

**Mission**  
*20 June 1803*  
*To Captain Meriwether Lewis*  
*The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri*  
*river, to such principal streams of it as by its course and communication*  
*with the waters of the Pacific ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon,*  
*Colorado or other rivers may offer the most direct & practicable water*  
*communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.*  
**THOMAS JEFFERSON**

# Lewis and Clark in the Oregon Country

## Pre-Expedition

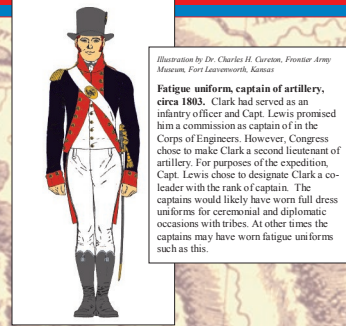
At the start of the 19th Century the United States extended west to the Mississippi River. However, 2 out of 3 citizens lived within 50 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. Canadian furtraders were venturing into the country of the upper Mississippi. "He said this would be a commercial and scientific venture, but turned to Capt. Lewis and the U.S. Army to plan, equip and fund this expedition. In the spring of 1803 Capt. Lewis went to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia to learn about surveying, natural history and medicine. On the way he stopped at Harpers Ferry Arsenal to order arms and ammunition. While in Philadelphia he purchased survey instruments, supplies, gifts for the Indians and clothing - quickly spending the \$2,500 Congress had appropriated for this expedition. He also placed an order for a keelboat for the mission. With his own money he bought a powerful air rifle and a large Newfoundland dog. Capt. Lewis wrote to his friend and former Army comrade, William Clark, asking him to be expedition co-commander. On 4 July 1803 news arrived that the U.S. had purchased Louisiana from the French. This meant the expedition would be in U.S. territory until it reached the Rocky Mountains.



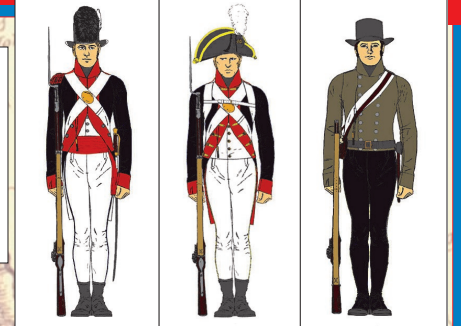
**Lewis's air rifle.** "My air gun also astonishes [the Indians] very much, they cannot comprehend it's shooting so often and without powder, and think that is great medicine. ... (Capt. Lewis, 24 January 1806). Although there is controversy over what type of air gun Capt. Lewis took on the expedition, this replica represents the leading contender. Bartholomew Girardon of Vienna invented this type of repeating air rifle just before 1800. The compressed air reservoir in the butt powers the discharge of up to 20 consecutive balls from a magazine alongside the barrel. Capt. Lewis's air gun could have been .51 caliber, discharging a ball at about 500 feet per second (the power of a modern .38 revolver). It took over 1500 strokes on the air rifle's pump to charge the reservoir.



**Capt. Meriwether Lewis, 1806.** Portrait painter C. B. J. F. de Saint-Méran did this watercolor of Capt. Lewis shortly after Lewis's return. Over his shoulder Capt. Lewis wears an otter and ermine tippet, probably the one given to him by Sacagawea's brother, Chief Cameahwait of the Shoshone. The rifle is believed to be the one actually carried on the expedition. Its features are both civilian (checkered wrist, slim lines) and military (sling swivels).



**Fatigue uniform, captain of artillery, circa 1803.** Clark had served as an infantry officer and Capt. Lewis promised him a commission as captain of the Corps of Engineers. However, Congress chose to make Clark a second lieutenant of artillery. For purposes of the expedition, Capt. Lewis chose to designate Clark a co-leader with the rank of captain. The captains would likely have worn full dress uniforms for ceremonial and diplomatic occasions with tribes. At other times the captains may have worn fatigue uniforms such as this.



**Full uniform, sergeant, 1st Infantry, circa 1803.** This is the uniform that several of the privates in the Corps would have worn at least part of the time and almost certainly for ceremonial and diplomatic occasions with native tribes.

**Full uniform, private, 1803.** This is the uniform that several of the privates in the Corps would have worn at least part of the time.

**Full uniform, recruit, Corps of Discovery, circa 1803.** This is a representation of the uniform issued to men specially recruited for this expedition.



**S.U.S. Springfield Musket.** This U.S. flintlock arm was a faithful copy of the French Charleville musket used by American forces during the Revolutionary War. Infantry soldiers joining the Corps of Discovery probably carried this arm. It is caliber .69 smoothbore, with a barrel length of 45 inches, weight 9.5 pounds. This model was made from 1795 until 1808.



**Fort Clatsop.** This is one understanding of the layout of the Corps' 1805-1806 winter quarters. It is based on journal descriptions by the enlisted men who built it. The quarters featured rooms for the enlisted men, quarters for the Charbonneau family, captain's quarters and a smokehouse. The captains' quarters had a fireplace, the other rooms had a central firepit.

Reprinted from Lewis and Clark Trail Maps: A Cartographic Reconstruction, Volume III (Martin Platonidou) by permission of Washington State University Press.



**Chronology**

**1803** On 31 August Capt. Lewis heads down the Ohio River on the keelboat with several volunteer soldiers and almost 2 tons of supplies. They pick up Capt. Clark along the way. The "Corps of Volunteers for North Western Discovery" goes into winter quarters at Camp River DaBois directly across from mouth of the Missouri.

**1804** The Corps, strengthened with translators and more volunteer soldiers and recruits, heads up the Missouri in keelboat and 2 pirogues (large rowboats). The Corps meets in council with several tribes; Sgt. Floyd dies (the Corps' only fatality). The Corps constructs and occupies winter quarters at Fort Mandan.

**1805** Keelboat and several members of the party are sent back downriver. Main party heads upriver with 2 pirogues and 6 dugout canoes. The Corps now includes Toussaint Charbonneau, his wife Sacagawea and their baby. Wild game is plentiful and the men are beginning to make deerkin leggings and moccasins since their uniforms are wearing out.

**April-July** Reaching a major river junction, the Corps has to decide which river is the Missouri; the men believe it is the northwest branch but the Captains choose the south branch; the men loyally follow and the Captains are proven right when they reach the Great Falls of the Missouri a few days later.

**August** **Oregon Country.** On 12 August the Corps reaches Missouri River source and Capt. Lewis crosses over the divide. Instead of the expected easy slope to the Pacific, he sees "immense ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow." Capt. Lewis encounters some Shoshone and Sacagawea reunites with her brother Cameahwait, leader of the Shoshone band. Capt. Clark explores the Salmon River canyon and determines it to be impassable. No longer in U.S. territory, the Corps is now entering an area open to claim by England, Spain and possibly Russia.

**1-19 Sep** The Corps obtains horses from the Shoshone and heads north accompanied by a Shoshone guide; the Corps stops at **Travelers Rest**, then heads west on a well-used Indian trail. Crossing over **Lolo Pass**, the Corps experiences the worst part of their journey; they fight snow and hunger, there is no game and they are forced to eat a horse.

**22 Sep** The Corps reaches a Nez Perce camp at Weippe Prairie, where they all get sick "from eating the fish & roots too freely" (Capt. Clark).

**26 Sep** At **Canoe Camp** on the "Kooos-koos-kee River" (Clearwater) the Corps begins building canoes out of large pine logs; the Nez Perce agree to take care of the Corps' horses until they return.

**7-16 Oct** The Corps sets out down the Clearwater in 5 canoes; they encounter 15 rapids and lose one canoe before reaching "Lewis's River" (the Snake). The presence of Sacagawea "reconciles all the Indians... a woman with a party of men is a token of peace" (Capt. Clark). The Corps camps on the Columbia River.

**Background Map**  
▲ 1805 camp sites (westward bound)  
▲ 1806 camp sites (eastward bound)  
**SHOSHONE** native peoples encountered

Capt. Clark drew the original of this map while at Fort Clatsop. Samuel Harrison engraved and published it in 1814 as "A Map of the Lewis and Clark Track Across the Western Portion of North America."

**19-20 Oct** The Corps passes and names Hat Rock on the south shore; "We now begin to find the Indians very numerous, and their Camps lay near each other along the shores on both sides of the River" (Pvt. Whitehouse). The Corps begins encountering Indians wearing items of European clothing.

**23-25 Oct** The Corps portages around Celilo Falls; Capt. Lewis exchanges one of the Corps' smallest canoes and some other trade goods for a Chinook canoe; "these canoes are never made than any I have ever seen and Calculated to ride the waves, and carry immense burdens." (Capt. Clark). The Corps runs rapids at the Narrows and remain for 2 days at **Rock Fort** to patch canoes and dry out cargo.

**1-3 Nov** **Tidewater.** The Corps portages around the Cascades of the Columbia and camps at base of Rooster Rock; they can now see the Columbia River falling and rising with the tide of the Pacific Ocean; the Corps enters area previously explored by Lt. William Broughton of Capt. George Vancouver's 1792 British sea expedition; the Multnomah in this area have pieces of sailor's clothing, blankets and a few muskets and pistols.

**7 Nov** "Ocean in View! O the joy!" (Capt. Clark). The Corps camps on north shore of the Columbia and gets their first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean.

**24 Nov** Exploring the north shore of the Columbia, the leaders find no suitable wintering site that will protect them from incessant wind and rain. After all party members are polled, including Sacagawea and York, the Corps decides to cross the Columbia in search of a better site.

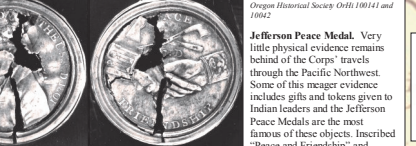
**28 Nov** The Corps sets up camp at "Point William" (Tongue Point) on the south shore of the Columbia; Capt. Lewis and 5 men look for a winter camp site.

**7 Dec** The whole Corps moves to where they will build winter quarters at **Fort Clatsop**, named after the local band of Chinookian Indians.

**24-25 Dec** The Corps starts moving into their new quarters, then celebrates Christmas with "a Salute, Shout and a Song" and an exchange of small presents; their dinner is spoiled elk, spoiled fish and some roots.

**28 Dec** **Salt Makers Camp.** A small party departs to set up a salt-making camp on the beach; this operates through February and produces 3 to 4 bushels of salt.

**1806**  
**1 Jan** The men wake the captains with a volley and shouts, but their New Year's celebration is limited to "eating our boiled Elk and wappatoe, and solacing our throats with our only beverage more than usual." (Capt. Lewis); their last whiskey had been used up on Independence Day 6 months ago. Drawing on his experience with frontier fortifications, Capt. Lewis writes out an order for the "exact and uniform discipline and government of the garrison."



**Oregon Peace Medal.** Very little physical evidence remains beyond the Corps' travels through the Pacific Northwest. Some of this meager evidence includes gifts and tokens given to Indian leaders and the Jefferson Peace Medals are the most famous of these objects. Inscribed "Peace and Friendship" and featuring an Indian and a soldier's hand clasped in friendship as well as a peace pipe crossed over a tomahawk, these medals symbolized the Corps' peaceful intentions. The medals carried by the Corps were silver and in 3 different sizes: about 2, 3 and 4 inches in diameter.

In 1891 this broken 2-inch medal (shown both face and reverse) was found on a Columbia River island near the mouth of the Walla Walla River.

**7-12 Jan** Capt. Clark and several members, including Sacagawea, trek 20 miles south to **Ecola** to see a beached whale and trade with local Indians for some of its blubber. They had planned to leave in April, but elk are now scarce and the men are falling ill so the Corps leaves Fort Clatsop and begins the trip upriver.

**22-23 Mar** They had planned to leave in April, but elk are now scarce and the men are falling ill so the Corps leaves Fort Clatsop and begins the trip upriver.

**2-12 Apr** Capt. Clark and 7 men explore up the "Multi-no-mah River" (Willamette). The Corps portages around the Cascades with great difficulty; it is raining and local Indians harass them, even stealing Capt. Lewis's Newfoundland dog (recovered later).

**15-19 Apr** **Rock Fort.** Party members engage in hunting, building pack saddles and trading for horses. Crossing to Horsechief Lake on north side of the Columbia, the Corps trades for more horses before proceeding upstream on foot and horseback.

**28-30 Apr** The Corps visits and celebrates with the Yakima and Walla Walla; Lewis calls the Walla Walla the "most hospitable, honest, and sincere people that we have met in our voyage." The Corps then travels across country; reaching mouth of the Clearwater in 6 days.

**14 May** The Corps camps with Nez Perce at **Weippe Prairie**, waiting for up to 3 weeks for high country snows to melt.

**15-17 Jun** Despite a Nez Perce warning, the Corps sets out for the mountains; the Corps encounters snow 12 to 15 feet deep and retreats.

**24-30 Jun** Guided by 3 Nez Perce warriors, the Corps passes over the mountains, stops at **Travelers Rest** and plans their next march.

**July** Capt. Lewis and 9 men head for the Great Falls of the Missouri via the shortest route; they explore Marias River country and then canoe down the Missouri. Capt. Clark and rest of the party head up the Bitterroot Valley and cross over to Missouri headwaters, explore beyond, then return to the Yellowstone.

**Aug-Sep** Capt. Lewis and his party catch up with Capt. Clark's party on the Missouri River below the Yellowstone. On 23 September the Corps arrives in St. Louis, exactly six months after leaving Fort Clatsop. Crowds line the waterfront to cheer their return.



**Harpers Ferry Arsenal rifle (replica).** In early 1803 Capt. Lewis went to Harpers Ferry Arsenal and acquired 15 rifles with slings and other accoutrements. These rifles had been made by private contractors during the 1790s and stored at Harpers Ferry Arsenal. Of larger caliber than civilian long rifles of this era, they proved to be a boon for the Corps' members, providing a long range, accurate and powerful arm for hunting large animals such as elk and buffalo as well as for fending off grizzly bear attacks.



**French Horse Pistols.** These 1877 French Army pistols were the direct pattern for the first authentic American made military pistols. The "1 pr. Horsemen's Pistols" recorded as being issued to Capt. Lewis at Harpers Ferry Arsenal were probably of this type. They are caliber .69 smoothbore with an 8.5 inch barrel, no sights, a brass frame and a walnut one-piece grip.

**Post-Expedition**

Although the Corps did not discover an easy water-based route across the continent, they did uncover the tremendous potential of the Pacific Northwest: an abundance of fur and fish, a moderate climate, fertile soils and peaceful Indians.

Journals of the expedition attracted interest from a nation (and world) hungry for information about the American West. In 1807 Sgt. Patrick Gass was the first to publish his journal. In 1814 two volumes of the abridged diaries of Lewis and Clark were published, first in the U.S. and then in Europe. Besides their pay, enlisted veterans of the Corps received 320 acres of land. Several returned west to work in the fur trade.

Sacagawea's son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, went to live with Capt. Clark and be educated. He traveled to Europe, learned several languages, settled in California and died in 1866 near Jordan Valley, Oregon, while en route to Montana.

Capt. Clark became governor of Missouri Territory and was later in charge of Indian affairs west of the Mississippi. He died in 1838.

Capt. Lewis became governor of Louisiana Territory. He was killed in 1809, probably by his own hand.



**Spontoon.** Also called an esponenton, this was carried by infantry officers to serve as a badge of rank, a sort of baton or signaling device and as a personal weapon. For Captains Lewis and Clark the spontoon also served as a walking-stick on rough or slippery terrain and as a pro to steady a rifle for a long shot.

There was no standard design for spontoons, except they were supposed to have a blade one foot long fastened to a 1 1/4 inch diameter, 6 foot long shaft.