

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

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Illinois Valley News

Road Building

First there was a dull, subdued report. This pre-shock wave, sounding like an echo on the wrong side of the blast, was followed immediately by a thunderous roar that jarred the whole area, and the great rock cliff came tumbling down in a spectacular jumble of multi-ton chunks of rock and lesser debris.

This gigantic heap, looking like the destruction resulting from a massive earthquake, and covering the road with an impenetrable-looking 20-ft.-deep barrier, was immediately attacked by a monster machine, one of Bill Mignot's mighty "cats" that handle huge rocks weighing tons the way a juvenile expert shoots marbles.

To watch such an impressive display of power is to witness a thrilling spectacular—with a free ticket and a ringside seat. It's the most fascinating spectacle I've had the privilege of enjoying this summer, and until Bill's road-building operation with his fantastic machines moves farther up the valley and out of my sight and hearing, I'm afraid much of my time will be spent just

watching those tearing, rending, monsters at work.

When the road was originally cut across the face of the great hardrock cliff down the road, the rock was found to be so resistant that the job turned out to be more than was bargained for. So a narrow road, formed in part by rock fill (that was washed away in the Big Flood, leaving us up-the-crickers stranded for a couple of weeks) was settled for. And over the intervening years the great rocky mass above the roadway has looked ominously down on us with a leering smile.

But when the big solid-rock point saw No-nonsense Bill—who has done any number of such tough jobs for the Forest Service—moving in with his heavy modern equipment, its supercilious smile quickly changed to a worried frown.

First maneuver in the frontal attack against the big cliff was performed by Bob Wadleigh, at the controls of the big precision rock-drill, an ingenious contraption powered by compressed air which, by adding extensions to the drill bit, can penetrate to any desired depth. Starting at one edge of the cliff, a series of 25 or 30 holes, 30 feet deep and about 3 inches in diameter, were drilled across the cliff-face a few feet above the road level.

Later these holes were packed with

heavy charges of powerful blasting powder, detonating caps inserted in each charge and all connected together with a continuous electric wire which led a safe distance up the road, where it terminated in a small portable box containing an electric generator. Protruding from the top of the box is a hand-operated plunger which, when suddenly depressed, activates the generator and sends an electric current along the wire. This electric impulse, for all practical purposes instantaneous, sets off all the powder charges at once.

And that's where we came in: The high and mighty mass of stone, that had held tough for a million years, gave a mighty shudder of despair, hung for an instant shattered and dying, then came crashing down with a roar of final defiance to rest in a vast jagged heap atop the road, as a last pitiful demonstration of its hate and revenge for the old man-made wound that had started all the trouble in the first place.

The big bulldozer, battering away at the huge rockpile, appearing at times to be in danger of being crushed or swept into the river below by tumbling boulders from above, in a surprisingly short time had the road cleared sufficiently to allow waiting cars and log trucks to pass.

Back home after watching the

main mass of debris pushed off the road, and trying to catch up on my homework, occasionally I'd hear another heavy blast from down river and have to drop everything and hurry down to investigate. What I usually found was Bob and brother Bud shooting "donikers," blasting apart the big dangerous hanging chunks of rock left after the big blast that could conceivably slide down onto the road later.

In a way I'll be glad when the road-building operation moves away up the canyon! I've got a lot of things to do here at the cabin that just can't be put off much longer, but the roar of the big machines and the fascination of watching them work affect me the way a powerful magnet does a footloose piece of iron.

But there's really a limit to how much we can allow such a distracting influence to interfere with our homework—I just must get these neglected chores taken care of.

Uh—excuse me, please. I just heard another thunderous roar down the road a piece, and I know the boys will be expecting me down there to help study the result of whatever it was they did. And I know they will appreciate my hearty approval of whatever the result might be.

LIBRARY ...

Continued from A-1

Indeed the constant random destruction occurring at the library, schools, churches and businesses strains both nerves and budgets throughout the community, and while some seek explanations for these damages, others, like Valley resident Karen Weber, say "most of these criminals don't have any purpose."

"A lot of these vandals and local criminals are nihilistic," Weber said. "And if we let them, they'll tear the rest of this community apart. This town could lose all its personality and end up looking like a penitentiary or a military base."

Indeed, tall cyclone fences now encircle parts of the former county building, the post office, and now, the library is considering the same tactic to keep the riff-raff out.

A few people had been "holed up" behind the library, where camping chairs and bags of cloths were found. And evidence of camp fires in the summertime had neighbors pretty nervous, according to Illinois Valley Library branch manager Roberta Lee.

"One day we found a brief case and a set of golf clubs and a kid's bicycle," Lee said, adding that the owners of the first two items were located, but that she still has custody of the bike - though if someone calls and describes it, they can claim it.

She also said the building's down spouts had been kicked off and that some thug tried to jimmy the back door open, prompting a county employee to add a metal reinforcement plate to the door and install an exterior security light - though the very next night, the new fixture was spray painted to block the light.

"On a weekly basis we've

been battling vandalism, graffiti and break-ins," Lee said. "We cannot have people continuing to cost us thousands of dollars. It's too much. So we're looking at fencing the back to protect our air intake and propane tank. We really don't want to look at a fence in the front - but the only fencing we can afford is chain link."

"Part of what we're seeing are signs of the times," Weber added. "But another really big part of the trouble is this place. The poverty, the criminal elements and the lack of commitment to law enforcement; all that adds up. Plus, there's not enough grassroots participation in the neighborhood watch."

Lee and Weber both talked about strategies to end the seemingly endless cycle of criminality that has a grip on Cave Junction and they both say effective solutions would involve empowering neighborhood watch organizer Jimmy Evans with a real budget.

"The businesses and the city all have to kick in more money to hire real security," Weber said.

"Jimmy's got some great ideas and he's working harder than anybody for our community. We should fund him and listen to him," Lee said. "We must have additional security out on our streets at night."

Evans himself repeatedly asks for more people to "take back their own town" by getting involved in the CJ Patrol.

The late Audrey Moore, a popular community organizer who founded Precious Dirt, a local group that focused on soil health by confronting the dangers of pesticides, had a sign on her desk that read: "I always thought someone should do something about this; until one day I realized, I was someone."



(Photo courtesy Scott Blackledge for the *Illinois Valley News*)

After repeated vandalism the fountain at the library will be taken down.

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