

NACHES PASS TRAIL SPRING ACCT.

102 hikes, p. 110-111.

One-way trip from east side 9 1/2 miles

Hiking time 5 hours

High point 4900 feet

Elevation gain 1500 feet

Walk the pioneer wagon route across Naches Pass and see blazes cut by emigrants, logs they rolled out of the way, dirt they shoveled, and trees they chopped. Unfortunately, you will see more tracks of vandals than pioneers, because the Forest Service inexcusably permits motorbikes and jeeps on the route. These adventurers seeking a mechanical challenge have obliterated much of the pioneers' trail which should have been preserved for more respectful travelers with an appreciation of history.

This may be the only pioneer trail left in the 48 states that hasn't been paved over or bulldozed. Yet Weyerhaeuser has cut the trail with roads at four places, the Forest Service at two others, and the Forest Service has shortened the trail on the east side.

Highlights can be enjoyed in a day hike to Government Meadows from the west side, but for a better appreciation of the trek of 1853, start from the east side, camp overnight at Government Meadows (where the pioneers spent months), and next morning descend the west side, over "The Cliff" where wagons were lowered on rawhide ropes. In either case, allow plenty of time for leisurely exploration.

For a day hike from the west, drive US 410 east from Enumclaw 20 miles to a log-trestle overpass, turn left on road No. 70, and go 8 miles to the Greenwater River bridge. About a quarter mile beyond turn right on a spur road, cross Pyramid Creek, and park, elevation 2560 feet. The trail (track) takes off up the timbered ridge to the left. Ascend three and a half miles through forest to Government Meadows, 4800 feet.

For an overnight hike, leave one car at the west trail head and drive a second over Chinook Pass and 23.5 miles east from the summit. Turn left 14 miles on Little Naches road No. 197, then turn right on road No. 1923 and go .3 mile to the trail head, elevation 3200 feet.

The first wagon train crossed Naches Pass in 1853. One or two others followed, but the route proved so difficult it was abandoned. In 1910 the Forest Service reopened the way for foot and horse travel. To "celebrate" the centennial of the first crossing, a group of jeepsters hacked and gouged over the pass in 1953, and since then the trail has been heavily used by motorbikes and four-wheel vehicles which have rutted the forest.

Thanks to the vehicles, the trail is impossible to miss, but finding remnants of the original wagon road requires imagination. Two clues are useful:

For one, the pioneers took the line of least resistance by detouring around big trees and logs; the jeepsters use chain saws to make a more direct line, and thus in many places the old track is several

hundred feet from the jeep ruts and relatively wellpreserved. For a second clue, the wagons were top-heavy and to save shoveling on side hills the pioneers frequently followed the ups and downs of a ridge crest; particularly on the west side, jeeps have contoured around some ridge tops.

In six miles from the east trail head, reach the wooded, 4900-foot summit of Naches Pass, and in another 3/4 mile the Pacific Crest Trail junction and campsites at Government Meadows. The next day cross six roads on the way down; at 1/2 mile from the west trailhead descend "The Cliff," where pioneers lowered their wagons.