

fort clatsop

In 1805-6 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark wintered at Fort Clatsop after their trail-blazing 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—provided the 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 U.S. territory.

President Thomas Jefferson chose Captain Lewis to head the expedition, and he selected 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, and make scientific and geographic observations. In the interest of trade and peace, they also were to 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 of 30 men started from the mouth of the Missouri River near St. Louis in one 17-meter (55-foot) keelboat and two smaller boats called pirogues. They spent the first winter at Fort Mandan which they built among

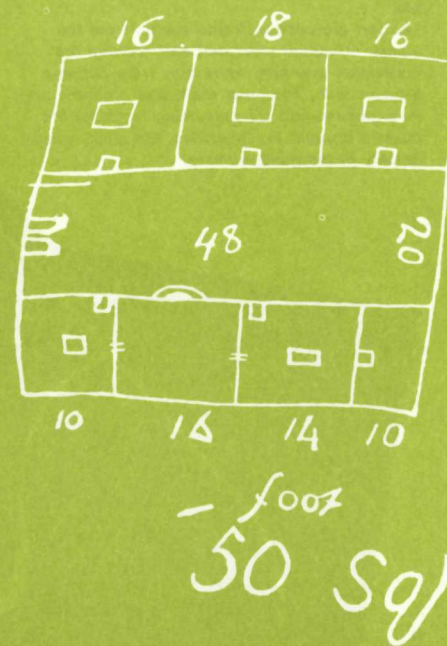


the Mandan villages 2,600 kilometers (1,600 miles) up the Missouri. The tedious trip took five months. From the nearby village of Minnetarre, Charbonneau, a half-breed interpreter, joined the expedition with his young Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, and their infant son. Lewis and Clark knew that her knowledge of the Shoshones and their language would help in the passage through the Rocky Mountains.

On April 7, 1805, the party plus the Charbonneau family left Fort Mandan in 2 pirogues and 6 canoes and followed the Missouri and its upper branches into an unknown world. Near the Missouri's source, the party cached the canoes. Sacagawea's people provided horses and a guide, "Old Toby," for the grueling trip over the Continental Divide. Once on the Clearwater River of Idaho, they built more canoes, and after some 970 kilometers (600 miles) of water travel down the Snake and Columbia, they sighted the ocean on November 15, 1805, near present-day McGowan, Wash.

Within 10 days the two captains decided to leave their storm-bound camp on the north shore and cross the river 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 they began to build the fort and by Christmas Eve the party was under shelter. They named the fort for the friendly local Indian tribe, the Clatsops.

The winter at Fort Clatsop was spent preparing for the trip back. Hunters and salt-makers broke a trail to the seacoast. There, 23 kilometers (14



Captain William Clark drew this plan of Fort Clatsop on the elk skin cover of his field book. The numbers indicate the dimensions.

miles) to the southwest, at present-day Seaside, three men set up camp on the ocean beach and laboriously boiled more than three bushels of salt out of the seawater in five metal kettles. George Drouillard earned high praise from his commanders for his hunting skill, for a good meat supply was necessary for survival; the party consumed about 130 elk, 20 deer, and many small animals and fowl during the winter. Some men made elk-hide clothing and moccasins for the homeward journey. Cutting firewood in the dripping rain forest was another never-ending task. And the rain

plagued the men by causing influenza and other ailments, which the captains treated with the best available remedies.

Indians, whom Clark described as close bargainers, came to Fort Clatsop to visit and trade, bringing fish, roots, furs, and handcrafted articles. There were few hostile incidents, for a strict military routine was observed at the fort. At all times a sentinel was posted and at sundown the fort was cleared of visitors and the gates shut for the night.

The captains and some others spent time bringing their journals on the trip up to date. Both Lewis and Clark made copious notes on the trees, plants, fish, and wildlife in the vicinity of Fort Clatsop and drew sketches. Many of their 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 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. When preparations were completed, 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.



Administration

Fort Clatsop National Memorial, 10 kilometers (6 miles) southwest of Astoria, Ore., and just south of Business U.S. 101, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent is directly in charge of the park. His address is Route 3, Box 604-FC, Astoria, OR 97103.

Visiting The Park

We suggest that you first tour the exhibit room and see the audio-visual program at the visitor center.

Then, stop at the replica of Fort Clatsop, which was built through the efforts of many citizens and organizations in Clatsop County in 1955 on the occasion of the Lewis and Clark Sesquicentennial celebration. In constructing the replica, the floor plan dimensions drawn by Clark on the elkhide cover of his fieldbook were faithfully followed. In 1958 the Oregon Historical Society donated the site of the fort to the Federal Government, and it became part of the National Park System.

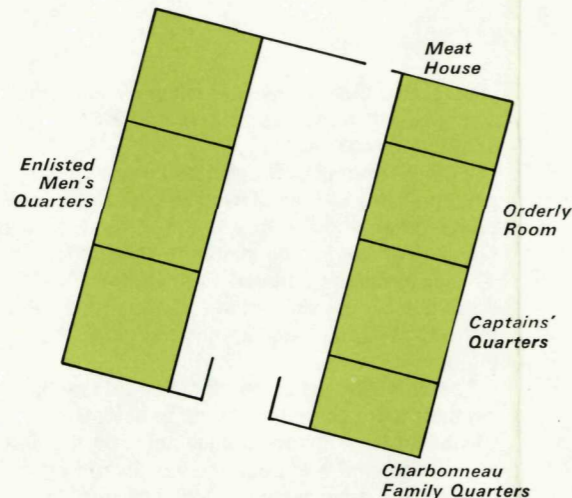
Besides touring the fort, you can walk trails corresponding to those used by the explorers to the expedition's canoe landing and to the camp spring.

A picnic area is just west of the parking areas. Overnight accommodations and meals are available in nearby towns, and camping facilities are at Fort Stevens State Park 8 kilometers (5 miles) away.

From the middle of June through Labor Day, a living history program is presented by buckskin-clad rangers to the visitors. The firing of flintlock rifles and other activities that illustrate the life-style at Fort Clatsop during the winter of 1805-6 are demonstrated.

Related Points of Interest

Within 40 kilometers (25 miles) 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.



As if it were impossible to have 24 hours of pleasant weather, the sky last evening clouded and the rain began and continued through the day. In the morning there came down two canoes, one from the Wahkiacum village; the other contained three men and a squaw of the Skilloot nation. They brought wappatoo and shanataque roots, dried fish, mats made of flags and rushes, dressed elkskins, and tobacco; for which, particularly the skins, they asked a very extravagant price. We purchased some wappatoo and a little tobacco, very much like that we had seen among the Shoshones, put up in small neat bags made of rushes. These we obtained in exchange for a few articles, among which fish-hooks were the most esteemed. One of the Skilloots brought a gun which wanted some repair, and having put it in order, we received from him a present of about a peck of wappatoo; we then gave him a piece of sheep-skin and blue cloth, to cover the lock, and he very thankfully offered a further present of roots.

—from the **Journals** of Lewis and Clark written at Fort Clatsop December 31, 1805.

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The fort provided welcome shelter from the almost continual rains that had plagued the expedition members while they were building the stockade. The meat room was probably used as a smokehouse for preserving the meat the hunters brought in. Otherwise, the meat rotted quickly in the damp climate.



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Spring. The Lewis and Clark Expedition members found numerous springs in the vicinity of their newly constructed fort. The spring adjacent to the fort probably was the party's main water supply.

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Canoe Landing. Traveling up the Netul (now Lewis and Clark) River, the expedition came ashore here on December 7, 1805, to establish winter quarters. When the party's five canoes were not in use for hunting or exploring, they were kept in the little slough to the south of the canoe landing. It was a duty of the sergeant of the guard to visit the canoes at least once every 24 hours to see that they were safely secured.



An artist's conception of how Fort Clatsop looked originally.

For Your Safety

Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. Please be cautious when visiting the canoe landing, for the banks of the river and slough are often slippery and unstable. Please keep children away from the water and exercise common sense and caution at all times.

We're Joining The Metric World

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to improve interpretation for park visitors from other nations.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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