

Footprints Through the Sands of Time

The Harbor's Turn of the Century Transit System to the North Beach

Byline: Kelly Calhoun, Executive Director/Curator of Museum of the North Beach

In the 1800s, there were no roads on the North Beach, only well-worn paths bushwhacked by local Indians that later became horse and wagon trails.

Prior to the Northern Pacific Railway extending its line to Moclips in June 1905, steamers became an important and integral part of the much-needed transportation system on Grays Harbor. From an 1892 article in the *Aberdeen Herald*: "We can and should have direct steamer communications with Oyhut, and every inducement should be held out to bring the settlers here." A wharf was built at Oyhut that year.

For many years, there were a number of steamers throughout Grays Harbor. These locally built vessels transported mail, supplies, and passengers, or dragged their tows of log rafts to the open waters of the harbor and on to the many lumber mills.

A round trip passenger excursion fare averaged 50 to 75 cents. The steamer *Ranger*, captained by H.A. Benham, took its maiden voyage to the North Beach in August of 1899 when the *Aberdeen Herald* reported, "...In building the new steamer, Captain Benham knew just what was required... and planned accordingly. The *Ranger* is a staunch seaworthy vessel and will be appreciated by the travelers to the North Beach." By 1901, the *Ranger* was making daily trips between Aberdeen and the beach, often to accommodate as many as forty people. Mail, food, and supplies were off-loaded from the steamers and transported up the beach by horse-drawn wagons to settlers and the Quinault Reservation. On one trip, the passengers viewed the unusual sighting of a live whale inside the harbor. Captain Benham took several shots causing the whale to dive out of range.

Many of the passengers were mostly along to participate in crabbing and/or clam digging activities. If successful, they would have huge crab and clam feeds. Some of the passengers from Aberdeen and Hoquiam would bring their bicycles and pedal up and down the ocean beach.

In 1902, the new town of Moclips was platted by founders Dr. Edward Lycan and Robert Chabot. They requested the Northern Pacific Railway extend their line to their "health and pleasure resort." The NPNRY sent a surveying party on the steamer *Ranger*. Also in 1902, an article was written by Charles A. Loughheed, who, as a young boy, was raised with his siblings by their mother at the Copalis Hotel. He wrote, "Our nearest town was Hoquiam, which could only be

reached by traveling along the beach for about nine miles to a place called Oyhut where the steamer Ranger came three times weekly supplying the beach with mail, freight, and passenger service. A trip to town meant we must spend one day and two nights before we could return home."

News from 1905: **January** – Dr. Lycan, founder of Moclips, left Hoquiam on the steamer Ranger for Oyhut en route to Moclips to look after the clearing for the new townsite. **February** – H.D. Chapman of Copalis came up on the steamer Ranger with rheumatism. He went to the Hoquiam General Hospital for medical aid. **October** -- The steamer Ranger has been out of commission due to a broken propeller. Douglas Brothers supplied a new propeller and shaft.

In 1906, Captain Benham sold the Ranger to be used by the Chehalis Boom Company. By this time, the Northern Pacific Railway completed its line from Hoquiam to Moclips. Mills sprang up along the way with rail spurs branching out in all directions through the heavy timber. Passengers, mail, freight, and timber products were now using the new form of transportation on the North Beach. The end of the romantic steamers was soon coming to an end.

(four photos ahead)



Steamer Ranger Plowing the Waters of Grays Harbor



The Ranger at Drydock in Hoquiam

SUMMER TIME CARD

—FOR—

Str. RANGER

(Carrying U. S. Mail.)

—TO—

North Beach

Daily Except Sunday.

IN EFFECT JULY 27, 1903

Lv. Aberdeen, 7:30 a. m.

LEAVE OYHUT

Lv. Hoquiam, 8:30 a. m.

**Tuesday, Thursday
and Saturday, 12 m.**

Arv. Oyhut, 10:30 a. m.

**Monday, Wednesday
and Friday, 11 a. m.**

EXCURSIONS EVERY SUNDAY

Leaving Aberdeen at 8:00; Hoquiam 8:45 a. m.

Returning, leave Oyhut at 4:00 p. m.

Fare, Round Trip, 75 Cts.

Aberdeen Landing, Harbor Dock.

Hoquiam Landing, N. W. L. Co.'s Dock.

For Freight or Passage Apply on Board.

H. A. BENHAM, Master

The Rangers Round Trips to the North Beach Advertisement, 1903



Captain Henry A. Benham on the Right After a Hunting Trip