

Beeson-Robison Ditch

By George Kramer

Located south of Talent, in southwest Oregon, the Beeson-Robison Irrigation Ditch diverts water from Wagner Creek to nearby agricultural land. Dug by John Beeson and John Robison, together with David Stearns, the Beeson-Robison Ditch relies on one of the oldest recognized water rights in Oregon.

Welborn Beeson, John's seventeen-year-old son, wrote in his diary on April 10, 1855, that "Robison's Stearnes [*sic*] and Us have entered into a partnership to build a dam and dig a ditch to convey water passed [*sic*] Stearnes and to our pasture for our mutual benefit." Robison's claim was west of Beeson's, and the Stearns claim was farther south. By the end of the month, water was flowing two miles downstream to irrigate the three claims, a part of the transformation of the Wagner Creek Valley into one of southern Oregon's most productive agricultural regions. "Wagner Creek," the *Oregon Sentinel* reported in 1885, "is the garden spot of our valley," providing favorable conditions for growing wheat, melons, peaches, corn, and other crops.

The Beeson-Robison water right was established on Wagner Creek at 1854, about six months after the Wagner Ditch, on the same creek, which is widely recognized as the oldest water right in Oregon. Water rights on Wagner Creek were litigated in 1908 in a dispute with upstream miners. After the adoption of Oregon's first unified water law in February 1909, the State of Oregon began the adjudication process in the Rogue River drainage to establish priority water rights. Welborn Beeson Jr., along with R.H. Purves and H.H. Goddard, successors to the Robison and Stearns properties, filed a claim based on John Beeson's original water right. Their Beeson and Robison Irrigating Ditch company was awarded eighty-five miner's inches, and the right was reconfirmed as having been established in 1854.

The Beeson-Robison Irrigating Ditch Company, incorporated in 1911, operates the ditch for the benefit of its residential and commercial user-owners. In 2017, the concrete dam on the ditch, which was built in about 1911, was removed and replaced by a recontoured streambed that feeds the canal headbox, maintaining the ditch operation while returning upstream fish passage to Wagner Creek.

Sources

Beeson Diary (January 1853-December 1856). Welborn Beeson papers, 1848-1893, Ax 799, Box 1, Folder 10. University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections, Eugene.

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