

# The Lewis and Clark Expedition

In 1803 the United States purchased France's Louisiana Territory, a vast area between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. That same year, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson asked Meriwether Lewis to lead an expedition through these little-known lands and on to the Pacific Ocean. He wanted a detailed account of the region's geography, plants, animals, and Native American tribes. He also hoped to locate a continuous water route to the Pacific.

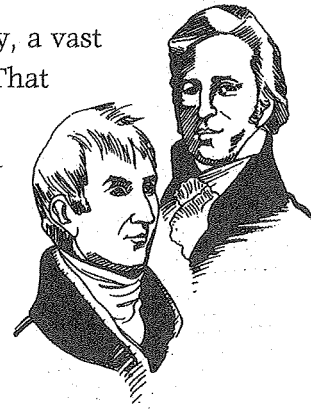
Lewis, his co-captain William Clark, and a crew of over 40 men began their journey into the wilderness on May 14, 1804. Starting near St. Louis, they headed up the Missouri River in two canoes and a large keelboat. Pestered by mosquitoes and ticks, the men traveled up the river, making excursions on land and recording their observations in journals. They ate roasted beaver tail, slept in tents, and often struggled upstream against strong river currents.

On August 3 Lewis and Clark held their first official meeting with Native Americans at Council Bluffs in present-day Nebraska. Sitting down with members of the Missouri and Oto tribes, they gave out presents and told the tribesmen of their **benevolent** "great father" in Washington, D.C., who wanted to be their friend. Moving on through the Great Plains, the group saw huge buffalo herds and had a threatening encounter with the powerful Lakota tribe.

The explorers spent the bitterly cold winter at Fort Mandan, a camp they had built in what is now North Dakota. In early April, when the Missouri River was no longer frozen over, part of the group started back to St. Louis in the keelboat packed with plant, rock, and animal specimens for the President. Included was a live prairie dog. The rest of the group, now in eight canoes, continued west. With them was a young Shoshone woman named Sacagawea.

By June this group had reached the Great Falls of the Missouri, around which they had to lug their canoes and supplies. Menaced by rattlesnakes and grizzly bears, they took nearly a month to make their way. In August they came to the area from which Sacagawea had been stolen when she was a child. Hoping to trade for horses for their journey across the steep Rocky Mountains, the men held a meeting at Camp Fortunate with Cameahwait, a Shoshone chief. When Sacagawea arrived to act as their **interpreter**, she burst into tears. Cameahwait was her long-lost brother.

After an exhausting trip across the Rockies, the explorers rested by the Clearwater River in present-day Idaho. Once again able to travel by boat, they moved swiftly downstream on the Clearwater, sometimes upsetting their canoes in **treacherous** rapids. In mid-October they reached the Columbia River where they were greeted by the Wanapam Indians. One month later, having traveled over 4,000 miles in 18 months, Lewis and Clark and their companions arrived on the coast of the Pacific.



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