

Air Gun



Air gun, c. 1812 — Milwaukee Public Museum

At one point during the meetings, Lewis fired an air gun to communicate another message. An air gun was like a BB gun — it used compressed air instead of gunpowder to shoot a bullet, so it didn't make a loud bang when fired. The Indians had not seen guns like this before and were amazed. *What message did this send?**



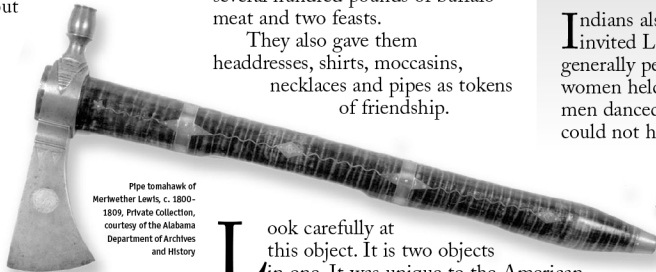
Feast bowl, pre-1865 — Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, photo by Hillel Burger (28-16-10/98291; T2719.4)

Feast Bowl

Indians gave gifts as well, mostly in the form of food. This is a feast bowl carved to represent a bird. Imagine it piled high with steaming buffalo meat. The Teton Sioux, for example, gave Lewis and Clark several hundred pounds of buffalo meat and two feasts.

They also gave them headdresses, shirts, moccasins, necklaces and pipes as tokens of friendship.

Council meetings were a two-way exchange. The Indians included a pipe ceremony. This ceremony was a solemn act filled with meaning Lewis and Clark did not fully understand. Some pipe ceremonies were secret and private, but those seen by non-Indians were meant to symbolize importance. The pipe smoke was a visible prayer that called the entire universe to witness the unity of those who smoked together. At the end of the ceremony, the pipe might be given to one of the participants.



Pipe tomahawk of Meriwether Lewis, c. 1800-1809, Private Collection, courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

Look carefully at this object. It is two objects in one. It was unique to the American frontier, and was not used before 1700. *Can you identify both objects?*

A pipe tomahawk combined the Indian pipe of peace and the European ax of war. It symbolized the choice that underlay every meeting of Lewis and Clark and the Indian tribes. Meriwether Lewis owned this one. Both officers and enlisted men carried these on the expedition.

Calumet Pipe

At least twice, Indian leaders presented a pipe to Lewis and Clark at the end of a pipe ceremony.

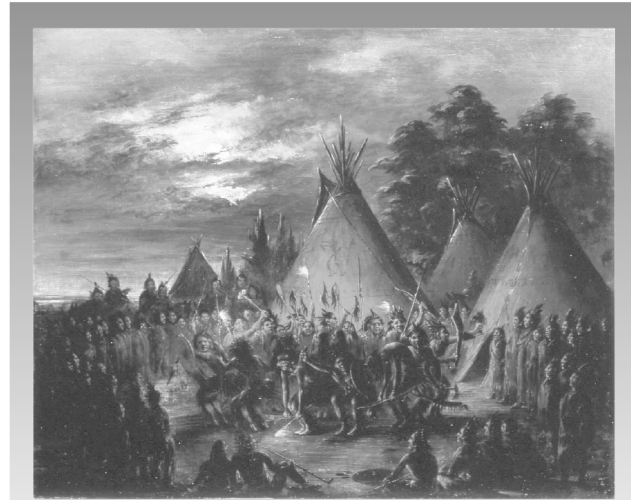
The calumet was the oldest and most symbolic style of pipe used in North America. Historians think this is one of the pipes given to Lewis and Clark.



Calumet pipe stem, late 1700s to mid-1800s — Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, © President and Fellows of Harvard College (99-12-10/53121; T1908A/III)

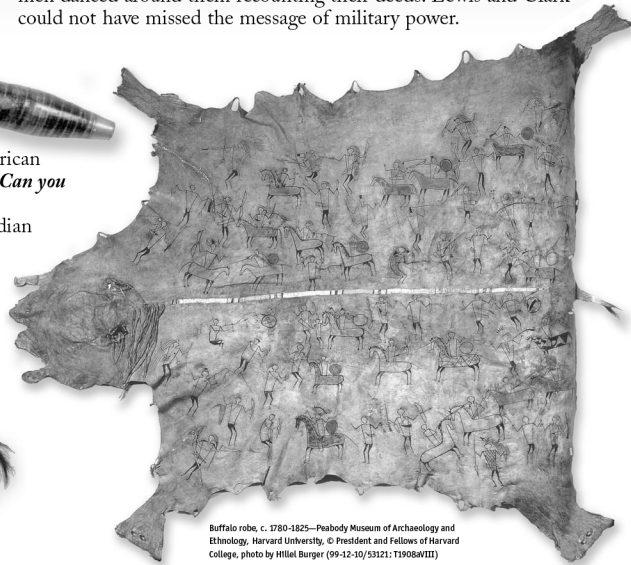
Buffalo Robe

As the expedition traveled up the Missouri River, it met with many Indian tribes who were enemies of each other. Yet, sometimes enemies were trading partners. It was a complicated political landscape that Lewis and Clark found difficult to understand. On several occasions, Indians gave expedition



Scalp Dance, Sioux, c. 1832 by George Catlin — Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.

Indians also had ways to communicate their power. The Teton Sioux invited Lewis and Clark to a scalp dance. These dances were generally performed after the return of a successful war party. The women held up newly captured scalps suspended on sticks, while the men danced around them recounting their deeds. Lewis and Clark could not have missed the message of military power.



Buffalo robe, c. 1780-1825 — Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, photo by Hillel Burger (99-12-10/53121; T1908A/III)

members painted buffalo robes as gifts. Often the images on these robes portrayed battle scenes, examples of the complex relationships between tribes. Lewis and Clark were mistaken to think that the tribes would change their policies at the request of a passing troop of American soldiers.

Weblink

To investigate a hide painting at the Smithsonian Institution, check out "Tracking the Buffalo: Stories from a Buffalo Hide Painting" at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/buffalo/>

* ANSWER: It showed off American power and technology.