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CANOE CAMP SITE

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In August 1805, Lewis and Clark crossed the mountains which today separate Montana from Idaho, and near present-day Salmon made contact with the Shoshoni people. They traded for horses, and after considering both the Snake and Salmon River routes, they finally set out northwards, crossing the Bitterroots again under guidance of Old Toby, the Shoshoni. They turned west again near where Lolo, Montana, now is, and crossed the Lolo Trail, traveling over rough country through early snow, and finding little game on the way.

Hungry and tired out, they came at last to the valley of the Clearwater, where they met a Nez Perce band under a chief they called Twisted Hair. The friendly Indians shared what food they had with the white men. It was mostly roots, berries, and dried fish, and made the men sick, but it was the best they had. The Journals say on September 24 "Capt Lewis scercely able to ride on a jentle horse which was furnished by the Chief, Several men so unwell that they were compelled to lie on the Side of the road for Some time, other obliged to be put on horses."

They found a stand of pine and in spite of hunger and illness started to build canoes. Clark's first draft for September 26th says "Set out early and proceeded down the river to the bottom on the S. Side opposit the forks & formed a camp had ax handle ground &c our axes all too small. . . several men bad Capt Lewis sick. . . I am a little unwell hot day."

By October 6 they had finished five canoes--Sergeant Gass said "to save them [the men] from hard labour, we have adopted the Indian method of burning out the canoes." They had cached saddles and gear, and arranged to winter their horses with the Nez Perce people. On the morning of Monday, October 7, half-starved, sick, ill-equipped, they nevertheless shoved off from shore and started out on the last lap of their trip to the Pacific. Canoe Camp Site was their last major stopping place.

(Quotations are from Thwaites' edition of the Lewis and Clark Journals.)