

# THE CONCRETE HERALD

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## CONCRETE HERALD ANNIVERSARY EDITION

### City Light Projects Harness Powerful Skagit River After Long, Hard Struggle

It was over 70 years ago that the first white man battled his way into the fearful Skagit river canyons above Marblemount. They were hunting for gold then, but overlooked a wealth far greater than any metal in the many power sites along the upper reaches of the river. But the country became known and in 1907 engineers made a trip through the same rugged canyons, this time with transit, and level as they mapped out eleven miles of the deepest gorges and made plans for the building of a hydro-electric plant larger at that time than any in the world.

By 1919 the project was ready to go and workmen swarmed into the upper country to clear the site for Newhalem and the Gorge Dam, first step in the plan. The Gorge plant, with a capacity of 60,000 kilowatts, was completed in 1924 and the generators were started with great ceremony – President Calvin Coolidge pushing a button in, the White House to start them turning.

From then on the project has been in continuous construction. Diablo Dam, 7 and a half miles up from the gorge Plant was completed in 1930. It was built in Diablo Canyon, a gorge of solid granite with vertical walls rising 160 feet from the river bed, yet were less than 100 feet apart. The lake formed by Diablo Dam is five miles long. Waters from the dam operate two main generators with a capacity of 64,500 kw each, and two smaller units of 1,500 each.

The third step in the plan was Ross Dam, built near Ruby Creek and originally called Ruby Dam. At the death of J. D. Ross, whose dream made the dams possible, his name was given to the latest and largest of them all. Ross Dam was started in 1937, the first step completed in 1940. The second step began almost immediately and the dam is now 545 feet high and has formed a lake 24 miles long. The water from the dam will eventually flow through new Ross powerhouse, now under construction to add another 360,000 kw to the capacity of the Seattle project. The first power is expected to be produced in 1953 when two generators will be installed and operating.

Just in the past few weeks an additional 60,000 kw of power was added with the installation of another generator at the Gorge power plant.

City Light is one of the oldest publicly owned utilities in the United States and is next to the largest – Los Angeles exceeding in size only. In addition to providing millions of dollars in payroll for the upper valley, besides the great traffic in cement, supplies and machinery that must come through the valley to reach the dams. City Light also created an unusual recreation area by opening their Newhalem camp to tours, which brought visitors from all parts of the world to spend a supervised week end seeing all the wonders of the upper Skagit. The tours had to be discontinued when accommodations were

needed for construction workers on the later projects, but may be resumed again when present construction is completed.

Once only reached by train from Rockport, motorists now can drive over a good road all the way up to Newhalem. Regular trains make it possible to visit Diablo Dam, from where a schedule of boats provide transportation up the lake to Ross Dam.