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Wednesday, May 04, 2011



**Our mission is to inspire people of all ages to travel by bicycle. We help cyclists explore the landscapes and history of America for fitness, fun, and self-discovery.**  
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## FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY

The main route of the Lewis & Clark Bicycle Trail is made up of paved roads, bike paths, and unpaved rail-trails, with occasional short sections of gravel roads. Conditions vary from rural to urban.

Lewis and Clark's expedition traveled more often by boat via rivers than by land, and this route follows the rivers as closely as possible. Occasional rough roads, narrow to nonexistent shoulders, and sparse services make this one of our more challenging routes. Keeping this in mind, we recommend that you equip yourself with a fat-tired touring bicycle. Also, you'll want to include a water filter on your packing list, as many of the campgrounds available are primitive and do not have potable water sources. If you use motels, plan ahead and be ready to ride some long days, perhaps as much as 100 miles. Distances between services in some areas can be substantial, so prior planning of your daily mileage is important.

Options and alternates offer much variety. The eight map sections show 4,675 mapped miles. Traveling the most historically correct (main) westbound route over Lemhi Pass, you will ride 3,253 miles to reach the Pacific Ocean. In total, there are 174 miles of unpaved rail-trail and 184.3 miles of gravel, 24.5 of which are unavoidable if you stay on the main route. Some options allow you to avoid gravel sections or closer proximity to the Missouri River, whereas others offer historical side trips and rarely seen vistas like the view from Lewis and Clark Pass.

## GLIMPING THE PAST

You will have many opportunities to pause and learn about the history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at interpretive centers and museums that are along the route, in the smallest towns and largest cities. Probably the most impressive of these is the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center in Great Falls, Montana. In addition to Lewis and Clark-themed points of interest, the route also passes through six Indian reservations and features Native American and regional museums.

## TAKING YOUR TIME

Plan on around two and a half months (give or take) for the most direct routing. Some will traverse the route quicker, but this leaves less time for sightseeing. This route can be ridden from May through September. Note that snow can occur at any time in the Rocky Mountains, and the highest pass on the route is over 7,300 feet. Although the prevailing weather patterns are from west to east, local wind patterns are more dependent on the passing pressure systems and local terrain, so you can expect your fair share of tailwinds and headwinds, regardless of which direction you ride the route.

## ROUTE NETWORKS

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## ADVENTURE CYCLING MAPS

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The route begins at the impressive Lewis and Clark State Memorial Park visitor center outside Hartford, Illinois. The center is near the mouth of the Wood River, on the opposite side of the Mississippi from where the Missouri feeds into it. It was at the mouth of the Wood where the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition spent the winter of late 1803 and early 1804, making final preparations for a spring departure up the Missouri. After crossing the Mississippi River into Missouri, the route joins the Katy Trail, a long converted rail bed. With its smooth surface of crushed limestone, the Katy traverses the floodplain of the Missouri, often running immediately beside the river and just above the water level. You can shorten the distance on the Katy by crossing the Missouri and using the Jefferson City Option. Much of the Missouri countryside that was wild frontier when Lewis and Clark passed through has been transformed into densely settled urban and suburban pockets. The Missouri River corridor can be considered a heavily used recreational and industrial strip linking the St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas. Kansas's short contribution to the route, by comparison, is more rural, winding amidst rolling grainfields. At Brownville, Nebraska, you can ride the Steamboat Trace or choose the Hamburg Option. This 34-mile option is paved, with the exception of a 4.5-mile gravel stretch. Riding conditions in southeastern Nebraska and southwestern Iowa range from rural to urban, the latter particularly around Omaha-Council Bluffs.

Between Council Bluffs and Sioux City, the riding tends to be either table-flat or very hilly, depending on whether you're in the Missouri River floodplain or in the flanking Loess Hills. Roads around both of these Iowa cities can be very busy, so avoid riding them during the morning and afternoon commuting hours. West of Yankton, South Dakota, recreational vehicle traffic can be heavy, as it can be around any of the lake or dam access areas (Fort Randall, Chamberlain, Fort Thompson etc.). Near Bonesteel you will have the opportunity to ride closer to the river on the Whetstone Bay Option. This option is 25.5 miles in length, with 14.5 miles on a hard-packed dirt and gravel road with no services other than a campground. State Highway 1806 out of Fort Thompson carries less traffic, while dishing up extreme climbs and dramatic vistas. The actual Lewis and Clark Trail through this area -- the Missouri River, that is -- is less a river than a string of huge reservoirs, peppered with isolated communities and seasonal services. This trend continues into North Dakota and eastern Montana. From Fort Thompson, there are two ways into Pierre, South Dakota, continuing on the main route or following the Lake Sharpe Option. This 61-mile option, on the north side of the Missouri River, goes through the Crow Creek Indian Reservation.

North of Pierre, you will ride through high, rolling bluff country that is typically some distance away from the river corridor but which occasionally proffers amazing views of the big body of water below. The route through the capital city of Bismarck, North Dakota, has two options: one urban through the heart of the city where services are located and the other on bike paths closer to the river. You'll probably find yourself either praising or cursing the ever-present wind, depending on which way it is blowing in relation to the way you're trying to go. Plenty of river and lake access is offered via gravel roads as you ride along State Highway 1804, which you follow between Pierre and Williston, North Dakota. Potentially heavy recreational and agricultural traffic on the road is countered by generally good sight distances; services are few and far between, a situation you will



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Initially in Montana -- especially if you're bucking headwinds -- the riding might be characterized as "put your head down and grin and bear it" conditions. But after you turn south at Nashua and continue to Fort Peck, the riding and the scenery vastly improve. You won't actually lay eyes on the Missouri River for some 300 miles, as you ride between Fort Peck and Fort Benton. That is not to say that you will not experience some of the most spectacular mountain-and-plains vistas in North America. From Fort Peck to the junction with State Highway 200, you'll cycle through rolling badland hills. After turning west onto State Highway 200, the wind will be a concern; it can affect your steering and make it hard, or even impossible, to hear cars approaching from the rear. A rear-view mirror, always a good idea, is strongly suggested in windy areas such as these. From Lewistown to Fort Benton, you'll ride through the Montana of imagination, an idyllic scene that Charlie Russell, "America's cowboy artist," couldn't have bettered.

South of Great Falls, you will finally start getting into the canyons and mountains Montana is known for. A dividend of the terrific mountain scenery is that a large share of the lands are federally owned, so campgrounds become much more plentiful than they've been up to this point. At Three Forks, where the Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson rivers merge, you'll leave the Missouri River behind for good. Three miles south of Dillon, you will again be faced with choosing between two options, both of which include crossing the Continental Divide. Staying on Lewis and Clark's 1804 westbound route takes you over Lemhi Pass, which includes 24.5 miles of gravel while the 87-mile paved Big Hole Option represents Clark's 1806 eastbound journey. The Big Hole Option passes the Big Hole National Battlefield and Visitor Center that tells the tale of the Nez Perce and their flight to freedom. On this option, you will also encounter Clark's 1806 eastbound route over Gibbon's Pass.

The Bitterroot Valley, in western Montana, has become heavily populated in recent years. Traffic increases dramatically as you follow secondary roads that parallel U.S. Highway 93. At Traveler's Rest -- a.k.a. the town of Lolo -- the route heads north into Missoula. Here you can find several bike shops and visit the headquarters of Adventure Cycling Association. Although the site of Missoula was not encountered by Lewis and Clark during the expedition's westbound travels, on the return trip east, the nine-man contingent led by Capt. Lewis passed the location of this future city.

Leaving Montana, the route follows U.S. Highway 12 southwest from Lolo to Powell, Idaho, and you'll be roughly tracing the actual route of Lewis and Clark. The main route continues west on its twisting way from Powell through the corridor of the Lochsa Wild and Scenic River. The Lochsa joins forces with the Selway River at Lowell, where the two transform into the Middle Fork of the Clearwater. Lewis and Clark didn't use this river corridor and instead stayed on the mountain ridges to the north along an existing Indian trail.

Our 145.3-mile Lolo Trail Option climbs high up along ridgelines to access the rough roller coaster of a dirt road known as the Lolo Trail. Due to the rugged, mountainous terrain and scarcity of services and water, only fit, experienced mountain bikers should attempt this option.

At Kamiah (KAM-ee-eye), the recommended route leaves the Clearwater River and U.S. Highway 12. Alternatively, if you take the River Option continuing along U.S. Highway 12 and following the Clearwater into

Lewiston, you would be staying true to Lewis and Clark's actual route, but you would have to contend with a great deal of traffic to do it. The road is narrow, winding, and largely lacking in shoulders. The main route, in contrast, hides a wonderful surprise of low-traffic byways rolling past the forests and through the farmlands of the southern reaches of the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. From the main westbound route, you will have two choices to cover the last 21 miles into Clarkston, Washington. The seven-mile Lapwai Option parallels U.S. Highway 95 on smaller, lightly traveled roads. It connects with the River Option at the Nez Perce National Historic Park. The 22.5-mile Hell's Gate Option stays on smaller roads and heads down to Hell's Gate State Park on the Snake River at the edge of Lewiston.

West of Clarkston, where the Snake River bends northwest, you'll leave Lewis and Clark's westbound route, and not join it again until you reach the Columbia River near Walla Walla, Washington. Much of the bicycle route between these two cities, however, does follow the approximate overland route taken by the Corps in early May 1806. Your windy -- and potentially very hot -- ride through the Columbia River Gorge and on to the coast will be a study in contrasts: from stretches of traffic-clogged I-94 to a couple of closed-to-cars sections of the Historic Columbia River Highway, now a beautiful state trail, and from the bustle of metropolitan Portland to small, serene communities that barely earn a dot on the map. Via the Washington Option through the gorge, you'll find that State Highway 14 has light traffic, with occasional large trucks and few services. The highway has an intermittent shoulder. Two series of tunnels have buttons to activate "Bikes in Tunnel" lights. This option is 10.5 miles shorter and rejoins the main route in Portland.

U.S. Highway 30, unfortunately, is a busy way to end the trip, but there's a good reason all of those motorists are heading west: to get out to that beautiful coastline. From Astoria, two spurs delineate Lewis and Clark's further explorations. The 21.5-mile Seaside Spur passes Fort Clatsop National Memorial, the Corps' 1805-1806 winter quarters, and continues on to Seaside, where the Corps processed seawater into salt for their return journey. The 20-mile Cape Disappointment Spur crosses the Columbia River into Washington and heads west to Fort Canby State Park.

In the spring of 1806, the Corps began their return journey to St. Louis. To cover more area and gather more information, they divided into two parties at Traveler's Rest in Lolo, MT. Capt. Lewis and nine men returned to the great falls of the Missouri via the Blackfoot River and the Sun River, crossing the Continental Divide at what would later be called Lewis and Clark Pass. This part of the journey is mapped in the 187.5-mile Blackfoot Option east of Missoula.. It uses two-lane highways that parallel the Blackfoot and Sun rivers. A 13-mile gravel spur along Alice Creek is shown for those who want to ride/hike up to Lewis and Clark Pass to view what Lewis and his men saw. This option ends in Great Falls, Montana.

Capt. Clark and the rest of the expedition returned to Camp Fortunate (Clark Canyon Reservoir) and then to the Missouri-Yellowstone confluence. This 506-mile journey is reflected in map section 8 beginning in Three Forks, Montana. In general, the route stays on I-90 and the frontage roads that parallel it. Services can be few and far between the farther east the route goes. You'll have a gentle climb over Bozeman Pass to get into the Yellowstone River drainage. The route is slightly rolling with great views of the Yellowstone River. Between Bozeman and Glendive the route occasionally uses the interstate when there is no frontage road. Use caution when entering and exiting the ramps, as most of them have cattleguards.

The interstate does have a wide shoulder and carries light traffic as far as interstates go, but use caution as the traffic does travel at high speed. Pompey's Pillar, the site where you can see William Clark's signature, is 8.5 miles north of Worden and a mere half mile off the route. State Highways 16 and 200 have intermittent shoulders and light traffic. This map section ends in Williston, North Dakota.

#### **Part of a Larger Effort**

In response to all of the interest and activity in the years leading up to the bicentennial celebration, the National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial was formed. Working hand in hand with federal and state agencies, Indian tribes, and other groups and individuals, the council coordinated dozens of partners, programs, and events commemorating the bicentennial. The staff, board of directors, and members of Adventure Cycling are proud that their organization had a part to play in that greater effort. The council recognized the Lewis & Clark Bicycle Trail map series as part of the nationwide celebration.

Portions of the above text are excerpted from the book "Bicycling the Lewis and Clark Trail," published in spring 2003 by Globe Pequot Press in cooperation with Adventure Cycling Association. It is available for purchase through the [Cyclosource](#) online catalog.

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