

President Thomas Jefferson asked one of his key aides, twenty-eight-year-old Meriwether Lewis, to lead an expedition west - all the way to the "western ocean." He wanted to know what was really "out there."

Lewis wanted another man to help him lead the expedition (called the Corps of Discovery). He asked William Clark (who was four years older than Lewis) to serve as co-leader.

As the two men, and members of their expedition, embarked on the journey, they faced uncertainty and danger. Traveling where no one from the outside world had previously gone, their trip was the equivalent of modern man's journey to the Moon.

The lands through which Lewis & Clark would travel were the homelands of Native Americans. Britain, Russia, Spain and France also had an interest in this land.

In 1803, however, Napoleon had offered to sell all of France's interests to America for the total sum of \$15 million. The "Louisiana Purchase" more than doubled the size of the United States.

To make the dangerous journey westward, Lewis and Clark handpicked their men. York - Clark's slave and companion, since childhood - would definitely go. The other men would be equally reliable and trustworthy.

Lewis, an often-solitary man who could spend hours alone with his dog, would record every new thing he saw. He would also try to collect specimen of various plants. The journals of Lewis and Clark give us the story of their remarkable journey.

Today it is nearly inconceivable to imagine how they made the trip. They traveled the mighty Missouri River - transporting not just themselves but all their supplies - in canoes. They had to cross mountains they hadn't anticipated. They were hampered by sandbars, storms, ticks, mosquitoes and a host of other potentially trip-stopping problems.

Some days they could only travel a few miles - they had about 3,000 to cover. Yet ... they made the journey to the Pacific Ocean - and back - in just 2½ years.

See, also, these videos:

Lewis and Clark Meet Sacagawea

Lewis and Clark - Meeting with the Shoshone

Lewis and Clark - Reach the Pacific Ocean

Lewis and Clark - After the Corps of Discovery

Meriwether Lewis - Girandoni Air Rifle

Sacajawea - Interpreter for Lewis and Clark

Credits:

Clip from "[Lewis & Clark - Great Journey West](#)" (2002). Online, courtesy National Geographic and YouTube.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Lewis-and-Clark-and-the-Corps-of-Discovery>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Lewis-and-Clark-and-the-Corps-of-Discovery>