

The Salt Works

Seaside, Oregon

ARRIVAL

On December 8, 1805 Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark established their winter quarters at Fort Clatsop. Here the Corps of Discovery lived in preparation for their long journey home.

"We having fixed on this situation as the one best calculated for our winter quarters," Clark wrote, "I determined to go as direct a course as I could to the seacoast...." His main purpose was to locate a route for a salt-making party.

Though Clark was indifferent to salt, the rest of the expedition wanted it as seasoning. As their diet ranged from elk to fish and dog, salt improved the taste of their food and thus their morale.



THE SALT CAMP

On December 28 the captains sent five men to establish a salt camp. Five days later, they found a suitable place on the seacoast fifteen miles southwest of Fort Clatsop. The seawater had a high salt content here, and game and wood were abundant.

Near some houses of the friendly Clatsop and Tillamook Indians, "they commenced the making of salt and found that they could make from three quarts to a gallon a day." Captain Clark pronounced it "excellent, white and fine."

Three men were constantly at work. Using five brass kettles, the saltmakers boiled approximately 1,400 gallons of seawater over the next several weeks. Three-and-one-half bushels of salt were produced for the return trip.

On February 20, 1806 the seacoast camp was abandoned. Little remained beyond the stack of fire-blackened rocks which were once the furnace.

REMEMBRANCE

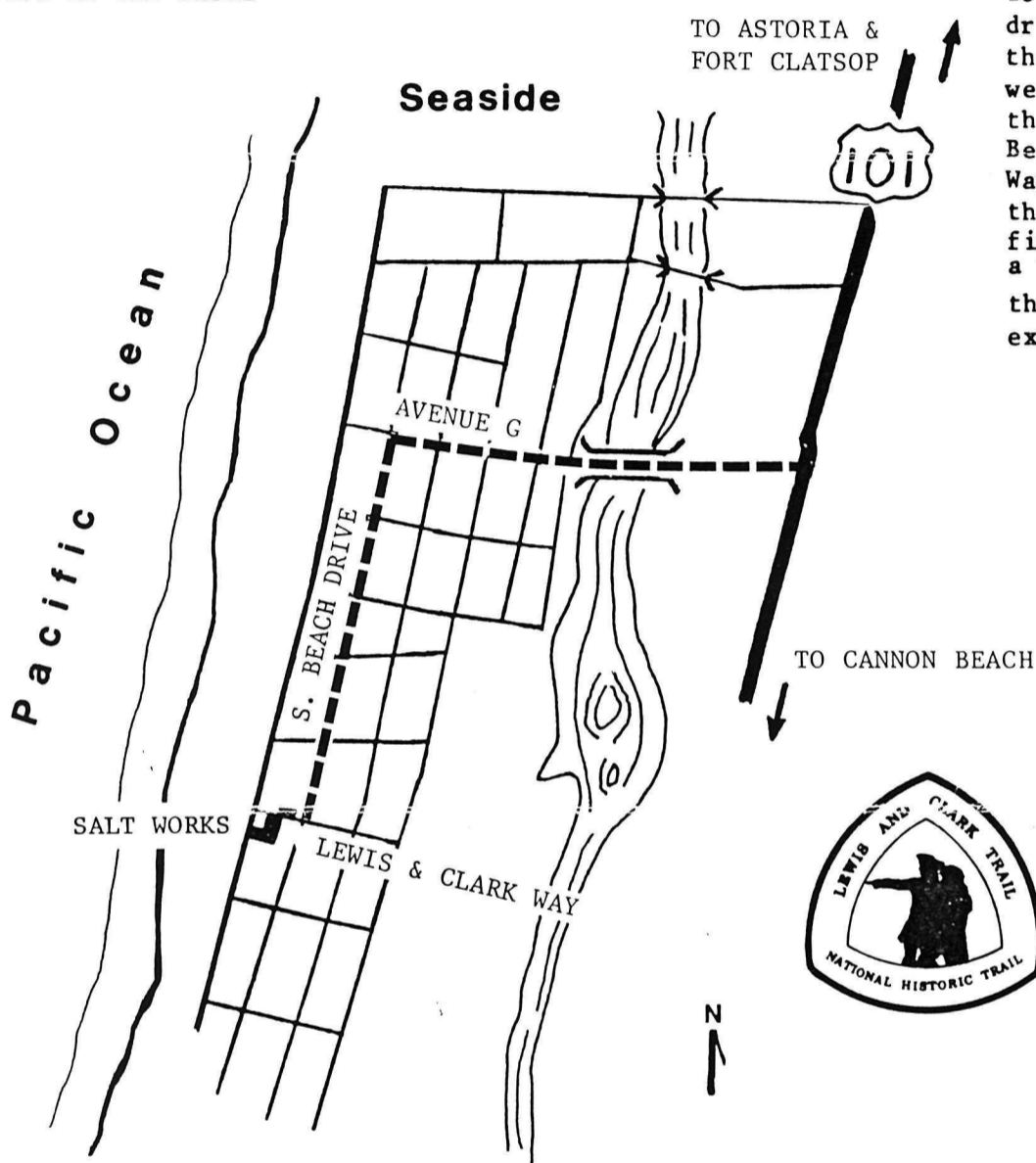


In 1900 the long-forgotten site was reestablished by the Oregon Historical Society as a memorial to the Corps of Discovery. It was based on the rockpile and the testimony of Jenny Michel, a Clatsop Indian born in 1816. Prior to her death in 1905, she recalled her mother's memory of white men boiling water on that spot.

In 1979 the site was donated by the Oregon Historical Society as an addition to Fort Clatsop National Memorial, which maintains it through a contract with the Seaside Lion's Club.

What remains today are the only touchstones to the time of Captain Clark's saltmakers. And as for their hospitable Native American neighbors, they too vanished after the death of Jenny Michel--one of the last full-blooded Clatsops--whose own story is tied to theirs.

HOW TO GET THERE



To reach the salt works, drive on U.S. Highway 101 to the town of Seaside. Turn west on Avenue G and follow the green signs to South Beach Drive and Lewis & Clark Way. There you can imagine that winter day in 1805, when five men arrived to replenish a vital supply of salt for the Lewis and Clark expedition.



ADMINISTRATION



The salt works is administered by the superintendent of Fort Clatsop National Memorial, whose address is Route 3, Box 604-FC, Astoria, OR 97103. In visiting the salt works please drive carefully, and respect the property rights of the residents living there today.