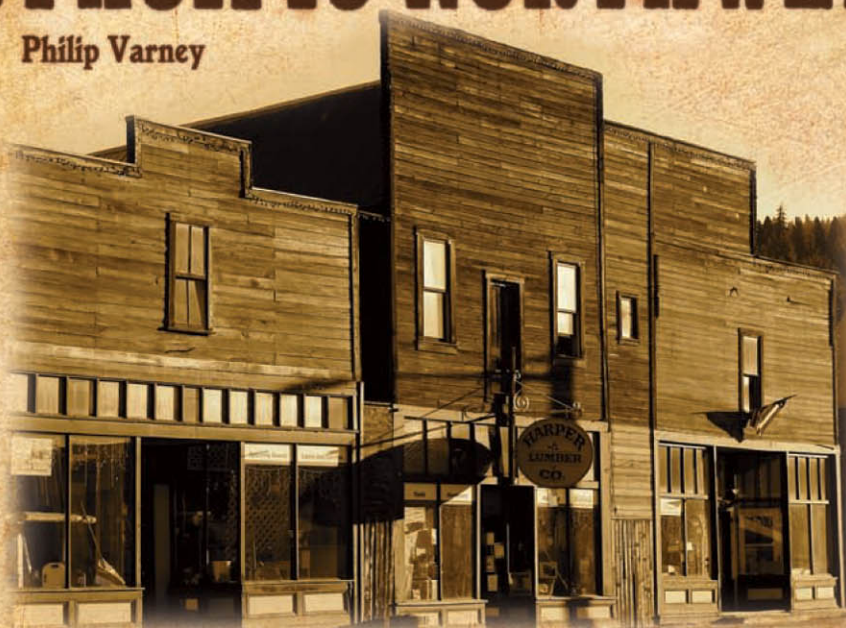


GHOST TOWNS

of the **PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

Philip Varney



Your Guide to the Hidden History
of Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia







FATHER
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GHOST TOWNS **of the PACIFIC NORTHWEST**



**Your Guide to the Hidden History
of Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia**

Text and Photography by Philip Varney

Voyageur Press

**FOR GREG AND MARY ELLEN PSALTIS, ERICA PSALTIS,
REID PSALTIS AND NAN ALLISON, AND KOSTA PSALTIS**



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ICE
MENTAL
PLACE

OPEN

TO THE READER

Ghost towns offer a fascinating and unique opportunity to explore the history of the West, providing a glimpse into a way of life now long gone. While most ghost towns in places such as California, Colorado, Nevada, or Arizona are remnants of once-booming mining communities, the Pacific Northwest's ghost towns have a more varied history. Only twenty-one of the fifty-four sites featured in this book were initially settled because of mineral wealth. Seventeen communities were farming towns, while eight were related to fishing, six to defending the United States, and two to logging.

I began prowling Oregon's back roads in search of ghost towns in 1982, but I didn't explore Washington's back country until 2000. I was really tardy venturing into British Columbia, first exploring for ghost towns there in 2003. Having now seen a small portion of that extraordinary province, I'll return—and often. I hope this book will inspire others to do so as well.

Ghost Towns of the Pacific Northwest is intended for people who love history, seek unusual experiences, and enjoy solitude. Some of the destinations in this book—out-of-the-way spots such as Holden, Washington; Sandon, British Columbia; and Flora, Oregon—may be unfamiliar even to natives of the area. Other sites attract thousands of visitors annually, such as Port Gamble, Washington; Fort Steele, British Columbia; and Jacksonville, Oregon. Chasing down the ghost towns of the Pacific Northwest will take you from the seacoast high into the forests of the Cascade Range. You will view the magnificent Columbia River as it passes through Revelstoke, British Columbia, to its first entry into the United States in Northport, Washington, and to its dramatic meeting with the Pacific Ocean near Astoria, Oregon. You will see the Pacific Northwest as you have never seen it before. That certainly happened to me.

The towns featured in this book are arranged geographically, so you can visit places in logical groups, beginning with some excellent sites within a day's trip of Seattle. The following chapters take you away from population centers and onto true back roads. Each chapter features a map of the area, a history of each town, a description of what remained at the site when I visited, specific directions to each site, and, naturally, photographs.

A person new to ghost town hunting might tour the first entry in this book, Port Gamble, and wonder just what I consider a ghost town to be, because Port Gamble is a lovely, well-maintained, historic treasure. By my definition, a ghost town has two characteristics: The population has decreased markedly, and the initial reason for its settlement (be it mining, logging, farming, or fishing) no longer keeps people there. Port Gamble's sawmill has closed, and vacant lots attest to how many residences have disappeared. No one there today makes his living as a logger, and the population is a fraction of the community in its heyday. A ghost town, then, can be completely deserted, such as Bodie, Washington; it can have a few residents, such as Sandon, British Columbia; or it can have genuine signs of vitality, such as Sumpter, Oregon. But in each case, the town is a shadow of its former self. The three preceding examples were all mining towns, and their boom has long since passed.

To be included in this book, however, a town must have significant remnants. Fifty-four ghost towns are featured here, but I visited and eliminated 145 other sites (79 in Washington, 52 in Oregon, and 14 in British Columbia). Many were eliminated because so little of historic importance remains, but most were omitted simply because they are modern towns today.

The inclusion of military installations in a ghost town book may surprise some readers, but I have found that ghost town hunters also love old forts. Several of my previous books have featured installations that include historic remnants. Think of the six presented in these pages—three that guarded Washington's Puget Sound and three that stood sentry near the mouth of the Columbia River—as “ghost forts.”

Ghost Towns of the Pacific Northwest encompasses two states and a portion of a province, so if you wish to visit all the sites in this book, you'll put significant miles on your vehicle. But I assure you that they will be some of the most enjoyable miles you will travel in the West. And, for the first time in all my books, I did not need four-wheel drive. I didn't even require a truck, although I used one.

I wrote my first ghost town book in response to my frustration with the way other such books are generally organized. I wanted a completely practical, informative guide that would fit comfortably on the seat of my truck. Some guidebooks I have followed in the West seemed to be written principally for armchair travelers. Unfortunately, some were written by armchair authors. I cringe when I realize that a book I'm using was written by someone who obviously hasn't personally

observed what he is writing about. For this second edition, I revisited and rephotographed every site in this book in 2010 and 2011. The book's emphasis is on what remains in a town, not what was there in its heyday. I describe what to look for at each site, and in most cases I suggest walking or driving tours.

I also make recommendations about several museums and one commercial ghost town enterprise, British Columbia's Three Valley Gap Heritage Ghost Town (in chapter 3). My observations are candid, and I received no special consideration at such sites in the original edition of this book. On my return trip for the second edition, I did receive complimentary admission and permission to photograph both Three Valley Gap and Fort Steele, to take advantage of early light before the attractions opened (see acknowledgments). Otherwise, I paid for all attractions, and guides knew me only as another tourist. I received no special access to any other sites for photography; even at Three Valley Gap and Fort Steele, I did not go into any areas closed to tourists. I put away all my film cameras and lenses utilized in my first seven books and used a digital camera with only two zoom lenses. I did not use either a flash or a tripod. My purpose in doing this was that I wanted to take photos that any person with a camera could take. This is in contrast to some of my previous books in which either I or my photographer partners for three books, John and Susan Drew, paid for permits or were given special privileges because of what we were working on. I did not do that for this volume. If you like the photos I took, you can get the same shots I did.

When it comes to looking for photographic subjects, I suggest starting with graveyards. Almost every town has a cemetery, even if it has little else. A perfect example is in southern Oregon: The town of Sterlingville has completely vanished, but its cemetery remains. Some of my most enjoyable but poignant moments have come while walking around graveyards, since emotions are often laid bare on tombstones. To read the grief of parents in the epitaphs of their children is to see the West in absolutely personal terms. History comes tragically alive in cemeteries. In addition, headstones make wonderful photographic subjects, as you will see in this book.

To visit all of the sites in this book without frantically racing from one to another, I would estimate that you would need, heading out from Seattle, about five days for chapter 1.

For chapter 2, if you are going northeast from Chelan (the debarkation point for Holden, the last entry in chapter 1), you might need only two days, with a logical overnight at Kettle Falls.

I spent five days rephotographing chapter 3 in 2011, and I think you could do well in about the same time—perhaps a day less—if you start from either Osoyoos, British Columbia, or Kettle Falls, Washington.

The likely starting point for chapter 4 is Portland. You could visit all the sites with an overnight in a place such as Astoria, which is a town I love to visit every summer. But here's my advice: Take at least two days to enjoy this enchanting area.

Chapters 5 and 6 can be explored together rather conveniently. From Portland, I would estimate that you would need about a week, but I always tarry an extra night or two in Sumpter, Oregon, because it is such a wonderful place (see acknowledgments).

The principal town for exploring chapter 7 is Medford, although nearby historic (and delightful) Jacksonville has wonderful accommodations and restaurants. An overnight or two in either community is sufficient to visit this captivating area.

Why are we called to these places where so many have toiled and so many have been forgotten? My late friend, mystery writer Tony Hillerman, in the foreword to my New Mexico book, captured the answer: "To me, to many of my friends, to scores of thousands of Americans, these ghost towns offer a sort of touching-place with the past. We stand in their dust and try to project our imagination backward into what they were long ago. Now and then, if the mood and the light and the weather are exactly right, we almost succeed."

Our "touching-places with the past," however, are in immediate and long-term danger. Vandals tear up floorboards hoping for a nonexistent coin. Looters remove an old door with the vague notion of using it, only to discard it later. Thieves dislodge a child's headstone, heartlessly assuming no one will miss it.

These old towns are not only to be explored and photographed, but also to be protected and treasured. As you visit the places in this book, please remember that ghost towns are extremely fragile. Leave a site as you found it. I have seen many items on the back roads that tempted me, but I have no collection of artifacts. If you must pick up something, how about a fast food wrapper or a soft drink can? You must be a part of the preservation, not the destruction.

When I was doing fieldwork for my book on Colorado, I found the following notice posted in a lovely but deteriorating house. It eloquently conveys what our

department should be at ghost towns and historic spots:

Attention: We hope that you are enjoying looking at our heritage. The structure may last many more years for others to see and enjoy if everyone like you treads lightly and takes only memories and pictures.

Finally, a word to my Canadian readers: Please don't be offended by the title of this book. I realize that British Columbia is not in the "Pacific Northwest" of your great country. The title mostly reflects a simple way of describing the region. I have a special fondness for Canada, where I was warmly welcomed while doing fieldwork for this book.

— *Philip Varney*
Tucson



An unusual pyramidal rooftop caps this boarded-up two-story residence in Mayville, Oregon.



INTRODUCTION

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia are linked by more than mere geography. For thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans, indigenous people lived in their forests, fished their rivers and coastlines, gathered seeds in their vast inlands, and traveled their great waterways. When Europeans “discovered” the Pacific Northwest, four great nations laid claim to some or all of the combined territory.

Spanish seafarers Bruno de Heceta and Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra were the first known Europeans to confirm claims on the region, when they reached the coast of the Pacific Northwest in 1775. The United States’ claims were solidified when Captain Robert Gray was the first to sail into the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean in May of 1792. Captain George Vancouver validated England’s interests when he explored Puget Sound and the Columbia a month later. Mariners and fur traders from the north established claims for a fourth nation, Russia.

Spain and Russia eventually abandoned their stakes in the Northwest because of insubstantial documentation of claims and their pursuit of other colonial interests, leaving the region to England and the United States.

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Thomas Jefferson’s Corps of Discovery, led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, firmly established the United States’ land claims in 1805 and prompted fur traders to explore the region further. In 1841, Congress passed the Pre-emption Act, which permitted males, widows, and female heads of families to claim 160 acres of public land for farming purposes. Two years later a westward movement, known as “The Great Migration,” began. Over the ensuing three decades, more than three hundred thousand settlers, lured by the promise of a new Eden, took the two thousand-mile Oregon Trail west from Independence, Missouri.

The boundary between British Columbia and what would become Washington was established along the forty-ninth parallel in 1846, with the land north of the boundary belonging to England. Two years later, Congress established the Oregon Territory, which extended from the present-day northern boundary of Washington and the southern boundary of Oregon all the way east to the summit of the Rocky Mountains.

Even when you’re miles away from Kent, Oregon, you’ll be able to see the concrete grain silo (rear) and another behemoth made of wood.



Otto Benson died when he was less than three years old. His epitaph, in the Blue Mountain Cemetery of Sumpter, Oregon, reads: *Thou art gone little; Sweet child of our love. From earth's fairy strand; To bright mansions above.*

When the California Gold Rush began in 1849, many Northwest settlers headed south to the excitement. Others discovered, however, that they could make a profit off the rush without leaving the Oregon Territory by supplying California with wheat, flour, salmon, lumber, and shingles. Wheat was in such demand early in the 1850s that its price jumped from one dollar to six dollars per bushel in less than five years.

Washington became a separate territory in 1853, and its present boundaries took shape when the Idaho Territory was formed in 1863. Washington did not achieve statehood until 1889, whereas Oregon was granted statehood in 1859 and has seen no change to its boundaries since that time.

North of the border, Vancouver Island became a crown colony of England in 1849. In 1858, gold was discovered in the Fraser River area, sparking an influx of at least twenty-five thousand settlers, most

of them single men from Oregon, Washington, and the California gold fields. Although the Fraser excitement was short-lived, it sent prospectors looking elsewhere in British Columbia, resulting in subsequent strikes in the Cariboo, the Kootenay, and the Klondike. Originally known as New Caledonia, British Columbia began to have both urban and rural communities, and a considerable portion of the early settlers were Americans. In 1871, British Columbia became the fifth province of the Dominion of Canada, but its citizens voted to do so on the condition that a rail link from the east would be built.

Although mining lured many settlers to the Northwest, none of the strikes were long-lived enough to create permanent communities, except for the few towns that supplied coal. Farming, ranching, and the logging industry offered more stable incentives for immigrating to the area, especially when free land was offered under

the Homestead Act beginning in 1862. And in the 1870s, the newly perfected canning process allowed the fishing industry to provide for more than a local market.

Nothing, however, influenced the populating of Oregon, British Columbia, and Washington more than the completion of railroads. The British publication *The Economist*, in the middle of the nineteenth century, noted that in the 1820s the speed a man could go unaided was about four miles per hour, “the same as Adam.” By horse, it was up to about ten miles per hour for any distance. But *The Economist* went on to say that by the 1850s, a man could, by train, habitually go forty miles per hour and occasionally as high as *seventy*. Portland was connected to the Atlantic seaboard by rail in 1883. The Canadian Pacific Railway was completed between Halifax and Vancouver in 1885. The Northern Pacific Railway entered Tacoma in 1887. All three political entities exploded in growth. To use Washington as an example, the territory’s population in the 1880 census was 75,116. By the 1890 census, the newly formed Washington state was home to 357, 232 people. In 1897, Washington became the outfitting point for the Klondike Gold Rush, solidifying a link between the United States and Canada that remains economically and politically vital today.

Today, British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon have vibrant urban areas that are the jewels of the Northwest. But each of them has a highly skewed concentration of population. As a result, when you cross the Cascade Range, you enter rural areas that are far different from the commotion of Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland. It is in these areas where some of the best remnants of the past can be found.

To experience the Pacific Northwest’s past, one can explore its historic remnants: the mining camps, prairie ghosts, and logging towns that were all but abandoned in search of more promising places. The tent camps have disappeared. The majority of wood-frame towns have vanished as well, having fallen to fire, vandalism, salvage, or the ultimate destroyer—gravity. Some delightful towns still exist, however, and the best are showcased throughout this book.



St. Anthony's Catholic Church is a historic building (not a reconstruction) in Fort Steele, British Columbia.

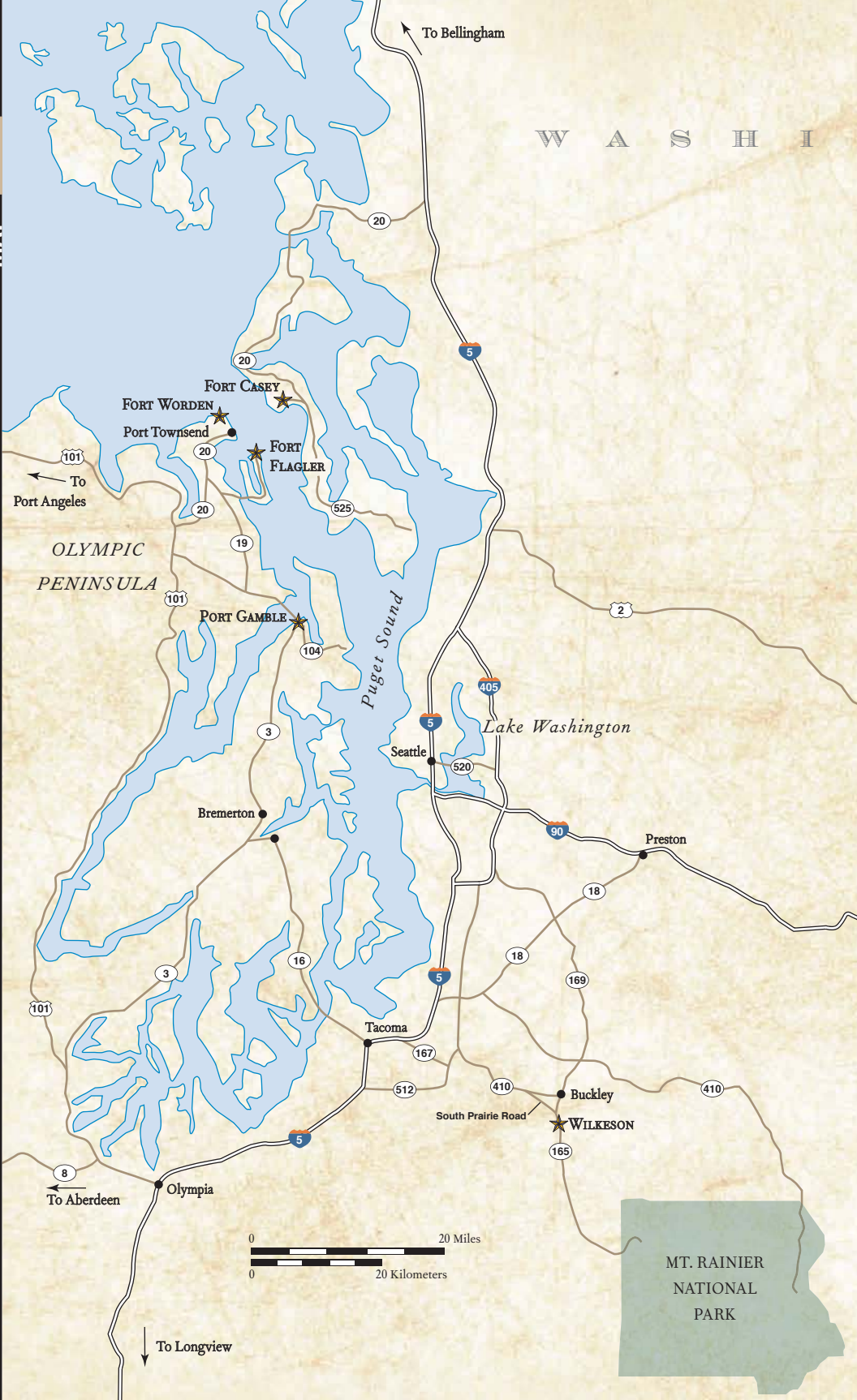


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GHOSTS OF THE SEATTLE AREA

YOUR PACIFIC NORTHWEST GHOST TOWN ADVENTURES begin with several sites within day trips of Seattle, including a delightfully preserved former lumber town, three forts that protected Puget Sound from naval attack, and three coal mining towns. Farther from Seattle is a copper-mining town virtually unchanged since the 1930s and isolated from the outside world—accessible only by a three-and-a-half-hour boat ride. Because these sites are in the most populous areas of Washington, they are not as “ghostly” as others in this book, but each displays only vestiges of its former life.

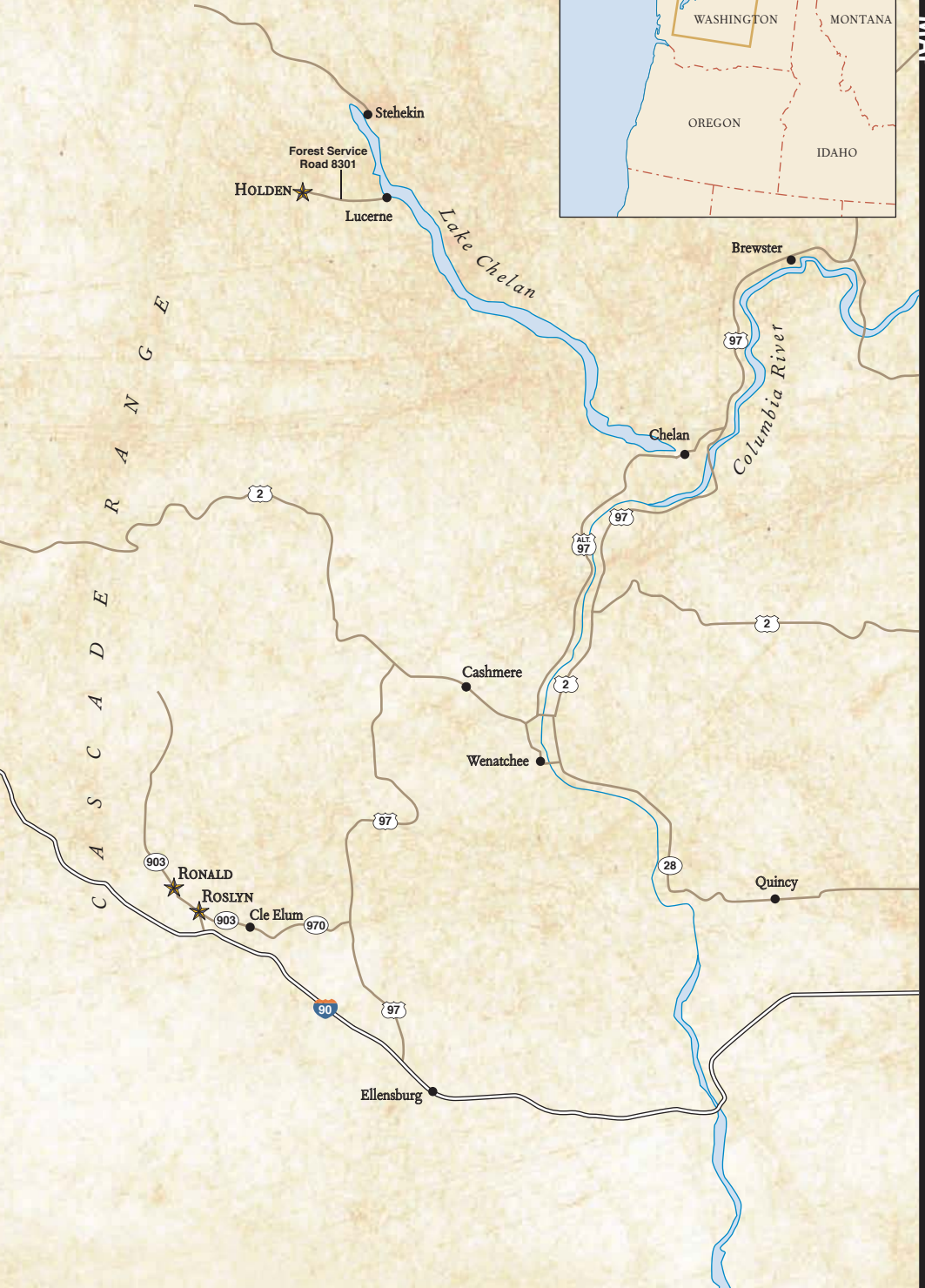
The Holy Trinity Orthodox Christian Church of Wilkeson, Washington, has an onion dome, a feature common on the churches of eastern Europe. Many of Wilkeson’s coal miners came from that region.



N G T O N



MAP



R A N G E
C A S C A D E

PORT GAMBLE

Port Gamble is one of the Northwest's most delightful communities. It was created as a company town in 1853 by Pope and Talbot, a lumber and shipping company originally formed in December 1849.

The year 1849 was, of course, the beginning of the California Gold Rush, which was to yield the largest concentration of gold in the history of the world. A. J. Pope, Captain William C. Talbot, and Cyrus Walker, natives of Maine, saw in the Gold Rush an opportunity for more than mineral wealth. They realized that San Francisco, the center of commerce for that rush, was about to surge in growth and prosperity. In 1853, Talbot and Walker led a maritime expedition up the Pacific Coast, eventually coming across huge supplies of timber, along with water deep enough for a sizable port, in Puget Sound. Pope and Talbot became experts at providing lumber for the booming economy in northern California.



Port Gamble's 1906 community center and post office is still the center of the action in town.



Built in 1916, Port Gamble's general store sells merchandise and houses two interesting museums.