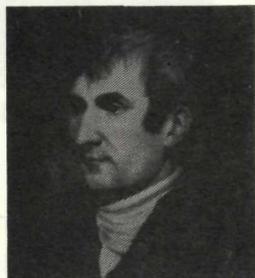


Big Hole

National Battlefield
Wisdom, Montana
(406) 689-3155

LEWIS AND CLARK and the CORPS OF DISCOVERY

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson authorized the Corps of Discovery, popularly known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Jefferson foresaw the expanding destiny of the nation and hoped to establish claims on behalf of the United States all the way to the Pacific coast. Furthermore, in 1803, Ohio came into the Union and the Louisiana Territory was purchased from France. Jefferson believed knowledge of the new lands was essential to integrating them into the young nation. In 1804, he appointed 30 year old Meriwether Lewis and 33 year old William Clark to lead the exploratory expedition.



Meriwether Lewis

The Lewis and Clark Expedition was one of the most dramatic and significant episodes in the history of the United States. In 1804-06 it carried the destiny as well as the flag of our young Nation westward from the Mississippi across thousands of miles...—up the Missouri, over the Rocky Mountains, and on to the Pacific.

Co-captains of the Corps, Lewis and Clark covered more than 7000 miles in 28 months, and made significant contributions to the understanding of geography, natural history, inhabitants, and map knowledge of the previously undocumented regions of our continent.

The information they accumulated and subsequently published, and the trust and friendships established with American Indians were to benefit the young nation for years to come.

THE NEZ PERCE CONNECTION

Lewis left Pittsburgh in late August, 1803, and reconnoitered with Clark at Clarksville, Indiana Territory. They left Clarksville in late October, and traveled as far as Camp Wood, near St. Louis, where they stopped to spend the winter, assemble their company, and prepare for the journey ahead. On May 14, 1804, under rainy skies, the expedition paddled away from the dock at Camp Wood, westward bound. By October 26, they had reached the Mandan Villages, in present day North Dakota, where they spent the winter of 1804-05. It was here that Lewis and Clark hired a French-Canadian trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau as an interpreter. Charbonneau eventually convinced the captains to allow his pregnant young wife, Sacajawea, to accompany the expedition.

Leaving the Mandan Villages in early April 1805, the men traveled by canoe on the Missouri and Jefferson Rivers, reaching Camp Fortunate, south of today's Dillon, Montana, by late August. On August 30, 1805, they sunk their canoes and prepared for an overland trek north.

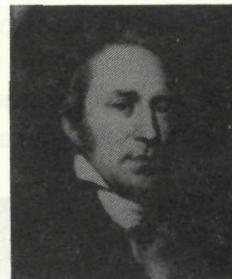
On September 12, 1805, the Expedition "*proceeded on*" after spending a few days organizing and repairing items at a campsite they named 'Travelers Rest', about 10 miles south of today's Missoula. On the 13th, the expedition stopped at Lolo Hot Springs, where Clark tasted the water. On the 14th, 6"-8" of snow fell, and the Corps became lost when their Shoshoni guide, Old Toby, mistakenly took the wrong trail. Game was scarce, and the expedition was suffering from extreme cold and hunger. Fallen timber blocked the trail, horses slipped and fell down the steep slopes, and morale was at a low ebb. As the situation became increasingly serious, the entire expedition was in jeopardy: this was to prove the most difficult part of their whole journey.

Finally, in desperation, Lewis and Clark split their forces. Clark pushed ahead with six men to hunt while Lewis stayed with the main party. Nine days after leaving Travelers Rest, Clark met Twisted Hair, a Nez Perce man camped at

Weippe Prairie with his band. The Indians fed the starving explorers dried salmon, berries, and camas roots. Two days later, Lewis struggled in with the rest of the expedition. Most of the men were weak from their punishing trek over the Bitterroots, and many were nearly debilitated from severe dysentery. Twisted Hair helped Clark find trees suitable for making canoes, and the expedition camped for about 10 days at "Canoe Camp", near today's Orofino, Idaho. In camp, they regained strength and prepared for the next stage of the journey.

On October 7, Lewis and Clark resumed their westward journey, heading down the Clearwater River en route to the Columbia. Traveling now in boats, they asked the Nez Perce to safeguard 38 horses until they returned the following year. Friendly Nez Perce living in streamside camps provided information, while Twisted Hair and another Nez Perce man agreed to accompany the expedition downstream. On October 25, the two Indian men returned to their people, and on November 15, 1805, Lewis and Clark caught their first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean.

After spending the long winter 1805-06 at Fort Clatsop, Washington, Lewis and Clark met the Nez Perce again on their return trip east in the spring of 1806. Late spring snowfall forced the expedition to spend nearly a month camped with Nez Perce people near Kamiah, Idaho.



William Clark

RETURNING THROUGH THE BIG HOLE

Lewis and Clark split forces when they returned to Travelers Rest on the return trip. Lewis proceeded north to the previously uncharted Marias River. Clark traveled in a southeasterly direction and explored from the headwater of the Yellowstone to its confluence with the Missouri River.

On July 3, 1806, Clark and his party left Traveler's Rest and traveled south through the Bitterroot Valley. They climbed today's Gibbon's Pass to cross the mountains, then camped on Trail Creek on July 6, a few miles west of today's Big Hole National Battlefield. The next day they crossed into the Big Hole and continued through the valley to a campsite near Jackson, where several members of the expedition boiled some meat in the hot water of the springs. Clark noted: *the one about the size of my 3 fingers cooked dun in 25 minits the other much thicker was 32 minits before it became sufficiently dun.*

JOURNEY'S END

The Lewis and Clark expedition reached St. Louis on September 23, 1806, after a journey of two years, four months and ten days.

Long given up for dead, the men of the expedition must have resembled Robinson Crusoes. These strangers to roofs and beds, with a far-off look in their eyes, the first U.S. citizens to cross the continent, were a special breed. Until the day they died, no matter what fate might inflict or where it might scatter them, they would always stand apart from other men--united in memory with their old comrades of the 7,000 mile trip to the Pacific that no one else could ever share.

SACAJAWEA

The young Shoshoni woman who accompanied the expedition has captured the imagination of many later day armchair travelers. Sacajawea was about 18 years old when the captains allowed her to join the expedition. They knew she would be helpful as an interpreter to her people, and hoped the presence of a woman and a baby in their party would ease their way with potentially hostile Indian groups. Her son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, was born on February 11, 1805, and spent the first 19 months of his life with the Expedition. Sacajawea and her family returned to their home in the Mandan Villages in August, 1806, after traveling to the Pacific coast and back with the Expedition.

Recommended reading:

The Journals of Lewis and Clark, edited by Bernard de Voto. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1953.

Lewis and Clark: Historic Places Associated With Their Transcontinental Exploration (1804-06), by Roy E. Appleman. United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1975. *All quotes are from this source.*

