

The adventures of lewis and clark assignment

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In 1804, two men, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were sent out by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the land of the Louisiana Purchase. The two men were to determine if the new territory actually had something that could contribute to America, or if there was nothing new or of importance. They were told to study the plant life, animals, and the geography of the region, to map out the borders of the land. In addition, they were to discover if the area had any natural resources which could make the land beneficial to the economy. What they discovered in the Louisiana Purchase was massive; numerous Indian tribes, plant and animal species, and the Rocky Mountains.

Thomas Jefferson had long wanted to explore the western lands. The Lewis and Clark expedition was not the first attempt at doing so, either. In 1793, while Secretary of State under President George Washington, \$128 was raised to send French botanist Andre Michaux to explore out to the Pacific Ocean (Duncan 8). Michaux never made it past the Ohio River, though, so Jefferson planned to try again. Since Jefferson hadn't yet acquired the Louisiana Territory, he had to have the mission approved by the countries still in charge of the territories. When writing to the British, French, and Spanish, he explained that it would be a purely scientific expedition. When he secretly wrote to Congress, though, Jefferson emphasized the commercial and economic benefits of exploring the land, in hopes of having the mission approved. England and France agreed to the expedition, and even though Spain objected, Jefferson continued on planning the mission. To lead the "Corps of Discovery", as Jefferson named it, he chose his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, saying, "was impossible to find a character who to compleat science in botany, natural history, mineralogy and astronomy, <https://assignbuster.com/the-adventures-of-lewis-and-clark-assignment/>

habits adapted to the woods and a familiarity with the Indian manners and character” (Ambrose 76). At age twenty-eight, some people believed that Lewis would be too impulsive, and possibly endanger this “ enterprise of national consequence” (Duncan 9). Nevertheless, Lewis continued on with his preparations for the expedition. He spent the spring in Philadelphia, studying with Andrew Ellicott, an astronomer-surveyor, being tutored by multiple scientists, and learning medical advice from Dr. Benjamin Rush. In addition to learning vital tips for the journey, Lewis also spent most of the money appropriated by Congress for the journey gathering supplies. He bought a range of items, including telescopes, compasses, fishing supplies, and clothing for his men, and gifts for Indian tribes he might cross (Duncan 10-11). After planning his return to Washington, Lewis, against Jefferson’s original idea, decided he needed a co-captain. His choice was William Clark. Even though the War Department strictly forbade another man leading the expedition, Jefferson did nothing to stop it, and Clark accepted the offer. The day before the group was scheduled to head west, Jefferson received the news that America now owned the entire territory of Louisiana, instead of just the New Orleans port like he had expected. With the land now in US hands, Jefferson no longer had to hide his true motives from other countries. At Jefferson and Lewis’s final meeting, Jefferson told that “ the great object is to ascertain whether from its extent and fertility the Missouri country is susceptible of a large population” (Ambrose). One of the other main goals was to determine if there was an all-water route to the Pacific. With other small scientific objectives, Lewis, Clark, and the Corps of Discovery sent out on the westward expedition.

After spending the winter camped at River Dubois, the group of men

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prepared to make their way down the Missouri River on their first leap into uncharted territory. On May 14th at four o'clock, "under a gentle breeze" the Corps of Discovery started the expedition (Ambrose 137). Through the first few days of the journey were far from easy. Bad weather, bugs, and travel problems plagued the crew for weeks. On June 1st, the group had reached the Osage River, and set up camp. In order for Lewis to collect samples, he demanded that all surrounding trees be cut down. In addition, in true scientist form, Lewis would also walk around collecting samples of both animal and plant species, and making note of the physical aspects of the land (Ambrose 141). Though, because this was now more of a diplomatic expedition, the other important aspect was to befriend the Indian tribes that resided in the western lands. Jefferson attempted to contact the Sioux Indians, but had no such luck. Multiple times the Corps of Discovery passed through territories of the Kansas Indians, Pawnees and Otos, only to find no Indians present. Only when one George Drouillard, one of the translators of the group, find a lone Indian and persuade him to bring the group back to his tribe, did they have their first encounter with Indians. Lewis and Clark then used a technique that would be used with all future Indian encounters. They showed the tribes examples of their military power and advanced technology, such as compasses, and of course, guns. Lewis and Clark also had a speech prepared, in which they referred to the Indians as "children" and the leaders of America as their "great fathers" (Lavender 116). One of the most important Indian encounters was with a girl from the Shoshone tribe, Sacagawea, in which the journey would change dramatically.

Sacagawea, Bird Woman as her name translated to, was originally born a Shoshone Indian. At approximately age ten, though, she was captured by the

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Hidatsas, and then sold to French Canadian fur trapper Toussaint Charbonneau. At the time of her and Charbonneau's hiring, Sacagawea was only fifteen and pregnant with her first child. Learning from previous Indian encounters, they all knew how hard communication would be. Sacagawea would translate to Charbonneau, who would then translate to the Corps' translator, who would finally translate to Lewis and Clark. For some time, the Hidatsas traveled with the Corps of Discovery, and helped answer one of the most important objectives of the entire journey. When the group reached split in the Missouri River, known as Three Forks, the Hidatsas stopped their journey, but not before answering one of the most important questions of the entire journey. Before they left, they pointed out how on the "Western side of this river consists of open and level plains" (Ambrose). Lewis and Clark now knew that there were in fact habitable lands in the Louisiana Territory. The other extremely important finding the Corps of Discovery had was the Rocky Mountains. In May 1805, Lewis saw the Rockies for the first time. Despite the numerous rocks and minerals within the mountains, Lewis only noted the animal species found. Even though the minerals could have been excellent export items, Jefferson told Lewis to take note of "such minerals as lead, iron, and coal, valuable adjuncts to an agricultural economy" (Ambrose 254). According to Jefferson, animals were more the "great wealth" of the Rockies than the minerals.

When Lewis had returned to report his findings, despite all the positive outcomes of the journey, such as the new species of animals, plants, and discovering that the land was habitable, he knew that the bad news would shine through. There was no direct water way to the Pacific, like Jefferson had hoped. He did highlight instead on another finding, saying "we view this <https://assignbuster.com/the-adventures-of-lewis-and-clark-assignment/>

passage across the continent as affording immense advantages to the fur trade...The Missouri and all its branches from the Cheyenne upwards abound more in beaver and common otter, than any other streams on earth” (Lewis, 200). The government could cut out the British almost completely, cut the distance traveled, and have the furs arrive earlier and in better condition, leading to an increase in price. Lewis believed that he had been the first to explore the American West, that he should be the one to exploit it. Over the next few months, Lewis and Jefferson had many different meetings with all political figures trying to get this new form of fur trade to happen. In addition, Lewis traveled across the east coast, to Philadelphia, Virginia, and St. Louis, where each city insisted on throwing him a ball or feast in his honor.

Over the course of almost two years, Lewis and Clark with the Corps of Discovery explored the Louisiana Territory, and returned with both good and bad news. While there wasn't a direct water route to the Pacific Ocean, there were numerous animal species that could be used to benefit the fur trade. Despite not having all the information on the journey, what the two men did contribute changed the American view of the west from barren lands to something that would be extremely important and useful.