

# Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust News

P.O. Box 603, Vermillion, SD 57069



Edited by Tom Gasque & Mark Wetmore

August 2002

## SPIRIT MOUND HISTORIC PRAIRIE

Much progress has been made in an attempt to step into the visual past and recreate a microcosm of the great prairie that Lewis and Clark encountered on their trek to Spirit Mound in 1804. Structures have been removed from the Spirit Mound Historic Prairie. Badly eroded areas like the old feedlot have been contoured. Some trees still need to be removed.

What was the prairie vista like 200 years ago? The journals of Lewis and Clark make it clear that the only trees they saw from the mound were along the "Missouris Points" and "Whitestone Creek" (today's Vermillion River). An excerpt from Captain Clark's journal is very eloquent:

*The Surrounding Plains is open void of Timber and leavel to a great Extent: hence the wind from whatever quarter it may blow, drives with unusial force over the naked Plains and against this hill;*

The area (320 acres) of Spirit Mound Historic Prairie is too small to attain the richness of fauna and flora (species diversity) that existed 200 years ago. Bison and elk will not likely be observed. We still hope the visitor can obtain some sense of traveling back through time.

Land previously in soybeans has been planted with nine native grass species and 19 native forbs, including rough blazing star, aster, and compass and cup plants. All were acquired from nearby sources at approximately the same latitude as Spirit Mound. From the mound these species will create the illusion of a highly diversified prairie.

Visitors on the trail, which is marked but not yet constructed, will sense even more diversity. On both sides of the trail 36 native forbs will accompany the nine grass species. In seasonally wet (mesic) areas other grasses will be planted. These were purchased by funds obtained through the Vermillion Basin Water Development District.

On the dry (xeric) sloping mound drought resistant grasses and forbs are scheduled for planting.

The expert at prairie design is David D. Breyfogle of "The Prairie Stewardship Project." The building tools for this work in progress are burning, brush and weed control (sometimes with spot applications of herbicide), mowing, interseeding, and in some cases, especially on steep slopes, the planting of plugs. Planting the steep dry mound will require community volunteers. Members of the Spirit Mound Trust and the Sierra Club worked together last fall to broadcast pasque flower seeds. The Sierra Club donated funds to the Trust for the purchase of seeds in an effort to increase species diversity. We intend to give other community groups the opportunity to help us recapture the past prairie by planting seeds or plugs.

It will take many years to have a "true" historic prairie. In fact it can never be attained, since some species are extinct, and some so rare that it is impractical to attempt planting on a small piece of land. However, with your physical and financial assistance we hope to allow visitors to experience the illusion that they are with those with undaunted courage. Plant species "new" to all but trained botanists will be seen by most of us. We will remember that Lewis and Clark saw them when they had never been described in the scientific literature, when many of the native plants were known only to the Native Americans.

— Jim Heisinger

## NEW BROCHURE PRINTED

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks has designed and printed a new brochure on Spirit Mound Historic Prairie. The brochure covers all aspects of the site: Native American traditions, the Lewis and Clark visit, the natural history, and the ongoing restoration project.

The brochure is available now, and a copy accompanies this newsletter. Additional copies will be available at the W. H. Over Museum.

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## Membership Renewal

To faithful members, we thank you for your support over the years and hope that you will renew; to those of you who are not members, we urge you to join us. And tell your friends about our important work to preserve this historic treasure. The purchase of the land and the grants to develop it into a historic prairie are just the beginning. The Spirit Mound Trust has a continuing commitment to support the restoration by adding to the endowment fund and to remind the world of the importance of this site long after the bicentennial comes and goes.

Snip off this portion of the newsletter and fill out the form on the other side. Make your check payable to **Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust**, and mail it today to

Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust  
PO Box 603  
Vermillion, SD 57069

## SPIRIT MOUND MAY BECOME NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

The S. D. State Historical Preservation Office has engaged Ethnoscience, a research firm in Billings, Montana, to conduct a comprehensive cultural and historic study of Spirit Mound.

Ethnoscience staff members read numerous historical documents and interviewed a number of people. Their report will be used to support the Preservation Office's nomination of Spirit Mound as a National Historic Landmark, the highest level of recognition for a historic site. Currently the site is on the National Register of Historic Places.

## TRUST RECEIVES AWARD

The Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation presented the 2002 Heritage Award to the Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust at the Foundation's annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, July 31, 2002. The award, in the form of a commemorative plaque, recognizes significant contributions to the preservation of sites important to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The nomination was submitted by District 17 Representative Judy Clark.

## VERMILLION'S LEWIS AND CLARK FESTIVITIES SET FOR AUGUST 23-25

Vermillion's annual commemoration of Lewis and Clark's visit to Spirit Mound will be August 23-25, 2002. Events will include a wacipi, workshops on Native American Culture, the First Annual Lewis & Clark Keel Boat Race, Lewis & Clark re-enactors, and a trek to Spirit Mound.

On Sunday, August 25, you may follow in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark by hiking from Cotton Park to Spirit Mound. The walk will begin at 8:00 am and will take about six hours. A registration fee, which includes lunch, water, snacks, and a booklet, will be charged.

For those not interested in making the trip by foot, vans will be available for guided tours on both Saturday and Sunday.

For details on all of these activities, contact the Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, 906 East Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069 (1-800-809-2071 or 624-5571).

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Ron Thaden, recently retired Clay County Extension Agent, has been hired by SDGF&P, Division of Parks and Recreation, for ongoing maintenance of Spirit Mound Historic Prairie. His knowledge of the natural history of the county and his experience make him an excellent choice for this important position.
- The Trust is trying to find photographs of Spirit Mound to show how its appearance has changed over time. If you have older photographs of the mound that you would be willing to let us use, please contact Mark Wetmore, P.O. Box 96, Vermillion (605-624-3748; <mwetmore@iw.net>). Original photos will be returned, and any images that are published will include a credit for their source.
- As most of you know, the plaque that was fixed to the stone at the top of Spirit Mound was stolen last summer. The Trust has posted a reward of \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible. If you have information, contact the Clay County Sheriff's office.
- An internet web site is being developed for Spirit Mound. It should be activated very soon and will have current information about the mound and links to related sites. Look for it at [www.spiritmoundsouthdakota.org](http://www.spiritmoundsouthdakota.org).
- The Trust still has for sale several items of interest to Trust members. A print of Ron Backer's painting of the explorers atop Spirit Mound is available for \$100; postcards, with Charles Wetmore's photograph of the mound from the west, are \$1 each; and lapel pins are \$5. You may order these items at the time you pay your annual dues. Prices include delivery.

## LEWIS & CLARK - SPIRIT MOUND TRUST BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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### Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust Membership Renewal.

Please add my name to the membership rolls of the Lewis & Clark - Spirit Mound Trust. I enclose my check for \$10.00 (tax deductible\*).

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

\*tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization (No. 93-0921345)

Dues \$10.00

Please send me the following:  
Number

Ron Backer Print (\$100) \_\_\_\_\_  
Post Cards (\$1) \_\_\_\_\_  
Lapel Pin (\$5) \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed