

## CLOSE TO HOME

## TRAVELING FROM YAKAITL-WIMAK TO WILLAPA BAY BY CANOE

## Second interlude: Portage into the Willapa

By DAVID CAMPICHE

*Note: This is part two of a three-part series.*

Jimmy Goulter tells stories of his grandfather, John R. Goulter, and grandmother, Jenny, living in a pioneer house built by John's father, Allen, in the mid-19th century. The house rested beside the Wallicut River, where today U.S. Highway 101 intersects with U.S. Alternate Route 101, just two miles east of Ilwaco. John R. Goulter later became a member of the Washington State Legislature and was often pulled away from his farm for weeks at a time. One might assume that he sometimes traveled with R. H. Espy (another legislator) from Oysterville, the great-grandfather of Sidney Stevens, a favorite writer of local lore and a fine historian. Jimmy's father, Allen, was born in that house in 1919.

There were few roads then, and none led to Olympia. John R. Goulter most likely portaged rolling hills dozens of times, and then use river canoes and ferries to complete that 110-mile journey. Left at home, Jenny kept a loaded shotgun by the front door. Washington Territory was still the wild west. Out one of her few windows, she could see flights of swans and geese and immeasurable hordes of waterfowl. They settled on her fields and charged the night with contorted sounds, with squawks and whistles and honks and raspy protests. Coyotes stalked them. Pre-contact, the Native Americans hunted them with bows and arrows. They were keen archers, these First Peoples, and the numbers of these birds must have been daunting. Up these same streams that laced her property like spider webs, tens of thousands of salmon bolted up any waterway that offered sanctuary, a spot to lay a red and regenerate offspring.

The small village of Chinook was another nine miles east up the Columbia River, an ancient Tsinuk

(Chinook) outpost, once numbering in the thousands of indigenous peoples but now pummeled to a dozen small lodges of dispirited inhabitants. Early chronicler James Gilcrest Swan defined the new Boston (a universal native term for the American settlers) village: "We now drew near the village proper, which consisted of some 12 to 14 houses, occupied by whites, and nearly the same numbers of Indian lodges."

From Swan's journals, "The Northwest Coast" or "Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory," we gather that the Wallicut River was a small artery leading from the Columbia River to an overland trail that terminated on Bear River, about two miles from the mouth of that sturdy stream. Betsy Trick, a half-Chinook of recent legend, defined the Wallicut as "brook of shining pebbles." The trek over the Willapa Hills was more than a mile and arduous.

This Wallicut portage was one of three routes followed by the Chinook peoples from the Columbia River to Willapa Bay. A portage is a short overland route that a person follows, carrying a boat or supplies between two waterways.

The Chinook River (Wapalooche) portage was also well traveled, as was a portage from Black Lake in Ilwaco, north and then east up Tarlatt Slough and into the Willapa. The portages were later used by the early pioneers, including the Goulter family.

Jimmy's father, Allen Goulter II, a local veterinarian and World War II vet, was a well-regarded doctor who administered care to horses, cows, cats and dogs. When one of my own father's springer spaniels was left tattered in a dog fight — naturally, over a female — the two docs, Goulter and Campiche, spent most of a night doing skin grafts on the dying animal. He survived, only to fight and lose again, reminding this writer of something akin to the War of the

Roses. Oh, how men love to quarrel! This held true of the Chinook and the white settlers as well, an unfortunate fact that we tend to overlook.

The Wallicut to Bear River portage is nearly invisible today. But Jimmy Goulter knows the route well. Many of his observations are based on memories and details from his youth. On the other hand, Jimmy is a bit of a sleuth, and he knows his geography.

At the top of the Wallicut was the Marshall Somme property, and a house with a horse and pack. For a buck, a settler could rent the horse, and the dutiful animal would carry family belongings and/or supplies on its broad back across their field, and then along a meandering trail that followed a ridgeline, which today parallels, crosses and often follows Highway 101 over the big hill just west of the Bear River Bridge. It terminates just north of that same bridge on an elevated river bank, just a couple hundred yards down Jeldness Road. The Chinook had an encampment here, and probably initiated a tariff for the use of their landing. Like a modern-day parking lot, canoes were cached for the return trip up Willapa Bay to the Chinook winter lodges. It would have been difficult to drag the long cedar vessels overland. Swan describes one as weighing a ton.

Not impossible however; the infamous wordsmith, Willard Espy, describes the portage — and how his grandfather, R. H. Espy, stole a burial canoe, and he and Isaac A. Clark carried the vessel on their shoulders and then launched into Willapa Bay.

As the two entrepreneurs began to paddle down the deep-water channel that traversed the bay, the Willapa shimmered with quicksilver light. The two easterners were planning a rendezvous with Espy's Indian friend in Oysterville. Late that afternoon, their Boston Tillicum was born. The seedling outpost would be called Oysterville.



PHOTO BY DAVID CAMPICHE

Pictured is the Lower Wallicut River on Jimmy Goulter's field in Pacific County, Washington. The Wallicut River was a favored portage of the Chinook peoples and first Euro-American pioneers.



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Pictured is Tarlatt Slough at Willapa Bay. Another portage involved traveling from Black Lake in Ilwaco, north and then east up Tarlatt Slough and into the Willapa.

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