

# SCRATCHPAD

## The last river ferry

By **LISSA BREWER**  
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



The Washington state ferry Cathlamet once ran consistently on the route to Whidbey Island. I grew up taking the ferry, but only recently learned that Cathlamet is also the name of a town, an outpost nestled along Washington's Ocean Beach Highway.

Named for a tribe that once occupied villages along the Columbia River, the town of Cathlamet sits just above the river's rocky north shore. It's accessible from the south by taking the Julia Butler Hansen Bridge across the Cathlamet channel from Puget Island. I was handed a book by an Astoria local who for eight years lived on the island,

and decided to take a drive.

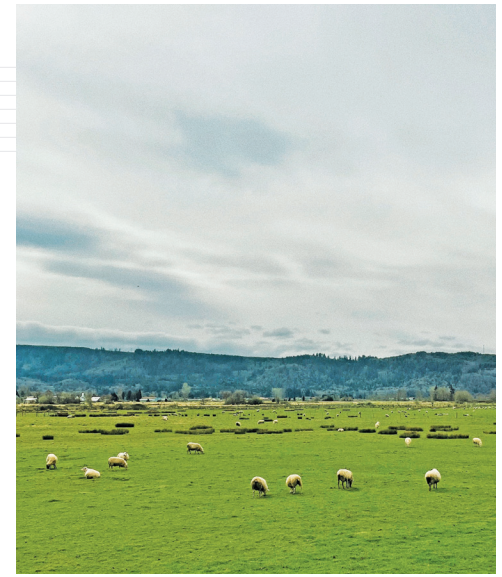
The island itself can be reached from the south at Westport via the Wahkiakum County ferry. It was here that I found myself on a blue and misty morning to complete a loop, venturing out to the island, across the channel and west back to the Astoria Bridge.

The Oscar B., named for ferry skipper Oscar Bergseng, is the last remaining ferry on the lower Columbia. Service on the route began in 1925 and continues to run every day of the year, leaving on the hour from Puget Island and fifteen minutes later from Westport.

Winding along from Westport slough, the ferry turns east near Coffee Pot Island to land at a small dock along the south shore of Puget Island. From here, a loop road con-

tinues along the river bank, passing green farmlands, weathered ships and quaint beach homes. Swans, bald eagles and herons take flight near the water's edge and bluebirds scatter through the tree branches. Dormant blackberry bushes fill the meadows next to fields of sheep.

Take side roads through the island to find a network of sloughs before heading on to the streets of Cathlamet. Visit the downtown shops and marina, then head west to the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge, a 5,600 acre preserve for the Columbian White-Tailed Deer, also a destination for birdwatching. Stop for a rest in Skamokawa before winding back along the highway toward Astoria.



Lissa Brewer

**Sheep graze in a grassy meadow on Puget Island.**

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### STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS

#### COAST WEEKEND EDITOR

LISSA BREWER

#### CALENDAR COORDINATOR

SARAH SMITH

#### CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID CAMPICHE  
M.J. CODY  
WILLIAM DEAN  
PETER KORCHNAK  
BARBARA LLOYD McMICHAEL  
PATRICK WEBB

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**Phone:** 503.325.3211 Ext. 217 or 800.781.3211

**Fax:** 503.325.6573

**E-mail:** [editor@coastweekend.com](mailto:editor@coastweekend.com)

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