



Lewis & Clark

in Columbia River Country

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

Anticipating the Columbia from Nez Perce Country

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.

A Cautious Encounter

On September 20th, 1805, Captain William Clark first met a camp of Nez Perce after their harrowing trip over the Bitterroot Mountains:

...at 12 miles descended the mountain to a level pine Country proceeded on through a butifull Country for three miles to a Small Plain in which I found maney Indian lodges, at the distance of 1 mile from the lodges I met Indian boys, when they Saw me ran and hid them-

selves in the grass I dismounted gave my gun & horse to one of the men, searched in the grass and found 2 of the boys gave them Small pieces of ribin & Sent them forward to the village Soon after a man Came out to meet me with great Caution & Conducted me to a large Spacious Lodge which he told me (by Signs) was the Lodge of his great Chief who had Set out days previous with all the Warriors of the nation to war on a South West derection & would return in 15 or 18 days.

(Clark, from Moulton V.5, 222)

Collecting Clues

The next day, Clark got a map of the river ahead from one of the Chiefs:

A Fine morning Sent out all the hunters in different directions to hunt deer, I myself delayd with the Chief to prevent Suspission and to Collect by Signs as much information as possible about the river and Countrey in advance. The Chief drew me a kind of chart of the river, and informed me that a greater Chief than himself was fishing at the river half a days march from his village called the twisted hare, and that the river forked a little below his Camp and at a long distance below & below 2 large forks one from the left & one from the right the river passed thro'gh the mountains at which place was a great fall of the water passing through the rocks, at those falls white people lived from

whome they preceured the white Beeds & Brass &c. which the womin wore...

(Clark, from Moulton V.5, 226-7)

How Many “Sleeps” Away?

On September 22nd, 1805, another Chief provided an elk skin map of the region for Clark:

...we attempted to have Some talk with those people but Could not for the want of an Interpreter thro’ which we Could Speake, we were Compelled to converse alltogether by Signs— I got the Twisted hare to draw the river from his Camp down which he did with great cherfullness on a white Elk Skin, from the 1s fork which is a few seven miles below, to the large fork on which the So So ne or Snake Indians fish, is South 2 Sleeps; to a large river which falls in on the N W. Side and into which The Clarks river empties itself is 5 Sleeps from the mouth of that river to the falls is 5 Sleeps at the falls he places Establishments of white people. and informs that great numbers of Indians reside on all those foks as well as the main river...

(Clark, from Moulton V.5, 230)

The explorers traveled quickly down the Columbia, accompanied by Nez Perce guides as far as Celilo Falls.

Once they built their winter quarters at Fort Clatsop and settle in, they began to collect information about their hosts, the Clatsops, and other neighborhood tribes. These tribes spoke a trade language, “Chinook Wawa.” Lewis and Clark learned some of the language over the following months. Until that time, however, the party had to work hard to overcome the language barriers.

Where We Live, How We Live

On January 8th, 1806, Captain William Clark wrote:

...I enquired of those people as well as I could by Signs the Situation, mode of liveing & Strength of their nation They informed me that the bulk of their nation lived in large villages Still further along the Sea coast to the S, S, W. at the enterence of 3 Creek which fell into a bay, and that other houses were Scattered about on the Coast, Bay and on a Small river which fell into the Bay in which they Cought Salmon, and from this Creek (which I call Kil a mox River) they crossed over to the Wappato I. on the Shock-ah-lil corn (which is the Indian name for the Columbia river) and purchased Wappato. that the nation was once verry large and that they had a great maney houses, In Salmon Season they Cought great numbers of that fish in the Small Creeks, when the Salmon was Scerce they found Sturgion and a variety of other fish thrown up by the waves and left by the tide which was verry fine, Elk was plenty in the mountains, but they Could not Kill maney of them with their arrows. The Kil â mox in their habits Customs manners dress & language differ but little from the Clatsops, Chinooks and others in this neighbourhood are of the Same form of those of the Clatsops with a Dore at each end & two fire places i, e the house is double as long as wide and divided into 2 equal parts with a post in the middle Supporting the ridge pole, and in the middle of each of those divisions they make their fires, dores Small & houses Sunk 5 feet.

(Clark, from Moulton V.6, 184)

Article written/adapted by?

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