



PLAIN TALK FILE PHOTO

Spirit Mound, pictured here with flowers in full bloom is a wonderful place to visit with a parking and picnic area, restroom and a walking trail leading to the top of the mound from which hikers can stand where Lewis and Clark did so many years ago.

The Spirit Mound: A Local Legend

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

To an average person driving past the Spirit Mound on Highway 19 five miles north of Vermillion it might seem they are passing a simple hill when, in fact, the geographical anomaly has held special significance throughout South Dakotan history.

The hill was known by the Sioux as Paha Wakan and was a center of high superstition as discovered by Lewis and Clark when they traveled through the area.

As quoted on www.spiritmound.com, Clark recorded in his journal the following:

"Capt Lewis and my Self Concluded to visit a High Hill Situated in an emence Plain three Leagues N. 20° W. from the mouth of White Stone river, this hill appear to be of a Conic form and by all the different Nations in this quarter is Supposed to be a place of Deavels or that they are in human form with remarkable large heads and about 18 inches high; that they are very watchfull and ar armed with Sharp arrows with which they can kill at a great distance; they are said to kill all persons who are so hardy as to attempt to approach the hill; they state that tradition informs them than many indians have suffered by these little people and among others that three Maha men fell a sacrifice to their murcyless fury not meany years since- so much do the Mahas Souix Ottos and other neibhbouring nations believe this fable that no consideration is sufficient to induce them to approach this hill."

Curiosity was sufficient to induce Lewis and Clark to hike nine miles out of their way to visit the site and climb to the top of the hill.

Today if history buffs wish to travel the approximate course that Lewis and Clark did, beginning at Cotton Park in Vermillion, take Dakota Street north, then Main Street west to Stanford Street / Hwy 19 and continue on it six miles to Spirit Mound.

Clark wrote again in his journal about the view from the summit.

"from the top of this Mound we beheld a most

butifull landscape; Numerous herds of buffalow were Seen feeding in various directions, the Plain to the N. W & N E extends without interruption as far as Can be Seen- ... no woods except on the Missouri Points... if all the timber which is on the Stone Creek [Vermillion River] was on 100 a[c]res it would not be thickly timbered, the Soil of those Plains are delightfull."

The Dakota Territory was created by the U.S. government in 1861 after the Yankton Sioux moved to a reservation 70 miles West and the first homestead was filed on the Spirit Mound area in 1868.

Throughout the years of agriculture and various forms of cultivation the area lost its original natural beauty that awed Lewis and Clark.

"Preservation and restoration also came slowly to the mound," reads the history on spiritmound.com. "Local efforts placed it on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and in 1986 a local group incorporated the Spirit Mound Trust, dedicated to saving the mound as a public resource."

The restoration is currently headed by the Spirit Mound Trust, dedicated to the goal of restoring the area to the way it was when Lews and Clark set foot there 200 years ago.

Preservation has included seeding the area with natural prairie plant species which in turn invite the wildlife back to the area.

"There are many challenges," the website reads. "We must encourage the remnants of the original prairie to proliferate, halt the growth of invasive species and introduce additional native species at appropriate sites."

Now a state park the Spirit Mound is a wonderful place to visit with a parking and picnic area, restroom and a walking trail leading to the top of the mound from which hikers can stand where Lewis and Clark did so many years ago.

On the way signs mark various species of plants native to the prairie.

The history of the mound

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Transportation In Early Vermillion

Compiled From historical Plain Talk Issues

STEAMBOATS REACH VERMILLION

With its location on the Vermillion and Missouri Rivers, steamboat navigations was destined to come to Vermillion. Even though it started slowly by 1864 steamboat travel was in full gear.

Nearly 50 vessels were reported that year alone. During the next 15 years, the number of boats steadily increased to 75 boats plying the river from Sioux City and Yankton to Fort Benton and stops along the way.

The large number of boats on the water and the natural shallowness of the river signaled that accidents were destined to happen.

The sternwheeler North Alabama, a well-built craft with good speed, enjoyed many successful trips before snagging on the Missouri. One of the most daring trips undertaken by veteran pilot, Captain Grant Marsh, was aboard the North Alabama.

On Oct. 1, 1869, the vessel left Sioux City for the forts on the upper Missouri to deliver perishable vegetables to the military garrisons. Also aboard the vessel was Major Bannister, the military paymaster, and his clerk, Mr. Baker. They were taking money to pay the troops at the posts to be visited.

The warm weather held for the journey to Forts Randall, Hale, Sully, Rice and Stevenson. The cargoes were unloaded and the soldiers paid. Only one fort remained - Fort Buford.

After leaving Fort Stevenson, the air began to chill. Within a day, slush ice was forming on the river. The vegetables were transferred from the main deck to the hold. Small fires were started to keep the air warm. For a frail wooden steamboat, this was a daring experiment. However, no disaster resulted.

As the ice continued to form, the North Alabama struggled on until October 22 when the vessel was frozen solid against the bank at the mouth of the Little Muddy Creek.

Captain Marsh sent two Indian scouts who had joined the party at Fort Berthold, overland to Fort Buford to advise the commanding officer of the North Alabama's situation. Though the fort was more than 25 miles away, the next day a train of covered wagons could be seen, coming to relieve the boat of its cargo.

The soldiers had equipped each wagon with a small camp stove and were able to reach the fort without losing any of the vegetables. Major Bannister returned to the fort to pay off the garrison.

Ten days after the ice froze, it broke and the river began running. Captain Marsh sent one of the scouts back to Fort Buford to get Major Bannister. As soon as the two arrived back at the boat, the North Alabama cast off and traveled at full speed to Sioux City, arriving there November 15.

For this successful trip, Captain Marsh declared he received more commendations from the military than any other work he performed.

It was less than one year later, on Oct. 27, 1870, that the North Alabama sank near Vermillion in what is now known as the North Alabama Bend. The Yankton newspaper described the disaster as follows:

"She was going from the Dakota shore to the Nebraska shore and about 200 yards from the latter shore, she struck her bow on the end of a sunken log, and went down without advancing another yard, the log knocking a hole in her nearly eight feet long and two feet wide, sinking her in less than thirty minutes."



COURTESY PHOTO: CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Vermillion Train Depot pictured here circa 1915 heralded the start of the modern age according to newspaper reports at the time. The station would open up Vermillion to easier travel and help spur growth in town.



COURTESY PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Looking upriver toward the bow of the North Alabama and the snag that sank the steamboat on the Missouri River in 1870.

The craft was valued at \$12,000. The newspaper account stated that her cargo was 2,000 pounds of flour. A news article from 1906, states the steamer carried more than flour. The July 12th issue of the New York Tribune stated:

"The river steamer North Alabama, which was sunk in the Missouri River six miles below here, (Vermillion) in 1870 strangely rose to the surface yesterday and today crowds of spectators line the banks. The boat carried a cargo of flour and whiskey for the Yellowstone district. The fifty barrels of thirty-six-year-old whiskey have attracted the lovers of good liquor and already a scramble to find the prize has begun. As yet it has not been reached, owing to the quantities of mud accumulated over the lower decks."

In the heyday of steamships, the 1869 season, 143 landings were made at the Yankton levee. The navigation of the Missouri was not seriously hampered except by sandbars during low water. The river was free from accidents except those that were common to streams everywhere. Steamboats did not cease to navigate the Missouri because of any hindrance or obstacle to navigation.

The coming of the railroad across the great river meant passengers and freight could be carried quicker and more economically. The inevitable result was steamboats were compelled to abandon the river.

RAILROAD HERALDS MODERN ERA

Prior to 1872, Vermillion was a river town that depended on side-wheeler steamboats to handle freight and passenger traffic. Other towns in Southeast Dakota, such as Elk Point,



COURTESY PHOTO: CLAY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION.

A train leaving Vermillion in December of 1907 carried passengers to and from town.

received goods by horse or ox-drawn wagons.

The nearest railroad was in Sioux City, Iowa. Elk Point advocated the construction of the Dakota Southern from Sioux City to Yankton. Union County voted in favor of a bond issue to finance the railroad.

Vermillion residents apparently reasoned that if the Dakota Southern ran from Sioux City to Yankton, it would have to go through Vermillion. Recalling railroad bond swindles in the eastern states, many settlers were against a bond issue. When brought before the people for a vote, the \$80,000 bond proposal failed when 762 of the 825 voters cast negative ballots.

The officials of the Dakota Southern accepted the defeat in Clay County. They required that the local businessmen donate 150 city lots to the railroad, procure a free right-of-way through the county and raise \$4,000 for a depot building.

These demands brought bitterness when owners of the right-of-way received no compensation for their land. Eventually all the requirements were met and the Dakota Southern arrived in Vermillion on Dec. 2, 1872.

The local newspaper, the *Dakota Republican*, reported: "A new era dawned upon Vermillion...we are in the World again. We have not fully comprehended and realized it, but it is true, nevertheless - Good-bye stagecoaches, slow journeys, tedious rides, and dread of trips away from home! Good-bye the Frontier and All-Hail Civilization, which had found us again!"

"The first passenger train was put on the road and carried the mail both ways between Sioux City, IA, and Vermillion. Last Monday will henceforth be to our town the most prominent and important epoch of all its history."

"Welcome to the locomotive, and may we never get ahead of it again."

Clay County Historical Society Presents

'Twas the Night Before Christmas!

TOUR of HOMES

Friday, December 4, 2015
4:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Tickets - \$15
Available at the Austin-Whittemore House, Nook 'n Cranny, and Vermillion Beauty Shop

RIDES AVAILABLE - LIMITED NUMBER OF SEATS
Sponsored by Vermillion Public Transit

For more information call: Clay County Historical Society @ 605.624.8266

Merry Christmas to all, and to all, a good night!



Medicare Part D Plan Enrollment Assistance

SHIINE volunteers will assist Medicare beneficiaries, FREE of charge, with information needed to make informed decisions and/or enroll in a new plan for the 2016 Medicare Part D (Prescription Drug) plan year.

SHIINE also assists with:

- Medicare Parts A & B
- Medicare Part D Plans
- Medicare Savings Plans
- Choosing a Medigap Policy
- Medicare Advantage Plans
- Protecting your Medicare benefits
- Medicare fraud, waste & abuse
- Extra Help, Low income subsidy for Part D

Open Enrollment Period:

October 15 - December 7, 2015

Volunteers Available:

Tues from 9 a.m. - noon and
Thurs from 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. at
the Vermillion Senior Center,
320 W Main, Vermillion SD

To schedule an appointment,
please call 605-624-4883

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