

Original trail to valley 'proved' by resident

One day several years ago as Leonard Whitmore, a timber cruiser for the U.S. Forest Service, was looking over some land on Mt. Hebo, he came across what looked like a well-worn trail working its way up the mountainside.

Further investigation by Whitmore revealed the hollowed out spot was indeed a trail, in fact, the original road used by white settlers to traverse the Coast Range from Tillamook County to the Willamette Valley.

The trail never crossed a ravine during its 50 miles, following ridgetops to Grande Ronde.

First mentioned in the Warren Vaughn diary in 1854, the trail may have followed paths originally paced out by Indians, Whitmore said, but there is no way of knowing for sure.

That trail served as the only way to getting into the valley overland until about 1859 when another trail was worked through to Yamhill.

Whitmore has authenticated the trail for Forest Service records. It was recently entered in the National Register of historical locations.

"I remember the early

surveyors plat showing the course of the trail passing the edge of Hebo Lake. His notes mentioned a section corner nearby that was 1,100 feet north of the old trail," Whitmore said. "On a summer day in 1975, I took an assistant with me to help measure the distance between the found section corner and the trail.

"We were in a state of excitement and anticipation when we neared the last few feet of our measurement; and there it was, a three-foot-wide trail faintly visible beneath a several-inch accumulation of dead ferns and twigs. As we followed more of the trail, the reality of its past historical events unfolded before our eyes. We could see a potential recreational value of developing this site for the benefit of the public to hike and to enjoy as a nature and historical trail. A further search, lasting several weeks, was made to find as much more of the trail as possible. Roads and radar base activities have destroyed all evidence of the path on the summit of Mt. Hebo," Whitmore said.

Eventually, about three miles of the trail will be

developed for hiking, but Whitmore said no schedule has been set up for that.

One portion extends from Lake Hebo easterly for two miles to within one-half mile of the radar base. The second trail site starts at the east Mt. Hebo campground traversing down the steep east slope of the mountain for one mile to North Lake.

Today, the trail, which is about 3-4 feet wide, is in good shape, except it has at one spot, a 70-year-old tree growing right in the middle of it. Whitmore warns against hiking it at this time because the trail is unmarked and a hiker might get lost.

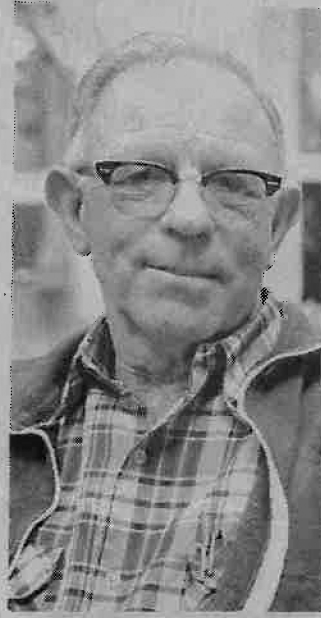
Vaughn, who provided the first record of the trail, visited Tillamook Valley in 1852 and made a donation land claim near the Kilchis River.

By 1854, Whitmore said documents show the Tillamook Valley contained five or six families and 11 bachelors for a total number of about 50 souls. To provide for a more convenient transportation route, settlers were anxious for a passage over the Coast Range to the Willamette Valley via Grand Ronde. Indian trails needed improvement for use with saddle and packhorses.

As part of an application to the National Register, Whitmore wrote a history of the trail and area, part of which follows.

Several Tillamook Valley residents decided to ascend Mt. Hebo, thinking by so doing, they could gain knowledge of surrounding country. From this 3,200 foot summit, they were able to determine routes. The easiest route was across ridgetops since valleys and lowlands were choked with fallen trees, dense underbrush and debris from a forest fire in 1845.

Hiram Smith, one of the earliest Tillamook Valley settlers, made a trip the early spring of 1854 to Grande Ronde for the purpose of constructing a road from that end toward Tillamook. He raised a subscription of men to help with this enterprise. After about four miles, they went back on Smith, causing him to abandon his project. He went through to Tillamook and got the cooperation of several residents. About May 1, 1854, Truman Harris, James Quick, Mr. Alderman, Smith, Trask and others went over the mountains to Grande Ronde. They made an agreement



Leonard Whitmore

with Grand Ronde settlers to help cut the trail from their end and the Tillamook settlers to start at their end, racing to see who would reach the Nestucca River first.

The Grand Ronde party reached the Nestucca River first, but they kept on working. When the two parties met, all was excitement, and there went up such a shout the mountains re-echoed again and again for they were assured of a much near, safer, and pleasanter route to the valley.

Immediately following the completion of the trail, several horsemen arrived from Grande Ronde to the Tillamook Valley. Despite about 200 snags lying across the road, they made the trip in one day.

As the news spread that there was a new trail to Tillamook, a large number of men flocked into the country taking up new homesteads. One year after the trail was cut, Major Ambrose N. Armstrong surveyed the boundaries of the Indian Reservation. His survey notes and plat shows the course of Hiram Smith's four miles of road and is titled "Road to Killamook (sic)."

Armstrong made a trip over the road two years after it opened and commented that it was "a trail barely practicable. It is the intention to finish the wagon road as soon as convenient. This will make the travelling distance from Salem to Tillamook within two - and - a - half days."

The trail was used by settlers until 1859 when a shorter route was found by traveling up the Trask River over the mountains to Yamhill. The trail continued to be used by Indians from the reservation for travel to the reservation.

With construction of a wagon road from Grande Ronde down the Little Nestucca River to the

Nestucca Valley, which was dedicated July 4, 1882, use of the historical Grand Ronde Mt. Hebo trail was discontinued, although other settlers traveled it occasionally.



HISTORIC PATH — Above, Leonard Whitmore points out original trail used by settlers of Tillamook Valley to reach Grande Ronde. Below, another U.S. Forest Service employee shows how 70-year-old tree grew up in middle of trail. (Whitmore photos)

