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: BLM

Specific Area Covered

☐ Mouth  ☐ End  ☐ Center

Latitude: 42° 12' 16" N  
Longitude: 120° 05' 36" W

☐ Heading  ☐ End

Latitude: ° ' " N  
Longitude: ° ' " W

Section(s)  
Township(s)  
Range(s)  Meridian

Date Submitted: 07/28/2019
**Elevation** 4,398
- ☑ Feet
- ☐ Meters

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**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):** Negro Ben Mountain 1146832

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

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<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>
</table>

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**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 1964. 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
Telephone: 503.360.8731
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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>1146832</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Negro Ben Mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Summit (Definitions)</td>
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</table>

**Citation:**

**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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigger Ben Mountain</td>
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**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>
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</table>

BGN Subject Folders: (Click arrow to open folder)

**Correspondence:**

**Forms:**

**Counties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Country</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>029</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>US</td>
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</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>421216N</td>
<td>1230536W</td>
<td>Ruch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Unionsown 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 Unionsown 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 Unionsown. A subsequent search through the 1867 assessment rolls yielded nothing. Ben seemed to have disappeared by the time the 1870 enumerator came to Unionsown 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.41 18 Assessment Rolls, Jackson Co. OR
5. 1870 U.S. Census M593 Roll 1286 p. 552 Linn County, Oregon, Albany Precinct.
Recommended Name: Negro Ben Mountain

State: Oregon
Civil Division: Jackson County
Secs. 5, 6, 7, and 8, T. 38 S., R. 3 W., and T. 39 S., R. 3 W., Willamette meridian

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

Description: Mountain with an elevation of about 4,394 feet, in the Siskiyou Mountains, about 2 miles south and 2.3 miles west of the Applegate River and 3 1/2 miles 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, 1:42

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

Submitted by: DGN
Prepared by: Holmes
Reviewed by: Stulberg
Date: 9/7/63
Date: 10/2/63
Date: 10/3/63
Docket List No. 60
Date approved by Sec. Int. 6/24/64
Promulgation date: 6/24/64
| 
| --- |
| (1a) **Negro Ben Mountain** 1963 |
| (1b) _______ 19 |
| (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) **Negro 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..." |
The Board of Commissioners’ Work Session was opened by Commissioner Roberts on Tuesday, October 15, 2019, at 9:00 a.m. in the Jackson Room. Those present were:

Colleen Roberts, Commissioner
Rick Dyer, Commissioner
Danny Jordan, County Administrator
Joel Benton, County Counsel
John Vial, Director, Roads and Parks
Mike Kuntz, County Engineer
Loris Fenner, Recording Secretary
Members of the Press

Absent: Bob Strosser, Chair

1. **Jurisdictional Transfer of Roads to the City of Medford – John Vial, Director, Roads and Parks Department; and Mike Kuntz, County Engineer**
   
   Mr. Vial began by reviewing the history of jurisdictional exchanges in the County. He reviewed the information related to the current proposal with the City of Medford (*Submission No. 1*). He spoke about the various roads, and a public hearing that is scheduled for Wednesday, October 30, 2019, during the Board of Commissioners’ Regular Televised Meeting. Mr. Vial and Mr. Kuntz recommended approval of the transfer of roads to the City of Medford. The Board asked questions and following discussion, the Board thanked Mr. Vial and Mr. Kuntz for the information.

2. **Petitioned Vacation of a Portion of Graffis Road – John Vial, Director, Roads and Parks Department and Mike Kuntz, County Engineer**
   
   Mr. Vial reviewed information on the Graffis Road area and the nature of the petition from an adjacent property owner to vacate a portion of the road. Mr. Kuntz clarified that the road is currently a right-of-way; however, it is used by others to access areas beyond the section petitioned to vacate. Following discussion and review of the information provided (*Submission No. 2*), Mr. Kuntz and Mr. Vial recommended the Board not approve the petition following the public hearing on the matter which is scheduled for Wednesday, October 30, 2019, during the Regular Televised Meeting of the Board.

3. **Governor’s Council for Wildfire Response – Rick Dyer, Commissioner**
   
   The Commissioners in attendance agreed to table the discussion until the entire Board was present. Staff was directed to place the topic on a future agenda.
4. Discussion of Draft Comment Letter for the Butte Falls, Round Oak Forest Management Project – Joel Benton, County Counsel
   Mr. Benton distributed copies of the draft letter (Submission No. 3). Following brief discussion, the Board agreed to sign the letter.

   Commissioner Dyer made a motion to agree to sign the letter of comment for the Round Oak Forest Management Project, and Commissioner Roberts seconded the motion. Those who voted aye: Commissioner Dyer and Commissioner Roberts. Motion passed.

5. Discussion of Proposal to Rename Negro Ben Mountain in Jackson County by the Oregon Geographic Names Board
   Mr. Jordan reviewed the information provided (Submission No. 4). Following brief discussion, the Board agreed to not provide official comment.

6. Executive Session
   The Executive Session began at 9:36 a.m. under ORS 192.660(2)(d), Labor Negotiations-Press Excluded ORS 192.660(4).

   The Executive Session ended at 10:15 a.m. and there being no further business, the Work Session was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

   JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

   ____________________________
   Bob Strosser, Chair

   /s/ Colleen Roberts
   Colleen Roberts, Commissioner

   /s/ Rick Dyer
   Rick Dyer, Commissioner

   /s/ Loris Fenner
   Loris Fenner, Recorder

   Approved on: 10/30/19
Hi Bruce,

Lauren Brown the Field Office Manager for the Ashland FO has stated they have no objections to this name proposal. Please let me know if you need anything else from the BLM.

Thank you,
-f

- This has been pleasant & professional
Frank P. Lahm III
503.808.6428
Geographer (Team Lead)
957.3 - Land Records Team
Oregon State Office
Bureau of Land Management
August 7, 2020

Oregon Black Pioneers Endorses the Renaming of Negro Ben Mountain to “Ben Johnson Mountain”

Contact: Zachary Stocks
zachary@oregonblackpioneers.org

Oregon Black Pioneers is Oregon’s only historical society dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide. As such, OBP has the responsibility of identifying sites across Oregon with African American historical significance and advocating for their appropriate commemoration and interpretation. The Board and staff of Oregon Black Pioneers support the renaming of Negro Ben Mountain (42°12' 16’N, 123° 05' 36’W) in the Rogue River National Forest to “Ben Johnson Mountain”.

Ben Johnson was a Black man born in Alabama in 1834 who came to Oregon in 1853, settling in a Jackson County community called Uniontown along the Applegate River. On a mountain near town, he built a blacksmith shop where he lived and worked between 1868 and 1869 at the height of the area’s mining boom. By 1870, Johnson had left Jackson County and settled in Albany, Oregon where he married Amanda Gardener, a former slave, and continued to work as a blacksmith. He died in 1901 at age 66.

The 4500’ mountain where Johnson’s cabin stood sits south of the town of Ruch, in Oregon’s Jackson County, near today’s Cantrell Buckley County Park. At some point while Johnson lived there or just after, the mountain became known as “Nigger Ben Mountain”. The name stood as official until 1964 when the US Geological Survey’s Board on Geographic Names changed the mountain’s name to Negro Ben Mountain, the name which the peak retains to this day. While the change to Negro Ben Mountain reflected an important effort to eliminate racial slurs from geographic place names on public lands, the word “Negro” has long since become antiquated and is no longer an accepted term to describe African Americans.

We believe it is in the best interest of the public to rename Negro Ben Mountain “Ben Johnson Mountain”. Public spaces that use racist or antiquated racial terminology do not represent the best of Oregon. It is not appropriate for the state to continue to recognize place names that perpetuate language which we would not use to refer to African Americans today, just as we no longer use many terms that had earlier been commonly used to describe Indigenous, Chinese, Japanese or Jewish Americans but are today considered racial slurs.

Additionally, we believe the memory of Ben Johnson is best preserved by having his full name featured in the official place name, without any sort of racial qualification. For many years, Ben’s last name was unknown. Now that it is known, Oregonians should acknowledge the dignity of his life and the value of his contributions to the Uniontown community by referring to the mountain by his full, actual name, not by a pejorative term ascribed to him by others or with outdated racial terminology.
Our organization would look forward to working with local partners and historical organizations to develop new programming at the site which reveals Ben Johnson’s story to the public and supports greater recreational and educational opportunities on the mountain which bears his name.

***

Oregon Black Pioneers was founded in 1993. Its mission is to research, recognize, and commemorate the culture and heritage of African Americans in the State of Oregon. Its vision is to be the premier resource for information about Oregon’s African American culture and heritage. For more information please contact zachary@oregonblackpioneers.org.
Change Negro Ben Mountain to Ben Johnson Mountain: summit; elevation 4,935 ft.; on Bureau of Land Management land 14 mi. SW of Medford; named for Benjamin Johnson, a blacksmith who lived near the base of the mountain in the late 19th century; Secs 6,5,8&7, T39S, R3W, Willamette Meridian; Jackson County, Oregon; 42°12'16"N, 123°05'36"W; USGS map – Ruch 1:24,000; Not: Negro Ben Mountain, Nigger Ben Mountain.

Proposal: to change a name considered offensive
Map: USGS Ruch 1:24,000
Proponent: Margo Schembre; Wilsonville, OR
Administrative area: Bureau of Land Management land
Previous BGN Action: Negro Ben Mountain (BGN 1964)
Names associated with feature:
GNIS: Negro Ben Mountain (FID 1146832)
Local Usage: None found
Case Summary: This proposal is to change the name of Negro Ben Mountain, located on Bureau of Land Management land in Jackson County, to Ben Johnson Mountain. The proponent states that the summit was named for Ben Johnson, a local blacksmith: “We know his last name, it’s appropriate and respectful, in 2019, to call it Ben Johnson Mountain and not ‘Negro Ben.’”
The summit was first labeled on USGS topographic maps in 1921 with the pejorative form of the name. On the 1956 edition, the name was changed to Negro Ben Mountain but was changed back to the pejorative form on the 1960 edition. In 1964, the BGN established the name Negro Ben Mountain “to conform with the BGN’s policy.”
Until the 2000s, the last name of “Ben” was unknown. Lewis McArthur, in his volume Oregon Geographic Names, wrote “The name was very old and appears to have been derived from a man named Ben who operated a small blacksmith shop near the [Applegate] river and accommodated miners by sharpening picks and other tools. . . Ben’s last name appears to have been lost to posterity.” Rush and the Upper Applegate Valley, published in 1990, reported that “Ben” was a blacksmith in the small town of Uniontown, which no longer exists but which was located at the base of the mountain.
In 2003, Jan Wright, a historian for the Southern Oregon Historical Society, discovered that a man named Benjamin Johnson was listed as “colored” in the 1868 and 1869 assessment rolls for Jackson County, and living in Uniontown. In the 1870 and 1880 censuses of Albany in Lynn County, Johnson and his wife were listed as “mulatto.” The details were published in a 2003 Medford Mail Tribune article and two years later in Southern Oregon History Today. The Applegater, a local community news magazine, has published pictures of Benjamin Johnson’s cabin at the base of the mountain. A road that circles the mountain is named Negro Ben Road.
As part of its research, the OGNB contacted the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, which responded that it had no opinion on the matter.

BLM stated they had no objection to this name proposal. 10-23-19