

Reaching the Ocean, Returning Home

The captains realized that there was no **Northwest Passage** – no river that would easily bring them to the Pacific Ocean. Instead, there were just mountains – massive, never-ending mountains!

Finally, on November 15, 1805, the Corps of Discovery reached the Pacific Ocean at the mouth of the Columbus River between present-day Washington and Oregon. The crew was cold and wet; the wind and rain were constant. Centuries before, the ocean had been named "Pacific" meaning calm and quiet. However, Clark noted in his journal that the ocean was anything but pacific – stating, in fact, it was just the opposite!

With another winter upon them, the Corps would have to wait until spring to head home. They built their winter quarters in Oregon – a fort that they named **Fort Clatsop**.

Four months later, on March 23, 1806, the expedition finally began their journey home. In order to explore more of the territory the company broke into two smaller units – Clark leading one of the groups; Lewis the other. They reunited about six weeks later near Yellowstone River.

On September 23, 1806, the Corps of Discovery reached St. Louis, Missouri. The explorers were greeted with a joyful reception. Many people had believed that the entire crew had perished due to the length of their absence. In fact, there had been only one fatality during the entire journey – a sergeant named **Charles Floyd** who died in Iowa. It is believed he had a burst appendix.



The entire expedition had taken 2 ½ years. Through it all, Lewis and Clark documented their journey with detailed records. Clark's mapping abilities were so accurate that he estimated that they had travelled 4,162 miles from Fort Wood to the Pacific Ocean. He was only off by 40 miles!

The impact of the expedition was enormous. Mapping the territory, cataloguing the plants and vegetation, documenting climate and terrain, and establishing trade with the Native Americans all promoted western expansion.

Lewis and Clark were recognized as heroes. Both were paid well, given land, and rewarded with appointments to prominent positions. Lewis' life ended tragically three years later when he was either murdered or committed suicide. William Clark lived to the age of 68 and led a full life.