

North Fork of the Oregon Trail?

by Jerry Bates



LAST February the Naches Pass Coalition met at the Meeker Mansion. It was a standing room only turnout with meeting attendees representing many local historical organizations including folks from the Oregon-California Trails Association, a representative from Washington State Historical Society, Washington State Park Service, Pierce Co. Planning Department and many other interested individuals and historical societies. The Coalition was formed approximately 10 years ago to research, protect and promote the historic Naches Pass Trail. The most important agenda item, and of most concern to our organization,

was the proposed recognition by the National Park Service of the Naches Pass Trail as part of the Oregon National Historic Trail Route.

We all accept the fact that the Naches Pass Trail, among other significant historical uses, was a fork or branch of the Oregon Trail. However, the National Park Service has never officially recognized it as part of the National Oregon Historic Trail system.

For the past 25 years Dave Welch working with the California-Oregon Trails Association, has

Learn More About the Naches Pass Trail

tried to get the trail added to the Oregon National Trail Route. Last January the National Park Service forwarded to the United States Congress a study recommending additional trails for inclusion in the National Trails System. The bad news — the Naches Pass branch was not recommended for inclusion as a branch of the historic Oregon Trail. According to the criteria the NPS uses the Naches Pass trail lacked only one qualification (enough to disqualify it) — “historical significance” as associated with the Oregon Trail. Supporting this decision, the Forest Service deems the Oregon Trail has historical significance only in the 1841-1848 timeframe. Since documented use by emigrants didn’t occur until after the 1848 date, the Naches Pass route was not recommended. The 1848 cutoff date is highly debatable since seventy-eight percent of those who came to Old Oregon (Oregon and Washington) on the Oregon Trail made that journey after 1848.

This lack of NPS recognition doesn’t change the fact that the state, Pierce County and local historians fully recognize this route as culturally and historically significant to our region’s history and development. It was the ancient Indian artery between eastern and western parts of the state, the military road connecting Fort Steilacoom and Fort Walla Walla, and the route used by the Longmire-Biles wagon train that brought the first organized group of American settlers to Puget Sound—by way of the Oregon Trail.

Things could change in the future; the Trails Act could be modified, there is precedent for this. Various approaches to having this ruling changed were explored during last February’s meeting.

Some good news

After the January 2020 Congressional legislation, the National Park Service recognized two branches of the Oregon Trail to Washington—the Whitman Branch and the Cowlitz River route—since they were used before 1848.

Editor’s Note: Special thanks to Dave Welch for his help getting all the facts straight for this article.

The Go-To website for everything Naches Pass Trail can be found at nachestrail.org. It’s a rich resource of links, detailed information and research regarding the trail. The Naches Coalition has also published a brochure for a quick overview of trail history, ask for a copy at one of our meetings.

The old trail has a fascinating history—one our society has drawn on many times over the years. This newsletter has featured numerous stories about the trail. Our research director Carl Vest has written articles for the *Puyallup Herald*, focusing on the Biles-Longmire 1853 wagon train crossing. The South Hill Historical Society had an excellent presentation by Denis Larson, co-author of the book *Yankee on Puget Sound*, focusing on the trail. DVDs of his presentation are available; all newsletters and Carl Vest’s *Puyallup Herald* articles can be found on our website southhillhistory.com.



The Naches Trail website & brochure.

From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

Please call, e-mail or write any change of address to me, Ben Peters, 253-845-7028, poppa-ben2002@yahoo.com, South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582, South Hill, WA 98374.

Also, don't forget that we are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Dues, donations, etc., are fully deductible from your income taxes if you are able to do so. If you need a receipt for tax purposes, contact Ben.

Dues Reminder

I will attach a sticky note to the Society newsletter mailed closest to your renewal date. **No need to fill out the membership form unless there is a change of some kind.**

The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of the month, 11:00 AM, (no meetings July and August) at The Highlands in the Community Center. This complex is located at 502 43rd Ave. SE, adjacent to and east of the Mel Korum YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information, go to our website southhillhistory.com.

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Meetings will be canceled until further notice due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Visit our website!
southhillhistory.com

South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

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Annual Dues: Society membership \$25.00 <i>Note: Please do not send cash.</i>		Make check or M.O. payable to South Hill Historical Society and mail with this application to: South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582, South Hill, WA 98374



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Box 73582
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