

Theme 2: Exploration and Settlement

The Upper Missouri River was crucial for the exploration, settlement, and development of northcentral Montana.

Subthemes:

1. Over the last 15,000 years, the stories of hunters and gatherers, fur trappers, homesteaders, settlers, miners, and many others have been intricately tied to the Upper Missouri River and its landscapes.
2. Lewis and Clark recorded no permanent settlement in this area of Montana, just evidence of its use by many nomadic peoples. This area of Montana was often referred to as a “common hunting ground.”
3. The Corps of Discovery portaged the Great Falls of the Missouri in about two arduous and back-breaking weeks. The 18-mile Portage Route is now a National Historic Landmark due to its national significance.
4. The mission of the Lewis and Clark Expedition to follow the Missouri River to its source left a rich legacy of recording flora, fauna, and geology of our area, much of it new to science.
5. Settlement could not happen until immigrants learned to live with the nomadic natives of the area.
6. From trading posts to city, the Missouri River played a crucial role in the settlement of “the birthplace of Montana”—Fort Benton, now a National Historic Landmark.
7. The founder of Great Falls, Paris Gibson, understood the importance of the Missouri River concerning settlement, farming/ranching, and mechanical power development.
8. Railroad development brought an end to river navigation. Agriculture flourished because the railroads provided fast and reliable shipment to markets.