
Stop 55. Pony Express

Arrival datetime: Saturday, July 20, 4:45PM
Sites visited: Lewis and Clark State Park, Pony Express Museum
Accommodations: Drury Inn
States traveled: Iowa, Missouri

At Lewis and Clark State Park, we went straight to the replica of the keelboat Discovery. To our surprise, there were no ropes or barriers. The man in the visitor center invited us to go on board and look

around. Then he had to close the shop for a few minutes as he left his pills at home. Our exploration of the Discovery was private and unsupervised.



Michael aboard a full size replica of the keelboat Discovery.

The keelboat was purported to be a very accurate replica, long and narrow, 50 feet

long by 12 feet wide, a shallow u-shape. Its only shelter was one cabin at the bow,

about 12-foot square, and one awning on a platform above it. We were surprised how uncomfortable it was. The cabin ceiling was less than five feet high. Jennifer bumped her head and even the shortest man in 1803 would have had trouble remembering to keep his head down. There was no comfortable seating, though we suppose Lewis and Clark may have had furniture on it at the time of their travels. A companion boat, a replica of one of the pirogues, was little more than a long deep rowboat. Both were equipped with long sturdy sticks that the men had dug in at the bow and walked to the stern to keep the boat moving forward upriver.

We strolled about a mile through a nature trail. Mulberries were ripe and we ate a few off the trees. We drove to the beach but the water was too murky and crowded with children to consider swimming. We drove south and stopped in Council Bluffs, where Lewis and Clark had their first meeting with Indian Chiefs. We had a bit of trouble finding the Lewis and Clark Monument, but were finally successful in getting a sweeping overview of the river and the city of Omaha, Nebraska beyond it.

The tourist literature on St. Joseph Missouri highlighted Riverside Park. But that must have been a mistake. It was deserted and barren except for a rusty truck and small red car having a rendezvous in the parking lot. Weeds grew from cracks in the sidewalks and parking lots. By the river was a little ticket booth and a concrete platform to which a riverboat with faded decoration was docked. Litter was strewn on the platform and construction tape draped across the boat. Half a dozen historical

markers surrounded an empty flagpole. We read the markers, looked at the river, and surreptitiously kept an eye on the parked cars in hope that we were not accidentally witnessing a drug deal.

We were also the only tourists at the very impressive Pony Express Memorial Statue. There we provided entertainment for young men hanging out on a bench across the street.

The Pony Express Museum boasted two other tourists. But they left as we arrived, so we had the museum to ourselves. We posed with the statues of riders taking off through stable doors.



Jennifer at the Pony Express Museum.

The exhibits told very informative and entertaining stories of the riders and their adventures. The average route was 100 miles and the entire route covered 2000 miles. We saw an advertisement for riders that actually said, “orphans preferred.” One modern astronaut whose grandfather was a rider was quoted as saying that the same spirit that drives a person to be an astronaut now is what motivated the youth of the 1800s to ride the pony express.



The Pony Express Memorial.

We checked into a highway hotel and went swimming to cool off. In the advertisement literature in the hotel room, we finally found a restaurant on the Missouri River, the Sunset Grill. We drove local roads to get there, within a few miles encountering all kinds of neighborhoods, from small poor urban shacks to mansion houses with nice lawns. Dinner was excellent and so was

the sunset. The sky was all the same shade of dusty white. The river was in the shade from a line of short light green trees on the opposite shore. It remained dark green throughout. On the horizon, a line of taller, darker, green trees turned deep purple just in front of the setting sun, by then a deep orange ball sinking through a horizontal stripe of pink

Miles traveled:	225
Departure datetime:	Sunday, July 21, 8:40AM
Departure weather:	83° Sunny