

Camp Sherman's growth not always painless

by Eric Belden

The small community of Camp Sherman, located on the slopes of the Cascades in Central Oregon, is experiencing growth pains. Once the site of a handful of homesteads, the U.S. Forest Service estimates approximately 250,000 visitors at the Camp Sherman store each year with more than 200,000 vehicles going to and from Camp Sherman annually and an average daily count of more than 1,000 vehicles during the summer season.

With Jefferson County and citizen groups evaluating land use goals, the growth of the Metolius Meadows housing development, the forest service re-evaluating recreation lease sites along the Metolius River and a new cautious attitude prompted by the 1978 murder of Kaye Turner in the surrounding forest, Camp Sherman is in transition.

Homesteading began in the Camp Sherman area sometime in the late 1800s. Allingham Place, now part of the Deschutes National Forest, was one of the earliest ranches, settled in the 1880s. The first Post Office, named "Matoles" after the Metolius River, was established in 1885.

In the early 1900s, more settlers came to the area and the first fishing resort opened along the river. 1912 saw the first influx of tourists, wheat farmers from Sherman County in Eastern Oregon, who came to fish and relax after the summer harvest. More Sherman County farmers joined the first vacationers and by 1920 they had established a small colony in newly christened "Camp Sherman."

In the 1920s the first forest service recreation leases were granted for sites along the Metolius River and the permanent Post Office and the Camp Sherman store were erected at their present location. Resorts sprung up to meet the demands of vacationers. Lake Creek Lodge, House on the Metolius, Ford's River Resort and the Metolius River Resort were former ranches or homesteads developed to serve the influx of tourists.

In the 1950s, approximately 60 people lived full-time in Camp Sherman, primarily working at the State of Oregon fish hatcheries or in tourism. The community virtually closed in wintertime. Gradually the longtime residents began selling and subdividing land. A new trailer court, self-service laundry and school changed the face of Camp Sherman.

With improved transportation and more time and money for recreation, Camp Sherman began to feel the first pains of growth. In 1960, the vehicle count for the summer season was almost 75,000. The U.S. Forest Service widened and paved roads and altered campgrounds for higher capacities to handle new recreation demands on the area.

The 1970s brought major changes to Camp Sherman. With

the development of nearby Black Butte Ranch, a large recreation resort with summertime and permanent homes, and the increased activity at Hoodoo Ski area, full-time employment could be found in the Camp Sherman area. Young construction workers and resort workers at Black Butte Ranch moved into Camp Sherman as full-time residents.

The 150 acre Metolius Meadows development, a former mint ranch with some 140 available homesites, was created in Camp Sherman over objections of many residents and after a lengthy battle with environmentalists. This development provided a number of new lots and made it possible to buy property in Camp Sherman, where most land is government-owned and there is a scarcity of private property for sale.

Now there are approximately 150 full-time residents and some 100 housing units on private land in Camp Sherman. In the summer season, the population jumps an additional 500 persons, with the majority of the seasonal residents occupying cabins on the 108 U.S. Forest Service recreation lease sites along the Metolius River.

Forest service annual vehicle counts in Camp Sherman steadily rose from 162,000 in 1970 to 226,000 in 1973. It was assumed by the forest service that a 10% annual increase would bring nearly 600,000 vehicles into Camp Sherman by 1984. Recent traffic counts do not show that trend, however, perhaps due to the gas shortages and price increases and the fact that the Camp Sherman area may have reached its desirable capacity level. Counts for vehicles going through Camp Sherman in 1978 and 1979 are 263,323 and 223,717 respectively, based on U.S. Forest Service estimates. Also, forest service

annual visitor estimates at the Camp Sherman store have remained constant for the last four years at approximately 237,000.

Larry Sherrer, a Camp Sherman resident since 1971 and former restaurant manager of Black Butte Ranch, has seen a number of changes in Camp Sherman.

"It used to be a free-living place where you could hide from reality," he said. Now the increased number of residents and transients in the area have given rise to new concerns. "Camp Sherman needs to be incorporated; it needs regular services (like police and fire)."

Currently Camp Sherman depends on police assistance from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department located in Madras, an hour away. There is a volunteer fire department with the fire chief of Black Butte Ranch acting as Camp Sherman's chief also.

The murder of Kaye Turner, a jogger who disappeared from Camp Sherman in December, 1978, and whose remains were found in the surrounding woods months later, has added to these concerns.

"It created a lot of paranoia among the women, some of it has still lingered. I think we're a lot more cautious than before," Sherrer said. "When I ran through the woods, I thought about it. You wouldn't stand a chance in hell out there alone."

"Camp Sherman hasn't changed much except for the Metolius Meadows development," said "Babe" Siegner, Camp Sherman resident for 25 years and former resort owner. "It's here so I accept it but I would like it better if we didn't have it. The housing development was the logical thing to do. As a ranch, it couldn't make much money."

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Camp Sherman growing

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The Kaye Turner incident represents the trend of things to Siegner. "Every winter there are a few more break-ins in the area," she said.

The murder did have some effect, however. "It made me a little more careful, like taking the keys out of the car," she explained.

One thing Babe is certain of. "I hope I never have to live anywhere else," she said.

Mary Lou Loar, Camp Sherman's postmaster and former store owner, has watched the community change during her 10 years in the area.

The Kaye Turner murder has not affected Loar much.

"I lived here before the incident and as a store owner I was always cautious," she said.

Because the murder has not been solved, however, she still feels some apprehension. "But it isn't just Camp Sherman," she explained. "Portland and Eugene are experiencing more crime."

"There aren't as many tourists here now," said Loar, recalling summer holidays in the early 1970s when nearly 5,000 tourists visited the store. "But people are staying longer lengths of time."

"There will always be tourists," she added. "Camp Sherman, and all recreation areas, are release valves for people."

A resident of Metolius Meadows development, Loar believes the development has added a lot to the community.

"It has allowed people to live in the community who used to camp here and liked the area," she said. "And, it has brought more tax revenues into the community."

"The big changes in Camp Sherman have already come," said Lawrence Dyer, long-time resident and caretaker for the House on the Metolius fishing resort. "When Metolius Meadows gets developed, there won't be much more change."

"The forest service might take away some summer homes," he added. "Camp Sherman could change from primarily summertime residency on land leases to full-time residency at Metolius Meadows."

"I don't think Camp Sherman can change that much more — there's so little private land left," said Betty Dyer, Lawrence's wife. "However, the forest service is the highest authority and they could change it all."

According to Warren Seaward, Resources Assistant at the Sisters Ranger District, current U.S. Forest Service concerns primarily center around the Camp Sherman store area: the lack of public restrooms, traffic congestion, the need for public day use picnic areas and the establishment of a visitor information center. Although no definite decisions have been made, nine permittees near the store have been notified that their forest service leases may not be extended when their current 20 year term expires in 1989. The forest service is in the process of deciding what are the best uses for the recreation lease sites in light of increased recreation demands on the area.

According to Seaward, recent campground use has gone up seven percent based on fee collections, despite the fact that vehicle and visitor count estimates have remained constant.

"I expect more local people rather than distance travelers in the Camp Sherman area," said Seaward. "The kind of use will change but the numbers will not drop off."

Camp Sherman has undergone many changes and seems destined for more. Hopefully, through all the fluctuations, it will maintain the atmosphere of a small, peaceful community.