

# Mountain Passage

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

By NACHES RANGER DISTRICT  
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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 35 wagons in the autumn of 1853.

Members of the Longmire wagon train became part of 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."

Today most of the pioneers who passed over Naches Pass during territorial days are now forgotten.

Hudson Bay records indicate that as early as 1835 Native American trappers were crossing the Naches Pass bound for Fort Steilacoom. By 1840, mountain men Pierre Pamburn of Fort Walla Walla, Cornelius Rodgers of the Whitman Mission, and Pierre Charles and Peter Brecier of the Hudson Bay Company had already crossed Naches Pass. In 1840 Chief Ow-hi was trading for cattle in Seattle, bringing his stock back to Yakima via Naches Pass.

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 Basin after crossing Naches Pass.

By 1853 a number of local pioneers, including Andy Burge, crossed the Naches Pass. Burge was one of the more colorful characters who assisted some early pass road builders. Supported by citizens groups and the territor-

ial 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 adven-

## NACHES PASS/George McClellan Opted for Snoqualmie Pass

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tures, "By Canoe and Saddle." Winthrop, for whom the North Cascades town of Winthrop was named, died in the Civil War.

More famous than Winthrop was George Brinton McClellan. McClellan, an officer during the Mexican War, along with I.I. Stevens, was called to the Washington Territory to map out mountain passes for the Pacific Railroad survey. McClellan spent the summer of 1853 trying to reach the Naches and finally determined Snoqualmie Pass was a more viable crossing. McClellan was the first Union general in the Civil War and the originator of the famous McClellan cavalry saddle. A footnote to McClellan's difficulties crossing Naches Pass was penciled in area history when a man named Tinkham, also working for Stevens on the railroad survey, crossed Naches Pass in 10 days in January 1854.

In October 1853 the Biles Wagon Train branched off from the Oregon Trail near Walla Walla and crossed Naches Pass. The 36 wagons traversed the Naches river 68 times before reaching the summit. James Longmire's

diary is the most popular account of wagons crossing Naches Pass, and because of his prominence, the wagon train became known as the "Longmire Wagon Train."

Little evidence remains of other crossings but a smaller party crossed Naches Pass shortly after the Longmire train in 1853. Because it was late in the year, snows in the mountains prevented the wagons from navigating the pass so they were left at the Ahtanum Mission. Members of the train packed up what they could on stock and made it across Naches Pass, returning in the spring to retrieve the rest of their belongings.

Several more parties crossed in 1854, notably the wagon train of

Winfield Scott Ebby, who later settled on Whidbey Island. Because of the increasing Indian hostilities in Central Washington, no wagon trains 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.

Edgar, for whom Edgar Rock was named, was later killed during the Indian uprisings and his companion, Andy Burge, was wounded.

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 driveway and is not suitable for passenger cars or widetrack four-wheel drive vehicles. During winter the trail is a popular snowmobile route.

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

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