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Lewis*

**US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
and the
LEWIS AND CLARK
BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION**



William Clark

“FIRST COUNCIL”
Nebraska Signature Event
July 31-August 3, 2004
After Action Report

Background: In 2000, the National Council for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial decided to highlight some of the more nationally significant festivals and events and call them “Signature Events”. These events were to be those of nationwide historical significance, have the potential of high visitation, and be multicultural in nature. The “First Council” was designated as the seventh of these Signature Events. The weather for the event of July 31 through August 3, 2004 was hot and humid with temps in the mid-to-upper 90’s and a heat index on some days up to 115 degrees.

The actual event itself was spread over 6 sites – a pre-event Visitor Center opening in Nebraska City, the main event site on the old river terrace below Fort Atkinson, Fort Atkinson itself, Boyer Chute, Fort Calhoun, and Blair. The Corps was involved at the main event site on the river terrace, Fort Calhoun, and Blair.

In addition to Ken Wilk and myself, Corps personnel that worked in one or more of the venues at this Signature Event included: Tim Bischoff (MVS); Ed Shirley (SWF); Dave Quebedeaux (SAS); Gene Herrmann and Larry Spisak (both LRP); Jon Carlson and Michael Haas (NWP); Rick Magee (NAE); Allen Gwinn (NAB); Jan Burton and Bunnie Watkins (NWK); Carrie Richardson (SPK); Julie Price and Wayne Freed (NWO); Ruth Ann Millsaps (SWG); and Michael Smith (SAM).

Pre-event planning: Jean Nauss (NWD) was an associate member of the Nebraska L&C Commission. By attending the meetings, the Corps was able to assist in the planning of the event and head off any problems before they arose. Drawing on the experiences of past Signature Events, what worked and what didn’t, the Corps was able to provide insight into crowds to be expected and the flow of the event itself. The Corps also designed the layout of the parking area. Corps representatives from NWO Engineering Division did the surveying of the large field to be used as the parking lot and set flags for the 6,000 parking spaces.

Early on, the event organizers planned for 7,000-12,000 people attending the 4-day event. After hearing of the visitation to other Signature Events, they upped their visitation estimates to 10,000 per day. The final visitation count (based strictly on cars in the parking areas) was over 65,000 for the 4 days!

Action: The Corps was involved in the pre-event planning and 6 separate venues during this commemorative event: the Interpretive Center opening in Nebraska City; COE Exhibit; Federal speakers; reenactments camp; Corps of Discovery 2; the Tent of Many Voices; the rededication of a DAR monument in Fort Calhoun; a ceremony at the Sergeant Floyd Monument in Sioux City; and a very special memorial ceremony at the Sergeant Floyd Monument.

Interpretive Center Opening: In a pre-event kick-off activity held Friday July 30, 2004, several members of the team went to the dedication of the new Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Nebraska City, NE. Local dignitaries, the media, center coordinators, Lewis and Clark historians, and the public attended the Visitor Center opening. Participating were Jean Nauss (NWD), Larry Spisak (LRP), Tim Bischoff (MVS), and Rick Magee (NAE). While Mrs. Nauss staffed a display of COE L&C brochures and the Discovery Box, Mr. Magee, Mr. Spisak, and Mr. Bischoff were dressed in their period expedition attire roaming through the crowd and engaging people in discussions of the expedition. Approximately 500 people attended the event.

COE Exhibit: The Corps was part of a contingent of Federal, state, and local agencies sponsoring an exhibit. The exhibits were set up in an “air conditioned” tent. Although the temperature in the tent was not 75 degrees, it was considerably cooler than outside and huge blowers kept air moving around. The Corps exhibit had five parts – (1) one backdrop of the historic aspect of Lewis and Clark and one backdrop of the modern army connection; (2) a display of the Discovery Box; (3) prints of the Michael Haynes painting commissioned by the Corps; (4) a “trading center” and (5) an information table that contained a variety of COE brochures. The exhibit area was crowded with people even before the event was scheduled to start and continued that way all day until the event closed for the night. In all, there were 72,000 interpretive contacts made at the exhibit booth.

The weather made things very difficult for everyone. Because the exhibit tent was “air conditioned”, there were huge crowds in the tent constantly. This made for extremely crowded work conditions for those rangers working the exhibit.

Federal Tent Speakers: During the Signature Event, a portion of the exhibit tent was set aside for a variety of Federal, State and local speakers. Originally, the speaker area was to be separated from the exhibits by a partition. However, because of the size of the tent, the partition was not going to work. As a result, the noise from the exhibit area was very distracting to the speakers. However, the Corps had several representatives that participated in this venue. Speakers included Jan Burton, NWK (The Story of York); Rick Magee, NAE (Recruiting for the Expedition); Jean Nauss, NWD (Hardships of the Expedition); and Dave Quebedeaux, SAS (Diplomacy of the Expedition). These presentations resulted in 485 interpretive contacts.

Corps Encampment: Members of the Corps’ Captain Lewis’ Company as well as members of the Frontier Army Living History Association provided costumed interpretation (1803 Army) at the event site. Participating in this endeavor were Ed Shirley, (SWF); Larry Spisak, and Gene Herrmann (both LRP); Jon Carlson (NWP); Tim

Bischoff (MVS); Dave Quebedeaux (SAS); Rick Magee (NAE); and Ken Wilk (NWK). Also participating was Steve Wilson (Frontier Army Living History Association). During the 4-day event, roughly 41,990 interpretive contacts were made.

Here again, the heat and humidity really took its toll. Although water was plentiful, many times the men complained of headaches, nausea, and overall fatigue. The reenactors tried to take time to come into the exhibit tent to cool off. However, with wool uniforms and high heat, it was not enough. Monday, Aug 2, was the hottest day of the event with a heat index of 115 degrees. Because most of the men were beginning to suffer the effects of the heat, the camp was dismantled early (with the encouragement of the event organizers) and the men were allowed to go back to the hotel and cool off.

Corps of Discovery II – 200 Years to the Future (Corps 2) – The Corps 2 exhibit itself consists of approximately 32 panels with an associated audiotape headset or hardcopy text that discuss Jefferson's vision; Lewis, Clark, and the members of the expedition; with the remainder depicting the natural resources and the Native American influences on the expedition. In addition, Raystown Lake Project (NAB) constructed and donated a ½-size land-based replica of a keelboat. Visitors were encouraged to come into the keelboat for interpretive programs about the expedition. During the Signature Event, rather than being located at the Signature Event site, NPS opted to have the Corps 2 at Dana College in Blair, roughly 12 miles away. As a result, visitation to this venue was no where near the visitation to the event site. In spite of this, COE park rangers assisted for 2 days to provide interpretive talks and information to dignitaries and members of the public visiting the keelboat exhibit. Roughly 1018 interpretive contacts were made at the keelboat replica.

Tent Of Many Voices – This is a venue associated with Corps 2 (same portable generator provides electricity for heat and lighting for both) but separate from it. TOMV has a small stage for presentations and seating capacity of 150. Dave Quebedeaux (SAS) was the only Corps representative asked to speak at TOMV during this Signature Event. His presentation was about the Diplomacy of the Expedition. He had 45 interpretive contacts.

DAR Monument Rededication Ceremony - Captain Lewis' Company provided five members for presentation of the colors at the Daughters of the American Revolution ceremony. The DAR rededicated a monument in the town of Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, honoring the first council by Lewis and Clark with an Indian tribe. The monument was a granite boulder that had been originally presented for the Centennial in 1904. It was the first monument to Lewis and Clark in Nebraska. The original agenda had been found in the archives, and was followed although mercifully abbreviated because of the heat and blazing sun. Speakers included Congressman Doug Bereuter, Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns, and several DAR officials. From the Corps of Engineers presenting the National and DAR Colors were Ed Shirley (SWF), Larry Spisak (LRL), Gene Herrmann (LRL), Jon Carlson (NWP), led by Rick Magee (NAE).

Sergeant Floyd Memorial - After the event on Monday August 2, all Corps members participating in the Nebraska Signature Event made a side trip to Sioux City, IA. Here, we were treated to a special tour of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. Next came a

tour of the murals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at the Southern Hills Mall. Finally, at dusk, members of the Corps placed a wreath at the Sergeant Floyd Memorial in honor of the only member to die during the expedition, as well as Gen. Hiram Chittenden, the Corps engineer who constructed the memorial. At the memorial, the Corps contingent was photographed and interviewed by 2 local television stations as well as local radio.

Indirect Contacts: In the course of the Signature Event, several Corps representatives were contacted by newspapers, radio, and television reporters. Five newspaper interviews resulted in several articles, including one story that was picked up by AP and seen in the Pacific Northwest. Fiddle players, Larry Spisak (LRL) and Daniel Slosberg, were taped for a National Public Radio spot. In addition, two radio interviews and two television interviews were conducted.

Lessons learned

1. Communication with the organizers really paid off during this Signature Event. Each day, contact was made with the event organizers to see if there are any last minute changes. We did a much better job of following up when we found out that there may have been a change and finding out what our role was because of that change.
2. Another item that was missing at other events but very present at this Signature Event was a very visible “Events Information Booth”. At each of the two entrances to the event site, visitors were given a schedule of the day’s activities including speakers, special activities, presentations, and vendors.
3. We need to ensure that we have both water and Gatorade to ensure the health of all involved. Although there was some water made available, because of the high temperatures, it was quickly consumed. It would also be good to have an insulated historical looking box for hiding both in camp.

Future outcome: The next Signature Event will be August 25-September 26, 2004. This will be “Oceti Sakowin - Remembering and Educating.” This event is being sponsored by the Alliance of Tribal Tourism Advocates and will be at three locations in South Dakota. The Corps will be participating at each of the event sites.

Final thoughts: The Corps was very involved in the Nebraska L&C commission meetings. As such, we were able to head off problems before they actually happened. We were also able to influence the event organizers to have a better “flow” to the event by keeping the sellers/vendors separated from those that were true exhibitors.

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