

Mullan Road
Sec 28, T9N, R10W GOLDCREEK VICINITY
Powell County
Montana

HAER No. MT-41

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Mullen Road

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Location: Section 28, T9N, R10W, approximately 6 miles SE of Goldcreek, Powell County, Montana

Date of Construction: 1859-62

Builder: Lieutenant John Mullen (U. S. Army)

Owner: Montana State Prison Ranch

Present Use: Range land

Significance: Constructed between 1859 and 1862, the Mullan Road connected Fort Benton at the head of navigation on the Missouri River with Fort Walla Walla in what is now southeastern Washington. U. S. Army Lieutenant (later Captain) John Mullan commanded the project, which was intended to facilitate the movement of troops between the Plains and the Columbia Plateau during times of Indian hostilities. Although the military road was never used extensively by the Army, it did become a popular thoroughfare for emigrants and fortune seekers during gold rushes in the 1860s and for a few years thereafter. Predating the arrival of railroads in the region, the Mullan Road is primarily significant for being the first constructed road to link the Northern Plains with the Columbia Plateau.

Mullan arrived at Fort Benton in the summer of 1860, having constructed much of the road from Fort Walla Walla. He then returned west over the road, rebuilding certain segments along routes requiring fewer crossings of major rivers. Mullan originally routed the road on the north side of the Clark Fort River east of Goldcreek and north of the Little Blackfoot River east of Garrison, Montana. During his return westward in the summer of 1860, Lieutenant Mullan rerouted the road southwest from the Little Blackfoot up Spotted Dog Creek and down Helena Gulch to the Clark Fort River about 7.2 km (4.5 miles) north of Deer Lodge. Crossing the river at that point, the new route ran up Mullan Gulch and continued northwest through the area identified here for recordation, and on to the Goldcreek vicinity.

In his official report, Mullan made the following notation regarding his rerouting of the road in this area:

We made no radical change in the location, except in passing from Belknap's camp to the Deer Lodge valley.

Having sent forward my wagonmaster, Mr. Caldwell, to examine this section, and it being pronounced by him practicable for wagons with a moderate amount of work, I determined to adopt it, and thus avoid the last three crossings of Hell's Gate (Clark Fork) and the four of the Little Blackfoot. It rendered the road longer by three miles; but the avoiding of these streams at high water was an object of great importance, and this is the present permanent location of the road...

Although historic documentation verifies that the Mullan Road crossed through Sec. 28, T9N, R10W, no remains of the road have been identified in this area. Travellers probably took advantage of the open rangeland topography and strayed away from any established trail in search of better grass for their livestock, or to avoid excessively muddy or snowy portions of the road. This segment of the Mullan Road was probably merely a general route and not a well-established road.

Despite the lack of physical remains, the Mullan Road has been determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places based upon the integrity of the setting through which the route of the road passes.

Sources

General Land Office survey maps: T9N, R10W, 1870; T8N, R10W, 1870; T8N, R9W, 1869; and T8N, R8W, 1871

John Mullan, Report on the Construction of a Military Road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton, Sen. Ex. Doc. 43, 47th Cong., 3rd sess., U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1863, p. 27, and maps from this document entitled "Map of the Mountain Section of the Ft. Walla Walla and Ft. Benton Military Wagon Road from Coeur d'Alene Lake to Dearborn River, by Theodore Kolecki, "on file in the Map Collection, University of Montana, Missoula.

John Mullan, Mullan Road Maps, numbers W76-16(8) and W76-16(9), Record Group 77, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Documentation prepared by:

Craig Holstine, 1981-82, as part of a electric transmission line project administered by the Bonneville Power Administration