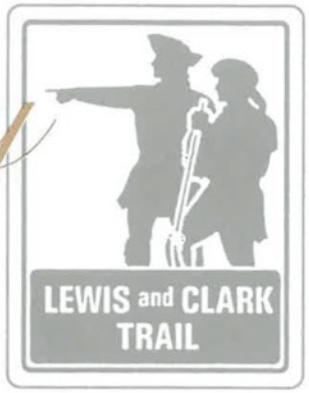
A Lasting Legacy

The Lewis and Clark Place Names of the Pacific Northwest—Part II



BY ALLEN "DOC" WESSELIUS

This is the second in a four-part series discussing the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the explorers' efforts to identify, for posterity, elements of the Northwest landscape that they encountered on their journey.

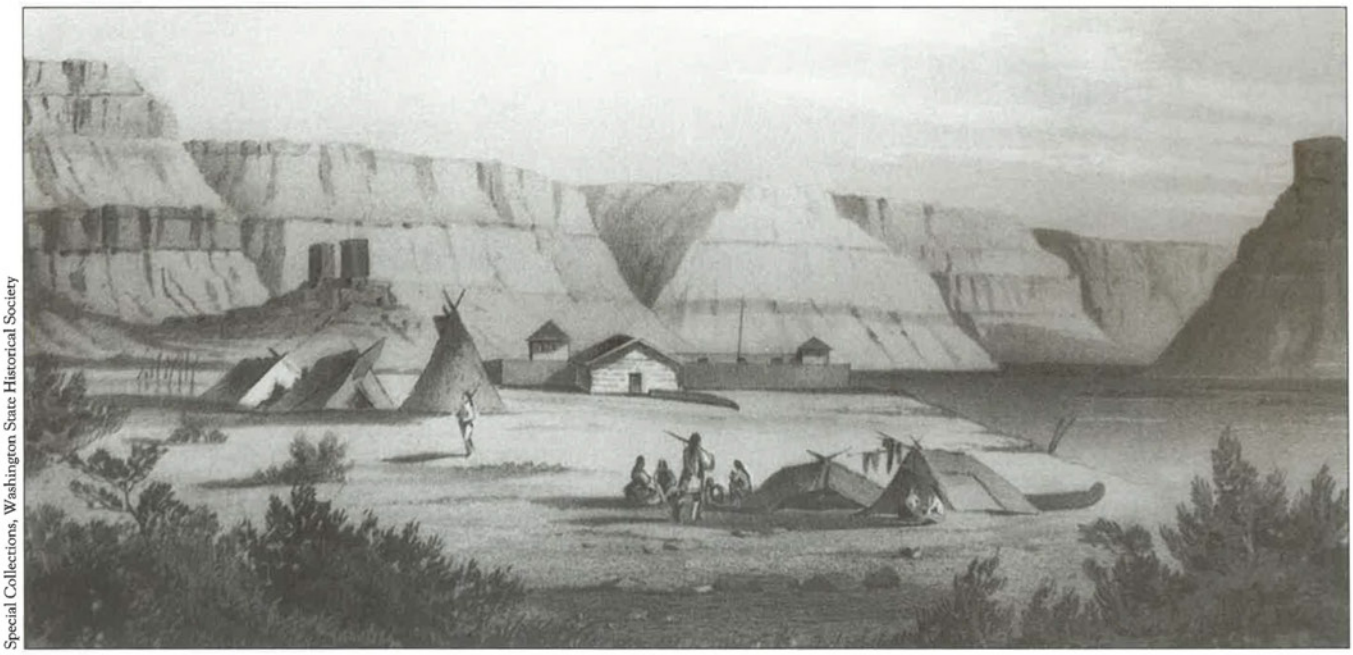
COLUMBIA RIVER

"The Great River of the West" was on the maps that Lewis and Clark brought with them but the cartographic lore of its upper reach influenced William Clark when he identified the supposed upper fork as "Tarcouche Tesse." British explorer Alexander Mackenzie had called the northern reach of the river "Tacoutche Tesse" in his 1793 journals and map. When the explorers realized they had reached the Columbia River on October 16, 1805, they also discerned that they would not discover the source of the drainage, important as that was for establishing the future sovereignty of the region. After Lewis & Clark determined that there was no short portage route between the Missouri and Columbia rivers, the myth of a Northwest Passage evaporated. The priority for the expedition now was to achieve the primary goal of its mission by reaching the mouth of the Columbia River.

American rights of discovery to the Columbia were based on Robert Gray's crossing of the bar in 1792 at the river's discharge into the Pacific. He explored the waterway's western bay and named it "Columbia's River" after his ship, *Columbia Rediviva*. Gray's territorial claim to the watershed was later disputed by England after George Vancouver's exploration, but the American's name for the river was retained, though modified to "Columbia River."

The captains tried to record an Indian name for the Columbia River but were confused by varying translations and the profusion of names that were spoken in different Indian dialects by

Returning upriver in 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition realized the importance of a key regional confluence, that of the Walla Walla and Columbia rivers. British and American fur traders took advantage of this gathering place for Native Americans and built forts here.



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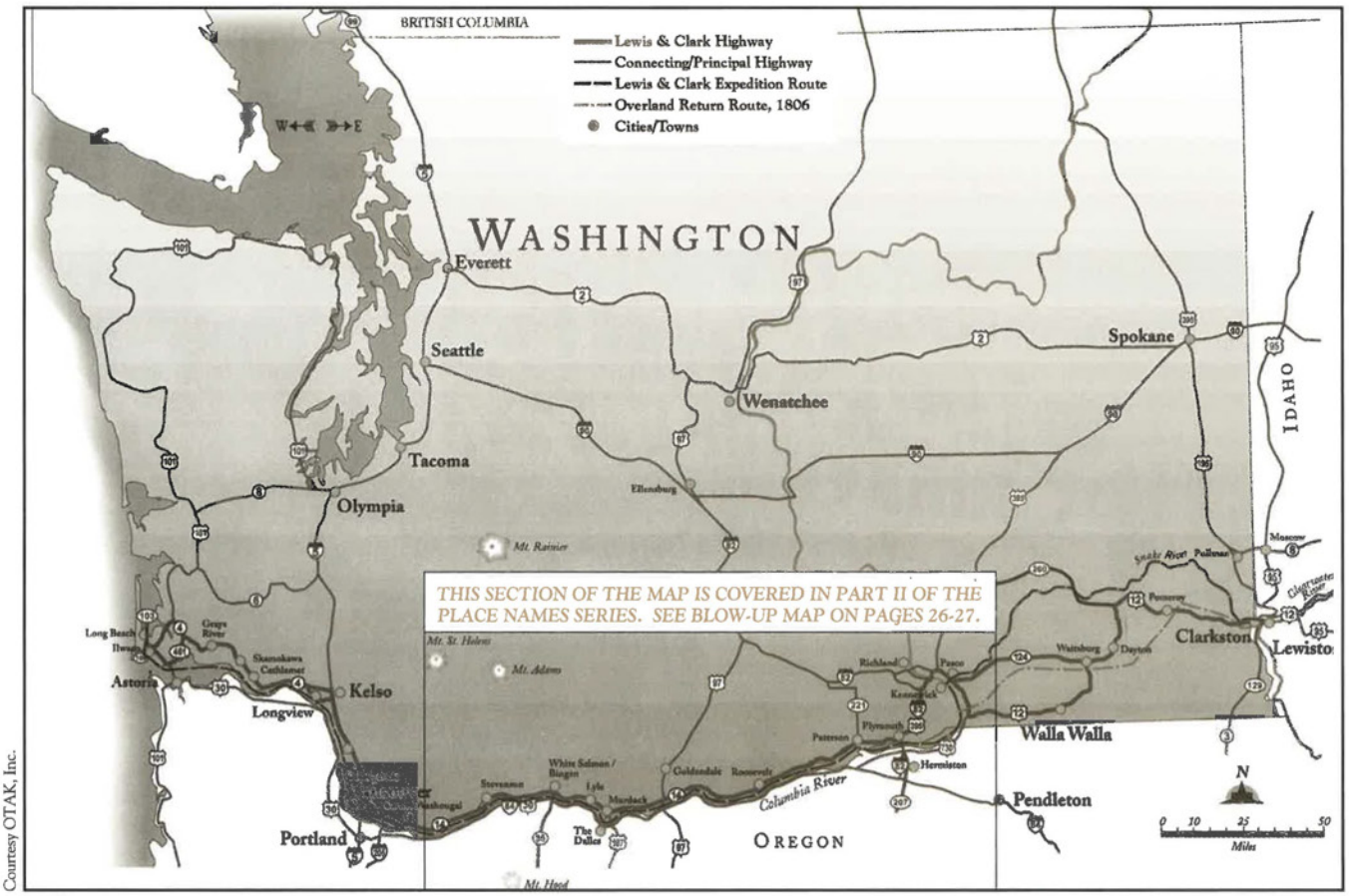


Courtesy OTAK, Inc.

tribes living along the watercourse. Most names given today as Native American names for the river can be translated as "the River."

Yakima River

The "Tap teel," also spelled "Tapetett," river was observed by Clark when he explored eight miles upriver from the "Forks of Columbia at its confluence with the Snake." Clark anglicized a Yakama word for one of the tribe's villages on the river—"Taptat." "Tapteal," meaning "narrow" in the Yakama language, is given as the origin for that particular name, one of many Indian names for the river.

British fur traders from Canada recorded the tribal name, "E-Yakama," given by Salish-speaking Spokane Indians for their Sahaptian-speaking neighbors. Divergent meanings for the Indian term, "E-Yak-kah-ma" or "Yah-ah-kama," persist in the literature today. "Black bear," translated from "yah-kah," and the plural ending "ma" is one explanation. Another origin for the native word is "runaway," after a chief's daughter who either ran away or was deported to another village. "Tap-teil," "Nocktosh," "Yahinse," "Eyakama," "Eyakemka," "Yakama," and "Skaemena" have been used in the past to identify the watercourse. The river's name today commemorates the Yakama Nation of central Washington.

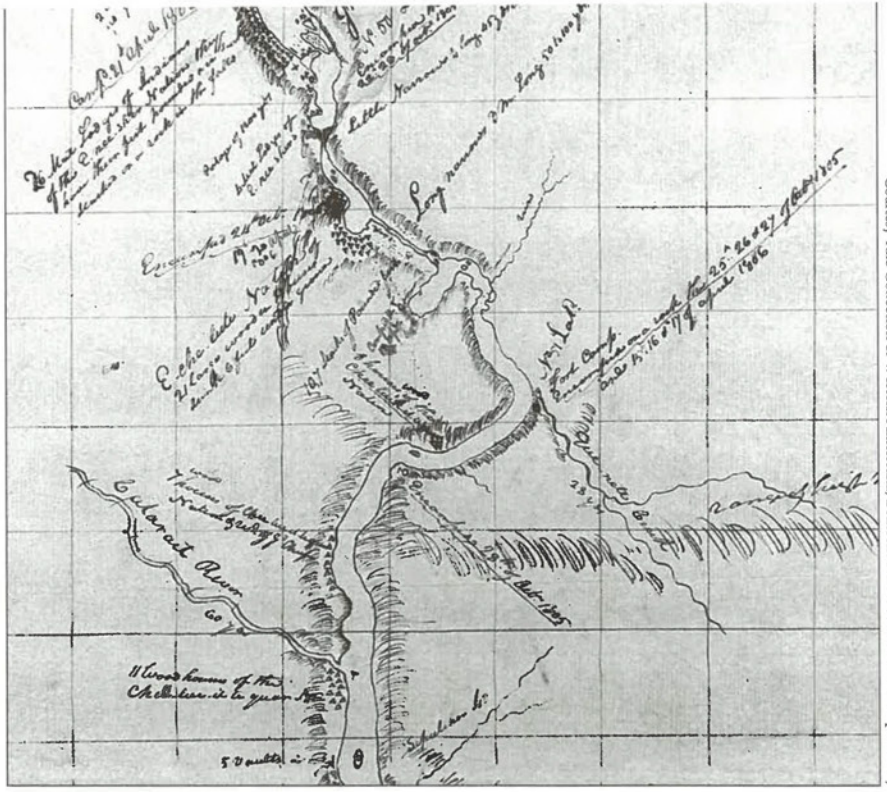
Walla Walla River

Lewis and Clark observed this river on their westbound journey but did not name the "Wollah Wollah River," with various spellings, until their return trip in 1806. Waterborne in the fall of 1805, the explorers were not impressed with the river's small drainage; but when they camped on its bank in the spring, the snowmelt was considerable. They named the river after the local inhabitants, who were friendly and hospitable to the expedition. In the Sahaptian language, "walla" means "running water" and duplication of a word is the diminutive form; so Walla Walla is a distortion of the Indian meaning, "small rapid river."

The mouth of the river was a key crossroad for the Indians; converging here were numerous trails that served the region. In 1818 Donald McKenzie, a prominent fur trader, took advantage of this gathering place and built a fort for the North West Company. The stockade was called Fort Nez Perces, Fort Numipu, after the Nez Perce name for themselves, meaning "The People." The Hudson's Bay Company later absorbed its competitor and rebuilt the fort, which had burned down in 1841. The new trading post, built of adobe and renamed Fort Walla Walla, was occupied by the British until 1855. The townsite of Wallula, platted in 1862, became an important steamboat landing for disembarkation to the Idaho and Montana goldfields. The place name for the river is now Walla Walla. More than 20 different forms of the acceptable place name have been used in print.

Mount Hood

First sighted by Clark on October 18, 1805, the towering peak was not identi-



Courtesy Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

RIGHT: This map from the Lewis and Clark journals shows the section of the Columbia from above The Dalles to its confluence with the Klickitat River. Between the "Great Falls of the Columbia" and "The Grand Rapids of the Columbia," the Corps of Discovery camped at several locations in the Columbia River Gorge.

BELOW: Sighted by Captain Clark on October 18, 1806, Mount Hood was later identified as the dormant volcano named by Captain Vancouver of the Royal British Navy in 1792.

fied until a week later. The imposing landmark that dominated the landscape was named "Timm or falls mountain," after questioning the local inhabitants about their language. The expression "Tum Tum" was sounded by the Indians to indicate the beating of the heart and the constant sound of cascading water at the "Great Falls of the Columbia." At first Lewis and Clark had trouble identifying the dormant volcanoes they observed, knowing that George Vancouver and his lieutenant, William Broughton, had named four Pacific Northwest peaks in 1792 (Baker, Rainier, St. Helens, and Hood). When the expedition ascended the river the next spring, Clark partially sorted out the relationship of the five peaks they had seen, including Jefferson which they had named for their sponsor. On April 6, 1806, Lewis recorded Clark's observations of the five "conic pointed mountains" in his journal.

Thirteen years before the Lewis and Clark expedition, Broughton had ascended the Columbia River by Vancouver's order. Broughton was of the opinion that the towering peak was the termination of the river in French explorer Louis La Verendryes' "Rocky Mountains." Oregon's highest mountain was named to honor Lord Samuel Hood of the Royal Navy who signed the original instructions for Vancouver's voyage.

Mount Adams

The second dormant volcano the captains observed caused much consternation. Identified incorrectly as "Mt. St. Helens," the "very high humped mountain" was not correctly deter-

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The "Great Falls of the Columbia" was first recorded by Clark on October 22, 1805. This constriction of the Columbia River was a favorite seasonal salmon fishing site for Native Americans and an important trade center.

mined to be a different entity until the expedition returned up the river in 1806. Clark observed five different and distinct snowcapped mountain peaks, but he did not take the opportunity to name the one that was east of the "Western mountains," and he did not include Hood and Adams on his master map of 1810. Apparently river courses were more important for his empirical cartographic record of the Pacific Northwest.

In 1839, Hall Kelly, a patriotic schoolteacher, undertook a project to change the Cascade Range to the "Presidents Range" and rename the mountain peaks for individual presidents. His endeavor did not result in a change of British names already in place (Rainier and Hood for example), but the easternmost volcano in central Washington was finally assigned an American name. Officially charted by Charles Wilkes in 1841, the peak was named to honor the second president of the United States, John Adams.

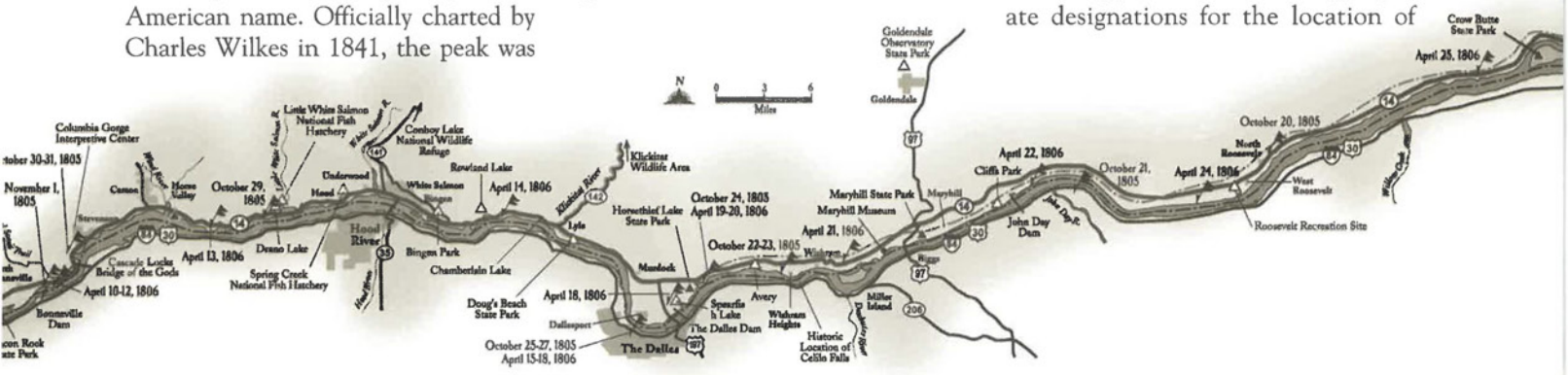
Hat Rock

Clark observed a rock "resembling a hat" on the southern shore of the Columbia River and recorded it in his journal. Other than as a passing note in his daily course log, this small basalt mesa would not have been a geographical feature of significance. Though this observation was not intended to be a definite place name, today the rock is called Hat Rock, in Hat Rock State Park, Umatilla County, Oregon.

Rock Creek

Lewis and Clark used many names to describe the rapids they encountered on the Snake and Columbia rivers. "Rocky rapids" was at the mouth of a small unnamed stream on the northern bank of the Columbia River. Rock Creek, in Klickitat County, Washington, is a place name given for the creek's association with the rapids that Clark identified on his route map.

Most rapids were later renamed and recorded on maps with names familiar to the river steamboat era. Eight dams built on the Columbia and Snake rivers have impounded the water to create an inland waterway for shipping all the way to Lewiston, Idaho. The rapids have disappeared, along with appropriate designations for the location of



these restrictions to water travel. The river rapids named by Lewis and Clark will not be included here since they have disappeared beneath the water.

John Day River

"River La Page" was named to honor Private Jean Baptiste LePage, who enlisted in the corps after the court martial of John Newman at Fort Mandan on the Missouri River. LePage, a French Canadian, was an independent fur trader living with the Mandan Indians. He was probably recruited by the captains because of his familiarity with the Upper Missouri River. There is no other historical record of LePage—he disappeared in the mists of time along with many other place names commemorating corps members.

There are two rivers in Oregon honoring John Day, a backwoodsman who joined Wilson Price Hunt's Astorian overland expedition, 1811-12. The name of the eastern Oregon river commemorates the hardships Hunt's group experienced while trying to reach Astoria via the Snake River through Hell's Canyon. John Day and his companions were robbed by Indians and managed to reach a friendly tribe where they were rescued by a passing fur brigade from Astoria.

Deschutes River

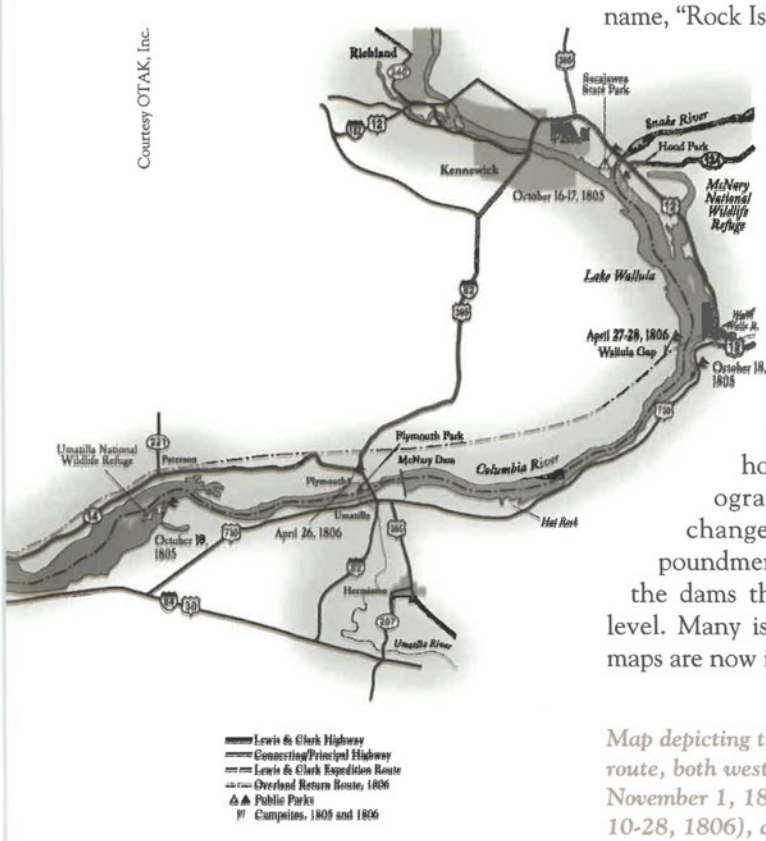
This river was first called "Clark's River" and appears on the route map as such. To avoid confusion with the previously named "Clark's Fork" (Pend Oreille River), it was later changed to "Towarnahiooks," which with its various other spellings is the Chinook term for "enemies," referring to a river coming from southern Paiute Indian territory.

In the fur trading period the French Canadians called the drainage "Riviere des Chutes," French for "river of the falls," because of its close proximity to the "La Grand Dalle de la Columbia." The tendency to simplify place names with local usage has shortened the name to "Deschutes."

Miller Island

The large island was given a descriptive name, "Rock Island," as the waterborne corps was swept toward the "Great Falls of the Columbia" and their first portage of Columbia River rapids. Known today as Miller Island, in Klickitat County, Washington, the island was probably named after an early pioneer in the region. Many islands were noted by the explorers; however, today the physiography of the river has changed because of the impoundment of the river behind the dams that control the water's level. Many islands noted on Clark's maps are now inundated.

Courtesy OTAK, Inc.



Map depicting the Corps of Discovery's route, both westbound (October 16-November 1, 1805) and returning (April 10-28, 1806), along with today's roads and place names. Dates denote when the expedition camped at that location.

Celilo Falls

The "Great Falls of the Columbia" was first recorded by Euro-Americans with the Lewis and Clark expedition. The river cut into basalt rock to create a constriction of the river with a twenty-foot falls followed by a mile of narrow, channeled rapids with a drop of eight feet in river elevation.

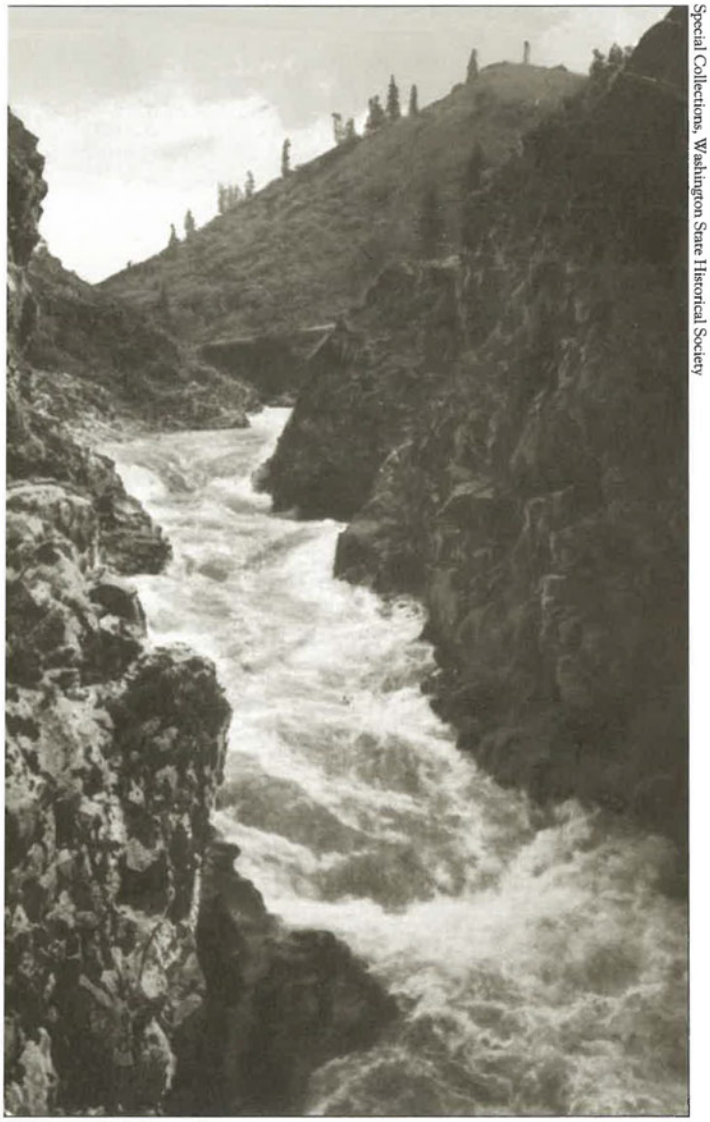
There are several suggested meanings for the aboriginal origin of "Celilo"; one is "floating sand cloud," from the sand storms that occur when high winds sweep through the Columbia River Gorge. The Celilo Canal was completed in 1915, creating a short-lived steamboat waterway to Lewiston, Idaho. Lake Celilo behind The Dalles Dam, which was built in 1956-57, has inundated the falls. The flooding also eliminated important fishing grounds for many Indian tribes that relied upon the salmon caught at the falls.

The Dalles of the Columbia

"Short Narrows" and "Long Narrows" described two locations where the river contracted to form furious rapids, which the corps "shot" with dugout canoes at this locale. Returning eastbound in 1806, the captains made a switch from waterborne craft to horse transportation here. Since the spring snow melt made rapids in the narrows impossible to pass, the party portaged overland on an ancient Indian trail that points upstream.

French Canadian boatmen for the British fur trading companies called the two narrow channels of the river "La Grand Dalle de la Columbia" and "Les Petites Dalles." "Dalle" meant "flagstones" or "slabs" in French, for the large, smooth slabs of basalt rock that formed the channels in the river. The polished stones reminded them of stones used for paving roads and streets in eastern Canada. Other early names used by explorers and fur traders were "Columbia Falls," "Great Falls of the Columbia," "Big Chutes," and "The Narrows."

The Dalles of the Columbia, or simply The Dalles, was a name used by American pioneers to describe the nar-



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"Cataract River" was named by the captains from information they received from local Native American inhabitants that resided on the Columbia River and utilized the narrow gorge of the Klickitat River for fishing.

row river channels. A post office was established in Oregon Territory with the name Dalles in 1851 but was changed to The Dalles in 1860.

During the steamboat era on the Columbia, the narrows were called "Ten Mile Rapids" and "Five Mile Rapids," representing their distance east from the boat landing at The Dalles. The creation of Lake Celilo behind The Dalles Dam flooded these features.

Mill Creek

Lewis and Clark acquired the name "Que-neet Creek," also spelled "Que-nett," meaning "salmon trout," from the local Indians and applied it to a small stream on the southern shore of the Columbia. Seeking a defensive position for an encampment, they ascended the stream and found a natural rock formation for their security. Mill Creek, the present place name, derived from the establishment of a sawmill on the stream during the military occupation at Fort Dalles, Oregon Territory. The fort was an important military post during the Indian wars era.

Rock Fort

"Fort Rock Camp" and "Fort Camp" were names used by members of the corps to designate their encampments of October 25 to 27, 1805, and April 15 to 17, 1806, at the mouth of "Que-neet Creek." The natural basalt rock formation resembled a fort. Located in the city of The Dalles, Oregon, the Rock Fort site now commemorates the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Rowena Gap

"Pilgrim rocks" was used only once in the journals, in Clark's mileage notes compiled at Fort Clatsop. Only conjecture can be applied in trying to determine why the name was chosen for this particular geological feature near the present town of Lyle. Perhaps Clark was simply using the Latin derivation of pilgrim—"foreigner on a journey." The river bluffs, with six separate basalt lava flows, stand bare of soil to about the 1,000-foot level. The spectacular bluffs on the northern shore of the Columbia are situated in Klickitat County, Washington, east of Lyle.

Klickitat River

"Cataract River" was named by the captains based on information they received from the local inhabitants regarding "the large number of falls which the Indians say is on it." They never saw the falls that formed a natural fishing place in the narrow gorge, created as the river cut its way through solid basalt to reach the Columbia. By concentrating salmon runs, the falls provided a location for dip netting, an old-style of salmon fishing that continues today.

Klickitat is an anglicized version of the Indian name for a permanent village set at the mouth of the river. The village may have been the "Friendly Village" described by Clark on the westbound journey in 1805.

Memaloose Island

"Sepulchar Island" was one of several islands noted by the corps as containing burial vaults for the Indian tribes that lived along the river. Several islands in the Columbia were named Memaloose, accepted spelling adopted by the United States Board of Geographic Names (USBGN). The name derived from "Memaloose Ilahee," Chinook jargon words for "land of the dead." Lower Memaloose Island, the one named by Clark, is downstream from the mouth of the Klickitat and overlooked by parks on both sides of the river. A prominent obelisk on the island marks the grave of Victor Trevitt, a pioneer who wished to be buried with his Indian friends.

Hood River

"River Labiche" was named to honor expedition member Private François Labiche. Recruited by the captains, he enlisted in the corps at St. Charles on the Missouri River. Half French and half Omaha Indian, he was chosen as a permanent member of the party for his experience as a river boatman and Indian trader. His skills in translating native languages extended to accompanying Lewis to Washington, D.C., to interpret for Jefferson and visiting Indian chiefs.

An early name for the drainage was "Dog River." While camping on the river, a party of early settlers ate dog

meat in preference to starving. The unpopular name was changed to Hood River, after Mount Hood, the source of the drainage.

White Salmon River

"Canoe Creek" was named by the captains because several native fishing canoes were observed at the mouth of the stream. The corps passed and noted its size, then continued downstream, holding to the northern shore of the Columbia. The Lewis and Clark journals frequently mention the "white salmon trout," but the origin of the present place name is less attractive. Migrating salmon have a change in flesh color, from red to pinkish white. After spawning in the river, the salmon die and decay on the river bank. This river's name originated with the dead fish that were known to float downstream and collect at the mouth of the river.

Little White Salmon River

The captains did not observe this drainage but marked its course on the route map, based on conjectural information obtained from the local inhabitants. "Little Lake Creek" was a description and not intended as a place name for the unseen drainage. The corps camped the evening of October 29, 1805, near a "Pond" close to the northern shore and marked the little lake on their route map. The present place name derived from its association to the larger upstream drainage in the same region. This body of water is now known as Drano Lake, but the physiography has been changed by backwaters from Bonneville Dam and highway construction.

Wind River

"New Timber River" was later changed to "Crusats River," after a member of the corps, Pierre Cruzatte. Detecting a change in climate zones and vegetative growth, the captains first named the drainage after observing for the first time the broad leaf maple. At Fort Clatsop, Clark realized that Cruzatte was the only member of the corps who had not been honored with a place name on the westbound journey. He changed the name on the route map and course distance log, correcting the oversight. Cruzatte, half French and half Omaha Indian, was recruited by the captains and enlisted in the corps at St. Charles on the Missouri River. The experienced voyageur and Indian trader added to the complement of seasoned frontiersmen that comprised the party. The one-eyed French boatman had another skill that benefited the expedition—he played the fiddle.

The present descriptive name was given by Isaac Stevens in 1853. Factors influencing the climate in the region are the Columbia River Gorge and the prevailing moisture-laden, westerly winds from the Pacific Ocean. Strong winds surge and ebb through the narrow gap in the mountain range.

Cascades of the Columbia

Recorded as "Grand Rapid," "Great Rapids," and "Great Shute," the Cascades were the last obstacle on the Columbia to challenge the westbound corps with a portage. "Shute" was Clark's perverse spelling of the French "chute," used to describe a narrowed channel in a waterway.

The captains emphasized the word "cascades" in their journals but did not regard the word as a place name. The term became an accepted name after continued reference to these falls by early trappers and later explorers on the river. In 1825 John Work of the Hudson's Bay Company was the first to record the place name, "Cascades," to describe these falls in the Columbia.

Four and a half miles long, the Cascades of the Columbia were separated into two sections. The first made a bend around a rocky point on the Oregon shore, then went into a 2,000-foot-long pitch in the river and a 21-foot drop. This was called the Upper Cascade. The rest of the contracted waterway, the Lower Cascade, was a long three-and-a-half-mile pitch in the river. The total fall of the river from the head of Upper Cascade to the bottom of Lower Cascade was 45 feet at high water and 36 feet at low water.

In 1850 a portage road was built on the north side of the river for transportation around the rapids. A railroad car pulled by a mule along wooden rails was eventually replaced with a steam locomotive. The Cascades blocked navigation to the upper river until a 3,000-foot-long canal was built around the Upper Cascade at Cascade Locks, Oregon. After 15 years of work on the canal, navigation on the river was passable to The Dalles in 1896. These first steps in converting the Columbia for inland water transportation were later replaced with massive federal projects. The Cascades and the early locks were flooded by backwater from Bonneville Dam in 1937.

Cascade Mountain Range

Referred to as "Western mountains" by the captains, they did not attach a specific name while describing the mountain range in their exploration. They used the term "cascades" to denote waterfalls in the mountain range but did not attach any specific names to the terrain or intend the term as a toponym. The corps was oriented toward watercourses; their place naming reflects the importance they attached to recording the geography of the river.

David Douglas, a British botanist, is given credit for first recording the name "Cascade Range of Mountains" in 1826. It is assumed that the range took its name from the Cascades of the Columbia, even though the range extends from California into British Columbia. Another theory has Douglas naming the mountain range for its numerous cascades, the largest concentration of waterfalls in North America.

The range was also named by the Spanish in 1790. While sailing off the coast, Manuel Quimper called them "Sierra Madras de San Antonio." As mentioned previously, in 1839 Hall Kelly tried unsuccessfully to change the name to President's Range.

The Cascade Range dominates the geography of the Pacific Northwest and divides it into semiarid inland and damp coastal provinces. The two separate climatic zones give rise to the wide botanical, faunal and cultural diversity of the Pacific Northwest.

COLUMBIA

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COVER: *Traveling down the Columbia River on the way to its mouth, Canadian fur trader and explorer David Thompson passed Kettle Falls in what is now the northeast corner of Washington. Thompson left Kettle Falls July 3, 1811, arriving at Astoria on July 15. See related story starting on page 38. (Paul Kane painting, courtesy Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.)*