Lewis and Clark: The Ultimate Adventurers

The story of Lewis and Clark is a tale of discovery and adventure many of us only wish we could experience. Two hundred years ago much of the American West was a mysterious, wild and unknown land to Americans. Because of this, the Lewis and Clark Expedition took months to cross territory that now takes us just days or even hours to cover. As they ventured across prairies, mountains and rivers, they met with many Native tribes, discovered and named many plants and animals and even named the mountains and territories they came across.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark became friends while serving together in the Army. President Thomas Jefferson chose them for the historic trip because of their excellent wilderness and botany skills, as he was hoping for detailed descriptions of the region. In addition, the President hoped that Lewis and Clark would find a direct trade route to the Orient. Despite the fact that no route was found, their exploration set the stage for the great migration west that Americans would begin only a few decades later.

On May 14, 1804, Lewis and Clark’s crew, the Corps of Discovery, set out on their 8,000-mile journey. They left equipped with everything from compasses and hatchets, to telescopes and botany books. Colorful face paint, tomahawks, and tobacco were given as gifts to the Native people, both as a sign of good faith and to help ensure a safe journey through the region. Also accompanying the group was a young Shoshone woman named Sacagawea, who would prove instrumental in the success of their journey.

They blazed a trail starting in the Kansas Territory, heading up the Missouri River. They then passed into the Nebraska Territory and headed north through what is now South and North Dakota, crossing the Missouri River and passing through the vast grasslands of the area. These grasslands were home to countless bison, antelope, prairie chickens and mule deer.

On August 24, 1804, the crew saw its first bison. Back then, up to 70 million bison covered the prairies. Bison were a very important source of clothing, shelter and food for the Native Americans. By 1883, largely due to over-hunting, only 350 bison remained in the whole country (today there are a few hundred thousand bison, but only a few herds live in the wild).

By September of 1804, the crew had discovered 178 plants and 122 animals west of the Mississippi never before seen by Europeans. In October, Lewis and Clark reached the large native cities of Mandans and Hidatsas (population 4,500) in present day North Dakota, where they built a fort and stayed for the winter. The winter of 1804 was the coldest the crew had ever felt, with temperatures reaching as low as 45 degrees below zero. In April, as they continued west toward the Rocky Mountains, they began noticing signs of another large animal - the grizzly bear. Moving onward through what is now Montana, they encountered the Bitterroot Mountain Range, described by one crew member as “the most terrible mountains I ever beheld.” They proceeded to the Snake River and followed the border of present day Washington and Oregon, passing by Mt. Hood. Finally they reached the end of the continent and set up their winter camp at Fort Clatsop. They were all very happy to have finally reached the Pacific Ocean.

The crew returned east, nearly tracing the path they took on their westward trip. By the end of 1805, they had returned to the East Coast, where they were considered heroes. Today many of the wild places that Lewis and Clark explored still exist, but are in need of protection to remain wild. The Sierra Club has identified areas along the trail that are in the most need of protection. By preserving these wild areas, we can have the opportunity to experience the same types of adventures that Lewis and Clark did. We may not discover new animals or plants, but we can discover more about our country, our environment and ourselves.

The Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition

The Lewis and Clark Expedition took shape following one of the most significant events in American history – the Louisiana Purchase. The Louisiana Territory, purchased from the French in 1803, was 820,000 square miles in size and stretched from present day Montana to the delta of the Mississippi River. This purchase paved the way for Lewis and Clark’s voyage of discovery and changed the face of America forever.
LEWIS & CLARK QUIZ

1. Who was President of the United States when Lewis and Clark started the trip?
   a. Benjamin Franklin  
   b. Jimmy Carter  
   c. Thomas Jefferson  
   d. Abraham Lincoln

2. Why were Lewis and Clark chosen by the President to go on this trip?
   a. They had excellent wilderness and botany skills  
   b. They smelled funny and nobody liked them  
   c. Lewis was raised by bears and wanted to look for his parents  
   d. Clark had never seen the ocean

3. Lewis and Clark’s first names are:
   a. Bo Lewis and Larry Clark  
   b. Furry Lewis and Singin’ Leon Clark  
   c. Jerry Lewis and Joe Clark  
   d. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark

4. If you were to follow the route that Lewis and Clark took, you’d pass through these states:
   a. Texas, Nebraska, Idaho and Hawaii  
   b. Virginia, Oregon, Montana, Utah, New York and California  
   c. Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon  
   d. Kentucky, Minnesota, Washington, Texas and Alaska

5. Now, see if you can write the name of each state on the map above!

6. How long was Lewis and Clark’s journey in total?
   a. 15 miles  
   b. 8,000 miles  
   c. 32 days  
   d. 1,100 miles

7. What Native American helped Lewis and Clark on their expedition?
   a. Red Cloud  
   b. Sacagawea  
   c. Geronimo  
   d. Sitting Bull

8. What animals did Lewis and Clark NOT see during their journey?
   a. Grizzly Bears  
   b. Gorillas  
   c. Bison  
   d. Prairie Dogs

ANSWERS: 1.c  2.a  3.d  4.c  5.  6.c  7.b  8.b
L Lewis and Clark made their journey west when America was still a very young country. In fact, the United States had only been a country for 28 years when they set out on their adventure. Do you ever wonder what America was like at this time, almost 200 years ago? Then maybe a career as a historian would interest you!

As a historian, you get to learn all kinds of interesting things about the past. What was life like before electricity? Before cars? Before computers? How would a trip from Missouri to Oregon be different today from the same trip 200 years ago? Through their hard work and dedication, historians help us unlock the secrets of the past and also to understand how we got where we are today.

On their journey, Lewis and Clark discovered huge colonies of prairie dogs, called prairie dog towns. These towns are made up of an intricate system of mounds, burrows and tunnels that the prairie dogs have built. Called “barking squirrels” by Lewis and Clark, prairie dogs keep the grass around their mounds short in order to spot predators from a distance. This constant clipping encourages growth of other native plants that help feed other animals.

Two hundred years ago, as many as 5 billion prairie dogs inhabited the American West. Now, they are at risk of disappearing forever and are candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Are you curious about how you can help save the planet?

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5 things you can do to help

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<td><strong>Respect all living things</strong></td>
<td><strong>Save energy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Share your knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Read</strong></td>
<td><strong>Get outdoors</strong></td>
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<td>All living things contribute to the beauty and diversity of the earth.</td>
<td>If we all conserve, we can reduce the threat of oil and gas exploration in the lands of Lewis and Clark.</td>
<td>Tell your friends and family what you have learned about Lewis and Clark’s amazing discoveries.</td>
<td>By reading about Lewis and Clark, you will learn a lot about America and its amazing variety of plants and animals.</td>
<td>Become familiar with the land, plants and animals in your area in order to better protect them.</td>
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