

Rogue River Ranch

National Historic Site



Top: Ranch, Bottom: Main House/Museum 2003

**Rogue National
Wild and Scenic
River**



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Introduction

Rogue River Ranch National Historic Site is located in southwestern Oregon approximately 75 miles northwest of the city of Grants Pass. The ranch is at the mouth of Mule Creek and nestled in the heart of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River's wild section. Once a major Native American site, there is evidence of over 9,000 years of Native American habitation. In the 1880s, the site evolved into a small gold-mining community, with up to 100 residents trying to scratch a living from the gold-bearing gravel bars of the Rogue River. The ranch structures remaining today represent the center of the old community of Marial. The ranch hosted a trading post with lodging in the second story, a blacksmith's shop, and numerous outbuildings that filled the early residents' social and commercial needs.

The Ranch is open from May through October.



Rogue River Ranch/Billing's Ranch, c. 1915

Facilities

There are primitive camping areas and toilets on the river near the mouth of Mule Creek. Camping is allowed at the ranch;

please coordinate with the caretakers. There is a public toilet, small parking area, and drinking water at the ranch. The drinking water is available at one outside spigot near the caretaker's house.

A no fee campground, Tucker Flat, is 0.1 mile down the road, northwest, from the ranch. Tucker Flat has six primitive campsites, toilets, and a trailhead into the Rogue Wilderness. Water is available from Mule Creek, water purification is advised.



Rogue River Ranch 2003

Access

The ranch can be accessed by boating, hiking, or driving. The ranch is 22 river miles and 23 trail miles from Grave Creek. The drive to the ranch is 37 miles from Grave Creek. Most people take two days to float, three days to hike, and two hours to drive to the ranch. See the directions and the map in this booklet. If you drive, be prepared with a full tank of gas and plenty of food and water. There are no gas stations or services along the route. Drive with care as the roads are narrow and winding.

Directions to the Ranch

From Glendale

- 0 miles** Exit 80 on I-5; go southwest to Glendale.
- 3 miles** In Glendale, turn right on Douglas County Road #27/Reuben Road. Cross bridge and turn left past lumber mill.
- 8 miles** Road junction; Douglas County Road #321.
- 16 miles** At Riffle Creek junction; go left on paved BLM Road #32-7-19.3; follow signs to Marial.
- 24 miles** Junction with BLM Road 32-8-31; turn right and follow paved road.
- 29 miles** Road junction with BLM Road #32-8-9.2 on right; go left and continue on 32-8-31.
- 30 miles** Junction, turn left on BLM Road #32-9-14.2.
- 33 miles** Marble Gap junction; continue ahead, pavement ends.
- 36 miles** Fourmile Saddle junction; keep left and stay on 32-9-14.2.
- 45 miles** Rogue River Ranch/Marial/Mule Creek.

From Galice

- 0 miles** From town of Galice head north on Galice Road.
- 8 miles** Cross Grave Creek Bridge and stay left on BLM Road #34-8-1. This route is the “Grave Creek to Marial Byway”, follow byway signs to the Ranch.
- 13 miles** Junction with Whisky Creek Road #33-8-26; stay right on BLM Road 34-8-

1, pavement ends; narrow road, watchout for other vehicles and log trucks!

16 miles At junction with BLM Road #33-8-13; stay left and continue on 34-8-1.

24 miles Junction with BLM Road # 32-8-31; go left and continue on paved road.

29 miles Road junction with BLM road # 32-8-9.2 on right; keep left and continue on 32-8-31.

30 miles Junction, turn left on BLM Road #32-9-14.2

33 miles Marble Gap junction; continue ahead, pavement ends.

36 miles Fourmile Saddle junction; go left and stay on 32-9-14.2.

45 miles Rogue River Ranch/Marial/Mule Creek.

Native Americans

Archeological excavations have shown that Native Americans used the Marial area for over 9,000 years. Takelma speaking people represented an ancient people of the Rogue Valley, while Athabascan speaking people were relatively new immigrants to the area. Although languages differed, there was a common way of life shared by those living along the Rogue at Marial, a way of life based on hunting, fishing, and gathering.

Major food sources were fish, deer, acorns, and camas. Marial was likely a permanent village towards the end of native occupation, unlike more ancient occupations, which were probably seasonal camps, used from time to time by local people.

The native way of life along the Rogue came to an abrupt end in the 1850s. Despite

efforts at treaty-making and after a bloody war, the surviving native people were removed to reservations in northern Oregon in 1856. During the ensuing years, however, a native presence was still expressed at Marial. Adeline Billings, wife of one of the first Euro-American settlers of Marial, was a Karuk Indian from northern California. Her childhood along the Klamath River to the south gave her many traditions which found a familiar home along the Rogue. Over the years members of the Cow Creek Band of the Umqua Indians, survivors of the nineteenth century wars, continued to cross the divide from the north to come hunt and fish at Marial.

Settlers and Gold Miners

In 1868, John and Adeline Billings settled near Agness with their first three children. They moved up river twice in the following years and had seven more children, making their final home at Big Meadows above Mule Creek in 1892.

In the early 1880s, the Marks Brothers Mining and Milling Company operated a sawmill and flume



Flume and trestle over the East Fork of Mule Creek c. 1910

system on the East Fork of Mule Creek, which is where John and his sons worked.

In 1887, Tom Billings, John and Adeline's second son, filed an official homestead claim at the mouth of Mule Creek. One year later, Tom transferred the claim to his older brother, George. In 1894, Tom and his wife Anna had their first child, a daughter named Marial. The growing settlement at Mule Creek was named after Marial Billings.



Crowin children next to hydraulic giant drive at a placer mine at Mule Creek, early 1900s

In 1898, George, wife, Sarah Ann, and 3-year old, Ivin Billings, settled near the Mouth

of Mule Creek. By 1903, they had finished building a 2-story main house and established a trading post and boarding house for travelers.

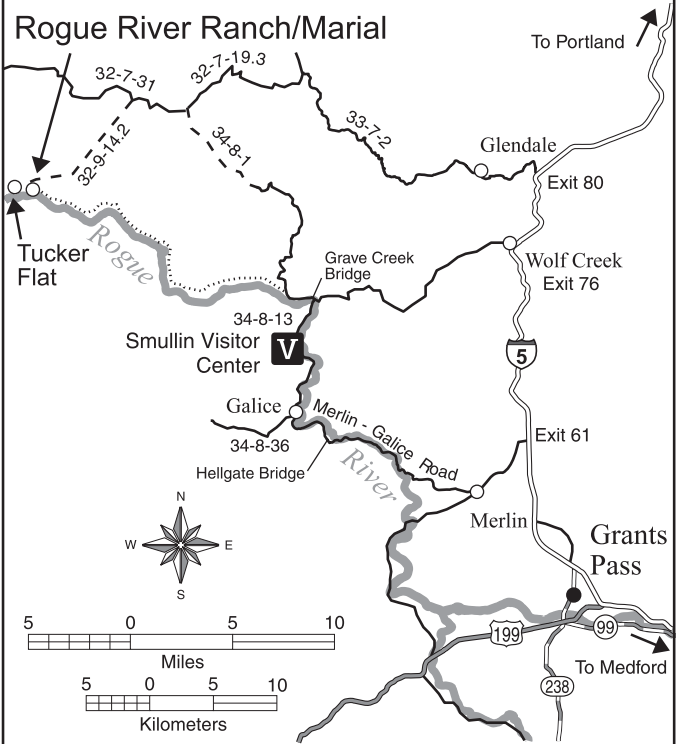
About 1907, the Red River Mining and Milling Company bought Marks Brother's East Fork of Mule Creek sawmill, flume system, and claim and George Billing's claim on the west side of Mule Creek, Douglas Bar. A two-story house and assay office were then built at Douglas Bar with up to 5 hydraulic giants mining the Bar.

In 1908, George and Sarah Ann built a barn, now known as the "tabernacle," to stable horses and mules. By 1912, the Red River Mining Company was not successful enough so they folded. George Billings reacquired the original claim as an agricultural homestead. In 1916, George and Sarah Ann







Map to Ranch



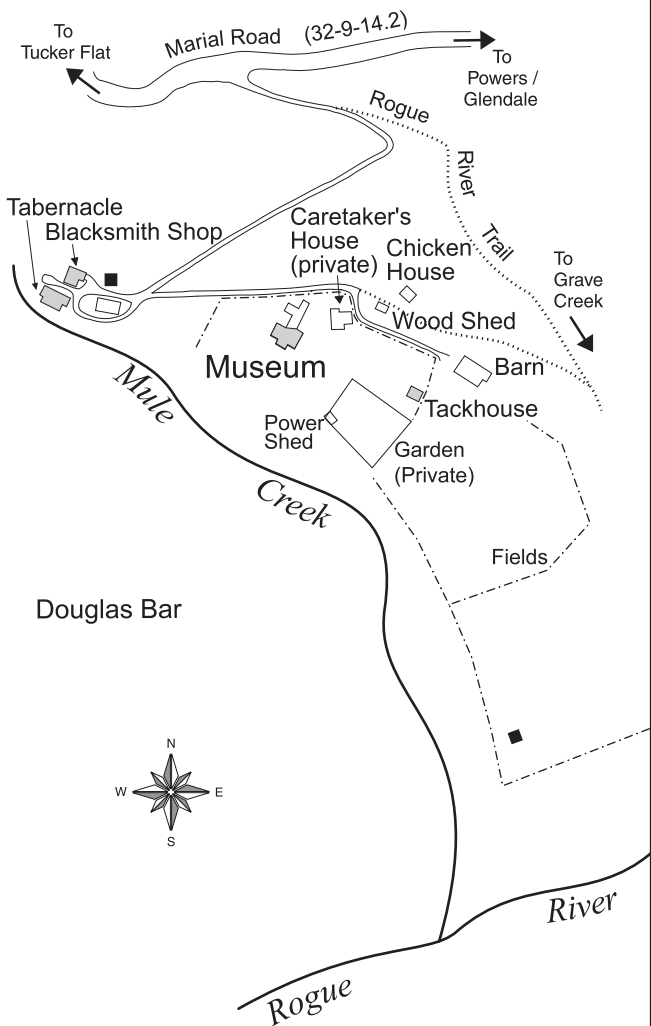
Rogue River Ranch/Marial



Legend

-  Interstate
-  Federal Highway
-  State Highway
-  Paved Road
-  Gravel Road
-  Rogue River

Ranch Layout



Legend

- Open to the Public
- Toilet
- - - Fence line

Map not to scale

established a post office at Billings' Trading Post.

Between those bustling years of 1903 and 1929, the Billings Trading Company grew to become the center of social life for 75 to 100 residents of the Mule Creek/Marial area. Settlers came by foot from as far away as Bald Ridge and Paradise Bar to attend dances and church services. The boarding house attracted miners, travelers, and an occasional roguish character in need of a hideout.

In 1931, George Billings sold his 70-acre ranch to Stanley Anderson for \$5,000. The Anderson's later purchased 130 acres across the river from the ranch. In the years following, the Anderson family added a caretaker's house, bunkhouse, tackhouse, woodshed, storage shed, expanded the main house, and fixed up the chicken shed and blacksmith shop. They tore down most of the buildings at Douglas Bar and in 1956, they painted the main house red.

In 1970, the Anderson's sold the entire complex (199.95 acres) to the U.S. Government under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program. At present, the Bureau of Land Management maintains this National Historic Site and keeps an on-site museum open for public viewing. The Billing's original main house serves as a museum with displays on Native Americans, the mining and farming era of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the Anderson era of the 1930s through 1970. All are welcome to visit the ranch from May to October.

Three generations of Billings, John and Adeline, Sarah Huntley and George and their children: Ivin, Evered, and Alpine, worked and lived at Marial. Ivin Billings grew-up at Marial and shortly before his death in 1977, Ivin was interviewed and gladly shared his knowledge and feelings about life in the Rogue River Canyon. **Ivin's reflections are in italics on the following pages.**

Main House

The main door was always facing the creek. There was no fireplace; just a wood heater in the living room. Original door knobs, windows, and such were just good hardware. The ornate ones were put in later. All glass for windows was packed over from West Fork by horse -- came from Portland. Window frames were handmade. Furniture, chairs, sofas, rockers, was all handmade by Father. He was quite a carpenter.



Main House/Museum 2003

From the time they moved on the place they start taking in boarders. Sometimes there'd be 15 or 20 'fore night . . . they's just come in on you . . . just keep food on hand. Meals were 75 cents a day, a dollar with their bed. Breakfast, we had eggs all kinds of vegetables from the garden, always all kinds of fruit. Made bacon out of bear, makes the finest bacon, hang it up and smoke it, slice right up, cook it in a pot of beans. Fish -- oh, those lovely salmon. Salt down about 2 ten

gallon whiskey kegs full, three or four gunny sacks full of fish caught with a willow pole, hook and line -- all I ever used was a fly.



Maxine and Mrs. Corwin, Ivin Billings and Bill Corwin showing their catch at the Red River Mining and Milling Company, c. 1918

Main house, boarding house, trading post, post office, call it what you will ... lumber for the house was all made by hand. Used ponderosa pine growing out on the flat, where the three apple trees are now - - between the two pastures. Had 5 saws going at one time 10 men. Whipsawed it right here. The siding was shaved off with drawing knife and planed smooth to 1/4. All work was by hand. The outside was built in a couple of years, but the inside took 6 or 7.

Barn

Had a pet goat, couple of varmint dogs -- they'd tree bear, cougar, anything that come around. We had cats -- cats in the barn.



Barn 2003

Only raised hogs one time. Mean! You can't fence them out, you can't let them run and there were a lot of wild hogs here. I'm more afraid of a hog than I am a bear.

This was all open country back then. The Indians used to burn about every two or three years. Burn off the brush, keep the berries coming, and the hazelnuts and the acorn, growing healthy. Game was so much fatter than they are now.

Tackhouse

Lost some horses on the winter range. Sometimes we'd get a severe winter and a lot of snow. We'd



Tackhouse 1990s

have to ski grain on our backs over the mountain. We'd chop down tan oak trees for the roughage and give them the grain to get through the hard spells.

Blacksmith Shop

In the wintertime, you would spend time working on equipment. Dad was always busy making lash rope cinches and hooks. He did



Blacksmith Shop 2003

all the leather work, made his own pack saddles.

Tabernacle

We called it the storage shed. For years we held dances upstairs. When father opened up Sunday morning services, we didn't have



Tabernacle 2003

*dances
there any
more. He
really
preached a
very good
sermon.*

Gold Mining

I used to go down the bank near the ranch and get spending money. Anything smaller than what you could pick out with your fingers - wasn't bothered with. Every spring after the creek lowers you get \$40 to \$50. Gold is always, always trying to work down, down in every little niche and crevice.

Some became rich, yet most died poor. But more than the haunting of gold, it was the spell of adventure, the enchantment of the rugged canyon walls and wild river that clutched the souls of these early pioneers.

First was ground sluicing. Panning isn't good for anything, just for prospecting, find out where the gold is. Hard work, doesn't go very fast. Gravel has to be worth 5 or 10 dollars a yard. Rocker came next . . . you could handle 10 times as much as you could with a pan, I've done quite a bit of it. Made a living mining for several years here.

Trapping

Mink, otter, marten, raccoon, fox, lynx cat, bobcat. I did it several winters during the

teens. Grandfather would sell hides -- here were plenty of hide buyers. The mails were full of price lists every fall.

From A Diary

The building was two stories high, upstairs was one large room packed full of beds. Bed sheets suspended from the ceiling by wires separated some beds from others. The owners and travelers, including women all slept in this room. Beds were mainly piles of gunny sacks and old unwashed blankets held up by a network of rawhide thongs across the underside of a frame. I never undressed here, slept in my long underwear . . . with my jacket for a pillow.

When the place was full at night it was a nightmare. There was almost continuous coughing, snoring, grinding of teeth, talking in sleep, urinating in a can or out the window, and other night noises. There always seemed to be someone walking around the room or to the window or stairway, which shook the floor and building. Sound sleep for any length of time was impossible.

On one trip I arrived in the evening after walking all day over the trail and sat down, as the only guest, to a supper of cold boiled squash, stale bread and poor coffee. These people were poor, had no regular income. They gave the traveler the same accommodations they were used to. Their living came from the country. Their meat when they had any, came from the hills as venison, and their fish from the nearby river. In the fall they went on an animal hunt to the old Indian hunting grounds for deer and bear meat and huckleberries, which they dried for winter. They were used to this kind of living, which we now call poverty, but it was rough on many of the soft outsiders who ventured into their country.

For More Information

Bureau of Land Management

Medford District
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
541/618-2200
www.or.blm.gov/Medford

Smullin Visitor Center at Rand
14335 Galice Road
Merlin, Oregon 97532
541/479-3735
May 15 - October 15
www.or.blm.gov/Rogueriver

Other Helpful Brochures

Books about the Rogue River
Grave Creek to Marial National Back
Country Byway
Rogue River Float Guide
Rogue River Trail Grave Creek to Illahe
Shuttle Map

Bibliography

Illahé, by Kay Atwood, 1978
Quotes by Ivin Billings, 1976
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