

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail extended by 1,200 miles into the Eastern Legacy

Thanks to the distinguished and dedicated efforts of volunteers, elected officials and the [Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation](#), an extremely important 1,200-mile segment of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's route in 1803 was federally recognized March 12, 2019, as part of the [Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail](#).

The extended trail encompasses the Ohio River and a short segment of the Mississippi River as well the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Wheeling, West Virginia; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Louisville, Kentucky, and nearby Clarksville, Indiana. The total length of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail is now 4,900 miles and goes from Pittsburgh to the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon.

The trail extension was included among a package of 100 provisions within the [John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act](#) regarding management and conservation of natural resources on federal lands. Congress passed the Act in February; it was signed into law by the president on March 12.



“The extension of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail—the route of the most important adventure of exploration and discovery in our nation’s history—is a major win for all Americans,” said Lou Ritten, a Chicago area resident who is president of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation (LCTHF), based in Great Falls, Montana. The LCTHF was a major player in helping to move the trail extension through Congress.

“The 1,200 additional miles add a significant new chapter to the story of Lewis and Clark,” Ritten said. “It opens the way for more people now and in future generations to learn about the explorers and their important role in history.”

The trail extension traverses a large area of the East known as Lewis and Clark’s [Eastern Legacy](#): 14 states and Washington, D.C. These are areas important in the expedition’s story or have historic sites or events related to the explorers before and after their journey.

The extended trail goes through portions of seven states: Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, as well as areas of Illinois and Missouri not previously considered part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail that was federally designated in 1978. Those states join 11 others that—until the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act was signed into law—solely comprised the historic trail. Those states are Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Oregon, as well as areas of Missouri and Illinois.

[Click here to learn how Lewis and Clark relate to the Dingell Act...](#)

By increasing the trail to 4,900 miles, the legislation moved the route's eastern boundary from Wood River, Ill., near St. Louis, Mo., to Pittsburgh. The extended trail goes through the Ohio River Valley Basin, where 25 million people—almost 10 percent of the U.S. population—reside.

The trail now encompasses two more of the nation's major rivers—the Ohio River and a short segment of the Mississippi River—along with the three other major waterways taken by the expedition: the Missouri, Snake and Columbia rivers.

Lindy Hatcher, LCTHF executive director, said the trail extension is important because it was along those 1,200 miles that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark organized, recruited and trained for their journey of more than three years. “The explorers got in their boats and, as they traveled the 1,200 miles of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, they began working together as a team,” Hatcher said. “This time was critical to the success of the expedition.”



Map of Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail extension from near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to Pittsburgh.

Without the inclusion of the 1,200 miles within the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, some historians and other Lewis and Clark aficionados have believed the expedition's story has only been partly told in history books and guidebooks, most of which largely focus on the 3,700 miles from Wood River to the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon.

Paige Cruz, a Huntington, West Virginia, resident and chair of the LCTHF Eastern Legacy Committee that helped shepherd the legislation through Congress, said the extension “helps connect the dots all the way across the country that Lewis and Clark explored.”

Another committee member, Jerry Wilson of Versailles, Indiana, said the trail extension will encourage local groups and agencies to continue developing interpretive signage, historic sites, and public education. There are 22 states connected either directly to the trail or to historic sites and events related to the explorers before or after the 1803-06 expedition.

Wilson noted the newly recognized trail segment will encourage more tourists and history buffs to visit communities, landmarks and historic sites along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. As well, this new addition may result in more visitation along the other 3,700 miles of trail as tourists who visit the new mileage find that they want to visit the rest of the trail, he said.

“The most obvious immediate benefit of the extended trail will be to the tourism industry,” Wilson said. “It's going to help restaurants, filling stations, hotels and motels, and many other businesses that rely on tourism.”

Phyllis Yeager, an LCTHF Eastern Legacy Committee member who lives in Floyd's Knobs, Indiana, near the Ohio River, said the inclusion of the 1,200 miles will open the way for more historical markers, Lewis and Clark activities, museums, and statues.

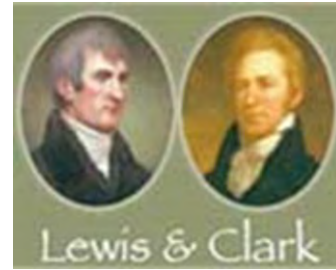
“This will encourage the teaching of history in a valuable way that it is not taught in history books,” she said. “The value of the legislation goes beyond tourism dollars and economic value. It will result in public education that benefits our entire culture.”

The extended trail includes at least 26 significant sites related to the expedition’s journey along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from August 30, 1803, to Dec. 13, 1803, when the explorers began constructing a winter camp—they named it [Camp Dubois](#)—near Wood River. The following May the explorers left the camp to begin their arduous journey along the 3,700 miles federally designated in the 1978 version of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. They reached the mouth of the Columbia River in late 1805 and returned to St. Louis in September 1806.

Their journey along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers was documented by journal entries written mostly by Lewis. At the time, some local residents also recorded meeting the explorers. Lewis’ journal during this time covered a wide range of topics, Cruz said. “He wrote about natural features, the wildlife and weather, plants, Indian burial grounds, the level of the river and the temperature of the water, and the people he met.”

Here are summaries of a few of the sites visited by Lewis and Clark along the two rivers:

[Pittsburgh:](#) Lewis spent six weeks in this booming town of 2,400 people while he waited for the construction of a 55-foot [keelboat](#) to be completed. He talked to locals about the Ohio River, checked inventory and recruited 11 men to join the voyage down the river. It was in Pittsburgh that Lewis purchased [Seaman](#), a Newfoundland dog, for \$20. The dog became a member of the expedition and today—for kids and many adults alike—is almost as famous as Lewis and Clark. As he was leaving Pittsburgh, Lewis began writing in journals that would be maintained by him and Clark. Their journals are insightful records that give historians of today a magnificent window into the past. Lewis departed in the new keelboat on August 30, 1803, to travel down the Ohio River for the next



What the explorers did

Considered to be among the world’s [10 most famous explorers](#), [Meriwether Lewis](#) and [William Clark](#) led an expedition through a largely unexplored region of America from the fall of 1803 to September 1806.

Known as the [Corps of Discovery](#), the expedition that journeyed through the wilderness was comprised of [33 soldiers and civilians](#). Among them was a [slave](#) and a teenaged [Shoshone woman](#) and her [baby](#). A large Newfoundland [dog](#) also traveled with the expedition.

The explorers laid a foundation for U.S. relations with Native Americans tribes they encountered. They recorded [174 plants and 134 animals](#) previously unknown to science. They drew maps that became important in the country’s westward expansion.

Both leaders, as well as some of their companions, maintained detailed journals that told the story of vast landscapes and opportunities. The information encouraged and helped pioneers in the nation’s westward expansion.

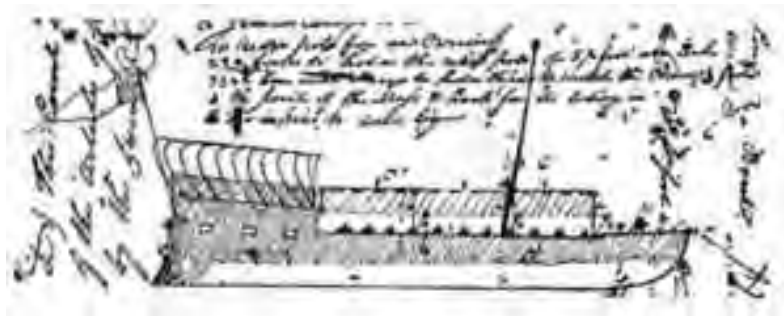
month and a half to meet up with William Clark, his friend and expedition co-leader at Clarksville, Indiana.

Wheeling, West Virginia: When Lewis and his companions reached there on Sept. 8, 1803, the community consisted of about 50 houses. Lewis spent time talking politics with a Revolutionary War veteran, [Thomas Rodney](#), whom the current U.S. president, [Thomas Jefferson](#), had appointed as a judge to adjudicate land claims. Lewis and Rodney talked while eating “water melons”—the spelling of watermelons in the rough-hewed, versatile spelling methods back in those days. Lewis demonstrated a specially designed 51-caliber barreled [air gun—a pneumatic weapon](#)—that he brought along specifically to complement flint-lock muskets and pistols used on the expedition. The air gun could fire 22 times a minute. The judge admired it as a “curious piece of workmanship not easily described.”



Model of the Lewis and Clark keelboat constructed in July and August 1803 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. [The model was created by nautical historian Richard Boss.](#)

Cincinnati, Ohio: Lewis and his companions reached there Sept. 28, 1803, and remained several days to gather more supplies and give his fatigued men a rest. At that time of the year, the [Ohio River was extremely low](#) and the men had to push and pole the keelboat, a grueling task. About 1,000 people resided in Cincinnati, a growing [community that provided supplies to travelers](#). While in Cincinnati, Lewis wrote a long letter to Thomas Jefferson and took a 17-mile overland side trip to [Big Bone Lick](#) in Kentucky to gather fossils for the president. Lewis sent fossils to Jefferson on a passing river boat, but they never arrived because they were lost in transit.



Clark's drawing of improvements for the keelboat in January 1804 at the expedition's winter camp near Wood River, Illinois.

Falls of the Ohio: The treacherous Falls of the Ohio is where [Lewis and Clark joined forces on Oct. 15, 1803, and began the expedition together](#). William Clark was living with his older brother, Revolutionary War hero [General George Rogers Clark](#), who had a cabin in [Clarksville, Indiana](#) near the falls. The [Clark home site](#) is an important part of the Lewis and Clark story. Lewis met up with Clark there—this was the first time the two friends talked face-to-face about the impending journey—and together they recruited [nine young men](#) from Kentucky and Indiana who formed the core of the [Corps of Discovery](#). Among the recruits was Indiana native Charles Floyd, the only expedition member to die on the journey. He passed away at today's Sioux City, Iowa, from what was believed to be a ruptured appendix.

During their stay at George Rogers Clark's home, Lewis and Clark often visited nearby [Louisville, Kentucky](#), while making final preparations. They departed the area via the Ohio River on Oct. 26, 1803. After they completed their expedition in 1806, they returned on November 8, 1806, to [Locust Grove in Louisville](#), the home of William Clark's sister [Lucy Croghan](#), for a family celebration.

[Cairo, Illinois](#). After leaving the mouth of the Ohio River and moving up the Mississippi River, the expedition camped near Cairo on Nov. 14, 1803. They paused for six days while the captains honed their surveying and mapping skills by practicing the technique of [celestial observations](#). Clark used a surveyor's compass and chain to determine the [widths of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers](#): the Mississippi, 1,435 yards; Ohio, 1,274 yards. The confluence of the two rivers sprawled over 2,002 yards; in today's comparisons, the length of almost seven football fields.



***Falls of the Ohio:** This photograph from 1928 is what the series of falls may have looked like when Lewis and Clark were there. In modern times, the river has been dammed and the falls and rapids that remain today have considerably less voracity. The falls pictured here were later inundated by a dam. Photo by Christopher Morris of [Kentucky Waterfalls](#).*

A few wording changes open the way for major opportunities...

In comparison to the wording of some of the 100 projects in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, the extent of wording in the section related to the Lewis and Clark trail extension was minor: six words replaced four words in of the [National Trails System Act](#) that in 1978 originally designated the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

The word "3,700" was struck as the mileage length of the Lewis and Clark trail and replaced with "4,900" for the mileage. The words "Wood River, Illinois," were replaced with "Ohio River in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania," as the trail's eastern boundary.

The amended section also revised the official trail map, created in 1977, by showing the national historic trail now goes from Pittsburgh to the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon. Previously, the eastern boundary of the map was Wood River.

Although the wording changes seem minor, they were huge in terms of positive impacts that may occur in the coming years. There will likely be revisions of history books and tourist maps, websites, and historic guidebooks about Lewis and Clark and their companions.

Mike Loesch, a Mason, Ohio, resident who sits on the LCTHF's Eastern Legacy Committee, said the designation may open the way for more federal, state and local funding possibilities for developing historic sites, signage and educational programs. "The trail extension

tremendously raises the visibility of the trail,” he said. “This will help in the long run to develop partnerships among agencies and citizen groups interested in furthering public education and tourism.”

As an example, Loesch pointed to the possibility that, in the future, partnerships among agencies and volunteer groups might be developed to create a major trail system that loops from the East and goes west into North Dakota by connecting existing historic trails. Among the trails that could connect to make the loop are the 4,600-mile [North Country National Scenic Trail](#), 1,444-mile [Buckeye Trail](#), 78-mile [Little Miami Scenic Trail](#), and the extended Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.



Map of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail as designated in 1978. The trail goes from Wood River, Illinois, to the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon. Not shown on this map: the 1,200-mile extension of the trail east from Wood River to Pittsburgh. Map by [Weber State University](#).

“All sorts of possibilities have are now available,” Loesch said. “The extension of the Lewis and Clark trail creates tremendous opportunities.”

The 4,900-mile trail, which includes the newly approved 1,200 miles, remains the nation’s [second-longest national historic trail](#) behind the 5,665-mile [California National Historic Trail](#). The route forged by Lewis and Clark, however, is the nation’s longest exploratory route that relied upon waterways. The explorers followed the Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, Snake, and Columbia rivers, in addition to three smaller streams: the Jefferson and Beaverhead rivers in Montana, and the Clearwater River western Idaho.

There were only a few areas where a waterway was not involved. They spent a difficult 31 days [portaging 18 rugged miles overland around the Great Falls of the Missouri River](#) in Montana. They journeyed by horses, acquired by trading with local natives, over the Rocky Mountains in Montana and Idaho. On their 1806 return trip to St. Louis, they also took short trips overland from eastern Washington and into parts of Idaho and Montana.

Classic case study...

The journey that led to federal approval of the trail extension could easily be used as a case study for a school civics class learning how ideas can evolve into a law of the land.

Thoughts about broadening the scope of the historic trail accelerated during the 2003-06 national bicentennial commemoration of the expedition. More than 100 groups of citizens and government agencies were organized back then—many of them in Ohio, Indiana and other Eastern Legacy states—to plan and carry out the bicentennial.

After the bicentennial celebration concluded, grassroots groups, government agencies and nonprofit groups like the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation continued to enhance historic sites and public education in the Eastern Legacy. By 2019, at least [59 Lewis and Clark sites, museum exhibits, statues, trails, scenic overlooks, memorials, boat replicas, and trail markers](#) were developed in the Eastern Legacy. In addition, the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation provided grants to fund signage at 40 Lewis and Clark sites in the Eastern Legacy.

Grassroots and nonprofit groups also worked with government agencies to associate appropriate public projects with Lewis and Clark.

An example was a successful effort that resulted in the naming of a new 2,500-foot bridge across the Ohio River as the [Lewis and Clark Bridge](#). The \$763-million bridge, which was [dedicated and opened for traffic](#) in December 2016, connects Indiana and Kentucky at Louisville. The then Indiana Gov. [Mike Pence](#), who is now the U.S. vice president, said in a statement at the time that the chosen name “Lewis and Clark” was [an ode to Indiana and Kentucky’s shared historical prominence in the expeditions of Lewis and Clark](#).



Eastern Legacy signage: A sign marker placed at sites and trailheads connected with the Lewis and Clark story in the Eastern Legacy. The signs were funded by grants from the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.



The Lewis and Clark Bridge over the Ohio River. The bridge connects Indiana and Kentucky at Louisville. A campaign by Lewis and Clark enthusiasts encouraged the state to use the Lewis and Clark name. Photo by [ENR Midwest](#).

For many Lewis and Clark enthusiasts, it was a long journey to the signing of the trail extension into law.

More than three decades ago, for instance, Yeager was surprised to find that many local people along the 1,200 miles knew little, if anything, about their communities’ associations with the expedition. So she began actively promoting the idea that more attention should be

given to Lewis and Clark's presence in Clarksville and Louisville. "I was determined to do something about it," Yeager said. "It became a passion for me."

Yeager and others living in Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky began promoting the presence of Lewis and Clark sites in their areas. Yeager recalled: "People started asking the question of what did Lewis and Clark have to do with this area? They had not learned this in school. They became curious and started finding out how their areas were involved in the Lewis and Clark story."

In 2009, the National Park Service launched an extensive study that looked at extending the official historic trail to include all or parts of the Eastern Legacy. The [NPS study](#) thoroughly reviewed historical sites and information, and existing public sites related to the expedition. The agency also held extensive public hearings in an attempt to narrow down options, one of which was extending the historic trail to Pittsburgh.

In February 2018, the NPS released its findings, which noted the historical and cultural importance of the Ohio River to the expedition. Subsequently, at the request of Lewis and Clark advocates, a proposal to extend the trail to Pittsburgh moved into the congressional arena.

Legislation was introduced in 2018 in the House of Representatives by Rep. [Luke Messer](#) (R-Indiana) and co-sponsored by Rep. [John Yarmuth](#) (D-Kentucky), importantly making it a bipartisan bill that would appeal to both sides of the political aisle. Rep. [Susan Brooks](#) (R-Indiana) and Rep. [Bill Johnson](#) (R-Ohio) also became co-sponsors.

The Lewis and Clark Heritage Foundation was a significant player in the legislation's journey through the House in 2018. Hatcher testified before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands. Members of the Eastern Legacy Committee and other LCTHF members also wrote congressional representatives.

"Many people urged Congress to support the trail extension," Loesch said.

The House passed the legislation in July 2018. It was then introduced in the Senate by Sen. [Todd C. Young](#) (R-Indiana) and co-sponsored by Sen. [Joe Donnelly](#) (D-Indiana). However, the Senate legislation was not acted upon prior to the end of the congressional year.



The Missouri meets the Mississippi, then and now: Map of the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers showing locations when Lewis and Clark were there and stayed the winter of 1803-04 at a camp they built and named Camp Dubois.

How it happened this year...

In the current Congress, Sen. [Lisa Murkowski](#) (R-Alaska) introduced the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. The act was a bipartisan package of land bills: projects involving wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, national parks, historic sites, trails, tribal lands, and heritage areas throughout the nation.

Included within the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act was the Eastern Legacy Extension Act, introduced in the Senate in January by Sen. Young. In the House, Rep. Johnson introduced similar legislation. The plan was to move forward with these stand-alone pieces of legislation if, for some reason, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act wasn't signed into law.

It was signed and now the historic trail has another 1,200 miles for people to explore.

(This article was written by [Gary Kimsey](#), a volunteer writer for the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. In 1973, when he was 23, Gary spent [six months retracing the Lewis and Clark route](#) by canoe, foot and backpack with four other young men. Now retired, he manages the [Lewis and Clark News](#) blog and does volunteer work for the LCTHF. He can be reached at garykimsey@yahoo.com.)

