

The North side of Mt. Hood
The Priceless History of the Cloud Cap - Tilly Jane and Cooper Spur backcountry

The **Cooper Spur** area is steeped in history, having first been used as a backcountry recreation haven in the 1880s and continuing through today. For generations, Klickitat basketmakers gathered cedar roots from this area for use in making their coiled huckleberry baskets. The forest here is also a watershed for a quarter of the people living in its vicinity. The valley below is one of the nation's agricultural showpieces, famous worldwide for its pears - more than 30% of the United States' winter pears are grown here, as are over 11% of the nation's Bartlett pears. This unique area benefits all who live in Oregon.

The nearby **Cloud Cap – Tilly Jane** area is an officially designated historic district containing “sites and features from a bygone recreational era.”¹ The district contains some of the oldest structures and roads on the mountain. The area includes three roads, Cooper Spur, the Cloud Cap Inn, Cooper's Tent campsite, the Snow Shoe Club Cabin, a Civilian Conservation Corps (“CCC”) camp, Tilly Jane Forest Camp, Tilly Jane Guard Station, the American Legion camp and amphitheater, and a CCC Ski Warming Hut. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Oregonians accessed the North side of Mt. Hood from Hood River via the daily train from Portland.

These rugged early adventurers enjoyed unspoiled backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking. Today this tradition continues and the North side is known as the backcountry side of the mountain. Visitors continue to enjoy a surprisingly pristine mountain experience complete with historic buildings for shelter. The Forest Service recognizes that cultural resources such as those in the Cloud Cap – Tilly Jane historic district are a great benefit for our communities. The Mt. Hood Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement notes, “cultural resources can help communities to feel increased respect for their heritage, and to feel the continuity that exists between the past and the present. Cultural resources may help to increase self-esteem within communities. **These kinds of values are priceless.**”²

The **Cloud Cap Inn** is the oldest alpine lodge on the mountain and enjoys national historical significance as well. The beautiful building was constructed with heavy log walls and two native stone fireplaces. The Inn opened in August of 1889. The Inn's long history involved many of the people whose names grace geological features and roads in Northwest Oregon. In 1910 the **Snowshoe Club Cabin** was built across the hill-top from the Cloud Cap Inn. In the 1920's the Inn was threatened by a plan for a modern hotel and a cable tramway to the very summit of Mount Hood.³ Wilderness advocates soundly defeated these plans, which they characterized as “an unconscionable rape of a prime, scenic wilderness area.”⁴ Later the first competitive skiing race on Mt. Hood took place in 1925 on a course from the Cloud Cap Inn.⁵

¹ Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (October 1990) (“Management Plan”)

² Management Plan at page III-165.

³ Jack Grauer, Mount Hood: A Complete History (1975) at page 90.

⁴ Grauer at page 91.

⁵ Grauer at page 152.

The Forest Service subsequently purchased the Inn in 1942 for \$2000.00 and in 1950 considered razing the Inn, which had fallen into disrepair. Luckily, the **Crag Rats of Hood River** made a successful bid for club use of the Inn and made extensive repairs in 1954 and 1974. Since that time the Inn has been used by backcountry hikers and skiers with much satisfaction.

The **Tilly Jane Ski Trail** is equally historic. The trail was used by the American Legion climbing groups in the 1920's, and it is possible that the trail was also used by Native Americans and early settlers in the Hood River Valley, as the high alpine meadows along the trail may have been used by valley shepherders. The **Tilly Jane Guard Station** was built in 1934 and initially it received seasonal use for backcountry access and fire protection. The **Ski Warming Hut** (also know as the Tilly Jane Ski Cabin) was constructed by the CCC in the late 1930s. A local historian, Mr. Lewis McArthur stated that the 1920 American Legion sponsored climbers were led by local Crag Rats and that they favored the Tilly Jane Ski Trail because it provided immediate entry into the backcountry and a more direct approach to the mountain.

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail climbs 1900 vertical feet in 2.7 miles to reach the Cloud Cap – Tilly Jane historic district. The trail climbs gently, without switchbacks, up a series of unique steps and flats to a broad ridge-top with a number of open parkland settings before it reaches the Cloud Cap - Tilly Jane. The trail provides a direct link to the Ski Warming Hut, the Tilly Jane Guard Station, the Snowshoe Club Cabin and the Cloud Cap Inn.

Today as in the past, virtually all snow season traffic to the Cloud Cap Tilly Jane Historic Recreation Area, Cooper Spur, Eliot Glacier and parts beyond is via the Tilly Jane Ski Trail. The trail is cut wide for ski descent and is noted by many for its aesthetic lay and pitches developed by the early skiers who crafted it. The trail remains virtually unchanged since it was brushed out and widened in 1939. The sweeping, open vistas across Mt. Hood and nearby ridges and peaks are virtually the same as they were when past visitors experienced them. Along the trail visitors are treated to an overwhelming quiet and sense of peace that pervades the area. This sense of peace connects visitors with the early explorers who heard the same birds and saw the same flora and fauna without any mechanical intrusions or visibly altered landscapes.

The **Cooper Spur Ski Area** emerged from a jump hill near the old Homestead Inn in the 1920's. In 1927 the North Slope Ski Club realized that the hill was on Forest Service land and obtained a permit for a ski area at the site of the current Cooper Spur Ski Area. Tow ropes were added by local ski clubs in 1938 and 1940. In 1939 the CCC performed a ski hill improvement project at Cooper Spur. Up until the year round opening of the Loop Highway in 1968, the ski area was managed and maintained by the local ski clubs. The 50 acre ski area sits at a lower elevation, appropriately modest in size and provides a family-oriented recreation opportunity. There are very few areas left on Mt. Hood above 5,000 feet (consistent snow level) that have the varied terrain for quality downhill skiing.⁶ The ski area has remained small primarily due to the elevation and the adjacent historic Cloud Cap and Tilly Jane backcountry.

⁶ Management Plan at III-124.