



August 5, 2003

## Lewis and Clark the Final Chapter

*Epic adventure. Scientific discovery. Preparing the United States to become a transcontinental nation.*

*Those phrases describe the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which journeyed from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1804-1806.*

*The bicentennial celebration of the expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began this year and will continue through 2006.*

*While there's plenty of time to retrace the trail blazed by the Corps of Discovery, why not start now? Whenever they go, history-minded travelers will find ample historical attractions plus nearby KOA Kampgrounds.*

by Dennis Gaub, for KOA Kompass

A rousing reception greeted the Lewis and Clark expedition when it arrived in St. Louis in September 1806, completing a 2-1/2-year, 8,000-mile journey to the Pacific Ocean and back.

Crowds lined the bank of the Missouri River to watch the expedition's landing on September 23, according to historian Jim Ronda's account in *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

Two days later, the explorers got a full dose of homecoming cheer during a dinner and ball at William Christy's city tavern:

- They were toasted along with Christopher Columbus, George Washington and, of course, President Thomas Jefferson, the expedition's benefactor.
- Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were praised for "perilous services [that] endear them to every American heart."

Not to be outdone, according to Ronda, residents of Fincastle, Virginia (the hometown of Clark's wife, Julia Hancock), sent congratulations: "You have navigated bold and unknown rivers, traversed Mountains which had never before been impressed with the footsteps of civilized man, and surmounted every obstacle, which climate, Nature, or ferocious Savages could throw in your way."

Yet, the expedition's accomplishments seemingly faded out of American view in a few years. They were not fully appreciated until decades later when given a new look and fresh analysis by historians and geographers. Nowadays, Lewis and Clark buffs can absorb information from hundreds of books, dozens of magazines and historical journals and documentary films produced by the likes of Ken Burns.

The fanfare surrounding the expedition's bicentennial observance (2003-06) makes it easy to forget that Lewis and Clark failed their fundamental assignment. As Jefferson told Lewis in June 1803, the expedition's goal was to find a "direct water communication," or route, from the Missouri-Mississippi river system to the Columbia River system and the Pacific. The rugged mountains of present-day western Montana and central Idaho, of course, nixed that dream.

Still, the expedition continues to inspire Americans on many levels and thus must be considered a success. "The Lewis and Clark Trail has come to represent all American journeys," Ronda says. "In the Corps of Discovery's progress across the continent, Americans see reflected thousands of individual passages into a new world."

The fates of Lewis and Clark diverged after the expedition.



KOA is offering a limited edition Lewis and Clark video commemorating the most famous camping trip in history. Hosted by James Whitmore, the video showcases a one-hour visit back in time to learn more about Lewis and Clark and their epic adventure. Included with the video are a disposable 35 mm camera, Travel Journal, Adventurer's brochure of must-see destinations, fun and educational family games and an explorer's map - an entire Explorer's Kit to help you plan your next family adventure!

### Get Yours Now!

Order your video and Explorer's Kit [online](#) or send a check for \$16.95 to: KOA, Inc., Explorer's Kits, P.O. Box 30558, Billings, MT 59114-0558.

### Get Yours FREE!\*

Stay two nights at any KOA (or combination of KOAs) before October 31, 2003, and we'll send you this terrific video and Explorer's Kit for FREE (\* +\$6.95 for shipping and handling)! Simply send us your registration receipts showing proof that you stayed two nights at any KOA Kampground between August 1 and October 31, 2003 along with a check for \$6.95 for shipping and handling to KOA, Inc., Explorer's Kits, P.O. Box 30558, Billings, MT 59114-0558.



Lewis, the more intellectual of the two, took on the primary responsibility of writing a three-volume report on the expedition. The first volume was to have been a narrative of the journey, followed by volumes describing Native Americans the expedition met; new species of plants and animals that were recorded; and other natural phenomena that were found.

Lewis, however, encountered personal and financial difficulties. What the 19th century called melancholia plunged him into depression and, reportedly, alcohol abuse. He had been appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory, but he was ill suited for politics. Compounding his problems, Lewis faced pressure from creditors over nonpayment of expedition bills: government clerks questioned and delayed payment of some drafts on the federal treasury that he had written to pay for expedition expenses.

In the fall of 1809, the 35-year-old Lewis left for Washington to argue his case for honoring the chits, but he never arrived. "The mystery of his violent death in October 1809 at a wayside tavern in Tennessee can never be solved now; it might have been murder, but the testimony leads most observers to conclude that Lewis took his own life," writes historian Donald Jackson in his essay, "The Race to Publish Lewis and Clark," included in Ronda's *Voyages of Discovery*.

Lewis, who never married, was buried along the Natchez Trace near Nashville, Tennessee; a monument marks his interment.

Lewis hadn't started the manuscript before his death, which disrupted plans to promptly publish the expedition's feats.

It took until 1814 for Clark, Jefferson and Philadelphia editor Nicolas Biddle to print a substitute version of the narrative that Lewis had planned. According to Jackson, Jefferson wanted Benjamin Smith Barton, a botanist and zoologist at the University of Pennsylvania, to edit and publish the planned two volumes of scientific information from the expedition, but Barton died before completing the task.

Not until 1904 -- a century after the Corps left St. Louis -- were the complete expedition journals published. Reuben Gold Thwaites edited the landmark edition.

Clark's post-expedition life was happier. He was first appointed Indian Agent and, after Lewis' death, governor of Missouri. He and his wife, Julia, who died in 1820, had four sons and a daughter. Clark then married a widow, Mrs. Harriet Kennerly. Together, they had another son. Clark died in St. Louis on September 1, 1838, at age 68, and is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis.

Charles G. Clarke, in a 1970 book, *The Men of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, provides the most complete account of all 51 men recorded as being members of the expedition. He also summarizes what is known about others who joined the expedition en route, including Sacagawea, her husband, Toussaint Charbonneau and their son, Jean Baptiste (Pomp).

Here's what happened to several of the better-known expedition members:

- York, Clark's African-American slave, was freed by his master and returned to Louisville, Kentucky, where he married, according to Clarke. However, a new book by historian Thomas P. Slaughter (*Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness*) refutes the idea that Clark willingly freed York. Instead, Slaughter asserts, it was the slave's unceasing efforts that ultimately earned him liberty.
- Private Patrick Gass, who was almost 98 when he died in 1870, making him the last surviving expedition member.
- Sergeant Nathaniel Hale Pryor married an Osage woman and lent his name to places in Montana and Oklahoma.
- George Drouillard, the interpreter, was killed by the Blackfeet Indians in 1810 while on a return trip to the Upper Missouri River area with a fur-trapping party.
- Private John Colter was honorably discharged from the expedition while en route through present-day Montana in August 1806. He is believed to have been the first white man to see what is now Yellowstone National Park. After returning to St. Louis, Colter went back to the Rockies and outlasted Blackfeet pursuers in a famous footrace. He returned to Missouri, had a son and probably died in 1813.
- Sacagawea, who died in 1812, according to some accounts. More generally accepted, though, is the report that she lived into her 90s and died in 1884 at Wyoming's Wind River Indian Agency.
- Private Alexander Hamilton Willard, who migrated from Wisconsin to California during the Gold Rush era and died at age 87 in 1865. Willard lived long enough to become the only expedition member known to have been photographed.

#### Sources consulted:

Charles G. Clarke, *The Men of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 1970  
 James P. Ronda, *Find the West: Explorations with Lewis and Clark*, 2001  
 James P. Ronda, *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 1998  
 Thomas P. Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness*, 2003