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Lewis & Clark Trail News
Bringing the Trail to Life
May 30, 2026



Dry land wheat fields stretch across the Upper Missouri River Breaks north of the Judith and Mocassin Mountains in central Montana.

Photograph © by: Gordon Wiltsie - Courtesy of American Prairie

2026 Annual Gathering - Great Falls

June 21 - 24

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

Explore the updated [Meeting Guide](#)

[Register Today](#)

Annual Gathering Sponsors

Book Sale and Silent Auction at the Annual Gathering

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's June 21-24 Annual Gathering in Great Falls, Montana, will feature two popular traditional events: a book sale and silent auction.

Proceeds will go to the LCTA William P. Sherman Library and Archives in Great Falls. The holdings in the library and archives total about 3,000 volumes—some dating to the 1700s—that truly cover *All Things Lewis and Clark*.

If you fly fish (or would like a great gift for someone who does), the silent auction's *pièce de resistance* will be a fly rod handmade by LCTA member, Fred Schaefer, a gentleman who enjoys fly-fishing so much that in 1978 he began making fly rods as a serious hobby.



Fred made the custom 7.5-foot, 4-weight rod in the style of the popular bamboo rods of the 1950s specifically for the silent auction. The rod represents more than 40 hours of Fred's work over 60 days. It has two interchangeable tips, one for dry flies, the other for nymphs.

The rod has an international flair to it. The line guides are attached in wrapped silk from England. The reel seat is comprised of nickel silver fittings, while the reel-seat spacer is made from Amboyna burl from Southeast Asia and has an incredibly beautiful design. The grip (the handle) is made of cork from Portugal. The rod itself is made of Tonkin cane, a species of bamboo from China that has dense, strong fibers.

All in all, it's a study, elegant fly rod designed for catching big fish and to be around for its owner to pass on to a grandchild.

The silent auction features a diverse collection. Among the standout offerings are

- Pieces donated by Kris Townsend, including a numbered and signed print of William Clark and the guide Toby on the Salmon River, a work contributed by

a descendant of Alexander Willard.

- Nine signed, mixed-media originals by artist Wayne Wilson—the same works used to create the banners for the LCTA Discovering Lewis & Clark educational website.
- Additional offerings include interpretive materials donated by historian Mary Jane Bradbury, books from the collection of the late Joe Musselman and others, as well as a mix of rare and contemporary books, maps, and related items.

[Learn more](#) about the Sherman Library and Archives.

Summer of VR - Lewis and Clark Virtual Reality

In 2024, the Lewis and Clark Trail Alliance partnered with Shenandoah University and its [Center for Immersive Learning](#) on an ambitious experiment: could the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition be experienced in a completely new way through virtual reality?

The answer was a resounding yes.

Faculty and students from Shenandoah University spent weeks traveling the Lewis and Clark Trail from Monticello to Fort Clatsop, capturing landscapes, interviews, and interpretive experiences that became the foundation for the groundbreaking Lewis and Clark VR project. The effort ultimately produced a virtual reality application now available on the [Meta Horizon Store](#), along with a 15-part [video series](#) highlighting important stories and voices from across the Trail. But the project was never intended to be a one-time expedition.

Now, in 2026, the next chapter is underway with the launch of the “Summer of VR Tour.”

This year’s tour features a new group of students, fresh locations, and an expanded vision for how immersive storytelling can connect modern audiences with the Lewis and Clark story. Traveling westward along the Trail, the team has embraced the spirit of the road trip with custom souvenir T-shirts inspired by legendary stadium rock concert tours — a fitting symbol for a project that is quickly becoming its own kind of traveling production.

Summer of VR Tour

Historic Locust Grove	Atka Lakota
Filson Historical Society	Pompey's Pillar
Falls of the Ohio	Three Forks – Missouri Headwaters
Fort Massac	Beaverhead Rock
Cairo, IL	Clark's Lookout
Fort Kaskaskia	Lemhi Pass
Gateway Arch	Sacajawea Center
Camp DuBois	Traveler's Rest, Lolo, MT
Bellefontaine Cemetery	Lewiston, ID
Missouri Historical Society	Sacajawea Historical State Park
St. Charles Boat House	Cape Disappointment
Fort Osage	Fort Clatsop
Lewis & Clark Center, Nebraska City	Lewis & Clark Saltworks
Sgt. Floyd Monument	End of the Trail Seaside Promenade
Dignity of Earth and Sky	Cannon Beach

LCTA Presents The 2026 Summer of VR



www.lewisandclark.org

"Summer of VR" T shirts provided to the team

As of May 30, the team has entered Eastern Montana and is already more than halfway through its production schedule. Along the way, students are documenting landscapes, recording interpretive content, and capturing the atmosphere of places that continue to define the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

The work happening on the road this summer is only the beginning. When the tour concludes, students will return to the classroom and immersive media labs at Shenandoah University to begin transforming the material into an updated VR experience and additional video productions designed for a growing audience of Lewis and Clark enthusiasts on YouTube and beyond.

The continued partnership reflects a larger opportunity for the Lewis and Clark Trail Alliance: reaching new audiences through emerging technology while connecting younger generations to the landscapes, stories, and significance of the Trail.

For many people, Lewis and Clark history begins with a book.

For others, it may soon begin with a headset.



Brad Winn, Site Manager at Camp Dubois puts on a VR Headset



Students at Gateway Arch National Park



Posing at Kaw Point



Filming at Historic Locust Grove

Lewis and Clark VR APP Wins two Telly Awards



Shenandoah University and the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance have earned national recognition for their innovative virtual reality collaboration, Lewis and Clark VR, which received two prestigious 2026 [Telly Awards](#) for excellence in immersive media production.

The project was honored with a Silver Telly Award in the “General–Student” category, recognizing immersive productions created by students in academic programs, and a Bronze Telly Award in the “General–History” category for productions that bring historically significant events and people to life through immersive storytelling.

Developed through a partnership between Shenandoah University and the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance, the VR experience uses emerging technology to immerse audiences in the story of the Corps of Discovery and the legacy of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The production was led by a student and faculty team that included Project Lead Lee A. Graff, Executive Producer Nathan Prestopnik, Producer Mariah Arant, VR Experience Director Wes Brown, and additional contributors in 3D modeling and immersive production.

The recognition highlights Shenandoah University’s leadership in digital media education and the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance’s continued investment in technology-driven historical interpretation, public engagement, and cultural tourism experiences.

This Vast Enterprise



Historian and author Craig Fehrman has launched a highly successful national tour for his acclaimed new book, *This Vast Enterprise: A New History of Lewis & Clark*, which has rapidly climbed to #14 on the New York Times bestseller list. Fehrman’s compelling and deeply researched reinterpretation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition has drawn widespread national attention and praise for bringing fresh perspective and energy to one of America’s defining stories.

The momentum behind the book has led to a series of high-profile interviews and podcast appearances, including conversations with Anthony Scaramucci on [Open Book](#) and Clay Jenkinson on [Listening to America](#). Early national reviews have hailed the work as both groundbreaking and highly engaging, further cementing its place as one of the most important new books on the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

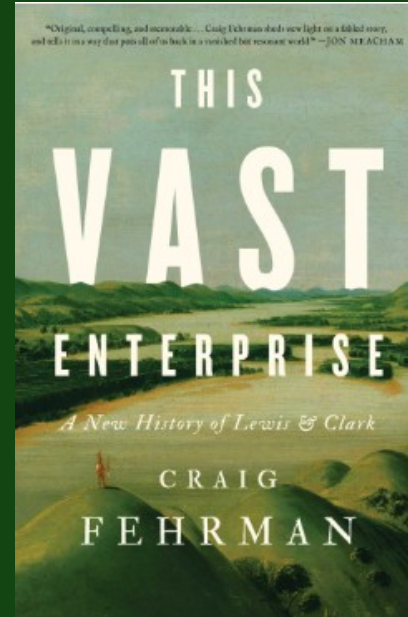
The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance was also fortunate to host Craig for two outstanding LCTA Zoomcasts, which are available at the links below.

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.

Why Was This Sergeant Buried Four Times?

A Memorial to the First U.S. Soldier to Die West of the Mississippi River

Real Stories of the Lewis and Clark Trail

LEWISCLARKTRAILSTORIES.SUBSTACK.COM



Riding for their Lives

To the Far Edge of the Louisiana Purchase

UNDAUNTEDTRAVEL.SUBSTACK.COM

Undaunted Travel



Charles Floyd was born in Kentucky around 1782. In 1803, at age 21, he was recruited by Captain William Clark and joined the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery at Camp River Dubois in present-day Hartford, Ill. At the time, he would have been among the younger men on the expedition.

Floyd was appointed as one of the three sergeants (the Corps was a military expedition and organized along military structure). He was reportedly intelligent and well-liked, and Clark seemed to favor him. [Read the article](#)

The Corps of Discovery's northernmost journey would also become its most dangerous. While wintering at Fort Clatsop near the mouth of the Columbia River in today's Oregon, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark made one of the boldest decisions of the entire expedition.

Rather than remain together on the return journey, the Corps of Discovery would divide into smaller detachments to gather additional geographic and scientific information for the young United States. [Read the Article](#)

CNN Series *This Land* to Feature Descendant Voices



A major new television series exploring the expansion of the United States will soon bring renewed national attention to the story and legacy of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. CNN Original Series [This Land](#) premieres Sunday, June 7, with two episodes airing weekly at 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. ET/PT.

Timed to coincide with America's 250th anniversary, the six-part series examines pivotal moments that shaped the nation's growth across the continent, including the Louisiana Purchase and the Corps of Discovery expedition. Through interviews with descendants of historical figures, the program connects the past to the present in a deeply personal way.



Matt Nelson in the Gates of the Mountains

Of special interest to members and supporters of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance is the participation of [Dustina Abrahamson](#) and [Willow Abrahamson](#), descendants of [Sacajawea](#), the young Lemhi Shoshone girl whose knowledge, diplomacy, and guidance proved invaluable to the success of the Expedition, alongside [Matt Nelson](#), a direct descendant of Expedition co-commander [William Clark](#). Their

appearances provide a powerful living connection to the people whose lives and experiences helped shape the story and legacy of the Corps of Discovery.

The series promises to explore not only the achievements of exploration and expansion, but also the lasting impacts these events had on Indigenous communities, migration, politics, and the development of the United States.

Trail enthusiasts, historians, and anyone interested in the enduring legacy of Lewis and Clark are encouraged to watch this important national production. Episodes will also stream on CNN digital platforms beginning June 8.

[Watch the Trailer](#)

2026 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. Michelle Schwartz won with this *Headwaters of the Missouri* landscape.



[Enter the Contest](#)

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Washington, Missouri Center Threatened to Close

For years, the Washington, Missouri, Lewis & Clark Visitor Center has welcomed travelers arriving by train, car, and riverboat along the Missouri River corridor. Housed inside the city's historic 1888 Water Works building, the center has become a unique stop for visitors exploring the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the heritage of Washington, Missouri. Now, the future of the center is uncertain.



Owner Toni Cavin recently shared that the facility's lease will expire within the next year, and without new leadership or support, the center may be forced to close. After investing years of effort, interpretation, and community engagement into the site, Cavin hopes someone with an interest in heritage tourism, local history, or visitor services may be willing to step forward and continue its mission.

Located on city park grounds between the Missouri River and the railroad tracks, the center occupies one of the community's most distinctive historic structures and serves as an important gateway for visitors exploring the region.

Anyone interested in learning more about taking over or supporting the Washington Lewis & Clark Visitor Center is encouraged to contact Toni Cavin directly at: WashMo_OntheGo@yahoo.com



“Camp of the Gros Ventres of the prairies on the upper Missouri” c. 1840 (cropped)
[Karl Bodmer](#) (1809–1893)

Day by Day Radio Episodes

In the [White Cliffs](#) of the [Upper Missouri River Breaks](#), the [enlisted men](#) struggle to tow the boats from slippery and narrow banks. [Lewis](#) tests the humidity by measuring the evaporation rate, and Pvt. [Whitehouse](#) describes an empty [Atsina](#) camp.

[May 30, 1804](#)

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.

Play Lewis & Clark Trivia



Meriwether Lewis had a great idea while planning the western expedition. Indeed, it really was a great idea, but, well, it didn't work.

His idea—he called it an “experiment”—was for a very usable portable contraption that would make things a lot easier far up the Missouri River. He had it built at the U.S. Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Va. When the expedition reached what is now Great Falls, Montana, Lewis decided now was the time to assemble his experiment. And thus it was assembled. And thus it was a huge failure.

The trivia quest: What was Lewis's “experiment”?

(*Hint:* Take a look at the photo. It's a replica of Lewis's failed experiment on display near the site where the experiment was assembled near Great Falls. Lewis and other explorers began assembling it on June 23, 1805, and worked on it for the next 11 days until they realized it wouldn't work).

[Submit your answer](#)

The winner of this trivia game will be emailed a list of Lewis and Clark books to choose one book for the prize. All books are used but in good condition.

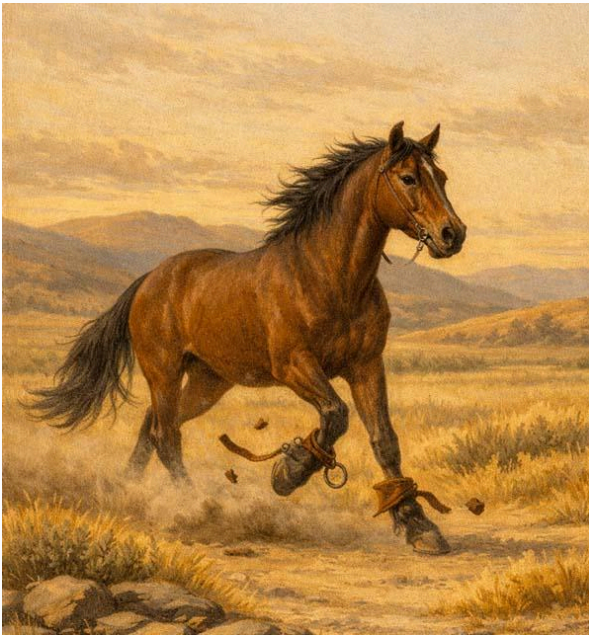
The trivia game in the last *Trail News* had a two-part answer. The question was about what caused the jovial atmosphere to dissolve after the previous night's ball hosted by the residents of St. Charles, Mo., for the explorers after they arrived there on May 16, 1804.

One of the two answers: Three privates faced court-martial for behaving in an unbecoming manner related to the previous night's activities. The second answer: Some visiting Kickapoos told William Clark that the Sauk and Osage were at war, something he and Lewis had been trying to prevent.

Six readers answered correctly. When more than one reader provides the correct answer, a drawing is done. Leon Klusmeyer was the winner.

Words of the Expedition

“Spanseled”



If you're into arcane equine or livestock words, you may know what “spanseled” means. In modern times, the word is spelled “spancel.” Meriwether Lewis, though, spelled the word as “spanseled” in his April 21, 1806, journal entry.

At the time when Lewis wrote the word, the expedition was near Celilo Falls on the Columbia River, headed home. Lewis wrote: “Notwithstanding all the precautions I had taken with respect to the horses one of them had broken his cord of 5 strands of Elkskin and had gone off spanseled.”

Today, “spancel” is a seldom-used livestock handling term meaning to use a rope to hobble an animal. The word evolved from the early Dutch and German word, “spannen,” meaning to “stretch, bind or fasten.” The first recorded use of “spanceled” in written English occurred in 1610.

The Oxford English Dictionary says the use of today's word “spancel” is extremely rare. That was the case, too, in the expedition's journals. Lewis's writing of “spanseled” (spanceled) and a couple of instances where other explorers used variations of “spanseled” were the only times the word was used.

To discover what happened after the horse broke its “spancel,” read [Lewis' journal entry](#). You'll be surprised about the way Lewis described his actions that day in 1806 in dealing with natives, whom he called “villains.”



Teacher Workshop

The Lewis and Clark Fort Clatsop Teacher Workshop is designed for educators seeking creative ways to bring history to life for their students. Hosted at historic Fort Clatsop, one of the most significant sites associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, this in-person

professional development opportunity provides practical teaching tools, historical resources, and collaborative learning experiences that can be immediately applied in the classroom.

Participants will earn five professional development credit hours and enjoy a complimentary lunch while exploring innovative approaches to teaching

American history, Indigenous history, geography, exploration, and cultural heritage.

Whether you teach elementary, middle school, high school, or informal education programs, this workshop will provide valuable resources and strategies to help students connect with the story of the Corps of Discovery and the people, places, and cultures that shaped the American West.

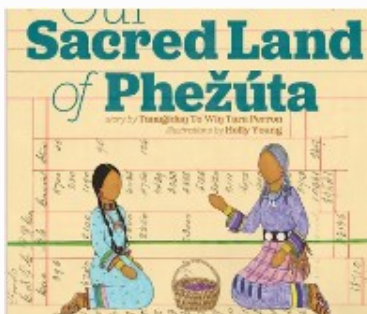
October 24 at 9 a.m. Fort Clatsop Visitor Center, Astoria, Oregon

[Registration](#)

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



[Pint Night](#)
Billings, MT
June 3



[Story Time](#)
Chamberlain, SD
June 9



[Jefferson's Gambit](#)
Cannon Beach, OR
June 11

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](#)



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.

The Last Word

Old and New Friends

One of the things I value most about the Lewis and Clark Trail Alliance is the people. This summer, I am looking forward to participating in three outstanding events: the Lolo Trail work projects at Weippe and Powell, along with the LCTA Annual Gathering in Great Falls.

Each of these experiences offers something special—an opportunity to contribute, learn, and connect.

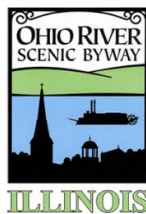
For many of us, these events provide a chance to reconnect with friends we have known for years. Whether we first met on a trail project, at a gathering, or through our shared passion for the Lewis and Clark story, those personal connections are a big part of what makes our Alliance strong.

At the same time, I am equally excited to meet new friends. Some are people I have only encountered through Zoom meetings, email exchanges, social media, or simply by seeing their names associated with projects and initiatives across the Trail. There is something rewarding about finally putting faces to names and building relationships beyond a screen.

I encourage each of you to take advantage of the many opportunities this summer. Attend a trail project, join us in Great Falls, or participate in another LCTA event. You may reconnect with old friends, make new ones, and deepen the connections that strengthen our community and help carry our shared mission forward. The Trail is rich with history, landscapes, and stories—but it is the people who bring it to life and make it special.

Richard Hunt

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