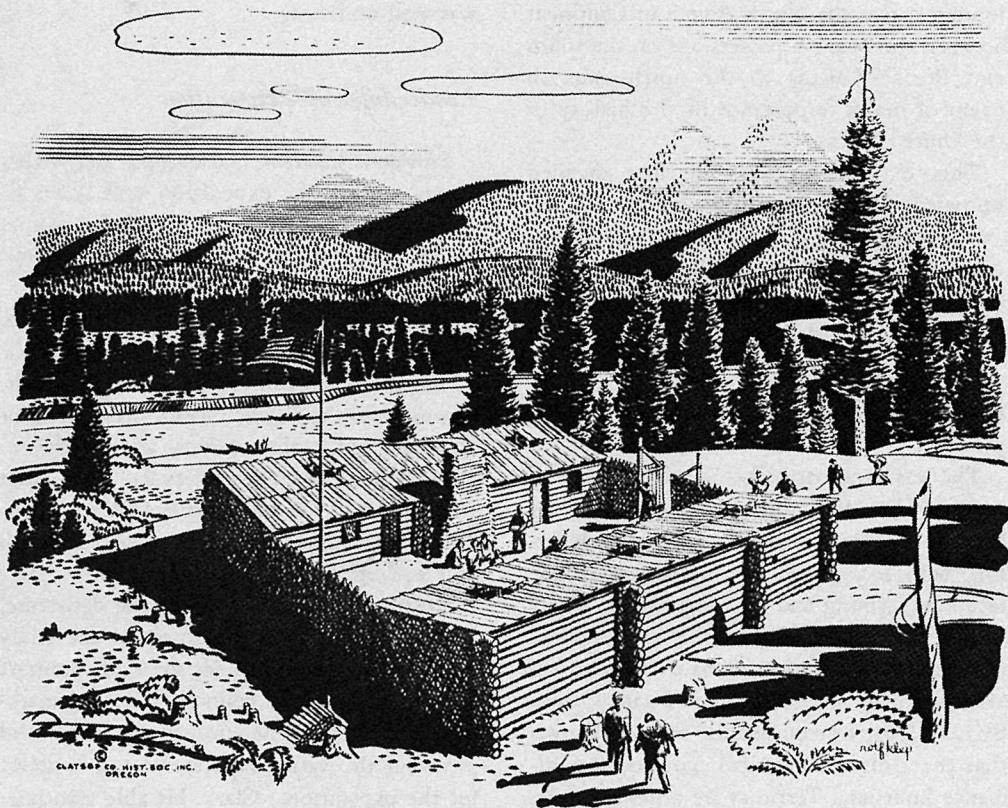


FORT CLATSOP

NATIONAL MEMORIAL



CLATSOP CO. HIST. SOC. INC.
OREGON

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Here Lewis and Clark wintered in 1805–06 following their epoch-making journey from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition—the first journey across the North American Continent between the Spanish possessions on the south and British Canada to the north—was an event of major importance in the history of the United States.

This expedition gave the first detailed knowledge of the American Northwest and awakened the interest which started the procession—first of trappers, then of settlers—that was a factor in making Oregon American rather than British.

Background of the Expedition

The vast and virtually unknown territory west of the Mississippi had for many years been of absorbing interest to Thomas Jefferson, who recognized its importance to the future of a young and growing nation. After his election to the presidency in 1800, he lost no time in formulating plans to send an exploration party overland to the Pacific Ocean. By June 1803, when it became publicly known that the United States had acquired the immense Louisiana Territory by purchase from

France, active preparation for the expedition was well underway.

Leadership and Preparation

President Jefferson chose Capt. Meriwether Lewis to head the expedition, and Lewis selected William Clark, his friend and former commanding officer, to share the responsibilities of leadership.

They were instructed by the President to explore the Missouri River to its source, establish the most direct land route across the continent to the Pacific Ocean, make scientific and geographic observations, and, in the interests of future trade and peace, learn what they could of the Indian tribes they encountered and impress them with the strength and authority of the United States.

During the year preceding the departure, Captain Lewis applied himself to the study of scientific subjects under some of the most learned men in the country. With remarkable efficiency, he determined the needs and procured the varied equipment and supplies for the expedition. Clark, his able associate,

recruited and trained the Regular Army volunteers and hardy young frontiersmen who made up the Corps of Discovery.

Outward Bound

On May 14, 1804, the expedition started from the mouth of the Missouri River near St. Louis in one 55-foot keelboat and two smaller open boats called pirogues. The 1,600-mile ascent of the Missouri to the Mandan villages in what is now North Dakota was a tedious voyage of more than 5 months. Sgt. Charles Floyd, the only member to lose his life during the entire expedition, died of natural causes near present-day Sioux City, Iowa. Warlike Sioux threatened the party, but were overawed by a display of firmness and courage.

Fort Mandan was built and occupied during the long, hard winter of 1804–05. At the nearby Minnetaree village, the services of Charbonneau, a half-breed interpreter, were acquired. His young Shoshone wife, Sacajawea, and their infant son accompanied him, as the leaders wished to use her knowledge

Statue of Sacajawea at Bismarck, N.D.



of the Shoshone Indians and their language to help gain passage through the Rocky Mountains. She displayed unflinching fortitude and staunch courage in sharing all the rigors and hardships of the trail, and her native knowledge and resourcefulness contributed materially to the success of the expedition.

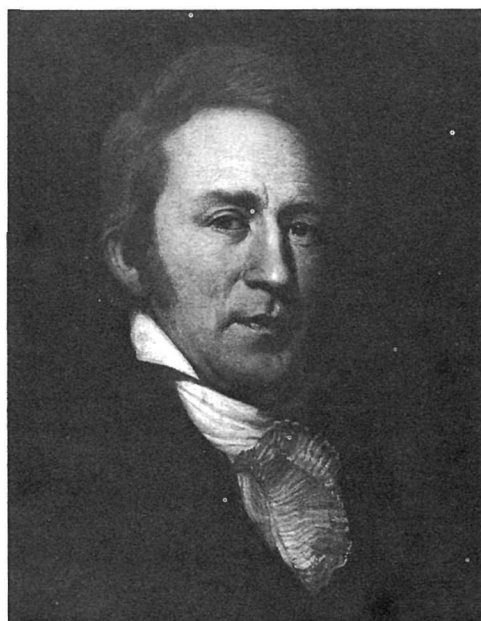
On April 7, 1805, the party of 30 men plus the Charbonneau family of 3 left Fort Mandan in the 2 pirogues and 6 canoes on its venture into the unknown. On the same day, the 10 men not assigned to the final phase of the expedition started back downstream for St. Louis, laden with natural history specimens and dispatches and letters from the leaders and their men.

The continued ascent of the upper Missouri presented many challenges. Not least was the long portage around the Great Falls, accomplished by considerable toil and ingenuity. Correctly choosing the main water route, they continued up the Jefferson-Beaverhead forks in Montana toward the Continental Divide as far as the canoes could go. Before them were formidable mountains whose crossing required horses, for which they successfully traded with Sacajawea's Shoshone people and later with friendly Flatheads.

But even with horses, the explorers had great difficulty traversing the Lolo Trail through the rugged Bitterroot mountains to the Nez Perce country on the Clearwater River in northern Idaho. There canoes were built and the party proceeded down that stream and the Snake River in eastern Washington into the Columbia. On November 14, after some 600 miles of water travel, they had their first full view of the ocean from near present-day McGowan, Wash.

Locating for the Winter

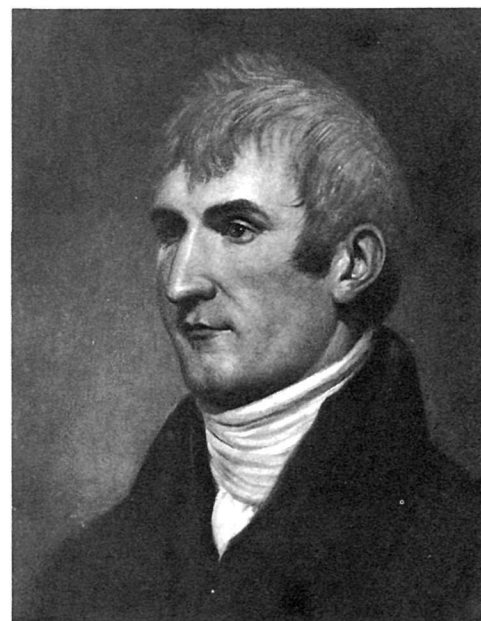
Their camp on the north shore of the estuary was exposed to the ocean gales, and the hunting was poor. Learning from visiting Clatsop Indians that elk were more plen-



Capt. William Clark. Painting by Charles Willson Peale. COURTESY INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK COLLECTION.

tiful on the south side of the Columbia, and aware that a location fairly near the ocean beach would be convenient for making much-needed salt, the company voted to seek a suitable wintering site across the river. Rough water made it necessary to go upstream several miles to navigate the crossing. This accomplished, a temporary camp was established on Tongue Point, just east of present-day Astoria, Oreg. Captain Lewis with a small party scouted ahead and finally resolved on a location 2 miles up a small stream, now called the Lewis and Clark River, flowing into a bay of the Columbia now known as Young's Bay. Clark called it Meriwether's Bay, incorrectly believing Captain Lewis to be the first to survey it. Like so many geographic features of the area, it had been named by Lt. William Broughton of Capt. George Vancouver's command, during his river survey in 1792.

The site for the winter encampment was chosen because of several reasons. Most important, it was near good hunting in the lowlands where elk wintered in large num-



Capt. Meriwether Lewis. Painting by Charles Willson Peale. COURTESY INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK COLLECTION.

bers. It was 30 feet above high water mark, timber suitable for construction was at hand, and fresh-water springs were close by. The forest cover and hills provided shelter from the prevailing southerly winter gales which lashed the open estuary of the Columbia, and it was close enough to the harbor for them to become aware of any visiting ships. The seashore was less than 4 miles to the west. The main village of the friendly Clatsop Indians was about 8 miles distant, close enough for trading, far enough to keep their friendly neighbors from calling too frequently. The location admirably served their needs of winter residency.

On December 8, construction of their winter quarters was begun, and the party was under shelter on Christmas Day, 1805. Here, in a lonely outpost in a vast wilderness, they celebrated with volleys of firearms, singing, and exchanging simple gifts. Their yuletide feast consisted of lean elk, spoiled dried fish, and roots. Five days later the structure was completed and named Fort Clatsop, after the local Indian tribe.

The Indians

The Clatsops, Chinooks, Cathlamets, and Tillamooks were the most frequent visitors at Fort Clatsop. They lived in the surrounding area, looked and dressed very much alike, and spoke a similar language. Head flattening was a common practice. The captains described them as talkative, inquisitive, intelligent, and possessing excellent memories.

These Indians had been in contact with white fur traders who came to the coast in ocean-going ships for a dozen years before Lewis and Clark arrived overland. They could describe the ships which brought the traders to the mouth of the Columbia and remember the names of their masters. Some had acquired a few words of English, but communication with them was chiefly by the sign language.

Although they possessed a few old muskets, they still relied mainly on the bow and arrow for hunting. Lewis and Clark expressed great admiration for the natives' canoes and their skill in handling them. Glass beads represented money to the natives; they prized blue beads above all others. The Indians came to Fort Clatsop to visit and trade, bringing fish, roots, furs, and handcrafted articles. There were practically no hostile incidents. Clark described them as very close bargainers. Although fond of smoking, they apparently had no desire for spirituous liquor. Generally speaking, these "Canoe Indians" were of small stature and not handsome by white man's standards.

Life at Fort Clatsop

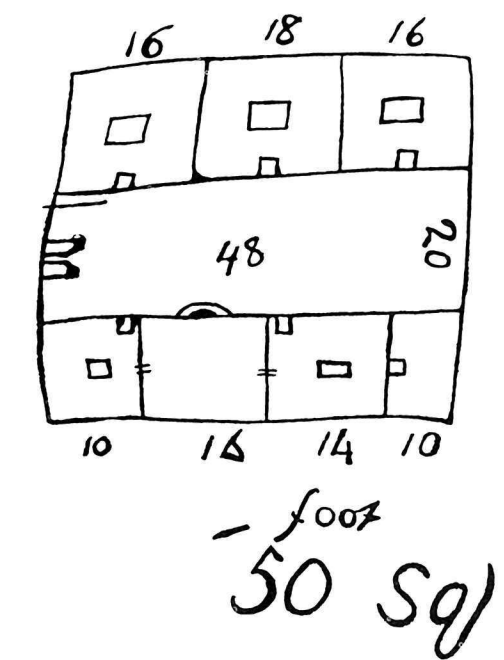
Strict military routine was observed. A sentinel was constantly posted, and at sundown the fort was cleared of visitors and the gates shut for the night. The men were plagued by almost constant rain, with resultant colds, influenza, and other ailments, for which the captains diligently adminis-

tered available remedies. Fleas were a major nuisance, fresh relays of the tormenting insects being acquired on each visit from their Indian neighbors. There never was much food in reserve, and hunting for meat was all-important. George Drouillard earned high praise from his commanders for his skill as a hunter. Some 130 elk, 20 deer, and many small animals and fowl were killed during the winter. Cutting firewood in the dripping rain forest was a continuous task.

A trail to the seacoast was established for the use of hunters and salt-makers. Three men were detailed to set up a camp on the ocean beach 14 miles to the southwest, at present-day Seaside, where more than three bushels of salt were laboriously boiled out of seawater in five metal kettles.

When stormbound or not engaged in outside tasks, the men serviced their weapons and equipment. Elkhide clothing and moccasins were prepared for the homeward journey. The captains and the others who kept an account of the trip brought their

Clark's ground plan of Fort Clatsop. From Thwaites, *Original Journals*.



The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

ABOVE: The 15-star, 15-stripe flag carried by the expedition was the second official flag of the United States.

journals up to date. Both Lewis and Clark made copious notes on the trees, plants, fish, and wildlife of the vicinity of Fort Clatsop and drew excellent sketches. Many such descriptions were the first identification of important flora and fauna of the Pacific Northwest. Clark, the cartographer of the party, spent most of his time drawing maps of the country through which they had come. Some, surprisingly accurate, were based only on information supplied by Indians.

A welcome addition to their diet appeared in late February when the eulachon, or smelt, started running up the Columbia. These delicious little fish were heartily welcomed by the hungry men, who, although they preferred meat, were getting tired of lean elk. For vegetables, the men at Fort Clatsop had to be content with various roots including the wapato, which was very much like a small potato. These root-foods were gathered by the Indians in the marshy lands up the Columbia and brought to the fort for trade.

Trip to the Whale

News of a whale stranded on the ocean beach 25 miles southwest excited the interest of the garrison—the blubber and oil were edible and presumably none of them had ever seen a whale. Captain Clark selected a small party to make the trip. Sacajawea begged to go, pointing out that she had come a long way to see the great waters but had not yet been to the ocean; now that a monster of the sea was also to be seen, she thought it would be very hard if she were denied. She was therefore permitted to accompany them.

On the third day they arrived at the sandy beach, now known as Cannon Beach, where lay only the remains of the whale. They found that the industrious Tillamook Indians had reduced it to a virtual skeleton and were busily engaged rendering oil by boiling the

blubber. The whale was a palatable windfall from the sea and an economic event of great importance in the life of the natives who made use of it in various ways in trading for items desired or needed from neighboring tribes. Clark was able to procure 300 pounds of the meat and some oil.

En route they had visited the salt-makers camp at present-day Seaside and marveled at the scenery as they made the tortuous climbs over Tillamook Head and other points projecting into the ocean.

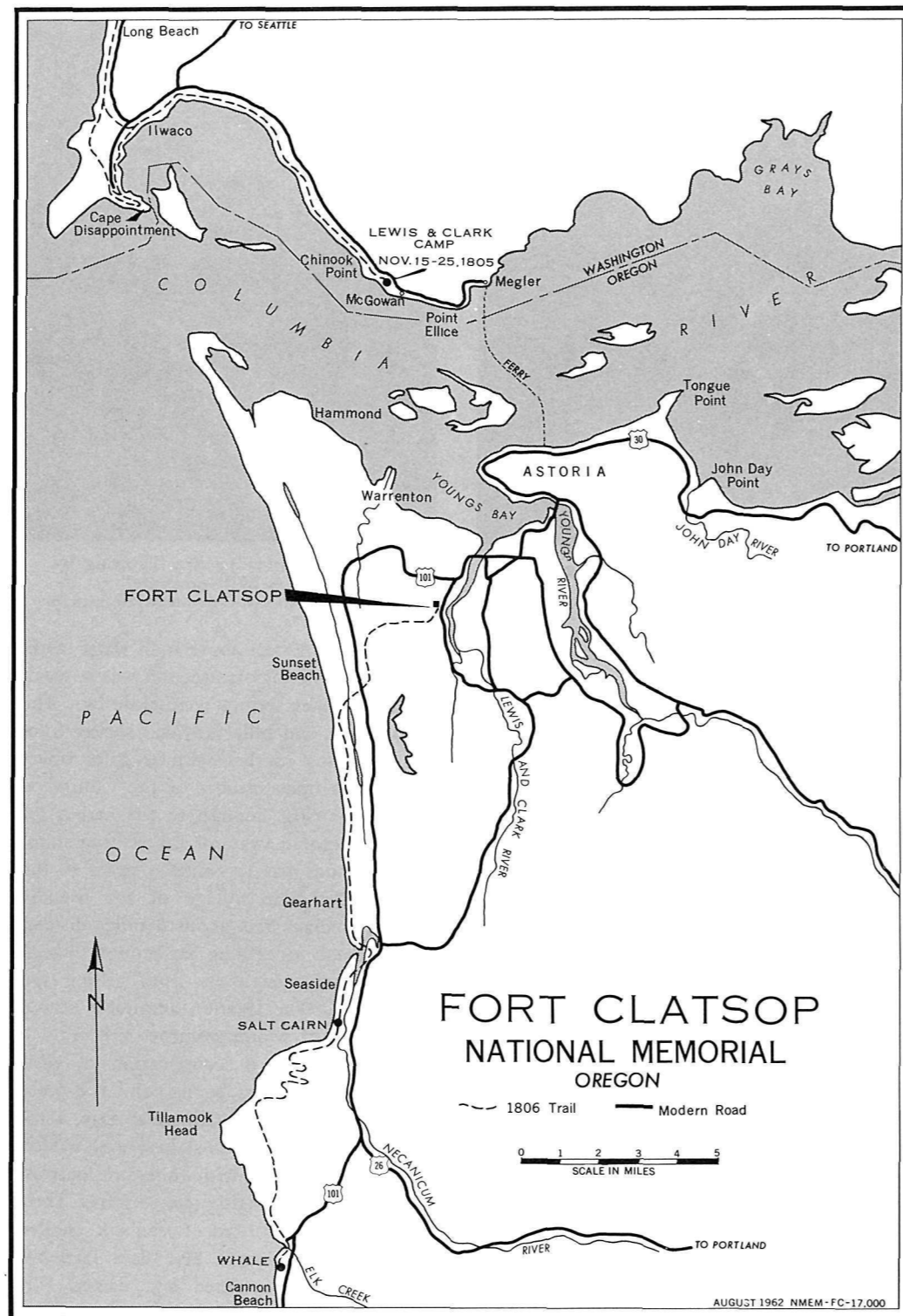
The party camped for the night at Cannon Beach, the southernmost coastal point reached by the expedition during its western journey. The next day, they began retracing the route to Fort Clatsop, which they reached after an overnight stop at the salt camp. The trip was an interesting diversion from the monotonous routine at the fort and was accomplished during fine weather.

Departure

As spring approached, the elk took to the hills, and it became increasingly difficult for the hunters to keep the camp supplied with meat. The men were restless and anxious to begin the return trip. Fort Clatsop, with its furnishings, was presented to Comowool, the Clatsop chief, as a mark of appreciation for his cooperation and friendliness. On March 23, 1806, the expedition embarked in canoes for the trip up the Columbia River—destination, the United States and home.

Fort Clatsop Today

Nothing of the original fort has survived. Through the cooperative efforts of many citizens and organizations of Clatsop County, a replica was built in 1955 on the occasion of the Lewis and Clark Sesquicentennial celebration. It faithfully follows the floor plan dimensions as drawn by Captain Clark on the elkhide cover of his field book.



Since no contemporary drawing of the building is known to exist, the general appearance is largely conjectural, but based on knowledge of similar structures of that period.

The Memorial

The site of Fort Clatsop was preserved by the Oregon Historical Society and later donated to the people of the United States. The 125-acre Fort Clatsop National Memorial was authorized by Congress in 1958 to commemorate the winter encampment of the Lewis and Clark Expedition following its successful crossing of the North American continent. The memorial, located 4½ miles southwest of Astoria, Ore. is open all year. U.S. 101 passes just north of the area. Overnight accommodations and meals are available at Astoria, Warrenton, Seaside, and Gearhart, Ore.

A museum interpreting the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and the modern replica of the fort are features of the memorial. Trails corresponding to those used by the explorers may be followed to the canoe landing, the camp spring, and toward the seacoast.

Related Points of Interest

Short trips of 25 miles or less, south and north of Fort Clatsop, will orient you to points visited and described in the Lewis and Clark journals. These include the salt cairn at Seaside, the trail over Tillamook Head to Cannon Beach, and, in the State of Wash-

ington, the camp and trail sites at McGowan, Cape Disappointment, and Long Beach.

Administration

FORT CLATSOP NATIONAL MEMORIAL is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 83, Astoria, Ore., is in immediate charge.

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and Territorial affairs.

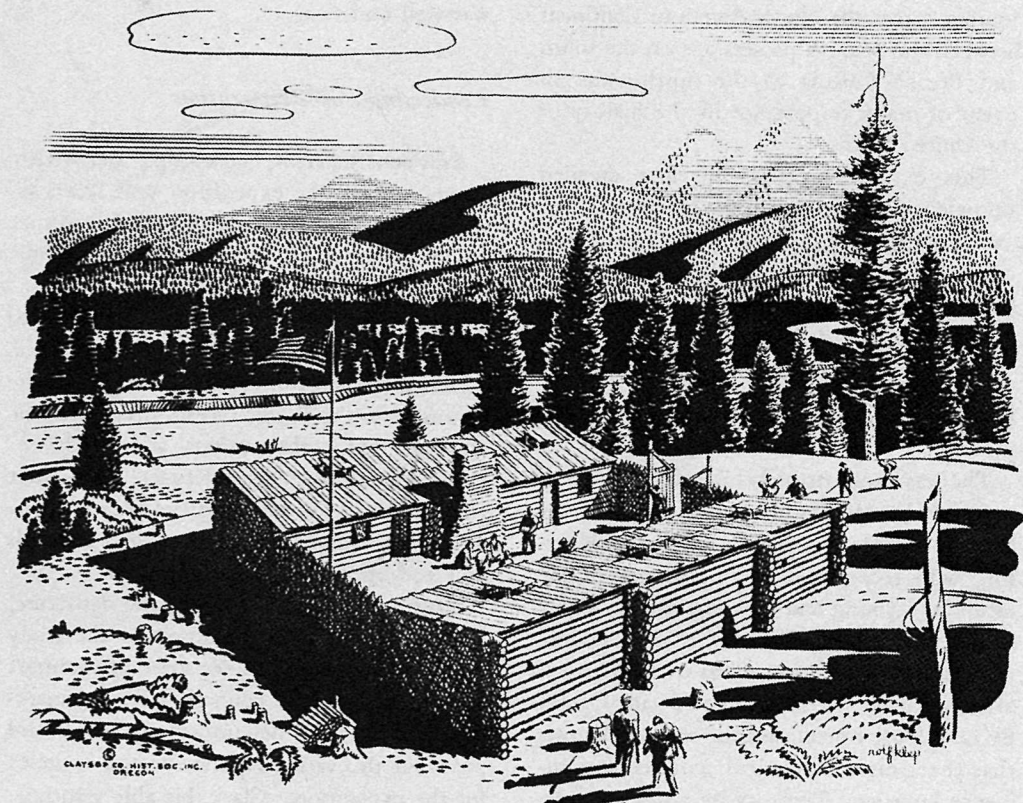
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

Mission 66

MISSION 66, a program designed to be completed by 1966, will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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OREGON



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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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