



Lewis & Clark Trail News
Bringing the Trail to Life
May 2, 2026



Along River's Edge Trail at West Bank Park in Great Falls, Montana, you'll come face to face with this life-size steel frame sculpture titled, "Grizzly Bear." Created by Nathan Bread in 2008, the artwork commemorates the approximate location where Meriwether Lewis encountered a grizzly on June 14, 1805.

That day Lewis was alone and came upon a herd of about 1,000 bison near a bend in the Missouri River. He proceeded to shoot a large, fat bull and was so distracted in admiring his kill that he forgot to reload his rifle and didn't pay attention to his surroundings.

He wrote in his journal entry for the day, "a large white, or reather brown bear, had perceived and crept on me within 20 steps before I discovered him; in the first moment I drew up my gun to shoot, but at the same instant recolected that she was not loaded and that he was too near for me to hope to perform this operation before he reached me, as he was then briskly advancing on me;"

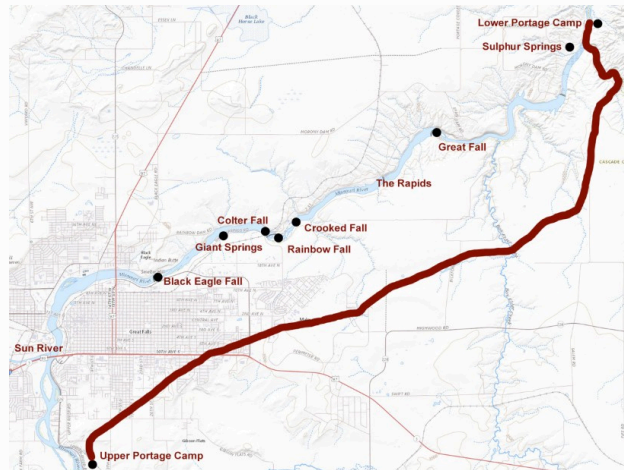
Lewis ran at full speed for about 80 yards, then plunged into the river thinking that if he could go deep enough the bear would have to swim and he would defend himself with his espartoon. When he was waist-deep, he turned and saw the bear had wheeled about, ceasing his pursuit.

Extraordinary Tours. Rare Access. Unforgettable Perspective.

The Annual Gathering in Great Falls will feature two exceptional, limited-access experiences—unlocking expertly curated stories within places few ever get to see.

Portage Route Tour

Walk the ground where the expedition struggled, adapted, and endured. Visit the Upper and Lower Portage Camps with expert guides who connect the landscape to the decisions made on it—revealing the human story behind the route.



Fort Benton - Decision Point

Step behind the scenes at one of the most pivotal moments of the journey. Stand where choices shaped the expedition's future, with interpretive access and storytelling that bring new depth to a familiar place.

These are not standard tours—they're curated experiences designed to deepen your understanding of the Trail through access, context, and expert interpretation.

2026 Annual Gathering - Great Falls

June 21 - 24

[Meeting](#) and [Hotel](#) Registration available now

Explore the updated [Meeting Guide](#)

[Register Today](#)

Extend Your Stay

Great Falls offers far more than can be experienced in four days. Attendees are encouraged to arrive early or stay longer to explore the region including

- 36th Annual Lewis and Clark Festival, June 19–20
- Three-day [White Cliffs canoe trip](#), June 25 - 27
- Tower Rock and Gates of the Mountains Boat Trip (on your own)
- Grand opening Montana Historical Society Museum (Helena), June 26–27
- Fort Benton Summer Celebration, June 26–27

Pre- and Post- Tours

- [Sulphur Springs Hike](#) with John Jengo
- Lower Portage [1/2 day float trip](#)
- [Guided hike](#) to Lewis and Clark Pass
- [Waking the Dead](#)
 - Pay (cash) at the gate, no registration required

Additional Details

- Silent Auction: Contact [Georgia Kline](#)
- Exhibitor, Authors: Contact [Kelly Paladino](#)

Annual Gathering Sponsors



This Vast Enterprise



Craig Fehrman, acclaimed author of *Author in Chief*, delivers a fresh, deeply researched account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. This *Vast Enterprise* challenges familiar narratives, revealing both truth and distortion in the captains' story.

Drawing on new documents and Native perspectives, Fehrman highlights overlooked figures like John Ordway and Wolf Calf while reexamining Sacagawea, York, Jefferson, and

Black Buffalo. Each chapter shifts perspective, emphasizing human complexity, political strategy, and cultural encounter.

The result is a nuanced narrative showing the expedition's success as a collective effort—an expansive, federally backed mission shaped by diverse individuals and their sacrifices.

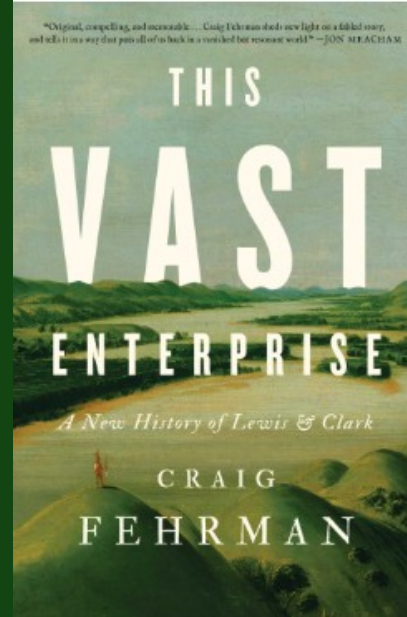
Watch the LCTA Zoomcasts

[William Clark](#)
[John Ordway](#)

“Do we really need another book about the Lewis and Clark expedition? Over the past two centuries, hundreds of titles have charted the journey. And yet,

after reading “This Vast Enterprise,” by Craig Fehrman, my answer is an emphatic yes.” *New York Times*

Bookshop.org



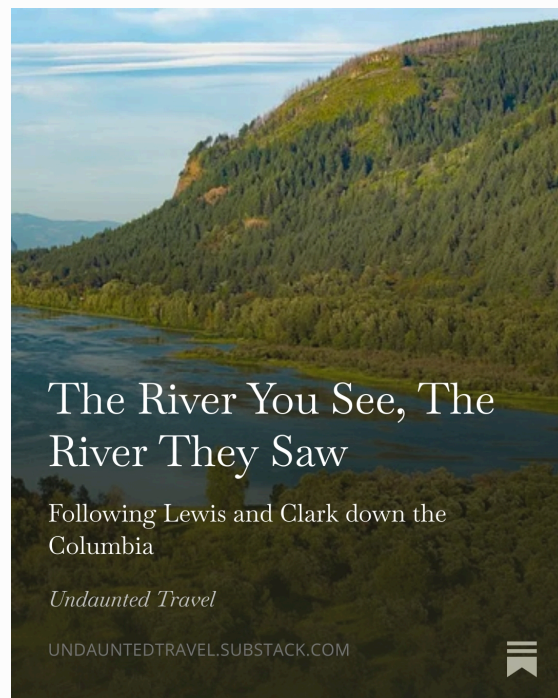
Substack

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance’s Substack publications—[Real Stories of the Lewis and Clark Trail](#) and [Undaunted Travel](#)—are now available to explore. Both are free to subscribe and feature engaging, well-researched storytelling from across the Trail.

Here are two of our latest featured stories, with many more available to explore on our Substack pages. Consider subscribing to one—or both—to stay connected and receive new stories as they’re published.



When my son was in the military, our family took a trip to visit him at Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage, Alaska. I had never been there, and knowing we would be doing some hiking, I downloaded one of



In October 1805, as Meriwether Lewis and William Clark turned their canoes into the Columbia River on their way to the Pacific Ocean, they entered one of the most dynamic landscapes of their entire journey—a place defined not by

those citizen scientist apps to help me identify plants and small critters we would encounter.

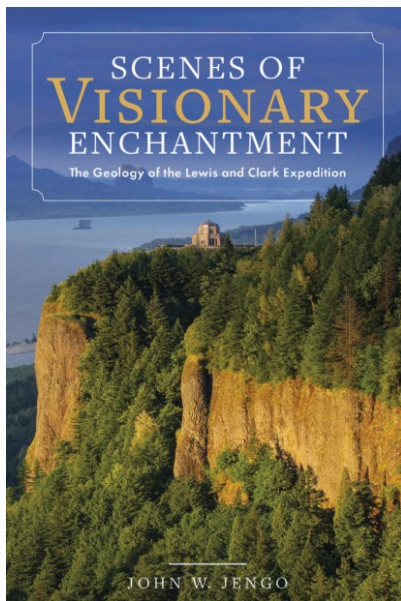
The vast beauty of America's 49th state did not disappoint.

Before long, I was pointing and snapping and clicking in the Alaska forest like Jane Goodall (minus the Chimpanzees)...[read more](#)

emptiness, but by motion, people, and power.

At the confluence of the Snake and Columbia, they were welcomed by thriving Indigenous communities. Hundreds gathered—singing, drumming, trading—surrounded by villages sustained by immense salmon runs. This was not a frontier. It was a cultural and economic ...[read more](#)

John Jengo Zoomcast May 17



Join with the Lewis and Clark Trail Alliance on May 17 at 4 p.m. CDT for a compelling [Zoomcast](#) with geologist and LCTA member, John W. Jengo, author of a groundbreaking new study on Lewis and Clark Trail geology. Jengo's research affirms the accuracy and depth of the Expedition's geological observations.

Drawing on extensive fieldwork and analysis of historic journals and scientific reports, he brings fresh insight to the landscape, science, and legacy of the Corps of Discovery.

Don't miss this engaging [presentation](#) that bridges early 19th-century science with modern geological understanding.



LCTA Photo Contest

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance 2026 Photo Contest is now open to submit your fantastic photos for judging and winners to be included in our annual calendar.

[Enter the Contest](#)



Beaver Tail © 2017 by Kristopher K. Townsend.

Day by Day Radio Episodes

In eastern Montana, the morning brings an inch of new snow. Due to wind, the enlisted men move the boats less than five miles, and they encamp southeast of present Poplar. [Lewis](#) considers [beaver](#) tail a delicacy, Pvt. [Joseph Field](#) finds a scarlet cloth hanging from a tree branch, and Lewis explains “big medicine”.

[May 2, 1805](#)

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

Originally aired by [Yellowstone Public Radio](#) during the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial observance. 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.

[Of Interest](#)

[Grants](#)

[Alliance](#)

[Camping and Paddle](#)

[Freedom's Frontier](#)

[Photo Contest](#)

Play Lewis & Clark Trivia



The Lewis and Clark explorers always kept an eye on the weather. The weather had a personal impact on each person (and Seaman, too!), but it could also delay the expedition. Prior to the expedition's departure from Camp River Dubois on May 14, 1804, William Clark repeatedly mentioned the weather in his journal.

Here's the trivia question: Why did the weather matter so much in early May 1804?

Pick the correct answer from these options:

- A. The Missouri River's water level determined whether the boats could safely launch.
- B. Clear skies were needed for astronomical readings.
- C. Rain would ruin their gunpowder.
- D. Lewis and Clark required a fair day for ceremonial reasons.
- E. The explorers knew Seaman didn't want to be out in bad weather.

[Submit Your Answer](#)

The trivia question in the last Trail News asked about what the explorers did with their two large dugout canoes at Fort Rock before continuing toward the [Long Narrows](#) of the Columbia. They tried to make a trade with local natives, but that did

not work. So they cut up the canoes for firewood.

Eleven readers answered correctly. When more than one reader provides the correct answer, a drawing is done. Jolene Dempster was the winner.

[Learn about the expedition's winter at Camp River Dubois](#)

Oregon Chapter Trail Stewardship May 18

Join us for our next Meetup event on May 18 at 8 a.m. at the Megler Rest Area on Highway 101 (just east of the Astoria Bridge). We'll kick off the morning with muffins and juice while we organize the day's activities.

From there, we'll head to the shoreline near Knappton Cove to walk the beach, pick up trash, and learn about the Corps of Discovery's challenging, rain-soaked stay in November of 1805.



LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL CLEANUP MEETUP

MAY 18 • 8:00 AM
MEGLER REST AREA
Highway 101
(just east of the Astoria Bridge)

Muffins & juice provided to start the day!

THE PLAN:

- KNAPPTON COVE**
Walk the shoreline, pick up trash, and learn about the Corps of Discovery's wet, rainy stay in November of 1805.
- IF TIME & WEATHER ALLOW: CHINOOK PARK**
Continue trail cleanup just east of Chinook, Washington.

WHAT TO BRING:

- Weather-appropriate clothing
- ✓ Sturdy shoes & work gloves
- ✓ Trash picker (if you have one)
- ✓ Hearty lunch
- ✓ Washington State Parks Discovery Pass

WE'LL PROVIDE:

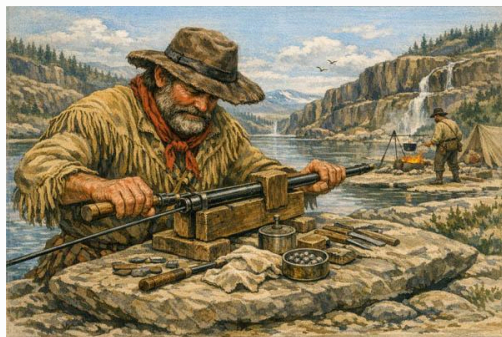
- ✓ Muffins
- ✓ Juice
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Cookies

GUIDED BY JIM SAYCE • TRASH BAGS PROVIDED

If time and weather allow, we'll continue our efforts at Chinook Park, just east of Chinook, Washington, to further clean up along the Trail.

[Details](#)

Words of the Expedition Cut Out



Unless you're a rifle enthusiast or a gunsmith, you likely don't know what "cut out" is all about.

On April 8, 1806, as the Lewis and Clark Expedition was slowly moving upstream on the Columbia River on the return to St. Louis, William Clark was having difficulties with what he called his "small rifle," his personal, finely made, small-caliber, muzzle-loading rifle used

for precision shooting and small-game hunting. He asked John Shields to check it out. Shields was a blacksmith and gunsmith, one of the more indispensable expedition members.

Shields regrooved the rifle barrel. The process—called "cut out"—involved cleaning, deepening and sharpening the barrel's existing grooves by using some of the gun tools purchased three years earlier at Harper's Ferry: files, small chisels, scrapers, vices, clamps, and a rifling rod (also called a freshening rod), a long, slender metal rod that follows existing grooves inside a muzzle-loading rifle barrel.

Clark was pleased with the results. He wrote in his journal: “John Shields Cut out my Small rifle & brought hir to Shoot very well.”

From court-martialed to “skill and ingenuity”:
[Read this fascinating article about John Shields](#)

Share the Adventure!



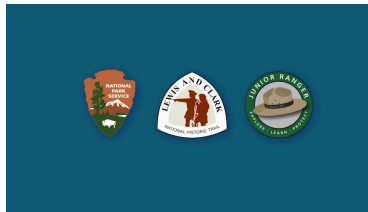
Help us expand the community by sharing the newsletter with your network. Simply provide this [sign-up link](#) to friends, family, and fellow Trail enthusiasts.

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



[Departure Event](#)

Camp Dubois
May 9 - 10



[Junior Ranger Day](#)

Big Bone Lick
May 16



[Trivia Night](#)

Billings, MT
May 17

Volunteer Vacations on the Lolo Trail

Enjoy an unique immersive voluntourism experience that combines meaningful trail work with rich interpretation, cultural engagement, and backcountry exploration. This is more than a work trip. Your experience will include: Guided hikes to historic campsites, Interpretation from subject matter experts, Evening campfire programs featuring, Nez Perce tribal representatives, Lewis & Clark historians and Forest Service experts

These fully outfitted, multi-day voluntourism experience invites participants to contribute directly in the preservation and accessibility of the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails.

Volunteers will assist with essential trail stewardship activities, including sign maintenance and corridor clearing, helping ensure safe and meaningful access for future visitors. All work takes place along the historic Lolo Trail Corridor—the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the 1877 Flight of the Nez Perce.

Limited to 12 participants per event (age 16+). Three nights camping, two days working, the \$100 registration includes outfitter provided tents, cots, eight meals, worksite transportation, equipment and interpretive campfires.

Here's how to sign up for the events:



Snowbank Camp, Lolo Motorway
July 9 - 12

[Register](#)



Musselshell Meadows
June 17 - 20

[Register](#)

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.](#)

[Discover Lewis and Clark](#)

The Last Word

A Picture Worth the Journey... a photograph doesn't just document the Lewis and Clark Trail—it reveals it.

From eastern origins, where waterways and early American frontiers shaped the expedition's departure, to the vast western landscapes that tested its limits, the Trail unfolds as a sequence of visual experiences. Geography is the narrative: shifting light, changing terrain, and the subtle details that transform a place into a story. What the Corps of Discovery encountered wasn't a single landscape, but a continuum—one that can still be seen, if you know where to look.

We're fortunate to have an extraordinary archive of imagery—but the Trail is not static. Each season, each journey, each perspective adds something new.

We're inviting you to help expand that visual narrative in two ways. Enter the **annual photo contest**—where winning images are featured in our calendar—or send images directly to director@lewisandclark.org for general use. Please note: photos submitted directly are not entered into the contest.

We're especially looking for people in motion—and yes, dogs along the Trail (Newfoundlands encouraged).

Show us what you see.

Richard Hunt

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ALLIANCE

EDUCATION



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