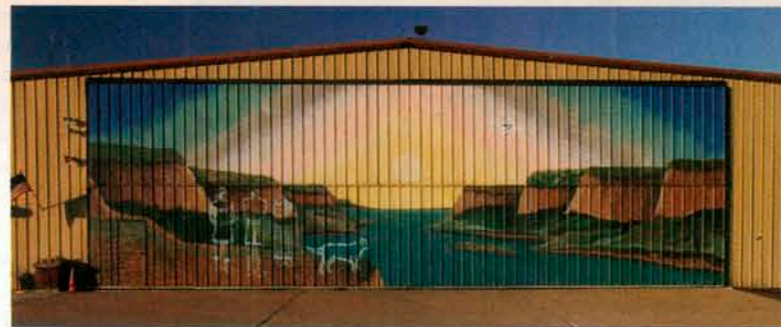


Westward Ho!

Retracing the Steps of Lewis & Clark in a Cessna 172

TEXT BY PHILIP ANDREW DAVEY • PHOTOS BY RICHARD MACK



This hangar door was painted by a muralist in exchange for maintenance on his aircraft.

HERE'S THE FORMULA. Start with three good friends, one pristine, fuel-injected 2001 Cessna 172 with new digital radios, moving map GPS and various other bells and whistles, and minimal baggage. Forget about work, bills and life's problems for eight days.

The mission—photograph the Missouri River from northwest North Dakota to the headwaters of the Missouri River at Three Forks, Montana. Then follow the Yellowstone River up to Miles City, Montana, before returning to northern Illinois. No sweat. Is there anything that three 40-something dads can't handle?

What brought all of this about? My lifelong friend, Richard Mack, a professional photographer, is wrapping up a book of photographs, *The Lewis & Clark Trail American Landscapes*, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition for Quiet Light Publishing (www.quietlightpublishing.com).

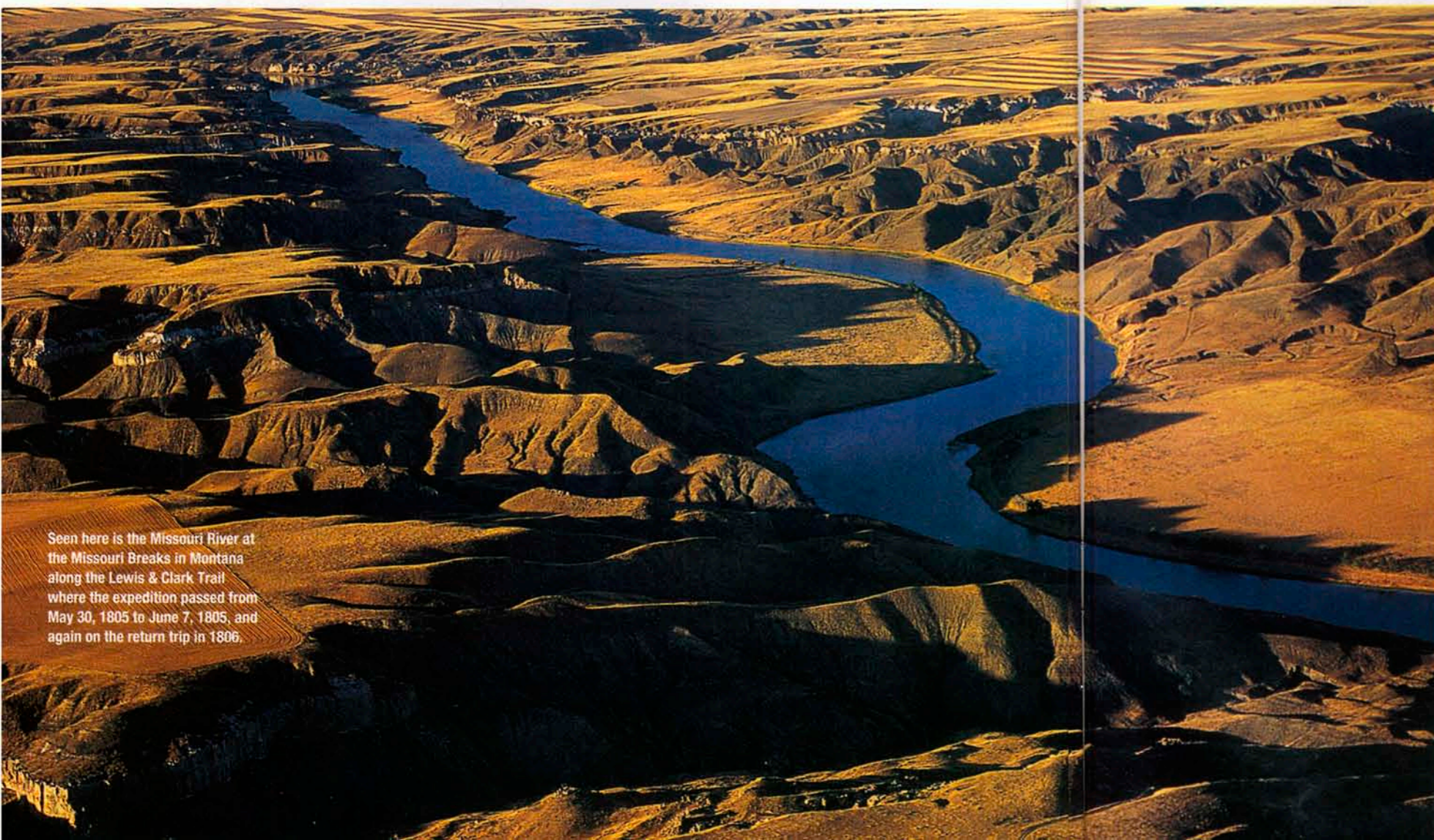
The Corps of Discovery left from near St. Louis in May of 1804. Richard's last few photographs needed to be from the air. Would I fly him and another friend out to Montana in a 172? There wasn't a pause—"Book it!"

Flying northwest from the Chicago area out to Williston, North Dakota, we saw the only significant weather of the weeklong trip. A narrow band of storms had shown up that morning on NEXRAD radar and we expected we would have to land in Minnesota to wait them out. By Prairie Du Chien, however, the line was dissipating and the enormous Mississippi River came into view rolling slowly beneath us. In "exchange" for my pilot report on the conditions we were experiencing, a helpful Flight Watch specialist gave us an extensive, detailed update on weather that confirmed VFR conditions ahead.

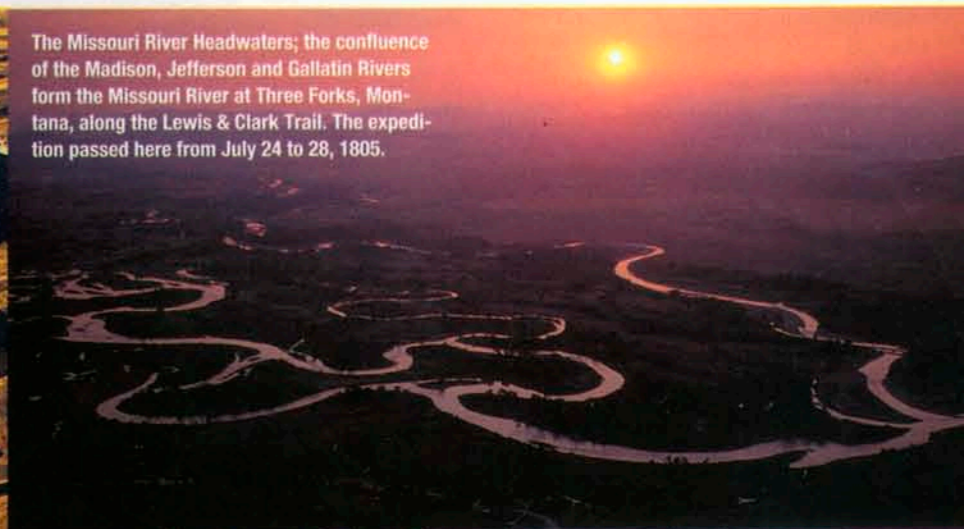
Cruising steadily along in the 172 we began to appreciate that the newer model is a totally different airplane than

the 172s produced prior to Cessna's restart. The latest 172 has a rock solid, heavy feel in the ailerons, and the plane leapt off the ground with 10 degrees of flaps. When checked against fuel receipts, the fuel gauges proved accurate. The separate fuel flow gauge, not present on the older 172s, was useful not only in confirming fuel management plans, but assisted in accurate leaning as well. Crisp, flip-flop digital radios, and a built-in intercom were part of an avionics package that included a GPS that could be coupled to the autopilot. There was no ADF, mercifully rendering NBD approaches an academic issue, but how do you tune in a ballgame or country and western station?

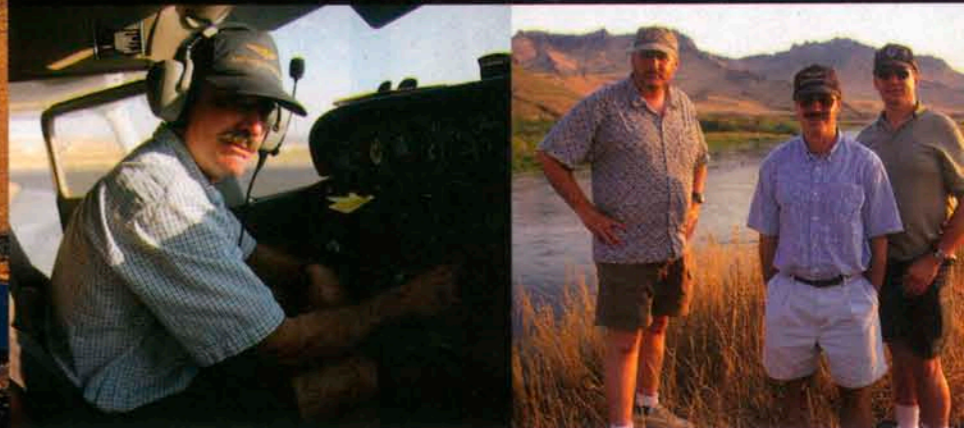
And music we could have used. The northwestern states are huge! We flew VFR from point-to-point always asking for and getting flight following with one exception. There was a stretch in northwest North Dakota where even at 10,500 feet we were not



Seen here is the Missouri River at the Missouri Breaks in Montana along the Lewis & Clark Trail where the expedition passed from May 30, 1805 to June 7, 1805, and again on the return trip in 1806.



The Missouri River Headwaters; the confluence of the Madison, Jefferson and Gallatin Rivers form the Missouri River at Three Forks, Montana, along the Lewis & Clark Trail. The expedition passed here from July 24 to 28, 1805.



ABOVE LEFT: Pilot Phil Davey gets ready for an evening shoot in Three Forks, Montana. ABOVE RIGHT: From left to right is photographer Richard Mack, pilot Philip Davey and Rob Beaderstadt on the Missouri River, Pelican Point Fishing Access about 30 miles west of Great Falls, Montana, along the Lewis & Clark Trail. The Corps of Discovery passed by this spot on July 16, 1805.

on radar. A female controller admonished us, like a mother to a child, to call in after passing a checkpoint. With nothing but nature's rough beauty below us, it was reassuring and comforting to hear that gentle voice.

Fortunately, Mother Nature Had Her Own Ideas

Fierce headwinds prevented us from making it to Williston and we landed at a small airport. The friendly FBO operator volunteered that if we couldn't fly on we were welcome to stay at the airport. Behind a door, to what we assumed was a storage area, was a tidy bedroom complete with nightstand, lamp, rug, TV, shower and towels. The room was free for stranded pilots.

He tossed us the keys to the courtesy car (a concept that astonishes every non-pilot I tell) and we drove into town. Main Street sported a barbershop with pole, a Rexall Drugstore and Suzy's Café. After several hours in the "saddle," we were ready for a slice of homemade fruit pie (\$1.30) and coffee (50 cents).

People saw the courtesy car, realized we were out-of-towners and introduced themselves to us—not to sell us anything, but to see if we were enjoying ourselves and knew the local history.



Rob and Phil sit back and relax on the porch of the Hotel Sacagawea in Three Forks, Montana.

and we witnessed a slowly changing landscape. Visibility was unlimited to a sharp horizon.

Did Meriwether Lewis ever dream of flying up this river instead of slog-ging upstream, foot by foot, day by day, through all its twists and turns, dragging a heavily laden keelboat? I daydreamed about meeting him.

The internal combustion engine would need some explaining; the Cessna I believe he would have intuitively understood.

A Beautiful Barter

Slough International Airport in Williston, North Dakota, is a non-towered field with approach lights, an ILS and a 1984 Ford doing "hard time" as a courtesy car. As with all good courtesy cars, it shakes and rattles a bit before it rolls.

Our gracious FBO host inquired about our trip. "Funny," he said. "We had a pilot who couldn't pay for his annual. But he was a mural artist. You might enjoy this." He switched on the electric motor to close the big hangar doors, revealing a painting of Lewis, his Newfoundland dog (Seaman), William Clark and Sacagawea standing watch over the Missouri River.

A Slightly Different View of the Same Incredible Landscape

The next morning we flew into Montana, a state one and a half times the size of Great Britain. Golden plains and purple mountains replaced the green corn and soybean fields of Illinois. We were sharing views that Lewis described 200 years earlier when he wrote, "I had a most pleasing view of the country particularly of the wide and fertile valleys formed by the Missouri and the Yellowstone Rivers." He and his men were consuming as much as nine or ten pounds of meat per day to fuel themselves as they worked their way upriver. We were viewing those same plains zipping along in smooth air at 8,500 feet, comforted by the hum of the engine, drinking a can of pop and munching our favorite snacks.

That pop caught up with us and we landed at a small airfield in the midst of one of those massive Montana wheat fields. Yellow is not the color of those fields when the sun is setting; they're as gold as the ring on my left hand.

Riddle Me This...

I was doing my "rain dance" in front of the locked door to the pilot's shack, a clean building, freshly painted, with a satellite TV. Looking through the plate glass windows, we could see the coffee machine and keys to the courtesy car on the desk. But the door was locked! The sign on the door read, "SQUAWK VFR, PLEASE LOCK DOOR WHEN LEAVING."

1804-1806: The Lewis & Clark Expedition by Philip Andrew Davey

TO APPRECIATE THE audacity of the Lewis and Clark expedition you must remember that with the exception of parts of the West Coast and a few trading posts, virtually everything west of the Mississippi River was unknown to Americans before 1804.

Fearing an Anglo-American alliance and needing funds, Napoleon sold 827,987 square miles to the United States in July of 1803. "Sixty million francs for an occupation that will not perhaps last a day!" Napoleon allegedly exclaimed. Americans were equally delighted with the Louisiana Purchase. The United States had just doubled in size.

Thomas Jefferson had recognized the need to explore the northwest reaches of the continent for at least ten years when he gave Lewis the following instructions in 1803: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River, and such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean...may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce."

Confident that the Rocky Mountains were no greater an obstacle than the Appalachian Mountains, Jefferson hoped the Missouri River would be a water route to transport goods from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. He requested an appropriation of \$2,500 to fund the expedition, called the Corps of Discovery. Congress approved.

Lewis and Clark and 30-odd soldiers packed many tons of supplies into a 55-foot-long keelboat. Supplies included 5,555 rations of flour, 4,000 rations of salt pork, trinkets, colored beads and 120 gallons of whiskey. The Corps of Discovery began their trip on May 21, 1804, just outside of St. Louis, Missouri. Their biggest problem was they were going upstream. Rowing, pushing, pulling and sailing moved the keelboat. The river current averaged 5 miles per hour.

The expedition would last 28 months, cover 8,000 miles and go to the Oregon Coast and back. They wintered at Fort Mandan in central North Dakota from December 21, 1804 to April 6, 1805. On April 7, 1805 they left the fort and proceeded westward into Montana. A French fur trapper and his teenage wife, Sacagawea, were hired to join the expedition. The explorers were familiar with the forests of New England; they had not imagined the magnificent plains they were encountering. West of what is now Williston, North Dakota, they entered Montana and found the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. Further west they saw five spectacular waterfalls (present day Great Falls, Montana) which aligned with reports by American Indians and confirmed they were still on the Missouri River and not one of its tributaries. Further upstream and still east of the Rocky Mountains were the headwaters of the Missouri River at what is present-day Three Forks, Montana.

Meriwether Lewis was a gifted man. He rarely traveled in the boat during the trip, choosing instead to

walk along the banks, observing new plants and animals, and then carefully describing and drawing them in his journals he wrote in camp. One discovery that gave them fits was the grizzly bear. Shot once with a .54 caliber bullet from a long rifle it awoke; shot twice it charged. The men were in a country teeming with deer, elk, antelope and enormous herds of thousands of buffalo.

Just west of the headwaters, now traveling on foot, the Corps desperately needed horses to continue over the Rockies. A Shoshone Chieftain, Cameahwait, was indifferent and reluctant to sell the expedition horses for merely beads and medallions. He wanted rifles, a trade Lewis and Clark feared making. The impasse seemed insurmountable and could result in the expedition being unable to continue.

"Brother!" cried a tearful Sacagawea. "Sister!" shouted Cameahwait. The two had not seen each other for five years following Sacagawea's kidnapping by Hidatsa Indians. Hollywood soap opera writers could not have crafted a more dramatic script. Horses were purchased and the expedition continued. They finally arrived at Fort Clatsop, Oregon, on the Pacific Coast, on December 8, 1805.

After wintering in Oregon, the Corps, on March 23, 1806, began its return eastward. On the return trip, Lewis took the Missouri River eastward; Clark took the Yellowstone River southeastward and then northeastward to its intersection with the Missouri River and a reunion with Lewis. The all-water route from the Atlantic to the Pacific did not exist. The Rocky Mountains made sure of that.

Only one man died on the trip. Sergeant Charles Floyd most likely developed peritonitis from an infected appendix that had perforated or ruptured. The other casualty of the trip was Lewis; shot in the buttocks on August 11, 1806, just weeks before his triumphant return to St. Louis. He had been hunting elk for food for the men with Private Cruzatte, a man who reportedly was nearsighted in his only good eye. Despite the retrieval of an army bullet from Captain Lewis' hindquarter, Cruzatte steadfastly denied any wrongdoing. Some "historians" speculate this was the origin of the phrase, "Failing the straight-face test."

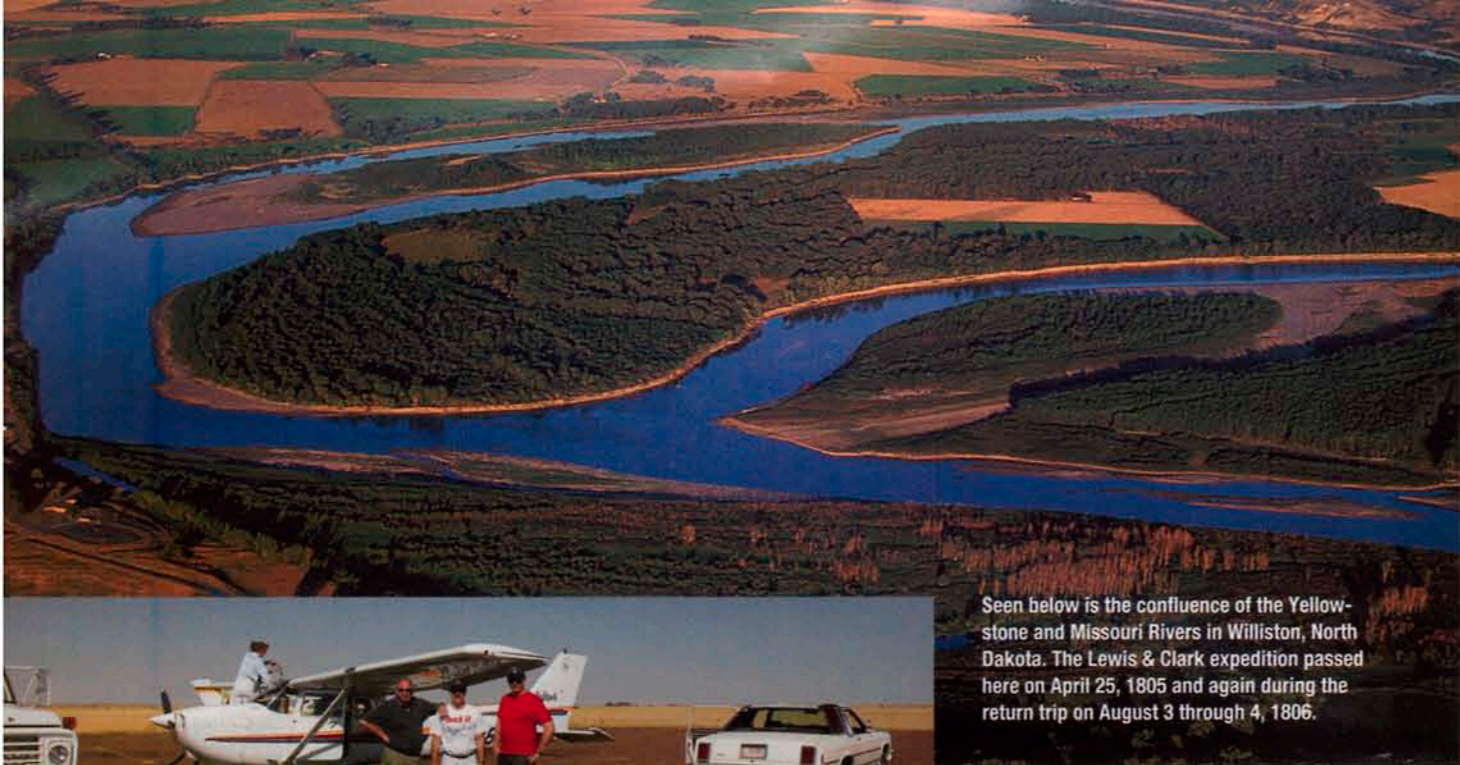
The expedition arrived to a hero's welcome in St. Louis on September 23, 1806. The Corps of Discovery had amassed a wealth of knowledge about the northwestern part of the country and the Indian tribes that lived there. They returned with detailed maps of the frontier. Their measurements of the Great Falls, for example, vary only a few feet from modern calculations. During Lewis' long, solitary walks, he chronicled and drew 178 new species of plants and 122 species and sub-species of animals. The expedition also enabled the United States to claim the Oregon region, which was west of the land obtained in the Louisiana Purchase. An explosive pioneer expansion into the region in the 19th century soon followed.



The Montana Badlands near Miles City were a beautiful sight from overhead.

Lewis and Clark had stopped in this area on their way upriver and had the good fortune to hire a French fur trapper, Toussaint Charbonneau, and his young Indian wife, Sacagawea, to join the expedition.

The winds died down and we flew on to Williston. The views of the Missouri from 6,500 feet were spectacular



Seen below is the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers in Williston, North Dakota. The Lewis & Clark expedition passed here on April 25, 1805 and again during the return trip on August 3 through 4, 1806.



As their plane is refueled, the traveling companions take a moment to snap a photo before hopping into another courtesy car, which they were happy to find on several of their stops.

Huh? It then dawned on me. I pressed 1-2-0-0 on the lock's touch pad and the door opened! Ten minutes later we were in the airport's 1979 Cadillac headed into town to savor a sandwich piled high with turkey at a riverside café, enjoying a ground view of a river that had enchanted us from the air. As always, we dutifully topped off the car's gas tank before returning it.

Only By Sea or By Air

The Missouri Breaks are towering, white cliffs along the Missouri River one sees either by boat or by air. There are no roads. Our procedures for photographing this stretch of the Missouri River were the same as other photo shoots on the trip.

We pored over sectionals to visualize elevations and obstacles we would face. Sunset times were reviewed. We waited on the ground by the plane for the sun to lower for that warm, yellow light you get right before sunset. At that moment, we took off and flew in silence at cruise speed to the photo scene looking forward to the work.

At the photo scene, the intercom was turned down, the right window

opened, the plane slowed to 65 knots, and we started flying the slow race-tracks that work best. It is tough for a photographer looking through a small viewfinder, the lens jostled by 65-knot winds, to photograph. We communicate with simple hand signals; we both know what can be done and what is needed. Richard is not a temperamental genius; he's just a genius.

My First Mountain Flying

After shooting the Missouri Breaks, we flew to Great Falls. The next day we prepared to fly to the headwaters of the Missouri River at Three Forks. This was my first experience in any type of mountain flying and I waited for the coolness of the late afternoon. Drawing on all sources of information, I re-checked weather with FSS, spoke with a pilot who had just landed, and chatted with a local CFI before departing. We knew we could always come back to Great Falls. As I found out, getting off the ground was not the challenge; climbing was.

Our pre-flight efforts paid off. Although the climb was slow, we were well above any peaks along the route. There were only light winds, visibility

was acceptable, though diminished in the haze of the Montana forest fires, and Great Falls provided flight following for a good distance. We contacted and monitored Helena Tower before safely landing at Three Forks airport.

The FBO was closed at Three Forks. The owner had posted instructions on how to pump gas and in a light-hearted gesture had left a bat and ball by the locked door for entertainment.

While we tied down the plane, the town's former mayor came by on his four-wheeler and told us the story behind the naming of Pogreba Field. Colonel Dean A. Pogreba was a seasoned combat pilot when he was shot down on October 5, 1965 and became a POW. He went to Vietnam because he said he would. There were alleged sightings of him years after the war ended, but no confirmation of what happened to him.

The 100-year-old Sacagawea Hotel with its broad apron of a front porch was home for the night. A dozen rocking chairs lined the porch for guests to read the day's paper or just watch the limited traffic go by. Inside we noticed that overalls and corn seed baseball caps had been replaced by oversized belt buckles, cowboy boots and cowboy hats. A hot shower was followed by a cold beer that never tasted better.

At dusk, Richard photographed the confluence of the Jefferson, Madison



The white cliffs along the Missouri River at the Missouri Breaks in Montana were passed by the Lewis & Clark expedition from May 30, 1805 to June 7, 1805 and again on the return trip in 1806.

and Gallatin Rivers that form the Missouri River. Forest fires resulted in TFRs dotting the area. The smoke had reduced visibility to eight miles and gave his photos a unique, surreal look.

A Journey Almost Complete

Taking off the next morning, we climbed slowly in the thin mountain air and safely threaded our way through the Bozeman Pass to Miles City. Along the way, the Bighorn River meets the Yellowstone. Further south is the Little Bighorn River, the scene of an infamous battle still years to come when Clark passed by.

Flying to Miles City afforded spectacular views not only of the Yellowstone River, but also the barren, vast areas north of the river which in late afternoon were a photographer's paradise.

After that day's photo shoot, we landed and a crescent moon rose. A light, warm breeze gently blew over the field and we savored the moment.

The next morning in the hotel restaurant, pilots battling forest fires shuffled in for an early breakfast. They had been away from home for a long time. Required to be at the airport from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., they must be airborne within 15 minutes of a call. Their planes and tanker trucks were pulled out and ready to go well before nine. Their planes—large, low-wing, single-engine planes swinging a 4-bladed prop in front of a 1,000-hp radial engine—reminded me of WWII Corsairs.

Miles City marked our "R.T.B." point. We had traced the Yellowstone as far as we were going to and reluctantly headed southeast for home. Two

hundred years ago, Clark followed the Yellowstone River to the Missouri River to wait for his lifelong friend Lewis. The Corps of Discovery enjoyed a quicker trip down river to a warm welcome and celebrations in St. Louis.

We, too, were on our way to wives and children awaiting our return. The land was gradually changing from endless prairies of yellow and gold to the familiar crisscross of roads bisecting green fields, dotted with red barns and white farmhouses. The sectional charts were appropriately changing color as well. When the Mississippi River came into view and the radio chatter increased, we knew the trip was about to end. The GPS showed we had another 45 minutes. The sun was setting on our day and trip.

What did we discover? America is alive and doing well. The joy of small, plane travel, hop-scotching along the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, sampling Americana, is an experience to be treasured. There are parts of this great country where life remains simple and friendly. Coffee tastes best after a few flight hours and served with fresh fruit pie. And seen and unseen friends at FSSs, Flight Watch, FBOs and ATC, make up an American air system that we happily enter for the admission price of a pilot's license.

The Yellowstone River west of Miles City, Montana, was passed by Captain Clark and a party of men from the Lewis & Clark expedition team in July of 1806.

