

LEWIS AND CLARK MEET MR. GRIZ

Editor's Note: The creative spelling and punctuation found in the journals has been faithfully reproduced to give you the true flavor of the time.

The Corps of Discovery led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark entered Montana in April of 1805. The explorers had wintered with the Mandan Indians in what is now central North Dakota. They spent the winter gathering information from the local tribesmen to determine what lay ahead. The Indians and French traders they encountered no doubt warned the white men about the ferocious "great white bear." The explorers did not faithfully record these warnings in their journals. The Indians told how they prepared for a grizzly hunt as if they were going on the war path against neighboring tribes and would not think of challenging the bear with fewer than six to eight warriors and the likelihood that one or two of their number would not survive the encounter. On Monday, April 29th, 1805, Lewis recorded the following after the group's first close encounter near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers,

"... the Indians may well fear this animal equipped as they generally are with their bows and arrows of indifferent fuzees, but in the hand of skillful rifle men they are by no means as formidable or dangerous as they have been represented."

By this comment Lewis exhibits a quality of confidence, if not arrogance, shared by intrepid explorers everywhere that feel virtually invincible. This feeling of superiority depended on their own physical qualities, character and experience, not to mention their Kentucky flintlocks. Lewis recognized the differences between the eastern black bear, of his and his fellow's experience and this animal. Lewis described the beast killed on that date,

"... it was a male not fully grown, we estimated his weight at 300 lbs. not having the

means of ascertaining it precisely. The legs of this bear are somewhat longer than those of the black, as are its tallons and tusks incomparably larger and longer."

Though far from the first description of a grizzly, this is the first detailed one. Henry Kelsey, in 1691, was probably the first white man to see a grizzly.

It was not only the physical characteristics that separated this bear from his eastern cousins, but its temperament and attitude toward men. A child with a stick could easily frighten off the timid black bear, while this giant carnivore of the western plains was used to having his own way and feared no living creature including man and was more likely to attack especially when provoked. Sgt. Patrick Gass wrote,

"The natives call them white, but they are more of a brown grey. They are longer than the common black bear, and have much larger feet and talons."

Lewis and Clark and their men became believers when they met a much larger specimen on May 5th. Clark wrote,

"The river rising & current Strong & in the evening we saw a Brown or Grizzly beare on a sand beech, I went out with one man Geo Drewyer & killed the bear, which was very large and a turrible looking animal, which we found very hard to kill we Shot ten Balls into him before we killed him, & 5 of those Balls through his lights. This animal is the largest of the carnivorous kind I ever saw"

Lewis' description was more detailed, "It was the most tremendous looking animal, and extremely hard to kill notwithstanding he had five balls through his lungs and five others in various parts he swam more than half the distance across the river to a sandbar, & it was at least twenty minutes before he died: he did not attempt to attack, but fled and made the most tremendous roaring from the moment he was shot. We had no means of weighing this monster; Capt. Clark thought he would weigh 500 lbs. for my part I think the estimate too small by 100 lbs. he measured 8 Feet 7 1/2 Inches from the nose to the extremity of the hind feet, 5 F. 10 1/2 Ins. around the breast." The following day Lewis wrote, "I find the

curiiosity of our party is pretty well satisfied with respect to this animal, the formidable appearance of the male bear killed on the 5th added to the difficulty with which they die when even shot through the vital parts, has staggered the resolution (of) several of them, others however seem keen for action with the bear; I expect these gentlemen will give us some amusement shortly as they (the bears) soon begin now to coppolate."

Amusement was probably not the word that came to mind as several of the party were forced to flee after discharging their single-shot rifles and seeing little effect, besides enraging the bears, as described in the journal of Sgt. John Ordway.

"Saturday 11th May 1805 ...one of the party which had a lame hand was walking on Shore. towards evening he came running and hallowing to the perogues chased by a brown bair which he had wounded, bad. Some of the hunters went out with him and killed it. It was nearly of the Same description as the one killed Some days past, but much fatter." Then on the 14th Ordway reported, "... abt. 4oClock the men in the canoes Saw a large brown bear on the hills on the S.S. 6 men went out to kill it. they fired at it and wounded it. it chased 2 of them into a canoe, and anothe(r) (into) the River and they Steady firing at after shooting eight balls, in his body Some of them through the lites, he took the River and was near catching the Man he chased in, but he went up against the Stream and the bear being wounded could not git to him one of the hunters Shot him in the head which killed him dead. we got him to Shore with a canoe and butchred him we found him to be nearly the Same discription of the first we killed only much larger."

As the expedition continued westward they had several more hair-raising adventures with Mr. Grizzly. (Source material: "The Journals of Lewis & Clark", Bernard DeVoto, "The Journals of Patrick Gass," "The Journals of John Ordway", *Undaunted Courage*, Stephan E. Ambrose, 1996)

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and store were soon added and a cow town was born. The place maintains an old west flavor with its false front buildings on main street, many of which are over 80 years old.

This town is the gateway to some of the most remote and beautiful river canyons, badlands and prairie wilderness in the west. Much of this rugged terrain is in the Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge which stretches for almost 200 miles and surrounds Fort Peck Lake. The loop route you'll take out of here is about 227 miles long, so you should give yourself a couple of days.

Leave Jordan headed east on Highway 200 to Circle. Almost immediately you'll see red and yellow colored buttes and badlands. This is dinosaur country and is a favorite hunting ground for paleontologists. One of the first dinosaurs of record, a Tyrannosaurus Rex was discovered near Jordan in the Hell Creek Formation in 1904. Since then its been the source of many excellent finds.

Circle is another "cow town" which got its name from the Circle Brand, one of Montana's earliest ranches. This is still primarily a farm and

ranch town. To the south of Circle you'll see a unique range of high sandstone hills. The Big Sheep Mountains were named after the Audubon Sheep that lived there until eliminated by the homesteaders in the early 1900s.

Take Highway 13 north out of Circle toward Wolf Point. When you reach Highway 2, turn east and continue through Wolf Point and the Missouri River Valley to Nashua. Turn left at Nashua onto Highway 117 to Fort Peck Dam and the town of Fort Peck. Just beyond that you'll reach Montana 24. Go right on this and drive over the dam. This area east of Fort Peck Lake is called Dry Arm. Continue on Highway 24 to Highway 200 and turn right to Jordan.

The Missouri and Yellowstone Route

Twenty miles to the northeast of present day Sidney on April 27, 1805, Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery first entered Montana. A couple of days earlier, they camped at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers just

across what is now the border. Their journals tell the story of abundant wildlife in the area:

"we saw great quantities of game today; consisting of the common and mule deer, Elk, Buffalo, and Antelopes; also 4 brown bear, one of which was fired on and wounded by one of the party, but we did not get it; the beaver have out great quantities of timber; saw a tree nearly 3 feet in diameter that had been felled by them." The next day, they encountered their first grizzly bear... "I walked on shore with one man about 8 A.M. we fell in with two brown or yellow bear."

Almost a year and a half later on August 16, 1806, they met each other on their return trip. Previously, the two captains had agreed to split up on the western side of Montana. Lewis took the northern route retracing their steps west, and Clark took a southern route primarily following the Yellowstone river.

Sidney is your hub for several short tours. Before leaving Sidney, be sure and visit the MonDak Heritage Center.

For a great view of the Yellowstone Breaks and Badlands, follow Highway 16 three miles south to Route 23. Go left and drive another three miles until you reach Highway 261. Turn right heading