

McArthur family: longtime contributors to Oregon History

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

I'm accustomed to receiving quite a bit of feedback on my hiking columns, but I'm always a little surprised when I hear it from people outside of Central Oregon. So, I was once again surprised, and flattered, when I received an invitation to contact Portlander Lewis L. McArthur about my October column on Tam McArthur Rim.

Lewis L. McArthur is the 98-year-old son of Lewis A. McArthur, whom one might consider to be the godfather of geographic names in the state of Oregon. Together, these two men have been instrumental in chronicling Oregon's history through the compilation of the stories behind the names of thousands of Oregon's geographic sites.

Tam McArthur Rim is named, of course, in honor of Lewis A. "Tam" McArthur, a Portland businessman, who was born more than 132 years ago. Looking up to the mountains from Sisters, Tam McArthur Rim is the high ridge visible below and to the left of Broken Top.

Curiously, as I noted in my October column, Lewis L. McArthur reports that the rim that bears his father's name is probably one of the few prominent geographic features in Oregon that his father never visited. The impetus for the name, however, came from Robert W. Sawyer, of Bend, McArthur's

longtime friend. After Tam's death in 1951, Sawyer was among the many Oregonians who felt that this purveyor of geographic names deserved to have his own name enshrined on Oregon's landscape.

"It was all cooked up by Bob Sawyer," said Lewis L. "I remember Mr. Sawyer very well. He came west from New England and arrived in Bend about the same time as the railroad. He worked with the *Bend Bulletin* and was publisher and editor there for many years."

Sawyer pushed to have the prominent Central Oregon ridge named after his friend. Shortly thereafter, the United States Board on Geographic Names did just that, and the rim has borne Tam McArthur's name ever since.

A few years after his father's death, Lewis L. recalls climbing the rim with a group of his father's friends to scatter his father's ashes at the site that now bears his name. "That's where I'm going to be scattered pretty soon," he said. "I'm 98 years old, you know."

Ironically, the younger McArthur notes that his father would not have approved of the official use of a nickname such as "Tam" on a geographic feature. One thing that I was not able to discover in the historical record, was where the nickname "Tam" came from; so, I asked his son. As it turned out, however, he didn't really know either. "He had always had that nickname

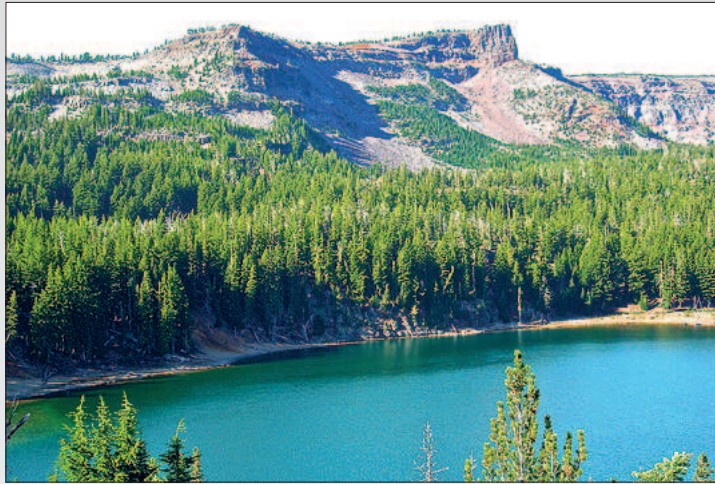


PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Tam McArthur Rim — one of Sisters Country's premier hikes.

since he was a small child, maybe even a baby," Lewis L. said. "I asked my grandmother once, and even she couldn't say for sure."

At more than 7,700 feet, Tam McArthur Rim rivals the elevation of such prominent local peaks as Mt. Washington and Three Fingered Jack. It looms a thousand feet above Three Creek Lake and Little Three Creek Lake. Since the snow gate to the lakes, on Forest Road 16, was closed last month, access to the area will be limited to winter travel until the road is opened again next summer.

When Tam was born in The Dalles, in 1883, his family already had a lengthy history in Oregon. His grandfather was Navy Lieutenant William P. McArthur, who conducted the first survey of the Pacific Coast for the United States Coast Survey in 1849. The Office of Coast Survey is the oldest U.S.

scientific organization, dating to 1807, when President Thomas Jefferson signed a bill creating the organization to survey the nation's coasts.

McArthur's maternal grandfather, James W. Nesmith, arrived in Oregon even earlier, in 1843, and served in both houses of the U.S. Congress in the 1860s and 1870s. Tam's father, Lewis Linn McArthur, was a justice on the Oregon Supreme Court from 1870 to 1878; and his mother, Harriet Nesmith McArthur, helped found the Oregon Historical Society in 1898.

After graduating from the University of California in 1908, Tam worked for the Oregon Electric Railway until joining Pacific Power and Light when it was formed in 1910. He eventually became PP&L's vice-president and general manager.

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