



Photo courtesy of Bill Yenne

The Bitterroot River passes through a broad, level valley that gave the Corps of Discovery a week of respite between the extreme difficulty of Lost Trail Pass and the horror of climbing across Lolo Pass. Author Bill Yenne took this photo and many of the other pictures that appear in his new book, "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark: Yesterday and Today."

Modern expedition

Montana native traces famous trail, documents changes in landscape

By JOHN SMITHERS
of the Missoulian

Bill Yenne says he was "bitten by the bug" to retrace the entire route of Lewis and Clark – from St. Louis to the Oregon coast – during a trip of his own along the stark plains of northern Montana three years ago.

Yenne made the decision on a rainy June day during a search for Camp Disappointment. The northernmost point reached by the Corps of Discovery is nestled along Cut Bank Creek on the Blackfeet Reservation, with the rugged peaks of Glacier National Park soaring to the west.

The location where Lewis camped during his return trip in 1806 now sits on a private campground owned by the Blackfeet near a centuries-old sacred ceremonial site of the tribe.

Lewis and his men called the place Camp Disappointment after

overcast skies kept Lewis from making precise celestial readings. Lewis wrote that he had "lost all hope of the waters of this river ever extending to N Latitude 50 degrees," and he was right – it is just north of 48 degrees – ending the explorer's dream of a larger America.

But standing under cloudy skies at that same campground nearly 200 years later launched Yenne into the past and on a quest of his own.

The result is the University of Montana graduate's "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark: Yesterday and Today."

"I wouldn't call it something as biblical as an epiphany, but it just hit me, 'Hey, this would be a good idea for a book,'" Yenne said in a recent interview. "My friend and I had spent the entire day finding this

place with the help of a Blackfeet woman at the campground, and I started getting excited about it, about going out and seeing things the way (the Corps) saw them."

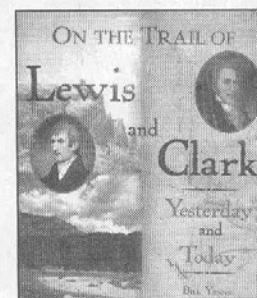
Yenne, 55, grew up in West Glacier and attended Columbia Falls High School before going to UM. He has lived in San Francisco for the past 30 years, and has written a wide variety of books on historical and travel topics, including North American Indians, rail travel, beer, aviation and Elvis.

As with most of Yenne's books, "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark" included extensive travel and personal investigation on his part.

Another trademark of Yenne, an accomplished photographer, is that most of the photos in the book are by the author.

Where this effort would vary from past ones, however, held some irony for Yenne.

■ Childhood in Montana shaped author's works
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Page by page

Title: "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark: Yesterday and Today"

Author: Bill Yenne

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www.motorbooks.com

Expedition

Continued

"A lot of times, you don't appreciate the significance of where you grew up until you're gone," he said. "I had never really been a big Lewis and Clark buff. Like a lot of my interests, it was one of those things I kind of kept on the shelf."

"The whole time I was growing up right there I had made only one visit to Camp Disappointment and that was with my father when I was around 9, so the memory is pretty vague."

But through the three-week trip across 11 states, as Yenne followed the trail of the explorers as closely as he could by whatever roads necessary, he came to appreciate the tremendous accomplishments of Lewis and Clark and their party.

"When you cross South Dakota and eastern Montana, you really get a sense of how vast and impressive the journey was," Yenne said.

And in many ways along extensive portions of the trail, very little has changed. Anyone who has drifted along the slow, meandering Missouri for days at a time can still grasp the isolation and stark beauty Lewis and Clark must have sensed 200 years ago.

As with any good recounting of the expedition, Yenne includes much of the day-to-day experiences of the captains, along with well-known highlights.

Where Yenne deviates from other Lewis and Clark books is in the modern detail he provides; thus the "Yesterday and Today" portion of the title.

It's a tactic Yenne has used to great effect before, including perhaps his best-known work, "San Francisco: Then & Now" (Thunder Bay Press, 1998).

"Well, it isn't exactly like other books I've done," Yenne said with a laugh. "The photographer with Lewis and Clark didn't do a great job of preserving his film, so there weren't a lot of pictures you could compare with."

"But (then and now) is a very important aspect of this book because people should really sense this in context," he added. "You can see what places look like now, and a lot of pictures are really unchanged from what they might have been (200 years ago). It's all part of the experience, all part of the story."

While Yenne didn't go so far as to construct a keelboat or gouge a canoe out of a cottonwood, he introduces readers to Iowa's Butch Bouvier, widely considered the foremost authority on the watercraft of Lewis and Clark.

Yenne documents modern landmarks along the trail – significant and quixotic – from Lewis and Clark's, a restaurant in St. Charles, Mo., to Spirit Mound Historic

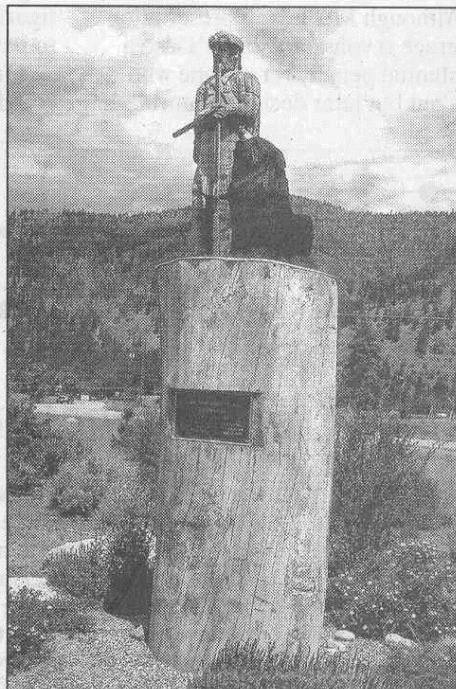


Photo courtesy of Bill Yenne

A few hours after passing through what would become Missoula, Meriwether Lewis and his party reached the site of the present lumber town Bonner, on the mouth of the Blackfoot River. In 2002, this Jim Rogers sculpture of Lewis and Seaman was erected in Bonner to commemorate Independence Day 1806.

Prairie in South Dakota and the Jim Rogers sculpture of Lewis and his dog Seaman in Bonner.

Yenne notes most of the campgrounds and historical landmarks, along with the people who are bringing the past to life during the expedition's bicentennial celebration.

"It's like the book I did on Elvis shrines," he said. "It's as much about the obsession and the people involved as it is about Elvis – or Lewis and Clark."

Yenne also says it was vital to him to note the relationships Lewis and Clark had with Natives along the trail, particularly the help the explorers received from friendly tribes and the guidance of Sacagawea.

"Any time you glorify people that were involved in westward expansion, a minority will not like what you do," he said. "But it's really time to refocus our celebration on the way Lewis and Clark were treated ... on the gracious hospitality of the Mandan, Shoshone and Nez Perce."

"Let's deal with the reality as we are," Yenne added. "Nowadays the relations are probably better than they've ever been. It used to be that the policy in the Indian Bureau was to eliminate Indian culture, but that has changed and (the change) is pretty much going on all over."

For Yenne's money, the most interesting stopping points on the journey are the reconstructed camping sites and forts, particularly Fort Clatsop several miles south of the Columbia River near Astoria, Ore.

Stop and see

Milestone points along the 4,000-mile Lewis and Clark trail.

Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center

Number 1 Lewis and Clark Trail
Hartford, IL 62048

www.campdubois.com

The North Dakota Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center

Fort Mandan

P.O. Box 607

Washburn, ND 58577-0607

www.fortmandan.org

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park

Fort Clatsop National Memorial

92343 Fort Clatsop Road

Astoria, OR 97103-9197

www.nps.gov/lewi/index.htm

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center

4201 Giant Springs Road

Great Falls, MT 59403-1806

www.fs.fed.us/r/lewisclark/lcic/

Sioux City Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center

900 Larsen Park Road

Sioux City, Iowa 51102

www.siouxcitylcic.com/

The fort was the 1805-06 winter quarters for Lewis and Clark, and the reconstruction was completed in 1955 at the best-guess location of the original site.

Numerous photographs and descriptions of must-see locations are included. Even directions to visitor centers like the highly regarded Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center in Great Falls are provided.

Yenne freely admits, however, that the large hardcover book wasn't meant to be taken on the trail with you.

"It's pretty much just for the armchair traveler," he said. "It really won't fit in a backpack or glove box."

The lasting impression Yenne hopes to leave with readers is the same one he was left with.

"What they accomplished was remarkable," he said. "It was a military operation under military command with military discipline. And they accomplished their mission."

"They found the headwaters of the Missouri and the mouth of the Columbia ... and they lost only one man," Yenne added. "They didn't lose any of their notes; all the scientific data that was gathered was brought back. ... And, importantly, they demonstrated that America would be the dominant power in the entire continent. It was tremendous."

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Upbringing inspired Yenne to seek out adventure near, far

By JOHN SMITHERS
of the Missoulian

Bill Yenne is a perfect example of what happens when a child reads too many books and doesn't watch enough television.

He ended up with an imagination.

Born in 1949, two blocks from the south rim of the Grand Canyon, Yenne became a Montanan in 1951 when his father took a job as the National Park Service's director of backcountry trails for Glacier Park.

As a boy, he spent summers exploring Glacier's nooks and crannies with his dad and winters devouring books by the dozens.

"When you grow up in Glacier Park, your environment is extremely limited by climate," Yenne said. "Because of that, I developed lots of interests. I was a voracious reader.

"That's how I developed my interest in aviation. When I was a kid, I was just crazy about airplanes. I remember lying out on the front lawn using binoculars to watch B-52s fly over."

While Yenne's imagination was taking flight, his feet remained grounded in western Montana – for a time.

He attended the three-room, six-grade West Glacier School before moving on to Columbia Falls High School and then the University of Montana.

In 1970, Yenne married Carol Klauss, a Sentinel High School graduate.

"I'm her country boy and she's my big-city girl," Yenne said.

Distant places retained their pull on him, however, so when Yenne's course work was complete – even before school was officially out in 1971 – he hit the road to begin fulfilling his wanderlust.

"I loved growing up in Montana, but when it came

Yenne to learn?

Interested in more about Bill Yenne or his books? See more of his work at www.agsbookworks.com.

time to go, I was anxious to leave," Yenne said. "There were a lot of places I wanted to go."

Despite settling in San Francisco, Yenne hasn't stopped going.

His recent 11-state tour researching "On the Trail of Lewis and Clark: Yesterday and Today" allowed him to make it a lifetime sweep of all 50 states.

"I nailed the last two – Iowa and Nebraska – during the trip," Yenne said proudly.

Along the way, he's also toured Japan, Guam and the Philippines, as well as Europe extensively.

One of his European work/vacations resulted in a book on gargoyles – "not terribly unlike coming face to face with a mountain goat in Glacier Park," Yenne said.

Carol, with whom Yenne has two daughters, remains a constant companion for most of his trips, including the Lewis and Clark jaunt.

"I took my wife, but I have to admit she wasn't too excited about that at first," Yenne said.

"The thing I like most about what I do is that I get to pursue a lot of different interests," he added. "I've got myself into a niche where I can do a lot of different types of projects."

More projects are forthcoming, the author promises, including a book on Indian wars that he is just finishing.

"This summer has kept me pretty close to home because I had a little grandson born prematurely," Yenne said. "Everybody is doing fine now, so we'll be traveling again soon."

The world awaits.