



Stagecoach

watercolor and ink over graphite underdrawing on paper, 1920, courtesy Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

STAGE COACH LINE

In 1879, the first stage coach line crossed the Basin from Fort Benton through Stanford, Utica, Judith Gap to Martinsdale.

The stage coach was a grand improvement on its predecessors the pack train and the covered wagon, and yet the traveler never knew what mishaps the day's journey might bring. The stage coaches were known as "Concords" because they were built in Concord, New Hampshire. Openings for the door were cut several inches above the floor so the coach could be floated across streams if necessary. The body of the coach was swung on stout leather straps and this method of suspension gave the vehicle a peculiar swaying motion. The stage coaches were enclosed in winter. In the summer the trip behind the swift horses was a delightful one.

*"In 1887 the Billings and Great Falls line operated through the basin (Judith). We left Great Falls at seven o'clock in the morning halting at Belt for dinner and at Stanford for supper, and landing at Lewistown the next morning. On such a trip the four horses were kept on a steady trot, and a change of horses would be made every 15 or 18 miles."**

* (Perley M. Silloway, "Silloways History of Central Montana," 1936, p. 11.)

Two stages a day came from Great Falls to Lewistown crossing the river in Philbrook. All freight from Fort Benton to the Musselshell country crossed the river here, too.

C. M. Goodell owned and operated the stage line. Goodell's ranch, now known as Woodlawn Farm, was the home to 500 horses and mules, 300 head of cattle and two bands of sheep. The stage coach lost its premier role when the Great Northern Railroad came through the basin at Hobson.