



The Mighty Columbia ...

The river now becomes deeply encañoned ... 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 Native Americans moved with the seasons and followed sources of food. Various Salishan Tribes in the north whose lives centered around the Columbia River called it *Swah-netk'-qhu*—Big Water. They 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 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 increased water level 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, of glaciers advancing and retreating and floods caused by ice dams forming and bursting, repeated many times. The water carried gravel and debris, icebergs and boulders. It scoured bedrock into bizarre landforms called channeled scablands and gouged steep-walled gorges called coulees.

River of Life, River of Dreams

TRIBES AND RESERVATIONS

Native Americans have lived here for millennia—fishing, hunting, 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 Tribes 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 were flooded. A member of Colville Confederated Tribes 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

Tribes gathered annually at Kettle Falls to fish for salmon. Huge rock slabs straddled the river and forced the water over a series of falls. The waterfalls formed a natural barrier for migrating fish, making them easier to catch. Native people 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. In 1825 the Hudson’s Bay Company built Fort Colville, a self-sufficient trading post with homes, farms, shops, and storage buildings for furs. The fort’s river location made it a prime spot to collect and send pelts—beaver, bear, mink, lynx, and wolf—downstream for shipment east. Missionaries, like fur traders before them, greatly affected 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 Tribes still gather annually—praying for the salmon to return.

FORT SPOKANE

Established in 1880, Fort Spokane was one of the last frontier forts built in the West. Issues over land ownership arose 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 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 force of infantry and cavalry to keep a watchful eye on Native Americans and settlers. Fortunately this was a time of relative peace. Troops saw little action aside from routine drills, parades, and patrol duty.

In 1898 most troops left for duty in Cuba after the Spanish-American War broke out. The military decommissioned the post and transferred it 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 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 in 1932 ended the debate. He 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 US 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 had stood for about 4,700 years. Today the dam is one of the largest producers of hydroelectric power in the United States and one of the largest hydroelectric facilities in the world. Grand Coulee provides electricity for hundreds of cities and water to irrigate over 500,000 acres of cropland.



NATIVE AMERICANS
For millennia Native people 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 “Jaco” Finlay came here in the early 1800s. Rival companies Hudson’s Bay and North West bartered with Native people 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 Hudson’s Bay 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 Native people harvesting salmon.

MISSIONARIES
In the mid-1830s missionaries came here. They hoped to convert Native people 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 chapel for Native Americans 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 upper Columbia’s sandbars. When news leaked, 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 PEOPLE
The first Asians to arrive in eastern Washington in large numbers were Chinese. 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 here. 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 with local Tribes as they saw their traditional hunting, fishing, and homelands shrink. At the height of the US Army presence, over 300 soldiers plus their families and other civilians lived at the fort.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
During his presidential campaign Roosevelt promised the American people a New Deal. When he took office in 1933 he launched programs to create jobs and pull the United States out of the Great Depression. The new Public Works Administration oversaw construction of housing, bridges, and dams, including Grand Coulee. Today the lake bears Roosevelt’s name.

DAM BUILDERS
Over 8,000 people helped build dams in the peak construction period. Engineers and surveyors determined the exact placement of the dam and location of new roads and railroads. Others labored to clear trees from the reservoir areas, excavate dam sites, build towns on each side of the river, and temporarily reroute the river. They poured tons of concrete.

PARK AND PARTNERS
The creation of Lake Roosevelt led Congress to establish the national recreation area in 1946. Today five partners protect it. The National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colville Confederated Tribes, and Spokane Tribe together manage the lake, shoreline, and surrounding federal lands.

PARK VISITORS
Water, cool water. Most people come to Lake Roosevelt for its refreshing water and opportunities for boating, water sports, 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 seasonal ranger-led activities.

1750

1775

1800

1825

1850

1875

1900

1925

1950

1975

2000

A white and blue motorboat named "LAKE ROOSEVELT" is shown on a body of water. Several people are on board, including a man in a white hat on the deck and others on the upper level. The boat has a blue stripe and the name "LAKE ROOSEVELT" written on its side.

Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area stretches north for 133 miles, from Grand Coulee Dam to Onion Creek, 13 miles from the United States-Canada border. It embraces the lower reaches of many streams, including the Spokane and Kettle rivers.

Camping All 16 campgrounds reachable by car are reservation only. Go to www.recreation.gov or call 877-444-6777. Many park campgrounds can be reached by boat. All boat-in campgrounds are first-come, first-served.

Fees and Permits Fees are charged year-round at National Park Service boat launches for all types of boats and at campgrounds (boat-in campsites are free). Check with the Tribes concerning permits to camp, fish, and hunt on either Tribal reservation.

Tribal fishing licenses are required on water and land adjacent to the reservations. Check with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Colville or Spokane Tribes. Tribal hunting regulations apply on reservations; check with the Tribes.

Fort Spokane The visitor center in the guardhouse is open Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. It has information, permits, exhibits, and a bookstore. A one-mile trail around the fort is open year-round. For hours call 509-754-7893 or visit the park website.

Kettle Falls and St. Paul's Mission St. Paul's Mission is one of the oldest churches in Washington. Signs along the ¼-mile Mission Point Trail explain the history of the falls, the mission, and the role of Hudson's Bay Company in the area. For information visit the park website.

Ride a Free Ferry Keller Ferry links WA 21 on the lake's north and south shores year-round. Gifford Ferry connects with WA 25 near Inchelium (about mid-lake) year-round, based on water level.

Colville Confederated Tribes For camping information call 509-634-3145. For fishing and hunting permits and regulations call 509-634-2110 or visit www.colvilletribes.com.

Spokane Tribe For camping, fishing, and hunting permits, information, and regulations call 509-626-4400 or visit www.spokanetribe.com.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

More Information Check bulletin boards in campgrounds and at boat launches.

Lake Roosevelt National Recreational Area
1008 Crest Dr.
Coulee Dam, WA 99116
509-754-7800
www.nps.gov/laro

Visit us on social media.

Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.
Select "save this park" to use offline.

Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

 **National
Park Foundation**
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Plan Your Visit Find up-to-date information on fees, activities, facilities, safety, and regulations at visitor centers, www.nps.gov/laro, and social media.

Area Services Plan ahead! Be prepared for limited services. Food, lodging, gas, boating and fishing gear rentals, and other services are available in Coulee Dam, Grand Coulee, Kettle Falls, Colville, and Northport. Find small stores at Keller Ferry, Seven Bays, Two Rivers, and McCoys. (See *chart at right*.)

WARNING—Lake Levels Vary Water levels in the lake fluctuate often—even overnight. Low water may make some boat launches unusable at times. The maximum lake level is 1,290 feet above sea level. For a lake level forecast call 800-824-4916.

Safety and Regulations Regulations differ among areas managed by federal, state, and Tribal agencies. Read bulletin boards, ask rangers, and know

the rules. • Be aware of navigational hazards like protruding logs and snags, sandbars, and floating debris. • Always wear a life jacket when on the lake. • Never ride on the bow of a boat. • There are no lifeguards; swim at your own risk. Do not swim alone. • Dispose of human waste in proper sanitation containers. Do not use plastic bags. Use dump stations and floating pumpout stations. Marine sanitation devices (MSD) are required when shoreline camping. • Pets are not allowed on developed swim beaches. Pets are allowed elsewhere but must be leashed at all times. • Protect yourself from the sun and drink plenty of water. • Please watch your children. • Collecting artifacts is strictly prohibited. Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park, including historic areas and submerged town sites. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

Emergencies call 911