

Lewis and Clark: A New World (Natural History)

By Toni Lee Robinson



¹ Do you groan at the idea of a long road trip? If so, you wouldn't have wanted to go with Lewis and Clark. They spent two and a half years "on the road." President Thomas Jefferson sent a team of thirty-five explorers on the trip. The name of the group was the Corps (core) of Discovery.

² To get ready for the journey, Lewis went back to school. He worked hard. He learned how to use the stars for telling direction. He learned about pressing plant samples, or specimens, on paper. He studied the animal kingdom. He even learned about fossils! President Jefferson had asked him to watch for signs of animals that were extinct.

³ These voyagers were not on vacation. Their trip was hard work. There weren't even any roads where they were going! First they traveled by keelboat, a large boat for hauling freight. Later they went by canoe, horseback, and on foot. Exploring was a big job. Almost every day the travelers made maps and wrote notes. From their journals, Americans would learn about the newest part of their nation.

⁴ What a wealth of discoveries this team made! They found hundreds of plants and animals that scientists didn't know about. Wherever the explorers went, they studied the area around them. Even in dangerous places they took note of what they saw.

⁵ Once, the Corps got lost in the mountains. Everyone was cold and hungry. Men and horses fell down the steep slopes. Still, Clark writes "...country is thickly covered with ...pine of which I [counted] 8 species..." Clark saw four different kinds of pine. These were whitebark pine, lodgepole pine, western white pine, and ponderosa pine. He had also found Englemann spruce, subalpine and grand fir, and western red cedar. Scientists learned about these trees for the first time from Clark's notes.

⁶ Native people showed the Corps many new species. One of these

was camas (CAM-us). Its waves of blue flowers made prairie meadows look like lakes. The Nez Perce (NEZZ-purse) dried this plant's root for food.

⁷ No one knows how many plant samples the team collected. Some of the specimens were ruined by floods. But the explorers brought home over two hundred samples. Bitterroot, Oregon grape, and the pink fairy or deerhorn were some of them. All of these were new to science.

⁸ The team learned of new kinds of animals. They had heard about grizzly bears from the Indian people. Lewis thought that scary stories about the bears were mostly fairy tales. But the men were chased again and again by the huge, fierce animals. Lewis decided the stories were true.

⁹ The explorers saw many splendid sights on the trail. One day they counted ten thousand buffalo in one herd! Elk and deer grazed calmly as the travelers passed by. Antelope, coyotes, and prairie dogs were new sights. One day the crew tried to catch a prairie dog. They poured lots of water to flush it from its burrow. After a whole day, it was finally caged. The prairie dog and five other animals were sent to President Jefferson.

¹⁰ Lewis wrote about an odd animal he had seen. It was black and reddish-brown with yellow stripes. He thought it might be a kind of wolf or wildcat. Experts have guessed he saw a wolverine. This animal is the size of a wildcat but will attack animals much larger. It is known for its ferocious hunger.

¹¹ The explorers found some new fish. One was a type of trout and another was the eulachon (YEW-la-chawn). The team noted birds like the California condor and the meadowlark. But mammals made up the bulk of their discoveries. They even saw a whale that had washed up on the beach. The crew took turns going down to the ocean by canoe to see it.

¹² One of the Corps' most important jobs was drawing maps. There had been few maps of the new land west of the Mississippi. Most of those were wrong. Lewis and Clark drew very exact maps of the areas through which they passed. In the years after the voyage, many people used these maps.

¹³ The Corps discovered many wonders of America. Their hard work helped scientists and others to know about the West. They didn't travel by road. But their journey may be America's most famous "road trip."

Name _____

Date _____

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<p>1. What was the name of the group sent to explore the West?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Corps of DiscoveryThe Lewis and Clark TeamThe Western ExplorersThe Discovery Team	<p>2. Who sent the group on their journey?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">ScientistsThe American peopleCongressPresident Jefferson
<p>3. How did Lewis prepare for the trip?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">He worked out.He studied.He built a houseboat.He planned a going-away party.	<p>4. How were plant specimens kept for science?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">They were packed in ice.They were pressed between papers.They were kept fresh in water.They were ground up and put in bottles.
<p>5. Why did Lewis study fossils?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Jefferson asked him to watch for signs of extinct animals.He had seen some in Washington he wanted to identify.He just loved to study.He wanted to know how they were made.	<p>6. Why did the explorers keep journals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">So they could bring back information about their discoveriesBecause it was a way to relax in the eveningsBecause they had all been given new diaries before they leftSo they could keep track of their friends after the trip was over
<p>7. How did the explorers catch a prairie dog?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">They poured its hole full of water so it would come out.They caught it in a net.They sang it to sleep.They put peanuts outside its burrow.	<p>8. Name one of each of the following seen by Lewis and Clark:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Plant _____Mammal _____Bird _____Fish _____

