

# What's in a Name?

*The geography of Washington's backcountry is loaded with history*



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*Place names in Washington's backcountry have a variety of origins: Native American words, explorers' friends and associates, and even mythology (as at Lake Valhalla, pictured above).*

**By Jan P. Klippert**

Colorful place names invite hikers to envision a landscape rich with the lives of Indians, fur trappers, prospectors, foresters and explorers. Throughout Washington, place names remind us of a rich legacy. Recorded history of the Pacific Northwest land features begins with voyages of discovery. Those were followed by British and French overland exploration by the Hudson Bay Company and the new upstart country the United States.

Prior to 1492, for most Europeans much of the world was *terra incognita*, unknown land. Explorers mapping distant shores gave names to places and land features they saw. Along the Pacific coast of North America,

Spanish, Russian, English, French and American explorers touched land that was to become known as Oregon Country. The origin of the word Oregon is obscure. In 1778 Jonathan Carver of Weymouth, Massachusetts published a book, *Three Year's Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*. The travels, beginning in 1766, refer to "The River Oregon, or the River of the West that falls into the Pacific Ocean at the Straits of Anian." Oregon Country—the vast territory that lay between California and Alaska—captured the imagination of thousands.

Named after early explorers, the mythical Straits of Anian has retained the Spanish name, Straits of Juan de Fuca. Sailing along the coast, on July

4, 1788, Captain Meares saw rugged snow-capped mountains and named them Mount Olympus. In 1792 the American Captain Gray sailed into and named both the Columbia River and Gray's Harbor. In the same year, sailing for Great Britain, Captain Vancouver labeled several landmarks, including Mount Baker. The Indians called it Kulshan, and today Kulshan Cabin and Kulshan Glacier keep the memory alive. Captain Vancouver unwittingly inspired controversy that has lasted for many years when he named the mountain known to the Indians as Tahoma, Mount Rainier.

Explorer-botanist David Douglas is best remembered for a local species, the Douglas fir. During his expeditions to the northwest between 1824

and 1827, he refers to a range of rugged, rocky snow-capped mountains as the Cascade Range. Some writers thought "President's Range" was a more appropriate name. However, no name took hold until the government-sponsored Wilkes Expedition of 1841 officially charted and recorded the mountains as the Cascade Range.

Explorers recording landmarks named many geographical features after the more than one hundred Pacific Northwest Indian tribes. Each had its own language or dialect that was passed on orally from generation to generation.

Even before European explorers arrived, two major coastal tribes, the Chinook and Nootka, had developed a language to facilitate trade among various tribes. It became known as the Chinook Jargon. When the European explorers first appeared there were about 80 words in Chinook. The jargon became the language for general communication and spread rapidly. By the 1830's missionaries preached, prayed and sang hymns using Chinook. This jargon was supplemented by English, French and Spanish terms so that by 1880's more than 250,000 people from Klamath County Oregon to the Alaska Panhandle spoke and traded using the dialect.

Indian names identify many places. Chetwoot, the Chinook word for bear, is the source of Chetwoot Lake in the heart of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Hikers in Tenas Creek basin would find it small, pretty or slight, fitting since "tenas" means just that in Chinook. Wapato is jargon for potato. Imagine trying to market Wapato Point as Potato Point!

The Talapus/Olallie Lake Trail is a popular hike in the Alpine Lakes. Talapus, meaning coyote or prairie

wolf, is important in Indian legend as having supernatural powers. Olallie means berry, and originally, the salmonberry. Could it be assumed that the original peoples would travel to the mystical Talapus Lake to receive special powers and pray for a favorable harvest at Lake Olallie?

Many geographic place names retain tribal identity. For example, today 16 counties are named after Indian tribes. They are also remembered in other ways. The name Snoqualmie is associated with a city, river, mountain, and mountain pass. Nisqually is a familiar name of a glacier, river, delta, and wildlife sanctuary. Adventurers kayak the Stilliguamish River and climb Stilliguamish Mountain.

Alexander Ross, during his 1811 exploration on behalf of John Jacob Astor and the Pacific Fur Company, traversed what was once the Indians' northern trade route across Cascade Mountains. Ross' exploration left from

"Chuck" is the Chinook word for water. So White Chuck River is white water. "Pil" meant red. Originally given to a local red stream, the name Pilchuck has also been given to the mountain nearby. Skookumchuck is a powerful or rapid stream. Skookum, which means strong, is still used today to portray a person of sturdy character. Hyak means fast or quick. Naming ski slopes Hyak seems appropriate.

Washington became a state in 1889. The first act of the newly formed state legislature was to identify 34 counties as subdivisions of the state. By 2002 there were 39 counties. Definition of county boundaries was important to all counties. The County Engineer surveyed and recorded the county boundary. Today observant hikers can follow some of the county boundaries and find old survey markers from long ago. A hiker can follow the tread of the County Line Trail going west from the Old Blewett Pass for several miles as the trail separates Kittitas and Chelan Counties.

Likewise, routefinding skills are required to find the old surveyor tread along the ridge of Abeil and Tinkam Peaks. Interestingly Abiel Tinkam was an engineer with the McClellan military party, important in the Indian Wars.

Plant and animal names commonly identify geographic features: Meadow Mountain, Tamarack Mountain, Snowgrass Flats, and Heliotrope Ridge are all examples. Noteworthy are such places as Ptarmigan Traverse, Trout Lake

(are there trout in every Trout Lake?), Bear Lake, and Bear's Breast Mountain. Gray wolves were systematically exterminated from Olympic National Park. At one time they gave credence to place names such as Gray Wolf



*Eponymous Mountains: some peaks are named for their residents. Hence, Goat Lake and Goat Mountain.*

Twisp (yellow jacket), went up the Twisp River, over the pass to Stehekin (the way through) on to the Skagit (an Indian Tribe) River Basin.

Many words from the Chinook jargon are found as geographic names.

Jan Kupper

Creek, Gray Wolf Ridge and Gray Wolf Pass. Goats have always been a favorite; colorfully describing the goat-like skills needed to traverse the terrain of Goat Rocks Wilderness, Goat Lake and Goat Flats.

Natural phenomena and conditions encountered by explorers are recorded in many place names and suggest conditions a hiker may encounter: Rainy Pass, Mosquito Lake, Blue Lake, Green Mountain, Bald Mountain, and so on. Ragged Ridge, Rock Lake, and Windy Pass offer clues as to what might be expected. Big Snow Mountain, Overcoat Peak, Icicle Creek, Big Snow Mountain, Old Snowy suggest climate and hiking conditions. Hikers approaching Cathedral Rock or Artist Point may anticipate awe-inspiring views.

Geological features are often reflected in place names. The Foss River drainage east of Skykomish is no exception. Names have been given to mountains and lakes because of the copper ores found in the area: Malachite Peak, Peak 6245 (which Fred Becky named Tourmaline Peak), Azure and Azurite Lakes. The Necklace Valley trail up the East Fork Foss River offers a valley studded with jewel-like lakes strung out along the way: Jade, Opal, Jewel, and Locket Lakes. Nearby are Gold Lake and alternately, Fools' Gold Lake!

Mining prospectors helped establish many trails used today. Near Barlow Pass, it is reported that a prospector seeing a vein of ore on a nearby mountain exclaimed that there was enough to make him as rich as the Count of Monte Cristo. And the name has stayed with the mountain massif.

In the same area Bedal Mountain is named after members of the Bedal family who homesteaded the Sauk River. Bedal Creek was named after

for hikers to note that a big slide, Spring 2002, destroyed a large section of the Squire Creek Road FS 2040 that accessed trail 654.)



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*The name Trout Lake doesn't guarantee good fishing.*

James in the late 1890's. The Bedal sisters, Edith and Jean, ran a pack train to support mines on Monte Cristo and Morning Star. Remnants of Harry Bedal's cabin can be found in a high alpine meadow between Bedal Peak and Sloan Peak. Harry helped build the lookout on Three Fingers.

South of Darrington is Jumbo Mountain. There were so many white elephant prospects on the mountain that it became aptly named Jumbo. On the south and eastern flanks of Jumbo Mountain miners built a 16-mile long tramway from Darrington to access mining prospects along Copper Creek. At the end of the tramway was the Bornite Mine. Eightmile Creek was halfway to the Bornite mine. Eightmile Creek Trail 654.1 accesses Squire Creek Pass. Today climbers use the old Bornite Mine tramway/road to access technical climbs on Liberty and Big Bear Mountains. (It is important

Throughout centuries it has been the practice to label geographic sites after prominent people.

Gifford Pinchot National Forest recognizes the important work of the first United States forester, Gifford Pinchot, who was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt. William O. Douglas Wilderness memorializes the work of this longest serving Supreme Court Justice, William O. Douglas of Yakima. Justice Douglas was instrumental to the conservation movement in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century.

Stevens Pass was named after John F. Stevens, the construction engineer who supervised Great Northern Railroad laying track over the Cascades.

Theodore Winthrop traveled from Steilacoom to Walla Walla in 1853. The little town of Winthrop in Okanagon County received its name in 1890 in recognition of Winthrop's travels recorded in the book, *Canoe and Saddle*.

Samuel K. Barlow, surveyed the Sauk River valley in 1845 and his name has been identified with Barlow Pass.

Edward Blewett, was instrumental in the development of the mining district located in the vicinity of the Blewett Pass and the Liberty area between Chelan and Kittitas Counties.

William E. Bailey, owner of the Seattle Press Newspaper sponsored the Press Exploring Expedition, 1889-1890. The Bailey Range that runs





*Cascade Pass. Early 19th century explorer and naturalist David Douglas was one of the first to refer to the mountains of the Pacific Northwest as the Cascades.*

north/south from High Divide to Dodwell-Rixon Pass is considered the backbone of the Olympic Mountains. Along the route are a number of mountains named after people associated with the *Seattle Press* newspaper, Press Expedition members, or people associated with the newspaper industry. These include Mount Pulitzer, Mount Seattle, Mount Carrie, Mount Ferry and Mount Barnes.

John Dark was a miner, explorer and shepherd who mapped much of the Dark Divide region, an unprotected roadless area between the Cispus and Lewis River drainage.

Major Edward Sturgis Ingraham recorded 11 ascents of Mount Rainier. On his fifth ascent, 1888 he was accompanied by famed naturalist John Muir. Today, Camp Muir is named in his honor. Likewise, the Ingraham Glacier justly records Ingraham's many mountaineering achievements and contributions to education as Seattle's first City Superintendent of Public Schools.

William Denison Lyman was an educator at Whitman College. He was an expert on the Columbia River and on August 12, 1900, he "explored the most complex concentration of scenic

majesty within the United States . . . towering over the equally majestic finger of water called Lake Chelan." Today maps refer to this as Lyman Glacier and Lyman Lake.

Walt Bailey worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps at the Verlot Camp on the Mountain Loop Highway during the 1930's. Then Walt served in World War II. Upon his retirement he returned to Verlot and spent several years restoring this priceless trail that now bears his name.

Likewise, other enterprises are recorded in place names. To supply the growing ranks of settlers, military personnel, traders and trappers, the stockmen and horsemen had flocks of sheep and cattle. Corral Lake, Horse-shoe Basin, and Sheep Lake were names given to the locale that reflect earlier interests.

Other interesting and sometimes humorous names have been attached to the mountains and lakes. Tom, Dick, and Harry Lakes are close together. Hikers probably wonder about the people associated with places such as Pete's Pond, Rachel Lake, Mount Margaret, Lake Lillian, and Peggy's Pond. Interestingly a ridge of mountains near Lake

Wenatchee is called Poets Ridge and honors the poets Poe, Irving, Longfellow, Whittier, and Bryant.

Mountains have forever been the home of the gods. Northwest Indians, Viking lore, Wagner's music and Christianity have all mentioned mountains and their mystical powers. Place names in the Cascades are no exception. The Enchantments are home of Naiada Lake and Leprechaun Lake, Merlin's Tower, Excaliber Rock, Sprite Lakelet and Rune Lake. We also find Valhalla, Talisman, Cathedral Rock, Freya Necklace and Hoodoo Mountain on the maps. It must be remembered that 'hoodoo' has two meanings, as a spirit it bodes of bad luck; geologically a 'hoodoo' is a unique geological feature, usually a flat-top mountain. Asgaard Pass, Janus Lake and Mount Olympus are all names from antiquity and mythology.

Geographic names help orient us to where we are. We are all acquainted with streets and avenues, cities, and states. Recognizing and understanding geographic features and place names associated with those features adds another dimension to the hiking experience.