

Earl's Diary - Monday - July 14, 2014

Greetings to all my Loyal Readers,

Today is my first of three sightseeing days. My ultimate destination is the town of Florence, about 80 miles north of Bandon, right on Highway 101. Of course, every town on Oregon's coast is right on 101. It's the only major thoroughfare!

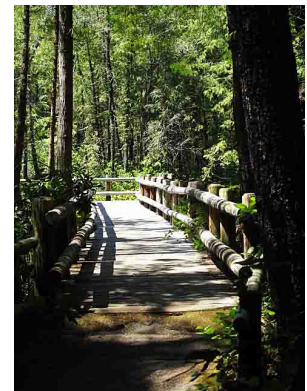
I will be passing through Coos Bay and Reedsport on my way. There are more sights to see there on Tuesday or Wednesday.

I left Bandon at 10:00 thinking it would take about 2 hours of driving and that's what it took. Getting anywhere on this coast is NOT an experience in speedy driving. The countryside is mostly forest covered until a town is reached.

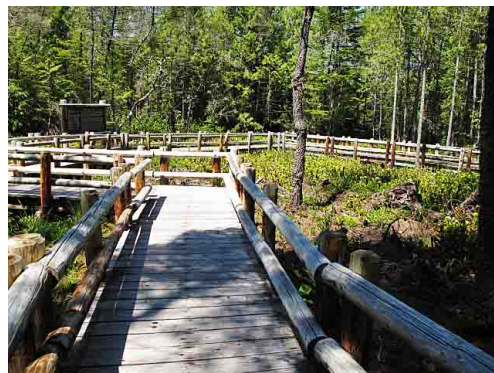
True to its reputation, weather is unpredictable in Oregon. As I left Bandon, it was overcast and drizzly. All through Coos Bay and Reedsport the overcast was the same. Upon reaching Florence, I couldn't believe my eyes! The sun was out and blue sky shone everywhere! Finally I thought, this is going to be a great day!

My first stop was five miles north of Florence at the Darlingtonia Wayside. What is a Darlingtonia you ask? It's a very special plant.

A short walk through dense forested trees brought me to a small sunlit bog area covered with these unusual plants.



Here's probably more than you ever wanted to know about this plant.



Darlingtonia State Natural Site is the only Oregon state park property dedicated to the protection of a single plant species. Concurrently, the plants it protects are the only carnivorous flora in the system.

This 18-acre botanical park provides parking and a boardwalk trail out into a fen that is home to *Darlingtonia californica*. Also called a cobra lily, the rare, strangely-shaped plant is the only member of the pitcher plant family (Sarraceniaceae) in Oregon.

What visitors see in this little garden of multi-colored horrors (for insects), is a plant with yellowish green hooded leaves that form erect, 10 to 20-inch-high hollow tubes. On top, the leaves are often purplish to reddish mottled with transparent areas. A hidden opening into the stalk is bordered by a large, green, mustache-shaped appendage beneath the curved hood of the leaf. Nectar inside the plant's hidden opening attracts the insects. Once inside, an insect becomes confused by the transparent areas that appear like exits. It's all "downhill" for the insect from that point as it eventually drops into the lower part of the tube, is trapped by downward-pointed hairs and falls into a pool of water at the bottom of the stalk. Bacteria in the water decompose it into nitrogen that is then absorbed by the plant.

Darlingtonia californica has flowers with five purple petals (surrounded by yellow sepals) that bloom in the spring. Associated species include an orchid, California lady's slipper, and two lilies, *Tofieldia* and *Narthecium*.

Darlingtonia plants are found in serpentine soils and sphagnum fens arising from wet sands on coastal plains.



After a half hour of enjoying the sun and plants, I was once again headed north. My destination was 10 miles away. Do you remember me telling you the coastal Oregon weather is unpredictable? Well, in that short 10 mile distance, and climbing in elevation over the rugged craggy cliffs, the weather suddenly became overcast AND almost foggy in spots. That is NOT a good sign for good picture taking!



Heceta lighthouse appeared on the distant point ahead. Pronounced “Ha-SEE-Ta” by most, “HECK-ah-Ta” by others, yet everyone agrees Heceta Head is one of the most beautiful lighthouses in the world. The Heceta Head Lighthouse and Light Keeper’s house are circa 1894.



The lighthouse is a working lighthouse. From a height of 205 feet above the ocean, its “first order” Fresnel lens, casts it’s beams some 21 miles out to sea. It is the brightest light on the Oregon coast.



Heceta Head is named after the Spanish explorer Bruno de Heceta, who explored the Pacific Northwest during the late 18th century. Before him, Heceta Head was a spot of frequent fishing and hunting by the Native American tribes that populated the area.

In 1892, a crew of 56 began construction of the light. Because of the site's seclusion, building materials were either shipped in if the weather and tide permitted, or brought from Florence by wagon, the latter usually taking four or five hours. Stones were brought from the Clackamas River and bricks came from San Francisco. Completed in August 1893, the entire project cost \$80,000.



The Heceta Head Lighthouse closed to the public in August of 2011 for restoration and repairs. The lighthouse has been returned as much as possible to the way it would have looked in 1894.





Oops. There I go again, taking closeups of flowers found along the trail.



As I was driving back toward Florence, I noticed the light was actually going around. I stopped at a view point and captured this picture.



I thought this bridge had a very interesting architectural design.

Cape Creek Bridge carries U.S. 101 across Cape Creek, just south of the Heceta head land.

On to the next stop:

Just down the road, a brief 3 miles on a very curvy road that traverses above the extremely rugged shoreline stands one of Oregon's premier privately owned tourist destinations. Some may even say the privately owned "tourist traps". However, vehicles (and their owners) flock to the site daily. You can't miss the place. Highway 101 goes right through the middle of it.





Steller Sea
Lion
(*Eumetopias
Jubata*)

This member of the eared seal family is found from Central California to the Bering Sea. This is the only mainland



rookery, the rest of their homes being on rocks off shore. Sea lions make the area their home year around, generally landing in the cave during fall and winter stormy season and on the rock ledges outside during the spring and summer.

In the spring, bulls gather harems of 10 to 20 cows and keep these families until breeding is finished in early July. The weaker males are fought away and are called bachelor bulls. Sea lions possibly breed every other year, as many of the young are observed nursing well into their second year. Single pups are born in spring and weigh 40 to 50 pounds. Bulls average 1200 to 1500 pounds at maturity and cows average 500 to 700 pounds. The average life span of the sea lion is about 20 years.



FEMALE STELLER SEA LION

THIS SEA LION IS A 3 YEAR OLD FEMALE STELLER SEA LION FOUND NEAR NEWPORT OREGON, WITH A FATAL GUN SHOT WOUND. SHE WAS OVER 7 FEET LONG AND WEIGHED 327 POUNDS. THIS SPECIMEN WAS PREPARED BY AND IS ON PERMANENT LOAN TO SEA LION CAVES FROM THE HATFIELD MARINE SCIENCE CENTER IN NEWPORT OREGON.



A paved trail leads down to an overlook where animals can be observed in their natural habitat.



Could this be a bull with his harem?



Here's probably more than you ever want to know about the place - proceed with caution:



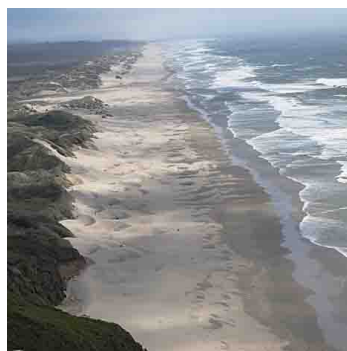
Sea Lion Caves is a privately owned wildlife preserve and bird sanctuary (since 1932) centrally located just 11 miles north of Florence.

The cave system is at sea level and the ocean continually washes into the main cavern which has a floor area of about 2 acres and a vaulted rock dome about 125 feet high. Southward from the main chamber, a low passage runs 1,000 feet to a sea level opening. This corridor is flooded at high tide and free of water at low tide. The western entrance is a short, high passage through which the ocean washes at all tide levels. At the north, a third entrance is about 50 feet above the ocean which serves as an elevated observation area where the entire underground cave system and its wildlife are visible.

Sea Lion Caves was discovered in 1880 by a local seaman, Captain William Cox. Captain Cox purchased the land in 1887 from the State of Oregon. His family owned the property until 1926.

Access to the caves from the hillside above was not even considered until after the land was acquired by R. E. Clanton in 1927, with the specific intention of opening the cave as a business. A 1,500-foot long trail was excavated by hand into the face of the cliff. At the bottom, a 135 step wooden tower was extended down to the north entrance of the caves. Despite the difficulty and danger of the construction, the trail and stairs provided safe access for visitors and the Sea Lion Caves opened to the public in August 1932.

In 1961, the addition of an elevator resulted in a sharp rise in the number of visitors. The elevator took three years to build. The elevator has a capacity of 23 passengers and travels 208 feet at 250 feet per minute (2.8 miles per hour). It can accommodate 400 people per hour.



I'm now homeward bound. First, a stop in Florence for a bite to eat. As I descended the fog shrouded headlands, the sun started to peek through and by the time I arrived in Florence the sun was out again, although the wind was blowing.

Oh my gosh! There's a DQ in Florence! That should satisfy my craving for a Blizzard!



I saw a couple interesting pictures as I glanced out the DQ window. The northern most sand dunes of the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area reaches the Siuslaw River, in Florence.



This is another architecturally interesting bridge over the Siuslaw River in Florence. Notice how blue and clear the sky is. This is actually one of my own photos and not something I found on the internet.

It was getting late so off I went for the two hour drive back to Bullards Beach. It was a fascinating and educational day at the three sights I visited. I hope my writings and pictures have interested you also. Thanks for coming along on this day trip with me. - Earl