

excerpt from report

Michael Easton Nov. 1975

Anon. n.d. "Notes on some Flora of the Skagit Valley"

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(excerpts)

Very Dry Rock Outcrop

Although it is situated above the level of the proposed reservoir, an area of rock outcrop east of the Skagit River near Ross Reservoir merits description. It is the location for one of two occurrences of Ponderosa pine in the Skagit Valley. The community appears to be an intrusion from the drier Interior Douglas-fir Zone situated eastward, and contains many plants peculiar to the Interior or to very dry sites including shrubs -- Rocky mountain juniper (Juniperus scopulorum) and flat-top spiraea^{ea}; forbs -- steer's head (Dicentra uniflora), Hooker's onion (Allium acuminatum), small flower alumroot (Heuchera micrantha) rosy pussytoes (Antennaria rosea) and lomatum ambiguum; ferns -- lace fern (Cheilanthes gracillima), Indian's dream (C. siliquosa), and parsley fern (Cryptogramma crispa); and grasses -- bluebunch wheatgrass (Agropyron spicatum) and pinegrass.

In recognition of the special interest of this dry rock outcrop and associated vegetation it was recently encompassed in an Ecological Reserve of 150 acres.

Plants of Special Interest

Because the Skagit Valley is a transition zone between the interior and coast climates, plants which are normally restricted to either the coast or the interior are found mixed in the Valley. In addition, some plants normally found at higher elevations grow on the floor of the Skagit. The plants in these categories and shrubs of particular interest are discussed briefly.

Interior Plants

Some of the plants found in the Valley which are generally confined to interior areas of British Columbia are enumerated below.

Ponderosa Pine The occurrence of Ponderosa pine in the Skagit Valley is noteworthy as it represents an isolated portion of the range of a species normally confined to the driest valleys in British Columbia. Except for the Fraser Canyon population of Ponderosa pine beginning near Boston Bar and extending north, it is the only location accessible from the Lower Mainland without having to cross a high mountain pass. It is also the only location for Ponderosa pine in the Coastal forests of British Columbia. It compares with the locations for Ponderosa pine in the Puget Sound Basin of Washington. Of the two locations in the Skagit Valley, the best specimens in terms of diameter and height occur in the meadow. The population of Ponderosa pine may have been larger in the past, as British Columbia Forest Service records show 14,000 cu. ft. of yellow (Ponderosa) pine logged sometime between 1948 and 1954.

Water Birch Water birch is restricted to locations in Interior British Columbia ranging from middle elevations to the subalpine areas. The Skagit is the only known location of this species in a coastal forest (Hosie, 1969). It occurs in association with crab apple in a distinct 10-acre habitat three miles north of the International Boundary.

Trembling aspen Though found on Vancouver Island, this tree is generally rare in coastal areas. In the Skagit it occurs in the vicinity of the Ponderosa Pine meadow near Ross Reservoir.

Engelmann spruce The Valley is the western limit of this species. Specimens are scattered in the valley bottom but are more common at higher elevations on the eastern slopes. Hybridization with Sitka Spruce is possible but no examples have been located.

Mountain alder This alder, generally lacking in coastal areas, is found as commonly as red alder in the valley bottom. There appear to be intermediate types between red, mountain and Sitka alder (*A. sinuata*).

Flat-top spirea This species is a common inhabitant of the interior of British Columbia and is rare in coastal areas. In the Valley it is abundant on mesic to dry sites.

Additional plants found in the Skagit Valley which are generally confined to interior areas of British Columbia include: Rocky Mountain juniper, Creeping juniper (Juniperus horizontalis), Red raspberry (Rubus idaeus), Shrubby cinquefoil (Potentilla fruticosa), Large purple fleabane, Macoun's buttercup (Ranunculus macounii), Rosy pussytoes, River cinquefoil, Bluebunch wheatgrass, and Pinegrass.

Coastal Plants

The following plants found in the Skagit Valley, which are generally confined to coastal areas, are enumerated below.

Pacific silver fir While not common, this tree occurs sporadically throughout the valley bottom and more than any other species indicates that the Skagit is more allied to the Coastal than to the Interior Forest Zone. It increases in abundance at higher elevations particularly on the western slopes.

Broadleaf maple This tree reaches its eastern limit in the Skagit Valley. It is not nearly as abundant in the Skagit as in the neighbouring Silver Creek Valley.

Red Alder Again, the Skagit is the eastern limit and this tree is much more abundant in the Silver Creek Valley.

Additional plants found in the Valley which are generally confined to coastal areas include vine maple, Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis), Black-cap raspberry (Rubus leucodermis), Trailing blackberry (Rubus ursinus), Alaska blueberry (Vaccinium alaskaense), Red huckleberry, Vanilla leaf, Sword fern, Woolly sunflower (Eriophyllum lanatum), Youth-on-age (Tolmiea menziesii), Small flowered alumroot, and a species of beard tongue (Penstemon ovatus).

High Elevation Plants

Plants found in the Skagit Valley which are more normally found growing at higher elevations include subalpine fir (Abies lasiocarpa) which is scattered throughout the valley bottom, black mountain huckleberry which is unusually common on dry to mesic sites, Engelmann spruce and alpine timothy (Phleum alpinum).

Shrubs of Special Significance

Three shrubs found in the Skagit Valley are of special interest. They include the rhododendron, false boxwood, and black mountain huckleberry.

California or red rhododendron - the Valley is famous for this spectacular plant. The Skagit River area and a small location on Vancouver Island are the only known areas of this plant in British Columbia. It is estimated that at least 70 percent of the rhododendrons in the Skagit are above the floodline of High Ross Reservoir.

A second ecological reserve within the Skagit Valley is designed to protect an area of these rhododendrons just north of the floodline. This reserve encompasses 180 acres of a rhododendron-Douglas-fir plant association.

False boxwood - This plant is widespread in British Columbia but reaches its best development in the interior Douglas-fir and Western Hemlock Zones. The Skagit is probably one of the best locations for the plant on the coast. Its accessibility to Vancouver markets makes it valuable as a forest green for the florist industry.

Black mountain huckleberry - This shrub is common on mesic to dry alluvium and outwash in the valley bottom. It has purplish black berries which are edible and of good flavor.