

Corps of Discovery Fun Facts

One of the most famed voyages of exploration in American history came to be known as the Corps of Discovery. President Thomas Jefferson had been interested in finding a water route to the Pacific. However, he had been unable to put together an expedition to explore the territory west of the United States.

After the Louisiana Territory was purchased from France in 1803, Meriwether Lewis agreed to lead Jefferson's western exploration. Congress set aside funds for the voyage.

Meriwether Lewis received \$2,500 from Congress to obtain supplies, materials, and services needed for the expedition. His list of items and their associated cost were:

Mathematical instruments
\$217

Arms and Accouterments Extraordinary (clothing)
\$81

Camp Equipment
\$255

Medicine and Packing
\$55

Means of Transportation
\$430

Indian Gifts
\$696

Provisions Extraordinary
\$224

Materials for making up the various articles into Portable Packs
\$55

Pay for the Hunters, Guides, and Interpreters
\$300

Silver Coin to defray the expenses of the party from Nashville
\$100

Contingencies

\$87

Total budget
\$2,500

In addition, Jefferson gave Lewis a letter of credit to obtain goods and services for the expedition. Lewis spent about \$39,000 which was considered a large sum of money in the early 1800's.

Weapons:

The rifles Lewis took with him were built under Army contract in 1792 and 1794. Produced in Pennsylvania they were .49 caliber with a 42-inch barrel. The weapons also featured a patch-box with a push-button release. The weapons were prepared for the Expedition by shortening the barrels to between 33 and 36 inches, and swivels were added to make it possible to carry them with a leather sling. The Armory also fitted the rifles with new locks and provided both replacement locks and spare locks parts for each rifle.

Uniforms:

The Lewis and Clark Expedition was a military operation. As such, the men wore uniforms of their regiments. When their initial issue wore out in the late summer / early fall of 1805 the men would make military clothing out of leather.

Transportation:

Lewis left Pittsburgh on August 31, 1803 in a keelboat especially built for the expedition. Capt. Lewis designed the keelboat and oversaw its construction in Pittsburgh. It was 55 feet long, 8 feet wide, and could carry about 12 tons of supplies. It had a crew up to 27 men.

Discoveries:

The Corp brought back invaluable geographic and scientific data, including 178 new species of plant life and 122

previously unknown species of animal life. Lewis and Clark succeeded in mapping a route beyond the Mississippi River to the West Coast. They recorded the flora and fauna, made scientific and astronomical observations, and met with many Indians tribes during the Journey. The Corp of Discovery completed its mission with only one fatality, Sergeant Charles Floyd, who died of an apparent ruptured appendix. During a skirmish the Corp of Discovery killed 2 Blackfeet Indians and a party of Nez Perc'e Indians were killed while on a peace mission on behalf of the Corp of Discovery.

The Corp of Discovery covered 7,689 miles in two years, four months and ten days.

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