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FISHING FALLS

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Like upper Salmon Falls, nine miles farther down Snake River, Fishing Falls (later known as Kanaka Falls) had an important early Indian fishing village. As Snake River's highest salmon cascade, Fishing Falls got onto John C. Fremont's map of that area and subsequently appeared quite frequently on other maps which included that area. Fishing Falls received less early notice in Oregon Trail accounts than Salmon Falls got, but some early emigrants traded for salmon there. Fremont and two of his party described Fishing Falls in detail:

J. C. Fremont, 1 October 1843: Our encampment was about one mile below the Fishing falls, a series of cataracts with very inclined planes, which are probably so named because they form a barrier to the ascent of the salmon; and the great fisheries from which the inhabitants of this barren region almost entirely derive a subsistence commence at this place. These appeared to be unusually gay savages, fond of loud laughter; and, in their apparent good nature and merry character, struck me as being entirely different from the Indians we had been accustomed to see. From several who visited our camp in the evening, we purchased, in exchange for goods, dried salmon. At this season they are not very fat, but we were easily pleased. The Indians made us comprehend, that when the salmon came up the river in the spring, they are so abundant that they merely throw in their spears at random, certain of bringing out a fish.

Charles Preuss, 2 October 1843: Yesterday we passed the Fishing Falls. Now we can purchase salmon to our heart's desire.

These miserable Indians are a happy, harmless people. Here too, only wealth makes them insolent and arrogant, as it does the Sioux with the long buffaly skins, their nice lodges, etc. These poor devils sew together twenty groundhog skins, and yet the garment does not reach to their knees. Their winter lodgement is made of reeds, and salmon is their only food, which, to be sure, is never exhausted. Below the falls the fish rise in such multitudes that the Indians can pierce them with their spears without looking. Now that we have butter and salt, this is a good dish.

Theodore Talbot, 2 October 1843: Camped early on the banks of Snake River, having come thirteen miles. Alick Godare, Gilpin, and myself went down the river to some Shoshonee lodges at the commencement of the "Fishing Falls." These Indians speak the same language as the other Snakes but are

far poorer and are distinguished by the name of Shoshoccos, "Diggers" or "Uprooters." They have very few, and indeed most of them, have no horses, are nearly naked and have no better shelter than shanties made of twisted willows; in winter many take refuge in caves. They are nearly amphibious. We most admired the dexterity with which they spear the salmon. These fish ascend Snake River to these falls in great numbers. The Indians use a long spear with a barb fitting loosely on its point. When they spear the salmon the barb immediately comes off, but is attached by a cord to the lance and the fish is played about, until they can get near enough to kill, or throw it upon the shore. Did they not use this method, the weight and struggles of the salmon would so much enlarge the wound or break the lances, so as to set them free. Even as it is some salmon more knowing than their fellows bite through the cord and thus escape.

Several families of Indians were camped on an island, but putting the salmon they wished to trade with us on little floats made of grass, they soon swam over to us. We returned to camp well laden. This is not the best season for salmon but we found them notwithstanding very excellent eating.

In his later account of his Oregon Trail journey in 1852, Clarence B. Bagley confused Fishing Falls with Salmon Falls. Since he crossed at Payne's Ferry and took a north side alternate that by-passed Salmon Falls, he had to have traded at Fishing Falls instead:

We passed American Falls and went on down the south side of the Snake River some distance below Salmon Falls. At the latter place we got our first salmon. This was a notable point for the catching of these fish by the Indians who came there from many miles in every direction to catch and dry the salmon for their winter's food. All sorts of trades were made for the fish. The Indians had no use for money but were glad to exchange for clothing and particularly for ammunition . . . Father took the shirt off his back in exchange for a big fish and I cannot now remember of ever in my life enjoying food with a greater relish.

Our company decided to cross to the north side of the stream and at a point that later became known as "Payne's Ferry," we ferried over in our wagon beds that had been made with such close joints that a good packing with candle wicking and fragments of clothing made them so nearly water tight that by putting two of them together and laying the tongues and other poles across they held up quite a load. The men stripped entirely naked and directed the horses across and also towed the improvised boats as well. It was dangerous and slow process but all hands had become accustomed to meet difficulties and dangers bravely and efficiently.

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