

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LEWIS AND CLARK: Early Commemorations and the Origins of the National Historic Trail.**

By *Wallace G. Lewis*

Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010. xiii + 229pp. Photographs, map, notes, bibliography, and index. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60732-026-5.

**Reviewed for *Material Culture* by Kevin Blake, [kblake@ksu.edu](mailto:kblake@ksu.edu), Department of Geography, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506.**

In the last decade the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition spawned a plethora of publications, thus the first thought when picking up *In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark* is whether there is any possible niche for a fresh treatment of the expedition. The hook in this monograph by Wallace G. Lewis, professor of history at Western State College (Gunnison, CO), is its focus on the commemorations of the Corps of Discovery between the Portland, OR Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905 and the creation of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in 1978.

The National Historic Trail (NHT) landscape is of critical importance in the narrative of commemorating Lewis and Clark. The book examines how the expedition's meaning is manifest in the NHT, particularly how culture is marked in material ways. The story includes how signs and statues along the trail reflect larger movements and ideals, such as imperialism, transcontinental automobile touring, community boosterism, and historical authenticity. Combining this subject material with the look of the book – a relatively small and thin volume, with extensive endnotes and small black-and-white photographs, and ten-point font – it is quickly clear that this is intended as a scholarly treatment and not a popular bestseller, despite the attractive dustjacket design.

The volume's insightful introduction examines how the material trail landscape shapes public memory and the expedition's narrative. The author asserts that over the twentieth century "monuments and statues have largely given way to historical parks and interpretive centers" (p. 4) and that the "veneration of the trail" (p. 5) in the Lewis and Clark narrative emerged over this same time as a competitor to the "heroic apotheosis" (p. 11) of the explorers. Indeed, the Corps was far less regaled in the national myth of Manifest Destiny during the nineteenth century than it is today, and the explorers were nearly non-entities in public memory prior to the 1905 exposition.

Chapter One, "Monuments," explores how certain characteristics of the expedition were selected for heroic-sized monuments. The Sacagawea statue in Portland, the Astoria (OR) Column, and Montana's slow efforts to erect a Lewis and Clark statue in Fort Benton dominate this chapter. As is the case with the rest of the book, the chapter is not organized chronologically, but rather moves from story to story. Chapter Two, "Tracing the Route," is the longest chapter in the book and it describes the expedition's history and routes.

Chapter Three, "The New Explorers," begins to address the meat of the book's purpose: how a growing public interest in the expedition and trail led to the NHT, such as the early efforts to popularize and mark the geographic features of the trail. For anyone who enjoys trying to discover a hard-to-find feature, such as a monument or a natural landmark, this is an interesting chapter as it follows intrepid mapmakers retracing the expedition route and family touring adventures published in *National Geographic Magazine*. Chapter Four, "The 1955 Sesquicentennial," reviews the significance of pageant commemorations, highways as material culture, and reconstructed forts. It includes an insightful comparison of what the expedition meant during the twentieth century to residents of the Pacific Northwest and Northern Plains states. Montana has often been the linchpin in commemorative efforts, in how quickly or slowly it adopted various types of commemorations, and in how it ties together the plains and mountains portions of the trail in public memory.

Chapter Five, "The National Commission," examines how symbols of national identity and heritage, such as wilderness, became manifest through the efforts of the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission during the 1960s. The Commission was pivotal in coalescing regional and local interest into a strong sense of purpose to commemorate the route's places of distinction. The discussion of how the Pick-Sloan dams affected the trail landscape and its Indian peoples is especially worthwhile. The book concludes with a relatively brief Chapter Six, "Commemoration and Authenticity on the Trail." Again, the author excels at contextualizing the Lewis and Clark commemorations within larger discourses. For example, American Indian views of the expedition are linked to the concepts of public memory, cultural democracy, and historical authenticity.

Errors are rare, but readers may become confused about the direction of flow of the Missouri River in the State of Missouri when reading: "west of Boonville and the Lamine River, the Missouri curves north and then southwest before continuing its generally westward course to Kansas City" (p. 44). The author is describing here the direction of travel by the expedition in 1804, rather than the flow of the river. Doniphan County (KS) is misspelled as "Donophan" (p. 46), the town of Macy (NE) as "Macey" (p. 47), and the Lincoln Highway is mistakenly described as going from Salt Lake City across "eastern Utah and Nevada to Donner Pass" (p. 93) rather than across western Utah.

The interpretive power of the book's illustrations is diminished by the lack of reference to them in the text, yet the greatest flaw of the illustrations relates to the only map in the volume. The map of the route of the NHT (pp. 42-43) features tiny and sometimes blurry text, and some labels on the far left (OR) and right (IL) are cut off. This is a grievous design flaw given the author's exhortation for "readers to become familiar with the geography of the expedition's routes" (p. xii).

By scholarly standards the writing style is quite solid, but like much of the steppe terrain traversed by Lewis and Clark, the prose is moderately dry. Rarely does a passage achieve a delightful turn of phrase, and even given the relatively short length of the book, it is not a quick read. The chief obstacle to greater reader enjoyment, though, is not the writing style, for the author's ideas are clearly stated, but is instead the volume's

organization and shifting focus. The main purpose, to explain how early commemorations evolved from a focus on the expedition personnel to their route, and how this culminated in the creation of the NHT, sounds straightforward enough, yet the reader is diverted at several points in the text.

Chapter One, for example, takes the story of statues and monuments from 1905 up through 1989, and it focuses almost exclusively on the mountain states of the trail. Then Chapter Two rather awkwardly steps back, twenty-five percent of the way through the book, to describe the entire history and route of the expedition. The insertion of this historical narrative between conceptual inquiries results in some repetition, especially in Chapter Three when the expedition's difficulties in the Bitterroot Mountains are again recounted. A strictly chronological organization of commemoration efforts that followed a description of the expedition would have achieved the author's goals with greater conceptual tightness. *In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark* is, nevertheless, an important contribution to the literature, for it provides a thorough and insightful focus on a relatively ignored era in the fascinating commemorative history of the expedition.

**Kevin Blake**, professor of geography at Kansas State University, has interests in the symbolism of landscapes in the American West. In 2004, he published an article examining how American Indians are commemorated in the landscape of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in *Great Plains Quarterly* 24(4): 263-282.

