

Menasha's Road

The old Coos Bay Military Wagon Road lands included more than 100 square miles of Oregon timberland worth a fortune to whoever owned it. Battles over that land, including lawsuits, state political fights, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, and three changes of ownership between the mid-1880s and 1911, would have a single result: a portion of the Wagon Road lands would belong to C. R. Smith and Menasha—at least temporarily.

The Coos Bay Wagon Road had its inception on September 5, 1865, when the Coos County Court ordered:

... that the Road located from Huffman's Ferry on the North Fork of the Coquille river in Coos County, Oregon, running up the middle Fork of said River by the way of Enchanted Prairie, thence in an Easterly direction to the boundary line between Coos and Douglas counties, it is ordered that said road be let to the lowest bidder for the term of ten years, persons leasing said Road to make a good pack trail six feet wide in the clear, the grade of said road not to be more than ten feet in one hundred feet and if a good Wagon road is not made at the end of ten years from the line that the said pack trail is completed then the said lease to be forfeited, that three gates shall be placed on the Road, and it is ordered that sealed bids shall be received at the County Clerks Office for the leasing of said Road until Thursday the 28th day of December 1865 at 10 o'clock am and that notice is published in the Oregon Statesman four weeks.

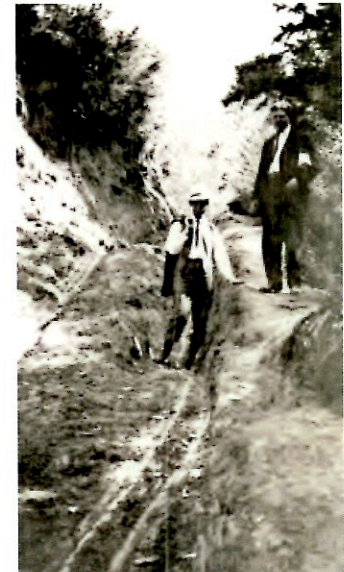
Apparently construction proved more difficult than anticipated. The initial contractor defaulted, even after additional funds were allocated. After two years without much progress, on July 2, 1867, the Coos County Court again ordered:

... that a road from the residence of Mrs. J. Huffman on the Coquille River... to the County line of Douglas County, be leased for the term of ten years to such party or parties as will open, improve and keep in repair the said Road upon the best of terms, following the location made by George Brown, Daniel T Hill and Thomas J. Rowley as filed in the county Court September 24, 1865. That the grade of said road shall not exceed four feet to the rod that there shall be no more than two toll gates on said road and that the bridges may be constructed of either wood or stone.

The Federal Government became interested in the project and in 1869 made a grant of 99,819.35 acres of land to spur private construction of a road from Coos Bay to Roseburg. The federally sponsored route ran from Roseburg through Looking Glass and Ten Mile in Douglas



The Coos Bay Military Wagon Road at Rocky Point between Roseburg and Coos Bay. The driver is Walter Laird (Douglas County Historical Society)



Once the road was built, the winter rains and the steep terrain wreaked havoc on the dirt roadbed (Douglas County Historical Museum)