

Owyhee: Granddaddy of the Big Dams

Editor's Note: This story on the building of Owyhee Dam was taken from the quarterly publication of Cornell, Howland, Hayes and Merryfield, Engineers and Planners. They have offices in Corvallis, Portland, Seattle and Boise, and are one of the largest engineering firms in the Northwest. This story has received wide circulation through their publication, and perhaps there are many of our readers who aren't familiar with the whole story of the dam. Pictures and data are courtesy of the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, Design and Construction Division, Region 1.

Owyhee Dam, when it was completed in 1932, was the highest masonry structure ever built. It required 536,471 cubic yards of concrete for its construction, 12,186 of which were in the spillway.

Located in the central part of eastern Oregon near the Idaho border, it was constructed by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation between 1928 and 1932, serving both as a storage and diversion dam.

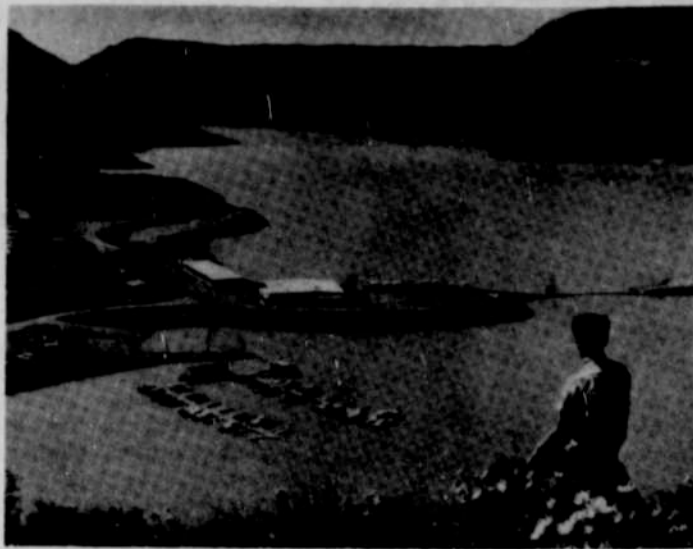
The project derives its name from Owyhee River, which with its contiguous drainage area of volcanic origin, was named "Hawaii" by a group of Hawaiian trappers of the Hudson Bay Company early in the 19th century. Succeeding scouts, Indians and pioneers developed this into the word "Owyhee," and ultimately it was spelled phonetically.

The project first came under consideration at the turn of this century. The rich lands, favorable climate and transportation potential for successful settlement were recognized early. The territory, crossed by the Oregon Trail near old Fort Boise, now Parma, Idaho, had become very productive.

Alfalfa and fruit were being raised and livestock thrived as numerous irrigation projects were constructed to the east of Owyhee River. The need for a firm water supply became more and more urgent.

The magnitude of the project, combined with the inaccessibility of potential dam sites, delayed its development and kept the land in open range long after feasibility was established.

By the time construction began in 1928, engineering technology had advanced sufficiently to handle the problems inherent in large dam construction. However, a



Reservoir created by Owyhee Dam is approximately 52 miles in length. Lake Owyhee is a popular recreation area, attracting waterfowl hunters in winter, and swimmers, boaters, water skiers and fishermen in the summer. Water from the reservoir is supplied to 118,249 acres in eastern Oregon and western Idaho.

fault plane existed and required excavation to a nominal width of about 20 feet, 113 feet deep and 265 feet in length. Concrete backfill totalled 35,623 cubic yards.

A standard-gauge railroad was constructed from the Dunaway siding of the Oregon Short Line Railroad, southwest of Nyssa, Oregon, to the dam, a distance of 24 miles, for the purpose of hauling construction materials and equipment. Roadways had to be improved to provide access for trucks and workers' cars.

The mass of concrete for the dam, containing maximum 8-inch-size aggregates, was delivered to individual blocks by cableway, in 8-cubic-yard bottom dump buckets. A "jockey" rode the bucket, directing its travel from the mix plant to the point of delivery, then released a portion of the mix where designated by the foreman.

Instantaneous discharge of the whole load resulted in the empty bucket scooting skyward like a spitwad in a rubber band, as tension of the main cable, or gut, was released. Bucket jockeys needed no reminders to fasten their seat belts.

Owyhee Dam is a concrete arch-gravity type of structure, of 417 feet structural height and of 325 feet hydraulic height. A 60-foot-diameter steel ring gate on the crest of the spillway controls spillway discharges. The spillway is of the morning-glory type, located on the right abutment, with a vertical spillway shaft connecting to a tunnel that was used for diversion of the river during construction. Before overtopping the dam (elevation 2,675 feet) approximately 40,000 second-feet of water could be passed through the spillway.

Sluice outlets at an elevation of 2,370 feet consist of three 5-foot-diameter metal conduits. Control of flow is accomplished by two 4 x 5-foot high pressure slide gates installed in the dam near the upstream end of each. The upstream gate in each instance is for emergency control.

River outlets consist of three parallel conduits 4' 9" in diameter controlled by 4-foot-square high-pressure slide gates and 48-inch balanced needle valves, the latter located in a valve house on the downstream face of the dam.

Operation and inspection galleries are provided at upstream and downstream locations in Owyhee Dam at an elevation of 2,377 feet. These galleries are connected by four transverse galleries which open at portals on the downstream face.

Two vertical inspection shafts begin at the respective lower transverse galleries, intersect similar galleries at the 2,500-foot level and terminate at hatches in the crest roadway. Structural behavior equipment is monitored from these passageways.

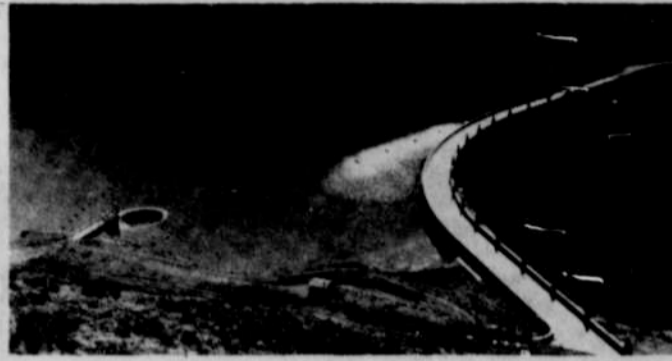
The reservoir created by Owyhee Dam is approximately 52 miles in length, with an area of 13,000 acres at normal water surface elevation of 2,670 feet. Total storage is 1,120,000 acre-feet, 715,000 of which is usable. Water from the reservoir is supplied to 118,249 acres in eastern Oregon and western Idaho.

Owyhee Dam served in a measure as a proving ground for theories being developed for use in design and construction of Hoover Dam. Frank A. Banks, its construction engineer, went on to become the builder of the mighty Grand Coulee Dam.

Today Owyhee Reservoir has become one of the area's great recreation facilities. Rugged mountains bounding the pool provide breath-taking scenery. Boating is excellent and spiny ray fish are abundant. A restaurant, motel, and boat launching facilities occupy a point on the east bank about four miles from the dam.

Crops on project lands have been extended to include large acreages of sugar beets, potatoes and corn. Farming thrives in the area. Dairies, creameries, meat packing plants, sugar refineries, canneries, and plants for processing, packaging and freezing farm products dot the landscape in all directions.

Growth in the area long ago exceeded the greatest dreams of the early day planners.



Sixty-foot diameter steel ring gate on the crest of the spillway, controls spillway discharges which, under 12-foot depth, are 30,000 c.f.s.

BUENA VISTA NEWS

***** BY HELEN HOFFMAN - PHONE 372-2806 *****

BUENA VISTA-Mr. and Mrs. Gene Stephen attended a card party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ray Strickland Feb. 21. Mr. and Mrs. Gene Stephen were recent visitors in the homes of their nieces, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Mosso and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Dan Crosswhite and family, all of Payette.

Mrs. Guy Tanner and Mrs. Alzina Salters went to Caldwell on business Feb. 18. Mr. and Mrs. Ed Brandt were dinner guests in the home of Mrs. Mae Bretz Feb. 22.

Mrs. Mae Bretz and Mrs. Ed Brandt went to Ontario on business Feb. 21. Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Ekanger accompanied their son, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Ekanger and son, Randy of Caldwell, to Othello, Wash., where Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Ekanger visited another son, Alvin Ekanger.

The Bernard Ekangers went on to Moscow where Randy participated in the Idaho State Wrestling Tournament. Randy received a trophy for his weight class. They returned home Feb. 22.

Mr. Woodrow Seuell was among the group that attended a bowling tournament at Van Couver, Wash., over the weekend.

Mrs. Nelva Dinger of Ontario visited Feb. 23 at the Woodrow Seuell home.

Miss Melinda Messer was a weekend guest of Patty Seuell at the Woodrow Seuell home.

Mr. and Mrs. Earl Ingersoll of Livingston, Mont., were recent guests of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Adams. The Ingersolls are old friends of the Adams.

Mr. and Mrs. James Stephen attended the Pamona Grange at Oregon Trail Hall Feb. 21. Mr. and Mrs. James Stephen visited Mr. George Coleman at the Mercy Hospital in Nampa Feb. 22.

Mrs. Dwight Seward left by bus Feb. 14 for Bend, Ore., where she visited Mr. and Mrs. Robert Jackson and helped care for a new grandson, Brent LeRoy who was born Feb. 10. He joins a sister, Marcy, and weighed seven pounds and four ounces at birth. Dwight Seward and Shirley and Gary went to Bend Feb. 21 and brought Mrs. Seward home the 22.

Mr. and Mrs. Dale Morgan and family and Mrs. Helen Wilson and Don drove around the loop from here to McCall and back through Meadows having good roads.

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Mr. and Mrs. Carl McDroe visited Feb. 23 at the Glenn Hoffman home.

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