

AUGUST 11, 1943

# Upper Skagit Dams Are Huge Asset To County

By the Editor

Be it said to the everlasting credit and honor of "J. D." Ross and his zealous associates, a few of whom are still living and carrying on, and to the credit of the good people of Seattle who followed their leadership, they have created a marvelous, living, pulsating, engineering project on the upper Skagit river that will endure and serve the people of their city and adjoining coast communities for countless generations to come. They have reclaimed a mountain wilderness for human service, they have transformed a raging, rushing river, confined for thirty long miles in an almost inaccessible, towering, precipitous canyon, into a modern gigantic hydroelectric power system. They have harnessed nature, without destroying it, to serve the needs of man. They have taken possession of the flood waters of this short but mighty Pacific Coast river, removing the menace of annual disaster to the rich and broad valley lands below, and stored them to furnish more power. The engineers of the Seattle City Light project on the upper Skagit have done their job with consummate skill and vision, passing the utilization of this vast power into other hands for adequate distribution and use.

After an interval of several years we enjoyed the privilege last week of visiting and thoroughly inspecting this great power project located practically in our own backyard, so close that we do not appreciate its size and importance. It really belongs to Skagit county by every rule of geography and contiguity, although the first and original Gorge powerhouse at Newhalem lies three miles north of our county boundary line and is, therefore, in Whatcom county. The entire project is inaccessible to western Whatcom; it must be entered through Skagit county and through this county flows all the traffic connected with it. Every mile of inhabited and cultivated Skagit valley, aside from the project installations, lies in Skagit county. Some day we hope the legislature will consider these facts seriously enough to attach this eastern area of Whatcom county to Skagit county, of which it should be a part for all practicable purposes.

## Well Guarded

For years, or since construction began up there, the City of Seattle has featured summer excursions carrying thousands of sightseers, but war has changed all this. Now it is almost as hard to get a pass into this closely guarded area as it would be to get through the eye of a needle. Official business or family relationships are about the only keys that will unlock the gates at Newhalem. As it is all within the National Forest, the government is in supreme control, and it is no mistake to state that it exercises this authority to the limit. In addition to necessary protection to the power project similar protection must be accorded to the forests which cover the region. However, Supt. Hoffman in Seattle kindly issued the required permission, based on the close mutual interest we have in being as well acquainted as possible with the project, and resident engineers and officials accorded us every hospitality and convenience and aid during our three days' stay. An intense loyalty to the work by all connected with it prevails everywhere, a deep and commendable pride that after all has made its success possible.

## Courageous Job

Building the Skagit project was not child's play but a man's job. It took grit, courage, sweat and hard-ship to drive tunnels, build dams, install machinery, to even set up living quarters up there. The cost cannot be measured in money. Where the upper dam, Ross Dam, was built in the past few years and where it is now being raised, there wasn't a level spot on which to build crude living quarters. There still isn't. It is just a precipitous, rocky canyon. Buildings are perched on rocks, blasted to furnish sites. The only wharf at the head of Diablo Lake is a floating one. Contractors are digging out the side of a hill for more operating room. It is probably the world's worst construction site. An idea of the depth of the river canyon—a narrow one at that—is gained from the fact that this man-made reservoir, or lake, is 100 feet deep in the channel between Diablo and Ross Dams, a distance of about eight miles. Above Ross Dam, Ruby Lake spreads out with less depth and when new work on this dam is finally completed, this reservoir will back up five miles into Canada. Seattle has already acquired the necessary Canadian property and flood rights.

## Three Units

The Seattle project consists of three separate units, built in series. Diablo the original Gorge power-