

Fort Clatsop

NATIONAL MEMORIAL, OREGON



Here in 1805-6 Lewis and Clark wintered after their epoch-making journey from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. Their expedition—the first journey across the North American Continent between the Spanish possessions on the south and British Canada to the north—was of major importance to the United States. It gave the young Nation its first detailed knowledge of the American Northwest and awakened an interest which lured a procession of trappers and settlers into the region and helped make Oregon American territory rather than British.

President Thomas Jefferson chose Capt. Meriwether Lewis to head the expedition, and Lewis selected William Clark, his friend and former commanding officer, as co-leader.

Their instructions were to explore the Missouri River to its source, establish the most direct land route to the Pacific, make scientific and geographic observations, and, in the interests of 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.

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 (pirogues). The 1,600-mile ascent of the Missouri to the Mandan villages in what is now North Dakota required a tedious voyage of more than 5 months.

Fort Mandan was built and occupied during the long, hard winter of 1804-5. At a nearby Minnetarre village, Charbonneau, a half-breed interpreter, joined the expedition. His young Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, and their infant son accompanied him, because the leaders wished to use her knowledge of the Shoshones and their language to help on the passage through the Rocky Mountains.

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 and breasted the Missouri and its upper branches into an unknown world. Finally, near the Missouri's source, the party cached their canoes. Horses and a guide—"Old Toby"—were obtained from Sacagawea's people. Overcoming many hardships, they continued over the backbone of the continent to the Clearwater River in Idaho. Canoes were built, and after some 600 miles of water travel down the Snake and Columbia, the ocean was sighted from near present McGowan, Wash., on November 15, 1805.

Within 10 days the two captains decided to leave their storm-bound camp and cross to the south shore, where elk were reported to be plentiful. Lewis, with a small party, scouted ahead and found a suitable site for winter quarters, evidence of enough game for the winter, and a

salt supply. On December 8 construction of winter quarters began, and by Christmas Eve the party was under shelter. The fort was named for the friendly local Indian tribe, the Clatsops.

Strict military routine was observed at the fort. A sentinel was posted at all times, and at sundown the fort was cleared of visitors and the gates shut for the night. An almost constant rain plagued the men, causing influenza and other ailments, which the captains treated with the best available remedies.

The Indians came to Fort Clatsop to visit and trade, bringing fish, roots, furs, and hand-crafted articles. There were practically no hostile incidents. Clark described them as close bargainers. Hunting for meat was all-important. George Drouillard earned high praise from his commanders for his skill at this. 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 never-ending 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. Elkhide clothing and moccasins were prepared for the homeward journey. The captains and the others who kept an account of the trip brought their journals up to date. Both Lewis and Clark made copious notes of the trees, plants, fish, and wildlife in 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.

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, bound for home.



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FORT CLATSOP TODAY

Nothing of the original fort has survived. Through the 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 fieldbook.

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.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The memorial is 4½ miles southwest of Astoria. U.S. 101 passes just north of the area. Overnight accommodations and meals are available in nearby towns.

Exhibits and a modern reconstruction 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

Within 25 miles or less, south and north of Fort Clatsop, are several sites 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 Washington, 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.

The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great historical, natural, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people.

A superintendent, whose address is route 3, Box 604-FC, Astoria, Oreg. 97103, is in immediate charge of the memorial.

