LEWIS AND CLARK BICENTENNIAL:

REKINDLING THE SPIRIT OF DISCOVERY AND RESPECT

By Karen Fisher

On October 18, 1805, William Clark noted in his diary, “The morning was cool and fair, and the wind from the south-west.”

Cutting a path through wriggling, squirming salmon in their fall migration to the sea, Captains Lewis and Clark led a procession of canoes through the mouth of the Snake River into the Columbia. Indian men and women lined the beaches and islands catching and drying their winter supply of fish.

Two-and-a-half years before, President Thomas Jefferson had commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to find the best trade-passage from the Missouri River via the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. They were to make notation of everything they saw—from geography to plants, animals, and cultures of Native Peoples.

They have been referred to as “the writingest explorers ever.” Through their diary entries, we can relive their journey, making our own discoveries about the history that took place in our back yards.

The expedition of the Corps of Discovery spanned the period from January 1803 through September 1806. By the time the crew returned to civilization, most had given up hope of seeing them again.

The years 2003 to 2006 have been designated Lewis and Clark Bicentennial years. The bravery, persistence, and keen observations of those men will be remembered along their original path with events in 19 states from coast to coast.

Umatilla County makes plans

Bill Hansell, Umatilla County Commissioner and first president of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial in Oregon Committee, is excited about the opportunities the Bicentennial brings to Umatilla County. He sees it as motivation to make his County more visitor friendly.

A committee, chaired by Sam Pambrun, is discovering sites of historical or cultural interest all over the county. A team of writers is searching out information about those sites to be included on interpretive, county-map signs at six of the busiest entries to Umatilla County and in the cities of Pendleton and Hermiston.

Sam says, “Being a part of this project has been a real kick.” He’s lived in this county for years, but was unaware of how much history took place here.

Umatilla County’s second major thrust is to complete a commemorative walking trail from Hat Rock Park to the Morrow/Umatilla County line where it will meet up with Morrow County’s Columbia River Heritage Trail.

Hikers can view the terrain that Indian tribes inhabited for thousands of years, that white explorers “discovered,” and that Oregon Trail emigrants followed. Now tugboats pull barges down the river filled with commodities from inland farms headed for international markets.

Soon a helicopter will carry a bridge to the washed-out area of the old railroad bed between Hat Rock and the Port of


Bill Hansell, Umatilla County Commissioner, attended the opening ceremony of the Bicentennial at President Thomas Jefferson’s home in Virginia, Monticello.
Umatilla. Then directional and interpretive signs will be placed along the Trail.

**Morrow County plans**

For years Morrow County locals wished for a walking trail between Boardman and Irrigon, but nobody thought it possible. The federal government owned too much of the riverfront land.

In 1998, Morrow County Planner Tamra Mabbott approached the National Park Service for help in establishing a 28-mile commemorative trail roughly paralleling the shores of the Columbia River.

“Initially there was a lot of interest in calling the trail the Morrow County Lewis and Clark Trail,” says Bryan Bowden of the National Park Service. But the committee decided that Lewis and Clark were just one story of hundreds that make up their heritage. They decided to call it the Morrow County Columbia River Heritage Trail.

Carol Michael of Boardman now heads the Heritage Trail Committee. She says their remaining obstacle is to find a way to cross a slough in the Umatilla Wildlife Refuge. This section should be filled and completed—along with interpretive and directional signage for the Trail—by the 2005 Bicentennial of the Columbia-River-leg of Lewis and Clark’s journey. See www.columbiarivertrail.org.

If you would like to hike the Heritage Trail, you can join in a guided walk on part of the Trail during the Fifth Annual Morrow County Lewis and Clark Heritage Day, October 19, 2003, 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. at the Irrigon Marina Park.

Other free activities include a Lewis and Clark Discovery Box presentation (with replicas of items Lewis and Clark took on their expedition or found along the way,) Native American displays, early American music, and a pie social.

Carol Michael, chair of the Morrow County Columbia River Heritage Trail Committee shows the Trail sign at the Boardman Marina Park.

**What did the Indian people think of Lewis and Clark?**

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla have produced a beautiful map of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Homeland Heritage Corridor. The Lewis and Clark camps are marked with red flags. Original Indian place names are given beside present-day names.

On the reverse side of the map are quotes from Elders of the Tribes telling what they heard their parents and grandparents say about contacts with early non-Indians.

Lawrence Patrick says, “To us, they came very precarious; they were just going through this country not prepared for what they might run into. The people from here thought they were like children that didn’t know how to take care of themselves. They just hoped they would get home where they belonged.”

“The Indian people helped them on their way,” says Lydia Johnson, another tribal member, “and they might not have survived at all if the Indian people had not helped them.”

Will Clark affirmed this truth in his May 1, 1806, entry: “We can justly affirm to the honor of those people that are the most hospitable, honist and Sencere people that we have met with on our Voyage.” [Clark’s spelling]

continued on page 8