

# Meriwether Lewis

NATIONAL MONUMENT

Tennessee

FORT CLATSOP

FORT MANDAN

ST. LOUIS

GRINDERS  
STAND



*Meriwether Lewis.*  
*Capt. 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Regt. Dragoons.*



# Meriwether Lewis

## NATIONAL MONUMENT • Tennessee

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Oscar L. Chapman, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Arthur E. Demaray, *Director*

*Here died and is buried Meriwether Lewis, who led the expedition that in 1804-5 first carried the American Flag across the continent to the Pacific*

Meriwether Lewis was the leader of the Lewis and Clark Expedition which in the first decade of the nineteenth century explored vast new regions of the North American continent, carried the American flag across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and opened the way for the great westward expansion of the United States.

### MERIWETHER LEWIS

Among the explorers who had a part in opening up the West, Meriwether Lewis is one of the most significant. Born near Charlottesville, Va., in 1774, he obtained a commission as lieutenant in the regular army, served with distinction at various frontier posts in the old Northwest Territory, and was soon promoted to a captaincy. His acute powers of observation attracted the attention of Thomas Jefferson who, on becoming President, selected Captain Lewis as his private secretary.

When the exploration of the West was proposed, Meriwether Lewis asked for and was given command of the expedition. He had particularly strong qualities of character which fitted him for the role of explorer. Thomas Jefferson, justifying his choice, wrote the following appreciation of Lewis:

*Of courage undaunted; possessing a firmness and perseverance of purpose which nothing but impossibilities could divert from its direction; careful as a father of those committed to his charge, yet steady in the maintenance of order and discipline; intimate with the Indian character, customs, and principles; habituated to the hunting life; . . . honest, disinterested, liberal, of sound understanding, and a fidelity to truth so scrupulous, that whatever he should report would be as certain as if seen by ourselves; with all these qualifications, as if selected and implanted by nature in one body for this express purpose, I could have no hesitation in confiding the enterprise to him.*

After his return in 1806, Lewis was appointed Governor of Louisiana, which included all of the Louisiana Purchase except the present State of Louisiana, then called the Territory of Orleans. In the fall of 1809, Lewis, who was suffering from a nervous or mental disorder which Jefferson termed "hypochondriac affections," set out from St. Louis on a journey to Washington. He went down the river to Memphis where he met the Chickasaw Indian Agent who accompanied him through Chickasaw country to the Natchez Trace. He reached Grinders Stand—an inn used as one of the overnight stops along the Trace—on October

11, 1809, and there during the night, he died from a gunshot wound, probably from his own hand.

### *THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION*

Long before he became President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson had been interested in securing more accurate geographical information about the valley of the Missouri River and an overland route to the Pacific Ocean. Soon after taking office he asked authority to send out an expedition to explore the country.

The expedition, with Lewis as leader and William Clark second in command, was organized in 1803 and spent the winter of 1803-4 on the Mississippi opposite St. Louis. In the meantime, Jefferson's efforts to acquire New Orleans had resulted in the acquisition of the entire province of Louisiana, a vast area out of which all or parts of 13 States have been carved.

In March, Lewis was made the agent to receive the transfer of Upper Louisiana. On May 14 he led his band of 32 men up the Missouri River and westward. They spent the winter in a Mandan Sioux village near the present site of the city of Bismarck, N. Dak. The journey was resumed in the spring of 1805. Crossing the Rocky Mountains in the late summer, they reached the Pacific near the mouth of the Columbia, where they erected a fort and spent the winter. The return journey was made in a single season, the party reaching St. Louis in September 1806.

The expedition brought back a vast amount of information about the climate, topography, plants, animals, and native peoples of the Northwest. The courses of the Missouri, Yellowstone, Snake, and lower Columbia Rivers and many lesser streams were discovered and charted. The knowledge of the country gained by the expedition materially hastened the occupation of the West and has been of great importance to students of western expansion. The explorations of Lewis and Clark on the

#### *Administration Building*



Monday August 19<sup>th</sup> 1805.

This morning I arose at daylight and sent out three hunters. some of the men who were much in want of leggings and moccasins I suffered to dress some skins. the others I employed in repacking the baggage, making pad: saddles &c. we took up the net this morning but caught no fish. one beaver was caught in a trap. the frost which perfectly whitened the grass this morning had a singular appearance to me at this season. this evening I made a few of the men construct a coon of willow brush which we hauled and caught a large number of fine trout and a kind of mullet about 16 In. long which I had not seen before. the scales are small the nose is long and obtusely pointed and exceeds the under jaw. the mouth is not large but opens with folds at the sides. the colour of it's back and sides is of a blue. brown and belly white; it has the jagget bones from which I have supposed it to be of the mullet kind. the tongue and palate are smooth and it has no teeth. it is by no means as good as the trout. the trout are the same which I first met with at the falls of the

Sample lines from Lewis' journal, August 19, 1805

Pacific slope of the Rocky Mountains greatly strengthened the American case in the later diplomatic struggle with England to gain possession of the Oregon country.

#### THE MONUMENT

Meriwether Lewis National Monument was established February 6, 1925, and comprises 300

acres of federally owned land. Within the monument, the places of historic interest include: a section of the long-abandoned Natchez Trace; the site of Grinders Stand; and the grave of Meriwether Lewis.

*The Old Natchez Trace.*—A gentle swale or, in some places, a bare gully marks the Natchez Trace on which Lewis made his last journey. This wilderness road, evolving from a series of

Indian trails, was improved first by the Army in 1801-3 and again by the Postmaster General in 1806 to insure communication between Natchez, in Mississippi Territory, and Nashville. For two decades it played a vital part in connecting the eastern settlements and the south-western outposts of the United States. It was important as a post road, a military road, and a route by which Kentucky boatmen returned to their homes.

*Site of Grinders Stand.*—Grass-covered rubble and a metal tablet mark the site of this inn. It was a rude frontier establishment, similar to a dozen others on the Natchez

*Grave of Meriwether Lewis*



Trace, where travelers found food and shelter.

*Burial Place of Meriwether Lewis.*—Meriwether Lewis was buried in a simple grave beside the Natchez Trace. Except for a "post fence" built in 1810, the plot was unmarked until 1848. That year the State of Tennessee erected over the remains a broken column, symbolic of his untimely death. Five years earlier, a new county including the grave site had been created and named Lewis.

Other units of the National Park System which help to tell the story of the westward movement of the American people are: Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Mo.; Homestead and Scotts Bluff National Monuments, Nebr.; and Whitman National Monument, Wash.

### HOW TO REACH THE MONUMENT

Meriwether Lewis National Monument is on Tennessee Highway 20, 7 miles east of Hohenwald and 35 miles west of Columbia.

### SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

The area is open the year around. A rustic building contains the National Park Service office and a small exhibit illustrating the career of Meriwether Lewis and the significance of his accomplishments. A picnic ground has fireplaces, benches, and tables.

### ADMINISTRATION

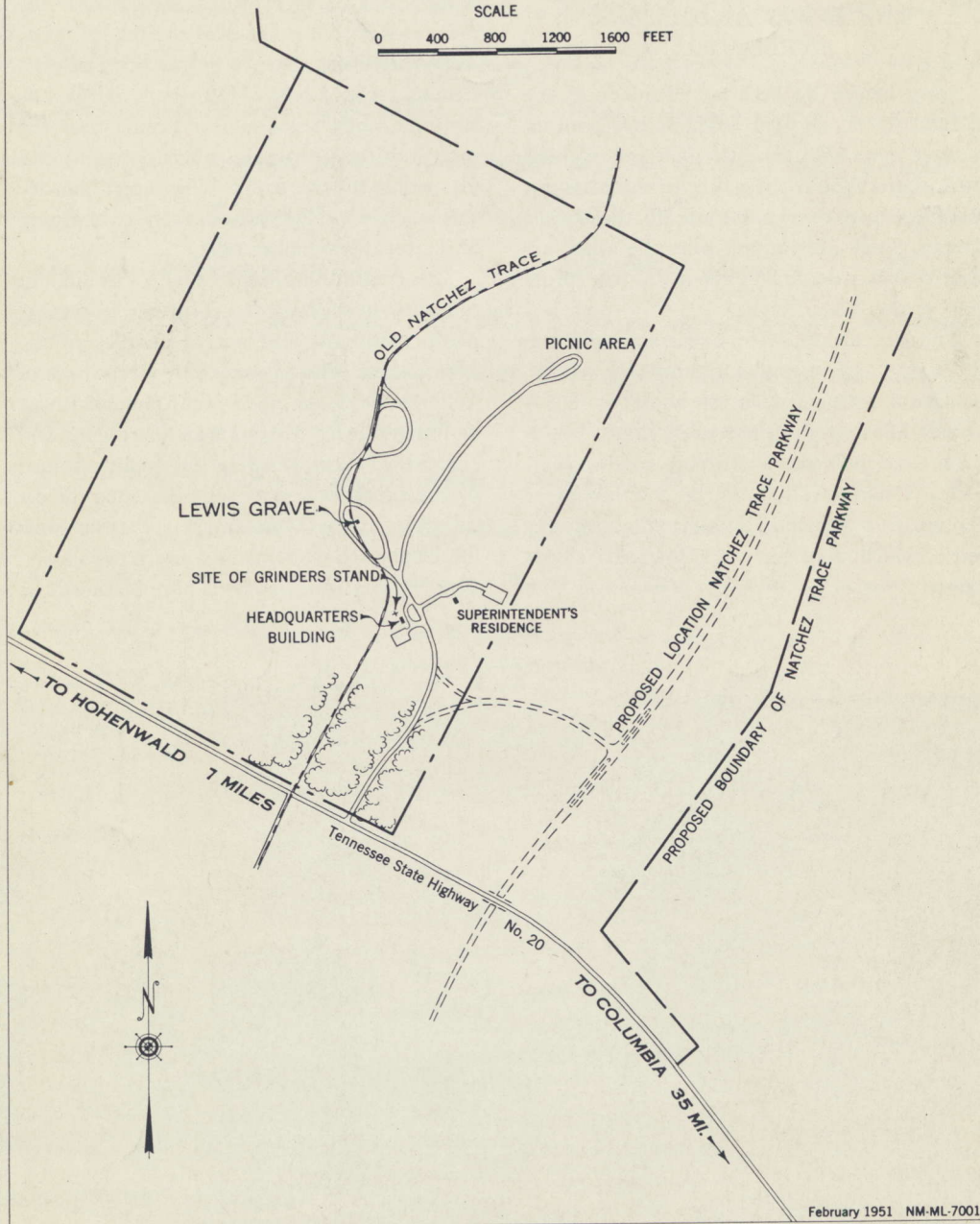
Meriwether Lewis National Monument is part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. Address inquiries concerning the area to the Superintendent, Meriwether Lewis National Monument, Hohenwald, Tenn.

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