

Voyage of Discovery

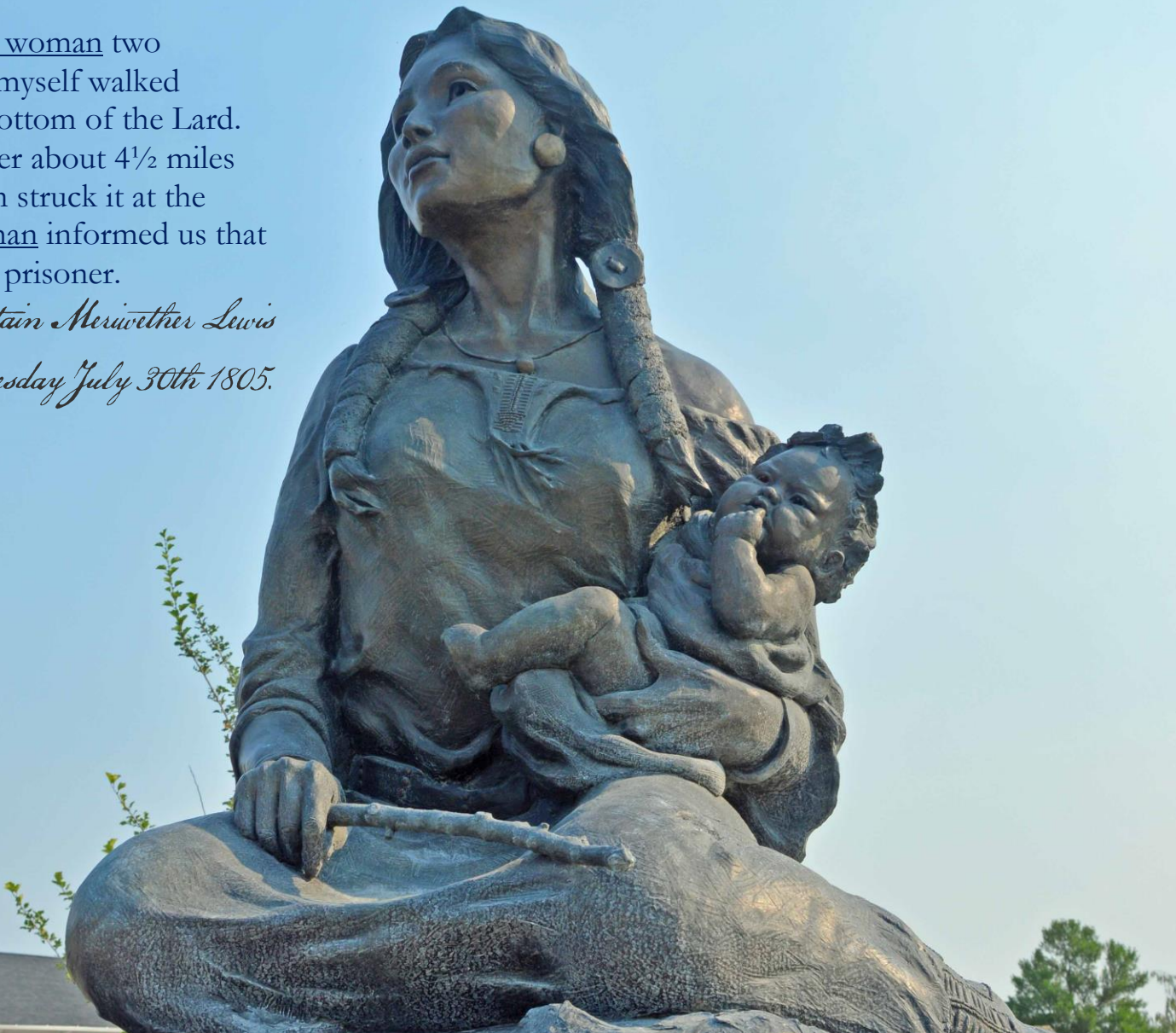
On the Lewis and Clark Trail – Three Forks, Montana, to Kalispell, Montana

12 July 2021

Sharbono, his woman two
invalids and myself walked
through the bottom of the Lard.
side of the river about 4½ miles
when we again struck it at the
place the woman informed us that
she was taken prisoner.

Captain Meriwether Lewis

Tuesday July 30th 1805.



This statue of Sacajawea and her son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, stands across the street from the Sacajawea Hotel in Three Forks, Montana, where Julie and I spent last night. Here, her name is spelled with a "j" rather than a "g," indicating locals consider her Shoshone. When the Lewis and Clark Expedition reached this place, where three streams join to create the Missouri River – North America's longest river – she recognized it as where she had been kidnaped by Hidatsa warriors from the Shoshone buffalo hunting party she was camped with as a young girl. When the expedition moved a bit farther west, it encountered Shoshone, whom she recognized. Its chief, Cameahwait, was either her brother or cousin (the two relationships are the same word in the Shoshone language). Because of her presence with the expedition and her role as a translator, Cameahwait gave Lewis and Clark the horses they needed to carry the expeditions' gear over the Rocky Mountains.

Sacagawea, enigmas and history

Her name, tribe, status (captive, wife or slave?) later life and death are disputed among multiple academic historians, keepers of tribal oral histories and even various American governments.

“We will never know the truth about Sacagawea; we will never even know her name,” wrote Virginia Scharff, a University of New Mexico history professor, in her 2002 book *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement and the West*.

According to another historian, Elizabeth Fenn of the University of Colorado, a 2015 Pulitzer Prize winner for her history of the Mandan people who’s at work on a new Sacagawea biography, Scharff is one of two scholars “to have truly seen Sacagawea for what she was, an indigenous woman whose contested life story has much to teach us about the initiative and mobility of native women more generally.” ¹

The other scholar Fenn said, was Sally McBeth, an anthropology professor at the University of Northern Colorado. McBeth ratified Scharff’s uncertainty in a 32-page paper in which she called the expedition’s only



My screenshot of Otis Halfmoon

female participant “Sacag/jawea.” ² The “g” or “j” dispute – her name means “Bird Woman” in Hidatsa (“g”) or “Boat Pusher” in Shoshone (“j”), either of which might be her native tribe – is just one uncertainty with many accompanying implications. And that’s just for two of her names.

After reviewing my Zoom recording of her lecture a few weeks ago, Fenn has found at least 10 names for the Native American woman who accompanied the Lewis and Clark Expedition from Fort Mandan to the Pacific Coast and back in 1805-06, carrying her infant son on her back.

Without her, Lewis and Clark may never have gotten horses and a guide from the Shoshone – who recognized the teen-ager as having been kidnapped from the tribe

near Three Forks, Montana, a few years before – to pack their stuff over the Idaho mountains.

No one disputes *that*, or that William Clark who called her “Janey” in his journal.

For most of two centuries, the Clark’s recollections in his journal, the latitude/longitude readings and drawings of animals East Coast Americans had never imagined in Lewis’ journal, and Thomas Jefferson’s letters and other papers at Monticello and the Library of Congress, formed the foundation of written history about the expedition.

Not surprisingly, the writers all emerged as heroic figures. The historical teaching was about separating the good guys from the bad, not about learning why and what people had done to try to understand ourselves.

Otis Halfmoon, a citizen of the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho, who learned about Lewis and Clark through the tribe’s oral history told by his father, never regarded Lewis and Clark as heroes.

The expedition “was the beginning of the end of much of who we are,” he said in an online presentation for a Native American tourism association, to which I was invited last month. Halfmoon remembered hearing a member of his tribal council once saying, “We should have killed them.”³

Halfmoon, now retired as a National Park Service interpreter at American Indian sites throughout the West, was one of several Indian leaders who worked to tell their history for what was planned as a three-year “celebration” of the Lewis and Clark Expedition’s bicentennial in 2003-06. By the time the bicentennial’s commencement ceremony was organized for Charlottesville, Virginia, the event had become a “commemoration,” and the chosen keynote speaker was now-retired historian James Ronda, whose landmark contribution to the study of the expedition in his 1984 book *Lewis and Clark: Among the Indians*, was its inclusion Native American perspectives.

“To understand this journey story, to appreciate its complexity and variety, we need to get off the [Lewis and Clark] boat and get on the bank,” Ronda told the crowd at Monticello in January 2003. “... We need to change the angle of vision. We need to see this emblematic American journey story through fresh eyes. Through native eyes.”⁴

One reason for scholars’ previous reluctance to use Native sources was their stories are not written down. Sequoyah, a North Carolina Cherokee, invented the first writing system in a Native American language in 1821, 15 years after Lewis and Clark’s trek. Tribes passed down their histories by word of mouth, usually through storytellers assigned that task.

Though unsupported by writing, many aspects of American Indian oral histories are backed up by graphic records. One custom shared among tribes was the creation of “winter counts,”⁵ which became the Rosetta stones for deciphering Native pictographs. Winter counts were usually animal hides, like bison, on which symbols were drawn representing the most important event of each tribe’s year. A year ran from winter’s first snowfall to the next winter’s first snow. The tribal “keeper” would use them as a memory trigger for the other important stories of that year.



The winter count by Lone Dog of the Yanktonais Nakota Community, beginning the winter of 1801 and ending in 1871. The “year the stars fell” – the 1833 Leonid meteor shower – is shown by the red arrow. The blue arrow points to the 1802 smallpox epidemic, a torso covered with red dots.

The tribal “keeper” would use them as a memory trigger for the other important stories of that year.

Before Garrick Mallery, an ethnologist who worked for the Smithsonian in the 1800s, began his research, these drawings were usually assumed to have no meaning.⁶ But on several winter counts he saw, there was a drawing of what looked like stars falling in the sky. By assuming this was the Leonid meteor shower of 1833, widely seen across the Great Plains, he began correlating symbols with other historical records, such as an 1802 smallpox epidemic recorded by the Spanish and French. The years recorded on the winter counts spiraled outward from the center.

With that understanding, Native oral histories began to gain credibility with white academics. But Natives themselves were distrustful of whites. Only 40 of the 60 tribal governments contacted by Indians like Halfmoon agreed to participate in the 2003 bicentennial and its planning.

"I know who you are," Halfmoon said the head of one Lakota band told him. "I researched you. I see you're a pow wow person, you're an emcee, you were raised on a reservation. As far as I'm concerned, you're a government Indian.' To be told that was amazing to me. It was eye-opening." ⁶

Halfmoon has been one of the leading proponents of the story that William Clark fathered a son by a Nez Perce woman during the weeks of May and June 1806, when the expedition waited for the snow on Idaho's Bitterroot Mountains to melt and allow them to continue their return trip to Saint Louis.

The tribe's oral history records his name as *Halahtookit*, meaning "daytime smoker." Halfmoon said he had reddish hair, blue eyes and called himself Clark.

There are multiple expedition journal entries of sex with Native women, though not by Lewis or Clark. Many tribes had customs of sharing women with visitors in the belief that sex transferred desirable traits of the visitors to the tribe itself. York, Clark's slave on the expedition, was especially desired, according to the journals. The expedition carried medicine to treat venereal diseases.

Halahtookit would grow up to fight for the Nez Perce against the U.S. Army in 1877, was captured and sent to Oklahoma, where he died and was buried in a mass grave with other Nez Perce POWs, according to the Tonkawa Tribe's official website, which has a picture of the monument.⁷

When he told that story at Lewis and Clark enthusiasts' gatherings, Halfmoon said he was met with disbelief because Captain Clark was "an officer and a gentleman. I always had to laugh because I'm also a veteran of the U.S. Army, and I know some of those officers and gentlemen."⁸

Sacagawea's story (I'm arbitrarily using the spelling used by the park service) is a story that has been molded and re-molded to fit the agenda of the storyteller. There are more statues of her than any American woman, according to National Geographic, and I have and will include pictures of the ones Julie and I encounter in these newsletters.

Since photography had not been invented in the early 1800s and no one bothered to even sketch her at the time, her statues and contemporary paintings are like Jesus' images on countless Sunday School walls, changing ethnicities to suit the artist and audience for whom they're intended.

Her statue in Charlottesville, where her name has a "j," is controversial and may be removed because it shows her crouching behind Lewis and Clark in a subservient pose as they stand nobly gazing at the Pacific Ocean they're seeing for the first time. Her first statue, funded and erected by women in Portland, Oregon, was unveiled in 1905 on the double occasion of the Lewis and Clark centennial and the 37th National American Woman Suffrage Association Convention, which would help extend the franchise to American women in 14 more years. Sacajawea (another "j") is standing, pointing westward like a guide.

Why were suffragists interested? When the expedition voted whether to spend the winter of 1805-06 at the mouth of the Columbia River on the north or south bank, Sacagawea and York each got to cast a ballot. "This is the first time in history that a statue has been erected in memory of a woman who accomplished patriotic deeds," Susan B. Anthony said at the unveiling of the Portland statue.

A year ago, Portland artist Wendy Red Star, of Apsáalooke (Crow) descent, was asked about the statue by *The Art Newspaper*.⁹

“You want to applaud [the suffragists] because there’s a sort of movement towards acknowledgement,” Red Star said. “There’s still so much that just seems, to me, very much like a fantasy. Sacajawea, Pocahontas — they’re these Native women that society used, in a way. But it was towards the colonial agenda, and it worked.”

Ronda, the historian, concluded his 2003 bicentennial speech saying, “Lewis and Clark do not offer us simple truths and comforting answers. If you want stories of comfort and triumph, go some other place. Their journey – our journey – takes us to moments of genuine friendship and open-handed cooperation, but also to places of suspicion and violence. We need to get right with Lewis and Clark.”

He could have added Bird Woman, Bo-i'-naiv, Porivo, Grass Woman, Janey and Sakakawea as well.

Notes

¹ **Sacagawea's Capture and the History of the Early West**, an online lecture by Elizabeth Fenn, professor of Western American History at the University of Colorado presented by the University of Virginia Lifetime Learning Program, which I attended June 17, 2021 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-apr-20-bk-kirsch20-story.html>

² **Memory, History, and Contested Paths: Re-imagining Sacagawea / Sacajawea** by Sally McBeth, anthropology professor at the University of Northern Colorado, American Indian Culture and Research Journal, <https://www.unco.edu/hss/anthropology/pdf/mcbeth/reimagining-sacagawea.pdf>

³ **Voices on the Lewis and Clark Trail**, American Indian Native Alaskan Tourism Association (AIANTA) webinar, May 25, 2021 on YouTube <https://youtu.be/8gblGrOrDtc> Otis Halfmoon’s presentation begins at 13:15.

⁴ **Commencement Speeches**, Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commencement, January 18, 2003, CSPAN video <https://www.c-span.org/video/?174679-1/lewis-clark-bicentennial-commencement> Ronda’s keynote speech begins at 51:37.

⁵ **Winter Count**, Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_count

⁶ **Ibid**

⁷ **Nez Perce Memorial**, Tonkawa, The Tonkawa Tribe Official Website <http://www.tonkawatribe.com/nezperce.html>

⁸ **Ibid**, (AIANTA) webinar

⁹ **The complicated history of the first monument to Sacajawea, funded by suffragists and designed by a woman**, by Karen Chernick, August 26, 2020, *The Art Newspaper* <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/the-complicated-history-of-the-first-monument-to-sacajawea-funded-by-suffragists-and-designed-by-a-woman>

This chart will track the 78 counties in nine states that we're traveling through from St. Louis to the Pacific coast. The counties are listed in the order we enter them. Counties that the Corps of Discovery traveled through or had some other connection with have red explanation cells.

TOMORROW - County-by-county in Montana

Start Day 7 at Kalispell, Montana

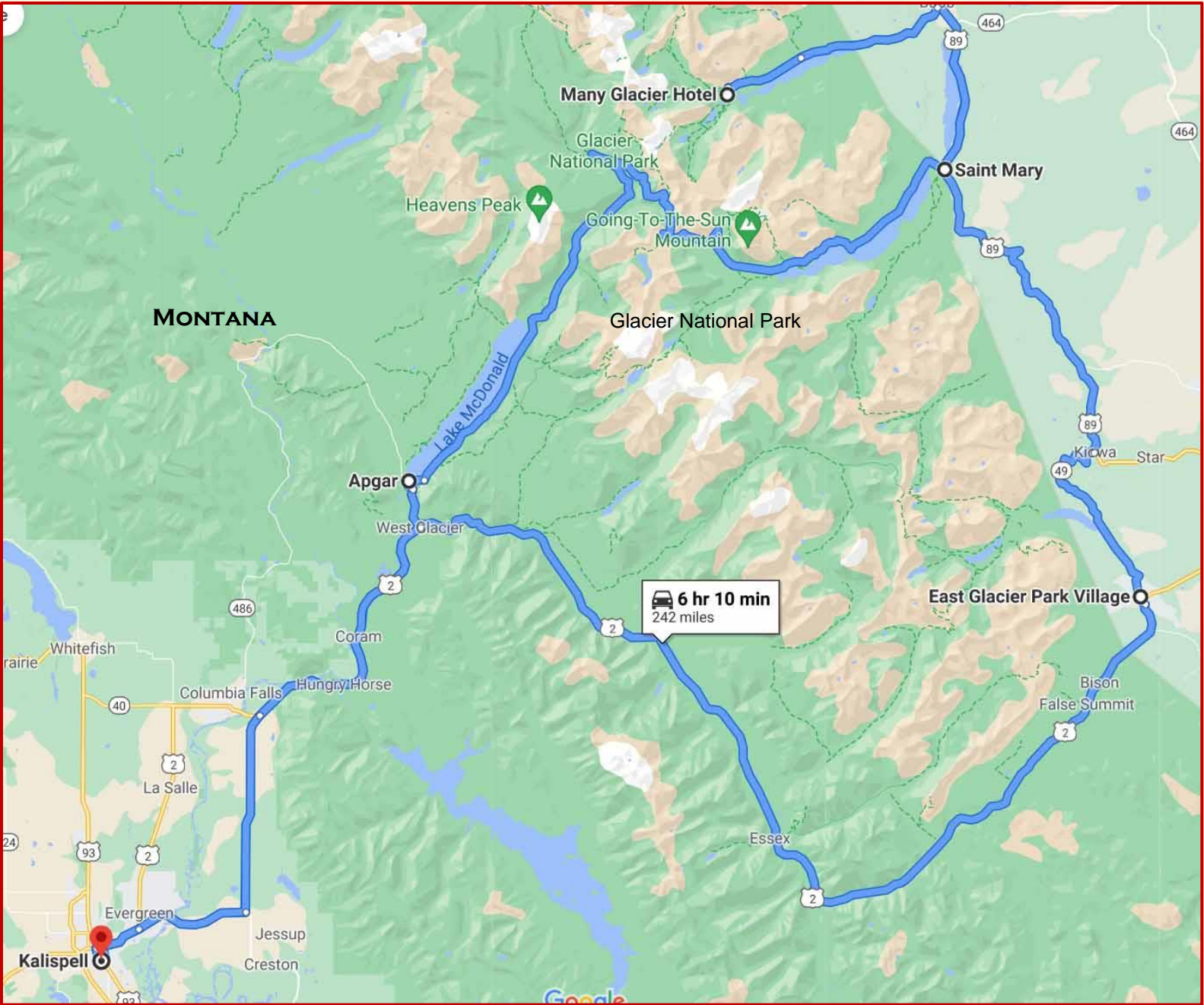
Via Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park, U.S. 2

County	Population	County seat	Source of name / significance to Lewis and Clark
54. Glacier	13,753	Cut Bank	Glaciers in Glacier National Park.

End of Day 7 at Kalispell, Montana

Day: 242 miles / 389 kilometers

Trip: 2,178 miles / 3,505 kilometers



IN PATRIOTIC MEMORY OF
SACAJAWEA

AN INDIAN WOMAN WHOSE HEROIC COURAGE
STEADFAST DEVOTION AND SPLENDID LOYALTY
IN ACTING AS GUIDE ACROSS THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS
MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE

LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION
1804 - 1806

TO OCCUPY SO IMPORTANT A PLACE IN THE
HISTORY OF THIS REPUBLIC

ERECTED BY
THE MONTANA DAUGHTERS
OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION
1914

The Daughters of the American Revolution's take on Sacagawea's role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



Julie at the Sacajawea Hotel in Three Forks, Montana.

A couple miles east of downtown Three Forks, the river Lewis and Clark named for President Thomas Jefferson, which is on the right, joins the river on the left, which they named for James Madison, then secretary of state and Jefferson's successor as president. According to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, this marks the start of the Missouri River. For Montana, the official start of the Missouri River is several hundred yards farther downstream (next page) where the Gallatin River, named for Albert Gallatin, secretary of the treasury, also joins. The expedition explored the lower reaches of all three streams before deciding to follow the Jefferson River upstream as far as possible in their canoes. Then they used horses from the Shoshone to pack their stuff over the Continental Divide and float down the Snake and Columbia rivers to the Pacific. Horses are not native to North America, however. The Shoshone obtained their horses – and the military advantage over other tribes those horses provided – by trading with tribes in the Southwest, who got them from the Spanish. They brought them by ship across the Atlantic Ocean. The Hidatsa, who kidnapped Sacagawea near where Julie is standing, had a military advantage over the Shoshone – firearms from trading with the British in Canada.



For this picture, I'm standing on a highway bridge spanning the Gallatin River looking toward its confluence with the combined Jefferson and Madison Rivers, which flow left to right just beyond the sandbar. This image and the previous one were shot in the Missouri Headwaters State Park. According to an information plaque in the park, if you sat in your inner tube at this point and just floated with the current, you'd reach the mouth of the Mississippi River below New Orleans at the Gulf of Mexico in 2½ months. When Julie and I drove to Three Forks yesterday (Sunday) from Yellowstone National Park, we drove down valleys along the courses of both the Gallatin and Madison rivers, which begin in the park.

