

## CHAPTER 3

# Boosterism's Public – Private Partnership, 1916-1933

---

Some Americans have believed that the frontier produced a distinct national character—one based on self-reliance, love of liberty, aptitude for innovation, and belief in progress.<sup>1</sup> Whether this is true or not, such thinking prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century, at a time when the Forest Service sought to regulate use on what had formerly been (at least since 1850 or so) a frontier commons. Popular fiction during the first couple of decades after 1900 generally portrayed forest rangers as pioneers, who in facing an untamed land alone, constantly faced the threat posed by wildfires and unscrupulous forest users who stole timber, set fires, or otherwise harmed the public interest through self-serving and expedient actions that worked against the long-term vision of conserving natural resources.<sup>2</sup>

In 1910 rangers and forest guards patrolled between 450 and 670 square miles each, but did so with horses and hand tools. For fire protection on the national forests to work, it had to be seen as both an investment and precondition to more intensive management. Long-term success, according to Graves and others in the leadership of the Forest Service, depended upon strategic placement of roads, trails, lookouts, and guard stations—as well as telephone lines, tool caches, and fuel breaks. Even with the constant reminder of the menace that wildfire posed to western communities (1910 was a particularly bad year), federal subsidy in the form

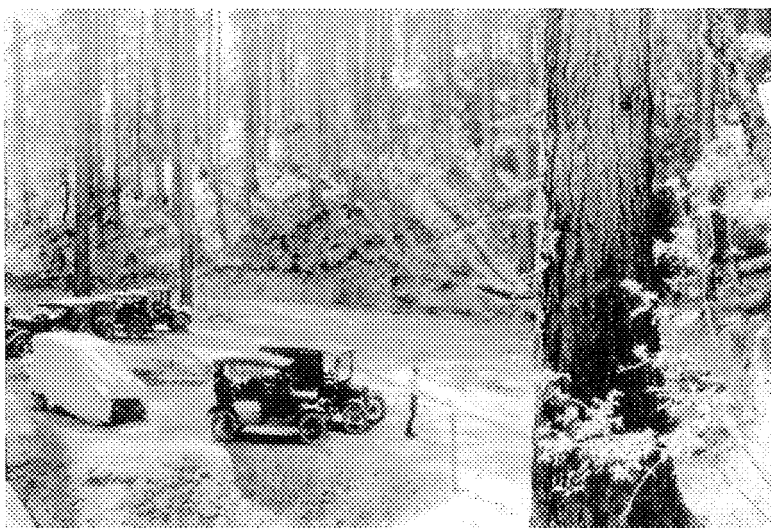


FIGURE 28. Parking area at Oregon Caves in 1922. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

of appropriations for developing infrastructure on the national forests was slow in coming. Private land produced far more timber, and most investments made in the national forests served a relatively small number of constituents, so Congress understandably proved reluctant to provide as much funding as the Forest Service requested. More lavish subsidies for developing the west (which began with grants Congress gave to railroads during the Civil War) were tied to faster returns.<sup>3</sup>

### *Highways to Oregon Caves*

Although the agency saw its primary duty as managing timber, more roads opened the possibility of new uses like recreation tied to the expanding ownership of automobiles, and thus more constituent support. The Good Roads Movement also adopted language of the frontier as it pressed for “new roads over old trails.”<sup>4</sup> Even if far from unified, this coalition consisted of farmers, country doctors, traveling salesmen, manufacturers, and urban professionals. Beyond creating new possibilities for touring, the movement also sought to broadcast its message that more and better roads could aid progress by eradicating rural isolation. Consequently, road advocates adapted promotional strategies first developed by the railroads to emphasize how a system of both

long-distance and local roads served to unite the nation.<sup>5</sup>

As automobile ownership in America began to surge, the Good Roads Movement and the Forest Service applauded Congress when it passed the first federal highway act in 1916. Some funding became available for the next fiscal year, with a portion of the appropriation made under the act directed to roads and trails in the national forests, such that the Forest Service received ten million dollars for construction over the next decade. The legislation also carried three key stipulations. First, no state could receive federal funds without setting up a highway department. This acted as the impetus in Oregon to begin implementing the plans laid by its highway commission several years earlier for a system of trunk roads. The second stipulation also served to strengthen the idea of state control over highways by requiring that it assume responsibility for maintaining roads financed under the act's provisions. Third, states could not act unilaterally with federal funding for roads, since the Secretary of Agriculture (who oversaw the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), the agency charged with supervising highway projects crossing federal lands) had to approve project statements submitted by the highway departments.<sup>6</sup>

The small amount of money appropriated by Congress in 1916 boosted prospects for a road to Oregon Caves only a little. It did, however, lead to a reconnaissance survey that examined possible routes up Sucker and Cave creeks to the monument. This undertaking by the Bureau of Public Roads followed their survey of the Hayes Hill section of the Grants Pass – Crescent City wagon road during the fall of 1917.<sup>7</sup> The next step, location work for both routes, was spurred by passage of another act less than two years later. Aimed at funding rural post offices, it also granted another nine million dollars toward development and administration of roads in the national forests. BPR engineers could thus determine and stake the best route from Holland to the monument, one that some observers first thought might ultimately reach Williams.<sup>8</sup>

Actual construction of the road began in August 1921 with clearing over the twelve miles between “Robinson’s Corner” and a parking place for 50 cars at the monument, with the latter located about 900 feet from the cave entrance. Grading a roadway eight feet wide with turnouts then ensued from Grayback Creek, with most of the work accomplished by crews of men with hand tools and teams of horses.<sup>9</sup> A “trail” for pedestrians connected the

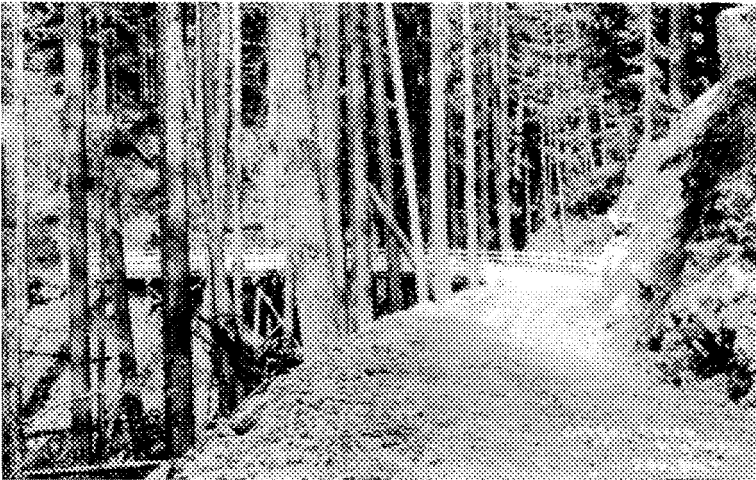


FIGURE 29. The Oregon Caves Highway prior to widening was little more than a one lane road through the Siskiyou National Forest. Frank Patterson took this view of the Lake Creek Bridge in 1924. (OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

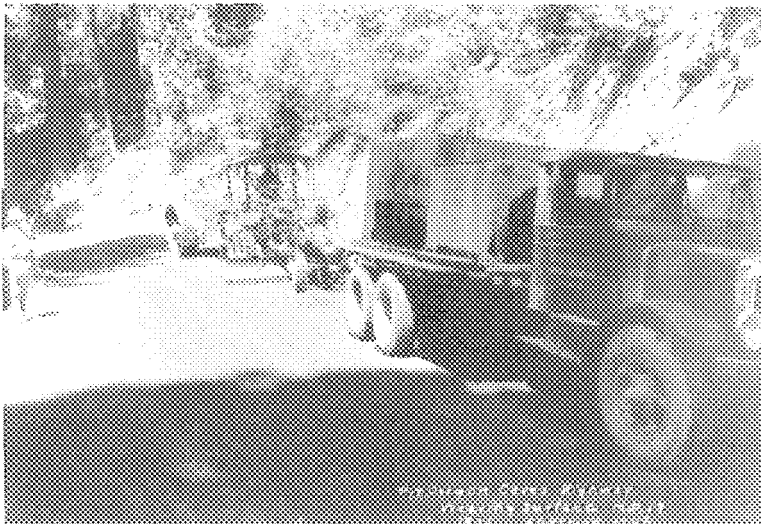


FIGURE 30. Paving the Oregon Caves Highway about two miles from the monument in 1931. (Photo courtesy of the Oregon Department of Transportation.)

monument's main parking area to the cave entrance, though it also was built eight feet wide to allow the occasional transport of supplies and equipment. Crews completed virtually the entire job by

the following June, thereby allowing motorists access to the monument for most of the 1922 season so that visitation increased by almost ten times (to 10,000) over what it had been in 1921.<sup>10</sup>

Auto travel to the cave that year had still been hampered by the incomplete part of the Oregon Caves Highway, where three miles of road to run north of Sucker Creek (and thus away from Waldo and Holland) had been designed, but not built.<sup>11</sup> Boosters in Grants Pass also wanted a better connection with Crescent City than the wagon road which wound its way over the torturous Oregon Mountain grade and down Patrick Creek in California. Elected officials in Josephine County lobbied the state highway commission to change the road's name in Oregon to the "Redwood Highway" in May 1924 to provide the traveling public with the impression that the route between Grants Pass and San Francisco constituted a major scenic thoroughfare.<sup>12</sup> The highway commission thus voted to improve a section of road between O'Brien and the state line, a project that was financed in part through a bill enacted by the state legislature authorizing the nation's first gasoline tax. In the mean time, several houses appeared at the "Redwood Junction" where the highway met the road to the monument, a place whose promoters dubbed "Caves City."<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 1926, annual visitation at the monument had more than doubled (to almost 21,000) from what it was just four years earlier—even with an impediment in the form of what amounted to a one-lane access road. Boosters in Grants Pass called for widening the Caves Highway and were soon joined by businessmen from the Redwood Empire Hotel Resort Association whose annual convention featured a caravan to the monument that fall.<sup>14</sup> This advocacy quickly paid dividends, though not in the form of a road contract, but BPR engineers supervised widening the road to a 14-foot standard within the national forest over the next three years, beginning in the spring of 1927.<sup>15</sup>

Widening the Caves Highway came as improvements to the Redwood Highway begun in 1924 culminated with a vastly improved road link between Grants Pass and Crescent City.<sup>16</sup> Visitation to the monument thus continued to increase (to more than 24,000 in 1928), coincident with more funding for roads. State highway department crews and county personnel worked together in order to widen the road between the forest boundary and Caves City in 1929. That year BPR made use of a smaller



FIGURE 31. Widening the Oregon Caves Highway did not remove this hairpin curve. (Photo by Frank Patterson, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

federal allotment to enlarge the monument's main parking lot and complete the road widening within the Siskiyou National Forest to 16 feet.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent resurfacing and then paving in 1931 created a dustless road touted to be one of the best in southern Oregon.<sup>18</sup>

Such an investment for highway infrastructure followed a national trend in responding to the spectacular increase in automobile ownership over three decades (going from only 8,000 in 1900 to some 40 million in America thirty years later), but becoming especially acute during the 1920s. What made the Oregon Caves Highway unusual in relation to the state highway system was that it terminated at the monument with no through connection while several trunk roads in Oregon still were either partially or fully surfaced with gravel.<sup>19</sup> Not only could Grants Pass interests argue for improving the monument's approach road based on the economic importance of being a gateway to Oregon Caves, they could also point to the existence of a public and private infrastructure supporting an expanding tourist industry. The appearance of overnight accommodation formed a cornerstone of that infrastructure, as the Grants Pass newspaper reminded readers with its travelogue section in June 1931. Although the cave tour retained top billing in the lead article, the paper ran headers announcing "Oregon Caves Highway Lined With Visiting Sightseers," and "Auto Camps Along Highway Near Caves Junction Delight Tourist."<sup>20</sup>

*Beginnings of a recreational infrastructure*

Auto camping started as a response from leisure travelers to the freedom presented by owning an automobile, in that they could avoid the cost and restriction of hotels by camping outside towns or anywhere along a road. The auto “gypsy” thus dodged the necessity of making hotel reservations, eating at set times in dining rooms, having to interact with desk clerks (who sometimes looked askance at dusty motorists, as opposed to their clientele who traveled by rail), or paying to park their car in a garage.<sup>21</sup> By 1915 civic boosters in many western municipalities looked to situate an auto camp in a centrally located city park, reasoning that such facilities could attract tourists to local businesses and allow the town to advertise itself as one embracing progress.<sup>22</sup> Like Ashland, Grants Pass opened a free municipal auto camp by the summer of 1915, one that included a community house so campers could cook their meals and socialize with others in Riverside Park. Hotel owners and entrepreneurs who wanted to open private camps viewed a free city-run camp as unfair competition, though it was the sheer popularity of Riverside Park among campers that led to a charge of 50 cents per night in 1923, mainly to offset expense of providing utilities.<sup>23</sup> Cabins appeared in Riverside Park as well as Ashland’s Lithia Park by 1925, reflecting a trend of motorists carrying less camping gear.<sup>24</sup> Municipal camps became crowded in the summer and imposed limits on how long people could stay in them by this time, so many travelers found private camps attractive—especially if cabins could be rented.

The first commercial camps in Oregon and Washington appeared during the summer of 1922. Only seven years later, Grants Pass possessed the largest number of such camps (24) among all cities in the Pacific Northwest. Approximately 190 cabins dotted the vicinity of Grants Pass in 1929, but motorists could also find them scattered along the Redwood Highway as well as other major travel routes in western Oregon.<sup>25</sup> These cabins could be built for \$200 or less, thus allowing owners to recoup their investment in only a season or two of rentals. Whether situated in town, or on a main road many miles from a central business district, commercial cabins tended to be arranged in a row either parallel or perpendicular to the highway. Rural cabin camps often included a gas station and possibly a store as part of their operation. These differed from resort cabins, which were more substan-



FIGURE 32. Camp near Grayback Creek as it appeared in 1916. (U.S. Forest Service photo by U.L. Upson.)



FIGURE 33. "Grayback Park" in 1924. This photo was used by the Forest Service in the late 1920s to illustrate a typical campground scene in the national forests of Oregon. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

tial since their clientele usually stayed more than one night. Resort camps also placed more emphasis on harmonizing their cabins with the surroundings, often utilizing either foundation plantings or trees for screening and building the structures in irregular clusters. Some proprietors erected resort cabins with exterior details to distinguish one cabin from another and used



logs, shingles, or tree bark to imitate the nearby forest.<sup>26</sup>

With hotels and cabins readily available, camping began to be less prevalent in Oregon towns by 1930, with free facilities being a thing of the past. Free campgrounds could be found in the national forests, however, ever since the Forest Service started including automobile-associated recreation as a recognized "use" (supposedly on a par with timber and grazing) in 1916. That year the Forest Service built its first developed campground at Eagle Creek in the Columbia Gorge, a facility that included camp tables, toilets, and a station where campers could register. Situated at the head of a trail built especially for hiking, the campground served as a showpiece in a "Columbia Gorge Park" declared by the Secretary of Agriculture in late 1915.<sup>27</sup> Congress provided funding for more campgrounds in the national forests only hesitantly at first, but by 1925 the Forest Service counted 1,500 of them. Only a third of that number, however, even possessed the most basic facilities. Over the next five years, an annual appropriation that averaged \$45,000 for campground development had to be divided among 150 national forests, so improvements made at any single site were generally modest. Some tables, fireplaces, pit toilets, and minimal leveling for tents and parking generally cost in the neighborhood of \$200.<sup>28</sup>

Since Oregon Caves National Monument possessed no land level enough to permit camping by motorists (aside from the parking lot which some visitors used for that purpose during the 1922 and 1923 seasons), Forest Service officials decided to layout a public campground below the monument but near the highway. They chose a site on Sucker Creek near its confluence with Grayback Creek in 1922, though Congress still had to pass a bill transferring some revested railroad grant land to the Siskiyou National Forest before clearing for the campground could proceed.<sup>29</sup> Although the Forest Service allocated only \$10,000 for recreational improvements in all of the national forests that year, it made this campground enough of a priority during the 1923 season (given how the agency administered only one national monument in Oregon) to fund some tables and fireplaces, as well as a water system and two large restrooms. By September the forest supervisor pointed to the popularity of "Grayback Park" (also called "Sucker Creek" or the "Oregon Caves" forest camp) as justification of the need for an additional twenty tables and fireplaces.<sup>30</sup>

Although funding the campground facilities loomed fairly large within a small budget devoted to recreation, it comprised only one piece of a larger "Oregon Caves Resort" that the Forest Service saw as funded largely from private investors but split between the Grayback site and the monument. Resort development at Oregon Caves and elsewhere in the national forests of the period fit a template that the agency called "recreation centers." These were established as a kind of zoning measure on the national forests, but with several justifications. One asserted that the Forest Service could be the dominant purveyor of recreation on federal land in Oregon and Washington, where there was a considerable amount of old growth timber that the agency did not want transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) or another bureau. Such centers also appeared to be a way of accommodating concentrations of people who wanted to pursue outdoor activities like camping, fishing, hunting, and horseback riding, while also keeping them from dispersing to areas within the national forests where they might inadvertently set fires or otherwise interfere with the management of timber or grazing. In such recreation centers, national forest land could be developed by investors who leased tracts to build resorts near lakes, along rivers, or by tourist attractions like the Oregon Caves.<sup>31</sup>

Privately run resorts were intended to complement government-funded amenities like campgrounds, roads, utility systems, and trails. The Forest Service thus created a private-public partnership on the national forests that also included the state highway department when needed. Agency leadership in Portland moved to publicize this partnership to motorists in 1923 through issuing a free map of the national forests in Oregon, one including descriptions of each recreation center and a list of municipal and roadside campgrounds.<sup>32</sup> The Forest Service supplied more detail about each recreation center by dispensing free leaflets about some of them (one covering Oregon Caves appeared in 1922), though hikers, campers, horse users, and hunters could also buy a handbook covering all of the designated areas in Oregon for a small fee from the Government Printing Office.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the need to stimulate recreational developments in Oregon's national forests of the time did not come so much from the growing city of Portland or the towns in the Willamette Valley, but from a geopolitical battle waged in Washington, D.C., where the Forest Service faced competition from the National Park

Service. Although the Forest Service administered a far greater land base than its younger rival (Congress created the NPS in 1916 and placed it within the Department of the Interior), Park Service leadership pursued expansion aggressively, often at the expense of the USFS. Even if national monuments once under Forest Service administration like the Grand Canyon (transferred to the Park Service in 1919 when it was reclassified as a national park) deserved its new designation, the NPS posed a constant annoyance, if not an outright threat, to the USFS during the 1920s and 30s. The Park Service took the offensive with its unilateral legislative proposals for expanding existing national parks like Crater Lake through transfer of national forest land, but also pestered key congressmen with an insistence that only one bureau (the NPS) should manage all of the national monuments. In seeing itself as the main provider of recreation on federal lands and at one point (in 1922) temporarily succeeded in blocking an appropriation for campground development in the national forests, the NPS viewed such Forest Service expenditures as future competition for the funding of these facilities in the national parks.

Rancor between the two bureaus over park expansion and money for recreational developments had reached such proportions by 1924 that the Coolidge Administration had to set up a "coordinating commission" for the purpose of informing Congress how best to allocate contested areas. When the NPS and its allies succeeded in more than doubling the size of Sequoia National Park two years later by not engaging the commission, however, the Forest Service created a new administrative classification on the national forests called wilderness (or "primitive") areas.

Capitalizing on what some people saw as too much road building in the national parks, chief forester William B. Greeley initiated an inventory of the still roadless land the Forest Service administered as a precursor to classification as wilderness by the agency. Although administratively designated wilderness could be revoked (and in some cases, did not prove to be all that restrictive), it worked to stem the tide of successful land transfers, reinforcing what the Forest Service wanted its constituents to believe about the agency's ability to manage both recreation and timber destined to be utilized in the future.<sup>34</sup>

Wilderness areas in the national forests of the time tended to be situated at high elevations, where timber values were negligible in comparison to the costs of providing roads or other access.

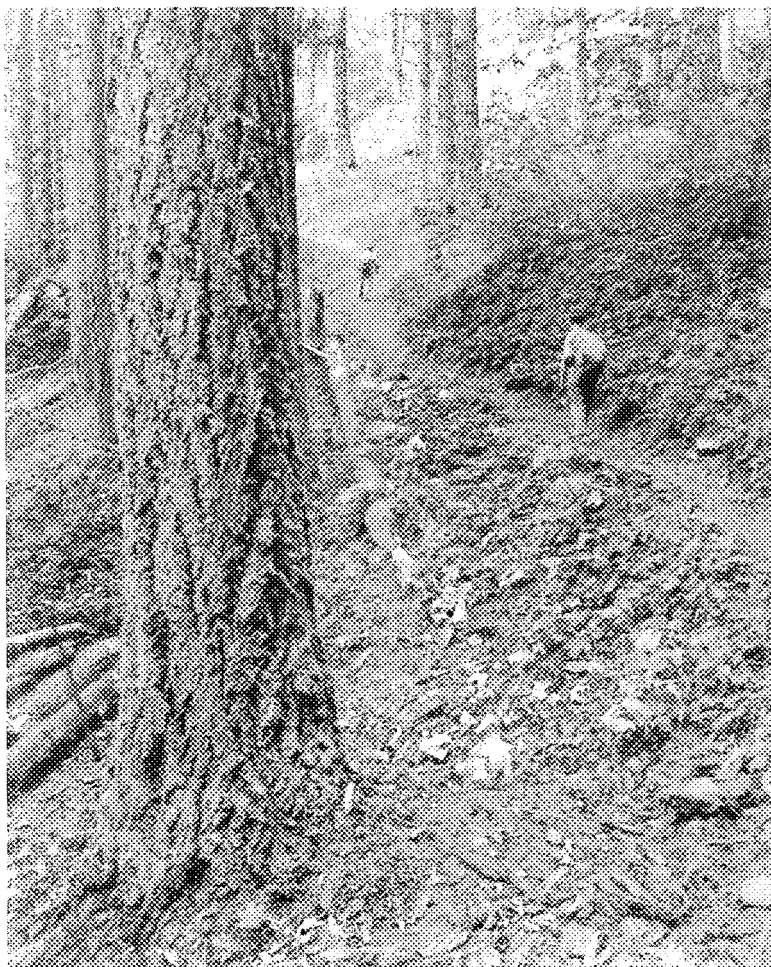


FIGURE 34. Hikers on the “Oregon Caves” (Big Tree) Trail in the 1920s. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

Recreation centers identified by the Forest Service, however, could often be situated on the periphery of wilderness areas, as staging areas serving users who preferred a backcountry recreational experience. The privately run resorts could provide beds and supplies to those who wanted such amenities, but the Forest Service could promote the wilderness it controlled as something more “pure” than sometimes crowded national parks, where those who came for solitude might be alienated by an expanding road network and the villages designed to centralize visitor services. Although disaffected park users constituted only a tiny minority of visitors at that

time, they could be vocal and through the press helped to fuel the perception of wilderness in the national forests as a legitimate alternative to national parks for backcountry recreation.<sup>35</sup>

One advantage to the Forest Service in its war of public relations with the NPS lay in the fact that the wilderness areas in national forests were situated closer than the national parks to most Oregonians, as was the case for many residents of other western states. As less crowded and thus free of the restrictions that the NPS sometimes had to impose on park users (many of whom represented a non-resident or national constituency in contrast to the local or in-state one the Forest Service courted), wilderness areas also allowed the Forest Service to enhance its image as a federal agency that worked with its constituents to bring federally funded amenities to the designated recreational centers. Even before the Forest Service launched its wilderness inventory in late 1926, the district forester based in Portland wrote that recreational centers in the national forests of Oregon amply met the local and regional demand for a type of "wilderness park" because these areas contained sufficient acreage to offer variety and adventure.<sup>36</sup>

Other types of administrative designations could be used in lieu of the more restrictive "wilderness area" in places with recreational appeal and where sufficient quantities of merchantable timber might make road building viable for commodity production sometime in the future. State game refuges represented one such designation compatible with a "recreation center" like Oregon Caves. Established in cooperation with the state game commission (like most states, Oregon retained the management authority over wildlife within its borders), the refuges theoretically functioned as a safeguard against extreme depletion of breeding stock, whether for big game or migratory waterfowl. These remained closed to hunting all year and could function as a kind of park, especially where the Forest Service had begun developing a trail system for the purposes of fire control and recreation.<sup>37</sup> The agency's leadership thus endorsed setting aside the "Oregon Caves Game Refuge" on 20,000 acres surrounding the monument in April 1926, supposedly as part of a plan described by one newspaper account to have game animals (in this case, deer) as "tame as in Yellowstone."<sup>38</sup>

In their self-appointed role to promote recreation in Oregon, Forest Service officials also had a hand in promoting the spread of state parks. District forester C.J. Buck sat on an advisory commit-



FIGURE 35. By 1919 what became known as “Government Camp” near the cave entrance featured a rudimentary water system and places for tents to accommodate visitors who stayed overnight. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

tee for the state parks, which in 1925 numbered only 28 areas that totaled 1,400 acres. Buck and others in the Forest Service saw their potential, however, to complement recreational developments located in the national forests by serving as rest stops for motorists who used the state’s highway system.<sup>39</sup> State park acquisitions (most sites had to be purchased from private owners) in Oregon accelerated by the end of the decade, though their number and size lagged behind California—where the nonprofit Save-the-Redwoods League had spearheaded efforts to establish a chain of parks between Crescent City and San Francisco through buying

private timberland. Park sites along that portion of the Redwood Highway were large enough to provide focal points (since most preserved old-growth redwood forest) for northbound tourists who then might continue their journey toward Grants Pass. Members of the Redwood Empire Association and Grants Pass Commercial Club were quick to realize that an existing resort on national forest land at Patrick Creek represented one potential stop near the state line—as did Oregon Caves—since both recreation centers lay either on, or near, the travel corridor between Grants Pass and Crescent City.

Having a road to Oregon Caves from its junction with the Redwood Highway as of 1922 represented a new prospect for investors willing to join the Forest Service in developing a resort for the monument. Until 1915 the agency had interpreted existing law and regulations as prohibiting private development in the national monuments, but this stance changed in the wake of Congress passing the Term Occupancy Act on March 4 of that year. The legislation authorized the Forest Service to lease national forest lands for hotels, camps, or other types of resorts like summer homes. A subsequent solicitor's opinion that the act also allowed the leasing of land within national monuments had Forest Service officials pondering whether to grant requests for permits at Oregon Caves and other higher-profile areas it administered. These could be issued at the agency's discretion, but District Forester George H. Cecil first sought advice about the Oregon Caves situation from a member of his research staff, Thornton Munger. After inspecting the monument in the spring of 1917, Munger recommended that no permit be granted without provisions requiring the prospective concessionaire to spend several thousand dollars on improvements. Munger also convinced Cecil that this simply could not be done until a highway to Oregon Caves was built.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime, the seven- or eight hundred visitors who reached the monument on foot or horseback each summer needed to bring their own outfit or hire it near the two trailheads. In 1917 it took two hours by car or auto stage to go from Grants Pass to Williams, where the Grants Pass Commercial Club arranged for a private party to maintain a "resort" (meaning that tents could be rented for an overnight stay) at Caves Camp. Visitors needing saddle or packhorses needed to make arrangements with a proprietor at Provolt. Motorists could also go

through the Illinois Valley and then to Holland, but the road ended at the confluence of Sucker and Grayback creeks. They could camp near the trailhead, hiring horses and/or guides from either of the two closest ranches.<sup>41</sup> With the number of visitors each year still only a thousand or fewer, the Forest Service facility infrastructure at the monument could best be described as scanty. By 1919 the only improvements outside the cave consisted of toilets near the entrance and some pipes that provided campers with water.<sup>42</sup>

With the located line of the future Oregon Caves Highway now set, the Forest Service had to consider how to make a resort operation work at the monument. The monument's steep topography made for plenty of uncertainty about the feasibility of development, especially when agency officials could not know what patterns might emerge from road access. For the moment, they deferred granting anything more than a temporary permit authorizing a tent camp where the concessionaire provided meals and lodging.<sup>43</sup> By the fall of 1921, however, the Forest Service decided to move cautiously with its long-range planning for Oregon Caves, in the direction of establishing a future government headquarters, an improved campground, and overnight accommodations at Grayback, thus limiting facility development at the monument to that of a parking area, lunch room, and guide quarters. Separating the resort into two units did little to clarify how much private investment might be needed even in the short term, since an as-yet unknown tourist trade would determine the amount of capital that the Forest Service could demand up front from a prospective concessionaire.<sup>44</sup>

When the road finally reached Oregon Caves in June 1922, the Forest Service responded by granting a temporary permit for its concessionaire (a man named McIlveen who had previously managed the Patrick Creek resort) to operate a tent camp and guide service. It worked as an interim measure, though the Forest Service knew that McIlveen lacked the investment capital needed to meet the terms of a concession contract that officials envisioned as lasting ten or more years. Consequently, the Forest Service turned to the commercial club—now renamed as the Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce—to find parties willing to incorporate and put \$20,000 toward permanent improvements over three years starting in 1923.<sup>45</sup>

The Forest Service previously tried to entice local contacts like



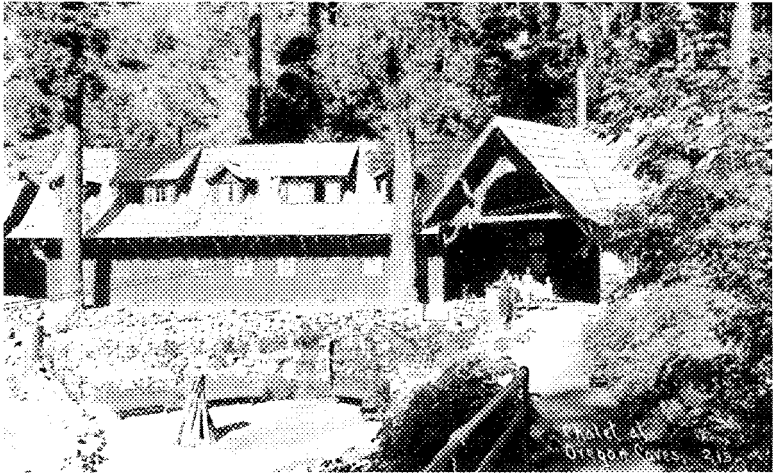


FIGURE 36. Frank Patterson took this photo of the Chalet in 1927. (OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

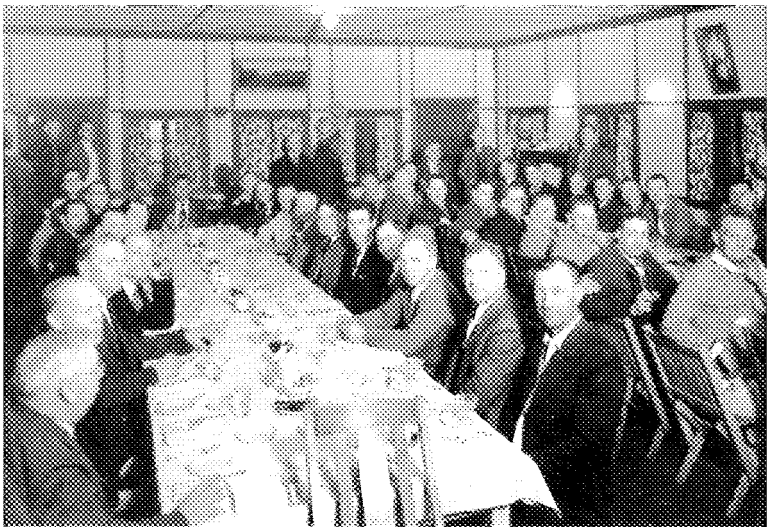


FIGURE 37. A meeting of the Grants Pass Commercial Club in the Chalet. Manager George Sabin and builder Gust Lium are at bottom left. (Oregon Caves Company album, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

pharmacist George Sabin with placing ten or fifteen thousand dollars toward a hotel, but Sabin and a group of his fellow businessmen wanted to see how things might go in 1922 before they committed to anything.<sup>46</sup> Seven of them incorporated contingent on Forest Service approval of their application for an exclusive privi-

lege to provide guide service and permanent facilities, something granted in March 1923. The Forest Service retained the power to revoke it for unsatisfactory service, but among other things specified that a guide headquarters building be erected at the monument as soon as possible.<sup>47</sup>

Plans for the new structure had to first be approved by the forest supervisor, so the Oregon Caves Company requested the consulting services of Arthur L. Peck, a landscape architect who periodically worked on Forest Service projects and taught at the Oregon Agricultural College in Corvallis. As a preliminary step to drawings, Peck recommended an architectural theme that might unify resort developments at the monument with those planned for the tract on Grayback Creek. He followed in the footsteps of his mentor Frank Waugh, who visited Oregon Caves with C.J. Buck in 1917 as part of a trip to assess the recreational possibilities on the national forests.<sup>48</sup> Little in the way of concrete results came from Waugh's visit six years earlier, but in April 1923 Peck suggested that an architectural theme for the resort should be "Swiss" or "Alpine."<sup>49</sup> Its distinctive feature quickly became the use of the bark of Port Orford-cedar as sheathing, complemented by sugar pine shakes for roofing material. Peck originally put forth the idea of using cedar shakes as siding, but the company experienced difficulty in obtaining sufficient quantities. When one of their "pick and shovel" men who were excavating the building suggested cedar bark as an alternative, Sabin (who had been hired to manage the concession) agreed.<sup>50</sup>

Peck's significance to future development of the cave entrance area was largely confined to locating some building sites, though he conceptualized the first two pieces of a larger development scheme. The first involved a "chalet" to be placed on the terrace named "Government Camp," where Peck thought a "porch" might allow visitors to look down the "valley" of Cave Creek, one that doubled as a gathering area where those taking the tour might meet their guide. As the center of pedestrian circulation, the porch served as a trailhead for an existing footpath to the cave's upper entrance, a route along which one or more small buildings (such as cabins or cottages) could replace the tents and be "arranged as on an irregular street."<sup>51</sup>

Constructed to be a multi-purpose building, the Chalet was intended to house an office, dining area, a changing room for wearing coveralls as part of taking the cave tour, and quarters for



FIGURE 38. Resort cabins or “cottages” at Oregon Caves. (Photo by Frank Patterson, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

guides. The popularity of dining in the Chalet had become so apparent during its first season of operation that Sabin urged that an addition be built. He also wanted to improve the tent houses, erect a stone fireplace for nightly gatherings below the Chalet, and transplant native flora (ferns in particular) to enhance the resort setting. Such enthusiasm made forest supervisor E.H. MacDaniels write to the district forester, in regard to any lingering doubts that the Forest Service might have about renewing the permit, about how unlikely it was that anyone else could match the level of investment and service provided by the company.<sup>52</sup>

Such a statement should be seen in the context of the company having spent more than double what it agreed to invest in the Chalet according to terms of the permit, as a means to begin backing away from putting large sums into the Grayback development. Sabin and the stockholders expressed their reluctance to build a resort hotel at Grayback in the fall of 1923, mainly because they saw the monument as their profit center instead of a site located eight miles away.<sup>53</sup> The company nevertheless erected a store near the campground built by the Forest Service in the first months of 1924. Not only was this building required as part of the permit, but Sabin thought it useful as an “information bureau,” where visitors could make telephone reservations for overnight accommodations and meals at the monument.<sup>54</sup> The trend toward building structures at the monument continued that year, with two private-

ly funded buildings added. One was "Kiddie Kave," a nursery for children too young for the cave tour, while a small lamp house (for carbide lanterns in the absence of electric lights) located adjacent to the cave entrance constituted the other addition. The latter also doubled as a "studio" to sell images produced by scenic photographer Fred Kiser.<sup>55</sup>

Increasing dissatisfaction with the appearance of tent houses and their platforms above the Chalet served as the main reason for why Forest Service officials encouraged the company to spend several thousand dollars on constructing new cabins in their place once the summer season ended in 1925.<sup>56</sup> Sited along the "irregular street," the seven units were sheathed in cedar bark and came with separate bedrooms, a toilet, and bath. The cabins were designed and built by Gust Lium (the son-in-law of stockholder Sam Baker) who also undertook a small dormitory for housing male guides by the summer of 1927. Construction of these facilities signaled the end of Forest Service insistence on resort buildings at Grayback.<sup>57</sup> With eleven structures added at the monument since 1923, the company also had to expand its septic system in the fall of 1927. By the beginning of the following year, their investment also included installation of some electric lights to illuminate the area around the Chalet, as well as a service road that went to an incinerator located near No Name Creek.<sup>58</sup>

The Forest Service estimated that the company had expended roughly \$35,000 by early 1928, with this figure resulting from what Buck and others described almost six years earlier as the necessity to "successfully exploit Oregon Caves" for tourists.<sup>59</sup> This infusion of private money for developing the monument should be seen against the backdrop of the \$130,000 in state and federal funds that financed a road between Grayback and the cave entrance, as well as direct expenditures from the Forest Service budget over a fifteen-year period—which by 1925 had grown to \$12,000.<sup>60</sup> About a third of the latter figure consisted of salaries for the forest guards stationed at Oregon Caves between 1910 and 1922, so that actual improvements mostly consisted of the replacing of wooden ladders with iron ones, widening of passageways, and building better trails both in the cave and above ground.<sup>61</sup>

Not that the Forest Service lacked plans that could be implemented with funding from a special appropriation. Electric lighting could eliminate the need for candles and carbide lamps, devices blamed for having detrimental effects on cave formations.<sup>62</sup>



FIGURE 39. Newly completed exit tunnel, 1931. (Photo by Frank Patterson, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

Planning for lights started in the fall of 1920, so that an estimate for a power plant and wiring were incorporated into bills introduced during the 1922 and 1924 sessions of Congress.<sup>63</sup> Both bills failed because officials in the Harding and Coolidge administrations objected to a funding request where lighting accounted for only half of the proposed appropriation (\$30,000), with the remainder consisting of unspecified improvements.<sup>64</sup>

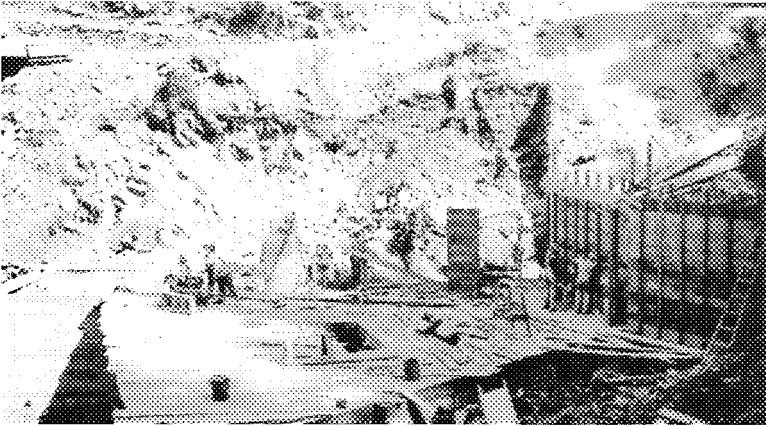


FIGURE 40. Crew working on the Chateau's foundation, 1931. (Oregon Caves Company photo, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

A new bill written by the Forest Service and introduced by Senator Charles McNary of Oregon in February 1928 contained more specific language. It earmarked funding for electric lights, a system to wash formations while removing mud from the cave, and for building an exit tunnel. The bill passed in early 1929, mainly because the Forest Service convinced McNary and others in Congress that with rising visitation to Oregon Caves (it almost reached 25,000 in 1928), the contemplated improvements could work to make the monument virtually self-supporting. This could be done, they argued, by having the appropriated amount (\$35,000) eventually returned to the Treasury through the government collecting a percentage of the fees paid by visitors to the company for taking the cave tour.<sup>65</sup>

Work financed by the appropriation began in the summer of 1930 with installation of pipe and hose for a washing system in the cave.<sup>66</sup> Excavation for a power generating plant for the lights followed, at a site below the cave entrance in the canyon formed by Cave Creek.<sup>67</sup> This diesel-powered plant was necessary while the Forest Service waited for a private utility to build a transmission line from the Illinois Valley. The exit tunnel affected circulation and visitor experience in the cave even more than electric lights, since prior to its construction visitors had to retrace their steps from the Ghost Room to the upper entrance. This routing made tours more than two hours in duration and required parties going in opposite directions to pass each other. Such a circulation pat-

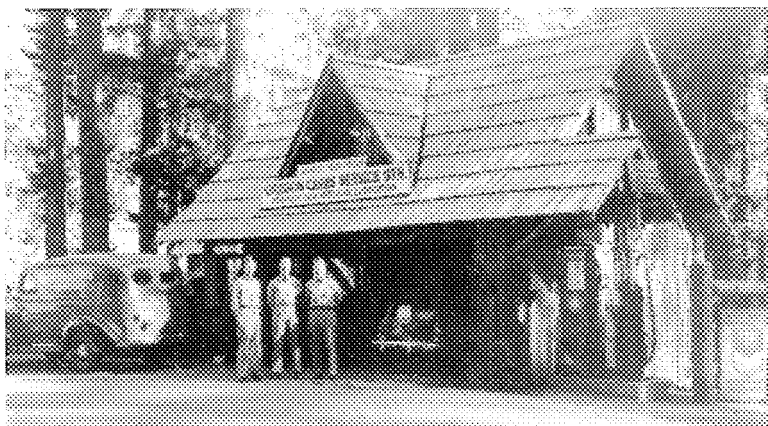


FIGURE 41. Service station in the main parking area, about 1937. (Photo courtesy of Bud Breitmayer.)

tern proved to be especially difficult on days when more than four hundred people entered the cave, but the Forest Service made no firm decisions about the route of an exit tunnel until the spring of 1930.<sup>68</sup> At that point the agency's surveyors compiled the first profile map of Oregon Caves, but also shot a transit line which indicated the most feasible route required 500 feet of excavation above the Ghost Room.<sup>69</sup> This project then went to contract, but construction proved so expensive and difficult for the winning bidder that he defaulted. The Forest Service now had to hire day labor to finish a job that consumed nine months instead of the expected five.<sup>70</sup>

Completion of the tunnel came in February 1931, just as the company (which was now calling itself the "Oregon Caves Resort") pressed the Forest Service to renegotiate. Instead of an annual permit, they wanted to obtain a term agreement, or what amounted to a twenty-year contract, something contingent on completion of a specified program of improvements within three years. For several years Sabin and the stockholders had openly expressed their desire to build a hotel in the ravine below the cave entrance, a location that might permit water from Cave Creek to run through the dining room.<sup>71</sup> By December of 1928 they had publicly promoted the allure of an ample lobby, heated rooms, and larger dining facilities than those in the Chalet.<sup>72</sup> When they began to ask the Forest Service for at least 20 years of operation at the monument to be more or less guaranteed by a term permit, Forest Supervisor J.H. Billingslea took the hotel idea seriously enough to

begin discussions about design with Sabin, Lium, and Peck in September 1929. Peck pointed to how such a building might enhance a view of the distant ridgeline, while possibly relieving pedestrian and vehicular congestion below the Chalet if a "fore-court" filled the head of the ravine. A rustic bridge could be built to allow visitors access to the hotel site, making it in Peck's words, "the hub of all further improvements."<sup>73</sup>

What delayed the start of hotel construction for another two years was linked to the insistence of company stockholders on what the Forest Service saw as financing a \$50,000 building project with future profits derived from visitors paying fifty cents each to go through the cave with a guide. The Forest Service nevertheless granted the company exclusive rights to the guiding concession, as well as those for food service and accommodation at the monument for a period of twenty years in October 1931.<sup>74</sup> Crews had already begun pouring concrete for walls and the bottom floors of the hotel by that time, work that represented an act of faith on the company's part since it came during the worst period of the Great Depression.

Despite some uncertainty over how the project might be financed, Sabin and the stockholders remained confident. A record number of people (28,000) visited Oregon Caves in 1931, partly because they could reach the monument on a recently widened and paved highway. The company anticipated increased business in coming years by erecting a service station at the monument's main parking area according to plans prepared by Lium and approved by the Forest Service. Sheathed in cedar bark like the other structures, it included a garage and enough space to bunk four employees in an upstairs room. The station also provided a way for the diesel house built for lighting the cave to generate revenue for the company, in that the mechanic hired to maintain it could also run the service station. Having gasoline available at the monument proved acceptable to the Forest Service, since officials knew that the Oregon Caves Highway lacked any such facilities for motorists.<sup>75</sup> The company encountered no difficulties when they built the service station in June, but financing the hotel required that they sell \$25,000 of stock in order to raise half of the construction cost. Enticing new investors at that time proved to be more difficult than anticipated, so the work supervised by Lium slowed with no more than twenty men on hand at any one time.<sup>76</sup>

While crews poured concrete for the hotel, the company also



augmented their need for additional water by building a cylindrical reservoir holding some 17,000 gallons in the "gulch" above the Chalet.<sup>77</sup> This privately funded addition to the monument's utility infrastructure went unseen by most visitors, though Sabin and the stockholders made sure that newspapers publicized the distinctive features of the "Chateau," then under construction. In addition to a portion of Cave Creek flowing through the dining room, prospective guests could anticipate enjoying a sunken garden that featured a pool bordered by native plants. Sabin promised steam heat and baths in all of the hotel rooms, with guests to be greeted by an imposing marble fireplace in the lobby of the six-story structure.<sup>78</sup>

*Transfer to the National Park Service*

With financing difficult enough that the Chateau's completion had to be delayed until the spring of 1934, the company wanted to renegotiate, or at least defer, that provision in their term permit which required half of net proceeds from cave tours be paid to the government each year.<sup>80</sup> The Forest Service agreed to a deferment but would not renegotiate, so Sabin attempted (in a somewhat indirect way) to court the NPS who he thought might further develop the monument's infrastructure without these kinds of strings should the administration of Oregon Caves ever be transferred. Park Service director Horace Albright ordered Roger Toll (the superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, but who also reported on the worthiness of new areas for possible transfer to the NPS) to make a "general study of caves" in September 1931, an assignment that included a visit to the monument.<sup>81</sup> Toll's report was lukewarm in that it made no recommendation for or against transferring administration of Oregon Caves, but Sabin felt he had nothing to lose by baiting the Forest Service with an observation that NPS officials sometimes failed to cooperate in promoting scenic attractions outside of their jurisdiction.<sup>81</sup> Taking care to cite no one by name, he asked the Forest Service to secure Albright's opinion about a policy of "mutual co-agency" and its benefits for Oregon Caves and other areas on the Pacific coast. Albright's eventual reply was cordial, pledging that more effort would be made to promote Oregon Caves, but this gave Sabin an opportunity to write a gracious letter in return.<sup>82</sup>

On the surface, this exchange between Sabin and Albright

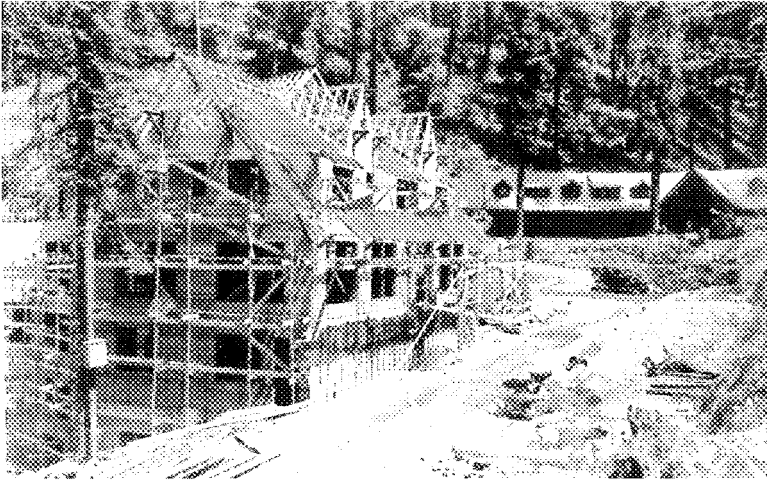


FIGURE 42. The Chateau under construction in 1933. (OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

amounted to nothing more than pleasantries and an opportunity to explain Sabin's apparent misperception. Yet it also served to keep Oregon Caves on the NPS radar screen while an executive order from President Franklin D. Roosevelt was being drafted in response to legislation passed by Congress on March 3, 1933, requiring him to investigate how reorganizing federal agencies might best serve the functions assigned to the Executive Branch. In reference to what the NPS might gain, much of the order issued on June 10 was explicitly worded to authorize the transfer of battlefields and other historic sites (which were a keen interest of Albright's) from the War Department to Interior. The order also provided for all national monuments (including the 16 administered by the Forest Service under the Secretary of Agriculture) to go to the NPS if Roosevelt heard no objections within 60 days.<sup>83</sup> A conference between Forest Service and Park Service officials in Washington resulted in a misunderstanding of what each agency thought about how many were to be transferred.<sup>84</sup> The President then transferred all of the ones administered by the Forest Service in August, though the NPS did not assume control of them until the following April.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike most of the 16 monuments (where Forest Service expenditures remained minimal at best), the transfer of Oregon Caves represented a blow to agency prestige. The Forest Service wanted to show that a wise investment of federal funds had gone

toward developing a national monument under its care, money that in concert with private capital might even put such recreational improvement on a self-supporting basis. While Forest Supervisor G.E. Mitchell acknowledged that the company could fare better under NPS administration, since that agency seemed to have more success in landing appropriations for development where no return to the government was expected. He nevertheless contended that the public interest was better served by the Forest Service, citing the small amount expended on administering Oregon Caves could be directly tied to the efficiency gained by the monument being part of Siskiyou National Forest. What worried Mitchell and others in the Forest Service, however, were efforts that Sabin might make to expand the monument since NPS officials had expressed the view that Oregon Caves was too small at 480 acres to warrant any large appropriation for further recreational improvements. For the time being, though, Forest Service officials wished to avoid open disputes with the NPS. It seemed a better course to simply accept the situation and continue to cooperate with promoting Oregon Caves when possible, given their overarching desire for good relations with the residents of Grants Pass and Josephine County.<sup>86</sup>