



The Mighty Columbia...

The river now becomes deeply encaioned . . . the bluffs are many-colored . . . To this must be added the green of the trees . . . the old gold of the bunch-grass shining in the sunlight . . . forming one of the grandest, most beautiful sights in the universe.

Lt. Thomas W. Symons, Columbia River Navigation Survey, 1881.

For tens of thousands of years the Columbia River flowed wild and free. The untamed waters made their way to the Pacific—changing channels, skirting glaciers, suddenly flooding—controlled only by what nature dictated. Nomadic Indians moved with the seasons and followed their sources of food. Various Salishan tribes in the north whose lives centered around the Columbia River called it *Swah-netk'-qhu*—Big Water. Indians knew the river for its rich salmon runs. In the 1800s traders and settlers knew it

as a transportation route that brought supplies upriver and delivered furs and crops downriver. In the mid-1900s the building of dams harnessed the river as never before. People now experienced the river in new ways. Dams provided electricity and irrigation water and protected homes from flooding. Construction of Grand Coulee Dam led to the creation of Lake Roosevelt. In 1946 the area was federally designated a national recreation area.

Today sagebrush and golden bunchgrass adorn the shores along the southern half of the lake. Lichens on basalt cliffs add splashes of yellow, red, and green. The northern half of the park reveals cooler mountains forested with ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and western larch. As Lieutenant Symons did in 1881, you can marvel at the landscape—it is still a grand and most beautiful sight.



READING THE ROCKS

During the last ice age a massive glacial lobe moved down from Canada, creating an ice dam that blocked the natural courses of rivers. Rivers backed up. Huge lakes formed, including Lake Missoula. The increasing level of the water behind the ice dam caused it to float and burst. Sudden, massive walls of water—some thought to be 400 feet high with speeds approaching 65 miles per hour—flushed across central Washington. This cycle, glaciers advancing and retreating, floods caused by ice dams forming and bursting, repeated many times. The water carried gravel and debris, icebergs and boulders, scouring bedrock into the bizarre landscape we call channeled scablands and gouging steep-walled gorges called coulees.

River of Life, River of Dreams

TRIBES AND RESERVATIONS

American Indians have lived here for over 9,000 years—fishing, hunting animals, and collecting wild fruits and vegetables. Each year tribes gathered at the river to catch salmon, trade goods and ideas, and socialize.

Life began to change in the early 1800s as vastly different cultures arrived—fur traders, missionaries, settlers, and soldiers. Encroachment on traditional native lands led to tensions between Indians and newcomers, culminating in a brief war, treaties, and the establishment of reservations. Eventually the Spokane and Colville tribes moved to land allotted along the Columbia. In the 1930s, with the building of dams, traditional fishing ended. The upper river was blocked to salmon; homes and sacred sites flooded. As a native explained, "The river we had known was destroyed. . . . The salmon came no more, and with the disappearance of the salmon, our traditional economy was lost forever." Today the Columbia is still alive, and Spokane and Colville elders tell stories of the river to their children.

KETTLE FALLS

Kettle Falls once was an annual gathering place for Indian tribes who came to fish. Here huge, angled slabs of rock straddled the river, forcing the water over a series of falls. The waterfalls produced a natural barrier for migrating salmon, making fish easier to catch. Indians speared and netted thousands of salmon—enough to provide half of their families' diet for the coming year.

In the early 1800s fur trappers came to trade, and missionaries came to baptize. The Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Colville in 1825, a self-sufficient trading post with homes, farms, shops, and buildings for storing furs. The fort's location at Kettle Falls made it a prime spot for collecting and sending valuable pelts—beaver, bear, mink, lynx, and wolf—downstream for shipment east. Missionaries, like fur traders before them, had considerable impact on local tribes. Priests introduced a new religion, promoted farming and a sedentary life (over traditions of fishing, hunting, and gathering), and built churches, including St. Paul's Mission.

The falls and the site of Fort Colville are now submerged, but the Indians still gather annually—praying for return of the salmon.

FORT SPOKANE

Fort Spokane, established in 1880, was one of the last frontier forts built in the West. Ownership of land became a problem as the area filled with entrepreneurs seeking the agricultural opportunities promoted by the Northern Pacific Railroad. Keeping the semi-nomadic Spokane and Colville tribes within reservation boundaries—and keeping land-hungry settlers out—was potentially a difficult job. The fort's strategic location at the confluence of the Columbia and Spokane rivers allowed a small peace-keeping force of infantry and cavalry troops to keep an eye on the Indians and the settlers. Fortunately this was a time of relative peace. The troops at Fort Spokane saw little action aside from routine drills, parades, and patrol duty.

In 1898 most troops left for duty in Cuba after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. The post was decommissioned and transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The fort opened as an Indian boarding school in 1900, but declining enrollments closed the school in 1908. The fort served on and off as a tuberculosis sanatorium and Indian hospital until its final closure in 1929.

GRAND COULEE DAM

The decision to build Grand Coulee Dam was not made casually. For decades politicians, private companies, landowners, and the public argued about the dam's location, design, and purpose. Was it to provide hydroelectric power, irrigation, flood control? The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) in 1932 ended the debate. FDR was convinced that building large, public infrastructure projects would revive the economy and get people back to work. Roosevelt was especially interested in projects in the Columbia Basin.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation began construction in 1933. When completed in 1942 Grand Coulee Dam was the largest masonry structure ever built, breaking a record, set by Egypt's Great Pyramid, that stood for 47 centuries. Today the dam is the largest producer of hydroelectric power in the United States and third largest hydroelectric facility in the world. Grand Coulee provides electricity for hundreds of cities and supplies irrigation water for over 500,000 acres of cropland.



INDIANS

For centuries Indians fished in the river that carried life-sustaining salmon. Loss of fisheries above the dam changed their lives forever.

Then God put fish in the rivers. . . . When the Creator gave us Indians life, we awakened and as soon as we saw the fish and the game we knew that they were made for us. —Colville and Okanogan Chiefs, 1925

FUR TRADERS

Traders like Jacob Finlay ventured here in the early 1800s. Rivals Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company bartered with Indians for pelts in exchange for blankets, cloth, mirrors, tobacco, ammunition, and rifles. Traders exchanged a \$6 rifle for 20 beaver skins, each worth \$50. In 1832 a HBC employee wrote, "We made an enormous profit on the Indian trade."

DAVID THOMPSON

The first explorer to document his travels here was fur trader and mapmaker David Thompson in 1811. He had two motives: build trading posts and chart the Columbia from its headwaters to its mouth. (Lewis and Clark traveled the lower river in 1805.) Thompson's party reached Kettle Falls on June 19, in time to see Indians from many tribes harvesting salmon.

MISSIONARIES

In the mid-1830s missionaries began visiting the upper Columbia region, hoping to convert Indians to Christianity and improve their lives. In 1841 Father DeSmet spent 10 days at Fort Colville (near Kettle Falls), preaching and baptizing. Father Ravalli built the first Indian chapel at Kettle Falls in 1845. Two years later St. Paul's Mission was built above the falls.

FORTUNE SEEKERS

Gold discovered near Kettle Falls! In 1854 a Hudson's Bay Company employee found gold on the sandbars of the upper Columbia. When the news leaked out a wave of fortune seekers flooded the region. Miners found relatively little gold, but their presence—as they rushed from one reported gold strike to the next—created demands for new businesses and settlements.

CHINESE

Chinese were the first Asians to arrive in eastern Washington in large numbers. By the mid-1860s hundreds of men worked placer mines along the Columbia, from China Bend to the river's mouth. By 1870 Chinese miners outnumbered American-born miners two-to-one. They built mining camps, laundries, and stores, providing services for nearby towns.

SETTLERS

In the 1870s settlers established permanent homes and businesses in the area. Some ran supply boats on the river, others farmed wheat or harvested and sold lumber. The completion of railroads in the 1880s brought a new influx of settlers. The railroads gave farmers and businesses a new way to get orchard crops, grains, and livestock to market.

SOLDIERS

The presence of troops at Fort Spokane in the 1880s pacified settlers moving into the area and helped keep peace among Indian tribes as they saw their traditional hunting, farming, and homelands shrink. At the height of U.S. Army occupation over 300 soldiers plus their families and other civilians lived at Fort Spokane.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Roosevelt (FDR) promised a New Deal for the American people during his presidential campaign. When FDR took office in 1933 he quickly launched programs to create jobs and bring the U.S. out of the Depression. The new Public Works Administration oversaw construction of housing, bridges, and dams, including Grand Coulee. Today the lake bears FDR's name.

DAM BUILDERS

During the peak of dam construction over 8,000 people worked in various jobs. Engineers and surveyors determined the exact placement of the dam and location of new roads and railroads. Laborers cleared trees from the reservoir area, excavated the dam site, built towns on each side of the river, rerouted the river temporarily, and poured tons of concrete.

PARK AND PARTNERS

The creation of Lake Roosevelt led to the establishment of the national recreation area in 1946. Today the lake, shoreline, and surrounding federal lands are managed by the National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colville Confederated Tribes, and Spokane Tribe—five partners protecting resources of the lake.

PARK VISITORS

Water, cool water. Most visitors come to Lake Roosevelt for its refreshing water and its premier opportunities for boating, watersports, and fishing. But there is more here than the lake. You can camp, picnic, hike, visit historic Fort Spokane and St. Paul's Mission, and join ranger-led activities, offered seasonally.

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