



Camp Latgawa News

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We often talk about Camp Latgawa's importance as a place apart for emotional and spiritual growth for people today and as a place for teaching the next generation of community leaders. But Latgawa has long been a place of renewal and has an important historical significance to southern Oregon. We thought it would be interesting and entertaining to write a bit about that history.

A Short Journey into the Past

In 1871 a young John H. Tyrell was hunting elk when he chanced upon some soda springs east of the family homestead. This became a favorite place for him and he continued to visit those springs over the rest of his life.

Though the primitive roads were very rough and the creek had to be forded 10 to 12 times to get there, Dead Indian Soda Springs quickly became a popular vacation spot for people wishing to escape the summer's heat on the valley floor. The August 2, 1895 edition of *The Medford Mail* reports "something like 100 campers out at Dead Indian Springs."

After 1902, the Forest Service used the site for a guard station. Charles Wilkinson was stationed at the guard station from 1906 until retirement in 1915. Wilkinson built a small, two-room cabin for his family to live there while he acted primarily as a fire lookout.



One of Wilkinson's early cabins, c. 1915

Following retirement Wilkinson was granted a special use permit for a development centered around the soda springs. Early camping had primarily involved the use of canvas and tent frames with a wood floor. Now Wilkinson would construct small cabins and make them available for rent. It was during this period that the building now known as the "Library" was built.

By 1922 the development of the Dead Indian Soda Springs resort had begun in earnest. This is likely when "Tyrell House", the house that Greg and Eva now inhabit, was built and served as the "lunch room". Most buildings built at that time have been removed but, along with Tyrell and the Library, Jerusalem (the craft cabin) and Macedonia (the camping supply cabin) and the shop and the storage shed behind Tyrell are still extant.

It was during this decade that the bottling and selling of the soda springs water took place. Though not commercially successful, the high quality of the water and its reputed health benefits did provide further impetus for resort development.

In 1930 the Wilkinsons sold their interest in the resort for \$2,750. They sold it to John R. Tyrell, the son of the young elk hunter who had discovered the springs in 1871. For the next

23 years John and his wife Ella, Jackson County school teachers, would spend their summers operating the resort.

They immediately set about improving the resort, building 4 small cabins. One of these cabins still stands. Originally the Cook's Cabin it is now called Antioch and it used as the Health Center during summer camps and is a small sleeping cabin for hospitality groups.

As early as 1926-1932, private summer homes were built at the resort. It is not certain whether families leased the land from Wilkinson and Tyrrell and built their homes or if Wilkinson and Tyrrell built the homes and sold them to frequent campers. Both Gorby Cottage and Damascus cabin date from this period.

In 1939 the Tyrrells were granted a permit to build a concrete pool fed by a flume from Dead Indian Creek. The pool was inundated with silt and debris following a flood in 1958. It was cleaned out and repaired, but destroyed beyond repair by a flood in 1964. The present pool and bathhouse was built in 1966 with a large part of the funding coming from the ticket sales for Shakespeare plays put on at the camp by local youth. The pool was renovated in 2003 following the reconstruction of the driving bridge washed out in 1997.

Under Tyrrell ownership the central lodge (Tyrrell House) served as the dining hall for the resort. Patrons ate meals on the screened-in front porch overlooking the central campground area. A chicken coop (now the summer camp cabin known as Rome) was built and chicken dinners, at \$1.00 each, became a staple of camp life.

The Civilian Conservation Corp also played a role in the construction history of the resort. A rock bridge and platform built to access the soda springs was washed out in the devastating 1964 flood, but the gazebo and the new road to the site, both built in 1936, are still here and in use today.

By 1953 the Tyrrells had retired from teaching and sold their interest in the resort to the Oregon Methodist Conference. Subsequent to assumption of the lease and purchase of improvements from the Tyrrells the Methodist Conference began acquisition of the remaining privately-held summer cabins and this resulted in the consolidation of ownership of all area structures except the gazebo by 1958.

1958 also saw the addition of the main lodge, known as Dolph Hall. The structure was constructed in the basement of the Medford United Methodist Church by volunteers and assembled on site that spring.

The following year, church volunteers from Eugene built the 8 summer camp cabins known collectively as the "Hill Cabins".

Mineral-spring based resorts were once a common feature in southern Oregon starting in the 1880s. Now only 3 of these resorts remain extant and open to the public, Jackson Wellsprings, Buckhorn Springs and Camp Latgawa. Unlike either of the other two, Camp Latgawa retains a high degree of original structures *and* has remained in continuous operation since its original development. Camp Latgawa is a relatively intact example of a rustic mineral-spring based campground in southern Oregon. Its long history as a part of both mineral-spring development and the summer camping phenomena make this an important cultural resource.

And Now...

We love Camp Latgawa's history and how the buildings blend so nicely with their surroundings. It is part of why it feels so good to be here. These buildings have stories to tell and we want them to keep telling them into the future. Time takes its toll and standards change so the buildings must be cared for and updated if Latgawa is to keep its unique history.



Antioch – Orig. Cook's Cabin, built 1930

This summer Antioch was renovated - new roof, new bathroom floor and shower, new interior walls, a heater was installed and a porch light was too. The cabin is still the same historic Cook's Cabin that John Tyrrell built in 1930, but made repaired and updated for safety and comfort in 2011.



Gorby Cottage, built 1929

In 1998 Gorby Cottage also got a similar makeover and is now one of the favorite guest cabins at the camp.

Damsacus is the next cabin that we have slated for repair and renovation. Built around 1930 it is still a safe, solid building, but we would like to replace the roof, repair some structural decay and give the interior a major update.

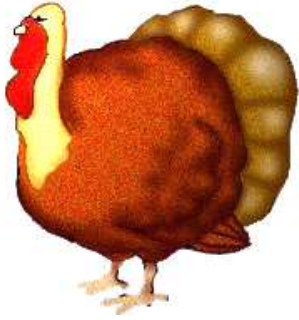
This will be the largest and most expensive renovation of a cabin that Camp Latgawa has yet undertaken. Camp Latgawa has relied on donor support throughout its history and that is still true today. With every family that visits this beautiful space, important memories are made. The first time that a young camper sleeps under the stars, vital connections with nature are born. When an adult attending a retreat is able to leave behind the distractions and noise for a weekend, deeper connections to self and community are realized. With your support, you can be a part of the wonderful tradition that is camp and help it to continue to be as important for future generations as it has been for generations past.



Damsacus, built c. 1930

Consider supporting the Damascus Renewal Project and Camp Latgawa by making a donation of any size. You can get a mail-in donation form or donate online at <http://gocamping.org/donate>.

If you would like to leave a lasting legacy you can add a provision in your will to make a bequest to Camp Latgawa. For more information contact Camp Latgawa Director Greg Clensy.



Thanksgiving at Latgawa

Same great food, NEW TIME! Thanksgiving meal will be served at 2:00 p.m. this year! Now you don't have to drive home after dark.

Enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner complete with all the favorites like yams, stuffing, homemade squash rolls, mashed potatoes, pie and much more!

The meal begins at 2 p.m., but you are welcome to arrive earlier and enjoy a walk in and around the camp or sip on some cider by the fire. Seats are limited, so sign up soon!

Where? Camp Latgawa

When? Thursday, November 24, 2011. Dinner begins at 2:00 p.m.

Who? Anyone. Whether it's just you or the entire family we've set a place for you at our table.

Cost? \$15 for adults, \$9 for kids 2-8, free under 2.

How? Call (541-826-9699) or e-mail Camp Latgawa at camplatgawa@hotmail.com and tell us your name, number of people in your party, and ages of any kids under 9 years old.

