

Excerpts from the “Journals of the Expedition”, Captains Lewis and Clark
May 1804 – September 1806

Read the selected journal entries from the Corps of Discovery’s journey west and answer the related questions at the end of the paper.

September 5, 1804

Wednesday. The wind was again high from the south. At five miles, we came to a large island, called Pawnee island, in the middle of the river; and stopped to breakfast at a small creek on the north, which has the name Goat creek, at eight and a half miles. Near the mouth of this creek the beaver had made a dam across so as to form a large pond, in which they built their houses. Above this island the river Poncara falls into the Missouri from the south, and is thirty yards wide at the entrance. Two men whom we dispatched to the village of the same name, returned with information that they found it on the lower side of the creek; but as it is the hunting season, the town was so completely deserted that they had killed a buffalo in the village itself. This tribe of Poncaras, who are said to have once numbered four hundred men, are now reduced to about fifty, and have associated for mutual protection with the Mahas, who are about two hundred in number. These two nations are allied by a similarity of misfortune; they were once both numerous, both resided in villages, and cultivated Indian corn; their common enemies, the Sioux and small-pox, drove them from their towns...

September 7, 1804

Friday. The morning was very cold and the wind southeast...As we descended from this dome, we arrived at a spot, on the gradual descent of the hill, nearly four acres in extent, and covered with small holes: these are the residence of a little animal, called by the French *petit chien*, who sit erect near the mouth, and make a whistling noise, but when alarmed take refuge in their holes. In order to bring them out, we poured into one of the holes five barrels of water without filling it, but we dislodged and caught the owner. After digging down another of the holes for six feet, we found, on running a pole into it, that we had not yet dug half way to the bottom: we discovered, however, two frogs in the hole, and near it we killed a dark rattlesnake...we were also informed, though we never witnessed the fact, that a sort of lizard, and a snake, live habitually with these animals. The *petit chien* are justly named, as they resemble a small dog in some particulars, though they have also some points of similarity to the squirrel. The head resembles the squirrel in every respect, except the ear is shorter, the tail like that of the ground squirrel, the toe-nails are long, the fur is fine, and the long hair is gray.

December 12, 1804

Wednesday. The wind is still from the north, the thermometer being at sunrise thirty-eight degrees below 0. One of the Ahnahaways brought us down the half of an antelope killed near the fort; we had been informed that all these animals return to the Black mountains, but there are great numbers of them about us at this season which we might easily kill, but are unwilling to venture out before our constitutions are hardened gradually to the climate. We measure the river on the ice, and find it five hundred yards wide immediately opposite the fort.

April 6, 1805

Saturday. The party now consisted of thirty-two persons...The two interpreters, were George Drewyer and Toussaint Chaboneau. The wife of Chaboneau also accompanied us with her young child, and we hope may be useful as an interpreter among the Snake Indians. She was herself one of that tribe, but having been taken in war by the Minnetarees, by whom she was sold as a slave to Chaboneau, who brought her up and afterwards married her...All this party with the baggage was stowed in six small canoes and two large perioues...

June 20, 1805

Thursday. As we were desirous of getting meat enough to last us during the portage, so that the men might not be diverted from their labour to look for food, we sent out four hunters to-day: they killed eleven buffalo. This was indeed an easy labour, for there are vast herds coming constantly to the opposite bank of the river to water...Captain Clark returned this evening, having examined the whole course of the river and fixed the route most practicable for the portage. They first day, 17th, he was occupied in measuring the heights and distances along the banks of the river, and slept near a ravine at the foot of the Crooked falls, having very narrowly escaped falling into the river, where he would have perished inevitably, in descending the cliffs near the grand cataract. The next day, 18th, he continued the same occupation...he encamped near the mouth of a creek which appeared to rise in the

South mountain. These three islands are opposite each other, and we gave them the name of the Whitebear islands from observing some of those animals on them. He killed a beaver, an elk and eight buffalo. One of the men who was sent a short distance from the camp to bring home some meat, was attacked by a white bear, and closely pursued within forty paces of the camp, and narrowly escaped being caught. Captain Clark immediately went with three men in quest of the bear, which he was afraid might surprise another of the hunters who was out collecting game. The bear was however too quick, for before captain Clark could reach the man, the bear had attacked him and compelled him to take refuge in the water. He now ran off as they approached, and it being late they deferred pursuing him till the next morning.

July 6, 1805

Saturday. Last night there were several showers of rain and hail, attended with thunder and lightning: and about daybreak a heavy storm came on from the southwest with one continued roar of thunder, and rain and hail. The hail which was as large as musket balls, covered the ground completely; and on collecting some of it, it lasted during the day and served to cool the water. The red and yellow currant is abundant and now ripe, although still a little acid. We have seen in this neighbourhood what we have not met before, a remarkable small fox which associates in bands and burrows in the prairie, like a small wolf, but have not yet been able to obtain any of them, as they are extremely vigilant, and betake themselves on the slightest alarm to their burrows which are very deep.

July 29, 1805

Monday. This morning the hunters brought in some fat deer of the longtailed red kind, which are quite as large as those of the United States, and are, indeed, the only kind we have found at this place: there are numbers of the sandhill cranes feeding in the meadows; we caught a young one of the same colour as the red deer, which, though it had nearly attained its full growth could not fly; it is very fierce and strikes a severe blow with its beak. The kingfisher has become quite common on this side of the falls: but we have seen none of the summer duck since leaving that place...the small birds already described are also abundant in the plains; here too, are great quantities of grasshoppers or crickets; and among other animals, a large ant with reddish brown body and legs, and a black head and abdomen, who build little cones of gravel, ten or twelve inches high, without a mixture of sticks, and but little earth. In the river we see a great abundance of fish, but we cannot tempt them to bite by any thing on our hooks. The whole party have been engaged in dressing skins, and making them into moccasins and leggings. Captain Clark's fever has almost left him, but he still remains very languid and has a general soreness in his limbs. The latitude of our camp, as the means of two observations of the meridian altitude of the sun's lower limb with the octant by back observations, is N. 45 24' 8.5".

October 5, 1805

Saturday. The wind easterly, and the weather cool. The canoes being nearly finished it became necessary to dispose of our horses. They were therefore collected to the number of thirty-eight, and being branded and marked were delivered to three Indians, the two brothers and the son of a chief, who promises to accompany us down the river. To each of these men we gave a knife and some small articles, and they agreed to take good care of the horses till our return. The hunters with all their diligence are unable to kill any thing, the hills being high and rugged, and the woods too dry to hunt deer, which is the only game in the country. We therefore continue to eat dried fish and roots, which are purchased from the squaws, by means of small presents, but chiefly white beads, of which they are extravagantly fond. Some of these roots seem to possess very active properties, for after supping on them this evening, we were swelled to such a degree as to be scarcely able to breathe for several hours. Towards night we launched two canoes which proved to be very good.

READING QUESTIONS – Answer each question thoroughly and thoughtfully on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What evidence in the entries suggests that the Corps of Discovery were not the first white men to come into contact with the native tribes along the lower Missouri River? Explain and support with evidence.
2. List all the types of *fauna* described and recorded by Lewis and Clark throughout these journal entries.
3. Describe the foods eaten by the Corps of Discovery throughout the entries. How did they acquire this food?
4. Which two unique, “new” animals do you think were being described in the entries of September 7th & July 6th?
5. Describe the various dangers and hardships faced by the members of the Corps of Discovery.
6. Explain the ways in which the native people assisted the Corps of Discovery. Did the Corps return the favors?
7. What special training or skills did Captains Lewis and Clark have for determining their exact location on 7/29?