

### III.A. AUTO CAMPING IN JOSEPHINE COUNTY, OREGON: 1900 - 1909

Indian traces and water courses set the paths of trails in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were trails and farm-to-market dirt roads, most impassable during the winter months and disjointed roads from county to county were the norm.

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The number of cars in the Pacific Northwest increased after 1905 and many owners outfitted their vehicles with camping equipment.

But back in the old days, pre Pacific Highway, you had to drive to the mountains on narrow dirt and rutted roads. Destinations were remote and had been near inaccessible. The major road in Josephine County followed the path established by the Applegate Trail emigrants in the 1840s - 1850s and the stage companies in the 1860s. Even though these areas could now be reached by automobile, getting there was by no means an easy task. Early motorists had to deal with lack of supplies, food, water, and gas.

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stranded. They had to resort to a nearby farmer or an enterprising Hugo or Sunny Valley businessman (and his 19th-century equipment) to haul them out.

The challenge and majesty of spectacular scenery in remote areas of the world lure today's adventurous travelers to scale tall peaks, cruise wild rivers and mingle with game in wild areas. But a 100 years ago, Southwestern Oregon's mountains and streams, especially the Rogue River, were the

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unexplored frontier that attracted rare auto tourists to explore its scenic beauty and the thrill of landing a Chinook salmon. The motoring public increased significantly after a large amount of the road work was completed on the Pacific Highway in 1913. After which many visitors were introduced to the great kings of the river weighing from 10 to 60 pounds apiece.

Visitors were lured to Oregon by the scenic attractions - and a sense of adventure since they were the first to travel through these unfamiliar areas. They had common interests in road conditions, scenic attractions such as the wild flowers, fishing success, and available accommodations.

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Macadam roads. Macadam roads are made of compacting into a solid mass a layer of small, broken stone on a convex and well drained roadbed using fine stone dust and water as cement.

**1902** As bad as the roads are there is lots of freight being hauled to Greenback and vicinity according to the Leland correspondent. All placer mines are running full blast. The larger mines use plenty of powder to tear down the heavy banks. One can hear the blast continually. (From Out of the Past, *The Daily Courier*, Jerry Acklen)

**Fast-driving, Snorting, Gas Buggies**

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**1907** *“Arriving in Grants Pass, July 3, 1901, he (Dr. Walker Sr.) rented a temporary office on the second floor of the old City Hall building on Sixth Street. ... Six years after arriving in Grants Pass, he was counted among the envied few who had purchased new automobiles. He bought a “Winton” from agent Dennis Stovall.* (Percy T. Booth. 1984. *Grants Pass The Golden Years 1884 - 1984*. Grants Pass Centennial Commission. Grants Pass, Oregon).

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The "Honk, Honk" of six big automobiles as they scurried through the streets all day and even far into the night, gave Grants Pass a very citified appearance Tuesday. The occasion was a "Free Trip Around the World" gotten up by the enterprising W. B. Sherman Realty Company, and at four different places receptions were extended the guests (October 18, 1907).

**1909. Mrs. Caroline Sexton, of Hugo, is the guest of Sheriff Russell's family this week. Mrs. Sexton is one of the oldest "Indian fighters" in Josephine county, she being 81 years old, and in the early days had her home burned three different times by the redskins.**

Wednesday, Mrs. Sarah York, mother-in-law of Sheriff Russell, and Mrs. Sexton took their first automobile ride, Cap. Verdin taking the two old ladies for a long ride in the country (*Rogue River Courier*, Personal & Local, July 2, 1909).

By the late 1910s there was a change in how the remote mountains of Oregon were perceived. Instead of being viewed as obstructions that stood in the way of their ultimate destinations, say to a fishing stream, travelers now saw isolated mountain areas as escapes from their urban surroundings. Nature, therefore, became a diversion from everyday life that provided an uplifting experience.

By the late 1920s visitors took the opportunity to learn about the animal and plant life found in the mountains as well as topics such as geology, paleontology and ecology. These motorists grew to appreciate the mountains for their unique beauty and abundance of wildlife.