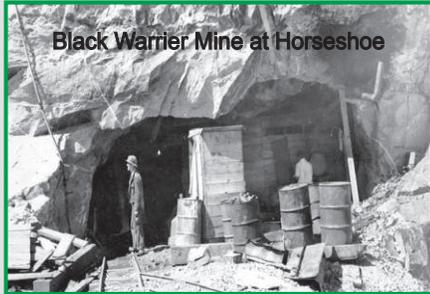


Historical Overview Of “The Way Through”

Stehekin is based on a Native American word, meaning “The Way Through.” The Stehekin River Valley has a very long history of being used as a passage. It originally was part of a travel route linking the tribes of the Puget Sound and Skagit areas with those of the Columbia River Plateau. Groups traded goods across the mountains through Cascade Pass. Canoes at the head of Lake Chelan carried travelers the last miles out to the Columbia River and plateau.



“No human can look out upon this great mountain upheaval, this panorama of cliffs and cataracts, and crags and glaciers and mineral deposits without being awed into reverent contemplation of the almighty power which wrought this majestic and sublimely beautiful picture,” wrote DeWitt Britt, a writer in the company of twenty eight others traveling to Horseshoe Basin in 1893 along the valley road.

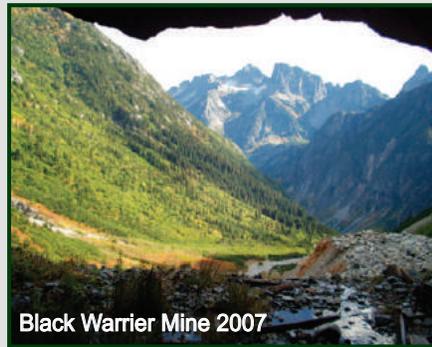


Black Warrior Mine at Horseshoe

Mining activity brought the first permanent white settlers into the Stehekin Valley. In the last part of the 19th century, prospectors began exploring for mineral wealth. They found gold, silver, lead and copper ore. Many a prospector and interested party visited the Stehekin Valley during this era, carried to the upper reaches often by way of horseback and pack train along a trail leading to early claims concentrated in the vicinities of Doubtful Lake and Horseshoe Basin at the head of the Stehekin Valley.

“It was primarily the discoveries of these early prospectors of the large veins of silver-lead galena ores in the Horseshoe Basin, Park Creek and Bridge Creek areas of the upper Stehekin Valley that brought so many people here at this time. By the next summer more people had flooded in to the upper Lake Chelan and Stehekin area than at any other one time since.” (p. 39 “Lake Chelan in the 1890’s.” Byrd, Robert)

In 1899, most of the “wagon road” from Stehekin to Bridge Creek was built to accommodate a mine to market route. Later the river road was built using CC labor and was in use until 2003. With the exception of the crude and often steep access to the mines, road building never went much beyond 23 miles past the Boat Landing. Several plans to link the valley with the outside by roadway over Cascade Pass were pursued but never occurred. Even though a roadway would never follow the entire “way through” by way of Cascade Pass, an established road now opened up the area for people to visit the Stehekin Valley for more reasons than prospecting. Read from Carol Stone’s “Stehekin: Glimpses of the Past” and find several stunning accounts of pack trips through the heart of the Cascades, enjoyed by early travelers for the sole purpose of discovering breathtaking beauty.



Black Warrior Mine 2007

The lower Stehekin Valley became home to a few homesteading families, settlers, miners, packers, and hotel owners. A small settlement was based at Bridge Creek as well. The road was the lifeline for all the early settlers providing an artery to their lands, their mines, and their income of transporting the visiting public into the majestic scenery beyond. Many tourists traveled the lake, spent the night in hotels such as the Field hotel, one of the most well known destination resorts in the Pacific Northwest at the time, and then proceeded to ride horseback with a packer into the high country along the road.



In 1943, a passable road reached Horseshoe Basin with the aid of state appropriations. The lands surrounding the road were eventually governed by the US Forest Service. In 1968, the lands came under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The road remained the access to the high country and several trailheads and campgrounds.

Much has changed in the Stehekin Valley since the pioneering days, but the “old ways of life” have not totally disappeared. The Stehekin River Road is still the lifeline of the Valley. Children of homesteading families continue to live in the valley and make a living providing services for the visiting public; leading pack trips, providing up lake transportation by barge, managing the Stehekin Valley Ranch, operating the Stehekin Pastry Company, offering guided raft trips on the Stehekin River, offering expertise in photography, providing unique and beautiful rental homes and cabins, and horseback rides.

The vitality of this little mountain community and the well being of the residents and visitors depend in large part on the ability to access the inspirational and historical upper Stehekin Road. “The Way Through” is a unique passageway that ties us not only to unsurpassed beauty, but also to meaningful American historical footsteps.



Stehekin River



Curt's bus at Carwash Falls

We want the National Park Service to honor the commitment stated in the Wilderness Act... Reopen the Upper Stehekin River Road and give the American Public access to the North Cascades Wilderness once again.