



Lewis & Clark Expedition

The Lewis & Clark Expedition is considered by some as the most important journey of exploration in American history. In less than three years, the members of the expedition traveled over 8,000 miles (12,900 km) by keelboat, canoe, horseback, and on foot across the American West from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Pacific Ocean and back.

President Thomas Jefferson instructed Lewis and Clark to accomplish five main goals on their expedition: to find the source of the Missouri River, to cross the Rocky Mountains, to follow the largest river west to the Pacific Ocean, to establish trade with the native peoples, and to assure the Native Americans of the peaceful intentions of the United States. To a remarkable extent, they accomplished these goals, despite the fact that no river existed to provide a direct water route to the Pacific Ocean.

► Starting Out—Up the Missouri

The men were trained by William Clark at Camp Wood where the Missouri River and Mississippi River converge. Clark was a tough but able instructor. During this time, Meriwether Lewis stayed in St. Louis making final arrangements and purchases for the journey. The 45-person expedition departed up the Missouri River on May 14, 1804.

They traveled on a flat-bottomed, raft-like keelboat and two large wooden dugout canoes called *pirogues*. Their supplies included fishing hooks, tools, medals with Jefferson's picture engraved on them, compasses and other scientific instruments, medicine, rifles, beads, knives, trading goods, and some food. The men had to row, sail, pole, and haul the keelboat with ropes against the rushing water caused by spring floods. They endured hail and soaking rains, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks, and illnesses. At night they stopped along the shore or on an island for safety.

En route they met members of several tribes including the Yankton Sioux who were friendly and helpful and the Teton (or Lakota) Sioux who knew they were coming and were not as friendly. The Teton Sioux were accustomed to charging fares for permission to cross their territory and the expedition was nearly destroyed here. Only the determination and quick wits of the leaders and some disagreement among the Sioux chieftains got them safely past.

During the 1,600-mile (2,570-km) trip up the Missouri River to its headwaters, they met members of other tribes, including the Arikaras who were at war with the Mandan Indians. Lewis and Clark had hoped to receive help from the Mandans and managed to arrange an uneasy peace between the warring tribes.

► Winter at Fort Mandan

Near the Mandan villages, the men built a series of eight connected log cabins in a V-shape with a fence over the open end. These buildings were called Fort Mandan. During their winter stay at Fort Mandan, Lewis and Clark caught up on their journals, directed the construction of six dugout canoes, talked to Native Americans and French fur trappers about the land to the west, and hired Toussaint Charbonneau and his Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, as guides and interpreters.