This month's theme:
Lewis and Clark Meet the Shoshoni

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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

December, 2004

Lewis and Clark Meet the Shoshoni

In August of 1805, Meriwether Lewis was starting to worry. Summer was coming to an end and the ocean was nowhere in sight. The Corp of Discovery, under his and Captain William Clark's command, expected to spend the winter on the coast looking for a ship to take his group back to the east. The soldiers needed directions and horses if their mission was to succeed. They needed help.

Then, on the horizon, Lewis spotted several people. The Captain and the two soldiers who were with him grew excited. Could this be the Shoshoni? According to Sacajawea, the Indian wife of a French-Canadian fur trader they had hired last winter, they were close to the tribe's homeland. Sacajawea was born as a Lemhi Shoshoni before being kidnapped by another tribe. In the last few days she had

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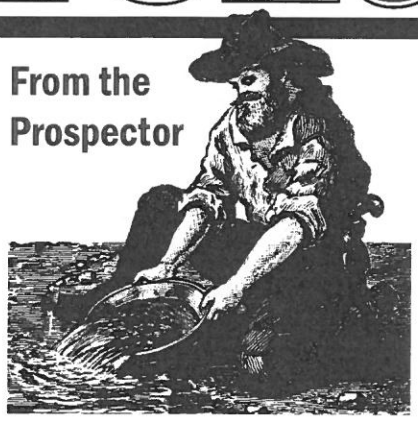
From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors!

I don't know about you guys, but I love the story of Lewis and Clark. The thought of a small group of explorers making their way across thousands of miles of uncharted land just gives me the shivers. From grizzly bear attacks to dangerous river rapids, the expedition proved their bravery again and again. There's more than just the adventure, though. One of the things I like best about the story of Lewis and Clark is that it is also the story of the Native people who already lived in the west. We don't have enough room to talk about the entire expedition, so we're going to concentrate on a part of the story important to our state, when Lewis and Clark met the Shoshoni people.⌘

begun to recognize landmarks she had seen as a child. If she was correct, her people- the Shoshoni- were near. Maybe the tribe would help the expedition.

Lewis tried to contact the Indians by waving a blanket over his head. A man on a horse slowly rode near, then changed his mind and rode quickly away. Disappointed, Lewis and his two companions moved on. Luck was with them though. In the next mile the men came across three more Indians. One quickly ran away but the other two, an older woman and a young girl, stood still, frightened by the strangers. Sensing their fear, Lewis quickly showed that he meant no harm by handing out gifts. Contact with the Shoshoni had been made.

The meeting between Lewis and Clark and the Shoshoni was one of the most remarkable situations on the expedition's long journey. When Thomas Jefferson sent the Corp of Discovery west, he had given them many instructions. The explorers were supposed to find a water route from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean, make maps of unexplored territory, study the plants and animals they encountered, and contact any native people they met along the way. This last instruction was very important. If traders and pioneers were to come west in the future, they would need the cooperation of the people who lived there. If Lewis and Clark made friends now, it would help others later. But there was another, more practical reason to befriend the Indians. Lewis and Clark needed help. It was a long, dangerous trip across the unmapped continent. In some areas, food and directions were hard to come by. Without the assistance of the people who lived in the west, the expedition probably would not succeed.

Merriwether Lewis wearing a tippet made of ermine tales that was given to him by the Shoshoni

The Shoshoni people did not have to help the Corp of Discovery. At first they were suspicious of Lewis and his two companions, thinking that they might be a trick sent by their enemies, the Blackfeet. The captain convinced the Indians that the rest of the expedition, including the Indian woman Sacajawea, was close behind. The Shoshoni decided to trust the strangers and wait. Soon Clark and the rest of the group arrived.

From here on the meeting went better. In one of the first formal meetings between the expedition and the Shoshoni leader, Cameahwait, something incredible happened. Sacajawea cried out in joy and hugged the Shoshoni chief. They were brother and sister and they had not seen each other since they were children. This happy reunion helped ensure the Shoshoni would help the explorers.

The Shoshoni people showed their generosity. Even though they were starving and poor they shared their meager food supply and gave Lewis a beautiful piece of fur clothing called a tippet. The Shoshoni gave the expedition much needed directions to a trail that crossed the mountains and warned them not to continue on the dangerous Salmon River. Although they were about to ride onto the great plains for their annual buffalo hunt, the Shoshoni sold Lewis and Clark horses to carry their supplies. And finally, the tribe supplied a guide to help the crew negotiate the difficult path to the ocean.

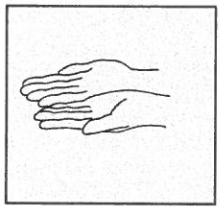
The Corp of Discovery still had many difficulties ahead, but with the help of the Shoshoni the expedition now had a better chance of reaching the ocean before the horrible cold and snow of winter hit the land. ⌘

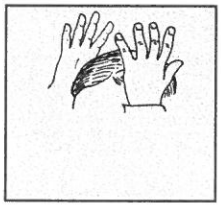
The Fun Page

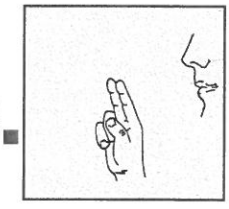
Indian Sign Language

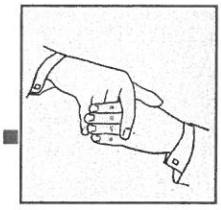
It was important for Lewis and Clark to be able to speak with the Native Americans they met on there journey. One of the ways they did it was to use Indian sign language. This form of non-spoken communications was used by many tribes and was an easy way to exchange simple ideas. Although this language is rarely used today, some of the signs are still very simple to learn. For example, to say water you raise a cupped hand near your mouth. See if you can guess what these other eight signs mean.

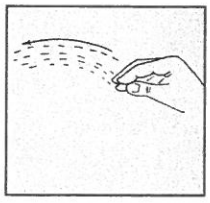
Water

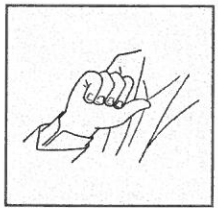
A. 

B. 

C. 

D. 

E. 

F. 

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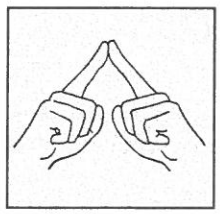
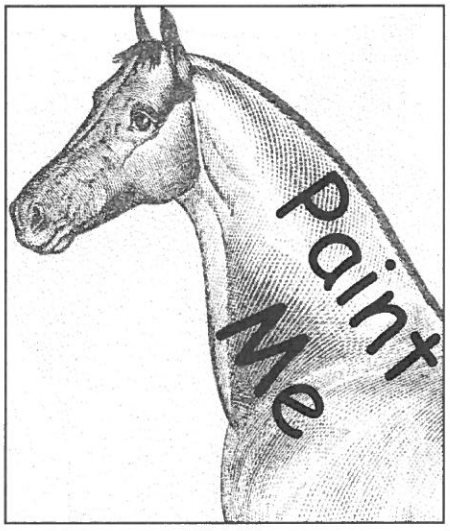
H. 

Answers: *A-Book B-Deer C-Friend D-Horse E-Jump F-Me G-Owl H-Teepee*

Next Month's Activities

Now it's your turn, Prospectors. We've given you a good introduction to the story of Lewis and Clark among the Shoshonis, but there's a lot more information out there. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own project about this part of the Lewis and Clark expedition. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, school, and town where you are from, and the name of your Prospector chapter.

Modern Hand Signals: Communication was a very important part of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Fortunately for the group, many of the tribes used a common sign language. Once the Corp of Discovery learned the basic hand movements, they could easily exchange their questions and ideas with the Native Americans. The world has changed a lot in two hundred years. Although Indian sign language was helpful back then, it has not been updated in many years. Common objects like cars and computers have no signs. If the Indians still used this form of communication, what would the modern signs look like? Pick a few objects that are unique to our lives in the 21st century and create new sign language for them. Draw a



picture of how we should hold our hands and give us some instructions for their movement.

Sacajawea Lives: No one is quite sure what happened to Sacajawea. Most historians believe that she died at a very young age, but some believe that she lived a long life among her people in the West. Imagine that Sacajawea did live a long and happy life and learned to write English. What important information and secrets could she tells us about Lewis and Clark and life in early 1800's? Pretend you are the great Shoshoni woman and write us a page from your autobiography.

Painted Horses: Horses changed the lives of the North American Indians. For the tribes living near the Great Plains, horses meant that they could travel farther to hunt buffalo. Since they believed their horses were important, many tribes treated them with respect and decorated them with painted shapes and patterns. If you had a horse, how would you decorate it? Show us a picture of your new precious pet and the artwork that would cover its body. We can't wait to see what you come up with.

Send it your work by Jan 13th, 2005 to

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