

THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY: 200 YEARS

The Lewis and Clark expedition traversed thousands of miles during its epic adventure two centuries ago. To commemorate the Corps of Discovery's bicentennial, another intrepid explorer set out to retrace its footsteps, albeit with twenty-first-century conveniences.

The Corps of Re-Discovery

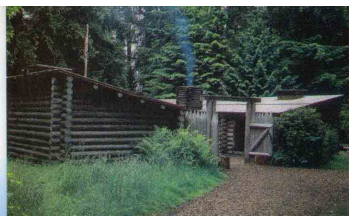
Story and photographs by Randall Hyman

"You're only the second vehicle to make it up the Montana side today," park ranger Mike Crosby said as I admired the sweeping panorama of Idaho's rugged Bitterroot Range. "We had some heavy rains last night and that road gets pretty messy when it's wet."

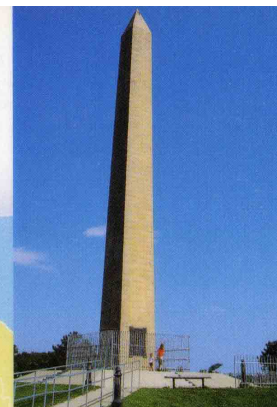
After following the Missouri River for nearly 3,000 miles, I had reached the Continental Divide, but it seemed too easy. I had not paddled, towed, or poled vessels upstream against fierce currents and treacherous snags. I had endured no grueling portages around miles of waterfalls. And I had not suffered from hunger, sunstroke, venereal disease, poisonings, frostbite, dysentery, or bear attacks. That was in marked contrast to the experiences of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, whose trail from St. Louis to Oregon I was retracing on the eve of their expedition's bicentennial. The most I could boast of this brisk June day was having braved flubcap-deep mud to pilot my own vessel, a Winnebago Vista camper van, up Lemhi Pass.

For Lewis, this view from Lemhi Pass, on today's Idaho/Montana border, was a discouraging indication of what still lay ahead. Opposite: A statue of Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea stands at Fort Benton, Missouri.

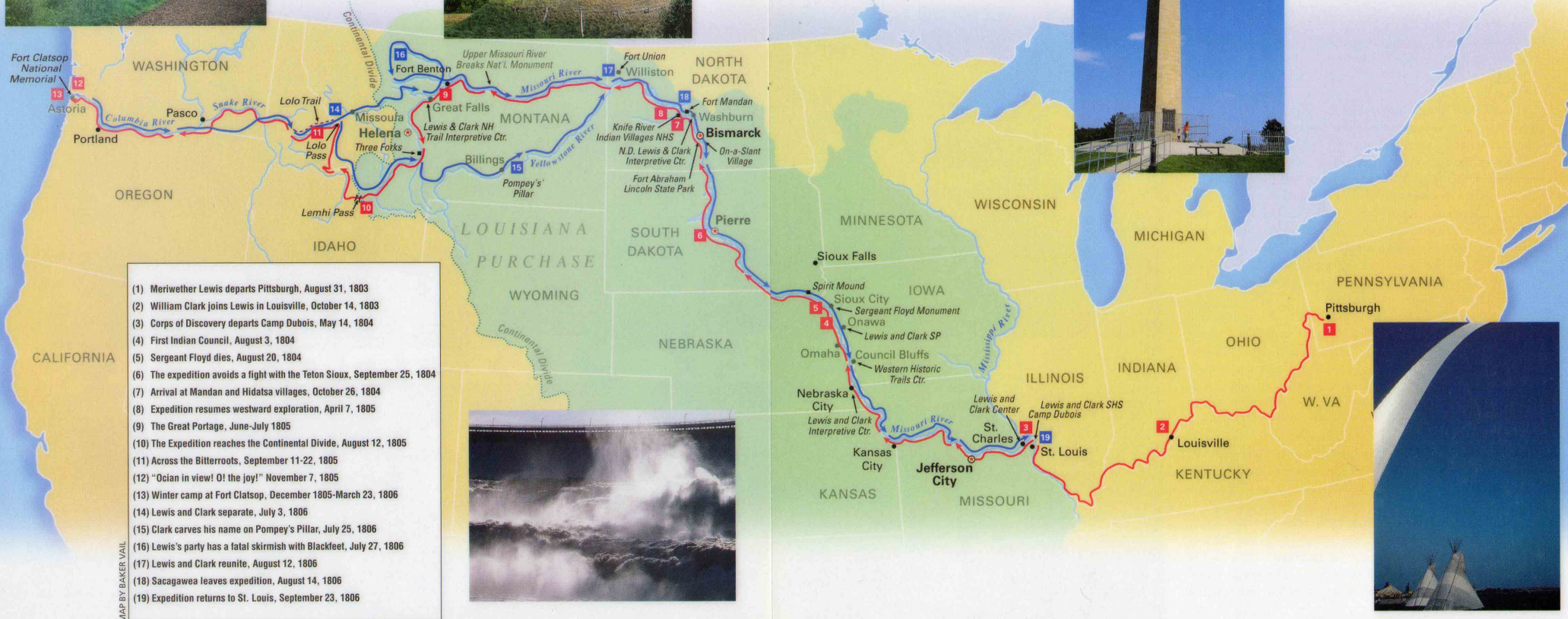
HISTORIC
TRAVELER



Left: Fort Clatsop. Right: Mandan lodge, On-A-Slant Indian Village. Below: The Great Falls of the Missouri.



Left: The Sargeant Floyd Monument. Below: The Gateway Arch, with teepees, St. Louis.



The view was spectacular, but when Lewis stood here on August 12, 1805, his reaction must have been awed shock. His orders from President Thomas Jefferson had been to discover an easy water route to the Pacific Ocean, the fabled Northwest Passage. When Lewis reached this point, he had expected to find broad valleys and rivers such as those in his native Appalachians, leading gracefully off to the distant sea.

Instead, he found a sea of mountains, "immense ranges . . . with their tops partially covered with snow." The peaks blocked the way to the Pacific and shattered all hopes for a Northwest Passage. Having spent a year struggling up the entire Missouri River to its headwaters, Lewis, Clark, and their band of explorers found themselves still in the midst of a vast, unmapped wilderness. Game was scarce, they had no horses, and winter was breathing down their necks. Lewis had failed his president.

Nevertheless, it was to be a splendid failure. By the time Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery returned from the Pacific Ocean to St. Louis in September 1806, it had mapped 4,000 miles of Missouri and Columbia River watersheds, gathered information on dozens of Indian tribes, collected 122 animal and 178 plant specimens previously unknown to science, and penned more than one million words in adventure-laden journals. An infant nation thirstily swallowed accounts of its exploits, and the journey became an American legend—a gripping saga of heroism, discovery, foolishness, and miraculous good luck.

"When you read about their journey," Mike Crosby reflected, "it's just the reverse of when you learn more about something and say, 'Oh, so *that's* how they did it.' With Lewis and Clark, you learn more about it and say, 'But how did they *do* that?' How did they pole, paddle, and tow vessels thousands of miles upstream,

trudging through muck and over sandbars, heaving against swirling currents, plagued by mosquitoes and disease? How did they portage huge dugout canoes and tons of cargo around miles of waterfalls on bloody, cactus-punctured feet? How could they shoot the Columbia on cascades that even local Indians would not attempt? And how could anyone survive all this, make it to the Pacific Ocean, and then bear to turn around and repeat the entire journey in reverse?

I began asking questions such as these as soon as I started upriver from my home in St. Louis. My first stop was the nearby town of St. Charles, Missouri, site of the expedition's first notable campsite. From my front door I zipped along the interstate and reached St. Charles within 20 minutes. It had taken the Corps of Discovery two days of struggle to cover the same distance up the river. I found St. Charles buzzing with reenactors wearing the

red, white, and blue woolen uniforms of early nineteenth-century soldiers and carrying flintlock rifles. They were participants in a Lewis and Clark festival, but the weekend's star attraction—a working replica of the keelboat Lewis and Clark skippered the first year—was still docked up the Mississippi River. The Missouri and the Mississippi were in full flood, and the debris careening down them made it too risky to bring the replica, even though it had a 150-horsepower motor hidden beneath the cabin.

I did find two broad, flat-bottomed boats called pirogues sitting on trailers near turgid floodwaters that had swallowed half the riverside park's lawn. Standing in one pirogue was Bob Shannon Anderson, straightening his standard-issue 1804 army jacket over a 50-something belly. Although countless reenactments and special events are scheduled during the four-year-long bicentennial, Anderson's project is among the most ambitious. Each summer

through 2006 members of the Discovery Expedition of St. Charles, dressed as Lewis and Clark and company, will pilot replicas of the three original boats—the 55-foot keelboat and two 40-foot pirogues—down the Ohio River and up the Missouri. “We’ll be stopping at towns along the way giving demonstrations,” Anderson said. “I’m playing George Shannon, my direct ancestor, and my 19-year-old grandson will be coming along—same age Shannon was when he went.”

Shannon was the youngest member of the Corps of Discovery. Aside from the expedition’s main hunter—a half-Shawnee woodsman named George Drouillard—and two half-Omaha voyageurs named Pierre Cruzatte and François Labiche, his fellow explorers were all tough young soldiers, mostly in their twenties, hand-picked for their wilderness experience and skills such as carpentry and blacksmithing. During the winter of 1803 they camped near St. Louis while Clark screened them and Lewis awaited official transfer of the Louisiana Territory to American hands.

Once the expedition began, the two captains and their three sergeants kept journals, as Jefferson had ordered. By the time they returned to St. Louis the explorers had compiled more words than the Old and New Testaments combined and created a snapshot of the American west before it was “the West.” The journals also created portraits of the writers themselves—especially Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

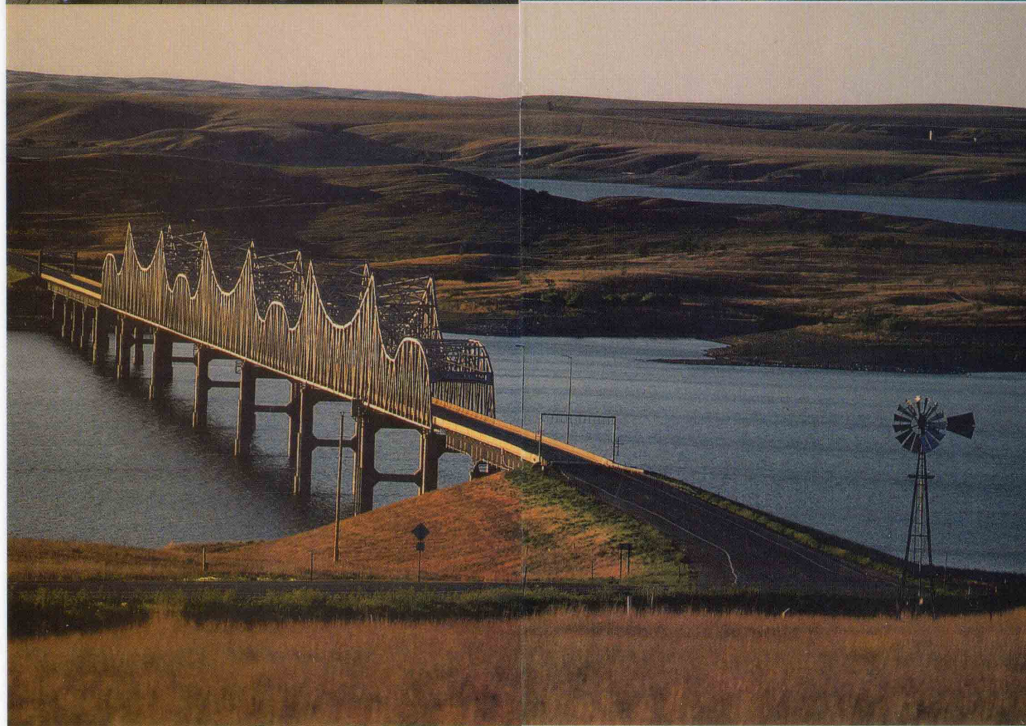
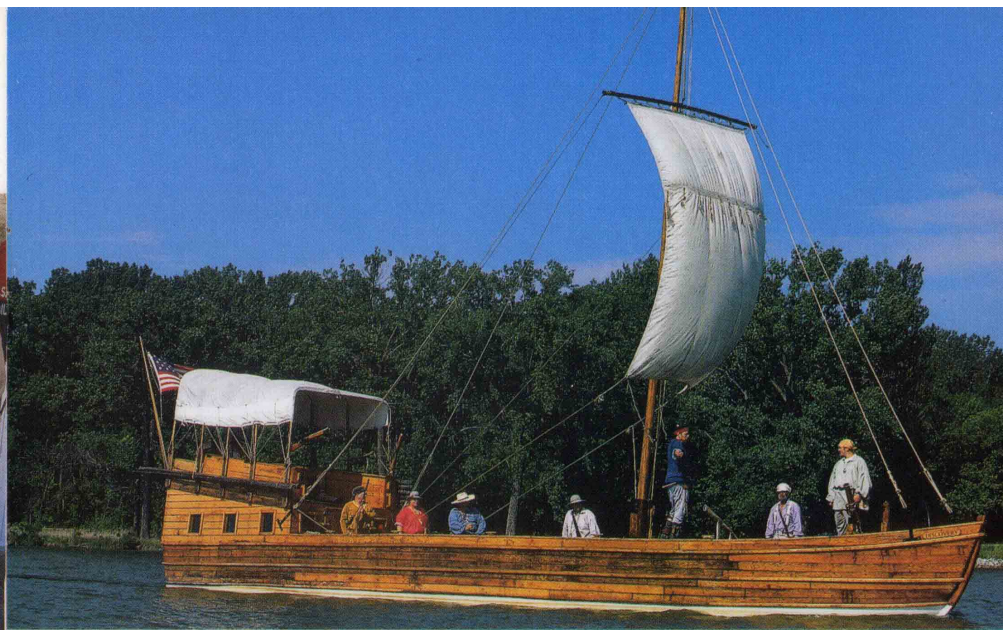
Opposite as they were, Lewis and Clark were a good match. Lewis was mercurial and judgmental, given to outbursts of temper or inspired risk-taking that drove the enterprise forward. Clark was steadfast and tolerant, often carrying the full weight of the expedition alone. Between the two of them they cheated the odds and lost only one man while traversing more than 8,000 miles of wilderness.

If the Corps had guardian angels, they were Indian. Drouillard, who hailed from Kentucky, provided most of the nine or 10 pounds of meat each man consumed daily and parleyed with tribes in Indian sign language. Sacagawea, a teenage mother who joined the expedition in North Dakota, saved the men several times. Old Toby, a Shoshone guide, led the explorers through the Rockies, and Watkuweis, an elderly Nez Perce woman, spared them from massacre. Rather than filling them with arrows, Native Americans fed the men when they faced starvation and guided them when they were hopelessly lost. The Indians couldn’t know that this expedition of white men marked the beginning of the end of their way of life.

As the Corps of Discovery journeyed towards the mouth of the Kansas River (now Kansas City) in June 1804, they passed broad shores of sandy mud punctuated with white limestone bluffs and oak-hickory forests in spring bloom. Osage Indians and fur trappers hailed the keelboat and two pirogues as the small fleet passed upstream. This first stretch was not unexplored wilderness.

Driving the “blue highways” that snake across the state of Missouri, I tried to fathom how much the river had changed here. Until the twentieth century, the muddy Missouri was a broad, meandering maze of braided channels littered with snags. Today, wing dikes jut from its banks like huge pinball shuttles, taming the river’s reckless nature all the way north to South Dakota. There a series of dams forms six huge lakes that extend into North Dakota and halfway across Montana. One of the most pristine stretch-

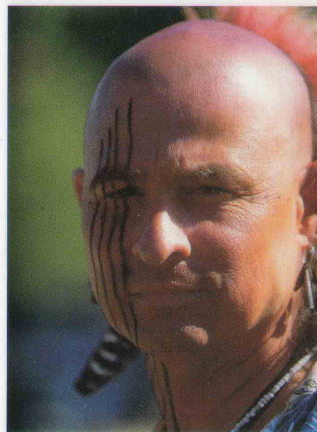
Clockwise from right: Constructed for a large-screen movie, a working replica of Lewis and Clark’s 55-foot keelboat now cruises on Iowa’s Blue Lake. U.S. Route 212 passes over the Missouri River near Lake Oahe, South Dakota. Checkers, anyone? Small-town America lives on in Arrow Rock, Missouri.



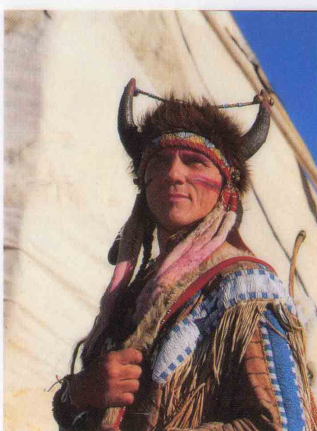
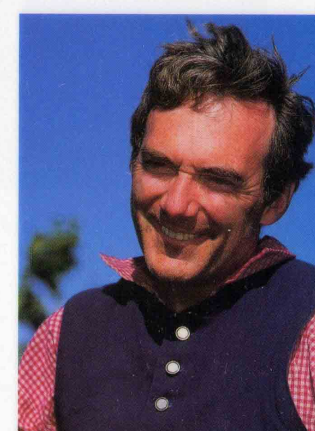
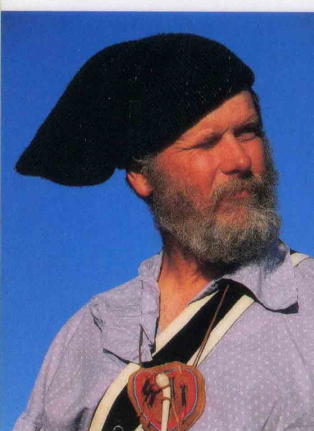
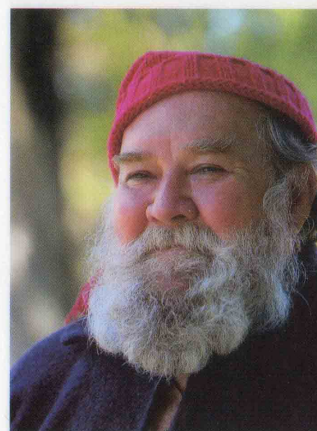
es of river left, the Missouri Breaks, sits above the last large lake near Fort Benton, Montana. Beginning after the Breaks is a series of smaller dams—the first ignobly placed directly atop the Great Falls—followed by more all the way up to Clark Canyon Reservoir near Lemhi Pass.

Driving north from Kansas City into Nebraska and Iowa, I saw limestone cliffs and dense forests give way to loess country, what Lewis called “bald-pated prairie”—bluffs of wind-blown glacial till topped with spotty woods. Beyond the bluffs lay prairie and woodlands that were once home to herds of buffalo, elk, and deer. When the Corps passed through, most Indians were far to the west hunting migrating buffalo. Finally, 20 miles north of the present city of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Lewis found Oto and Missouri Indians willing to listen to the speech he had prepared for such occasions. It was the expedition’s first council meeting. The main chief and his hunting party were gone, but in exchange for shiny peace medals, flags, whiskey, beads, and trinkets, the stay-at-home braves sat through Lewis’s sales pitch, a performance he repeated countless times with varied success all the way to the Pacific. Lewis told them a Great White Father was in charge and they would have to change the way they did business. No more British traders, and no more intertribal wars. Then he impressed them with telescopes, compasses, modern flintlock rifles, and a unique air rifle he had to pump a few hundred times to fire several shots. The Indians marveled at the black skin of Clark’s slave, York, and Lewis’s bear-like Newfoundland dog, Seaman. After the council the Corps pushed north.

They spent one night at present-day Blue Lake—riverfront property at the time. This small Iowa lake is an oxbow, a marooned meander of the Missouri near the town of Onawa. I arrived here, 700 miles upstream from St. Charles, amid the bustle of another Lewis and Clark festival, with more reenactors in



At Lewis and Clark festivals across the nation, reenactors dress in various guises. This page, clockwise from top left: A Corps of Discovery reenactor, Onawa, Iowa. Robert Anderson, George Shannon's descendant, St. Charles, Missouri. A Native American, St. Charles, Missouri. French voyageur, St. Louis, Missouri. Lareen Munro as Sacagawea, Great Falls, Montana. Michael Terry, Fort Union, North Dakota. Richard Baker as Pierre Cruzatte, Great Falls. A Corps soldier, Onawa. Opposite, left to right: French voyageur, Fort Union. Another voyageur, St. Charles. Norman Anderson as Meriwether Lewis, Great Falls.



woolens and buckskins saluting 15-star flags while the aroma of charbroiled buffalo burgers filled the air. As a heavy wind whipped whitecaps across the lake, I spied a keelboat, sister to the one I had missed in St. Charles, out on the water. "This here's the only authentic keelboat replica in the world," history buff William Kennedy boasted about the boat he helped build. "No motor or nothin', so we can't put her on the river. Gotta push her into position just to sail down the lake. Thirteen tons and can float in 12 inches of water."

Before hoisting the keelboat's sail, the weekend soldiers invited me onboard. "We'll have a boat just like this at our museum in Nebraska City," banker Doug Friedli told me as we surged down Blue Lake beneath a large canvas sail. As co-chairman of the \$8 million Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center opening in his hometown in 2004, Friedli helped acquire the keelboat replica, which was featured in a recent IMAX® film about Lewis and Clark. "It's kinda neat that the actual boat has been on the water all the way up to Montana. We're going to have one side packed the way it was going upstream, the other like it was going downstream—with plant and

City back to the peaceful countryside and a river that was growing steadily narrower and greener. Trees were disappearing as prairie began to dominate. I soon reached South Dakota, heart of the Great Plains.

Emulating Lewis, an avid hiker who sometimes covered 30 miles a day collecting specimens, I detoured north of the town of Vermillion to Spirit Mound. Lewis and Clark had taken the same route two centuries earlier, trekking far from the river to visit this anomalous mound in the middle of the prairie. Indians avoided it, for according to legend Spirit Mound was home to 18-inch blue demons armed with deadly arrows. A stiff wind tore at my clothes all the way up, and I wondered if the little devils were firing arrows at me from hidden places in the tall grass. Unlike Lewis and Clark, I spied no buffalo, but I did see signs of the feed lot that had been at its base until the state's park division took over and planted native grasses and herbs.

Chasing the setting sun, I headed upriver to Calumet Bluff, which had been half-destroyed since the expedition's time to build Gaven's Point Dam, the first of six large hydroelectric

animal specimens, maybe even a live prairie dog."

Friedli and I sat on sideboard lockers similar to those Clark had designed for storage and as a platform for soldiers poling the boat. They had been filled with tons of salted pork, gunpowder, ammunition, tents, and bundles of Indian gifts as the expedition made its way north to a winter stopover in North Dakota. The next spring French voyageurs piloted the keelboat back down to St. Louis with a cargo of skins, skeletons, fossils, pressings, Indian souvenirs, a few live animals, the journals, and two men who had been kicked out of the expedition.

The men headed into troubled waters after they left Onawa. Sergeant Charles Floyd, Clark's cousin and trusted assistant, grew sicker by the mile. He died of appendicitis at the site of present-day Sioux City. Internal surgery was still unknown, so even the best doctor could not have saved him. Today a 100-foot-high obelisk honors Floyd, the only expedition member to die during the journey. I paid a visit to the memorial with a touch of sadness. Floyd's was once a lonely grave, but now he has plenty of company from the industry and highways that line the Missouri. I gladly pushed through Sioux

plants harnessing the Missouri River. Here the Corps held council with the Yankton Sioux. The Sioux were friendly, but they warned that their brethren upriver were not so hospitable.

Lewis and Clark learned that firsthand at a spot across the river from present Pierre in what is now a modest city park. There they met the Teton Sioux and near disaster. The rich and powerful Indian nation demanded payment from boats passing up and down the Missouri while raiding and trading with tribes bordering their lands. Lewis made little impression with his sideshow of gadgets and weaponry, and the three chiefs scoffed at his token gifts. The captains invited the chiefs aboard the keelboat for whiskey, but this went poorly. After depositing the Indians back on shore, Clark announced that his men were going upriver with or without permission. The soldiers manned their boats as hundreds of Indians lined the banks behind their chiefs. Three warriors grabbed the moorline of Clark's pirogue and another hugged its mast while a chief berated and pushed Clark, demanding more gifts. The captain drew his sword.



An expedition canoe crafted in steel watches over the rolling farmlands south of North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea.

The braves nocked their arrows and the Corpsmen cocked their rifles. A single shot from either side would have triggered a bloodbath, but a calmer hand prevailed. Chief Black Buffalo stepped forward and called off his men. Violence had been averted—for now, but the expedition wasn't out of danger. The captains were astonished when the Sioux, impressed by Clark's bravery, invited the Corps to a great feast the next day followed by two nights of revelry. But with suspicions still high, the third day ended in another standoff, until the men extricated themselves from their hosts' erratic hospitality and escaped upstream.

"When they came it was a non-event for my people," shrugged Dakota Goodhouse, a soft-spoken college student majoring in Indian history. "My great-great-grandfather was there. His exact words were, 'Some white men came up the river. We stopped them. We held a council to decide if they should pass and they slipped by in the night.'" Today Goodhouse is a guide at On-A-Slant Indian Village, a reconstruction of five earthen lodges at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park near Bismarck, North Dakota. As a Teton Sioux, Goodhouse would have been a sworn enemy of the Mandans who lived here two centuries ago.

For the region's natives, the sight of white men was nothing new. "I mean, there were already white people living in the area," Goodhouse said. French and British fur traders had already been living among the Mandans—and were inadvertently killing them faster than the Teton Sioux were. In 1780, On-A-Slant was part of

a bustling metropolis that stretched for miles along the river. A year later, smallpox had killed 90 percent of the population. By the time the Corps of Discovery visited, On-A-Slant held the crumbling ruins of just 85 lodges.

At the North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn, one hour north of On-A-Slant, I learned more about the Indian perspective. The new multimillion-dollar interpretive center offers visitors an opportunity to learn how the Corps spent its first winter among the Mandans, and the obstacles the men met on their trek westward. One of the galleries features prints by Karl Bodmer, the German artist whose sensitive portraits of early nineteenth-century Indians still tantalize. "The first whites didn't come upriver like a gale force," history interpreter Patrice Tunge said. "They came more like a gentle breeze, followed by more breezes. Indians didn't realize early on they would no longer be the main people."

Two miles down the road stands Fort Mandan, an exact reconstruction of the modest wooden barracks the Corps built for their winter here. Whatever pride the men felt in erecting the first American fort west of the Mississippi, it must have been tempered by humility. For after struggling 1,600 miles upriver for more than five months, they were back in the lap of civilization. The Mandan villages here were more populous than Philadelphia and formed the cultural and economic mecca of the northern Great Plains. Even before leaving St. Louis, the captains had circled the villages on their map as the place to stay that first winter.

The Mandans and nearby Hidatsas helped the white men draw crude maps of what lay ahead and warned them of a great waterfall many sleeps distant. When the Corps reached the Rocky Moun-

tains, the Mandans said, they had to find the Shoshone tribe and buy horses. To do that, they would need a guide and translator. A loutish French-Canadian fur trader named Toussaint Charbonneau, who had won two kidnapped Shoshone girls by gambling with their Hidatsa captors, offered himself and his wives as translators. The expedition needed only one wife, so either Charbonneau or the captains chose Sacagawea, even though she was six months pregnant.

After a winter of frostbite, women, venereal disease, and extraordinary Mandan hospitality, the Corps was ready to push on. "From St. Louis the river runs pretty much north," said Tunge, sitting in her cluttered office amid buffalo dew-claw Indian rattles, beaver skins, felt hats, and brain-tanned buffalo hides. "It isn't until here that you start really going west, and that's when the adventure began. Imagine, you're going where no white man has ever been, nobody's even written about the Great Falls. Can you imagine how tiny they felt?"

The Corps set off from the Mandan villages on April 7, 1805. Lewis and Clark sent the keelboat downriver with some of the men, but the group was augmented by Charbonneau and Sacagawea, and Sacagawea's newborn baby, Jean Baptiste (nicknamed "Pomp"). As the band journeyed westward in the spring of 1805 through prairie, sagebrush, and badlands, the first major landmark it hit was the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, near the present-day border of Montana and North Dakota. Lewis scribbled enthusiastically in his journal, "The whole face of the country was covered with herds of buffalo, elk and antelopes . . . so gentle that we pass near them while feeding without appearing to excite any alarm . . . they frequently approach us more nearly to discover what we are, and in some cases pursue us a considerable distance . . ."

When I pulled up to the confluence I found a herd too, but it was comprised of 20 shiny behemoths lined up side by side on a parking lot. It was a Winnebago rendezvous. I excited no alarm, but I did encounter some curious, middle-aged RV owners who approached to admire my compact Vista. They were all headed for a mountain-man festival at nearby Fort Union. In his journals, Clark had recommended the site as a good spot for a military post and by 1828 local tribes were trading beaver skins and buffalo hides at the fort. Within three decades the Civil War, smallpox, warring Sioux, and the silk hats that replaced beaver headgear combined to close its doors. The National Park Service completed a meticulous reconstruction of the fort and trading post in 1991. Walking outside its towering wooden stockade amid trappers and voyageurs hawking beads, hides, guns, and books, I stepped back to a time several decades after Lewis and Clark's visit, when trade was brisk, relations were friendly, and white settlers had not yet disrupted the Indians' nomadic lifestyle.

Michael Terry, a Florida Seminole, was at the fort re-creating the life of the Plains Indians. "When other Indians see me they say, 'Hey, you look like a Hollywood Indian,'" he told me with a laugh. Terry wore the horned headdress of the Cheyenne and the clothing and regalia of the Blackfeet. Everything about him was authentic, from the tepee he had sewn from 31 buffalo hides to the amazing array of tools, weaponry, and ornamentation inside. "You go to a powwow and think that's the real thing, but everything's changed."

SIGNATURE EVENTS

The Lewis and Clark bicentennial officially began this year on January 19 with a ceremony at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. The National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial plans other "signature events" until 2006. Those events are listed below, and there is more information at www.lewisandclark200.org.

2003

October 14-26, Louisville, Kentucky, and Clarksville, Indiana. **The Falls of the Ohio** will include reenactments of Lewis and Clark meeting in Louisville and their departure from Clarksville.

2004

March 12-14, St. Louis, Missouri. A **Three Flags** ceremony will observe the Louisiana Purchase's 200th anniversary.

May 13-16, Hartford and Wood River, Illinois. **Expedition's Departure: Camp River Dubois** will commemorate the start of the Corps' journey up the Missouri.

May 14-23, St. Charles, Missouri. **Preparations Complete, the Expedition Faces West**. The 25th-annual Lewis and Clark Heritage Days Festival will mark the departure from St. Charles.

July 3-4, Atchison and Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. **Heart of America: A Journey Fourth** will celebrate Independence Day.

July 31-August 3, Fort Atchison Historical Park, Fort Calhoun, Nebraska. The **First Tribal Council** commemoration plans to include participation from every tribe along the Lewis and Clark Trail.

August 27-28, Chamberlain/Oacoma, South Dakota. **Oceti Sakowin: Remembering and Education** will focus on Native-American experiences before, during, and after the Corps of Discovery.

October 22-31, Bismarck, North Dakota. **Circles of Cultures, Time of Renewal and Change** will focus on Lewis and Clark and their stay with the Missouri River Indians during the winter of 1804-1805.

2005

June 2-July 4, Great Falls, Montana. **Explore the Big Sky** will recall the expedition's experiences in Montana, which included the Great Falls portage and encounters with grizzly bears.

November 24-27, Fort Clatsop National Memorial, Astoria, Oregon. **Destination 2005—The Pacific** will celebrate the arrival on the west coast and the winter spent at Fort Clatsop.

2006

June 14-17, Lewiston/Lapwai, Nez Perce National Historical Park, Clearwater Casino, Heart of the Monster, Idaho. **Among the Nez Perce** will be based around the expedition's encounters with this important tribe.

July 25, Pompey's Pillar, Billings, Montana. **Clark on the Yellowstone** will take place at the only site that bears physical evidence of the expedition's passage.

August 17-20, North Dakota. **Home of Sakakawea** will celebrate the young Shoshone woman at the sites of the Native-American villages where she joined and left Lewis and Clark.

Early fall, greater St. Louis, Missouri. **Confluence with Destiny: The Return of Lewis and Clark**. A ceremony marks the expedition's end.

When Fort Union first opened, only Assiniboine and Crow came. The Blackfeet were long-time partners of the British and refused to trade. They had not forgotten that Lewis and one of his men had killed two of their warriors on the expedition's return journey when the Blackfeet tried to steal guns and horses. It was the only fatal encounter of the entire expedition. "These Indians

were angels," Terry reflected. "They lived a tough life, and they were tough." He grabbed a primitive bridle from his tepee and went to fetch his pinto. I watched him ride bareback toward the Missouri River in the evening sun, an etching from the past.

After leaving Fort Union and driving halfway across the monotonous plains of eastern Montana, I was ready for a change. Heading south from Malta I received my first taste of mountains. The Little Rockies, along with several other "island" ranges, are volcanic remnants left over after their big brothers to the west were formed. Just beyond these, cutting through sagebrush and grasslands teeming with pronghorn antelope, the road plunged into a 600-foot-deep valley to the river. Here I found Kipp Recreation Area, a fisherman's heaven at the lower end of the pristine Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Paddlefish, huge, flat-nosed relatives of the sturgeon, were spawning, and the hunt was on. "They pulled out three 50-pounders this morning," one of the men crowded along the banks told me. The large prehistoric fish stick to the bottom, and fishermen catch them on highest line with heavy hooks that snag their bodies, not their mouths. The record catch weighed 142.5 pounds. How Lewis would have swooned to have added *that* to his specimens!

"My wife says Lewis and Clark were the first tourists," ranger Mark Schaefer told me as he packed his gear on the bank after floating five days downstream through the Breaks. "She's Chippewa-Cree, so she sees it differently. But still, imagine these guys coming upriver and what great shape they must have been in—all sinew." Schaefer should know. He patrols the river, prepared to help any of the 5,000 canoeists and kayakers that shoot the Breaks each year. This is one of the most celebrated stretches of the Mis-

souri River. Untouched and inaccessible except by boat, it is famous for white sandstone pillars and sculpted cliffs.

After emerging from the Breaks, the Corps spent a week at the confluence of the muddy Marias and clear-flowing Missouri trying to decide which one to follow. The captains went against the guesses of everyone else and chose the southern, clear branch—which turned out to be the correct choice, as they confirmed when they came face to face with Great Falls. Having developed an intimate acquaintance with the Missouri during the previous 2,500 miles, the men were astonished to see the river they knew so well crashing over a 96-foot precipice in a roaring explosion of foam and spray. Lewis discovered four smaller falls upstream, and the captains mapped an 18-mile portage around the obstruction.

The men carved wooden wheels and mounted them to axles on the huge dugout canoes. Lacking horses, they slaved like oxen to pull tons of cargo and six boats over rough, hilly prairie—even sailing them at times—in four trips. Prickly pear carpeting the path punctured double-thick moccasins and infected the men's battered feet. On the final portage a violent hailstorm caught some of the soldiers out in the open. "They were much bruised, and some nearly killed . . . one knocked down three times and others without hats or anything on their heads bloody," Clark noted in his journal on June 29, 1805.

The expedition members seemed to have nine lives. During the one-month portage layover, several of the men, including Lewis, narrowly escaped grizzly bear attacks. Sacagawea fell deathly ill with pelvic inflammation and recovered only with a treatment of opiates, bark infusions, and water from a mineral spring that Lewis luckily found. During the hailstorm, she, Jean-Baptiste,

Clark, and Charbonneau nearly drowned in a flash flood.

The city of Great Falls boasts the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, one of the finest museums on the entire trail. Its two levels trace the complete expedition, paying special attention to the portage. Once a year the center hosts a festival that includes a living history encampment on the Missouri River. Visitors can see the Corps of Discovery reenactors in their tepees and tents and watch them roast beaver over fires and play fiddles. Demonstrations include celestial navigation, fire making, and animal skinning.

High-school teacher Norman Anderson portrays Lewis at the festival each year. We stood in the quiet festival encampment after closing hours amid reenactors and campfires and talked about Lewis's life—and his bizarre death. On his way to Washington, D.C., in 1809, Lewis died at a Tennessee wayside inn. Some scholars contend it was murder; others believe it was suicide. "I'd rather he was murdered," sighed Anderson. "Noble heroes don't kill themselves. But Lewis was \$4,000 in debt, with a history of depression, and an addiction to opium and alcohol. We'll never really know what happened, but we can guess."

The next morning I continued along the river south of Great Falls and entered the foothills of the Rockies. I took a short boat tour through the towering limestone canyon that Clark dubbed Gates of the Mountains and then pushed on to Three Forks, the confluence of the three rivers that form the Missouri. Here the Corps entered Sacagawea's childhood backyard, for it had been near this spot five years earlier that Hidatsa warriors had ambushed the Shoshones, killing many of them and taking Sacagawea and another young girl prisoner. It was also here,

in 1810, that Drouillard met his end. He had returned to help set up a trading post, but Blackfeet warriors ambushed and killed the veteran hunter, then disemboweled and dismembered him.

Though haunted with dark history, Three Forks provided a highlight of my trip. Here the Missouri officially starts amid a lush green setting of pasture and woodlands. The Jefferson and Madison Rivers form the Missouri, then meet the Gallatin a few hundred yards downstream on the other side of a tall limestone bluff. Lewis diplomatically named the three rivers for the president, secretary of state, and secretary of the treasury, assigning Jefferson's name to the quickest and most westerly route to the Continental Divide.

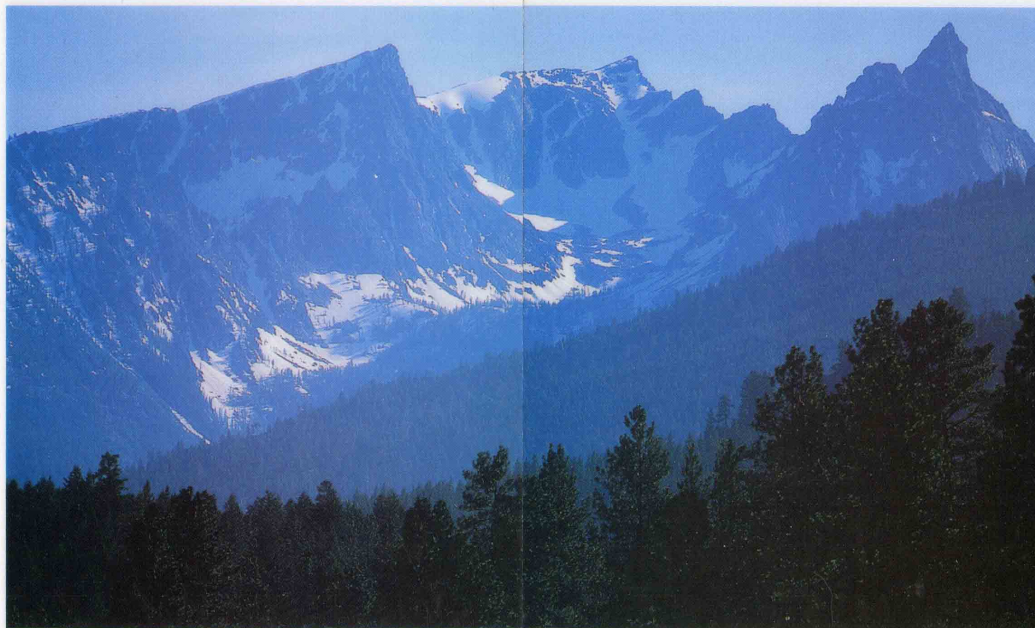
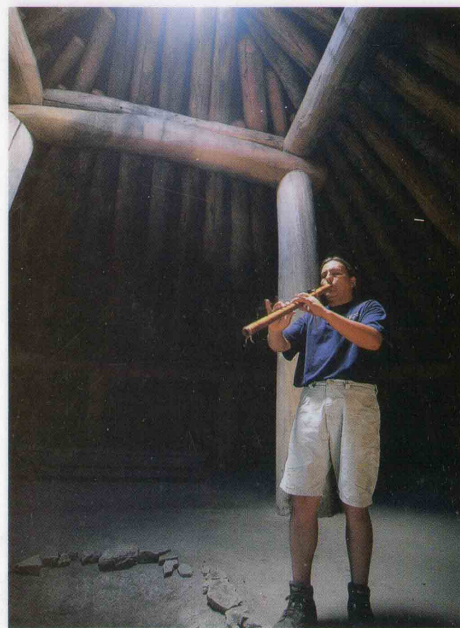


From Three Forks Sacagawea helped guide the Corps through Shoshone country past the confluence of the Beaverhead and Big Hole Rivers, which form the Jefferson, and up the Beaverhead to sagebrush flats below Lemhi Pass. On the other side of the Continental Divide the Corps finally found a Shoshone band, but the Indians were reluctant to trade—until Sacagawea realized the chief was her brother. It was another miraculous stroke of luck.

Nonetheless, one of the most difficult parts of the journey still lay ahead. An elderly Shoshone guide dubbed Old Toby led the explorers north along the Lemhi River, past the headwaters of the treacherous Salmon River, up snowy Lost Trails Pass, and down along the Bitterroot River. Awesome peaks lined both sides of the Bitterroot Valley for miles. The men must have shuddered, knowing they would somehow have to beat their way over them. Old Toby led them to a spot near present Missoula on the Lolo Trail, an ancient Indian route that led to buffalo hunting grounds east of the Rockies. Clark named the camp Travelers Rest.

Driving up Lolo Pass, I could not understand why the Bitterroots had nearly wiped out the expedition. The route was deceptively easy, a long, straight, gentle slope much of the way up. Then I topped Lolo Pass and it all became clear. "Curves Ahead, Next 77

Opposite: Park guide Dakota Goodhouse plays a flute in the main Mandan lodge at On-A-Slant Indian Village in North Dakota. **Left:** At 10,157 feet, Trapper Peak is the tallest mountain in the Bitterroots, the expedition's most formidable obstacle. **Above:** Sheep create a woolly roadblock near Helena, Montana.





Children clamber on the wreckage of a ship at Fort Stevens State Park near Astoria, Oregon. When Lewis and Clark arrived here, they had completed only half of their journey.

miles," read a sign, and I saw steep canyons and jagged peaks extending in every direction. The math was simple. It took me 3,000 miles to go from nearly sea level to the Rockies; now the road plummeted to just 1,000 feet above sea level in less than 100 miles.

The sinuous drive was spectacular as it wound along the endless rapids of the Lochsa River through steep, conifer-lined canyons. Two centuries earlier these canyon walls came straight down into the churning waters. There was no river trail. The Corps hiked craggy, exposed ridges in hail and snow with 40 overloaded horses faltering along brutal slopes. There was no game to hunt and the band was starving. After 12 grueling days the explorers emerged onto a broad plain. Below they could see the Clearwater River snaking off toward the Pacific Ocean. It was the vista Lewis had expected to see hundreds of miles back at Lemhi Pass.

"Kinda surprisin' when you come up that hill and find it's flat up here, ain't it," said Robert Needham, a retiree living in Weippe, Idaho. He had parked behind my Winnebago at the roadside marker for Weippe Prairie, about 20 miles from the main highway and 2,000 feet up from the Clearwater River. I had come here to see where the Corps had emerged from the mountains and met the Nez Perce, a powerful and important tribe. The Nez Perce the explorers encountered fed them at first, then considered killing them for their fine guns. Watkuweis, a tribal elder whom British traders had rescued from Blackfeet captors in her youth, had a fondness for whites. She pled for their lives and prevailed.

"Shoulda been here three weeks ago when camas was in full bloom," Needham told me. "It was like a big blue ocean out here. Indians still come and dig 'em up in fall." I waded through elbow-high white wildflowers to take a picture. "We started a camas festival a few years ago and it's growing like a bad weed," Needham told me. "Too many people. Now with this Lewis and Clark stuff they say we'll get six million people in the next four years. Not too happy about that."

I gazed across the peaceful prairie, empty except for a lone farmhouse framed by distant mountains. Feeling as if I was barely ahead of imminent crowds, I pushed off and started racing for the Pacific, following the Clearwater to its meeting with the Snake amid the arid grasslands of Lewiston, Idaho. From there I drove through the semi-desert wheat country of eastern Wash-

ington before I reached the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers at Pasco. As I traced the Columbia downstream, the dry bluffs of the upper Columbia River Gorge gradually gave way to the lush green of the coastal Pacific Northwest.

Here Lewis and Clark were in overdrive. They met a host of different tribes living along the Columbia, but their sights were set on the Pacific. The coordinates of the Columbia's mouth were already established by ship-borne traders, so Lewis, who had taken celestial readings of longitude and latitude at every campsite since St. Louis, knew how tantalizingly close to the Pacific they were. Now he was closing in on his goal. Careening through cascades that even native tribes said were impossible, the Corps pushed on recklessly. When locals heard the men were going to shoot the Narrows (now inundated by dam waters near The Dalles) they lined up downstream to salvage what booty they could retrieve once the foolhardy white men met their certain doom. But the men came crashing through, safely afloat in their clumsy ponderosa-pine dugouts.

The explorers believed they had seen everything, could do anything. They had survived the worst that nature could throw their way and were rushing headlong to triumph. Nearing the Pacific, however, the Columbia's immense width turned river into ocean, with brutal waves, gales, and fog. Narrow strips of rocky shore hemmed in by steep cliffs made camping nearly impossible. Tides and surf pinned them among boulders as huge logs crashed ashore.

After seven desperate days the foul weather temporarily subsided. Lewis and Clark led two separate groups by foot to the ocean, past a point that had received the name Cape Disappointment 17 years earlier when a fur trader abandoned his search for the Columbia there. He never suspected he was anchored right at the river's great, yawning mouth. Convinced they would have to winter elsewhere, the captains polled the Corps, slave and Indian included. The group agreed to build a shelter, Fort Clatsop, on the south side of the Columbia further upstream, a spot with plentiful game and sheltered from the full brunt of the ocean.

Two hundred years later, it was my turn to dabble my toes in the icy Pacific. I reached Fort Stevens State Park near Astoria, Oregon, at night and beelined for shore the next morning. Slowly, ceremoniously, I walked directly across the long sandy beach into the surf.

I thought of how Lewis, Clark, and their Corps had overcome incredible challenges, taken ridiculous chances, and survived narrow scrapes to get here. I tried to imagine what they had felt when they finally reached the Pacific—knowing they would have to turn around and do it all over again in reverse. They spent a dank winter at Fort Clatsop, punctuated by only 12 rainless days, and were eager to push off at the earliest opportunity. The Corps finally started east on March 23, 1806. Just six months later the men were back in St. Louis, having experienced one of the greatest explorations in American history.

As for me, I took the interstate. ☺

RANDALL HYMAN has blazed his own trails worldwide for more than 20 years as he's covered historical and natural history topics for several major magazines.