
Lewis and Clark's expedition undisclosed superhero: Sacagawea

Sacagawea's accomplishments were never acknowledged much through the journals of this expedition, but today she is considered a national heroine! Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had come to encounter many obstacles throughout their trip through the Louisiana territory and to the monstrous fish: the Pacific Ocean. Would Lewis and Clark have survived their expedition without Sacagawea? If not, would it have decelerated the process of expanding the new world? That question may never be answered, but the survival of Lewis and Clark can be throughout the notes of history. When Lewis and Clark went on their expedition, it is safe to assume that Sacagawea had prevented their failure throughout the expedition. Originally, Sacagawea was only to accompany the group while her husband, Charbonneau, signed on to the expedition expecting to be the translator (Woodger, 2004, p. 79). Understandably, after Charbonneau's failures on the trip Sacagawea ended up being a large importance. Sacagawea had saved the trip from the very beginning of Lewis and Clark's expedition. Her accomplishments were undoubtedly successful to the requests of President Jefferson's conquest.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark found camp in present day North Dakota. They were anxious to find someone who spoke Shoshone for their expedition to navigate through the Louisiana territory. Charbonneau was selected as an interpreter and to provide guard duty, and Sacagawea (Charbonneau's wife) was only brought along to accompany the trip. It wasn't long until Lewis and Clark realized that Charbonneau was a coward and an awful interpreter. Charbonneau realized how much Lewis and Clark would need her rather than him (Woodger, 2004, p. 80). This was the first sign that Sacagawea was notably the rescuer of this mission. When needed to, Sacagawea would translate from Shoshone into Hidatsa, and Charbonneau would translate Hidatsa into French, and another explorer would translate from French to English. At that time, even one of the explorers noted that Sacagawea would become of importance during this trip documenting "The woman that is with us is a squaw of the Snake nation of Indians, and wife to our interpreter. We expect she will be of service to us, when passing through that nation" (Lewis and Clark Expedition: Journals, 2014). As the trip lead the crew prattling through the waters of a river, a drastic incident occurred. One of the boats had been blown over by a gust of wind from Charbonneau leaning at the helm. Three of the men on that ship could not swim; one of them being Charbonneau. Sacagawea, being calm and clear headed, swiftly dove under to gather their valuable papers and any other important items they would need to continue this trip (Kessler, 1996, p. 56). These papers serve as a purpose to inform President Jefferson what they encountered on their journey. If those papers had not been retrieved then vital parts of their exploration might not have been known to future Americans.

Lewis and Clark started to depend primarily on Sacagawea for translation and courage rather than Charbonneau. Sacagawea was hardly beneficial to the group for much of the land navigation. When it came down to it Sacagawea did not know much of the land. After all, Sacagawea spent most of her life by the continental divide. Before Lewis and Clark reached Missouri she didn't take part in the decisions, deciding what path to take (Ronda, 2012). Sacagawea was becoming more and more reliable when George Drouillard's Indian sign language wasn't always capable of being understood by the Indians. One of President

Jefferson's request was for Lewis and Clark to communicate with the Indians, to let them know they are not harmful and that they are in need of assistance navigating the land (Ronda, 2012). Without Sacagawea's teamwork with her husband and the other interpreters, the journey for Lewis and Clark would have been very testing. She often worked as part of a long and cumbersome translation chain that took each native word through many speakers before reaching the captains (Ronda, 2012). Productively, she was the first source of translation in the process. If Drouillard's communication with the Indians had ever failed then so could have the exploration without the help of Sacagawea. The absence of direction on an expedition through these vast lands could possibly lead them in circles and lost for weeks, leading them on a journey with a great possibility of death. They could even end up documenting misleading parts of the land, which would provide false evidence of the land to the President.

Soon after passing through Missouri, Sacagawea started to become more familiar with the land. She was able to recognize Beaver Point and knew that it was possibly near her people (MacGregor, 2014). One of the explorers wrote down "'The Indian woman recognized the point of a high...she assures us that we shall either find her people on this river or immediately west of its source.'" (Irving, 1999, p. 5). She told the story of how part of her tribe spent some time there before she was viciously captured by the Minnetarees. The group started to advance on familiar Indians that Sacagawea knew. As a sign, Sacagawea started to suck on the other Indians fingers to show that she was also a Shoshone Indian (Clark & Edmonds, 1979, p. 28). The familiarity of the land to Sacagawea showed Lewis and Clark that she knew the land they were about to discover and the people in the land. This event would soon become of great importance to the orders demanded from President Jefferson and the lives of the crew. As the crew was brought to the camp, Sacagawea began to recognize some familiar faces. She then came into contact with the chief of the tribe, realizing that it was her brother. This serene reunion stopped the exploration for two days and two nights. Lengthy discussions took place to converse the land ahead of them. (Clark & Edmonds, 1979, p. 32). The noble relationship Sacagawea had with her people, allowed them to obtain horses for the journey through the mountains, because without these horses Lewis and Clark would not be able to cross the continental divide and find the headwaters of the Columbia River (Milne, 2003, p. 315). This negotiation might not have successfully gone through if it wasn't for Sacagawea's family connection with the tribe and her Indian heritage (MacGregor, 2014).

Sacagawea and the rest of the exploration crew left the tribe and continued their journey. As the crew roamed throughout out the land, Sacagawea started to become more familiar with parts of it. As the crew passed through modern day Montana, Sacagawea started to reminisce about how she frequented the territory and how familiar the mountains were. She noticed a gap in the mountains that would lead them to a short cut (Irving, 1999, p. 5). This short cut had saved them valuable time which was well needed in an exploration as lengthy as this one. They sooner reached the Organ coast at almost the start of winter. Luckily, Sacagawea's native talents were still infused in her being that she was able to craft items such as moccasins and boils tallow (boiling base for fire). She also had a robe made of sea otter skin, but as the weather started to get colder, Lewis was in desperate need for it and bartered for it. Time went by and food was becoming scarce on this west coast. Sacagawea had saved a slice of bread for her child, but gave it to Clark instead knowing that he would needed it. Although, he did not verbally show his gratitude, he documented in his journal how much he appreciated the flour bread (Kessler, 1996, p. 60). Much of the crew's appreciation to Sacagawea were never documented in their journals. Lewis and Clark were the only ones that documented slight appreciation to her and noted her achievements (Kessler, 1996, p. 63).

After the eighteen month navigation, Sacagawea had shown her strength and nobility. She had saved the crews belongings from the rapid rivers that allowed them to successfully continue the trip. She served as the first source of interpretation with the local Indians, which she brought peace and information on land navigation. Her relationship with the Shoshone Indians made it possible for the crew to obtain horses. She had served as an excellent pilot for the crew leading them through Missouri and the continental divide. In addition, she had aided the crew by knitting knickknacks with the nature around her. The journals of Lewis and Clark prove that Sacagawea was a major contribution to the success of the exploration.

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