



Along the Lewis and Clark Trail on the Helena National Forest



The Missouri River near Beaver Creek



Atop Lewis & Clark Pass



Gates of the Rocky Mountains

The Landscape Crossed by Lewis and Clark

The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 spent several months traveling the Montana landscape. Along much of the expedition's route on the Helena National Forest the landscape looks much the same as it did in 1805-1806. Visit the route of the famous explorers on public lands in central Montana. See the map on the back for specific locations along the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Gates of the Mountains

The Gates of the Mountains are located 25 miles north of Helena and can be reached by traveling north on I-15 (see map on back). Commercial boat rides through the "Gates" are available daily during the summer.

As Lewis traveled along the Missouri River in the Gates of the Mountains he wrote "... this evening we entered much the most remarkable cliffs that we have yet seen. these cliffs rise from the waters edge on either side perpendicularly to the height of 1200 feet. every object here wears a dark and gloomy aspect. The tow[er]ing and projecting rocks in many places seem ready to tumble on us ... from the singular appearance of this place I call it the *gates of the rocky mountains*" (Meriwether Lewis, Friday, July 19, 1805).



Fay Schaller - photographer

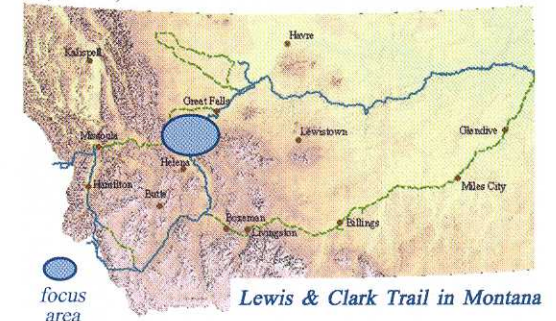
Golden Currant

Missouri River near Beaver Creek

To reach the confluence of Beaver Creek and the Missouri River travel east on Highway 280 from Helena. At the small town of York head north and follow the signs to Beaver Creek.

As Meriwether Lewis traveled through the broad Missouri River Valley he was delighted with the abundance of currants he found growing along the river. Of the golden currant Lewis commented "this currant is really a charming fruit and I am confident would be preferred at our markets to any currant now cultivated in the U' States" (Meriwether Lewis, July 20, 1805).

Captain Clark who traveled by land in this area rather than on the river found the broad Missouri Valley tough on a traveler's feet stating "my feet is very much brused & cut walking over the flint, & constantly Stuck full [of] Prickley pear thorns, I puled out 17 by the light of the fire . . ." (William Clark, Friday, July 19, 1805).



focus area

Lewis & Clark Trail in Montana



Lewis and Clark Pass

Alice Creek/Lewis and Clark Pass

The Alice Creek/Lewis and Clark Pass area can be reached by traveling east on Highway 200 from Lincoln, Montana. The turnoff to Alice Creek is 10 miles east of Lincoln. From highway 200 travel 11 miles north on the Alice Creek Road #293 to reach the Trailhead for Lewis and Clark Pass. The hike to the pass is 1.7 miles.

On July 7, 1806, Lewis and his men traveled swiftly east along the Blackfoot River Valley (past present-day Lincoln, Montana) on the ancient Road to the Buffalo Trail. The Road was simple for the Corps members to find; they merely followed the ruts made by generations of American Indian hunters, their families and their travois pulled by horses or dogs. They followed a track along today's Alice Creek that took them northeast to the foot of the Continental Divide.

As Meriwether Lewis reached the top of what is now Lewis and Clark Pass he wrote "from this gap which is low and an easy ascent on the W. side the fort mountain [Square Butte] bears north East, and appears to be distant about 20 Miles" (Meriwether Lewis, July 7, 1806). This was the first recognizable landmark for Lewis' party since leaving Travelers' Rest near Lolo, Montana.



Crimson Bluffs

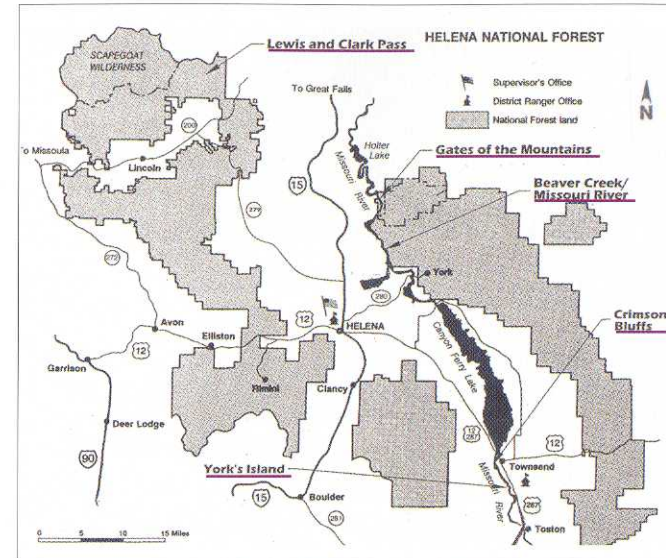
Crimson Bluffs & York's Island

To reach Crimson Bluffs, travel north of Townsend on Highway 287 for about one mile. On the north side of the Missouri River, turn west on River Road. Travel for about 1.5 miles or until reaching an obvious U-shaped turn. An interpretive sign marks the site on the east side of the road. The Crimson Bluffs lie below the road on the Missouri River. To reach York's Island, travel south of Townsend on Highway 287 for approximately four miles or until reaching signs for York's Island Fishing Access site. The Island lies to the south of the fishing access.

This area was described as a "remarkable bluff of crimson colored earth" (Meriwether Lewis, July 24, 1805). Further south lies the York's Island Fishing Access site marking the location William Clark designated on his map of July 24, 1805, "Yorks 8 Islands."

The Crimson Bluffs and York's Island lie near Helena National Forest lands on property managed by the Bureau of Land Management and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

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Preserving Heritage Sites

National Forests across Montana are working to record and protect the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (LCNHT). The Helena National Forest conducted an inventory of the trail in 1999-2001. The study included mapping the trail's location and recording important heritage sites that lie next to the LCNHT.

Part of the trail's importance is that it was not only used by the famous explorers but Indian people also traveled this route for over a thousand years before Lewis and Clark made their journey. For more information, contact:



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