

AMERICAN INDIAN FLAGS AND THE L&C BICENTENNIAL

The Corps of Discovery presented flags to Indians they met along their journey, but today, those tribes proudly fly flags of their own

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BY EDWARD B. KAYE

In the early 1800s, the United States was a very young country, occupying just the eastern coast of North America. France, Great Britain, Spain and Russia all made territorial claims on and occupied parts of the continent. President Thomas Jefferson envisioned the expansion of the United States to the western coast. His administration purchased the Louisiana Territory in 1803, doubling the size of the country. He then sent his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and Lewis's former army commander, William Clark, on an expedition to explore the territory and seek a water-based route across the continent.

From May 1804 to September 1806, Lewis and Clark led a military corps up the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean, and back. Their "Corps of Discovery" traveled more than 8,000 miles through the homelands of more than 50 modern-day Indian tribes, through the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase and into Oregon Country. The Lewis and Clark Expedition was the first Euro-American party to cross the present United States, map its travels, collect scientific specimens, and record detailed observations of the land and its native people. It traversed what would become 11 of the current 50 states. Lewis and Clark's journey became one of the most important chapters in the early history of the United States, and opened up the West to conquest and settlement.

Two hundred years later, the country commemorated the Lewis and Clark Expedition with a multi-year series

of events, exhibitions, books, monumental art, park dedications and educational opportunities. Nearly all of today's "encounter tribes," which represent the 100 tribal nations recorded by Lewis and Clark, participated in the bicentennial, seeing it as an opportunity to tell their side of the story. A few, viewing the expedition as the beginning of the end of their way of life, avoided the commemoration.

TRIBAL FLAGS AND THE BICENTENNIAL

While 200 years ago none of those encounter tribes had flags of their own, today nearly all have flags. President Jefferson's detailed instructions to the captains described the tribes as "nations," and indeed current U.S. government policy requires states and federal agencies to deal with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis. Along with federal laws allowing operation of gambling casinos, this has spurred tribal flag adoption over the past 25 years. Several tribal flags were adopted specifically in anticipation of the bicentennial.¹

From January 2003 to September 2006, the national Lewis and Clark Bicentennial comprised thousands of events across the country. Nearly every community along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and many sites throughout the Eastern Legacy held some form of commemorative event. Additionally, there were 15 national "Signature Events." Every trail state had a substantial organizing group. Several federal agencies sponsored significant participation including the U.S.

Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service. Other agencies also participated, including the Army National Guard, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Mint, which featured Lewis and Clark's Shoshone interpreter, Sacagawea, on the U.S. one-dollar coin and issued a special set of commemorative nickels.

The National Park Service led federal efforts. It created the "Corps of Discovery II: 200 Years into the Future," a mobile exhibit and event venue that traveled the length of the trail for more than three years. TME Co., a Connecticut company

that specializes in the manufacture and sale of flags and flag-related merchandise, generously provided Corps II with a full set of encounter tribe flags. The staff of Corps II flew the flags of the host tribes in each of the sites it visited. They never flew more than three flags at once, but for many of the hundreds of thousands of visitors, it was the first time they had ever seen a tribal flag.

The largest single use of tribal flags occurred during the opening ceremonies of the "Destination: The Pacific" Signature Event in November 2005 at the Pacific Ocean. Held on Veterans Day and sponsored by the Army National Guard, the ceremonies combined historic, patriotic and military ritual. Representatives of 50 encounter tribes—all of them U.S. military veterans—carried tribal flags in a solemn procession. The tribal flags were supplied by members of the North American Vexillological Association, most coming from the collection of Dr. Dennis Moore. That evening, the local Clatsop-Nehalem tribe hosted a potlatch for all visiting tribal representatives, with young "wolf dancers" in front of the tribe's new flag.

The event coincided with the opening of "Lewis & Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition," at the Oregon Historical Society. Tribal representatives with their flags paraded in downtown Portland for the opening event the next day.

The national event in September 2006 commemorated

the return of the expedition to St. Louis on the Mississippi riverbank in front of the famous Gateway Arch. The St. Louis city flag was replaced on the main flagpole by the flag of the Osage Nation, in whose traditional homeland the events took place. Again, tribal representatives carried

their flags, marching in under the arch and forming a line in front of the crowd with the flags flying in the breeze.

TRIBAL FLAGS

The following encounter tribe flags appeared in the November 2005 events. They represent tribes currently on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and others with a historical connection. Tribes from the Eastern Legacy portion of the

trail, from Virginia and Pennsylvania to Illinois, are not represented. Since many tribes no longer live in their native homelands, having been relocated to reservations, a geographic sequencing is difficult. Therefore, the tribes and their flags are displayed alphabetically.²

The flags had special meaning: they showed how the Indian side of the story was heard, respected and included in the bicentennial. They provided a meaningful symbol of belonging to members of the participating tribes. No matter that none existed at the time of the expedition, today the flags herald a new way of viewing the history of our country.



Charlie Tailfeather, representing the Warm Springs Reservation, led the procession of the largest collection of Native American tribal flags of any Lewis & Clark Bicentennial commemorative event at Destination: The Pacific and here at the Oregon Historical Society in November 2005.

Edward B. (Ted) Kaye is editor of Raven, the scholarly journal of the North American Vexillological Association, dedicated to flag studies. He led Lewis and Clark Bicentennial efforts in Oregon from 1996 to 2002, and now serves as secretary of the foundation's Oregon Chapter. He coordinated state and tribal flag displays for Oregon's major bicentennial events.

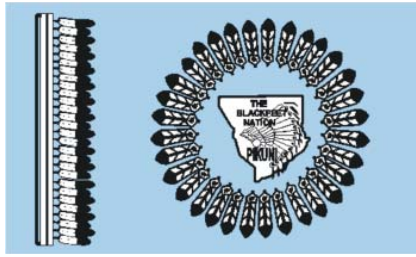
NOTES

¹ In recent years, dozens of tribes have been encouraged to adopt flags by the efforts of Peter Orenski—owner of TME Co., which specializes in the manufacture and sale of lapel pin flags and other flag merchandise—and the seminal work of Don Healy, "Flags of the Native People of the United States," first published by the North American Vexillological Association in 1997.

² Peter Orenski graciously provided most of the flag images used in this article. See www.tmealf.com.



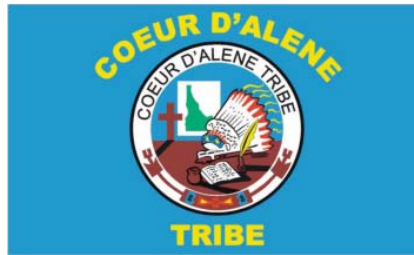
Absentee Shawnee Tribe
Oklahoma



Blackfeet Nation
Browning, Montana



Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
Eagle Butte, South Dakota



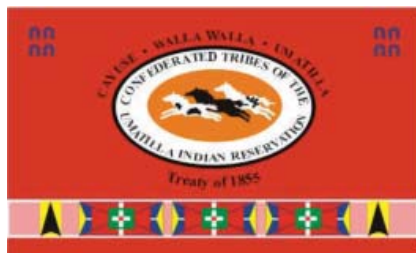
Coeur D'Alene Tribe
Plummer, Idaho



Comanche Nation
Lawton, Oklahoma



Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians
Oregon



Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla
Indian Reservation
Pendleton, Oregon



Confederated Tribes of the Warm
Springs Reservation
Warm Springs, Oregon



Crow Nation
Crow Agency, Montana



Eastern Shawnee Tribe
Oklahoma



Iowa Tribe of Kansas & Nebraska
White Cloud, Kansas



Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma
Oklahoma



Kalispel (Pend D'Oreille)
Washington



Chinook Indian Tribe
Chinook, Washington



Clatsop/Nehalem Confederated Tribes
Turner, Oregon



Confederated Tribes of the
Colville Reservation
Nespelem, Washington



Confederated Tribes of the
Grand Ronde
Grand Ronde, Oregon



Confederated Salish and
Kootenai Tribes
Pablo, Montana



Cowlitz Indian Tribe
Longview, Washington



Crow Creek Sioux Tribe
Ft. Thompson, South Dakota



Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe
Flandreau, South Dakota



Fort Belknap Gros Ventre-
Assiniboine Community
Harlem, Montana



Fort Peck Assiniboine-Sioux Tribe
Poplar, Montana



Kanza Nation
Kaw City, Oklahoma



Kickapoo Tribe
Oklahoma



Kootenai Tribe
Bonners Ferry, Idaho



Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians
Great Falls, Montana



Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
Lower Brule, South Dakota



Northern Arapahoe Tribe
Ft. Washakie, Wyoming



Northern Cheyenne Tribe
Lame Deer, Montana



Otoe-Missouria Tribe
Red Rock, Oklahoma



Pawnee Indian Tribe of Oklahoma
Pawnee, Oklahoma



Peace/Presentation Flag
U.S. Flag with Eagle in Canton
Presented by Corps of Discovery to tribes



Sac and Fox Tribe of Iowa
Tama, Iowa



Sac and Fox Tribe of Missouri
Reserve, Kansas



Spokane Tribe
Wellpinit, Washington



Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
Ft. Yates, North Dakota



Three Affiliated Tribes of the
Ft. Berthold Reservation
New Town, North Dakota



Loyal Shawnee Tribe
Oklahoma



Nez Perce Tribe
Lapwai, Idaho



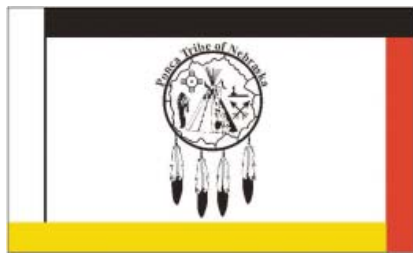
Oglala Sioux Tribe of the
Pine Ridge Reservation
Pine Ridge, South Dakota



Omaha Tribe
Macy, Nebraska



Osage Nation of Oklahoma
Pawhuska, Oklahoma



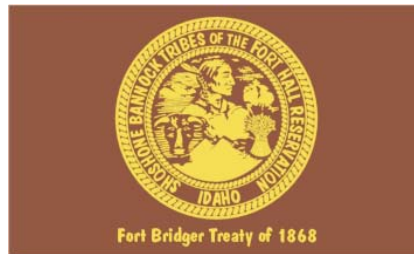
Ponca Tribe of Nebraska
Niobrara, Nebraska



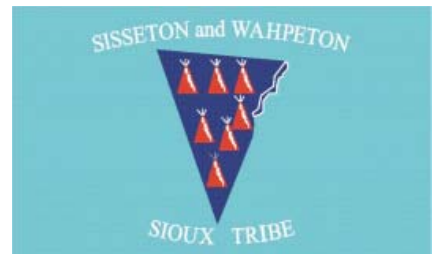
Rosebud Sioux Tribe of the
Rosebud Indian Reservation
Rosebud, South Dakota



Santee Sioux Tribe
Niobrara, Nebraska



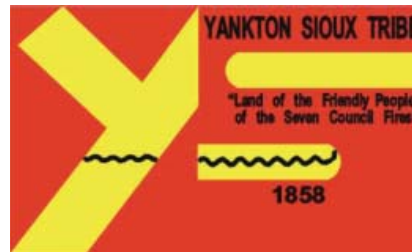
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
Ft. Hall, Idaho



Sisseton-Wahpeton of
Lake Traverse Reservation
Sisseton, South Dakota



Yakama Indian Nation
Toppenish, Washington



Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota
Marty, South Dakota