

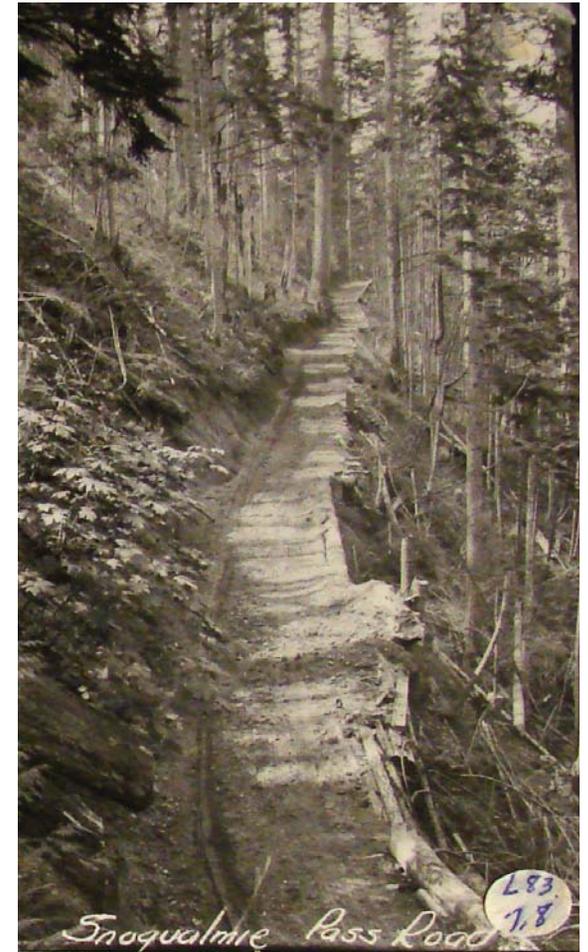
The development of a comprehensive road system came slowly to King County, Washington. Until the first decades of the 20th century, inhabitants remained heavily dependent on rivers and other bodies of water as the dominant mode of transportation. Yet it was the ancient overland trails established by Native Americans between major waterways and across the Cascade Mountain range that later became the foundation of today's modern road network.

King County's road system was evolutionary in its growth with regard to both the number and type of roads built to meet the needs of each successive era. Through centuries of native habitation, and into the period of early Euro-American exploration and settlement, the first roads were merely narrow footpaths and animal/pack trails carved through ancient first-growth forests. As settlement increased in the middle decades of the 19th century, these trails were widened and kept clear of underbrush to accommodate wagons and cattle. Although many roads remained dirt well into the 20th century, their number grew exponentially in the late 1800s. During those decades, new construction formed the bulk of local roadwork, due to the rising demand for farm-to-market access from nearly every corner of the county. However, by 1900 road construction had temporarily caught up with development. County roadwork was now focused on extension, connection, and re-alignment of existing wagon roads.

As the 20th century unfolded, the soaring popularity of the automobile transformed the landscape of King County. When 150 early-model motorcars attempted crossing the rough trace over Snoqualmie Pass, en route to the 1909 Alaskan-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, the event helped convince local governments to begin engineering road systems suited for the automobile. By 1913, several million dollars had been appropriated for vehicular road development and improvement within King County. The post-WWII economy encouraged an increase in automobile ownership and private travel, triggering still further improvements, including the construction of new highways to developing suburbs.

The 170-year progression of road development in King County is uniquely regional and provides interesting insight into a place where growth was significantly influenced by rugged topography, a challenging natural environment, and a strong pioneer determination to tame them both.

Appendix B King County Roads: History of Overland Transportation



Snoqualmie Pass Wagon Road, ca. 1900. Courtesy of the Eastside Heritage Museum