



DISCOVERY & EXPLORATION

# Across America: The Lewis & Clark Expedition



MAURICE ISSERMAN

JOHN S. BOWMAN AND MAURICE ISSERMAN, GENERAL EDITORS



DISCOVERY & EXPLORATION

# Across America: The Lewis and Clark Expedition



MAURICE ISSERMAN

JOHN S. BOWMAN and MAURICE ISSERMAN  
General Editors



Facts On File, Inc.

## **Across America: The Lewis and Clark Expedition**

Copyright © 2005 by Harry S. Anderson

Maps © 2005 by Facts On File, Inc.

Captions copyright © 2005 by Facts On File, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information contact:

Facts On File, Inc.  
132 West 31st Street  
New York NY 10001

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Isserman, Maurice.

Across America : the Lewis and Clark expedition / Maurice Isserman.

v. cm. —(Discovery and exploration)

Contents: Monticello and Lemhi Pass, August 12, 1805—Search for the Northwest Passage—Preparing the way, March 1803—May 1804—Up the Missouri, May—October 1804—“The most perfect harmony”: winter at Fort Mandan—“This little fleet”: up the unknown Missouri—To the Missouri headwaters—On foot and on horse across the Rockies—“Ocean in view!”: to the Pacific—Homeward bound.

ISBN 0-8160-5256-5

1. Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806)—Juvenile literature. 2. West (U.S.)—Discovery and exploration—Juvenile literature. 3. West (U.S.)—Description and travel—Juvenile literature. [Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806) 2. Explorers. 3. West (U.S.)—Discovery and exploration. 4. West (U.S.)—Description and travel.] I. Title. II. Series.

F592.7. I87 2004

917. 804'2—dc22

2003025130

Facts On File books are available at special discounts when purchased in bulk quantities for businesses, associations, institutions, or sales promotions. Please call our Special Sales Department in New York at (212) 967-8800 or (800) 322-8755.

You can find Facts On File on the World Wide Web at  
<http://www.factsonfile.com>

Text design by Erika K. Arroyo  
Cover design by Kelly Parr  
Maps by Pat Meschino

Printed in the United States of America

VB FOF 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

*For David Weintraub,  
who for 30 years has been Lewis to my Clark,  
and Clark to my Lewis.*



## NOTE ON PHOTOS



Many of the illustrations and photographs used in this book are old, historical images. The quality of the prints is not always up to current standards, as in some cases the originals are from old or poor quality negatives or are damaged. The content of the illustrations, however, made their inclusion important despite problems in reproduction.

# CONTENTS



Introduction	ix
<b>1 MONTICELLO AND LEMHI PASS: AUGUST 12, 1805</b>	<b>1</b>
Thomas Jefferson's Other Explorers	4
<b>2 SEARCH FOR THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE</b>	<b>7</b>
Alexander Mackenzie's Expedition across Canada	15
<i>United States, 1802</i>	17
<b>3 PREPARING THE WAY: MARCH 1803 TO MAY 1804</b>	<b>20</b>
Lewis and Clark's Traveling Library	23
Lewis's Map Collection	27
<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, August 31, 1803–May 21, 1804</i>	32
St. Louis: Gateway to the West	34
<b>4 UP THE MISSOURI: MAY TO OCTOBER 1804</b>	<b>38</b>
The "Barking Squirrel"	45
Lewis's Air Gun	49
<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, May 21–September 28, 1804</i>	51
<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, September 28, 1804–April 7, 1805</i>	54
<b>5 "THE MOST PERFECT HARMONEY": WINTER AT FORT MANDAN</b>	<b>57</b>
Smallpox and the Fate of the Mandan Tribe	61
<i>Fort Mandan and Neighboring Mandan and Hidatsa Villages, November 1804–April 1805 and August 1806</i>	64

	The Trading Network of the Plains Indians	66
	Members of the Corps of Discovery	74
<b>6</b>	<b>“THIS LITTLE FLEET”:</b> UP THE UNKNOWN MISSOURI	76
	The Buffalo and the Plains Indian Economy	78
	Encounters with a Grizzly	82
	<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, April 7– July 30, 1805</i>	84
<b>7</b>	<b>TO THE MISSOURI HEADWATERS</b>	87
	The Many Names of Sacagawea	89
	<i>Portage around the Great Falls, June–July 1805</i>	92
	The Rocky Mountains	96
	<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, July 30–August 12, 1805</i>	100
<b>8</b>	<b>ON FOOT AND ON HORSE ACROSS THE ROCKIES</b>	102
	<i>Bitterroot Mountains (Lolo Trail), September–October 1805 and May–July 1806</i>	113
	The Nez Perce Horses	116
<b>9</b>	<b>“OCIAN IN VIEW!”:</b> TO THE PACIFIC	118
	The Columbia River Salmon Culture	122
	<i>Fort Clatsop and Its Indian Neighbors, 1805–1806</i>	125
	<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, August 12–November 7, 1805</i>	127
	<i>Campsites and Selected Sites near the Mouth of the Columbia River, November 15, 1805–March 23, 1806</i>	132
<b>10</b>	<b>HOMeward BOUND</b>	136
	<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, March 23–July 3, 1806</i>	139
	<i>Route of Lewis’s Party and Route of Clark’s Party, July 3–August 12, 1806</i>	144
	Mountain Men and the Fur Trade	150
	<i>Route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, August 1803–September 1806</i>	151
	Given Up for Lost?	152
	<i>Route of the Corps of Discovery, August 12–September 23, 1806</i>	153

Epilogue PUTTING THEIR NAMES ON THE MAP	155
Glossary	165
Further Information	167
Index	171



# INTRODUCTION

---



On April 7, 1805, Captain Meriwether Lewis dipped his pen in ink and made an entry in a red leather-bound notebook. Since the previous May, he and the men under his command had traveled 1,600 miles by boat up the Missouri River. They were known as the Corps of Discovery. They had spent the winter of 1804–05 in a little wooden fort that they constructed at a site near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. The ice on the river had finally melted, and they were preparing to resume their journey. As Lewis surveyed the six small canoes and two larger boats called pirogues that would carry his party westward to the farthest reaches of the Missouri River, he voiced a deep sense of satisfaction. “This little fleet,” Lewis wrote in his journal that day, “altho’ not quite so respectable as those of Columbus or Capt. Cook, were still viewed by us with as much pleasure as those deservedly famed adventurers ever beheld theirs. . . .”

Two hundred years later, Lewis and Clark’s “little fleet” is itself “deservedly famed” in the annals of exploration and discovery. Larry McMurtry, a Pulitzer prize-winning novelist, recently described the journey of the Corps of Discovery as “our first really American adventure,” and its record in the pages of the journals kept by Meriwether Lewis and his

co-commander William Clark as “our only really American epic.”

What places Lewis and Clark in the first rank of American explorers? They led the first



A U.S. Army captain, Meriwether Lewis left active military duty to assist President Jefferson in secretarial tasks. His acute awareness and attention to detail were an asset to the president and proved useful again in Lewis’s journal entries and drawings. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-10609]*)

exploration party ever officially sponsored by the government of the United States. They were the first white men, and very likely the first men ever to cross the entire North American continent through the territory that would soon become the western United States. They were the first white men to travel on the Missouri River in the territory that was to become the state of Montana, and thus the first to see the Great Falls of Montana, the Gates of the Rockies, the Three Forks of the Missouri, and the river's headwaters in the Rocky Mountains. They were the first white men to cross the Continental Divide south of Canada, the first white men to explore the length of the Yellowstone River, the first white men to see the Clearwater and Snake Rivers, and the first white men to sail down the Columbia River to the sea. They were the first white men to make direct contact with and learn something about the life of the Shoshone, the Flathead (Salish), and the Nez Perce Indian tribes. They discovered and were the first to describe for scientific purposes 122 species of western birds and animals and 178 plants. They left their names, and the names of the members of the Corps of Discovery, on hundreds of hills, rivers, creeks, and cities throughout the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest regions of the United States.

But beyond the many "firsts" that can be listed next to their names, Lewis and Clark deserve their ranking among the greatest of American explorers because of the personal qualities that they displayed on their expedition. They were exemplary explorers. It is not just that they were men of "undaunted courage," as historian Stephen Ambrose called them, though they certainly were that. Their greatest virtues as explorers proved to be their power of observation and their rarely waning enthusiasm for, as Lewis put it, the "scenes of visionary enchantment" that they

encountered on their long journey to the Pacific and back.

Biologist Paul Cutright wrote in *Lewis and Clark, Pioneering Naturalists* that Meriwether Lewis possessed an ability "effortlessly and spontaneously" to see the "little things so often overlooked, even by the well-trained naturalist." Historian James Ronda, in *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, praised Lewis's abilities as an ethnographer (someone who studies human cultures and races); Lewis, Ronda wrote, had "the naturalist's ability to describe objects with almost photographic fidelity. [He] brought to ethnography the practiced eye of one who delighted in describing and cataloguing the creatures of the natural world." Mapmaking, or cartography, is a craft that depends upon close observation and measurement: Geologist John Logan Allen wrote in *Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* that William Clark proved himself "a cartographer of unusual skill" whose maps of the Missouri and Columbia basins were "cartographic masterpieces."

Lewis and Clark were also, as historian Donald Jackson once famously noted, the "writingest explorers." Among the tons of supplies the explorers carried with them were, as listed in their inventories "6 papers of ink powder" and "4 metal pens brass or silver." Following instructions given to Lewis by President Thomas Jefferson, Lewis, Clark, and at least six other members of the expedition kept journals. Taken together, these journals allow people today to reconstruct on a day-by-day basis, from May 14, 1804, to September 23, 1806, where the explorers were, how far they traveled, what they were doing, what they were eating, how their health was holding up, and the state of their morale.

Lewis and Clark were the most prolific of the journal-keepers: Between the two of them they produced 200,000 words in the



Throughout the journey, Lewis and Clark encountered many unfamiliar plants and animals. They carefully described their findings in their journals and demonstrated great talent in cartography (mapmaking) and drawing. This illustration is one Clark made of the sage grouse, a bird Lewis dubbed "mountain cock," "heath cock," and "cock of the plains." (Missouri Historical Society)

time it took them to make the round-trip from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Pacific Ocean. When one thinks of the Lewis and Clark expedition, one tends to remember the great moments of discovery: Lewis standing atop Lemhi Pass on the Continental Divide, Clark recording his joy at his first view of the Pacific, both men marveling at the sight of thousands of buffalo spread out across the Great Plains landscape, and so on. To those images another should be added: the captains sitting with their little portable wooden desks spread out on their laps after a long, hard, and often dangerous day's travel, sitting by the campfire and writing, writing, writing in their journals.

It is not only the quantity but the quality of their writing that makes the Lewis and Clark journals a continuing source of fascination to Americans, an "American epic," in Larry McMurry's words. Though Lewis and Clark had no intention of creating great literature when they set down the record of the expedition, in McMurry's opinion, "by the force and immediacy of the expression, they accomplished the one essential thing that writers must do: they brought the reader along with them, up that meandering river and over those snowy peaks." And, as Lewis's biographer Stephen Ambrose commented with equal admiration, "On virtually every page they reveal something of their personalities." The words that Lewis and Clark and other members of the expedition recorded between 1804 and 1806 lie at the heart of the narrative that follows. All quotations, except where otherwise noted, come from Lewis's or Clark's pen.

A note on spelling: By Larry McMurry's estimate, William Clark found 22 different ways to spell the word *Sioux* in the journals. He probably came up with almost as many variations in spelling the word *mosquito*.



William Clark joined the expedition when he received the offer directly from fellow Virginian and fellow officer Meriwether Lewis. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-105848]*)

Lewis came closer to standard spelling, but as his rendering of the word "*rispectable*" [respectable] in the sentence that describes his "little fleet" suggests, he was not always successful. In the account that follows, the original spelling has been left intact in the quotations. Where the meaning of a word may be unclear, the version set down by Lewis and Clark will be followed by the correctly spelled word in brackets. The quotations from the journals are all taken from Gary Moulton's recent and definitive edition of *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, published in 13 volumes by the University of Nebraska Press.

# MONTICELLO AND LEMHI PASS

August 12, 1805



The president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was spending the summer of 1805 at Monticello, his stately hilltop home in Virginia's Piedmont region. There, amid the tranquil beauties of his plantation's flower and herb gardens, he was able to escape for a while the pressures of office, as well as the heat, humidity, dust, and disease that the summer months brought to the nation's new capital in Washington, D.C. So Jefferson was not at the White House on Monday, August 12, 1805, when a long-expected wagonload of wooden boxes, trunks, and cages arrived there for him.

The shipment included animal skins, skeletons, antlers and horns, minerals, seeds, dried plants, a tin box containing insects and mice, a buffalo robe painted with the scene of a battle fought by American Indian tribes, an Indian bow and quiver of arrows, a live magpie, and a something described on the list accompanying the shipment as a "living burrowing squirrel of the praries" (better known today as a

prairie dog). This odd assortment had been packaged and sent to Jefferson four months earlier by his young friend and former aide Captain Meriwether Lewis of the U.S. Army.

Lewis had dispatched the shipment from his temporary base at Fort Mandan on the upper Missouri River, near the junction of the Missouri and the Knife Rivers in the present-day state of North Dakota, a place that in the winter of 1804–05 had represented the westernmost outpost of the authority of the government of the United States. From Fort Mandan, the boxes and crates had followed a circuitous route to their final destination at Jefferson's official residence. They were carried by boat down the Missouri River to St. Louis, then down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, then by sea to Baltimore, and finally by wagon to the White House.

President Jefferson did not have a chance to examine the contents of Lewis's shipment for several months, but he was delighted to hear of their arrival. He instructed his servants

at the White House to make sure that the skins and furs were well preserved and that the magpie and prairie dog were looked after (they were still alive when he got back to Washington in October). He also looked forward to the day when he would be able to hear firsthand from Captain Lewis about his adventures, but he knew it would be many months, perhaps even a year, before that would be possible. For Meriwether Lewis and the small party of explorers that he led were at that moment somewhere deep in the American western wilderness, traversing a blank



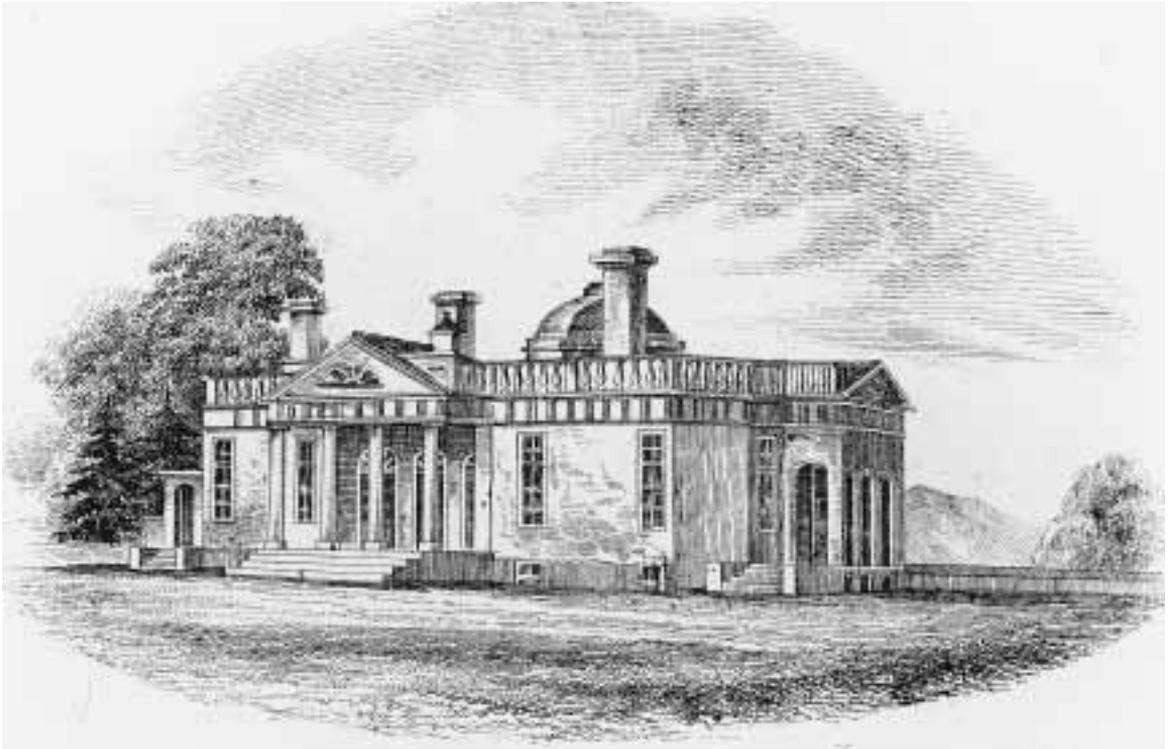
Thomas Jefferson held many important political positions in his life, most notably that of the third president of the United States. But he was also an inventor, a naturalist, a linguist, an architect, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and the founder of the University of Virginia. Jefferson worked to organize the exploration of a Northwest Passage for 20 years before finally succeeding. (*National Archives [NWDNS-208-PU-104HH(4)]*)

place on the existing maps of the North American continent, where non-Indian Americans had never before ventured.

## THAT SAME DAY, ABOUT 1,850 MILES WEST OF MONTICELLO . . .

On August 12, 1805, Lewis awoke early. He was an impressive-looking man, more than six feet tall, lean and well muscled, his skin deeply tanned by the sun. He was camped with three other men by a small stream near the western border of the present-day state of Montana, a stream that he believed would lead them in a day or so to the headwaters of the Missouri River. The rest of his expedition, laden with supplies that they were transporting in dugout canoes, was following more slowly 20 or so miles behind Lewis and the advance party. Lewis and his companions were traveling light, on foot, with no provisions but what they could carry on their back. They had no tent and slept under the stars, wrapped in their blankets. But they did have an American flag, which flew over their small camp on a wooden pole that Lewis stuck in the ground the night before.

At first light Captain Lewis sent George Drouillard, a civilian hunter, one of the most competent men under his command, to look for the trail of an Indian whom they had spotted the day before. Lewis hoped that this Indian was a Shoshone and could lead them to the rest of his tribe. Ever since their departure from Fort Mandan in April they had looked forward to meeting the Shoshone, because they had heard it was a tribe rich in horses. Lewis and his party would need horses to carry their supplies over the Rocky Mountains to the headwaters of the Columbia River, which they believed lay just on the other side.



Thomas Jefferson designed this stately home for himself in 1768. Monticello stands near Charlottesville, Virginia, and is a popular tourist attraction for visitors to the area. (*Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-107586]*)

Once they were on the Columbia they could build new canoes and sail down to the Pacific Ocean, their ultimate goal.

It was still early morning when Drouillard returned. The rain the night before made it hard to find the Indian's trail. Still they decided to press on up a gentle valley that led them to a high wooded hillside. The stream they had camped along branched into smaller rivulets. As always, Lewis kept his eyes open for unfamiliar plant and animal life, whose distinguishing features he carefully noted in his journal. He noted "several large hawks" that flew overhead, "nearly black in color" (possibly red-tailed hawks, or Swaison's

hawks). Later he saw a large animal "of the fox kind" (probably a wolverine). There were also signs of Indian presence; the ground by the stream had been dug up by Shoshone searching for edible roots. Later in the morning Lewis and his party stopped to rest and breakfasted on the last of the dried deer meat that they were carrying in their packs; they had no other food with them except a small amount of salt pork and some flour.

They had found an Indian path that led them up the valley, until it turned "abruptly to the West through a narrow bottom between the mountains." The path was getting steeper, but they pushed on, their excitement mounting.



### Thomas Jefferson's Other Explorers

Lewis and Clark's lasting fame, although certainly justified, has obscured the efforts of the other explorers who headed west in the years of Thomas Jefferson's presidency. Jefferson saw the Lewis and Clark expedition as just one part of a multipronged and coordinated effort to learn more about the vast region of western North America. When Jefferson reported in February 1806 on Lewis and Clark's progress up the Missouri (based on information the two expedition leaders had sent back to Washington from their first winter encampment in North Dakota), he did so in a document entitled "Message from the President of the United States Communicating Discoveries Made in Exploring the Missouri, Red River, and Washita, by Captains Lewis and Clarke, Doctor Sibley, and Mr. Dunbar."

At Jefferson's request, William Dunbar, a Mississippi planter, and George Hunter, a Philadelphia chemist, led an expedition up the Ouchita River through northern Louisiana into present-day Arkansas in fall 1804. In spring 1805 a second Jefferson expedition set off up the Red River, this one led by Thomas Freeman, a civil engineer and surveyor, and Thomas Custis, a medical student. Dr. John Sibley joined them en route. Their 40-man expedition pushed up the Red River into present-day Texas, then part of the Spanish empire in the New World. On July 29, Spanish troops intercepted the American explorers at a spot on the Red River known ever since as Spanish Bluff, about 30 miles northwest of present-day Texarkana, Texas. The Spanish commander bluntly told them that they had to return to where they came from or be taken into custody.

After Lewis and Clark, the best-known explorer of Jefferson's era was undoubtedly another army officer, Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike. Pike was born in Lambertton, New Jersey, in 1779, the son of an American military officer. Following his father's example, Zebulon joined the U.S. Army at the age of 15, and he served on the Ohio frontier in the 1790s. In July 1806 Pike led an expeditionary party west from St. Louis, up the Missouri River, then along the Arkansas River, and finally, on horseback, crossing the Kansas plains into Colorado. There they were the first Americans to encounter the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies. (One of those peaks has since been known as Pike's Peak.) Like the Freeman expedition, Pike's party ran into Spanish troops, who put them under arrest for trespassing onto Spanish lands. Pike and some of his men were released to U.S. authorities in Louisiana on June 30, 1807. Other members of the party were later released. "Language cannot express the gaiety of my heart when I once beheld the standards of my country waved aloft," Pike said of his return.

"[T]he road was still plain," Lewis wrote in his journal soon afterward, "I therefore did not despair of shortly finding a passage over the

mountains and of taisting the waters of the great Columbia this evening." Up and up they walked, four more miles, until finally they



Painted in 1988 by Robert F. Morgan, *At Lemhi* shows Lewis joined by three other members of the expedition, taking a moment's rest as they searched for the Shoshone Indians in July 1805. (*Montana Historical Society, Helena*)

came to the spring bubbling up from the ground that fed the little stream (present-day Trail Creek) they walked alongside. This, Lewis believed, was “the most distant fountain of mighty Missouri in such of which we have spent so many toilsome days and wristless nights.” One of his men, Hugh McNeal, stood with one foot planted “on each side of this little rivulet and,” Lewis noted, McNeal had “thanked his god that he had lived to bestride the mighty & heretofore deemed endless Missouri.” As for Lewis, his joy knew no bounds: “I had accomplished one of those great objects on which my mind has been unalterably fixed for many years . . .” He asked any future readers of his journal to “judge then of the pleas-

ure I felt in allaying my thirst with this pure and ice cold water,” the headwaters or origin of the Missouri River.

It was another half-mile to the summit. The pass ahead, later to be known as Lemhi Pass, crossed the Continental Divide. On the eastern side of the mountains, all waters flowed east or southward, eventually to end up in the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. On the western side, which they were approaching, all waters would eventually flow by one means or another to the Pacific. And that included the Columbia River, whose headwaters Lewis fully expected to find on the far slope. No non-Indian American had ever before stepped across the Continental Divide.

Finally they were at the top, 7,373 feet above sea level, with a broad vista opening up to the west. And there, “from the top of the divideing ridge,” there was no sign of the Columbia River and the easy water route that they had dreamed of finding to the Pacific. Instead, as

Lewis wrote, “I discovered immense ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow.” They were at the farthest boundary of the United States. They had a long, hard way to go before they would see the Pacific Ocean.

# SEARCH FOR THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE



The New World that Christopher Columbus encountered in 1492 represented both an opportunity and an obstacle to European explorers and to the soldiers, missionaries, traders, and settlers who would follow in their paths. Columbus had been searching for an old, not a new, continent. He had hoped to find a passage to the riches of Asia, an ocean crossing to replace the long, difficult land route that in past centuries had brought a mere trickle of trade goods from India and China to European markets. Instead, he stumbled upon the Americas—two continents previously unknown to Europeans, home to tens of millions of Native peoples whose civilizations would in time be swept aside by the conquering powers from across the Atlantic. There were riches in the Americas: gold, silver, and timber; rich fishing grounds off the coasts; endless lands where European settlers could grow cotton, rice, wheat, and corn; and pastures and plains where they could graze their sheep, cows, and horses. But for all the potential bounty of the

New World, the Americas also stood in the way of the realization of the European quest to find a waterborne trade route to Asia, to India and China—fabled and distant lands of silks and spices.

Nevertheless, the dream of what the European explorers called the “passage to India” proved hard to kill. It took new form in the belief that, somewhere, the American continents must be pierced by a water route—a strait, or perhaps a great inland sea that drained to both the Atlantic and the Pacific, or, failing that, a system of rivers that could be linked together by short portages where small boats could be carried across land from one body of navigable water to the next. For the next three centuries after Columbus’s landing in the New World, generation after generation of European explorers sought that elusive water route across the Americas.

In the course of the 16th century, Spanish and Portuguese explorers were able to establish that neither South nor Central America offered such a route. That left North America.