



LEWIS & CLARK'S MONTANA JOURNEY

MERIWETHER LEWIS AND WILLIAM CLARK LED THE FIRST U.S. EXPEDITION ACROSS THE CONTINENT IN 1804-1806.

President Thomas Jefferson sent them to find the headwaters of the Missouri River and an overland route to the Pacific Ocean. The scope and adventure of their journey is unmatched in American history and ranks among major explorations of the world. Well over one-fourth of that exploration was within what is now Montana. Today, highways parallel most of their route, making a scenic loop tour that winds through every region of the state.

Many Lewis & Clark Trail sites in Montana offer views that are nearly unchanged from the early 1800s. It is easy to look at the natural landscapes and imagine what you might have felt if you had been among the 33 "Corps of Discovery" expedition members. Most of the wildlife recorded in the explorers' journals can be seen by the observant visitor today. You may want to keep your own day-to-day journal of discovery to capture memories of your exploration.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

This guide begins where US 2 crosses into northeastern Montana. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery first entered modern-day Montana on the Missouri River just south of this point.

1  **Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site**
In April 1805, the captains noted that the area where the Yellowstone River joins the Missouri would be an excellent spot for a trading post. In 1829, Fort Union was constructed near the confluence of rivers and quickly became the top fur-trading post on the upper river. The fort has been reconstructed, and the once-elegant Bourgeois House is now a visitor center. Open year-round except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. Living-history demonstrations, special interpretive programs and longer hours during the summer months. At the border of Montana and North Dakota between US 2 and MT 200.

2  **Glasgow**
Nearly every animal noted in Lewis & Clark's journals except grizzly bears still can be seen in eastern Montana. There are three auto tours for viewing wildlife in the Glasgow area. The most concentrated wildlife viewing tour is just southeast of Glasgow on the Missouri River at Fort Peck. This tour features preservation pastures with elk, antelope and buffalo, so sightings are nearly guaranteed. Also a self-guided nature trail for walking and several sites for prime bird/waterfowl observation.

3  **Fort Peck**
Boat, fish and camp on this giant lake with 1,500 miles of shoreline. Scenic overlook east of the dam on MT 24 has interpretation for local Lewis & Clark sites. Year-round museum at the powerhouse. Historical Fort Peck Theater offers family-pleasing musicals or dramas weekends June – August.

Route Notes
The fastest way to get to the next major interpretive site, Fort Benton, is to take US 2 across Montana's "hi-line" to Havre and then take US 87 south. Or, you may wish to continue on US 2 for a side-trip visit to Glacier National Park. However, if you prefer to stick more closely to the expedition route and see more back country views of the Missouri River, take US 191 south at Malta to the remote wildlife viewing areas described below.

4  **Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Auto Tour Route**
On their journey west, Lewis and Clark spent 13 days within today's Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge. The CMR, as it is locally known, is the second largest wildlife refuge in the continental U.S. Grasslands, sagebrush and ponderosa pines provide some of the wildest prairie habitat left in the country. You might see raptors, antelope, deer, grouse and prairie dogs, along with elk from one of the largest remaining prairie elk herds. Plan at least two hours for this 20-mile auto tour and its marked stops. Begins 55 miles south of Malta off US 191 and ends just one-half mile north of the Missouri on US 191. The gravel road of the tour route may become impassable during extended periods of rain, so use proper caution. This is a US Fish & Wildlife Service site.

5  **Missouri Breaks National Back Country Byway**
Just across the river and westward is a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Byway that parallels the lower 50 miles



Hiker on White Cliffs

of the "Wild and Scenic" section of the Upper Missouri. Interpretive signs for fascinating scenery, geology and wildlife are along the 81-mile loop. April – October, you can take a short side trip to cross the Missouri on the free McClelland Ferry. The BLM has a brochure on the Byway and side trips. From US 191, continue south to Hilger and take Highway 236 to Winifred. NOTE: This Byway is on graveled and unimproved roads which become impassable when wet, so consider the weather in making your plans. The highway map shows a 4-mile unimproved road from US 191 just south of the river to the Byway; HOWEVER, this is a primitive road that is impassable and somewhat dangerous if it is not completely dry.

Route Notes
If you explored the back country routes off of US 191, you can continue to follow US 191 south, then take MT 81 north and MT 80 west to Fort Benton. If you are ready for the services and conveniences in a larger town, continue nine miles past the intersection of MT 81 on US 191, and you'll be in Lewistown. If you are in Winifred after driving the Missouri Breaks Back Country Byway, you could instead take the graveled 236 west to Big Sandy and US 87.

6  **Fort Benton**
Montana's official state memorial statue of Lewis, Clark and Sacagawea with her infant son stands on the historical levee downtown. The walking tour of the four-block-long levee includes museums, the ruins of the Old Fort (currently being rebuilt) and other historical buildings. The BLM's Upper Missouri Visitor Center features a slide show with readings from expedition journals Memorial Day – Labor Day. Tours, float trips, picnicking, museums.

7  **Loma and the Marias River**
When Lewis and Clark reached the Marias River, they camped for nine days while exploration determined which river was actually the Missouri. Loma now sits at that confluence 11 miles north of Fort Benton on US 87. The BLM has interpretive signs at Decision Point overlook on the ridge above the Missouri. Here is the view that the captains had while trying to decide which way to go. 1/4-mile hiking trail; wildlife viewing.

8  **Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River**
Taking a trip on this section of the Missouri River is probably the single best way to experience what Lewis and Clark saw on their journey. Guided trips from river outfitters and/or canoe rentals for independent trips are available in Fort Benton, Loma and Virgelle. The BLM maintains a list of resources.



Gates of the Mountains

9  **Great Falls**
The Corps of Discovery came upon a series of five waterfalls instead of the one "great falls" about which they had been told. The party spent a month in the area portaging their boats and supplies around the falls. A must-see is Giant Springs Heritage State Park. Clark found the "Giant Springs" during the portage and guessed correctly that it must be one of the world's largest. A national interpretive center for the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail is scheduled to open here in the spring of 1998. Highlights are interactive exhibits, an introductory video by documentary film maker Ken Burns and an outdoor living-history encampment. Rainbow Falls (Handsome Falls) can be seen from an overlook in the park. The Great Falls Information Center (intersection of 2nd Street and 10th Avenue South or follow signs from I-15 on 10th Avenue South) and chamber of commerce have maps and information on overlooks to see the other falls and other historical sites in the area.

10  **Gates of the Mountains**
Noted on expedition maps as "The Gates of the Rocky Mountains," the Missouri River cuts through 1,200-foot-high cliffs in this three-mile-long canyon. This is an official Wildlife Viewing Site, and commercial boat tours provide a very comfortable way to experience the river for a couple of hours. This site has its own exit off of I-15, about 17 miles north of Helena.

11  **Helena and Canyon Ferry Recreation Area**
Following I-15 or the River Recreation Road southward, you'll come to Montana's capital, Helena. The Montana Historical Society (225 N. Roberts) offers a literal walk through Montana's history in its Homeland Exhibit, and that history emphasizes the expedition. Nearby Canyon Ferry Recreation Area provides 76 miles of shoreline on the impounded Missouri and offers all types of water recreation, picnicking and camping.

12  **Missouri Headwaters State Park**
Take US 287 south from Helena to get to the headwaters of the Missouri River. This is where Lewis and Clark named the three rivers which combine to form the Missouri (the Jefferson, Gallatin, and Madison rivers). Interpretive signs, hiking, picnicking, camping, fishing and floating are activities now available. Varieties of vegetation here are much the same as in 1805. From Three Forks, go east on Secondary 205, then north on Secondary 286.

Route Notes
The captains chose to follow the western-most river, which they named the Jefferson, to find a route to the Pacific. From Three Forks, follow US 287/MT 2 westward and stay on MT 2 when US 287 branches southward toward Yellowstone National Park. A major attraction on MT 2 is Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park. The explorers were unaware of these beautiful limestone caves which may now be toured, but the park was named in their



— Lewis and Clark Route in Montana
- - - Lewis' Exploration Route of the Marias River

honor. To continue to parallel the river route of the expedition, drive on MT 2 west to Whitehall, then take MT 55 south until it merges with MT 41.

13  **Beaverhead Rock State Park**
Sacagawea recognized this huge rock resembling the head of a swimming beaver and knew that she was near her Shoshone tribe's summer homeland. You'll see the landmark along MT 41 about 14 miles north of Dillon, but most do not readily see the shape of the beaver's head in the rock. This day-use park is undeveloped. There is an interpretive sign south of Beaverhead Rock on MT 41.

14  **Clark's Lookout State Park**
Clark climbed this area to get a look at the Beaverhead Valley on August 13, 1805. This site is owned by the state for preservation and later development, but signs may not be in place. About 1 mile north of Dillon on Highway 91 (parallels I-15 on the east side).



Bitterroot Valley

15 Dillon

The Beaverhead County Museum at 15 S. Montana is an impressive museum of local history that is open March – November. Just down the boardwalk (which has authentic western cattle brands burned into it) is the town's historical railroad depot, which is now a statewide visitor center. The visitor center has a Lewis and Clark diorama and information about Lewis and Clark Trail sites in the area.

16 Camp Fortunate Overlook

Driving south on I-15 from Dillon, take the Clark Canyon Dam exit. An overlook on the west side of the reservoir gives a view that approximates Camp Fortunate (which is now under the water). It was here that the expedition gained from Sacagawea's brother, Chief Cameahwait, the horses they needed to take them across the mountain ranges into the Columbia River drainage. Fishing, boating, camping, picnicking.

Route Notes

Lemhi Pass is where Lewis and Clark crossed the Continental Divide, leaving the Louisiana Purchase territory. There is a small campground and memorial to Sacagawea near the pass. This is a sometimes rutted and boggy road. In the summertime, most passenger cars can make this trip, but the Idaho side is more steep, so traveling with a trailer or motorhome is not recommended. Backtracking up I-15 to county road 278 is a paved shortcut to Montana's western-most Lewis and Clark Trail sites, and it also closely follows the route Clark took on his return journey eastward in 1806.

17 Lost Trail Pass

After traveling for a time in what is now Idaho, the explorers again entered Montana very near to Lost Trail Pass. An interpretive sign at the pass explains all of the historical trails in the area. If you have come across Lemhi Pass, take ID 28 to US 93 north. If you have taken the paved route 278, go northwest on MT 43 to reach Lost Trail Pass.

The Big Hole National Battlefield is along MT 43 and is well worth a stop to understand the bitter battles that were taking place by the 1870s between native tribes and the U.S. military.

18 Sula (Ross' Hole)

The Corps of Discovery's journey eased as they traveled into the beautiful Bitterroot Valley and came upon a village of over 400 Salish (Flathead) Indians. They camped a few miles north of Sula and learned of the Lolo Trail going west across the Bitterroot Mountains.

19 Travelers Rest at Lolo

At Lolo Creek (present-day Lolo), the expedition camped going to and coming from the Pacific. They named their camp Travelers Rest. On the return trip, Lewis and Clark split up to explore different sections of the Louisiana Territory. An interpretive sign at the junction of US 93 and US 12 gives further information. The Lolo Motorway (Forest Service Road 500) is an unpaved road that follows the original trail up on the ridge, while US 12 provides a faster, more comfortable route that parallels the original. Check with the Forest Service or area visitor centers for a map and current conditions if you plan to follow the primitive road.

20 Lolo Hot Springs

The expedition stopped here for hot baths on June 29, 1806. Now commercially operated.

21 Lolo Pass Visitor Center and Packer Meadows

The visitor center is at the pass as you enter Idaho. The expedition camped at nearby Packer Meadows and an interpretive sign provides more information.

THE RETURN JOURNEY FROM THE PACIFIC

On July 3, 1806, the expedition separated at Travelers Rest as they made their return trip eastward. Clark, 20 men, and Sacagawea with her baby took 50 horses and headed south through the Bitterroot Valley. Clark's party then crossed the Big Hole and traveled the Yellowstone River Valley. Lewis and nine men went north, down the Bitterroot River to the Clark Fork and then east along the Blackfoot. Lewis' aim was to explore the Marias River in the northwest part of the Louisiana Territory.

CLARK'S JOURNEY EAST

Clark and his larger party retraced the trail down to the Lost Trail Pass area (actually nearby Gibbons Pass, which is nearly inaccessible) and entered the Big Hole Valley. Driving MT 43 and then Secondary 278 allows you to follow their journey rather closely.

The party stopped to enjoy the warm waters of present-day Jackson Hot Springs, which is now commercially operated.

They crossed Big Hole Pass (on Secondary 278) to return to Camp Fortunate (Clark Canyon Dam) and retrieve their dugouts and the supplies cached the year before. Just before the pass, you can turn south off of 278 to visit Bannack State Park, site of Montana's first territorial capital (1864). It showcases a gold-rush-era ghost town.

Back at Three Forks, Sergeant John Ordway and nine men took the dugouts down the Missouri River to the Great Falls. Clark and the rest of his party headed east along the East Gallatin River and then came upon the Yellowstone River near Livingston (a gateway to Yellowstone National Park). You can follow the approximate route by driving east on Interstate 90.

22 Buffalo Mirage Access

Here, Clark's group carved out two dugout canoes to continue their exploration of the Yellowstone River. To reach the fishing access site at the approximate location, exit I-15 at Park City, follow the signs seven miles east on the frontage road, and then six miles on the county road to the site. Undeveloped fishing access site.

Route Notes

To follow the Yellowstone River, drive on I-90 until the junction with I-94 just east of Billings, then follow I-94 east. There are many communities and points of access to the river along this route. Continue on I-90 east if you want to make a side trip to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument just southeast of Hardin off I-90.

23 Pompeys Pillar

Named "Pompy's Tower" on maps of the expedition (Clark had nicknamed Sacagawea's son "Pomp"), this large pillar of sandstone now has stairs to allow visitors to see the incredible view from the top. On July 25, 1806, Captain Clark carved his name and the date on the pillar. This is the only remaining physical evidence of the expedition along the entire length of the trail. Interpretive tours, hiking, picnicking and a visitor center. 28 miles east of Billings, off I-94.



Pompeys Pillar

24 The Yellowstone River

There are many opportunities for recreation along the Yellowstone River. Gravel along the river from Custer to Sidney often yields Montana agates (inquire locally or through Custer Country tourism region for guide services or rockhounding tips). Fishing and floating are two other favorite activities on the Yellowstone. Badlands scenery is abundant in Terry or Makoshika State Park (at Glendive) where you can drive to view awesome rock formations.

LEWIS' JOURNEY EAST

On horseback, Lewis followed the Bitterroot River north from Travelers Rest. He crossed the Clark Fork near present-day Missoula, then followed a route along the Big Blackfoot River which the Nez Perce used to get to the plains for buffalo hunting. Today, you can very closely follow in his footsteps by driving US 93 into Missoula, then going east on I-90 to the exit for MT 200. Montana's Highway 200 follows the Blackfoot through Lincoln. Lewis crossed the Continental Divide at Lewis and Clark Pass, but that pass is accessible only by a hiking trail today. When Lewis' party reached the Sun River (just west of where MT 200 begins to parallel that river at Simms), they followed it to their old upper portage camp on the Missouri at Great Falls.

Lewis and three men from his party then rode overland to explore the Marias River. The best way to follow this journey is to drive from Great Falls to Fort Benton on US 87, then follow Secondary Road 223. Just west of where 223 crosses the Marias is where Lewis reached the Marias. He found the headwaters three days later and then followed the northern branch (Cut Bank River). Drive US 2 west from its intersection with 223 and head for Cut Bank to follow his route.

25 Camp Disappointment

On Cut Bank River east of present-day Browning, Lewis could see the river exiting the mountains. He called this northern-most campsite of the expedition "Camp Disappointment" since this meant the Marias did not reach 50 degrees north latitude, which would have extended the boundary of the Louisiana Territory. At milepost 233 on US 2, there is a historical highway marker which is four miles directly south of the actual camp site.

THE RENDEZVOUS

Lewis and his party made a hasty retreat back down to the Missouri after killing two Indians who were attempting to steal their horses at a camp on the Two Medicine River. They luckily encountered their expedition boats (Ordway's party) coming down the Missouri from Great Falls. Lewis' party and Clark's party met again close to where the Yellowstone River flows into the Missouri River.

RESOURCES

Statewide travel information:

Travel Montana
800-VISIT-MT or 800-847-4868 (outside Montana)
406-444-2654 (inside Montana)
<http://travel.mt.gov>

Travel information from any of Montana's six tourism regions is available by dialing these toll-free numbers:



— Lewis and Clark Route in Montana
- - - Lewis' Exploration Route of the Marias River

Lewis & Clark information:

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
P.O. Box 3434
Great Falls, MT 59403
<http://www.lewisandclark.org>

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
National Park Service
700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 100
Madison, WI 53711
<http://www.nps.gov/lecl>

Information on state parks or fishing access sites:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 E. Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
406-444-3750
<http://fwp.mt.gov>

Other Montana resources:

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
P.O. Box 1160
Lewistown, MT 59457
406-538-7461
<http://www.mt.blm.gov>

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
Box 110
Lewistown, MT 59457
406-538-8706, ext. 0
<http://www.glasgow.com/town/cmr.html>

USDA Forest Service - Northern Region
Federal Building
200 E. Broadway, Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807
406-329-3511
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/welcome.html>

A Few Suggestions for Further Reading on Lewis & Clark:

The Journals of Lewis and Clark, abridged edition, edited by Bernard DeVoto

The Traveler's Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail, by Julie Fanselow

Lewis and Clark: Historic Places Associated with Their Transcontinental Exploration (1804-06), by Roy E. Appleman, National Park Service

Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the West, by Stephen E. Ambrose

Out West: American Journey Along the Lewis and Clark Trail, by Dayton Duncan

The Story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, by R. Conrad Stein (for 2nd - 4th graders)

The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 11 volumes, edited by Gary E. Moulton



Produced by Travel Montana, Department of Commerce, in cooperation with Montana's tourism regions. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided to disabled individuals upon request. The information is accurate to the best of ability at press time.

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1424 9th Avenue • P.O. Box 200533 • Helena, MT 59620-0533

Front cover Missouri River photo by John Lambing.
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