Camp Meriwether History Trail



1926 – 2026

By Tim Kniser

Camp Meriwether History Trail Map



New Parade Ground

The heart of camp today is the flag campus and parade ground in front of Discovery Lodge. Built in 2004 on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the three flag poles are framed by the anchors and chains recovered from the wreck of the Struan. Other hardware can be found along the walkway around the lodge. Four granite memorials were later placed around the flag poles. One honors scout leader Ed Povey. As a camper in 1930, he was one of the earliest recipients of the Vi Et Consilio award.





But flag ceremonies at Camp Meriwether weren't always held up here on the hill. Originally the flag campus, dining hall, and trading post were located in the valley at the base of Cardiac Hill. Start your History Trail hike by taking the beach trail or camp road down to the oldest parts of camp. Look for the first marker by the old flagpole.

1. Old Flagpole

When Camp Meriwether was first built, the heart of camp was known as "headquarters", which included all of the parts of camp located in the coastal meadow surrounding Headquarters Creek (now known as Allen Creek).



Scouts and scouters from all parts of camp came to the meadow for morning and evening flag ceremonies. Those coming from the four original campsites took all three meals in the dining hall there. The original flag campus included a single flagpole and the anchors, chains, and other hardware recovered from the Struan. The last part of the wreckage recovered from the surf was the anchor winch gear, which hasn't moved from this spot since 1953.



In 1990, in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the wreck of the Struan, two temporary flagpoles were added and a visiting Norwegian scout brass band played for the camp at each flag ceremony.









2a. Rover Bunkhouse & Corral

Take a minute to look up the beach to north, in the direction of what was Rover campsite.

In 1927, few hardy souls started the Rover Troop on the old Krogstad homestead. Krogstad was an army veteran who lived at the base of Cape Lookout. He then sold the property to the Chamberlains, his neighbors to the south. A corral was built in a flat clearing on the Krogstad homestead site that had later been used by the Chamberlains to grow potatoes. This flat area above the creek is where Camp Clark is now. Soon after, they built a bunkhouse and a small kitchen along Krogstad Creek, later renamed Rover Creek.

The Rovers were older scouts who camped separately from the rest of the scouts. They rode their horses along the beach and often took multi-day treks, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles through the Coast Range.

2b. David Douglas Campsite

Also to the north, between Camp Meriwether and Camp Clark is David Douglas campsite.

By 1929, a growing number of older scouts wanted to learn more about natural history during their two-week stay at Camp Meriwether. And so, in 1929 an independent campsite was built on the bluff north of "headquarters" to do just that.

The campsite was named after David Douglas, the prolific 19th century botanist who described many of the significant plant species in this area. The site was built around a small creek that trickles down to the beach. Scouts prepared their own meals from food brought up the beach by burro. The troop was originally led by scoutmaster Bob Myers, and later by Bob Cathey, an early Vi Et Consilio recipient. During World War II, it was converted into the headquarters for a National Guard lookout post and has been in use ever since.

3. Museum and Trading Post

The Museum was one of the first buildings at Camp Meriwether. It was built in this spot using the windows, shakes, and very uneven planks from the Chamberlains' barn. The planks had been part of the Struan cargo. The Struan nameplate was attached above the door. The Museum was also called the Hotel, because visitors sometimes stayed there.

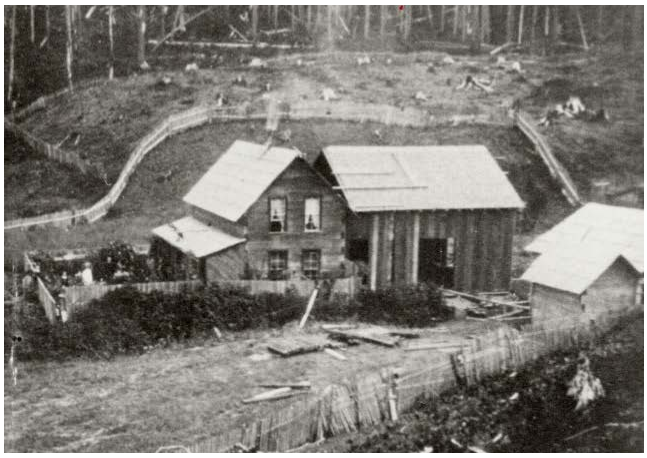


On the south side of the flagpole was another building that served as both a tool shed and Trading Post. Wagons carrying the scouts' duffels and supplies from Sandlake unloaded here. Scouts were encouraged to write letters home, so the Trading Post sold stamps and photo postcards showing different places around camp. Many of the old photos you see in this guidebook, including the one to right, were originally postcards used by scouts at Camp Meriwether.



4. Chamberlain Home and Sawmill

The Chamberlain family came to this area in 1886 as homesteaders, intending to farm and harvest timber. In 1890, the schooner Struan ran aground and covered this isolated beach with its cargo of wood. It had been carrying almost a million board feet of lumber, including large bridge timbers. The Chamberlains used the salvage to build a new house and a water powered sawmill, adorned with the Struan nameplate, on the creek.

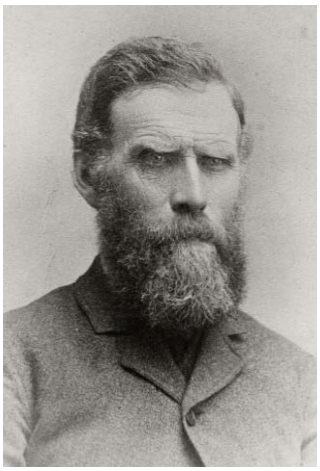


The house was here at the base of this small hill. A small waterwheel in the creek powered the sawmill, which sat on the southern side of the creek close to where it ran out to the beach

Ezra and Hanna Chamberlain lived in the house with their sons. Later, their eldest son, Robert, lived in the house with his family. Their younger son, Ernest, built a cabin further inland at a site in the forest we now call "The Homestead".



Take the Vigil Trail to the Chamberlain gravesite.







5. Chamberlain Gravesite

When the Portland Area Council bought this property from Ernest Chamberlain, he pointed out the spot where his parents, Ezra and Hanna Chamberlain, had been buried. There was no marker at that time, but later he asked that the spot be permanently marked and provided a marker which still exists. One of the weekly chores performed at camp is tending to this gravesite.

Ezra and Hanna had a good life as farmers in Iowa. But the short, hot summers and long, cold winters that got Ezra interested in homesteading in the Pacific Northwest. 1884, travelled to Vancouver, Washington. Upon seeing the lush green grass and blooming fruit trees, he wrote to his family to sell everything and move west.

Also buried here is Orlo Rexford Chamberlain, a grandson of Ezra and Hanna, who spent his early years at this place that is now Camp Meriwether.



6. Old Campfire Bowl

At the beginning of the first summer season at Camp Meriwether, a treeless clearing behind a little knoll was selected for conducting courts of honor and having campfires to bring together all the scouts in camp. The little draw was called Sleepy Hollow and over the years it was made into what is now known as the Old Campfire Bowl.

In the early years of the Portland Area Council, camp became an important time for scouts to both show their skills and be recognized and awarded their rank. Despite the remote location, parents and other visitors were regular guests at Camp Meriwether Courts of Honor.



At its peak, the Old Campfire Bowl seated five hundred people packed tightly. It was replaced in 2004 by the New Campfire Bowl on Lake Chamberlain. The Old Campfire Bowl still exists in appearance, but winter storms in the coastal forest have steadily rotted and broken the seating. Please do not enter. Return the way you came.

7a. Old Dining Halls



Here is where the first building, the Dining Hall, was built at Camp Meriwether in 1926. That first year, canvas flaps substituted for windows, and until the benches were finished, everyone ate standing up. The lodge at Camp Chinidere had been lost to a fire the summer before, so the dining hall was built without a fireplace or stove, and the kitchen and woodshed were separate buildings behind it. All the food was carried between the kitchen and dining hall during each meal.

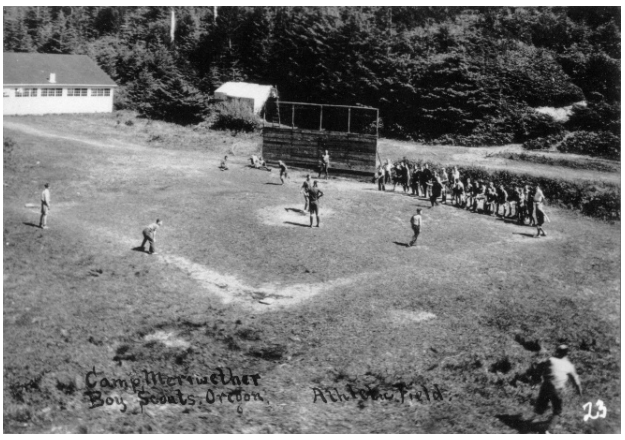


The Dining Hall was replaced in 1952 with a larger, more modern building with double the seating capacity. It had a fireplace flanked by double doors on the north and south ends, and lots of tall windows facing the ocean. The kitchen was attached on the east side by swinging doors, with an electric refrigerator and gas cooking range. The kitchen and storage areas were upgraded and remodeld many times during its fifty years of use.

7b. Parade Ground/Ball Field



For almost eighty years, the center of camp operations was in the grassy meadow where Allen Creek flows out to the beach. The Chamberlains built their home here. As the lowest and flattest part of the property, this was the easiest place to enter camp and was home to all of the camp's most important buildings.



In the early years of Camp Meriwether, this area was known as "Headquarters" and the creek was known as "Headquarters Creek". The flag campus was built on the west side and the dining hall was built on the east side. On the north side was built the Museum and later, the Big Lodge and Hospital. On the south side was the Trading Post. The parade ground in between doubled as a ball field. Baseball had just entered its Golden Age as the national pastime and, despite the limited space and lack of equipment, it was a popular camp activity for scouts.

Take the old trail here up and around the hill.









8a. Big Lodge

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ENTER THIS BUILDING. Walk from the steps around the building to the right.

This memorable building is the Big Lodge. Built in 1928 and 1929, it is the oldest remaining structure in camp. All the building materials had to be delivered by horse cart traveling up the beach from Sand Lake, so this was a significant construction at the time. Salvaged bridge timbers from the wreck of the Struan were used to support the weight of this massive structure, which needed to be big enough to hold the entire camp when it rained.

Inside the double doors is a large room with a big fireplace. Opposite the doors was a business office and a director's office. The ground floor rooms were used as a wood shop and a leatherworking shop. The Big Lodge also had plumbed restrooms, one for campers and one for visitors.

Sadly, the Big Lodge is not currently usable.

8b. Hospital

Also in 1928, a camp Hospital was built a little higher on the hill to the east of the Big Lodge. It had a small exam room, an infirmary with beds, a room for the camp doctor, and a big porch for first aid instruction. A tent located behind the Hospital served as the quarantine ward but fortunately was never needed.

During the summer, the Hospital saw more use as a classroom than as an emergency room. Despite its name, it was really just a well-kept rustic cabin. It had a stove in the front room and could be used as temporary quarters in the winter. Even in later years, staff and their families occasionally lived here between camping seasons.

From here, walk down the steps and up the road and past Discovery Lodge. Your next stop is in the center of camp.

9. Climbing Tower

The Climbing Tower is a fifty-five-foot cement tower used by hundreds of scouts for climbing and repelling. It has two repelling routes, and seven climbing routes--six outside and one inside.



Climbing at camp began in the 1980s, when a sixteen-foot wooden tower with boards for handholds was built near the shooting ranges. When the weather was good, scouts would repel off the sandstone cliff at Camp Clark and climb the basalt columns at the base of Cape Lookout.



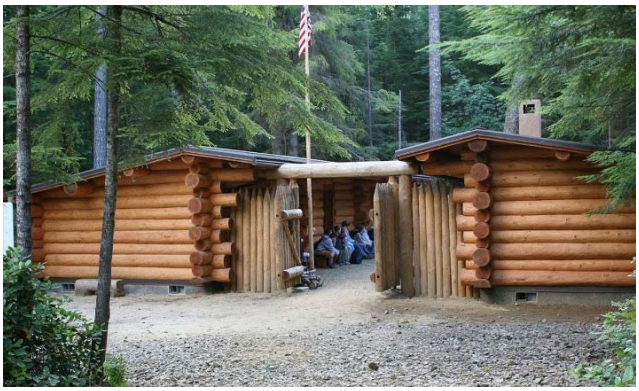


Climbing merit badge was introduced in the 1990s. To meet the growing interest in climbing, a thirty-two-foot wooden tower was built with molded handholds and an overhang. All climbing activities were then moved to the tower.

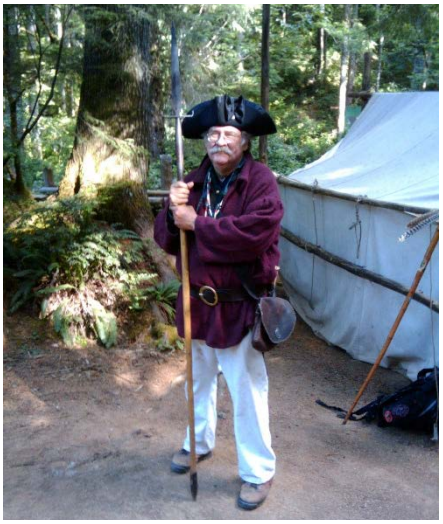
The current Climbing Tower was built in 2013 and quickly became a focal point in the camp.

10. Fort Clatsop/Blackpowder

In 1927, when Meriwether was chosen as the camp's name, a small replica of Fort Clatsop was built in camp at the north end of the lake.



In the 1980s, several black powder Explorer posts formed in the Columbia Pacific Council as the result of growing interest in muzzleloaders and historic outdoor skills. Some of these scouts and scouters brought their enthusiasm to camp and made Two Captains West, a new program area dedicated to the Corps of Discovery. It was intended for older scouts, and had its own muzzleloading rifle range. By the 1990s, blacksmithing and a Rendezvous added to the adventure.



In 2004, a new full-scale replica of Fort Clatsop was built on the old Two Captains West site, bringing the camp's Corps of Discovery theme back to its roots.









11. Lake Trail

This is the entrance to the Lake Trail, which loops around the east and south sides of Lake Chamberlain, opposite the waterfront.

For many years, there were no roads into camp. The simplest way to get to Camp Meriwether was along the beach. This was how every box, bag, or board arrived. But for the scouts, a more direct path was made. The scouts hiked from the end of the road in Sandlake, over the dunes, and down a forested trail to Lake Chamberlain. From there they took the Lake Trail into camp.

For fifty years, scouts entered camp by hiking from across the dunes. When off-road vehicles became common in the dunes, scouts hiked into camp from the top of Cape Lookout. But space for drop off was limited. After twenty more years, a bigger parking lot was built at camp and scouts now enter Camp Meriwether from the east.

12. Boat House/Ecology Center

The sandy spit of land at the northernmost end of Lake Chamberlain was the site of the original camp replica of Fort Clatsop that scouts had built from rough-hewn logs from around the Camp Meriwether property. For years, it was used as part of the Lewis and Clark Pageant that instructed new scouts of their responsibilities at camp.

The Boat House was sponsored by the Rotary club in the 1950s. It was a spacious cedar finished building that kept the waterfront equipment dry and protected from winter storms. Located at the highest point between Lake Chamberlain and the fen known as Frog Bog, the regular rise and fall of the lake rarely reached the floorboards of the Boat House. But on rare occasions, the lake has risen one to two feet above the floor of this building.

In 2021, the building was remodeled and converted into a solar-powered Ecology Center. It is now a teaching and learning hub of nature education for all.

13. New Campfire Bowl & Stagecraft



In 2004, Discovery Lodge was built on the hill south of the meadow. The lodge houses a dining hall, medic, trading post, and business office. This moved camp "headquarters" closer to the campsites and program areas. At the same time, the Campfire Bowl was moved to center of camp. The new Campfire Bowl has more seating and better visibility. Lake Chamberlain provides a beautiful backdrop. Before being used for campfires, this hillside was Shoshone campsite.



This part of camp has been used for many things over the years. On the way here, you passed the entrance to the Stagecraft Area. Starting in the 1950s, that area was used for the first dedicated archery and rifle ranges. As camp expanded, new shooting ranges were built on the eastern edge of camp. The old range area became the Ron Rohweder Nature Center and about ten years ago was finally repurposed for stagecraft.

14. Little Lodge

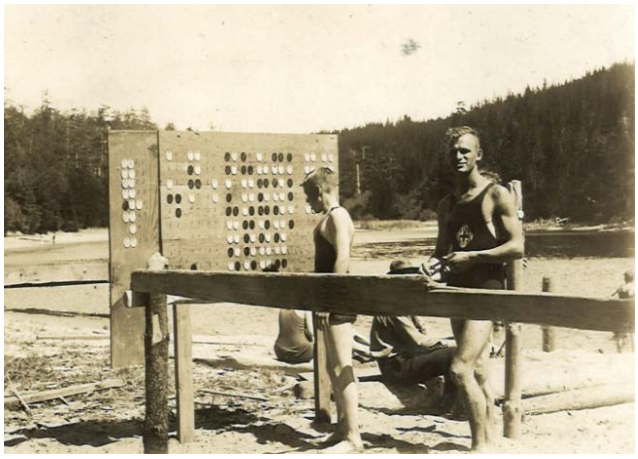


The Rotary Program Center was built in 1986 and was immediately nicknamed the Little Lodge. The west side main room was originally used for leaders as an indoor space to meet. Its wood stove, kitchenette, and shower made it a popular retreat for leaders who needed a quiet place to work or just socialize. The east side was used as camp master quarters during the winter and as a second trading post in the summer. When camp headquarters was moved to Discovery Lodge, the handicraft shop was moved to the Little Lodge.



Many donors and volunteers are memorialized on wall plaques in the main room. And many of the old campsite signs and other large mementos made by troops in years gone by have found a home on the walls of the Little Lodge.

This was not the first Little Lodge at camp. Decades before the Rotary Program Center, an earlier Little Lodge was located further up the bluff trail north of the current Campcraft Area.





15a Waterfront

One of the most important features of Camp Meriwether is Lake Chamberlain. Named for the Chamberlain family that homesteaded the property, this six acre coastal dune lake is nestled at the base of sand dunes,and surrounded by a mature conifer forest.

In the early days of camp, a lookout tower and a dock were built on the shore of Lake Chamberlain and a diving tower was built out in the middle of the lake. Scouts swam between the dock and diving tower, while lifeguards patrolled on either side in row boats. Each troop was allotted two swimming periods a day. Swim tests, buddy tags, and a buddy board were used in the same way they are now. If a scout was a nonswimmer, they were taught to swim as soon as possible. Row boats and canoes were also available for scouts to use. The camp lifeguards had their quarters on the Sea Scout Ship Lion on the west shore of the lake.





15b Sea Scout Ship Lion

In the summer of 1927, the Sea Scout Ship Lion was constructed on the lake shore just North of the swimming area. The money for the building was donated by the Lions Club, and it looked much like an actual ship. In 1928, it became the campsite for the sea scouts and the camp lifeguards. Campers slept in hammocks below deck. It had a galley where they prepared all their own meals. On the upper deck were officers' quarters and a pilot house, complete with a ship's wheel and bell. Sea scouts would sometimes take a night cruise aboard the SSS Lion. They would plan a trip, plot their course, stand watches, and enjoy some midnight snacks and stargazing on deck.

Several years of high water flooded the lower deck, and the wooden foundation began to deteriorate. The SSS Lion was used by sea scouts until 1940.

The next stop is Pirates campsite, which you just passed as the lake came into view.

16. Pirate Campsite

From the beginning, the plan for Camp Meriwether was to make widely separated troop sites rather than the narrow tent streets that were typical of scout camps at the time. Originally, there were four sites. Scouts came to camp for two weeks and chose their troop site on the first day. Staff members served as scoutmasters.



Pirate campsite was located on a sandy slope covered in shore pine; in the very same spot it is today. Originally a circle of six tents of six scouts and a leaders' tent, it was a popular choice for first year scouts because of its proximity to the waterfront. Also because of its location, it was the only campsite that had to get its water from the lake instead of Allen Creek. In the original vision of the camp, the Pirate troop was to be the swimming and boating troop. Don Earl was the Pirate scoutmaster for many years. The Pirates' flag was, not surprisingly, a skull and crossbones.



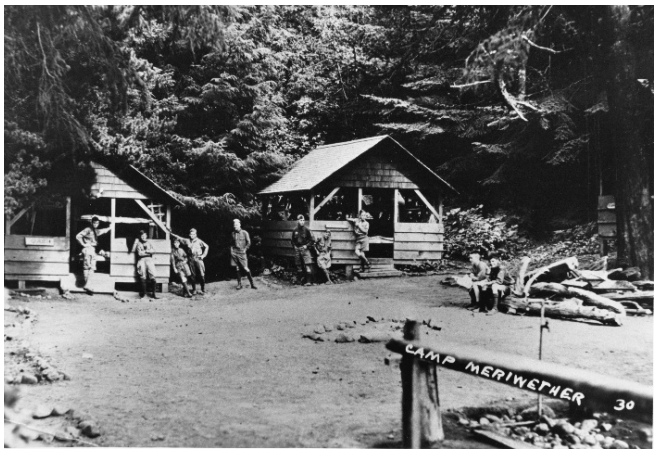
17. Struan Campsite

Head back up the trail towards the road. Walk past the first Struan sign on your left and past the Little Lodge on your right.

Named for the local shipwreck, Struan campsite began as as a row of three tents of eight scouts plus a leaders tent. How Obie picked the site or even found it was a mystery to all. It was built along the top of the cliff face with the backs of the tent platforms on the hillside and the front propped eight feet off the ground. The Struans were to be the nature troop. Their flag was an anchor, just like those of the ship Struan that had washed ashore near the Old Flagpole on a stormy Christmas morning in 1890. For many years, there was a well-used, but precarious trail that led from the campsite down the crumblimg sandstone bluff to the beach. Gnarly old shore pine frame the Struans' scenic view of Cape Lookout just as they have since the very beginning of camp.









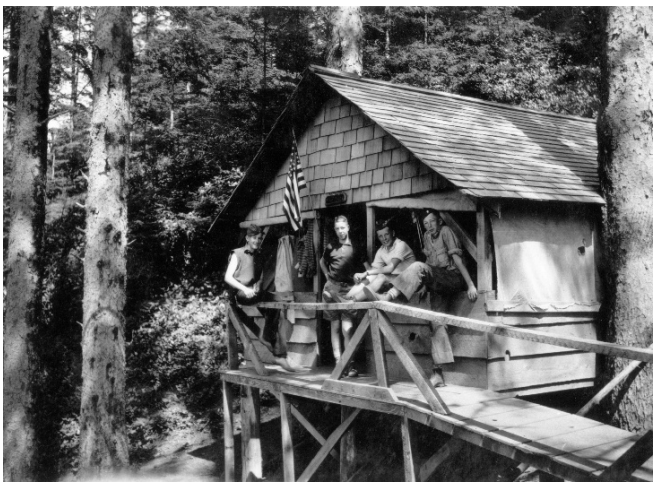
18. Lookout Campsite

Walk past the first sign for Lookout campsite, staying on the trail to the right.

Lookout campsite was located on the highest and flattest part of the bluff. It was considered by many early scouts to be perfect location, halfway between food and swimming. It originally had six tents of six scouts each and a leaders' tent. Ken Ackles was a popular song leader and Lookout troop assistant scoutmaster in the early years of camp. In its first year, the Lookout Troop was, indeed, the hiking troop. But hiking was popular with scouts from all the troops. By the second year, any scouts could go on three-, four-, or five-day hikes to Cape Kiwanda, Cape Lookout, Cape Meares, and beyond to destinations along the coast.

The first trail to Lookout campsite ran up from the beach, past Bunyan campsite, then along the bluff.





19. Bunyan Campsite

Paul Bunyan campsite was, until recently, located in a small ravine full of spruce trees. It had easy beach access just a few hundred yards south from Allen Creek. It was first built as three eight-person scout tents and a leaders' tent, all of which had a spectacular ocean view. The first scoutmaster was J.B. Miller, who then became the much-loved camp caretaker a few years later. Bunyan was envisioned to the pioneering troop. Their flag was an axe and timber hook.

The trail that leads down to and past the ravine has always been steep and difficult to cross. Over the years, various bridges and stairs have been built to assist scouts and scouters making their way along this trail to the dining hall and back.

Your next stop is the Chapel, which is on a more gradual trail and avoids the stairs down from Bunyan campsite. Take the next trail to the right.

20. Chapel

The Chapel is a place for everyone, irrespective of faith or religious background. Built in 2004, this purposely open space near the center of camp draws the visitors' attention outward and upward into the beauty of the coastal forest.



Throughout its first 100 years, Camp Meriwether's chapel services have been held in many quietly contemplative and ruggedly inspiring locations. The very first were held on the slope of Cape Lookout itself, a good forty-minute hike north of the rest of camp. In the years after, they were held in several different locations along the bluff just north of the old flagpole, in Sleepy Hollow above the old campfire bowl, and in a steep clearing overlooking the treetops of Eagle Valley. Most of these places have long been overgrown and forgotten by most, but a few old timers remember and still visit to enjoy the solitude they afford.



Discovery Lodge

Congratulations! You have completed the Camp Meriwether History Trail and have come full circle, back to where you started at Discovery Lodge. This all-purpose building serves as the camp's dining hall and kitchen, medic's office, business office, and trading post. Discovery Lodge was built in 2004 with money provided by many generous donations. Much of the story of camp and many of the names of donors can be found on the walls inside.



Interested in learning more about the history of Camp Meriwether? The current Trading Post is located on the south side of Discovery Lodge. Many pictures and artifacts from Camp Meriwether's past and present are displayed here. Books and maps about the early days of camp are for sale. Next time you visit the Trading Post, take a look for yourself!



Welcome to Camp Meriwether 2026!

It's Camp Meriwether's 100th anniversary year! This summer, there are many fun and interesting opportunities to learn about the history of Camp Meriwether and to be a part of that history yourself!

Vi Et Consilio Award
The Vi Et Consilio was the honor camper award first given in the early days of Camp Meriwether. Vi Et Consilio translates as "Strength and Wisdom" and was the family motto of Meriwether Lewis, the namesake of Camp Meriwether. It was chosen as the name for the honor camper award by our first camp director, G.H. Oberteuffer, who also named our camp.

The award was given by the camp's scout leaders to a select group of campers who demonstrated:
advancement towards ranks and other awards,
enthusiastic participation in all camp activities,
helpfulness to fellow campers and to the camp.

Camp Meriwether is continuing the honor camper tradition this summer. Once again, the Vi Et Consilio award will be given by scout leaders to recognize honor scouts using the same three criteria. Our current camp director, Missy Hill, will share more about this award at our opening and closing campfires.

Camp Meriwether History Tour
Monday afternoon at 3:30 pm at the Old Flagpole in the valley (by the Beachfront Shelter). Tour the original Headquarters area and learn about the early history of Camp Meriwether. Get your questions answered by our knowledgeable commissioner staff.

Candlelight Tour at Fort Clatsop
Tuesday evening at 8:00 pm at the Fort. Learn about Meriwether Lewis and the Corps of Discovery at our full-scale replica of Fort Clatsop, the 1805 winter home of the expedition. Hear tales of adventure from the members of the Corps of Discovery.

Want to learn more?
Books and maps of the Early Days of Camp Meriwether are available at the Trading Post, including:
Life at a Pioneer Homestead on the Pacific Ocean by Orlo Rexford Chamberlain
An Early History of Camp Meriwether by Ken Wells
Illustrated Map of Camp Meriwether by William Gordon Holford