

Lewis, Clark and Sacagawea

Have you ever wanted to go on a quest into unknown lands? Well, two white men named Meriwether Lewis and William Clark got to go on a real quest to explore the rivers of the western United States in 1804. The American president, Thomas Jefferson, sent them on the quest. He hoped they would find rivers big enough for boats to float on all the way to the Pacific Ocean from the eastern part of the United States.

The United States of America said that the area now covered by Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana belonged to them, but very few American citizens had ever gone there. Many Native Americans lived there who had never seen white people and white Americans had no maps of the land or rivers of this area. Meriwether and William started out on their journey from Missouri with thirty-one people to help them.

They started out in May and it took them a year and half to go over the plains and mountains that today take just two days by bus or a few hours in an airplane. Finally, in November 1805 they made it to the Pacific Ocean. They might not have made it without the help of a Native American Indian woman named Sacagawea who joined their expedition near the beginning and travelled with them. She spoke several languages and knew a lot of the land they had to travel through. She guided the group and interpreted for them, so that Native Americans gave them food and helped them through the winter in the mountains. She carried her baby on her back the whole way.

They rode in large canoes part of the way, but they also walked a lot when the mountain rivers were too small. It was a very hard trip and they didn't find any rivers big enough for boats to go all the way across North America to the Pacific Ocean from the east. However, they did find a lot of new plants and animals that Meriwether and William had never seen before. They have been considered heroes by many Americans, though they might not have realized that they brought new diseases and hard times to Native American people in the area.

1. Why did Meriwether and William need Sacagawea's help?

2. Why do you think the President wanted to find rivers big enough for boats to float all the way to the Pacific Ocean?
