

Iron Wills and Men of Leather The story of the Lewis & Clark Expedition By DAVID C. HINZE

Camp Dubois - Winter 1803

The men arrived in mid-December on the Illinois shore about fourteen miles above St. Louis. They camped near Wood River or "Dubois" in French. Their journey was not a grand affair as the snow and hailstones pelted the Corps of Discovery.

They choose the campsite, nearly across from the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Log cabins quickly appeared and within a week the men moved into their partially finished shelters.

On Christmas morning, 1803, Lewis and Clark celebrated the day by having the Kentucky rifleman fire a salute and an extra ration of whiskey helped bring good cheer to the men.

One of the reasons for the location of Camp Dubois was availability of good water and plentiful wild game. Lewis and Clark used this period to sort out the best hunters in the small band. The three most proficient were Drouillard, John Colter and Reuben Fields who never returned empty handed.

Clark was charged with instilling discipline in the newly formed crew. He had trouble with whiskey consumed while the men worked away from camp, but the sting of the whip, and Clark's firm hand, gradually converted the individuals into an efficient team.

While Clark wrestled with the discipline Lewis remained downstream in St. Louis. The town contained about 1,000 inhabitants, but it was rich in the items needed by the Corps.

The most prominent citizens of the village were Aguste and Pierre Choteau, wealthy half-brothers, who dominated the local fur trade.

Lewis made Pierre Choteau's home his unofficial headquarters and began to piece together key facts to make the trip successful.

Lewis purchased gunpowder, bullets, knives, blankets and trade goods for the Indians from the Choteau warehouse. The two brothers, in turn, helped Lewis recruit more French-Canadian boatmen for the journey.

Lewis sent a stream of scientific items back to Jefferson. Local tree and shrubs as well as animal specimens went east to the President's delight.

Perhaps the most unusual item was a giant hairball discovered in the stomach of a buffalo.

Lewis and Clark gleaned as much information about the river and the Indian civilizations they hoped to contact.

Clark worked extremely hard on learning the sign language needed to communicate on the upper-Missouri. Weather and other scientific observations filled Clark's journal.

Finally, the ice melted on the Missouri River. After five months at Camp Dubois, on the afternoon of May 14, 1804, the keelboat and two canoes crossed the Mississippi and sailed into the mile-wide mouth of the Missouri.

Dave Hinze is a professional historian and tour guide. He leads tours and presents at conferences on Lewis & Clark, and other topics pertaining to early American history, for the American History Education Association. To reach reach Hinze phone 1-800-298-1861 or visit his website at: AHEA2004@yahoo.com

Very little is needed to make a happy life. -Marcus Aurelius Antoninus -

Table with 24 columns (6:00-5:30) and 18 rows of TV listings for Sunday Evening/Late Night, November 16, 2003.

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