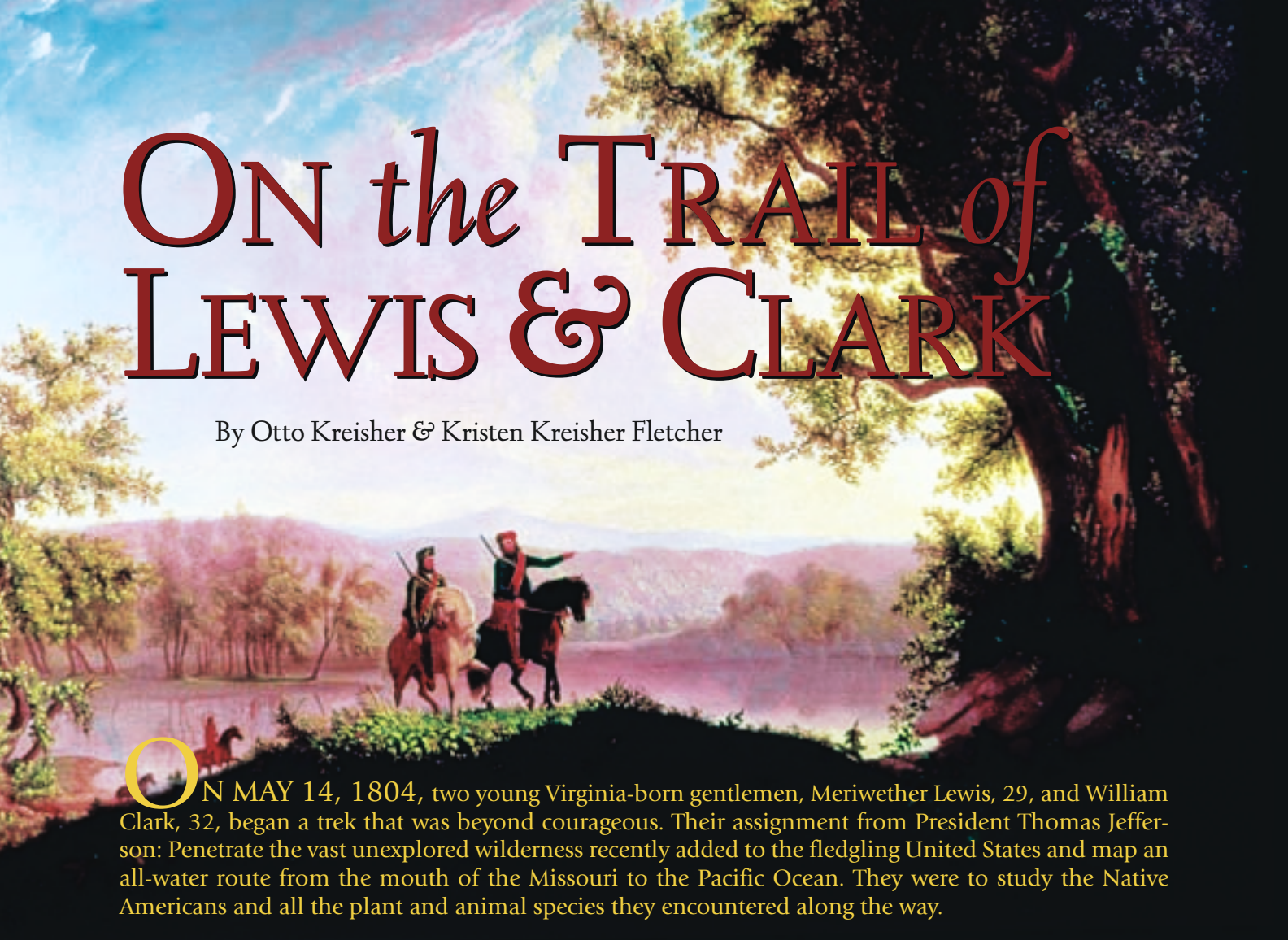



# ON the TRAIL of LEWIS & CLARK

By Otto Kreisher & Kristen Kreisher Fletcher



**O**N MAY 14, 1804, two young Virginia-born gentlemen, Meriwether Lewis, 29, and William Clark, 32, began a trek that was beyond courageous. Their assignment from President Thomas Jefferson: Penetrate the vast unexplored wilderness recently added to the fledgling United States and map an all-water route from the mouth of the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean. They were to study the Native Americans and all the plant and animal species they encountered along the way.




Lewis and Clark's 44-man Corps of Discovery faced grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, scurvy, dysentery, swarms of mosquitoes, freezing temperatures, occasionally hostile Indian tribes and always a looming unknown. They muscled their boats up rivers and around rapids and hiked for 3,700 miles across what now constitutes 11 states. The physical exertion was so great that each man ate nine pounds of meat a day and rarely felt satiated. Along with the hardship, however, there was wonder. In their journals, Lewis and Clark provide breathless descriptions of prairies, great Missouri River waterfalls and Rocky Mountain peaks. Including the return journey, the Corps covered 8,000 miles in 28 months.

Although much along the expedition's Missouri and Columbia River routes has changed, travelers can still follow the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail from Hartford, Ill., through 11 states. Miles of the route can be followed only by auto, but some sections still can be explored by boat, by bike or on foot.

In the latter half of the 19th century, much of the Lewis and Clark trail was traced by railroads. Today, as

the nation celebrates the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, stretches of rail corridor along that famous route have been returned to trail use. Brush up on your history, go to those rail-trails, and experience the spirit of frontier adventure.

## CONFLUENCE TRAIL, MADISON COUNTY, ILLINOIS



**B**efore the Corps of Discovery began their journey, the men went through drills and target practice, gathered additional supplies, made adjustments to their 55-foot keelboat and got a bit restless as they waited out the winter at Camp Dubois near Wood River, Ill. The 16-mile Confluence Trail, beginning at Alton, takes visitors near this first winter camp (although the actual site is now underwater). The rail-trail offers Mississippi River views which surely are as awesome as those the explorers saw in 1803 and 1804. It terminates at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Hartford, Ill., where a replica of the keelboat is on display along with exhibits showing how Lewis and Clark prepared for their trek.



Conflicence Trail, courtesy of Madison County Transit

### KATY TRAIL, ST. CHARLES TO BOONVILLE, MISSOURI

In May 1804, a crowd of well-wishers from St. Charles, Mo., cheered as the boats set off into the unknown. This longest off-road stretch of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Trail parallels the 225-mile Katy Trail, the whole of which runs from Clinton, Mo., to St. Charles. While biking or hiking the 152-mile rail-trail span along the Missouri River from St. Charles to Boonville, Mo., visitors can appreciate the toil required to row, pull or push the keelboat and two canoes—laden with as much as 20 tons of cargo—against the current. Trailside exhibits provide information and

**Fun fact:** The Corps of Discovery included commanding officers Lewis and Clark; 41 recruits and volunteers; Clark's slave, York; Sacagawea, her son and her French husband; and Lewis's dog, Seaman. They had only one death, one desertion and one dismissal.

maps detailing the expedition's path through Missouri.

This May, St. Charles is hosting a nine-day commemorative event that will begin with the arrival of replicas of the expedition's three boats. Fife and drum corps, military units and interpreters in period dress will also join the celebrations. The commemoration is one in a four-year series of National Signature Events along the trail route (see page 7, "Continue the Discovery").

**Fun fact:** Capt. Lewis estimated his expenses at and Congress appropriated \$2,500 for the journey. The Corps spent nearly \$40,000.

### Journal Excerpt

**Perils of the Missouri River—May 24, 1804 (Clark)**  
*Passed a verry bad part of the River Called the Deavels race ground. ...The Swiftness of Current Wheeled the boat, Broke our Toe rope and was nearly over Setting the boat...*

### WABASH TRACE NATURE TRAIL, COUNCIL BLUFFS TO BLANCHARD, IOWA

President Jefferson told Lewis and Clark to meet with Indian tribes they encountered and express the wish of the United States "to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them, & of our disposi-

tions to a commercial intercourse with them," according to the *Journals of Lewis and Clark*. Although Indians were at times a source of anxiety for the explorers, they also were crucial to the Corps' success. The guidance, trade goods and accompaniment of the Mandans, Shoshones, Nez Perce, Chinooks, Clatsops and other tribes helped the Corps survive winters, avoid hunger and navigate unfamiliar landscapes.

The 62-mile Wabash Trace Nature Trail is inland from the Missouri River path of Lewis and Clark, but its Council Bluffs trailhead is named for the campsite where the expedition first met with the Otoe and Missouri Indian tribes in August 1804. The actual site is across and downriver from the city.

**Fun fact:** Near the Niobrara trail in Nebraska, the expedition found its first prairie dogs. They used gallons of water and spent much of one night trying to flush the creatures out of their extensive tunnels, with success.

### Journal Excerpt

**Meeting with the Indians—August 3, 1804 (Clark)**  
*...Delivered a long Speech to them expressive of our journey the wishes of our Government, Some advice to them and Directions how they were to conduct themselves.*

### NIORBARA TRAIL, NIOBRARA, NEBRASKA

The Corps explored the Niobrara River area in September 1804. Members mused in their journals that its high, angular sand ridges might be the ruins of ancient fortifications.

Short but scenic, the Niobrara Trail runs beside the shallow, fast-running river that Lewis and Clark scouted but decided not to test. The 2.1-mile paved rail-trail crosses an old railroad trestle over the river, near where it joins the Missouri. A kiosk in nearby Niobrara State Park displays information on the expedition's travels in the area.



Wabash Trace, courtesy of Lisa Hien



# ON *the* TRAIL of LEWIS & CLARK



## ROUGH RIDER TRAIL, MANDAN, NORTH DAKOTA

As the Corps of Discovery passed through North Dakota territory in October 1804, snow told them it was time to set up winter camp. They settled at Fort Mandan, counseled with nearby Mandan and Hidatsa Indian tribes and met Sacagawea, the Shoshone woman who would accompany them as a guide for the rest of the expedition. On their return journey the

Corps visited the tribes again. Mandan Chief Sheheke joined them on their eastward trek to report to President Jefferson.

The rugged, 23-mile unpaved Roughrider Trail from Fort Rice to Mandan, N.D., gives modern travelers a taste of the challenges Lewis and Clark faced as they forged through the wilds. The trail follows the Missouri River, offering sweeping views of the river and wooded hills—vistas that have changed little since the Corps passed through. Visitors should be prepared to ford streams and perhaps, during the long winters, travel by snowmobile to explore the trail.

**Fun fact:** The men subsisted mainly on a diet of deer, elk, buffalo and the fruits and vegetables they found or received from the Indians. Beaver tail was a favorite. In lean times, they resorted to horse and dog. Lewis didn't mind dog meat; Clark couldn't "become reconciled to the taste." When the expedition cleared the Bitterroot mountains, the switch to meals of roots and dried fish provided by the Nez Perce Indians made many on the expedition, including Capt. Lewis, violently ill.

## Journal Excerpt

**Description of Mandan villages and winter camp—October 27, 1804 (Clark)**

*... houses are round & verry large containing several families.*

## RIVER'S EDGE TRAIL, GREAT FALLS, MONTANA

The River's Edge rail-trail runs from downtown Great Falls for 24 miles along both banks of the churning Missouri River, covering ground explored by Lewis and Clark in June 1805. It passes five falls that the Corps had to get around, and a spot where Captain Lewis, armed only with an unloaded rifle, faced a grizzly bear. (Lewis waded into the river and used the end of his espartoon to convince the bear to retreat.)

Thirteen miles of the trail are paved, providing easy access to the series of waterfalls and the dam



River's Edge Trail, photo by Doug Wicks

that now covers one of the rapids Lewis and Clark confronted. The remaining 11 miles of graveled trail lead into Ravine Canyon, where Clark camped while plotting the expedition's portage around the falls.

An interpretive center in Great Spring State Park, just east of the trail, and numerous panels along the way commemorate events of the famous journey.

Astoria Riverwalk, photo by Chris Bryant



### Journal Excerpt

**Bear encounter**—June 14, 1805 (Lewis)

*I drew up my gun to shoot, but at the same instant recolected that she was not loaded and that he was too near for me to hope to perform this operation before he reached me, as he was then briskly advancing on me; it was an open level plain, not a bush within miles nor a tree within less than three hundred yards of me.*

### ASTORIA RIVERWALK, ASTORIA, OREGON

After 19 months Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Ocean in November 1805. In Astoria, Ore., they stopped to explore the mouth of the Columbia River and the Pacific Coast. During the rainy winter at Fort Clatsop, from December 1805 to March 1806, Lewis and Clark worked on their journals, organized the scientific data they had gathered, drew maps and steeled themselves for the return journey. The five mile Astoria Riverwalk and trolley car line run along the Columbia River and close to a re-creation of Fort Clatsop.

In his journal Captain Lewis expressed apprehension about reporting to President Jefferson that there was no all-water route to the ocean.

He need not have worried. Though the President was disappointed, the expedition was met by cheering crowds and public acclaim when it

**Fun fact:** Meriwether Lewis filled his journal with detailed descriptions and drawings of flora and fauna, describing 178 new plants and 122 species and subspecies of animals. The expedition was the first to record for science the coyote, jackrabbit, bighorn sheep and California condor.

returned to St. Louis on September 23, 1806, and met with Jefferson in late December. In 28 arduous months, Lewis and Clark had forged the nation's greatest trail through the great American West and inspired a nation.

### Journal Excerpt

**First view of the Pacific**—November 7, 1805 (Clark)

*Great joy in camp. we are in view of the Ocian ...*

*Washington, D.C.-based writers Otto Kreisher and Kristen Kreisher Fletcher are father and daughter. The two have always enjoyed running and writing, and now share a passion for history. This is the first time they have shared a byline.*

Sources: *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (Penguin USA, 2002), edited by Frank Bergon, and *Undaunted Courage* (Simon & Schuster, 1996) by Stephen Ambrose.

### Continue the Discovery

**Confluence Trail.** For more trail information visit [www.mcttrails.org/ConfluenceTrail.html](http://www.mcttrails.org/ConfluenceTrail.html). Lewis and Clark interpretive center in Hartford: <http://state.il.us/hpa/hs/LewClark.htm>.

**Katy Trail.** Learn more at [www.mostateparks.com/katytrail.htm](http://www.mostateparks.com/katytrail.htm). Lewis and Clark bicentennial events in Missouri: [www.lewisandclark.state.mo.us](http://www.lewisandclark.state.mo.us).

**Wabash Trace Nature Trail.** The Western Historic Trails Center (712-366-4900) has more information on the Lewis and Clark trail.

**Niobrara Trail.** Camping facilities and cabins near the trail in Niobrara State Park are available from mid-April to late November. Float trips on the upper Missouri are offered in warm months. Visit [www.ngpc.state.ne.us/parks/showpark.ihtml?Area\\_No=126](http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/parks/showpark.ihtml?Area_No=126) for more information.

**Roughrider Trail.** The trail starts in Abraham Lincoln State Park ([www.ndparks.com/Parks/FLSP.htm](http://www.ndparks.com/Parks/FLSP.htm)). The park is the site of On-a-Slant Indian Village, a replica of a Mandan village like those Lewis and Clark saw. The park is also the site of the Army post from which Custer began his ill-fated trip to Little Big Horn.

**River's Edge Trail.** Just east of the trail, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Interpretive Center in Great Spring State Park has exhibits on the local tribes and the expedition's portage around the falls. Visit [www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/recreation/lcic/lcic.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/recreation/lcic/lcic.shtml).

**Astoria Riverwalk.** For trail and Fort Clatsop information visit [www.oldoregon.com](http://www.oldoregon.com). Just two blocks from the Astoria Riverwalk Trail and riverfront trolley and four miles from Fort Clatsop is the historic 32-room Hotel Elliot (877-378-1924).

For additional information on all of the trails visit RTC's online trail finder at [www.trailink.com](http://www.trailink.com).

For more on Lewis and Clark history, celebrations and the National Signature Events, visit the Web site of the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial at [www.lewisandclark200.org](http://www.lewisandclark200.org).

Information about the Lewis and Clark National Heritage Trail and other special events can be found through the National Park Service at [www.nps.gov/lecl/welcome.htm](http://www.nps.gov/lecl/welcome.htm).