

A LASTING LEGACY

The Lewis and Clark Place Names of the Pacific Northwest – Part I

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*We shall not cease from exploring
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

—T. S. Elliot

At the close of the 18th century, most of the world's seas had been explored and roughly mapped. However, middle North America was unknown to the scientific community of Europe and America. Human history in the Pacific Northwest began thousands of years before the first Euro-American explorers entered into the vast wilderness between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast, but an accurate record of its geographic composition did not exist.

Aboriginal cultures flourished in the unknown "Far West," where the inhabitants fished the streams and hunted in the plains and forests. Nineteenth-century explorers knew they were not "discovering" new lands but were acquiring, for the first time, knowledge to be recorded and shared with the scientific community. International claims for sovereignty resulted from this quest to acquire knowledge of the unknown territory. After two centuries of traditional coastline surveys of the Pacific Northwest, there ensued a political rush to map the interior. Among other consequences, this mix of cultures resulted in a colorful blend of names that were applied to geographical features encountered and recorded for the first time by the explorers.

President Thomas Jefferson's instructions to Captain Meriwether Lewis were explicit: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river and search principal streams of it, as, by its course and communication with the water of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct and practical water communication across the continent for the purpose of commerce." The thinly disguised "Corps of Volunteers of North Western Discovery" was designed to obtain more than just scientific knowledge, for the undisclosed purpose of the expedition was to enhance American claims to the Columbia River drainage by making a transcontinental journey to its mouth on the Pacific Ocean.

As science gives legitimacy to exploration, exploration is a prelude to exploitation. When he became president, Thomas Jefferson, always the statesman, had the opportunity finally to fulfill his scientific curiosity about the Far West. His search for knowledge, however, was surpassed by his desire to expand the nation westward. He was concerned about foreign appropriation of unclaimed western territories, and he realized the economic importance of western trade to the fledgling Union.

Jefferson was also a visionary. Before most of the public and a majority of those in government realized the importance of the West, Jefferson sought to gain knowledge of it. The Lewis and Clark expedition, as it is known today, was not a consequence of the Louisiana Purchase; preparations for the exploration were complete before the public knew that the government had finalized negotiations for that transaction. While the Louisiana Purchase was of vital importance to the final boundaries of the United States, the expedition was instrumental in eventually establishing American sovereignty over the Pacific Northwest.

The Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-06 left St. Louis and began its journey across the continent to the Pacific Ocean by traveling up the Missouri River. Once the military unit crossed the Rocky Mountains, the co-captains, both army officers, led the corps of twenty-six enlisted men, two civilian interpreters, the wife and son of one of the interpreters, and the personal servant of Captain Clark into unknown and unclaimed territory. Upon reaching what is now known as the Snake River, the corps entered the present state of Washington on October 10, 1805.

By the time the expedition left the confines of Washington, on May 5, 1806, the captains had created a lasting legacy for future place names in the region. A conventional expectation is that original place names have a perpetual right to retention. In reality, place names are constantly changing. Unfortunately, if a name is changed, it loses its connection to a certain time in the past. Donald Jackson, a leading authority on Lewis and Clark, summarized correctly, "It is the flux, the fragility, the role of happenstance, and the waywardness of human nature in the handing down of place-names that make their study so worthy a subject."

The Lewis and Clark nomenclature of Pacific Northwest place names can be managed with four categories. First are the places named for persons, both members of the corps and friends. The captains honored every member of the expedition with a name along the 1805 westbound route. While only five Pacific Northwest rivers were bestowed names for members from the corps, none of these commemorations has lasted. Probably the most grievous loss was the change of two main Columbia River tributaries honoring the two captains who first mapped the basin's principle features.

Known native and Euro-American names, the second category, were applied when the captains had or could obtain this information. The custom of Pacific Northwest tribes—naming a specific point on a river rather than the river itself—was foreign to the captains. Though the captains tried through interpreters to obtain Indian names for these features, it was difficult to settle on any single nomenclature as different tribes would often have different names for the same specific location. The various geographical linguistics of the Indian tribes along the route of exploration also tended to confuse the captains when they tried to give native place names to specific drainages.

The captains had information from Captain George Vancouver's *Voyages of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean* and scrupulously used the known place names instead of engaging in wholesale renaming of the British toponyms in the spirit of American patriotism. Lewis took tracings from Vancouver's *Voyages* and included this topographical information on a large inclusive map to be used during the expedition. This working map was not complete. It located Mount Hood, Mount St. Helens and Mount Rainier but did not include other British place

names. Lewis and Clark names that duplicated British honorifics did not survive the British dominance of the fur-trade era in the Pacific Northwest, which lasted until the mid 19th century.

The third place-name category consists of descriptive names that Lewis and Clark applied to geographical features. Generally, these names were contrived to describe the characteristics of the geographical feature under consideration. Often these descriptive names were not intended to be used as specific place-names—i.e., "Broad Brook," "Knob," and "High Humped Mountain." In some cases descriptive place names were replaced later in the journey with names that can be assigned to the first or second category of place names. The captains' journals and maps contain many examples of changes from the original first impressions.

The fourth place-name category, manufactured names, has no direct relationship to the geographic feature named and no direct association can be positively drawn as to why the name was chosen. In rare cases, only conjecture exists when trying to determine why the captains chose a name, though journal entries provide some clues. It is interesting to note that Lewis and Clark did not shift names—that is, name a place after a well-known place name—a common practice among other explorers and settlers.

Eighty percent of the Lewis and Clark exploration between St. Louis and the Pacific Ocean took place on waterways; therefore, the names applied by the captains were predominantly to tributary streams, islands, terrain abounding drainages, and the occasional striking geographic feature encountered along the way. The members of the expedition were voyageurs, river boatmen, not mariners or mountain men. Lewis and Clark's place names reflect this orientation in their naming of landscape features along the watercourses they followed. Other than in descriptive terms, the captains did not bother, except in one instance, to apply their colorful names to the mountains they observed.

A study of Pacific Northwest history during the 19th century reveals why so few Lewis and Clark place names survived to be included in today's geographical nomenclature. By the time of Nicholas Biddle's 1814 publication, *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark*, the erosion had already begun. Biddle, the first editor of the journals, wrote the earliest narrative of the expedition for public record; but the volume did not have a large distribution, perhaps because of its delay in publication. It did contain an engraved map that was an abbreviated version of Clark's manuscript map of 1810.

Post-expeditionary maps were not readily available to the nationalistic fur-trading enterprises then being established. British dominance in the Pacific Northwest fur trade influenced the usage of place names established along the coast by Vancouver and up the Columbia. British fur traders—North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) employees—nurtured these names and contributed their own colloquialisms to the topographical nomenclature, solidifying England's contribution to Pacific Northwest place names and lending legitimacy to England's claim of sovereignty to the region.

No such reinforcement was applied to Lewis and Clark's efforts. The Pacific Northwest was not visited again by any member of the corps after the expedition returned to the United States in 1806. Thus, unlike Montana, where former expedition members engaged in the fur trade and perpetuated names familiar to them, few Washington and Oregon names given by Lewis and Clark survived. The failures of American fur traders on the Pacific slope, such as John Jacob

Astor, the Winship brothers and Nathaniel Wyeth, aided the dominance of British place name usage. Without the benefit of Lewis and Clark's topographical information, the mutations of time replaced the captains' names with the nomenclature of trappers, westering Americans and British. Their constant contact with the land gave them the opportunity to devise new and more enduring place names.

Certainly, the name changers having the biggest influence on the acceptance of their designated place names were the Oregon Trail emigrants. The pioneers often gave places names with no concern for previous or existing identities, either out of ignorance or with knowing disregard. Naming rivers, streams, mountains and, eventually, inhabited places was accelerated with the development of the Oregon Country and reflected the change in culture of the population.

The influx of American citizens into the Pacific Northwest not only determined the eventual sovereignty of the region but also stimulated the federal government's role in defining the region. Lieutenant Charles Wilkes of the United States Navy Exploring Expedition showed little regard for British place names or even those given by Lewis and Clark. Many of his names for geographic features were not consistent with past designations, but his atlas helped to standardize some Pacific Northwest place names. The Pacific Railroad Survey, directed by Isaac Stevens and aided by the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, conducted explorations to determine a practical railroad route from the Midwest to the Pacific. Stevens had trouble assigning Lewis and Clark place names to his maps when he determined that many had been replaced with more traditional names that were common to the populace of the region.

By the mid 19th century, federal government surveys and maps finally provided the public with cartographic information about the Pacific Northwest; unfortunately, this was the final demise for many Lewis and Clark names. Distortions and omissions from Biddle's information appeared in commercial maps, and Lewis and Clark's names were lost, except among a few historians.

The United States Board of Geographic Names was finally established at the end of the 19th century to monitor the naming of geographic features and localities to avoid confusion and duplication. The government's intervention could not save Lewis and Clark names from natural extinction; most of the expedition's names had already been replaced. Active community involvement has since resulted in four local names being changed, reverting to the captains' name for the geographic feature, to reflect the importance of the Lewis and Clark expedition in their locality. Only one small stream, Lewis and Clark River, in Clatsop County, Oregon, was designated to honor the two men who led the expedition that helped establish the Pacific Northwest as United States sovereign territory.

Field notes and revised manuscript materials provide the necessary information to study Lewis and Clark place names used in the Pacific Northwest. Route maps and draft maps, compiled by Clark, give more detail on the actual geography encountered by the corps than the final refined map of 1810 or the engraver's copy for the published version of the journals in 1814. Of 88 names the captains used in the two western states we now call Washington and Oregon, only 13 of those introduced by Lewis and Clark have survived to be included in today's nomenclature of place names.

Onomastics, the physiological and social process of naming, will be included in this toponymy of Lewis and Clark place names in the Pacific Northwest. The names will be discussed as they were

applied chronologically, as the corps explored both westbound and eastbound. This presentation is intended to provide the historian and students of the Lewis and Clark expedition an opportunity to follow the geographic features as the captains identified them and devised their names. For the sake of the modern reader, place names of geographic features will be identified in boldface and spelled in the accepted form. Lewis and Clark's name and a discussion of its origin will follow. A brief history of the geographical feature and its present place name will complete the discussion of the subject.

Pend Oreille River

"Clark's River," also called "Clark's Fork," was recognized by Lewis and Clark as a major branch of the Columbia River. In the captains' image of western rivers, as they appear on Clark's master map, the two large drainages they explored in the Northwest were honored by naming the tributary rivers of the Columbia after the leaders of the expedition. They visualized the names for the drainage systems to carry throughout their course to their confluence with the Columbia. "Clark's Fork of the Columbia" was the implied full name for the main river of the watershed.

After crossing the Rocky Mountains and passing over the Bitterroots, the corps resumed their journey down a "handsome stream" (Bitterroot River) and derived from their Shoshoni guide its course and learned of a large lake (Lake Pend Oreille) in the northward drainage. Although the captains did not explore the entire course of this drainage, they rightly assumed that it was a tributary of the Columbia. Route maps and journal entries show the confusion that existed in trying to name the watercourse. Lewis's decision to make name changes, settling the issue, did not occur until the spring of 1806 when a southern tributary of the Columbia (Deschutes River) was finally assigned a place name. On the return journey, Lewis separated from Clark and explored the main branch of the drainage system named for his co-captain. Lewis and Clark had as much difficulty naming the main branch and its tributary streams in this drainage system as did future Americans.

The lengthy implied place-name was difficult to apply to modern topographical maps. The Bitterroot-Clark Fork-Pend Oreille river system has undergone many name changes as trappers, miners and pioneers named and renamed the tributaries and sections of the main river. Officially, the Clark Fork is the proper name for the main stream, in Montana, formed by the Flathead River from the north and the Bitterroot River from the south, that flows northerly into Lake Pend Oreille. Downstream from the lake, to its junction with the Columbia, it is called the Pend Oreille River. The Pend Oreille River joins the Columbia above the 49th parallel, in Canada, after passing through Washington's Pend Oreille County. French Canadian fur traders named the river after Indians who originally inhabited the area and wore shell ornaments in their ears. They used a perverse form of the French term "pendant d'oreille" for their colloquial version to describe the natives and the river they inhabited.

The map, "State of Oregon and the Washington Territory, 1859," named the entire river drainage as "Clark's Fork," but by 1865 a "Washington Territory" map listed it as "Clark Fork or Pend Oreille River." Some older maps identified the drainage from "Lake Pend Oreille" to the Columbia as the "Pend Oreille River." The present place name spelling has been standardized; however, the name Pend Oreille continues to elicit some interesting pronunciations.

Snake River

"Lewis's River" was named by Clark to honor his friend and fellow leader of the expedition on August 21, 1805. He named the "Westerly fork of the Columbia" (Lemhi and Salmon river conjunction) to honor "the first white man ever on this fork of the Columbia." On October 10, 1805, the waterborne expedition in five dugout canoes reached the confluence of the "Koos koos ke River" (Clearwater River) and "Kimooenem River" (Snake River) and made a geographic deduction that the "large southerly fork" was "the same one we were on with the Snake or So-so-nee nation."

Exactly when the captains made the name-change from "Kimooenem River" to "Lewis's River" cannot be determined. Erasures and scratched out words have changed the maps and journal entries to indicate their final intentions. "Lewis's River" was intended to designate the place name for the largest tributary of the Columbia, but the captains did not realize until the next spring that the "Westerly fork of the Columbia" was only a branch of "Lewis's River." Indian informants indicated that "Lewis's River" had a much larger and longer drainage system to the south.

The Clearwater River meets the Snake River at the present Washington-Idaho border between Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington. The river's present name gradually replaced the name bestowed by the captains for the largest tributary of the Columbia and the British fur traders' name, "Nez Perces River." Snake, or Shoshoni, Indians occupied the mountainous region between the plains and Columbia Plateau. They were familiar to the early trappers and explorers of the region, and the tribal name eventually replaced Lewis's honorific on early maps of the region. The name "Snake" Indians was a misnomer; fur traders mistook the hand gesture used in sign language to represent the movement of a snake instead of the Indians' meaning—salmon migrating upstream against the current.

The Nez Perce Indians named the river in this region "Shawpatain," "Sahaptain," or "Saptain," as spoken in several dialects. The difficulty in translating Native American languages to English becomes apparent in the naming of this watercourse. In addition to the misinterpretation of sign language, perhaps a distortion of the Indian name resulted in another charting for the place name. Wilkes in 1841 showed the main stream of the river as "Satin or Lewis River" on the government's maps. The 1859 map, "Oregon State and Washington Territory," listed the drainage as "Lewis Fork or Snake River," but by 1865 the Washington Territory map had dropped all indications of the Lewis and Clark name for the river and established its present place name.

Alpowa Creek

On October 11, 1805, the course and distance log notes, "Passed a large camp of Alpowa Cr. Indians." The creek was not named on the route map or journal entries, either westbound or eastbound. Clark explained in the journals that in taking Indian vocabularies, "great object was to make every letter sound." "Alpowa" must have been one of the easier native names for Clark, who spelled phonetically and derived some interesting spellings, occasionally using several forms for the same word.

Alpowia Creek in Asotin County enters the Snake River in the vicinity of the former Alpowia City, later renamed Silcott. The townsite was inundated by Lower Granite Reservoir in 1975. Chief Timothy State Park and Alpowai Interpretive Center are now located on an island created by the dam's backwater.

Gary Moulton, the most recent editor of the Lewis and Clark journals, reports that the village was known as "Alpoveyma," from which came the modern place name. An anecdotal explanation of the meaning, "a spring forming a creek," is not consistent with local native place naming. Many of the native names in common usage today are not the original native pronunciations and the exact meanings have been lost, despite creative attempts to explain them.

Tucannon River

The captains' use of the name "Kimooenem" for a large river (Snake) and one of its tributaries (Tucannon) is confusing. Conjectural and secondhand information obtained from natives helped the captains select the original place names. Perhaps there was a misunderstanding in the interpretation of native information for the two drainages; however; they may have intentionally intended to use the name for the small stream after the decision was made to honor Lewis by giving his name to the large river. Eastbound in 1806, the expedition crossed this stream while on an overland trail and recognized the drainage as the stream they had passed while waterborne in the fall of 1805, although they did not quite spell it the same. The Nez Perce term "Qemuynem" referred to the Walla Walla Indians' tribal areas and may have been analogous to "Kimooenem," used and variously spelled by the captains.

"Tukanin," also a Nez Perce term, meant "abundance of bread root." *Lomatium cous*, pronounced "kouse" or "couse" in the native language, was an important early spring food source that grew in the sandy soil. The present place name, Tucannon, derived from this native word, but various spellings of the name have plagued the drainage: "Twocannon," "Tuchannon," "Tucanon," "Tokanon," "Tookanan," and "Tukanin." Railroad surveyors once spelled it "Two Cannon," and the map artist drew two cannons on the charts.

Palouse River

"Drewyers R," as Clark usually spelled George Drouillard's name, honored a river with the name of one member of the expedition. Arlen Large, a noted Lewis and Clark historian, surmised that Lewis and Clark did not try to rank the esteem for various subordinates according to the size or importance of the geographic feature named for them. George Drouillard, a half Shawnee civilian interpreter for the expedition, was the group's main hunter and woodsman. Lewis regarded him as a valuable member of the corps and recommended him for a bonus at the end of the mission.

Drouillard was one of the last members of the expedition to be commemorated on the westbound route; the captains bestowed his name to a drainage that Clark described only as "a large Creek." The largest tributary of the Snake River below the Clearwater River, and largest from the north, was named "La Pelouse" (translates to "grassland country" in French) by French Canadian fur trappers. The Indian village at the mouth of the river was called "Palus," occupied

by what is now known as the Palouse tribe. The most common Indian name for the river was "Moh-ha-na-she." Later, the drainage was known as "Pavillion," "Pavion," "Peluse," and "Flag" river by various surveyors of the region. Today the established name of the river, Palouse, commemorates the Indian tribe of that region in eastern Washington.

Monumental Rock

"Ship Rock," so named because it resembled the hull of a ship, was plotted on the expedition's route map. The Lewis and Clark name did not survive, replaced with a new name during the steamboat era on the Northwest rivers. Monumental Rock, the large basalt rock formation near the Monumental Rapids in the Snake River, inspired the name for one of the four dams on the lower section of the Snake River, Lower Monumental Dam.

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