

What did Lewis & Clark Do, Anyway?

Thomas Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on a great expedition in May, 1804. They set out on a great journey across what was then the Louisiana Territory. They met unknown people, terrible weather conditions and unseen places.

In the year 1801, Lewis was a young Army Captain in Pittsburgh. He received a letter from Thomas Jefferson, asking him to become his secretary-aide. Lewis was happy to take the position. Soon, Jefferson announced that he wanted to plan an expedition to explore the West, and he appointed Lewis to be in command of the journey. Since Lewis needed a co-



commander, he appointed his long-time friend and former commanding officer, William Clark. Together, the two friends would make the long journey. The two men rarely argued, and were both fantastic, noble leaders.

Why did Jefferson want the men to make this journey? For one, he was curious to know what the lands of North America were like in the West. He was also interested in the area politically. The Louisiana Purchase was made in the year 1803. Thomas Jefferson orchestrated the largest real estate deal in America's history. France owned the area, but Napoleon (the French leader at the time) agreed to sell all of the Louisiana Territory – more than 828,000 square miles. Originally, Napoleon had refused a similar offer, but he changed his mind because he needed the money - and agreed to make the sale. Suddenly, the United States was much larger! Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to explore the newly acquired portion of the USA.

The men did not travel alone. They had a fleet of men to make the journey with. There were about 38 men enlisted, and they traveled by boat. They also had a guide, named Sacagawea. She was a Native American hired to interpret the Shoshone language, so that the explorers could communicate with the native Indians. She was also

able to recognize certain geographic landmarks that she knew about through her people.

During their trip, Lewis and Clark, and their team gave many of the first descriptions of plants, animals, rivers, and the Rocky Mountains. The land was wild and often rough. They also gave detailed reports about many of the Indian nations that they came across.

To make such a journey, the men needed many skills. They needed to understand geography, navigation, and how to live in the outdoors. They needed to have lots of supplies, equipment, and trading goods. The two men explored and mapped their route.

The expedition covered over 8000 miles, and it took them two years, four months, and ten days.

Today, the Lewis and Clark Trail is an approximate path of their journey that goes through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon – and back.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Who sent Lewis and Clark on their expedition?
 - a. William Shakespeare
 - b. Thomas Jefferson
 - c. Abraham Lincoln
 - d. Bill Clinton

2. In what year did Lewis and Clark set out on their journey?
 - a. 1704
 - b. 1748
 - c. 1804
 - d. 1904

3. The expedition covered over:
 - a. 800 miles
 - b. 8000 miles
 - c. 9500 miles
 - d. 80,000 miles

4. Who was the leader of France during this time?
 - a. Manuel de Godoy
 - b. Napoleon
 - c. Joseph Buonaparte
 - d. Francois Barbe-Marbois

5. How did the men travel?
 - a. Train
 - b. Horse
 - c. Boat
 - d. Car

6. What best describes Lewis and Clarke's relationship before they became co-commanders?:
 - a. They were brothers.
 - b. They were enemies.
 - c. They were old friends and Clark was Lewis's former commanding officer.
 - d. They used to work at a farm together.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Short Answer Questions

1. What were Lewis and Clark's first names?
2. Explain the role of Sacagawea.
3. About how many men travelled with Lewis and Clark?
4. What made Napoleon change his mind and decide to sell the Louisiana Territory?
5. How large was the Louisiana Territory?
6. What is the trail called today that follows this expedition?
7. In your own words, what skills did Lewis and Clark possess to be able to successfully carry out such a journey?

ANSWER KEY:

Multiple Choice:

1. B
2. C
3. B
4. B
5. C
6. C

Short Answer:

1. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.
2. She was hired as an interpreter to aide in communication with the natives.
3. About 38 men travelled with them.
4. He needed the money.
5. Over 828,000 square miles.
6. The Lewis and Clark Trail.
7. Individual Response.