

Excerpts from DISCOVERY OF NACHES PASS

Pambrun Family History

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Our family oral history has long contended that Pierre Chrysologue Pambrun and Cornelius Rogers explored and discovered the Naches Pass from the Yakima Valley over the Cascade Mountains to Steilacoom on Puget Sound. This paper is a combination of two previous Pambrun Family papers; Cornelius Rogers written in 2010 and Naches Pass written in 1999. If the truth were known, Pierre and Cornelius likely “discovered” an ancient Indian trade route eastside Indians and westside Indians had used for millennia....

Naches Pass

Pierre was tasked by Hudson’s Bay Company Governor George Simpson with finding a wagon route from his post, Fort Nez Percés at modern-day Wallula, across the Cascade Mountains to the Puget Sound Agriculture Company at Fort Nisqually.

Simpson’s purpose in assigning this task to Pierre was to assure that Red River carts could navigate from the community of Red River (Winnipeg) to Puget Sound. The Red River cart brigade made it across the Canadian prairies, but the Rocky Mountains proved to be an impassible barrier to the carts....

James Sinclair was chosen to lead the Red River Migration because he’d made the trip before. He knew the route and the difficulty of the Rockies.... The reasons for Simpson’s sponsorship of this endeavor were (1) labor for the Nisqually farm and (2) placement of British citizens north of the Columbia River for the purpose of competing with the Americans in claiming the “jointly occupied” Oregon Territory. In 1838 the Hudson’s Bay Company believed that the Columbia River would be the dividing line when the Joint Occupation Treaty was renewed.

Simpson was unable to entice Red River white people (Swiss settlers imported by Prince Rupert) to make this trip in 1840 so he had to lower his standards and send 128 half-breed métis people in 1841.

The métis (French mixed blood) people didn’t have wagons; they used Red River carts to carry their baggage. This event was known as the Red River Migration of 1841. The Red River carts made it across the Canadian prairies from Red River (Winnipeg) but couldn’t negotiate the Rocky Mountains. Pack trains were used to cross the Rockies.

In their contracts with the HBC, Simpson promised the Red River Settlers houses, out buildings, fences, seed, and farm equipment would be waiting for them at the Nisqually farm. None of this was true.

When the Red River settlers arrived at Fort Nez Percés the fall of 1841, they learned no arrangements had been made for them at neither the farm nor Fort Nisqually. They continued down the Columbia River to the Willamette Valley.

Taking up land in the Willamette Valley among the Americans was problematic for the Red River settlers, not because they were Canadian but because Governor Simpson didn't like to be disobeyed.

When Simpson learned the settlers had gone to the Willamette Valley, he instructed Dr. John McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver to refuse them food, supplies and tools until they moved north of the Columbia.

The HBC officers were none too happy with this arrangement either. When the HBC Committee in London refused to approve Simpson's farm scheme, he bullied the Columbia District HBC officers into buying stock in the Puget Sound Agriculture Company. This counterfeit manipulation infuriated Dr. John McLoughlin and was the start of his estrangement from his boss.

Pierre took Cornelius with him to explore the Naches Pass. He called it the Nisqually Pass. They left Fort Nez Percés the fall of 1839. This is from family oral history.

- *In the mountains it was sleeting and they needed to build a fire for their camp. Pierre gathered small sticks, piled them up, poured black powder over them and went back for more. Cornelius put more sticks on the pile and poured on more black powder from his powder horn and went searching for more wood. Pierre returned with more sticks, poured on more powder and used flint and steel to light it. The triple dose of gun powder exploded, burning off Pierre's eyebrows. My dad said this story has been in the family for more than a hundred years. He always chuckled when telling it.*

In spite of what dad's Uncle Pete had to say about Cornelius Rogers, the rest of the family seemed to hold him in high esteem. Dad said Cornelius never got credit for sharing in the discovery of Naches Pass, not from the Hudson's Bay Company nor from the missionaries.

My friend Tom Holloway, an independent, volunteer historian at Fort Vancouver National Historic Park, found Cornelius Roger's journal documenting the Naches Pass Expedition. Stafford Hazelett had transcribed it from an 1847 *Oregon Spectator* news article in 2009. William Gray had provided the material for the 1847 *Spectator* article. Evidently Gray had Cornelius' journal in his possession. I wonder what happened to the rest of it.

Rogers' journal is the "missing link" for the Pierre Pambrun-Cornelius Rogers "Discovery of Naches Pass" story. The journal was not dated. However, when taken into consideration with all the other known, documented history of the Red River Migration, Pierre and Cornelius almost surely explored Naches Pass the fall of 1839, just like our family oral history contends....

Attachment A

The Oregon Spectator, May 13, 1847, page 2, column 4 from Oregon Historical Society microfilm; transcribed June 18, 2009, by Stafford Hazelett.

Clatsop Plains, April 2d, 1847. / Mr. Editor --I have found among my old papers an account of the route from Wallawalla to Nisqually. I have thought as there appears to be some interest felt as to the practicability of a northern route from Wallawalla through to the sound, that this paper would give the information desired and save the expense of another passage of the same route for the same purpose. The paper is from the pen of the deceased Mr. Cornelius Rogers: he passed the route in company with the deceased Mr. Pambrun, for the express purpose of exploring in view of a road from Wallawalla to Nisqually. They both reported it practicable, with the difficulties mentioned. They estimated that it would take eight men some twenty days to clear the brush and logs so that cattle and pack animals could pass with ease. A wagon route is practicable, with but little more difficulty than passing the Cascade mountains by Mr. Barlow's road. / W.H.G.

ROUTE FROM WALLAWALLA TO NISQUALLY August 31st. Left Wallawalla and encamped on the Jankama river, about twenty-eight miles from the Fort. Sept. 1st. Traveled about forty miles and encamped near the head of a small coulee, which runs towards the Columbia, emptying below the Priests Rapids. Sept. 2d. Traveled about thirty miles, crossing the north branch of the Jankama, and encamped on a small branch coming in from the west. Sept. 3. Traveled about eighteen miles and encamped on the south branch of the Jankama. Sept. 4th. Made about thirty-six miles, having followed

the same branch up, crossing and re-crossing until about ten A.M. reached the forks, and after following up the northern branch until three P.M., ascended the mountain and encamped on its western declivity. Sept. 5th. Descended the mountain and about 2 P.M. came to what we called "White water river," running from the region of Mount Ranier towards the N.W. Encamped on its banks after following down it about two hours. Very little grass. Made about twenty miles. Sept. 6th. Made about eighteen miles and encamped on the same stream with good grass. Sept. 7th. Following down the river a short time: we left it on our right, and traveling southwest, passing three small rich prairies in the early part of the day, and some open timber land in the latter part, we encamped on another river from the southeast, running to northwest, nearly of the same size as the one which we left. Distance about thirty miles. Sept. 8th. About ten A.M., entered the plains of Nisqually and arrived at the Fort about three P.M. Distance about thirty miles. Distance estimated at two hundred and fifty miles. The first four days of the route, the road is excellent. The fifth crosses the river often, and has some underwood, but is not bad. A few rods only of steep ascent to the top of the mountain. Sixth--the descent of the mountain is good, but after that, the forest is very bad. The 7th and eighth days, very bad from underwood and fallen timber. The early part of the ninth is bad, having as before fallen timber and thick underwood. Last part of the ninth, level plain.

Attachment B

Tom Holloway found the second attachment and provided it to me. It is from a 1998 *Yakima Herald* news article....

See the *Yakima Herald* article below:

Mountain Passage

Pioneers, surveyors, military men, Indians all crossed Cascades via Naches Pass

By NACHES RANGER DISTRICT
SPECIAL TO THE YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

NACHES PASS/George McClellan Opted for Snoqualmie Pass

Continued from Page 1C

ures, "By Canoe and Saddle," Winthrop, for whom the North Cascades town of Winthrop was named, died in the Civil War.

More famous than Winthrop was George Brinton McClellan. McClellan, an officer during the Mexican War, along with I.I. Stevens, was called to the Washington Territory to map out mountain passes for the Pacific Railroad survey. McClellan spent the summer of 1853 trying to reach the Naches and finally determined Snoqualmie Pass was a more viable crossing. McClellan was the first Union general in the Civil War and the originator of the famous McClellan cavalry saddle. A footnote to McClellan's difficulties crossing Naches Pass was tented in area history when a man named Tinkham, also working for Stevens on the railroad survey, crossed Naches Pass in 10 days in January 1854.

In October 1853 the Biles Wagon Train branched off from the Oregon Trail near Walla Walla and crossed Naches Pass. The 36 wagons traversed the Naches river 68 times before reaching the summit. James Longmire's

The Naches Pass Historical Wagon Trail is known today from many sources but primarily from the journals of James Longmire, who crossed Naches Pass with 35 wagons in the autumn of 1853.

Members of the Longmire wagon train became part of Pacific Northwest settlement legend when they lowered their wagons over cliffs west of the pass before moving on to Puget Sound. Their trip was immortalized in a fictionalized, though relatively accurate book by Della Gould Emmons, "Nothing In Life Is Free."

diary is the most popular account of wagons crossing Naches Pass, and because of his prominence, the wagon train became known as the "Longmire Wagon Train."

Little evidence remains of other crossings but a smaller party crossed Naches Pass shortly after the Longmire train in 1853. Because it was late in the year, snows in the mountains prevented the wagons from navigating the pass so they were left at the Ahtanum Mission. Members of the train packed up what they could on stock and made it across Naches Pass, returning in the spring to retrieve the rest of their belongings.

Several more parties crossed in 1854, notably the wagon train of

Today most of the pioneers who passed over Naches Pass during territorial days are now forgotten.

Hudson Bay records indicate that as early as 1835 Native American trappers were crossing the Naches Pass bound for Fort Steilacoom. By 1840, mountain men Pierre Pamburn of Fort Walla Walla, Cornelius Rodgers of the Whitman Mission, and Pierre Charles and Peter Brecier of the Hudson Bay Company had already crossed Naches Pass. In 1840 Chief Ow-hi was trading for cattle in Seattle, bringing his stock back to Yakima via Naches Pass.

Winfield Scott Ebby, who later settled on Whidbey Island. Because of the increasing Indian hostilities in Central Washington, no wagon trains crossed Naches Pass after 1854.

During the 1856 Indian War, the Naches Pass trail was used by both Native Americans and the U.S. military. A famous incident occurred along this route near Sawmill Flat when John Edgar, a military scout, successfully warned the military of advancing Native American warriors.

Edgar, for whom Edgar Rock was named, was later killed during the Indian uprisings and his companion, Andy Burge, was wounded.

The first written record of Naches Pass belongs to members of the Wilkes Expedition who crossed it in 1841. Leaving from their moorage at Steilacoom, Lt. Johnson, the expedition botanist Brackenridge and scouts Pamburn and Charles spent the early summer in the Columbia Basin after crossing Naches Pass.

By 1853 a number of local pioneers, including Andy Burge, crossed the Naches Pass. Burge was one of the more colorful characters who assisted some early pass road builders. Supported by citizens groups and the territor-

ial government, these pioneers sought to improve the pass route to accommodate wagons. E.J. Allen and Robert S. Moore, under the supervision of Richard Arnold, are the best-known road builders; they worked there from 1853-54.

The year 1853 stands out as the year Naches Pass hosted a diversity of visitors. During the summer Theodore Winthrop crossed Naches Pass and wrote a book of his adven-

After the war, Naches Pass was used as a way to drive stock between the Yakima Valley and Puget Sound. Andy and Milt Burge, pioneers in the Yakima Basin, were probably the most famous of those who drove stock over the pass after 1860.

Today, Naches Pass can be visited throughout the summer on

foot, horseback or motorized vehicles. The trail is a designated four-wheel driveway and is not suitable for passenger cars or wide-track four-wheel drive vehicles. During winter the trail is a popular snowmobile route.

Information about the trail is available at the Naches Ranger Station on Naches Pass.

YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

2 C • Thursday, November 5, 1998