

# Overlanders in the Columbia River Gorge, 1840-1870: A Narrative History

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Submitted to:  
National Park Service  
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Submitted By  
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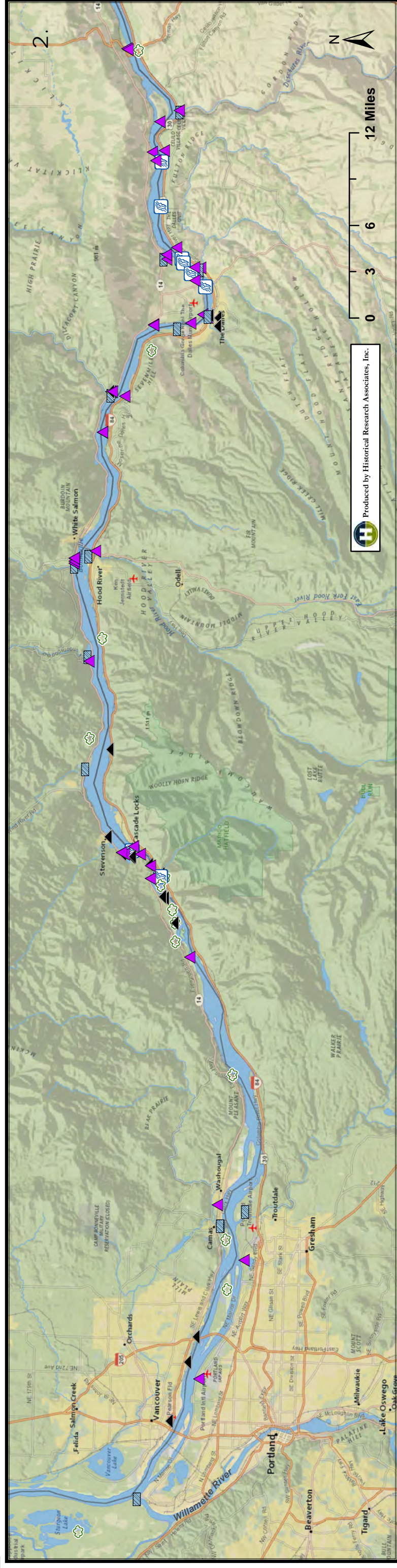
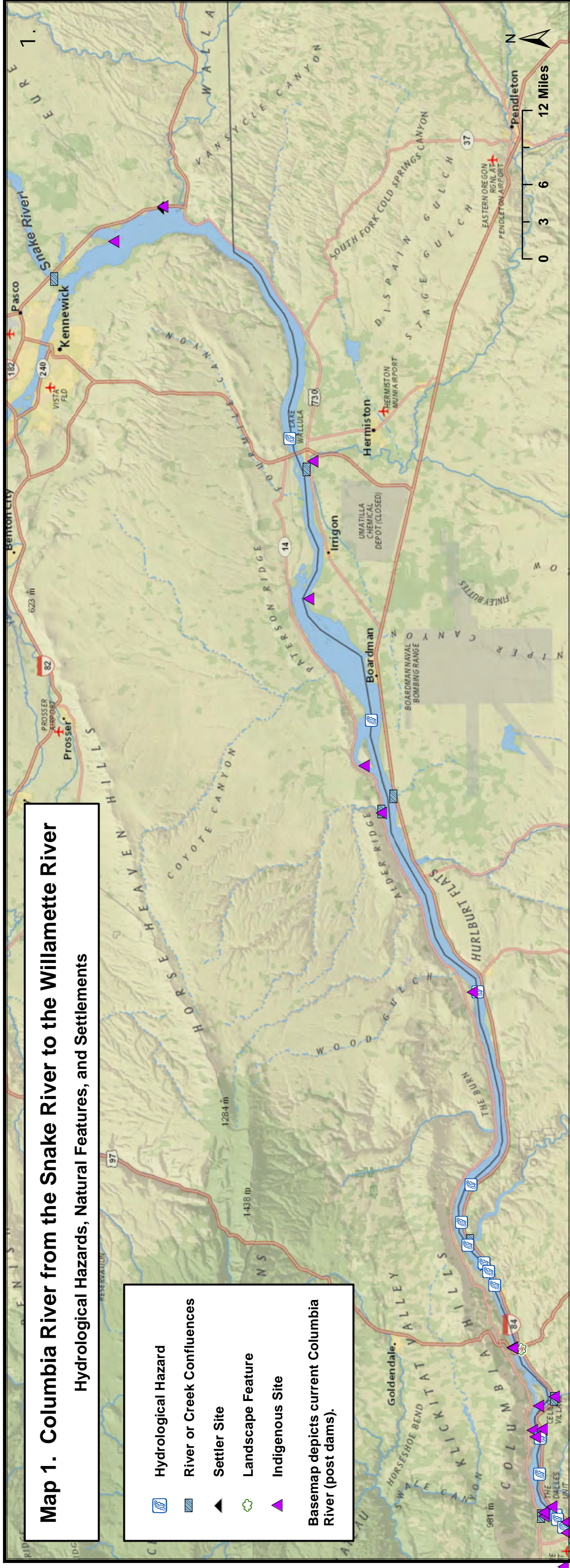


# Map 1. Columbia River from the Snake River to the Willamette River

Hydrological Hazards, Natural Features, and Settlements

-  Hydrological Hazard
-  River or Creek Confluences
-  Settler Site
-  Landscape Feature
-  Indigenous Site

Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).



# Introduction: Purpose of Study and Methods

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The National Trails Office of the National Park Service (NPS) hired Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), to write a narrative history of Oregon Trail overlanders' travel through the Columbia River Gorge from approximately 1840 to 1870. Most who followed the Oregon Trail did not traverse the Columbia River Gorge, if they could help it, because the gorge posed numerous dangers for travelers unfamiliar with the rugged terrain and raging river. When Samuel Barlow opened a road around the southern side of Mount Hood in 1846, overlanders going to Oregon City more often chose that route, rather than braving the Columbia River.

This report centers on the Columbia River and its banks, from the confluence with the Snake River (near present-day Pasco, Washington) to the confluence with the Willamette River (near Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington), from 1840 to 1870 (see Map 1). Using maps, historical documents, and images, it examines change over time in the landscape of the Columbia River Gorge, hydrological hazards of the river, methods of navigating the river, historical livestock and wagon tracks, American Indian settlements and businesses along the river, interactions between American Indians and overlanders and how they changed over the years, the Hudson's Bay Company's role in overlander travel, calamities and deaths that befell overlanders, alternative routes and how they altered travel on the gorge, and commercial transportation.

HRA began work on this project in late September 2019. HRA historians conducted extensive research online, in HRA's collections of books and map files, and in collections of local libraries. HRA consulted overlanders' journals on the Oregon-California Trails Association website, journals and secondary source materials in digitized collections (such as JSTOR and HathiTrust), and online image collections from the Oregon Historical Society and other repositories. HRA also conducted in-person research at the Oregon Historical Society. HRA's GIS specialist completed maps for the final report. HRA historians worked closely with Angélica Sanchez-Clark, Lee Kreutzer, and Guy McClellan of the National Trails Office, who provided guidance, feedback and bibliographic references/sources throughout the process.

We draw heavily from the journals of overlanders and other firsthand accounts written by individuals years after they made their journey. In order to provide insight into the experience of traveling along the Columbia River, we include sizeable excerpts from these journals. This allows readers to experience the journey more vividly than if we were to summarize their words. However, the excerpts in this report are not exhaustive and come nowhere near representing the myriad of diverse experiences that travelers had along the river. We do not intend these quotes to represent all journeys or to serve as the definitive experience of travelers in the gorge; rather, they are a window into the experience that some individuals had.

In this report, we divide overlander travel through the Columbia River Gorge into four distinct periods:

1. 1843 to 1847: A period of heavy mass migration, with large numbers of travelers taking the Columbia River route. This period concludes with the Waíiletpu incident, which altered routes of subsequent overlanders, and the opening of the Barlow Road.
2. 1848 to 1853: A period of heavy migration, but with most overlanders taking the Barlow Road. Those who traveled along the Columbia River often did so because the winter snows had begun in the Cascade Mountains, making the Barlow Road impassable. This period ends in 1853 and is followed by a gap in overlander travel along the river of approximately 1854 to 1857, during which the US government engaged in treaty-making and sought to remove Indigenous communities in the area by force, leading to armed encounters.
3. 1858 to 1863: This period is marked by the rise of White-run enterprises along the Columbia River, including portage roads, railroads, and steamboats. It concludes with a series of gold rushes in Idaho that triggered a massive movement of settlers from the Willamette Valley upstream to the Snake River Valley.
4. 1864 to 1870: Dwindling migration and development of full-scale railroads along the Columbia River mark this fourth and final period.

The first two chapters are organized thematically. Chapter 1 introduces the early geology and history of the Columbia River. Chapter 2 provides a portrait of overlanders and explains why the rush of overland migration to Oregon occurred. Chapters 3 through 7 are organized geographically, moving downstream along the Columbia River from the Snake River to the Willamette River. Chapter 3 covers the area from the Snake River confluence to the Deschutes River confluence. Chapter 4 encompasses Celilo Falls to the Narrows, or Dalles. Chapter 5 covers The Dalles City and its predecessors down to the head of the Cascades Rapids. Chapter 6 examines travel through the Cascades Rapids and portage. And Chapter 7 considers travel from the bottom of the Cascades to the Willamette River confluence. Chapter 8 provides a conclusion to the report, and the Epilogue discusses the many canals and dams that have altered the hydrology of the Columbia River. Each chapter is organized chronologically around the four time periods described above.

## A Note on Names and Terms

The Columbia River has been a central gathering and trading place for far-reaching groups of people for many centuries. People living along the river have given it and nearby features different names in many languages. Because of this, HRA uses the accepted US Geological Survey place names for this report. We do this for clarity, but we recognize that using imperial place names can be problematic and can contribute to erasing millennia of people and cultures along the Columbia. When possible, we include Indigenous place names and their language of origin in parentheses.

Much of the mid-Columbia is the homeland of Sahaptin-speaking people, while the mid- to lower Columbia is home to Chinookan-speaking people. In the area from the Cascades through Celilo Falls, where these two broad groups overlapped, languages included the Wasco-Wishram Upper Chinookan dialect of Kiksht spoken by Upper Chinookan people, and the Columbia River dialect of Columbia Sahaptin spoken by the Plateau people, who lived seasonally or year-round on the river from the Dalles upstream.<sup>1</sup> The Indigenous place names we reference are from these language groups. For the mid- and upper Columbia, we drew heavily from *Ćán Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sahaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla*, and for the mid- and lower Columbia, we drew from *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia, Chinookan Villages of the Lower Columbia*, and *People of The Dalles: The Indians of Wascopam Mission*. We do not italicize terms in other languages, but instead explain to the reader what language that term comes from.<sup>2</sup>

Many references to Indigenous people in historical journals and accounts were written by White settlers. They often use the term “Indian” and rarely specify what village individuals are from. Due to this lack of clarity, we use the term “Indigenous” if we cannot with certainty determine how the individual would have self-identified. If we are referencing people in a region, we sometimes use the terms “Chinookan” or “Sahaptin” to refer to the people living roughly in the area of those language groupings, as noted above. While “Indian” and “American Indian” are terms preferred by some people whose ancestors lived on the North American continent before Europeans arrived on it, we avoid using those terms in this report (excluding in direct quotations) since White settlers have often used the term to stereotype and generalize all Indigenous people. As Michael Yellow Bird explained,

Under colonial rule Indigenous Peoples in the United States and Canada were systematically subjugated and oppressed because Europeans and European Americans considered them to be an inferior race. Because colonizers regarded Indigenous Peoples as inferior, they felt justified in ignoring individual tribal identities and labeling Indigenous Peoples as one racial group: Indians. To the colonizer this made sense because it was economical, efficient, and required little thinking.<sup>3</sup>

We also avoid the term “Native American” and “native” because of the problematic definition of the term and the co-opting of it by certain groups. We capitalize the term “Indigenous” because, as Yellow Bird wrote, it helps to “signify the cultural heterogeneity and political sovereignty of these groups.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Boyd, *People of The Dalles: The Indians of Wascopam Mission* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1996), 11, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene S. Hunn, E. Thomas Morning Owl, Phillip E. Cash Cash, and Jennifer Karson Engum, *Ćán Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sahaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Pendleton, OR: Tamástslíkt Cultural Institution, 2015); Robert T. Boyd, Kenneth M. Ames, and Tony A. Johnson, eds., *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2013); Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 4; Henry B. Zenk, Yvonne P. Hajda, and Robert T. Boyd, “Chinookan Villages of the Lower Columbia,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 6–37.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Yellow Bird, “What We Want to Be Called,” *American Indian Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 1–21, esp. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Yellow Bird, “What We Want to Be Called,” 2.

We use and capitalize the term “Black” rather than “African American” since it is a more encompassing phrase and reflects a shared community and culture.<sup>5</sup> There has been much recent discussion over whether “White” should also be capitalized.<sup>6</sup> Some argue against it: the *Columbia Journalism Review* put it, “White carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists.”<sup>7</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah argued the counterpoint, noting that not to capitalize White allows White people to skirt responsibility for the shared values and attitudes that have defined whiteness in this country, and he addresses the point about white supremacists by writing, “If the capitalization of *white* became standard among anti-racists, the supremacists’ gesture would no longer be a provocative defiance of the norm and would lose all force.” Appiah writes,

One reason that the MIT philosopher Sally Haslanger prefers to capitalize the names of races is, she explains, “to highlight the artificiality of race,” by contrast to the seeming naturalness of color. A larger argument lurks here: Racial identities were not discovered but created, she’s reminding us, and we must all take responsibility for them. Don’t let them disguise themselves as common nouns and adjectives. Call them out by their names.<sup>8</sup>

For this reason, we have chosen to capitalize “White” in this report.

Other settler-related terms that we use merit explanation. Historically, many White settlers used the word “emigrant” to refer to Americans who moved from Eastern and Midwestern states to Oregon. This term is fraught with cultural superiority that emphasizes the leaving, rather than the arriving. Settlers arrived in a place with thousands of years of its own cultures: they were immigrants to this new space. To avoid the problematic connotations of “emigrant,” we most often choose “overlander,” a long-used term to describe one who traveled across land from the Eastern and Midwestern United States to the western reaches of the continent, or “settler.” In some cases, we use the term “immigrant,” but we avoid “emigrant” unless it was used in original text in a quote.

Other terms that appear in the report are not frequently used today. The following definitions may be helpful:

**bateau, bateaux:** A flat-bottomed, shallow-draft boat that could be rigged with a sail, commonly used on rivers in North America by fur traders. “Bateaux” is the French plural and is accepted as the standard English plural for the term.

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Coleman, “Why We’re Capitalizing Black,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2020, A2; Sarah Glover, “One Thing Newsrooms Can Do: Capitalize ‘B’ When Reporting About the Black Community,” *Amsterdam News*, June 11, 2020, <http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2020/jun/11/one-thing-newsrooms-can-do-capitalize-b-when-repor/>.

<sup>6</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black,” *Atlantic*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/>; Coleman, “Why We’re Capitalizing Black.”

<sup>7</sup> Mike Laws, “Why we capitalize ‘Black’ (and not ‘white’),” *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>.

<sup>8</sup> Appiah, “The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black.”

**blockhouse:** A style of military fortification. In the Pacific Northwest, blockhouses were often compact, two-story structures constructed of timbers and with a pyramid hip roof.

**Conestoga wagon:** A large, broad-wheeled covered wagon, drawn by livestock, used during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**Oregon Country:** The term for the territory between the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, between the northern border of Spanish California and the southern border of Russian Territory (in what is now British Columbia and Alaska). This covered present-day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Wyoming, Montana, and British Columbia. The Oregon Country was not included in the land that the United States acquired from France through the Louisiana Purchase, which only granted the United States land east of the Rocky Mountains. Despite being heavily populated by many different groups of Indigenous people, European countries (France, Spain, and Britain) and the United States engaged in years of debate over who among them had a legal right to the land in what is now the Pacific Northwest. The term “Oregon Country” was used during the years of “joint occupation” of the region by Britain and the United States, which occurred from 1818 until the two countries resolved their boundary dispute in 1846.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 1. Samuel Augustus Mitchell created this 1846 map of Oregon, California, and Texas. Here, the map is zoomed into the Oregon Country and the tentative border between US and British territory at the 49th parallel.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Maps Division.

<sup>9</sup> J. Neilson Barry, “Oregon Boundaries,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (September 1932): 259–67.

**Owyhee:** A common nineteenth-century spelling of Hawai'i. The British term for the Hawaiian Islands was the Sandwich Islands, bestowed on the archipelago by James Cook in 1778. Hawaiians came to the Pacific Northwest to work in the fur trade, often hired by British, French, or American traders.<sup>10</sup>

**portage:** A temporary break in water travel due to a hydrological obstruction, which usually necessitates carrying a vessel and gear for a distance around the obstruction. Portage can be a verb (e.g., the group needs to portage around the falls) or a noun, especially when referring to a well-traveled route around a hydrological hazard (e.g., the portage around Celilo Falls).

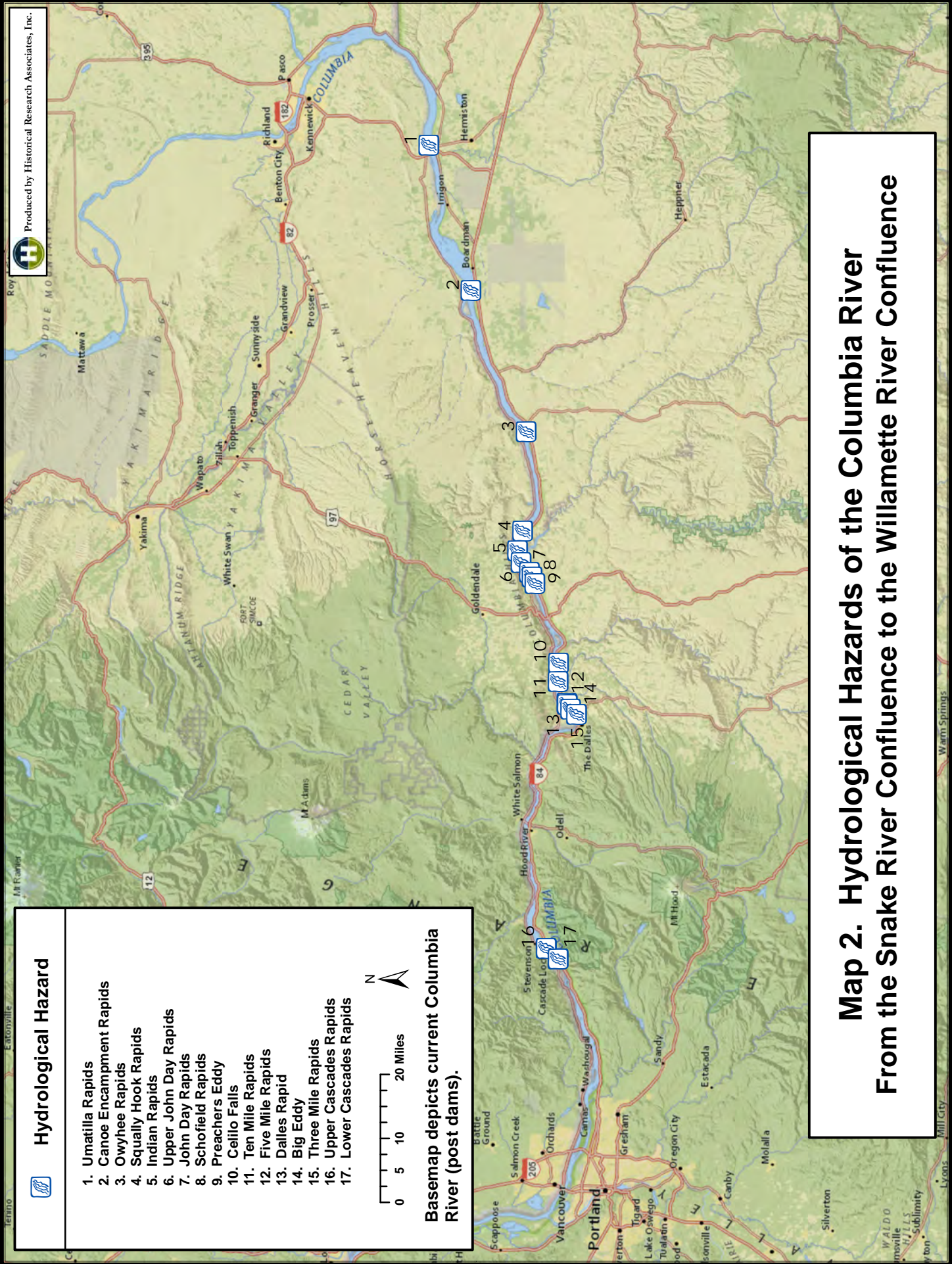
**prairie schooner:** A covered wagon used by most overlanders. It was lighter than Conestoga wagon and thus preferable for long-distance travel.

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<sup>10</sup> Harold Whitman Bradley, "The Hawaiian Islands and the Pacific Fur Trade, 1785–1813," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 1939): 275–99; George I. Quimby, "Hawaiians in the Fur Trade of North-West America, 1785–1820," *Journal of Pacific History* 7 (1972): 92–103; J Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Diasporic Deracination and 'Off-Island' Hawaiians," *Contemporary Pacific* 19, no. 1 (2007): 138–60.







### Hydrological Hazard

1. Umatilla Rapids
2. Canoe Encampment Rapids
3. Owyhee Rapids
4. Squally Hook Rapids
5. Indian Rapids
6. Upper John Day Rapids
7. John Day Rapids
8. Schofield Rapids
9. Preachers Eddy
10. Celilo Falls
11. Ten Mile Rapids
12. Five Mile Rapids
13. Dalles Rapid
14. Big Eddy
15. Three Mile Rapids
16. Upper Cascades Rapids
17. Lower Cascades Rapids



Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).

**Map 2. Hydrological Hazards of the Columbia River From the Snake River Confluence to the Willamette River Confluence**

# Chapter 1: The Columbia River Gorge before 1840: Geological, Natural, and Early Human History

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## Geological Overview of the Columbia River Gorge

Between 16.7 and 5.5 million years ago, a series of massive lava flows emanated from enormous fissures in the earth's crust near the present-day western border of Idaho. When each flow cooled, the lava solidified into basalt, covering massive land areas in new rock. Basalt often forms joints during the cooling process, and the stone appears as vertical, hexagonal-looking columns of dark stone when exposed. Another lava flow would then form and cool on top of the previous one. More than 350 separate lava flows eventually covered over 81,000 square miles of present-day Washington, Oregon, and Idaho in thick layers of basalt, including most of the current Columbia River Basin.<sup>11</sup>

The Columbia River Gorge was carved out of these basaltic rock layers at the end of the last ice age. Around 15,000 years ago, massive ice sheets that had covered Canada, northern Washington, Idaho, and Montana receded over the span of a few thousand years. The retreat occurred in a series of ebb and flow events. It took several thousand winters and summers for the ice to melt away, with a lot of refreezing in between melting phases. Over the course of these freeze-thaw cycles, a massive ice dam that held back Glacial Lake Missoula in what are now mountain valleys in Montana failed and refroze over and over, causing a series of massive flood events. Geologists estimate that there were hundreds of flood events from Lake Missoula, the twenty-five largest of which discharged over 1,000,000 cubic meters per second. (For context, the highest recorded flow of the Columbia River is only 35,000 cubic meters per second.) The floods carved out the present-day Columbia River Valley and the many adjacent channels and scablands that now cover Washington State.<sup>12</sup>

Since the floods cut through the basalt layers, the river's banks are mostly layers of dark basalt pillars. The volume and force of flood water during the river's formation carved the basalt into steep vertical cliffs on either side of the river for most of its course between the Snake and Willamette

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<sup>11</sup> US Geological Survey, "Columbia River Basalt Group Stretches from Oregon to Idaho," last updated June 27, 2017, [https://volcanoes.usgs.gov/observatories/cvo/cvo\\_columbia\\_river\\_basalt.html](https://volcanoes.usgs.gov/observatories/cvo/cvo_columbia_river_basalt.html).

<sup>12</sup> Gerardo Benito and Jim E. O'Connor, "Number and Size of Last-Glacial Missoula Floods in the Columbia River Valley between the Pasco Basin, Washington, and Portland, Oregon," *Geological Society of America Bulletin* 115, no. 5 (May 2003): 624–38; Northwest Power and Conservation Council, "Floods and Flood Control," accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/floods>.

Rivers. After the floods, the Columbia was the largest river emptying into the Pacific Ocean from North America, when measured by volume of water discharged.<sup>13</sup>

## Landscape and Hydrological Features of the Columbia River Gorge

This section provides a brief description of the natural features of the Columbia River and its banks over a stretch of more than 200 miles, from the Snake River confluence to the Willamette River confluence (for an overview of hydrological hazards along this stretch of river, see Map 2). Later chapters in this report describe, flowing from upstream to downstream, how travelers along the Oregon Trail negotiated and understood these natural features. The river's rapids and banks look vastly different today than they did in the nineteenth century because of the many dams built along the Columbia River during the twentieth century. For that reason, we use the past tense when describing the river's natural features.<sup>14</sup>

From the Snake River confluence, river travelers heading downstream at first experienced only minor turbulence. The steep basalt cliffs on either side of the river for the first twenty-five miles were likely covered in dry grasses and shrubs, a semi-arid, treeless landscape, much as it is today. Travelers then encountered the Umatilla Rapids, a series of small rapids ahead of the confluence with the Umatilla River. Approaching the Umatilla River and then for several miles after that, the landscape flattened out, with marshes filling the surrounding lowlands and no high cliffs in sight.

About ten miles downstream of the Umatilla River, the canyon walls inched up again slowly. At first the river remained wide and calm, but then it gradually transitioned into a narrower channel with taller surrounding cliffs. After about forty miles of gradual transition, river travelers reached Canoe Encampment Rapids (perhaps named by early traders). Twenty miles or so downstream from that point came Owyhee Rapids, a minor rapid that presented no major obstacles to navigation.

About fifteen miles downstream of Owyhee Rapids, a series of minor rapids stretched for ten miles. They were known by many names, including Squally Hook Rapids, Indian Rapids, Preacher's Eddy, Schofield Rapids, Upper John Day Rapids, and John Day Rapids (the John Day River flowed

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<sup>13</sup> US Geological Survey, "Columbia River Basalt Group Stretches from Oregon to Idaho"; Benito and O'Connor, "Number and Size of Last-Glacial Missoula Floods," 624–38.

<sup>14</sup> This section uses information from a variety of sources, listed here together since each paragraph contains bits from many sources: Rebecca Tyson Smith, "The Geology of the Columbia River Gorge," *Overland Journal* 10, no. 1 (1992): 2–14; Lewis A. McArthur, "Oregon Geographic Names," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 26, no. 4 (December 1925): 309–423, esp. 360; Lewis R. Freeman, *Down the Columbia* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1921), 336–37; Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 17–24; T. C. Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 16, no. 2 (June 1915): 133–74, esp. 134; Jennifer Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaa?awn / As Days Go By: Our History, Our Land, Our People—The Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Pendleton, Portland, Seattle, and London: Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, Oregon Historical Society, and University of Washington Press, 2006); Eugene S. Hunn with James Selam and Family, *Nch'i-Wána "The Big River": Mid-Columbians and Their Land* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); Hunn, et al. eds., *Cáv Paná Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten*; Megan K. Friedel and Terry Toedtemeier, "Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins's 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 388–411; Mathias D. Bergmann, "'we should lose much by their absence': The Centrality of Chinookans and Kalapuyans to Life in Frontier Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 34–59; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 29–32.

into the Columbia amid the turbulence). A stretch of about fifteen miles of relatively calm water followed, and partway through that section, the Deschutes River flowed into the Columbia.

Celilo Falls (silaylo in Sahaptin), gushing falls in a narrow valley with relatively steep, treeless basalt cliffs protruding from each side, posed the first major obstruction to downstream navigation. The horseshoe-shaped falls were one of the most important fishing spots along the Columbia for Indigenous peoples, many of whom traveled great distances to fish for salmon and to trade with others gathered there.

The rapids in the ten miles after Celilo Falls had many names of European American origin: explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark called them the Short and Long Narrows, French fur trappers called them the “dalles,” and the US Geological Survey (USGS) later named each rapid the distance it was upstream from the town of The Dalles (i.e., Ten Mile Rapids, Five Mile Rapids, and Three Mile Rapids). Indigenous people and settlers generally regarded the rapids in this section as difficult and requiring a portage, except perhaps in extremely high water. The river channel was narrow, as evidenced by Lewis and Clark’s name for the rapids, and the dry, basaltic hills rose to either side of the river as they had for most of the journey since the Snake.



**Figure 2. The Dalles Rapids, passing through the tight channel that became known as the Narrows. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1882.**

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

Between the Dalles and the Cascades Rapids, there was a forty-mile-long, calm, lake-like section of river, since the river was essentially dammed at the Cascades Rapids. Stumps of long-dead trees protruded from the water, evidence that the natural dam had not always existed. The Cascades

themselves, which Lewis and Clark called “the Great Chutes,” were the most significant obstruction along the entire river. The river cut through massive mountains at this point, which were later named the Cascades, after the rapids. The rapids completely blocked river navigation and necessitated a portage of almost five miles.



Figure 3. Upper Cascades Rapids. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, 1882.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

After the Cascades, the river once again smoothed out. No major rapids obstructed travel between the Cascades and the confluence with the Willamette River. The only spot that consistently challenged river travelers was the bend at Cape Horn, where strong winds caused problems for sailboats. Beyond this point, the river valley opened up and included significant areas of low-lying marshland as the valleys of the Sandy River and then the Willamette River intersected with the Columbia River.

The Columbia River was powerful and potentially dangerous, but it was also an important source of sustenance. Pat Courtney Gold, a Wasco person from the Oregon side of the river, described it:

*Wauna* is the Columbia River People’s name for the river and is more than a name; it is a living entity. It can be compared to an honored Elder who has been a part of us for generations. *Wauna* provides nourishment, connects us with our upriver People, and shares its songs with us. The songs change with the seasons and offer comfort to us. *Wauna*’s gurgles, roars, and river laps are our river songs.<sup>15</sup>

Settlers did not know the river as Indigenous people did, and so it presented a significant challenge to them, as missionary Henry Spalding wrote in 1837:

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<sup>15</sup> Pat Courtney Gold, “The Long Narrows: The Forgotten Geographic and Cultural Wonder,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 596–605, esp. 596.

The Columbia is the most frightful river I ever saw navigated by any craft. . . . Probably a larger quantity of water must flow than in the Mississippi, but it is frequently pressed into a channel of ten rods. Many lives are lost in this river. None but the Canadians and Indians would ever think of navigating this terrible Columbia.<sup>16</sup>

## Indigenous People in the Gorge



Figure 4. In his 1844 map of the Pacific Northwest, Charles Wilkes shows the Columbia River and the approximate range of Indigenous people over the area, categorized by language grouping. The Chinookan people occupied the banks of the lower Columbia River, while the Walla Walla, or Sahaptin-speaking people, lived along the mid-Columbia.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

Indigenous people of the mid- and upper Columbia who spoke languages in the Sahaptin language family called the Columbia River Nch'i-Wána, while Chinookan people on the lower Columbia called the river imał or iyagaytł imał, or hayash-tsəq<sup>w</sup> in Chinuk Wawa, the pidgin language that developed on the lower river (also known as Chinook Jargon).<sup>17</sup> The banks of the Columbia River near its major rapids were major trading and fishing grounds for Indigenous people from all over what is now the northwestern United States and southwestern Canada. Since the area was a major regional center of trade and cultural exchange, the people living along the river or visiting lived in dynamic cultural environments. The village was the highest political unit, and complex kinship ties shaped social groupings and connected people throughout the region. The

<sup>16</sup> H. H. Spalding to Brothers Wm. & Edward Porter & their wives, October 2, 1836, 3, available on Oregon-California Trails Association website (hereafter OCTA website).

<sup>17</sup> Hunn, et al. eds., *Ćám Paná Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten*, 76–93; Zenk et al., “Chinookan Villages of the Lower Columbia,” 7.

term “tribe” came about as part of the post-European contact treaty-making and removal processes and is not necessarily helpful or accurate for describing the historic groupings of people whose homelands are along the Columbia River.<sup>18</sup>

The following list of people with homelands along the Columbia River is not exact, nor is it comprehensive, but it provides a start for understanding how people lived along and used the river. Some groups lived near the river year-round, while others came to the river only seasonally. Groups that resided on the banks of the upper Columbia, from the confluence with the Snake River to Celilo Falls, spoke primarily Sahaptin languages and included the Cayuse, Nez Perce, Palouse, and Umatilla, Walla Walla, Wanapum, and Yakama people. Lower Columbia residents, from the Cascades Rapids to the Willamette River, spoke Chinookan languages and included Upper Chinook, Cathlamet, Wahkiakum, and Cowlitz people.<sup>19</sup>

In the mid-river region from Celilo Falls to the Cascades Rapids, the Chinookan and Sahaptin people overlapped, creating a dynamic place of mixed cultural traits. This central area was home to Klickitat, Wishram, Wasco (also sometimes called Wasco-Wishram), and Tenino people, and many others visited seasonally to access fishing and trading opportunities. The banks along the three main rapids—the Cascades, the Dalles, and Celilo Falls—were the busiest centers of commerce and population along the river in the early 1800s. Archeological evidence indicates that this section of the river had long been a major trading area for a large region, stretching from present-day British Columbia down to northern California. Because of this, it was a multiethnic and evolving regional cultural center. Salmon running seasons were especially important times, when people from all over came to fish and trade along the banks of the Columbia.<sup>20</sup>

As subsequent chapters will explain, Indigenous peoples’ use of the river evolved over time, as did their interactions with overland travelers and settlers in the region. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, Indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest had not experienced direct contact with Europeans. In the early nineteenth century, Indigenous people still were the primary power brokers along the Columbia River. Yet, by 1860, their communities had undergone extreme and violent shifts due to the ever-increasing White presence in the area. Anthropologist Robert Boyd summarized the extreme change that Indigenous people in the area experienced during this period:

Culture change among the Indians of the Pacific Northwest proceeded at a very rapid pace: in less than a century, from initial contact with Spanish ships in 1774 to the establishment of reservations in the 1850s, native populations dropped to less than a quarter of their original numbers, they were removed from their original homes, with a few exceptions their fishing and gathering economies were

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<sup>18</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 5, 32–34; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 5, 32–34; Yvonne Hajda, “Social and Political Organization,” in *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, eds. Robert T. Boyd, et al. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2013), 146–48; Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 34, 36; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Yvonne Hajda and Elizabeth A. Sobel, “Lower Columbia Trade and Exchange Systems,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 106–24; Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 29; Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 52.



disrupted, their materials cultures were displaced and altered by White influence, their kin structures and social networks were loosened or unraveled, and their religious systems were wiped out, forced underground, or folded into new- semi-Christian configurations.<sup>21</sup>

Even before heavy White settlement, disease was a major driver of cultural disruption. Indigenous communities along the Columbia experienced the following known epidemics: smallpox (1775–1871 and 1801–1802); possibly venereal diseases or tuberculosis (1824–1825); “fever and ague,” which was likely malaria (1830); whooping cough and dysentery, brought by White settlers immigrating to the region (1844); and measles (1847). So many people died as a result of these diseases that the Indigenous population of the Pacific Northwest may have dropped to half of the area’s precontact population by 1829.<sup>22</sup> Even in the wake of these devastating losses, Indigenous people living in the Columbia River Valley continued to fish on the river, carry on their cultural and linguistic heritage, participate in new economies, and maintain their way of life, despite aggressive anti-Indigenous federal policies.<sup>23</sup>

## Fur Trade and Military Expeditions

The first White people known to have reached the Columbia River were Robert Gray and George Vancouver. Both arrived in 1792, on separate expeditions to explore the region on behalf of America and Britain, respectively. Both Gray and Vancouver sailed into the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean. Gray, who arrived first, named the river after his ship, the *Columbia Rediviva*. His party left after trading with Chinookan people near the mouth of the river. Vancouver’s party continued upstream and claimed the entire river for Great Britain. With Vancouver was British Naval Lieutenant William Broughton, who surveyed and mapped the Columbia River one hundred miles inland, up to around the confluence with the Willamette River. Broughton’s survey report and map were the first written descriptions of the Columbia River.<sup>24</sup>

The first US military expedition to traverse the Columbia River Gorge was the Corps of Discovery, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Their initial journey downstream was in the autumn of 1805, and they returned traveling upstream on the river in 1806. Unlike the Gray and Vancouver expeditions, Lewis and Clark came from inland. After traveling up the Missouri River, they crossed the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and then journeyed down the Snake River and

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<sup>21</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 141–44.

<sup>23</sup> Antone Minthorn, “Wars, Treaties, and the Beginning of Reservation Life,” in *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaa?awn / As Days Go By: Our History, Our Land, Our People—The Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla*, ed. Jennifer Karson (Pendleton, Portland, Seattle, and London: Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, Oregon Historical Society, and University of Washington Press, 2006), 61–92.

<sup>24</sup> William L. Lang, “The Chinookan Encounter with Euro-Americans in the Lower Columbia River Valley,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 250–54; Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaa?awn / As Days Go By*, 34.

onto the Columbia. Lewis and Clark would not have been able to complete their journey without significant help from Indigenous people, both with navigating the river and with securing food.<sup>25</sup>

Merchants in search of furs began entering the Columbia River region in the 1810s. Most fur traders were British or French (often from eastern Canada) and many of the ships originated in Boston—so much so the Chinuk Wawa word for “American” was “Boston.”<sup>26</sup> In 1811, British fur trader David Thompson of the North West Fur Company charted the Columbia River from its headwaters in present-day British Columbia to the mouth of the river. Near the mouth of the Snake River, Thompson met Yelépt, a Walla Walla leader who had also helped Lewis and Clark navigate the river. Thompson and his crew arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River on July 15. There, they found Fort Astoria, which had recently been established by a crew from John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company that had sailed in from the Pacific Ocean. That crew included Alexander McKay, David Stuart, Alexander Ross, Gabriel Franchère, and twelve Hawaiian men.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequently, Thompson and some of the Fort Astoria crew traveled upriver together, where they met Chinookan and Sahaptin people, upon whom they relied for knowledge about food and river navigation. Traders continued to venture upriver in later years and had several violent encounters with Indigenous people as a result of cultural misunderstandings. The area around the Cascades Rapids was a source of particular conflict. The Chinookan people living there required those wishing to portage around the rapids to provide gifts in exchange for the portage. Fur traders were upset about having to pay to make the portage, despite being the interlopers in the region. On several occasions, the traders used armed force and murdered Indigenous people who complicated the portage.<sup>28</sup>

In 1818, with permission from Cayuse and Walla Walla leaders, the North West Fur Company of Montreal built Fort Nez Percés near where the Walla Walla River met the Columbia. This was the first permanent White presence in the Columbia River Plateau region. Fort Nez Percés became an important trading post, sometimes called “the Gibraltar of the Columbia.”<sup>29</sup> In 1821, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), a powerful British fur company, bought the North West Fur Company, which

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<sup>25</sup> James P. Ronda, “Down the Columbia,” in *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 11, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gary Moulton (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press / University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, 2005), <http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/journals.php?id=1805-10-11>; Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 36–39.

<sup>26</sup> Rena V. Grant, “Chinook Jargon,” *International Journal of American Linguistics* 11, no. 4 (October 1945): 225–33, esp. 231; Douglas Leechman, “The Chinook Jargon,” *American Speech* 1, no. 10 (July 1926): 521–34, esp. 532.

<sup>27</sup> Lang, “The Chinookan Encounter with Euro-Americans in the Lower Columbia River Valley,” 262–66; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 144; Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 34, 41–43; Jack Nisbet, *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thompson Across Western North America* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1994, reprinted 2007), 201–21; Jay H. Buckley, “Life at Fort Astoria: John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company Post on the Columbia River,” *Proceedings of the 2012 Fur Trade Symposium, September 5–8, 2012, Pinedale, Wyoming*, edited by Jim Hardee (Pinedale, WY: Sublette County Historical Society/Museum of the Mountain Man, 2013), 63–82.

<sup>28</sup> Buckley, “Life at Fort Astoria,” 73.

<sup>29</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyáakaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 44–46; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 13.

began an era of HBC dominance on the Columbia. The HBC took over Fort Nez Percés and soon after renamed it Fort Walla Walla.<sup>30</sup> In 1824, the HBC established Fort Vancouver on the north side of the Columbia, between the Sandy and Willamette River confluences. The HBC remained the dominant fur trading company along the Columbia for the next two decades.<sup>31</sup>

Fur traders relied heavily on Indigenous trade networks and river expertise. Indigenous river pilots were the only people who knew how to navigate the dangerous rapids along the Columbia, including the types of boats to use, the best water routes, and the best places to cross rivers.<sup>32</sup> Fur traders utilized Indigenous networks to succeed in trade and based their land courier routes on Indigenous trails and trade routes.<sup>33</sup> Fur traders depended almost exclusively on Indigenous people for food until the HBC established a farm at Fort Vancouver in the late 1820s, after which point Klickitat and Chinookan people worked at the farm and other Fort Vancouver enterprises.<sup>34</sup> Also in the 1820s, the HBC built a sawmill along the river, several miles upstream of Fort Vancouver.<sup>35</sup>

The HBC employed people from all over. This included many Indigenous men from eastern tribes, including Iroquois, Cree, and others. On Pacific journeys, the HBC recruited Hawaiians, many of whom ended up working for the HBC in forts along the Columbia. Other fur traders came from Quebec or other parts of Canada, America, Great Britain, and Louisiana, and included people of European, Indigenous, and African descent.<sup>36</sup>

The HBC did not bring any women to the northwest, and it initially prohibited men employed by the company from marrying Indigenous women. However, the HBC changed its stance after seeing how French traders' intermarriage with local women strengthened alliances. The HBC began to encourage men to marry women from local communities in order to "solidify tribal relations and ensure smooth trading." To meet the same ends, the HBC discouraged "casual exploitative relations" between HBC employees and Indigenous women.<sup>37</sup> Some Indigenous leaders along the

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<sup>30</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaḡawn / As Days Go By*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 144.

<sup>32</sup> Bergmann, "'we should lose much by their absence,'" 34, 40; Gilbert E. Conner, "Indian Trails," talk to the Rotary Club, in Karson, *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaḡawn / As Days Go By*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 140; Bergmann, "'we should lose much by their absence,'" 42.

<sup>34</sup> Bergmann, "'we should lose much by their absence,'" 42–43.

<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth, *The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6* (Eugene, OR: University Press, 1899), 176; Myron Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot* (Seattle: The Alice Harriman Company, 1909), 89; "The Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray, from December, 1836, to October, 1837," *Whitman College Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (June 1913): 6; William L. Lang, "Pacific Fur Company," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, March 8, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> C. O. Ermatinger, "The Columbia River under Hudson's Bay Company Rule," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (July 1914): 192–206, esp. 198; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "Negroes and the Fur Trade," *Minnesota History* 15 (1934): 421–33; Melinda Marie Jetté, "Betwixt and Between the Official Story: Tracing the History and Memory of a Family of French-Indian Ancestry in the Pacific Northwest," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 142–83; Melinda Marie Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races: A French-Indian Community in Nineteenth-Century Oregon, 1812–1859* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaḡawn / As Days Go By*, 47.

Columbia also saw intermarriage as a benefit, and married their daughters off to traders to strengthen their relationships with the HBC and further their own influence. The marriages between Indigenous women and British, French, and Canadian traders became important in the evolution of the multicultural societies that existed along the Columbia in the 1830s, with people of European descent now mixed into already diverse communities.<sup>38</sup>

Fur traders participated in existing trade networks along the Columbia River. This included the slave trade on the Columbia, run primarily by Chinookan people, with most enslaved people being captured from Indigenous communities south and east of the lower Columbia River. Fur traders purchased enslaved people from Indigenous traders and married women who owned slaves.<sup>39</sup> White people and Hawaiians employed in the fur trade exchanged goods at existing Indigenous central trading points of the Dalles and the Cascades. Fort Vancouver and Fort Walla Walla also became important trading posts, where Indigenous people exchanged otter pelts, beaver pelts, and horses with fur traders for “wool, flannel, calico, tobacco twists, tea bricks, sugar cones, mouth harps, thimbles, beads, nails, metal cups and kettles, guns, ball and powder, dice, needles, and hats.”<sup>40</sup>

Even with the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous people retained control over the river and remained the most powerful entities along it through the 1840s. Chinookan people controlled navigation and trade on the lower Columbia, Klickitat and Wasco-Wishram people were dominant along the important fishing grounds and trade centers of the mid-Columbia, and the Walla Walla and Cayuse exerted the most influence over navigation of the river upstream of Celilo Falls. The HBC altered the trade dynamic along the river, but it was just one new trading partner for Indigenous people who had long maintained networks with a wide array of groups. The HBC forged alliances with leaders of Indigenous villages in order to access existing trade networks but did not supplant them. Even the language used by Indigenous traders on the river, Chinuk Wawa, was already a combination of various languages before Europeans arrived, and it evolved after the coming of fur traders to include some English and French words.<sup>41</sup>

In 1824, the HBC appointed John McLoughlin the “chief factor” (head) of the Columbia Department (region). Apart from a brief furlough in Europe, McLoughlin remained in this position for a little over two decades. McLoughlin became influential and was known for having fairly good relationships with Indigenous people along the Columbia River (his first wife was Ojibwe and his

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<sup>38</sup> Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 38–40.

<sup>39</sup> Hajda, “Social and Political Organization,” in *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 157–58; Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 45.

<sup>40</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaɔawn / As Days Go By*, 46; Meredith Gairdner, “Notes on the Geography on the Columbia River.” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 11 (1841): 256.

<sup>41</sup> Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 36–37, 46; Karson, ed., *wiyáxayxt / wiyákaaɔawn / As Days Go By*, 43–44, 47.

second wife, Alexander McKay's widow, was part Cree). However, this was not uniformly the case, and the HBC also perpetrated some violence against Indigenous people under his leadership.<sup>42</sup>

McLoughlin assisted White missionaries and other traders in the region by providing them with food from the Fort Vancouver farm, allowing them to stay at the fort, and sometimes loaning them boats (he continued these practices with Oregon Trail settlers, as later chapters will discuss).<sup>43</sup>

Nathaniel J. Wyeth, a Boston businessman who came to the area in 1832 on a fur trade expedition, remarked on the abundance he encountered at Fort Vancouver:

Here I was received with the utmost kindness and Hospitality by Doct. McLauchland [McLoughlin] the acting Gov. of the place[,] Mr McDonald Mr Allen and Mr McKay gentleman resident here Our people were supplied with food and shelter from the rain which is constant they raise at this fort 6000 bush. of wheat 3 of Barley 1500 potatoes 3000 peas a large quantity of punkins[,] they have coming on apple trees, peach Do. and grapes. Sheep, Hogs, Horses, Cows, 600 goats, grist 2, saw mill 2. 24 lb guns powder magazine of stone the fort is of wood and square they are building a Sch. of 70 Tons[,] there are about 8 settlers on the Multnomah[,] they are the old engages of the Co. who have done trapping. I find Doct. McLauchland a fine old gentleman truly philanthropic in his Ideas he is doing much good by introducing fruits into this country which will much facilitate the progress of its settlement.<sup>44</sup>

Henry H. Spalding, a Presbyterian missionary, similarly reported on the abundance and hospitality of Fort Vancouver in 1836:

We were very kindly received by Dr. McLoughlin the chief factor in Columbia. We were much disappointed at the abundance of necessaries and comforts of life here to be obtained, and cheaper than in the city of New York, from the fact that all goods come to this country free of duties. Two ships from London this year heavily laden with goods. Two now in port, one from the Sandwich Islands: both sent this fall. Two more expected soon from the coast. The company have also a steamboat for the coast. The farm at Vancouver produced 4,000 bushels of wheat and other grains except corn, in proportion. The Dr. has a beautiful garden of about 15 acres, containing all manner of fruit.<sup>45</sup>

In the late 1830s, the fur trade began to decline due to changing fashions and over-hunting, but the HBC remained influential on the Columbia River through the early 1840s. When overlanders came to the area in large numbers, McLoughlin became known for advancing them credit and assisting them on their journey down the Columbia River.<sup>46</sup> However, by the late 1840s, the HBC had begun receiving bad press in the eastern United States: many members of the US Congress

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<sup>42</sup> Dorothy Nafus Morrison, *Outpost: John McLoughlin and the Far Northwest* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999), 51–52, 58–59, 174–86; Gregory P. Shine, “John McLoughlin (1784–1857),” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, May 1, 2019, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/mcloughlin\\_john/#.XknPQ2hKhPY](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/mcloughlin_john/#.XknPQ2hKhPY).

<sup>43</sup> Henry B. Zenk and Tony A. Johnson, “Chinuk Wawa and its Roots in Chinookan,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 272–87; Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 90–91; H. H. Spalding to Brothers Wm. & Edward Porter & their wives, October 2, 1836, 3, available on OCTA website; “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 176–77.

<sup>45</sup> H. H. Spalding to Brothers Wm. & Edward Porter & their wives, October 2, 1836, 3, available on OCTA website.

<sup>46</sup> Morrison, *Outpost*, 51–52, 58–59, 174–86; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 14; Bergmann, ““we should lose much by their absence,”” 43–44.

considered the company to be “anti-American,” “greedy,” and an obstacle to White settlement and American takeover of the region. In addition, the company’s agricultural operations across the Pacific Northwest were losing money. Amid these difficulties, the HBC effectively forced McLoughlin’s retirement and passed his duties on to Peter Skene Ogden and James Douglas in January 1846.<sup>47</sup>

In the early 1840s, Charles Wilkes and John C. Frémont led US military expeditions down the Columbia. Wilkes reached the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean in 1841. His maps and observations about Indigenous people, fur traders, missionaries, and early settlers are a valuable source of information about early overlanders in the river valley.<sup>48</sup> In 1843, Frémont led an expedition that traveled overland along the path that overlanders had taken the same year, although at the Grande Ronde River, he took an alternative route from the one the overlanders had used to reach Fort Walla Walla. Frémont’s objective was to map the area and connect previous surveys by Wilkes (1840–1841) and Clark (1805–1806). After reaching the Columbia River at Fort Walla Walla, Frémont’s party continued on to Fort Vancouver.<sup>49</sup> Frémont’s journal and that of Theodore Talbot, a member of his entourage, contain details about what travel along the river was like in 1843, the same year that the first large party of overlanders came down it.<sup>50</sup> Frémont and Wilkes were assisted significantly by Indigenous and HBC guides and river pilots, who helped them navigate rapids and portages and provided them with Chinook canoes, HBC bateaux, food, and supplies.<sup>51</sup> Other important observations on the Columbia River from military scouts come from two British military officers, Henry J. Warre and Mervin Vavasour, who conducted a reconnaissance of the Oregon territory during 1845–1846.<sup>52</sup>

The 1846 Treaty of Washington between Great Britain and the United States ended the joint occupation of the Oregon Territory and established the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as the boundary between British

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<sup>47</sup> John A. Hussey, “Chapter 4: History of Fort Vancouver, 1846–1869: A Brief Outline,” in *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1957), [no page number in online format], [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/fova/hussey/chap4.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/fova/hussey/chap4.htm); Ann F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800–1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 142; Morrison, *Outpost*, 419–26.

<sup>48</sup> Louise Rasmussen, “Artists of the Explorations Overland, 1840–1860,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1942): 56–62, esp. 57; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 142; Charles Wilkes, *Western America, Including California and Oregon, with Maps of Those Regions, and of ‘The Sacramento Valley,’* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1849), 50–103.

<sup>49</sup> John C. Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the years 1843–’44* (Washington: Blair and Rivers, Printers, 1845), 184.

<sup>50</sup> Charles H. Carey, ed., *The Journals of Theodore Talbot, 1843 and 1849–52* (Portland, OR: Metropolitan Press Publishers, 1931), vii–viii.

<sup>51</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 184–95.

<sup>52</sup> Rasmussen, “Artists of the Explorations Overland,” 59.

and American territories.<sup>53</sup> The treaty gave HBC “possessory rights,” meaning the company was able to keep its property at Fort Vancouver, which it continued operating in some capacity until 1860, and Fort Walla Walla, which it operated until military conflicts between the Cayuse and the United States forced its abandonment in 1857.<sup>54</sup> British military expeditions on the Columbia River ceased after this treaty, but American military expeditions for surveying and protection of overland travelers continued. The US Army set up a post at Fort Vancouver in 1849, occupying the site jointly with the HBC for several years, and subsequently established other military posts along the river, as later chapters will discuss.

## Missions Before 1840

White missionaries first arrived in the Columbia River region in the 1830s. Jason and Daniel Lee, first established a Methodist Mission on the Willamette River in 1834 (Daniel Lee would later set up a mission at the Dalles). Two years later, two couples from upstate New York—Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and Henry and Eliza Spalding—traveled down the Columbia (with help from Indigenous river pilots) looking for a place to establish a Protestant mission.<sup>55</sup> They briefly considered the Dalles because of the many Indigenous people who lived there. However, the HBC hoped to keep the mission reliant on the HBC for supplies and so encouraged the Whitmans to establish it farther upriver.<sup>56</sup> They eventually settled on Waíletpu, a site up the Walla Walla River near the present-day town of Walla Walla, after receiving permission from a Cayuse leader.<sup>57</sup> The only other missionaries on the mid-Columbia River in the 1830s were two Catholics, Belgian priests Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers. Blanchet and Demers traveled widely in the Pacific Northwest, including stops at the Cascades of the Columbia, but they did not settle long-term along the river.<sup>58</sup>

In 1838, with the Whitmans at Waíletpu, Methodist missionaries Daniel Lee and Henry Perkins established the Wascopam Mission near the Dalles Rapids, one of the river’s major trading centers and settlement areas.<sup>59</sup> Perkins’ wife, Elvira Johnson, joined them later that year. The exact location

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<sup>53</sup> “Significant Events in the History of Celilo Falls,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 720; William L. Lang, “Oregon Question,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, July 10, 2019, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon\\_question\\_54\\_40\\_or\\_fight/#.XkgaTmhKiUk](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_question_54_40_or_fight/#.XkgaTmhKiUk).

<sup>54</sup> Hussey, “Chapter 4: History of Fort Vancouver,” [no page number in online format].

<sup>55</sup> H. H. Spalding to Brothers Wm. & Edward Porter & their wives, October 2, 1836, 3, available on OCTA website.

<sup>56</sup> Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 50–51.

<sup>57</sup> Roberta Conner and William L. Lang, “Early Contact and Incursion, 1700–1850,” and Minthorn, “Wars, Treaties, and the Beginning of Reservation Life,” 46, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 20–22.

<sup>59</sup> Raymond W. Settle, ed., *The March of the Mounted Riflemen: First United States Military Expedition to travel the full length of the Oregon Trail from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Vancouver May to October, 1849, as recorded in the journals of Major Osborne Cross and George Gibbs and the official report of Colonel Loring* (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1940), 233.

of the mission is not known, but it was somewhere in the present-day town of The Dalles.<sup>60</sup> Lee explained,

The location we have chosen is situated on the south side of the river about 4 miles below the Dalles. Here is a small creek empties into the Columbia it's Indian name is Hoiss. Near the mouth on the east side is Wascopam Village from which our station takes its name. . . . The Dalles are the finest salmon fishery in the world and are visited every year by large numbers of Indians from the surrounding country besides about 1000 are constant residents in the vicinity.<sup>61</sup>

The Wasco people who lived near the new Wascopam Mission helped the missionaries gather supplies, wood, and provisions to establish the mission. Lee and Perkins described the Indigenous village, Kaclasko, near Wascopam Mission:

It contains about 15 houses, they are built of cedar boards and covered with the bark. Each occupies an area of about 15 by 20 feet with roofs a little elevated in the middle. The door is a low narrow opening through the wall covered with a mat. The fire is in the centre and the smoke escapes through an opening at the top.

Here the whole household mingles together. The boys naked, the men often so and the girls and women but partially covered. Such are Indian houses and their families, the wretched abodes of wretchedness, which we must constantly see, but are little able to retrieve.<sup>62</sup>

Lee and Perkins went to the Indigenous markets at the Dalles to trade fishhooks, needles, and flints for game and fish. They also bought materials from the HBC at Fort Vancouver and brought them back to the Dalles with the help of Indigenous river pilots.<sup>63</sup> They planted a garden, kept horses (one gifted from a Walla Walla chief), and hired people from local tribes and one Hawaiian person who had likely come to the region to work for the HBC.<sup>64</sup> Perkins built the first structure of the mission, a log residential house, with the help of Winslow Anderson, a free Black man who had been living in the Willamette Valley.<sup>65</sup> By late 1839, they had also built a schoolhouse and chapel, and a barn.<sup>66</sup> For more on the Wascopam Mission and nearby villages in the 1840s, see Chapter 5.

Lee and Perkins' Eurocentric descriptions of Indigenous life illustrate how missionaries interacted with Sahaptin and Chinookan people differently than fur traders had, since the missionaries came with an explicit agenda of converting people to European American cultural norms. Fur traders, by contrast, aimed to trade with existing societies to secure profits, and they

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<sup>60</sup> Bergmann, “we should lose much by their absence,” 34; “Significant Events in the History of Celilo Falls,” 720; Karson, ed., *wiyáxcayxt / wiyáakaa?ann / As Days Go By*, 47; Robert Boyd, “Wascopam Mission,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, May 21, 2018, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/wascopam\\_mission/#.XXwpJShKiUk](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/wascopam_mission/#.XXwpJShKiUk).

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Lee and H. K. W. Perkins to Rev. N. Bangs, in *Extracts from the Notebook of Daniel Lee, 1838*, 2, Box 1, Folder Daniel Lee Letters 1838–43 2, Daniel Lee Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

<sup>62</sup> Lee and Perkins to Bangs.

<sup>63</sup> Lee and Perkins to Bangs.

<sup>64</sup> Lee and Perkins to Bangs; Marcella M. Hillgen, “The Wascopam Mission,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (September 1938): 223.

<sup>65</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Hillgen, “The Wascopam Mission,” 224; Boyd, “Wascopam Mission.”



relied on cooperation with Indigenous people in order to do so. The missionaries possessed the same settler colonial ideals as the overlanders who followed them, and they often guided the settlers. The overlanders arrived with the intent to take over the land for themselves, not to coexist with Indigenous people.<sup>67</sup> Historian Katrine Barber further explains this distinction and the transition from fur trade in the region to settlement of the area:

If classic colonialism was resource-oriented and circular (colonists lived in the region temporarily to oversee the extraction of natural resources, ultimately returning to their countries of origin), settler colonialism was a one-way journey motivated by land acquisition that required dispossession and its justification. The 1843 arrival of as many as 1,000 American settlers guided by missionary Marcus Whitman from Fort Hall into Cayuse Territory signaled the advent of settler colonialism in Oregon Country. Other early watershed events include the Oregon Treaty of 1846, which ended the joint American-British occupation of the Oregon Country and through which Britain abandoned its fur-trading operations and withdrew its land claims below the forty-ninth parallel, and the passage of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) in 1850, the legal process for settler land acquisition in Oregon Territory. All marked the end of the fur trade period and the incoming rush of land-hungry Americans.<sup>68</sup>

Chapter 2 provides more detail about the transition from the fur trade and missionary era to widespread settlement in the area.

## A Changed World

The dynamics of cultural interchange along the river shifted markedly around 1840. In the late 1830s, malaria, syphilis, and other diseases brought by fur traders, missionaries, and military expeditions rippled through the valley. These illnesses hit the thriving communities along the Columbia River particularly hard and killed many people living along the river and throughout the vast trade networks connected to the Columbia.<sup>69</sup> When settlers began arriving in large numbers in the early 1840s, they encountered Indigenous communities that had recently been through devastating disease outbreaks, which placed their power and influence along the river in a somewhat precarious position.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Lang, “The Chinookan Encounter with Euro-Americans in the Lower Columbia River Valley,” 269–71.

<sup>68</sup> Katrine Barber, “‘We were at our journey’s end.’ Settler Sovereignty Formation in Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 382–413, esp. 389–91.

<sup>69</sup> Bergmann, “‘we should lose much by their absence,’” 38–40; G. Thomas Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge, 1843–1855: The Final Ordeal,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 134–75, esp. 167.

<sup>70</sup> Wendi A. Lindquist, “Stealing from the Dead: Scientists, Settlers, and Indian Burial Sites in Early-Nineteenth Century Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 338; Charles Wilkes, quoted in Hillgen, “The Wascopam Mission,” 232.



# Chapter 2: Overlanders on the Oregon Trail

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## Overview of the Oregon Trail

Between 1840 and 1870, an estimated 500,000 people traveled on a 2,000-mile overland route to destinations in what are now Oregon, Washington, California, and Utah. The route was called the Oregon Trail, the Emigrant Road, or the Road to Oregon. As is the case with other immigrant trails in what is now the United States, the route of the Oregon Trail was based on a series of Indigenous trails.<sup>71</sup> Starting from the Missouri River in Independence, Missouri, the trail followed the Platte and North Platte Rivers through Nebraska and eastern Wyoming, then the Sweetwater River to South Pass in Wyoming, and then along the Snake River in eastern Idaho.

Families began traveling to Oregon in increasing numbers after 1842, establishing a variety of cutoffs and new trails over the next three decades. People began their journey at towns along the Missouri River, known as “jumping-off” places, including Independence and St. Joseph, Missouri, and Council Bluffs, Iowa. In these towns, families and individuals purchased supplies, formed companies of wagons, and then began their journeys west. Most wagon trains left the jumping-off places in mid-April. They aimed to reach Fort Kearny, Nebraska, by mid-May; Fort Laramie, Wyoming, by mid-June; South Pass by July; and Oregon by September.<sup>72</sup>

In 1849 and beyond, increasing numbers of people began the journey from more northerly points in Iowa and Nebraska. From eastern jumping-off points, overlanders chose either to go west to Oregon or Washington, or southwest to California or Utah. Once travelers reached Oregon, they could choose among several routes to reach the Willamette Valley. The corridor for westward movement that became known as the Oregon Trail later became stagecoach roads, then railroads, and finally automobile highways.<sup>73</sup>

## Policies and Boosterism Spurring Migration to Oregon

Those who traveled overland on the Oregon Trail were part of a broader American movement of settler colonialism. From the founding of the United States, people had staked out homesteads

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the map of the “well-used trail system” created and used by Indigenous people of the Columbia River Plateau created by Eugene S. Hunn, E. Thomas Morning Owl, Modest J. Minthorn, and Jennifer Karson Engum as part of “*Naami Tūcaami Timná: ‘The Heart of Our Country,’*” in Hunn et al., *Ćán Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sahaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla*, 15. The authors write, “Many of these trails later became emigrant trails.”

<sup>72</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 7; Carlos A. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 84, 90; William L. Lang, “Oregon Trail,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed April 6, 2020, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon\\_trail](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_trail).

<sup>73</sup> Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 611; Lang, “Oregon Trail”; Oscar O. Winther, “Commercial Routes from 1792 to 1843 by Sea and Overland,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (September 1941): 230–46, esp. 237.

beyond the western peripheries of American territory, utilizing such trails as the Great Wagon Road (1720s) and the Wilderness Road (1770s). Starting in the early 1800s, politicians promoted westward expansion of the United States, encouraging settlers to take up land without regard for the many Indigenous people already living on it. Columnist John L. O’Sullivan popularized the phrase “manifest destiny” (coined by Jane McManus Storm Cazneau) in 1845 to describe Americans’ belief that they were destined by God to occupy the North American continent from coast to coast.<sup>74</sup> This expansionist ideology was part of James K. Polk’s 1844 presidential campaign platform in which he called for Oregon to be solely occupied by the United States, rather than jointly with Great Britain, as it had been since an 1818 treaty. Politicians such as Missouri senators Thomas Hart Benton and Lewis F. Linn supported efforts to resolve the boundary dispute with Great Britain and claim Oregon as part of the United States.<sup>75</sup>

Due to the ongoing dispute between Britain and the United States, settlement in Oregon was initially organized by individuals and organizations, rather than being state-encouraged like previous colonial endeavors, and centered on an area that was not officially part of the union. Benton, Linn, and others produced a series of books and newspapers that fueled so-called Oregon Fever. This immigration-booster literature used embellished language to describe the Oregon Country as paradise on Earth and claimed that the journey westward was both practicable and easy. Other boosterism employed religious rhetoric, such as the Massachusetts-based and Methodist-led Oregon Provisional Emigration Society and subsequent Oregon Societies established in towns throughout the Mississippi Valley. These societies encouraged the immigration of Christians to Oregon to convert Indigenous people. Some early travelers published accounts of their journeys and shared exaggerated descriptions of the mild climate and rich soil in the Oregon Country. By the mid-1840s, prospective overlanders could use these trail guides, such as Lansford W. Hastings’s *The Emigrant Guide to Oregon and California* (1845) and Overton Johnson and William Winter’s *Route Across the Rocky Mountains* (1846), to plan their journeys. These guides were often written by people who had traveled across the continent as traders (for example, Ross Cox and Alexander Ross), on behalf of the US government (such as Frémont, Wilkes, and Lewis and Clark), or as settlers (Jesse Applegate, Johnson and Winter, and many others who followed in later years).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Adam Gomez, “Agrarianism, Expansionism, and the Myth of the American West,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 2 (September 2012): 236–62, esp. 236–47; Megan Jenison Griffin, “Jane McManus Storm Cazneau, 1807–1878,” *Legacy* 27, no. 2 (2010): 416–32, esp. 418–21.

<sup>75</sup> Heike Paul, “Agrarianism, Expansion, and the Myth of the American West,” in *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 322; Kenneth R. Coleman, *Dangerous Subjects: James D. Saules and the Rise of Black Exclusion in Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2017), 70; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 97; Lang, “Oregon Trail.”

<sup>76</sup> John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 42–43; Lillian Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1992), 20; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 79; Thomas F. Andrews, “‘Ho! For Oregon and California!’: An Annotated Bibliography of Published Advice to the Emigrant, 1841–47,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 33, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 41–64.

The growing presence of Americans in the Oregon Country in the 1840s changed the legal landscape of the region. Anticipating the arrival of a large number of overlanders in the autumn of 1843, European Americans already residing in Oregon created the Provisional Government that spring. Existing independently from both the United States and Great Britain, the new government established legal principles for land ownership and citizenship in Oregon with passage of the Organic Act. The act granted 320 acres of land to any White man and 640 acres to any married couple. It also granted citizenship to the male descendants of White men, enfranchising the sons of White men who had Indigenous wives. Notably, the laws did not provide title for the settlers, which meant they were effectively squatting on Indigenous land, with the assumption that the US government would legally transfer the land title later on. The land law further drew White people to Oregon.<sup>77</sup>

The 1846 treaty between the United States and Great Britain ended joint occupation of the Oregon Country and established a new national boundary along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Two years later, after a continued surge in the area's White population and as a result of the Whitman incident and subsequent war between the United States and the Cayuse people, settlers lobbied for territorial status in Oregon to gain additional federal military protection. On August 14, 1848, in response to those requests, the US Congress granted Oregon territorial status.<sup>78</sup>

Territorial status enabled Oregon politicians to lobby Congress to pass the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) in 1850. It became one of the most generous land distribution laws in US history, promising up to 320 acres per person. It allowed only White men, married women, and "American half-breed Indians" to claim land (thus implicitly excluding non-White people from eligibility, which included Black, Hawaiian, and full-blooded Indigenous people). The DLCA legally validated earlier land claims filed under the Provisional Government's Organic Act. More than 7,500 claims, accounting for 2.5 million acres of land, had been filed under the DLCA by the time the act expired in 1855.<sup>79</sup>

## Indigenous Dispossession and a Legal System of White Supremacy

The DLCA established a legal system of White supremacy in Oregon by preventing non-White people from owning land and dispossessing Indigenous communities. Although Indigenous communities had not ceded title to their lands, the US government began giving it away through the

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<sup>77</sup> Kenneth R. Coleman, "We'll All Start Even?: White Egalitarianism and the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 414–39; William G. Robbins, "This Land, Oregon," Oregon History Project, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://oregonhistoryproject.org/narratives/this-land-oregon/resettlement-and-the-new-economy/a-new-legal-landscape>.

<sup>78</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, "Oregon Territory's Movement for Self-Government, 1848–1853," *Pacific Historical Review* 26, no. 1 (February 1957): 17–32; Leslie M. Scott, "Oregon's Provisional Government, 1843–1849," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (September 1929): 207–17; Oregon Secretary of State, "Oregon History: Territorial Government," accessed August 25, 2020, <https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book/Pages/facts/history/pre-territorial.aspx>

<sup>79</sup> Lang, "Oregon Trail"; Coleman, "We'll All Start Even?," 414–15.

DLCA. To address the situation, the US government negotiated treaties in the 1850s with Indigenous communities that lived along the Columbia River year-round or seasonally—including the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, and Middle Oregon Tribes—resulting in the transfer of millions of acres of land to the US government. Having experienced years of diseases that ravaged their communities and wars with the US military, some (but not all) Indigenous leaders wearily signed treaties with the US government. Congress ratified these treaties on March 8, 1859, weeks *after* it declared Oregon the thirty-third state in the Union.<sup>80</sup>

In conjunction with the treaties, the US government issued military orders for Indigenous people to relocate to US-drawn reservations, which were small portions of Indigenous peoples' territories. The US government grouped Indigenous people into “tribes” that did not always reflect their dynamic cultural communities, especially in the trading hubs along the Columbia River Gorge. They further grouped several of these tribes onto each reservation, forcing individual nations to share reservations and a common government as “confederated tribes.” Treaties reserved fishing rights for Indigenous people but required most people living along the river to leave their homelands. This led to a major power shift along the Columbia River Gorge. After 1860, most Chinookan- and Sahaptin-speaking people no longer lived full-time on the Columbia’s banks, and while they did return seasonally to fish, White settlers claimed their lands along the Columbia through land donation laws.<sup>81</sup>

On the mid- to lower Columbia, some Chinookan-speaking people of the Columbia River Gorge—who identified as Wasco, Wishram, White Salmon, and Cascades on the mid-Columbia, and Wapato, Skilloot, Kathlamet, Chinook, and Clatsop on the lower Columbia—refused to sign treaties that would take their lands away.<sup>82</sup> The resulting back-and-forth with Congress, and the difficulty of classifying the diverse communities of Chinookan people, “left the Chinook people without ratified treaties, thereby severely constraining their ability to protect the expropriation of their land and resources and to seek redress from the U.S. government.”<sup>83</sup>

The US government increased military presence along the Oregon Trail following a series of armed conflicts between Indigenous people and the United States. Several of these conflicts

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<sup>80</sup> Lang, “Oregon Trail”; Barber, “‘We were at our journey’s end.’” 395; William Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 12, The Plateau* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 154; Darrell Millner, “Blacks in Oregon,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed April 6, 2020, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/blacks\\_in\\_oregon](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/blacks_in_oregon).

<sup>81</sup> Hunn et al., *Neh’i-Wána “The Big River”*, 275–79; Minthorn, “Wars, Treaties, and the Beginning of Reservation Life,” 64–73; E. Thomas Morning Owl and Roberta L. Conner, “Pašúwaša Tímanina Tiičámna: ‘They Are Cutting Up the Marked Land,’” in Hunn et al., *Cáw Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sabaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla*, 49–50.

<sup>82</sup> Tony A. Johnson, “The Chinook People Today,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Fisher and Melinda Marie Jetté, “Now You See Them, Now You Don’t: Chinook Tribal Affairs and the Struggle for Federal Recognition,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan People of the Lower Columbia*, 290–91.

occurred during the treaty-making process, notably at the Cascades in 1856.<sup>84</sup> The United States stationed additional troops in the region to protect settlers from Indigenous people who were distraught over losing their lands to White settlers and their loved ones to disease. This led to construction of additional military forts and other infrastructure along the Oregon Trail. Along the Columbia River, the US Army took over Fort Vancouver, established Fort Henrietta at Echo, Oregon, stationed soldiers at The Dalles, and established blockhouses along the portage around the Cascades Rapids.<sup>85</sup>

US policymakers relied on increased White settlement in Oregon to justify taking land from Indigenous people. White settlers echoed this argument. For example, this excerpt was published in *The Dalles Daily Mountaineer* in 1866:

There is no more erroneous idea than that the military ever can or ever will subjugate the Indians. You may carry on “a war of posts” for fifty years against the Snakes, and they will still be eating government mules and citizens’ cattle and horses almost in site of the military camps. History proves that Indians never were subjugated by regular soldiery. . . .

But subjugation, in my opinion, means something more. It means the defeat of the Indians, the permanent occupation of their country by a productive population of whites, besides holding the Indians in a position where their lives are absolutely at the mercy of their conquerors. To bring about this state of affairs, we need more population; and until we have it, occasional murders will be perpetrated by the Snakes, and occasional bands of horses and cattle will be stolen.

The most that the government can do is to distribute arms amongst the miners and settlers here. As to the balance, we will have peace and security when we have induced a sufficient population hitherwards to occupy the mines and to cultivate the valleys.<sup>86</sup>

As the above letter illustrates, White newcomers consciously advocated for settlement and state-sponsored violence against Indigenous people as a way to erase the presence of Indigenous people and culture.<sup>87</sup>

## The Overlanders

Most overlanders came from either the Old Northwest (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio) or the border states of Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Starting in 1843, family migration increasingly dominated overland travel. Women, who almost always traveled with family units, made up 15 to 20

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<sup>84</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, “This Place Is Romantic and Wild?: an Historical Overview of the Cascades Area, Fort Cascades, and the Cascades Townsite, Washington Territory” (Heritage Research Associates, 1984); Stephen Dow Beckham and Rick Minor, “Archaeological Testing at Fort Cascades and the Cascades Townsite” (1984).

<sup>85</sup> Delia M. Coon, “Klickitat County: Indians of and Settlement by Whites,” *Washington Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (October 1923): 248–61, esp. 255; Harold J. Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon: 1853 Diaries, Letters and Reminiscent Accounts* (Tooele, UT: The Patrice Press, 2008), 308; C. F. Coan, “The First Stage of the Federal Indian Policy in the Pacific Northwest, 1849–1852,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 22, no. 1 (March 1921): 46–89, esp. 50–51.

<sup>86</sup> H. M., “Letter from Canyon City,” May 11, 1866, printed in *Daily Mountaineer*, May 21, 1866.

<sup>87</sup> Barber, “We were at our journey’s end.,” 386–87.

percent of overlanders during the 1840s.<sup>88</sup> While the majority of overlanders who immigrated to Oregon were White, Black people made up possibly up to 3 percent of overlanders before 1860. Many traveled as free people, while some were enslaved and traveled with White overlanders. As stated above, however, Black people were not allowed to claim land under exclusionary territorial and federal laws.<sup>89</sup>

Overlanders moved west for a variety of reasons. Some sought new economic opportunities and hoped to secure land in Oregon. Many were farmers drowning in debt after the panic of 1837 and record-setting floods in Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa that damaged farms and ruined crops. Some came seeking better health, since diseases such as malaria and cholera were prevalent in the Mississippi Valley. Others wanted to escape conflicts surrounding such issues as race, slavery, and religion.<sup>90</sup>

## Typical Routes and Number of Travelers

There were several different routes that overland travelers took to reach their destinations (for an overview of the primary routes, based on a 2019 National Park Service study, see Map 3<sup>91</sup>). The primary route that became known as the Oregon Trail was first identified by Robert Stuart, a Pacific Fur Company employee returning from Fort Astoria in 1812. Stuart, traveling from west to east, journeyed upstream along the Columbia River, across the Blue Mountains, along the Snake River, over the Continental Divide at South Pass (present-day Wyoming), and down the Platte River to Missouri. The route provided a relatively easy wagon crossing of the Rocky Mountains. Fur traders and missionaries utilized the route for the next several decades in their travels from east to west. The Whitman and Spalding parties took this route in 1836, establishing a precedent for family migration along the trail.<sup>92</sup>

The first covered wagon train reached the Oregon Country in 1841, part of a larger party that split at Fort Hall, with half going to California as the Bidwell-Bartleson party, and the other half

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<sup>88</sup> Quintard Taylor, “Slaves and Free Men,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 153–70, esp. 153–54; Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 4, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Stacey L. Smith, “Oregon’s Civil War: The Troubled Legacy of Emancipation in the Pacific Northwest,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 154–73; Taylor, “Slaves and Free Men,” 169; Lang, “Oregon Trail.”

<sup>90</sup> Samuel N. Dicken and Emily F. Dicken, *The Making of Oregon: A Study in Historical Geography* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1979), 70; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 90–91; Coleman, *Dangerous Subjects*, 72–73; Taylor, “Slaves and Free Men,” 154.

<sup>91</sup> Department of the Interior (DOI), National Park Service (NPS), Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes of the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, California, and Pony Express National Historic Trails: Appendix A: Study Route Descriptions and Historical Overviews, September 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Lang, “Oregon Trail”; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 84; Karson, ed., *wiyaxayxt / niyaakaa'awn / As Days Go By*, 49.



heading to the Columbia River with pack animals.<sup>93</sup> Also in 1841, a party led by Joe Meek and Robert “Doc” Newell reached the Columbia River, although not with covered wagons.<sup>94</sup> In 1842, Dr. Elijah White, a former missionary and a newly assigned Indian subagent in Oregon, led eighteen wagons and over one hundred people across the trail. White’s party left their wagons at Fort Hall, Idaho, and proceeded on horseback to the Willamette Valley.<sup>95</sup>

In 1843, a party consisting of approximately 875 hundred men, women, and children; one hundred wagons; and seven hundred head of cattle left Independence, Missouri, for the Oregon Country. This group traveled along the route that White had taken the previous year—now called the Oregon Trail. The party broke into several groups early in their journey but became collectively known as the “Great Migration.” Whitman and a Cayuse man named Istikus, returning from a trip to Boston, traveled with some of the party for segments of the western journey.<sup>96</sup> One man in the party, James W. Nesmith (who later became an elected official in Oregon), observed,

Dr. Whitman was persistent in his assertions that wagons could proceed as far as the Grand Dalles of the Columbia river, from which point he asserted they could be taken down by rafts or batteaux to the Willamette valley, while our stock could be driven by an Indian trail over the Cascade mountains, near Mt. Hood.<sup>97</sup>

The 1843 Great Migration marked a new era of family-centered overland travel on the Oregon Trail.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., ed. *The Bidwell-Bartleson Party, 1841 California Emigrant Adventure. The Documents and Memoirs of the Overland Pioneers* (Santa Cruz, CA: Western Tanager Press, 1991); Joseph Williams, *Narrative of a tour from the state of Indiana to the Oregon territory in the years 1841-2* (New York: The Cadmus Book Shop, 1921).

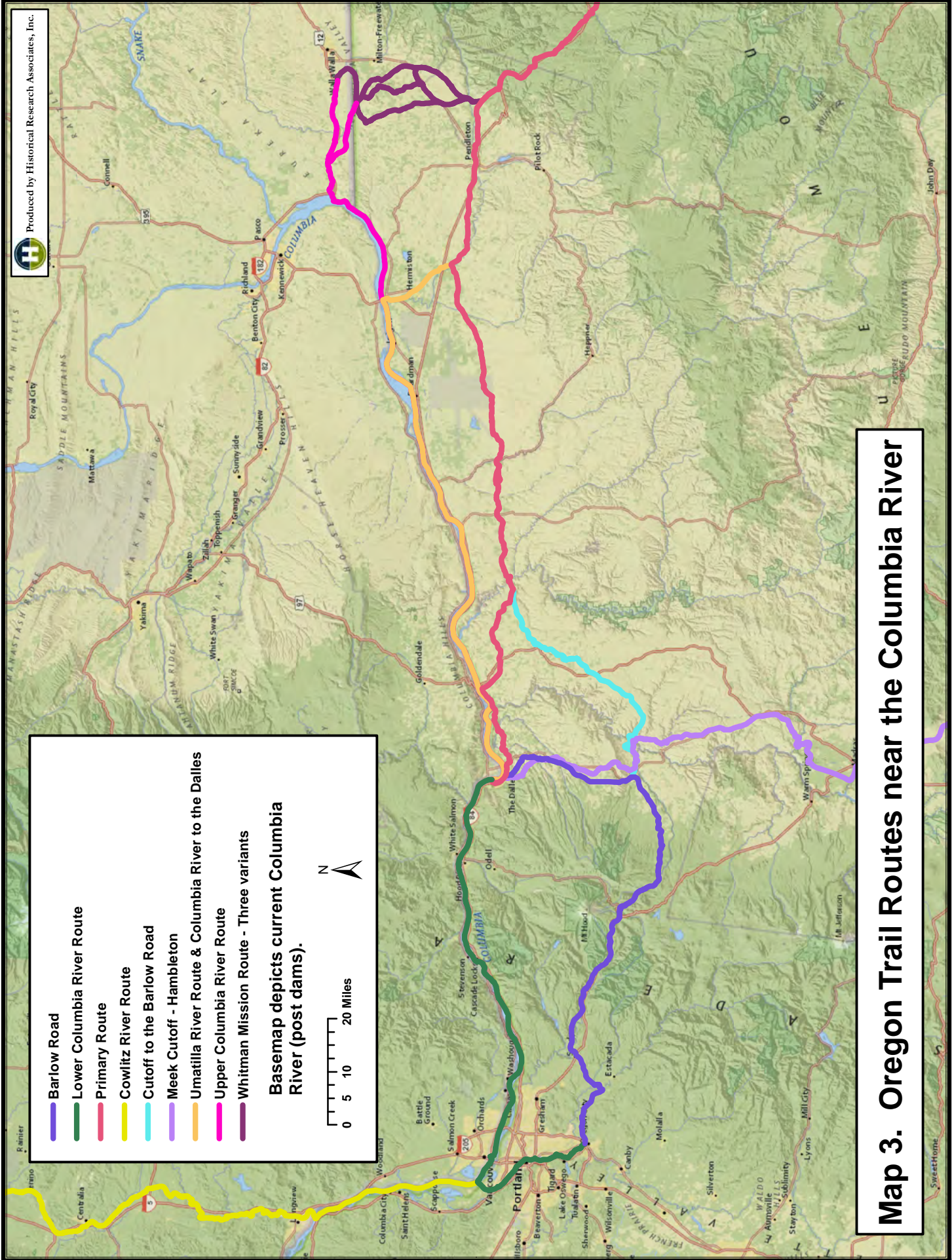
<sup>94</sup> Meek and Newell took three wagons from Fort Hall and later stripped them down as a result of the difficult of traversing through sagebrush. They then dragged the undercarriages through the Blue Mountains. Robert Newell, *Memoranda: Travles in the Teritory of Missourie: trawle to the Kayuse War: together with A report on the Indians south of the Columbia River*, ed. Dorothy O. Johansen (Portland, OR: Champoeg Press, 1959).

<sup>95</sup> Frederick V. Holman, “A Brief History of the Oregon Provisional Government and What Caused Its Formation,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 2, no. 13 (June 1912): 89–139, esp. 106.

<sup>96</sup> Conner and Lang, “Early Contact and Incursion, 1700–1850,” 23; S. B. L. Penrose, “The Wagon Train of 1843 — Its Dual Significance,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (December 1943): 361–69; H. M. Beadle, “The Story of Marcus Whitman Refuted,” *American Catholic Historical Researches* 16, no. 4 (October 1899): 187–97; Lin Tull Cannell, “William Craig: Governor Stevens’s Conduit to the Nez Perce,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2005/2006), 19–30, esp. 26.

<sup>97</sup> *Transactions of the Third Annual Re-union of the Oregon Pioneer Association and the Annual Address Delivered by Hon. Matthew P. Deady . . .* (Salem, OR: E. M. Waite, Printer and Bookbinder, 1876), 47.

<sup>98</sup> Winther, “Commercial Routes from 1792 to 1843 by Sea and Overland,” 238; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 86; Coleman, *Dangerous Subjects*, 71.



**Map 3. Oregon Trail Routes near the Columbia River**

The 1843 Great Migration travelers entered the present state of Oregon at the Snake River crossing near Nyssa. From there, they traveled through Keeney Pass (near the present-day town of Vale, Oregon) to Farewell Bend, the last point along the Snake River. The route then turned northwest and ascended the Burnt River Canyon and crossed the Powder River Valley (now known as Baker Valley) and Grande Ronde River Valley. The trail continued northwest across the Blue Mountains, one of the most difficult portions of the entire trail. After emerging from the Blue Mountains, overlanders chose among several route options, often depending on the year of travel and weather conditions.

The route that the Great Migration took through the Blue Mountains became known as the Whitman Mission Route, since it stopped by the Whitmans' Waiilatpu Mission on the way to the Columbia River. The Whitman Mission Route branched off from the main trail approximately twelve miles east of present-day Pendleton, Oregon. Immigrants drove northward toward the mission and then to the Columbia River at the HBC's Fort Walla Walla (formerly Fort Nez Percés, at *Waiúla*, present-day Wallula). In 1843 and 1844, almost all overlanders took some version of this route. An estimated 2,500 to 3,000 travelers used the Whitman Mission Route between 1840 and 1847, followed by a complete drop-off in travel via the mission after it was destroyed in 1847 (see Chapter 3).<sup>99</sup>

When overlanders who took the Whitman Mission Route reached Fort Walla Walla, they decided whether to take the Naches Pass Trail (after its opening in 1853) or the Upper Columbia River Route. Those who took the Upper Columbia River Route either floated down the Columbia River in makeshift rafts or borrowed HBC bateaux, or drove their stock down on Indigenous trails on the south side of the river.<sup>100</sup> They then crossed the Deschutes River (first aided by Indigenous people who charged a fee to carry belongings over the river, then by a White-run ferry), climbed back up onto bluffs on the south side of the river, and descended back into the river valley near Wascopam.<sup>101</sup>

Around 1845, Elijah White began encouraging overlanders to bypass Waiilatpu and instead follow the Umatilla River all the way to the Columbia, a more direct route. Immigrants who took this route often continued on a trail on the southern bank of the river until they reached the Wascopam Mission site at the present-day town of The Dalles, although some constructed rafts and floated down the river for part of the distance. The Umatilla River Route enabled overlanders to avoid some of the rapids between Fort Walla Walla and the Umatilla River confluence.<sup>102</sup>

By the late 1840s, many overlanders opted for a revised route, which became the main stem of the Oregon Trail. Like the Umatilla River Route, the main stem emerged from the Blue Mountains

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<sup>99</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 148–51.

<sup>100</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 149, 154.

<sup>101</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 152–53.

<sup>102</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 147–48, 154.

through what are now known as Pendleton, Echo, Echo Meadows, Well Springs, and Four Mile Canyon. Instead of following the Umatilla River Valley down to the Columbia River, however, this route crossed the Umatilla and John Day Rivers upstream of their respective confluences with the Columbia, remaining for a longer period on the Columbia River Plateau. It was thus a hillier route than that along the river, but it avoided challenging water travel between Fort Walla Walla and the Dalles Rapids. It reached the Columbia River near present-day Biggs Junction, west of the mouth of the Deschutes River. After the Deschutes, the trail climbed onto the bluffs above the river before descending to the Columbia again at The Dalles.<sup>103</sup>

From The Dalles, overlanders who took the river route broke down their wagons and loaded everything they had onto rafts, fur traders' bateaux, sailboats, or canoes on loan from and steered by Indigenous pilots and floated down the river. Often a few men in each party accompanied livestock on footpaths along the river and reunited with the river travelers at the head of the portage around the Cascades of the Columbia Rapids, before returning to the footpaths. Starting in the early 1850s, overlanders could also take a steamboat from The Dalles to the Cascades, if they could afford it. They portaged around the Cascades and then took rafts, bateaux, other sailboats, or steamboats to Fort Vancouver, or, in later years, directly to Portland or Oregon City. Other overlanders chose to travel north to Puget Sound after reaching Fort Vancouver, taking the Cowlitz River Route. Traveling on the Columbia River was dangerous, with rapids and high winds, and it could be expensive, since those controlling boats and portage roads (whether Indigenous or White) often charged fees. Despite the challenges, an estimated 22,000 overlanders navigated the Columbia River Gorge between 1843 and 1855.<sup>104</sup>

Starting in 1846, many overlanders took the newly opened Barlow toll road over the Cascades. Previously, the Cascade Mountains, particularly the passes around Mount Hood, were impassable to wagon trains. In 1845, Samuel K. Barlow and Joel Palmer cut an eighty-mile trail from The Dalles, around the south shoulder of Mount Hood, and on toward Oregon City. Barlow then petitioned the Provisional Government to establish a toll road on this route. The Barlow Road opened in 1846, initially charging five dollars per wagon and ten cents per head of livestock.<sup>105</sup> In 1846, Levi Scott and other settlers led overlanders on a more southern route, which avoided the Columbia River altogether and instead took travelers southwest from Idaho, across present-day Nevada and

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<sup>103</sup> US Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, "The Oregon Trail . . . A Potential Addition to the National Trails System," June 1975, 36; DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 159–61.

<sup>104</sup> Karen Bassett, Jim Renner, and Joyce White, *Oregon Historic Trails Report* (Salem: Oregon Trails Coordinating Council, 1998), 27, 30; Lang, "Oregon Trail"; Edwards, "The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge," 135; US Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, "The Oregon Trail," 36; DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 159–61.

<sup>105</sup> This was significant, since the average farm laborer made about \$0.40 a day (in New Jersey, the only state with data that year, possibly even less in Missouri). US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *History of wages in the United States from Colonial times to 1928. Revision of Bulletin No. 499 with supplement, 1929-1933* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934), 225.

California, and then northwest to the southern Willamette Valley. This became known as the Southern Route to Oregon or the Applegate Trail.<sup>106</sup>

Beginning in 1847, overlanders developed two cutoffs to the Barlow Road, both of which allowed travelers to bypass the Columbia River and The Dalles completely and take a more direct route through Oregon to the Willamette Valley. Overlanders used these routes regularly from 1847 through 1853, and possibly into the 1860s. The Barlow Road likely carried over 31,000 overlanders during the height of Oregon Trail migrations. Travelers continued to use the route into the twentieth century, and it became the basis of US Highway 26 crossing the Cascade Mountains.<sup>107</sup>

**Table 1. Overland Immigration to Oregon, 1840–1860<sup>108</sup>**

Year	Total Number of Arrivals by Destination		
	Oregon	Oregon and California	Cumulative West Coast Total (OR and CA)
1840	13	13	13
1841	24	58	71
1842	125	125	196
1843	875	913	1,109
1844	1,475	1,528	2,637
1845	2,500	2,760	5,397
1846	1,200	2,700	8,097
1847	4,000	4,450	12,547
1848	1,300	1,700	14,247
1849	450	25,450	39,697
1850	6,000	50,000	89,697
1851	3,600	4,700	94,397
1852	10,000	60,000	154,397
1853	7,500	27,500	181,897
1854	6,000	18,000	199,897
1855	500	2,000	201,897
1856	1,000	9,000	210,897
1857	1,500	5,500	216,397
1858	1,500	7,500	223,897
1859	2,000	19,000	242,897
1860	1,500	10,500	253,397
<b>Total 1840–1860</b>	<b>53,062</b>	n/a	<b>253,397</b>

<sup>106</sup> Lang, “Oregon Trail”; Bassett et al., *Oregon Historic Trails Report*, 9–10, 27; Nathan Pedersen, “Barlow Road,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed April 8, 2020, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/barlow\\_road/](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/barlow_road/); US Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, “The Oregon Trail,” 36–37; Levi Scott and James Layton Collins, *Wagons to the Willamette: Captain Levi Scott and the Southern Route to Oregon, 1844–1847*, ed. Stafford J. Hazelett (Pullman, WA, Washington University Press, 2010).

<sup>107</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 158–59, 217–24.

<sup>108</sup> Unruh, *Plains Across*, 119.

Westward migration became an annual event, with hundreds to thousands of people leaving the Midwest every year for opportunities in Oregon.<sup>109</sup> Immigration varied considerably from year to year due to weather, disease, armed conflicts between Indigenous people and the US government, passage of land donation laws, and gold rushes in California and Idaho (see Table 1). As circumstances changed, so did the overlander experience. Betsey Baley, in a letter dated September 20, 1849, remarked, “It took us seven months and twenty-one days to reach Oregon from Missouri. This was a long time to live in a wagon.” (Baley actually spent closer to 231 days traveling.) The journey became easier over time as a result of new routes and better guidance from previous travelers. In the 1840s, the average journey on the Oregon Trail took 169 days, with wagon trains covering twelve to fifteen miles per day. By the 1850s, it took an average of 128 days for overlanders to reach Oregon.<sup>110</sup>

## Traveling on the Trail

The overlander outfit—which included a wagon, oxen, food, and other supplies—was essentially a mobile household. Rather than the big-wheeled, boat-shaped Conestoga wagon common on the East Coast, those traversing the Oregon Trail used the smaller, lighter prairie schooner with a flat bed. Prairie schooners could become amphibious with the application of tar to caulk the slats of the wagon, which facilitated river crossings. Most overlanders used four to six oxen to pull their wagons. Though they were slower than horses or mules, oxen were steadier and more adaptable to variable trail conditions. As Lansford W. Hastings wrote in his 1845 *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California*, “Oxen endure the fatigue and heat, much better than either horses or mules; and they also, subsist much better upon vegetation alone, as all herds are, of course, required to do, upon all portions of the route.”<sup>111</sup> The main expense for any Oregon Trail journey was transportation, including the wagon, oxen, and necessary gear for repairs.<sup>112</sup>

A typical wagon could haul between 2,000 and 2,500 pounds. Most of the space in a wagon was reserved for food—a family needed to carry enough to last six months—and other necessary supplies. Overlanders acquired provisions at the beginning of a journey, and guidebooks like Hastings’ offered them recommendations:

In procuring supplies for this journey, the emigrant should provide himself with, at least, two hundred pounds of flour, or meal; one hundred and fifty pounds of bacon; ten pounds of coffee; twenty pounds of sugar; and ten pounds of salt, with such other provisions as he may prefer, and can

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<sup>109</sup> Lang, “Oregon Trail”; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 86.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth L. Holmes ed., *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 1: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840–1849* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1995), 38; Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 7; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 84, 90; Lang, “Oregon Trail.”

<sup>111</sup> Lansford Hastings, with introduction by Mary Nance Spence, *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969; originally published in 1845), 145.

<sup>112</sup> Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 23; Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 22–23; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 89.

conveniently take . . . Very few cooking utensils should be taken, as they very much increase the load, to avoid which, is always a consideration of paramount importance. A baking-kettle, frying-pan, tea-kettle, tea-pot, and coffee-pot, are all the furniture of this kind, that is essential, which, together with tin plates, tin cups, ordinary knives, forks, spoons, and a coffee-mill, should constitute the entire kitchen apparatus.<sup>113</sup>

Additional foodstuffs included rice, dried beans, chipped beef, dried fruit, tea, pickles, mustard, lard, pepper, vinegar, and saleratus (baking soda). A family outfit also included tools, farming equipment, bedding, clothing, candles, soap, matches, and firearms. If room allowed, families brought non-essential items such as books, musical instruments, furniture, and art supplies. Travelers often discarded goods along the trail, seeking to lighten their wagons and avoid exhausting their draft animals.<sup>114</sup>

Among the challenges overlanders faced on the trail were river and stream crossings, steep topography, extreme weather, and disease. Disease, particularly cholera, was the most common cause of death, followed by accidents. Between 1840 and 1860, an estimated 4 to 6 percent of overlanders died.<sup>115</sup>

The roles of men and women on the Oregon Trail mirrored nineteenth-century social norms. Men typically held leadership positions in wagon trains, drove the draft animals, repaired wagons, stood guard over camps and livestock, and hunted. Women were responsible for caring for children and the sick, cooking, doing laundry, setting up camp, and packing and unpacking provisions at river crossings. Children also had chores. They often herded animals, washed dishes, fetched water, gathered firewood, and looked after younger children.<sup>116</sup>

## Reaching the Columbia River

For those overlanders who took a route that included the Columbia River, reaching the river was an important marker in their months-long journey. The Columbia River Gorge's steep basaltic cliffs, churning rapids, high winds, and all-around dramatic landscape inspired awe, fear, and sometimes disappointment in weary Oregon Trail travelers.

The quotes included in Table 2 are from the journals of overlanders. They reflect the range of overlanders' initial reactions to seeing the Columbia River for the first time.

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<sup>113</sup> Hastings, *Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*, 143–44.

<sup>114</sup> Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 23; Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 192–93; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 89.

<sup>115</sup> Lang, "Oregon Trail"; Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails, 1841–1869* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 143.

<sup>116</sup> Lang, "Oregon Trail"; Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest*, 89; Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 35; Oregon-California Trails Association, "Children on the Trail," accessed August 25, 2020, <https://octa-trails.org/trail-stories/children-on-the-trail/>.



Figure 5. Benjamin A. Gifford, “Middle Cascades, Columbia River,” ca. 1906.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Table 2. Seeing the Columbia River for the First Time

Name of Overlander	Year	Remarks Upon Seeing the Columbia River for the First Time
James Nesmith	1843	Sunday, October 8.—Left our Cayuse neighbors this morning in good season and started for Fort Walla Walla, where we arrived in three hours. It is situated at the mouth of the Walla Walla River, from which it takes its name. It commands a view of the Columbia River, otherways the prospect is dreary. Above and below are high bluffs, while near to the fort are sand banks not possessing fertility enough to sprout a pea, and in fact this is too much the case with all the far-famed Walla Walla Valley. There are some spots of good soil immediately on the streams, but from Dr. Whitman’s to the fort, a distance of twenty-four miles, there is no timber except a little cottonwood, or a species of Balm of Gilead, and at the fort there is not a tree in sight on either side of the Columbia River. If this is a fair specimen of Oregon, it falls far below the conceptions which I formed of the country. <sup>117</sup>
Osborne Cross	1849	The day’s ride had brought me to the banks of the Columbia river, four months and eleven days after leaving Washington city. We had gone through much fatigue and many perplexities, had escaped the cholera and surmounted many difficulties, and when we reflected that we had at last reached the Columbia river, though not at the end of our journey, it filled each ones breast with feelings which cannot be easily described. We now began to think that by a little more perseverance our journey would soon be brought to an end. The fatigue endured would only render the trip more interesting when we look back on it hereafter, [and] it would be a source of pleasure to reflect on the hardships endured and what we had encountered during a period of five months. <sup>118</sup>
Esther Hanna	1852	It was with varied emotions that I gazed on its broad bosom and almost felt that we were at our journey’s end. Little did I think in my school days as I traced out this river, that ever I should stand upon its shores or drink of its clear water! But so it is! Here am I after months of toil and fatigue, permitted to see this noble and far-famed river! There is something grand and sublime in the scenery around it, yet I was disappointed in the scenery. Instead of trees with luxuriant foliage, you see massive rocks, pile upon pile. . . . The only green shrub I saw was a weed . . . I also noticed a few flowers peeping through the sand. The water of this river is certainly the clearest and sweetest of any water I ever tasted. <sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> James W. Nesmith, “Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 7, no. 4 (December 1906): 329–59, esp. 352.

<sup>118</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 231.

<sup>119</sup> Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge,” 137.

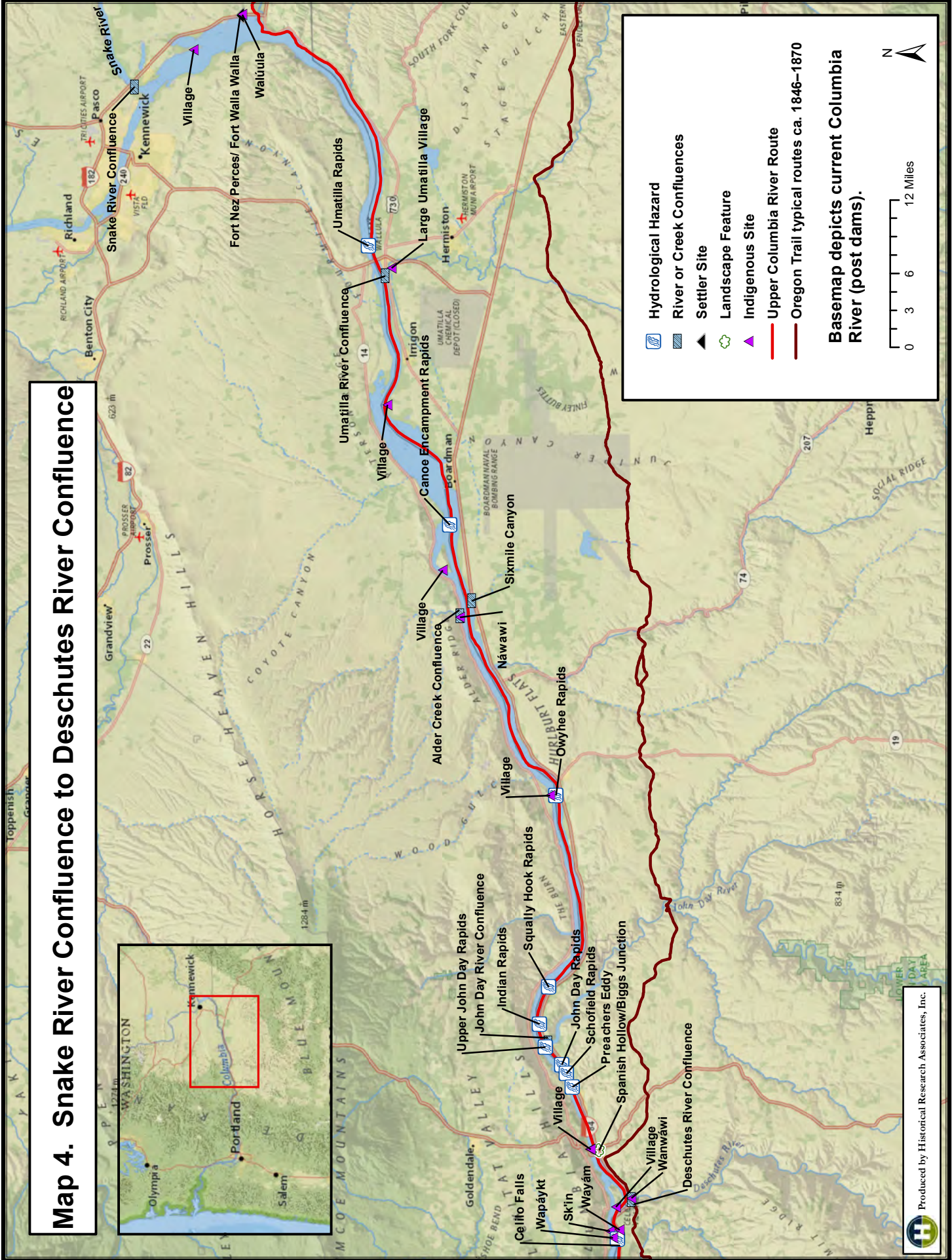


Table 2. Seeing the Columbia River for the First Time		
Name of Overlander	Year	Remarks Upon Seeing the Columbia River for the First Time
Phoebe Hines	1853	How our drooping spirits revived under the magical inspiration of the very name of 'Columbia river.' This name had long been associated with all that was desirable in the new country. And now we stood upon the bank of its mighty rushing waters. There was nothing attractive in the scene, not a tree, spear of grass, or vegetation of any kind to be seen . . . <sup>120</sup>
Harvey Kember Hines	1853	A few miles from our camp brought us to where the road descended the Columbia bluff, just below what is now known as Spanish Hollow, and we stopped for a few moments on the sandy shore of the mighty river. At last on its banks! River of the hopes, desires, and imagination of my boyhood! With Olney's Atlas before me I had sat for hours, day after day, when I was from seven to fifteen years of age and studied the long flow of the grand river from its fountains in the mountains to its burial place in the sea. I had said in my heart, I shall one day stand on its banks. I had traced the line and limits of the 'Great American Desert' and, with the stories of Captain Riley and others on the great African Sahara stimulating imagination, had pictured myself traversing this great desert on a camel, almost a wild Bedouin myself. The great 'unexplored regions' that stretched from far east of the Rockies to the Pacific, and from about the 35 to the 45 degrees of north latitude had a strange charm to my eyes, and my soul sung its prophesy of adventure in these unknown wilds. It seemed, then, the fulfillment of a great purpose when I stood on the bank of the Columbia, laved my feet in its crystal flow, drank of its pure waters, bathed my face in its limpid purity. True, I had come in away and for a purpose I did not forecast in my boyhood's dreams, but I had come. The camels with which, in my early thoughts, I would sail the desert sea were changed to oxen: the fleets of the caravan were transformed into 'prairie schooners:' the wild huntsman's garb and prowess were changed into a commission of the gospel of peace: but I had come: and who shall say these dreams of my boyhood were not God's way to prepare my heart for the purpose and work of my life? At all events the thrill of conquest was in my heart as I stood, that Sabbath morning, on the bank of the great Columbia. <sup>121</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 298.

<sup>121</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 285.

**Map 4. Snake River Confluence to Deschutes River Confluence**



**Hydrological Hazard**

**River or Creek Confluences**

**Settler Site**

**Landscape Feature**

**Indigenous Site**

**Upper Columbia River Route ca. 1846-1870**

**Oregon Trail typical routes ca. 1846-1870**

**Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).**

0 3 6 12 Miles

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# Chapter 3: Fort Walla Walla to The Deschutes River Confluence

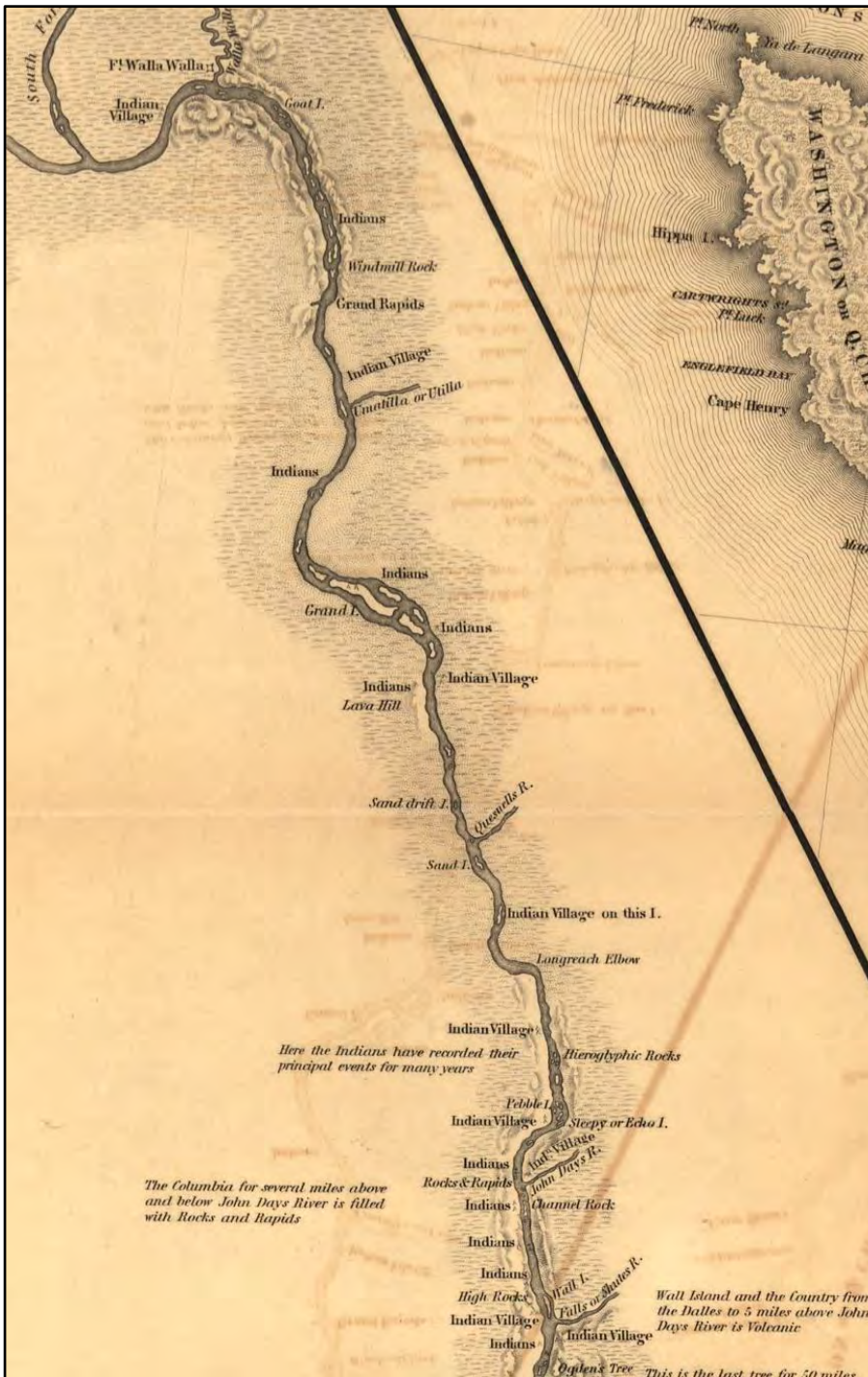


Figure 6. Charles Wilkes included an insert in his 1844 map of the Pacific Northwest that detailed landscape features, hydrological hazards, and Indigenous villages along the Columbia River. This section shows the Columbia River from the Snake River Confluence to the Deschutes River Confluence.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

## River and Communities ca. 1800

The section of the Columbia River from the Snake River (Naxíyam Wána in Sahaptin) confluence to the Deschutes River confluence was relatively calm and navigable by boat (see Map 4 for an overview of this section of the river). Below a series of islands that Indigenous people used as seasonal fishing camps, the Walla Walla River (Walawála in Sahaptin) flowed into the Columbia at a Walla Walla village called Walúula, the site of present-day Wallula Junction. Roughly twenty-five miles downstream of Walúula, the Umatilla River (Ímatalam Wána in Sahaptin) entered the Columbia. An important Umatilla winter village was located near the mouth of the river, and there were minor rapids on the Columbia at the confluence.<sup>122</sup>

After the Umatilla Rapids, the river widened as its valley grew broader and flatter. Here, marshy islands dotted the river, some of which are today part of the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge. Many of these were home to important seasonal fishing villages. Near where Alder Creek emptied into the Columbia on the north side of the river, there was a large Umatilla village called Náwawi, as well as many smaller villages and seasonal fishing camps occupied by Umatilla, Cayuse, Nez Perce, and other Columbia River people. Beyond the village, the walls of the gorge began to rise more steeply, and the river became more constricted. As the canyon narrowed, the Owyhee Rapids presented a minor navigational obstacle and a place marker in this long stretch of calm river.<sup>123</sup>

The river passed through a series of significant but not impassable rapids about fifteen miles downstream of Owyhee Rapids. These rapids became known, in succession, as Squally Hook Rapids, Indian Rapids, Upper John Day Rapids, John Day Rapids, Schofield Rapids, and Preachers Eddy. Indigenous people likely had other names for these rapids, and early European travelers gave them a variety of names. The John Day River (Waháwpam in Sahaptin) flowed into the Columbia amid this turbulence. Thomas J. Farnham described the view from the Columbia River before the John Day confluence:

[We] . . . approached the bend on the river, where it changes from a south-west to a north-west course. At this place the cliffs which overhang the southern bank presented a fine collection of basaltic columns. Along the margin of the river lay hillocks of scoriae, piled together in every imaginable form of confusion. . . . Sand-hills on the opposite shore rose a thousand feet in the air. Basalt occurred at intervals, in a more or less perfect state of formation, till the hour of noon, when the trail led to the base of a series of columns extending three-fourths of a mile down the bank. These were more perfectly formed than any previously seen.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Hunn, et al. eds., *Ćáw Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten*, 90–97.

<sup>123</sup> Hunn, et al. eds., *Ćáw Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten*, 76–93.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Jefferson Farnham, quoted in Smith, “The Geology of the Columbia River Gorge,” 3.



**Figure 7.** The section of river just downstream from the John Day River confluence had sand dunes on its southern bank. Photograph by Albert Henry Barnes, ca. 1913.

Source: Maryhill Museum of Art.

About ten miles past the last of the rapids near the John Day confluence, the main channel of the Columbia dipped south below what is now known as Miller Island and the Deschutes River flowed into the Columbia. William Clark of the Corps of Discovery expedition called Miller Island an “Island of rocks which is about 4 miles long,” with five Indigenous lodges on the north side of the river, opposite the island.<sup>125</sup> There was also a Sahaptin village at the mouth of the Deschutes River, called Wanwáwi.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 22, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>126</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 35.

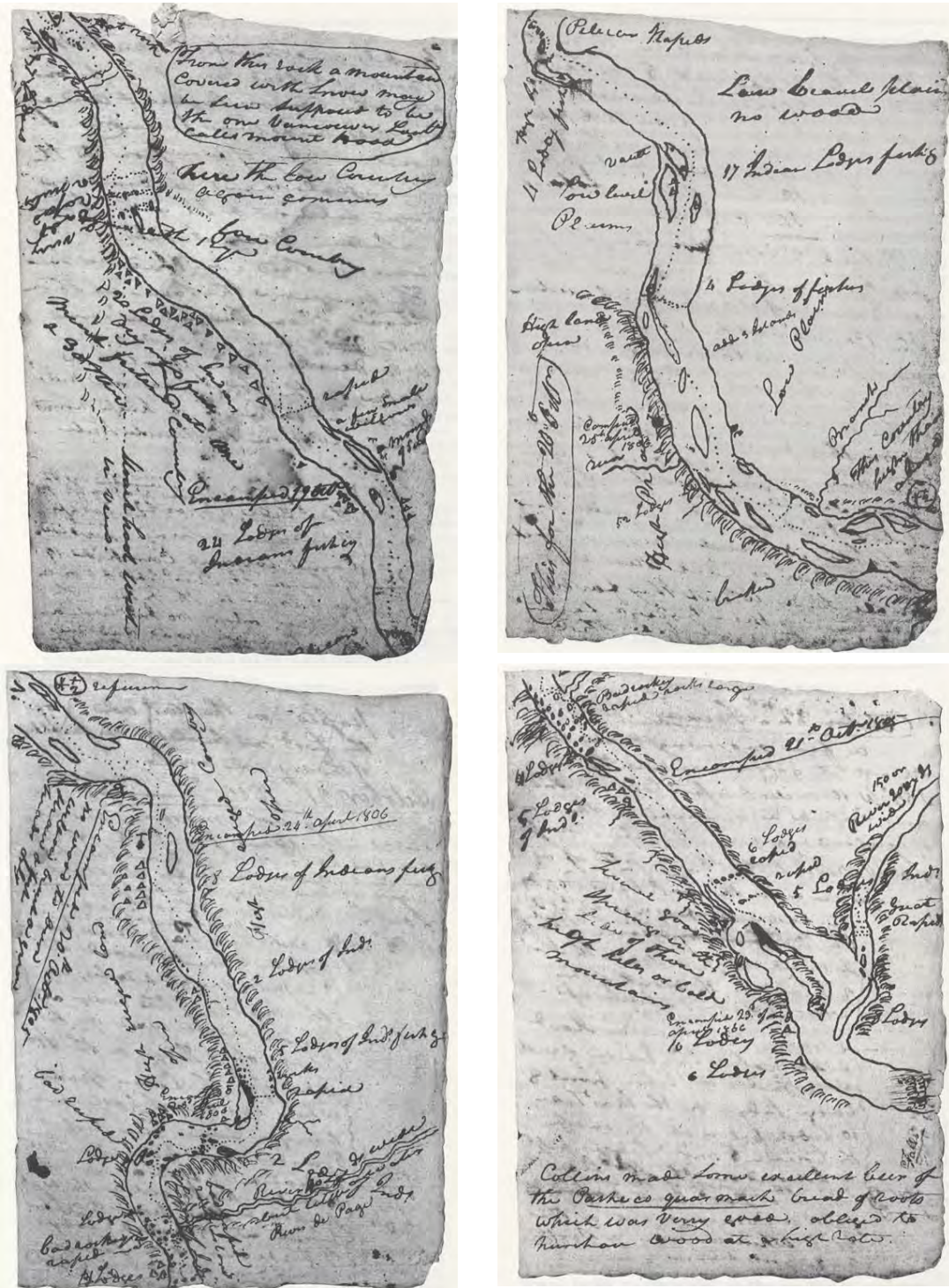


Figure 8. William Clark drew sketches of the Columbia River at (listed clockwise, starting with the upper left): the mouth of the Umatilla River, between the Umatilla and John Day Rivers, the mouth of the John Day River, and the mouth of the Deschutes River. On all four maps, Clark indicated where Indigenous people lived with the notation “Lodges” (often with an accompanying number) or “Indian lodges,” and he also used triangles to represent lodges. These drawings indicate that the banks of this stretch of river were heavily populated by Indigenous people. 1805.

Source: Missouri Historical Society.

## Arrival of White Fur Traders and Missionaries (ca. 1805-1840)

Lewis and Clark were among the earliest European Americans to write about this section of the river. They and other men in their party kept journals, recording their natural observations and the many Indigenous people they met in 1805 and 1806.<sup>127</sup> Fur traders who had entered the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean did not reach this far up the river until the 1810s, when they began to expand their activities inland along the Columbia. In 1818, Walla Walla and Cayuse leaders permitted the North West Fur Company to establish Fort Nez Percés at Walúula, near where the Walla Walla River flows into the Columbia. In 1821, the HBC acquired the North West Fur Company and took over the fort, renaming it Fort Walla Walla.<sup>128</sup>

Over the next two decades, travelers relied heavily on Indigenous knowledge and trade networks to navigate the river and to procure food and supplies. Jacob A. Myers noted in 1828 that his party traded horses, salmon, and roots with people in this section of the river. They hired local men to assist with their journey and sent mail between fur company forts via Indigenous couriers.<sup>129</sup> Journalist George Wilkes described the central role that Indigenous people played in the survival of White people on the Columbia River in the 1830s:

... they perform a great deal of work for the whites, and where labor is so scarce as it is here, they are of no slight assistance to the settlements. Many of them make very good hired hands, and they are found particularly useful in rowing boats, paddling canoes, herding cattle, and in the menial operations which require a sort of refuse labor, if such a term can be used, that would be dear at the outlay of a valuable settler's time. . . . Upon the whole, these Indians are of vast benefit to the whites of this region. In the present condition of the settlements, we should lose much by their absence.<sup>130</sup>

Despite calling the assistance of Indigenous people “refuse labor,” Wilkes acknowledged that the fur traders, missionaries, and settlers in the region needed Indigenous knowledge to safely navigate the river and procure food, supplies, furs, and workers.<sup>131</sup>

Downstream of Fort Walla Walla, water travel was relatively easy for a distance. Nathaniel J. Wyeth, a Boston businessman involved in the fur trade, wrote that the stretch below Fort Walla Walla included just one “bad rapid.”<sup>132</sup> Traders cooperated with people living along the river: Wyeth’s party assisted a sick Indigenous leader somewhere upstream of the John Day River and

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<sup>127</sup> Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 20, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>128</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáakayxt / wiyáakaaʔawn / As Days Go By*, 46; NPS, “The Many Fort Walla Wallas,” March 1, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/historyculture/the-many-fort-walla-wallas.htm>; Theodore Stern, *Chiefs and Chief Traders: Indian Relations at Fort Nez Percés, 1818–1855, Volume 1* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1993), 4–5, 76–77.

<sup>129</sup> Jacob A. Myers, “Journal of a Trip from Fort Colville to Fort Vancouver and Return in 1828,” *Washington Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (April 1920): 111.

<sup>130</sup> George Wilkes, *History of Oregon, Geographical, Geological and Political* (New York: Colyer, 1845), reprinted in *Washington Historical Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (January 1913): 208–9.

<sup>131</sup> This devaluation of non-white labor was a common characteristic of settler colonialism. See Barber, “‘We were at our journey’s end.’” 386.

<sup>132</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 174.

received a horse to eat in return.<sup>133</sup> Ice blockages sometimes caused more trouble for travelers than rapids. William H. Gray, a lay person with the Spalding and Whitman party of 1836, wrote that they encountered ice floating just upstream of the mouth of the Umatilla River. Members of the group were “obliged to throw out our lading to get our boat upon the ice. We drew it a short distance and got into water again.” After encountering additional ice portages near the mouth of the Deschutes River, they eventually greased their boats to protect them.<sup>134</sup>

## Early Overland Travel (1842-1846)

### *Fort Walla Walla and Preparing for the Down River Journey*

Peter Burnett, one of the organizers of the 1843 “Great Migration,” reported arriving at Fort Walla Walla on October 16 with his party, where they were greeted by Archibald McKinley, the HBC’s chief trader at the fort.<sup>135</sup> Walla Walla, Cayuse, Nez Perce, and Umatilla people around Fort Walla Walla were less receptive than McKinley to the hundreds of newcomers who came with the intent to stay. Jesse A. Applegate, a young boy traveling in 1843, noted that there were many Indigenous people at the fort, and he described a campfire skirmish between an immigrant and an Indigenous person. Applegate wrote that after the fight, McKinley “invited, or rather advised, us to sleep in the fort, as the Indians were not well disposed toward us.”<sup>136</sup> Fur companies continued to provide protection for settlers at the fort as a result of the increasingly strained relationships between settlers and Indigenous people.<sup>137</sup> The HBC also sold goods, supplies, and services to overlanders, missionaries, and military expeditions.<sup>138</sup>

William T. Newby, who was with the 1843 wagon train, wrote that his party obtained canoes (presumably from Indigenous people, since the HBC boats were not canoes, although Newby did not specify) to travel the Columbia River by water:

(October 16) We came to Fort WallaWalla on the Carumba River. Distance 5 [miles].

(October 17) We lay buy. Thare was some 25 [emigrants who] finuly swap[p]ed thare cattle for cattl in the Walamet Valley & tuck water. This fort is in charge of the Hudson Bay Co & managed by a Mr. McKindly, in which two much cannot be said in his prase, tho the fort was poorly supplied, yet all accomodations posable was extended.

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<sup>133</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 174.

<sup>134</sup> “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 5–6.

<sup>135</sup> US Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, “The Oregon Trail,” 9.

<sup>136</sup> Jesse A. Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843: Recollections of My Boyhood* (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1934), 80–81, [https://ia600109.us.archive.org/14/items/GR\\_74/GR\\_74.pdf](https://ia600109.us.archive.org/14/items/GR_74/GR_74.pdf)

<sup>137</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 151–52.

<sup>138</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 151–52.



(October 18) We peuced canoes for going buy watter. Let me heare state that I cant say any more about the way by land, oneley that it is 250 miles to Vancoover. There was a good meny we[n]t by land with thare waggions & packers &c.<sup>139</sup>

HBC traders also assisted early overlanders with water travel. At Fort Walla Walla, Burnett wrote that he procured from McKinley

an old Hudson's Bay Company's boat, constructed expressly for the navigation of the Columbia and its tributaries. These boats are very light, yet strong. They are open, about forty feet long, five feet wide, and three feet deep, made of light, tough materials, and clinkerbuilt. They are made in this manner so that they may be carried around the falls of the Columbia and let downover the Cascades. When taken out of the water and carried over the portage, it requires the united exertions of forty or fifty Indians, who take the vessel on their shoulders, amid shouts and hurras, and thus carry it sometimes three fourths of a mile, without once letting it down.<sup>140</sup>

S. M. Gilmore, also traveling in 1843, wrote that the HBC allowed overlanders passage in their boats and gave them provisions, while “at the same time refusing any compensation for either.”<sup>141</sup> Others were not as fortunate: Lindsay Applegate reported that his family “failed in our efforts to obtain boats.” Instead, they made their own makeshift watercraft using driftwood. At Fort Walla Walla, the Applegates sold some cattle to the HBC. They left other cattle, horses, and wagons in the care of the HBC, with the plan to return for them later in the summer, when passage was easier.<sup>142</sup> When Frémont passed through Fort Walla Walla in October 1843, he observed the Applegates and others preparing for the downstream journey:

Mr. McKinley, the commander of the post, received us with great civility; and both to myself, and the heads of the emigrants who were there at the time, extended the rites of hospitality in a comfortable dinner to which he invited us. . . . At the time of our arrival, a considerable body of the emigrants under the direction of Mr. Applegate, a man of considerable resolution and energy, had nearly completed the building of a number of Mackinaw boats, in which they proposed to continue their further voyage down the Columbia. I had seen, in descending the Walahwalah river, a fine drove of several hundred cattle, which they had exchanged for California cattle, to be received at Vancouver, and which are considered a very inferior breed. The other portion of the emigration had preferred to complete their journey by land along the banks of the Columbia, taking their stock and wagons with them.

Meanwhile, Frémont's party stocked up at Fort Walla Walla and hired an Indigenous guide:

Having reinforced our animals with eight fresh horses, hired from the post, and increased our stock of provisions with dried salmon, potatoes, and a little beef, we resumed our journey down the left bank

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<sup>139</sup> Harry N. M. Winton, “William T. Newby's Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (September 1939): 219–42, esp. 238–39.

<sup>140</sup> Peter H. Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 128.

<sup>141</sup> S. M. Gilmore, “Letter from Oregon,” *Western Journal*, March 15, 1845, reprinted in “Oregon Material Taken from a File of an Independence (Mo.) and Weston (Mo.) Paper for 1844 and 1845; Also Some Minor Extracts from Other Papers in That Vicinity,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 4, no. 3 (September 1903): 270–86, esp. 281.

<sup>142</sup> Lindsay Applegate, “Notes and Reminiscences of Laying out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road into Southern Oregon in the Year 1846,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (March 1921): 12–45, esp. 12–13; Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 89.

of the Columbia, being guided on our road by an intelligent Indian boy, whom I had engaged to accompany us as far as the Dalles.<sup>143</sup>

### *River Travel on the Upper Columbia*

Once travelers had stocked up and procured or built boats at Fort Walla Walla, they embarked on the waterborne portion of their travel. Jesse A. Applegate described the journey downriver in their makeshift boats:

Occasionally we saw Indians on the river in canoes. Each canoe was wrought of a single log cut from a pine, cedar or fir tree, and excavated mostly by burning, but the finishing work was done with edge tools, originally of stone and bone perhaps, but now of iron and steel. The canoes I saw here on the upper river were shapely, and neatly finished, but quite plain in appearance and generally large enough for only two or three persons.<sup>144</sup>

Newby's journey in a canoe was relatively smooth:

(October 19) We la[u]nched our canoes a bout 2 oclock & went a bout 25 miles to the Youtilley [Umatilla] Falls. We had some difficulty; I stove up &c. . . .

(October 20) We continued down the river, passing severl rapids &c. Incamping with some waggeons &c.<sup>145</sup>

Burnett's journey was different from, and perhaps easier than, the Applegates', since he was in a bateau and had an Indigenous river pilot accompanying him:

We employed an Indian pilot, who stood with a stout, long, broad paddle in the bow of the boat, while Beagle [one of Burnett's friends] stood at the stern, holding a long steering-oar, such we were used upon flat-bottoms and keel-boats in the Western States. I remember that my friend Beagle, before we left Walla Walla, expressed great confidence in his skill in steering, as he had often passed the Ohio rapids at Louisville. But these rapids were nothing like those on the Columbia. I have seen Beagle turn as pale as a corpse when passing through the terrible rapids on this river.

Our Indian pilot was very cool, determined, and intrepid. On one occasion, I remember, we were passing down a terrible rapid, with almost the speed of a race-horse, when a huge rock rose above the water before us, against which the swift and mighty volume of the river furiously dashed in vain, and then suddenly turned to the right, almost at right angles. The Indian told Beagle to hold the bow of the boat directly toward that rock, as if intending to run plump upon it, while the rest of us pulled upon our oars with all our might, so as to give her such a velocity as not to be much affected by the surging waves. The Indian stood calm and motionless in the bow, paddle in hand, with his features set as if prepared to meet immediate death; and, when we were within from twenty to thirty feet of that terrible rock, as quick almost as thought he plunged his long, broad paddle perpendicularly into the water on the left side of the bow, and with it gave a sudden wrench, and the boat instantly turned upon its center to the right, and we passed the rock in safety.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 184.

<sup>144</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 94.

<sup>145</sup> Winton, "William T. Newby's Diary of the Emigration of 1843," 238–39.

<sup>146</sup> Peter H. Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Chapter III, *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 5, no. 1 (March 1904): 64–99, esp. 84.

Overton Johnson and William Winter also traveled down the river in 1843, in a separate group from the main wagon train. Their experience resembled Burnett's:

From Dr. Whitman's Mission, we proceeded to Fort Walawala, situated on the East bank of the Columbia, at the mouth of the Walawala River. Here we disposed of our animals, procured canoes from the Indians, and having obtained a pilot from them, we cast our frail barks, on the waters of the Columbia. The River, up and down from the Fort, as far as we could see, was broad and smooth . . .

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Meredith Gairdner, a botanist and doctor who traveled along the Columbia in the 1830s, noted that Walla-Wallas sang a tune while paddling canoes, which Gairdner called a "monotonous Indian song."<sup>148</sup>

### *Land Travel from Fort Walla Walla to the Deschutes River*

For Frémont and those driving livestock down the river via the trail on the south bank of the river, the route avoided rapids, but it was still challenging. This trail was narrow and difficult to transport wagons on, and it involved steep climbs and descents through the valleys of tributaries to the Columbia River—the Umatilla, John Day, and Deschutes—as well as fords over those rivers.<sup>149</sup> Frémont described the land route from Fort Walla Walla downstream:

November 2, 1843: At noon we crossed John Day's river, a clear and beautiful stream, with a swift current and a bed of rolled stones. It is sunk in a deep valley, which is characteristic of all the streams in this region; and the hill we descended to reach it, well deserves the name of mountain. Some of the emigrants had encamped on the river, and others at the summit of the farther hill, the ascent of which had probably cost their wagons a day's labor; and others again had halted for the night a few miles beyond, where they had slept without water. We also encamped in a grassy hollow without water. . .

[November 3, 1843:] After two hours' ride through a fertile, hilly country, covered as all the upland here appears to be with good green grass, we descended again into the river bottom, along which we resumed our sterile road, and in about four miles reached the ford of the Fall River, (*Rivière aux Chutes*), a considerable tributary to the Columbia. We had heard, on reaching the Nez Percé fort, a repetition of the account in regard to the unsettled character of the Columbia Indians at the present time; and to our little party they had at various points manifested a not very friendly disposition, in several attempts to steal our horses. At this place I expected to find a badly disposed band, who had plundered a party of 14 emigrant men a few days before, and taken away their horses; and accordingly we made the necessary preparations for our security, but happily met with no difficulty.<sup>150</sup>

Washington Smith Gilliam described his party's route in 1844 and Indigenous people they encountered:

In the course of a day or two after the delivery of the horse we reached the Columbia River. We thought the distance from where we struck the river to the mouth of the Umatilla about two miles,

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<sup>147</sup> Overton Johnson and Wm. H. Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains* (Lafayette, IN: John D. Semans, Printer, 1846; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), 34–35.

<sup>148</sup> Gairdner, "Notes on the Geography on the Columbia River," 256.

<sup>149</sup> DOI, NPS, Revised Feasibility and Suitability Study for Additional Routes, 152.

<sup>150</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 185–86.

being able to trace the course of the stream by the fringe of willows on its margin. We considered that reaching the Columbia river [was] another important event in our journey.

The Indians between this point and The Dalles we found to be the most insolent and thieving that we had met in our travels. Their insolence was met on more than one occasion with a good, sound threshing.

From this point to The Dalles our route lay principally along the south bank of the Columbia river, although at places abrupt bluffs closed into the river and forced the road out on the highlands.<sup>151</sup>

Prejudiced attitudes such as those in Gilliam’s writings further damaged relations between Indigenous people and overlanders.

Most parties sent their livestock downriver by a land route, rather than attempting to transport the cattle and oxen in boats. Edwards Evans Parrish took an Indigenous trail on the south bank of the river and camped three miles downstream of Fort Walla Walla on the night of November 4, 1843. The next day, they encountered “an uncommonly big sand hill. We put twelve yoke of oxen to one wagon, and so on until we were up, then camped on the hill.” They continued to make their way down the south bank of the river, noting that there was little feed for their cattle. Parrish also wrote that “Indians were thick around us,” and on the next day, “We camped this evening on the river, many Indians in attendance.”<sup>152</sup> Parrish wrote that Indigenous people living between the Umatilla and John Day Rivers were eager to trade:

Indians swarm around again to trade. Some have salmon skins, rabbits and one a mink. Yesterday one had a weasel. An iron spoon, an old pair of scissors, a pen knife, butcher knife, a sausage cutter and a roundabout were included in their stock in trade, which they had bought of the companies before. The road down the river is generally sandy, though some of it is solid. No timber of any kind. Small willows and cow chips are the chief fuel we have to burn. Indians last night stole three horses, one from Jenkins, one from Gamaliel and one from me.<sup>153</sup>

Others wrote more positively of interactions with Indigenous people in this section of the river: Medorem Crawford lost his horse some sixty miles downstream of Fort Walla Walla, but Indigenous people found it and returned it to him the following day.<sup>154</sup>

Overlanders traveling by land paid Indigenous guides to cross the Deschutes River (also referred to as the “Chute” or “Shutes”) in the early 1840s. For instance, James Nesmith wrote that in 1843, he “Hired two Indians to conduct us across the ford, which we crossed without difficulty.”<sup>155</sup> Once parties crossed the Deschutes River, they often camped on the other side near a village. Edward Evans Parrish wrote that there were “More Indians here than at any other place on this side the

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<sup>151</sup> “Reminiscences of Washington Smith Gilliam [from 1844],” in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1903* . . . (Portland, OR: Peaslee Bros., Company, Printers, 1904), 208.

<sup>152</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888* (Portland, OR: Press of Himes the Printer, 1889), 116–17.

<sup>153</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 117.

<sup>154</sup> Medorem Crawford, journal, 1842, 12, available on OCTA website.

<sup>155</sup> Nesmith, “Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 358.

mountains.”<sup>156</sup> Nathaniel Wyeth had noted several years previously “about 20 Lodges of Indians” near the Deschutes River.<sup>157</sup>

## The Waïiletpu Incident (1847)

Cayuse and Walla Walla people were alarmed by the huge numbers of White settlers coming to the region, but they became especially worried when overlanders began to transmit diseases to Indigenous communities. A measles outbreak in 1847, spread in part by annual gatherings at Fort Walla Walla, killed many Indigenous people who lacked immunity to the disease. A doctor at Fort Vancouver estimated that about a ninth of the local population died during the outbreak. Some Cayuse people who went to missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman at Waïiletpu for treatment observed that White patients recovered more often than Indigenous patients, and “some Indians began to suspect [Whitman] of deliberately killing Cayuses in order to take their land.”<sup>158</sup>

On November 29, 1847, a group of Cayuse men killed the Whitmans and eleven other people at Waïiletpu in response to many issues and grievances with the mission, the deaths their people had experienced from the measles outbreak being the final straw. Antone Minthorn, former chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, described this incident, which became known as the “Whitman Massacre,” from the Cayuse point of view:

The 1848 Cayuse War with the U.S. Army had its roots in the Whitman incident. I choose not to call it a “massacre,” as it has been labeled in popular historical literature. The use of “massacre” prejudices and freezes the event in time, ignoring the context from both sides of the account, including the hundreds of people who died in the epidemic that Whitman could not cure. The incident must also be understood from the standpoint of *tematat* “medicine doctor tradition”, which calls for the life of the healer to be taken if he fails to cure the sick. When Marcus Whitman returned east to protest the proposal to close Waïiletpu Mission and, on the return trip, when he brought more people to settle the Oregon Country, the Cayuse leaders warned him that what he was doing was not the understanding they had with him. His expressed purpose for being with the Cayuse was to teach them about the Christian religion. But he brought more people, developed more land, and brought sickness that killed many Cayuse. Whitman refused to listen to the warnings, and the Cayuse killed him and the others living at the mission.<sup>159</sup>

Settler militias responded to the Waïiletpu incident with military force against the Cayuse. Within the next few years, the US Army established a military presence in Oregon and increased its presence elsewhere along overland trails, arguing that it was needed to protect White settlers from the Indigenous people whose land the settlers were taking.<sup>160</sup> During ensuing hostilities, the HBC

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<sup>156</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 118.

<sup>157</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 237.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Boyd, “The Pacific Northwest Measles Epidemic of 1847–1848,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 6–47, esp. 8, 12–13, 20, 25; Cassandra Tate, “Cayuse attack mission, in what becomes known as the Whitman Massacre, on November 29, 1847,” September 24, 2014, <https://www.historylink.org/File/5192>.

<sup>159</sup> Minthorn, “Wars, Treaties, and the Beginning of Reservation Life,” 64.

<sup>160</sup> Tate, “Cayuse attack mission, in what becomes known as the Whitman Massacre . . .”

continued to operate at Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia, but the fort was attacked by Cayuse people in 1855 and later burned. The HBC abandoned it completely by 1857.<sup>161</sup>

## Changes in Overland Travel After the Waïletpu Incident (1847-1856)

### *Umatilla River Route*

Following the Waïletpu incident, travelers stuck to a route that avoided Waïletpu and Fort Walla Walla. Instead, most overlanders met the Columbia River near Spanish Hollow (present-day Biggs Junction) or near the confluence of the Umatilla River.<sup>162</sup> Even within a single party, overlanders might choose different options, as Susan Amelia Cranston described in 1851:

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Traveled 17 miles 4 to the river the roads fork near the river[,] one takes down the Columbia river[,] the other crossed the Eumatilla and keeps up from the Columbia bottom[,] here we found a trading post and men employed in building an Indian agency [the Uilla Indian Agency][.] the information that we could get was that the left hand was much the best road and grass but water scarce[.] 2 of the wagons of our company chose to go the Columbia road[,] the rest of us crossed the river eat dinner and went 10 miles to Butter creek . . .<sup>163</sup>

In 1849, a US cavalry regiment—the first military expedition to traverse the entire length of the established Oregon Trail and part of the increased military presence along the trail—reached the Columbia River near the mouth of the Umatilla River.<sup>164</sup> Major Osborne Cross described the first part of the regiment’s journey along the Columbia River:

We arrived at the Columbia on the sixteenth of September, one hundred six and one-half miles from the Grand[e] Rond[e], [and] continued down the Columbia to the Dalles, ninety-eight miles, fording Deschutes river at a bar near its mouth. This portion of the route varies from heavy and shifting sand to high and precipitous hills, with great scarcity of wood and pasturage, making the travel exceeding difficult.<sup>165</sup>

Like Cross, A. A. Denny’s 1851 party met the Columbia at the mouth of the Umatilla River before proceeding on a trail on the Columbia’s southern bank.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Minthorn, “Wars, Treaties, and the Beginning of Reservation Life,” 64–65; Joshua Binus, “Fort Nez Perce,” Oregon History Project, March 17, 2018, <https://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/fort-nez-perce/#.Xo3mBMhKhPY>

<sup>162</sup> Peters, ed. *Seven Months to Oregon*, 285.

<sup>163</sup> Journal of Susan Amelia Cranston in *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1851*, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1984), 124–25.

<sup>164</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 339.

<sup>165</sup> Square brackets in original. Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 340.

<sup>166</sup> A. A. Denny, “Journal of the Route to Oregon,” 1851 (transcribed 1940), 10, available on OCTA website.

## Main Route Shift to Spanish Hollow/Biggs Junction



Figure 9. Remnant wagon ruts from the Oregon Trail, descending from a hill at present-day Biggs Junction.

Source: Susan Buce.

In 1852, Samuel Stout's party reached the Columbia River near Spanish Hollow.<sup>167</sup> As 1852 wore on, this route became the primary river access point for overlanders traveling this section of the trail.<sup>168</sup> A portion of the wagon tracks descending from the river's bluffs to its banks are still visible near the current town of Biggs Junction, but the remainder are covered by Interstate 84 and the dammed up Columbia River (see Figure 9).<sup>169</sup> Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank described the road down the hill, and then on to the Deschutes:

Oct. 22. Arose early and drove down to the great Columbia River for wood and water for breakfast. Had a very long but not very steep hill to descend. At the foot we found a trading station. Sell flour, pork, sugar and tobacco at 40 cents per pound. Stopped and got our breakfast. No wood but very poor willows and some greasewood. Drove on to Deschutes River, 3 miles. No grass in the bottoms, all eaten off. The Columbia here is very rapid and shallow, stream apparently about the size of Rock

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<sup>167</sup> "Diary of Samuel Stout Wagon Train, Oregon Trail 1851," 1851, 8, available on OCTA website.

<sup>168</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 285; Cornelia A. Sharp, journal, 1852, printed in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 186.

<sup>169</sup> "Nine Places Where You Can Still See Wheel Tracks from the Oregon Trail," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 3, 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/follow-relics-oregon-trail-180960589/>.

River, Illinois, flowing over a rocky bottom, with frequent falls and not navigable for sap troughs or canoes.<sup>170</sup>

Abigail Jane Scott wrote that they took the same route, and near Spanish Hollow, “several of our cattle got stuck fast in the quick sand and it was with difficulty we could get them out.”<sup>171</sup>

Origen Thomson also took the route in 1852. He reiterated how steep it was, and he apparently paid someone (perhaps Indigenous people?) for food and shelter:

[*Monday, September 5*]—Columbia River five miles, after de[s]cending a very long and steep hill. There is danger in taking stock to the river here, as there are quicksands. Going two miles down the river, we slept at night with a family from Illinois. We got our super, breakfast, and lodging for \$1.00, besides twenty cents we gave for a salmon: had a fine specimen of indian dancing.

The following year, Harvey Hines described the landscape around Spanish Hollow:

When the road reached the Columbia, there was nothing but the great river to interest us, except the utter sterility and desolation of the spot. It was a wilderness of sand dunes, without a blade of grass, or a tree or shrub to cast a cooling shade over us. One side of us was the wide flow of the river, and on the other tall basaltic cliffs only a few hundred feet from the water’s edge. Though it was a Sunday it was impossible for us to camp in this desolation, and so, after a half hour’s rest just at the river’s brink, we drove on down the stream hoping to find, ere long, a place to spend at least part of the sacred day in quietude.<sup>172</sup>

Other parties following the tracks near Spanish Hollow in 1853 included those of T. J. Connor and Maria Parsons Belshaw.<sup>173</sup>

### *Crossing the Deschutes*

After Spanish Hollow, the trail continued along the Columbia below bluffs for almost five miles, where it crossed the Deschutes River. Harvey Hines called the Deschutes “a bold, strong stream, cleaving the giant hills to their foundations, and rushing over a rent and chasmed bed of basalt into the Columbia in several foaming rapids—hence its name.”<sup>174</sup> A person in the Dinwiddie party described the full journey from where the trail descended the bluff around Spanish Hollow to the Deschutes crossing as it was in 1853:

Started up a ravine, had long ascent traveled over very rolling prairie, to the Columbia River which we reached in about four miles, the land along the River is of first rate soil producing a heavy herbage, the Columbia is a noble stream, walled in by lofty escarpments of black volcanic rocks. The road then

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<sup>170</sup> Bert Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852” (Webber Research Group, no publication date), 77.

<sup>171</sup> Journal of Abigail Jane Scott in *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852: The Oregon Trail*, eds. Kenneth L. Holmes and David C. Duniway (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1997), 128.

<sup>172</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 297.

<sup>173</sup> Joseph W. Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (December 1932): 318–33, esp. 326; T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, p. 11, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website, <https://www.octa-journals.org/category/merrill-mattes-collection/page/2>.

<sup>174</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 297.



follows down the river to the crossing of the Deshutes river, three miles, the road some sandy. Reached Deshutes or Fall River about ten o'clock, here is two new hewed log houses with shingled roofs. Kept us to pretty nigh sunset to get ferried over, some fifteen teams in before us, paid three dollars per waggon for crossing. Camped on the west bank, had waggons that had been left for fire wood, found grass on the mountain about one mile off-Deshutes or Fall River is a very rapid stream, ferry just below the falls, the river is about one hundred and fifty yards wide. Forded our horses and cattle some distance below the ferry, water not very deep, but swift.<sup>175</sup>

Indigenous people provided services to settlers crossing the Deschutes River. In 1847, Elizabeth Dixon Smith paid Indigenous people to ferry her family over the river in a canoe:

crossed falls or Shutes river[,] it was high rapid and dangerous the water came clear to the top of the waggon beds[,] me and my children with as many more women and children as could stow them selves in to a canoe was taken over by two Indians which cost a good many shirts[,] the Indians are thick as hops here and not very friendly[,] any body in preparing to come to this country should make up some calico shirts to trade to the Indians in cases of necessity you will have to hire them pilot you a cross rivers[,] a gainst we got here my folks were a bout striped of shirts trousers jackets and wamases.<sup>176</sup>

James Miller's party hired an Indigenous guide to ford the Deschutes near its mouth in 1847:

Our train had gone on and crossed the Deschutes, fording it by employing an Indian guide who understood the ford. It was a rapid stream and in it were some very deep holes, which re quired caution to get safely over. When my brother and I arrived on the opposite bank from our train, our father sent Indians to help us cross. We got off our horses and got on behind the Indians. I was afraid that the horse would fall down with two on his back in such a swift stream. I soon found that I had a most difficult job, as the redskin had no clothing on except a breech clout, and I found it very difficult to get a hold of his greasy skin, in order to keep from falling off his pony into the stream. It was like holding on to an eel.<sup>177</sup>

Despite comparing his guide to an animal, Miller's party, like Smith's, was only able to cross the Deschutes River safely thanks to Indigenous knowledge of the river and physical help from Indigenous people who carried their belongings. In 1849, Major Osborne Cross's Mounted Riflemen noted that the management of the ford and ferrying services across the Deschutes were run solely by Indigenous people living there:

It contracts here and forms a very pretty fall before it reaches the Columbia, which is not more than two hundred yards from it. This stream is probably one hundred yards wide and is very difficult to cross when the water is high. When this is the case the animals have to be swum across to an island below the falls and the loads and wagons taken over in canoes, which [are] entirely managed by Indians.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Margaret Booth, ed., "Overland from Indiana to Oregon: The Dinwiddie Journal," *Sources of Northwest History* No. 2 (Missoula: State University of Montana, 1928), 13.

<sup>176</sup> Journal of Elizabeth Dixon Smith in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 139. A "wamas" or "wamus" is an outer jacket made of strong cloth, often worn by men in the nineteenth century. K. Keith Richard, "Of 'Gingham,' 'Barn Doors,' and 'Exquisites': George H. Himes on Pioneer Fashion," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 385–93, esp. 393.

<sup>177</sup> James D. Miller, "Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I.): Overland Trail, 1848," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (March 1930): 55–68, esp. 63–64.

<sup>178</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 233.

In 1851, Stout paid Indigenous guides to cross the river near its mouth, writing in his journal, “Wee ferried it payed \$5 per waggon.”<sup>179</sup> Denny’s party ferried the Deschutes (which he called “Fall river”) in 1851, but he did not specify the cost.<sup>180</sup> Amelia Hadley wrote that same year:

... crossed the Deschutes river a little above where it emptyes in Columbia[,] had to ferry[,] paid 5 dollars per wagon here we learned the sad intelligence that those that went down in a canoe were drowned. It is dangerous going down especially when heavily loaded as they were, there being so many rapids in the river, their canoe was found bottom side up, with a pair of boots tied in the captern nothing has been seen of them.<sup>181</sup>

Susan Cranston’s party paid for the ferry after waiting a day because of the numerous wagons waiting to cross. They eventually crossed safely, but Cranston wrote, “the ferry was not very good and the river was very swift and full of rocks.”<sup>182</sup>

Settlers depended so much on Indigenous help to cross the Deschutes that legends arose about the crossing. Harriet Talcott Buckingham wrote in 1851,

[September] 15 Crossed the Dechutes river – very rocky & difficult. We were told the story of an emigrant woman who was afraid to cross with her train, but was persuaded to get on a horse behind an Indian that had just crossed. When in the middle of the stream with dizzy brain she cried out in fear. The Indian turned his face to her & said, “Wicked woman put your trust in God”[.] These words in good English frightened her worse than ever – He was one of Whitmans good Indians & he had been taught this by that missinary martyr.<sup>183</sup>

The camp on the east side of the Deschutes River, where overlanders waited for the ferry, remained busy in the early 1850s.<sup>184</sup> Dinwiddie mentioned seeing “two new hewed log houses,” presumably built by settlers, on the east bank of the Deschutes River in 1853.<sup>185</sup> Parthenia Blank described two settler houses there in 1852, “and some tents belonging to the Walla Walla Indians, who do some ferrying and act as guides to those who ford. Pretty shrewd fellows for money, but very civil.”<sup>186</sup> There was also a White-run ferry, started in 1852 by Nathan Olney.<sup>187</sup> Blank explained that determining whether to ferry or ford the Deschutes River came down to one’s financial situation:

Deschutes River is, to appearances, nearly as large as The Columbia, but it must be much smaller, and comes dashing down over the rocks, as rapid as water can come on a place inclined 1 foot in 20. Here

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<sup>179</sup> “Diary of Samuel Stout Wagon Train, Oregon Trail 1851,” 1851, 8, available on OCTA website.

<sup>180</sup> A. A. Denny, “Journal of the Route to Oregon,” 1851 (transcribed 1940), 10, available on OCTA website.

<sup>181</sup> Journal of Amelia Hadley in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 94.

<sup>182</sup> Journal of Susan Amelia Cranston in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 126.

<sup>183</sup> Journal of Harriet Talcott Buckingham in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 50.

<sup>184</sup> James Akin, Jr., journal, 1852, in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 273.

<sup>185</sup> Booth, ed., “Overland from Indiana to Oregon,” 13.

<sup>186</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 78.

<sup>187</sup> Charles Floyd Query, *Oregon Ferries: A History of Oregon Ferries Since 1826* (Bend, OR: Maverick Books, 2008), 9.

is a ferry at \$2 for those who have money, and a ford for those who have not. The latter is the most numerous class.<sup>188</sup>

Origen Thomson forded the river in 1852, convinced it was not too difficult:

*Tuesday, September 6. . . – Des Chutes, or Falls River, two miles. This stream is deep, swift, and has a rocky bottom. There is a ferry over it, but it can be forded by crossing to the island, and then going down to a clump of trees and driving across. I swam an emigrant's horse, and not knowing the ford, got wet up to the waist. Walked until I got dry, although it was cold.*<sup>189</sup>

Abigail Scott's party paid an Indigenous person near the mouth of the Deschutes to assist with the river crossing:

Early this morning we took up our line of march and came four miles when we came to Deshutes of Falls river; this stream is about one hundred and fifty yards in width, and courses its rapid way through rocky kanyons forming numerous cascades until it reaches the Columbia into which it empties. We got an Indian to pilot the wagons across the river and also one to take the females over in a canoe, for which service they taxed us four dollars; The ford is at the mouth of the river and a short distance below a handsome cascade.<sup>190</sup>

Like Scott, Joseph Hines paid an Indigenous person to assist with the river crossing, rather than paying for the White-run ferry service:

When I arrived at the ferry landing, I found the boat had just crossed to the opposite side of the river, where alone there was a chance to rest before starting on the last 15 miles to the Dalles. On the opposite side, from a small elevation, one could see the road for nearly four miles away, and I was anxious to see if there were any trains of emigrants now at hand. So I called to the ferryman to come and take me over, and offered him the dollar which the law required. He refused to come, and told me to wait unto the next train came up and then he would come. I informed him that I had come all the way from Portland to meet some friends, and the next train, which was then about one mile away, might be the train, and I desired to meet them on the other side. He turned abruptly away, saying he could do nothing for me. "Very well," I replied, "then I will help myself." I rode up to an Indian nearby, showed him a silver dollar and asked him to lead my horse over. In a moment he had tossed his lariat over the head of my horse and was dragging me into the river. He seemed to understand what I desired, and seemed to know exactly to do. They soon discovered what was going on at the ferry above, and offered to come over and get me if I would go back. I told them that I guessed I would wait until the train came up, then we would all go back together. We passed safely over, the water in no place being higher than the horse's knees. The stream having divided about 300 yards below the ferry, it was easily fordable on horseback. Strangers, of course, knew nothing about this, and the ferry people, by exaggeration and deception, had kept it a secret a great length of time.<sup>191</sup>

Hines then brought his family (the other Hineses that had been traversing the Oregon Trail from New York State) over the Deschutes River, showing them how to ford the river with their wagons

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<sup>188</sup> Webber, ed., "The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852," 77. This diary is also included in Holmes and Duniway, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5*.

<sup>189</sup> Origen Thomson, *Crossing the Plains: Narrative of the Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures Attending the Overland Journey of the Decatur and Rush County Emigrants to the "far-off" Oregon, in 1852* (Greensburg, IN: Orville Thomson, 1896), 94.

<sup>190</sup> Journal of Abigail Jane Scott in Holmes and Duniway, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5*, 129.

<sup>191</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 293–95.

and livestock, the way the Indigenous man had shown him, and they thus bypassed the ferry. His niece Celinda described the crossing as a close call:

. . . we forded the DeShoots [*sic*] near its mouth. It is a large river & very rapid. Before crossing we very unexpectedly met Uncle Joseph Hines . . . Uncle J piloted us across the river (an Indian had just done the same for him) The current was so strong that it was almost impossible to guide the oxen & prevent them from going down stream[.] We came very near upsetting in the river in very deep water & the current was so strong.<sup>192</sup>

While Celinda’s account hints that the crossing without the ferry was still difficult, Joseph Hines was pleased with his solution to save money by paying Indigenous people for assistance about how to ford the river, rather than paying more for the White-run ferry.<sup>193</sup>

## Arrival of Steamship Travel on the Upper Columbia (1858-1870)

### *First Steamships*

As of 1856, non-Indigenous river transportation upstream of the Deschutes River was mostly by bateaux or barges rigged with masts (“sail schooners”) and primarily carried military supplies for the US government.<sup>194</sup> In 1858, R. R. Thompson and Lawrence W. Coe built the first steamship for the Columbia River upstream of Celilo Falls and named it the *Venture*. The steamship was built downstream and was “intended to be dragged over the Dalles-Celilo Portage upon timbers loaded upon her for the purpose,” but it crashed amid rapids and never made its way upriver.<sup>195</sup> Thompson and Coe built a second steamer, called the *Colonel Wright*, this time constructing it at the mouth of the Deschutes River. The lumber to build the hull came from two sawmills along the Columbia, one near Fifteen Mile Creek and the other near the Cascades Rapids, and the machinery was all hauled over the Dalles-Celilo Portage. The *Colonel Wright* made its first trip up the Columbia River in April 1859, and it made “big money” for Thompson and Coe as the only steamer on the upper river until 1862.<sup>196</sup>

Steamship travel was too expensive for the average overlander. As of 1863, the Oregon Steam Navigation Company (OSNC) charged \$60 for one passenger to travel between Portland and Lewiston, Idaho, via steamship and portage railroad.<sup>197</sup> Considering that the average monthly wage

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<sup>192</sup> Journal of Celinda Hines in *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1853–1854*, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1986), 123.

<sup>193</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 296.

<sup>194</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 163.

<sup>195</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 164.

<sup>196</sup> Fred W. Wilson, “The Lure of the River,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (March 1933): 1–18, esp. 3; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 164.

<sup>197</sup> William D. Lyman, *The Columbia River: Its History, Its Myths, Its Scenery, Its Commerce* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, 1963), 208.

for a farmhand in Oregon in 1860 was \$33.61, this fee was unaffordable to the majority of those settling in Oregon.<sup>198</sup>

## Gold Rush in Idaho

Steamboat travel (both freight and passenger) exploded in the early 1860s during the gold rush in Idaho, as prospectors rushed to get supplies from Portland to Idaho. This marked the beginning of increased settler traffic in both directions on the Columbia River. It coincided with a decrease in overlander traffic along the river, as Oregon-bound travelers took more established, land-based routes either through the Cascades farther south, or north to Puget Sound. A few overlanders with enough money took steamboats or railroads through the Columbia River Gorge, but it was no longer a primary route for overlanders traveling on the Oregon Trail.

In December 1860, the OSNC organized and combined the interests of all steamboat owners on all parts of the river. To carry freight from Deschutes Landing to Wallula, the OSNC charged \$100 per ton by bateaux or \$80 per ton by steamboat.<sup>199</sup> Randall Hewitt described steamship travel between Wallula and the mouth of the Deschutes River in 1862:

Steamers were running up the Columbia to the mouth of the Snake, somewhat irregularly, thence up that river about one hundred and sixty miles, to the incipient town of Lewiston. They were flat bottomed, light draft, stern wheel boats, and would in ordinary stages of the river have little trouble to make the trip. On the up trips they were generally well loaded with freight, and progress against currents was slow; but the down trip was always light, excepting for passengers, and quick time was made. Rates were “all the traffic would bear,” but money at that period was the freest thing in the market, so complaints were seldom heard.<sup>200</sup>

The gold rush increased the demand for boats and provisions along the Columbia River, and while most of the traffic was going upstream, parties like the Hewitts boarded at Wallula on their way to homesteads in the Willamette Valley.<sup>201</sup> In 1862, in response to increased traffic, the OSNC added several steamers between Celilo and the Snake River area gold mines: the *Okanogan*, *Tenino*, *Spray*, and *Cascadilla*. The following year, the OSNC added the *Webfoot* and *Nes Perce Chief* to the fleet from Celilo to the Snake River, as well as a small propeller boat, *Celilo*. In 1864, the OSNC added the steamers *Yakima* and *Onybee* to the upper river fleet to meet the demand, which continued to come primarily from the gold rush.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> United States, *Statistics of the United States, (including mortality, property, &c.,) in 1860; compiled from the original returns and being the final exhibit of the eighth census, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1866), 512.

<sup>199</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 153, 158, 161.

<sup>200</sup> Randall H. Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide: a mule train journey from East to West in 1862, and incidents connected therewith* (New York: Broadway Pub. Co., 1906), 470.

<sup>201</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 473–74.

<sup>202</sup> Frederick C. Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” *Professional Memoirs, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, and Engineer Department at Large* 5, no. 22 (July–August 1913): 380.

## Steamship Towns

Deschutes Landing, the first point upstream of all major rapids, became an important stop for mid- and upper Columbia River steamboat travel in the late 1850s.<sup>203</sup> The town consisted of “a store, an eating house, a stone fort or warehouse and four or five other buildings.”<sup>204</sup> This location, near the mouth of the Deschutes, had also been the site of an Indigenous village. Those not taking steamboats still needed other ways to cross the Deschutes River. Around 1860, William Graham built a toll bridge to cross the Deschutes near its mouth, and in 1862, several individuals received a license to operate a ferry on the lower Deschutes, but it is unclear exactly where or how long this ferry service lasted.<sup>205</sup>



Figure 10. A steamship travels through Wallula Gap. Photograph by Asahel Curtis, 1915.

Source: University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, CUR1290.

Upstream, Wallula (which Walla Walla people had long called Walúula) became another bustling steamship town. J. M. Vansyckle filed a land claim and built a log hotel for travelers stopping at the town. Vansyckle became a major booster for the new White, settler-occupied town.<sup>206</sup> Hewitt described the bustle of Wallula in this period:

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<sup>203</sup> Anita K. Drake, “The Autobiography of Lulu D. Crandall,” extracted from the *Dalles Chronicle*, October 18, 1928–April 11, 1929, 47.

<sup>204</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 153.

<sup>205</sup> Query, *Oregon Ferries*, 9.

<sup>206</sup> G. Thomas Edwards, “Town Boosterism on Oregon’s Mining Frontier: James Vansyckle and Wallula, Columbia Riverport, 1860–1870,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 78.

Wallula was showing a commendable spirit of enterprise, and in anticipation of becoming an important “city” building lots were held at a high figure. Real estate was very active on the occasion when our company was detained there, and the “rise” of property was something wonderful; lots lapped—or lopped—over on one another with true western abandon, the “transfer” being made complete in a very brief period.<sup>207</sup>

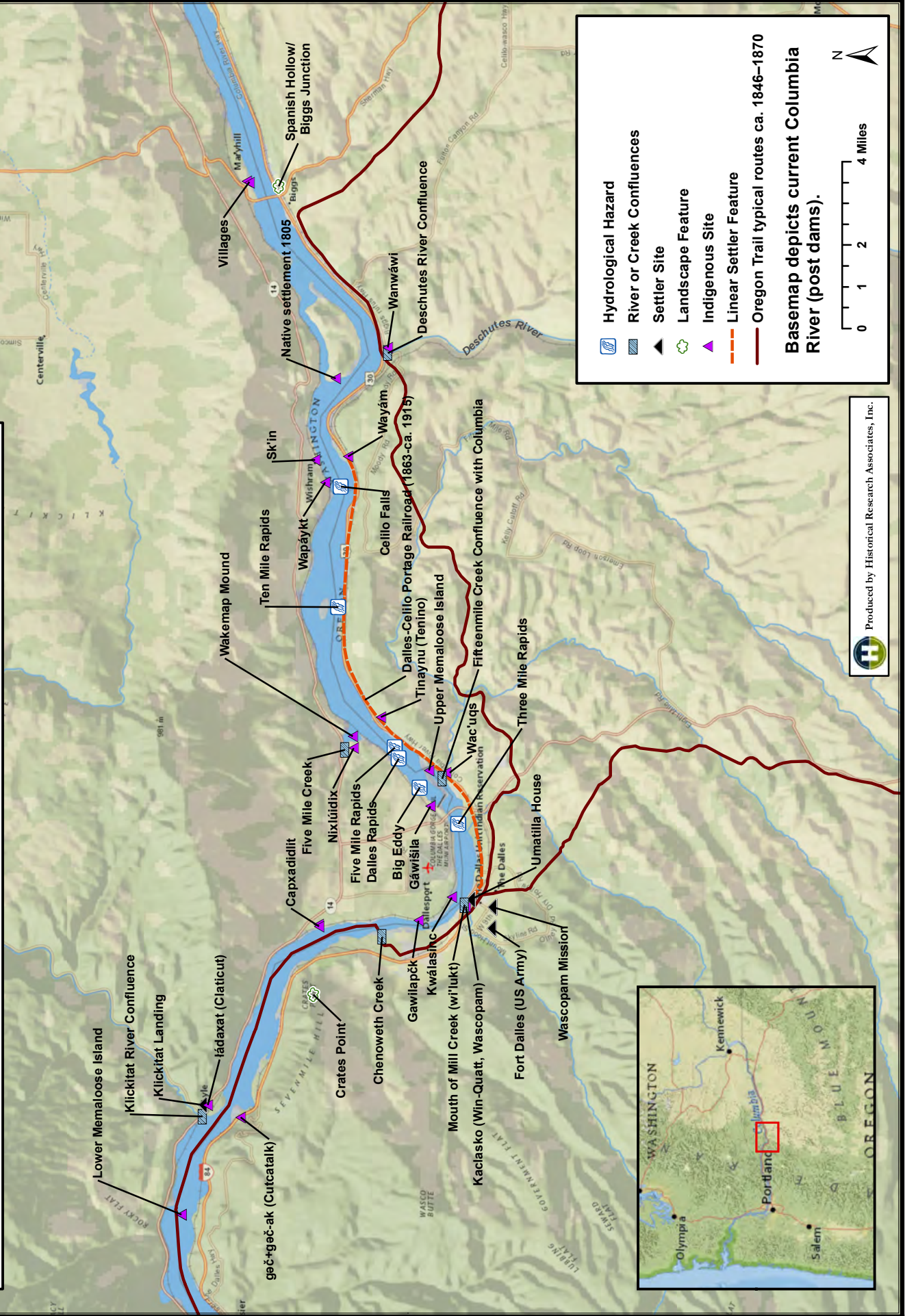
Wallula remained a major trading point in the 1860s because of the gold rush upriver, and it later became an important railway stopping point for Chinese immigrants moving inland to support mining and railroad operations.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 471.

<sup>208</sup> Edwards, “Town Boosterism on Oregon’s Mining Frontier,” 84, 94.

# Map 5. Deschutes River through the Columbia River Narrows



**Legend**

- Hydrological Hazard
- River or Creek Confluences
- Settler Site
- Landscape Feature
- Indigenous Site
- Linear Settler Feature
- Oregon Trail typical routes ca. 1846-1870

**Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).**

Scale: 0 1 2 4 Miles

North Arrow

Produced by Historical Research Associates, Inc.





## Chapter 4: Celilo Falls and the Short and Long Narrows

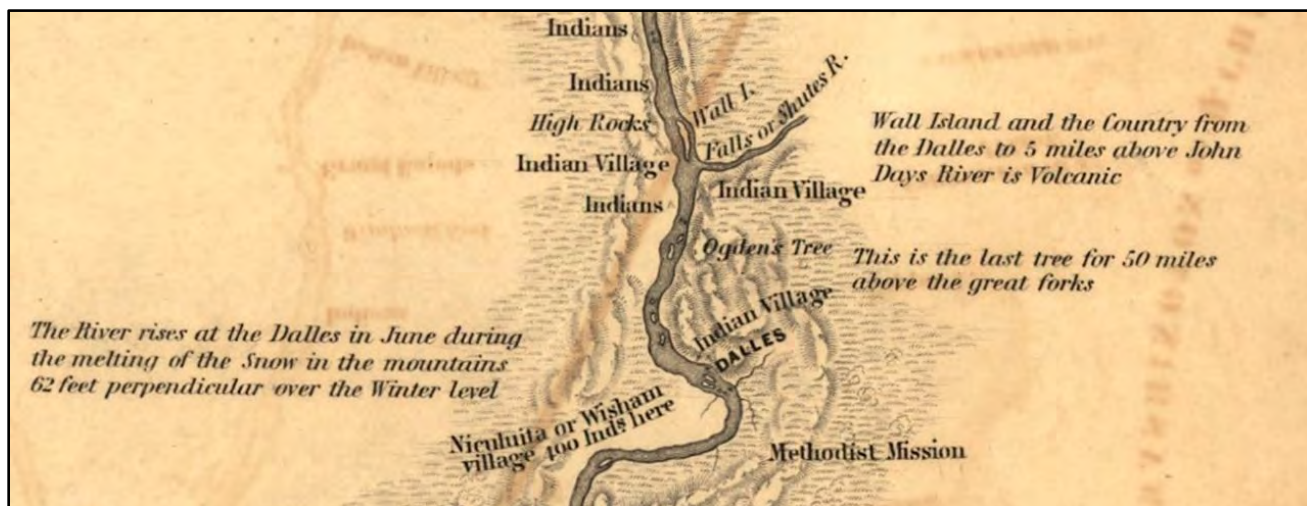


Figure 11. Segment of Charles Wilkes’s 1844 drawing of the Columbia River on his map of the Pacific Northwest. Here, the drawing is zoomed in to the stretch of river from Celilo Falls through the Columbia River Narrows (also known as the Dalles Rapids).

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

### River and Communities ca. 1800

*“Between the Des Chutes and The Dalles were a succession of dangerous rapids, a menace to and interrupting navigation; the water was boiling and foaming the whole distance.”*

- Randall H. Hewitt<sup>209</sup>

From Celilo Falls to the present-day city of The Dalles, the Columbia River descended and squeezed into a narrowed gorge (see Map 5 for an overview of this section of the river). This stretch of river presented the second-most difficult obstruction to river travel on the Columbia—surpassed by the Cascades Rapids—and the first major hydrological hazard for those traveling downstream. It began with Celilo Falls and continued for over ten miles through narrow canyons with dangerous rapids. The rapids changed with the river level: at low water, the rapids at Celilo Falls were more pronounced, while at high water, the rapids at the end of the Narrows became more dramatic.<sup>210</sup> British fur trader and cartographer David Thompson described this section of the river as:

<sup>209</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 475.

<sup>210</sup> Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 596–605; Philip Klindt and Linda Klindt, *Win-Quatt: A Brief History of The Dalles, Oregon*, ed. Widge Johnson and Carolyn Wood (The Dalles: The Philip Klindt Family, 2011), 3; Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 24, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 135; Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 377.

steep high walls of Basalt Rock, with sudden sharp breaks in them, which were at right angles to the direction of the wall of the River, these breaks formed rude bays, under each point was a violent eddy, and each bay a powerful, dangerous whirlpool; these walls of rock contract the River from eight hundred to one thousand yards in width to sixty yards or less; imagination can hardly form an idea of the working of this immense body of water under such a compression, raging and hissing as if alive.<sup>211</sup>

Henry Spalding offered a more detailed description of this section of river:

The perpendicular cliffs on each side of the river, from the Dalles to Des Chutes on the Columbia River, and the Columbia River Falls, are all worthy of the highest descriptive powers. The water of the Columbia,—draining 500,000 square miles from Wind River mountains to Mt. St. Elias, and from the Cascade Range to the Rocky Mountains,— are all forced through a gorge at the upper end of the Dalles, which is not over 80 feet in width at low water. It's depth has not, I believe, been ascertained. When the Columbia River is high, the water rises a hundred and more feet above this gorge, and backs over the Falls, five miles above, which at low water have a perpendicular fall of about fifteen feet. The Dalles are about three miles in length commencing one mile and a half above the town of the Dalles. About half way between the narrow gorge mentioned above, and the Falls, there is another narrow passage of about 300 hundred feet in width. There the water is smooth up to the foot of the falls. At the present stage of water the perpendicular descent of the water is hid by the back-water from the Dalles, but enough is visible to throw the Cascades of the Columbia into the shade, as far as the water is concerned. The Rapids, extending about a thousand feet above the Falls, commence over a mile below the Des Chutes river, and descend some twenty feet in that distance. Standing opposite the mouth of the Des Chutes, the rapids of the Des Chutes are visible, and looking down the Columbia River Falls we cannot but regret that every attraction except the beauty of the water view is lost. The eye rests on a scene of sterility, unbroken by a single tree. The rocks rising in terraces, are covered with little patches of earth which produce but a stunted crop, at best.<sup>212</sup>

People have lived along the Columbia River from Celilo Falls through the Narrows for over 9,000 years, according to radiocarbon dating, and there is evidence to indicate that they may have been there much earlier.<sup>213</sup> The Narrows were a dividing point between language groups: Chinook-speaking people occupied the riverbanks from Celilo Falls down to the mouth of the river, and Sahaptin-speaking people lived on river banks from Celilo Falls upstream.<sup>214</sup> The Narrows and Celilo Falls were a coming together point, an important mixing place among many cultures. People who lived year-round in the area included Wasco and Wishram people (part of the Chinookan language group), and Klickitat, Yakama, Tygh, and Tenino people (part of the Sahaptin language family).<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 138.

<sup>212</sup> “Editorial Correspondence,” *Oregonian*, May 30, 1861.

<sup>213</sup> Virginia Butler and Jim O’Connor, “9,000 years of salmon fishing on the Columbia River, North America,” *Quaternary Research* 62, no. 1 (2004): 1–8; Loren G. Davis, Alex J. Nyers and Samuel C. Willis, “Context, Provenance and Technology of a Western Stemmed Tradition Artifact Cache from the Cooper’s Ferry Site, Idaho,” *American Antiquity* 79, no. 4 (October 2014): 596–615.

<sup>214</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 135–36.

<sup>215</sup> Klindt and Klindt, *Win-Quatt: A Brief History of The Dalles, Oregon*, 10.

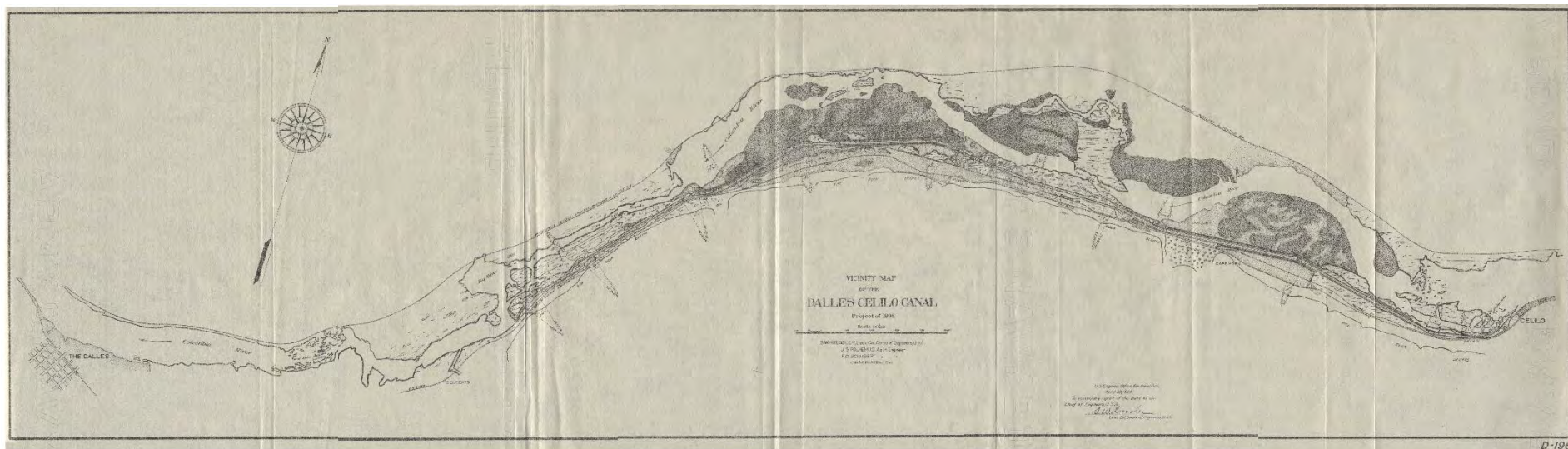


Figure 12. The USACE drew this sketch of the Columbia River between Celilo Falls and The Dalles in 1913. While it includes some things that were nonexistent in the early 1800s (a railroad and a canal), it provides a detailed and useful drawing of the hydrological features in this stretch of river.

Source: US Army Corps of Engineers, included in Frederick C. Schubert, "The Dalles-Celilo Canal," *Professional Memoirs, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, and Engineer Departments at Large* 5 no. 22 (July–August 1913): 375–414.

## Celilo Falls



Figure 13. Celilo Falls was the second-greatest obstruction to waterborne travel on the Columbia River. The banks around it were important fishing and trading sites for Indigenous people across the region, ca. 1910.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

The first obstruction to navigation, if traveling downstream, was Celilo Falls. In the early twentieth century, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) provided specific dimensions of the falls:

The fourth obstruction [past the Dalles town, if going upstream] is Celilo or Tumwater Falls, where a rock reef crosses the river bed. This reef has a surface elevation of about 132 feet above sea level. The low water surface above the falls is 126½ feet above sea level and at the lower end of the reef 80 feet, making a total fall of 46½ feet at low water. The lower end of the reef is 6,000 feet below the head of the falls. At low water the river bed is composed of a large number of small islands separated by deep channels. The main channel is about 300 feet in width and follows the Oregon shore. At the head of the main channel is the noted Horse Shoe Falls, where there is a sheer fall of about 24 feet at low water. At ordinary high water during June freshets, the fall is about 6 feet. During the June freshets a boat can run the rapids without great danger, and several steam-boats have done so without serious damage to the hulls.<sup>216</sup>

Lewis and Clark called them the “Great Falls” and some fur traders called the falls “Les Chutes.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 377.

<sup>217</sup> Henry J. Biddle, “Wishram,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1926): 115.

There were several important permanent towns around Celilo Falls. On the south side of the falls was Wayám, later known as Celilo Village. Wayám was a Sahaptin word that meant “above,” and it was a summer and autumn residence for Sahaptin-speaking people who likely wintered near the mouth of the Deschutes River. Situated on the banks north of the falls were “two closely allied but distinct village communities,” Sk’in and Wapáykt.<sup>218</sup> The name Sk’in comes from the Sahaptin word for the cradleboards used to carry infants, which a rock over the falls resembled.<sup>219</sup> Lewis and Clark noted seventeen lodges here and wrote that the people called themselves “E-nee-shur” (likely the Sahaptin-speaking Tenino people).<sup>220</sup>



Figure 14. This painting, completed in 1884 by John E. Stuart, depicts a Sahaptin summer fishing village near Celilo Falls. The image depicts post-contact life through the eyes of Stuart, a White artist, but it gives some indication of what nineteenth-century Sahaptin fishing camps might have been like.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

In the early 1800s, the riverbanks from Celilo Falls through the Narrows were crucially important regional trading grounds and were busiest when the salmon were running. People came from as far north as British Columbia and as far south as the Great Basin to trade for salmon and

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<sup>218</sup> Eugene S. Hunn, “Sk’in: The Other Side of the River,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 614–16, 618.

<sup>219</sup> Andrew Fisher, “Sk’in,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, March 17, 2018, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/sk\\_in/#.Xo9Mp8hKhPY](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/sk_in/#.Xo9Mp8hKhPY).

<sup>220</sup> Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 22, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

other goods.<sup>221</sup> Jennifer Karson called the falls “the center of regional trade distribution in the Columbia Basin country” and “one of the great fishing places in North America.”<sup>222</sup> People came to purchase, among other things, powdered salmon, or “killuk” in the Kiksht language (also known as Upper Chinook or Wasco-Wishram). Powdered salmon could be stored up to a year, making it one of the most popular products available.<sup>223</sup> Clark described the salmon-drying process and the trade:

the waters is divided into Several narrow chanel[s] which pass through a hard black rock forming Islands of rocks at this Stage of the water, on those Islands of rocks as well as at and about their Lodges I observe great numbers of Stacks of pounded Salmon (butifully) neatly preserved in the following manner, i e after Suffiently Dried it is pounded between two Stones fine, and put into a speses of basket neatly made of grass and rushes of better than two feet long and one foot Diamiter, which basket is lined with the Skin of Salmon Stretched and dried for the purpose, in theis it is pressed down as hard as is possible, when full they Secure the open part with the fish Skins across which they fasten tho' the loops of the basket that part very Securely, and then on a Dry Situation they Set those baskets the Corded part up, their common Custom is to Set 7 as close as they can Stand and 5 on the top of them, and secure them with mats which is raped around them and made fast with cords and Covered also with mats, those 12 baskets of from 90 to 100 w. each (basket) form a Stack. thus preserved those fish may be kept Sound and Sweet Several years, as those people inform me, Great quantities as they inform us are Sold to the whites people who visit the mouth of this river as well as to the nativs below.<sup>224</sup>

## The Narrows

Some three miles downstream of Celilo Falls were the Short Narrows, as named by William Clark, and five miles below that were what he called the Long Narrows. In 2007, Pat Courtney Gold (Wasco) told a Wasco creation story about the Narrows:

Long time ago, Coyote was walking along the south side of Wauna [the Columbia River] when he spotted some motion ahead of him. His curiosity got the best of him, and he quickly ran to see what was going on. Badger was dipnetting and growling at his bad luck. Coyote watched and commented on Badger's technique, which angered the bad tempered Badger. “Mind your own business, Coyote,” snarled Badger. But, minding other people's business *is* Coyote's business. “Get lost, Coyote,” said Badger, as he moved to a new fishing site. Coyote followed, much to Badger's annoyance. Badger quickly lost his temper and, snapping and snarling, attacked Coyote. Coyote is nimble, and quickly maneuvered out of Badger's way. Badger's claws left deep scars in the rocks. This sparring went on, up the river, and Coyote started tiring. Badger swung his huge claws at Coyote, who tried to jump out of his reach but was tired and too slow. Badger's huge curved claws caught Coyote's stomach, ripping it and exposing Coyote's intestines. The two continued their battle as they moved up and down Wauna. Eventually, they both tired. Coyote resumed his walk up the river, leaving Badger to resume his fishing and grumbling.

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<sup>221</sup> Charles F. Sams, III, “Wakanish Naknoowee Thluma: ‘Keepers of the Salmon,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 647.

<sup>222</sup> Karson, ed., *wiyáxcayxt / wiyáakaa?ann / As Days Go By*, 33–34.

<sup>223</sup> Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 600.

<sup>224</sup> William Clark, October 22, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

Up to the day before the gates closed on The Dalles Dam, you could see Coyote's entrails zigging and zagging along Wauna with Badger's claw "scars" in the rocks. That is the Wasco story of the lava formation near The Narrows.<sup>225</sup>

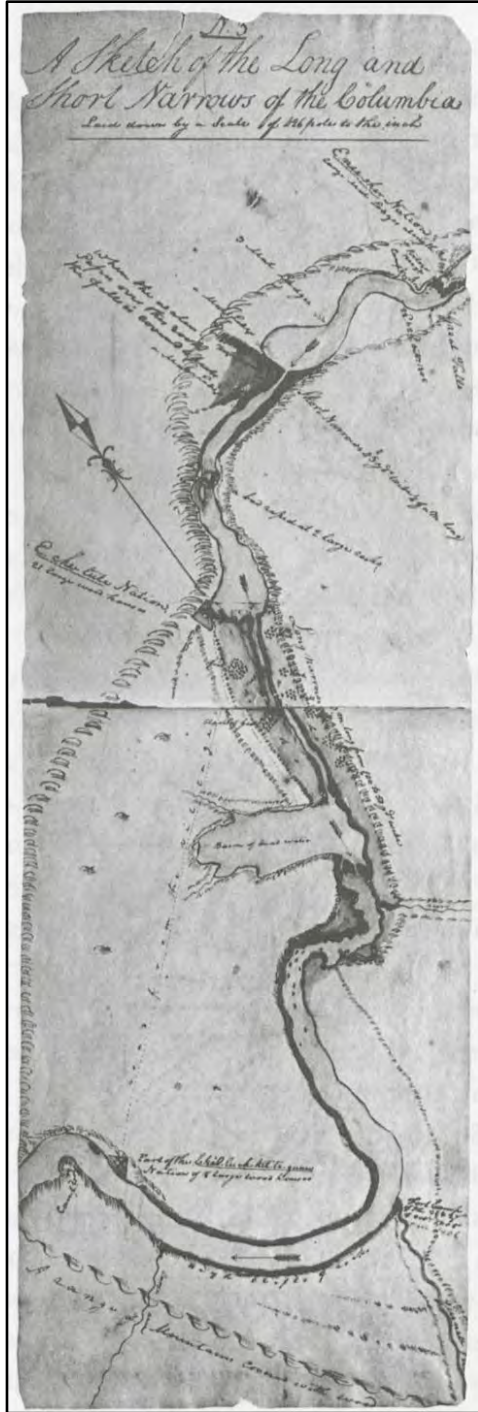


Figure 15. William Clark drew the Short and Long Narrows after passing through the area in 1805. Note Celilo Falls at the upper left-hand corner, followed by a pool ahead of the Short Narrows, another pool ahead of the Long Narrows, and then Big Eddy on the north side of the river. The present-day town of The Dalles is located near the mouth of the creek that runs into the Columbia River at the bottom righthand corner of this image.

Source: American Philosophical Society.

<sup>225</sup> Gold, "The Long Narrows," 598–99.

European fur traders called the Short and Long Narrows “the dalles,” sometimes referring to the “Petit Dalles” (or Little Dalles, the same as Clark’s Short Narrows) and “Les Grandes Dalles de la Columbia” (or simply the Dalles, Clark’s Long Narrows). The word “dalles” might be a corruption of the French “d’aller” meaning “to go,” or from the French word for flagstone lining a gutter (dalle), or an old French word for a sluice or valley. The USGS later adopted “Ten Mile Rapids” as the official name for the Short Narrows, and “Five Mile Rapids” for the Long Narrows, based on the distance between these rapids and The Dalles town below.<sup>226</sup>



Figure 16. The Narrows, or the Dalles Rapids, looking downstream with Mount Hood in the background. Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1882.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

For this chapter, we use the terms Long Narrows and Short Narrows, since they indicate a stretch of river rather than isolated rapids and therefore can be more useful in describing river segments. However, if discussing a particular rapid, we use the name that the journal author called it, which was often some form of the “dalles” terms. If needed, we clarify using the USGS term.

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<sup>226</sup> Biddle, “Wishram,” 115; Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 375; Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 596–605; Bruce J. Rigsby, “Panakpuuśayśaykś: ‘Caring for a Legacy,’” in Hunn et al., *Cáw Pawá Láakeni – They Are Not Forgotten*, 57; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 135; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 30–31.





Figure 17. The Dalles Rapids, looking upstream. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

At the Short Narrows, the channel was about forty-five yards wide for a quarter of a mile, then two hundred yards wide below that.<sup>227</sup> Downstream about five miles were the Long Narrows, which fur trader Gabriel Franchère described as “a channel cut by nature through the rocks, which are here almost perpendicular: the channel is from 150 to 300 feet wide, and about two miles long. The whole body of the river rushes through it, with great violence, and renders navigation impracticable.”<sup>228</sup> William H. Gray poetically described the danger of these rapids:

The waters are truly in a coiling, curling, scalling, rolling, foaming condition, as they pass through the rocks, which present the appearance of one solid bed of lava. The channel appears to be not more than 30 feet wide at the entrance, where the rocks are between 50 and 100 feet in perpendicular height. The water is now near 25 feet lower at the entrance of the Dalles than it was when we came down in September.<sup>229</sup>

Narcissa Whitman described the Long Narrows at low water:

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<sup>227</sup> William Clark, October 24, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>228</sup> Gabriel Franchère, quoted in Susan Bruce, “The Dalles,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, September 19, 2019, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/the\\_dalles/#.XXwiPyhKiUl](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/the_dalles/#.XXwiPyhKiUl).

<sup>229</sup> “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 6.

Below the main fall of water are rocks, deep, narrow channels, and many frightful precipices. We walked deliberately among the rocks, viewing the scene with astonishment, for this once beautiful river seemed to be cut up and destroyed by these huge masses of rock. Indeed, it is difficult to find where the main body of water passes. In high water we are told that these rocks are all covered with water.<sup>230</sup>

Pierre Jean De Smet elaborated on how changing water levels transformed these rapids:

Here the river is divided into several channels separated from one another by masses of rocks, which rise abruptly above its surface. Some of these channels are navigable at certain seasons of the year, although with very great risk, even to the most experienced pilot. But when, after the melting of the snow, the river rises above its usual level, the waters in most of these channels make but one body, and the whole mass of these united streams descends with irresistible fury. At this season the most courageous dare not encounter such dangers, and all navigation is discontinued. In this state the river flows with an imposing grandeur and majesty, which no language can describe. It seems at one moment to stay its progress; then leaps forward with resistless impetuosity, and then rebounds against the rock-girt islands of which I have already spoken, but which present only vain obstructions to its headlong course. If arrested for a moment, its accumulated waters proudly swell and mount as though instinct with life, and the next moment dash triumphantly on, enveloping the half smothered waves that preceded them as if impatient of their sluggish course, and wild to speed them on their way.<sup>231</sup>



Figure 18. Seasonal Indigenous fishing village at the head of the Narrows (upper middle of image). Cropped from photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1882.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

John C. Frémont wrote that the rock on the river's bank here "was worn over a large portion of its surface into circular holes and well-like cavities, by the abrasion of the river, which, at the season of high waters, is spread out over the adjoining bottoms."<sup>232</sup> At the foot of the Long Narrows was Big Eddy, a deep, circular basin in the rock, carved by post-fall waters. Big Eddy represented the end of the obstructions that stretched from Celilo to that point, about ten river miles total.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 86–87.

<sup>231</sup> Pierre-Jean De Smet, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet*, vol. 1 (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 385, quoted in Cain Allen, "Boils Swell & Whorl Pools': The Historical Landscape of the Dalles—Celilo Reach of the Columbia River," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 552–53.

<sup>232</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 187.

<sup>233</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 134.

There were several permanent villages around the Long Narrows. At the head of the Narrows on the north side of the river, near present-day Horse Thief Lake, was the largest settlement along the rapids, a Wishram village called Nixlúidix in the Kiksht language (Lewis and Clark called it Echeloot, and others called it Spedis or Spearfish). The Sahaptin name for this village was Wishyami, which led early fur traders to call the village Wishram.<sup>234</sup> There was a visible mound near the village site that settlers called “Wakemap Mound,” which Clark observed in 1805 was about thirty feet tall.<sup>235</sup> Clark described Nixlúidix in 1805:

This is the Great Mart of all this Country. ten different tribes who reside on Taptate [Yakama] and Catteract [Klickitat] River visit those people for the purpose of purchasing their fish, and the Indians on the Columbia and Lewis's river quite to the Chopunnish [Nez Perce] Nation Visit them for the purpose of tradeing horse buffalo robes for beads, and Such articles as they have not. The Skillutes [Watlala] precure the most of their Cloth knivs axes & beads from the Indians from the North of them who trade with white people who come into the inlets to the North at no great distance from the Tapteet [Yakama]. their horses of which I saw great numbers, they precure from the Indians who reside on the banks of the Columbia above, and what fiew they take from the To war ne hi ooks [Pauite] or Snake Indians.<sup>236</sup>

Clark noted the village had twenty houses.<sup>237</sup> On the south side of the Long Narrows, Tináynu (Tenino), a Sahaptin-speaking village, was located across the river from Nixlúidix.<sup>238</sup> Downstream from Tenino, was a Wasco fishing town called Wac'uqs.<sup>239</sup>

Nixlúidix was such a significant trade center that practically everyone who passed the village mentioned it in their writing, including Alexander Ross (1811), Wilson Price Hunt and Ross Cox (1812), Gabriel Franchere (1814), David Douglas (1825–26), Wyeth (1832), John Townsend (1839), and Wilkes (1841).<sup>240</sup> Ross, for example, described Nixlúidix as it appeared in 1811:

The main camp of the Indians is situated at the head of the narrows, and may contain, during the salmon season, 3,000 souls, or more; but the constant inhabitants of the place do not exceed 100 persons, and are called Wy-am-pams; the rest are all foreigners from different tribes throughout the country, who resort hither, not for the purpose of catching salmon, but chiefly for gambling and speculation; for trade and traffic, not in fish, but in other articles; for the Indians of the plains seldom eat fish, and those of the sea-coast sell, but never buy fish. Fish is their own staple commodity. The articles of traffic brought to this place by the Indians of the interior are generally horses, buffalo-robes, and native tobacco, which they exchange with the natives of the sea-coast and other tribes, for the higua beads and other trinkets . . . Now all these articles generally change hands through

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<sup>234</sup> As noted, this village was near present-day Horse Thief Lake, which is nine miles below the present-day town of Wishram, Washington.

<sup>235</sup> Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 599; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 47–49; Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., October 24, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*; Biddle, “Wishram,” 116–17; Bruce, “The Dalles.”

<sup>236</sup> William Clark, April 16, 1806 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>237</sup> William Clark, October 24, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>238</sup> Hunn, “Sk'in: The Other Side of the River,” 618.

<sup>239</sup> Lindquist, “Stealing from the Dead,” 340; Hunn, “Sk'in: The Other Side of the River,” 618; Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 599, 603.

<sup>240</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 47.

gam[b]ling. . . . The long narrows, therefore, is the great emporium or mart of the Columbia, and the general theatre of gambling and roguery.

We saw great quantities of fish everywhere.<sup>241</sup>

Gold later described the markets around the Narrows:

These markets were more than an economic gathering. The People came together for social gatherings, families came and were united, dancing and songs were shared, young people found prospective partners, and gambling games continued during the nights. This area was a major communication center, where these cultures shared stories, ideas, and politics.<sup>242</sup>

Chuck Williams (a Cascade Chinook person) wrote that the Long Narrows “was the best fishing spot of all. Countless salmon filled the eddies around these constrictions.”<sup>243</sup>

### Early European Travel Through Celilo Falls and the Narrows (ca. 1805-1842)



Figure 19. William Clark drew Celilo Falls after passing it in 1805. He notes “Portage 120 yards” around the falls on the north side of the river, and a large village of the “E-nee-sheer Nation” (likely Tenino people, who were Sahaptin-speaking) on the north side of the river, before the falls.

Source: American Philosophical Society.

<sup>241</sup> Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River: Being a Narrative of the Expedition Fitted Out By John Jacob Astor, to Establish the “Pacific Fur Company,” with an Account of the Indian Tribes on the Coast of the Pacific* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1849), 117–18.

<sup>242</sup> Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 600–601.

<sup>243</sup> Chuck Williams, quoted in Gold, “The Long Narrows,” 597.

When fur traders and early settlers encountered Celilo Falls and the Narrows, they were forced to portage around them. Lewis and Clark's party portaged their boats over the falls with help from Indigenous people living there, who often charged some sort of fee. Corps of Discovery member Patrick Gass called the falls "terrifying, with vast rocks."<sup>244</sup> Clark described his party's travel through the Long Narrows:

Capt Lewis and my Self walked down to See the place the Indians pointed out as the worst place in passing through the gut, which we found difficult of passing without great danger, but as the portage was impracticable with our large Canoes, we Concluded to Make a portage of our most valuable articles and run the canoes thro[.] accordingly on our return divided the party Some to take over the Canoes, and others to take our Stores across a portage of a mile to a place on the Chanel below this bad whorl & Suck, with Some others I had fixed on the Chanel with ropes to throw out to any who Should unfortunately meet with difficulty in passing through; great number of Indians viewing us from the high rocks under which we had to pass, the 3 first Canoes passed thro very well, the 4th nearly filled with water, the last passed through by takeing in a little water, (we) thus Safely below what I conceived to be the worst part of this Chanel, felt my Self extreamly gratified and pleased. we loaded the Canoes & Set out, and had not proceeded, more than two mile before the unfortunate Canoe which filled crossing the bad place above, run against a rock and was in great danger of being lost, This Chanel is through a hard rough black rock, from 50–100 yards wide. Swelling and boiling in a most tremendous maner Several places on which the Indians inform me they take the Salmon as fast as they wish; we passed through a deep bason to the stard Side of 1 mile below which the River narrows and divided by a rock The Curent we found quit jentl . . .<sup>245</sup>

Like Lewis and Clark, early fur traders hired guides to get through the Narrows, either by water when the river was high or by portage in low water.<sup>246</sup> When the salmon were not running, fewer Indigenous people were at the Narrows, as Jacob Myers observed in 1828: "There are not many Indians about Dalls now; the most of them are out on the plains collecting roots."<sup>247</sup> This was part of the normal rhythm of life for many people, who in the late spring and summer months traveled to upland meadows where camas, a staple of the diets of many Indigenous people in the area, grew.<sup>248</sup>

When Nathaniel Wyeth crossed the falls in 1832, his party paid around fifty Indigenous people tobacco "to carry our boat about 1 mile round the falls the goods we carried ourselves."<sup>249</sup> Wyeth wrote of the Long Narrows portage:

shortly after passing the falls we passed what are called the dalles (small) or where the river is dam[m]ed up between banks steep and high of not more than 100 feet apart through which the whole waters of the mighty Columbia are forced with much noise and uproar. I passed through with some

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<sup>244</sup> Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, et al., October 23, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*; Bergmann, "we should lose much by their absence," 41.

<sup>245</sup> William Clark, October 25, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>246</sup> Quoted in Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 144.

<sup>247</sup> Myers, "Journal of a Trip from Fort Colville to Fort Vancouver and Return in 1828," 108.

<sup>248</sup> Eugene S. Hunn, "Panáyukęša Ánimay: They Are Gathering for Winter," in Hunn et al., *Ćáw Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sahaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla*, 43–45.

<sup>249</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 145.

Indians while my men went round they not being good boatmen enough to trust and fright[en]ed withall.<sup>250</sup>

Like Wyeth, Narcissa and Marcus Whitman also paid Indigenous people (about twenty total) “a twist of tobacco about the length of a finger to each” to assist with the portage around Celilo Falls and the Narrows below. Narcissa Whitman wrote, “After loading several with our baggage and sending them on, the boat was capsized, then placed upon the heads of about twenty of them, who marched off with it, with perfect ease.”<sup>251</sup> That was on the downstream journey, but when they returned up the river, Narcissa wrote of the fear associated with portaging these rapids for settlers like herself:

At the Little Dalles . . . the current is exceedingly strong and rapid, and full of whirlpools. Not recollecting the place particularly, at the request of the bowsman I remained in the boat, being quite fatigued with my walk past the other Dalles. It is a terrific sight, and a frightful place to be in, to be drawn along in such a narrow channel, between such high, craggy, perpendicular bluffs, the men with the rope clambering sometimes upon their hands and knees upon the very edge, so high above us as to appear small, like boys. Many times the rope would catch against the rocks and oblige someone to crawl carefully over the horrible precipice to unloosen it, much to the danger of his life. When my husband came up, in passing this place, the rope caught in a place so difficult of access that no one would venture his life to extricate it, for some time. At last, an Indian ventured. When he had ascended sufficiently to unfasten it, he was unable to return, and did not until he was drawn up by a rope. They had another accident which threatened both the lives of some of them and the property, and but for the protecting hand of God would have been lost. While the men with the rope were climbing up a steep and difficult ascent, the rope lodged upon a rock, which held it fast, and had it remained there until all hands had gained their point and commenced hauling, all would have been well but one of the men above prematurely shoved it off. The current took the boat down stream rapidly, in spite of every effort to save it, prostrating all hands upon the rocks, and some of them were nearly precipitated down the precipice by the rope. The boat received no injury, but was safely moored below The Dalles, on the opposite shore. Our husbands, with the men, obtained an Indian canoe and crossed to the boat. Thus they were preserved. It was just night as we succeeded in passing this difficult place in safety, for which we desired to be grateful. Many boats have been dashed to pieces at these places, and more than a hundred lives lost.<sup>252</sup>

Europeans were suspicious of Indigenous people at the Narrows even as they relied on their expertise for navigating around the rapids. HBC representative George Simpson wrote that he had been warned of what he said traders sarcastically called the “Chivalry of Wishram,” and wrote that he had his party protect their belongings from theft while passing through the Indigenous settlements around the Dalles, since Indigenous people “always congregated here in considerable numbers.”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 174–75.

<sup>251</sup> Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 86–87.

<sup>252</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 141–42.

<sup>253</sup> Quoted in Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 143.

## The First Overlanders in the Rapids (1843-1846)

In 1843, subgroups of the Great Migration wagon train arrived at Celilo Falls and the Narrows after descending the upper river on makeshift rafts, canoes, and boats. Johnson and Winter called Celilo Falls “the Chutes” and described their party’s passage through them and the Narrows below, with help from Indigenous people they hired:

We passed on to what is called the Chutes, through many dangerous Rapids; to have accomplished which, would have been very impracticable, without skillful guidance. Here the River is wide, full of large rocks standing out of the water, and falls several feet. We were compelled to make a portage of nearly a mile, over rocks and sand, carrying our canoes and baggage on our shoulders. Three miles below the Chutes are the Little Dales [*sic*]; where the River runs three hundred yards through a narrow channel, between high rocks. Here we made another portage of our baggage, and smallest canoe, and with some difficulty hired the Indians to run the others through the rugged Canion. A few miles further, and we came to the Great Dales; where we were compelled to leave our smallest canoe, and again make a portage of our baggage, a distance of one and a half miles, over the rocks. Here, the whole Columbia runs through a Canion not more than seventy feet wide, whirling and boiling in the most furious manner, running with terrible velocity, and chafing against its rugged, rocky walls; and it requires the most dexterous management, which these wild navigators are masters of, to pass the dreadful chasm in safety. A single stroke amiss, would be inevitable destruction.<sup>254</sup>

William T. Newby hired Indigenous people at the Narrows to transport his group’s canoes through the rapids:

(October 24) We packed a bout 3 quarters of a mile & hir[e]d the Indians to run our canoes through the Dalls. Then we continued on to the Big Dalls & packed our things uperds of a mile & hired the Indians to run our canoes through, & incamp[ed] at the end of the Dalles.

(October 25) We reached the mis[s]hion a bout 10 oclock & lay buy.<sup>255</sup>

The Applegates met tragedy here. Between Celilo Falls and the Dalles Rapids, the family boat that had not hired an Indigenous pilot capsized and three people aboard drowned.<sup>256</sup> Despite the Indigenous river pilot saving the lives of those in the other boat, Jesse Applegate (unsuccessfully) attempted to shoot the man after landing on shore.<sup>257</sup> John C. Frémont, who was on a military expedition on a land route, away from the river, heard about the drownings. He wrote,

In the recent passage through this chasm, an unfortunate event had occurred to Mr. Applegate’s party, in the loss of one of their boats, which had been carried under water in the midst of the *Dalles*, and two of Mr. Applegate’s children and one man drowned. This misfortune was attributed only to want of skill in the steersman, as at this season there is no impediment to navigations; although the place is

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<sup>254</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 34–36.

<sup>255</sup> Winton, “William T. Newby’s Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 240.

<sup>256</sup> Frémont and Lindsay Applegates’ narratives both say the accident occurred at the Dalles, but in Jesse A. Applegate’s narrative, *A Day with the Cow Column*, he describes the rapids and drownings and writes that after the accident, they portaged through the narrows, which he calls “Devil’s Gullet.” This would seem to suggest that the capsizing took place before the narrows. Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 97–102; Applegate, “Notes and Reminiscences of Laying out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road,” 13.

<sup>257</sup> Burnett, “Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer,” Chapter III,” 84; Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 97–102; Applegate, “Notes and Reminiscences of Laying out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road,” 13.

entirely impassable at high water, when boats pass safely over the great falls above, in the submerged state in which they find themselves.<sup>258</sup>

Jesuit priest Pierre-Jean De Smet wrote in 1846 of the crowds at the Narrows during the salmon running season, and how overlanders traded with Indigenous people:

Indians flock thither from different quarters of the interior, to attend, at this season the year, to the salmon fisheries. This is their glorious time for rejoicing, gambling, and feasting; the long lent is passed; they have at last assembled in the midst of abundance—all that the eye can see, or the nose smell, is fish, and nothing but fish. Piles of them are lying everywhere on the rocks, the Indian huts abound with them, and the dogs are dragging and fighting over the offal in all directions. Not less than eight hundred Indians were present on this occasion. . . .

The dalles at present, form a kind of masquerading thoroughfare, where emigrants and Indians meet, it appears, for the purpose of affording mutual aid. When the Oregon emigrants arrive here, they are generally in want of provisions, horses, canoes, and guides—these wants the Indians supply, receiving in exchange the old travelling cloths of the doctors, lawyers, farmers, Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, &c., that pass through the deals on their westward route. Hence the motley collection of pants, coats, boots, of every form and size, comforters, caps and hats of every fashion.<sup>259</sup>

Indigenous people had established footpaths on the bluffs above the Narrows, which became the basis for wagon routes between the Deschutes River and the Wascopam Mission at the foot of the Dalles Rapids (part of the “main stem” route of the Oregon Trail).<sup>260</sup> This land route took wagons from the Deschutes River inland to the fledgling settlement at The Dalles, south of the Long Narrows. Parties traveling this route first had to ascend a steep hill immediately after the Deschutes River, a difficult climb but one that wagons and livestock could make.<sup>261</sup> Historian T. C. Elliott explained the establishment of this wagon route:

a larger number of the immigrants drove through by land and pioneered [based on Indigenous trails] the first wagon track south of the river, which became the road for later migrations. This road climbed the hills after crossing the Des Chutes river and came upon the Columbia again between Big Eddy and the, present city of The Dalles; the path along the river's edge below the Des Chutes river was not suitable for wagons, and was never so used.<sup>262</sup>

A few people followed this path as early as 1843. That year, Edward Evans Parrish wrote that his party took this “exceedingly hilly” route to avoid the rapids.<sup>263</sup> Frémont’s team, who had an Indigenous guide with them, also took the inland route around the Dalles Rapids. After ascending

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<sup>258</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 187.

<sup>259</sup> Father P. J. De Smet, *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46* (New York: Edward Dunigan, 1847), 232–34.

<sup>260</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 102.

<sup>261</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 118; Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 237; Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 295.

<sup>262</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 149–50.

<sup>263</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 118.



hills west of the Deschutes River and some overland travel, Frémont wrote, “We passed rapidly three or four miles down the level valley, and encamped near the mission.”<sup>264</sup>

## Primarily Inland Travel (ca. 1846-1855)

One change that precipitated the use of the inland route was the 1846 opening of the Barlow Road, which went over the Cascades Mountains south of Mount Hood to the Willamette Valley, allowing overlanders to avoid the Columbia River downstream of The Dalles. About six miles east of The Dalles town, the trail from the Deschutes forked. One path brought travelers to The Dalles, while the other brought them to the gate of the Barlow Road. From Barlow’s Gate, overlanders paid a toll to enter the Barlow Road, which took them over the Cascades to Oregon City and thus bypassed the Cascades Rapids. So, in the hilly region south of the Columbia River Narrows, overlanders from 1846 on could decide whether to travel over the Cascade Mountains or down the Columbia River.<sup>265</sup> If they went to The Dalles, either before their downriver journey or before traveling to the Barlow Road, they could reach the town only two days after crossing the Deschutes River.<sup>266</sup>

When the Mounted Riflemen took this inland route in 1849, Osborne Cross wrote, “The country between here and the Dalles becomes very hilly and not very unlike that crossed on Burntwood creek.”<sup>267</sup> Between 1851 and 1853, William Vanbuskirk, A. A. Denny, Samuel Stout, Parthenia Blank, James Akin Jr., and the Hines family all took the inland route, up and down the ravines over Five Mile Creek and Ten Mile Creek, then downhill toward The Dalles settlement.<sup>268</sup> The path was well used, evidenced by the fact that the Hines received a visit from a traveling preacher while on this road between the Deschutes and the Dalles.<sup>269</sup>

Origen Thomson also took the hilly route in 1852 but diverged from the main path:

The trail now ascends a high hill four miles, and then another mile to the summit. From this can be seen two snow-capped mountains—Mount Hood and Mount St. Helena. Ten-mile creek one mile, one and a-half to a spring, and a-half to the forks of the road. The left leads to the Gate, the right to

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<sup>264</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 187.

<sup>265</sup> “Diary of Samuel Stout Wagon Train, Oregon Trail 1851,” 1851, 8, available on OCTA website; Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 326–27; Journal of Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 123–25.

<sup>266</sup> Miller, “Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I),” 55–68, esp. 64.

<sup>267</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 233–34.

<sup>268</sup> William Vanbuskirk, journal, 1851, 5; A. A. Denny, “Journal of the Route to Oregon,” 1851 (transcribed 1940), 10; “Diary of Samuel Stout Wagon Train, Oregon Trail 1851,” 1851, 8, all available on OCTA website; Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 77; James Akin, Jr., journal, 1852, in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 273; Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 296.

<sup>269</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 297–98.

The Dalles, which is eight miles. Instead of climbing the second hill we took an Indian trail, and went around it, getting a fine view of the Dalles of the Columbia.<sup>270</sup>

It is unclear which direction this “Indian trail” went, although perhaps it was closer to the river, since it afforded Thomson a better view of the Dalles Rapids.

While many overlanders traveled by land on their way to The Dalles or the Barlow Road, some river travel continued through the Narrows. Fur traders continued to use the river, and in 1847, Peter Skene Ogden of the HBC mentioned paying Indigenous people at the Long Narrows powder and ball in return for their assistance.<sup>271</sup> Some overlanders still took the river route, such as Mary Jane Hayden’s party in 1850. They spent three days “converting our wagon bed into a boat as it had to be calked and pitched and seats put in, three oars made and oar locks put on.” Hayden described the difficulty of river travel in this section:

I was in a strange country without home or money and in very delicate health, and if they went down I wanted to go with them. We finally got off with many prayers and good wishes of the people. We were two days in advance of the other boats. We had not gone far, only twelve miles, when we came to Hell Gate, as it was then called, where the river narrows and the banks are perpendicular and very high, (possibly a hundred feet). With such a high wind it was very difficult to keep our cockle-shell boat off of the rocks, which was my part of the work. Two were rowing and one was steering. At this point the river narrows and the current was strong and we were making very good progress until after noon when we came to a long point of rock which we had to round, when at Mr. Hayden's suggestion they landed and I was told to get out. I asked what for and was told to adjust the load. I did as requested, then Mr. Copeland got out, and my satchel which contained what little money we had was thrown out and they pushed off and left us standing on the bank. We were to try and pick our way over and around this place to find a landing below, which we did, and joined the others. Here they lunched and we resumed our voyage, but we came to another obstacle and stopped and I was invited to get out of the boat which I flatly refused to do. I preferred to take my chance with the rest. My mind was made up to that before I left home. I preferred death to being left alone in a strange country (as I had not fully recovered from the mountain fever) and winter coming on and not one soul I had ever seen before, as we had parted from all we had known on the route and they were all scattered. Nor in the sixty-five years since have I ever seen one person that we traveled with.

So we overcame our third difficulty and camped for the night. . . . I do not remember encountering any other difficulties before reaching the Cascades.<sup>272</sup>

## Effects of Indigenous Removal on the Narrows (1855-1859)

Beginning in the 1850s, the US government imposed treaties upon Indigenous people living at Celilo Falls or the Narrows, requiring their removal to US-drawn reservations. The anger and resentment stemming from treaties and the subsequent forced relocations led to what became known as the Yakima Indian Wars (1855–1858), during which the US Army burnt down the village of Sk’in. These events dramatically reduced Indigenous populations at the Narrows and Celilo Falls. The treaties reserved fishing rights for tribes, and Indigenous people continued to visit Celilo Falls

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<sup>270</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 94.

<sup>271</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 149.

<sup>272</sup> Mary Jane Hayden, *Pioneer Days* (San Jose, CA: Murgotten’s Press, 1915), 22–23.

and the Narrows seasonally. Some people refused to leave their homelands and continued to live on the Columbia River. But the long era of Indigenous control of the regionally important Dalles-Celilo fishery and portage was over.<sup>273</sup>

Despite treaty fishing rights, industrial fisheries eventually disrupted Indigenous fishing practices. The first White-owned canneries on the Columbia River opened near the mouth of the river in 1864.<sup>274</sup> Canneries at the mouth and in the lower Columbia River disturbed Indigenous fisheries in the lower river in the mid-1860s, but the fisheries at the Dalles and Celilo were not immediately affected. Canneries did not open near the vital mid-river fishing grounds until the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>275</sup>

## Dalles-Celilo Portage Road (1859-1863)

After the US government removed the Wasco, Wishram, and other Chinookan and Sahaptin-speaking people from their villages around the Dalles and Celilo Falls, overlanders and other river travelers took the same portage trail around the falls that Chinookan and Sahaptin people had established, which had been previously used by fur traders and settlers who hired Indigenous river pilots. It became known among settlers as the Dalles-Celilo Portage Road and was controlled by settler Orlando Humason with assistance from a US government Indian agent, an army officer, and Samuel Johnson. Humason charged \$20 per ton, or \$1.25 per ton per mile, for use of the portage road. No one attempted to build a portage road on the north side of the river, where occasional steep, rocky ledges in prohibited construction along the full stretch. Elliott explained the road's route:

its upper end, however, for a time was Deschutes Landing at the eddy just below the mouth of the river of that name. From the boat landing at the present city of The Dalles the road followed very closely the present line of railroad tracks along the river grade and across Three-Mile Creek, then turned to the right through a gap in the hills to a crossing of Five-Mile Creek at its confluence with Ten-Mile Creek, then eastward to a crossing of "Ten-Mile" at the Fulton Ranch, then over what was known as "N . . . Hill" to the landing. Later it reached the River through a natural gap in the rocky bluff opposite the steamboat landing at Celilo. For several years this was the most active, as well as the most important wagon road in the state of Oregon.<sup>276</sup>

Amid the post-treaty hostilities between the United States and Indigenous people, the US Army patrolled the road to protect settlers and transport troops.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Hunn et al., *Nch'í-Wána "The Big River"*, 55, 269–70; Hunn, "Sk'in: The Other Side of the River," 621; Fisher, "Sk'in."

<sup>274</sup> "Significant Events in the History of Celilo Falls," 721.

<sup>275</sup> Andrew H. Fisher, "Tangled Nets: Treaty Rights and Tribal Identities at Celilo Falls," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 105, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 178–211, esp. 188–89.

<sup>276</sup> A portion of the quotation that used a racial slur has been omitted. Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 153.

<sup>277</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 153–54, 165.

When gold was discovered in Idaho in 1860, traffic on the portage road skyrocketed.<sup>278</sup> The OSNC established a transportation network that monopolized travel along the river through railroads and steamships. The abrupt shift from Indigenous to White control of the river was acutely apparent in the Dalles-Celilo section of the river, since it had been such a thriving center of trade for Indigenous people across the region. Historian William Lang described this sudden shift:

OSN perfected its dominance of river transport only five years after government representatives had successfully pressured Indian tribes to cede millions of acres of land and to agree to leave the river. It was a breathtaking acquisition of place, a transformation of engagement with the river that represented perhaps the greatest revolution on the middle Columbia since the Pleistocene floods that had created the landscape of falling water. . . . Alexander Ross's "great emporium or mart of the Columbia" [the Dalles to Celilo] had been transformed into a new economic place.<sup>279</sup>

The OSNC "bought out" Humason sometime around 1860 "and expended one hundred thousand dollars in mules, wagons and other equipment to handle the traffic."<sup>280</sup> The OSNC continued to use wagons to make the portage, connecting to steamships going upstream from Celilo and downstream from The Dalles.<sup>281</sup> In 1862, Randall Hewitt arrived with a party at Celilo Falls. He wrote, "At this point the rapids were impassable, and thence all the passengers and their baggage and whatever other of their possessions were conveyed around the portage, fifteen miles to The Dalles, by stages; every one of the vehicles was loaded to excess inside and out."<sup>282</sup>

## Dalles-Celilo Portage Railroad (1863-1870)

The loads of people and supplies moving upstream up to the gold rush became so great that it was increasingly difficult to move them by wagon over the Dalles and Celilo Portage Road. The OSNC began construction of the Dalles and Celilo Railroad on the south side of the river on March 17, 1862, and opened the fourteen-mile railway to passengers and freight in 1863. The railroad was used heavily by Portland merchants shipping their goods to inland areas, but it was too expensive for most overlanders.<sup>283</sup> When Schuyler Colfax, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, described the Dalles-Celilo Railroad in 1865, it was still an option for the wealthy only. Colfax explained that the road had "the best locomotives and cars, as any railroads in the country," and the

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<sup>278</sup> Henry L. Talkington, "Story of the River—Its Place in Northwest History," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (June 1915): 181–95, esp. 186; Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 153.

<sup>279</sup> William L. Lang, "The Meaning of Falling Water: Celilo Falls and the Dalles in Historical Literature," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 566–85, esp. 570–71.

<sup>280</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 154.

<sup>281</sup> Schubert, "The Dalles-Celilo Canal," 378.

<sup>282</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 475.

<sup>283</sup> Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 158, 169–70; Edwards, "Town Boosterism on Oregon's Mining Frontier," 87.

connecting steamboats had “every comfort and luxury that are found in the best of eastern river craft,—large state-rooms, long and wide cabins, various and well-served meals.”<sup>284</sup>



Figure 20. The Dalles and Celilo Railroad, constructed by the OSNC in 1863, ran between the town of The Dalles and Celilo Falls along approximately the same route as Indigenous portage trails. Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

By the late 1860s, newspapers highlighted the beauty of the scenery visible from Columbia River railroads:

About seven miles [east] from the Dalles we left the car and clambered over the rough rocks to see the river, far below us, passing through a narrow gorge. Above and below, it [is] more than a mile in width; here, it contracts into a bed of about two hundred feet wide. It is not easy to describe or to imagine the wild magnificence of the scene.<sup>285</sup>

This marked a new era of recreational travel through the gorge, available to those who could afford the steep prices.

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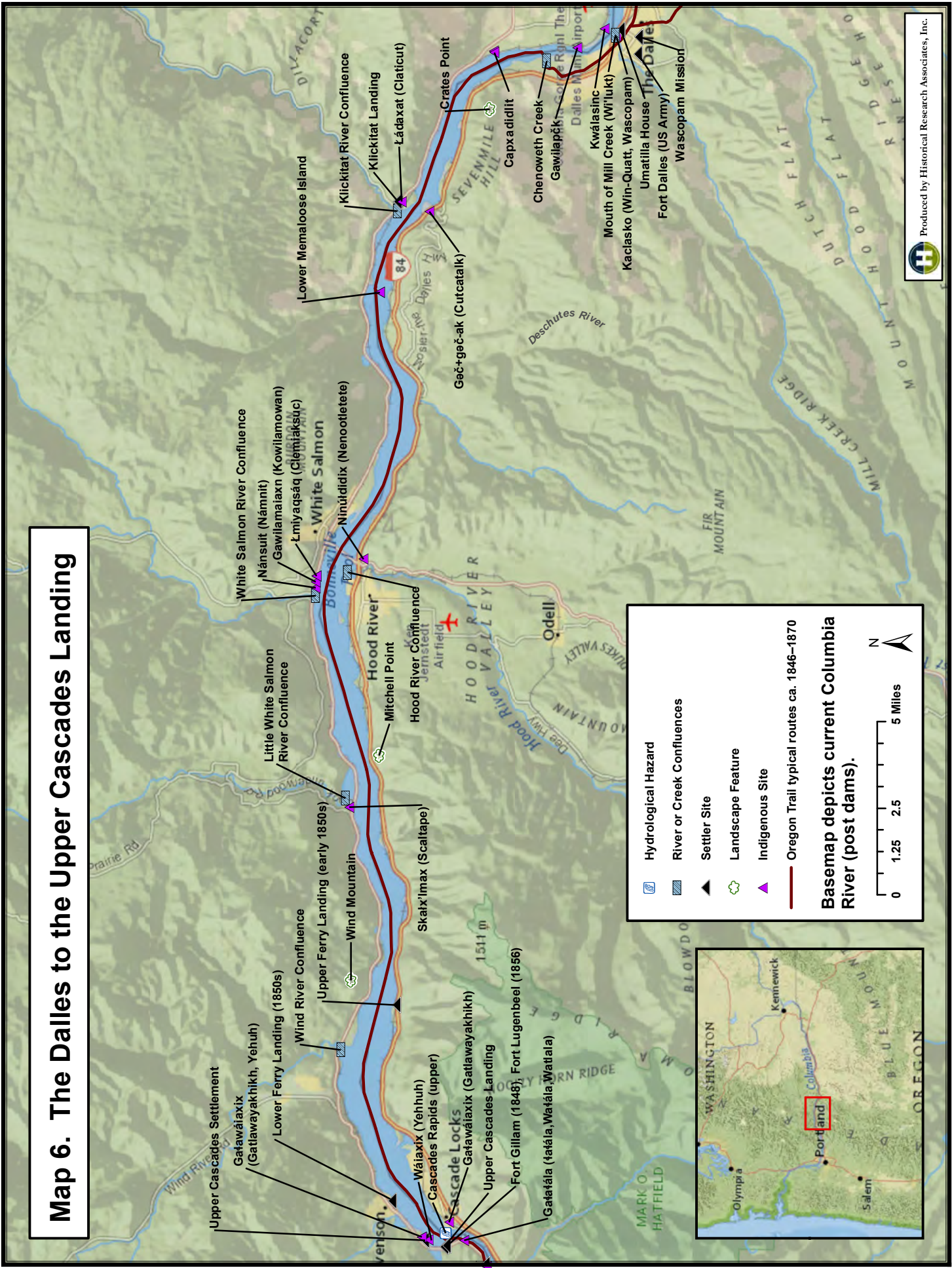
<sup>284</sup> Schuyler Colfax, as quoted in Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 165.

<sup>285</sup> “North Pacific Railroad—California, Oregon and the Northwest,” *Oregonian*, October 1, 1869.

The area from Celilo Falls through the Narrows of the Columbia River had changed dramatically between 1840 and 1870. By 1870, the once-powerful Wasco-Wishram gatekeepers were gone, replaced by White industrialists and the railroad, and overlanders by that point were far more likely to take inland wagon routes than try to negotiate the difficult rapids and expensive rail portage.



# Map 6. The Dalles to the Upper Cascades Landing



Hydrological Hazard  
 River or Creek Confluences  
 Settler Site  
 Landscape Feature  
 Indigenous Site  
 Oregon Trail typical routes ca. 1846–1870

**Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).**

0    1.25    2.5    5 Miles

N





## Chapter 5: The Dalles to the Cascades

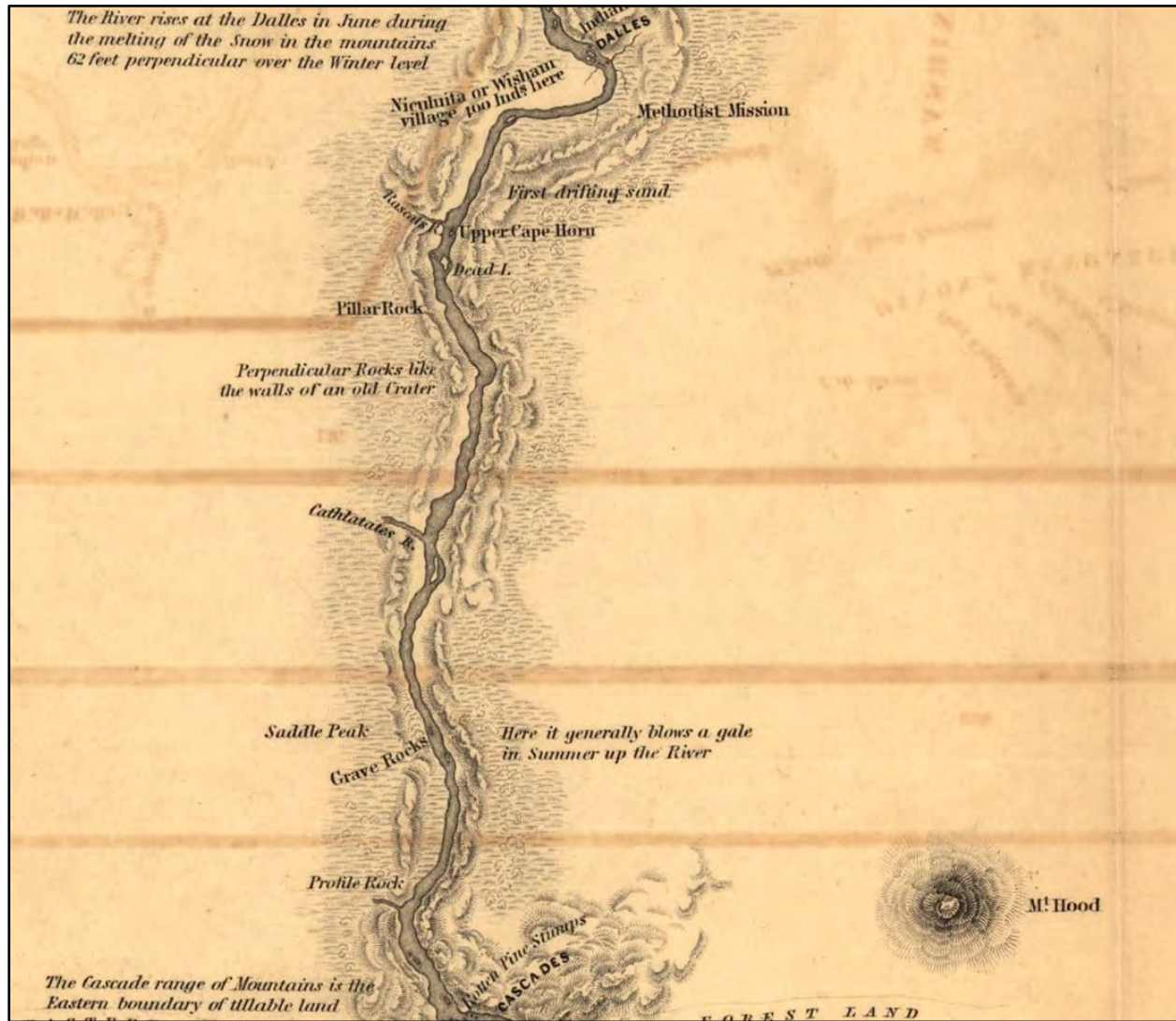


Figure 21. Segment of Charles Wilkes's 1844 drawing of the Columbia River from his map of the Pacific Northwest. This section shows the stretch of river from the bottom of the Narrows (or Dalles Rapids) to the upper end of the Cascades Rapids.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

### River and Communities ca. 1800

After the last of the Dalles Rapids, the river was relatively calm for a distance of about forty miles (see Map 6 for an overview of this section of the river). This calm section resulted from obstructions to the river's flow at the end of the forty-mile stretch, at the Cascades Rapids (the rapids themselves are discussed in the next chapter). The natural dam at the Cascades backed up the

river to the foot of the Dalles Rapids, rendering the intervening stretch lake-like. Downstream of the Dalles, the shores of the river became steeper and lined with trees and vegetation, unlike the arid riverbanks at points upstream. This transition occurred over the course of about twenty miles. By the time downstream travelers reached the confluence with the Hood River, which flows into the Columbia from the south, the gorge walls were covered in thick forest growth. Mount Hood was visible from the river looking south, and Mount Adams and Mount St. Helens were visible to the north.

While some Indigenous people lived in this calm, lush, and narrow section of the Columbia River Gorge around 1800, it was less of a hub than the heavily trafficked area from the Narrows to Celilo Falls. In 1805, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark camped at the foot of the Narrows near present-day The Dalles, Oregon, near what is now called Mill Creek. Clark wrote, “The natives Call this Creek near which we are encamped—*Que-nett*.”<sup>286</sup> The Kiksht word for the mouth of Mill Creek was wi’lukt, which meant “looking through an opening or gap,” and the springs near the site of the Wascopam Mission were called a-mútan after wild hemp that grew in the area. The flatlands on the south side of the river, where the present-day city of The Dalles is located, were known as wi’nkwat, meaning “a large indentation in a river or lake bank, useful as a landing place.”<sup>287</sup> It has often been spelled as Win-Quatt, and referred to as the name of the Wasco village at the site. However, it was not the name of the Indigenous village there, but rather the term for the landing as a geographic feature. The village on this flatland was called Wascopam in Sahaptin and Kaclasko in Kiksht.<sup>288</sup> Both Wascopam and Kaclasko had roots in the Kiksht word wasq’ó, which meant cup or “horn bowl,” and pam, which meant people.<sup>289</sup>

Between the Dalles and the Cascades Rapids, people living in villages along the river were mostly Upper Chinookan, part of groups that later became known as White Salmon and Klickitat. Downstream from Que-nett, Clark reported encountering villages on the north side of the river (at least two, near present-day Murdock and Lyle, Washington).<sup>290</sup> They spoke the same Chinookan dialects as Wishram people around the Narrows. Clark noted “they have some good horses of which we saw ten or a douzen” and remarked that they did not see horses in the more heavily forested areas downstream of Hood River, where “the country is too thickly timbered to admit them to run the game with horses if they had them.”<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> William Clark, October 27, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>287</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 45.

<sup>288</sup> D. Lee and J. H. Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon* (New York: J. Collord, Printer, 1844), 176.

<sup>289</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 45–46.

<sup>290</sup> William Clark, October 29, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>291</sup> Gary E. Moulton, editorial note on April 14, 1806 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.



Figure 22. John Mix Stanley, “Mountain Landscape with Indians,” oil on canvas, between 1870 and 1875. Stanley’s painting of the Columbia River, with Hood River in the background, is what anthropologist Robert Boyd called the “only known depiction of a traditional Chinookan settlement.” Stanley based the painting on drawings he made during his visits to the Northwest between 1846 and 1853.

Source: Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of the Wayne County Medical Society, 59.312.

Several villages, some seasonal and some year-round, were located at the mouths of creeks emptying into the Columbia. There may have been a village called Capxadidlit on the east bank of the river a few miles downstream from the Wascopam Mission site. The village of ládaxat (Claticut) sat at the mouth of the Klickitat River and across from that was another village, possibly called lagəč+gəč-ak (Cutcatalk). Just east of the mouth of the White Salmon River was a village called at various times Nánsuit (Námnit), Gawilamaiaxn (Kowilamowan), or lmiyaqsáq (Clemiaksuc). Skalx’lmax (Scaltape) was at the mouth of the Little White Salmon River and Ninúldidix (Nenootletete) was on the east bank of the mouth of Hood River.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 40–44.

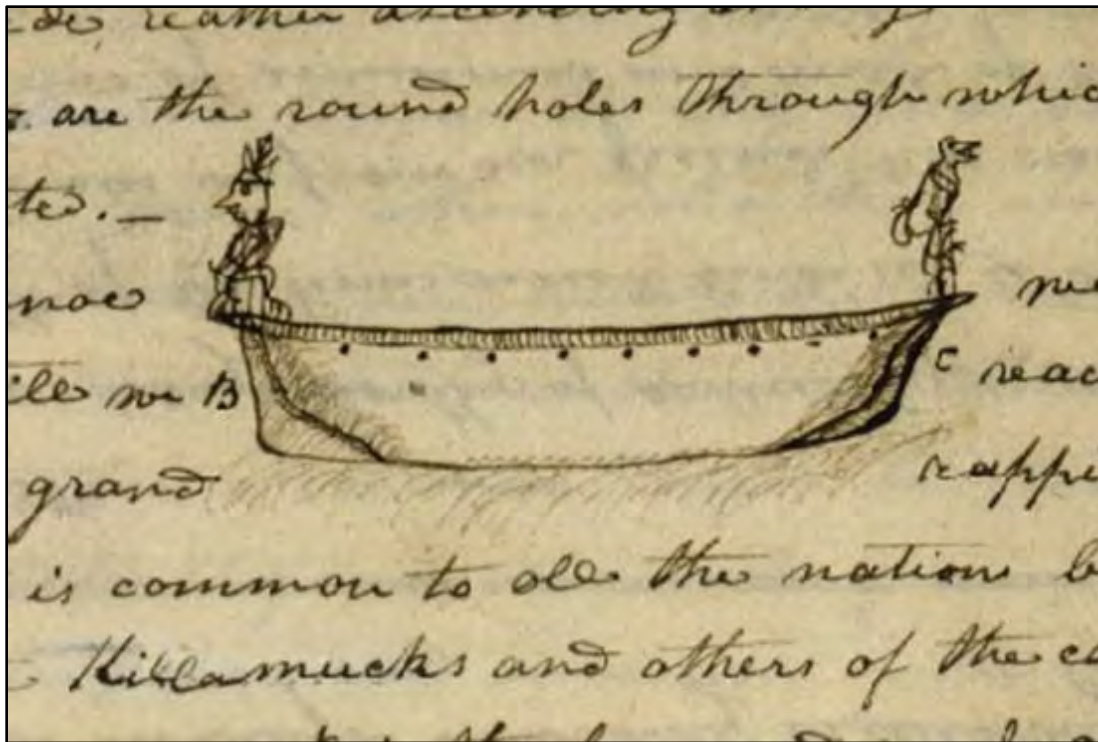


Figure 23. Meriwether Lewis drew this image of a Chinookan canoe in his journal on February 1, 1806.

Source: American Philosophical Society.

This section of the river was an important Indigenous transportation route between the Cascades Rapids and the Narrows. The wind whipped through the narrow gorge, sometimes making the journey difficult, despite the lack of rapids. Clark reported on October 28, 1805,

The wind which is the cause of our delay, does not retard the motions of those people at all, as their canoes are calculated to ride the highest waves, they are built of white cedar or Pine very light wide in the middle and tapers at each end, with aperns, and heads of animals carved on the bow, which is generally raised. Those people make great use of Canoes, both for transpotation and fishing, they also use of bowls & baskets made of Grass & [NB: bark] Splits to hold water and boil their fish & meat.<sup>293</sup>

Clark noted canoe traffic in this section of the river and evidence of trade between Indigenous people and Europeans:

as we were about to Set out 3 canoes from above and 2 from below came to view us[,] in one of those Canoes I observed an Indian with round hat Jacket & wore his hair cued [NB: he Said he got them from Indians below the great rapid who bought them from the whites].<sup>294</sup>

After visiting a Wasco-Wishram house on the north side of the Columbia River, Clark wrote, “I Saw a British musket, a cutlash [cutlass] and Several brass Tea kittles.”<sup>295</sup>

<sup>293</sup> William Clark, October 28, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>294</sup> William Clark, October 28, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>295</sup> William Clark, October 28, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

## The “Sunken Forest”

From near the Klickitat River confluence (present-day Lyle, Washington) to the Cascades Rapids, stumps rose from the Columbia River’s smooth waters. When passing through in 1805, Lewis described this phenomenon:

throughout the whole course of this river from the rapids as high as the Chilluckittequaws, we find the trunks of many large pine trees sanding erect as they grew at present in 30 feet water; they are much doated and none of them vegetating; at the lowest tide of the river many of these trees are in ten feet water. certain it is that those large pine trees never grew in that position, nor can I account for this phenomenon except it be that the passage of the river through the narrow pass at the rapids has been obstructed by the rocks which have fallen from the hills into that channel within the last 20 years; the appearance of the hills at that place justify this opinion, they appear constantly to be falling in, and the apparent state of the decayed trees would seem to fix the era of their decline about the time mentioned.<sup>296</sup>

When Frémont passed through in 1843, he surmised that the trees had fallen into the river due to “immense land slides from the mountains, which here closely shut in the river, and which brought down with them into the river the pines of the mountain.”<sup>297</sup> Reverend Samuel Parker, a representative of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions who was in the region with Marcus Whitman to scout a new mission site, thought that the land had subsided.<sup>298</sup> In 1835, Parker wrote,

On a full examination, it is plainly evident that here has been a subsidence of a tract of land, more than twenty miles in length, and about a mile in width. The trees standing in the water are found mostly towards and near the north shore, and yet, from the depth of the river and its sluggish movement, I should conclude the subsidence affected the whole bed. That the trees are not wholly decayed down to low water mark, proves that the subsidence is comparatively, of recent date.<sup>299</sup>

Still other travelers theorized that the lake and the stumps were due to the damming effect that the Cascades Rapids downstream had on the river above it. In 1843, Johnson and Winter explained why Frémont’s theory of a landslide was likely incorrect:

Here [Wascopam Mission] we were obliged to remain more than a day, on account of high wind, by which we were detained several days on our passage to the Cascade Falls. From the Mission to the Falls, a distance of fifty miles, the River has scarcely any current, The Mountains are high on either side, rocky, and in many places covered with heavy forests of Pine, some of which, are at least ten feet in diameter and three hundred feet high. A short distance below the Mission, we found the stumps of trees, standing erect, in ten or fifteen feet of water, as if a dam had been thrown across the River, and the water backed up over its natural shores.

We asked the Indians if they knew how these stumps came to occupy their present position; but none of them were able to inform us. They have a tradition among them, that long ago, the Columbia, in

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<sup>296</sup> William Clark, April 14, 1806 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>297</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 195.

<sup>298</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 15.

<sup>299</sup> Samuel Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains under the Direction of the A.B.C.F.M., containing a Description of the Geography, Geology, Climate, Productions of the Country, and the Numbers, Manners, and Customs of the Natives: with a Map of Oregon Territory*, fifth edition (New York: Mark H. Newman & Co., 1846), 142.

some part, ran under ground; and that, during an eruption of Mount St. Helens, the bridge fell in. Some such circumstance as this, is the only way possible, in which this anomaly can be accounted for, unless Captain Fremont is correct, (which is certainly, extremely doubtful,) in supposing them to be land slides. For they are found no where below the Cascade Falls, although the character of the river, and its shores, is, above and below these Falls, very much alike. They are found immediately above the Falls, and as far up as the still water extends, which lack of current in the River, we consider to be the effect of some vast impediment, having been thrown into it, at the Cascade Falls. The falls seem to be composed of large detached masses of rocks which circumstance also favors our opinion. A short distance below the Wascopin Mission, and the Rapids of the Great Dales, we found the first of these submerged stumps. They increased in number, as we descended the River; as is always the case wherever there has been an impediment, thrown into the channel of a stream, so as to raise the water over its natural shores. Immediately above the Wascopin Mission, as we have before noticed, and at least as far up as Fort Walwala, the River is full of Falls and Rapids, and such also we believe to have been the original character of the River below here we find, at the present time, these stumps, and an entire lack of current; as this portion of it includes the breach through the Cascade Mountains, the most rugged country, perhaps, through which the Columbia flows.

If these stumps and trees, (for many of them are still sixty or seventy feet above the water in the River,) had been brought into their present position by land slides, as Caption Fremont suggests, it seems to us, to be a matter of course, that the most of those which were not thrown down by the motion, and agitation, would have been found standing in various inclined positions; but on the contrary, we find them nearly all standing erect. And again, what is highly improbably, the slides must all have been very nearly simultaneous, as the trees are all, about in the same state of preservation. The most of them stand opposite where we considered the shores too gradual to admit of a slide.<sup>300</sup>

Later scientific investigations supported the dam theory to explain the stumps. In 1855, geologist John S. Newberry, part of Lt. Henry L. Abbot's Pacific Railroad Survey, wrote that the Cascades Rapids,

acting as a dam, has raised the level of the water above the Cascades, giving to the stream its lake-like appearance, and submerging a portion of the trees which lined its banks. Of these trees, killed by the water, the stumps of many are still standing, and by their degree of preservation attest the modern date of the catastrophe.<sup>301</sup>

Many overlanders agreed with Newberry's view and thought that the stumps were only partially decayed because they had only recently been submerged.<sup>302</sup>

In 1934 and 1935, Donald B. Lawrence, a Portland botanist, documented over 1,800 stumps during low water. Lawrence used dendrochronology to hypothesize that the trees were killed by flood at least two hundred years before his study.<sup>303</sup> He later found the oldest tree growing out of landslide debris had germinated around 1562, which meant the landslide that created the Cascades Rapids and left the drowned trees in the lake behind it must have occurred before then.

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<sup>300</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 36–38 (text split into paragraphs for readability).

<sup>301</sup> *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, Made under the Direction of the Secretary of War, in 1854–5*, Vol. VI, S. Rept. 78, 33d Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington: Beverley Tucker, Printer, 1867), 56.

<sup>302</sup> Smith, "The Geology of the Columbia River Gorge," 6.

<sup>303</sup> Donald B. Lawrence, "The Submerged Forest of the Columbia River Gorge," *Geographical Review* 26, no. 4 (October 1936): 581–92, esp. 591.

Radiocarbon dating in recent years has placed the slide between 1400 and 1500 CE.<sup>304</sup> (For further discussion of the landslide that created the dam at the Cascades, see Chapter 6.)

## Kaclasko, Wascopam, and The Dalles

### *Fur Trading Posts at The Dalles (1829)*

The first European settlement near the present-day town of The Dalles was a trading post established in 1829, located somewhere near Big Eddy. It was led by a man with the last name Bache (his first name is unknown), a former HBC employee funded by a wealthy Bostonian to set up a trading station to cut into the HBC's monopoly along the river. Upon hearing of the new post, HBC Chief Factor McLoughlin sent James Birnie from Fort Vancouver to The Dalles to rival Bache. Birnie's post was located near the town of Klaskan, close to the future site of the Wascopam Mission. Birnie put Bache out of business within the year. The HBC closed Birnie's post soon after, satisfied that it had stomped out the competition.<sup>305</sup>

### *Wascopam Mission (1838-1847)*

The first sustained White settlement at The Dalles began when Daniel Lee and Henry Perkins established the Wascopam Mission in 1838.<sup>306</sup> Lee and Perkins chose the location because of its proximity to the busy Indigenous fisheries and trading centers along the Narrows/Dalles of the Columbia River (see Chapter 1 for more on the founding of the mission).<sup>307</sup> Many of the Chinookan and Sahaptin people who lived near or visited the Narrows traded with the missionaries and overlanders at Wascopam. Henry Perkins learned Sahaptin, and he held major revivals at which he preached in Sahaptin in 1839–1840.<sup>308</sup>

In 1840, Henry and Laura Brewer joined the mission, with the task of farming. Perkins and Lee had not attempted much agriculture before the Brewers arrived. By 1841, the Brewers and others had cultivated about three hundred acres, and they had harvested enough wheat, oats, potatoes, and other vegetables to make the mission somewhat self-sufficient, although they still sent the wheat to the HBC gristmill, downstream near Fort Vancouver, for processing.<sup>309</sup> With the farm functioning

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<sup>304</sup> Jim E. O'Connor, "The Evolving Landscape of the Columbia River Gorge: Lewis and Clark and Cataclysms on the Columbia," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 105, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 409; Smith, "The Geology of the Columbia River Gorge," 6.

<sup>305</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 14.

<sup>306</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 140.

<sup>307</sup> Lee and Perkins to Bangs.

<sup>308</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 21.

<sup>309</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 21.

and a small store at Wascopam, the mission's focus shifted slightly away from proselytizing and more toward trade and supplying overlanders.<sup>310</sup>

Fur traders and other missionaries had passed through Wascopam since its founding, but overlanders began arriving in 1841. The mission became an important resupply point on the Oregon Trail. In 1841, the "Red River Party" of Canadians stopped at the mission on their way to Puget Sound. The following September, over one hundred overlanders from Missouri passed through the mission.<sup>311</sup> One of them, Medorem Crawford, camped at the mission and bought potatoes and other food at Perkins' house, where his party was "kindly rec'd and hospitably treated."<sup>312</sup> Several of those who passed through in 1842 and 1843 were Missouri farmers and Methodists. They had attended Methodist camp meetings back home and were happy to have a place to worship, and Perkins was happy to have them. During the 1843 migration, however, the numbers of people passing through overwhelmed the mission's small stores. Brewer wrote, "They draw heavily on our little supplies, but we could not see them pass hungry & starving."<sup>313</sup>

Overlanders who camped at the Wascopam Mission in 1843 included the Applegates, John Boardman, James Nesmith, Overton Johnson, and William Winter.<sup>314</sup> Johnson and Winter described the mission's setting:

Three miles below the mouth of this Canion [the Short Narrows/Dalles Rapids], and one hundred and twenty-five miles below Fort Walawala, is the Wascopin [Wascopam] Methodist Mission, at this time under the superintendence of Mr. Perkins, and situated half a mile from the South bank of the River. They have a small Farm attached to the Mission under the superintendence of Mr. Brewer.<sup>315</sup>

Nesmith traded with Indigenous people while at the mission. He wrote, "I swapped my horse for a Chinook canoe" and then "Made some arrangements and started about two o'clock with an Indian pilot."<sup>316</sup> Edward Evans Parrish wrote that his party camped outside of the mission, but Waller came to their encampment and preached to them.<sup>317</sup> One overlander gave birth in the Perkins' home.<sup>318</sup>

Frémont passed through Wascopam several weeks after the Great Migration train of overlanders. Frémont described the mission as a thriving settlement:

We passed rapidly three or four miles down the level valley, and encamped near the mission. The character of the forest growth here changed, and we found ourselves, with pleasure, again among oaks

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<sup>310</sup> Hillgen, "The Wascopam Mission," 227.

<sup>311</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 23–24.

<sup>312</sup> Medorem Crawford, journal, 1842, 12, available on OCTA website.

<sup>313</sup> H. Brewer, November 7, 1843, quoted in Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 23–24.

<sup>314</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 184*, 107; Jim Tompkins, "Mileposts Along the Oregon Trail," accessed June 25, 2020, <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/Milepost5.htm>.

<sup>315</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 35–36.

<sup>316</sup> Nesmith, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," 358.

<sup>317</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 118.

<sup>318</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 23–24.



and other forest trees of the east, to which we had long been strangers; and the hospitable and kind reception with which we were welcomed among our country people at the mission, aided the momentary illusion of home.

Two good-looking wooden dwelling houses, and a large school-house, with stables, barn and garden, and large cleared fields between the houses and the river bank, on which were scattered the wooden huts of an Indian village, gave to the valley the cheerful and busy air of civilization, and had in our eyes an appearance of abundant and enviable comfort.<sup>319</sup>

Perkins helped Frémont hire several Indigenous men to assist him with the journey downstream: Skakaps (Frémont called him “White Crane”), Stiletsi (possibly the Tenino chief Seletsa), and William “Billy” Chinook (a nineteen-year-old Chinook man), who had lived in the Perkins’ household for a while.<sup>320</sup>

In the years after 1843, management of Wascopam Mission changed several times. Daniel Lee left in 1843, and Perkins left in 1844. Perkins was replaced by Alvan Waller, who had been at a mission in Oregon City. Waller ran the mission with continued assistance from Henry and Laura Brewer until September 1847, when the Methodists sold it to the Presbyterians. From this point on, the mission was no longer referred to as Wascopam but was instead called the mission at the Dalles, the Dalles Mission, or simply the Dalles, after the rapids just upstream of it. Perrin Whitman (Marcus Whitman’s nephew) and Alanson Hinman were put in charge. After Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were killed at Waúiletpu two months later, Perrin left the Dalles Mission and allowed US military troops and locally organized militia groups to use the mission grounds. The troops used the temporary garrison, which became known as Fort Lee, during subsequent combat between the United States and the Cayuse people. The following year, during the military occupation, Catholic missionaries established St. Peter’s Mission near the site of the former Wascopam Mission.<sup>321</sup>

### *Military Presence at The Dalles (1847-1867)*

Overlanders traveling through The Dalles in 1847 found it in turmoil due to the measles epidemic and subsequent violent confrontations between settlers and Indigenous people. That year, Elizabeth Dixon Smith wrote that she “passed what is called the Dalls mission [sic] where two white families live among [sic] the Indians[,] it looks like starveation [sic].”<sup>322</sup> An 1847 editorial in *The Spectator* described violence between overlanders and Indigenous people somewhere near The Dalles:

We regret to state that the party who came through with this wagon, consisting of ten men had some misunderstanding with the Dalles Indians, which resulted in bloodshed and death. In the fight between the Wascopams and the whites, young Mr. Shepperd . . . was killed; a Mr. Parker, and

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<sup>319</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 187.

<sup>320</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 24–25, 329–30.

<sup>321</sup> Hillgen, “The Wascopam Mission,” 227–28; Journal of Elizabeth Dixon Smith in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 140; Boyd, “Wascopam Mission”; Historic The Dalles, “Establishment of Fort Dalles,” accessed June 17, 2020, <http://historichthedalles.org/history/fort-dalles/>.

<sup>322</sup> Journal of Elizabeth Dixon Smith in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 140.

another individual . . . were seriously wounded. The principal chief of the Indians was killed, and several others were severely wounded.<sup>323</sup>

When James Miller passed through that same year, his party camped at the site of what would later become the center of town. He saw only “one house in sight at this camp,” that of Indian Agent Nathan Olney, who “had a cabin, one-half mile below on the flat. He had an Indian wife.”<sup>324</sup>

After 1847, overland migration through eastern Oregon and the Dalles slowed due to the armed conflicts between Indigenous groups and the US military. The buildings at the Wascopam Mission deteriorated, as Major Osborne Cross described in 1849:

The Old Mission has gone greatly to ruin. It is composed of a dwelling-house, which we now occupied, and three more buildings, one of which, opposite the one fronting the river, had been used as a schoolhouse. These buildings would all have made good quarters for a detachment of troops (which was suggested in my letter to the colonel), who could have remained here and taken charge of the stores and public property this fall. The buildings rest on the side of the picket-work, which is made of heavy pine logs brought from the neighboring mountains, where wood for fuel and timber can be procured in great abundance. The out-buildings have all been destroyed and the whole is going to decay since the war with the Cayuse nation, at which time it was abandoned. There is a fine spring but a short distance from the house, and the whole valley, which lies between the mission and the river, is finely watered.<sup>325</sup>

Although the mission site was in shambles, some militia troops and a few settlers still passed through the area. Cross implied that the area was still a hub of information and trade. He wrote, “we had the pleasure of meeting with those who could give us some intelligence in the way of late news from the states, of which we had so long been deprived.” He also noted that the area near the former mission was very smoky, perhaps indicative of wildfires burning that year.<sup>326</sup>

Cross’s Mounted Riflemen stayed near the former mission site for several weeks. They procured help from Indigenous people around the Narrows to ferry supplies upriver through the Dalles Rapids and on to Settle at the old mission site. Settle explained,

The mackinaw boat went off early this morning, much to the delight of the Indians. They were very anxious to visit the Indians above, who had assembled in large numbers to fish for salmon and to see the soldiers, who had attracted much curiosity among them. . . . The boat was well manned, having a fine boat's crew of twelve Indians who made it glide through the water like a “thing of life.”

The interpreter was taken sick with chills and fevers, and there was but little change among the Indians. [The sick] had increased to five patients, and [we had] no medicine to give them. I began to feel that my pleasure [at] seeing the command would only be equaled by the sight of our resting place of a few days since. An emigrating party came in this morning from Deschutes river. [They] were compelled to take their wagons apart, but thought that in a few days the river would be low enough to drive across. I therefore determined to go up in the morning, where I hoped to find my boat safely landed, which was sent yesterday to their assistance. . . . I learned on reaching the crossing that the

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<sup>323</sup> “[Editorial Correspondence],” *Spectator*, September 2, 1847.

<sup>324</sup> Miller, “Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I.),” 55–68, esp. 64.

<sup>325</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 236.

<sup>326</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 234–35.

troops would not be there until the next day. I regretted that my boat had not arrived, nor could it be got over the last fall. The Indians labored all day to succeed, but becoming disheartened had finally abandoned all further attempts, and were enjoying the hospitality of their friends when I assembled them together to return to the Old Mission through the same deep cuts among the rocks [which] they had yesterday toiled almost in vain to overcome.<sup>327</sup>

Settle noted that the overlanders he encountered were heading for the former Wascopam Mission site, “which seemed to be the general rendezvous for such as feared to undertake at this time the crossing of the Great Cascade range, particularly [those] with weak teams.” Settle’s notes reinforce the site’s importance as gathering point for settlers, a place where they decided whether to take the Barlow Road or the Columbia River for the remainder of their journey.<sup>328</sup> The old mission site also became an important meeting site between tribes and the US military during treaty negotiations over the next several years.<sup>329</sup>

In 1850, the US Army established a post at the site of the old mission on a ten-square-mile tract of land, which they named Camp Drum. In 1853, the name changed to Fort Drum, and shortly thereafter to Fort Dalles. Settlers who had chosen to overwinter at The Dalles, which some people did in order to wait out the challenging weather in the mountains, were hired by the military to build a mill, quarters, a barn, a mess house, and a cottage for the commanding officer of the post.<sup>330</sup>

For the rest of the 1850s and into the 1860s, overlanders interacted with soldiers at Fort Dalles as they passed through.<sup>331</sup> The fort’s primary purpose was to protect settlers and address any perceived threats from the Indigenous people who lived in the area. It became “the primary depot for army operations east of the Cascade Mountains” and the central distribution point for men, supplies, and weapons during the wars the US government waged on Indigenous people. Its importance later diminished, and the US military abandoned it completely in 1867.<sup>332</sup>

### *The Dalles, 1851-1870*

With the advent of steamship travel and the new military presence at The Dalles, the city became a bustling central point of trade and commerce for White settlers. Harvey Hines described the town as “two or three small buildings, and several traders’ tents, with a much larger number of emigrants

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<sup>327</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 242–43, brackets in original.

<sup>328</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 243, brackets in original.

<sup>329</sup> Coan, “The First Stage of the Federal Indian Policy in the Pacific Northwest, 1849–1852,” 50–51.

<sup>330</sup> Klindt and Klindt, *Win-Quatt: A Brief History of The Dalles, Oregon*, 39; NPS, Scotts Bluff National Monument, “Military & Supply Forts on the Oregon Trail,” brochure, undated. <https://www.nps.gov/scbl/planyourvisit/upload/Forts-on-the-Oregon-Trail.pdf>

<sup>331</sup> Gwen Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (September 1931): 217–39, esp. 235.

<sup>332</sup> Coon, “Klickitat County: Indians of and Settlement by Whites,” 251–52; Gregory P. Shine, “Fort Dalles,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, March 5, 2020, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/fort\\_dalles/#.XrGTB6hKiUk](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/fort_dalles/#.XrGTB6hKiUk).

tents. . . .”<sup>333</sup> The old mission site had been destroyed, with only the stone foundations remaining.<sup>334</sup> The town had a practicing physician nearby, Dr. C. W. Shaug.<sup>335</sup> Despite these developments, Origen Thomson called The Dalles “a dirty hamlet of a few miserable huts” when he passed through in 1852.<sup>336</sup>

Indigenous trade networks centered at the villages along the Narrows continued, but The Dalles became a separate, mostly White-run trade center. Overlanders traveling through The Dalles in the early 1850s noted the many goods that could be bought and at what cost. In 1851, overlander William Vanbuskirk arrived at The Dalles and sold his oxen there for \$50 per yoke.<sup>337</sup> Parthenia Blank wrote in 1852, “Prices are coming down at the dalls. Flour can be had at 15 cts. Pork at 37 ½, Salt at 25, Saleratus 25, Sugar 25 to 30.”<sup>338</sup> James Akin was there in October, when flour was 35 cents per pound.<sup>339</sup>

Some overlanders who took the Barlow Road still passed through The Dalles, usually if they needed to wait for wintery conditions to improve in the mountains. If conditions did not improve, some decided to take the Columbia River Route. Abigail Jane Scott indicated that health could affect a person’s decision about which way to go:

Sept 17 . . . We this morning sent two of the wagons by the way of the Dalles to be sent to Oregon City by water[,] Mr Stevenson also left us at this place in order to go down the river, as he has been a long time sick and was too weak to think of crossing the mountains.<sup>340</sup>

George Tribble later wrote about his party’s experience during the heavy immigration of 1852:

When we got to the Dalles we found thousands waiting for transportation from there to Cascade Falls. The emigrants had to wait about four weeks for their time to get a boat. They would send their stock on to the mouth of Sandy near Vancouver. There was an Indian trail down the Columbia (River). The emigration in the earlier part of the year crossed the Cascade Mountains but the snow fell early that year so the only way to get to the Willamette River was by way of the Columbia.”<sup>341</sup>

After settlers began to claim land under the 1850 Oregon Land Donation Act and the United States forced Indigenous people to move to reservations, The Dalles became an even more White town. Indigenous influence and presence were erased by settlers taking over their land and trade routes. Some people of Indigenous descent surely still lived and traded at the Dalles, but

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<sup>333</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 300.

<sup>334</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 300.

<sup>335</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 289.

<sup>336</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 95.

<sup>337</sup> William Vanbuskirk, journal, 1851, 5, available on OCTA website.

<sup>338</sup> Journal of Cecelia Adams & Parthenia Blank in Holmes and Duniway, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5*, 308.

<sup>339</sup> James Akin, Jr., journal, 1852, in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 273.

<sup>340</sup> Journal of Abigail Jane Scott in Holmes and Duniway, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5*, 129–30.

<sup>341</sup> George Tribble, “Autobiographical Sketches of George William Tribble,” *Oregon Genealogical Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 22–23.

documentation of them decreases in the 1850s as part of Indigenous erasure to justify White settlement.<sup>342</sup> An example of the White takeover of The Dalles can be found in the case of Robert R. Thompson, a principal stockholder of the OSNC. In 1854, Thompson filed a claim for 640 acres of land around The Dalles under the Oregon Land Donation Act, part of which became “Thompson’s Addition to the City of The Dalles.” Thompson was later appointed Indian agent at the Dalles after that and worked often with the US Army’s quartermaster at Fort Dalles. Thompson became “controlling owner of the largest fleet of bateaux on the upper river, and of the first steamboat to be operated there.”<sup>343</sup> When the OSNC took over the Dalles-Celilo Portage Railroad, Thompson and his OSNC associates controlled that stretch of the river, as well.<sup>344</sup>

Some overlanders found the town less hospitable in this period, complaining that prices were high and speculators were simply looking to make money off of immigrants. David Newsome wrote, “Instead of being received by the Oregon people, with open hearts and arms, and welcomed to their country, we are fleeced without mercy.”<sup>345</sup> The town continued to grow, with some newly arrived overlanders settling at The Dalles, and others coming up from the Willamette Valley to settle. In 1856, Methodists started a new church at The Dalles, followed by a Congregationalist church in 1859 and a Baptist church in 1861.<sup>346</sup> In 1857, the Umatilla House was built as a hotel for travelers passing through via steamship. Historian Martha McKeown wrote, “Besides entertaining travelers, the hotel became a meeting place for steamboat men, miners, sheepmen, cow punchers, freighters, and the citizens of The Dalles.”<sup>347</sup>

The US military expanded Fort Dalles during the violence associated with forced relocation of Indigenous people to reservations.<sup>348</sup> In 1856, when the US military engaged in armed confrontations with Yakama, Klickitat, and Chinookan people, the captain of the *Mary* brought the boat to The Dalles to pick up soldiers stationed at Fort Dalles, who then rode the boat downstream to provide backup.<sup>349</sup>

As upstream travel to the gold mines increased in the late 1850s and early 1860s, The Dalles boomed. Randall Hewitt reported a lot of “gambling resorts,” some of which “were gorgeous in

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<sup>342</sup> Barber, “We were at our journey’s end.” 382–93.

<sup>343</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 161.

<sup>344</sup> Dorothy O. Johansen, “The Oregon Steam Navigation Company: An Example of Capitalism on the Frontier,” *Pacific Historical Review* 10, no. 2 (1941): 179–88, esp. 180.

<sup>345</sup> David Newsome, quoted in Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge,” 142, 144.

<sup>346</sup> Hillgen, “The Wascopam Mission,” 229.

<sup>347</sup> Martha Ferguson McKeown, “Historic Umatilla House at the Dalles,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (March 1930): 37–38.

<sup>348</sup> Oregon Historical Society, “Fort Dalles Surgeon’s Quarters,” National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, September 10, 1971, 2–3.

<sup>349</sup> P. W. Gillette, “A Brief History of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 5, no. 2 (June 1904): 122; Coon, “Klickitat County: Indians of and Settlement by Whites,” 253.

appointments” and “well patronized.”<sup>350</sup> The new train depot, one end of the Dalles-Celilo Portage Railroad, was located “near the Umatilla House at the head of the incline to the wharf boat which was the scene of so many greetings and farewells in early days.”<sup>351</sup> A Portland newspaper, the *Oregonian*, described the town as of 1865:

At The Dalles, lies the second town in Oregon, baring the name of the Dalles, and holding a population of 2,5000. It is the *entrepot* for the [indecipherable] mines in eastern Oregon. . . . Two million dollars in gold dust came in here from eastern Oregon and Idaho in the single month of June . . .<sup>352</sup>

Historian Fred Wilson later described The Dalles in this era as a settler-run town of industry:

In every essential it was a river town. Men talked steamboats; they lived with them; the coming and going of the boats were the crowning activities of the day; the captains and the engineers, the pilots, mates and pursers were the best known men about the town. When evening came and the steamer’s whistle was heard as she rounded Crates Point the most interesting hour of the twenty-four had come. As the passengers reached the Umatilla House, the symbol of hospitality, the townfolk gathered; old friendships were renewed, new acquaintances quickly made, the news and gossip of the outside world told to eager listeners, while the town boys looked on with admiring eyes upon the men ‘who ran the boats.’ . . .

The Dalles took on cosmopolitan airs. Upon the arrival of the Portland boat its streets were thronged until the portage train left for Celilo to connect with the upper steamers. Many stayed over to complete their miner’s outfit and the townsmen put forth every effort to make their stay attractive, with consequent local profit. Business was brisk; money came easily and went with equal facility, and the river as it rolled along was the source of all supply. To speak of steamboat days and omit the Umatilla House would be a paradox indeed. The steamboat and this famous stopping place were inseparable. In the days when the miners were coming the old hotel was the town’s civic center. Everyone went to the Umatilla House if they wanted to find anyone else. In its spacious dining room the dancers gathered for the firemen’s ball or like social festivities. Around the comfortable lobby one could see the men who were making history. Military officers passing through from Fort Vancouver to Fort Walla Walla, civil engineers of prominence on their way to bring improved methods of mining, stockmen, newspaper writers, captains, engineers, deckhands and roustabouts were all here . . .<sup>353</sup>

Wilson made no mention of Indigenous people who were likely still conducting business there. Hewitt’s was one of the only accounts from the 1860s that acknowledged continued Indigenous businesses near The Dalles. He noted that when settlers traveling from Portland to the Shuswap mines passed through The Dalles, “[t]he Indians ferried them across the streams for small presents, handkerchiefs, shirts, etc.”<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 480.

<sup>351</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 157–58.

<sup>352</sup> “The Columbia River—Oregon and its Position,” *Oregonian*, November 7, 1865.

<sup>353</sup> Wilson, “The Lure of the River,” 1–2, 7.

<sup>354</sup> “Letter from the Mines,” *Oregon Argus*, July 3, 1858.

The US military closed Fort Dalles in 1867, satisfied as to the safety of White settlers in the region.<sup>355</sup> By 1870, the town had shed some of its gold-rush roughness and had, in the words of a Portland newspaper writer, “a general appearance of order and cozy comfort; trees are already grown large enough to shade the sidewalks; flowers and ornamental shrubbery are seen in every street.”<sup>356</sup>



**Figure 24. The Dalles town viewed from the East. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

## Travel from The Dalles to the Cascades

### *Water Journey from Dalles to Cascades*

Fur traders had run mackinaw boats (small, open sailboats) or borrowed Indigenous canoes on this stretch of the river for several decades.<sup>357</sup> The HBC sometimes provided sailboats to early overlanders for free, as they did from Fort Walla Walla to Celilo Falls in 1843. However, it is not always clear whether overlanders paid the HBC for these services or who piloted the boats (pilots likely were HBC employees, while local Indigenous people sometimes manned the oars).<sup>358</sup> The missionary Elijah White took one of these sailboats from Wascopam Mission to the head of the Cascades.<sup>359</sup> In 1844, Washington Smith Gilliam’s party dismantled their wagons and brought them—along with the women, children, and most of the men—down to the Cascades in boats supplied by the HBC.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Oregon Historical Society, “Fort Dalles Surgeon’s Quarters,” 2–3.

<sup>356</sup> “Summer Wanderings,” *Oregonian*, June 21, 1870.

<sup>357</sup> “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 8.

<sup>358</sup> Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge,” 147.

<sup>359</sup> A. J. Allen, compiler, *Thrilling Adventures, Travels and Explorations of Doctor Elijah White among the Rocky Mountains and in the Far West . . .* (New York: J. W. Yale, 1859), 167; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 323–24.

<sup>360</sup> “Reminiscences of Washington Smith Gilliam [from 1844],” 208.

Other early overlanders hired Chinookan people to take them down the windy section of the river between the two portages. In 1843, Edward Henry Lenox and David Thomas Lenox hired two Indigenous guides to take most of the family in a Chinook canoe to Oregon City, while a son stayed behind to drive cattle via Chinookan footpaths on the south side of the river.<sup>361</sup> James Nesmith, also traveling in 1843, hired an Indigenous river pilot to take him from the Narrows to the Cascades in a canoe. They completed the journey in several days. Nesmith wrote that the pilots “paddled down the river all day; scenery wild and romantic,” and they continued the following day “with two Indian canoes in company.”<sup>362</sup>

Frémont chose to take the water route rather than a land option, obtaining help from the three Indigenous men he had hired at Wascopam:

Mr. Perkins assisted me in procuring from the Indians a large canoe, in which I designed to complete our journey to Vancouver, where I expected to obtain the necessary supply of provisions and stores for our winter journey. Three Indians from the family to whom the canoe belonged, were engaged to assist in working her during the voyage, and, with them, our water party consisted of Mr. Pruess and myself, with Bernier and Jacob Dodsden. In charge of the party which was to remain at the Dalles I left Carson, with instructions to occupy the people in making packsaddles and refitting their equipage. The village from which we were to take the canoe was on the right bank of the river, about ten miles below, at the mouth of the Tinanens creek [most likely Fifteenmile Creek]; and while Mr. Pruess proceeded down the river with the instruments in a little canoe, paddled by two Indians, Mr. Perkins accompanied me with the remainder of the party by land. The last of the emigrants had just left the Dalles at the time of our arrival, traveling some by water and others by land, making ark-like rafts, on which they had embarked their families and household, with their large wagons and other furniture, while their stock were driven along the shore.

. . . We were a motley group, but all happy: three unknown Indians [owners of the canoe, likely Chinookan people]; Jacob, a colored man; Mr. Preuss, a German; Bernier, creole French, and myself. . . we again embarked, and resumed our pleasant voyage down the river. The wind rose to a gale after several hours; but the moon was very bright, and the wind was fair, and the canoe glided rapidly down the stream, the waves breaking into foam alongside; and our night voyage, as the wind bore us rapidly along between the dark mountains, was wild and interesting. About midnight we put to the shore on a rocky beach, behind which was a dark-looking pine forest. We built up large fires among the rocks, which were in large masses round about, and, arranging our blankets in the most sheltered places we could find, passed a delightful night.<sup>363</sup>

The wind did not always cooperate as it had for Frémont. William T. Newby’s party was detained by high winds for several days on its way to the Cascades.<sup>364</sup>

Once the Barlow Road opened in 1846, most parties avoided this stretch of river altogether. Those who still choose to take the river often did so because they arrived too late in the season to cross the Cascades, due to heavy snow. James Miller’s party was forced to take the river route when

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<sup>361</sup> Charles George Davis, *The South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon. Short Studies in the History of the Oregon Country, Including Strategies in the Cold War over the Far West Frontier* (North Plains, OR: EmigrantsWest.com, 2000), 57.

<sup>362</sup> Nesmith, “Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 358.

<sup>363</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 188–89.

<sup>364</sup> Winton, “William T. Newby’s Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 240.



it arrived at the Dalles too late in the season in 1847. Miller described the process of building rafts, which they did near the Chenoweth Creek confluence, at a point that some called Crates Point:

We went to work cutting dry pine trees, hauled them to the river and built a large raft to carry our wagons and our effects down to the Cascade falls. We knocked the wagons and put first the running gears on the raft, then the wagon beds; then all our other property, and the families on last. In our party now were Jacob Conser and family. He had one wagon. O'Neil had left us before we arrived at The Dalles. There was a detail of six men and boys to drive the stock down the trail to the Cascade falls; so the raft and stock started for their places of meeting again.<sup>365</sup>

The Chenoweth Creek confluence became the common place for building rafts, likely since it was one of the last wide, flat areas on the south side of the river before the riverbed narrowed into a gorge.<sup>366</sup> Elizabeth Dixon Smith's party built their rafts there as well. On the ensuing journey downstream, her party battled sickness, cold, and strong winds:

Oct 28 here [near the mouth of Chenoweth Creek] is a great many emigrants encamped[.] men making rafts[.] others going down in boats which have been sent up by speculators.

Oct 30[.] rainy day[.] making rafts[.] women cooking and washing[.] children crying[.] Indians bartering potatoes for shirts[.] they must have a good shirt for a half a peck of potatoes.

Oct 31 . . . snow close by on the mountain[.] we should have went over the mountains with our wagons but they are covered with snow consequently we must go down by water and drive our cattle over the mountains . . .

Nov 2 we took off our wagon wheels layed them on the raft[.] placed the wagon beds on them and started[.] there are 3 families of us . . . on 12 logs 18 inches through and 40 ft long[.] the water runs 3 inches over our raft. . . .

Nov 9 finds us still in trouble[.] waves dashing over our raft . . . it is very cold[.] the icesickles [*sic*] are hanging from our wagon beds to the water[.] to night a bout dusk Adam Polk expired[.] no one with him but his wife and my self[.] we sat up all night with him while the waves was dashing below.<sup>367</sup>

Otelia DeWitt's party also traveled this section of river via raft. During the journey, her husband died, leaving Dewitt widowed with six children. They buried him in an unmarked grave.<sup>368</sup>

Many early travelers reported seeing tombs on an island a few miles downstream from the Wascopam Mission. This was a Chinookan burial place, which became known as Memaloose Island.<sup>369</sup> Historian Gary E. Moulton explained that "Memaloose Ilahee" came from the "Chinook jargon words for 'land of the dead.'" The site was used as a burial ground by the Wishram or Dalles

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<sup>365</sup> Miller, "Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I.)," 55–68, esp. 64–65.

<sup>366</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 241.

<sup>367</sup> Journal of Elizabeth Dixon Smith in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 140–41.

<sup>368</sup> *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 288.

<sup>369</sup> There was an upper and a lower Memaloose Island: the upper was in the Narrows, while the lower was several miles downstream from The Dalles. References to the islands are often vague, and it can be difficult to decipher which island the writer is talking about. Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 106–7; Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 254–56.

people, both groups in the Chinookan language family.<sup>370</sup> Lewis and Clark noted it in 1805. Nathaniel Wyeth wrote that in 1832, at the foot of the Dalles, he saw

an island called the Isle of the Dead on which there are many sepulchers[,] these Indians usually inter their dead on the Islands in the most romantic situations where the souls of the dead can feast themselves with the roar of the mighty and eternal waters which in life time afforded them sustenance and will to all eternity to their posterity.<sup>371</sup>

William H. Gray called Memaloose Island “Pigeon, or Grave Island,” and his party camped either on the island or near it in February 1837.<sup>372</sup> Jesse A. Applegate wrote that the island was the burial place of the “Waskopum tribe.” He reported, “Others who passed that way across the island said they saw dead bodies everywhere, on rocks, on rafts, in old broken canoes.”<sup>373</sup> The extent of death Applegate saw may have been due to the illnesses that had killed many Indigenous people around the Columbia River Gorge in the late 1830s. Some overlanders pilfered graves on or near Memaloose Island, which aggravated tensions between Indigenous people and overlanders.<sup>374</sup>

The Mounted Riflemen hired Chinookan people to ferry their supplies from the Dalles down to the Cascades via rafts and canoes.<sup>375</sup> Cross gives a detailed description of the journey, which they completed with the assistance of Indigenous people and HBC employees (all bracketed text is from the original quoted work):

[September 24, 1849:] The boats were all loaded and off at half-past nine o'clock. Major Ruff and family and fifty men - also a large quantity of company and private baggage - were transported in three mackinaw boats, one yawl, four canoes, and one whale-boat. . . .

October 2. The balance of the stores were all placed in the boats [and], with the assistance of an increased number of canoes, we left the Old Mission with delight in the hope of soon arriving at the end of our journey. The day remained calm and warm until the afternoon, when a light breeze sprang up, which continued to increase as the sun went down.

The bold mountain scenery soon commenced on both sides of the river, rising gradually in some places from the water's edge. [It was] covered with pine and capped with scrub oak, [which was] only fit for fuel. Other parts of the mountains presented steep, rugged cliffs, sometimes rising perpendicularly from the water and in many places broken into rugged and steep cliffs. About thirteen miles below the Old Mission we passed several rocks standing in the river, which had once been a burying ground for the Indians [Lower Mimaluse Island]. Their object, doubtless, was more to secure their dead from the prowling beasts of prey than [to] any romantic feeling on their part. There were many places for the deposit of the dead, which reminded me very much of old tombs in a dilapidated state, but on a closer examination [they] were found to be made of bark and supported by sticks and boards driven in the ground.

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<sup>370</sup> Gary E. Moulton, editorial note on October 29, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>371</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 175.

<sup>372</sup> “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 6.

<sup>373</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 110–11.

<sup>374</sup> Lindquist, “Stealing from the Dead,” 338–40; De Smet, *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845* 46, 235.

<sup>375</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 253.

The main channel of the river here passes between these rocks and the projecting rocks from the shore, through which a large arch that can be seen in low water presents a singular appearance. The ravines or deep gorges run far back in the mountains and are covered with pine and oak. The scenery, altogether thus far, was very picturesque.

Seven miles from here we came to an Indian village on the right bank of the river in a small valley, where the troops under Major Tucker crossed. [Footnote: Near the mouth of the Klickitat River] Passing back over the mountains they followed a trail which leads to the falls and thence to Fort Vancouver. It is a small bridle-path and entirely impracticable for a wagon road. The river takes a bend here, showing high mountains on the right bank. Those on the left form something of a valley, with but little timber compared with the opposite side. I may remark here that since starting from the Dalles the timber on both sides of the river has appeared very small, with but few exceptions.

The evening was fast drawing to a close when we met Mr. Prew [Footnote: Preu, or perhaps more properly Proulx. Two men by this latter name were in Oregon in 1849. They were Charles and Francois, the former being recorded as a Hudson's Bay company employee. He was probably the man to whom Cross refers] returning with one boat for me. He had been all day making twenty-two miles. As we had a fine breeze from the northeast, which was increasing, I left the canoe and took the barge, leaving it to follow and was soon out of sight. The river began to approach the high mountain range and in many places [it] reminded me, as the moon shone upon the scenery, of the highlands of the Hudson river.<sup>376</sup>

### *Transporting Livestock by Riverbank Trails (1843-1860)*

Overlanders who boated down the river often chose to have some of the men in their party take the livestock by land, via Indigenous trails along the river. Medorem Crawford wrote of this journey by land, which he completed with the help of an Indigenous person who knew the route:

[I] started at 1 o'clock with an Indian Guide, rose a long hill and left the river, traveled over the most romantic country I have yet seen. The day is very pleasant indeed and the tall trees through which we are passing adds much to the beauty of the prospect. On our left arises Mt. Hood with its snowy peak glistening in the sunbeams, on the right & about the same distance Mt. Helena which resembles Mt. Hood very much. As we descended towards evening we saw far below us the river flowing as it were & dividing the two snowy peaks. We descended a considerable of a hill and found the pleasantest camp, the best wood, grass, and water we have had in a long time, travelled 12 miles . . .<sup>377</sup>

In 1844, John Minto's party left their wagons at The Dalles and drove their cattle on a trail on the southern side of the river, south of Mount Hood. They attempted the journey in the winter and, after some livestock died and the party killed others for food, they turned back to The Dalles,

where they were kept until spring and driven down the Columbia river valley trail, crossing to the north side by swimming a little below the mouth of Hood river and back to the south bank below the mouth of Sandy.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 149, 254–56.

<sup>377</sup> Medorem Crawford, journal, 1842, 12, available on OCTA website.

<sup>378</sup> *Transactions of the Fourth Annual Re-union of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1876 and the Annual Address Delivered by Hon. R. P. Boise . . .* (Salem, OR: E. M. Waite, Printer and Bookbinder, 1877), 48.

That same year, Washington Smith Gilliam took his party's livestock over the mountains while the women, children, and the rest of the men went down the river by boat. Gilliam recounted a harrowing journey over the mountains:

Most of the men and some of the larger boys took the task of driving the livestock over the trail that led down the Columbia River, the snow on the mountains having fallen so deep as to preclude the possibility of passing that way. I was assigned to the task of assisting in driving the stock down the trail.

For the first few days the weather was good, but before we reached Cascades Falls the gates of heaven seemed to have opened, and the rain came down in torrents. The stream near where we camped rose in the course of the night so as to make it impossible to cross it. There we were, with very little to live on. Our situation was becoming critical; but about the third day, late in the evening, we got provisions from the Falls, and the next morning the water had fallen so that we could cross. We at once availed ourselves of the favorable condition and crossed and pursued our journey to the Falls, a distance of about ten miles, where we found plenty of food awaiting us. . . .

In taking a retrospect of my life I regard this trip from The Dalles to Vancouver as the severest hardship that it was ever my lot to endure. For days and nights my clothes were never dry. That, coupled with starvation and the frightfully terrible roads over which we traveled, combined to make it such. Yet this occurred when I was only fifteen years old.<sup>379</sup>

Like Gilliam, the Lenox family decided that three men would drive the cattle for fifteen miles over what Edward Lenox called “crude Indian paths.”<sup>380</sup>

At a point downstream of Hood River, overlanders had to cross the Columbia, due to steep cliffs on the southern riverbank. Many had their cattle swim across. In 1847, James Miller described the crossing near Wind Mountain:

At or below Wind Mountain, a few miles above the Cascade falls, we swam our cattle and horses over to the north side of the river and drove them down to or near our camp, close to where our people unloaded from the raft, which had, by the time they arrived there, set very low in the water—so much so that the running gears of the wagons were in the water, the logs getting water-soaked.<sup>381</sup>

Others took their cattle across the Columbia near the mouth of Hood River and then continued on well-established Indigenous footpaths along the north side of the river—paths that were also used frequently by the HBC.<sup>382</sup> When the Mounted Riflemen passed through in 1849, they crossed their livestock from the south to the north side of the Columbia River near the Hood River confluence, according to advice from Indigenous guides with them.<sup>383</sup> Jesse Applegate later described this southern route:

From the Dalles, horse trails cross the Cascade mountains on both sides of Mount Hood—the northern route is the most direct, but the southern is less difficult, and better supplied with grass.

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<sup>379</sup> “Reminiscences of Washington Smith Gilliam [from 1844],” 208–9.

<sup>380</sup> Davis, *South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 57.

<sup>381</sup> Miller, “Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I.),” 55–68, esp. 65.

<sup>382</sup> Davis, *South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 57–60.

<sup>383</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 249.

Though these paths run over very steep and rugged mountains, and were still more difficult from the great quantity of fallen timber, and the thickness of the undergrowth, yet emigrants arriving before the snow was too deep on the mountains, usually drove their animals by one of these trails in preference to twice crossing the Columbia river.<sup>384</sup>

The trails through the gorge were steep and difficult. Origen Thomson, traveling in 1852, described the journey in the pack trail in detail, starting out from The Dalles on the southern bank of the river:

. . . [T]he trail leads across the bottom and, in two and a-half miles, crosses a little branch; half-mile farther is a spring, to the left of the road in some bushes . . . Turning to the left, in two miles we encamped under cover of some bushes . . . Winding around a hill for eight miles we come to a little creek . . . following this a mile turned to the left, and in another mile come near to a spring branch; here ate dinner. We then crossed a very difficult place, the ground being covered with loose stone, very thick, some round and some sharp. Then rose a steep hill, after turning to the right, and a little farther another hill, (altogether about two miles); then came to a very pretty piece of table land covered with grass, where we stopped and let our cattle graze awhile; then rose another steep hill, winding around its side for six miles and passing over a level place, commenced the decent of the mountain. Here night came on us; the head drove of our cattle had started down the hill, and left the hind ones on the top, where there was good grass. At the foot of the first decent is a spring; here we struck a light, after groping our way down the hill in the dark, cooked our supper and laid down to a refreshing sleep. One of our cattle gave out this evening and we had to leave him.

*Friday, September 17–19.* The cattle left on the hillside had wandered considerably, but were found down a ravine about two hundred feet below our camp—all recovered with little trouble. Continuing the decent, in one mile came to the crossing of Dog river [Hood River]; it is quite wide here, but no more than knee deep, the channel rocky and current swift; the water has a dirty yellowish color and is very cold. The place to cross is at the head of the island. The trail is blazed from here to the lower ferry, two miles above the Cascades. In a mile and a-half we stopped where [there] was plenty of grass for an early dinner; six miles more brought us to the brow of the hill overlooking the Columbia River . . . The trail here goes up to a point below which the river is many hundred feet, perpendicular—then turns sharp to the right; the decent is steep and winding for a distance, then turns sharp to the left and descends between ledges of rocks. In a few rods it turns to the right again and continues along the hillside, over a rocky trail, then winds among the bushes until it enters a grassy beach, leaving which turns to the left and descends to the river bottom, which is very marshy next to the river, and in places only wide enough for a trail. The decent is about one mile. We drove down the bottom and camped for the night: poor grass. While laying here, heard a boat passing down. While it was at least two miles off, we could hear distinctly the plash of the oars and the voice of a woman singing; afterwards learned that it was the boat upon which Camilla went down.

*Saturday September 18 – 8.* – In a-half mile came to a very steep hill, and over a very high and steep backbone, and a short distance farther to a rocky point which was quite dangerous, from the fact that there was a large rock near the top that was quite smooth, that had a few steps cut on it, and if the ox missed the ‘chute’ he would fall over, and very likely go to the bottom of the hill, twenty or thirty feet, onto the sharp rocks. A company just ahead of us had a very large and fine-looking ox to fall over, but he lodged against a tree, and, with some help, got up without any farther injury than some bruises: ours got across safely. Two or three more stony points were crossed, but they were of minor importance, and the rest of the way in the bottoms. Encamped about two miles above the upper ferry, after a drive of near eight miles; drove our cattle over a slough onto an island, where there was pretty

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<sup>384</sup> Z, “Road to Oregon—No. 2,” *Spectator*, February 4, 1847. Dale Lowell Morgan identifies “Z” as the pseudonym for Jesse Applegate. Morgan, ed., *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail, Volume 1* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 69–77.

good grass. They were several days behind at the ferry; provisions very high, and ours had been used up.

*Sunday September 19* – To-day one of the Coneys and myself rode down to the lower ferry, to learn the prospect for crossing there; missing it, rode on to the Cascades, and coming back found where it ought to be. The ferry station was on the opposite side, and it was not running, as it was too windy. Found that they crossed as fast as they come, and that the road was practicable. Got back about dark and found that Coneys were just crossing. (The boys got some flour to-day, at 35c. per pound.) . . .<sup>385</sup>

George Tribble, who traveled down the pack trail in 1852, wrote of the danger of the steep trail:

I and four other boys drove our cattle down the river. The stock were poor and weak. At one place called Shellrock Point, if an animal made the least misstep it would fall one hundred and fifty feet on a bar of the river. Hundreds had made that misstep. Consequently there was a pile of dead animals. We were careful to take ours over one at a time and lost none.

We camped about a quarter of a mile from that place. Oh horror of horrors such a hideous night. We had the piercing howl of the coyotes to the agonizing roar of the big timber wolves, black, gray, and yellow. The wolves had congregated from every quarter to eat on the carcasses of the dead cattle. We had to stand guard all night to keep the wolves from attacking us. We had to keep up a perfect fusillade to keep them out of camp.<sup>386</sup>

The rough trail was hard on the livestock, too. George Belshaw wrote that “the animals had sore feet from climbing the hard and rocky mountain roads,” so they camped to let the cattle rest.<sup>387</sup>

Even after the advent of steamship travel, many overlanders still drove their livestock down these trails. In 1851, William Vanbuskirk wrote that he “drove down to the river” after spending five days at The Dalles, then “loaded up and I started on the pack trail with Whislens mare and Fathers.” It took him three days to reach the Cascades via the pack trail.<sup>388</sup> From their boat on the river, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank observed, “the pack trail which passes along here seems almost impassable, the mountains are so very steep.”<sup>389</sup> The sisters hired a man at The Dalles to drive the cattle over that steep trail once winter passed, at the cost of \$6 per head. One member of their party stayed behind with him.<sup>390</sup> In 1851 Edward Conner hired two people to assist with taking their livestock on the trails between The Dalles and the Cascades. The livestock actually beat them there: the journey by trail took only four days to the boat’s six days.<sup>391</sup>

By 1852, two ferries—likely operated by White settlers, although it is unclear—ran across the river to accommodate livestock crossings. The upper ferry, located near Wind Mountain, sometimes

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<sup>385</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 96–98.

<sup>386</sup> Tribble, “Autobiographical Sketches of George William Tribble,” 3–5.

<sup>387</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 236.

<sup>388</sup> William Vanbuskirk, journal, 1851, 5, available on OCTA website.

<sup>389</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 79.

<sup>390</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 78.

<sup>391</sup> T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, p. 11, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website.

stopped running due to high winds. The lower ferry was “two miles above the Cascades.”<sup>392</sup> In 1853, Harvey Hines took the upper ferry from the southern bank to the northern bank. He wrote that “the landing of the flat boat used for ferrying stock” was on the south bank near present-day Lang State Park, directly across from Wind Mountain. The ferryman came over for Hines in a canoe and brought him from the south side of the river to the north side. The ferryman loaned Hines blankets and let him camp near the landing, sharing bread, bacon, and coffee.<sup>393</sup> George Belshaw also took his livestock on one of these ferries in 1853.<sup>394</sup>

### *Steamship from Dalles to Cascades (1851-1870)*

The first steamboat to run between The Dalles and the Cascades was the *James P. Flint*. It was financed by Daniel Bradford, Putnam Bradford, J. O. Vanbergen, and James Flint (a businessman from San Francisco).<sup>395</sup> Harriet Talcott Buckingham, an overlander, took the *Flint* in 1851. Most of her party went over the Cascades Mountains, but, she wrote, “the rest of us came by boat & raft to the Portage of the Cascades, where we camped. The little steam boat James G [*sic*] Flint brought us part of the way.”<sup>396</sup> The *Flint* did not last much longer than Buckingham’s journey: it sank on September 22, 1852. It was later excavated from the river and rebuilt as the *Fashion*.<sup>397</sup> In 1853, two additional steamships began running between The Dalles and the Cascades. One, the *Mary*, was “built at the Cascades,” where a sawmill had been established (see Chapter 6).<sup>398</sup> Another, the *Allan*, was a small propeller boat brought over the Cascades by HBC agents from Oregon City. The *Allan* primarily carried freight, while the *Mary* generally provided passenger service.<sup>399</sup>

Steamboats did not supplant all other means of water travel. Some overlanders could not afford steamship fares and continued to travel this section of the river by other means. George Tribble wrote, “The available transportation consisted of everything from two canoes lashed together to a steamboat.” Tribble “went ten miles below the Dalles and cut pine logs and made a raft to carry our wagons and camp utensils down to the Cascade Falls,” as earlier overlanders had done.<sup>400</sup> James Akin Jr.’s party also built near Chenoweth Creek. They spent several days cutting and hauling logs, caulking their wagons, and preparing their raft for the journey, while three in their party “start[ed] with the cattle on the pack trail.” After a day in which Akin reported they “take our raft to pieces;

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<sup>392</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 96–99.

<sup>393</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 305.

<sup>394</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 236.

<sup>395</sup> Gillette, “A Brief History of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company,” 122; Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 378; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 162.

<sup>396</sup> Journal of Harriet Talcott Buckingham in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 50.

<sup>397</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 163.

<sup>398</sup> Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 378.

<sup>399</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 163.

<sup>400</sup> Tribble, “Autobiographical Sketches of George William Tribble,” 3–5.

put it together again,” they set off for the Cascades. It took them four days to make the journey from Chenoweth Creek to the Cascades; the main cause of delay was wind.<sup>401</sup>

HBC bateaux provided another means of travel, often operated by former fur traders or White settlers. Some towed barges to transport wagons and other belongings. In 1852, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank rode an open keel sailboat from The Dalles to the Cascades.<sup>402</sup> In 1853, T. J. Connor (the brother of Edward, who had taken the family’s livestock on a trail by the river) “put our wagons and goods on a boat,” but experienced delays going downriver from The Dalles “owing to contrary winds.”<sup>403</sup> The Belshaws took a flat-bottomed sailboat from The Dalles to the Cascades in 1853, on which they loaded all of their wagons and goods.<sup>404</sup> Maria Parsons Belshaw described the journey as follows:

SEPTEMBER 16TH. Stay in town [The Dalles] all night then take shipping on the Serpent heavily loaded, many sick ones. Sister Helen and Sister Elizabeth very sick, have been several days, the rest better, start soon.

SEPTEMBER 17TH. Came 16 miles last night—came to shore at 12 o’clock had too much head wind—very windy to-day. Lay at shore for wind to abate. Sick ones no better—all getting impatient.

SEPTEMBER 18TH. Had a fair wind to-day—hoisted the sail and ran into the harbor at the Cascades 4 o’clock this afternoon. Very stormy here, we can scarcely walk about.<sup>405</sup>

Steamboat passenger service influenced the decisions families made about whether to take the river route or the Barlow Road. In 1853, while resting at The Dalles, the Hines family, at the advice of Joseph Hines (who was already living in Portland and had come upstream to meet the party at The Dalles) decided to take the river rather than go through the mountains. Celinda Elvira Hines wrote, “It had been our intention to cross the cascades but uncle J advised us to go by the Dalls . . . and go ourselves down the river,” while Joseph went with the cattle and horses “down [the] pack trail which goes along near the river.”<sup>406</sup> The Hines men had hired a barge to take the family and their belongings to the Cascades, but the boat sprang a leak and everyone disembarked. Instead, Robert Newell, a former trapper and settler in Oregon who the United States had dispatched to minimize tensions with Indigenous people in the area (he had been in the region for many years and his wife was Nez Perce), kept an eye on their belongings and ensured that they arrived safely at the Cascades in a couple of days.<sup>407</sup> Celinda described the uncomfortable journey aboard the *Allan*:

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<sup>401</sup> James Akin, Jr., journal, 1852, in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 273–74.

<sup>402</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 78.

<sup>403</sup> T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, 12, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website.

<sup>404</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 235.

<sup>405</sup> Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 327.

<sup>406</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 300.

<sup>407</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 300–303.



It is a poor apology for a boat very small having no cabin & we were obliged to seat ourselves as best we could on the floor or whatever we could find to sit upon. This is the only steam boat which plies between the Dalls & the Cascades. It was brought here last spring from the Sacramento being the first steam boat which ever run on that river. Were about 7 hours running down (50 miles). The scenery was very romantic indeed. The banks of the river are mostly perpendicular rocks from one to a hundred feet in height. This river is not so wide as the Ohio but much deeper and unlike that river the waters of the Columbia are clear & pure. We landed on a stony beach after dark but succeeded in finding a sandy place & made camp. We had brought our beds but had no tents so we made our beds under the star-spangled arch of heaven & thought no one could wish a more magnificent canopy.<sup>408</sup>

Harvey Hines called the steamboat they took the *Mary*—it is unclear whether he and Celinda were on different boats or if one of them was incorrect in their designation. Harvey wrote that the *Mary* “consisted only of a hull in which was encased a small engine, which propelled it through the water at perhaps five or six miles an hour.” Harvey reported that it took between eight and ten hours to reach the Cascades.<sup>409</sup> Celinda wrote that when they arrived, another boat “laden with emigrants” came in, and the additional settlers “camped around us.”<sup>410</sup>

In 1857, the Bradfords built another steamboat at the Cascades, the *Hassalo*, which went back and forth between The Dalles and the Cascades for a period before later being hauled over Celilo Falls and serving routes farther up the river. It was “the first stern wheeler on the middle river,” and was skippered by Captain Ephraim W. Baughman, who had piloted the *Mary*. Steamboat travel continued to be the primary form of water travel for this stretch of the river through the 1860s, although it remained too expensive for most overlanders. By the late 1860s, steam travel in this stretch of river supported travel to and from the gold mines of Idaho more than it did the travel of overlanders.<sup>411</sup>



Figure 25. The steamship *Oneonta* travels between the Upper Cascades Landing and The Dalles. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

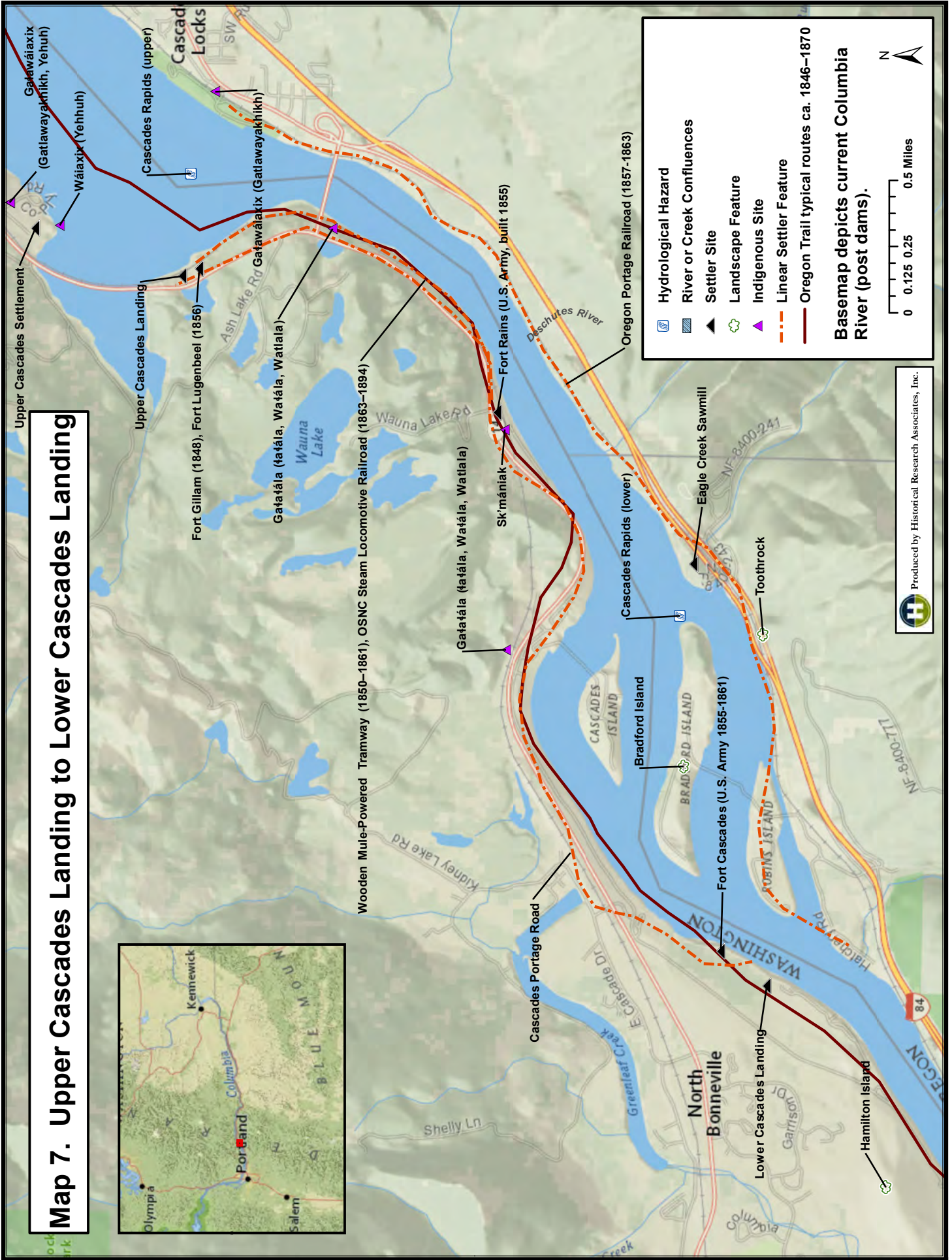
<sup>408</sup> Journal of Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 123–25.

<sup>409</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 301.

<sup>410</sup> Journal of Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 123–25.

<sup>411</sup> Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 378; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 163.

# Map 7. Upper Cascades Landing to Lower Cascades Landing



**Legend**

- Hydrological Hazard
- River or Creek Confluences
- Settler Site
- Landscape Feature
- Indigenous Site
- Linear Settler Feature
- Oregon Trail typical routes ca. 1846-1870

**Basemap depicts current Columbia River (post dams).**

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles

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Produced by Historical Research Associates, Inc.

## Chapter 6: The Cascades Rapids and Portages

The Cascades Rapids ca. 1800



Figure 26. Segment of Charles Wilkes's 1844 map of the Pacific Northwest showing the Cascades Rapids.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

### *Descriptions of Rapids and Explanation of Their Origins*

The Cascades Rapids—also called the Cascades of the Columbia, the Great Chutes, or the Great Falls—were the most significant obstruction to navigation along the Columbia River (see Map 7 for an overview of this section of the river).<sup>412</sup> The six-mile-long stretch of river consisted of a series of rapids, the first of which Clark called the “Great Shute” in 1805:

This Great Shute or falls is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile with the water of this great river[,] Compressed within the Space of 150 paces in which there is great numbers of both large and Small rocks, water passing with great velocity forming & boiling in a most horriable manner, with a fall of about 20 feet, below it widens to about 200 paces and current gentle for a Short distance. a Short distance above is three Small rocky Islands, and at the head of those falls, three Small rocky Islands are Situated Crosswise the river, Several rocks above in the river & 4 large rocks in the head of the Shute; those obstructions together with the high Stones which are continually brakeing loose from the mountain on the Stard Side and roleing down into the Shute aded to those which brake loose from those Islands above and lodge in the Shute, must be the Cause of the rivers daming up to Such a distance above, (and Show) where it Shows Such evidant marks of the Common current of the river being much lower than at the present day.<sup>413</sup>

<sup>412</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 79.

<sup>413</sup> William Clark, October 31, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

Clark drew a map of this section of the river (see Figure 27).

Osborne Cross, who passed the falls in 1849, gave a navigational description of the area:

The Cascades or Great falls of the Columbia river are not more than three-quarters of a mile in length, and there is no part where the water has a perpendicular fall. At the commencement of the rapid the rocks project from the left bank and form a reef partly under water until it nearly crosses to the upper island. This is the first ripple where the water receives an increased velocity. [It] glides swiftly down for about a quarter of a mile, when it passes a high rock and in a short distance meets with some half dozen more, where it commences to boil and foam with all its fury. The river between the island and left bank contracts considerably, and the whole column of water of the Columbia river passes down over masses of rock, forming in its way whirlpools through the whole distance which cause the water to roll up as if there were some immense pressure be low. It makes a magnificent scene. The sublimity of it can hardly be described or surpassed. A continuation to the foot of the rapids will make a distance of four miles. There are several pitches, which are made by the several ledges of rock extending across the river. [These] make it dangerous, particularly when the river is low, as was the case at this time. In high water not only the lower rapids are passed in ascending, but the big falls also, and in fact all the obstructions which are not only met with here and [at] the Dalles, but [at] other places of less importance.<sup>414</sup>

Johnson and Winter described the Cascades Rapids as follows:

Fifty miles below the [Wascopin] Mission we came to the Cascade Falls. Here the River, compressed into two thirds of its usual width, descends over huge rocks several hundred yards, with an inclination of about five degrees; and from the head to the foot of the Rapids, a distance of four miles, the water descends about fifty feet. From the great agitation of the water, caused by its rushing with such velocity down its rocky channel, the surface of the River, for several hundred yards, is as white as a field of snow. On the South, the dark basaltic walls, rising perpendicularly four or five hundred feet, are covered with Pines. There are small Islands of rock, both above and below the Falls many of which are timbered, and huge volcanic fragments cover either shore.<sup>415</sup>



Figure 27. William Clark drew a map of the Cascades in 1805, a version of which was published in Nicholas Biddle's 1814 paraphrased version of the journals.

Source: Nicholas Biddle, et al., *History of the expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky mountains and down the river Columbia to the Pacific ocean, performed during the years 1804–5–6; by order of the government of the United States* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1814).

<sup>414</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 259, 262–64.

<sup>415</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 38.



Figure 28. Upper Cascades Rapids. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, 1883.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

Cross described the noise from the wind in the narrow gorge as “strong enough to silence the sound of the angry waters as they whirled and boiled among the rocks with deafening sound.”<sup>416</sup>

John Kirk Townsend also emphasized the noise of the rapids when he passed them in 1834:

These cascades, or cataracts are formed by a collection of large rocks, in the bed of the river, which extend, for perhaps half a mile. The current for a short distance above them, is exceedingly rapid, and there is said to be a gradual fall, or declivity of the river, of about twenty feet in the mile. Over these rocks, and across the whole river, the water dashes and foams most furiously, and with a roar which we heard distinctly at the distance of several miles.<sup>417</sup>

When the water was low, the rapids covered only part of riverbed, according to Jesse A. Applegate. At those times on the north side of the river, “the stone floor of the bed was covered with soft green moss.”<sup>418</sup>

Daniel Lee and Joseph Frost, missionaries associated with Wascopam, called the Cascades Rapids “the great obstruction to the navigation of this noble river.” Lee and Frost speculated on their origin, citing Indigenous knowledge that the rapids were a relatively recent formation:

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<sup>416</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 259.

<sup>417</sup> John Kirk Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains, to the Columbia River and a Visit to the Sandwich Islands, Chili, &c with a Scientific Appendix* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, and Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1839), 164.

<sup>418</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 112.

The Cascades appear to be of a comparatively recent date, perhaps formed within the last three or four centuries. Above them, for more than twenty miles, the river appears to be twenty feet and upward above its former bed. The Indians say these falls are not ancient, and that their fathers voyaged without obstruction in their canoes as far as the Dalles. They also assert that the river was dammed up at this place, which caused the waters to rise to a great height far above, and that after cutting a passage through the impeding mass down to its present bed, these rapids first made their appearance. The extensive sands in this part of the river, and the trunks of trees standing *erect* where they grew, twenty feet below high water, make it probably that the Cascades are of modern date, and that the channel was formerly much lower than at present. Some of these trunks are from twenty to thirty feet high, and two to three feet through. The wood within is hard and sound; no part appears petrified. The supposition that a subsidence has occurred here appears groundless. Admit a dam at the Cascades, and these appearances perplex no more, their origin seems natural. At the Cascades there are indications that the stream has left its former bed, in which its course was westward, and abruptly turning to the south, rushes on and plunges down in that direction nearly a mile. Then gradually turning to the west one-fourth of a mile, we find the *first rapid*; thence a mile, the *middle rapid*; and a mile and a half further, the *lower rapid*. This appears to be a new channel.<sup>419</sup>

In 1847, overlander Loren B. Hastings summarized the Chinookan origin story of the falls:

The Indians have a tradition that many years ago there was a natural bridge across the Columbia river here and their fathers paddled up and down the river under this bridge; but Mount Hood and Mount Helen got in a passion, and in their rage they shook the earth and caused this bridge to fall in the river and make these falls.<sup>420</sup>

Many other early White people in the Columbia River Gorge relayed Chinookan explanations that the falls had been created relatively recently and suddenly. The presence of the submerged tree stumps upstream of the dam persuaded many of them that the Chinookan account was accurate. For example, Burnett explained why he found the Indigenous understanding of the Cascades convincing:

There was then an Indian tradition that about a hundred years before the Cascades did not exist, but that there was a succession of rapids from the Dalles to where the Cascades are now. The whole volume of the Columbia is now confined to a narrow channel, and falls about thirty feet in the distance of a quarter of a mile. This tradition said that the river gradually cut under the mountain until the projecting mass of huge stones and tough clay slid into the river and dammed up the stream to the height of some thirty feet, thus producing slack water to the Dalles. And I must say that every appearance, to my mind, sustains this view.

The Columbia, like most rivers, has a strip of bottom land covered with timber on one side or the other, but at the Cascades this bottom land is very narrow and has a very different appearance from the bottoms at places on the river above and below. The mountain on the south side of the river looks precisely as if a vast landslide had taken place there, and the huge rocks that lift their gray, conical heads above the water at a low stage go to prove that they could not have withstood that terrible current for many centuries. In the winter when the water is at its lowest stage, immense masses of thick ice come down over these Cascades and strike, with tremendous force against the rocks, and the consequent wearing away must have been too great for those rocks to have been in that position many centuries.

But there is another fact that seems to me to be almost conclusive. As we passed upon the river the water was at a very low stage, and yet some twenty miles above we could see stumps of various sizes

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<sup>419</sup> Lee and Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon*, 199–200.

<sup>420</sup> Loren B. Hastings, quoted in Smith, “The Geology of the Columbia River Gorge,” 6.

standing as thick beneath the water as trees in a forest. The water was clear and we had a perfect view of them. They were entirely sound and were rather sharp in form toward the top. It was evident that the trees had not grown in the water, but it had been backed up over their roots and the tops and trunks had died and decayed, while the stumps being under water, had remained substantially sound; and the reason why they were sharp at the top was that the heart of the timber was more durable than the sapwood which had decayed. Another reason for the sharpness of the stumps at the top is the abrasion caused by the floating masses of ice.

It was the opinion of Governor Fremont that these stumps had been placed in this position by a slide which took them from their original site into the river. But I must think that opinion erroneous because the slide could hardly have been so great in length, and the appearance of the adjacent hills does not indicate an event of that magnitude. It is much more rational, I think, to suppose that the slide took place, at the Cascades, and that the Indian tradition is true. Another reason is that the river at the points where these stumps are found is quite wide, showing an increase of width by the backing up of the water over the bottoms.<sup>421</sup>

Father Pierre-Jean de Smet was also convinced that the Chinookan account was correct, and he also cited the sunken forest as evidence:

There is an interesting, and very plausible Indian account of the formation of these far-famed cascades, on which so much has been said and written, so many conjectures regarding earth-slides, sinks, or swells, caused by subterranean volcanic agents. "Our grandfathers," said an Indian to me, "remember the time when the water passed here quietly, and without obstruction, under a long range of towering and projecting rocks, which, unable to bear their weight any longer, crumbled down, thus stopping up and raising the bed of the river; here it overflowed the great forests of cedar and pine, which are still to be seen above the cascades." Indeed, the traveller beholds with astonishment, a great number of huge trunks of trees, still standing upright in water about twenty feet deep. No person, in my opinion, can form [form] a just idea of the cause that produced these remarkable changes, without admitting the Indian narrative.<sup>422</sup>

Geologists in the twentieth century agreed with the Chinookan conclusion about the origins of the Cascades. In 1936, geologist Donald Lawrence wrote,

At some former time the Columbia River, flowing smoothly seaward, pressed close to the base of the north wall of the gorge, against former cliffs of Table Mountain and Greenleaf Peak. These 3400-foot heights are capped by a hard layer of basalt 1500 feet thick. . . . While this basaltic cap was being undermined by the river, the land was also subsiding. Upstream for a score of miles the channel lay about as it does now, but it was deeper and in many places narrower at high water by at least 70 yards than it is today at low water. Upland trees grew down to the edge of this ravine, where their roots were seldom or never flooded by spring freshets. When the river bed had subsided to about 100 feet below present mean sea level, according to Hodge, the undercut north wall toppled over into the channel at a point (Fig. 4) about two miles due west of the present town of Cascade Locks and precipitated a landslide that carried millions of tons of rock and soil into the channel and across to the south wall of the gorge. The slide may have been cataclysmic, as most students seem to have thought, or it may have been more or less gradual, as Berkey implies, but there is no reason to doubt that an effective dam was created impounding the river above.<sup>423</sup>

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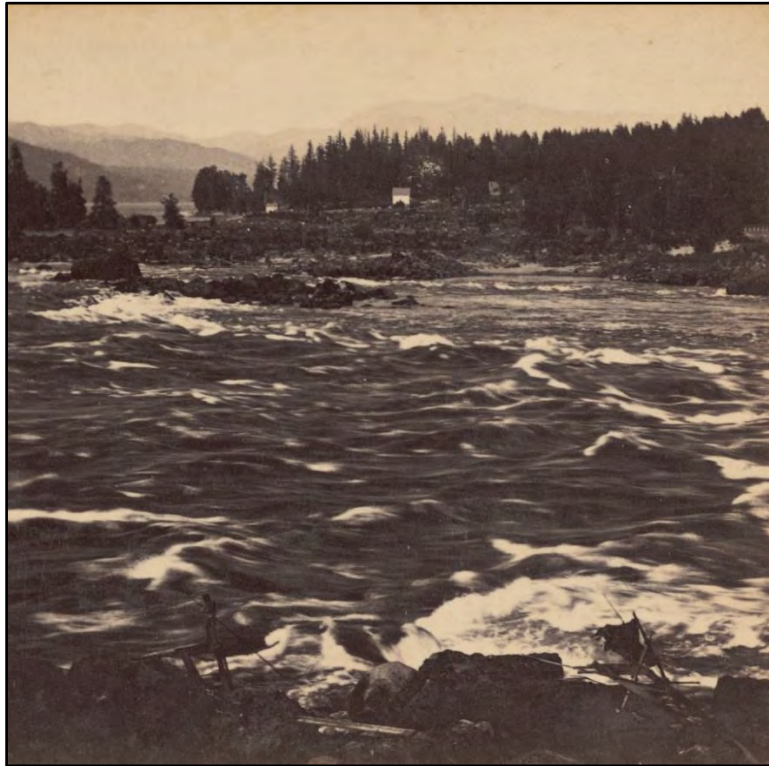
<sup>421</sup> Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Chapter III," 89.

<sup>422</sup> De Smet, *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845* 46, 231.

<sup>423</sup> Lawrence, "The Submerged Forest of the Columbia River Gorge," 586.

Other geologists confirmed that landslides had occurred, and the river changed course after the slide.<sup>424</sup> Geologists later called this event the Bonneville Landslide, and they estimate that it occurred between 1400 and 1500 CE.<sup>425</sup>

### *Indigenous Villages at the Cascades*



**Figure 29. Indigenous people fishing at the Cascades of the Columbia (foreground). Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

There were several Indigenous villages around the Cascades Rapids as of 1805. The most significant settlement was at the upper end of the Cascades, just east of what is now known as Ashes Lake. Lewis and Clark called this village Yehhuh, and in Chinookan, it has been called wáiaxix. When the fish were running, the people at this village moved across the river to the present-day townsite of Cascade Locks, known as gaławáiaxix (Gatlawayakhikh) (also in Chinookan, as are the names below).<sup>426</sup> Clark observed this movement in 1806:

The inhabitants of the Yeh-huh Village on the North side immediately above the rapids have lately removed to the opposite side of the river, where it appears they usually take their salmon. like their relations the Wah-Clel-lars they have taken their houses with them. . . . these houses are most generally built with boards and covered with bark. . . . several families inhabit the same apartment.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Lawrence, “The Submerged Forest of the Columbia River Gorge,” 585.

<sup>425</sup> Elizabeth A. Sobel, Kenneth M. Ames, and Robert J. Losey, “Environmental and Archaeology of the Lower Columbia,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia*, 39.

<sup>426</sup> Zenk et al., “Chinookan Villages of the Lower Columbia,” 8–9; Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 37.

<sup>427</sup> Meriwether Lewis, April 11, 1806 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.



Other Chinookan- and Sahaptin-speaking people visited the Cascades seasonally to fish. Anthropologist Robert Boyd explained the importance of the fishery at the Cascades, and the villages downstream from gaławáiaxix and wáiaxix:

The Upper Cascades was the site of the major rapids; here also was the most important dip-net fishery on the reeds and rocks just upstream from the modern Bridge of the Gods. . . . Below the Bridge of the Gods was a rough stretch of river and a portage that terminated at a possible second winter village, *sk'mániak* (at the site of Fort Rains; contemporary Skamania is seven miles downstream), already abandoned when Lewis and Clark visited. . . . There was another stretch of rapids, reeds, and fishing areas near Garrison Eddy at the downstream tip of Bradford Island.<sup>428</sup>

Just downstream from the abandoned *sk'mániak* townsite was Juqixayagilxam (Kikhayagilkham), a burial site for the people of the Cascades.

There were several seasonal villages along the rapids, inhabited by Chinookan people (the people and villages have been called Watlala, gałałála, łałála, or wałála).<sup>429</sup> Watlala was likely a seasonal residence for some Chinookan people who lived near present-day Portland the rest of the year, while others may have lived at the Cascades full-time, and still others came to the Cascades only when the salmon were running.<sup>430</sup> Lewis described a settlement he called Wah-clel-lah (likely the same village that has been called *nimišxáya* by ethnographers), which he placed about a mile downstream from Beacon Rock:

This village appears to be the winter station of the Wah-clel-lahs and Clahclellars, the greater part of the former have lately removed to the falls of the Multnomah, and the latter have established themselves a few miles above on the North side of the river opposite the lower point of brant island, being the commencement of the rapids, here they also take their salmon; they are now in the act of removing, and not only take with them their furniture and effects but also the bark and most of the boards which formed their houses.<sup>431</sup>

After Indigenous removal, most known survivors of the Upper Chinookan people living at the Cascades, who have been called Watlala, Shahala, or Cascades, joined Wasco people at the Warm Springs Reservation or Wishram people on the Yakama Reservation.<sup>432</sup>

### *Portage Trails and Early Accounts of Portages*

The Cascades were an important bottleneck on the Columbia. As of the early 1800s, Upper Chinookan people living near the rapids, often called Cascades Indians by settlers and traders,

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<sup>428</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 37.

<sup>429</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 37–40; Zenk et al., “Chinookan Villages of the Lower Columbia,” 8–9.

<sup>430</sup> David V. Ellis, “Cultural Geography of the Lower Columbia,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia*, 55–60.

<sup>431</sup> Meriwether Lewis, April 9, 1806 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>432</sup> Gary Moulton, editorial note on William Clark, et al., November 2, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

controlled the portage around the rapids. The power that came with controlling this portage continued as fur traders, missionaries, and settlers arrived.

Early non-Indigenous people passing through the Cascades described a well-defined Chinookan trail around the rapids. In 1805, William Clark scouted the trail:

I took two men and walked down three miles to examine the Shute [Cascades Rapids] and river below proceeded along an old Indian path, passd. an old village at 1 mile on an elevated Situation of this village contained verry large houses built in a different form from any I had Seen, and laterly abandoned, and the most of the boads put into a pond of water near the village, as I conceived to drown the flees, which was emencely noumerous about the houses—. I found by examation that we must make a portage of the greater perpotion of our Stores 2½ miles, and the Canoes we Could haul over the rocks, I returned at Dark[.] Capt Lewis and 5 men had just returned from the village, Cap L. informed me that he found the nativs kind, they gave him berries, nuts & fish to eate; but he could get nothing from them in the way of information.<sup>433</sup>

Clark then explained how Indigenous people and his own party accomplished the portage:

Set all hands packing the loading over th portage which is below the Grand Shutes and is 940 yards of bad way over rocks & on Slipery hill Sides[.] The Indians who came down in 2 Canoes last night packed their fish over a portage of 2½ miles to avoid a 2d *Shute*. four of them took their canoes over the 1st portage and run the 2d Shute, Great numbers of Sea otters, they are So Cautious that I with deficulety got a Shute at one to day, which I must have killed but Could not get him as he Sunk. . . . We got all our Canoes and baggace below the Great Shute 3 of the canoes being Leakey from injures recved in hauling them over the rocks, obliged us to delay to have them repaired[.] a bad rapid just below us three Indian canoes loaded with pounded fish for the &c. trade down the river arrived at the upper end of the portage this evening.<sup>434</sup>

Upper Chinookan people continued to control the area around the Cascades Rapids as fur traders began traveling along the river regularly, and they assisted traders with the portage, for a price. A malaria epidemic in 1831 caused settlement patterns to change at the Cascades by the mid-1830s.<sup>435</sup> When Nathaniel Wyeth passed the Cascades in 1832, he reported that his party portaged and saw only a few Indigenous people, but many dead bodies.<sup>436</sup>

When John Kirk Townsend passed through the portage in 1834, he noted a “small Indian village” above the Cascades, but his party appears to have passed through without hiring any Indigenous assistance. Going it alone was not easy, as Townsend described:

It is wholly impossible for any craft to make its way through these difficulties, and our light canoes would not live an instant in them. It is, therefore, necessary to make a portage, either by carrying the canoes over land to the opposite side of the cataracts, or by wading in the water near the shore, where the surges are lightest, and dragging the unloaded boat through them by cable. Our people chose the latter method, as the canoes felt very heavy and cumbersome, being saturated with the rain which was still falling rapidly. They were accordingly immediately unloaded, the baggace placed on the shore, and the men entered the water to their necks . . . In the meantime, Mr. N., and myself were sent ahead . . .

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<sup>433</sup> William Clark, October 30, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>434</sup> William Clark, November 1, 1805 entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>435</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 38.

<sup>436</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 176.

We found a small Indian trail on the river bank, which we followed in all its devious windings, up and down hills, over enormous, piles of rough flinty rocks, through brier bushes, and pools of water, &c., &c., for about a mile and descending near the edge of the river, we observed a number of white men who had just succeeded in forcing a large barge through the torrent, and were then warping her into still water near the shore. . . .

In the mean time, we had all to walk back along the circuitous and almost impassable Indian trail, and carry our wet and heavy baggage from the spot where the boats had been unloaded. The distance, as I have stated, was a full mile, and the road so rough and encumbered as to be scarcely passable. In walking over many of the large and steep rocks, it was often necessary that the hands should be used to raise and support the body; this, with a load, was inconvenient. Again, in ascending and descending the steep and slipper hills, a single mis-step was certain to throw us in the mud, and bruise us upon the sharp rocks which were planted all around. This accident occurred several times with us all.

Over this most miserable of all roads, with the cold rain dashing and pelting upon us during the whole time, until we felt as though we were frozen to the very marrow, did we all have to travel and return four separate times, before our baggage was properly deposited. it was by far the most fatiguing, cheerless, and uncomfortable business in which I was ever engaged, and truly glad was I to lie down at night on the cold, wet ground, wrapped in my blankets, out of which I had just wrung the water, and I think I never slept more soundly or comfortably than that night.<sup>437</sup>

In 1836, the Whitmans had their boat towed over the falls on a rope, likely with assistance from HBC employees, who usually pulled their bateaux over the rapids in this manner. Burnett later wrote that HBC employees would “let down [the bateau] by means of ropes in the hands of the Canadian boatmen.”<sup>438</sup>

Some Indigenous river pilots could steer boats over the Cascades Rapids, depending on the water level. In 1839, Thomas Farnham explained how a skilled pilot saw his party safely through part of the rapids:

The bowsman dips his paddle deeply and quickly; the frail canoe shoots to the northern shore between a string of islands and the mainland; glides quickly down a narrow channel; passes a village of cedar board wigwams on a beautiful little plain to the right; it rounds the lower island; behold the Cascades! An immense trough of boulders of rocks, down which rushes the “Great River of the West.” The baggage is ashore; the Indians are conveying the canoe over the portage. . . . The current was strong where we reentered our canoe, and bore us along at a brisk rate.<sup>439</sup>

Around 1840, Tamakoun (or Tamakun) appears to have been the most influential leader at the Cascades. Paul Kane painted Tamakoun in 1847, a year before he died, likely due to measles during the epidemic of that year. Tamakoun’s death was part of a broader trend: the number of Indigenous people living at the Cascades declined quickly as they became victims of disease and occasional

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<sup>437</sup> Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains*, 164–67.

<sup>438</sup> Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 89; Burnett, “Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer,” Chapter III, 84.

<sup>439</sup> Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *Farnham’s Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anabua and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory* (1843, reprinted Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2007), 371–76.

violence.<sup>440</sup> Still, Upper Chinookan people at the Cascades continued to control the portage in the 1840s as settlers began arriving in large numbers.



**Figure 30.** Tamakoun was the leader of the village at the head of Cascades during most of the 1840s, until his death in 1847. Paul Kane, 1847.

Source: Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Gift of Raymond A. Willis in memory of his mother, Emmie à Court (“Chelsea”), daughter of Allan Cassels and granddaughter of the Honourable G. W. Allan.

## Early Accounts of Overlanders (1843-1850)

Nearly all overlanders in 1843 paid Chinookan people at the Cascades for some sort of assistance to get around the rapids. The typical way of making the portage was to walk around the Upper Cascades Rapids, and then either portage the remaining rapids or go by boat if conditions were favorable.<sup>441</sup> Chinookan people provided services to overlanders that could include any part of that journey. For example, Edward Evans Parish paid “four Indians” to transport his party’s goods at the portage.<sup>442</sup> James Nesmith hired an Indigenous man to assist the pilot they had already hired

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<sup>440</sup> Boyd, *People of The Dalles*, 39–40.

<sup>441</sup> Burnett, “Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer,” Chapter III,” 84–87.

<sup>442</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 119.

upstream get through the lower rapids, while Nesmith and the rest of the party went around the rapids on foot.<sup>443</sup>

Indigenous guides told John C. Frémont that paying Chinookan people to assist with portaging was typical:

In less than an hour we halted on the left bank, about five minutes' walk above the cascades, where there were several Indian huts, and where our guides signified it was customary to hire Indians to assist in making the *portage*. When travelling with a boat as light as a canoe, which may easily be carried on the shoulders of the Indians, this is much the better side of the river for the portage, as the ground here is very good and level, being a handsome bottom, which I remarked was covered (*as was now always the case along the river*) with a growth of green and fresh-looking grass. It was long before we could come to an understanding with the Indians; but at length, when they had first received the price of their assistance in goods, they went vigorously to work; and in a shorter time than had been occupied in making our arrangements, the canoe, instruments, and baggage were carried through (a distance of about half a mile) to the bank below the main cascade, where we again embarked, the water being white with foam among ugly rocks, and boiling into a thousand whirlpools. The boat passed with great rapidity, crossing and recrossing in the eddies of the current. After passing through about 2 miles of broken water, we ran some wild-looking rapids, which are called the Lower Rapids, being the last on the river, which below is a tranquil and smooth—a broad, magnificent stream.<sup>444</sup>

Burnett, reliant on Indigenous people to make this portage, complained about them and described with admiration Frémont's tactics to force Chinookan people to do what he wanted:

It took us some days to make the portage, it raining nearly all the while. At the head of the Cascades there were several large, projecting rocks, under one side of which the Indians could lie on the clean, dry sand, secure from the rain. They would build a fire in front and sit or lie under the projecting rocks; and, as they were at home with their kindred and families, they were in no hurry to go forward, and were not much disposed to go out in bad weather. . . .

We were anxious to proceed, as Governor Fremont had still to make the perilous journey to California, but there were only some five to eight whites to several hundred Indians. But the cool, determined, yet prudent, Fremont managed to command our Indians and induce them to work. When nothing else would avail, he would put out their fires. Finding it necessary to work or shiver, they preferred to work.<sup>445</sup>

At the bottom of the Cascades, Frémont saw many overlanders camped along the rapids:

On a low broad point on the right bank of the river, at the lower end of these rapids, were pitched many tents of the emigrants, who were waiting here for their friends from above, or for boats and provisions which were expected from Vancouver. In our passage down the rapids, I had noticed their camps along the shore, or transporting their goods across the portage.<sup>446</sup>

These people were waiting for the men and livestock, or for the HBC to bring up supplies and provisions. They pitched tents to stay in while they waited for their families or supplies. William Newby wrote that at Cascade Falls, “we met Capt. Waters with a larg [sic] bo[a]t & a supply of

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<sup>443</sup> Nesmith, “Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 358.

<sup>444</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 189.

<sup>445</sup> Burnett, “Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer,” Chapter III, 87.

<sup>446</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 189.

pervision. We left our canoes a bove the fawls & went a bord the bote.”<sup>447</sup> Overton and Winter also noted seeing an HBC bateau that “had been brought up from the Fort, for the accommodation of the Emigrants.”<sup>448</sup>

Those who did not pay Chinookan people or the HBC to assist with the portage often described an uncomfortable journey, such as Washington Smith Gilliam in 1844:

When we arrived here the oxen were taken to haul the wagons around the portage, which detained us probably two days, after which we resumed our journey, and, enduring hunger, drenching rains and traveling over the worst roads that I ever saw, we reached Vancouver early in December.<sup>449</sup>

As more and more overlanders arrived, the Upper Cascades Landing became a rendezvous point for families who had taken makeshift rafts from The Dalles downstream. Since the men in a party often drove livestock from The Dalles via the riverbank trails, the women, children, and remaining men in the party often waited at a landing above the Upper Cascades Rapids, close to the village of wáiaxix, for the rest of their party and the livestock.<sup>450</sup> John Minto, traveling upriver to meet others in his party, described the sometimes pitiful state of overlanders by the time they reached this section of the river:

. . . we proceeded up the river and found the families in scattered bands making their way down as best they could—some in canoes, some on rafts, and most by batteau, suffering wet, cold and hunger; to an extent pitiable to see. I found the mother of the family with whom I had left Missouri at the Cascade falls. She had traded the best dress she had the evening before to an Indian for about a peck of potatoes; these were not eaten by her family and famishing neighbors. Her husband, Capt. R. W. Morrison, was in the Cascades with the snow bound cattle, so near famished that some who were in the same situation had eaten their only dog.<sup>451</sup>

Burnett described an uncomfortable stay the base of the Cascades when traveling back upriver, while the Chinookan people, accustomed to the journey and the weather, had little trouble:

The Indians, with the three canoes, had passed on farther up the river, and although we fired signal shots, they could not be induced to return. They had with them the sugar and tea, and the Indian lodge, composed of buffalo-skins, neatly dressed and sewed together. This lodge was in a conical form, about fourteen feet in diameter at the base and eighteen feet high, with a hole at the base of about two by three feet for a door, and one in the top for the escape of the smoke. A deer-skin formed the door-shutter, and the fire was built in the center, around which we sat with our backs to the lodge; and when we lay down we put our feet to the fire and our heads from it. In this way we could be warm and comfortable, and free from the effects of the wind and rain, without being at all incommoded by the smoke from our small fire, as it rose straight up and passed out through the hole in the top of the lodge. The lodge was supported by long, strong, smooth poles, over which it was tightly stretched. It was far superior to any cloth tent I ever saw. . . .

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<sup>447</sup> Winton, “William T. Newby’s Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 240.

<sup>448</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 38.

<sup>449</sup> “Reminiscences of Washington Smith Gilliam [from 1844],” 209.

<sup>450</sup> Davis, *South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 57–58.

<sup>451</sup> *Transactions of the Fourth Annual Re-union of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1876 . . .*, 48.

Soon after we had lain down the rain began to fall gently, but continued steadily to increase. At first, I thought it might rain as much as it pleased without wetting through my blankets, but before day it came down in torrents, and I found the water running under me, and into the pockets of my pantaloons and the tops of my boots. It was a cold rain, and the fire was extinguished. I could not endure all this, and I sat up during most of the remaining portion of the night upon a log of wood, with one pair of blankets thrown over my head, so as to fall all around me. In this way I managed to keep warm, but the weight of the wet blankets was great, and my neck at last rebelled against the oppression. I finally became so fatigued and sleepy that just before day, when the rain had ceased, I threw myself down across some logs of wood, and in that condition slept until daylight. . . .

Next morning we rose fresh and fasting and ascended to the Indian encampment, where the Governor [Frémont] found our Indians comfortably housed in the lodge, cooking breakfast.<sup>452</sup>

In 1847, Elizabeth Dixon Smith Geer recounted her party's difficult journey on the portage trail around the Cascades:

Nov. 18 my husband is sick[.] it rains and snows[.] we start this morning around the falls with our wagons[.] we have 5 miles to go[.] I carry my babe and lead, or rather carry, another through snow, mud and water, al most to my knees it is the worst road that a team could possibly travel[.] I went ahead with my children and I was afraid to look behind me for fear of seeing the wagons tum over into the mud and water with everything in them[.] my children gave out with cold and fatigue and could not travel and the boys had to unhitch the oxon and bring them and carry the children on to camp[.] I was so cold and numb that I could not tell by the feeling that I had any feet at all[.] we started this morning at sunrise and did not get to camp untill after dark and there was not one dry thread on one of us not even my babe[.] I had carryed my babe and I was so fatigued that I could scarcely speak or step[.] when I got here I found my husband lying in Welches wagon very sick[.] he had brought Mrs. Polk down the day before and was taken sick here[.] we had to stay up all night tonight for our wagons are left half way back[.] I have not told half we suffered. I am inadequate to the task[.] here was some hundreds camped waiting for boats to come and take them down the columbia to vancouver or Portland or Origion City.<sup>453</sup>

James Miller's party also had to wait for their livestock, which arrived at the Upper Cascades Landing "one or two days" after the raft did. Miller wrote, "We next hitched up our teams and pulled our wagons five miles over the portage."<sup>454</sup>

When the Mounted Riflemen passed through the Cascades in 1849, they hired Chinookan people at the falls to help move the regiment's supplies over the falls.<sup>455</sup> Cross had sent several men in a raft downriver, which they attempted to take over the falls. In the Cascades Rapids, the raft overturned, and "Six men were buried within the whirlpools." Two men survived the ordeal with only minor bruises, having been carried by the current over the falls.<sup>456</sup> The rest of Cross's party transported their HBC mackinaw boats over the portage road on the north side of the river (rather than through the rapids). They did so at the suggestion of a Canadian trader and Chinookan people

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<sup>452</sup> Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Chapter III," 86–87.

<sup>453</sup> Journal of Elizabeth Dixon Smith in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 142–43.

<sup>454</sup> Miller, "Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I)," 55–68, esp. 65.

<sup>455</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 251.

<sup>456</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 260–61.

assisting the Mounted Riflemen through the area who said it was too dangerous to pass through the rapids in high water. Cross described the portage road as challenging and in poor condition:

Mr. Proulx, the Canadian who had charge of the Indians, . . . assembled the Indians, and with about forty of them transported three mackinaw boats, one yawl, and a whale-boat half a mile over one of the most rugged roads I have ever traveled. [It] was filled with rocks and [passed] through a thick pine forest. The stores were carried in a wagon and every preparation [was] made to leave by sundown. This was performing the work [in less time] than that [usually consumed] when boats were [taken] down by water. It may never be equaled again, much less surpassed. Having no further use for the canoes, which had been employed at the Dalles to assist in transporting the stores to the falls, they were all discharged and a large mackinaw boat substituted. This was too large to bring over the falls when the first were brought to the Dalles.

The banks of the river about here are extremely rocky, [while] the mountains are high and steep and thickly covered from their base to the top with pine, fir, and hemlock. The timber on the right bank of the river is much better than that on the left, as the mountains are not so high and the land more rolling. Much of the timber has been destroyed by fire along this part of the river, as it [has been] through [to] the Pacific.

October 4. At sunrise the loading was renewed and finished by half-past eight p.m. Then the boats were taken by Mr. Proulx to the foot of the rapids. The detachment under Captain Claiborne was marched down, while Lieutenant Denman and his family walked to the foot of the rapids as they were at that time considered too dangerous to venture a boat. It was thought better to let the stores go [in boats] and the men could walk. . . .

Towards the lower part of the rapids there is quite a clearing at what was once an Indian encampment. Here the timber is very fine and easy of access.”<sup>457</sup>

In 1850, Mary Jane Hayden’s party hired an Indigenous river pilot to assist with landing, but he backed out because of the poor quality of their boat. She then received assistance from a soldier, and then eventually rejoined her party. Her description of the portage is included at length below, because it provides a useful snapshot into what interactions between Indigenous people, the increasing US military presence in the region, and overlanders were like at the time. Hayden wrote,

We had been warned of the danger of being drawn into the current at the Cascades and so hired an Indian to pilot us to the right landing. On getting to the landing we expected to get an Indian to take our boat over the falls as they did the whale boats, but they looked at it, shook their heads, saying in Chinook, “Wake Close Kanim, wake tickey.” Interpreted, “It is not a good boat and I don’t want to.” And they didn’t. We camped for the night and like McCawber, hoping something would turn up that we could see a way out. Sure enough in the morning we found two soldiers who were going to the Lower Cascades with a six-mule team and we got them to put our boat upon top of their wagon bed and put our freight in it. I was helped upon top of that, a very high perch I assure you. I was not able to walk the five miles of portage, so had to ride.

. . . of all the roads or rough places in my twenty-five hundred miles of unbroken roads and canyons, this was the worst. I don’t think the wheels touched the soil. It was rock the whole distance. Our three men and one soldier, walked, the other soldier riding his wheel saddle mule.

As we left the Upper Cascades our route lay along the mountain side going higher all the way to a hundred and fifty feet above the river bank and where we came to an immense rock which crossed

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<sup>457</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 262–64.



our road. It was a very rough rock and sloped back from where we had to go, not leaving room enough for the wagon, so they cut young fir trees and laid them on the side of the rock leaving the butts of the trees for two wheels to rest on. All that held these trees in place was some dirt thrown on the tops to keep them from sliding off. The driver steered his leaders up on the side of the rock as far as he could until they commenced to slide down (they were all rough shod), so by that time the next two mules were climbing the rock. As they slid down the wheels were on the rock and the wagon was on the ends of those poles shaking up and down and I on top of that high load. As soon as we were around and on level ground the driver turned around in his saddle and said, "Madam, I want you to get down." I asked, "Why?" He said, "My team came near dragging me over the bank yesterday, and I can depend only on my wheelers." There I had sat looking over the bank or side of the mountains away above tall fir trees growing below, the wagon teetering up and down. That was the worst experience of my whole trip. That soldier will never be whiter when dead than he was when he turned in his saddle and spoke to me. There had not been a word uttered since we had started. I got down, but I don't know how I did it, and he drove off and left me without another word. From there on the road was as level as a house floor. I suppose you will wonder what I did (I didn't cry). This time I was left alone in the road, but I knew that the three men who were walking would be along after a little, so I hunted a log and sat down finally, as they had not come. I hunted berries, ate two or three and then thought they might be poisonous so threw the rest away.

When the men came we followed our wagon-bed, as that contained all our earthly possessions and a walk of less than a mile over a smooth level road, brought us to the depot of supplies, and my driver had quite recovered from his fright. We proceeded to unload and launch our boat, thinking our difficulties all overcome. We did not know of two or three miles of very dangerous rapids. We had not gone far until we saw what was before us. Great tall rocks which we could not pass, the water was so swift and rough. We went ashore and took our freight up the bank and then wrapped the empty boat around with ropes which we had used many times in emergencies, then carrying the freight up the bank and down to the boat. This we did three times in getting through the rapids. No boat could go up the rapids and only dug-out boats with Indians could come down.<sup>458</sup>

## Improvements at the Cascades Portage (1851-1870)

### *Mule-Powered Tramway (Early 1850s)*

The Upper Chinookan people who controlled the Cascades declined in numbers as a result of disease, US government attempts to remove them, and the actions of White settlers. Settlers seized the opportunity to capitalize on the difficulty of travel around the Cascades. In 1850, Francis A. Chenoweth began construction of a wooden portage railroad along the north side of the Upper Cascades Rapids. His railroad connected the portage around the upper rapids with the portage around the lower rapids, about 2 ½ miles. Both the rails and the mule-drawn cars were constructed of wood, and it was sometimes called a mule-powered tramway.<sup>459</sup>

The tramway made traveling easier than it had been by the portage route, despite the fact that it primarily carried freight, not passengers. A. A. Denny provided one of the earliest accounts of a settler taking the tramway in 1851. After arriving at the Upper Cascades Landing, Denny wrote that

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<sup>458</sup> Hayden, *Pioneer Days*, 23–25.

<sup>459</sup> Jeff Terry, "Legacy of the Oregon Pony," *Trainmaster (Pacific Northwest Chapter National Railway Historical Society)* (June 2012): 3; Gillette, "A Brief History of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company," 121; Friedel and Toedtmeier, "Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins's 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge," 404.

he “took the hand car on the portage. 2 miles to the next point for shipping.”<sup>460</sup> The following year, Parthenia Blank described a mule-powered tramway and related infrastructure at the Upper Cascades Landing:

Here is a large warehouse and from it proceeds a railroad 3 miles long, made of scantling and plank without iron. On this runs a small car propelled by a mule attached to it by a long rope for an engine, and a pair of thills between which the engineer stations himself and walks and guides the car. On this the charge is 75 cents per 100 pounds, but takes no passengers. At the end of the railroad the goods have to be let down perpendicularly some 150 feet to the river, from whence they are taken on a boat to the steamboat landing, about 3 miles more. Charge, 75 cents in all.<sup>461</sup>

In 1853, Celinda Hines wrote, “there is a wooden rail road between here [Upper Cascades Landing] & the lower landing 5 miles.”<sup>462</sup> It is not clear exactly how long the railroad was, or whether it had been extended during the year since Blank arrived. In 1853, Chenoweth sold the operation to the Bradford brothers.<sup>463</sup>



**Figure 31.** The mule-powered tramway pictured here is the Oregon Portage Railroad, on the Oregon side, which at one point had a small steam locomotive (“The Oregon Pony”), but after its retirement, the operator of the Eagle Creek Sawmill used mules to carry cars over the wooden railroad. This system is similar to what Bradford operated on the Washington side of the portage starting in 1851. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

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<sup>460</sup> A. A. Denny, “Journal of the Route to Oregon,” 1851 (transcribed 1940), 11, available on OCTA website.

<sup>461</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 79. This journal also printed in Holmes and Duniway, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 5*.

<sup>462</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 303.

<sup>463</sup> Terry, “Legacy of the Oregon Pony,” 3.

Those who could not afford to pay for the portage railroad waited for the members in their party who had been traveling with the livestock to arrive, reassembled their wagons (having had taken them apart to raft them down from Chenoweth Creek), and carried their supplies in their wagons.<sup>464</sup> The portage remained a difficult journey.<sup>465</sup> T. J. Connor reported that when he reached the Cascades in 1853, “We put up our wagons and went round the Portage to the foot of the Cascades.”<sup>466</sup> Celinda Hines, after noting the wooden railroad, traversed the portage on foot. “The highway is very bad,” Hines wrote, “We were obliged on that account to go all the way on foot.” Hines was one of the few people who had positive things to say about the portage around the rapids:

The walk down was delightful. Were it not for our anxiety about the teams it would have been truly enchanting. The scenery is exceedingly wild. Mountains towered 100’s of feet above us & the river now rolling in terrific madness now as placid as a sleeping infant’s brow.<sup>467</sup>

Harvey Hines, traveling with Celinda, agreed that the highway was bad. He also noted remnants of the same Chinookan burials:

The road was—well, there was no road. It was simply now driving our wagons on the great rocks and boulders that lay on the river’s bank, or then out among the yew and fir and hemlock that covered the mountain points. Of all the rough places of which we had seen wheels rolls this was the roughest. We drove through an Indian burying ground where grinning skulls and bleaching bones lay here and there upon the ground; relics of a departed era, and a rapidly dying people. After four or five hours bouncing and bounding over the rock or trailing among the trees we reached a point not far from the present steamboat landing on the north side of the river . . .<sup>468</sup>

Maria Parsons Belshaw described her party’s portage, after waiting for the men, cattle, and horses to meet up with the women at the Upper Cascades Landing:

SEPTEMBER 22ND. Our teams arrived this morning the stock endured the journey on the pack trails very well, the cattle better than the horses. Our men better than when they started. We start for the lower landing at 2 o’clock this afternoon, bad roads very narrow sidling and rocky, large rocks some of the way, that is very hard on the oxen and wagons. Passed an Indian grave yard. Saw hundreds of human bones lying on the ground. The Indians dig holes in the ground and sit -them in, then cover them with boards or build a board house over them, then wrap them in blankets. I suppose for there were many blankets rotting on the ground. Camped on the bank of the river. It is a pleasant place. There are 3 or 4 buildings here store bakery and Farm house and one not finished. Ground level grass. Occasionally a tree waving its branches. Traveled 5 miles.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Journal of Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 126.

<sup>465</sup> James Akin, Jr., journal, 1852, in *Transactions of the Thirty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 274.

<sup>466</sup> T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, p. 11, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website.

<sup>467</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 309.

<sup>468</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 310–11.

<sup>469</sup> Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 328.

## Upper Cascades Landing in the Early 1850s



Figure 32. Carleton E. Watkins took this photograph of the Upper Cascades Landing in 1867. It shows the upper blockhouse in the top right (Fort Lugenbeel), the upper end of OSNC portage facilities, the bridges, a warehouse (likely owned by OSNC), and several other buildings in the settlement.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

In September 1851, Harriet Talcott Buckingham described the scene at the Upper Cascades Landing:

Indians were salmon fishing at the Portage & were drying their fish there. They had a great dance dressed in costume – none but the young men danced. . . .

Many fine canoes were to be seen, made of great length out of trunks of great cedar trees – some might by fifty feet in length hollowed out & carved with high sculptures prows, glistening with brass headed nails & it was wonderful to see the skill with which they would handle them. The squaws all seemed to be rich in ornaments of beads & brass strings of bead of all colors weighing pounds hang from the neck, - all looked happy and contented.<sup>470</sup>

Some overlanders saw many Indigenous people at the Cascades while others saw few, correlating with seasonal movements related to fish runs. Overall, there were far fewer Upper Chinookan people at the Cascades in the early 1850s than there had been a decade before, due to diseases, the influx of White settlers, and increasing US military presence in the area.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Journal of Harriet Talcott Buckingham in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 3*, 50–51.

<sup>471</sup> William L. Lang, “The Chinookan Encounter with Euro-Americans in the Lower Columbia River Valley,” in Boyd et al., *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia*, 271; Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 99–101.

As of 1853, Origen Thomson described the Upper Cascades Landing, the upper end of the mule-powered tramway, as a “town,” consisting of “three houses, in which are two stores and one dwelling.” The construction of the tramway and associated development marked the beginning of permanent White settlement around this area. Thompson continued,

one of the houses is two stories high—in the upper story a boarding-house, and below a store. From this house there is a plank road around the Falls, one and a-half miles long and about three feet wide, and there is one little car, with truck wheels, drawn by an old mule, on which is transported most of the goods back and forward. The road terminates abruptly, and the goods are let down fifty feet by a rope, into an open boat, to be conveyed to the steamboat, as it is too rapid for the steamer to go up so far. A great quantity of store goods is hauled around in wagons. The cost of transporting a wagon around the Falls is \$5, and freight one dollar to one twenty-five cents.<sup>472</sup>

Maria Parsons Belshaw described it that same year:

There is one store, boarding and gambling house all in one, and one above us, and some below at the boat landing. We hear nothing but bitter oaths that an all wise and over ruling God our Father and our Creator forbade us to take. Such as makes sober and rational people shudder to hear. It appears to be quite a business place. Flour \$10 per hundred Beef \$25 per hundred Calico 25 cts. per yard, Potatoes \$3 per Bushel, Butter \$1 per pound.<sup>473</sup>

George Belshaw commented on the town-like atmosphere of the Cascades, comparing it to The Dalles. He saw many Chinookan people fishing along the rapids.<sup>474</sup>

Settlers at the Cascades helped overlanders who were on their way to the Willamette Valley. During heavy immigration in 1852, settlers at the Cascades like the Bradfords and Baileys “filled their homes with sick and dying overlanders and appealed to Portlanders to rush money ‘to obtain help for the sick and coffins for the dead.’”<sup>475</sup> The sicknesses spread while parties waited in crowded conditions at the Upper Cascades Landing for their pack teams or boats with the rest of their party to arrive.<sup>476</sup> The Belshaws had several sick people in their party, and one woman gave birth to a baby girl while waiting at the landing for the pack teams.<sup>477</sup> Celinda and Joseph Hines both became ill while at the Cascades. The wait was especially long for some parties, such as the Hineses, because the men and livestock got lost “among the many Indian trails.” Despite being sick, Celinda Hines received “several calls from gentlemen” and “an invitation to attend a party at the boarding house.”<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 99–101.

<sup>473</sup> Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 327–28.

<sup>474</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 235–36.

<sup>475</sup> Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge,” 165.

<sup>476</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 301–3, 306.

<sup>477</sup> Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 328.

<sup>478</sup> Journal of Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 126–27.

## *Military Presence at the Cascades (1848-1858)*

In 1848, during armed confrontations against Indigenous people, the United States established Fort Gilliam, the first military presence at the Cascades, near the site of the Upper Cascades Landing. Fort Gilliam served as a supply depot for soldiers engaged in actions against Indigenous people farther upriver. In the 1850s, US removal policies forced most Indigenous people away from the Columbia River, marking the end of Chinookan control of the Cascades portage. The US Army subsequently built garrisons along the Cascades in 1855 and 1856, one near the Lower Cascades Landing (Fort Cascades) and the other near the former village site of sk'mániak (Fort Rain). The Army also renamed the blockhouse near the Upper Cascades Landing Fort Lugenbeel. These three forts were blockhouses (see Figure 33), which the US Army used across the Pacific Northwest at the time. The Army's presence along the Cascades spurred additional White settlement in the area, as settlers created communities around each fort, with businesses to serve the soldiers.<sup>479</sup>



Figure 33. The US Army built three blockhouses along the Cascades Rapids in the 1850s. Here, the middle blockhouse, also known as Fort Rain, pictured from two vantage points. Stereoviews by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

On March 26, 1856, Chinookan, Yakama, Klickitat, and other Columbia River people attacked the US military garrisons at the Cascades. Casualties from the battle included seventeen White people and likely many Indigenous people, but sources only list the White deaths and refer to the event as the “Cascades Massacre.” This sort of propaganda helped settlers and US officials perceive the White settlers as the victims, completely disregarding the fact that White people had displaced

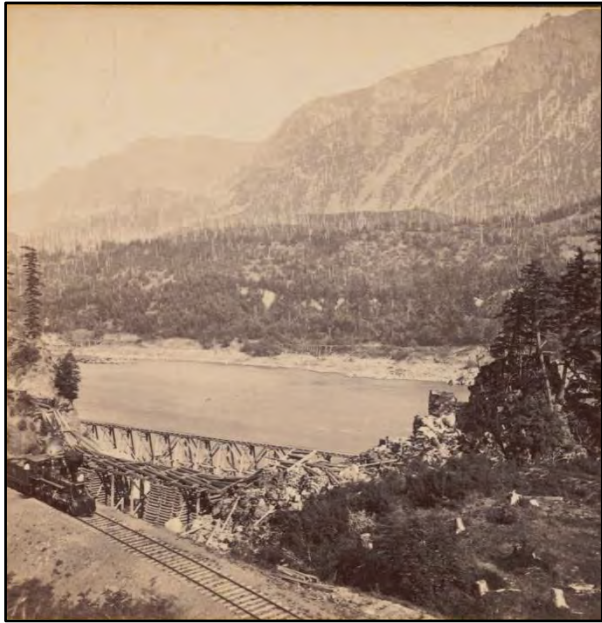
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<sup>479</sup> Friedel and Toedtemeier, “Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins’s 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge,” 399–401; Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 308; Frances Parkman, *The California Oregon Trail* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1849), 685; Beckham, “This Place Is Romantic and Wild”; Beckham and Minor, “Archaeological Testing at Fort Cascades and the Cascades Townsite.”

Indigenous communities of the Columbia River and Plateau regions from their homelands in just a few generations, first through disease and now through forced removal. Many accounts of this encounter privilege the viewpoint of the White settlers and the US military, treating the American choice to cut off Indigenous ways of life as a tactical decision and romanticizing the hangings of Indigenous people, even while also noting that White people who murdered Indigenous people never faced consequences for their crimes.<sup>480</sup>

After the violence at the Cascades, the US Army built the White Salmon Blockhouse at the mouth of the White Salmon River, upstream from the Cascades. It was taken down just a few years after being built, though settlers lived in it for part of the time it remained standing.<sup>481</sup> General John E. Wool issued an order to White settlers following the violence, forbidding settlement in the land east of the Cascades. Any settlers already in the area had no legal right to be there, according to US law that maintained this land as “Indian territory.” Squatting continued, however, and the US government did not meaningfully attempt to stop the illegal practice of White people settling on Indigenous lands.<sup>482</sup>

The Army abandoned the middle blockhouse at the Cascades by 1858, and the upper and lower blockhouses soon after. These blockhouses and the “High Bridge” the Army had built had fallen into disrepair by the late 1860s (see Figure 34). Buildings that had been erected by settlers around the blockhouses remained, however, and the Cascades area became a place of permanent White settlement.<sup>483</sup>



**Figure 34. Ruins of the High Bridge, built by the US Army in 1860. Pictured in the front of the image is an OSNC steam locomotive approaching from the east. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

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<sup>480</sup> Joel Graham, “A Massacre on the Frontier,” *Washington Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (April 1908): 233–36; David Wilma, “Native Americans attack Americans at the Cascades of the Columbia on March 26, 1856,” February 7, 2003, <https://www.historylink.org/File/5190>; Kent D. Richards, *Isaac I. Stevens: Young Man in a Hurry* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1979), 291–93

<sup>481</sup> D. A. Brown, “White Salmon and the Old Blockhouse,” *Washington Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (April 1927): 110–18.

<sup>482</sup> Coleman, “We’ll All Start Even,” 416–17; Frank B. Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway: The Oregon Portage Railroad at the Cascades of the Columbia River,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 25, no. 3 (September 1924): 171–235, esp. 180.

<sup>483</sup> Friedel and Toedtemeier, “Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins’s 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge,” 401–4.

## Portage Roads and Railroads (1856-1860)

The United States established an official military road on the northern side of the river, which followed the same trail that Chinookan people and then settlers had used to portage around the rapids (see Figure 35). In the autumn of 1856, White settlers (it is not clear who) began operating a coach on this road to assist passengers with the portage, for a fee. The following year, Daniel and Putnam Bradford, who had bought the wooden portage railroad from Chenoweth, rebuilt the road.<sup>484</sup>



Figure 35. This General Land Office (GLO) map from an 1860 survey shows the northern bank of the Cascades portage. There is a U.S. Garrison (Fort Lugenbeel) at the beginning of the portage, with several structures nearby. “Bradford’s Railroad” is drawn along the shore, and further inland is the “U.S. Military Road” that followed the Chinookan portage route.

Source: US Bureau of Land Management.

Meanwhile, on the Oregon side of the river, Joseph S. Ruckel and Harrison Olmstead constructed a road along the riverbank. It is likely that there were pathways that Chinookan people used to traverse this section of the river, but the available sources do not mention a path on that side of the river. The Chinookan trails on the north side of the river were the regularly used routes.

<sup>484</sup> Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway,” 180–81; Gillette, “A Brief History of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company,” 121; Friedel and Toedtemeier, “Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins’s 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge,” 404.



Ruckel and Olmstead hoped to compete with the Bradford's tramway on the north side of the river. Because the violence in 1856 mostly took place on the north side of the river, Ruckel and Olmsted were successful in drawing business away from the Bradfords' portage railroad for some time.<sup>485</sup>



Figure 36. The Oregon Portage Railroad was constructed in 1857. Viewed from the East, with the Tooth Bridge in the distance. Photography by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

In 1857, Ruckel converted his portage road into a railroad to better compete with the Bradfords across the river. Ruckel's railroad was 4.5 miles long and made of wood and iron. There was a walking path along the center of the tracks. Like the Bradfords' railroad across the river, it was mule powered. However, it was susceptible to flooding and sustained severe damage within a year of its construction.<sup>486</sup> Frank B. Gill later described Ruckel's Railroad:

There was a large amount of bridging, because it was a great deal less expensive to draw upon the adjacent forests for timber than with the methods then available to build up earth embankments. . . .

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<sup>485</sup> Gill, "Oregon's First Railway," 178–79; Terry, "Legacy of the Oregon Pony," 3.

<sup>486</sup> Terry, "Legacy of the Oregon Pony," 3; Gill, "Oregon's First Railway," 184; Schubert, "The Dalles-Celilo Canal," 378.

The Oregon Portage Railroad was built over the small rocky elevation which marks the eastern end of the present Bonneville station grounds, through which barrier the Union Pacific trains now dash. Between this point and the western bank of Eagle Creek the traveler passes the Tooth rock, whose base was then washed by the Columbia at least during flood stages, and this depression was crossed by a heavily built trestle where today is a solid embankment.<sup>487</sup>

In 1859, Ruckel and Olmsted joined with the Bradfords to bring both of their railroads under the Union Transportation Company (later renamed the OSNC)—the same company that operated steamships between the Upper Cascades and The Dalles, from Deschutes Landing to Wallula, and the Dalles-Celilo Portage Railroad. Ruckel and Olmsted and the Bradfords continued to operate their respective railroads, but OSNC now controlled prices.<sup>488</sup> They both had five-year contracts with OSNC, “under which they received ½ of freight charges between Portland and The Dalles (\$30/ton) for anything transported over their portage.”<sup>489</sup> The OSNC now had a monopoly in travel along the entire river, owning all steamships and railroads or roads along the portages.<sup>490</sup>

Starting around 1860, cargo traffic on the river increased due to the gold rush in Idaho. In 1861, the OSNC began rebuilding the wooden railroad on the Washington side of the river into a steam railroad, with iron rails and steam locomotives.<sup>491</sup> Later that year, Ruckel bought a steam locomotive to run on the existing wooden tracks on the Oregon side. Ruckel’s small locomotive was nicknamed the “Oregon Pony” during the gold rush. It carried about two hundred tons of freight per day, mostly upriver to the mines.<sup>492</sup> Amid this construction and increased traffic, the



Figure 37. The OSNC built a sawmill along its Oregon Portage Railroad, at Eagle Creek, to assist with railroad-building at the Cascades. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

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<sup>487</sup> Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway,” 186–89.

<sup>488</sup> Terry, “Legacy of the Oregon Pony,” 3.

<sup>489</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 159.

<sup>490</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 158, 164.

<sup>491</sup> Gillette, “A Brief History of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company,” 121; Terry, “Legacy of the Oregon Pony,” 4; Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway,” 193–94, 201.

<sup>492</sup> Terry, “Legacy of the Oregon Pony,” 4.

OSNC opened a sawmill along the Oregon Portage Railroad (see Figure 37). Adjacent to the sawmill were several structures for housing employees of the mill and livestock.<sup>493</sup>

Few overlanders in the late 1850s or 1860s wrote about taking these railroads, mostly because they were taking routes that avoided the Columbia River. Those who did go this route often walked the portage, but, if they could afford it, they paid for the portage railroad to transport their goods. The bulk of the traffic in the 1860s on these railroads was related to the gold rush, not immigration on the Oregon Trail. Overlander Randall Hewitt described the portage railroad as of 1862, although it is not clear which side he traveled on:

... [T]he navigation company had constructed, at great cost and considerable engineering skill, a timber tramway over which to transport passengers and merchandise. It was not possible to pass these furious rapids in any other way, so abrupt are the granite walls of the river, only at the risk of life and property, as in the days of old voyageurs. The expense of hewing out the way and constructing this portage road added greatly to the cost of transportation. Gravitation was the motive power on the down grade, mules being utilized to transport the flat cars up. Most passengers preferred to walk in both directions.

At the foot of the last rapids everything was passed down a steep incline on cars secured to a cable loop, the loaded car going down serving to send the light one up. At the foot of the incline another boat was in waiting, moored in water smooth and tranquil.<sup>494</sup>

Hewitt saw Chinookan people fishing at the Cascades, indicating that they continued to fish there even after being forced to move to reservations.<sup>495</sup>



**Figure 38. The OSNC railroad tracks viewed from the middle blockhouse. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

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<sup>493</sup> Friedel and Toedtemeier, “Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins’s 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge,” 393.

<sup>494</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 484–85.

<sup>495</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 485.

In April 1863, after a year of construction, the OSNC opened the new iron railroad on the Washington side.<sup>496</sup> OSNC then closed down the portage rail on the Oregon side, due to its flood-prone location.<sup>497</sup> The tracks on the Oregon side were used only by the operators of the OSNC sawmill. Joseph Bailey, who oversaw the sawmill, and his staff allowed livestock to walk on the wooden tracks to traverse the portage and used mule-powered carts to transport the baggage of the people accompanying the livestock. Several years later, the OSNC (later the Union Pacific) made the Oregon portage structures part of the company's line on the south side of the Columbia River.<sup>498</sup>

Traffic for the remainder of the decade was mostly related to the gold rush or people coming from downstream to settle at points inland. In 1865, an account of the journey from Portland to Wallula was published in the *Oregonian* as promotional literature for the OSNC:

Climbing the full river until we see close before us the foaming breakers that form the cascades of the Columbia, we then mount the iron horse, and with rush and puffing haste, course over the mountains side six miles, to where the beautiful and commodious *Oneonta* [sp?] is waiting to receive us. The railroad and steamboat are in striking contrast with the Indian fishing village which is found upon the bank. The works of the Cascades Railroad are important and most creditable to the enterprise that has accomplished so much good on the river. It is a luxury to travel on the Columbia.<sup>499</sup>

Settlers living in the area worked on the OSNC's portage railroad on the Washington side, or to support the railroad or the towns that grew up along it.<sup>500</sup> The rail portages changed the Cascades and foreshadowed future rail development on both sides of the river, extending beyond the Cascades portage (see Chapter 8).



**Figure 39. Upper Cascades Landing. Photograph by Carleton Watkins, 1867.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

<sup>496</sup> Gill, "Oregon's First Railway," 217–18; Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 158.

<sup>497</sup> Friedel and Toedtemeier, "Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins's 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge," 395; Gill, "Oregon's First Railway," 204–8; Elliott, "The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence," 159–60.

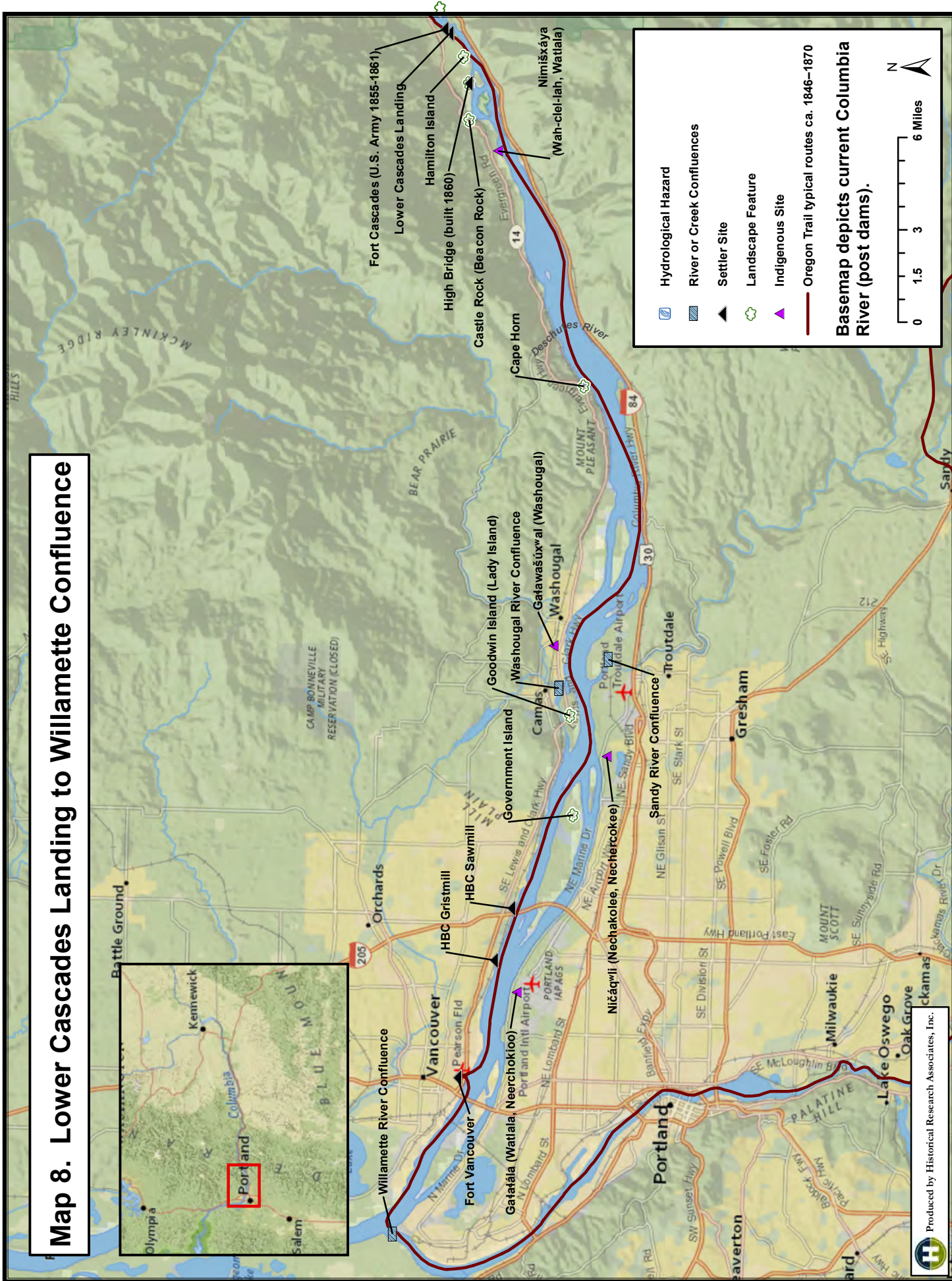
<sup>498</sup> Terry, "Legacy of the Oregon Pony," 4; Gill, "Oregon's First Railway," 208–9.

<sup>499</sup> "From Portland to Wallula," *Oregonian*, June 7, 1865.

<sup>500</sup> Friedel and Toedtemeier, "Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins's 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge," 401.



**Map 8. Lower Cascades Landing to Willamette Confluence**



## Chapter 7: The Cascades to the Willamette River



Figure 40. Segment of Charles Wilkes's 1844 map of the Pacific Northwest showing the stretch of river from the bottom of the Cascades Rapids to the Willamette River Confluence.

Source: US Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

### River and Communities ca. 1800

The stretch of the Columbia River from the Lower Cascades Landing to the Willamette River confluence was relatively calm, with no significant rapids (see Map 8 for an overview of this section of the river). Travelers passed by Castle Rock (now known as Beacon Rock) just after the Cascades

Rapids and then traveled on calm water. The primary obstacle to navigation was the wind, particularly in the gorge area, where steep mountains and hills constricted the river below and created a wind tunnel. Travelers noted the worst of the winds around Cape Horn. As the valley opened up below the Cascades, the river calmed and widened. Johnson and Winter described this stretch of river:

Below the [Cascade] Falls on the South side, there is, for several miles, a perpendicular rock bluff, rising from the water five hundred feet; over which several small streams are pouring, in beautiful Cascades. The Columbia is broad and deep from the Falls to the Ocean, and the ride runs up to the foot of the Rapids. Twenty miles below the Cascades, the River makes a sudden bend, about a high Mountain point called Cape Horn. Immediately on the point, there are several spires of solid rock, rising, like huge horns, out of the water, from fifty to sixty feet high. . . . A few miles below Cape Horn, the highlands on the South side, recede from the River, leaving wide, low bottoms; which generally overflow in the Spring. This low land continues to widen, to the mouth of the Willamette, and extends up that River about eight miles. In this part of the Columbia, there are many low islands.<sup>501</sup>

A little over ten miles downstream from Cape Horn, the Washougal River—named after a Chinookan village—entered the Columbia River on the north side of the river. French Canadian traders sometimes called it “la Prairie du Thé” (the Tea Prairie River), because a type of mint grew there that they used to make tea. Across from the Washougal River, the Sandy River flowed into the Columbia. Its sprawling, sandy delta was the source of the river’s name. Several low-lying islands lay in the next few miles of river, including Goodwin Island near the mouth of the Washougal River, and the large Government Island (also called Diamond Island, White Goose Island, and Swan Island) just downstream. Around twenty miles downstream from the Sandy and Washougal Rivers, the wide Willamette River flowed into the Columbia River, just past the present-day town of Portland.<sup>502</sup>

From the bottom of the Cascades to the Willamette River confluence, there were several Indigenous villages, mostly occupied by Chinookan people. Just east of the mouth of the Washougal River was gaławašúxʷal, (or Washougal). A few miles downstream from that village, on the south side of the river, was ničáqʷli (also called Nechakolee or Nechercokee). And about ten miles downstream from ničáqʷli was gałalála (also called Watlala or Neerchokioo).

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<sup>501</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 39.

<sup>502</sup> Ross Cox, *Adventures on the Columbia River, including the Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains, Among Various Tribes of Indians Hitherto Unknown: Together with A Journey Across the American Continent, Volume II* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1831), 164.





Figure 41. At Cape Horn, downstream of the Cascades Rapids, winds whipped through the narrow Columbia River Gorge and often posed a hazard for those traveling by boat. Photography by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

## Early Fur Trade Era (1824-1840)

The HBC built Fort Vancouver in 1824, across the Columbia from gałáála. Fort Vancouver served as the HBC headquarters for the Columbia Region, which stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>503</sup> Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Columbia Region, was stationed at Fort Vancouver. In 1828, McLoughlin had a sawmill constructed upriver from Fort Vancouver. The HBC made flour through hand- or mule-powered gristmills starting that year, and then constructed a water-powered gristmill in 1836. In 1837, the HBC constructed a second sawmill near the first.<sup>504</sup> Initially, the HBC depended almost exclusively on Chinookan people for food, but in the late 1820s, the company started a farm at Fort Vancouver. HBC employees of European, Hawaiian, and Chinookan descent provided labor for the farm.<sup>505</sup> In the mid-1830s, most people at the fort spoke French, but they also spoke Hawaiian, Chinookan, Iroquois Chinook Jargon, and English. Many of the fur traders, including McLoughlin and James Douglas, married Indigenous women, who then lived at the fort.<sup>506</sup>

Wyeth explained the ease of the journey from the Cascades to the HBC's Fort Vancouver, writing, "With a fair wind and a little rain we descended the river at a great rate." His party killed a goose on the way and saw an eagle before reaching the HBC sawmill.<sup>507</sup> Gray wrote that, after waiting out a storm,

we were again on our way. . . . next day we reached the sawmill and camped early. All hands must wash up and get ready to reach the fort in the morning. . . . In coming round a bend of the upper end of the plain upon which the fort stands, we came in full view of two fine ships dressed in complete regalia from stern to stern, with the St. George cross waving gracefully from the staff in the fort.<sup>508</sup>

Traders and those on diplomatic or military missions on behalf of the British or American government usually resupplied at Fort Vancouver, and they often stayed for a few days. These visitors reported receiving a warm welcome and material assistance from McLoughlin. After arriving at Fort Vancouver in October 1832, Nathaniel Wyeth described the fort and his reception:

Here I was received with the utmost kindness and Hospitality by Doct. McLauchland [McLoughlin] the acting Gov. of the place Mr McDonald Mr Allen and Mr McKay gentleman resident here[.] Our people were supplied with good and shelter from the rain which is constant they raise at this fort 6000 bush. of wheat 3 of Barley 1500 potatoes 3000 peas a large quantity of punkins[.] they have coming on

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<sup>503</sup> John A. Hussey, "Chapter 2: Old Fort Vancouver, 1824–1829," in *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society and National Park Service, 1957), [no page number in online format], <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/fova/hussey/chap2.htm>.

<sup>504</sup> The HBC also constructed a sawmill at Abernathy Island, at the mouth of the Willamette, in 1842. Winther, "Commercial Routes from 1792 to 1843 by Sea and Overland," 233; Leonard Wiley, "Mill Creek Site of Grist Mill of Hudson's Bay Company," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (September 1942): 282–85; Hussey, "Chapter 2: Old Fort Vancouver, 1824–1829," [no page number in online format].

<sup>505</sup> Bergmann, "we should lose much by their absence'," 42–43, 49.

<sup>506</sup> Eells, *Marcus Whitman: Pathfinder and Patriot*, 90–91.

<sup>507</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 176.

<sup>508</sup> Winther, "Commercial Routes from 1792 to 1843 by Sea and Overland," 244.

apple trees, peach Do. and grapes. Sheep, Hogs, Horses, Cows, 600 goats, grist 2, saw mill 2. 24 lb guns powder magazine of stone[,] the fort is of wood and square they are building a Sch. of 70 Tons[,] there are about 8 settlers on the Multnomah[,] they are the old engages of the Co. who have done trapping. I find Doct. McLauchland a fine old gentleman truly philanthropic in his Ideas he is doing much good by introducing fruits into this country which will much facilitate the progress of its settlement (Indian corn 3000 bush).

The gentlemen of this Co. do much credit to their country and concern by their education deportment and talents. I find myself involved in much difficulty on ace. of my men some of whom wish to leave me and whom the Co. do not wish to engage no[r] to have them in the country without being attached to some Co. able to protect them alledging that if any of them are killed, they will be obliged to aveng[e] it at an expense of money and amicable relations with the Indians. And it is disagreeable for me to have men who wish to leave me. The Co. seem disposed to render me all the assistance they can they live well at these posts they have 200 acres of land under cultivation the land is of the finest quality.<sup>509</sup>

In 1836, the Spalding and Whitman missionary group party stayed at the Fort for several days.<sup>510</sup> Like Wyeth, Spalding worried his men would leave him for the better conditions available with HBC employment.<sup>511</sup>

When William H. Slacum arrived on the Columbia on a US-sponsored mission in late 1836, he described the thriving business of the HBC, which he called an “immense foreign monopoly”:

Fort Vancouver, the principal depot of the Hudson Bay Company west of the Rocky mountains, stands on a gentle acclivity, four hundred yards from the shore, on the north bank of the Columbia, or Oregon river, about 100 miles from its mouth. The principal buildings are enclosed by a picket forming an area of 750 by 450 feet. Within the pickets, there are thirty four buildings of all descriptions, including officers' dwelling houses, workshops for carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, coopers, tanners, &c., all of wood except the magazine for powder which is of brick; outside and very near the fort there are forty-nine cabins for laborers and mechanics, a large and commodious barn, and seven buildings attached thereto; a hospital and large boat house on the shore, six miles above the fort. On the north bank, the Hudson Bay Company have erected a saw mill on a never-failing stream of water that falls into the Columbia; cuts 2,000 to 2,400 feet of lumber daily; employs 28 men, chiefly Sandwich Islanders, and ten yoke of oxen; depth of water, fours fathoms at the mill where the largest ships of the company take in their cargoes for the Sandwich islands market.

The farm at Vancouver contains, at this time, about 3,000 acres of land, fenced and under cultivation, employing generally 100 men chiefly Canadians and half-breed Iroquois; the mechanics are Europeans. These, with the factors, traders, clerks, and domestics, may be estimated at thirty. The laborers and mechanics live outside the fort in good log cabins—two or three families generally under one roof; and as nearly every man has a wife, or lives with an Indian or half-breed woman, and as each family has from two to five slaves, the whole number of persons about Vancouver may be estimated at 750 to 800 souls. The police of the establishment is as strict as in the best regulated military garrison. . . . The ration consists of eight gallons of potatoes and eight salt salmon a week per man, in winter, and peas and tallow in summer; no bread or meat allowed by the company at any time. . . . The farm at Vancouver has produced this year, 8,000 bushels of wheat, 5,500 bushels of barley, 6,000 bushels of oats, 9,000 bushels of peas, 14,000 bushels of potatoes, besides large quantities of

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<sup>509</sup> Wyeth, *Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831–6*, 176–77 (text split into paragraphs for readability).

<sup>510</sup> “Unpublished Journal of William H. Gray,” 7.

<sup>511</sup> H. H. Spalding to Brothers Wm. & Edward Porter & their wives, October 2, 1836, 3, available on OCTA website.

turnips, (rutabaga,) pumpkins, &c. About 6,000 bushels of wheat, of the old crop, remain on hand this year.

*Stock* consists of about 1,000 head of neat cattle, 700 hogs, 200 sheep, 450 to 500 horses, and 40 yoke of working oxen. There is a large threshing machine, distillery, (not at present in operation,) and a grist-mill. . . .

A large ship arrives annuually from Longon, and discharges at Vancouver; cargo, chiefly coarse woollens [*sic*], , cloths, baizes, and blankets; hardware, cutlery, calicoes, cottons; and cotton handkerchiefs; tea, sugar, coffee, cocoa, soap, tobaccos, beads, powder, guns, lead, rum, playing cards, boots, shoes, ready-made clothing, &c., &c.; besides every description of sea stores, canvas. . . , cordage, paints, oils, chains and chain cable, anchors, &c. . . .<sup>512</sup>

## Early Overlander Travel (1840-1849)

The HBC's dominance on the river had begun to wane by 1839, as more and more American settlers arrived in Willamette Valley. In response, the HBC directed British settlers to head to destinations farther north. Increasing immigration led HBC leaders to admit by 1841 that the Columbia River would likely go to the Americans, which would likely spell the end of HBC dominance in the region.<sup>513</sup> American settlers traveled the lower Columbia and arrived at Fort Vancouver in the early 1840s, as these changes were underway.

### *Water Travel from the Lower Cascades to Fort Vancouver*

Most early overlanders traveled by boat from the bottom of the Cascades Rapids to Fort Vancouver, before then resupplying and heading to their final destinations of Portland, Oregon City, or elsewhere. Chinookan canoes and HBC bateaux arrived and departed from a boat landing at the bottom of the Cascades.<sup>514</sup> Many of the settlers traveling in 1843 paid Chinookan people or the HBC to take them and their belongings down this calm stretch of river in canoes or bateaux.

Peter Burnett paid Chinookan people to transport his party in their canoes, and he paid the HBC to carry remaining settlers in a bateau. William Newby was one of the immigrants who rode in the HBC boat, steered by "Captain Waters."<sup>515</sup> Burnett noted that the HBC "boat was navigated by Canadian French, and the canoes by Indians. . . . We found that the Indians could propel their canoes with paddles much faster than we could our boat with oars."<sup>516</sup> Burnett elaborated on the superior design of the canoes made by Chinookan people downstream of the Cascades:

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<sup>512</sup> John Forsyth and William A. Slacum, "Slacum's Report on Oregon, 1836-7," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 13, no. 2 (June 1912): 175-224, esp. 185-87.

<sup>513</sup> John A. Hussey, "Chapter 3: History of Fort Vancouver, 1829-1846," in *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society and National Park Service, 1957), [no page number in online format], <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/fova/hussey/chap3.htm>.

<sup>514</sup> *Transactions of the Sixteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1888*, 119.

<sup>515</sup> Winton, "William T. Newby's Diary of the Emigration of 1843," 241.

<sup>516</sup> Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Chapter III," 86.

These canoes are substantially of the same model as the clipper-ship, and most probably suggested the idea of such a form of marine architecture. They are made out of a solid piece of white-cedar timber, which is usually about one quarter of the first cut of a large tree. It is a soft wood, but very tough. This timber grows upon the banks of the Columbia, below Vancouver, to a very large size. It is easily split with wedges. The Indians manage to cut and burn down the tree, and then cut and burn off a part of the trunk, and split it into quarters. Then they hollow out the inside of the canoe, mostly by burning. For this purpose they kindle small fires along the whole length of the canoe, which they keep steadily burning, and, by careful and constant watching, they cause the fires to burn when and how they please. The outside they shape with their tomahawks; and, before these were introduced, they used sharp flint-stones for axes. These canoes are usually about thirty feet long, three feet wide, and two feet deep, and are sharp at both ends, with a gradual taper from near the center. No craft could have a more handsome model, or run more swiftly. They are light, strong, elastic, and durable, and are propelled by paddles.<sup>517</sup>

Frémont's military crew paid Chinookan pilots to take his party in Chinookan canoes from the foot of the Cascades to Fort Vancouver. Frémont described an Indigenous river pilot steering them through a difficult area:

About 10 o'clock our pilots halted, apparently to confer about the course; and, after a little hesitation, pulled directly across an open expansion of the river, where the waves were somewhat rough for a canoe, the wind blowing very fresh. Much to our surprise, a few minutes afterwards we ran aground. Backing off our boat, we made repeated trials at various places to cross what appeared to be a point of shifting sand bars, where we had attempted to shorten the way by a cut-off. Finally, one of our Indians got into the water, and waded about until he found a channel sufficiently deep, through which we wound along after him, and in a few minutes again entered the deep water below. As we paddled rapidly down the river, we heard the noise of a saw-mill at work on the right bank; and, letting our boat float quietly down, we listened with pleasure to the unusual sounds; and before midnight encamped on the bank of the river, about a mile above Fort Vancouver.<sup>518</sup>

James Nesmith rode in a Chinookan canoe, and when he arrived at the HBC sawmill, he saw several HBC employees "taking up a barge to bring the families down from the Mission."<sup>519</sup>

The primary issue in the downstream voyage between the Cascades and Fort Vancouver was wind in the narrow gorge. Frémont described it:

We glided on without further interruption between very rocky and high steep mountains, which sweep along the river valley at a little distance, covered with forests of pine, and showing occasionally lofty escarpments of red rock. Nearer, the shore is bordered by steep escarped hills, and huge vertical rocks, from which the waters of the mountain reach the river in a variety of beautiful falls, sometimes several hundred feet in height; occasionally along the river occurred pretty bottoms, covered with the greenest verdure of the spring. . .

A few miles below the cascades we passed a singular isolated hill; and in the course of the next 6 miles occurred five very pretty falls from the heights on the left bank, one of them being of a very picturesque character; and towards sunset we reached a remarkable point of rocks, distinguished, on account of prevailing high winds, and the delay it frequently occasions to the canoe navigation, by the name of *Cape Horn*. It borders the river in a high wall of rock, which comes boldly down into deep water; and in violent gales down the river, and from the opposite shore, which is the prevailing

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<sup>517</sup> Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Chapter III," 85.

<sup>518</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 190.

<sup>519</sup> Nesmith, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," 358–59.

direction of strong winds, the water is dashed against it with considerable violence. It appears to form a serious obstacle to canoe travelling; and I was informed by Mr. Perkins, that in a voyage up the river he had been detained two weeks at this place, and was finally obliged to return to Vancouver.

The winds of this region deserve a particular study. They blow in currents, which show them to be governed by fixed laws; and it is a problem how far they may come from the mountains, or from the ocean through the break in the mountains, which let out in the river.<sup>520</sup>

Nesmith was in a Chinookan canoe steered by Indigenous people:

Sunday, October 22.- Got breakfast and started in good season with our pilot and another young Indian. . . . Pulled down the river about eight miles and were obliged to encamp in consequence of headwind, which made rather too much swell for our canoe to ride in safety. We encamped on the north side of the river. The boys killed two pheasants. Weather fine and pleasant.

Monday, October 23.- The wind high this morning from the Southeast. Hoisted a sail on our canoe. We all got out to walk around a point while the Indians should run the canoe through, which they did and landed. The other boys missed the trail and kept back in the bluffs. I came to the canoe and waited for them until nearly sundown. Passed off the time in reading Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor." The wind continued high. I started at an hour by the sun and ran until some time after dark, when I discovered a fire on the north bank of the river, which the Indians said was "Boston fire," meaning white men. I ran for the fire and fired my pistols, which were soon answered by those at the fire. Upon coming up, I found them to be McDaniel, Haggard, and Otey, who had missed the trail in the morning, and having walked twenty miles, concluded to wait for the canoe.<sup>521</sup>

Jesse A. Applegate, traveling with Nesmith, similarly wrote that they camped because of the headwinds around Cape Horn.<sup>522</sup> Johnson and Winter reiterated that the delay at Cape Horn was typical:

Here we were met by a heavy gale of wind, and compelled to run ashore, and remain until the next day. This frequently happens to voyagers, on this part of the river. In one instance, a crew of Emigrants were under the necessity of throwing part of their loading overboard, in order to gain the shore. . . .<sup>523</sup>

Johnson and Winter called the remainder of their journey to Fort Vancouver, "a very disagreeable passage."<sup>524</sup>

John Minto told a story of passing through a storm at Cape Horn in 1844. Although likely exaggerated for effect, his story provides insight into the relative ease of Indigenous water travel, as compared to overlanders. Overlanders who chose to steer their own boats were at a major disadvantage, since they lacked knowledge of the river that Indigenous people from the area had:

We were just entering the gorge of Cape Horn at the east end and close to the Oregon shore, when we saw a storm of wind and cloud coming into it from the west. The wind was so strong that it literally lifted the water from the river and took it upward as spray, and still upward as dense fog

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<sup>520</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 189–90.

<sup>521</sup> Nesmith, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," 358–59.

<sup>522</sup> Applegate, *A Day with the Cow Column in 1843*, 114–15.

<sup>523</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 39.

<sup>524</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 39.

cloud. In front of this mass of fog and spray, five or six bald eagles circled, whirled and dove seemingly in fierce delight— . . . With that and the sight of the approaching storm, I was fascinated so as to temporarily forget the swift approaching danger, but that soon became the engrossing subject. There were but three of us to man the top-heavy, three-ton batteau; we having left the two Indians who had assisted us, while we plied between the Cascade falls and the Dalles, at their homes at that place. Mr. Crocket proposed we land as soon as possible on a little sand spot on the south side, which we were then very near; to this Clark, who had the steering oar, and consequently, control of the boat, objected, he being determined the boat should go to the north side of the river; over this the three of us wrangled and might have got to blows if we had had either time or room to move, but we had not, for our top-heavy load of people left no space for by-play, and the storm was so near by this time that the preceding swell began to rock the boat. She had to have motion or she would surely go down before the onset of the storm. We bent to our oars with all our strength, just in time to avoid that result, though she shipped considerable water. We were now enveloped in the spray, it shutting us from the sight of some Indians in a canoe that were preceding us and hugging the (now) Oregon shore. These went on their way and carried the news to our friends, who were camped at Linton, a canvas town on the west bank of the Willamette six miles below where Portland now is, that we were all certainly drowned as they had seen us go down in the “skookum chuck” (strong water), and so no doubt it appeared to them. But the first shock of the storm proved the worst, and we managed to reach the north bank of the river and landed, where if we should be weather bound by water we could proceed to Vancouver by the trail.<sup>525</sup>

As settlement increased in the 1840s, some immigrants paid White settlers, rather than Chinookan people or the HBC, to transport them down the river in a boat. In 1847, James Miller wrote,

[At the Lower Cascades Landing], my father contracted with Owen Bozarth and brother to take our wagons and other effects from the lower Cascades to Fort Vancouver in a large bateau, a boat about 40 feet long, 6 feet wide, 3 1/2 feet deep. About all of the traffic on the lower Columbia and Willamette rivers was done by what were then called Hudson's Bay bateaux. One of them would carry 300 or 350 bushels of wheat, or 10 tons weight. We had Bozarth land our wagons on the south side of the Columbia River, opposite Fort Vancouver, and then our folks went into camp until our stock arrived from the lower Cascades, being driven down the trail on the north side of the Columbia River, which took the men detailed for that purpose about three days.<sup>526</sup>

Bozarth might have used an HBC bateau, but this is one of the first recorded circumstances of settlers (not traders) helping other settlers down the lower river.

Others continued to hire Indigenous people to assist with the boat voyage, such as the US military's mounted riflemen as they traveled through in 1849. Osborne Cross described Chinookan sailing and the journey along this stretch of river:

Having all arrived, we soon got under way, each boat unfurling what little sail the Indians could raise. They are never backward in spreading their blankets when ever a fair wind offers, which sometimes does not occur for weeks. The wind was fair and as we strung out we produced quite a fleet, the whole number of [craft] being five mackinaw boats, one barge, and one whaleboat.

The scenery continued to present a bold appearance until we descended about halfway to [Fort] Vancouver, at a point called Cape Horn. From this part of the river the mountains begin to fall off gradually until a flat country is seen on the left bank. The banks and islands were studded with sycamore, while the hills on the right were covered with pine. Ten miles below Cape Horn the islands are large, and being filled with sycamore [they] resemble very much [those of] the Mississippi valley.

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<sup>525</sup> *Transactions of the Fourth Annual Re-union of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1876 . . .*, 49.

<sup>526</sup> Miller, “Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I.),” 55–68, esp. 65.

About six miles above Fort Vancouver we passed a saw- and flour-mill which is the property of the Hudson's Bay company. From here the mountains recede until the country on the left bank becomes quite low. [Here is] a beautiful country for agricultural purposes, [lying] between [Fort] Vancouver and Oregon City, which is twenty miles from the fort. The whole of the boats arrived at Fort Vancouver at five o'clock in the [afternoon], having run forty-five miles [today]. They accomplished the distance from the Dalles in three days, [it] being ninety miles, and were detained one day at the falls. Here we met that portion of the command which had left several days before us. [(Tuckers command)] Some of the parties had only arrived one day before, having been detained by heavy head-winds.<sup>527</sup>

Not everyone had difficulty with the winds around Cape Horn—some days, the winds were manageable. In 1850, Mary Jane Hayden wrote,

On the following day we passed our last danger point, Cape Horn of the Columbia. We had never heard of it and knew nothing of its dangers. We passed it about three o'clock and kept on until about five when we stopped for the night with rather better camping facilities.

Got an early start next morning, the weather was beautiful and about noon we were in mid-stream to take advantage of the current, as our boat was a slow one. When we heard a great shouting and cheering and on looking we saw the three whole boats we left at The Dalles and such waving of hats, sun-bonnets and handkerchiefs. We rested on our oars and they pulled to us. (We had been traveling alone from The Dalles.) I assure you we had many questions to answer. Some were, "Where did you stay last night, and where did you round Cape Horn?" And we then told them. They were astonished and said that they couldn't, they didn't dare to, the wind blew so. And to this day the best steamboats on the river never round Cape Horn when the wind blows.<sup>528</sup>

### *Livestock Trails and Ferry*

While most of the immigrant parties traveled by boat from the Cascades to Fort Vancouver, several men in the party usually walked the section with their livestock. The primary trail between the bottom of the Cascades and Fort Vancouver was on the north bank of the river, a Chinookan path that the HBC also used. The road started close to the Columbia below the Cascades, then went north and around Cape Horn, then along the bank of the Washougal River to the Columbia, and then close to the Columbia until reaching Fort Vancouver.<sup>529</sup> Some military parties, such as one hundred men from the Mounted Riflemen in 1849, took this trail.<sup>530</sup>

When parties heading for the Willamette Valley reached Fort Vancouver, they usually had their livestock swim across the Columbia River.<sup>531</sup> Some people crossed their livestock at the mouth of the Washougal River, while others had their cattle swim to Fort Vancouver to Switzer's Landing, across the river from the fort.<sup>532</sup> The landing was named after John Switzler, a settler who had built

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<sup>527</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 264–65.

<sup>528</sup> Hayden, *Pioneer Days*.

<sup>529</sup> Davis, *South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 59–60.

<sup>530</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 340.

<sup>531</sup> Miller, "Early Oregon Scenes: A Pioneer Narrative (In Three Parts, I)," 55–68, esp. 65.

<sup>532</sup> Davis, *South Road: And the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 59.



it in 1846. In subsequent years, overlanders could pay Switzler to ferry themselves and their livestock across the river.<sup>533</sup>

### Fort Vancouver (1843-1846)



Figure 42. A drawing by Henry J. Warre shows Fort Vancouver in approximately 1845.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

The HBC's Fort Vancouver was still a bustling place in 1843, the first year that a large number of White overlanders stopped at it. Johnson and Winter described what the fort looked like that year:

It is situated on the North side of the River, one hundred miles above its mouth. The buildings occupied as stores, warehouses, shops, residences of the agents, men, &c., make quite a village. The ground back, for half a mile, is level, and then rises, with a gradual inclination, until it is elevated several hundred feet above the River. It is set with grass, and makes a very pretty appearance. Vessels drawing fifteen feet water, ascend the Columbia this far, without any difficulty. Vancouver is the principal depot of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, West of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>534</sup>

In the early years of heavy White settlement in Oregon, overlanders relied on the HBC for supplies and food, and many spoke highly of Chief Factor McLoughlin. Nesmith wrote, "We were kindly treated by Dr. McLaughlin, in charge of the fort. Gave us a good dinner and showed us other

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<sup>533</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 240.

<sup>534</sup> Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 39.

courtesies.”<sup>535</sup> Newby also praised McLoughlin.<sup>536</sup> Washington Smith Gilliam later recalled that McLoughlin “received father kindly and treated him splendidly.”<sup>537</sup>

When Frémont arrived at the fort, he wrote that McLoughlin “received me with the courtesy and hospitality for which he has been eminently distinguished.” Frémont’s description of Fort Vancouver provides insight into what the atmosphere was like during the 1843 wave of overlanders:

I found many American emigrants at the fort; others had already crossed the river into their land of promise—the Walahmette valley. Others were daily arriving; and all of them had been furnished with shelter, so far as it could be afforded by the buildings connected with the establishment. Necessary clothing and provisions (the latter to be afterwards returned in kind from the produce of their labor) were also furnished. This friendly assistance was of very great value to the emigrants, whose families were otherwise exposed to much suffering in the winter rains, which had now commenced; at the same time that they were in want of all the common necessaries of life. Those who had taken a water conveyance at the Nez Percé fort, continued to arrive safely, with no other accident than has been already mentioned. The party which had passed over the Cascade mountains were reported to have lost a number of their animals; and those who had driven their stock down the Columbia, had brought them safely in, and found for them a ready and very profitable market, and were already proposing to return to the States in the spring for another supply.<sup>538</sup>

Thomas Lowe, a fur trader who was stationed at Fort Vancouver, wrote about a party of American overlanders passing the fort in 1845:

A Party of 18 Americans arrived at the Fort from above before breakfast, in two of the Company’s boats, being part of this year’s Immigration from the States. The whole party when they started from Independence [*sic*] amounted they say to 3300 men, women and children having with them 600 waggons, of which number however 100 waggons have branched off to Calefornia [*sic*], so that only 500 come to the Columbia. This statement agrees with what the three Canadians who arrived some time ago told us. No accounts are to be opened here with the new Immigrants, whatever they get from the Shop must be paid for in Cash. These 18 men took passage again in the forenoon for Lynnton in the Green Boat, which was proceeding there for Wheat. “Callepooiah” arrived in the afternoon from the Falls.<sup>539</sup>

After the Barlow Road opened in 1846, the majority of settlers took that route to the Willamette Valley and few traveled past Fort Vancouver. Those who did pass by the fort could rely increasingly on other White settlers for supplies, which lessened the power of the HBC in the region. HBC leadership worried that Fort Vancouver was too close to the American settlements in the Willamette River Valley and that the fort would be raided. This concern prompted McLoughlin’s kindness toward overlanders and caused the HBC to shift its center of operations to the north, into present-day Canada.<sup>540</sup> The HBC’s influence waned further after the boundary treaty with Britain was signed in 1846. The HBC stayed at Fort Vancouver and received the title to the land at the fort from the

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<sup>535</sup> Nesmith, “Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 358–59.

<sup>536</sup> Winton, “William T. Newby’s Diary of the Emigration of 1843,” 241.

<sup>537</sup> “Reminiscences of Washington Smith Gilliam [from 1844],” 209.

<sup>538</sup> Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, 191.

<sup>539</sup> Thomas Lowe journal, August 24, 1845, Archives of Manitoba, 26.

<sup>540</sup> Hussey, “Chapter 3: History of Fort Vancouver, 1829–1846,” [no page number in online format].

US government, but the company continued to transition out of the region.<sup>541</sup> Meanwhile, the fur trade declined, and the fort's main economic role became supplying settlers and the US military. White settlers began squatting on land outside of the fort's stockade. As former employees of the HBC left for the gold rushes in California and then Idaho, the HBC presence at the fort declined to a point where it appeared to be holding the land only "in order to assert its claims before the British and American Joint Commission."<sup>542</sup>

Fort Vancouver changed in 1849, when the US Army's Mounted Riflemen and an artillery division established a camp up the hill from the HBC stockade, with the permission of the HBC. The US Army called the camp Vancouver Barracks, and Major D. H. Vinton became the "senior quartermaster of the Pacific station" at Vancouver Barracks.<sup>543</sup> The Army built the actual barracks the following year. Over the next several years, the number of troops stationed at the fort shifted, but the Army maintained a nearly constant military presence at Fort Vancouver.<sup>544</sup>

## Steamboat and US Military Era (ca. 1850-1870)

### *Steamboat Travel from Lower Cascades Landing*

Starting around 1850, steamboats ran between Portland and the Lower Cascades Landing. For many years, steamboats and sailboats operated concurrently. In 1851, A. A. Denny's party took a sailboat called the *Brigg Henry* from the Lower Cascades Landing to Portland.<sup>545</sup> Two years later, sail and steam travel continued: Celinda Hines mentions that the steamboat *Multnomah* was coming in to the Lower Cascades Landing while four sailboats were also docked at the landing.<sup>546</sup> The *Multnomah*, a 108-foot side wheeler built in Oregon City, carried passengers between the Cascades and Portland for the price of \$6.<sup>547</sup> Other steamboat operators charged even more, such as the captain of the *Columbia*, who charged \$10 per person.<sup>548</sup> Perhaps because of these high prices, sail travel continued alongside steamships. For example, T.J. Connor's party took the sailboat *Ohio* from the Cascades to Portland in 1853.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Hussey, "Chapter 3: History of Fort Vancouver, 1829–1846," [no page number in online format].

<sup>542</sup> Patricia C. Erigero, *Cultural Landscape Report Volume II: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site* (National Park Service, 1992), <http://www.nps.history.com/publications/fova/clr/chap3-2.htm>.

<sup>543</sup> Settle, ed., *March of the Mounted Riflemen*, 269.

<sup>544</sup> Erigero, *Cultural Landscape Report Volume II: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*.

<sup>545</sup> A. A. Denny, "Journal of the Route to Oregon," 1851 (transcribed 1940), 11, available on OCTA website.

<sup>546</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 309.

<sup>547</sup> Randall W. Mills, *Stern-Wheelers up the Columbia* (Palo Alto, CA: n.p., 1947), 189; Webber, ed., "The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852," 80.

<sup>548</sup> Edwards, "The Oregon Trail in the Columbia River Gorge," 168–69.

<sup>549</sup> T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, p. 11, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website.

Since all of the steamboats and sailboats going to the Cascades stopped at the Lower Cascades Landing, White settlers began building amenities for the overlanders and other travelers waiting there. By 1852, there the landing area included a tavern—a two-story frame house—where many overlanders stopped for food.<sup>550</sup> The steamboat landing and tavern were on Hamilton Island, on land that had been claimed by a White settler of that name. Adams and Blank waited at the tavern for the steamship to arrive and take them to Portland in 1852.<sup>551</sup> In



Figure 43. Steamboat docked at the Lower Cascades Landing. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

1853, Thomson stopped by the tavern before continuing on the pack trail to Fort Vancouver.<sup>552</sup> The charge to stay overnight was \$3.<sup>553</sup>

Celinda Hines recalled that, while staying at the Lower Cascades Landing, “A gentlemen presented us a watermelon.”<sup>554</sup> Maria Parsons Belshaw waited for a steamboat at the Lower Cascades Landing for several days, while the men in her party drove the stock by foot. Once the steamboat arrived, it took only a day to get to the mouth of the Sandy River, as Belshaw described:

SEPTEMBER 24TH. Puff-Puff came the steamer this morning. We took passage and soon launched out on the deep waters of the Columbia. It rained a little had a pleasant trip and splendid view of Cape Horn, its lofty rocks and crystal waters flowing down, its summit decked with a beautiful green tree with its branches bidding us welcome to its craggy rocks. Tongue cannot describe the beautiful scene that the God of nature has unfurled. Went to the landing on sands at 2 o'clock 17 minutes. We were four hours coming down. Quite pleasant here. There are farms within 2-4 & 6 miles of here. Raining very hard this evening . . .<sup>555</sup>

<sup>550</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 80.

<sup>551</sup> Webber, ed., “The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters, Cecelia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852,” 80.

<sup>552</sup> Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 99–101.

<sup>553</sup> Edwards, “The Oregon Trail in the Columbia Gorge,” 165.

<sup>554</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 309.

<sup>555</sup> Ellison, “Diary of Maria Parsons Belshaw, 1853,” 329.

George Belshaw, who took the pack trail while the women in his party took the steamboat, noted that someone at the Lower Cascades Landing was selling food. He wrote,

My horses are pretty thin, but they asked me \$4 per dozen for sheaf oats. That is too much for them. I bought some flour today at \$15 per 100 pounds. The day following I sent my family down on a boat to the mouth of Big Sandy, in the Willamette Valley, and I put the stock together and went a little ways and camped.<sup>556</sup>

Chinookan people were still living along the river in the early 1850s, but in small numbers. Overlanders rarely mentioned Chinookan assistance on this stretch of river after steamboat service began, perhaps indicating that they interacted less with Chinookan people and possibly relied less upon their assistance due to increasing White settlement and new transportation infrastructure. Alternately, it may have indicated that White settlers did not consider their interactions with Chinookan people worth noting, a real possibility in light of the increasingly anti-Indigenous sentiment of overlanders. Between waiting at the tavern and traveling by steamboat to Portland, overlanders spent most of this last stretch of the journey in White-owned spaces.

Harvey Hines described the *Peytona*, which his party boarded at the Lower Cascades Landing, as a “steam flatboat.” Hines helped to load onto the boat “our people, wagons, and all our camp equipage for a ride to the mouth of the Sandy River,” while he and some other men took the cattle on the stock trail.<sup>557</sup> Celinda Hines described the ride on the *Peytona*:

After dinner went on board the steam boat Peytona on which we had previously conveyed our things & went down 30 miles to Sandy[,] The trip was delightful[,] Rocky islands rear their craggy peaks far above the surface of the water. There is a high rocky precipice called Cape Horn[,] The scenery is very beautiful here. When some more than half way down we were started by the intelligence that the boiler was empty. The fire was immediately put out & the boiler refilled. Had this not been discovered when it was we should probably been the victims of an explosion. When nearly down we were somewhat frightened by the captains rushing up to the pilot in great agitation who seemed also to be much excited[,] the cause of which we knew not but it seemed the boat struck a snag & was in danger.<sup>558</sup>

She did not mention any further issues with the *Peytona*, suggesting that everything turned out well.

By 1853, some overlanders were traveling upstream from Portland to claim land along the Columbia River. For instance, Alice Ellen Gaylord’s family had traveled to Portland via the Barlow Road, but after living in Oregon City and then Clackamas County, they decided to settle at The Dalles. They took the steamboat *Carrie Ladd* from Portland to the Cascades, with the entire family and all of their livestock on the boat.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 236.

<sup>557</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 310–11.

<sup>558</sup> Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 127–28.

<sup>559</sup> Lillia Lela Moore, “Diary of Orange Gaylord to California and Oregon in 1850, a Second Trip to Oregon in 1853, Including Gaylord Family History,” in *Transactions of the Forty-Fifth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association, Portland, July 19, 1917* (Portland, OR: Chausse-Prudhomme Co. Printers, 1920), 437–39.

## *Livestock Trails in the Steamboat Era*

Even after steamboats began running the river, overlanders continued to use the trail on the north side of the Columbia River to move livestock. In 1853, T. J. Connor drove his stock on this trail after seeing off most of his party on the sailboat *Ohio*.<sup>560</sup> Origen Thomson took the same trail with his livestock, skipping Fort Vancouver and instead ferrying the cattle across the river, possibly near the mouth of the Washougal River:

[*Friday, September 24:*] Passing over the mountain, in a-half mile we came to a fine running branch, and grass to the left, and in eight miles to the Columbia, below the range of mountains. The first of the way from the Cascades is along the river, and, with the exception of a few muddy streams to cross, is a good road. Crossing the mountain is bad in places, though nothing like as bad as above the Cascades; the woods are very thick, and cattle could be very easily lost if they strayed but a short distance from the road. The bottom here is quite wide and level, and is covered with very good grass. We drove down the bottom, and camped on a little brook; got a loaf of bread and a quart of milk from a house near by, and a few pounds of venison and pound of sugar from an indian, which made us an excellent supper and breakfast.

*Saturday, September 25-3* --In three miles came to the upper ferry, and the wind being very high there was no crossing; so we lay all day, f[e]asting on potato[e]s (and nothing else) at \$1.00 per bushel; and they were the very best—"the kind they have in Oregon." In the evening drove our cattle to an island, where was the lower ferry landing. Here was good grass, and the cattle had a grand feast. The two ferries are in hot competition; the upper one crosses for a "bit" a head, and the lower charges nothing, but those paying anything can pay 10 cents.

*Saturday, September 25—12.*—Crossed before breakfast, as the wind was fair and there was no telling how soon it might raise the whitecaps. We had to man the oars, and it was pretty good exercise to pull our teams across the Columbia, (about a mile wide ;) then come back and partook of a first-rate breakfast at the ferryman's house, at 50 cents. It was a real good farmhouse breakfast. We had boiled beets, turnips, potatoes, beef, fresh butter, and milk, light bread and molasses, pies, and preserves. You may be sure we did it justice. . . . Here we left Whitlock, who was going to Oregon City—we to Portland . . . The ferry lands just below the mouth of the Sandy. Ten miles from Portland we left our cattle on a claim, in the Columbia bottom, at 25 cents a week per head; here bought a watermelon, the first we had eaten this season.<sup>561</sup>

In 1853, Harvey Hines and some other men from his party traveled with their cattle and horses on the trail on the north side of the river. They camped at the base of Castle Rock, then went over Cape Horn.<sup>562</sup> Hines described that segment of the trail:

The trail down the shore until we came to Cape Horn was exceedingly rough, full of fallen trees and broken rocks, and margined by such a dense growth of timber and underbrush that we could not stop a moment after we started until about the middle of the afternoon. Though we had horses it was impossible to ride them through the forest, and so, turning them loose with the cattle, we were all on foot. What with running through the woods to bring back cattle that were refractory, and the continued yelling and shouting necessary to keep the cattle moving along the trail this was one of the most wearisome days of the entire journey. . . . [We] descended from Cape Horn mountain and were going out of the forest upon the grassy river bottom that stretched a few miles above the Washougal

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<sup>560</sup> T. J. Connor, journal, 1853, p. 11, Merrill J. Mattes Collection, available on OCTA website.

<sup>561</sup> Thomson mentioned an island, which may have been Government Island, suggesting that he was near the Washougal. Thomson, *Crossing the Plains*, 101–2.

<sup>562</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 310–11.

Creek. It was subset, and we hastened forward desiring to reach the ferry on the Columbia before we halted. After dark we forded the arm of the stream to Goodwin's Island, and letting our cattle stray at their own sweet will upon it, built our camp fire under a great oak that stood near Mr. Goodwin's house. We had made our drive from the Cascades quicker than any company had done before us.<sup>563</sup>

The next day, Hines and the other men “ferried our stock once more over the great Columbia” and met up with their party at the mouth of the Sandy River.<sup>564</sup>

Many immigrant parties in the early 1850s waited near the Sandy River for their men and cattle to arrive, and then all traveled together to their final destinations. By 1853, the Sandy River Delta was home to several White settlers. Some offered immigrants food, such as John Crosby, near whose home some overlanders camped while waiting for their livestock. Celinda Hines wrote, “We were camped near Mr. Crosby's. Country very fine Every kind of vegetable [*sic*] grows large. Melons plenty. Cattle came this morning all well Concluded to remain over sabbath.”<sup>565</sup>

George Belshaw described his journey on the trail from the Lower Cascades Landing to the mouth of the Sandy River, which he took after paying for his family to take a steamboat:

I put the stock together and went a little ways and camped. Good grass.

Sunday, September 25, we started the cattle again. The trail goes near by the river most of the way, and good grass in patches. We drove about 16 miles and camped on a little creek just beyond the mountains.

Monday, September 26, we only drove eight miles today, on account of losing a cow while we camped on the Columbia bottom. Grass short. One hill so steep that the cattle had to slide down.

Tuesday, September 27, I drove the stock down to the ferry boat, about two miles, and got them all safe across. Had to pay 25 cents per head. I got to the wagon, where my family was, about noon. We then drove out a little ways to good grass on the Columbia bottom and camped. This is on the Willamette Valley, Oregon.<sup>566</sup>

### *US Military at Fort Vancouver*

By the mid-1850s, the US military had begun using Fort Vancouver as a base for campaigns to force Indigenous people onto reservations. Troops from Fort Vancouver traveled up to the Cascades during the March 1856 armed conflict between the United States and Chinookan people. The confrontation halted steamship travel for a period—the *Belle*, *Mountain Buck*, and *Fashion* were then running on this section of the river—but it resumed shortly thereafter. Most overlanders

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<sup>563</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 313.

<sup>564</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 314.

<sup>565</sup> Celinda Hines in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women, Volume 6*, 128.

<sup>566</sup> Castle, “Belshaw Journey, Oregon Trail, 1853,” 236.

avoided the Cascades, and the Columbia River Route in general, in the aftermath of this and other violent incidents.<sup>567</sup>



**Figure 44.** Gustavas Sohon completed this lithograph of Fort Vancouver in 1854. It depicts the period when the US Army and the HBC shared the area. The HBC buildings are on the right, while the more recent US military buildings are on the left, up the hill from the original fort.

Source: NPS.

Tensions increased between the US military and the HBC over time, and by 1860, US soldiers were actively dismantling HBC structures in the area. By June 1860, anything transportable had been shipped to HBC officials in Victoria, British Columbia, and the US Army had full control of the fort.<sup>568</sup> American troops stationed at Fort Vancouver spent the remainder of the 1860s rounding up or using military force against Indigenous people who did not want to go to reservations, making sure that White settlers could safely take the lands of the Indigenous people they were displacing.<sup>569</sup> The US Army improved and kept in use most of the roads that the HBC had used, which were based on Chinookan trails through the region.<sup>570</sup>

By the end of the 1860s, the US Army was “protecting” overlanders from Indigenous people in general, but overlanders who took the Columbia River Route were not necessarily interacting with the military or with Fort Vancouver while on their journey, since steamships and stock trails bypassed the fort. And with the HBC’s declining presence at Fort Vancouver in the 1850s and near complete abandonment by 1860, settlers no longer had interaction with the HBC, either.

<sup>567</sup> Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway,” 180–81.

<sup>568</sup> Erigero, *Cultural Landscape Report Volume II: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*.

<sup>569</sup> Hussey, “Chapter 4: History of Fort Vancouver,” [no page number in online format].

<sup>570</sup> Hussey, “Chapter 4: History of Fort Vancouver,” [no page number in online format].



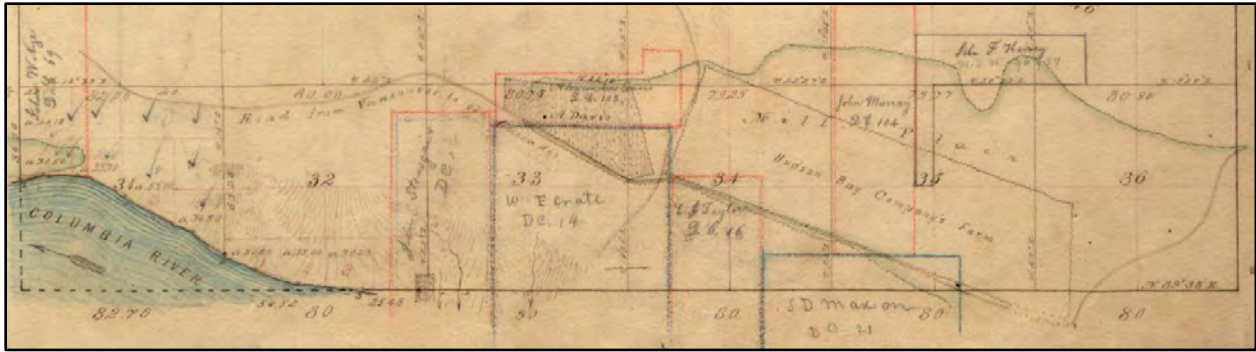


Figure 45. The US military used roads that the HBC had used, which were based on Chinookan trails in the area. Here, the “Road from Vancouver to the Cascades,” zoomed in to the area around Fort Vancouver (notice the HBC farm and the several homesteads in the area). US General Land Office, 1857.

Source: US Bureau of Land Management.

## Gold Rush

People traveling upstream from the Willamette Valley to the gold fields in Idaho made up much of the White settler traffic on the Columbia River in the early 1860s. Steamship travel boomed as a result, transporting supplies and prospective miners from Portland upriver, and dejected or elated seekers (with their gold) downriver.<sup>571</sup> The *Oregonian* published an account of upriver steamship travel in 1865. The writer traveled aboard the *Wilson G. Hunt*, “a large side-wheel steamer”:

From Vancouver the river winds its way past craggy points, with here and there an opening of low flat land. Over the high rugged banks rush numerous streams formed by the melting snow of the mountains, making majestic waterfalls, many of which descends from a height of over one thousand feet. The water, dissipated into spray, forms a spectacle of surprising beauty and grandeur. Before the eye is satisfied with gazing upon these glories, you pass through the gorge and emerge into a large opening, where the river rapidly widens. From this point Mount Hood is visible in all its majesty, mantled in its snowy shroud. . . . Arriving in sight of a promontory named Cape Horn, another wild scene is presented. What is here witnessed baffles all power of description. Nothing elsewhere seen can possibly surpass it. Further on, Prospect Rock is beheld. This admonishes the traveler of his near approach to the Cascades. Leaving the steamer here he proceeds by railroad six miles to the upper falls. Here another steamer is found waiting. This boat is surpassed by none on this Coast. . . . In the spacious saloon of the boat a table is laid loaded with the most excellent and delicious fare.<sup>572</sup>

As on other stretches of the river, only those with money could afford steamship travel on the Columbia. As of 1865, it cost \$6 per person and \$15 per ton of freight to travel from Portland to The Dalles (which included the steamship between Portland and the Lower Cascades, the rail portage around the Cascades, and the steamship from the Upper Cascades to The Dalles).<sup>573</sup> Randall Hewitt’s party could afford the steamer, and he described a pleasant trip:

<sup>571</sup> Wilson, “The Lure of the River,” 5.

<sup>572</sup> “Notes of a Trip to Owyhee,” *Oregonian*, May 11, 1865.

<sup>573</sup> “Miscellaneous,” *Oregonian*, May 13, 1864.

The boat below the rapids was a Hudson River palace in miniature, the Willamette. The dinner served to a large assemblage was excellent and abundant. . . .

A remarkable point of rocks jutting into the river, known as Cape Horn, is distinguished thus because of high winds and the delays it occasions to navigation. It is a bold high buttress of solid rock, extending out into deep water, against which the winds dash the water with such violence as at times to be a source of danger.<sup>574</sup>

Few settlers could afford these luxuries, and most took the Barlow Road or other routes to areas available for homesteading. The importance of this lower stretch of the Columbia River to White immigration to Oregon and Washington had effectively ended by the 1860s.

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<sup>574</sup> Hewitt, *Across the plains and over the divide*, 486–87.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

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Overlander travel through the Columbia River Gorge can be split into four distinct periods. First, the early mass migration lasted from approximately 1843 to 1847. This period begins with the first major influx of travelers, the Great Migration, and concludes in the year of the Waíiletpu incident, which shifted travel patterns and routes. Overlanders in these years often traveled on the Columbia River for at least part of their journey. They often reached the Columbia River at some point between Fort Walla Walla and the Deschutes River and traveled downstream in makeshift rafts, paid for Indigenous pilots to guide them in canoes, or secured the use of HBC bateaux. A few overlanders attempted to go over the rapids from Celilo Falls through the Narrows in makeshift rafts, but after the Applegate deaths, most chose to portage that section of the river. Overlanders usually paid Indigenous people to assist them with the portage, as Indigenous people had required fur traders to do. They stopped at Wascopam Mission to rest and restock their supplies, then continued by water to the Upper Cascades Landing. At the Cascades Rapids, overlanders paid Chinookan people to help them portage around the falls, and many also paid for assistance in carrying supplies. Travel from the bottom of the Cascades to Fort Vancouver was by raft, canoe, or HBC bateau, often with the sail raised.

The second period, roughly 1848 to 1853, came after the opening of the Barlow Road in 1846 and the Waíiletpu incident in 1847. During these years, most overlanders who chose to travel through the Columbia River Gorge only did so because they arrived too late in the year to travel by the Barlow Road, which became too snowy to travel on sometime in autumn. Indigenous people still controlled the portage around the Cascades, but their power had diminished due to disease and coordinated American attacks on Indigenous communities.

The journey of the women and children of the Hines family represents the second period of travel well. The Hineses reached the Columbia River east of the Deschutes River confluence and then took a wagon trail to The Dalles. After stopping in The Dalles for provisions, they took a steamboat to the Upper Cascades, while some in their party drove their livestock through the mountains on the south side of the river. The party portaged the Cascades along with the men and livestock. The men then took a trail with the livestock the rest of the way, while the women and children boarded a steamboat from the bottom of the Cascades to the Sandy River.<sup>575</sup>

For both of the first two periods, overlanders used established livestock routes to move their cattle, oxen, and horses. Starting at whatever point the group reached the Columbia River, a few men in the party drove livestock on Indigenous trails along the river—mostly along the south bank—until they reached one of several points between Hood River and the Cascades, where the livestock swam or were ferried across. The men then continued on the north bank of the river until

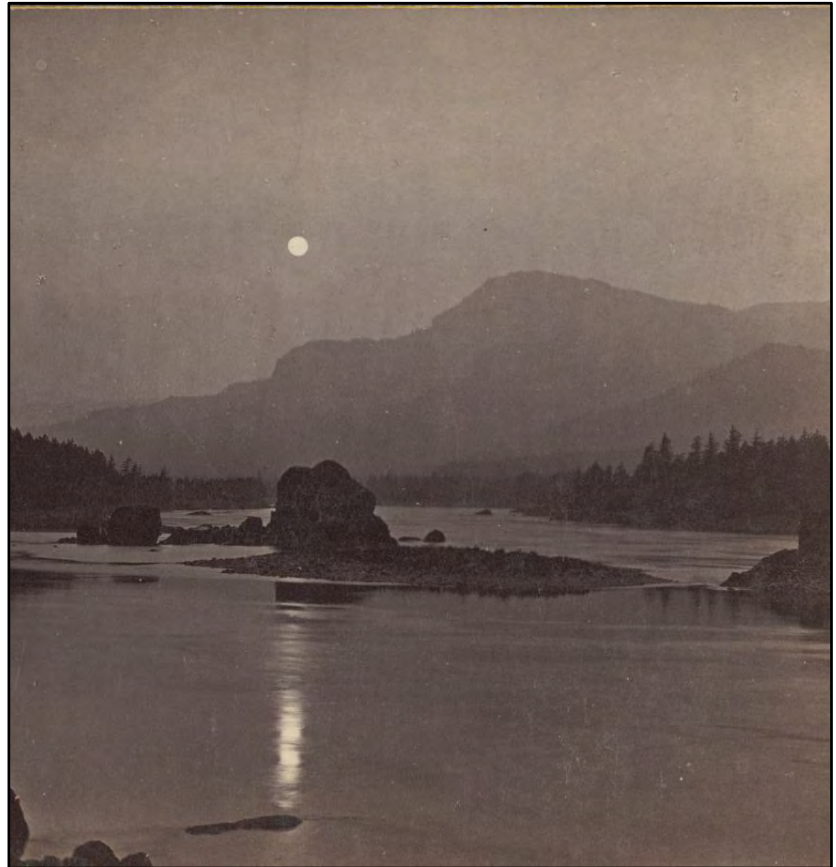
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<sup>575</sup> Peters, ed., *Seven Months to Oregon*, 285–316.

they reached a point around the Washougal River, where they ferried or swam their livestock to the south bank of the river and then drove them to Portland or Oregon City.

A gap in significant overlander travel along the Columbia River occurred around 1854 to 1857, during the period in which the US government signed treaties with Indigenous people and waged wars to force them onto reservations. For part of this period, Indigenous lands east of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington were formally closed to settlers, although this did not stop individuals from squatting on these lands. Overlanders who traveled west during these years often avoided the Columbia River in order to circumvent its dangerous rapids.

The third period of migration through the river valley stretched roughly from 1858 to 1863. This period was marked by the development of White-run enterprises, such as a wooden portage railroad around the Cascades, a portage railroad between The Dalles and Celilo, and White settlements around steamship and rail developments. A series of gold finds in Idaho in the early 1860s prompted further development of White-run businesses and settlements, and they led to more upriver than downriver traffic for most of the decade. While some overlanders still traveled along the Columbia River in the 1860s, most took more direct routes better-suited to wagon travel, and the river instead became a two-way thoroughfare for settlers, dotted with White-run businesses.



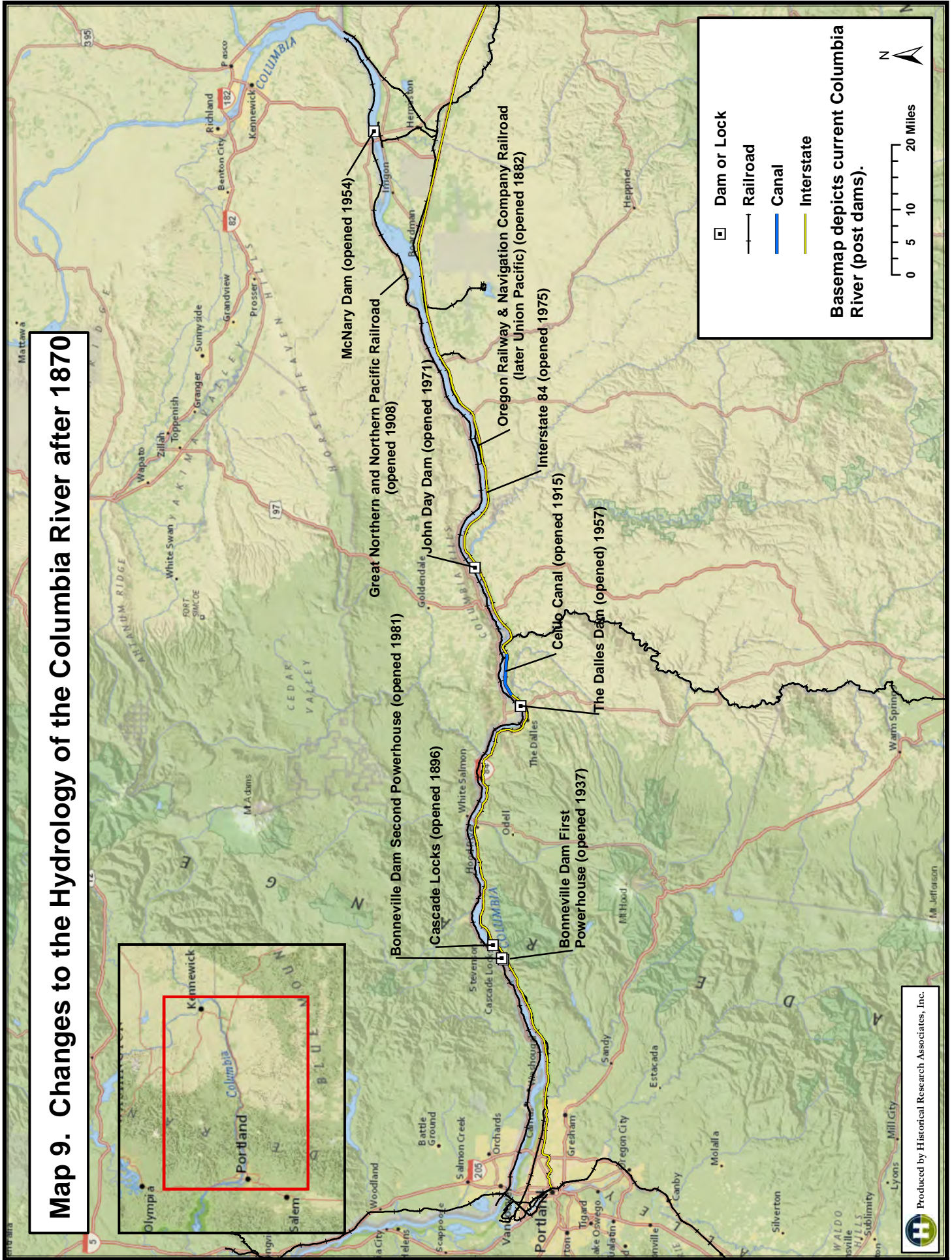
**Figure 46.** The Cascades of the Columbia under moonlight. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867.

**Source:** Oregon Historical Society.

A fourth and final period, from 1864 to 1870, was a time of dwindling overland migration through the gorge and of increased railroad travel in both directions along the gorge. The mid-Columbia River Valley had at this point become a center of White-run commerce and ceased to be a main route of overlander travel.



**Map 9. Changes to the Hydrology of the Columbia River after 1870**



## Chapter 9: Epilogue

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### A Changed River: The Columbia River After 1870

After 1870, the US government and private companies radically changed the hydrology of the Columbia River through three types of infrastructure projects: canals, railroads, and dams (see Map 9). The canals and railroads served similar purposes—to facilitate easier movement of people and goods through the river valley—and their periods of construction overlapped. In the twentieth century, the US government built a series of dams on the Columbia River to generate electricity. These three types of development forever altered the Columbia River.

#### *Cascade Locks and Canal*

In the late nineteenth century, with Portland booming, wealthy White industrialists in the region began investigating ways to improve freight transportation along the Columbia River. In 1874, a few of these men incorporated the Cascade Canal and Lock Company. They added investors and changed the name to the Columbia River Improvement Company. Although they hired an engineer to plan a canal around the Cascades Rapids, they did no further work on the project.



**Figure 47.** The US Army Corps of Engineers blasted the riverbed in preparation for constructing the Cascade Locks and Canal. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, 1883.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.



**Figure 48.** Cascade Locks under construction, viewed from the east. Photograph by Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1883.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

In 1876, Congress authorized funding for the canal and locks at the Cascades. The following year, the US government condemned land on the Oregon side of the Columbia River at the Cascades Rapids, some of which had been part of the Oregon Portage Rail and was property of the OSNC. The USACE began excavation the following year, but excavation stalled due to lapses in congressional appropriations. When the project resumed, the Corps blasted basalt at the future location of the canal and in the river channel downstream of the canal, to improve waterborne passage through that section. The USACE completed construction in 1896, and the canal and locks opened for use November 5, 1896. With the Cascades Canal open, boats could travel from the mouth of the Columbia to The Dalles without obstruction or portage.<sup>576</sup>



Figure 49. Steamship *Bailey Gatzert* passes through Cascade Locks. Photograph by William L. Finley, ca. 1900–1940.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

## Railroads

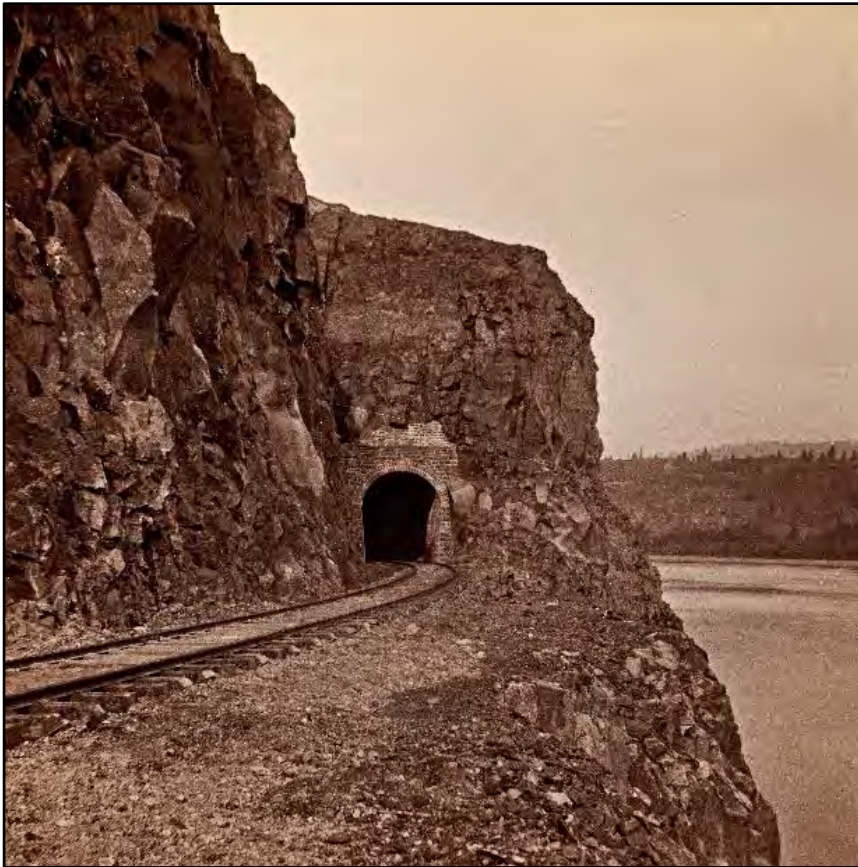
The first railroad to run the entire stretch of the Columbia River from Portland to Wallula was completed by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company in 1882. It incorporated the routes, and possibly some of the old structures, of the Dalles and Celilo Portage Railroad and the Oregon Portage Railroad at the Cascades. Continuous rail travel was easier than the previous combination of steamboat and portage railroad, so steamboat travel on the river declined after the opening of the railroad.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 134; Gill, “Oregon’s First Railway,” 224–29, 233–34; Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 382; William F. Willingham, “Cascade Locks,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, December 18, 2019, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/cascade\\_locks/#.XvOawmhKiUk](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/cascade_locks/#.XvOawmhKiUk).

<sup>577</sup> Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 381.





**Figure 50. The recently completed Railroad Tunnel No. 3 on the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company railroad on the southern bank of the Columbia River. Stereoview by Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1883.**

**Source: Oregon Historical Society.**

In 1908, the Spokane, Portland, and Seattle Railway completed a railroad on the Washington side of the river. The “North Bank Railroad” carried passengers and freight between Portland and Pasco.<sup>578</sup> When the railroad opened, the *Oregonian* reported,

Completion of the North Bank road, one of the most notable achievements of railroad construction in the West, was properly celebrated at an elaborate banquet at the Portland Commercial Club last night. . . . The opening of this railroad means the commercial supremacy of Portland in the Pacific Northwest. In addition to connecting the city directly with two transcontinental railroad systems—the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific—Portland is made the natural gateway and metropolis of a water-grade route from a wonderfully productive Inland Empire to the sea. The additional territory which is thus made directly tributary to this city had outgrown its transportation facilities and consequently was without rapid communication with the markets of the world. It was in response to the demand of increased facilities for marketing the abundant crops of that district that Mr. Hill investigated and acted.<sup>579</sup>

Settler towns in Washington along the Columbia River boomed with the new railroad and the traffic it brought.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> “The New Route East,” advertisement, *Oregonian*, December 14, 1908, 4; Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 382.

<sup>579</sup> “Portland Greeted Railroad Builder: Celebrates Opening of North Bank Road,” *Oregonian*, November 7, 1908.

<sup>580</sup> “Cliffs Takes on New Life,” *Oregonian*, November 30, 1908, 13.

## Dalles-Celilo Canal



Figure 51. The Celilo Canal under construction in the foreground, viewed from the south bank of the Columbia River. The railroads on both sides of the river are visible, as is a steamboat just upstream of the falls. Photography by R. E. Williams, 1913.

Source: Oregon Historical Society.

Around the time the USACE surveyed and constructed the Cascades Canal, it examined the possibility of constructing a canal around the Dalles Rapids and Celilo Falls. The Corps made formal surveys in 1879–1880 and considered several different options for installing locks or other improvements, but Congress did not appropriate funds for construction. In 1893, Congress reexamined plans, and the Corps recommended a railroad from Celilo to The Dalles and a canal on the Oregon shore once the money was available.<sup>581</sup> An engineer involved in the process later wrote,

There was also a good deal of talk during 1893 of a dam at the head of The Dalles which would pond the water back to the foot of Tumwater falls, drowning out Ten-Mile Rapids, and the idea had a good deal of favor until Colonel G. H. Mendell, corps of U. S. engineers, recommended the construction of a boat railway from Celilo to Big Eddy. The board of engineers had approved a portage railway from

<sup>581</sup> Schubert, “The Dalles-Celilo Canal,” 384–85.

The Dalles city to Celilo, and he included this in his recommendation, saying it could be used as a part of the boat rail way to be constructed later.<sup>582</sup>

Construction of the canal stalled until 1905, in part because those who navigated the river were not especially interested in the plan. That year, Congress and the state of Oregon appropriated funds to build “a continuous canal from head of Celilo Falls to the foot of Five Mile Rapids at Big Eddy.”<sup>583</sup> Construction occurred over the next decade, and the Dalles-Celilo Canal opened in 1915.<sup>584</sup>

### *Dams on the Columbia*

In the twentieth century, the USACE constructed a series of dams that drowned the rapids of the Columbia River and changed the riverbanks. These dams were, in order of year of construction:

#### **Bonneville Dam (first powerhouse) (completed 1937)**

- Location: Just downstream of the Cascades Rapids.
- Rapids affected: Cascades of the Columbia.

#### **The Dalles Dam (completed 1957)**

- Location: Just upstream of the town of The Dalles.
- Rapids affected: Dalles Rapids (Short and Long Narrows) and Celilo Falls.

#### **John Day Dam (completed 1971)**

- Location: Just downstream of the John Day River.
- Rapids affected: John Day Rapids, Upper John Day Rapids, Indian Rapids, and Squally Hook Rapids.

#### **McNary Dam (completed 1954)**

- Location: Just upstream of the mouth of the Umatilla River.
- Rapids affected: Umatilla Rapids.

#### **Bonneville Dam (second powerhouse) (completed 1981)**

- Location: Added to original Bonneville Dam. The new structure was close to the Washington shore.
- Rapids affected: Cascades. Widened channel of the river on the Washington side, creating a new island (“Cascades Island”) between the original spillway and the newly constructed powerhouse.

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<sup>582</sup> Marshall N. Dana, “The Celilo Canal—Its Origin—Its Building and Meaning,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 16, no. 2, Open (June 1915): 109.

<sup>583</sup> Dana, “The Celilo Canal,” 110.

<sup>584</sup> “Canal to be Opened May 1,” *Oregonian*, January 5, 1915, 12; Elliott, “The Dalles-Celilo Portage; Its History and Influence,” 134.

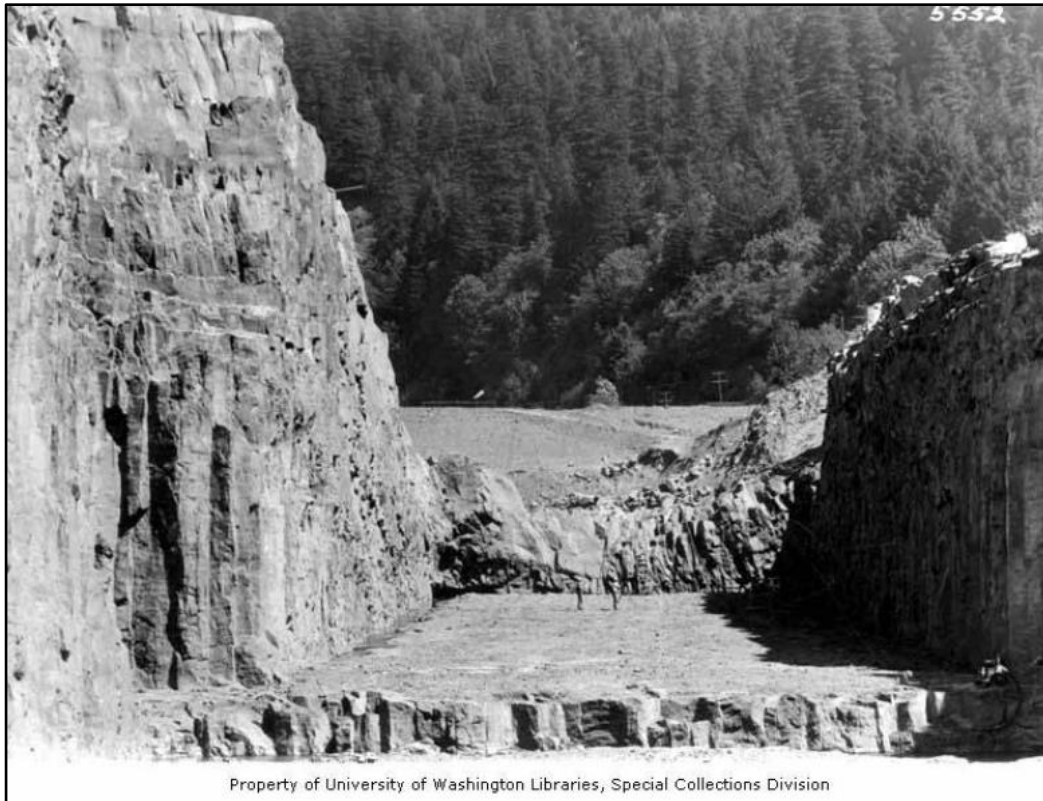


Figure 52. Excavation for the construction of the Bonneville Dam lock and gate sill, 1937 or 1938.

Source: University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, IND0768.



Figure 53. Bonneville Dam on May 23, 1937, shortly after its construction. The Cascades Rapids would have been behind the dam and around the river bend, which is now relatively still water.

Source: Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Catalog ID Number S1991.34.42.



Figure 54. Dalles Dam under construction in 1955. The Long Narrows (Dalles Rapids) and Big Eddy are on the right-hand side of the image. The Short Narrows (Little Dalles Rapids) and Celilo Falls are upstream, or to the right, of what is visible here.

Source: Washington State Historical Society Tacoma, WA, Catalog ID Number 1997.76.20.9-6-55-010.



Figure 55. The Dalles Dam opened in 1957 and flooded the Dalles Rapids and Celilo Falls.

Source: US Army Corps of Engineers.

The Columbia River that Chinookan people and Sahaptin people lived near and fished on for centuries, and that fur traders, missionaries, and overlanders encountered in the nineteenth century, no longer exists. Excavation of rock in preparation for dam building and in the service of easing navigation permanently altered the riverbed. The dams that followed have drowned the rapids behind them, leaving no trace of the free-flowing Columbia that roared through chasms at the Dalles and the Cascades. However, dams can be removed, and the river could flow freely again even in its altered bed, which some Indigenous people whose ancestral homelands are the banks of this river still ask for.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Courtney Flatt, “Northwest Tribes Call For Removal of Lower Columbia River Dams,” *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.opb.org/news/article/pacific-northwest-tribes-remove-columbia-river-dams/>; “Yakama Nation calls for removal of Columbia River dams,” October 14, 2019, *Indianz.com*, <https://www.indianz.com/News/2019/10/14/yakama-nation-calls-for-removal-of-colum.asp>; Jeffrey Mize, “Two tribes want three Columbia River dams removed,” *Columbian*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.columbian.com/news/2019/oct/14/pacific-northwest-tribes-remove-columbia-river-dams/>.

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