

Lewis *and* Clark



Pathfinders of the Great Northwest

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



Route of Lewis and Clark to Oregon and Return

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CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS and CAPTAIN WILLIAM CLARK were the first white men to ascend the Missouri River to its source and to descend the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. By blazing a trail, over two thousand miles long, through a vast, unstudied territory, they became the Pathfinders of the Great Northwest.

Up to the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition, 1804-1806, the wide plains beyond the Mississippi River, except for a few British or French trading centers, contained no white settlements. The mouth of the Missouri River was well known, however; and in 1792 the ship *Columbia* from Boston had "blundered into the harbor of a vast river flowing into the Pacific." This river had been called Columbia. What lay between these two rivers was practically unknown to the white man. After the purchase of Louisiana Territory, when President Jefferson wished to have this country explored, he proposed, for the leaders of the expedition, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. For endurance, adventurous determination, fidelity to trust, and resourcefulness in extreme need, these young explorers stand without a peer in the annals of America.

The Leaders Themselves

TO UNDERSTAND the Lewis and Clark Expedition, it is well to know something of the leaders themselves. Meriwether Lewis was born August 18, 1774, near Charlottesville, Virginia, of a distinguished family. As a small child, Meriwether possessed courage and a love of the outdoors. From thirteen until eighteen years old, he attended Latin school; at twenty he joined the militia and soon entered the regular army as a lieutenant of the line; and at twenty-three he was promoted to captain and made paymaster of his regiment. In 1801, he was chosen by Thomas Jefferson, an early neighbor and friend of the Lewis family, as his private secretary. Captain Lewis held this office for two years, or until the time when President Jefferson appointed him leader of the western expedition.

Upon learning that he was to lead the western expedition, Captain Lewis went at once to Philadelphia, where he sought "greater familiarity with the language of the technical sciences, and readiness in the astronomical observations necessary for the geography of his route." Furthermore, "to guard against untoward accident," Lewis asked to have a companion in command, and the choice finally fell upon William Clark.

William Clark was also born in Virginia, August 1, 1770. When about fourteen years old he moved with his family to Kentucky, near the present city of Louisville, and here in crude, simple surroundings of the border he grew to manhood. From his elder brother, George Rogers Clark, he learned much of the Indians, and from frontier life, he gained a knowledge of self-preservation and endurance that was in-

valuable in his later western experiences. Like Lewis, Clark joined the army: at eighteen he was made ensign in the regular service, at twenty he was appointed captain of militia of Clarksville, at twenty-one he was commissioned lieutenant of infantry under Wayne, but at twenty-six, because of ill health, he resigned, and retired to his Kentucky farm. Clark had met Lewis in the army, they had at once formed a close friendship and when, in 1803, Lewis insisted that Clark join him in commanding the expedition to the far west, the latter consented.

Making Ready

CAPTAIN LEWIS went to the mouth of the Wood River, near St. Louis, Missouri, in the fall of 1803, established headquarters, and raised a force of picked men. The entire party numbered forty-five—and for six months during the winter of 1803-4 he "hardened the men to rigid discipline, . . . superintended the building of boats and the making of arms, accouterments, scientific apparatus, and all equipments." The expedition was carried on under articles of war: Congress appropriated \$2,500 for equipment for the journey and for gifts for the Indians. The explorers were in winter quarters when, on March 10, 1804, the French flag was lowered at St. Louis and the stars and stripes was unfurled over the great west. Two months later, May, 1804, Captain Lewis and Captain Clark were ready to start.

The Beginning of the Journey

THE expedition set forth up the Missouri in three boats. The American flag floated from the prow of the main craft—a bateau fifty-five feet long, fitted with ten-foot decks

in bow and stern, and in the middle with lockers, "whose tops could be raised to form a line of breastworks along either gunwale, in case of attack from Indians," and which was manned by twenty-two oars. The two other boats were open pirogues with about six oars each. The party led horses along the river bank, for the daily use of the hunters and for emergency against the Indians.

Up the river the explorers pressed slowly and quietly. On May 22, on Good Man's River, they made their first trade with the Indians—some Kickapoos who gave them four deer. Not until June 26 did Lewis and Clark reach the present site of Kansas City. Forty-three days had been spent in crossing our state of Missouri. Here the party held a peaceful council with the Kansas Indians, and here, for the first time the hunters saw buffalo.

Councils with the Indians

FOR another month the party proceeded undisturbed. They came to the mouth of the Platte River on July 26, a date which marked a decided change in the duties and actions of the explorers. Heretofore, they had met only friendly Indians; now they were in the lands of warlike tribes, they must not only secure peace for themselves, but also make peace between the warring tribes. To this end, Lewis and Clark sent messengers, bearing gifts, to the Pawnee and Otoe villages lying within fifty miles to the west, inviting the chiefs to a council on a bluff on the present site of Calhoun, Nebraska. The name Council Bluff was given to this site, but it was later appropriated by the present city of Council Bluffs in Iowa.

August 3, 1804, the council was held. After the Indians, with six chiefs, were assembled, the Americans told them that their Great White Father (President Jefferson) wanted them to live at peace, that he would grant them protection and trade, and that he sent them gifts. Then the explorers gave the chiefs medals, paint, garters, powder, and small trinkets. Although Lewis and Clark were successful in this, their first important conference with the Indians, yet they knew that they must be constantly on their guard.

The only death in the party during the entire expedition was that of Sergeant Charles Floyd. Of him Captain Clark wrote in his journal: "We buried him on the top of the bluff one-half mile below a small river to which we gave his name . . ."

With the Sioux Indians

THE explorers next had experience with the Sioux Indians, —Indians with a reputation for treachery and ferocity. As was their custom, the Americans made fires to let the Indians know they were approaching. Then when twelve miles from a Yankton (a Sioux tribe) village, they sent Sergeant Pryor to the Indians with presents of tobacco, corn, and cooking utensils. In return, Pryor was served a "fat dog, already cooked," which he ate heartily and "found it well flavored." August 30, Captain Lewis addressed the Sioux chiefs, "under a large oak tree, near which the flag of the United States was flying," and gave the grand chief a medal, a flag, and a "richly laced uniform of the United States Artillery Corps, with a cocked hat and red feather." In his reply, the grand chief Weucha (Shake Hand) promised to make peace between the Pawnees and Mahas and to cease fighting with the Otoes and Missouris.

Having made peace with the Yanktons, Lewis and Clark sailed on to the West. September 24, they met the Tetons, another tribe of the Sioux, and barely escaped a fight. For days, bands of Tetons kept following the expedition along the river banks, begging and threatening. To avoid them, the Americans encamped on islands and sand-bars in mid-stream.

In Winter Quarters

By October 10, Lewis and Clark reached the Ricaras, — Indians who, when a member of the expedition was sentenced to be whipped publicly for misconduct, resented such punishment. By the end of October, the Americans, having journeyed 1600 miles, came to the country of the Mandans and Minnetarees. Here they decided to spend the winter, and built log cabins and fortifications which they named Fort Mandan. Fort Mandan was near the site of the present city of Bismarck, North Dakota.

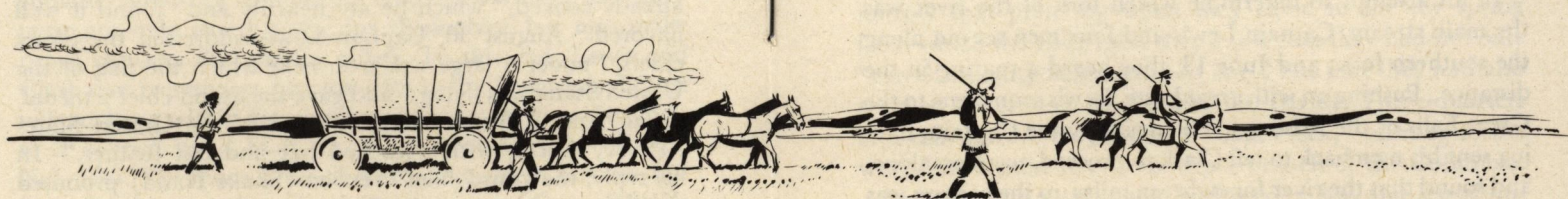
All along the journey the explorers had kept records of the geography and the animal and vegetable life of the land — the very first written reports of this region. They also made

maps. Among other things, they described the prairie dog and the antelope of the plains, animals then unknown to science. During the winter the men completed the reports, and in the spring of 1805, they sent them to President Jefferson, a detachment of fourteen men being chosen to carry them back.

Up to this time, Captain Lewis had met enough French trappers to serve him as interpreters to the Indians, but he knew that there were no trappers to the West, so before he started on, he engaged a half-breed, Chaboneau, and his Indian wife, Sacajawea, or Bird Woman, a captive from the Snake Indians of the Rockies, to act as interpreters and accompany him over the mountains. By April, 1805, the explorers had built new canoes, made a goodly store of pemmican, from the dried meat of buffalo which they had been hunting all winter, and were ready to move on.

On to the West

The party now numbered thirty-two. They set sail in six canoes and two pirogues. The canoes they had made



from green cottonwood, highly unfit for such use, but the only wood available. Over a thousand miles of the roughest waters of the Missouri the men traveled in these makeshift boats. Although watersoaked food and clothing became a daily experience, the men were undaunted.

The explorers were to find other obstacles than leaky boats and Indians. April 29, Captain Lewis and a hunting party were attacked by a grizzly bear, hardly escaping with their lives. Lewis and Clark gave to us our first knowledge of the grizzly.

While walking along the shore to lighten the canoe, Captain Lewis, May 26, 1805, climbed to the top of a high cliff and saw, for the first time, the "shining mountains." Undoubtedly, no other white man had ever before gone so far to the northwest. On and on the party went, but under increasing difficulties. The river became too deep for poles, too swift for paddles, so the men tracked the boats upstream by a towline. Finally, when the men found it absolutely impossible to proceed with such heavily laden boats, quantities of food, clothing, powder, etc., were cached (buried in the ground) at a point where the river forked.

In an attempt to determine which fork of the river was the main stream, Captain Lewis and four men set out along the southern fork; and June 13, they heard a roaring in the distance. Pushing on with great haste, Lewis soon came to the Great Falls of the Missouri. The next day the Captain, having sent his men back to tell Clark to proceed, went on alone, and found that the river for eighteen miles up the canyon was a series of cascades.

Over the Great Divide

TO transport the canoes around the falls, the men made carriage wheels from cottonwood trees, and axles from the mast of the remaining pirogue. Once beyond the rapids and into shallow water, Lewis tried to use a steel framework, which he had brought, for a boat thirty-six feet long. Skins were collected and stretched over the frame, then smeared with buffalo tallow, charcoal, and beeswax. While in water the boat was successful, but when out of water it was a failure, the mixture over the skins dried and fell off in chunks. Consequently the iron frame was buried and left behind, and dugout canoes were made from cottonwood logs.

On to the West the expedition proceeded. July 19, the explorers entered the "Gates of the Rockies"; July 25, Captain Clark discovered the three forks of the Missouri, which were promptly named the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers. Up the Jefferson the men sailed until they reached three more branches. These they named Philosophy, Philanthropy, and Wisdom (after President Jefferson's virtues.) Today, however, these streams are known as Willow Creek, Stinking Water, and Big Hole. Having followed the Missouri for three thousand miles, the explorers at last found it so narrow that presently when they came to the icy spring from which the river rises, they knew that they had not only "run the mighty Missouri to its lair!" but that they had also reached the crest of the Continental Divide. Three-quarters of a mile ahead, they found a "bold creek," running to the west—the Lemhi River, an upper branch of the Columbia.

Since early August, game had become less and less abundant. Furthermore, since April they had seen no Indians.

They hoped to obtain food from the Red Men, but as the river was too shallow, even for canoes, they wanted to trade for horses to journey overland. On they went, with Bird Woman as their guide, until they came to the land of the Snake Indians. Lewis set out to find the natives and suddenly came upon two Indian women. The women bowed their heads, expecting to be killed at once, but Lewis gave them trinkets and painted their faces red, an act understood by all Indians as meaning friendliness. Presently up galloped sixty mounted Shoshone warriors, ready to fight, but seeing the friendliness of Lewis, they gave him cakes of dried cherries. Lewis led the Indians back to his party, where Bird Woman recognized the chief, Cameawait, as her brother. Peace and supplies were now assured the Americans.

The Pacific Ocean, at Last!

THE Americans purchased horses from the Shoshones, and with scarcely ten days' emergency rations, and with little hope of finding game in the mountains at this late season, they continued to the West. Finally the party crossed the hills and reached the village of the Nez Percé Indians, who gave them fish and camas root to eat.

At this point, Lewis and Clark found the river to be navigable, so they ordered their men to hollow logs by fire, Indian fashion, for five boats. Leaving the horses with the Nez Percé chief for his keeping until their return at an indefinite time in the future, and purchasing from the Indians as many dogs, for food, as they could carry, the heroic explorers set sail down the Kooskooskee, or Clearwater River. October 16, they reached the Columbia River. Often the canoes were upset in the swift water by whirlpools or rocks, a

great deal of their baggage was lost, yet on and on the men sailed. With practically nothing to eat, save dog meat, they were hungry and weak, but not discouraged. Happy were they, when, November 7, they first caught sight of the Pacific, "that ocean, the object of all our labors, the reward of all our anxieties. This cheering view exhilarated the spirits of all the party, who were still more delighted on hearing the distant roar of the breakers." First of all white men up the Missouri River, across the mountains, and down the Columbia to the Pacific, the noble band, after a year and a half of "unparalleled perseverance," ended their westward journey.

Winter on the Pacific Ocean

ALTHOUGH the Pacific Ocean had been their objective for eighteen months, the explorers found its shores a dreary place to spend the winter. There was almost continuous rain. Finally, on December 25, they moved into seven huts, which they had built, and celebrated a rainy Christmas with "some poor elk, a few roots, and some spoiled pounded fish." By January first, the men completed a rude fortification and named it Fort Clatsop, after a nearby Indian tribe, whose members, wrote Captain Clark, "sometimes washed their hands and faces."

All winter the officers worked over their journals. Captain Clark sketched a map of the country they had covered since leaving Fort Mandan and made a plan which "shortened the route from the mountains . . . to the Falls of the Missouri. His sagacity in this was marvelous; . . . his plan was found to be perfectly practicable, cutting off 580 miles from the most difficult part of the way. He was a born geographer; indeed, his was a catholic, a cosmopolitan genius."

All winter the men traded with the Indians and hunted. They cured the meat, boiling sea water for salt, and dressed the skins, making them into coats, pants, and moccasins for themselves. Lewis and Clark had hoped to obtain supplies from American vessels, but no ships came to shore during the entire winter. The only hope of getting supplies for the homeward journey lay in trading with the Indians, yet for this trade they had only "six blue robes, one scarlet ditto, five robes which we have made out of our large United States flag, a few old clothes trimmed with ribbons, and one artillerist's uniform coat and hat, which probably Captain Clark will never wear again," and such small trinkets as might be tied in two handkerchiefs.

Homeward Bound

MARCH 23, 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition left Fort Clatsop and started up the Columbia River for their long journey home. In their descent of the stream the men had taken chances in shooting the falls, now they were forced to carry their canoes around them. At last horses became imperative, but the purchase of these took practically everything the explorers possessed. Furthermore, they were time and again harassed by the Indians, who stole from them at every opportunity. Above the Great Falls of the Columbia, however, they came to the Walla Walla Indians, who gave freely of their supply of food and firewood: the chief presenting Captain Clark with a white horse, and Clark returning the kindness with his artillerist's sword.

Having been replenished, the party moved on, yet by the time it reached the Nez Percé villages, May 5, it was nearly destitute again. The Nez Percé chief had been true to his

trust; he had kept the horses for the Americans, and now he returned them. By June 15, the Americans reached the foothills of the Bitter Root range, and a few days later, on the main ridges, they found snow twelve to fifteen feet deep, completely covering the trail and all firewood. Sending back to the Nez Percé villages, they secured, for two guns, guides who promised to lead the party to the falls of the Missouri. Within a fortnight, they were again reduced to a diet of roots, without salt; yet worn and half starved as they were, they took upon themselves new labors. They divided into two parties: Captain Lewis with nine men to go direct to the Falls of the Missouri, then ascend Maria's River; Captain Clark to lead the rest of the men to Jefferson River, which Sergeant Ordway and nine men were to ascend, while Clark took his party down the Yellowstone River.

While ascending Maria's River, Captain Lewis met the Minnetaree Indians, who tried to steal the white men's guns. A fight followed. An American, Fields, killed a savage with a knife thrust; Lewis shot another with a pistol. Mounting the captured Indian horses, Lewis and his men, "rode for their lives through river and slough, sixty miles without halt."

August 12, the two commands came together below the Yellowstone. Except for visits with the Mandans, the Minnetarees, the Ricaras, and with trading parties from St. Louis, the expedition made no more stops. It sailed down the Missouri, making about seventy-five miles daily. At noon, September 23, 1806, the boats drew quietly up to the river front of St. Louis, where, as Clark wrote: "We were met by All the village and received a harty welcom from its inhabitants." The welcome was all the more hearty because the people of the United States had given the party up for lost. As a reward

of merit, Congress, in 1807, granted Captain Lewis fifteen hundred acres of land, Clark one thousand acres, and each of the men three hundred acres and double army pay for the period of the journey.

March 3, 1807, Meriwether Lewis became Governor of Louisiana, and held the office until his death, October 11, 1809, when he was thirty-five years old. On March 12, 1807, Captain Clark was appointed by President Jefferson brigadier-general of the Louisiana militia, and Indian Agent. By his firm, yet kindly rule, Clark acquainted the Indians with our government, made them obey its laws, and became celebrated from St. Louis to the Pacific for his justice toward the Red Men. In 1813, Clark became Governor of Missouri Territory; in 1822, he was appointed by President Monroe as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, an office which he held until his death, September 1, 1838.

So ends the story of Lewis and Clark and their followers, who, no less than the leaders, portrayed a "simple hearted, unselfish devotion to the interests of the nation." These men had done more than journey across the great West and back, they had given new and vital information of the geography, the plant and animal life, and the geology of the new country. They had opened a vast and unknown territory to settlement and development; and had hastened western expansion of the United States.

The history of our country is much more than a chronicle of wars and political events, it is the story of a vigorous, adventurous people conquering a new country; and in that conquest no one played a more important part than Lewis and Clark, the Pathfinders of the Great Northwest.

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