

NACHES PASS

Far up in the Cascade Range, at an elevation of 4,988 feet, lies historic Naches Pass. From Pyramid Peak, on the north side, may be seen Mount Rainier to the southwest, rising in all its grandeur above the surrounding country, while off toward the southeast the canyon of the Naches River extends on to the great Yakima Valley. Four counties of the state of Washington meet at the Pass—Kittitas on the northeast, Yakima on the southeast, Pierce on the southwest, and King on the northwest.

Mountain ranges are barriers to the advancement of railroads, and it is only by boring tunnels or laying tracks over the pass, if Providence has been thoughtful enough to provide them at not too high an altitude, that their routes may be extended from one side to the other. Through the Cascade Range, in this state, are twelve main passes, the lowest of which, Snoqualmie, with an elevation of 3,004 feet, was chosen by the Milwaukee Road; while the next lowest, Stevens, with an elevation of 4061 feet, was the choice of the Great Northern. Instead of having used one of the remaining passes, the Northern Pacific Railroad made its way from one side of the Range to the other by means of the Stampede Tunnel, about eleven miles from Easton. Naches Pass is the fifth lowest, while Chinook Pass, selected for the highway across the Cascades, ranks ninth, with an elevation of 5440 feet.

If the Cascade Range was such a hindrance to the on-coming railroads, what must it have been to the emigrants! No wonder that those coming from the east to settle in the Puget Sound country embarked on long sea voyages around the Horn, or came across the plains by wagon trains until they reached the Columbia, then went by boat down the river and up one of its tributaries, then perhaps overland for some distance, and possibly a trip on some portion of the Sound to their destinations.

Thus it was that in September, 1853, when the leaders of a certain emigrant party decided to leave the Columbia and reach Puget Sound by crossing the Cascade Range, they were attempting something that no wagon train had accomplished before. When at last thirty-four of the thirty-six wagons were safely down the steep incline at the western end of Naches Pass, and were wending their way onward, carrying the families that were destined to do so much

for this region, a big event had taken place. The first wagon train had crossed the Cascades.

In more recent times, attention was again focused upon the Pass, when a highway across the Cascades in that region was under consideration. The road was finally built, not through Naches Pass, but through Chinook Pass, about twenty miles south of the former. As this new highway extends for a considerable distance along the Naches River and through the town of Naches, it may be referred to as the Naches Highway, but obviously it has no claim to the name Naches Pass Highway, which one sometimes hears applied to it. In 1932, sixty miles of the Naches Highway, including the park entrance, became known as the Mather Memorial Parkway, named in honor of Stephen T. Mather, first Director of the United States National Park Service.

According to Professor Edmond S. Meany in his *Origin of Washington Geographic Names*, Naches is an Indian name, applied to the Pass, to the river having its source in that locality and flowing into the Yakima, to the canyon, to the valley, and to a small town on the river, about sixteen miles northwest of Yakima. The word has been spelled in numerous ways, among them 'Nachchese' in Winthrop's *The Canoe and the Saddle*, published after his journey in 1853; 'Wachess' by J. Patton Anderson in James G. Swan's *North-west Coast*, in 1857; 'Nacheess' on James Tilton's *Map of Part of Washington Territory*, 1859. The form now in use appeared for the first time on Preston's *Map of Oregon and Washington West of the Cascade Mountains*, 1856. The Wilkes Expedition in 1841, called the Naches River the 'River Spipen.'

As to the meaning of the word "Naches," the writer has found only one explanation—that given by Henry Charles Sicade, of Indian birth, and living near Tacoma. In a letter dated June 23, 1929, replying to an inquiry which had been sent to him by Benjamin L. Harvey of Tacoma, concerning the origin, Mr. Sicade writes as follows: "I was not sure of the meaning of the word or name 'Natchez.' So I hunted an Indian woman, quite old, whose father and mother came from that section of our state and could talk their language or dialect. She says the name was of two words, 'Naugh,' or a more guttural word, means rough, roaring or turbulent; 'chez' means water or waters. When I see you I can better pronounce the guttural words, now used as one word, 'Natchez.'"

Among the names associated with the early history of Naches

Pass are those of Pierre C. Pambrun of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Walla Walla and Cornelius Rogers of the Whitman Mission, who are credited in the *Oregon Spectator* of May 12, 1849, with an exploration as early as 1840. Other early visitors to the Pass were Pierre Charles and Peter Brecier, a relative of Simon Plamondon of the Hudson's Bay Company and of the Cowlitz Valley. The two men later became guides for Lieutenant Robert E. Johnson's party from the United States Exploring Expedition.

In 1841, Lieutenant Johnson was sent across Naches Pass by Commander Charles Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-42, for the purpose of reporting on the country east of the mountains. He left the first authentic record of a trip across the Pass. Concerning preparations at the headquarters, Fort Nisqually, for the lieutenant's departure, Commander Wilkes wrote in his Diary for May 12: "Orders given to Mr. Johnstown (Lieutenant Robert E. Johnson) to prepare for an excursion into the interior. Also to Dr. Pickering, T. W. Waldron of the *Porpoise*, Mr. Brackenridge and the Sergeant." Other entries from day to day tell of the preparations of the party. On the 18th, Wilkes wrote: "There is no end to the delay. I hope to see them off tomorrow."¹ They left on the 19th. On July 16th, Wilkes records:² "Johnson's party returned. All well."

In his *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, published in 1856, Commander Wilkes gives a detailed account of Lieutenant Johnson's trip. The party consisting of Lieutenant Johnson, Mr. Pickering, Mr. Waldron, Mr. Brackenridge, a sergeant of marines and a servant, left Fort Nisqually on May 19th. On the following day, the guides, Pierre Charles and Peter Bercier, joined them and all set out for the mountains. Crossing the Puyallup and the Stehna, they followed an Indian trail.

On the 26th, they arrived at Little Prairie, where they decided to wait a day so that their horses could have good grass. As they wished to find out if horses could go over the Pass and at the same time carry forward some of the loads to save the horses, Mr. Waldron and Pierre Charles went ahead with the Indians who each carried a load of about fifty pounds. Lieutenant Johnson remained in camp for the purpose of taking observations, while Dr. Pickering and Mr. Brackenridge accompanied the party as far as the snow-line. They camped on a prairie about two-and-a-half acres in extent.

1 "Wilkes Diary," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI. (1925)

2 "Wilkes Diary," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVII. (1926)

Toward the close of the next day, messengers coming from Mr. Waldron who had reached the summit and was proceeding down the east side to camp at the snow-line, reported snow ten feet deep and seemed doubtful about the possibility of getting the horses over. But Lieutenant Johnson was determined to go, and set out. Late in the morning they met the Indians and Pierre Charles who seemed more hopeful about getting the horses over. In the late afternoon they reached a good camping place. On the 29th they departed early in the morning while the snow was firm. As the horses did not sink deeply in the snow, the party was able to make a quick ascent. They passed over a series of low elevations until they arrived at the summit, from which position Mount Rainier was visible. The altitude, according to Lieutenant Johnson's barometer, was 5092 feet.

While ascending the western slope, it was noted that the pines were very scrubby, in sharp contrast to those on the summit, which towered to a height of eighty feet, with branches all at the top. At the summit was a plain about a mile long and half a mile wide. The distance over the top was about five miles. With few exceptions, the horses reached the east side of the mountains, but like the Indians they were in an exhausted condition. The Indians were paid off and the two that were returning to Nisqually were given botanical specimens to take to the Fort. The party which had gone ahead on foot, consisting of Mr. Waldron, Pierre Charles and several Indians, camped over night at the snow-line.

The summit was found to be an open space of about twenty acres, surrounded by a heavy forest of spruce. The party was inconvenienced by breaking through the snow, but at no time did it become dangerous. About eight miles of snow were passed over, and in the middle of the afternoon they reached the Spipen or Naches River where they camped.

Lieutenant Johnson's party proceeded on to Yakima, Fort Okanogan, Grand Coulee and Spokane House, exploring and collecting specimens and information before returning to Fort Nisqually, the headquarters.

Among the interesting narratives of members of the emigrant party which crossed Naches Pass in 1853 are those of James Longmire, one of the leaders, David Longmire, his son, and George H. Himes. At the time, these two were boys a little over nine years old.

James Longmire's account³ was prepared several years ago by Mrs. Lou Palmer, from interviews with him. He tells of starting

3 "Narrative of James Longmire," *Wash. Hist. Quart.*, Vol. 23, pp. 47-60 and 138-150.

from his home at Shawnee Prairie, Indiana, with his wife and four children, John Moyer and Joseph Day, March 6, 1853; of the arrival at St. Joseph on the Missouri, where he bought eight yoke of oxen and a large quantity of supplies; of the meeting at Kaneshville (now Council Bluffs) with Mr. Van Ogle, John Lane, and Asher Sargent and his family; of their journeying on together, crossing the Rocky Mountains at South Pass, according to the instructions given in *Horn's Guide for Emigrants*. Several days after crossing the mountains the party was increased by the families of Tyrus Himes, father of George H. Himes, and others.

James Longmire's first mention of Naches Pass is contained in the following: "At Grande Ronde a happy surprise awaited us. Nelson Sargent, whose father was in our party, had met John Lane, who had arrived in advance of us, with the welcome news that a party of workmen had started out from Olympia and Steilacoom to make a road for us through Naches Pass over the Cascades, ours being the first party of emigrants to attempt a crossing of the Columbia north of the Dalles."

After going fifty miles further to the Umatilla River, the party left the emigrant trail with thirty-six wagons, struck out for Fort Walla Walla, a trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, fifty miles away. In due time they reached Fort Walla Walla and after a few set-backs, arrived at Wells Springs. There Nelson Sargent, who had gone in advance with others, looking for a good road, returned with the news that after crossing the canyon they would have a good road, and that they had seen the trail which the Steilacoom and Olympic Company had made for the emigrants. The party followed Wenas Creek, (on which David Longmire later had his farm) crossed the Nachez River, which they followed four days, crossing it sixty-eight times. After leaving it, three days' travel brought them to the summit of the Cascades. Finding grass and good water, they stopped two days to rest. Concerning the most difficult part of the trip, Mr. Longmire says:

"Three miles farther on we came to Summit Hill where we spliced rope and prepared for the steep descent which we saw before us. One end of the rope was fastened to the axles of the wagons, the other thrown around a tree and held by our men and thus, one by one, the wagons were lowered gradually a distance of three hundred yards, when the ropes were loosened and the wagons drawn a quarter of a mile farther with locked wheels. Here we reached

Greenwater River. All the wagons were lowered safely, except the one belonging to Mr. Lane, now of Puyallup, which was crushed to pieces by the breaking of one of the ropes, causing him and his family to make the rest of the trip on horseback."

At the top of Summit Hill, Mrs. Longmire and Mrs. E. A. Light, who had gone ahead of the wagons with their children, were surprised to meet a white man on the trail with his pack horses. The man proved to be Andy Burge, who had come from Fort Steilacoom with supplies for the road-makers; but they had already given up for lack of food. After failing to convince the emigrants that it was useless to try to make their way over the country ahead of them, he gave them his supplies and returned to Fort Steilacoom, blazing trees to aid them as he went along.

After crossing the Greenwater sixteen times and the White River seven times, working the roads every day, Connell Prairie was finally reached, then the Puyallup River and the present site of Van Ogle's hop farm. Six miles from Steilacoom was the spot where the company last camped together. The families then left for various places, James Longmire and his family making their home at Yelm Prairie.

The account of the emigrant party of 1853 given by David Longmire⁴ is interesting because it contains among other things a splendid tribute to his boyhood friend and companion over the Pass, George H. Himes. David Longmire was born in Indiana, May 8, 1844, and George Himes in Pennsylvania, ten days later. Concerning their relationship, David Longmire says:

"It is hardly necessary to add that Mr. Himes and I have been warm personal friends during all the sixty-three years since those strenuous days through Naches Pass. Mr. Himes has become famous as a historian of the Northwest. On June 19, 1907, he gave the annual address before the Oregon Pioneer Association⁵ and told well the story of that famous immigration of 1853. His address was published and with it a list he had compiled of members of the party, which was the first to cross over the Cascades to Puget Sound."

George H. Himes, in the address just mentioned, tells of leaving Lafayette, Illinois, on March 21, 1853, with his father, mother, and other members of the family, and joining with other families on the trip. On August 17, about one hundred fifty persons and thirty-six wagons left Umatilla for Fort Walla Walla. About September

⁴ *Wash. Hist. Quart.*, Volumes 7 and 8, 1916-17, Jan., 1917, pp. 22-28.

⁵ *Oregon Pioneer Association Transactions*, 1904-12, pp. 134-152.

17th or 18th, after several days' travel through sage brush as high as the tops of the covered wagons the edge of the timber bordering the mountains was reached. The road which they had expected to find was disappointing—scarcely more than an Indian trail, but there was no thought of turning back. Mr. Sargent knew the settlers had begun work on a road across the mountains and could not understand why it was not completed. The party pushed on until Summit Prairie was reached, about October 1st. While there was no snow in the immediate vicinity, it could be seen in all directions.

Early the next morning, after less than an hour's travel the company halted. A steep bluff had been reached over thirty feet high, and for a thousand feet farther on the ground was so steep that it was impossible for horses or oxen to descend. How this difficult problem was solved is told by Mr. Himes:

"It was soon decided that the wagons should be lowered with ropes, and the teams driven single file by a circuitous trail to the foot of the mountain. Accordingly a long rope was stretched down the hill, but it was not long enough to lower a wagon to a place where it would stand up. Then James Biles said: 'Kill one of the poorest of my steers, make a rope of his hide and see if that will be long enough; if not, kill another.' Three animals were killed before the length of rope required was secured. After each wagon was lowered to the end of the rope a yoke of oxen was hitched to the wagon, and by rough-locking, and attaching small logs with projecting limbs to the rear, it was taken down a quarter of a mile and across Greenwater River where we camped that night. It required almost two days to make this descent. Two of the thirty-six wagons were hopelessly wrecked on the hill, and a small quantity of provisions lost."

After they left the Greenwater River, the party made better progress. The wagon road had been cut through to the Greenwater, but upon the word of an Indian from east of the mountains on his way to the Sound that no "Boston" men were coming, the road-workers abandoned their labors and returned home. Two weeks later the weary emigrant party reached the end of the journey.

At least one member of the emigrant train that crossed Naches Pass in 1853 is still hale and hearty—George H. Himes, who as a boy of nine walked the entire distance from Stark County, Illinois, to the homestead taken up by his father five miles east of Olympia. On May 18th, Mr. Himes celebrated his 90th birthday. The next

morning, he was at his desk as usual in the Portland Auditorium where he is curator of the Oregon Historical Society, a position he has filled since 1898.

Early in 1910, Professor W. H. Gilstrap, Secretary of the State Historical Society, and George H. Himes met for the planning of a monument to mark the last camp, October 8, 1853. On July 14th, William Lane of Tacoma, Mr. Van Ogle of Orting, David Longmire and George H. Himes, all members of the 1853 emigrant party, drove out to Buckley and located the spot. At that time, Mr. Gilstrap arranged to have David Longmire take Mr. Himes and himself over the old trail, from the last crossing of the Yakima River to Buckley.

In his address delivered at the unveiling of the monument, October 8, 1913,⁶ Mr. Gilstrap tells how David Longmire met Mr. Himes and himself at North Yakima, and drove them to his home on the Wenas River, September, 1910. From there the three men were accompanied by the four sons of David Longmire. Each member of the party had a saddle horse, and there were three pack horses. It took four and one-half days to cover the old trail from the Longmire home to Buckley, or five days from the last crossing of the Yakima to the same terminal point, a distance of 126 miles. For the emigrant party, the journey consumed nearly a month.

As Mr. Longmire had gone over the trail through Naches Pass from two to four times each year between 1860 and 1884, driving cattle, he was able to point out many of the old camping places and river crossings.

"Lieutenant Arnold," says Mr. Gilstrap, "completed the military road across the mountains in 1854 and 1855. It had been commenced by citizens in 1853. The Government road grade on the summit and for a few miles to the east is in very good condition unto this day."

A road over the mountains was the ambition of the early settlers of the Puget Sound country, but construction proceeded very slowly. "The Journal of Occurrences at Fort Nisqually" has the following entry on August 6, 1850: "A party of men here today on their way to cut a road across the mountains to Wally Wally, the expense incurred (to be) paid by subscription among the settlers." For many months following the establishment of the *Columbian* at Olympia on September 11, 1852, that newspaper kept the road before its readers, urging that it be built, publishing calls for meetings where committees were appointed for the work, asking subscriptions to the road-building fund, and calling for men to donate their labor.

⁶ *Wash. State Hist. Soc. Pub.*, Vol. II. 1907-14, pp. 215-232.

In 1852, shortly before Washington became a separate Territory, Delegate Lane of Oregon was able to get a Congressional appropriation of \$20,000 for the road. Isaac I. Stevens, soon after his appointment as governor of Washington Territory, announced that the money had been placed in his hands and that work would soon be started under Captain George B. McClellan. After waiting more than a month without hearing from McClellan, the settlers decided to take matters into their own hands. After collecting \$1,200 and some supplies, and getting two groups of men to give their labor they sent them out on July 9th. One group, composed of Nelson Sargent and others began work at the Yakima end, while the other, under Edward Jay Allen, began widening the trail along the Puyallup and clearing through the forest along the White and Greenwater Rivers. The way was cut through to the foot of a ridge leading to Naches Pass. It was here that Theodore Winthrop, on August 26th, walked into the camp of young Allen, the twenty-two-year-old engineer, and enjoyed his hospitality. After spending the night at the camp, he continued on his way, without giving his name to his host. It was not until years afterward, when Colonel Edward Jay Allen happened to read the chapter in *The Canoe and the Saddle* describing the visit to the camp, that it dawned upon him that his guest that night was Theodore Winthrop.

A false report that the emigrant train had gone to the Willamette Valley caused the road-workers to cease their labors and return to Olympia. Upon learning of their mistake, some hastened back to the mountains and arrived in time to be of assistance in getting the wagons down the steep incline.

Colonel Allen, in his *Reminiscences*, tells of completing the road in the summer of 1854 with \$15,000 that remained of the fund appropriated by Congress. His account tends to show that McClellan did not accomplish what had been assigned to him. Brigadier General Henry Hodges, who was quartermaster at the time, takes the blame for the delay in getting started on the road, saying it was his fault and not Captain McClellan's, but at the same time, he also makes it clear that his former chief did not reach Naches Pass or cross the Cascades.

More than \$6,600 in money, supplies and labor were given by the Puget Sound settlers toward the building of the road. The urgent request of Governor Stevens that Congress reimburse them brought no response.

Naches Pass has figured to some extent in the Indian Wars. While the fighting was going on between Major Haller's men and the Indians under Kamiakin at Toppenish Creek, an Indian rider brought word that soldiers under Lieutenant Slaughter had left Fort Steilacoom and were coming by way of the Pass to attack the Indians. With the arrival of Qualchan's warriors at Toppenish Creek to aid Kamiakin, Haller was obliged to retreat. Some of the Indians followed him, while the rest, under Qualchan, were sent to meet Lieutenant Slaughter. While they were in the Selah Valley, Indian scouts that had come over Naches Pass told them that Slaughter and his men would reach the summit that day. They lost no time in starting up the Naches River to meet the enemy. Among the scouts in advance was Te-i-as, the uncle of Qualchan. At a rocky point where the trail leaves the river (now called Edgar Rock) a white man was sighted riding along the trail from the west. When the Indians surrounded him, they recognized him as the trader, Edgar, who had married the niece of Te-i-as. When the latter asked where he was going, he replied he had come to warn them of the soldiers who were coming for an attack. Afraid that Qualchan would kill Edgar, Te-i-as advised him to return from whence he came. In addition, the simple and unsuspecting Te-i-as told him all about Major Haller's defeat and why the Indians were on their way to Naches Pass. Edgar followed the advice of Te-i-as and rode in all haste to join Lieutenant Slaughter for whom he was scouting. Learning that Haller had retreated, there was no need for Lieutenant Slaughter to go further, so he began his return march. When Qualchan learned the facts he was in a rage, and hurried to the summit for an attack. There he was met by a Nisqually Indian who told him that Slaughter and his men were within a short distance of the settlements.

Among recent visitors to the Pass is Robert B. Walkinshaw, Seattle attorney, Mountaineer, and author of *On Puget Sound*. He has been over the ground on two different occasions—the first time in 1929, in a party of six, and the second time, four years later, accompanied by his son, who had also been with him on the earlier trip. From a conversation with him, the following was obtained:

The 1929 party was composed of Clarence B. Bagley, his grandson, Park Bagley, Redick H. McKee, engineer for the United States Geological Survey, who made early topographical maps in the vicinity of Seattle, A. H. Denman, attorney from Tacoma and head of

the Mountaineers in that city, Robert B. Walkinshaw, and his son, Walter.

About the first of July, they left Seattle, following the White River Road for some distance. Four and a half miles beyond the junction of the Greenwater River with the White, the group left the highway and started on the trail leading up to Naches Pass.

On the western slope, some traces of the old road were visible. Trees were observed that had been felled to aid in letting the covered wagons down the incline. At the summit, they found a series of about ten open meadows, the largest of which is known as American Meadow. "It was at the summit meadows," Mr. Bagley remarked, "where Longmire and Sargent, with their emigrant train, rested in 1853, and the half-famished horses had a chance to graze."

It was in August, 1933, that Mr. Walkinshaw made his second visit to Naches Pass with his son—this time on a hunting and fishing trip. They travelled on across the summit and spent some time on the eastern slope. On the return trip, they were at the top within a day of the eightieth anniversary of Theodore Winthrop's crossing. A great admirer of the author of *The Canoe and the Saddle*, Mr. Walkinshaw was interested in identifying some of the places mentioned in the book. He found a clear round spring, about the depth of a barrel, in one of the small meadows near the American Meadow. The characteristics of the spring itself and of the locality tally so closely with Winthrop's description that Mr. Walkinshaw feels certain it is the one at which he stopped to drink in 1853. On the eastern slope, about two-thirds of the way down, is an open prairie which he identified as the place where Theodore Winthrop camped for a day and a night. A third place of interest is in an open meadow near the White River bridge, where the remains of an old camping fire-place may be seen. From the location and general appearance, there is no doubt in Mr. Walkinshaw's mind that here was the camp of the road-builders at which Winthrop stopped for a short time.

Rich as it is in historic interest, and located in one of the best parts of the State for scenic grandeur, it is to be hoped that Naches Pass will some day be made a National Monument—a monument to the achievements of those who would not be vanquished by the rough trails and trying days of '53.

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