

Reserve: ‘What do people want these roads to do for them?’

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Generating revenue has never been the main priority of the reserve, but the costs associated with maintenance may not make it a sustainable venture, Barnes said.

“If we have to do extensive road rehab every time we do this, we’re not going to break even,” Barnes said. “We’re going to have to subsidize that.”

If the report suggests a lot of major modifications are necessary, the community has a few options.

Thinning could be taken out of the plan as a recommendation altogether, and the roads decommissioned, Barnes said. The downside would be the city would no longer be able to expect any kind of revenue from the reserve, meaning any restoration will have to be paid with grants or the general fund. The ultimate goal of restoring the forest would still evolve naturally, Barnes said, but not as quickly.

The community could also still have thinning operations, but leave the logs in the reserve for habitat restoration rather than revenue, Sims said.

Roads would not have to be maintained to support logging trucks.

There are benefits to having less disturbance in a watershed, but he also has seen how thinning has encouraged new growth, Sims said. Keeping woody debris within the reserve could also aid in ongoing salmon habitat restoration efforts.

“You do have an impact,” Sims said. “But it’s also more about the perception of what that is. People are shocked by it, but in a couple of years it looks more natural.”

This summer, Sims will continue evaluating roads throughout the reserve to determine which need major, minor or no maintenance to support any future activity — whether that be a logging truck or a hiker. He expects the report to be finished by September, and hopes it will inform the committee in whatever direction is chosen.

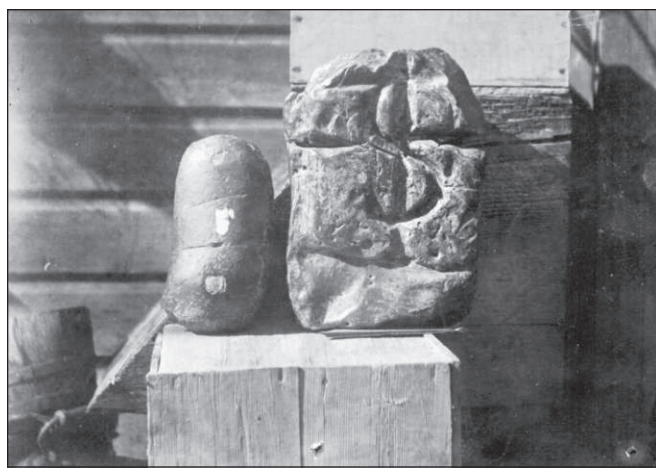
“A lot of it will come down to: What do people want these roads to do for them?” Sims said. “We’ll take a fresh look at all of it, to see if the community is excited about another thinning project.”



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Roads are being evaluated in the Ecola Creek Forest Reserve as a part of the five-year review of the property.

Beeswax: Group last searched for shipwreck last summer



Oregon Historical Society

Researchers have linked the markings from blocks of beeswax found near Manzanita to shippers in the Philippines that were part of the Spanish galleon trade across the Pacific Ocean.

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had a complete manifest of the estimated 235 passengers and crew aboard the ship.

Researchers also found a partial cargo manifest, including 2.5 tons of mercury that may help with identification of the wreck, and were able to link the markings on some of the beeswax blocks found in Oregon to shippers in the Philippines part of the galleon trade.

“I hope that our archival research will help the archaeological team in locating the wreck,” La Follette said. “I would also like other people to do genealogical research of the

people on the passenger and crew list.”

Other articles in the quarterly recap the Santo Cristo de Burgos’ crew and cargo, along with the Spanish galleon trade across the Pacific Ocean and the tradition of treasure hunting around Neahkahnie Mountain and the Nehalem Spit. One recaps the research by the Beeswax Wreck Project, started in 2006 to ascertain the nationality, port of origin, destination, name and final resting place of the ship.

The Beeswax Wreck Project has since been folded into the Maritime Archaeological Society, a nonprofit based in Astoria and focused on doc-

umenting shipwrecks in the Pacific Northwest. The group last searched for the shipwreck last summer, deploying side-scan sonar and an underwater robot to explore rocky outcroppings along Oswald West State Park.

Scott Williams, lead researcher with the Beeswax project, said the archaeological society is hampered by a lack of money for the expensive underwater archaeology equipment. The group will dive near the Beeswax search area this summer in search of an unrelated anchor chain, but needs a new magnetometer to help find metal deposits from artifacts such as the can-

nons the Santo Cristo de Burgos would have been carrying, he said.

But Williams is excited about the potential interest La Follette’s work could generate.

“I think it kind of kicks it up to another level of scholarship,” he said. “Having this out will really raise awareness.”

La Follette, who is active with the Oregon Coast Alliance, will present her team’s findings July 8 at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. Copies of the Oregon Historical Quarterly are available at the historical society’s museum store, and starting next week at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

D.B. Cooper: ‘I want out of the system’

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Colbert claims the letter, part of a larger FOIA document dump, proves that his No. 1 Cooper candidate — Robert Wesley Rackstraw, an Army paratrooper and ex-convict now living in the San Diego area — is the infamous airborne bandit. Rackstraw was once a person of interest to the FBI before the bureau cleared him.

In the typed, two-paragraph letter, allegedly written from the Bahamas to “let you know I am not dead but really alive,” the writer repeats a couple of odd phrases, their final iterations appearing in the sentences:

“I want out of the system and saw a way through good ole Unk,” (that is, Uncle Sam); and “And please tell the lackey cops D.B. Cooper is not my real name.”

Rick Sherwood, a member of Colbert’s investigative team and an Army Security Agency veteran who briefly supervised Rackstraw in Vietnam, had a theory: Perhaps the repetition signaled Army “code-speak,” used by the military to locate enemy troops during the war.

Code cracked

The decoded results: “through good ole Unk” becomes “by skyjacking a jet plane” — and “And please tell the lackey cops” becomes “I am 1st Lt. Robert Rackstraw.”

When Colbert asked his “cold case” team to review Sherwood’s work, “They said, ‘Uh, this is a confession.’”

“It’s stunning,” Colbert said. “I mean, he not only admits he’s Cooper, he says he did it.”

Sherwood explained the code-breaking process, which is copyrighted, to The Daily Astorian off the record. His results were checked by another member of Colbert’s team, retired Lt. Col. Ken Overturf, using an old Army code book.

Earlier this year, Sherwood deciphered codes from

a court-released D.B. Cooper letter sent to the Seattle Times, New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Washington Post. On each carbon copy — three of which were scooped up by the FBI before they were printed — was a series of numbers and alphabetical letters. It’s the same code used in the new Oregonian letter.

When decrypted, the characters point to the three military units Rackstraw served in, two of them top secret until the 1980s. He is the only man known to have served in all three units, a fact Colbert called “the smoking gun.”

Overturf said in an email: “I do not believe that anyone else could possibly fit the profile of these three units.”

Because using the code would require someone with knowledge of the coding process, and the intellect to apply them in the D.B. Cooper letters, “the investigative path again leads directly back to Rackstraw,” he wrote.

Rackstraw could not immediately be reached for comment.

Norman de Winter

Colbert argues that, in the months leading up to the hijacking, Rackstraw passed through the Astoria area under the alias “Norman de Winter,” claiming to be a moneyed Swiss baron. The bizarre episode remains part of the collective memory of people who lived on the North Coast at the time.

De Winter got friendly with townsfolk, took their food and money, promised them a free trip to his lodge in Switzerland for the Christmas holiday — and suddenly vanished. A short time later, de Winter allegedly resurfaced in Corvallis.

Then, on Nov. 24, 1971, a dark-suited, cigarette-smoking man wearing sunglasses and using the name “Dan Cooper” (misreported as “D.B. Cooper”) boarded a Northwest Orient flight from Portland to Seattle. He told the

stewardess his briefcase contained a bomb, and demanded cash and some parachutes after the passengers deplaned at their destination.

He ordered the crew to fly him to Mexico and, somewhere over the Oregon-Washington state border, he skydived into the dark wilderness, the money fastened to his body. He was never caught, and the identity of the thief has been a source of relentless, often far-fetched speculation. The incident remains the only unsolved skyjacking in U.S. history.

‘I’d be extremely nervous’

When the de Winter/Rackstraw/Cooper connection came up, some people wondered whether the Astoria visitor’s name is a nod to Dick Winter, the parachuting hero of World War II’s Normandy invasion. No photo of de Winter has been found.

Rackstraw is one of many names offered up over the years from the “Cooperite” community. Joseph Lakich and Walter Recca, military veterans who both died in recent years, are among the latest Cooper contenders.

Colbert, the author of “The Last Master Outlaw,” has been building a cumulative case for Rackstraw’s guilt over several years. He accuses the FBI, which closed the D.B. Cooper case in 2016, of ignoring his evidence. The agency announced it will not accept new evidence except the stolen money or parachute.

In the past, Rackstraw has shrugged off the idea that he’s Cooper, though he has repeatedly hinted in interviews with journalists that he could be the man after all. He has dismissed and disparaged Colbert’s work.

With this latest revelation, however, Sherwood imagines Rackstraw’s evasions will become harder to sustain.

“If I was Robert Rackstraw, I’d be extremely nervous,” Sherwood said.



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