

Gettin' out of town



To the slopes and back with a couple stops along the way

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Up the McKenzie River Highway

Photos by Hank Trotter

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It starts about this time of year. That depressing, lackluster boredom with winter's bland colors and constant cold, a sort of large scale cabin fever. Time to get away and see something different. Time to get out of town.

Junction City

Passed up by the railroad— Rescued by the automobile

JUNCTION CITY — This is the town that cars built.

If it has four wheels and requires a human to steer, Junction City considers it an integral part of life.

Perhaps this fact becomes clear just inside the Junction City limits, where the parade of car dealerships begins.

Or when, after you've driven past the first 350-car lot, you begin passing the RV dealerships. Or the trailer lots. It doesn't matter. This is the town that cars built.

Occasionally new fads come in to style. Last year it was the new Safeway store; the largest in the valley, local residents boasted.

Why this grocery chain would want to build such a monster of a store in their town is still a mystery. "I guess if they're going to build one, it might as well be big," said Bette Anderson, the town librarian. But the reasons don't matter much, the idea that it was the largest was enough to make it the topic of conversation for months here.

But now even the topic of Safeway is passe.

What's the newest store of interest in Junction City? Why the new auto parts store, of course, one resident said.

It's almost a patriotic pride of cars that inspires Junction City residents. Besides having the largest Safeway, they have the largest American flag flying proudly over one car dealer's expansive lot.

On the flagpole is a dedication from Gov. Vic Atiyeh, not just to Junction City or the flag but to a way of life.

"This flag," the plaque reads, "is dedicated to the great people of Oregon in recognition of one of our greatest freedoms, the freedom of mobility as part of America's heritage."

But this town's obsession with transportation began long before the advent of cars. In 1872, when the town was incorporated, it was named Junction City in the hopes of attracting the railroad, Anderson said.

But the railroad declined the town's offer, and Junction City was a town without a junction, a town without transportation.

And then cars came to the rescue.

The state built Highway 99 and divided it east and west at Junction City, and the town then lived up to its name.

And the cars came. Now gas stations proliferated, the most notable being the Brown Jug, a gas station that, indeed, looks like a brown jug.

Howard Williams, who reopened the Brown Jug earlier this month, doesn't know why the original owner built a brown jug.

The year was 1934, and strange buildings were more popular then. But still Williams only has a guess as to where the idea for the jug originated.

"He got the plans out of a magazine, Popular Mechanics, I think," Williams said.

Junction City has other claims to fame, including the annual Scandinavian Festival. But the popularity of the event has a tendency to irritate local residents.

As Mazie Bailey, owner of the Junction Inn Boarding House puts it, "I just as soon leave town then; you can't even get to your car."

Story by Stasia Scarborough
Photo by Steven Wall

