

The Old Trail from The Dalles to The Basket Fort on The Naches

(apparently by Wallace Wiley, who wrote the companion piece, following)

When I was asked to write the old trail, I did not realize what a changes had taken place in the last 72 years, on this old trail. There were no roads built in the valley until 1856. The miners and prospectors had followed the Indian trails. In 1854 Gov. Stevens tried to make treaties with the Indians and put them on reservation. This caused an Indian War with Kamakin as Chief. There were no settlers here at that time. But the country was full of prospectors and travelers. A number of these were killed by the hostiles, including Agent Bolin [sic] of The Dalles.

Col. George Wright, U.S.A. with 1100 men and Col. Steptoe with 500, and Col Cornelius with 350 Oregon Volunteer, were sent against them. My wife's father Isaac Wingard was in Col. Cornelius' regiment. They chased the Indians from The Dalles to B.C.

It was found necessary to build a road for transportation of their wagons and war supplies. The contract for building the road from The Dalles to the Basket Fort, which is now Eschbach Park, was given to Capt. Dent, was finished in the spring of 1856.

My father and family came over the road in 1868, to the Ahtanum, as all immigrants from the Willamette and Lower Columbia.

The Soldiers built a block-house in Klickitat one at Fort Simcoe and had a big camping ground on the Wiley boys' ranch on the Ahtanum two miles west of Wiley City. Here they grazed and recruited their extra stock.

On reaching Eschbach Park on the Naches, Col. Wright threw up earth works and built the Basket Fort. In May and June 1856 there were about two thousand troops and teamsters at the Basket Fort, waiting for the river to go down so that they could go on north. They used the Indian trails from here on.

This trail crossed over some very rough and mountainous country over the Simcoe Mountains. There was one long hill called 13 miles, so steep that coming down it with a wagon the driver would have to drag a tree behind his wagon for two miles. I remember when father cut a green tree and fastened it to his wagon us boys had great sport riding in the tree top down the hill.

This road controlled all of the Indian resources on this side of Columbia, the Celilo fishery, the big Camas prairie, at Mt. Adams, huckleberries.

The Ahtanum fish traps (Mesrodis) which were on the south side of Wiley ranch.

The best ford on the Naches river altho they finally built a bridge there when the water went down. The old trail commanded the Wenas, Kittitas, Wenatchee and Okanogan.

This fort was garrisoned for about 2 years. Then Fort Simcoe was staffed.

When the Basket Fort was abandoned, a large number of wagons and camp out fits were condemned and burned at the Ahtanurn camp.

In later years all the pioneer blacksmiths came there and gathered up the irons. 35 years later when I bought that camp site, I ruined a good many axes on old irons, over grown with brush. I can't begin to tell you all the families who followed this old Basket Fort trail. But a few of the early ones were Isaac Hays, who besides raising a large family, hauled beets and made sorghum. **** Thorpe, milked Holstein cows, Powells were brick masons, Quesnells were farmers. Armour Eschbach came a little later, but got the loveliest spot of all, The Eschbach Park.

THE BASKET FORT

By

Wallace Wiley

We have unveiled a monument or Marker in commemoration of the Basket fort and the trails leading to and from it. This was first called Fort Naches.

The trail is pre-historic. It was the main artery of commerce used by the Indians from B. C. to Mexico, It passes through the strip of country lying between the Cascade Mountains and the Rocky Mountains crossing the Columbia in several places. It has hieroglyphic paintings on high rock cliffs, at several places, showing that a prehistoric race traveled this trail. We will confine ourselves to the part that passes through Washington; starting from the Dalles, Oregon, it passes through Klickitat, Yakima, Kittitas, Chelan, and Okanogan Counties a distance of about two hundred and fifty miles.

The Basket Fort was built on the Naches River, about 12 miles Northwest of Yakima, which is now known as The Eschbach park. It is about half way from either end. Trails branch from this point going to Cowiche, Tieton, Upper Naches, Wenas, Lower Yakima and Moxee. It crosses barren hills, wooded spurs of the Cascade Mountains, valleys with beautiful streams of water and some of the most fertile lands of the State. But the trails greatest usefulness was in giving immigrants a road to come into the valleys of Klickitat, Toppenish, Yakima, Naches, Kittitas, Wenatchee, Methow and Okanogan.

United States Troops first used this trail and improved it in 1855, and in 1856 Col. Wright in command of federal troops engaged in the Indian War of '55 and '6. The Basket Fort was built by Col. Wright in 1856 and was known as Fort Naches. This Fort took the name of the Basket Fort later by the settlers on account of it being built of willow baskets filled with earth.

Splawn's "Kamican" tells in it that this fort was large enough to hold one or two companies of soldiers and all of their stores. It was protected by earth works and rifle pits, and in connection with this Fort on June 8, 1856, Col, Wright completed a bridge across the river, and on June 11 the eight companies of soldiers passed over and marched nine miles to Wenas. Col. Wright said in referring to the Basket Fort; "This Depot will enable us to move unencumbered by a. large pack train."

In 1856 Capt, Dent was given a contract to improve the trail. It was built in an oval shape like an egg, and was surrounded by the soldiers, consisting of eleven companies under Col, Wright, five under Col, Steptoe and a regiment of 350 of Oregon-Washington volunteers under Col. Cornelius. Mrs. Wiley's father Isaac Wingard, was in Col. Cornelius' regiment.

The Basket fort was only used one summer and no other buildings were erected here.

Col. Wright returning from the North, established Fort Simcoe August 1856, deeming it a better site for a military post. He moved everything to Fort Simcoe, and the material for the officers quarters was shipped from Boston around Cape Horn and hauled over this trail to the new Fort Simcoe.

Site of old Fort Naches, also known as the Basket Fort, on Naches River near Eschbach, approximately 3 miles S. of the town of Naches (Highway 410) on the S. Naches Road, about 1 mile west of Eschbach Park on the Naches River.



Close up of replaced monument, contributed by “Mi-Hi,” historical council. Old bronze monument was knocked down by construction a few years ago.



Marker Gone But Basket Fort Trail Still [text missing]

Route Was Much Used

By Dan Sanford

When snow has fallen on the Yakima Valley, drifts will sometimes form vague outlines of the Basket Fort Trail. Winding in and out over the Tieton and Ahtanum highlands towards the lower valley, this beaten path disappears again when spring brings the region's flora back to life.

The natives of this country used the trail for a long time before the United States soldiers used it in their march into the Northwest more than 100 years ago.

The place where they crossed the Naches River—about one mile west of the present Eschbach Park0151 was marked with a monument by the Yakima Historical Society in 1939.

The historical setting would be worth inspection, but there is nothing there to see, except fruit orchards and the H. P. Horning ranch.

During road construction or engineering projects some time ago in the area, the society's concrete marker was knocked aside.

The marker's inscribed plaque fell off during the commotion and was recovered by Mrs. Ann Smith who at that time lived nearby on the Old Naches Road. Mrs. Smith, who is now curator at the Yakima Valley Museum, is saving the plaque in hopes someone will use it and put the historical site back in order.

Miners were probably the first white men to use the Basket Fort Trail. Setting out from The Dalles Ore., they could follow the road up to Fort Simcoe, over the Ahtanum, through the Cowiche Canyon and over what many call today, the Tieton high-[text missing]

The trail forks in Naches—one path continues though the Naches pass and the other goes to Colville and the Okanogan area. This early transportation rout is sometimes called the Eel or Klickitat Trail.

Col. Wright came here with the purpose of dealing with the Indians and determining a location for a fort. In the spring and [lost text] bench of earth near an impassible part of the river. The



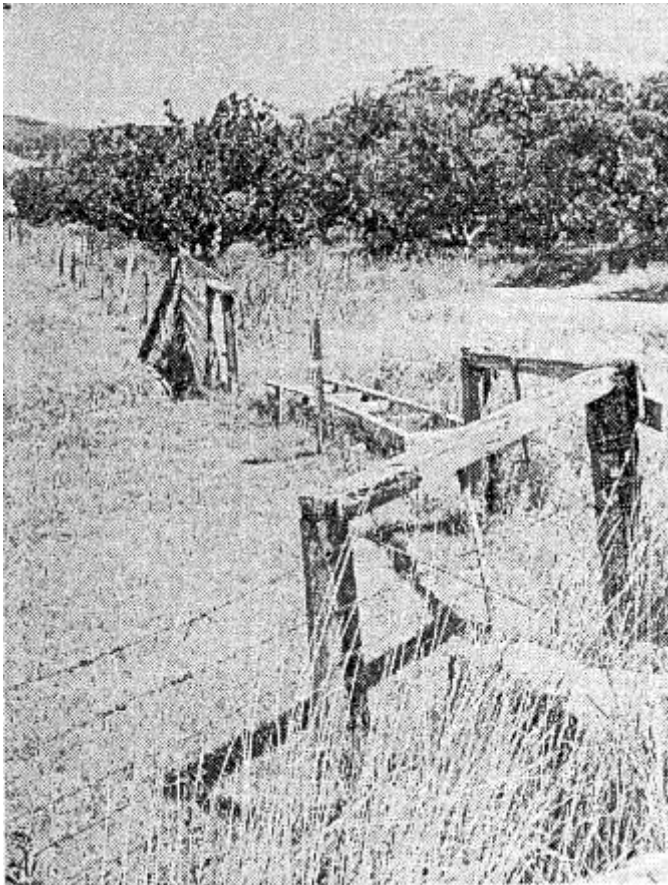
AWAITS FIXING—The plaque which once hung on the Basket Fort Trail historical marker is displayed by Mrs. Ann Smith, curator at the Yakima Valley Museum. Mrs. Smith recovered the plate when the marker was damaged.

river in its torrential fury over the years has changed the landscape and left the basket fort indistinguishable. But some speculate that Wright's horses grazed on the meadows that have remained in the area.

Wright's entry into Yakima was -[text missing] wanted war and in anger left the council taking 200 warriors, half of the forces, with him.

Then, as A. J. Splawn relates in his book "Ka-mi-akin," Ow-hi sent this message to Wright:

"Ow-hi is glad to quit fighting. His people are tired and poor. It seems when he drinks water or eat food it tastes of blood. He is [lost last lines at bottom of page on copy] ...humiliate themselves before this pale-faced chief from a distant -[text missing] the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River should be given [illegible] to the Indians as it is no -[text missing]



BASKET FORT MARKER PUSHED ASIDE— Nearly hidden by reeds and grass, the historical market of the Basket Fort Trail, right foreground, on the Old Naches Road has been abandoned. Near this place the ancient Indian trail descends to cross the Naches River after stretching over the Ahtanum and Tieton highlands. In 1856 Co. George Wright entered the Valley to deal with the Indians and built a fort close to the river, northeast of this marker in the direction the fence trails in the background. The marker was knocked over during construction in the area and now lies near the entrance to the H. P. Horning Ranch, one mile west of Eschbach Park.