

Reopen “The Way Through” To More Than A Very Few

Throughout history Stehekin has been a way through the heart of the rugged and sheer North Cascade mountain range. Used by Native Americans, explorers, trappers, miners, homesteaders, and now hikers and beauty seekers, the Stehekin Valley is a pathway of unparalleled beauty. The valley remains remote because there are no outside roads leading into it, but once visitors reached the valley, usually by boat, they had long been able to access the upper reaches of this awe inspiring place by catching a ride on a Park Service shuttle bus up a primitive but remarkable road. Once at the end of the road, they could experience the extreme grandeur of places like Horseshoe Basin, Cascade Pass and Trapper Lake.

In 1958, Sierra Club’s David R. Brower rented a vehicle at the Stehekin landing and drove his sons and camping gear along the 21-mile Stehekin Valley Road. Driving along the narrow road, their excitement must have been tangible. These adventurers were on their way to discover the incredible grandeur of the North Cascades. They had another task as well. They were filming a movie entitled, “Wilderness Alps of Stehekin.” This movie was then promoted by the Sierra Club and local environmental groups to elevate the idea of creating a vast National Park Complex in the North Cascades of Washington State.

Arriving at the Cottonwood Campground the Browsers still had plenty of hiking ahead of them, but because they were able to drive (a raucously bumpy ride for sure) to the end of the road, they were able to

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access awe-inspiring vistas unavailable in the lower valley. The ability to access the heart of the North Cascades along the 23 mile Stehekin Valley Road made a deep and positive impression on the Browsers.

Narrating the “Wilderness Alps of Stehekin” movie, David describes the North Cascades as “a crown jewel of American scenic grandeur” . . . “un-surpassed anywhere in the United States.” Beyond the praise heaped on the natural setting, David paid tribute to the primitive road his family drove along to reach the Cottonwood Campground. “The road starts at a handsome lake shore and dead-ends in Paradise.” The paradise David spoke of included the tumbling waterfalls of Horseshoe Basin with its ring of rugged, majestic peaks easily accessible from Cottonwood. Unfortunately, the recreational access corridor David and his sons drove along in 1958 is no longer available to valley visitors in 2008.

The Sierra Club and others promoting National Park legislation used the “Wilderness Alps of Stehekin” as a tool to influence elected officials and gain public support concerning the importance of creating a National Park Complex in the heart of the Cascades. The two predominant themes characterized in the movie were preservation and public use and enjoyment. “Wilderness Alps of Stehekin” promoted a vision and a promise. The vision was that public lands would be set aside for environmental protection. The promise was that Americans would continue to have access to the heart of the Cascades.

Citizens supporting these ideals influenced elected officials to pass legislation creating the North Cascades National Park Complex.

All legislation for this area calls for the preservation of the resource, as well as, the continuation of public access along the Upper Stehekin Valley Road. Legislative history specifically documents the importance of maintaining the primitive road used by David Brower and his sons. Unfortunately, because of the flood of 2003 and the subsequent NPS road closure, most people visiting Stehekin today will be unable to access upper valley trails and campgrounds.

The purpose of this publication is to advocate for reopening the Upper Stehekin Valley Road as an essential access corridor into the North Cascades.

Stehekin Heritage believes citizens of all ages and physical ability should have the opportunity to access the upper Stehekin Valley and be inspired by the grandeur of this magnificent setting. In the challenging era we live, the opportunity to refresh the body and inspire the soul is as essential in 2008 as it was in 1958.

David Brower voiced this same sentiment fifty years ago. Narrating the summary of his movie David stated, “You have a right to discover it, I told Ken and Bob (Brower’s sons) and your children and theirs too, just as we did.”

All Americans have the right to discover the heart of the Cascades just as the Browsers did fifty years ago. It’s time to reopen the Upper Stehekin Valley Road - *The Way Through* - to more than a very few. Stehekin Heritage hopes you will support efforts to reopen the Upper Stehekin Valley Road.



Stehekin School Students with Ron Scutt @ Horseshoe Basin Drainage

Stehekin Heritage invites you to support: Reopening the historical Upper Stehekin Valley Road closed by extreme flooding in 2003... see back page

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“IF YOUNG CHILDREN ARE DENIED ACCESS TODAY, WHO WILL BE THE ARDENT SUPPORTERS OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WILDERNESS TOMORROW?”

~ JUDITH A. GUSTAFSON ~