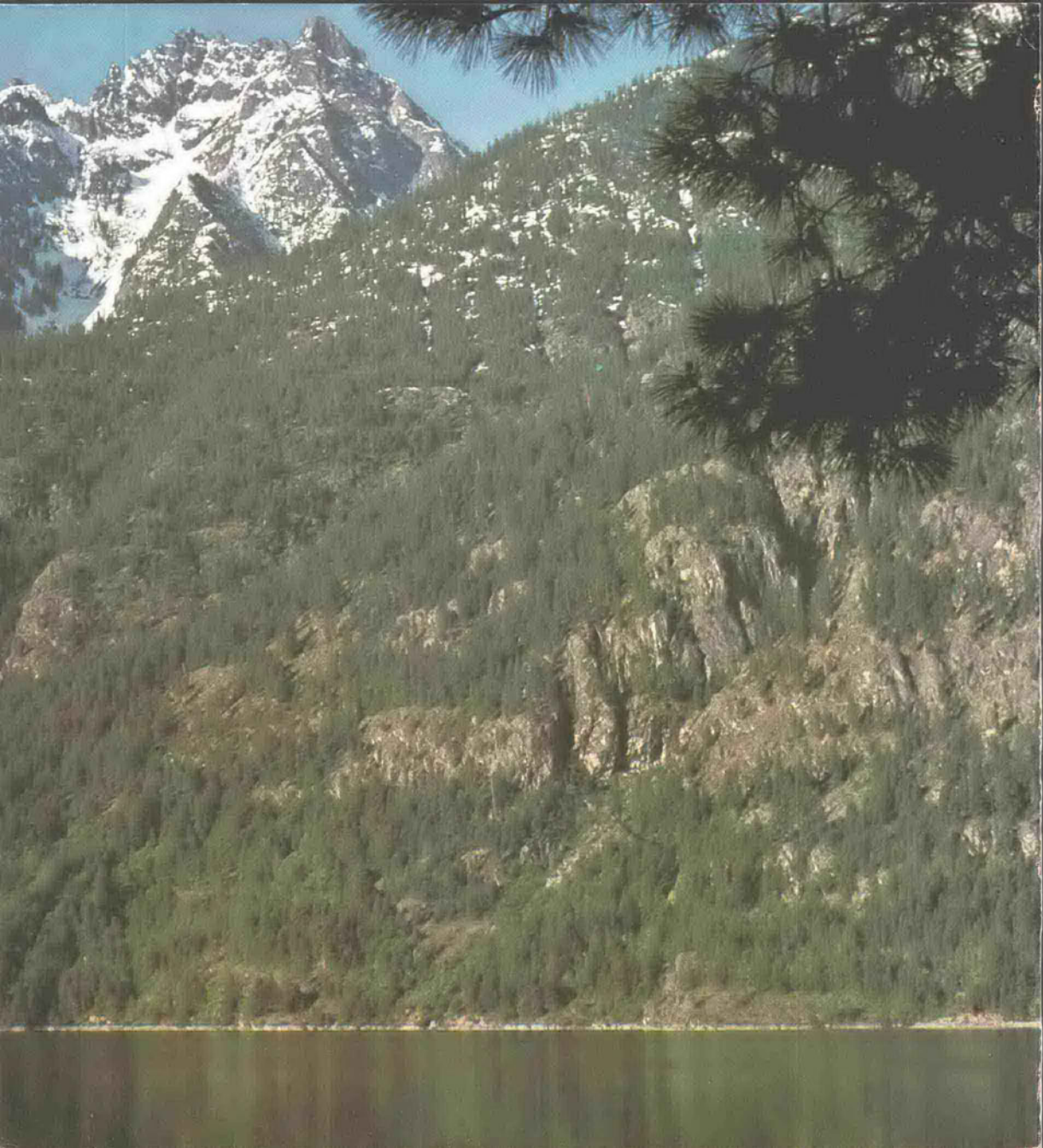


Stehekin



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Cover: NPS Photo

On summer afternoons the wind rushes down the Stehekin Valley from the cool mountains to the west, fans out across the upper lake in a great sweeping gesture, then washes through the pines and firs around Stehekin Landing. The waters of the lake, deep green and still until that moment, sparkle in sunlight and shadow. Stillness becomes movement; the easy quiet of the early afternoon is broken, and a vibrancy—a stimulating tension—pervades the valley.

WITHDRAWN

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PROLOGUE: THE WAY THROUGH

A long, crooked lake sparkles in the morning sun at the foot of glacier-capped peaks. Beyond the lake and between the mountains lies a river valley, lush and quiet. Together, the lake and the valley form a passage through the North Cascades, the mightiest mountain range in the Pacific Northwest. This passage has long been used by Indians, miners, and casual visitors, and, in the language of the Skagit Indians, it has come to be known as "Stehekin—The Way Through."

Man is a recent and tentative inhabitant of this country. The few settlements are surrounded by mountains and are not reached by highways and railroads from the outside. The land interrupts the flow of human events. Water and air are the mediums of transportation, and the seasons mark the passing of time. And with time spent here, Stehekin takes on another meaning besides denoting a physical passage. Whether we are among the few who make our homes in the Stehekin country or among those who visit for a few hours or days, it becomes a spiritual passage through dawns and sunsets, storms and sunshine.

Horseshoe Basin

Cottonwood Camp

McGregor Mountain
2,475 m.

McAlester Mountain
2,416 m.

Lone Mountain
2,047 m.

Doubtful Lake

Trapper Lake

High Bridge

Buckner Homestead

Rainbow Falls

Stehekin

Flat Creek

Agnes Creek

Stehekin River

Rainbow Creek

Devore Creek

West Fork

South Fork

Company Creek

Riddle Creek

Fish Creek

Flora Mountain
2,536 m.

Lucerne

Bonanza Peak
2,899 m.

Holden

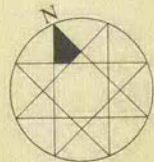
Railroad Creek

Domke Lake

Dumbell Mountain
2,567 m.

Copper Peak
2,733 m.

Cardinal Peak
2,620 m.



Grizzly Creek

Bridge Creek

Cascade

Bear Creek

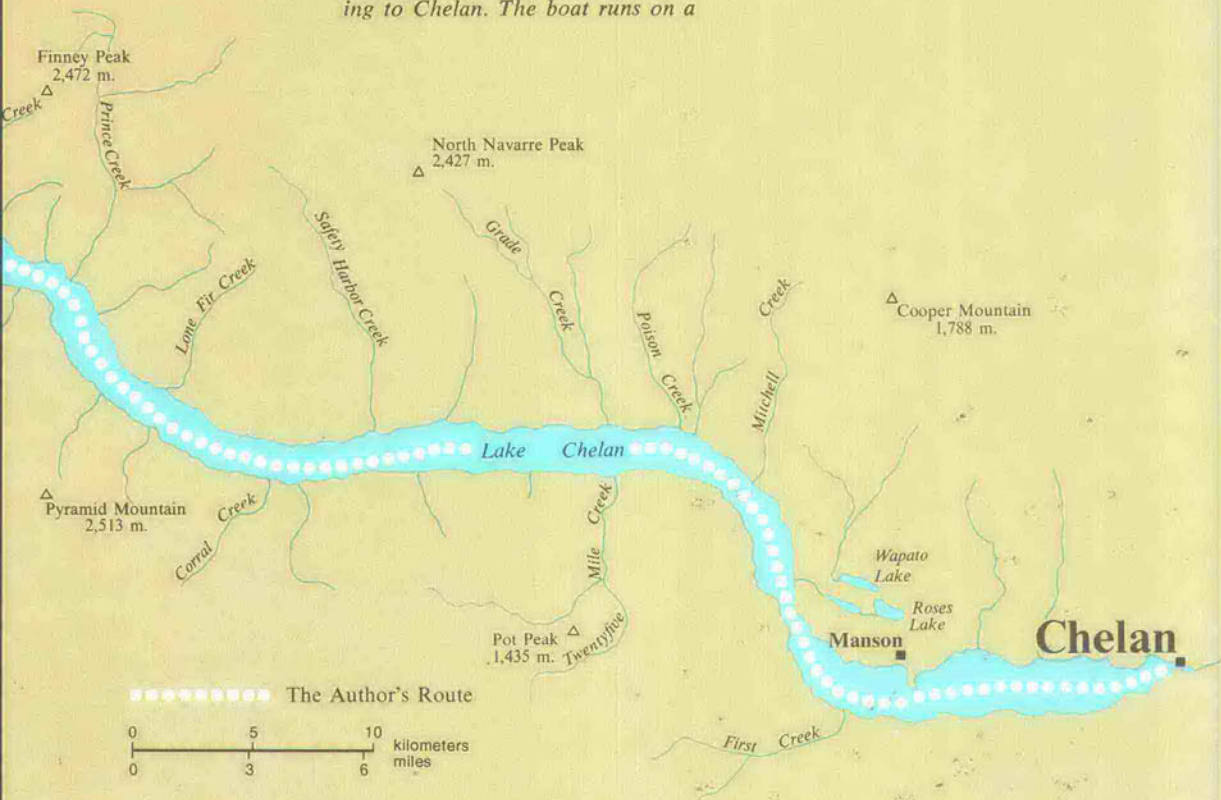
Travel Tips

Traveling to Stehekin in north-central Washington is one of the great adventures in the National Park System. The journey to this isolated village at the head of Lake Chelan is a superb introduction to the grandeur and wildness of the North Cascades.

Several hiking trails lead to Stehekin, but the most common ways of reaching it are by boat or float-plane. From late spring to early fall a passenger ferry leaves daily from Chelan and makes a short stopover in Stehekin before returning to Chelan. The boat runs on a

reduced schedule the rest of the year. Float-plane flights may be arranged in Chelan.

Those who wish to stay overnight in Stehekin should make advance reservations. Campers may use several primitive camping areas in the Stehekin Valley and surrounding mountains. For more information on accommodations, hiking trails, and camping facilities, write to the superintendent, North Cascades National Park, Sedro Woolley, Washington 98284.





Stehekin

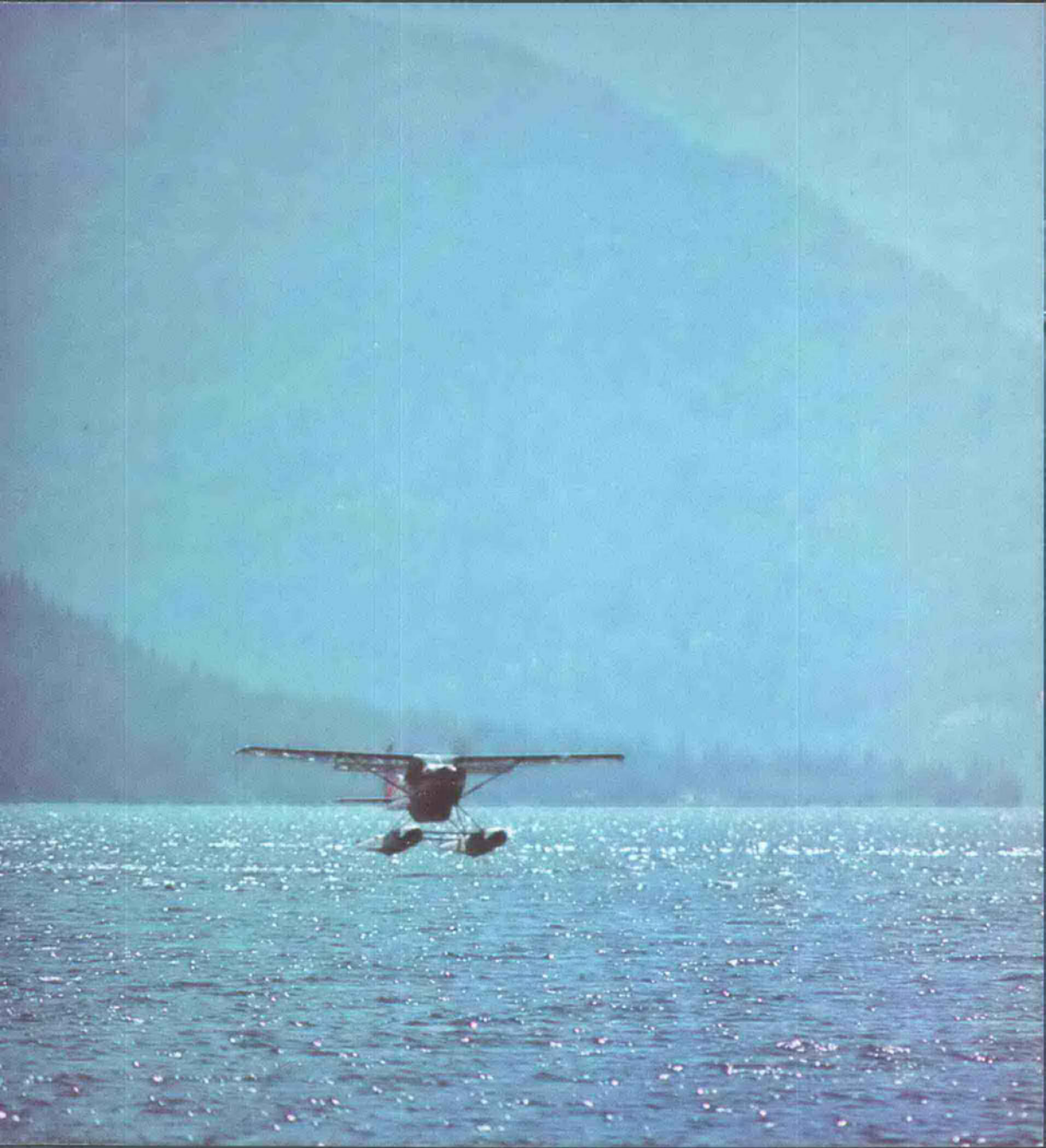
A Wilderness Journey into the North Cascades

Text and photos by
William A. Bake

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U.S. Department of the Interior



The Voyage Uplake



In the early morning, the activity at Chelan, Washington, tends to focus on a dock where the *Lady of the Lake* waits quietly in the calm water, her smooth, rounded hull making scarcely a ripple on the green surface of Lake Chelan. On the dock, stacks of luggage, backpacks, fishing gear, groceries, and plain cardboard boxes wait to be loaded. People stand impatiently, shivering as much from the anticipation of the trip as from the early morning chill. Stehekin and the Cascades are ahead, suddenly much closer than all the planning and thought of previous days could ever make them. At length the loading begins. People and supplies disappear into the boat, the diesels growl, and the surface of the water shimmers with vibration. The boat moves, a bow wave builds, water curls astern, and the dock is left behind. Another voyage uplake has begun.

For the first hour, the scenery might well be characterized as gently beautiful. At the lower end of the lake lies Chelan, a former mining supply town now oriented to agriculture and tourism. Northwestward along the shores, apple, peach, and apricot orchards flank the lake until the slopes are finally too steep. The left (west) side of the lake is a favored location for vacation homes up to Twentyfive Mile Creek, where the last paved road ends and wilderness begins. The North Cascades, rising in earnest along the upper third of the lake, crowd in and push away civilization. Only a few houses and landings interrupt the solitude.

At intervals the routine of the trip is interrupted as the boat stops to deliver mail, passengers, and supplies to isolated homes and communities. Lucerne, which serves as a gateway to Holden Village, a Christian awareness center, and as a trailhead for the famed Glacier Peak Wilderness Area, is an almost certain stop. For the people who spend summers at these isolated landings, the arrival of the daily boat is an event. And for those on board, the brief stops are a source of curiosity and perhaps envy toward those on shore—emotions that are soon forgotten when the boat moves on.

Further north the Cascade crest nears and the lake narrows. Grassy hills no longer slope down to the shoreline; precipitous gray cliffs and ever-thickening forest dominate.

The boat seems to move more quickly now. The shoreline is nearer, brought in by narrowing of the lake, and the pilot is cutting the bends closely, all the while maintaining speed. Lake Chelan, deep and protected from storms by the peaks, is ideally suited to the passage of the largest boats. In many ways the lake is like the fjords—those long, narrow arms of the ocean that penetrate the coastline of Scandinavia. Both, in fact, are legacies of the ice age.

As more bends in the lake are rounded and its 82-kilometer length becomes more apparent, each new point is a focus for expectation. The head of the lake and the cluster of buildings that is Stehekin Landing must surely lie around the next bend. But first there are moments spent watching for mountain goats and mule deer, glimpsing snowfields on high peaks, and experiencing the mood created by increasing cloud cover. The landscape here echoes with the shadows of wilderness. Solitude presses in and the boat becomes a comfort—a tiny, moving cluster of humanity in a place where roles are reversed, where wilderness, not humanity, dominates.

Stehekin

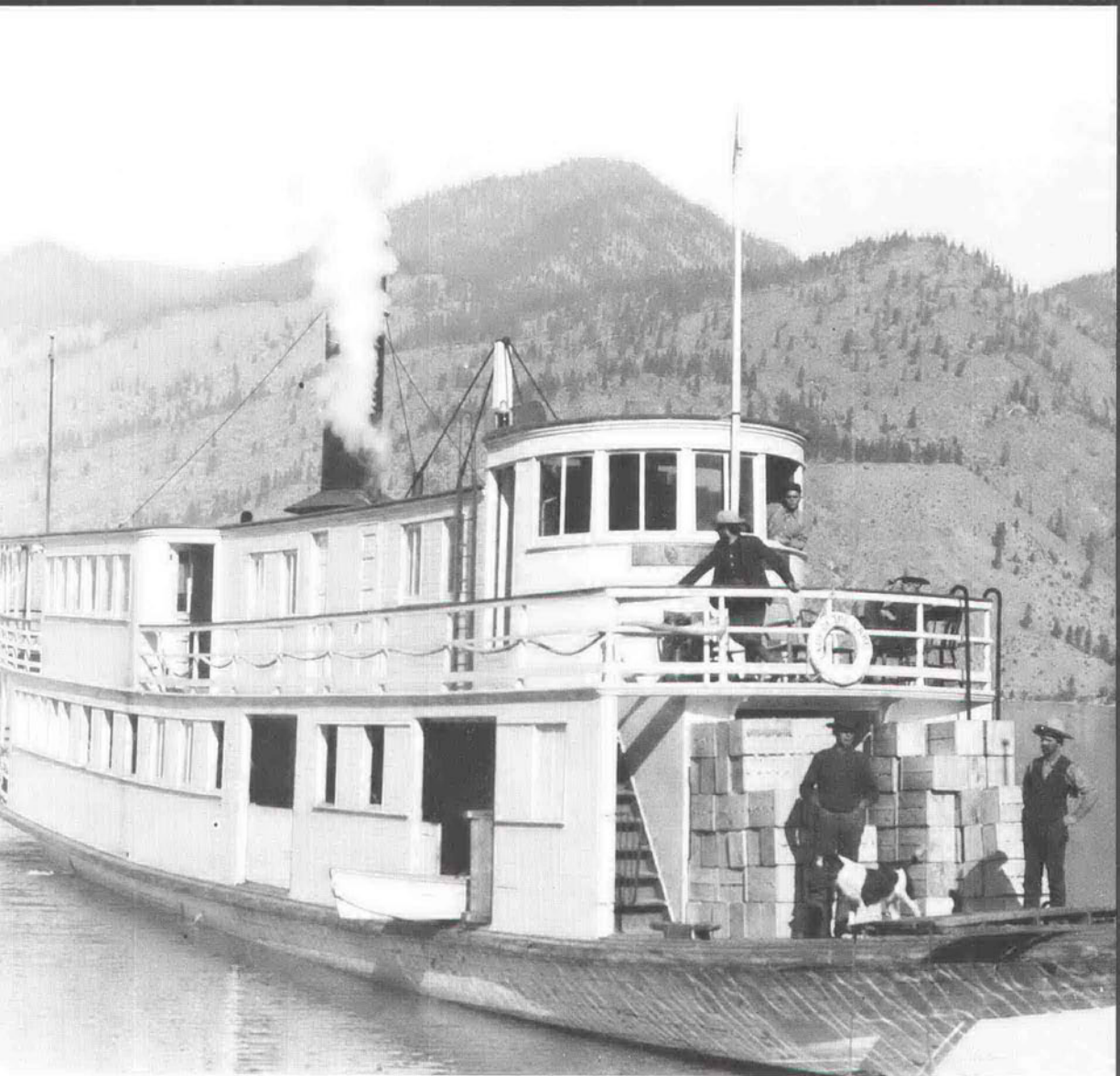
Chelan



A Legacy of the Ice Age

About 15,000 years ago the entire basin now occupied by Lake Chelan was filled with moving ice. Gouging and scraping, two glaciers had moved into the Lake Chelan trench—one from near the crest of the Cascades and one from the Columbia River Valley. They met about one-third of the way up the present-day lake, and this glacial collision carved out a basin, now known as the Lucerne Basin, the deepest part of the lake.

The illustration above is a longitudinal profile of Lake Chelan. The profile shows the configuration of the lake from its surface to the bottom along its 82-kilometer length from Chelan to Stehekin. Note that the deepest point of the Lucerne Basin is 466 meters from the surface of the water and 131 meters below sea level! The profile is adapted from a drawing by Alex Alexander based on data collected by the Department of Oceanography at the University of Washington.



Early Shipping on Lake Chelan

The sound of steamboat whistles and, more recently, the echoes of electric air horns have been a part of life along Lake Chelan for almost a century. Through the years, the sight of white hulls against the sparkling waters has nevertheless seemed extraordinary rather than routine. To the people living up-lake the boats are the lifeline upon which they depend for physical and cultural sustenance.

Regular steamboat service on Lake Chelan began in 1889 with the launching of the Belle of Chelan and has continued on a year-round basis ever since. The first boats were slow and burned great quantities of wood. Nonetheless, there was a certain kind of elegance to the old plank-hulled boats with their wood-and-brass fittings. The steamer Stehekin, preeminent in popularity from 1893 to 1904, was an example. In March of 1900, the Chelan Leader, a local newspaper, reported that:

"The steamer Stehekin is a 'thing of beauty and a joy.' In addition to a commodious ladies' cabin there has been added a gentleman's

The first Lady of the Lake, a steamboat, hauls apples on Lake Chelan about 1900.



smoking room and a galley, the one forward and the latter aft of the cabin. A number one range and all the other accoutrements of a well furnished kitchen have been put in place, and regular meals will be furnished the passengers hereafter. The ladies' cabin is furnished with a grand piano, sofa and easy chairs. The pilot house has been placed above the cabin. On the lower deck is ample room for all the freight business likely."

By 1900, two other craft matching the Stehekin in size and comfort were on the lake: the Swan and the first Lady of the Lake. Eventually, however, all the steamboats were replaced by gasoline and diesel powered boats—much in the same way that steam engines were replaced by diesels on railroads. Whether anyone living along Lake Chelan misses steamboat whistles in the way many people over 45 miss steam train whistles is uncertain. But there is no question that the early boats, with their unique ability to push away for a few moments the vast Cascade wilderness, were welcome and necessary to those living along Lake Chelan.

The Climate

Climatic conditions in the North Cascades vary widely with elevation and geographic location. Peaks generally receive more rain and snow than valleys, and areas west of the range are wetter than those on the east. This precipitation pattern is a result of the north-south orientation of the Cascade Range; this barrier causes the region's predominantly west-southwest winds to cool and release their water vapor as they flow upslope.

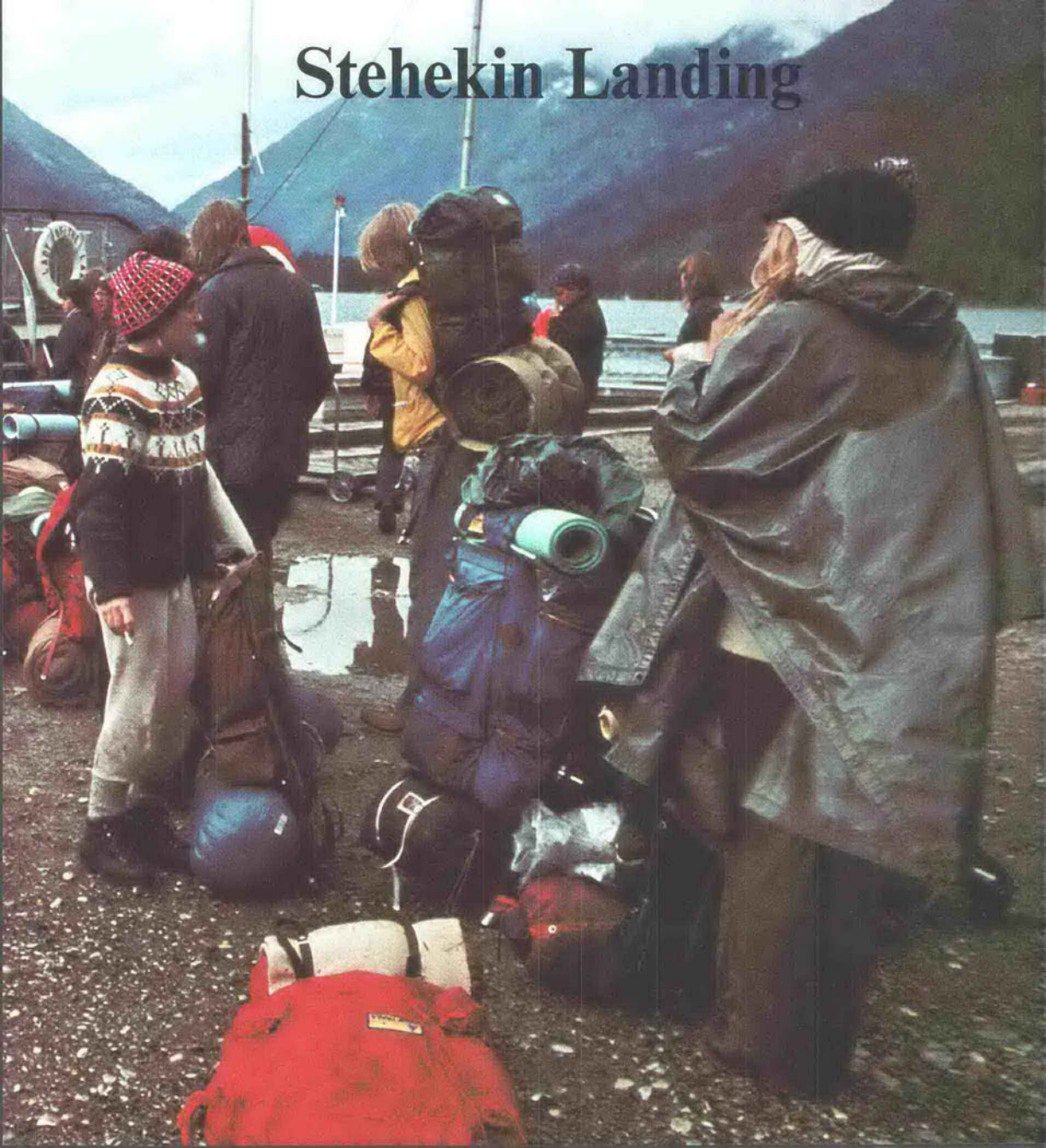
The Lake Chelan–Stehekin area, because of its location away from the maritime climate of the coast, is somewhat more variable in temperature and precipitation than the coastal regions. In winter, temperatures can be quite cool (around freezing or below) yet summers are often uncomfortably warm. Because the region is so close to the Cascade crest, precipitation increases rapidly westward—though at Stehekin Landing it is still only about one-fifth of the amount that may be expected on the west slope. Most of the precipitation falls in winter, creating a climate in which summers are dry and quite warm.



LADY OF LAKE



Stehekin Landing



The landing and the river valley beyond it form a pocket of civilization that consists of houses and a few visitor accommodations strung out along the lower third of a long, twisting road winding nearly to the Cascade crest. From the boat, only a cluster of buildings can be seen; most of the valley's scattered dwellings are hidden in the forest or are some distance up the valley. As the boat draws closer and finally slows, there is little more to see than a dock, a few pleasure craft, perhaps a floatplane, and a few people waiting motionless for the boat.

For a few minutes after the boat arrives, the dock is covered with people. Luggage, colorful backpacks, and moving groups of excited and uncertain visitors deciding what to do next turn the landing into a flurry of activity. But the flurry soon ends. Like the arrival of dawn and dusk, the approach of the boat is an expected and routine part of life

here. Transportation is waiting for those visitors who want to see Rainbow Falls, and lunch is ready.

Within a few moments, the Rainbow Falls bus is gone, the lodge guests have found their rooms, and the backpackers and those planning to take horseback trips are waiting quietly for their transportation upvalley. Stehekin Landing settles back for awhile, waiting until the time nears for departure of the boat.

On the trip to Rainbow Falls, visitors pass a part of the lake that is dry during the winter when power generation lowers the water. Construction of a dam on the Chelan River during the 1920s now maintains the lake slightly above its natural level. Beyond the last bit of open lake, the road enters moist, thick forest. Then, as the land rises a bit, the forest thins and the bus pulls into the falls parking area. Rainbow Falls is an enclave of lush, watered ferns, mist-covered mosses, and tall redcedars set along the side of the valley. In the freshness of springtime, snowmelt fills the falls and sends its roar far down the valley. The sound is a part of life for the children who still attend the one-room log Stehekin School along the road, and for the year-round residents and summer people whose houses sit half-hidden up and down the valley.

At the landing, those day-visitors who remain behind most probably will walk a ways along the lake, smelling the

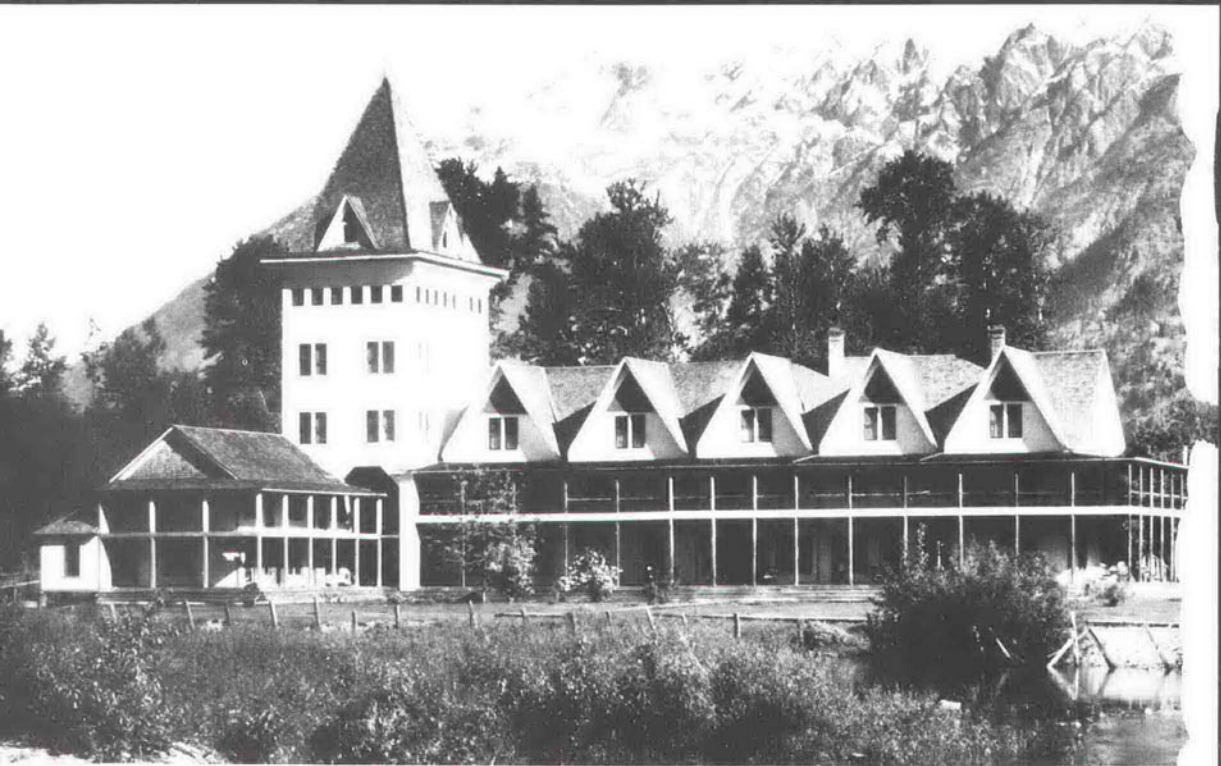
clean evergreen scent, watching sunlight play through leaves and across the water, and hearing the sound of wind flowing through the tall firs along the shore. The experience is quieting and it carries with it a hint of the pace at which life moves here. Then, with not quite the same hurry as when they landed, people return to the dock area. The boat loads, sounds its air horns, and disappears down the lake.

In many ways, this sequence of events has changed little through the decades. Certainly the intentions of those arriving at Stehekin Landing are much the same as they were generations ago. As early as the late 1880s, steamboats were slowly plowing their way uplake from Chelan. For a decade, the passengers were almost exclusively miners, and the cargoes were supplies for the Black Warrior, Blue Devil, and other mines located in the high country at the head of the Stehekin River. Mineral exploration in this valley never returned the effort expended on it, though, and by 1900 there were as many tourists riding the boats as there were miners. Mining continued sporadically until the 1950s, but the lure of the Stehekin Valley for most was its wilderness beauty.

When tourism began in earnest, Stehekin's popularity in large measure could be traced to its accessibility. In the decades before the automobilization of America, tourists frequented those places of natural beauty and tranquility that

were reasonably accessible by railroad. One, the Great Northern Railway, wound downstream along the Columbia River from Spokane, and by combining railroad and steamboat travel tourists could reach Stehekin with relative ease and comfort.

The mountain grandeur and relatively mild summers in the valley were so well known by the 1890s that hotels had been built at Stehekin and along the lake at favored locations. The habits of vacationers have changed somewhat through the decades, resulting in shorter stays for most visitors and an interest in backpacking, but hotel visits still remain very popular. Today, many people stay for only the brief layover of the Lake Chelan excursion boat, but for those who stay longer and prefer the leisure and amenities of a hotel vacation or housekeeping cabins, service can be obtained at the North Cascades Lodge.



The old Field Hotel, with its accommodations for 100 guests, reflects the splendor of the Victorian era, a sharp contrast with simpler and more rustic tastes.



Hostelries Through the Years

More than any other aspect of life in Stehekin, the resort hotels symbolize the tourist lifestyle that has for so many decades flourished in this valley. Stone fireplaces and overstuffed chairs, after-dinner conversations, footsteps on wooden floors, the aroma of meals being prepared, and laughter from rooms down the hall have been a part of Stehekin since the 1890s.

The first hotels began in mining years. When the miners left and thoughts of money were finally shaken, some of them at least remembered the sheer magnificence of the valley and spread the word on this, the best of its resources. In the meantime, tourists were discovering Stehekin on their own. Business was good at the hotels, and the first of them—The Argonaut—soon became part of a larger establishment known as the Field Hotel. Victorian in style, containing 24 rooms, and “lathed, plastered, and painted in a good and substantial style,” it stood on the flats at the end of the lake, an area that would be submerged when the lake level was raised slightly in the late 1920s. In 1910, however, the Field Hotel was in its heyday and featuring accom-

modations for 100 guests. Yet even this capacity was not enough to satisfy the demand for lodging. Another hotel, the much more modest Purple House—named for its owner—operated at the same time.

In 1926, with the lake waters advancing up its walkways, the Field Hotel was succeeded by the newly built Golden West Lodge. In appearance, the lodge differed dramatically from its predecessor. More rustic, yet very much given to the amenities required by guests, it served overnight visitors until 1971 and now is used for park visitor programs. Today, the North Cascade Lodge continues the tradition. In the links forged between the generations who have visited Stehekin, hotels must rate among the strongest and most durable.

Mining

High, almost inaccessible, and storm battered, the Horseshoe Basin and Doubtful Lake areas near Cascade Pass seem unlikely as locations for mines. But when the tenacity of 19th-century miners is taken into account, it comes as no surprise that with the discovery of gold, silver, lead, and copper there the population of the valley quickly jumped to more than 1,000 individuals. (In contrast, the year-round population in recent decades has numbered about 70.)

When the miners came, the route they took was the one all of us follow. Chelan became the staging area; it was there that supplies arrived by railroad and river. Stehekin was the advance base from which forays were made into the mountains. The mines themselves, located at the very end of all possible transportation, became the focal points of frenzied activity. Heavy machinery, including great lengths of wire cable, mining cars and tracks, and assorted gears, drills, hammers, and boilers were brought in. Nothing seemed too large to take to the mines, even if it had to be carried piece by piece.

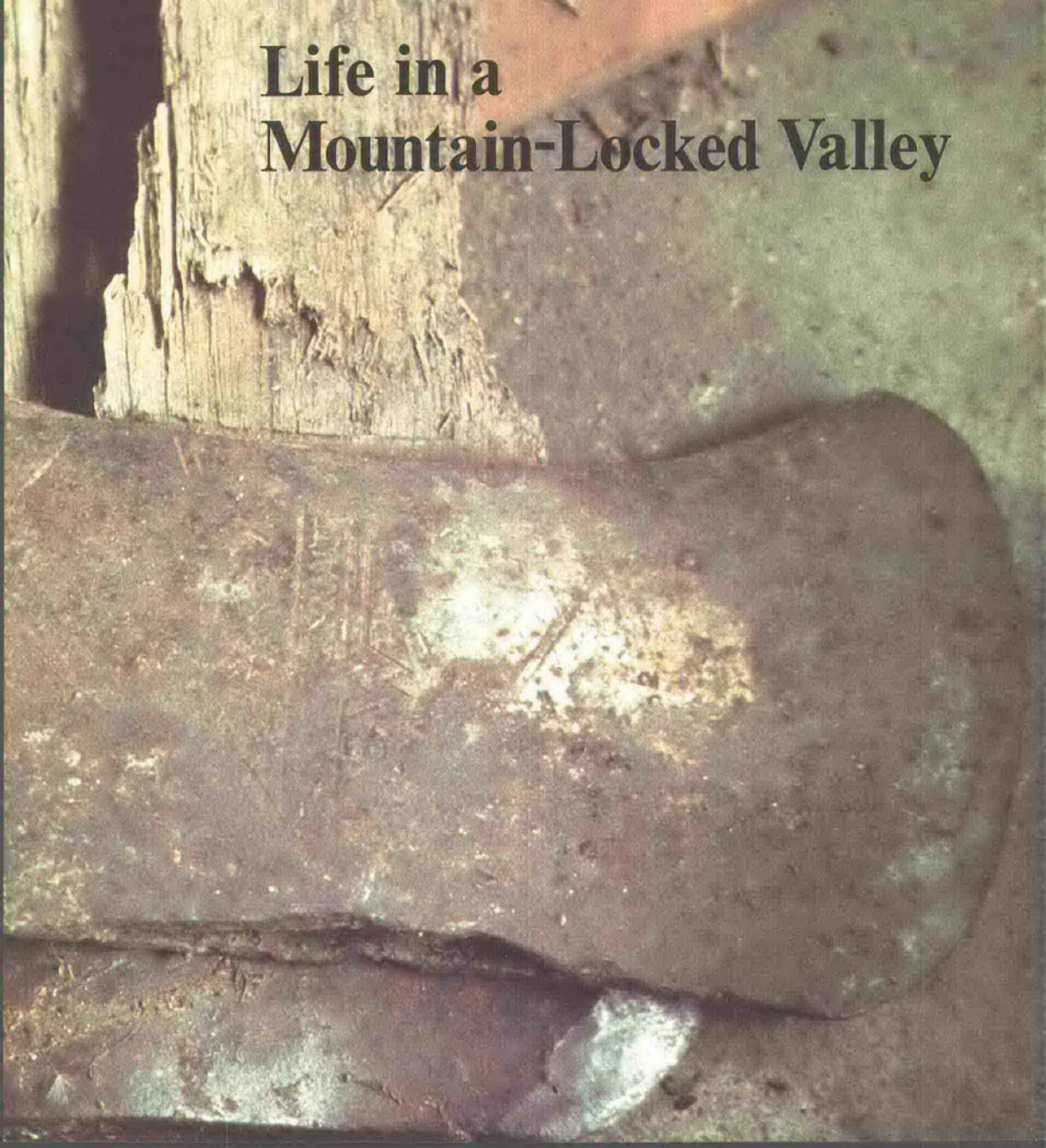
Fifty years after the height of the mining boom, the struggle seems to have been futile. No fortunes were made and the few remaining pieces of mining equipment lie rusting in the rain. Hikers who take the relatively easy day-hike from Cottonwood Camp to Horseshoe Basin can see the entrance to the Black Warrior Mine, which ranked with the Blue Devil at Doubtful Lake as one of the best known mines. Ice and snow surround the mines, the clouds wash past them, and their damp blackness echoes the futility of man's attempts to tame the high country.

Getting equipment into and getting ore out of the mines in Horseshoe Basin and elsewhere in the valley was a formidable task for the miners.





**Life in a
Mountain-Locked Valley**



On summer afternoons the wind rushes down the Stehekin Valley from the cool mountains to the west, fans out across the upper lake in a great sweeping gesture, then washes through the pines and firs around Stehekin Landing. The waters of the lake, deep green and still until that moment, sparkle in sunlight and shadow. Stillness becomes movement; the easy quiet of the early afternoon is broken, and a vibrancy—a stimulating tension—pervades the valley.

Looking up the valley from Stehekin Landing, it seems difficult to wish for a better place to live. The mountains lock the valley in their grip, isolating everyone who lives there. The years pass; the landscape changes little. A balance has been achieved here between man and nature that works to the benefit of both. Satisfactions flow from the timeless elements in life—the snowfalls, conversations, and mountain moods.

Wind and water are the creators and sustainers of the Stehekin country. The wind is always there in the mountains, scouring the high peaks and searching out the corners of the lowest valleys. Finding it is never a problem. Even when it is unfelt, the sky betrays the wind's presence in the moisture that is drawn eastward by the seawind, pressed upward by the Cascade Range, and cooled until its moisture becomes cloud vapor.

Piling upon western slopes out of sight at Stehekin, low clouds gray out the ridges and forests, stealing the substance and leaving the shape. In the fog, the forest is still, cold, and dripping with dampness. Snow lingers well into summer on these slopes; the gray sky keeps the sun from spiriting it away.

Day upon day, the clouds form on the western side of the Cascades, sweeping patches of sunlight before them, brightening wildflower meadows and intensifying the green of the forest until, at the top, the clouds roll over the crests and abruptly disappear in the warming, sinking air. From Stehekin on the east, they can be seen at a distance tumbling off the peaks and shredding themselves in the blue sky. Their wetness already wrung out along the western slopes, the clouds await fresh moisture. None comes. The great continental landmass to the east is dry.

Just as the wind and rain respond to the mountains, so also does the life on them. Douglas-fir, western redcedar, western hemlock, and mountain hemlock grow tall to the west of the divide. Ferns and mosses festoon and carpet the forest floor. Wildflowers—paintbrush, lupine, asters, columbines, and countless others—color the open meadows at higher elevations. The land is moist, cool, and caught in the grip of the clouds that cover it. On the east slopes, all that changes. The trees are smaller, the wildflowers fewer, and the open spaces more prevalent. These changes, begun quickly, continue relentlessly until eastward on the Columbia Plateau, almost within sight of the crest, the forests give way to bunchgrass and finally to sagebrush.

Along the eastern slopes of the Cascades, rivers drop rapidly through thinning forest toward the Columbia River. From their sources in snowfields and glaciers along the crest, they gather and descend until the valleys echo with the roar of whitewater. Swelling and fading with the seasons, the streams bring the life of the high peaks to the valleys below.

The Stehekin is one of these rivers. Following a course predetermined by the glaciers that preceded it down the valley during the Ice Age, the Stehekin tumbles through canyon and forest on its way toward Lake Chelan. Almost always, the water is fast, and in many places the river drops so far into

rocky clefts that only short stretches of it are visible from any particular place. Bursting around sharp bends, the Stehekin is seen briefly before it disappears again around other turns. So it goes until the valley begins to level out at the head of Lake Chelan, allowing the river a moment to slow as its waters merge with the lake.

Such a description might have fit many a river in the North Cascades before the era of dams. Now, many of the Stehekin's counterparts have been impounded so that the electrical and water supply demands of the Pacific Northwest states and provinces can be met. In its wildness, the Stehekin River is distinct.

Into this setting of mountain, cloud, and forest, Lake Chelan and the Stehekin River Valley thrust a corridor through the changing landscape. But the corridor is long, isolation brings hardship, and for only a few people is the valley the best of all places to live. Life in the Stehekin Valley is—in a word—a tradeoff. Many of the conveniences and routines taken for granted in America are seldom experienced by valley residents. Living here means no public school beyond the eighth grade, no formal church buildings, poor television reception, and very few shopping trips. Grocery shopping more often than not means writing up an order and sending it downlake with a blank, signed check attached. Land—the

little that is not in public ownership—is extremely expensive and so is the cost of building and maintaining houses. Automobiles are costly to operate and have a tendency to suffer under the severe operating conditions in the valley. Medical services are not readily available and even cemeteries are nonexistent. More problems exist than need be mentioned.

For those who accept this and stay, there is the community with its intangible but substantial web of long-standing friendships, spontaneous get-togethers, occasional square dances, and constant visiting. The permanent residents know each other well and take a keen interest in valley affairs. If a social gathering is called or a person needs help, they all soon know about it. Visitors may be completely unaware of events—there is no need for them to know—but when social events are called, valley residents will collect at somebody's house, at the Buckner orchard, or perhaps at the community building for a square dance. Outside the building, a diverse array of old and new cars, pickup trucks, and vans will stand silent watch until the evening is done. Then, down forest-dark roads, headlights will pick their way to cabins and houses spread thinly through the lower valley.

Despite the sharing of experiences and a common affection for the valley, the people here do not have the same background. A few have spent their lives in the valley, but

most of them lived outside with diverse occupations and assorted lifestyles. Young and old, they settled here because the valley represents the qualities in life they consider important—a release from the uncertainties of a complex, unpredictable society and the opportunity to find personal expression and meaning in a magnificent setting.

Through the decades, a routine has developed that is dependent on the seasons. Spring comes late here and the pace of life is slow to quicken. But the opening of the visitor season during the summer brings a burst of activity to the valley. Summer residents move in, tourist accommodations and services open, and groups of hikers and horseback riders take to the trails. In late autumn, another surge comes with the hunting season. Winter is the quiet time. The boat comes uplake less frequently, and everyone relaxes. This is the season when the valley and its people most seem part of another, earlier era in American life.

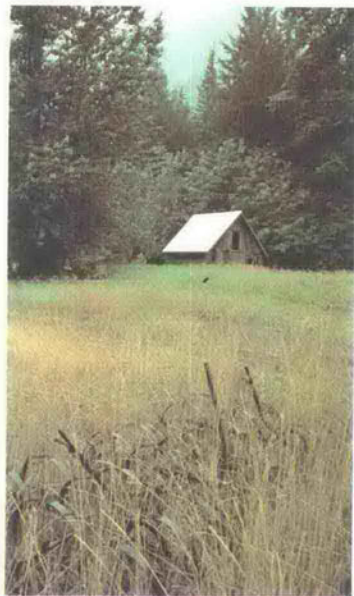
A Wilderness Homestead

The flatlands along Rainbow Creek are not the sort of place that begs to be farmed. At best, they are only marginal enough to support the sort of farm that exists through constant sweat and toil. But then, farming is always an investment—a commitment that can't work without the total dedication of a family's resources. Here, five kilometers up the Stehekin Valley and a lake away from the nearest market outlets, that statement is doubly true. Yet from 1911 to 1953 a family took that land and molded it into a self-sufficient farm, in the process carving out a place in the wilderness and keeping silent company with the thousands of dirt farmers who broke the sod of the plains and cleared forests across the continent during the 1800s.

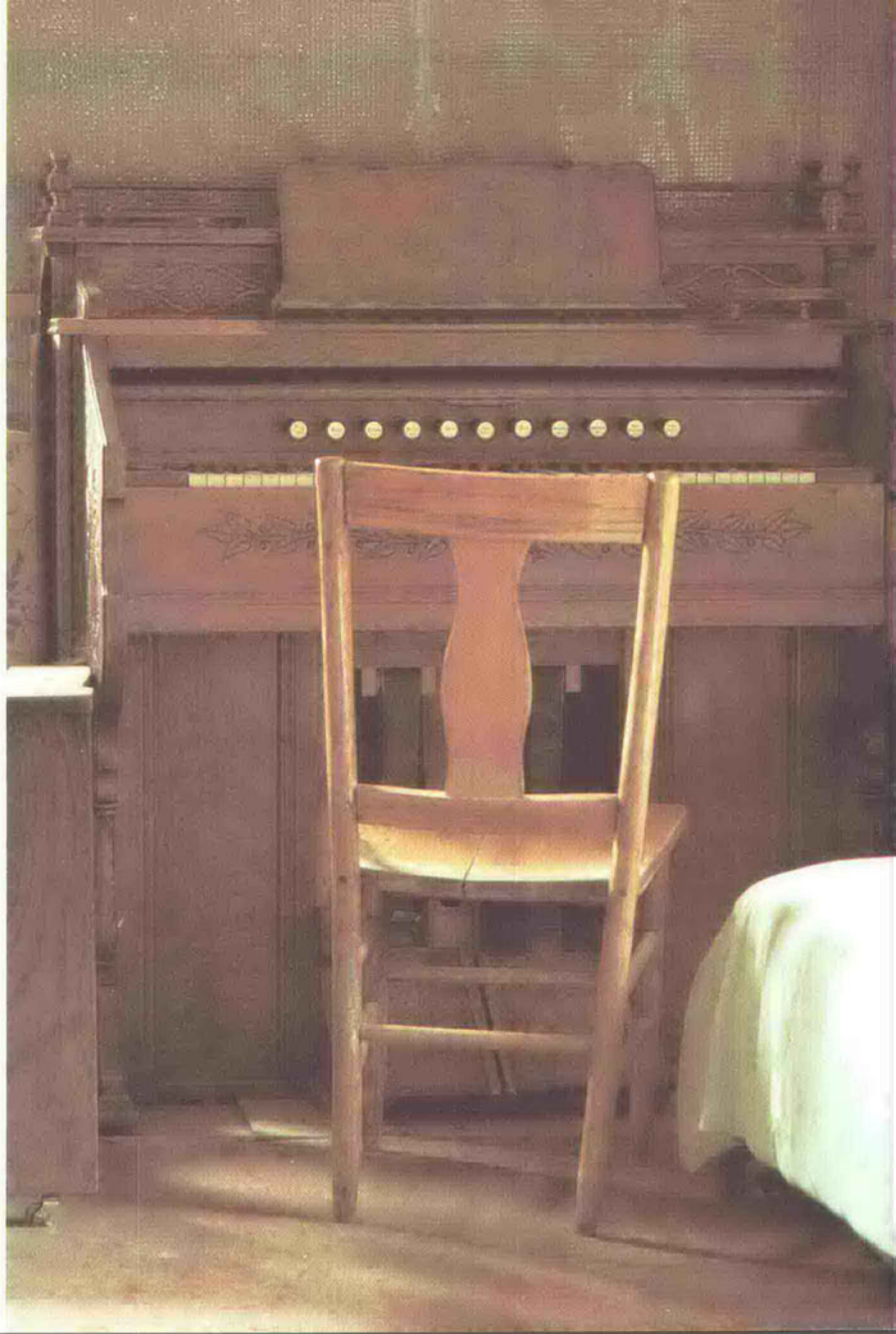
The Buckner Homestead, as the farm is known today, has mellowed since it was abandoned. Trodden earth has been covered with luxuriant sweeps of grass, and the debris of daily living is disappearing beneath the growth. There is melancholy in such scenes. Lichens on shingles and rust on metal provide the mood. For some, the place has a quality of artistry about it now. In its old age, the Buckner Home-

stead belongs not to people, but to the countryside.

Historically, the Buckner place is an excellent example of homesteading. A bit late perhaps—there were few such self-sufficient farms left in the 1930s and '40s—but perfect in its pattern. In the Buckner tradition, incessant labor, good luck, and a knowledge of natural processes counted a great deal. These days, chemistry, technology, and economic efficiency have much more to do with farming. But here at least, the memories and lessons of the old ways are still to be seen.

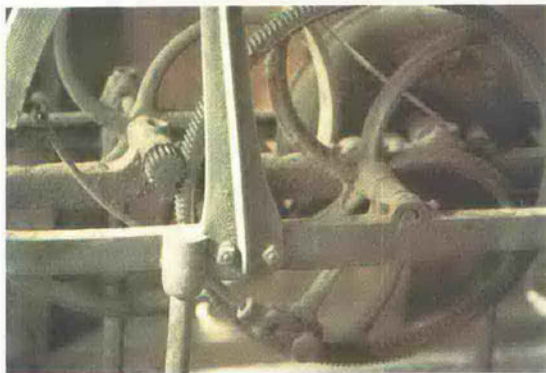


There's something sad yet beautiful about the abandoned buildings of the Buckner Homestead. Inside, a shaft of light compresses the years, and it seems as if only moments have passed since the family gathered around the organ to hear a favorite tune.





**Oil cans, funnels, pulleys,
apple presses, and assorted
farm implements remind
us of the self-sufficiency
of life in the valley.**



**Old buildings on the
Buckner Homestead,
constructed with field
stones and rough-sawn
boards, seem a part
of the natural landscape.**



**Transporting a car into
the valley is a rare
event, and those cars that
come usually stay.
Abandoned by man,
vehicles and cabins
alike are soon taken
over by nature.**





Stehekin Trees

On the east side of the Cascade crest, forests are dramatically affected by an increasingly dry, rocky environment. At the higher elevations, isolated groves of tall, slender subalpine firs are the most commonly seen trees, though some of the mountain hemlocks so often encountered on the west side of the mountains are still present. Further down the Stehekin Valley, but still above Cottonwood Camp, Engelmann spruces are mixed with the alpine firs. Both of these species tower above bushy, leafy Sitka alders growing on the slopes.

At lower elevations, the climate is warmer and many more tree species can be found in differing wet and dry locations. Away from lakes and streams, the rusty orange-barked ponderosa pine is the most conspicuous species. This tree grows well in rather dry soils. Because of that, it occupies more area at these lower elevations than any other species. In moister soils, Douglas-firs grow. On some slopes along the Stehekin River this species occurs in almost pure stands. A mixed forest of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir covers the valley near Rainbow Falls.

Fog sweeps in and disguises trees and ridges. The sun then comes out and sharpens the distinct pattern in the bark of the ponderosa pine. Each excites the senses.

A mixture of western redcedar, western hemlock, western white pine, grand fir, and Douglas-fir grows in the wettest places. Along the end of the lake and Stehekin River are black cottonwoods, red alders, and bigleaf maples. Only in these wet places is the forest as thick and lush as it is on the west side of the mountains. Elsewhere, the trees may be tall, but lack of moisture enforces a greater spacing between them, resulting in a more open forest.



A Walk in the High Country

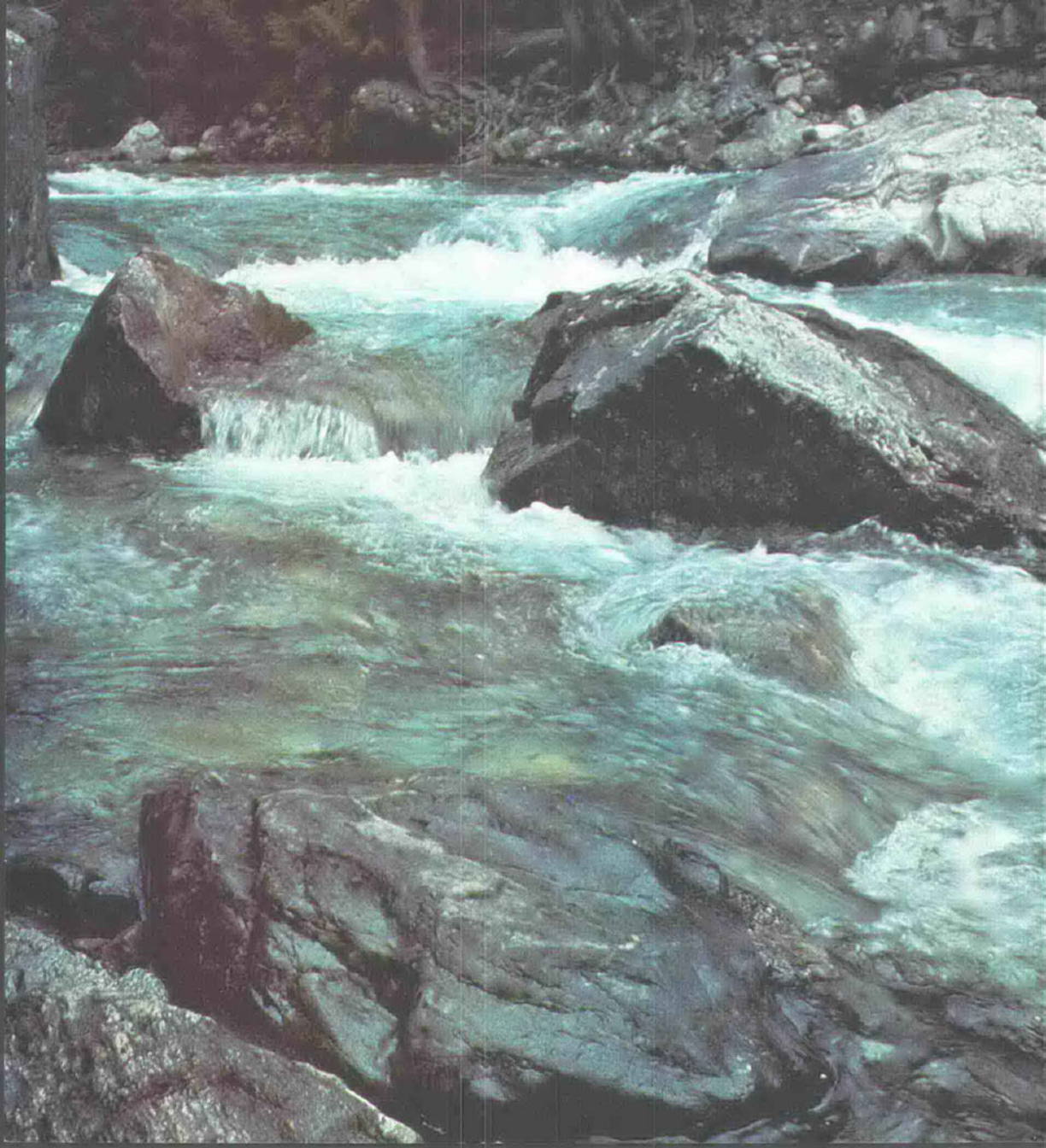
For many persons who visit Stehekin, the landing is a jumping-off point for trips into the high country. Day hikers, too, have time to visit many areas. With the help of a ride up the valley, they may even visit the popular Horseshoe Basin and return to Stehekin Landing late in the afternoon.

Horseshoe is a high glacier-carved basin that is cold and laden with snow much of the year. On a good day, a hike to the basin is an encounter with the sharp sense of life and survival that occurs on the cutting edge of the Cascades. Everything is honed by the climate. The rocks are sliced and cracked by ice, trees are shaved of their bark and stunted by wind and heavy snow, and flowers shove and compete for space in the short growing season. The air is often bracing and the clouds are spectacular if not threatening.

Moving along the trail, hikers are constantly challenged by the surroundings. The sounds of rushing water and wind swell and fade with the passing moments, and pikas and marmots issue sharp warnings that pierce the general quiet. Only the slow pace allows



The sounds of rushing water and the colors of mountain flowers reward those who venture into the high country.





Discovering a patch of
vivid monkeyflowers and
coming upon a broad
perspective of the hills
etch the Upper Stehekin
Valley in our memories.



the mind to comprehend much of what is seen during the day: color—the dull gray of the cliffs, the red of monkeyflowers and paintbrush, the green of alders; light and shadow—the constant interplay of sun and clouds; and form and texture—the massive mountains, delicate flowers, and smooth cottonwood leaves against rough wood or rock.

The trail follows the U-shaped glacial trough of the upper Stehekin Valley, skirting rockslides, paralleling and crossing creeks, and passing through thickets. It climbs the valley wall to the basin and opens away from the more restricted valley bottom. Flowers become more prolific and snow often lies along the trail. In two hours, hikers can be in the basin watching waterfalls plunge over the headwall.

The Horseshoe Basin area is both a physical place and the culmination of a mental process that begins when civilization is left behind on lower Lake Chelan. Discovering what lay uplake began the process, knowing what was upvalley beyond Stehekin Landing continued it, and exploring the high country culminates it. Being here brings the answer to what lies beyond and above the near horizon.

NPS Photo



Up the Stehekin Valley, beyond Cascade Pass, Mount Johannesburg's ridge sharply declares the ruggedness of the terrain.



EPILOGUE: A SUMMER EVENING

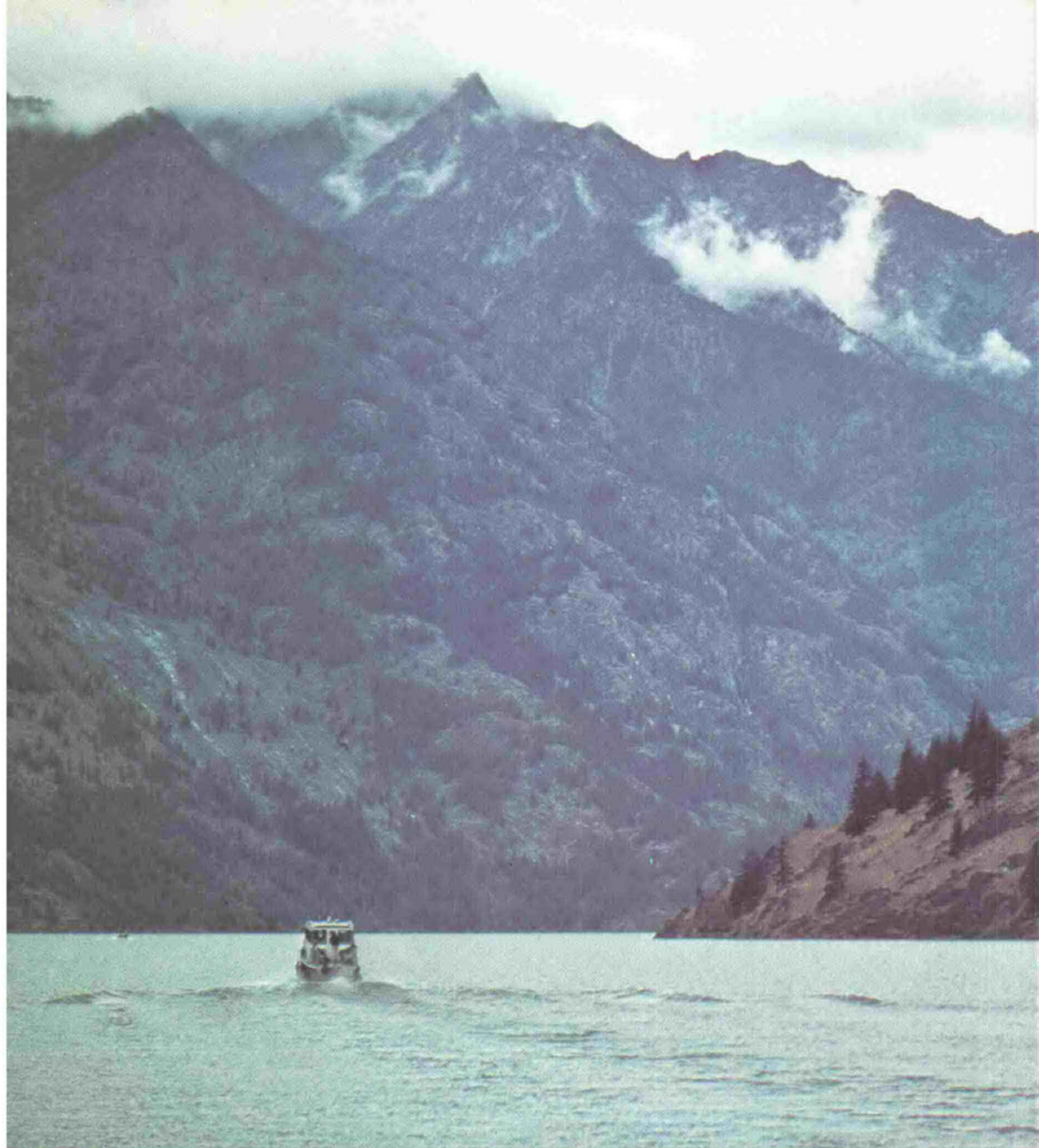
At dusk, a different sort of distinctiveness comes to Stehekin. The mountains, substantive in the daylight, are shadows now. With the coming darkness, their immensity has increased. It seems implausible that men could be clustered around tiny flames in the great mountain void.

Close at hand, a screen door slams and voices dissolve the silence. Briefly, a young couple can be seen against the lights of the nearby North Cascades Lodge. In a moment they are gone, taking their sounds with them. All is quiet again.

Along the lake, the wind and light are fading together, and a few evenly spaced ripples reflect the first stars, setting them swaying in timed sequence. From the valley, the orange glow of a single faroff window light sends an undulating shaft of reflection through the ripples. Otherwise, there is nothing to be seen of man's presence up the valley. No street lights, no signs, no skyglow. It is as if man is not there; something of the earth primeval is sensed. That is Stehekin's special distinction.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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