Mountain Passage

Pioneers, surveyors, military men, Indians all crossed Cascades via Naches Pass

By NACHES RANGER DISTRICT
SPECIAL TO THE YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

NACHES PASS/George McClellan Opted for Snoqualmie Pass

Today most of the pioneers who passed over Naches Pass during territorial days are now forgotten. The first written record of Naches Pass belongs to members of the Wilkes Expedition who crossed it in 1841. Leaving from their moorage at Steilacoom, Lt. Johnson, the expedition botanist Brackenridge and scouts Pamburn and Charles spent the early summer in the Columbia River basin, crossing Naches Pass.

By 1853 a number of local pioneers, including Andy Burge, crossed Naches Pass. Burge was one of the more colorful characters who assisted some early pass road builders. Supported by citizens groups and the territorial government, these pioneers sought to improve the pass route to accommodate wagons. E.J. Allen and Robert S. Moore, under the supervision of Richard Arnold, are the best-known road builders; they worked there from 1853-54.

The year 1853 stands out as the year Naches Pass hosted a diversity of visitors. During the summer Theodore Winthrop crossed Naches Pass and wrote a book of his adventures.

The Naches Pass Historical Wagon Trail is known today from many sources, but primarily from the journals of James Longmire, who crossed Naches Pass with 36 wagons in the autumn of 1853.

Members of the Longmire wagon train became part of the Pacific Northwest settlement legend when they lowered their wagons over cliffs west of the pass before moving on to Puget Sound. Their trip was immortalized in a fictionalized, though relatively accurate book by Della Gould Emmons, "Nothing In Life Is Free."

Winedfield Scott Ebby, who later settled on Whidbey Island. Because of the increasing Indian hostilities in Central Washington, no wagons crossed Naches Pass after 1854.

During the 1856 Indian War, the Naches Pass trail was used by both Native Americans and the U.S. military. A famous incident occurred along this route near Sawmill Flat when John Edgar, a military scout, successfully warned the military of advancing Native American warriors.

After the war, Naches Pass was used as a way to drive stock between the Yakima Valley and Puget Sound. Andy and Milt Burge, pioneers in the Yakima Basin, were probably the most famous of those who drove stock over the pass after 1860.

Today, Naches Pass can be visited throughout the summer on foot, horseback or motorized vehicles. The trail is a designated four-wheel drive route and is not suitable for passenger cars or 4x4 vehicles. During winter the trail is a popular snowmobile route.

Information about the trail is available at the Naches Ranger Station on Naches Pass.

YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

2C • Thursday, November 5, 1988