

## A LASTING LEGACY

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

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This is the fourth and final installment of our series on the place name designations used by co-captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as the Corps of Discovery made its way through the vast and varied landscape of the Pacific Northwest. Many names have Native American origins, while numerous others appear to be descriptive of physical features in the landscape, and still others commemorate expedition members; there also exists a small group of names for which the source or inspiration is now a mystery. Most of Lewis and Clark's designations have fallen out of use. Of those that remain, many have been altered in some way. Even so, the monumental achievements of the expedition, especially the maps and journals wherein the multitude of place names was faithfully recorded, provide a lasting legacy for generations to come.

#### **Cathlamet Head**

There is no indication in the journals regarding the derivation of "Point Samuel" in naming a large projection of landmass that diverted the course of the Columbia. One supposes that the captains named the point to honor Samuel Lewis, a relative of Lewis's who was also the copyist for Clark's 1814 map.

The corps avoided the wide Columbia River estuary and crossed the river in their dugout canoes after proceeding upstream along the northern shore. After the commanding officers consulted the members of the party, they decided to seek winter quarters on the southern shore near the river's mouth.

Captain Vancouver had proclaimed that American merchant Robert Gray had only entered the Columbia River estuary, and after consulting with Lieutenant Broughton, Vancouver decided that the river's mouth was at the narrow channel created by the projecting landmass. Vancouver did not recognize Gray's claim of American rights to the territory, believing only military officers could make claims of sovereignty. The disputed sovereignty of the Pacific Northwest continued for over 50 years.

The current name for Oregon's most northern point is an anglicized version of "Kala amat," the name local Chinook-speaking natives called themselves. "Calamet," the local natives' word for "stone," may have been used to describe a particular place on the river. It subsequently became the village's name and the name its people called themselves. The tribe was the westernmost village of the Upper Chinook-speaking Indians. Culturally, they were oriented to the river and to the salmon fishing traditions of the Lower Chinook.

At the time of Lewis and Clark's contact with them, the "Calt-har-mar" had their village on the southern shore of the Columbia. Later they moved to a village on the north bank. Both tribal

names used by Lewis and Clark, "Calt-har-mar" and "War-ci a cum," were spelled and pronounced in a variety of ways by early explorers and pioneers. Today, Cathlamet and Wahkiakum, are the standardized spellings for place names, preserving the etymology of the words first recorded by Lewis and Clark.

### **John Day River (in western Oregon)**

"Ke-ke mar que Creek" was an analogue the captains used for a word obtained from the local natives. They did not comprehend that Pacific Northwest Indians did not name geographical features such as rivers and creeks; instead, they identified sites on the drainages. This concept was also foreign to later cartographers. Their translations of native languages led to many misconceptions of actual Indian meanings and names.

This western Oregon river, like the one in eastern Oregon, was named for John Day of Wilson Price Hunt's Astorian overland expedition, 1811-12.

### **Tongue Point**

Clark used his Christian name to identify "a very remarkable point which projects into the river..., Point William." He formed a camp on the windward side of the point for ten days while Lewis, with five men, conducted a reconnaissance of the area and sought a secure location for winter quarters.

Clark's name for the point did not supplant the anatomical name used by Broughton in 1792 to describe the 350-yard-wide projection into the river's estuary from the southern shore. The point's present place name retains the British identification.

### **Smith Point**

"Point Meriwether," after Lewis's first name, was used by Clark to identify the eastern point of a large bay on the south side of the Columbia River estuary. The point has had many names, an indication of the long-disputed sovereignty over the Pacific Northwest.

In 1792, after exploring the Columbia River, Broughton named the strategic site "Point George," honoring the king of England and emphasizing Great Britain's territorial claims. The first commercial settlement of Americans on the Pacific Coast was founded on the point by the Pacific Fur Company in 1811. Point Astoria, the western extremity of Astoria, was named for John Jacob Astor, one of America's richest businessmen and owner of the American Fur Company, parent company of the Pacific Fur Company.

The settlement was not called a fort until the Americans surrendered it to the British in 1813, a result of the British-American War of 1812. The British rechristened the trading post, built Fort George, and used the "Point George" name again. The name Astoria was gradually restored after Americans reclaimed the settlement five years later, but the point's name changes continued. The Wilkes expedition charted the point as "Youngs Point." The present name is derived from early American settler Samuel Smith, who took up a donation land claim on the point.

### **Youngs Bay**

Clark was uninformed when he named "Meriwether Bay" to honor Lewis as "the 1st white man who ever Surveyed this Bay." Before he ascended the Columbia to continue his exploration, Broughton had explored the bay in 1792 using a single-sailed cutter flying the Union Jack. He

named a river entering the bay "Young's River" after Sir George Young of the Royal Navy. The bay's present place name comes from that river.

### **Youngs River**

Lewis and Clark attempted to use native words to identify geographical features, but their names were a corruption of the native language, and often several attempts at different native words were used in the journals. "Kil how a nah Me" and "Wo lump ked" were both used on draft maps to identify this drainage; there is no indication in the journals of the source of the aboriginal words. Broughton named the waterway "Young's River" in 1792, after Sir George Young of the Royal Navy. The British name has been retained, without the use of the possessive.

### **Lewis and Clark River**

The native name for the river where the expedition members built their winter quarters was reported to be "Netul." "Fort River" was also used in the journals to describe the drainage. The aboriginal name was used until 1925 when the river was renamed to honor the co-captains of the Corps of Discovery. The small river is the only watercourse in the Pacific Northwest that commemorates both of the men who led that epic transcontinental exploration to the mouth of the Columbia River.

### **Fort Clatsop**

The first American military establishment to be built in the Pacific Northwest was the winter quarters for the Corps of Discovery. The fort was built around seven cabins and occupied by the main party of the corps from December 7, 1805, to March 23, 1806. The company spent the cool, damp winter sustaining its provisions by hunting while the captains worked on their journals and maps. Fort Clatsop was named to honor the friendly Indian tribe that occupied the southern bank at the mouth of the Columbia and the adjoining Pacific Coast. Their name derived from the Chinook language, meaning "those who have pounded salmon."

Today the site of the Corps of Discovery's fort is honored as Fort Clatsop National Memorial, maintained by the National Park Service. A reproduction of the fort was built in 1955 by citizens and organizations of Clatsop County to mark the 150-year celebration of the expedition.

### **Saltworks-Fort Clatsop National Memorial**

Not all of the corps' members were detailed to hunting and fort duties; a salt-maker's cairn was built on the Pacific Coast. A rotating crew of three maintained the "Salt Works." In 1900 the historic site was located in present-day Seaside by a committee of the Oregon Historical Society. The Saltworks-Fort Clatsop National Memorial is maintained by the National Park Service.

### **Skipanon River**

The day after establishing the site for Fort Clatsop, Clark conducted a reconnaissance of Point Adams and the ocean shore to locate a campsite for the salt makers, then blazed a trail back to the fort from the coast. An aboriginal word, "Skip a nor win," was used by Clark to identify the "creek" that drained into the Columbia River estuary near the mouth of the river. The river was used by the Indians to conduct commerce between the river and coastal villages. Clark first recorded the aboriginal word that is the origin of the present place name, but the meaning is not known. The river's place name had several different spellings before it was standardized.

### **Neacoxie Creek**

At the time of Clark's exploration, "Ne-er ca wen a ca Creek" drained directly into the Pacific Ocean. Shifting sand and rechanneling has changed the course of the drainage from that which Clark illustrated on his maps. Clark visited the native village on the coast where the drainage entered the ocean, near the present site of Slusher Lake. The present creek drains into the Necanicum estuary and derived its name from the local natives, identifying the original mouth of the drainage as "a place with small pine trees."

### **Necanicum River**

Clark first used the native word "Kil a mox" on his map to identify a "butifull river" that drained into the Pacific, but crossed it out and added "Clatsop River." He renamed the drainage to correspond with the tribal affiliation of the inhabitants of a nearby village. Local Indians had informed the captains of a beached whale, and Clark, with 12 corpsmen, traveled to the coast to obtain whale meat and oil. Sacagawea with her baby boy, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, accompanied the detachment; she wanted to see the ocean, having traveled with the corps since Fort Mandan. The party stayed a night at the salt-makers' camp, then proceeded along an Indian trail to reach the next village. The prefix, "Ne," of the present name for river indicates "place" in native language; however the rest of the meaning for Necanicum has been lost.

### **Tillamook Head**

Lewis named the large promontory that projects into the ocean after Clark, who first saw the "high point of a Mounntn" from Cape Disappointment. Later, Clark climbed the mountain when he took a contingent of the corps to view a beached whale south of the headlands. While on Tillamook Head he hiked out on a point (Bird Point) and described the view; hence the name "Clark's Point of View" was first applied to the mountain.

The present name is derived from the Tillamook Indians who lived along the coast on both sides of the headland. The name is from the Chinook language but has been anglicized for modern convenience. Once spelled "Killamuck," the spelling was changed to Tillamook about the time Tillamook County was created by Oregon's territorial legislature in 1853.

### **Ecola Creek**

"Eculah or Whale Creek" was used by Clark not only to designate the native word "ikoli, meaning "whale," but also to indicate the English meaning. The creek entered the ocean not far from the beached whale that had intrigued the explorers. An Indian village was situated on the creek, and an incident with one of the corpsmen brought out one of the few recorded instances of Clark's humor. Sergeant John Ordway reported in his journal that Clark had first named the creek "McNeals folly" because Private Hugh McNeal had used poor judgment, crossed the creek and entered the village with an Indian. The Indian had lured him away from the detachment and intended to rob him but was foiled when a native girl raised an alarm.

The creek, in the present-day town of Cannon Beach, Oregon, was named "Elk Creek" by early pioneer settlers. A recent name change was enacted to reinstate Clark's place name, "Eculah" on draft map and "E cu-la" in a journal entry. A perverse form of the native word and Clark's eccentric spelling was used for today's place name, Ecola Creek.

### **Tillamook Bay**

Clark did not see the bay he named "Kilamox Bay," though he drew a map and named several drainages that entered the bay. The local natives supplied him with their topographical understanding of the southern geography. The map is remarkably accurate in many aspects when compared to modern topographical maps. However, there are some obvious representations of the region's actual geographical features. The "Kilamox" were the Tillamook Indians, a Salishan language tribe, and the difference in geographical linguistics created a problem in interpretations for Clark.

The present place, Tillamook, is a corruption of the name for the Indian tribe that resided on the bay. The Chinook language meaning of the word cannot be interpreted accurately.

### **Crims Island**

In the spring of 1806, during the eastbound journey home, some new geographical discoveries were made and the captains were able to fill in some blank spots on their maps, applying names to features that had been noted but not named on the westbound journey. "Fanny's Island" was one such feature, named for Clark's younger sister, Frances.

William Broughton, in 1792, named this "Baker's Island" for a Second Lieutenant in Captain Vancouver's command. Charles Wilkes, in 1841, named the island "Gull," which with the lapse of time has been transferred to a small island north of the west end of this island. Today it retains the surname, as do many islands in the river, of a pioneer homesteader on the island.

### **Clastkanie Valley**

Lewis and Clark named the "elegant and extensive bottom on the South side" for its association with the island complimented with Clark's younger sister's nickname. "Fanny's Bottom" remained on the route map but Clark must have had second thoughts, changing his journal entry to "Fanny's Valley."

Native Americans in the area used the word "Tlasts-kani," which did not name a place on the river but rather a place in the mountains. Early pioneers applied their anglicized version of the name to the valley and river that drained into the Columbia. After many varied spellings, the valley's place name has been standardized to Clastkanie.

### **Cowlitz River**

"Cow-e-lis-kee River" was noted on the westbound exploration but actually named on the homeward journey. Descending the river, Clark marked the drainage on his route map "not known." Returning upstream, the captains tried to use a native term to identify the river, spelling the word phonetically.

The etymology of Cowlitz is interesting; there have been many spelling attempts to approximate the Indian pronunciation. The Lower Chinook word "qawilick-i," meaning "where the Salish people are," derived from the Salish language word "kawlicq," meaning "Salish-speaking people of the river." The anglicized version of the native word, and the captains' figurative form, has now been applied to the river that has its origin on the glaciers of Mount Rainier.

### **Kalama River**

"Cath la haws Creek" was named on the return trip to identify the drainage on the north bank of the Columbia. Their name was a perversion of geographical linguistics, an attempt to identify the tribe that resided on the "creek." The best clue to the origin of today's place name is Private Joseph Whitehouse; his journal has the natives calling the drainage "Calanus."

Early fur traders anglicized the Indian word to "Kalama" to identify the river. Today several versions of the name's origin exist, shrouding the meaning of the original origin. One version has that John Kalama, a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) agent of Hawaiian descent, established a fur trading post at the mouth of the river. Another version has the railroad town on the river being named in 1871 for the Indian word meaning "pretty maiden." Such is often the case when a community promotes the origin of its name.

### **Lewis River**

The captains used "Chah wah na hi ook River" to identify a "Small river" that entered the Columbia on the north shore. Their name was a figurative form of the Chinookan term for "enemies." Later another river would be identified with the same aboriginal term; however, their spelling of the word for "enemies" was different. Translation was difficult for the captains on the lower Columbia River because nobody in the party spoke the difficult aboriginal languages.

In 1853 a railroad surveyor charted the river as "Cathlapootle," a distortion of a common name for the river used by early explorers, fur traders, and settlers. Today the river is named for Adolphus Lee Lewis, a descendent of an HBC employee who homesteaded near the river's mouth, not for Captain Meriwether Lewis of the Corps of Discovery.

### **Willamette River**

Clark misunderstood Indian information when he named the "Mult no mah River" and drew his maps showing the origin of the river about where the Great Salt Lake is located. This misinformation helped establish the 42nd parallel as the boundary between the Pacific Northwest territory and the Spanish holdings in California. Clark named the river after the local tribe that resided on the river, their name in the Chinook language meaning "those at/toward the body of water." Geographical intuition indicated that the large southern valley they had named "Wappato" and later renamed "Columbia" must have a drainage, but the captains missed the tributary on both their westbound and eastbound exploration. Clark was later able to explore the river with the help of an Indian guide; the confluence was multiple and hidden by several islands close to the southern shore of the Columbia.

Broughton first recorded the river's existence on October 29, 1792, naming it "River Manning's," after a member of Vancouver's expedition. Controversy over the river's name and its spelling continued until 1841 when Wilkes standardized the present name and its spelling in his atlas. "Wal-lamt" was an Indian name for a place on the river near present-day Oregon City, Oregon.

### **Mount Jefferson**

Clark observed a distant snow-capped peak south of the Columbia River on March 30, 1806, when he was at the mouth of the "Multonomah River." His focus on the river courses is apparent with the absence of Mount Jefferson—a peak he had named—on his 1814 map.

In an attempt to emphasize British claims to the Pacific Northwest, the peak was called "Mount Vancouver" by the early employees of the British fur trading companies. A "Map of Oregon Territory, 1838," designated the mountain peak as "Mount Vancouver." By 1859, Mount Jefferson, the original designation given by Lewis and Clark, was restored on the "Map of the State of Oregon and Washington Territory." The second highest mountain peak in Oregon has retained the place name given by Lewis and Clark to honor their president, designer of the Corps of Discovery.

### **Umatilla River**

"You ma lolam River" had been missed by the outbound expedition but was added to the route map on the return trip in 1806. A Nez Perce term was used to designate the name for this southern drainage into the Columbia. Like several other Lewis and Clark names, the present place name is recognizable from the captains' designation for the geographical feature, despite the spellings.

The river's name was standardized when Wilkes charted it in 1841. Umatilla Landing was established at the mouth of the river in 1863, an important steamboat landing on the Columbia for mines in Oregon and Idaho.

### **White River**

Using horses to complete the homeward journey to their dugouts on the Missouri River, the captains had the advantage of getting off the river courses and viewing the distant terrain from a higher vantage point. In the vicinity of today's Maryhill Museum they observed two drainages flowing into "Towahnahiooks [Deschutes] River" and named them "Skimhoox" and "Kies-how-e."

The first tributary of the Deschutes River is the White River, a descriptive name derived from the color of the river's water when glacial silt is present. The second watercourse is difficult to identify from Clark's map; Wapintia Creek is too small for Clark's "Kies-how-e River." Larger drainages into the Deschutes River are further away and cannot be viewed because of mountains. Perhaps Clark was charting the drainage from misunderstood Indian information.

### **Yellepit**

"Yel-lep-pets Village" sat on the Columbia's western shore, opposite the mouth of the "Wallah Wallah River." It was named for a tribal chief who was hospitable to the corps, leading their cavalcade across the Horse Heaven Hills to his camp and helping them cross the Columbia. His name, from the Nez Perce, means "friend, blood brother," and "trading partner."

The present railroad siding of Yellepit is the only place name recognition today for the Indian chief who befriended the corps. The Indian village site where the corps camped for two nights, in present Benton County, Washington, was inundated by Wallula Reservoir, created by McNary Dam in 1954.

### **Touchet River**

The river was unmarked on the route map and was first referred to as "a branch of the Wallahwallah river" in the journals. The course of the river was followed by the corps on their cross-country shortcut to the "Kooskooski River"; they named it "Wh(ite) Stallion River" when they reached a fork in the drainage. The captains intended their river names to be attached to

the entire watercourse, from the head of the drainage to its mouth. The river was probably named for the white stallion given to Clark by Chief Yel-lep-pet. There is no indication in the journals of the captains' derivation for the name. The overland "Route to Kooskooke" was not marked on Clark's map of 1814, but is represented by a dotted line on their route map. Again, an indication of their focus on water courses for future transportation needs.

The course the expedition followed was an ancient Indian trail known as the "Nez Perce Trail to Celilo Falls." The route was called the Overland Trail by fur traders, miners, military, stockman, settlers, and other frontiersmen. The present place name derived from the Nez Perce word "Tuse," meaning "roasting." Legend had Coyote roasting salmon on the river after he broke the fish dam guarded by the five Swallow Sisters at Celilo. Touchet has been anglicized [too-shee] to its present form, leading to confusion for its supposed French Canadian fur trader connection.

### **Coppie Creek**

On the overland shortcut, the captains often did not pay particular attention to naming geographical features and exact locations of their encampments; the mission was complete and they were going home. At a fork in the drainage they followed, they named one branch "Gambler's River" and the main branch "Wh(ite) Stallion River." No indication in the journals is given for using the manufactured name, "Gambler's River," for the small creek.

In addition to the names Lewis and Clark assigned to geographical features, there are several aboriginal tribal names introduced in the journals that are used today for place names. Some names are easily recognizable, like Chinook, Clatsop and Walla Walla, despite Clark's eccentric spellings and today's anglicized versions. Some present-day place names, like Cowlitz and Umatilla, can be associated with Indian tribal names, and the captains tried to translate and convert the words to English spellings. Other tribal names, like Wahkiakum and Cathlamet, were not used by the captains for their names of geographical features but preserve the etymology for present place names. Modern spellings of these places are different from the native words and quite different from Lewis and Clark's phonetic spellings of tribal names; however, the association can be made.

Metathesis, transposition of letters, has often occurred with the metamorphosis of aboriginal words to today's place name spellings. Okanogan was spelled "Otchennukane" by Clark, but the present place name derived from the same tribal territory recorded in the journals for the tribe's location. "Quathlah pah tle" has been changed to Cathlapotle to identify an archaeological site, the same village the captains described at the confluence of the present Lewis and Lake rivers with the Columbia. The "Kil-la-mucks" Indians first recorded by Clark are now identified as Tillamooks, and their name is used in several Oregon place names. A possible error in transferring handwritten journal notes and present day transposition of letters gives another Oregon place name that can be associated with the corps' records: Clark's spelling for the name of the Clakamas tribe was "Clark-a-mus."

Some modern place names derived from Indian tribal names recorded by Lewis and Clark are more difficult to make the etiological association. The "Met-cow-wes" Indians were recorded by the captains as residents of the Columbia but they may have been relatives of the Methows, an inland tribe associated with the Upper Columbia and Okanogan rivers that were fishing on the Columbia at the time of the corps' passage. This aboriginal term is now a place name used for several geographical features and places in Okanogan County. The Chehalis tribe was identified as the "Chiltz," an indication of the difficulty of translating Indian names into English. The



captains properly identified the Chehalis tribal territory but anglicized the pronunciation and spelling of their name, used in several Washington place names today.

The Lewis and Clark expedition has gone down in American history as an epic journey of exploration that left its historical legacy not only in the Pacific Northwest but across the nation. When they crossed the Continental Divide on their return journey, the captains completed the greatest exploration of the new republic, and their discoveries would eventually help define the boundaries of the United States. Despite these achievements, the captains' nomenclature for geographical features was ill-served by historians and cartographers.

Most of their place names have not been retained for modern usage and were replaced by new ones that have no pertinence to the original designation or commemoration of the Corps of Discovery. Just as historical events refuse to remain fixed, so too a living language will not permit itself to be immutable. In the mutations of time, nearly all of the Lewis and Clark place names have changed, as the nation "proceeded on."

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