

Lewis and Clark: Corps of Discovery **Northeast Montana Weather 200 years ago** **By Tanja Fransen, Warning Coordination Meteorologist**

Things haven't changed all that much weather wise since Lewis and Clark's Corp of Discovery traveled through northeastern Montana 199 years ago. They encountered the same unrelenting spring winds we face every day, and many times in their journal they noted that it rained, but that "it was but a mere sprinkle."

When they first headed into present day Montana, it was the 27th of April 1805. The Corp of Discovery took twice daily weather observations, including temperature, wind direction, cloud conditions, and an observation about whether the river had fallen or risen while they were at the camp site. They took the observations each morning at sunrise, and then again at 4 p.m. in the afternoon. Many of the men who kept journals also commented on the weather itself, especially if it was particularly an awful weather day.

The biggest obstacle in our region was the wind. Oftentimes they had to stop until the winds died down, or else risk the canoes being swamped by the waves that were created. (Just think about a day of strong winds on Fort Peck Lake with a 20 foot Bayliner, and you'll have the idea of what they went through).

On May 14th, the near constant winds came to a head one afternoon upstream of today's Fort Peck Dam. Interpreter Charbonneau was at the helm of a perogue (and untrained for the position) when Sergeant Ordway expounded, *"About 4 oClock the white peroque of the Captains was Sailing a long, there came a violent gust of wind from the NW which was to the contrary to the course they were sailing. It took the sail and before they had time to douse it turned the perogue down on one Side So that she filled with water, and would have turned over had it not been for the awning which prevented it. With much a diew they got the sail in and got the pirogue to shore."* With direct orders from quick thinking Peter Cruzatte, they righted the perogue. In the midst of the tipping craft was Sacagawea and her son Jean Baptiste known as "Little Pomp." She calmly leaned out and gathered instruments, books and medicine critical to the Expedition, and even more critically she saved the journals that would later become the historical pieces that allow us to know what the Corp of Discovery encountered.



The Discovery Expedition of St. Charles Reenactment Group visited the top of Tower Hill and the Milk River Overlook Site on May 8, 2005, exactly 200 years after the original Corps of Discovery named the Milk River. Photos by Mike Fransen.