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**Bozeman Trail**

**Lead:** Perceived as a short cut to Montana gold and Oregon settlement, the Bozeman trail cut almost three months off the journey, but there was one major problem.

**Intro.:** *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

**Content:** The premier immigrant trail running through the upper Midwest to Washington and Oregon was the Oregon Trail or Overland Trail. Traced in the 1830s and heavily traveled through the 1850s it provided a rough and dangerous alternative to sea travel. It went up

**the North Platte River through South Pass, the Snake River Valley and the Blue Mountains and into the Willamette Valley. Yet the Oregon Trail was by no means an easy route, and during the Civil War, with the discovery of gold in western Montana, word began to circulate of a new trail, a short cut, with better water for the stock and better grades that could eliminate time and distance in the journey west. The problem was it cut across territory jealously guarded by a normally fractious and loose federation of clans, Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. Their repeated attacks on miners and wagon trains gave the Trail its nickname, “Bloody Bozeman.”**

**The promoter of the short cut was Joseph Merin Bozeman and during 1865 and 1866 the number of travelers along the Trail continued to swell, encouraged by the power of Army garrisons at three forts built specifically along the Trail to protect them. Just before Christmas 1866, a huge war party led by the charismatic Chief Red Cloud ambushed and wiped out a detachment of Army troops within hearing range of Fort Phil Kearny near the start of the Trail.**

**So devastating was this attack that wagon trains were stopped, the forts dismantled, and for a time, the Bozeman Trail was abandoned. Essayist Donald McCaig says the**

**Trail represented conflicting visions of prosperity. These were the richest Indian hunting grounds in the region, but they cut across white's access to gold and easy passage to the west. The Indians blocked the Trail and made it stick, but the victory was short-lived. Red Cloud's words were prophetic, "Now we are melting like snow on the hillside, while you are growing like spring grass."**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

**Johnson, Dorothy M. *The Bloody Bozeman: The Perilous Trail to Montana's Gold*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1971.**

**McCaig, Donald. "The Bozeman Trail," *Smithsonian* 31 (7, October 2000): 88-101.**

**<http://www.bozemantrail.org/>**

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