

Busy Preparations Before the 1806 Split



The Corps of Discovery arrived at Travelers Rest for their 2nd stay, late on June 30, 1806. Activity was at a fever pitch. Something big was about to happen. The contingent of 33 people and 67 ponies were going to split up and go several directions across the Louisiana wilderness. The plan was hatched back on the Pacific coast - their way home would be different. Seeking a most practical route to the western sea was their main goal. Some would retrace parts of the 1805 trek, while others would explore entirely new routes and regions in today's Montana. It was a bold and dangerous plan. Breaking out into very small groups made them all vulnerable. There was strength in numbers.

Regardless of the upcoming excitement, the Corps went about their business in routine fashion. Some men prepared the camp, a few tended to the horse herd and unpacked supplies, others hunted for food, made bullets, and repaired broken guns. Game seemed a bit more abundant here this time of year. They butchered 13 deer. But most of all they rested. They even had some fun, running foot races with the Indian guides. The trip over the mountains from the Nez Perce villages had been brutal. Deep snow and poor mountain trails had been major obstacles. The Corps credited their five young Nez Perce guides for their mountain passage success.

Captain Lewis, who often suffered from writer's block, was suddenly writing up a storm! He finished his letter to Hugh Heney, the British trader in Canada. They had met at Mandan the year before. He handed the letter to Clark with a list of supplies the Corps badly needed. Heney would also be asked to help convince Mandan chiefs to come with the Corps to meet President Jefferson in Washington. Lewis was nearly manic with his pen. In just two days, he cataloged a variety of birds common in the area. Morning doves, black (Lewis) woodpeckers, pileated woodpeckers, common flickers, larks, cranes, sandpipers, curlews, kingbirds, blackbirds, ravens, sage grouse, hawks, and common sparrows all made his list. Somewhere in the midst of this feverish writing episode, he managed to convince the five Nez Perce guides to continue on with him for at least a few more days. One guide was rewarded with a repaired sawed-off rifle. Lewis needed directions how to cross Clark's River and find the Road to the Buffalo. The young guides feared Blackfeet could be close and preferred to head home, but agreed to remain a bit longer than comfortable.

The busy Lewis also wrote a lengthy piece on the prairie dog that he called the barking squirrel. Incredibly he wasn't done recording. Lewis continued on by identifying several new plant species in the area. The campsite was in full bloom with wildflowers. July was early summer back then. He took full advantage. This is where his namesake "Lewisia Rediviva" was found. We call it the Bitterroot today. It is Montana's state flower. Two species of clover were distinguished: small headed white clover and owl clover. Lewis also identified the new "Black" cottonwood tree species as opposed to the "Narrow Leaf" and "Plains" varieties they had seen along the Missouri and Columbia waterways. He also documented accounts of Liverwort, Stone Crop, and Bessey's crazyweed. This was indeed an incredibly productive few days at Travelers Rest! They parted on July 3rd and wouldn't see each other again until August 12th in North Dakota.



Bitterroot



Bessey's Crazyweed



Owl Clover



Small Head Clover



Liverwort



Stone Crop

The Black Cottonwood leaf is the Park's symbol & logo...



Travelers' Rest