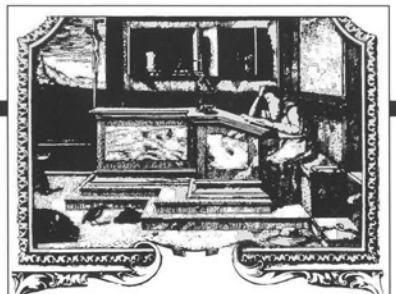


HISTORY COMMENTARY

Ways of Knowing—Thoughts on Beyond Lewis & Clark: The Army Explores the West

By Allyson Purpura

Unlike other commemorative tributes to the Lewis and Clark expedition, in the exhibition, *Beyond Lewis and Clark: The Army Explores the West*, the travails of captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark are only one part of a larger story—the United States Army's exploration of the West. Told in many voices, it is a story about the daunting transformations in communication and way-finding technologies that had a profound impact on the subsequent capture, settlement, and perception of the American "West."

The exhibition is deceptively simple—and this is what intrigues the visitor. The further you step into the exhibit space the more you are aware of the contingencies of exploration and discovery. The sheer fortitude and clarity of purpose that distinguished all of the explorers notwithstanding, the nature of travel and information-gathering depended largely on the technologies that were available to them at the time. Indeed, technology shaped how the Anglo-American image of "the West"—its terrain, its expanse, and its possibilities—changed over time.

Visitors to the exhibit also learn that these contingencies of exploration are profoundly social in nature. Encounters with Native American peoples shaped the explorers' decisions and experiences at every turn—sometimes, quite literally: which direction to head, what resources to exploit, which alliances to make. But while local knowledge was of supreme importance to these explorers, Native American ways of knowing and interpreting the landscape differed significantly from their own—in form, approach, and intent. Whether for trading or hunting expeditions, pilgrimages, seasonal migrations, or expansionist campaigns, indigenous navigational aids guided Native Americans across the landscape and gave meaning and purpose to their place within it.

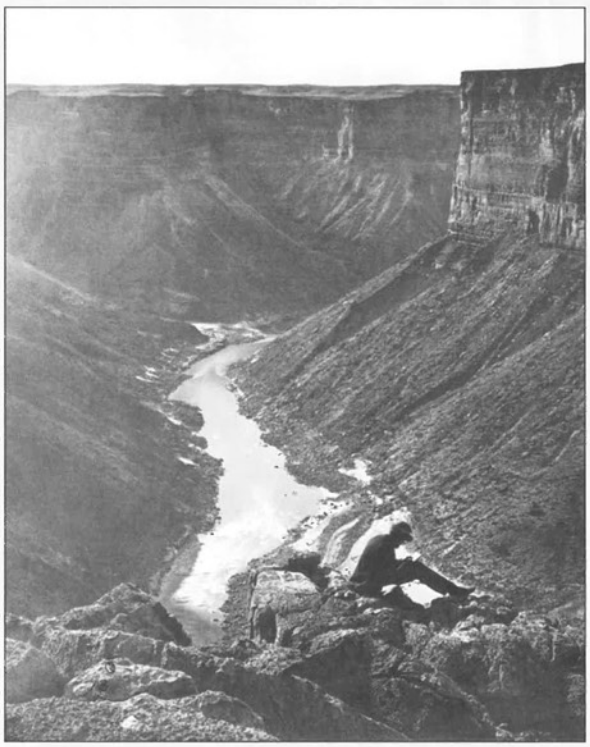
For the military explorers meaning and purpose derived from their "Great Father" back east and his vision of an ever-expanding and prosperous republic. Now the exhibition visitor comes to see that relations of power must be added to the contingencies of exploration. While all its missions were driven, to various degrees, by commercial, scientific, and "diplomatic" interests, the army's priorities would change over time—and as technologies of communication and transportation became more efficient, commercial and imperial interests only intensified. These changes were reflected significantly in the explorers' relations with, and images of, the native peoples they met along the way—be they allies or rivals, assimilated or sovereign.

Broadly speaking, "knowing" is a cognitive process that is mediated by culture. The term, "ways of knowing," refers to how this happens—how we come to apprehend and construct what is "true" or certain in the world. It also refers to knowing as a social act. That is, it is never neutral, objective, or value-free. As individuals we know directly, through our senses and creatively, through our capacity to reason, remember, and imagine. We also know through the aid of technologies and systems of representation that shape the way we interpret information about the world. Indeed, it is in this space of interpretation that information becomes "knowledge"—something that is culturally defined, valued, and socially controlled. Thus, not everyone has access to the same kinds of knowledge, nor do all people know in the same way: gender, ethnicity, class, age, and placehood are all dimensions of power and identity that shape how a person comes to know his or her world—and how a person comes to interrogate and probe that world for alternative "truths."

When different ways of knowing meet, whose knowledge finds the way? The Enlightenment's empirically-driven, positivistic science—"pure" knowledge liberated from the "superstitions" of monarchs, priests, and alchemists alike—created authoritative "facts" and ways of knowing that distinguished these modern world explorers from their precursors as well as from the native groups they would encounter. Technologies that increased the explorers' control over nature brought legitimacy to the empire of Reason and Conquest. By putting regions on a map and native words on a list, explorers laid the first and deepest foundations for colonial power. By giving proof of the "scientific" nature of their enterprise, they exercised power in a pure, subtle form—as the power to name, describe, and classify. While anthropologist Johannes Fabian is referring here to the colonial encounter in Africa, the point he makes about the subtle powers of inscription bears on the American story as well.

The army's capture and renaming of the West was epitomized in maps. Their navigational tools were based on the belief that space was homogeneous, objective, and value-free, and that it could be fixed and bound by lines on a grid. The observer is not an organic part of the space but is located outside of it, creating it; in this way he is author of the landscape. From this vantage point, the observer can see the whole at once and move in all directions without being seen. This conceptualization of objectified, discretely delineated space was of great consequence because it made possible the notion of alienable property rights.

While the explorers' methods of navigating and seeing remained outside of the observed landscape, Native American way-finding



Geography and Maps Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

COMING IN FEBRUARY: NEW PERSPECTIVES

BEYOND LEWIS AND CLARK is the first and largest in the New Perspectives exhibit series presented by the Washington State History Museum in commemoration of the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Opening Saturday, February 14, 2004, *Beyond Lewis and Clark* tells the story of the Corps of Discovery as the prototype of United States Army exploring expeditions from 1807 through 1870, including those led by John C. Frémont and Washington's first territorial governor, Isaac Stevens.

Rare objects in the exhibit include William Clark's map of the Columbia River estuary, Meriwether Lewis's air rifle, mineral and botanical specimens from all the major expeditions, original drawings and paintings of western landscapes and tribal leaders, and an extensive collection of army uniforms and exploratory equipment. This major exhibition, organized by the Washington State History Museum, opened in Virginia in July 2003 to widespread acclaim.

A companion exhibit, *Lewis & Clark Revisited: A Trail in Modern Day*, opens simultaneously and features photographs of places Lewis and Clark visited. These photos depict significant Lewis and Clark sites today in comparison with the scenes described in expedition journals. Future exhibits in the New Perspectives series include *Discovering the Rivers of Lewis & Clark*, a history of the rivers the expedition traveled, and *The Literature of Lewis & Clark*. The latter features books and maps gleaned from the famed collection of Corps of Discovery materials housed at Lewis & Clark College in Portland.

methods tended to be an intrinsic part of it. That is, navigational aids are largely embedded in cosmology—in part they are metaphorical, and as such their purpose is to make connections between phenomena. These connections are what guide and create direction, both in a moral and literal sense.

Broadly speaking, Native American way-finding methods are not singular in purpose. They orient space in conjunction with time, which is anchored in place. What emerges is a symbolic geography embodied in a range of technologies that are evidenced in the shape and placement of Apache and Lakota ritual lodges; directional structures such as the intertribal meeting place of the Great Plains Medicine Wheel in Wyoming; the star charts of the Pawnee; the sacred stone cairns used by Nez Perce and Yakima tribes; and in the petroglypghs and pictrograms that mark pilgrimage routes for many native peoples. Thus forms of Native American way-finding represent the intersection of three dimensions— the land (what you walk through), language (the names, words, and stories embodied in the land), and the self (consciousness and the power to act). As such, the land can be used to analyze and discipline the self. Motifs often encountered in Native American way-finding systems that orient a person in space include representations of the center, the four cardinal directions, the sky and celestial bodies, and vertical axes.

Many native groups drew pictures on the ground as graphic but ephemeral adjuncts to oral traditions about moving from place to place. When Native Americans did make maps as we see them today, it was usually at the request of Western explorers; thus they are best understood as artifacts of contact and exchange. Indeed, Native American maps using writing and pictographs—particularly those of the period covered by this exhibition—are less about the objective fixing of "real" places on a grid and more about narrative: in this way, they are documents of an event, a migration, a story, a biography. Native Americans wrote themselves and their (dis)locations into these maps, showing both reflexivity and autonomy in their recounting of history. As such, the maps become documents of encounter rather than objective delineations of space and location.

Today native peoples combine culture-based way-finding technologies—oral traditions, reading the landscape, astronomical observation, vernacular architecture—with instruments such as compasses, telecommunication systems, and Geographic Information Systems (using remote sensing images to produce maps and analyze other kinds of spatial data), especially when mapping tribal lands for tribal claims. In this confluence of cultural knowledge, the distinctions between "traditional" and "modern" ways of knowing become fluid but are never neutralized, for navigating through the politics of self-determination requires us to remember that such a distinction is emblematic of a time when discovery and dislocation were inextricably linked.

In the end, the visitor to *Beyond Lewis and Clark* learns that exploration may well be inspired by the pursuit of knowledge. But knowledge is not something that can be found—it is created by those vested with the authority to bring meaning and order to things new and different and, in doing so, bring legitimacy to far-reaching acts of power, such as the creation of "the American West."

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COLUMBIA

The Magazine of Northwest History

A quarterly publication of the

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME SEVENTEEN, NUMBER FOUR

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COLUMBIA (ISSN: 0892-3094) is published quarterly by the Washington State Historical Society.

All articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in ***Historical Abstracts*** and ***America: History and Life***. *EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS:* Inquiries and submissions should be directed to ***COLUMBIA***, WSHS Research Center, 315 N. Stadium Way, Tacoma, WA 98403; 253/798-5918. All unsolicited manuscripts and photographs submitted must include return postage (in stamps) and suitable packaging to ensure their safe return. Although reasonable care will be taken with materials received, no responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials, including photographs. *BOOK REVIEWS:* Address all review copies and related communications to Robert C. Carriker, Department of History, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA 99258. *POSTMASTER:* Please send address changes to Washington State Historical Society, 1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402.

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***FRONT COVER:** On their journey to the Pacific Ocean and back, despite many difficulties and a great number of other duties to perform, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark created a detailed and voluminous record of the flora and fauna they encountered even now continues to provide valuable information to natural history researchers and scholars. See related article beginning on page 18. (Voorhis Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.)*