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## Historical Archaeology's "Trip" to Crater Lake

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# Historical Archaeology's "Trip" to Crater Lake

by Doug Wilson, NPS Archaeologist



Photographs courtesy of Fort Vancouver NHS

*This Arborglyph on a felled tree near Dutton Camp reads: "John Kennet Caton, July 30th 1881."*

Crater Lake National Park, one of the earliest parks in the National Park System, preserves the traces of an old wagon road that ran from Jacksonville in southern Oregon to Fort Klamath, just south of the park. In September, Todd Miles, Jacqueline Cheung, Eric Gleason, and I had the honor to conduct an archaeological assessment and re-examination of this 1865 road. The road crosses through the southern part of Crater Lake National Park, roughly tracing State Highway 62 from the west entrance of the park to its south entrance. We were also able to explore the 1869 Dutton Creek wagon route which spurs off the military wagon road up to the rim of Crater Lake. These impressive and unique cultural resources, which reside within

a park that epitomizes the natural beauty of our American West, provide a unique panorama of changing human perspectives on the park. For those who view these features, they encode abstract concepts of preservation and the uses of wild and beautiful places that resulted in the National Park Service.

First, what is a wagon road? A wagon road is much narrower than a regular road. The four-foot wheel base of a wagon (or early automobile) makes for a much narrower footprint. Wagon roads look different than those dirt roads that many of us are familiar with from family camping trips or other excursions into forest and desert lands. In the soft pumice from the eruption of Mt. Mazama (ca. 7000

years ago) that coated the slopes of Crater Lake, the wheels of the wagons cut deep ruts that make for a very clear trace in most places. These ruts wind north from the south entrance of the park through the thick ponderosa pine, crossing and recrossing State Highway 62, and ending in the hemlock and Shasta red fir forests on the western boundary of the park.

The archaeological survey of a wagon road puts one into the shoes of a traveler from a time remote from our own; when travel over short distances took hours, and stopping places near water and grass to feed the stock were of paramount importance. As we got close to the highway, the whizzing

*...continued on page 4*



# Crater Lake Wagon Roads

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of cars past the old wagon road contrasted with our foot-bound mode of travel. It revealed perceptibly just how far (and how fast) we have come.

And then there are the camps—camps where beautiful springs and creeks provide a steady source of water that feed steep glacier and stream-cut canyons. Camps called Soldier's (Whitehorse Springs), Kanyon Spring (Anna Springs), Dutton, Oklahoma, and Cold Springs (Dead Wood) provided necessary resources to wagon-bound travelers. Historic, and at times modern, blazes on the trees denote years of camping at these sites. Teamsters and soldiers used these sites, and later scientists, mountain climbers, tourists, and even politicians. Today, these sites are abandoned—modern visitors stop for short visits in picnic areas and camping grounds, but most never realize that their ancestors spent time at these places, cooking on an open camp fire, repairing vehicles, taking care of their stock. Their camp might have been a day or more from Crater Lake, while we can easily travel there in an hour.

The Klamath Indians and other tribal groups used these camps,



*Artifacts found along the road.*

too. Wagon roads follow ancient trails where people journeyed to huckleberry, hunting and gathering grounds, or visited sacred places in the mountains. These camps served many people.

Along the road there are vivid reminders of the past—parts of wagons and early automobiles, tin cans, and bottles. These things abandoned along the way provide a human face, a tangible reminder of those who made and used these roads. In places, the silence of the forest and the fallen logs that cross the road create a sense of decay and loss that rivals more dramatic “ruins” in other places.

The road to Crater Lake is fundamentally different from the old military wagon road. The road is harder to follow. It is much steeper. Its major distinction is the abundance of blazes and “glyphs” that cover old camping grounds. The people that crossed this trail wanted to memorialize their trips. As early as 1853, Crater Lake was distinguished as the “Mysterious Lake”. News editor James Sutton and his group of tourists blazed the route to the rim, and coined the term “Crater Lake”. The dates on the arborglyphs (writing on trees) show increasing visits to Crater Lake in the late 19th century. An arborglyph on a felled tree near Dutton Camp reads: “John Kennet Caton, July 30th 1881”. If it is the John Kenneth



*Blazed tree.*

Caton who was born in Appleton City, Missouri, and is buried in Cottage Grove, then he was just 10 years old when he visited the area. Perhaps for that reason, the “N’s” in the glyph are carved backwards. Another at the crest of the rim reads: “OKAFADE . . ./JUNE 6 89”, which may be James O. Kafader, who was born in Jackson County in 1867 and became a miner in Fort Bidwell, California. Another tree memorializes the visit by “Mr. + Mrs. Wm Lemo/Aug. 18, 1897” punched into a tin sheet and nailed to a blazed tree. These glyphs provide a material record of visitation to the lake at a time when William Gladstone Steele and the Mazamas were publicizing its importance for preservation. Crater Lake became a National Park in 1902, and shortly after that the modern automobile road was built through Munson Valley in 1904.

The wagon road is preserved in segments, some that follow modern hiking trails and some that are truly abandoned. These simple traces of road tell the story, in physical form, of how the preservation ethic came to be and the continuing history of visitor use in National Parks.

*Many thanks go to Park Historian Steve Mark who conceived and initiated the survey of the wagon road and has supported its interpretation, preservation, and monitoring.*



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