

The Freeway Through the Canyon

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YREKA—When traveling the beautiful highway through the Sacramento canyon between Redding and Yreka meeting or passing trucks and trailers hauling freight and refrigerated food, the thought may have occurred about what it might have been like 100 years ago.

When Siskiyou was first settled, the nearest approach to a road was the old Hudson's Bay trail, leading up the Sacramento river through Shasta valley, across the Klamath, and over the Siskiyou into Oregon. Wagons had never been over the trail, except six that came as far as Wagon valley in 1849. From there to Sacramento valley a wagon wheel had never made a track.

Prospectors came down from Oregon, up to the Sacramento river and over Trinity, Scott and Salmon mountains with pack mules carrying their provisions and tools.

When gold was discovered in Yreka, these trains started for Shasta for supplies. From that time until 1856, the only means of transporting goods was by pack-train. Because of the rugged Sacramento river canyon, travel from Yreka was routed over to Ft. Jones and Etna to Callahan, over the mountain to Weaverville and Trinity and then to Redding.

It was back in 1837 that Michael LaFramboise pioneered the first trail which later became the accepted highway of commerce. In 1841, Navy Lt. George F. Emmons, a member of the official U.S. Government Around the World Exploration party under Lt. Charles Wilkes, explored and mapped this trail from San Francisco Bay to the mouth of the Columbia river.

Willard and Norton Stone of New Lebanon, Ill., were responsible for building the first road into Siskiyou county up the Sacramento river canyon. They arrived in Siskiyou county in 1854. Willard and Norton Stone and their father, Elias Stone, formed the Soda Springs and Pit River Turnpike Road company to construct a toll road in the Sacramento river canyon in 1859.

The road began near Lower Soda Springs near the Shasta-

Siskiyou county line. The ruggedness of the canyon caused the road to be steep in many places. Where it was possible the river was bridged and where there were high bluffs the road either went over or around them, but it followed the river most of the way.

There were seven bridges, made of trees cut along the river which were heavy, green, and hard to handle. Some trees had to be floated down the river to the bridge site, then taken from the river and to the foundations. The bridges were built higher than the highest watermark, on the advice of the oldest Indians, yet in the floods of 1861-62 all but two of them were washed away.

Families Moving Southward

As work progressed on the road, the Stone families kept moving southward. The road followed the Sacramento river to Pollock, now under water by Lake Shasta, then eastward to the McCloud river, along the west bank of the McCloud to its junction with the Pit, and along the Pit for a short distance to where the ferry was located, which is now the site of the present highway-railroad bridge.

Elias Stone mortgaged everything he had, but was unable to raise enough funds to continue after the flood. He and his sons sold their interest to Dr. Autenrieth of Yreka, who operated the toll road for several years until it was bought by the county.

The road was narrow, and there were stretches of steep mountain on one side and the swift river on the other, hundreds of feet below.

The bridges were without rails, just split timber on beams spanning deep ravines. Generally a man would either walk or ride ahead of the wagons and warn of the approach of another wagon team. Sometimes wagons would meet unexpectedly, and passing or backing up almost was impossible. The only thing they could do was unload one wagon, set it as far to one side as possible, and let the other wagon squeeze by with inches to spare.

Had to Contend With Indians

Not only did the road builders and packers have difficulty cutting their way through the mountains, but they also had

to contend with Indians. Some were friendly, others decidedly not.

One instance tells of an Indian attack at Sugar Loaf mountain in March, 1853, when a party of about 20 men engaged in a fight with Indians. Another party of whites came upon the battle and reported that the mountain was literally alive with Indians, who had selected a position where they had the advantage over the whites.

Not wanting to get into the fight, the party unpacked the mules and made their way over the mountain, leaving the men to fight their own way out and escape. Sugar Loaf Mountain is 25 miles north of Redding.

Snow was another hardship road builders had to face. A news item in the Yreka Journal in March, 1869, read:

Road Opens for Teaming

"The Sacramento River Road is now open for teaming, the proprietor L. Autenrieth, having sent down a lot of mules to break a body of snow a short distance below Soda Springs, which was the only barrier existing between this place and Red Bluff. Two teamsters loaded at Red Bluff for this place last Tuesday, and will probably arrive here the last of next week."

By 1886, stages and the railroad were running through the canyon and mail, freight and passengers were getting through except when the winter weather brought deep snows and the river was too high to cross. As time went on, roads were improved and regular travel was established.

In 1914, the road was in bad condition because of lack of maintenance, and became impassable for long periods of time. Traffic had to be diverted over longer routes. Such were conditions in the Sacramento river canyon when the California highway commission was formed.

The first duty of T. A. Bedford, district engineer of the newly formed District II, was to make recommendations as to the best route between Redding in the central valley and Yreka on the northern plateau.

Bedford Rules Out Route

In 1913, there was considerable agitation for this route to be constructed west from Redding through French Gulch, Trinity Center, Carville over Scott mountain, through Ft. Jones to Yreka. Bedford ruled out this route, and between 1914 and 1919 construction of the road between Redding and Dunsuir was carried on at a feverish pace.

Some of the difficulties facing early contractors, also were encountered later. The crooked alignment resulted in curves as sharp as a 20-foot radius, and many grades were up to 20 per cent.

From 1923 to 1929, surfacing and realignment contracts were let on this portion of the route, even to the extent of paving two portions with concrete. But for the most part, surfacing consisted of gravel, which the maintenance department later oiled.

With the advent of the Shasta Dam, it was necessary to relocate 19.5 miles of highway through rough terrain, it follows the old Oregon Trail road. It is an improved two-lane section and contains some of the heaviest grading undertaken on a two-lane highway in District II. It was completed in 1943 and is still traversed by the traveling public.

Need of Improvement

Following World War II, it was apparent that older portions of the highway in the canyon would need improvement. In 1951 a special projects section was organized in District II to begin preliminary studies and prepare plans for the realignment and reconstruction of Highway 99 in the Sacramento river canyon to a multilane facility.

Once again it was discovered the same problems were still there, namely the river, the Southern Pacific railroad, and the springy unstable areas. By 1954, the first section was started, beginning at Dog Creek near the head of Shasta lake, and each successive year as more funds became available, additional sections were let to contract.

The section between the north end of Shasta lake and Dunsuir has now been completed, providing 30 miles of freeway and expressway through the scenic canyon.

Rain Causes Numerous Slides

The heavy rainfall in 1955-56 caused numerous slides and one slip-out of a major fill. These were corrected by installation of horizontal drains and the shifting of the line into the hill. Then in 1957-58, it became apparent that more extensive measures of correction would be necessary to stabilize the foundations for the deep fills.

It took numerous auger borings to determine the underground conditions and many consultations with the materials and research department to correct the conditions. The remedies were then made a part of the design for the remaining three projects in the canyon.

Another problem occurred in the area of Dunsuir when it became necessary to eliminate the hazards of runaway trucks through Dunsuir. This was accomplished by the design on the basis of a full freeway. At one place in the canyon, it became necessary to move the main line of the Southern Pacific railroad and construct a new channel for the Sacramento river. Other places required deep cuts and large fills.

Work is continuing at present on the conversion of the two lane highway around Shasta lake to modern four-lane standards. When this work is completed, the section between the Pit river bridge and the completed work in the canyon, a distance of approximately 14 miles, new contracts will be let.

Travelers will be able to go between Redding and Yreka in less than two hours, when it used to take dust covered travelers two days.



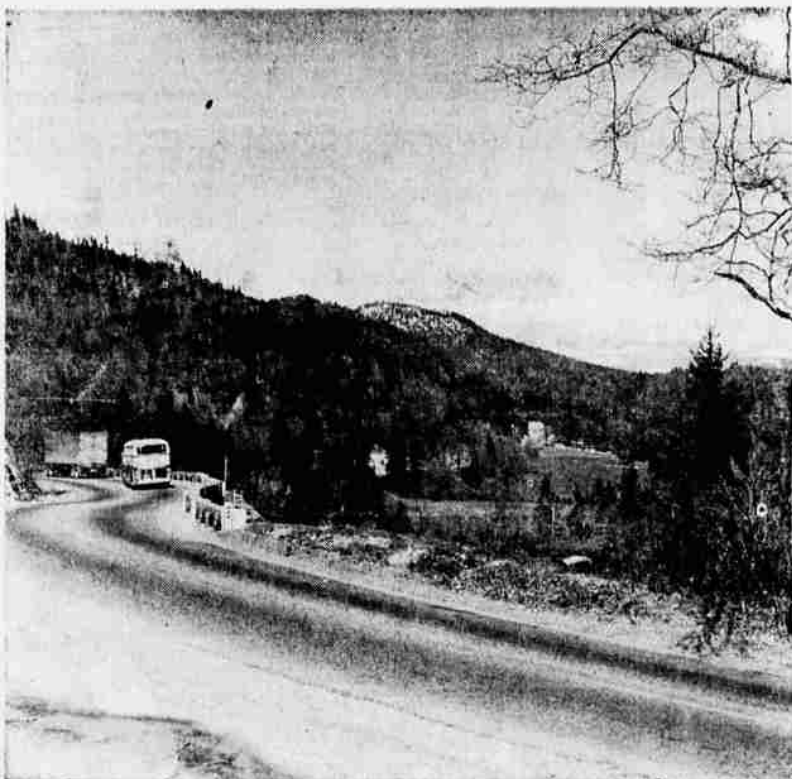
This view shows Interstate 5 in the Sacramento river canyon in the Dunsuir area. Dunsuir is in the middle of picture, with Mt. Shasta in the background.

Features

Sports

MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE

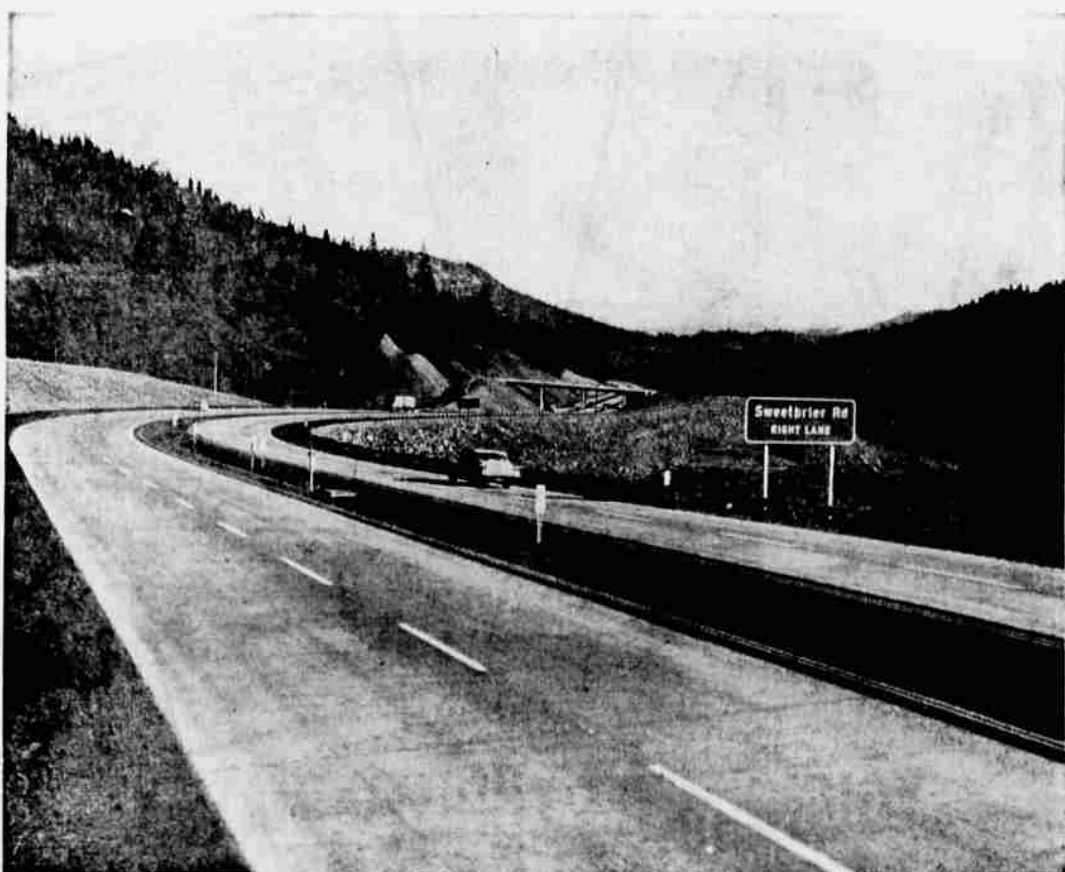
SECTION B MEDFORD, OREGON, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1963 PAGES 1 to 10



The highway through the Sacramento river canyon near Sweetbrier before construction of the freeway is shown in this picture.



This concrete arch bridge along Interstate 5 between Redding and Yreka has been replaced with a six-foot reinforced concrete arch.



This view shows the same section of the highway through the Sacramento river canyon near Sweetbrier after construction of Interstate 5. The Sweetbrier interchange is in the background. (Pictures by the division of highways of California.)



Looking north along Interstate 5 in the Sacramento river canyon, Castle Crags State park is visible on the left with Castella and the old highway visible on the right.