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July 1, 2003

Lewis and Clark Reach the Pacific Ocean

Epic adventure. Scientific discovery. Preparing the United States to become a transcontinental nation.

Those phrases describe the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which journeyed from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1804-1806.

The bicentennial celebration of the expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began this year and will continue through 2006.

While there's plenty of time to retrace the trail blazed by the Corps of Discovery, why not start now? Whenever they go, history-minded travelers will find ample historical attractions plus nearby KOA Campgrounds.

by Dennis Gaub, for KOA Compass

As the Lewis and Clark Expedition neared the Pacific Ocean -- the western end of its remarkable trip -- in the late fall of 1805, expedition members encountered and passed a stern test from the elements.

Captain William Clark, writing in the expedition journal, bluntly described conditions that the Corps of Discovery endured as it neared the mouth of Columbia River.

His entry for November 12, 1805: "It would be distressing to a feeling person to See our Situation at this time all wet and cold with our bedding ... also wet, in a Cove Scercely large enough to Contain us, our Baggage in a Small holler about _ a mile from us, and Canoes at the mercy of the waves & drift wood, we have Scured them as well as it is possible by Sinking and wateing them down with Stones to prevent the emence [waves] dashing them to pices against the rocks."

Yet, the expedition survived wretched weather and food shortages, built winter quarters at Fort Clatsop and came out of the winter of 1805-06 rejuvenated and ready for the triumphant return to St. Louis.

Modern visitors to Idaho, Washington and Oregon are afforded greater comfort, but they can gain a sense of adventure by sampling some of the abundant Lewis and Clark sites in those states. Highlights follow.

IDAHO

- Lehmi Pass, which straddles the Continental Divide and marks the Montana-Idaho boundary. When the Corps topped the Divide in 1805, it had left what was then the United States. Today, a 50-mile trip to the pass -- half on pavement and half on gravel and dirt -- brings travelers through a valley where Meriwether Lewis first saw a Shoshone on horseback. (Earlier, the expedition had met other Shoshones -- Sacagawea's tribe -- and traded for horses brought over from the western side of the Divide. Without horses, it's doubtful that the expedition could have crossed rugged mountains and reached the Columbia Basin.)
- Monument to Sacagawea, a granite marker identifying the Lehmi Valley as her birthplace, located about a mile north of the town of Tendoy.
- The Lolo Trail/Motorway, a backcountry route across the Bitterroot Range that

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accesses some of the top Lewis and Clark sites along the expedition's route. Visitors are advised to check with the Powell Ranger Station for current road conditions. Motorized travel is recommended for high-clearance vehicles only, but hiking and horseback riding provide alternate access.

- Canoe Camp, on the Clearwater River, where the expedition stopped in late September and early October of 1805 to build five canoes. The vessels provided the Corps with rapid passage down the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia rivers.
- Nez Perce National Historical Park, on US 95, west of Spalding, which offers a film and examples of artifacts, traditional Nez Perce tools, clothing and weapons.

OREGON/WASHINGTON

- Sacajawea State Park, near Pasco, Washington, which features the Sacajawea Interpretive Center. Exhibits illuminate the journey, spotlight Sacajawea's contributions and show bone and stone tools made by native peoples in the area.
- Wishram Overlook, a historical marker on Washington state route 14, and, nearby in Oregon, The Dalles. Here, visitors gain a sense of another major challenge to the expedition – the Great Falls of the Columbia River, now submerged under The Dalles Dam.
- Beacon Rock State Park, west of Stevenson, Washington, where the expedition left the Columbia's rapids and entered Pacific Ocean tidewater.
- Vista Park, in Skomaka, Washington. Although Corps members were wet and their food had turned unappetizing, their spirits were buoyed here. Clark exemplified the shift in morale with his famed observation: "Ocean in view! Oh, the joy."
- Fort Canby State Park, Washington, which evokes many of the same ocean-side sights, sounds and smells that the expedition experienced 198 years ago. Two interpretive centers are located in the area – one in the park and the other in nearby Ilwaco, Washington.
- Fort Clatsop National Memorial, west of Astoria, Oregon, which features a replica of the Corps' second and final winter quarters. The reconstructed fort compliments an outstanding Lewis and Clark museum.

[KOA locations in Idaho](#)

[KOA locations in Oregon](#)

[KOA locations in Washington](#)

Author's note: Throughout this series, the name of the expedition's Shoshone guide is spelled as both Sacajawea and Sacagawea. The latter spelling is generally accepted as the correct one, but several place names use the former spelling. The older spelling is kept in this series for those instances where "Sacajawea" is a part of a site's official name.

Order your own KOA Explorer's kit, which contains a one-hour VHS video, "Travelin' On. The Lewis & Clark Trail," commemorating the most famous camping trip in history. [Click here](#) to order or learn what else is included in the kit.

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