

1804

Lewis and Clark spent the winter of 1803-04 at Camp Dubois on the east bank of the Mississippi River, upstream from St. Louis, at St Charles. Here the captains recruited more men, increasing the ranks of the "Corps of Volunteers for Northwest Discovery" to more than 40. As spring approached, the members of the Expedition gathered food and supplies and packed them into barrels, bags, and boxes. The boats were loaded and the party made ready to depart. On May 14, 1804, the Lewis & Clark Expedition began its trip up the Missouri River.

Lewis, Clark, and other members of the Expedition began writing in their journals, a practice that continued throughout the journey. Map-making was equally important, particularly in the previously unexplored regions. As the explorers encountered new rivers and streams, they were responsible for naming them. They named some for famous Americans, such as Jefferson and James Madison, and others for friends and members of the Expedition. The same was true for some of the new plants and animals they encountered. Many of these names are still in use today.

In late July the explorers camped north of the mouth of the Platte River, at a site they called Council Bluff. Lewis noted in his journal that the location was good for a trading post. It was here on August 3 that Lewis and Clark had their first council with Native Americans, a small group of Oto and Missouri Indians. During this time Sergeant Charles Floyd, one of the soldiers, became ill and died of a ruptured appendix on August 20. He was the only member of the Expedition to die during the journey.

As the Expedition traveled up the Missouri River during late August and into September, the landscape along the river changed drastically. The forests receded, replaced first by tall prairie grass and then the shorter grass of the high plains. Thousands of buffalo were seen grazing, and prairie dogs were first sighted. The evening temperatures became colder, with frost on the ground some mornings. Lewis and Clark planned to winter near long-established villages inhabited by large numbers of the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes, north of present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. On October 26, 1804, the Expedition arrived at the earth-lodge Indian villages, approximately 1,600 miles from St. Charles. A good site was found for a camp, and the men set about building Fort Mandan across the river from the Indian villages.

From where and when did Lewis and Clark depart?

What two activities did the expedition do the entire trip?

How many days did the expedition travel before they met any Native Americans?

Describe the changes in the landscape the expedition observed as they traveled up the Missouri river.

Where did Lewis and CLark spend the winter of 1803-1804 and how far had they traveled?