

## II. Main Event

If Pittsburgh was a main staging point for the Lewis and Clark Expedition (Chapter 1 of two weeks ago) with much of future material needs coming together there from east of Western Pennsylvania, Camp Dubois, which was on the Wood River above St. Louis, and near the mouth of the Missouri River, was the beginning of the Main Event. The time spent in between Pittsburgh and Camp Dubois in 1803, and at Camp Dubois during the 1803-04 winter, was the period of assembling an able Corps of Discovery.

Thereafter, important scientific observations concerning new flora and fauna become a big story thread, which, along with mapping the west, and interactions with the Indian Nations, became the Main Event. Chapters to come will have more to say about The Corp of Discovery keelboat, the Corps itself, maps, salt, and Indian Nations. Here, about flora and fauna of the new west.

By onset of winter of 1804-05, the Corps of Discovery and keelboat had ascended the Missouri River as far as the Mandan villages near what is today Bismarck, North Dakota. On April 7, 1805 the keelboat was sent back to St. Louis with data, Indian objects, plant specimens, zoological specimens, minerals, four live magpies, a prairie dog and a prairie sharp-tailed grouse, all meant for delivery to President Thomas Jefferson. This marked the end of the keelboat's useful life with the Expedition. A 32-person Corps continued up the Missouri without it, in the two original pirogues that accompanied the keelboat, and six dugout canoes.

Two animals survived alive all the way through Washington to the Peale Museum in Philadelphia, a magpie and a prairie dog; the prairie sharp-tailed grouse succumbed along the way. Of even greater scientific significance is the survival of 122 new, formal, vertebrate animal descriptions, which have been indexed by Paul Russell Cutright (see below). Included among these species and subspecies are 65 from west of the Continental Divide. Among the 122 are Lewis's Woodpecker and Clark's Nutcracker.

Cutright's book also contains an index of 178 newly described (formally at the time, that is) plants, of which 140 are from west of the Continental Divide. Specimens from east of the Divide were lost to flooding of a Missouri River cache at Great Falls during the winter of 1805-1806. More than 200 dried and preserved specimens are today housed at Lewis and Clark's Herbarium at The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University.

The Main Event generated incomparable data before the wave of white European stock destroyed that moment's picture forever. To get the data, and bring it home to Mr. Jefferson, required both the Jefferson/Monticello Library-homeschooled observer that was Meriwether Lewis, first of all, and William Clark as willing partner. However, that, as Jefferson knew, was not enough. It required the frontier skills of the two captains and the rest of the Corps, ever attending to the issue of feeding the Corps in difficult lands, surviving while on the move much of the time. Salt as preservative was a critical

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on 8/04/21.

need; keeping it in supply symbolizes the attention of the captains to all the little and large things, all that was sustenance and all that was science, and all of which made the Lewis and Clark Expedition the incredible success that it was.

That piece for another time, but for now here is another bibliographic resource, one not already mentioned in the preceding Jefferson articles (archived at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org>): Cutright, P.R., "Lewis & Clark: Pioneering Naturalists," Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press (1989). It's in the WLN on-line catalogue.

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