

*Adventures on the American Frontier*

# EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Part Seven

Lewis and Clark Travel  
Up the Missouri River



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Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York



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ISBN: 978-088092-917-2

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York, on acid-free paper using vegetable-based inks at the Royal Fireworks facility.

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz  
Editor: Jennifer Ault  
Book and cover designer: Christopher Tice  
Audio and narration: Christopher Tice



16Feb21



By the time the United States of America was a new country, men had mapped the shape of North America. They had been all around the edges, except in the frozen northern regions. They knew how large the continent was, but there were great parts of the West where no white man had gone.



The country was still young when it suddenly grew to almost twice its size. The first boundaries of the United States were the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Mississippi River on the west, the Great Lakes in the north, and the Gulf of Mexico to the south. But in 1803, the United States bought a great piece of land in the West. It included the rest of the Mississippi Valley and the valley of the Missouri River.

The people wondered what the land was like. No one had a map of it. No one



knew how long the Missouri River was or where it started.

“Does it connect with the Columbia River?” people asked. The Columbia River is the largest river in the Pacific Northwest, flowing south from the Rocky Mountains in Canada. If the Missouri River connected with the Columbia River, then it would provide a pathway to the Pacific Ocean.

President Thomas Jefferson decided to send explorers up the Missouri River to find out.

In May, 1804, Captain Meriwether Lewis and his closest friend, Second Lieutenant William Clark, left St. Louis, Missouri, with forty-four men. They had a keelboat and two small boats loaded with food, tools, clothes, and gifts for the Native Americans they would meet along the way.

But traveling up the Missouri River meant going against the current, and it was not an easy job. Keelboats were the best boats to use to go upriver in those days, but it was hard work, and the men in Lewis



and Clark's expedition had to be strong.

Not far into their journey, travel became even harder than they had expected. The river was wild and the current fast.

"Hold her!" the pilot of the keelboat called to the boatmen who stood in rows on either side of the cabin. Each of them pushed his long pole into the river bottom and leaned hard against it. They were poling, pushing, and pulling the boat up the river, and they did not want to let it drift back even a foot.