



# the expedition of Lewis & Clark

## CROSSING THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

*A cold, hungry and dangerous trek  
across the mountains*



While on hunting, Private John Colter came upon three Nez Perce Indians and brought them into the camp that afternoon. The Nez Perce man said his people lived on a plain on the Columbia River just over the mountains. From his village, he told Lewis, the expedition could navigate all the way to the sea by canoe. This was great news. To get to the Nez Perce village « would require five sleeps which is six days travel, to reach his relations... » This also sounded good news to Lewis.

Having so far escaped the Lakota, mosquito and grizzly attacks, a horrendous portage, illness and exhaustion, the Corps of Discovery started the hard part of the journey. On September 11, 1805, the expedition began to climb « the most terrible mountains » Patrick Gass wrote, « that I ever beheld. »

It began to snow and continued to snow all of September 16 until an accumulation of eight inches. The expedition was not dressed or equipped for a snowstorm.

By September 18, the Corps' remaining provisions were a small amount of bear oil, a little portable soup and 20 pounds of candles. To fill the deepening void in their guts from days without food, some of the men ate candles. Because candles in those days were made of animal fat, this hard culinary choice was not without its nutritional benefits.

On September 20, Clark's party was the first to stagger out of the mountains onto an upland plain. They could see many Nez Perce lodges in the distance, which they moved toward.

Lewis and the rest of the men staggered down from the mountains the following day, September 21. The only things on their minds were food, more food and rest.

**Sammye J. Meadows, Jana Prewitt**  
Lewis and Clark for Dummies, 2003.

### CROSSING THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

1. When they talk with a member of the Nez Perce tribe, what does Lewis learn about crossing the mountains?
2. Was it supposed to be a complicated trek?
3. Finally, what happened to the expedition members?
4. How did they manage not to starve?
5. Finally, when do they get out of the snowy mountains? What is their physical condition?



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