

OPINION

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Walking in the path of glory and ruination

Lewis and Clark national park is a great historical stage

We who reside at the mouth of the Columbia River live in the midst of one of America's great adventure stories. Between November and March of each year, we may relive the arrival, daring deeds and departure of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Friday, March 23, was the day the expedition put their canoes into the water of what the Chinooks called Netul (our Lewis and Clark River) and headed back upriver.

In the midst of William Clark's journal entry for that day, these words leap out. "We... left Fort Clatsop on our homeward bound journey." After nearly five months at the western edge of the continent, the Lewis and Clark Expedition set off back to the United States — its western frontier then defined by Missouri, and St. Louis in particular.

Six of us commemorated this consequential day in our regional history by reading from the journals written by Clark, Capt. Meriwether Lewis, Sgt. John Ordway, Sgt. Patrick Gass and Private Joseph Whitehouse. We also reflected on the differences between our pampered lives and those of the rough and ready explorers.

Our group was led by Jon Burpee, superintendent of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. Joining in reading from the journals were Matt Winters of the Chinook Observer; his cousin and fellow Western history enthusiast Bob Bell; Darrell and Merideth Brann of Enterprise; and Steve Forrester, retired publisher of The Daily Astorian. Of all the Fort Clatsop superintendents of the past three decades, Burpee is one of the most enthusiastic interpreters of this history.

After lunch in the picnic area near the Fort Clatsop Visitors Center, we walked down the hill to Netul Landing, from which the canoes departed on that day 212 years ago.

By the time we reached Netul Landing, the expedition had been waterborne for 10 minutes. Clark had sent elk hunters ahead to Point William, known to us as Tongue Point. (By the date this is in print, the expedition was in the vicinity of modern-day Troutdale east of Portland, stocking up on wild game meat, including an unlucky family of bears.)

In our layers of contemporary outerwear but still feeling the chill of rain and snow, we reflected on how hardy the explorers were — clothed in one layer of buckskins and wearing moccasins of elk hide. Burpee commented that making many dozens of these moccasins for the return journey was one of that winter's prime activities.

Time travel made easy

At its best, Lewis and Clark national park presents many such opportunities for a kind of personalized time travel. Aside from our small party, we encountered no one else at Netul. The National Park Service hasn't erased all evidence of civilization from Fort Clatsop's viewshed. But as nesting ducks pattered around the quiet wetlands, the rustic setting made it easy to imagine the bustle that would have accompanied departure — men lugging heavy loads through the forest from the little nearby fort and securing supplies in their canoes for the arduous journey home. There was no napping in the backseat for anyone on the homeward leg of that seminal American "road trip."

Infamously, one of the canoes they departed in was stolen from the Clatsop Indians, after one of the expedition's own clunkier watercraft drifted away on the tide. By the time the expedition arrived at the mouth of the Columbia, they were running low on barter items. Burpee spoke of how the Chinook/Clatsop people were sophisticated traders and consumers, having run one of the Northwest's mightiest mercantile empires for centuries. They began trading with European ship crews starting in 1792. By 1805-06, it's possible to imagine them exclaiming, "We don't need no stinkin' blue beads" or more eloquent words to that effect. So unable to buy a canoe, the explorers merely swiped one.

Like the vast majority of the physical culture of Columbia estuary tribes, that richly symbolic canoe wasn't cherished by its new owners and faded away into anonymous oblivion. You will scour the world's great museum collections in vain for much tangible evidence of the Chinooks. There is a marvelously carved house post that some passerby found in a tangle of river driftwood in the 19th century. There are a few elegant leaf-shaped Chinook cups and ladles in the collections of the Smithsonian and other major institutions. These probably only survive because some trader plucked them out of context and tucked them away out of reach of the disaster soon to envelop the Chinook. All



Matt Winters/For The Daily Astorian

Stephen Forrester, right, reads from Lewis and Clark Expedition journals on March 23, the anniversary of the explorers' departure from Fort Clatsop on their return journey to the United States as it was constituted in 1806. Jon Burpee, left, superintendent of Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, participated in the journal readings.

who see them wish we could step back 200 years and barter for one of our own, perhaps for a big box of deluxe abalone buttons.

Burpee reflected on surviving accounts of the comforts and supreme stylishness of Chinookan plank houses, which were described as cozy works of art. How odd it must have been for local native residents in that long-ago winter to have a strange encampment of hairy, smelly, hungry white transients show up in their neighborhood — carrying big firearms! This considered, the estuary's original residents responded with remarkable tolerance.

Light and dark

When visiting Fort Clatsop, Dismal Nitch, Station Camp, Cape Disappointment and our area's several other premier Lewis and Clark sites, our first thoughts may be of the explorers and how they set the stage for U.S. westward expansion. They are unsurpassed in terms of individual tenacity and exciting encounters with the West's unsullied wonders.

But our most lingering and troubling thoughts are of the horrific losses suffered by the First Peoples of the Columbia estuary. Within 25 years of the expedition's visit,

plagues on the scale of a Stephen King nightmare had turned the lively villages here into fallen ghost towns. By the time Sgt. Gass died in 1870, many civilizations contacted by Lewis and Clark were barely clinging to a kind of hungry, twilight existence. Descendants of the magnificent Chinook and Clatsop were left to scour the mudflats beneath white men's canneries in search of castoff salmon heads.

Learning of the light and dark sides of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and the good people they once met here, is one of greatest privileges of living on this glorious coast. We absolutely should celebrate the past in evocative places like Netul Landing. And we absolutely should support, learn and perfect what we can of the nearly lost art of living as the Chinook and Clatsop did. People with eloquent hands should still produce profoundly simple cedar cups here on the Lower Columbia, and we all can use them, rubbing them smooth with our fingers and lips, imparting to them the rich character that will someday make them truly beautiful.

We must never overlook the plain fact that some of the families who hosted Lewis and Clark live on. More than dead explorers, it is they who deserve our most rapt attention.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Youth are the leaders of tomorrow

Thank God for our children. Though I have none, I have been fortunate to work with many, and watch my nieces and nephews grow up. Kids are amazing. Some follow a straight path, and seldom veer off the course laid out for them, and others take the road that leads to wonder, excitement and life's adventures.

I am pleased to watch and listen to the current youth force, March For Our Lives, the #NeverAgainMovement promoting responsible gun ownership. To read and hear adults utter statements saying the students are being fed into it by teachers or adults so underestimates the true value and intellect of our children, the leaders of tomorrow.

I am impressed and motivated, as I have almost but given up on the adult child who is currently leading this nation. Just a simple look back at history proves that students are the ones who have led monumental change in this country and our world.

To name a few, the U.S. civil rights movement with student lunch counter sit-ins; the Arab Spring, students rise up in Cairo's Tahrir Square; the turnaround of the Vietnam War brought upon by student protests; the 1969 Stonewall riots for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights; and many more.

I applaud these courageous young people for their focus and enthusiasm who are mobilizing a divided nation, and unintentionally showing how weak our leaders are. "May integrity and honesty be their virtue and protection." — Psalms 25:21

Be the change.

PAUL FLUES II
Astoria

Vote Wev for county commissioner

If I lived in District 3, I'd be voting for Pam Wev for Clatsop County commissioner. As I don't, let me urge those who do to grab that ballot and do so, when you it hits your mailbox.

Pam is thoughtful, articulate, well-organized, and puts her concern for others first. She has owned a small business, worked as a city planner, and raised her children as a single mom. Since arriving in our county, she has

become actively involved in our community.

Pam's values are organized around collaboration, connectedness and civility. If you pay attention to county happenings, all seem to be sorely needed. She is a woman who jumps in to help, and bring solutions that work. For more details, go to her website: wevforcounty-commissioner.com

We've now lived here for nearly 24 years, and as a former public employee and always news junkie, I've paid attention to how things are done at cities and at the county. I've observed those running against Pam Wev, and have no faith that they would be as effective, or have the strength and energy she brings to this new role. So, I encourage you to support and vote for this remarkable woman, Pam Wev, for county commissioner.

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Pick up your beach litter

It all starts with parents, who should teach their children about picking up after themselves. We spend a lot of time on Sunset Beach. Each time, within 50 feet of our vehicle, I can pick up two grocery bags of water bottles, bottle caps, beer cans and bottles, plastic of cheese, toys, cigarette butts, and plastic from all kinds.

What is particularly bad is people burning fence boards and pallets with nails and long screws, left behind in the sand for people to drive on them. Broken glass bottles from wine and/or beer and cans are left in fire pits. We all love seafood. What do you think they are ingesting? It is some of the trash left on the beaches.

In the national news is a huge article on the plastic the size of Texas left floating in the Pacific Ocean. Where does it come from? Those people who don't care about what they leave on our beautiful beaches.

It is everyone's responsibility to, instead of jogging or driving by when they see this, to pick it up. Take a bag, always, and if you see it and don't pick it up, you are part of the problem.

For those of you who bring plastic, glass, cans, wood pallets, fence boards with nails and screws, throw cigarette butts on the ground and leave them behind: Shame on you. Pick it up!

JANE MASON
Beaverton

Post at school brings back memories

In response to the article "Longtime Knappa residents recall origins of mysterious baseball field post" (The Daily Astorian, March 29): I well remember the day we, at Knappa Elementary School, set out stones in the wet cement at the base of the Commemorative Oregon Trail Post. My friend and I put our rocks side by side.

Several years ago, I drove by with one of my grown kids to show them the post, and try to find "my rock," which was shaped like a molar. After clearing away the mat of grass and dirt, voila. There it was, and Gladys' too.

At the time, we were studying from a little social science book, "Stories of Oregon," that had many short wonderful tales of early Oregon events in history. Our early grade school teachers — first and second and third and fourth grades — were two great teachers, Mrs. Vlastelicia and Mrs. Solvin, who gave us such a good beginning. They were marvelous teachers.

The "boys" in the photos were all about three years younger than I was, as I was about 10, and in the third or fourth grade. I'm sure there are many others from the time we put our stones in the cement who remember it as well as I do. I think the post should be kept and restored. I'm willing to help. It's a very pleasant memory.

ALICE OJA NIELSEN
Brownsmead

Vote Orr for state representative

John Orr is running for District 32 state representative, and I want to tell you why I am voting for him. I have known John for almost 20 years. During that time I have found him to be honest, compassionate, brilliant and hardworking.

He tackles problems with the same integrity and research that he used back when he was a lawyer. When he had his law practice, his nickname among his fellow lawyers was "wonder boy," because of the his dedication in getting positive results. He will be fighting for a healthy Pacific Northwest.

I am excited that John Orr is running for office at this critical time in history, and will

be voting for John, for our future and our children's future. Join me.

If you want to know about John's beliefs and passion, go to "John Orr State House" on Facebook.

VICKI McAFEE
Astoria

Affordable housing one of our greatest challenges

Thank you to The Daily Astorian for reporting and editorializing on matters of concern to the public. Your attention helps involve and educate all of us, and it's an essential part of our representative democratic process and of a robust community.

One of our greatest challenges is the lack of affordable and available housing. I've been advocating and working to address housing issues for years as a community activist, as a Clatsop County planning commissioner, and now a county commissioner.

Currently, I work with state and local housing agency people. I also sit on the board of the regional Community Action Team, which addresses housing needs and solutions in Clatsop, Columbia, and Tillamook counties.

I also co-chair the Association of Oregon Counties' Housing Subcommittee, which works on defining needs and developing solutions for housing shortages all over Oregon. This is a problem all over the state, and we need good teamwork with partners all over the county, the region, and the state to solve it.

I'm passionately devoted to the well-being of people here, beginning with housing needs. As a community, we can and must work together and use the best in all of us to create conditions that result in meeting our housing needs.

LIANNE THOMPSON
Commissioner, Clatsop County, District 5

Orr is great choice for state representative

I proudly endorse John Orr as a responsible, considerate, and compassionate decision maker for a state representative. Mr. Orr has certainly been a very down to earth person, with our better interests in mind, for a great choice.

JOHN HREHA
Astoria