

OCEAN IN VIEW!

« O! the joy »



Carried along by the river's breakneck current, the corps rode the Clearwater. They reached the Snake River on October 10, the Columbia six days later. There the Americans paused to rest and meet Indians who had gathered along the shore; in one village Clark estimated there were 10,000 pounds (4,500 kilograms) of dried salmon. Then the explorers headed down the Columbia, portaging around the river's roughest spots in the Cascades, the last mountain range between them and the Pacific.

Upon reaching a wide body of water Clark waxed momentous—prematurely. On November 7 he thought they had reached the Pacific: "Ocean in view! O! the joy," he wrote in his journal. But they were actually at the estuary of the Columbia—still 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the coast. Fierce Pacific storms, rolling waters, and high winds pinned them down for three weeks—"the most disagreeable time I have experienced," Clark wrote.

But by the middle of November they made it to the Pacific. Eagerly the men scanned the gray, rolling waves of the ocean for the masts of a ship that could carry them home. Eventually, though, they resigned themselves to spending the winter on the coast.

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FORT CLATSOP

Winter on the west coast

On November 24, 1805, when the expedition reached the place where the Columbia River emptied into the Pacific Ocean, the captains held a vote among all the members to decide where to settle for the winter. Sacagawea's vote, as well as the vote of the Clark's manservant York, were counted equally with those of the captains and the men. As a result of the election, the Corps stayed at a site near present-day Astoria, Oregon, in Fort Clatsop, which they constructed and inhabited during the winter of 1805-1806.

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1. What happened on November 7 1805?
2. When did they actually reach the ocean? Explain the weather conditions in these last miles.

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3. What did they do when they reached the Pacific ocean?
4. Why was this moment very symbolic?
5. What was their decision?