

## The Legend of Silent Rock

Mount Hood stands majestically in northern Oregon, towering over the landscape around it. This volcano is 11,249 feet tall, the tallest point in Oregon, and can be seen from up to 100 miles away. It's considered the most likely Oregon volcano to erupt, but chances of an eruption are very small; the volcano is considered by many to be dormant.

Mount Hood has many significant features. There are several glaciers and snowfields that cover much of the top of Mount Hood year-round with notable large rock formations near the summit. Mount Hood is the home of ski resorts and hiking trails and waterfalls. Its foothills feature orchards and wildflowers. Small towns, lodges and cabins offer places for people to stay.

But among the many wonders of Mount Hood, there is one particular feature that locals warn must be shown a particularly high level of respect: Silent Rock.

Silent Rock is located on Highway 26 on Mount Hood between the small mountain villages of Rhododendron and Government Camp.

According to local lore, while driving past this particular rock, you must be completely silent. Turn off your radio and no talking allowed. Because, they say, if you make noise as you drive past Silent Rock, bad things happen.

Ryan Ward has spent much of his life in the area and says he has heard many stories about what happens to people who make noise driving past the rock. "My brother thought the whole thing was a joke. One time as we drove through he turned up the volume on the music he was playing and just started yelling as loud as he could. I kept telling him to shut up, but he just laughed.

"Not even a mile farther down the road, his car started to sputter. He just barely got off to the side of the road before the car engine completely shut off. It turned out the car was out of gas, even

though he'd just filled the gas tank that morning. He was freaked out."

It took several hours for them to get help, and they didn't get to ski that day at all.

Amy Velo remembers a particular ski trip with some friends from school when they were in 8th grade. "There were about 40 of us on the bus on the ride up. When we got to Silent Rock, some of the others thought it would be funny to make noise, but most of us were silent.

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

Many others share similar stories of bad things that happened when someone made noise at Silent Rock: cars breaking down, snowboards and skis getting broken or lost, and people who have ended up with missing teeth, broken arms, and other injuries.

How Silent Rock got its apparent powers is a mystery.

The superstition around Silent Rock has been around since at least the 1970's. Amy Velo explained, "My uncle says that they were being



quiet at Silent Rock and telling stories about it back when he was in high school, before I was even born.

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

A similar story claims that a construction worker was killed in the area while the road was being built, so Silent Rock is to show respect to him.

Another more far-fetched story claims that the Native Americans who lived in the area would throw their enemies off the cliff with rocks in their mouths so they couldn't yell on the way down. Still other stories tell of settlers doing the same to the Native Americans instead.

A section of the Oregon Trail called Barlow Road passes by Silent Rock in the valley below, so there are several other legends about Silent Rock related to the pioneers that came through what was a particularly difficult section of the trail.

Others say the highway was built over an ancient Native American burial ground, so the area around Silent Rock is now cursed.

Some believe that the stories about Silent Rock were simply made up by a bus driver trying to scare a loud, rowdy busload of kids into being quiet.

Some major noise in that area could be happening soon. The state department of transportation is planning to make some improvements to the highway that passes by Silent Rock. The current road is dangerous, whether or not you believe the legend, particularly when it gets slippery in the winter. More than 75 crashes have happened in that area in the last ten years, injuring almost 70 people and killing three.

Locals are debating about the best potential improvements for the road. Suggestions include a shuttle or train system or a concrete barrier. The current plan involves widening the road - which would mean blasting part of Silent Rock to make room - and putting in a concrete median to keep cars from crossing into oncoming traffic.

Regardless of what changes are made and whether or not the Silent Rock legends are true, there is one message that the locals tend to agree on.

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