

OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

HOW THE STAIRCASE GOT ITS NAME

(Adapted from Hood Canal Courier, 1932)

The origin of the name "Staircase" seems to be a question asked by every newcomer to this area. Some very weird conceptions have been reported. One fellow came expecting to see a high mountain shaped like a staircase, a mile or more long. Another was looking for a canyon through which the river fell over steps as in a staircase. Still another had heard the trail went up a mountain cut in a stairway of solid rock.

The truth is that in 1889, Lieutenant O'Neil with some soldiers built the first trail from the original Lake Cushman up the North Fork, Skokomish down into the Duckabush, up to Marmot Lakes and over the pass that now bears his name into the Quinault Valley to reach Lake Quinault.

In later years, prospectors and trappers improved the old O'Neil trail by finding short cuts. In the 1930's, the Forest Service made further improvements resulting in the comparatively easy present trail up the north side of the valley.

To fully appreciate the present trail one should follow the traces of the old one up and down the mountains along the south side of the river, dodging trees and rocks. Apparently, no dynamite was used in its construction, for whenever it nears a rock bluff it climbs over or dodges under it. It seems the hills meant nothing to those hardy old timers. The old trail is a hard half day's hike from Staircase to Big Log, five miles up the river. On the new trail it can be made easily in two hours.

One of the rock bluffs that confronted Lieutenant O'Neil was the one at the present location of Staircase campground. He was unable to go under the rock because the river flows along its base in a deep pool, so he had to go over the top. To get to the top he had to

build a wooden stairway of cedar logs to bridge a little ravine near the top of the rock. That wooden stair was the original staircase and was called by the old timers the "Devils Staircase".

For more than twenty years, this *Devil's Staircase* was the only trail past the rock. In 1911, with Uncle Sam furnishing the dynamite, the miners got together and blasted a wide level trail around the face of the rock. This trail (now called Shady Lane), remains in use today. The name "Staircase" has become attached to the vicinity of the rock and to a resort built on the flat below it.

The summer resort at Staircase has been removed by the National Park Service and a campground established across the river. The road was built three miles further up in 1931 but is no longer open to vehicles above the camp and ranger station. The lower level trail remains including the cut blasted from the rock.

An excerpt from "Mining the North Fork Skokomish" by Robert Keatts.

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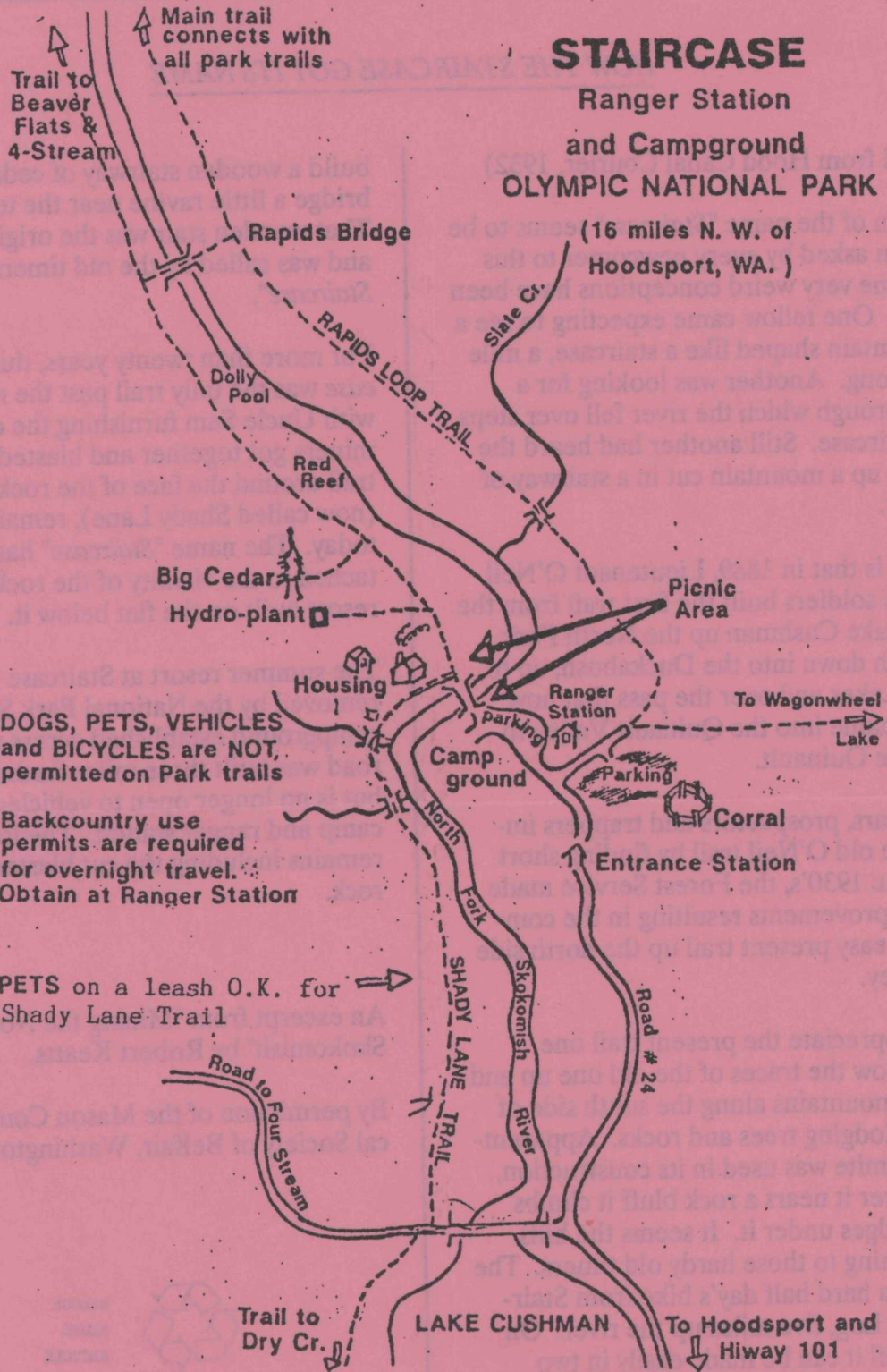


REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE

STAIRCASE

Ranger Station
and Campground
OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

(16 miles N. W. of
Hoodsport, WA.)



**DOGS, PETS, VEHICLES
and BICYCLES are NOT
permitted on Park trails**

**Backcountry use
permits are required
for overnight travel.
Obtain at Ranger Station**

**PETS on a leash O.K. for
Shady Lane Trail**

Trail to
Dry Cr.

LAKE CUSHMAN

To Hoodsport and
Hiway 101