

Keizer Rapids Park

History of Keizer Rapids

Native American History

For over 10,000 years Native American tribes used the Willamette River for fishing, transportation, water, and commerce. It is likely they traveled through, fished and camped near the Keizer Rapids and throughout the valley.

The Willamette Mission & the Thomas Dove Keizur Wagon Train

In 1834, Jason Lee established a Methodist Episcopal Mission at present day Willamette Mission Park, about seven river miles north of Keizer Rapids. News from the missionaries about the Willamette River and its lush fertile valley, mild climate, towering forests, abundant fish and wild game spread throughout the east and enticed many to come to Oregon.

Inspired by the news from the Jason Lee

Mission and other early pioneers, Thomas Dove Keizur joined the Jesse Applegate wagon train and began his journey to Oregon in 1843. They were part of the first large migration of over 900 emigrants to travel to Oregon via the Oregon Trail that year. The Applegate wagon train had many wagons that were slower than others, which caused stress and conflicts among the travelers. To resolve these conflicts Jesse Applegate divided the wagon train into two groups. Mr. Applegate stayed with the slower larger group and Thomas Dove Keizur led the smaller, quicker group and arrived in the Willamette Valley first.

The Keizur wagon train traveled down the Willamette Valley in search of the best land to make their claims. They sought a route to cross the river and decided the shallow waters at Keizer Rapids was the best place to cross. The wagon train crossed the Willamette River at Keizer Rapids into present day Polk County where they spent the winter. After exploring both sides of the river, Mr. Keizur determined that the east bank of the Willamette was the best area to homestead. He then crossed the Willamette again at Keizer Rapids and staked out his claims and those of his son John B. Keizur along the east bank of the Willamette adjacent to Keizer Rapids.

First Surveyed Land Claim in Oregon.



In 1851, John Preston initiated the cadastral land survey system and the first general land office opened in Oregon City. Surveyed on September 1, 1852, the Keizer Rapids

parcel was the first metes and bounds donation land claim surveyed in the entire Oregon Territory, which includes present day Oregon, Washington and parts of Idaho and Montana

The Origin of the Name "Keizer Rapids"

Like the City of Keizer, the Keizer Rapids (also called historically "Keizur's Rapids") derives its name from the Keizur family that homesteaded the adjacent area. The name Keizer Rapids preceded the creation of the City of Keizer by over a century and is a longstanding recognized feature on many maps, including Rand McNally.

KEIZER
Rapids
PARK

About Keizer Rapids Park

The Keizer Rapids Regional Community Park encompasses an 85-acre parcel of land along the Willamette River. Currently managed by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the property's limited infrastructure and public access means few people use or enjoy it. In 2003, Oregon Parks committed to a 25-year lease on the parcel with the City of Keizer to develop the property into a park benefitting both local and regional communities. With acquisitions from willing landowners, the park will expand to 119 acres, offering continuous public access along the Willamette River.



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The River Boat Era and Boats Walking on Stilts

The River Boat Era on the Willamette River peaked in the 1880s. At that time there were dozens of steamboats moving tons of cargo and passengers up and down the Willamette. Keizer Rapids was a well-known navigational obstacle, especially during low water flows. To overcome these types of obstacles, several river boats were equipped with “stilts” to literally walk the boats through shallow waters in the Willamette, including Keizer Rapids.

The Commercial Era and Keizer Rapid’s Role in the Creation of I-5

After the River Boat Era came the Commercial Era. The river was dredged creating a deeper channel on the west side of the rapids. This diverted some of the water from flowing over the gravel bar and into the channel, allowing for more commercial use of the river. Keizer Rapids also played a role in the expanding highway travel in the Willamette Valley as it was used by the Highway Department as a source of aggregate in creating Interstate 5 during the 1960s.

Recreation History of Keizer Rapids

The Keizer Rapids site has long been popular for local recreation. It was known by various names including Charge Quarry, Beardsley Bar, and King George. The Keizer Rapids parcels owned by the Highway Department were transferred to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department in 1993 and 2004. Although the land was publicly owned, it was not formally open to the public. The department, together with Keizer RIVER task force partners, is working to open the Keizer Rapids properties to the public with the creation of Keizer Rapids Park.

Sources:

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David Loudon, Marion County Surveyor (interview)

Provided and authenticated in cooperation with Keizer Points of Interest Committee (KPIC)

Oregon Blue Book (www.bluebook.state.or.us)

Richard Chesebrough, Oregon Willamette River Sternwheeler (interview)

Willamette River Fact Sheet (www.oregonwri.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/WillametteRiverFactSheet.pdf)

Oregon Parks & Recreation Department, Willamette River Recreation Guide

(www.oregonstateparks.org/images/pdf/will_river_guide.pdf)

