

Bridge to forgotten voices: Confluence publishes field guide to explore Vancouver landmark

Trending

By [Scott Hewitt](#), Columbian staff writer
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5 Photos

A jogger takes in some sunshine along a recently renovated and reopened Confluence Land Bridge in March 2022.

Photo Gallery

What do you think the banks of the Wimala River — now generally known as the Columbia — looked and sounded like to explorers Lewis and Clark over 200 years ago? And what do you think the same site might look like 200 years from now?

There are more thought-provoking questions than answers in a new downloadable, printable field guide to the Vancouver Land Bridge, which passes over state Highway 14 and links the river to Fort Vancouver, this

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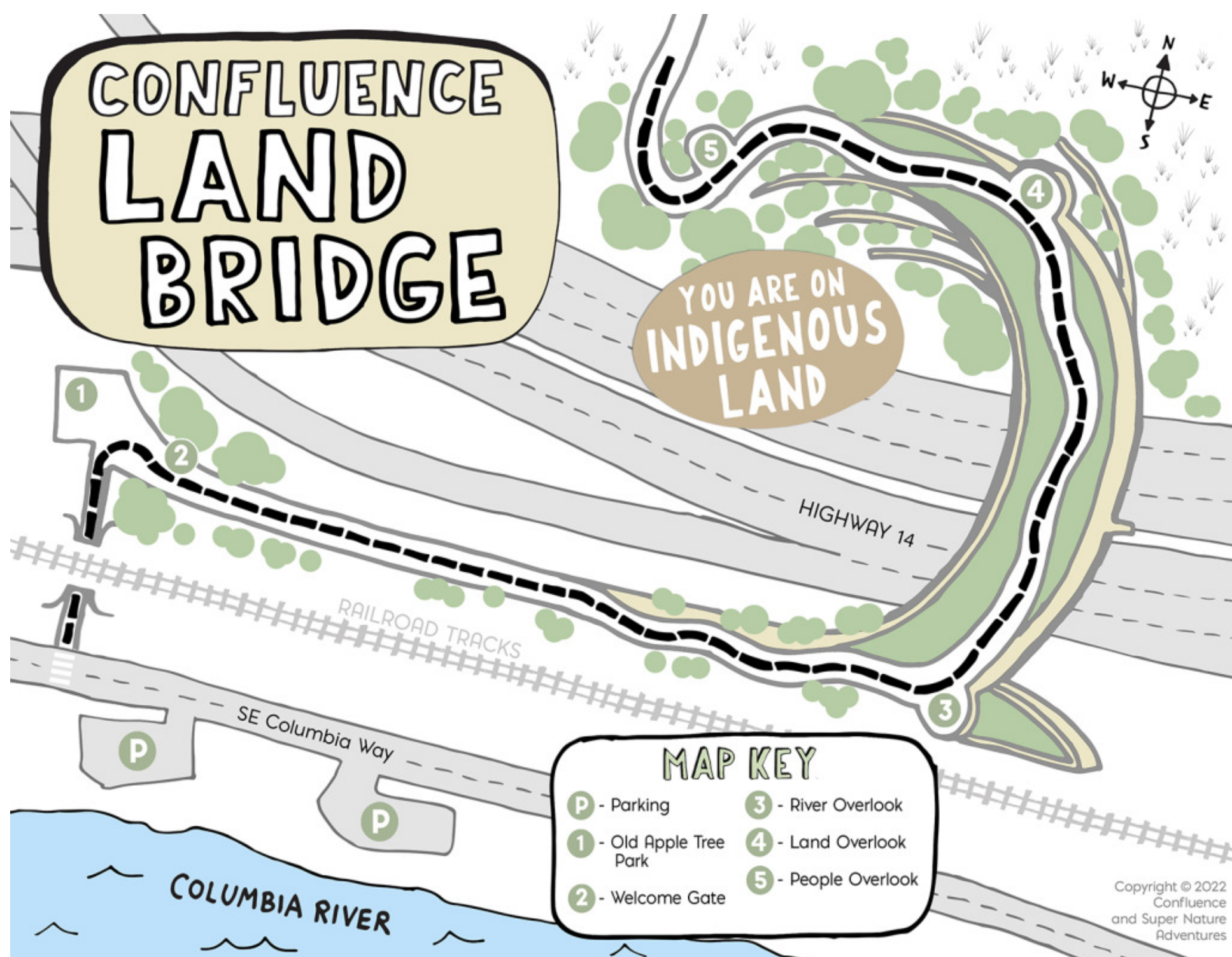
Confluence.

[Confluence is a nonprofit organization](#) that was launched two decades ago to steward history-oriented artworks along the river but whose mission has expanded into an ongoing, multifaceted educational project.

“It doesn’t end with the artworks,” Fogarty said. “That’s just the beginning.”

Confluence aims to revive forgotten or ignored local history, reconnecting all of us with Indigenous voices and cultures that never disappeared from the landscape and today are not just surviving, but thriving, Fogarty said.

Far from “discovering” an empty Pacific Northwest, he said, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were visitors to a busy region full of Indigenous communities, cultures and economies.



“We have all these brown signs of Lewis and Clark pointing the way,” Fogarty said. “Well, who did they

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“It’s sometimes politely said that story has been ‘overlooked,’ ” he said, “but the truth is it was systematically erased from public discourse and from the history books.”

‘Voices of the River’

Confluence was founded after the much-celebrated Lewis and Clark Bicentennial observances of 2002, when community activist Jane Jacobsen and others launched a project to install commemorative public artworks along the river.

Maya Lin, the famous designer of the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C., was involved in envisioning and designing five riverside sites that begin in Clarkston (near the confluence of the Columbia and Snake rivers) and end at Cape Disappointment on the Pacific Coast. (A sixth site is still planned.)

Seattle architect Johnpaul Jones designed the Vancouver Land Bridge, which was unveiled in 2008.

The original idea was for the Confluence project to wind down and leave local landowners or community partners to tend the artworks. But tribal leaders seized upon the opportunity to keep the theme alive and expand it, Fogarty said. Confluence evolved to educate mainstream American culture about the history and continued presence of Indigenous peoples in their midst.

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Fogarty said the nonprofit has a full-time staff of three, plus numerous part-timers and advisers. They organize Indigenous storytelling gatherings and Native educator appearances at local schools, as well as expand a digital library of interviews, discussions, podcasts and galleries. Most recently, Confluence began publishing a new annual peer-reviewed journal called “Voices of the River.”

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Volume 1 of “Voices of the River” features opinions, memoirs, historical fiction, artworks, an excerpt from an upcoming book and a couple of carefully footnoted academic papers: one exploring the complicated culture of Chinook canoe journeys, the other analyzing how the Yakama Nation pursued treaty rights and its own sovereignty across generations.

“Voices of the River” got going thanks to a pandemic relief grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Fogarty said. A doctoral student in history at the University of British Columbia, Lily Hart, edited the journal.

“We wanted our writers to be able to be cited, to get the credit they deserve,” Fogarty said.

But, because academic peer review is often aimed at critique, not support, “Voices of the River” approached it differently.

CONFLUENCE DIGITAL LIBRARY

Here’s a small sample of the wide variety of digital materials (videos, interviews, podcasts, photo and art exhibits, more) available for free at the [Confluence Library](#) (confluenceproject.org/library)

- | | |
|---|--|
| “ Field Guide to the Confluence Land Bridge ” | “Restoration of sovereignty and self-governance” |
| “Indigenous approaches to sustainability” | “Riding in the Happy Canyon Rodeo” |
| “Tribes of the Columbia River system” | “How learning about salmon connects kids to culture (and the seven fish they should know)” |
| “Chinook chairman Tony Johnson: fighting for recognition” | “Teachers: How to successfully welcome a native educator into your classroom” |
| “Children of Celilo Village” | |
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“We wanted to uplift people, not beat them up,” he said. “We created this process for writers to connect with each other. It’s been a really positive experience. That’s a theme we’ve found with this project: community building.”

Prairie over highway

“You are on indigenous land,” states an introductory bubble on the front of the new Field Guide to the Confluence Land Bridge

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The simple, hand-drawn, five-page guide was created by Portland outfit Super Nature Adventures, which creates “trail packets” (maps, field trip guides, activity books, other materials) that aim to add value to classroom or family explorations of parks, trails and museums.

“We’ve wanted to do a school guide for each site for years,” Fogarty said. “It’s a handy thing to print out.” Intended for teachers and field trips, it can add a thoughtful, educational element to anyone’s visit to the Vancouver Land Bridge, which manages to “pull the prairie over the highway,” as the architect put it.

The field guide steers visitors through the canoe-paddle-motif Welcome Gate (by artist Lillian Pitt) and up to the three observation decks.

“Find a place to sit or stand,” the guide advises. “What are some ways that human use is changing this place today?”

“It’s open-ended,” Fogarty said. “It’s an invitation to relearn history and our relationships with the land and with each other. It’s an invitation to keep learning more.”

Coming this year from Confluence are “My Name is LaMoosh,” a children’s book by Warm Springs Elder Linda Meanus (co-published with Oregon State University), a documentary film called “Stories from the Canoe” by Woodrow Hunt, who is Klamath/Modoc/Cherokee and the founder of Tule Films; and, grant-funded field trips to many Confluence sites.

Fogarty added that Confluence co-founder Antone Minthorn, the former chair of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, sums up the mission this way: “After all this history, Confluence is asking the question: Now what?”



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Scott Hewitt

Columbian staff writer

@ ScottHewitt
 (360) 735-4525
 scott.hewitt@columbian.com

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