

Lewis & Clark's Missouri

ENCOUNTERING INDIANS

PART 4 OF A SERIES OF EIGHT NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION FEATURES

LEWIS AND CLARK met Indians from many different nations during their travels through the lower Missouri River region. Lewis had studied the various tribes and their customs before the expedition. He hoped to learn more about their way of life and brought a list of questions to ask Indians he encountered.

The first people Lewis met in present-day Missouri were Shawnee traders. The Shawnee had settled in the southeast part of Missouri that became known as the "Cove of Fat" because bear-related products, especially bear grease, were the region's main trading products. About half of the Missouri Shawnee lived in long houses. Several Shawnees admired Lewis' Newfoundland dog, Seaman, and offered to purchase him. But Lewis wouldn't sell.

Lewis and Clark knew the Indians they would encounter on their expedition spoke many different languages and that communication would be a challenge. They hired several people to serve as interpreters. One was George Drouillard, part-Shawnee, who lived in the Cape Girardeau area all his life. He spoke Native sign language.

During the winter at Camp DuBois the Corps had a variety of Indian visitors who were curious about the camp as well as interested in trading. On Christmas Day they hosted three Indian guests. Clark mentioned the Kickapoo Indians most in his journals, and

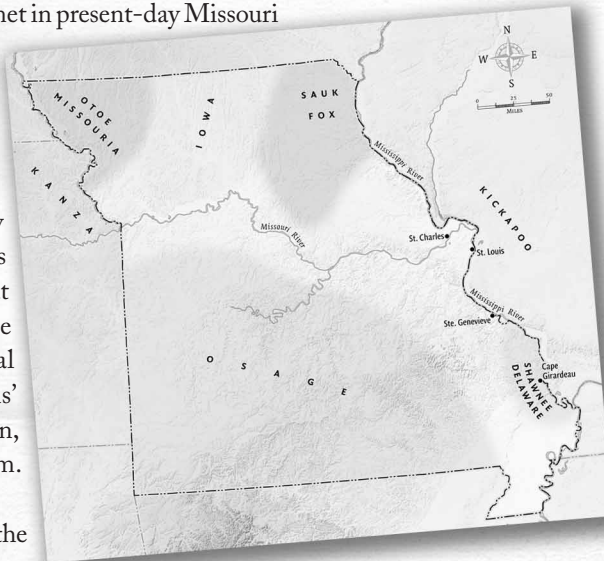
Lewis and Clark encountered the Kickapoos several times during their St. Louis winter, sometimes exchanging whiskey and tobacco for deer.

The Kickapoo lived scattered throughout the Illinois and Missouri region and hunted and farmed. At the time of the expedition there was tension between the Kickapoo and the Osage, another tribe in the region. In March, Lewis and Clark had traveled to St. Charles with Pierre Chouteau and Charles Gratiot to try to stop a war between the Kickapoo and the Osage. The Osage Indians lived scattered along the Osage, Missouri and Arkansas rivers, and were the dominant Indian tribe of the area.

During the expedition's travel across present-day Missouri, they encountered small groups of Indians, but did not pass any major villages. On July 28, 1804, Clark wrote that

George Drouillard had met up with a Missouri Indian while hunting on the prairie. "This Indian is one of the few remaining of that nation, and lives with the Otoes, his camp about 4 miles from the river. He informs that the 'great gangue' of the Nation were hunting the buffalo on the Plains." That explained what must have been a mystery to the members of the Corps: all the tribes of the lower Missouri River region were out hunting buf-

falo and not near the river. It was not until they reached the area near present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa, that they held their first council with Indian leaders, the Otoe and Missouri Indians.



Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis



Osage Lance

Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, photo by Cary Horton

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