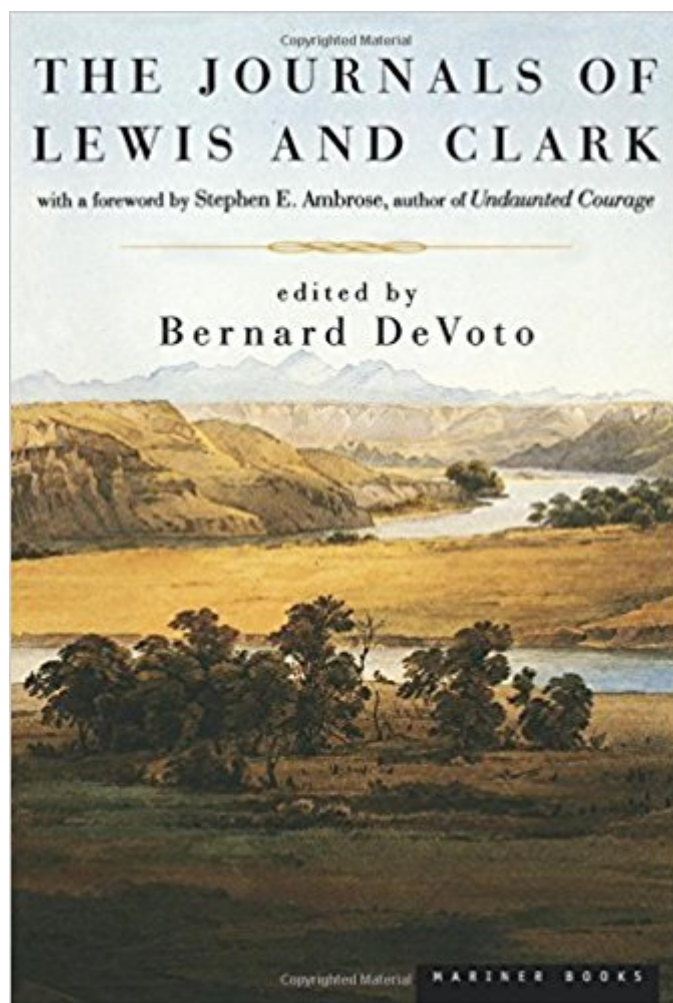


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The Journals Of Lewis And Clark (Lewis & Clark Expedition)



Synopsis

The Journals of Lewis and Clark are "the first report on the West, on the United States over the hill and beyond the sunset, on the province of the American future" (Bernard DeVoto). In 1803, the great expanse of the Louisiana Purchase was an empty canvas. Keenly aware that the course of the nation's destiny lay westward; and that a "Voyage of Discovery" would be necessary to determine the nature of the frontier; President Thomas Jefferson commissioned Meriwether Lewis to lead an expedition from the Missouri River to the northern Pacific coast and back. From 1804 to 1806, accompanied by co-captain William Clark, the Shoshone guide Sacajawea, and thirty-two men, Lewis mapped rivers, traced the principal waterways to the sea, and established the American claim to the territories of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Together the captains kept this journal: a richly detailed record of the flora and fauna they sighted, the native tribes they encountered, and the awe-inspiring landscape they traversed, from their base camp near present-day St. Louis to the mouth of the Columbia River, that has become an incomparable contribution to the literature of exploration and the writing of natural history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To me, the Lewis and Clark expedition ranks as one of the greatest voyages of discovery in human history. Because of the scientific and geographical discoveries that were made, it stands in significance alongside the travels of Marco Polo, the journeys of Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand

Magellan, and James Cook, and the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. This one-volume edition of Lewis' and Clark's masterpiece is outstanding in every way. Edited by the late Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Bernard DeVoto (1897-1955), it allows the reader to gain a fuller understanding of the Lewis and Clark expedition through the words of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark themselves. Lewis and Clark's expedition begins in 1804, taking the 33-person Corps of Discovery from St. Louis, Missouri to the Pacific Ocean and back again (a distance of over 8,000 miles). Among other things, it results in the initial exploration and mapping of the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest, and the description and classification of over 100 never-before seen species of flora and fauna. In addition, it dispells the myth of a northwest passage to the orient, and opens up the vast central and western regions of the continent to commerce with the United States. Captain Meriwether Lewis, the commander of the Corps of Discovery, is instructed by President Thomas Jefferson to keep a journal of the daily events, scientific observations, and measurements of latitude and longitude along the way. Both he and his co-commander, Captain (in reality Lieutenant) William Clark follow Jefferson's instructions, although not always faithfully. Lewis and Clark return from their 30-month long expedition as national heroes.

The introduction to this book, written by Stephen Ambrose, states that the Journals of Lewis and Clark are an American treasure. At first this seemed like hyperbole, but while reading the Journals, it became clearer why this statement was made. For in the Journals the reader sees in the mind's eye the vast prairies, indomitable mountains, wide, powerful rivers, and vast Pacific Ocean as Lewis and Clark saw them. Through the Journals the reader encounters Indian tribes, both friendly and fierce. At other times, the puzzling descriptions of previously unknown species of animals and plants give insight as to what discovery and exploration mean. This is what makes the Journals a national treasure. Reading the Journals gives the contemporary reader a sense of what it was like to look at the American West for the first time. In an era when there are precious few corners of the earth that have not been mapped, the Journals convey reader to a time when exploration was not only commonplace, but a necessity for national survival. The Journals of Lewis and Clark are not particularly easy to read at times if you are not accustomed to the reading genre of travel diaries. Also, at times, the terse writing style of William Clark made the Journal difficult to "plow" through. Merriweather Lewis' entries were much more readable, but his entries do not appear until after the first quarter or so of this edition. If you are a person who likes maps, the number of maps is low and the detail they provide is small. There may be other versions of the Journals out there that provide better maps. The commentaries provided before certain chapters that summarize the events

that the Journals are about to relate are very helpful in understanding the narratives that follow.

This would be, if I could do it, a two-part review. To the source material itself, the journals, I would award five stars out of five--six out of five, even, spelling errors and all, for it's absolutely superb stuff. I have read a fair bit in the adventure and exploration line of literature, but nothing as good as these journals for conveying what it felt like to be on such an expedition. Often, it is the little detail at the end of a day's entry that works the magic; for example, when you read several dozen times about the mosquitoes and gnats being "verry troublesome," or "exceedingly troublesome," it tells you something. As does Lewis's quiet contentment with a bellyful of fresh meat after a long and weary hike. And, as Stephen Ambrose notes in his moving and evocative foreword to this book, the fact that these are on-the-fly journal entries--not memoirs--means that the reader sees the good and the bad choices, the discovery that went on along the way. You will probably recognize at once, for instance, that not all grizzlies will be as easy to kill as the first one the corps encounters, but they don't know that, and you are there to read of their changing opinion of these bears as they meet more and more of them. So the raw material is first rate. The second part of my review would be for the editing, and I would give that four stars out of five. DeVoto, for all his erudition, does make something of a nuisance of himself from time to time. In the first place, he was clearly writing for the "Manifest Destiny" camp of historians--an outlook now taken with a few grains of salt. Here he is, for example, commenting on the earliest hostile encounter with an Indian tribe, "Indian bluster immediately collapsed and from then on the terrible Tetons were mere beggars.

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