



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**

# Boaters' Guide

Fort Benton to Judith Landing  
Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument





*“As we passed on it seemed as if those  
seen of visionary enchantment  
would never have an end...”*

Meriwether Lewis, May 31, 1805



# The Upper Missouri River: Flowing with History and Adventure

Welcome to the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. It's a place where American Indians made their homes for centuries. It's a place where Lewis and Clark walked, camped and wrote about 200 years ago. It's a place where mountain men climbed the river rim and caught their first glimpse of the snow-crested Rocky Mountains to the west. It's a place where generations of Montana ranchers have made their homes.

The Upper Missouri River remains a place where time seems to move a little slower, and history and adventure greet you around each bend of the river.



The Missouri is the longest river in the United States; flowing more than 2,500 miles from its source on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains near Three Forks, Montana, to its confluence with the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Missouri. A 149-mile segment of Montana's Upper Missouri was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in 1976. This powerful river highway and portions of its adjacent, rugged uplands now make up the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, which was established in 2001.

The monument's 375,000 acres of public land contain a spectacular array of plant life, wildlife, unique geologic features, endless recreational opportunities and important historical and cultural values. The expansive, dramatic landscape retains much of its unspoiled character, thanks to the care and stewardship of modern-day Montana ranching families, the land management professionals of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the thoughtful use by awe-inspired visitors. It's a place where we connect the West of the past, with the West of today.

The Upper Missouri landscape you'll see remains largely unchanged from what Lewis and Clark saw 200 years ago. If properly cared for, Meriwether Lewis' "visionary enchantment" of the Upper Missouri will remain, while needed natural resources are put to use.

The BLM is entrusted with managing the public lands within the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. We cherish this remote, beautiful part of the country, and we expect you will, too. We hope your visit to the Upper Missouri is safe and pleasant, and that you'll find your own unique kind of enchantment each time you return.

# How to Use This Boaters' Guide

If you are well prepared, your trip on the Upper Missouri River can be an experience full of pleasure and discovery. If you are careless, however, this can be a very tough, even dangerous, trip. Please read the next section, "What You Need To Know Before Your Trip," before you launch.

The remainder of this guide is intended to enrich the Upper Missouri experience for both new and well-seasoned river floaters. It contains safety tips, up-to-date maps, suggestions about camping and interpretive information to make your trip more enjoyable.

After an introductory section, this Boaters' Guide provides two fold-out maps and 21 one-page maps of the river. These maps show the location of various features, the corresponding river mile, and land status (ownership). The information in much of this guide is keyed to features by "river mile" which is the distance along the river traveling downstream (generally west to east) from Fort Benton, Montana (mile 0), to the Judith Landing Public Access Site and Campground (mile 88.5).



Features along the river are identified and discussed in text by river mile. If appropriate, their location is further identified to the left or right of the downstream bow of a boat (for example, mile 41.5 L or mile 63.0 R). In addition, the popular stretch of the river between Coal Banks Landing (mile 41.5) and Judith Landing (mile 88.5) is frequently referred to as the "White Cliffs" section of the Upper Missouri since it contains many spectacular sandstone formations that resemble stone castles and ancient masonry pillars.

As a designated Wild and Scenic River as well as a National Monument, the Upper Missouri has three different classifications (Wild, Scenic and Recreational) that are generally based on shoreline development. The Wild sections of the river are from miles 52 to 84.5, 92.5 to 99.5, and 104.5 to 128.5. These sections are generally inaccessible except by water and have essentially primitive shorelines. The Scenic sections of the river are from miles 99.5 to 104.5 and 128.5 to 149. These sections have shorelines that are still largely primitive and undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. The Recreational sections of the river are from miles 0 to 52 and 84.5 to 92.5. These sections may have some development along their shoreline and are accessible in places by roads.

The Upper Missouri is unique in the Wild and Scenic River system because the boundaries from Coal Banks Landing to James Kipp Park range from “rim-to-rim” rather than the standard quarter mile from either shoreline. The boundary from Fort Benton to Coal Banks is from “bank-to-bank.”

Two large pull-out maps in this guide show the entire river corridor. They are included because public land within the Monument extends beyond the immediate banks of the river into upland areas in many locations, especially on the lower stretch of the river. You are welcome to hike on public land, but remember, there is also private land along the river, and you cannot go beyond the ordinary high-water mark of the river onto private land without prior landowner permission. Via color-coding, the maps delineate private land from BLM land or State of Montana land. Most of the boundaries between public and private land are not marked by signs, and it's your responsibility to know where you are.

On many of the pages we have left large blank spaces where you are encouraged to write your own observations. You, too, are an explorer. Your journal may not become as famous as Lewis and Clark's, but recording what you see and feel along this trip may mean more to you and your family than any other story of the Upper Missouri.



# **What You Need To Know Before Your Trip**

## **ACCESS**

Public access sites to the Upper Missouri River are limited, so you need to plan ahead about where you will put in and take out. Private landowners along the river are able to enter the river from their own land, but visitors must use the developed public access sites. The principal launch points include: Fort Benton Canoe Launch (mile 0), Fort Benton Motorboat Launch (mile 1.4), Wood Bottom (mile 20.3), Coal Banks Landing (mile 41.5), Judith Landing (mile 88.5), and the James Kipp Recreation Area (mile 149). Additional launch opportunities at Virgelle Ferry (mile 39.1) and McClelland (or Stafford) Ferry (mile 101.8) make trips of various lengths possible.

Many boaters choose one of the widely available commercial services to either shuttle their vehicle or bring themselves, their boats and gear back from take-out locations to their launch points. You can find out about these shuttle services at the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center in Fort Benton. Cars can be parked in unguarded lots at each of the public launch/take-out locations.



## **CAMPING OPPORTUNITIES**

Four types of camping opportunities are available along the Upper Missouri:

**Level 1 - Developed Public Access Sites and Campgrounds:** These sites are accessible by road with a full range of developments that may include parking lots, boat ramps, vault toilets, campsites for tents and RVs and picnic facilities. These sites include the Fort Benton Canoe Launch, Fort Benton Motorboat Launch, Wood Bottom, Decision Point, Coal Banks Landing, Lower Woodhawk, Judith Landing, and the James Kipp Recreation Area.

**Level 2 - Developed Boat Camps:** These sites are accessible to the public only by boat. The sites (Little Sandy, Lone Tree Coulee, Eagle Creek, Hole-in-the-Wall, and Slaughter River) contain vault toilets, metal fire rings and, occasionally, open-air shelters. The BLM has administrative road access to these sites.

**Level 3 - Primitive Boat Camps:** These sites are accessible only by boat and provide only a metal fire ring; there are no other developments. These sites include Evans Bend, Senieurs Reach, Black Bluff Rapids, Pablo Rapids, Dark Butte, The Wall, McGarry Bar, Gist Bottom, Upper Woodhawk and Hideaway.

**Level 4 - Dispersed Public Land:** In addition to the developed sites described above, camping is permissible on any of the 90,000 acres of public land adjacent to the river. The absence of development allows opportunities for those seeking a completely primitive experience. If you choose to camp on dispersed land, take special care to leave it exactly as you found it. Please do not build new fire rings; use a gas stove instead. If a fire ring exists, you may use it, but the idea is to use dispersed land in such a way that your presence is not detectable by the next visitor who discovers the site. We are trying to sustain this opportunity for a primitive experience and need your help. Please practice "Leave No Trace" camping. If you need help with these techniques, please give us a call or talk to one of our staff members prior to your trip.

Some camping areas are much more popular than others; especially sites such as Eagle Creek, Hole-in-the-Wall and Slaughter River. These are places where additional floaters will likely be spending the evening. Please be respectful of the other visitors. You can find a description of these major sites in the map section of this guide.

Camp on durable surfaces such as established campsites, sand or gravel. Good campsites are found, not made. If you are part of a larger group, do your best to concentrate your tents, so there is room for others. Avoid spreading out your party along the bank and occupying all the best available spaces.

Pack out everything you bring in, including food scraps, toilet paper, hygiene products and so forth; the "Pack-It-In/Pack-It-Out" rule applies on the Upper Missouri.

## CAMPFIRES

Wood is scarce in the more popular campsites, so a gas stove or charcoal grill is recommended. It's a good idea to collect firewood during the day if you plan an evening fire. Cutting live or standing timber for firewood is not permitted.

Even small fires can leave scars that last a long time. Please use existing fire rings. Make sure your fire is dead out before retiring – drown it with water, stir the remains, drown again and check around the fire ring. Do not leave food, plastic or metal in a fire ring. Before the start of your trip, check with any Montana BLM office to find out if fire restrictions are in effect.



# HIKING OPPORTUNITIES

The public lands within the monument boundaries offer a diversity of hiking opportunities that will satisfy the range of every visitor, from novice hiker to expert adventurer. Visitors are encouraged to explore the unique landscape of the “Breaks” terrain and to see for themselves the spectacles of unchanged “visionary enchantment” so eloquently described by Captain Meriwether Lewis 200 years ago. Keep in mind there are no officially marked or maintained trails within the monument, so visitors must use caution and common sense when hiking and pay attention for the hazards discussed in this guide.



## USE OF MOTORIZED WATERCRAFT

In the Recreational segments of the river, motorized watercraft travel upstream and downstream is allowed year round.

### Open Recreational Segments (Year Round)

- Fort Benton to Pilot Rock (mile 0 to 52)
- Deadman Rapids to Holmes Council Island (mile 84.5 to 92.5)

However, from June 15 through September 15 there are seasonal, motorized watercraft restrictions on the Wild and Scenic segments of the river.

### Seasonally Restricted Wild and Scenic Segments (June 15 - Sept. 15)

- Pilot Rock to Deadman Rapids (mile 52 to 84.5)

**Daily** — Motorized watercraft travel is allowed downstream only at no-wake speeds.

A no-wake speed is defined as a speed where no white water occurs in the path of the vessel or in waves created by the vessel.

In this segment, upstream travel by motorized watercraft is limited to administrative, emergency or law enforcement watercraft only.

- Holmes Council Island to Fred Robinson Bridge (mile 92.5 to 149)

**Thursday, Friday & Saturday** — Motorized watercraft travel is allowed downstream only at no-wake speeds:

**Sunday, Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday** — No motorized watercraft travel is allowed:

Upstream motorized watercraft travel is limited to administrative, emergency or law enforcement travel only.

Again, a no-wake speed is defined as a speed where no white water occurs in the path of the vessel or in waves created by the vessel.

**If you are planning a trip with a motorboat and are unfamiliar with the river, please contact the BLM at (406) 622-4000.** Depending on water levels and the size of your boat, there are inherent dangers with gravel bars, rocks, and other hazards.

## HUMAN WASTE MANAGEMENT

A mandatory portable toilet regulation is in effect for overnight visitors on the river between Fort Benton (mile 0) and the boundary of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (mile 138.8). The portable toilet must be either a washable, reusable toilet system or an approved degradable bag system specifically designed for human waste disposal. All portable toilet waste must be carried out of the river corridor and deposited in an authorized disposal facility. The washable, reusable toilet system may be serviced at James Kipp Recreation Area. Degradable bag systems may be disposed of in dumpsters at Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing and James Kipp Recreation Area.

Vault toilets are located at Wood Bottom, Coal Banks Landing, Little Sandy, Stafford Ferry, Eagle Creek, Hole-in-the-Wall, Slaughter River, Judith Landing and Lower Woodhawk campsites. A composting toilet is available at the Dark Butte campground. We strongly recommend bringing your own supply of toilet paper.

**NOTE: Vault and composting toilets are not authorized disposal facilities.**



# REGISTRATION AND VISITOR FEES

For your own safety, the BLM encourages you to register your party prior to your trip. You can register at the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center, Fort Benton Canoe Launch, Fort Benton Motorboat Launch, Wood Bottom, Coal Banks Landing and Judith Landing. If BLM employees are not present, please use the self-registration boxes at these locations.

There is currently a fee for upstream and downstream travel between Coal Banks Landing and James Kipp Recreation Area. Fee campgrounds include Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing, and James Kipp Recreation Area. Please contact the BLM or consult the Monument webpage for current fee amounts.

## RIVER SAFETY

The Upper Missouri is considered an easy river to float. The Class I rapids along the Upper Missouri are defined as easy, fast moving with riffles and small waves, few obstructions, easily avoided, low risk, and easy self-rescue. However, you should plan carefully to ensure a safe, enjoyable trip.

- Approved personal flotation devices are required for every boater. Children under 12 must wear a life vest at all times.



- Weather can be one of the most hazardous factors on the river. Temperatures during the floating season can range from 32 degrees to 100 degrees. Be prepared for any weather conditions by bringing clothing that can be layered. Don't forget rain gear, a shade hat, long-sleeve shirt and pants, and a thermal layer. The combination of wet clothing and cool temperatures can cause a rapid loss of body heat known as hypothermia. Hypothermia can be deadly, so be familiar with its symptoms and treatment. Bring canned soups, tea or hot cocoa. Exposure to heat and the narrow river valley can cause heat exhaustion. Drink plenty of water and take frequent breaks out of the sun.
- The narrow canyons of the river can hide approaching storms until the last minute. Watch the weather both in front of and behind you. Sudden, violent thunderstorms can whip the river's surface into dangerous whitecaps. Get off the water when you see a storm approaching, especially when lightning is present. Do not take cover under trees during lightning storms. Sudden storms can create flash flooding, so be sure your gear is secured.

- Even in clear weather, moderate-to-strong winds often blow through the river valley. The wind may increase or decrease your travel time. When camping in windy conditions, be sure your tent and boat are tied down and secured or they can blow away. Bring extra food in case your trip duration is increased due to wind.
- Floaters should pay attention to the two ferry crossings on the Upper Missouri (mile 39.1 and 101.8). Be aware of the two low-hanging cables that cross the river in front of each ferry. Also, stay away from the upstream side of each ferry because the strong undercurrents they create can easily submerge your craft.



- While swimming or wading, we recommend you have a companion and wear a personal flotation device. The river has deceptively strong currents with hidden rocks and snags below the surface.
- Take precautions while climbing and hiking on the uplands. Sandstone cliffs are soft, and a fine layer of sand on surfaces makes them slick.
- Limbs from aging cottonwood trees can break without warning. Camps should be located away from the trees, especially during high winds.
- Rattlesnakes are found throughout the river area, and hikers and campers should be careful where they put their hands and feet.

## POTABLE WATER

The BLM recommends you bring adequate drinking water (**one gallon per person per day**) while floating the river. There is usually potable water available at Coal Banks Landing (mile 41.5) and the James Kipp Recreation Area (mile 149). However, the water wells at these two sites are tested monthly during the recreation season to determine if the water is suitable for drinking.

## CLOTHING AND GEAR

Tennis shoes, water sandals or rubber boots are desirable for wear in watercraft, but hiking boots will make exploring shoreline areas easier. Necessities include a shade hat, long-sleeve shirt, long pants, rain gear, jacket, sunscreen, sunglasses, first-aid kit and mosquito repellent. You might also want to consider a mosquito head net and a screen tent. Your gear should be stowed in dry bags (or water-tight containers) to protect it from the elements as well as boating mishaps. You won't want to forget your camera or binoculars, because there's much to see.

# On the River

## BOATING AND RIVER ETIQUETTE

### Sound of Silence

One of the great things about the Upper Missouri is what you don't hear. Only a few places remain where you hear no sounds of human activity. Many people return to the Upper Missouri just to experience the joy of hearing only nature's sounds. When you're floating the river, be respectful of others who are not interested in your noise. In campsites, keep your conversations and revelry under control, especially after dark. Fireworks are prohibited on public land. Here, silence is golden. Leave your boom boxes at home. The sounds of nature are often sublime; by being quiet, you'll hear more, not less.

### Respect for Cultural Resources

A remarkable attraction of the Upper Missouri is the visible presence of remnants of a fascinating cultural history. It's the responsibility of every visitor to protect our common history, so do not touch or move any of the historic features you encounter. These features might be as unassuming as circles of small stones that once held down American Indian tipis; however, they are culturally valuable. Indian rock art (petroglyphs) are particularly fragile, degraded even by the oil on our hands, so please do not touch them. Old homestead sites abound, and you are welcome to explore those on public lands, but please do not displace any of the old tools, boards or remnants of this remarkable homesteading era. Please be aware that there may be some hazards associated with these sites.



### Respect for Private Land and Grazing Cattle

Much of the land adjacent to the Upper Missouri is privately owned. You must have landowner permission before entering private property for any activity. Know where you are on the river by using the maps in this guide. Please respect private land and property rights. Trespassing is against the law.

Private landowners commonly utilize their land for livestock grazing, and many also have permits for grazing their cattle on State of Montana land and BLM land. Livestock grazing is allowed on public land within the monument, so do not be surprised if you see cattle by the river, even in the sections designated as Wild.

## Non-native Invasive Weeds

Noxious weeds dominate many areas in the West. Once they're established, they can take over and completely change the character of an area in a few short years. We want you to help us keep the Upper Missouri River as free as possible from noxious weeds.

Learn to recognize invasive plants. Invasive weeds are opportunistic. They'll hitchhike to an area any way they can. Check your vehicle, clothing, shoes and even your pet for weed seeds before and after visiting the area. Some aquatic invasive species can survive two weeks on dry land, so be careful about transporting wet equipment in and out of the monument. Do your best to clean and dry equipment that comes in contact with water.



## Wildlife and Plants

Observe wildlife from a distance. Remember, it's their home and you're the visitor here. Be a respectful guest. Do not approach, follow or stalk wildlife. Never feed the wildlife. They're better off without your helping hand.

Birds use the islands in the Missouri River for nesting. Please don't disturb them and avoid camping on the islands between April 1 and July 31.

Enjoy, but please don't pick vegetation. Native plants add to the scenery and provide a food source for wildlife and a seed source for regeneration.

## Take Your Time

The Upper Missouri River is a special place, so take your time. Use this guide to plan your trip around the features you'd most like to see. Many afternoons, upstream breezes can slow your downstream progress, so getting an early start when the winds are calm is a good idea. Be ready for an adventure, because that's what the Upper Missouri River is all about.

## ABOUT THE AREA, NATURALLY

### A Living Museum

The Upper Missouri region is an area of contrasts – from the wide, fertile valley below Fort Benton to the scenic White Cliffs downriver from Coal Banks Landing. The stark, rugged badlands below Judith Landing add yet another vista to the northern Montana skyline.

The Upper Missouri's geology, vegetation and wildlife make it a living museum.

Geologically, the land was originally laid down in horizontal layers, the sediment and shorelines of a great inland sea that once covered most of the Great Plains. These layers have since undergone a transformation – folded, faulted, uplifted, modified by red-hot volcanic activity and gouged

and cooled by glaciers. This powerful mix, with erosion added, created the region known as “the Breaks.” The word “Breaks” is a geographical reference that describes landforms that erode or break away from uplands to the river bed below.

*“For here it is too that nature presents to the view of the traveler vast ranges of walls of tolerable workmanship...”*

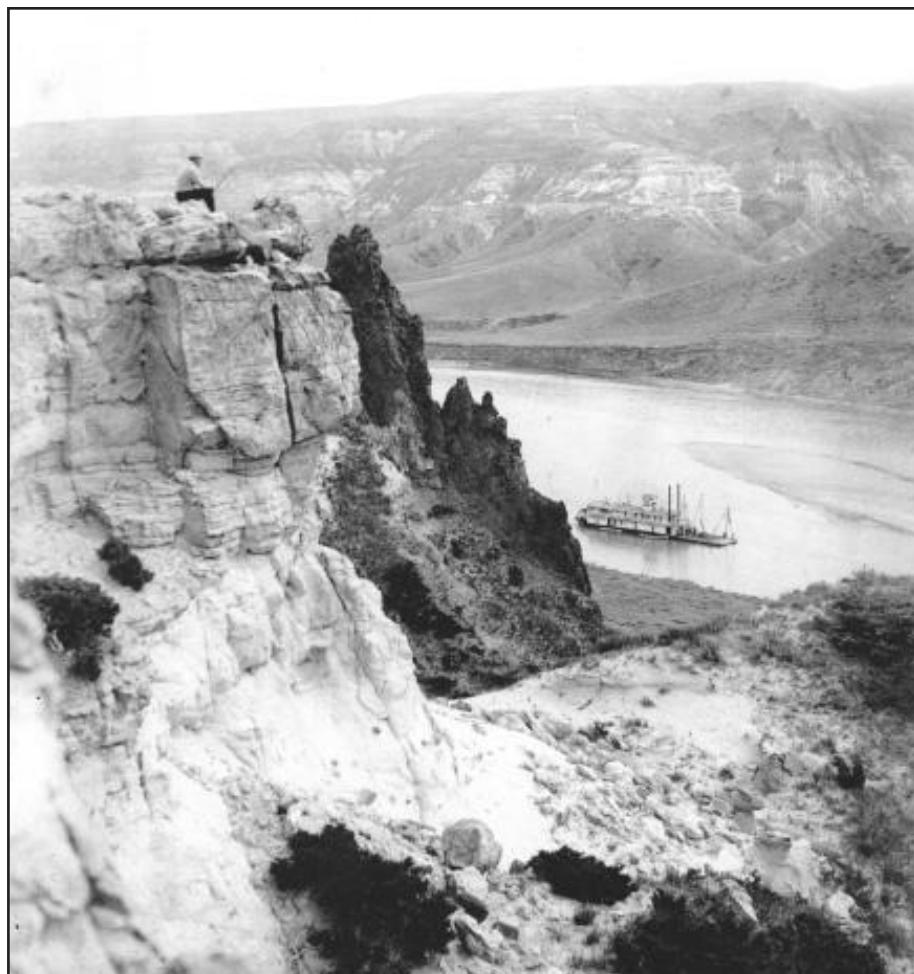
Meriwether Lewis,  
May 31, 1805

The vegetation adds to the diversity along the river. Large groves of cottonwood, ash, boxelder, willow, and an understory of wild rose and snowberry hug the riverbanks between Fort Benton and Coal Banks Landing. The river terraces, bottom lands and valley slopes support mostly sagebrush and grass. High shale cliffs, where the river still slices into the valley slopes, are void of vegetation. The cottonwood groves diminish as you approach the White Cliffs, and the conifers – ponderosa and limber pine, Douglas-fir and juniper – begin to appear in the side coulees (drainages) and along the valley slopes.



The varied vegetation provides habitat for an array of wildlife. Most of the 60 species of mammals, 233 species of birds and 20 species of amphibians and reptiles in the Upper Missouri River valley are dependent in one way or another on the riparian zone – the area of green plants along the river. The most common inhabitants are mule and white-tailed deer, pheasant, waterfowl and raptors. Prairie dogs, greater sage-grouse and antelope live on the plains above the valley. You might also observe elk and bighorn sheep.

Forty-eight species of fish, ranging from tiny minnows (weighing a half-ounce) to immense paddlefish (which can grow to 140 pounds) reside in the river. Anglers are most likely to catch goldeye, sauger, walleye, northern pike, channel catfish, smallmouth bass, carp, and smallmouth buffalo. Other unusual species in the river are the pallid and shovelnose sturgeon and the blue sucker.



## The People

Human occupation of the Upper Missouri River Breaks began more than 12,000 years ago. The area was part of the homeland or hunting grounds of numerous native peoples until around 1900, when Euro-American expansion reached its zenith.

The Upper Missouri was occupied by the Blackfeet, Nakoda (Assiniboine), White Clay (Gros Ventre), Crow, Plains Ojibwa and Cree nations. The region was also frequented for buffalo hunting by the Lakota, Mandan, Arikara and Hidatsa from the eastern plains and from the west by the Kootenai, Salish, Niimiipuu (Nez Perce), Kalispel and Shoshone. Their occupation of this area is evidenced by religious sites, burial sites, pictographs, petroglyphs, riverside habitation sites, tipi rings, rock cairns, buffalo jumps and corrals. Again, please be respectful of the remnants of these special places; they are sacred to many people.

Lewis and Clark followed much of the Upper Missouri River on their historic westward exploration in 1805-06. Today, the Upper Missouri is part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. The Corps of Discovery followed the Missouri from St. Louis to one of its sources in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains of southwest Montana. The Corps traveled the wild and scenic portion of the river westward (upstream) in May and June of 1805. On May 26, 1805, while hiking above present-day Bullwhacker Creek, Captain Clark wrote, "From this point I beheld the Rocky Mountains for the first time with Certainty...."

After failing to discover a northwest water passage to the Pacific Ocean and spending the winter at the mouth of the Columbia River, the Corps came back through Montana in the summer of 1806, on its way home. The explorers parted ways for awhile; Lewis and a small party traveled back down the Missouri, while Clark explored the Yellowstone River to the south. Today's travelers can camp in the same places as the Corps and easily visualize the scenes described in the expedition journals.

*"In many places....we observe on either Side of the river extraodanary walls of a black Semented Stone which appear to be regularly placed one Stone on the other.... [T]hose walls Commence at the waters edge & in Some places meet at right angles."*

William Clark, May 31, 1805

Fur traders quickly followed Lewis and Clark's route, and forts (both trading and military) began to appear along the river. The fur trade spawned the first extensive use of the Missouri River as a road through this wild country. Keelboats, mackinaws, bullboats and canoes plied the upper river for the next two decades, bringing trade items and returning east with a wealth of furs. Steamboats followed in 1831, reaching Fort Union on the eastern border of Montana the next year. Steamboats reached Fort Benton in 1860, and river traffic swelled after gold was discovered in the area a short time later. In 1866, the Luella carried 2.5 tons of gold dust down the Missouri. Valued at \$1.25 million, it was the richest cargo ever to go down the river. The colorful steamboat period on the Upper Missouri ended around 1890, when the railroad punched through the countryside, and dam construction began.

Settlers began arriving after the Civil War. By 1916, almost every bottom along the river with enough level ground to farm had been settled. But farming along the Missouri was a rough way to earn a living. Drought, grasshoppers, poor soils, extreme weather and isolation forced many settlers to give up their farms and move on. Their shacks and cabins stand along the river in somber testimony of dreams that were not meant to be.

Today's residents take special care of their ranchlands along the Upper Missouri River based on their longstanding appreciation for the land and the communities where they live. A special program entitled "Undaunted Stewardship" began in 2002, in anticipation of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial to foster sustainable management of family ranches.

Undaunted Stewardship extends even beyond the Upper Missouri River, working as a statewide partnership involving 19 agricultural and conservation groups in Montana. It is managed and directed by Montana State University, the Montana Stockgrowers Association and BLM. To help preserve historic sites and encourage sustainable stewardship on private rangelands, Undaunted Stewardship certifies farms and ranches that use state-of-the-science land management practices. These

Undaunted Land Stewards protect the long-term health and productivity of Montana's natural resources, preserve historic sites and find ways to share them with the public.

## On-Site Management

You will likely meet park rangers, law enforcement rangers and range technicians during your trip on the Upper Missouri River. Park rangers provide information to visitors, record registrations, assist with search-and-rescue operations, conduct maintenance and a variety of other tasks. They are there to help you. At launch sites, seasonal workers and trained volunteers will help you prepare for your trip. They know the Upper Missouri River well and will be happy to answer questions you might have about the trip.

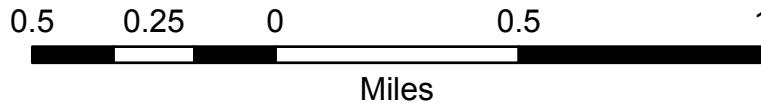


# Map Legend

[Yellow Box]	BLM - Upper Missouri River National Monument	[Green blob icon]	Cottonwood Stands
[Orange Box]	BLM - Outside the Monument	[Red circle icon]	Fire Ring
[Brown Box]	Indian Reservation	[Lewis & Clark icon]	Lewis & Clark Campsites
[Green Box]	USFWS National Wildlife Refuge	[Canoe icon]	Canoe Launch
[Light Blue Box]	State of Montana	[Boat icon]	Motorized Boat Launch
[White Box]	Private	[Purple triangle icon]	Developed Public Access and Campground
[Dark Blue Box]	Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River	[Dark Brown triangle icon]	Developed Boat Camp
[Brown Box]	Scenic and Access Easement	[Orange triangle icon]	Primitive Boat Camp
—	Wild and Scenic Boundary	[Orange question mark icon]	BLM Office
—	Township/Range	▲	Point of Interest
—	Section		
—	40-Foot Interval Contour		
—	River Mile		
—	Perennial Stream		
—·—	Intermittent Stream		

## ROADS

- Paved
- Other



Miles



Kilometers

Scale 1:24,000

Even though every effort is made to depict the road network and other features as accurately as possible, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) cannot guarantee road classification and/or positional accuracy of roads and other features in all cases. No warranty is made by the BLM for use of this data for purposes not intended by BLM.

Foldout map Fort Benton to Coal Banks



Foldout map Coal Banks to Judith





*"Here it is . . . that nature presents to the view of the travelers vast ranges of walls of tolerable workmanship, so perfect indeed are those walls that I should have thought that nature had attempted here to rival the human art of masonry had I not recollect that she had first began her work.... As we passed on it seemed as if those scenes of visionary enchantment would never have an end."*

Meriwether Lewis,  
May 31, 1805



## Upper River Section

### Fort Benton to Coal Banks Landing (miles 0 to 41.5)

The Upper Missouri is a designated Wild and Scenic River with segments classified as Wild, Scenic and Recreational. Your trip from here to Coal Banks Landing will be in a Recreational segment. This segment is busy in early spring and late fall (the primary fishing and hunting seasons). Motorized watercraft use, both upstream and downstream, is allowed year round. Most of the adjacent land in this segment of the river is private land. Remember, any use of private property requires permission from the landowner. It is typically a two-day float from Fort Benton to Coal Banks Landing.

#### River Mile

##### 0 L Chouteau County Fairgrounds Campground and Canoe Launch

This fee campground by the river has a canoe launch, 25 tent sites, 7 RV sites with electric hookups, BLM and county host sites, showers and bathrooms. The contact phone number is (406) 622-5505.

##### 1.0 L Fort Benton, Montana

Fort Benton, Montana, is a fitting starting point for a trip down the Upper Missouri. The city was the upstream terminus for the steamboats that plied the waters of the Missouri from 1859-1890. As the jumping off point for the gold and silver mines of Idaho and Montana, Fort Benton was a wild and wooly conglomerate of adventurers, American Indians, merchants, traders, cowboys and swindlers. The restored main street of Fort Benton is graced by a picturesque riverside city park that hosts vibrant summer markets and monuments to the town's historic past.



##### 1.4 L Fort Benton Motorboat Launch

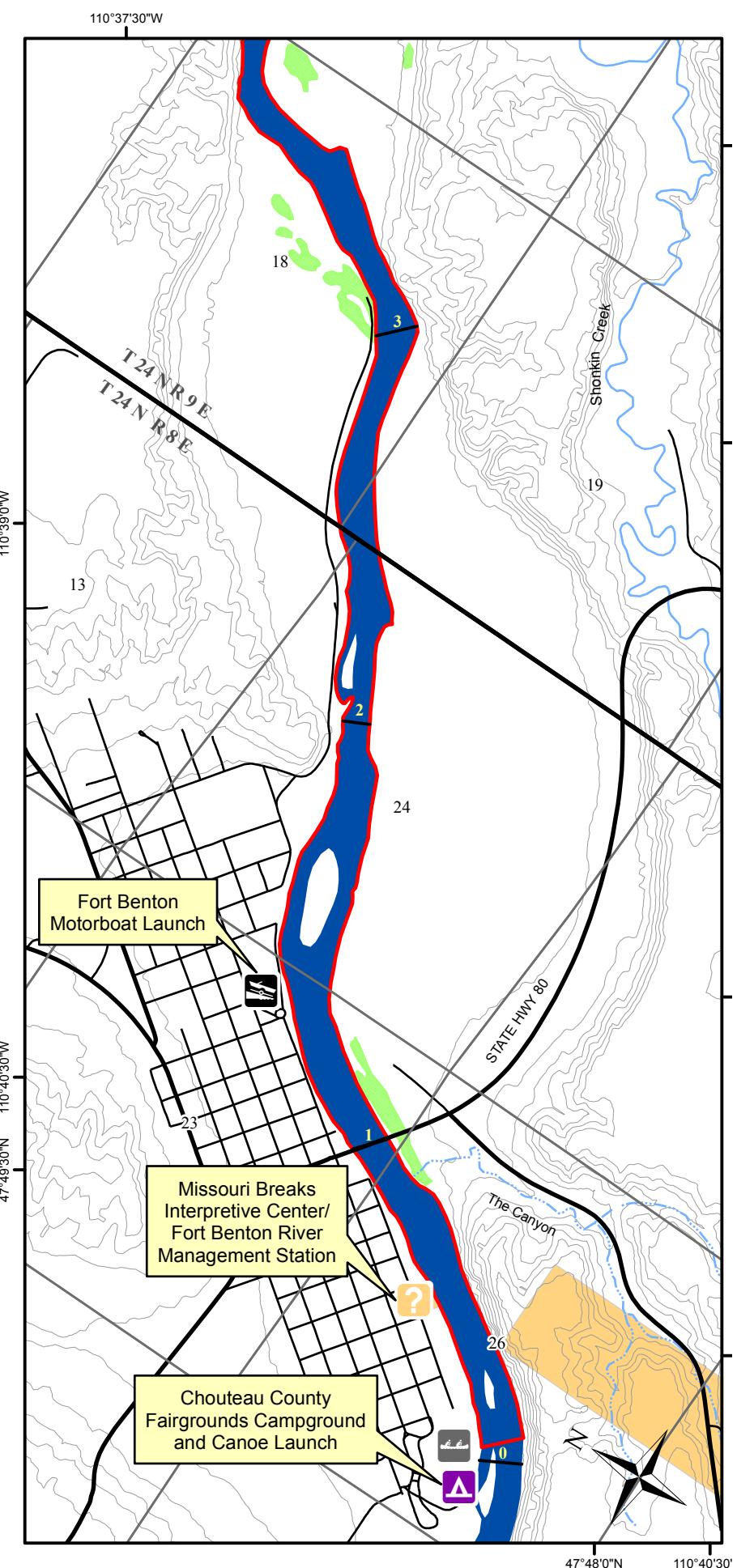
This launch site is located near the city park. If you launch from here, please use the registration box located next to the ramp.

##### 1.9 L Signal Point

Looking downriver from these twin peaks, Fort Benton residents could observe the downstream river corridor for five miles. Smoke from the first steamboat of the season was an anticipated and celebrated event because its arrival replenished the much-desired stocks of whiskey, tobacco and other sundry items.

#### SAFETY NOTE: Water

Make sure you have enough potable water with you for the duration of your trip since there is no potable water source for more than 40 miles. You'll be surprised how much water you'll consume during the course of your journey on the Missouri. One gallon per person per day is recommended.



## River Mile

### 4.8 R Shonkin Creek

Called the Snow River by Lewis and Clark, the stream emerges from the Highwood mountains to the south. Its name is probably derived from “Chantier,” French for “yard of a ship.” Early settlers used the boatyard at the mouth of Shonkin Creek to construct the flat-bottomed mackinaws and dugout canoes used to transport freight downriver.

### 5.7 R Evans Bend Primitive Boat Camp

A primitive boat camp is a campsite accessible only by boat with development limited to a metal fire ring. This site burned in July 2015 when careless campers failed to drown their campfire, killing about 40 acres of mature cottonwood trees. It will take decades for this area to recover, but the BLM is working with partners to re-establish cottonwood trees and improve habitat. Camping is still allowed here, but be cautious of weakened trees. Two more primitive boat camps are found at river miles 16.2 and 19.4 between here and Wood Bottom.



### 6.2 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

During a brief separation of the two leaders, Captain Clark and the expedition’s main party camped near here on June 12, 1805. Captain Lewis, in an effort to locate landmarks the Hidatsas told him about, led a small advance group in search of the Great Falls of the Missouri, which would validate the correct route.

### 8.5 R Harvey’s Trading Post

This post was built in 1846, by Alexander Harvey to compete with the American Fur Company’s Fort Lewis, which was located at present-day Fort Benton. In 1847, in an effort to enhance his operation, Harvey relocated the post closer to Fort Lewis and renamed it Fort Campbell.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

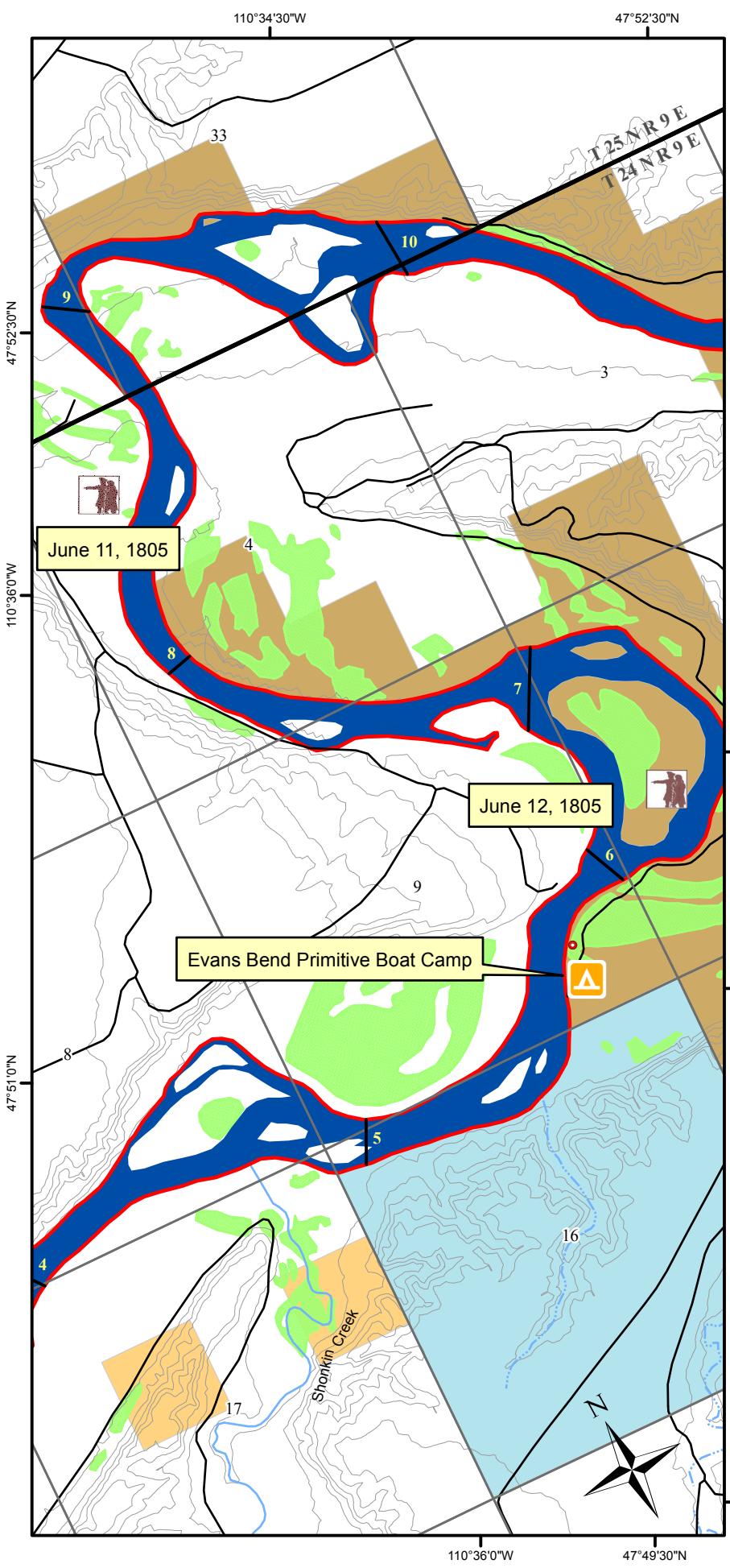
### 8.6 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

Captain Lewis and his party camped here on June 11, 1805. The Teton River is higher here than the Missouri, thus allowing water to run through the underground gravels and bubble up to form Grog Springs. The spring water was used by Captain Lewis to mix a potion of boiled chokecherry bark, which he drank to cure his stomach troubles.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

### 9.0 L Cracon du Nez, “Bridge of the Nose” in French

The name derives from the narrow ridge dividing the Teton River drainage from the Missouri. This ridge served as a passageway for Blackfeet Indians camped on the Teton traveling to trade at Fort Benton.



## River Mile

### 11.1 R Fort Fox-Livingston

The Union Fur Company built this small post in 1843 to compete with Fort MacKenzie just down river. It only survived one trading season.

### 11.5 L Rowe's Landing

This landing was used by steamboats to replenish their wood supply on their route to Fort Benton. The landing was later used by dredge boat crews to improve navigation of the river channel.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

### 14.0 L Fort MacKenzie

Built by David Mitchell in 1832, Fort MacKenzie was the main trading post in Blackfeet country until it was burned in 1844. During its tenure, trade changed from beaver to buffalo. Prince Maximilian and the artist Karl Bodmer visited the fort in 1833, where Bodmer painted scenes of intertribal warfare that occurred during their stay.

In 1837, Blackfeet Indians were exposed to small pox when a keelboat loaded with contaminated trade-goods arrived at the fort. The disease spread quickly through the Blackfeet Nation. The results were horrific. More than two-thirds (6,000) of the Blackfeet people are estimated to have been killed by the disease.

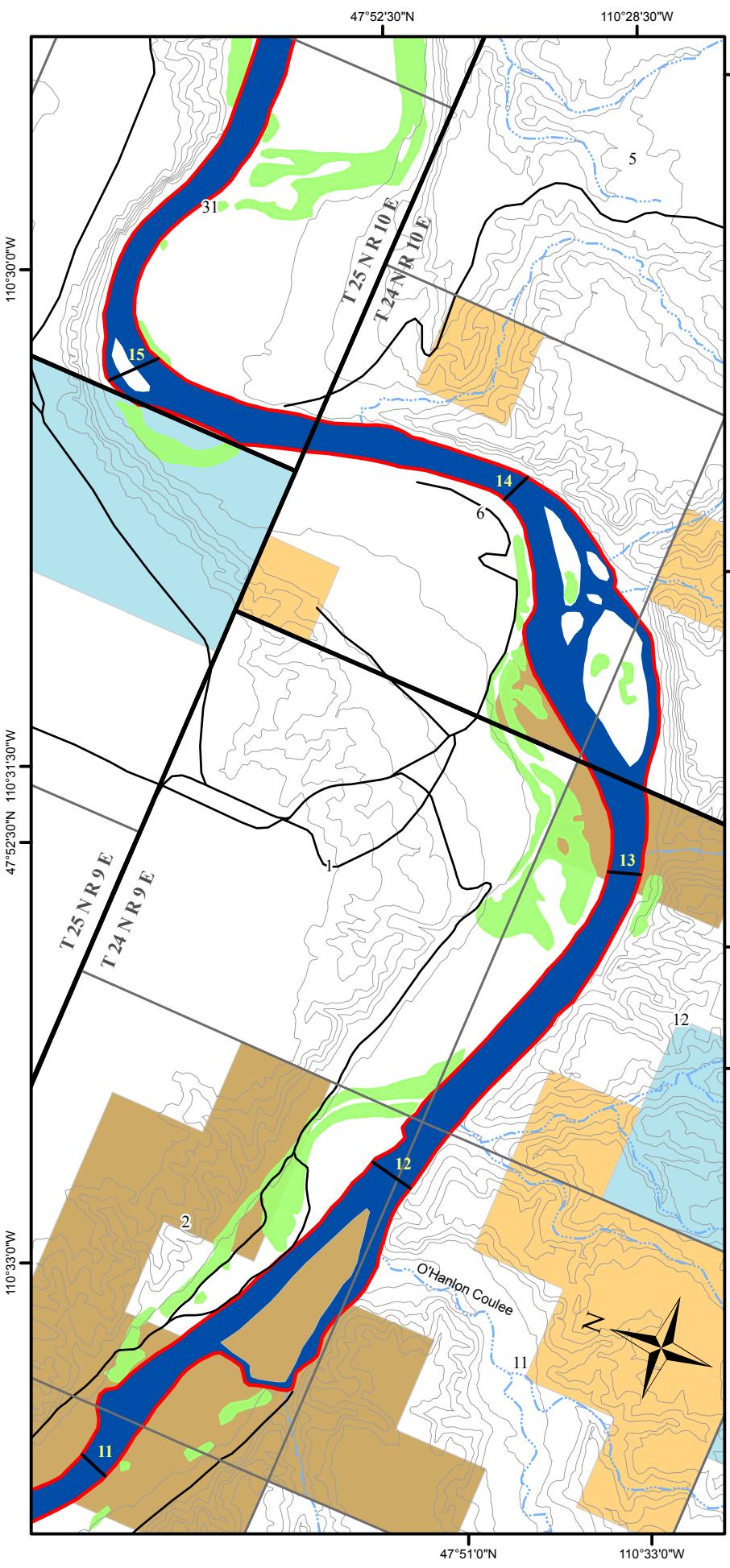
The fort was abandoned and burned in 1844, after relations with the Blackfeet soured, making continued trading at the fort impossible.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

### *Personal Journal Notes*

#### **SAFETY NOTE: Rattlenakes**

On occasion you may encounter the prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) along the Upper Missouri River. This species was frequently encountered by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Unless provoked or surprised, the prairie rattlesnake is typically non-aggressive. Be aware when walking thought tall vegetation, among rock outcroppings or around old homesteads. Use caution when gathering firewood.



## River Mile

### 16.2 R Senieur's Reach Primitive Boat Camp

This campsite has a metal fire ring and is within an enclosure, a fenced area built to exclude livestock.

### 18.5 R Black Bluffs

This long exposure of Colorado shale runs along the last stretch of the river before the mouth of the Marias River. The shale contains many fossils from the Silurian period.

### 19.4 L Black Bluff Rapids Primitive Boat Camp

This site is located at the upriver end of a stretch of immature cottonwoods. It is a nice alternative to Wood Bottom (river mile 20.3 L) if you are seeking a more primitive camping experience.

### 20.3 L Wood Bottom Developed Public Access Site

Wood Bottom is a developed public access site and campground. It has a graveled parking area and boat ramp, a vault toilet and metal fire rings. The site is accessible to the public by an all-weather road.

### 20.9 L Hiking Opportunity: Decision Point Overlook Trail

Land your canoe on river left immediately after floating under the Loma Bridge. From here it is about a 1/2-mile hike up the county road to the Decision Point parking area where there is an interpretive kiosk. A 1/4-mile loop trail tops out on a ridge overlooking the Marias and Missouri rivers. Several interpretative panels provide historic information on the town of Ophir, Fort Piegan and the Lewis and Clark 10-day encampment. It marks the location of the 2005 Lewis and Clark Bicentennial National Signature Event.

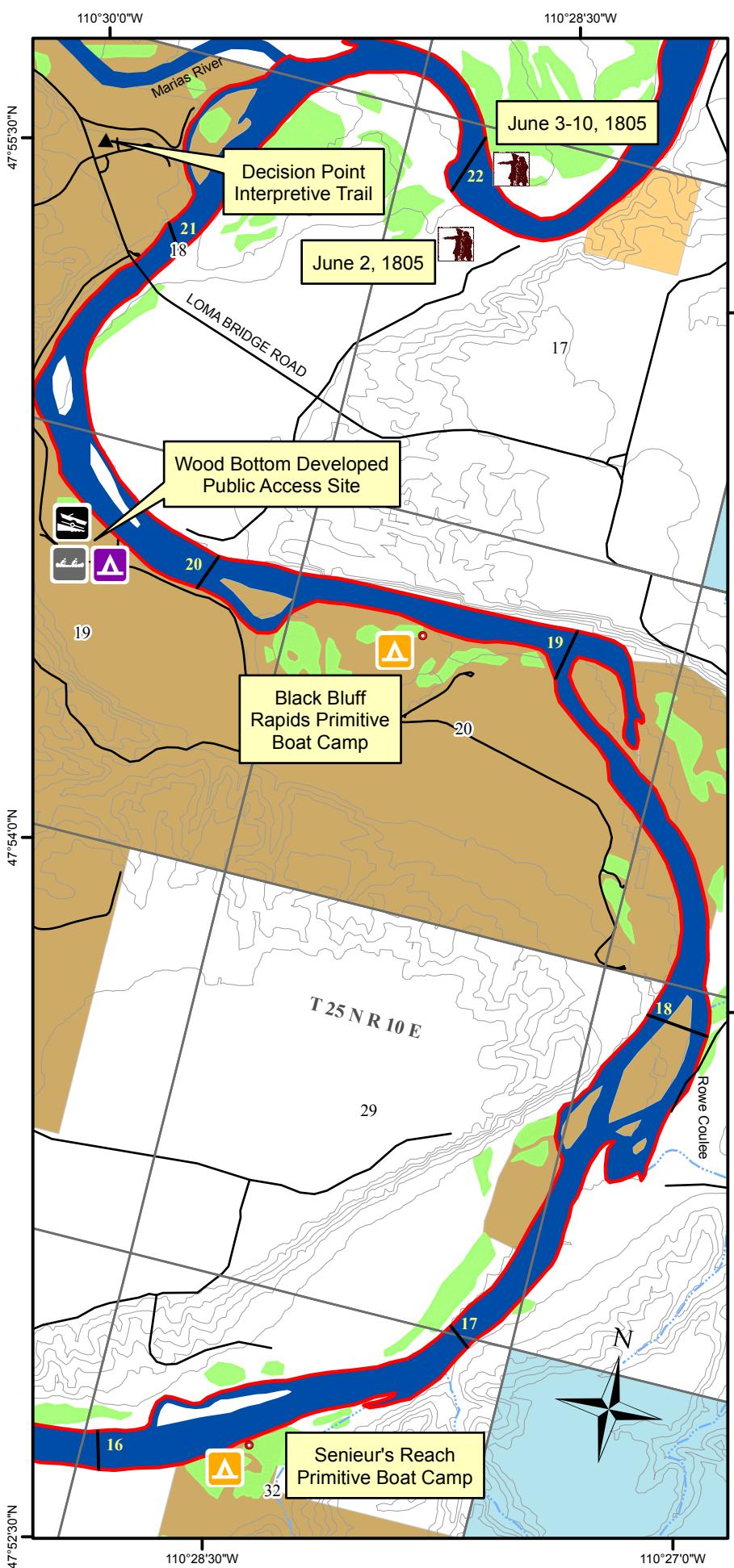
### 21.0 L The Town of Ophir

In 1865, the town of Ophir, located at the confluence of the Teton, Marias and Missouri rivers, was going to rival Fort Benton as the head of navigation on the Missouri River. However, plans for the town were abandoned after the construction crew was attacked and killed by Blood warriors seeking retaliation for the murder of several tribal members in and around Fort Benton.

### 22.0 L Decision Point - Corps of Discovery Campsite, June 3-10, 1805

[Lewis] June 3, 1805 "This morning early we passed over and formed a camp on a point formed by the junction of two large rivers...." The Expedition stayed at this site for 10 days trying to determine which river would lead to the Northwest Passage. The entire crew felt the right fork, the Marias, was the true Missouri. However, after further exploration, the two captains determined the south fork, the Missouri, was the correct route. Once this decision had been made, Lewis decided to name the right fork Maria's River after his cousin Maria Wood. At some point the apostrophe was dropped and the river became known as Marias, pronounced "Mu ri us." Their decision was the right one, and they moved farther up the Missouri toward the Great Falls.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**



## 22.1 R Corps of Discovery Campsite

Before arriving at Decision Point, the expedition had another threatening encounter with the notorious grizzly bear on June 2, 1805. Lewis wrote, "The bear was very near catching Drewyer; it also pursued Charbono who fired his gun in the air as he ran but fortunately eluded the vigilance of the bear by secreting himself very securely in the bushes until Drewyer finally killed it by a shot in the head...." Being too late in the evening for further exploration, the expedition camped in a grove of cottonwoods opposite to the entrance of the Marias River.

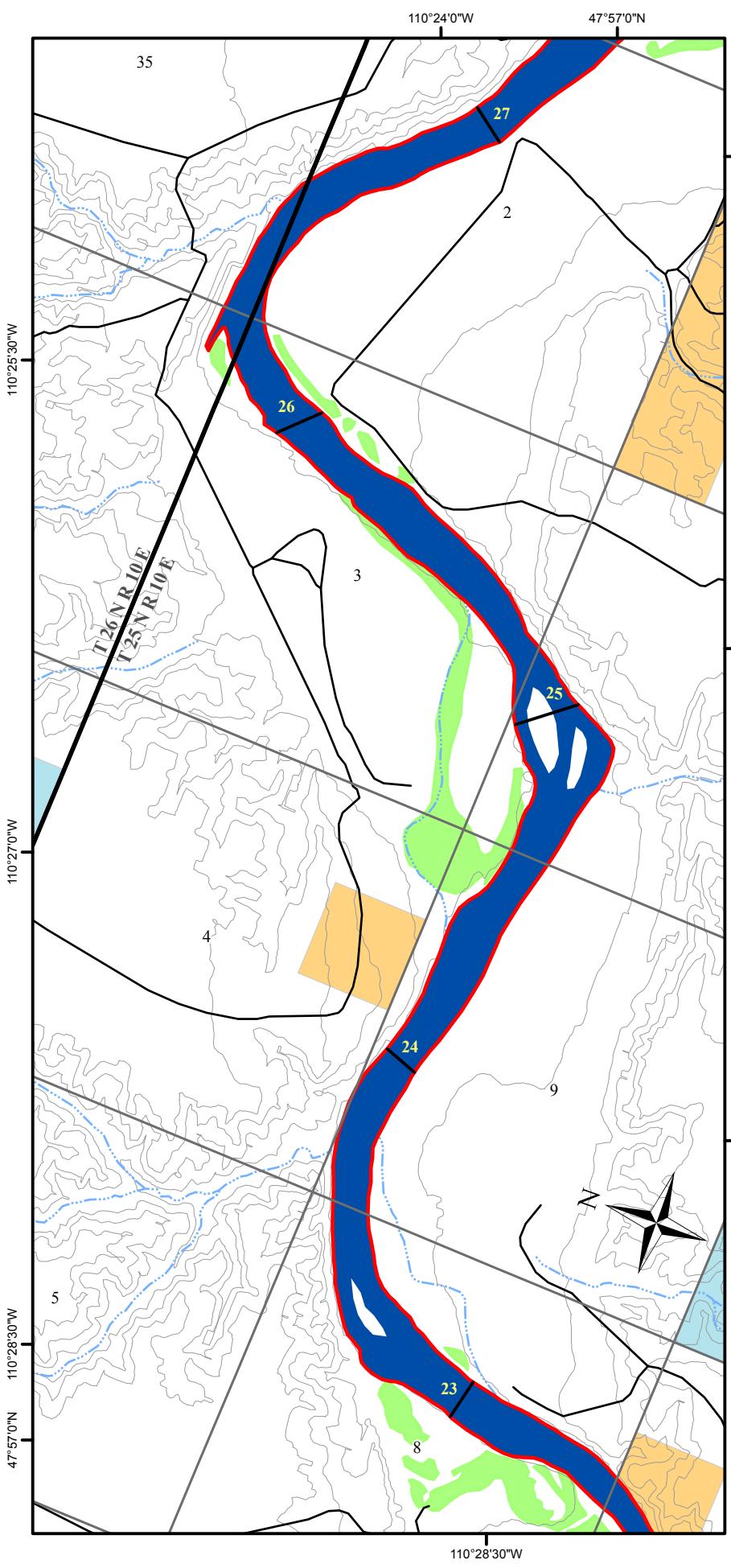
**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

## 22.5 L Fort Piegan

Built in 1831, Fort Piegan was the first American post to secure the coveted trading relations with the Blackfeet. James Kipp and a crew of 75 men constructed it near the mouth of the Marias. The post, although successful in its first year, was abandoned due to fear of Blackfeet unrest instigated by the rival British Hudson Bay Company.



## *Personal Journal Notes*



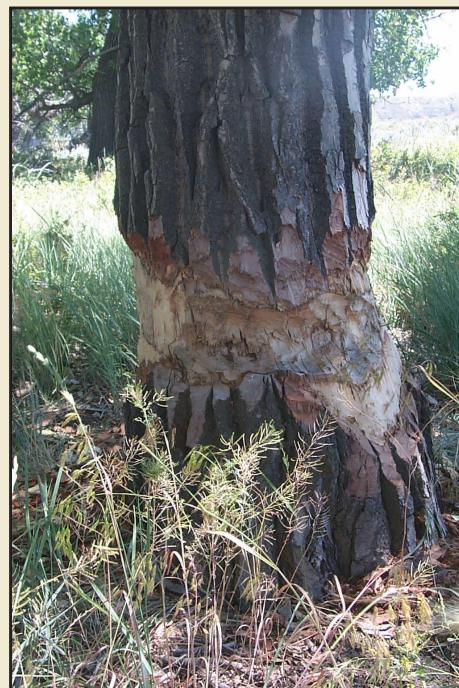
## Missouri River Natural History: Cottonwoods and Islands

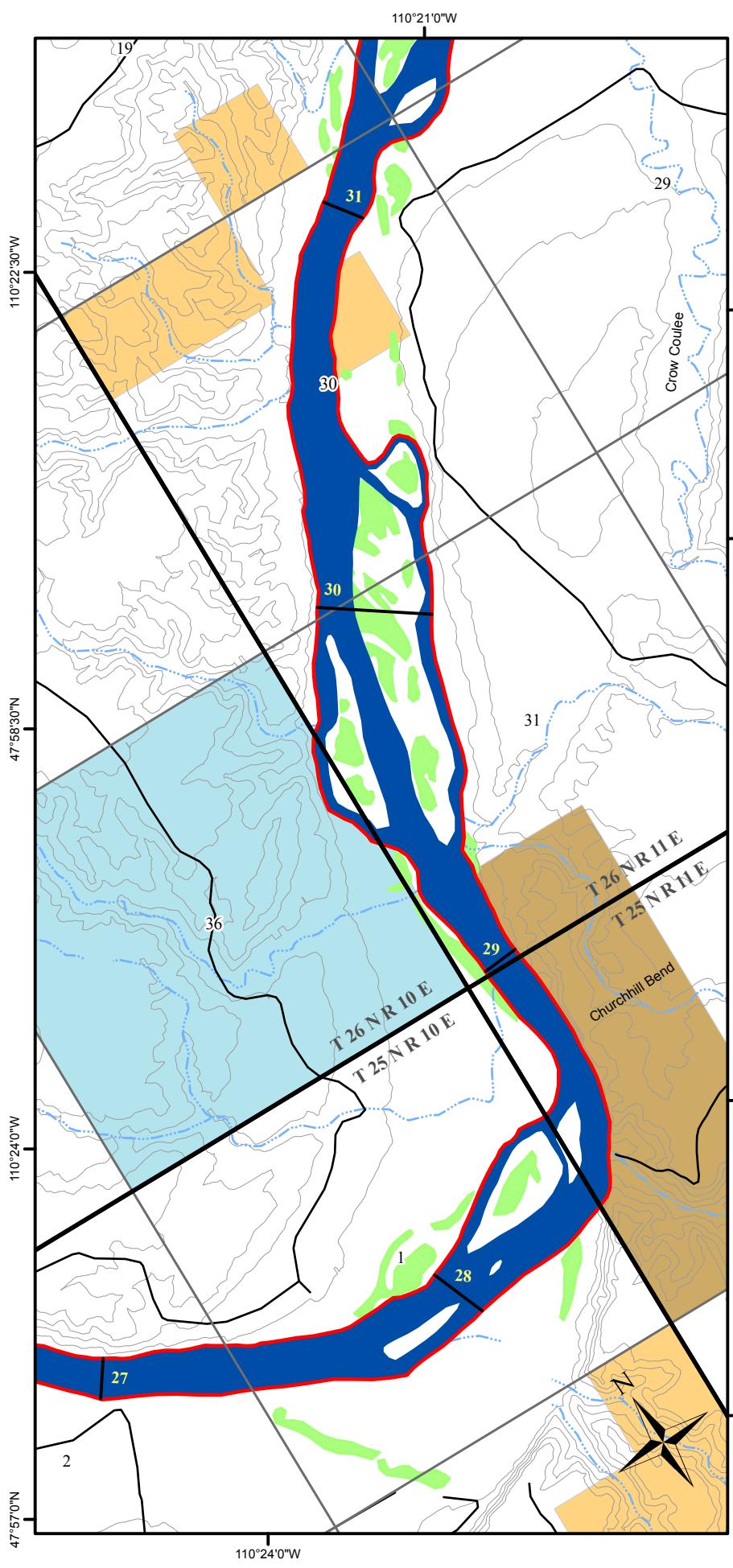
Prior to the construction of major dams on the Missouri River, spring floods would reform river channels and create new islands and gravel bars. The big floods of 1908, 1953 and 1964 left lasting legacies of transformed stream sides and riparian vegetation. The floods' bank building action created cottonwood seedbeds sufficiently high above the river that winter ice jams would not slice off the young seedlings in subsequent years. The condition of riparian vegetation is of vital concern to managers and visitors to the Upper Missouri, since it provides habitat for wildlife, regulates ecological functions and provides beauty and shade to visitors. In addition to the plains cottonwood trees (*Populus deltoides*), other important plants provide food and shelter for wildlife. Willows, green ash, boxelder, snowberry, silver sagebrush, Woods rose, and red-osier dogwood are important woody species, and cattail, bulrush, and sedges provide cover for waterfowl, amphibians and small mammals.



During the steamboat era after the Civil War, "woodhawkers" sold cords of wood along the river to steamboat captains to fuel their

boilers. Although a significant proportion of cottonwood was cut for the steamboats, much of the floodplain had recovered its potential to grow cottonwood by the mid-1900s. Recent flood control measures, however, have severely limited opportunities for cottonwood regeneration, and young replacement stands of cottonwoods are relatively rare. In addition, cottonwood trees are commonly targeted by beavers; you will likely see many signs of beaver activity along the river.





## River Mile

### 32.6 R Corps of Discovery Campsite

On the return trip, the Corps of Discovery separated, with Captain Lewis leading one party to the Great Falls and subsequent exploration of the Marias River country while Captain Clark led the other party to explore the Yellowstone River. At the Great Falls, Lewis split his party, leading three men to explore the Marias headwaters while the others proceeded around the falls and down the Missouri River to retrieve caches of supplies deposited the summer before. After their reunion near Fort Benton, the Lewis party continued down the Missouri, camping at this site on July 28, 1806.

This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.

### Modern Cultural History: Farm and Ranch Families

Much of the private land along this stretch of the river is owned by ranching and farming families, whose agricultural operations are a lynchpin of local economies and lifestyles. Many of the agricultural operations along



the Upper Missouri combine grain growing and livestock, with wheat and barley as common cereal crops, and cow-calf operations dominating livestock production. Cattle may congregate along rivers for watering during summer months, but many ranchers are

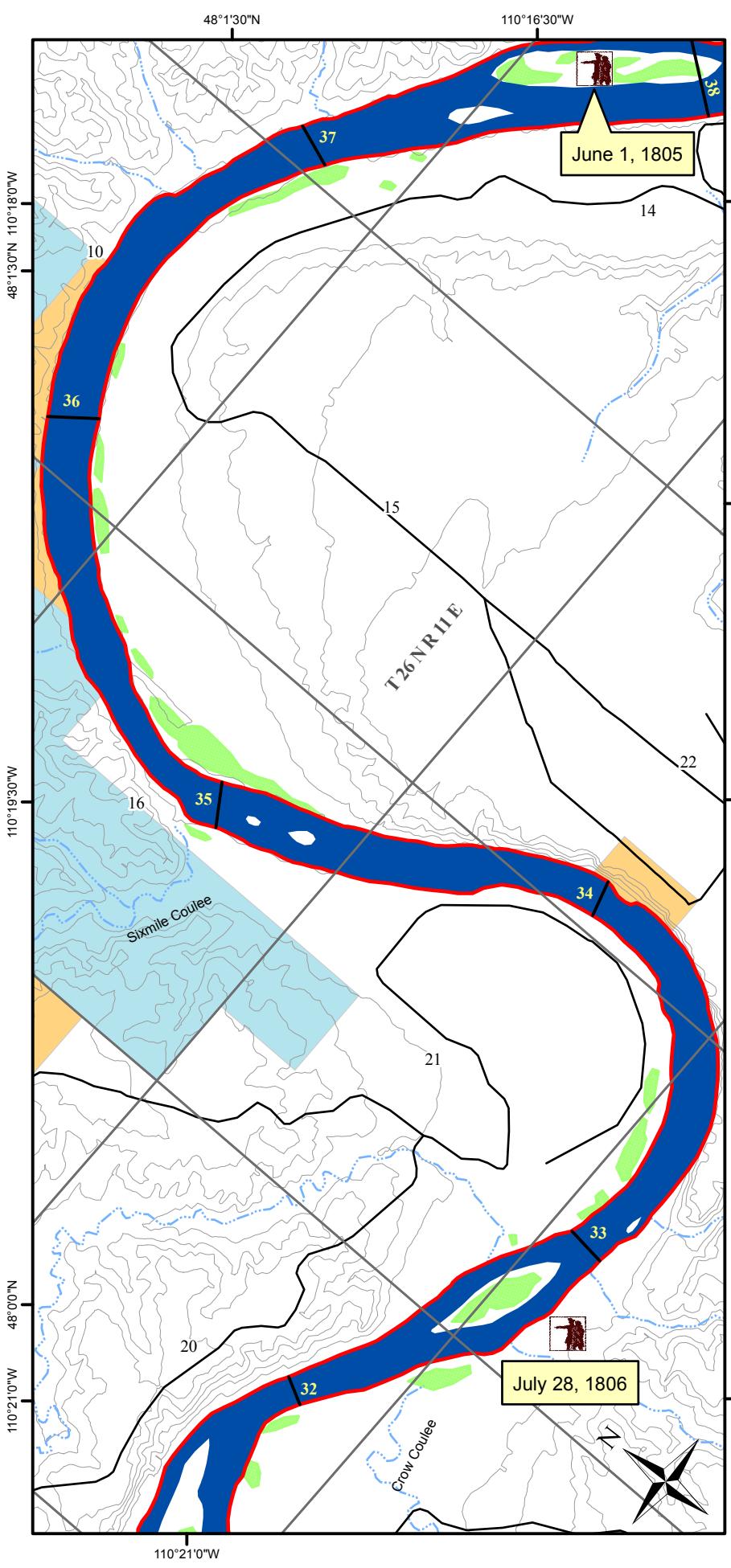


experimenting with solar-powered pumps and other off-site (distant from the river bottom), hot-season watering systems. Please do not disturb livestock.

### 37.6 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

During their westward journey, the entire Lewis and Clark Expedition camped here on June 1, 1805. Lewis noted that the river cliffs were not nearly so high and the country was becoming more level.

This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.



## River Mile

### 39.1 L Virgelle Ferry

This free, diesel-driven cable ferry is operated by Chouteau County. The original ferry, established in 1913, was driven by the river's current.

#### SAFETY NOTE:

Beware of the two low-hanging cables that cross the river in front of the ferry. Also, stay away from the upriver side of the ferry because strong undercurrents can easily submerge your craft.

### 40.3 L Town of Virgelle

Virgelle was a small homestead town with a bank, general store, post office and grain elevator. It was named for the open-range cattleman, Virgil Blankenbaker, whose ranch headquarters were nearby. Present-day Virgelle includes a mercantile/antique store and a bed-and-breakfast. It is located a mile south of Coal Banks Landing.

## White Cliffs Section – Coal Banks Landing to Judith Landing (miles 41.5 to 88.5)

You are entering the White Cliffs section of the river, an area much noted by Captain Lewis. This section is the most popular floating stretch on the Upper Missouri, and you will likely see other visitors along this route. The first 10.5 miles are classified as Recreational with motorized watercraft use allowed year round in both directions. At mile 52 you enter the Wild segment, and the beginning of the actual White Cliffs. Keep in mind much of the land is privately owned and used for livestock grazing. The typical float time required for this section is two nights and three days. Although there are four developed boat camps in this section (Little Sandy, Eagle Creek, Hole-in-the-Wall and Slaughter River), none of these camps has potable water. No potable water is available at the take-out at Judith Landing.

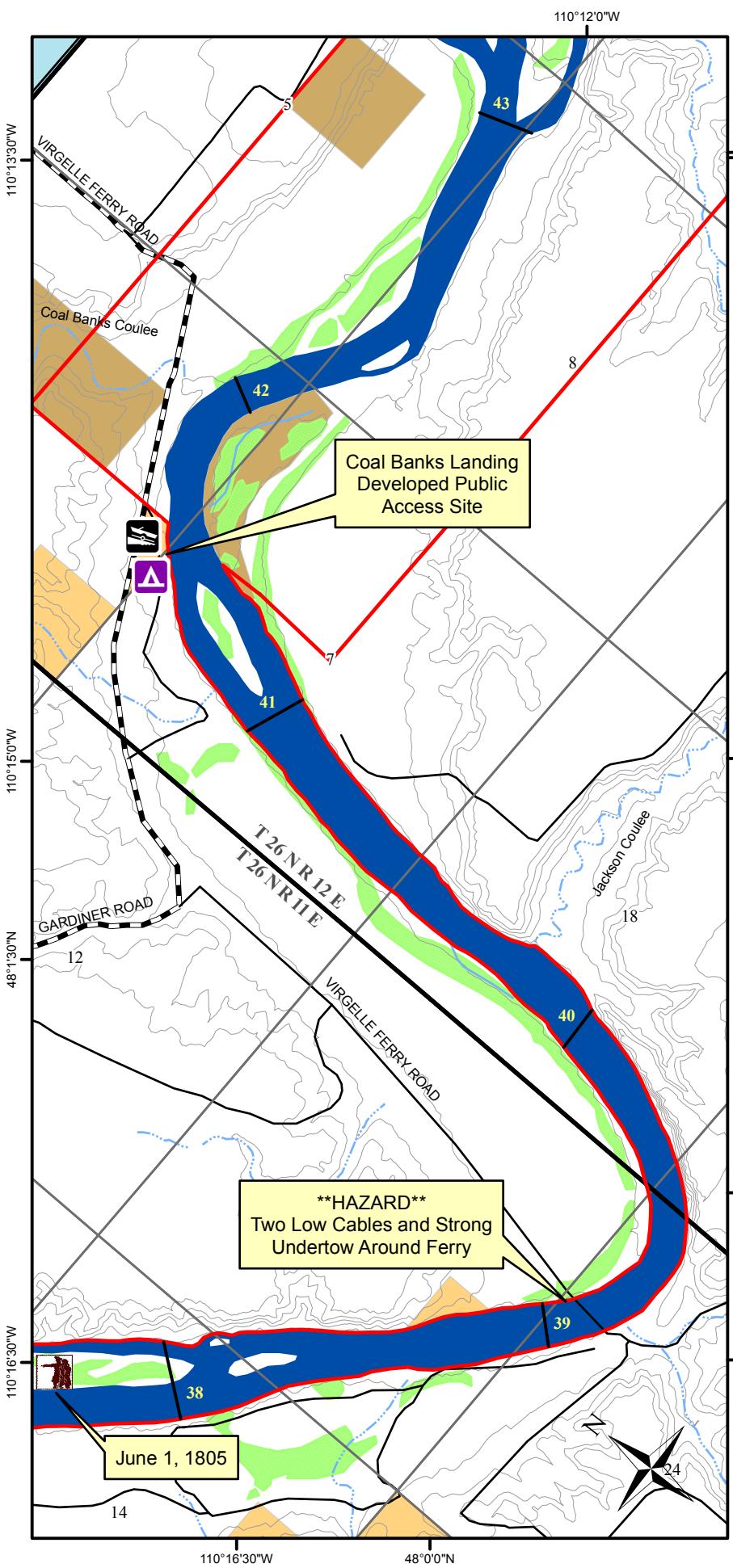
### 41.5 L Coal Banks Landing Developed Public Access Fee Site

Coal Banks Landing is the primary launch point to float the Upper Missouri River. For safety sake, we strongly recommend registering your trip with BLM or at the self-registration box prior to launching. The boat ramp can be quite crowded on summer mornings when several groups decide to launch. Please be considerate of others when stacking your gear and lining up canoes for launching. Coal Banks Landing has tent and RV camping, 13 picnic tables, nine fire rings, two vault toilets, two parking areas, a concrete boat ramp, potable water (usually) and a BLM contact station. Campground interpretive programs may be offered during peak-use seasons (June-August). Contact on-site BLM staff for details or call 406-622-4000.

Coal Banks got its name from the dark layer of lignite coal in the hillsides. The landing was used by steamboats, both during the Indian Wars of 1876-1877, and the construction of Fort Assiniboine on the northwest side of the Bears Paw Mountains.

#### SAFETY NOTE:

Motorboats may not be able to launch (depending on size) if water levels drop below 5,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). This is the last opportunity to replenish your water supply from a public water source.



## **Undaunted Stewardship Historic Preservation Sites**

The Undaunted Stewardship program encourages sustainable rangeland stewardship and helps preserve historic sites located on private land. A kiosk is located at each site to interpret historic aspects of the property. The sites are for day-use only and access is limited to the fenced area surrounding the site. Please respect private property and do not camp or build fires on these sites. Leave No Trace principles apply here, just as they do on public land.

### **River Mile**

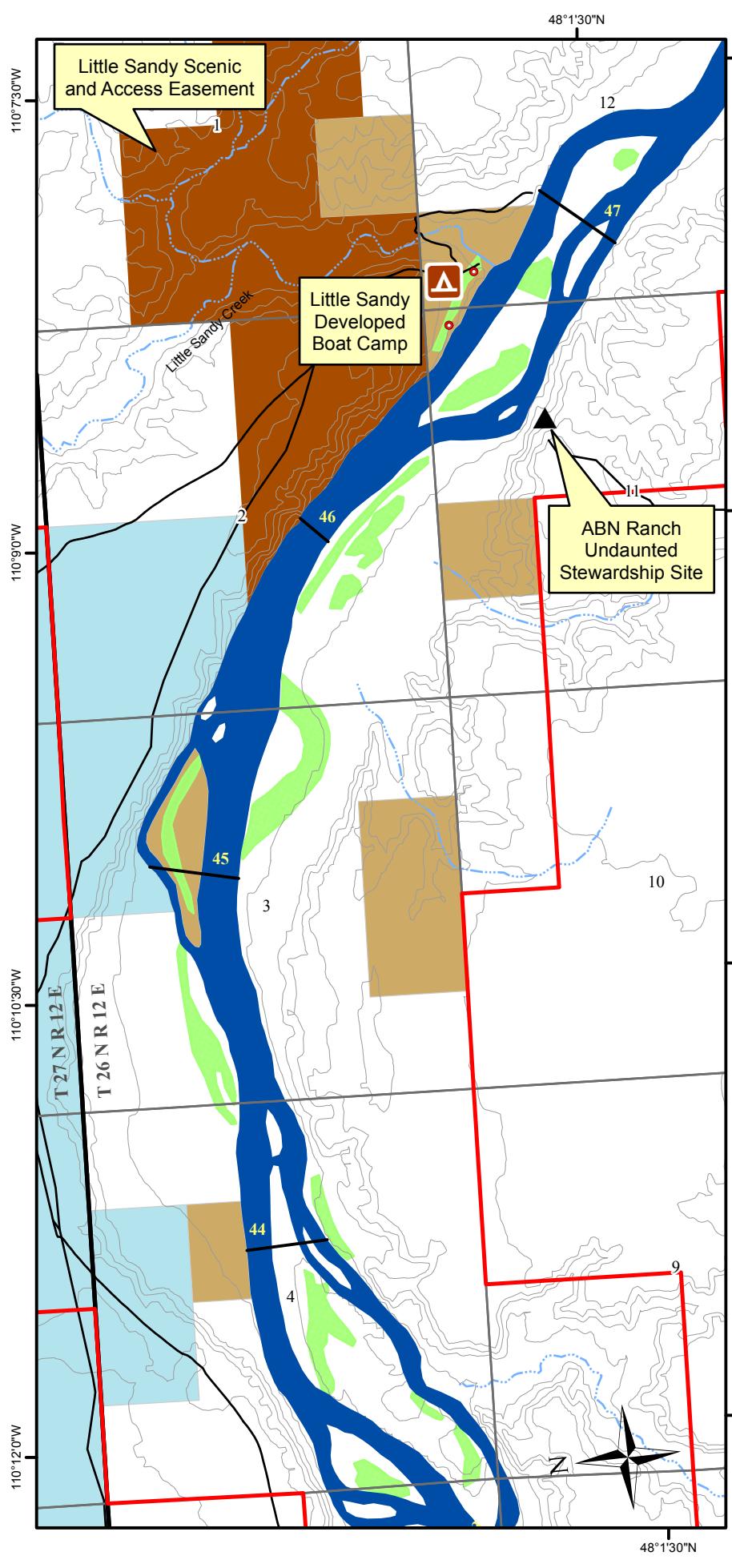
#### **46.5 R Certified Undaunted Steward – ABN Ranch**

Look around and you are likely to see the remains of an old homestead, as well as a variety of birds and wildlife. Habitat for these species is maintained through careful livestock grazing management. As at Coal Banks Landing upstream, the riverbanks display the land's coal and oil-laden geology.

## **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Acquisitions**

You will notice that several key recreation sites are easements or fee-title acquisitions purchased with LWCF program funding. Fee title means the public purchased the land outright; an easement means the public purchased protection of the land and the right to use the land but the land is still privately owned. The law establishing the LWCF was passed in 1965, and authorized funding for certain federal agencies and all states to acquire land for recreation and conservation purposes. LWCF funding is appropriated by Congress each year. To date, BLM has acquired 10 fee title acquisitions and two conservation easements. Some LWCF acquisitions are highlighted on the river maps.

*Personal Journal Notes*



## River Mile

### 46.7 L Little Sandy Developed Boat Camp

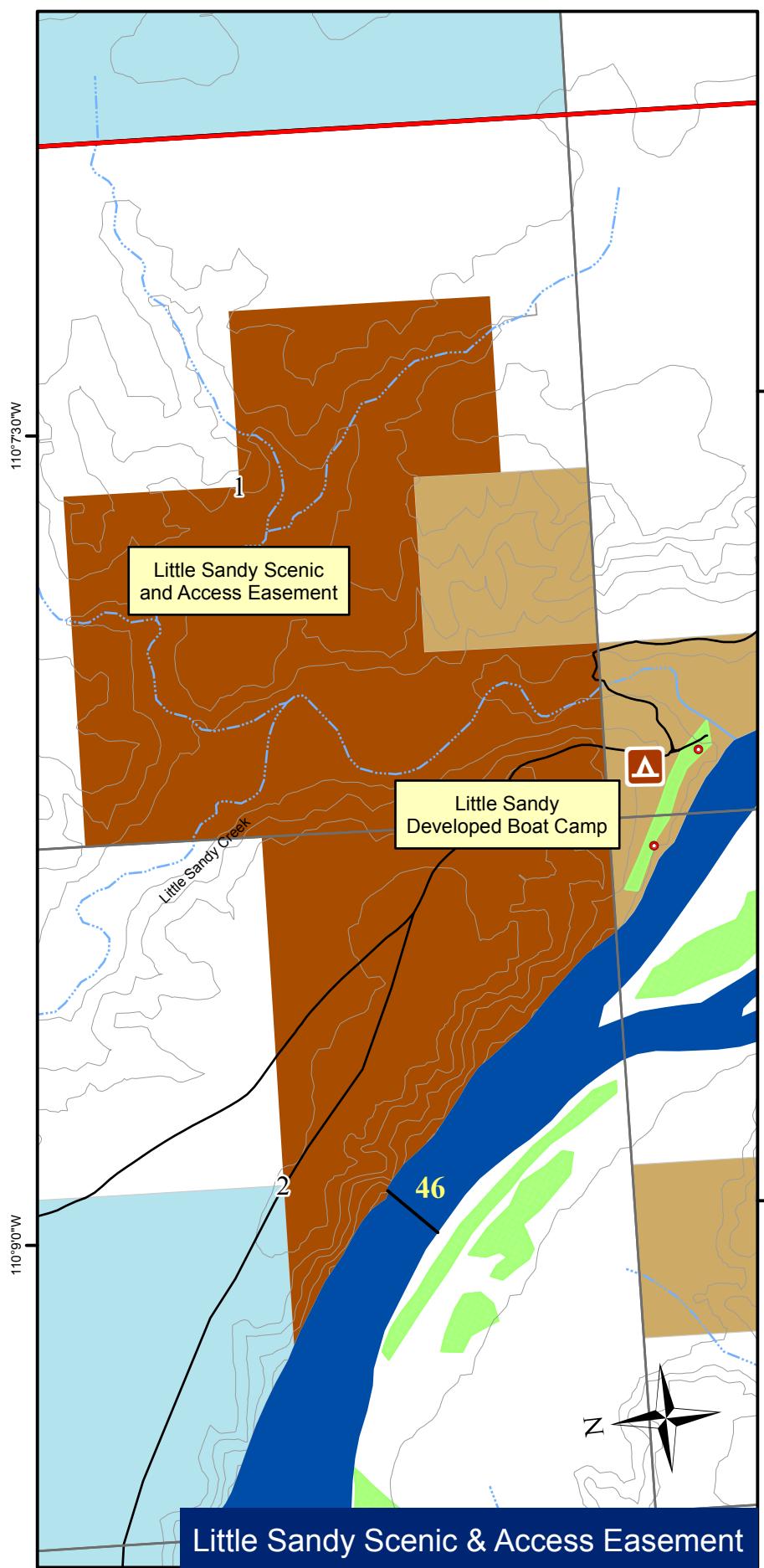
A developed boat camp is a site accessible only by boat with improvements such as vault toilets, shelters and metal fire rings. Little Sandy has one vault toilet and two



fire rings. There is administrative road access to the site for facility maintenance, but there is no public road access to the campsite. The BLM has a 385-acre recreation easement on the bluffs behind the campsite that offers magnificent views of the river corridor and the surrounding prairie landscape. This easement was purchased through the LWCF program in 1993.

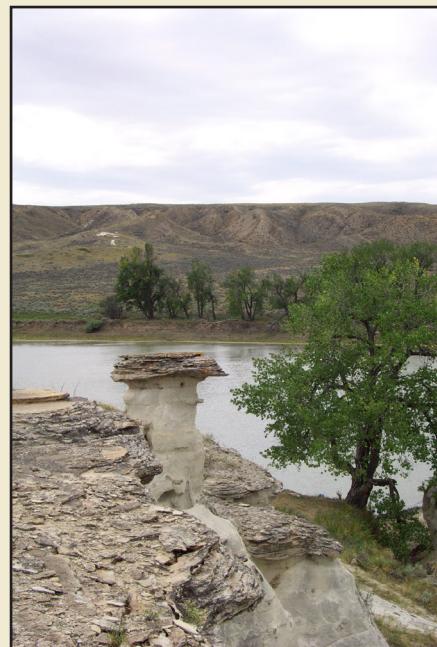


*Personal Journal Notes*



## Geologic History - Landforms on the Upper Missouri

As you float down the Missouri, you can't help but notice the unusual rock formations. The Upper Missouri contains diverse sets of rock types with a wide range of ages. The river itself carries a high sediment load from the erosion of soft sedimentary rocks, while the rocky channel bed contains more erosion-resistant sandstones and other more resistant rocks originating from sources upstream. Dark igneous formations (dikes or plugs from old volcanic activity) loom unexpectedly after



being exposed through years of erosion. The upcoming White Cliffs are mainly Virgelle sandstone, a formation deposited in a shallow sea in the Cretaceous period. The white color of this rock is frequently tinted red when its magnetite is exposed to oxygen during erosion, which then turns it into reddish-colored iron oxide. This process creates the picturesque reddish caps and hues on pillars and rock "toadstools."

## River Mile

### 49.0 L Lonetree Coulee Developed Boat Camp

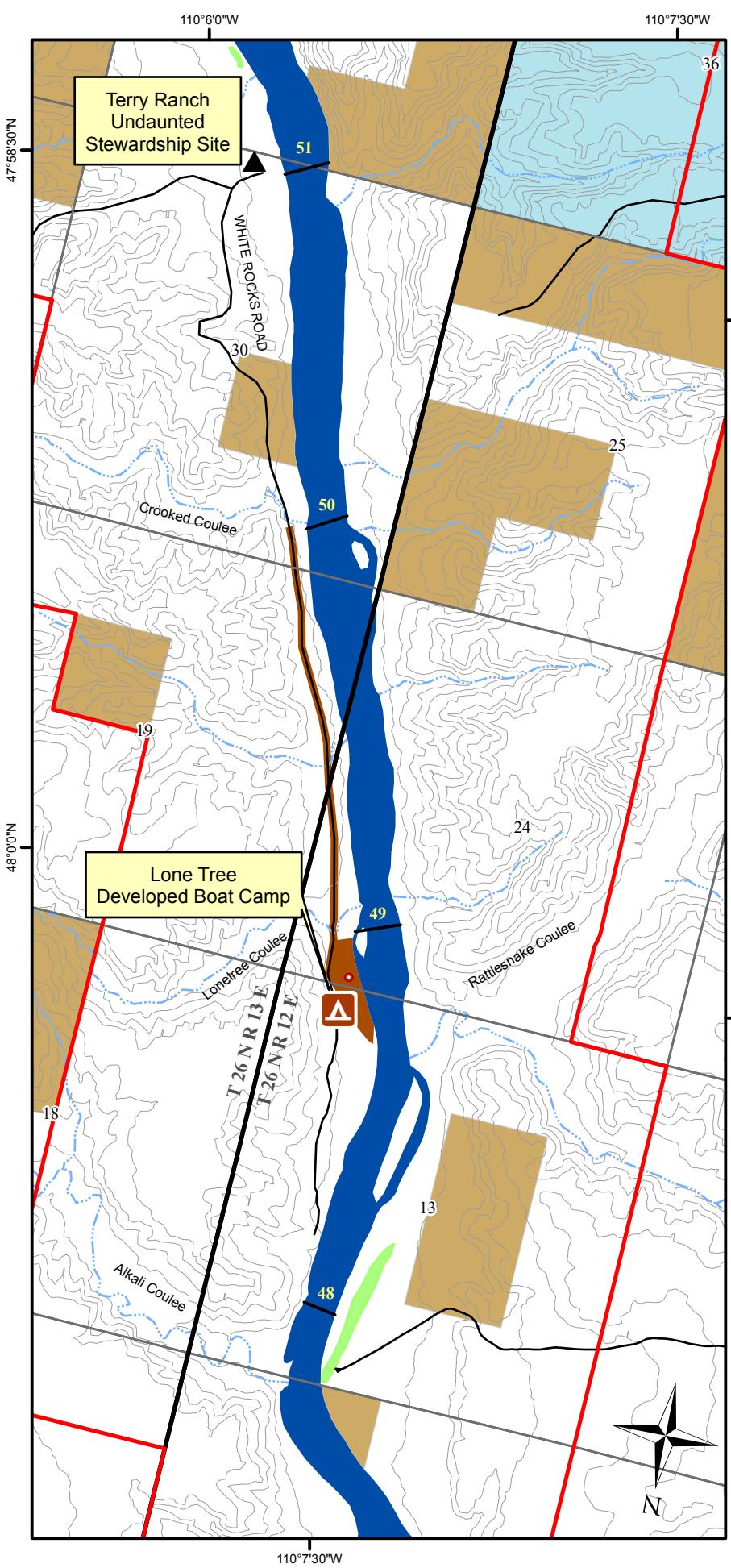
Lonetree Coulee is located on private land and is managed with a scenic and access easement in partnership with the landowner. The access easement includes a campground (suitable for smaller groups), vault toilet, fire rings, and a hiking trail that parallels the river



along a two-track road downstream from the campsite. All other areas of the easement require prior landowner permission for access.

### 51.0 L Certified Undaunted Steward – Terry Ranch

Steamboat captains depended on Pilot Rock as a navigating point after Lewis wrote about "scenes of visionary enchantment" in this White Cliffs area. Today, you stand on land where members of the same ranch family have lived and worked for five generations raising sheep, cattle and crops.



## **52.0 The Wild Classification Begins**

From this point downstream until mile 84.5, the Upper Missouri River is classified as Wild. No motorized use is allowed upstream from June 15 through September 15, and

downstream use of motors is restricted to no-wake speeds. The dramatic character of the White Cliffs has inspired explorers and artists for the past two centuries. In 1833, artist Karl Bodmer traveled with German Prince Maximilian. Maximilian's flowery descriptions of the cliffs led to names like "Castle Rock" and "Chapel Rock."

## **River Mile**

### **53.1 R Public Land Access**

Please observe on the map how this quarter section of BLM land abuts the river with only the corner appearing to touch the bank. There is no legal access to this piece of public land. Please respect the private property of the adjacent landowner and do not attempt to access or camp on this BLM parcel.

### **53.5 R Monroe Cabin**

Only partial walls of cut sandstone remain of the cabin on the hillside above Monroe Island. It was used by Jack Monroe when he was trapping wolves and allegedly stealing horses in the 1870s and 1880s.

### **53.7 R Monroe Island - Dispersed Camping Opportunity**

This island is an example of a dispersed public land camping opportunity. In general, you won't find these marked on the maps. Any parcel of BLM land with legal access from the river constitutes a dispersed opportunity. These areas are meant for boaters who want to search and explore and find their own primitive, undeveloped campsite. Many such parcels have rock fire rings built by past users. We ask that you use existing fire rings and not build new ones. Leave the site exactly as you found it. We are trying to preserve the increasingly rare opportunity for boaters to camp in a natural, primitive setting free of all traces of development.

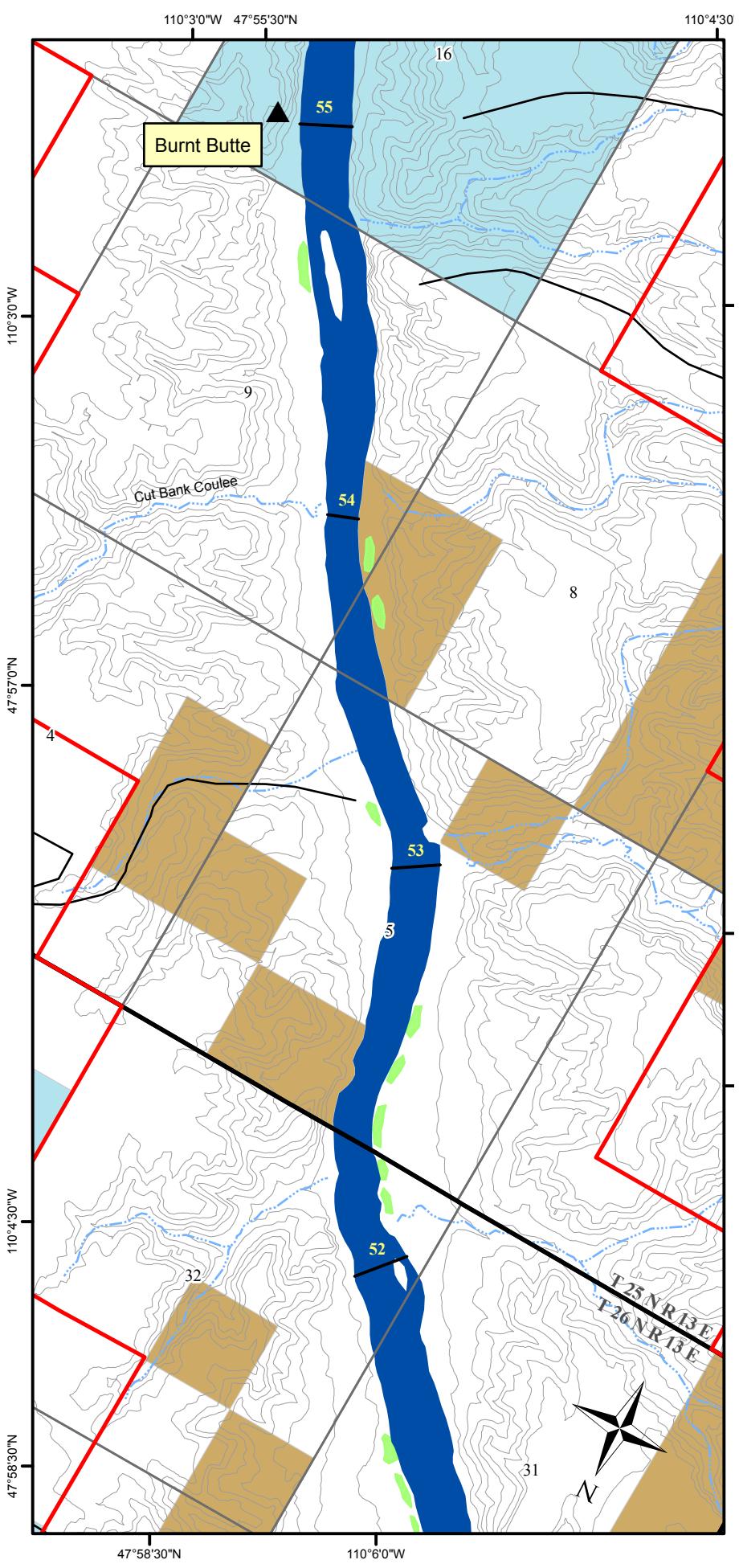
In 1998, an enclosure was constructed at Monroe Island to reduce the impacts of livestock grazing. In recent years, the backchannel of the old island has filled in with a rich array of riparian vegetation. If it is getting late in the afternoon and you prefer solitude, this might be a good spot to camp for the evening. Two miles downstream is the Eagle Creek developed boat camp, the most popular camping location on the Upper Missouri River. You won't be able to paddle back upstream to camp at previously viewed locations, and downriver from Eagle Creek, camping spots are very limited for the next five miles.

## **55.0 L State of Montana Land: Burnt Butte**

Protruding from the hillside is Burnt Butte, igneous rock plugs exposed after centuries of erosion. Burnt Butte is on State of Montana land, identified in blue on the maps in this guide. State land is publicly owned and administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. You may hike or camp on state land, but a State Lands Recreational Use License is required.

### **SAFETY NOTE:**

Care must be taken in hiking on these sandstone formations because the rock can be quite soft and slippery.



## River Mile

### 55.7 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

On May 31, 1805, Lewis and Clark stayed at one of the most beautiful campsites of their journey west. Vivid descriptions of the White Cliffs of the Missouri are found in their journals. Although the creek was originally named “Stonewall Creek” by the explorers, it is commonly called Eagle Creek today, renamed by homesteaders because it emerges from Eagle Butte to the north.

**NOTE: A brass marker plate identifies the campsite.**

### 56.0 L Eagle Creek Developed Boat Camp

Eagle Creek is the most popular visitor destination on the Upper Missouri River. The spectacular cliffs and multiple hiking opportunities attract visitors throughout the floating season. Eagle Creek is a developed



boat camp with two vault toilets and five metal fire rings. Please try to concentrate your tents and the impact of your party's use of Eagle Creek, because many others may wish to camp in this location.

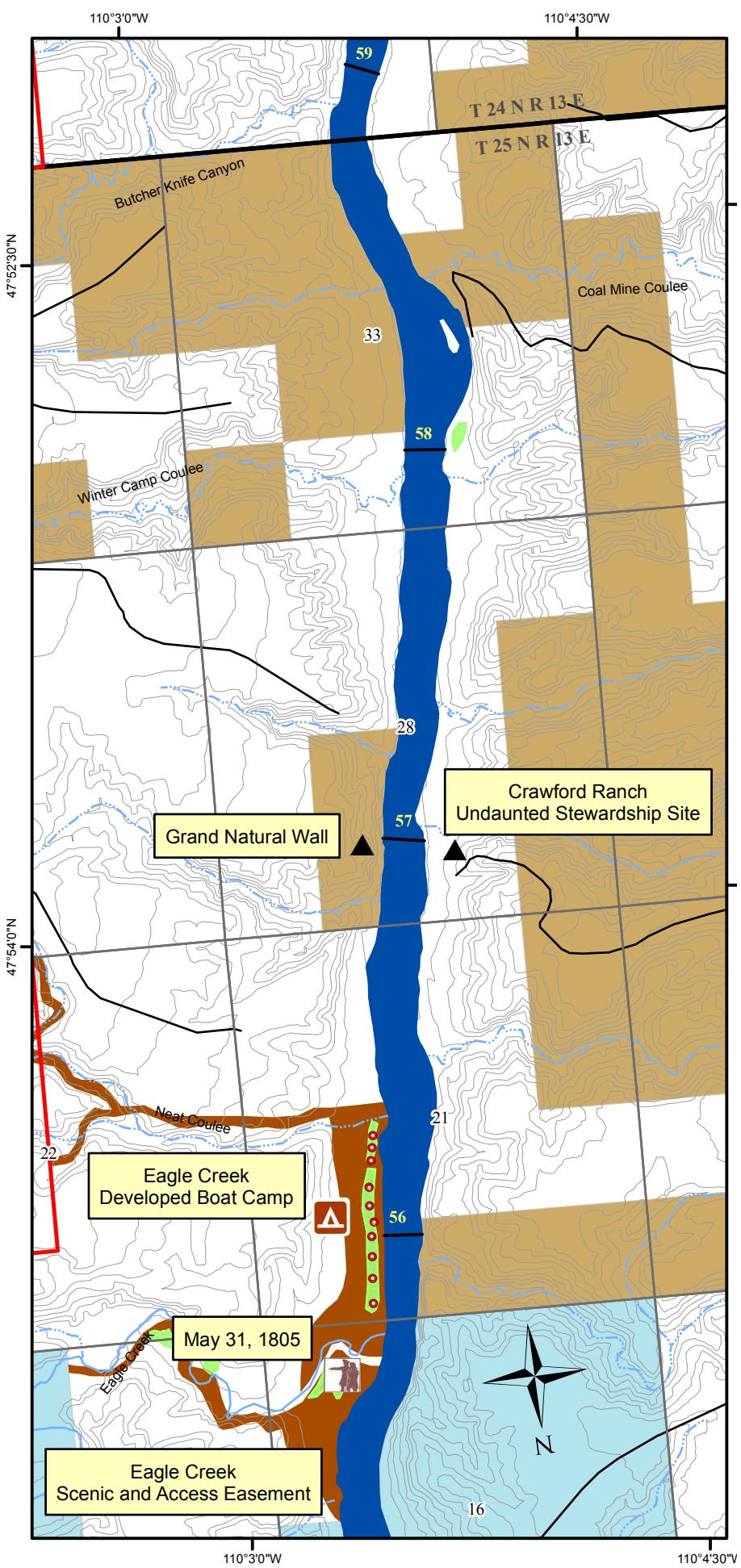
Eagle Creek is located on private land and is managed with a scenic and access easement purchased by BLM through LWCF program funds. Under the terms of this easement, the landowner retains the opportunity to graze cattle in the Eagle Creek area, which normally happens in August and September. An administrative road gives access to the site for maintenance, but there is no public road access to Eagle Creek.

Visitors will observe numerous small cottonwood trees at this location enclosed with small wire fences. These trees are part of a cottonwood regeneration project sponsored by a partnership involving the BLM, private landowners, and Friends of the Missouri Breaks. The trees are planted by the partners and watered throughout the summer in an attempt to reestablish native cottonwood trees along the river corridor. There are several planting sites on both private and public lands to include Dark Butte, Slaughter River, and Judith Landing. Additional planting sites are scheduled annually through 2020.

**NOTE: The access easement is denoted by the brown area on the map.  
We encourage you to explore this area, but please respect the boundaries of the easement and the surrounding private land.**

### 56.9 L Grand Natural Wall

This “wall-like” appearance is quite common along this stretch of the river. Millions of years ago, during active volcanic periods, dark molten material was forced into cracks in the sedimentary rock. Over time the molten material solidified and subsequent erosion of the surrounding softer rock exposed the dark igneous walls you see today.



## **57.0 R Certified Undaunted Steward – Crawford Ranch**

Lewis and Clark were enchanted by these White Cliffs and ranch families have protected them ever since. The Crawford Ranch uses strategic water placement to manage livestock grazing and enhance wildlife habitat.

### **Camping Tips:**

Bigger groups are better accommodated at the first five upriver sites. However, please concentrate your group in one site and avoid spreading out through the adjacent sites.

- Groups of less than six are encouraged to try the primitive sites downriver from the established campsites.
- Putting tents behind the tree line eliminates danger from falling cottonwood limbs and also camouflages them from the river.

### **Hiking Opportunity: Neat Coulee**

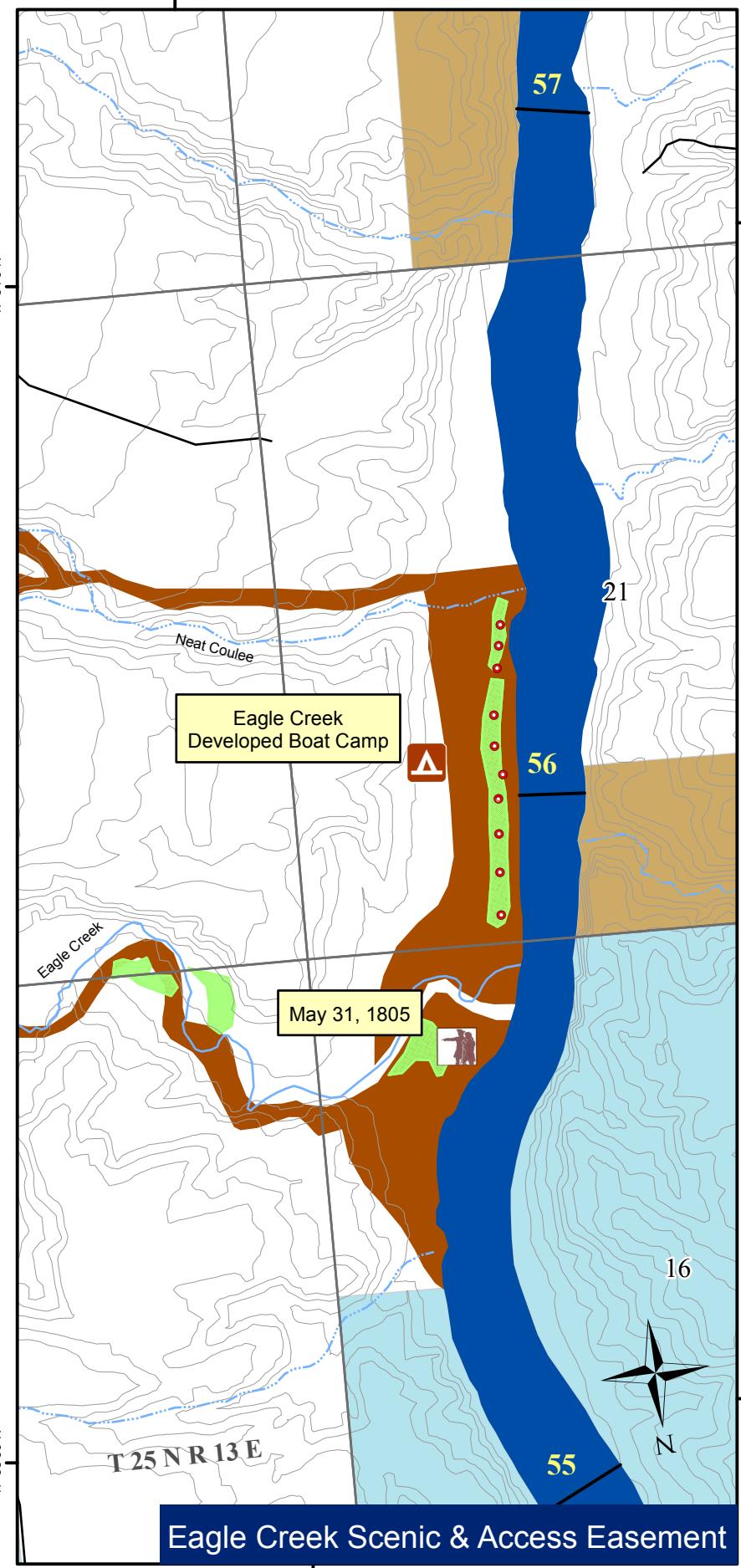
Eagle Creek forms the north, or upstream end, of the Eagle Creek camping area. On the south, or downstream end, of the campground is another small drainage nicknamed “Neat Coulee.” Hiking up this small canyon leads to an ever-tightening slot canyon where visitors can marvel at the curves and shapes in the rock caused by water erosion.

The Eagle Creek area has a rich history. Archeological evidence indicates American Indians used this area as a campsite for centuries. Since homesteading days, the area was also home to a herd of wild horses captured up through the 1960s for rodeo stock, giving the area another name, “Wild Horse Bottom.” In 1906, the Conley Post Office was established here for area homesteaders, but it remained for only 15 months.



On the opposite side of the river from the campground are large sandstone cliffs with LaBarge Rock, another dark igneous plug, guarding the downstream cliff face. This formation is named after a mid-nineteenth century steamboat captain. Directly across from the main camping area at the top of the central cliff you can see the remnants of one of Montana's most famous natural arches, the “Eye of the Needle,” which collapsed in 1997.





## River Mile

### 59.6 L Eagle Rock and Kipp's Rapids

This igneous rock resembles a perched eagle when viewed from upstream. The shallow rapids just downriver from Eagle Rock were hazardous to steamboats because there is no clear channel. The rapids were named for James Kipp, a trader for the American Fur Company.

### 62.0 R Citadel Rock

A National Historic Landmark, the Citadel is one of the most prominent natural features on the Upper Missouri. It is an impressive, dark igneous rock at the river's edge, about one-half mile upstream from Hole-in-the-Wall campground. It has been featured in some of the most famous historical paintings of the Upper Missouri. A deep fishing hole adjacent to the rock is popular with local anglers.



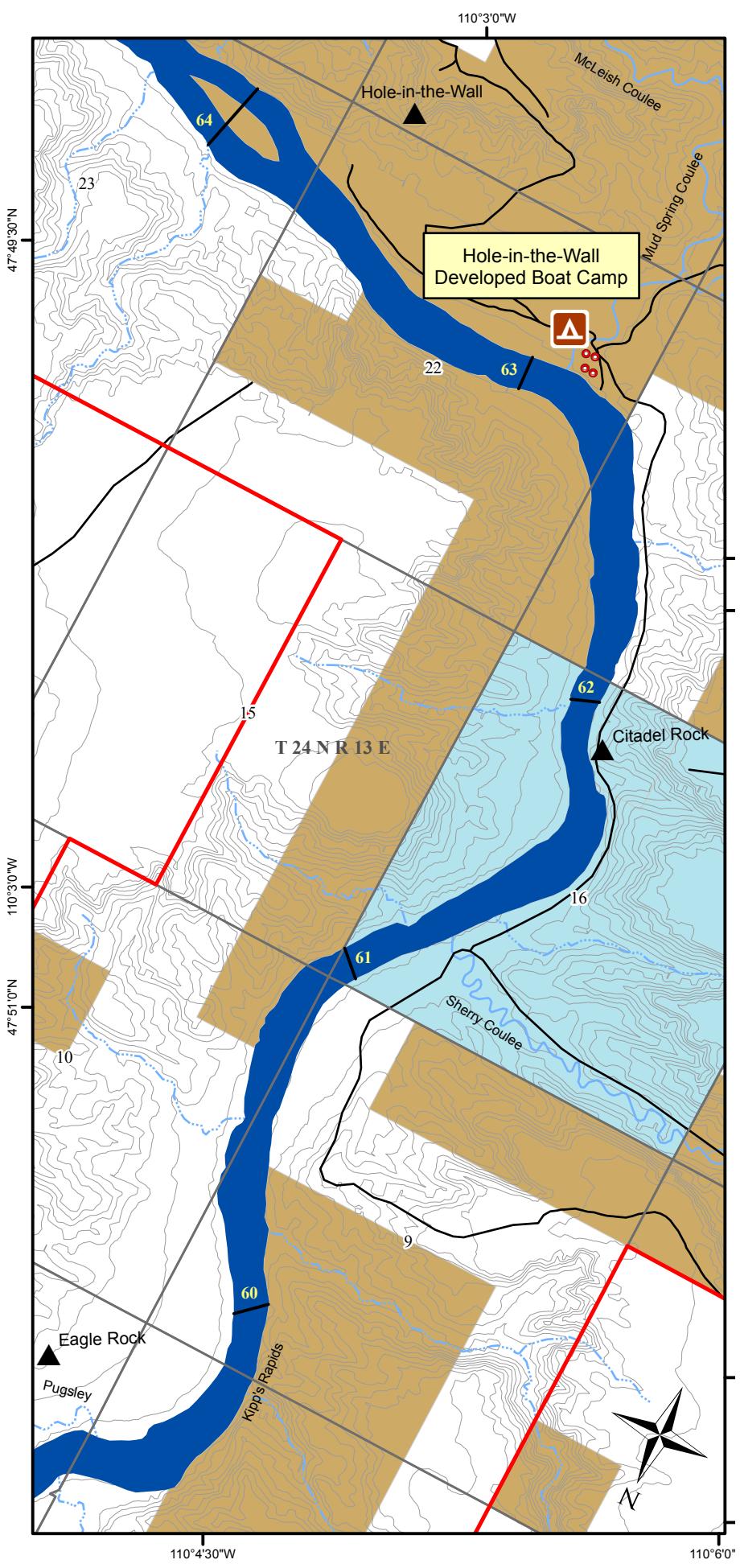
### 63.0 R Hole-in-the-Wall Developed Boat Camp

Hole-in-the-Wall is a developed boat camp with two vault toilets and four metal fire rings. Two log shelters provide the only source of shade. The site has a non-potable water well attached to a solar-powered drip system used to irrigate cottonwood and green ash saplings within the camping area.

### 63.8 R Hiking Opportunity: Hole-in-the-Wall

To the east of the campsite, looking downriver, the rock cliff with an eight foot hole near the top is accessible via a hiking trail. Climbing up to the "Hole-in-the-Wall" is not for the inexperienced hiker. The trail is steep, and the drop from the edge is precipitous. Many earlier visitors have, unfortunately, left graffiti on the cliff wall. Please don't add any additional markings to this extraordinary natural feature.





## River Mile

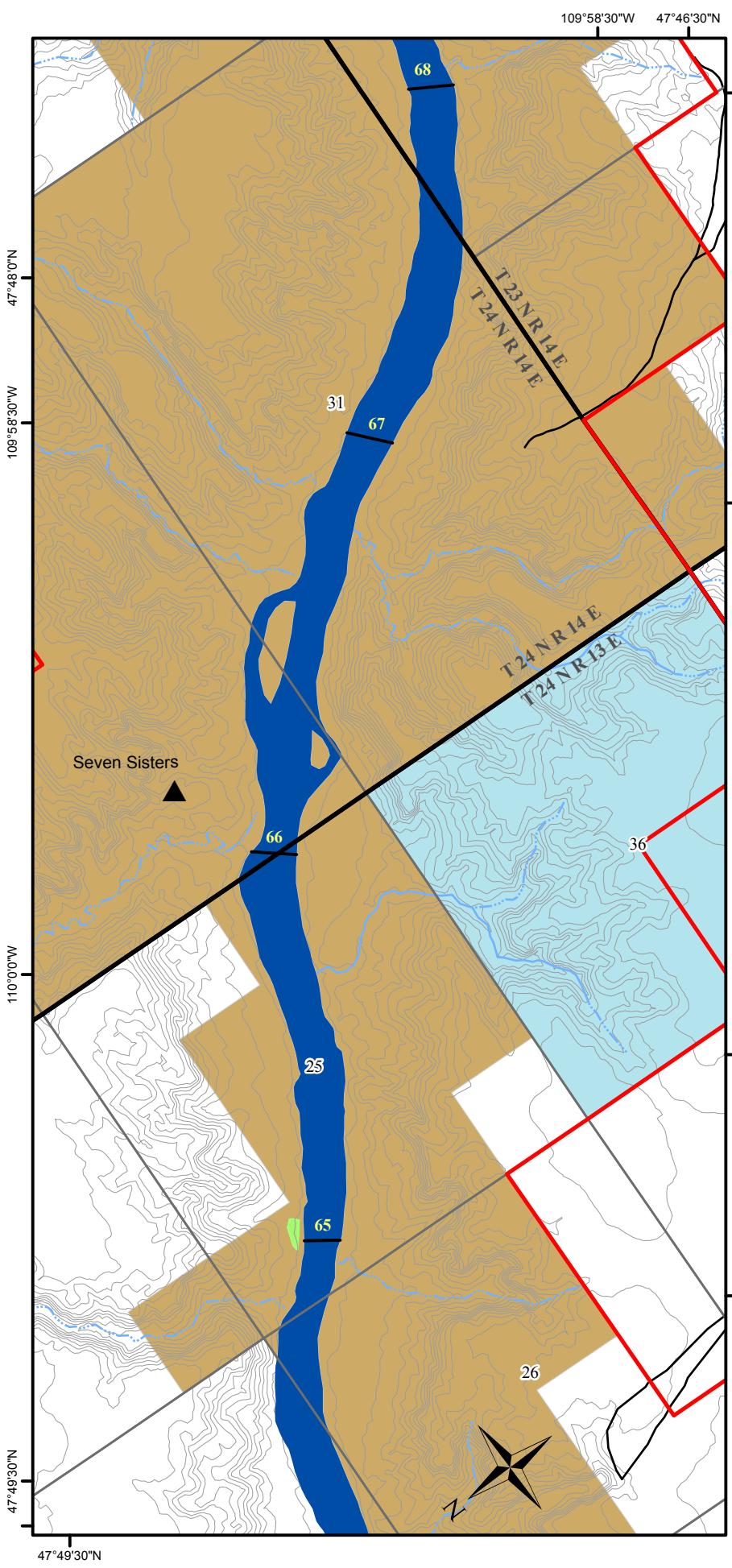
### 65-71 Geologic Wonders

The section of the Upper Missouri River just below Hole-in-the-Wall is one of the most scenic stretches within the National Monument. Extraordinary rock formations and towering pillars have inspired explorers, visitors and artists for years. Certain formations have been given special names, such as Steamboat Rock, Dark Butte and Archangel. Karl Bodmer painted the seven sandstone columns, called the “Seven Sisters.” The columns represent seven nuns in their habits with Sister Superior leading them up the hillside.



This section of the river has BLM-administered land on both sides. For the adventurous, this is a spectacular place for short hikes. At mile 66.5 R, small creeks have converged into a canyon known as “Valley of the Walls.” There are no marked or maintained trails here, so use care when landing canoes or hiking in this steep terrain.





## River Mile

### 68.8 L Dark Butte Primitive Boat Camp

A long line of cottonwoods welcome visitors to the Dark Butte camping area. Dark Butte is a primitive boat camp with two metal fire rings and two composting toilets. Just above the campground, outstanding hiking opportunities abound on public land where you can find breathtaking views of the river corridor and the nearby rock formations.

#### Steamboat Rock

High on the bluff behind the Dark Butte camping area is a sand-stone formation resembling a twin-stacked steamboat.



### 69.8 L Dark Butte and Archangel

A large shonkinite plug, known as Dark Butte, rests high on the cliff. The formation in front of Dark Butte is the Archangel, with wings spread in white sandstone.

### 71.0 Lidstone Ferry Crossing

A free ferry operated here from 1917 to 1925. It was built by Chouteau County to enable local travel between Geraldine and Big Sandy. It became a popular route for bootleggers, who smuggled whiskey through the Breaks on their way to Canada.

### 71.3 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

On May 30, 1805, the expedition had only covered five and a half miles. It was rainy, cold, and miserable, and the walls of the river canyon were getting higher and steeper, making upstream progress more difficult. The site is located on a narrow sagebrush flat across the river from a grove of green ash trees.

**NOTE: A brass marker plate identifies the campsite.**

### 72.8 L Pablo Rapids Primitive Boat Camp

The Pablo Rapids campsite is a primitive boat camp with a single metal fire ring. This site also serves as an experimental riparian restoration project. A solar panel operates a small irrigation pump that moves water to a stock tank located a half-mile off the river. This provides water for cattle as an alternative to obtaining water from the river. The solar panel also powers an electric fence to keep livestock out of the campsite.

**Tip:** Low-water conditions create an extremely muddy approach to the landing.

47°45'0"N 109°54'0"W

12  
Pablo Rapids  
Primitive  
Boat Camp

47°46'30"N

Steamboat  
Rock

Dark Butte  
Primitive  
Boat Camp

109°57'0"W

Dark Butte

May 30, 1805



10

4

9

70

123 NR 14E

T 24 N R 14 E

T 23 N R 14 E

T 22 N R 14 E

T 21 N R 14 E

T 20 N R 14 E

T 19 N R 14 E

T 18 N R 14 E

T 17 N R 14 E

T 16 N R 14 E

T 15 N R 14 E

T 14 N R 14 E

T 13 N R 14 E

T 12 N R 14 E

T 11 N R 14 E

T 10 N R 14 E

T 9 N R 14 E

T 8 N R 14 E

T 7 N R 14 E

T 6 N R 14 E

T 5 N R 14 E

T 4 N R 14 E

T 3 N R 14 E

T 2 N R 14 E

T 1 N R 14 E

T 0 N R 14 E



## River Mile

### 73.3 Pablo Rapids and Wolf Island

Pablo Rapids caused the grounding of many steamboats, although canoes typically pass over the rapids easily. One of the grounded steamboats was the *Marion*, piloted by Captain Abe Wolf in 1866. After going aground, the crew mutinied and put Captain Wolf adrift in a small boat. Stuck in the river, the crew drank all the whiskey before being brought to justice. The island, about a mile below the rapids, retains the name of the unfortunate captain.

### 76.8 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

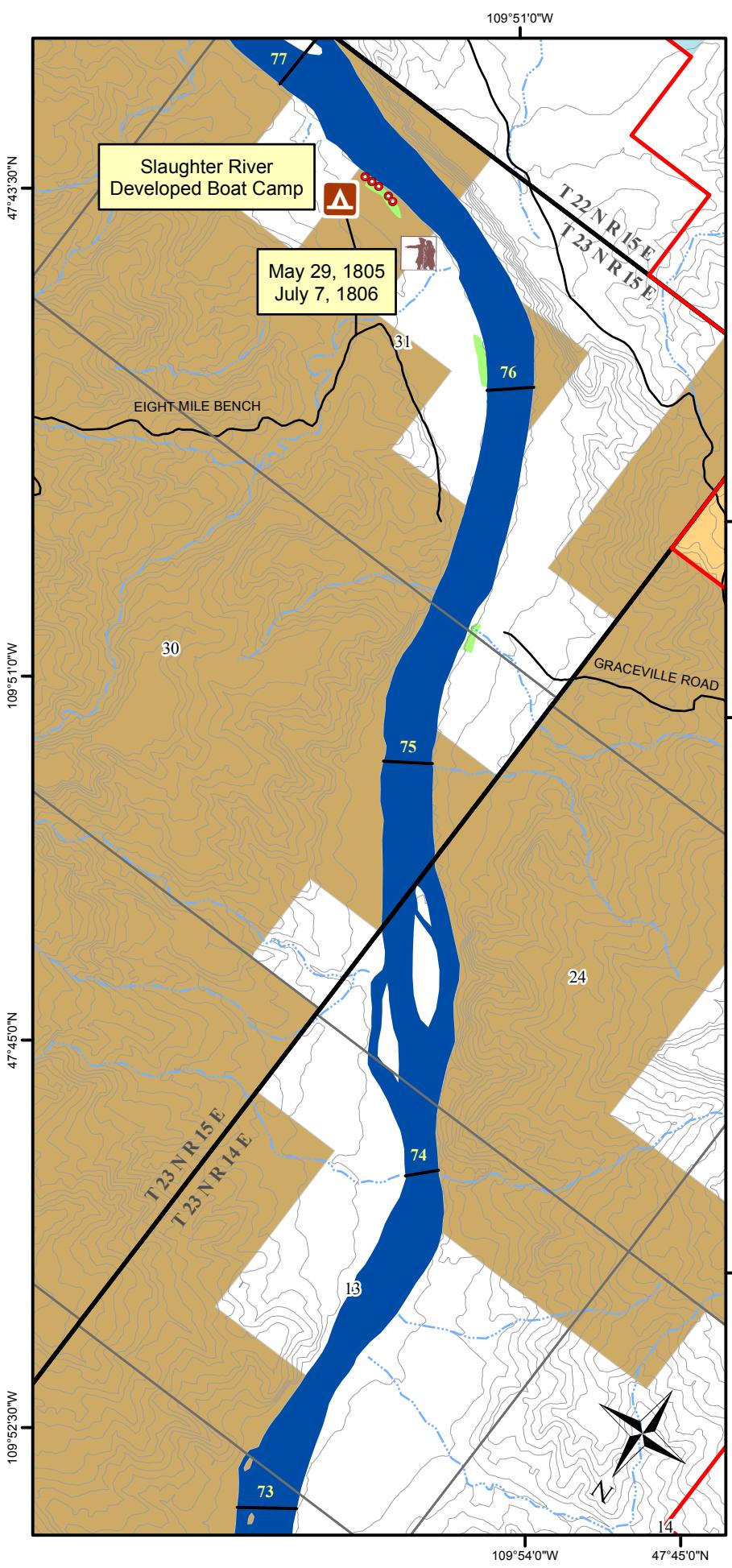
The Corps did not often use the same campsite, but this was an exception. On May 29, 1805, during its upriver trip, the expedition encountered a mass of mangled buffalo carcasses and assumed it was a “pishkun,” a Blackfeet term meaning “deep kettle of blood” or a buffalo jump. The presence of these carcasses, nearly opposite a small river, inspired the captains to name the landmark Slaughter River (present-day Arrow Creek). On the expedition’s return trip, Captain Lewis’ party camped here on July 29, 1806. The campsite is located about one-eighth of a mile from the BLM campground.

**NOTE: A brass marker plate identifies the campsite.**

### 76.8 L Slaughter River Developed Boat Camp

Slaughter River is a popular developed boat camp with a fenced enclosure, two vault toilets, one log shade shelter and five metal fire rings. Many people decide to camp here on the last night of their trip through the White Cliffs section. Since there will likely be other people sharing the campground with you, be courteous to the other campers and try to concentrate your party’s tents and limit the impact of your party’s use.





## 77.2 R Arrow Creek

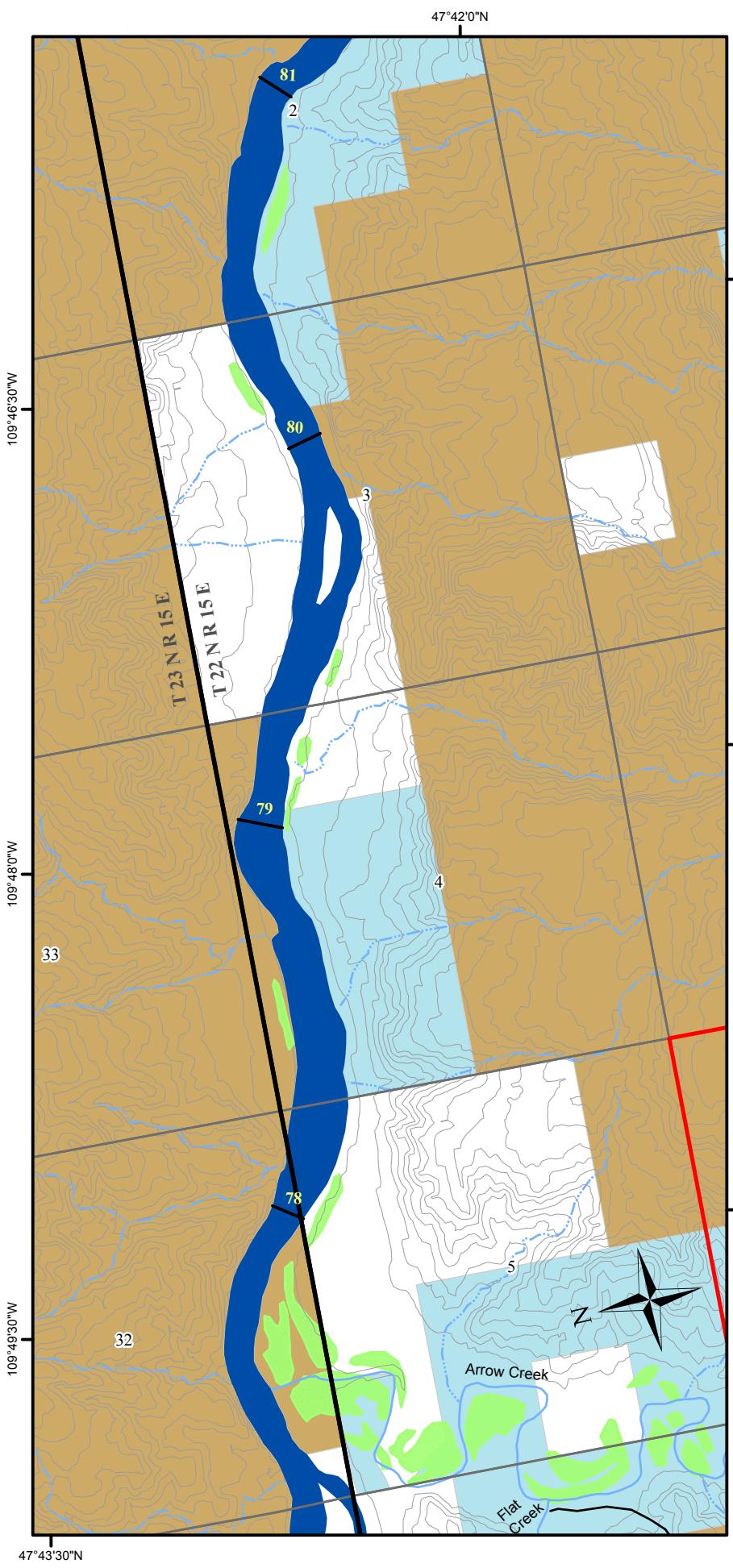
The Lewis and Clark expedition called the river entering on river right “Slaughter River,” after the pile of buffalo carcasses they passed on their way west, but this relatively large drainage system was renamed Arrow Creek. Young cottonwoods abound in the flooded area at the confluence of the Missouri and Arrow Creek. In 1833, a group of Indians almost caused the accidental sinking of the keelboat *Flora* when too many tried to climb aboard while Karl Bodmer was ashore sketching for his painting, “Camp of Gros Ventres of the Prairies.”

From this point on downriver, you have left the major sections of White Cliffs and will begin to observe different landscape formations. Rolling, broken hills topped with pine forests become apparent, as the monument begins to show some of the “Breaks” topography for which it is named.

## 80.7 R Flat Rock Riparian Project

Located in a grove of cottonwoods is an experimental livestock exclosure constructed in 1998, to observe changes in riparian vegetation in the absence of cattle grazing.

*Personal Journal Notes*



## River Mile

### 81.3 L The Wall Primitive Boat Camp

The Wall is a primitive boat camp with two metal fire rings located under a mature stand of cottonwoods. Like the earlier Pablo Rapids site, it is an experimental site with an electric fence enclosure powered by solar panels.

**Tip:** A prairie dog town is located directly behind the campsite.

### 84.5 Recreational Section of the Wild and Scenic River

After 32.5 miles of floating a Wild section of the Upper Missouri River, the river returns to a Recreational classification at mile 84.5. Powerboats may now travel up and downstream in this river section. Most powerboat traffic on this portion of the river comes from the launch site at Judith Landing four miles below. You are getting close to the end of the your float if you plan to take out at Judith Landing, so enjoy the last sights and sounds of the Upper Missouri experience.

### 84.5 Deadman Rapids

During the early steamboat years, this was commonly referred to as "Drowned Men Rapid." It has been theorized that the name's origin evolved when a canoe capsized in 1837, drowning all four crewmen aboard.

### 84.5- Judith Landing Historic District

92.8 On December 6, 1975, this area was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District. Among the many events identified within the district are:

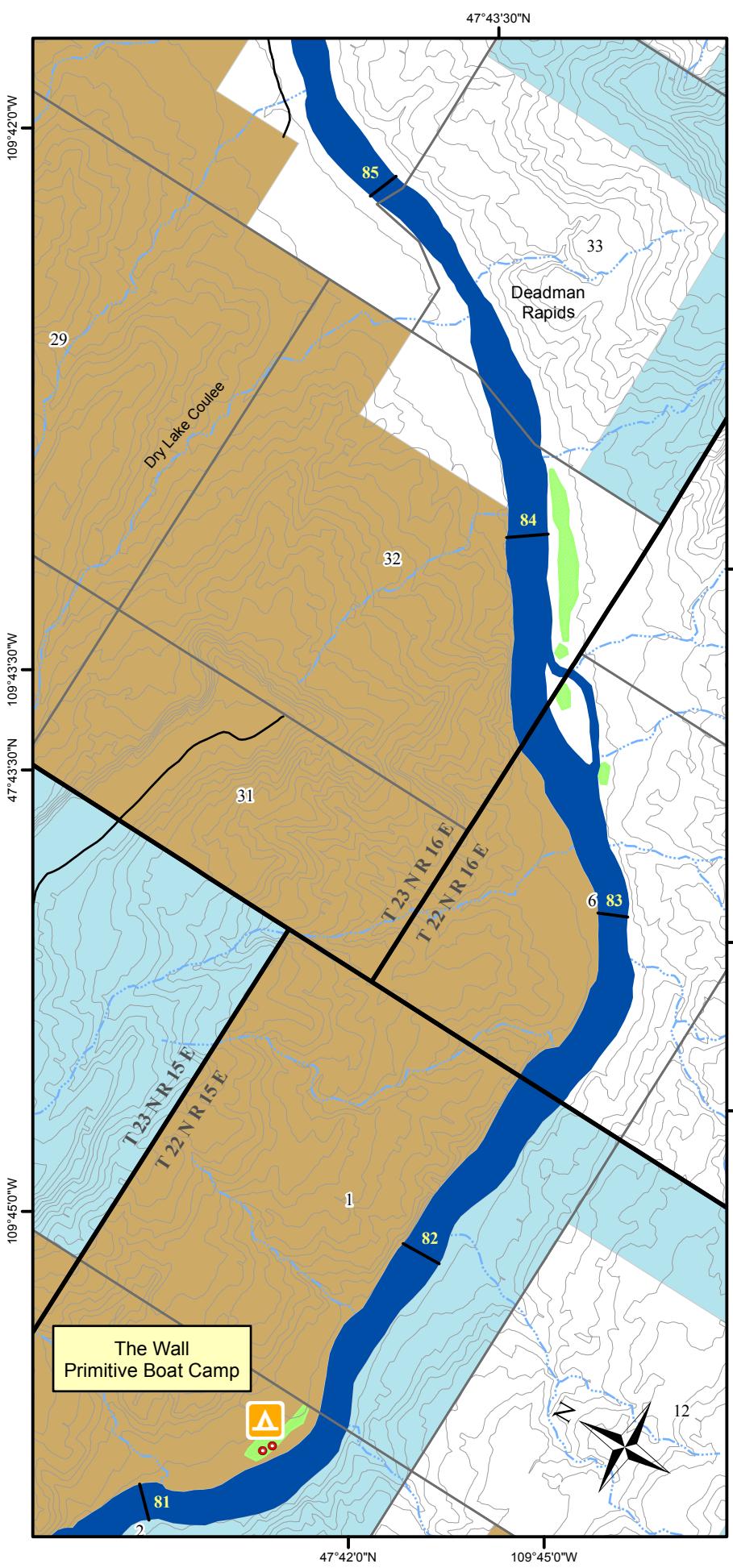
- Corps of Discovery Campsite, May 28, 1805
- Fort Chardon Trading Post, 1844-1845
- Isaac Stevens 1855 Treaty
- Camp Cook (first military post in Montana), 1866-1870
- PN Cable Ferry, 1880-1908

### 86- P-N Ranch

89 R On the right side of the river is a long stretch of private land with both immature and mature cottonwoods. The entire river bottom was once part of a large, open-range cattle spread founded by T.C. Power, merchant prince of Fort Benton, and John Norris, who managed the ranch for the company.

**This site is on private property. Landowner permission is required for access.**

*Personal Journal Notes*



## River Mile

### 87.5 R Judith River

Captain Clark, who explored this river for several miles from its mouth, named this river in honor of his sweetheart Julia (or Judith) Hancock, whom he married in 1808.

### 88.5 L Judith Landing Developed Public Access Site -- Fee Site

This is the common take-out point for many boaters coming through the White Cliffs section of the river. BLM has a five-month lease for public access to the site from May 15 to October 15. A boat ramp allows you to remove your boats and gear. A BLM contact station, vault toilet and trash receptacles are next to the boat ramp.

Between October 16 and May 14, permission to camp and/or park vehicles at this site is required from the landowner, and a fee may be charged. Please call (877) 256-3252 for further details.

The Judith Landing Campground is immediately upriver of the highway bridge and is connected to the boat ramp by road. It contains tent and RV camping, seven picnic tables, seven fire rings and one vault toilet.

For those interested in floating the lower stretch of the Upper Missouri River, Judith Landing is the common launch point for a three to five day float to the eastern end of the monument at the James Kipp Recreation Area. The lower section of the river receives much lighter visitor use than the White Cliffs section, and you'll have many opportunities for quiet reflection in the wide open breaks country that recalls the days of the old West.

**Tip:** If you plan to terminate your trip at Judith Landing, the take-out point is about one-tenth of a mile downriver from the Highway 236 bridge. Boaters continuing downstream, but planning to camp here overnight, should take out at the campground about two-tenths of a mile upriver from the bridge.

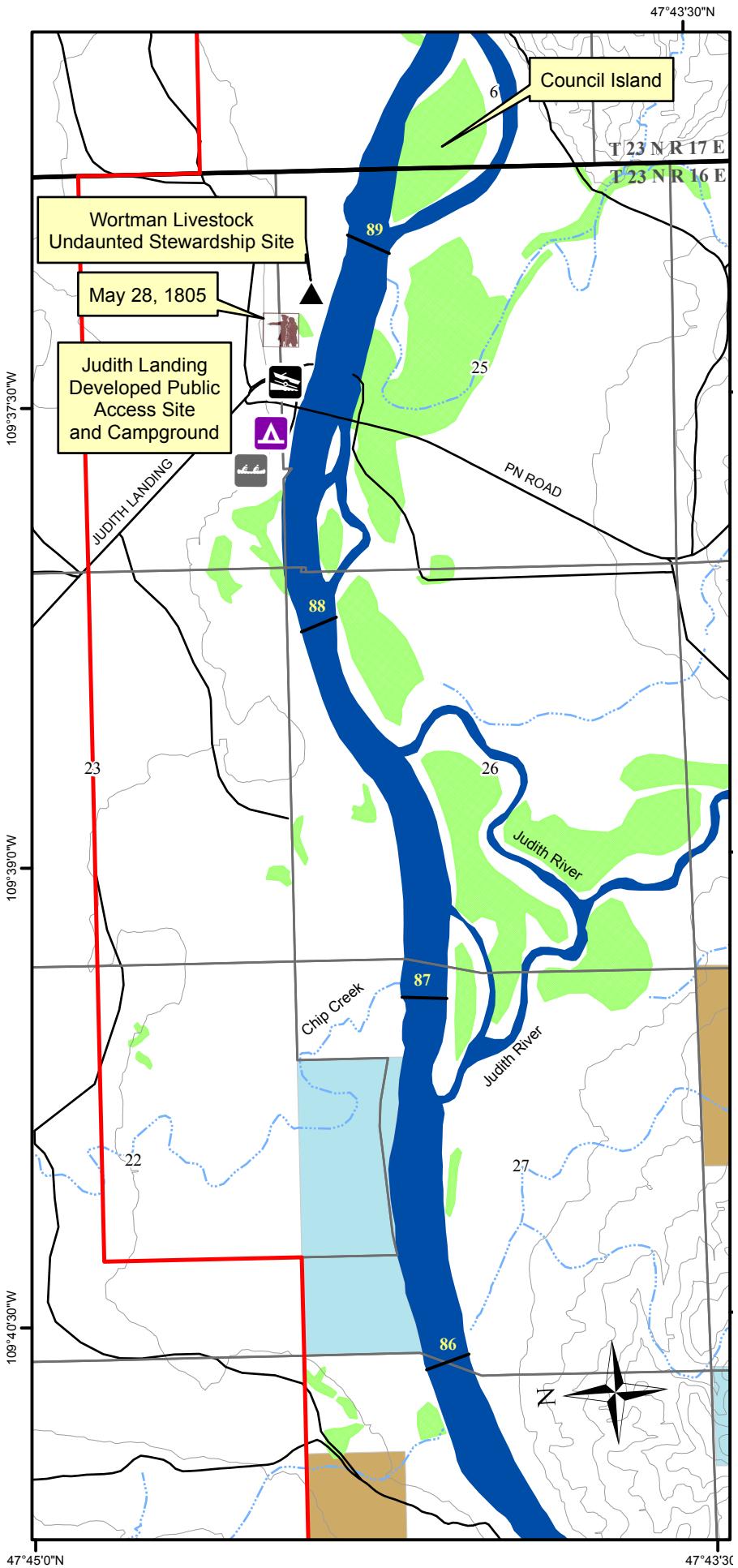
### 88.7 L Corps of Discovery Campsite

The Expedition camped here on May 28, 1805. Directly across the Missouri River is Dog Creek, called Bull Creek by the explorers in recognition of the incident which occurred when they stayed at this site. Clark wrote, "Passed a Creek of running water on the Stard Side about 35 yards wide and camped imedeately opposit to a Small Creek on the Lard. Side we call Bull Creek from the Circumstance of a Buffallow Bull swiming from the opposit Side and comeing out of the river imedeately across one of the Perogues without Sinking or injureing any thing in the Perogue, and passing with great violence thro' our Camp in the night makeing 3 angles without hurting a man, altho they lay in every direction, and it was very dark...."

**NOTE: This site is on private property with access granted by the landowner through the Undaunted Stewardship program. A brass marker plate identifies the site.**

### 88.7 L Certified Undaunted Steward: Wortman Livestock

Lewis' dog, Seaman, saved the Corps of Discovery from a late night buffalo stampede when they camped here May 28, 1805. This juncture of the Missouri and Judith rivers later served as the site for Indian treaty negotiations and a primary steamboat stop, where firewood was plentiful and crossing was easiest for miles.



## Sites and Facilities Chart

Site	River Mile	GPS Coordinates (Datum: WGS 84)			Boat Ramp	Road Access	Shelter	Fire Ring	Toilet	Water
		Zone	Easting	Northing						
Fort Benton Canoe Launch	0.0 Left	12T	0526968	5294688	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Fort Benton Motorboat Launch	1.5 Left	12T	0525188	5296393	✓	✓			✓	✓
Evans Bend Primitive Boat Camp	5.7 Right	12T	0531284	5299257				✓		
Senieurs Reach Primitive Boat Camp	16.2 Right	12T	0539328	5303118				✓		
Black Bluff Rapids Primitive Boat Camp	19.2 Left	12T	0539203	5306511				✓		
Wood Bottom Public Access Area and Campground	20.3 Left	12T	0538224	5306090	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Coal Banks Landing Public Access Area and Campground	41.5 Left	12U	0556947	5320128	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Little Sandy Developed Boat Camp	46.7 Left	12U	0564444	5319871				✓	✓	
Lone Tree Coulee Developed Boat Camp	49.0 Left									
Eagle Creek Developed Boat Camp	55.7 Left	12T	0570390	5307032				✓	✓	
Hole-in-the-Wall Developed Boat Camp	62.9 Right	12T	0570077	5296671			✓	✓	✓	
Dark Butte Primitive Boat Camp	68.8 Left	12T	0578442	5292728				✓	✓	
Pablo Rapids Primitive Boat Camp	72.8 Left	12T	0583371	5290298				✓		
Slaughter River Developed Boat Camp	76.8 Left	12T	0586356	5285538			✓	✓	✓	
The Wall Primitive Boat Camp	81.2 Left	12T	0593485	5284167				✓		
Judith Landing Public Access Area and Campground	88.5 Left	12T	0603272	5288198	✓	✓		✓	✓	

# **Emergency and Contact Information:**

## **Emergency Contacts**

*In case of emergency, contact any of the following:*

<b>Chouteau County Sheriff</b> (River mile 0 to 88.5)	(406) 622-5451
<b>Fergus County Sheriff</b> (River mile 88.5 to 149)	(406) 538-3415
<b>Blaine County Sheriff</b> (River mile 88.5 to 149)	(406) 357-2019
<b>BLM Law Enforcement Ranger</b>	(406) 538-1939

## **Additional Information**

### **BLM - Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center/**

**Fort Benton River Management Station** (406) 622-4000

701 7th Street

Box 1389

Fort Benton, MT 59442

*For questions regarding river management or visitor services and information.*

**BLM - Lewistown Field Office** (406) 538-1900

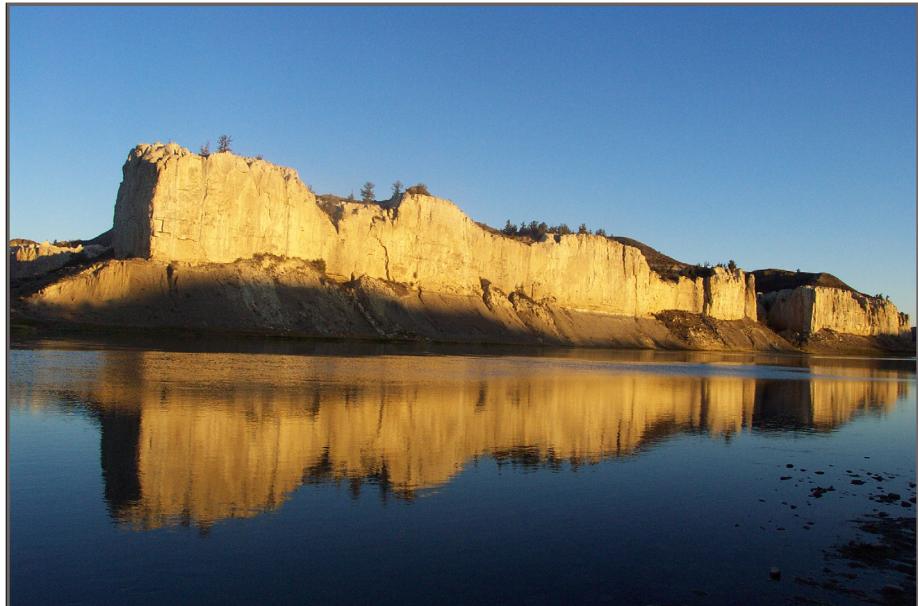
**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks** (800) 847-6668

*Report Misconduct and/or Game Violations* (406) 454-5878

### **USGS**

[http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/current/?type=dailydischarge&group\\_key=basin\\_cd](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/current/?type=dailydischarge&group_key=basin_cd)

*Contact for Daily River Flow*





*“The water in the course of time in descending from those hills and plains on either side of the river has trickled down the soft sand cliffs and woarn it into a thousand grotesque figures, which with the help of a little immagination.... are made to represent eligant ranges of lofty freestone buildings, having their parapet well stocked with statuary.....In other places we see the remains or ruins of eligant buildings; some collumns standing and almost entire with their pedestals and capitals....”*

Meriwether Lewis, May 31, 1805

United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



BLM/MT/GI-05/011 Rev. 4/17

