

Saint Louis  
**COUNTY**

*explore*

**PARKS**

# FORT BELLE FONTAINE



## **FORT BELLE FONTAINE**

**First American Fort West of the Mississippi  
Last Campsite of the Lewis and Clark Expedition  
WPA Structures from the 1930s**

North end of Bellefontaine Road  
St. Louis, Missouri 63138  
314/544-5714 or 800/735-2966 TTY  
[www.stlouisco.com/parks](http://www.stlouisco.com/parks)

Established in 1805 on the south, low-lying bank of the Missouri River, near the confluence of the Mississippi River, **Fort Belle Fontaine** was the first U.S. military post west of the Mississippi in the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. Originally called Cantonment Belle Fontaine, it served as an American Indian "factory" or trading post for local Sac, Fox and other American Indian tribes. General James Wilkinson, first governor of the Louisiana Territory and military commander, selected the site. Buildings at the site were erected by three companies of the First Infantry under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Kingsbury in 1805. The factory was removed in 1808. General Bissell was the commanding officer at Fort Massac in southern Illinois when he was sent to St. Louis in 1809 to take command of Cantonment Belle Fontaine. The U.S. Army transferred the majority of

its troops to Jefferson Barracks (now a park in south St. Louis County) from Fort Belle Fontaine in 1826. The Fort was finally abandoned in 1833.

**Lewis and Clark:** Captains Lewis and Clark and members of their "Corps of Discovery" expedition camped across the river from this site at the start of their voyage on May 14, 1804. **On the last night of their journey, September 22, 1806, Lewis and Clark and their troops camped at the Fort and celebrated their return to civilization with fellow American soldiers.** Chief Sheheke (Big White) of the Mandans returned with the expedition and received clothing from the post's store for his trip to visit President Jefferson in Washington.

**Other Expeditions:** From its early days, the Belle Fontaine site served as a launching or stop point for expeditions to the far-reaching American West. Among those explorers was **Zebulon Pike** - his trips north on the Mississippi in 1805 and west along the Missouri in 1806 both left from Fort Belle Fontaine, where he left his family during his absence. Colonel **Henry Atkinson's** 1819 Yellowstone Expedition and the scientific expedition of **Stephen Long** shoved off from these shores as well.

**Missouri Hills Home:** Originally called Bellefontaine Farms and established in 1913, the Missouri Hills Home, also at this site, was built by the city of St. Louis as a training school for boys. The Home is now coed and now under the care of Missouri's Division of Youth Services. St. Louis County acquired the property surrounding the Home in 1986.

**WPA Structures:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression of the 1930s. WPA workers built all the limestone projects (including the Grand Staircase, pictured) from 1936-1940, to enhance the Missouri Hills Home estate and attract visitors to the picturesque landscape.

**Hours, Admission and Tours:** Park open 8:00 am until sunset. Free admission - special event fees may apply. **A free self-guided tour is available at the Grand Staircase.** Guided tours are available by appointment. For more information, call 314/544-5714 .

**Historic Encampment:** This annual event - **a weekend near September 22, when Lewis and Clark last landed at this site** - offers reenactments, black powder shoot, traders' row, demonstrations and more.



**Educational Programs:** Fort Belle Fontaine offers a variety of educational programs. For information, call 314/544-5714.

**Other Nearby County Park Historical Attractions:** Tour the Bissell House at 10225 Bellefontaine Road. For information, call 314/544-5714.

**Accessibility:** For accessibility accommodations or this card in an alternative format, call 314/544-5714 or 800/735-2966 TTY. Two business days notice is needed for sign language interpreters or Braille.

**Directions:** From I-270, exit at Bellefontaine Road - go north to the end. Check in at the guard gate.