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Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership

## Lower Columbia River WATER TRAIL MAP AND GUIDE

Text Sample

# 1. Overview Description of the River

Native Americans called it *Nch-i-Wana*, "The Big River." The Columbia has shaped the character of the Northwest, and still inspires a wondrous sense of adventure. From Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean, the Water Trail encompasses a 146-mile, free-flowing stretch of the river's lower reaches. The scenery is sublime, from spectacular waterfalls and sheer basalt cliffs to evergreen-cloaked hills and mazes of mist-shrouded islands. Wildlife refuges harbor hundreds of species of birds and mammals, while immense flocks of migratory birds soar high overhead. History haunts the shorelines with remembrances of abandoned canneries, docks, roaring steamboat towns, Lewis and Clark landing sites, Chinook Indian fishing camps. A day's paddle might veer from tranquil sandy shores to bustling ports of call. A river of legend, the Columbia is extravagant in beauty, dramatic in landscape, and always an intriguing journey.

# 2. Overview Description of Each Reach

## Reach 1: The Gorge

### **River miles 146-122. Bonneville Dam to the mouth of the Washougal River in Washington and the Sandy River in Oregon**

The Water Trail begins just below Bonneville Dam, the last of the Columbia River dams; from here the river is free-flowing to the Pacific. Throughout this reach, the trail passes through the beautiful Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, where craggy 3,000-foot basalt cliffs rise dramatically from the river. Multnomah Falls, with its 620-foot drop, is tallest of the bevy of cascading waterfalls -- the second highest concentration in the country, next to Yosemite Valley. Intriguing rock formations like Phoca Rock, Rooster Rock and 850-foot Beacon Rock are remnants of ancient lava flows. The river is wide and open, with frequent rough waters, and strong winds confirm the Gorge's reputation as a sailboarding mecca. Large commercial tugs and barges create a busy marine highway.

## Reach 2: Portland/Vancouver

### **River miles 122-102. From the confluences of the Washougal River in Washington and the Sandy River in Oregon to the mouth of the Willamette River**

Downriver from the Gorge, the landscape transforms into gradually widening floodplains and heads into a highly urbanized shoreline. Flowing past the communities and metropolitan areas of Camas and Vancouver in Washington, and Troutdale and Portland in Oregon, the river is fringed with moorages and marinas, and Portland International Airport. The Columbia's two largest deep-water ports, the Port of Portland and the Port of Vancouver, are typically lined with docked international cargo ships. On clear days, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Adams, and Mt. Hood are visible jutting above the panorama of Cascade Mountains. During summer months especially, this stretch of river experiences extremely heavy traffic, with a steady stream of cargo ships, tugs and barges, cruise ships, sailboats, jet skis and powerboats.

### Reach 3: Sauvie Island

#### **River miles 102-86. The upriver end of Sauvie Island to just southeast of St. Helens, Oregon**

Kelley Point Park, at the southern end of this reach, marks the Columbia's confluence with the Willamette River. Sauvie Island in Oregon is the largest Columbia River island, 15 miles long and four miles wide, with its own rivers, lakes and sloughs. The southern half is mainly private farmland while the northern 12,000 acres comprise the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area, permanent home or migratory stopover for more than 260 species of wildlife. The northern shore is a popular long, sandy beach with Warrior Rock Lighthouse near its end. Across the river is the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Scappoose Bay offers an extensive, intricate maze of wetlands and marshes. The mainstem of the Columbia is narrow in this stretch, but there are many side channels, sloughs, bays, and adjacent lakes.

### Reach 4: St. Helens/Kalama

#### **River miles 86-68. From the confluences of the Multnomah Channel and the Lewis River to just west of the Cowlitz River in Kelso, Washington**

St. Helens was founded as a river mill town, and its National Historic District buildings, dominated by a 1906 stone courthouse, are visible from the river. A number of islands worth exploring -- Sand Island, Deer Island, Martin Island, Goat Island and Sandy Island -- offer interesting sloughs and side passages. Along this stretch the Columbia is narrow, although the shore broadens on the Washington side near Woodland. Large cargo ships frequently traverse up and down the shipping channel.

## **Reach 5: Longview/Rainier**

### **River miles 68-38. From the confluence of the Cowlitz River to mid-Puget Island east of Cathlamet, Washington**

Pulp and paper mills, and busy commercial ship-loading of logs and other products headed around the world, give Longview and Rainier an industrial landscape. The Lewis and Clark Bridge crosses the river high overhead, the only bridge between Portland and Astoria spanning the entire Columbia. Wooded hills and mountains in the distance frame the river scene, until downriver where the Washington shoreline rises into steep cliffs. This reach features a variety of open water, island and backwater sloughs, with the mainstem dominated by the shipping channel and large commercial river traffic.

## **Reach 6: The Refuge**

### **River miles 38-18. From Cathlamet, Washington to the confluence of Gray's River**

From the water, much of this reach looks untouched by civilization. The Lewis & Clark National Wildlife Refuge is a labyrinth 35,000 acres of dozens of islands, wetlands, tidelands and marshes laced with myriad channels and backwater sloughs. Roosevelt elk, small white-tailed deer, and many species of birds inhabit the 5,600 acre Julia Butler Hanson National Wildlife Refuge for Columbian White-tailed Deer. One of the few remaining Sitka spruce swamps is preserved at Blind Slough. A stretch of vertical cliffs and 80-foot waterfalls is known as the "lower Gorge." The towns of Cathlamet and Skamokawa recall the once-abundant river communities that dotted the shoreline. Water conditions vary greatly. Near Tenasillahe and Puget islands, the river is narrow and confined, then widens to a broad, open expanse downriver.

## **Reach 7: The Mouth**

### **River miles 18-0. From the confluence of Gray's River to the Pacific Ocean.**

The mouth of the Columbia, where thousands of ships have foundered, is considered one of the most perilous on earth. Between Cape Disappointment and Clatsop Spit the mouth is two miles wide. The river's confluence with the Pacific is fraught with large waves, river and tidal current and strong winds that create both challenging and potentially dangerous conditions. Up through the tributaries of this reach are calm backwater streams and small rivers meandering through wetlands, woods and farms. Astoria, one of the first settlements in the West, still has a working waterfront, with docks and wharves along its length. A short stroll from Netul Landing on the Lewis & Clark River is Fort Clatsop, a replica of the fort built by Lewis and Clark. Across the Columbia, Fort Canby

and Cape Disappointment commemorate the spot where Lewis and Clark first reached the Pacific.

### 3. Trip Recommendations

#### Reach 1: BIDDLE'S BEACON

**Launch/Landing:** Beacon Rock State Park, WA. River mile 141

**Distance:** 5 miles round trip (overnight option)

**Skill Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Charts:** NOAA 18531, \_\_\_\_\_ chart's descriptive name\_\_\_\_\_.

**Tide Tables:** Pacific Beaches with corrections for \_\_\_\_\_, WA.

**Directions:** Beacon Rock State Park is located 35 miles east of Vancouver WA at milepost 35 on Highway 14.

**Description:** Beacon Rock, named and described by Lewis and Clark as "a remarkable high rock," is a remnant of an ancient volcanic explosion; at 848 feet high it stands as a stunning landmark to guide a paddle around Pierce and Ives islands. Two-hundred acre Pierce Island is a Nature Conservancy preserve, haunt of osprey and beavers. Visitors are asked to stay only briefly and leave no trace. Heavily-wood Ives Island is part of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Adjacent to the islands are the wetlands and uplands of Pierce National Wildlife Refuge on the Washington shore (not open to the public) and on the Oregon side, John B. Yeon State Park, site of a trailhead to two of the gorge's most beautiful and secluded waterfalls, Elowah and Upper McCord Creek falls. Surrounding views from the water encompass Hamilton Mountain, Aldrich Butte, Yeon Mountain, St. Peters Dome and Rock of Ages. Camping is available year-round at popular Beacon Rock. An easy trail leads to the summit of the rock, with panoramic views up and down the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area from Wind Mountain to Crown Point. Henry Biddle purchased the rock to build a trail and in 1935 his heirs turned it over to the state for use as a park.

#### Reach 1: CAPE HORN CRUISIN'

**Launch/Landing:** Dalton Point, Oregon. River mile 133.6

**Distance:** 1-6 miles round trip

**Skill Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Chart:** NOAA 18531, Columbia River: Vancouver to Bonneville

**Tide Tables:** Pacific Beaches with correction for Ellesworth, WA (estimate only)

**Directions:** Dalton Point, at milepoint 29 of Interstate 84 in Oregon, is accessible only from the westbound lanes. If driving east, exit at Multnomah Falls then return two miles west to the Dalton Point boat ramp.

**Description:** At the western edge of the spectacular Columbia River Gorge, Dalton Point is gateway to geologic beauties and fine sandy beaches. Just over a mile downriver, near the Washington side, rises a rugged basalt pillar, remnant of massive landslides eons ago. Lewis and Clark named it Phoca Rock for the many harbor seals, *Phoca vitulina*, they saw nearby. The main shipping channel runs between the Rock and shore; large commercial craft, especially tugs and barges, can approach quickly and almost silently. This area can also be hazardous with winds and rough water. Cape Horn, with its impressive towering basalt cliffs rising directly out of the river, waterfalls and small caves, lines the shore beyond. Mid-river is Sand Island, a partly-forested, undeveloped part of Rooster Rock State Park. Its extensive sandy beaches are clothing-optional. Lewis and Clark camped from April 6 to April 8, 1806 just downriver from the island. Shuttle trips can be continued downriver, to land at Rooster Rock State Park (RM 128.5, five miles from Dalton Point) or Corbett Ramp ( RM 126.5, seven miles from the launch.)

## Reach 1: STEAMBOAT LEGACY

**Launch/Landing:** Steamboat Landing Park, WA. River mile 123

**Distance:** 6 miles round trip

**Skill Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Charts:** NOAA 18531, \_\_\_\_\_ chart's descriptive name).

**Tide Tables:** Pacific Beaches with corrections for \_\_\_\_\_, WA.

**Directions:** The park is located in Washougal, WA, at Highway 14 and 15th Street.

**Description:** A Clark County Heritage Site, Steamboat Landing offers both a beach launch and a floating dock. In the 1880s, it was the home port for the steamer *Calliope*, and some of the pilings are still visible a few hundred yards upstream from the site. Remnant dock pilings and pieces of pipeline at the landing are the remains of a Pendleton Woolen Mills dock for unloading oil, used from the 1920s to the '40s. A mile upriver is the Captain William Clark Park at Cottonwood Beach, and a mile downriver is the Port of Camas-Washougal Boat Ramp. Lady Island is three miles downriver. In 1805 Lewis and Clark estimated its size at 3-1/2 miles long and 1-1/2 miles wide. They watched more than a thousand waterfowl pass over its head and named it "Island of Fowls." Today Highway 14 crosses over the island, which is now the property of Crown-Zellerbach Corporation; part of it is a pulp mill but the island's sandy beaches revealed at low water are fine for a picnic lunch. At the upriver end of the island

are the mouths of two rivers -- in Washington the Washougal River and in Oregon the delta of the Sandy River -- both excellent waterways for further exploration.

## Reach 2: PADDLING THE PORTS, WILDLIFE BONUS

**Launch/Landing:** McCuddy Marine Docks, Oregon. River mile 107

**Distance:** 12 miles round trip

**Skill Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Charts:** NOAA 18531, Columbia River: Vancouver to Bonneville, and NOAA 18525, Columbia River: St. Helens to Vancouver.

**Tide Tables:** Pacific Beaches with correction for Vancouver, WA

**Directions:** Interstate 5 north to Jantzen Beach exit, drive a half mile along NE Tomahawk Island Drive to the Alder Creek Kayak and Canoe store parking lot.

**Description:** Huge international cargo ships at anchor, dry docks, cranes, pilings, piers, grain silos and stevedores at work provide a fascinating backdrop for exploring the busy inland seaports of Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington. A circumnavigation of Hayden and Tomahawk Islands (now one connected narrow island, about 5.5 miles long) offers a flavor of urban river ambiance -- the Port of Portland's Terminal 6, marinas and floating houseboat communities, overhead the Interstate Bridge and low-flying airplanes from the Portland International Airport. Lewis and Clark called Hayden "Image Canoe Island" after the highly-decorated canoes they saw in the area; from here they spotted and named Mount Jefferson. More than 800 acres of the island's northern half are undeveloped and sit at the intersection of two major wildlife corridors. The cottonwood-ash forest is one of the largest intact stands left on the lower Columbia and the area is used by more than a hundred wildlife species, including bald eagles, pileated woodpeckers and painted turtles.