



Lewis & Clark Trail News

Bringing the Trail to Life

December 27, 2025



Cattails along the Shields River

Kenneth Younger's charming photo of cattails along the Shields River, a Montana stream named after the expedition's gunsmith, John Shields, is an excellent representation of a plant setting that would have caught the eye of Meriwether Lewis.

Lewis was a botanist in spirit and practicality. He learned the importance of plants from his herbalist mother, and, like Thomas Jefferson, he was particularly interested in medicinal and economically valuable plants. Even on the expedition's toughest days, Lewis found time to observe plants. The expedition recorded 240 plant species, 178 of which were new to Western science. [Discover more about Lewis as a botanist.](#)

Kenneth's beautiful photo was one of 14 selected for the 2026 LCTA calendar. The photos were submitted during our [annual photo contest](#). Our supply of

calendars is dwindling. These make wonderful gifts for the start of the new year and are available for \$20 as a fundraiser for LCTA programs.

[Order yours now.](#)

LCTA Grants

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance annually provides grants to organizations that need assistance on projects that tell the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. For 2026, 17 organizations received a total of \$94,415 in grant funding. We're profiling two grant recipients in this and upcoming newsletters.

Gathering at Tmsmł̄

Travelers' Rest Connection, which supports Travelers' Rest State Park near Missoula, Montana, received \$8,000 to help fund and expand its annual Gathering at Tmsmł̄. Started in 2024, the two-day event celebrates Indigenous art and culture. It's held at Travelers' Rest State Park, an area historically called "Tmsmł̄" ("No Salmon") by the local Seliš people.



The popular event expanded in 2025 to include a day of activities for 300 local schoolchildren. Education stations are run by the park's staff members and volunteers, the Seliš-Qlispé Culture Committee and Seliš language interns from the Flathead Reservation. The plan for next year's event is to increase student attendance and add programming to attract a broader audience.

[Learn about the Lewis and Clark Expedition's time at Travelers' Rest](#)



Montana's Historic Signs

The vagaries of weather—wind, rain, snow, sun—and, unfortunately, vandalism can, over time, damage one of the more important methods for telling the expedition's story—interpretive signage. Signage in roadway pull-offs, parks, community centers, and elsewhere must be reviewed periodically to determine whether signs require repair, replacement, or updating to reflect newly available information.

The LCTA Portage Route Chapter in Great Falls, Montana, received \$2,200 in LCTA grant funding to hire a company to inspect and assess the condition of approximately 95 interpretive panel signs in central Montana. The assessment will focus on the condition of the signs and identify which organizations own them. This

ownership research will be conducted to identify owners and request sign replacements. Some signs have not been replaced or updated in the last 20 years.

[Find out about the expedition's time in Montana](#)



Winter Storytelling

For nearly two decades, Winter Storytelling at Travelers' Rest has been a seasonal celebration of the Seliš tradition of sharing stories during the cold winter months. Each Saturday from January 4 through March 8, gather at the Travelers' Rest State Park Visitor Center – and on Zoom – at 11 a.m. to hear stories from elders, authors, historians, and naturalists.

Admission to Winter Storytelling is \$5 per person; free for members of Travelers' Rest Connection.

Storytellers



Lucy Vanderburg



Tim Ryan



Ramona Holt

Day by Day Radio Episodes



**Blacksmith Bellows
Fort Mandan**

December 27, 1804

Smithing Iron

Several Indians here to Day, much Surprised at the Bellos & method of makeing Sundry articles of Iron

—William Clark

The blacksmiths were John Shields, Alexander Willard, and William Bratton.

Listen to the full library of [Day by Day broadcasts](#)

Originally aired by Yellowstone Public Radio during the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial observance in 2004-2006, these 627 radio episodes parallel the expedition dates starting May 14, 1804, and ending September 25, 1806. They are narrated by Hal Hansen, scripted by Whit Hansen and Ed Jacobson, and produced by Leni Holliman.

Step Into History with Lewis & Clark VR!



Experience the Legendary Expedition Like Never Before

Ready for adventure? Take a journey through time with *Lewis & Clark VR*—the immersive virtual reality experience that brings the expedition's epic people, places, and events to life! Explore historic sites, interact with virtual artifacts, and uncover fascinating stories narrated by experts—all from the comfort of your classroom or home.

Proudly sponsored by the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance and created by the talented students at the [Shenandoah Center for Immersive Learning](#), *Lewis & Clark VR* is your ticket to a dynamic learning experience. Discover more at [SCIL](#) and download the app today at [Meta](#). Don't just learn history—live it!

The Future is Here

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Virtual Reality app is now available for download from the Meta Horizon store. Thanks to our partnership with [Shenandoah Center for Immersive Learning](#), you can experience the inside of an earth lodge, winter at Fort Mandan, and stand inside the cabin of a keelboat barge. Share the news widely!

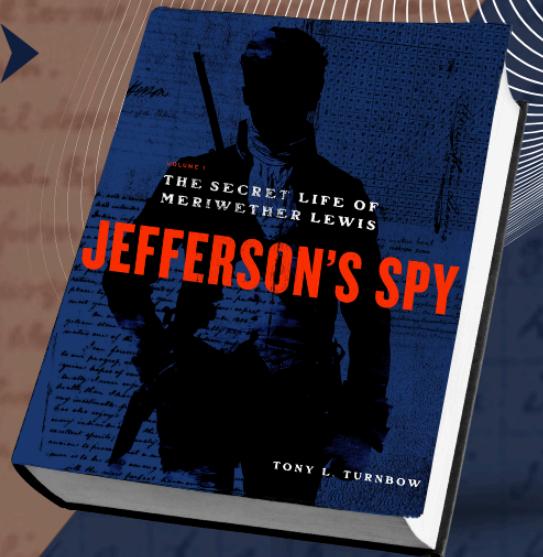
[Meta Store](#)



LEWIS COUNTY PUBLIC
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES



BOOK LAUNCH



The Secret Life of Meriwether Lewis: Jefferson's Spy (Vol. 1) by Tony L. Turnbow

In Jefferson's Spy: The Secret Life of Meriwether Lewis, Tony L. Turnbow explores Lewis's relationship with his mentor, Thomas Jefferson, and the secret work he performed on Jefferson's behalf until his death on the Natchez Trace in Tennessee.



SATURDAY

January 24th, 2026



START TIME

02:00 PM Central

Join us for the launch of a
fascinating new book by
historian Tony L. Turnbow.



www.lewislibrary.com



15 Kyle Ave., Hohenwald, TN

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Play Lewis & Clark Trivia

The new year was greeted on Jan. 1, 1804, with an inch of snow at Camp River Dubois, the Lewis and Clark Expedition's winter encampment near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Several local [men visited the camp](#) to trade goods and participate in a contest. William Clark put up one dollar as the award for whoever won the contest—that's about \$27 in terms of the value of today's dollar.



Our trivia question: What kind of contest was it?

[Submit your answer](#)

The winner of this trivia contest will receive *Sacagawea's Child: The Life and Times of Jean-Baptiste (Pomp) Charbonneau* by Susan M. Colby. The 200-page book explores how Jean-Baptiste, during his 61 years, integrated into his own life the voyageur lifestyle of his father (Toussaint Charbonneau), the Native American heritage of his mother (Sacagawea) and the Jeffersonian tradition of his guardian (William Clark).

Nine people submitted a correct answer to the question in our last newsletter: What gift did Sacagawea give to Clark on Dec. 25, 1805? The answer: weasel tails. When more than one person submits the correct answer, a drawing is done to determine the winner. David Brinkley was the winner. He will receive a book about Lewis and Clark



Missouri National Recreational River

National Park Trust and the National Park Service (NPS) have announced the successful acquisition of a 676-acre property on James River Island within the Missouri National Recreational River near Yankton, South Dakota. As the largest privately held tract on the 730-acre island, this acquisition is a landmark

achievement, safeguarding irreplaceable natural habitats, preserving a historically significant landscape, and increasing public access while dramatically expanding the acreage managed by the park.

This acquisition by NPS was made possible using \$1.6 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which is permanently authorized at \$900 million per year under the 2020 Great American Outdoors Act. LWCF protects public lands managed by federal, state, and local governments across the United States.

The island and surrounding area also hold significant historical importance, having served as a campsite for the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery in 1804 and 1806. Preserving this land ensures that the stories of these explorers and their journey along the Missouri River remain connected to the landscapes they traveled.

With the completion of this acquisition, the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) strengthens its role as a protected space where nature and history are honored. It offers visitors an unparalleled opportunity to explore and connect with one of South Dakota's most ecologically and historically significant landscapes.

[National Park Service MNRR](#)

Words of the Expedition

The *Journals of Lewis and Clark* contain a language that feels raw, immediate, and strangely poetic. The spelling is eccentric, the phrasing inventive, and the tone often somewhere between military dispatch and wonder-filled diary.



Punchins—now, there's a wiggling word used in the journals. It's still in use today, although in different contexts and commonly spelled as “puncheons.” It's a good example of the evolution of words.

The word “punchins” was used during the explorers’ construction of their winter encampments and for repair work on boats. The explorers felled trees and then split them to make “punchins”—rough boards used as floorboards or roof shingles. It could be, however, that the expedition’s journal writers unknowingly misspelled the word “puncheons” because the spoken word sounds like “punchins.”

Whatever the spelling, the word originated in the mid-14th century and denoted the process of punching holes, making dies for coins or casting printers’ ink. But, more than three centuries later, for [Patrick Gass](#), carpenter-in-charge for building Camp River Dubois, Fort Mandan, and Fort Clatsop, the term meant rough boards produced by splitting logs. In carpentry work today, the word is still sometimes used. More often, today’s “puncheon” refers to large casks that hold whiskey or other spirits.

Regardless of the spelling, making “punchins” was not easy, as pointed out in William Clark’s Dec. 21, 1805, journal entry about the [construction of Fort Clatsop](#):

“...we Continued at the Cabins dobbing & Shinking of them, fall Several trees which would not Split into punchins..

[Listen to the Lewis and Clark Day by Day radio broadcast for Dec. 21, 1805](#)

Ohio River Way + Hipcamp

Communities play a key role in making the Ohio River Way accessible for paddlers, cyclists, and campers—and one of the biggest needs are places to camp overnight.



Through Ohio River Way's [partnership with Hipcamp](#), communities can help close those gaps by encouraging local landowners, residents, farmers, marinas, and campgrounds to list available sites.

Once a site is listed on Hipcamp, it automatically appears in the [Ohio River Way collection](#), putting it directly in front of travelers planning multi-day trips. Just a few local listings can turn your town into an overnight stay that invites visitors and creates new, low-barrier economic opportunities for your community.

[Share this resource](#) on your community's website, making it easy for Ohio River Way travelers to find overnight options as they plan their adventures. Reach out to jessica@ohioriverway.org for promotional materials.

Share the Adventure!



Lewis & Clark Trail News
Bringing the Trail to Life



Help us expand the community by sharing the newsletter with your network. Simply provide this [sign-up link](#) to friends, family, and fellow Trail enthusiasts.

See all the events on the [LCTE Events Calendar](#)



[John Maclean](#)
Travelers Rest, MT
January 3



[Americans](#)
Henderson, KY
January 10 - February 21



[Big Medicine](#)
Provo, UT
January 22

Where on the Trail?

Our newest fun feature invites you to guess the location along the Trail.

[Answer](#)

This aerial photo was taken by aviator and photographer Jim Wark, who began retracing the Lewis and Clark Trail by air in 1999. Many of his photos are featured in articles on our educational website, Discover Lewis & Clark.



[More about Jim and his photos.](#)

The Last Word

At the Annual Gathering in September, LCTA President Bill Bronson appointed a task force to consider the future state of LCTA and engage in long range planning which will posture our organization for success and growth for the future. Many members who were present volunteered to serve on one or more of three work groups.

The three areas of focus are Public Engagement, Financial Sustainability, and Programming. Each work group is meeting by Zoom on a frequent basis with vigorous participation.

The Public Engagement Work Group is assessing how LCTA is perceived by its members and the broader communities it serves. This includes evaluating whether LCTA provides the tools, organizational structure, and systems necessary for a well-functioning nonprofit, as well as the effectiveness of its outreach to the general public, special interest groups, libraries, and schools.

The work group will also focus on strengthening and formalizing relationships with key federal partners (including the National Park Service and other land-

managing agencies) and with state and local organizations such as historical societies, parks and recreation departments, travel commissions, genealogical groups, and friends organizations.

The Programming Work Group is identifying opportunities for national and local initiatives, reviewing LCTA's print and digital publications, and exploring whether future "signature" experiences could be developed to generate increased interest and engagement comparable to the Bicentennial. The group will also evaluate LCTA's approach to meetings and gatherings, including the frequency, cost, and overall value of Annual Gatherings.

The Financial Sustainability Work Group is examining current and potential revenue streams, including paid memberships, *We Proceeded On* subscriptions, endowments, digital advertising, grants, and sponsorships. In addition, the group will evaluate LCTA's staffing model and organizational infrastructure to determine what is required to sustainably support the organization's mission in the future.

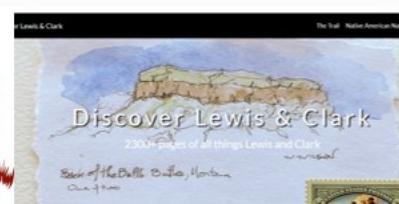
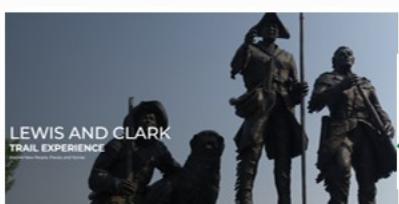
Priority # 1 is our current membership. We invite, and truly need, your input. Just after we turn our calendars to 2026, you will receive a survey. We promise to make it short, to the point, and easy to reply. Your voice really matters, and we need to hear from you. Please do take five or ten minutes to give us your feedback.

Pat Traffas
Vice President, LCTA

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