

**BLM**

Bruneau and Owyhee Field Offices / Idaho

# Owyhee Uplands Back Country Byway





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The Byway east of Jordan Valley, Oregon



## *Owyhee Uplands Back Country Byway*

The Owyhee Uplands National Back Country Byway, known locally as the Mud Flat Road, is the primary access to central Owyhee County. From there, many rough roads and hiking routes enter more remote areas.

### **Getting There**

The Byway can be reached through Jordan Valley, Oregon (80 miles southwest of Boise) or from Hwy 78 near Grand View, Idaho (70 miles southeast of Boise). The Byway is primarily a gravel road: 92 miles within Idaho and 12 miles within Oregon. A round-trip excursion on the Byway from Boise takes a full day. There are no services along the Byway. Services are available in Jordan Valley and Grand View.

### **Traveling the Byway**

The Byway is a graveled road that is mainly one and one-half lanes wide. It can be traveled by most passenger vehicles during the summertime. The road traverses relatively flat to gently rolling topography, but short grades of up to 12% are encountered in a few places. The Byway is usually impassable from late November through March due to snow. Precipitation can make the road treacherously slick, so use caution during inclement weather. Due to the fragile nature of the soils and vegetation, keep all vehicles on the roadway.

## **Be Prepared for the Desert**

Plan ahead to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. Be sure to take these supplies:

- Plenty of gasoline
- A properly inflated spare tire, lug wrench and jack
- Bottled water; don't drink from streams without treating the water.
- Extra food and clothing for inclement weather
- Camera, binoculars and field guides
- First Aid Kit
- Flashlight
- Surface Management Status Map (Triangle 1:100,000 scale, available from BLM, showing land ownership)

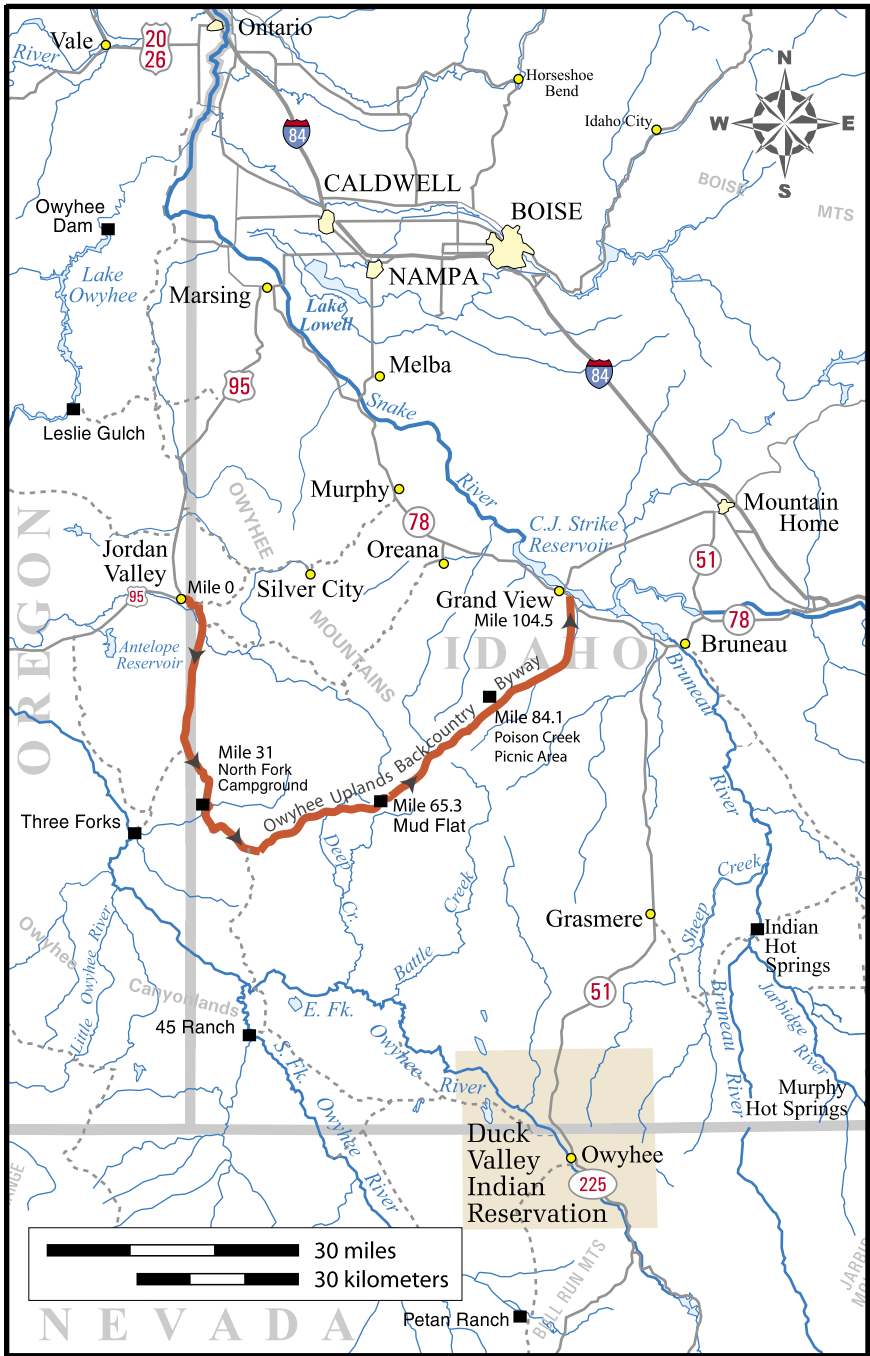
Please be aware that there are many parcels of private land along the Byway. Please respect private property by having the right maps and equipment to avoid trespassing.

There is no cell phone coverage along most of the route. Be sure someone knows of your travel plans.

## **Attractions**

This is high desert scenery at its finest. From Jordan Valley, you'll pass by irrigated hay meadows along Jordan Creek, and then climb into the mountains through stands of juniper and mahogany. You'll journey across broad, rim-rocked plateaus that are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrass, spotted with aspen, and dissected by the canyons of the Owyhee River. The horizons are framed by the Jarbidge, Bull Run, Santa Rosa, Steens and Owyhee Mountains.

You will pass through several different vegetation zones. Take time to get out of your car and experience the Owyhee Uplands—look at, touch, smell, and listen to this special area.



## Byway Mileages

**Mile 0 (Mile 104.5, beginning at Highway 78 south of Grand-view.)** - Begin in Jordan Valley by turning left (east) at the blinking light onto Yturri Blvd. Mileages begin at this intersection.

Travel east along Jordan Creek with its isolated ranches nestled between sagebrush-covered hills. South Mountain (7801') rises above the valley to the south.

Euro-American settlement of the area started with the discovery of gold on Jordan Creek in 1863. The creek and the town are named after Michael Jordan, leader of the original prospectors to the area, who died in a fight with Indians in 1864. Jordan Valley began as a supply depot for the Owyhee mines. Cattle ranches soon developed to supply meat to the miners.



Sandhill Cranes

**2.9 miles (Mile 101.6)** - Stay right on Pleasant Valley Road.

**7.5 miles (Mile 97.0)** - Stay right on Juniper Mountain Road.

**14.8 miles (Mile 89.7)** - The pavement ends; the next 74 miles is gravel road.

**15.2 miles (Mile 89.3)** - Notice the rock outcrops on the right side of the road. They are a volcanic rock called basalt. The Owyhee Uplands are largely composed of basalt and rhyolite rocks resulting from volcanic activity that began about 17 million years ago and ended about 2 million years ago.

**18.8 miles (Mile 85.7)** - Near the Idaho-Oregon state line, low sagebrush-covered hills extend from the west flank of South Mountain. Juniper woodlands periodically reach the road.

The sagebrush-steppe landscape is a dry habitat characterized by sagebrush, other shrubs and short bunchgrasses. This habitat has declined substantially in recent decades across the western United States, due primarily to development and increased wildfire. However, the Owyhee Uplands comprise one of the largest areas of unfragmented sagebrush habitat in the West. Sagebrush communities provide essential habitat for a number of important wildlife species including pronghorn antelope, pygmy rabbits, sage grouse and migratory songbirds.

**22.4 miles (Mile 82.1)** - Three Forks Junction. From this point you can take a side trip and overlook the confluence of the North Fork, Middle Fork and Main Owyhee Rivers. Be sure you have sufficient fuel and time to make this 25 mile/one hour round-trip addition to your journey. Turn right and travel 9.5 miles to a junction. Turn left and drive 2.7 miles to a cattle guard and the rim of the Owyhee Canyon. Park your vehicle before the cattle guard and walk to the rim.





Three Forks from the overlook

**25.6 miles (Mile 78.9)** - Private water impoundments like Dougal Reservoir provide habitat for a variety of waterfowl including Canada geese, tundra swans, western grebes, and many species of ducks. The area around here is a mix of public and private land, and there is no public motor vehicle access to the reservoir off of the Byway.

**31.1 miles (Mile 73.4)** - At the rim rock of the North Fork Owyhee River, old-growth stands of stunted gnarly juniper pepper a boulder rubble and rock outcrop landscape.

**31.1 to 31.9 miles (Mile 72.6-73.4)** - Dropping into the North Fork Owyhee River Canyon, the visitor can camp or picnic at the North Fork Recreation Site (31.9 miles). The kiosk provides a map of the Owyhee Canyonlands and information on the wildlife and history of the area.

Rivers flowing through the high desert provide more than water for wildlife. The narrow band of vegetation along rivers – called the riparian zone - helps reduce erosion and improve water quantity.



North Fork of the Owyhee River

The riparian zone also provides shade, which helps maintain cool water temperatures and increases a stream's ability to hold dissolved oxygen, which is vital for trout and other fish species.

Riparian areas with a mix of shrubs and bank-stabilizing sedges are critical for maintaining habitat for native fish, such as the redband trout. While these fish are uniquely adapted to harsh desert environments, they are most abundant in streams with well-developed riparian canopies. The redband trout is listed as a species of special concern by Idaho Fish and Game and as a sensitive species by the BLM.

**33.3 miles (Mile 71.2)** - Looking westward, a massive plateau is cut by the narrow, meandering gorges of the Owyhee River system. Nearly a million years ago, extraordinary high water levels caused ancient Lake Idaho to spill over and collapse its northern shoreline. The lake drained out through Hells Canyon in a cataclysmic flood event. As the water level dropped, the Owyhee, Bruneau, and Jarbridge Rivers, and their tributaries, began to erode upstream, or headward, carving deep canyons in the thick layers of rhyolite and basalt. About one fifth of the world population of native, California bighorn sheep live in and around these deep canyons. The plateau is framed by the Steens Mountains and Santa Rosa Mountains of Oregon and Nevada.

**38.3 to 51.9 miles (Mile 52.6-66.2)** - Along the roadside on rocky, fire-resistant sites are the twisted forms of old-growth juniper which have survived the elements and wildfire for over 500 years. Western juniper woodlands, specifically young junipers, are increasing in the sagebrush-grass openings. Good examples of this can be seen at 43.0 miles and 51.9 miles.

Without management measures, the juniper woodlands will continue to expand in the area and grow more dense, choking out the desirable variety of shrubs, grasses and other understory vegetation.



### Juniper Woodlands

This decrease in habitat diversity would reduce the quality and productivity of the area for both wildlife and livestock grazing. The BLM is attempting to use prescribed fire and thinning of juniper in some areas to maintain the openings of sagebrush and grass.

**42.6 miles (Mile 61.9)** - Junction with the rough four wheel drive road that crosses Juniper Mountain (6733').

**52.3 miles (Mile 52.2)** - Look down the drainage of Stoneman Creek to Current and Deep Creeks in the distance. A stand of aspens is off to your right.

In the arid West, aspen stands are second only to riparian areas in habitat importance. Aspen stands have a rich understory that provides abundant forage, and they provide important nesting habitat for a variety of birds.

Aspen is very fire dependent. Aspen stands regenerate primarily from the suckering that results from soil heating associated with fire. In the absence of fire, aspen stands grow old and decadent, and conifers expand and crowd them out.

**53.0 miles (Mile 51.5)** - Beaver were reintroduced to Stoneman Creek in 2000. They have thrived in this habitat and created a number of beaver dams. The dams have raised the water table leading to an increase in native vegetation and attracting songbirds and other wildlife.

Riparian habitats comprise less than 2 percent of the arid landscape, but 60 percent of Idaho's land birds are associated with them.

**54.3 miles (Mile 50.2)** - Current Creek. The sagebrush plateaus teeming with wildlife, streams filled with fish, and camas meadows, made the Owyhee Uplands an attractive land for ancestors of the Shoshone and Northern Paiute Indian tribes.

The region also offers evidence of the Euro-American exploration and settlement: homesteads, cabins, rock walls, cairns, historic cowboy and sheepherder camps, and Basque carvings on trees and rocks.

Cultural resources are fragile and irreplaceable. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 and the Antiquities Act of 1906 protect them for the benefit of all Americans. Do not destroy or remove your heritage. Please enjoy, but leave artifacts as you find them.



Beaver Dams at Stoneman Creek

**57.2 miles (Mile 47.3)** - From here, Deep Creek flows south for 32 miles to join the East Fork of the Owyhee River. The various forks of the Owyhee River and its tributaries form a vast complex of deep, sheer-walled canyons popular for remote and challenging Spring-time whitewater boating.

Approximately 157 miles of the Owyhee River and its major tributaries in Idaho have been found suitable by the BLM for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, but have not yet been designated by Congress.

**65.3 miles (Mile 39.2)** - Mud Flat Administrative Site was originally established as Camp Mud Flat, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. The camp was used in the summer months in 1940 and 1941.

The Mud Flat Camp consisted of a generator house, bathhouse, latrine, two infirmary tents, kitchen, mess hall, officers' quarters, technical service quarters, two educational tents, plus tent barracks. Very little of the original camp remains: concrete building pads, a ditch, a rock dam, numerous rock lined paths, and an existing frame garage.

The Mud Flat Administration Site is currently used to house BLM staff and researchers working on public land projects and research.

**66 to 78 miles (Mile 26.5-38.5)** - The Al Perry Bluebird Trail was started back in 1977 with 25 bluebird boxes installed along the Byway between Nickel Creek and Pleasant Valley. By 1991, 370 boxes provided nest sites for the Mountain Bluebird - Idaho's state bird. Look for the white boxes on posts along either side of the road, and for the rapid flight of the brilliant blue birds.

**70.1 to 75.6 miles (Mile 28.9-34.4)** - As you travel northeastward, the mountainous juniper woodlands eventually give way to a high, rolling plateau blanketed with sagebrush and bunchgrass interspersed with pockets of curlleaf mountain mahogany. The landscape has the appearance of a south-African savannah (without the giraffes). Vistas to the south are framed by the Jarbidge and Bull Run Mountains of northern Nevada.

Curlleaf mountain mahogany is an evergreen tree or shrub that rarely exceeds 25 feet in height. It is not related to the true tropical mahoganies and has wood that is extremely hard and heavy. Both the trunks and branches are twisted and gnarled. Curlleaf mountain mahogany typically grows in rocky mountainous areas in shallow soils. It is one of the most valuable browse plants for deer and elk in southern Idaho and provides one of the best sources of protein for wintering big game animals.

**78.1 miles (Mile 26.4)** - Battle Creek is named for a fight between Bannock Indians and Euro-Americans that occurred near the creek in July 1864. Among those killed was Michael Jordan for whom Jordan Valley, Oregon, and Jordan Creek are named.

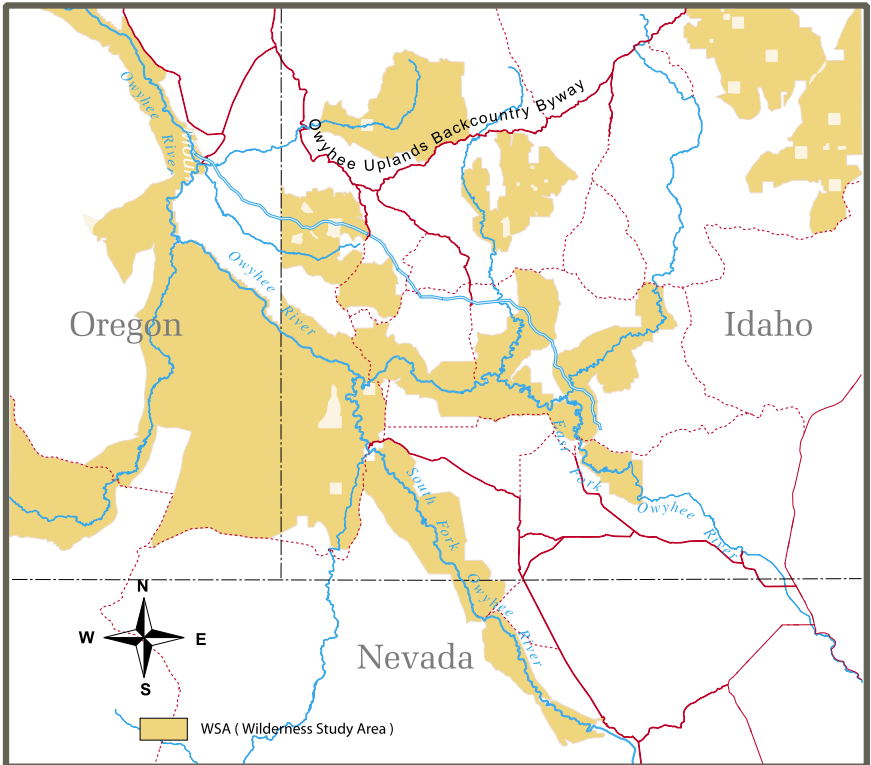
The southwest corner of Idaho is a remote area of high desert plateaus and steep, rugged canyons known as the Owyhee Canyonlands. Within this sparsely inhabited area, roughly 500,000 acres are Wilderness Study Areas (WSA). Several WSAs border the Byway.

WSAs are BLM-managed public land that have been evaluated and found to have value as wilderness. Such lands are protected to retain those values until Congress either designates the land as wilderness or releases them for other purposes. Activities including livestock grazing, hiking, hunting, boating, and fishing are allowed in WSAs and in designated wilderness areas. Off-highway motor vehicle travel is prohibited. The locations of some of the nearby





Curleaf Mountain Mahogany



BLM Wilderness Study Areas

WSA complexes are shown on maps at the Juniper Mountain intersection (mile 42.6) and at the Poison Creek Recreation Site (mile 84.1).

**78.5 miles (Mile 26.0) -**

Leaving the Owyhee River drainage behind, cross a saddle at 6133' and descend through the steep Poison Creek drainage. The water course is lined by willows, aspens and cottonwoods.

**84.1 miles (Mile 20.4) -**

Poison Creek Picnic Area

**86.0 miles (Mile 18.5) -**

Southeast of this location, approximately 8 to 10 miles, are the Big and Little Jacks Creek Canyons, one of several locations in this region where California bighorn sheep live.

**87.2 miles (Mile 17.3) -**

Cross an expansive salt desert shrub landscape. Salt desert shrub habitat occurs in areas that have very low precipitation (less than 10"). The soils are commonly sandy or saline.



Poison Creek Picnic Area

Dominant shrubs include shadscale, budsage, fourwing saltbush, spiny hopsage, Wyoming big sagebrush, and greasewood.

The salt desert shrub habitat is generally more open than sagebrush dominated habitats, with larger spaces between shrubs and bunchgrasses. It provides habitat for several special status migratory songbirds such as the loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, and black-throated sparrow.



Salt Desert Shrub

**88.7 miles (Mile 15.8)** - Stay right to reach Hwy 78.

Cryptogamic soils can be found under the salt desert shrubs in this area. Cryptogamic soils are composed of living organisms that are intertwined 1-4 mm above the soil surface. They are an association of cyanobacteria (previously called blue-green algae), green algae, soil lichens, mosses, and microfungi. Cryptogamic soils improve soil stability, productivity, and moisture retention. They moderate surface temperature extremes and enhance seedling establishment. They are critical to the health of the desert. Some disturbance is normal and helps these soils to capture moisture.



Limestone remnants of Lake Idaho

**94.2 miles (Mile 10.3)** - The limestone hills off to your left are deposits from ancient Lake Idaho, a Lake Ontario-sized series of lakes that stretched from present-day Twin Falls, Idaho, to Baker, Oregon, and filled the valley from the Boise Front to the Owyhee foothills with thick layers of ash, clay, silt, sand, limestone and gravel. Fossilized plants, fish, clams, snails, and mammal bones are common in these old lake sediments.

**95.6 miles (Mile 8.9)** - Turmes Ranch. The Turmes family settled here in 1880. They planted an orchard, had a large garden, and raised hay and grain. They also operated a “way station” for travelers for many years. The old stone buildings are still standing.

**95.8 miles (Mile 8.7)** - The small cemetery up on the hill across the road from the ranch is the resting place of members of the Turmes family and several others.



**104.5 miles (Mile 0)** - The Byway ends at Hwy 78. Turn left onto Hwy 78 and travel west approximately 2 miles to Grandview. Turn right onto Hwy 67 and travel approximately 25 miles to Mountain Home. Follow the signs to I-84 and return to Boise approximately 45 miles.





Turmes Ranch



Turmes Family Cemetery

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Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority –[www.cbfga.org](http://www.cbfga.org)  
No. 13 Western Juniper and Mountain Mahogany Woodlands  
No. 16 Shrub-steppe  
No. 18 Desert Playa and Salt Scrub Shrublands  
An Introduction to Biological Soil Crusts -[www.soilcrust.org](http://www.soilcrust.org)

Welcome to Jordan Valley – brochure from City of Jordan Valley, Oregon  
Camp Mud Flat, Division of Grazing Summer Camp, Civilian Conservation Corps  
Owyhee County website –[www.owyheecounty.net/profile/index.htm](http://www.owyheecounty.net/profile/index.htm)

For information on the history of Owyhee County, contact the Owyhee County Historical Museum at PO Box 67, Murphy, ID 83650 and (208) 495-2319.

