

James Longmire and the Longmire Medical Springs Resort



James Longmire (NPS photo)

James Longmire (1820-1897)--pioneer, statesman, entrepreneur, and mountaineer--first viewed Mount Rainier in 1853 as he led the first wagon train over the challenging Naches Pass north of the mountain. It was the last part of a westward journey that began in Indiana and followed the Oregon Trail to Puget Sound. He settled on the Yelm Prairie with his family, where he had full view of Mount Rainier's imposing summit.

James Longmire's homestead became a stop for travelers on their way to the mountain, who benefited from his knowledge of the area. He worked as a packer for railroad surveyors looking for a route along the south side of the mountain and guided climbing parties headed for Mount Rainier. While guiding a party in 1883 he was persuaded to climb to the summit himself at the age of 63. At the end of this climb James Longmire found the mineral springs that now bear his name. While searching for his horse, which wandered away while he climbed the mountain, he found it grazing near a meadow bubbling with steaming geothermal springs. With the idea of developing a medical resort at the springs, James Longmire returned home to tell his family he had discovered their fortune.

The following year, with the help of local Native Americans, James Longmire and his sons cleared a thirteen-mile wagon road from Ashford to the mineral springs, where he built a cabin. In 1885 he opened a small, two-story hotel with a lobby downstairs and five guest rooms on the second floor. Soon barns and other buildings were added for an outfitting business to meet the needs of campers and climbers traveling up the mountain to the meadows of Paradise.

By 1889, two bathhouses and some guest cabins were completed and the health spa was being advertised in local newspapers. The resort proved so popular that an addition was added to the hotel, for a total of twelve rooms, and tents were erected nearby. Guests paid eight dollars per week for accommodations, meals, and treatments at the springs. The alleged healing powers of these mineral springs attracted many people to soak in the water and drink the mineral-laden waters.

In 1892 James Longmire was awarded a patent for 18.2 acres of land that included the adjacent meadow and most of the mineral springs. He became involved in the movement to create a national park at Mount Rainier, though he did not live to see it accomplished by the time he died in 1897. Eventually, more-modern businesses replaced the Longmire family's resort. The family sold their property to the park in 1939, having contributed significantly to the park's history and the history of Washington State. Today visitors still come to the area seeking the tonic of nature's beauty and grandeur from the mountain that inspired James Longmire.



Longmire's Medical Springs Resort
(NPS photo)