



Primary Interpretive Themes: Fort Vancouver NHS

from Long Range Interpretive Plan, Vancouver National Historic Reserve

Primary interpretive themes are those ideas/concepts about the Vancouver National Historic Reserve that guide every facet of interpretive and educational program development and delivery. These themes are critical to visitor understanding and appreciation of the Reserve's importance. The themes, based on the purpose, mission, and significance statements, provide the foundation for all interpretive and educational media and programs in the Reserve. The themes do not include everything that may be interpreted, but they do address those ideas that are most important for a meaningful visitor experience.

All interpretive efforts (through both personal and non-personal services) should relate to one or more of the themes, and each theme should be addressed by some part of the overall interpretive and educational program. Effective interpretation results when visitors are able to connect the concepts with the resources and derive something meaningful from the experience. Interpretive themes also contain overlapping concepts, and it is almost impossible to present one theme without touching on elements of others.

The following themes, divided into major topics, will provide the basis for interpretation and education at the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. The topics and primary theme statements appear in bold, followed by a list of key supporting concepts. Also, note that the numbers do not indicate any prioritization.

1. Cultural and natural resource conservation: How do we know this place and why should it be protected?

The wealth of cultural resources, which comprise the physical remains of many significant people and important events, are closely integrated with a unique natural environment, creating special outdoor classrooms for archaeology and historical architecture, wetlands management, species study, and the examination of past and future impacts and conservation measures.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors better understand:

- The importance of scientific investigation, archaeology, history, and other disciplines in helping to discover and learn about former communities within the Reserve.
- The Reserve is the premier historical archaeological site in the Pacific Northwest.
- The methods to study humans using archaeology, oral history, and

documentary sources and by which the natural environment is understood.

Specifically:

- How archaeological sites are identified, tested, excavated, managed, and interpreted.
- How material culture is analyzed, compared, and interpreted.
- How sub-surface remote sensing methods can be used to explore sites.
- How soil, water, and other samples are studied for chemical, pollen, and other characteristics to better understand human and environmental interactions.
- How water delivery and sewage treatment has changed over time.

The rationale for protecting and preserving archaeological, architectural, and landscape resources.

- The rationale for wetland restoration projects along the river.
- The ways in which humans have interacted with and changed the natural environment.
- The movement from resource exploitation to resource conservation: timber, fisheries, water, agriculture, and archaeological resources.
- Why it is necessary to protect and preserve archaeological, architectural, and landscape resources.
- The qualities and significance of the built environment with the cultural and natural landscape.
- Ways in which uses of the natural and cultural resources has determined wealth, status, ethnicity, and family composition.
- Why looting, including metal detecting, of archaeological sites is viewed as stealing a piece of history.
- Why protection of water resources is necessary.

2. Crossroads and Environment: How does this place support diverse human and non-human communities?

Vancouver lies on the Columbia River where the land, water, wildlife, and people have interacted through time to create evolving communities.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors better understand:

- The reasons people settled here-past and present.
- The mild climate was an attraction to settlement.
- The importance of the river to several industries (ie. timber, transportation, wheat milling).
- Large source of water.
- The importance of the Columbia River for power, navigation, and irrigation.
- The river is the only navigable river in the region that goes from the Pacific Ocean to the interior.
- The river continues to be important for navigation.
- The area's connections between Puget Sound and the Willamette

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- The changing cultural composition of the region over time, which is reflected in the Hudson Bay cemetery.
- Impact of settlement, which includes among other things, the introduction of exotic species and diseases.
- The struggle for economic and social control by various groups over time.
- The British and then American stronghold over native lands from 1825-1890.
- This area was generally considered a defensible position militarily.
- How the area became a significant and central location for military operations from the 1850s to the present (i.e., spruce mill, shipbuilding, point of embarkation, defense, etc.).
- The area lies along a major north/south migration route for many wildlife species.
- Impacts from the Ice Age Missoula Floods creating a unique landscape of prairies and subsequent settlement patterns.
- The importance of renutrition of the river from the ocean (i.e., to salmon migration).
- The manner in which the mild climate contributes to biodiversity.
- The area as a hub for HBC, military, transportation, medical treatment, social gatherings, etc.
- Changes in the landscape, use, and management of the area's urban wetland.
- The multiple perspectives of the area's importance as a regional, national, and global crossroads:
 - Political crossroads (i.e., who was in control).
 - Aviation crossroads (i.e., the 1937 Russian flight and early flight exploration).
 - Crossroads of human and cultural interaction (i.e., people who came here and changed the lives of others).
 - Crossroads for cultural and economic exchange.
 - Religious crossroads.
 - Crossroads in labor/trade.
 - Crossroads of environmental and social decisions (i.e., endangered species, salmon dams, etc.).
 - Crossroads in "interpretation" (i.e., dating back to the HBC curiosity collection).
 - Native use of area

3. Exploration and Discovery: How do we know this place?

For centuries people have recognized the richness of the natural and cultural resources in the area and have conveyed this knowledge to others through oral, written, and scientific records. These explorations and discoveries have influenced and will continue to

influence new and changing uses of the area, including impact through settlement and industry on the environment, trade, agriculture, and social organization.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors better understand:

- The reasons people (including ancestors of the native peoples, the HBC, military, and others) explored this area.
- The Columbia River as both a corridor and barrier to exploration.
- Some of the myths that fueled people's imaginations about the Pacific Northwest.
- The relationship of the HBC and the military to science, exploration, and settlement.

The past and continuing importance of physical and social mapping of the area.

- The variety of explorers who visited/lived in the region and how they influenced who we are and what we know today (i.e., Lewis & Clark, Charles Wilkes, David Douglas, George McClellan, Horatio Hale, John Mullan, John C. Fremont, Paul O'Neill, Joel Palmer, Mother Joseph, Joseph Barnes, Thomas Nutall, Sacagewea, etc.).
- How exploration in the past differs from today (i.e., the ethics of discovery).
- Different technologies and perspectives in determining what is relevant in describing the area's history and significance.
- The area as a hub for exploration into other locations.
- Descriptions of people by early ethnographers.
- The center of non-native knowledge of the region.
- The spiritual and artistic expressions of exploration and discovery.
- Mutual exploration and interactions of different people in exploring and learning about each other (e.g., the Indians explored those they encountered).
- Some of the far-reaching contributions of the army units based out of Vancouver (i.e., Alcan Highway, Alaskan Relief Expedition, overseas expeditions, mapping, etc.).
- The contributions of people rotating through the military post (including a prominent figures such as Grant, Marshall, Howard, etc.), and how they affected the dynamics of the community.
- The importance of the area in coastal defense, Indian War expeditions, and embarkation during World Wars I and II.
- The positive and negative impacts of America's drive for manifest destiny.
- The use and contributions of the Reserve as an early training ground for archaeology.
- The development of technological and social innovations (i.e., the Kaiser Shipyard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, etc.).
- Resource (timber, fisheries, water, etc.) discoveries in the area that allowed for development.
- The different ways people have used area resources over time.
- The contributions of pioneer aviators and aviation technology.

Efforts in exploring solutions to today's issues (i.e., public health, environmental preservation, cultural resources preservation, etc.).

- Costs and negative effects of exploration and discovery (i.e., exploration, exploitation, disease).
- The region's role in American Imperialism at home (Washington Territory) and overseas (Philippines and Hawaii).
- The role women had in the exploration and discovery of the area.

4. Settlement and Development: How do we use this place?

Many factors have attracted and supported the waves of human settlement in the Vancouver area and contributed to the development of a high degree of social and cultural diversity, social stratification, co-existence, cooperation, and conflict.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors better understand:

- How people have been able to thrive and sustain in this area.
- What it may take to thrive here in the future.
- The multiple factors (climate, water, fertile land, furs, timber, open space, food, and military protection) that attracted people to the area.
- Due to the natural bounty of the area people were able to live here with relative ease.
- Native cultures and economics were very sophisticated.
- Early settlement here contributed to growth of nearby communities.
- Settlement came in waves (i.e., American Indians, HBC, emigrants, military, international immigration).
- This was the end destination for many people as well as a central locale for dispersal.
- The importance of trade and partnership.
- Efforts in developing the army post gave a sense of permanence to settlement in the area.
- There were government incentives to settle here and develop infrastructure (i.e., Civilian Conservation Corps, Bonneville Power Administration, Land Reclamation Act, Kaiser Shipyard, Columbia River Dams, etc.).
- The development of sustainable communities to maintain a high quality of life.

The competition for resources (i.e., land, water, fishing, etc.)

- The importance of the area as a transportation hub.
- The rivalry for regional status.
- Social points of conflict and the evolution and overlapping of geographic, political, military, social, religious, and resource boundaries.
- The role of the Catholic church and other religions and missions in the area.
- The role of partnerships in the area's settlement and development.
- The issues surrounding future regional development.
- The establishment of schools for the deaf and blind.
- Women's roles and stories.
- Individuals known and unknown who have left a legacy (i.e. Dr. John

McLoughlin and General George C. Marshall).

- The infrastructure created by the HBC assisted early Oregon Territory pioneers in establishing their new lives.
- Spatial organization of structures and landscape elements reflect the status of power and relationships of organizations.
- Materials at the site reflect regional and global changes in technology and how this relates to past economic and political power.
- Variability in architecture reflects technological and social variability in households, families, occupations, and industry.
- Impact on the environment from industrial development.

5. Work and Community: What do we do in this place?

Based on the influence of both nature and people, the Vancouver National Historic Reserve is a place where diverse human communities have formed, overlapped, and interacted over time.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors better understand:

- The influence of the native people.
- The various kinds of occupations people have engaged in over time (including leading and subservient roles, caring for planes in the 1920s, harvesting salmon, etc.)

The daily life (including working conditions, types of recreation, etc.) of people in different eras.

- The development of different communities based on types of work (i.e., military, aviation, shipbuilding, medical/nursing, etc.)
- The area was the birthplace of many northwest industries (i.e., agriculture, fruit growing, fishing, and the first saw mill).
- The ethnic, social, and religious groups associated with specific industries.
- Differences in the quality of life for different groups of people.
- Interactions and issues related to race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Who was in power at different times.
- Who was included and excluded in the dominant social system.
- The different educational systems over time.
- Relations to international communities.
- The different types of communities in the area.
- People came from many different places, and the reasons they stayed or left.
- Temporary communities of the area including the Buffalo Soldiers of the late 19th century and the Italian prisoners of war detained here during World War II.
- Changes in key industries over time.
- The impacts of technology on work and industry.
- The area was a center for the CCC—a community in its own right.
- The nature of the military community here (such as the 24th Infantry).
- Relations of the military with the community.
- The movement of the military from the site and the establishment of



the Vancouver National Historic Reserve.

- The role of the Army troops from the Vancouver Barracks in combating labor union strikes in the Pacific Northwest and California.
- The changes brought on by the Spruce Mill and later Kaiser Shipyard to family and worklife.