

Iron Wills and Men of Leather: The story of the Lewis & Clark expedition.

By DAVID C.HINZE

Lewis & Clark were not the first of European background to place footprints upon the ground of the upper Missouri. Like most of us they benefited from those who went before them to the wilderness. The Indians explored and developed thriving civilizations in the upper Missouri region before a single European set foot on the continent.

When the Europeans did arrive they sought out gold, free land and the urge to spread their religion. The French explored the upper reaches of what they called Louisiana in canoes, using the river system as a natural highway through the interior. LaSalle, Marquette and others mapped the rivers and established the fur trade with the Indians.

Soon, other traders made their way into Missouri country to trade with the Mandan, Teton-Sioux and Omaha Indians. The Indians exchanged corn, pelts, buffalo robes for colorful beads, and other western items. The chief prize among the Indians was to trade for a gun. The new weapon gave the Indian enormous killing power as well as increased standing among their people.

The first person to travel overland to the Pacific Ocean was explorer James McKenzie. A Canadian, McKenzie proved the journey could be accomplished, and this stimulated the imagination of many Americans. The young Canadian kept a detailed journal of his trip and copies of his book helped formulate the idea of Lewis & Clark's journey west in President Thomas Jefferson's mind.

The western lands tantalized many along the eastern coast. The size and scope of the region remained unknown, along with the potential riches, caused much speculation about the potential of the west. For the most part it remained blocked off to the Americans because the lands were owned by European powers France and Spain.

Lewis and Clark, with a small band called the Corps of Discovery, would bring answers to a country hungry to expand westward. They would open the door to expansion, at the expense of the natives, and continue America on and aggressive policy of westward expansion for the next fifty years.

Join us every week as we proceed on with the two great captains and capture the spirit and challenges with Lewis & Clark, and other topics pertaining to early American history, for the American History Education Association. For more info phone (800-298-1861) or AHEA2004@yahoo.com

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