

From Neakahnie Mountain near Manzanita

By Wesley Andrews

This panoramic view looks south along the Oregon coastline from the steep slopes of Neahkahnie Mountain. It was photographed by Wesley Andrews, a producer of scenic view postcards, about 1915. To the left is one of the treacherous trails that took travelers on foot over the mountain, connecting the beach trails from Arch Cape on the north with the beach visible in the distance. The trails had been in use for centuries by Clatsop and Tillamook Indians and their neighbors.

For coastal Indians, travel until the early 1800s was either on foot or by canoe. Canoes were suitable for major rivers and tidal estuaries, such as that of the Nehalem River, visible in the distance in this photograph. However, sea-going canoes were not common along the Oregon Coast, with its crashing surf, high winds, and strong and often erratic tides and currents. South from the Columbia River, the beach was paralleled by a series of dunes, lakes, and connecting sluggish streams, and travel on foot or by canoe was possible as far as present-day Seaside. From there, travelers had to climb on foot over densely-timbered Tillamook Head to reach Cannon Beach, where a few more miles of sand led to Arch Cape.

South from Arch Cape, the trail led through timber and across wind-swept hillsides over Arch Cape, behind Cape Falcon, and finally along the treacherous face of Neahkahnie Mountain, "the terror of travelers," as historical geographer Samuel Dicken put it. Composed of splintering shale, sandstone, and basalt, the 1700-foot high headland has a western slope "as steep as the roof of a house and as it approaches the sea the slope breaks off in an almost vertical cliff, nearly 500 feet above the sea," according to Dicken. The Indian foot trail, skirting the top of the cliff line to avoid climbing over even more loose rock, persisted well into the twentieth century, gradually widened to permit horses and livestock to use the route. By 1915, it was possible to bring a buggy over part of the route, as depicted here.

Road builders intent on completing an Oregon coastal highway in the 1920s and 1930s found Neahkahnie Mountain to be among their most formidable obstacles. The coastal river mouths demanded the construction of a succession of immense bridges, a project that was completed in 1936. However, the coastal highway between Seaside and the Nehalem River still looped inland some dozen miles to the east around Onion Peak, thwarted by Neahkahnie Mountain. During the late 1930s, a tunnel was blasted through the ridge of Arch Cape and high steel bridges were erected to span Arch Cape Creek, Short Sand Creek, and Necarney Creek. Highway 101 was finally opened along the entire length of the Oregon coast in 1940.

Further Reading: Dicken, Samuel N. *Pioneer Trails of the Oregon Coast*. Portland, Oreg., 1971.

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