



Bicycle Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail

Tod Rodger

**Bicycle Guide
to the
Lewis & Clark Trail**

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Disclaimers

The author and publisher of this book, and the government agencies on whose roads you bicycle, are not responsible for your riding habits, bicycle condition, and any accidents which might occur while following this route. They urge users of this Guide to wear a certified bicycle helmet, wear highly visible clothing, use reflectors and lights, obey all traffic laws, watch for pedestrians and motorists, and generally use good common sense and courtesy.

Road and trail conditions change. The routes suggested in this book may be altered due to road and trail maintenance, changes in state and local roads, and road and trail surface conditions. Surface conditions of roads and trails may change due to weather, construction, and other local factors. Every effort has been made to provide accurate information in this book at the time of publication.

Updates will be posted on the author's website at www.deerfootpublications.com as they are received and verified. Readers are invited to send suggested updates to Tod@deerfootpublications.com.

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Dedicated to:

Doug Rodger (1971–1991)
my first and best touring partner

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Acknowledgments

I love bicycle touring. I am grateful to all those who have tolerated, supported, and encouraged me in this passion—especially my friends, riding partners, extended family, and daughter Chris, who nursed me back to health after an accident, and still urged me to, “Go for it, Dad.”

Although my early academic strengths and interests were in math and science, I have come to appreciate and love the beauty and history of our United States as I have aged and travelled. And as I gradually became the one who documents family and group travels, I have also realized how much I enjoy writing.

I was on a sabbatical from teaching high school math in 1998 when I first saw Ken Burns' public television series on Lewis and Clark, and saw the light. I could combine all these things I love. Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage* further inspired me and provided the final kick I needed to get going. After a year of trying to convince Adventure Cycling to work together on a map and book description of the Lewis and Clark Trail, I was discouraged when they decided to proceed without my help. However, Harvey Botzman of Cyclotours and many friends encouraged me to proceed anyway.

Many people helped along the way. The Lauritzens, Aikens, Hales, and Bells were generous with accommodations, hospitality, and ideas. Visitor centers, chambers of commerce, B&Bs, National and State Park information centers, and Lewis and Clark interpretive centers have been very interested, helpful, friendly, generous, and patient; and many have read and critiqued sections of the book. Rex Garrelts and Mark Viets (Captain Lew and Captain Bill) have road tested parts of the book on their bicycle tour. The Ankers and staff at Anker Publishing and the Dufurs at Pebble Publishing have been most helpful with publishing issues.

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The quotations from the journals of Lewis and Clark are all from the Moulton edition, and I am grateful to the University of Nebraska Press for permission to use them. For the most part, the quotations are referenced by date, because that is the easiest way to locate them in the journals. I thank the National Park Service for permission to use the familiar silhouette of Lewis and Clark on the cover of this book. All photographs are by Lyn and Tod Rodger, except the cover photograph of the author by Roy Moffa.

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WHY BIKE THE LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL? ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK



*The author looking up to his heroes, who are looking west.
Explorers at the Portage by Robert M. Scriver,
is at the Great Falls Visitor Center.*

WHO WERE LEWIS AND CLARK?

WHAT DID THEY DO?

WHY IS THEIR TRIP SIGNIFICANT?

When the fledgling United States was only 26 years old in 1803, the Mississippi River formed its western boundary. The vast continent beyond the Mississippi was legally administered by Spain; but it was populated only by “Indian” tribes that could be either friendly or dangerous, a few French trappers and traders who had ventured beyond the French settlement of St. Louis, and a few American pioneers who had illegally homesteaded fertile farmland.

The Pacific coast was sparsely inhabited by Spanish missionaries, and ownership was claimed and disputed by Spain, Britain, and Russia. The American explorer Grey had discovered the mouth of the Columbia River, and the British explorer Vancouver had ventured 100 miles up the Columbia River; but no European had seen the vast area between the Dakotas and the Pacific Ocean.

Where others saw conflict, confusion, and desert wasteland, Thomas Jefferson, our nation’s third president, saw opportunity. Some historians have pointed out that America was an empire before it was a nation—struggling with the British, French, and Spanish to find the “northwest passage” to the rich Orient and to establish a nation on the American continent. In what many saw as folly, but history later confirmed was brilliance, Jefferson convinced Congress to purchase the Louisiana Territory for three cents an acre, thereby doubling the size of the United States.

On June 20, 1803 Jefferson charged Meriwether Lewis and William Clark with leading a U.S. Army expedition of 30 men to explore this new land. His instructions to Lewis stated, “*The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it’s course & communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce.*” Even with the inconsistent spelling and stilted grammar of the times, the instructions are still very clear.

Over the next two years the “Corps of Discovery” travelled 7,000 miles from St. Louis, up the Missouri River, over the Rocky Mountains, down the Columbia River to Astoria, Oregon, and back again. In this epic American exploration of unknown territory they lived off the country, made maps, acted as ambassadors to many curious and mostly friendly Native American tribes, and documented many new species of plants and animals. Although their intentions were to find new routes, learn about the land, develop friends and trading partners—not to conquer or convert—in hindsight the eventual outcomes seem obvious.

By the time of the expedition’s return in 1806, traders and settlers were already pushing westward into the new territory—a process which in many ways defined the United States for the next 100 years. Even today, the phrase “go west, young man,” still rings with adventure and opportunity.

This was very much the age of exploration and empire building. Individuals were moving west for free land, better beaver trapping, and new trade with native people. Governments were encouraging and supporting this movement, both to reap commercial benefits and to expand their empires.

Trade with the Orient was already very profitable, but the sea voyage around either South America or Africa was long, dangerous, and expensive. The strategic importance of a water route across the North American continent had been clearly recognized for many years, and the race to discover this was well underway. In 1793 Jefferson had tried to send a private expedition to cross the continent, but it was aborted when the leader was found out to be a secret French agent. In the same year, the British explorer Mackenzie was the first to cross the North American continent over the Canadian Rockies, but his route offered no hope for either commercial use or future settlement. The race languished for almost ten years as other events claimed more attention.

The common knowledge of the time assumed there was a geographical divide somewhere between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean. Since the Missouri River was the largest river flowing eastward from the plains, it seemed logical that you could travel up the Missouri River, portage over the divide, pick up the “River of the West” (generally assumed to be the Columbia River), and float down to the Pacific. Everyone thought “the divide” was similar to the Appalachian Divide—not very high or steep, and easy to portage in a day or so.

The surprises of the expedition would be both daunting and awesome. No one could imagine how high, dramatic, and complex the Rockies would be, or what kind of weather could be expected there. No one knew the Rockies are not a single mountain range, but a confusing puzzle of interlocking ranges. No one knew the length of the Missouri River, or that it included a series of five “great falls” cut between steep cliffs. These are only a few of the things Lewis and Clark discovered, and these and many other adventures are still there for you to discover on your own epic journey.

WHAT IS THE LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL?

In 1978 Congress established the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail as part of the National Trails System. The National Park Service administers this trail in partnership with many federal, state, and local agencies, private organizations, and private landowners. These groups are also involved in many recreational and interpretive sites and activities along the Trail. See Appendix E for additional resources and information.

Although the Lewis and Clark expedition travelled mostly on rivers, Lewis often explored the adjacent land, and hunting parties walked to search for game. Today some roads that follow the rivers have been marked with the familiar silhouettes (on the cover of this book) of Lewis and Clark pointing the way. Sometimes roads on both sides of the river display these signs. Sometimes the expedition split up and took multiple routes. Sometimes the exact route is unknown. And many

times the exact route and campsites have been wiped out by the changing course of the rivers over the last 200 years.

So the words “Lewis & Clark Trail” have come to signify the general and approximate route followed by the Corps of Discovery. Although this book follows many of these roads, it also uses some different roads and trails that are more suitable for bicycle travel.

WHY BIKE THE LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL ?

In 1804 Lewis and Clark’s two-year expedition grabbed the imagination and attention of the whole country—as it still does today. The PBS television program first caught my interest and sparked the idea of bicycling this route. Reading Stephen Ambrose’s *Undaunted Courage* immediately confirmed my decision.

When I first read about the Corps of Discovery sailing, rowing, poling, and pulling their boats up the Missouri River and then crossing the Rocky Mountains and riding down the wild Columbia River, I was impressed and amazed. What hardships! What joys! What accomplishment! After riding this route, my sense of amazement, respect, and admiration have grown even greater.

I will also proudly admit my own feeling of accomplishment. As usual, I have forgotten most of the hardships and remembered most of the joys. This is a challenging bicycle tour, and the feeling of accomplishment is proportional to the challenge and the effort.

First, it’s a great ride. Even without any association with Lewis and Clark, it provides a panorama of beautiful scenery, good roads with light traffic, a variety of accommodations and food, and exposure to wonderful people. On this basis alone, it’s as good as any long distance bicycle tour.

Second, it’s a great way to see, feel, and fully experience our vast and varied country. Passing through nine states from St. Louis, Missouri, to Astoria, Oregon, it provides a comprehensive sampling of these “united states.” For myself, having grown up on the east coast and having lived on both coasts, it was an awakening to the vast middle of our country. Although technically not a “transcontinental” ride, at 3,000 miles it’s almost as long. If you really need to accomplish a true transcontinental ride, it’s easy enough to find a route between St. Louis and the east coast—perhaps following Meriwether Lewis’s path from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and down the Ohio River to St. Louis.

Third, this route has great historical meaning and significance for our country. By 1804, both France and Spain were in trouble in North America, and opportunity was ripe for the new United States. Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory doubled the size of our country, and Lewis and Clark’s exploration described the new land and opened it for future settlement. It’s interesting to ponder what the current United States might be like if it still ended at the Mississippi River.

Fourth, bicycling this route is a way to make history come alive. There are many historical sites and exhibits along the way which are both fun and educational to visit. This book describes most of them briefly, and the route was devised to

include as many as possible directly on or near the route. Appendix D describes other books that tell more about the Lewis and Clark expedition and will help prepare you for a bicycle trip on the Trail.

Finally, the years 2003–2006 mark the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Renewed attention is being focussed on this heroic and significant event in our country's history, and many towns and states along the route are adding to their repertoire of services, activities, and celebrations.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Bicycle Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail is intended for dreaming, planning, and executing your trip. It is large enough to contain all the information you will need, and small enough to carry with you.

Chapter 2 describes my **philosophy** of flexibility and trade-offs, and some questions that will help you plan a successful tour.

Chapter 3 is an **overview** of the entire Lewis & Clark Trail. It is intended to help you understand the big picture and create a “Master Plan” for an overall trip or series of trips. A table summarizes all possible places for overnight stops and the services they provide.

Chapter 4 contains **descriptions and maps** for **towns** along the route. In my touring experience—especially in the western United States—it's relatively easy to get from town to town. The problems come when you reach a town: where can you find camping, motels, supermarkets, bike store, etc. This section is intended to help you on a daily basis as you travel the Trail.

Chapter 5 provides **detailed cue sheets** (directions) and **maps** for riding between towns. This chapter is separate, so you can tear out pages and put them in your handlebar bag or pocket as you ride from town to town. For your convenience, there are separate sets of cue sheets for both westbound and eastbound travellers; so you can tear out and discard unnecessary pages to lighten the book.

Appendix A makes suggestions about **preparing your bicycle**.

Appendix B is a suggested **equipment list**.

Appendix C provides tables summarizing **weather** for different areas on the Trail.

Appendix D lists and briefly describes **other books** about the Lewis and Clark expedition and route. These provide both fun reading and helpful information as you prepare for your bike tour.

Appendix E provides sources for state highway maps and other **additional information**.

Appendix F shows **public transportation**—a list of airports and a map of major train and bus routes.

Although this book contains sufficient maps and information to plan and execute a bicycle tour of the Lewis & Clark Trail, many people will want to acquire state highway maps to see how the route fits into the big picture. After planning a trip, I like to cut up state maps and carry only the essential parts. Western states offer these maps free, along with lots of general information about interesting things to see and do in their states.

You will note that cumulative miles have been placed sideways in the righthand page margins in Chapters 4 and 5. These are to aid you in cross-referencing and moving among Chapters 3, 4, and 5. They will also help you thumb through the book and quickly find the page you want.