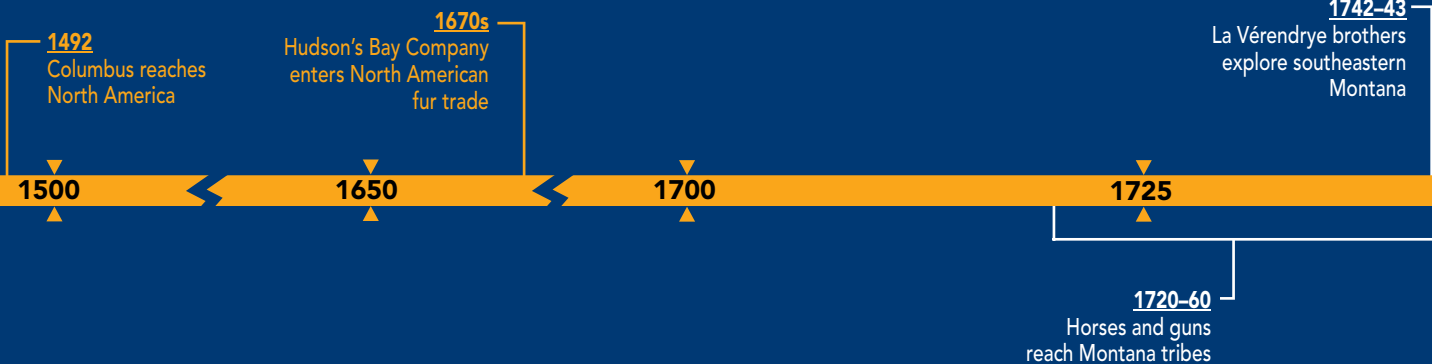


# 4 Newcomers Explore the Region – 1742–1827



FIGURE 4.1: *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole*, by Charles M. Russell, 1912







## READ TO FIND OUT:

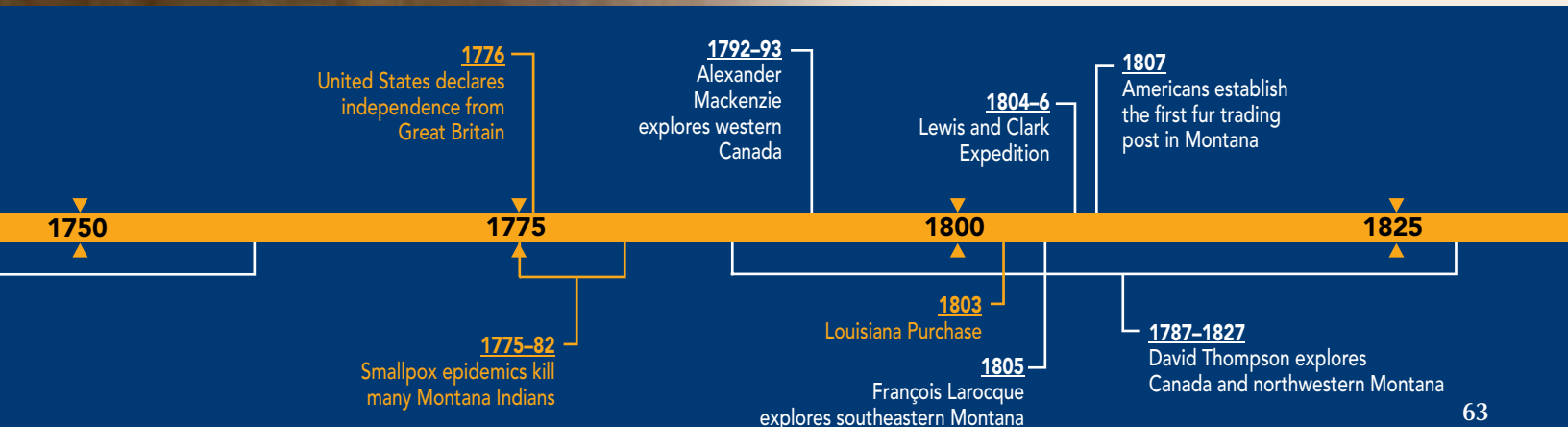
- What explorers were looking for when they came here
- How an idea called Manifest Destiny affected the future of this land
- How the explorers and the locals saw each other
- How American and European explorations changed life here

## The Big Picture

To the Indians, Montana was a homeland that gave them life. To the Europeans, the West was an obstacle to the Pacific Ocean—and a rich source of furs. Different ways of thinking about the land set up a century of conflicts between cultures.

In 1800 many people of different tribes and languages lived in the place we call Montana. They hunted bison on horseback, traded widely with other tribes, helped their allies, and fought their enemies. Almost all tribes had been **traumatized** (extremely troubled) by European diseases. All of the region's people had adapted to immense changes. They were about to face many more.

Many people here had heard about the light-skinned people to the east. But no one knew that back east the United States of America had declared itself a new nation in 1776. No one in Montana knew that France, Spain, England, and the new United States were competing for control over the Great Plains, or that people thousands of miles away were making deals that would change the future of this land.



## America Was an Obstacle to Asia

When Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic in 1492, he expected to land in Asia and become fabulously wealthy by bringing home a boatload of spices. At that time, all the world's spices came from a region of Asia known as the East Indies—now called Indonesia—then called the Spice Islands. Pepper, cinnamon, ginger, mace, and cloves from this land fetched a high price in Europe. It took Columbus and some other explorers some time to understand that they had bumped into an entirely different continent.

The Americas offered many riches—furs, gold, and fertile lands. Early explorers and settlers claimed these riches for themselves and their countries. Many of them felt that they had “discovered” this land they called the New World, even though millions of people had already lived here for thousands of years.

To the shipbuilding nations of Europe, waterways were the super-highways of the time. So, as the Europeans spread out to find furs, gold, and other natural resources, explorers continued looking for a waterway across the continent. They hoped to find a **Northwest Passage**—a water route across North America from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean—that would connect them to the markets of Asia's Far East. They searched for almost 300 years, but by the late 1700s no one had found the mythical Northwest Passage.

**FIGURE 4.2:** This 1720 map shows how little Europeans knew about the western half of North America. The northwest is labeled “Parts Unknown.” At that time, the Euro-American settlers thought California was an island. You can also see that they drastically underestimated the distance from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.



What they had found, though, was that the North American continent was a lot bigger than they originally thought.

### **Early Explorers Circle around Montana**

French and British fur trading companies hired explorers to travel across the land, claim territory for their company or country, and set up profitable relationships with the Indian nations here. Fur was big business. The people who owned the trading companies became very rich from the fur trade.

Overland explorers worked their way southwest from Hudson's Bay, west from Montreal, and north up the Mississippi River. Explorers in ships also mapped the Pacific Coast, while the Spanish worked northward from Mexico and the Russians worked southward from Alaska.

The region between eastern Montana and the Pacific Ocean was the last blank space on the map because it was the hardest to get to. The fur companies and the leaders of the four most powerful countries in Europe—England, France, Spain, and Russia (which had begun exploring Alaska and the West Coast in 1741)—could not wait to see what was there.

### **Out of the Northeast: The La Vérendrye Brothers, 1742–43**

In the middle 1700s a Frenchman named Pierre La Vérendrye ran a trading post north of Lake Winnipeg in Canada. He knew from the native people that across the Rocky Mountains lay the Western Sea (Pacific Ocean). In 1742 he sent his youngest sons, François and Louis, on an expedition toward the Rocky Mountains. Unfortunately, they broke their navigational instruments after only a few days, so they could not tell for sure where they had gone. They also kept poor journals.

One day the La Vérendryes reported seeing snow-capped mountains to the west, which they said were the Rockies. (They probably were the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming and southeastern Montana.) The brothers had hoped to climb these distant mountains and get a good view of the Western Sea. Instead, they turned around because Pawnee Indians in the area were preparing to battle the Shoshone.

Later, the two brothers were not sure where they had been. For a long time the La Vérendrye brothers were called “the first white men in Montana,” even though it turns out they probably never got here. Even so, they had journeyed farther west than any other known European explorers of the time.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view the image, see the print edition of *Montana: Stories of the Land*.

FIGURE 4.3: The La Vérendrye brothers stopped short of the mountains—either the Rockies or the Bighorns. They were not officially recognized for their explorations, though they did contribute important geographical information to later expeditions. Canadian artist C. W. Jefferys (1869–1951) drew this imagined scene.

FIGURE 4.4: Alexander Mackenzie, a Scot, was the first European north of Mexico to reach the Pacific Ocean by overland travel.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view the image, see the print edition of *Montana: Stories of the Land*.



## To the North and West: Alexander Mackenzie, 1792–93

In 1789 a young Scotsman named Alexander Mackenzie stepped into a canoe in Lake Athabaska, in central Canada. He set out to follow one of its rivers all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Instead, the river (now called the Mackenzie River) took him to the Arctic Ocean. He decided he needed to learn navigation before he went on any more expeditions.

A few years later, in 1792, he returned to Lake Athabaska for another attempt to find a waterway to the Pacific Ocean. This time Mackenzie, another Scot, six Métis guides, and two of their Indian wives followed the Peace River west to its **headwaters** (the source of a river) and then hiked over the Rockies through a brutal cold snap (ax blades “became as brittle as glass,” they reported). They followed the murderous rapids of the Fraser River as far as they could. Then they walked, reaching an inlet of the Pacific Ocean at Bella Coola, British Columbia.

Mackenzie’s 2,800-mile round trip took less than a year. He did not find the Northwest Passage, and the route he took was not practical for transportation. Yet Mackenzie’s vivid descriptions and accurate maps greatly excited the British-owned fur companies. They wanted to dominate the fur trade west of the Rockies all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

Mackenzie’s book, *Voyage from Montreal*, also excited another world leader named Thomas Jefferson.

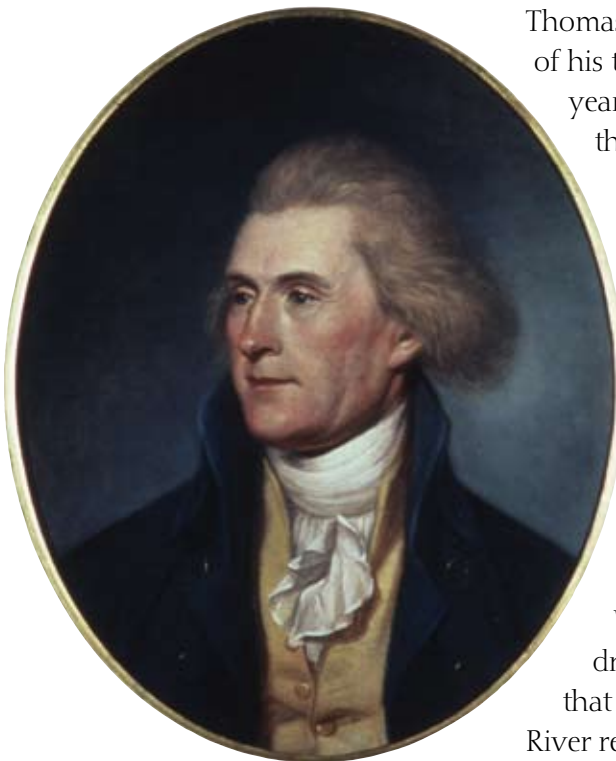
## Thomas Jefferson’s Vision of the West

Thomas Jefferson, one of the most curious and imaginative Americans of his time, was elected president of the United States in 1801, the same year Alexander Mackenzie’s book was published. Jefferson feared that the British would find the legendary Northwest Passage and claim the land and fur trade west of the Rockies. He was eager to lay claim to the West for the United States.

Jefferson’s vision for the growing United States was both idealistic and practical. He wanted the United States to succeed as a great experiment in democracy. He wanted to create a nation of small farmers, where ordinary people could own and work their own land. For that, he needed a large territory. He also wanted to beat the British to the Pacific Ocean and to gain control of resources and transportation routes from coast to coast.

Jefferson and other Americans also had another idea for the West. Perhaps the Indian people, who did not share America’s dream for economic power, could be moved onto the Plains so that Americans could have the fertile farmlands of the Mississippi River region. This idea, that governments should take land and resources away from native people for the economic benefit of the nation, changed life across the continent.

FIGURE 4.5: Thomas Jefferson hoped that the new United States of America would be an example of democracy, scientific progress, and enlightened ideals. He also knew more about the geography of North America than almost any other American at the time. This portrait was painted by American artist Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827).



## Manifest Destiny: An Idea That Shaped a Nation

What made Americans think they could claim whatever lands they wanted? It was an idea older than America itself—an idea people later called **“Manifest Destiny.”** Many Europeans believed that God had given them the North American continent to spread the ideals that they thought defined civilization: agriculture, private enterprise, and Christianity. They thought this mission was so important that it justified taking lands away from people—even killing people—who did not live by these ideals.

By 1800 there were more than 4 million European settlers living in the United States. This was far more settlers than there were **indigenous** (native to a particular land) people, especially since many native people had died from European diseases that came over with the settlers.

To the settlers, North America seemed an immense land rich in natural resources of every kind. If the United States could own it all, imagine how strong its economy could be! And with a strong economy, surely this great new democratic nation could be an example to the world.

Thomas Jefferson was not alone in his ambitions. France, England, and Russia all wanted to claim the continent’s interior region. They all wanted the territory they called French Louisiana.

## The Louisiana Purchase: The United States Buys a World It Has Never Seen

Louisiana stretched all the way from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The Americans wanted Louisiana because it was a huge land area, because the Mississippi River was a main transportation route, and because it might contain the much-desired Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean.

On April 30, 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory—more than 800,000 square miles—for \$15 million (equal to \$276 million today). It was an unbelievable stroke of luck for the young United States. The small nation immediately doubled in size. It gained free access to the Mississippi River and all its tributaries. And it claimed ownership over unlimited economic opportunities. With the stroke of a pen, the United States gained tremendous political and economic power.

But what did the Americans purchase? They were eager to find out. Meanwhile, back in Montana, people had no idea that their homeland had just been “sold.”



*FIGURE 4.6:* Powerful men far away from Montana negotiated the Louisiana Purchase. This mural, titled *The Louisiana Purchase*, decorates the Montana State Capitol. It depicts an imaginary meeting between Thomas Jefferson (at far left) and Napoleon Bonaparte (at far right). In reality, the two men never met.

**“Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the clouds, and the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?”**

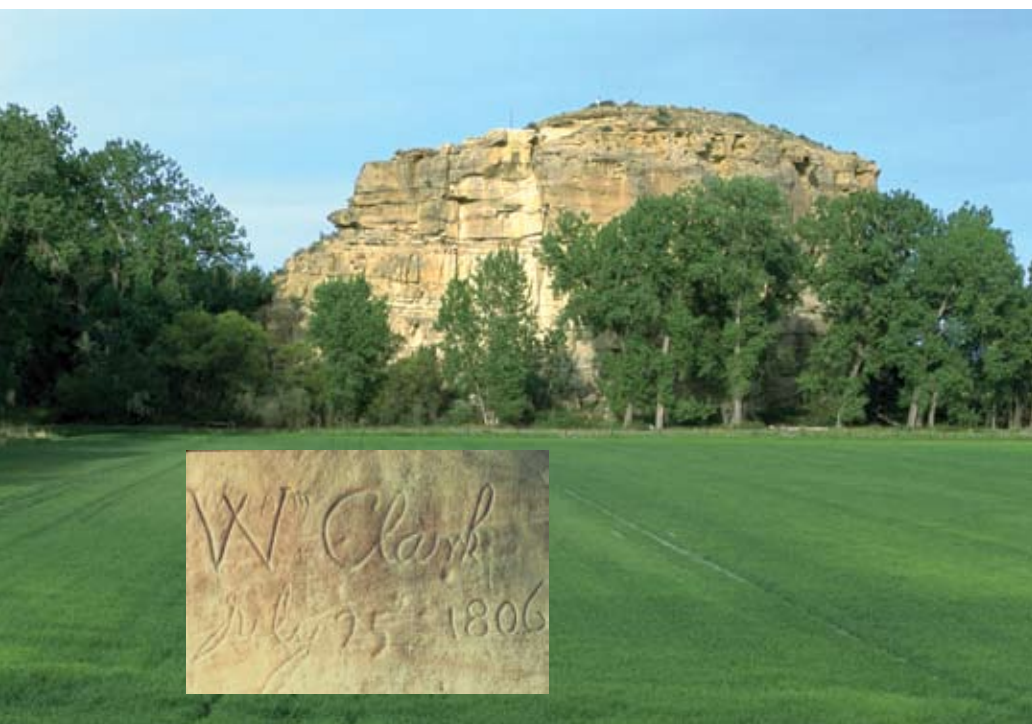
—TECUMSEH, SHAWNEE INDIAN LEADER





**FIGURE 4.7:** While most explorers before them were hired by fur companies, Lewis and Clark's voyage was a military expedition sponsored by the government. American illustrator Dean Cornwell (1892–1960) painted this imagined scene many years after the actual expedition.

**FIGURE 4.8:** François Larocque described this monumental landform in September 1805. In July 1806 Clark's group named the large rock Pompeys Tower—now Pompey's Pillar. Clark engraved his name and the date into the sandstone near other engravings of animals made by native people (inset photograph).



## Lewis and Clark Explore America's New Purchase

Thomas Jefferson had long dreamed of sending explorers across America. But the purchase of Louisiana made his idea for an expedition all the more important. He chose as its leader his own private secretary, the educated, experienced, 28-year-old Meriwether Lewis. Lewis in turn chose William Clark, a veteran frontiersman and friend, to be his co-leader—important in case either man died along the way.

Lewis was shy and thoughtful, keen in business, curious about plant and animal science, and somewhat knowledgeable about Indian

cultures. Clark was outgoing, good with the men, an accomplished mapmaker, and a genius at geography. They respected each other and cooperated well.

Lewis and Clark's expedition was different from previous expeditions sponsored by fur companies. First of all, instead of looking for good fur country, Lewis and Clark were searching for the Northwest Passage. And second, theirs was a U.S. military expedition with a military name: the Corps of Discovery.

The Corps of Discovery included Sergeants John Ordway, Charles Floyd, Patrick Gass, and Nathaniel Pryor, and 23 privates. Seven non-military members accompanied the expedition, including Clark's black slave, York; translator Toussaint Charbonneau; Charbonneau's Shoshone

wife, Sacagawea (who had been kidnapped years earlier by the Hidatsa); and their baby, Jean Baptiste, nicknamed Pomp. The captains chose each man for his abilities, strengths, and experience. Lewis also brought along his Newfoundland dog, Seaman.

People sometimes think of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as a story of two brave American explorers making their way through unknown territory, but this is not true. Lewis and Clark consulted widely with the Indians and fur trappers they met along the way, all of whom knew something about the geography of the land and the lifeways of its people.

## They Found a Land Beautiful beyond Description

The Corps of Discovery left St. Louis on Monday, May 14, 1804. Traveling by boat, they headed up the Missouri River and reached central North Dakota by October. They spent the winter of 1804–5 living with the Mandan Indians on the Missouri River (about 20 miles north of present-day Bismarck), who already had hosted many other explorers.

In April 1805 the Corps of Discovery entered what is now Montana. They were amazed at the beauty of the land and all the wildlife they saw. “We can scarcely cast our eyes in any direction without perceiving deer Elk Buffaloe or Antelopes,” Lewis wrote in his journal (using creative spelling). A few days later, at Porcupine Creek (near Poplar), he wrote that the land was “beautifull beyond description.”

The Corps pushed and pulled their boats up the river, laboring against the river’s flow. Then, in June, they reached a **confluence** (where two rivers of the same size come together). Which one was the Missouri River, and which one was the tributary? They spent nine days studying both rivers, then chose the southerly route. They still were not entirely sure they were right. But five days later they reached the awe-inspiring Great Falls—and they knew they were on the Missouri River. (The other river they later named the Marias.)

After struggling around the Great Falls of the Missouri River, they pushed onward to the headwaters, where the rivers now called the Madison, Jefferson, and Gallatin come together. By this time they were pretty discouraged. They had learned that the Northwest Passage was a myth—there was no easy water route across the continent. They desperately needed to meet some Indians who would sell them horses and help them over the mountains before winter.

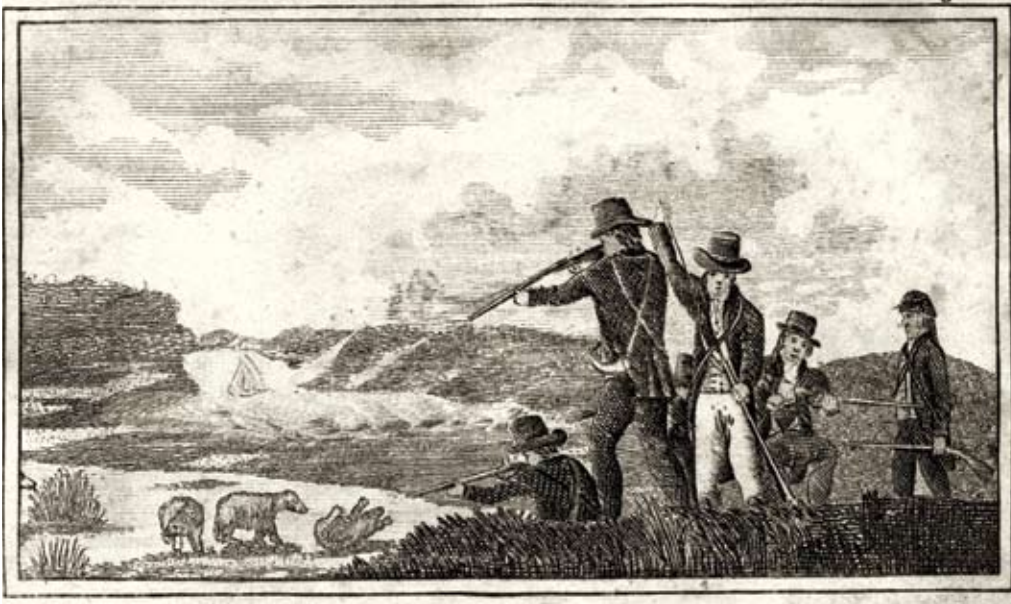
Suddenly, Sacagawea shouted out that she knew where they were. She recognized the landscape and said they were nearing her homeland. A few days later, the Corps met a band of Shoshone, led by Sacagawea’s own brother, Cameahwait.

This small band of Shoshone people lived in Idaho and had crossed into Montana for their fall bison hunt. They had brought with them just what they needed. They had no extra horses or

*FIGURE 4.9:* Captain Lewis stood before the Great Falls of the Missouri for two full hours just staring at the grand sight. The Great Falls was one of five waterfalls in this part of the river. Montana photographer F. Jay Haynes (1853–1921) took this photo in 1880. Now there is a dam across the river here, and the falls will never look like this again.







**FIGURE 4.10:** With no cameras, Lewis and Clark drew pictures of some of the sights and events they witnessed on their journey. Later, publishers hired illustrators to imagine other scenes described in the journals kept by members of the expedition. This woodcut shows Captain Clark and his men shooting bears somewhere in the Yellowstone region. It appeared in the 1810 edition of Sergeant Patrick Gass's journal.

supplies to trade with Lewis and Clark. Nevertheless, they delayed their hunt to lead the Corps to the main band in the Lemhi Valley.

With the help of the Shoshone, Lewis and Clark and their group crossed the Continental Divide on foot and horseback at Lemhi Pass and then over Lost Trail Pass into the Bitterroot Valley. They met a group of Salish Indians who fed them and traded several "elegant" horses for Lewis and Clark's exhausted animals.

Some of the Salish showed Lewis and Clark where Lolo Pass crossed the Bitterroot Mountains. The expedition crossed the pass in a bitterly cold September. For the next two months, they traveled down the Columbia River toward the Pacific Ocean.

Salish oral histories include memories of their encounter with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. That day a Salish group was picking chokecherries at a place called **K<sup>w</sup>úit̓ Púp̓l̓m̓** (qu-TEEH-thl pooh-pt-lim), or Great Clearing. A scout first noticed seven strangers with pale skins and odd clothing approaching. Salish elder Pierre Pichette tells the story in *Salish People and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, a booklet published by the Salish Culture Committee in 2000.

*Chief Three Eagles ordered buffalo robes to be brought and to be spread in the gathering place. By signs, he told the strangers to sit on the robes. The men were a puzzling sight to all the Indian surrounding them.*

*After the white men had sat down, they took their little packs off their backs. The chief looked through their packs and then began to explain to the people. "I think they have had a narrow escape from their enemies. All their belongings were taken away by the enemy. That's why there is so little in their packs. Maybe the rest of the tribe were killed. Maybe that is why there are only seven of them. These men must be very hungry, perhaps starving. And see how poor and torn their clothes are."*

*The chief ordered food to be brought to them—dried buffalo meat and dried roots. He ordered clothing also to be brought to them—buckskins and light buffalo robes that were used for clothing.*

*One of the strange men was black. He had painted himself in charcoal, my people thought. In those days it was the custom for warriors, when returning home from battle, to prepare themselves before reaching camp. Those who had been brave and fearless,*

the victorious ones in battle, painted themselves in charcoal . . . So the black man, they thought, had been the bravest of this party.

All the men had short hair. So our people thought that the seven were in mourning for the rest of the party who had been slaughtered. It was the custom for mourners to cut their hair.

By signs, Chief Three Eagles and his counselors came to a little understanding with the white men. Then the chief said to his people, "This party is the first of this kind of people we have ever seen. They have been brought in safely. I want them taken out safely. I want you warriors to go with them part of the way to make sure that they leave our country without harm."

They did not take with them the robes and clothing Chief Three Eagles had given them. Perhaps the white men did not understand they were gifts.

### Another Encounter on the Return Journey

The expedition reached the Pacific Ocean on November 7, 1805, and built Fort Clatsop. After a soggy, cold winter on the Oregon Coast, the Corps of Discovery began their eastward trek toward home in March 1806. This time they wanted to see more of the country. When they reached the Bitterroot Valley, they split up into two parties, Clark to map the Yellowstone River and Lewis to head north to explore the Marias River, which had confused them on the way west.

Lewis's party headed up the Big Blackfoot River (the Nez Perce called it *Qoq'aalx 'iskit* (koh-KAHL is-kit, meaning "the river of the road to buffalo"). Lewis left a team at the Great Falls and took three men up the Marias River to explore.

Here Lewis's group had the only violent encounter with Indian people on their entire voyage. One evening they met some young Blackfeet men and decided to camp with them. During the night Lewis's men woke to find the Blackfeet stealing their guns. In a few panicked moments, they stabbed one Blackfeet man, shot another, and beat a hasty retreat—100 miles in 20 hours—overland to the Missouri River.

Many years later, a Piegan Blackfeet named Wolf Calf told an interviewer about that encounter. Wolf Calf was 13 when Lewis's party appeared along the Marias River. Wolf Calf and some other Piegan teenagers were riding home after a raiding party against a neighboring tribe. As they passed Lewis's camp, their leader challenged them to steal a few of their belongings. The Blackfeet man that Lewis reports having killed was a youth named Calf Standing on a Side Hill.

When the interviewer asked Wolf Calf why their party had not pursued Lewis to retaliate for the murder of Calf Standing on a Side Hill,

### Clark Writes of Meeting the Salish

"Those people recved us friendly, threw white robes over our Sholders & Smoked in the pipes of peace, we Encamped with them & found them friendly but nothing but berries to eate a part of which they gave us, those Indians are well dressed with Skin Shirts & robes, they Stout & light complected more So than Common for Indians, The Chiefs harangued [talked actively] untill late at night, Smoked our pipe and appeared Satisfied. I was the first white man whoever wer on the waters of this river . . . Those people possess ellegant horses."

—JOURNAL OF WILLIAM CLARK,  
SEPTEMBER 4 AND 5, 1805



FIGURE 4.11

## Early European Explorers to the Region



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| — — — — — Hudson 1610–11                | — — — — — La Vérendrye 1738, 1742–43     |
| — — — — — Champlain 1615                | — — — — — Hearne 1770–72                 |
| — · — · — · — Joliet and Marquette 1673 | — — — — — Mackenzie 1789, 1792–93        |
| — · — · — · — La Salle 1679–82          | — · — · — · — Lewis and Clark 1804–6     |
| — — — — — David Thompson 1784–1850      | — — — — — François Antoine Larocque 1805 |

Wolf Calf said that they were frightened, too, and ran away, just as Lewis had done—but in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile, Clark’s party hiked an ancient Indian trail over what is now Bozeman Pass and dropped down to the Yellowstone River. On August 3 they reunited with Lewis’s party at the Missouri River. Six weeks later, the Corps of Discovery arrived back in St. Louis, exhausted and triumphant.

## **A Door That Would Never Close: Consequences of Exploration**

The Corps of Discovery had not found a Northwest Passage, the mythical easy water route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. But they had reached the Pacific Ocean and claimed for the United States everything they mapped.

The expedition fulfilled one of Jefferson's dreams: to extend American control from coast to coast. Along the way Corps members cataloged an unbelievable richness of wildlife, plants, and other natural resources, predicting that rich profits could be made from them. Their reports of the land they had seen thrilled Americans.

They spent most of their time in present-day Montana, made more discoveries here than anywhere else, and came closest to being killed in this region. Here they identified and cataloged 31 plant species and 32 animal, fish, and bird species new to them.

On their journey they met 27 different Indian tribes, including Shoshone, Blackfeet, Salish, Assiniboine, White Clay (Gros Ventre), and Nez Perce, and they had horses stolen by the Crow. Their violence against the Blackfeet created a deep distrust for whites among Blackfeet people that would last a long time. Yet almost all the tribes had welcomed and helped them. In fact, it was the help and goodwill of the Indians Lewis and Clark encountered along the way that ensured the success of their expedition.

Their "discovery" of a wide-open country rich in resources and indescribable in its beauty immediately lured new people into the region. Before they even got home, they met trappers bound for the beaver-rich streams of the Upper Missouri River. Behind them came traders, missionaries, and other Europeans and Americans with new ideas about the land.

## **Other Explorers Fill in the Map**

Two other explorers were almost as important to mapping this area as Lewis and Clark. One was a young man named François Larocque, who explored what is now southeastern Montana. The other was a fascinating character named David Thompson, who explored the northwest.

### **Southeastern Montana: François Larocque, 1805**

During the winter Lewis and Clark spent with the Mandan in 1804-5, they met a 20-year-old French Canadian named François Antoine Larocque. Larocque worked for a British-owned fur company. He asked if he could join them for the voyage westward. "No," said

### **Sacagawea: Child, Host, and Diplomat**

Seventeen-year-old Sacagawea helped the Lewis and Clark Expedition in many ways, but not much is known about her. It is said she was captured at age 12 and taken from her Shoshone homeland to the Hidatsa far away. In 1805 her husband joined Lewis and Clark as a translator. For the next two years, Sacagawea traveled hundreds of miles from the Mandan in North Dakota to the Oregon Coast and back again, carrying her infant son in a cradleboard on her back. Along the way she dug roots and collected berries and medicinal plants, sharing them with members of the expedition.

Her Shoshone relatives say Sacagawea would have worn red paint down the part of her hair, across her forehead, and on her upper cheeks as a sign to other Indians that she was Lemhi Shoshone and that she was traveling for peaceful purposes. Her presence probably saved the Corps from attack by Indian bands watching their movements through Montana.



## What Anybody Else Would Do

“The thing about Lewis and Clark was that they were insignificant to us in some ways and yet they were so significant subsequent to (after) the initial contact . . . Somebody once asked me, ‘How come you were so war-like, and why were other tribes afraid of you, and why were the new settlers afraid of you?’ We were just doing what anybody else would do, which was protecting our land.”

—NARCISSE BLOOD, PIEGAN, 2001

FIGURE 4.12: How would you describe a geyser to someone who had never seen or heard of one? The Old Faithful geyser, shown here in a painting by Austrian artist Gustav Krollman (1888–1962) is a familiar sight to Montanans today. But when John Colter came back from his solo expedition of the Yellowstone region, people did not believe his stories of boiling ponds and steam shooting out of the ground.



Lewis. He did not want any other nation involved in the U.S. exploration of the Missouri region.

So, in the summer of 1805, Larocque, two other trappers, and several Indian companions began their own “journey of discovery to the Rocky Mountains,” according to his journal. They followed the Little Missouri River into southeastern Montana, then turned up the Powder River until, peering through a scope, they saw the jagged peaks of the Bighorn Range, which they thought were the Rocky Mountains.

They continued south into Wyoming, then turned northward again along the Powder River to the Bighorn River, and down to the Yellowstone River. On September 15 Larocque wrote in his journal of a “whitish perpendicular rock on which was sketched in red a battle between three people on horseback and three on foot.” The following year, on his return from the Pacific, William Clark named this same rock “Pompey’s Tower.”

Larocque traveled with the Crow and Hidatsa and traded with the Gros Ventre and Shoshone along the way. He made agreements with the Crow to kill bear and beaver for him during the coming winter, which he would purchase the following spring. But by that spring the United States controlled the fur business in the Louisiana Territory. They discouraged British fur trapping activities. Larocque never returned, but his knowledge about the southeastern corner of Montana helped the trappers who followed him.

### Northwest Montana: David Thompson, 1787–1827

Some people call David Thompson the greatest geographer of the West. He explored vast areas of western Canada and was the first to survey the entire length of the Columbia River. But he operated in a very different way than most explorers: he lived here. While others tried to travel as far and fast as they could, Thompson spent 40 years truly discovering what there was to know about this region. He mapped nearly 2 million square miles of area, built several trading posts, and recorded scientific and geographic details in his journals. His is a remarkable story.

David Thompson was born to a very poor family in Wales, Great Britain. When he was 14 years old, his family shipped him off to Canada to be **apprenticed** (employed as a learner) to the Hudson’s Bay Company. At age 17 he led his own expedition into the Plains region as far west as present-day Calgary. Here he wintered with the Piegan Indians,

learning their language and ways. He brought along scientific books and studied **meteorology** (weather), surveying, and astronomy.

In 1807 Thompson entered the Flathead and upper Columbia River region. He mapped parts of present-day Montana that Lewis and Clark and the other explorers never saw. He surveyed the Kootenai River, the Clark Fork, Flathead Lake, and the Missoula Valley. He helped establish trading posts on Lake Pend Oreille (in Idaho) and built Saleesh House near present-day Thompson Falls, the Montana town named after him.

Thompson probably walked 55,000 miles in his lifetime. He explored and mapped lands from Lake Athabaska to the mouth of the Columbia River. He recorded longitude, latitude, astronomical data, geographic features, plants, animals, and the languages and cultural practices of the many Indian people who befriended him. He traveled with his family, refused to do things that would harm Indians, and was known as a man of good character. The Salish called him Koo-koo-sint: “He who looks at the stars.”

## From Obstacle to Treasure Trove

The fur companies who financed explorers like David Thompson and François Larocque were after one thing: beaver. The cold-water streams of the Rocky Mountain region were rich in beavers with pelts of lush, thick fur. Lewis and Clark reported that the upper Missouri was “richer in beaver and otter than any country on earth.” Lured by the news, trappers began pouring up the Missouri River.

What was so important about the beaver? Beaver fur was perfect for making hats. Far away, in cold Europe, people could not get enough of the warm, luxurious fur. With fur in demand, more Americans began changing how they thought about the wilderness of the West. It was no longer an obstacle to the Pacific Ocean but became a treasure trove to be mined for the rich profits it would bring.

### John Colter: Explorer Turned Trapper

The story of John Colter shows how exploration immediately opened the West to the fur trade. Colter was a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, one of its best hunters, and an eager adventurer.

While Lewis and Clark were still paddling down the Missouri River in 1806, they met two trappers heading upriver to trap on the Yellowstone River. The trappers persuaded Colter to leave the expedition and join them. Colter spent the winter trapping on the Yellowstone. Down the river he came the next spring, his canoe loaded with furs. This time he met Manuel Lisa, a trader who wanted to build a trading post on the Yellowstone River. Lisa talked Colter into turning around again and spending another winter trapping in Montana.

In the autumn of 1807, John Colter and two Indian guides walked



*FIGURE 4.13:* This statue of David Thompson and his wife, Charlotte, stands in Invermere, British Columbia. David and Charlotte were married for 57 years, had 13 children together, and often traveled as a family.



through southwestern Montana and into the area now known as Yellowstone Park. They were looking for Crow people to trade with. The appearance of an enemy band discouraged the two Indian guides from going any farther. Colter continued on alone. In the dead of winter—and all by himself—he covered 500 miles of mountain passes, sulphurous hot springs, wild rivers, and deep gorges that people now visit in Yellowstone National Park. Later, when he told people about the fantastic landscape he saw, nobody believed him. But his experiences fascinated the men who came after him. Later, William Clark added Colter's route through Yellowstone into his map of the region.

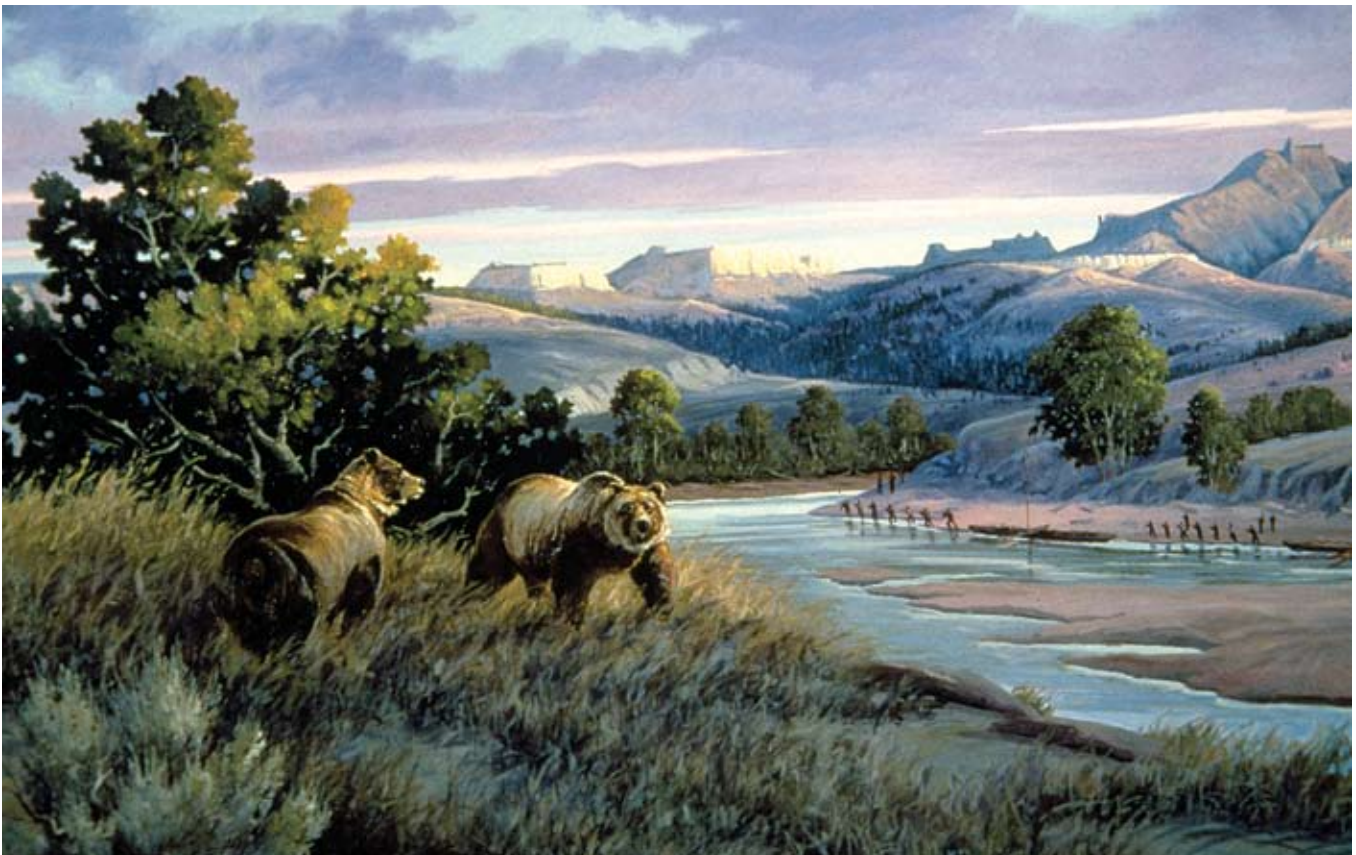
## New People Bring New Ideas

The explorers themselves did not change the people or the land here. But behind them came hundreds of others—fur trappers, traders, and missionaries. These newcomers brought new tools, technologies, and materials, including medicines, the repeating rifle, and “strike-a-lights,” which made fire starting much easier. They also brought alcohol and disease, which had devastating effects on Indian people.

Most of all, these newcomers brought very different ideas and expectations. They followed a different religion. They operated under a new economic system called **capitalism** (an economic system in which privately owned businesses carry on trade for profit). And they had very different ideas about how to use the land.

The arrival of these newcomers began a new chapter in human history here.

*FIGURE 4.14:* Can you find the Corps of Discovery? Explorers like Lewis and Clark made a tiny imprint on the enormous landscape of the Upper Missouri region, as this painting by Montana artist Robert F. Morgan (born 1929) shows. More people flooded into the region in their footsteps, eager to profit from the region's rich natural resources.



## How It Worked

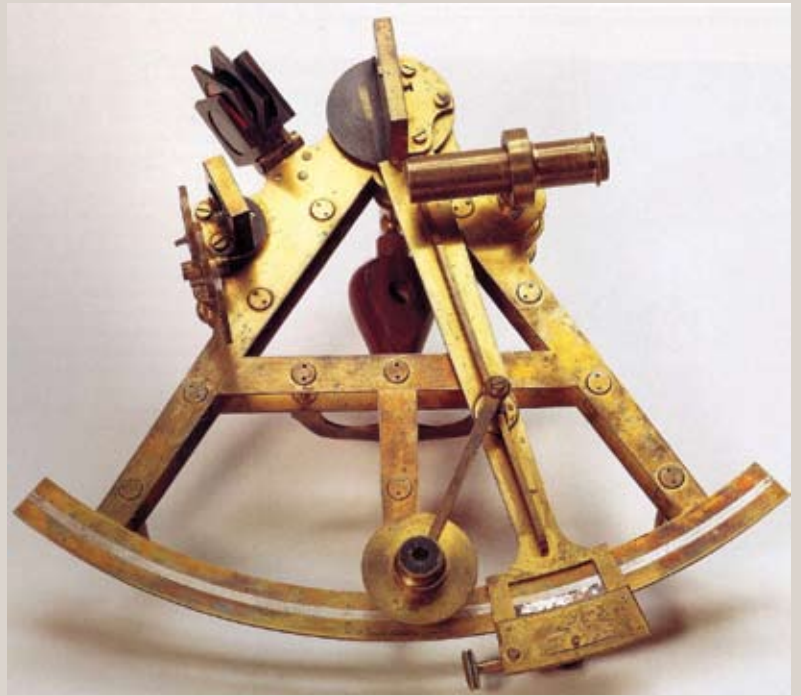
# Navigation Tools the Explorers Used

If you were an explorer and had been walking through an unfamiliar land for several days, weeks, or months, how would you figure out where you were?

Travelers around the year 1800 used several navigational instruments to determine **latitude** (distance north or south from the equator) and **longitude** (distance east or west from the central meridian, which runs from the South Pole to the North Pole through Greenwich, England).

To measure latitude, you would use a **sextant** (a tool that measures the angle between two points) to find the angle between a celestial object (usually the sun or North Star) and the horizon. With the help of a book of tables, you could use that angle to determine your latitude.

The rotation of the earth makes measuring longitude a little harder. But it is easier if you have a **chronometer** (a very accurate clock). Before you departed, you would set the chronometer to **Greenwich Mean Time** (the local time in Greenwich, England, at the central meridian of the earth). Alternately, you could set your chronometer to the local time of a location with a known longitude. Every day of your trip, you would stop at noon—the moment when the sun reached its highest point—and check the time on your clock. (To figure out when the sun really was at its highest point,



*FIGURE 4.15:* A British ship's captain named John Campbell invented the sextant about 1757. It helps navigators figure out where they are on the earth by comparing the angle above the horizon of celestial bodies like the sun, the moon, or recognizable stars.



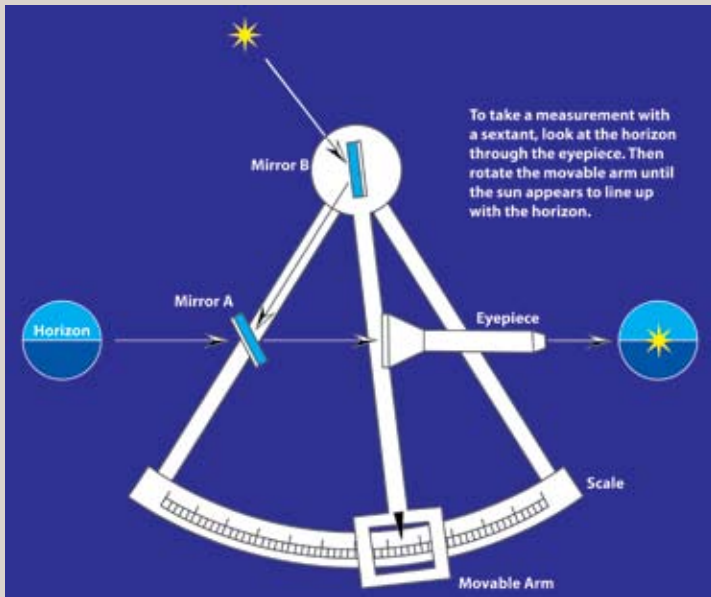


FIGURE 4.16: A sextant simply measures the angle between two objects. Explorers measured the angle between the sun and the horizon to figure out the latitude of the spot on which they were standing.

you would use your sextant.) The difference in time between local noon time and the time on your clock would help you determine your longitude, or the distance from the central meridian.

The globe is divided into 24 meridians, each representing one hour of the day (since the earth rotates once every 24 hours). One hour equals 15 degrees. One degree equals  $\frac{1}{15}$  of an hour, or 4 minutes. So, if you were standing at the headwaters of the Missouri River at noon, and your clock said 7:25, you would know that you were standing at longitude

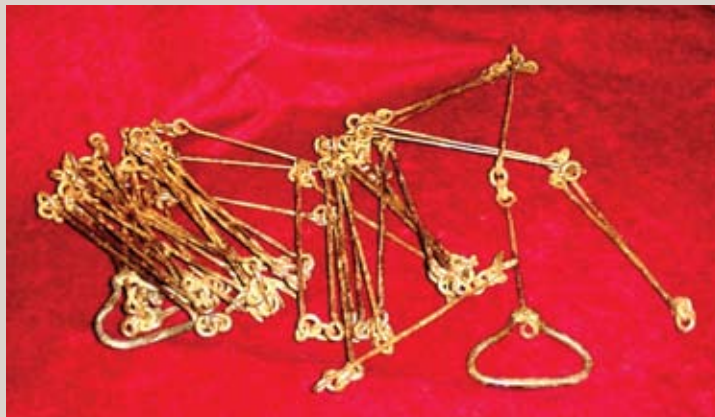
111 degrees and 15 minutes. This requires an extremely accurate clock. The chronometer that Lewis and Clark carried cost \$250 (about \$4,400 today). It was their most expensive piece of equipment.

You would also want to carry compasses, both a magnetic hand compass to determine direction and a surveyor's compass. If you wanted to make absolutely sure of a measurement, you might mount your large surveyor's compass on a tripod and then peer through the sight at a target. The tripod and the compass's larger size would help you get a more accurate reading than you could get from a hand compass.

And, to measure distances, you might haul out your Gunter chain. This was a measuring device invented by

German mathematician Edmund Gunter in 1620. It was a simple metal chain with 100 links, measuring 66 feet. Eighty chains equal a mile, and ten square chains equal one **acre** (43,560 square feet, or 4,840 square yards).

FIGURE 4.17: The Gunter chain is a simple, foldable measuring device similar to today's tape measure.



# CHAPTER 4 REVIEW

## ► CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify: (a) Alexander Mackenzie; (b) Meriwether Lewis; (c) William Clark; (d) Sacagawea; (e) Corps of Discovery; (f) Wolf Calf; (g) François Antoine Larocque; (h) David Thompson; (i) John Colter; (j) Louisiana Territory
2. Define: (a) Northwest Passage; (b) indigenous; (c) confluence; (d) headwaters; (e) capitalism; (f) sextant; (g) chronometer
3. Why did Europeans want to find a way across the North American continent?
4. What countries were most interested in exploring the West and why?
5. Why was Thomas Jefferson eager to claim new land for the United States?
6. What was the main purpose of the Corps of Discovery's expedition?
7. What was one of the most important contributions made by Sacagawea to the success of the Corps of Discovery's expedition?
8. Describe the areas in Montana explored by the Corps of Discovery, François Larocque, and David Thompson.
9. What was the primary information given by early explorers that brought more people to the western lands?
10. Describe some of the navigational instruments used by explorers in the early 1800s.

## ► CRITICAL THINKING

1. How was the Corps of Discovery unlike other expeditions into the western lands?
2. Compare (and contrast) the relationship the Lewis and Clark Expedition had with the Indian tribes they encountered and the relationships other explorers had with Indians. What do you think accounts for the similarities and differences?
3. The men of the Corps of Discovery had believed the Rocky Mountains to be similar to the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States. How do you think they felt when they realized this was a far different kind of mountain range? How do you think it made them feel about the return trip?
4. The Corps of Discovery stayed close together throughout their westward journey. On the return journey through Montana, however, they separated into three small groups. Why do you think they did this, and was it a wise decision?

5. Two of the major obstacles faced by the Corps of Discovery were the Great Falls and the Rockies. Compare and contrast the difficulties each physical landform presented. Which difficulty do you think was the most discouraging to the group?

## ► PAST TO PRESENT

1. Are there any lands left in the world today that have not been explored by modern people? What might be new frontiers for people today? What are the reasons we would want to explore new places?
2. Many white Americans looked forward to “celebrating” the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial in 2006. Many Indian people objected to calling it a celebration. They wanted to call it a **commemoration** (memorial) instead. What is the difference between a celebration and a commemoration? What different attitudes do the two words imply? What do you think accounts for these differences?

## ► MAKE IT LOCAL

1. Are there any places near you that early explorers passed through? If so, why were they there and what did they do? If not, why do you think they did not come to your area? Are there any historic sites near your home marking early Euro-American exploration? Are any places named after these explorers in your area?

## ► EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Make a timeline of the major events of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Begin with their departure from St. Louis, and end with their return. Record and describe at least ten events.
2. On a map of Montana, chart the tribes the early explorers met. Briefly describe the encounters, including where they met and what information and goods, if any, were traded.
3. Choose one of the encounters between Indians and European explorers described in the chapter. Write a descriptive paragraph from the point of view of both an Indian and a European describing what you think might have been each person's first impression of the other.
4. Find your latitude using a homemade sextant.



# Credits

The following abbreviations are used in the credits:

BBHC Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming  
GNPA Glacier National Park Archives  
LOC Library of Congress  
MAC Montana Arts Council, Helena  
MDEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena  
MDT Montana Department of Transportation, Helena  
MFWP Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena  
MHS Montana Historical Society, Helena  
MHSA Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena  
MHSL Montana Historical Society Library, Helena  
MHS Mus. Montana Historical Society Museum, Helena  
MHS PA Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena  
MSU COT Montana State University College of Technology, Billings  
NMAI National Museum American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
MSU Billings Special Collections, Montana State University Billings Library  
NARA National Archives and Records Administration  
NPS National Park Service  
NRIS Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena  
SHPO State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena  
TM Travel Montana, Helena  
UM Missoula Archives & Special Collections, The University of Montana-Missoula  
USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
USFS United States Forest Service  
WMM World Museum of Mining, Butte

## Chapter 4

- FIG. 4.1** *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole*, C. M. Russell, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 4.2** *A new map of the north parts of America claimed by France, 1720*, courtesy Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA
- FIG. 4.3** *The Brothers La Vérendrye on the Western Plains*, C. W. Jefferys, Library and Archives Canada, copy negative C-073569, item number 00744
- FIG. 4.4** Sir Alexander Mackenzie, original engraving from *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence* by T. Cadell, 1801, Library and Archives Canada, former registration number 89-069
- FIG. 4.5** *Thomas Jefferson*, Charles Willson Peale, Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA
- FIG. 4.6** *The Louisiana Purchase*, F. Pedretti's Sons, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 4.7** *Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804*, Dean Cornwell, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 4.8** Pompey's Pillar, courtesy Bureau of Land Management, Billings
- FIG. 4.8 inset** W. A. Clark signature on Pompey's Pillar, courtesy Bureau of Land Management, Billings
- FIG. 4.9** Great Falls of the Missouri River, summer 1880, photo by F. Jay Haynes, MHS PA Haynes Foundation Coll. H-321
- FIG. 4.10** "Captain Clark and His Men Shooting Bears," illustration from *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery* by Patrick Gass (Philadelphia, 1810), p. 95, MHSL
- FIG. 4.11** Routes of Early European Explorers, map by MHS, based on maps from World Book Encyclopedia and [www.davidthompson200.ca](http://www.davidthompson200.ca)
- FIG. 4.12** *Old Faithful Geyser#1*, Gustaf Krollman, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 4.13** David and Charlotte Small Thompson statue, Invermere, B.C., sculpted by Rich Roenisch, photo by Ross MacDonald
- FIG. 4.14** *White Bears and White Cliffs*, Robert F. Morgan, MHS Mus.
- FIG. 4.15** Sextant, courtesy Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, USFS, Great Falls
- FIG. 4.16** *How a Sextant Works*, Geoffrey Wyatt, Helena
- FIG. 4.17** Survey chain, courtesy Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, USFS, Great Falls