

# Walk Historic Newhalem



Seattle City Light

## WELCOME TO NEWHALEM AND THE SKAGIT PROJECT

Owned and managed by Seattle City Light, Newhalem is part of the Skagit Hydroelectric Project, which extends 40 miles along the Skagit River from Newhalem to the Canadian border. City Light has generated hydroelectric power on the upper Skagit River since 1918. There are now three dams on the river and one on a nearby creek that provide power to the citizen-owners of Seattle and surrounding areas. These engineering marvels are a testament to the vision and foresight of James Delmage (J.D.) Ross, considered to be the “father” of City Light. The steep canyons of the upper Skagit River provided ideal locations for generating power. The waterfalls in the canyon immediately upstream of Newhalem also formed a natural barrier that kept fish from spawning farther up-river.

Under the leadership of **J.D. Ross**, the Skagit Project enjoyed a national reputation as a showcase promoting hydroelectricity and municipal ownership prior to World War II. Each year thousands of tourists, many proud citizen-owners from Seattle, flocked to the Skagit to participate in two-day tours of the Project by rail and boat. The Skagit Tours continue today under a partnership between City Light, the National Park Service, and North Cascades Institute.



## Stewardships & Partnerships



City Light recognizes that its operations draw upon natural resources that are vital to wildlife and fish, which add to the quality of life in the Pacific Northwest.

The utility embraces its responsibilities

as a steward of the environment. In partnership with local tribes, state and federal agencies, as well as environmental groups, City Light puts this commitment to work in many ways.

To preserve and restore wildlife and fish habitat, the utility buys property and has protected more than 10,000 acres this way. By managing river flows, fish are allowed to grow and flourish. The Skagit River, thanks

## WALKING TOUR OF NEWHALEM

**Newhalem got its start in 1918** as a construction camp for workers building the Skagit Project. At times more than 300 workers and their families lived in Newhalem and Diablo, another City Light town seven miles upstream. Fewer than 40 people live in the two towns today. Parts of both towns, along with the Skagit Project powerhouses and dams, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This walking tour of Newhalem will introduce you to the historic features of the town and the nearby hydroelectric plants – Gorge and Newhalem – following the footsteps of citizens who visited the town in the 1930s. Although features have changed, the town retains its original layout and many of the historic structures from the pre-war years. As you stroll through the town today, imagine what it must have been like to reach this remote community by train, when the wonders of electricity and hydropower were still brand new.

in part to the utility's efforts, supports some of the strongest salmon runs in Puget Sound. Over 70 percent of Skagit River Chinook Salmon spawn in the 23 miles of river between Gorge Powerhouse and Rockport.

The utility also helps provide recreational and educational experiences in this beautiful land. In 2006, the North Cascades Institute, National Park Service and City Light combined efforts to create the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center on Diablo Lake. Classes and field trips give day trippers and overnight guests the chance to explore the North Cascades in numerous, creative ways. Visitors enjoy dining at the Learning Center, a gourmet experience.



**1** Begin your tour at the **Skagit Information Center**, which was constructed in 1999 to serve a new generation of tourists and provide information to visitors to the North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake National Recreation Area. The building



was designed to blend with the architecture of Newhalem and the surrounding landscape. Next to the Information Center (toward the highway) is **The Hotel**, originally built in 1920 to house construction workers.

**2** **Old Number Six**, a Baldwin steam locomotive, played an important role in the construction of the Skagit Project. It operated on Seattle City Light's Skagit River Railway, which ran 23 miles from Rockport to Newhalem and later extended to Diablo. The railroad, built in 1920, carried construction materials, equipment and workers to the towns, dams and powerhouses.



**3** Designed and built in 1920, the **General Store** is one of three buildings on Main Street dating to the town's early development. Employees paid for items using scrip (a substitute for cash). The company store

serves residents and visitors today. Stop in for some famous homemade Skagit fudge!

**4** Numerous bunkhouses were built east of Main Street (behind the General Store) to house tourists in the summer and Skagit Project workers during the winter months. One of four remaining bunkhouses, the **New Cook's Bunkhouse** (to your right), built 1934, was converted in 1990 into a wildlife research station for the National Park Service. The nearby **Cambridge House** (1921) was converted into a community library in the 1990s and now serves as offices. The **Pansy House** (1934) initially provided lodging for construction crews. Later, it housed the dishwashing crews who worked in Gorge Inn. After 1934, it was used to house workers' families and now provides lodging for City Light employees temporarily working on Skagit Project facilities.





**7 Currier Hall** sits on the footprint of the Big Hall, the social center for the town of Newhalem and the site where presentations were given to tourists. Currier Hall was built in 1957 and named for a long-time employee of City Light, Dana Currier.

**8 Gorge Inn** was built in 1920 as a mess hall for City Light employees working on the Skagit Project. Tourists (and unmarried City Light workers) ate in this facility from the late 1920s until 1941, when the overnight tours stopped due to World War II. This building continued to serve



employees until the late 1970s. After many years of disuse, Gorge Inn underwent extensive renovations in 2012-2013 and recently reopened to serve employee meals once again. Stop in to see exhibits on life in the town of Newhalem over the years.

**9** This grassy area had dozens of tent cabins and wood-frame houses for use by City Light workers. The rows of trees are reminders of the residential roads and paths that existed in this section of town. To your left, there is another view of Silk Stocking Row. Garages for the Silk Stocking Row houses were located to the right, near the highway. These were constructed in 1939 when the road to Newhalem was completed and made it possible for employees to have cars. Made of corrugated iron and too small for today's cars, the garages were torn down in 2010. They were replaced with newer structures to serve the needs of current Newhalem residents and blend into the area.

**5 The Newhalem Powerhouse** generated energy for the Gorge Dam construction. It continues to utilize the original power tunnel, penstock, Pelton wheels, turbines and generators. It's the oldest operating power plant in the Skagit system. To reach the powerhouse, cross the suspension bridge at the end of Main Street and follow the Trail of the Cedars (approximately one mile round-trip; 40 minutes, including stops).



**6** The first permanent housing planned for operators at the Project, **Silk Stocking Row** (a common term in construction camps for the most desirable housing), reflects J.D. Ross' wish to provide attractive houses in an attempt to make a more contented workforce. Nine houses in variations of four designs following the craftsman/bungalow style were built in the 1920s (to your left). These homes still provide housing for Skagit Project employees and several have been recently renovated.



**10** In the 1930s, **Ladder Creek Falls Garden** was famous for its exotic flowers, but these plants required overwintering in greenhouses and dedicated



care. Many did not survive due to manpower shortages during World War II. However, the trail through the gardens, as well as the associated pools and bridges, are still present, enhancing a noteworthy

display of established hardy plants, designed and cared for by today's City Light gardeners. Visit the nighttime display of lights— energy-efficient LED lights, installed in 2011, create a spectacular vision. Take the trail (¼-mile distance) for incredible views of waterfalls in a narrow slot gorge. (See photo on inside cover.)

**11** The first of the three plants built on the Skagit River, **Gorge Powerhouse** played an important role in the development of a major regional power supply system. Completed in 1924, the powerhouse sent the first electric power from the Skagit Project to Seattle. A Visitor Gallery provides a view onto the powerhouse floor and exhibits on the history and operation of the Skagit Project.



In response to increasing power demands, a 100-foot addition was built onto the neo-classical concrete and steel reinforced building in 1949. Gorge High Dam, located several miles upstream from the powerhouse, was built between 1955 and 1961 and replaced two others in the same location. Stop into the Visitors' Gallery for a view of the plant floor and the generators.

## Walking Tour of Newhalem

Begin at the Skagit Information Center

**12** **Ross Crypt** is the final resting place for J.D. Ross and his wife, Alice Maud Ross.

**10** **Ladder Creek Falls Garden**



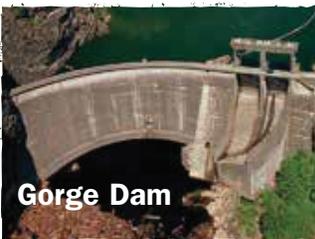
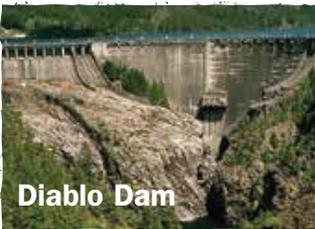
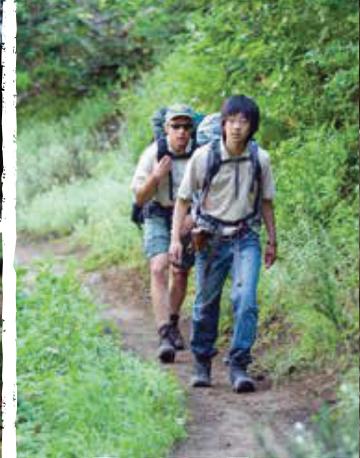
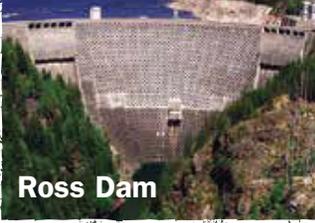
Once you have completed your tour, walk or drive to the Gorge Powerhouse where you can enjoy Ladder Creek Falls Garden and the Powerhouse Visitors' Gallery. To walk there, follow the path along the Skagit River to the east and look for the suspension bridge leading to the Gorge Powerhouse and Ladder Creek Falls Garden (about ¼ mile, 10 minutes).

See enlarged section

## HISTORIC SITES OF NEWHALEM

1. Skagit Information Center
2. Old Number Six
3. General Store
4. Bunkhouses
5. Newhalem Powerhouse
6. Silk Stocking Row
7. Currier Hall
8. Gorge Inn
9. Grassy Area
10. Ladder Creek Falls Garden
11. Gorge Powerhouse
12. Ross Crypt





## TODAY'S SKAGIT TOURS

To see more of the Skagit Project and North Cascades, make a reservation for one of the Skagit Tours. Cruise the emerald waters of Diablo Lake on the *Alice Ross IV*, venturing deep into the Skagit Gorge and viewing Ross Dam and Powerhouse. Or, take an in-depth guided tour of Newhalem and the interior of Gorge Powerhouse. Visit the area in the fall and winter to witness the cycle of life as salmon return from the sea to spawn in the Skagit River, followed by hundreds of eagles that descend on the area to feed.

For more information on Skagit Tours, call **(360) 854-2589**, visit [www.SkagitTours.com](http://www.SkagitTours.com), or stop by the Skagit Information Center in Newhalem, Washington, located directly off the North Cascades Highway, State Route 20, a leisurely three-hour drive northeast of Seattle, Washington.



### Seattle City Light

[www.seattle.gov/city-light](http://www.seattle.gov/city-light)  
[www.SkagitTours.com](http://www.SkagitTours.com)  
(206) 684-3030



The Skagit Project is located within the boundary of the Ross Lake National Recreation Area, a unit of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. For information on the park, visitors are encouraged to visit the North Cascades Visitor Center located west of Newhalem, via the Newhalem Creek Campground, [www.nps.gov/noca](http://www.nps.gov/noca), **(206) 386-4495**.

