

Oregon's South Coast

Continued from cover

by Myrna Oakley

toward Windy Cove Campground. The harbor offers facilities for public boat launching, custom canneries, equipment and rentals, bait, fuel, and ice.

Charters with equipment provided are available for those who want to test their skill at hooking one of the five species of salmon native to Oregon's coastal waters—the mighty Chinook, the speedy Coho, the lake dweller Sockeye, the smaller Chum, the humpback Pink, and the sea-run Atlantic. Most of the salmon spawn in coastal streams and rivers, returning to the sea at varying stages in their individual life-cycles.

Jetty and rock fishing can be a challenging pastime as well, with perch, ling cod, salmon, and sea bass lurking off the South and Training jetties near Salmon Harbor.

Lumber Baron Country ... The Simpson Family Legacy

Traveling south on Highway 101, one easily forgets that the narrow asphalt ribbon hugging sea cliffs (and with its many bridges spanning rivers) once had to be traveled on foot, horseback, by canoe or, later, ferry.

Asa Meade Simpson sailed here from San Francisco, bringing supplies to gold miners. He saw grand stands of virgin Douglas fir and a natural bay. Simpson stayed in the North Bend-Coos Bay area and became one of the region's wealthiest lumber and ship-building barons. In all, more than 50 sailing vessels were built in Simpson yards located at Coos Bay and at Greys Harbor, Washington. Lumber mills, logger operations, a fleet of freighters, and a packet service linking Portland and San Francisco ... not bad for a fellow who thought he was destined to peddle supplies to gold prospectors.

The North Bend-Coos Bay communities come into view as you cross the bay, not by canoe or ferry, but on McCullough Bridge, the longest WPA bridge (nearly a mile) constructed in the region. Dedicated on June 5, 1936, the channel spans rise 150 feet to accommodate ocean-going vessels.

A stop at the Visitors Information Center at the south end of the bridge will provide tons of helpful information and maps (it's one of the most helpful and best-stocked Centers I've encountered along the coast). One of the area's best historical museums is also located at the south end of the bridge—the Coos Curry Historical Society Museum, sporting an old-time steam locomotive and some interesting antique logging equipment. Inside find Native Indian and early coast pioneer artifacts. Next door is Simpson Park with covered as well as outdoor picnic facilities and restrooms.

To experience some grand coastal scenery often overlooked, take a side trip to Charleston. Follow signs to Empire and Charleston, across tiny Charleston bridge and turn south to Sunset Bay, Shore Acres, and Cape Arago.

Sandstone cliffs curve around miniature half-moon Sunset Bay, atop which are easy hiking trails. At low tide, walk out to explore tide pools along the south side ... purple sea urchin, blue-green sea anemone, oblong chiton, and tiny rock crab beckon. The seaweed can be slippery, but with sturdy shoes and a measure of caution, the whole family can enjoy the tide pools at Sunset Bay. Stay for sunset if possible—a photographer's delight. There's a safe, sandy beach and picnicking close by, as well as Sunset Bay Campground.

Another three miles south of Sunset Bay visit Shore Acres Park and Botanic Garden, the former estate of Asa Meade Simpson's son, Louis J. Simpson. The original mansion, built along the sea cliff in 1906, burned down in 1921; was rebuilt seven years later, then razed in 1948 after use as an Army officers headquarters during World War II. A garden cottage with its gambrel-shaped roof and shake siding is the only structure remaining.

The gardens, created by Simpson in the early 1900s, have been restored by the Oregon State Parks Department to their former splendid grandeur. Stop at the entrance to the formal garden and enjoy the display which illustrates the history of Shore Acres and the fabled Simpson family. Flower-lined pathways pass hundreds of varieties of roses and lead down stone steps to another botanical treasure, the oriental garden. With its quiet pond surrounded by azaleas, rhododendron, iris, and giant rhu-barb, imagine oriental stone lanterns lighted in the evening for the Simpson's bejeweled guests—images of another era in Oregon's history.

Visit the glass-walled viewing gazebo perched where the mansion once stood on the sea cliff west of the gardens. Waves pound and crash against huge tilted out-croppings and Simpson's Reef where the cacophony of barking sea lions can sometimes be heard. Cameras are a must at Shore Acres.

Cranberries, Cheese & Zane Grey Country

For an alternative route back to Highway 101, try Seven Devil's Road, a beach loop drive through rural countryside between Charleston and Bandon. Rockhounds can spend hours at Whiskey Run, Merchant's, and Agate beaches. Marine fossils can be found at Coos Head and Fossil Point.

Bandon, in the heart of the Coquille Valley, is famous for its cheese-making which began in the late 1800s. Cheddar cheese and butter were shipped to San Francisco by steam boat. Stop and watch the cheese-making process and sample a variety of cheeses.

Also known as the "Cranberry Capital of Oregon," Bandon has about 900 acres of cranberry bogs under cultivation. The original vines were brought from Massachusetts by pioneer grower Charles McFarlin in 1879. In those days, the Coos Indians helped clear land and hand-pick the crop during the annual Fall harvest. Several shops offer cranberry sweets—you'll enjoy meandering through Old Town.

Heading south about 25 miles, plan a stop at Port Orford to see Cape Blanco and the lighthouse constructed in 1870 on the western-most point in the continental U.S. Long a shipping point for the valuable white Port Orford cedar, the city was incorporated 84 years after a group of nine gold prospectors were besieged by local Indians on nearby Battle Rock in 1851.

South of Port Orford the mountains press close to the sea and Highway 101, once a narrow Indian trail, curves along a shelf high above the waves and around Humbug Mountain to Wedderburn and Gold Beach. Some call it Zane Grey country, for the fabled writer of westerns loved the Rogue River area and had a cabin up-river from Gold Beach for many years.

One of the best side trips on the south coast is the mailboat trip up the lower Rogue River from Gold Beach—32 miles to Agness. Passengers and mail are transported up the river across riffles and rapids in open (and safe) hydro-jet powered boats. Genial pilots will point out wildlife and geological features or recount lively tales of early river life. A hearty lunch at Singing Springs Lodge and the 32-mile return trip complete the interesting day trip.

If time permits, plan a stop at Cape Sebastian five miles south of Gold Beach. The cape rises 500 feet from the ocean and offers spectacular views of the coast, north and south, as well as hiking trails and picnic areas.

Myrtlewood can be found in the form of bowls, salt shakers and cribbage boards in souvenir shops along the south coast. To see the fragrant trees in their natural form, visit the 320 acre virgin Myrtle forest eight miles from Brookings, up the Chetco River. Loeb Park, set aside to preserve the Myrtle trees in the 1940s, is included in the Harris Beach Park district and is an ideal spot for camping, fishing, and hiking.

Leave the bright lights behind for a time ... visit the southern Oregon coast where one can find clamming, crabbing and fishing ... hiking, beachcombing or museum-hopping ... along with quantities of solitude, quiet forests, marching sand dunes and driftwood-strewn beaches. Once visited, the traveler will return again and

again to discover the beauty and serenity of the south coast.

Tourist Information

Oregon Dunes Headquarters
855 Highway Ave.
Reedsport, OR 97467
(503) 271-3611

Reedsport Visitors Center
P.O. Box 11
Reedsport, OR 97467
(503) 271-3495

Bay Area Visitors Center
P.O. Box 210/50 E. Central
Coos Bay, OR 97420
(503) 756-4613 (North Bend Center)
(503) 269-0215 (Coos Bay Center)

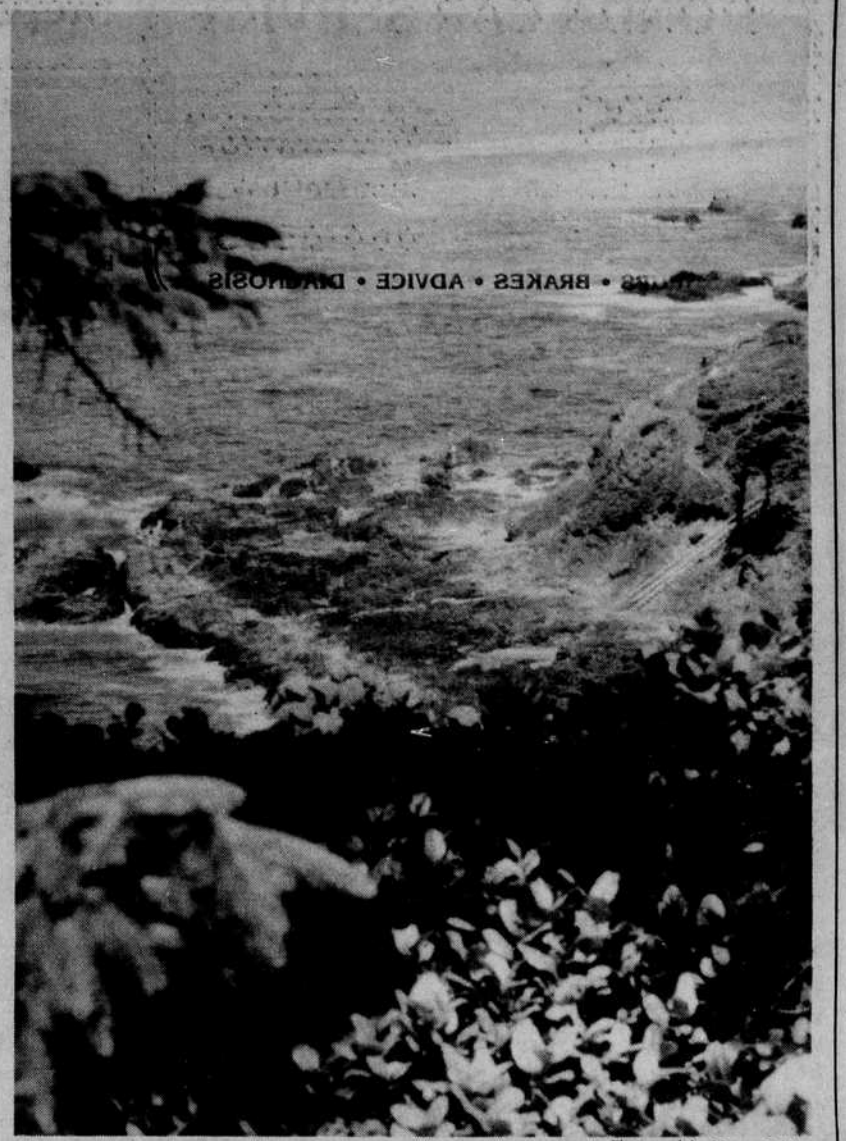
Bandon Visitors Information
P.O. Box 1515
Bandon, OR 97411
(503) 347-9350

Port Orford Visitors Center
Highway 101 South/P.O. Box 637
Port Orford, OR 97465

Gold Beach-Wedderburn Visitors Center
510 South Ellensburg/P.O. Box 55
Gold Beach, OR 97444

Brookings Visitors Center
Highway 101 South-Harbor/P.O. Box 940
Brookings, OR 97415
(503) 469-2213

Chetco Ranger Station
446 Oak Street
Brookings, OR 97415



Tide pools at Cape Perpetua ... at low tide.

Photograph by Myrna Oakley



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