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MERIWETHER LEWIS LOOP

KEY AT-A-GLANCE
INFORMATION**LENGTH:** 3.5 miles**CONFIGURATION:** Loop**DIFFICULTY:** Easy to moderate**SCENERY:** Ridge and streamside forest**EXPOSURE:** Mostly shady**TRAFFIC:** Moderate**TRAIL SURFACE:** Dirt, rocks, leaves**HIKING TIME:** 2 hours**ACCESS:** No fees or permits**MAPS:** Meriwether Lewis Site Hiking Trails, available at trailhead**FACILITIES:** Restrooms, water at Meriwether Lewis campground during warm season, restrooms only in winter**SPECIAL COMMENTS:** This loop is only one among several possible loop combinations at the Meriwether Lewis Monument site.

IN BRIEF

This hike is centered on Meriwether Lewis Monument, just off the Natchez Trace Parkway. Meriwether Lewis died here in 1809, during his return trip to Washington from St. Louis. The hike begins at Grinders Stand, follows the historic Trace for a mile down to attractive Little Swan Creek, and eventually loops back to the monument area.

DESCRIPTION

This loop hike travels some very historic ground. It was at Grinders Stand on the Natchez Trace, on October 11, 1809, where Meriwether Lewis died under circumstances that remain mysterious to this day. Following his famed expedition to the Pacific accompanied by William Clark, Lewis was appointed governor of Louisiana, which covered roughly 15 million acres, essentially the extent of the Louisiana Purchase. The government did not honor some of his expenses for the expedition, so Lewis decided to return to Washington to dispute them. He traveled south by water from St. Louis to the site of present-day Memphis, then headed east by land to avoid the British presence offshore, where he feared his expedition papers might be confiscated. Thus, he and a few companions found themselves on the

GPS Trailhead
Coordinates

UTM Zone (WGS84) 16S

Easting 0458190

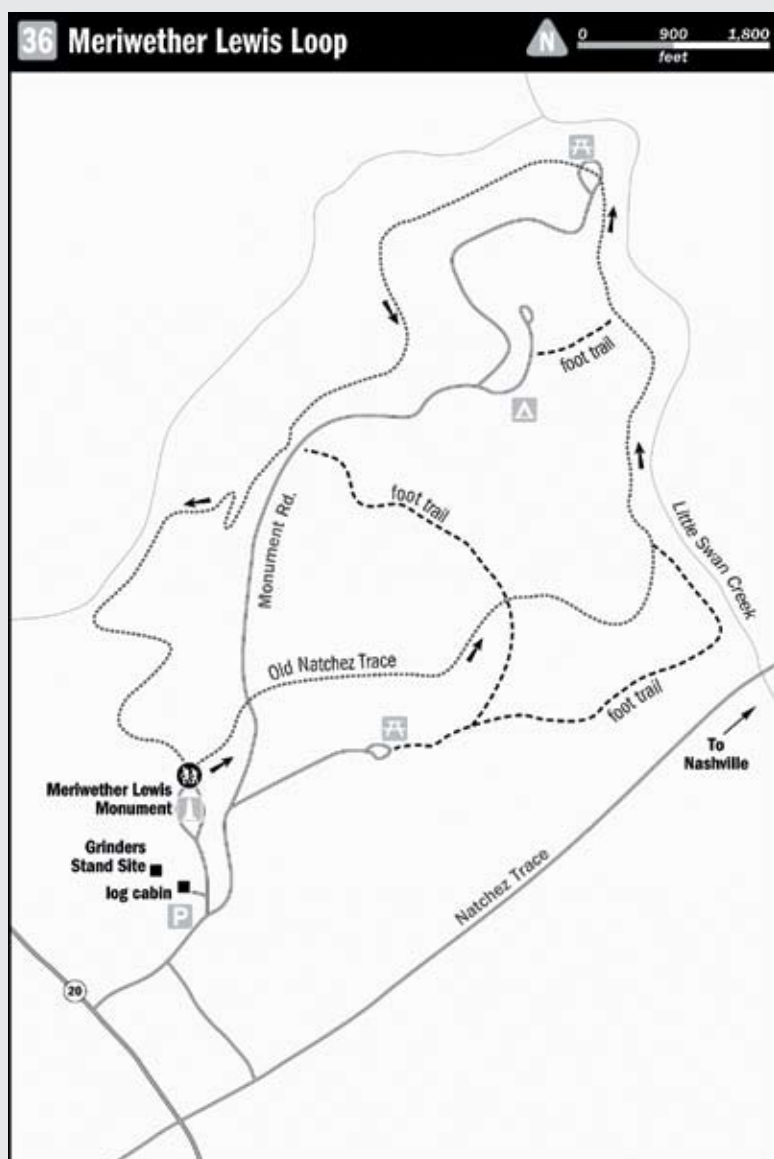
Northing 3929680

Latitude N 35° 30' 41.6"

Longitude W 87° 27' 40.0"

Directions 

From Exit 46 on I-65 south of downtown Nashville, take US 412 west 34 miles to the Natchez Trace Parkway, passing through Columbia. Turn right onto the parkway access road, then stay forward, heading to "Historical Exhibit" at Meriwether Lewis Monument. Park at area near log cabin on left.





**Meriwether Lewis
Monument**

Trace. Lewis arrived first at Grinders Stand, where, according to Mrs. Grinder, “He seemed distraught all evening.” Later that night, Mrs. Grinder heard shots and Lewis died the following day, at age 35, having already become one of America’s greatest heroes. Whether he committed suicide or was murdered is one of our country’s great historical uncertainties.

Today, visitors can go to the very spot where Lewis died. A monument is nearby, and a stretch of the original Trace can be walked for a mile. Hikers then will pick up a foot trail that travels down the bluffs of Little

Swan Creek, then up a feeder branch to make a loop. Start this hike at the trail-head log cabin, which has interesting historical exhibits about the Natchez Trace.

Take some time to absorb the information here. The stone outline of the Grinders Stand cabin is near the log cabin, denoting the exact site where Lewis died. Head toward the stone monument to Meriwether Lewis, and read the inscriptions. The marble rectangles planted into the ground around the monument are graves of early settlers of Lewis County, giving rise to the name Pioneers Cemetery.

Pick up the original Trace at the far end of the monument. This is the actual start of the hike. Follow the Trace past a split cedar tree with two trunks. To your left, a hiker sign marks another trail; this is your return route. As you walk the Trace, consider how American history might have changed had Lewis walked the path you are on now, instead of having his journey cut short at Grinders Stand. Considering his fame and popularity after his Corps of Discovery mission to the Pacific, he might have become President. The Meriwether Lewis Monument, a

shaft extending skyward, is broken off at the top, symbolizing a life of potential greatness cut short for reasons unknown.

The original Trace soon crosses Monument Road, then passes another trail leading left, a loop shortcut. The original Trace becomes gullied as it descends to Peavyhouse Hollow and Little Swan Creek, where it meets a foot trail at mile 1. Turn left onto the foot trail, and Little Swan Creek will be off to your right. Head downstream, soon climbing, as this side of the creek becomes a steep bluff. Reach a side trail leading left to the area campground. Keep forward in the Little Swan Creek valley, where views extend from the bluff. Soon you'll reach the picnic area. Walk across the picnic parking area, passing a copse of cedar trees at mile 1.7.

You'll enter the woods at a hiker trail sign with a couple of picnic tables off to your right. Now you're heading upstream along a noisy feeder branch of Little Swan Creek. The singletrack path works up the feeder-stream valley, circling into and out of side hollows. Turn away from the stream valley onto a hardwood ridge-line, reaching Monument Road at mile 2.7. Immediately turn away from the road, passing beneath a picnic table and overlook. Descend back into the feeder branch hollow by switchbacks and resume heading upstream in a fern-dotted flat, crossing the streambed twice in succession. Here, the streambed is normally dry. Switchback out of the creekbed to emerge onto the original Trace near the Meriwether Lewis Monument at mile 3.5, ending the hike.

NEARBY/RELATED ACTIVITIES

The Meriwether Lewis Monument area has more than just hiking trails. The monument-area roads and nearby Natchez Trace are good for bicycling. And there's a quiet, first-rate campground here. Nearby is the Buffalo River, which is great for canoeing. Outfitters are located in nearby Hohenwald. Visit www.nps.gov/natr for more information.