

*As long as there are wild places and wild things, we can  
remember the wild and free aspects of ourselves - which  
are a big part of what makes us human beings*

John Denver

THE AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE TO THE HIKING TRAILS OF  
**COUGAR MOUNTAIN**  
REGIONAL WILDLAND PARK AND SURROUNDS

NEW EDITION BY **CHARLES MCCRONE**

FOREWORD BY **HARVEY MANNING**

ORIGINAL TEXT BY HARVEY MANNING AND RALPH OWEN

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the Muldoon Seam at an angle of 42 degrees – 850 vertical feet, to 200 feet below sea level. In the years of its use, 1914 to 1926, 11 electric locomotives worked underground, delivering filled cars that were hauled up

### Ford Slope



photo by Jere Carson

the 1740-foot incline by a steam hoist at the surface. The channel that extends out from the opening is not the bed of Coal Creek but the ropeway where the hoisting cables ran out to the hoist. As directed by the interpretive sign, look off in the woods to your right, where a H marks the location of the steam hoist that pulled the cars.

Go back up from the sidetrip to Ford Slope, and take the Steam Hoist Trail. It passes above a seasonal pond, and a brushed-over junction with the unsigned trail, and then at 0.1 mile from W3 crosses Coal Creek on a low bridge right above one of the best artifacts of the olden days, an intact *concrete dam* built in 1916 that made a millpond of Coal Creek, which flowed under the dam into a covered flume, not reappearing on the surface until the Steam Hoist. In those days the creek was similarly covered all the way through the millyards and down past the bunker, to provide room for the mine haulway, railroad,

and buildings. Now the millpond is completely sedimented and brushed in, forcing Coal Creek out of the flume to the surface nearly six feet above its original level. In addition to its economic role, the pond served a second purpose, recreational, and a third, educational, as the *Ol' Swimm'n' Hole*. Bathing suits being unknown, the town rule was that on alternate days the girls swam (and the boys hid out up in the woods) and the boys swam (and the girls hid out up in the woods). Beyond the creek crossing is the site of the *sawmill*, still visible in the still standing sawmill footing block on the left side of the trail. (This sawmill was the last in a series of several that served Coal Creek town; after spending three days logging, the crew would spend three days sawing mine timbers and rough lumber for local building.) A heap of bricks from the demolished burner stack lie beneath a cover of soil and plants. The trail heads north now, and rises to look down on the massive pillars of the foundation of the *Steam Hoist* (signed), 0.2 mile from W3. Harvey Manning describes his first discovery of the hoist: "In 1976, when first I fought through the thorns and muck, I gaped as if an explorer in the jungles of the Yucatan chancing upon a Mayan pyramid. I didn't know what I'd discovered but realized this much concrete – the most substantial relict of olden-day Newcastle – meant something important. Learning these were the foundations of the Steam Hoist, I cleared a path and cleaned the vegetation from one pillar to permit climbing to the top to survey the scene. The eye sees naught but jungle. The imagination sees mine yards all around, machine shops, warehouses, offices and, on the sidehill, a large boiler house with eight tall smokestacks."

Directly across from the Steam Hoist an unsigned trail climbs left to the Wildside Trail; our way is to head straight ahead and slightly down, following the line of the ropeway between the Hoist and Ford Slope, and also connecting to the **Wildside Trail** (W1) at 0.3 mile from W3. Strangely both our way and the unsigned trail mentioned above are signed "W4 Steam Hoist Trail" at their respective intersections with the Wildside, causing potential confusion since only the more northerly is shown on the County's GIS map distributed at the trailhead. At our Y-shaped intersection with W1, head right and slightly down. 0.1 mile later the Wildside passes through a horse barrier and joins the Rainbow Town Trail just west (on the other side) of Ford Slope, within sight of our earlier route. (Near this junction, a pipe sticking out of the ground marks the site of the *first* Ford Mine fan house, built of wood around 1905, complete with steam engine.) Take the Rainbow Town Trail for about 100 feet left and then depart it to follow the Wildside right and down a flight of stairs (signed for Red Town Trailhead).

The Wildside Trail here skirts the slopes of a small hill (in fact a mine dump from the gypo Strain Coal Company). Beneath it is the site of the *Wash House* where miners emerging from the Ford Slope cleaned up before going home. What has happened since those days? Well, whereas the company hauled waste rock in rail cars down the valley to what later became the Cinder Mine, the gypo miners who operated after the company quit dumped wastes handy to their holes. In company days the entire area was a large flat (not natural – itself made by excavating-filling the primeval terrain). The gypos built hills of waste, covered the sites of the Wash House, other buildings of the mine yards, and also of Rainbow Town, a cluster of miner-owned houses painted any color except (perhaps) red.

In company days electric locomotives hauled mine cars from the Ford Slope 1/3 mile downstream to dump loads in the top of the bunkers, from the bottom of which railroad cars were loaded for Seattle. Near the Wash House site, just past the bridge, a dead-end path can be spotted (depending on the brush) going left off the Wildside Trail on a remnant grade of the mine haulway and leading to a pit, a caved-in entry to a gypo mine (or perhaps it is an airway?) in the Jones Seam. The Wildside Trail drops to cross Coal Creek -- here in a deep gully -- and amid more mysterious hillocks and gulches climbs the bank to the grade of a road last used by the gypo miners, before that as a skid road along which logs were hauled downstream to a sawmill, predecessor of the one upstream. Here is a plugged-up gypo's hole into the Bagley Seam. Long before the gypos the company had a major water-level entry into the Bagley Seam here. The seam's lower portion has subsided, forming an unnatural ravine, ascended by a path, which is the **Bagley Seam Trail (W10)**, the next leg of our loop.

Turn right on W10, climbing 0.2 mile up the ravine, past the *Bagley Seam* exposed in the ravine wall, to the **Red Town Trail**. Here for the first time in the loop, retrace your steps, left on the Red Town Trail about 200 feet, to the junction with **Cave Hole Road Trail (C3)**. Head right, uphill, passing on the left a long cave hole on the Number 3 seam, and in 0.1 mile head left on the **Red Town Creek Trail (C2)** (800 feet). Another 0.1 mile (past a tremendous maple on the left) and *Dam #3* across Red Town Creek is attained, which once supplied the Red Town neighborhood. It is easy to spot the intact, though breached, timber-reinforced earthen dam that stored waters of Red Town Creek to alleviate the considerable thirst of Red Town. Cross the creek, which both below and above here flows in a splendid wild-tangled gorge but just at this point runs over a flat terrace. Then climb in another 0.1 mile to the **Military Road (N2)** (800 feet). The *Military Road* once connected Issaquah to (historic) Newcastle; read the interpretive sign at the junction for more on its history (and for the fascinating story of 1860s conflicts between Indians and the first white settlers in the Issaquah area). Read the Military Road trail description later in this chapter for more information on its route. For now, head left and downhill, completing the historic loop in 0.2 mile back to Coal Creek Townsite Trailhead. Just shy of the parking lot, the Military Road Trail switchbacks down into the drainage of Red Town Creek, crosses over, then climbs to join the parking area.

## MILITARY ROAD (N2)

*Trailheads:* Coal Creek Townsite, Clay Pit Road

*Coal Creek Townsite to Clay Pit Road (166<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE)*  
0.7 mile; elevation gain 425 feet

### Background

The Military Road Trail, as it exists within the Park boundaries, runs from the Coal Creek Townsite Trailhead eastwards to the Clay Pit Road, but it once ran all the way to Issaquah, crossing the Sky Country along what is now the north edge of the Park and winding down to Goode's Corner. The description in this chapter will deal with the protected park portion only. In the Precipice chapter, a description can be found of the far Issaquah end, the only other clearly surviving portion, which the Precipice Trail follows in its route south from Summerhill. In between, much of the remaining traces are already only history. To read about Harvey Manning's account of the middle section -- which remains fascinating for its historical content even as the real route fades into its twilight -- see Appendix A. Many times I have wished that the original route had been protected in its entirety before it was too late. Enjoy the two portions we have left (separated by two miles as the crow flies -- and a lot of topography). Support us in our efforts to get the Issaquah end in the Park!

### History

After Governor Stevens negotiated the treaties that caused the Indian Wars (or, as the other side called them, the White Wars), Washington Territory was garrisoned by the U.S. Army and maps of the era are crisscrossed with "military roads." We don't know when ours was built, or for what eventuality. We do know that from the 1870s (or possibly the late 1860s), until the Seattle, Lake Shore & Eastern Railway reached Issaquah in 1888, this road (also called James Bush Road, Summit Road, Stage Road, and Post Road) was the main route from Issaquah (and North Bend) to Seattle. People and produce (including hops) came over the hill to Newcastle and from there to Seattle -- at first to Lake Washington and on by boat, and later by train. Produce from the farms of Squak Valley was carried over the hill to the hungry



miners in Newcastle. While present roads go circuitously around Cougar following valleys, the early road took the direct high route, which stayed dry and passable even during the rainy season.

We are also not certain when use of this road as a main route ceased. It was evidently still traveled extensively into the 1890s and maybe even this century. The situation is further confused by the construction, at some time (unknown to us as yet) prior to the publication of the 1895 U.S. Geological Survey map, of County Road 66, which in part followed the older road but in part didn't.

We do know, from an undated photo taken (probably sometime between 1884 and 1895), that stages (wagons, not coaches) employed the route to connect Issaquah and Newcastle. (The later motor stages run by the Bush family went around south of the mountain, through May Valley.) We also know from Fred Rounds that in his youth the route was used strictly by horses and walkers. When inviting an Issaquah gal to a dance in Newcastle, a gallant would walk 5-odd miles to Issaquah to her house and walk her back the 5-odd miles to the dance hall, but would not walk her home because in a few hours he had to go down in the mines; presumably the gals banded together for the return – lighted perhaps by carbide?

The road also was walked by Reichert, the miner who planted the orchard (still extant) atop Radio Peak, kept cows, and each morning on his way to work carried two cans of milk in a shoulder yoke down to Red Town, delivering milk (by pouring in pannikins left on porches) before riding a mine car into the depths of the Ford Slope. An old name thus was "Reichert's Hill." Another old name was "Goat Peak" but the less said of that the better. This was all well and good, but by the time we latter-day archaeologists arrived on the scene some of the route had been taken over by modern roads and some thoroughly confused by the maze of logging roads built from the 1920s on. Aided by maps and Fred, Ralph Owen and Harvey Manning were – independently and in alliance – 5 or 6 years figuring out the route – which the Trails Club wanted to have designated as a protected Historical Road connecting to the Seattle - Walla Walla Railroad (that being in its eastern end also the **Coal Creek Trail**), making a history walk from Elliott Bay to Issaquah – connecting to the history walk from Issaquah along the Gilman Railroad to North Bend. But the developers would have none of that, of course.

### Description

Strangely, the start of the trail is not well signed from the parking lot (650 feet). Look for where Red Town Creek slips underneath the parking lot access road and espy the trail down in the brush, well shy of the other main routes branching out from the trailhead.

The trail starts on the true left bank of the creek but immediately crosses (no bridge, but shallow), and sidles uphill out of the ravine on a path built as a 1989 Eagle Scout project (look for the coal outcropping upstream from the crossing). The path rises out of the ravine to meet the Military Road proper, here also County Road 66 (still marked as such on my 1992 Thomas Guide). In this general area were once White Town, Union Hall, and the Dance Hall. Nearby was once a footlog bridge crossing the ravine, the way home to White Town from the Saloon (Fred Rounds told the story of a large woman, a regular at the Saloon, who didn't make it home one night; he was in the rescue party which got her out of the ravine, alright save for a hangover). The trail route takes the old road rightwards, coming to a junction with the **Red Town Creek Trail (C2)** at **0.2 mile** (800 feet). Read the story on the interpretive sign here (very interesting!). Continuing on and up, the trail crosses the shallow drainage of one fork of Red Town Creek on planks. (Right at this point, County Road 66 once diverged from the Military Road, just shy of the crossing and forged straight ahead, its route long since taken over by a seasonal creek.) The trail then parallels the deeper gulch of the other fork of Red Town Creek, crossing that one at its shallower origin. At **0.7 mile**, the Military Road Trail comes out on 166<sup>th</sup> Way – also known as the **Clay Pit Road (C1)** -- a few yards from where it is gated at the Park boundary (1075 feet).

(While walking one of the steeper pitches of this ancient, narrow wagon road, one is reminded of a Cougar Mountain story told by Bessie Wilson Craine in her delightful book, Squak Valley, reprinted in 1983 by the Issaquah Historical Society and for sale at its museum. "The spring that I was five years old {1887}, Mother took a notion that she would like to go to Seattle and spend some of her butter money. On Mother's return trip from Seattle, she had quite an experience on the stage over the New Castle Hill. She and some lady, with a bird in a cage, were sitting in the back seat. Some man had tied two hound dogs to the seat. When they were going up one of these steep hills, the seat went over backwards. The woman, birdcage, two dogs and Mother landed in a heap in the road. No damage was done. Mother had a quick temper, also a sense of humor; but after all, that was carrying things too far. By the time she got untangled from the dogs, she, no doubt, told the stage driver plenty and gave him some good ideas as how to fasten the seat down, besides just slipping them over the side boards. By the time she reached home and retold the incident, they all had a good laugh. About all I could think of was wondering if they hurt the dogs when they fell on them.")

For the description of the continuation of the Road over to Issaquah, see Appendix A.

## CAVE HOLE ROAD TRAIL (C3)

*Trailhead:* Coal Creek Townsite

*Features:* Sandstone strata, muted views west

*Red Town Trail to Clay Pit Road*

*1.1 miles; elevation gain 450 feet*

### Background

Early on the company built a wagon road from the mine works up to the Klondike Dam, the route carefully located between coal seams, care also taken not to mine too close to the surface beneath it. (The Klondike Dam lowered the level of what was Klondike Lake - now swamp -- to provide water for washing coal as well as supplying houses.) The trail's name comes from the superb exhibit of cave holes into the Number 3, Bagley, and Muldoon Seams and what they tell us of mine history. The Cave Hole Road serves as a connector between the Curious Valley and the Sky Country and as access to favorite sidetrails. *Note: the mileages to various junctions and features on the King County trail signs along Cave Hole Road Trail are particularly inconsistent; I have judged between them and selected those mileages that seemed most sensible.*

### Description

From the Coal Creek Townsite Trailhead (650 feet) ascend Hill Street (aka **Red Town Trail**) 0.2 mile to the Red Town site (750 feet) and turn off left on the Cave Hole Road Trail. The unnatural gully on the left is a long cave hole on the Number 3 Seam. About 300 feet further up, on the right, is a strip mine in the Bagley Seam begun by the gypo Strain Coal Company around the end of World War II; it had to be precipitously abandoned when the digging let air into the underground fire that had been smoldering since 1894, causing a mushroom cloud alarmingly visible (it being wartime) from Seattle. On the left again, the careful eye can spot a brushed-over upper street of Red Town. The walk along this section is a steady and moderate climb; the trail retains its original wagon road character, a nice and wide shaded way.

Next, **0.1 mile** along Cave Hole, the **Red Town Creek Trail (C2)** goes off left (800 feet), leading to the Red Town Dam and the Military Road. From this junction, the road switchbacks right, crossing the Number 3 Seam (cave holes to the right and then the left, many accessible from tiny footpaths, though don't confuse the series of drainage ditches on the right for paths; the cave holes extend on the strike line through the forest all the way up to Nike Park). The road bends left to parallel a row of cave holes in the Bagley off right in the brush; across Coal Creek valley in winter can be seen the entry road to Newcastle (former Landfill) Golf. The golf entry road actually follows a strip mine, also in the Bagley, allowing the hiker to orient himself in relation to the strike of the seams. Interestingly, the direction of the strike is also visible in a strata of outcropping sandstone, partially exposed in the tread of the trail.

At **0.5 mile** from the Red Town Trail, the trail to **Coal Creek Falls (C4)** goes off right (1040 feet). Off left, hidden in the brush can be found the portal of a mine worked by the Pacific Coast Coal Company in the Muldoon, and a small clay pit; off right are Muldoon cave holes. These continue through the brush down the strike line to Red Town, as well as up through forest nearly to the Clay Pit Road. The road now bends right to cross the Bagley seam, whose cave holes henceforth are off left in the brush (some accessible from footpaths).

After about 0.2 mile of stiffer climbing, the road reaches the top of the valley wall and levels out (1100 feet). To the left is passed a path to the Champion Cave Hole, in the Bagley, often filled with water, seeming big enough to swallow a whole row of condos. To the right at 1175 feet a sideroad -- now barely visible -- once dipped to cross Coal Creek. (Beyond, in a few yards, it climbed to an unnatural slope. Here, before the era of core-drilling, the company explored the coal seams by tunneling, contemplating making this their center of operations. The Ford Mine was chosen instead. No coal was exported but the operation was steam-powered by its own product, so clinkers are strewn about. The concrete structure was the storage facility of the firm that in the 1960s made explosives nearby. The road continued uphill and in about 3/4 mile intersected **Fred's Railroad**.)

The trail actually descends slightly before hitting at **1.0 mile** the shaded junction with the **Claypit Road Bypass Trail (C9)**, which climbs to **Fred's Railroad** in 0.3 mile and provides an alternative to walking the Claypit Road. (The sign at this junction notes Coal Creek Falls as 1.1 mile behind, implying it is 0.7 mile from the Falls junction to here: a whopping 0.3 mile different from the sign at that junction that placed the Clay Pit Road only 0.5 mile uphill.) In the vicinity of the C3-C9 junction there are many more artifacts and features for



the explorer to find in the brush, though the identity of most is now hard to discern! The Cave Hole Trail ends by intersecting the **Clay Pit Road (C1)** at **1.1 mile**, 1200 feet.

## COAL CREEK FALLS TRAIL (C4)



*Trailhead:* Coal Creek Townsite

*Cave Hole Trail to Quarry Trail*

*0.6 mile; approx. elevation gain 80 feet (from Falls to new junction with C6)*

### Background

Harvey Manning recounts his discovery of the Falls: "Often in the rainy season, walking the Quarry Trail beside Coal Creek's tumbling flow from the High Basins to the Low Basins, I'd heard the loud roar close below, but thoughts of investigating the source of the sound were dispelled by salmonberry thickets. Then, in 1982 I think it was, in the course of tracing the lines of cave holes along the Number 3, Bagley, and Muldoon I became interested in the maze of ancient roads built during at least two eras of gypo logging south from the Cave Hole Road to Coal Creek's gorge. One day, astonished, I found myself in a chilly darkness and dankness, great old trees green with moss, sopping up mist and dropping it on my head, gorge walls leaping up on either side of a stream white with cataracts, the bed a litter of granite erratics. The old cat road I was following ended – and before me the falls were splashing down a 30-foot slab, sloshing around in sandstone potholes. I did some flagging and chopping, spread the word, and instantly the falls became one of our most popular short hikes, delicious for picnics on hot summer days, a crystal palace in winter when the falls freeze."

### Description

From the Coal Creek Townsite Trailhead (650 feet) ascend **Red Town Trail (W2)** to Red Town, turn left on the **Cave Hole Trail (C3)**, and, roughly 0.7 mile from the trailhead, turn right onto the signed trail to the falls (1040 feet). Initially the trail is wide and flat but quickly closes into a tight forest trail flanked by young alder, which form in places barely shoulder wide portals for the hiker to pass through. Pass a Bagley cave hole on the right, a Strain mine in the Muldoon on the

### Old Growth Stumps



photo by Charles McCrone

left, and proceed on an upsy-downsy contour. At one point, the trail swings down to parallel then cross a narrow ravine, then crests and follows the opposite, higher side of the same ravine in the other direction. After a few more twists and turns, the trail drops around a corner into the gorge of Coal Creek Falls. Here is a geographic transition: beyond the wide drainage of Coal Creek, the evergreens stand tall and beckon to the Sky Country. The trail takes a gentle contour down the side of the gorge and easily reaches the creek just below the Falls, crossing on a newer King County bridge (**0.4 mile** from Cave Hole). Between the bridge and the Falls, virtually in the streambed, are a trio of old-growth stumps, notched by loggers. The air is noticeably cooler here in summer. On the far side of the creek, the trail is a bit more pitched and steep, and pulls away from Coal Creek to climb to a new junction with the **Quarry Trail (C6)** at **0.6 mile**, amid a forest of young alder on the plateau above Shy Bear Creek (*Note: the original*

*junction with the Quarry Trail at 0.5 mile is gone, moved further up due to a winter '99-'00 reroute of the Quarry Trail).*

(As a boy Fred Rounds worked for a hard-rock miner from Montana, shoveling Ball Park gravel into the hopper of a sluice box. The miner never let Fred watch him clean the rug, but kept at the placering long enough to make Fred think there must have been gold dust. The source? Gold can come from sedimentary strata. Fred, though, said a ledge of hard, crystalline rock outcrops in the creek above the falls. An outcrop of such rock wouldn't fit the bedrock geology but could be a glacial erratic, gold-bearing. Or maybe the miner was a fool, and his gold to match.)

## DE LEO WALL (DAVE'S) TRAIL (W9)

*Trailheads:* Licorice Fern #2, Coal Creek Townsite, Summit Junction

*Features:* Views, Madrona groves, Picture Buttruss

*Indian Trail to Summit Junction*

*1.1 mile; elevation gain 419 feet*

### Background

For generations local daredevils have flirted with death and destruction on De Leo Wall, skidding down to its brink from the summit of Marshall's Hill. Trails Club hike leaders, sweating out the safety of their parties, decided there had to be a better way. In 1981 Dave Kappler found it – or rather made it, flagging an easy and safe way from the Curious Valley to a wall-top viewpoint that is as splendid as any other yet not the least airy-scary.

Dave's original trail extends from the Indian Trail in the heart of the Curious Valley up to the viewpoint; the original Marshall's Hill Trail (see description following) deadended at the summit above just above that, until Ed and Muriel Roselius built an intermediary section of trail bringing them together. In the Park lexicon, the now complete trail up to Marshall's Hill, and beyond to Summit Junction, kept the name "De Leo Wall Trail" and the name "Marshall's Hill Trail" was left only to that section of the original Marshall's Hill Trail beyond Summit Junction; the hiker taking that trail from the north thus, ironically, never reaches the summit of the Hill.

### Description

From a southward heading on the **Indian Trail** (W7) turn right (west), just shy of Far Country Corner, onto the signed De Leo Wall Trail, across Long Marsh Creek to the end of the **Wildside Trail** (W1) (700 feet). The De Leo Wall trail proceeds straight ahead, the Wildside right. Following an ancient woods road, the way contours around and out of the Curious Valley (passing above a cute little cattail marsh) into the sidevalley of Dave's Creek (750 feet), which winds down the hillside in a ravine seemingly disproportionately deep for the creek's trickle. Old road is then left for built trail: ascending into a forest rich and old and unmolested by human hand or saw in many a decade. The way climbs and with some ups and a few downs swings around the side of Marshall's Hill, the slope steepening, rock outcrops appearing, and the forest becoming south-side sunny and dry, firs yielding to madrona.

**0.7 mile:** Forest canopy abruptly yields to sky at the **Madrona Grove Viewpoint** (this is the "De Leo Wall" mileage marker on the signs). An andesite buttress juts from the hillside, a great spot to sit and soak up sun and eat lunch. The views are superb down the wall to May Valley, some 600 vertical feet below, out to Rainier and where St. Helens used to be, the Black Hills, Sea-Tac, I-5, Southcenter, and Renton. Very loud country, out there. Here the serviceberry blooms, and also the *Ceanothus sanguineus*, and Easter lily and chocolate lily, and Indian paintbrush and blue-eyed Mary, and honeysuckle and strawberry – a garden growing to one side of the sky.

In 1983 Ed and Muriel Roselius constructed the section of trail up the remaining steps to the summit of Marshall's Hill (1119 feet), tying into the old southerly portion of the Marshall's Hill Trail. This portion of the De Leo Wall Trail is one of the steepest moments on Cougar Mountain, a series of dry tight switchbacks with

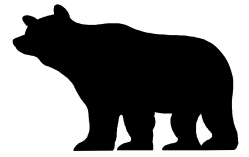
**Madrona Grove Viewpoint on De Leo Wall**



photo by Jere Carson



# The East Slopes



The eastern trails of the Wildland Park (E1 through E9) all traverse The Precipice (save for the short connector trails of E8 and E9). The geography of the Precipice is immediately evident from any casual perusal of a topo map of Cougar Mountain, wrapping around the mountain from Lewis Creek Gorge in the north all the way to Wilderness Creek in the southeast, most steep on either end. The trails of this section descend it at its somewhat less severe points, heading down from Anti Aircraft Peak to State Route 900. As the current park boundary is only halfway down the east face of the mountain, the lower end of these trails have long been threatened with development in the form of various proposals for an “East Village”. Through the combined efforts of the Trails Club and the City of Issaquah, and the remarkable willingness of the final developer (Intracorp) to negotiate with us, the wild space of West Tibbetts Creek Canyon and southwards is being dedicated to the City as permanent open space. This major victory gives us 1) the entirety of the Bear Ridge Trail (the opening trail of this chapter) into perpetuity 2) an invaluable wildlife corridor between Cougar and Squak mountains 3) the informal Tibbetts Creek trailhead as it is now; and 4) the Canyon itself, one of Cougar’s most remarkable places. Development northwards will bring some unwelcome changes, however, to familiar trails: the lower end of the Shangri La Trail will be bisected by a development road and houses will intrude onto The Precipice between the Shangri La and Surprise Creek Trails.

It is impossible to consider the trails of the East Slopes separate from those in the next chapter. That is why the Park must be expanded to reach past the powerline to the northeast, encompassing the Military Road portion of the Precipice Trail. The Trails Club has always supported a continuous Precipice Trail joining that part of The Precipice currently outside the Park to that part within. For more background on The Precipice and its traverse, see the next chapter.

## BEAR RIDGE TRAIL (E3)

*Trailhead:* Tibbetts Creek

*Features:* the Fantastic Erratic, West Tibbetts Creek Canyon

*State Route 900 to Shangri La Trail*

*1.6 mile; elevation gain 750 feet*

### Background

Bear Ridge is actually a linked pair of ridges between the great wide valley-gorge of West Tibbetts Creek and the companion valley-gorge of Claypit Creek. The name came quite naturally to the Indians, who in pioneering the route found themselves sharing the blackberries and salmonberries and Indian plums with wildlanders who wore fur coats but no boots. The trail has a destination uniquely its own – the far famed Fantastic Erratic. It also gives views north down into the splendid canyon of West Tibbetts Creek, which is with Coal Creek one of Cougar's two largest streams. Moreover, West Tibbetts is Cougar’s largest, longest *pristine* stream, essentially unmolested by man the entire 2 miles from headwaters in Lame Bear Swamp to Highway 900. (Note: the Bear Ridge/Shangri La Trail signs are another group of King County Park signs mutually inconsistent in their mileages, being off as much as 0.3 mile from one sign to another; consequently the mileage markers below may not match all the signs along the way.)

### Description

A few steps from the Tibbetts Creek Trailhead (200 feet), the Bear Ridge Trail heads up left. Note the gurgle of Clay Pit Creek just to the left of the trailhead; the first section of the trail follows the deepening gorge of that creek on a former road dating from the pulpwood logging of 1976. From the crest of Lower Bear Ridge, a few feet to the right, are fine gazes down into jungle depths of West Tibbetts Creek. From the trail itself are fine gazes down (to the left) into jungle depths of Claypit Creek.

The road grade dwindles to naught at the upper limit of the pulping and the trail sidehills off north, across the crest of Lower Bear Ridge, to Erratic Creek (600 feet). Turning uphill from here, Bear Ridge Trail crosses Erratic Creek, here flowing underground, and ascends onto the narrow crest of Upper Bear Ridge. A section

corner monument is one novel sight of the route (the associated spraypainted bearing tree was uprooted and left hanging over the trail during the 1998-1999 winter). Another novel sight is a pair of old-growth Douglas fir the loggers left. (Query: Where did the loggers come from to cut this slope, in the 1920s? No logging railroad grades or cat roads are to be seen. Presumably a skyline system was used, the logs yarded via aerial cable up to the railroad whose grade can be found at about the elevation of Protector Ridge).

At **1.2 mile** the trail drops off the crest to another crossing of Erratic Creek and its namesake, The Erratic! Truly Fantastic! As of 2000, the largest known erratic in the Issaquah Alps, among the largest ever discovered in lowland Western Washington. Scratching away under the superb wall of licorice fern, into the very hard but nondescript (not granitic) igneous rock, one might find the chiseled inscription, "Product of Canada."

As of 2000, Bear Ridge is the official southern starting point for the Precipice Trail route (also see the Precipice Trail description in the subsequent chapter), and from The Erratic the ascent to the Precipice proper is made. Leaving the vicinity of The Erratic, the Bear Ridge Trail in its final steep switchbacking reaches the crest of the ridge, which soon fades into the flats of a broad bench (900 feet).

The trail swings northerly near the brink of the bench, through pulped land, to a former pulper road. Look for a marvelous hollowed out burnt tree on the right. The level section of the trail crosses Erratic Creek again, then West Fork Tibbetts Creek on a narrow, natural bridge of earth collected on a huge downed cedar, and heads straight for the **Shangri La Trail**.

### the Fantastic Erratic



photo by Jere Carson

## APPENDIX A

### MILITARY ROAD: ORIGINAL COMPLETE ROUTE

#### *Coal Creek Townsite to Goode's Corner*

*3.75 miles; elevation gain 800 feet, loss 1300 feet*

For a historical overview and a description of the first section of the route, as it exits Coal Creek Townsite as a formal park trail, see that chapter of the guidebook. We pick up below from the Clay Pit Road eastwards, largely quoting from Harvey Manning's 1989 description. Note: much of this route is gone, obscured by development; it is included herein for historical interest.

#### *166<sup>th</sup> to Big Tree Ridge*

*1.5 mile; elevation gain 325 feet, loss 675 feet*

We've traced the road as it ascends nearly to the top of Radio Peak and sidehills down Cougar's northeast slopes, but most of this stretch and perhaps all is lost; already it passes through a number of yards and houses and more obstructions are being built as you read this. Our fallback hope is to locate and gain public permanence for a detour route.

A potential detour route for the section from 166<sup>th</sup> to Cougar Mt. Drive can be followed, which adds nearly a mile and 200 foot gain to the values listed above. As of 1989, another 3/4 mile of the grade beyond the detour can be walked high on the north side of Cougar by those willing to explore. This section is on private land and may be posted. If so, turn back. The trace is there for those with eyes to see it, some flags may be seen, but it is not presently being formally maintained as a trail. To reach this section from the gate on Clay Pit Road, turn up the Clay Pit Road and walk it until the **Coyote Creek (Bill's) Trail** (N4) is seen striking to the left. Follow this trail until it reaches the **Radio Peak Trail** (N3) and follow this second trail as it crosses the top of Radio Peak and drops to meet Cougar Mountain Drive.

Turn right and walk up the paved Cougar Mountain Drive (1300 feet) with old orchards on both sides of the road. In 100 yards, at the upper end of the orchard on the left side of the road, turn downhill off the road and walk along the edge of the orchard a few feet until intersecting the faint trace of a narrow old road. This is the Military Road. Turn right and

follow this trace a few hundred feet until it drops into a small creek ravine that used to be crossed by bridge. After scrambling out of the streambed the way is seen again – nearly overgrown – cut into the sidehill, level at first and then starting to slowly lose altitude. The road intersects a newer woods road which obliterates the tread for a few feet, but our road is seen again leaving the left side of this newer road. A second, deeper stream is soon reached – the log bridge long since rotted away – followed shortly by a crossing of **Peggy's Trail** (N10) (1220 feet; 1/2 mile from Cougar Mountain Drive).

The 1/4 mile section beyond Peggy's Trail is especially nice as it winds across a little bowl and goes back into a nice grove of second-growth conifers. New houses are being built beside the road beyond here so turn back before reaching them and return to Peggy's Trail. Climbing uphill on Peggy's Trail you soon reach Cougar Mountain Drive – a gravel road. There are two roads here to the left, the upper Cougar Mountain Drive which goes up to Radar Park, and the lower a neighborhood driveway. Follow the driveway until a powerline crosses it. Follow the powerline (**Goode's Corner Trail** -- E7) uphill to the right. It soon crests (1250 feet) and begins downhill. At 3/4 mile (600 feet) the "Stage Road" section, described below and in the Precipice Chapter, climbs left from the powerline swath. This magic 1/4 mile can then be followed up until it meets the top of Big Tree Ridge – see below.

#### *Big Tree Ridge to Goode's Corner*

*1.2 miles; elevation loss 650 feet (described in reverse, the most practical way to explore)*

Harvey Manning's account: "For years I'd heard about the 'Stage Road'. The Thorbergs gave me directions on where to find it, and so did a descendant of the intermarried Tibbetts and Goodes I met at Goodes Corner. I floundered around in the woods, often on ancient grades, wondering if these were it, suspecting they were just Mr. Thorberg's old logging roads. Finally I studied the route as shown on the 1895 U.S. Geological Survey map, transferred the line to the modern GS map, and on May 7, 1979, set out from Goodes Corner (75 feet).

I saw from the map that the road had taken off from what is now Highway 900 some 1/4 mile south of Goodes Corner and slanted northward up the slope, topped out on a gentling, a sort of bench, at 300 feet and there intersected today's powerline swath. Assuming from the map and a look at the terrain that from here the road had meandered, switchbacking, in a general uphill line, I left the powerline and a short way north came to the swath of a buried telephone cable. Proceeding up it, I found nothing that definitely was old road. Several short stretches of narrow grade beside the cableway tantalized. But I sadly realized the telephone company and Puget Power had done in the old road, obliterated just about every trace. There had to be switchbacks and I wove this way and that on what might be bits of grade – or might be swath-making cat tracks. At 600 feet began a steepness that obviously would have demanded switchbacks. None were to be seen. So I said the heck with it, this was my last shot ever at trying to find the danged old road and I'd do something else with the rest of the afternoon.

I climbed straight up the steep telephone cableway – now the **Telephone Trail** -- and there it was! Coming from the powerline swath, crossing a pretty little creek (no trace left of the bridge that once had to be there), and becoming eloquently distinct as a grade just barely wide enough for a wagon.

I followed it northwest across the head of a broad gully I soon recognized, from the lack of stumps except beside the road, as virgin forest – in a broad green amphitheater of swordferns, wonderful big maples and alders and middling-big cedars and firs grown up since a 1912 forest fire. The grade hadn't been molested by modern bulldozers or motorcycles, apparently hadn't seen a wheel since the stages quit running.

The walking was slow, the stops long, across the amphitheater through The Precipice to the edge of a broad bench (725 feet). (*Ed. Note: the **Precipice Trail** uses this section in its current route; for a different perspective on this portion as part of that route, see that chapter.*) Few spots

### APPENDIX C 1991 DESCRIPTION OF MAY CREEK GORGE TRAVERSE

#### *Lake Washington to Honey Creek Farm*

*1.5 miles; elevation gain 150 feet*

Go off I-405 on Exit 7 and park beside Lake Washington Boulevard on the wide shoulder just north of May Creek bridge (25 feet). On the north side of the bridge are two paths. The first goes along the creek; take the other, through the field, under I-405, to Jones Avenue.

Turn right on Jones, a little old road with less traffic the farther you go, great for walking and horsing. It enters an unsuspected culdesac, a hideaway vale whose green walls exclude all sight and virtually all sound of I-405. Paths lead between scattered homes to the creek. Just past the point where the narrow lane of Lincoln enters on the left, May Creek

Park begins on the opposite side of the creek, and with no trail. The road passes the first of the monster cottonwoods that decorate the valley. Valley and road (now NE 31st) turn east, deeper into peace and quiet. The green walls rise 100 feet, then 200 feet, on either side. The road crosses May Creek to the true left bank, and ends at 2/3 mile from the start of park – which here widens to take in the entire canyon, floor and walls. Near here the railroad to Newcastle crossed the gorge on a giant trestle 138 feet high and 1205 feet long. Originally built in 1878 by the Seattle & Walla Walla Railroad, a replacement was built in 1897 by the Pacific Coast Company. The footings for the pilings of this second trestle can still be seen in the streambed. The May Valley Logging Company railroad ran up the valley floor underneath the trestle (1910). (To drive this point turn left from Exit 7 to 110<sup>th</sup>, right on NE 43rd, and left on Jones.)


Excellent horse trail enters a wildwood of great maples and cottonwoods, alders as big as alders ever get, vine maple canopies, skunk cabbage, and gravel bars. In 1/3 mile the trail crosses Honey Creek on logs to a woods road. (This leads up Honey Creek 1/4 mile to the Devil’s Elbow on 95th, an antique, twisty, narrow road, an alternate entry.)

The trail crosses a deep pond on remnants of a plank bridge and is obscured by deep grass of an old pasture. A junk car, a lone power pole, and miscellaneous artifacts and garbage remind one of the vanished farm, whose inhabitants surely all died of rheumatism. The trail is re-found just as it ends (175 feet) at a lovely big gravel bar that gives local kids all the fun they want; they explore no farther.

*Honey Creek Farm to the Waterline Trail*  
 1 mile; elevation gain 50 feet

This is the stretch that requires rubber boots, gloves, and a lively curiosity. Or stoicism. This is the forest pretty dang primeval – or at least retread primeval. If it asks more of the walker, it rewards more. The easiest entry is from upstream and thus the trip will be described from that direction.

*(Appendix C continues next page)*



## Issaquah Alps Trails Club Membership Application

from Cougar  
 Guidebook

Post Office Box 351, Issaquah, Washington 98027

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

New       Renewal

Annual regular dues ..... \$15

Annual contributing dues ..... \$25

Lifetime membership ..... \$200

Limited income ..... \$6



**I would like to volunteer with the Club in the area(s) of:**

Hike leadership

Trail maintenance

Hotline

WomenWalk Hikes

Trails Center staffing

Administrative support

Event coordination

▲ All memberships cover the entire family.

Drive SE 89th west from Coal Creek Parkway 1/5 mile to its intersection with the **Waterline Trail** (370 feet). Walk the pipeline swath a flat 1/5 mile south past the last house and plunge 1/5 mile down the slippery clay path to May Creek (225 feet).

On both banks good trails go downstream – but both peter out in a few hundred feet at a popular play place on gravel bars overhung by great big old trees. To proceed downstream – on either bank – go high or low, as seems best, sometimes near the water, sometimes on alluvial terrace. 1/4 mile from the pipeline is a powerline swath that is used as creek access by walkers from 89th and the gravel pit on 95th.

A good trail goes downstream on the true left bank. Beyond a large mossy outcrop of bedrock it crosses to the true right, where there are monster maples and a boggling 4-foot cottonwood, but also a wide, brushy tributary valley that forces recrossing to true left. It's therefore easiest to stay on the true left, though the path often dwindles. Forge ahead through groves of gigantic alders, over grassy glades. Pause at sandbars tracked by little critter feet and a bedrock rib jutting out in a gravel bar. At about 1/4 mile from the powerline, it's useless to pretend anymore – downstream from the large tributary on the north there really is no trail worthy of the name.

But don't be daunted. Cross and recross the creek as circumstances and mood dictate. On both banks are traces of an ancient road, something historical to muse on. In 1/3 mile is the playground at the end of the horse trail.

*Waterline Trail to May Valley*  
*0.3 mile; elevation gain 50 feet*

The uppermost stretch is so short and has so much wading it currently interests only neighborhood kids. Again, the description is from upstream, the easiest access.

Spot the trailhead just north of the Coal Creek Parkway bridge over May Creek (275 feet). A few hundred feet upstream the creek meanders around green pastures of the 1/2-mile floodplain of May Valley; here it has notched into a 30-foot gulch and is cutting on down, down into its excellent gorge. The path drops to the creek, tunnels vine maple to a gravel bar where the creek undercuts a gray wall of glacial till and clay. Large concrete blocks lie in the bed; their explanation comes when the path crosses the creek, clambers up the clay, and comes to ancient blacktop that led to a vanished bridge.

The trail immediately drops back to the creek, to a pool by a large mossy boulder, and crosses a footlog to a 4-foot cottonwood. After a bit on the true right bank the trail crosses to an island, then the true left bank, and clambers up gravel to a higher trail from the neighborhood, much used by local kids. The way drops back to the creek, wades to the true right bank and a gravel bar beneath a 20 foot gravel wall. It crosses back to true left and hits the pipeline swath (225 feet).

EARTH'S CRAMMED WITH HEAVEN, AND EVERY BUSH AFLAME  
WITH GOD. ONLY HE WHO SEES TAKES OFF HIS SHOES.

-- ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING