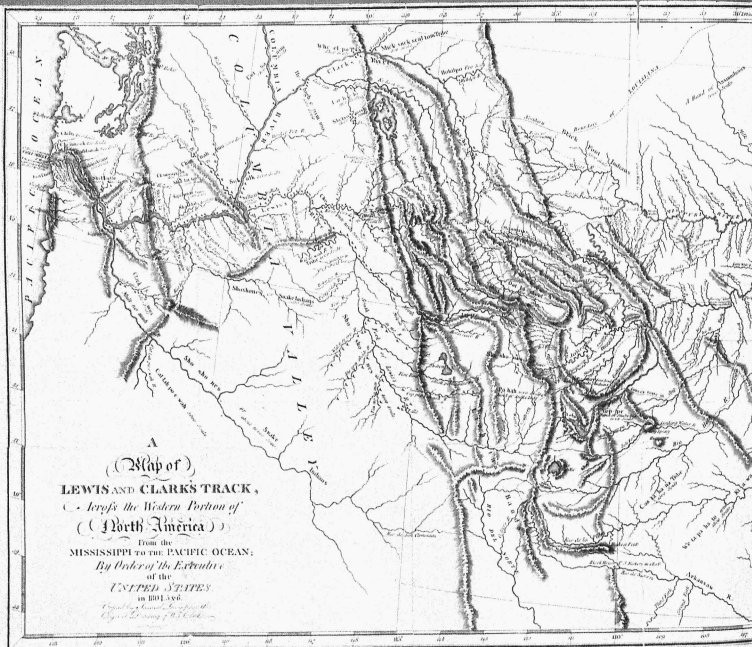


Rediscovering the Corps of Discovery

STORY BY JOHN BEAHLER



*William Clark, far left,
and Meriwether
Lewis, left,
first charted
the great,
unknown
expanse
of the
American
West from
1804 to
1806.*



G. B. S. 1806. (By Vault 0007)

Division of Maps
Library of Congress

THE EXPEDITION HAS BEEN CALLED America's greatest adventure story, and a fair amount of that drama unfolded right here in Missouri almost 200 years ago.

Mizzou wouldn't be in existence for another 35 years when Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery muscled up the Missouri River in 1804, but the band of explorers passed just a few miles away. In fact, they stopped at a natural rock formation called Split Rock in southern Boone County, at the mouth of a stream that's now called Perche Creek.

If expedition members had traveled far enough up the Perche, they would have hit a smaller stream known as Hinkson Creek. As generations of MU students know, "the Hink" would have taken those explorers to what today is the south edge of campus.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark couldn't possibly have imagined back then that this unsettled stretch of forest and prairie, miles from the river, would become the site of the first public institution of higher learning in the vast Louisiana Territory that President Thomas Jefferson sent them to explore.

But there is a connection. The notion of public higher education as a way to promote reason and learning was one of Jefferson's ideals for the growing republic. The University campus, with its Francis Quadrangle, is patterned after a model that Jefferson established at the University of Virginia.

MU's link to Jefferson's vision is alive and well. As the nation gears up to commemorate Lewis and Clark's epic adventure beginning in 2003, faculty, students and staff for several years have been planning a series of events highlighting MU's connection to the development of the Louisiana Territory.

Susan Flader, professor of history, is helping coordinate the campuswide observation of the Lewis and Clark bicenten-



SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D.C./ART RESOURCE, N.Y.

Native American tribes helped the explorers with food and directions. Nearly three decades later, frontier artist George Catlin painted Black Rock, a Two Kettle Chief.

nial. Flader, a scholar of environmental history and the history of the American West, says she's amazed at the range of projects that MU faculty, staff, students and alumni are working on.

Here's just a partial list: Education experts are developing a curriculum that will tell the Lewis and Clark story in schools around the state. A statue of Thomas Jefferson has been set into a small garden on the edge of Francis Quadrangle, not far from his original grave marker.

A music professor and her students are producing and staging an original musical

about the expedition, and they plan to tour the production around the state. The troupe will even perform at the national kickoff of the bicentennial in January 2003 at Monticello, Jefferson's country home near Charlottesville, Va.

MU geographers are busy reconstructing the course of the Missouri River in Lewis and Clark's time by using the original land surveys through the state from 1815 to 1820. Scientists at MU continue to work with government agencies to study the ecology of the Big Muddy and explore how wildlife habitat can be

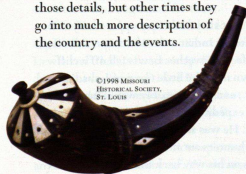
brought closer to its natural state as it existed when the expedition passed by.

And scores of MU alumni are pitching in to help as state agencies and private groups plan for a wave of tourists following in the expedition's footsteps.

Undaunted Courage, the best seller by Stephen Ambrose, along with a public television documentary by Ken Burns, have fanned the interest of people all over the world. According to even the most conservative estimates, millions of people are expected to take part in bicentennial events at some point along the 4,000-mile-long Lewis and Clark Trail.

What is it that ignites America's fascination with this band of explorers? "I think because the expedition was so successfully prosecuted," Flader says. "They did what they said they were going to do — they got all the way to the Pacific and back.

"I also think it's because they kept journals; they wrote about what they found. Thomas Jefferson wanted them to put the information down in detail. Sometimes the journal entries are just those details, but other times they go into much more description of the country and the events.



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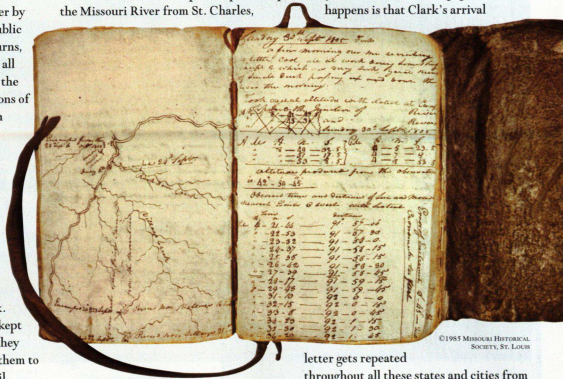
The expedition was well-supplied for its day, but by modern standards their equipment might be considered crude. The inlaid powder horn, above, owned by William Clark, was the best technology of its time. Clark sketched detailed maps and recorded the expedition's daily route in his elk skin-bound field journal. The entry at right is for Sept. 30, 1805.

That was enormously fascinating to Americans from the time that the earliest published versions appeared."

The expedition clearly had an impact on a nation that was less than three decades old when the explorers pushed up the Missouri River from St. Charles,

and what they saw. Clark knew his brother would give this letter to the local paper in Frankfort, Ky."

In those early days of American journalism, newspapers happily lifted articles they came across in other papers. "What happens is that Clark's arrival



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Mo. They brought back word of the richness of the American West. "It opened people's eyes to the possibilities of the country and stimulated the fur trade that began out of St. Louis and continued to be headquartered there," Flader says.

Research by journalism Professor Betty Winfield gives another dimension to the Lewis and Clark saga — how the American press depicted the expedition's return. Her earlier work looked at how the press molds public perception, including ways of casting individuals as heroes.

"Lewis and Clark understood the press, and they did their own press release as they were getting close to St. Louis," Winfield says. "Clark wrote a letter to his brother in Kentucky with Lewis' help, and they gave a summation of the trip and talked about their suc-

cess throughout all these states and cities from Pittsburgh, up the coast of New England, all the way down into Georgia," Winfield says. "They framed the story of their success to begin with."

Not all the newspapers of the day agreed with that version of events. Much of the press then was controlled by the Federalist Party, which adamantly opposed Thomas Jefferson and, by extension, the exploring party he had sent West. "The partisan press had to recognize that the expedition had returned — this would be like the man who came back from the moon," Winfield says. Still, the Federalist newspapers gleefully pointed out that the expedition had failed in its goal to find a water route to the Pacific.

When Lewis got back to Washington, D.C., his success was trumpeted at a fancy banquet with round after round of



JOHNSON ART MUSEUM, OMAHA, NEB., GIFT OF ENRON ART FOUNDATION

The explorers were stunned by huge herds of bison, elk and deer. Lewis reported hearing the roaring of rutting bulls from miles away. In his painting Buffalo and Elk on the Upper Missouri, Karl Bodmer captured a scene that would have been familiar to expedition members.

toasts in his honor. One of the most flowery paens to their heroism was reprinted in national publications. The Federalist press jumped on it with both feet, ridiculing the effusive praise in an unsigned satire, now believed to be written by John Quincy Adams.

Others have been less cynical. Anthropologist Ray Wood cites distinguished historian Donald Jackson, who observed that

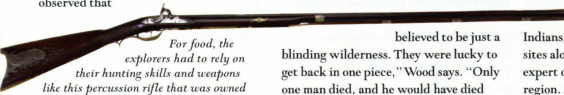
“even somber, dedicated historians seem to become starry-eyed when the mention of Lewis and Clark comes up. It’s something that appeals to historians and the public alike,” Wood says. “I really can’t argue with that. Academics usually don’t like hyperbole, but that seems to fit Lewis and Clark.

“It’s an epic story about two men leading an expedition into what was popularly

“But they had every opportunity to be killed by Indians, die of disease, fall off cliffs. Meriwether Lewis fell off a cliff down near the little town of Labadie, Mo., and that probably would have ended the expedition if he hadn’t caught himself. He was also shot in the butt by one of his hunters out in Montana. Of course he was on his way back then, so it wouldn’t have affected the expedition as much.”

Wood has spent most of his career studying the Plains

Indians, the fur trade and archaeological sites along the Missouri River, and is an expert on the earliest maps from the region. After the expedition returned, William Clark prepared a “magnificent, tour de force of a map of the American



For food, the explorers had to rely on their hunting skills and weapons like this percussion rifle that was owned by William Clark.

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believed to be just a blinding wilderness. They were lucky to get back in one piece,” Wood says. “Only one man died, and he would have died under the care of the finest doctor in the world at that time.

West" that was first published in 1814, Wood says.

"When they went out there that map was blank for all practical purposes. About 10 years after the expedition it was filled in. It's almost like the dark side of the moon before and after our satellite imagery of it."

This past summer, Wood ran an archaeology field camp at the site of a fur trading post on the Missouri River in North Dakota, just a few miles from the Corps of Discovery's first winter camp. Wood questions whether the expedition had much immediate impact on the Indian tribes they encountered. "They were charged with visiting each tribe and telling them that their great white father was now in Washington, D.C., and then they went away. They gave gifts and medals, but nothing of any monumental significance," he says.

"Initially, I don't think the impact lasted more than a day or so after their departure. The long-range consequences of the expedition are quite another matter. Native Americans today probably aren't as intrigued by the expedition as the rest of us because it was the harbinger of cultural disintegration for them."

Wood recently completed a book about expeditions up the Missouri River before Lewis and Clark's famous trip. His book, due out next year and titled *Prologue to Lewis and Clark*, makes the point that the lower Missouri already was well-known to early travelers.

"Lewis and Clark weren't exploring anything for their first year," Wood says. "They were traveling a well-established trail where every major stream was already named; people knew the tribes who lived there. It was a well-mapped route from St. Louis all the way to the Mandan Indians."

That's true enough, says Jim Denny, but perhaps it misses an important point. Denny, AB '65, MA '66, is a historian

with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) parks division. "They did have the latest maps and the latest intelligence, but if that means that the expedition doesn't take on meaning until they get off into the unknown, I take great issue with that," Denny says. "Certainly, Lewis and Clark themselves were just incredibly fascinated with this stretch of the river.

"Clark was keeping his journal entries every day. He recorded every stream that they saw. They stopped frequently to do astronomical readings and fix the exact locations of latitude and longitude. They were hard at work the whole time they were through Missouri, observing this state, making comments on what they saw."

Clark's journal is a concise, diligent, daily record of the journey through Missouri, but as a historian, Denny would have liked the hard-working explorer to have loosened up a bit in his writing.

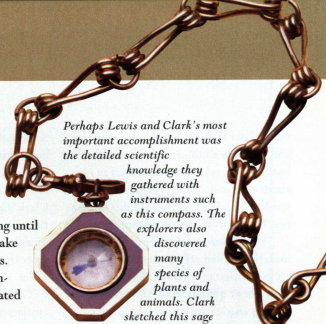
"There's not much personality in it," he says. "You sure wish there'd been a little more gossip, a little more description of day-to-day activities and the interactions of expedition members. There are thousands of questions that we have that Clark doesn't answer."

Their trek upstream along the Missouri River is important for another reason, Denny says. It was the expedition's shakedown cruise. A little more than a week into their journey, the explorers hit an especially rough spot.

Crew members were pulling the keelboat through

Perhaps Lewis and Clark's most important accomplishment was the detailed scientific

knowledge they gathered with instruments such as this compass. The explorers also discovered many species of plants and animals. Clark sketched this sage grouse, below.



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a swift, dangerous stretch of river near present-day Washington, Mo. The towrope broke and the boat spun out of control, twirling around and around in the muddy water before the boatmen got it under control.

"Clark in his journal says at the end of that experience that 'nothing saved the keelboat but ...' and just lets the sentence trail off," Denny says. "Then just two

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weeks later they get in a similar situation, and this time all the men are out of the boat in a second and get it tied off in another second. Clark exclaimed that he wouldn't trade this group of folks for the best boatmen on the Mississippi River.

"That's how quickly they became the team that pulled off just about the greatest expedition in world exploration. That's how quickly it all happened, and it all happened right here in Missouri."

As a historian, Flader is happy to see events like the Lewis and Clark bicentennial help rekindle America's interest in its own history. "I think they're valuable from that perspective, and I also think they stimulate us to look at what we have in the way of historic sites and resources and to do something with them," she says.

"I think there's a lot more attention being given to the Missouri River as a result of the bicentennial that might actually end up in some fairly significant restoration of wildlife habitat, riverine vegetation and ecosystem quality."

Positive things are happening.

Scientists at MU are making key contributions in a multistate effort to better understand the Missouri River's natural ecology. The Big Muddy was Lewis and Clark's highway to the West, but expedition members probably wouldn't recognize the river today. "It's a very different river from when they saw it," says David Galat, a fisheries scientist at Mizzou.

Galat and researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey reconstructed the historical hydrology of the Missouri and are documenting what impact these changes have had on fish and wildlife. The river was once what scientists call a "braided stream." Instead of a single, fast channel like today, many channels wound through sandbars and islands. Those channels shifted constantly as the water chewed its way through the riverbanks.

There were quiet backwaters in the river, too — sloughs, channel cutoffs, oxbow lakes and wetlands. When they camped near some of those oxbow lakes on the Missouri, the journals reported that expedition members feasted on the

catfish they caught.

"Big Muddy" was an apt name for the river. Clark described the muddy Missouri this way: "The water we Drink, or the Common water of the missourie at this time, contains half a ... Wine Glass of ooze or mud to every pint."

The Missouri certainly isn't a clear mountain stream today, but Galat says there has been a 70 percent reduction in the river water's suspended sediments at Hermann, Mo., since the huge dams were built upstream. Other things have changed, too. "The oxbow lakes and wetlands associated with the historical river are largely gone," Galat says. "They're gone because of three things: channelization, building levees on the flood plain and subsequent land development."

That rich river bottom cropland has been an economic bonanza for Missouri agriculture, but not without some trade-offs. Nearly 40 species of animals that were common when Lewis and Clark passed this way are imperiled today: shorebirds such as piping plovers and least terns, and native fish species like the pallid sturgeon.

The idea of returning the Missouri River to a pristine state that Lewis and Clark saw might not be practical. Still, Galat would love to have been along on the expedition. "No kidding. Most biologists wish at some point in their life to be able to see a natural system that isn't highly degraded," he says. "There are not too many of those left in the world."

Oddly enough, it was the devastating floods of the mid-1990s that helped trigger this renewed interest in the river. Missouri farmers have sold tens of thousands of acres of the most flood-prone land to public agencies for wildlife and

During the pioneer era, the Missouri River was an east-west highway. George Catlin depicted the wild upper stretches of the Missouri in 1832 for his work River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles Above St. Louis.



SOUTHONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D.C./ART RESOURCE, N.Y.

conservation areas along the river. MU researchers and students helped the Missouri Department of Conservation conduct a massive project — called the Missouri River Post Flood Evaluation — that looked at some of the most sensitive issues in river ecology.

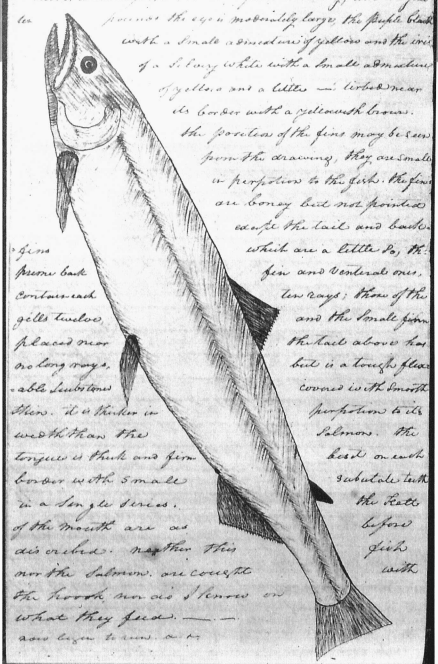
"We learned a phenomenal amount. It was probably one of the most comprehensive analyses of flooding," Galat says. "What we've learned has now gone into assisting these various agencies in answering questions like, what are the best lands to buy? How do we manage them for a diversity of natural resources?"

"Plus, there are a lot of other values, like agriculture, that are very important in the flood plain. The real issue is, how much land do we need to get back? Where is it? How often do we need to let the river reconnect with its flood plain in these areas? What kind of flows and connections do we need to accomplish that?"

Galat points out that most big river systems around the world have all been highways of human exploration and development. "Consequently, they've all had some serious degradation from a natural resource point of view," he says. "The interesting thing about the Missouri and other rivers is that the pieces are still there. They're just not as abundant or put together in the same way that they were when Lewis and Clark were here.

"But we're also seeing that if you give them a little room to move in, if you give them a little bit of water at the right time, that you can pretty much have the best of both worlds. You can capitalize on the economic benefits that rivers provide society, but at the same time you can enhance some of those natural values which more of society is starting to appreciate."

For the past few years Denny has been tracing the expedition's route along the Missouri River as the natural resources department and other state agencies prepare for a throng of tourists



In the Pacific Northwest, Clark found this coho salmon, which he sketched in March 1806.

during the bicentennial.

The Show-Me State will have plenty to share. After all, the Katy Trail State Park runs along the north bank of the Missouri River from St. Charles to Boonville. Visitors can take the hiking-and-biking trail at pretty much the same pace that the expedition traveled upriver.

DNR's parks division is in the process of placing interpretive signs along the Missouri. "We want to tell almost on a day-by-day basis the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition in Missouri," Denny says. "We want to tell that story to some-

body actually standing by the river, looking at a sign that explains what went on when the expedition went by right on that very spot.

"We also want to get people out into Missouri's beautiful countryside, driving our back roads and getting to one of our great rivers as often as possible." *

All of the original Lewis and Clark pieces pictured are courtesy of Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, curators of the upcoming exhibition, *Lewis & Clark: One Land - Many Visions: The National Bicentennial Exhibition*.