

PETER SKENE OGDEN
STATE PARK
A
JEFFERSON COUNTY ATTRACTION

The Peter Skene Ogden State Park is situated astride the Crooked River Canyon, and covers both approaches of The Dalles-California Highway (US97) bridge, elevation 2766 feet (U.S.G.S.). These tracts are described as being in Section 32, Township 13 South, Range 13 East and Section 5, Township 14 South, Range 13 East, W.M., Jefferson County, Oregon, containing 56.90 acres.

This practically level park surface is cut by the narrow, spectacular Crooked River Canyon, the low water level in the stream bed being over 300 feet below the deck of the bridge, which is 400 feet long, supported by an arched truss, anchored at both ends in the practically vertical, basalt walls. As a central Oregon sage brush and juniper tract alone, this state park would be unimportant. Its significance lies in being situated on the verges of the narrow, picturesque Crooked River "box canyon" of sheer depth; crossed by a splendidly constructed highway bridge at one end and a substantial steel railroad bridge at the other, both exhibits of engineering skill. Also, the immediate locality and general surroundings possess many unusual scenic features, that are of extraordinary geologic interest; and there is an overall historic background.

The park surface is more or less level, of the typical central Oregon desert type, with a fine, wind borne, surface soil of volcanic ash origin, underlain by a pumiceous deposit, that supports a scant minor vegetation, with a few, scattered juniper trees. On the south side, between the highway and the gorge and from the south bridgehead westward to the not distant underpass, a parking space has been partially smoothed and cindered. With a masonry parapet skirting the rim of the gorge; the site affords a much used opportunity for visitors to view with safety, the sheer walls and thrilling depths of the gorge itself, in combination with the interesting bridge structures that rest so far above the stream.

While the gorge is not of phenomenal depth, its situation on a primary highway brings it to attention and many people are thrilled by the view into its depths as they harken to the gentle winds of Aeolus, rising from the somber abyss.

A comprehensive, well illustrated, description of the Crooked River area is to be found in Bulletin No. 252, issued by the Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey, in 1905, entitled, A Preliminary Report on the Geology and Water Resources of Central Oregon, by Israel C. Russell. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations are from this publication.

In this bulletin it is revealed that in the vicinity of the park, the Crooked River valley went thru a number of transformations before reaching its final stage which cut thru a comparatively recent, geologically speaking, intra-canyon lava flow that had filled the old channel to highway bridge level. In the centuries that followed the waters flowed in much greater volume than now and cut its way thru the hard basalt lava to its present depth.

Crooked River is not a large stream at any time of normal flow. During the irrigation season, when the water is diverted to the alfalfa fields in the Prineville Valley, the stream beneath the highway bridge is little more than a trickle. Also, "Owing to the absence of saturation at any but great depths, percolation is away from instead of toward the stream channels, and such flow as persists becomes tepid, more or less alkaline, and unwholesome".

"Another and still more remarkable change occurs" a few miles down stream, "where springs of great volume appear in its bed and along its sides. One of these . . . of large volume, is known as Opal Spring, for the reason that in the sands it brings to the surface are kernels and grains of opal, derived from the basaltic rock through which its supplying conduit passes. Other springs come in near at hand, and the river quickly becomes a rushing torrent of clear, cool water. The volume here is about 200 cubic feet per second, practically all of which comes from springs". Below these springs Crooked River is famous for its trout fishing.

"This river has its source in large warm springs east of Hampton Buttes, in the eastern part of Crook County, its length approximately 115 miles to where it joins the Deschutes." The Canyon begins at Forest Crossing, approximately eleven miles, river distance, above the park. In this distance Trail Crossing, two or three miles above the state park, was the only horse ford known to the Indians in the entire thirty miles of canyon, and their trails from both sides of the river converged at this point. Later it was used by settlers with saddle horses and pack animals. About 1900 a road was graded down the steep slopes, a bridge was put across the river, and Trail Crossing became a strategic, as well as historic locality.

"From Forest Crossing to Trail Crossing the river has eroded the base of a rugged mountain composed of light-colored acid tuffs, cut by a great basic dike. The tuffs worn by winds and rain have been sculptured into many remarkable monumental forms". These are located five or six miles river distance, above the highway bridge. The site of the most fantastic of these eroded "monuments" is now known as Smith Rock. On page 328 of Lewis A. McArthur's, Oregon Geographic Names, (first edition) we read: "There are a number of stories about the origin of the name of this peculiar formation on the north bank of Crooked River. J. N. Williamson of Prineville says that about 1863 a company of soldiers was camped nearby, during Indian troubles, and one Smith climbed upon the rock to get a view. A boulder that he stood on rolled from under his feet, and he fell and was killed. There are other versions, but this seems the most probable".

The Smith Rock site is one of the principal natural scenic assets of the Crooked River canyon area.

Heretofore these odd, picturesque rock formations have not attracted merited attention because of their isolation and inaccessibility. The roads built under the direction of the Reclamation Service during the construction of the irrigation canal that will carry water from the Wikiup dam to the arid lands of

the Madras and Agency Plains districts, have, no doubt, opened this locality to visitors. This large canal required the construction of two tunnels. The upper one passing beneath the Smith Rock ridge, the second one a short distance farther on. A few days ago the press announced the completion of a great labyrinth of false work across the Crooked River canyon; erected as a temporary support for the permanent bridge to be constructed over the canyon depth to carry the canal conduit.

These features of complicated engineering, together with the fantastic rock formations above them, bring this locality into prominence as a possible state park site, and thus make available to the public these natural and cultural scenic features, as supplemental to those in the parks already established on Crooked River.

HISTORY The Peter Skene Ogden State Park was named in honor of a courageous, self-reliant fur trader and explorer, who was early in the employ of the Northwest Company, with which he continued until this concern was absorbed by the Hudson Bay Company in 1821, and was thereafter with the latter company until 1852.

The only historic incident which can be construed as directly connecting the name of Peter Skene Ogden with this park, or its surroundings, rests upon his probable use of Trail Crossing, two or more miles upstream from the park, when he set out upon his, so called, Snake expedition of 1826-27. Nevertheless, his name attached to this state park will perpetuate the memory of a valiant explorer of the Oregon Country, in the days when hostile Snake Indians almost constantly harassed them, and starvation continually threatened them. During all that winter the cold was severe and the snow deep, as they moved from stream to stream; the trappers often barefoot, almost without clothes, some without blankets, and living on a scant take of beaver, the flesh of horses that had died of exposure and disease, or an occasional half famished deer. A winter of trying hardships for even these wilderness veterans; where some of the Indians, in their extremities, had resorted to cannibalism to survive.

Jean Baptiste (Joseph) Gervais¹, one of the first settlers on French Prairie, after whom the town of Gervais was named, with a party of eight men with horses and mules joined the expedition on September 30, 1826, about the time they were on Crooked River. Gervais was also with Ogden in the John Day region in 1825.

From I. C. Elliott's sketch of Ogden's life published under the title of "Peter Skene Ogden, Fur Trader"; we learn that he "was born in the City of Quebec in 1794²; the more exact date not having been traced. His father, Isaac Ogden, was doubtless born in Newark, New Jersey. He was graduated in the first class out of King's College, now Columbia University. He chose the law as a profession and became a distinguished jurist. First a patriot, he later became a royalist and sought safety in New York. In 1783, when the British left, he abandoned his property and prospects and went to England. In 1788 he was appointed by King George III, to be Judge of the Admiralty at Quebec. Very soon after 1794 he was appointed to be one of the Puisne Judges of the District of Montreal, where it is assumed Peter Skene Ogden spent his boyhood and youth. Peter shunned a chance to become a clergyman and chose to be a fur trader".

In 1811, age 17, he entered the service of the Northwest Company as a clerk. Previous to that he had begun the study of law. Earlier, he had for a short time been employed as a clerk in John Jacob Astor's Montreal fur establishment. Peter's oldest brother David, twenty two years his senior, was one of the chief counsels of the Northwest Company.

Just where he began earning his thirty or forty pounds sterling per year is not known, but it is presumed he spent the entire seven years of his apprenticeship in the region of Fort Isle a la Crosse, in South Athabasca, where he was a staunch supporter of the Northwest Company in the feuds with the Hudson's Bay Company.

1. See p. 205, Vol. XI, No. 2, Oregon Historical Quarterly.

2. Ibid. Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 354.

Contrary to the wishes of his friends he preferred the wild, untrammelled life of an Indian trader "to laws delays". He wifed an attractive daughter of the Cree nation at Red River, and his first son was born on January 18, 1817. In 1818 he was at Fort George (Astoria). In 1820 he had acquired a one share interest in the Northwest Company and became a partner; then at Shuswap.

"In 1821 the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were amalgamated". In 1823 he went to England and was back at York Factory on Hudson's Bay to take charge of the Hudson's Bay Company express to the Columbia River. The winter of 1823-24 was spent at Spokane House; nine miles northwest of the present City of Spokane, where Dr. John McLoughlin arrived on October 27, 1824.

Ogden was appointed Chief Trader by the London office, on March 3, 1824, then thirty years old and thirteen years in the fur service of the two companies. He was chief of the Snake expedition of 1824, and his 1825-26 expedition was exploring eastern Oregon around the head of the John Day River. He was in Utah in 1828-29 and 30. Between 1831 and 1838 was in the British Columbia Region, and spent three and a half years in the Nass River and Stickeen River areas; the lower Stickeen then Russian territory. In 1835 appointed Chief Factor in command of the New Caledonia District with headquarters at Fort St. James, on Lake Stuart. In 1844 took a vacation, the first in twenty two years, visiting in England, Canada and the United States. From 1845 to 1849, shared the management of Fort Vancouver with James Douglas; then became Chief Factor on the Columbia River until 1852. "He died at Oregon City, October 27, 1854, and was laid to rest in the Mountain View Cemetery."

He was known to all the Indians west of the Rocky Mountains as "The Old Whitehead". His canoe men and servants knew him as "M'sieu Pete". In 1849 The Honorable Thos. Nelson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Oregon, wrote

of him. "The Chief Factor of this Company, Governor Ogden, is a gentleman of high standing; and much good feeling is manifested by him on all occasions towards the people of the United States. Archibald McKinley said of him, "He was a wonderful man. Whenever the Hudson's Bay Company had occasion to send any of their officers on a dangerous expedition, Peter Skene Ogden was sure of a berth".

By many the crowning achievement of his eventful career was considered to be securing the release of those who were seized and held by the Cayuse Indians at the time of the Whitman massacre in 1847.

CONCLUSIONS

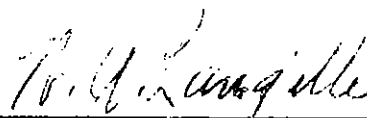
The Peter Skene Ogden State Park rests particularly beside the Deep, geologically interesting Crooked River Canyon, where it is spanned by a highway bridge, far above its stream bed, on one of Oregon's main north and south routes of travel, which now carries an ever increasing traffic, with an always greater number of people pausing to look into the canyon depths. Not only is this park of local scenic interest, but it is, as well, situated in the midst of a geologic wonderland, that in its detail, is almost unknown to travelers. This is a factor that can be translated into a feature of even greater importance to visitors than its interesting canyon site.

The park setting is picturesque, the area commodious, comparatively level, and exceptionally well situated for any present or future park development. The soil is good, and irrigation water is available to insure the growth of adaptable, sheltering trees, shrubs, flowers, or any desired general landscape features. These are its important physical attributes. Transcending them is its strategic location in a section of interior Oregon that is rich in geologic and volcanic oddities. In several directions are localities where fossilized specimens of prehistoric animals, trees and plants of almost unbelievable antiquity have been found. Not too distant are rock caves in which artifacts have been unearthed, made by ancient tribesmen who occupied them centuries ago, long before showers of hot pumice from erupting volcanoes invaded their cave dwellings in sufficient quantity to bury, and scorch or destroy their combustible possessions and, no doubt, dislodge the occupants.

These sum up to the fact that a wide surrounding area is a storehouse of prehistoric treasures, practically unknown to the general public, many of whom would be pleased to have at least a passing acquaintance, with some of

these world renowned scientific antiquities.

This section of Oregon has many other natural features, some of which enter the realm of fantasy. At present there is no specific place where there is an informed person to bring them to attention and advise visitors where and how they may be seen. Along the entire length of the Dalles-California, in Oregon; it is believed the Peter Skene Ogden state park site, itself of interest, offers the most convenient and most logical situation for the establishment of an information station and housing an exhibit of the wonderful fossil remains of Oregon's early mammalia and flora, for the specific purpose of creating interest in the many widely distributed and highly interesting natural features of this area. Such a station emphasized by a fossil exhibit would find favor with visitors and greatly redound to the credit of the State, culturally and financially.



W. A. Langille
State Parks Historian

WAL:ad
January 23, 1946

RECOMMENDATIONS

This park should always be kept in its natural state. Its value lies in its scenic setting. It should never be commercialized. Keep it as it is.

S. H. Boardman.

S. H. Boardman,
State Parks Superintendent

SHB:ss
1-27-47