

Mapping and Lewis and Clark

Many European explorers, one of the earliest and most famous being Columbus, sought a water route from Europe to Asia that was more economical than sailing around Africa. As the New World was colonized, Americans and Europeans still used the traditional African route or sailed around the tip of South America. Both of these routes were slow, dangerous, and expensive, and the search for a water route to Europe and Asia became a search for a water route across North America, known as the Northwest Passage.

For hundreds of years, the fabled Northwest Passage inspired explorers as they tried to find a navigable route through North America. President Thomas Jefferson still envisioned such a water route when he instructed Meriwether Lewis, "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it's course & communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce" (DeVoto, 1953).

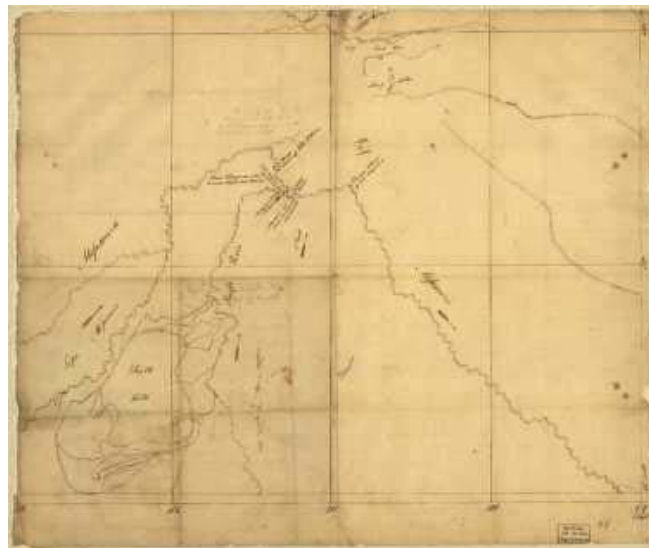
At the time of Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, maps were "rare, expensive, and available only to the leaders of society." The process required to make a map involved a great deal of time and skill, and most available maps actually were published in England or France (Ehrenberg, 2000). Jefferson made great efforts to ensure that Lewis and Clark had access to the most recent maps and exploration narratives of their time.

Many of the rare maps that shaped the plans of Jefferson and Lewis and Clark have been preserved. This web site presents some of those maps, as well as the map Clark produced after his journey, and later maps up until the present time. Some of the maps are from the Library of Congress and can be examined more closely by following the instructions in the next paragraph.

Instructions: To view a map from the Library of Congress more closely, click on the map. The Library of Congress page for that particular map will appear in the browser. Then, for a larger image, click on the map again. A new page will appear with instructions for changing zoom level and window size. Use the web browser's back command to return to this page.

Early Maps

The 1798 map shown below indicates that knowledge of the junction of the Heart and Missouri Rivers and the Mandan Villages was readily available to Lewis and Clark. However, west of that point details become less accurate.

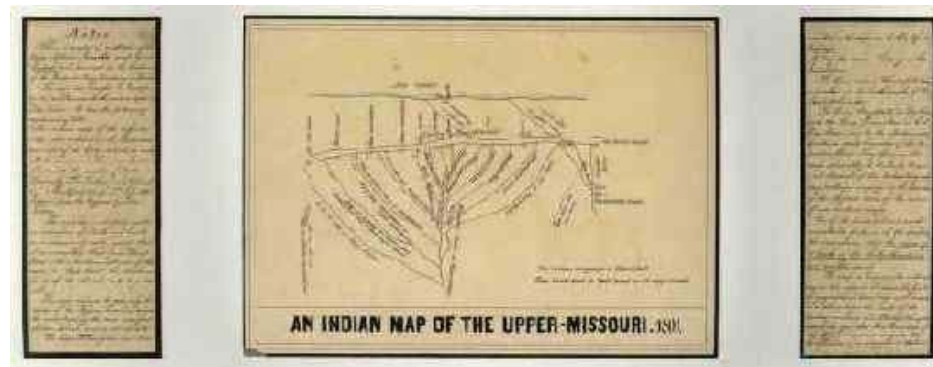


The north bend of the Missouri River, 1798.
Vicinity of the junction of the Missouri and Knife Rivers
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Two common misconceptions about North America's interior were that the headwaters of major rivers of the West were near each other and that the Rocky Mountains were just one or two ridges of low mountains (Bredenberg, 2000). Information gathered from early fur trappers, traders, and Native Americans often was misconstrued or taken too literally in order to support these optimistic misconceptions.

The map shown below was copied from information obtained from a Blackfoot chief. Maps such as this fueled hopes for a

navigable route across North America. However, the map represents the different needs, communication styles, and spatial concepts of the Native American cultures and was not meant to be taken as literally as it was by European explorers. For a discussion of such differences, visit **Indian Spatial Concepts: Time, Distance, and Direction** at http://www.lewis-clark.org/MAPTERRINCOG/nav_mti3.htm.



An Indian Map of the Upper-Missouri, 1801.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

The notes added to the above map show a glimpse of the time period in which the map was created. The notes were added after the map was created and indicate some knowledge of the Lewis and Clark journey because Fort Mandan is mentioned. However, the author does not seem to know the outcome of the journey.

Notes

This is a copy of a sketch of the Upper-Missouri — Branches made by an Indian and preserved in the archives of the Hudson's-Bay-Company in London.

The map was brought to Europe by the well know Northwestern explorer, Peter Fidler. It has the following explanatory title:

An Indian map of the different tribes, that inhabit on the East — and West side of the Rocky Mountains with all the rivers and other remarkable places, also the number of tents. —

Drawn by "The Feathers" or "Ackomock-Ki", a Blackfoot chief. 7th Febr. 1801.

Reduced from the Original by Peter Fidler.

The map has unhappily neither an indication of North and South nor a measure of miles, except that it is remarked, that from "Devil's Head" (the Northern extreme of the map) to "Owls Head" (the Southern point of the sketch) is 33 days travel.

The map appears to give only the names of the Mifsouri branches above the great bend of the river near Fort Mandan, which bend is not indicated.

The Indians names are given, as it is remarked on the map in the Blackfoot language.

Of 4 of the names Fidler gives the translation:

The River, where "Chesterfield house" is marked, is the South branch of the sKatschawan.

The River "Omokkatti" or Big River and the River "Punnokow" or Red Deer — River, may be the Northern and Southern great branches of the Columbia River. They flow on the map separately to the Pacific Ocean.

A student of the Indian Languages may perhaps recognize in the branches of the Mifsouri some of the rivers of our modern maps.

One of the principal and most remarkable features of the maps is the circumstance that the names of 11 peaks of the Rocky Mountains are marked on it.

The map is, however, also interesting in this respect: It shows the field of geographical Knowledge and perhaps in a certain degree the limits of the hunting excursion of a Blackfoot chief at about the year 1800. This Knowledge of the Mifsouri sources was greater than the information of our geographers at that time.

Map Used by Lewis and Clark

Lewis and Clark took the map displayed below with them. It represented the best knowledge available at that time but included the common misconceptions mentioned previously. The Rocky Mountains are represented on the map by just one ridge, and rivers, such as the Heart River, are shown to have their headwaters in the Rockies. The map indicates very little was known about the Missouri River.



Lewis and Clark map, with annotations in brown ink by Meriwether Lewis, tracing showing the Mississippi, the Missouri for a short distance above Kansas, Lakes Michigan, Superior, and Winnipeg, and the country onwards to the Pacific, 1803.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Clark's Map of 1810

Upon their return, Lewis and Clark ended the hope of a navigable water route across the continent via the Missouri River system. However, they brought with them knowledge of new lands and resources for the growing country. Clark used this knowledge to construct a new map of the West, which he completed in 1810. Information from William Dunbar's exploration of the Ouachita River, Thomas Freeman's Red River (of the south) expedition of 1806, James Wilkinson's expedition on the Arkansas River, Zebulon Pike's expeditions to the southern Rockies and upper Mississippi River, and the 1807-1808 exploration of the Yellowstone basin by former Corps of Discovery members George Drouillard and John Colter also was incorporated in Clark's map (To the Western Ocean, 1995).

The map was adapted and published by Samuel Lewis in 1814 and is shown below.



A map of Lewis and Clark's track, across the western portion of North America from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean: by order of the executive of the United States in 1804, copied by Samuel Lewis from the original drawing of Wm. Clark, 1814.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Atlas of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

Dr. Gary E. Moulton recently published a 13-volume set of books that include Clark's maps and the journals of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Patrick Gass, Joseph Whitehouse, and Charles Floyd. The first volume is titled **Atlas of the Lewis and Clark Expedition** and gathers all the known maps relating to the expedition. More information about the 13-volume set can be found by visiting the [University of Nebraska Press](http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/lewis_and_clark.html) web site, http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/lewis_and_clark.html.

Filling in the Spaces

Gradually, the geography of the West was filled in by explorers, surveyors, and the railroad.



Correct map of Dakota compiled from United States and Territorial surveys Nov. 1, 1882.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division



Official railroad map of Dakota issued by the railroad commissioners, November 1st, 1886.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division



Sectional map of the state of North Dakota published by authority of the commissioners of railroads under the direction of the governor; drawn and compiled from official maps of the General Land Office and other authentic sources, 1892
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Other Resources

The history of the mapping of North America can be explored further through a web site entitled [Exploring the West from Monticello: A Perspective in Maps from Columbus to Lewis and Clark](http://www.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/lewis_clark/home.html) from the University of Virginia, http://www.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/lewis_clark/home.html. The links below are for sections of that web site that were very informative and helpful in developing this web site. The information goes beyond the scope of this web site and is worth accessing for those interested in history and mapping.

[To the Western Ocean: Planning the Lewis and Clark Expedition](#)

[Observations of Latitude and Longitude at all Remarkable Points](#)

Another excellent resource is from the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Visit [Lewis & Clark Mapping the West](#)

at <http://www.edgate.com/lewisandclark/>.

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