

CAMP WITHYCOMBE  
Southeast Clackamas Road  
Clackamas  
Clackamas County  
Oregon

HABS OR-185  
OR-185

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OR-185

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### CAMP WITHYCOMBE HABS No. OR-185

**Location:** Southeast Clackamas Road, Clackamas, Clackamas County, Oregon

**Date of Construction:** 1903-1938

**Builders:** Oregon National Guard and Works Progress Administration

**Present Owners:** Oregon National Guard

**Present Use:** Military Base and Museum

**Significance:** Camp Withycombe is significant as the site of the earliest organized firing range in Oregon and as a developed landscape with various architectural features, all with the common theme of national defense. The camp has served as a rifle range and training ground for the Oregon National Guard for more than 90 years. Camp Withycombe is one of the oldest National Defense ranges in the western United States, and at the time of its construction it was described as the most "thoroughly modern and fully equipped rifle ranges available." The range was the first on the west coast to employ a 1000 to 1500-foot shooting range, and one of the first in the country with this feature. The camp is also significant for its association with the WPA, which provided improvements to the site during the 1930s as the camp was further developed as a supply depot.

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## I. HISTORY AND SITE DEVELOPMENT

Camp Withycombe, located at the foot of Mt. Talbert southeast of Portland, is a collection of National Defense facilities dating from 1903 to the late-1930s. Camp Withycombe has served as a rifle range and training ground for the Oregon National Guard for more than 90 years. The original 234 acre parcel of land was first named Camp Benson after Governor Frank W. Benson, but was later renamed Camp Withycombe during World War I for James Withycombe, the Governor during that time.

Significant elements of the camp include the rifle range, a 24-station 500 yard facility that first opened in 1909, the Mess Hall (Building No. 200, currently used as the Post Operations Center), built c. 1912, the Storage Building No. 206, built in 1910, the Feeding Barn (Building No. 305), built in 1910, Storage Building No. 308, built 1910, Storage Building No. 310, built 1910, the Supply Building, built 1920, a barn (Building No. 525), built c. 1903, and the Adjutant General's House, built in 1938. Other elements include a Memorial Area and a collection of Quonset huts used for storage. All of the buildings on the site were constructed by the Oregon National Guard with the exception of the barn (builder unknown) and the Adjutant General's House (constructed by the W.P.A.)

Camp Withycombe is significant as the site of the earliest organized firing range in the state and as a developed landscape with various architectural features, all with the common theme of National Defense. Camp Withycombe has served as a rifle range and training ground for the Oregon National Guard since the land was purchased by the U.S. Government in the spring of 1909. The firing range officially opened for the season on May 15, 1909.

Commonly referred to as the Clackamas Rifle Range, the Camp Withycombe rifle range is one of the oldest National Defense ranges in the western United States. At the time it was constructed, the Camp Withycombe range was described as the most "thoroughly modern and fully equipped rifle range available." The site was hailed as "ideal for the purposes of rifle practice and competitions." It was the first range on the west coast to employ a 1000 to 1500-foot shooting range and one of the first in the country with this feature. At that time, only the newest service rifles had a shooting range of this distance. The layout of the range was carefully considered, as wind and sun played an important role in target practice. Mt. Talbert, to the east and north of the range, provided some protection against the wind and helped to minimize any fishtailing effects. The mountain also provided a safe backdrop for the range and the flat land at the base of the mountain provided an ideal flat firing range. The range was cited as having the "perfect environment" upon its opening.

Troops from all over the state came to the town of Clackamas by the Southern Pacific Railroad and then walked to the camp where they stayed for seasonal rifle practice. The range was also the site of annual state target competitions. By 1913, the Oregon Infantry placed third out of forty-three in the competition, a success which was attributed to the excellent rifle range facility at Camp Withycombe.

During World War I, in addition to its function as a rifle range, the camp was used to receive enlistees and as the site where Oregon troops were mobilized at the start of the war. It served as an important headquarters for the National Guard during the war, serving as a central supply depot and as a training center. During subsequent years, newer buildings were constructed to facilitate the needs of the guard.

During the 1930s, the camp developed as a supply depot for the National Guard. Some of the buildings and structures on the camp property, such as the Adjutant General's House (1938) and the rockwork framing the main entrance, were built by the W.P.A. during this period.

The camp still serves as a training facility, supply depot, and equipment repair facility for the National Guard. Until recently, the rifle range was regularly used for target practice by various agencies such as the State Police. Though the rifle range is now closed due to deteriorated baffles and complaints from nearby residential areas, the range retains its original layout with modifications only in the structures which shelter the close range target area. A portion of a rock retaining wall and a stone drinking fountain are located near the range, dating from the W.P.A. era.

## II. SOURCES

Donovan, Sally. Cultural Resource Evaluation of the Proposed Sunrise Corridor Project, Clackamas County, Oregon. (Final Technical Report) Dames and Moore, November 1991.

Norman, James B. Request for Determination of Eligibility: Camp Withycombe. Oregon Department of Transportation, 1994.

Oregon Department of Transportation. Final Section 4(f) Evaluation: Camp Withycombe. February 1998.

## III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The photographic documentation of Camp Withycombe is a result of the Sunrise Corridor Project, which acquired right of way from this historic resource. No prudent or feasible alternatives were identified that would avoid Camp Withycombe. The project constructed a limited access expressway between the Milwaukee Expressway and the intersection of Highways 212 and 214 at Rock Creek. 156 acres of the Camp Withycombe property were acquired by the Oregon Department of Transportation for the construction of the expressway, and all land not used by the project was surplus property, which included the entire area encompassed by the rifle range. As the project isolated the rifle range from the rest of the camp, a new access to the rifle range was constructed via Mather Road, and interpretive signage and this photographic documentation served as partial mitigation for the project's effects to Camp Withycombe.