

Behind the Name:

The Allison Oregon Wine Country's Premier Inn & Spa

We looked for a name big enough to embrace the whole Willamette Valley—one which felt inclusive not only of Oregon wines, but also of Oregon's many other agricultural riches.

The source of much of the Willamette's unique fertility is derived from a series of massive ice age floods that came from Glacial Lake Missoula in Montana and scoured across eastern Washington, sweeping its topsoil down the Columbia River Gorge. When floodwaters met log-and-ice jams at Kalama, in southwest Washington, the water caused a backup that filled the entire Willamette Valley to a depth of 300-400 feet above current sea level (1). Geologists have come to refer to the resulting lake as Lake Allison. Some geologists suggest that the Willamette Valley flooded in this manner multiple times during the last ice age. (1, 2)

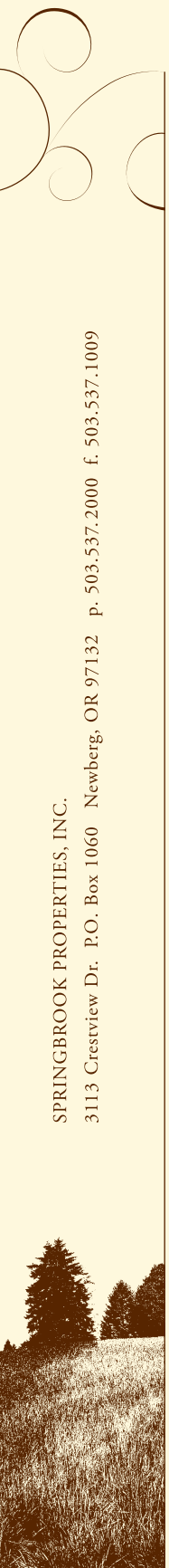
How big was Lake Allison?

If 300-400 foot-deep floodwaters descended on the Valley today, in Portland (elevation 20 ft), only the tops of the West Hills, Mt. Tabor, Rocky Butte, Kelley Butte and Mt. Scott would be visible (2), as would some of the city's skyscrapers, such as the US Bank Building (530 feet) and the First Interstate Tower (540 ft). Newberg's elevation is 175 feet above sea level, Oregon City (138 ft), McMinnville (157 ft), Salem (154ft), Corvallis (235 ft) and Eugene (430 ft). (3)

The lake gradually drained away, leaving layered sedimentary soils on the valley floor to a height of about 180-200 feet above current sea level throughout the Tualatin, Yamhill and Willamette Valleys. (2) The future lobby of The Allison, Oregon Wine Country's Premier Inn & Spa, will sit at 290 feet above sea level. Soils on the property include flood deposit soils as well as volcanic soils typically found above the flood deposit line and favored by some varieties of wine grapes.

How Lake Allison got its name

It was named for Oregon State University geologist Ira S. Allison who first described Willamette Silt soil in 1953 and noted its similarity to soils on the floor of former Lake Lewis in Eastern Washington. Allison also is known for his work in the 1930s documenting the hundreds of non-native boulders (called Erratics) washed down by the floods, rafted on icebergs and deposited on the valley bottom and in a ring around the lower hills surrounding the Willamette Valley. One of the most prominent of these is the Bellevue Erratic, just off Hwy 18 west of McMinnville. (1)



Ira S. Allison

Allison was a geologist at Oregon State University. He moved to Corvallis, Oregon, in 1928 and lived there for 62 years. He died in 1990. (4)

(1) Cataclysms on the Columbia, by John Elliot Allen and Marjorie Burns with Sam C. Sargent, 1986. Pages 175-189

(2) Geology of Oregon, by Elizabeth L. Orr, William N. Orr and Ewart M. Baldwin, 1964. Pages 211-214

(3) Elevations from Wikipedia

(4) Oregon Fossils, Elizabeth L. Orr and William N. Orr, 1999, pages 343-345.

