THE 1997 KLAMATH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TOUR
FORT ROCK, OREGON

By Susan Rambo

On June 22, 1997 at 8:10 a.m., a full bus and two vehicles left for Fort Rock. Driving along Highway 97 north you could see remnants of the old highway as it snaked in and around the points along Upper Klamath Lake. We passed by the long abandoned site of the Algoma Mill. In the distance the Algoma Incline was faintly visible. (See Trumpeter #3, 1986 for further reading on old Highway 97 and the Algoma Incline.)

We made a brief stop at Collier Park, site of a logging museum, then continued on our journey.

We turned right off Highway 97 onto the Silver Lake Highway. In about two miles we approached the 10,000 acre Klamath Marsh. This area is now called the Klamath Forest Wildlife Refuge and is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. It was acquired, following termination of the Klamath Tribe, for $300,000.

This marsh is the ancestral home of the Ouwykane (Ox-e-con-e) people. The Klamath Marsh Indian tribelet permanently resided in this area. In 1864, the Klamath tribes ceded their ancestral homeland of approximately 20 million acres in exchange for approximately a 2 million acre reservation. The Klamath Marsh was included within the reservation. There were permanent villages located along the shores of this marsh up until about 1874 when the Indians moved to the Chiloquin area to be closer to the Klamath Agency. The Indians called this marsh E ukshi (E-ook-she).

The marsh was an important food source for the Indians. It
provided waterfowl, fish, roots, berries and wocus. Deer abounded along the shoreline and in the forests. Trees large enough for dug-out canoes grew close to the water. The pod of the lily is a source of wocus which was a staple of the Indian diet. Wocus is harvested in August from canoes. It is dried and ground into a meal. The gathering of wocus continued regularly up until about 1920 and even today a few tribal members still gather wocus. The marsh also provided reeds and tules for clothing, baskets and housing.

We crossed the Military Crossing Road, which was a log-constructed "bridge" of sorts, that allowed the crossing of the Klamath Marsh. Logs were laid lengthwise and then crosswise. This road was originally called The Oregon Central Military Road. It ran from Eugene, Oregon to Silver City, Idaho. Construction began in 1864. It was never completed. It was a controversial road that infuriated the Indians.

The Military road had been planned before the treaty. Although the Indians were aware that a road would be placed through the reservation, they thought it would be a small wagon road. In reality, what was planned was the confiscation of a twelve-mile-wide swath of the best land through the reservation, so white settlers could develop the land along the roadway. By 1881, the road company was advertising every odd section of Indian land for three miles back from the road for sale. The government retrieved the lands alongside the unconstructed portions of the road by 1889, giving it back to the Indians.

After passing through miles of sage and pumice soil, with a scattering of pines and juniper, we entered the Lakeview Highway and passed through Silver Lake.

We arrived at Fort Rock at 10:45 a.m. Fort Rock is a three-sided volcanic caldera that creates an impression of an easily defended fortress. However, it was never used as a fort (by settlers, anyway). Everyone who wanted, hiked up the trail into the caldera. We saw over a dozen different species of wildflowers in bloom. After the hike, we sat down, wherever we could find shade, and ate our lunch. We listened to Murel Long,
and his daughter, Ann McGill speak of their memories of Reub Long. As many of you know, Reub Long co-authored *The Oregon Desert*, which is a must-read book about the Fort Rock area and Mr. Long's life.

We made a brief stop at the Fort Rock Cemetery, where many of the Fort Rock settlers are buried. At 1:15 we left the cemetery and headed for the museum. At the museum, many old buildings have been preserved for our inspection; Dr. Thom's office and the St. Rose Catholic Church, just to name a couple. After we walked around and enjoyed the old buildings, we gathered in front of the old church to listen to Art McEldowney talk about the Fort Rock Cave and the geological history of the area. We could see the cave's location from the museum, about 1 to 1 1/2 miles away. (See Herald and News, Sunday, July 6, 1997, Page 35 for Ann McGill's report on the cave.)

Art McEldowney is an active member of the Archaeological Society of Central Oregon. They oversee the Reub Long Butte, which includes the cave. Fort Rock and Reub Long Cave or Fort Rock Cave are both tuff ring volcanoes that were formed many years ago when upward-moving lava in the earth's crust encountered underground water. Upon contact with the cooler water, the hot lava exploded, creating a circular crater.
If you look along the walls of Fort Rock, you will see wave-cut benches formed during the late Pleistocene epoch. Up to 11,000 years ago, this area was a lake. Silver Lake, Christmas Lake, Fossil Lake, and Fort Rock were interconnected, with the contiguous broad lake reaching a maximum depth of over 200 feet. Fort Rock would have been an island. The unusual shape of Fort Rock, with the wide breach in the south rim was due to wave action from the former lake eroding the thin walls of the ring. Looking around at the irrigated fields today, it is difficult to imagine that 11,000 years ago the water was 200 feet above my head. Today the steep walls of Fort Rock provide an excellent habitat for the many raptors in the area.

Mr. McEldowney related to us a Paiute story about the creation of Fort Rock. In the Paiute culture, Coyote is the basis of many stories. Coyote was a very crafty villain. It was discovered that people were coming and the Great Spirit needed to name all of the animals. Coyote was the last one to get a name and because he was the last one to get a name, he was given some magical powers. That's what enabled him to help people.

Many years ago, there was a giant that lived in this area. In Paiute his name meant people-grinder. Every morning, the giant would get up and he would look around for smoke. He knew that that's where people were, so he would go over with his great basket and his long, sharp stick and he would spear the people and put them in his basket. He then would go back to his camp and grind them up and eat them. The people became very concerned, because they were disappearing at an alarming rate.

They went to their Great Chief and asked for help. The Great Chief said that he would converse with Coyote and see what they could do. The next day, the Great Chief summoned Coyote and explained the problem. He asked Coyote if he could do anything about it. Coyote said that he could take care of that problem. Quite easily, in fact. But, it would cost. So Coyote and the Great Chief parlayed for several hours. It was decided that the chief's daughter would be payment for Coyote to take
care of the giant. Once they agreed on payment, Coyote told the Great Chief to tell all of his people not to make any fires for five days. The Great Chief spread that information.

The first day the giant got up and he looked across the skyline and he saw no smokes and he went hungry that day. The next day, he woke up and he looked across the skyline and he saw no smokes and he went hungry. The third day, he got up and he looked across and he saw no smokes and he was hungrier still. By day four he was very hungry and weak. On the fifth day, Coyote went to the path where the giant people-grinder walked and he waited for him to get up and when he did arise, Coyote said, "I need to challenge you for ownership of this area".

The giant said, "What do you mean, challenge me?"
Coyote said, "Well, I'm going to challenge you to who gets to use this area. The challenge is that I will get into your great people-collecting basket and you can strike me three blows as hard as you possibly can. If you don't kill me, then you get into the basket and I get three blows."

So, the people-grinder agreed and while he turned slightly, Coyote jumped out of his skin, tossed his skin in the basket, yanked up a sagebrush and jumped under the sagebrush and pulled the sagebrush down on top of himself.

He then said, "Okay, I'm ready, strike your blows."
The giant took his great people-gathering stick and smacked the bottom of the basket with a great whack.
Coyote said, "Ah, that feels so good on my back, could you hit a little bit lower?"
The giant, slightly infuriated, hit just as hard as he possibly could.
Coyote said, "Is that all the harder you can hit? Certainly you can hit harder than that."
The giant gave his third and final blow just as hard as he possibly could.

It was then Coyote's turn, "Okay, you get in the basket and I will strike three blows."
The giant got in the basket and Coyote struck the first blow and blood spurted and skin flew open and the giant said, "Oh me, oh my!"

Coyote hit him a second blow. That was a mortal blow and the giant thrashed and thrashed about, because he was in great pain. He fell out of the basket and died.

Now, if you look at Fort Rock, you'll see that one side is torn out and that is the great food gathering basket. Northeast of here, there is a large crack in the ground, called "Crack in the Ground" and that is the stick that the giant flailed as he came out of the basket and that's what dug the crack in the ground. The red cinder cones you see are the blood splashes from his injuries. And Lake Abert, being very saline, is tears that he shed while he died.

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We then heard from Vivian Stratton, who has lived in the Fort Rock area for most of her 92 years. According to Vivian, the buildings have all been moved from other locales, except for the reception room, the only modern building on the property.

She related stories about the houses and their occupants. One, the Pierre Belletable house, she referred to as "almost a
mansion". The Belletable's had a little bit more money than most of the people that came to this valley. She believed they had four or five children. Mr. Belletable was a chef in a famous restaurant in Philadelphia, previous to coming to Fort Rock. They came from an elite background. For some strange reason they dropped everything they had back east and came west. Mr. Belletable had to go to Portland and work in a restaurant to make money to support the family out here.

She spoke about Dr. (James W.) Thom. Dr. Thom was the doctor in Silver Lake and the Fort Rock area up until about 1924, when he moved to Bend. He traveled by horseback or horse and buggy until along toward the later years, when he finally bought a Ford. His office is located on the Museum grounds. He brought the entire Silver Lake and Fort Rock Valley residents through the influenza, after the first World War, and only lost one case, that Vivian knew of. He had one practical nurse to assist him.

Vivian related that the land was advertised in the East as farmland. It was the last homestead area opened up to the public before the Homestead Act was eliminated. Back then the bunch grass was as high as your horse's stirrups. It was
grazing land. But it wasn't suitable for farming, because of the summer frosts and the lack of moisture. People came in thinking they could make a living on 320 acres and they couldn't. At least most of them couldn't. Now, if you look around you see alfalfa fields, irrigated by overhead pivot systems that are owned and operated by mega-corporations, such as the ZX Ranch.

We boarded the bus and by 3:00 p.m. we left the museum, heading south on Highway 31. The clouds moved in, fluffy, white, with dark bottoms. The temperature was at or near the 70's and the breeze was cool. All said, it was a fun, informative trip. Thanks to Wayne and Lois Ann Scott and Paul and Billie Fitzhugh for the great job they did.
New faces and a new look! Lynn and one of our newer volunteers, Richard Gover, have given the lobby a face lift with leftovers! Lynn salvaged from the court house and administration building and created a very professional and efficient counter and desk arrangement. Come in and take a look. Carole Orendorff no longer sits behind the Visitor desk. She took a position at Crater Lake National Park and lives at Crater Lake. You will find in her place, Valerie Lapsley, who is a native of Klamath Falls and whose father was a school principal. Valerie has a great attitude and helps our visitors with great enthusiasm. Come in and meet Valerie.

You may have noticed the painting going on outside as well. County maintenance has prepared the surfaces by scraping off years of accumulated paint and applying a fresh new coat. It not only gives the building a much needed lift but also perks up those of us who work inside. For visitors, it speaks well toward community upkeep. We thank our Maintenance men!

Be prepared to see work at the Baldwin this winter. The retrofit from FEMA and the matching funds the museum has saved for many years will allow strengthening of the walls and exterior to make the museum stronger and safer in the event of another earthquake.

For all of you who give so willingly, time, money, supplies, I say thank you! The staff recognizes that we couldn’t survive without your constant support. Many times I have said, the Baldwin wouldn’t be open without our volunteers. Lynn couldn’t keep up with the dusting, cleaning, displays, labeling, etc. Etc. etc. without your assistance. For the lady who schedules you all to work, Nedra Putman, another job that takes hours of time, thank you for your commitment. (Nedra has actually worked at the Baldwin longer than I.)

Next summer, some interesting plans for Fort Klamath. The Living History Association is planning several weekends of re-enactment activity at the museum site. They will be wearing period costumes, some will ride horses, and activities will simulate those you might have expected back in 1865 or so. Watch for a schedule.

Museum pictures (murals) were reproduced by Lloyd Baker for the Running Y Sports Center. The decorating theme is western and our photos fit the decor perfectly.

Next on the calendar will be the Toy Show during the Snowflake Festival. Several exhibits are getting a new look and new labels in our on-going process to upgrade and present our history in an appealing way.

Pat McMillan, Director
The following contributions were made to the Endowment Fund since the last issue of the Trumpeter. These contributions benefit the Museum and are thoughtful and fitting tributes to those special friends and family who are remembered and honored.

**PAUL DELLER**
Jeane MacBeth

**FRANK EBERLEIN**
Dorothy Buchanan
John & Lois Enders
Wm. & Carol Haggerty
Larry & Sharon Haskins
Jim & Elna Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. H.O. Juckeland
Van & Patty Landrum
Pelican Tractor Co., Inc.
Mae Smith
Al & Vicki Switzer
Tingley Lake Estates
Elisabeth Trowbridge
Sharon W. Whitwer

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The Museum needs the following:
sandpaper, all grits; tack cloth; lint-free rags;
small brushes, 1 to 2.5 inches; large plastic drop
cloths; steel wool; paint brush cleaners; stains;
paint thinner. If you have any of these supplies
sitting around your garage, please consider
donating them to the museum.

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**CORRECTION**

The December 1996 issue of the Trumpeter incorrectly spelled Belva Parsons name. Please correct your copy.

If you see an error in a story in the Trumpeter, please call the Editor. I want to set the record straight.

**From Whence Came Four Feet Eight and One-Half Inches**

**How Specs Live Forever**

The U.S. Standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4-feet, 8.5-inches. That's an exceedingly odd number. Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and the U.S. railroads were built by English ex-patriates. Why did the English people build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did "they" use that gauge then? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing. Okay! Why did the wagons use that odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing the wagons would break on some of the old, long distance roads, because that's the spacing of the old wheel ruts.

So, who built these old ruted roads? The first long distance roads in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts? The initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagons, were first made by Roman war chariots. Since the chariots were made for or by Imperial Rome they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

Thus, we have the answer to the original question. The United States standard railroad gauge of 4-feet, 8.5-inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman army war chariot. Specs and bureaucracies live forever. So, the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be exactly right. Because the Imperial Roman chariots were made to be just wide enough to accommodate the back-ends of two war horses.
OFFICERS OF KLAMATH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President........Wayne Scott
Vice-President...Billie Fitzhugh
Secretary.........Janis Kafaton
Treasurer........Susan Rambo

K. C. H. S.
MUSEUM MEETING ROOM
1451 Main Street
Klamath Falls, OR 97601
USE SPRING STREET ENTRANCE

1997 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

Meetings are held the 4th Thursday of the month -- with some exceptions! NEXT MEETING:

OCTOBER 23    7:30 pm

* Sunday, NOVEMBER 23 - 12:30-4:00 pm - Fall Potluck & election of officers.

* NO MEETING IN DECEMBER.

DUES

$5.00 PER PERSON. Payable by January 31st of each year. This includes your membership and the receipt of the Trumpeter four times a year. Send your check to Klamath County Historical Society, 1451 Main St., Klamath Falls, OR 97601.

Please renew your membership in order to remain on our mailing list for The Trumpeter. Without your dues, the Historical Society cannot continue to send The Trumpeter to you. Join and enjoy the history of Klamath County with the friendship of our group.

We welcome reader submissions. If you have an interesting short story about life in early Klamath County, please submit it to Susan Rambo c/o Klamath County Museum.

NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE KLAMATH COUNTY MUSEUM

The Rummage Sale brought in over $400.00.

The Antiques & Collectibles Sale will be November 8th, 9-4 & November 9th, noon-4.

The Annual Meeting will be held November 11th, 11:30 am at Sizzler.

How the Animals Found Their Places

A Northern Paiute Story

In the old time Coyote was boss. Coyote said, "Bear, you better stay in the mountains." Deer said, "I want to go live in the mountains too!" Sucker said, "I want some water."

Duck said he wanted water too. Swan said, "Look at me, I am growing pretty now, see, I am white all over."

Bear pounded the ground. "Ground," he said, "who is talking about me?"

Ground said, "Indian talks pretty mean," so Bear went out and bit him.

"I want to stay here in the rocks," said Mountain Sheep. "I like to feel the ground."

Rock said, I like to stay here in one place and not move."

Sagebrush said he felt the same way.

This is Coyote's story.

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Welcome New Members!

Maynard C. Drawson
Dena Iverson