

HISTORIC ROADS OF THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY

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Over the past twenty years, I've done a half dozen presentations to various groups regarding the historic roads of the Walla Walla Valley. I originally prepared this paper 15 April 2015. I have revised it three times; this will be my last revision. I prepared the 2022 version for the US Department of Fish and Wildlife and for the Oregon-California Trails Association.

Theodore Kolecki was Colonel George Wright's topographer on his 1858 mission to punish the Coeur D' Alene Indians for embarrassing Colonel Edward Steptoe at Rosalia, Washington. Along Wright's line of march between Vancouver Barracks and the Cataldo Mission Kolecki produced approximately 100 seven-square-mile maps of the route, plus a few additional side trip maps.

One of Kolecki's side trips was from U. S. Army Fort Walla Walla to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) fur trade post Fort Nez Percés at Wallula. Kolecki's maps of Wright's route to and from the Walla Walla Valley are attached. Kolecki is the main source for mapping early Walla Walla Valley Roads.

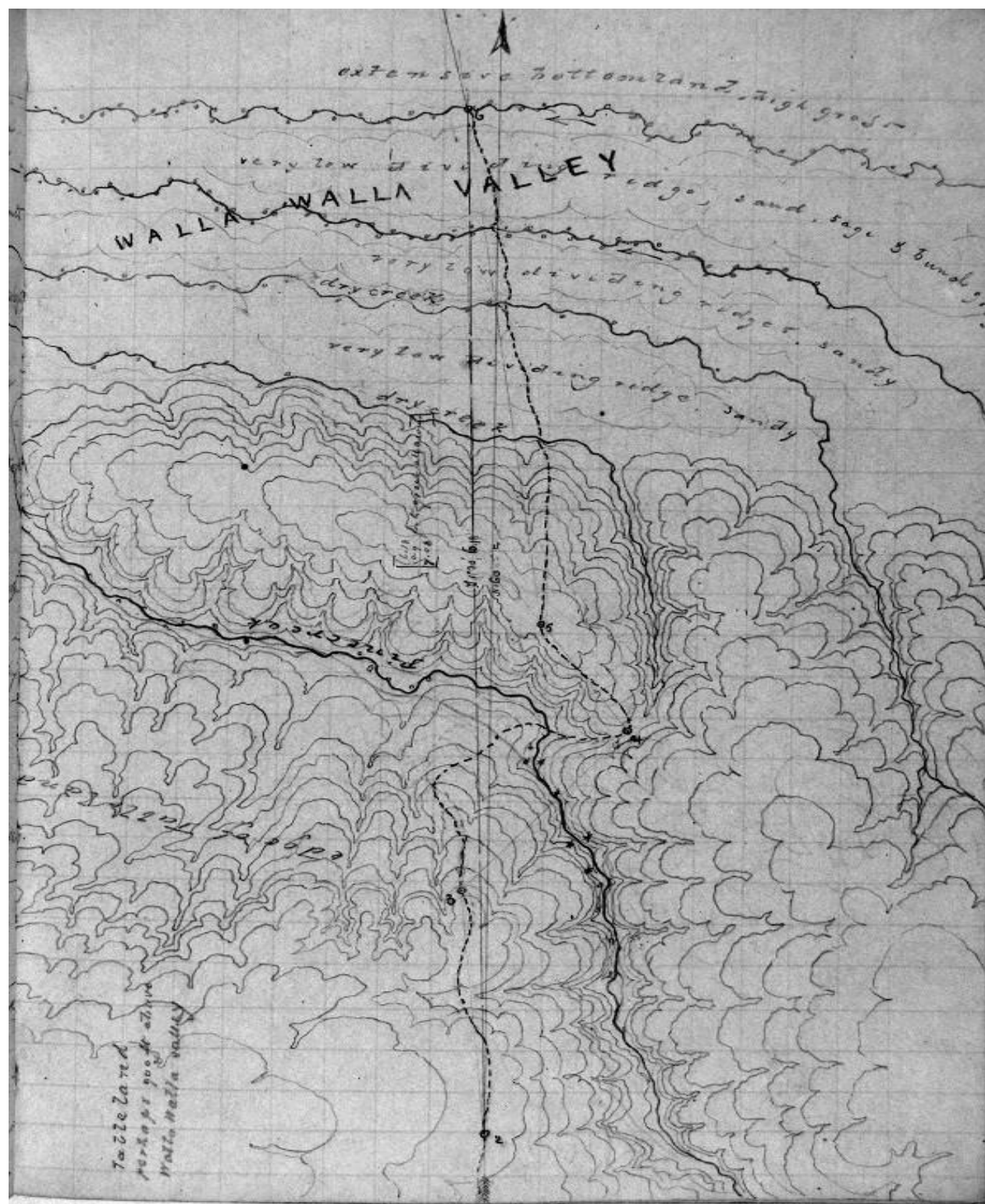
Listed below are known Walla Walla Valley historic roads and approximate dates of use.

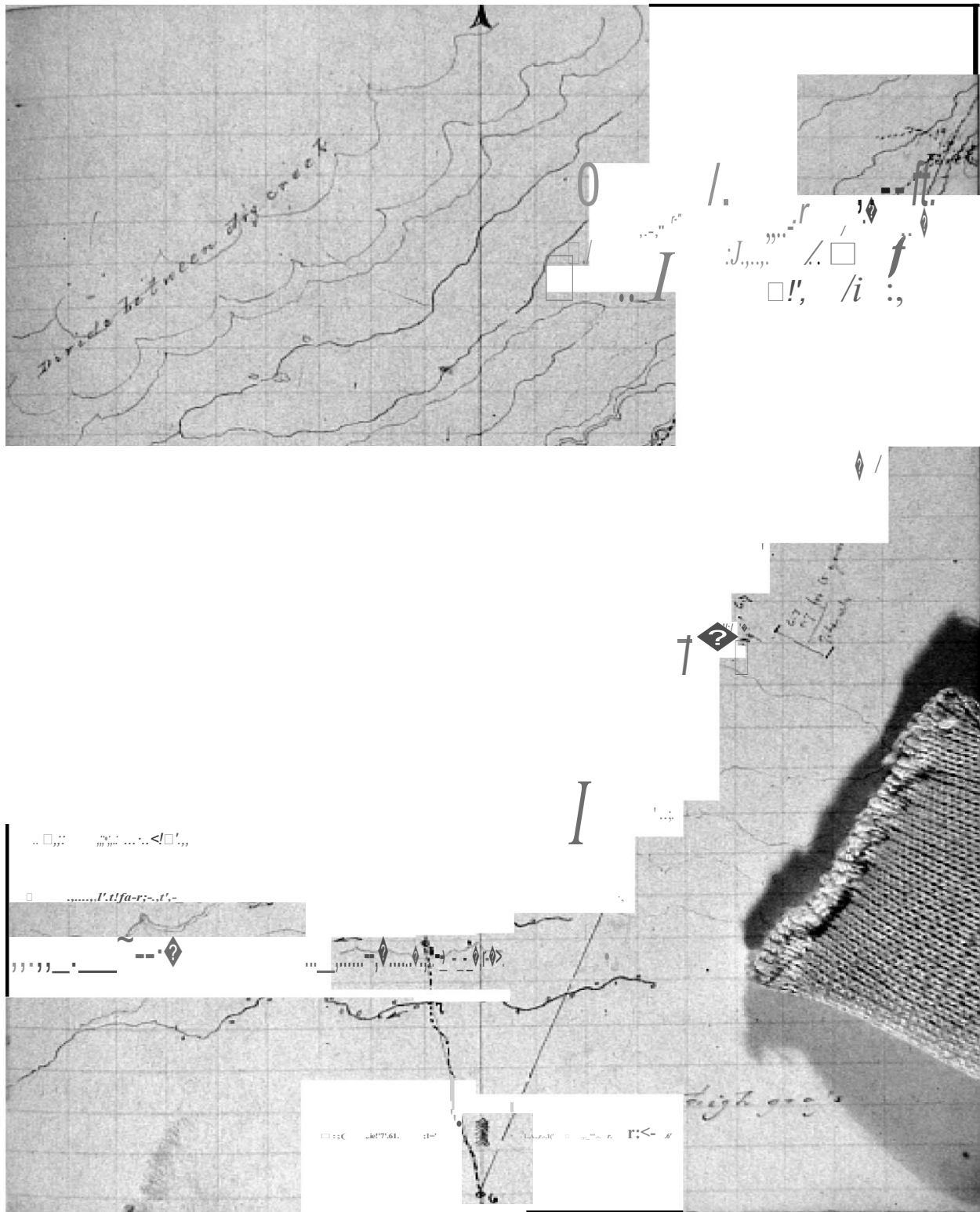
- **Oregon Trail to Whitman Mission:** The Whitman Route of the Oregon Trail enters the Walla Walla Valley from a ridge a quarter mile west of Seven Hills Vineyard near Milton-Freewater. It crossed the Walla Walla Valley south to north, fording the river at Mojonner Crossing. [Kolecki; 1841-1847]
- **Oregon Trail, Whitman Mission to Fort Nez Percés:** The Trail crossed Mill Creek a half mile west of the Mission, crossed the Touchet River a mile north of Touchet, crossed the Walla Walla River to the south bank at Nine Mile Ranch, crossed back to the north bank at near Vancycle Canyon (Five-Mile HBC Garden) and to Fort Nez Percés. [Kolecki; 1841-circa 1885]
- **Oregon Trail, Fort Nez Percés to Willamette Valley:** The Oregon Trail from Fort Nez Percés traveled down the south bank of the Columbia (or by boat) to Hat Rock, to Cottonwood Bend of the Umatilla River via Diagonal Road to the Umatilla Army Depot, joining the Oregon Trail now known as the "mainstem" from Pendleton near Tub Springs. [Kolecki; Umatilla Trail at Irrigon, BLM Report by Sarah LeCompte, October 2000; 1841-1885]
- **Mullan Road:** The Mullan Road and the Oregon Trail between Wallula and the Whitman Mission are the same. That section between US Army Fort Walla Walla and the Mission are depicted by Mullan and Kolecki. The Mullan Road continued from Walla Walla to Prescott, Lyons Ferry, Spokane, Coeur D' Alene, Missoula and Fort Benton. [Kolecki; 1859-1885]

- **Nez Perce Trail:** Walla Walla Chief *Yellept* told Lewis and Clark this was the “Good Road.” The original Nez Perce Trail started in the vicinity Lewiston and traveled to Farewell Bend on the Snake River. The Nez Perce Trail created the bend in Walla Walla’s Main Street. From the Walla Walla Valley it turned east up Butler Grade to Wildhorse and backwards on the Oregon Trail to the Snake River. [Pre-History]
- **Lewis and Clark Trail:** On their return trip in 1806 the Corps of Discovery transferred their baggage from boats to pack horses at Horse Thief Lake. They camped at the confluence of the Walla Walla and Columbia Rivers with Walla Walla Chief *Yellept* on 27 April. From there they followed the Nez Perce Trail to Clarkston, Washington and on to St. Louis. [Lewis and Clark Journals, 1804-1806]
- **Celilo Road:** This route started in Northeast Washington State on the Columbia River. It was likely first used by the Methow Indians, an interior Salish Tribe. They traveled down the Columbia to meet the salmon in the spring because they were hungry. Lewis and Clark noted them in their journals at Sundale in Klickitat County. They used the Nez Perce Trail to Fort Nez Perce, crossed the Columbia there and traveled down the north side of the river to Celilo Falls. [Pre-History]
- **HBC Trail and Road:** The HBC trail and road connected Fort Nez Percés with two gardens (2-mile and 5-mile) and the HBC Farm located three miles west of Umapine, Oregon. The trail(s) eventually became roads as the HBC began using wagons to haul grain, hay, produce and beef. The route was originally established by the North West Company in 1819. There were two routes. The first one parallels Hwy 12 and passes between “Night Cap Peak” and “Night Cap Butte” to Touchet. The second followed the Walla Walla before turning up Pine Creek to the HBC Farm. [HBC, NWC Records, Warre & Wilkes, Kolecki Field Notes; 1819, 1846 & 1858]
- **Whitman Road to Lapwail Mission:** This route connected the Whitman and *Lapwail* Missions. It traveled through downtown Walla Walla and followed the Nez Perce Trail to Lewiston. Lewis and Clark followed part of this route on their return trip in 1806. It was later a stage road. There are many places the road is still visible. [Drury, Opening of Old Oregon; 1836-1885]
- **Road to Wildhorse:** The route of this road is unknown. There is a short segment of the Road to Wildhorse shown on a Kolecki map near the confluence of the Touchet and the Walla Walla Rivers and it is mentioned in his field notes. Whether this road connects with the previously mentioned Whitman Route of the Oregon Trail between Cayuse and the Whitman Mission or if it is a separate route is unknown. There are no Kolecki maps showing the entirety of this route. [Kolecki; 1858]
- **Vancycle Canyon:** The Vancycle Canyon Road runs from north of Helix to the approximate location of the HBC Five Mile Garden on the Walla Walla River. A railroad was built down the

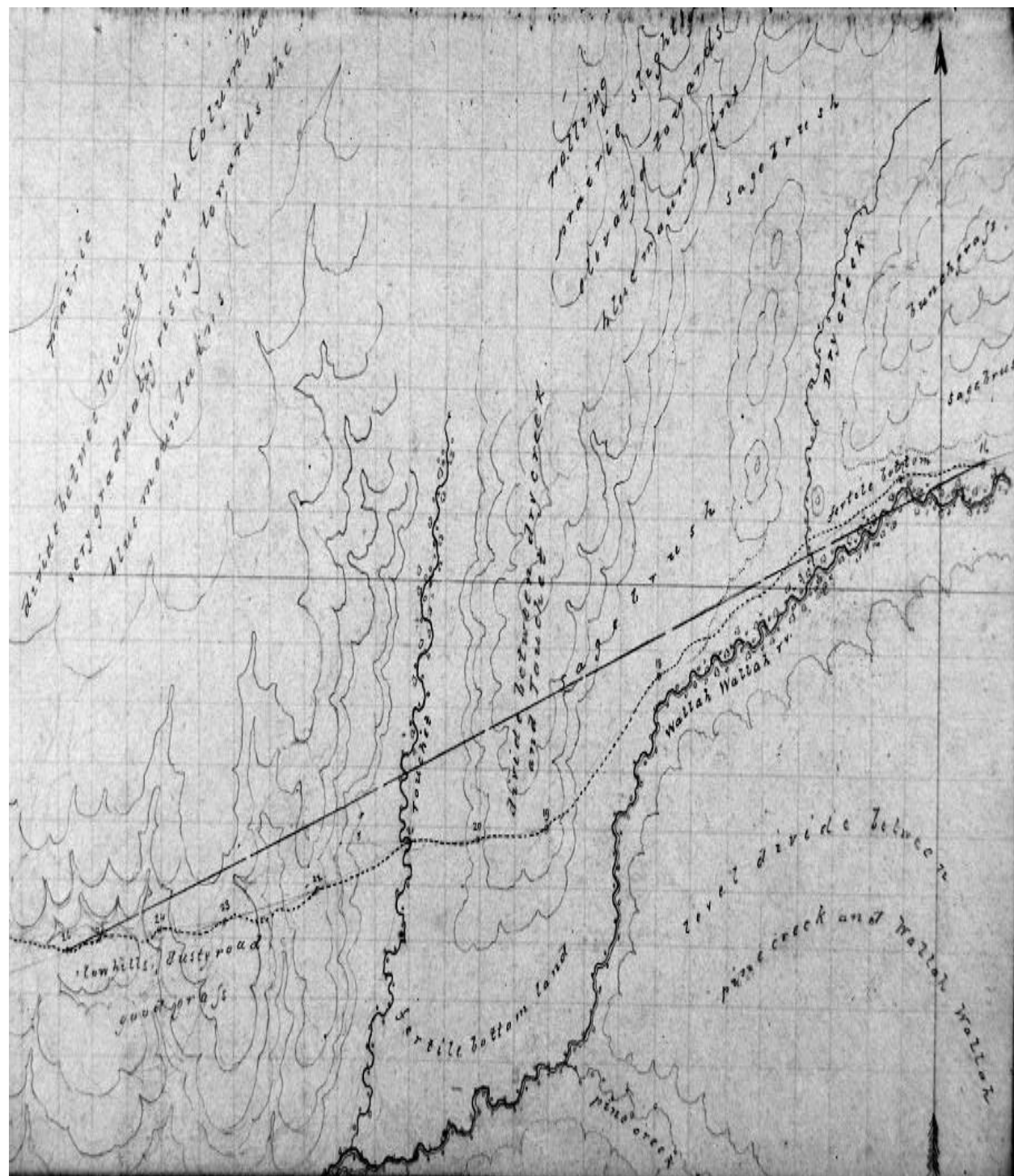
grade in 1889. The service road and the railroad pretty much destroyed any traces of the original road. I hiked it in 1982. Vancycle Canyon lines up perfectly with the azimuth taken by Marcus Whitman in 1836 from the top of Fox Hill in the Grande Ronde Valley. The age of the original trail is unknown. [Gary Miller Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 1996; attached photo, monolith which supported the railroad bridge across the Walla Walla River]

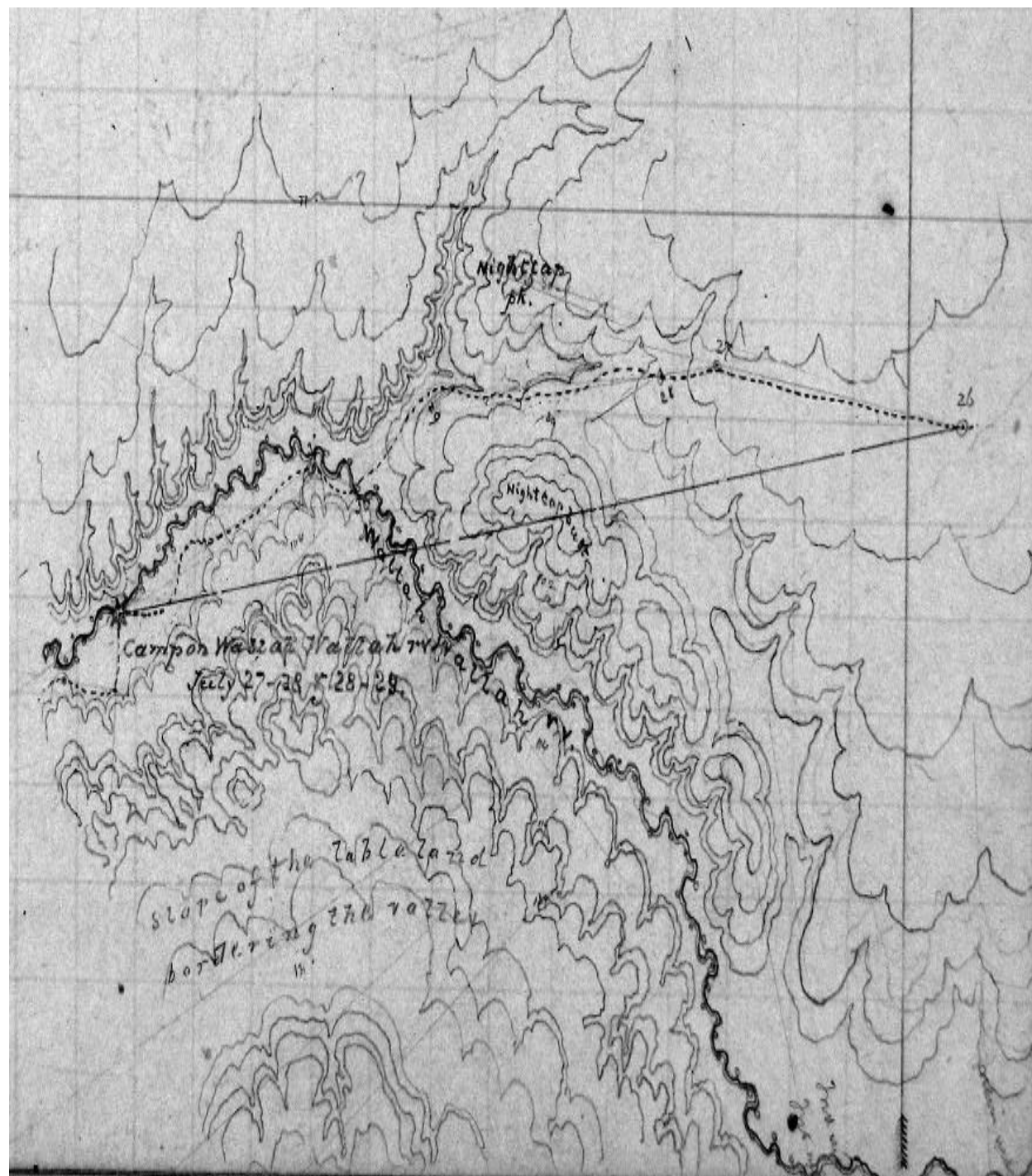
- **Butler Grade Trail:** The Butler Grade Trail connected the site of Fort Nez Percés with Wildhorse Creek on the Umatilla Plateau. This may be a 10,000-year-old trail. It is obviously an Indian road and was never used by wagons. The old wagon road is beside it to the east. [Prehistory; photo 2004 by Frank Duff]
- **The Dalles Military (Stevens) Road:** The Dalles Military Road followed the route established by Governor I. I. Stevens when he traveled from Fort Vancouver carrying gifts for the failed 1856 Treaty. The road starts at the US Fort Walla Walla (Veteran's Hospital), crosses the Walla Walla River at Tum-A-Lum, climbs the ridge behind Milton, traverses the Dry Creek Valley, crosses Pine Creek at Weston and follows Wildhorse Creek to Pendleton where it joins the Oregon Trail to The Dalles and on to Vancouver. [A. D. Pambrun Autobiography; 1856-1900]
- **Hudson's Bay Company Brigade Trail:** This may be the most significant of all the Walla Walla Valley Roads. It is on the Brigade Trail water route at Fort Nez Percés, Wallula, WA. The Trail crossed the Walla Walla River at its confluence with the Columbia. The HBC Brigade Trail stretched some 950 miles from Fort Astoria and later Fort Vancouver to Fort St. James on Stuart Lake in New Caledonia (Northern British Columbia). The Brigade Trail was used for transporting furs "out" to Vancouver and "outfit" (supplies for the forts and trade goods) "in" to New Caledonia. The Trail used the Stuart, Nechako, Fraser, Thompson, Okanagan and Columbia Rivers and one overland pack trail across the Thompson Plateau. If you were a clerk at Fort Nez Percés when the Brigade pulled in, you had to stay up all night reading and copying the mail. Email didn't exist in 1826. Fort Nez Percés was considered one of the most important posts "along the communication" on the Brigade Trail.

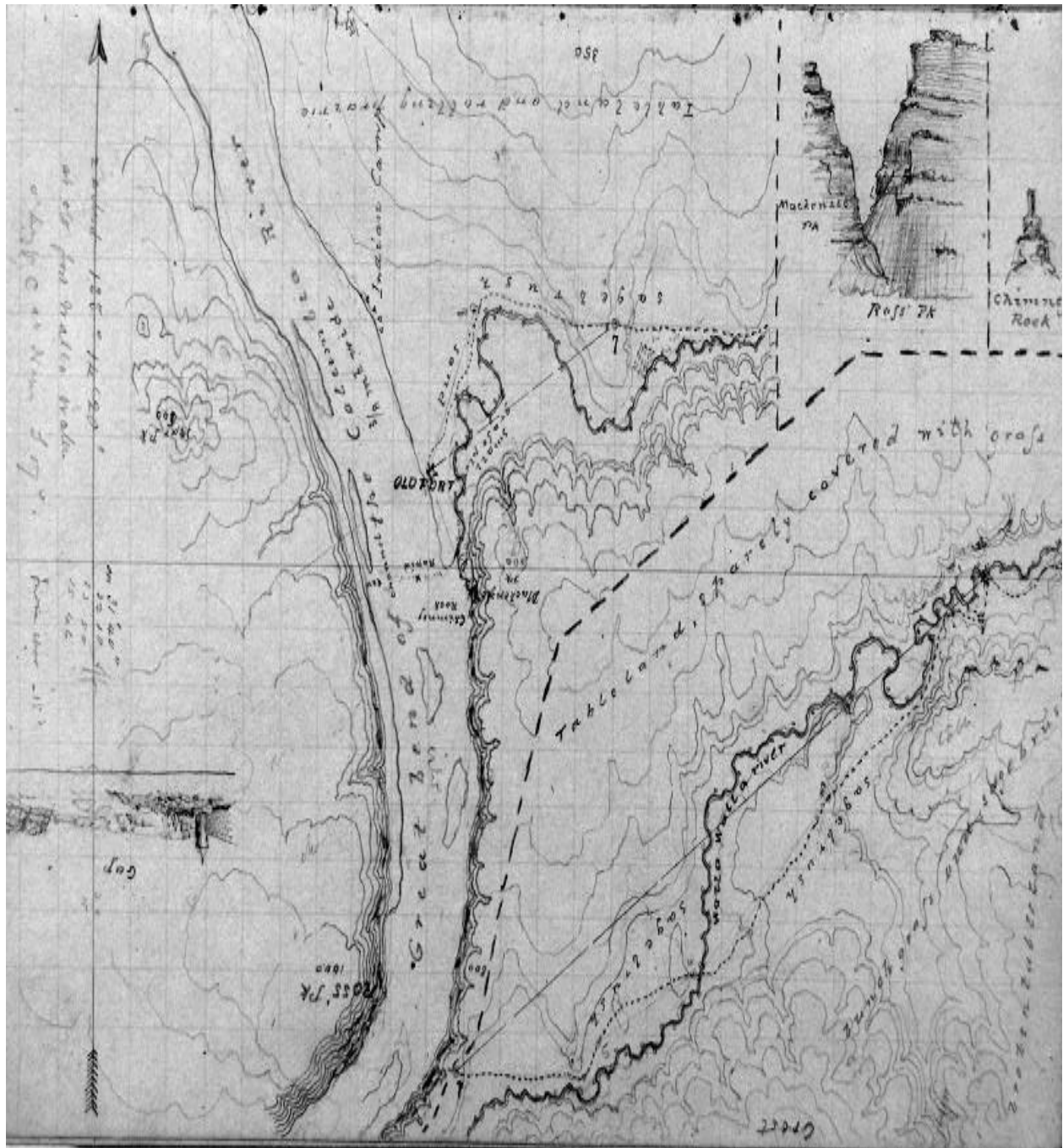




Pine Creek Ridge to Whitman Mission and US Army Fort Walla Walla

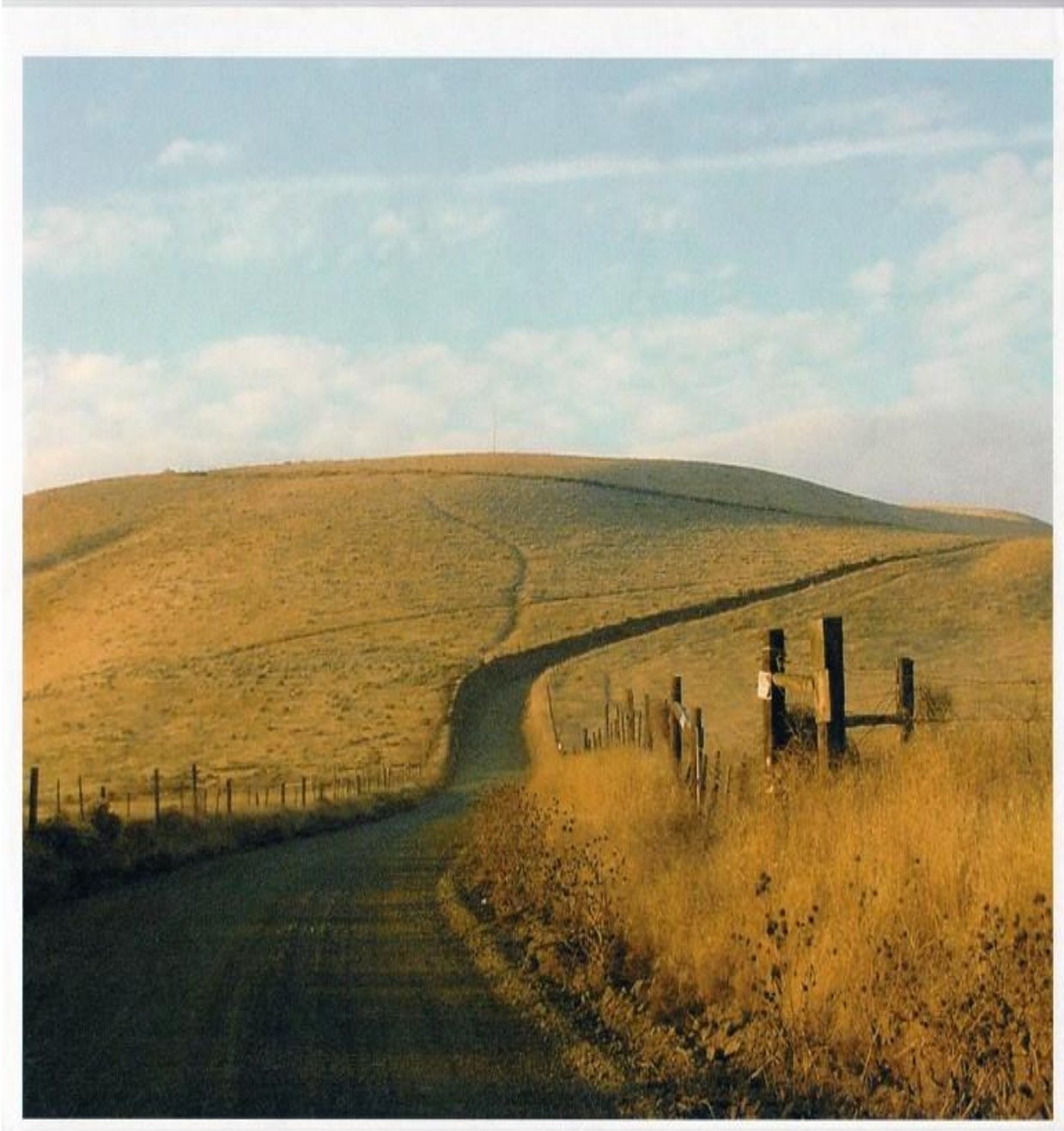








Vancycle Canyon Railroad Crossing of Walla Walla River



Butler Grade Trail



Stevens Road-The Dalles Military Road at Milton -Freewater