

DID YOU KNOW?

Historical notes from Big Butte Historical Society
Compiled by Charleen Brown



IS IT SNOWY BUTTE, BIG BUTTE, MT. PITT OR MT. McLOUGHLIN?

What do you call the 9,500 foot peak that dominates the southeastern skyline near Butte Falls? Since the early 1800's it has been known by various names. To the Indians, it was "Alwillamchadis." To early explorers it was Snowy Butte or Big Butte. The two most prominent peaks in the area were called "Snowy Butte and Black Butte." Later "Black Butte" became known as "Rustler Peak" after local ranchers had trouble with cattle thieves and "Snowy Butte" became known as Mt. Pitt. The origin of this name is in some dispute. Some say it was named after William Pitt while others claim it was after the Pitt River. Still others insist that it is because of the pit on the north slope. But then, there is the story that a lame man by the name of Pitt was the first to climb the mountain, so he named it after himself. Whatever the source of this name, it was identified as Mt. Pitt on a Charles Preuss map in 1843. To add to the confusion, in 1832 a Hudson Bay trapper, Donald McKay had named the mountain, Mt. McLoughlin in honor of Dr. John McLoughlin who is also known as the "father of Oregon." Then, in 1905, the Legislature officially named it Mt. McLoughlin. Today, Mt. McLoughlin is the official name but, to most of the "old timers and locals" it is and always will be Mt. Pitt.

Every year in late May or early June a phenomena occurs on the west slope of Mt. Pitt that has given rise to a legend that has been passed down from the Indians through early settlers to the fishermen of today. As winter snows begin to melt, the rocky ridges become exposed. As the snow continues to melt, an emerging wing pattern becomes more and more visible. This is known as the 'angel or eagle' wings, depending on which old-timer is telling the story. The legend has it that; "when the wings appear, it is time to drop a fishing line in any mountain stream and watch the fish swarm to the hook. Fishing is guaranteed to be best in all mountain streams when the wings are seen on the mountain."

Farmers in the Agate Desert claimed to have seen Mt. Pitt erupt in April, 1915. They reported seeing clouds of smoke and steam coming from the peak of the mountain. Butte Falls residents were indignant and one resident wrote; "This peak is only 16 miles from Butte Falls, and in plain sight. We positively know it did not erupt. There is a small cloud that encircles it and looks very much like smoke, so this is probably what they saw." Many times each year, clouds seem to get caught on the top of the mountain which gives the appearance of an eruption.

To learn more about our area, visit the Medco Caboose Museum, located next to the Public Library and the E.W. Smith/Bill Edmondson Museum at 432 Pine Street. Museum hours are posted at each location. Membership in the Big Butte Historical Society is a fantastic bargain at \$5.00 per year for family membership. Your support preserves our wonderful past for the future.