Domestic Geographic Name Report

Action Requested:

☐ Proposed New Name
☐ Application Change
☒ Name Change
☐ Other

Recommended Name: Ben Johnson Mountain
State: Oregon
County: Jackson
Administrative Area: Rogue River NF

Specific Area Covered

☐ Mouth
☐ End
☒ Center Summit

Latitude: 42° 12' 16" N
Longitude: 123° 05' 36" W

☐ Heading
☐ End

Latitude: 0° 00" N
Longitude: 0° 00" W

Section(s) S6
Township(s) T39S
Range(s) R3W
Meridian W
**Elevation**: 4,398
- **Feet**
- **Meters**

**Type of Feature** (stream, mountain, populated place, etc.): mountain

**Is the feature identified (including other names) in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)?**
- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

**If yes, please indicate how it is listed (include name and GNIS feature ID number):** 1146832

**Description of Feature** (physical shape, length, width, direction of flow, etc.):
- Mountain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maps and Other Sources Using Recommended Name (include scale and date)</th>
<th>Other Names (variants)</th>
<th>Maps and Other Sources Using Other Names or Applications (include scale and date)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RUCH 1:24 K</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name Information** (such as origin, meaning of the recommended name, historical significance, biographical data (if commemorative), nature of usage or application, or any other pertinent information):

The mountain was named for Ben Johnson, a local black blacksmith. The summit historically was known as Nigger Ben Mountain until the present name officially was adopted in 1954. We know his last name, it's appropriate and respectful, in 2019, to call it Ben Johnson Mountain and not "Negro Ben".

**Is the recommended name in local usage?**
- **Yes**
- **No**

**If yes, for approximately how many years?**

**Is there local opposition to, or conflict, with the recommended name (as located)?** unknown
For proposed new name, please provide evidence that feature is unnamed:

Additional information:

Submitted By: Margo Schembre
Company or Agency:
Title:
Address (City, State, and ZIPCode): 30050 SW Rose Lane, Wilsonville, OR
Telephone: 503.360.8731 margo.schembre@gmail.com
Date: 7.28.2019

Copy Prepared By (if other than above):
Company or Agency:
Title:
Address (City, State, and ZIPCode):
Phone (day):
Date:

Authority for Recommended Name:
Mailing Address:
Telephone:
Occupation:
Years in Area:

Authority for Recommended Name:
Mailing Address:
Telephone:
Occupation:
Years in Area:

Authority for Recommended Name:
Mailing Address:
Telephone:
Occupation:
Years in Area:
Feature Detail Report for: Negro Ben Mountain

ID: 1146832
Name: Negro Ben Mountain
Class: Summit (Definitions)


Entry Date: 28-Nov-1980
*Elevation: 4393/1339

*Elevations in feet/meters from the National Elevation Dataset

Variant Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant Name</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigger Ben Mountain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Board on Geographic Names Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Decision Type</th>
<th>BGN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negro Ben Mountain</td>
<td>Board Decision</td>
<td>Official</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BGN Subject Folders: (Click arrow to open folder)

Correspondence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Year</th>
<th>Folder Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Forms:

Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>State Code</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>029</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coordinates (One point per USGS topographic map containing the feature, NAD83)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Latitude(DEC)</th>
<th>Longitude(DEC)</th>
<th>Latitude(DMS)</th>
<th>Longitude(DMS)</th>
<th>Map Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.2044906</td>
<td>-123.0933797</td>
<td>42126N</td>
<td>1230536W</td>
<td>Ruch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1958 Ruch quadrangle
Recommended Name: Negro Ben Mountain

State: Oregon

Civil Division: Jackson County

T. 38 S., R. 3 W. and T. 39 S., R. 3 W., Willamette meridian

Secs. 5, 6, 7, 8

Lat. 42°12'15" N., Long. 123°05'30" W.

Lat. 42°06'15" N., Long. 123°02'30" W.

Description: Mountain with an elevation of about 4,394 feet, in the Siskiyou Mountains, about 1 mile south and 2.3 miles west of the Applegate River and southwest of Ruch.

Summary, indicating submitting person, or agency, source for locating the feature; reason for submittal of the name and pertinent facts of the case, for presentation to DNC.

Ruch, 11/2;

DGN (BSM) Medford. to conform with the Executive Committee of the Board policy; not in USNF although covered by FS. map.

Submitted by: DGN
Prepared by: Holmes
Reviewed by: Stillberg

Date: 9/7/63
Date: 10/2/63
Date: 10/3/63

Docket List No. 60
Date approved by Sec. Int.
Promulgation date: 6/24/64
Negro Ben Mountain 1963

(2a) Nigger Ben Mtn 4394 1954
(2b) 19
(2c) 19
(2d) 19
(2e) 19
(2f) 19
(3a) Nigger Ben Mountain 1958
(3b) 19
(4a) Nigger Ben Mtn 4394 1958
(4b) 19
(5a) 19
(5b) Not shown 19
(5c) 19
(6) Not shown 1963
(7a) Nigger Ben Mountain 1958
(7b) 19
(8) Not listed 1962
(9) 19
(10) 1960
(11) 19
(12) Nigger Ben Mountain 1952
(13) "... elevation about 4500 feet; is in the Siskiyou Mountains... The name is very old and appears to have been derived from a Negro named Ben who operated a small blacksmith shop near the river..."

Sept. 17, letter memo

USC&GS USFS DGN USGS

State Geogr. Bd.

Other:

Field names report 19

Annotated maps ( ) ( )

USGS Quad, Ruch / 1:62,500
USGS 1:
USGS 1:
USGS 1:
USGS State base

AMS Medford 1:
AMS 1:250

USFS Rogue River Nat'l For.

USFS

USC&GS Aero Ch. Klamath Falls, 1/500

Coast Pilot

Off. State Road Map Not Shown

Jackson County, sh. 394

County, sh.


U. S. Census, Table 7, Pop., Vol. 1

BGN Decision

Lewis McArthur, Oreg. Geog. Names, p. 448
Negro Ben Mountain, JACKSON. For many years this 4,500-foot peak in the Siskiyou Mountains, a little to the southwest of Ruch and Applegate River, was called Nigger Ben Mountain. The name was very old and appears to have been derived from a man named Ben who operated a small blacksmith shop near the river and accommodated miners by sharpening picks and other tools. In his spare time, Ben worked a tunnel on a small prospect he had developed. There are a number of stories about Ben, most of them probably apocryphal. Ben’s last name appears to have been lost to prosperity. In 1964, the USBGN, in Decisions List 6402, changed the name to its present form.

MODERN MAPS OF THE APPLEGATE area near Cantrall-Buckley Park identify an intriguing mountain named “Negro Ben.” The Applegate settlers started calling the mountain “Nigger Ben” to designate the area where Ben, a blacksmith in Uniontown in the late 1860s, made his home. In the 1960s the U.S. Board on Geographic Names changed the word “nigger” to “negro” in an effort to make the name “less demeaning.” If they had referred to the mountain as simply Ben’s Peak, or left it nameless, that would have erased the evidence that people of color had a historical impact on the Applegate area. As it is, we at least know that Ben made an impression, although we don’t know if he even knew that the mountain had been named for him.

It seems obvious what his neighbors called him, but the real mystery has always been what Ben’s last name was. The other blacks known to have been in the area have their first and last names recorded on the census and other records but Ben’s identification has been elusive. More often than not, many minorities can be found listed in court records. The fact that Ben isn’t found in these records may indicate either that he stayed out of trouble or that he just didn’t live here long enough to leave a paper trail. Finding Ben’s last name became a goal of mine.

I only knew his name was Ben, that he was black and that he lived for a while in Uniontown on the Applegate, worked as a blacksmith and did some prospecting. I went to the Jackson County Courthouse looking at land and mining records and even went to the mountain itself in a futile attempt to get some clues there. Nothing showed up on the Jackson County records or in the memories of the old timers.

I was actually searching for something else when I made a breakthrough at the University of Oregon Knight Library’s Special Collections in Eugene. A “colored” Benjamin Johnson appears on the 1868 and 1869 assessment rolls for Jackson County, Oregon, in Uniontown. A subsequent search through the 1867 assessment rolls yielded nothing. Ben seemed to have disappeared by the time the 1870 enumerator came to Uniontown to take the census. With his last name to guide me, however, I was able to expand the search to other areas in Oregon and finally found a “mulatto” named Benjamin Johnson, a blacksmith from Alabama in Albany, Linn County, in both the 1870 and 1880 censuses listed with Amanda Johnson, his wife.

According to the Linn County marriage record they were married December 31, 1870. Amanda was listed as a black woman but both 1870 and 1880 list Benjamin as a mulatto. If Negro Ben and Benjamin Johnson of Albany, Oregon, are the same person, then that explains why he doesn’t show up on other Jackson County records. It appears that he moved to Albany to marry and pursue his blacksmithing in a more populated place. Ben moved from Jackson County, but he left his mark in Southern Oregon where we still remember him through the mountain that bears his name.

Jan Wright is a historian for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

ENDNOTES
3. Isaac Jones, Samuel Cozzens, Charles Blockwell, and Samuel Vose, to name a few.
4. U of O, Knight Library, Special Collections. Box 87 V, 41 p. 8, 1868 Assessment Rolls, Jackson Co. OR and p. 14 18 Assessment Rolls, Jackson Co. OR.
5. 1870 U.S. Census M593 Roll 1286 p. 552 Linn County, Oregon, Albany Precinct.
Memorandum

To: Chief Topographic Engineer (RT-C)
From: Pacific Region Engineer (C)
Subject: Name change on the Ruch, Oregon-California map

Your memorandum of September 17

Our records do not show the specific reason for submitting a change for the name Negro Ben Mountain, as shown on the 1956 Ruch 1:62500-scale map, to Nigger Ben Mountain as shown on the 1960 reprint, since these records are usually removed from the files after the changes are made on the reprint. However, we think that the original form of the name as it appears on the 1960 reprint is justified and should be retained.

We have a proof copy of the Ruch, returned by the Regional Forester in January 1956, calling our attention to the use of Nigger Ben Mountain on Forest Service maps for 36 years, and to its appearance as such in McArthur's Oregon Geographic Names. We note that it appears in this form on the 1958 Rogue River National Forest map. Field investigation on the Ruch quadrangle submitted the name as having established local usage as Nigger Ben, in the same form as it appeared on the 1908 Grants Pass 30-minute quadrangle.

In view of its long established usage and the absence of any evidence of derogatory intent or local objection, we feel that our change to Negro Ben on the 1956 edition of the Ruch was not necessary, and the form on the 1960 reprint follows fully the policy set forth in your memorandum of December 6, 1960 on the general subject.

Robert O. Davis
Pacific Region Engineer
Memorandum

To: Pacific Region Engineer (C)
From: Chief Topographic Engineer (RT-C)

Subject: Name change on the Ruch, Oregon-California map

The Director's office has questioned the reason for changing the name of Negro Ben Mountain, as shown on our 1986 Ruch 1:62,500-scale map, to Nigger Ben Mountain as shown on the 1980 reprint.

Please let us know so that we might furnish this information to the Director's office.

[Signature]

For Chief Topographic Engineer

cc:
Topo Files
RT
RT-C
Mr. C. R. Mason √

50:CRMason:sjt 9-13-62