

Draft February 25, 2010

### III. C. AUTO CAMPING IN JOSEPHINE COUNTY, OREGON: 1920s

**1920** Roadside rest areas began appearing on state highways in the early 1920s.

When weak tires and rough roads were commonly accepted by Oregon motorists, the road shoulders were scattered with sharp materials capable of puncturing tires. Nails, screws, bolts, and wire fell from rattling cars, trucks and farm wagons. And in that day, motorists were quick to curse them for causing a flat. Blowouts were the rule. In the 1920s, it was considered a feat in automobile history for a tire to last beyond 3,000 miles. Drivers, at least the smart ones, carried a spare inner tube and tire patching kit.

The house at the city auto park for the convenience of tourists in cooking their meals is practically completed. One of the electric cooking plates has been received and is on display at the Cramer Bros. Hardware. There are to be 12 of these plates at the auto camp and two more in the park for picnickers. Many tourists come and spend a week or more here enjoying the climate and swimming (January 23, 1920).

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Finally, on July 14, 1920, the grand opening of the Los Angeles Municipal Campground was celebrated (Willis Osborne. *Los Angeles Corral*. Number 222. Winter 2001-01. *Los Angeles Municipal Auto Camp*). The camp offered tourists running water, gas for cooking and heating, dressing rooms, shower baths, and wash tubs. *Touring Topics* continued: ***There are stone ovens for those who like to cook a la wilderness and tables out under the trees for those who don't care for the glorious sensation of rushing their own fodder at one of the local cafeterias.***

In order to avoid conflicts over camping space *Touring Topics* continued: *...the new camp ground has been provided with mathematically laid out stalls in which flivver may be tethered just like old dobbin used to be on the farm.*

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**1920. Many Tourists Enroute** Many auto tourists are enroute through Grants Pass, despite the bad weather conditions that have existed. They report the roads are fairly good to the south but a few bad places are encountered in the mountains toward Portland. Two motorcycle tourists came through here today and numerous autos have gone through. J. M. Morgan and family, of San Diego, and H. C. Gates and family stopped at the Oxford last night and left north this morning (*Rogue River Courier*, March 26, 1920).

Four carloads of automobiles were received Saturday by various dealers, and are now being unloaded. There was one car of Nash Autos, one of Buicks, one of Dorts and one of Overland Fours (July 16, 1920).

A number of auto park enthusiasts spent Monday evening at the camp in clearing the grounds. The men burned brush and the woman raked leaves and dead grass. They enjoyed a picnic supper after work (July 16, 1920).

*“By 1920, auto camps and campgrounds were making inroads on hotel business, built primarily for traveling commercial business trade. Most towns now had **“Tourist”cabins and campgrounds, where the vacationer could pitch a tent, have wood and water furnished, and at Grants Pass, an exclusive for the kids, a swim in the Rogue — all for fifty cents.** Many delighted tourist found themselves, staying another day or two, so the whole family might enjoy the City’s Riverside Campground and cool dips in the Rogue.”* (Percy T. Booth. 1984. *Grants Pass The Golden Years 1884 - 1984*. Grants Pass Centennial Commission. Grants Pass, Oregon).

**1921** The Automobile Club of Southern California published a list of auto camp grounds compiled and issued by the Highway Weather Service. There were 110 camps listed in its May 1921 issue of *Touring Topics*, “A Handy Directory of the Auto Camp Grounds of California and Vicinity with Directions.” Grants Pass, Oregon was one of five camps located outside of California.

- Ashland, Oregon: Highly improved auto camp grounds, well situated in upper part of Lithia Park.
- Denver, Colorado: Has well equipped auto camp grounds in Overland Park. Shower baths, laundry, club house, free dancing. Steam tables for those that wish to purchase food. Attendants. Wood at cost.
- Grants Pass, Oregon: Four and one-half acres on the bank of Rouge River. Running water, electric cooking plates, electric lights.
- Portland, Oregon: Now open. No charges except for gas used in cooking. Free showers, swimming pool, laundry facilities, social room. Albina Avenue and Portland Boulevard.
- Roseburg, Oregon: Municipality maintains improved auto camp grounds in center of city on north bank of Deer Creek. Free except 25¢ for use of electric stove in kitchen. Attendant.

With the summer season right on the job and everything pointing to an amplitude of gasoline and good weather it becomes apparent that the public camping grounds for motorists with which California is now plentifully dotted, are in for a mighty busy season. The average man prefers to get out and “rough it” in a camp to living in hotels simply because it offers a decided change from the daily routine of his daily task in addition to offering an inexpensive and comfortable way of spending a motorized vacation (Uniform Rules To Govern Public Auto Camp Ground. May 1921. *Touring Topics*).

From Camp Cajon at the gateway to California clear to the Oregon boundary the state is freckled with public camping grounds, one of the worst features of which, to date, has been that there was a different set of rules for each and every camp. With the camps springing suddenly into being it was only natural that such a condition should exist. In an effort to correct the troubles arising from this situation a meeting was held last month at Long Beach at which representatives of Chambers of Commerce, City and County officialdom and the Automobile Club of Southern California gathered and discussed the matter, finally adopting a set of resolutions regarding universal rules to be applicable to all public camping grounds for motorists in Southern California and capable of use any place else (Uniform Rules To Govern Public Auto Camp Ground. May 1921. *Touring Topics*).

**1922 Paving on the stretch of road north of town was again started this morning after having been held up for the past week because of the bad weather. A gang has also been put on Sexton mountain to get this part of the highway ready for the hot stuff .**

Upon arrival the party is to give the license number and make of car, the number in the party, the name of the applicant, his permanent address and the names of members of the party (Uniform Rules To Govern Public Auto Camp Ground. May 1921. *Touring Topics*).

**1922** Paving on the stretch of road north of town was again started this morning after having been held up for the past week because of the bad weather. A gang has also been put on Sexton mountain to get this part of the highway ready for the hot stuff (Paving Again Under Way. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Friday, May 12, 1922).

Two decades ago the horseless buggy was in its experimental stage. The sound of the exhaust of the gas-propelled vehicle brought the whole family to the window to see the new contraption go by, and it was a common cause of hilarity when the driver would have to “get out and get under,” for the engine was not the perfect thing it now is. Twenty years have witnessed wonders in the perfecting of the automobile. It has become almost fool proof, and the exercise of common care makes it practically certain in its action. When trouble occurs, it can ordinarily be traced to

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carelessness or inexperience on the part of the operator. The automobile has changed the entire trend of industry. From it the present system of highways has developed, and transportation has been revolutionized. It has become a necessity where only a single decade ago it was considered a luxury (The Automobile. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

While the development of the automobile, the development of the tractor has kept apace, and farm work, has met a great a change as has transportation. The wheeled horse has taken much of

drudgery from the farm, thought it seems that the era of the tractor has only opened (The Automobile. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

The development in the automotive line that can be anticipated during the next 10-year period will no doubt be in the fuel supply. Internal combustion engines may give way to propulsion by electrical or other energy obtained direct from nature's laboratory. Some day gas manufactured from petroleum, will have to give way, and the need of the occasion is always met (The Automobile. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

Grants Pass instituted a charge of 50 cents per night in its municipal camp during 1922. Located on the banks of the beautiful Rogue River, adjacent to the city park and 200 yards from the Pacific Highway, the auto park camp, consisting of 4½ acres, maintained by the city of Grants Pass, is one of the most favorably situated tourist parks in western Oregon. As far as possible, without destroying the natural beauties of the site, native trees and shrubs have been left to give shade.

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Electric kitchens are being provided for the comfort of the tourist, while nearly 50 tables have been purchased, and are being placed in convenient places. It is estimated that without being crowded, the auto park can easily provide a camping place for 100 automobile parties. (City Maintains Modern Camp Grounds. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

Conforming to plans adopted at a recent meeting of representatives of auto parks in the state, a standard camp will be maintained during the season, with a fee of 50¢ a day to be charged for every automobile. Every thing possible for the sanitation of the grounds and the convenience of the guests is being done. The principal roads have been graveled, while sawdust is being put on some of the sandy stretches. All brush and dead wood has been removed. Bathing places will be constructed, as will places for the washing of clothes (City Maintains Modern Camp Grounds. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

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Official opening of the camp site will be between April 10 and 15, depending upon the progress of the work. Mr. and Mrs. Joe Ferguson will have charge of the auto park during the season. Mr. Ferguson to be superintendent, while Mrs. Ferguson will have a small supply store, selling seasonable fruits and vegetables. Registration cards are being printed, and a complete record of each tourist will be kept. From the auto park many convenient and attractive side trips can be made during the day, the chief of which is that to the Oregon Caves. Excellent fishing can be had, while the business section of Grants Pass can be

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reached by a few minutes walk (City Maintains Modern Camp Grounds. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

**Total of 10,505,606 Automobiles Are Registered In United States — 1920 Gain 17.6 Per Cent.** Oregon stands near the head of the list in the proportion of automobiles to the population, according to figures compiled by the Automotive Industries, New York. For every 6.76 residents of the state one car is registered, Oregon being seventh on the list. There is one car for every 10.2 persons in the United States, Iowa heading the list with 5.38 and Alabama bring up the rear with 29.5. This state is 27<sup>th</sup> in the number of cars and trucks and shows an increase of 14.04 per cent over 1920, the figures being for 1921 (Oregon Seventh In Ratio Of Cars, State Has One Machine For Every 6.76 Persons. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

In today's edition of the Courier the circular recently put out by the Chamber of Commerce advertising the Rogue Valley and Grants Pass to the tourist has been reprinted in full. A total of 15,000 of the Pamphlets was printed and will be distributed during the summer to automobile parties passing through (Courier Prints Chamber Auto Tourist Circular. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

**A Home For You.** Grants Pass, a city of almost 5,000 people, is the best city in the Rogue River Valley located on the Rogue River, and in the center of the playground of the Pacific Coast. From its well-paved streets with cluster homes radiate paved roads to Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco; roads to the most spectacular cave in America — Oregon Caves; to the magnificent redwoods on the Pacific Coast; Bollon Lake at the end of the trail; Hell Gate Canyon, where the mighty Rogue has chiseled it way through solid rock on its tempestuous journey to the ocean; Crater Lake, one of the wonders of the world; the thousands of spots which cannot be adequately described, including water falls, places where canyons grow deep, camping, hunting and fishing. The churches, theaters, public buildings, library, and homes are worthy of a city many times the size of Grants Pass. The people are "folks" like you. "IT'S THE CLIMATE," means much to us, for we have neither the heat of the Sacramento Valley, nor the rainfall of the Willamette Valley. Prostrations, cyclones and windstorms are unknown, while the rainfall is 34 inches (Grants Pass, Josephine County Oregon, "Its The Climate". *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

**"IT'S THE CLIMATE"**

A total investment of \$900,000 is represented in the 1,496 automobiles and trucks in Josephine county, according to figures compiled by M. O. Wilkins of the Wilkins Automobile Information Service of Portland The total is estimated by basing the unit value of \$600 on each of the 1496 cars and automobiles in the county. The combined ownership of Fords, Chevrolets, Dodges and other small cars amounts to about 80 per cent of the total ownership. At the close of the 1921 series, with a population of 7655, Josephine county had a total of 1496 cars, 1318 passenger cars and 178 trucks, or a ration of one car to every five people (Much Invested In

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Automobiles, Josephine County Has Nearly Million In Cars. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

**Dedication of Pacific Highway.** Marshal Joffre, speaking at the dedication of the Pacific highway at the inter-state bridge, today, said: "Roads are the strongest, most helpful agents of civilization, bringing prosperity, commerce and happiness. The road which is the object of today's ceremonies is the longest highway in the world, and I am happy to say that the road is now formally opened." (Joffre Speaks At Dedication of Pac. Highway, French Marshal Participates in Ceremonies At Portland, World's Longest Road Way, Strongest, Most Helpful

Agents of Civilization, Says the Distinguished Guest. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 4, 1922).

**Four or five years ago when the people of the state were floundering around in the mire of the Oregon roads, they were willing to pay almost any price to have better ones.**

Though the city auto park will not be officially opened to tourists for at least a week, there are three parties at present occupying the site. One

party, composed of men, has established temporary quarters, pitched a tent, and made itself at home. It has been there for the past two weeks. The other two parties are stopping but for a day or two (Auto Park Occupied. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Wednesday, April 5, 1922).

Four or five years ago when the people of the state were floundering around in the mire of the Oregon roads, they were willing to pay almost any price to have better ones. Now that a good trunk highway has been provided through the state and other sections have been supplied with better transportation facilities, there is a huge bill to pay. There is only one equitable means of paying for the highways and that is to have those who benefit, meet the cost. It is unquestionably the automobile owner who gets the greatest amount of good. Old Dobbin can play his way through ruts and quagmires with little damage, but his automobile must have good roads. There is a saving on tires and repairs which more than offsets any tax which the state might justly impose. Owners of cars realize the fact that the damage done the highway comes through the weight of the car and that a tax levied on the weight is just. Also the gasoline tax as a supplement to the license fee can not be questioned as a good gage of the amount of use given the highway. But the main feature is that the tax is paid for the privilege of using the highway. Owners of automobiles want good highways and will pay any just tax when they are assured that the money goes back in the roads. It would surely be a poor policy to build a road and then neglect it when a small expenditure yearly will keep it in repair (On Better Roads. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, April 5, 1922).

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**Auto Camp Opens Thursday.** The Grants Pass auto camp, adjacent to the city park, will be opened on the regular pay schedule Thursday, April 20, with many improvements over former years. Tourist travel has already begun and it is thought that many will take advantage of the camp even early in the summer. Tourist traffic will

be heavy this year according to predictions, as there are many waiting in California for the weather to become warm before starting north. All automobiles will be routed through the city park instead of via Park street so that the tourist may get a glimpse of the park. The new entrance to the camp ground parallels Park Street. Wash racks for cars have been put in close to the river and a pump has been provided near there. A hot water heater has been added to the equipment in the electric kitchen and hot water will be on hand during meal times. New camp sites have been cleared out and roads leading to them have been graveled. The camp ground will be cared for this season by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Ferguson, who will maintain the camp store. All camp necessities in the way of food will be on sale at the store (Auto Camp Opens Thursday, Automobiles Will Be Routed Through City Park During Season. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 15, 1922).

Tourists are beginning to pass through the city in large numbers, now that the roads are getting in good condition. Several distinctive outfits were seen Wednesday, ranging from a huge box-like affair to a regular "house on wheels." Every sort of motor vehicle from an old one-lunged relic to the latest in limousines is to be noticed (Tourist Travel Lively. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 18, 1922).

**Pay Basis.** The tourist season will be officially opened tomorrow when the Grants Pass auto camp is opened to the public on a regular pay basis. This summer there will be thousands of automobile tourists stay from one day to a week or longer in the city and a welcome should be extended to them. It is more than likely that many people will come through here looking for permanent locations and it is the first impression that they get of a city that may make up their minds that it would do for a home town. There are many attractions in and around Grants Pass. We all know them but the stranger does not. He will appreciate a little information regarding the country and of scenic trips which may be taken. It takes very little effort to send the traveler away with a pleasant feeling toward Grants Pass. The reputation already gained by the city for open hospitality and friendliness should be maintained (Welcome The Tourist. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 19, 1922).

**Auto Camp.** Adjoining Riverside Park on the east is a tract of land purchased by the city three years ago, for an Auto Camp. It has been left more or less in its natural condition with roads cut through, and the brush cleared.

A has a number of splendid camping spots. An attendant is in charge of the park. An electric kitchen has been installed and when a charge is made it will cover the use of the kitchen for preparing meals. The proximity of the river and swimming, makes the Auto Camp a place for the tired and dusty tourist (Auto Camp. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Saturday, April 1, 1922).

In the days of old Dobbin and muddy roads, the Rogue Valley was a territory of rather magnificent distances.

**Proper Cooperation.** The paved highway and the automobile have done more to break down sectional jealousy than any other agency. No longer is it popular for one community to play against another community. Progress is not now measured by what a single town may do, but what the district as a whole may accomplish. In the days of old Dobbin and muddy roads, the

Rogue Valley was a territory of rather magnificent distances. Sectional strife was bitter, and each ambitious town thought it must be build upon the wrecked hopes of another. Today we know our neighbors better and we know that their interests and our are identical.. Advancement and success as brought by united effort.

Recently the business people of the three principal cities of the Rogue Valley have been visiting one another, and from this touching of elbows and interchange of thought has come understanding that will benefit all. Grants Pass for years has been looking forward to the day when Cave day, in celebration of the highway to the caves, could be observed. This is the year. There has also been a pretty popular demand for the observance of the Fourth of July. Ashland also felt the patriotic impulse, and the eagle at the Lithia city has been fed for the occasion. Without strife and with the best of spirit, the situation has been solved to the satisfaction of the business organizations of the two communities by a tacit understanding that the upper valley people will join in the big day on Grayback when the Caves highway is officially opened, and Grants Pass will keep her own eagle in leash for a year, and will add to Ashland's enthusiasm. (Proper Cooperation. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Friday, May 12, 1922).

Bids for the last bit of paving of the Pacific Highway, seven and three-quarters miles between Halsey and Harrisburg, in Linn County, were opened today by the state highway commission. The Pacific Highway work was started just five years ago. Bids on the stretch of paving of the West Side highway of the Monmouth - Suver section will be opened tomorrow (Last Link Of Highway Will Be Completed, Bids Opened in Portland For Paving Of Stretch Near Harrisburg, Work Begun Five Years Ago, Bids for End of West Side Highway Will Be Opened Tomorrow — Section Is Near Monmouth. *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, Tuesday, May 9, 1922).

With the first fine weather of the year work has begun on Smith hill and Sexton mountain, a grader and gang of men being kept busy filling in the soft places which occur where the road is in the shade the greater portion of the day, and in general conditioning of the highway. Motorist who recently returned from Portland state that the highway between that city and Grants Pass is in excellent condition, making the trip easily in a day, and at no time being forced to change gears because of the condition of the road. (Today in History — Out of the Past. *The Daily Courier*. Jerry Acklen)

By mid 1922, there were 1,850 municipal campgrounds throughout the United States according to an American Automobile Association survey, and the AAA predicted the total would surpass 2000 before the end of the 1922 tourist season (Willis Osborne. *Los Angeles Corral*. Number 222. Winter 2001-01. *Los Angeles Municipal Auto Camp*). California led all states with 168 campgrounds in the survey while Illinois followed with 129. There were 66 camps in Washington, 48 in Oregon, 9 in Nevada, and 14 in Arizona.

**1923** Ashland instituted a charge of 50 cents per night in its municipal camps during 1923.

*The Grants Pass auto camp grounds have been put in condition and will be open ready to receive travelers on April 1". A charge of 50 cents a night will be made for the first four nights of the stay in the city, and at the end of this period the traveler is allowed to remain six days longer free of charge. Campers wishing the privilege of shower baths will be forced to make arrangements until the bath house is opened on June 15. Mr. and Mrs. Joe Ferguson are to have charge of the camp again this year (March 2, 1923).*

**This shift from free to pay camps was important for the small-scale entrepreneurs in Josephine County. Pay camps favored rural property owners away from the cities. More important, now there could be several camps within a given area rather than one per town.**

**This is certainly true of northern Josephine County which would soon have around a dozen strung like popcorn on a string on the Pacific Highway between Merlin Hill and Mt. Sexton Pass. Some local property owners became auto camp pioneers as they provided grocery stores and gasoline stations along with the campground.**

**1924** The Grants Pass Buick agency will hereafter be handled by J. T. Tuffs and T. M. Stott, both of this city. Mr. Stott, stated that he will make the insurance business his main occupation and will conduct that in connection with the new enterprise. (June 29, 1924).

One of the most attractive spots on the Redwood highway between Grants Pass and Crescent City is the Log Cabin service station auto cabins and store at the concrete bridge on Deer creek a short distance southwest of the Selma store. New work on a log hotel 26 x 34 feet, two stories, will be commenced (September 6, 1924).

The tourists are now beginning to use the highway according to the number signing up at the Grants Pass Auto Camp every night. There is now an average of 25 cars a night stopping at the resort. Instead of being mostly people with a destination in view and being in a hurry to get there these tourists are on their vacation and are taking their own time. About 850 cars have registered there this season, being an advance over the number there at this time last year (June 20, 1924).

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