

Lewis and Clark

National Historical Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commision

Ocean in View! O! the joy.



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When Capt. William Clark wrote these words in his journal on November 7, 1805, he was not standing at the Pacific Ocean but the Columbia River estuary. It would be another couple of weeks before he or Capt. Meriwether Lewis would stand at what they had "been so long anxious to See." By then they had traveled more than 4,000 miles across the North American continent with a contingent of 31 explorers, mostly U.S. Army enlisted men, known as the Corps of Discovery.

The expedition was President Thomas Jefferson's idea. He had for years been fascinated by the vast and virtually unknown territory west of the Mississippi River, and in June 1803 he announced plans to send an exploratory party by rivers to the Pacific. He had chosen Lewis to head it, and Lewis selected Clark, his friend and former commanding officer, to share the responsibilities. They were to explore the Missouri River to its source, then establish the most

direct water route to the Pacific, making scientific and geographic observations along the way. They were also to learn what they could of Indian tribes they encountered and impress them with the technology and authority of the United States.

The explorers started up the Missouri River from near St. Louis on May 14, 1804. After a tedious journey of five months, they wintered at Fort Mandan, which they built near the Mandan Indian villages 1,600 miles up the Missouri. Here they acquired the interpreting services of Toussaint Charbonneau, a French-Canadian trader, and his young Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, accompanied by their infant son, Jean Baptiste.

In April 1805 the Corps of Discovery left Fort Mandan and followed the Missouri and its upper branches into an unknown world. Along the Lemhi River, in what is now Idaho, Sacagawea's people provided horses and a guide for the gruelling trip

Cape Disappointment State Park, Washington
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over the Continental Divide. In mid-November 1805, after some 600 miles of water travel down the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers, the Corps of Discovery finally viewed the Pacific Ocean after setting up a temporary camp (Station Camp) on a sandy beach near Chinook Point on the north shore of the Columbia.

For 10 days the men explored the surrounding area, including Cape Disappointment, in an unsuccessful attempt to locate a favorable site for a winter encampment. Finally, on November 24, expedition members voted to cross to the south side of the Columbia where game was reported to be plentiful. Lewis and a small party found a "most eligible" site about two miles up the Netul River (now Lewis and Clark River). On December 10, 1805, the men began to build a fort that they named for the local Indian tribe, the Clatsop. By Christmas Day they were under shelter. It would be their home for the next three and a half months.

Treated with "extrodeanary friendship"

When Lewis and Clark reached the northwest tip of what is now Oregon in 1805 they found some 400 Clatsop living on the southern side of the Columbia River. Their neighbors, the Chinook, lived on the northern banks of the Columbia and the Pacific Coast, while the Tillamook lived on the coast to the south. They were all wealthy and shrewd traders, masterful canoe builders, with few enemies, and they treated Lewis and Clark with "extrodeanary friendship."

The captains found them talkative, inquisitive, intelligent, and possessing excellent memories of trading ships visiting the area. Some Clatsops had acquired a few words of English from traders who had visited the area by ship, but communications with them were mainly by gestures. Friendly relations prevailed between the Clatsop and the explorers throughout the winter. When the Corps departed on March 23, 1806, Lewis and Clark gave the fort they had built and its furnishings to the Clatsop leader, who "has been much more kind an[d] hospitable to us than any other indian in this neighbourhood."



Salmon were, and still are, a fundamental part of the spiritual and cultural identity of Columbia Basin Indians. Drawing from Clark's journal.

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This map drawn by William Clark shows the mouth of the Columbia River, the western terminus of the Lewis and Clark expedition, which arrived there in mid-November 1805.

DAVID RUMSEY MAP COLLECTION

A high-prow canoe used by Indians in the Pacific Northwest.

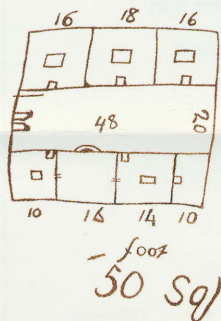
© MICHAEL S. THOMPSON

Dentalium shells were prized as currency and decoration to indicate wealth.

BURKE MUSEUM

Chinook and Clatsop Indians as drawn in Clark's journal.

MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY



A floor plan with dimensions drawn by William Clark on the elkskin cover of one of his journals was used as the principal guide in constructing the replica of the fort (below).

MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY



MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The information collected by Lewis and Clark on the regions they traversed was laboriously recorded in journals like the one shown here. The explorers updated their journals during their three-and-a-half-month stay at Fort Clatsop.

“At this place we had wintered”

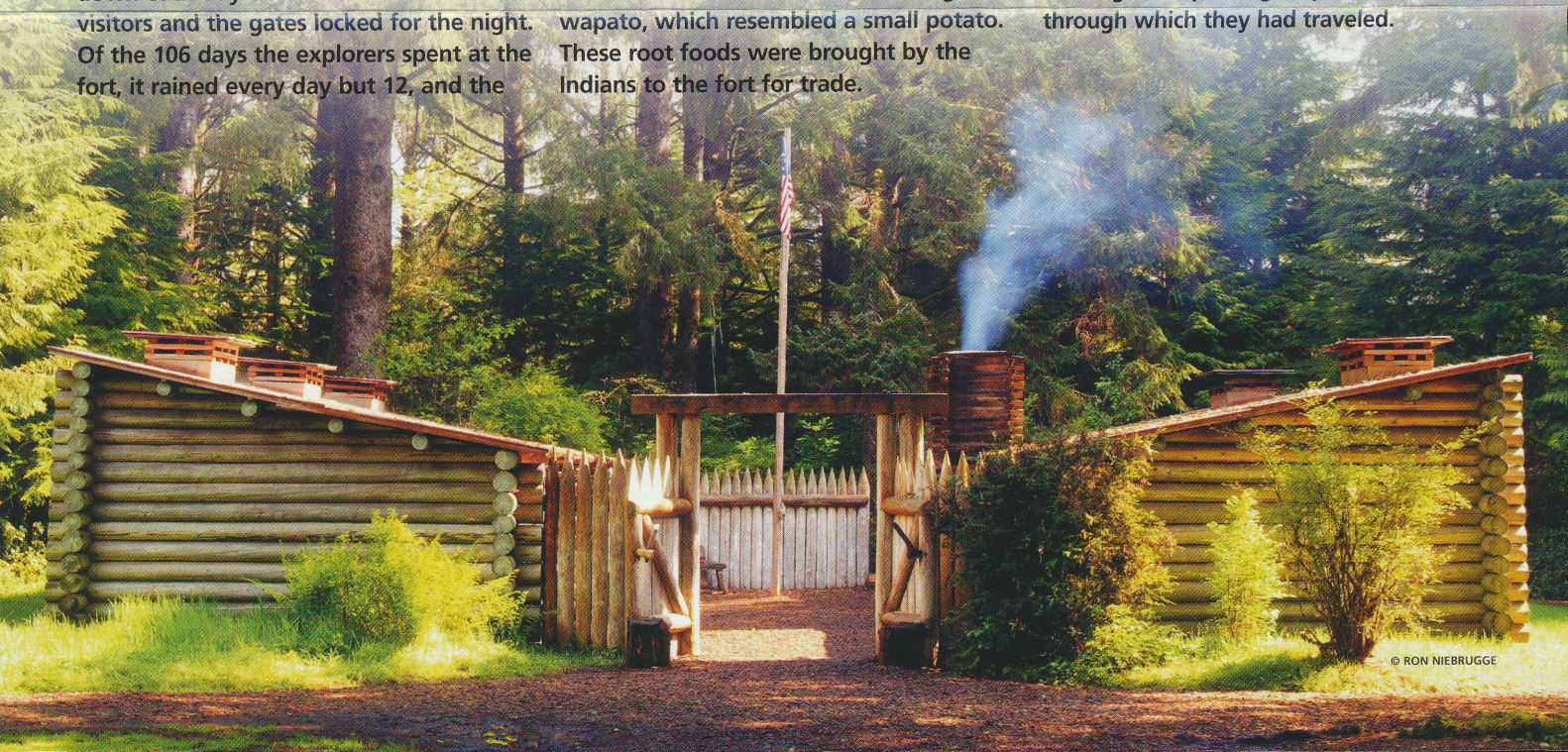
The Corps of Discovery remained at Fort Clatsop from December 7, 1805, until March 23, 1806. During that time, Clatsop and Chinook Indians, whom Clark described as close bargainers, came to the fort almost daily to visit and trade. The captains wrote often in their journals of these tribes’ appearance, habits, living conditions, lodges, and abilities as hunters and fishermen.

Throughout the winter Lewis and Clark maintained a strict military routine. A sentinel was constantly posted, and at sundown each day the fort was cleared of visitors and the gates locked for the night. Of the 106 days the explorers spent at the fort, it rained every day but 12, and the

men suffered from colds, influenza, rheumatism, and other ailments that the captains treated. Clothing rotted, and fleas infested the blankets and hides of the bedding to such a degree that a full night’s sleep was often impossible.

With little food in reserve, hunting for meat was all-important. The men killed more than 130 elk, 20 deer, and many small animals, including fowl, during the winter. Whale was later added to their diet. For vegetables the men had to be content with various roots, including the wapato, which resembled a small potato. These root foods were brought by the Indians to the fort for trade.

Due to the rain the men often stayed indoors engaged in a variety of tasks, from servicing their weapons and preparing elk-hide clothing for the homeward journey to making elk fat candles as light for journal writing. The captains brought their journals up to date, making copious notes on the plants, fish, and wildlife around Fort Clatsop, and drew excellent sketches. Many such descriptions were the first scientific identification of important flora and fauna of the American West. Clark, the cartographer of the party, spent most of his time refining and updating maps of the country through which they had traveled.



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Preparing for Home

“Excellent, fine, strong & white”

By the time the expedition arrived at the Pacific Coast its supply of salt for preserving and flavoring food was nearly exhausted. To remedy this situation, on December 28 Clark directed three of the men—Joseph Field, William Bratton, and George Gibson—to “proceed to the Ocean [and] at Some Convenient place form a Camp and Commence makeing Salt with 5 of the largest Kittles. . . .” Alexander Willard and Peter Weiser went along to help carry supplies.

The men set up camp about 15 miles southwest of Fort Clatsop “near the houses of

some Clatsop & Kilamox [Tillamook] families” in what is now a residential area of Seaside, Ore. Usually at least three men were there, though the number varied and personnel were rotated. Salt was obtained by boiling sea water “day and night” in kettles placed on an oven built of stones and fueled by trees and wood debris along the shore. The men were soon producing about three quarts a day of what Lewis described as “excellent, fine, strong & white” salt. By February 21, 1806, when the camp was abandoned, the salt makers had accumulated enough

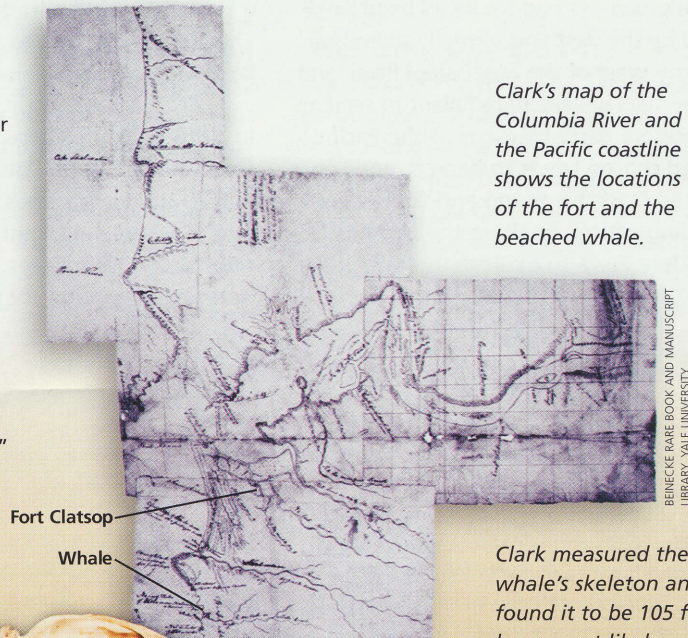
for the trip home. About three of the approximately four bushels produced at the camp were packed in kegs and used on the homeward journey.

John Clymer’s painting depicts the explorers at the salt works with the Clatsop and Tillamook looking on. Although subsequent research has shown that the explorers’ clothing has too much fringe and, as members of a military expedition, the men would have been clean-shaven, the painting does effectively illustrate the method by which the salt was produced.



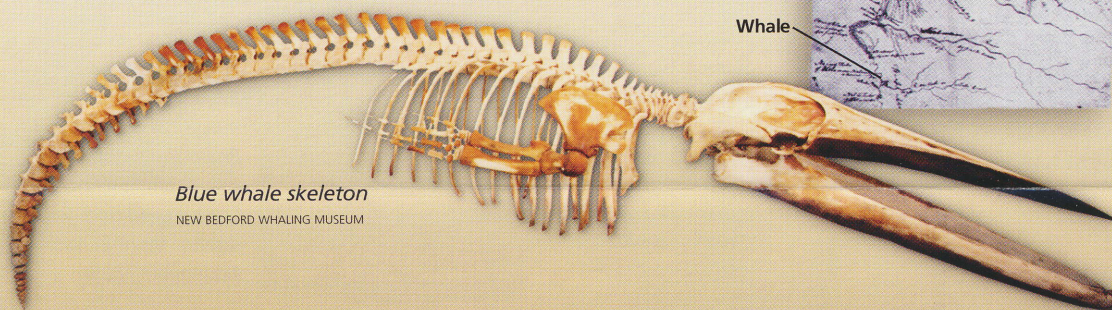
A "Monstrous Fish"

Two days after Christmas 1805, Clatsop Indians told the Corps of Discovery that a whale had washed ashore southwest of Fort Clatsop near a Tillamook village (in today's Cannon Beach). Adverse weather conditions prevented Clark and other members of the Corps from reaching the whale until January 8. (Sacagawea, who insisted on seeing "that monstrous fish" and the ocean, accompanied them.) By then only the whale's bones remained. The Tillamook Indians who had gathered much of the whale's meat and blubber were reluctant to part with any of it, but Clark did manage to obtain approximately 300 pounds of blubber and a few gallons of rendered oil. Lewis sampled the blubber and found it "not unlike the fat of Poark tho' the texture was more spongy and somewhat coarser. I had a part of it cooked and found it very palatable and tender, it resembled the beaver or the dog in flavour." Today's six-mile Tillamook Head Trail from Cannon Beach to Seaside follows the same coastal route used by Clark and his party.



Clark's map of the Columbia River and the Pacific coastline shows the locations of the fort and the beached whale.

BENECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY



Blue whale skeleton
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

Clark measured the whale's skeleton and found it to be 105 feet long, most likely making it a blue whale. They average 75 to 80 feet in length and weigh about 110 tons.

Introducing Lewis and Clark National Historical Park

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is a joint venture between the National Park Service and the states of Oregon and Washington. The park preserves sites that mark the success of key parts of the Corps of Discovery's mission—arriving safely at the Pacific, maintaining friendly relations with local Indian tribes, preparing maps and revising journals that would record their discoveries, and getting ready for the trip home. The following sites and the former Fort Clatsop National Memorial constitute the new national historical park. Together they embody stories of hardship and danger, of surprising collaboration and adaptations, and of exploration and discovery. (See map at right.)

Clark's Dismal Nitch Named by Clark, this is the site of the expedition's November 10–15, 1805, encampment. It was here in a cove surrounded by cliffs and high hills that a fierce November storm pinned down the expedition for six days and threatened its survival.

Station Camp Here, during its November 15–25 encampment, the Corps of Discovery got its first view of the Pacific Ocean after 18 arduous months of exploring some of North America's roughest terrain. Here, too, Captains Lewis and Clark conducted, contrary to standard military protocol, the famed "vote" to cross the Columbia River and examine the south side for a winter encampment site. The polling of expedition members included Clark's slave York and Sacagawea.



Netul Landing This area of the park provides a wonderful opportunity to stroll a paved path along the Lewis and Clark River and enjoy the river atmosphere. During peak summer months Netul Landing serves as the parking lot and regional transit bus arrival point for a visit to Fort Clatsop.

Fort to Sea Trail This six-mile hiking trail from Fort Clatsop to the Pacific Ocean at Sunset Beach approximates the route members of the Corps of Discovery took when traveling to and from the ocean during the winter of 1805–1806. The trail runs through the homeland of the Clatsop Indians, one of the tribes that helped ensure the survival of the Corps.

Salt Works Located in the city of Seaside, Ore., this reconstructed site commemorates the expedition's salt making activities (see above).

Cape Disappointment State Park This marks the farthest point westward reached by Lewis and Clark. This 1,882-acre camping park offers 27 miles of ocean beach, one of the oldest functioning lighthouses on the West Coast, hiking trails, and remnants of Civil War-era Fort Canby. The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, which overlooks the confluence of the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean, contains exhibits offering an overview of the expedition's entire journey. For more information: 503-861-3078.

Fort Columbia State Park Fort Columbia constituted the harbor defense of the Columbia River from 1896 to 1947. It is one of the few intact coastal defense sites in the United States. In 1805 this area was the home of the Chinook Indians and their famed Chief Comcomly. During their visit to the lower Columbia, Lewis and Clark mapped the headlands and passed along the shoreline in their excursions to Cape Disappointment.

Fort Stevens State Park Fort Stevens, built in 1864, guarded the mouth of the Columbia River from the Civil War through World War II. In 1805 a Clatsop Indian village occupied part of the land on which the fort was built. The village was located near the north shore of Point Adams, a strategic location for contacting Native Americans and, later, European-American traders traveling on the Columbia River. For more information: 503-861-1671.

Sunset Beach Recreation Area Sunset Beach is one of the main trailheads for the Fort To Sea Trail. It provides visitors with direct access to the Pacific Ocean, with expansive views from Cape Disappointment to the north and Ecola State Park to the South.

Ecola State Park In 1806 Captain Clark and 12 expedition members crossed Tillamook Head, "the Steepest worst & highest mountain I ever ascended" to see a beached whale south of what is now Ecola State Park near the town of Cannon Beach.

About Your Visit to Fort Clatsop Fort Clatsop is open year-round except Christmas Day. In the peak season (mid-June through Labor Day), park hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; the rest of the year 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

When visiting the park be sure to see the replica of Fort Clatsop and the exhibit room and audio-visual program at the visitor center. You should also walk the trails to the expedition's canoe landing and the camp's spring.

For Your Safety: *Stay on designated trails and exercise caution at all times when walking or playing around water features. River banks and cliff slopes are often slippery and unstable. On beaches be aware of sneaker waves or drift wood that can knock people down and wash them into deep water.*

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

For More Information
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Ecola State Park
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