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Photos retrace the wilderness route of Lewis and Clark

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BY RUMMANA HUSSAIN Staff Reporter



Commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to find a water route to the Pacific and explore the uncharted West, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark enlisted several dozen men, Shoshone Indian princess Sacagawea and a Newfoundlander named Seaman to accompany them on a spectacular three-year, 8,000-mile trek that still spices up otherwise staid history books and instills awe in the most hardened backpackers.

Two hundred years later, Evanston photographer Richard Mack retraced the group's steps, capturing Lewis and Clark's geographic and scientific findings with one of the many devices the duo never had a chance to thoroughly explore: a camera.

Mack's 248 color photos chronicling the Yellowstone River, Native American villages, Missouri's White Cliffs and other scenic gems the Corps of Discovery stumbled upon are featured in the new \$90 book, *The Lewis & Clark Trail American Landscapes*. A selection of the pictures, just one of many tributes recognizing the bicentennial anniversary of the expedition, will be on display at the River East Arts Center, 435 E. Illinois, until May 20.

Using Lewis and Clark's journals as his guide, the commercial photographer spent two years shooting the same landscape the pair visited at roughly the same time of year to get a sense of what they were seeing and feeling.

Family opted out

That also meant enduring extreme temperatures that ranged from a bone chilling minus-15 degrees to a sweltering 110.

"To be able to sit there and look at the stuff that they wrote about, that's pretty impressive stuff," Mack, 49, said before a debut celebration Friday for his 256-page book at the River East Art Center.

Mack usually worked alone, sometimes a week at a time, renting cars along the way after flying in at various locations on the trail, which begins in St. Louis. He often camped along rivers during the first half of the project and rented a pickup truck and camper as a treat to himself toward the end.

His wife, Kathy, and two children, Sara, 19, and Sam, 17, opted not to go along. "Nobody wants to sit around for five hours while you take a photograph," Mack said, laughing.

Mack was amazed that Lewis and Clark's entire group -- except one man -- had survived when the trip concluded in 1806. The explorers often ran low on food, got into scuffles with some Native American tribes and fell ill.

The biggest setbacks Mack endured were three flat tires and a shaky landing in a private plane.

"There is no comparison to what I did and what Lewis and Clark did. They didn't know where they were going. They had no maps. They were trail blazers," Mack said. "Those guys were tough."