

Native Peoples Encountered By Lewis and Clark

Village Locations 1803-1806



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 Eastern High School, Principal: James A. Sexton
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 -Alber's Equal-Area projection -
 (Continuously U.S.)

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Village Locations in 1803-1806

Osage

Village Location in 1803-1806: present-day western Missouri, about 300 miles from St. Louis

The Osage were one of the first nations encountered by the Expedition. The tribe lived 300 miles west of St. Louis, along what is today the western border of Missouri. The nation frequently traded with Pierre Chouteau, the man who helped Lewis & Clark organize the Indian delegations to Washington, and Osage were represented in the first party to meet President Jefferson. One of the first plant specimens Lewis collected for the President was a cutting of the Osage orange tree (which he called the “Osage apple”). Native peoples used the wood for war clubs and bows, and early French trappers called the tree *bois d’arc*, literally “wood of bow.” President Jefferson’s interest in the Osage orange cutting that Lewis sent to him ensured its proliferation throughout the states, and today, it grows throughout the East.

Missouri & Oto

Village Locations in 1803-1806: along the Missouri River, near the present-day Missouri- Nebraska border

Lewis and Clark found these tribes living together along the present-day Missouri-Nebraska border. Once two independent nations, they joined villages after a smallpox epidemic greatly reduced their numbers. They were farmers and bison hunters. Missouri Chief Big Horse and Oto Chief Little Thief met with the two American captains in the Expedition’s first tribal council in August 1804 at a site named Council Bluff (or Bluffs). It was the first test of the Expedition party’s strategies for negotiating with the Indians: token gifts, technology demonstrations, and speech making and diplomacy, challenged by great language barriers. The parties exchanged foods—the explorers sharing their tobacco, pork, flour, and cornmeal with the Indians, and the Indians providing watermelons to the Corps of Discovery. In March 1805, Oto and Missouri representatives joined a delegation of nations to visit President Jefferson in Washington, D.C.

Pawnee

Village Location in 1803-1806: along the Platte River in present-day Nebraska

The Pawnee lived in permanent villages of dome-shaped earth lodges along the Platte River in present-day Nebraska. Within each lodge resided about 30 to 50 members of an extended family. During their council with Captain Lewis, the Pawnee chiefs agreed to send three men to Washington, D.C.

Yankton Sioux

Village Location in 1803-1806: at the mouth of James River

Lewis and Clark met Pierre Dorion, a Frenchman who lived with the Yankton Sioux, and asked that he help arrange a council with the tribe and serve as interpreter. He and Sergeant Pryor went to the village, and Pryor (a Kentuckian) became the first member of the Corps to observe a camp consisting of tipis, which he described as: “*made of Buffalaw Skins Painted different Colour, all compact & handSomly arranged...of a Conic form.*” Pryor was treated to a feast of “fat dog.”

Seventy warriors from the Yankton Sioux or Nakota nation were persuaded to meet with Lewis and Clark at Calumet Bluffs on August 30, 1804. After the speech making ended, the men enjoyed bow and arrow demonstrations and traditional dancing. The chiefs who spoke were Weuche, Struck by the Pana, Half Man, White Crane, and Arcawechar. They tried, unsuccessfully, to negotiate firearms and ammunition for their warriors. Captain Clark

wrote extensive descriptions of the Yankton dress, ceremony, music, weapons, and warrior societies, and he compiled a vocabulary for the President.

Teton Sioux

Village Location in 1803-1806: along the Missouri near the Bad River, in today's Pierre, South Dakota

Warned by traders in the area, the Expedition feared passing through Sioux territory. Although the council with the Yanktons was pleasant, the encounters with the Teton Sioux or Lakota were not so peaceful. In September 1804, the flotilla passed 100 armed warriors on the bank near the mouth of the Bad River and determined that they were from the Brulé Band, led by Black Buffalo. From the start, the Americans began to threaten the Indians. Then during the talks, Lewis and Clark tried to single out one man as leader, a frequent mistake that caused tension among the various chiefs. (Chiefs Buffalo Medicine and the Partisan were also taking part in the meetings.) When the captains were entertained in the village, populated by around 900 Sioux, they were ceremoniously carried to the council lodge atop white buffalo robes. Clark wrote:

On landing I was received on a elegant painted B. Robe & taken to the Village by 6 Men & was not permitted to touch the ground untill I was put down in the grand Concill house on a White dressed Robe.

But in spite of the organized diplomacy, warriors seized the Expedition boats twice and tried to prevent the Expedition from leaving. They demanded more gifts as a toll, but all the captains were willing to give was a bit of extra tobacco. The second confrontation was one of the tensest moments on the whole Expedition Trail. Chief Black Buffalo was able to calm the men both times, but Lewis and Clark were not able to broker the kind of partnership that President Jefferson had hoped to have with the Sioux.

Cheyenne

Village Location in 1803-1806: along the Cheyenne River, in present-day Wyoming

Lewis and Clark first encountered Cheyenne people around the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara villages, where they came to trade horses, flour made of pounded prairie apples, and beautiful quillwork for Mandan corn and guns from the Arikara. Cheyenne representatives visited the explorers during their winter at Ft. Mandan. This nation was historically a sedentary farming culture, but they were forced to become nomadic hunters due to conflict on the Plains. The Cheyenne could provide the Expedition with information about tribes in the southwest and west.

On the return trip, more time was spent with the Cheyenne. After being invited into a chief's tipi on August 21, 1806, Captain Clark wrote: *"the Chyenne Chief envited us to his Lodge. ...which was new and much larger than any which I have Seen it was made of 20 dressed Buffalow Skins..."* Clark smoked with the chief, then offered him a Jefferson Peace Medal, which was refused. Clark explained:

He knew that the white people were all medecine and was afraid of the medal or anything that white people gave them.

Arikara

Village Location in 1803-1806: at the mouth of Grand River, in what is now northern South Dakota

Beginning October 9, 1804, the Expedition was entertained in the Arikara villages near the present-day border between South and North Dakota. These were the first of many villages where the Expedition would encounter dome-shaped earthen lodges, a housing style common to agricultural people on the central Great Plains. The lodges had a fire pit in the center, four main posts, and a tunnel-like entrance with a buffalo skin covering the door. Smallpox had previously reduced the population, and when Lewis & Clark arrived in the first village, set on Ashley Island in the Grand River, they found it occupied by about 2,000 people in 60 lodges. The Arikaras formed the center for trade on their part of the Missouri, and they provided horses, corn, and other produce for the Sioux, Cheyenne, Osages, and others. Chiefs included Pocasse, Grey Eyes, Crow at Rest, Man Crow, and Hawk's Feather.

The Corps of Discovery visited there for five days, feasting on the produce the tribe grew, including pumpkins, watermelons, and tobacco. (In winter, their diet shifted primarily to the buffalo.) The Arikaras were amazed at York's stature and skin color, and they called him "Big Medicine." Captain Clark, his master, wrote:

Those Indians wer much astonished at my Servent, they never Saw a black man before, all flocked around him & examind him from top to toe.

Mandan

Village Location in 1803-1806: on the upper Missouri River, in the middle of North Dakota today

In the fall of 1804 the Mandan lived in two villages along the upper Missouri River. These villages, Matootonha and Rooptahee (now known as Mitutanka and Nuptadi), were the center of trade on the upper Missouri. The total population was estimated to be 4,500 people, greater than most cities of the United States. Lewis named one lead chief for each village: Posecopsahe (Black Cat) for Nuptadi, Sheheke (Big White) for Mitutanka. Big White's wife, Yellow Corn, greeted the explorers carrying a 100-pound load of meat. Chief Black Cat helped Lewis & Clark locate a site where the Corps could build Fort Mandan, to pass the winter of 1804-05. Because the nation was light-skinned, some Euro-Americans had speculated that this tribe could have descended from Prince Madoc and his Welshmen who, according to legend, had discovered America before Columbus.

During the winter, the Expedition set up a mini-trade network with the Mandans. Private John Shields, from West Point, Kentucky, established a temporary blacksmith shop at the fort where he mended hoes, repaired guns, and made battle axes, hide scrapers, and arrow points in exchange for food for the Corps of Discovery. The Mandans negotiated a price of 7-8 gallons of corn for each piece of metal. The Mandans were good neighbors, sharing information and resources. The men were invited to join a Mandan buffalo hunt in December 1804.

When the Corps of Discovery passed back through the Mandan villages on their way home, Chief Big White accepted the invitation to go with them, even though his people cried, believing they would never see him again. The delegation, with Big White, his wife, and children, traveled through Kentucky on their way to Washington. They met with President Jefferson on New Year's Eve 1806.

Amahami, Minitari, & Hidatsa

Village Locations in 1803-1806: along the Missouri River near the Knife River

Theses nations collectively known as Hidatsa were neighbors and allies of the Mandans. Like the Mandans, the Hidatsa lived in three villages of earthen lodges along the Knife River. Caltarcota was a chief proper. The Expedition first met with Hidatsa representatives on October 28, 1804, when they learned of the nation's trade ties to the British. During the winter at Fort Mandan the Hidatsas, who frequently ranged beyond the Rockies, taught the Expedition about the Crow, Flathead, Shoshone, and Nez Percé Indians.

The three villages of related peoples were:

Mahamha, inhabited by the **Amahami** or Awaxawi Hidatsa, was the southernmost and smallest Hidatsa village, located at the confluence of the Knife and Missouri Rivers on the right bank. Most of Lewis and Clark's contact with this village was through Chief Tatuckcoprinreha (White Buffalo Robe Unfolded). They discussed trade and peace negotiations that Lewis was trying to broker between the Mandan-Hidatsas and the Arikaras.

Metaharta, home of the **Minitari** or Awatixa Hidatsa, was the middle village. There were about 40 lodges, and Ompsehara (Black Moccasin) was the chief. Warriors from this village captured Sacagawea years before during a raid west of Rockies, and she and her husband, Toussaint Charbonneau, were living there when Lewis & Clark arrived. Lewis attempted to encourage peace among the Hidatsas and the Shoshones and Blackfeet, but warriors of the Wolf society left for a raid on the Blackfeet while the Expedition was there.

Menetarra, the northernmost and largest of the three villages was home to the **Hidatsa** proper. It consisted of 130 lodges led by Chief Le Borgne or One Eye. Le Borgne was so amazed with York, he tried to rub the dark color right off of his skin. Like other Indians, he believed that York was extremely powerful.

Blackfeet

Village Location in 1803-1806: in the northernmost portion of the return Trail, at the Missouri & Marias Rivers

Named for their customary moccasins that were dyed black, the Blackfeet Confederacy controlled a vast territory in the northeastern Great Plains. Lewis & Clark didn't encounter this nation on their westbound route, but they did hear about them from their rival tribes, the Shoshone and Nez Percé. They dominated the area with guns obtained from trading beaver and wolf pelts to the British, and they raided nations all over the region frequently.

On the return journey, when Lewis and Clark formed separate parties for independent exploration, Lewis's detachment traveled north to the Marias River, in search of Blackfeet. They found a group of warriors and began to warn them of the relationships the Americans were fostering with their enemies. The Indians attempted to take guns and horses from the Corps of Discovery and a fight ensued. Captain Lewis and Private Reubin Field, a Kentuckian, each killed one warrior, the only moment of tension with native peoples to have such a regretful end.

Crow

Village Location in 1803-1806: the Yellowstone River at the foot of Rockies, on the return Trail

The Crow lived along the Yellowstone River at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in present-day southern Montana and northern Wyoming. Although they were mostly hunters, they did raise tobacco. The Crow earned a reputation as the most skilled horse thieves of the plains. On the eastbound Trail in July 1806, Clark took an independent party to explore the Yellowstone River region and dispatched Sergeant Pryor to the Mandan villages with a letter for a trader. Crow warriors stole the couriers' horses, and Pryor and his detail were forced to abandon their mission, build bullboats, and catch up with Captain Clark.

Much of the information the Expedition gathered about the Crow was from other nations, including the Hidatsa, who years before had forced the Crow out of the upper Missouri region. On November 12, 1804, Clark recorded this in his journal:

The Ravin [Crow] Indians have 400 lodges & about 1200 men, & follow the Buffalow, or hunt for their Subsistance in the plains & on the Court Noi [Black Hills] & Rock Mountains, & are at war with the Siaux [and] Snake Indians.

Assiniboin

Village Location in 1803-1806: in today's northeast Montana

The Assiniboin village was located in what is today northeast Montana. Lewis and Clark encountered the nation around November 15, 1804, during the tribe's annual sojourn near the Mandan villages. Mandan Chief Black Cat brought the Assiniboin band Chief Chechank (Old Crane) to meet the explorers.

Shoshone

Location in 1803-1806: both east and west of Rocky Mountains

After their portage around the Great Falls, the Expedition was anxious to locate the Shoshone, the nomadic nation they hoped would supply them with horses and aid for crossing the mountains that loomed ahead. Their Indian guide, Sacagawea, was from this tribe and spoke the language. On August 8, 1805, she recognized Beaverhead Rock, an

outcropping that indicated they were approaching the Shoshone range. A few days later, they located members of the tribe.

Sacagawea and Shoshone Chief Cameahwait turned out to be brother and sister, and the spot was named Camp Fortunate. Cameahwait negotiated to provide the explorers with what they need to cross the Bitterroots: twenty-nine horses, one mule, and a guide nicknamed Old Toby. Clark wrote this about the chief: “*a man of Influence Sence & easey & reserved manners, appears to possess a great deal of Cincerity.*”

This nation, often forced to hide in the mountains and live on roots and berries, shared what little they had with the Expedition, and the chief created a detailed relief map in sand of the Lemhi, Salmon, and Bitterroot rivers and the mountains for Clark. The Shoshone also told the explorers about the tribes they would soon encounter: the Salish and the Nez Percé. Clark described their destitution and also their unique attitudes about social equality in this way:

Those Indians are mild in their disposition, appear Sincere in their friendship, punctial, and decided. kind with what they have, to spare. They are excessive pore, nothing but horses there Enemies which are noumerous on account of there horses & Defenceless Situation, have deprived them of tents and all the Small Conveniances of life...The women are held more sacred among them than any nation we have seen and appear to have an equal Shere in all conversation, which is not the Case in any other nation I have seen. their boys & girls are also admited to speak except in Councils, ...

Nez Percé

Location in 1803-1806: on the plains west of the Rockies

The Nez Percé were the largest tribe that Lewis and Clark met between the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast, and they had a vast range just west of the Rockies. Their name was French for "pierced nose," a reference to the nose pendants worn by some. Typical plateau Indians, the Nez Percé fished the Clearwater and Snake Rivers and harvested camas roots. When Clark and other members of the Expedition emerged exhausted and starved from their journey over the Bitterroot Mountains, this tribe greeted them with camas roots, dried fish, and other foods. But eating too much of the unfamiliar foods made the men terribly sick, with vomiting and diarrhea. Some men, including Captain Lewis, were sick for more than a week, and the Indians considered taking the guns and trade goods from these strangers. An old woman named Watkuweis, who had lived among white traders, convinced them not to harm the white men.

Their elderly chief, Twisted Hair, drew a map of the Columbia River falls to prepare the explorers for what was ahead, and after watching the ill men struggle to make dugouts, he taught Clark the method for making burned out canoes, at a site the captain called Camp Canoe. Because the Nez Percé were master horsemen, Lewis branded the party's horses and left them in the care of the tribe for the winter.

When the Corps returned in May 1806 to claim their horses, they spent a couple of months with the Nez Percé, waiting for the snow to melt in the mountains. During this time at Camp Choppunish, Clark set up shop as a doctor to help the sick in the tribe. Chief Cut Nose provided guides for the trip over the Lolo Trail, and Lewis asked his men to provide them with game meat in gratitude:

I directed the hunters to ... indeavour to kill some more meat for these people whom I was unwilling to leave without giving them a good supply of provision after their having been so obliging as to conduct us through those tremendous mountains.

Salish (Flathead)

Village Location in 1803-1806: in the Bitterroot River valley, present-day Montana

The Salish nation was encountered in the Bitterroot Valley (today, Montana), September 1805. Salish chief, Three Eagles, saw the expedition first and returned to warn his village of the approach, but when the Corps reached the 33 lodges at Ross's Hole, they were warmly greeted by the Indians. The Salish traded the Expedition's horses for much better ones. Lewis & Clark mistakenly called this tribe "Flathead," even though they did not practice the custom of

skull alteration that the Expedition would encounter closer to the coast. They estimated a total of 450 lodges for entire tribe. The Salish were actually similar to their neighbors and allies, the Shoshone, but their language was very different. Sergeant John Ordway speculated that these people could be the lost Welsh Indians who, according to myth, descended from Prince Madoc, an explorer who was believed to have discovered America before Columbus.

Walla Walla

Village Location in 1803-1806: where the Columbia River meets the Snake and Yakima Rivers

The Lewis & Clark Expedition first encountered the Walla Walla on their way to the Pacific, but since they were so anxious to reach their goal, they promised to stop for a visit on their return trip. The nation lived along the Walla Walla River, near the junction of the Snake and Columbia Rivers. They had quite a trading business established, and Clark noted that they must have had over 10,000 pounds of dried salmon ready for trade. Chief Yelleppit greeted the men warmly in May 1806 and persuaded the Corps to stay for three days. He taught Lewis & Clark a shortcut to the Lolo Trail, and he let the men stock up on food for the return journey. The chief also presented Captain Clark with a “*very elegant white horse*” and, in return, the captain presented him with his sword and some ammunition.

Lewis offered this complimentary testimony about the Walla Wallas:

...three young men arrived from the Wallahwollah village bringing with them a steel trap belonging to one of our party which had been negligently left behind; this is an act of integrity rarely witnessed among indians. during our stay with them they several times found the knives of the men which had been carelessly lost by them and returned them. I think we can justly affirm to the honor of these people that they are the most hospitable, honest, and sincere people that we have met with in our voyage.

Yakima & Wanapum

Village Location in 1803-1806: where the Columbia River meets the Snake and Yakima Rivers

Living near the Wallas Wallas were two related tribes. The Yakima participated in the dancing and celebrations along the Walla Walla River while the Expedition visited. This nation numbered some 1,200 people who lived in houses covered in woven rush mats along the Columbia and Yakima Rivers, in what is now central Washington State. The Wanapum turned out on the riverbanks to watch the arrival of the white strangers. Lewis and Clark spent two days in their mat lodges, with Chief Cutssahnem. Clark recorded descriptions of the houses, clothing, and physical characteristics of the people they met here.

Palouse

Village Location in 1803-1806: eastern Washington and northern Idaho today

The Palouse, another fishing culture of the plateau, lived along the Palouse River. Like the Nez Percé, they were expert horse breeders and horse traders; the Appaloosa horse takes its name from the Palouse Indians. When Lewis and Clark encountered them in October 1805, they estimated the Palouse population at around 1,600.

Wishram & Wasco

Village Location in 1803-1806: on the north and south banks of the Columbia at the Dalles

These nations lived on either side of the Columbia River, along a fertile section of the river known as The Dalles. They sold the expedition members fish, dogs, roots, and acorns. The name of the Wishram village translated to “trading place,” a center for a major dried fish enterprise.

Clatsop

Village Location in 1803-1806: along the Columbia River, in present-day northwest Oregon

Like the Chinooks, the Clatsops were a fishing people with advanced skills in canoe building. Clatsop canoes could ride the ocean waves carrying up to 30 people. About 400 Clatsops inhabited the northwest tip of present-day Oregon, in three villages on the southern side of the Columbia River. Clark drew sketches in his journal depicting the method of head flattening the tribe practiced, strapping boards to the head to reshape the forehead so it slanted backward. Lewis was fascinated with the tribe's conical hats made of cedar.

The Clatsops provided needed supplies to the explorers and helped them select a location for their final winter camp, which was named after the tribe. They also introduced the explorers to many new animals, including a tasty fish, the eulachon, whale, and sea otter. Lewis called the tribe "*friendly and decent,*" "*kind and hospitable.*" When the Expedition left Fort Clatsop in March 1806, Lewis gave it to the Clatsop Chief Coboway. Years later, Coboway showed a trader the list of the explorers' names—a souvenir he had saved of their winter along the coast.

Chinook

Village Location in 1803-1806: ranging from the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean

The Chinook numbered about 400 when the Corps of Discovery visited their villages along the south bank of the Columbia River in October 1805. They lived in wooden plank houses, supplemented their main diet of fish with the roots and berries plentiful in the area, and successfully negotiated with the British and American traders who came to the Oregon coast for decades. The health and population of the tribe had been impacted by contact with the traders.

The Corps of Discovery encountered them frequently during the winter at Fort Clatsop. The captains praised the nation for their beautifully carved and finely crafted coastal canoes, but they wrote complaints that their neighbors along the coast were unreasonable traders and occasional thieves. In spite of these complaints, Captain Lewis wrote: "*These people the Chinooks...have been very friendly to us; they appear to be a mild inoffensive people. ...*"

Tillamook & Wahkiakum

Village Location in 1803-1806: along the coast of what is today northwest Oregon

Settled in villages from the mouth of the Necanicum River south to Tillamook Bay, the Tillamook were Salish Indians living in what is now northwest Oregon. They caught enough fish during the annual salmon run—April to October—to last a year, drying and pounding some into a powder for future use. When Lewis and Clark first encountered the tribe in 1805, they recorded that about 1,000 people lived in 50 houses in their village. It was this tribe that sold the Corps of Discovery the whale oil and blubber that they enjoyed on the coast.

The Wahkiakum were a Chinookan-speaking people who lived in two villages at the mouth of the Elochoman River, not far from the Tillamooks. Like most tribes in the area they subsisted on salmon, roots, and berries and participated in the elaborate regional trade network. Representatives from this nation met with the explorers at Fort Clatsop, and Lewis & Clark noted that they drove a hard trade bargain, often preferring to sell their wapato roots to other Indians rather than the relatively poor explorers, with their depleted supplies. Captain Clark wrote this on November 7, 1805:

Two canos of Indians met and returned with us to their village, they gave us to eate Some fish, and Sold us fish, Wa pa to roots three dogs and 2 otter skins for which we gave fish hooks.

....