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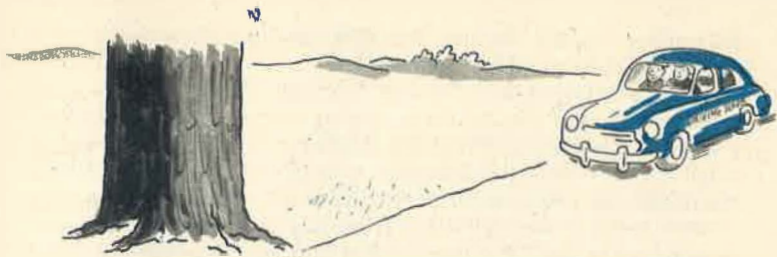
Here, in No. 1 of a new series of "Horseless Carriage Adventures," Charles Harper pictures a scene as familiar in the days of the magic lantern and the stereopticon as in the home movie era—presenting that great transparent gulf of color known to generations of tourists as "The Grand Canyon." Memory quiz: Did you recognize the Model C Ford on the rim?

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FORD TIMES



July 1952



"Oh, Mr. Loveland, Mr. Loveland . . . speak to me . . . speak to me . . ."



Bill O'Malley

. . . did I flunk?"



Road construction along the Lochsa River

Lewis and Clark Highway

by Richard L. Neuberger

paintings by Alfred Dunn

AS HE DRIVES along the road through Black Canyon, Glenn Boy peers ahead intently for a look at the distant ridges which beckon from beyond the rim rock.

Glenn is a U. S. Forest Ranger and he could be searching for the first faint hint of fire. But another reason, too, turns his woodsman's eyes in the direction of the towering uplands. On those knife-like summits of rock and pine, history once was made—indeed, the most eventful history in all the stirring annals of the Pacific Northwest.

The ridges above Black Canyon are pitted with dark gorges,

Pack string heading into Idaho Primitive Area—→

but over this perilous route in 1805 staggered a column of hungry men and one slender Indian girl with a papoose seven months old on her back. They searched for a portal to the legendary Western Ocean, and the lean adventurer who led them carried a banner with a strange device, a banner never before seen in that vast wilderness. His name was Meriwether Lewis and the banner bore fifteen stripes of red and white and fifteen gleaming stars.

So this is why the tall forest ranger slows his automobile and looks upward in tribute toward the lofty Lolo Trail, when he wheels through the chasm carved by the murmuring Lochsa Fork of the Clearwater River. It was this fork which Lewis and his fellow Army officer William Clark called *Kooskooskee*, the stream that runs fast and clear.

No water could be clearer than that which surges in the Lochsa. Legend tells us that when Lewis and Clark dropped into this river one of the medals which President Jefferson intended as a gift for Indian chiefs, the words "Peace and Friendship" still could be read as they glistened from the river bottom. If a modern wayfarer boasting 20/20 vision were to repeat the deed today with a coin, perhaps he could discern through the marvelously transparent mountain water the date that the money was minted.

Not so long ago it took a remote pilgrimage by horseback or on foot to flip a coin into the Lochsa. Now it can be done from the comfortable seat of a sedan.

Up this stream of crystal-clear water and great tradition threads a road. For twenty-three miles eastward from the Idaho town of Kooskia, which is on State Highway 9, the road follows the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River. At the trading post of Lowell, twin streams merge their foaming resources to form the Middle Fork. One is the Lochsa, and this the road follows. The other is the Selway, and five miles up this companion stream stands Fenn Ranger Station, an oasis of trim buildings in the dense timber.

For twenty-three more miles the twenty-six-foot gravel road, gently graded and gracefully curved, pursues the Lochsa toward its snowy birthplace. This is farther than any other improved highway penetrates into the most immense primitive area remaining in the United States. At the upper

Swimming in the Lochsa—cold but thrilling—→



Selway Falls on the Lewis and Clark Highway→

end of Black Canyon, the road trickles off into steep slopes. A gap of thirty-two miles exists before the other prong of the road is reached. There, men have constructed a similar thoroughfare westward for approximately twenty-five miles out of Lolo Hot Springs, Montana.

Only one name could be given this road, and engineers of the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads looked at maps of the first American expedition across the continent and gave it: the Lewis and Clark Highway.

For many miles the road and the tortuous Lolo Trail, where Lewis and Clark nearly perished of starvation, are as much sisters under the skin as the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady. The road clings to the water-level grade along the Lochsa. The trail peers down from the ridges above the chasm.

Idaho's people regard the Lewis and Clark Highway as a road of destiny. No state is so barricaded by majestic but impassable solitudes. Idaho can be crossed from east to west by U. S. 30 near its southern boundary. In the north U. S. 10 spans the state. Yet for 412 miles between Boise and Coeur d'Alene not one all-year road traverses this sovereignty of vast distances and imperial scenery.

The Lewis and Clark Highway, when the breach of thirty-two miles has been closed, will provide the first permanent avenue by either road or rail across Central Idaho, a domain of mile-deep canyons and soaring crags. Furthermore, it will slice forty-four motoring miles off the northern route across the country between Portland and Minneapolis.

Completion of the project relies upon Congressional and state appropriations. It has been an expensive undertaking. Built to the same Public Roads standards as the Alaska Highway, in some places it has cost two or three times as much a mile as that wilderness corridor. On one particular stretch in Black Canyon, where blasting powder had to notch a granite shelf, the outlay was \$214,000 a mile. The average cost has been \$115,000. The surface of the Lewis and Clark Highway now is deep gravel; eventually it will be asphalt.

But even before construction crews from east and west meet in some lonely abyss along the Lochsa, the road offers easy access to superlative fishing, hunting and camping. In addition, the Lochsa is dotted with sandy beaches. The

Train runs from Lewiston along the Clearwater→



Road workers' camp along highway →

crystalline water tempts swimmers. Thomas H. MacDonald, commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads, plunged in at the age of sixty and pronounced it a "handsome" bath, paraphrasing Meriwether Lewis. My wife was equally enthusiastic about her dip in these fair riffles which guided the original westbound Americans.

Lewiston, Idaho, is the taking-off place, and Lewiston (population, 12,910) may be reached either over U. S. 95 or U. S. 410.

From Lewiston a paved road thrusts east and south in a wide half-moon arc beside the foaming Clearwater. Could there possibly be a better locale for Junior's history lesson than the back seat of a car, with maps spread out on a patient maternal lap?

There, just off the road, is where Lewis and Clark felled five logs of Ponderosa pine so that white men might voyage for the first time on the headwaters of the Columbia River system. Here is Lolo Creek, where the explorers glimpsed navigable shallows after weeks of footsore wandering in the mountains. And down on the Clearwater's bright shore a surveyor of the Corps of Army Engineers felt his hair stand on end when he unearthed a rusty branding iron that went all the way back to America's early stirrings toward the sunset. This was its inscription:

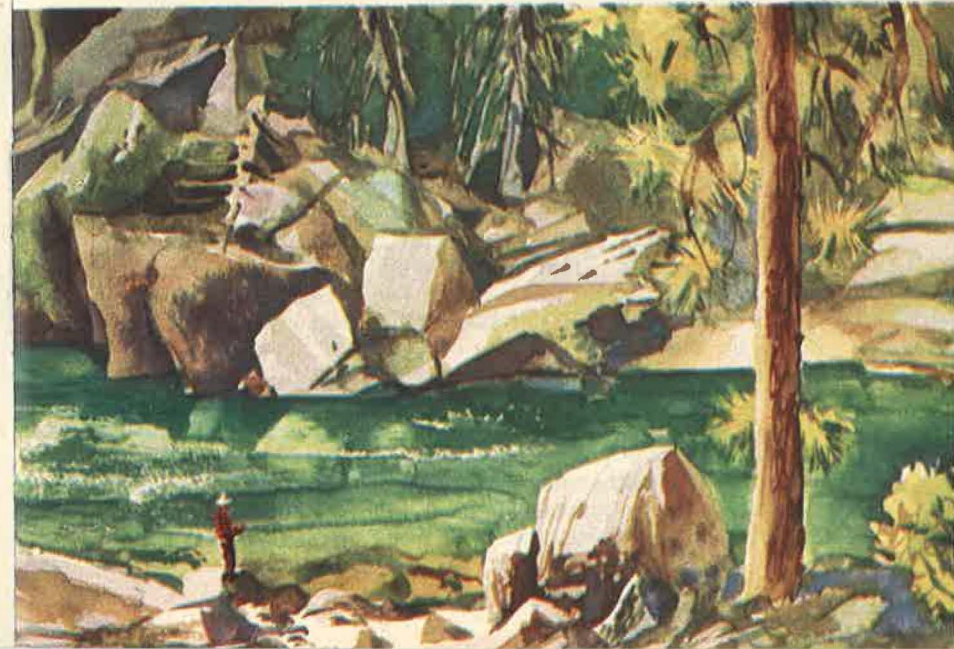
U. S.

Capt. M. Lewis

At Kooskia civilization runs out. This is the last of the pavement. At Kooskia the motorist hears for the final time the bray of the bouncing one-car Diesel train, its cab striped a candy-cane red and white, which brings the mail and the *Daily Tribune* the sixty picturesque miles from Lewiston. At Kooskia the grub box and the medicine kit must be stocked. There are no supermarkets between Kooskia and the present end of the Lewis and Clark Highway, forty-three miles directly eastward in the fastnesses.

Above the union of the Lochsa and Selway Rivers sprawls a gabled house built of scoured stones, taken from the riverbeds. It is not precisely the kind of house one might expect to find in these forests where Lewis and Clark suffered their sternest hardships.

Fishing the scenic Selway River →



Early American period furniture graces the quiet living room. A maple sideboard is decorated with Sheffield silver and Dresden china. Pliable coin spoons hang on the walls. A pendulum clock ticks ceremoniously in the corner of a pavilion-sized kitchen. Poster beds with crocheted spreads can be seen off the carpeted hallways. Portraits of stately ladies are omnipresent.

How did the Virginia of colonial days get to the Nez Perce National Forest?

Frank Bowles, six-foot two-inch son of a homesteader on the Lolo Trail, married a Virginia belle. But when he looked out on the orderly countryside of the Old Dominion, he could hear in his ears the persistent trilling of the distant Lochsa. The broad fields of alfalfa seemed to stiffen into the ramparts of Black Canyon. Finally he persuaded his wife to go back with him to the wild realm which beckoned so urgently.

It was exactly 3,000 miles from Petersburg, Virginia, to the wooden bridge across the Lochsa which leads to Fenn Ranger Station. Bowles completed the journey at the wheel of a discarded school bus, with his wife's piano and hutch and bedsteads tied down where once the pupils had sat. Trout fishermen and elk hunters looked up bewildered as the yellow vehicle, with the legend, "Prince George County, Virginia," merrily spattered gravel into the river.

"I guess I really followed in Meriwether Lewis' footsteps," statuesque Butler Bowles reminisces now. "He trekked from Albemarle, Virginia, to the Lolo Trail and I migrated from Virginia to the Lewis and Clark Highway!"

In spite of the high-standard gravel road into the core of the Nez Perce National Forest, these are not solitudes where the supply of wildlife has been ruinously marauded. But rich though this domain may be in trout and whitefish and mule deer, its greatest single resource is history. The lurking presence of the Lolo Trail is felt by everyone who drives over the incompleated Lewis and Clark Highway or who bulldozes it a little wider.

The mountain river murmurs plaintively in its trough of scrubbed rock. Motorists hear the same lilting lullaby which the first frontiersmen listened to in the era when the United States was very young.

. . . So the Lochsa flows to the Middle Fork. The Middle Fork flows to the Snake. The Snake flows to the Columbia. And the Columbia flows on to the sea. ■