Once part of the historic Union Pacific Railroad line where Idaho’s transportation silver and lead ore and gold during the mining era of the 1880s, the Wood River Trail is now a paved 30-mile multi-use trail, providing non-motorized transportation, fitness and fun to cyclists, walkers, joggers, and equestrians.

The “ Rails to Trails” conversion became a reality when a new law for the abandoned railright-of-way was enacted in 1970. The first mile of the Wood River Trail was paved in 1984 and, with the passing of a bond in 1988, and with great support and additional donations, the Wood River Trail was completed in 1992.

Interpretive signs along the way keep the history alive for those on the trail. Signs already installed are listed here. Others are available for sponsorship.

A SELF-GUIDED HISTORICAL TOUR

1. RECREATION TRAILBLAZERS - Interpretive Sign — A tribute to the team that homesteaded Boise County Recreation District in 1915, and then created the “Rails to Trails” path to connect the Wood River Valley’s communities.

2. BALD MOUNTAIN - Interpretive Sign - Tells how the Bald Mountain became a world-class ski resort.

3. KETCHUM DEPOT - Interpretive Sign - The territory of the Union Pacific Railroad is marked by a small railroad stop.

4. THE PHILADELPHIA SMELTER - Near the confluence of Warm Springs Creek and the Big Wood River stands the Philadelphia Smelter. Built on 40 acres of land in 1881, the smelter was a processing plant for silver and consisted of four furnace, smelter line, chetwood line, chetwood house and administrative buildings.

5. FROM RAILS TO TRAILS - Interpretive Sign – This timber bridge, which crosses the Big Wood River at one time was the original bridge in Idaho. Built in 1882, it was the first link of the Wood River Branch of the Oregon Short Line Railroad, and saw its last freight train in 1959. In 1988, the bridge was rebuilt as part of the rails-to-trails conversion for recreational use.

6. SHEEP TRAILING - An homage to the history of sheep trails and its mark on the valley. In the 1950s, Ketchum enjoyed more sheep than anywhere in Idaho. This drove the economy, and allowed the local community to thrive.

7. TRIUMPH TRAM LINE - In 1906, a tram line was constructed from the Triumph Mine complex in East Fork Canyon. The line ran west through Bonner, and across Highway 75 to a lower terminal south of the Ketchum Depot. During the 1980s, the tram line was dismantled and hauled to Salt Lake City.

8. COLD SPRINGS BRIDGE - Interpretive Sign – The 309-foot former railroad bridge south of Ketchum is one of the countryside’s remaining engineering legacies developed and patented by George Pomeroy. These are only two of the 2,781 bridges in the United States, seven of which are located in Idaho. The 217-foot Girdet Bridge can also be seen from the Anderson Bridge.

9. IDAHO BASQUES - Interpretive Sign - The largest population of Basques outside their native Pyrenees in Spain is located in Idaho and, in the early 1900s, they herded sheep along the stock trails.

10. COLD SPRINGS RANCH - Interpretive Sign – Near the end of the mining era, the first band of sheep from the Snake River Basin were trailed along this route through the Wood River Valley over Galena Summit to summer pastures in the Sawtooth Valley and Stanley Basin. Herders passed through here on what was once the Cold Springs Ranch. Portions of the well-worn trail, still used today, can be seen on the hillside to the west.

11. CENTURY OF STRUGGLE & FISHING REGULATIONS - Interpretive Sign - Located at Boxcar Bend, home for Union Pacific boxcars which were lowered into the river in 1955 and filled with large boulders for the construction of a access point.

12. EAST FORK MINES - Interpretive Sign - Of the three mines operating out East Fork Canyon between 1896 and 1912, the Triumph Mine was the primary producer, bringing in more than $30 million. South of East Fork Road was the Beaconite of Galena, which by 1882 shipped out 60,000 tons, a new office and a saloon.

13. DEER CREEK MINES - A small railroad shop stop had its last run in 1955. This served as a drop-off point for the galena ore which came from mines directly across the valley to the west. A foundry was built here where galena, not mining, was processed and loaded onto rail cars.

14. HAILEY DEPOT - Interpretive Sign - At the turn of the century, Hailey functioned as an important trade center for the mining and livestock industries. Between Coy and Walnut Streets, a depot stood along the tracks that connected Branson to Ketchum. (Designed by the Community School students)

15. ARBORETUM - Interpretive Sign - A guide to native trees and shrubs, this site was established in 2003. 

16. BELLEVUE MINES - A small population of Basques outside their native Pyrenees in Spain is located in Idaho and, in the early 1900s, they herded sheep along the stock trails.

17. BELLEVUE DEPOT - Once a lively camp of tents, wagons and willow shanties, this hamlet grew into one of Idaho’s only chiseled cities in 1893 while under territorial government. The Bellevue Depot was located where Second Street becomes a gravel road at the south end of Bellevue.

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