Lewis and Clark along the River near Traveler’s Rest

First Camp
September 9–11, 1805

Second Camp
June 30 to July 5, 1806

"Descended the mountains to Traveler’s Rest leaving those tremendous mountains behind us — in passing of which we have experienced cold and hunger of which I shall ever remember."

William Clark

"The wild rose, serviceberry, white-berried honeysuckle (snowberry), seven bark, elderberry, alder, quaking aspen, chokecherry and broad and narrow-leaved willows are native to this valley."

Meriwether Lewis

1805 — Lewis and Clark traveled for 56 days from Great Falls to Traveler’s Rest. Returning in 1806, both Clark and Lewis wrote about the native plants of the area.

Native Plant Species

Bitterroot
Idaho fescue
Serviceberry

Bitterroot
height: 3 to 6 inches
habitat: Meriwether Lewis first collected the bitterroot in the Bitterroot Valley

Idaho fescue
height: 1 to 2 feet
habitat: sandy-loam soil, 15% minimum precipitation

Serviceberry
height: 2 to 15 feet
habitat: low elevation

The root system is slow to establish, but this bunchgrass can persist in semi-arid conditions.

Montana’s state flower, bitterroot, was collected by Lewis on July 5, 1806 at Traveler’s Rest. One specimen was successfully propagated upon their return.

Invasive Plant Species

Knapweed
Toadflax
Cinquefoil

height: 8 inches to 4 feet
habitat: variety

Spotted knapweed is an invasive species you may find at Traveler’s Rest. Purplish-pink flowers and black bracts are two key identifying features.

Dalmatian toadflax, introduced to the United States as an ornamental, is used in fabric dyes and cold remedies.

height: 12 to 28 inches
habitat: low and mid-elevation

Sulfur cinquefoil may be mistaken for Montana’s native northwest cinquefoil (Potentilla recta). Leaves have five to seven leaflets.

Montana artist Don Gretytak illustrates an ordinary day along the banks near Traveler’s Rest in June, 1806. William Clark documents the numerous tall pine trees on this day in his journal.

Today — As you travel along rivers and trails near Traveler’s Rest, you will observe invading plant species like spotted knapweed that were not present in 1806 but are common to many areas in Montana. Non-native plant species found nearby, including Dalmatian toadflax and sulfur cinquefoil, were brought by unsuspecting travelers along waterways, roads, and hiking trails. Wildlife, people, and pets transport seeds on their coats, clothing, shoe treads, vehicle tires, and boat bottoms.

Once introduced, invading species thrive in Montana’s climate. Spotted knapweed adapts to many habitat types and spreads rapidly as do Dalmatian toadflax and sulfur cinquefoil. These invasive plants out-compete native plants and reduce wildlife habitat. You can help protect pristine areas from invading species by not walking or driving through infestations.

You may see these three invading plant species when you visit Traveler’s Rest State Park and surrounding area.

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