



[Back to Newsletter](#)

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## Explore the Lewis and Clark Trail Through Montana

*Epic adventure. Scientific discovery. Preparing the United States to become a transcontinental nation.*

*Those phrases describe the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which journeyed from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1804-1806.*

*The bicentennial celebration of the expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began this year and will continue through 2006.*

*While there's plenty of time to retrace the trail blazed by the Corps of Discovery, why not start now? Whenever they go, history-minded travelers will find ample historical attractions plus nearby KOA Campgrounds.*

*To guide the way, articles during the next few months will focus on the Lewis and Clark trail.*

by Dennis Gaub, for KOA Kompass

Montana was decades away from existence in 1805 when the Lewis and Clark Expedition made the first of its two crossings of the region.

Yet, members of the Corps of Discovery undoubtedly appreciated the grandeur of what was to become the Treasure State. They surely reveled in the same breathtaking views that draw visitors two centuries later: "Shining Mountains," sparkling lakes, rivers that start with a trickle on high peaks and end up being major contributors to North America's greatest waterways and blue skies spanning plains and peaks.

The expedition logged more distance traveling across Montana than anywhere else on the journey from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back: about 2,000 miles of the 8,000 total miles. That means travelers retracing the Lewis and Clark trail will find a wealth of related sites and activities in Montana.

Two "must-see" destinations are Pompeys Pillar National Historic Landmark and Great Falls. The National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial has selected both sites for [national heritage signature events](#) during the 2003-2006 bicentennial celebration of the expedition.

Pompeys Pillar, located 28 miles east of Billings, is a sandstone column named by William Clark for Sacagawea's son, nicknamed "Pomp." Clark inscribed his name and the date in the rock on July 25, 1805 – the only remaining physical evidence of the expedition appearing on the trail as it did 200 years ago.

Clark Day, an annual event at Pompeys Pillar, gives visitors a chance to visit historical interpretive stations, eat buffalo burgers and listen to bluegrass music in a park along the Yellowstone River (the longest free flowing stream in the lower United States) This year's event is scheduled on July 26-27.

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Lewis, describing his first sight of the Great Falls of the Missouri River, wrote in the expedition journal: "I hurried down the hill ... to gaze on this sublimely grand spectacle." He could have been excused for modifying that tribute later, after the expedition labored almost a month on an difficult 18-mile portage around the falls.



**Seeing Beaverhead Rock, in southwestern Montana, told Sacajawea she was home -- back in the land of her tribe, the Shoshoni. (Photo by Dennis Gaub)**

Today, visitors can relive the trip at the [Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center](#), located in Great Falls along the Missouri River. Programs, lectures and exhibits cover every aspect of the expedition: the corps' interaction with the Plains Indians, new wildlife species, medical practices and a show-and-tell program about a valued expedition member, Lewis' Newfoundland dog Seaman.

Visitors will also want to put the 15th annual Lewis and Clark Festival on their calendar. A [wide range of activities](#) takes place during the Wednesday-Sunday event, scheduled June 25-29, 2003 at the interpretive center and other Great Falls locations.

Montana visitors in 2003-2005 will have a chance to see "Documenting the Corps of discovery" a [traveling exhibit by the Montana Historical Society](#). On display are primary documents, interpretive resources, artifacts and sculpture and paintings by artists such as Robert M. Sriver, Robert Morgan and Shorty Shope.

Noteworthy among Western Montana sites linked to Lewis and Clark are:

- Beaverhead Rock State Monument, along State Route 41 north of Dillon, a landmark recognized by Sacajawea, who told the expedition captains that her tribe, the Shoshones, would be found nearby. The corps later traded with the Shoshones for horses, without which the expedition would not have been able to cross the Continental Divide into the Columbia Basin.
- Lehmi Pass, where the expedition crossed the Continental Divide and left the land of the Louisiana Purchase.
- Travelers' Rest State Park, a centuries-old Native American campsite that the expedition used in 1805 and 1806. Located south of Lolo and west of Highway 93, the [park](#) was the site of an archaeological dig in the summer of 2002 that uncovered the Corps' latrine and central campfire. Those finds position the park as one of the few sites along the trail with physical confirmation of the Corps' visit.

Montana visitors attracted by the expedition will hardly run out of things to do over the next four years – the state may have more Lewis and Clark-related events than anywhere else along the route. In 2003 alone, about 40 [Lewis and Clark events](#) are scheduled in Montana cities and towns.

Join us next month when we conclude our series with an overview of the expedition's route through Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

#### [KOA locations in Montana](#)

Order your own KOA Explorer's kit, which contains a one-hour VHS video, "Travelin' On. The Lewis & Clark Trail," commemorating the most famous camping trip in history. [Click here](#) to order or learn what else is included in the kit.

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