

Wagon Ride Over The Coast Range

Continued from last week

On the return trip Cottage Grove, Drain and Oakland appeared promising places, set in picturesque scenery, and Roseburg, sitting among the hills looked well kept and prosperous.

Called at 5 in the morning, I prepared to take the mail stage that left at 6:00 in two sections.

The automobiles made good time, the roads were fair and, mounting little by little we came to Camas valley, that airy area of level land, up a thousand feet nearer the sun than we are. Close to the top of the mountain we passed the remnants of a rock crusher that had been brought up there and put in position to crush before the rock had been tested. Then it was found that the rock was not suited to road purposes and the crusher was never used.

At Camas the mail was transferred to two wagons, without springs and with four horses hitched to each. The seats were bedded down with straw, a blanket thrown over. Then we passengers were seated and a blanket strapped around us. The driver did not have any blanket over him. He wanted to be free to use his legs when the wagon tipped over, he cheerfully informed us as he swung into position. He thrust the toe of one foot into a loop of leather on the dashboard and grasped the ribbons and the whip "Only tipped over three times the last trip" he remarked. "I never drove four horses before. Say, boys, which line do you pull when you want to gee?"

With playful talk of this kind he ambled on while the leaders turned into a thoroughfare that resembled a down east hog lane in the early spring time.

The weather which had been clear now developed lowering clouds which soon began to sprinkle occasionally. Of course the rig was not covered and the rain as it increased or diminished helped with the adventure.

Climbing upward the chuck holes kept getting deeper and the places when, as the driver said, "everybody stopped to rest" became more numerous. The yellow clay was drying up and had reached that stage when its texture was stiff and resisted the wheels of the wagon. Each deep hard stretch was harder than the previous one to go through. A man who lives at the "sheep ranch" one of the few spots along the trail where any one lives, appeared at this time and added to the load of the leading wagon with three rolls of wire fencing. Soon after this wagon reached a particularly long and stiff piece of mud where one of the leaders of the team varied the monotony of the steady pull by lying down in the traces. Our driver promptly went forward to aid in the rescue. The sheep ranch man and the head driver had already tackled the task and before long succeeded in getting the horse in exactly the wrong position for a forward movement, all around, with its back in the mud and its feet pawing the air. The horse was comfortable for once in the varied career of its existence and it evinced a reluctance to arise from its easy couch. However, after the harness had been removed, and after considerable profanity, and whip and other stimulants, the horse was finally put right side up, albeit some what wobbly on its feet.

To put it back into the hole

was manifestly unwise so the leaders of the back team were brought forward and hitched in. It seemed that the rescued horse was grouchy or sickly or something. But the rearranged team was ineffective to haul the wagon with its weight of perhaps 1500 pounds to higher ground.

Our cheerful driver took the reins and although he swore until the leaves on the nearby myrtles wilted the effort was bootless.

The sheep ranch man was, however, a natural genius, and he suggested that the passage be made as an automobile is run, by attaching power to the rear wheel.

So the original leaders were sent back into the mud and leaders number two were hitched to the top of the felly of the back wheel. There the effect was the same as the effort of a man at the spokes and the wheel and wagon went forward a bit. With a couple more hitches the wagon was up on the heights at the end of the mire. With a liberal use of profanity, and whip, wagon number two went dashing down into the depths and out again without a stop.

This is only one instance of the heroic work necessary to get our mail through every day. When the mail fails to come through you can put your imagination at work and figure how the teams are working over that twenty odd miles of mud and rock through the canyon on the Roseburg mail route.

As an experience, a mile or two may be passed with the novelty of the thing still working. But when you sit for eight or ten hours while the horses walking are passed by pedestrians, and when each chuck hole seems worse than the one just passed over, it requires some restraint to take it all good naturedly.

All the while Nature is presenting some of her most inviting scenery. As the road grade rises and falls we ride nearer or farther from the waters of the Middle Fork of the Coquille which flows down the canyon. Sometimes its flow is fairly peaceful, most often is a rushing rapid and frequently it dashes around boulders, or makes a fall with a noise like the booming of the ocean surf.

Contributing creeks add their force to the main stream and often to do so they tumble down from considerable heights with miniature cascades. The slopes of the canyon are lined with giant firs, and some that have their root far below, still, with their tops, pierce into the clouds. Sometimes where the canyon widens and the traveller gets perspective enough to see the nearby wooded mountains, the banks of fog curl in and around the timber of their sides like the smoke from some camp fire.

Long about five o'clock we arrived at the transfer station where we were treated to a meal that was lunch and dinner all in one. And it was a meal of infinite variety and abundant quantity as well as excellent quality, eaten with the appetite of a day laborer.

At the station we got a fresh relay of horses and a spring wagon and proceeded on a night journey to Bridge. Since entering Coos county the roads had been materially better and the ride was not at all uncomfortable, except for the occasional dash of cold rain. This wagon, like the first was minus a cover.

Camas valley has bonded itself to extend the road to the Coos county line and the county court says it will add enough money to

see the thing is done right. "Ten years too late" grumbles the driver.

Enroute to the next stop we were entertained with various reminiscences by the driver—of dark nights and bears and bob cats and also of the nervous passenger. Of this class was the lady who was in the rig one night when the roadway was obstructed by a large fallen tree. The tree was too large for one man to handle with the ax which the wagon regularly carries, so the driver announced his intention to unhitch a horse and ride back to the nearest settler two miles away, for help in clearing the track. The nervous lady however insisted that the driver stay with his passengers, that he get the rig on the other side of the obstruction immediately and proceed with the journey.

It was at this stage of the ride that the houses of the settlers began to grow more numerous and at times the road was actually fenced off from the land through which it traversed.

The passage of the stage was quite an event in the life of these settlers and some of them sat up beyond bed time in order to share in the excitement. Those houses where no light showed the driver endeavored to waken the inmates by cat calls and usually there was an answering signal.

At a barn near Bridge we paused for another transfer, the seventeenth of the trip. The new rig was an auto truck that came chugging up from Myrtle Point and seated in this the end of our destination seemed close.

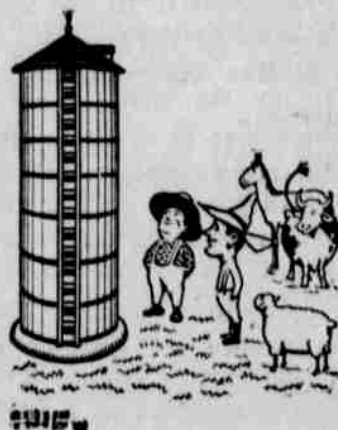
One of the passengers, a lady, who had referred to the Sugar Loaf, now began to express more uneasiness. It developed that the Sugar Loaf was a famous eminence in the neighborhood of Myrtle Point around which the road from Bridge winds and where the roadway at times is stolen from the mountainside which at certain seasons threatens to reclaim its own or failing in that, dump the travelers on the grade down into the river which flows below.

We knew there was a river be-

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low for the lady assured us there was and at times we could hear the murmur of the waters although the night was so dark that we could see very little of the scenery. At any rate we passed the Sugar Loaf grade in safety and were soon into Myrtle Point where, we were assured, the streets were worse than the roads that are between that point and Bridge.

In the morning by the auto to Coquille and there we made the nineteenth change to the Telegraph and thence to Bandon on the morning of the wreck of the

Fifield.

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