



*Meriwether
Lewis*

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



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**“EXPLORE! THE BIG SKY”
Great Falls, MT Signature Event
June 29-July 4, 2005
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. “EXPLORE! The Big Sky” was designated as the tenth of these Signature Events. The weather for the event was clear and hot with temps in the upper 80’s to low 90’s.

The kickoff for the event was held on June 1. “EXPLORE! The Big Sky” commemorated the fateful decision at the Marias River confluence and the portage around the Great Falls, as well as honoring the native cultures of the Plains Indian tribes. The Federal and State agency participation in Signature Event was limited to June 29 through July 4.

Corps representatives working the event included Jeff Lockwood, Garland Ireland (both MVK); Dave Quebedeaux (SAS); Rick Magee (NAE); Pat Kline, Larry Spisak (LRP); Joyce Sellers (SAM); Alana Mesenbrink (NWS); Terry Schmidt (SWF); John Stokley (SPN); Tim Bischoff (MVS); Heather Burke (SAJ); Ken Wilk (NWK); and Jean Nauss (NWD). All took turns at manning the various venues during the week. Susie Kline (formerly LRP) was brought on board as a contractor to oversee the exhibit booth and paintings.

Action: The Corps was involved in 6 separate venues during this commemorative event – COE Exhibit; Stewardship Stage; Corps of Discovery II; the Tent of Many Voices, Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation reception, and July 4th Parade.

COE Exhibit: The Corps exhibit was part of a contingent of Federal, State and local agencies and communities sponsoring a booth/exhibit in the Exhibition Building at the Montana Expo Center. The Corps exhibit had six parts – (1) a 3-part exhibit backdrop with a description of the Lewis and Clark Expedition on one panel, the Missouri River on another panel, and the Corps’ mitigation efforts on the third panel; (2) a display of the Discovery Box; (3) a display of historical artifacts from the early 1800’s; (4) an information table that contained a variety of COE brochures including the brochures “The

U.S. Army and the Lewis and Clark Expedition” and “Lewis and Clark Expedition – A Portrait of Army Leadership” published by the Center of Military History and the Corps of Engineers, respectively, and the “Zap the Zebra” brochure assembled by the 100th Meridian Group to combat the spread of zebra mussels; (5) the 5 Michael Haynes prints that the Corps had commissioned; and (6) a “trading center”. This was an attempt to engage more people and 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. This was a huge hit!

The unfortunate thing about the exhibits was that they were far away from the other activities at the Expo Center. In addition, the exhibit venue was not well advertised. On Saturday, Sunday and Monday, attendance picked up in part because of the Corps having 2 reenactors outside at various locations telling people that there were free exhibits at the other end of the park.

There were a total of 3,800 interpretive contacts to the exhibit booth during the Signature Event.

Stewardship Stage: During the Signature Event, a portion of the exhibit area was set aside for a variety of Federal, State and local speakers. Originally, the speaker area was to be separated from the exhibits and located in another building. However, because of the cost involved in having another building, the stage was incorporated into the exhibit area. It was separated from the exhibits by curtains. However, at times the noise from the exhibit area was very distracting to the speakers. The Corps had several representatives that participated in this venue. Speakers included Larry Spisak, LRP (Music of the Expedition); Rick Magee, NAE (Recruiting for the Expedition); Alana Mesenbrink, NWS (Blood, Sweat, and Fears of the Expedition); Dave Quebedeaux, SAS (Diplomacy of the Expedition); Heather Burke, SAJ (Hardships of the Expedition); and Susie Kline (formerly LRP). These presentations resulted in 204 interpretive contacts.

Corps of Discovery 2 – 200 Years to the Future (aka: Corps 2) – The Corps 2 exhibit itself consists of approximately 32 panels with an associated audiotope headset that discuss Jefferson’s vision; Lewis, Clark, and the members of the expedition; with the remainder depicting the natural resources and the Native American influences on the expedition. In addition, Raystown Lake Project (NAB) constructed and donated a ½-size land-based replica of a keelboat. Visitors were encouraged to come into the keelboat for interpretive programs about the expedition. During the Signature Event, all COE park rangers attending the event worked in their park ranger uniform or as one of the members of the expedition to provide interpretive talks and information to dignitaries and members of the public visiting the keelboat exhibit. This resulted in approximately 2,900 interpretive contacts.

Tent of Many Voices (TOMV) – This is a venue associated with Corps 2 (same portable generator provides electricity for heat and lighting for both) but separate from it. TOMV has a small stage for presentations and seating capacity of 150. Rick Magee, NAE (Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy); Dave Quebedeaux, SAS, (Diplomacy of the Expedition); Tim Bischoff, MVS, (George Drouillard); Larry Spisak, LRP, (Music of the Expedition);

Heather Burke, SAJ, (Hardships of the Expedition) gave interpretive talks during the Signature Event. In all, approximately 341 interpretive contacts were made.

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Reception – The Corps was asked to attend and provide several reenactors for the Foundation reception on Friday night. The reenactors were to mingle and provide color and interest to the reception. Jean Nauss (NWD), Ken Wilk (NWK), and Susie Kline (formerly LRP) attend the event along with the COE reenactors Pat Kline (LRP), Tim Bischoff (MVS); and Larry Spisak (LRP). In addition, Mr. Spisak played period songs on the fiddle. In all, there were 300 interpretive contacts made during the reception.

July 4th Parade –COE participation in this venue was not planned in advance. As a result, most of the park rangers and reenactors were at their duty stations. However, 6-year old Ariel Kline, daughter of Pat and Susie Kline (LRP) was asked to participate in the parade as a representative of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. Because of her young age, her mother accompanied Ariel.

During the entire Signature Event, there were roughly 7,600 interpretive contacts made along with 14 indirect (media) contacts made.

Lessons learned

1. This event, at least the Federal agency exhibit portion was not really advertised as a Signature Event. To make the most of the situation, it would have been best to have all of the exhibitors and vendors separated but in a more confined area. Having the Federal and State exhibits in an area ½ mile away from the vendors and Indian games with no advertising made it seem as though the exhibits were an afterthought and not really part of the event. As a result, not many visitors knew enough to walk the extra distance to take advantage of the exhibits. Plus having the event scattered in so many places discouraged visitation at more than one site.
2. The mix of folks in the exhibit area was much more organized than at other events. Only Federal and State agencies, exhibitors and other Signature Events were in the Exhibit Hall. The vendors were in a separate location. This was helpful in that visitors were not trying to “buy” pieces of the exhibit and it made it much easier for the agencies to coordinate efforts and support each other.
3. As a whole, the Signature Event lasted too long (June 1-July 4, although the exhibitors were only asked to be present from June 29-July 4); it was spread out in too many locations; the free venues were not well advertised; the events were not well supported by the city residents; and overall it appeared to be nothing more than a money making venture for the city. This could have been a magnificent event if consolidated into a small area and time. However, it appeared extremely disorganized and an afterthought.
4. The Great Falls event was a superb example of why charging fees for interpretation is counter-productive. Those that are already "members of the chorus" may be willing to pay, but the fee will put off the people who you want to reach with your message. Over and over potential visitors were heard to say, "If we have to pay, I'm not interested." . Confusing fee structures for parking and some events and not others angered many

potential visitors. Many folks did not attend some events because of the fees, confusion about fees, or expectation of illogical fees. The articles in the paper each day added to the confusion when at times two articles on the same day often had contradictory information.

5. It was a good event, except that few people came. Problems were the scattered locations, lack of publicity, lack of signage, lack of directions, lack of being made to feel welcome by the event organizers or the community. No pins for participants, no maps for the visitors, no easy to find daily schedule all played against the success of the event.

Future outcome: The next Signature Event will be “Destination the Pacific” November 11-15, 2005 in the Astoria OR/Long Beach WA area. The nature of the Corps and Army presence at this event will be huge. The Corps is continuing to work with event organizers as well as the National L&C Council to ensure the presence of all of the Federal MOU agencies.

Final thoughts: The Corps of Engineers contingent was always one of the first to arrive at the event site every morning and one of the last to leave every night. All of the COE participants went out of their way to help out wherever possible. This included assisting other exhibitors getting set up every morning. During the weekend, the Corps provided park rangers and reenactors to help garner support and attract visitors into the exhibit area.