Lewis and Clark
National and State Historical Parks

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park
Oregon / Washington

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cape Disappointment State Park, Washington
© RON NIEBRUGGE

"Ocian 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 over 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. In June 1803 he announced plans to send an exploratory party by rivers to the Pacific. He chose 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.

MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Information collected by Lewis and Clark was laboriously recorded in journals like the one shown here. The explorers updated the journals during the Corps of Discovery's three-month stay at Fort Clatsop.

In April 1805 the Corps of Discovery left Fort Mandan and followed the Missouri and its upper branches into an unmapped world. Along the Lemhi River, in what is now Idaho, Sacagawea's people provided horses and a guide for the grueling trip 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 saw the Pacific Ocean after setting up a temporary camp (Station Camp) on a sandy beach on the north shore of the Columbia.

For 10 days the men explored the surrounding area, including Cape Disappointment, looking for 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 eligable" 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 months.

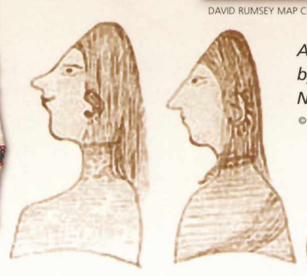
Treated with "extrodeanary friendship"

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 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 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, Coboway, who "has been much more kind an[d] hospitable to us than any other indian in this neighbourhood."

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

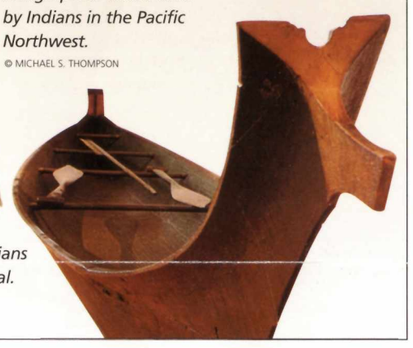
Salmon were, and still are, a fundamental part of the spiritual and cultural identity of Columbia Basin Indians. Drawing from Clark's journal.
MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Chinook and Clatsop Indians as drawn in 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.

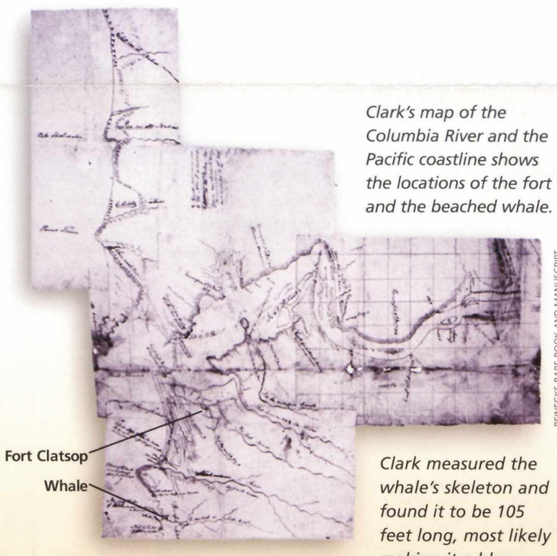


A high-prow canoe used by Indians in the Pacific Northwest.
© MICHAEL S. THOMPSON

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.

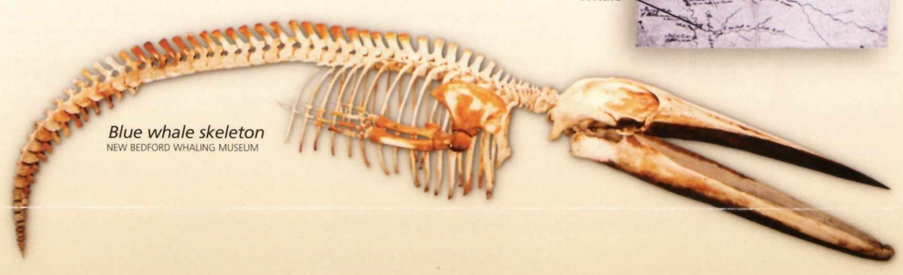
The Tillamook Indians who had gathered much of the whale's meat and blubber were reluctant to part with any of it, but Clark managed to purchase approximately 300 pounds of blubber and a few gallons of rendered oil. Lewis sampled the blubber and found it "not unlike the fat of Poark tho' the texture was more spongey and somewhat coarser. I had a part of it cooked and found it very pallitable and tender, it resembled the beaver or the dog in flavour." Today's six-mile Tillamook Head Trail from Seaside to Indian Beach in Ecola State Park 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.

BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY

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.



Blue whale skeleton
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

"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 elkhide 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.

"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 [Nehalem] 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.

Below: *This replica of Fort Clatsop was built in 1955 largely from a floor plan with dimensions that William Clark drew on the elkskin cover of one of his journals. The replica was destroyed by fire in October 2005.*

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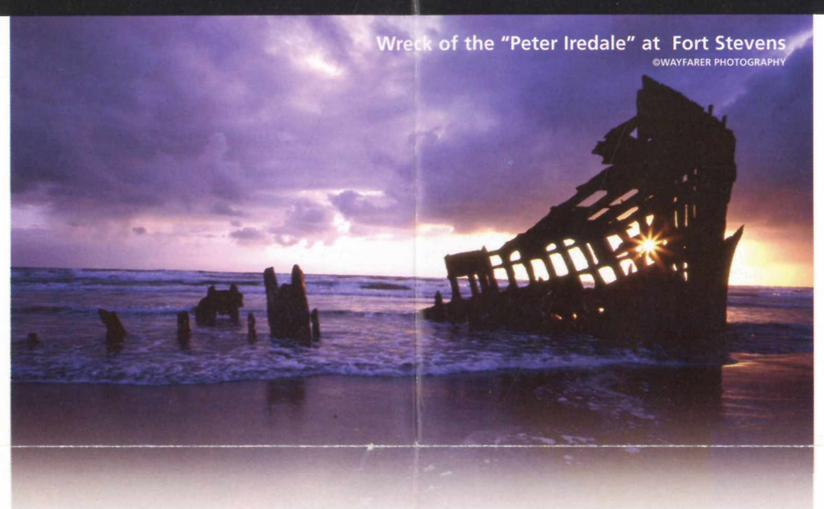
Exploring Lewis and Clark National and State Historical Parks

Fort to Sea Trail
NPS/BOB GREENBURG


Wreck of the "Peter Iredale" at Fort Stevens
©WAYFARER PHOTOGRAPHY

Ecola Beach
©FOTOSEARCH

Welcome to one of America's newest national parks. The park rings the mouth of the Columbia River and stretches some 40 miles along the rugged Pacific Coast. The Chinook and Clatsop Indians have made this region their home for thousands of years. More recently, during the winter of 1805–06, Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery visited here at the end of their 4,000-mile trek across the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. Now, with the creation of this new national park, you can walk where first Chinook and Clatsop and then Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery walked.

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is a joint venture between the National Park Service and the states of Oregon and Washington. The park consists of 12 individual areas 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 recorded their experiences and discoveries, and preparing for the trip home. Taken together, the following sites embody stories of hardship and danger, of collaboration and adaptation, and of exploration and discovery.

Dismal Nitch So described 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 polled the members of the Corps of Discovery whether to cross the Columbia River and examine the south side for a winter encampment site. This poll was the first of its kind to include Clark's slave York and Sacagawea.

Netul Landing This area of the park provides an opportunity to stroll a paved path along the Lewis and Clark River (originally the Netul 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 reconstructed Fort Clatsop.

Fort to Sea Trail This 6.5-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.

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

Cape Disappointment State Park This marks the farthest point westward reached by Lewis and Clark. *See "Cape Disappointment State Park" below for features and activities.*

Fort Columbia State Park For thousands of years this area was home to the Chinook Indians. Fort Columbia (1896–1947) is one of the few intact coastal defense sites in the United States. Explore the fort grounds or hike the trails that wind up the hillside through mature stands of spruce and hemlock trees. In summer the park hours are 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; in winter 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. A small parking fee is charged.

Fort Stevens State Park For thousands of years the Clatsop Indians lived here on Point Adams, the southern tip of land that marks the entrance to the Columbia River. After this land became part of the United States, the same geography that served the needs of the Clatsop Indians also served the United States military. From the Civil War through the end of World War II, Fort Stevens Military Reservation guarded the mouth of the Columbia River. *See "Fort Stevens State Park" below for features and activities.*

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

Fort Clatsop Built on the banks of the Netul River (now the Lewis and Clark River), this was the winter encampment for the Corps of Discovery from December 1805 to March 1806. *See "Fort Clatsop" below for features and activities.*

Ecola State Park In 1806 Captain Clark and 12 expedition members, including Sacagawea, crossed Tillamook Head, which Clark called "the Steepest worst & highest mountain I ever assended," to see a beached whale south of here in the present town of Cannon Beach. *See "Ecola State Park" below for features and activities.*

About Your Visit Start your visit at one of the park's two main visitor centers: at Fort Clatsop, near Astoria, Ore., or the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center at Cape Disappointment State Park near Ilwaco, Wash. The Fort Clatsop Visitor Center is open year-round except December 25. 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. The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. A small admission fee is charged at each visitor center. Park rangers are ready to answer your questions and help plan your visit. Maps, guide books, and other literature are available.

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.*

For More Information
Lewis and Clark National Historical Park
92343 Fort Clatsop Road
Astoria, OR 97103
503-861-2471
www.nps.gov/lewi

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Cape Disappointment State Park

Cape Disappointment (formerly Fort Canby State Park) is a 1,882-acre camping park on the Long Beach Peninsula, fronted by the Pacific Ocean. The 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. Visitors enjoy beachcombing and exploring the area's rich natural and cultural history. The nearby coastal towns of Ilwaco and Long Beach feature special events and festivals, spring through fall.

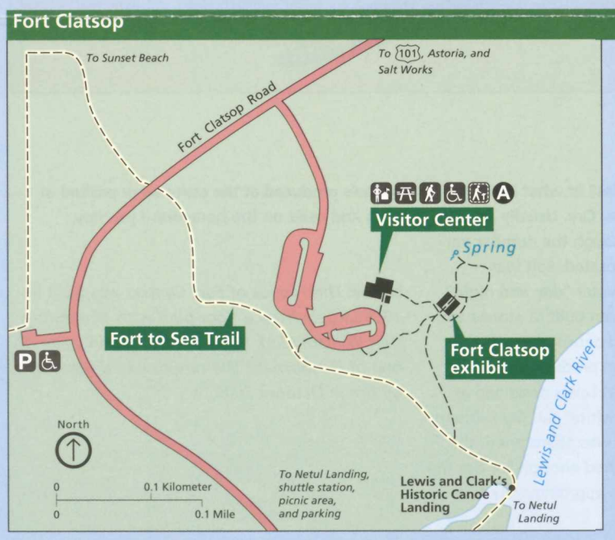
Perched on a cliff overlooking the mouth of the Columbia River, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center contains exhibits offering an overview of the Corps of Discovery's entire journey from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean. Primary focus of the exhibits is on the expedition's discoveries and experiences along the Columbia River, with special attention given to the Corps' arrival at the mouth of the Columbia and the overland journey to the Pacific Ocean. The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center is open year round. For specific seasonal operating hours please call the park office at 360-642-3078.

Fort Stevens State Park

Camping, beachcombing, freshwater lake swimming, trails, wildlife viewing, boat ramps for fishing and canoeing, an historic shipwreck, and an historic military area make Fort Stevens a fascinating park to visit. A network of nine miles of bicycle trails and six miles of hiking trails allow you to explore the park through spruce and hemlock forests, wetlands, dunes, and shore pine. Throughout the year, you can browse through displays dating back to the Civil War at the museum, visit the only enclosed Civil War earthworks site on the West Coast, and explore World War II gun batteries.

The historic area (open daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1) features a military museum and gift shop, guided tours, interpretive displays, movies, living history demonstrations, and a replica of a Clatsop Indian plankhouse (to the west of the World War II barracks). For a detailed tour of the park ask for the Fort Stevens Trail Guide and Historic Military Site at the military museum and gift shop. Call 503-861-1671 or 800-551-6949 for more information.

Fort Clatsop



Here you will find a replica of Fort Clatsop, as well as living history programs, ranger-led programs, an exhibit hall, orientation films, a bookstore featuring books for all ages, American Indian crafts, and much more. You will also find the trailheads for the Fort to Sea Trail and the Netul River Trail.

The Fort to Sea Trail is 6.5 miles long and runs from the visitor center at Fort Clatsop to Sunset Beach on the Pacific Ocean. Lewis and Clark constantly kept parties in the field hunting, gathering food, making salt, and trading with the Indians. This trail lets you explore the forests, travel along the coastal rivers and lakes, and cross the coastal dunes much like the Corps of Discovery. The trail runs through the homeland of the Clatsop Indians, one of the tribes that helped ensure the survival of the Corps. The Netul River Trail is a shorter trail, only 1.5-miles long, that follows the river from Fort Clatsop to Netul Landing. The landing features a kayak/canoe launch that is part of the Lower Columbia River Water Trail, and a life-sized statue of Sacagawea and her son. Call 503-861-2471 for more information.

Ecola State Park

Wrapping around Tillamook Head between Seaside and Cannon Beach, Ecola State Park is a hiking and sightseeing mecca. Trails with cliffside viewpoints along nine miles of Pacific Ocean shoreline overlook picture-postcard seascapes, cozy coves, densely forested promontories and even a long-abandoned offshore lighthouse. Swimmers can enjoy two spacious, sandy beaches—Crescent Beach and Indian Beach. Surfers can ride the waves at Indian Beach, and tide pools await discovery. Keep a watchful eye for the many species of wildlife and birds that call Ecola home. During the winter and spring, migrating gray whales may be seen from one of the promontories overlooking the ocean. Those interested in finding the 1806 beached whale site will experience none of the hardship that confronted Captain Clark and his party: a paved road from Cannon Beach and a trail network make the trek much easier.

Ecola State Park offers year-round recreation for all types of modern day explorers. Call 503-436-2844 or 800-551-6949 for information.

The Lower Columbia River Water Trail spans 146 miles of tidally-influenced waters from the Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean. It includes sites and facilities for non-motorized boating.