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# The Story of Lewis and Clark

## Book 2: To the Pacific Ocean



Written by Peter C. Montin  
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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The dotted line shows the Corps' journey through the fall of 1804.

## Introduction

On May 14, 1804, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark headed up the Missouri River with their group, the **Corps** (KOR) of Discovery. They hoped to find an easy way to travel on rivers from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. This route, called the **Northwest Passage**, would open up the vast new territory of the United States for traders and settlers.



Sacagawea and her infant son joined the journey.

By the spring of 1805, they had traveled 1,500 miles (2,400 km), met many Native American tribes, lost one explorer to illness, and spent a freezing winter in a fort they built themselves. Now, it was time to head out again. Over the winter, three new people joined the expedition: a French fur trapper, his young Shoshone (sheh-SHOW-nee) wife, Sacagawea (sah-kah-gah-WEE-ah), and their infant son, Jean-Baptiste, whom Clark nicknamed “Little Pomp.” On April 7, 1805, the Corps of Discovery launched its boats and headed west again.

## The Fork and the Falls

The wildlife around the Missouri River continued to astound Lewis and Clark. Bison, elk, grizzly bears, and antelope covered the plains. The hunting was good; the explorers grew fond of roasted beaver tail, while Sacagawea helped them find wild artichokes, turnips, berries, and herbs. Soon they saw beautiful limestone formations rising along the riverbanks. The team was sure it was coming close to the place where the Missouri River ended and the Columbia River began. Everything seemed to be going perfectly.

On June 2, the boats came to a fork in the river. None of the Native Americans had mentioned this fork, and nobody knew which way to take. Captain Lewis and Captain Clark split up, and each took a group to explore one branch of the river. Most of the explorers were sure that the north fork was the real Missouri. But the captains believed the south fork was correct. Captain Lewis took a second trip up the south fork, where he heard the roaring of a waterfall. The Native Americans had told him about the Great Falls of the Missouri River. Now he was sure the south fork was correct. Even though most of the team believed that Lewis and Clark were wrong, they followed their trusted leaders.



Hauling the boats was nearly impossible.

Lewis and Clark thought it would be easy to carry their boats and supplies around the falls. The group carved wooden wheels to help drag the boats. But they still had to cut a path through the thick cottonwood trees. The ground was covered with prickly pear cactus. The thorns pierced the team's **moccasins**. One man was bitten by a rattlesnake, and everyone was tortured by the mosquitoes. Lewis had thought it would only take them a few hours to get around the falls. It took them almost a month.

Finally, they could float their boats on the river again. Sacagawea began to recognize the territory of her Shoshone tribe. Lewis and Clark both believed they would soon find the Columbia River, which led west to the Pacific Ocean.

The river forked into three branches, and the Corps of Discovery took the west branch. It was only a small creek now. A Native American trail ran alongside the creek and up a ridge. Lewis leapt onto the trail. He was sure that at the top, he would see the Columbia River, and possibly even a great plain leading to the Pacific Ocean. Finally, he reached the top of the ridge.



Lewis's first view of the Rocky Mountains

What he saw astounded him—there was no river, no great plain, and certainly no Pacific Ocean. Instead, he saw mountains. The mountains were taller, wider, and more **impassable** than any mountains he had ever seen. Even though it was early summer, the peaks shone with snow. These were the enormous Rocky Mountains. In that instant, Lewis knew that there was no Northwest Passage. But still, he was determined to find a way to the Pacific Ocean, whether it was easy or not.

## Over the Mountains

Lewis and Clark knew that they would not be able to take the boats over the Rocky Mountains. Instead, they hoped that the Shoshone, Sacagawea's people, would sell them horses. Sacagawea would be their **interpreter** and would help convince the tribe to sell their horses for the dangerous journey.

Sacagawea was overjoyed to see her tribe again. Another tribe had kidnapped her and sold her to her French-Canadian husband when she was only twelve. She had not seen her friends and relatives in years.

Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea sat down to speak with the chief of the village. Suddenly, Sacagawea leapt up and embraced the chief, sobbing. The chief was her own brother. The Shoshone agreed to sell the expedition all the horses they needed. They also offered a guide, whom Lewis and Clark nicknamed Old Toby.



Sacagawea happily reunited with her brother.



The mountains proved more difficult than anyone had imagined.

The mountains were tougher than Lewis and Clark ever imagined. The slopes were steep and slippery with ice and snow. Men and horses fell and injured themselves. Old Toby could not find the trail among the snowdrifts and fallen trees. Each time they came to a ridge, they saw only more mountains. Food was becoming scarce, and the team was showing signs of **malnutrition**. Finally, they decided that they had to shoot and eat a horse in order to survive.

The members of the Corps of Discovery were nearly dead when they finally found their way out of the mountains. They arrived in a Nez Perce Native American village. The Native Americans gave them food and helped them build canoes to travel down the rivers, which now flowed west, to the Pacific. They were finally on the last leg of their journey.

## The Pacific Ocean

The Corps of Discovery traveled quickly, now that it was going with the current instead of against it. There were many rapids and waterfalls. Sometimes the explorers were in such a hurry that they simply floated down the rapids, hoping to survive. The high, dry plains suddenly changed to the cool rainforests of the Cascade Mountains.



The current allowed the Corps to move west quickly.

They were getting closer to the sea—the river began to taste salty and to rise and fall with the tides. The entire group was eager to see the ocean. But just as it seemed that Lewis and Clark's group would reach the Pacific, a fierce storm blew in. Cold rain and huge waves soaked the Corps. Once they even had to move their camp in the middle of the night so they would not be washed away by the waves.



Storms threatened to wash away the explorers.



The Pacific Ocean at last

When the weather improved, the Corps continued down the river. At last, they saw waves, a beach, and a horizon of water. *Ocean in view*, Clark, who was a terrible speller, wrote in his journal. *O! The joy!* The Corps of Discovery had made it to the Pacific Ocean.

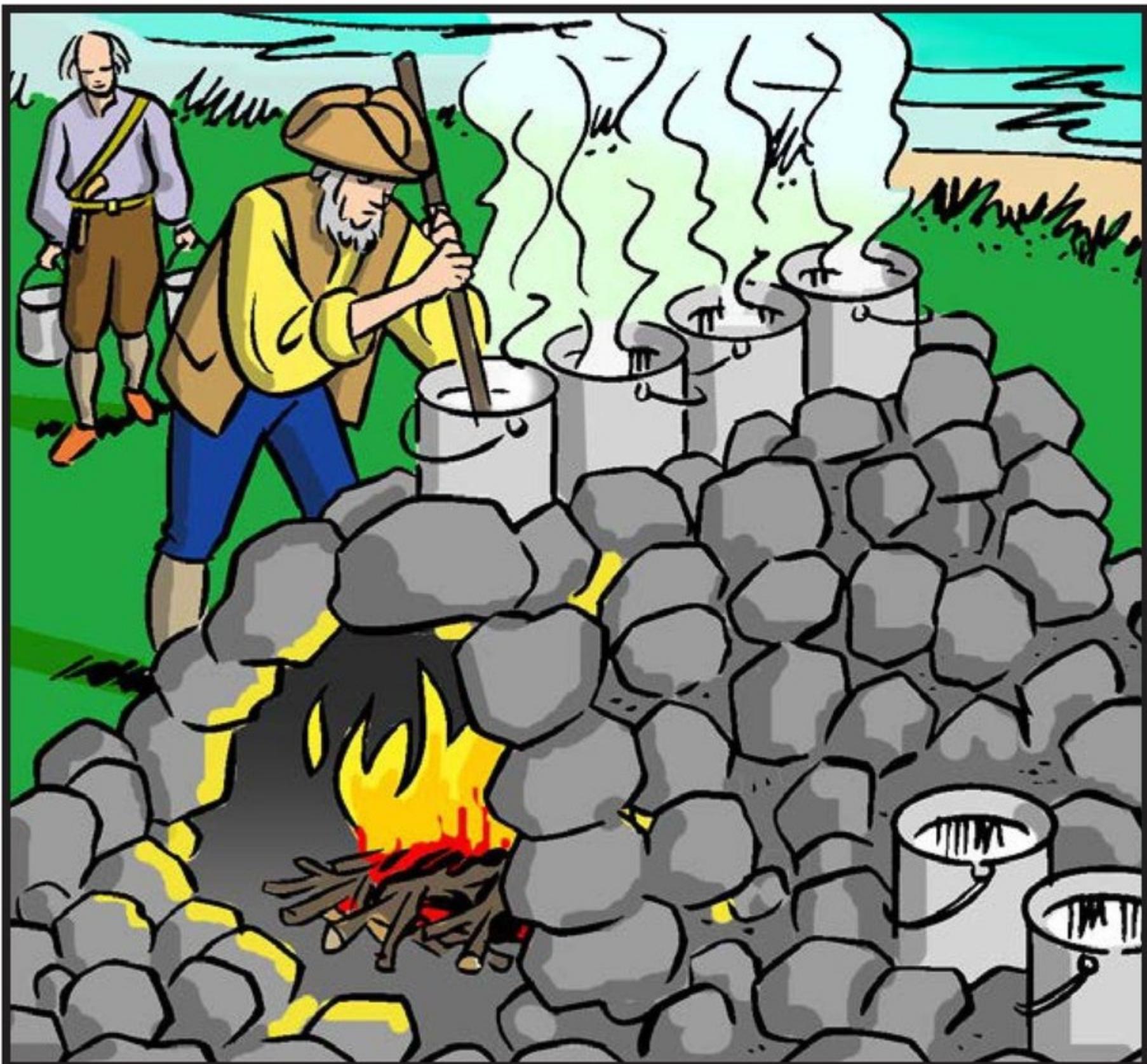
## Winter on the Coast

The weather was beginning to turn cold, and Lewis and Clark needed a place to spend the winter. At first they had camped on the north bank of the Columbia River. The Native Americans told the group that the south bank was better. The leaders decided to let the Corps of Discovery vote. Each member had a vote, including the African-American slave, York, and Sacagawea. This was decades before either African-Americans or women could legally vote in the United States. The group voted to move to the south bank.

The Corps built a fort they named Fort Clatsop, after the Native American tribe that lived there. The winter was wet, cold, and miserable. It rained almost every day, the food was bad, and many of the men were homesick. Thomas Jefferson had promised that if the Corps of Discovery saw any ships on the Pacific, it could ask for a ride home, and the government would pay. But no ships appeared.



The Pacific Northwest is famous for rain even today.



One of the explorers' tasks was to boil seawater to make salt.

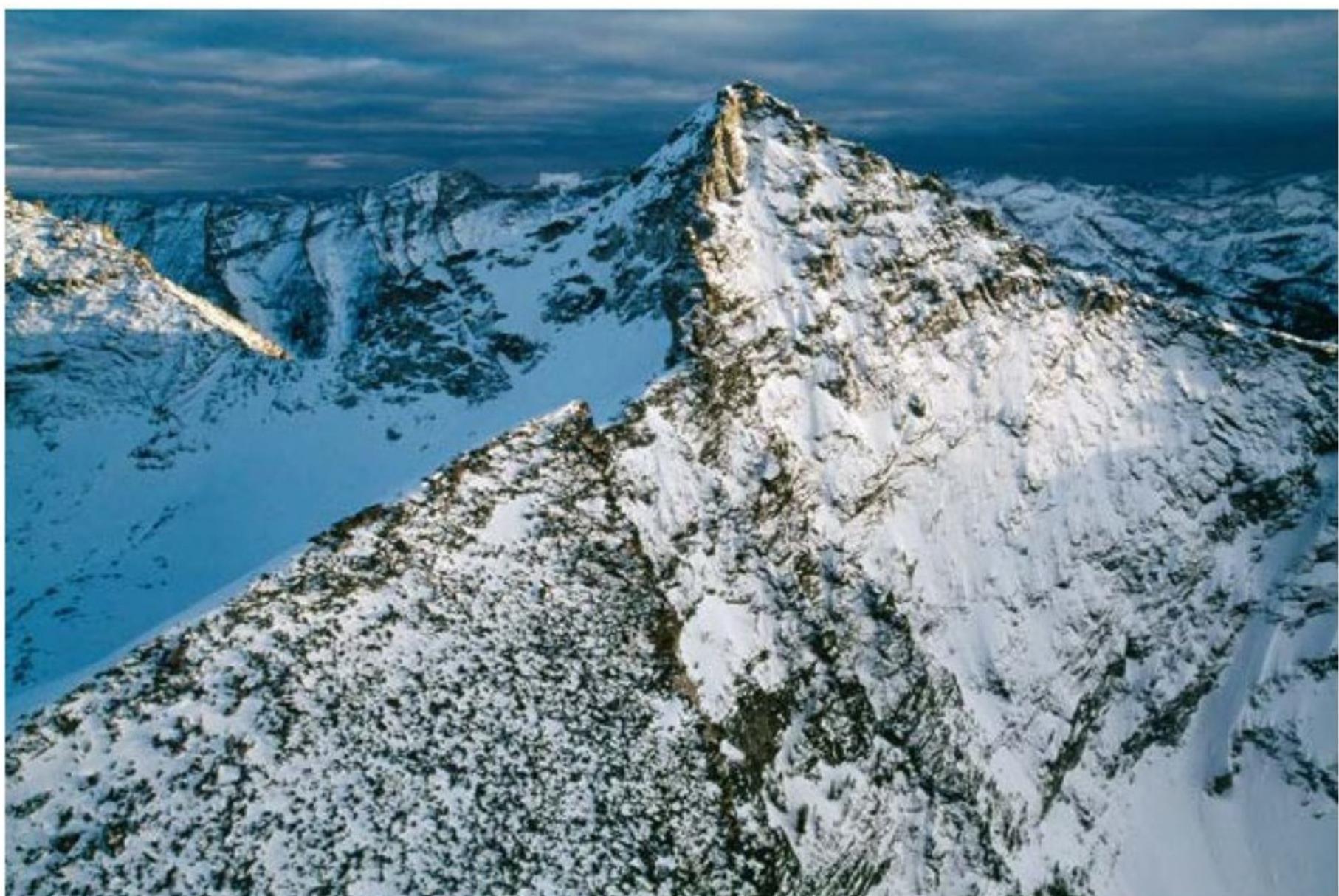
The team spent its time preparing to go home and tell the world what it had done and seen. All the men filled in their journals, adding information about the weather, the land, the people, and the wildlife. Clark, who turned out to be a natural mapmaker, drew a map of the territory they had crossed. Other men repaired equipment and prepared supplies for the journey.

By the time spring arrived, the explorers were eager to be moving again. On March 23, 1806, they began traveling east, up the Columbia River.

## Heading Home

Canoeing up the Columbia River was very difficult, and the Corps of Discovery soon traded its canoes for horses. They eventually reached the Nez Perce village where they had stumbled out of the mountains. The mountains were still covered with snow, and the group chose to wait for warmer weather rather than risk death again. But after a month, they grew impatient and tried to cross the peaks. They found themselves struggling through twelve-foot snowdrifts, even though it was mid-June. They turned back.

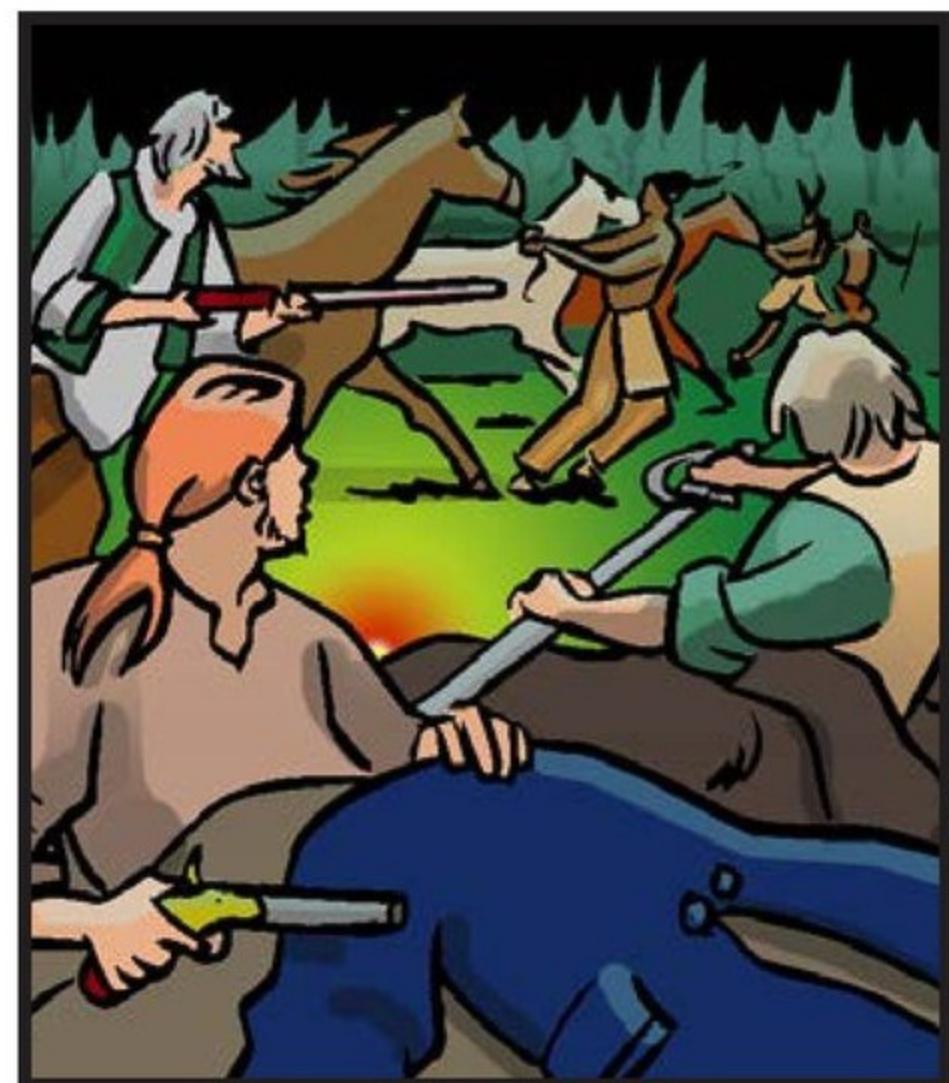
After another week of waiting, they tried again. It was still difficult, but they succeeded with the help of some Nez Perce guides.



Some steep mountain passes remain frozen all year.

From then on, the Corps would be going with the river, over territory they had crossed before. Lewis and Clark decided that they had time to split up and explore. Clark, Sacagawea, and many members of the Corps headed toward the Yellowstone River, where they had left their boats the summer before.

Lewis and a group of nine men went north, coming close to what is now the Canadian border. On July 25, while Lewis and his group slept, a band of Blackfoot Native Americans tried to take their horses and guns. Most of the Native Americans ran off when the men awoke. But one man stabbed a Native American, and Lewis shot and killed another.



The raid and shooting

This was the only violence between the Corps of Discovery and any of the Native Americans they met. Lewis and his group hurried on to where the Missouri River met the Yellowstone River. There they met part of Clark's party at a place they named Reunion Point. The group hurried on by canoe.

## Do You Know?

On the return trip, Lewis went hunting with a member of the Corps, Pierre Cruzatte. Suddenly, Lewis was shot in the back of the thigh. Lewis assumed that it was the Blackfoot Native Americans, but it turned out to be Cruzatte. Cruzatte had only one eye, and he had mistaken Lewis for an elk.

They all soon arrived at the Mandan Native American town where they had spent their first winter. They said goodbye to Sacagawea, her husband, and Jean-Baptiste, who were staying in the village. Another member of the Corps, John Colter, also decided to leave the expedition to join a group of fur trappers.



Sacagawea's son later lived with Clark to attend school.

The rest of the expedition continued down the river toward home. They went swiftly, encountering many fur trappers, settlers, and explorers who were following in the expedition's footsteps. At last, they reached St. Louis on September 23, 1806. The Corps of Discovery was overjoyed, and so were the people of St. Louis. Many people had assumed that the explorers had died along the journey.

<i>Jefferson picks Lewis to head exploration team</i>	<i>April 1803</i>
<i>Louisiana Purchase</i>	<i>July 4, 1803</i>
<i>Corps of Discovery sets out</i>	<i>May 14, 1804</i>
<i>Sgt. Charles Floyd dies</i>	<i>August 20, 1804</i>
<i>Corps reaches Mandan town</i>	<i>October 24, 1804</i>
<i>Leaves Mandan town</i>	<i>April 7, 1805</i>
<i>Reaches Great Falls of Missouri</i>	<i>June 13, 1805</i>
<i>Reaches Rocky Mountains</i>	<i>August 31, 1805</i>
<i>Finishes crossing Rocky Mountains</i>	<i>Sep. 22, 1805</i>
<i>Corps sights Pacific Ocean</i>	<i>Nov. 7, 1805</i>
<i>Begins return journey</i>	<i>March 23, 1806</i>
<i>Returns to Nez Perce</i>	<i>May 28, 1806</i>
<i>The Corps splits up</i>	<i>July 3, 1806</i>
<i>Joins again at Reunion Point</i>	<i>August 12, 1806</i>
<i>Reaches Mandan town again</i>	<i>August 14, 1806</i>
<i>Returns to St. Louis</i>	<i>Sep. 23, 1806</i>



Jefferson was extremely proud of the Corps' accomplishments.

## The Effects of the Expedition

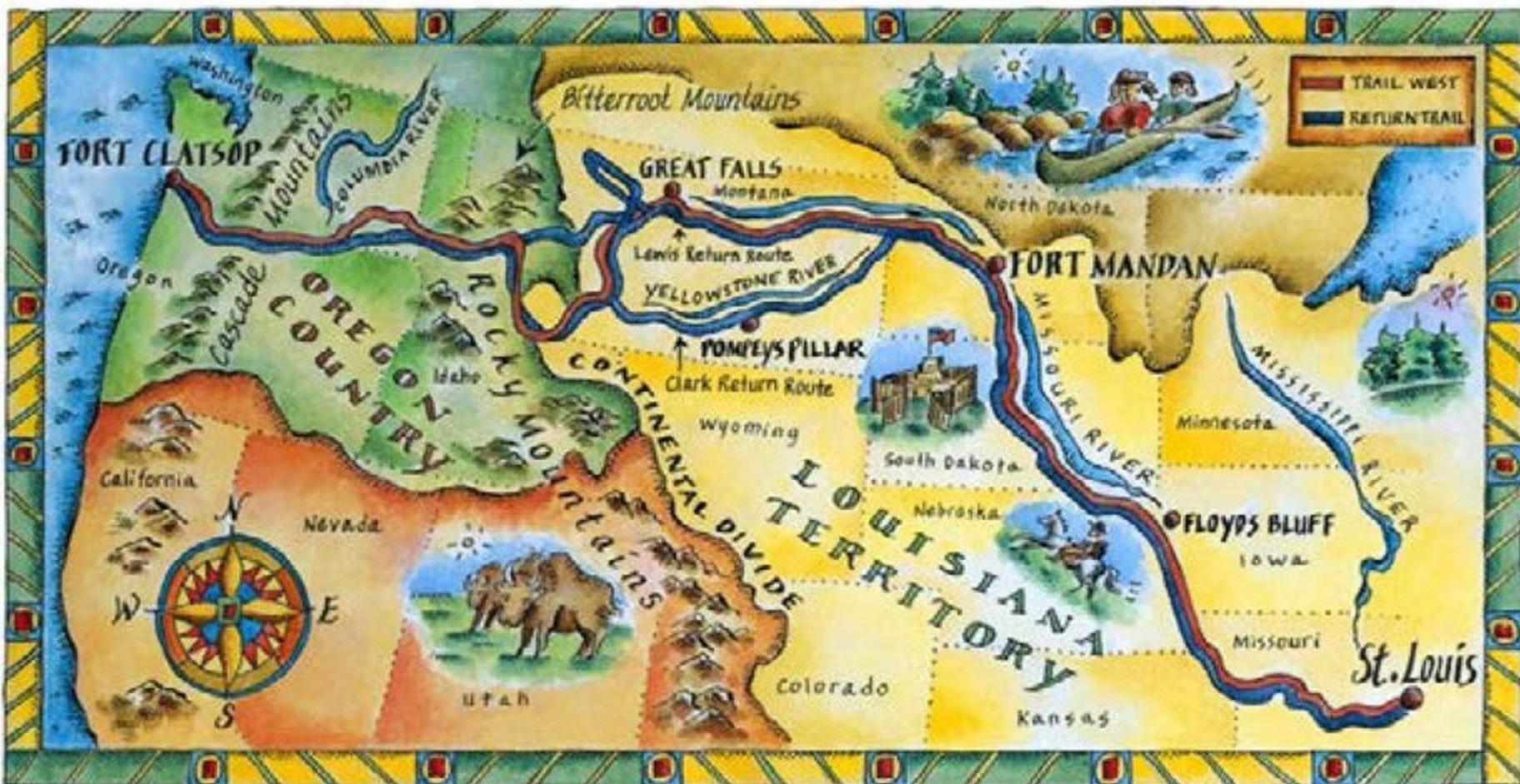
Lewis and Clark went to Washington, D.C., to visit President Jefferson and present him with the results of their journey. Jefferson was disappointed that there was no Northwest Passage, but he was delighted with what Lewis and Clark had done. He carefully studied their new map. He took the animal hides, horns, and skeletons they had collected and displayed them in the White House. He especially enjoyed the live groundhog that the Corps had shipped to him.

Captain Lewis was named the governor of the new Louisiana Territory. But Lewis was unhappy in his role. He had financial trouble, and many people noticed that he seemed moody and sad. In 1809, he headed toward Washington, D.C. in hopes that Jefferson could help him with his problems. On his way there on October 11, he committed suicide with his pistol.

Captain Clark settled in St. Louis, where he had a career in public service, which included serving as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He always tried to help the Native Americans who had helped him on his expedition.



Clark went on to a successful career.



Lewis and Clark's mapping expedition covered over 8,000 miles and took almost 2½ years to complete.

Lewis and Clark's story has been told in hundreds of books, movies, and poems. Everything from schools to motels have been named after the two men. But the most important effect of Lewis and Clark's journey was that they opened the American West to settlers, explorers, prospectors, and adventurers. They paved the way for the American farms, factories, and cities that we know today. After the Lewis and Clark expedition, the American West was never the same.

## Explore More

### At the Library

Ask your librarian to help you find books on the Lewis and Clark expedition. You may even be able to find parts of Lewis and Clark's journals. Also check out the video section of the library for films about the Corps of Discovery.

### On the Internet

- A. In the address window, type *www.google.com*.
- B. Type *Lewis and Clark* in the search window and click on "Google Search."
- C. Read the colored links. Click on one that looks interesting. When you want to explore other links, click on the "Back" button at the top left.

### On Land

If you ever visit the western United States, you might get a chance to follow in Lewis and Clark's footsteps. Lewis and Clark's camps and trails in the Pacific Northwest are marked on maps. You can even visit re-creations of the forts and view the Pacific Ocean from where the expedition first spotted it. Form your own Corps of Discovery!

## Glossary

<b>corps</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of workers or soldiers (p. 4)
<b>impassable</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	impossible to get through (p. 8)
<b>interpreter</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who translates from one language to another (p. 9)
<b>malnutrition</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a disease brought on by not getting enough nutrients (p. 10)
<b>moccasins</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	soft leather shoes often worn by Native Americans (p. 7)
<b>Northwest Passage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an imaginary trade route across North America that went up the Missouri River and down the Columbia River (p. 4)
<b>prospectors</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who search for gold, silver, or other precious minerals (p. 22)

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