

By Ron Eber

John B. Waldo, native son of Oregon, explored the "primeval solitudes" of the high Cascades from the time he was a boy until his death in 1907. His love of the "untrammelled woods" and an asthma condition led him to the clean air and sparkling waters of the Cascades almost every summer. There he would explore the woods and climb the mountains, hunt and fish, appreciate the wildlife and just plain enjoy the vast Cascade wilderness. The Cascades were truly his second home.

John Breckenridge Waldo was born October 6, 1844 on the family homestead near Salem. His parents, Daniel and Malinda Waldo, came to Oregon by wagon train in 1843 and settled in the foothills just east of Salem. Daniel was a local leader and active in the formation of Oregon's provisional government. John graduated from Willamette University in 1863 with a science degree, studied law in San Francisco and was admitted to the Oregon Bar in 1870. He was elected to the Oregon Supreme Court in 1880 and served until 1886. Judge Waldo became the first native born Chief Justice in 1884. A Republican, he was elected to the Oregon Legislature in 1889 for one term as a representative from Marion County.

Judge Waldo truly loved the wilderness. His letters and diary provide an early account of the natural history of the Cascades in the late 1880s. They describe his travels and demonstrate his appreciation for the woods, mountains, lakes, and wildlife.

His usual base camp each summer was in the lake country south of the Three Sisters. O'Dell, Crescent, Davis, and Waldo lakes were his favorites. He was also a frequent visitor to the Crane Prairie and the hot springs along the Breitenbush

## John Waldo: Pioneer Conservationist of Oregon

*"The policy of the government in establishing [Forest] Reserves cannot be too highly commended. How splendid for this age to leave posterity a resort and pleasure ground for the people forever."*

River. He was especially fond of the small lakes and meadows hidden deep in the woods. The lakes he called the "liquid eyes" of the mountains.

As an explorer, he is credited with identifying the current route over Santiam Pass in 1880. Also in 1880, he and four friends became the first Oregonians to travel the crest of the Cascades from Mount Hood all the way to Mount Shasta. Much of this route is now part of the Pacific Crest Trail. Their initials can still be seen carved in a tree near Island Lake in the Sky Lakes Wilderness Area.

His diary describes the abundant wildlife found in the Cascades. He saw elk, antelope, black bears, and countless deer. In 1888, he also reports seeing a grizzly bear northwest of Mt. Jefferson. He hunted and fished for food, not for sport. His annual camping trips heightened his appreciation and concern for the Cascades. On many occasions, he commented on his concern over increased forest fires, damage to meadows caused by sheep and the related decrease in wildlife. He and John Muir would have heartily agreed about the damage done by uncontrolled sheep grazing.

In the mid-1880s, citizen efforts began in Oregon and elsewhere to place off limits (reserve) certain public lands from acquisition under the settlement, mining, and timber laws. Inspired by William Steel's successful effort in 1886 to protect Crater Lake, Judge Waldo helped to initiate a campaign to reserve the entire Cascade range. As a member of the Oregon Legislature, he introduced

House Joint Memorial No. 8. The Memorial clearly sets forth Judge Waldo's views about the important values of the Cascades and the need for their protection.

The Reserve was to extend from the Columbia River to the California border, including the Crater Lake Reserve, and extend 12 miles on either side of the crest of the Cascades. The Memorial declared that the proposed Reserve's "wildness, game, fish, water and other fowl, its scenery, the beauty of its flora, the purity of its atmosphere and healthfulness" made it desirable to be "set apart and kept free and open forever . . . as a public reserve or park, and for no other purpose."

It described the Cascades as "high, rocky, unfit for cultivation, largely covered with forests . . ." and the source of "the streams watering the rich agricultural valleys" of the Rogue, Umpqua, Willamette and Deschutes Rivers and Klamath Lake. In light of today's controversy over the management of the National Forests, it is interesting to note that the Memorial declared the forests of "little commercial value . . ." but their "preservation" of "paramount value and importance."

The Memorial was drafted to prohibit grazing but was amended to allow its continuation for ten years. Mining was to continue, but unworked or abandoned claims were to revert to the public domain after two years. Leases for hotels and resorts were allowed as well as hunting and fishing, except for the purpose of "merchandise or profit."

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The Memorial passed the House but was killed in the Senate by sheep grazing interests. Undeterred by this setback, Judge Waldo continued his efforts to protect the Cascades along with other concerned Oregonians. Success was achieved on September 28, 1893, when President Cleveland established a 4.5 million acre Cascade Forest Reserve covering in large part the area initially proposed by Judge Waldo in 1889.

Almost immediately, the Cascade Reserve was attacked as being too large and unnecessary. There were continual protests about restrictions on the sue of the forests, especially from sheep grazing interests. Oregon's Congressional delegation led the effort to significantly reduce the size of the Reserve. Together with the Mazamas, Sierra Club, and other Oregon conservationists, Judge Waldo continued his efforts to protect the Reserve.

In April 1896, Judge Waldo wrote a lengthy letter to President Cleveland strongly urging the continued protection of the Cascade Reserve. It is a magnificent letter that demonstrates the Judge's extensive knowledge about the Cascade Reserve, the problems with its management and his love of the mountains. Including quotes from both Emerson and Thoreau, he urged President Cleveland to recognize that:

*"There are educational uses in mountains and the wilderness which might well justify a wise people in preserving and reserving them for such uses . . . Not only fields to toil in, but mountains and wildernesses to camp in, to hunt and fish in, and where, in communion with untrammelled nature and the free air, the narrowing tendencies of an artificial and petty existence might be perceived and corrected, and the spirit enlarged and strengthened."*

Hopefully persuaded in some measure by Judge Waldo's letter, President Cleveland retained the Cascade Reserve without modification and today it forms the core of the Mt. Hood, Willamette, Deschutes, Umpqua, Rogue River, and Winema National Forests, as well as Crater Lake National Park.

We have been left a great natural legacy, in large part because of the tireless efforts of Judge Waldo. He set the example of how a knowledgeable and committed citizen can protect the forests and wild places one loves. He died as he lived, climbing the mountains. Stricken by illness while climbing Mount Jefferson, he died shortly after being brought home to Salem on September 2, 1907. In tribute it was written:

*"To him the mountains . . . were a book to which there was no end. The beauty of the hills was a sermon, the whispering trees a prayer, the mountain streams songs of gladness and hymns of peace. The forest was his temple, and there he worshipped."*