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# Lewis and Clark Redux: A Review Essay

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WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN

*The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition: July 28–November 1, 1805*, Vol. V. Edited by Gary E. Moulton. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. xi + 415 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, tables, bibliography, index. \$40.00.)

*The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition: November 2, 1805–March 22, 1806*, Vol. VI. Edited by Gary E. Moulton. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. xii + 531 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00.)

This review considers volumes five and six of the Moulton edition of the journals and notes of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Volume five records the expedition's progress from the Three Forks of the Missouri to the Cascades of the Columbia River. Volume six covers the expedition's experiences from the Cascades to the Pacific Ocean and the winter at Fort Clatsop, and concludes with the beginning of the return journey, March 22, 1806.

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In view of the emergence of the "new" or "nouvelle" western history, a happening that one erstwhile western historian has termed the "most important event in western history in the last fifty years," one must pause to consider just what one is reviewing when one is following Lewis and Clark's trek. Many consider this one of the truly epic marches in American history—a deed whose valor and significance for emergent American civilization is unmatched. Now, however, we must ask, if we are to be "politically correct," whether, on the contrary, Lewis and Clark's intrusion into other people's homelands was not an act of crude aggression? Were not Lewis and Clark and their rude companions the vanguard of what George Catlin was shortly to call "the juggernaut of civilization"? Did they not lead the charge that changed an Eden into an ecological disaster and an act of continental genocide? Were they not harbingers of "the days of the locusts" for something some historians and even geographers call "the West"? We must confront the possibility that Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery were merely rude, even contemptuous Anglo conquistadors—tarnished hegemonic capitalists looking for trade possibilities, and not heroes at all! Readers are urged to think about this and its implications as they read Moulton's monumental volumes recording their deeds.

Volume five of the journals is necessarily much devoted to micro-geography as Lewis and Clark struggle to locate an all-water route from the Three Forks of the Missouri River to the known reaches of the Columbia, up which Vancouver's men had earlier paddled for more than 100 miles. The two American captains soon learn that they are destined for disappointment on this score as they make their way through some of the most difficult, mountainous country now in the United States. We learn from Moulton's careful editing that their way was not really guided by Sacagewea, but was a combination of frustrating trials and errors enhanced by Native Americans' misinformation and, just as often, by their very real help. Lewis and Clark's trek also involves critical geographical sensitivity at crucial points. Which fork of the Missouri to follow (the western or Jefferson); then which fork to take at the junction of the Big Hole, Beaverhead, and Ruby rivers (the Beaverhead, a continuation of the Jefferson); then when to leave the Beaverhead and head for Lemhi Pass and give up their hope of an all-water route to the Pacific.

Along the way, we find in Lewis' entry for Saturday, August 10, 1805, what is probably the first mention of the "rocky Mountains"—a name that obviously stuck. And so it went, as they passed through the Shoshone country where Sacagawea finally met her relatives, then

left them to accompany Lewis and Clark across the snowy sky-high Lolo Pass and the Continental Divide to the Clearwater, the Snake, and the Columbia to the Pacific—or at least in this volume to the Cascades of the Columbia. Every twist and turn of the explorers' meandering march is carefully traced by Moulton, who, however, makes a glaring error on page one of his introduction. He attributes the concept of the "pyramidal height of land" from which all the great rivers of the West flow in different directions to Captain Cook and Alexander MacKenzie, when in fact it was the brainchild of Peter Pond and Jonathan Carver.

The reviewer found questions about the Native Americans most interesting, however. First, one is disappointed that Moulton fails to note that, at the Three Forks, the explorers were in the heart of Blackfeet country, though in a footnote he describes the killing of trapper John Potts in 1808 and George Drouillard in 1810 and John Colter's famous run from the Blackfeet in 1808. The fact that the Blackfeet were not present when Lewis and Clark crossed their country probably made their trip a happier one. Moulton also consistently refers to the Shoshone's dreaded enemies, the Minitaris or Hidatsa. But the Hidatsa lived far to the east on the Missouri near present Bismarck, North Dakota. Surely the Shoshone were referring to the Hidatsa's relatives, the Crow, who lived much closer in the Valley of the Big Horn. This possibly better explains the capture of Sacagawea, whose name meant "bird woman." Could it have actually been the Crow (Absaroka or "bird people") who took her from the Shoshone, then left her with their Missouri River relatives, the Metaharta Hidatsa, which is where the French Canadian trapper Toussaint Charbonneau purchased her from the Hidatsa and Lewis and Clark first met her?

Naturally this volume deals most extensively with the Shoshone or Snake tribe, showing them as poor, starving victims of native tribes from the east and west. Specimens of the Shoshone include views of brutes like "famished dogs" devouring a recently slain deer, with blood and guts dripping and dangling from their mouths. One delighted fellow lost all dignity while chewing on nine feet of small intestine and squeezing out the contents for a further "feast." On the other hand, the generosity of these near-starving people, who shared what little food they had with the explorers, caused Lewis to declare that he would henceforth "live for mankind." The success of the expedition was greatly aided by the Shoshone Chief Comeahwait, who, on Wednesday, August 14, 1805, sat down with Lewis and explained, via diagrams in the dirt and piles of sand, the complex geography of the mountainous Continental Divide country through which they would have to pass.

It needs to be added, however, that Lewis detected errors in the chief's information, and he wrote "his information fell far short of my expectation or wishes."

The role of Sacagawea throughout the volume is enigmatic. According to Lewis, she showed no sorrow in recollecting her capture by the Minitaris and "no joy in being again restored to her native country." She did indeed point the way to her people's country in a vague way, though her primary contribution was as an interpreter. Apparently she was hardly welcomed upon her return to her people, and her husband, Toussaint Charbonneau, beat her without retaliation from her relatives. All he received was a tongue-lashing from Clark. In volume six her insignificance to the party is made clear when well over a month passes after the Corps of Discovery settles at Fort Clatsop before, at her insistence, she is "allowed" to view the Pacific that she had traveled so far to see.

Two other points arise in volume five. Lewis and Clark discover that the tribes beyond the mountains possess huge herds of horses. Neither the source of these horses in such quantity, nor the origins of the Appaloosa, nor Lewis' identification of the Nez Perce horses with the horses along Virginia's James River (which were not Spanish Arabians) is ever adequately dealt with by Moulton, though there has been much debate among scholars and horse fanciers about the Appaloosa. Then, too, considering the fairly recent, late eighteenth-century arrival of the Spaniards in ships off the Northwest Coast, and the fact that a mare drops one colt a year, how does one account for the thousands of horses that these natives possessed? No one has considered this question.

And finally, to readers of *Keepers of the Game*, it is interesting to note Clark's observation while amongst the Columbia River tribes that "the number of dead salmon on the shores and floating in the rivers is 'incredible. . . .'" This suggests that Native Americans, too, were not above wasting nature's bounty. All in all, volume five of this multi-volume enterprise is by far the most interesting.

Volume six deals mostly with the monotony of wintering at Fort Clatsop. And because the party was stationed in one place for a considerable time, there is far greater attention devoted to recording of plants and animals, all of which Moulton identifies in astounding detail. Clearly this is Moulton's natural history volume, though due to his incredible meticulousness in this respect throughout the series, all of the volumes will be of great interest not only to naturalists but to historians of ecology.

In volume six we also learn of the heroic efforts in building Fort Clatsop; of the many serious injuries and illnesses suffered by the men of the expedition and their amazing recoveries; of the consistent friendliness of the once feared coastal tribes; of the fact that the Chinook and Clatsop women are "lude and carry on sport publicly"; that they have syphilis, as well as fleas to communicate; that "Prostitution, Carnally, Sensuality, Lustful Sensual" are words the captains used to describe the native women in a notebook presented to John James Audubon at St. Louis, April 19, 1843, by Superintendent of Indian Affairs D. D. Mitchell, for reasons one can only speculate about; that Lewis ordered his men especially to treat the natives in a friendly manner; and that he himself preferred dog meat above all others.

These things are, of course, not all that one learns from the winter journals. We learn, for instance, that Lewis and Clark first sighted the Pacific "Ocian" on November 7, 1805; that they carved on trees the news of their arrival by land from the United States at least three times; that the natives informed them that dozens of trading ships had been there before them; that there were no Spanish settlements, though there was some evidence of Spanish presence; that Native Americans, often limited in their travels, could give gross geographical misinformation at times; that partially based on this, Clark finished his first overall map of "the West" on Friday, February 14 (Valentine's Day), 1806, leaving out Utah, Nevada, Oregon, and Colorado, while placing California and New Mexico just south of and next to the present northern tier of states—Washington, Idaho, Montana, and, just to the south of them, Wyoming, thus placing New Spain, or Mexico, close by their route—a mistake the Spaniards, who tried to intercept them, made as well. We also read a great deal of no consequence about horses, elk, and a positively revolting detailed account of the making of castoreum, or beaver bait. According to Lewis, the bait includes not only materials from female beaver glands, but a few dashes of nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, and "ardent spirits," much like a Christmas eggnog, except that Lewis declared it to resemble "mustard prepared for the table."

Thousands of interesting details like the above make up these intriguing volumes so faithfully footnoted by Moulton. In addition, Moulton adds three valuable tables listing the ships known to have visited the Columbia; the translation of tribal names given to Lewis and Clark into present-day tribal names as designated by anthropologists; and a comparative list of distances covered by Lewis and Clark on the outward journey, though with very little comment about their accuracy. This whole series of volumes is a work for the ages.

As for the journey itself, which barely matches Moulton's own achievement, it was made up of the millions of mundane, almost Darwinian details of mutation that go to make up the first steps in the replacement of one physical and cultural ecosystem by another that the "new" western historians self-righteously call conquest and the romantics call high adventure.