

# New Idaho Foundation Chapter and Idaho Lewis & Clark Trail Committee Dedicated to Protecting Last Remnants of the Lewis & Clark Trail

By James R. Fazio

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Idaho has the distinction of being the last major region of the continental United States to be viewed by whites. Lewis and Clark were, of course, those first visitors and their triumph at Lemhi Pass and tribulations in the Bitterroots are well known. Today, a struggle of a different nature continues along the route traveled by the Corps of Discovery. It is a struggle of importance to anyone with an interest in Lewis and Clark history, for at stake is the protection of the section of Trail route that remains today least altered by the works of modern civilization.

It was an awareness of Idaho's unique relationship to Lewis and Clark history that prompted Governor John Evans to establish by executive order the Idaho Lewis and Clark Trail Committee (WPO 10:1). That occurred late in 1983, making Idaho the most recent<sup>1</sup> Trail state to form a committee or commission to follow-up on the work and recommendations of the federal Lewis and Clark Trail Commission which existed from 1964 to 1969.

The Idaho committee has begun to make up for its late start by actively involving itself in significant projects. In our two years of existence, we have had little time for the niceties of historical study or celebration. Instead, we have been thrust into the position of fighting a battle in a war that has been long waged—and generally lost—along most of the 3,000-mile Lewis and Clark route. Both ethically and by charge of the executive order that created our committee, we feel obliged to do what we can to protect the remnants of the old Trail.

Some of these remnants make your heart thump a little louder. There are segments in the rugged Bitterroot Mountains that are still unmistakably visible. On the descent from Glade Creek Camp to the Lochsa River there remains a depression in the topsoil of the forest floor made from the passage of thousands of moccasins en route to ancient fishing spots. The exploration party

most assuredly walked this path. There are ridgetops and meadows and ways along the wild streams that were unquestionably traveled by the party and which remain much the same today as they did in 1805-06. And there are the campsites, places like Glade Creek where one can sense the presence of the explorers resting in the tall grass of this forest opening, drawing their water from the pleasant creek that meanders through.

The Trail route and its features from Lolo Pass to the Clearwater River are well documented thanks to the modern-day exploration of people like Ralph Space and Andy Arvish, former Clearwater National Forest supervisor and recreation/lands specialist, respectively. Maps and reference works abound, and along most of the route small metal plates mark the travelway, much of it unquestionably being in the exact place of passage.

The problem is that this part of the historic route—hallowed ground to the Lewis and Clark scholar—passes through a working forest. Most of the unaltered segments lie within the Clearwater National Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service, or on land owned by Plum Creek Timber Company, a subsidiary of Burlington Northern. Burlington Northern's predecessor company was the recipient of "railroad lands" used to spur settlement of the West. In all cases, the land supports a forest that is an important part of both the economic foundation and the future of Idaho.

The Idaho committee has directed most of its energies toward making sure that the historic Trail is given as much protection as possible as roads and chainsaws cut deeper and deeper into the old growth forests of north central Idaho. The committee's first meeting after organizing was held at the confluence of the Lochsa and Selway Rivers. From there, with officials from the Forest Service, segments of the Trail were visited and views were exchanged on the future management of the area. It became very clear that logging would have high priority since none of the Trail route is in desig-

nated wilderness. At the same time, it was apparent that the agency understood the historic and recreational value of the Trail and would attempt to protect it using appropriate management methods. Along some segments, clearcutting would even yield to less visible selection cutting. In all areas, fire lanes and log loading docks would be kept off the Trail. The meeting provided not only valuable information, but the start of a good working relationship with Forest Service officers whose decisions directly influence what happens along the best preserved segment of the mountainous Trail route.

That initial meeting in the fall of 1984 was soon followed by another action of lasting importance. Each national forest in the United States has been directed by Congress to develop a plan outlining its activities and management directions for the next ten years. After an elaborate period of public involvement used to help select from numerous alternatives, the plan will be the basis for what happens on virtually every acre of our national forests. Obviously, the Clearwater National Forest Plan will determine the fate of some premier segments of the Lewis and Clark Trail. The Forest Service considered the Trail corridor—including the Nez Perce's Nee-Mee-Poo Trail—important enough to warrant a 132-page appendix to the Forest Plan. This document, known as the *Lolo Trail System Implementation Guidelines*, was given careful scrutiny by the Idaho committee. This turned out to be in the best interests of all who are interested in Lewis and Clark, for despite the agency's best intentions, there is considerable room for improvement in their plan if the old Trail route is to survive in its present, unique condition.

Some examples of the criticism forwarded from the committee included: (a) a lack of sociological data on which to base decisions on what kind of recreational developments, if any, should be made (in contrast to great amounts of data on the timber resource); (b) a tendency to subordinate protection of the trail system to a "when possible" or "when compatible with other uses" status rather than subordinating other projects or

1. Six of the eleven Trail States have Governor appointed Lewis and Clark Trail Committees, Commissions, or Councils. They are: Iowa, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington.

uses to protecting the Trail and associated sites; (c) an apparently low priority for the Trail in the agency's budget allocation process; (d) complicated descriptions of plans for harvesting the area's timber, and an apparent favoritism for clearcutting; and (e) a reluctance to pursue mineral withdrawals for land traversed by the Trail, including most of the Lewis and Clark campsites (mineral withdrawals prevent the mining of areas).

There is much good to be said of the plan, but the above is cited to illustrate the kind of watchdog function served by members of the Idaho committee. It remains to be seen how many of our suggestions will be incorporated into the final draft of the document.

Another example of the issue-oriented role of the Idaho Committee was the Fall 1985 meeting. This time the focus was on private land traversed by the Trail just west of Lolo Pass. The purpose was to initiate dialogue with Plum Creek Timber Company, learn what measures they might be taking to safeguard the Trail on their land, and explore alternatives for future use and protection of the Trail and campsites. At the same time, we asked to review the site of a gravel pit proposed by the Idaho Division of Highways. The proposed excavation is on Plum Creek's land and was to come within 25 feet of a beautiful stretch of trail along the edge of the Crooked Fork just before it joins White Sand Creek to become the Lochsa River.

This, too, proved to be an interesting and productive meeting. We learned that Plum Creek Timber Company is very conscious of the Trail. The company's original unit manager, a Mr. Harvey, carefully located the Trail across company property. Although company policy does not allow for buffer strips of vegetation along the trail, it does require workers to keep log skidders and other equipment off the Trail tread. Most importantly, the company has actually chosen not to log in areas considered to have high potential for public use and enjoyment. Happily, these include such sites as 13-Mile Camp, Packer Meadows, and the magnificent Glade Creek Camp, and the Trail route between the latter.

In our post-visit recommendations, we suggested a higher degree of cooperation and communication between company and Forest Service officials, especially to encourage joint projects such as clearly marking the entire Trail with the help of Clearwater National Forest archae-

ologist, Karl Roenke. We suggested continuing dialogue with our committee, and that the company pursue possibilities of exchanging easement rights along the Trail for an appropriate tax advantage. We also were successful in having the gravel pit specifications modified to move the edge of excavation to 50 feet from the Trail instead of 25 feet.

Actions of the Idaho Committee in its first two years have resulted in tangible benefits for future Trail users, but more importantly there has been a good spirit of cooperation built between our group of citizens and the government and industry officials responsible for the land that presented Lewis and Clark with such a challenge during their passage. Last summer the committee successfully won its bid to host the Foundation's national meeting in 1990. The goal of that meeting will be to review the success of foresters' efforts along the "Lolo Trail" to protect an historical treasure while at the same time managing the timber and other resources that are so vital to Idaho's economy.

The continuity of any committee appointed by a governor is precarious at best. With Governor Evans' term expiring in 1986, we decided to create a chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation to assure continuation of our work and to add the strength of a nationwide interest group to our efforts. On October 19, 1985 at the Powell Ranger Station, 13 members of the Foundation — most of us also members of the governor's committee — signed a petition for a "new entity financial grant." The petition was subsequently approved, with officers of the new Idaho Chapter being: Ottis Peterson, president; Dr. James F. Hammersten, vice-president; and Audrey Peterson, secretary-treasurer.

With Idaho's far-flung population of little more than one million, the number of people with a serious interest in the Lewis and Clark Trail are few. To assure adequate protection of the Trail across the rugged backbone of our state, we need the interest and support of the entire Foundation. One thing that every member can do to help is to show that interest *does* exist for the protection of the historical aspects of the Trail. For example, when visiting the Trail, let land managers and community support services (motel operators, etc.) know of your interest. This translates to dollars and helps demonstrate that good resource management can produce tourism income as well as commodities. Another thing that needs to be

done is for every chapter and every state committee to protest strongly any management action that unnecessarily impacts the Trail route in their area. The success of one group adds strength to the efforts of others. Similarly, we need to recognize private and public organizations that help safeguard Lewis and Clark history and perpetuate the spirit of that remarkable chapter in American history.

As the Foundation's newest entity, the combined Idaho Chapter and Governor's Committee looks forward to the continuing support of its neighboring groups who have already been most helpful, and to hosting the national meeting during Idaho's Centennial in 1990.

## University of Idaho Announces Summer Field Course on the Lolo Trail

Sid Eder, Summer Session Director, University of Idaho, Moscow, has announced a July 7-13, 1986, Summer Session field based course. Titled "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark", the course will offer a unique and exciting field study of the history and natural history of the 1803-1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition. The field work involves retracing the 1805 route of the explorers across northern Idaho from Lolo Pass (Montana-Idaho stateline) to the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers (at Lewiston, Idaho). Participants (limited to 25) will study both what the explorers found and what are the present conditions of the occupants of the lands they explored, examined, and documented in their journals, maps, and sketch-drawings. A major part of the course will allow students and professors to visit sites and attempt to observe discoveries made by the Expedition, e.g., plants, wildlife, terrain, Indian culture. Trip leaders and instructors will be: Steven J. Brunsfield, University of Idaho naturalist, specialist in Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain flora; Cort Conley, director of the University of Idaho Press and author of *Idaho for the Curious*; Sam H. Ham, Associate Professor, Wildlife Recreation Management, and consultant to the National Park Service regarding the Lewis and Clark Expedition; and Carlos A. Schwantes, director, Institute for Pacific Northwest Studies and Associate Professor of History. For further information write: Summer Session Office, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 83843, or phone (208) 885-6237.