

BATTLE ROCK
an
HISTORICAL STATE PARK

Within a City

Battle Rock State Park consists of thirteen parcels of land made up of certain lots in Blocks 28, 29 and AA in the platted townsite of Port Orford, Curry County, Oregon. It does not include Battle Rock itself.

Lots 3 and 4, located in Lot 2, in Block 29, were a gift to the State Of Oregon, from Thomas D. and Ellinor C. Davidson, brother and sister, in memory of their father, by deed dated September 11, 1930. Also, all of Lots 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, Block AA, were a gift to the State from L. L. Knapp, by deed dated March 16, 1940. The other lots were purchased.

The principal part of this small park fronts the Oregon Coast Highway at Mile Post 319.56, which is also the Main Street of Port Orford. The area slopes gently toward the beach, its outer edge some twenty five or thirty feet above tide, facing Battle Rock itself, which is a small, steep sided rock islet, accessible from the shore end, except at high tide. Beyond is the open, Port Orford roadstead, with Humbug Mountain in the near distance.

The park area is adjacent to the business section of the town, has sanitary facilities, a drinking fountain, parking space and facing the splendid sea view of the open roadstead there are resting benches. This small park is now a distinguishing feature of this small city and will be of far greater significance and of much more interest in the future.

HISTORY:

This small park, Port Orford and their surroundings, are rich

in the historic lore of Oregon's early coast settlement, and also figured in the earliest explorations of the northwest coast. The original discovery of nearby Cape Blanco is credited to Martin de Aguilar who named it on January 19, 1603, who, second in command to Sebastian Vizcaino, sailed from Monterey with two vessels on January 3, 1603, on the last of the very early voyages of discovery by Spanish navigators along the North Pacific shores, when de Aguilar and most of his crew died on the return voyage to Acapulco. Captain George Vancouver sighted and determined the latitude of Cape Blanco on April 24, 1792, naming it Cape Orford. It is the most westerly point in Oregon.

The roadstead was charted in 1850 by William P. McArthur, grandfather of Lewis A. McArthur, who has done so much for the history and place names of Oregon. William P. McArthur was at that time commander of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey vessel Ewing and called it Ewing Harbor. However, the name Port Orford persisted and is the one now commonly used. See Lewis A. McArthur's Oregon Geographical Names, Page 52.

Captain William Fitcher one of the earliest steamship navigators plying the California-Oregon coast line, and also the second licensed Columbia River bar pilot, entered the roadstead with the Sea Gull early in 1851. Impressed with the possibilities for a harbor, which was bordered by a fine appearing forest, he conceived the idea of establishing a settlement there. On reaching Portland a party of nine men were engaged to go on the return trip of the Sea Gull and they were left there on June 9, 1851, with Captain J. M. Kirkpatrick, the only one with any frontier experience, in charge.

When the steamer left this small party established their camp on what is now Battle Rock. They placed a small ship's signal cannon in a

strategic position commanding the only approach to their citadel and awaited the attack of the Indians, which took place the next day. The havoc wrought by the cannon, fired when the Indians were within a few feet of its muzzle, and the subsequent small arms fire, repulsed the surprised horde of attackers and they quickly retired. The party resisted two other assaults later on. The vessel failing to return as scheduled, and realizing that with their scant supply of arms and munitions they could not successfully resist a night attack, they managed to escape from the rock, eluded their pursuers and other hostiles on the Coquille River, where a friendly Indian led them to the coast again and after eight days of constant danger, fatigue and hunger they reached the settlement at the mouth of the Umpqua River on July 2, where they were cared for. Here the steamer Columbia had reported that they had called at Battle Rock and finding the body of a white man on the beach, and the camp demolished, concluded the entire party had been killed. After a day of rest the party was taken to Scottsburg where they disbanded. The details of this story is one of the most thrilling sagas of encounters with hostile Indians that ever took place along the Oregon coast.

On July 14, 1851, Captain Tichenor arrived on the Sea Gull with a party of sixty seven well armed men and adequate supplies. On July 15 the party was put ashore and Captain Tichenor selected Fort Point as a suitable location for a building site, leaving James S. Gamble in charge of the party and work. Two block houses were erected preliminary to any other work, but there were no further troubles with the natives.

On May 9, 1852, Captain Tichenor brot his wife and three children to the new settlement. In 1868 he left the sea and settled down at his Port Orford home. In 1880 he platted and officially named the town Port Orford.

In 1854-55 Port Orford was the center of a considerable gold mining activity. The town boasted of several hundred inhabitants, there were several stores, and at one time nine hotels. By the end of 1856 the cream of the placer mines had been skimmed and the town declined. In 1868 a widespread forest fire destroyed most of the buildings in the town, and much of the valuable Port Orford cedar that was then abundant in the surrounding area.

The foregoing historical information relative to the early history of Port Orford and Battle Rock is from the "Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties" published under the auspices of the Pioneer and Historical Association of Coos County, Orvil Dodge historian.

Altho Battle Rock State Park is of unpretentious area, and devoid of striking scenic qualities, it is of more than ordinary historical significance in commemorating the related thrilling incidents of the trying, early pioneering days of this section of the Oregon Country, when it was peopled by some of the most savage and relentless natives of the entire state. The actual park site is reminiscent of early mining days when this now somnolent town possessed all the attributes that pertained in the roistering days of the boom mining towns of the 1850's, when raw gold was plentiful and there were high hopes of it being a new and enduring eldorado, but like all placer mining camps it was all too soon worked out.

The present Knapp hotel, adjacent to the park, is a comparatively modern building which represents a business which began about 1860, and has been owned and operated by members of the Knapp family ever since. A long time for one family to retain the ownership of a hotel property thru the many years of changes in this locality.

Regardless of the future of the town of Port Orford itself, this small park, even tho it does not include the actual site of the historic incidents that gave the park its name, does, and always will have a standing with the traveling public. The very name arouses an interest, which is stimulated by reading the historic marker, relating to the incidents that brot Battle Rock into prominence in the days of the first attempt to establish a settlement in this part of Oregon.

It is of interest to note here, that thru a special invitation from Gilbert E. Gable, the first mayor of the City of Port Orford, Lord Walpole of England arrived there on December 2, 1935, as an honored guest of the newly incorporated city.

Lord Walp ole, the ninth Earl of Orford, is a direct descendant of Sir Robert Walpole, the first Earl of Orford, in whose honor Captain George Vancouver named Cape Orford, now known as Cape Blanco, on April 24, 1792, only seventeen days before Captain Gray entered the Columbia River. Cape Blanco is the name reputedly given to this cape by Martin de Aguilar, a Spanish navigator on January 19, 1603. Vancouver's name, Cape Orford, fell into disuse in favor of the earlier title. The name Orford was used and perpetuated by Captain William Tichenor, who named his settlement Port Orford and the name was also given to the roadstead where the city and Battle Rock now stand.


W. A. Langille
State Park Historian

May 1, 1944

BATTLE ROCK STATE PARK

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The park at present has a large round wood marker, a monument with a bronze plaque imbedded therein. This should be replaced with a stone monument. The wood parking bumper rail should be replaced with spaced boulders. The South parking area should be oiled. A line change will effect the area and park adjustments will have to coordinate with this change.



S. H. Boardman
State Parks Superintendent