



*Tracing the route
of American
explorers Captain
Meriwether Lewis and
Captain William Clark
is great fun for
anyone with an urge to
discover an important
chapter of frontier
history.*

In the
**Footsteps of
Lewis & Clark**

by Peter Stekel

On May 14, 1804, Captain Meriwether Lewis, 29, and Captain William Clark, 33, set out on what would become one of the great expeditions through America's Western frontier.

Leading a group of 45 men called the Corps of Discovery, the two explorers left Camp Wood (in present-day Illinois, just a few miles from St. Louis, Missouri) with presidential orders to find an over-land route across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, to strengthen U.S. claims on the Oregon territory, and to gather information about Native Americans and the country. From his journal, William Clark observed the historic departure, "In the presence of many of the neighboring inhabitants, [we] proceeded on under a gentle breeze up the Missouri."

Thus began a journey that would take more than two years to complete. For Lewis and Clark, the expedition was filled with danger and harsh conditions as they traveled through mostly wild and uncharted territory.

Luckily, modern-day explorers can enjoy comfortable travel and still trace the original path of the famous expedition. State and county highways run parallel to much of Lewis and Clark's trail. And you'll have a much easier time searching for food and shelter. There are plenty of good restaurants, overnight lodgings, and camp sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Indeed, tracking the Lewis and Clark Trail, which is one of 11 designated national historic trails in the United States, has become a popular pastime for many travelers who want to discover their own adventure and learn a little bit of history along the way. Visiting the actual sites where explorers like Lewis and Clark once stood is an exciting, fun, and memorable way for kids to learn history. And

just for the heck of it, try keeping a journal of your trip. Captain Clark's written document of the expedition has proven to be an invaluable record.

It took Lewis and Clark more than a year to travel down the Missouri River by keelboat and cross the Rocky Mountains on horseback before they reached the Pacific Northwest. Many of the areas along the Lewis and Clark Trail are still quite remote, so we recommend that you carry up-to-date AAA maps, top off your tank when necessary, and always inquire locally for road conditions. Also, be prepared for any kind of weather. When Lewis and Clark

elements, and was no stranger to hunger. But when Clark looked across the vast mountain ranges as the expedition was camped at Weippe Prairie, Idaho, repairing their outfit and making contact with the Nez Perce Indians, he despaired, "We were compelled to kill a colt for our men and selves to eat for want of meat. The mountains which we passed today [were] much worse than yesterday..."

Today, you can drive the route on the Lolo Motorway, which is a series of unpaved forest service roads that start in Horse Sweat Pass, Idaho, and end up in Weippe Prairie. But be prepared: depending on the time of year,



made their way across the steep mountains and wide valleys of the West, they encountered thunderstorms, high winds, searing heat, and snowstorms.

To begin our adventure, we join the Lewis and Clark Trail in northern Idaho, where Lewis and Clark and their crew crossed the craggy mountain ranges at Lolo Pass and descended the rugged Lolo Trail to the Clearwater River, near present-day Orofino. Captain Clark, who at 33 was the oldest member of the party, had spent his life living and working in the wilderness. He was accustomed to harsh living conditions and battling the natural

Present-day Fort Clatsop, which served as Lewis and Clark's winter shelter in 1805, is now a National Historic Site. As part of the park's history program, staff members dress in period costumes and demonstrate frontier skills.

the road conditions could be difficult and may require a high-clearance vehicle. Allow plenty of time to make the trip, or take Highway US 12 through Idaho's beautiful Lochsa Valley. Be forewarned though; it's 115 miles to Kooskia and the only services are midway in the town of Lowell. Pick up a forest service map at Powell's U.S.

Forest Service Visitor Center to find campgrounds, hiking trails, Jerry Johnson hot springs, the Lochsa Historical Ranger Station, and information on white-water rafting on the Clearwater River.

After building dugout canoes, Lewis and Clark proceeded down the Snake River, past present-day Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington. Both towns serve as unofficial headquarters for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. This beautiful side trip offers sturgeon fishing, jetboat trips, nature study, camping, and plenty of hiking trails.

Also nearby is the Nez Perce National Historical Park, located within the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. Visitors can explore 38 different interpretive sites, which explain the history and culture of the Nez Perce and the 1877 Nez Perce War.

Across the border in Washington, located in an incredibly arid region, Clarkston has some surprising attractions such as lush green golf courses and the farthest-inland, deep water

port in the country.

When Lewis and Clark reached the Clarkston area, autumn was fast approaching, and the two captains were anxious to reach the Pacific

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Ocean, where they would establish their winter camp. Lewis and Clark were worried about the scarcity of game and the high cost of trading food with the local tribes. They had grown tired of salmon and were hungry for deer or elk meat, which was hard to come by. Lewis and Clark also hoped to reach the Pacific coast in time to make contact with a merchant ship that could take them home.

There are many state highway routes that intersect the Lewis and

Clark Trail between Clarkston and Tri-Cities. A cluster of Washington's state parks (such as Chief Timothy State Park with accesses to the Snake River, Lewis and Clark Trail State Park on the Touchet River, and Lyon's Ferry State Park on the Palouse River) are easily accessible and fascinating, geologically and historically. They also provide ample opportunities for water fun such as swimming, fishing, and boating. Interpretive displays at Sacajawea State Park, (4.4 miles southeast of Pasco), tell the story of the Shoshoni Indian woman who played an instrumental role in guiding the Lewis and Clark party safely over the mountains. While you're in the area, a highly recommended trip along Interstate 82 will take you to the Yakima Valley, where you can discover several of Washington's award-winning wines.

If you follow the Columbia River on Interstate 84 on the Oregon side or Washington SR 14, you are tracing the exact route of the Lewis and Clark expedition all the way to Portland. On

