

WELCOME TO THE WEISER RIVER TRAIL

Follow the corridor of an 84-mile railway line, the **Pacific and Idaho Northern (P&IN)**, which served the region from 1899 to 1995. For for the people of Adams and Washington counties, the **P&IN** was an essential transportation network.

Steel rails traversed the rugged terrain of central Idaho, passing through desert canyons, lush farmlands, forests, and mountain meadows. Although the tracks are gone and trains no longer make a daily commute between Weiser and New Meadows, walking or cycling on the old railroad bed is an unforgettable experience.

LOOKING BACK

The rugged, timbered, and remote land of west-central Idaho was home to the Shoshone and Nez Perce tribes for centuries until gold was discovered north and south of this area in the early 1860s. Fortune seekers flooded the region searching for rich mineral deposits.

They followed the Weiser and Salmon Rivers along pack trails carved by horses, mules, and freight wagons traveling between the gold fields.

THE SEVEN DEVILS MOUNTAINS

Miners traversed the western edge of central Idaho, where the jagged peaks of the Seven Devils Mountains pile up against both sides of the Snake River to form Hells Canyon,

the deepest gorge in North America. Inside these mountains are pockets of copper and other precious metals.

The story of the railroad along the Weiser River links to copper mining in the Seven Devils Mountains. Rich copper lodes discovered in 1862 by Levi Allen showed great promise, but lack of transportation prevented early development of the area. Railway access was crucial to the success of a copper mine, but construction of the **P&IN** did not begin until 1899. The railroad was finally completed, many years later, in 1911.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Some settlements in west-central Idaho came into existence before the arrival of the **P&IN**. Weiser, established in 1864,

to the GOLDEN HEART OF IDAHO



became a supply hub during southern Idaho's mining boom. Council, north of Weiser, was founded in 1876. The community took its name from an annual trade rendezvous attended by Native Americans from all over the Northwest. White travelers misinterpreted the rendezvous as "council meetings" and the location became known as Council Valley.

Soon after Council was established, a town called "Meadows" appeared along the headwaters of the Little

Salmon River. When the **P&IN** railroad arrived in 1911, the line ended on the other side of the valley at a new town called "New Meadows."

THE RAILROAD ERA

Before the advent of cars and trucks, railroads were the only practical way to move people and products over long distances. Towns lacking rail service were often isolated and worked to get railroad connections.

The **Oregon Short Line Railroad**, a subsidiary of the **Union Pacific**, built a line through Weiser in 1884,

connecting the community to a larger regional transportation and supply network.

Miners in the Seven Devils region needed lumber and agricultural products. Loggers and farmers needed a way to transport their goods to the mines. For almost ten years, surveys conducted for proposed rail lines along a northern route brought a boom for towns in the area as speculators and investors searched for a new route. Then, in 1899 the dream of a railroad became a reality when construction of the **P&IN** started north from Weiser.

THE PACIFIC AND IDAHO NORTHERN (THE "P&IN")

"On to the Seven Devils" blared the headline of the *Weiser Signal* newspaper on March 9, 1899. Two months later, on May 16th, a huge crowd gathered in Weiser to watch railroad promoter Thomas Bates drive a Seven Devils copper spike to launch the first rails.

Between 1899 and 1901, the **P&IN** built 60 miles of tracks north to Council. Over the course of the next ten years under the leadership of Edgar M. Heigho, the **P&IN** added stops at Fruitvale, Starkey, Tamarack, and Rubicon. Tracks were laid at the rate of a mile per day with as many as 800 laborers, including Japanese and Italian immigrants. Steel rails were laid over wood ties that had been cut from nearby forests and floated down the Weiser River.

The first rails on what was called the "Meadows Extension" were laid in October, 1910, and quickly completed, with the last spike driven in January, 1911 at the newly-platted town of New Meadows.

The **P&IN** served as a "Farm-to-Market" railroad, hauling cattle, peas, grain, and lumber, but the dream of connecting to the copper mining towns of the Seven Devils never materialized: it was too expensive to build. Copper was difficult to excavate, too, which forced many bankruptcies and the eventual shutdown of the copper mining industry by 1920. The **Union Pacific Railroad** purchased the **P&IN** in 1936, but as highways improved and automobile travel increased, fewer passengers rode the train. The railway operated as a freight line from 1950 until 1995.



Photo 1: P&IN Depot at Weiser, Idaho. Photo courtesy John Aguirre. Photo 2: P&IN 103, a steam engine built by Baldwin Locomotive Works, Pennsylvania. It was one of several steam locomotives used on the line. The railroad was important to the development of the region along the Weiser River. Photo courtesy John Aguirre. Photo 3: Ore was transferred by freight wagon from the Seven Devils Mining District to the rail line at Council. Photo courtesy Idaho State Historical Society, #64-145.2. Photo 4: Shown here is "He Devil Mountain" the tallest peak in the Seven Devils Range. Photo courtesy Dale Fisk. Photo 5: P&IN Depot, Council, Idaho. Photo courtesy John Aguirre. Photo 6: Sheep were important to the economy in the Weiser Valley. Photo courtesy John Aguirre. Photo 7: New Meadows railroad depot and train. Date Unknown. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum, #2017-153. Photo 8: Stacked ore awaiting transport. Left to right: Walter James, Joe Salsbery, Arthur (Frenchy) David, and Pat Kane. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum, #951481. Photo 9: Mining activity stimulated the development of agriculture and ranching in the Weiser Valley. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum. Photo 10: Postcard view of hay crop, Council, Idaho. Date unknown. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum. Photo 11: Driving the first spike for the P&IN Railroad, Weiser, Idaho, May 16, 1899. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum, #60-193.2. Photo 12: Edgar Heigho was instrumental in the development of the P&IN Railroad. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum, #05039. Photo 13: The winding route of the P&IN followed the Weiser River. P&IN cars, seen rounding the hairpin curve known as "The Devil's Elbow," approximately twenty-one miles from Weiser. Photo courtesy of John Aguirre. Photo 14: Building the railroad was hard work, as seen in this photo of a P&IN construction camp between Fruitvale and New Meadows. Photo courtesy Council Valley Museum, #16076.

BECOME A MEMBER

The Weiser River Trail is owned and managed by the Friends of the Weiser River Trail, a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. The mission of the FWRT is to preserve the integrity of the former Pacific and Idaho Northern Railway corridor that forms the Weiser River Trail; manage it as a public recreation trail along its length; and conserve and enhance the riparian and other natural habitats within the corridor. Friends of the Weiser River Trail is a self-funding membership organization that depends upon funds raised through membership dues, grants, private donations, and fund-raising efforts to cover ongoing maintenance and operation costs for the 84-mile Weiser River Trail. The trail is maintained by volunteers. We welcome your support. For membership and other information visit us on the web at www.weiserrivertrail.org.

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LASTING LEGACY: THE WEISER RIVER TRAIL

In 1995 the Idaho Northern and Pacific, commonly called the P & IN, railroad line from New Meadows to Weiser was abandoned. The following February a group of citizens met to discuss its future use and potential. The group envisioned a public recreational trail along its 84-mile length. To make this dream a reality, the group sought partnership opportunities with Washington and Adams Counties, the State of Idaho, and local residents.

They formed a citizens' committee initially called the *Weiser River Access Trail Committee* to investigate issues related to building a trail. The group faced several challenges and worked hard to overcome them. The top priority was get right-of-way on the abandoned rail line. Some residents in Adams and Washington counties also had to be convinced that a recreational trail would benefit the communities.

This small group of dedicated individuals, including Shirley Atteberry, Lane Williams, Dick Pugh, Barbara Barber, and Chris Malloy formed a non-profit group, **Friends of the Weiser River Trail**. The group advocated for the trail and gathered a membership base of 77 interested citizens. Since then, membership has grown to over 650 members.

The Friends developed a mission statement to preserve the integrity of the Pacific and Idaho Northern Railroad corridor, to develop, manage and maintain a public recreation trail along its length, and to protect and enhance the riparian and other natural habitats within the corridor.

They forged a complex agreement with Union Pacific whereby the railroad would donate the corridor, and the Friends would develop and manage the right-of-way as a trail. Known as "Railbanking," this concept was established in 1983 as an amendment to Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act. It is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail agency to use an out-of-service rail corridor as a trail until a railroad might need the corridor again for rail service. In August, 1997 the Union Pacific granted the rail corridor to the Friends.

This nationally-recognized trail was constructed due to the hard work and determination of dedicated volunteers. The first seven miles of the trail were dedicated on June 6, 1998. The 84-mile corridor winds from 5,500-foot high New Meadows alpine forests, through rock-terraced grassy canyons, farm country, and sections of the Weiser River.

The trails ends in Weiser.



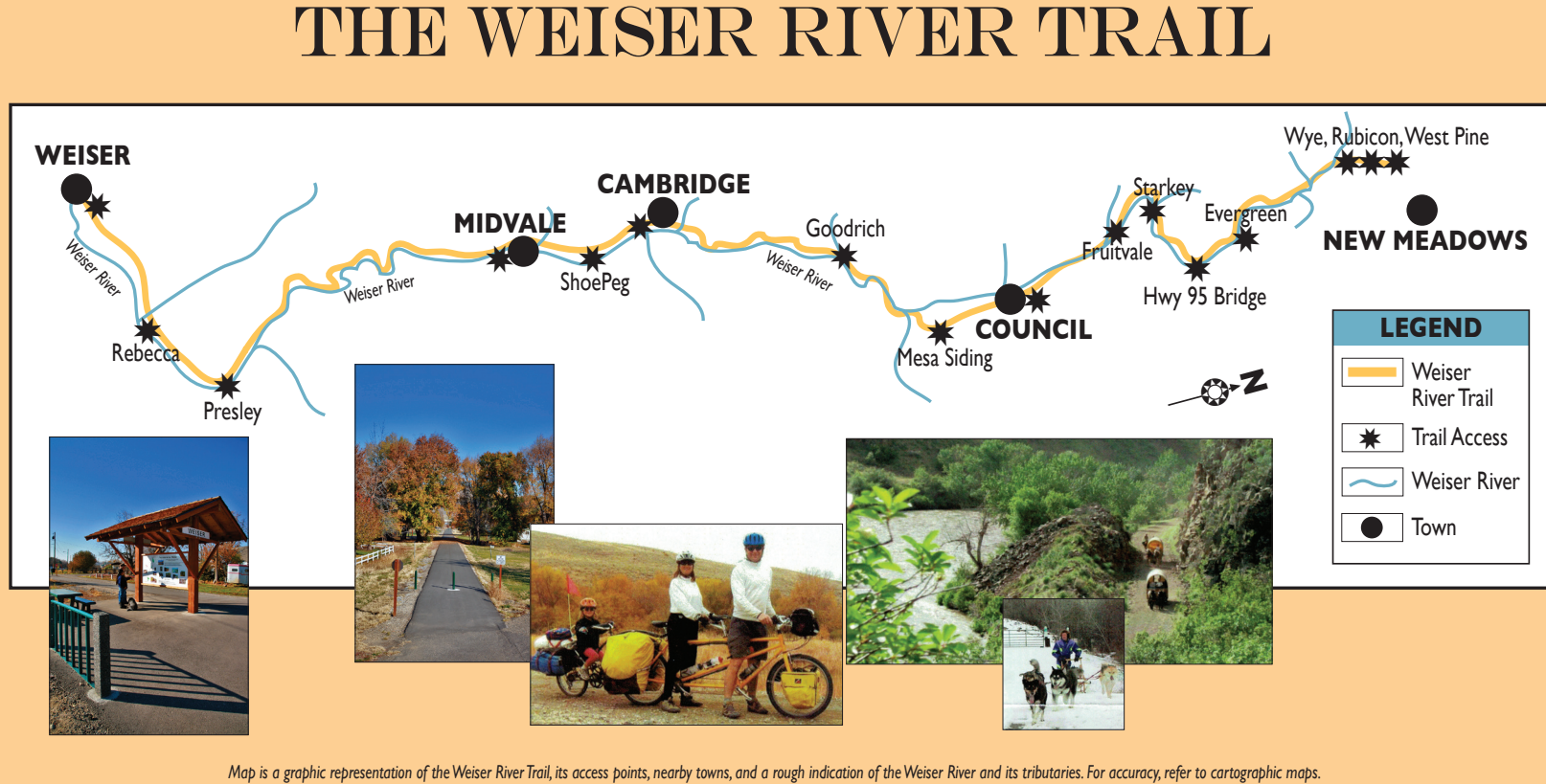
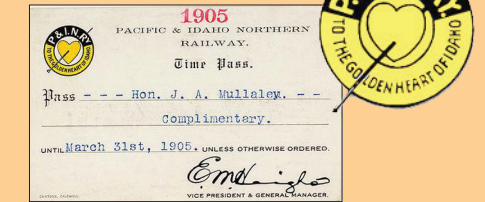
Photo: Friends of the Weiser River Trail

Today hikers, bicyclists, and horse enthusiasts enjoy the longest rail trail in Idaho. Annual gatherings on the trail include bike events in June and October, and the popular Weiser River Wagon Trail event.



TO THE GOLDEN HEART OF IDAHO

In 1904, the P&IN adopted a clever logo, used to advertise the railroad. The circular yellow and black logo featured the outline of a heart, with the railroad's new slogan, *To the Golden Heart of Idaho.*



Map is a graphic representation of the Weiser River Trail, its access points, nearby towns, and a rough indication of the Weiser River and its tributaries. For accuracy, refer to cartographic maps.

THE WEISER RIVER TRAIL

to the
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Idaho's Longest Rail-Trail