

Confusion?

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This month's small place: North Bend

North Bend sits 30 miles east of Seattle on I-90, nestled up against the Cascade Mountains. A rural community of 4700, North Bend still looks as it did 50 years ago before the freeway came through the area. North Bend and Snoqualmie are adjacent to one another, and now share a common border through Meadowbrook Farm. Originally named "Snoqualmie", North Bend took its current name because it sits on the "north bend" of the Snoqualmie River.

North Bend and Snoqualmie share a common history since much of the happenings over the last 150 years occurred in the greater Snoqualmie Valley. But like any place, North Bend does have its own unique history and character.

Jeremiah Borst settled in the Snoqualmie Valley in 1858 and is considered the first settler in the Snoqualmie Valley. The first settler in the North Bend Area was Matts Peterson, who arrived in 1865. Peterson was deeply in debt and ended up selling his property to Borst. The property was offered to Will Taylor in exchange for labor. Taylor became a prosperous as a farmer and trading post owner. He platted North Bend, but called it "Snoqualmie." Because there was already a town called Snoqualmie, Taylor changed the name of the community to Mountain View; however the post office objected to the name. Taylor changed it to the current name of North Bend. The city was incorporated in 1909.

Until the mid 1970's, the I-90 freeway came through downtown North Bend. All of this

traffic was a boon to the city's economic well being. Since North Bend is the first community that west bound drivers encounter, the town was a welcome rest stop before travelers reached Seattle. Numerous restaurants and gas stations awaited travelers tired from the 70 mile drive over the pass from Ellensburg. Like most cities that have a major highway as their main street, North Bend had a high traffic volume and severe congestion. The speed limit dropped from freeway speeds to 30 mph in town. In an effort to reduce congestion on the freeway, the State of Washington built a bypass south of the city and moved I-90 traffic away from the downtown area. This move dramatically changed North Bend as business shifted from downtown to lands next to the freeway.

The freeway shift did land North Bend a different sort of business, an outlet mall. Just yards from I-90, the mall started as a single building and expanded as outlet shopping grew in popularity. The mall once was one of only two in Western Washington, with the other outlet mall being in Chehalis. Developers have built other malls in close proximity to the Seattle area, which pulled some business from North Bend. Mall businesses have come and gone, but the mall continues to see tourist traffic on the weekends and during the summer.

North Bend, along with Snoqualmie, served as the backdrop for the 1990's TV series, Twin Peaks. Local landmarks such as Mt. Si, the Mar-T Café, the falls and Salish Lodge appeared in the show. But, as is the case, TV fantasy diverged from local reality. On TV, the Mar-T looks different than the actual location. Now known as Twede's, the eatery suffered a disastrous fire and was

rebuilt. But the café still features a “damn fine cup of coffee”, good pie and huge portions at a reasonable price.

North Bend is a “portal” to outdoor activities in the Snoqualmie Valley and the Washington Cascades. Hikers travel through North Bend to reach the Mt. Si trail which works its way to the top of 4000 foot Mt. Si. The mountain, which dominates the North Bend landscape, is a Mecca for urban climbers. Rattlesnake Mountain, to the south, features numerous trails along with Tiger Mountain which is southwest of the town.

The ski areas of Snoqualmie Pass lie to the east of North Bend on I-90. The areas were once four separate ski spots, each with a separate owner. During the 70’s, skiers used to flock to the separate areas of Snoqualmie Summit, Ski Acres, Hyak and Alpental to carve tracks in the “Cascade Concrete”. Each destination varied in its degree of difficulty with Snoqualmie Summit being the easiest of the four and Alpental being the most difficult. It has been often said that Seattle learned to ski at Snoqualmie. And Snoqualmie has the distinction of having been an innovator of night skiing!

The pass, though, is one of the lowest ski areas in the U.S. The base elevation is just over 3000 feet, and snow has always been a problem for the Snoqualmie ski hills. The other Cascade ski destinations are at 4000 feet (and up!) and are not affected as much by the snow levels. But, the snow level can rise and fall throughout the winter and it’s not uncommon to see late winter snow levels at 3500 to 4000 feet. Hyak, particularly, suffered from low snowfall. The smallest of the four, Hyak had several owners throughout its life. With profitability problems, the hill often sat out the season closed. The other three areas suffered

through the dry years as well and lacked funds to fully upgrade their operations.

During the 1980’s, Snoqualmie Summit’s owner bought all four areas. They operated The Pass as one large resort and advertised it as “four areas on one lift ticket”. But several dry years of late openings and low snowfall ate into the profits of The Pass. The owners sold the complex to a larger company which could afford to upgrade the aging facility and better ride through the lean years. (The Pass will be featured in an upcoming series on Washington ski areas.)

In early August, North Bend hosts the Festival at Mount Si, which is a weekend of parades, exhibits, and food. It’s a small town summerfest that has something for everyone.

Getting to North Bend is very easy. Drive 30 miles east on I-90 and take Exit 30 into town. To ride Metro to North Bend, take route 209 from the Issaquah Park and Ride; however, the route doesn’t run on Sunday. Route 214 will take riders from Seattle, but only operates during the afternoon commute hours.

Next month: We drive down SR202 to Snoqualmie

Confusion? is a periodic publication of the Snoqualmie Ridge Press, Frank Hansche, Proprietor. It is published for family, friends and members of AAPA and NAPA.

The nameplate is set in 48 point Brush, the headlines are 14 point Baskerville Italic and the body text is 12 point Baskerville.

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