

FORT CANBY STATE PARK



WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
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The Story of the Entrance to the Columbia River is Literally....

A PAGE OUT OF HISTORY

Pacific Northwest history was written here at the entrance to the "great River of the West."

Cape Disappointment was named by a disappointed English sea captain, John Meares when in 1788 he failed to gain entrance to the point of recognizing the Columbia as the long sought river.

He had been preceded by Bruno de Heceta in 1775 who was the first white man to see the mouth of the river. Heceta made note in his ship's log that he believed it to be either a great river or the entrance to a strait.

The Columbia was finally named for the first vessel known to have crossed the bar....the American ship Columbia commanded by Captain Robert Gray of Boston. On May 11, 1792 he ascended the estuary as far as the Chinook village between the present McGown and Point Ellice which laid the cornerstone of American claim to the Oregon Country.

CAPTAINS LEWIS AND CLARK - first saw the Pacific Ocean from Chinook Point, near what is now Fort Columbia State Park, on November 15, 1805 and pushed westward to accomplish their goal at Cape Disappointment and reached the Pacific Ocean.

CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT - FORT CANBY - The U. S. Government had for some years owned Cape Disappointment before it was decided to fortify the mouth of the Columbia River. Fear of Confederate raiders during the Civil War may have been a contributing factor to establish military defenses in this area although some historians say that the specter of a "foreign war" loomed big upon the horizon during that time.

When Fort Stevens, Fort Columbia and Cape Disappointment....the three guard points of the mouth of the river....were considered for fortification, the latter location became known as Fort Canby. In 1865 eight guns were in place at that fort by January and in June of that year the "first fortification thrown up in Oregon Territory against foreign foes and domestic traitors" was dedicated.

Fortunately, there was no attack on the river entrance during the Civil War years. Fort Canby was reactivated from time to time around the turn of the century, the first World War and World War II. In 1947 it was declared surplus and in 1957 the first of the area became a state park. The addition of 725 acres from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1966 brought the total park area to 1516 acres.

CHINOOK POINT AN HISTORICAL LANDMARK - is a hilly spur jutting westward into the Columbia River between the towns of Megler and Chinook, having been named by Lieutenant W. R. Broughton of Vancouver's exploring expedition in 1792 after a nearby Chinook Indian village.

It was dedicated as a Registered National Historic Landmark on June 25, 1965.

FORT COLUMBIA HISTORICAL STATE PARK - became a state park in 1950 when a large part of the Fort Columbia Military Reservation, including Chinook Point, was transferred by the U. S. Government General Services Administration as an historical monument to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. For more information secure the booklet on this state park.

GRAVEYARD OF THE PACIFIC - records of the scores of ships lost at the entrance to the "Great River of the West" date back from the early 1800's. Hundreds of people lost their lives as their ships tried to gain entrance to the Columbia. Modern day lighthouses at Cape Disappointment and North Head in the vicinity of Fort Canby State Park, a lightship stationed miles offshore and constant channel dredging all combine to make crossing the Columbia River Bar less dangerous. Three great jetties have changed the appearance of the surrounding area as lands have "accreted" from the sea to make more recreational land at Fort Canby.

THE LONG BEACH PENINSULA - 26 miles of unbroken sandy beach...the longest in the world...offers clamming, beachcombing, fishing from the jetty, in the surf or from local charter boats, and camping in ever-expanding Fort Canby State Park. Some day soon another great state park will be developed at Leadbetter Point at the end of the peninsula and Willapa Bay.