

A COAST FOR ALL SEASONS



BY ROBERT STANLEY NEED

Seven political entities, called counties, comprise the legal subdivision of the Oregon coast. From north to south, they are: Clatsop (approximate population 30,200); Tillamook (18,500); Lincoln (25,800); Lane (230,400); Douglas (74,700); Coos (59,300); and Curry (12,500). All together, the coastal counties represent more than 450,000 Oregonians, or roughly just under one-quarter of the state's population, according to the 1970 census. And before you start screaming about using the heavy valley-oriented populations of Lane (Eugene) and Douglas (Roseburg, et al.), we recognize this and find it a very important factor in discussion, as you will find out later.

We find that these coastal counties also account for nearly a quarter of the retail business conducted annually in Oregon.

Edging sideways into the argument about population, in view of the preponderance of Lane and Douglas counties' valley populations, we can for the sake of discussion find that it is something like 200,000 year-around coastal residents who bear the brunt of the capricious twists and turns of the area's economic fluctuations.

For more than a hundred years the logging barons kept the Oregon coast as their own private baronial fief, enjoying its physical remoteness from "civilization," building towns only as centers of their processing and shipping mills, and in violent and often brutal competition giving birth to a poisonous and enduring atmosphere of insularity and suspicion between towns and sections. This attitude continues and is often the cloud that darkens relationships between Coasters and the strong influences that are moving in from the Willamette Valley and elsewhere.

The coastal range has been raped of its first-stand cedar and fir and replanting has been far short of the reproductive panacea it was promised to be. Perhaps it will take the fall of a rapidly diminishing 2nd-growth tree on the head of every Coaster before the message is clear — the days of dependence on the wood products industry to support the coastal economy are quickly and decisively drawing to an end. The coastal mills that have not already been shut down appear to be pawns in a much larger game being played from Portland, San Francisco and New York, and the voices of a few hundred thousand coastal residents are too feeble to control the industry as a viable and truly local adjunct to the local economy.

The coast had better soon find some other more reliable direction for its economic survival. At stake are not only local businesses and support services, local transportation or housing services. Most importantly, local morale is at the edge of despair and confusion.

THE HEAVY INDUSTRY SALVATION

The unstable wood products situation is not really new or surprising. Since the early 1940s coastal businessmen have put up with mill closings and the fitful starts and stops of ambitious projects from Astoria to Brookings. But every time they face the problem, after a brief and usually unproductive

and misunderstood dialogue on coastal tourism, they frantically grovel at the feet of their economic gods and chant "Bring in heavy industry," with the corollary chorus, *It will create thousands of jobs.*

Proponents of heavy industry bellow long and loud with supposedly attractive catch-phrases such as "We need diversification," and "We need the jobs."

Their opponents respond, at first in obvious agreement that diversification is desperately needed, and yes, the sorry state of the coastal job market must be remedied. But, they ask — What, When, Where & How?

Thrusting a heavy industrial facility like the aluminum smelting works that once sought residence in Warrenton would

result in a nearly endless chain reaction that could in the long run either destroy or unfavorably change the character of life in northern Clatsop County. The present unstable energy picture implies that a massive electrical energy user like the aluminum plant would have been, whether client to Trojan (nuclear power) Bonneville (hydroelectric dams) or the Vernonia Power & Light Company (local public utility), would constantly threaten shut-downs and layoffs of this wonderful new job corps the AMAX aluminum plant would have been. Clatsop County would have built itself into a dependent satellite of AMAX, and the Astoria metropolitan area might eventually have been described as the "Little Seattle-Boeing Complex to the South." It is not nonsense; the new shipping facilities required, the new housing, the new food and service supply outlets, the land transportation access arteries built upon local taxpayers' moneys, all would constantly lie at the mercy of the daily aluminum quote on the stock exchange or on the variable snow levels supplying the upper Columbia River. The slightest tremor in the delicate balance would cause panic in Clatsop. And — like the reliance on wood production for so long, the Coasters would have nothing to say about it.

At the risk of espousing the *Pinko Environmentalists*, we must raise the fact that hundreds of thousands of dollars have already been spent on geological studies to determine what the coast of Oregon is made of, what it can take and what it should be used for. All of these expensive reports show without doubt that we are standing on some of the most unstable, shifting and geologically immature land in the world, and that any idea of siting nuclear power plants on the coast would be suicidal.

To even attempt to stabilize the massive slide areas, to remove the man-induced siltation of the bays and estuaries — without even mentioning the total destruction of the fragile ecology that would result — would cost more than any citizen, governmental body or private corporation could or would be able to pay.

Of all the so-called heavy industry discussed for the Oregon coast, there should be serious interest in shipping. Astoria, Newport, Coos Bay and North Bend are all in the process of improving port conditions. But this program is hampered with the traditional curse of inadequate land transportation facilities once the ship comes in, or getting stuff to port in time to not miss the boat. Private industry and government must agree to repair existing rail lines and roads and construct new ones. A great deal of planning with public support and participation must be done.

ADAPTABLE INDUSTRY

If, with proper planning, properly built and conducive to both the health and aesthetics of the coast, some heavy industry does find its way here, excellent: it should be welcomed. But what is so pathetic is the fact that so many productive, lucrative and attractive business alternatives do and can exist here on the coast.

Very little public concern has been given to the invitation of businesses known as the nearly infinite spectrum of "light industries." *The Wall Street Journal* and dozens of other periodicals reveal literally thousands of American light industries that are looking around for new homes. Some do not like the cities they are in or cities in general, others would like an image change and better working and living conditions for their employees. Modern communications and even our present coastal transportation abilities would allow companies to operate

ELEANOR RIGBY...COME HOME

BY TERRY BLEVINS

Most Cannon Beach taverns do a tremendous business. Rarely the scenes of drunken brawls or unruly boisterousness, they usually are packed with quiet ships passing in the night.

In the smaller towns in Oregon and elsewhere, the taverns are meeting places for old friends who gather together nightly for an hour to shoot some pool (as in Wheeler) or to play some shuffleboard (as in Vernonia) or to pass the time in any of a myriad of pleasant, fulfilling ways.

In metropolitan areas, the taverns are, for the large part, the stop-off point between a day's work and an evening with the family, for both blue collar workers and executives.

All taverns run into periodic troublemakers, alcoholics or hangers-on. But there is another disquieting aspect of the taverns in Cannon Beach: the apparent makeup of the clientele. These taverns, it would seem, have become both the haven and the hell of the lonely.

The Oregon coast, and particularly that portion in southern Clatsop County, attracts the lonely because of its mystery, its beauty and its reputation. But the climate, usually rainy, often stormy, black, wet and windy, then perpetuates and amplifies that loneliness.

One sees these lonely people everywhere, ambling alone along the streets at all hours of the day and night, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee, or sipping beer in the taverns while immersed in inscrutable circumspection.

"They're strange people," remarked one bartender. "They come in alone, not to pick up anybody, or to be picked up...they just want to be with people."

"But while they come in looking for companionship, they find they can't relate to anyone. They can't develop any kind of relationship, meaningful or otherwise. It's kind of sad."

Who are these sad, misanthropic people, who don't really want to be misanthropic but can't help themselves? They are, of course, all different, with different psychological makeups, with different backgrounds, and with different problems.

But speaking generally, they are people of artistic temperament. Cannon Beach, Oregon's newest and fastest growing art colony, is the Mecca of painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, photographers, weavers and potters.

Banding together, and by joint effort, they live through the winter, painting, sculpting, writing, playing and singing, taking pictures, weaving and throwing pots. In the summer,

gallery doors are thrown open to the "fat cats" from Portland and elsewhere, and the artists sell, sell, sell.

At least some of them do.

Many don't.

As with the old chicken-egg analogy, it's a question of which came first. Did the artist, a lonely, insecure introvert become an artist in order to express him/herself...only to find that didn't work either? Or did the artist, frustrated over his/her inability to use their medium meaningfully (meaningful in the sense their works mean something to others; hence sales and bank accounts), become a lonely, insecure introvert?

It has probably worked both ways, but the result is the same.

While this coastal town may be atypical in the "art colony" sense, it is all too typical in another.

With the exception of the relatively few "natives," we coastal residents are big city people playing small town America. We play by the rules of gossip and imaginary intrigue, then are surprised and hurt by the results.

And no one is more hurt than the sensitive, frustrated, unsuccessful artists.

Cannon Beach is a one-dimensional environment for artists. It begins and ends at the same point. While an artist might have his/her greatest opportunity there, she/he will also have their greatest competition. Medium, message and mediocrity are not enough.

Cannon Beach is an adult daydream. Its reputed lure has attracted these people, who now find they must cut wood, sell bottles and dig ditches to eke out an existence. Too poor to leave, too disgruntled to do anything differently, they wait (and wait) for someone to recognize their talents and, in the meantime, they seek out the others just like themselves for no other reason than to reassure themselves that, while they are lonely, they are not alone.

Terry Blevins was one of the last editors of the original *North Coast Times Eagle*, and acclaimed by staff and readers his best editor. Founder publisher Robert Stanley Need called him, "The most expert Editor in our brief, tempestuous history." His story 'Eleanor Rigby...Come Home' is reprinted from the June 27, 1974 issue.

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