

CELILLO FALLS

...Since time immemorial

Celilo Falls is a historic property of religious and cultural significance to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) since time immemorial.

It was traditionally used as a fishing and trading location with its own form of trade patois known as "Chinook Jargon" and an Indian sign language unique to the location. Native people from the Bitterroot Mountains to the Pacific Coast, from Southern Canada and Northern California, created the vast trade network at the site.

Lewis and Clark passed Celilo Falls just after the main fishing season and witnessed the processing and trading that took place in the surrounding villages (Ronda 1984:171-172). With the introduction of non-Indian contact, adaptive changes took place at Celilo while subsistence fishing continued. It was not until the damming of the Columbia that the greatest changes occurred to Columbia River peoples. The Dalles Dam, near The Dalles, Oregon, had a profound effect on the population of Indian people that depended upon fishing at Celilo Falls for their subsistence needs.



Oral histories of three Tribal Elders as they recall Celilo Falls:

Abundant Fisheries

An elder recalls how Celilo Falls was a different fishery than it is today. He remembers an abundance of fish and lamprey. He learned to fish for the subsistence needs more than he did for economic gain: "Growing up, you mainly had to look at the subsistence. You were taught that you got to bring fish to your mother so that she could take it and dry it or can it. In them days, they used to salt it in big barrels."

However, after the subsistence needs were met, the sale of fish brought in extra money.

Transportation to Celilo

This elder also recalls the duration of the trip from the Umatilla Indian Reservation to Celilo: "It took a long time to make that, maybe two or three days to Celilo, so we had areas where we could camp. We bartered in my time all the way down to Biggs ... and then from Biggs, you could begin to feel the dampness from the Celilo Falls. You could begin to hear the great Celilo Falls and the hills across the river

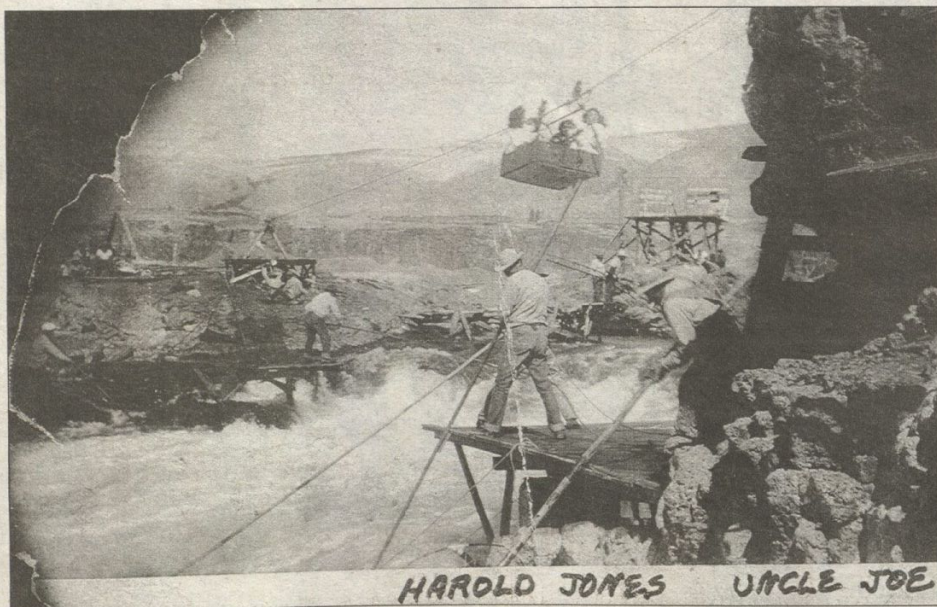
used to stay green on account of the mist that used to fly over. Our people came together from all over. It was a gathering of our people, people we didn't see for years".

No Boundaries

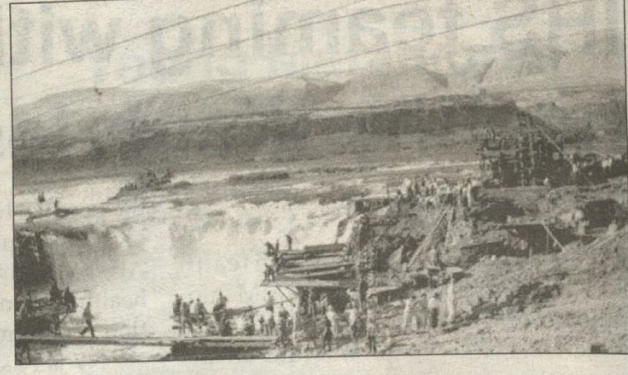
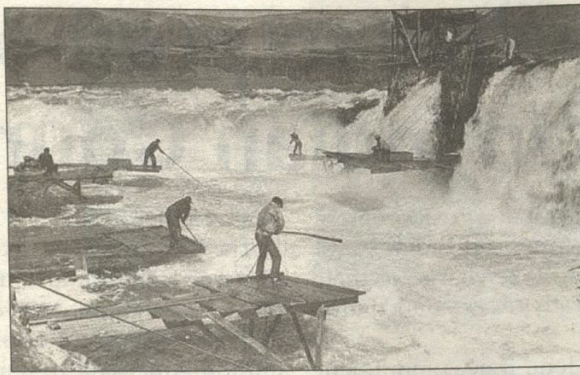
In this elder's lifetime, the river was not considered a dividing line between two states. They never referred to fishing sites as being on the Oregon or Washington side, just as being, "on the river." While certain families held territorial rights to certain fishing scaffolds, it was not uncommon to share these sites with others and fish side by side with Yakama, Umatilla, and Nez Perce tribal members. After the treaty settlements followed the dam construction, the negotiations on the river for fishing sites became much more contracted by third parties, no longer allowing for the

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natural relationships to continue on the river.

Woman Fishing At Celilo

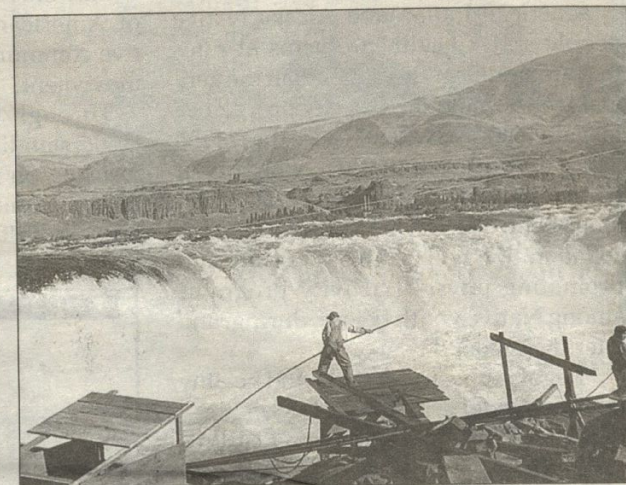
The memory of Celilo remains vivid for these two elders who are brother and sister. They recount the story of the sister being the first woman to fish at Celilo. Their father sought permission from other fishermen there and held a traditional dinner and gift-giving ceremony so that his daughters' rite of passage would be accepted by the Celilo fishing community at large.

The Flooding

Army Corps housing was offered to their family in the few years leading up to the dam. This constituted a significant change as they had been previously living in shanty towns along the railroad tracks or in tents along the river. Years before Celilo flooded, their father began to prep them for the inevitable, taking them to various sites along the Columbia that would also disappear in the flooded backwaters of The Dalles Dam. They remember that their parents and others of that generation tried to fight the dam and traveled to Washington, D.C., to argue their treaty rights to the falls. They also vividly recall the day the falls flooded over, how long it took, and the number of tourists that came to watch. The sensory memory of the place is still strong for this female elder, who says that she can close her eyes and still hear the roar of the falls.

Economic Losses and the Importance of Traditional Use Areas

The economic structure was significant at Celilo. Monetary earnings were pooled from fishing into what was termed, "the company" or "the corporation," to keep everyone economically afloat during the season. This communal atmosphere fell in line with the practice of providing for more than just one



individual family. To that end, these elders recall that they often shared their catch with extended relatives from the Nez Perce reservation throughout the year.

The largest effect the dam had upon these elders was their family's return to and re-establishment of traditional fishing areas on the tributaries of the Snake River. They were taken to these tributary areas by their father in order to continue subsistence fishing. He knew of these camping and fishing sites from his youth and was taken to these places by his ancestors. As this elder recalls, "That's where we went from Celilo. Since we lost that, then we had to go up to the Grande Ronde, Granite, Imnaha, to catch fish; to dry it, to can it for winter, or to, if we got it back early enough, to put it in the freezer. So we had to change. I mean we knew about the spots up here, dad already knew about them. Because as soon as they flooded Celilo, he

just took us right up there."

In making this transition, their family had to switch from dipnetting to gaffing on the tributaries.

"A year after Celilo was when we started going up to the Grande Ronde first, up the Grande Ronde Valley, up in the meadows. Up there is where we started going gaffing for salmon then. So, it was a whole new way of fishing for us [as children] but we learned real quick."

They moved from the Grande Ronde to the Imnaha River with a band of four or five families that had all been fishing regularly at Celilo before the dam. They also learned to follow the salmon, such as only camping in the Granite area for one week as the runs passed through.

This transition to the tributaries was an opportunity to return to usual and accustomed camping areas in the mountains, where fish weirs and tepee poles were still cached - items they came across once while traveling to "the old places." However, in returning to those sites, they often had to negotiate access from park rangers to camp in the off-season and were made to erect their teepees in specified campgrounds rather than in their traditional locations. They remained there for more than a month at times, getting food for their winter subsistence, and canning and drying fish.



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