A TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN THE UPPER SKAGIT

We tend to develop a natural connection to places in the wild Upper Skagit. Place is also about history and the people who came before us and their relationship to the land. The chronology below is offered here as means to place Upper Skagit peoples, past and present, within a timeline of natural and cultural events, so that we may better consider our own relationships with the land.

SOME PRE-CONTACT PERIOD EVENTS (DATED IN YEARS BEFORE PRESENT BY RADIOCARBON TECHNIQUE)

24–18,000 A glacial lake occupies the valley where today’s Ross Lake now exists.
14,500 The large Cordilleran Ice Sheet that covers the northern half of today’s Washington, including the North Cascades (and Seattle and Puget Sound as far south as Centralia), begins to melt away.
CA. 11,000 The ice age elephants (mammoths and mastodons) and Bison, prior to this time fairly abundant in many parts of the unglaciated Pacific Northwest, have become extinct.
+9000 Earliest evidence of people in the high elevations of Washington State & B.C. & the N. Cascades interior at Cascade Pass, & of the use of Hozomeen chert (a variety of quartz rock similar to flint, used to make tools).
8400 Native people begin a long tradition in the Upper Skagit to quarry Hozomeen chert; parts of Jack, Desolation, & Hozomeen mountain are made of these ancient sea-floor rocks; Hozomeen chert use begins to spread beyond the local source areas.
6000 Cooler moister climate begins, widespread economic shift to more intensive use of local resources, more complex and diverse technologies, along with more permanent villages.
3800 Largest known eruption of Mt. St. Helens deposits 2 in thick layer of yellow, sandy volcanic ash (“Y”) across widespread areas of the Pacific Northwest, including the Ross Lake area.
2000 Widespread and recurrent use of the upper Skagit floodplain and valley landforms as base camps for hunting and gathering expeditions (mountain goats, deer, beaver, food & medicinal plants).
1,400 At Newhalem, under a large boulder, Indian people cooked and preserve mountain goat, bear, and other animals hunted in the surrounding mountains.
660 Old World diseases first introduced, with devastating effects to American Indian populations.

CALENDAR DATES (A.D.) OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN RECORDED HISTORY IN THE ROSS LAKE VICINITY

1730 Indian people of E. Washington acquire horses from Great Basin Indian bands; horses introduced to North American by Spanish explorers in the southwest in the 1500s.
1778 Captain Cook’s third voyage arrives in the San Juan Islands.
1804 (Aug. 12) Lewis and Clark are first Americans to describe seeing a coyote (lower Missouri River).
1814 Alexander Ross makes the first documented (and extremely uncomfortable) crossing of the North Cascades by a non-Indian, over Cascade Pass.
1827 Ft. Langley, a Hudson’s Bay Co. trading post, is established on the lower Fraser River.
1850 The Little Ice Age, a period of alpine glacier growth, ends.
1853–1855 Isaac Stevens, territorial governor, signs series of treaties with Indian bands and tribes in W. Washington.
Aug. 1859 Henry Custer begins canoe trip down the Skagit River from Hozomeen to mouth of Ruby Creek.
1861 The U.S. Civil War begins.
1870 The first non-Indian inland settlement on the Skagit River is established at Mount Vernon.
1872 Yellowstone National Park is established as first national park, and first such park world-wide; it is managed by the U.S. Army.
Summer, 1872 Smohalla, Wanapum Indian prophet, predicted that the Great Spirit would soon shake the earth to show his displeasure with the encroaching white man.
Dec. 14, 1872 A major earthquake, estimated to exceed 7 on the Richter scale, is felt throughout north-central Washington; the quake’s epicenter is located in the approximate vicinity of today’s Ross Lake.
1876–1877 A huge log jam at Mount Vernon is finally removed, allowing steamboat navigation up the Skagit River; Otto von Pressentin and others discover a trace of gold along lower Ruby Creek.
1879 N. E. Goodell establishes a trading post near present-day Newhalem, to supply gold prospectors on Ruby Creek.

Winter, 1879–80 A gold rush begins, with the lower reach of Ruby Creek packed with prospectors who endured snow depths of 12 ft or more in the upper Skagit River valley; most prospectors access the valley from the lower Fraser River, near today’s Hope, B.C.; others access the valley from below the Skagit gorge at Newhalem.

CA. 1881 N. E. Goodell visits a traditional Skagit Indian long house near today’s Marblemount, which he describes as 200 ft long and 50 ft wide with siding of cedar planks 12 ft long and 18 in wide.

1884 John McMillan establishes a homestead in the lower Big Beaver valley.

1890 Most of the land available for homesteading under the Dawes Act (1887) is claimed in the Marblemount-Newhalem-lower Cascade River vicinity.

1891 A railroad line reaches Rockport from the west.

CA. 1895 Tommy Rowland settles across from the mouth of Big Beaver Creek, on the east side of the Skagit River.

1897 President Grover Cleveland proclaims the Washington Forest Reserve, which includes the North Cascades and the Upper Skagit.

1905 The U.S. Forest Service was created and assumed management of the Upper Skagit Valley.

1916 The Skagit River freezes over.

1917 The first Sourdough Lookout is built by Frank Davis (son of Lucinda Davis, a pioneering settler); the City of Seattle begins building Gorge Dam, the first of three on the Skagit River.

1922 Railroad transportation, to serve dam construction, is completed to Newhalem.

1922 (July 29) John McMillan dies at his ranch in the Big Beaver valley

1924 The City of Seattle begins operation of Gorge Dam (a wood crib dam) and powerhouse.

1924 Guy Cook (Gerry’s grandfather) comes to work at Newhalem, drives the train between Rockport and Diablo.

1926 A forest fire started in the Big Beaver valley spread rapidly to burn a large area around Ross Lake.

1929 Construction of Diablo Dam is completed.

1932 Desolation Lookout is built.

1933 A Civilian Conservation Corps crew builds the present-day Sourdough Lookout.
1933  Ed Cook (Gerry’s dad) works trails for the U.S. Forest Service and stays at the Boundary Guard Station.

1939  First concrete is poured in Ross Dam.

CA. 1943  Clearing begins of the forest that will be inundated behind Ross Dam.

1949  The concrete structure of Ross Dam is completed and waters of the Skagit River are impounded.

1950  Replacement of the original wooden Gorge Dam by a concrete structure is completed.

1952  The first Ross Powerhouse generator is completed and the first power from the dam is supplied to Seattle.

1953  The full Ross Dam reservoir height, to an elevation of 1602.5 ft, is reached; waters touch Canadian soil for the first time.

1956  Jack Kerouac is fire lookout on Desolation Mountain.

1967  Gerry’s first year working on Ross Lake.

1968  North Cascades National Park Service Complex is established by Congress.

1971  Gerry is fire lookout on Sourdough Mountain as new North Cascades Highway is built.

1972  The new North Cascades Highway opens, providing the first vehicle route across the North Cascades.

1984  Bob’s first visit to Ross Lake to start an archeological study for the park, while an employee of WSU.

1987  The first of many Hozomeen chert (flint) quarries discovered in the Upper Skagit, dating to 8,400 years ago.

1988  Most of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex is formally designated Wilderness by U.S. Congress and entered into the National Wilderness Preservation System.

1999  In the spring, Ross Lake is drawn down 134 feet, the lowest level since the reservoir was impounded; archeological investigations continue on Skagit River landscapes previously inundated for 50 years.

Oct. 2003  One of the largest Skagit River floods on record causes floodplain erosion and builds gravel bars and woody debris piles; heavy rains trigger landslides up Goodell Creek and in the Skagit Gorge above Newhalem.

2005  Hozomeen chert toolstone from the Upper Skagit is found in the 9,000 year old soil at Cascade Pass.