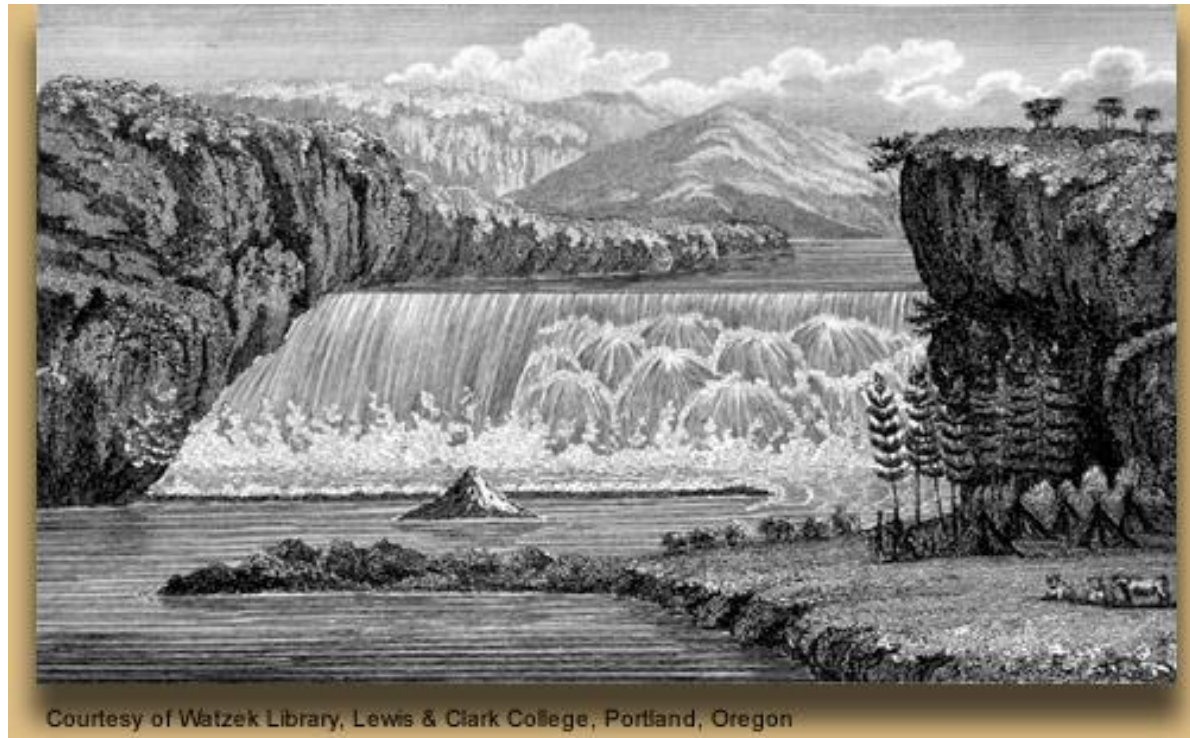


SUN RIVER/GREAT FALLS

The Road Becomes Easier



Courtesy of Watzek Library, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon

Principal Cascade of the Missouri

Engraved from a drawing

by John James Barralet from a sketch by Meriwether Lewis (1807)

“On the morning of the 19th of July,” writes Mullan, “we again moved over a rolling prairie region. We had now left the more difficult sections of the mountains, and skirted along their eastern bases over the long lateral spurs making out from the main range; these spurs were untimbered, and here became reduced to easy rolling hills; only light work was needed,”

“When we reached the Dearborn River, we now left both the mountains and their spurs behind us, and emerged upon the broad, swelling prairies of the upper Missouri. On the 28th, we proceeded to Sun River, crossing at a ford (at) the Indian agency of the Blackfeet. At this point our work proper ceased, for the remaining distance of fifty-five miles to Fort Benton was over an easy and almost level prairie road, with no running streams.”

The Blackfeet Indian Agency referred to by Lt. Mullan was near modern-day Great Falls. Around 1600, Piegan Blackfoot Indians migrating west claimed the area around Great Falls and it became their tribal territory. Great Falls takes its name from the series of five waterfalls in close proximity that Lewis and Clark had to portage around requiring 31 days of difficult labor for ten miles during the westward leg of their 1805-1806 expedition.

The Great Falls of the Missouri River were the limit of navigation on the Missouri River. The town itself was not established until 1883. By that time the various portions of the Mullan Road had long been abandoned or had formed the route of more modern roadways.