


it's different

GATES *of the* **MOUNTAINS** **WILD AREA**



MISSOURI RIVER
and **MERIWETHER**
CANYONS

ENTERING
GATES OF THE MOUNTAINS
WILD AREA
HELENA
NATIONAL FOREST

Phil Murphy

60 minutes
from **HELENA**

YES, just one hour from Helena

... thirty minutes drive to the north over Highway No. 91 and thirty minutes by excursion boat through the sensational Canyon of the Missouri—lies Meriwether Canyon. This is the western entrance to one of the most recently-designated of our national forest primitive regions, the Gates of the Mountains Wild Area.

Here, entrapped between the forbidding Missouri River Canyon to the west and the glowering ramparts of the Big Belt mountain range to the east, fifty square miles of agonized limestone writhe and buckle in magnificent torment. A labyrinth of enchanting canyons and gulches gash the area. Many of them are traversed or connected by foot trails.

Meriwether Canyon is characteristic of the place. The chasm is a fantasy in green and gold. In cloistered confusion, the madness of four miles of condemned limestone pierce the heavens in sunlit glory. Temples and fortresses, castles and cathedrals tower more than a thousand feet above a rejected cloak of pine and fir forest.

Grotesque stone figures people the canyon and lurk in surprising places. Weird caves and caverns pock the walls, some of which contain primitive sign writing by a people long gone. The canyons are saturated



Photo by Harold McClellan

"Meriwether Boat Dock"

EXCURSION TRIPS

From Lewis and Clark Landing
Sundays and Holidays
During the Summer Months

10 A. M., 12 N., 2 P. M., 4 P. M.,
6 P. M.

With Stop Over Privilege

at
MERIWETHER CANYON

Daily Trip 2 P. M.

Trips Other Days by Special
Arrangement. Inquire
Helena Chamber of Commerce

with stillness. Echoes audibly eddy in prolonged and charming response. It is a bewildering land—a land of tumultuous silences clamoring to be heard.

Meriwether Campground, on the river shore, is maintained by the U. S. Forest Service. It is an ideal spot to picnic or camp. From here it is but a short walk to reach or see many of the wonders indicated on the map within this folder. The campground is furnished with rustic tables and benches, fireplaces, fuel and drinking water. It is located on the site of the first camp established by a white man in this area, that of Captain Meriwether Lewis of the famous Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The atmosphere of the two canyons, Missouri River and Meriwether, is so heavy with majestic solitude that one readily feels that he is deep within the wilds, far from everyday life. Actually, Meriwether Campground is, in a straight line, no more than five miles from the Helena-Great Falls Highway No. 91.

The Gates of the Mountains Wild Area, of which Meriwether Canyon is a part, was, on March 25, 1948, dedicated by the Chief of the U. S. Forest Service to remain in its primitive condition. Containing more than 5,000 acres but less than 100,000 acres, it is called a wild area. Had it contained more than 100,000 acres it would have been termed a wilderness area.

The map on this page is intended to guide you to some of the many, many cataclysmic gems with which this area abounds. In particular, it is designed to aid the visitor who, on foot, would venture into the primeval for a few hours.

This is strictly a primitive land. It exists now just as it has come to you through untold centuries. Other than the very few paths and trails necessary to accessibility there are no modern conveniences. None are permitted.

All the lands immediately east of river lie within the Helena National Forest. Within the forest is located the "Gates of the Mountains Wild Area," western boundary approximately one half mile east of and parallel to river. Therefore, Meriwether Campground is situated outside the wild area, as are some of the geological attractions and the river itself. As the river approaches Meriwether it flows northward.

The rock formations throughout the entire area are of Madison Limestone. Ponderosa, Lodgepole Pine and Douglas Fir are the predominating trees of the forest.

From Meriwether, in no case need you walk more than one and one half miles to reach or see any of the unique features indicated on the drawing by numbered circles. Many points of interest shown are but a few hundred yards from camp. (The numbers identify the features by name in the Index column.)

Weekend excursion boat schedules are such that you may spend six to eight hours here and be assured of an evening return to the docks at Lewis & Clark Landing. In addition to the weekend schedules, there is at least one round trip made each week day. Boat schedules may be obtained from the Helena Chamber of Commerce.

Overnight camping on designated areas at Meriwether is permitted. However, such stays are limited to two successive nights. This limitation is necessary so that others, in turn, may enjoy like outings.

historic Missouri River and Meriwether canyons

were well known to primitive peoples. It is likely that prehistoric man found sanctuary here. Relics of his handiwork have been found in the Helena area.

Writings and drawings in caves and on canyon walls attest to the presence of early Indian visitors. Flint and obsidian chips and complete arrowheads have been found throughout the area, particularly along the river shore. Neither stone is native to the region. Possibly many of the powerful tribes of the northwest camped here to hunt or war; among them the Crow, Sioux, Nez Perce and Blackfoot.

REPLACING the Indian, the white renegade and desperado haunted the somber depths of the canyons during Helena's gold rush days. The natural wildness furnished an ideal rendezvous and hideout for fugitives from the law, horse thieves and all around bad men.

At the peak of the lawless period the Vigilantes entered the scene. Justice — although often swift and violent — soon depleted the ranks of murderers and robbers.

With the advent of law and order the canyons were freed of lawbreakers and to this day, except for the animals of the wild, remain untenanted.

NICHOLAS HILGER, in about 1885, first commenced commercial passenger boat operations with "The Rose of Helena." In those days it required expert piloting to navigate the rapids of the Missouri River Canyon. Today such hazards no longer exist. Holter Dam, down river, creates Holter Lake, the backwaters of which deepen the river channel as much as seventy feet.

Throughout the canyon the river is very deep. It is extremely placid and its flow is hardly noticeable.

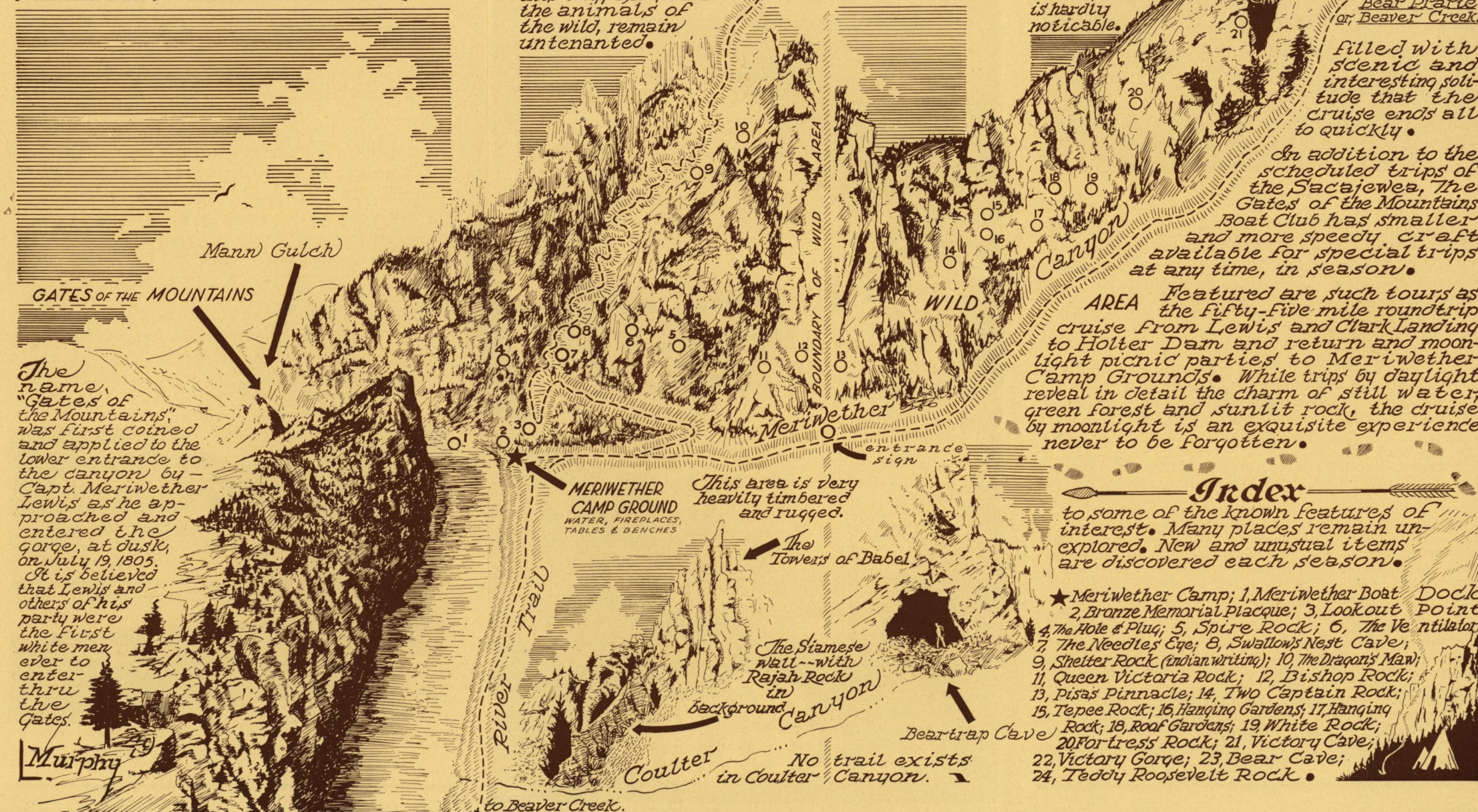
The present excursion boat, the eighty passenger Sacajewea, gives you leisurely passage — so filled with scenic and interesting solitude that the cruise ends all too quickly.

In addition to the scheduled trips of the Sacajewea, The Gates of the Mountains Boat Club has smaller and more speedy craft available for special trips at any time, in season.

Featured are such tours as the fifty-five mile roundtrip cruise from Lewis and Clark Landing to Holter Dam and return and moonlight picnic parties to Meriwether Camp Grounds. While trips by daylight reveal in detail the charm of still water, green forest and sunlit rock, the cruise by moonlight is an exquisite experience never to be forgotten.

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to some of the known features of interest. Many places remain unexplored. New and unusual items are discovered each season.

- ★ Meriwether Camp; 1, Meriwether Boat Dock; 2, Bronze Memorial Plaque; 3, Lookout Point; 4, The Hole & Plug; 5, Spire Rock; 6, The Ventilator; 7, The Needle's Eye; 8, Swallow's Nest Cave; 9, Shelter Rock (Indian writing); 10, The Dragon's Maw; 11, Queen Victoria Rock; 12, Bishop Rock; 13, Pisas Pinnacle; 14, Two Captain Rock; 15, Tepee Rock; 16, Hanging Gardens; 17, Hanging Rock; 18, Roof Gardens; 19, White Rock; 20, Fortress Rock; 21, Victory Cave; 22, Victory Gorge; 23, Bear Cave; 24, Teddy Roosevelt Rock.





Associated Press Photo

"Meriwether Trail"

HELENA NATIONAL FOREST

Created on April 12, 1906, by proclamation of President Theodore Roosevelt. It straddles the Continental Divide for seventy-four miles, from Lewis and Clark Pass on the north to Thunderbolt Mountain on the south, and has a gross area of 1,154,358 acres.

The headquarters of the Forest Supervisor are in the City of Helena.

There are an average of about 50 forest fires on the Helena annually, and one-third of these are man-caused.

ALL THOSE WHO TRAVERSE THE FOREST ARE URGED TO FOLLOW THESE SIX RULES:

1. **Matches.** Be sure your match is out. Break it in two before you throw it away.
2. **Tobacco.** Stop to smoke in safe places that are cleared of dry or inflammable material. Be sure pipe ashes and cigar or cigarette stubs are dead before throwing them away. Never throw them into brush, leaves, or needles.
3. **Making Camp.** Before building a fire scrape away all inflammable material from a spot 5 feet in diameter. Dig a hole in the center, and in it build your camp fire. Keep your fire small and never build it against trees, logs or near brush.
4. **Breaking Camp.** Never break camp until your fire is out—dead out. Leaving any unextinguished fire is dangerous as well as unlawful.
5. **Brush Burning.** Never burn slash or brush in windy weather or while there is the slightest danger that the fire will get away. Burning permits are required between May 1 and September 30 of each year.
6. **How to Put Out a Camp Fire.** Stir the coals while soaking them with water. Turn small sticks and drench both sides. Wet the ground around the fire. If you can't get water, stir in earth and tread it down until packed tight over and around the fire. Be sure the last spark is dead.