

Fort Clatsop

Ocean in view! O! the joy.

“Ocean in view! O! the joy.”

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 overland to the Pacific. He had chosen Lewis to head it, and Lewis selected Clark, his friend and former commanding officer, to share the responsibility.

ties. 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 over the Continental Divide. In November 1805, after some 600 miles of water travel down the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers, they finally sighted the Pacific.

Within 10 days of arriving on the coast, Lewis and Clark decided to leave their storm-bound camp on the north shore and cross the river, where elk were reported to be plentiful. Lewis, with a small party, scouted ahead and found a “most eligible” site for winter quarters. On December 10, 1805, the men began to build a fort about two miles up the Netul River (now Lewis and Clark River). By Christmas Day they were under shelter. They named the fort for the friendly local Indian tribe, the Clatsop. It would be their home for the next three months.

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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 Nehalem 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 was 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 left the fort and all of its furnishings to Coboway, one of the Clatsop chiefs, 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.

MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

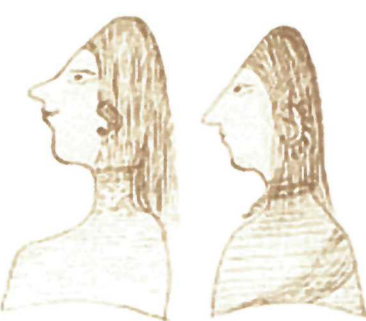


DAVID RUMSEY MAP COLLECTION

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.

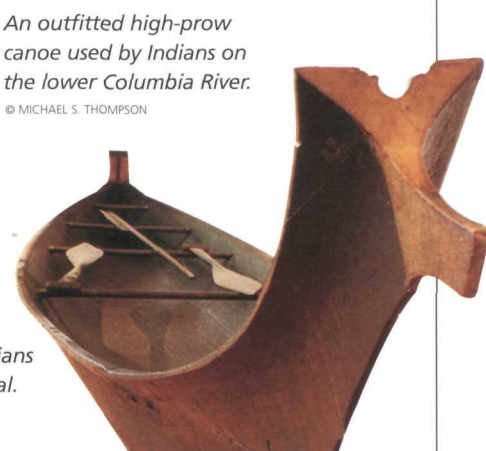


Dentalium shells were prized as currency and decoration to indicate wealth. BURKE MUSEUM



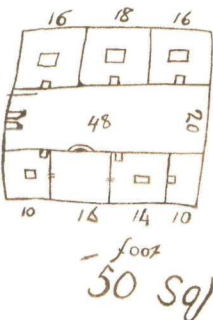
Chinook and Clatsop Indians as drawn in Clark’s journal.

MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY



An outfitted high-prow canoe used by Indians on the lower Columbia River.

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A floor plan with dimensions drawn by William Clark on the elk skin 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 the journals during their three-and-a-half-month stay at Fort Clatsop.

“At this place we had wintered”

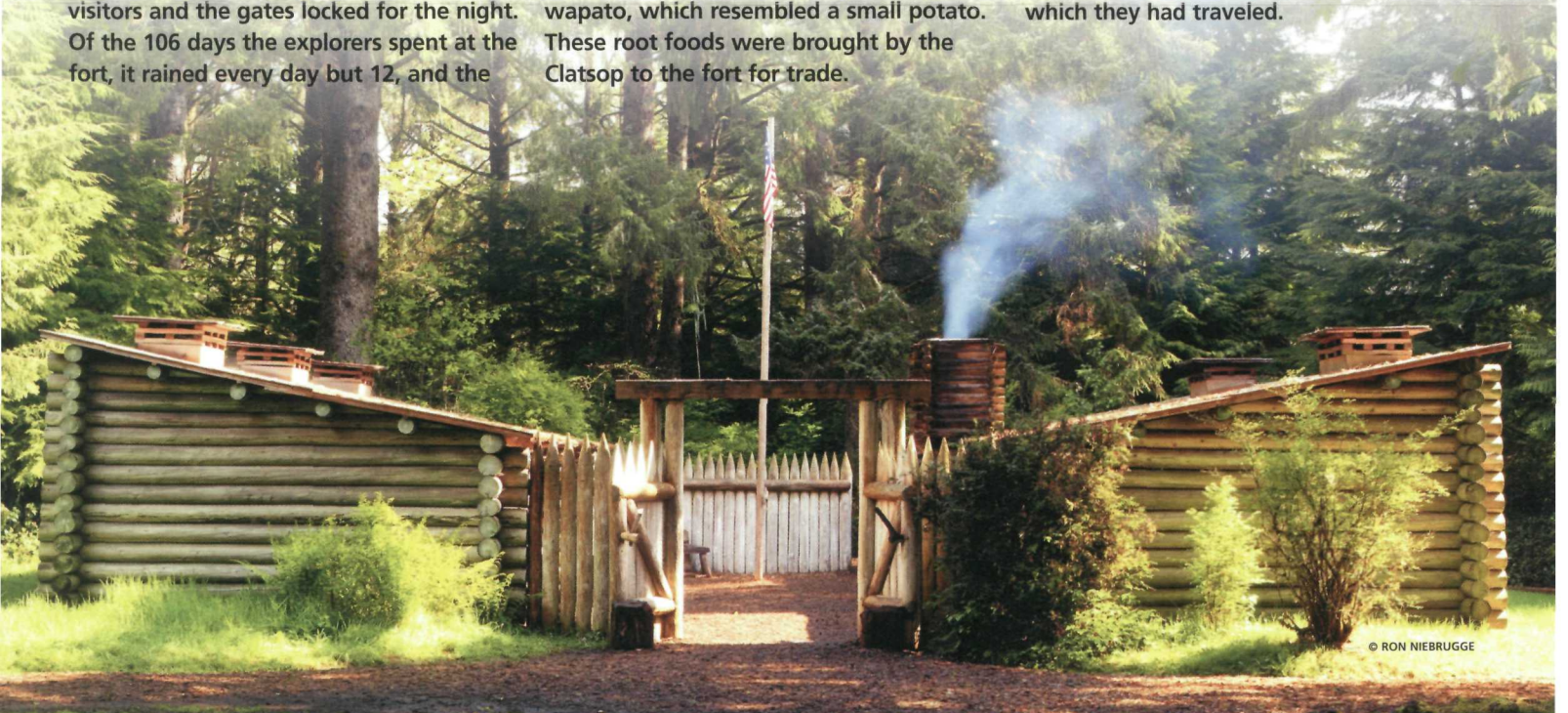
The Corps of Discovery remained at Fort Clatsop from December 7, 1805, until March 23, 1806. During that time, Clatsop and Chinook Indians, whom Clark described as close bargainers, came to the fort almost daily to visit and trade. The captains wrote often in their journals of these tribes’ appearance, 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 Clatsop 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 trees, plants, fish, and wildlife around Fort Clatsop, and drew excellent sketches. Many such descriptions were the first identification of important flora and fauna of the Pacific Northwest. 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 making 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 [Nehalem] families" in what is now a residential area of Seaside, Ore. Usually at least three men were here, 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.

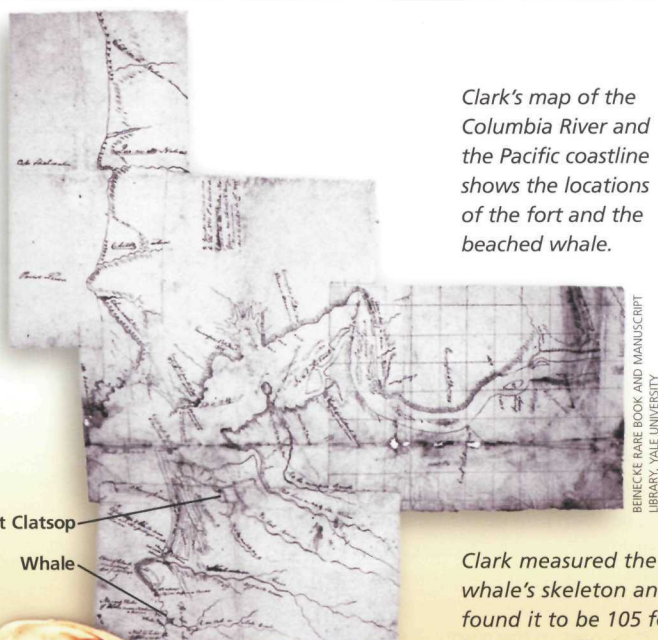
John Clymer's 1975 painting depicts the activity at the salt works with Clatsop and Nehalem looking on. While recent research indicates that the explorers' clothing has too much fringe and, as members of an official U.S. Army expedition, the men would have had little if any facial hair, the painting nevertheless effectively illustrates the method by which the salt was produced.



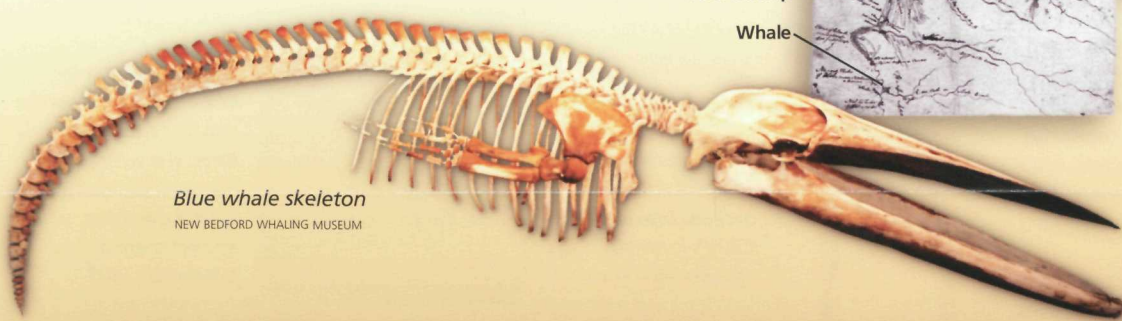
FROM "SALT MAKERS" © BY JOHN F. CLYMER
COURTESY OF MRS. JOHN F. CLYMER AND THE CLYMER MUSEUM OF ART

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 (at today's Cannon Beach in northwest Oregon). Because of adverse weather conditions, Clark and other members of the Corps did not reach 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 Nehalem Indians who had gathered much of the whale's remains were reluctant to part with any of it, but Clark did manage to obtain approximately 300 pounds of blubber to add to the food supply 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."



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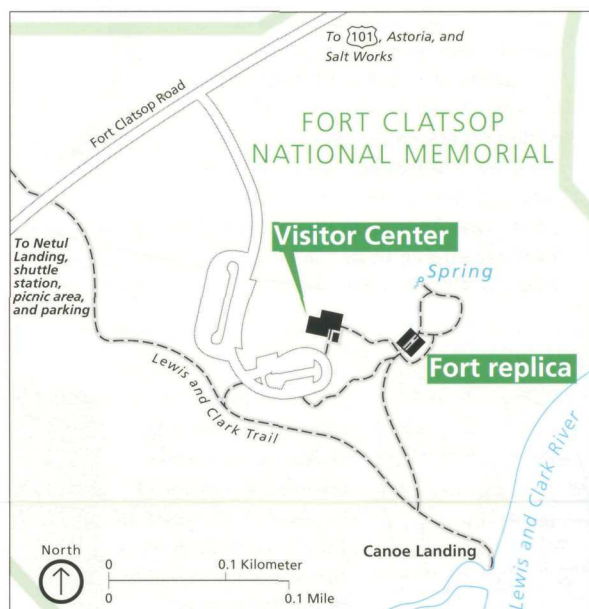
Blue whale skeleton
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

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.

About Your Visit

During the summers of 2004 through 2006, the parking lot at the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center will be closed to vehicular traffic. Visitors should leave their cars at their lodging or at designated parking lots and use the Lewis and Clark Explorer Shuttle to visit Fort Clatsop and other Lewis and Clark sites.

All visitors also need to purchase a timed entry ticket in advance to visit the park. This ticket also serves as a three-day pass on any regional bus as well as the Lewis and Clark Explorer Shuttle.



When visiting the park be sure to see the replica of Fort Clatsop and the exhibit room and audiovisual program at the visitor center. You should also walk the trails to the expedition's canoe landing and the camp's spring. A picnic area is available south of the visitor center.

Overnight accommodations and meals are available in nearby towns. Camping facilities are at Fort Stevens State Park seven miles away and at private campgrounds.

Fort Clatsop National Memorial 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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92343 Fort Clatsop Road
Astoria, OR 97103
503-861-2471
www.nps.gov/focl

For Your Safety
Don't allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. Please be cautious when visiting the canoe landing and Netul Landing; the banks of the river and slough are often slippery and unstable. Stay on designated trails and exercise caution at all times.



Left: End of the Trail monument in Seaside, Ore., not far from the site of the salt-making camp.

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Below: A park ranger explains aspects of Fort Clatsop's history to park visitors.

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