FHR-8-300 (11-78)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic GREAT FALLS PORTAGE NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

and/or common

2. Location

street & number ____ not for publication

city, town Great Falls ____ vicinity of congressional district Second

state Montana code 30 county Cascade code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
X district	____ public	xx occupied	xx agriculture	____ museum
____ building(s)	____ private	xx unoccupied	____ commercial	xx park
____ structure	xx both	____ work in progress	____ educational	xx private residence
____ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	____ entertainment	____ religious
____ object	____ in process	xx yes: restricted	____ government	____ scientific
	____ being considered	____ yes: unrestricted	____ industrial	____ transportation
		____ no	____ military	xx other: cemetery

4. Owner of Property

name Office of the Mayor/ State Department of Fish and Game/multiple private and public ownership

street & number

city, town ____ vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cascade County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Great Falls, state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title NONE has this property been determined elegible? ____ yes ____ no

date ____ federal ____ state ____ county ____ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	XX original site
XX good	___ ruins	XX altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Lewis and Clark were probably the first white men to view the Great Falls of the Missouri, the fourteen-mile stretch of falls and rapids where the river drops 520 feet over five great rock shelves and the river channel rushes between 200 foot high canyon-like walls. The natural spectacle of the falls has been ruined--radically altered by modern settlement. Giant hydroelectric operations now dam the river and expose the massive rock cliffs that were once unseen behind torrents of white water.

Today the magnificent Great Falls of the Missouri have been harnessed for hydrdoelectric power, only a small volume of water falls over the great rockshelves which are largely exposed, and a city has grown up around the falls.

Snow-topped mountains rim this wide upland plain in all directions except north. To the east are the Highwood Mountains, to the southeast the Little Belt Mountains, to the south the Big Belts, and in the west and southwest the distant peaks of the Sawtooth Range. Geographically, the Great Falls signal the beginning of the Rocky Mountains on the Lewis and Clark route westward.

The integrity of the historic 18-mile stretch varies from natural, undisturbed, remote areas, to those completely altered by modern development. The Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark consists of two discontiguous sections of the trail which remain largely as Lewis and Clark would have known them. These areas encompass the lower campsite, where the boats were taken out of the water and preparations for the overland trek begun, and the upper campsite, where the expedition assembled Lewis' experimental boat and resumed its exploration of the Missouri River.

No evidence of the portage route is discernible today, but documentary and cartographic research, combined with study of the local terrain by several groups, has resulted in the delineation of the approximate route as seen on the map entitled "The Great Falls Portage of Lewis and Clark 1805-1806", and the four 1965 USGS 7.5' series maps enclosed. The research and field assessment of Robert Bergantino, Butte, Montana, is used in the establishment of Clark's survey route and the expedition's portage route. By studying contemporary maps and the expedition journals, and the terrain of the route, the two routes have been charted with a relatively high degree of confidence.

Following the instructions of President Jefferson, Clark scouted and plotted the "survey route" -- a contribution to Clark's map of the unexplored Northwest, and the ideal route if terrain and equipment had not been a factor. It was not a route necessarily to be followed, since the coulees dictated a less direct but more practical route over higher ground -- the "canoe route". (Please refer to the Portage map, as well as the two routes marked on the USGS maps). The expedition's lower and upper campsites and other historic features are marked.

The Lower Portage Camp (marked with a circle on USGS Morony Dam Quadrangle) was located approximately one mile downstream (north) from the mouth of Portage (now Belt) Creek, on the east bank of the Missouri River. About one and one-quarter miles below Morony Dam, and free of major intrusions, the vista from Belt Creek downriver is still one of undisturbed natural riverway. The undammed river rushes over rapids and through a channel lined with bluffs and canyons, surrounded by treeless grazing land, covered with prickly pear cactus and high grass.

The area is used only for grazing and the sole man-made features visible from the cliffs above Belt Creek are a group of small ranch structures on the west side of the river and a few fence lines to restrain grazing animals. The lower portage campsite is extremely remote and accessible only by four wheel drive vehicle and by foot.

From the lower portage campsite, the party towed the canoes up the Missouri River,then up the present Belt Creek which is lined with steep gorge-like cliffs. On the east bank, near the mouth of Belt Creek, is a small grove of cottonwood trees, probably used by Lewis and Clark to construct their wagons for the portage.

The Sulphur Spring, whose water is credited with saving the life of the critically-ill Sacagawea, is located opposite the mouth of Belt Creek, about three hundred yards from the west bank of the Missouri River, on a sloping grass shelf (labeled on the USGS map). The spring itself is about thirty feet in diameter, and the stream which flows from it drops over a high rock shelf, in a waterfall, into the Missouri River. Sulphur Spring is remotely located in the well-preserved east section of the route, and is privately owned. Access to it is very difficult, but its waterfall and stream can be seen easily from the opposite side of the river. Sulphur Spring is included inside the boundary drawn around the lower portage route area.

The Montana Power Company owns the land on both sides of Portage Creek for about 1,000 feet upstream from its mouth. The rest is privately owned ranch land, although there is no developed activity other than livestock grazing in the immediate vicinity.

About one mile up Portage (Belt) Creek, the expedition hand-carried the canoes up the treacherously steep cliffs. After ascending these steep walls, the men traced the most feasible southwesterly route across several creeks and ravines. As seen on the USGS maps, the canoe route led across the natural crossing points over several small drainages, hilly terrain, and Willow (now Box Elder) Creek.

The approximately eight-mile stretch from Portage (Belt) Creek to Clark's fourth survey point at the "head of a drane which falls into the Missouri at the 19 feet or crooked fall" (now the eastern limits of Malstrom Air Force Base) is privately owned and used almost exclusively for wheat farming, with only a few scattered farm structures. Near the north end of the portage, a county highway runs north and south along a township section line and then northeasterly to the farms in the Belt Creek area, crossing the canoe route several times. Just west of the point where the portage route crosses Willow (Box Elder) Creek and the former trackbed of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad line, the route turns more westerly.

The next 4.8-mile section of the expedition's survey and canoe portage route is not included in the National Historic Landmark designation due to its loss of historic integrity. The two routes cross the outer ends of the runways at Malstrom Air Force Base, south of the major complex of buildings, though marked by lights, towers, and small airport utility buildings. Southwest of the air base, the route crosses two forks of the major four-lane highway, Route 87/89, then proceeds southwesterly through an area of recent housing and commercial development, which bears no resemblance to the open land seen by members of the expedition in 1805.

The second of the two discontiguous designated areas begins on the east side of Mount Olivet Cemetery and continues approximately two and one-half miles over gently sloping land to the White Bear Island upper portage campsite. While not of the historically significant period, and therefore a non-contributing element, the Mount Olivet Cemetery, elevation 3,500 feet, is one of the highest points of land on the expedition's portage route. The cemetery is located in a grove of trees which protects the natural character of the vista,

and from its own high vantage point, the last section of the portage trail can be seen largely as Lewis and Clark observed it. The final section of the trail leading to the Missouri River is open farmland, with some farm structures and a few roads crossing the land. A non-contributing element located on the canoe portage route is a small tract of new housing which, nevertheless, is minimized by the vastness of the terrain.

The Upper Portage Campsite, located on the east bank of the Missouri River, south of the mouth of the Sun River, has changed considerably since the time of the expedition. The Missouri River has experienced a build-up of silt in this area, and the river's ox-bow is becoming less pronounced. Both factors have contributed to the obliteration of the three distinct White Bear Islands noted by Lewis and Clark.

The expedition camped in an area on the east riverbank opposite a group of three islands they named for the unusually large number of grizzly bears there. The westernmost island has become a part of the west riverbank, and that low lying area is still covered with heavy growth of cottonwood, willow, and brush.

The middle island has become more prominent, and has lost its historic integrity by the intrusion of modern structures and the paved, two-lane River Drive (Route 226) which runs the length of the island. The easternmost island has all but joined the east riverbank.

The canoe portage route followed the original east bank of the Missouri River to the upper portage campsite. The site of the camp now lies farther from the riverfront than it did originally, due to the changing watercourse and siltation. The expedition camped just to the to the east of what is now Route 226, below the southern tip of the middle island on the east riverbank. The presumed campsite remains open land, privately owned. Although some development is taking place around the area where the expedition camped, cached supplies, and resumed their river trek, the campsite area itself is undeveloped.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	___ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	xx engineering	___ music	___ theater
xx 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates June 13, 1805– ~~July 13, 1805~~ **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The month of labor and adventures experienced by the Lewis and Clark expedition in completing their portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri River presented a challenge to the explorers exceeded only by the obstacles encountered in their crossing of the Bitterroot Mountains. During the portage, which lasted thirty-one days, all the equipment and supplies, including canoes, had to be carried across an overland route of approximately 18 miles either by hand or in makeshift wagons around the 21-mile unnavigable stretch of falls and rapids. The time spent in covering this relatively short distance was critical, since the expedition needed sufficient time to cross the Rocky Mountains to the west before the onset of winter.

HISTORY

On June 13, while attempting to ascertain whether they were following the true course of the Missouri River, Meriwether Lewis and a small advance party travelling overland were the first known white men to see the Great Falls of the Missouri River. The Minitari (Hidatsa) Indians had described these falls to the expedition during its winter stay at Fort Mandan. From several miles away Lewis first heard the roar of the huge falls and that day and the next he explored the falls and rapids all the way to the Medicine (now the Sun) River.

Lewis recorded his impression of the falls:

> I hurried down the hill which was about 200 feet high and difficult of access, to gaze on this sublimely grand spectacle. I took my position on the top of some rocks about 20 feet high opposite the center of the falls . . . from the reflection of the sun on the sprey or mist which arrises from these falls there is a beautiful rainbow produced which adds not a little to the beauty of this majestically grand scenery.
> (Lewis, 13 June 1805)

From the Indians' description of the Great Falls, Lewis and Clark anticipated a short detour by land around a single set of falls. Rather, the necessity of a longer portage became apparent as Lewis discovered further falls and rapids upriver. On June 16, Lewis sent a messenger back to Clark and the main party camped on the west bank of the Missouri below the future lower portage camp,

reporting discovery of the falls and arranging to meet and camp at the lower end where the portage would begin. The campsite was especially good because of the driftwood that collected there, providing them with fuel in those treeless plains. On the 14th, while exploring the area, Lewis recorded having several dangerous encounters involving a grizzly bear, a mountain cat or wolverene, and three buffalo bulls.

Clark and the main party arrived and set up camp at the lower end of the falls on June 16, at what was to be known as the lower portage camp, and rejoined Lewis and his group that same day. At the camp, Sacagawea, who had been seriously ill for more than a week from some unknown malady, was given water from the Sulphur Spring located opposite Portage Creek (Belt Creek). The water apparently cured her sickness, which had been unaffected by Clark's various treatments.

June 16, the canoes were unloaded and moved over rapids and rocks up the Missouri and then about one and one-quarter mile up Belt Creek to the place where they could best be hand-carried up the high bluffs to the plain above. June 17, Clark went ahead to plot and map the survey route. Lewis directed preparations for the portage.

The large white pirogue was unloaded and hidden with some supplies in a willow grove, to be reclaimed on the return trip. To replace the pirogue, the group prepared for assembly Lewis' favorite project, the "Experiment", an iron-framed boat manufactured at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, and brought all the way from Pittsburgh for use on the upper Missouri River. To transport the canoes and baggage, two simple wagons were constructed, using 22-inch-diameter wooden discs crosscut from a large cottonwood tree for the wheels, the mast of the white pirogue for axles, and improvised parts made with what little timber was available.

June 17 to June 23, Clark and five men mapped out and marked with stakes a survey route lying on the south side of the 21-mile stretch of river. They also established the upper portage camp. The supplies were moved to the top of the hill above the canoes on June 21. The traverse of the the entire remaining portage route took place on June 22. Equipment was hand-carried about three miles from the lower camp to the top of the high plain. The heavy canoes, built of cottonwood trees, were also carried about three-quarters of a mile to the top of the high plains, uphill from the bank of Portage (Belt) Creek. Some equipment was hand-carried the entire route.

The crude wagons required constant repair as the men dragged them across the rough terrain,around ravines and hills and across creeks. The summer heat beat down mercilessly, the prickly pear cactus cut the men's feet through their moccasins, and progress was very slow as the group verged on collapse from exhaustion. Lewis wrote:

> They are obliged to halt and rest frequently for a few minutes, at every halt these poor fellows tumble down and are so much fortiegued that many of them are asleep in an instant; in short their fatiegues are incredible; some are limping from the soreness of their feet, others faint and unable to stand for a few minutes, with heat and fatiegue, yet no one complains, all go with cheerfullness.
> (Lewis, 23 June 1805)

June 29, after an extremely hot day, a violent storm struck with torrents of rain and huge hail stones which actually knocked down and injured several men. Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea and her baby were caught by the deluge in a gully and nearly drowned. The expedition was constantly alert for the exceptional number of grizzly bears and rattlesnakes, and was also plagued by swarms of mosquitoes. Game of all kinds was plentiful, and the men stocked up on food and leather clothing. On June 30, Clark estimated he saw 10,000 buffalo on the plain around him.

At the upper portage camp, the 36-foot long iron frame of the "experiment" was assembled and covered with skins. No successful method to caulk the seams was discovered, however, and the boat was abandoned on July 9. Consequently, five more days were spent building two dug-out canoes out of huge cottonwood trees by a ten-man party under Clark, at a site fourteen miles upstream.

Independence Day was celebrated at the upper portage camp, where all the men and equipment were assembled.

> Our work being at an end this evening, we gave the men a drink of Sperits, it being the last of our stock, and some of them appeared a little sensible of it's effects the fiddle was plyed and they danced very merrily untill 9 in the evening . . . . We had a very comfortable dinner, of bacon, beans, suit dumplings and buffaloe beef &c. in short we had no just cause to covet the sumptuous feasts of our countrymen on this day.
> (Lewis, 4 July 1805)

July 13, Lewis left the upper portage camp to join Clark at the canoe-building site. July 15, the entire company set our upstream in their eight canoes. By this time, the expedition was very eager to locate the Shoshone as guides across the mountains, having spent a month to portage around the Great Falls which were only the beginning of the Rocky Mountains. At this juncture, it was apparent that a trip to the Pacific and back to Fort Mandan or even the Great Falls that season was out of the question. The time left to cross the Rockies to the Columbia River before winter was growing short and there were great unknown but anticipated obstacles ahead.

Ferris, Robert G., editor. Lewis and Clark: Historic Places Associated with their Transcontinental Exploration (1804-06). Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1975.

Thwaites, Reuben G., editor. Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-06. 8 vols. New York, 1905-06.

Wheeler, Olin D. The Trail of Lewis and Clark. 2 vols. New York, 1904.

Bergantino, Robert M. "Lewis and Clark Portage Route Map", Butte, Montana, 1984.

Correspondence: Larry Gill, Great Falls, Montana; R.J. McCaig, Montana Power Company; Mrs. LaVern Kahl, Great Falls Public Library; with Roy E. Appleman, NPS, 1964.

Boundary Review Project survey by Blanche Schroer, NPS, with the assistance of Nels Thorsens and David Conklin, Montana Department of Fish and Game, September, 1975.

On-site survey by Nancy Witherell, NPS, with the assistance of the Portage Route Chapter, Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., June, 1984.

UTM References:

Section A (north):

A) 12/497260/5273350
B) 12/497210/5270800
C) 12/498140/5270800
D) 12/498140/5269580
E) 12/496220/5264900
F) 12/493720/5263300
G) 12/488910/5261280
H) 12/488910/5262675
I) 12/493120/5264280
J) 12/495640/5268110
K) 12/495695/5273340

Section B (south):

L) 12/481080/5258040
M) 12/478130/5255390
N) 12/477695/5255390
O) 12/477665/5255525
P) 12/480560/5259100
Q) 12/481085/5256100

DESCRIPTION:

Starting at a point in the southwest corner of Section 36, T22n,R5E; thence south approximately 1.5 miles to a point in Section 12, T21N, R5E; thence east approximately .5 mile to the east line of Section 12; thence south approximately .8 mile along said section line; thence southwest approximately 3.2 miles to a point on the south line of Section 26, T22N, R5E; thence southwest approximately 1.85 miles to the midpoint on the north line of Section 3, T20N, R5E; thence southwest approximately 3.1 miles to the east curb of a county road in Section 7, T20N, R5E; thence north approximately .9 miles along said road to a point; thence northeast approximately 2.7 miles to a point in Section 33, T21N, R5E; thence northeast approximately 2.9 miles to the midpoint of the south line of Section 14, T21N, R5E; thence north to a point in Section 35, T22N, R5E; thence east to the point of the beginning.

Starting at a point in Section 20, T20N, R4E; thence southwest approximately 2.4 miles to a point on the north curb of a street in Section 25, T20N, 53E; thence west approximately .3 mile to a point; thence northwest to a point; thence northeast approximately 2.6 miles to a point on the midline of Section 17, T20N, R4E; thence east approximately .3 mile to the north-south midline of Section 17; thence south approximately .65 mile along the midline of Sections 17 and 20, T20N,R4E, to the point of the beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundaries of the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark include the terrain necessary to convey the historical feeling and association of the portage route and the intrusions at such a scale are minor. The nomination includes the most important points of the portage route, and, while not contiguous for the entire eighteen-mile length, presents a near-complete picture of the portage route.

Although the south section does include some intrusive elements, most notably several blocks of a residential community, the vista is so broad as to mitigate the impact of this area on the original character of the terrain. The cemetery, contained in a grove of trees, does not visually intrude upon the scene. At White Bear Island Camp (upper campsite), the boundary has been drawn to include the actual campsite, now an open field on a dairy farm, and to exclude the now-altered island from which the expedition hunted and fished. Although there are intrusive elements nearby, these are not included in the boundary drawn around the campsite, still similar to its supposed original appearance.

Recent research of the journals and the topography of the site has resulted in accurately located and labeled routes. The landmark boundaries, drawn in consultation with a historian of the portage route, reflect the degree of confidence in the location of the two trails as well as the present state of alteration of the site.

The period of significance was determined so that the acreage enclosed in the boundary corresponds specifically to the portage itself, and does not include additional scouting or survey trips along both riverbanks.

All built elements are non-contributing.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 7700 acres

Quadrangle name 7.5' series, revised 1975: Morony Dam, Mont.; Northeast Great Falls, Mont.; Southeast Great Falls, Mont.; Southwest Great Falls, Mont.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References (see continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A				B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
Montana	30	Chouteau	015

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project, 1976 (Roy E. Appleman, 1966) revised, Nancy Witherell, Historian, 8/84

organization Historic Sites Survey National Park Service

date National Park Service-Rocky Mountain Region

street & number 1100 L Street, NW

telephone 655 Parfet Street Denver, CO 80225 (303)234-2560

city or town Washington, DC 20240

state

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state ___ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date

[redacted]