

# Missouri River

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Missouri National Recreational River



## Lewis & Clark on the Missouri National Recreational River

The Lewis & Clark Expedition travelled the stretch of river that is now Missouri National Recreational River from late August through early September of 1804, and again on their return trip in 1806. You can follow in their footsteps and discover for yourself the sites recorded in their journals.



### Ionia Volcano

On August 24, Captain Clark wrote: “we Set out at the usual time and proceeded . . . to the Commencement of a blue Clay Bluff of 180 or 190 feet high on the L.S. Those Bluffs appear to have been latterly on fire, and at this time is too hot for a man to bear his hand in the earth at any depth, great appearance of Coal. An immense quantity of *Cabalt* or a Crisolised Substance which answers its description is on the face of the Bluff.”

The source of the heat was actually a chemical reaction among the various min-

erals eroding from the bluff, not volcanic activity. This mineral combination has since washed away and the bluff is no longer hot.

To reach Ionia Volcano take the dirt road (across from a small park) north from Rt. 12 in Newcastle, Nebraska. Go 3.4 miles and turn right at the fork in the road; another 1.8 miles brings you to Ionia Cemetery. It lies across the road from a small overlook and the top of what’s left of Ionia Volcano.

GPS: 42.690353,-96.830637

### Spirit Mound

On August 25, a very hot day that Lewis described as “murky”, eleven Expedition members, plus Seaman, Lewis’ dog, hiked the eight or so miles to “. . . See the Mound which was viewed with Such terror by all the different Nation in this



Replanted prairie at Spirit Mound

NPS photo

quarter. . . .” Instead of seeing “evil Spirits” upon arriving at the top of the hill, they saw a plain totally flat as far as the eye could see and also “several large gangs of Buffalo & Elk feeding . . . upwards of 800 in number.” The only trees in sight were scattered along the Big Sioux, Vermillion, James, and Missouri rivers.

To visit Spirit Mound, take Rt. 19 about 7 miles north from Rt. 50 in Vermillion. The entrance is on the west side of the highway. From the parking lot a hiking trail leads to the top of the conical hill. Spirit Mound Historic Prairie is being restored as much as possible to its historic appearance during the expedition’s visit. Area tribes still regard this location as a spiritual place, so please be respectful of it during your visit.

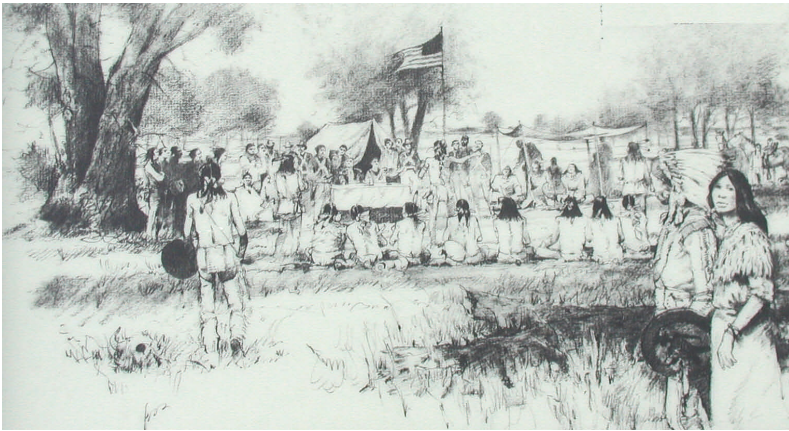
GPS: 42.867441,-96.955869

### Calumet Bluff

From August 28-31, the expedition made camp below Calumet Bluff in a narrow plain on the Nebraska side of the Missouri. Here the captains held council with the Yankton Sioux. Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor, who had been sent across the river to invite the chiefs to come to council, reported on shelters “of a Conic form Cov-

ered with buffalo Roabs Painted different Colours”—tipis, the first the expedition had seen.

The exact location of the camp and council site is unknown. The river changed its course an unknown number of times since 1804. And construction of the Gavins Point Dam in 1952-57 resulted in a greatly altered



Council at Calumet Bluff—artist's conception

NPS

landscape from what the expedition members knew.

The Corps of Engineers' Lewis & Clark Visitor Center sits atop Calumet Bluff. It is on Nebraska Rt. 121 about 5 miles southwest of Yankton, South Dakota. Exhibits include a copy of the speech Lewis made to the Yankton Sioux; a transcript of the speech is available upon request.

GPS: 42.849132, -97.477269

## Niobrara River



NPS photo by Linda Gordon Rokosz

On September 4, Capt. Clark wrote that the expedition came upon the "River Que Courre" [Rapid River, today's Niobrara]. He explored "this river three miles to a butifull Plain on the upper Side where the Panias [Pawnees] once had a Village." As is the case today, the river is "not navigable for even Canoos without Great difficulty owing to its Sands." The Mormon Canal today accepts part of the water from the Niobrara and empties it into the Missouri River.

Niobrara State Park offers great views of both rivers and the canal. The park is on Nebraska Rt. 12, a couple of miles west of the town of Niobrara.

Niobrara State Park: 42.751393, -98.065982

Niobrara River, Mormon Canal, and hwy 12 bridge viewed from Niobrara State Park

## Old Baldy (The Tower)



NPS photo by Linda Gordon Rokosz

On September 7, Clark wrote that he and Lewis walked up "to the top which forms a Cone and is about 70 feet higher than the high lands around it . . . discovered a Village of Small animals that burrow in the grown (those animals are Called by the French Petit Chien)." John Ordway wrote that "they attempted to drown several out of their holes, but they caught but one, which they brought in alive. . . . Shields killed a prairie dog, which was cooked for the Capt's dinner. . . . They are a curious animal."

Old Baldy is on private property and can only be viewed from a distance. Take Fourth Street north from Nebraska Rt. 12 in Lynch and drive 6.4 miles—it's a dirt road most of the way. At a fork in the road—just past a farmstead—turn right onto another dirt road and drive for 0.8 miles. As the road turns to the right, there is a small pull-off to the left. Old Baldy is to your front at eleven o'clock. There is also a field road on the right leading to another overlook with an interpretive panel. This road is not recommended for vehicles in wet weather.

GPS: 42.926389, -98.479557

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