



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

The Cascadia Marine Trail site at Joseph Whidbey State Park is located about half way between Deception Pass and Point Partridge on the west side of Whidbey Island, just south of Rocky Point and Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. It is open to west wind and waves sweeping in through the Strait of Juan de Fuca but, with a public sandy beach, it is one of the few available landing sites on northwest Whidbey.

Coast Salish Indians that lived throughout Puget Sound before white settlement hunted and gathered berries and other plants in the area. They managed the vegetation with intentional fires and some cultivation to encourage the growth of camas, nettles, bracken, and other edible plants. Game, fish, and edible plants were so abundant that the Indians in the area never experienced famine.

The first Europeans to explore the west side of Whidbey were Spaniards of the Quimper Expedition of 1790. Manuel Quimper sent his second pilot, Juan Carrasco, to explore the area, but the Spaniards did not linger long or venture far. They saw Admiralty Inlet and Deception Pass but thought they were closed inlets. Captain VanCouver arrived in 1792 and explored more extensively, discovering that Admiralty Inlet led to Puget Sound.

The settlers of northwest Whidbey were primarily Dutch that arrived in the 1890's to establish dairies and farms. The land was extraordinarily fertile and the area set national records for bushels of wheat per acre. But the west shore of Whidbey became known for a different economic activity: smuggling.

After a federal law of 1882 had prohibited Chinese immigration, smuggling Chinese immigrants from British Columbia to the west side of Whidbey became a lucrative business. The present Classic Road was originally a cross-island trail and it was used to sneak in Chinese immigrants. Washington State, and the entire West Coast, was caught up in virulent anti-Chinese racism. On Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor vigilantes agitated against Chinese people and boycotted their businesses. Many of the farmers defended the Chinese, arguing that they were responsible and reliable farmers and lessees, but the vigilantes blamed Chinese for all economic ills and blew up the Chinese farmers' potato storage pits. After continued terrorism and the Tacoma riot in 1885 that drove Chinese from that city, most Chinese left Whidbey as well. By 1900, only a few, mostly elderly farmhands remained, protected by their employers and landlords.

Another smuggling activity at that time included opium, perhaps related to arrival of the Chinese. Opium would be landed on the west shores of the island at night and later distributed to other parts

of the island or the mainland. One settler found several cans of it on the shore, and thinking it was purple paint, painted his house with \$3,000 worth of opium.

The earliest settlers in the area that became the state park were George and Sarah Hathaway, who received their homestead patent in 1888. The land later came into the hands of Dutch settlers Fred DeWilde and his wife Wiepkje. In 1927 they deeded the property to Charles Christensen and his wife Carrie DeWilde Christensen. The Christensen family farmed, raised livestock and added substantial improvements.

In 1941, with World War II unfolding, the Navy selected the fertile, mostly flat area of northwest Whidbey Island for an airfield. The Christensen farm was one of many taken to create Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. By that time, their well-constructed house had modern plumbing, telephone, electricity, maple floors, cedar closets, and four bedrooms, while the farm had a barn and numerous substantial outbuildings for storage and livestock. The government offered \$18,000 for the property, but a court challenge awarded the Christensens \$26,000.

In the early 1970's, the Federal Government began to inventory its holdings, determine what was excess to its needs, and transfer or sell the surplus. The land that became the state park had become a Navy rifle range. There were bullet backstop berms and shelters for the target shooters, but most traces of the farm were gone.

Federal land determined to be excess is generally offered to state governments before being offered for sale to the public. Discussions began between the federal and the state agencies, which both concluded that Whidbey Island had a shortage of public recreation sites, especially with shoreline access. Through the 1920's and '30's Whidbey Island had become a tourism destination and the public recreation sites were busy and crowded. In 1974 the Federal Government quitclaimed the property to the State with a restriction that it would revert to the United States if it were not used for park and recreation purposes.

The State Parks and Recreation Commission began planning for the park with the Island County Planning Board. State Parks argued that it was strapped for cash and the legislature would not fund development and maintenance of the park. Discussions and planning dragged on until 1978 when the agency produced a draft environmental impact statement that proposed that the best option would be to lease it to KOA to develop and operate a campground. State Parks read the deed reversion clause to require that the park have a campground.

The proposed campground would have included 119 pull through sites, a pumping station, ranger residence, parking lot, trails, headquarters, restaurant and recreation room, heated pool, tot lot, restroom and showers, baseball field, day use area, etc. Curiously, the drafter of the planning document, under contract to the agency, was a business partner with KOA. Island County objected to the plan, arguing that it was inconsistent with shoreline restrictions, traffic congestion would be overwhelming, and the campground would overdraw the limited water supply on the island. After much legal wrangling, the County ultimately got its way and the State verified that the deed reversion did not require campground development.

Finally in 1986 the park was completed as a day use only park. State Parks had solicited suggestions from the public for naming the park and chose the name to recognize Joseph Whidbey, the Ships Master on the 1792 Vancouver expedition, who had circumnavigated the island through Deception Pass and determined that Whidbey is an island.

The CMT site was established in 1996. The Navy base is on the north, with a small arms range and communications tower visible. From the CMT site, the aircraft noise can be very loud day or night. The noise is considered disruptive and annoying or “the sound of freedom”, depending on one’s point of view.

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Sources and Acknowledgements

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