



BLACK ROCK DESERT
HIGH ROCK CANYON
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

RABBIT HOLE SPRINGS

Emigrant History

- Water is scarce along the Applegate Trail; however, there were several main locations that emigrants depended upon for their water supply.
- These locations were: Antelope Springs, Rabbit Hole Spring, Black Rock Hot Spring, Double Hot Springs, Mud Meadow and High Rock Lake.

Why is the spring called “Rabbit Hole?”

“After traveling about fifteen miles (eastward from Black Rock) we began to discover dim rabbit trails running in the same direction in which we were traveling. As we advanced the trails became more plain, and there were others constantly coming in, all pointing in the general direction toward a ledge of granite boulders which we could see before us. Approaching, ...we could see a green mound where all the trails seemed to enter, and on examining the place closely we found a small hole in the top of the mound, in which a little puddle of water stood within a few inches of the surface....Digging down in this clay we made a basin large enough to hold several gallons and by dark we had quite a supply of good pure water....Great numbers of rabbits came around us and we killed all we wanted of them. This is the place always since known as Rabbit Hole Springs (1).” Lindsay Applegate 1846

- During the massive westward emigration in 1849, many emigrants found the spring at Rabbit Hole disappointing.
- The Applegate’s blazed the trail for the purposes of Oregon-bound emigrants and as an escape route in the event of hostile interaction with the British.
- The trail was not meant for the passage of thousands of emigrants in 1849.

“our disappointment, when we found the promised [Rabbit Hole] springs to be only three or four wells sunk in the ground into which the water percolated in a volume about the size of a straw, and each hole occupied by a man dipping it up with a pint cup, as it slowly filled a little cavity in the ground (2),” Alonzo Delano 1849.

- Consequently, Rabbit Hole was less of an oasis and more of a frustration for weary, thirsty travelers. Wells had to be dug in order to retrieve a decent amount of water, and if one arrived later in the day, especially later in the year, the water supply was certain to be low.

1. Dodd, Charles H. The Emigrant Experience. 19th Century Productions. Chilcoot, CA. 2001.
2. McGuckian, Peggy. Emigrant Trails in the Black Rock Desert. U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management. Winnemucca, NV. 1978.



Black Tailed
Jack Rabbit
Tracks



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In Their Own Words: What did the emigrants think of Rabbit Hole Spring?

"We rested about an hour and started for Rabbit Hole Spring, said by some to be thirteen and by others sixteen miles from the springs in the pass. We arrived at what we supposed to be the spring about ten o'clock at night, but we could not get water there but drove about two miles further where we found some wells that had been dug by the emigrants to get water for stock, etc," Israel F. Hale Aug. 22, 1849.

"We started this morning at 5:30 o'clock and travelled 19 miles across a barren undulating desert, when we came to a place known as Rabbit Wells, where four or five wells, some 8 or 10 feet deep have been excavated by the immigrants in advance for the purpose of obtaining water for themselves and their stock. These wells with one or two exceptions were filled with dead animals. Having seen water at the bottom and being so eager to obtain it, they rushed head first into them, where they perished and could not well be extricated," George Keller Sept. 15, 1849.

"Along the edge of this Plateau are a number of springs as they are called, but are actually wells, dug from 3 to 6 feet deep, and from 4 to 5 feet diameter, containing cool, clear water but a little saline about half filling the wells. Two of these springs were about 4 feet apart. In one was a dead ox, - swelled up so as to fill the hole closely, - his hind-legs and tail only above ground. Not far from this was another spring similarly filled. There was scarcely space for the wagons to reach the holes for the ox-carcasses." J. Goldsborough Bruff Sept. 29 1849.

"Several wagons had stopped in the road, and a knot of men were gathered around a particular spot, which marked the place [Rabbit Hole Spring] of glorious element, and with parched tongues we went up. Judge of our disappointment, when we found the promised springs to be only three or four wells sunk in to the ground, into which the water percolated in a volume about the size of a straw, and each hole occupied by a man dipping it up with a pint cup, as it slowly filled a little cavity in the ground. Each man was taking his turn to drink...and as to getting a supply for our cattle, it was out of the question...We had been inveigled there by false reports and misrepresentation, without preparing for such a contingency, as we might have done, in some measure, by cutting grass on the river.." Alonzo Delano 1849.

Information obtained from:

Dodd, Charles H. The Emigrant Experience. 19th Century Productions. Chilcoot, CA. 2001.

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