

Hiking Place Names

The stories behind names in the backcountry

BY JAN P. KLIPPERT

When you're out on the trail, or at home poring over topographic maps, you're quickly confronted with an abundance of place names. Just about every peak, alpine tarn and creek you'll encounter in Washington's backcountry has a name. And there are plenty of stories behind all those names. Domke Lake. Hozomeen Mountain. Cady Pass. Each name reveals a little bit about the Native American people, miners, and forest rangers who first entered these places. Here's a short ramble through some of the places you might encounter on your hikes.

Native American Names

For several thousand years, Native Americans have populated the Pacific Northwest. Each tribe had its own language, tongue or dialect. None had a written language. Their place names and travel routes were transmitted by tradition and story. Washington's geography is replete with reminders of the first Native Americans. Most counties have names derived from the original inhabitants: for example, Snohomish, Skagit, Chelan, Clallam, Spokane, Yakima and Klickitat. Local Indian tribal names are ascribed to many geographic features, including the Nisqually, Stillquamish, and Nooksack Rivers.

Hozomeen, from the Fraser River dialect, has retained its meaning "twin peaks with a rocky depression between," and has been applied to a peak and a river in the North Cascades. Shuksan, appropriately enough, means steep and rugged. Sahale (as in Sahale Ridge near Cascade Pass) means mountains of "the great spirit." Entiat in the local dialect meant "rapid water." Itswoot Lake is

route through the mountains between Twisp ("yellow jacket") and Skagit Valley "a place of refuge." However, another source refers to Stehekin as "rough water."

The mountain foothills town of Sultan was not named after an East Indian potentate; rather it was named after the local Indian Chief Tseul-tud. The Chinook Jargon word for three, "klone," was



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What's in a name? Some backcountry names come from Native American languages, while others are merely descriptive. Dishpan Gap (pictured, with view to Glacier Peak) was named by forest ranger and supervisor A.H. Sylvester. Sylvester named more than 1,000 geologic features in the first half of the twentieth century.

named for the Chinook word for bear.

Two different meanings for Stehekin appear in references for that wonderful place on Lake Chelan ("deep water"). In 1814, explorer Alexander Ross, identified the meaning of Stehekin in the local vernacular as "the way through" because it was on the most northerly Indian trade

applied to three lakes in the Icicle Creek drainage known as Klonauqua Lakes. This word is a mix of Chinook "klone" and Wenatchee word for water, "qua."

The Explorers

Place names in Washington also reflect the rich legacy of exploration. Those

explorers included fur trappers, miners, map makers, military topographers and professional foresters. Thousands of square miles of Oregon Country went from 17th century *terra incognita* to 20th century *terra familiaris* within a short 200 years.

European explorers who first arrived by sea, and later settlers who came by land, gave names to geographical features. In 1778, Jonathan Carver of Weymouth, Massachusetts published a book, *Three Year's Travel through the Interior Parts of North America*. He refers to "River Oregon, or the River of the West that falls into the Pacific Ocean at the Straits of Anian." Historic maps frequently refer to the Straits of Anian, but, as time went on the straits were given the Spanish name Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Captains Gray (in 1792) and Vancouver (in 1792 and 1798) came by sea and named features they saw from the decks of their ships. Vancouver alone recorded 400 features on his maps, such as Hood's (later, Hood) Canal, Puget Sound, Mount Rainier and Mount Baker.

Soon after Lewis and Clark's return from their Voyage of Discovery in 1806, several military forts protecting commercial interests and settlers were established in the Northwest, further establishing claims for the United States in the Oregon Territory. Forts on the 1811 map used by explorer Alexander Ross included Forts Astoria, Vancouver, Oakinachen,

Colville and Nezperrces. Ross was commissioned by John Jacob Astor to further establish the Pacific Fur Company in the Oregon Territory. His explorations started at what is now known as Astoria. He traveled north to Steilacoom, crossed the Cascade Mountains and traveled north as far as Twisp. The Alexander Ross explorations identified four Indian trade routes across the Cascade Mountains.

Explorations of the interior Cascades in 1860 by E. F. Cady and E. C. Ferguson helped increase knowledge of the routes over these mountains, just as more pioneer settlers were beginning to arrive in the Northwest. Cady and Ferguson traveled the east sections of Snohomish and Skykomish drainage basins, and found a low pass, now named Cady Pass in honor of one of the expedition leaders.

The U.S. military, which also set out to explore the mountains, was responsible for many Cascade place names. The Pickett Range of the North Cascades isn't named for its sharp spires—instead,

it honors U.S. Army Captain George. E. Pickett who was in charge of Fort Bellingham and later gained fame in the Civil War. A well-established Native American trail between Yakima Pass and the Cedar River was used in part by explorer Lieutenant Abiel Tinkham in 1853 and 1854. Maps today put his name on local geological features, including Mount Tinkham and Abiel Mountain.

Prospectors and Shepherders

Prospectors and shepherders also made their mark by naming features of the Cascades. For example, Ewing Basin, near the Chiwaukum Mountains near Scottish Lakes High Camp, is named after a hard rock miner Howard Ewing. Also in the Chiwaukum Mountains, McCue Ridge is named for 19th century trapper Roderick McCue.

For many years in the 19th century, sheep herding in the Pasayten and Wenatchee areas supplied the military and settlers with a locally-produced food



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The author at Cady Ridge in the north-central Cascades. The pass was named for E.F. Cady, an explorer who mapped the region in 1860. Explorers, prospectors and shepherders were responsible for many of the place names in Washington's mountains.

supply. Throughout the region geographic names bring to mind names of people and local history: Wild Horse drainage was a favorite grazing area, while Sheep Mountain, Knox Lake, Spanish Creek Camp and Grass Camp all recall sheep herding days gone by.

Domke Lake and Domke Mountain near Lake Chelan were named after a pioneer settler. Pioneer Judge Navarre, also a civil engineer, explored much of what we know as Navarre Coulee and Navarre Peaks in the Chelan/Okanagan Coulee area. The Emmons Glacier on Mount Rainier is named for Samuel Franklin Emmons, a geologist studying the mountain's glaciers.

The Forest Service Era

Gifford Pinchot, first supervisor for U.S. Forest Service, served from 1889 to 1912. The former Columbia National Forest in southwest Washington was renamed in his honor in 1949. During the Pinchot era, fire protection and public safety demanded that natural features have names so that fires could be located and fire fighters sent to the right location.

Many names in the Cascades were the work of A. H. Sylvester, a U. S. Geographical Survey topographer in the Snoqualmie Ranger District between 1897 and 1907 and Wenatchee

Forest district supervisor from 1908 to 1931. Sylvester named more than one thousand geological features. During Sylvester's tenure, frequent updates and printing of maps occurred of the region between Snoqualmie Pass and the North Cascades, attesting to improved naming of geographical features.

Frequently Sylvester would travel the trails of the Cascades with Ranger Burne Canby. One morning while traveling in the high country they awoke to find the meadow covered with rime. This was mapped as Frosty Meadow. Nearby Frosty Creek and Frosty Pass also received chilly names. Crossing Frosty Pass

(which was later mapped as Icicle Ridge) they came across a pair of unnamed lakes. Burne had two sisters and Sylvester named the lakes for them: Margaret and Mary. The next day they came across another unnamed lake. Margaret and Mary had a friend named Florence, and the lake has this name today. A fourth lake was to become Flora, named for the wife of another ranger. Lakes throughout the district were named after friends, relatives, brothers, sisters and wives of district employees.

Sylvester often assigned whimsical names. Dishpan Gap is a saddle that reminded someone in his hiking party of a dishpan. Kodak Peak got its name when one member of a climbing party lost a new camera

In the early 1900s A. H. Sylvester came to an area undiscovered by other explorers or map makers. He wrote, "It was an enchanting scene. I named the group Enchantment Lakes." Later in the century Bill and Peg Stark visited The Enchantments frequently and named features they encountered, many of which have an air of mystery and spirituality:

Nada Lake,
Gnomes
Tarn, High
Priest, Lost
World Plateau,
Magic Meadow,
Merlin's
Tower,
Rune, and
the Temple

Dishpan Gap is a saddle that reminded someone in A.H. Sylvester's hiking party of a dishpan. Kodak Peak got its name when one member of a climbing party lost a new camera.

For all his whimsy, A.H. Sylvester also came up with more serious, reverential names. North and east of Lake Wenatchee, along the Little Wenatchee River, are series of mountains Sylvester named for American poets Irving, Poe, Longfellow, Bryant and Whittier. Older maps show the Poets' Ridge Trail was once used by sheep herders. Even today experienced hikers can follow the old tread created by thousands of sheep that went from Lake Wenatchee to Dishpan Gap.

Early exploration resulted in mapping and designating place names to geographic features completed by military

people, topographic engineers or those seeking commercial fortunes: fur traders, prospectors, railroad and road builders and foresters protecting the forest. As their work developed trails into the heart of the unknown land it was left to the recreational community to "finish" the work. Books such as *Range of Glacier* by Fred Beckey and *East of the Divide* by Chester Marler (see review, page 29) give the reader a great deal of history of the North Cascades and insight for the naming of many features.

Today hikers and climbers enjoy the legacy of many generations including Native Americans, explorers, trappers, miners, military mapmakers and people who worked and studied the geology and geography of the landscape. Perhaps reflecting on names on the map will add a whole new understanding and dimension to the hiking experience. ♦

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To Learn More about Place Names

The Tacoma Public Library maintains a great Washington State place name search engine on its website. Try typing in locations Domke Lake, Dishpan Gap, Kodak Peak and others at:

<http://search.tpl.lib.wa.us/wanames/>

Further Reading

Historical Atlas of the Pacific Northwest, 1999, by Derek Hayes

East of the Divide, 2004, by Chester Marler

Range of Glaciers, 2003, by Fred Beckey

Challenge of the North Cascades, 1969, by Fred Beckey

Gill's Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon 1909