

The Story of Lewis and Clark 1

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book

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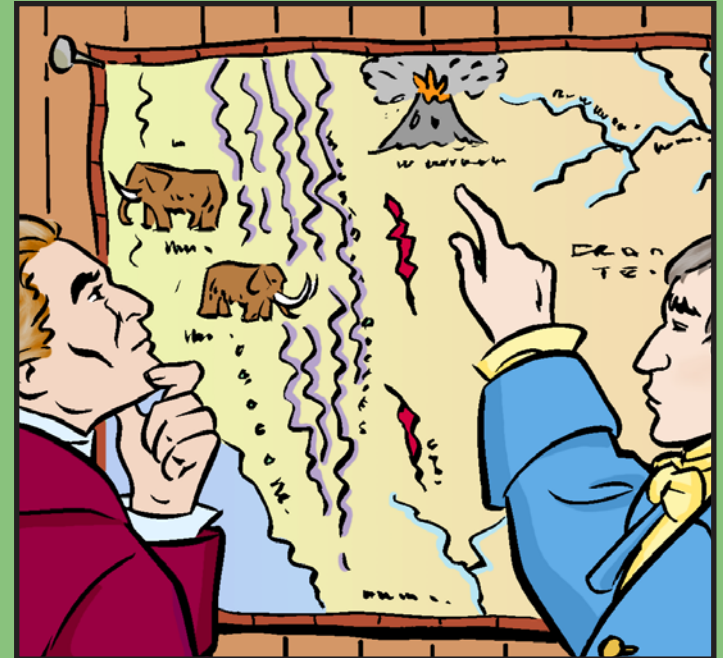
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The Story of Lewis and Clark

Book 1: Up the Missouri River



Written by Peter C. Montin
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Correlation

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North America in 1800

Introduction

Two hundred years ago, United States territory ended on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Ships had sailed around South America and visited the Pacific coast, but almost nothing was known about the land in between. The French owned the land from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Spain controlled Texas, the Southwest, and California, and Great Britain controlled Canada.

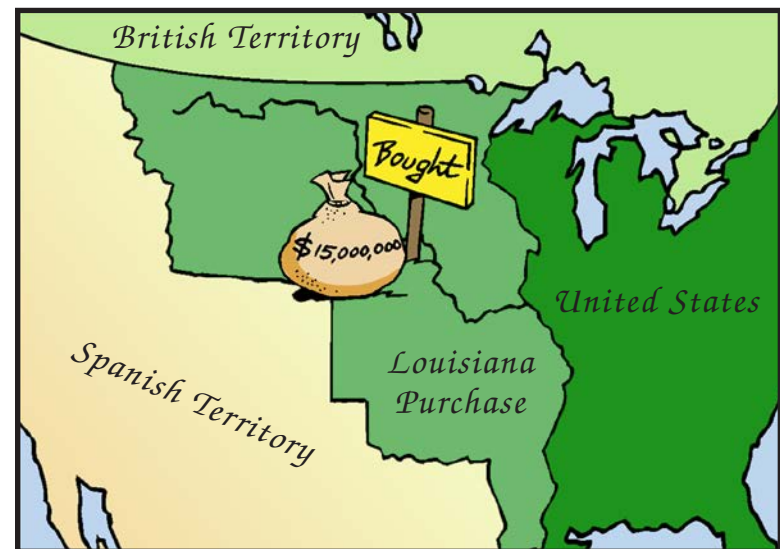
People in all of these countries believed that there might be a **Northwest Passage** across North America. They imagined the Northwest Passage

as an easy river-going route that would run from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Many people believed that if you sailed all the way up the Missouri River, it would be just a short hike to the top of the Columbia River, where you could sail to the Pacific.

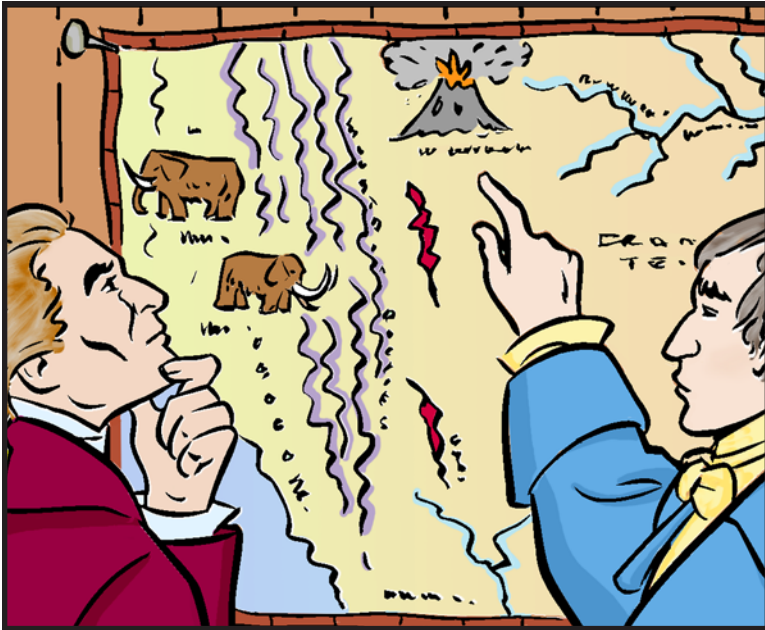
Thomas Jefferson, the country's third president, believed that the United States needed to find and control the Northwest Passage if it was going to become a powerful nation. The Northwest Passage would be a great trading route between the nations of North America. Jefferson also loved science, geography, and learning about other cultures. He wanted to send an **expedition** up the Missouri River. The men would record the plant and animal life of the West, meet with the Native Americans there, and, Jefferson hoped, find the **fabled** Northwest Passage.

Congress set aside \$2,500 for the expedition, and Jefferson chose his personal secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, to be its leader. Lewis was a close friend of Jefferson's, and Lewis had spent time in the army in western Pennsylvania and Ohio—which was then the western frontier. Lewis asked his friend William Clark to help him lead the expedition.

Just before Lewis and Clark were set to leave, Jefferson surprised the entire nation. In Europe, France was at war with Great Britain, and France was losing money fast. The French wanted to sell all of their land in North America. Jefferson bought all 820,000 square miles of land for \$15 million—only three cents an acre. This deal, known as the Louisiana Purchase, almost doubled the size of the United States. Many people criticized Jefferson—after all, he had no idea what lay in the land he had just bought. Suddenly, Lewis and Clark's expedition had become much more important. They were now setting out to explore the newest part of the United States.



The shaded area shows the Louisiana Purchase.



Maps of the time showed strange legends about the West.

Preparation

In 1803, the year that Jefferson set the expedition in motion, crossing North America was as challenging and mysterious as traveling to the moon. No one knew what lay between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean—there were rumors that woolly mammoths still roamed the nation. Most Americans thought that the Native Americans were **hostile** and dangerous. Without cars, telephones, maps, or modern medicine, the journey was sure to be dangerous. Lewis and Clark were risking their lives. Luckily, Lewis was a thoughtful planner.

Lewis traveled to Philadelphia to learn mapmaking, navigation, plant- and animal-identification, and other necessary skills. He bought everything the explorers would need for the trip. He purchased tons of camping supplies, including hatchets, fishhooks, warm clothing, and material for tents. He also bought hundreds of pounds of dried corn, salted pork, flour, sugar, and 200 pounds of a dried soup mixture called “portable soup.” Even with all this food, Lewis and Clark knew that they would have to hunt to get enough to eat. Lewis bought rifles, bullets, and barrels of gunpowder. The barrels were made of lead, which could be melted and formed into bullets when the bullets ran out.

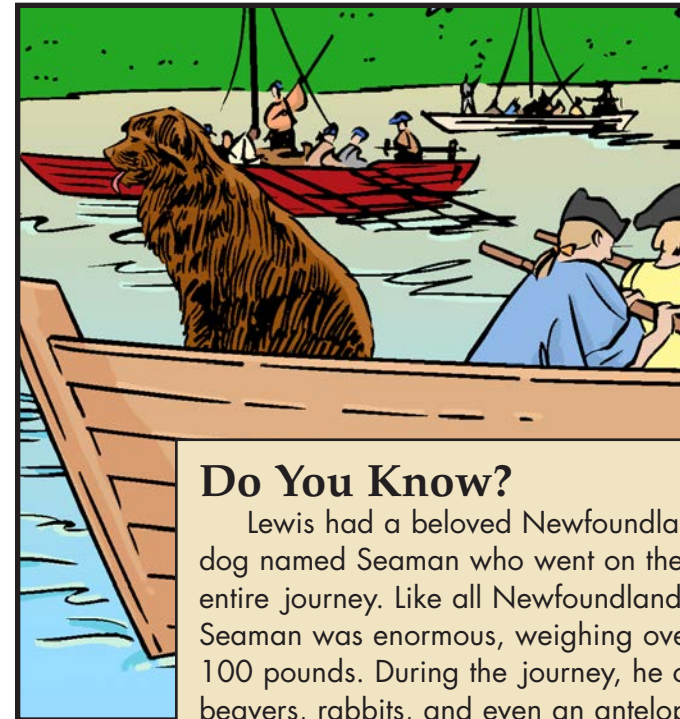


Lewis assembled a huge amount of supplies.

Lewis also bought hundreds of dollars worth of gifts to give to the Native Americans they would meet along the trip. He bought mirrors, sewing needles, combs, bright cloth, tobacco, and other hard-to-make goods. The gifts would show the Native Americans that the Lewis and Clark expedition came in peace. Lewis also arranged for three boats that would take them up the Missouri River. A 55-foot **keelboat** would carry men and their supplies, and two smaller canoe-like boats called **pirogues** (pih-ROGES) would be useful for scouting ahead.

Lewis and Clark made sure that they chose the best people to make the trip with them. They chose mostly young men, many of whom had been in the army. Some were excellent at boating, while others were good hunters. They chose some men who knew how to fix rifles and some who could use iron to make horseshoes, axes, and other necessary tools. They also chose men who could speak Native American languages. One member of the team was William Clark's African-American slave, York. The 45 men who eventually set out on the journey became known as the Corps (KOR) of Discovery.

Lewis and Clark brought all of their supplies to St. Louis, near where the Missouri River joins the Mississippi. The Corps of Discovery rowed up the Mississippi to set up camp for the winter of 1803. There, on the edge of unknown land, the men trained for their journey, making sure that they worked well together both physically and mentally. After waiting out the winter, the Corps of Discovery finally set off up the Missouri River on May 14, 1804.



Do You Know?

Lewis had a beloved Newfoundland dog named Seaman who went on the entire journey. Like all Newfoundlands, Seaman was enormous, weighing over 100 pounds. During the journey, he caught beavers, rabbits, and even an antelope for the team to eat, and he guarded the expedition from bears and wolves.



Hauling the boats through mud was terrible work.

Going Upriver

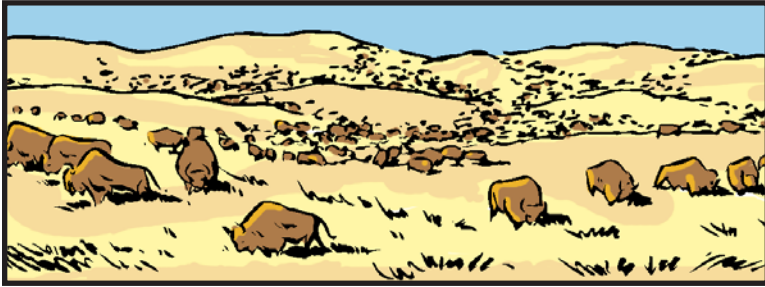
The Missouri River has the nickname “Big Muddy,” and Lewis and Clark soon found out why. The river was wide, full of curves, and not very deep. It was often filled with floating wood and dead trees. The thick, muddy water made these hazards hard to see. The Corps was also moving against the strong current, so they went extremely slowly. When the water was deep enough, the men used poles, oars, or sails (if the wind was good) to move upstream. But the boats often got caught on the river bottom, forcing the men to get out and drag the boats along using ropes. If that were not enough, the soft, sandy banks of the river often collapsed suddenly—at one point, a collapse almost sank the keelboat.

The only thing the men had to drink was muddy river water, which often made them sick. Hard work gave them blisters, **boils**, upset stomachs, and muscle strains. Lewis had learned a little bit about medicine while he was in Philadelphia, but in 1804, medicine often did more harm than good. The men had no way to ease their pain or keep their wounds clean, and they were in constant discomfort. Every man who kept a journal wrote about the horrible mosquitoes. Sudden hailstorms cut and bruised the explorers. Wind and rain drove them back down the river. The adventure seemed more like a punishment.

After two months, the men had not made it out of the modern state of Missouri. As the summer wore on, one of the men, Sergeant Charles Floyd, grew ill. On August 20, he died, probably of a ruptured appendix. The Corps buried him in what is now Sioux City, Iowa. Miraculously, he was the only member of the expedition to die on the trip.

Do You Know?

The mosquitoes on the Missouri River were so bad that the explorers smeared bear fat on their skin, trying to keep the insects away. Imagine how bad they smelled! Luckily, they had mosquito netting to sleep under at night.



Even in 1804, there were fewer buffalo than there had been before Columbus sailed.

Into the Plains

Eventually, the land around the Missouri River began to change. The hills gave way to broad plains. There were very few trees, except right along the riverbank. The men began to see immense herds of bison, sometimes numbering thousands of animals. President Jefferson had instructed all of the men to take note of any new plants and animals they discovered. The men described pronghorn antelope, jackrabbits, prairie dogs, and coyotes, all of which were unknown in the East.

The Lewis and Clark expedition had entered the Great Plains. At the time, these plains were one of the largest grasslands in the entire world. They must have looked much like the African Serengeti Plains you see in nature films today. They seemed endless, **uninhabited**, and filled with wildlife.

The men's journals were filled with descriptions of new discoveries, and the hunting was excellent. When they killed an animal, they preserved its skeleton and hide in a crate, which they planned to send back to President Jefferson in Washington.

But the plains were not uninhabited. Native Americans had been living and hunting there for thousands of years. Lewis and Clark's expedition did not see many of them at first, because many of the tribes were **nomadic**, or moved from place to place with no permanent home.

Eventually, the Corps of Discovery came into contact with representatives of the Missouri, Yankton Sioux, and Lakota tribes. Most Native Americans welcomed the explorers and accepted their gifts of peace. Many of them were fascinated by York, the African-American slave. Most Native Americans had seen or heard of white people, but they had never seen an African-American. One elderly Native American even rubbed York's skin, thinking he was a white man who had painted himself to trick them. York had fun with the attention. He played games with the children and showed off.

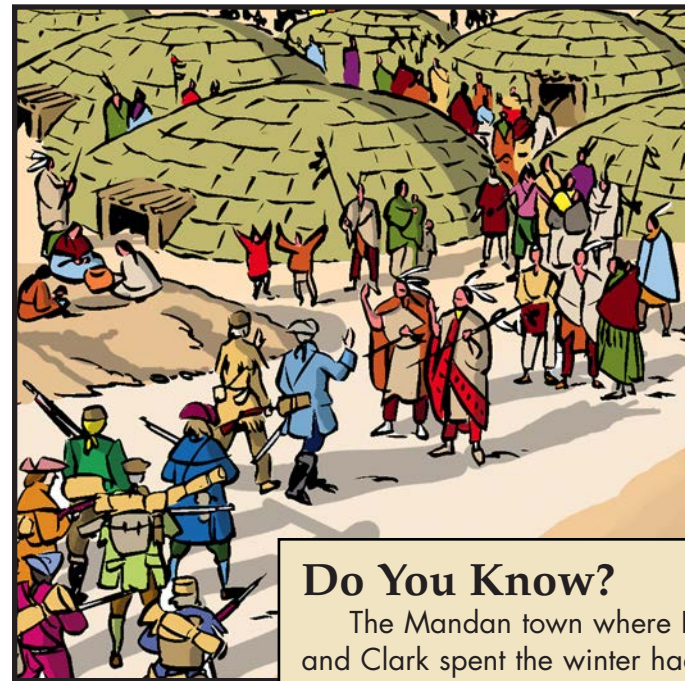
In September, the expedition met with the Lakota, an extremely powerful tribe that controlled most of the trade along the lower Missouri River. The Lakota did not like the idea that another nation now controlled their land and would soon be taking over the river. Lewis and Clark often made speeches to the Native Americans, calling them “children,” and saying that they had a new “Great White Father” in the east. The Lakota did not like being called “children.”

When Lewis and Clark sailed into Lakota territory in what is now South Dakota, there was tension in the air. The Lakota were not satisfied by Lewis and Clark’s gifts. Some of the Lakota grabbed hold of one of the pirogues. Lewis, who had a hot temper, got into an argument with the chiefs. But luckily, Clark, who was more even-tempered, and a Lakota chief, Black Buffalo, calmed everyone down. The expedition continued safely.



Lewis and Clark meet
Native Americans

As fall approached, the weather began to grow colder. Light snow began to fall as early as October, and flocks of geese filled the sky, heading south for the winter. The expedition came upon a town of Mandan Native Americans, who lived in sturdy **sod** houses. The Mandan were friendly and welcoming. Lewis and Clark realized that they would not reach the end of the Missouri River before winter. They decided that the Mandan town would be a good place to make camp until spring.



Do You Know?

The Mandan town where Lewis and Clark spent the winter had a bigger population than St. Louis or even Washington, D.C. at the time.



The men were not well prepared for snow and cold.

Spending the Winter

The Corps of Discovery built a sturdy fort near the Mandan town and made friends with the Native Americans. The explorers were lucky that they got along so well with the Native Americans, because the weather quickly turned harsh. Most of the men had grown up in Virginia, and they were totally unfamiliar with the difficult winters of the northern plains. They traded with the Native Americans to get food, tools, and warm bedding. Lewis also offered his medical skills to the Mandan. On one extremely cold February night, he was asked to help deliver a baby.

The woman who was giving birth was Sacagawea (sah-kah-gah-WEE-ah), the wife of a French-Canadian fur trapper. She was a member of the Shoshone tribe, who lived near the source of the Missouri River. Lewis thought that she could be an excellent guide and **interpreter** on their journey. The baby was born safely, and the mother and her infant son joined Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery.



Sacagawea and her son

The winter of 1804 and 1805 was very harsh. Food ran low. By springtime, the Corps of Discovery was eager to be on the move again. The Native Americans told them of a large waterfall not far upstream. Lewis and Clark believed that this waterfall was a signal that they were approaching the **Continental Divide**, where the rivers begin flowing west, toward the Pacific Ocean. The Corps of Discovery was sure that the Northwest Passage was not far off.

On April 7, 1805, the Corps of Discovery headed west once more with hope in their hearts.

To be continued in *The Story of Lewis and Clark, Book 2*

Explore More

1 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.

2 On the Internet

- In the address window, type *www.google.com*.
- Type *Lewis and Clark* in the search window and click on "Google Search."
- 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.

3 In the News

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 trail up the Missouri River and down the Columbia River is marked with signs and on maps. You can ride on the trail in your car, you can canoe up the river on a guided tour, and you can even hike the trail on foot. Signs and markers along the way tell you what the explorers did at different points along the route. Form your own Corps of Discovery!

Glossary

boils (<i>n.</i>)	red, sore spots where the skin is infected (p. 12)
Continental Divide (<i>n.</i>)	a chain of mountains in North America that separates the rivers that flow east into the Atlantic Ocean and the rivers that flow west into the Pacific Ocean (p. 18)
expedition (<i>n.</i>)	a journey or a voyage; also, a group of people who go on a journey or voyage (p. 5)
fabled (<i>adj.</i>)	told about in stories and fables, but not proven to exist (p. 5)
hostile (<i>adj.</i>)	very unfriendly (p. 7)
interpreter (<i>n.</i>)	a person who can translate one language into another (p. 18)
keelboat (<i>n.</i>)	a shallow covered riverboat used to move cargo (p. 9)
nomadic (<i>adj.</i>)	moving from place to place without a permanent home (p. 14)
Northwest Passage (<i>n.</i>)	an imaginary trade route across North America that went up the Missouri River and down the Columbia River (p. 4)
pirogues (<i>n.</i>)	canoe-like boats (p. 9)
sod (<i>adj.</i>)	made of grass, roots, and soil cut from the top layer of the ground (p. 16)
uninhabited (<i>adj.</i>)	not lived in by people (p. 13)