

# Early Irrigation



## Eckert Diversion Dam and Ridenbaugh Canal

This is the Eckert Diversion Dam, not Barber Dam. It diverts water into the Ridenbaugh Canal, now owned and operated by the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District (NMID).

William B. Morris began work on the canal in 1877 and completed seven miles before his death in 1878. His wife and nephew, William H. Ridenbaugh, hoped to extend the canal but couldn't find funding. The canal and water rights were bought and sold several times, with each new investor extending the canal and adding more lateral ditches. By 1891, the system contained 100 miles of main canals with 153 miles of lateral ditches, and a chain of ten lakes and water storage reservoirs, completely covering the bench and the area south of Boise. In 1903 the canal was extended 53 miles in length, with 271 miles of lateral canals. The system had in

force 23 large gates, 109 checkgates, 296 lateral taps, 280 weirs, 33 culverts, two flumes, each 500 feet long, and a number of smaller flumes. Altogether, around one-half million board feet of lumber went into the construction of the canals.

NMID was founded in 1904 and now supplies irrigation water to some 69,000 acres of farms, lawns, and gardens in Canyon and Ada Counties. The water is used to irrigate Borah High School and many other properties in Boise; it travels under Boise Towne Square Mall and continues to deliver water until it reaches Lake Lowell.



*Cementing Ridenbaugh Canal, ca. 1930. Photos: [www.waterarchives.org](http://www.waterarchives.org)*

All of the early canals were constructed entirely of dirt. The photos above show the first stretch of the Ridenbaugh Canal being lined with concrete in the summer of 1910. The work was done to repair a leak, but it also prevented further seepage, saved water, and paved the way for Idaho's larger irrigation canals to be lined with concrete.

