

We can save McKee Bridge

BY ROBERT E. VAN HEUIT

The McKee Bridge was built in 1917. The purpose of the structure was to convey two stages per day into the Applegate Valley, as well as carry copper ore from nearby mines. In 1956, due to increases in vehicle weights, a bypass road was built with a concrete bridge. The covered bridge was closed to vehicles but remained open to pedestrians until now. This covered bridge is the fourth oldest in the state of Oregon and considered to be the highest at 45 feet above the water. The bridge is a significant attraction for tourists and residents of Jackson County. The bridge is an economic benefit to the area, as over 6,000 people visit the bridge annually from the United States and foreign countries.

Our historic bridge has been closed due to a critical defect discovered during an

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inspection in October 2011. The following describes what has happened and what is happening as a result of this inspection.

Inspection

Early in 2011, Oregon Bridge Engineering Company (OBEC) submitted a proposal to inspect the bridge. The cost of the inspection, including design of a cable-and-plank system to be installed under the bridge, was \$5,000. The cable-and-plank system was to be utilized for a close inspection of the underside of the bridge. The proposal was accepted by Jackson County and the McKee Bridge Historical Society (MBHS) gave the county \$5,000 for that work. OBEC provided the design of the cable-and-plank system. MBHS also paid about \$8,000 for the materials, scaffolding, and core drilling that was necessary to install the cable-and-plank system. The county completed the installation of the cable-and-plank system in September. Early in October 2011, OBEC inspected the bridge and the approaches. On October 25, OBEC reported by letter to the county and to MBHS the results of the inspection. During the inspection OBEC inspectors found a number of deficiencies, including a critical one in the bottom chord of the north truss. Because of that deficiency, OBEC strongly recommended that the county close the bridge immediately to all users. The county complied.

Remedial actions

MBHS, Jackson County, the State of Oregon, and OBEC jointly searched for any possible funding that might assist in

financing a program for repairs. A federal grant program for restoration of covered bridges was found. It was decided that the county would submit a proposal to the grant program to completely restore the bridge. The total cost of the project was estimated to be about \$550,000. The grant program requires that 10.27% of the budget be provided as matching funds to supplement the grant. This means that MBHS will need to raise about \$56,000 (matching funds). Jackson County owns the bridge, but has not budgeted money to maintain the bridge since 1956. Since then local residents and MBHS have raised funds to maintain the bridge. The grant application was submitted in December

and we expect to receive a response sometime in the spring of 2012. If and when we get approval and funding, it will take about 18 months to complete the work. If we do not get the grant, we will still need to raise at least \$50,000 just to correct the critical problem with the north truss so it can be reopened to pedestrian traffic.

Fundraising needed

Assuming we get the grant, MBHS is taking steps to start raising funds now. Members of the board of directors are investigating a number of charitable organizations that may be willing to assist us. Two members of our board planned to attend the recent Oregon Nonprofit Leaders Conference in Medford in hopes of making contact with charitable foundations that may be willing to help us.

As a fundraiser for McKee Bridge, Phil Dollison will present a program about Alcatraz Island (the former prison in San Francisco Bay) on May 8 at 7 pm in the Ruch Library community room. Phil grew up on the island and has some interesting pictures and stories to share with us. There is no charge for attending, but any donations will go toward restoration of the bridge.

McKee Bridge Day will be on Saturday, June 23, this year, to participate in the Applegate Valley Days celebration. On that day, Janeen Sathre will lead three interpretative walking tours of the Gin Lin mining area. The first hike will be 3-1/2 miles, moderately difficult, following the hand-dug ditch. The remaining walks will be easy to moderate one-mile tours of hydraulic mining landscape. Meet at McKee Bridge and travel by car to the

trailhead. The first hike will start at 9:30 am, second hike at 1 pm, and third hike at 3 pm. A donation is required to participate. *All hike donations will be matched by the Microsoft Foundation.* For information, go to www.applegatevalleydays.org and click on "EVENTS."

In addition to these activities, we hope you will also assist us as you are able. If you have any ideas or contacts with any charitable organizations that would like to join us, please contact Paul Tipton at 541-846-7501 or Bob Van Heuit at 541-899-2927. Should you wish to make a contribution to be used for the matching



funds requirement, please mail it to McKee Bridge Historical Society, P.O. Box 854, Jacksonville, OR 97530. Contributions are 501(c)3 tax-deductible.

The MBHS Board of Directors appreciates your continued support.

Robert E. Van Heuit
President
McKee Bridge Historical Society
541-899-2927

BUNCOM DAY 2012

Hitch up the team, saddle that mule, grab the kids and head out to historic Buncom for Buncom Day 2012. If you've attended this friendly event before, you probably already have Saturday, May 26, on your phone or calendar. Old-time fun for all includes the internationally famous parade, food, music, booths, tadpoles, petting zoo and, of course, the infamous chicken splat. The Applegate Lion's club promises plenty of great food this year, and bring your musical instrument for an old-fashioned country jam.

Festivities start at 10 am and end at 3 pm with the fabulous parade around 1 pm Buncom time.

For information, check out our at website www.buncom.org or call Connie Fowler at 541-899-7805.

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Saturday's Events:

"Come-free"...All About Comfrey
Common Herbs - Special Women
Growing a Backyard Pharmacy
Ecological Water Garden Design
Plant ID Walks • Ethical Wildcrafting
Essential Oils: Sourcing & Uses
Protecting & Growing
'At Risk' Medicinal Plants
The Botanical Adventures of Herbal Ed
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Cost: Members: \$65 Non-Member: \$75
Boxed Lunch: \$10 (turkey or vegetarian)

To Register:

Please call UpS at 802-476-6467
or visit www.unitedplantsavers.org

For Class Descriptions & Teacher Bios
visit: www.herb-pharm.com/PTF_2012

Sunday's Events:

3 hour Intensive: \$75
Using Tonic Herbs in the Care &
Treatment of Companion Animals
Pass for Farm Tours: \$20
Herb Pharm, Pacific Botanicals
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