



# Lewis & Clark

## in Columbia River Country

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

#### Learning about People of the Lower Columbia

##### Introduction

Have you ever played "telephone," where you pass some specific message from one person to the next and then compare notes from beginning to end? Think about all the challenges faced by the Corps due to language barriers and cultural differences. How well do you think the people in these scenarios understood each other?

Read excerpts in the links below from Lewis and Clark's journals to learn of some of these communication challenges and how they were overcome.

##### Entering the Lower Columbia

On November 3, 1805, Lewis and Clark arrived at Sandy or "Quicksand" River on their trip downriver to the coast. Fog obscured their first experience of the lower Columbia, below the cascades, a sign of things to come. They reached their destination, the Pacific Ocean, on November 15th. After exploring the area, they settled upon the south shore for their winter encampment. Fort Clatsop was their

headquarters from December 7, 1805 to March 23, 1806.

They spent more time exploring villages on their return trip upriver, especially along the Willamette and near the mouth of Sandy River, where they were encamped from April 1-6th.

##### Generosity

On March 27th, 1806, in a camp opposite the mouth of the Cowlitz River, Meriwether Lewis reported the generosity of a Skillute village:

*...the natives appeared extremely hospitable, gave us dried Anchovies, Sturgeon, wappetoe, quamash, and a species of small white tuberous roots about 2 inches in length and as thick as a man's finger; these are eaten raw, are crisp, milkey, and agreeably flavored. Most of the party were served by the natives with as much as they could eat; they insisted on our remaining all day with them and hunting the Elk and deer which they informed us were very abundant in their neighbourhood. But as the weather would not permit us to dry our canoes in order to pitch them we declined their friendly invitation, and resumed our voyage at 12 Ock.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.7, 18)

##### Personalities

From Fort Clatsop, on January 6th, 1806, Meriwether Lewis wrote:

The Clatsops, Chinooks, Killamucks are very loquacious and inquisitive; they possess good memories and have repeated to us the names capacities of the vessels &c of many traders and others who have visited the mouth of this river; they are generally cheerfull but never gay.

(Lewis, from Moulton V.6, 168)

### Clatsop Games

On December 9th, 1806, William Clark wrote about games played by the Clatsop people (with notes added later by Nelson Biddle, in conversation with Clark):

*...those people have a Singular game which they are verry fond of and is performed with Something [NB: a piece of bone] about the Size of a large been [NB: bean] which they pass from, one hand into the other with great dexterity dureing which time they Sing, and ocasionally, hold out their hands for those who Chuse to risque their property to guess which hand the been is in -; the individual who has the been is a banker & opposed to all in the room. on this game they risque their beeds & other parts of their most valuable effects - this amusement has occupied about hours of this evening, Several of the lodge in which I am in have lost all the beeds which they had about them - they have one other game which a man attempted to Show me, I do not properly understand it, they make use of maney peces about the Shape and size of Backgammon Pices which they role through between two pins Stuck up at certain distancies...*

(Clark, from Moulton V.6, 119-20)

On January 6th, 1806, while cold rain fell at Fort Clatsop, Meriwether Lewis wrote:

*...in common with other savage nations they make their women perform every species of*

*domestic drudgery. but in almost every species of this drudgery the men also participate. their women are also compelled to geather roots, and assist them in taking fish, which articles form much the greatest part of their subsistance; notwithstanding the survile manner in which they treat their women they pay much more respect to their judgment and oppinions in many rispects than most indian nations; their women are permitted to speak freely before them, and sometimes appear to command with a tone of authority; they generally consult them in their traffic and act in conformity to their opinions. I think it may be established as a general maxim that those nations treat their old people and women with most differrence [deference] and respect where they subsist principally on such articles that these can participate with the men in obtaining them; and that, that part of the community are treated with least attention, when the act of procuring subsistence devolves intirely on the men in the vigor of life.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.6, 168-9)

### Gender Roles

On March 19th, 1806, just days before leaving Fort Clatsop for good, Meriwether Lewis wrote more on the subject of work and gender roles:

*The men of these nations partake of much more of the domestic drudgery than I had at first supposed. They collect and prepare all the fuel, make the fires, assist in cleansing and preparing the fish, and always cook for the strangers who visit them. They also build their houses, construct their canoes, and make all their wooden utensils. The peculiar provence of the woman seems to be to collect roots and manufacture various articles which are prepared of rushes, flags, cedar bark, bear grass or waytape. The management of the canoe for various purposes seems to be a duty common to both sexes, as also many other (domestic) occupations which with most Indian nations*

*devolves exclusively on the woman. Their feasts which they are very fond are always prepared and served by the men.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.6, 436)

## Feminine Strength

On January 9th, 1806, on route to see the beached whale along the rough coastline to the south, William Clark had an opportunity to observe the strength of Clatsop women:

*...on the Steep decent of the Mountain I overtook five men and Six womin with emence loads of the Oil and blubber of the Whale, those Indians had passed by Some rout by which we missed them as we went out yesterday; one of the women in the act of getting down a Steep part of the mountain her load by Some means had Sliped off her back, and She was holding the load by a Strap which was fastened to the mat bag in which it was in, in one hand and holding a bush by the other, as I was in front of my party, I endeavored to relieve this woman by taking her load until She Could get to a better place a little below, & to my estonishment found the load as much as I Could lift and must exceed 100 wt. the husband of this woman who was below Soon came to her relief..*

(Clark, from Moulton V.6, 189-90)

## Clatsop Social Structure

On January 19th, 1806, Meriwether Lewis described what he could observe about Clatsop living arrangements:

*Several families of these people usually reside together in the same room; they appear to be the father & mother and their sons with their son's wives and children; their provision seems to be in common and the greatest harmony appears to exist among them. The old man is not always respected as the head of the family, that duty most commonly devolves on one of*

*the young men. They have seldom more than one wife, yet the plurality of wives is not denyed them by their customs. These families when asociated form nations or bands of nations each acknowledging the authority of it's own chieftain who dose not appear to be hereditary, nor his power to extend further than a mear repremand for any improper act of an individual; the creation of a Chief depends upon the upright deportment of the individual & his ability and disposition to render service to the community; and his authority or the deference paid him is in exact equilibrim with the popularity or voluntary esteem he has acquired among the individuals of his band or nation. Their laws like those of all uncivilized Indians consist of a set of customs which have grown out of their local situations. not being able to speak their language we have not been able to inform ourselves of the existence of any peculiar customs among them.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.6, 221-2)

## Intertribal Relations

On March 27th, 1806, Meriwether Lewis describes their territory and relationships with the Lower Chinook bands:

*The principal village of these Skillutes reside on the lower side of the Cow-e-lis'-kee river a few miles from it's entrance into the Columbia. These people are said to be numerous. In their dress, habits, manners and language they differ but little from the Clatsops Chinnooks &c. they have latterly been at war with Chinnooks but peace is said now to be restored between them, but their intercourse is not yet resumed. No Chinnooks come above the marshey islands nor do the Skillutes visit the mouth of the Columbia. The Clatsops, Cathlahmahs and Wackkiacums are the carriers between these nations being in alliance with both.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.7, 18)

On March 30th, 1806, in the vicinity of "Image Canoe Island" (Hayden Island, Multnomah County), Meriwether Lewis wrote:

*The natives who inhabit this valley are larger and reather better made than those of the coast. Like those people they are fond of cold, hot & vapor baths of which they make frequent uce both in sickness and in health and at all seasons of the year. They have also a very singular custom among them of baithing themselves allover with urine every morning.*

(Lewis, from Moulton V.7, 33)

Article written/adapted by?

(note: I'm not sure who wrote these but we probably need a source?)