

Description of Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail is approximately 3,700 miles long, extending from Wood River, Illinois, to the mouth of the Columbia River, near present day Astoria, Oregon, following the historic outbound and inbound routes of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The trail connects 11 states (Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon) and many tribal lands.

The trail was established by Congress in 1978 as part of the national trails system (NTS) as one of four original national historic trails. Today, visitors can follow the approximate route of the Corps of Discovery (Lewis and Clark Expedition members) by exploring the trail using a variety of transportation methods and interpretive means.



Foundation Document Overview

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail

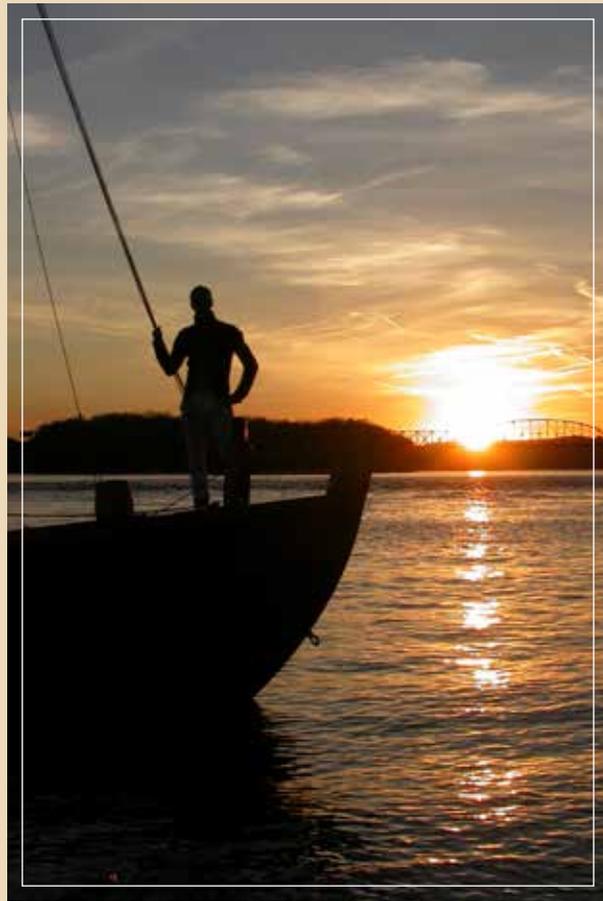
IL, MO, KS, NE, IA, SD, ND, MT, ID, WA, OR



Contact Information

For more information about the *Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Foundation Document*, contact:
Park Headquarters at 402-661-1804 or www.nps.gov/lecl
or write to: Superintendent, *Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail*, 601 Riverfront Drive, Omaha, NE 68102

Purpose



THE PURPOSE OF LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL is to commemorate the 1804 to 1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition through the identification; protection; interpretation; public use and enjoyment; and preservation of historic, cultural, and natural resources associated with the expedition and its place in U.S. and tribal history.

Significance

Significance statements express why the trail's resources and values are important enough to warrant national trail designation. Statements of significance describe why the trail is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are directly linked to the purpose of the trail and are substantiated by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the trail's distinctive nature and help inform management decisions, focusing their efforts on preserving its resources and values.

- The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail commemorates the 1804 to 1806 Corps of Discovery, which explored the Louisiana Territory and beyond. This epic journey contributed to significant scientific knowledge and profound political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes to the lands and the peoples of the North American continent.
- The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail identifies and marks the historic route and sites where the Lewis and Clark journey took place, and provides context for preservation of the route and further understanding of the expedition and its subsequent outcomes.
- The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail links contemporary communities including tribes whose historic connections span generations, to the places associated with the 1804 to 1806 expedition. The trail provides an opportunity to demonstrate the continuum of human history in these same locations and the subsequent relationships that developed among multiple cultures.
- Segments of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail retain characteristics and a sense of place as seen and experienced by the Corps of Discovery. Today, the trail provides visitors with connections to the historic event through recreational, interpretive, and educational opportunities.
- The Corps of Discovery recorded a vast amount of information about landscapes, resources, and the people encountered during the journey. The observations of the corps are used today to connect the public with the past and illuminate the changes that have taken place over time.
- Following the expedition's route from eastern forests through treeless plains across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Northwest, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail crosses a wide diversity of landscapes, biological communities, and climate zones.

Fundamental Resources and Values



American Indian Tribes and Tribal Cultural Resources.

- The trail route passes through numerous tribal homelands where initial contact was made among tribal peoples and the Corps of Discovery. Important to understanding the trail are contemporary tribal cultures, languages, cultural landscapes, place names, sacred sites, and communities. Tribal oral histories and detailed descriptions contained in journals of the Corps of Discovery substantiate, validate, and enrich knowledge and understanding of the tribes encountered on the expedition.

Historic Route and Associated Natural History.

- Designation of a national historic trail relies on the ability to identify (with some degree of certainty) the geographic locations of historic events. For many historic routes, these locations are readily known as a result of long use or adequate records. The exact routes followed by the Lewis and Clark Expedition are known in a general sense, both from original documents and subsequent efforts to relocate their journey.
- Identification of the routes and access to the landscapes and ecosystems through which they passed is significant for the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. President Jefferson's charge included seeking out and identifying lands, wildlife, vegetation, and American Indian people along the route. For this reason, the experiences along the entire route were part of the expedition's purpose, in addition to finding a water route to the Pacific Ocean. The landscape was not simply a backdrop for historic events; it constituted part of the event.
- Features and components that contributed to ecosystems at the time of Lewis and Clark are important to the contemporary experience of the trail. The degree to which the ecosystems remain intact as cohesive habitats, landscapes, and environments contributes to the vicarious experience of modern travelers.
- Cultural landscapes are the locations, features, and components along the route that are associated with the journey of the Corps of Discovery. The integrity of these landscapes and their ability to convey the setting, feeling, and association of the expedition is important to the contemporary experience of the trail.

Interpretive Themes

Partnerships. While they do not fit the concept of fundamental resources as that term is used by the National Park Service, trail partners are stewards who are essential to the preservation, education, public access to, and protection of, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. They are individuals, organizations, agencies, and tribes that manage resources and connect visitors to trail history and experiences through a variety of opportunities.

For the National Park Service to manage and achieve its legislative mandate, national historic trail partners and partner organizations are critical. The length and complexity of the trail and the fact that very little of the trail is under NPS ownership means that many activities must be in collaboration with partners, landowners, and governmental organizations.

Primary Documentation. Documentation of the expedition includes journals, maps, oral histories, plant and animal specimens, artifacts, drawings, diagrams, and letters and correspondence. These items describe the careful planning and execution of the expedition, and document in detail the rivers, plants, animals, geology, geography, scenery, sounds, smells, climate, weather, and indigenous peoples of the lands encompassed by the Louisiana Purchase.

The expedition documentation conveys poignant human stories of survival and perseverance, and chronicles how the human diversity of the Corps of Discovery and its diplomatic relationships with Indian nations contributed to the safe return of the expedition. The expedition documentation also serves as a resource for present-day researchers, and provides a look into U.S. military, economic, political, and social agendas as a young nation asserting its authority and exploring its limits.

