

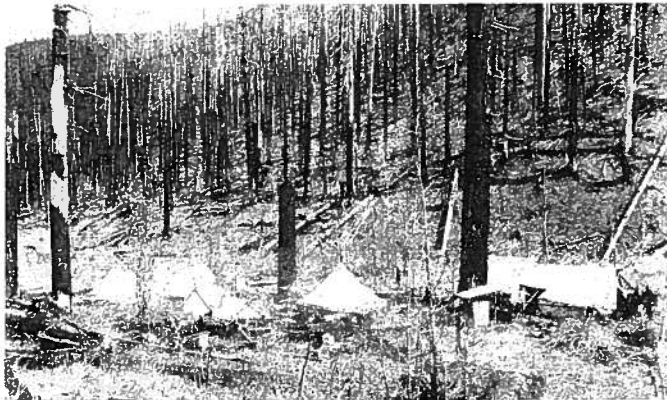
# Driving Through Washington's Largest Wildfire

## A self-guided tour of the Yacolt Burn

*Imagine flames 300 feet tall, wind whipping at 40 miles per hour, and sparks leaping over ½ mile, spreading fire 20 miles in 12 hours. At the end of three days 238,000 acres of forested land between Stevenson and Vancouver lay smoldering in ash and smoke. It became known as the Yacolt Burn of 1902, named after the largest community at its western edge, the largest wildfire recorded in Washington history. Thirty-eight people died and 148 families lost their homes. A hundred years later, evidence of the burn and efforts to protect and reforest it are still visible.*

*Between 1902 and 1952, over 25 large, intense, conflagrations occurred within the boundaries of the first burn. Known as "reburns," they caused further devastation and made reforestation difficult. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) members were the major work force from 1933–1941. In the 1950's Washington State adopted an inmate work program, with crews at Larch Corrections Center, located in the original burn. Both groups built telephone lines and lookouts, planted over 16 million tree seedlings, and felled snags within the old burn creating fire breaks.*

*This guide shows you remnants of activities that occurred after the burns. Observe signs of protective measures and reforestation efforts as you travel. Also, notice the vegetation. Multiple fires destroyed competing vegetation, allowing huckleberries to flourish, a unique benefit.*



CCC tree planters camp in the Yacolt Burn 30 years after the fire, surrounded by scorched trees showing intensity of the original burn.  
USDA Forest Service photograph

**Start the tour:** From WA Hwy 14, go north on Wind River Hwy for ten miles. At Hemlock Road, turn left and go 1.2 miles to the junction of Forest Road 43. Stops along the tour are based on miles traveled from this junction. There are occasional mile markers on Forest Roads but they are not consistent; keep track of mileage yourself. The stop numbers are keyed to approximate locations on the map on the reverse.

**TOUR STOPS** (can be driven east to west or west to east; however, directions are from east to west)

**Stop 1 MP .2 - Wind River Nursery** fields behind the fence. The fields are part of the former Wind River Nursery that opened in 1909. Started by the Forest Service as a direct result of the Yacolt Burn and burns that occurred in Oregon in 1902, it was the first Forest Service tree nursery in the Pacific Northwest. Over the years, nearly a billion seedlings were grown here for replanting the Yacolt and forest land throughout the Northwest. At peak production, it grew over 32 million seedlings a year. The Nursery closed in 1997.

**Stop 1 - Bunker Hill**, a former lookout site, rises behind the fields. It is the eastern edge of the burn. The large trees visible on the southwest slope survived the Yacolt Burn while the rest of the area burned. The smaller trees that cover most of the hill were planted from Wind River Nursery seedlings.

**Follow Forest Road 43 up the incline. When you reach the top, turn right and go west on Forest Road 41.**

**Stop 2 - MP 9.1 Snag Break** on both sides of Forest Road 41. Look for decaying cut stumps. They are indications of fire breaks that were created to prevent the torchlike spread of fire during reburns. More than 1 million snags were felled in the Yacolt to create snag breaks.



CCC enrollees falling snag east of Mowich Butte in 1933.  
USDA Forest Service photograph

**Stop 3 - MP 9.7 View into Rock Creek Drainage** to the south. This area burned multiple times between 1902 and 1929. The Rock Creek Fire of 1927 covered 48,000 acres. In the 1929 Dole Fire, 227,000 acres were burned. The area was replanted in the 1930's, creating an "even aged" stand of trees.

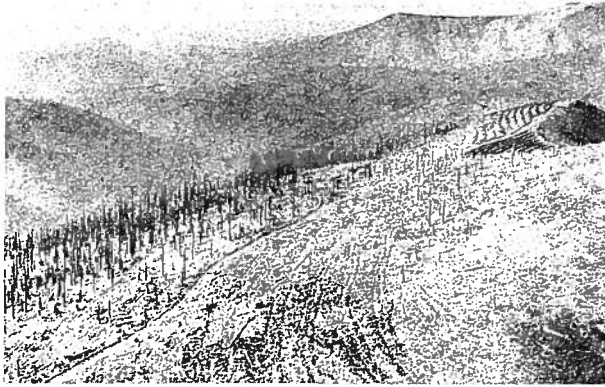
**Stop 3 - Lookout Mountain** to the west is aptly named. A fire lookout was built on top around 1914, rebuilt in 1930, and removed in the 1960's. Eight lookouts were constructed in the Yacolt Burn between 1914 and 1955 to help detect fires. You can walk or drive cautiously up Road 501 (1.7 miles) to behold the amazing 360° panorama the lookout observer would have seen.



Lookout Mountain fire lookout was built about 1914, the first of eight lookouts constructed in the Yacolt Burn.  
USDA Forest Service photograph

**Stop 4 - MP 10.6 Silver Snags** south of the road, on the north slope of Little Lookout Mountain are remnants of the 1902 fire and multiple reburns. Weathering removed the outer bark of the fire-killed trees and the sun bleached the sapwood to it's silver hue. Snags provide wildlife habitat as well as unusual beauty.

**Stop 5 - MP 11.7 Terracing on Lookout Mtn** was an experimental attempt at replanting the burn. Look to the south and notice the terracing furrows on the north slope of Lookout Mtn at regular intervals. In the 1950's and 1960's, bulldozers terraced the side slopes to create a better growing environment for seedlings. Keep an eye out for other terraced areas as you travel. From this viewpoint, virtually everything you see was devastated in the 1902 fire except the most distant ridge to the northwest.

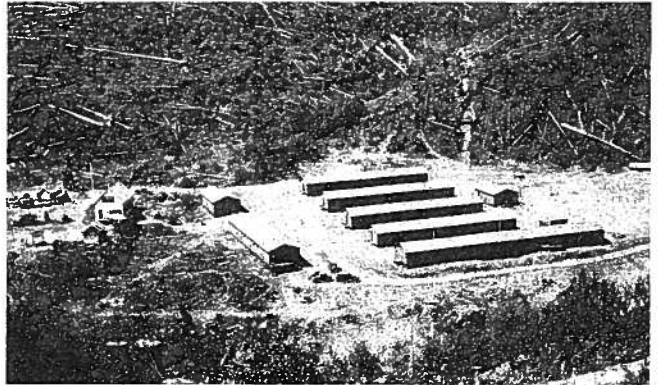


1969 photo of terracing on McKinley Ridge, similar to terracing on Lookout Mtn.  
USDA Forest Service photograph

**Stop 6 - MP 12.5 – 13.6 Telephone Line Remains** on the south side of road are a series of decaying stumps wrapped with wire to secure 6 x 4 inch telephone "poles". They are what is left of the communication network connecting one lookout to another. Hundreds of miles of telephone lines were erected in the Yacolt to speed fire communications. Notice the burn marks on many of the stumps.

**Stop 7 - MP 17.8 Mixed Species Planting**, another reforestation attempt, is indicated by pine trees growing in the area planted along with Douglas-fir. The intent of the experiment was to have pine trees protect the Douglas-fir from the extreme environment until the fir could outgrow the pine. However, the fir seed was not well suited to the site. Many methods of replanting were tried in the Yacolt. Harsh growing sites and multiple reburns made it difficult to establish a new forest.

**Stop 8 - MP 24.2 Sunset Campground** was a CCC Camp from 1933 to 1941, housing 200 men annually. The camp was built to accomplish reforestation and fire prevention projects within the Yacolt Burn. Several smaller spike camps were set up closer to the men's work sites during the summers .



CCC Camp Sunset was a base of operations for CCC crews who felled snags, planted seedlings, and built trails, lookouts and telephone lines in the Yacolt Burn. They also fought forest fires.  
USDA Forest Service photograph

**From Sunset Campground, turn left onto County Road 12.**

**Stop 9 - MP 28.4 Firewise houses** are on both sides of the road. People living in these houses know they are living in the Yacolt burn and that a huge destructive fire could occur again. As people spread further into forested areas, the odds of encountering a wildfire increase. However, by taking preventative measures, they can increase the chances that their houses will survive.



Firewise houses create a landscape that is lean, clean, and green for at least 30' around the house. Fire resistant material on the roof and walls adds protection from a wildfire.  
For more information, check [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org) on the internet.  
Photo courtesy of WA State Department of Natural Resources

**Continue seven miles to the intersection of County Road 16 and Lucia Falls Road. Choose your route home from here.**

**Be Safe! Stay on main roads, stay right on curves, and drive slowly.**

**Remember, only YOU can prevent Forest Fires!**

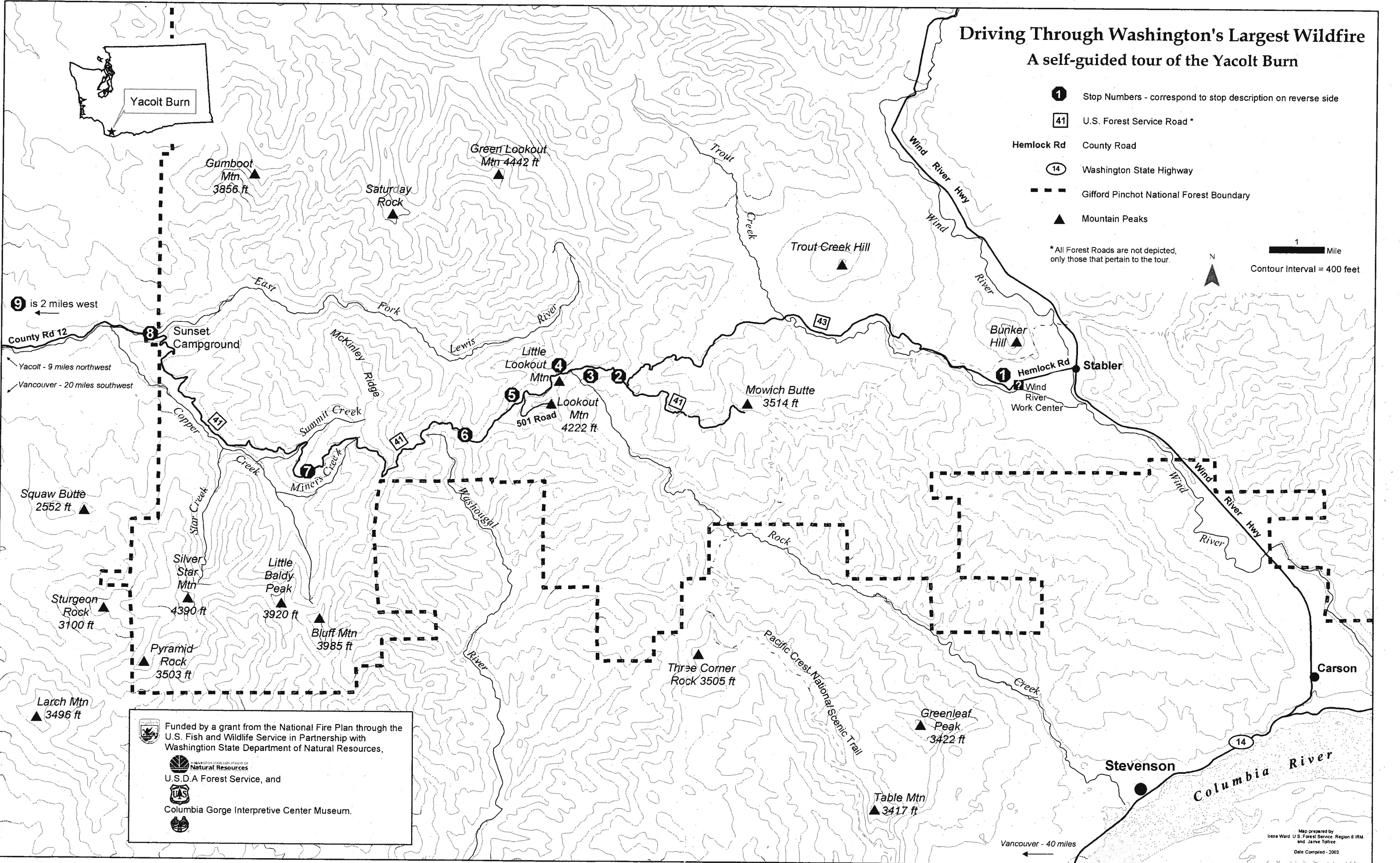
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- 1** Stop Numbers - correspond to stop description on reverse side
- 41** U.S. Forest Service Road \*
- Hemlock Rd** County Road
- 14** Washington State Highway
- - -** Gifford Pinchot National Forest Boundary
- ▲** Mountain Peaks

\* All Forest Roads are not depicted, only those that pertain to the tour.

1 Mile  
Contour Interval = 400 feet



**9** is 2 miles west  
 County Rd 12  
 Yacolt - 9 miles northwest  
 Vancouver - 20 miles southwest

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
 U.S.D.A Forest Service, and  
 Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum.

Vancouver - 40 miles

Map prepared by  
 Irene Ward U.S. Forest Service, Region 6 IRM,  
 and Jaime Tollace.  
 Date Compiled - 2003