Chapter 1

Reflecting on the Legacy: Lewis and Clark, Then and Now

In This Chapter

- Getting acquainted with the Corps of Discovery and its fascinating story
- Figuring out what the Corps actually did
- Recognizing how the exploration changed America (for better and for worse)
- Commemorating the Lewis and Clark expedition

As true stories go, you won't find a better one than the Lewis and Clark expedition. It includes a great multicultural cast of characters and a terrific action-adventure plot that's full of surprising twists and turns. And it's set in an inhabited paradise full of natural wonders that no American had seen before. This chapter gives you an overview of the story.

In the end, Lewis and Clark couldn't fulfill some of the expedition's goals, but they did increase America's knowledge of the West and opened the door for westward expansion. As you discover in this chapter, this was good news for U.S. growth and prosperity, but terrible news for American Indians and the natural environment.

Today, Americans are re-exploring the legacy of Lewis and Clark, as the National Bicentennial of the expedition is commemorated from 2003 to 2006. You, too, can get on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail to experience for yourself its scenes of "visionary inchantment," as Lewis so aptly described them. This chapter gets you started.

Proving That Truth Is Stranger (and Better) Than Fiction

It's an unlikely story: a melancholic presidential secretary and a genial frontier planter leading three dozen young Euro-American men, a handful of

French-Canadians, a black slave, an Indian girl, her infant child, and a large dog on a voyage to find an all-water route across a vast, uncharted continent to a faraway ocean.

With only their wits, frontier skills, and significant tribal assistance to guide them and keep them alive, this group trekked thousands of miles on foot, by canoe, and on horseback, carrying or dragging tons of supplies and trade goods from one Indian village to the next. See Figure 1-1.

After dozens of near-fatal mistakes and mishaps and 28 months of hardship and deprivation (long after they'd been given up for dead), they returned having lost only three men — one of their own to death by natural causes and two Blackfeet Indians killed in a gun and knife fight.

Lewis and Clark had remarkable skills and luck. They seemed to find whatever they needed at just the right time — tribes willing to guide them, transportation to get them to their next destination, the instincts and reflexes to overcome the next threat (heat stroke, grizzly bear attack, malaria, gunshot wound, and a flash flood). When their skill gave out, they relied on luck. And when their luck gave out, they mustered the will to "proceed on," which became their watchwords.

Meeting the Cast of the Saga

One of the reasons that the Lewis and Clark saga continues to fascinate people today is its large and colorful cast.

- The brilliant but troubled Meriwether Lewis
- Out-going and rock-steady William Clark
- The Indian child bride and mother Sacagawea
- Her un-heroic husband, Toussaint Charbonneau
- The "dancing" baby, Jean Baptiste
- York, the slave who became "Big Medison" (see Chapter 8)
- Generous Sheheke of the Mandan tribe
- Compassionate Cameahwait of the Shoshones
- The civilian jack-of-all-trades, George Drouillard
- The dog, Seaman
- The wise and proud Teton Sioux, Black Buffalo
- Cheerful, sincere Twisted Hair
- The one-eyed fiddler, Cruzatte

Chapter 2 shares many more details about this cast of characters.

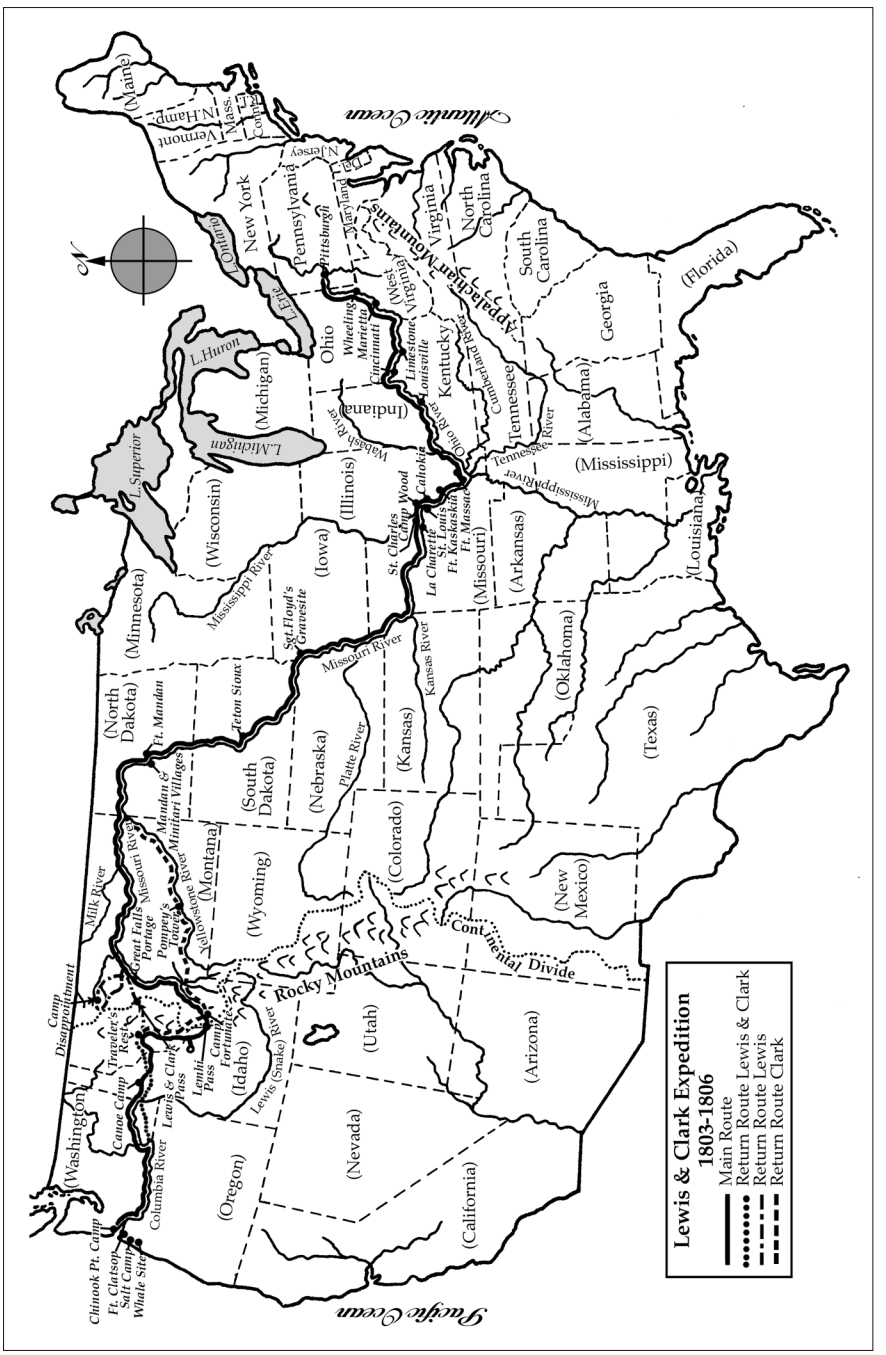

Figure 1-1: Map of the expedition.

Lisa S. Reed.

Supporting the Corps: American Indians to the rescue

Many tribes gave the expedition shelter, food, transportation, guides, maps, directions, and advice, including:

- The Mandan and Hidatsa of the Upper Missouri, who sheltered the Corps during its first winter
- The Shoshone, Salish, Nez Perce, and Walla Walla, who allowed the expedition to survive its march over the mountains
- The Chinooks and Clatsops of the Columbia River valley, who taught the Corps how to survive in the Pacific Northwest

Several individual Indians also stand out in their efforts to help the expedition:

- Early in the journey, Teton Sioux leader Black Buffalo saved the mission by diffusing tensions between his people and the Corps of Discovery at the mouth of the Bad River.
- Mandan leader Sheheke and his people took the Americans in for the winter, saying "If we eat, you shall eat; if we starve, you must starve also."
- Cameahwait, leader of a starving band of Shoshones, decided to delay a buffalo hunt (although his people needed the meat for survival) in order to help the first white men they had ever seen.
- Watkuweis, an elderly Nez Perce woman, saved the Corps by telling her tribe to "do them no hurt."
- Old Toby, a Shoshone, guided them west across the mountains.
- Unknown and unsung Shoshone women helped transport the expedition's bags.

The person who writes the words gets to tell the story. For this reason, most accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition include some recognition of the role Indian people played in the explorers' survival, but don't include what Indians thought of Lewis and Clark. Comparing their impressions of the Corps of Discovery with Lewis's and Clark's recorded impressions of the tribes would give a truer, richer picture of those human encounters.

In this book, we try to present tribal perspectives but don't tell Indian stories about Lewis and Clark. They are not our stories to tell. We eagerly look forward to the time when we can read tribal accounts about Lewis and Clark in words written and published by Indian people. Until then, the saga of Lewis and Clark is only half written.

Accepting Mission Improbable

The primary mission of what Lewis called his "darling project" was to find the Northwest Passage, a mythical all-water or nearly all-water route from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean (see Chapter 3). Thomas Jefferson directed Lewis and Clark to find "the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce."

Jefferson also instructed the Corps to carry out these secondary missions:

- Along the way, study Indian tribes, some felt to be hostile, and collect tribal vocabularies.
- Hold diplomatic meetings with the tribes in order to persuade them to enter into trade alliances with the United States and make peace with their enemies. These efforts were so that the United States could monopolize the burgeoning fur trade, squeezing the British out.
- Encourage the tribes to send delegations of important Indians east to meet Jefferson.
- Distribute enough (but not too many) gifts to the Indians to win their cooperation.
- Collect animal and plant specimens, as well as observe soils, minerals, and climate. Navigate by the stars.
- Keep journals and make accurate maps and drawings.
- Come back alive.

The explorers were to keep a sharp lookout for proof of woolly mammoths, Welsh Indians, a mountain of salt 180 miles across the prairie, and some shining mountains said to rise five miles above the plains in a single ridge, among other tantalizing fantasies that were part of 1803 Western lore. See Chapter 3 for details.

Exploring empty wilderness or inhabited, civilized homelands?

Members of the Corps of Discovery considered their journey a voyage of discovery. No one from the United States had traveled west of the Upper Missouri valley, so the Corps believed every bend in the river, sunset behind a mountain, tool made from bone, taste of fresh-pulled root, smell of bear fat, and notes of songs wailed in unfamiliar languages to be discoveries that expanded knowledge about the continent.

But Lewis and Clark didn't actually *discover* anything in the sense of being the first to find something out (as dictionaries define "discover"). The land and water that the expedition explored had been occupied, known, and actively used for millennia by native peoples. The 100-plus tribal nations in the expedition's path had their own languages, traditions, social and political hierarchies, health care, education, religions, and customs. The tribes operated far flung trade networks; established hunting, gathering, farming, and sacred boundaries; formed alliances; and made enemies as circumstances dictated. Lewis and Clark did not blaze their own trail — they traveled Indian roads, using Indian maps and advice.

Adding to scientific knowledge

On behalf of science, Lewis and Clark collected and recorded 178 plant species and 122 animal species. They were the first white people to create a nearly accurate map that showed the continent as it was. And they determined once and for all that no all-water Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean existed.

Everywhere Lewis went on the expedition, he observed and meticulously recorded plants and animals he believed to be new to science. Late in May of 1806, while the expedition stayed with the Nez Perce and waited for the snow to melt in the Bitterroot Mountains, the men brought Lewis a black woodpecker with a red throat and white and blood red breast. Lewis had seen the bird at a distance but not up close. Taking his time, he lavished a five-hundred-word description on it. We know the bird today as "Lewis's woodpecker." Its skin, the only zoological specimen that survives from the expedition, is at Harvard University. In addition, during his wait with the Nez Perce, Lewis had a very productive period as a botanist, collecting and preserving nearly 50 plants, including Lewis's syringa, purple trillium, ragged robin, and the green-banded mariposa lily.

While Lewis waxed poetic about animals and plants, Clark made detailed maps of the areas they traveled. Clark's famous map of the West (see Chapter 9) turned out to be off by only 40 miles out of the nearly 8,000 the expedition traveled. It has been useful to geographers and map makers ever since.

Lewis and Clark and the journal-keeping soldiers all recorded copious detail about the rivers and landscapes, weather conditions, and most of all, the people. Lewis's and Clark's *ethnological* (comparison of cultures) observations are revealing, both about the people recorded and about the ethnocentricity of the men doing the recording.

Placing Lewis and Clark in History

One of the ways that the Lewis and Clark journey stands out among all the other explorations of the Americas is the over one million words that Lewis and Clark wrote in their journals. Clark was the most faithful journalist, writing nearly every day, and he was also the most idiosyncratic speller. He spelled the word "mosquito," for example, over two dozen ways, without once spelling it the way Americans spell it today.

The journals are an unparalleled record of fact, opinion, bias, affection, anger, humor, sadness, and mortal danger. They make Lewis's and Clark's continental journey a human story, full of life and its triumphs and failures, joys and sorrows, and never-ending challenges.

Most of the intrepid explorers were dead just a few years after returning from the West, but because they kept journals that record every place they went and what they saw, heard, and did, the Lewis and Clark expedition lives on in American imaginations, hearts, and history classes.

The Lewis and Clark expedition, preserved in those journals, paved the way for rapid and radical change, and the country has made almost mind-boggling progress since the early 1800s. Yet that progress has come at a terrible cost to indigenous peoples and the environment.

Beginning Manifest Destiny

Manifest Destiny, the 19th-century doctrine that America's westward expansion was pre-determined and inevitable wasn't named until later in the century, but it was the obvious course of U.S. politics when Lewis and Clark set off on their voyage. The western half of the North American continent contained a million square miles in 1800, all unknown to United States citizens. This enormous uncharted land mass inspired visions of future U.S. power and prosperity in statesmen like President Jefferson, who conceived and planned the Lewis and Clark expedition. The West beckoned to men like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, who were young, fit, courageous, confident, and willing to test their fortunes against it.

Jefferson believed that western tribes could be instrumental in the development of a fur-trade empire and would gradually be assimilated into white culture. If not, they would have to be removed to some other place. Jefferson worried that assimilation would not happen fast enough on the frontier — it had not happened with tribes in the East, who had moved or been run off from their lands or gone into hiding. And it was not happening in Indiana Territory at that moment, where settlers were deciding that the Indians needed to leave and were clamoring for government intervention.

Jefferson thought that the surviving Eastern and Midwestern tribes were best protected from whites and should be removed to somewhere west of the Mississippi River, somewhere whites didn't want to live. The logical extension to that thought was that eventually, some western tribes would also have to be removed, although Jefferson may or may not have thought that far in advance.

White Americans believed that it was their God-given right to settle the West, and the path had to be cleared. Nineteenth-century Americans perceived the presence of Indian tribes all over the continent as an obstacle to settlement of U.S. territory — wherever whites chose to live.

A century of conquest

As you look back 200 years to the Lewis and Clark expedition, the landscape has radically changed. The environment has been critically damaged, and the tribes were nearly decimated. The expedition may not have directly caused these changes, but it was the catalyst for change. The West was certainly never the same after Lewis and Clark's visit.

Disease brought by Euro-Americans was the first wholesale killer of American Indians. Then, conflict with white settlers resulted in the loss of traditional homelands and hunting territories and removal or confinement to reservations. White settlement depleted the game animals that the tribes depended on for food, clothing, and self-sufficiency. Federal policy built dams that buried tribal lands in water and stopped the great salmon runs. Poverty, starvation, and dependency plagued reservation tribes. Federal government policy took Indian children from their parents and placed them in faraway boarding schools, where they were forced to give up their languages and cultures. Solemn treaties with tribes were broken. Presidential executive orders and acts of Congress continually reduced tribal lands. Federal policy withdrew sovereignty status from tribes and rescinded support for struggling tribal governments, schools, and social services. Federal policy tried to eradicate Indians.

Today, the tribes are striving to preserve their languages — languages that Lewis and Clark heard and tried to phonetically record in their journals. Tribes are working successfully to revitalize their cultures, traditions, practices, arts and crafts, songs, and stories. American Indian tribes are beginning to recover.

Waging a century of war against the environment

The overwhelming bounty of the West that Lewis and Clark described over and over was gone by the end of the same century in which they described it. Many animal and plant species were driven to extinction and many remain endangered. The countless numbers of buffalo that covered the plains for

Protecting the earth

The Sierra Club is participating in the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial commemoration with a five-year campaign to permanently protect the 56 million acres of remaining wildlands in Lewis and Clark country, preserve and restore key wildlife habitat, and protect threatened and endangered species (such as bison, wolves, grizzly bears, and salmon). Advocated solutions include wilderness designation, hands-on conservation, lands acquisition, smart growth, and an end to commercial logging on national forests and public lands.

The American Rivers organization has created a traveling exhibit called "Discover the Rivers of Lewis and Clark," to encourage citizen involvement in key decisions facing the Missouri, Snake, Yellowstone, and Columbia Rivers and to enhance public interest in river conservation. To find out more, visit www.sierraclub.org or www.americanrivers.org.

miles and held up Lewis's and Clark's canoes for hours while crossing rivers were decimated to near extinction by white hunters and settlers. Dams now constrict the natural flow of rivers. The huge salmon runs of the Columbia River and Pacific Northwest were stopped by dam after dam built to supply hydroelectric power, and some species of salmon recorded by Lewis and Clark are now extinct. These same dams buried the mighty Great Falls of the Missouri and the thundering Celilo Falls on the Columbia.

The beaver and otter were trapped out. Grizzly bears and wolves were forced to the brink of extinction. And the passenger pigeon that darkened the skies in Lewis's and Clark's day and provided supper for the explorers on occasion, perished completely from the face of the earth.

Today, many Americans are interested in conserving what bounty is left. National environmental organizations have focused their efforts on preserving and restoring the lands and waters traveled by Lewis and Clark. Federal, state, and tribal resource-management agencies enforce sustainable use regulations. And individual Americans are being more respectful, picking up their litter and contributing tax-deductible dollars to help protect and preserve America's natural treasures.

As a result, the rivers are slightly less polluted, although still dammed. Tribal consortiums are bringing back the salmon and buffalo bit by bit. Grizzly bears and wolves are multiplying again. Severe threats from resource extraction, growth, sprawl, drought, and general idiocy still exist, but for most Americans, what was once squandered is now valued.

Showing respect when visiting American Indian reservations

A good rule when planning to visit any American Indian reservation is to call the tribe or check the tribal Web site before your visit. Then go by the tribal headquarters as soon as you arrive to pick up any materials that may help you locate public events, attractions, and activities and to find out about any special rules to follow or permits you need. If the tribal headquarters are closed, locate a museum, visitor center, casino gift shop, motel, restaurant, or gas station and ask about what activities are encouraged and permitted on the reservation.

Tribal powwows, games, and rodeos are social events on reservations that usually welcome the public. Powwows are gatherings featuring generations-old drumming and dancing, along with traditional dress and food. Bring a lawn chair or blanket for an outdoor powwow, because seating is limited and generally reserved for the dancers and their families. The dance area is sacred, but guests may dance when invited by the emcee.

Most cultural and religious ceremonies require special permission to attend or, in some cases, may be closed to visitors.

Use established public roads, trails, and walkways. Never wander onto tribal or private property. Never disturb a sacred site or remove its artifacts. Instead, purchase mementos in wonderful shops and galleries that you find on reservations.

If in doubt, ask. Obey any posted rules and show the appropriate respect for cultural traditions, resources, and property. Flash and video photography are often not allowed at all on reservations without permission, or may not be allowed at specific events. Some tribes charge a fee for permission to photograph. If photography is allowed, always ask your subject's permission before snapping the camera.

Cultural and recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and gambling, may be offered on the reservation. Tribes have rules that protect their land's environment and wildlife. Contact tribal offices or visit the tribal Web site for regulations concerning access, recreational opportunities, motels, restaurants, and casinos.

In other words, do unto others. Show respect and enjoy the vacation of a lifetime, while persevering the natural, cultural, and historical richness of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and helping protect it for future generations.

Retracing the Corps' Steps: The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail

Because William Clark made such an amazingly accurate map; because Lewis and Clark took and recorded so many navigational readings (longitude, latitude, distances, and courses of rivers); and because the captains and several of the men wrote clear, compelling descriptions of the lands

that they were traveling through, today, you can visit the entire route that Lewis and traveled — from the birthplace of the expedition at Monticello (Jefferson's residence) to the awesome Pacific Coast. You can create your own personal exploration by car, boat, train, bus, canoe, kayak, bicycle, horseback, or hiking boots.

In 1978, Congress designated Lewis's and Clark's route as the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail — part of the National Trails System. The 3,700-mile-long trail is administered by the National Park Service in partnership with other federal agencies, states, tribes, not-for-profit organizations, and private landowners. The trail officially begins at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center near Wood River, Illinois, and wanders up the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains, down the Clearwater and Snake Rivers to the Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean. From its beginning in Illinois, it then passes through the modern states of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Some places, such as Monticello in Virginia and Lewis's Gravesite in Tennessee, are not on the official Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail but are integral to America's epic saga and, therefore, are designated as Lewis and Clark National Historic Sites.

All along the route, you find interpretive signs and centers, museums, state parks, marinas, big cities, small towns, Indian reservations, powwows, sweeping prairies, rolling grain fields, national forests, private lands, soaring vistas, sacred places, and great beauty. In a nutshell, you find the American West.

You can drive scenic byways and heritage corridors, take your boat up the Missouri, or ride Amtrak's *Empire Builder* train across the northern Plains. However you go, please take good care of this national treasure. For more information about Trail and related sites, log on to `www.nps.gov/lecl` or call 402-514-9311.

Joining the Journey: The National Bicentennial Commemoration

The bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition is being observed by the United States from 2003 to 2006. The commemoration is a grassroots, cross-cultural, nationwide volunteer effort to help people explore one of the most significant turning points of America's collective past. It is actively supported by over a dozen federal agencies, 35 tribal nations, 19 state governments, countless not-for-profit organizations, hundreds of local communities, a bipartisan Congressional caucus, and the president of the United States. The first lady of the United States serves as honorary chairperson of the bicentennial commemoration.

Because Lewis and Clark were instrumental in the creation of a coast-to-coast nation, the 200th anniversary of their journey was originally conceived as a celebration of their achievements. But the Corps of Discovery also marked the path for the future conquest by one people over a number of others. The tribes who met Lewis and Clark wanted to participate in the bicentennial, but not in a celebration. They couldn't celebrate the loss of everything in life as they once knew it. Early organizers, eager for historical accuracy, changed the term from "celebration" to "commemoration" and linked arms with tribal leaders to honor all perspectives.

More than half of the tribes whose homelands Lewis and Clark traversed are participating in the bicentennial commemoration. They are telling their stories, revitalizing their languages, protecting sacred lands, building interpretive and cultural centers, developing cultural tourism opportunities, and inviting the public to visit Indian country and enjoy native hospitality. They are planning and hosting national signature events during the bicentennial and working shoulder to shoulder with their non-Indian neighbors to make your visit a memorable one.

Most of the tribes are members of the Circle of Tribal Advisors of the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial — a historic coalition of 35 tribes working together to give national voice to Indian perspectives.

The National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial commemorates the pluck, luck, wit, and grit of Lewis and Clark in leading the Corps of Discovery across the continent. It applauds the cooperation between U.S. soldiers and American Indians. It honors the land and waters that the Corps of Discovery traveled. And it salutes the American Indians of this land who survived to tell their stories.

Participating in Corps of Discovery II

To commemorate the bicentennial, the National Park Service, with assistance from tribes and from other federal agencies, has created a touring exhibit and performance space called "Corps of Discovery II: 200 Years to the Future." On the road through fall 2006, it will visit dozens of communities and Indian reservations across 19 states, focusing on the nation's natural and cultural heritage and the stories of its people before, during, and after the expedition. Don't miss this exciting interactive traveling interpretive center when it comes to your town! For details, go to www.nps.gov.

Attending national signature events

Between January of 2003 and September of 2006, 15 national Lewis and Clark Bicentennial signature events are being hosted by communities along the trail:

- **Charlottesville, Virginia, January 14–19, 2003:** *Jefferson's West,* Bicentennial Commencement at Monticello
- **Clarksville, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky, October 14–26, 2003:** *Falls of the Ohio*
- **St. Louis, Missouri area**
  - **March 12–14, 2004:** *Three Flags Ceremony,* St. Louis, Missouri
  - **May 13–16, 2004:** *Expedition's Departure Camp Dubois,* Hartford and Wood River, Illinois
  - **May 14–23, 2004:** *St. Charles: Preparations Complete, the Expedition Faces West,* St. Charles, Missouri
- **Kansas City, Missouri area, July 3–4, 2004:** *Heart of America: A Journey Fourth,* Atchison and Leavenworth, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri
- **Omaha, Nebraska area, July 31–August 3, 2004:** *First Tribal Council,* Fort Atchison State Historical Park, Fort Calhoun, Nebraska
- **South Dakota, August 27–September 30, 2004:** *Oceti Sakowin Experience: Remembering and Educating,* South Dakota Tribal lands and reservations
- **Bismarck, North Dakota: October 22–31, 2004:** *Circle of Cultures, Time of Renewal and Exchange*
- **Great Falls, Montana: June 1–July 4, 2005:** *Explore the Big Sky*
- **Fort Clatsop, Oregon: November 24–27, 2005:** *Destination 2005 - The Pacific*, Pacific County, Washington, and Clatsop County, Oregon
- **Lapwai, Idaho:** June 14–17, 2006: *Among the Nez Perce,* Nez Perce National Historical Park, Idaho
- **Billings, Montana: July 22–25, 2006:** *Clark on the Yellowstone,* Pompeys Pillar National Monument
- **Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, North Dakota: August 17–20, 2006:** *Reunion at the Home of Sakakawea,* New Town, North Dakota
- **St. Louis, Missouri: September 23, 2006:** *Confluence with Destiny: The Return of Lewis and Clark*

For more information about all of these national events, log on to `www.lewisandclark200.org`.

Getting more information

Hundreds of community and regional events are scheduled during the bicentennial. And along the Lewis and Clark Trail, you can find dozens of federal, tribal, and state parks; monuments; historic sites; wildlife refuges; and interpretative centers. To help you find out more about these places and events, here are some useful Web sites:

- National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (calendar of events): www.lewisandclark200.org
- National Park Service/Fort Clatsop National Memorial: www.nps.gov/focl
- National Park Service/Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail: www.nps.gov/lecl
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (dams, lakes, parks): www.usace.army.mil
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management (National Monuments and federal lands): www.blm.gov
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (dams, lakes, parks): www.usbr.gov
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (National Wildlife Refuges): www.fws.gov
- U.S. Forest Service (National Forests and Grasslands): www.fs.fed.us
- U.S. Geological Survey (maps): www.usgs.gov

To find specific state and tribal tourism sites, go to your favorite search engine and enter the name of the specific tribe or state.