Welcome to Mulberry Bend

Downriver from Mulberry Bend, near River Mile 772, you will pass the confluence of the Vermillion River.

You will also pass the remains of Ionia Volcano, noted in Lewis & Clark’s journals, south of Mile 768. The River turns south at Kate Sweeney Bend, named for the steamboat wrecked in the vicinity in 1855. As you turn east again, the Bolton river access is located on the South Dakota shore.

During fur trade and homesteading times, the Missouri River followed a “great bend” to the north, meeting the South Dakota bluffs in lower Vermillion and making that city a busy river town.

In the spring of 1881, a deluge of ice and water destroyed old Vermillion and cut off this bend. The Missouri carved a new channel nearer where it is today and the Vermillion River filled its abandoned channel.

Among other sites Lewis & Clark visited in August 1804 is a geologic formation subsequently named the Ionia Volcano, located on a bluff near what is now Newcastle, Nebraska. They literally followed their noses and a sulfur-like smell (like rotten eggs), then saw and heard steam rising out of the ground. Based on these observations, they thought it might be a volcano.

One can paddle up the Vermillion River from its current confluence approximately five miles against the current to Cotton Park in Vermillion, the site of another Water Trail access point.

From that site, at the 1804 Vermillion-Missouri confluence, Lewis & Clark and a small group of explorers left their pirogue and began a day-long overland visit to Spirit Mound on August 24, 1804. Spirit Mound is today accessible by Highway 19, 11 miles to the north.

Geologists later determined that though the area is geologically active, it was not a volcano. The “volcano” has eroded since Lewis & Clark’s time, leaving only a trace in the hillside, accessible from the road atop the bluff south of River Mile 768. Local folks still refer to the area as Ionia Volcano or Volcano Hill.

Nearby, nine miles downriver is Kate Sweeney Bend. Here, on August 1, 1855, a side-wheeler steamboat named Kate Sweeney sank. 200’ long and 36’ wide, the remains of the Kate Sweeney have not been located.

Bolton access is on the South Dakota side of the river, just around the next sharp bend to the east.