

The Old Redwood Stage Road



Welcome to the Old Redwood Stage Road Tour

The information in this handout will provide background information about the cultural and natural history seen along the old Redwood Stage Road. Additional information will be provided in mile-by-mile road guides handed to participants at each of the seven check points along the tour route.

Preparing for the tour

This tour is organized to assure everyone gets through the historic route and out of the backcountry. The following suggestions will help to make your trip more enjoyable.

- Be certain your vehicle has tires suitable for driving on gravel roads.
- Fill the gas tank before arriving at the tour starting point. There are no gas stations for the first 50 miles of the tour.
- Check oil and radiator fluid levels.
- Carry extra drinking water.
- Bring a roll of toilet paper.

Tour starting point

The tour starts at the Elk Valley Casino located at the south end of Crescent City. From Highway 101, turn on Elk Valley Road, drive one mile and turn right on Howland Hill Road. Drive about a half mile to the casino on the left.

TWO TYPES OF STAGES

When the first roads were constructed from Crescent City to the gold mining communities of southern Oregon, horse-drawn stagecoaches were used to transport people over this route. Around 1910, the horse drawn stage coaches were replaced by cars called auto stages.





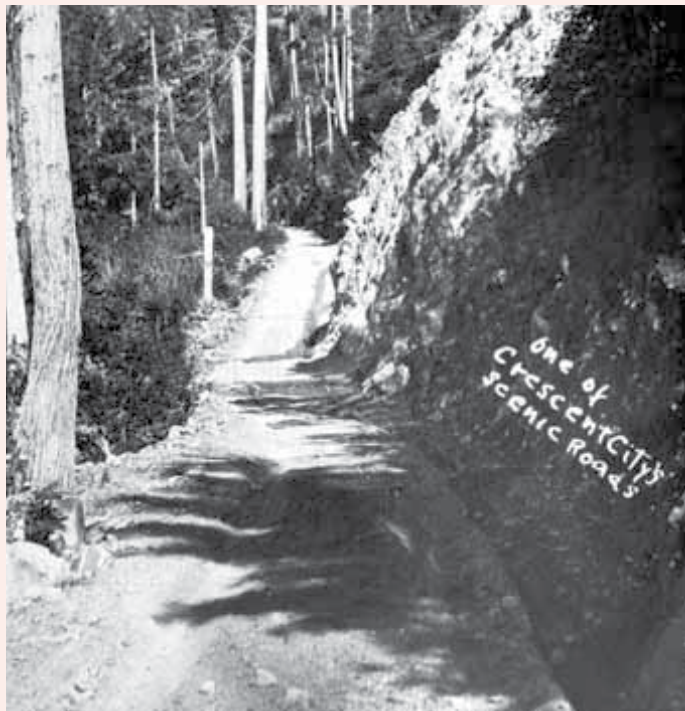
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History

The Redwood Stage Road

Hand labor was used to construct roads during the early history of this region and these roads were generally made no wider than the minimum width for wagons to pass. The photo below shows what the old Redwood Stage Road might have looked like after it was constructed.

In recent years, the road has been widened and covered with gravel to make it suitable for all-weather travel. Although the road is now wider and covered with gravel, the grade follows the original road bed.



Native Americans of the Crescent City region, the Tolowa and Yurok, used trails to trade with the Takilma and Rogue tribes in southwest Oregon. In 1851, the discovery of gold in northern California and southwest Oregon created a demand for supplies. The quickest way to deliver these supplies was by sea and Crescent City rapidly became the port of choice for supply ships.

For the first five years of the gold rush, supplies were carried by pack mules from Crescent City to mining camps near Yreka in California and Waldo in Oregon. The trails they used may have been the same as those used by Native Americans. The trail to Yreka became known as the Kelsey Trail and the trail into southwest Oregon became known as the Cold Springs Mountain Trail. The Old Redwood Stage Road follows close to the same route used by the Cold Springs Mountain Trail, which was estimated to have as many as 200 pack animals going over it each day.

In 1856, the first road was constructed between Crescent City and southwest Oregon and was named the Turnpike and Puncheon Road. After 20 years of use, the road fell into disrepair as gold became scarce and the demand for supplies dwindled.

A merchant named Joseph Wimer, the owner of a store in the town of Waldo, Oregon, decided to make a new road to Crescent City. This road was completed in 1882 and became known as the Wimer Road.

About the same time, a merchant named Horace Gasquet in California began construction of a road that went from Crescent City to his store and resort, which was located at next to the Smith River at the present-day community of Gasquet.

Gasquet continued his road to the California border where it connected to the Wimer Road. Gasquet's road made a shorter route to the sea and hence became the preferred route.

The Old Redwood Highway Tour follows segments of all three roads; the Gasquet Road in California, the Wimer Road into Oregon's gold country, and the Turnpike Road through Waldo and Kerbyville, Oregon, the region where Oregon's 1851 gold rush started..

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Rocks and Plants

The geology seen along the Old Redwood Stage Road is not difficult to understand if you can grasp two basic concepts

- The west coast of northern California and southern Oregon have been created by the collision of the American continental plate and the Pacific Ocean plate. The ocean plate is almost always pushed under the continent.
- As the ocean crust is pushed under the continental, pieces break off and pile up under the continent. This causes a gradual uplift of the region by about 1-3 millimeters per year.

During the geologic history of this region, entire pieces of the ocean crust have broken off under the continental edge. Over the millenia, uplift has brought these rocks closer to the surface and erosion has whittled away the terrain until the rocks that were once 5-10 miles below the surface are now the mountain tops seen along the tour route.

The tour begins on rock that is currently being scraped off the ocean floor and

piled up under the continent edge. The large redwood trees are found on these rocks. The tour then enters a large section of ocean crust considered to be the most complete geology of its type in the United States. After this, the road goes through an extensive outcrop of mantle rock, which is one of the largest in North America. The route then swings around to the foot of the ancient continental edge, seen in the background of the photo above, before arriving in Kerbyville.

Plant communities also change dramatically along the tour route starting with the redwood forest along the cool, coastal fog belt and transitioning to oak woodlands and Douglas fir forests in Oregon. Along the way the road passes through a large exposure of mantle rock. Mantle rock is a poor source of essential plant nutrients and also contains high levels of nickel and chrome, which may be harmful to some plants. For this reason, plant communities growing on mantle rock are distinctly different from communities growing on other rock types even though temperatures and rainfall are likely identical.



Mantle rock (photo above) has a high content of iron and turns a rust-red color on weathered surfaces. More than 50 inches of rain falls in this region every year and the combination of stunted plant communities found on these rock outcrops and the red color of the rock is why some people have nick-named the mantle rock outcrops of Oregon and California the “red rock desert”.



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A 1915 ride on the Redwood Stage Road

A recollection from “fender rider” named Lew Krauss of Selma, Oregon

Around 1915, a young man living in Selma, Oregon walked down to the old stage road to Crescent City. He was planning to catch an auto stage to Crescent City and waited by the side of the road listening for the pop, pop, pop of the two cylindered International stage, which could be heard for some distance in the sparsely settled country.

Finally he heard the stage coming and watched as it came down the hill and forded a small creek. When it drew close enough he could see that passengers were crowded in all available space inside, some were hanging on the outside and luggage and packages of every size and description were tied every where.

The stage driver said to the waiting young man, “Son, if you can find a place to hang on, you can go.” Without qualm, the traveler paid his fare, and sat on the front fender. Almost before he was settled, the stage was under way and went popping down the dusty little road on its 70 mile trip to Crescent City.

The stage, loaded as it was, didn’t travel too fast and the going wasn’t too bad through the Illinois Valley. The road they were following, the old stage road, went through Kerbyville, crossed the Illinois River and on to Waldo. Much of the way was through forests.

After leaving Waldo, the road went past the Stone Corral and then became a tortuous, narrow road, up hill and down, with some of the turns so sharp, the stage had to back up once or twice to make the curve.

More than once, the fender rider thought the driver should not have taken the outside curves so fast, because as the car made the turn, the fender was out over nothingness. The scenery must have been breath

taking but the fender rider was too busy hanging on to the fender to enjoy the view.

The road had deep ruts and was very dusty. All the passengers were covered with dust and the young man riding the fender out in front was the dustiest of all.



It was dusty up hill and down hill and at the bottom of every hill there was a stream that had to be forded. The passengers and driver were splashed, but the fender rider got the wettest – and then more dust.

The dust ended when they came to the plank road, which was still in use at that time. But, oh how bumpy that part of the ride was. The young man’s hands were cramped with hanging on.

Soon Crescent City came into view and the auto stage pulled up in front of an inn signaling the end of the trip for the mud and dust covered fender rider.

Story adapted from the history book *Golden Days and Golden Ways* by Ruth Pfefferle.

Photo: Harvest International stage in the redwood forest.