

The Pacific

Northwest:

An interpretive

History"

By Carlos Arnaldo

Schwantes

1989, 1996

CHAPTER I

A Sense of Place:

The Essential Pacific Northwest

*
First impression! As I found her so will I always think of Seattle. As young and eager. Life still the great unexplored, living still the great adventure. With no old past to stop and worship; no dead men's bones to reckon with; no traditions chained to her ankles. She lives in new-lumbered houses and seems to despise old timber that has lost its fragrance. Older cities forget that they were once—trees. In those cities they love old "muskky, ruskky" houses where the regicides once hid or Paul Revere stopped and sipped a cup of tea. But in Seattle, it is as though the trees had change to house shapes, still keeping the essence and benediction of earth-contact.—Seattle,

Her Faults @ Her Virtues (ca. 1925)

*

Any search for commonly agreed upon boundaries for the Pacific Northwest will prove fruitless. Countless miles of borders divide and subdivide the region's variegated landscape into counties, cities, national parks and monuments, national and state forests, and even soil conservation districts, yet the regional perimeter, except along the Pacific Ocean, remains as indistinct as a fog-shrouded promontory. State and local boundaries are precisely defined by law, and often they are quite dramatic: Hells Canyon forms what may be the most spectacular border in the United States, separating Oregon and Idaho. One hundred thirty miles long and in places 7,700 feet deep, one-third of a mile deeper than Grand Canyon, the remote gorge compresses the Snake River into a maelstrom of white water. Far less visible but nonetheless still marked by signs posted along Oregon and Idaho highways is the

45th parallel, the line of latitude equidistant from the Equator and North Pole. It thus seems all the more ironic that the single boundary not defined in any meaningful way is that of the Pacific Northwest itself. Nowhere does an official roadside marker welcome people to the region.

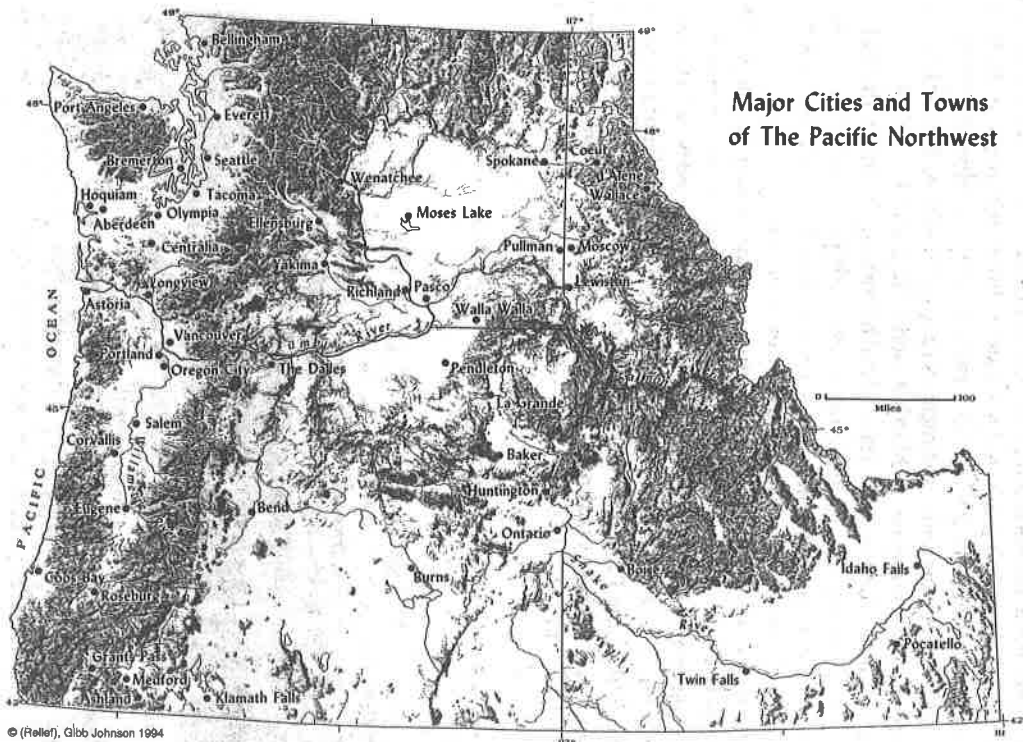
The fact is that Pacific Northwesterners themselves cannot agree upon their region's bounds. In addition to the generally accepted core states of Washington and Oregon, some people would include western Montana and even northern California and British Columbia within the region. Idaho presents the greatest challenge to easy classification because some residents perceive their state as oriented toward Oregon, Washington, and the Pacific Rim, while others consider it part of the intermountain West that includes Montana and Utah. A popular quip in geographically divided Idaho is that the state has three capitals: Spokane for the northern half, Salt Lake City for the southern half, and Boise for everywhere else. Some scholars classify Oregon and Washington within the Far West or Pacific states and Idaho within the Mountain states, or they separate the lush, green Douglas-fir country of Oregon and Washington west of the Cascade mountains from the high, often arid interior.

Ultimately, anyone studying regions of the United States must decide where to draw their boundaries, and this book extends the perimeter of the Pacific Northwest to encompass the three states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. That simple arrangement may seem somewhat arbitrary, but it conforms reasonably well to the logic of geography, economics, and history that together constitute common ground for places as different as metropolitan Seattle and the sparsely populated rangelands of eastern Oregon and central Idaho.

A region can best be defined by discontinuities that mark its borders and by the geographical, political, economic, social, and cultural bonds that give it some sense of internal unity or community. The discontinuities that mark the perimeter of the Pacific Northwest and give it the general shape of a parallelogram are the Pacific Ocean, the Klamath (Siskiyou) Mountains and Great Basin desert, and the Rocky Mountains, and the Canadian border, one political and three natural boundaries. At its maximum reach, the Pacific Northwest extends 480 miles north to south and 680 miles east to west.

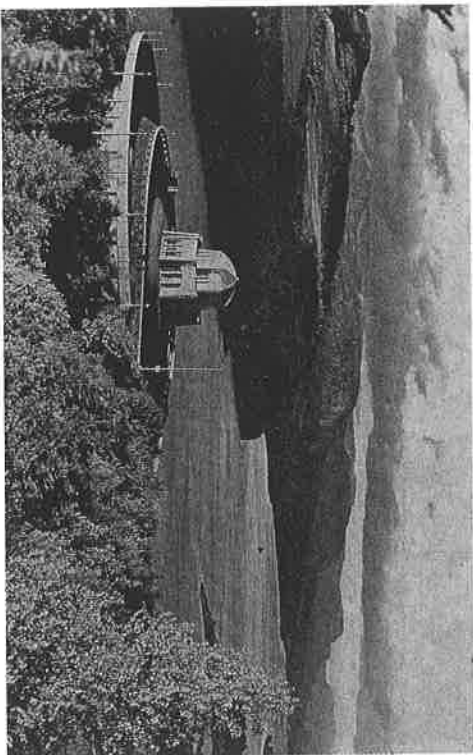
Several unifying forces operate within this 250,000-square-mile region: the Columbia River and its numerous tributaries, networks of transportation and communication, patterns of trade and commerce, and a special sense of place derived from history and geography. These integrative forces

Major Cities and Towns of The Pacific Northwest



lessen internal divisions caused by mountain ranges, distance, state boundaries, and differing economic activities and political and religious cultures. An understanding of the main currents of Pacific Northwest history begins with an appreciation of the region's geographic setting, one of the most diverse natural landscapes in North America. It continues with an awareness that, for the better part of its recorded history, life in the Pacific Northwest revolved around supplying the world with raw materials—furs and skins, logs and lumber, wheat and a variety of agricultural commodities, fish and other seafoods, and precious and base metals.

Yet no matter how valuable its natural resources were to succeeding generations of entrepreneurs, the Pacific Northwest remained geographically remote from the continent's centers of economic and political power. That remoteness, combined with its historic role as supplier of raw materials, defined the Pacific Northwest as a colonial hinterland. Even at the dawn of the twenty-first century, large portions of the region still grapple with the economic and social consequences of decades of hinterland status; and though the metropolitan centers of Seattle and Portland can no longer



1. Vista House at Crown Point overlooks the western entrance to the Columbia River gorge. "The scenery combines all that is picturesque and beautiful in mountain, stream, forest, cataract and cascade," boasted a 1904 guidebook issued by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company to describe its water-level route through this vital gateway. Courtesy Oregon Historical Society, ORNH 3865.

4

JOHN MUIR ON THE Juxtaposition of PORTLAND AND MOUNT HOOD
The heights back of Portland command one of the best general views of the forest and also of the most famous of the great mountains both of Oregon and Washington. Mount Hood is in full view, with the summits of Mounts Jefferson, St. Helens, Adams and Rainier in the distance. The City of Portland is at our feet, covering a large area along both banks of the Willamette, and with its fine streets, schools, churches, mills, shipping, parks and gardens makes a telling picture of busy, aspiring civilization in the midst of the green wilderness in which it is planted. . . .

Never shall I forget my first glorious view of Mount Hood one calm evening in July, 'though I had seen it many times before this. I was then sauntering with a friend across the new Williamette bridge between Portland and East Portland, for the sake of the river views, which are here very fine in the

tranquil summer weather. . . . I was not conscious of anything occurring on the outer rim of the landscape. Forest, mountain and sky were forgotten; when my companion suddenly directed my attention to the eastward shouting, "Oh, look! look!" in so loud and excited a tone of voice that passers-by, sauntering like ourselves, were startled and looked over the bridge as if expecting to see some boat upset. Looking across the forests over which the mellow light of the sunset was streaming, I soon discovered the source of my friend's excitement. There stood Mount Hood in all the glory of the Alpen glow looming immensely high, beaming with intelligence, and so impressive that one was overawed as if suddenly brought before some superior Being newly arrived from the sky. . . . — John Muir, "Mt. Hood from Portland," *Pacific Monthly* 7 (May 1902): 213–14

be classified as hinterlands of the United States, part of their special appeal to residents and tourists alike derives from continuing ties to the region's own extensive outback, a relationship made visible in both cities by the spectacular and seemingly unspoiled natural backdrop formed by snow-capped mountains nearby.

NATURALLY NORTHWEST

What special qualities define the Pacific Northwest? What makes Pacific Northwesterners' sense of place distinct from that of Californians, southerners, or New Englanders? One simple and obvious answer is the environment, the region's spectacular natural setting—the stunning juxtaposition of mountains and water that characterize its coastline and Columbia River gorge; the vastness of its interior, a land of sagebrush plains and empty spaces. Residents occasionally refer to the region as "God's Country," and the opening stanza of "America the Beautiful" could well describe its mountain peaks and amber waves of grain.

5

Fundamental to a Pacific Northwesterner's sense of place is the awareness that much of the region remains uninhabited or only lightly populated. A person trapped in rush-hour traffic on one of Seattle's floating bridges may not believe that claim, yet the population of the entire Pacific Northwest was only 8.7 million in 1990—approximately equal to that of Los Angeles County. But residents of the region are spread out over an area the size of the six New England states and New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Oregon alone encompasses more area than the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

To describe the Pacific Northwest as lightly populated is technically correct but very misleading. The region's residents tend to gather like bees into a few urban hives. More than half of Washington's population lives in a handful of counties that border the east side of Puget Sound and embrace the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, Everett, Bellingham, and Bellevue. A second population center is Spokane on the state's eastern edge.

Two-thirds of Oregon's population is concentrated in the Willamette Valley, which extends a hundred miles from Portland south to Eugene. Of Oregon's eleven cities with populations of thirty thousand or more, only Medford lies outside the Willamette Valley. Idaho has always been more rural than the other two states, yet two separate urban complexes centering on Boise and Pocatello contain half its population. Idaho has only three cities of thirty thousand or more, and all are situated on the Snake River plain in the southern part of the state. Washington, with twenty-three cities of thirty thousand or more, is the most urbanized of the three states. The percentage of population living in urban areas—communities with twenty-five hundred or more residents—varies from 76 in Washington to 71 in Oregon and 57 in Idaho. The national average in 1990 was 75 percent.

Because of the tendency of Pacific Northwesterners to cluster in a few urban areas, the population density of King County, Washington—site of the region's most populous city, Seattle, with slightly more than half a million residents—is 708 people per square mile. Yet several sprawling counties in eastern Washington have fewer than 4 people per square mile. A dozen counties in eastern Oregon and central Idaho are even more lightly populated.

This settlement pattern means that even urban residents of the Pacific Northwest experience a strong sense of their natural setting. The composite city stretching from Everett to Olympia—sometimes referred to as Pugetopolis—is ninety miles long but narrow enough to afford boaters and fishermen easy access to the open waters of Puget Sound in one direction and

backpackers, skiers, and hunters convenient escape to the Cascade mountains in the other. From the shores of Puget Sound to the ski slopes at Snoqualmie Pass is little more than an hour's drive, about the same time it takes Portlanders to reach Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood.

It is even easier to maintain visual contact with the region's spectacular natural setting. On a clear spring day after a winter of leaden skies and intermittent drizzle, many a resident of Seattle or Portland draws fresh inspiration from the sight of Mount Rainier or Mount Hood floating majestically on the horizon. A person can travel the length of Puget Sound or the Willamette Valley and never lose sight of the Cascades or the Coast Ranges. Portland, in fact, has municipal regulations that protect "view corridors" through the central city. The heart of Portland is not a building but rather an outdoor gathering place: Pioneer Courthouse Square, a one-block, open-air plaza located in the center of the shopping district.

Contact with the natural setting is easier still in Idaho, which, except for the Snake River plain, is one vast sea of mountains and foothills dotted with a few modest islands of farmland such as the Camas Prairie and the Palouse in the northern panhandle. One wit suggested that if its vertical surfaces could be rolled flat, Idaho would become the largest state in the union. But Idaho without its mountains is inconceivable. The rugged, nearly inaccessible terrain of much of the state—especially the Bitterroot and Sawtooth ranges—is one reason why Idaho life will for the foreseeable future be oriented to outdoor activities.

The landforms of the Pacific Northwest are not matters of just geology and real estate but also of aesthetics and culture. The most repetitive theme in the region's literature is the interaction of people and their natural environment; much of the region's history is played out against a backdrop of dramatic landforms. Not surprisingly, Pacific Northwesterners commonly translated their sense of place into a belief that natural environment determined the types of people who settled Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Rugged mountains and gargantuan trees called forth strong-willed, self-reliant individuals to match them, or so Northwesterners have often claimed.

Even if this romantic notion was impossible to prove, it remained central to the thinking of generations of settlers and helps to explain why so many newcomers defined progress as taming nature through exploitation of the region's abundant natural resources. Perceptions of abundance still shape public discussions of how best to treat the region's land, timber, and water resources.

MOUNTAIN SHADOWS: PACIFIC NORTHWEST GEOGRAPHY

In a sense, the entire Pacific Northwest can be described as lying in the mountains' shadow. Few areas are so situated that mountains are not readily visible, and even those anomalous places still experience the influence of mountain ranges on regional weather patterns, vegetation, and economic activities.

At many points along the Pacific Coast of Oregon and Washington, mountains touch the sea. The Coast ranges extend from northern California to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington and average about fifty miles in width. For most of the distance their peaks seldom top three thousand feet, and in southwestern Washington they flatten into a series of low rises called the Willapa Hills. Farther north, the land again rises dramatically to form the Olympic Mountains, topped by Mount Olympus at eighty-two hundred feet above sea level.

Lying between the coastal mountains and the Cascade range is an alluvial plain about 350 miles long and 50 miles wide that forms the Puget Sound-Willamette lowlands. Separating the northern from the southern portion of the plain are gentle hills located about halfway between Olympia and Vancouver, Washington. The Puget Sound-Willamette lowlands constitute the heart of the Pacific Northwest. Here are located two state capitols and a concentration of cities, colleges and universities, television and radio stations, corporate headquarters, banks, and manufacturing establishments greater than anywhere else in the region. Despite its essentially urban character, this alluvial plain still supports a thriving and diverse agricultural industry.

The Cascade mountains extend from northern California into southern British Columbia and vary in width from more than one hundred miles at the Canadian border to less than fifty miles at the California border. Numerous lava flows surmounted by large and small volcanic peaks characterize the range. The most famous of these volcanoes is Mount Saint Helens, which erupted violently in 1980 but since has been relatively quiet. The Cascades also include several dormant volcanoes, a few of which have erupted within the past two centuries. Other well-known Cascade peaks are Lassen and Shasta in California, Hood in Oregon, and Rainier, Adams, and Baker in Washington. Rainier at 14,410 feet is the highest mountain in the Pacific Northwest and is topped in the forty-eight contiguous states only by Mount Whitney (14,494 feet) in California's Sierra Nevada and by Mount Elbert (14,433 feet) and two sister peaks in the central Colorado Rockies.

MOUNT SAINT HELENS

Mount Saint Helens once was the lowest of Cascade peaks. At 8:32 on the Sunday morning of 18 May 1980 it stunned the nation and the world when it blasted away its crown with a force five hundred times greater than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. Speeding at up to 120 miles per hour, a whirlwind of heat, ash, and debris denuded two hundred square miles of heavily forested land within a fifteen-mile arc to the north. All told, the blast killed nearly sixty people, an estimated fifteen hundred elk, five thousand black-tailed deer, two hundred black bears, and hundreds of thousands of birds and fish. Massive mudflows down the Toutle and Cowlitz valleys filled the Columbia River's main channel and raised it from a depth of 40 feet to a mere 14 feet. This brought shipping to an abrupt halt.

A dense boiling cloud rose from the crater and deposited several inches of ash on portions of eastern Washington and northern Idaho, leaving its traces even on the East Coast and giving rise to a wry comment: "Don't come to Washington this year, Washington will come to you." On that Sunday in May and for several days following, the predominant mood in the Pacific Northwest was one of apprehension and fear. Some residents wondered whether this eruption was a prelude to something worse. Perhaps Mount Baker would erupt next. Perhaps the ash was poisonous or radioactive. Yet after cleanup crews reopened streets and highways in

eastern Washington, life returned to normal. Nonetheless, the Pacific Northwest Regional Commission published a pamphlet called "Exploding the Myth: The Pacific Northwest Remains Beautiful" to counteract any erroneous impressions in other parts of the United States.

Mount Saint Helens was not the only Cascade volcano to erupt in the twentieth century. In 1914-17, Mount Lassen vented steam, ash, and lava. During the nineteenth century, several peaks including Hood, Saint Helens, and Rainier put on eruptive displays. None, however, was as violent as the May 1980 blast or the even more spectacular one half a dozen millennia earlier when Oregon's Mount Mazama exploded with a force forty-two times greater than that of the Saint Helens eruption.

When filled with water from rain and melting snow, a caldera nearly two thousand feet deep and six miles wide formed the natural wonder of Crater Lake, famed for its breathtaking indigo blue water.

Mount Saint Helens and its immediate vicinity became a national volcanic monument in 1983. Nature is still at work healing the scars caused by the eruption. The event reminds Pacific Northwesters what it means to live in the mountains' shadow, especially when some of those mountains turn out to be dormant—rather than extinct—volcanoes.

But Mount Rainier appears far more spectacular than the others because it rises abruptly from the coastal plain and towers above lesser peaks. Its massive slopes support twenty-seven named glaciers, the single largest mountain glacier system in the lower forty-eight states and the source of

several Northwest rivers. The Cascade Range includes three national parks and the Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument.

At the eastern edge of the Pacific Northwest stand the Rocky Mountains, an uplifted area that includes numerous ranges like the Bitterroots, which form the Idaho-Montana border. Local chains like the Wallows of northeastern Oregon or the rugged Klamath Mountains that straddle the Oregon-California border add variety to the region's landscape.

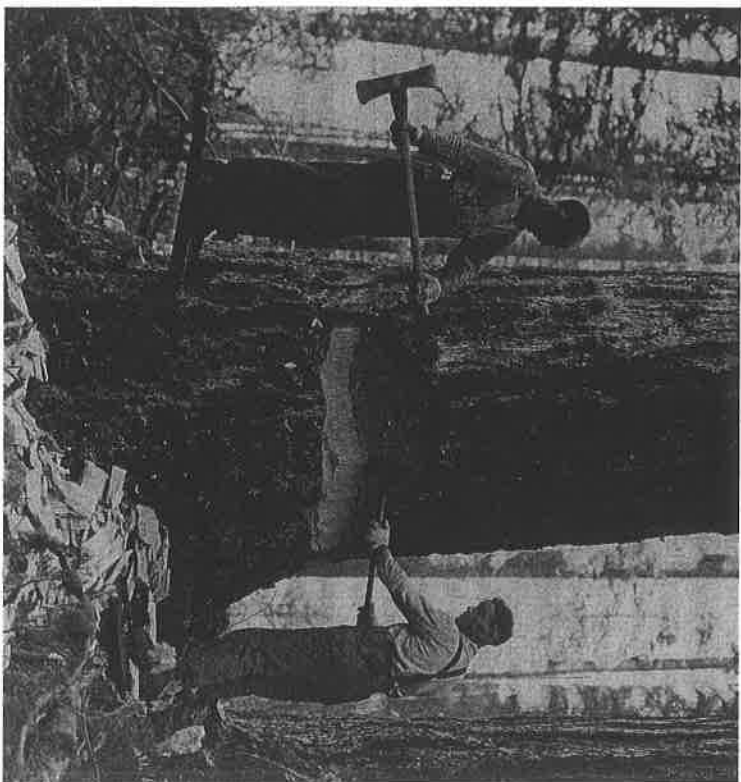
The common impression that the Pacific Northwest is a land of evergreens, ocean mist, and snowcapped peaks contrasts with reality: much of the region's surface is treeless and arid. First-time visitors to the dry areas are often surprised witnesses to the ways mountains and elevation influence rainfall. Most of the world's arid regions result from a planetwide system of air currents, but those of the Pacific Northwest result from mountain rain shadows.

The Cascades, the Rockies, and other ranges influence weather as part of a complex process that begins over the Pacific Ocean. As prevailing northwesterly winds sweep across its surface during the winter months, they become laden with moisture later lost crossing the land. The marine air enables much of the region to enjoy relatively mild winters. Portland, Oregon, for example, experiences far less snow and less frequent subzero weather than St. Paul, Minnesota, or Portland, Maine, cities that lie farther south. During the winter months, much of the region is covered with marine air and layers of clouds that restrict the total hours of sunshine. Northern Idaho, for instance, though located more than three hundred miles from the ocean, receives only about 50 percent of the maximum sunshine available in winter because of the marine climate.

As moist air from the Pacific rises to cross the coastal mountains, atmospheric pressure decreases, the air cools, and like a squeezed sponge the clouds release some of their moisture in the form of rain or snow. In parts of the Olympic Peninsula an annual rainfall of 120 to 140 inches is common, and some years it can top 180 inches, or the equivalent of two billion gallons of water for each square mile of forest. The result is a veritable evergreen jungle of moss-festooned forest giants like the Sitka spruce and Douglas fir, all softly illuminated by sunlight filtered through layers of vaporous clouds. The Hoh, Queets, Quinalt, and Bogachiel valleys of the Olympic Peninsula are probably the best extant examples of the Northwest rain forest, a soggy ecosystem found no other place on earth.

In the Puget Sound-Willamette lowlands the average annual rainfall is about the same as that in New York City or New Orleans (thirty to fifty

10



2. Two loggers strike a pose that once epitomized the Pacific Northwest's timber-dependent economy. Courtesy: Forest History Society.

inches), but because the precipitation so often occurs as drizzle, the winter rain seems interminable and the weather dreary. In Portland and Seattle it rains an average of 150 days each year.

Wet winters and relatively dry summers characterize much of the Pacific Northwest, just the reverse of the weather pattern of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. People in Portland and Seattle must water their lawns during the summer, and August is a time of forest-fire danger. The relationship between temperature on land and sea explains this phenomenon: during winter the land is cooler than the sea; during summer the reverse is true. Summertime air increases in temperature as it moves from sea to land and thus is able to retain more of the moisture it collected from the Pacific.

11

Regardless of the season, when clouds from the Pacific Ocean sweep up the face of the Cascades, they reach higher, cooler elevations than in the Coast ranges. Snowfall on some peaks during the winter months may total three hundred inches and on occasion may exceed one thousand inches annually. Paradise Inn, located at the fifty-four-hundred-foot level on the south slope of Mount Rainier, recorded a total of 93.5 feet of snow during the winter of 1971-72.

The clouds lose much of their remaining moisture by the time they pass two dozen miles beyond the summit of the Cascades. Farther down the eastern slope the land becomes noticeably drier, and the moisture-loving Douglas firs and tangled undergrowth that thrive on the west side give way to ponderosa pines and eventually to the grasses and sagebrush that survive where annual rainfall averages ten inches or less.

The lowest precipitation occurs in the central and eastern portions of both Washington and Oregon and in southern Idaho—a highly varied landscape of hills, eroded slopes, rugged mountains, flat plains, and sandy deserts, all underlain with basalt, a volcanic rock. Precipitation increases gradually as one travels across eastern Washington to the Idaho panhandle, from an annual average of six inches along the Columbia River in central Washington to twenty-one inches at Pullman, 140 miles east and 1,300 feet higher.

Famed for its fertile soil, the Palouse country that surrounds Pullman and overlaps a portion of the Washington-Idaho border is one of the most productive wheat-growing regions in the United States, yet immediately north and west of the Palouse lie the channeled scablands, a series of dry canyons called coulees, where the soil is thin and the country is suitable mainly for grazing cattle. From the Palouse to the Rockies, annual precipitation increases until it almost equals that in parts of the Puget Sound-Willamette lowlands, enabling stands of western white pine, red cedar, and Douglas fir to thrive in the Idaho panhandle. Commercial forests account for 65 percent of the total land area of northern Idaho and 70 percent of Oregon and Washington west of the Cascades, but only 30 percent of those two states east of the Cascades.

Much of the annual precipitation eventually returns to the Pacific Ocean to repeat the cycle, but not before it generates electric power and irrigates arid lands. If water from rain or snow does not evaporate or sink into the soil, it reaches the Columbia River and reenters the Pacific near Astoria, Oregon. Primary exceptions to this pattern are local rivers and streams that drain into Puget Sound or directly into the ocean from the Coast ranges.

On a map of the Pacific Northwest, the Columbia River and its tributaries resemble a giant gnarled oak tree resting on its side with its topmost branches reaching as far inland as southern British Columbia, western Montana, and northwestern Wyoming. From its source in the Canadian Rockies, the Columbia River extends a distance of 1,270 miles to the Pacific Ocean and drains 258,000 square miles, an area larger than France, Belgium, and the Netherlands combined. More than any other physical feature it knits the disparate elements of the Pacific Northwest together, crossing desert, high plains, wheat fields, cattle ranges, and grassland as it threads its way between mountains to reach the sea. Over the years the Columbia River has been a vital transportation link and highway of history, a source of irrigation water and hydroelectric power, a cause for environmental concern, and dramatic regional symbol.

Joining the Columbia just north of the Canadian border is the Pend Oreille River, which drains far northern Idaho and western Montana. The Columbia's largest tributary, the Snake River, joins it near Pasco, where the trunk of the growing river twists south and then abruptly west. Originating a thousand miles east near Yellowstone National Park, the Snake is itself one of the major rivers of the United States. After cutting through the plains of southern Idaho, where a portion of its water irrigates six million acres of farmland, the Snake plunges into Hells Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America. The chutes and rapids here terrorized explorers and completely blocked river communication between northern and southern Idaho. The Deschutes and John Day rivers enter the Columbia east of the Cascades after draining the sparsely populated land of central Oregon. A hundred miles from the sea, the Willamette River, having served the needs of Portland, Salem, and Eugene, joins the Columbia's massive trunk.

The Columbia River flows through four mountain ranges, pours more water into the ocean than any other river in North America except for the Saint Lawrence, Mississippi, and Mackenzie, and exceeds every river on the continent in the generation of hydroelectric power. In fact, its waters contain an estimated 40 percent of the nation's total hydroelectric potential. Except for a 50-mile stretch bordering the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in central Washington, the Columbia has been engineered into a chain of lakes formed by dams that stretch from Bonneville Dam to the Canadian border. Through a series of eight locks, towboats and barges can climb the Columbia and Snake rivers to reach Lewiston, Idaho's only seaport, located 460 miles inland and more than seven hundred feet above sea level.

The Columbia River was an avenue of trade and commerce and knitted

together the Pacific Northwest even before the coming of Euro-Americans. For Indian people as well as for newcomers, the Columbia counteracted the divisive influence of mountains, especially the Cascade Range, a wall breached only by the Columbia and one other river, the Klamath, in southern Oregon.

There can be little doubt that the Cascades once hindered easy communication and transportation in Oregon and Washington and that the mountains bordering the Salmon River divided Idaho—and still do during the season when snowdrifts and avalanches block the passes and grades. Today, in the legislatures of all three states, opinions frequently divide along these mountain barriers.

Even so, the divisive quality of the region's mountain ranges has probably been overstated. The sight of Mount Rainier or Mount Hood inspires people regardless of whether they live east or west of the Cascades. The Cascade Range forms a backdrop for residents of Seattle and of Ellensburg on the opposite side and is equally a part of a sense of place in both communities. Central Idaho's rugged Salmon River country affords the same recreational opportunities to hunters, fishermen, and backpackers whether they live in Lewiston to the north or Boise to the south.

Mountains contribute to the irregularity of natural and manmade landscapes in the Pacific Northwest. Unlike the prairie states, where rectangular fields of corn and soybeans extend to the horizon, the far Northwest gives the appearance of being rough and unfinished. Except for state and international boundaries and city streets, straight lines are uncommon features of the landscape. The region's coastline is irregular and its land is uplifted into jagged peaks and sinuous hills that give the Palouse country in July and August the appearance of a swelling ocean of wheat. To become accustomed to the Pacific Northwest climate and landscape—to become accustomed to life in the mountains' shadow—is crucial to developing a sense of place.

AN AMERICAN HINTERLAND?

Patches of clear-cut forest land and abandoned sawmills, closed mines and forsaken fish canneries were increasingly common features of the Pacific Northwest landscape in the late twentieth century. A sense of place, it seems, must also come to terms with economic activity, or lack thereof.

The region's role as supplier of raw materials gave economic life in the Pacific Northwest some special contours. Even before contact with European and American traders in the late eighteenth century, Native Ameri-

cans had established among themselves elaborate trade networks based on the use of natural resources like fish and roots. Beginning in the 1780s with the trade in furs and skins, Pacific Northwest commodities played important supporting roles in the metropolitan-dominated economic systems of Europe and North America, although the region itself remained a colonial hinterland for the next two centuries and thus was economically vulnerable to forces beyond its control. For several generations the region rode an economic roller coaster that alternated crazily between boom and bust, and no one seemed able to get off.

As recently as the 1980s—despite the existence of urban centers as large as Seattle and Portland and the great aircraft manufacturing plants of Boeing—it was still appropriate to describe the Pacific Northwest as a hinterland, at least the bulk of it outside metropolitan areas. Two Pacific Northwests had emerged, economically speaking: the relatively prosperous high-technology, manufacturing, and exporting businesses centering on Seattle and Portland, and the traditional extractive industries of the less populated areas. Difficulties in the latter sector inevitably affected the entire region in the form of diminished tax revenues and underfunding of state services and institutions; and during the mid-1980s there were troubles aplenty in mining, agriculture, and timber. Other imponderables such as freight rates and the cheap electricity needed to lure new businesses and industries or to keep the existing ones competitive in distant national and international markets continued to influence the region's economic future.

Hinterland status also shaped the Pacific Northwest past. Certain features of the region's early history bear more resemblance to the natural resources frontier of Canada than to the commercial and agricultural settlements of the eastern United States. The Pacific Northwest was integrated into the fur trade centering on Montreal and the Saint Lawrence Valley and later the Hudson's Bay region well before it developed close economic and social ties with the United States. Reorientation of the region did not occur until after American missionaries arrived in the late 1830s, and a substantial number of settlers from the Ohio and Missouri valleys came the following decade.

When Oregon achieved territorial status in the late 1840s, two generations had passed since the opening battles of the Revolutionary War, thirty states had entered the Union, eleven men had served as president of the United States, Harvard College was already two hundred years old, and the population of New York City was rapidly approaching seven hundred thousand. In the late 1840s about ten thousand non-Indian people lived in the

entire Oregon Territory, which included not only the future states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, but also western Montana and a portion of western Wyoming. The territory's most populous non-Indian community was Oregon City, with fewer than a thousand residents. Nearby Portland had even fewer residents, and the future cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, and Boise did not exist.

The northwestern corner of the United States, in short, was both geographically remote from the East Coast and chronologically distant from the mainstream of American history. But rather than be merely a backwater of American history, the Pacific Northwest followed a separate watercourse toward regional development. The following chapters chart its main features.

Part I Isolation and Empire