



Bluegrass Express

The Story of Tygh Valley Bluegrass Jamboree

What Is Your Favorite Festival?

By Mike Hutchins

More than 50 years ago, the Tygh Valley Bluegrass Festival was always held at the end of September each year. The setting is beautiful, the feeling is warm and exciting, and the jamming is always some of the best of the year. After the 50th at the end



Photo by George Spivey

of the season and always took like the hot outdoor bluegrass event, before we all show up for the winter while we wait out the "gray wall of doom" rainy months. Now it has a more personal meaning for me.

During the summer of 1986, I was on a fishing trip to eastern Oregon with my son, and we stopped for lunch at the "Shankle Place" in the "gray town" of Shanks.



The Northwest Bluegrass Boys (Steve Hilde, Mike Fink, Mike Hutchins, Chad Davidson) at Shale Canyon

Oregon. While waiting for our lunch at the food stand, I got into a conversation with a friendly lady working behind the counter. I asked her if the town mentioned had any thought of having a bluegrass show in the town and she asked me questions about

the music and about the folks who were there. I had been playing bluegrass with The Northwest Mountain Boys for a number of years. Then, we "talked" about the food and gave her Steve Hilde's phone number. There was the leader of Northwest, along with Mike Fink, and we always looked for new venues and ways to promote

the music. Not long after I got home from the trip, Steve contacted all of us and we started working on a venue close to Shanks with Don Falkenberg, Markely & Jackson.

In January of 1986, while on our annual winter trip to the mountains in High, Oregon and North Yolla, Washington, The Northwest Mountain Boys stopped in Shanks to do an evening concert. It was a fairly cold night with a half inch of ice on everything and a deep wind blowing. The show

was held at the old Shankle School, which had been built around 1900 but hadn't been done for decades. There were old grammar and arithmetic books still written in chalk on black blackboards. We played without a PA, on a small vintage organ that was lit by a single light socket hanging above a wire over our heads. We set up and played and found a large 150 seat show hall in one of the back rooms. And it up and we were in business! Three with the cold and no outside about 15 or 20 people came out to hear us and the show was a great success. Later that evening, we jammed in the lobby of the hotel across the street before bed, and plans were hatched for a festival later that year in Shanks.

In September of 1986, Northwest went back to Shanks and played at the first

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