

Anatomy of a Rumor

Trackside Series #15

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For those of you anxiously waiting for the third and final installment about the U.S. Army's Spruce Production Camps in this area, those located along the Alsea Southern Railroad, I'm sorry to once again have to disappoint you. I've again been sidetracked (pun intended) by another subject so the discussion about the spruce camps will have to wait for a future article.

In railroad history, as in the history of many other subjects, there are rumors that exist. With trains and railroads, many of these rumors center around the story of lost locomotives that have been abandoned in the woods, supposedly found by some hiker or hunter that happened to stumble onto it during their experience in the brush. South Lincoln County is no different. There are numerous stories of a locomotive abandoned in the hills south of Waldport and this was even the subject of installment number two of this series.

How do such rumors get started? What is the makeup of such rumors? Well, as mentioned earlier, the abandoned locomotive rumors usually begin with a wayward hiker or hunter. The rumor of the old railroad depot in Depoe Bay got started.....! Say what? What railroad depot in Depoe Bay? You know, the one that shows up on the map. And so, another rumor is born.

I recently stopped in to visit Jody Weeber at the Oregon Coast History Center in Newport to inquire about an album of photographs depicting the operations of the Spruce Production Division. While there she showed me a map that someone living in Depoe Bay had given to her. This small map is a portion of a larger U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle map and shows the area along the coast between Cape Foulweather and Boiler Bay.

Noted on the map, about one half mile south of Depoe Bay, are the words "Train Depot", written in capital letters. They're easy to locate as the black lettering is written over the blue of the Pacific Ocean. The wording on the map is located on Cove Point and is in the area of the Little Whale Cove development, a gated community at the west end of Singing Tree Street.

The lettering is hand written, as are many of the notations on this map. This indicates that this map is a provisional version of a standard U.S.G.S. quadrangle map. This means that an updated, final version will be forthcoming in which the new handwritten notations will change to a normal printed format. When I got home I looked in my collection of maps and found that I have this same map in my files. The portion of the map showed to me by Jody came from the Depoe Bay 7 ½' U.S.G.S. quadrangle map and is the 1984 provisional edition.

The copy of the map was given to Jody by a fellow that lives in Depoe Bay. He had been shown the original map by one of his neighbors and noted the indication of a train depot on it. He knew that Jody happened to live in the area where the depot is indicated and asked her if she had ever heard of any railroad station being located in her

locale. Of course she hadn't but there it was, written on a map that was produced by the U.S.G.S., an official government agency. That means there must have been one there, doesn't it?

Before we rush to a conclusion here and head to Depoe Bay to catch the next train at the depot, let's examine some facts. First, maybe whatever cartographer made that notation on the map just assumed that since the town was named Depoe Bay there must have been a train depot there. However, notice the difference in the spelling. The name of the town is spelled Depoe Bay, not Depot Bay. The understanding is that the town was named after Willie DePoe, a Siletz Indian, also named "Old Charley". If the notation wasn't made for that reason then we must assume that it was put on the map because someone figured there were actually train tracks through Depoe Bay at some point in time.

But, let's not jump to any conclusion just yet and do some more checking of the facts before rushing forth and telling the world about our newly discovered train depot. While several railroad companies did propose railroad lines along our central Oregon coast, none were ever built. One of the more ambitious plans was that of the Portland & West Coast Railroad & Navigation Co. It planned to construct a railroad from Newport, northward along the coast past Otter Rock and Depoe Bay, to the mouth of the Salmon River then north and eastward towards Portland. This company was promoted by J. H. Fitzgerald about 1915 but died at the outbreak of World War I without any construction having been completed.

However, World War I did cause a railroad to be built that came closer to reaching Depoe Bay as any other line. This was in the form of the Yaquina Northern RR that was built by the U.S. Army's Spruce Production Division. This line began at a connection with the Southern Pacific's track at Yaquina City. From there the line headed west to Newport then turned northward up the coast, passing through Agate Beach before reaching Otter Rock. While grading did reach as far north as Otter Rock rails were only laid northward as far as Spencer Creek. The end of the war on November 11, 1918 brought construction of the line to a halt, about three miles south of Depoe Bay. Close, but no cigar.

Another system of tracks came fairly close to Depoe Bay but as with the Yaquina Northern RR, ended up several miles from the city. Those were the logging spurs of the C.D. Johnson Lumber Co. This system of spurs branched northward and westward from the Camp 12 operations near Siletz and while they did come close to Depoe Bay they terminated at a point about five miles east of town. Again, close but no cigar.

And so it seems that this rumor has no basis, as is such with many rumors. After all, if a rumor was true it wouldn't be a rumor, now would it? No, it would be a true story or a fact, not a rumor. So, after examining the facts surrounding this rumor it seems that is all we have here, an unfounded rumor. The only fact we know to be true is that the words "train depot" do show up on an official map issued by our government. Other than that all we have is smoke and mirrors. So, before anyone rushes to the Depoe Bay to catch the next train through town, remember the facts!

