Yakima County Facts

- 2nd largest county in WA, covering 4,296 square miles (2.7 million acres)
- Ranks eight in per-county population with 256,728 residents /2020 USA census.
- The town of Yakima is the county seat.
- Yakima County encompasses most of the Yakama Nation Reservation,
- Federal, state, or tribal governments own nearly 200 million acres of land in the county.
- The location of many towns within Yakima County was largely determined by the Northern Pacific Railroad, along whose route the sites were chosen, named, platted, and sold to original settler
- Sagebrush & shrub steppe landscape.

Industry

- Yakima County's primary industry is agriculture.
- Yakima County is a leading global producer of apples, hops, mint, and asparagus, cherries and the county's wine industry continues to expand and flourish.

Weather

- Annual average of 300 days of sunshine
- 9 Inches precipitation / year

Geography

- Yakima County is bordered on the west by wilderness areas: the Norse Peak Wilderness and Pierce County to the northwest, the William O. Douglas Wilderness/Snoqualmie National Forest/Goat Rocks Wilderness and Lewis County to the central west, and the Cascade Mountain Range/Mt. Adams Wilderness and Skamania County to the southwest. Kittitas County borders Yakima to the north and the two counties share the 260,000-acre Yakima Firing Center United States Military Reservation. Benton County borders Yakima to the east and Klickitat County to the south.

Mount Adams

- 3rd highest peak in the Cascade Range and the second highest peak in Washington (after Mount Rainier).

Irrigation

- The Yakima River, a tributary of the Columbia, runs through the Yakima Valley and with its tributaries the Naches and Tieton Rivers feeding some 2,100 miles of irrigation canals throughout the Yakima Valley.

The earliest inhabitants

- The confederated bands and tribes of the Yakama Nation.
- Known for gathering camas, bitter root, and berries, hunted deer, and harvested salmon from the Yakima and Columbia rivers.
- These bands were nomadic, especially after acquiring horses from northern Great Basin tribes sometime between 1730 and 1760.
- The name Yakima has been translated to mean black bear (from yah-kah, meaning black bear, and the plural ending ma), or runaway, referring either to the rushing waters of the Yakima River or to a tribal legend about a runaway or deported daughter of a Yakama chief.

Euro-American Settlement

- The earliest European settlers were members of the Catholic Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate.
- Arrived at the invitation of Yakama chiefs Ow-hi (d. 1858) and Kamiakin (ca. 1800-1877)
- The Oblates established several small missions in the Yakima Valley beginning in 1848.
- A larger mission, St. Joseph's Mission on the Ahtanum, in 1852. *(Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976)*
- The **first irrigation ditch** was dug on the grounds of this mission that same year.

Washington Territory

- Established on March 2, 1853, newly appointed Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens quickly set out to extinguish Native American claim to the land and encourage white settlement.
- On June 9, 1855, 14 tribal leaders signed the Treaty of Yakima, ceding 10,828,800 acres of ancestral lands to the United States government. *(The Yakama Nation celebrates Treaty Days yearly)*

- The Yakama Nation Yakama tribal leader Kamiakin was a reluctant signatory. The nearly immediate failure of Stevens to enforce parts of the agreement that protected some Yakama rights led Kamiakin to withdraw his acquiescence to the treaty.
- On October 5, 1855, gunfire erupted between Kamiakin's men and Major Granville Haller's troops at Toppenish Creek, marking the beginning of the **Yakama Native American Wars.**

The United States government established Fort Simcoe in 1856 and by 1858 the uprising had been quelled by the slaughter and starvation of many members of the tribe. *(Fort Simcoe is a WA state day use, interpretative park retaining several Historic buildings)*

The Yakama Nation Reservation

- 1,271,918 acres (1,573 square miles).
- The reservation encompasses several towns including Parker, Wapato, Toppenish, and White Swan, as well as part of the Simcoe mountain range. The eastern half of **Mount Adams** (12,276 feet), an active andesitic strato-volcano, extends into the southwestern corner of Yakima County.
- In 1994 the tribe changed the spelling of their name to Yakama. (From Yakima)
- The Yakama Nation controls nearly 1.3 million acres, the largest land mass controlled by any of the 29 federally recognized tribes in the state.
- The tribe has 9,600 enrolled tribal members, more than any other Washington tribe.
- Three language families were indigenous to the 14 bands and tribes that constitute the Yakama Nation: Sahaptian, Salishan, and Chinookan.
- The 14 bands and tribes are the Palouse, Pisquouse, Yakama, Wenatchapam, Klinquit, Oche Chotes, Kow was wayee, Sk'in-pah, Kah-miltpah, Klickitat, Wish ham, See ap Cat, Li ay was, and Shyiks.

Cattle in the Yakima Valley

- Native Americans had wintered herds of cattle in the Yakima Valley since Kamiakin brought the first herd to the area in 1840. In 1859
- Legendary **cattleman Ben Snipes** (1835-1906) *(His Historic Cabin and bronze sculpture of him branding a calf is located in Sunnyside, WA)* drove his first herd of cattle through the Yakima Valley to the gold fields of the Fraser River in Canada.
- Long cattle drives through the area were common until the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad, after which cattle were driven to rail stations and shipped to market.

First non-missionary settlers

- Fielding Mortimer Thorp (1822-1894) and Margaret Bounds Thorp (1822-1888) with their nine children were the first non-Indian, non-missionary settlers to the Yakima Valley, arriving in 1861 at the future site of Moxee to join the 250 head of cattle Thorp had driven there to graze the year before.
- The Alfred Hensen family and widow Nancy McHaney Splawn Bond (1812-1905) with her five sons, Charles, William, George, Moses, and Andrew J., moved to the Yakima Valley soon after. Other settlers followed, many of them young men associated with the area's increasing cattle culture.

Yakima County

- Yakima County was briefly (from January 12, 1863 to January 21, 1865) part of a large county called Ferguson County. When Ferguson was dissolved after only two years, the County of Yakima, including more or less present-day Yakima and Kittitas Counties, was established.
- On November 24, 1883, Kittitas County was divided from Yakima, leaving the county boundaries approximately as they remain.

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