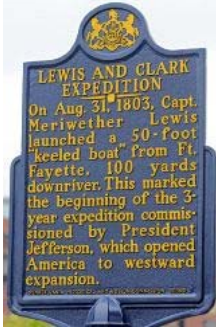


National Park Service considers recognizing Pittsburgh as Lewis and Clark launch point

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By Patricia Lowry, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



VWH Campbell Jr.

A Lewis & Clark Expedition marker was erected in 2008 near the 10th Street Bypass.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail extends west from Wood River, Ill., for more than 3,700 meandering miles to the mouth of the Columbia River at the Pacific Ocean.

Trail visitors can travel its meadows and forests on horseback, raft and canoe its rivers and hike its Bitterroot Mountains in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark as they explored the Louisiana Purchase and searched for a navigable water route to the Pacific.

Yet some people think it misses the boat -- the big one made here in 1803 for the expedition -- and other key aspects of the journey's planning and preparation.

Now, the National Park Service, which administers and promotes the trail, is studying whether it should be extended along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers to Pittsburgh and up the Monongahela to Elizabeth. It also would include additional sites and overland routes, in Pennsylvania and other states, followed by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, independently or together, prior to and after the 1804-06 expedition.

"We're trying to pin down where the historic path or paths were, and we're looking at those sites today to see if they meet the criteria for being included in a national historic trail," landscape architect and project manager Ian Shanklin said in an interview.

Over the past 15 years, before and after the Lewis and Clark bicentennial commemoration, lawmakers heard from constituents in communities east of St. Louis who felt their cities and towns should be recognized for the roles they played prior to the Corps of Discovery's launch in 1804. So in 2008, Congress ordered the Eastern Legacy Special Resource Study to look at the feasibility and suitability of extending the trail.

Heinz History Center president and CEO Andy Masich thinks it's an idea whose time has come.

"Lewis considered Pittsburgh to be the start of the expedition," Mr. Masich said. "When he writes in his journal, 'Left Pittsburgh this day at 11 o'clock,' he believes that is the start of his expedition. Most people would consider the launch point to be the start of an expedition, and that's why I think Pittsburgh is so important."

The history center, which has had a small Lewis and Clark exhibit since 2003, wants to partner with the park service in developing the trail here.

Mr. Masich said one idea is to construct a skeletal, life-size steel replica of the big boat as it would have appeared under construction along the banks of the Allegheny River. Lewis and Clark's big boat -- they called it 'the barge' -- is thought to have been built at Fort Fayette, near the site of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. Since 2008, a state historical marker on the riverbank has honored the boat's construction.

"Pittsburgh has such a big part of it and people are just now beginning to realize this is the main staging area where the military hardware was assembled," said John McNulty of Pittsburgh's West End, a member of the St. Charles, Mo., group of

re-enactors who commemorated the Corps of Discovery's trip by undertaking the same voyage 200 years later.

In the first phase of the study, conducted last fall, Mr. Shanklin held formal hearings in Paducah, Middlesboro and Louisville, Ky.; Clarksville, Ind.; Marietta, Ohio; Charlottesville, Va.; and Philadelphia. In Western Pennsylvania, he and park service landscape architect Diane Keith held a formal hearing attended by about 45 people on Dec. 6 in Elizabeth Borough, where residents believe one or more of the boats for the expedition may have been built at John Walker's boatyard. The borough continues to celebrate the connection with a small annual festival.

"When we began, we understood there was a large contingency of Lewis and Clark enthusiasts in Elizabeth," Mr. Shanklin said. A follow-up meeting could be held in Pittsburgh.

To some extent, the new sections of the trail would promote what's already happening.

"One of the consistent themes we heard at every single meeting is that most communities are already celebrating the Lewis and Clark connection in some way or another, whether it's the trail or a site or educational events or publications," Mr. Shanklin said. "Most communities are really looking for an opportunity to connect those pieces into a network so it is continuous. Those communities feel all they need is to market it as part of the historic trail to validate what already exists."

The park service also will try to determine what parts of the trail are not being interpreted.

"Where there may be missing gaps, there may be partners who could help bridge the gap with trail -- for water and land, for paddlers and walkers, [for cyclists and horseback riders]. Any number of trail types may fit within the parameters," Mr. Shanklin said.

In Pittsburgh, "That river is the best trail they've got," said Mr. Masich, who envisions interpretation through self-guided experiences with maps and iPhone or cell phone narrations, along with the history center exhibit.

Of the more than 100 sites along the existing trail, which winds through 11 states, only five sites are owned and operated by the National Park Service. As with the existing trail, new sections would be interpreted on its website, www.nps.gov/lecl, which also provides links to local sites.

Ideas floated at the meeting in Elizabeth, Mr. Shanklin said, included having boat-building demonstrations there, marking where the ferries crossed near there and establishing a National Center for the Rivers in Pittsburgh.

"Some expressed concern about the scenic quality of the trail corridor and the billboard industry's large role in the state," Mr. Shanklin said. "The scene in Pittsburgh and Elizabeth is greatly changed."

A designated trail generally should accurately follow the historic route but can deviate to avoid routing through subsequent development. Also, it must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.

Tom Jones, an event planner and producer who in 2004 started the legislative push for the trail extension to Monticello, is proposing that the Monongahela River Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation build a replica of the Walker boatyard in Elizabeth. A half mile away, he wants to build a replica of Fort Clatsop, the winter shelter that the Corps of Discovery built near the mouth of the Columbia River. Between the boatyard and the fort, a walking trail would interpret significant events and people of the expedition.

Another idea, introduced by Mr. McNulty, is establishing a Lewis and Clark Nature Preserve on the mostly vacant and rustic eastern end of Brunot's Island, to mark Lewis' first stop of the journey, a few miles after he and his crew launched on Aug. 31, 1803, from near the Point. On Brunot's Island, Lewis loaned his air gun to a civilian, who accidentally shot a woman, grazing her head.

In 2003, "We re-enacted the air gun incident on Brunot's Island," Mr. McNulty said. "We had people from all over, and we had nothing to show them [on the island]."

He envisions the nature preserve, with a small hiking trail and special habitats for wildflowers, bats, birds and bees, as publicly accessible to paddlers via a small grotto for tying up kayaks and canoes. Tourists could arrive by boat ferry. In a later phase, the nature preserve could be open to walkers and cyclists over a pedestrian bridge.

Brunot's Island, owned by Dr. Felix Brunot in 1803, is now the property of Duquesne Light and holds an electrical substation. Mr. McNulty said he hopes to build community support for the concept before approaching the utility company.

Nineteenth-century travel writer Fortescue Cuming described Brunot's estate in 1807 as a two-story cottage with large barns and other outbuildings.

"He has judiciously left the timber standing on the end of the island nearest Pittsburgh, through which, and a beautiful locust grove of about 10 acres, an avenue from his upper landing is led with taste and judgment about half a mile to his house," Cuming wrote.

Asked if federal funding would be available for trail extension projects, Mr. Shanklin said, "That's the \$20 million question. Given the fiscal climate, you can make a reasonable guess at what the funding options might be. As we go through the feasibility process that's precisely what Congress has tasked us with doing -- how much it would cost, who would pay for it and how it would be conducted. The volunteer partnership component is enormous with National Park trails."

This year, the park service will evaluate the significance, suitability and feasibility of suggested sites, routes and projects and draft preliminary management alternatives. Next year, it will analyze those alternatives and produce a draft study and environmental assessment.

As documents relating to the project are posted, people will be able to leave comments on the study's website. To access it, type "Eastern Legacy Special Resource Study" into your web browser.

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