

Discover Stories on the Land

Below is the third excerpt from the unpublished 1996 book, Stories on the Land: An Environmental History of the Applegate and Upper Illinois Valley, by George McKinley and Doug Frank. The Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc., will be publishing the book in its entirety in 2018.

Establishing the route

In the 1830s and '40s the expeditions of the Hudson's Bay Company established a known route through southwest Oregon. Ogden's journey (recounted in the Fall 2017 *Applegater*) was not atypical of the first Euro-American encounters with the region. Later, Michel LaFramboise guided several expeditions: in 1833 (under the leadership of Alexander McLeod) and in subsequent years. In September 1833, John Work's expedition camped along Bear Creek.

Many of these Hudson's Bay groups were large and of varied membership. Work's encampment comprised 63 men, women, children, and Indian guides. Ogden may have traveled with his wife. In some ways, these groups imitated the lifestyle patterns of the natives they encountered, moving across the landscape as nomadic hunter-gatherers and relying upon the land for sustenance. They regularly engaged the natives in trade relations. Their obligation, however, was not to the land and its long-term diversity, but to the furtherance of the commercial and imperial goals of their employer, along with whatever personal goals they may have had. Their relations with the Indians, in marked contrast to those of the later American settlers, were largely nonviolent.

When McLeod and his company moved through the area in 1827, they established friendly relations with the Kelawatset Indians, but when Jedediah Smith and 14 other men moved some 300 pack animals loaded with furs up the southern Oregon coast the following year, Smith, not long out of a Mexican jail in California, moved rapidly and recklessly across the land, losing animals to rivers and traveling hungry. In the vicinity of the lower Umpqua, Smith and company were attacked by Kelawatset Indians. Most of the party were killed.

In 1834 and 1837, en route from the Sacramento Valley to the Willamette, Ewing Young pushed cattle, horses, and mules along the Hudson's Bay Company trail. Besides hoping for personal economic gain, Young was aiming to promote the self-sufficiency of the Willamette region, to show that Americans "could settle in the Willamette Valley with an assurance of being self-supported," completely independent of the company. With the establishment of a viable cattle population, this possibility became apparent, and the Willamette region began a new era of development.

However, both the 1834 and 1837 journeys by Young through southwest Oregon were marked by skirmishes and tension with the native inhabitants. The reasons are perhaps matters of speculation, but it could be presumed that natives might consider Young's small band of men driving 700 cattle over the Siskiyou Summit or 300 up the coast an essentially different threat from that of McLeod's, Ogden's, and Work's nomadic bands of hunters and traders of differing age, sex, and ethnicity that they had previously encountered. In *History of Southern Oregon*, A. G. Walling attributes the success of the English in the fur trade to the overwhelming percentage of French-Canadian and mixed-blood participants, people known to display a

high level of professionalism and expertise. The Americans, on the other hand, were more interested in the lifestyle of drinking and rowdiness than in the need to run a successful company. J. Ross Browne describes the earliest Americans as "a wild, reckless, and daring race of men, trappers, and hunters, whose intercourse with the Indians was not calculated to afford [the Indians] a high opinion of the Americans as a people."

We can speculate other reasons for increased tension with the native inhabitants. Simply the numbers of people coming through could have raised concern. By the time Young drove his first band of cattle over the crest, some 250 British and Americans had already traversed this "Siskiyou Trail" between Oregon and California. Another reason might be that the natives were aware of settlement activity in the Willamette and perceived the connection between these large drives and their own future in the region. Or perhaps the ravages of disease, evidenced in original contact with natives across the continent, had already begun to appear in this region as well. At any rate, the hostile encounters between the first settlers and the natives stand in marked contrast to the earlier, more congenial relations between Hudson's Bay Company trappers and those same native peoples. This difference anticipates an era only a few years distant when all manner of civil relations failed.

A well situated country

Though the earliest travelers through the region were inattentive to detailed record-keeping and the production of historically retrievable information, the Emmons party of the Wilkes Expedition marked a significant step toward cataloging the land.

Officially termed the United States Exploring Expedition and sent to explore the Antarctic, South Pacific, and Pacific Northwest, the Wilkes Expedition set out from Norfolk, Virginia, on August 18, 1838, with 346 men under the command of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes.

By the spring of 1841, they had reached the Pacific Northwest at the mouth of the Columbia River. Their arrival was less than glorious, though, as Lieutenant George Emmons, who had been sent ahead to scout the Columbia, ran his ship aground at the mouth of the river and could only stand ashore and watch as the ship came apart against the rocks.

By August, the whole of the expedition was reunited at Fort Vancouver. Emmons, having recovered from his ignominious arrival, was put in charge of an overland exploration south into California. He traveled with 76 horses or mules and 39 people including a surveyor/cartographer, a naturalist, an artist, two botanists, a geologist, a surgeon, a number of native guides, and a small band of settlers (four women and eight children among them). The exploration generated a wealth of information and carefully recorded observations, though not about the Applegate and Illinois valleys, as the company adhered to the well established Hudson's Bay Company route and did not enter this area.

After nearly a decade of exploration and reflection, Wilkes, writing in 1849, anticipated the contemporary discussion surrounding the Pacific Rim. "No country," he said, "is so well situated to communicate with all parts of the Pacific Ocean as Oregon."

Note: Excerpted by Diana Coogle from pages 19-21 of Stories on the Land: An Environmental History by George McKinley and Doug Frank.

HEROES IN THE APPLGATE

Continued from page 1

there are showers in big semitrailers and a giant 2,500-gallon drum of water to keep them flowing.

Next we headed to Main Street, just past the big yellow awning where the early morning briefings are held. Here, in the communications tent, is where communication is facilitated among on-site fire crews, helicopter crews, and medical evacuations, and fire information and maps are updated.

Along Main Street were other offices and services, such as medical, ordering, planning, training, operations, air operations, safety, and public information, where Meg was based. We also visited the copy shop—they had thought of everything.

With firefighters out fighting fires, all was quiet in the open-air dining area. I could only imagine what a hub of activity this deserted place must be at mealtime. Many calories are expended fighting fires, and it must be hard to keep up with all

those hungry champions. What do the firefighters do for entertainment, you might ask? They sleep. (There is a no-alcohol policy at the camp.)

This pop-up town even had an airport! We trudged up the "Stairway to Heli" to get to the Helibase, which housed three different sizes of helicopters that could accommodate different jobs, environments, and weather conditions. Some features of the Temsco Eurocopter—like the spacious interior that holds five to six passengers and the mechanism to which up to 2,400 pounds of external loads, like buckets of water, are attached—were pointed out to me by Ben Dean, a strapping helicopter crew member, with great relish. This enthusiasm was pervasive at the Helibase. Ben explained with a big smile, "We all just like to be outside."

Donations

Our community was so grateful for the firefighters and many wanted to bring over a casserole or a pie. Through Meg, I learned that the most meaningful action the public can take is to donate to the Wildland

Firefighter Foundation, which benefits fallen or injured firefighters and their families. We can show our gratitude as a community by contributing to this worthy cause. To help, go to wffoundation.org or call 208-336-2996.

I left the Incident Base with a sense of awe and gratitude for all the individuals, teams, crews, resources, and equipment brought to our community to protect us. They travel across the country as fire season peaks in different locales. When a fire is contained, they move to the next fire.

By mid-October, the fire camp had vanished. The heroes had moved on. All that was left was a tidy, rain-drenched field.

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Note: See the Miller Complex Fire progression map online at applegater.org.



Feidela Rivera, part of a nine-member camp crew from Arizona, organizes firefighting clothing in the supply tent at the Miller Complex fire camp. (Photo: Shelley Manning.)

Prevent flue fires!



In the past few years, the Applegate Valley Fire District has seen an increase in flue fires, most of which could have been prevented. Flue fires are especially dangerous because they can spread to the attic within minutes. The best way to deal with a flue fire is to prevent it. According to the Chimney Safety Institute of America (csia.org), here are some ways to help prevent flue fires:

- Clean your chimney at least once each year, before the colder season begins.
- Use only seasoned hardwoods.
- Build smaller, hotter fires that burn completely and produce less smoke.
- Never burn trash in your fireplace or wood stove as this can spark a chimney fire.
- Do not store combustible items near flue and chimney pipes.
- Use a metal bucket when cleaning out ashes from the fireplace or wood stove.
- Be sure smoke alarms are working—early detection is key! Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home and outside each sleeping area. Test smoke-alarm batteries every month and change at least once a year.
- If you do have a flue fire, know how to recognize the sound (a rumbling noise like a moving freight train), and call 911. Then:
 - Immediately close down the air intake into the stove or fireplace. This deprives the fire of oxygen and will help cool and extinguish the fire.
 - Never, ever put water into the chimney. This can cause cracks to form in the lining of the flue and lead to a house fire.
 - Have your flue examined by a professional before using it again.

Wood stoves and fireplaces are great ways to heat a home and save money at the same time. Follow these safety tips to safely enjoy your heat source as the colder weather sets in.

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