The Missouri River
and
The Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commemoration

The watershed for the Missouri River provides drainage for approximately one-sixth of the United States. From the headwaters in Montana to the mouth in Missouri, the "Big Muddy" flows through seven states. Its importance to the American economy and its history is unparalleled.

For over 200 years, the United States Army has had very close ties to the Missouri River. After all, Lewis, Clark and most other explorers on the "Corps of Discovery" were members of the U.S. Army. Over the years, the Army has removed snags, protected banks, constructed a navigation channel, built flood control levees, established fisheries, preserved cultural resources, enhanced recreation, built dams, and developed wildlife habitats. The Army's relationship to the Missouri continues through today as the Corps of Engineers is the primary steward of the water and land along the most famous waterway in America.

Beginning in 2003 and continuing through 2006, the Corps of Engineers will be participating with the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council, Native American Tribes and other Federal, State, and local governments in the Bicentennial Commemoration of the famed Lewis and Clark Expedition. The Corps of Engineers wants you to enjoy the commemoration and has assembled the following maps to assist in your travels along the Missouri River. Whether traveling by car along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail or by boat on the Missouri River, the Corps of Engineers hopes that you experience some of the same feeling of discovery that Lewis and Clark did 200 years ago.

About the Expedition

The origin of this greatest of American adventures was a product of the visionary intellect of President Thomas Jefferson. By the time Jefferson negotiated the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, he had already arranged to send a contingent out to explore this new land. Jefferson gave command of the Expedition to the United States Army.

With Jefferson's instructions, Captain Meriwether Lewis began what was destined to be the most significant exploration of the American West. Lewis' journey began in the summer of 1803 when he left Washington, D.C. after completing months of preparation and specialized training in medicine, botany, and navigation. His first stop was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to obtain the custom designed 55' keelboat. Then, with a limited crew, he proceeded down the Ohio River to present day Louisville, Kentucky, where his partner and co-captain, William Clark, joined him. There the two captains selected the initial enlisted members of the expedition before proceeding on to their first winter campsite at Camp Wood, Illinois, near St. Louis. They eventually began their journey up the Missouri River and into the newly acquired Louisiana Territory on May 14, 1804. For the next two and a half years, the expedition traveled the length of the Missouri River, crossed the Rocky and Bitterroot Mountains, and followed the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia Rivers to the Pacific Ocean and back again.

Along the way, Expedition members kept detailed journals of their activities, collected specimens of discoveries, and charted their progress. They proceeded up against the Missouri's current, rarely making more than 12 miles per day, to the Mandan Villages where they spent the winter of 1804-1805. The next spring they continued on, joined by French trapper Charbonneau and his young Shoshone wife Sacagawea. With her assistance they crossed the mountains and proceeded down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. After spending the winter of 1805-1806 on the coast, they retraced their route, eventually returning to St. Louis in late September of 1806.

Courtesy of the Corps of Engineers - Kansas City District; "Lewis & Clark Bicentennial: Lower Missouri River".