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SITE OF THE SMITH MASSACRE  
ON JULY 14, 1828

EDITED BY LANCASTER POLLARD

THE EXACT LOCATION of the site on the Umpqua River where fifteen members of the Jedediah Smith party were killed by Indians on July 14, 1828, has not heretofore been determined. It now seems that this minor, but interesting, point in fur-trade and Oregon history is cleared up through the entries in the field note book kept by Harvey Gordon on a surveying trip made in 1857-58.

A transcript of those notes, covering Sec. 26 T 21 SR 12 W, and a tracing of a part of the accompanying map, were recently presented to the Society through the courtesy of one of its members.

Until the present time, nothing has been written concerning the location of the Smith massacre which has given any authority other than legendary tradition, and the spot has been located in several places.

In his notes Gordon states that a certain spot is the "place where Indians murdered eleven men in the employ of Smith . . ." These notes, inasmuch as they are a part of the United States Land Office records, may be accepted as correct; it does not necessarily follow, however, that Gordon's location is the exact spot, although the probabilities are that it is. His information was acquired and recorded only thirty years after the incident. He had access to the knowledge of the pioneer white residents of Gardiner, who first settled there twenty-two years after the massacre. More important, he had access to the knowledge of the Indians. In the preliminaries to his notes, Gordon states that he had employed a party of Indians; natives who were twenty-one years old at the time of the massacre would have been but fifty-one at the time of Gordon's survey. It is by no means improbable that some of the natives in his employ may have taken part in the massacre. All could have

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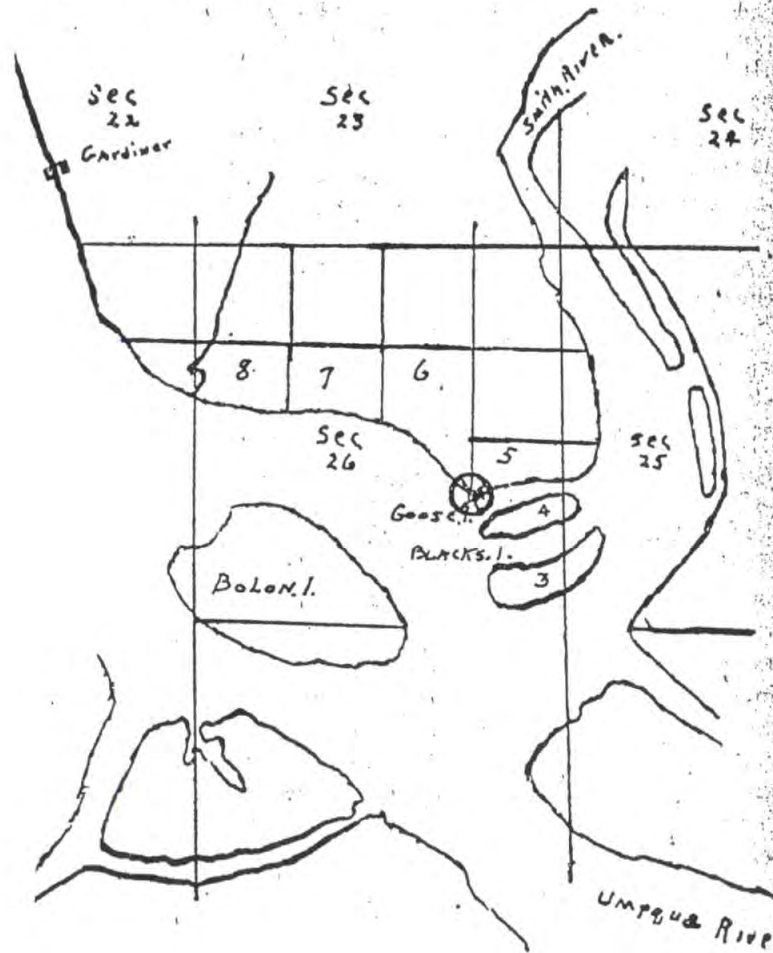
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had knowledge of the exact location; it can hardly be questioned that many did have.

As to the Gordon statement that eleven men were killed: it is accepted that Smith and his party numbered nineteen in all and that four—Smith, Black, Turner and Leland—survived. This left fifteen as being killed. The seeming discrepancy is easily explained. Alexander R. McLeod, of the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived at the scene in October of 1828 with his relief expedition. They reported finding eleven skeletons. Black, in



his account of his escape states that "Davis [Daws] was in the water and Indians were pursuing him in a canoe." It is probable that the four members of the party unaccounted for also tried to escape by swimming and were killed in the stream or at some distance from the camp site where the others were massacred.<sup>1</sup>

The change of compass course in Gordon's survey notes is exactly on the south end of the west line of Lot 5. Gardiner (formerly East Gardiner) Station on the Southern Pacific Railroad is in Sec. 25, approximately 150 feet east of the north line of Lot 5. The spot located by Gordon is marked by a circled cross on the map here reproduced. This map is a tracing of a part of the official map of the survey made by Gordon under U. S. Contract No. 69, let February 2, 1857, and filed as completed September 6, 1858.

The notebook is in the United States Land Office at Portland, as is also Gordon's map. One place named on Gordon's map differs from that in current use: what is now known as Perkins Island is named "Goose Island."

In the following transcript of Gordon's notes the first column is compass course, the second is distance as measured in chains (of sixty-six feet).

Notes covering Meander Line, Umpqua River from approximately the mouth to Smith River, along north shore. Contract Townships, Subdivisions, Meanders, dated Feb. 2nd, 1857, to Harvey Gordon, all filed as completed September 6th, 1858.

Twp. S. R 12 W. Willamette Meridian.

South between Secs. 19 and 20.

9.00 to right bank of Umpqua R. Set post, raised a mound of stone.

Land mountainous, soil 3rd rate.

In this township, and all others to be surveyed under the meanders of this contract, the forest is so dense that camp can-

<sup>1</sup>For accounts of the Smith massacre see: Rich, E. E., Ed., *The Letters of John McLoughlin . . . First Series*, 1941, pp. 68-70; Sullivan, Maurice S., *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*, 1934, pp. 107-111, 113; Sullivan, Maurice S., *Jedediah Smith*, 1936, pp. 174-179.



not be transported on horses, and I am obliged at extraordinary expense to employ a party of Indians for that purpose on all the land lines; but on the meanders, one of the assistants with a canoe is sufficient.

Therefore, as a measure of economy that portion of the survey is omitted until I can discharge the Indians.

Nov. 13, 1857.

N. 11° E	34.50	To meander corner in Sec. 19
N. 20° E	7.50	in Sec. 19
North	8:00	About N. end of Reservation—not pointed out
N. 5° E	6.00	
N. 24° W	2.50	
N. 13° E	8.00	
N. 48° E	7.00	
N. 28° E	18.00	
N. 23° E	10.00	Leave Sand hills on shore
N. 20° E	10.00	To meander corner
N. 42° E	12.00	In Sec. 20 to meander post
N. 35° E	5.50	In Sec. 17
N. 54° E	5.60	Rocky Bluffs
N. 36° E	5.40	
N. 57° E	5.50	
N. 37° E	5.40	
N. 53° E	10.00	
N. 41° E	12.20	To S. W. Corner of S. Scholfield's claim
N. 63° E	5.00	
N. 82° E	5.00	High Rocky Bluff
N. 73° E	15.00	" " "
N. 60° E	15.00	To meander corner
East	5.00	In Sec. 16
N. 57° E	5.00	Bluffs
N. 86° E	26.00	"
N. 83° E	18.00	
S. 63° E	15.00	to lower end of marsh
S. 43° E	18.00	to meander post

S. 50° E	2.00	in Sec. 15
S. 55° E	6.00	marshy shore
S. 38° E	11.00	" "
S. 25° E	20.40	at 9.00 Creek 100 links to meander corner
S. 30° E	9.00	in Sec. 20 at 5.00. Stream 50 links wide.
S. 23° E	13.00	marshy shore
East	2.00	" "
South	4.00	Marsh subject to inundation by highest tide
S. 45° E	2.00	
South	3.50	Land 1st and 2nd rate
S. 35° E	5.00	
S. 18° E	34.00	To Cooper's Wharf. U.S. Custom House and Gardiner P. O.
S. 20° E	14.00	To meander post
S. 18° E	10.00	In Sec. 27. leave marsh
S. 36° E	10.00	Rocky Bluffs
S. 35° E	10.00	
S. 55° E	5.00	
S. 82° E	8.00	To meander post—at 7.00. Creek 25 links wide.
S. 36° E	4.00	In Sec. 26
S. 87° E	32.00	Rocky Bluffs
S. 76° E	10.00	To marsh shore
S. 49° E	21.00	Place where Indians murdered eleven men in the employ of Smith, Sublette & Co., about thirty years ago.
N. 74° E	10.00	Up Smith's River on right bank
S. 79° E	11.00	To meander post
N. 77° E	5.00	In Sec. 25
N. 37° E	5.00	Leave marsh
N. 7° E	10.00	
N. 7° W	5.00	Rocky Bluffs

# 2 International Paper Co  
Horse Ranch  
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Meanders, T. 21 S., R. 12 W.

CHAINS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The land in this township is mostly mountainous, but about the numerous streams and lakes there are many small bodies of fertile land well suited to the growth of agricultural products. The marshes are all valuable for pasturage and meadows. The mountains are very steep, but not usually more than 3 or 400 feet high. All land not subject to overflow is covered with a dense forest of fir, spruce, hemlock, cedar, alder, maple, pine and other kinds of timber and thickly matted undergrowth consisting of sallalberry, thimbleberry, crabapple, manzanita, vine maple and other bushes without name. As usual, the vicinity of the Sea stimulates vegetation of all kinds to its utmost vigor.

The Umpqua River traversing this township from E. to W. affords a good harbor with a tolerable approach for shipping and is the route of commerce for the interior. Fort Umpqua is probably a permanent military station. There are several donation claims along the river. About seven years since, a colony of several hundred persons landed here in quest of gold mines and other fields of speculation. Gold not appearing, they applied themselves to the inception of cities. But title deeds proving weaker than the prescriptive right of savage nature, depopulation and decay soon left nothing but the names of Gardiner, Umpqua City, Providence and Rosalia, which still embellish the maps.



OK MAY 26 2001

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Harry Gordon  
meander  
9-6-1858

Meanders of T. 21.S., R. 12 W.

CHAINS

<u>Courses</u>	<u>Distances</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
S.23*E.	13.00	Marshy shore.
East	2.00	Marshy shore.
South	4.00	Marsh, subject to inundation at highest tides.
S.45*E.	2.00	
South	3.50	Land 1st and 2nd rate.
S.35*E.	5.00	
S.18*E.	34.00	To Coopers Wharf, U.S. Custom House, and Gardiner P.O.
S.20*E.	14.00	To meander post.
S.18*E.	10.00	In sec. 27. Leave marsh.
S.36*E.	10.00	Rocky bluffs.
S.35*E.	10.00	
S.55*E.	5.00	
S.82*E.	8.00	To meander post at 7.00 chs. creek 25 lks. wide.
S.36*E.	4.00	In sec. 26.
S.87*E.	32.00	Rocky bluffs.
S.76*E.	10.00	To marsh shore.
S.49*E.	21.00	Place where the Indians murdered 11 men in the employ of Smith-Sublette & Co., about 30 years ago.
N.74*E.	10.00	Up Smith River on right bank.
S.79*E.	11.00	To meander post.
N.77*E.	5.00	In sec. 25.
N.37*E.	5.00	Leave marsh.
N.7*E.	10.00	

STATE OF OREGON INVENTORY  
 HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS  
 Oregon State Highway Department, Salem 97310

Site Structure is historically significant to: Town \_\_\_\_\_ County        State        Nation       

Site Structure has historical associations with the following themes:

- |                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <u>Aboriginal man</u>       | Transportation/Communication  |
| <u>Maritime exploration</u> | Military/Indian Affairs       |
| <u>Overland exploration</u> | Government                    |
| <u>Fur trade</u>            | Arts and Sciences             |
| Missionary frontier         | Religion/Philosophy           |
| Oregon Trail migration      | Social/Humanitarian movements |
| Mining frontier             | Ethnic immigration            |
| Cattlemen's empire          | Travel/Recreation             |
| Agriculture                 | Conservation                  |
| Commerce/Industry           |                               |
| Development town/city       |                               |
| Other _____                 |                               |

2. County Douglas  
 Town \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name (Common) Smith Massacre Site  
 (Historic) (Same)  
 Original Use Riverbank  
 Present Use Roadbed; Bridge Abutment  
 Present Owner Longview, Portland and Northern Railway Company  
 Date 14 July 1828 Style \_\_\_\_\_  
 Source of Date See References  
 Architect \_\_\_\_\_  
 Builder \_\_\_\_\_

3. CONDITION: Good Fair Poor Re-sited Altered Restored  
 (Site) Open Overgrown Developed Obliterated by Reed  
 NEIGHBORING LAND USE: Commercial/Industrial Residential Blighted Undeveloped  
 SITE ENDANGERED BY \_\_\_\_\_ ACCESSIBLE TO PUBLIC: Yes No  
 On what basis Free Access

4. DESCRIPTION

Frame: Wood Iron Steel  
 Wall cover: Rough-hewn timber  
 Lap/Tongue-in-groove siding  
 Brick/Stone masonry Concrete Glass  
 Stories: Basement 1 2 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Attic  
 Roof: Gable Gambrel Hipped Mansard  
 Dormers \_\_\_\_\_ Cupola Tower Spire Dome  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chimneys: 1 2 3 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Stone Brick  
 Interior trim:  
 Paneling: Milled Carved  
 Wainscot Baseboard Chair-rail  
 Interior Walls: Boards Brick Plaster  
 Ornament: Molded plaster Wood-carved  
 Decorative painting \_\_\_\_\_  
 Original: Fixtures Hardware Furniture  
 Stairs: Central stair-hall Straight flight  
 Geometric Dog-legged Double-return  
 Enclosed Wood Iron  
 Openings: Regular Irregular  
 Attachments: Simple Porch Double Piazza  
 One/Two-story portico Veranda(s)  
 Side/Center ell Wing(s) Shed  
 Outbuildings: Wood shed Bath/Cook house  
 Smoke house Carriage house Barn  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Landscaping: Formal Forecourt Informal  
 Date executed \_\_\_\_\_ By \_\_\_\_\_

5. LOCATION DIAGRAM (Refer to known points)



Indicate North  
 Road or Highway Smith River Road, c. 1/2 mile n.e. of Highway 101  
 Street and No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Township 21 <sup>N</sup> <sub>(S)</sub> Range 12 <sup>E</sup> <sub>(W)</sub> Section 26  
 Recorded by Stephen Dow Beckham  
 For OCCDC and State Parks Division  
 Date 1 August 1974  
 Attached  
 Photo: Available 1771.00



PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION (Comment on original condition, alterations, and notable features)

The site was originally a riverbank near the junction of Smith River and the lower Umpqua. It is present traversed by the Smith River Road which joins Highway 101 about one-fourth mile to the southwest.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Elaborate on the historical theme circled on front of form)

Jedediah Smith, American fur seeker, explorer, and cartographer, led a contingent of his employees and their animals up the Oregon coast in the summer of 1828. Cutting new trails, spying out lands never before visited by Americans, they moved four or five miles each day through the brushy coastal country of southwest Oregon. On July 14, 1828, after an argument with the Kalawatset (Lower Umpqua) Indians, hostilities broke out that led to the death of eleven in the Smith party. The exact site of this event was noted in a surveying trip of 1857-58 by Harvey Gordon of the Oregon Land Office. Four other members of the expedition probably also perished near this site; four, including Smith, escaped.

For many years a wooden historical marker stood on nearby Bolen Island to mark the death of these Americans. Alexander R. McLeod and Hudson's Bay Company men visited the site in the fall of 1828 and recovered part of Smith's property. This visit is also recorded on the marker.

SOURCES CONSULTED (Existing surveys, publications, records)

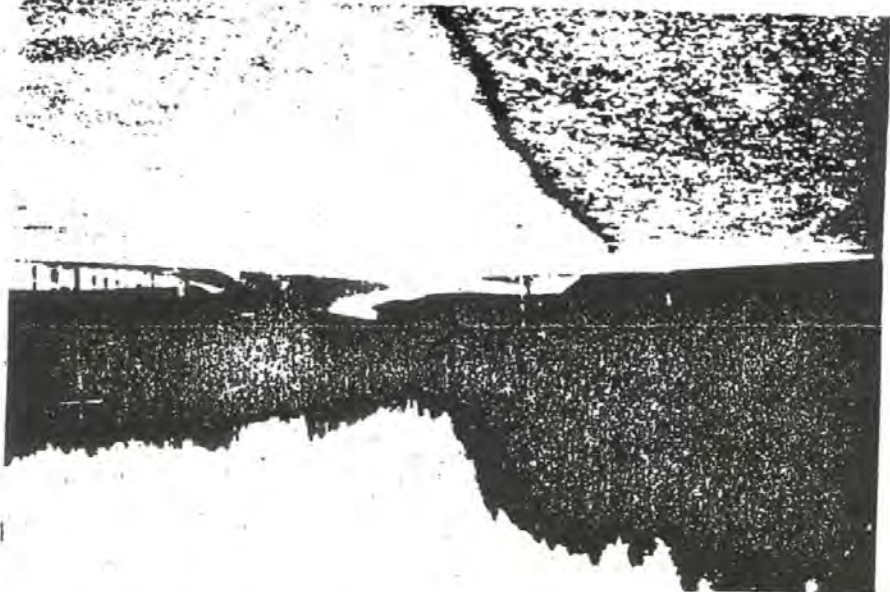
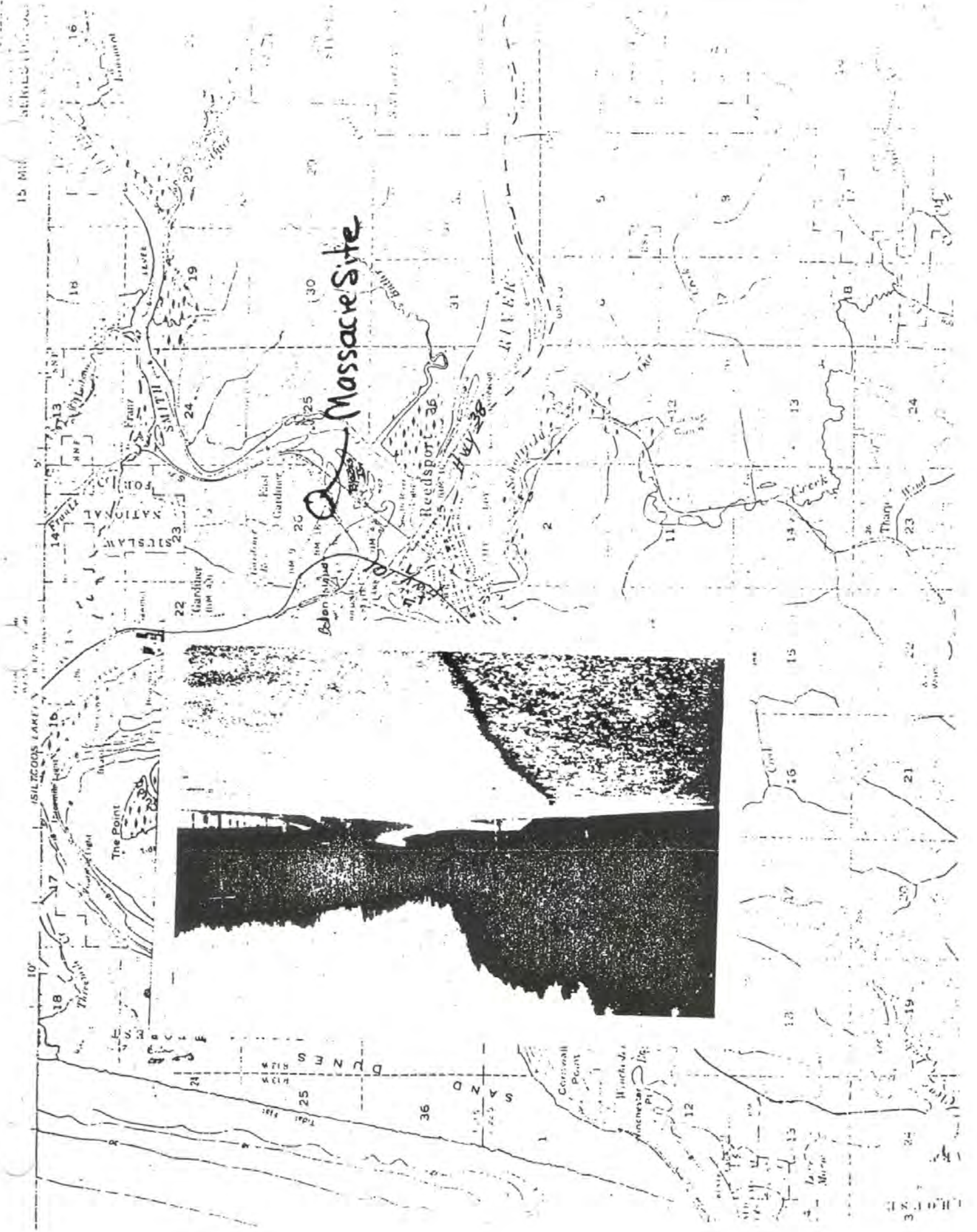
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- Moore, Wert E. "The Umpqua Massacre," Pacific Historian 4 (Nov., 1960).

District-Site Boundaries \_\_\_\_\_

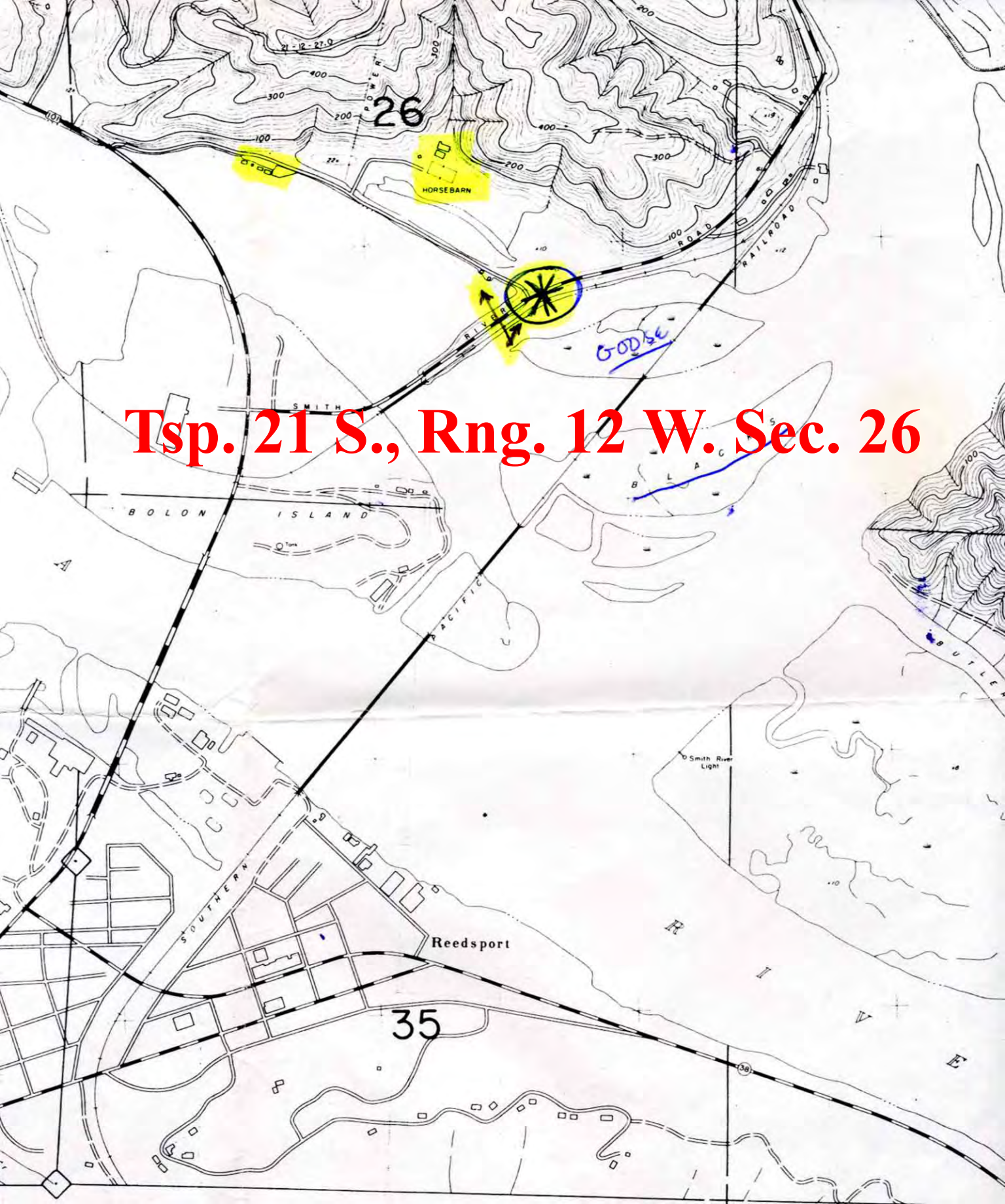
Approximate acreage of site \_\_\_\_\_

Location of current property title(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ County Assessor's Map No. \_\_\_\_\_ attached.







**Tsp. 21 S., Rng. 12 W. Sec. 26**



**1939 Aerial Photo**

**\*1828 Massacre/Burial**





**2002 Aerial Photo**

**\*1828 Massacre/Burial**

