

The Threat on Kaw Point – Redoubt at the Kansas River
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At the confluence of the Kansas River and Missouri River, at present-day Kansas City, on June 27, 1804, the men of the Lewis and Clark expedition built a “redoubt,” a long, temporary barricade of trees and bushes, six feet high, “to defend ourselves against the Indians, fearing that they might make an attack on us...” 2

The Corps of Discovery was a military expedition and decisions by the captains as to general military defense would be expected, so why did the captains order the building of a redoubt at this location?

St. Louis being a hotbed of in talk, the co-captains would have been seeking and listening to all kinds of information prior to May 1804, preparing to start up the Missouri River. Stories ranged from the profitable and unprofitable trade to the harrowing to the cultural.

Several events survive in writing to inform us what Meriwether Lewis may have learned, one story coming from the trading party of Perrin du Lac with the Kansa Indians in 1802. Perrin du Lac reported: “The Kanzas [Indians] are tall, handsome, vigorous and brave. They are active and good hunters. . . . Among the questions which this people put to me was the following: “Are the people of your country slaves to their wives like the [other] Whites with whom we trade?” Being fearful of losing my credit if I did not appear superior to the other Whites, I replied that they loved their wives without being their slaves; and that they [the white men] abandoned them [the white women] when they were deficient in their duty.” 3

The Kansa Indians lived at least 75 miles west of the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers in 1802, near present-day Manhattan, Kansas. Though Perrin du Lac and his group had traded successfully with the Kansa Indians, du Lac and his party experienced trouble on the return journey at the confluence of the Kansas with the Missouri River: “We saw a party of the Sioux approaching; we therefore immediately reembarked . . . We had hardly gained the opposite shore when we were saluted with a discharge of musquetry; but night coming on, the savages abandoned their pursuit. . .” 4

So Captain Clark would write in May 1804 of planning for: “opposition from roving parties of Bad Indians which it is probable may be on the R[iver].” 5

KAW POINT

As the Kansas River, commonly called the “Kaw,” flows into the Missouri River, the north bank on the Kaw comes to a point of land meeting the west bank of the Missouri. The photograph attached shows an October 2002 view from a bridge above the Kansas River, looking to the northeast, with the Kaw in the foreground, Kaw Point in the middle and the Missouri River flowing from left to right on the far side of Kaw Point. The Kaw is roughly 100 yards wide in this 2002 photograph, the Missouri roughly 225 yards wide; Captain Clark reported in June 1804 the width of each river being at least double the 2002 widths, at 230 and 500 yards, respectively.

The men would have stood behind the redoubt facing inland, with their backs to the Rivers.

THE REDOUBT IN THE JOURNALS

June 27, 1804 writings from expedition members include Captain Clark: “Comple[ed] a strong redoubt or breast work from one river to the other, of logs and bushes six feet high”⁶ and John Ordway: “All the party out early this morning cutting the Timber off a cross [across] the point and made a Hadge [hedge] a cross [across] of the timber and bushes to answer as defense and made room for Cap to take obser [observations of the stars].”⁷

The length of the Kaw Point redoubt is unknown, but 50 yards may be a good guess.⁸ Note also that Lewis needed some trees down to make latitude and longitude studies.

DEFENDING KAW POINT CAMP JUNE 1804---THE NATIVE AMERICAN DEFENSE/THREAT

The convergence of major waterways made the Kaw Point area open to conflict at any time. The Kansa, the Sioux, the Iowa, and other tribes might have been in the area for any number of reasons: to scout/defend their territory, to trade, to war on other Native Americans, to contest any Euro-Americans, etc.

SOME RECORDED NATIVE AMERICAN--EURO-AMERICAN CONFLICTS IN KAW POINT AREA

Surviving writings establish Euro-American/Indian fights on the lower Missouri and the Kaw Point area around this time. Some selected events, other than du Lac in 1802, above:

Iowa/Euro-Americans. In 1795, Benito and Quenache de Rouin, in two boats

with at least another two men, after successfully trading with the Kansa Indians, came east, down the Kaw toward the confluence of the Kaw and the Missouri. The Rouin group was attacked by 160 Iowa Indians, the Iowas continuing their war with the Kansa and in the process chancing upon the Rouin party. The Iowas pillaged the canoes, beat the men and caused "the greatest misery in the world." 9

2. Kansa/Euro-Americans. In October 1805, an American party, charged with returning an Arikara chief to his nation up river on the Missouri, was forced to "retreat to St. Louis" 10 without returning the chief. The American force had come upon "a Body of Canzes [Kansa] Indians, about twenty leagues below the mouth of the River of that name . . ." Not satisfied with turning back the said party, "This body of Canzes after their first, very rude and unfriendly interview . . . marched up the River and took Post at a difficult and narrow pass, where they decoyed two American hunters on shore who were descending the River, one of whom they killed, and the other after shooting an Indian made his escape, but unfortunately fell in with our Camp in the night, and not answering the challenge was fired upon and mortally wounded--" 11 by the American camp sentry.

3. Kansa/Euro-Americans. North of Kaw Point on September 14, 1806, Captain Clark wrote: "this being the part of the Missouri the Kansas nation resort to at this Season of the year for the purpose of robbing the pirogues . . . for the Smallest insult we Shall fire on them . . . we met three large [Euro-American] boats bound [upriver] to the Yanktons and Mahars . . . those young men received us with great friendship . . . those men were much affraid of meeting with the Kansas [Indians]."12

MUCH ADO

No contact occurred from the Native Americans during the three-night stay at Kaw Point in June 1804. "This [Kansa] nation is now out in the plains hunting the Buffalow." 13

MARCHING TOWARDS "PROHIBITION"

The captains enforced solemn duties on their men, especially sentries who should be on the watch for a night attack. What did occur at Kansas River of a military nature involved Americans punishing Americans. Sentry John Collins drank on the job; and the June 29 court martial charge asserted against Collins: "getting drunk on his post this morning out of whiskey put under his Charge as a Sentinal and for Suffering Hugh Hall to draw whiskey out of the Said Barrel intended for the [whole expedition] party . . ." Collins' penalty was "100 lashes on his bear Back." 14 Collins' fellow inebriate, Hugh Hall, received 50 lashes for unauthorized drinking.

The expedition had been safe those days in late June 1804. 15 The redoubt as a defense seemed to fade in favor of islands in the Missouri River as the expedition proceeded. The captains and the men went upstream a little wiser on June 29, 1804 and human beings can be noted for their streaks of intelligence.

FOOTNOTES

1 "The explorers and early mapmakers called the tribe and the river Cans, Causa, Kansa, Kances, Kanza, Konza, Quans, etc. Eventually the stream was named the Kansas River, though it is commonly called the Kaw." Floyd Benjamin Streeter, *The Kaw, The Heart of a Nation* (New York, Farrar and Rinehart, 1941), p. 4.

2 Gary E. Moulton, ed. *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 13 volumes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001), Vol. 11, p. 32. (Whitehouse). Hereafter cited as JLCE, with the appropriate journal keeper's name.

3 *Before Lewis and Clark, 1785-1804*, A. P. Nasatir, ed., Red River Books Edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 2002) p. 708. Journal of Perrin du Lac.

4 *Before Lewis and Clark*, p. 711.

5 Ernest S. Osgood, ed., *The Field Notes of Captain William Clark, 1803-1805* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1964), p. 21.

6 JLCE, Vol. 2, p. 325 (Clark).

7 *The Journals of Meriwether Lewis and Sergeant John Ordway, Kept on the Expedition of Western Exploration*, p. 61 (Ordway).

8 Space enough for: 1. "tents" pitched for about 45 men; 2. about 4 campfires; 3. repairing one or more canoes.

9 In *Before Lewis and Clark*, p. 316. Spanish lieutenant governor Trudeau's letter to one Valle, 1795.

10 William E. Unrau, *The Kansas Indians* (Norman Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1971) p. 82.

11 Governor Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, December 10, 1805, Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XIII, The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri* (Washington, United States Government Printing Office) 1948, p. 298.

12 JLCE, Vol. 8, p. 360 (Clark).

13 JLCE, Vol. 2, p. 327 (Clark).

14 JLCE, Vol. 2, p 329 (Clark).

15 The Lewis and Clark Historic Park at Kaw Point, at One Fairfax Trafficway in Kansas City, Kansas, immediately off of I-70, has a replica of the redoubt. See HYPERLINK "<http://www.moksrivervend.org>" www.moksrivervend.org.

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