

## The Legend of Silent Rock

Mount Hood stands tall in north Oregon. It towers over everything around it. Mount Hood is a volcano. It is 11,249 feet tall. Mount Hood is the tallest point in Oregon. It can be seen from 100 miles away. It could erupt someday. But chances of an eruption are very small. The volcano is considered by many to be dormant.

Mount Hood has many significant features. Glaciers and snow cover the top of the mountain all year. There are large rock formations near the top. Mount Hood has ski resorts. It has hiking trails and waterfalls. Its foothills have orchards and wildflowers. There are small towns, lodges and cabins.

One place on Mount Hood is thought to be important. Locals warn that it must be treated with respect: Silent Rock.

Silent Rock is on Highway 26. It is between the small towns of Rhododendron and Government Camp.

Stories say that when you drive by this rock, you must be silent. Turn off your radio. No talking allowed. They say that if you make noise at Silent Rock, bad things happen.

Ryan Ward grew up in the area. He has heard many stories about people who make noise driving by the rock. "My brother thought it was a joke. One time he turned up the volume on the music. He just started yelling as loud as he could. I kept telling him to shut up. He just laughed.

"Very soon, his car stopped working. He just barely got to the side of the road. The car engine shut off. It turned out the car was out of gas. But he'd just filled the gas tank that morning. He was freaked out."

It took hours for them to get help. They didn't get to ski that day.

Amy Velo remembers a school ski trip in 8th grade. "There were 40 of us on the bus. When we got to Silent Rock, some thought it would be funny to make noise. But most of us were quiet.

"We skied that day. Every one of the kids who made noise ended up with a problem. One kid broke a ski pole. Another lost one of her new gloves. And one girl threw up on the chair lift. It was really gross."

Many people have stories of bad things that happened when someone made noise at Silent Rock. They say cars have broken down. Snowboards and skis have gotten broken or lost. People have ended up with missing teeth, broken arms, and other injuries.

How Silent Rock got its powers is a mystery.

The legend of Silent Rock has been around since at least the 1970's. Amy Velo says, "My uncle said they were being quiet at Silent Rock when he was in high school. That was before I was even born.



“He said there was a really bad car crash up there. A semi-truck lost control. It went off the road. It crashed into several cars. They all fell down the side of the hill. Several people were killed. So he thought people were quiet at Silent Rock out of respect for those people.”

Another story says that a construction worker was killed there when the road was built. So Silent Rock is to show respect to him.

Other stories are harder to believe. One claims that Native Americans who lived there would throw enemies off the cliff. They put rocks in their mouths. The rocks kept them from yelling on the way down. Other stories say settlers doing the same to the Native Americans instead.

Part of the Oregon Trail passes by Silent Rock in the valley below. Some stories about Silent Rock are about the pioneers that came through that hard section of the trail.

Others say the highway was built over an ancient Native American burial ground. So maybe Silent Rock is now cursed.

Some say the stories about Silent Rock were just made up by a bus driver. He was trying to scare a loud busload of kids into being quiet.

A lot of noise could happen there soon. The state department of transportation wants to improve the highway that passes by Silent Rock. The current road is dangerous. It gets slippery in the winter. More than 75 crashes have happened in that area in the last ten years. Almost 70 people have been injured. Three have been killed.

People have different ideas about the best ways to improve the road. One idea is a shuttle or train system. Another idea is a concrete barrier. The current plan is to make the road wider. They will blow up part of Silent Rock to make room. A concrete median will keep cars from crossing into the other lane.

Many changes may be made. The stories may or may not be true. But there is one message that the locals tend to agree on.

As Ryan Ward explains, “We need to respect the mountain. Mount Hood is awesome. We should take advantage of the cool stuff we can do up there. But we also need to take care of it.”