lake, present route:	
	Omaha to Corinne.....	1,055
	Corinne to Fort Ellis.....	403
	Fort Ellis to Yellowstone Lake.....	118
	Omaha to Yellowstone Lake.....	1,576
	Proposed route:	<i>Miles.</i>
	Omaha to Point of Rocks.....	805
	Point of Rocks to Yellowstone Lake.....	289
	Omaha to Yellowstone Lake.....	1,094
	Distance saved from Yellowstone Lake.....	482
II.	Omaha to Bozeman, Montana, present route:	
	Omaha to Corinne.....	1,055
	Corinne to { Fort Ellis }.....	403
	{ Bozeman }.....	
	Omaha to { Fort Ellis }.....	1,458
	{ Bozeman }.....	
	Proposed route:	<i>Miles.</i>
	Omaha to Point of Rocks.....	805
	Point of Rocks to { Fort Ellis }.....	437
	{ Bozeman }.....	
Omaha to Bozeman.....	1,242	
Distance saved to { Fort Ellis }.....	216	
{ Bozeman }.....		
III.	* Passenger-rates, (railroad:)	
	Omaha to Corinne, Utah.....	\$79 25
	Omaha to Point of Rocks, Wyoming.....	57 25
	Amount saved per man.....	22 00

* As the distance (wagon-road) is about the same in the two cases, the saving effected can very fairly be represented by the saving over 250 miles of railroad.

		* Freight rates, (railroad :)	
IV.	}	Omaha to Corinne, (third-class,) per ton	\$42 20
		Omaha to Point of Rocks, (third-class,) per ton	32 20
		Amount saved per ton	10 00

To sum up: The proposed wagon-road saves 250 miles of railroad; 482 miles of distance to the Yellowstone National Park; and 216 miles to Fort Ellis, Bozeman, and the principal cities of Montana, which is one of the most productive mining regions of the West; is the shortest and most practicable road to the Yellowstone National Park and Montana; is heavily timbered through the belt of country where the heavy snows fall, indicating a probable winter route, while, at present, there is none; opens up a large tract (2,000,000 acres) of low-lying timber-land—a very important feature; will open to settlement the Wind River Valley, the Teton Basin, and the valley of the Upper Yellowstone; will hasten the attainment of the objects for which the Yellowstone Park was created by law; and will afford better competing lines of travel to the mining and other industries of Montana.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. A. JONES,
Captain of Engineers.

The CHIEF OF ENGINEERS,
United States Army, Washington, D. C.

The distance from Corinne to Fort Ellis is believed to be (from the best evidence we can get) 480 miles, instead of 403, making the distance 77 miles shorter via the proposed route than is given in the tables of Captain Jones. The Chief of Engineers, in his report, states that the Missouri River route is open but a few months in the year, and the navigation uncertain and unreliable, and goods sent by that route are frequently detained for long periods of time; he states that if the labor of troops can be utilized, a road which would be equal to the common roads in the Territories, can be constructed for the amount named in the bill, (\$60,000,) and in one working season, and would be chiefly required for grading, corduroying marshes, and bridging streams with timber which is conveniently available, and in cutting trees and extracting their stumps, over a distance of about 50 miles.

The average amount of freight from Union Pacific Railroad to Montana for four years ending with 1873, was 3,000 tons, about one-twelfth of which was Army supplies, the balance individual shipments and Indian supplies. The saving on this amount of freight (if it all came from the East) would be \$30,000 annually in railroad-transportation alone, to say nothing of passengers or troops; with the better and shorter route proposed, it is believed that a large amount of the freight which now passes up the Missouri River in the spring would pass over this route; this freight, for three years ending with 1873, amounted to from 3,000 to 6,500 tons per annum. The saving of 250 miles of railroad-travel and over 300 miles of stage-travel to the Great Yellowstone National Park, the great wonders of which will, without doubt, make it a great popular resort in the near future, would be sufficient to justify the expenditure, independent of the value of the road to the War and Indian Departments, and the citizens of Wyoming and Montana. The passage of the bill is recommended by General Ord, commander of Department of the Platte, Lieutenant-General Sheridan, and the Secretary of War.

The committee recommend the passage of the bill as amended, reducing the amount appropriated to \$50,000.