

Monument: Room with a View

By Julie Mansfield Smith

Settled into a quiet valley on the banks of the North Fork of the John Day River is the small community of Monument, Oregon. The area surrounding what is now Monument was first settled on in 1852. The first Post Office was established in October, 1857 with Prior Wilson as the first Postmaster. That is when the town became an actual dot on the map. The City of Monument itself was incorporated in 1947

Monument is approximately 120 miles from Pendleton, 60 miles from John Day, 225 miles from Portland and 140 miles from Bend. The population is approximately 150, and with the outlying areas this number doubles. Surrounded by junipers and rimrocks, the elevation is roughly 2000 ft. and the climate is arid during the summers. Though considered a desert area, there are many farms and orchards along the river that grow hay and a large variety of fruits. The remaining territory is used for raising various livestock.

During the early dates when the Native American Indians were passing through what is now Monument Valley, they called it "Man-Mint", which is of the Shahaptin language of the lower Columbia tribes. Then in 1869 the name "Monument" was given by one of its first settlers, Isaac Vilott. In a letter written by him, dated June 18, 1869, he stated that he had been here a week at that time and had only seen 5 other people. Mr. Vilott is credited with giving Monument its name. As the story goes it was due to a mountain nearby which resembles a pulpit. The peak is now called Monument Mountain.

Monument school has roughly 57 students combined that are enrolled in pre-school up to grades K-12th. The City of Monument has several city services in an active city council, a city manager, post office, a fire chief, volunteer fire department, an ambulance and volunteer EMT's who are trained through the state and county's ambulance service. Columbia Power is the local electric company housed in the center of town and carry supplies needed for irrigation and pump systems in their warehouse. There is also have a very active Senior Center and invite visitors to stop by on any Tuesday for lunch, which is open to the public. Boyer's Store has fuel and a nice selection of alcohol, tobacco and groceries. This is an area where 4-H and school sports are the highlights. These events are what the locals look forward to in numerous fundraising events found to assist the youth and volunteer services in the area with aid in many of their beneficial projects that help enhance their community and lifestyle. Lots of travelers also stop and enjoy the well-shaded and manicured city park as well as the Cavender Boat Launch and picnic area. This is where floaters can shuttle in or out with their fishing boats, rafts or canoes to enjoy the river activities. The Monument Motel and RV Park has upgraded theme rooms and very comfortable accommodations with kitchenettes available and several RV spaces and now has the North Fork Cafe and coffees open for your dining pleasure. There are several businesses located either out of their homes, in downtown Monument or in the surrounding area and other services which bring the area more comforts closer to home.

The Monument airport is located approx. 1 mile from town. The navigation aids are: VOR, runway dimensions: 2200 feet long, 30 feet wide, runway surface; hard surface gravel/treated, no runway lights, cement run-up pad. Landing is to the North, takeoff is to the South, muddy sides when raining or wet, radio frequency is 1229, runway slopes up to the North 5%. Airport passenger service is none nor freight service. Airplane storage: none

Creatures great and small are scattered north up to 5000 feet elevation on the Umatilla National Forest, all the way back to the river bottom in this valley. Rocky mountain elk and mule deer are well known for coming down from the mountains and feeding in the local alfalfa fields and hay stacks. Cattle and sheep graze on the Century Ranches in this cowboy country, and farmers do as their forefathers did generations before them. The steelhead spawn in the small creeks that feed into the John Day River, along with small mouth bass and trout. Occasionally, beavers, bald eagles, ospreys, badgers, rock chucks, geese, whooping cranes, antelopes, bobcats, cougars, coyotes and even a rattlesnake can be seen. In nature's window, it's a room with a view from every angle.

All in all, the Monument Valley offers spectacular vistas of the surrounding sage and juniper covered basalt rimrocks. Whether you are interested in fishing, hunting, hiking, white water rafting or just seeking a quiet respite from the hectic pace of life, Monument has it, along with the warm hospitality of a small friendly community.