

A LASTING LEGACY

The Lewis and Clark Places Names of the Pacific Northwest – Part III

By Allen "Doc" Wesselius

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This is the third in a four-part series detailing Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's use of place names on their journey through the Pacific Northwest, and how those names have fared through the years.

Sandy River

"Quicksand River" on the south side of the Columbia River was named by the Corps of Discovery because of the sand at its mouth that diverted the course of the Columbia to the northern shore. Erosion of mud flows from volcanic activity, which occurred shortly before the expedition's journey, washed from the slopes of Mount Hood and deposited the volcanic ash and pebbles into the Columbia.

In 1792 Lieutenant William Broughton had named this southern tributary "Barings River," probably after the English family of bankers and financiers. "Quicksand River" was used for nearly 50 years after the Lewis and Clark expedition, but it was shortened by early pioneers during the mid 19th century to its present form.

Washougal River

"Seal River" on the route map ("Sea Calf River" on the draft map of the expedition) was named for the harbor seal populations that congregated about the mouth of the river, feeding on salmon. This north bank flow into the Columbia was the site of an extended encampment the corps used while hunting the nearby open plains when the party returned upstream in 1806.

The present name is an Anglicized version of the native word for "rushing water." The Washougal river's confluence with the Columbia became an important steamboat stop—Parker's Landing—before the introduction of railroads along the river.

Lady Island

"White Brant Isld" on the route map and "Fowls I" on the draft map provide another example of the process by which the captains assigned names to geographical features. Names were suggested and sometimes a more appropriate name was selected for the final designation. Lewis, in 1806, decided that "white brant" was more appropriate, identifying the island with the lesser snow goose.

In 1792 Broughton had named the island "Johnstone Island," but the captains did not have this information. The present name is for Joseph Lady, who in 1853 had a land claim on the island.

Government Island

"Diamond Island" was named by the corps because of its shape. The physiography of the islands in this section of the Columbia has changed considerably in the past 200 years, making it difficult to correlate Clark's maps with modern topography. Island drift and flooding have changed the shape and alignment of the islands in the river.

Broughton spent the nights of October 29 and 30, 1792, in this section of the river on the final leg of his exploration of the Columbia. In 1850 the federal government reserved "Miller's Island" for a military installation, giving rise to the present place name.

Lemon Island

"White Goose Island" on the route map and "Twin Island" on the draft map were two low islands west of "Diamond Island." These descriptive names were given to the islands, but no apparent final decision was made on a single place name due to the relative insignificance of these features. The islands have now consolidated with Government Island, the channels between the islands filling with silt. Various spellings of Lemon have been applied to the island's name, since an early pioneer, Peter Lemon, was unable to sign his name.

Hayden Island

"Image Canoe Island" was named by the captains because of the ornamented native canoes that they observed on its shore. The many islands in this stretch of the river taxed the cartographer, Clark, to name and chart the river. What would be later named the Willamette River, coming in behind the islands, would elude the captains until their return upriver in 1806.

Broughton had named this island, close to the southern shore, after Vancouver's botanist, Archibold Menzies. Guy Hayden, an early Oregon pioneer, owned the island and it has had his name ever since.

Tomahawk Island

A small island between "Image Canoe Island" and the north shore of the river was given the name "Tomahawk Island," after an incident during which Clark's tomahawk pipe was stolen. Clark visited a village on the mainland but was unable to determine the location of a river that geographic intuition indicated must be present in the area.

The island was eventually washed away, but in 1927 the United States Board of Geographic Names (USBGN) was petitioned to assign the name to a new island that formed on the east end of Hayden Island. The Lewis and Clark name was perpetuated by naming a new island after one that has washed away. Tomahawk and Hayden islands have now almost been consolidated by river silting and road construction.

Mount St. Helens

This peak was confused for a time with another dormant volcano east of it but in the same latitude (Mount Adams). The captains finally identified Mount St. Helens when they were west of the mountain range, but they then confused the peak with Mount Rainier. They eventually corrected their identification and used the British name for the peak but recorded several different spellings in their descriptions of the mountain.

Sailing off the Pacific Coast, Vancouver observed a dormant volcanic peak of classic symmetry and named it to honor the British ambassador to Spain and his personal friend, Baron Saint Helens. In 1980 the picturesque peak lived up to its Indian name, "Lawala Clough," meaning "smoking mountain." The volcanic peak erupted and took 1,300 feet off the top, blunting the perfect snow capped cone.

Mount Rainier

The captains first identified Mount St. Helens as "Mount Ranier" but corrected their error later when both volcanic peaks were visible from farther down the river. They used the British name for the peak but never got the spelling correct, using several variations.

In the spring of 1792 Vancouver sighted the Pacific Northwest's highest mountain and named it for Admiral Peter Rainier of the Royal Navy. The British admiral gained fame for his defeat of American colonists in the Revolutionary War. Pronunciation of his French name was Anglicized to "Rainy-er" by the British and has now been Americanized to "Ray-neer."

The mountain has been subject to many suggested name changes by patriotic Americans, but it still retains the place name bestowed by the British. Each Indian tribe had a slightly different title for the peak; most were variations of "Tah-ho-ma," meaning simply "The Mountain." In 1917 the USBGN approved Mount Rainier as the official title for Washington's highest mountain, which is cloaked in the most extensive glacier system in the contiguous United States.

Sauvie Island

The largest island in the Columbia River was called "Wappato Island" by Lewis and Clark. The Indian word "wappato" for arrowhead root, which grew abundantly in the marshes, was used to name the island. The captains used several different spellings for the word "wappato" in their attempts to record the Indian pronunciation of the word.

Broughton visited the island in 1792 and named the western end of the island "Warrior Point" and the upstream point "Belle Vue Point." Nathaniel Wyeth built Fort Williams on the island in 1834-35, and some early maps used the name "Wyeth Island." The fort was named for one of Wyeth's fur trade partners, which was an American commercial rival to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The present name derived from a French Canadian employee of the HBC, Lourent Sauve, who settled on the island after the failure of the Wyeth enterprise. Although the spelling has been standardized, there are several different pronunciations of the name: Soh-vee, Sow-vee, Saw-vee and Saw-vay.

Willamette Valley

First called "Wap-pa-too Valley" by Clark, then changed to "Columbia Valley" by Lewis on the return trip in 1806. Nicholas Biddle changed the name to "Columbian Valley" when he edited the journals for the captains.

Billed as "The Garden of the World" by promoters of westward expansion, the Willamette Valley was the final destination for many western pioneers who followed the Oregon Trail. The present name derived from "Wal-lamt," an Indian name for a place on the river near the present site of Oregon City, Oregon.

Bachelor Island

Lewis and Clark first called the island "Green Bryor Isd," when they traveled downriver in 1805 but changed the name to "Quathlahpotle Island" in 1806. They honored the large village of 14 wooden houses and 900 inhabitants on the mainland, naming the island for the native village. The mild climate and abundant wildlife of the flood plain wetlands made this area attractive to native occupation.

In 1841 Wilkes charted the island as "Pasauks Island." The present name is of local origin, in honor of an unmarried man who took a donation claim on the island. Bachelor Island is now part of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. The mild, rainy winter climate of the lower Columbia River is an ideal environment for migrating and wintering waterfowl. Cathlapotle is an important archaeological excavation of the ancient Indian village on the mainland across from the island.

Deer Island

This island has retained the name given by Lewis and Clark, "E-lal lar or Deer Island." The Anglicized version of the Upper Chinookan word "E-lal las," meaning "deer," was used by the captains to identify the island. The corps hunted the Columbian white-tailed deer on the island when they returned upriver and needed to resupply their provisions.

Mount Coffin

Marked as "Knob," a descriptive notation, on the route map, the large rock was observed by the corps as they hurried toward the Pacific Ocean. The "remarkable knob" was used by the natives for interment of their dead and was noted by other earlier travelers on the river. The 240-foot basalt landmark was leveled for its gravel during port construction at Longview, Washington.

Wallace Island

Named "Sturgeon Island" by the expedition, there appears to have been an error in transferring information from the draft map to the route map. The position of modern islands is not consistent with Clark's drawings; therefore, the exact identification of the island is subjective. The island is now named after an early settler, Wallace Slang.

Puget Island

Probably named "Sea Otter Island" on the route map; the map is damaged, leaving "Sea" to be surmised. There also appears to be an error in transferring information from the draft map to the route map, but it is assumed that this is the island named for the important fur-bearing mammal.

Broughton, in 1792, named the island for one of Vancouver's lieutenants, Peter Puget. The present place name retains the British identification for the island, named for the same person honored by the naming of Puget Sound.

Tenasillahe Island

Clark used a descriptive term rather than an applied place name to identify this large island and nearby smaller island as "Marshy Islands." The island's present name is composed of two Chinook-jargon words, "tenas," meaning small, and "illahe," meaning land. The island was diked and farmed before becoming part of the Lewis and Clark Wildlife Refuge.

Pillar Rock

Simply marked "Rock" on Clark's route map, the basalt rock rose 75 to 100 feet above water level, depending on the tide. Clark recorded in the course and distance log, "Ocian in view! O! the joy," mistaking the wide Columbia River mouth estuary for the ocean. The landmark was given its present place name by Wilkes in 1841.

Lewis and Clark Wildlife Refuge

Traveling through the maze of islands both westbound and eastbound, the captains named them the "Seal Islands." Today the river estuarine refuge contains 35,000 acres of islands, sandbars, mud flats and tidal marshes. Woody, Horseshoe, Karlson, and Marsh islands are the main islands in the wildlife refuge on Oregon's side of the Columbia. Grays Bay

Grays Bay

This bay was given a descriptive name, "Shallow Bay," by the explorers as they coasted the shore, striving to reach the Pacific Ocean.

Vancouver had named the bay to honor Gray, a pointed reminder that the American had only explored the mouth of the river. The five months' difference between Gray's discovery and Vancouver's exploration resulted in contested territorial claims to the Pacific Northwest at the end of the 18th century and thereafter. Wilkes, in 1841, charted the bay as "Kutzule Bay," but the British name has been retained as the place name for the large, shallow bay on the north shore of the Columbia River.

Portuguese Point

The corps was pinned down on the west side of "Shallow Bay" on "Cape Swells" for two days as they waited out a storm while trying to reach the mouth of the Columbia. Their descriptive name derived from the waves that battered the coastline where they spent miserable nights waiting out the storm.

The present place name for the point is from early Columbia River navigators, with some evidence that the name has ties to a shipwreck.

Point Ellice

During a seasonal storm that raged inward from the coast, the corps was forced to stay for a week on the east side of a large promontory that projected into the river. Wind lacerated, waves lashed, and the roaring sea attacked them from every quarter. Gale-force winds threatened to thrust the party into the seething water. "Point Distress," "Stormy Point," and "Blustering Point" were names used to describe the site of the corps' plight during their attempt to reach the mouth of the Columbia.

The large mountainous projection into the river was named by fur traders of the North West Company to honor Edward Ellice, a London agent of the company. The present place name represents the British influence during the fur-trading period on the Columbia.

Cliff Point and Grays Point

The exact location of "Harbor Point" on the draft map of the Columbia River's mouth cannot be determined. The present Cliff Point and Grays Point are on the west side of "Shallow Bay," between the camp on "Point Swells" and the three campsites on "Point Distress." The geography of the shoreline is not consistent with Clark's "niches," which he exaggerated on his maps.

Cliff Point is a descriptive name for a group of cliffs on the western shore of Grays Bay. The British named the other predominant point on the western shore of the bay for William Broughton, who in 1792 explored the Columbia River for Vancouver. The present place name was charted by Wilkes in 1841 and named Grays Point to honor the American explorer who first explored the Columbia River.

McGowan

"Station Camp," also called "Camp Point," was the final campsite for the corps on the northern shore of the river. The captains used it as a base from which to explore the mouth of the Columbia. The camp was situated near what the captains thought was an abandoned Indian village, close to a small creek for a potable water supply in the wind-driven salt spray. The captains did not comprehend the biseasonal settlement pattern of the natives. Their summer fishing village on the river was not abandoned, but rather the population had moved to winter quarters. Clark constructed an important map for the corps' record of their northern shore exploration of the Columbia River's mouth. The map recorded the precise location of "Station Camp," but there is no indication in the journals of why that name was chosen. Using a

surveyor's term, the name was probably selected to represent a specific point; station on a horizontal plane is the equivalent of benchmark on a vertical plane. The object of the corps' mission was to reach the mouth of the Columbia River by transcontinental exploration. Clark's survey of landmarks and stations helped him document their success for future reference.

In 1848 Father Louis Linnet claimed 320 acres for a Roman Catholic mission on the windward side of Point Ellice, southeast of Chinook Point. Patrick McGowan purchased the claim in 1852 and started a salmon saltery, later building a cannery at the town already named in his honor.

McCowan's heirs donated the land for a small Washington State park, commemorating the Lewis and Clark campsite, "Station Camp."

Chinook Point

"Point open Slope" was used by the corps to describe a promontory below their main camp at the mouth of the Columbia, on the northern shore. The open slope had to be crossed, first by Lewis and later by Clark, when they explored the mouth of the river and Cape Disappointment.

In 1792 Broughton had named the point "Village Point" for a large Indian village situated near the projection into the river. In 1811 British fur traders named the promontory "Point Komikomi" to honor the Chinook chief of the village. Captain Edward Belcher, a British merchant in 1839, named the point for the important Indian traders on the Columbia, "Chenoke Point." Early explorers often made no attempt to determine the native designation for geographical features, which in this instance was known as "Nose-to-Ilse." The point derived its name from the Chinook Indians who occupied the lower northern banks of the Columbia. Early settlers distorted the original Indian name, "cinuk," to the modern form, Chinook.

United States Army construction of Fort Columbia on the point began in 1898, complementing Fort Canby on Cape Disappointment and Fort Stevens on Point Adams. The triangular defense of the Columbia River mouth remained active until the close of World War II. Remnants of the defensive fortifications can still be found in Fort Columbia State Park.

Baker Bay

"Haley's Bay" was named for the Indians' favorite trader, as reported to the captains, who had anchored in the protected inlet behind Cape Disappointment. Trade with the local inhabitants for sea otter skins led to commerce on the Columbia; however, the secretive merchants did not record their trade routes, so the captains did not have this important information until they questioned the natives.

The territorial sovereignty of the Pacific Northwest was left to other explorers with vested nationalistic endeavors. William Broughton named the bay, "Baker's Bay," to give credit to a British merchant, Captain James Baker, whose ship was anchored inside the Columbia's mouth when Broughton crossed the bar to explore the river for Vancouver in 1792.

"Deception Bay" and "Rouge's Harbor" were used by later merchants to describe the bay. The present place name, Baker Bay, retains the British name without using the possessive form.

Cape Disappointment

To describe the headlands at the mouth of the Columbia, Lewis and Clark used the British geographical place names given by Captain John Meares, a British trading merchant, in 1788. Meares was disappointed at not finding "The River of the West"; when he saw the mouth of the river, he thought it was only an entrance to a bay; thus the name Cape Disappointment.

Captain Bruno de Hezeta claimed to have detected the fabled Northwest Passage while sailing off the Pacific Coast in 1775. Lewis and Clark had a chance to use the Spanish name for the cape, "Cabo de San Rougue," but they chose not to.

Gray's name for the northern headlands, "Cape Hancock," and the Indian name, "Kah-eese," would not replace the original British name after its continued use by British fur traders. Cape Disappointment is one of the oldest British geographical place names in Washington.

Pacific Ocean

Clark used two 16th century terms to identify the ocean that the corps had traveled across the continent to reach: the "Sea of the South," as Balboa referred to the new ocean he sailed into in 1513; and the "Pacific Ocean," so called by Magellan in 1520, when he sailed around the world.

Point Adams

Lewis and Clark used Robert Gray's name for the low, sandy southern peninsula at the mouth of the Columbia River. "Point Adams" and "Columbia River" are names given by Gray that have continued in use to the present time. In 1792 he named the north cape on the mouth of the river "Cape Hancock" and the southern peninsula after John Adams, in an attempt to identify his "Columbia's River" with the United States. The Spanish had charted and named the peninsula "Cape Frondosa" (leafy cape), for its numerous trees.

Chinook River

There is an inconsistency between the maps and journals when trying to determine the names Lewis and Clark applied to two rivers that drained into "Haley's Bay." "White Brant Creek" and "Chinook River" are labeled differently on Clark's maps of the Columbia's mouth. He also misidentified the rivers when he went on a sojourn to the coast with 11 men. He probably intended the "Chinook River" to be applied to the drainage close to the village of that native nation.

The Chinook Indians controlled trade on the Columbia from their village on the great river's north shore; during the winter they migrated to Willapa Bay, protected from southwesterly storms. The name "Chinook" came from the Chehalis Indian name for the Chinook summer village, "cinuk." A hybrid version of the Chinook language came to be known as the Chinook jargon, the language of maritime and river traders.

Wallacut River

Errors created in transferring information from the journals to maps become apparent when studying the names the captains applied to this drainage. "White Brant Creek" was intended to be applied to the most westerly drainage into "Haley's Bay." "Chinook River" is charted for the watershed on one of Clark's maps, and he called the river by the same name when he camped near it while returning from the coast. Conjecture and second-hand information may have confused the captains. This drainage was used by the Chinook Indians to reach their winter village, but Clark intended the drainage near the Indians' summer village to be named after its inhabitants.

"Knights River" was used by HBC employees to identify the drainage. The present place name for the river came from the Chinook Indian word, "Walihut," meaning "place of stones." Near the mouth of the river, the north bank has many small, smooth boulders.

Leadbetter Point

"Point Lewis" was not seen by Clark when he conducted a reconnaissance of the seacoast north of the Columbia River. After gaining information from the local Indians on the supposed high point of land, he named it "after my particular friend Lewis." The captains did not engage in speculative creation of geography; however, sometimes they misunderstood the information they obtained. The exact geographical feature that Clark named has been identified as Leadbetter Point, North Head, and Cape Shoalwater by various authors. Clark crossed North Head and probably was describing a feature farther north on the seacoast. Cape Shoalwater, a high point—unlike the low Leadbetter Point—is farther north, on the northern side of the entrance to Willapa Bay.

Mearns, in 1788, described the peninsula more correctly as "Low Point" and named Cape Shoalwater. The present name for the peninsula honors Lieutenant Danville Leadbetter, a member of the United States Coast Survey in 1852.

Centralia veterinarian Allen "Doc" Wesselius is a member of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, a board member of the foundation's Washington chapter, and a longtime enthusiast of the Corps of Discovery and Pacific Northwest history.