

CAPE ARAGO STATE PARK  
A  
RENAMED  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  
DISCOVERY

The Cape Arago State Park is situated on the Cape Arago promontory, some fifteen miles south of North Bend. It is described as being in Lots 1 and 2, Section 19, and the  $N\frac{1}{2} NW\frac{1}{4}$ , Section 20, Township 26 South, Range 14 West, Willamette meridian, in Coos County, Oregon, containing 134 acres, a gift to the State from Lola G. and Louis J. Simpson the deed date June 1, 1932. The tract adjoins Shore Acres State Park both being portions of the former Simpson estate.

In J. S. Diller's comprehensive description of the Coos Bay Quadrangle, published by the United States Geological Survey some years ago, he says: "The Cape Arago uplift is a region of elevated terraces, or elevated beaches. They are well displayed about the mouth of Coos Bay and the hill of Seven Devils, especially upon its seaward slope. The first terrace about 60 feet above the present sea level, is well displayed between Yokam Point and Cape Arago. The slope of the hill north of Cape Arago is like a giant staircase. The sea cliff, at the foot of which the present beach now lies, is at that point about 60 feet in height, and is capped by a terrace at least 200 yards in width. At its eastern limit runs a steep slope, an ancient sea cliff, which is capped by a second terrace, and so upward by a succession of steps and terraces of ancient beaches extend to the top of the hill. Above 800 feet the beaches are less distinct, altho they may be detected about the summits of the highest peaks near the sea.

"An old trail to the Randolph mines at the mouth of Whiskey Run (seven miles south of Cape Arago) followed the coast from the mouth of Coos Bay. Travel was easy on the first broad terrace of the elevated beaches,

but below that point for 2 miles the coast is cut by numerous deep ravines on a steep slope, and the sea dashes against the high cliffs. The name of this rugged feature, the Seven Devils, arose from the difficulties it imposed upon the early traveler.

"The geological maps of this folio exhibit the distribution of eleven formations of which nine are sedimentary and two igneous. ...

"Chert - The chert of this quadrangle, which is doubtfully assigned to the Cretaceous period, is compact, hard and highly siliceous. It closely resembles some forms of flint and jasper ... The rocks of the Eocene period in this region have been called the Arago formation, but in this quadrangle they are grouped into two formations: the Pulaski and Coaledo. These formations occupy almost the whole of the Coos Bay region. They are composed generally of sandstone and shales which are especially well exposed near the mouth of Coos Bay and at Cape Arago, where they contain Cordita planicosta and numerous other characteristic fossils. Along the coast for two miles east of Coos Bay Lighthouse the Coaledo beds dip eastward at an angle of about 70 degrees . . .".

Quoting from "Bulletin No. 14-C Vol. 1. Coos, Curry and Douglas Counties", issued in 1940 by the "Department of Geology and Mineral Industries" in the Coos County chapter, under the caption Geology we read: "The geology of a large part of Coos County has been mapped by Diller ( '01-'03 ). The younger deposits are marine sands and alluvium in the valleys, with some stream terraces. The marine sands cover about 60 square miles, extending north ... from the south county line for about 22 miles, with widths varying from one to four miles. Then sands are exposed at elevations varying from sea level up to 1500 feet as a result of an uplift of the coastal land area. ..

"Next in age to these beach deposits is the Empire formation of the Miocene age, consisting of sandstones and shales. ....

"The generally mountainous Oregon coast is bordered in places by coastal plains that range from a quarter of a mile to 4 miles or more in width and are mostly less than 100 feet high. One consists of lowlands... the other is a group of slightly elevated marine terraces.

"In addition to these terraces a remarkable series of marine benches, the result of a Pleistocene submergence described by Diller, appears at intervals between sea level and an altitude of 1500 feet...".\*

The Cape Arago park, off the main routes of travel, is reached from either North Bend or Coos Bay (City), over State Highway 240, thru Empire and Charleston thence on to the Shore Acres and Cape Arago parks, the latter named after the bold promontory it occupies, which was charted and named as Cape Gregory in 1778. The crest of the park road is approximately five hundred feet above the sea, about the same elevation as the picturesquely steep, sea worn cliffs of the extremely rugged and deeply gulched, Seven Devils uplift, which faces the ocean just south of the park area.

On the crest of the promontory the park road divides. To the left it circuitously ascends a short distance to the caretakers cottage. To the right it descends to the attractive, grassed picnic grounds on the low, shoreland extremity of the cape near the sea edge of a quite wide, long since ocean made terrace resting about sixty feet above the turbulent sea. From year to year this terrace is gradually being undermined by winter storms, without any great change in its overall appearance, altho a few tables have been moved back since they were first placed in 1937.

This delightful "land s-end" has three open embayments, designated

\* "Pardee - 34 4-6"

in their sequence as North Cove, Middle Cove and South Cove, each having a beach of its own.

The park road descends the foreland and makes a wide circle a short distance away from the individual picnic area of each cove and its adjacent beach, all easily reached over short foot trails for the present, all have adequate tables, a comparable number of outdoor stoves, a good water supply and centralized sanitary facilities.

South Cove has the longest and widest beach and is the most popular for bathing, by reason of being the best sheltered from the cool northwest winds that occasionally plague all the Pacific Coast in summer. Off shore there is an array of rocks and reefs, protruding or awash, where sea mammals frequently disport, and the sea birds clamor noisily about their fishings while there is always the chance of observing one or more whales in the offing, sometimes quite near.

This is the only elevated coastal state park on the Oregon shore with its approach road first touching a high headland, commanding wonderful seascapes and extraordinary seashore views before reaching such an unusually picturesque group of picnic areas each overlooking its own beached cove from an ancient, sea formed terrace, created after the rugged Seven Devils uplift rose from the ocean depths to become an impeding menace to those who first endeavored to travel the coast line some eighty or ninety years ago, and unwittingly became enmeshed in its many difficulties and perils. It is still a challenge to highway engineers who desire the achievement of a shorter road directly along the ocean shore.

History. Spanish navigators sailing from Mexico in the early half of the sixteenth century were the first to identify by latitude and longitude perhaps crudely, any portion of the now Oregon coast. In the latter

half of the eighteenth century English and American vessels, following Spanish ships, reached farther north. Among them was an English one in command of Captain James Cook, who on March 12, 1778, sighted a high promontory which he named Cape Gregory, in honor of the saint of that name and date. He recorded the latitude and longitude, but learned nothing of the dark, green shore land beyond the ken of the long telescope with which he scanned the trees of the thickly wooded shores. Pondering the dangers that would peril his vessel should he venture nearer, he fled the forbidding coast and sailed on to further discoveries.

At this time he, and other European mariners were seeking the mythical "Straits of Anian", the "Great River of the West" was only an Indian legend and the word "Oregon" was not yet in the lexicons.

The saint's name applied to this park foreland by Captain Cook was lost when the U. S. S. Ewing, in command of William P. McArthur, made the first survey of the Oregon coast in 1850 and renamed it Cape Arago. The origin of this name is somewhat uncertain. On page 53 of his "Oregon Geographic Names", Lewis A. M. Arthur in commenting upon the origin of the word "Arago", states it was "possibly named after Dominique Francois Jean Arago, a French Physicist and Geographer", by Captain M. Arthur or one of his officers. Otherwise this particular section of Oregon's shore land seems to be singularly deficient in early related personal history, noteworthy incidents of settlement, or even mention of its physical features, outside of geological circles, excepting execrations upon the difficulty of travel over any part of the Seven Devils uplift. This compelled land travelers moving up or down the coast to avoid its fastnesses, for the longer, but much easier, Coquille River - Coos Bay route when seeking the golden sands of the beaches or adjacent uplifted benches of these localities in the 1850-1860 decades.

In 1853, "some half breed Indians .. found abundance of gold in the black sand at the mouth of Whiskey Run. ." (seven miles south of Cape Arago). "They worked these placers somewhat, finding gold in very fine particles . . . sometimes there being hardly a color but at others it was not uncommon to get eight or ten dollars from a pan full of dirt. These men sold their claim in the summer of 1853 to the Macnamara brothers who worked it with excellent results. The total yield of this claim was said to have been a \$100,000. . . . A town sprang up at Whiskey Run and speedily became a place of importance, containing saloons, restaurants, stores, lodging houses etc. in large numbers. The place was named Randolph.<sup>1</sup> . . . after a few months of active work the mines lost prestige and soon sank out of sight. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

This brief period of mining activity was marked by quite serious troubles with the hostile Coquille Indians largely due to overt acts by unscrupulous camp followers rather than the hard working miners struggling for a golden fortune.

Attendance. Although situated away from the main routes of travel, the number of people reported by the caretakers as visiting the Cape Arago park is quite surprising and indicates its popularity with the people of the neighboring surroundings and their visiting friends. Group assemblies seem to be a feature of this park attendance.

The annual records of the park attendance are listed as submitted by park caretakers since 1938 and on down to October 31, 1947, excepting

<sup>1</sup> The present Randolph is located on the Coquille River, some four or five miles southeast of the mouth of Whiskey Run.

<sup>2</sup> Wallings history of Coos County

the years 1943 and 1944 when the coast defense forces were in complete control of Oregon's ocean front. In those years they occupied and exclusively dominated the elevated Cape Arago foreland, which commanded a sweeping view of the southerly sea approach to the jettied entrance of Coos Bay a then highly important port for the shipment of lumber to our forces, and their allies battling for supremacy of the islands and waters of the Asiatic coast.

A summary of these, estimated attendance records as submitted by the successive caretakers for the years of record follow:

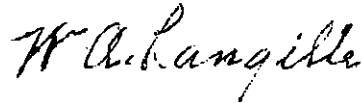
Year	No. of Cars	No. of Persons	(Three per car)
1938	12,943	38,829	
1939	15,458	46,374	
1940	15,904	47,712	
1941	20,608	61,824	
1942	2,709	8,127	
1943	-	-	Defense control
1944	-	-	" "
1945	4,129	12,387	
1946	21,712	65,136	
1947	14,221	42,681	To October 31, only.
Totals:	106,975	323,070	

Improvements. The Cape Arago State Park improvements were a Civilian Conservation Corps project, and the work was done by C.C.C. personnel, except when a skilled mechanic was occasionally employed for some particular job. Like all similar projects, plans were prepared on the ground by the supervisory staff, submitted to S. H. Boardman, State Parks Superintendent for his consideration, then forwarded to the Region Four office of the National Park Service in San Francisco to be passed upon by the technicians of that office before any element of its development was undertaken. The field inspectors then followed the work projects thru to completion, to insure the jobs being done in accordance with the plans

and prescribed standards of construction.

The work done in this park was accomplished in the fourth, sixth, ninth and tenth C.C.C. work periods during the winter months of the years 1934 to 1937 when snows precluded operations in the high land areas.

The work accomplished was the park road and trails, fire breaks, fire hazard reduction, clearing the picnic areas, setting up tables and stoves, providing a water system and the erection of a caretaker's cottage.



W. A. LANGILLE

December 4 1947



## CONCLUSIONS

Of the entire Pacific coast from British Columbia to Mexico it is believed the Oregon shore, as viewed from its paralleling coast highway, has the most varied and colorful general scenery, and the most picturesquely spectacular physical features of this whole coast line distance.

Too, these scenic features of today have an added interest when they are touched by historical records of early events or personal episodes, connected with the discovery of the general area or particular place they occupy. The southern Oregon coast is enriched by the sixteenth century records of Spanish explorers who perilously voyaged in small, crudely constructed vessels, often without decks poorly rigged and inadequately provisioned for protracted voyages in such unseaworthy craft, that were driven, almost uncontrolled, before the winds they encountered whether favorable or adverse, along the shores of California reaching southern Oregon latitudes and naming some of its headlands before San Francisco Bay was discovered. Even Sir Francis Drake is reputed to have anchored the "Golden Hind" in Cheteo Cove on June 5, 1579 before this great bay was known. Yet, these authentic records were long antedated by legendary Indian tales of vessels cast upon the shores that were manned by "dark bearded" men.

The latter half of the eighteenth century was also highly important in Oregon's written, ocean-side history, when English and American vessels also cruised these waters. Among them was an English vessel in command of Captain James Cook, who on March 12 1778, sighted and named Cape Gregory

(now Cape Arago) while on an exploring expedition along the Pacific Coast. At this time he and other European mariners were eagerly seeking the mythical "Straits of Anian" then supposed to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and provide a much shorter route from Europe to eastern Asia across North America. At this time it does not seem incredible that the wistful dream of such straits should have persisted, when the "Great River of the West" was still unknown and the word "Oregon" was not in use.

Of interest at the moment is the nature-sculptured promontory, which rose from the sea ages ago as part of the Seven Devils uplift, and has retained the same bold outlines that so many years ago caught the eye of Captain Cook and prompted its naming after Saint Gregory, in honor of the saint of that day, only to be lost in the events of later years. Now it is the frontispiece of two fine parks, easily reached by automobiles over a good graveled road which rises almost to the highest point before descending to the picturesque picnic areas, grouped at its near sea level extremity, and the alluring beaches.

Despite their isolation from the main routes of travel the records show these parks are visited by a surprising number of friendly people who assemble in the picnic areas to enjoy the outlooks, relax on the beach sands, watch the sea life, with whales occasionally lifting in the offing or perhaps viewing with interest a fleet of small fishing craft, riding at anchor in South Cove, while seeking a respite from the tedium of the outside seas.

The Cape Arago Park was originally planned to be strictly an ocean-side park featuring the wide panoramic views from its elevated foreland and the pleasing, facilitated picnic areas on the marge of the sea at its lower extremity.

While this original concept of Cape Arago park still pertains, and

there is room for its further developments, the addition of the adjoining Shore Acres park, places practically all of the promontory and its adjacent shore land, under complete control of the parks department thereby widening the opportunity for their future expansion and use, either individually or in coordination with one another.

Early Chinese. As a general rule, when people think of the early occupation of the Pacific coast of the North Americas, they assume it began with the Spanish settlements of Mexico and Central America which took place in the early part of the sixteenth century and moved northward in the later years. Since that period the written history has been connectedly continuous and there is little thought, or general knowledge of any written record of events previous to that time.

In "A History of California: The Spanish Period," by Charles E. Chapman, Ph. D., on page 23. we read "There is much general evidence that Chinese must have reached the western shores of the Americas and produced an effect on the life of the inhabitants. It is said that there are among the Indians many traditions of recognizably Chinese origin and also linguistic affinities, notably so in the Puget Sound country." And, leaving out the cultural features of Mexico and Central America with their Chinese implications he further states on page 24: "There are actual remains, however, to prove a likelihood, and almost a certainty, of Chinese appearances on our Pacific coast in the very distant past. In the course of excavations ancient Chinese implements and coins have been found ... A Chinese bronze fan, with ancient Chinese characters was found at Victoria, British Columbia and at a place called Cassiar in the same province some brass coins were unearthed said to be over three thousand years old."

Commenting further, is the remark "The one thing lacking to prove

Chinese visits to this coast has been incontrovertible literary evidence. However, he cites documentary Chinese history indicating there were Orientals in the "Kingdom of Fusang" as early as 458 A. D. From its descriptions, "Fusang" is supposed to have been California or Mexico. On page 29, Mr. Chapman says "Much more evidence might be given but it is perhaps already sufficiently clear that Hwui Shan had indeed visited Mexico"

Early Spanish and English. Chapman's studies indicate that between 1528 and 1530 Alonzo Nunez made his way across the continent from Tampa Bay, Florida to Culiacan Mexico, where he arrived in 1536. In June 1542 Cabrillo sailed from Navidad (or Natividad, due west of Mexico City) for the north. Cabrillo died and Bartolome Ferrero assumed command. On March 1 1543 (according to their observations), the ship reached the 44th parallel of latitude but was again driven back by storms. With the crews ill from scurvy, and worn out by unremitting toil he returned to Navidad on April 14, 1543. This was the first Spanish visit to either the California or Oregon coast.

Also, from the Chapman history, page 10 we learn that Sir Francis Drake left England in November 1577, at the head of a fleet of five ships, with 154 men. The "Pelican", later called the "Golden Hind", of one hundred tons burden, with elaborately fitted officers quarters, was the largest, and the only one to reach the Pacific all the others were lost. He left Guatamalco Mexico on April 16, 1579, and is supposed to have anchored in "Chotko" Cove on June 5, their farthest north position then returned south to Drake's Bay, in California and anchored there on June 17, remaining until July 23

"In truth, here was the first "New England" in North America, not alone in the name Nova (New) Albion, which Drake applied, but also in the deliberate intent then and thereafter to create a great English empire in the

Americas around the nucleus of Drake's California discoveries. The plan failed to mature, ... However, "The story finds a logical place in the great world events of the sixteenth century"

Following these events was Vizcaino's voyage in 1602-1603 when he named Cape San Sebastian after which there were no Spanish explorations on this coast north of California, for one hundred sixty years, or more, until the appearance of Perez in 1774, Hecate in 1774 and again in 1775 when he noted "evidence of the mouth of a great river". Bodega also cruised the Oregon Coast in 1775 with English and Americans following in numbers a few years later.

By that time, the greatness of Spain was declining, and when Cook named Cape Gregory in 1778, Spain no longer dominated the Pacific, nor its trade routes to the Philippines or the Orient. The English were established in what is now British Columbia and the Russians who had landed in Alaska in 1741 had quietly pushed along to the Farallones, in front of the Golden Gate, by 1812 six years after Lewis and Clark had left Fort Clatsop. These strategic islands were yielded to the United States after California was acquired from Spain in 1847. An event that occurred some four years after the first overland, mass settler migration to Oregon.

The preceding, quoted remarks anent the Chinese, or other orientals, who occupied at least a portion of the North Americas of both high and low latitudes, ten or more centuries ago, are an ancient, but wholly relevant and interesting background for all the coastal state parks of Oregon.

Particularly pertinent are the references to "certain linguistic affinities" of the neighboring Puget Sound natives to the Chinese language, and also the finding in British Columbia of Chinese bronze or other metal.

articles in Victoria, and Chinese coins in the Cassiar section of this province, allegedly three thousand years old. These statements give us a new and speculative perspective of what may really be the early history of the Pacific coast.

The quoted Chinese history records regarding "Fusang", as described by the Buddhist priest "Hwui Shan", when he returned to China in 499 A. D., are indeed intriguing and probably relate to the early Central America peoples who built temples and inscribed their indiscipherable writings, long before they were pillaged by Spanish conquistadors seeking treasure.

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December 4, 1947

CAPE ARAGO

Recommendations

Reforestation is the major betterment for the park. Post guard rail should be replaced with rock. Picnic tables should be added to the present areas.

May 7, 1948

  
S. H. Boardman  
State Parks Superintendent