

Lewis and Clark in North Dakota

President Thomas Jefferson's Jan. 18, 1803, confidential message to Congress was the spark that began the epic journey known to us as the Lewis and Clark Expedition or Corps of Discovery.

This message set into motion a brilliantly conceived and well-led expedition that few knew would have as great an impact on future generations as it ultimately did.

On May 14, 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark launched a corps of some 20 hardy explorers up the Missouri River from St. Louis. The expedition, originally budgeted by Jefferson to cost \$2,500, ended up costing the nation the grand sum of \$38,722.25. In all, they would be gone two years, four months and seven days. Of this, one quarter of the journey would be spent in North Dakota.

The Corps, traveling in a keelboat and several pirogues, reached North Dakota on Oct. 14, 1804, and on Oct. 21 had floated past the site of modern Bismarck-Mandan. Here they came to view three large Native American villages once thriving, but since abandoned, with the ancestors of the modern Mandans. These closely situated sites are now



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known as On-A-Slant Village, Chief Looking's Village and Double Ditch.

On Oct. 26, the Corps would begin their Mandan winter near the mouth of the Knife River. Here they would laboriously construct the living quarters, Fort Mandan. They spent the next few months adjusting to and learning the invaluable culture of their Mandan and Hidatsa neighbors. Their most successful and influential meeting came when they were introduced to a teenage Native American woman, named Sakakawea. She and her newborn son, whom they called Pomp, traveled with the expedition, joining her husband Charbonneau—who had been hired as a guide and interpreter. As history tells us, Sakakawea proved to be the most significant asset in that arrangement.

Early fur traders had been familiar with the land that Lewis and Clark saw while in North Dakota in 1804-05, but what the expedition recorded after that were sights never before seen by white men. Barely out of familiar stretches of the lower Missouri River, they began to record all of the wonders and bounties of nature. Not only were the visions of "immense herds of Buffalo, Deer Elk and Antelopes" spectacular, but they also translated into more scientific data than the men thought attainable.

In September 1806, when the men finally returned to St. Louis, they received a fantastic, but surprised welcome. Many had written them off long before, guessing they had met their demise. With them they brought a collection and citation of hundreds of plant and animal specimens, annotated map sketches and a heightened understanding of the cultures of 50-some tribes they had met along the way.

Today, the Lewis and Clark journals, in many renditions, have helped bring to light what the Corps of Discovery encountered 200 years ago. As a result of their expedition, the new nation now had the basis for a continental empire that would extend trade, exploit the natural resources of the new region, and cause generations of Americans to wonder at the achievements of their journey.

For more information on Lewis and Clark, call the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center at (877) 462-8535 or visit www.fortmandan.com.



North Dakota, Then and Now

To aid today's travelers, the highway on the east side of the Missouri River is numbered **ND 1804**, while the west side of the river is **ND 1806**. These commemorate the years Lewis and Clark traveled through our state. There is no "right" place to start following their trail, as long as you start with a spirit of adventure!

Lewis & Clark Trail Points of Interest

1. Fort Yates
2. Buffalo Herd Pasture
3. Prairie Knights Casino & Resort
4. Cannonball River
5. Kimball Bottoms
6. On-A-Slant Indian Village
7. Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park
8. Five Nations Arts Depot
9. United Tribes Technical College
10. North Dakota Heritage Center
11. Dakota Zoo
12. Keelboat Park
13. Lewis & Clark Riverboat
14. Chief Looking's Village Historic Site
15. Double Ditch Indian Village State Historic Site
16. Crooss Ranch State Park
17. Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center
18. Fort Mandan
19. Fort Clark Historic Site
20. Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site