Fort Stevens State Historical Site

SITE LOCATION KEY
1. War Games Building
2. Battery Pratt Command Station
3. Battery Pratt
4. West Battery
5. Battery Mishler
6. Battery 245
7. Rifle Range
8. West Battery Commander Station and Mine Observation Station
9. Parados
10. Steam Plant
11. 155mm Gun
12. Battery Clark Commander’s Station
13. Non-Commissioned Officers’ Quarters (sites)
14. World War II Barracks and Automotive School (sites)
15. Parados
16. Hospital (site)
17. Communications Bunker
18. Test Tanks
19. Mine Cable Storeroom
20. Commissary
21. Post Chapel (site)
22. Fire Station (site)
23. Chief of Engineers’ House Site and Bunker
24. Laundry (Site)
25. Searchlight Generator and Searchlights 3 & 4 (sites)
26. Torpedo Loading Room
27. Mine Dock Pilings
28. Mine Loading Building
29. Coincidence Range Finder Booth
30. Battery Smurthway
31. Coal Yard
32. Mine Casemate and Mine Commander’s Station
33. Original Earthwork (site)
34. Battery Freeman (site)
35. Native American Longhouse (site)

Welcome to Fort Stevens
The Fort Stevens Military Reservation guarded the mouth of the Columbia River from the Civil War through World War II. The park has more than five miles of hiking trails and seven miles of bike paths. The Oregon Coast Trail begins at the South Jetty and continues along the beach.

Hiking Trails
Scenic views of the water abound on the two-mile trail around Coffenbury Lake. A mile-long trail runs between the north end of the lake and Battery Russell along a ridge created by dune action many years ago, then connects with a nature trail east of the campground. This trail can also be accessed from the dump station.

If you look carefully at the forest, you can see how it is layered, with the tall trees on top, small trees and shrubs next, and small flowering plants on the ground. Each type of plant has found the level where the amount of sun is just right for its growth.

Trees & Flora
The park is full of Sitka Spruce, Shore Pine, Western Hemlock, Red Alder and Cascara Buckthorn. Small trees and shrubs include Pacific Red Elder, Oregon Crabapple, Coast Rhododendron, Red Huckleberry, Salmonberry and Salal. The ground cover is patched with Horsetail, Skunk Cabbage, and a variety of ferns such as licorice, sword, bracken, deer and wood. Watch for uprooted trees exposing broad, shallow root systems. This is caused by high water levels in the ground, which prevent the roots from going very deep.

Vehicles on the Beach
Motor vehicle travel on the beach is prohibited north of the Peter Iredale beach access to the South Jetty from noon to midnight May 1—September 15. Travel is permitted in this area at all other times. Be aware of posted signs for other rules and regulations.

Local Sightseeing
Astoria is historically important as the first permanent American settlement west of the Mississippi. The Columbia River Maritime Museum, Fort Astoria, the Clatsop County Historical Museum, and the Astoria Column offer information on the area’s history. Call the Astoria Chamber of Commerce (503) 225-6541 for more information.

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is home to a replica of the fort in which the Lewis and Clark expedition spent the winter of 1805-6. Drive south on Ridge Road, turn left at the “Y” to find alternate Highway 101, then follow the signs.

Seaside and Cannon Beach offer resort activities and spectacular scenery. Call the Seaside Chamber of Commerce (1-800-444-6740) or the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce (1-904-46-2623).
Over time, this tower served multiple purposes. The War Games Building started out as a plotting data into the plotting room from base end stations. The guns 5-6 were also part of the West Battery. Known as the ‘Barracks Battery’ since 1866, this emplacement has a unique place in coastal artillery design. Both its 10-inch disappearing guns were capable of 50° movement, called ‘all in one motion’. Only one other in the U.S. was so designed (in Galveston, Texas), and it no longer exists. Battery Mishler’s guns were also deactivated in 1918, although the guns were left in place for spare parts. For much of World War II, Battery Mishler was the site of the Harbor Defense Command Posts for both the Army and Navy. After the war, the guns were removed, but the pits were covered over. During the Cold War, an early warning radar and bomb site station was installed, and remained until 1962. Check the Visitor Center for a schedule of guided tours during the summer.

Battery 245 (1944) The Battery 245 was one of the 200 series batteries built to supplement harbor defenses. Battery 247, located across the river at Fort Canby, was the main battery of this type for the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia. Its guns, and those of Battery 245, were fired during training exercises.

Rifle Range (C. 1942) The rifle range sited here was used during the early years of World War II. It was updated in 1942, but in doing so, a portion of the old range fell on several civilian workers, killing them. It fell into disuse, likely after Battery 245 came on line. After the mid-1940s, a rifle range to the west was used.

Battery Command Station and Base End Station (1900; Mine Base End Station (1911) The Battery Command Station was one of the first built. It served the West Battery, and later, Battery Mishler. A Depression Position Finder instrument was installed there. By using the height of the tide and by determining the angle of the target, triangulation was used to find the range of the target. This information was then plotted to the guns. The submarine mine base end station also used a Depression Position Finder to develop range readings for the First Mine Command.

Parados (1896) The Parados was a concept developed by the brilliant French military designer Vauban. It consists of an embankment of earth at the back of an embankment that protects it from rear attack. This parados also protected the West Battery by limiting the area of fire from the Columbia River. If attacked, the gun crews could effectively operate in the area without fear of flanking fire from enemy ship bombardments.

Steam Plant (C. 1900) This plant produced electrical power for the West Battery. It was converted to a reserve power unit in 1920.

155mm Gun Although the 155mm gun was never installed at Fort Stevens, two of them were mounted at North Cove, Washington. As a harbor defense weapon, this gun was mounted on a concrete embankment called a Panama mount. The gun’s projectiles weighed 95 pounds each and had a range of nearly 11 miles.

Halfway Point of Tour

Battery Clark Base End Station (1899) This station provided range information for Battery Clark’s plotting room.

Non-Commissioned Officers’ Quarters (1907-08) These were the oldest remnant of buildings within the Fort area. Each building was a two-story duplex, built on a foundation of brick, and with brick cisterns behind each.

World War II Barracks (1941) and Athletic School (1941) None of these buildings remain, but the area once hummed with activity. The foundation remnants you see were for the buildings in various rooms. The rest of the building was wooden and set on concrete piers. The barracks housed up to 65 men.

Battery Clark (1899) Named for Captain William Clark of the Corps of Discovery, it covered the most northerly battery at the fort. Originally it was armed with eight 12-inch mortars; four of them were moved in 1917 across the river to Fort Canby. This equaled mortar fire at the mouth of the Columbia River, and made the Battery safer for gun operations.

Central Power Plant (1910) This plant was oil-fueled, producing steam for electrical generators. It powered most of the complex, with an auxiliary plant at the east end of the Parade. A separate plant produced power for Battery Russell and a small plant powered the searchlights.

Bakery Post, Service Club (C. 1900) Bred for the fort’s residents and workers was baked at this site. The building was later remodeled as a service club center, and was eventually demolished.

Artillery Engineer’s Building The Artillery Engineer and staff developed fields of fire, or grids, for various guns, which enabled quicker firing solutions for a given target. This information was then posted on large maps in the various plotting rooms. They were also responsible for monitoring weather data, because factors such as atmospheric pressure can affect the speed and range of artillery shells.

Guardhouse (1911) Occasionally (especially on payday), men stationed at the fort would go for a drink. When this happened, they spent time in this building. The Guardhouse is open to the public on a limited schedule during the summer months.

Hospital (C. 1910) A two-story building here served the medical needs of the men. During World War I, swine flu devastated Fort Stevens, and an estimated 50 men died in this building from the epidemic.

Communications Bunker (1922) and Test Tanks This bomb-proof and gas-proof building was the center of all communications. A large switchboard controlled everything. The structures in front of this building were tanks used to test cable for the sea mines.

Mine Cable Storeroom (1910) Everything needed to operate sea mines, except the explosives, was kept here.

Commissary (1900) This is where the fort’s personnel bought supplies.

Post Chapel (1943) A small plant powered the searchlights.

Fire Station (1914) The religious and emergency needs of the fort were met in these buildings. The church was appropriately painted white and the fire station red.

Steam Plant (C. 1920) This plant produced electrical power for the West Battery. It was converted to a reserve power unit in 1920.

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Mine Dock Filings (1894) The earliest plans for Fort Stevens show a dock at this approximate location, but by 1874 the shoreline had changed, and an extension was necessary. By 1910, the mine operation at the mouth of the Columbia required a new docking facility, including a railroad track for loading the mines onto boats. During World War II, the docks were further improved in anticipation of naval assaults.

Mine Loading Building (1941) In this building, the explosive charges were loaded into the sea mines. They were then transported to the mine dock on railroad cars.

Coincidence Range Finder Booth The small bunker was used as an observation and security post for the east end of the fort. Evidence suggests that it was not used after 1920.

Battery Smur (1902) Named for 2nd Lt. Elias Smur, killed during the War of 1812, this battery was armed with two 3-inch rapid fire guns. Battery Smur was designed to protect mine operations in the Columbia River. It was deactivated in 1910, and the guns were removed and scrapped.

Coal Yard (1902) Coal was used to heat the fort buildings.

Mine Casemate and Mine Commander’s Station (1918) Before World War II, all the mines on the Columbia River were controlled from this structure. Orders to detonate the submarine mines came from the Mine Commander’s Station to the south of the casemate. All mines were electrically detonated, and for extra protection, the casemate was gas- and bomb-proof. During World War II, this casemate was inactive and all submarine mines in the Columbia River were controlled from Fort Columbia on the Washington side of the river.

Original Earthworks (1863) and Battery Freeman (1902) Due to the presence of British and Confederate sea raiders in the area, President Lincoln ordered the construction of fortifications at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1863. On the Oregon side, Fort Stevens, a nine-sided earthen fort surrounded by a moat, was built at Point Adams. Armament consisted of 26 guns, including seventeen 10-inch muzzle loading Rodman cannons, which could fire a 128-pound cannonball over one mile. Fort Stevens was completed and occupied by troops in 1864. The earthwork was the only fort of its type on the west coast of the United States. During a modernization program at the turn of the century, a new battery was constructed within the original earthwork. Battery Freeman, named for Lt. Col. Constant Freeman, who served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, was armed with two 6-inch rifles on Barbetre pedestrian carriages and one 3-inch gun on a pedestal mount. All guns were removed from Battery Freeman in 1920, and the battery, along with the earthwork, was leveled in 1949 to make way for a parade ground. The earthworks was reconstructed by the Friends of Old Fort Stevens in cooperation with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, and the National Guard and U.S. Marine construction engineers.

Native American Longhouse This is the approximate site of a Chinook village known as Nehalehek. The site was the largest village in the area and was used seasonally in the summer for fishing and trading.