

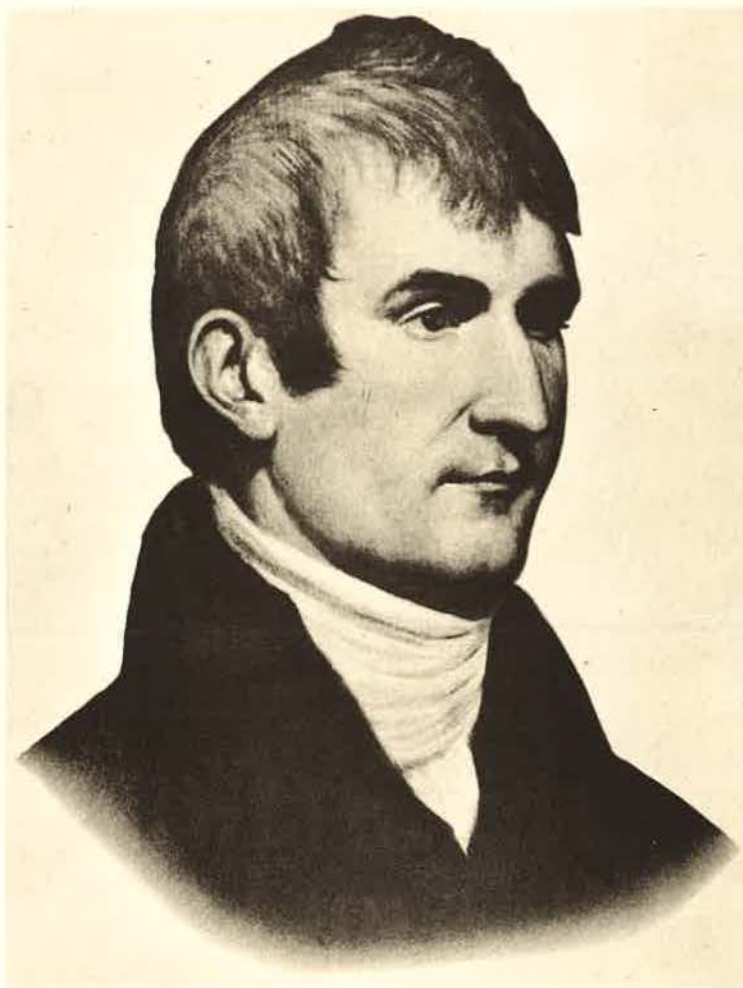
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
BLACKFEET AGENCY

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MERIWETHER LEWIS IN BLACKFEET COUNTRY

by
Helen B. West



MUSEUM OF THE PLAINS INDIAN
Browning, Montana

1964

PREFACE

Our interest in Meriwether Lewis's journey northward from the great falls of the Missouri was first aroused during a Museum historical marker program in the winter of 1962-63. While identifying and locating places of historic interest on the Blackfeet Reservation, it was felt that the expedition of 1806 should, if at all possible, be included. We already had a good idea as to the whereabouts of Camp Disappointment and the explorers' encounter with the Blackfeet. And we believed that the wealth of detail in Lewis's account as well as the absence of topographic change on the Reservation might make closer location of these points possible.

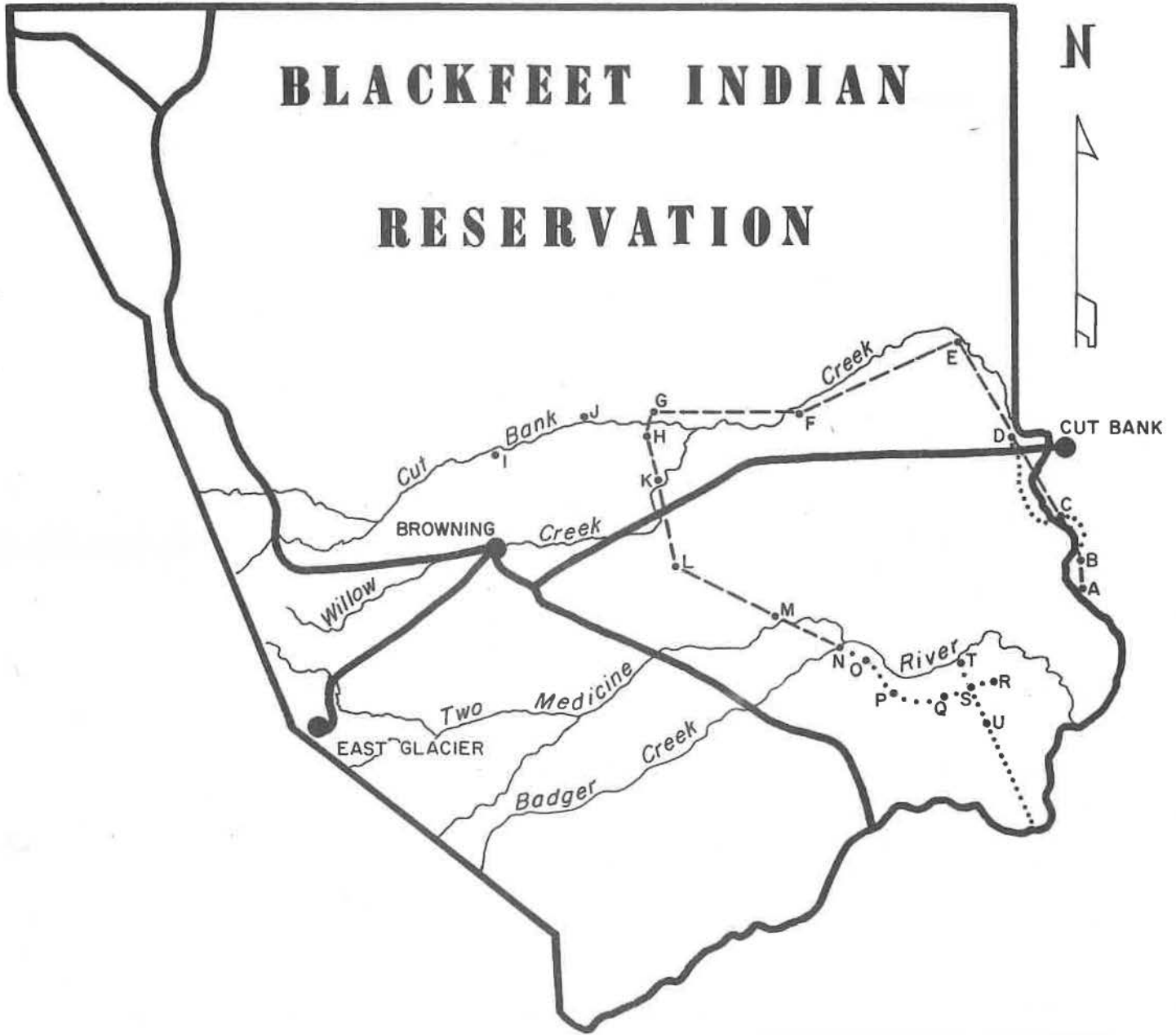
Fortunately at this time Robert H. Anderson and Ed Mathison, officials of the Boy Scouts of Cut Bank stopped by the Museum to inquire about marking a series of sites for an organized Scout tour. Since the area of their interest was not far from the Lewis-Blackfeet encounter, it was suggested that they consider pinning down this site as part of their troop project. Both men immediately became interested. Mr. Anderson, a pilot, conceived the idea of following Lewis's journey from the air, using aerial equipment and maps in checking the explorer's compass bearings and distances. Mrs. West, Archives Assistant, was asked to represent the Museum in the project because of her deep interest in and intimate knowledge of Montana history.

The endeavor proved more difficult than first expected. Many hours were spent by those concerned both in flight and in checking various documentary sources. The results are presented in the present account.

Our thanks are due the Messrs. Anderson and Mathison for their generous services in reblazing an old trail, to Mr. John C. Ewers for his interest and suggestions and finally, to Helen B. West, for putting, as our Blackfeet friends say, everything down on paper.

Museum of the Plains Indian
Browning, Montana

Claude E. Schaeffer
Director



- - - - - Lewis's compass courses
 Lewis's probable route
 A, B, C, etc., Location of sites referred to

ROUTE OF LEWIS'S TRAVELS ON WHAT IS NOW
 THE BLACKFEET RESERVATION

In July, 1806, on the Lower Two Medicine River, in the southern reaches of what is today the Blackfeet Reservation occurred perhaps the most dangerous and dramatic episode in the long and eventful trip of Lewis and Clark, from the mouth of the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean and back again. Here Meriwether Lewis, with three of his best men, on a side trip to explore the headwaters of the Marias River on the party's return from the Pacific had an encounter with eight Piegan, the southernmost tribe of the Blackfeet Confederacy, in which two Indians were killed.

One finds this incident mentioned as one of a handful of highlights of the entire expedition in even the most simplified accounts. Yet until recently¹ no one had succeeded in locating the site in the field.

We here attempt to locate this site in detail, tracing also Lewis's route through the entire area, from the forks of the Marias, up the Cut Bank River to Camp Disappointment, south to the Two Medicine and east from there to the site of the actual encounter, a sojourn of seven days for Lewis and his men in the dreaded Blackfeet country, all of the route on what is now the reservation belonging to those Indians.

This side trip exploring the headwaters of the Marias deserves such detailed treatment, since it embodied two of President Jefferson's primary reasons for the entire exploratory expedition. Foremost in Jefferson's mind was the necessity for finding a more direct and economic route to eastern markets for the rich fur trade hitherto controlled entirely by the British. He hoped some tributary of the Missouri would provide this route, thus breaking the lucrative British monopoly, with its political as well as economic overtones. Although this objective² was not publicly stated in Jefferson's letter of instruction to Lewis,² for obvious reasons of international diplomacy, it was uppermost in the mind of his emissary. Lewis, speculating on the sources of the Marias when he reached its mouth on the Missouri, writes, on June 8, 1805,³ in his daily Journal entry that he feels sure that the Marias "most probably furnishes a safe and direct communication to that productive country of valuable furs exclusively enjoyed at present by the subjects of his Britannic Majesty."

The letter of instruction referred to above was written by Jefferson on June 20th, 1803. By July 1st, on the eve of the party's departure, momentous news came to the President that materially altered the expedition's complexion. The Louisiana Purchase had been successfully negotiated. Now Lewis had another assignment. It was assumed that the northern boundary of Louisiana, which consisted of the Missouri drainage basin, was the 49th parallel. However, Jefferson believed if any portions of the Missouri drainage basin extended north of 49^o, they were part of Louisiana. Lewis shows himself well aware of this additional commission, stating in his Journal entry of July 1, 1806, as they are contemplating

dividing the party for their various missions, that he will "ascend Marias river to explore the country and ascertain whether any branch of it reaches as far north as the latitude of fifty degrees."

The results of this side trip which culminated in the episode with the Blackfeet proved even more important than its purposes. The skirmish on the Two Medicine was the party's only contact with the Blackfeet Indians, under whose shadow they had travelled for so long upon the Missouri. It represented the only hostile encounter of the entire expedition, in their three year trip from St. Louis to the Pacific and back again, in dealings with unnumbered Indian tribes, many of whom had never before seen a white man.

John C. Ewers, eminent authority on the Plains Indians, has given his appraisal of Lewis's encounter with the Blackfeet, writing that⁴ ". . . it was very significant historically for the following reasons:

1. It marked the first meeting of official representatives of the United States with members of the northwesternmost group of people residing in the recently purchased Louisiana - the Piegan Indians.
2. It marked the first armed conflict between official representatives of the United States and Plains Indians.
3. It marked the only armed conflict between members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and Indians, and probably the most serious single threat to the successful accomplishment of that great exploring expedition.
4. It marked the beginning of hostilities between members of the most powerful tribe of Indians on the Northwestern Plains and American citizens. It was the first cause of Blackfeet opposition to Americans which continued for a full quarter century (until 1831), and effectively prevented the establishment of American trade in a large segment of the northwestern portion of our country as it was constituted at that time."

This detailed study has yielded several incidental dividends.

Only by a close examination of the pages of the Journals and by a comparison of a given stretch of the journey in the field with that described by the Captains can their powers of observation be adequately appreciated. One follows their trail to the Two Medicine River and realizes that there, in this river bottom, are the rose and honeysuckle bushes Lewis describes, the three species of cottonwood, and even the yellow-bellied marmot (name of the small animal which fits Lewis's description) peering out from his sandstone cave. Too, one marvels at the powers of recall of a man, under as great a stress as it is possible to imagine, in a life-or-death struggle: Lewis must have

written his entry describing the encounter of July 27th at least twenty-four hours afterward and many miles away, yet he was still able to describe the incident with such precision that today we can step off the distances and recreate the encounter exactly as it happened.

Such a close examination also reveals two other aspects one might otherwise overlook.

The advantages of one edition of the Journals over another is not entirely clear cut. There is on the one hand, the first edition in 1814 by Biddle⁵, on the other the only edition of the complete original in 1904 by Thwaites⁶, and in between what is essentially an annotated version of the Biddle edition by Coues.⁷ The only edition possible to use for detailed study, of course, is the Thwaites, since it is the original, yet there are advantages in consulting the other two.

For instance, on July 22nd, Lewis errs in the body of his entry and in his course summary, which is added at the end of the day, by a difference of two miles (from the river crossing to Camp Disappointment,) Thwaites and Coues do not pick this up; Biddle does and presents a logical course.

Elliott Coues's editorship is impressive. With the addition of the codices-Lewis's courses and distances-in his footnotes, the information in the entries here considered is in reality the same as that in the Thwaites edition. His footnotes on the country covered indicate a commendable thoroughness and knowledge of the topography. His is the only commentary which accurately follows Lewis's route on this side trip.⁸ Although Coues was casual in his care with the original text, it occurs to one that had he not been so pressed by printers' deadlines, after his discovery of the existence of the original material, we might have had the definitive edition ten years earlier, with the additional benefit of his informative notes.

Possibly most interesting of all has been the problem of Lewis's techniques and accuracy in measuring distance.

Everyone seems in agreement that Lewis's navigational abilities leave something to be desired. John Bakeless, in assessing Lewis's capabilities, remarks that, "The idea was that, in the uncharted wilderness through which the expedition would pass, where there were practically no known points, navigation offered the easiest way of showing where the explorers had been. Mr. Jefferson, however, greatly overestimated the capacity of an infantry officer to navigate."⁹

Too much was expected of Lewis. Although he was trained in Philadelphia, then the map-making center of the country, under the leading experts of the day, Lewis was there for only ten to twelve days¹⁰ and it was a cram course at best. In addition, and more important, on several

occasions his chronometer ran down, and, in his three years absence he had no way of, in his own words, "setting her to going again," without an error in minutes which, as any navigator might realize, would throw his calculations in longitude off by many miles.

The navy may discount the navigating abilities of an infantry officer, but one cannot stand in anything but admiration of Lewis's powers to note and describe. Herman R. Friis, chief archivist, Cartographic Records Branch of the National Archives, assesses Lewis and Clark's map-making ability. He concludes that while Lewis's celestial observations, especially as to longitude, were approximations and consequently the maps dependent on them only sketches, the Journals' wealth of topographical detail was a major cartographic contribution.¹¹ ". . . a reading of the Lewis and Clark journals and an examination of their maps reveals that these men quickly learned the fundamentals of observation and description sufficiently well to give us a remarkably clear view of the geographical landscape as well as a reasonably accurate knowledge of where they were in terms of cartographic presentation."¹² Our careful examination of the country described by Lewis's entries from July 21st to 27th, 1806, bears this out.

While we may assume then that topographical detail is all we need to accurately determine Lewis's route, it has proved of interest to check the accuracy of his compass courses. Here a knowledge of contour elevations in the field is essential. With the benefit of this, it is possible to work back accurately from information in the Journals to Lewis's probable course, comparing the bearings he gives with our results.

More study is required on Lewis's techniques,¹³ but the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Lewis's course measurements were a straight line, from point to point.¹⁴
2. His mileages, in the eight measurements considered in this route from the forks of the Marias northward, ending at the forks of Two Medicine River and Badger Creek, total 55 miles, in contrast to 54 measured by map.
3. The accuracy of his compass courses is equally impressive. Of the eight bearings noted, three are exactly correct, one has a minor error of $7-1/2^{\circ}$, and the remaining four are uniformly short the approximate number of degrees of magnetic declination for this area.¹⁵ This would suggest that sometimes Lewis allowed for compass variation, and sometimes, possibly due to carelessness, did not. Allowing for this, his courses are astonishingly accurate.

One further observation resulted from this study. The two most important sites in this area, Camp Disappointment and Lewis's encounter with the Blackfeet, although of undisputed significance, have not been

located in the field before because of a combination of difficulties no one had attempted to surmount. Necessary for such location is a firsthand knowledge of the country and comparison of topographical details on the map and in the field with Lewis's compass courses and mileage. Following Lewis's route from the outset on the ground, and over the broken country which he covered would have been impossible for anyone not equipped with Lewis's technical training and keen geographical intuition.

The idea was conceived¹⁶ in the course of this study of flying Lewis's route by plane. In this way, proceeding, for instance, from a logical river crossing to a high butte described by Lewis from which he could determine his next objective, all data could be correlated (using the plane's compass, mileage from aeronautical charts, and the view below) and groundwork laid for a more specific surface approach.

One observes in this section of the Journals those literary characteristics which give an epic quality to the entire seven-volume report. Lewis had arrived on July 16, 1806, at the Great Falls of the Missouri. Time was a premium. The party was homeward bound, yet two foremost objectives of the expedition remained yet to be accomplished. Bearing in mind the importance of this exploration of the Marias's headwaters, as if this were to be his special trial, Lewis selects his three best men to accompany him: the two Fields brothers, Reuben and Joseph, active and enterprising young Kentuckians, and that standby of the entire expedition, George Drouillard (Drewyer). Drouillard, son of a French Canadian and an Indian woman, adept at sign language and an instinctive hunter, was always selected when a task required intelligence, dependability and frontier craft. It is doubly ironic that he met his death four years later on a fateful trading expedition near the Three Forks of the Missouri, at the hands of the Blackfeet. "I am too much of an Indian to be caught by Indians," he had said, when warned of the danger.¹⁷

As there are growing tensions and a sense of narrative in the body of the Journals, so we are built up toward a climax in this self-contained incident. We share the forebodings and apprehensions of the small party of four valiant men on this vast and hostile prairie.

Lewis had premonitions of disaster. He told the remaining men in the party to wait until September 1st for him at the mouth of the Marias, "at which time should he not arrive, we were to proceed on and join Capt. Clark at the mouth of the Yellowstone River and then to return home; but he informed us that should his life and health be preserved he would meet us at the mouth of the Marias river on the fifth of August."¹⁸

When the horses are temporarily missing on July 16, Lewis, thinking of Gros Ventres or Blackfeet (the two tribes seem to be interchangeable to him) is "allarmed." On July 17th, they encounter a bleeding buffalo and conclude that "the indians had been running them and were

near at hand. The Minnetares of Fort de prarie [Gros Ventres] and the blackfoot indians rove through this quarter of the country and as they are a vicious lawless and reather abandoned set of wretches I wish to avoid an interview with them if possible. I have no doubt but they would steel our horses if they have it in their power and finding us weak should they happen to be numerous will most probably attempt to rob us of our arms and baggage; at all events I am determind to take every possible precaution to avoid them if possible."

Is this a premonition or merely a judgment based on an accurate assessment of that particular tribe?

On July 18th and after, Lewis institutes a strict lookout every night, taking his turn with the men. By July 22nd, the trail gets warmer and their apprehensions mount. "game of every discription is extreemly wild which induces me to beleive that the indians are now or have been lately in this neighbourhood." The next day, Drouillard finds recently abandoned Indian camps. The weather is cold and wet, game is scarce, rations are exhausted, "rain renders our situation extreemly unpleasant." Lewis at Camp Disappointment, his farthest point north, is dispirited, unable to complete important celestial observations due to unremitting clouds, and when finally his chronometer stops, it is "as if the fates were against me." (July 25, 1806)

When finally, on July 26th, Lewis raises his glass on top of a hill on the south side of the Two Medicine River to a most unwelcome sight - eight mounted Indians - we have the climax which they had been anticipating with increasing dread for nearly three years, their confrontation with the Blackfeet.



Courtesy of Ed Mathison



Courtesy of Ed Mathison

Plate 1 (Upper) Detail of encounter campsite
(Lower) Can these be the "three solitary trees" under which party camped?



Courtesy of Ed Mathison



Plate 2 (Upper) Camp Disappointment
 (Lower) Lewis meets Piegan here

II

The following notes and comments on Lewis's route through Blackfeet Country are keyed to selected sites on the accompanying map.¹⁹

July 21, 1806

This study begins at the forks of the Marias River. (A) From A to B is six miles, on a course N 40° W, which agrees exactly, in both mileage and bearings, with Lewis's account. (The bearings of the Marias which they had been following to this point, A, is 280°, 20° more than Lewis observed.) Lewis accurately describes this stretch of the Cut Bank River as "30 yds wide confined closely between cliffs of rocks, shallow rapid and not navigable." Already he fears that its headwaters "will not be as far north as I wished and expected," a surprising conjecture, since he cannot see from here the river's bend to the West.

Lewis sets a new course here (B) of N 25° W, for seven miles. Our mileage and readings also agree here exactly with the Journals. The country is as he describes it, "hills broken, land poor," with no timber. He must deviate from his course, skirting ravines, but he crosses it again at (C), two miles from its commencement, where he fords the river to the south side, continuing on up river until dark. They still do not find any timber, so they make a fire of buffalo dung and camp in a narrow bottom under a cliff at (D). This is the logical place for the party to descend to the river to camp, since there is a natural declivity leading down to the water in the otherwise steep cliffs which confine the river here. Coues, in a footnote to the July 21st entry, places this camp about a mile further upriver, but this site fits more accurately the designated mileage and contours.

July 22

From (D) to (E) we disagree with Lewis on both mileage and compass bearings. He states this distance was 7 miles on a course of N 30° W. It is more nearly 5-1/2 miles on a course N 37-1/2° W. The course Lewis gives would have put him north of the river, where he did not go. Again he describes the topography accurately: ravines "steep and numerous. . . river closely confined between low but steep and rocky Cliffs." They travel over "a greater quantity of gravel than usual."

At (E), the river begins a "considerable bend to the wright or N.W.," as is apparent on the map. He sets a new course, S 80° W, which he pursues through the plains for 10 miles. We

agree with his compass bearings exactly but find him to be a mile long on his distance (from E to F) which on the map is 9 miles.

After leaving (E), Lewis describes the country as "more level les gravly and some bottoms to the river but not a particle of timber nor underbrush of any discription is to be seen," which accurately fits this stretch of country today.

Here (F) he changes his course once again, and from this point on, by adding 20° , the approximate magnetic declination for this area, to allow for compass variation in transposing Lewis's observations to the map, we are right on course with every reading. His course here which he gives us S 75° W (255°) is actually 275° . His mileage once again is long by 1-1/2 miles: it is 9-1/2 miles to the end of the course where they decide to camp rather than the 11 which Lewis gives.

Here (from F to G) Lewis contradicts himself. In the body of the entry, his daily mileage adds up to 29 miles; in his table of courses and distances which he summarizes at the end of the day, 28 miles. In addition, in the former, he indicates the distance from the river crossing to the bluff above Camp Disappointment (G) as 12 miles; in the latter, since he did not cross the river until one mile from the beginning of his new course, the distance is ten miles. For our purposes, however, since it was apparently an oversight on Lewis's part, and since the difference is negligible, we will use the more accurate table of distances.

As to topographical description, once again Lewis's description tallies with the country as we see it today. There is still no wood on the river where they stop to eat and graze their horses. He describes the river here, at the crossing, as making "a considerable bend to the left or South," which could refer to either the immediate part of the river or its general direction, in either of which case, the description is correct. They continue on the north side of the river through "a level and beautifull plain. The country has now become level, the river bottoms wide and the adjoining plains but little elivated above them; the banks of the river are not usually more than from 3 to four feet . . .," again this exactly describes the country here.

Lewis is now heading for high country, (G) from which, suddenly and dramatically, as a visit to the spot will confirm, he can see for the first time the point at which this most northerly tributary of the Marias enters the mountains. There is no reason for him to continue further; since this answers for him the two reasons for this exploratory trip. Although Lewis believes the Milk River may do so, it is clear that the Marias headwaters do not go beyond 50° latitude; consequently this holds no hope that the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase may be extended farther or that this river

may furnish a navigable connection with the fur-trading land of the British. For several reasons, this most northerly point reached by the expedition is truly Camp Disappointment.

Lewis here makes another of his intuitive geographical deductions: "I believe that the waters of the Suskashawan approach the borders of this river very nearly." We find the Hudson's Bay Divide - the elevation separating the waters of the Missouri from the Saskatchewan - a mere 20 miles north of this point.

He makes some other observations. He notes this range of the Rockies continues from S.E. to N.W.; that they appear to be composed of clay rather than rock (the snow cover and the subsequent rainy days in which visibility was limited may account for this misconception); and that they terminate abruptly at about 35 miles to the N.W. Chief Mountain, a prominent landmark of the Blackfeet, thrusts itself out from the main range of the Rockies at about 40 miles from this spot.

The party crosses the river and encamps on its south side at (H), which Lewis describes as "a beautiful and extensive bottom of the river about 10 miles below the foot of the rocky mountains where this river enters them." Checking the mileage once more, we find this to be slightly short. However, the exact mileage is open to debate, since at the distance of 10 miles the foothills do indeed begin. He also notes that the party encamps in "a clump of large cottonwood trees," the first they had seen since ascending this river. Although we find today that timber extends slightly below here in the river bottoms, cottonwoods of any size or age do not appear to grow east of this point.

Taking into account mileages, Lewis's topographical descriptions, and the purposes of this journey, there is no mistaking this location. Suddenly it is not necessary for them to proceed farther, and just across the river is an ideal campsite.

Thwaites, in a footnote to the July 22nd entry, marks this site by quoting Wheeler, whose location is an approximation and wide of the mark by several miles, but Coues once again locates this spot accurately (footnote, July 22nd entry.) He describes it as a little short of 113° longitude W., $48^{\circ} 40'$ N latitude, and a little west of the Ft. Macleod road. As we find it here, the old Ft. Macleod road crosses the river between Lewis's lookout bluff and the site of Camp Disappointment!

July 23

The party rests here for three days, while Lewis attempts again and again to "take the necessary observations."

I am advised²⁰ that here Lewis observed the altitude of the sun's lower limb at $56^{\circ} 8'45''$ (see appendix). From this reading, assuming the sun's declination and ignoring refraction corrections, we reach a latitude of $43^{\circ} 55.4'$. The actual latitude here is $48^{\circ} 40'$. Coues observes (in a footnote to entry on Aug. 18, 1805) that Lewis's observations for latitude are generally about one-half degree too far south. His uncorrected error here surpasses that by a good deal and would put him, roughly, in Wyoming.

As to longitude, we are worse off yet. Since his chronometer had stopped several times since leaving St. Louis, and since an error of one minute at a latitude of 45 degrees would mean an error of $7\frac{1}{2}$ astronomical miles (an error of thirty minutes at that latitude would introduce an error of 225 astronomical miles!) he may as well not have attempted an observation. Lewis was unable to complete his observations, since the clouds kept obscuring the heavenly bodies upon which he was apparently attempting to take a "time-sight" at a meridian crossing.

Other difficulties presented themselves. The men were running short of game. The inference was that the surrounding country had been recently hunted by the Indians, which added to their apprehensions. Drouillard, dispatched to hunt toward the mountains, reported "eleven leather lodges" recently abandoned, the poles only remaining. Since Drouillard was near timber country, one would assume the Indians had cut new poles and left the old. Drouillard, on this same hunting expedition had been commissioned by Lewis to go up the river to "observe its bearings and the point at which it "entered the mountains." He did this and returned to report to Lewis, who then "observed the point at which the river entered to bear S 50° W." Once again, if we add the 20° , the bearing is exact (I). Lewis also remarks on a "considerable bend to the West just above us," which the river makes, possibly noted by Drouillard on his foray. This is plainly observable (J) on aerial photographs and the topographical map approximately four miles west of camp.

July 24

Lewis is still having difficulty with his observations and the rain. To add to their troubles, the hunters return empty-handed. "The air has become extremely cold which in addition to the wind and rain renders our situation extremely unpleasant."

July 25

They have used up the last of their provisions, and Lewis directs Drouillard and Joseph Fields to go as far south as "the main branch of Marias River" in search of game. They return late

in the evening with "a fine buck on which we now fared sumptuously," and with the information that it was about ten miles to the Two Medicine, the valley there wide and well-timbered. The map measures about twelve miles due south from Camp Disappointment to a bottom of that description on the Two Medicine, where the Holy Family Mission is now situated, and which was a favorite wintering ground of the Blackfeet. Besides old winter camps, the hunters also saw several which had been more recently evacuated. " we consider ourselves extremely fortunate in not having met with these people. I determined that if tomorrow continued cloudy to set out as I now begin to be apprehensive that I shall not reach the United States within this season unless I make every exertion in my power which I shall certainly not omit when once I leave this place which I shall do with much reluctance without having obtained the necessary data to establish it's longitude as if the fates were against me my chronometer from some unknown cause stoped today, when I set her to going she went as usual."

July 26

We are now leaving Camp Disappointment with Lewis, heading south to his reunion on the Missouri with the rest of the party. It is not the intention here to recount in detail the events of this and the following day - for that one must go to the lengthy account in the original Journals attached - but rather to follow closely his route in order to locate the scene of the encounter with the Blackfeet.

Lewis sets off through the open plains in a southeasterly direction for 5 miles. (Here Lewis's distance is short. We find it to be 6-1/2 miles from H to K on the map.) At two miles from camp (K), he crosses a small creek, which is Willow Creek, the junction of which with Cut Bank River went unnoticed by Lewis on his route west on July 22nd because he was travelling on the north side of the river.

Here (L) he changes course from a general direction to S 75° E (105°). When we add again the degree of magnetic declination we once more have his true course (125°). He proceeds on this course for 7 miles, when he strikes the Two Medicine River (M). Here too his mileage is slightly short; we find a map measurement of 7-1/2 miles.

He crosses the river to its south side and proceeding on the same course, at 2 miles farther (map distance of 3 miles) meets the junction of Badger Creek (N). Lewis notes the characteristics of both streams which we may observe today: The Two Medicine River is markedly more turbid than Badger Creek.

The party crosses Badger Creek just above its junction, and, still on the south side of the river, proceeds downstream, "a little N of E" one mile (O).²¹ They stop here to dine on a deer killed by Reuben Fields and to "graze our horses," in a large and fertile bottom. Lewis describes the rose, honeysuckle and redberry bushes which are characteristic of this spot today, as well as three species of cottonwood.

After dinner, they proceed down river about three miles, "when the hills, putting in close on the S. side I determined to ascend them to the high plain." (P)

For anyone interested in making time, Lewis had no other choice. A glance at topographical map and photograph will show the country which Lewis describes: "much more broken than that above and between this and the mountains." Drouillard here leaves them, crossing to the north side, presumably to hunt.

Lewis has scarcely ascended the hills (Q) before he is greeted with "a very unpleasant sight:" an assemblage of about 30 horses and several Indians, who were "on top of an eminence" (R), presumably looking across the river at Drouillard whom they had just discovered. Lewis gives the distance of the Indians from him (from Q to R) as a mile. The butte proves, however, to be more nearly 1-3/4 miles away. It would appear that Lewis was in error on this since he needs his spyglass to pick out the Indians on the hilltop, which would scarcely have been necessary if they had been one mile distant. Also Lewis, in approaching these Indians to within one-quarter of a mile (S), while they scurried back and forth in alarm, in order to allow for so much activity would surely have used more than the time necessary to travel only 3/4 of a mile horseback. However, such an inaccuracy is trifling at a time of emergency.

Although Lewis identifies these Indians as Gros Ventres, there seems to be no question that they were a party of Piegans,²² probably returning from a horse stealing raid.²³

Lewis and the Fields brothers meet the Indians at (S) and Drouillard joins them here. "As it was growing late in the evening," Lewis proposes that the four white men and the party of eight Indians "should remove to the nearest part of the river and encamp together," the river being "at but a short distance."

We are now inundated by Lewis with such a wealth of specific topographical detail that it leaves no doubt as to the exact location of the dramatic incident to follow. The country here, as anyone in the field would readily perceive, is sharply broken, a series of "bad lands." Because of this, the canyon has been

unfarmed and largely ungrazed and must look virtually the same as it did on that summer day in 1806.

The party descends "a very steep bluff about 250 feet high to the river where there was a small bottom of nearly 1/2 mile in length and about 250 yards wide in the widest part, the river washed the bluffs both above and below us. . ." This is the only conceivable place which could fit such a description.²⁴ The descent into the canyon is precipitous but still possible to negotiate with horses. Topographical map and field examination show this bottom to be about 250 yards wide, 1/2 mile long, surrounded by bluffs almost 250 feet high, with - and this is possibly the most conclusive identification - cliffs washed by the river both above and below. In addition, as described by Lewis, we find that "the bluffs are so steep that there are but few places where they could be ascended, and are broken in several places by deep niches which extend back from the river several hundred yards, their bluffs being so steep that it is impossible to ascend them."

As an additional and scarcely believable bonus we find at (T) the probable location of the camp, three large and venerable cottonwoods. Is it possible that they are the "three solitary trees" described by Lewis under which his party and the Indians camped?

The evening was spent in talk around the campfire, with the help of Drouillard as interpreter. The Indians said a large band of which they were members was encamped on the "main branch of Maria's river" one-half day's march away near the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and that there was a white man encamped there with them. Lewis spoke of the necessity for peace with their neighbors and of a future trading post to be built at the mouth of the Marias. He "found them extremely fond of smoking and plied them with the pipe untill late at night."

July 27

It is possible to determine in this bottom the probable locations of the events, identified by roman numerals in accompanying photographs, of this day. Lewis awakes in camp (T) to see a struggle, as an Indian attempts to make off with Drouillard's gun. Meanwhile the Fields brothers have pursued another Indian who had seized both their guns: they overtake him at (I), "50 or 60 paces from the camp," where Reuben Fields killed the Indian. Drouillard and Lewis also succeed in retrieving their guns, when the Indians suddenly attempt to drive off all the horses. Drouillard and the Fields brothers pursue the main party of Indians who are attempting to drive the horses upriver (II).

Lewis runs after two Indians who are taking part of the horses "to the left of the camp . . . at the distance of three hundred paces they entered one of those steep niches in the bluff [III] with the horses before them²⁵ being nearly out of breath I could pursue no further. I called to them as I had done several times before that I would shoot them if they did not give me my horse." The Indians stop at a distance of 30 paces. Lewis shoots one through the belly, who fell to his knees and "partly raised himself up and fired at me . . . he overshot me, being bearheaded I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly."²⁶ Lewis's escape from death could hardly have been by a narrower margin.

Meanwhile, Drouillard returns to look for Lewis, having heard the gunfire, and the Fields brothers continue in pursuit of the Indians. They give this up as they see it is impossible to overtake them and return to camp, reporting that three of the Indians swam the river with some of the horses (IV) and that two more ascended the hill (V) and escaped with others. Lewis here does some discreditable arithmetic and adds up the Indians: three across the river, two up the hill, two which he had pursued, and one dead near camp. He arrives at a total of seven, wondering what had become of the eighth, who "we could not account for but suppose that he ran off early in the contest."

Fearing that additional numbers of Indians may be nearby and realizing that their lives depend on their haste, Lewis and the men burn all baggage left by the Indians, pack their horses, and leave the canyon as rapidly as possible, taking a course South of East through the plain (U) toward the Missouri where they are reunited with the rest of the party.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Helen B. West, "Cut Bank Boy Scouts Find Site of 1806 Indian Fight," Great Falls Tribune, July 14, 1963, an account of the first attempt to pinpoint the location of the Lewis-Blackfeet encounter by Museum and Boy Scout officials.
2. Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Donald Jackson, editor (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1962) pp. 61-66.
3. All Journal quotations are from the Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806. R. G. Thwaites, editor, 8 vols., New York, 1959. An excerpt consisting of the entries for the dates with which we are concerned is attached as an appendix to this study.
4. Letter to the author, October 5, 1963.
5. Meriwether Lewis, The Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1814 Edition. (New York, 1961,) hereinafter referred to as Biddle.
6. Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, hereinafter referred to as Thwaites.
7. Elliott Coues (editor), History of the Expedition Under the Command of Lewis and Clark (New York, 1893), hereinafter referred to as Coues.
8. Thwaites relies on O. D. Wheeler, The Trail of Lewis and Clark (New York, 2 vols., 1904), whose description of the Lewis route at least through this area, makes but little attempt at accuracy.
9. "Lewis and Clark's Background for Exploration", (Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences, Vol. 44, No. 11, Baltimore, 1954, pp. 334-338), p.336.
10. Jackson, op. cit. p. 40., Lewis to Jefferson, April 20, 1803.
11. "Cartographic and Geographic Activities of the Lewis and Clark Expedition" (Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences, Vol. 44, No. 11, Baltimore, 1954, pp. 338-351) pp. 350-351.
12. Ibid., p. 343
13. The general assumption, supported by C. E. Erdmann, research geologist, U.S. Geological Survey, Great Falls, (interview, Dec. 4, 1963) who has had a long-standing interest in the Journals, is that Lewis measured distance by estimate, by means of usual rate of travel per hour, preventing error accumulation by occasional verification by log line, odometer and celestial observations. Robert H. Anderson, Cut Bank, who has been closely involved with tracing this route, is convinced that Lewis used an accurate method of straight line measurement,

most probably triangulation. There is considerable support for this theory. Lewis was equipped with a complete set of map-making instruments (Jackson, Letters, pp. 69, 82, 93, 96). He realized the necessity for determining exact distances, as a check against latitude calculation, in this important side trip, (his mileages and compass courses bear this out.) Also, Lewis comments in his July 27th, 1806, entry that he "estimated" his distance at 3 P.M., after the party's hasty departure from the scene of the encounter on Two Medicine as 63 miles "compared with our former distances and courses," which he thus infers were not estimated. And in the long hours of summer daylight in this northern area, the party's usual daily mileage of 28 miles horseback would have permitted adequate time for such calculations.

14. He deviated from this in his own route of travel to allow for river crossings, ridges and deep ravines. Any other method of distance estimate in the broken country which he crossed would have been impossible. There is considerable internal evidence in the Journals for this (see entry, Sept. 19, 1805).

15. Which is on the average $19-1/2^{\circ}$. I am assured by K. L. Svendsen, Geomagnetism Division, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, that this declination has not varied by more than one-half a degree since 1806 (letter, March 12, 1964).

16. By Robert H. Anderson.

17. Gen. Thomas James, Three Years Among The Indians and Mexicans, (Lakeside Press, 1953), pp. 82-83.

18. Reported by Sgt. Gass in Wheeler, op, cit, II, pp. 295-296.

19. Because of size and bulk, it was impractical to include here more than the accompanying map, which indicates only the most general outline of the trip. However, supporting details in topographical maps of quadrangles Cut Bank, Blackfoot, Heart Butte and Lake Francis and aerial photographs, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Commodity Stabilization Service, Enlargement 3R-4T-142, and Indexes ZR-1, MS-5, MS-6, MS-7, MS-9, are on file in the Museum of the Plains Indian, Browning, showing accurately the courses and topography referred to and are available to anyone interested. Scale on the aerial photographs on file is somewhat distorted so mileages and compass courses are shown accurately only on the topographical quadrangles (Lewis's probably route being indicated by dotted lines when it diverges from his compass courses, which are the heavy straight lines). Only Lewis's probable route is shown on the photographs.

20. By my father, Russell H. Bennett, Minneapolis, who contributed the following explanation and who has had a long interest in the techniques of celestial navigation.

21. Lewis no longer gives courses and distances, so we will not concern ourselves with these, assuming that the succeeding mileages are estimates.

22. John C. Ewers, The Blackfeet: Raiders On The Northwestern Plains (Norman, 1958) p. 48; also Wheeler, op. cit. II, pp. 311-312. Wheeler assumes that the Piegan Wolf Calf, who described the fight to George Bird Grinnell was present. However this seems debatable for two reasons: Wolf Calf would have been a young boy at that time, and if there had been a boy with the eight Indians, Lewis surely would have remarked on it. Also Wolf Calf locates the incident on Birch Creek, eight miles south of the Two Medicine, an unlikely error for an Indian who had been involved in the fracas. One would suppose it more likely that he was relating a version of the fight heard from his contemporaries, since the incident was undoubtedly well known.

23. Coues (July 26 entry, footnote 4) assumes that the party has been hunting buffalo and have extra horses for this purpose. This other interpretation, however, in view of the large number of extra horses seems more logical.

24. Coues says (entry July 26th, footnote), "These topographical details fox the spot absolutely when taken in connection with the broader geographical features already given. I do not think that the actual scene of the conflict has ever before been determined." This is written from his desk in Washington, (vol. 1, p.IX) since he made no claim to having located the spot in the field. His specific understanding of the country undoubtedly derived from Army maps at his disposal (his place names would indicate this) and from his service when attached to the 1874 Boundary Survey as surgeon and naturalist (Coues, p.1109). Actually he and everyone else places the location of the encounter four miles below the mouth of Badger Creek. It was more nearly six miles, when one takes into account the additional distance from the point where the hills put in "close on the S side," (P) to the narrow bottom here described. (T)

25. It is possible to discern in this direction a slight trail toward a low point in the bluffs, kept worn over the years undoubtedly by the occasional cow or sheep straying into the canyon; one may guess that the Indians knew of this, one of the few passes, and for that reason were driving the horses in this direction.

26. The Indians themselves have only two guns in their party, which would account for their determination to seize those of Lewis and his men. The peril of the men may be assessed when one realizes that had the Indians been successful in depriving them of their guns or horses or both, the party would have been helpless on that vast expanse of prairie. Lewis realizes the danger the day before, surmising of the Indians that "from their known character I expected that we were to have some difficulty with them; that if they thought themselves sufficiently strong I was convinced they would attempt to rob us in

which case . . . I should resist to the last extremity preferring death to that of being deprived of my papers instruments and gun. . ."

Jefferson, in his letter of instruction to Lewis on June 20, 1803, (Jackson, loc. cit.) advises caution, reminding him. "In the loss of yourselves we should lose also the information you will have acquired."

APPENDIX

Excerpt from the Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
 (R. G. Thwaites, editor, Antiquarian Press, Ltd., New York, 1959.)
 Entries July 21-27, 1806.

Monday July 21st, 1806

We set out at sunrise and proceeded a short distance up the North side of the river; we found the ravines which made in on this side were so steep and numerous that we passed the river in doing which the pack horse which carried my instruments missed the ford and wet the instruments. this accident detained us about half an ho(u)r. I took the Instruments out wiped them and dryed their cases, they sustained no material injury. we continued on the S. side of the river about 3 miles when we again passed over to the N. side and took our course through the plains at some distance from the river. we saw a large herd of Elk this morning. the buffaloe still become more scarce. at 2 P.M. we struck a northern branch of Maria's river about 30 yds. wide at the distance of about 8 miles from it's entrance. this stream is closely confined between clifts of freestone rocks the bottom narrow below us and above us the rocks confine it on each side; some little timber below but not any above; the water of this stream is nearly clear. from the appearance of this rock and the apparent hight of the bed of the streem I am induced to beleive that there are falls in these rivers somewhere about their junction. being convinced that this stream came from the mountains I determined to pursue it as it will lead me to the most no(r)thern point to which the waters of Maria's river extend which I now fear will not be as far north as I wished and expected. after dinner we set out up the North branch keeping on it's S. side; we pursued it untill dark and not finding any timber halted and made a fire of the dung of the buffaloe. we lay on the south side in a narrow bottom under a Clift. our provision is nearly out, we wounded a buffaloe this evening but could not get him.

Courses and distances July 21st 1806

- S. 80 degrees W. 15 M^S with the river upward. it forks at the extremity of this course and the main or Sguthern branch bears S. 75 W. about 30 m^S. to the mountains
- N. 40 degrees W. 6 M. up the North branch. 30 yd. wide confined closely between clifts of rocks, shallow rapid and not navigable
- N. 25 degrees W. 7 M. still with the N. fork upwards. we struck the river at 2 miles from the commencement of this course, passed it and continued on it's South side. hills broken, land poor.

Miles

Tuesday, July 22nd 1806

We set out very early this morning as usual and proceeded up the river. for the first seven miles of our travel this morning the country was broken the land poor and intermixed with a greater quantity of gravel than usual; the ravines were steep and numerous and our horses feet have become extremely soar in traveling over the gravel we therefore traveled but slow. we met with a doe Elk which we wounded but did not get her. the river is confined closely between cliffs of perpendicular rocks in most parts. after the distance of seven miles the country became more level less gravelly and some bottoms to the river but not a particle of timber nor underbrush of any description is to be seen. we continued up the river on it's south side for 17 miles when we halted to graize our horses and eat; there being no wood we were compelled to make our fire with the buffaloe dung which I found answered the purpose very well. we cooked and eat all the meat we had except a small piece of buffaloe meat which was a little tainted. after dinner we passed the river and took our course through a level and beautiful plain on the N. side. the country has now become level, the river bottoms wide and the adjoining plains but little elevated above them; the banks of the river are not usually more than from 3 to four feet yet it dose not appear ever to overflow them. we found no timber untill we had traveled 12 miles further when we arrived at a clump of large cottonwood trees in a beautiful and extensive bottom of the river about 10 miles below the foot of the rocky Mountains where this river enters them; as I could see from hence very distinctly where the river entered the mountains and the bearing of this point being S of West I thought it unnecessary to proceed further and therefore encamped resolving to rest ourselves and horses a couple of days at this place and take the necessary observations. this plain on which we are is very high; the rocky mountains to the S. W. of us appear but low from their base up yet are partially covered with snow nearly to their bases. there is no timber on those mountains within our view, they are very irregular and broken in their form and seem to be composed principally of clay with but little rock or stone. the river appears to possess at least double the volume of water which it had where we first arrived on it below; this no doubt proceeds from the evaporation caused by the sun and air and the absorbing of the earth in it's passage through these open plains. The course of the mountains still continues from S. E. to N. W. the front range appears to terminate abruptly about 35 m^S. to the N. W. of us. I believe that the waters of the Suskashawan approach the borders of this river very nearly. I now have lost all hope of the waters of this river ever extending to N. Latitude 50 degrees though I still hope and think it more than probable that both white earth river and milk river extend as far north as latd. 50 degrees. we have seen but few buffaloe today no deer and very few Antelopes; game of every description is extremely wild which induces me to believe that the indians are now, or have been lately in this neighbourhood. we wounded a buffaloe this evening but our horses were so much fatigued that we were unable to pursue it with success.

Courses and distances July 22nd 1806

N. 30 degrees W. 7 M^S. with the course of the river upwards. river closely confined between low but steep and rocky Cliffs. water transparent.

S. 80 degrees W. 10 m^S through the plains, the river making a considerable bend to the right or N. W.
 S. 75 degrees W. 11 m^S. through the plains on the N. side of the river which here made a considerable bend to the left or South. we passed the river to it's N. side at one mile from the commencement of this course and again recrossed it at the extremity of the course and encamped on it's S. Side

M^S 28

Wednesday July 23rd, 1806

I dispatched Drewyer and Joseph fields this morning to hunt. I directed Drewyer who went up the river to observe it's bearings and the point at which it entered the mountains, this he did and on his return I observed the point at which the river entered to bear S. 50 degrees W. distant about ten miles the river making a considerable bend to the West just above us. both these hunters returned unsuccessful and reported that there was no game nor the appearance of any in this quarter. we now rendered the grease from our tainted meat and made some mush of cows with a part of it, reserving as much meal of cows and grease as would afford us one more meal tomorrow. Drewyer informed us that there was an indian camp of eleven leather lodges which appeared to have been abandoned about 10 days, the poles only of the lodges remained. we are confident that these are the Minnetares of fort de prairie and suspect that they are probably at this time somewhere on the main branch of Maria's river on the borders of the buffaloe, under this impression I shall not strike that river on my return untill about the mouth of the North branch. near this place I observe a number of the whistleing squirrel of the speceis common to the plains and country watered by the Columbia river, this is the first instance in which I have found this squirrel in the plains of the Missouri. the Cottonwood of this place is also of the speceis common to the Columbia. we have a delightfull pasture for our horses where we are.

Observed Meridian atld. of 0's L. L. with } 62 degrees.00' "
 Octant by the back observation--
 Latitude deduced from this observation--(blank space in MS.)

Observed Equal Altitudes of the sun with Sexta(n)t.
 h m s
 A. M. 7.40.57 P.M. 4.32.40 } Altd. of 0
 ".42.30 " .33.13 } 56 degrees.8'.45"
 ".43. 5 " .34.43 }

The clouds obscured the moon and put an end to further observation.

the rock which makes its appearance on this part of the river is of a white colour fine grit and makes excellent whetstones; it lies in horizontal stratas and makes its appearance in the bluffs of the river near their base. we indeavoured to take some fish but took only

one small trout. Mosquitoes uncommonly large and rather troublesome.

Thursday July 24th, 1806

At 8 A.M. the sun made its appearance for a few minutes and I took its altitude but it shortly after clouded up again and continued to rain the ballance of the day I was therefore unable to complete the observations I wished to take at this place. I determined to remain another day in the hope of its being fair. we have still a little bread of cows remaining of which we made a kettle of mush which together with a few pigeons that we were fortunate enough to kill served us with food for this day. I sent the hunters out but they shortly returned without having killed anything and declared that it was useless to hunt within 6 or 8 miles of this place that there was no appearance of game within that distance. the air has become extremely cold which in addition to the wind and rain renders our situation extremely unpleasant. several wolves visited our camp today, I fired on and wounded one of them very badly. the small species of wolf barks like a dog, they frequently salute us with this note as we pass through the plains.

Friday July 25th, 1806

The weather still continues cold cloudy and rainy, the wind also has blown all day with more than usual violence from the N. W. this morning we eat the last of our birds and cows, I therefore directed Drewyer and J. Fields to take a couple of the horses and proceed to the S. E. as far as the main branch of Maria's river which I expected was at no great distance and endeavour to kill some meat; they set out immediately and I remained in camp with R. Fields to avail myself of every opportunity to make my observations should any offer, but it continued to rain and I did not see the sun through the whole course of the day R. Fields and myself killed nine pigeons which lit in the trees near our camp on these we dined. late in the evening Drewyer and J. Fields returned the former had killed a fine buck on which we now fared sumptuously. they informed me that it was about 10 miles to the main branch of Maria's River, that the valley formed by the river in that quarter was wide extensive and level with a considerable quantity of timber; here they found some wintering camps of the natives and a great number of others of a more recent date or that had from appearance been evacuated about 6 weeks; we consider ourselves extremely fortunate in not having met with these people. I determined that if tomorrow continued cloudy to set out as I now begin to be apprehensive that I shall not reach the United States within this season unless I make every exertion in my power which I shall certainly not omit when once I leave this place which I shall do with much reluctance without having obtained the necessary data to establish its longitude as if the fates were against me my chronometer from some unknown cause stopped today, when I set her to going she went as usual.

Saturday July 26th, 1806

The mor(n)ing was cloudy and continued to rain as usual, tho' the cloud seemed somewhat thinner I therefore postponed setting out until 9 A.M. in the hope that it would clear off but finding the contrary result I had the horses caught and we set out bidding a lasting adieu to this place which I now call camp disappointment. I took my rout through the open plains S. E. 5 ms. passing a small creek at 2 ms. from the mountains when I changed my direction to S. 75 E. for 7 ms. further and struck a principal branch of Maria's river 65 yds. wide, not very deep, I passed this stream to it's south side and continued down it 2 Ms. on the last mentioned course when another branch of nearly the same dignity formed a junction with it, coming from the S. W. this last is shallow and rapid; has the appearance of overflowing it's banks frequently and discharging vast torrents of water at certain seasons of the year. the beds of both these streams are pebbly particularly the S. branch. the water of the N. branch is very turbid while that of the S. branch is nearly clear notwithstanding the late rains. I passed the S. branch just above it's junction and continued down the river which runs a little to the N. of E. 1 Ms. and halted to dine and graze our horses. here I found some indian lodges which appeared to have been inhabited last winter in a large and fertile bottom well stocked with cottonwood timber. the rose honeysuckle and redberry bushes constitute the undergrowth there being but little willow in this quarter both these rivers above their junction appeared to be well stocked with timber or comparatively so with other parts of this country. here it is that we find the three species of cottenwood which I have remarked in my voyage assembled together; that species common to the Columbia I have never before seen on the waters of the Missouri, also the narrow and broad leafed species. during our stay at this place R. Fields killed a buck a part of the flesh of which we took with us. we saw a few Antelopes some wolves and 2 of the smallest species of fox of the redish brown colour with the extremity of the tail black. it is about the size of the common domestic cat and burrows in the plains. after dinner I continued my rout down the river to the North of Ea(s)t about 3 Ms. when the hills putting in close on the S. side I determined to ascend them to the high plain which I did accordingly, keeping the Fields with me; Drewyer passed the river and kept down the valley of the river. I had intended to descend this river with it's course to it's junction with the fork which I had ascended and from thence have taken across the country obliquely to rose river and descend that stream to it's confluence with Maria's river. the country through which this portion of Maria's river passes to the fork which I ascended appears much more broken than that above and between this and the mountains. I had scarcely ascended the hills before I discovered to my left at the distance of a mile an assemblage of about 30 horses, I halted and used my spy glass by the help of which I discovered several indians on the top of an eminence just above them who appeared to be looking down towards the river I presumed at Drewyer. about half the horses were saddled. this was a very unpleasant sight, however I resolved to make the best of our situation and to approach them in a friendly manner. I directed J. Fields to display the flag which I had brought for that purpose and advanced slowly toward them, about this time they discovered us and appeared to run about in a very confused manner as if much alarmed, their attention had been previously

so fixed on Drewyer that they did not discover us until we had began to advance upon them, some of them descended the hill on which they were and drove their horses within shot of it's summit and again returned to the height as if to wate our arrival or to defend themselves. I calculated on their number being nearly or quite equal to that of their horses, that our running would invite pursuit as it would convince them that we were their enemies and our horses were so indifereent that we could not hope to make our escape by flight; added to this Drewyer was seperated from us and I feared that his not being apprized of the indians in the event of our attempting to escape he would most probably fall a sacrifice. under these considerations I still advanced towards them; when we had arrived within a quarter of a mile of them, one of them mounted his horse and rode full speed towards us, which when I discovered I halted and alighted from my horse; he came within a hundred paces halted looked at us and turned his horse about and returned as briskly to his party as he had advanced; while he halted near us I held out my hand and beckoned to him to approach but he paid no attention to my overtures. on his return to his party they all descended the hill and mounted their horses and advanced towards us leaving their horses behind them, we also advanced to meet them. I counted eight of them but still supposed that there were others concealed as there were several other horses saddled. I told the two men with me that I apprehended that these were the Minnetares of Fort de Prarie and from their known character I expected that we were to have some difficulty with them; that if they thought themselves sufficiently strong I was convinced they would attempt to rob us in which case be their numbers what they would I should resist to the last extremity preferring death to that of being deprived of my papers instruments and gun and desired that they would form the same resolution and be allert and on their guard. when we arrived within a hundred yards of each other the indians except one halted I directed the two men with me to do the same and advanced singly to meet the indian with whom I shook hands and passed on to those in his rear, as he did also the two men in my rear; we now all assembled and alighted from our horses; the Indians soon asked to smoke with us, but I told them that the man whom they had seen pass down the river had my pipe and we could not smoke until he joined us. I requested as they had seen which way he went that they would one of them go with one of my men in surch of him, this they readily concented to and a young man set out with R. Fields in surch of Drewyer. I now asked them by sighns if they were the Minnetares of the North which they answered in the affermative; I asked if there was any cheif among them and they pointed out 3 I did not believe them however I thought it best to please them and gave to one a medal to a second a flag and to the third a handkerchief, with which they appeared well satisfied. they appeared much agitated with our first interview from which they had scarcely yet recovered, in fact I beleive they were more allarmed at this accedental interview than we were. from no more of them appearing I now concluded they were only eight in number and became much better satisfied with our situation as I was convinced that we could mannage that number should they attempt any hostile measures. as it was growing late in the evening I proposed that we should remove to the nearest part of the river and encamp together, I told them that I was glad to see them and had a great deal to say to them. we mounted our horses and rode towards the river which was at but a short distance, on

our way we were joined by Drewyer Fields and the indian. we decended a very steep bluff about 250 feet high to the river where there was a small bottom of nearly 1/2 mile in length and about 250 yards wide in the widest part, the river washed the bluffs both above and below us and through it's course in this part is very deep; the bluffs are so steep that there are but few places where they could be ascended, and are broken in several places by deep niches which extend back from the river several hundred yards, their bluffs being so steep that it is impossible to ascend them; in this bottom there stand t(h)ree solitary trees near one of them the indians formed a large simicircular camp of dressed buffaloe skins and invited us to partake of their shelter which Drewyer and myself accepted and the Fieldses lay near the fire in front of the she(l)ter. with the assistance of Drewyer I had much conversation with these people in the course of the evening. I learned from them that they were a part of a large band which lay encamped at present near the foot of the rocky mountains on the main branch of Maria's river one 1/2 days march from our present encampment; that there was a whiteman with their band; that there was another large band of their nation hunting buffaloe near the broken mountains and were on there way to the mouth of Maria's river where they would probably be in the course of a few days. they also informed us that from hence to the establishment where they trade on the Suskasawan river is only 6 days easy march or such as they usually travel with their women and childred(n) which may be estimated at about 150 ms. that from these traders they obtain arm(s) amunition sperituuous liquor blankets &c. in exchange for wolves and some beaver skins. I told these people that I had come a great way from the East up the large river which runs towards the rising sun, that I had been to the great waters where the sun sets and had seen a great many nations all of whom I had invited to come and trade with me on the rivers on this side of the mountains, that I had found most of them at war with their neighbours and had succeeded in restoring peace among them, that I was now on my way home and had left my party at the falls of the missouri with orders to decend that river to the entrance of Maria's river and there wait my arrival and that I had come in surch of them in order to prevail on them to be at peace with their neighbours particularly those on the West side of the mountains and to engage them to come and trade with me when the establishment is made at the entrance of this river to all which they readily gave their assent and declared it to be their wish to be at peace with the Tushepahs whom they said had killed a number of their relations lately and pointed to several of those present who had cut their hair as an evidence of the truth of what they had asserted. I found them extreemly fond of smoking and plyed them with the pipe untill late at night. I told them that if they intended to do as I wished them they would send some of their young men to their band with an invitation to their chiefs and warriors to bring the whiteman with them and come down and council with me at the entrance of Maria's river and that the ballance of them would accompany me to that place, where I was anxious now to meet my men as I had been absent from them some time and knew that they would be uneasy untill they saw me. that if they would go with me I would give them 10 horses and some tobacco. to this proposition they made no reply, I took the first watch tonight and set up untill half after eleven; the indians by this time were all asleep, I roused up R. Fields and laid down myself; I directed Fields to watch the movements of the indians and

if any of them left the camp to awake us all as I apprehended they would attempt to steal our horses. this being done I fell into a profound sleep and did not wake until the noise of the men and indians awoke me a little after light in the morning.

July 27th, 1806 Sunday

This morning at daylight the indians got up and crowded around the fire, J. Fields who was on post had carelessly laid his gun down behind him near where his brother was sleeping, one of the indians the fellow to whom I had given the medal last evening slipped behind him and took his gun and that of his brother unperceived by him, at the same instant two others advanced and seized the guns of Drewyer and myself, J. Fields seeing this turned about to look for his gun and saw the fellow just running off with her and his brother's he called to his brother who instantly jumped up and pursued the indian with him whom they overtook at the distance of 50 or 60 paces from the camp seized their guns and rested them from him and R. Fields as he seized his gun stabbed the indian to the heart with his knife the fellow ran about 15 steps and fell dead; of this I did not know until afterwards, having recovered their guns they ran back instantly to the camp; Drewyer who was awake saw the indian take hold of his gun and instantly jumped up and seized her and rested her from him but the indian still retained his pouch, his jumping up and crying damn you let go my gun awakened me I jumped up and asked what was the matter which I quickly learned when I saw Drewyer in a scuffle with the indian for his gun. I reached to seize my gun but found her gone, I then drew a pistol from my holster and turning myself about saw the indian making off with my gun I ran at him with my pistol and bid him lay down my gun which he was in the act of doing when the Fieldses returned and drew up their guns to shoot him which I forbid as he did not appear to be about to make any resistance or commit any offensive act, he dropped the gun and walked slowly off, I picked her up instantly, Drewyer having about this time recovered his gun and pouch asked me if he might not kill the fellow which I also forbid as the indian did not appear to wish to kill us, as soon as they found us all in possession of our arms they ran and endeavored to drive off all the horses I now hollowed to the men and told them to fire on them if they attempted to drive off our horses, they accordingly pursued the main party who were driving the horses up the river and I pursued the man who had taken my gun who with another was driving off a part of the horses which were to the left of the camp. I pursued them so closely that they could not take twelve of their own horses but continued to drive one of mine with some others; at the distance of three hundred paces they entered one of those steep niches in the bluff with the horses before them being nearly out of breath I could pursue no further, I called to them as I had done several times before that I would shoot them if they did not give me my horse and raised my gun, one of them jumped behind a rock and spoke to the other who turned around and stopped at the distance of 30 steps from me and I shot him through the belly, he fell to his knees and on his right elbow from which position he partly raised himself up and fired at me, and turning himself about crawled in behind a rock which was a few feet from him. he overshot me, being bear-headed I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly. not having my

shotpouch I could not reload my peice and as there were two of them behind good shelters from me I did not think it prudent to rush on them with my pistol which had I discharged I had not the means of reloading untill I reached camp; I therefore returned leasurely towards camp, on my way I met with Drewyer who having heard the report of the guns had returned in surch of me and left the Fieldes to pursue the indians, I desired him to haisten to the camp with me and assist in catching as many of the indian horses as were necessary and to call to the Fieldes if he could make them hear to come back that we still had a sufficient number of horses, this he did but they were too far to hear him. we reached the camp and began to catch the horses and saddle them and put on the packs. the reason I had not my pouch with me was that I had not time to return about 50 yards to camp after geting my gun before I was obliged to pursue the indians or suffer them to collect and drive off all the horses. we had caught and saddled the horses and began to arrange the packs when the Fieldses returned with four of our horses; we left one of our horses and took four of the best of those of the indians; while the men were preparing the horses I put four sheilds and two bows and quivers of arrows which had been left on the fire, with sundry other articles; they left all their baggage at our mercy. they had but 2 guns and one of them they left the others were armed with bows and arrows and eyedaggs. the gun we took with us. I also retook the flagg but left the medal about the neck of the dead man that they might be informed who we were. we took some of their buffaloe meat and set out ascending the bluffs by the same rout we had decended last evening leaving the ballance of nine of their horses which we did not want. the Fieldses told me that three of the indians whom they pursued swam the river one of them on my horse. and that two others ascended the hill and escaped from them with a part of their horses, two I had pursued into the nitch one lay dead near the camp and the eighth we could not account for but suppose that he ran off early in the contest. having ascended the hill we took our course through a beautifull level plain a little to the S. of East. my design was to hasten to the entrance of Maria's river as quick as possible in the hope of meeting with the canoes and party at that place having no doubt but that they (the Indians) would pursue us with a large party and as there was a band near the broken mountains or probably between them and the mouth of that river we might expect them to receive intelligence from us and arrive at that place nearly as soon as we could, no time was therefore to be lost and we pushed our horses as hard as they would bear. at 8 miles we passed a large branch 40 yds. wide which I called battle river. at 3 P. M. we arrived at rose river about 5 miles above where we had passed it as we went out, having traveled by my estimate compared with our former distances and cou(r)ses about 63 ms. here we halted an hour and a half took some refreshment and suffered our horses to graize; the day proved warm but the late rains had supplied the little reservors in the plains with water and had put them in fine order for traveling, our whole rout so far was as level as a bowling green with but little stone and few prickly pears. after dinner we pursued the bottoms of rose river but finding (it) inconvenient to pass the river so often we again ascended the hills on the S. W. side and took the open plains; by dark we had traveled about 17 miles further, we now halted to rest ourselves and horses about 2 hours, we killed a buffaloe cow and took a small quantity of the meat. after refreshing ourselves we again set out by moonlight and traveled

leisurely, heavy thunderclouds lowered arround us on every quarter but that from which the moon gave us light. we continued to pass immense herds of buffaloe all night as we had done in the latter part of the day. we traveled untill 2 Ock in the morning having come by my estimate after dark about 20 ms. we now turned out our horses and laid ourselves down to rest in the plain very much fatieged as may be readily conceived. my indian horse carried me very well in short much better than my own would have done and leaves me with but little reason to complain of the robbery.