

NACHES PASS TRAIL HALL ACCT.

Nancy Irene Hall, "The Naches Pass Trail," In the Shadow of the Mountain. Enumclaw, Washington: Courier-Herald Publishing Company, 1983, p. 3-7.

In 1845, the first American settlers arrived and took up land adjacent to the Hudson's Bay Company's English holdings. The entire area fell into joint ownership between England and the American settlers, who insisted on their right to settle on the lands as well.

The movement of the new settlers caused strife in the area and finally on June 15, 1846, the United States and England settled their differences with England relinquishing its claim on Puget Sound.

The Americans were here to stay. On August 14, 1848, Oregon Territory was formally organized and the White and Green River watersheds fell under the jurisdiction of the newly-formed Oregon Territorial Government for the next five years. During those few years, substantial changes occurred in the country which the two rivers traversed.

What started the excitement was a new land law which went into effect that stirred many Americans. Called the "Donation Land Claim" of 1850, it commonly was known as the "Oregon Land Law". President Millard A. Fillmore signed it into law on September 27, 1850. Some of the settlers who arrived on Puget Sound before 1850 had heard of the act before Congress passed it and were banking on the fact it would become law and not just talk.

These early settlers were already on the scene and most had picked out choice land in the lower Puget Sound and were living on it. Other folks on the other side of America had an enormous distance to travel to take up claims on the free land. They prepared for the long overland journey in a hurry before the law went out of effect.

The "Donation Land Law" stated that "Every male settler over 18 years of age who was a citizen or had declared his intention to become a citizen, who had become a resident of the Territory before December 1, 1850 and who had lived on the land for four years could be granted 320 acres of land. If he was married, his wife could also fare up 320 acre; in her name.

The act also provided that any male settler over 21 years of age, who was a citizen

or had declared his intention to become one, and who settled in the Territory between December 1, 1850, and December 1, 1853, was entitled to 160 acres, and if married, an additional 160 acres for his wife. This same provision was made for a male settler who became 21 or who married after his arrival in the Territory.

An act of February 14, 1853 extended the provision of the 1850 act until December 1, 1855. It also permitted a person who had claimed land to purchase it for \$1.25 an acre after two years residence. In 1854 this residence requirement was reduced to one year.

December 1, 1855, marked the utmost limit of the new law and it was void after that date. How many wagon loads of settlers started across the dusty plains because of this law, it was just what Oregon Territory needed to get its feet off the ground.

The white settlers were in a fervor of excitement over the land give away and so were the native Indians, but their excitement was of another nature. It seemed in all the hurry of encouraging settlement, Congress had neglected to make any treaty or provision for the native Indians who considered the land the settlers were taking to be their own.

They had been told many times the "Great White Father" back East was going to settle up with them, but all they saw were more and more settlers moving in all around them.

Homes were going up and trees were coming down. Fences laced the lowland areas cutting the Indians off from long established food gathering areas. They were keeping quiet, but they were not pleased. In every other similar territory, the Indian claim had been extinguished before any settlers were allowed to take the land. Not so, in Oregon, the settlers had been there since 1845 and no settlement was in the statutes.

In the middle of all this land claim furor two new events happened in quick succession. The first was on March 2, 1853, when the President signed the bill creating Washington Territory. Once again the White River changed hands with the stroke of a pen. The people in the newly formed Territory wanted more settlers to come and take their place beside them in the Sound area.

At this point the Indians far outnumbered the white population, which faced a major obstacle to fast settlement. There simply was no road. The incoming emigrant from the East Coast to the Puget Sound region usually ended up in

California or Oregon.

The first talk of a road came from the military who were eager to connect Fort Steilacoom to Fort Walla Walla. One of the routes to be surveyed was the route over Naches Pass where the Indians had been crossing for centuries. Captain George B. McClellan was sent to over the mountain passes. He gave a thumbs down signal on the passes "wintery weather", and the military started to drag its feet on building the appropriated road.

This news roused the settlers of the Puget Sound into action. They had to have a road now as the trains of new settlers were on their way and were laboring under the misconception there was a new road opened over Naches Pass. The settlers put their heads together and decided to make their own road across the mountains to the East. They began contributing money, tools and food stuff.

Even the Indians of the Nisqually helped out. Chief Leschi gave 12 horses and sent his brother Queimutte as their guide. Their mother was a Yakima Indian and they knew the route over Naches Pass well.

So armed with axes, saws and tools of various types, each man on a horse and leading a mule laden with goods behind, started out from Fort Steilacoom on June 10, 1853. Another crew left Olympia on July 19 headed East and were going to make the road from the Yakima side toward the summit of Naches procrastinated and little was done.

They gave up and returned to Olympia on August 20. This left the little westside crew alone in the mountain.

That crew was under the direction of John Allen. They had taken the advise of John Edgar, and old Hudson's Bay Company man who was married to an Indian woman. He told them to follow the old Klickitat Indian trail over Naches Pass, as it would be the easiest route to follow.

The crew started cutting road at Boise Creek on the 15th of June in 1853. They worked at it for the next three and a half months. They cut, hacked, sawed and sweated along the White River, then started up the Greenwater River toward the top of the pass.

An excerpt from an account by Robert Moore gives an idea how difficult the conditions were the men labored under. "When we reached Letate Mountain we

ran short of provisions. A.J. Burge, our packer, having left half of his pack a short distance east of Boise Creek in a large hollow log, started after provisions.

"Two of his mules were lame and unable to carry their loads when we reached camp. He returned with sound ones for the provisions left behind. When he reached the cache he found that the bears had found the provisions, hauling out sacks of beans and rice, tearing open the sacks and scattering the beans right and left with their paw . The sugar they had consumed.

"Burge then turned the mules out on the White River prairie and returned to camp for those he left. When he got back to where he had left the mules, he was two days in finding them, so that by the time he got to Steilacoom and back, the laborers had reached the point of starvation. In fact, all who carried revolvers had taken up their belt three or four holes. "

They reached the summit about the first of September and then returned to Boise Creek and commenced cutting the road in the direction of John Montgomery's. "About the 4th or 5th of October, while we were camped at the Puyallup River opposite the present Van Ogle place, at midnight there came across the river a loud Hello. We were somewhat startled, for we did not know of any whites being in our rear. When we answered, we were told there were 70 wagons with emigrants behind and many were short of provisions.

"Having known the pangs of hunger ourselves, we told the man to come across to camp. This man was Mr. Akins. He said he was one of the James Biles Company. All hands turned out and shook hands with the first emigrant, who had crossed the Naches Wagon Road."

So the determined little 30-man crew had pulled it off and managed to clear enough road to allow a wagon train to get through into the beautiful Puget Sound area. It had been a formidable task. The first road was established in the upper White River area and those first emigrants must have been overjoyed to see the road, no matter how crude. It had saved their lives. They had not had it easy traveling over the road and it had taken all of their pioneer ingenuity to come up with the answers to some of the quotations on how to continue when they reached the "cliff" area.

They had to kill some sickly oxen and make ropes from their hides in order to let their wagons down, but they kept on. Those settlers had a code. No down-and-outers were welcome on the wagon trains. To go to Oregon it took a substantial

outlay of cash before going over the trail.

They had to have a wagon, livestock and foodstuff. Many miscellaneous tools were required to make repairs along the way. The men and women who came were a sturdy lot and were the equal of America's finest pioneer stock.

After they were found by the road crew they were led down to the Boise Creek Prairie and their hungry stock put out to graze on the tall prairie grass. The people went to the White River prairie to rest before the journey on to Fort Steilacoom.

Three weeks later, the Whitworth Train came over the pass in a storm and had to be rescued.

The trail had served it's purpose . Wagon loads of settlers had successfully made the arduous journey from east Of the Cascades safely to Puget Sound.