

Oregon Offtrack: A fine Prospect for an old-time visit
by Foster Church, special to The Oregonian
Wednesday August 13, 2008, 4:17 PM

Prospect sits in an enveloping forest, looking as if just enough trees were cleared to make room for a big hotel and a few other buildings. The main street is Mill Creek Drive. It connects at each end to Oregon 62, which runs north and east toward Crater Lake.

Hidden in the trees are enough houses and mobile homes to support a population of about 500, which may be fewer than in the days when at least five local sawmills processed logs hauled in from the forest. The mills are gone now.

Today, locals work at the Prospect Hotel, wait tables, tend bar or commute. They hang in because it's a beautiful place to live. A rushing river runs past, the air is clean and cool, the trees deep green and the sunlight golden on a summer evening.

Getting there

Flounce Rock offers a glorious view that sets it all in perspective. Take off from Prospect south on Oregon 62 about 4 1/2 miles and turn right on Ulrich Road. Climb six miles to a parking area and walk up to the summit, where communications towers cluster.

Below are sweeping views of Lost Creek Lake, the Rogue River and the Cascades. This is Prospect's neighborhood.

Mornings, beginning at 6 or 7 a.m., a little circle of men gathers for coffee at the Prospect Cafe. Linda Hammer, apple-cheeked and cheery, offers fills and refills and supplies details they don't remember. She's lived in town all her life.

At one table, Brian Boothby can be seen most days, sturdy and gray-haired. He had his own logging operation until the early 1980s, when the timber supply began to dwindle on the Rogue River National Forest.

Today, he's mostly retired and grumbles about environmentalists and misguided bureaucrats not seeing that the remaining big trees in the forest are rotting and will fall down before they're cut down.

Boothby has a Prospect pedigree. He came to town when he was 3 years old, but his family had lived there for generations.

His great-grandfather, Albion Boothby, in 1888 built the Prospect Hotel, the grandest structure on Mill Creek Drive.

Albion Boothby and his wife, Jennie, built it to accommodate visitors to Crater Lake, a big tourist attraction then and now. They sold the property in 1897, and it went through several owners. Fred and Karen Wickman own it now and run a tight ship in the hotel and the adjoining motel.

Its comforts still carry a 19th-century flavor, from the deeply shaded front porch to the dining room's restrained gentility.

Less restrained and less genteel is the Trophy Room Lounge, a good old-fashioned timber town bar that echoes with male horse laughs and the sound of pool balls colliding.

French trappers named the region and the river in the 19th century after the natives, whom they called les coquins, or rogues. It's not inappropriate for this raucous, mercurial river.

It extends 215 miles, from the slopes of Crater Lake National Park and the peaks of the Cascades to the river's mouth on the Oregon coast at Gold Beach.

The river is at its most powerful between Crater Lake and Prospect. At Natural Bridge, the entire river disappears into a lava tube and continues for 200 feet before erupting again. From there you can drive, or hike a 3.5-mile trail, to Rogue River Gorge just north of Union Creek, where the river is squeezed through a narrow, 500-foot long basalt canyon that's 20 feet across at some parts.

Farther south, just past Prospect are Pearsony, Mill Creek and Barr Creek falls and also an astonishing interlude in the river, where it is upstaged by rocks. The Avenue of the Boulders contains boulders the size of cars, trucks, houses -- perhaps small apartment buildings.

Most things manmade wither in the shadow of these rocks and this water. But a couple of locally staged events nicely fill the rest of a visit.

The Bluegrass Festival is held the second weekend of July, and the Jamboree & Timber Carnival, one of Oregon's last three timber carnivals, takes place the third week of August.

Some locals skip the Bluegrass Festival, in part because of its cost, but they flock to the Timber Carnival, a reminder of a time when timber ruled.

Foster Church, whose Offtrack stories appear monthly, can be reached at 503-246-7428 or at fosterchurch@qwest.net

PROSPECT

Getting there: Prospect is 270 miles from Portland. Take Interstate 5 south to just past Eugene, and Oregon 58 southeast to U.S. 97. Continue on U.S. 97 to Oregon 138 and go west to Oregon 230. Follow Oregon 230 south and continue south on Oregon 62.

Where to stay: Prospect Hotel, 391 Mill Creek Drive; rates for bed and breakfast \$115-\$195 May through October, \$110-\$175 rest of year; rates for motel \$90-\$120 May through October, \$70-\$100 rest of year; 800-944-6490; prospecthotel.com

Where to eat: Prospect Hotel Dinner House (in Prospect Hotel), 391 Mill Creek Drive, 5-9 p.m. daily May to Oct. 31; Prospect Cafe, 311 Mill Creek Drive, 6 a.m.-9 p.m. weekdays, 6 a.m.-10 p.m. weekends; 541-560-3641; Prospect Pizza, 51 Mill Creek Drive, 541-560-4000, 3-9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, noon-9 p.m. other days.

Visit: Natural Bridge, Rogue Gorge viewpoint, Mill Creek Falls, Barr Creek Falls, Pearsoney Falls, Avenue of the Boulders

More info: Upper Rogue Chamber and Convention Bureau, P.O. Box 1573, Shady Cove, OR 97539, upperogue.org

-- *Foster Church*