

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

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Hike to Whisky Creek

When leaving the broad Grants Pass valley area, the Rogue River winds its devious way to the sea, flowing variously to numerous points of the compass, for a long distance mostly north, but generally, necessarily, in a western direction, to final extinction in the Pacific at Gold Beach.

At Hell's Gate the higher mountains begin closing in to form the famous Rogue River Canyon, one of the West's greatest attractions to sportsmen, boatmen, hikers, nature lovers, and thrill-seekers. These last are given the ride of their lives over the many hair raising rapids, through the swift narrows between towering rock cliffs and down the few "falls" where the river drops away so abruptly the floater seems to be flying through space, his flat-bottomed river boat being hurled perilously close to the

rock bluff at times, or skimming within inches of great midstream rocks projecting ominously above the surface, the practiced river guide battling constantly to take you over the exciting course in relative safety and with maximum thrilling enjoyment.

Beginning at Graves Creek, some distance downriver from Galice, the Rogue canyon is at its loveliest and best, and continues thus for many miles toward Agness on the lower Rogue. Here, just below the Grave Creek Bridge, on the north bank is an improved boat landing and is the usual take-off point for the professional river guides. Here too is the beginning (or end, depending on which way you're travelling) of the beautiful Rogue River Trail, about 35 miles of foot-path that takes you through some of the finest, most rugged scenery to be found anywhere.

When Charles, Dean, and I, a trio of odd-balls who would rather clamber up high mountains or go clomping along forest trails with backpacks than travel by any other means, hiked down the Illinois and up the Rogue this summer, we were stopped by trail

reconstruction from doing the last four miles of the Rogue River Trail below Graves Creek. And so, our horoscopes simultaneously concurring, we decided to do something about that earlier omission.

We couldn't have chosen a lovelier time for our outing. The hills on both sides of the Canyon are painted with the many bright colors of autumn foliage. Add to this the vast dark-green expanses of the great conifers, interspersed with massive gray-brown outcroppings of rock that look down on the river from both sides, and you see a gay panorama of natural beauty that should satisfy the grumpiest of Nature's critics.

Saturday, at Dean's invitation, I went to Grants Pass and stayed overnight at his house for an early start down the Rogue on Sunday morning. Our day began with an added zest when we discovered next morning that the knob-robbers, on their pre-Halloween rounds, had during the night pilfered all our gearshift lever knobs. Dean's Datsun had only one to lose, but my jeep had four, and the little cluster of bare stripped levers

reminded me of a group of snags left standing after a rampaging forest fire. Of course we just laughed off the incident as an innocent little prank. Dean's laughter noticeably more gusty than mine—about 4 times more, in fact.

After an early breakfast the four of us, including Dean's brother, Neal, crowded into the doodlebug and drove down to Grave Creek. The new 4-mile section of trail, much of it carved out of solid cliff rock sometimes high above the river, is a hikers' delight. Two of the gang carried fishing equipment (I won't name the two because one of our basic club rules demands that all members share our failures equally). Now and then where the trail approaches the river we'd go down and ply the rushing, fish-loaded waters with soft rubbery angleworms that no fish in his right mind would ignore. With every cast, the instant the delicacy-laden hook hit the water steelhead of all sizes began jumping around. But, whatever the explanation, they did ignore our delicious offering and were merely poking fun at us by leaping out of the water and mirthfully thumping their fishy noses at us.

At Whisky Creek, where we ended our long river hike in June, we had a pleasant visit with our old friend Lou Martin, an old-time Canyon dweller. And once again we were treated to a delicious cup of Lou's special nail-floating coffee. Lou is the gentlemen (who we discovered last June), uses a scoop-shovel in lieu of a teaspoon in transferring instant coffee to your cup. And if you timidly suggest, about the second scoop, that that should do, Lou, continuing to shovel, sarcastically snarls, "Did you want coffee or water?"

The weather and trail were perfect for our exhilarating 8-mile river hike. And we found that the lure of the saucy, finicky steelhead, the cool but sunny weather and special fall scenery had drawn many others into the celebrated Rogue Canyon.

Despite the social indignity of being snubbed by the hoity-toity Rogue steelhead—and the loss of a few gear shift lever knobs—our outing was the kind that adds an important bit to our personal records for enjoyable future reference.

Civil war soldiers celebrated Thanksgiving in the field

By Tom Emery

As in most wars, the men of the Civil War found it excruciatingly difficult to be away from loved ones at holiday time. Thanksgiving was no exception.

The holiday itself has its roots in the Civil War. The first official proclamation declaring Thanksgiving as a national day of remembrance was issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, partly in honor of Northern successes in the war that year. Lincoln designated the last Thursday in November "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise."

That year, Thanksgiving fell on the day after a crucial Union victory at the battle of Chattanooga. The previous year in late November, armies were on the march

during the Fredericksburg and Vicksburg campaigns. Around Thanksgiving 1864, some Union forces were on the cusp of the bloody battle of Franklin, while others were marching to the sea with William T. Sherman.

Due to their harsh surroundings, many Civil War men in the field enjoyed only the most spartan of celebrations. In Kewanee, Illinois, teenage sisters Tirzah and Sarah Vaill received a letter from their older brother, an Illinois infantryman, after Thanksgiving 1861 that described his holiday meal, "hard bread" and salt pork. He added that "during the day I thought of you at home having your nice dinners" and "wishing maybe that you might present a plate to some of us soldiers filled with your own goodies."

From his camp in Virginia that same year, Private Zebina Bickford of the 6th Vermont Infantry made the best of his day. In a letter home, he mused that "you may think we are homesick today but it is not so," mainly because of a care package sent from loved ones back in Vermont. The goodies consisted of "a box of clothing and a few nicknacks consisting of eatables" that made "a very good thanksgiving for us."

With tongue in cheek, he wrote that "you can't imagine what a lot of fine things we had for supper... a piece of sour bread and salt pork." However, he gleefully noted that "some of mother's cookies and doughnuts that came in our box" made the evening memorable. It would be Bickford's last

Thanksgiving, as he died the following April 30.

The following year, Asa Bean, a doctor in the 114th Ohio, enjoyed greater tidings. On Nov. 27, 1862, he wrote that "there has been a surprise party here today for the benefit of soldiers and nurses." The feast included "roast turkey, chicken, pigeon, and oysters stewed" along with "baked chicken, boiled potatoes, turnip, apple butter, and cheese butter." Bean, though, lamented that he "cannot eat much without being sick." He, too, would die months later.

Elsewhere that year, Federal soldiers stationed at Fort Pulaski, Ga. held their own "fete and festival." The day's events included target practice and a rowing match, foot race, and hurdle sack race. Competitions

involving a greased pole and a greased pig were also on the agenda, as was a "burlesque dress parade."


In some cases, Thanksgiving was a time of spiritual reflection. On the first official installment of the holiday in 1863, Sewell Van Alstine, a soldier in the 95th Illinois, wrote in his diary that he "went to town" and "heard an excellent discourse by an army chaplain at the Presbyterian Church." He also wrote there was "no drill today," a welcome respite.

In 1864, the Union League Club of New York City pleaded for donations of "cooked poultry and other proper meats" as well as "mince pies, sausages, and fruits" for men in the field. The call brought in some \$57,000 in cash donations, as well as nearly 225,000

pounds of poultry and large quantities of cakes, gingerbread, pickles, apples, vegetables, and cheese. One appreciative soldier saw the deeper meaning, writing that "it isn't the turkey, but the idea that we care for."

Others received far less. That year, Lewis Crater of the 50th Pennsylvania recorded in his diary that the Sanitary Commission "issued three fine apples to every man." Despite the middling fare, Crater and others likely gave thanks that they had survived to see another Thanksgiving during the four bloodiest years in American history.

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