

Local Past – Where Did Footsteps Lead?

By Anne La Brake
For the Plain Talk

The year is 1804.

Vermillion doesn't exist, or at least not as the place you are familiar with it as.

There are no grocery stores, paved streets, or even college buildings.

The land most definitely exists though, although it is known to be a bit of space within the country of Louisiana, owned by the French Republic.

Vermillion, the name we know it as now, means "red stream."

This reflects the occupants of the area at that time.

The Yankton Sioux Indians.

Doubling the size of the United States, President Jefferson bought the Louisiana land from the French Republic for a total of \$11,250,000 million. This came to 3 cents an acre.

Then that historical expedition of the land followed where two well-known figures, along with 11 other men and even a dog for some of the way, would leave their footprints behind for us through the location of Spirit Mound, otherwise known as "Paha Wakan."

This was done with great enthusiasm, despite the rumored dangers that death could follow.

"On a hot and humid Saturday on Aug. 25, 1804, members of the Corp of Discovery led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark visited Spirit Mound to validate Native American stories of little spirits," explains James F. Heisinger, president of the Spirit Mound Trust. "These tiny spirits were said to have uncanny accuracy with bow and arrows and had terrorized nearby tribes.

"Since President Jefferson had instructed the expedition to learn all they could about the spiritual belief of Native

Americans, this trip to the mound was just part of their job description."

"No spirits were found," Heisinger counters. "The expedition members, though, were struck by the beauty of the immense prairie and the vast herds of buffalo and elk. This was the first time the captains had viewed the immense Midwestern Prairie."

Taking a step back, it's important to recognize that this would've been the first time these explorers had seen buffalo.

They'd, also, never been this far from the river before, a distance of about nine miles.

But what makes this area so significant when so many other locations would have been visited in the area by the explorers?

"While Lewis and Clark visited many areas along the Missouri River, most of the areas where they once stood have been destroyed by the meandering Missouri," Heisinger expounds. "The immensity of this meandering can be understood by reference to the flood of 1881. Following that flood, it was found that the river had moved four miles south of what is now the town of Vermillion.

"Areas not destroyed by the meandering river were buried under the reservoirs. Today, there are very few areas where modern adventurers can walk and feel confident that they are truly following in the footsteps of the Corp of Discovery."

Thankfully, for us, Spirit Mound is one of these places.

That in mind, what is being done to preserve the history of Spirit Mound?

"Today the area is a 320 acre state park," Heisinger shares. "It is owned and managed by the South Dakota division of Parks and Recreation. The Spirit Mound Trust, a group of interested citizens, was instrumental in the acquisition of the mound by the state.



"Paha Wakan" – are you brave enough to make the journey to the top? That is the challenge that awaits many.

ANNE LA BRAKE / FOR THE PLAIN TALK

"The Trust works closely with the district manager to restore the lost prairie of Lewis and Clark."

How did the area of Spirit Mound become altered from its original state in the first place?

"With the arrival of settlers in 1869, the lush and highly diverse native plants seen by the Corps of Discovery were replaced by corn and soybeans, a feedlot, as well as heavily grazed areas," Heisinger recounts. "Today the park bears some resemblance to the 1804 vista, but much remains to be done. Many native plant

species are thriving. Prairie ants, butterflies and birds are in abundance. The goal is to allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of a prairie ecosystem."

We have at Spirit Mound the ability to walk within the footsteps of our past where Lewis and Clark also walked, a place of history and tales long before they even touched its surface with their own feet.

What beats this, however, is that these footsteps, through acts of preservation done through the members of the Spirit Mound Trust, actually lead us into the future.

Reservoirs Ready for Season of Runoffs

By Randy Dockendorf
Press & Dakotan

With last year's previously stored flood waters out of the system, the Missouri River reservoirs are ready for the upcoming runoff season, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said Friday.

The reservoir system has available the full flood control zone capacity for the 2015 season, according to Jody Farhat, chief of the Missouri River Basin Water Management Division.

"The last remaining 2014 flood water was evacuated in early January when the combined storage in the reservoirs fell below 56.1 million acre feet (MAF), the base of the flood control zone," Farhat told the media Friday.

"The entire flood control capacity of the mainstream reservoir system is ready to capture runoff in the spring, reducing flood risk while providing good support to the other authorized project purposes."

The 2015 forecast for runoff in the Missouri River Basin above Sioux City stands at 25.5 million acre-feet (MAF), or 101

percent of normal. Normal runoff is 25.2 MAF.

However, the Missouri River basin above Sioux City has already seen an incredible amount of runoff, far ahead of schedule, said Corps senior hydraulics engineer Kevin Stamm.

"In January, we were 178 percent of normal for runoff," he said during a national conference call. "We've already seen the runoff that normally occurs in late February and March."

Runoff typically slows during the winter as snow accumulates and rivers freeze, according to the Corps. However, above-normal temperatures during the last half of January melted plains snow and river ice. As a result, those conditions created above-normal runoff for the month.

"Because of the warm temperatures, system storage climbed in late January, ending the month at 56.5 MAF, (which is) 0.4 MAF above the base of the annual flood control zone," Farhat said.

The conditions didn't affect the reservoirs' ability to reduce flood risk, she added.

The February forecast calls for above-normal runoff, while the March and April forecast calls for slightly below-normal runoff, Stamm said.

Gavins Point Dam releases at Yankton have been running from 17,000 to 20,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) because of above-normal runoff and a series of cold weather systems moving through the basin, the Corps said. The increased releases moved water that would be locked up because of ice.

Gavins Point has been running at 19,000 cfs, and it's expected to maintain that rate through February. After this month, the Corps expects Gavins Point releases to increase to 27,000 to 32,000 cfs.

Mountain snowpack will continue to accumulate during the next few months and normally peaks in mid-April.

During Friday's national call, South Dakota state climatologist Dennis Todey presented findings showing why the basin has evacuated much more water than usual.

"When you look at the conditions for the last 30 days, most of the basin is

at least a few degrees above average for temperatures, some as much as 6 degrees above average," he said. A large part of the basin continues to show abnormally dry conditions, he added.

The Great Plains has widespread snowpack, but it contains very low water content and is melting rapidly, Todey said.

The 8- to 14-day outlook calls for above-average temperatures through mid-February, he said. The northern basin has a greater chance of above-average precipitation, while parts of South Dakota and Nebraska have below-average chances for precipitation the rest of the month.

The 30-day outlook calls for above-average temperatures and increased chances of precipitation, he added.

The basin finds itself in a marginal El Nino situation, with any El Nino impact diminishing over time, he said.

"Into spring, it will likely be warmer in the upper and western part of the basin," he said. "The precipitation is mostly equal chances (for above



The Missouri River near Vermillion is ready for a new runoff season.

FILE PHOTO

and below average) across the area."

The Plains snowpack remains wide but relatively shallow, with the snow water equivalent of about a half-inch, according to Kevin Lowe with the National Weather Service's Missouri River Basin Forecast Center in Kansas City.

"Currently, the Plains snowpack isn't a concern, but there is a lot of winter left and things could change during the next couple of months," he said.

The forecast calls for normal to slightly below normal chances for

tributary flooding for most of the Missouri River basin, he said. "The exception is the eastern part of the Dakotas, where the runoff generation capability appears to be slightly better than average," he said.

The Corps will continue to monitor flood conditions, Farhat said.

"It's important to keep in mind that we're still in the early part of the season," she said. "At the present time, the plains and mountain snowpack is near average, but there's still more than two months remaining in the snow accumulation

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South Dakota Governor



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