

Travel, freight, and fancy on the Coquille River

# Yesterday's Highway



"Charm" makes it's way through the Coquille river system. Photo-Coquille Historic Society

BY ROBERT JUMP

They called the muddy track between Coquille and Myrtle Point a road, but it really wasn't by today's standards.

According to resident historian Boyd Stone, the road didn't get gravel until 1921. The area was certainly moving forward in those days. However, while we now think of motor vehicles anytime there's talk of going to Myrtle Point or Bandon, that's hasn't always been the case.

According to Stone, residents of yesteryear used their own version of a highway: the Coquille River.

"It was the main highway," Stone told The Sentinel. "There were an awful lot of boats that hauled milk, lumber, mail and passengers."

The normal snags and debris seen on the river today were problems for boats navigating the river in the early days as well. But they weren't the only hazards to river navigations.

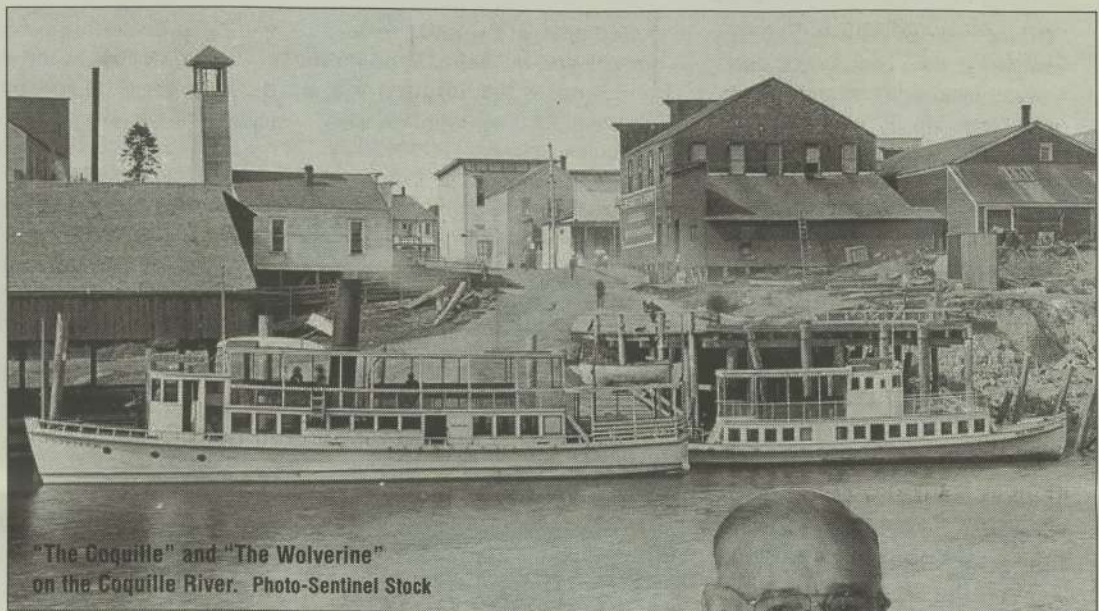
"There used to be a sign on the Coquille River Bridge about the nets from there on down," Stone said. "You could have nets out half way across the river and of course these boats had to know where the fishermen were 24 hours a day. The boats ran 24-hours a day, you know, because the tugboats had to run with the tide. If they were towing a raft of logs down and the tide went against them they had to tie up alongside the river."

In those days, Bandon was a thriving port.

"The mail boats would have come in from San Francisco into Bandon. We're talking about 1893, when the railroad came in," Stone said. "Mail would come into Coos Bay then it came in by railroad. Mail to Curry County would come into Coquille. Logan Kay was the purser on the Telegraph and he would get about a wagon load of mail and bring it up to the post office and another load to go back down to go to Curry County. There were all those stores down there so there was freight. There would be just a terrific amount of that stuff."

Mail and freight were moved between the railroad and the river through the Collier Warehouse.

"I remember the Collier Warehouse. It was torn down a few years ago, it extended from the depot to the river and that's where the railroad came in," Stone said. "They would move freight back and forth between the river and railroad because most of these farms were on the rivers, it was their highway. Even after the roads went in the farms were sitting on the river."



"The Coquille" and "The Wolverine" on the Coquille River. Photo-Sentinel Stock



The steamer "Alert" on the Upper Coquille. Photo-Coquille Historic Society

While residents now see milk being trucked to other locations, that wasn't always the case.

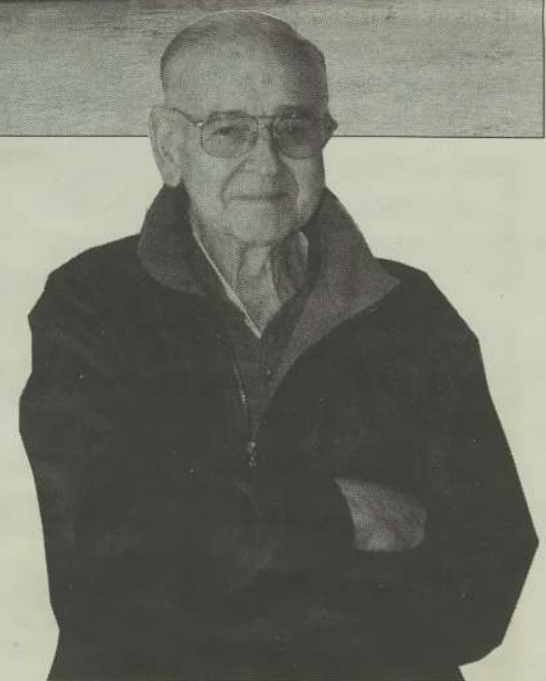
"Milk was a big thing to haul. There were milk boats," Stone said.

Then the roads were improved and boat traffic dwindled.

"The last boat to run was the *Charm*," Stone said. "It lost money because they had the mail contract. They had to fulfill the mail contract."

According to Stone, most of the boats navigating the river were steam powered, but not the *Charm*.

"It was propeller driven," Stone said. "It first started out on gas and then went to diesel. They use to say that it took cords of wood to run between Coquille and Bandon. That's a lot of wood."



Boyd Stone has fond memories of the former highway known as the Coquille River. Stone's book, "Living in the Past Lane" is available at the Coquille Valley Museum. Photo-Robert Jump

According to Stone the farthest he ever traveled on the river was to Beaver Slough. However, he once tried to take a boat to Bandon.

"We started to one day," Stone said. "We had a little bitty boat and we wanted to get back. We didn't want to go any further. We got to Beaver slough."

Stone thinks of the river fondly.

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