

Confusion?

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Enumclaw, October's Small Place

This month's small place is Enumclaw, a city in southeastern King County. The town sits up against the Cascade Mountains and in the shadow of Mt. Rainier. Eleven thousand people currently call Enumclaw home.

Enumclaw was founded by Frank and Mary Stephenson in 1885. The Stephensons platted the community, built a hotel and gave away lots for a saloon and a general store. The city was incorporated in 1913 as a municipal corporation.

The name "Enumclaw" comes from an Indian name that means "Place of evil spirits". The Indians called a nearby mountain "Enumclaw" because they believed the Thunderbird lived there. A local settler reportedly named the town.

During the 1880's and 1890's, agriculture was one of the primary industries of the emergent community. The crop of choice was hops used in making beer. Hops continued to be the dominant crop until decimated by an infestation of hop lice and a collapse of the commodity market. Local farmers turned to dairying as a replacement for hops. Dairy farming remains one of the plateau's major industries.

In 1887, a group of settlers formed the White River Lumber and Shingle Company to take advantage of the vast amount of lumber in the area. The mill became the town's major employer.

The first road to Enumclaw was a puncheon road and that put the community on the map. A puncheon road is made from logs and provides a very rough ride! Shortly after incorporation, the city leaders persuaded King County to pave the road into town.

The railroad did not come to the community until 1910. The Northern Pacific Railroad had bypassed the town when they routed their line through the community of Palmer. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad built a branch line into Enumclaw to transport the lumber and dairy products that the area was producing. The railroad finally gave way to truck transportation in the 1950's.

Besides lumber and agriculture, insurance emerged as one of Enumclaw's major employers. A group of residents formed the Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company in 1898 to insure properties against fire and catastrophic loss. The company continued to grow but only insured in Washington State. In 1952, the company added coverage in Oregon and Idaho and merged with an Oregon based insurance company in 1962. Farmers' Mutual changed its name to Mutual of Enumclaw in 1966 and continues to operate under that name today.

Enumclaw is home to the King County Fair, one of the last true country fairs. The fair started in the Georgetown area of Seattle in 1863 while Washington was still a territory. In 1900, the fair moved to Renton, then to Enumclaw after World War II. King County Parks owned the fairgrounds until 2007. In 2006, the County and the City of

Enumclaw reached an agreement to transfer the fairgrounds to the city. The property, now known as the Enumclaw Expo Center, continues to host the fair, which is into its 146th year.

For powderhounds and other outdoor enthusiasts, Enumclaw is a portal to outstanding winter and summer recreation. Downhill skiers travel through Enumclaw on their way to Crystal Mountain, a world-class ski resort. In fact, Enumclaw is the only way to get to Crystal because the eastern route over Chinook Pass closes every winter. Cross-country skiers can take advantage of the numerous trails throughout the Cascades. Summer recreation features hiking, picnicking and camping.

Drivers have several routes to Enumclaw while bus travelers will find “getting there” somewhat challenging. Pierce County drivers can head east on Highway 410 to Enumclaw. From Auburn, go south on Auburn Way to the Auburn-Enumclaw highway, SR 161. King County drivers start in Maple Valley and drive south to Enumclaw on SR 169. For Metro riders, only two routes serve Enumclaw. The 912 from Covington only operates from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm weekdays, while the 915, which runs from the Auburn rail station, operates from 5:00 am to 7:00 pm weekdays.

Enumclaw, in the shadow of Mt. Rainier, is an interesting place to visit. It's out of the way, but certainly worth the drive!

Next time: We head backup up SR 169 and Hwy 18 to North Bend

Crystal Mountain Ski Resort

Crystal Mountain is one of the largest ski areas in Washington State. Located just off US 410 from Enumclaw, Crystal features

world class skiing while only being two hours from Seattle. Started in 1962, the area grew to be one of the largest ski resorts in the state. It has long runs and lots of interesting terrain. To deal with long lift lines, Crystal installed one of the first detachable grip quad chairlifts in Washington State. (Quad means each chair carries four passengers.)

Snow in the Cascades can be fickle and the resort suffered several years of poor revenues due to low snow pack. As a result, the owners were unable to continue upgrading the facility. In 1997, the Boyne Mountain company bought the ski area and since has spent millions of dollars to update the resort.

Crystal has been featured in several Warren Miller ski films, which have helped give the area international recognition. In one film, Warren says he's happy to see such a nice resort so near soggy Seattle!

I will be featuring Crystal Mountain in a series of articles on Washington ski areas. The series will cover all of the active ski areas in the state. Look for it later on this year (time permitting!)

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