



Lieutenant William Broughton's Encounter at Cathlapotle - Excerpt

*from The Exploration of the Columbia River by
Lieutenant W.R. Broughton, October, 1792, An Extract
from the Journal of Captain George Vancouver*

It took Broughton and his crew seven days from the river's mouth to reach Point Vancouver, just a little more than 100 miles upriver. On October 26, 1792, as the party neared "Puget's Island," near present-day Westport, Oregon and Cathlamet, Washington they met four canoes. Later that day, another group of Indians in nine canoes camped near the party: "At first their warlike behavior appearance produced some small degree of caution; but this was afterwards, by their orderly behavior, proved to have been unnecessary." Broughton notes that the population increased significantly as the group headed upriver, and the language was "totally different."

The following excerpt describes Broughton's sighting of the village of Cathlapotle on October 28, 1792. It begins at Oak Point near present-day St. Helens, Oregon and Port Westward, Washington, where Broughton encountered 23 canoes, each carrying from three to twelve Indians. From Oak Point, the crew proceeded to Point Warrior, now Sauvie Island. Broughton refers to the main branch of the Columbia, Rushleigh's River (Lake River) and Call's River (Lewis River). Note that the threats of the Cathlapotle people are likely an attempt to halt upriver trade, rather than representing real danger.

"About three miles and a half from Oak point Mr. Broughton arrived at another, which he called Point Warrior, in consequence of being there surrounded by twenty-three canoes, carrying from three to twelve persons each, all attired in their war garments, and in every other respect prepared for combat. On these strangers discoursing with the friendly Indians that attended our party, they soon took off their war dress, and with great civility disposed of their arms and other articles for such valuables as we presented to them, but would neither part with their copper swords nor a kind of battle-axe made of iron.

At Point Warrior the river is divided into three branches; the middle one was the largest, about a quarter of a mile wide, and was considered as the main branch; the next most capacious took an easterly direction and seemed extensive; to this the name of Rushleigh's River was given; and the other that stretched to the S.S.W. was distinguished by the name of Call's River.

On the banks of Rushleigh's River was seen a very large Indian village and such of the strangers as seemed to belong to it strongly solicited the party to proceed thither; and to enforce their request, very unequivocally represented that if the party persisted in going to the southward they would have their heads cut off. The same entreaties, urged by similar warnings had been before experienced by Mr. Broughton during his excursion, but having found them to be unnecessary cautions he proceeded up that which he considered to be the main branch of the river, until eight in the evening; when, under the shelter of some willows they took up their lodgings for the night on the low sandy point, accompanied by twelve of the natives in a canoe, who fixed their abode very near to them. During the whole of this day little assistance had been derived from the flood tide; the ebb had slackened for about two hours, but no current upwards during that time was perceptible." [Broughton, October 28, 1792]