

Wayside museum.

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 southwestern outposts of the United States.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Meriwether Lewis Park is located on the Natchez Trace Parkway, 7 miles east of Hohenwald and 35 miles southwest of Columbia on Tenn. 20.

A museum, open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., houses exhibits about Meriwether Lewis and his significance. Nearby is a picnic area.

ADMINISTRATION

Established originally as Meriwether Lewis National Monument, the area was designated

a part of the Natchez Trace Parkway in 1961. The parkway is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

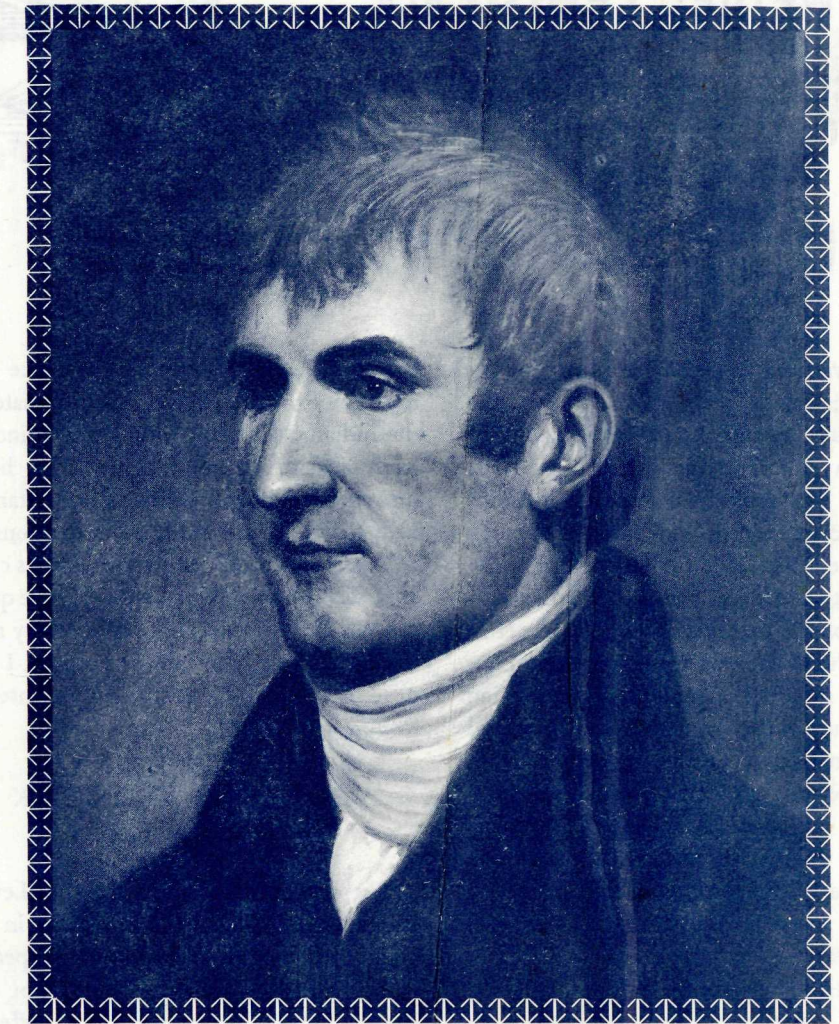
The National Park System, of which the parkway is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of the people.

The superintendent of Natchez Trace Parkway, whose address is Box 948, Tupelo, Miss. 38801, is in immediate charge of Meriwether Lewis Park.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed, to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute their full measure to the progress and prosperity of the United States—now and in the future.



Cover: Capt. Meriwether Lewis.
Painting by Charles Willson Peale.
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK COLLECTION.



Meriwether Lewis Park
NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY
Tennessee



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

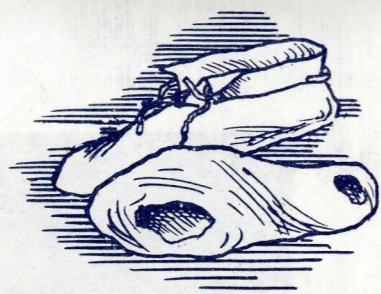


Reprint 1966

GPO : 1966-O-235-421

Meriwether Lewis Park

NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY



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

THE Lewis and Clark Expedition, led by Meriwether Lewis in the first decade of the 19th century, explored vast new regions of the North American continent, carried the American flag across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, and opened the way for the westward expansion of the United States.

Meriwether Lewis, one of the most outstanding of the explorers who had a part in opening the West, was born near Charlottesville, Va., in 1774. Obtaining a commission as lieutenant in the Regular Army, he served with distinction at various frontier posts in the old Northwest Territory and was promoted to the rank of captain. His acute powers of observation attracted the attention of Thomas Jefferson, who, on becoming President, selected Captain Lewis as his private secretary.

Long before he became President, 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 for and received authority to send out an expedition to explore the country.

President Jefferson selected Lewis to command the expedition, justifying his choice by saying, "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 com-

mitted 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."

THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

The expedition, with Meriwether 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 were 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 near the Mandan villages west of present-day Bismarck, N. Dak., resuming their journey in the spring of 1805. Cross-

ing the Rocky Mountains in 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 courses of the Missouri, Yellowstone, Snake, and lower Columbia Rivers and many lesser streams were discovered and charted by the expedition; and they brought back a vast amount of information about the climate, topography, plants, animals, and native peoples of the Northwest. The knowledge of the country gained by the expedition materially hastened the occupation of the West. The explorations of Lewis and Clark on the 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.

DEATH OF LEWIS

Early in 1807 President Jefferson appointed Lewis Governor of the Louisiana (later Missouri) Territory. Arriving at St.



Lewis on the Natchez Trace.
From the museum diorama.

Monday August 19th 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 strip some skins. the others I employed in repacking the baggage, making pack-saddles &c. we took up the net this morning but caught no fish. one heaver was caught in a trap. the first which perfectly, whitens the grass this morning has a singular appearance to me at this season. this evening I made a few of the men construct a cabin of willow brush which was hauled and caught a large number of fine trout and a kind of mullet about 16 inches long which I had not seen before. the scales are small the nose is long and obtusely pointed and reaches the under jaw. the mouth is not large but opens with folds at the sides. the colour of its back and sides is of a bluish brown and belly white; it has the jagged bones from which I have supposed it to be of the mullet kind. the tongue and palates 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

Lines from Lewis' Journal, August 19, 1805.

Louis in 1808, Lewis found himself embroiled in political and financial difficulties which brought on a disorder that Jefferson termed "hypochondriac affections."

Hoping to relieve himself of financial obligations incurred in the public service, Lewis left St. Louis for Washington in September 1809. He arrived at Fort Pickering (now Memphis) on September 15, and the commanding officer wrote Jefferson concerning Lewis: "His situation I tho't rendered it necessary that he should be stopped until he would recover, which I done and . . . in about six days he was perfectly restored in every respect and able to travel."

Lewis decided to go overland to Wash-

ington and left Fort Pickering September 29, accompanied by the Chickasaw Agent, James Neelly. They proceeded to the Chickasaw Agency, near Houston, Miss., and on October 6, 1809, started via the Natchez Trace to Nashville. During this stage of the journey, Lewis, according to Neelly, showed signs of "mental derangement."

After they crossed the Tennessee River, one packhorse was lost. Neelly remained behind to search for the animal and did not overtake his companion until October 11. Arriving at Grinder's Inn, Neelly found Lewis dead from two gunshot wounds. Neelly had him buried alongside the historic Natchez Trace. A week later he wrote

Jefferson, "It is with extreme pain that I have to inform you of the death of his Excellency Meriwether Lewis, Governor of upper Louisiana who died on the morning of the 11th Instant and I am Sorry to Say by Suicide."

GRAVE 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, when 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.

SITE OF GRINDER'S 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 Trace, where travelers found food and shelter.

Grave of Meriwether Lewis.

