



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

The Cascadia Marine Trail site at Fort Ebey State Park is located at Point Partridge, just north of the navigation light on the west side of Whidbey Island. The area is open to west wind and waves which may mean an opportunity for surf play or a challenging landing. The park is in the northwest part of the Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve, which encompasses central Whidbey Island.

Before Europeans came, Coast Salish Indians from around Puget Sound hunted and fished and gathered edible plants on the west side of Whidbey. In the early 19th century, fur traders introduced potatoes, which the Indians readily adopted as a cultivated crop. The Clallams had established potato fields on the prairie in central Whidbey by the time of white settlement.

The first Europeans known to explore the west side of Whidbey were Spaniards of the 1790 Quimper Expedition. Manuel Quimper named Point Partridge, the westernmost land on the island, "Punta de Mendez", but the name did not survive. The next European explorer, Captain Vancouver in 1792, named it Point Partridge after his brother John's in-laws.

Thomas Glasgow made the first attempt to settle on the central Whidbey prairie with his Indian wife in 1848. He didn't last long. Thousands of Indians from around Puget Sound were meeting at Penn Cove to discuss how to respond to the incursion of white settlers, and Glasgow felt threatened and left. Col. Isaac Neff Ebey followed in 1850, claiming 640 acres between Penn Cove and the west side of Whidbey, and brought friends and family who made claims as well. He is acknowledged as Whidbey's first white settler and the area is now known as Ebey's Landing and Ebey's Prairie.

Ebey was also an explorer in his own right, as well as an important public official, military and community leader. This inadvertently led to his being shot and beheaded by northern Indians in 1857, looking to kill a white chief to avenge the killing one of their chiefs at Port Gamble. Although identified as Haidas at the time, in all probability these were Tlingit Indians from Kake Island in southeast Alaska. The Indians had taken Ebey's head, and years later the head was purchased from the Indians on Kake, and returned to be buried with the rest of the body.

A number of development schemes roiled land prices in the late 19th century. There were several plans for railroads and canals that would cross Whidbey east to west. One such scheme in 1906 would have created a canal, big enough for ocean liners, along Libbey Road from Penn Cove to the wetland area just north of Point Partridge. It advanced enough that the trees were cut down along Libbey Road in anticipation, before the investors and speculators lost money and enthusiasm and moved on.

Washington State had experienced considerable controversy and agitation over liquor control since territorial days, and it was one of many states that enacted prohibition statewide in 1916, before it was adopted nationwide in 1919 by the 18th Amendment. Whidbey Island, close to Canada and situated in the middle of various marine transportation routes, became a major transshipment area for moonshine and bootleg liquor until prohibition repeal in 1933.

According to local historians, prohibition was hard to enforce because everyone knew or was related to everyone else and all were good neighbors and good customers. Former Seattle policeman Roy Olmstead's operation, the biggest in the state, at its height was bringing 200 cases of Canadian whiskey to Seattle every day. Because the Coast Guard and the Revenue cutters patrolled Deception Pass, smuggled liquor would often be landed at night on the west side of Whidbey, trucked across and reloaded on boats somewhere on the east side. Local historian William McGinnis described low, black-hulled boats capable of high speeds, racing through the passages with following roostertails. If stopped by the Revenue cutters they would be empty, but by night they would move their cargo, keeping well to the shaded shoreline and running under well-muffled power. In the morning there would be so many footprints in the sand it looked as if the army had come through. Rumrunners offered local children coins to keep quiet about what they saw. One farmer was offered \$100 in exchange for allowing trucks to be hidden in his barn one night.

When the United States entered World War II, military strategists planned and designed Fort Ebey for protection from aerial and chemical attacks. The Harbor Defense Command acquired the land by condemnation in 1942 and began construction, completed in 1943. It was the only coast artillery post developed exclusively for military defense during the World War II era.

The facilities near the CMT site included a heavily built observation post, concrete bunker, and two gun emplacements. The gun emplacements were designed to be invisible to aircraft. Tree cover was retained, protected by brick tree wells, and ivy was planted to hide the facilities. The artillery included 50 caliber machine guns and 6" guns with barrels 26 feet long, requiring 26 men to load and fire, and with a range of 15 miles. The crew won an international shooting competition but never fired the guns at an enemy. The fort became obsolete before the end of the war because of changing military techniques and technology. It closed shortly after the war, and was deeded to the State of Washington for park development in 1965.

Central Whidbey, encompassing Ebey's landing, Ebey's Prairie, and Coupeville, was one of the earliest settlements on Puget Sound. It has remained a rural community with a small town and farms, much of it owned by descendants of early settlers, with many houses and other buildings dating from the 19th century. When one family made plans for a housing development on their farm in the 1970's, a community effort was set in motion that culminated in the establishment of the Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve in 1978.

The federal legislation establishing the Reserve states that the objective is "...to preserve and protect a rural community which provides an unbroken historical record from nineteenth century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time." The Reserve was the first historic reserve of its kind created by the National Park Service, and is unique for a number of reasons:

Eight-five percent of the land is privately owned and preservation is accomplished through a combination of local land use regulation and the cooperation of private owners. It is managed by a partnership of town, county, Washington State Parks, and National Park Service representatives, and includes three state parks and several county parks.

The CMT site was established in the late '90's. The trail leading along the ridge from the CMT site leads to the rest of the Reserve. It's a great place to watch the sun set over the Pacific.

© Karen L. Borell

Sources and Acknowledgements

Becker, Paula, "Prohibition in Washington State", HistoryLink #9630, <http://www.historylink.org>, 2010, accessed September, 2016.

Cherry, Lorna, Langley, the Village by the Sea, South Whidbey Historical Society, 1986.

Clark, Norman H., The Dry Years: Prohibition and Social Change in Washington, Univ. of Washington Press, 1988.

Cook, Jimmie Jean, A particular friend, PENN'S COVE, A history of the Settlers, Claims and Buildings of Central Whidbey Island, Island County Historical Society Pub., 1973.

Guss, Elizabeth, Janice O'Mahony and Mary Richardson, Whidbey Island: Reflections on People and the Land, The History Press, 2014.

Hayes, Derek, Historical Atlas of the Pacific Northwest: Maps of Exploration and Discovery. Sasquatch Books, 1999.

Island County Historical Society, Janet Enzmann Archives and Research Library, Families, Parks, and other record groups, reviewed October, 2015, and September, 2016.

Island County, County Records, Auditor's Office, Island County Courthouse, Coupeville, WA.

Kellogg, George A., A History of Whidbey's Island, George. B. Astel Pub., 1934.

Lange, Greg, "Native Americans force settlers to leave Whidbey Island in August 1848", HistoryLink #5246, <http://www.historylink.org>, 2003, accessed December, 2015.

McClary, Daryl C., "Island County—Thumbnail History", HistoryLink #7523, <http://www.historylink.org>, 2005, accessed December, 2015.

McDaniel, Nancy L., A Sound Defense: Military Historical Sites of Puget Sound, Nancy L. McDaniel Pub., 2013.

McGinnis, William, The Langleyites of Whidbey Island 1899-1921, n.p. 1986.

McRoberts, Patrick, "North Coast Indians, likely members of the Kake tribe of Tlingits, behead Isaac Ebey on August 11, 1857", HistoryLink #5302, 2003, accessed December, 2015.

Meany, Edmond S., History of the State of Washington, McMillan Co., 1924.

Meany, Edmond S., Origin of Washington Geographic Names, Univ. of Washington Press, 1923.

Neil, Dorothy and Lee Brainerd, By Canoe and Sailing Ship They Came, Spindrift Pub. Co., 1989.

U.S. National Archives, Seattle Region, Record Group 071, Box 403; Record Group 121, Box 351; Civil Docket No. 471, U.S. v. 108 acres of land in Island County, Washington, Feb. 1942.

Washington State Archives, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Records, 1853-2001, Boxes 72, 186 and 187.

Webber, Bert, Retaliation: Japanese Attacks and Allied Countermeasures on the Pacific Coast in World War II, Oregon State Univ. Press, 1975.

Wilma, David, "Oak Harbor—Thumbnail History", HistoryLink #8223, <http://www.historylink.org>, 2007, accessed November, 2015.

White, Richard, Land Use, Environment and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington, Univ. of Washington Press, 1980.

White, Richard, "Indian Land Use and Environmental Change, Island County, Washington: a case study," in Arizona and the West, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 327-338, published by Journal of the Southwest, Winter, 1975.

As with my other research on Whidbey Island, sincere thanks are due to many public servants for patient assistance and useful advice in the preparation of this work: Ken House and staff at the National Archives in Seattle, Greg Lange at the King County Archives, staff at the Washington State Archives in Olympia, librarians at the Seattle Public Library Seattle Room and Sno-Isle Public Libraries in Coupeville and Langlely, staff at Washington State Parks, and many staff members at the Island County Auditor's Office. Again, a special note of thanks is due to Sarah Aldrich at the Janet Enzmann Archives and Research Library of the Island County Historical Society for assistance and advice in accessing historical records.