

River has been a magnet for many famous folks

By Kathleen Alaks
of the Daily Courier

A star in its own right, the Rogue River has attracted its fair share of celebrities, from actors and filmmakers to writers and politicians.

Film stars

Southern Oregon was a popular vacation spot for a lot of Hollywood types, especially in the 1930s and '40s.

Clark Gable made frequent trips to Southern Oregon. He particularly liked to stay, with wife Carole Lombard, at the Weasku Inn on Rogue River Highway and the Wolf Creek Inn north of Grants Pass.

He reportedly declared the Weasku Inn to be his favorite fishing lodge and he even is said to have proclaimed the virtues of the Weasku's flapjacks.

The avid angler spent a lot of time fishing on the river. He is unmistakable in an eye-catching 1933 photo from the Oregon Historical Society Research Library, nattily dressed in a suit and tie, holding a huge salmon alongside an unidentified woman in front of the Weasku Inn.

Gable also is said to have spent several weeks at the lodge after his wife's tragic death in 1942.

Other film folks known to have stayed at the Weasku Inn include cartoon and animated film pioneer Walt Disney, actor and crooner Bing Crosby.

The Wolf Creek Inn's famous guests include film actress Mary Pickford, director Orson Welles, and, more recently, actors Sir Patrick Stewart and Sir Anthony Hopkins.

Gregory Peck also spent time fishing the Rogue, with help from local fishing guide Bob Pruitt.

"(Peck) didn't have a rain hat, and it rained for five of the six days," Pruitt said in a 1996 Daily Courier article. "The orange juice from his orange baseball hat ran down his neck for five days. I had fun sitting there looking at it. But he was a dandy sport."

Shirley Temple was 7 or 8 years old when her family passed through Grants Pass in 1936 and she had her photo taken with a member of the Cavemen, a group of civic promoters who dressed as, well, cavemen.

Decades later, Shirley Temple Black made at least one other trip to the Rogue Valley. In October 1965, she joined friends and relatives for a four-day trip on the Rogue River, from Rand to Gold Beach, guided by Bob Pruitt.

Temple-Black's first three



Clark Gable, shown with an unidentified woman, said The Weasku Inn on Rogue River Highway was his favorite fishing lodge.

steelhead (caught at Battle Bar) are preserved in a photo with Pruitt.

"She lost every other fish, and finally landed those three," Pruitt told the Courier. "We called it Shirley's Puddle after that."

"Outside of her good looks, it was just like having anybody else in the boat," he said. "I think she was the easiest person to teach to fly-fish that I ever taught."

John Wayne and Katharine Hepburn filmed on the Rogue River for several days while making "Rooster Cogburn" in 1974. Most of their scenes were done near the Hog Creek landing.

They were ferried up and down the river for their scenes by local guides, including Mel Norrick.

river, with a helicopter overhead; and an episode of "Gunsmoke" with James Arness, Slim Pickens and Jack Elam.

The 1994 film "The River Wild" was filmed primarily in Southern Oregon and in Glacier National Park.

While in town, the cast and crew stayed at the Riverside Inn, while stars, who included Meryl Streep, Kevin Bacon and David Strathairn, rented private homes.

Bacon worked out at the G Street Health Club, and Streep frequented the Sunshine Cafe.

Filming began on the river Oct. 3, 1993. When weather was bad, the cast filmed on set at the Merlin Armory or in local warehouses where sets had been built. The YMCA pool was pressed into use as doggy diving scenes were filmed and, for its help, the Y received a spendy spa.

Johnny Depp spent time in Grants Pass in 1994 while shooting his movie "Dead Man," filming some of the river and forest scenes for the story of an Old West accountant on the run.

Some filming also was done near Fish Hatchery Park on the Applegate River.

Actor Dan Haggerty, best known as TV's Grizzly Adams made use of the Rogue River in two films. Most of the filming for "Spirit of the Eagle" in 1989 was done between the mouth of the Applegate and Grave Creek.

In 1994, "Grizzly Mountain" made use of the Rogue near Merlin, as well as Crater Lake and Mill Creek Falls.

Peter Graves and Rory Calhoun were in town during the 1951 filming of "Rogue River," Graves' first movie.

Writers

Iconic Western writer Zane Grey first came to the Rogue River in 1919 for a fishing expedition and fell in love with it.

He came back throughout the '20s and was so enamored of the Rogue and its fishing opportunities that, in 1926, he bought a mining claim at Winkle Bar where he built a crude one-room cabin of peeled logs and hand-split shingles that became his wilderness retreat.

The cabin still stands and is one of the most visited spots on the Wild Section of the river.

Grey not only fished the river, he also wrote about it. His 1929 novel "Rogue River Feud" isn't one of his best-sellers but many consider one of its chapters to be the finest description of the Rogue River ever written.

Grey also wrote about a driftboat trip on the lower Rogue in his book "Tales of Fresh Water Fishing," released in 1928.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier, 1988

Vice President George Bush enjoys a sunny day on the Rogue River salmon fishing in 1988 with guide Mel Norrick on the oars, and a Secret Service agent next to him.



LEFT: This photo will forever link Shirley Temple to Grants Pass. RIGHT: Meryl Streep appeared in "The River Wild," which was released in 1994 partially shot on the Rogue River.

Jack London was a regular guest at the Wolf Creek Inn, staying with his wife in a tiny room over the front porch. Legend has it that he knocked off a short story within view of the nearby mountain peak now bearing his name.

Politicians

By far the most famous politician to make a splash on the Rogue River was then-Vice President George H.W. Bush.

Six months before the 1988 presidential election, Bush bought a fishing license at Lil' Pantry Market in Merlin for \$4.

He had only \$3 in his wallet, Daily Courier reporter Paul Fattig wrote, but a bystander fished out an extra buck to seal the deal.

Fishing guide Mel Norrick rowed Bush from Morrison's Lodge to Grave Creek, about 8 river miles, trying to catch a spring chinook salmon.

Along the Rogue, Bush described himself as "enthusiastic and quite knowledgeable

when it came to fishing," as reported in the Courier.

He wore a U.S. Forest Service cap and a camouflage jacket over a light shirt and dark green jeans. A Secret Service agent sat next to Bush on the boat and several agents were placed along the riverbank, wearing suits and with walkie-talkie plugs in their ears.

Shortly after Bush's visit, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor took a four-day lodge trip with Norrick.

"She could ask more questions faster than anybody I had in my boat," Norrick told the Courier. "She hooked a big salmon below Raimie Falls, and just about got it to the boat and it came off. She felt so bad she lost that big old salmon. It was over 40 inches."

Though it's unclear if they fished or floated the river, politician Herbert Hoover visited Southern Oregon and stayed at the Weasku Inn and President Rutherford B. Hayes stayed at the Wolf Creek Inn.

The Remarkable Rogue!

Visit one of these agents for information on properties on or near the famous Rogue River...



401 Grays Creek Road
\$1,050,000

- 6 BR / 6 BA, 4333 sq. ft.
- 63 beautiful acres
- Two full residences
- Room for all your horses
- Large barn & shop
- Hay fields
- Mature landscaping
- Year round pond

HEATHER YRIARTE
Broker/Owner
541-324-0675

RE/MAX Integrity 1830 NE 7th St., Ste. 101 Grants Pass

410 Woodbury Lane
\$425,000

Storybook setting on the famous Rogue River!

- 2 BR / 2 BA + office
- 2.09 beautiful acres
- Hardwood floors, fireplace
- Breakfast noon, dining room
- Attached 2-car garage
- Detached 24x28 shop
- Deck, room for garden
- Close to town & hospital

SUZIE MATNEY
Broker/Owner
541-660-9818

John L. Scott REAL ESTATE Grants Pass 705 NE 7th St. Grants Pass

Located on the Famous "Rattlesnake Rapids"

- 700-ft Rogue River frontage
- 10.22-AC on 2 tax lots
- Irrigated pasture
- 2-story home w/basement
- 3 BR/3 BA, 2,566 sq. ft.
- Finished 3-car garage with shop
- 36x60 Shop
- River rights (domestic w/irrigation system through UV system)

13151 Agate Rd., Eagle Point \$1,295,000

Mike Malepsy Principal Broker 541-840-1424

Paradise on the river; own your own lodge style riverfront retreat!

2392 Rogue River Hwy. Gold Hill, OR

- 3 BR/2 BA, 1766 sq. ft
- Loaded w/ charm!
- Parquet floors & walls
- More custom woodwork
- Fish from your backyard!
- Outdoor kitchen/entertainment area with fireplace, BBQ, beer tap, ice maker, wine fridge, refrigerator & sink
- \$395,395

Don Teague 408-396-4729
Laurie Myers 541-315-3385

READY TO LIST YOUR RIVER PROPERTY? GIVE ME A CALL!

Ready to BUY or SELL? Just call MEL!

MEL ESTES
541-291-7886

783 Bentley Drive - \$179,500
Just Listed!

- 2016 Palm Harbor home
- Spacious, open interior
- Gourmet kitchen with island
- Full dining room
- 2 bedrooms + large den/office
- Luxury walk-in shower in master
- Large, insulated finished garage
- Private patio, large deck
- Lush, mature landscaping

Westlake Village
Shown by appointment

Jeanne 541-226-7172 • www.westlakevillagenw.com

The perfect secluded getaway on North Tummle Lake

4 acres with a rustic cabin nestled above the shore line with sweeping views of lake! Located on a secluded cove with water access only assures you will have no neighbors, no traffic, no surprise visitors! 2 bedroom cabin with 1 full bath and a comfy great room and huge deck. 1200 feet of lakefront!

\$250,000 (owner terms available). Owner is licensed Realtor in the state of Oregon.

858 NW 6th Street Grants Pass, OR 541-476-6502

Sharon Vest 541-660-1850

120 Kingsley Drive - \$189,250
Begin your new life in Westlake Village

- Large, landscaped corner lot
- Spacious living/dining room
- Walk-in pantry, appliances incl.
- Big windows, lots of natural light
- Luxury master bath
- Large walk-in closets throughout
- Stamped concrete courtyard
- Oversized garage, extra parking

Westlake Village
Shown by appointment

Jeanne 541-226-7172 • www.westlakevillagenw.com

301 Holmstead Rd. Williams, OR \$599,000

- 3 BR / 2 BA
- 2058 sq. ft.
- 5.27 acres
- Brand new kitchen
- Brand new bathrooms
- 982 sq. ft. guest quarters
- Man cave workshop
- 1344 sq. ft. four car garage
- Six bay machine shed

PAULA SEPOLPO
Principal Broker/Notary
541-846-7131

PINE-ROK REALTY
165 Tetherow Road Williams, OR 97544

HOMES • RANCH • LAND
Call for a River List!

Terri Lewis | Broker • Licensed in Oregon
541-659-3265
terri9796@gmail.com

598 NE E Street, Suite C Grants Pass, OR 97526

Located at the top of "Salmon Alley"

...a famous Rogue River salmon fishing hole

- 4+ acres, lodge style home
- 640' Rogue River frontage
- 3 BR, 3.5 BA, 3,132 sq. ft.
- 2,000 +/- covered decks
- Attached 2-car garage
- Detached 3-car garage
- 2-carports
- RV parking w/dump
- Boat ramp, fish pond

2259 Hwy. 234, Eagle Point \$998,000

Mike Malepsy Principal Broker 541-840-1424