

In the year 1804 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, along with twenty-nine hand-picked followers, were camping on the Missouri River. Lewis and Clark were being sent by President Jefferson to explore the vast stretch of land lying west and north of the Mississippi River. They were trying to find an interpreter to accompany them and translate for them among the Indians to the north and west.

The interpreter Lewis and Clark wanted was a man named Charbonneau who was part French and part Indian. Charbonneau had a young Indian wife named Sacagawea. By birth Sacagawea belonged to the Shoshone tribe. She had been captured in a raid by enemy Indians and sold into captivity as a slave. It was said that her husband had won her as a prize in a gambling game.

Wherever he got her, it was plain that Charbonneau did not want to lose her. He insisted that she go with him on the long trip. And so Sacagawea and her baby joined the expedition.

They had only traveled a short distance when Sacagawea won the gratitude of Lewis and Clark. The expedition had come by boat to the upper reaches of the Missouri River. Sacagawea was riding in the lead canoe with her baby. In the same canoe were the expedition's vital supplies. A squall struck without warning and the canoe keeled over dangerously. Charbonneau, who was guiding the craft, completely lost his head. Amid wild shouting the boat all but capsized.

Although Sacagawea had herself and her baby to save, she was also aware of the importance of the lead canoe's equipment. With extraordinary courage and quick thinking

she managed to snatch the most precious papers and supplies just as they were washed overboard.

That night in his journal, Clark acknowledged the group's tremendous debt to the Indian woman. Had their equipment been lost in the river, the expedition would have had to turn back. The delay might well have cost the United States the lands of the far northwest, for Great Britain had her eye on them also.

Sacagawea proved indispensable to the expedition in other ways. She knew where to find the hidden foods of the unexplored lands—wild artichokes, carrots, and potatoes. She knew how to break and boil the shank bones of elk and other wild animals to extract the nourishing marrow. All this was of the greatest value since men living too long on unbroken diets of salt fish, jerked meat, and rough bread become too sick and weak to travel.

Perhaps the most important of all Sacagawea's abilities was her keen sense of direction. She would look at a row of distant mountains that appeared to the others as only a jagged ridge of blue and, as if by instinct, she would know just where the hidden passes lay. Streams and rivers also yielded to her the secret of their distant sources.

After many weeks of travel, Sacagawea found herself once again in the land of her childhood. Though the band had reached Shoshone country, they saw no signs of any Indians.

One day Clark saw moccasin tracks in a damp place on the trail. They knew then that the Indians were nearby. But still they did not see any of them.

Sacagawea suggested that they make a fire

and leave beads, a looking glass, and a knife for cutting out moccasins near it. This would show their friendly intentions to the Shoshones. *They laid the offerings on the rock and slept some distance off.* In the morning the offerings were gone, but still no Indians appeared.

One day they heard the sound of horses' hooves in the distance. A band of sixty Shoshones in full warpaint and feathers appeared on the horizon. Every heart stood still. Every man fastened his hand on his rifle and waited tensely. The Indians numbered two to their one.

The chieftain heading the Indian party rode with impressive dignity toward Lewis, who was walking slowly toward the Shoshones.

Suddenly Sacagawea gave a loud glad cry and darted forward from among the white men. The chieftain was Sacagawea's brother Cameahwait, whom she had not seen since she was captured many years before in the raid that had made her a slave.

This chance meeting with Cameahwait was the greatest possible piece of good fortune for Lewis and Clark. Through Cameahwait's power they were able to get the horses they needed to travel on through the mountains to

the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

There is no record anywhere in the journals of any complaint on Sacagawea's part, or any flagging of her energies during the two and a half years of hardship. For her services she asked only one thing. She wished to go with the men to view the "Big Water," the Pacific Ocean. Lewis and Clark permitted her to come along.

Sacagawea's awe at the sight of the ocean, however, was lost in her amazement at the body of a whale cast up on the Pacific sands. In later years she told her "fish story" to hundreds of inland Indians. When she measured out quite accurately the whale's great length, they would yell with joy at her "big lie." At the same time she would describe her first sight of the seals she had seen on the Oregon shore as "people who lived in the water." No one doubted that story at all!

Sacagawea, who lived to be more than one hundred years of age, kept on traveling. Known among Indians by a variety of names—Chief, Lost Woman, Great Woman—she spent the remainder of her long life spreading good feeling between the settlers and the people of her race.

## CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. The Lewis and Clark expedition began its journey in**
  - A 1804
  - B 1812
  - C 1787
- 2. The interpreter Lewis and Clark hired was named**
  - A Sacagawea
  - B Meriwether
  - C Charbonneau
- 3. Lewis and Clark were doubtful about Sacagawea's going with them because she**
  - A was a woman
  - B had a papoose
  - C complained a lot
- 4. If Sacagawea had not saved the equipment and supplies from the lead canoe, the expedition might have**
  - A starved
  - B had to turn back
  - C lost their way
- 5. The nation besides the United States that wanted the lands of the far northwest was**
  - A Great Britain
  - B France
  - C Spain
- 6. Sacagawea helped the expedition most by her keen**
  - A sense of smell
  - B hearing
  - C sense of direction
- 7. The first signs of the Shoshone that the expedition saw were**
  - A moccasin tracks
  - B smoke signals
  - C old campfire sites
- 8. Lewis and Clark were able to get horses**
  - A by herding them on the plains
  - B with the help of Sacagawea's brother
  - C by giving the Indians guns
- 9. The "big lie" the Indians thought Sacagawea told them was about the**
  - A Big Water
  - B size of a whale
  - C people that lived in the water
- 10. In her later years, Sacagawea's attitude toward white people was**
  - A friendly and helpful
  - B suspicious and mistrustful
  - C deceitful and treacherous