

MONTANA

Bitterroot Valley

Lewis and Clark

The Bitterroot Flower

Meriwether Lewis, for whom the plant is named (*lewisia rediviva*), collected bitterroot plants on his return trip in 1806. Native Americans collected the root before the flower bloomed for a food source. The Bitterroot River Valley and Mountains are named for the plant and it is the state flower of Montana.

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A Modern Day Journey

The Lewis and Clark Expedition entered the Bitterroot Valley near what is now called Lost Trail Pass, at the western Montana border. The name Lost Trail reflects the experience of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as they traveled across the steep slopes in the snow and sleet. The exact route is still a mystery. Many believe they traveled around what is now Saddle Mountain and descended to the West Fork of Camp Creek.

The Corps of Discovery came into the Bitterroot Valley on September 4, 1805. In the Sula basin, they came upon a Salish Indian camp. The Salish were aware of the Corps approach. Since they had no blankets, the tribe thought they might be a group of travelers who had been robbed or possibly lost their blankets in battle. The Salish were short of food, but shared what they had and treated their guests with hospitality. They traded fresh horses to the Corps, who needed them to continue their journey. The horse trading went through a communications chain of English, French, Hidatsa, Shoshoni, and Salish. The explorers were interested in the Salish language. Since it sounded different than other Indian languages, there was speculation the tribe could be the Welsh descendants of historical legend.

On September 6, 1805, both parties left the camp. The Salish headed to buffalo country. The Expedition went

around Sula Peak, then followed the east side of the river. September 8, the party passed Skalkaho Creek and moved through Hamilton and Corvallis. They crossed Gird Creek by the Daly Mansion. The Expedition continued north down the east side of the river, close to where the Eastside Highway now runs. On September 9, 1805, they probably traveled right down Stevensville Main Street, had it been there! The Bitterroot River was crossed somewhere north of Florence. Travel through the Bitterroot Valley was fast and easy compared to the trek across Lost Trail Pass and what lie ahead. They proceeded to Travelers' Rest on the south bank of Lolo Creek. Here they rested and prepared for their journey on to the Pacific Ocean.

On their return, Lewis and Clark separated at Travelers' Rest. On July 3, 1806, Lewis and a small group went north to explore the shorter route their guide had pointed out. Clark headed south on the west side of the Bitterroot River with Sacajawea, her baby, 20 men and 50 horses. The river was too swollen to cross, so the journey continued on the west side which required crossing many treacherous creeks.

On July 5, they found five small islands that offered safe passage across the West Fork. They continued toward the Sula basin, site of the previous year's Salish meeting. They camped south of the Sula Ranger Station. On July 6, they crossed the Continental Divide and moved to the Big Hole over what is now called Gibbon's Pass

1. Travelers' Rest State Park - located at the south end of the community of Lolo, just off Hwy. 93 on Mormon Creek Road. The park is state-owned but managed by a private, non-profit organization. At this time site access is limited, but visits can be arranged by appointment. Please call the Travelers' Rest Preservation Project at 406-273-4253

2. Blodgett Overlook Trail - provides spectacular views of Canyon Creek, Blodgett Canyon and the valley where Lewis and Clark traveled.

3. Ravalli County Museum - housed the original county courthouse. The Museum has a diorama of the Corps of Discovery through the Bitterroot Valley and a permanent collection of American Indian artifacts, plus much more.

4. Daly Mansion - built in the late 1880's by copper king Marcus Daly as a family summer home.

5. Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge - 2,800 acre site along the Bitterroot River that provides undisturbed habitat for wildlife and waterfowl.

6. St. Mary's Mission - first permanent settlement in Montana. Clark played a major role in settling the Bitterroot Valley. His last official act was to issue a passport to Father DeSmet who founded the mission.

7. Indian Trees Campground - believed to be very close to the trail route. Scars are visible on the trunks of large, centuries-old Ponderosa pine trees. The Salish and Kootenai tribes who made their home in the area—as well as Nez Perce and Shoshone who were frequent visitors here—peeled away the outer bark to obtain the tree's sweet cambium layer for food. The strips of

cambium were rolled into balls and stored in green leaves to prevent drying, or were tied into knots to be eaten more easily. Culturally scarred trees are protected under the national Historic Preservation Act.

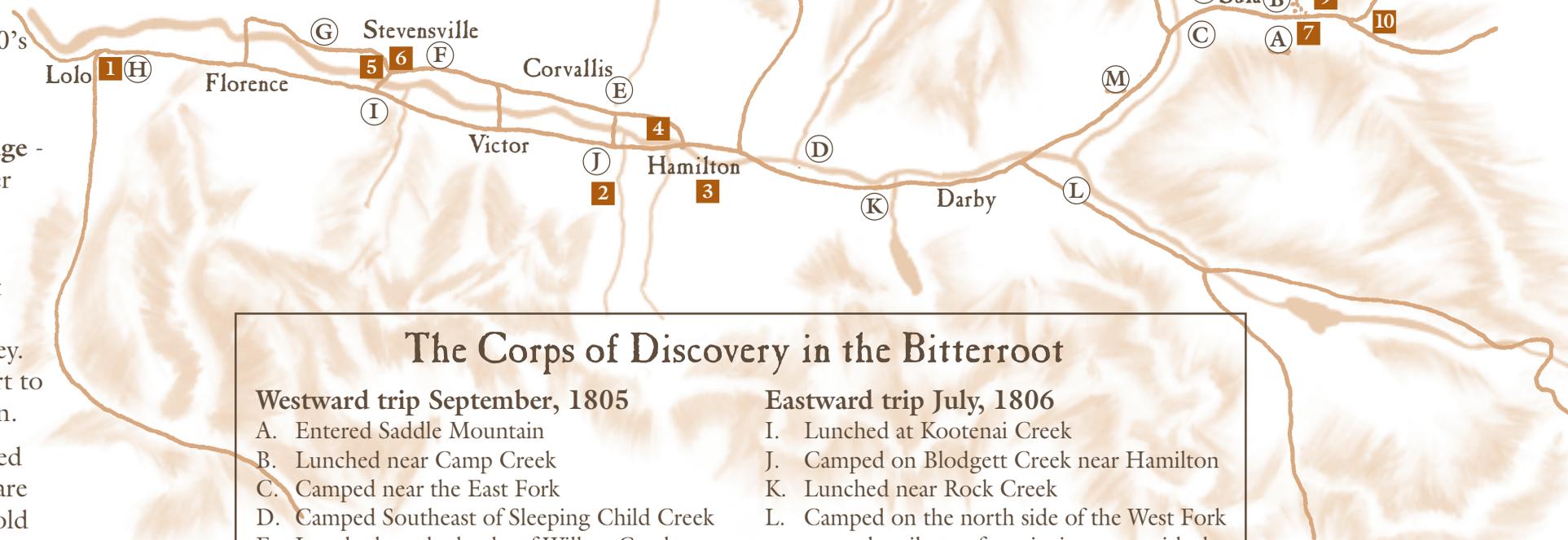
8. Sula basin (Ross' Hole) Area - location of a Salish camp with 33 lodges, 440 people and 500 horses in what was called the "Great Clearing" in the upper Bitterroot Valley when Lewis and Clark arrived. The Bitterroot Valley was the traditional homeland for the band known historically as the Flathead, now called the Bitterroot Salish. The

Charles Russell painting *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross Hole* was painted near here. Most of Ross' Hole is now in private ownership. The Sula Ranger District is located near where the Salish camp probably was and north of the 1806 Clark campsite.

9. The Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail - opportunity to hike the area of Clark's east bound trip. An off highway section is accessed from the Highway 93 North of Sula. The trail is classified as moderate to difficult.

10. Lost Trail Pass & Chief Joseph Pass - rugged area and probably looks similar to what it looked like 200 years ago. Today it is a popular winter sports area.

11. The Gibbons Pass Road - near the return trail of Clark. The Gibbons Pass area is very steep and the road has no turnouts on some sections. Be prepared to back down the road if you meet oncoming traffic. A safer, more recommended route is continuing south on Highway 93 to the top of Lost Trail Pass and turn East on Montana Highway 43, then travel to Gibbons Pass via Road #1260.



The Corps of Discovery in the Bitterroot

<p>Westward trip September, 1805</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Entered Saddle Mountain B. Lunched near Camp Creek C. Camped near the East Fork D. Camped Southeast of Sleeping Child Creek E. Lunched on the banks of Willow Creek near current site of Corvallis F. Spent the night in a field about two miles South of Stevensville G. Lunched at Eight Mile Creek H. Camped at Travelers' Rest 	<p>Eastward trip July, 1806</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Lunched at Kootenai Creek J. Camped on Blodgett Creek near Hamilton K. Lunched near Rock Creek L. Camped on the north side of the West Fork a couple miles up from its juncture with the Bitterroot River M. Lunched the north side of Sula Peak N. Camped near what is now the Sula Ranger Station.
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Map courtesy Carol Saylor