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# WEEKEND BREAK

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Ed Hunt

Historical photos provided by Appelo Archives Center



# RIVERS AND ROADS

## Local routes created against the odds of Pacific Northwest weather

By ED HUNT

I rode my motorcycle around Grays River Valley in the days after January's wild storms died down.

Sandbars of brown silt still formed temporary speed bumps on local roads. Guardrails were dented and mangled where trees had fallen across.

One such tree came down across state Route 4 just a few feet away from a house built by Ole Dosland — a Norwegian immigrant who used a team of horses to grade the road that would later cut through his farm.

Clouds clung to the treetops along the steep slopes of the Willapa Hills. Green pastures on either side of the Grays River were still covered by trapped floodwater waiting to either drain down into saturated soils or evaporate into saturated air.

A quarter mile from my house, a sign warned of a road closure on KM Mountain. A slide of rain-saturated earth oozed across the road Jan. 23, taking dozens of trees with it.

The slide was so large — 55,000 cubic

yards of earth and rock — stretching so far up the steep hill, that it was quickly determined that a cleanup would last for months. A major transportation route toward the outside world was cut off.

### The age of water transportation

Highways are latecomers in southwest Washington.

Rivers, creeks and bays were natural highways predating European settlement. These routes were well established and understood by the Chinook Indian Tribe, who used the coastal waterways as economic arteries to barter with inland nations and others along the coast.

For the first 100 years of European settlement, steamers ran regular routes connecting farm communities via riverside landings. Railroads cut deep into woods to haul out logs, transporting them only far enough to dump them into rivers, where they were floated out to sawmills.

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TOP LEFT: Altoona-Pillar Rock Road runs along the Columbia between Rosburg and the Pillar Rock Salmon Cannery. TOP RIGHT: Surveyors work on a wooden bridge somewhere between Knappton and Naselle, circa 1900. ABOVE: Norwegian immigrant Ole Dosland and his crew used horsepower to carve what would later become Washington state Route 4.



LEFT: One of the first attempts at a road over KM Mountain in Wahkiakum County. ABOVE: Local river boats carried consumer goods to inland communities before successful roads were built. BELOW: A plank footbridge across the Grays River near the Meserve Store in Wahkiakum County.

