

Jewel of the Applegate ~ 50 years of Cantrall Buckley Park



Entire article and all photo and memories (from Applegater Summer 2018, pages 10-11)



Enjoying the Applegate River in Cantrall Buckley Park



First Park Committee, 1997



Applegate School students plant a new pollinator garden

By Tom Carstens

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We will be honoring Cantrall Buckley Park on its 50th anniversary this July. Here is a brief history of how it survived with pride throughout those years.

1961: In the beginning

The year is 1961. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has built a single-lane bridge over the Applegate River to replace an old ford on the Cantrall family cattle ranch, Neil Ledward, the first Jackson County Parks Director, begins to see the possibility of a county park on the other side. In 1965, Harlan Cantrall agrees to sell the county 25 acres on both sides of the river. Neighbor Lewis Buckley joins the fun and sells another eight acres—Cantrall Buckley Park is born. Soon after, the Ossenbrugges and the Dunlaps sell more acreage. With a BLM lease, the park now encompasses 54 acres.

1965: Construction begins

Ledward spends the next three years transforming the heavily forested land into a park. There's a lot of work—the 1964 flood has devastated the flood plain. The area designated for the park is a big mess. All the earlier preparation work by the county has been obliterated. Downed trees and debris are everywhere.



Neil Ledward, Parks Director 1961 - 1991.



Harlan Cantrall.



Lewis Buckley.

To help clean it up, Ledward hires a bunch of Jackson County high-school boys, beginning a 30-year association with local kids. He believes that both the teenagers and the county would benefit from this concept of community service. He is right: these boys learn road construction, forestry, fire prevention, map reading, electrical, plumbing, irrigation, and riparian planting. They remove massive amounts of blackberries. Ledward teaches the boys to work around the big beautiful trees. (That's why we have such a cool, shady park today!)

1968: The park opens . . .

Slowly, but steadily, the park takes shape and opens on July 14, 1968, with a grand ceremony. Two years later, Cantrall sells the county another 34 acres. A campground is planned.

According to Ledward, Jackson County Parks "had more money than we knew what to do with." Ledward takes advantage and begins even more construction in the park: trails, an education gazebo, two ponds, a water feature, paved roads, a shelter, an irrigation system, a new restroom, and a playground. Through it all, Ledward constantly admonishes construction crews, "Keep the trees!" Old-timers remember that he was a good boss and teacher; he took the time to explain why and how the work was to be done.

Larry Lloyd is hired as the first resident park ranger.

The 70s: A tumultuous time

Bud Childers becomes the second park ranger in 1974. Right after, the Applegate River floods again, this time worse than in '64. Much of the previous work is destroyed. The approaches to the bridge are washed out. The park entrance is under water. Most of the new asphalt is ripped out. Park employees have to be rescued by boat. On top of all that, the river has shifted! Childers has his work cut out for him. It takes a year, but the park finally reopens—this time better than ever.

Ledward continues to use the Jackson County Youth Work Corps. These kids, along with county work crews, turn the park into a showcase for the state. State conventions take place at Cantrall Buckley so that other counties can learn how to build similar parks. Early work crews remember the park as "immaculate" and "pristine." Five hundred cars might show up on any given weekend.

But county timber payments supporting the park are drying up. The good times stop rolling. So, around 1976, Ledward begins the "Parks Enterprise Program"—an attempt to make the county park system function more like a business—more self-sufficient and less dependent on those disappearing timber payments. Gate receipts stay with the parks.

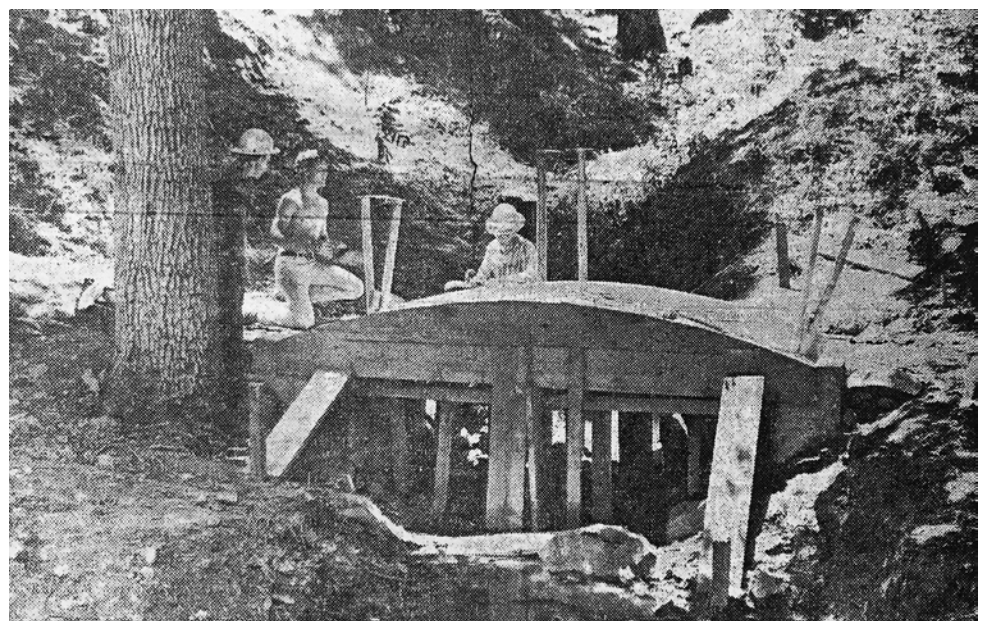
Ledward begins even more youth programs. The idea is to keep the park



Bud Childers, Park Ranger 1974 - 1985.



Cleanup after the 1964 flood (Medford Mail Tribune).



Bridge under construction, 1967.



Old swimming hole at Cantrall Buckley Park, circa 1967.



Signing of the March 1997 Participating Agreement. Seated, from left to right: Jackson County Commissioners Ric Holt, Sue Kupillas, and Jack Walker. Standing: (unknown), Terry Mitchell, Dick Goble, Jack Shipley, (unknown), (unknown), Terry Black, Tom Fiske, and Tom Brovarney.

presentable by sponsoring competitions for the kids in cleaning and clearing. He fosters a family atmosphere that endears the park to the community. Families take a lot of pride in the park.

The 80s: Park budget gets the ax

The park flourishes, but with a reduced budget and reduced patronage. With the completion of the Applegate Dam, the floods stop, but the water released from the bottom of the dam is really cold. People cut back on swimming. Fishermen are happy, though. The trout love that cold water, and the salmon enjoy good water flows. More sites are added to the campground. Money continues to tighten in all county departments. County parks are placed under the Division of Public Works. Political infighting ensues.

The 90s: Transition

Neil Ledward retires in 1991 after 30 years as Jackson County Parks Director. Soon after, the county initiates wholesale changes to its park system. In a controversial decision, the parks department is placed under the county roads division. Timber sales continue to slacken. The county decides to preserve only a core of parks. Each county park undergoes a review.

Cantrall Buckley doesn't make the cut. The park is popular but earns little income outside of gate receipts. The park needs a lot of work, but there is no money in the coffers. In 1996, the county decides to shutter the gates. Embittered park employees describe the closure as heart-wrenching. Some of them lose their jobs. Bud Childers retires.

The community has no warning about losing their access to the Applegate River. Residents feel that the county has no idea how popular the park is. Ledward fights the closure from retirement—to no avail.

Jack Shipley, who has just founded the Applegate Partnership, decides to organize a contingent of Applegaters to water and mow the grass, pick up trash, clear downed wood, and basically keep the park in shape until they can figure out what to do.

The 1997 flood doesn't help. The park is hit hard once again, so neighbors come out in droves to help clean up. The Applegate Lions Club repairs all the picnic tables

and helps move dirt. Other people buck downed trees and clean up the wood.

Shipley and others convince Paul Korbolic, the parks program director, to enter into a mutual agreement that would permit the community to run the park. Initially skeptical, Korbolic takes a leap of faith and helps draft a memorandum that the county commissioners sign in a park ceremony in the summer of '97. The Cantrall Buckley Park Committee is formed under the aegis of the Applegate Partnership. Korbolic remembers a feeling of "deep relief" that this beautiful park had been saved.

Cantrall Buckley becomes the only rural park in Oregon (and probably the nation) entirely managed by an unincorporated community without a supporting tax district. The members of the Park Committee have their work cut out for them. They hold several community meetings to figure things out and recruit volunteers. A \$10,000 grant from the Carpenter Foundation helps them get started. They hold fundraising events, and donations from the Applegate community pour in. The Park Committee hires a resident park ranger.

The following year, the Park Committee finds a more suitable home under a new nonprofit with a tongue-twister name—the Greater Applegate Community Development Corporation (GACDC). By this time, Jackson County has pretty much washed its hands of Cantrall Buckley. Being on the Park Committee starts to feel pretty lonely.

A popular program is "Movies in the Park." Applegaters gather every Friday night in the summer to watch a free family-friendly picture show on the big screen. Movies in the Park lasts several years until the copyright fees become too expensive.

2000 - present: Survival and rebirth

In 2001 Rick Barclay, a local logger, replaces Terry Mitchell as park ranger. Because he doesn't know anything about running a park, much less one with a shoestring budget, it would be trial by fire for him, and in he leaps!

Rick starts things off with a bang when he innocently applies for a septic permit. That's when he discovers the morass of county and state agencies he'll have to deal with. Rick gets a lot of help from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Laird Funk, a retired wastewater manager in Josephine County.

In 2004, the Park Committee, under the leadership of Dave Laananen, develops a Park Master Plan, funded by BLM and fulfilled during the next ten with grants totaling over \$600,000. Jackson County lends a hand.

By the end of 2007, the park has a new state-of-the-art wastewater treatment

system. A highlight is the "Vegetative Submerged Bed," or VSB, suggested by DEQ. This cattail "swamp" naturally cleans the park's wastewater before it is pumped back to the campground for irrigation. The next year sees the redesign of the park's freshwater system and new campground restrooms.

Always looking for capital improvement funds to augment gate receipts, the Park Committee holds a variety of fundraisers in the park. Most notable are the riverside wine festivals put on by the Applegate Valley Vintners Association (AVOVA).

Other improvements follow, including a new campground entrance road and an



Winefest fundraiser for the park sponsored by AVOVA.



Laird Funk supervises installation of new electrical hookups in the campground.



Ruch School students spread wood chips for new playground.



Jack Shipley, Park Committee 1997 - 2014.



Rick Barclay, park ranger 2001 - 2018.



Dave Laananen, Park Committee leader



2007 installation of new septic tank.



Vegetative submerged bed (VSB), aka "The Swamp."



ATA chair, David Calahan, prepares to lead a trail-work party.



Applegate parents plan the new playground.



Michelle LaFave and helpers cut the ribbon to officially open the new playground.



Tuffy Decker prepares the ground for the new playscape.



Tuffy the Turtle was named after Tuffy Decker and created by artist Jeremy Criswell.

electrical design for eventual RV hookups.

New educational trail signs go up throughout the park. Kids from Applegate and Ruch Schools participate in many events, including clearing blackberries, seeding pollinator gardens, and bedding native riparian habitat. A consortium of neighbors on North Applegate and Kubli Roads purchases new barbecue grills. Applegate Trails Association (ATA) restores all the park trails.

In June of 2016, the community celebrates the twentieth anniversary of its salvation of the park. The well-attended event includes the dedication of memorial benches to Shipley and Laananen and the official opening of a new playground and playscape designed by the “Applegate Moms” and their kids, led by Michelle LaFave. The playscape includes the park’s first piece of art—Tuffy the Turtle—crafted by local artist Jeremy Criswell and named after Tuffy Decker, who donated his construction labor. Almost \$60,000 has been raised from throughout the community.

The following year, Jackson County offers to take back responsibility for managing the park. A Greater Applegate (AGA), the renamed umbrella nonprofit originally called GACDC, accepts the offer in a unanimous board decision. The new Park Enhancement Committee (PEC) continues the mission of putting the community stamp on the park. In the works are an art walk designed by renowned metal artist Cheryl Garcia, a tile mural on the new playground restroom, a children’s interactive sundial display, fresh landscaping by the restrooms, more pollinator gardens designed by local school kids, new park benches designed



Weekend patron enjoys one of the new barbecue grills.

and built by the Grants Pass High School metal shop students, and a large array of solar panels—all funded and lined up. The PEC is planning a host of future projects, including a science learning center, a water-play area, and more native plant restorations.

For its part, Jackson County Parks just finished renovating the day-use restrooms and repairing the irrigation system. They will soon begin seeking funds for an expensive RV upgrade to the campground. The partnership is in good shape.

Golden Jubilee celebration in July

To celebrate the park’s history, the AGA is planning a Cantrall Buckley Park Golden Jubilee. This big event, on Saturday, July 14, exactly 50 years after the park opened, will celebrate the history of the Applegate Valley and the community spirit that has kept Cantrall Buckley Park alive. (See more information on page 1 of the *Applegater* Summer 2018.)

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The author thanks the following park old-timers for their help in compiling this article: Rick Barclay, Bud Childers, Jack Duggan, Bob Komody, Paul Korbolic, Neil Ledward, Ellen Levine, and Joe Strahl. All photos provided by Tom Carstens.



Park Committee makes plans in 2004.



Children enjoy the new playground.

Memories of Cantrall Buckley Park



From long-time park patrons



Tom Carstens makes memories of his own.

“I surely cannot recall the number of times I took my children and other neighborhood children to that beautiful place to dip in the river, climb the barrels, and explore the magical little walkways near the playground. After my children moved out, I found that I almost never went to the park. I soon began to miss it. The strong scent of the river, especially when it was perfumed in spring and summer with the shrubs that grow near the water’s edge, had such a powerful impact on me. I can still smell it when I’m not even there, and it is calming.”

“Twenty-two years ago, while my husband and I were picnicking at the riverside grassy lawn of the park on a hot summer day, dozens of violet-green swallows swooped in to hunt for the day over the gently flowing Applegate. Twenty-two years later, we continue to come back every season looking for unique bird sightings. Stop, relax, breathe, repeat. It never gets old and only gets better thanks to the multitudes of volunteers who have kept this gem of the Rogue Valley a continual joy to visit!”

“It is our community park. What a beautiful stretch of river for the public to have access to! That is especially important because river access for the general public is very limited in our valley.”

“My dog and I logged many, many miles on the park trails over the years, and that was wonderful. But my favorite times were the outdoor movies and the strong feeling of community (and anticipation, waiting for dark). I have no recollection of what the movies were, but the blankets, lawn chairs, popcorn, and sleeping children stand out in my mind as what the park is all about.”

“On our first visit to Cantrall-Buckley Park, we were met at the entry by resident manager, Rick Barclay. When we asked Rick whether we should keep our dogs on leash, he replied, “You can let them off their leashes if they chase the geese off the lawn.” For years to follow, Ginger happily accepted her regular duties of improving the condition of the park lawn. Although we consider Canadian geese to be beautiful creatures, we also appreciated finding clean areas of grass for our picnic blanket and not having to clean our shoes as often.”

“For years I have played with my children and our friends at Cantrall Buckley Park. I started before the kids were even born, dancing with my pregnant belly along the mesmerizing river, gazing at the beauty of the rocky outcroppings. I helped organize a group of families with young children to gather weekly on blankets in the sunny grass, to talk and share parenting stories, and watch our children blossom as members of the dynamic Applegate community. As our children grew from babes in arms to toddlers to little swinging monkeys, I felt safe and nurtured by the park’s cool shelter of trees and the playground’s old-school charm. I developed a strong connection to the park as a place of beauty and refuge, and as a community gathering spot.”

“In the 1970s I was sent from my home in the Applegate to 2North, the mental wing of Rogue Valley Hospital. I was inconsolably lonely and homesick. One day the patients on the ward were taken on an excursion in the country, to Cantrall Buckley Park. I was deeply affected. In that beautiful place I knew so well, under the trees and next to the river, I felt like I was home again. Catastrophically unable to communicate with anyone, I was at last, in that place, at peace.”

“The best part of volunteering in the park was the association with such great people. Finding community spirit is such a treasure. I’ve never felt more alive than when I was working to make our park better. What a gem!”

“Cantrall Buckley Park was one of the first places I visited in southern Oregon. What a beautiful respite next to the river. It embodied all of the peace and beauty of Oregon! Our Applegate community saw the value of public access to this beautiful treasure and made the commitment to keep the park despite the county’s lack of resources. What a gift the Applegate community made possible for visitors and residents alike.”

“The park was plucked out of almost disappearing to a new community life. A great gathering of community stalwarts stepped up to completely take it on. And did! Hard slugging and work, joyous successes, and camaraderie made it a success all the way to this year. Now it’s time to pass it back over to the county as a gem that will facilitate even more success and infrastructure. I was a board member for a while and enjoyed the wonderful people and creativity of it all firsthand. It’s importance as a community gathering place is a paramount part of our whole community.”

From Bonnie Rinaldi, former GACDC chairperson

“What made the experience a privilege was the opportunity to work with and get to know Dave Laananen, Laird Funk, Tom Carstens, and Rick Barclay. Each of these men gave generously and tirelessly of their time and talents to improve the park and make it a place that the Applegate community could enjoy and be proud of. So many hours, so much talent, and so much commitment on the part of each of these men inspired the rest of us to work harder.”

From Paul Korbolic, former parks director

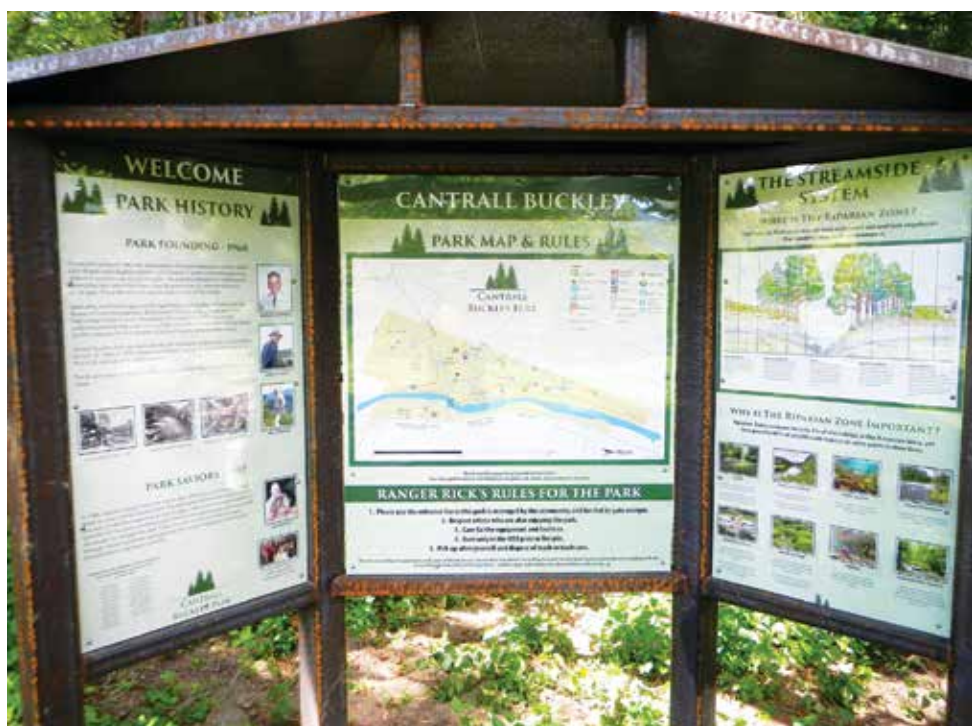
“Yahoo! When I walked out of the meeting, I felt like we had just been bailed out. A community group was willing to take on the task of operating and improving one of the most costly yet wonderful parks in our system. Had not been done anywhere to my knowledge. Thank you, community group!”



Out goes the old playground.



Artist Jeremy Criswell fundraises for the mural.



New signage in the park.