



A Cascadia Marine Trail Site History Honoring over 5,000 Years of Marine Travel

Camano Island State Park is located on the southwest shore of Camano Island at Lowell Point, looking towards Saratoga Passage and Whidbey Island to the west. Its creation is a remarkable story of volunteers and community spirit. The first Cascadia Marine Trail site was established here in 1993.

The first inhabitants of course were Indians. The site was part of the traditional lands of the Kikialos tribe, part of the Swinomish tribal group. The traditional boundary between the territory of the Kikialos and that of the Snohomish crossed the island at Lowell Point, with the northern part Kikialos land and the southern part Snohomish. The Indians called their summer camp there "XwE'S?D". They called Lowell Point "Tux qwa'sus", meaning "scorched face" or "scorched cliff", because the promontory terminates in a bluff with dark rocks, suggesting scorching.

The first Europeans were Captain Vancouver and crew who scouted the area in 1792. Due to fog, Vancouver did not see that Camano is an island. That was reported by Lt. Charles Wilkes, surveying for the United States in 1841. Wilkes named Lowell Point after a crewmember, James Lowell, and named the passage between Camano and Whidbey Islands Saratoga, after an American ship victorious in the War of 1812. The War of 1812 loomed large in public consciousness of the time. The bay protected by Lowell Point was originally named Algiers Bay, after another War of 1812 victory, the Battle of Algiers, but sometime after 1910 the spelling and pronunciation morphed into Elger Bay. British Navy Captain Charles Kellet, surveying the island in 1847, charted it under the name Camano, to honor Jacinto Ca'amano, a Spanish explorer in Nootka Sound near the end of the 18th century.

Next to arrive on Camano Island were loggers. Hand logging began in the 1850's and a major logging camp, mill, shipyard, and village were established on the north end at Utsalady. Logging intensified with the use of oxen and horses, and intensified even more by the 1890's with mechanization. At the turn of the century there were as many as 20 logging camps busy on the island. The site at Camano Island State Park had a logging camp, a skid road, and a shingle mill. By the 1920's the entire island had been logged with the last old growth gone by 1922.

Mechanized logging was much more destructive to the land, as the ground was clear cut and then torn up by steam donkeys dragging the logs to water. As a result, fires became more frequent and more destructive. What to do with logged lands became a major issue in Washington State. The logging companies began to subdivide their properties and sell acreage to farmers, but with fire-

damaged soil and the massive effort and expense required to remove stumps and slash, most farms barely provided subsistence for settlers.

With the popularization and widespread ownership of automobiles in the 1920's, a new economic opportunity appeared. It became the fashion for families to spend summers at beach resorts. The first bridge from the town of Stanwood to the island was completed in 1912 and Camano was advertised as "the island you can drive to". Twenty or more summer resorts were developed on Camano, catering to summering families or hunters and sport fishermen. Mothers and children would live in tents or cabins on the beach; fathers would work in the city and come up to the island on weekends. Hunting and fishing were hugely popular. School would be cancelled for the first day of duck hunting season.

The 1920's were also the years of Prohibition and Camano saw lots of related illegal activity. The site that later became Camano Island State Park was the location of a large still, reportedly operated with the cooperation of the local sheriff. Camano had many illegal stills, particularly on the less developed south end of the island, and it was also a favored drop-off site for liquor smuggled in from Canada. Automobiles on the bluffs above secluded coves would flash their headlights at night to signal the rumrunners when it was safe to land. The newspapers reported on gun battles and automobile chases between government agents and bootleggers. Even after Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Camano had the reputation as a community where one in the know could find a "blind pig", an unlicensed business selling moonshine.

In 1949 South Camano Grange #930 proposed the creation of Camano Island State Park as their successful entry in the National Grange Community Service Contest. The statement of need in their application resonates today: most of the shoreline was private property and the public had almost no access to the water. The proposed site was DNR-owned school lands. The local newspapers and the grange called for volunteers and the mayors of Stanwood and East Stanwood proclaimed State Park Day, encouraging merchants to close for the day and to send employees to volunteer. On July 27, 1949 hundreds of people, coming in cars, trucks, and buses converged on Point Lowell with their hoes, spades, rakes, axes, saws and hammers. The state commissioner of parks and his engineers and technicians supervised and directed the volunteers, who built park buildings and picnic tables, cleaned and tiled the spring as a water source, cleared walking paths, and built roads and parking areas with bulldozers. The grange women served 50 gallons of chowder, plus sandwiches, coffee, cookies, soda pop, and ice cream. The equipment included three bulldozers, nine farm tractors, 34 pickups and trucks, one large trailer truck, three wreckers, and a team of horses. The donated labor and machinery was estimated at 3,561 man-hours, 376 machine hours, goods and services for a total value of \$6,000. The state contributed \$5,000. At the end of the day, the public had their park and access to the water. Additional acreage near the estuary on Elger Bay was added to the park in 1958. The park was, and continues to be, hugely popular.

In the last few decades the primary activity on Camano has been residential development, particularly for retirees from Seattle. In 2005, through the patient and dedicated efforts of wildlife advocates, Camano Island became the first island certified as Community Wildlife Habitat by the

National Wildlife Federation. The resorts are gone, victims of changing tastes in leisure pursuits and the decline in fish and game. Some farming continues, some oldtimers remain, and the island residents continue to treasure their park.

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