

**All in Sperits:
On Leading the Corps of Discovery
William Clark to his Nephew Isaac
January 23, 24, & 26, 1807**

Washington city, January 23rd, 1807

Nephew, I thank you again for your congratulations on the successful completion of our long voyage which I credit to my good friend Capt. Lewis second only to divine providence. You asked at table how we could lead men so far throu so many dangers with so little loss. fear I gave you but few words and those poor by reply. The press of our business is now verry great, but as best I can will give my thoughts in reply. I have not the ready use of our journals and other Records but you will believe me when I say the scenes of the Voyage are yet fresh in mind.

You will understand that careful, even tedious preparation were utmost import to our mission. You know the listing of supplies, the design or our boat and the diligent tutoring of Cap Lewis and my own study in diverse Subjects before our departure. But understand too that we led picked men. Certainly the young men from Kentuck well used to hard work, life in wood and field tho not to army life. And to a degree the Army men who joined us downriver. Volunteers yes, but I know well the men officers will cheerfull permit to leave. So it was more fortunate than hardship, the Season being already advanced and our supplies not yet complete, the spanish Officer in Saent Louis denied us passage while he might seek instructions. A winter in camp on the banks of the Great Mississippi above St. Louis let us harden the men in the field, judge their Worth on closer inspection, and accustom all to a single Standard of military Discipline. We had but few events to concern us during the winter, all what might be expected of young men so close confind. When in spring three years past we set out on the Missouri none were sorry I think to trad camp life for the hard labor of moving our kiel Boat up river.

Let me be plain, no one should think our voyage to or first Winter camp at Fort Mandan easy. The route was known to us from the many traders and river men in st. Louis, but so too were the dificultes we might expect. The river itself, rappid, barred often by shifting sand, colapsing banks, and snages that everywhere threatened to swamp our craft. Remember too that summer was upon us, scorching heat, sudden storms and more Mosquitors than I hope ever to see again. Despite all, our men turned wilingly to oars, poles, and tow rope. We lived well as Game came plenty on the planes. Early we lost our good sergeant Floyd to a chorlic who had perform his service in every particular. We thought fit to give him Burrial will full Honors, not least that our men should see his life and service well valued and attested. But of our great trial this first summer I have not yet spoke. With few ecseptions the tribes of the lower River will impose upon traders for gifts beyond what would be oferred wilingly. None of these could match the Teton Scioux in determination to command the Traffic of the river. They would strip river men of a seasons furs or traders of the coats on their backs. On the lower river Tribes we took occasion to practise for our meeting with these Sioucx. Our charge was First that we should enform these people that their Great Father lived now in Washington, that they might now look to our trading people for their supply and not as they were formerly accustomed to the North, and that our St Louis merchant traders might secure the peltry trade. But if we were to secure our great goal of

opening an inland route by water to the Pacific and securing trade with the Orient, we must not only pass these tribes whose number far outwayed us, but if we should return at all, also secure our safe return, when we might expect to be much reduced in numbers and trade goods.

We determined to deal with these people as fourthrately as might be, paying due respect to their way of treating. We knew that no weighty matter might proceed before both parties had taken smoke, made exchange of gifts, and spoke at length. I will remind you too that all our discourse with these dusky gentlemen preceded first from English, then French and if none of our party of rivermen, guides and interpreters had more than indifferent words in their tongue, then in the sign talk customary on the plains. We had of course supply of small gifts as medals, flags, colored cloth and burning glasses, beads and needles &c. &c. Our intercourse with Ricarees, Panee Otoo &c, had given us good preparation.

With the Sioux we were prepared to practice these gentle arts of diplomacy but knew that our final reliance should be on our strength in arms. More, that they should understand that we would not be stopped in our passage, tho it might mean the life of every man in our command. Accordingly we had the men put their arms in order and redoubled our guards. Now we should see the proof of our winter in camp. Our great reliance was upon the discipline instilled in our men. That they should act instantly upon our command, but no less that no man should act without orders, however great the provocation or however great he deemed the danger. We relied yes on the discipline of soldiers, and several men had given us cause to exercise it by their insubordination or failure in duty. More than this we would require, for our party although they be subject to command were yet free men in will and spirit.

The delicacy of our position with these Sioux was very great. None but Capt Lewis or I might do the business nor could we choose but enter their camp with one or two men only attending. That our men should see us unwavering in the face of dangers was our greatest surety that we should see them so also. Nonetheless either Capt Lewis or myself remained on the barge at all times otherwise we should have no hope of continuing the voyage in case of some untoward event. I have no shame in telling you I did not sleep the four nights this business detained us with the Sioux. There were alarms attendant to unexpected accidents – a boat shearing its cable or the presumptuous impositions of their young men. I felt myself go warm once and took up the port fire for the swivel gun. I put my hand to Pommel more than once. At length they had understood that we should die but not be turned back. You will understand why we thought fit to name our camp Bad Humored island and were heartily glad to be quit of the place. In this testing of wills it was of the utmost that our men should act instant upon a command and that they should be so seen by the savages. Capt L and myself were in perfect accord that our men would do far more from willing compliance than threat of discipline however harsh could extract. Of military discipline we did have some small further call, principally in the matter of discharging a man from the party for insubordination and also ordered courts martial that gave lashes for some instances of laxness in guard duty upon which the lives of the whole party depended. (Our physical discipline greatly alarmed these natives, for these people are not accustomed to strike even their children for wrong doing lest it break their spirit.)

We were nonetheless determined to deal with the men of our party as liberally as proper discipline might allow, respecting their common humanity whatever their rank. Whether it

might be the preparation of some special meal as when Chabonno prepared his boudin to Capt L's particular delite or a frolick we were solicitous of the spirits of our men. Meager our means might be but we would suffer the men some celebration of Christmas, the new year to reward their labors and mark the passing of time in our winter camp at Fort Mandan. After a particularly laborsome day we would sometimes refresh their spirits with a dram of rum. This without fail brought out the fiddle. Our intrpreter Cruzatte would play and tired men dance until darkness or the hour brought an end to their frolick. (This dancing, not least of my black man York, much interested our tawny Hosts who often as not replied with one of their own or invited some of our party to attend upon theirs.

In this connexion I cannot fail to mention the extraordinary Custom of these people of the plains in offering the full Hospitality of their lodges and Wives. To refuse these offers they would not concent but counted it grave affront not to be endured and they would persist. To forbid young Vgorous men the charms of these Damsels we could not, yet we could insist that these labors of Venus not bring harm to the party, viz. as requiring that they first secure Permission of husband or father as their curious custom requires. In our first winter camp the Failure of one of our seargents in this matter caused us some distress. During our long winter on the coast we could not forbid them, but from our much shrunken stock of goods gave each man lengths of ribbon that they might not trade their knives &c &c for these favors. But of this I have writ too much already and will end by saying these Adventures gave us much occasion of practicing cures for Loues Veneris. The hour is now late and Cp Lewis and myself will be much occupied tomorrow. I will take up the pen tomorrow night if may be.

Jan 24th 1807

When Spring ice was out of the river at Fort Mandan we proceeded on. Men all in sperits after the winter in camp, anxious to procede. The labors of our men were still more burdensome sometimes in water still icy to their necks, barefoot through sucking mud and rocks. They were well acustomed to it and bore all without compleint. When we reached the mouth of the Yellowstone the men were heartened and we encouraged their celebration with a dram. Capt L and myself had no doubt of the party's readiness for heavy toil and immediate dangers. All seemed ready see our voyage through or die in the attempt. But uncertainty or fear of our voyage miscarying we feared would eat at their Resolve. From the Mandans and Minitarree we had drawn a clear picture of our intended route so far as the Stony Mountains and we had fair hope of a brief day's passage across a level plain to the headwaters of the Columbia. As we passed on up from the Yellow Stone, promised landmarks did come at greater distances than we expected but this gave the men of the party no great Aprehention.

Nothing shook our Confedence in the advice received of the natives until early June when we came to an unexpected Fork. We had counted streams as they joined left and right but had expected no large stream before we met with the great Falls of the Missouri. The men, not least Cruzatte our most seasoned Waterman, were of one mind that the Right fork, boiling and muddy like the river below must be the True Missouri and lead us to the height of land where the Columbia would head. Cap L and myself alone inclined to the left fork of clear water and stony bottom. Of our thinking and Researches I will say but little here. But you will understand how

Much hung upon the choice. The season of travel was already well advanced. If we chose unwisely we should not only lose our hope of reaching the Pacific and returning to Ft. Mandan before winter. We also earnestly Debated whether the lost time and effort might not so shake the Spirit of the party that we could not proceed. That we should consult their Opinion in some matters was understood. Just as we were pleased to appoint the man commended by the party to replace Sgt Floyd. So in this matter we heard the opinions of the men in all earnestness. When our determination was for the left fork, the Party was of one mind that the Right was our true course, but all were equally ready to follow our Chosen course with all cheerfulness. Tho they feared this clear stream would lead us high into the mountains far from the true sources of the Coloumbia.

In a short time Cpt L scouting ahead discovered the great Falls. The relief in camp was very great for it confirmed our choice of the left fork toward the headwaters of the Missouri. But shortly we learned that the falls were not one but a foaming channel of many miles and the portage not days but weeks long. Our men bore the immense Labor of the portage without complaint, tho their burdens were great. At every halt many were asleep upon the instant, some yet on their feet. They were battered by hail, baked by the sun and feet cruelly cut by prickly pear and flints. Yet our greater fear was that this further delay might weaken their confidence and resolve. Scarcely into this laborious business we celebrated the birthday of our Nation with a bounteous feast, but pouring a drahm, exhausted our supply of ardent Spirits. This day too with cap L concluded not to send back a canoe with dispatches to St. Louis as we had in the spring thought to do. Feared our party already no larger than need be but concerned more that the departure might so discourage the remainder as to risk completion of our charge. Of this plan we had said no word to the party and all seemed determined to press on come what might be.

As we came to the stony walls christened the Gates of the Mountains by C. Lewis, so we also passed beyond the merest hearsay of our Indian friends at Fort Mandan. Hereafter the success or failure of our voyage should depend on our success in trading for Horses, for without them our knowledge of the road ahead would profit us little. In this we placed much reliance upon the Indian woman wife to our interpreter Shabono, that she might know the country and assist in our discourse with the men of her tribe, called Snake or Sossone. Her illness below the great falls deepened our fears that we should not find this Nation or secure horses from them which we should sorely need if the portage to the Columbia might prove more than a few days. No less because she had proved her worth and had at her side an infant.

The Indian woman Sah-car-gah-weah finding the country familiar cheered the men that we might soon cross to the headwaters of the great Coloumbia. Despite our precaution and preparation after some days and no sign of the woman's people we felt the press of the season as it was now high Summer. We lacked neither powder and Ball nor marksmen but as we advanced game less and less and near to vanishing. We must pass mountains extent still unknown quickly before the advance of winter banished hope to reach the ocean and return to fort. Mandan this season or even hope for our Survival. Without horses and guides to the most likely road we had but little hope of success. That we were in the event able to secure both I credit most the diplomacy, patience and a little stratagem of Cap. L and too the hopes of those people for guns against their enemies. Without horses I believe the spirits of our party might have been broke beyond chance of proceeding. Horses secured I believe all credited our likely success.

From our winter camp at Ft. Mandan to the Shoshone our labors had been immense, but day to day we had followed a known route. Doubt of our success was a real and ever-present danger and we tended our party's spirits vigilantly. But on the plains we found game plenty and met with no one. Our dependence was on ourselves. Once mounted on horses from the Shoshone, through the mountains to the Columbian plains we met neither men nor game. Our hunters found but little and we soon ate what came to hand – crow, wolf or colt and I will say it plain, we starved. Our passage from the Shoshone across the mountains was painful in the extreme. Men, horses and baggage tumbled, stumbled across fallen timber and slipped down mountains slick with rain and then snow. I was as wet and cold as ever in my life and men fell sick on our short rations. Spirits I think sank lowest during this starving time. Now in addition to belief in our probable success the purest necessity for survival urged us on. When at last we emerged to encounter people of the Flathead nation we were starving, sick and exhausted. These people might have slaughtered us for our possessions, but in the event supplied us with dried, pounded salmon fish and root bread their principal food and guides as well. Dog now joined our diet, relished by my friend Capt Lewis and the rest of the party but never to my taste. We found that we had entered upon a very different country from that east of the mountains. In the plains our reliance had been most upon our selves and so it was in the mountains once supplied with horses by the Snake people. Now we found that we must depend upon the people of this sparse country for food, for trails and guides, and even for wood to burn. We had braved the fierce resistance of the Siouic, but now their mere indifference or unwillingness to trade would undo us. We depended in the extreme on the discipline of our men that they neither give or take offense and in this we were not disappointed.

The approaching winter pressed us on and the necessity to find some suitable winter encampment. Our men knew their tasks and turned readily to them with little more than a word from their sergeants. Of discipline and spirits we were always mindful, but now we reaped the yield of the hard work of the plains and we had little mind that the success of the expedition might be at hazard. Capt L had noted that among the Shoshons all men were chiefs and the principal chief he whose skill and courage were valued most. To my mind, rank notwithstanding, it was not altogether different with us. Now the men followed easily and we gave undivided thought to the route ahead as we launched at last onto the waters of the great Columbia.

You heard me at table speak of the profound joy felt by all when the great Pacific ocean came at last in view. Even before, we had guessed our approach by the growing number of bits and pieces of metal gear and cast off seaman's clothing amongst the people we passed on our voyage down the Columbia. Even as our stock of trade goods shrunk, so too unhappily we found them less regarded by these native people and the prices asked for fish, roots, wood, dogs and services of any kind &c. rose daily even as we were less able to pay. Here also we found a thievishness new to us on this journey, among people debauched we supposed by their contact with seamen and traders. But our joy at reaching the ocean was soon tempered by days of rain without pause so that our clothing and blankets rotted on our backs and the unending roar of immense crashing waves so that I could not in good faith call this ocean Pacific.

Where to winter we had now to decide. I had always held Salt air unhealthy and Attribute to it no little of the sickness that now beset us and so for a Time favored return some distance back up the Columbia to find a winter camp where we might live more comfortable and more favorably begin our return in the Spring. In the event concluded with Capt L wiser to winter near the coast where we might still hope to meet a trading ship to replenish our exhausted Supplies and send back dispatches to the u. States, that if we should not return our discoveries be not lost. But we thought fit to Poll the party who had suffered much and Served so well. After the sergeants vote came the men and my servant York and Janey favored any place where she might get potatoes. Drewyer did not hesitate to speak for a camp Upriver but all were reconciled to winter near the coast. We did not entirely abandon hope of meeting with a Ship, but nonetheless set the men to making Salt and tanning elk skins in the belief that we might well not. The winter held near constant rain and a diet of little more than pore elk often half spoiled some roots and water. Yet we celebrated Christmas and the birth of the new year as best we could, awarding each man who smoked a share of half our remaining tobacco and to those who did not a handkerchief each to raise their spirit. Despite our close quarters and sometime misunderstandings all lived in Harmony and expectation of the time when we should return to friends and Family. It is now late and tomorrow I rise early so will conclude and hope to write again tomorrow.

Janu the 28th 07

I had no chance to conclude yester night and so will hope to do Better now. With the approach of spring Captain Lewis and I much considered the time for our departure on return. Our route was known but our Prospects not without hazard. We had depended much on our passage down the Columbia on dried pounded fish purchased from those indians. But now our stock of trade goods was so Little that it might be carried easily in a large Kerchief. If we left before the Salmon returned we might expect to find the indians who depended on their own reduced stocks selling more Dear than we could well afford. Yet if delayed too Long we might find the people keeping our horses had grown Impatient and gone off. Without Horses we could not hope to cross the emence mountains and return to Seint Louis that year. If we left too Soon we would watch our supplies and pitifull stocks of trade goods dwindle as we waited for the great Snows to diminish sufficient for our pasage.

Now we had resort to a mode of travel I might call delibrat haste. We Elected not to wait for the salmon to return but nonetheless the tremendous snow of the mountains turned us back until we should find a sure guide to the fish weirs at Travelers rest. Now we perfected our skills as Guests. To our usual entertainments of the men's dancing and fiddle and such marvels as our air gun and my servant York we added my docturing and on ocasion Capt. L's magic with compass, magnet and fuse to please or cow our hosts to sell us food. I regret too that we had resort to threats to hold off the Persistent Thievery. We dared brook no insult lest we embolden those savages. Our entertainments with the Indians of foot and horse races and shooting at marks gave salutary proof of our prowess too I think.

Capt L and I had concluded that we might greatly enrich the complition of our mision by an examination of the course of the Maria's river for a route north to the fur country and also the Rochejaune or yellow stone river. The route taken on our Journey west being less favorable than

we had hoped and our winter study suggested the wisdom of trying the buffalo road of the Flatheads across the Stony mountains. The size of our party I believe had more than once preserved us from attack or other treachery, yet we concluded the risk tolerable of thus dividing the party on the return. We knew the route and the savages on the plains we knew would be but few. In the event my party on the Yellowstone lost our horses to raiding parties. Capt Lewis had encounter with a like party of Blackfoot which ended badly for two of them and was near to costing Capt Lewis his life. I will say that once the blackfoots had seen Drewyer scouting ahead, Capt L could not well retreat without abandoning Drewyer and inviting pursuit by their larger party. Once united again our progress down the Missouri was rapid and we lived well again on the easy hunting on the Plains. Yet even then our return was marred by our dependable Cruzatte wounding Cap L by mischance in hunting which tended carefully healed well.

But now my fire is gone out and my Chamber cold the ink near to freezing in my pen and I will end. In sum Capt L and I were in accord that we should lead by a few principes, but those held Fast. First that we should lead best in front, that is by our example, not asking that the party do what we could not or would not do ourselves. We did not hold ourselves too Good to take a hand with pole or cook pot when it might Encourage the men. Second that we should treat all with Humanity. Our intent was to deal with our men with Firmness but also with respect and Liberality so far as it should not hazard our mission. In Small things we might indulge them; in great we asked much of them. To do otherwise would have lost our hope of Success, for we could call from them far more than we could Command. Our policy toward the Indians was no less one of humanity, not least because our Successful passage to the Pacific and return depended on their friendship and aide. But recall too that our Mission was also to turn the carriage of the Fur Trade to the U. States, to turn their faces toward their new great Father and so much as possible establish Peace among them. And finally we were ever mindful of the Spirits of our men both to cheer them as we could after the hardships of the day and to be mindful of the daunting burden of what was known and unknown that might lie Ahead. Our practice was to consult their Opinion on some question when we knew Feeling to run high that they might find themselves well accounted in our eyes. On these plain but Solid stones was our journey founded and carried to Success.

I bid you remember me to our family and tell your Esteemed Father that I will write again in a few days time when I have as I expect a favorable Report of dealings with our Friends in this Capitol city. Apply your self diligent that you may be the man your Father thinks you.

Your Afectiunat Uncle,
William Clark

By Henry Whiteside

“This is a historical fiction or fictional history, as faithful to the Captains’ journals as I could make it, written in Clark’s clear, direct style and using his characteristic spelling.”