Stearns Claims First Crater Lake Discovery

(Continued on Page 16-A)

who desired to go, to add to the detail of Company I to make up the required 40 of the company who were to constitute the infantry portion of the expedition.

Accordingly we rode to the camp which was near the northwest end of the road, and encamped for the night.

Heard Of Lake

There was a party of three or four men from Jacksonville who came out to inspect the new road who had also just arrived at the camp. They had heard of the discovery of the lake by two members of the road-crew, and were desirous of visiting it. So the next day after I had secured the names of those of the road company who desired to accompany the expedition and securing directions how to find the lake, Captain Sprague, with the Jacksonville party and myself, rode up to Castle Camp where we spent the night, and next morning, leaving our horses we crossed the canyon and proceeded in an easterly direction, climbing a succession of ridges each one of which appeared to be the top of the mountain until we surmounted it and found still another summit ahead of us.

Finally we came suddenly to what appeared to be the jumping off place, and stood astounded at what looked to be the sky just below us. It required several seconds to convince us that we were looking down into the waters of a wonderful lake, instead of the sky. Awe and wonder held us spellbound for quite a period, when recovering ourselves we cautiously approached the edge of the cliff, which seemed to hang over the edge of the water.

Down To Water

We noticed some tracks of deer or goats that seemed to come from the direction of the water, and Mr. Ford and myself started to follow these tracks much against the remonstrances of our companions.

After passing over the brink we found the track of a slide that had at some time plunged down into the lake leaving a pumice-strewn track that seemed to afford sufficient foothold for us. The course of the slide was broken at intervals by intervening rock ledges which changed its course from a direct line and prevented us for awhile from seeing the edge of the water. At last after walking and sliding in the loose drift and catching occasional footing on projecting ledges, we came in view of the termination of the slide which appeared to have formed a small beach in a cove between projecting rock ledges. It being plain that we should succeed in reaching the water's edge there was a rivalry between Mr. Ford and myself to see which would first reach the water. Being younger and more nimble than my competitor, I won the race and fired my revolver to notify our companions of our safe arrival.

Soon Captain Sprague and Mr. Cook came straggling down, leaving Mr. Cluggage, who declared there was not money enough in the state of Oregon to hire him to risk his life in such a foolhardy attempt.

Gathered On Edge

We gathered together on the edge of the beach, which seemed to descend into the depth at an angle of about 70 degrees, and gazed down, down until the blackness obstructed the vision. On our side of this miniature beach was a cliff of rock hanging out of the lake depths to an elevation of some 20 or more feet, with a spreading hemlock growing near its summit, on the other or north side, was a lower shelf of rock that seemed to drop sheer into the blue black depths. At no place except where the slide extended into the water could the water be seen.

"Well," exclaimed Captain Sprague, "it is possible that this lake has been seen before, but I'm certain that no one has ever before ventured to its waters or has it ever been named. I think the man who first reached its waters is entitled to christen it; which one of you was first to reach the water?" Mr. Ford pointed to me and said, "The sergeant beat me in the race, and is entitled to the honor."

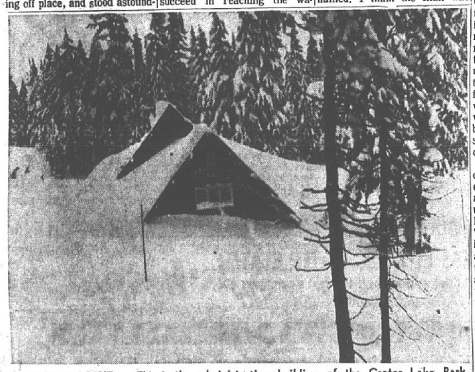
As I hesitated, not being able on the spur of the moment to think of a suitable name, the captain suggested that as it was the most majestic scenic wonder that he had ever viewed, that we call it Lake Majestic, and firing a volley with our revolvers over its waters we so christened it, and by that name only, it was known until in 1868 when James Sutton, then editing the Oregon Sentinel, visited it with a party who carried with them a canvas boat and rowing to the island discovered the crater in its top and upon his return to Jacksonville, wrote an account of his trip and rechristened the lake as "Crater Lake."

While we were standing at the water's edge, the question was broached whether or not there was any fish in the lake, when as though in answer to our query, a kingfisher lit on the overhanging bough of the hemlock tree, and spreading his wings gave vent to his harsh cry of "err-err-err" which we immediately interpreted as an affirmative answer to our question.

Upon our return to the fort, Captain Sprague wrote a letter to the Oregon Sentinel describing our trip, the lake and the name we gave it. The claim made then to the discovery of the lake by our company, was undisputed for 31 years. But the fact that they blazed the first trail to it, and that their's was the first discovery that ever was known to the world or to be followed up by visitors to see its wonders, has not nor can be disputed.

There is nothing to show that one of the prior discoverers ever re-visited the lake, or ever attempted to make known its unrivalled beauties to others. Even the crater in the top of Wizard Island, was suggested in Captain Sprague's letter, as also the future location of a hotel on its brink and the installing of boats upon its waters, and a trail leading to the water.

Why Mr. Steele and others have persistently ignored the claims of our company, and attempted to monopolize the credit for both discovery and exploitation, Mr. Steel can, if he will, explain.



A SNOWY SCENE — This is the administration building of the Crater Lake Park headquarters snowed under. The view shows the west end of the structure.

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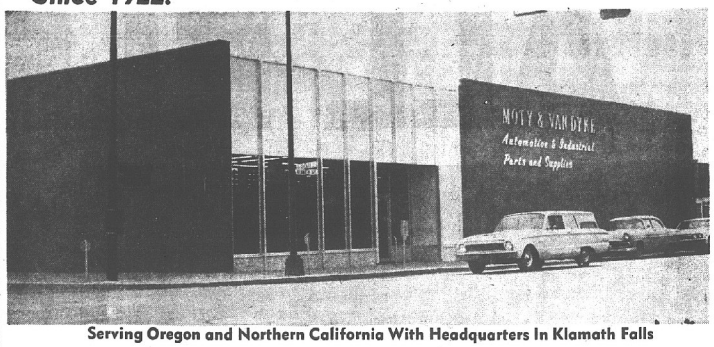

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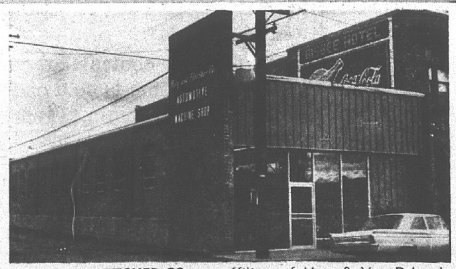

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