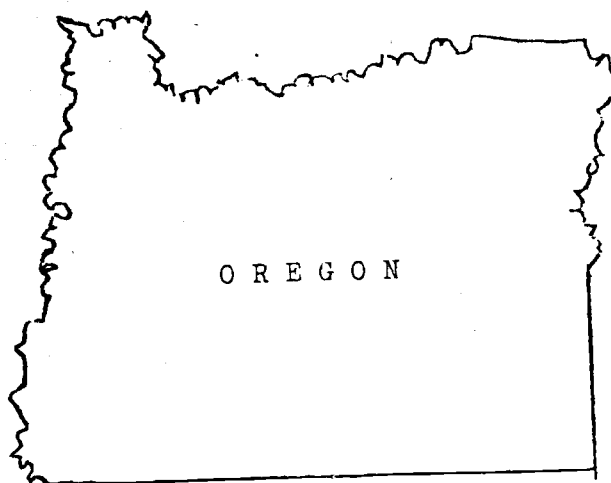


OREGON ODDITIES

AND

ITEMS OF INTEREST



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The items in this bulletin, selected from the material compiled by the Writers' Project and the Historical Records Survey of the Works Progress Administration, are representative of the significant collections being made by these nation-wide programs.

The Historical Records Survey is inventorying all sources of early Oregon history, including county and state records, town and church archives, historic cemeteries, old manuscripts and imprints, old printing presses, monuments and relics, private diaries, letters, and memoirs, historic buildings, and Indian records and lore.

The chief undertaking of the Works Progress Administration Writers' Project has been the American Guide Series of Books. In Oregon as in all other states the work includes the state Guide, designed to acquaint Americans with America and to present to the visitor the history, industry, recreational advantages and scenic attractions of the state. The Oregon Guide, now in the final stages of editing will soon be added to the list of those already published which includes Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture; Maine: A Guide "Down East"; Massachusetts: A Guide to its Places and People; New Hampshire: A Guide to the Granite State; Washington: City and Capital; Philadelphia: A Guide to the Birthplace of a Nation; Delaware: A Guide to the First State; Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State; Rhode Island: A Guide to the Smallest State; South Dakota: A South Dakota Guide; North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State; Vermont: A Guide to the Green Mountain State.

In addition to all the state guides, interesting publications now available include American Stuff; Cape Cod Pilot; Hoosier Tall Stories; The Hopi; Italians of New York; New Orleans City Guide; Whaling Masters; Who's Who in the Zoo; and Wisconsin Indian Lore.

Publications now in preparation by the Oregon Writers' Project include the Oregon Guide, an Oregon Almanac for 1939, Old Towns of Oregon, and Fire Prevention in Portland.

NATIVE OREGON PLANTS

Much concerning the flora of Oregon is inevitably intermingled with Indian lore. Nearly 200 plants found a place in the commercial, industrial, medical, culinary and religious life of Northwest tribes. With the passing of winter, Indian camps became active with preparation for the annual food-gathering.

Tribes migrated to Camas Prairie, Wapato Lake or Wocus Swamp for the yearly harvests.

A dozen varieties of berries, wild crab-apple, plum and Oregon grape ripened in season. Bird-cherry, salal and wild currant grew in profusion in forests and along the seashore. Nuts of various kinds were stored for the lean months, and seeds of numerous grasses and rushes added the important farinaceous element to the Indian diet. The white explorers and settlers, who came later, adopted many of these plants for their own use.

WAPATO

Wapato was one of the principal food plants of the lower Columbia River Indians. Bearing white blossoms in July and August, it grows in the water along streams and ponds. The edible tubers of the plant are rooted in the mud at the bottom of the stream. Indian women harvested wapato in April. They waded into the water, often shoulder deep, hung to the sides of boats and grubbed the tubers loose with their toes. Freed from the mud, the smooth tubers floated to the surface of the water, where they were gathered.

Wapato bulbs when boiled, resemble potatoes, with a slightly sweeter taste. Some have likened them to chestnuts. During the winter Lewis and Clark spent in Oregon, they existed on a diet which consisted mainly of elk meat and wapato.

The Indians made a stout cord from the dried stalks of the nettle. The steamed roots of the plant were used as food. Nettle greens are an old-fashioned dish in this country and in Europe.

The pounded root of the Solomon's Seal is still used by some Indian tribes as a remedy for rheumatism.

CAMAS

The camas might be called the Western Indians' staff of life because, of all food plants used by them, it is the

most important and widely known. The Indians jealously guarded their camas beds. Tribes went to war to settle disputes over them. The Nez Perce war, under the leadership of Chief Joseph, was waged by the Indians in a last, desperate effort to protect their camas beds.

In his journal, John Ball, Oregon's first school teacher (1832-33), says that camas "is as palatable and nutritious as potatoes." The pioneers were also acquainted with the food value of this plant. Camas bulbs simmered a long time have a consistency not unlike that of stewed pumpkin. It is said that camas pies were an equivalent of pumpkin pies in the old days. The settlers also depended on camas beds for summer hog pastures.

There are two varieties of edible camas. Both species are similar, growing in moist places and bearing either white or blue blossoms. The Leichtlin variety is larger and stouter. Improved varieties of the camas are cultivated by florists both in this country and in Europe.

A third variety of camas is the "death camas." The Indians knew it and dreaded it, as the three varieties are of similar appearance and grow under identical conditions. In spite of their knowledge, however, cases of poisoning from it were common. Camas is one of the worst stock-poisoning plants. Although horses and cattle usually survive the effects of the poison, sheep have been known to die by the hundreds from eating it. Hogs are considered to be entirely immune to the effects of the plant.

Indian medicine men often pounded and mashed the bulbs of the death camas and applied the pulp as a poultice to relieve pain.

The harvest lily blooms late in June or July. It is a lover of dry ground, and grows and bears its blossoms under conditions in which it seems impossible for a plant to survive. This plant has a deeply buried root, the secret of its hardiness. The Indians found these bulbs, which are tender and mealy when cooked, an excellent substitute for bread.

KOUSE

Kouse was another important food plant of the Northwest Indian tribes. It was known to the early explorers as "biscuit root," and to the French-Canadian voyageurs as "racine blanche." To prepare kouse

for food, Indians pounded them to a paste in a mortar, then moulded the paste into cakes which were dried in the sun.

CAT'S-EAR

Known in Oregon as the "cat's-ear" and in California as the mariposa, the sego lily, state flower of Utah, has edible bulbs which were the Indians' choicest delicacies. Sego, or seego, is an Indian word which is a general term for certain types of food. Sego bulbs were also eaten by the white settlers, especially in Utah, when they were faced with drought and starvation.

Yerba Buena is a delicate, evergreen vine belonging to the mint family. It was named by the Spaniards for its medicinal value, and it has been called Oregon tea because the early Oregon pioneers found its dried leaves to be an excellent substitute for tea.

One of the most widely distributed Oregon wild flowers, the dog-tooth violet, blooms profusely from April until late in May in the woods of valleys and foothills. Indians eat the bulbs of this plant, which has many local names, such as lamb's, deer's or adder's tongue, Spring lily, etc.

WILD BLACKBERRY

The wild blackberry has been very popular with both Indians and whites, up to, and including, the present time. It is the "green bryor" of which Lewis and Clark wrote: "It rises perpendicularly to a height of from four or five feet, when it descends in an arch, becoming procumbent, or rests on some neighboring plant or shrub...the fruit is a berry, resembling the blackberry in every respect and is eaten when ripe and is much esteemed by the natives..." The Indians made an infusion of the root bark for checking diarrhea and dysentery, and the medicinal value of the blackberry root was also appreciated by the pioneers.

The berries and tender shoots of both the thimble and salmon berries were eaten by the Indians. Salmon berry shoots were usually eaten with fish spawn, or oil. The astringent bark of the salmon berry was valued.

SKUNK CABBAGE

Skunk cabbage is a familiar plant to practically everybody in western Oregon.

Early in February the big, yellow spaths appear, and from then until May the swamps and swales are brightened by the yellow blooms. After the blossoms, tropical appearing leaves develop, often of great size. Skunk cabbage roots were used by the Indians for food, which saved many an Indian tribe from famine. When prepared for food, the roots were cooked in pits, in a manner similar to that used for wapato as described in John Ball's journal. Salmon and other large fish, when being prepared for steaming, were wrapped in the leaves of this plant.

According to the Cathlamet Indian legend, there were no salmon in ancient times. The Indians' only food consisted of leaves and roots, principally skunk cabbage. According to the legend, one spring the salmon came for the first time. As they swam up the river, a figure on the shore called: "Here comes our relatives, whose bodies are full of eggs! If it had not been for me, the people would have starved!"

"Who speaks for us?" asked the fish.

"Your uncle, Skunk Cabbage," the figure replied.

Then the salmon came to shore to see him and, as a reward for having fed the people, the Skunk Cabbage was given an elk-skin blanket and a war club, and the plant was placed in the rich soil along the river bank. There he still stands wrapped in his elk-skin blanket and holding aloft his war club.

Like the wild blackberry, the huckleberry is as popular today as it was with the Indians and pioneers. There are three varieties, evergreen, red and black. Of the three, the latter is easily the favorite, although the berries of the others are edible, but are lacking in flavor.

WILD STRAWBERRY

Two varieties of wild strawberries grow in Oregon. The short-stemmed, thick-leaved variety grows and bears its fruit close to the ground. The other type bears fruit on long, slender stems, often taller than the foliage. This species has thin, deeply-veined leaves. Wild strawberries were a welcome part of the Indian diet. Those who remember western Oregon's pioneer days, say that at that time wild strawberries were large, had a finer flavor than any cultivated berry of today, and grew plentifully everywhere. It has been said that grazing sheep have de-

grew most of the wild strawberries in Oregon.

The following recipe for cough syrup, used by early pioneers, is still in use today:

Boil together equal amounts of horehound and mullen leaves, with a small amount of liverwort and add enough sugar to the liquid to make a thin syrup.

Another pioneer remedy, used as a spring tonic or blood purifier, was made of burdock roots as follows:

Wash, scrape and slice the roots, cover with cold water and let stand six hours, then strain off the liquid and drink. Bruised burdock leaves were used as a poultice for burns.

There are three varieties of fireweed in Oregon; giant, pinnacled and yellow. The blossoms of the first two mentioned species are pink, and the latter, as the name indicates, yellow. Fireweed is so named because the plants spring up quickly in burned-over areas. Beekeepers prize this plant because it keeps their hives filled with honey. In the spring, tender shoots of the fireweed are often used as greens.

Even poison oak was found beneficial by the Indians. Baskets were made of its slender stems. The fresh juice was used in making ornamental designs on utensils. The juice was used to burn out warts and also to cure ring-worm.

Kinnikinnick is a small, trailing shrub, with reddish bark and leather-like evergreen leaves. The fruit is bright red and, although very dry and tasteless, it was part of the Indians' diet. The shrub received its name from an East Indian smoking mixture. Clerks of the Hudson's Bay Company smoked the dried leaves.

The bark of the Pacific Dogwood is very bitter and was successfully used as quinine by early settlers of Oregon.

The blue-berried elder is a natural medicine chest. Its inner bark is a very powerful emetic. Elderberry tea is used in breaking up colds. The blossoms cooked in oil make a cooling ointment, and the fruit boiled down acts as a mild aperient and diuretic. Besides its medicinal value, the fruit of the blue-elder is good for making pies, wine and jelly. The Indians made flutes from the young shoots.

The Oregon grape, state flower of Oregon, has clusters of dark berries, grape-like in appearance, which make a fine jelly. Oregon grape roots are valued for medicinal use, and every year tons of them are cut and marketed. Strictly speaking, the state flower is not a grape, but a barberry.

A valued plant among the Indians was the syringa. Arrows were made from the young, straight shoots, and bows from the larger and stronger stems. The macerated leaves made a good soap substitute.

Miners' lettuce has been a favorite green or salad plant among Pacific Coast inhabitants since very early times. Its many names: Indian lettuce, Spanish lettuce, etc., are derived from its popular use. The miners of '49 especially valued it, as they needed fresh vegetables, but had no time, in their wild rush for gold, to cultivate gardens. Seeing the Indians gather wild lettuce, the miners quickly adapted it to their own use.

Cascara bark was prized by the Indians, and pioneers as well appreciated its values as a laxative.

The young, firm "fiddle-heads" of the bracken fern are good to eat, having a flavor resembling that of asparagus. They are seldom used here as food, except by Asiatics and Europeans who prized such a dish in their native homelands.

Berries of the wild rose were called "famine food" by the Indians, possibly as an indication that they ate them during periods of food shortage.