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## THE LEWIS & CLARK CANOES ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER



Barbara Danielson photo

# *Sold Our Canoes* FOR A *Few Strands* OF *Beads*

**B**IRCH BARK CANOES constructed by northeastern Indian tribes revolutionized travel for 17th-century European explorers and entrepreneurs who ventured into the dense forests at the heart of the continent in search of mythical geographic passages and riches in furs. Early French explorers such as Samuel de Champlain quickly seized upon the importance of the Indian design that allowed light, maneuverable canoes to be paddled facing forward versus the early European attempts to row, facing backward, in heavy longboats on rapidly flowing

*ABOVE: This replica dugout canoe on display at Fort Clatsop approximates the size and form of the canoes Lewis and Clark constructed at Canoe Camp on the Clearwater River in 1805.*



BY ROBERT & BARBARA DANIELSON

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North American rivers. Utilization of the birch bark canoe was a singular factor that enabled Europeans to penetrate the vast northern continental interior. However, across the Great Plains in the West another solution to water travel was necessary as no tree produced bark that would sheath wood-frame canoes. (Exceptions to this were the small, flatwater cedar frame and Western white pine bark canoes—the so-called sturgeon-nosed canoes—used by some bands of the Kalispel, Kutenai, and Salish Indians.)

The answer to the problem was dugout canoes constructed entirely from single logs. This construction form reached its supreme level on the West Coast where Indians, freed from a migratory hunting and gathering economy primarily by a sedentary salmon economy (the resource came to them), were able to allocate time and human resources to the development of religion, arts, and the building of elegant, thin-walled, and ornamental canoes. Inland, however, the less stable economies required canoe building but in a more rude and practical form. It was this latter form of canoe building that the Lewis and Clark expedition adopted as they penetrated the last miles of what would become the American West.

CANOES WERE OBVIOUSLY essential for transporting expedition members, baggage, trade goods, guns, powder, lead, and scientific instruments on the waters of the Columbia River in order to reach their ultimate objective—the Pacific Ocean. But the canoes' importance in hunting and relations with the Indians as well as their role in strategic designs to return home may be less appreciated. Canoes were much more than wooden flotation devices. The way canoes were utilized on the Columbia River demonstrates once again that the two major elements contributing to the overall

success of the expedition were thorough advance planning and the ability to adapt when things did not go as planned. The Moulton edition of the journals of Lewis, Clark, Ordway, Gass, and Whitehouse is used here to make a definitive canoe inventory and to elucidate trade details for canoes, the handling of canoes at portages, and the fate of the expedition's canoes.

On October 7, 1805, the expedition—33 in number plus two Nez Perce chiefs, Shoshone guide Toby and his son, and Lewis's dog Seaman—resumed their journey by water from Canoe Camp near present-day Orofino, Idaho. For the first time, gravity and currents were in their favor as they traveled down the Clearwater River with about two tons of baggage in four large canoes and a "small pilot canoe." The size of the dugout canoes is never explicitly stated in the journals. The large canoes were probably 35 to 40 feet in length and the small canoe about 25 to 30 feet long. The canoes were constructed from ponderosa pine logs felled next to the river and laboriously formed by burning out the central cavities and shaping them with small hand tools. A clue to the mass of the large canoes may be found in the journal of Reverend Samuel Parker who followed Lewis and Clark down the Columbia River 30 years later. Scouting for mission sites in June 1836, he descended the Columbia in a large Indian canoe obtained at Fort Walla Walla and stated that 20 men were needed to carry it "on their heads and shoulders" around the rapids at "La Dalles." The dugouts used by Lewis and Clark may have been of similar size or perhaps even heavier.

Despite extremely rough water, rapids, falls, rocks on the rivers, severe winter storms in the Columbia River estuary, and numerous repairs, all of these ponderosa pine dugout canoes served the expedition well with no catastrophic failures. They were abandoned only when much lighter, more agile, Indian canoes



*Edward Curtis photo, taken at the Long Narrows c. 1910, of a Wishram canoe that resembles the canoe Lewis acquired below Celilo Falls. As the stern cannot be seen, it could be either a Cutwater or Chinook form.*



Edward Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society

became available, accidental losses occurred, or horses became the preferred mode of travel on the 1806 return journey.

It was a rough ride down the Clearwater and Snake rivers. By Captain William Clark's account they passed 39 rapids, 15 of which they labeled as "bad" on the Clearwater River; and 34 rapids, of which 9 were "bad," on the Snake River—a distance just short of 200 miles. The canoes took a battering over several of the worst rapids, but only on October 15, as they neared the confluence of the Snake and Columbia, was it necessary to portage some of the baggage. Nonetheless, the peril to the party and their canoes on the Columbia River tributaries was real and recognized. Clark wrote on October 13: "We should make more portages if the Season was not So far advanced and time precious with us." The Pacific Ocean was still far distant, but they felt they must reach their ultimate objective before winter. That meant taking risks and endangering their only mode of transportation as they passed through the treeless Columbia Plain.

**T**HE MID-COLUMBIA presented smoother sailing for the expedition, and for the next 122 miles after leaving the confluence they encountered only 12 rapids worth noting; 7 of them "bad," including the notorious "muscle shell" rapids (later known as the Umattilla Rapids). The day they passed this rapid, Private Joseph Whitehouse reported: "We found the day pleasant and the Navigation of the River easy, excepting at the Rapids several of which we passed... without any accident happening." But difficult passages lay ahead.

The first of the two major barriers to river travel between Canoe Camp and the lower Columbia was reached on October 22. All the baggage was unloaded and carried around the Great Falls of the Columbia (Celilo Falls, now submerged) on the north side and the empty canoes taken down the south side of the river the following day. Neither here nor at any other time is there any indication that any of the ponderosa pine canoes were actually lifted and carried—the wet weight of these vessels was simply too great. Sergeant Patrick Gass states: "We had to drag them 450 yards round the first pitch which is 20 feet perpendicular." They were then lined down the remainder of the narrow channel (temporarily losing one canoe) and paddled over to the camp on the river's north side. It was there, just below the present railroad bridge near the modern town of Wishram, that the first change was made in the little flotilla.

Captain Clark wrote in his first draft of October 23: "Exchanged our Small canoe for a large & a very new one built for riding the waves." He described it as "butifull of different Shape & Size to what we had seen above wide in the middle and tapering to each end... curious figures were cut in the wood." Clark added that the man who sold him the craft had himself "purchased it of a white man below for a horse... neeter made than any I have ever Seen and Calculated to ride the waves, and carry emence burdens, they are dug thin and are supported by cross pieces of about 1 inch diamuter..."

## LEWIS & CLARK and the End of the World



A play by Bryan Willis

**THURSDAY, MAY 5, 7 PM**

*Free program and free museum admission 5-8 PM*

The Washington State History Museum is pleased to present *Lewis & Clark and the End of the World* by Washington playwright Bryan Willis.

Just three years after his famous expedition across an uncharted continent, Meriwether Lewis, American hero, met an ignoble end. He spent his final night in a state of dejection and delirium, calling out for his old friend William Clark in a two-room "hotel."

In this play, his friend appears, and together they relive a panorama of experiences—the flash of a life before the eyes. What emerges is a portrait of two imperfect men whose powerful personal bond allowed for a fleeting greatness. Funny, heartwarming, and tragic, *Lewis & Clark and the End of the World* is a reflection on one of the most controversial events in early United States history; a tribute to the strength—and a reminder of the frailty—of the human spirit.

It was obviously a finely crafted canoe, far superior to their small pilot canoe. It seems strange that the owner, in an area where the Indians later often proved less than friendly, would part with it for a heavy, rudely made dugout canoe, a hatchet, and a few trinkets. The trades made for the expedition's Indian canoes on the return journey were perhaps even more one-sided, but this time in favor of the native traders.

Once again, nothing is specifically recorded about the dimensions of the Indian canoe and, despite being referred to as "large" by Clark on October 23, all future references to this canoe categorized it as a "small" one. Following is a more complete description of this canoe given by Captain Meriwether Lewis while the party was encamped at Fort Clatsop.

The Indian canoe was temporarily lost at Fort Clatsop on January 11, 1806, and Lewis wrote: "This will be a very considerable loss to us if we do not recover her; she is so light that four men can carry her on their shoulders a mile or more without resting; and will carry three men and from 12 to 15 hundred lbs."

At Fort Clatsop on February 1, Lewis described the four “forms” of canoes used by the Indians below the “grand chatarac” (Celilo Falls), and he used much the same words to describe the third and most common form: “[It] is usually 30-35 feet long, and will carry from two to twelve persons. 4 men are competent to carry them...say a mile without resting.” Clearly, this third form of canoe represents the canoe purchased at Celilo Falls. James Ronda identifies the form of this canoe in modern terms as a cutwater canoe. It differs from the oft-illustrated Chinook style, which has a vertical stern as compared to the gradually ascending stern of the cutwater Clark described on October 23, 1805.

Whether it was 30 to 35 feet long is debatable due to later characterizations, repeated and consistent, of its being “small.” Regardless, this canoe (probably constructed of western red cedar) would prove to be the canoe of choice in the following months for small hunting parties and rough water situations. Meriwether Lewis had made an excellent trade at Celilo Falls.

**T**HE EXPEDITION CONTINUED downstream from the falls on October 24, running the Short Narrows of The Dalles in the five loaded canoes—the non-swimmers walking with the valuables—and continuing on to the “Great Mart” (the center of trade in the Pacific Northwest) at the head of the Long Narrows. It was necessary to make a partial portage of a mile on the 25th, some carrying the valuables by the worst of the Long Narrows and others standing on shore with ropes in case of capsizing; but the dangerous narrows were navigated safely. The corps camped at Rock Fort (located now in the city, The Dalles) where trees once again appeared on the hillsides. Here they collected pine pitch to repair the canoes, dried the baggage, and hunted before proceeding down the gorge. The expedition resumed the voyage on October 28 and arrived at the Columbia River’s second great barrier to water travel—near the western end gorge—on October 30.

The Upper Cascades of the “Great Shute” (just down river of present-day Stevenson, Washington) was perhaps the most formidable barrier on the Columbia River and required that the canoes be unloaded and the baggage carried (the Indians also carried their canoes) at least half a mile. Joseph Whitehouse wrote on the 31st that they “took down two [large] canoes 1 at a time over high rocks on rollers, by main [man] strength and by being in the water which ran between Sd. [Starboard] Stone & large rocks.” On the following day Whitehouse reports that they carried all the baggage and took down “the other two large canoes, and th[e] Small [Indian] one.” According to Clark, the Indian canoe was carried around the “Great Shute” on November 1: “We set about taking our Small Canoe and all the baggage by land 940 yards of bad Slippery and rocky way.” They could carry the Indian canoe but struggled mightily with the others, using “rollers” or, as Clark described it, “we got the 4 large canoes over by slipping them over rocks on poles placed across from one rock to another, and at some places along partial streams

of river.” On November 2 they portaged the Lower Cascades (at the downstream end of “Brant Island,” present-day Bradford Island, at Bonneville Dam), and took the partially loaded canoes down one at a time—they were now past the last rapids and on tidewater. Unknown to the expedition, tidewater meant that they had only to descend about 9 vertical feet to the Pacific Ocean—9 feet left out of 7,373 feet at Lemhi Pass, where they had crossed the Continental Divide.

The men and canoes had taken another battering at the Cascades, but even more difficult times lay ahead at their ultimate westerly destination. It took six days to reach the broad estuary of the Columbia over relatively placid water. There they spent the next 18 days on the north side of the river in what is now the state of Washington, enduring terrible winter storms that inflicted severe blows to the ponderosa pine canoes. However, the two-month river voyage had not prepared the expedition with their four clunky dugouts and one Indian canoe for the “great fury” and “emence waves” of the Columbia estuary. The day after the first sighting of the “ocian” (November 7) at Pillar Rock, the “swells were so high and the canoes roled in such a manner as to cause several to be very sick.” The dugouts were not designed for the swells and waves encountered at the mouth of the Columbia River, and caution would be exercised as they made their way through waters the like of which no expedition member had ever experienced.

After cautiously coasting the perimeter of Grays Bay on the 8th, they found “the swells or waves so high that we thought it imprudent to proceed,” and they landed on the east side of Grays Point about 20 miles short of river’s mouth, remaining there until November 10. Once ashore their chief concern was for the canoes, but even so one sunk and three others filled with water as they lay pinned down on the open beach between masses of driftwood shifting in high tidewater and steep, densely vegetated hills. Clark wrote that the

*flood tide came in accompanied with emence waves and heavey winds, floated the trees and Drift which was on the point on which we camped and tossed them about in Such a manner as to endanger the Canoes verry much, with every exertion and the strictest attention by every individual of the party was scarcely sufficient to Save our Canoes from being crushed by those monerous trees maney of them nearly 200 feet long and from 4 to 7 feet through.*

One might expect the expedition’s enthusiasm for reaching the Pacific Ocean to be rapidly waning, but Clark goes on to say that the party “are cheerful and anxious to See further into the Ocian.” They hadn’t come over 4,000 miles to stop short now.

When the weather improved somewhat the next day, November 10, the expedition managed to inch toward the ocean along the shore for about nine miles until they were stopped short of present Point Ellice, which they graphically named Point Distress. Here they were again pinned down on another totally inhospitable piece of rugged shore. Their sole



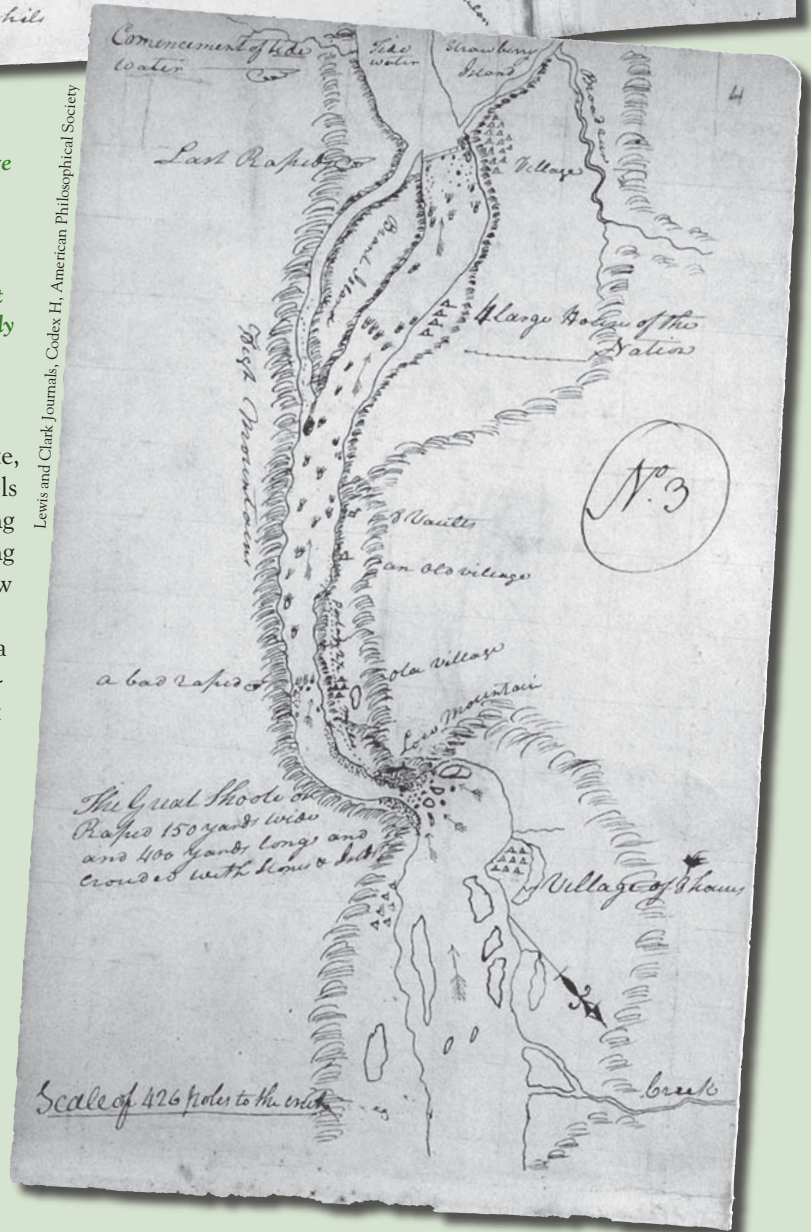
ABOVE: The Great Falls of the Columbia, later called Celilo Falls, drawn by Clark October 1805. The baggage portage is shown by the dotted line on the left and the canoe portage in the upper right hand corner.

RIGHT: The 1805 portage of the Upper Cascades is shown by the dotted line from the "Great Shoote" to just above "a bad rapid." The 1806 portage from the big eddy is marked "Portage 2 1/2 miles."

tactical objective became to reach a decent campsite, and that was only possible by canoe. Their vessels and skills, however, were not up to the task of taking on the violent waters of the estuary in the prevailing weather, but the local Indians soon showed them how it could be done.

At noon on the 11th, "5 Indians came down in a canoe, the wind very high from the S.W. with most tremendous waves brakeing with great violence against the Shores, rain falling in torrents...our canoes... at the mercy of the waves..." The Cathlamets were merely selling fish, not performing an act of bravado. Clark had only praise for them, "...certainly the best Canoe navigaters I ever saw."

**B**reakout from their terrible location became imperative. The next day three men attempted to round Point Ellice in the cutwater Indian canoe, which Clark described as being very similar to the canoe that had brought the five traders from across the estuary to their camp the day before. The attempt failed. Later that day they had to load and sink the canoes with rocks to "prevent their dashing to



pieces against the rocks....” The following day, November 13, Privates John Colter, Alexander Willard, and George Shannon were dispatched in the Indian canoe; they successfully rounded the point and located a good campsite a short distance downstream at what came to be called Station Camp, near present-day McGowan.

Now it was the dugouts’ turn. One of the dugouts was “much broken by the waves dashing it against the rocks” on November 14 but was successfully repaired. On the same day Lewis, hunter George Drouillard, and Privates Joseph Field, Reubin Field, and Robert Frazer set out in another dugout to round Point Ellice with five additional men who would return with the dugout while Lewis and his party struck out by land to determine if “any white men were below within our reach.” Lewis hoped—in vain, as it turned out—that they might find sea traders who could aid their cause. When they reached the Pacific they would reconnoiter the north side of the Columbia and the coast above it.

The dugout returned safely albeit half full of water. The next day, November 15, Clark attempted to pass Point Ellice in an unloaded dugout but was driven back by the violent waves. Undaunted, at mid afternoon the “wind lulled” and Clark had the dugouts “loaded in great haste and Set out, from this dismall nitich... proceeded on passed the blustering point below which I found a butifull sand beech.”

The main party remained at Station Camp, just east of present-day Chinook Point, until November 24. Lewis’s party returned from the vicinity of Cape Disappointment on November 17, and Clark took a party of 10 to the coast the following day to see more of the ocean. Both parties went by land, borrowing Indian canoes to cross the rivers feeding into Baker Bay.

**F**OLLOWING CLARK’S reconnaissance of the coast from Cape Disappointment to the vicinity of the modern town of Long Beach, he wrote in his journal on November 20 “...I employed Those Indians to take up [to Station Camp] one of our canoes which had been left by the first party that Came down...” It is evident that first party had stashed the cutwater canoe and left it unguarded for six days. Meanwhile, Indians had stolen Colter’s gig and basket on the 13th and the next night “stold both his [Shannon’s] and Willard’s guns from under their heads” while they slept. (All items were recovered.) Shannon told Clark the Indians below were “rogues” and clearly did not trust them, but nonetheless he had left their most valuable canoe unattended for six days. It seems likely that they had carried it beyond the reach of the eight-foot tides and hidden it; both Colter and Shannon were in Clark’s reconnaissance party and must have led Clark to its hiding place. Regardless, it was a risky move to leave the canoe unattended after the locals had demonstrated a proclivity for stealing, and it seems odd that the captains did not dispatch men to retrieve the canoe at an earlier date.

During their stay at Station Camp the decision was made to proceed to the south side of the Columbia River in search

of winter quarters. This move was based on the prospects for salt-making, an abundance of game, milder weather (compared to that upriver), and the possibility of a visit by a trading ship. Thus, on November 25 the expedition loaded the five canoes and proceeded upriver as the three-to-five-mile-wide estuary was too dangerous to navigate directly, although the Clatsops readily crossed “through emence high waves.” The corps encamped near Pillar Rock once again, crossed without incident where the river narrowed, and then descended the island-cluttered south shore to set up a base camp on Tongue Point (named Point William by Clark) on the 27th. During their landing, one of the pine dugouts “was split to [two] feet,” the last damage the canoes incurred on the Columbia prior to winter encampment.

On November 29 “Lewis and 5 men Set out in our Small Indian canoe” to hunt elk and locate a winter camp, “the swells and waves being too high for us to proceed down in our large Canoes, in Safty.” Elk were found to be abundant, and an appropriate camp site was found on the present-day Lewis and Clark River. By the end of 1805 Fort Clatsop was completed and the nearly three-month wait began, after which the weather would permit their return upriver. Now it was time for survival, trading, re-outfitting, journal writing, natural history observations, map making, strategic planning, and waiting in what seemed like eternal rain.

The canoes played an absolutely essential role in hunting and putting food on the table. During their time at Fort Clatsop several major changes occurred in the fleet. Sergeant Patrick Gass estimated that 131 elk were taken during the corps’ residence at Fort Clatsop, and probably most of the butchered animals, by far their main food and leather source, were retrieved and transported to the fort by water. Canoes were also used to move men partway to the salt-making camp on the Pacific Ocean and to travel upriver to trade for sturgeon, anchovies and wapato. The constantly wet, dense coastal rainforest made travel by land difficult at best, and whenever possible the men traveled by canoe.

Not all went well with the expedition’s canoes at Fort Clatsop, despite the apparent ease with which the Indians handled and maintained their large number of fine canoes in the face of powerful Pacific storms and tides. On January 11 the “Indian Canoe” was taken out by the tide and given up as lost on January 12. Lewis “lamented” the loss of this most valuable asset. However, it was recovered on February 5 with a whoop and celebratory gunfire from hunter Reubin Field. Another canoe, “one of the large perogues,” was temporarily lost for three hours when the tide broke the cord and carried it away. Lewis wrote that “had we lost this perogue also we should have obliged to make three small ones, which... would be a serious undertaking.” Here and on November 29 Lewis reintroduces the term “perogue,” applying it to watercraft very unlike those they had used on the Missouri River. The January 14 entry by Lewis also explicitly establishes that they had a total of four “perogues,” confirming that none of the large pine

dugouts had been lost or damaged beyond repair prior to their arrival at Fort Clatsop.

The meaning of the word “perogue” (actually pirogue—Lewis’s spelling is retained here) has been much debated. Clearly, the meaning varied among expedition members and changed with time. On the Columbia only Lewis used the term. Clark referred to all vessels as canoes, even when copying Lewis’s entries at Fort Clatsop in which Lewis used “perogue.” Although Lewis sometimes collectively referred to all vessels as canoes, at other times he referred to the large pine dugouts as perogues and all Indian watercraft as canoes. The other journal writers differentiated as to size by using the adjectives “large” and “small” (or “light”) for the canoes. Thus, almost all references on the Columbia River to either a large canoe or perogue refer to the dugouts constructed on the Clearwater River.

Following a detailed February 1 description of the four types of Indian canoes used on the Columbia River, Lewis stated that “they [Indians] prize their canoes very highly; we have been anxious to obtain some of them, for our journey up the river but have not been able to obtain one as yet from the natives in this neighborhood.” Acquiring “some” Indian canoes developed into part of the overall return travel strategy as Lewis expressed it on April 2 at present-day Washougal:

*... to exchange our perogues for canoes with the natives on our way to the great falls of the Columbia or purchase such canoes from them for Elkskins and Merchandize as would answer our purposes. These canoes we intend exchanging with the natives of the plains [Columbia Plateau tribes] for horses... as will enable us to travel altogether by land.*

CANOES HAD BECOME more than just a means of travel—they were also thought of as a way to facilitate the transition to land travel to reach the Nez Perce, who were looking after the expedition’s horse herd, in time to cross the Rocky Mountains by early June and reach St. Louis in 1806.

Canoe problems continued at Fort Clatsop when two perogues were damaged by the tide on March 3. A more serious problem arose on March 11 when a perogue sank and was lost in the Netul River (now called the Lewis and Clark River). Searches were made for the perogue on March 11, 12, and 13, but it was given up as lost and never recovered. Also on March 11 Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor briefly lost their cutwater Indian canoe when it drifted away while he was trading upriver with the “Cathlahmahs” (Cathlamets). He borrowed a canoe from the Indians to return to Fort Clatsop; on his return he found the errant canoe and secured it for later retrieval. George Drouillard, one of the ablest men of the party, recovered it on March 17.

The possible loss of two canoes on March 11 as well as the approach of April 1, the proposed departure date, may have precipitated the active pursuit of additional Indian canoes. On March 13 Drouillard was sent to “the Clatsop village to purchase a couple of their canoes if possible.” The Clatsops,

*The Columbia River below Celilo Falls where a railroad bridge pier now rests on the small island in the center of the channel. The 1805 baggage portage ended at the far right, near the base of the hill; the canoe portage is upstream, not visible in the photo.*



however, proved to be tough traders. Drouillard returned the next day with the Clatsops who brought “an indifferent canoe,” which they refused to trade for Lewis’s “laced uniform coat”—the expedition’s best trade item (besides guns). A second Clatsop canoe was brought for trade on March 15, but once again no deal could be struck, even for the artilleryist’s coat. Private Joseph Whitehouse wrote that Drouillard was dispatched on the same day to the Cathlamet village to purchase a canoe.

On Monday, March 17, Drouillard returned not only with the Celilo Falls cutwater Indian canoe that Pryor had stashed, but also with a “Cathlahmah” canoe acquired in trade for Lewis’s uniform coat and half a carrot (a spindle-shaped bundle of rolled and twisted tobacco). Now they had sold off one of their most valuable items; Lewis realized that for the Indians “a canoe... is an article of the greatest value except a wife... we yet want another canoe...” Clark continued, “As the Clatsops will not sell us one, a proposition has been made by one of our interpt [interpreters] and sever[al] of the party to take one in lieu of 6 elk which they stole from us this winter.”

The meat of six elk shot by Drouillard had been taken on February 6 by Clatsops who than brought back three dogs as “renumeration” on February 12; but the dogs ran off. On February 22 Drouillard went to the Clatsop village “to get the dogs which the Clatsops have agreed to give us in payment for the Elk they stole...” and returned on February 24 with two dogs. This was not quite the end of it, for on March 18 Whitehouse writes, “Our officers sent 4 men... in order to get a small Canoe which belonged to the Clatsop Indians. They returned in the Evening with the Canoe.” This canoe was the one used by Reubin and Joseph Field and Drouillard when the expedition ascended the Columbia River. Indeed, it may be that Drouillard was the “interpt” who suggested, according to Clark, that they steal the canoe. In any event, they had already received two dogs for the elk, and on March 24, when confronted by the canoe’s “Cathlahmah” owner on the Columbia River, they paid him an elk skin for it. In their haste to return upriver they were in no mood to argue the fine points of a questionable acquisition.

**O**N MARCH 22 Drouillard and the Fields brothers left Fort Clatsop in a small Indian canoe as an advance hunting party to a camp beyond Point William (Tongue Point). The homeward voyage had begun. The next day Sergeant Gass wrote, “We were employed... in dividing and packing up our loading; and distributing it among the canoes, which were five in number, three large and two small... at 1 o’clock, left fort Clatsop.” Thus the canoe inventory on March 23 at the beginning of “our homeward bound journey” was three small Indian canoes and three large pine dugouts, or “perogues.” From the Columbia River estuary to the Long Narrows of The Dalles the perogues served as freight and passenger vessels while the light, maneuverable Indian-made canoes carried parties of two to four for hunting, gathering pitch, and short recon-



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naissances. The exception to this pattern was when Clark and eight men explored six miles up the Multnomah (now Willamette) River in a single dugout.

Once on the Columbia River, Lewis and Clark were initially satisfied that they had enough canoes—they were offered one for sale on March 23 by a party of Chinooks, but the captains declined, “being already supplied...” However, on April 1 they had a change of heart and tried to purchase a canoe for six fathoms (36 feet) of white wampum beads, but the deal was quickly cancelled by the Indian seller. Maybe this was just too good a deal for Lewis to refuse, or perhaps it represented a change in strategy as expressed the following day at present-day Washougal (Provision Camp). Thinking ahead to when they would retrieve their horses from the Nez Perce, Lewis wrote of their plan to exchange dugouts for canoes and canoes for horses so that they could travel by land. “A large stock of horses” would be necessary to transport their baggage over the mountains and would also serve as a “certain resource for food.” The hungry westward passage over the Bitterroots had not been forgotten.

It appears likely that the strategic plan to acquire horses at the earliest opportunity had already been decided upon at Fort Clatsop. (No horses were found by the expedition or later explorers below the White Salmon River, 170 miles upriver from the mouth of the Columbia.) The descent of the Columbia and Snake rivers by canoe in the fall of 1805 had been an expeditious, if risky, way to travel. But ascending the same waters in the spring freshet was an entirely different proposition. Clark would no doubt have been reminded



*Wanapum canoe near Priest Rapids, 1951 (Wanapum boy is Willy Buck). The mid-Columbia Indian dugout canoes lacked the elegant bow and stern features of the lower Columbia canoes and resembled the expedition's Clearwater canoes.*



of the 80 or more rapids they had passed as he prepared his maps at Fort Clatsop.

**A**PRIL 9 FOUND the expedition at the foot of the Lower Cascades, with Drouillard and the Field brothers on the north side of the river in the “smallest canoe” (the stolen one) and the rest of the party camped on the south side with the other five vessels. The next morning the dugouts were taken across the south channel to Brant (Bradford) Island, towed upstream a quarter mile past the lower rapids and paddled to the north shore. Sergeant Pryor and Private John Collins followed in the two Indian canoes after collecting “rosin” for “paying” the canoes. All the loaded canoes were then towed up to the end of the portage (a distance of about two miles) one at a time.

Drouillard’s canoe went first. Once unloaded, according to Gass, it suffered a broken elk “chord” and was swept downstream below the Lower Cascades. There it was caught and returned to the portage by Indians who were rewarded with two knives. The corps lined the other canoes “to the lower end of the portage of the big Shoote and unloaded in the large eddy... and carried all the baggage on the top of the hill, and Camped.” The “large eddy” is at the site of historic Fort Rains and the steamboat “Middle Landing” and about two miles above the November 1, 1805, camp. The beginning of this long portage was well downstream of the 1805 portage of 940 yards. The 1806 portage was variously estimated at 2,800 yards, one and a half or two and a half miles.

The whole next day, April 11, was spent taking the three Indian canoes and two of the perogues from the beginning of the portage to the island campsite of October 30 and 31, 1805, and the April 12, 1806, camp above the “big Shoote” (Upper Cascades). The river was in partial flood stage, “up to 20 feet higher” than when they had descended in the fall. This made the portage long and required them to line the perogues and two of the Indian canoes for the entire five mile distance. Drouillard’s small Indian canoe was carried along the portage trail and the others were lined up with “great toil and danger” by 22 men, with additional help from the local Indians, for a distance of three miles.

Ordway described how the second dugout was brought up: “This large canoe filled twice with water at the worst pitch but with some difficulty and hard fatigue got them Safe up towards evening by the assistance of a number of Indians at the worst pitch & C. and halled the large canoe up by force although She was full of water.” The men were too “much fatiequed” to bring up the third perogue; nonetheless Drouillard and the Field brothers were sent ahead to “Crusatte’s river” (now called Wind River) to hunt and await the rest of the party. It had been a tough day.

In the rain the next morning Lewis and “every man that could be of any service” attempted to take the third perogue above the Cascades from the large eddy:

*In hawling the perogue around this point the bow unfortunately took the current at too great a distance from the rock, she turned her side to the stream and the utmost exertions of all the*

*Edward Curtis photographed this Indian canoe a few miles above the Cascades of the Columbia (c. 1910) where Lewis traded for two canoes to replace the loss of a Clearwater perogue in April 1806.*

*party were unable to resist the force with which she was driven by the current, they were compelled to let loose the cord and of course both perogue and cord went a drift with the stream.*

No attempt was made to recover the craft. Lewis looked ahead and figured that the loss would “compel us to purchase one or more canoes of the Indians at an extravagant price.” Putting the loss of a second Clearwater dugout behind them, they set out to carry the baggage over the portage. About 22 men (“all hands”) each carried four loads of baggage, which may have totaled between 3,000 and 4,000 pounds. This they distributed in the four available canoes (Drouillard was upriver hunting) on April 13 and set out, but they quickly realized that the heavy loads rendered the “vessels extremely inconvenient to manage and in short rather unsafe...” As he had done so often in the past, Lewis calmly understated a precarious situation.

Lewis set about resolving the canoe shortage by crossing the river to an Indian village in the vicinity of present-day Cascade Locks. He traded two robes and four elk skins (Ordway says two pieces of blue cloth and two elk skins) for two canoes. In addition, he acquired four paddles and three dogs for some deerskins. The price was much lower than the Chinooks and Clatsops had demanded at the mouth of the Columbia. Now fully outfitted with five Indian canoes and two perogues, the corps headed upriver toward the next barrier to river travel with Ordway in charge of the two new canoes (it was his perogue that had been lost).

ARRIVING AT Rock Fort on April 15, Lewis and Clark began to fulfill their overall travel strategy to acquire horses so they could travel by land. At eight o'clock the next morning Clark crossed the river to the area known as Rockport and commenced trade negotiations for horses. However, the Indians were not to be rushed into any trades for horses. After his unsuccessful bartering attempt at Rockport, Clark moved up to the head of the Long Narrows—the “Great Mart” and the main Wishram-Wasco village. On November 17 Clark set out his “merchandise” on a rock and was open for business. The dealing was tough; the prices were high. However, by the end of the day the party



Edward Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society

had acquired four horses, and Clark had notified Lewis back at Rock Fort of the local Indians’ great reluctance to trade for horses. Sending word to Clark to double the price offered for horses, Lewis reckoned they would need 12 horses to carry all the baggage, and he set his men to making 12 pack saddles. Lewis was still confident that they could trade Indian canoes for horses once they reached the “Mussel shell rapid where horses are more abundant and cheaper.”

On April 18 Lewis set out up the river to the Threemile Rapids (as named by latter-day steamboaters and located below The Dalles Dam) where they unloaded the canoes and dugouts, made a portage of 70 paces, lined the vessels up the rapids, reloaded (one “canoe” was split and its baggage carried, according to Gass), and proceeded on to the Big Eddy (behind The Dalles Dam near present-day Spearfish Lake) to camp. The Long Narrows was in flood, and Lewis judged conditions too “formidable” to pass either “up or down them in any vessel.”

The next day they planned to portage the entire two-mile length of the Long Narrows, but they could not take the two “perogues” any farther—presumably because they were too heavy to carry and the water too wild to line them. So the dugouts became firewood, a commodity in short supply now that they had reentered the Great Columbia Plain. At this point the expedition was totally dependent on Indian canoes and horses for hauling their baggage and any personnel unfit to walk.

On April 19, with the aid of the four horses Clark had purchased, the baggage was transported past the still intact pictograph, "She Who Watches" (which they didn't notice), to the head of the Long Narrows. The five Indian canoes were taken out of the water, partially dried to lighten them, and carried to the Wishram village near present-day Horsethief Lake State Park (not to be confused with the railroad town of Wishram). They began the portage at three in the afternoon. It was no small matter to carry the five canoes. As Clark wrote, "All hands brought over the Canoes at 2 lodes which was accomplished by 5 P.M." This was the only time that all five of the Indian canoes were actually carried. During this day and the one following, the increasingly serious game of trading underwent a major change.

Lewis and Clark managed to acquire five additional horses on April 19, but at a high cost. They were forced to trade three kettles which left them only an absolute minimum number to cook with for the remainder of the voyage. Still short of horses, Clark led an advance party upriver from the head of the Long Narrows to the site of a Tenino village just below the Great Falls of the Columbia (Celilo Falls) to acquire more horses. By this time Lewis was becoming frustrated at the difficulty of the trading and severely "reprimanded" Alexander Willard when he lost one of the horses.

Lewis's patience wore even thinner the next day when it was discovered that the Indians had "pilfered six tomahawks and a knife" and he found that further attempts to trade for horses were futile. He had acquired only two "indifferent horses for which I gave an extravagant price." The canoes he had so counted on exchanging for horses proved to be nearly worthless. He decided to take the ten horses they had acquired and two canoes loaded with the baggage that the horses couldn't carry and proceed upstream to bargain with perhaps more cooperative Indians. As for the other three fine Indian Canoes: "I barded my elkskins old irons [perhaps his branding iron, etc.] and two canoes for beads." Beads! The third canoe "for which they would give us but little I had cut up for fuel." The next morning he ordered "all the spare poles, paddles and the balance of our canoe put on the fire as the morning was cold and also that not a particle should be left for the benefit of the Indians."

**W**HILE LEWIS WAS experiencing limited horse-trading success and near unlimited frustration with the Wishrams, Clark fared even worse with the Teninos, albeit under more civil circumstances. On the 20th he displayed all his wares, which included "a blue coat, Callico shirt, a handkerchief, 5 parcels of paint a Knife, a wampum moon, 4 braces of yellow beads...my large blue blanket, my Coat Sword & Plume." He went on: "I used every artifice decent & even false Statements to induce those pore devils to Sell me horses." But that day he got none.

The next morning he admitted defeat and just waited for the arrival of Lewis and the remainder of the party. At the

same time, after burning the last particle of the canoe, Lewis departed the Wishram village to join Clark below the Great Falls. The two remaining canoes were "loaded heavily" and Sergeant Gass and three men took them upriver from the head of the Long Narrows. With "some difficulty" they passed the Short Narrows and arrived at the Great Falls after a five-hour upstream struggle of six miles. Lewis and his men joined them, and the full party of the expedition, now reunited, portaged around the Great Falls, carrying the baggage and the two canoes. The expedition camped above the falls on the north shore after sending the two canoes on ahead to the vicinity of present-day Deschutes River—Patrick Gass and Reuben Field in one, John Colter and John Potts in the other. That two men could navigate each loaded canoe upstream indicates how light and maneuverable these Indian canoes were.

On April 22, still deficient in horses, the land party continued walking along the river's edge, making sure they came in contact with all the Indians possible in order to trade for horses, dogs, Shappelell (cous—a native tuberous root), and wood. The land and water parties were not united again until April 23 at the camp near present-day Rock Creek, the site of a large Tenino village. Here they had a pleasant evening, the first in a long time, with smoking, violin playing, and dancing. To add to the occasion, "the natives promised to barter their horses with us in the morning we...hope that we shall be enabled to proceed by land from hence with the whole of our party and baggage."

They arose early on April 24 in anticipation of a successful day of trading and the hope of being able to proceed unhindered to the Nez Perce villages and the mountain trail back to the United States. Having purchased three horses and hired three more (for a total of 22), they were able to cease their laborious canoe travel up the Columbia River. Lewis wrote, "The natives had tantalized us with an exchange of horses for our canoes...but when they found we had made our arrangements to travel by land they would give us nothing for them... Drewyer struck one of the canoes and split off a small piece with his tomahawk...they offered us several strands of beads for which were accepted." The Teninos had bargained in good faith, knowing that once the expedition was committed to traveling by land their canoes had little or no value. In response to the residual frustration of the failure of the grand strategic trading plan, the hard bargaining positions of the Indians downstream, and the hardships endured by the tight-knit party, Lewis demanded and got at least a small victory. They were loaded up by two o'clock in the afternoon and with "6 fathoms of white beads" in their packs they "proceeded up the river between the hills and its North shore," continuing the homeward journey by land across the barren Columbia plain.

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# LEWIS & CLARK IN COLUMBIA RIVER COUNTRY



Portion of 1803 map of northwestern territories, untitled, by Nicholas King. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C.

# LEWIS & CLARK IN COLUMBIA RIVER COUNTRY



Portion of the 1806 map by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, titled "Map of part of the continent of North America: whereon is laid down the Missouri... and the Columbia Rivers, from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean." Courtesy of Boston Athenæum.