

HARRIS BEACH STATE PARK
CURRY COUNTY, OREGON

by
W. A. Langille

Harris Beach State Park is situated approximately two miles north of Brookings. It was originally a small, sea marge park with an area of 17.58 acres, purchased in 1926. In November 1941, an adjoining tract of 123.40 acres was acquired. This new area borders the east and south sides of the original tract and all is in Section 36, Township 41 South, Range 14 West, Willamette Meridian, with a total of 141 acres.

This addition gives the park three-quarters of a mile of picturesque, pleasure giving ocean frontage, with beaches, island, rocks, birds, and brilliant sunsets, that form a glorious sea panorama full of captivating interest in calm or storm. A befitting feature of the park is a rounded, treeless elevation which has been named Signal Knoll. The north park property line crosses well up on the northeast flank of the knoll and its outer base is on the seashore, rising to an estimated three hundred feet above tide to the ample summit, where the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey established a triangulation point a few years ago.

From the highway-level parking space on its south side, a switch-back trail, laid on easy grades, reaches to the crest of the hill, which commands a sweeping view of twenty-four miles of in-curving coast line, from Point St. George in California to the bald, rugged face of Cape Ferrelo. The latter, but two or three miles to the north of the park, was named after Bartolome Ferrelo, who is given in Lewis A. McArthur's, Oregon Geographical Names, "as being a pilot in the expedition of Juan Roderiguez Cabrillo, who sailed from Mexico in June, 1542. Cabrillo sank under the trials of the voyage, and Ferrelo succeeded him in command, who, on March

1543, found himself to be as far north as the 44th Parallel. While there is little of record to connect Cape Ferrelo with the pilot, it was named in his honor".

Rising prominently a scant half mile off shore from the base of Signal Knoll is humpbacked Goat Island, now a Migratory Bird Refuge, That lifts one hundred eighty four feet from the sea, overlooking the many odd shaped rock islets and rocks that mark the sea front of this locality. In a huge rock fronting the picnic area, is a high cleft, wide at water level, tapering steeply to a sharply closed apice. This cathedral like, rock window faces the incoming seas almost squarely and they charge thru the opening with great violence and resounding crashes that will some day deave the rock in twain. When the evening sun is in the right quarter as it nears the horizon, the flash and go of the gleaming sunlight, with the rythm of the lift and fall of the thundering seas, makes a vivid and oddly spectacular marine picture.

Between the present picnic area and the base of the knoll, there is a short, smooth, low tide beach of good width, where small boats can find fair weather anchorage. To the south the newly acquired area fronts a long beach with intervals of rock and sand that reach to some of the interesting inner rocks of the off shore groupings. One of these incloses a low-tide swimming pool where the water is warmer and there is no surf. A valuable bathing adjunct to any seashore park where children congregate.

The bench land between the beach and the highway is, generally speaking, comparatively level, has good soil, is adaptable to any kind of surface development, and the beach can be made easily accessible from a number of places.

Adjoining and eastward from the highway, the new area is fairly level for a considerable distance southward from the north property line, narrowing toward the south end of the tract, where there are frequent rock

outcroppings. Most of this low-lying land has a covering of short azalea shrubs that bloom profusely in season. Easterly, the flat gives way to a gently rising slope, that higher up, becomes more abrupt, its lift broken by two or three horizontal strata of light colored rock. Beyond the park property, is an ascending background of living forest that reaches brokenly to the summits of the coastal hills.

While the floral beauty of the azaleas dominate the scene in flowering time, there are many other of the less conspicuous flowers that bloom abundantly and make a delightful showing. Notably among these, particularly along the sheltered shore line, are the tall spikes of the white and gay colored foxglove, with a wealth of the always attractive wild iris, both being very much in evidence in the floral picture of the coastal area.

The park improvements have not, as yet, been extended beyond the original park area. Beside the highway a level, well graveled parking space has been provided, from which the trail to the top of Signal Knoll departs. A graveled trail leads a short distance to the few benched tables and single stove that rest comfortable in the wind-breaking shrubbery, near the edge of the bank, overlooking shore and sea. From the tabled space a dirt trail winds down the slope, rounds the seaward side of a high pyramidal rock and reaches to the short, northerly park beach. These improvements were made by C.C.C. Forces, members of a side-camp, detailed from the Gold Beach camp in the 1934-35 period, while temporarily billeted at Brookings.

Signal Knoll can be counted as a most valuable asset to this park. Its summit, now easily reached by a good foot trail, rises steeply from the edge of the sea and is sufficiently elevated to afford an unobstructed, overlooking view of the superb, offshore maritime panorama, in addition to the interesting coast line and shoreward views of the green, forested hills. Some

day, the north slope of the knoll will be acquired and a spiraled road constructed to the rocky crest, making the summit and its entertaining views readily accessible by automobile; to the great satisfaction of the average motorist, who enjoys most the scenic views with a car approach.

The additional new area has extended the shoreland features of the park, adding to its future importance in the marine field and, at the same time, gave it a background that includes a gayly flowered bosage of high merit that also enriches its potential values. No improvements have been made in this newly acquired area. These must await the turn of world events. On the old area, as mentioned, a few tables, a stove and other essentials have been installed, but there is no water supply. These modest beginnings are the forerunners of further improvements that will be extended to the newly acquired additional land and make of this appealing park setting, a quiet, seaside recreation area, with a wonderful sea frontage and beautiful shore land that is abundantly endowed with natural features that can be developed to become an exceedingly interesting and attractive park in a locality of much general charm.

W. A. Langille
State Park Historian

March 25, 1943

CONCLUSIONS

The recent addition to Harris Beach park extends the state-owned ocean front along a highly picturesque shore line, with a pleasing offshore seascape, dotted with islets and rocks of many shapes and forms, some awash, others rising a hundred feet or more above the ebb and flow of the sea, many of them resting places for the numerous water-fowl that flit from rock to islet and islet to rock as they seek nourishment from the mothering sea. Always pleasing, the ultimate charm of this shore line is when the evening sun is low and the waning day goes out in a glory of rich, unforgettable coloring.

On the opposite side of the highway, the comparatively level bench land is an extensive field of azaleas that will some day be threaded with a maze of foot paths, from the highway to the east border and from end to end, that visitors may enjoy to the utmost this wide array of delightful bloom.

Between the highway and the sea at the north end of the park area is an easily ascended eminence that commands unobstructed views of sea, coast line and inland hills for miles up and down this salutiferous coast, that is so peacefully restful in its delightfully primitive surroundings.

It is a park of the future, that will be fully utilized when the crowds in the recreation areas nearer the populous centers, shall have pushed further afield, those who find greater enjoyment in the quiet isolation of a charming environment, where restful peace prevails.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The water rights should be permanently secured for a water supply for the park, together with an easement for a pipe line, over and across any intervening private lands, between the water source and the park property, for the earliest possible installation of a pipe line, whenever funds and materials are available.

An observation shelter should be erected on the crest of Signal Knoll, whenever circumstances will permit.

Additional picnic tables and stoves should be added to those already constructed in the old part of the park. Tables and stoves should be constructed in the new part of the park down along the coast line in an open adaptable swale.


Opposite this swale in the low tide-high tide area is a natural swimming tank excavated out of solid rock by the sea. High tide fills this tank. The outgoing tide leaves the tank suitable for bathing purposes. The sun and air warms the water to several degrees warmer than the ocean water. The next high tide fills afresh the tank. Study should be given to this feature for possible betterment.

Some years ago an effort was made to have the Commission secure a crease at the Oregon-California line for the construction of a joint state park for general development purposes. The project was unapproved by the Commission. In keeping with this state entry park idea the writer highly recommends that all of the land situated east of the highway in Harris Beach Park be planted to native azaleas. To make an azalea park unrivaled the length of the Pacific Coast line, an entrance way to the state of unforgettable memory. At one time this entire area was an azalea field. A previous owner

had cleared the field of azaleas for farming purposes. The area can easily be brought back to azaleas. The caretaker of Harris Beach and A zalea Parks with some assistance can replant this entire area taking yearly sections. Azalea plant material may be had in most any direction from the park.

Diligence needs to be exercised in the eradication of gorse which has made a start in the park. This seeding comes from fields to the north. Owners of these fields should give their cooperation in eliminating the gorse from their own property.

The future enhancement of this park lies in keeping it in its natural state. Nature will eliminate the hand of man in the azalea planting in a few years. Never fool yourself by thinking that you can embellish the work of the Maker.


S. H. Boardman
State Parks Superintendent
March 30, 1944