



(U) Yakima: Fertile Valley in the High Desert

FROM: [REDACTED]
Yakima Research Station
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(U) An assignment at Yakima Research Station (YRS) in the state of Washington is the sixth PCS for this family and our first CONUS PCS**. The best part about it - the kids are now grown and gone! The down side - the grandchildren are on the East Coast! Still, keeping in touch is only a phone call or e-mail away and traveling for a visit is easier than a trip from overseas.

(U) We've only been in Yakima since summer and we love it here. The drive across country was an education in itself. Having spent all my adult years either in Maryland or overseas, it was exciting to see parts of my own country for the first time. I-90 west of the Mississippi travels through country that doesn't appear to have changed much since the days of the Conestoga wagons and it was humbling to imagine the hardships and deprivations that the early settlers endured on their move west.

(U) The day that we arrived in Yakima the mercury hit 104° yet it cooled off nicely when the sun went down. Everyone says that it was an unusually hot summer; still, the average humidity is very low (this is high desert) so the heat wasn't especially bothersome compared to a Maryland summer's day. We are currently experiencing our first winter in Yakima. Though there has been some snow and cold, it is nowhere near the cold and precipitation that Maryland has been having. And with Yakima located in the foothills of the Cascades, the snow-covered mountains are a spectacular sight! Many YRS families have homes with a view of Mt. Adams, Mt. Rainier or both.

(U) Yakima itself has a population of about 70,000 and my husband and I enjoy the small city atmosphere. Traffic is seldom heavy and the locals consider it a traffic jam when they have to wait for a stoplight to cycle twice. Each Sunday in summer and fall, there is a farmer's market on a downtown street - an excellent place to get just-picked local produce. The primary industry in this county is agricultural.

(U) Though the average yearly rainfall is only 7-8 inches, irrigation makes the Yakima Valley very fertile. Most of the Washington state apples and cherries come from the Yakima area and, in recent years, a thriving wine industry has also developed in the valley. Though the shopping opportunities aren't as extensive as in Maryland, we have had no problem finding what we want. For bigger shopping trips or just for a change of scene, YRS'ers travel to the Tri-Cities (Pasco, Richland and Kennewick), just over an hour to the southeast along I-82. Portland, Oregon, is only three hours away and there is no sales tax in Oregon. Seattle, home of the Mariners, the Seahawks and Starbucks, is just over two hours away and many go there for day trips or the weekend.

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(U) One sunny weekend in October, when the leaves were beautiful, my husband and I took a drive to Chinook Pass to see the fall colors and the first snow of the winter. At 5,432 ft., the pass is the highest pass crossing the Cascades. It generally closes in early November and re-opens in late May when the snow melts. Believe it or not, that day we saw very few cars on our drive and only a few people were at the pass itself. Compare that to the traffic on the Blue Ridge Parkway in fall!

(U) There is always something to do in the area. For outdoor enthusiasts, there are endless opportunities for hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing, snowmobiling and boating. If the arts are preferred, Yakima has active local theater groups and its own symphony. Numerous local venues regularly host big-name performances. Yakima is the home of the Central Washington State Fair in late September and the city boasts its own Continental Basketball Association team, the Sun Kings, and a minor league baseball team, the Yakima Bears.

(U) YRS'ers find getting to work in the morning to be nearly stress-free. Traffic on I-82 to the Yakima Training Center, where YRS is located, is usually very light. It also isn't unusual to see coyotes, jackrabbits or even deer and elk along the way. It doesn't surprise me that many YRS'ers say they never want to leave!

(U//FOUO) See the [YRS PCS website](#) for more information .

** Footnotes:

- CONUS= Continental U.S.
- PCS= Permanent Change of Station

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