



*Meriwether
Lewis*

**US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
and the
LEWIS AND CLARK
BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION**



William Clark

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT'S
Outdoor Expo Regional Event – Austin, Texas
October 2-3, 2004
After Action Report

Background: In 2000, the National Council for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial decided to highlight some of the more nationally significant festivals and events and call them “Signature Events”. These events were to be those of nationwide historical significance, have the potential of high visitation, and be multicultural in nature. Also, many communities across the country have scheduled events. When possible, at the request of event organizers, and nearby (and with support of) a Corps of Engineer’s Project, we try to participate. The Outdoor Expo was just such an event. This was the thirteenth year for this event that showcases all aspects of outdoor recreation. Fort Worth District has participated in the past with information booths. This year at the request of the District and event organizers we provided a Lewis and Clark theme as well as their traditional Water Safety and Outdoor Recreation themes. In the past the weather for the event was clear and hot with temps in the 80’s and 90’s, but no rain. This year saw the high temperatures, but also 3 inches of rain the opening morning.

As a result of the rain, parking was a nightmare! The nearby farm field that was to be used for parking was a quagmire so buses were hired to shuttle people from around the area. Although this event was well planned and organized, they hadn’t taken into consideration an alternate plan for inclement parking until the last minute. This provided lots of confusion and raw nerves.

All of the activities were held at the Texas Parks and Wildlife State Headquarters Complex. Overall attendance at the two-day event was 22,000 (9,000 Saturday and 13,000 Sunday). These are reduced numbers from years passed due to the weather and the resulting parking problems. Fort Worth District will be in charge of entering visitation numbers into OMBIL.

This AAR is for the Lewis and Clark component of COE involvement in this event. It will not deal with any other participation the COE had.

In addition to myself, Corps personnel that worked in one or more of the venues at this event included: Ed Shirley, Jeff Boutwell, Ryan Boutwell (Jeff’s son), Robert Henderson, Susan Robinson, Tim Gibson, and Murray McCarley all of SWF.

Action: The Corps was involved in 2 separate venues during this commemorative event – COE Exhibit and reenactment camp.

COE Exhibit: The Corps exhibit was part of a contingent of agencies, communities, and vendors sponsoring a booth/exhibit. The exhibit was in it's own tent outside the main exhibitor tent which held over 300 booths. Susan Robinson, Tim Gibson, and Murray McCarley manned it.

The Corps exhibit had four parts – (1) one backdrop of the historic aspect of Lewis and Clark compliments of Rick Magee (NAE); (2) a display of the Discovery Box; (3) an information table that contained a variety of COE brochures; and (4) a “trading center”. Rather than just to have little “give-aways” (Army L&C pins) out for visitors to take handfuls, the items were placed into a brass cooking pot suspended from a wooden tripod. On the tripod was a sign made of wood and leather that said, “Trade Goods – Will trade for information”. This was an attempt to engage more people, especially kids, in the booth to peak their interest in the expedition. In order to get something from the trading center, visitors first had to answer a question related to the expedition.

Attendance was fair. The main factor contributing to this was that we considered most visitors to the event were there to “do something”. They did not come to read material or stand and study exhibits. As a result, there were approximately 11,000 interpretive contacts at the Corps exhibit.

Reenactment Camp – During the time of the event, members of the Corps' Captain Lewis' Company presented frontier Army life – 1803. They showed the public what it was like to be a soldier on the L&C expedition. Camp was set up both days and activities were conducted by the men to show the every day life of the soldier. Participating in this endeavor were Jeff Boutwell, Ed Shirley, Robbie Henderson (all SWF); Jeff's son Ryan Boutwell; and Ken Wilk (NWK).

We were in a high traffic area and saw almost all visitors to the event. The camp was constantly busy. It was extremely difficult to get a break at all during the day.

Although the grounds of the event site were soggy after all of the rain, there was nearly always a line of visitors. There were 16,500 interpretive contacts made by COE personnel in just 1 ½ days.

Lessons learned

1. Again, the biggest lesson learned is that the Signature Event organizers need to have a contingency plan in case of rain. Many are taking the “rain or shine” attitude but in the case of 3 inches overnight, it went from being just “rain” to rather “a deluge and swamp”. Organizers need to let there folks on the ground directing exhibitors and public in on the plans and coach them in how to deal with folks. A poor attitude by one police officer can spoil the day for that family that has just waited in line for two hours. Consideration should be given to exhibitors with gear to haul in and out over spectators and empty-handed volunteers. Nearby parking should be offered to those exhibitors. It may be necessary for us to sit down with organizers upon our arrival at an event and discuss “Plan B” options before the event begins.

2. Hats off to the SWF staff for organizing this. Especially, Jeff Boutwell for organizing the L&C efforts and Tim Gibson for putting together the display and coordinating all those aspects.

Future outcome: The next event will be a Signature Event October 22-31, 2004 “The Circle of Cultures” in Bismarck, ND.

Final thoughts:

1. The Corps of Engineers contingent was a huge hit as usual. The booth and exhibit won the prize for “Best Non-Commercial Exhibit or Activity”

2. Although our participation in regional events will be limited by budget and Signature Events must be given priority, we must consider participating in these types of events. Events that are off the trail and have a direct tie to the expedition should be strongly considered. The positive image of the agency garnered with this type of activity is tantamount in creating good will among our constituents and therefore the rest of the Nation and Congress.

Respectfully Submitted,

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