

## CULTURAL HISTORY

# 9,000-year-old Campfires Found at Cascade Pass

LOCATED AT NEARLY 5,400 FEET, Cascade Pass is a quintessential Pacific Northwest mountain meadow. Delicate wildflowers bloom after the snow melts and small rock slides litter the area with debris from glaciers on the surrounding mountains. For those who hike the 3.7 miles (6 km) of moderately steep switchbacks, the view and aura of the pass awaken the senses to one of the state's most cherished alpine landscapes.

For park archeologist Bob Mierendorf, though, the most intriguing aspect of Cascade Pass lies beneath the surface, in the layers of soil accumulated over thousands of years. Here he discovered Native American artifacts that date back more than 9,000 years, earlier than any previously studied high elevation archeological site in Washington. "Cascade Pass is unique in the Washington Cascades for the following reasons," Mierendorf said, "no other [archeological] site is on the hydrologic crest and also has a clear pre-Mazama cultural component."

Through careful scientific excavation, Mierendorf encountered at least five separate layers of volcanic ash. Each layer has its own chemical identity that can be traced back to the specific Cascade volcano that spewed it forth. The first half-meter of digging passed familiar ash layers: two from Mt. St. Helen's, one from Mt. Baker and one from Glacier Peak. At almost one-meter down, Mierendorf discovered ash from Mt. Mazama – a massive volcano in Oregon that exploded 7,650 years ago, creating today's Crater Lake.



Archeologist Bob Mierendorf excavates in the park

It is well-documented and known among archeologists that early civilizations from the coastal and inland side of the mountains crossed Cascade Pass, but never before have artifacts been found along the crest of the Cascade Range that pre-date the Mazama explosion. With this new information in hand, the National Park Service is working to preserve Cascade Pass and its cultural history. Several trails at the pass are scheduled to be re-routed and re-vegetated in hopes of reducing erosion.

"It's not just soil loss anymore," Mierendorf said, "it's loss of ancient history."

## High Elevation Project Discovers Indian Camps and Travel Routes

Before archeologists from North Cascades, Olympic and Mount Rainier National Parks collaborated on their 3-year high elevation excavations, little was known about the native people's use of these mountainous parks. Now, with the ground-breaking research that concluded in 2004, they have discovered a wealth of information about the people who inhabited these landscapes thousands of years ago. The site surveys found short-term hunting camps, travel sites, tool-stone quarries, and base camps, suggesting a strong human influence in the areas.

Researchers used these new discoveries to determine ancient travel routes, and to learn more about the historic use of mountain goats and other subalpine and alpine fauna and flora. These discoveries uncovered exciting new findings about the effects of massive floods and climate change, such as volcanic eruptions and the Little Ice Age, on the native people. The research also has management implications for the parks, since 60 new archeological sites and isolated finds were discovered at high elevations. Preservation is imperative since these artifacts give researchers knowledge of the earliest people here and how these areas have changed.

## Links to the Past

### Excerpt from "North Cascades Days"

We wander the earth learning so much  
Encountering a black bear who's just having lunch  
He turns to face us wondering 'bout all the fuss  
And awaits our departure before returning to munch

A little spotted fawn just a few days old  
Has been left by her mom in a well protected fold  
Fear not; Mother Nature's watching while moms away feeding  
Nature's in balance, the fawn needs no keeping

Brondi searches for seeds to sow in the beds  
And imparts his great wisdom to fill up our heads  
He unveils the acers, pseudosuga and yew  
Then reveals common maples, Doug firs and ferns, too

We find buried treasures on the forest floor  
Pipsissewa, hazelnuts, wild ginger galore  
Riding the Ross Mule into Earth's Great Green Church  
We listen to stories Kerouac wrote from his perch

Now summer is scorching in the late August sun  
As stewards hike Baker, just for the fun  
We check in with Glacier, the call back's from McAloo  
Then we offer awareness to folks with no clue

Leave no Trace is the ethic we impart  
As we approach with a smile right from the start  
We point out the mountain goats, pikas and marmots  
The beauty, the hazards, the heathers and varments.

-From the memoirs of steward Terri Cloonan

For information on how to become a steward for the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, e-mail Charles\_Beall@nps.gov, or see [www.volunteer.gov/gov](http://www.volunteer.gov/gov)

STORIES OF THE PAST are embedded in the landscape of the park complex and nearby environments. These stories, uncovered by park researchers, date back more than 9,000 years and were revealed from more than 300 prehistoric and historic archeological sites. Recovered archeological sites include ancient hunting camps, food processing locations, fishing camps, rock art, tool stone quarries, historic mines and mining camps, fire lookouts, sheep herder camps, sawmills, homesteads and a "lost" hotel.

The Cultural Resources Branch of the Resource Management Division at North Cascades has been working to make the histories and artifacts of ancient days available for park visitors to view at several interpretive displays in park visitor centers and through a self-guided tour of a 1,500-year-old rock shelter at Newhalem. The artifacts tell a story of indigenous use of the mountains and their resources for the last 9,000 years, including a radiocarbon chronology and geologic record of Cascade volcano eruptions, which are used to mark the timing of both human and climatic events.

The Marblemount Curation Facility is a multi-park repository for the museum collections from North Cascades National Park Service Complex, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve and San Juan Island National Historical Park. The combined collections at the parks total over 1.2 million objects and grow with staff investigations and inventory, monitoring and academic research. Park visitors can view a sampling of the cultural resource collections at the North Cascades National Park Visitor Center near Newhalem, the American Camp Visitor Center on San Juan Island and the Burke Museum at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The museum collections include archeological, historical, ethnographic, and archival resources and geologic, biologic, and paleontologic specimens. Researchers can view historic artifacts that document early exploration and settlement of the area and examine project documents, historic records, park administrative documents, resource management records, maps, drawings, photographs, and oral histories.

For more information on the history of the national parks, visit: [www.cr.nps.gov](http://www.cr.nps.gov) [www.nps.gov/noca/historyculture/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/noca/historyculture/index.htm)