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Review of *In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark: Early Commemorations and the Origins of the National Historic Trail* by Wallace G. Lewis

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This informative and thought-provoking work analyzes the early commemorations of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the origins of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Neither a guidebook nor an administrative or institutional history of the agencies or organizations involved, this work is concerned with the interpretation and historical meanings of the expedition within the national ethos and how these have changed over time.

Wallace Lewis identifies the factors that contributed to the reinterpretation, resurgence of popu-
larity, and amplification of the importance of the expedition. These included the erection of monuments and statues, the publication of various editions of the expedition journals, painstaking efforts to locate the historical route by historians, promoters, and trail buffs, reconstruction of Forts Mandan and Clatsop, and, most important, automobile access that enabled people to follow the trail. Lewis’s central thesis asserts that modern-day travelers tracing the trail in their vehicles assume the explorers’ role and participate in the trail’s historic replication. The construction of highway routes in the first half of the twentieth century provided access to the expedition’s historical sites and played a critical role in the development and establishment of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in 1978.

The 1904 Centennial, too, sparked a number of publications, monuments, and reenactments that culminated in the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair and the 1905 Portland Exposition. Fifty years later, during the 1955 Sesquicentennial, communities along the trail recognized the promotional opportunities they might gain by commercializing the route during an era when auto tourism was in its heyday. To offer visitors something to see beyond western vistas, promoters erected monuments, held reenactments, sponsored pageants, and increased the public’s awareness of, and interest in, the Lewis and Clark Trail, hoping tourists would visit their town, spend some money, learn a little history, and travel on. Thousands of car explorers reconnected with the past and personally interacted with history through following in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, reading the plaques and journals, gazing at the monuments and scenery, attending the pageants and reenactments, and supporting measures to locate and mark the trail. Auto tourists believed the most inspiring and appropriate way to commemorate Lewis and Clark was “to follow in their footsteps, to personally trace as much of the route as possible while relating journal entries to segments of the countryside.” The end result was a complex local, regional, and national political journey to establish the national trail, which the National Lewis and Clark Trail Commission found to be a challenge. How could they interpret a historic route that was, in effect, “a linearly extended historical site that now existed primarily in the imagination.”

Like Lewis and Clark, they proceeded on, and on 10 November 1978 the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail was established.

The author might have expanded his analysis of the nineteenth-century meanings of the expedition even more to juxtapose them against his excellent examination of the years between 1904 and 1978. Moreover, additional materials from the archives of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation as well as federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service would have made the book even better, particularly regarding the creation of the national trail and the formation of local and national Lewis and Clark organizations. More information about how the trail affected the bicentennial commemoration also would have been welcomed. That said, this is a valuable contribution explaining how history, geography, popular culture, and memory intersect along the Lewis and Clark Trail and offering a window into how Americans imagine, recreate, reshape, and remember their distant past.