

Tilly Jane Ski Trail
Trail No. 643
Statement of Historical Significance

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail is historically significant because it was built to provide direct access to the structures in the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District and the northeast side of Mt. Hood during the snow season. As a result, the area became immensely popular with backcountry recreational enthusiasts, and the northeast side of Mt. Hood has become known as the backcountry side of the mountain.

The Cloud Cap Inn was built in the summer of 1889 and, like the 1885 Coopers tent camp, the Cloud Cap Inn was originally intended to be used only during the snow free season, which typically did not start until July. The intent to use the Inn only in the summer months quickly changed. In February 1890, Will and Doug Langille skied to the Inn on homemade skis. It was the first winter ski trip on the north side of Mt. Hood, and the approach up the 1889 wagon road was long and arduous. The pair spent their first night at the Elk Beds Cabin, and arrived at the Cloud Cap Inn on the second day to find the sun shining and water dripping from the eaves. The winter scene was so inspiring that the pair returned the next month with Lewis Adams, Theodore Dallas and photographer A.B. McAlpin to take photographs of the area with an 18 by 22 plate camera. Their winter trips were very successful and their exploration enticed others to do make the journey. The area soon became popular for backcountry enthusiasts who the challenge of making it up the mountain using their own strength and resolve. The area is known for a quiet and untrammelled winter recreation experience because it requires a willingness to step into the backcountry.

Access to the Cloud Cap Inn and surrounding area during the snow free months was primarily by horse drawn stage up the 1889 wagon road. In 1905, automobiles and a motor stage service were able to make their way to the Inn. The present road, built in 1924, provided summer access via automobile once the Cloud Cap Road was open and otherwise required a long by comparison self-propelled ski or snowshoe approach during the snow seasons. The Snowshoe Club was built in 1911 for year round use, and the Tilly Jane Guard Station, built in 1934, also received year round use.

In 1939 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) widened a winter access trail known as the Tilly Jane Ski Trail and also built the Tilly Jane Cabin. At that time the CCC also thinned the 1889 wagon road for use as a ski descent, and the area became quite popular. The Tilly Jane Ski Trail climbs 1900 vertical feet in 2.7 miles to reach the Historic District. The distance by Cloud Cap Road is about 10 miles. Today as in the past, virtually all snow season traffic to the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District, Cooper Spur, Eliot Glacier and parts beyond is via the Tilly Jane Ski Trail. On the way down, people have the option of descending the trail, the 1889 wagon road or the 1924 road. The Tilly Jane Ski Trail, Tilly Jane Cabin, Tilly Jane Guard Station, Snowshoe Club and Cloud Cap Inn receive significantly more use during the snow covered winter and spring than in the summer months.

The Tilly Jane Ski 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 reaching the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District. The Tilly Jane Ski Trail is cut wide for ski descent and is noted by many for its aesthetic lay and pitches that was given to it by the early skiers who crafted it.

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail is an essential element of the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District and the north side of Mt. Hood. Traditional winter use in the Historic District has always been and continues to be backcountry self-propelled recreation use. The direct access, width and aesthetic quality of the Tilly Jane Ski Trail has made the north side of Mt. Hood the backcountry side of the mountain. As it was in the early years of its creation, the Tilly Jane Ski Trail continues to be an immensely popular draw for backcountry enthusiasts from all over the Northwest.

The CCC was a vitally important organization during the Great Depression, especially in the largely undeveloped wild lands in the west. Founded in 1933 by President Franklin Roosevelt, the CCC's goals were to provide work for unemployed males and to support conservation efforts around the nation. Continuing until 1942, the efforts of the CCC focused on and shaped our national forests through reforestation, erosion and fire control, and construction of trails, roads, shelters, and more. There reference work "Utterly Visionary and Chimerical, A History of the USFS and CCC Works in the Pacific Northwest" by E. Gail Throop provides information on this area. The CCC successfully removed large numbers of men from relief rolls all across the country, and provided those men with skills and opportunities, such as travel and social diversification, otherwise unavailable to them. The Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District was one such area. Some of the CCC men on Mt. Hood were from as far away as Massachusetts.

In "The Complete History of Mt. Hood" Jack Grauer describes how skiing on the mountain changed over time. In the 1920s, cross country skiers used eight-foot pine skis with a rigged up harness for shoes ordered from a Marshal Wells Minnesota catalogue. Ski bindings quickly tore apart climbing boots and mail order leather ski boots were a big improvement. Eventually seven foot poles called push sticks in the catalogue were replaced with ski poles. As different turning styles were tried, skis became shorter, from 8' to 6'6" or 7'.

The trail's integrity is very high; it remains virtually unchanged since it was brushed out and cut in 1939. The sweeping, open vistas across Mt. Hood and to near and distant ridges and peaks are virtually the same as they were when the pioneers of the area first saw them. The old growth forest and open natural parkland on the ridge crest followed by the trail are essentially the same, since there does not appear to have been any logging around the trail. One can still go to this place and see almost exactly what the first explorers saw. Of the many people interviewed, both historic and more recent users, all mentioned the overwhelming quiet and sense of peace that pervades the area. This sense of peace connects with the early pioneers who would have heard the same birds and seen the same flora and fauna, without any mechanical intrusions.

The Tilly Jane Ski Trail is directly and closely linked to the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and listed in 1981. The aesthetic quality of the trail provided by the early skiers who built it and the direct access it provided to the Historic District, the northeast side on Mt. Hood, and the descent options provided have made this side of the mountain a mecca for backcountry recreational enthusiasts. Today, users can directly connect to the history of the trail simply by going to it, and hiking, snowshoeing or climbing up the trail and skiing or snowboarding down it, while taking in the sights, smells and views that existed when the people first created it. The Tilly Jane Ski Trail deserves recognition as an important feature on Mt. Hood, and inclusion in the National Register as a piece of Oregon's past, present and future for all generations to enjoy in its historic state.