



Discovery Park: A People's Park In Magnolia

By Bob Kildall

MEMORIAL TO US DISTRICT JUDGE DONALD S. VOORHEES

Authors Note: Before Don died he asked me to say a few words at his memorial service about Discovery Park. After his death July 7, 1989, Anne Voorhees asked me to help in a different capacity. This is the speech I wrote and later used at a Friends of Discovery Park memorial service and in a letter to the editor.

Discovery Park is his park—that we all agree. He felt that Seattle would be known for this Park—like London is known for Hyde Park; Vancouver for Stanley Park; San Francisco for Golden Gate Park and New York for Central Park.

It was a difficult task. The Department of Defense wanted an anti-ballistic missile base and the ABM headquarters for the entire West Coast located here. Native Americans claimed the property. We didn't have enough money to buy the land and no federal law allowed excess property to be given for parks and recreation. A golf initiative proposed an 18-hole course. And Metro had its own plans for the Park's beach.

The missile base was moved. A treaty was signed. A federal law was passed. The golf initiative failed. And even Metro studied an off-site solution first suggested by Don. He named the park "Discovery" partly after Capt. George Vancouver's ship. But even more "because when our children walk this park, discoveries will unfold for them at every turn." History, beauty, nature and the future are melded here.

He has been called "a great gentleman of grace and dignity," a "judge's judge" known for his "unswerving politeness." But when involved in securing Discovery Park you have to add: a determined gentleman, a good judge of the spectacular beauty of this property, its value to us all, and a man who was unswerving in his goal to acquire it and to protect it for all time.

The trail to the South Beach offers a sanctuary where visitors can escape the city crowds and find solitude in the woods. Photo by Roy Scully, 2000.



Judge Donald S. Voorhees
Courtesy of Anne
Voorhees.

Don wrote the central purpose and role of this park for the Park Master Plan—a purpose we all defend. “That role should be to provide an open space of quiet and tranquility for the citizens of this City—a sanctuary where they might escape the turmoil of the City and enjoy the rejuvenation which quiet and solitude and an intimate contact with nature can bring.”

He is gone. His good work remains. We lost a friend, as many did. But when we walk these woods in his park and see the birds, the mountains, Puget Sound and a glorious sunset, we will remember. And those who live here in the future are sure to ask, “Who made all this beauty possible?”

THE DISCOVERY PARK STORY

One of our nation’s most important park stories describes how local citizens, against overwhelming odds, turned an old US Army Fort in the Pacific Northwest into Discovery Park, Seattle’s largest open-space park.

A park at the Fort Lawton site had been a civic dream ever since 1917 when City leaders, disappointed that less than a major fort had been built on the grounds, sought the return of the property for a City park.

An opportunity to establish a park arose 47 years later when the Department of Defense (DOD) announced plans to surplus 85% of Fort Lawton.¹ By 1964, it was clear that Fort Lawton did not fit the modern military defensive needs of the nation. Responding to the DOD decision, a citizens’ committee planning the major Forward Thrust bond issue in 1965 included \$3 million as “seed” money for a park at Fort Lawton. In early 1968, Seattle voters approved this bond issue.

Later that same year, officials and citizens faced a seemingly impossible task to acquire the Fort for a park when the DOD announced plans to instead level 330 acres at the Fort to build an anti-ballistic missile base. The missiles would defend against inter-continental ballistic missiles, yet to be built. For security reasons, the rest of the Fort would likely be placed off-limits.

The history section of the 1972 Fort Lawton (Discovery Park) Master Plan notes: “The threatened loss of the site at first evoked a cry of protest from only a relatively few individuals. In time, however, that faint cry of protest became a roar of outrage from the community.”²

Twenty-five civic and environmental groups, led by US District Judge Donald S. Voorhees, organized the “Citizens for Fort Lawton Park” (CFLP) in June 1968. They sought Washington State’s congressional delegation’s help to not only move the proposed ABM site, but to obtain excess Fort Lawton property for a City park. The CFLP protest brought action by US Senator Henry M. Jackson who interceded with Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford to block the ABM site in the Fort.³ Finally, in December 1968, Clifford declared that the ABM plans for Fort Lawton were being abandoned.

However, under the existing surplus laws, the City would have had to pay millions to acquire the Fort, despite the fact that almost 70 years earlier the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, in the City’s interests, had deeded title to the property to the US Government at no cost in hopes of seeing a major military fort built there.

Local environmental and civic groups contacted their national offices in Washington D.C. to lobby for a new federal law introduced by Jackson. In Congress, it was referred to as “the Fort Lawton Bill.” It was supported by Washington State’s entire congressional delegation. For the first time, cities would be able to obtain excess federal property for park and recreation uses for less than 50% of fair market value. To assure that Fort Lawton came free to Seattle, Jackson added to the law, “. . . if the municipality had given the property to the federal government it *shall* be returned without cost.”⁴

After abandoning their plans for an ABM installation, the military declared much of Fort Lawton as surplus to its needs. However, Jackson’s legislation was only one of several laws covering federal surplus property. Many competing claims for Fort Lawton were made under other existing excess property laws: The US Navy and US Coast Guard wanted housing, school administrators wanted a campus, veterans groups wanted an “Arlington of the West” cemetery, the State wanted a correctional facility, builders wanted high-rises, and a local group, the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, wanted ownership. Most of these claims were withdrawn after public demands for a park at Fort Lawton grew in intensity. The park proposal prevailed.

Seattle added 15% more acreage to its existing parkland as a result of Jackson’s legislation. These additions included Discovery Park, Magnuson Park and the Seattle Tennis Center on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. More than 700 cities located within all 50 states received thousands of acres of federal property for parks worth nearly \$1 billion.⁵

The south meadows command dramatic views of Puget Sound and the snow-covered Olympic Mountains. Photo by Bob Kildall, Summer 2000.



Opposite: The magnificent sea cliffs tell 20,000 years of geologic history in colorfully stratified layers. Photo by Ken Baxter, courtesy of Virginia Baxter.

By early 1971, the Bureau of Indian Affairs asked the City to include a 19-acre site for an Indian Cultural Center in the Park. After negotiations, a lease was drawn up and accepted by both parties in late 1974. It called for the Center to be “Indian in spirit, simple and honest in design, to enrich and be in harmony with the natural setting and uses of a city park at Fort Lawton.”⁶ As the underlying federal deed allowed only park and recreation uses, the City, through the federally-funded Seattle Model City program, provided funds for a building in downtown Seattle to house needed urban Indian social services.

Earlier, Dan Urban Kiley of Charlotte, Vermont, and his Seattle assistant John Morse were hired to produce the Fort Lawton Park (Discovery Park) Master Plan. In the plan submitted to the City in 1974, Kiley wrote that if the guiding principles were faithfully followed we “. . . cannot fail to create a park which will be one of the great urban parks in the world—and a joy to this City forever.”⁷ Words from the Master Plan have been used countless times to fend off incompatible uses proposed for the park:

The primary role of this park in the life of the City is dictated by its incomparable site. That role should be to provide an open space of quiet and tranquility for the citizens of this City—a sanctuary where they might escape the turmoil of the City and enjoy the rejuvenation which quiet and solitude and an intimate contact with nature can bring.

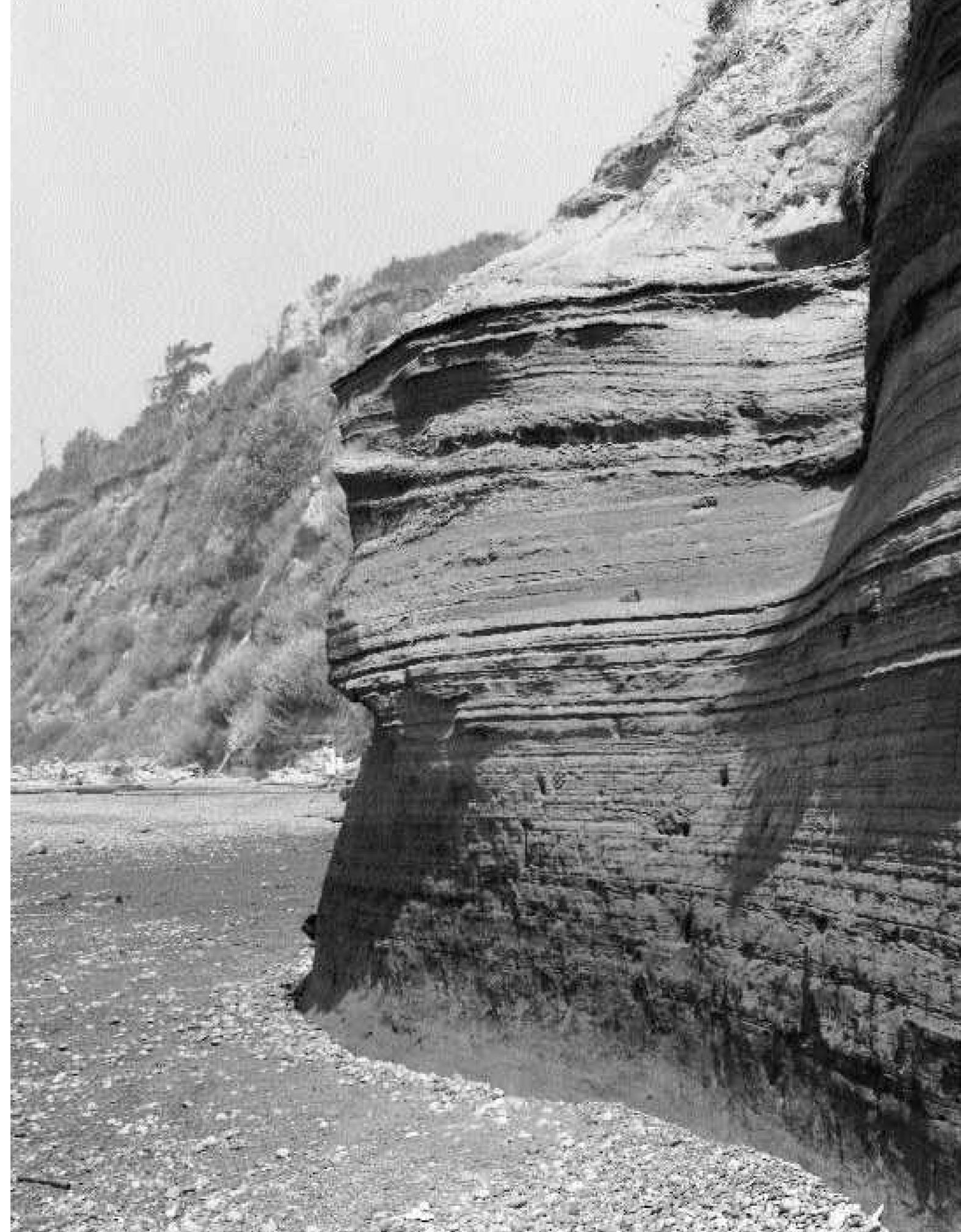
The Plan also contained this warning:

In the years to come there will be almost irresistible pressure to carve out areas of the park in order to provide sites for various civic structures or space for special activities without number for which, it will be contended, this park can provide an “ideal site” at no cost. The pressures for those sites may constitute the greatest single threat to the park. They must be resisted with resolution. If they are not, the park will be so fragmented that it can no longer serve its central purpose.

In his 1979 book, *Enjoying Seattle's Parks*, author Brandt Morgan of Santa Fe, New Mexico, wrote:

The spirit of nature thrives in this park, which is gradually reclaiming the old Fort Lawton Army base. Discovery Park encircles generous areas of woodland and beach, and offers mountain views and a variety of natural life zones to explore: meadows with deermice and shrews; forests with wildflowers and ferns; tidal beaches with barnacled rocks and smooth sands; and magnificent sea cliffs that tell 20,000 years of geologic history in colorfully stratified layers.

Wildlife abounds in this nature park. Over 150 species of birds have been seen here and giant squid have been sighted off the beaches. Flying squirrels soar between tree branches. Rabbits hop down hidden pathways. Berries abound in the summer, mushrooms in fall and spring. Discovery Park is a tranquil place away from the stress of the City—at once a wildlife sanctuary and an outdoor classroom for people to learn about the natural world.⁸



In the past three decades there have been more than a hundred proposals for “just a piece” of Discovery Park for “a worthwhile use.” If even half had been successful, there would be no park left. Citizens who fought so hard to create our 534-acre Seattle park remain diligent to see that the Park’s Master Plan is carefully followed.

The Park has become an escape for city dwellers from the streets, buildings, cars, noise, pollution, crowds and the stress of urban living. The chance to be in contact with the wildlife, view the serenity of the mountains and Puget Sound, and the opportunity for peace and solitude is an invaluable gift that Discovery Park affords local residents and visitors from all over the world. They appreciate and are amazed that within just a few minutes from the center of a city that it is still possible to find a place of wildness, quiet and tranquility.



THE BATTLE BEGINS

“The Battle for Fort Lawton” was a hot topic in the years following the decision to establish Discovery Park on the grounds of Fort Lawton. In a “P-I Opinion” dated April 24, 1978, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* addressed the number of proposals for the parkland, despite the effort to keep the Park intact as a natural refuge.

Ignoring the deep commitment of many Seattle citizens to the belief that there is no more valuable use of this site than as an open space, the idea that the land can still provide an “ideal site” at no cost for structures and activities without number has persisted in the form of more than 100 additional requests during the more than 20 years following the publication of this editorial:

The City of Seattle may come to regret disarming of Fort Lawton—now known as Discovery Park. Those long-range guns, symbolically at least, might help repel attacks on plans to turn the former army post into an urban wilderness.

Well-meaning people keep devising new ideas for what can be installed at Discovery Park. More than 100 serious proposals have been put forth, including plans to turn it into an anti-ballistic missile base, a national cemetery—“the Arlington of the West,” a residential academy for school dropouts, location for public horse rental stables, a stadium site and a Seattle version of the Butchart Gardens.

In 1975, voters had to sink a ballot issue that would have turned a large park area over to golfers. More recently, the attack came from the City’s Landmarks Preservation Board, intent on saving 25 old Fort buildings as examples of the turn-of-the-century government issue.

With the golf matter resolved and the historic preservation in abeyance, park lovers probably are sighing with relief. But it's too soon.

Two new obstacles to wilderness surfaced last week. The first came from the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation. That group leases 22 acres of land inside the park for their cultural center, Daybreak Star Arts Center.

Foundation director Bernie Whitebear now is asking the Park Board for two more acres (a former Coast Guard antenna site) for a longhouse. Whitebear says it would be used for ceremonial salmon dinners, education gatherings and ‘possibly, a restaurant.’ The Park Board is considering the request.

While the Indians besiege Discovery Park on one side, the cavalry attacks on the other. Much to the dismay of Seattle officials, the federal government is searching for a religious organization to buy the old post chapel.

A General Service Administration (GSA) spokesman said federal guidelines require that religious organizations be given first chance to acquire any surplus federal chapel, memorial or shrine.

GSA’s Auburn office is accepting bids through May 22. The price is a firm \$67,750, but the feds say they will arrange easy credit terms.

How can federal guidelines be so misguided? Can nothing be done to prevent this latest carving up of park property?

It’s apparent that constant effort, diplomacy and negotiation will be required for Discovery Park to fulfill the goals worked out by planners, city and citizens: to subordinate all developments to the environment of the magnificent natural site. The need for continuing vigilance is not unique to Discovery Park, nor to Seattle. Nearly 100 years ago, citizens working to create Central Park in New York City faced similar pressures. More than 35 proposals—from a stadium to the location for Grant’s tomb—were offered. The great park designer Frederick Law Olmstead (sic) could have been discussing Discovery Park, instead of Central Park, when he wrote: “The special difficulty of the park in city administration lies in the ordinary unreadiness to regard it otherwise than as a body of land held for a variety of purposes, vague and variable. Every year in its history some project of ruinous tendency has had the warm support of many men, the advantage to be gained by it seeming to them for the time to stand out in perfect clearness.”

As Olmstead (sic) made plain, it is essential to resist pressures to chop up an urban park site into special activities, no matter how worthy.

The Park Board, the City and the citizens must keep Discovery Park a sanctuary where people can escape turmoil and enjoy quiet and solitude. There is no more valuable use for Discovery Park than unspoiled beaches and meadows.

Wildlife lagoon on North Beach Trail. Photo by Heidi Carpine. Circa 1995.



COMMANDER CLOSES FORT LAWTON'S NORTH GATE

The front page of the March 20, 1969, edition of the *Magnolia News* featured three articles on Fort Lawton. One posed the question: "If and When . . . Natural Park at Ft. Lawton?" A second article was, "Veterans Group Proposes 'Arlington of the West.'" The third article was titled, "New Commanding Officer Takes Over Ft. Lawton."² A distinguished career officer, Colonel Stuart J. Palos was the new Post Commander at Fort Lawton. This is where this story began.

For years, US Army personnel at Fort Lawton and the neighboring communities of Magnolia and Lawton Wood had enjoyed a close and friendly relationship. Many retired soldiers and their families chose to live in the surrounding residential areas after their military careers. In fact, retired Army Colonel John R. Dey, a past Fort Lawton commander (1957- 1959), was the president of the nearby Lawton Wood Community Club.

Palos arrived just three months after *The Seattle Times* headlined: "Fort Lawton Won't Get Missiles; Two Kitsap County Sites Chosen—Army Base May become City Park."³ The news of the abandonment of Fort Lawton for a missile site was well received—particularly by those who wanted a park. (Kitsap County never received missiles either.)

For a while after Palos assumed command of the Fort, there were few if any changes. The Fort was open and quiet. Residents living in Bay Terrace, Commodore Way and Lawton Wood could drive back and forth between the Fort's east and north gates. The Metro bus stopped just inside the gate as it always had. There was a covered bus shelter for the convenience of the bus riders.

However, by early October, residents were well aware of the "new" security measures at the Fort Lawton gates. According to the October 8, 1969, *Magnolia Journal*, Palos addressed incidents on Fort property involving vandalism, drag racing, improperly licensed vehicles, speeding, drunk driving and illegally-equipped vehicles. He was quoted as saying:

"Little has really changed. The authority to limit civilian access to the Post has always existed, as has the prerogative to stop and search all vehicles entering or leaving the Post. However a rash of traffic violations, loose dog problems, and an increase in the trafficking in marijuana at the Fort has led to a somewhat more stringent enforcement of existing regulations."⁴

On a clear day, the North Beach Trail includes a majestic view of Mount Baker. Photo by Bob Kildall, Summer 2000.



Two days later *The Seattle Times* reported that the Fort was still open, although the covered bus shelter just inside the Fort gate had been moved to an interior housing area. Palos was quoted as saying that he had a responsibility to the people living on the Post and that the shelter was moved to accommodate them. He added that he did not have the money to build a new one for the outside neighbors, nor would he permit private citizens to build a new shelter at the old site.⁵

By October 23, the story became front-page news. *The Seattle Times* reported that Fort Lawton-area residents claimed they were harassed and threatened by military police who were stopping drivers. Residents were apparently unhappy about not being forewarned of the North Gate closure. Dey was quoted as saying that during his two years as Post Commander he "never found it necessary to close" the Fort. Army Corps of Engineers officials said that there was no written egress agreement for Lawton Wood residents, and that over the years, crossing over into the Fort had been by verbal consent. But Lawton Wood resident Mrs. Neil L. Wells was quoted as saying that provisions were made for egress when Congress accepted the property for a military facility. Her grandfather, Christian Scheurman, had homesteaded on property that was now part of the Fort.⁶

Things remained tense through the middle of November. Stories appeared regularly in the community and city newspapers. US Senator Henry Jackson became involved in mediating the issue, as did top ranking Army officials. Palos finally met with the Magnolia Community Club Board in a room full of irate citizens November 13.

Besides the inconvenience the closure created, citizens voiced concerns about delays that might occur for fire trucks and emergency vehicles in an emergency. Palos said that if there were a fire he would see to it that the gate was opened promptly. A resident in the back of the room shouted:

"I am with the fire department. You won't have to come and open the gates for us. We don't wait. We have chain cutters on the trucks. We'll come right through the gate. You may not know it, but the last time we had to use the North Gate on a call it wasn't to get to Lawton Wood. We were coming into the Fort to put out a fire at the NCO club!"

His statement broke the tension. Even Palos relaxed. People laughed. There was agreement to answer the problems. The Army and the residents patched up and resumed their friendly relationships. Today, the Army Reserve headquarters is on a remainder of Fort Lawton just outside the northeast corner of Discovery Park. The reservists and the neighbors work closely together and communicate regularly. Community organization representatives are invited to Army special events.



"Patience—we'll be with you in a few bolt-cutting minutes." October 30, 1969. Courtesy of Alan Pratt and *The Seattle Times*.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Was Discovery Park named for Captain George Vancouver's ship the *HMS Discovery* that sailed into Puget Sound in 1792? Many authors of travel books and guides seem to think so.

Stephen R. Whitney in *Nature Walks in & Around Seattle* claims the Park was named for Vancouver's ship.⁸ This opinion is repeated in *Insight Guides, Seattle; Magnolia: Yesterday and Today; Enjoying Seattle's Parks*, and numerous books and articles.

Colleen Cramer in her book *Romance on a Shoestring* describes Discovery Park as:

... 534 acres of romantic, out of the way places to explore, Seattle's largest park got its name for obvious reasons. A map from the visitor center will help you navigate through this scenic wonderland of forest, beach and grasslands.

However, none of these opinions is entirely correct. The person who first suggested the name "Discovery Park" was US District Judge Donald S. Voorhees, who had led the effort to create a park at Fort Lawton in 1968. He is known as "the father of Discovery Park." His suggestion was subsequently adopted by the Seattle City Council as the name for Seattle's newest park.

Voorhees was a student of Puget Sound history and Vancouver's exploration. But he was also an avid follower of the philosophy of Frederick Law Olmsted, the famed American landscape architect. Voorhees believed the name combined the history of Vancouver's exploration of Puget Sound on the *HMS Discovery*, with the excitement of visitors when they discover the wonders of nature in the Park. When asked to make a choice between the meanings, Voorhees would choose the experience of "discovery" by citizens, particularly children, visiting the Park for the first time, over the historical connection with the *HMS Discovery*.



Forests, deep ravines, views of Mt. Rainier and Olympic National Parks, make the Park's 2.8 mile loop trail an unforgettable walk. Photo by Bob Kildall, Summer 2000.

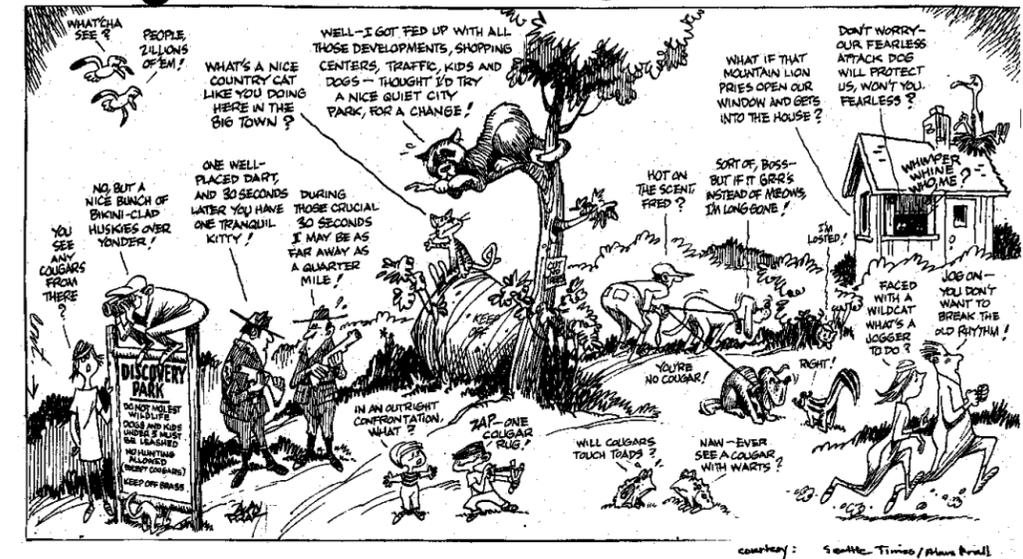
"... meadows are superb open slopes for informal play, kite flying or casual strolling." Kiley Plan 1974. Photo by Roy Scully, Summer 2000.



Prior to Voorhees' suggestion that the Park be named Discovery Park, the Magnolia Community Club had made ten recommendations if Fort Lawton were to become a park. One regarding the name read, "In appreciation of the many years in which the US Army had been a good neighbor, we recommend the park be named Fort Lawton Park."⁹

Today, the community accepts and embraces the City Council's decision to name Seattle's finest and largest nature park "Discovery Park." But Magnolians still thank the Army for preserving such a fantastic site within the City for so many years.

Cougar lies low in city park



Artist Alan Pratt courtesy of *The Seattle Times*.

WILD COUGAR IN DISCOVERY PARK

For a week during the summer of 1981, Discovery Park was in pandemonium, and for four of those days, the Park was closed after a cougar was reported to have run through the Naval Capehart housing area located in the middle of the Park. (The Capehart housing area is one of the pieces of property in Fort Lawton retained by the US Government.)

The next morning, Saturday, August 23, a park visitor spotted a cougar on the loop trail near the south bluff overlooking Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.

Sightings continued throughout the weekend, to include a number from Perkins Lane residents located just south of the Park who said a cougar was seen in their backyards. On Monday, Chief Park Ranger Paul Frandsen announced that the Park was closed.

By Tuesday, the State game officials arrived with trained hunting dogs to search the entire Park and portions of Fort Lawton retained by the US Government. In the meantime, a cougar sighting was recorded in the Park as well as near Smith Cove at the south end of Magnolia at 3 p.m. Finding nothing, the State game officials called off the cougar hunt. The Park remained closed.

On Wednesday, Park Ranger Bob Mindick discovered cougar tracks along the south bluff trail. Plaster casts of the tracks were made. The Burke Museum mammalogist, John Rozdilski, verified that the tracks belonged to a cougar. The State game officials returned with their dogs. That evening at 7 p.m., a resident reported another sighting of a cougar at the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks and Gay Avenue West near the Hiram Chittenden Locks and Commodore Park north of Discovery Park.



At 1 a.m. Thursday, a State game agent spotted a cougar sitting in a Pacific Madrone tree on the edge of the south bluff of Discovery Park. Just as the cat was about to jump from the Madrone, the game agent hit it with a tranquilizer on his first shot. The cougar fell into a ravine. As the story goes, the agent jumped into the ravine only to find the cougar was still conscious. Luckily the agent was unharmed. The 117-pound cougar was then captured and taken to the South Tacoma Game Farm. It was later released into the Cascade Mountain wilds the following week.

With the cougar captured, Frandsen opened the Park again to the public. A few days of excitement were over, but have not been forgotten.

Where did the cougar come from? At first, state game officials thought it took a marathon swim from Bainbridge Island. Later they abandoned that idea. In a 1993 children's book, *J. G. Cougar's Great Adventure*, author Virginia Bishop Tawresey muses that the cougar came to Discovery Park by hitching a ride on an open and vacant train boxcar.¹⁰

Today, the best guess is that it came down the Burlington Northern Railroad (BN) tracks from the Cascade foothills and then into the Park through the Kiwanis Ravine. Animals are safe on the tracks. They easily avoid the occasional train.

Several animals besides the cougar have likely used this BN wildlife corridor. Bears found their way into Edmonds-area backyards. A deer once ran into and shattered a Ballard store window. They both presumably found their way by coming down the tracks.

The Park staff named the wayward cougar "D. B. Cougar" after the mysterious skyjacker "D. B. Cooper" (who parachuted from a Northwest Airlines Boeing 727 over the Cascades in November 1971 with \$200,000 and has never been found by authorities). In the following years, a special "D. B. Cougar Day" celebration was held for the cougar that paid a mysterious visit to Discovery Park.

WEST POINT AND THE HISTORIC LIGHTHOUSE

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the West Point Lighthouse opened on November 14, 1881. It was built eight years before Washington Territory was granted statehood on November 11, 1889, and it is the oldest lighthouse in the Seattle area.¹¹

The lighthouse tower is 27 feet high. It has a 1000-watt quartz lamp inside with a French lens built in 1860. On a clear night, the flashing white light can be seen up to 19 miles and the red light up to 16 miles.¹² West Point greets ocean commerce going to the Port of Seattle, Tacoma and other Puget Sound ports, as well as naval ships, ferries, cruise ships and smaller craft sailing on Puget Sound.¹³

An officer-in-charge of a sailing expedition named the spit where the lighthouse is located "West Point" in 1841. The 43-year-old Lieutenant Charles Wilkes was in command of the United States Exploring Expedition that sailed from Norfolk, Virginia, on August 18, 1838.¹⁴ Wilkes, who would later serve as an admiral during the

*Opposite: Discovery Park's most impressive tree is a Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) found on the Loop Trail. Photo by Penny Rose. Discovery Park Archive. Circa 1990s.*

Driftwood on the Puget Sound beaches of Discovery Park attract park visitors. Photo by Roy Scully, Summer 2000.





Completed in 1881, the historic West Point Lighthouse is the earliest Coast Guard lighthouse built in the lower Puget Sound region. Photo by Bob Kildall, 2000.

Civil War (and was involved in the “Trent” affair in which he intercepted a British ship during the war), commanded a squadron consisting of six vessels. His instructions were to visit Rio de Janeiro, Tierra del Fuego, Valparaiso, the Fiji Islands, the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China and the northwest coast of America. Besides naming West Point, he named many other places in the Puget Sound area.

In 1907, people came to the lighthouse to salute the “Great White Fleet”—16 US Naval ships—as they steamed past West Point. President Theodore Roosevelt sent them on a worldwide “goodwill” tour to express the strength of American sea power to other nations. The ships were painted white to emphasize this point.

In 1910, well-known landscape architect John Olmsted sketched a plan for Fort Lawton. The sketch shows West Point and the existing pristine beach with an adjacent salt-water marsh.¹⁵ (Olmsted, the stepson and nephew of Frederick Law Olmsted, known as the “father of landscape architecture,” developed the 1903 plan on which Seattle’s park system is based with his stepbrother Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr. The Olmsted brothers also designed the landscape plans for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909 on what is now the University of Washington campus.¹⁶)

It wasn’t long afterwards that Seattle engineer Reginald H. Thomson completed the 12-foot diameter, brick-lined Fort Lawton sewage tunnel in 1911. It was designed to bring wastewater from central Seattle to an outfall off West Point. Sewage collected throughout Seattle was sent through sewer pipes and collected into Thomson’s tunnel. The untreated sewage was dumped off the West Point beach.¹⁷ Fear of a cholera epidemic caused the City to stop dumping in the lakes and to ship the sewage to be diluted and disposed of in Puget Sound instead.

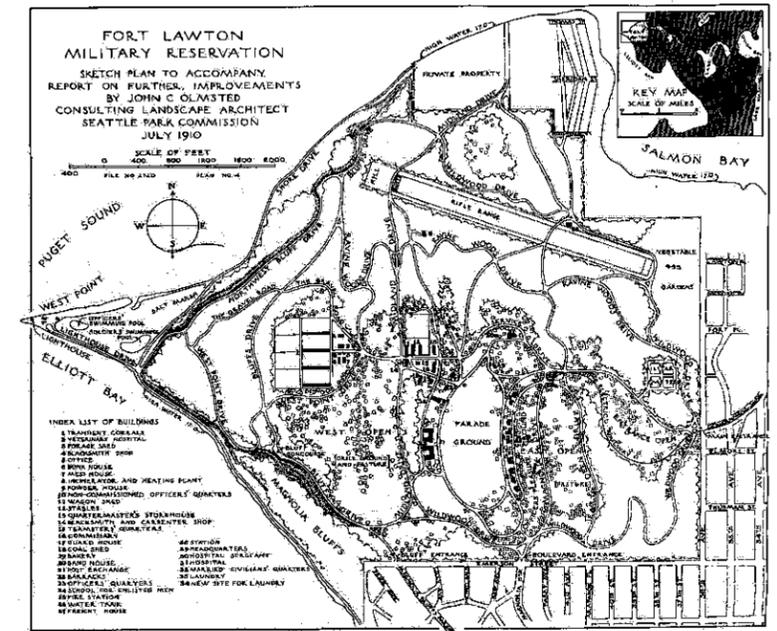
It was 55 years before simple primary treatment of sewage was provided at the West Point Treatment Plant in 1966. It was another 29 years before compliance with the National Clean Water Act and additional State requirements was achieved when secondary treatment of wastewater was added at the West Point treatment plant.¹⁸

Since that time, and as part of the mitigation for the use of shorelines, the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle (Metro)—now Metropolitan King County—has worked to hide the plant and to restore public use to the shorelines. Additions to the area include a path north of the plant that complies with the American Disabilities Act, a lagoon for nature studies, and a restoration of the beach for enjoyment.¹⁹

West Point has been the scene of many proposed developments. In March 1968, even before Fort Lawton became a park, the Washington State Oceanographic Commission’s Puget Sound Oceanographic Study Committee chose West Point as the “logical place to have a major aquarium and research facility combined with an educational facility.”²⁰

The same month, a column in *The Seattle Times* proposed “a research-and-recreation aquarium, a public park at Fort Lawton, and a bay-level waterfront parkway linking Smith Cove and West Point.”²¹ The Oceanographic Commission would “. . . operate the aquarium complex on a revenue-producing basis from admissions, concessions, a restaurant and cocktail lounge.”²² Dixy Lee Ray, then director of the Pacific Science Center and a member of the Oceanographic Commission, and later Governor of Washington State, called for the parkway to “open up the possibility for use by the aquarium complex on the south of the point, (to) . . . enable more people to reach the aquarium more easily, and would provide needed parking space.”²³ They expected to get unlimited fresh water from Metro’s sewage treatment plant and 12.4 acres of unused Metro land at no cost from Metro.

Called into action, Sierra Club leader Mike Ruby led an initiative signature gathering to protect both West Point and Golden Garden beaches from the proposal. The City Council agreed with the initiative and adopted it without a vote, so the research and recreation and the shoreline roadway proposals failed.



July 1910 map of Fort Lawton by John C. Olmsted for the Seattle Park Commission. (Olmsted, stepson of famous American landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, planned the Seattle Park and boulevard systems. Discovery Park Archives.

Left: The South Beach is broad and spacious at low tide and its charm and mystery come from its isolation and its great expanse. Photo by Ken Baxter, courtesy of Virginia Baxter. Circa 1960s.

successful in removing the sludge basin, which was a failure. Tests showed that sludge absorbs water too easily to support a roadway. Beach expert Wolf Bauer was hired by Metro to restore the beach. That carried out the goal of citizens who preferred a “natural and open” beach.

There were other proposals that never made it. The US Corps of Engineers listed West Point as a possible location for a wet moorage for private yachts. It conducted a test in 1971 to see if a “floating breakwater” could be constructed there. In 1980, Marine Animal Resource Center director Tag Gornall asked for a seal resource center to be built on Coast Guard Lighthouse property at West Point.²⁵

Because of the strong support by citizens for the guidelines laid down by the Discovery Park Master Plan, these proposals failed from overwhelming public opposition. Proposals that brought cars and buildings to the interior of the Park or to the shoreline were rejected by the Master Plan.

Somehow, West Point has survived. Harvey Manning, founder of the Issaquah Alps Trails Club and author on hiking in Western Washington, calls West Point the greatest beach in King County.²⁶ There will be new challenges to leaving the beach in a natural condition, but there will also be a strong defense by citizens to preserve this superb shoreline for wildlife and human recreation. What eventually happens will depend on the resolve of future generations.

FRIENDS OF DISCOVERY PARK

Speaking before the Seattle City Council in 1974, US District Judge Donald S. Voorhees recommended that an organization such as the Friends of Central Park in New York be formed to support Seattle’s Discovery Park. Voorhees told Council members that it was important to monitor the actions proposed for the Park and to defend the principles and philosophy found in the 1974 Discovery Park Master Plan.

Having led the CFLP in a successful effort to secure Fort Lawton from the US Government for a park in 1968, Voorhees’ experience and credibility led to the establishment of a supporting organization six years later.

As a result of Voorhees’ address to the City Council, members of the CFLP met December 4, 1974, to form the Friends of Discovery Park. Charter Board Members elected at that meeting were: Bob Kildall, President, Gerry Lamphier, Frankie Piper, Mike Ruby, Robert Sotnik, Bernie Whitebear, and Thomas O. Wimmer.

The purposes of the Friends of Discovery Park (Friends) are found in their by-laws:

The purposes of this corporation (FRIENDS OF DISCOVERY PARK) shall be to defend the integrity of Discovery Park; to create and protect there an open space of quiet and tranquility, a sanctuary where the works of man are minimized, appearing to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, a place which emphasizes its natural environment, broad vista and unspoiled shorelines; and to promote the development of the park according to a master plan responsive to these goals.²⁷

More than 750 Seattle citizens are members of the Friends. Nearly three-quarters of the members live outside the Magnolia community. The Friends have been in the forefront of nearly 100 issues where the integrity of the plan for the Park was in jeopardy.

In 1989, the Friends asked the City to create the Discovery Park Memorial Fund and raised more than \$34,800 for the Discovery Park’s new Visitor Center, dedicated in 1998. To protect the nesting Great Blue Herons and other natural qualities of the Kiwanis Ravine, the Friends obtained \$775,000 in State, Metropolitan King County, Shoreline Park Improvement Funds and Metro mitigation funds to purchase property in the ravine, which is adjacent to Discovery Park. This purchase protected a wildlife corridor through the ravine. The group also gives financial support to the Discovery Park day camp programs and to other Park programs.

While the Friends work closely with the park staff, the group stays independent of the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department by deliberate choice. It values its freedom to defend the Park by opposing or creating initiatives and referendum, to oppose issues considered harmful to the Park when the City has not or cannot take political action, or when there is concern for a City action deemed contrary to the Master Plan, and to lobby State, County and City governments.



Bald Eagles nesting in Discovery Park. Photo by Martin Muller. Circa 1980.



Sunset at Discovery Park from the south meadow. Photo by Paul Frandsen. Discovery Park Archive.

Following pages: Mount Rainier from Discovery Park, looking southeast over Perkins Lane and Elliott Bay with an infrared process. Photo by Ken Baxter. Courtesy of Virginia Baxter. Circa 1970.

Bob Kildall, a Seattle native, grew up on Queen Anne Hill and has lived on Magnolia with his wife Ruth since 1965. They met at the 1962 World’s Fair in Seattle. He was active in creating Commodore Park across from the Chittenden Locks, and was chairman of the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Locks. He is a former Chairman of the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners, past President of the Magnolia Community Club, and the founding President of the Friends of Discovery Park. His work on Discovery Park spans more than three decades. On April 21, 1988, he received the first State of Washington “Thomas O. Wimmer Award for continuous, long-term, dedicated service to maintain and enhance environmental quality in the State of Washington.” Bob has three children: Katie, Maria and Kristian.



Artist: Susan Welch.



Fort Lawton/Discovery Park 1896—1999

From author's personal records and newspaper clippings.

- 1896 Secretary of War chooses Magnolia Bluff as fort site.
- 1897 Seattle Chamber of Commerce deeds property, at no cost, to the United States for fort.
- 1900 Fort Lawton established.
- 1910 Olmsted Brothers present plans for Seattle's park system.
- 1911 Tunnel built under Fort Lawton to discharge sewage into Puget Sound.
- 1908-1941 Fort Lawton has little military use.
- 1917 Civic leaders and editors call for return of Fort Lawton for a park.
- 1938 Seattle refuses offer of Fort Lawton for \$1 during the Great Depression.

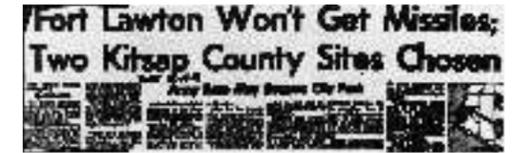
- 1941 Fort Lawton is major shipping point for troops during World War II.
- 1944 Italian prisoner-of-war is hanged at Fort Lawton by troops angered over special treatment of prisoners not given to U.S. black troops.
- 1950 Fort Lawton is major shipping point for troops during Korean War.
- 1957 Capehart military housing units built.
- 1962 Metro receives 99-year lease for 30 acres for the West Point treatment plant from Army.
- 1966 West Point primary treatment plant completed.
- 1968 Forward Thrust Park Bond Issue includes \$3 million to purchase Fort Lawton for a park.
- West Point is named as site for Aquarium-Research center. Initiative prevents that location.
- Tideland parkway from Smith Cove to West Point is proposed for Aquarium, but denied.
- The Department of Defense proposes an anti-ballistic missile system to defend against inter-continental nuclear missiles.
- Citizens for Fort Lawton Park organize to oppose ABM plans.
- UW Chapter of the Federation of American Scientists opposes the ABM.
- DOD abandons Fort Lawton ABM site in December.

- 1969 Senator Henry M. Jackson introduces Federal Lands for Park & Recreation Purposes Act "the Fort Lawton Bill." It allows cities to acquire surplus federal property for park uses at little or no cost.
- After a community survey, the Magnolia Community Club (MCC) supports a Fort Lawton Park.
- Veterans' groups seek to site a national military cemetery on the south bluff, but are denied.
- The Post Commander closes the Fort gates, citing security concerns.
- Park Superintendent Hans Thompson requests planning proposals for Fort Lawton Park. Dan Urban Kiley of Charlotte, Vermont is chosen.



March 31, 1968.
The Seattle Times.

- 1970 President Nixon signs Fort Lawton bill into law.
- Native-American group storms Fort and claims ownership.
- Seattle School District seeks Fort Lawton buildings for educational uses, but is denied.
- King County claims reversionary rights to 151 acres of Fort Lawton, but claim is denied.
- Opposition causes Navy to withdraw request for 110 acres of Fort Lawton.
- Under pressure US Coast Guard withdraws request for 44 acres of Fort Lawton.
- Army Reserve moves training from Harbor Island to renovated Fort Lawton buildings.
- Mayor Wes Uhlman appoints Citizen's Advisory Committee for Fort Lawton Park.



December 18, 1968.
The Seattle Times.

- 1971 General Services Administration (GSA) declares 425.75 acres of Fort Lawton as surplus.
- Mayor Uhlman tells GSA the City is determined Fort will become a park. He says the City rebuffed Audubon Society's request for 200-acres and to others including skeet shooters, equestrians, golfers, and soccer players.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) seek 30 acres of Fort property for United Indians of All Tribes Federation (UIATF) Indian Cultural Center (ICC) but later withdraws request asking that an ICC area be included in the Park plans.
- City applies for Fort Lawton for park and recreation uses.
- President Nixon announces 426 acres of Fort Lawton available for park uses.
- Army builds 3,800-foot chain link fence to enclose remaining Fort property. Sen. Jackson intercedes and it is removed.
- UIATF artist, Lawney Reyes, sketches plans for ICC. Plan later expands in size and impacts.
- Under pressure the US Prisons Bureau withdraws request for Fort Lawton property.
- Seattle architect Jack Morse calls for a boulevard entrance to Fort Lawton Park.
- American Kiteflyer's Association wants Park area reserved for kite flying, but is denied.
- Army Corps of Engineers lists West Point for yacht moorage. Moorage is located elsewhere.
- Metro forms liaison committee with Park advocates to make sewage plans compatible with the Park.
- Seattle allows Metro permit to build a sludge-dewatering basin at West Point beach. It is later removed and the beach is restored.
- 1972 Kiley Master Plan for Fort Lawton (Discovery) Park is submitted to the City.
- City agrees to lease 19 acres for the ICC.
- Newly-named Discovery Park opens to the public.
- Metro receives ownership of 40 acres at West Point from Army and a 100-year lease from State Department of Natural Resources for 40 tideland acres.
- President Nixon's daughter, Tricia Nixon Cox, presents deed for 391 acres of Fort to City.
- The Seattle Rhododendron Society asks for 20 acres of Fort Lawton for a "Rhododendron Forest." It was later built elsewhere.
- The Magnolia Action Planning Committee asks University of Washington landscape architecture class to study a boulevard entrance to Discovery Park.



February 14, 1973
Magnolia News insert.

1973 Burlington-Northern Railroad and the MCC celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Arbor Day by planting 180 incense cedars to beautify Discovery Park approaches.

MCC sponsors Seattle Beautiful Operation Triangle at 21st Avenue West and West Emerson Place to beautify approach to Discovery Park.

Senator Jackson dedicates Discovery Park calling it a "People's Park."

MCC challenges Metro's Auburn interceptor project. It would bring added Renton Plant sludge for discharging off West Point. (State later stops this practice.)

Chapel in the Pines is released to Park, adding an area of 2.5 acres.

1974 Kiley's 1974 Revised Master Plan updates 1972 plan.

Friends of Discovery Park (Friends) organize to oppose an initiative for a golf course on the south bluff area of Fort Lawton.

1975 Army announces a 151 upland acres of Fort Lawton is surplus to federal needs.

Seattle Park Board opposes golf course initiative. Later the voters defeat it.

City and UIATF sign lease for a 19-acre ICC.

MCC sponsors Seattle Beautiful Triangle Park at 32nd Avenue West and West Government Way to beautify Discovery Park approaches.

Discovery Park Loop Trail is designated National Urban Recreational Trail.

1976 Landmark's Board-Park Board committee meets to decide dispute over Park Historic District. They review 25 buildings containing more floor space than Seattle's city hall.

UIATF propose a People's Lodge for the first time, but is denied.

1977 UIATF's Daybreak Star Center opens.

Environmental groups led by Thomas O. Wimmer ask Metro to remove the West Point plant if secondary treatment is required and build a plant elsewhere.

GSA releases additional 127 acres of Fort Lawton to the City, bringing Park to 535 acres.

1978 City Council votes to preserve only two Fort Lawton historic buildings.

Taproot Theater Company asks for the Fort Lawton Chapel on the Hill, but request is denied.

Army Chief of Chaplain's recommends Fort Lawton Chapel be released to the Park.

1979 Seattle-King County Health Department director warns of pollution on West Point beach.

Marine Animal Resource Center seeks property at West Point for a seal rescue center after being refused property in the Park, but is denied.

1980 UIATF seeks the Coast Guard antenna site. Under terms of lease agreement they are not to ask for property outside the ICC boundaries. Request is denied.

1981 A cougar loose in Discovery Park closes Park. He is captured and returned to the Cascades.

1982 Proposal for reuse of Park's "historic buildings" meets opposition. It brings traffic into the Park's interior and allows commercial rentals.

Park Superintendent Walter Hundley calls for arbitration of UIATF lease violations.

Park Department plans West Central Maintenance Center at Discovery Park, but facility is later placed outside the Park.

1983 Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) grants Metro a waiver from secondary treatment.

City Council considers a "sale and lease back plan" for the Discovery Park historic buildings as a tax credit plan, but opposition defeats it.

1984 Washington Environmental Council, Legal Advocates of Washington, and Friends join Puget Sound Water Quality Defense Fund (PSWQDF) in lawsuit against Metro expansion.

The State DOE requires Metro to go to secondary treatment.

The Jackson Memorial Viewpoint is dedicated in Discovery Park.

1986 To date hundreds of cities have received park property from the "Fort Lawton Bill."

A Washington Trust for Historic Preservation suit stops historic building demolition.

Mayor Charles Royer calls for a new secondary treatment plant outside the Park to preserve the natural beauty of West Point and its value to future generations.

Donald S. Voorhees criticizes proposed Discovery Park Development Plan.

UIATF People's Lodge proposal includes Olympic-sized swimming pool, a 5000-seat arena, and 8 acres of Park for 250 more parking spaces, but is denied.

1987 Thomas Wimmer, leader of the PSWQDF, dies at age 77.

1988 City Council approves plan level permit for Metro expansion at West Point.

PSWQDF, LAW, "Friends," and WEC appeal permit to the Washington State Shoreline Board.

The Park Department establishes the Discovery Park Memorial Fund.

U.S. District Judge John Coughenour rules the City must review Historic Building decision.

Park planner Dan Kiley takes City to task saying, "...the city emasculated my Master Plan without giving me a chance to review it...Because of all this I do not consider this my Master Plan anymore, and therefore, do not have a loyalty to it."

City Council votes to save the facades of several historic buildings, but with no uses inside.

1989 Judge Voorhees dies July 7.

Discovery Park Memorial Fund raises \$34,800 in donations. Money is added to the Park's visitor center funds.

1990 Park staff memo calls UIATF application to the Federal Administration for Native Americans for funds to plan the People's Lodge "explosive." This proposal surfaced by chance in 1993.

National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration says studies find Metro and Seattle guilty of Puget Sound pollution. They find diseased fish off West Point.

Mountain bikers ask to use all Park trails but are kept only on paved trails.

Hang gliders ask for a special area on south bluffs, but are denied.

Northwest Golf Magazine tries again for a golf course in south meadow area but fails.

Citizens challenge City Light's proposal to build a vault in the Kiwanis Ravine and bring power lines through. This begins a successful effort to protect a Great Blue Heron nesting and wildlife habitat in the ravine and to preserve a wildlife corridor to the Park.



1977 Series.
Argus Magazine.

- 1991 Settlement agreement signed by environmental and civic groups with Metro and the City.
Paul Frandsen, Discovery Park manager, leaves the Park for new park position in California.
Advanced Wastewater Treatment Citizens Advisory Committee organized to meet Settlement Agreement goals to remove digesters, reduce plant size and open beaches for public use.
Park Department locates West Central Maintenance facility off-site ending plan to place it in Discovery Park.
- 1992 City Light moves proposed vault from the Kiwanis Ravine to a site near Commodore Park. A street-end park was built over it.
- 1993 The Environmental Education Association of Washington names Discovery Park as having the “outstanding community based environmental education program” in the state.

Metro allots \$30 million for the Shoreline and Park Improvement Fund.
Discovery of a Native American midden (refuse heap) slows secondary construction.
UIATF plans a 148,000-square foot People’s Lodge in Discovery Park.
Senator Slade Gorton proposes building a 140,000-square foot joint Army-Navy Reserve Center at Fort Lawton. The plan meets opposition.
Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks seek SPIF funds for boulevard entrance to the Park.
UIATF asks for Sand Point Naval Station property being declared surplus.
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program approves \$351,000 to purchase Kiwanis Ravine property. Other funds bring total to \$750,000.

- 1994 UIATF seeks space in Naval Readiness Center building on South Lake Union.
Citizens and Senator Gorton discuss problem of adding Navy reservists to Fort Lawton.
Citizens object to helicopters disturbing eagles and nesting Great Blue Herons.
Navy Captain D. H. Moses refuses to move Navy Mini-Mart from Park to Fort Lawton.
City Councilmember Jan Drago proposes three off-leash dog runs in Discovery Park but they are eliminated. Dogs on-leash are allowed in Discovery Park.
- 1995 Daybreak Star sewer line breaks. City Council says the lease requires the UIATF to repair it. The UIATF says, “The center leases the property from the city (\$1 a year). It is the city’s responsibility.” Council appropriates funds but requires repayment which is never made.
Friends oppose use of Metro’s sludge (bio-solids) on the Park’s meadows and application is stopped.
- 1996 P-Patch members seek a park site for transfer of their Interbay program, but are denied.
The Navy Reserve Director says moving the Naval Reserve to Fort Lawton does not enhance the Reserve’s mission capability and a location is found elsewhere.
Citizens unearth a 1993 UIATF request to the City to add 150-180 acres of Discovery Park to the ICC for a 21st Century Master Plan—A Native American “Commons.” The plan includes social services and the 9.5 acre “500” military area expected to be surplus. (The federal deed does not allow social services in the Park. These needs were provided for elsewhere in the City.) In the same request the UIATF asked for City support to gain “charter status” for federal recognition.
Police horse patrol will move from Discovery Park and paddock area to be restored as habitat.



March 2, 1988
Magnolia News.

- 1997 Metro completes construction of secondary treatment plant.
- 1998 The Save Discovery Park Coalition fights size and impacts of UIATF proposed People’s Lodge.
Citizens learn from BIA office in Portland that “charter status” means recognition of Indian tribes. A UIATF request for “charter status” had renewed fears of casino gambling.
- 1999 DCLU loses 1,000 citizen comments on the UIATF’s People’s Lodge proposal.
DCLU releases Draft Environmental Impact Statement on UIATF People’s Lodge.
City hearing examiner overturns DCLU’s decision ruling People’s Lodge’s use is as a museum.
UIATF appeal city hearing examiner’s decision to King County Superior Court.
King County Council votes to build third treatment plant. West Point will not expand.
- 2000 UIATF leader Bernie Whitebear dies from colon cancer, July 16.
Army Reserve dedicates new reserve building now reduced in size and impacts.
UIATF People’s Lodge appeal remains on hold.



July 13, 1998.
The Seattle Times.



Paul Bunyan’s golf ball.
This Cold War air defense radar now tracks routine aircraft traffic for the Federal Aviation Administration. Photo by Monica Wooton, 2000.