



Tenage Sacagawea and her infant son "Pomp" joined the expedition from the Mandan villages in North Dakota to the Pacific Ocean and back. Lewis & Clark Interpretive Park, Twin Bridges.

(Continued from other side)

Lewis killed a duck for dinner, and wrote "I found a parcel of drift wood at the head of the little island on which I was and immediately set it on fire and collected some willow brush to lye on. I cooked my duck which I found very good and after eating it layed down and should have had a comfortable nights lodge but for the musquetoos which infested me all night. late at night I was awakened by the noise of some animal running over the stoney bar on which I lay but did not see it; from the weight with which it ran I supposed it to be either an Elk or a brown bear (grizzly). the latter are very abundant in this neighborhood. the night was cool but I felt very little inconvenience from it as I had a large fire all night."

Wednesday July 31st, 1805

Lewis wrote, "This morning I waited at my camp very impatiently for the arrival of Capt. Clark and party; I observed by my watch t[h]at it was 7. A. M. and they had not come in sight. I now became very uneasy and determined to wait until 8 and if they did not arrive by that time to proceed on up the river taking it as a fact that they had passed my camp some miles last evening, just as I set out to pursue my plan I discovered Charbono walking up shore some distance below me and waited until [he] arrived. I now learnt that the canoes were behind, they arrived shortly after. their detention had been caused by the rapidity of the water and the circuitous route of the river. they halted and breakfasted after which we all set out again and I continued my walk on the Stard shore."

The canoe party passed by the Philosophy River (Willow Creek) where Clark camped on the night of the 26th. Lewis noted that this river split and reached the Jefferson in seven separate streams. The area was rich with timber and vast numbers of beaver and otter. In the uplands Lewis observed that the soil was poor and the grass was so dry that it would burn like tinder.

Just before camping in the evening George Drouillard saw a grizzly enter a thicket on the left side of the river. The men surrounded the thicket, but never found the bear. Lewis wrote: "nothing killed today and our fresh meat is out. when we have plenty of fresh meat I find it impossible to make the men take



Blazing star (Mentzelia laevicaulis) grows on dry hills along the Jefferson River. These flowers would have been in bloom when Lewis and Clark passed through the area.

any care of it, or use it with the least frugality, tho' I expect that necessity will shortly teach them this art."

Sergeant Gass slipped and fell backwards, injuring his back on the canoe. The entire expedition camped together at the mouth of present day Antelope Creek.

Thursday August 1st, 1805

Lewis set out overland in search of Sacagawea's people with the two interpreters Drouillard and Charbonneau, along with Sergeant Gass, who was too lame to work the canoes, but well enough to walk. They climbed the dry hills through what is now Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park, hoping to take a northwesterly shortcut to the Jefferson River, based on previous observations by Captain Clark.

Lewis had taken a dose of glauber salts in the morning to treat a slight case of dysentary that had bothered him for a few days. The medicine, along with the 11 mile hike through the hot hills without water, nearly exhausted Lewis before they reached water again. They never discovered the caverns, and their "shortcut" brought them instead to today's Boulder River, which they called Fields Creek in honor of Reubin Fields of the expedition. The Jefferson took a more southwesterly course.

The men came down from the hills near today's La Hood and saw some elk, of which Lewis and Drouillard killed two. They were delighted to have fresh meat after a couple days without any meat but a single beaver. They cooked and ate some and left the rest by the river for Captain Clark and his men to find as they came along with the canoes. Lewis and company hiked another six miles and camped on the north side of the river.

Captain Clark and the rest of the men brought the canoes and gear up through the narrow and rugged canyon, struggling against the swift water all the way. Joseph Whitehouse recorded, "the hills higher and more pine and cedar timber on them. we passed high cliffs about 500 feet high in many places, considerable of pine on the Sides of the hills, all the hills rough and uneven. at noon Capt. Clark killed a mountain Sheep, on the Side of a Steep redish hills or cliffs the remainder of the flock ran up the Steep cliffs. the one killed roled down Some distance. So we got it and dined earnestly on it. it being Capt Clarks buthday he ordered Some flour gave out to the party." He added, "I left my Tommahawk on the Small Island where we lay last night which makes me very Sorry that I forgot it as I had used it common to Smoak in." (It had a hollow handle, which served as a smoking pipe.)

They passed by today's South Boulder River, which they named Frazier's Creek after Rob Frazier of the expedition. A few miles later they found the two elk left by Lewis, and Jo and Reuben Fields shot five deer. Clark saw a large bear eating currants, but did not get a shot at it. They camped on the south bank, opposite from the Boulder River.

Friday August 2nd, 1805

Captain Lewis felt much better. He and his overland party resumed their march at sunrise and waded across to the south side of the Jefferson River for a shorter route through the valley. He wrote, "soon after passing the river this morning Serg. Gass lost my tommahawk in the thick brush and we were unable to find it, I regret the loss of this usefull implement, however accidents will

happen in the best of families, and I consoled myself with the recollection that it was not the only one we had with us."

Lewis described the Jefferson Valley, saying "the plain ascends gradually on either side of the river to the bases of two ranges of high mountains (the Tobacco Roots and the Highlands), which lye parallel to the river and prescribe the limits of the plains. The tops of these mountains are yet covered partially with snow, while we in the valley are nearly suffocated with the intense heat of the mid-day sun; the nights are so cold that two blankets are not more than sufficient covering."

They found "great quantities of currants today, two species of which were red, others yellow, deep purple and black; also black gooseberries and serviceberries now ripe and in great perfection. We feasted sumptuously on our wild fruits, particularly the yellow currant and the deep purple serviceberries, which I found to be excellent."

They saw many antelope and killed two deer. They also saw lots of elk and bear tracks, plus very old buffalo bones and manure. Some of the beaver dams along the river were five feet high and backed the water up over several acres. There were no recent signs of Indians, but they found abandoned conical lodges of willow boughs and brush, built with a door on one side. Lewis and company hiked 24 miles before camping on the south side of the river near the present day community of Waterloo.

Captain Clark and his men meanwhile continued upriver struggling with their utmost exertion against the rapidity of the current to drag the canoes and gear up stream. There were many islands in this part of the river, both large and small. They saw mallard and redheaded ducks, black woodpeckers, a large herd of elk, and several rattlesnakes.

On the north side they passed by the mouth of Birth Creek named for Clark's birthday of August 1st. It is now known as Whiteclark Creek. Clark covered 17 miles and also camped near the present day Kountz Bridge. He wrote, "I have either got my foot bitten by Some poisonous recorded, "the hills higher and more pine and cedar timber on them. we passed high cliffs about 500 feet high in many places, considerable of pine on the Sides of the hills, all the hills rough and uneven. at noon Capt. Clark killed a mountain Sheep, on the Side of a Steep redish hills or cliffs the remainder of the flock ran up the Steep cliffs. the one killed roled down Some distance. So we got it and dined earnestly on it. it being Capt Clarks buthday he ordered Some flour gave out to the party." He added, "I left my Tommahawk on the Small Island where we lay last night which makes me very Sorry that I forgot it as I had used it common to Smoak in." (It had a hollow handle, which served as a smoking pipe.)

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Clark and his men continued with their arduous task of pulling the canoes and gear upriver against the current, where they frequently had to "double man" the canoes to drag them one-at-a-time over the shallow riffles of stone and gravel. Clark killed a deer in the morning, and along the way found the tracks of an Indian who had apparently spotted their party and had run away.

Reubin Fields killed a large mountain lion or "panther" near a creek they named Panther Creek, now known as Pipestone Creek. They also saw deer, elk, antelope, bear, lots of beaver dams, and many common birds. Clark wrote, "the men wer compelled

to be a great proportion of their time in the water today; they have had a severe days labour and are much fortieged." They covered about 15 miles and camped near a rock out-cropping known as Point-of-Rocks.

Sunday August 4th, 1805

Lewis's party explored the confluences of the Ruby, Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers that together form the Jefferson. Charbonneau slowed the party



Desert Currant (Ribes cereum) one of several species of currants Lewis and Clark found and feasted on along the Jefferson River.

down with complaints about his leg, but still they hiked more than 20 miles up and down the rivers taking notes on the best possible course forward.

Of the southwest fork (Big Hole) Lewis wrote, "this is a bold rapid and Clear Stream, it's bed so much broken and obstructed by gravel bars and it's waters so much subdivided by Islands that it appears to me utterly impossible to navigate it with safety, the middle fork is gentle and possesses about 2/3rds as much water as this stream. it's course so far as I can observe it is about S.W., and from the opening of the valley I believe it still bears more to the West above. It may be safely navigated. it's water is much warmer than the rapid fork and it's water more turbid; from which I conjecture that it has it's sources at a greater distance in the mountains and passes through an opener country than the other. under this impression I wrote a note to Capt Clark, recommending his taking the middle fork p[ro]vided he should arrive at this place before my return, which I expect will be the day after tomorrow. this note I left on a pole at the forks of the river" Lewis saw no fresh signs of Indians, but commented that, "the Indians appear on some parts of the river to have destroyed a great proportion of the little timber which there is by setting fire to the bottoms." They camped on the Big Hole.

Lewis compared reports with Clark a few days later before finishing his journal entry, and added this note about Clark's trip up river, "the river continued to be crowded with Islands, rapid and shoaly. these shoals or riffles succeeded each other every 3 or four hundred yards; at those places they are obliged to drag the canoes over the stone there not being water enough to float them, and between the riffles the current is so strong that they are compelled to have c[ur]rent to the cord; and being unable to walk on the shore for the brush wade in the river along the shore and haul them by the cord; this has increased the pain and labour extremely; their feet soon get tender and soar by wading and walking over the stones. these are also so slipry that they frequently get severe falls. being constantly wet soon makes them feble also." The injury on Clark's ankle worsened, such that he was unable to walk. Clark and his men camped near the present day town of Silver Star.

Monday August 5th, 1805

Due to Charbonneau's bad leg, Lewis sent him and Sergeant Gass seven miles overland to a grove of tall trees on the middle fork (Beaverhead River), while he and Drouillard scouted farther up the right fork and climbed a high point where they could look out across the valley toward today's town of Dillon. From there they proceeded overland back to the middle fork, but Drouillard fell, badly spraining his

finger and injuring his leg. After a rest, they continued on to the river and were glad to quench their thirst. Lewis found a well-established Indian trail, but without any fresh signs on it. They traveled downstream and arrived in the dark where they were supposed to meet Charbonneau and Gass, but the men were not there. Lewis and Drouillard had to walk another three miles downstream in the dark to find them, covering a total of about 25 miles for the day. They camped a few miles upstream from present day Twin Bridges.

Downriver, Clark was having a more difficult time, as Lewis noted in his journal, "the river today they found straighter and more rapid even than yesterday, and the labour and difficulty of the navigation was proportionably increased, they therefore proceeded but slowly and with great pain as the men had become very languid from working in the water and many of their feet swollen and so painful that they could scarcely walk."

In the afternoon they arrived at the confluence of the rivers, but a beaver had cut down the note left by Lewis to take the middle fork, so Clark took the right fork, which seemed like the larger, more westerly route to follow. The crew ascended the river about one mile with great difficulty, at times cutting a passage through the willow brush to drag the canoes through. They camped on a muddy island where they had to make beds of brush to keep dry. Lewis later wrote, "Capt. Clarks ankle is extremely painful to him this evening; the tumor has not yet mature, he has a slight fever. The men are so much fortieged today that they wished much that navigation was at an end that they might go by land."

Tuesday August 6th, 1805

Having nothing to eat, Lewis and his small party spread out to look for game on their way back downriver, as well as to watch for Captain Clark and the rest of the expedition. Drouillard found the expedition first, and told Clark about the route up the middle fork. They paddled back downstream to the confluence, but tipped a canoe on the way, soaking all the baggage and a medicine box. Two of the other canoes were completely filled with water on the way down, their contents also soaked.

Joseph Whitehouse was thrown from a canoe in the rapids losing his shot pouch and horn. Lewis wrote, "the canoe had rubbed over and pressed him to the bottom as she passed over him and had the water been 2 inches shallower most inevitably have crushed him to death. Our parched meal, corn, Indian preasents, and a great part of our most valuable stores were wet and much damaged on this occasion." The entire expedition camped together on a gravel bar at the confluence where there was an abundance of firewood. Lewis wrote, "here we fixed our camp, and unloaded all our canoes and opened and exposed to dry such articles as had been wet. A part of the load of each canoe consisted of the leaden canestirs of powder which were not in the least injured, tho' some of them had remained upwards of an hour under water."

Three deer hides left high in a tree near the confluence were missing, presumably taken by a mountain lion. The hunters went out and brought back three more deer and four elk to feed the expedition. George Shannon had been sent upriver to hunt in the morning, before the canoes turned around. He did not come back to camp.



Sitting and paddling isn't adventurous enough for some!

Lewis and Clark named each fork of the river, retaining the name Jefferson River for the middle fork, which is today known as the Beaverhead River. In commemoration of virtues, they named the left fork the Philanthropy (now known as the Ruby River) and the right fork as the Wisdom River (now known as the Big Hole.)

Wednesday August 7th, 1805

Lewis sent Reubin Fields in search of Shannon. The expedition rested and dried out supplies. Having consumed much of their supplies, they stowed one canoe in a thicket of brush, and consolidated the gear into the remaining canoes.

Lewis fixed his gun and made navigational observations. By early afternoon the expedition was again underway, headed up the middle fork. An abundance of large and small biting flies more than made up for a reduced number of mosquitoes. The expedition traveled a few miles and camped just upstream from present day Twin Bridges. Lewis wrote, "we have not heard any thing from Shannon yet, we expect that he has pursued Wisdom river upwards for some[e] distance probably killed some heavy animal and is waiting for our arrival."

This was the second time Shannon had been separated from the group. Back on the lower Missouri he had been lost for fifteen days, and subsisted entirely on wild grapes for nine of those days. Drouillard brought in a deer in the evening. Clark noted that "all those Streams Contain emence number of Beaver orter Musk-rats &c." An afternoon thundershower poured down rain for about forty minutes.

Thursday August 8th, 1805

Lewis wrote, "We had a heavy dew this morning, as one canoe had been left we had no more ha[n]ds to spear for the chase; game being scarce it requires more hunters to supply us." Reubin Fields returned at noon, reporting that he had been up the Big Hole as far as the mountains and could find nothing of Shannon. Fields and some of the other hunters killed a few deer and antelope. Lewis reported, "[t]he tumor on Capt. Clarks ankle has discharged a considerable quantity of matter but is still much swollen and inflamed and gives him considerable pain."

Lewis noted, "the Indian woman recognized the point of a high plain to our right which she informed us was not very distant from the summer retreat of her nation on a river beyond the mountains which runs to the west. this hill she says her nation calls the beaver's head from a conceived re[s]emblance of it's figure to the head of that animal. she assures us that we shall either find her people on this river or on the river immediately west of it's source; which from it's present size cannot be very distant. as it is now all important with us to meet with those people as soon as possible I determined to proceed tomorrow with a small party to the source of the principal stream of this river and pass the mountains to the Columbia; and down that river until I found the Indians; in short it is my resolution to find them or some others, who have horses if it should cause me a trip of one month. for without horses we shall be obliged to leave a great part of our stores, of which, it appears to me that we have a stock already sufficiently small for the length of the voyage before us." The entire expedition camped a few miles downstream from Beaverhead Rock.

Shannon caught up with the group the following day and reported that he had come down the river to the point where he left the expedition, and not finding them, traveled back up river a considerable distance in search of them. He brought back three good deerskins and had

eaten plenty, "but looked a good deal worried with his march." Lewis noted.

The Shoshone

Clark continued up the river with the canoes and most of the men, while Lewis and a handful of men hiked ahead in search of Sacagawea's people. They walked up to the continental divide to the border between today's Montana and Idaho. With the Missouri River watershed behind them and the Columbia watershed ahead of them, they hoped to find a navigable route to the Pacific. Instead they found mountain ranges as far as the eye could see.

However, they found a band of Shoshone Indians, who came back with them to meet Clark and the crew on the Beaverhead River. Sacagawea was brought in to assist as an interpreter, when she recognized the chief, Cameahwait, as her older brother (a designation which might also be used for a cousin). She leapt up and threw her arms around him. With Sacagawea's help, Lewis and Clark were able to trade for the horses they needed and hired a guide to help get them safely across the mountains to navigable waters on the other side. It was a treacherous, snowy trek, and the men nearly starved, but they made it across. Lewis and Clark negotiated with the Nez Perce to take care of their horses for the winter. They made new dugout canoes and continued the journey down the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia rivers to the Pacific, at times shooting rapids so dangerous that the local Indians lined the banks to watch the crazy white men get killed.

They built Fort Clatsop a few miles from the ocean and stayed there for the winter, frequently trading or entertaining with the Indians.

Clark's Return Trip Down the Jefferson River

In the spring of 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition started home, dragging their canoes back up the Columbia River towards the Rocky Mountains. The Nez Perce returned their horses to them, and when the snow melted sufficiently near the end of June, the Corps of Discovery crossed back over the mountains. Lewis and part of the expedition explored a northerly route back to the Missouri, while Clark and the rest of the party returned to the canoes they had cached the previous fall. They recovered the canoes and proceeded down the Beaverhead River to the Jefferson and back down to the confluence with the Madison and Gallatin Rivers near present day Three Forks. They kept the horses, with part of the crew traveling overland, while others canoed back down the river. Paddling downstream proved to be much easier than going up!

Thursday July 10th, 1806

Clark wrote, "last night was very cold and this morning everything was white with frost and the grass stiff frozen. I had some water exposed in a basin in which the ice was 3/4 of an inch thick this morning. I had all the Canoes put into the water and every article which was intended to be sent down put on board, and the horses collected and packed with what few articles I intend taking with me to the River Rochejhone (Yellowstone River)".

The expedition covered 15 miles down today's Beaverhead River by noon when they stopped to let the horses graze. Along the way, Clark saw deer, antelope, rattlesnakes, and 15 big horn sheep. He wrote, "Sergeant Ordway informed me that the party with him had come on very well, and he thought the canoes could go as farst as the horses". Indeed, on this day, the canoes passed by six of their campsites from their struggle up river a year before.

Clark summed up the afternoon, "the Musquetors were troublesom all day and until one hour after Sunset when it became cool and they disappeared, in passing down in the course of this day we saw great numbers of beaver lying on the Shores in the Sun. wild young Gees and ducks are common in the river. we killed two young gees this evening. I saw several large rattle snakes in passing the rattle Snake Mountain they were fierce."

Friday July 11th, 1806

"Sent on 4 of the best hunters in 2 canoes to proceed on a few miles a head and hunt until I came up with them, after an early breakfast I proceeded on down a very crooked chanel, at 8 a.m. I overtook one canoe with a Deer which Collins had killed, at Meridian passed Sergt. Pryors camp near a high point of land on the left side which the Shoshones call the beavers head. the wind rose and blew with great violence from the S W immediately off Some high mountains covered with Snow. the violence of this wind retarded our progress very much and the river being evenly crooked we had it immediately in our face nearly every bend."

By six p.m. they passed the Beaverhead's confluence with the Philanthropy (Ruby) River, and an hour later they reached the confluence with the Wisdom (Big Hole) River where they camped for the night. A bayonet and the extra canoe left behind last year were found undisturbed. Clark ordered the men to recover all the nails from that canoe and another they were leaving behind and to make paddles from the sides of them.

George Gibson and John Colter killed a fat buck and 5 nearly grown geese. Sergeant Pryor shot a deer and left it by the river. He proceeded on down the river with the horses and did not camp with Clark.

Saturday July 12th, 1806

By 7 a.m. the men finished recovering the nails and making paddles. They ate breakfast and headed downriver, finding the current stronger and the river straighter than upriver, but they still had to battle the wind. A sudden puff of wind drove Clark's canoe under a log overhanging the river, pinching Thomas Howard between the log and the canoe. The canoe was nearly overturned, but they freed themselves before the rest of the party could make their way through the brush along the river to help them. By 3 p.m. they were all the way down to Field's Creek (the Boulder River) where they stopped to eat and camp. Alexander Willard and John Collins brought in two deer.

Sunday July 13th, 1806

Clark and his men started paddling early and reached the three forks of the Missouri by noon. Sergeant Pryor and the party with the horses arrived there just one hour earlier. They had killed six deer and a grizzly bear.

Clark sent Sergeant Ordway and some of the men with the six remaining canoes to meet Lewis downstream at the confluence of the Missouri and Marias Rivers. Clark took the rest of the men, plus Sacagawea and Pomp, along with the 49 horses, overland through the Gallatin Valley to explore the



The lower Jefferson runs through a wide valley lined with rolling hills.

Yellowstone River route back down to the confluence with the Missouri near the present-day Montana-North Dakota border. The horses were stolen along the way, but the men made boats and floated down the Yellowstone.

Lewis and Clark met up again on the Missouri River downstream from its confluence with the Yellowstone, shortly after Lewis had been shot in the buttocks by one of his own hunters. Lewis was confined to the canoe to recover for most the remaining journey back to Saint Louis, but he was on his feet again when they arrived. All were treated to a hero's welcome.

References:

"Headwaters Target of European Exploration." The Headwaters Herald. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Moeller, Bill and Jan. Lewis & Clark: A Photographic Journey. Mountain Press Publishing Company: Missoula, Montana, 1999. Ambrose, Stephen E. Undaunted Courage. Touchstone: New York, NY, 1996.



Louisiana Purchase and Lewis & Clark Expedition commemorative coins feature (clockwise from upper left): 1) President Thomas Jefferson, 2) the Louisiana Purchase, 3) the beginning of the expedition from Saint Louis, Missouri, 4) the expedition's keel boat, and 5) the peace medals given to Indian tribes along the way.

Colter's Run

Expedition members return to the Missouri Headwaters

After nearly three years in the wilderness, the Lewis and Clark expedition raced back home with everyone eager to return to their familiar homes and families. But the "immense quantities of beaver" noted by the explorers quickly brought several of the men back to this country. John Colter never even made it back to Saint Louis. Along the way, the expedition met two trappers headed upriver, who convinced Colter to come with them. Lewis and Clark approved Colter's discharge, and the three trappers spent the winter working the Yellowstone River.

Colter left in the spring, following a quarrel with his partners, and headed downriver again, only to encounter a large party of trappers working for the newly formed Missouri Fur Company. Included in the company were Lewis and Clark expedition members John Potts, George Drouillard, and Peter Wisner. Colter joined the company and headed back up the Yellowstone. They built a fort at the mouth of the Bighorn River in the fall of 1807. John Colter was sent out to meet the Indians, to invite them back to the fort to trade. In his wanderings, Colter discovered the geothermal features in and around today's Yellowstone National Park. His stories seemed so far-fetched that the area became known as Colter's Hell, and Colter became the butt of many mountain man jokes.

In the fall of 1808, Colter traveled with a band of Crow and Flathead Indians back towards the Missouri Headwaters, but they were attacked by the Blackfeet just before they got there. Colter

survived a wound to the leg, but his presence with the enemies of the Blackfeet led to hostilities towards whites in the headwaters area for years to come. Indeed Colter was captured by the Blackfeet on a subsequent trapping excursion on the Jefferson River.

Being in hostile territory, he and John Potts hid during the day and set out their traps at night, but they were discovered anyway by a band of about five hundred Blackfeet Indians, according to Colter's story. Seeing no alternative, Colter stepped out of the canoe. An Indian took Potts' rifle, but Colter grabbed it and handed it back. Potts pushed out from shore in the canoe and was shot with an arrow. He fired back, killing the Indian, but was immediately riddled with arrows.

Colter was stripped naked, and the Indians debated how best to use him for target practice. The chief asked Colter if he could run fast. Colter coyly indicated that he was a bad runner, and the chief gave him a short head start in front of his five hundred warriors. Colter ran like he had never run before, traversing five or six miles across dry rocky plains overgrown with prickly pear cactus, towards the Madison River (or back to the Jefferson by some accounts). One warrior closed the gap behind Colter and was just about to throw his spear, when Colter suddenly stopped and turned around. The startled Indian tripped and missed with the spear. Colter took it and killed him, then ran again. The other warriors stopped briefly where their comrade fell, allowing Colter the opportunity to disappear into the water. He swam under a pile of driftwood and found a space to put his head above water but still under the wood. He stayed there the rest of the day while the Indians searched the area until they finally gave up.

In the dark of night Colter swam downstream, then headed out overland back to the fort on the Bighorn, subsisting entirely on roots for the eleven-day, 220 mile journey.

The event didn't discourage him from coming back. Colter returned in 1810 with a company of 80 trappers and built a fortified fur trading post at the headwaters. They survived an attack by the Blackfeet, but George Drouillard was later killed, probably upstream from Whitehall. The fur post was abandoned after only five months and was burnt to the ground. Finally having enough of it, Colter and two other men returned to Saint Louis, surviving yet another encounter with the Blackfeet along the way.

After all the close-calls, it wasn't Colter's adventurous lifestyle that finally killed him. Instead he married and settled down to life of farming in Missouri, but caught yellow fever and died in 1812 or 1815.

References:

"Trapper Makes Miraculous Escape." The Headwaters Herald. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Colter-Frick, L.R. Courageous Colter and Companions. 1997. Ambrose, Stephen E. Undaunted Courage. Touchstone: New York, NY, 1996. "The Legend of John Colter." Montana Aflao: The Jefferson River. Missoula, MT, 1999 Edition.



Prickly pear cactus (Opuntia polyacantha) was a constant source of irritation for the mossasin-clad expedition as they explored Montana, but John Colter probably got the worst of it when he returned to the area and had to run naked across the plains with five hundred Blackfeet warriors in pursuit.