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OWYHEE

A Recreational Area of Promise

The State of Oregon has been endowed creatively with a diversity of embellishments that may be likened unto the Horn of Plenty. The rich lands devoted to agriculture. The mountain ranges with their forest cover. The scenic features displayed by sea, river, forest, mountain, plain. Financially from the state's exchequer standpoint, agriculture is the largest contributor. Then comes the products of the forests, and thirdly in line is the increment left in the state by the tourist within our borders. The State Travel Bureau, under the directive of the State Highway Commission, was organized in 1935. Their records show for that year, a tourist traffic income of \$25,000,000. The records of the bureau for the year of 1952 show a tourist traffic income of \$121,000,000.00.

A few months ago, Highway Engineer, R. H. Baldock, made a significant statement in a speech before the Portland Chamber of Commerce forum, wherein he stated that our recreational features, scenic attractions in a period of years would lead all other sources of income in the state. With the tourist business our third contributing factor of income at the present time, we should increase our endeavors in developing the recreational areas we now have, adding new scenic areas that should be included in the State Parks system. The State Parks system is a good deal like Topsy, it just grew up. For a number of years, the Division Engineers acted in a parks capacity, acquiring now and then a park area. In 1929 the writer was appointed Parks Superintendent. It was a one man battle for a number of years, a cracker barrel being the filing system.

The Parks system has come of age. It has risen to third place in state increment. The time has been reached when its importance should be recognized. Its development and enlargement should be of the first consideration. Financial assistance should be increased in its development that it may lead in all state income. From 1917 to 1951, there has been spent on highways state funds amounting to \$430,113,030. On state parks from 1917 to 1951, \$3,869,853.92, not quite one percent of the total. An expanding business should be financed in keeping with its growth. Tourist dollars are minted in the crucible of Creation. Patterned in a design everlasting if protected. Harvested through sight and spirit to bloom anew the coming spring untarnished. A perpetual velvetting of many channels of industry. A coinage of new money derived from the scenic panorama of a picturesque state.

A proposed, partially developed tourist drawing recreational attraction has been under consideration for several years. It is located in southeastern Oregon and is known as Owyhee Lake. A lake some forty miles in length which has been created through the construction of the Owyhee Dam by the U. S. Reclamation Department. An artificial lake cradled in a volcanic setting unique in the state's topography. There is only one other volcanic scenic attraction superior to it in the state of Oregon, and that is Crater Lake. An observation tour of forty miles by powered boats through this volcanic panorama of scenic grandeur. There is only one other such boat trip in Oregon and that is the thirty mile trip up the Rogue River from Gold Beach to Agness. Your nautical cruise starts a short distance above the dam and right at the start you have a towering mountain built layer upon layer of lava flows, intercepted here and there with perpendicular walls. A glance creates a steady observation of the architectural lines chiseled by the erosion of time.

A motor purrs, you glide away from the dock, and you are on your way through a land that Dante might once have moulded and colored. Each turn in the lake brings various vistas of formation and coloring. Sheer bluffs at the water's edge, a hill distant from the water's edge. Spires, columns, walls of perfected dimensions, pillars chiseled with the delicacy of an Italian artisan. Coloring likened unto Bryce Canyon. A pigment of varied coloring that only an artist could canvas. As to coloring, the following description is given by Reverend Wire, now retired and living in Salem - "Every imaginable shade and color from nearly white to darkest burnt brown; pink and rose; yellow and orange, ochre and tan, brownish red and light green. Here a light-colored cliff is marked with perpendicular ribbons of rust stain, while there beyond it is a hill of greenish yellow clay armored with a whole flock of knife blades of rock of richest sienna hue." All of this panorama unveiling before your eyes as you glide along the water in your boat. The gondolas plying the canals of Venice would be insipid after making this trip.

The canyons leading into the lake, especially Leslie Canyon, are spectacular in their formations and coloring.

As you leave the south end of the lake, you enter the Jordan Craters area of some fifty square miles. Across the bottom of the valley are four cinder cones spaced several miles apart. They still stand intact as if awaiting the throwing of a switch for a new flow of lava. Vapors can almost be imagined if a haze blankets the valley. These cones stand some ten to fifteen feet in height. They remind you of an oversized coke oven, an Eskimo's igloo. Conduits of tubes, gutters, pressure ridges are still discernible. Dr. Howell Williams of Berkeley, noted Volcanologist, states that these flows are of the most recent in western America. That they came after the first migrations of Indians to the country. This Jordan field is little known, a minimum of study having been given to it. What stories, facts, remain hidden in this vast field that convulsed Mother Earth in her labors of creation? What a setting of lake and geology for the harvesting of tourist dollars. Trail it, sign it, and a world will trod it for both pleasure and knowledge.

It might not be amiss to note the purpose of the impounding of this water. Through tunnel, concrete-lined ditches, canals, great syphons, the water is conveyed to the valley below. 101,700 arid acres come under the magic wand of these life giving waters. Seventy percent of the acres are in Oregon, thirty percent are in Idaho. There are ten individual irrigation districts subscribing for this water. If ever a desert was turned into a Garden of Eden, it is this Owyhee transformation. There is not another such prolific producer of the products of the soil to be found in the west. It is a revelation of the magic of reclamation. The tie of community endeavor, the death of communism. Where waters impounded in the cauldron of the devil are lead to the valley for the beautification of the Garden of Eden. Truth prevaieth over evil regardless of the "ism" that confronts it. The citadels of America are bulwarked in the soil of uncountable Owyhees.

The origin of the name "Owyhee" will be interesting to many readers. The natural thought would be of local origin, possibly some Indian tribe, but we went overseas, to the Hawaiian Islands, for it. Quoting from Lewis A. McArthur's book, "Oregon Geographic Names"-- "In 1826, Peter Skene Ogden's exploratory expedition went into the Snake River country, was attacked by Snake River Indians, and two members of the party were killed. They happened to be Hawaiians, hence the name Owyhee in their commemoration." McArthur makes one interesting notation, that a century ago, the Hawaiian Islands were known as they Owyhee Islands. What's in a name still remains remote in the majority of Oregonians minds of the scenic mysteries of this watered vulcanized canyon. The waters temporized the savageness of its ruggedness, and the musical lilt of the islands in my Owyhee softens the edges of a once rampant world.

On the canyon walls, Indian hieroglyphics of Aborigines' arts and facts await deciphering by the wisdom of present day technology. Maybe the key to the mysteries of this volcanic canyon is lost.

Half way up the lake is a naturally created landing field. Small ships fly in from Boise and intermediate points. From Nyssa and Ontario. A few moments of passage, a creel filled, back home within the hour. Where is the inaccessible to be found today? The lake has been stocked with a variety of Izaak Walton's choicest thrill tuggers, and where-ever you cast, your efforts are rewarded.

There is one interesting thing noted in the present day attendance and that is that it comes from Idaho. Must the stranger have to unfold to our unseeing eyes the recreational treasure we possess?

What is the procedure to be taken in the development of this recreational area? There are two units of the government set up for this purpose. The U. S. Government through its National Park Service. The State of Oregon through its Highway Commission and Parks Division. All land necessary for this development is now owned by the U. S. Government, hence there is no need of a budget for acquisition purposes. It is purely one of development, and can be carried on in yearly stages. There are two precedents in the west comparable to the proposed development of the Owyhee recreational project, wherein the U. S. Government through its National Park Service is now developing for recreational purposes, one being at Coulee Dam in the state of Washington. The other, Lake Mead, created through the construction of Boulder Dam located in the state of Nevada.

The U. S. Reclamation Bureau is the administrator of the Owyhee project. In all of the state's investigation of the possibility of its recreational development, the Bureau has been interested and helpful in every way. The National Park Service has made several temporary investigations of the project and are fully aware of its recreational possibilities. Both departments are under the Department of the Interior which is significant of full co-operation. In 1949, Congress passed H. R. 4403 which reads as follows: "To facilitate the administration by the Secretary of the Interior, in co-operation with other Federal, State, and local agencies, of the recreational uses of lands and waters within reclamation, flood-control, power, and other Federal reservoir projects." The law reads that funds will be budgeted by Congress for develop-

ment purposes. (It should be noted at this point that no expenditures for development purposes will be added to the water rights of the project settlers.) The law authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to transfer the recreational development to the state for administration purposes. With the Coulees Dam and Lake Mead projects as criterions of procedure, it seems a known directive for the state.

However the intent and concern of the state in the development of the Owyhee recreational project should be noted. Upon the invitation of interested citizens of Nyssa in the development of the recreational resources of the lake, members of the T. H. Banfield Commission visited the lake on May 12, 1948. They were very much impressed with the scenic features of the area, but were hesitant in adding it to the park system due to the cost of development. The main contributing factor being the revamping of the road to the lake which is some thirty miles in length. Their actions in such matters are controlled by the park law passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor on February 25, 1925. The law empowers the Commission to secure recreational areas adjacent to, along or in close proximity to state highways. In a case of this type, meaning so much in general recreational development of the state, what latitude should be taken in the interpretation of "proximity"?

Until this clause is amended, a state wide park system is unobtainable. An odd condition confronts us; for the want of a wheel the Universe stood still for centuries. There was no rut to follow to the next parish. Now we have the wheels, but no surface to roll them on. Could it be we who are in the rut of isolation?

An invitation was sent to Governor Douglas McKay, by organizations of Ontario and Nyssa, to be their guest in a preview of Owyhee Lake and its many scenic attractions. The Governor responded to the invitation and spent two days in September 1951, in looking over the lake and the developed irrigated lands brought into production through the waters of Owyhee Lake. Quoting from the Oregonian of September 25, 1951, "I am very much interested in this as a park site. The place has wonderful opportunities for recreation and it would also be good because of the natural beauty of the lakes". "Then too," he added, "there are no state parks in southeastern Oregon, and I feel one is needed." Governor McKay's statement shows a deep interest in the proposed project, and future plans to be worked out for its development I feel will have the full support of Governor Douglas McKay.

I would like to amplify one portion of the Governor's statement wherein he notes that southeastern Oregon has no state parks, that he feels one is needed. During a twenty-five year period, 184 recreational areas, small and large, have been acquired. Of this total, approximately seventy-five percent are west of the Cascades, twenty-five percent east of the Cascades. There is no park in the state park system that exceeds Owyhee Lake in recreational and scenic attributes. As formerly noted, I firmly believe that the recreational development of Owyhee Lake should be a co-ordinated project between government and state. However, if such a combination cannot be worked out, then the state should assume the responsibility of the development of the recreational resources of Owyhee Lake.

With a tourist business third in income in the state, destined to become first, a capital outlay for the development of this recreational asset is good business. Give the Parks Division two percent of the yearly highway income that Owyhee, its counterparts, its overnight camping, its wayside luncheon stops may be hastened in their development. It should be remembered that the tourist trade is one of the keenest competitive businesses in the world, for you are competing with the world. Oregon has been bedecked with a varied beauty second to none. Showcase it, for if left in the dark, it returns no lustre. California's yearly tourist income is around 500 million dollars. Our Tourist Bureau shows one-million foreign licensed cars visiting Oregon in 1952. It further shows that fifty percent of that total carried California licenses. Why? Because we have superior scenery, air conditioned air, a side road to hear a sermon preached on Creation away from the clank and smog of the outside world. We have so much to sell that is still in a dormant stage, unknown. It further shows that Californians are discerning, know where to look for the actual beauty along the wayside untarnished.

A comparison may be made in the tourist drawing power of a developed recreational Owyhee project, by citing the attendance at Lake Mead and Coulee Dam. In 1951, Lake Mead drew slightly over two million people. Coulee Dam slightly over three hundred thousand people.

If Oregon would build unto its unchallenged God-given scenic beauty for a world to see, it would bring Owyhee to the doorstep of the passing public. Treat the soul to soft music from a terrestrial world, with an offertory on behalf of the state.

By Sam'l H. Boardman
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