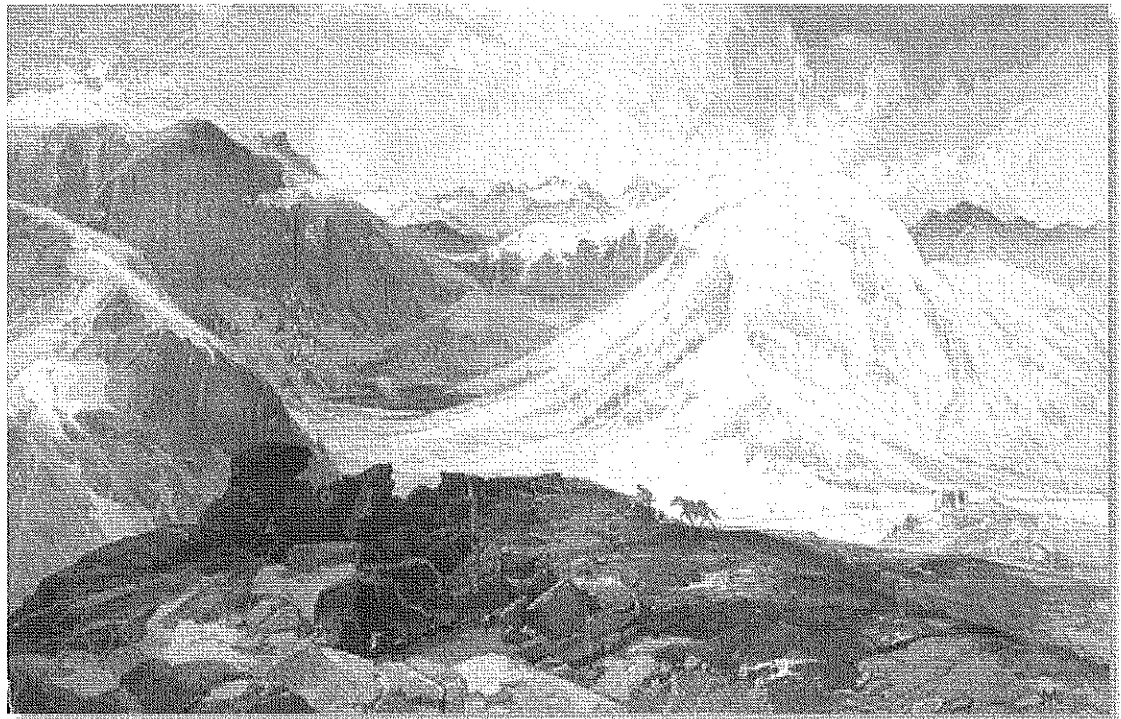


The Westward Journey of Lewis & Clark

President Thomas Jefferson wanted to know all about the Louisiana Territory (TAIR-uh-tor-ee), so he decided to send a group of men on an expedition (eks-puh-DISH-uhn) to explore this new land. Jefferson appointed Meriwether Lewis the leader of the expedition. Lewis chose the rest of his crew after first asking William Clark, an old army friend, to be his co-captain.

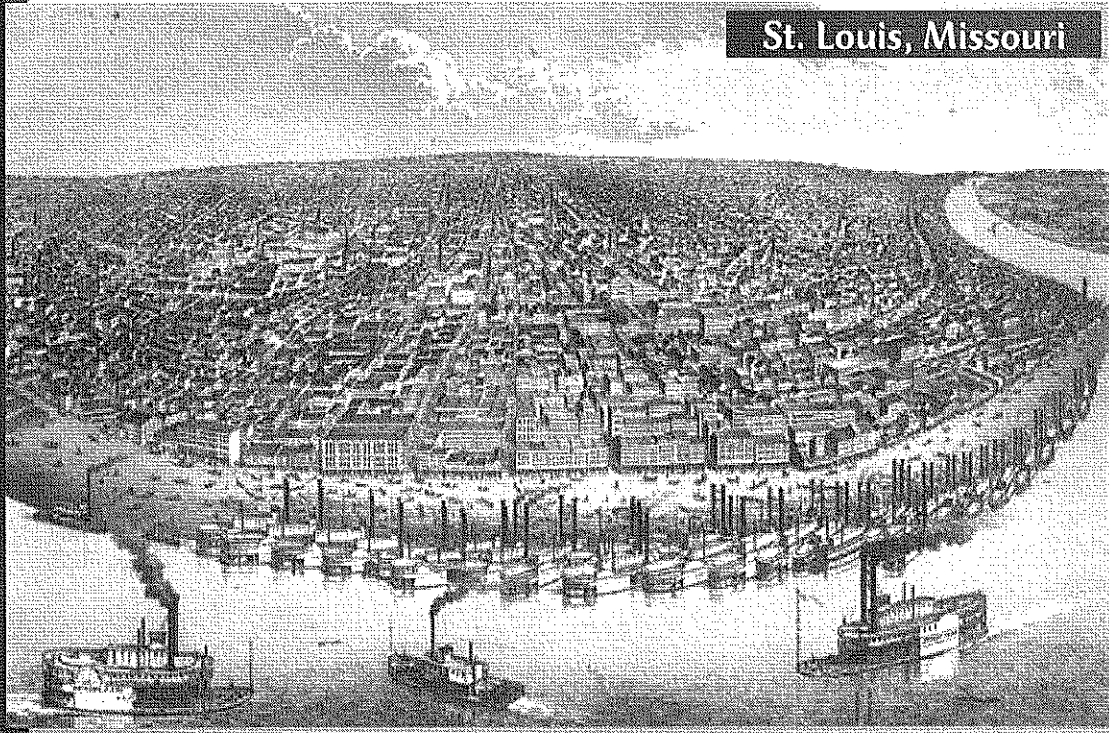


Lewis traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, in the winter of 1803–1804. There, he met his crew of about 40 men called the Corps (KORE) of Discovery. The men set up camp and spent months training. They built boats, exercised, and practiced shooting.

The Corps of Discovery began its journey on May 14, 1804. They planned to travel northwest along the Missouri River. This would lead them to the Rocky Mountains. There, they would cross a pass through the mountains. Rivers on the other side would take them to the Pacific Ocean.

Both captains kept journals in which they wrote about their adventures. They carefully recorded the weather and made maps of the land and the water. They described and illustrated all of the new plants and animals that they saw, including bison, coyotes, prairie dogs, and jackrabbits.

By November 1804, the crew reached what is now North Dakota. They befriended the Mandan Indians and decided to stay in one of their villages until spring. They built a camp called Fort Mandan. That winter the crew hired a new member named Toussaint Charbonneau. He was a fur trapper who lived with the Mandan people. His young Shoshone Indian wife, Sacagawea (suh-cah-guh-WE-uh), had just given birth to a baby boy. The two of them also joined the expedition.



In April 1805, the team set off again on the Missouri River. They started across the Rocky Mountain pass in September. The men had never seen such big mountains and had not realized how long the crossing would take. At last, the group made it to the other side of the Rockies. They built five new canoes, and they went down the Snake River into the area of land called Oregon. There, the river flowed into the Columbia River.

On November 7, 1805, the group was overjoyed when it saw the Pacific Ocean in the distance.

Comprehension Question

Why were the journals of Lewis and Clark important?