Fishing with Silas | An angler's guide to the Lewis and Clark Trail

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FISHING WITH SILAS, AN ANGLER’S GUIDE
TO THE LEWIS AND CLARK TRAIL

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Fishing with Silas

So here we are, two road-bound anglers, looking for a rest area late at night. Somewhere south of Sioux City, we just want to stretch our legs. But Iowa is preparing for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and instead of the typical steel and concrete rest area; we find a brand new rest stop dedicated entirely to the Corps of Discovery. In front of the beautifully lit building a giant map of the cross-continental journey tracks the outbound, return and side trips. Side panels describe the journey. What catches our attention, though, are the names inscribed on large blocks set in the building’s walls.

There they are, all the members of the Expedition. We read the names as we circle the building, remembering their roles on the trip. Baptiste Lepase, the translator. Reubin Field, one of the Field brothers that Clark depended upon so often. George Gibson and John Potts and William Bratton. We walk around the corner and keep reading names. John Shield, the fellow Lewis recommended for double pay. The legendary John Colter, who ran naked across Montana and explored the future Yellowstone Park. Richard Warfington, who went back to St. Louis after the first winter and never made it to the mountains. George Shannon, best known for getting lost. Even Seaman, Lewis’s Newfoundland dog, gets his own block.
Then come the captains by the other doors, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, followed by York and Sacagawea. These were the four most valuable members of the expedition, although only two were paid for their work.

At this point the two of us start moving quickly past the wall, looking hard for one particular name. Did we miss it? There is Drouilliard the hunter, Sgt. Ordway and Sgt. Floyd. Charbonneau, who flipped the boat and was married to Sacagawea. But where is our man? Where is the fellow that we are following across country? There's Cruzatte for the second time, and Lewis again and Sacagawea and York. Why can we not find him!

And then, back in the furthest corner, after privates Jessaume, Howard and Frazier, obscured by shadows from a thick shrub, we find our man. The soldier whose story we are most interested in. The sailor we have read everything that has been written about (which is very little) and have imagined much. The fellow who joins us on each leg of this journey, he fellow we talk to most every night when the sun sets. Silas Goodrich.

Of all the famous names on that trip, our hero may be the least acclaimed. Goodrich was not a great boatsman or hunter, although he never gave the captains reason to complain. He never won a shooting tournament. The sergeants never mentioned his name for any great heroic actions. What he did do, what we admire so much about him, was fish. From St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean, Siras Goodrich had a hook in the river almost every night.

"He is our fine fisherman," Clark wrote of Goodrich early in the trip. When the captains gave orders for setting up camp every night, Goodrich would head back to the river while hunters went out and tents went up. He baited his hook with deer guts or other
rotting meats. Then he’d cast into the water, let the bait sit on the bottom of a deep hole or swing it through a deep channel, and catch fish.

And he caught lots of fish. Catfish, bass, pike and trout. Herring, shad, salmon and steelhead. Many nights the soldiers ate fish along with their deer, elk, beaver or bison. Some nights they had nothing but fish. Without the fresh fish caught by Siras the crew could have starved a few times, or at least gone very hungry.

And here we are, two hundred years later, trying to find that which Siras discovered. Nick Gevock and I, Drew Winterer, both graduate students at the University of Montana, drive from St. Louis, Missouri to Seaside, Oregon, following the Trail and fishing the whole way. We spend two years, traveling on weekend-long to month-long trips from our homes in Missoula, Montana, fishing and talking to other anglers at every stop. We interview federal and state fisheries personnel. We visit bars where anglers tell stories. We tour hatcheries and dams. We take lots of pictures. We fish some more.

As we travel in the expeditions footsteps between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, we imagine Goodrich in his nightly pursuit, always with the familiar look of concentration and satisfaction common to all anglers on his face.

Sadly, Silas Goodrich never kept a journal. Imagine a daily record of the types and numbers of fish available to the traveling angler 200 years ago. Instead, as we research the fishing of the Expedition, we are forced to take what bits of information the other journal keepers left and fill in the rest. Our closest affiliations with Silas come always in the evenings, when we are camping somewhere along a river. When the fire burns low and the only sound is moving water or when the sun winks below the horizon
with us still fishing, we feel the connection with Silas again, and feel we are getting to know him.

Introduction

This book combines two of our greatest passions, fishing and history. While this may at first seem like an odd combination, when it comes to the Lewis and Clark Trail they come together nicely. To travel the Lewis and Clark Trail is to experience a true piece of Americana. The Lewis and Clark story embodies much of what defines us as a nation—exploration, pushing into an unknown frontier and advancing scientific knowledge. And yet, a heritage vacation spent retracing their route is, in many ways, unlike any other.

When tourists visit cathedrals in Europe or pyramids in Egypt, they come to see monuments that are manmade. But on the Lewis and Clark Trail, which runs from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean near Astoria, Oregon, the landscape itself is the monument. Discovering the grandeur and immensity of the plains and mountains through which the Trail passes is what the expedition, and a vacation on the Trail today, were and are all about. It is a voyage that passes through some of America’s most beautiful and diverse landscapes.

Of course most of these landscapes look nothing like what Lewis and Clark saw. Nearly two centuries of agriculture, livestock grazing, dam building, channelization and logging have seriously altered the areas through which Lewis and Clark passed. The Missouri, once a huge, wide river that was full of sandbars, islands, braided channels and
shifting currents, is now essentially a canal from just above Sioux City, Iowa to St. Louis. Above Gavins Point Dam, near Yankton, S. D., nearly all of the river bottom that Lewis and Clark saw and camped along is under one of the six massive dams in the Dakotas and Montana. The mountainous areas of the Trail in Montana and Idaho have been heavily logged in many areas. The Snake and Columbia Rivers have numerous dams on them, built for hydroelectric power and to aid barge traffic. Lewis and Clark would not recognize most of the landscapes they passed through almost 200 years ago.

These changes have affected more than just the landscape. The species of plants and animals dependent on the environments Lewis and Clark passed through have also been impacted. Many of the species the captains recorded for the first time no longer exist in these places, or are extinct altogether. Numerous other species of wildlife that live along the Trail are in real trouble, and may go extinct if more is not done to protect these areas.

At the same time, however, there are numerous restoration projects taking place along the Trail that are helping to bring back river bottom environments and healthy rivers. Many rivers are in much better shape than 20 years ago. People who live along the trail are recognizing the value of tourism to their economy. And they realize that healthy rivers are vital to attract tourists to their area for outdoor recreation. Federal, state and local governments are getting involved, and the improvements have greatly helped numerous fish and wildlife species.

One common thread throughout the Lewis and Clark Trail is the presence of water, most of the time big rivers, but also small mountain streams, man-made and natural lakes and the Pacific Ocean. Even when the expedition wasn’t traveling by boat
or canoe on a river, it was following one. That was the main purpose of the expedition-to find the easiest route across the continent to promote the trade of American goods, particularly furs. At the time, boats and barges were the easiest way to move things around, and Thomas Jefferson hoped to find an easy portage between the Missouri and Columbia River drainages. There is none, as Lewis and Clark were the first to discover. It was unfortunate news for Jefferson, but at least he knew the truth.

During our travels, we learned that many of these waters that make up the Trail offer some excellent fishing. Whether you are a serious or casual angler, fishing along the Lewis and Clark Trail offers a variety of fishing experiences for any angler. The lower Missouri River and its tributaries offer opportunities to catch monster catfish, as well as a number of other species. Farther upstream, the reservoirs of the Missouri in the Dakotas and eastern Montana are nationally known for their walleye and northern pike fishing. Montana is a trout fishers paradise, and Idaho offers the chance to fish for steelhead. Finally, the Columbia River is a major destination for salmon, steelhead and white sturgeon. And all along the Trail, we found that these waters have numerous other sport-fish species.

This book is not intended to be an all-inclusive guide to fishing on and near the Lewis and Clark Trail. Such a book would be impossible, given that the Trail is over 4,000 miles long. The number of tributaries of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers is staggering. Rather, our goal is to point out the best fishing along the route, and offer tactics that will help anglers catch fish along the way. We also give advice on where to get the best information for an area, whether it is a tackle shop or a local conservation office.
If there is one rule that applies to fishing while traveling, it is to ask the locals. We found that people are always willing to give advice on what was working best at the time, whether it be bait or a hot lure to use. And while sometimes people are hesitant to reveal their favorite fishing hole, they usually will tell you about a general area where you have a good chance to catch some nice fish.

This book also serves as an account of fishing on the expedition. We learned by reading the journals of the Corps of Discovery that expedition members did a lot of fishing. Sometimes it was just for fun, but more often it was an important source of food for the crew. There were many nights, in areas where game was scarce and fish abundant, that the crew would have gone hungry without fish. The journals are rife with mentions of fish and fishing, and we have included these quotes throughout the book. Often the best information about fishing and techniques used during the expedition comes not from the captains, but rather from the journals of the other men on the expedition who kept journals.

Several species of fish were among the many animals that Lewis and Clark recorded scientifically for the first time. These include the blue and channel catfish, steelhead, cutthroat trout and sauger, all of which are popular game fish today. There are many other species of fish that inhabit the waters of the Trail today, most of which were stocked by state fish and game departments at one time. Other species have ended up in these waters thanks to “bucket biologists” who illegally planted a few fish in a body of water. Often these fish do immeasurable damage to native fish populations, particularly when the planted fish are voracious predators like northern pike and walleye. Trout rivers and lakes in the West are especially fragile fisheries. Canyon Ferry Reservoir and the
Clark Fork River, both in Montana, are two examples along the Trail in which introduced fish have done a great deal of damage to native trout populations. Never move fish from one body of water to another. It is illegal, and could get you fined, imprisoned or both.

In other places, particularly the large reservoirs of the Missouri in the Dakotas and eastern Montana, states manage the introduced species and in many instances put the fish there in the first place. The walleye is by far the most popular sport fish in South Dakota, but there are many more today than when Lewis and Clark came through. These fish thrive in the cold reservoirs, and reproduce very well. Several of these reservoirs also have Chinook salmon fisheries that exist only because the fish are stocked every year by the state.

We also included information for each state on local and state resources for anglers. These organizations and government agencies are always quick to give advice on where, when and how to fish. They are also the place to purchase a fishing license and get information on current fishing regulations. In several states, particularly Montana and Idaho, some of the popular sport fisheries are catch and release only. Always know the regulations for the water you are fishing on. And just as importantly, learn how to properly release a fish. Catch and release is only effective as a management tool if the fish survives. In addition, size and bag limits change from year to year, so be informed before you go fishing. Many popular fishing waters throughout the states on the Trail have special size limits specific to that body of water. Size limits for largemouth bass, walleye, trout and salmon are particularly common on many waters. Remember that regulations are there to maintain, and often restore, healthy fish populations.
Out-of-state fishing licenses are not expensive. Several of the states offer the options of single day, three-day or weeklong fishing permits. If you plan on spending more than a week in a particular state, you will have to buy a season permit. Don't let that prevent you from experiencing some of the excellent fishing on the Trail. The money goes for fisheries management and research.

So grab your fishing poles and fly rods and hit the Lewis and Clark Trail. It will be one of the most memorable vacations, and fishing trips, you’ll ever take. We know it was for us!

Chapter One: Lewis and Clark Prepare to Cross the Continent

It is apparent after reading the journals and other related historical documents that Lewis and Clark planned to fish on their journey across the continent. The captains were not planning on fish being a main staple of their diet. They knew that in order to feed the number of men on the expedition (over 40 to begin with) they would need to hunt for big game. They came well prepared with the best rifles of the day, and brought enormous quantities of powder and shot. Lewis purchased only the best imported gunpowder, and designed special lead containers to hold the powder that could be melted down to make bullets. Deer, elk, antelope, bear and bison would be the bulk of their diet for the duration of the expedition. They also brought several smooth-bore muskets that were used as shotguns to hunt waterfowl, game birds and other small game.

Meriwether Lewis was not the kind of person who took things for granted. He believed game would be plentiful in the western country. He knew there were thousands
of Indians living out there, after all, and they did not have rifles. Surely a hardy group of young woodsmen armed with good rifles could be successful enough as hunters to survive. Still, Lewis brought along backup provisions. Barrels of salted pork, corn meal and about 200 pounds of portable soup were purchased in the months before departure.

Several documents in the months before the Corps departed indicate Lewis thought the fishing would be productive. For a leader as meticulous as Meriwether Lewis, fishing was an insurance policy. He made sure his expedition was well prepared to exploit all of the resources the land had to offer.

Lewis brought a lot of fishing gear. He bought the bulk of it, like most of the gear for the expedition, in Philadelphia. St. Louis was a long way from anything in that day. Lewis must have thought he would get a better price in Philadelphia, and he was right. Some items may have been impossible to find in St. Louis. On a list of requirements he would need, he included "4 Groce fishing Hooks assorted" and "12 Bunches Small fishing line assorted". The same list included "40 fish Giggs such as the Indians use with a single barbed point—at Harper's ferry" and "3 Groce fishing Hooks assorted" under the category Indian Presents'.

A list of accounting dated May 18, 1803 listed, among many other things, a purchase of $25.37 for "Fishg. tackle" from George Lawton, a Philadelphia auctioneer and fishing tackle dealer. The purchase was broken down as follows:

Mr. Israel Wheelen
Phila. May 18 1803
Bt. of Geo. R. Lawton

70 Large hooks @ 30/pr.[$?] $2.80

13
Another receipt, dated May 31, 1803 listed additional fishing supplies: "3 C Fish hooks" and "2 doz. Fish Lines". A later summary of purchases listed 2800 assorted fishing hooks, 125 large fishing hooks and fishing lines as Indian presents.

One journal entry in particular illustrates that Lewis got the idea that catfish would be abundant, and huge, on the Missouri. It is dated November 16, 1803, just two days after they had reached the Mississippi River after floating down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh. Lewis had been away from the men for the day, looking around the area. He wrote: "On our return which was at 5 m after 1 Oclock we were a little surprised at the apparent size of a Catfish which the men had caught in our absence altho we had been previously accustomed to see those of from thirty to sixty pounds weight we determined to ascertain the weight of this fish after taking the following dementions of it—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>Inches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length--</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$25.37
width between the eyes--

Circumference around the head just above the first fins and lower extremity of the gills being the large part of the fish--

The dementions of the mouth when opened to the ordinary, or easy practicable width was From the center of the lower to the upper jaw--

Width from side to side--

Weight—

Head--

Enterals [entrails]—very empty--

other parts of the carcase

The loss of blood, its lying out of the water six hours in the sun, & the waistage from the
circumstance of being obliged to weigh it in
small draughts not having any method of
weighing entire may be estimated at, at least

Total weight-- 128

"I have been informed that these fish have been taken in various parts of the Ohio & mississippi weighing from 175 to 200 lbs. weight which from the evidence of the subject above mentioned I have no doubt is authentic—"

Two hundred pound catfish? That was bigger than some of the deer they would shoot! Lewis must have thought that if these fish were present in the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, they would be in the Missouri as well. Of course catching a few 30 to 60 pound fish would provide a lot of food for the men. But these hogs would really be worth the time. The sight must have been reassuring to the men. There would be plenty to eat in the western country if they could catch fish such as this. Whatever fish were out there, Lewis brought the gear to catch them.

One man on the crew in particular would do more than his part to provide fish for the men. His name was Silas Goodrich, and he was by far the expedition’s best fishermen. Little is known about Goodrich. He was born in Massachusetts and stayed in the army after the expedition, but beyond that little has been written about him. What we do know is that this man loved to fish, and did so during the expedition on almost a daily basis. The captains constantly mention him catching fish, and make comments about how much he enjoyed fishing. It seems that he mastered catching fish, if he didn’t already
have that skill before the expedition started. He was particularly successful at catching catfish on the Missouri, most often with a baited hook.

The sergeants' journals tell us that several other men were getting in on the fishing in the evening on the Missouri, although they don't mention who. Goodrich was probably teaching them how. But it probably didn't take much skill to be successful. Throwing a baited hook into a river teeming with catfish is not hard. Still, Goodrich may have known something the others didn't. Maybe he knew exactly where to throw the hook or how much bait to put on.

The most convincing evidence of Lewis' anxiety about feeding the crew comes later, in a letter to his mother, Lucy Marks, dated March 31st 1805 written from Fort Mandan. The Corps had just survived the harshest winter any of them had ever experienced, and was preparing to depart for the next leg of the journey up the Missouri. Lewis wrote: "Game is very abundant, and seems to increase as we progress; our prospect for starving is therefore consequently small." This passage, after almost a year into the expedition, illustrates that the possibility of starving was always on the mind of Lewis. We learn later in the expedition that there were many nights in the mountains, where game was scarce, when the men would have gone hungry were it not for fish.

By the time Lewis wrote this letter the men had already exploited fish throughout the Missouri River. After they left Fort Mandan in the spring of 1805, they went through a long period when the fishing was not very productive. They were still catching catfish, but they were smaller and not nearly as abundant. It was not a reason for concern, however, because when the expedition was in eastern Montana they had more than enough game to sustain them. These were the biggest herds of bison and elk they would
see on the entire journey. Tens of thousands of bison were seen in a single view from a high point, and Lewis writes that sometimes they had to throw sticks and stones to get through a herd of buffalo. It was a big game hunter’s paradise, and reassuring for frontiersmen.

Fishing did pick up when the Corps reached the Great Falls. Here they were the first white people to see and record the cutthroat trout. They caught a bunch of them. They were also catching a few sauger and goldeye, although they did not like to eat either of these fish. These are some of the first journal entries in which Lewis writes about himself fishing, and says he does so simply to amuse himself.

Fishing took on greater importance when the expedition crossed over Lemhi Pass on the Montana-Idaho border. Unlike today, game was more abundant in the valleys. The mountains were scarce with game, and it is in the Lemhi and Lost Trail Pass areas that the party relied on fish for food many nights. After they crossed over the Bitterroot Mountains and came into the Columbia River drainage, salmon purchased from Native Americans were essential to their survival.

The near constant exploitation of fish is yet another example of the excellent leadership skills of Lewis. On those nights in the mountains when the hunters were unsuccessful, the men must have appreciated having Lewis as their leader. Without that fishing tackle, they might have gone hungry. And considering the intensity of the work they were doing every day, that would have been disastrous.

The Corps of Discovery fished very little on their return trip in 1806, or at least they didn’t bother to record every fishing experience. They were anxious to get home.
Once they were reunited after their separate explorations, they cruised down the Missouri very quickly. But there are still a few mentions of fishing.

The story of fishing for the expedition is a fascinating one. Like the hunting, the fishing was some of the greatest anyone has ever been lucky enough to experience. It is apparent from reading the journals that fishing was not always just done for survival. When Lewis writes about himself fishing, he often mentions that he did it to pass time, or simply to “amuse” himself. These men were on the greatest adventure of their lives, one filled with excitement and constant new experiences. But it was also filled with anxiety and stress. Indeed, if a few things had gone wrong, they all might have died at the hands of Native Americans or because of harsh weather. An evening spent fishing was often a nice diversion from the work, both mental and physical.

**The Big Muddy: We Hit the Trail**

We are introduced to Jeff Miller our first day in St. Louis. He meets us outside the sporting goods store he owns in suburban St. Louis and takes us next door to a coffee shop. On a hot, blue-sky day with a hint of a breeze, we listen to Missouri River stories and drink coffee with a living connection to the Missouri of yesteryear.

In 1937, before the dams had been built and the river bottom disappeared, Jeff canoed with his brother from Three Forks, MT, all the way back to St. Louis. His mother

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1 Our thousands of thanks to the Newbold family (Bill, Carol and Billy) for not only this introduction but also the wonderful hospitality and generosity they showed us. They got us baseball tickets to a double-header between the Cardinals and San Diego Padres. We watched Tony Guinn go 5-for-5 as well as watched Mark McGuire hit his 62\textsuperscript{nd} home run of the season.
was a Lewis and Clark history buff, and had stirred in her sons the desire to see the river as Corps of Discovery had seen it, before it disappeared for good.

"The river was a mile wide and an inch deep," says Miller. He remembers floating the river for days without seeing anyone else, every bend of the river defined with walls of trees. "We had maps with dotted lines and not much detail," Miller says, "But the river was slow then, so we had plenty of time to see everything. Mostly we just worried about going aground."

The word Missouri comes from the Osage Indians, who called the river the *Missourah*, meaning Big Muddy. The brick-colored water carries with it large portions of soil, scraped from the river bottom and deposited by feeder streams.

Lewis and Clark spent over a year on the Missouri River, but today would recognize only the mud. The river has been worked over by the Corp of Engineers during the last one hundred years, and very little of the river is as it used to be. Because of channeling for barge traffic, the Missouri is about 130 miles shorter and two-thirds narrower than in 1804.

The river started changing in the 1830's when snags (the downed and floating trees that plagued Lewis and Clark daily) started being removed from the river to aid steamboat travel. Willow mats were later placed along the river's banks to stabilize the wandering Missouri. Robert E. Lee, while working for the Corp of Engineers before the Civil War, invented the wing-dam, which was a method of keeping the current in the middle of the river, which maintained a single deep channel. These wing-dams were wooden posts and piles of rocks that jutted out into the river, like rows of broken teeth.
The Missouri River is a hungry river, and the meddling of humanity has resulted in a depriving the river of its traditional food. The cottonwoods islands, wide riverbeds and big bank-eating bends that nourished the river in the past no longer exist. These changes have hurt the health of the river.

Because the snags and islands are gone, fish habitat has been destroyed. Levees prevent fish from moving onto the river’s floodplain to spawn, and dam operations interrupt the high flows that trigger reproduction and migration. Today, sturgeon, paddlefish, chubs, minnows and other fish species that evolved in the formerly shallow, muddy and ever-changing Missouri are rapidly declining. Jeff Miller has spent his entire life alongside the Missouri River, and has watched all the changes first hand. He watched the dams go up and the river shortened. Even with all the changes, Miller says the river still retains its old identity, Old Muddy, and had remained a very productive fishery.

“The fish that were here before the dams are still here, in some impressive numbers,” Miller says. “And some news ones, too.”

Too soon we have to leave, and Miller walks out to our car with us. He looks in the window at our incredible amount of stuff. Tents, sleeping bags, boxes of books and bags of clothes filled the space, somehow making room for a large cooler and my collie,

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2 With all this said, let us now bring in a bright hope for the present and the future of the Missouri River. There are almost 40 wildlife habitat restoration projects going on presently on the river. These include wetland recovery down by St. Louis, six miles of restored river chute in Nebraska, renovated oxbow lakes, improvements in dam operations and the replanting of cottonwoods in Montana. The management of the river has also changed. The managing powers of the river learned that controlling the river has not been beneficial to the area. While the effort to control flooding has been huge since the 1930s, we are starting to realize that flooding is good for the river. Today, levees are being moved back to the edge of the flood plain, instead of the edge of the river, allowing the river room to move around at high water. This allows fish access to the floodplain for spawning, escape and growth. Because numerous fish know to spawn only by the high waters of the spring, allowing yearly floods has resulted in heavier spawns.
Hunter. He chuckles at the circus of our adventure and goes back in his store for a dog treat. I let Hunter out for some water. He comes back out with fishing pamphlets, dog biscuits and a warning to be careful around the Missouri.

“She’s a dangerous river, still,” Miller says. “Don’t think that we’ve tamed the Missouri.”

St. Louis

Standing above the Missouri River between St. Louis and St. Charles, Nick and I have a hard time believing anyone is fishing. The river below the bridge we stand on is muddy, churning and decorated with Styrofoam coffee cups, aluminum cans, chunks of wood, dirty foam and unidentifiable lumps of matter. A barge pierces the water below us, leaving more foam and debris in its wake. Then Nick points, and sure enough, just downriver, a solitary angler casts from the shore.

Most everyone we talk to in St. Louis fishes, but very few fish the Missouri River. Most people head for the Ozarks in southern Missouri, where wild trout and smallmouth bass live in the many large springs. Those that fish the Missouri generally cast bait for catfish and bass (mostly white and smallmouth). Many target the carp as a game fish. Almost everyone has access to a boat.

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3 Parents are reminded yearly about the dangers of the river when newspapers report deaths and the disappearances of children from the river’s edge.

“I was watching my grandson on that sandbar,” says Marlin Berry from Sloan, Iowa, explaining why he never lets his family’s kids near the river without a lifejacket, “and the bank just collapsed and took him with it. If I hadn’t grabbed him, who knows.”

“Don’t wade the Missouri!” says Mike Price from Decatur, Nebraska. “People see people drown every year.” Price lost a friend in a kayak to the river, and has heard of children being snatched from their parents.
We walk into numerous bait and tackle shops looking for fishing information. Each shop has numerous big fish pictures decorating walls; most have a crowd of middle- to late-aged men standing around talking fishing.

We find a wonderful fly shop in St. Louis, filled with young- to middle-aged men standing around talking fishing, and the main topic was fly-fishing for carp.

**Fly-fishing for Carp**

The first carp I ever caught on a fly was in my hometown of Essex, CT, in North Cove off of the Connecticut River. I was practicing casting with a big Royal Wulff tied on the end of my line. With every cast I would drag the fly across the surface of the cove, making my fly look as artificial as possible. I never once expected to catch fish; I was just out practicing my casts.

But on one of my big back casts, while my fly was racing across the water’s silent face, a giant carp smashed into my skittering Wulff, just hammered it. The fish set itself with its attack, fought like hell and proved to be over five pounds. What a great fish on my five-weight!

Carp are stubborn, heavy and ornery. Hooking into a 40-pounder with a fly rod can be a fun experience. Many Missouri River fly-fishers have taken to pursuing these dinosaur-looking fish with flies.

Tom Schlueter, who works at Hargrove Fly Goods in St. Louis, says good fishing for grass carp with a fly rod exists right in the St. Louis suburbs along the Missouri River.
“Carp on a fly are a lot of fun,” Schlueter says, pulling a picture of a twelve-pound carp he caught on a six-weight rod out of the back room at Hargrove’s. “The fight like hell and they’ll eat most anything. And they get huge.”

Fly-fishing for carp is definitely an acquired taste. Carp are not known for their readiness to take a fly, so often flies are specially designed for carp’s eclectic tastes. Because carp prefer seeds and berries to aquatic insects, popular carp flies illustrate this. Hargrove’s Fly Goods sells a mulberry fly, which imitates the small purple berries that fall into rivers off of mulberry trees.

“The carp don’t eat conventional flies, so we’ve had to try other patterns. For example, we know they like to eat bread that people throw in for them, so we came up with this,” Schlueter says as he shows us the Bread Fly, which imitates a small chunk of rye bred, complete with seeds.

Another good carp fly is white wool tied onto a hook, which imitates a cottonwood tree’s seedpod (the ubiquitous “cotton hatch” that pervades the air wherever cottonwood trees live; the carp eat the seed pod encased within the cotton).

Be ready for a rather nasty fight once you hook a carp. These big fish throw a lot of attitude into fights. Not known for running, carp instead thrash about, often throwing hooks with their blind spasms.

The ponds that decorate gold courses and subdivisions are often good carp habitat. Fishing these still waters with spider imitations, frogs and grasshoppers sometimes catches carp. Catching these big lunkers with a five- or six-weight rod is really a lot of fun. While some anglers may mock the carp-hunting fly fisherman, they will always look with envy on a doubled rod, strained net and huge fish size.
Chapter Two: Fishing the Lower Missouri

Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa

The Missouri River that flows through Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri looks similar throughout the four states. While the landscape changes— from the Iowa grasslands to Nebraska bluffs to the rolling hills and cliffs of Missouri—the river does not. Wing dams keep the current in the middle of the river. Levees new and old keep the water in its path. Rip rap, giant boulders places along the river’s bank to stop erosion, line the banks where the river flows through towns. Trees crowd the shoreline where they have been left alone, willows and cottonwoods the majority.

From St. Louis to Kansas City the river meanders westward in a consistent, managed manner. Numerous towns line the shore, including the capitol, Jefferson City. Even so, the river manages to maintain a feel of isolation. Long swaths of tree-lined shoreline frame the river. Islands and wetlands abound in the river bottom. Every county maintains fishing access points to the river, with a boat launch and parking area the prominent feature. Even without a boat, these offer outstanding access to quality fishing holes.

North of Kansas City the river straightens just a bit as it forms the state line for five different states. Here, still, the river maintains a wild feel to it. Big bends dominate the river with thickly forested banks on both sides. Farmlands of corn and soybeans run flush to this wall of trees, but from the river the fields are invisible.
In the highest reaches of the lower Missouri, below the dams where the river forms the underbelly of South Dakota and the Nebraska border, the river looks like the Missouri of long ago. She is a big river here, filled with eroding sandbars and riverbanks. Huge bends characterize this water, as opposed to the tight channels of downstream. There are very few wing dams in this section, and barge traffic is almost non-existent. The majority of boats are fishing boats. Cottonwoods and willows crowd the shorelines. There are many downed trees along the shore, threatening to become ship-killing snags at the next high water.

It is in this section, near Ponca State Park in Nebraska, that the Lewis and Clark traveler can envision the old river. Here there is a section that is “a mile wide and an inch deep,” as the old river used to be. Standing on the Ponca shore looking northeast toward South Dakota you can easily imagine the expedition’s keelboats being pulled, poled and pushed through the shallow waters.

These waters, because of their untamed nature, offer improved spawning ground to the river’s fishes. Catfish, white and black bass, and pike all benefit from the more wide-out water. All this makes this section of river a good destination for the traveling angler. Whether fishing from shore or from a boat, there is good access in this section to some memorable fishing.

The Corps Sets Out, Fishing in Missouri and Kansas

It is reasonable to say that the Corps of Discovery did not have fishing heavily on their minds as they traveled through today’s state of Missouri. They had just departed St.
Louis, and though they had been together for several months now, they were just getting accustomed to traveling as a unit. The intense labor of those first few weeks gave the men a taste of what they were in for during the next two years. They must have been thinking, can we really get these boats up this river to its headwaters, several thousand miles away? There had to be a lot of anxiety over the enormous task they were taking on. And the men must have known that they were making history, although the toils of their everyday labor probably kept their minds occupied with more immediate thoughts.

There must have been thoughts of, “will I ever see my family again”. Life in the early nineteenth century was difficult enough. The possibility of dying at any time from disease or injury suffered on the farm or homestead was very real. But the prospect of crossing the continent, and encountering numerous Native Americans, grizzly bears, massive mountains and fierce mountain and prairie storms, among other things, made the possibility of dying high.

But these men were tough, the cream of the crop. Lewis and Clark made sure they chose wisely when it came to the most important resource coming on the expedition-the men whom they would depend on for their lives. Lewis instructed Clark, in his letter dated June 19, 1803 asking Clark to join him as co-commander, to look for good men. Lewis wrote, “when descending the Ohio it shall be my duty by enquiry to find out and engage some good hunters, stout, healthy, unmarried men, accustomed to the woods, and capable of bearing bodily fatigue in a pretty considerable degree: should any young men answering this discription be found in your neighborhood I would thank you to give information of them on my arivall at the falls of the Ohio”’. Lewis knew that bringing along the wrong type of men could jeopardize the success of the expedition.
Clark also knew that picking the right men was absolutely essential. In a letter he sent Lewis several days after he’d written accepting the commission as a captain, Clark wrote, “I have temperally engaged some men for the enterprise of a discription calculated to work & go thro’ those labours & fatigues which will be necessary. Several young men (Gentlemens sons) have applyed to accompany us—as they are not accustomed to labour and as that is a verry assential part of the services required of the party, I am causious in giveing them any encouragement”.

Lewis responded, in a letter dated August 3, 1803, “from the nature of this enterprise much must depend on a judicious selection of our men; their qualifycations should be such as perfectly fit them for the service, outherwise they will reather clog than further the objects in view; on this principle I am well pleased that you have not admitted or encouraged the young gentlemen you mention, we must set our faces against all such applications and get rid of them on the best terms we can. They will not answer our purposes”. Clark continued picking men. He had plenty to chose from, because the word was out about the expedition and almost everyone wanted to go.

Like all explorers into the unknown, these men had to be anxious. But aside from the anxiety, there must have been even more excitement as they started up the Missouri. It would be the adventure of their lives. Because they were accustomed to frontier living, they were confident they could survive off the land. The government was providing them with excellent rifles, probably better than any of them owned. There may even have been a sense of cockiness about this bunch.

The men had been catching some fish during their stay at Camp Dubois. This gave the men an idea of the excellent fishing they would enjoy on the Missouri
throughout the trip. Lewis must have been pleased that he brought so much fishing tackle. But as was the case with the majority of the expedition, the staple was still meat, especially deer in the area around Camp Dubois. The men also brought in turkeys, rabbits, grouse, squirrels and other game. And they were in a settled area, so pork and corn were available.

After the expedition set off from St. Charles on May 21, 1804, the references to hunting begin immediately in the journals. Throughout today's state of Missouri, deer was the most important food source. White-tailed deer were plentiful. Clark makes constant references to the amount of deer sign they were seeing on the banks. One day he stated that "Deer to be Seen in every direction and their tracks are as plenty as Hogs about a farm". The hunters found deer very easy to get, and also killed a lot of black bears throughout Missouri. The expedition brought along several horses that the hunters for the day would ride along the banks and in the interior lands in search of game. The hunters would rendezvous with the boats at night and have the days supply of meat ready.

Another thing the men were exposed to right away on the voyage was the mosquitoes. They would haunt them for the majority of the next two years. They are mentioned almost daily in the journals. A week after they took off, Clark wrote that "The Musquetors are very bad". As they worked their way up the river, he continued to look for new ways to express how horrendous the mosquitoes were. One time Clark wrote that he was "Tormented with Musquetors & Small ticks." Later he said the musquitos were "very troublesome" and then "extremely troublesome". The captains were constantly trying to find new ways to describe just how miserable the musquitos made them. It was
something they could do nothing about, short of sitting close to the fire at night. They would simply have to bear it.

Clark also wrote a great deal about the beauty of the landscape they were passing through. Sometimes the captains would walk on shore and get on top of the river bluffs to look around. Lewis did this more often than Clark, because Lewis was a better naturalist and Clark a better boatman. But more often it was the hunters, especially the best hunters such as George Drouillard and John Colter, who were on shore and on the prairies above the river. They would describe what the land was like to the captains. Between what the captains saw themselves and the descriptions they were getting, they were painting a good picture of the landscape for Thomas Jefferson. On June 17, Clark wrote, “The Countrey about this place is butifull on the river rich & well timbered on the S. S. about two miles back a Prarie coms. which is rich and interspursud with groves of timber, the County rises at 7 or 8 miles Still further back and is roleing-- on the L. S. the high lands & Prarie Coms. in the bank of the river and Continus back, well watered and abounds in De[e]r Elk & Bear” Often Clark would comment that the areas looked excellent for settlement. Such descriptions must have pleased Jefferson, and certainly would have helped him justify the Louisiana Purchase to his political rivals.

Fishing is hardly mentioned at all in the captains’ journals throughout today’s Missouri and Kansas. As avid a fisherman as Silas Goodrich was, he was most likely doing some fishing at night, or at least dropping a line in from the boat. It is surprising fishing isn’t mentioned more on this section of the river, given the excellent catfishing they experienced in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. Clark’s prolific writing about the
landscape they were seeing as they traveled left little room for talk of fishing. Or perhaps they only fished occasionally, and had little success when they did?

Just two days after they departed, Clark mentions that the Femme Osage River was “abounding in fish”. There is no comment on any fish being caught. The next mention of fish comes on July 4, when they named a stream Independence Creek to honor the nation’s birthday. Clark describes an oxbow lake they visited, noting that it used to be the river channel, as being “clear and Contain great quantities of fish an Gees & Goslings”. The lake he describes today bears his and Lewis’ name, in Lewis and Clark State Park near the town of Bean Lake, Missouri. The final fishing entry, and the only throughout Missouri and Kansas in which fish are caught, comes on July 17. They were at the mouth of the Nishnabotna River in the extreme northwest corner of Missouri. Clark wrote, “Gutrich [Goodrich] caught two verry fat Cat fish”. It is unclear from the entry whether Goodrich caught the fish in the Missouri or in the Nishnabotna.

The sergeants’ entries are almost as scarce as those of the captains. On the outward journey, Patrick Gass and Charles Floyd said nothing of fishing throughout Missouri. There are a few days in which the captains said nothing of catching fish, but some of the sergeants did. One of the most interesting passages comes from Joseph Whitehouse on June 22, when he wrote “the hunters Came In with two deer & One fish the[y] shot”. Perhaps this was another one of those gigantic catfish that the hunters found close to the bank. In the only other fishing passage during the outward journey in Missouri, John Ordway noted on June 29 that “Several large Cat fish was Cought last night”.

On the way back, however, there is an entry that gives an idea about some of the huge catfish that were in the river. The men almost always simply described the fish as
being “large”. Lewis’ account of the enormous Ohio River catfish they caught is one of the only in which a weight is put to a fish. But on September 17, 1806, as the expedition hurriedly passed through Missouri, Ordway wrote, “one of the men caught a large catfish last night which is judged to weigh a hundred weight.” Because there is no description of the catfish, it could have been any type. Blue catfish get the biggest, but channel and flathead catfish also grow very large. The entire crew was anxious to get back to St. Louis, yet they still took time to fish. The allure of catching these gigantic fish must have been strong. Today’s trophy catfish anglers would love the chance to routinely catch such big cats!

**Catfish Tournaments**

Nick and I find a catfish tournament on Father’s Day in northern Missouri. A woman running a bait shop out of her garage in Phelps City, MO, gives us directions that leave us confused. We drive on dirt roads near Oregon, MO, looking for an unmarked access.

We find the access by spotting a bridge decorated with bleached catfish skulls and bones. People hang the fillet-less cadavers of catfish from this bridge, either to boast of their size or just to feed the magpies and ravens.

We follow this dirt road to the river, where we find a tent set up with two- or three-dozen people sitting in the shade. These people are here to witness the weigh in, when the anglers bring their fish in at the end of the day. In this particular tournament the
participants want to bring in only flathead catfish, and cash prizes await the catcher of the
biggest individual fish as well as the most total pounds of fish.

While the spectators wait for the boats to come in on this hot June day, the talk is
mostly about fishing for catfish.

"I've been fishing for flatheads all my life," says Glenn Rider, a large, rough-
looking fisherman from Nebraska, "and I'm just starting to figure this fish out. The more
I know the more I realize you need to be a scientist to know all this stuff."

Flathead cats live at the base of drop-offs in the river, and under the protective
roots of submerged trees or other structure. Fishing for these fish means parking a boat
near good looking holes and fishing with live bait.

"The Missouri state guys who survey this river told us if we want to catch the big
flatheads we should switch to 250-pound test line and shark fishing rigs," Rider says.
"I've had fish in here break 20-pound test like it was nothing."

The talk under the tent on this hot day never strays far from fishing, as most
people here have fished for cats their whole lives. The crowd grows as the day
progresses, mostly local people down to see a big flathead, and also to drink the free beer
and eat the free food provided by the sponsor of this event, Bud Slusher.

"He's been sponsoring these things for years," says a retired county sheriff. "He's
the only guy with money, since he sold most of these people their boats."

Slusher owns a sporting goods store in the town of Oregon that sells mostly
fishing boats and hunting gear. Among the crowd at this fishing access, he is held in
obvious high esteem. He seems to know every one by name, although he calls all the
children "Buddy," which is what everyone else calls him.
"I love these things," Slusher replies when asked why he sponsors these tournaments. "I don't think I get any extra business, I'm the only boat seller around, but I like everyone coming down and having a good time."

The first boat comes in two hours before official weigh-in. A father and his twelve-year old daughter pull two giant catfish out of the live well on the boat. Spectators crowd the riverbank for a look at the fish. The two catfish weigh twenty-six and twenty-four pounds. Even though flatheads get much larger than this, none of the other thirty-three tournament boats (all weighing in as close to official closing time as possible) can match either size. The father-daughter team of Robert and Hannah Brown, from Falls City, MO, win $800, for both most weight and biggest fish. They caught the fish near the mouth of a small river, right behind a wingdam.

There are tournaments like this one every weekend, up and down the river. Normally 25 to 30 pounds total weight usually wins the tournament, the biggest catfish Bud has ever seen in the competition was 45 pounds. A lot of the guys in the tournament travel and enter every tournament on the river.

**Fly-fishing for Cats**

Yes, there exist people who fly-fish for catfish. In every state that hosts catfish we find anglers that claim to have caught a cat on a fly. Upon questioning, though, most admit to baiting the fly with a worm before casting. There are the occasional anglers, though, who claim to have caught cats with a fly. Supposedly big gaudy poppers and
streamers work, especially at night. One unsubstantiated report had a twelve-pound channel catfish being caught on a “bread fly,” while the angler was chasing carp.

Marty Whitten, of St. Charles, MO, tells us the secret to catching catfish on a fly is patience and luck. “If you don’t have anything better to do with a night, you can catch a cat on a fly,” he says. “Just stay in one place, all night, and you might get lucky.”

So, one morning after we camp in the Nebraska side of the river, downstream of Omaha, I wake up early to a brilliant sunrise. We are camping under the protective cover of an oak grove, with the Missouri ten yards away. Immediately below the boat launch (all campgrounds on the Missouri River have boat launches) was a deep hole carved by a swirling eddy. An empty Styrofoam worm box tells me this is a known catfish hole. I have a six-weight rod rigged with a sinking line and a black wholly-bugger in a travel case, so I pull it out, put the two pieces of the rod together and start casting into the hole.

The warm breeze blows from upriver, stirring the leaves and leaving a burr on the water. A johnboat painted red moves downstream, its engine a muffled whine. I stand on the concrete boat ramp and cast repeatedly into the deep hole. The fly, tied with extra weight incorporated in the body, disappears quickly in the muddy water. I count to twenty, and then retrieve the line with short jerks and long pauses. Next cast, I let the fly sit on the bottom for a long time, jigging it occasionally with the rod tip. Next cast is a quick retrieve.

I catch nothing.

I remember what Whitten had said, about needing patience and luck, so I just keep casting. I let the black fly stay longer on the bottom with each cast, hoping for
something to eat it. I quit caring if it is a catfish I catch. I start hopping for a white bass, or a sauger, a brim or a carp. Anything!

Eventually I feel some company joining me on that riverbank. Without looking up I recognize the slow breathing and rough chuckle of Silas Goodrich. He sits above me, watching my attempts with a grin.

What’re you trying to do? he asks.

“Catch a catfish,” I say with grim determination.

You need bait to catch a cat, he says from behind me. Everybody knows that.

For another hour I stay and cast my wholly-bugger, hoping to prove my friend wrong. The sun and repetition lull me enough so that I sit down and fall into a wonderful half-sleep. This is how Nick finds me.

After I wake up and reel in, he asks if I have a worm on my fly.

The next day Nick and I hike into a pond buried in the hills of Stone State Park, in the northwest corner of Iowa. We heard from the local Fish & Tackle shop that some kid recently pulled a ten-pound largemouth out of this pond. We also saw pictures of twenty-pound catfish caught behind the shop out of the Big Sioux River, but it is largemouth that we chase today.

Stone State Park is beautiful, a prime example of the land as Lewis and Clark saw it. The descriptions of native grasses that Lewis wrote while hiking in this area still hold true today. From a road pullout we look over the junction of the Big Sioux with the Missouri and talk about Silas.
Silas was fishing a lot at this point in the trip. He would have been up at dawn every morning with a baited hook, and back to his rod as soon as camp was called at the end of the day. On days they did not move up river, he fished throughout the day.

I ask Nick if Silas ever caught largemouth bass, and he thinks that he probably did not. There are numerous mentions of bass in Lewis’s descriptions of fish caught, but those are probably the white bass, or even the smallmouth. Largemouth are native to the Mississippi drainage further south, though, so I argue that largemouth could have lived up this far, so Silas probably did catch some. Nick laughs and doesn’t argue much. “Maybe,” he says.

So we park the car and hike into this small pond to catch the fish that Silas may or may not have caught on the Missouri River. I have a spinning rod with an assortment of bass lures and spinnerbaits. Nick has a fly rod with small poppers, green with rubber legs.

We find the small pond choked with trees. I cast a rubber worm at submerged trees, dark leaf-choked holes along shore and out into the middle. Schools of crappie follow my rubber bait, some pecking at it, but no bass materializes.

Nick walks out on the lone dock in the pond and casts a small popper. He instantly catches a small crappie. He releases it and then catches another. Than another. Than another. His fly hits the water and the crappies start fighting to be the one he catches. One crappie that Nick releases turns instantly and eats the motionless fly that floats by Nick’s side.

The fishing eventually slows down for Nick, and I eventually catch a largemouth (just shy of two pounds). But I am jealous the whole time, as I stalk around the lake looking for wary largemouth, watching as he catches fish after fish.
“Be nice to have a fryer,” Nick says when I walk out to join him on the dock. “We would’ve eaten well tonight.”

Iowa and Nebraska Fishing History for the Corps of Discovery

As the expedition moved into Iowa and Nebraska, the men did a lot more fishing. At least, they wrote about it more. At times, mentions of fishing come almost daily in the journals. The catfish was still by far the most common catch, but the journals also start to talk about other fish they were catching. The men also had their single best day of fishing on the trip in Nebraska, when they caught over 800 fish in a pond near the river.

When the expedition arrived in the area just south of Lake Manawa, on July 22, 1804, they were anxious for a meeting with the Oto tribe. In anticipation of an encounter and council with the Otos, the captains decided to rest for several days while they sent scouts to look for members of the tribe. Clark wrote, “Came too and formed a Camp on the S. S. above a Small Willow Island, and opposit the first Hill which aproach the river on the L. S. and covered with timbers of Oake Walnut Elm &c. &c. This being a good Situation and much nearer the Otteaus town than the Mouth of the Platt, we concluded to delay at this place a few days and Send for Some of the Chiefs of that nation to let them Know of the Change of Government, The wishes of our Government to Cultivate friendship with them, the Objects of our journey and [the] to present them with a flag and Some Small presents ”.

The entries for the dates when they occupied Camp White Catfish, from July 22 to 27, 1804, reveal that the expedition started to fish in earnest. By the second day at the
camp, July 23, Clark referred to the camp in his second journal entry as Camp White Catfish, yet he made no mention of party members catching fish. The expedition must have been catching some catfish to give the camp such a name. It must have been a welcome change in diet for the crew.

The next day, July 24, Clark mentioned fishing at the camp, "This evening Guthrege [Goodrich] Cought a white Catfish, its eyes Small & tale much like that of a Dolfin". It is unclear exactly what species of catfish Clark was calling a white catfish. Cutright believes it was most likely a channel catfish, and the expedition would have been the first white people to see the channel catfish, except possibly a few French or British trappers living or trading with Plains tribes.

The expedition continued to look for the Otos, but without success. The tribe was out on the prairie hunting buffalo. The scouts found fresh signs of the Otos in their villages, so the party stayed for several days in the hope that some members of the tribe would show up. On July 27, the expedition continued upriver.

Just two days later, on July 29, Clark mentioned the white catfish again, "Caught three large Cat fish to day verry fat one of them nearly white those Cat are So plenty that they may be Cought in any part of this river but fiew fish of any other Kind. — " In another entry later that day, Clark added, "Those fish are in great plenty on the Sides of the river and verry fat, a quart of Oile Came out of the Surpolous fat of one of these fish". The Corps of Discovery was starting to take advantage of the fishing on the Missouri River in earnest.

In the journal entries for the days and weeks following the stay at Camp White Catfish, there are almost daily mentions of catching fish. Catfish is easily the most
commonly mentioned. But other fish are mentioned as well. On July 31, Clark wrote, “Cought a Buffalow fish—“.

The expedition arrived in the area around Salix, Iowa on August 13, 1804, hoping to meet a band of Sioux. The captains had been sending scouts to nearby Oto and Omaha villages for several days now, but they saw no one. What they found instead were empty villages full of graves, the result of a decimating epidemic of small pox.

The Corps of Discovery rested here a couple of days and did some of the most productive fishing of the entire journey. On August 15, 1804, Clark wrote, “I went with ten men to a Creek Damed by the Beavers about half way to the Village, with Some Small willow & Bark we mad a Drag and haulted up the Creek, and Cought 318 fish of different kind i’e’ Peke, Bass, Salmon, perch, red horse, Small Cat, and a kind of perch Called Silverfish, on the Ohio.—I cought a Srimp prosisely of Shape Size & flavour of those about N. Orleans & the lower party of the Mississippi in this Creek which is only the pass or Streight from Beaver Pond to another, is Crouded with large Mustles Verry fat…”

The fishing was even better the next day. Clark began his second entry for August 16 by calling the camp “Fishing Camp 3 ms. N. E. of the Mahars”. This time it was Lewis who took a group of men to fish. It was the most productive fishing day on the entire expedition. “Capt. Lewis took 12 men & went to the Pond & Crek between Camp and the old Village and Cought upwards of 800 fine fish, 79 Pike [WC: resembling Trout 8 fish resembg Salmon Trout] 8 Salmon, 1 Rock, 1 flat Back, 127 Buffalow & red horse 4 Bass & 490 Catt. with many Small Silver fish [WC: & Scrimp]”. The men enjoyed a
feast of fish for several days. Combined with the wild berries and fruits they were gathering, these were some of the better meals they would have on the expedition.

These journal entries tell us a great deal about the fish native to the Missouri River and the Great Plains. There were never salmon in the Missouri or any of its tributaries. Moulton suggests it may have been the brook trout that Clark was referring to. The rock may have been a rock or white bass, a fish that is still present throughout the Missouri. The most difficult fish to identify is Clark's “flat back”; it could have been a sucker or flathead catfish. The red horse was most likely the shorthead red horse, and the small silver fish could have been freshwater drum, or possibly minnows.

The Corps of Discovery suffered its only casualty in the vicinity of today's Sioux City, Iowa, on August 20, 1804. Sergeant Charles Floyd died of what most historians today believe was a ruptured appendix. It mattered not at all that they were out in the wilderness. Doctors could do nothing at the time to save people when their appendix burst. They buried Sergeant Floyd atop a bluff and named a small river nearby after him, which is still known today as Floyd's River.

Chapter Three: The Missouri River Reservoirs

South Dakota Fishing History: The Expedition Enters the Great Plains.

Many elements of the landscape, wildlife, climate and vegetation changed as the expedition turned west along the river on August 21, 1804. They were entering the area that is now the border between South Dakota and Nebraska. There were fewer trees away from the river bottom; rather the surrounding country was an immense grassland unlike
any they had seen before. The game was becoming even more plentiful, especially elk and buffalo. And they started to see new animals that were found only in the West, such as the antelope. They had entered the heart of the Great Plains, and the journals tell us it was a land teeming with game and edible plants. It was the beginning of the shortgrass prairie. For frontiersman living off the land, it was paradise.

The expedition experienced many firsts in South Dakota. They had just lost Sergeant Floyd near today’s Sioux City, Iowa. Floyd died of what most today believe was a ruptured appendix. He was buried on a bluff above the Missouri. He was replaced, as a sergeant, when the expedition elected Patrick Gass sergeant in what was the first vote west of the Mississippi for the United States.

They almost lost another party member. Private George Shannon, the youngest member of the expedition at 19, became lost while out hunting on August 26. Clark expressed great concern for him because he was not one of the party’s better hunters. The captains repeatedly sent men, usually some of the best woodsmen such as John Colter or George Drouillard, ahead of the boats to look for him. He had become convinced that he had fallen behind the boats, and kept walking upstream in an attempt to catch up. Finally, on September 11, the boats came upon Shannon, sitting on the bank nearly starved to death. He had run out of bullets, and in the previous 12 days had only eaten wild grapes and a rabbit he had killed by using a stick as a bullet. In a famous and oft-quoted journal entry, Clark wrote, “thus a man had like to have Starved to death in a land of Plenty for the want of Bulletes or Something to kill his meat”.

A number of animals that were characteristic of the West, and new to science, were encountered in today’s South Dakota. On September 7, the men spent an afternoon
trying to capture a prairie dog, which they, like French trappers who had come before, called “little dogs”. They poured water down their holes, finding out in the process that these little animals construct huge labyrinths of tunnels. Clark wrote, “The Village of those little dogs is under the ground a considerable distance we dig under 6 feet through rich hard clay without getting to their Lodges. Some of their wholes we (pu throw) put in 5 barrels of water without driving them out, we caught one by the water forceing him out.” The following spring they sent back a live prairie dog to Washington, one of only two animals to make it back alive.

They also discovered a mammal that they called “goats”, which today is called the pronghorn antelope. The first mention of the pronghorn was on September 3, when Clark recorded “Several wild Goats Seen in the Plains they are wild & fleet”. Clark wrote a long, detailed description on September 14 of a buck he had killed. Three days later, Lewis tried to kill a doe, but was without success. He had a hard time getting close to the animals, and observed in his journal entry, “…I beheld the rapidity of their flight along the ridge before me it appeared rather the rapid flight of birds than the motion of quadrupeds. I think I can safely venture the ascertainment that the speed of this animal is equal if not superior to that of the finest blooded courser.” Today we know that the pronghorn is the world’s second fastest land mammal; only the cheetah is faster.

While in South Dakota, the men saw for the first time the mule deer, which Clark called a “Curious kind of deer” that “runs like a goat”. Later they called it a “Black tail Deer”, among other names. They also saw an odd, wolf-like animal. It was first described as a “Small wolf with a large bushey tail”. It was the coyote. Several new species of birds and the white-tailed jackrabbit were also discovered.
Another big change that occurred as the Corps of Discovery entered modern South Dakota was the nearly constant interaction with Native American tribes. They had already encountered some Native Americans in Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska, but most of the time they found empty villages. The tribes were out on the prairie, hunting buffalo. Some of the meetings in South Dakota went well, but others, particularly with the Teton Sioux, did not go well and nearly lead to bloodshed. Given the many tense moments and stressful nights that the captains had, combined with the numerous new animals they were encountering and describing, it is not surprising that they did not write about fish as often as in the preceding weeks.

The numbers of game in present-day South Dakota was astounding. There is hardly a day that the captains do not mention buffalo, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer or antelope. The prairie was also full of wild fruits and berries, and the expedition was traveling through the area at the best time of year to take advantage of many of these foods. Everything was ripe and abundant. They were living large off the land.

There are mentions of fish and fishing during the journey through South Dakota. The expedition was still having success at catching what had become their staple fish—the catfish. On September 1, Clark wrote that “numbers of Cat fish cought, those fish is so plenty that we catch them at any time and place in the river”. They were at Calumet Bluff, in the area around today’s Gavins Point Dam near Yankton. They had a council with the Yankton Sioux that went very well. The Yanktons were friendly, but warned that the Tetons would not be.

Three weeks later, in the only other mention of fish and fishing in the captains’ journals throughout South Dakota, on September 21, Clark wrote, “worthy of remark the
Cat fish not So plenty abov white river & much Smaller than usial”. This was the first time the captains mentioned fish but did not say the fishing was excellent. They had been spoiled thus far on the Missouri with catfish. The fish were huge, and plentiful. It was the last mention of fish for the captains until the following spring.

There are some mentions of fish in the sergeants’ journals as well. On August 25, 1804, John Ordway wrote, “2 men of the party caught 9 cat fish last night 5 of them very large.” On the 27th of August, “2 of the party caught 12 fine cat fish last night,”. And on August 29, Ordway wrote, “we have plenty of fine fat Cat fish the most of the Time. Several large ones caught last night.-- The Missouri river affords us plenty of fish, & the Country plenty of all kinds of Game.” Often it is not mentioned who the men catching the fish were, but almost certainly Silas Goodrich was one of them. The fact that the men were fishing at night suggests it was also a form of entertainment. After a long day of paddling and poleing boats against the relentless Missouri current, you would think the men would simply want to sleep. But a beautiful evening on the banks of the Missouri, with a million stars overhead and the company of friends was too much to pass up.

Ordway continued to write about catfish. On September 7 he wrote that “a very large cat fish caugt. by Goodrich last night.” This statement makes one wonder, how big were these catfish the men were catching on this part of the Missouri? They had seen enormous catfish on the Ohio and Mississippi. In particular, they had seen the 128-pound giant that Lewis so meticulously described when they reached the Mississippi River in 1803. Were they calling the catfish they were catching in South Dakota “very large” relative to others they were catching? Or were the men continually catching 80, 90 and
100 pound catfish? The men never took the time to weigh them as accurately as Lewis
did with the fish on the Ohio. We can only wonder how big some of these fish were.

Patrick Gass also mentioned the catfish during these days early in modern South
Dakota. Although all of the people keeping a journal say the fish are easily caught, these
days must have been especially good because everyone talks about the quality of the fish.
On August 25, Gass gives an estimate of the weight of a group of catfish caught. It is also
one of the few journal entries in which the technique used to catch the fish is mentioned:
“Two of our men last night caught nine catfish, that would together weigh three hundred
pounds. The large catfish are caught in the Missouri with hook and line.” And on August
29, he wrote, “We are generally well supplied with Catfish, the best I have ever seen.
Some large ones were taken last night.” This was Gass’ last journal entry in which fish
were mentioned for the year.

Gass’ entry from August 25 is the first mention of catching fish with a hook and
line. Previous entries said the fish were caught with large bush nets, or more often simply
didn’t mention the technique used at all. Given the amount of tackle Lewis brought along,
and the size of the Missouri River, it makes sense that the men were fishing with hook
and line. The nets would be easier to use on tributary creeks, rivers and lakes close to the
river. Goodrich must have been dropping a line from the boat, and the men must have
been fishing with poles from the bank almost every night. Today’s trophy catfish anglers
would love to have the opportunity to catch ‘cats that big with such ease.
The days were getting considerably shorter as the expedition pushed on through South
Dakota, which made the captains anxious to push on and reach the Mandan villages
before winter set in on the Plains. They knew they would experience the harshest winter of their lives, much colder than any of the men had ever experienced.

**The Dammed Missouri**

The dams on the Missouri River all look alike; they just get bigger. The dams use giant walls of rock and soil to block the river and hold the water. At one end of these long walls sits the spillway and power plant. These giant concrete structures control the flow of water below the dam and generate electricity with the river’s force.

The federal government started building these dams as an excuse to get people to work during the Great Depression. From 1930 until 1950, the building of these dams employed over one million people. The added benefit of cheap electricity has made these dams relics worth keeping. Today, roughly 30 percent of the Dakotas’ electricity needs come from these dams.

An added benefit of the dams has been the birth of outstanding game fishing, with walleye being the prize catch. Anglers travel from all over the country to these reservoirs to chase this fish. Because walleye live in every reservoir, anglers have the opportunity to spread out.

Walleye are native to this area, so Silas might have caught some of them. He certainly caught some sauger, and might not have known the difference between the two relatives.

What would Silas have thought of these dams? When we first cross the Missouri at Gavins Point Dam we stop and stare out at the white-capped lake that our beloved
Missouri had turned into, and try to imagine what the Corps of Discovery would have thought if they came around the corner and saw such a sight.

"Lewis would have climbed a hill to get a view to describe it," Nick says, "and Clark would have organized a camp."

And Silas, we both knew, would have gone fishing.

**Gavins Point Dam, Yankton, SD**

Gavins Point Dam, the first man-made goliath in a series, stops the Missouri just west of Yankton, South Dakota. Above the dam sits Lewis and Clark Lake, an awfully ironic name.

Yankton is the perfect town to play host to this change of the river. This town feels different than the towns on the southern Trail. It’s one of the larger towns on the river, with a university, a hospital, coffee bars and industry. There are two strip bars in town, and a disc golf course. There is notably more tourism here than south along the Trail.

The landscape changes here. Below Yankton, high bluffs define the valley bottom, and tree-filled hills roll away from the river. Immediately above Yankton, the water runs up against arid shores, and what few bluffs remain are continually eaten at by the lapping shoreline.

We arrive at Gavins Point Dam in early October, at the beginning of the month-long paddlefish season. Both of us had heard a lot about paddlefish, but never seen one. When we arrived at the dam, over a dozen anglers line the rocks along the riverbank.
Two anglers measure a fish that lies between them. We walk over to look. A paddlefish, its gray belly spotted with dried grass clippings and dirt, lies upside down and motionless.

"It's under 45 inches," one fellow was saying.

"No, it's over," the other fellow said.

They measured again, both bending in to peer at the tape rule.

"See, that's under the line," the first fellow said.

"No, I don't think so," the second says.

When we ask what they are talking about, the second fellow, Leroy Walter from Crofton, NB, explains that the slot limit for paddlefish is 35 to 45 inches.

"If Fish and Game measures this fish and it's too big, it's a big fine," Walter says.

"But it's not too big," says the first man, Rod Beaudette from Yankton, SD. "I'm telling you, that's a legal fish."

Walter ends up taking the fish up to his car. It has been out of the water for ten minutes and remains motionless the whole time. We stay and talk with Beaudette, who tells us paddlefish stories. While he talks he cast into the river. He aims for the string of buoys that mark the no-boat zone below the dam. The cable connecting the buoys is littered with numerous lures, bobbers and hooks.

"Lots of those hooks are mine," Beaudette says as another cast lands close to the chocked cable. "The fish are just below those buoys, near the surface, there!" As he speaks he sweeps backward with his rod, and sure enough the rod leaps forward again.

We help him land the paddlefish. It is too big for the slot, which Beaudette notes with pride. He releases the fish, which swims away quickly. He admits that he is glad not
to catch a legal fish, because he is only allowed to keep one and he would hate to stop fishing before the season ends.

Just then Walter comes back with his paddlefish still in hand. He walks down to the river and tosses the fish into the water. “I kept measuring it, and it’s just too big,” he says, and walks back to his fishing pole.

Nick and I hurry over the boulders to see the fish. It had been out of the water for almost 30 minutes! There is no way that fish was swimming away, I think. But the fish stays motionless for just a moment, then quickly comes back to life. With two lazy sweeps of its tail, the fish swims out of sight, leaving behind a scattering of grass clippings.

“Wow,” I say, “that’s a tough fish.”

“That’s why they’re still here,” says Beaudette.

**Lake Yankton**

Lake Yankton sits just below the dam and north of the river. This used to be part of the river channel, and the state line between South Dakota and Nebraska, but during construction of the dam the channel was moved south and Lake Yankton formed. Campgrounds can be found on both the east and west side of the lake, and there exists plenty of lake access. Given the ease with which this lake may be fished from shore, we are amazed at the lack of anglers. The obsession with walleye that draws people to the tailwater and reservoir are a blessing in this area for anglers interested in largemouth bass, because Lake Yankton has an excellent population of largemouth.
In two hours of fishing, we catch numerous largemouth bass in the four to five pound range. This is a great place to spend a day and hook up with big, feisty largemouth. Lake Yankton is perfect bass habitat. It has numerous banks that are rocky and then drop off quickly into thick weed beds.

While largemouth bass is the primary target of most anglers on Lake Yankton, the lake offers a lot more as a fishery. It has an excellent population of panfish, and good populations of northern pike, walleye and catfish.

**Lewis and Clark Lake**

Lewis and Clark Lake is the only Missouri River reservoir in South Dakota that is not primarily a walleye fishery, according to Clifton Stone, a senior fisheries biologist with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

"It has a reasonably good walleye and sauger population, but is best known for bass fishing," he said, "especially smallmouth bass. That is what distinguishes it from the other reservoirs in South Dakota."

There are numerous access points all around the reservoir. Many anglers do well fishing right off the dam. Stone said Tabor, Sand Creek and Snatch Creek accesses offer some of the best opportunities for shore fishing. Just west of the town of Springfield, which has an access right outside of town, the lake ends. The river flows from here to Fort Randall Dam, one of the few sections of the Missouri in the state that still flows. The section of river from Springfield to the Running Water access has excellent fishing for panfish, and is good for both smallmouth and largemouth bass.
Lewis and Clark Lake also has an excellent population of channel catfish, and a few flathead catfish as well. But almost no one fishes for catfish on the lake or any of the other Missouri River reservoirs in South Dakota. Stone said catfish is the most underutilized species in the Missouri River system.

"In South Dakota, once you get above Gavins Point Dam, everybody who comes to South Dakota to fish has walleye on the brain," he said. "That's unfortunate because the water in the reservoirs is clean, and the flesh quality is very good." Several of the other South Dakota fisheries officials we spoke with said the same thing. Ten-pound catfish are not uncommon in reservoirs, and two-to-four pounders abound. These smaller cats are the best for eating.

Many other fish live in Lewis and Clark Lake, such as the bigmouth buffalo, carp, shiner, freshwater drum, gizzard shad, goldeye, northern pike, river carpsucker, rock bass, shorthead redhorse, shortnose gar, smallmouth buffalo, white bass, white crappie and yellow perch.

**Fort Randall Dam**

The next dam up the river is Fort Randall Dam. Again, the tailwater immediately below the dam is excellent for walleye, and also produces some trophy northern pike every year. Anglers can access the river right below the dam on both sides. There are boat ramps on both banks as well, one in Randall Creek Park on the south bank and another a mile downstream from the spillway on the north bank. Anglers can have great success for walleye fishing along the rocks on both sides. The area around the mouth of Randall
Creek on the south bank is especially good. Paddlefish and sturgeon both live in the tailwater section here, although they are rarely caught in any numbers.

Just downstream from the Randall Creek Recreation Area on the south bank of the river is the north unit of the Karl E. Mundt National Wildlife Refuge. The bottomland environment supports dozens of species of wildlife, including whitetail and mule deer, waterfowl, wild turkeys, raccoons and foxes. But the primary reason the refuge exists is its large population of bald eagles in the winter. This area has one of the largest populations of bald eagles in the United States outside of Alaska. The birds winter here because of the healthy numbers of two of their favorite foods—fish and waterfowl.

Lake Francis Case

Bruce Hoyer, called “Catfish” by most everyone in Oacoma, SD (or “the catfish guy”), is an 83 year-old commercial fisherman who plies lake Francis Case for catfish. Together with Alyce, his wife of 58 years, Hoyer catches, cleans and sells catfish, supplying local restaurants with fresh “Catch of the Day.”

In this land of walleye fisherman, Hoyer is an anachronism. While new boats with fish-finders and thousands of dollars worth of rods and reels zip past him on the lake, he checks his trot lines and fish traps out of his john-boat.

“People don’t know how good the catfish are right here,” he says to us as we help him grab a buoy that marks his trotline. “The clean water makes them taste better. There are lots here, more than walleye.”
Hoyer cuts his engine once we have hold of the line running off the buoy. Working our way hand over hand, we follow the trotline to the hooks. Hoyer baited the hooks two days earlier with live crayfish. He normally gets out everyday, but the day before had been wickedly windy and wet, too nasty for his boat. The first few hooks are picked clean. But then we find some yellow channel catfish, which Hoyer unhooks and throws unceremoniously into a bin on the boat. We also find a couple of fish skeletons, their heads still hooked, evidence of a flathead catfish visiting the trotline.

"There are some big flatheads in here," Hoyer says. "They eat whatever they want." Hoyer has pictures of flatheads bigger than 50 pounds that he caught on these trotlines, most of them newspaper articles. "I know there are bigger ones in here. Has to be."

There are no large flatheads on the trotlines, but there is much evidence of their presence. Numerous fish are missing bodies.

"A flathead got to them," he says. "They like raiding these lines." But Bruce does catch a giant drum, a small flathead, and some very big channel cats. After casting loose from the trotline (he does not re-bait it because he will not be back for a few days), we drift over to his fish traps. When we pull these up, we pour dozens of channel cats into the boat.

"The secret is the cheese," Hoyer says as he refills the traps with bait stored in a five-gallon bucket. The smell from the bucket, a heavy sickening stench, pervades our senses so that we almost taste the bait ourselves. "I get this from the leftovers at the cheese factory. I scrap the barrels after they're done." He laughs at our inability to bait the traps. "You have to get used to it, I guess."

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Back at the Hoyer house, he and Alyce get to work skinning the cats. They stand side by side at a bloodstained workbench in a shed behind their house. Bruce clubs the fish with an iron stick, killing them with a quick bludgeon on the top of their head. The big fish sometimes need two licks, and he really lays into the second shot. He cuts a ring around the head with a sharp knife, and then passes the fish to Alyce.

Alyce pulls the skin off the catfish, using thick pliers to grab the skin and tugging it off like a wetsuit. She then weighs the fish, and puts it aside.

The Hoyers sell the fish to area restaurants, and they get paid by the pound. They make a little more money with the fillets, so Alyce fillets the bigger fish but leaves the bones in the smaller fish.

Most of the Hoyers' friends eat catfish, and when we visit we eat nothing but. Generally the catfish is fried in a fryer (a plug-in fryer unit sits in most everyone's kitchen) and served with corn or potatoes. Super delicious stuff, and always worth stopping for at the Oasis, off of I-90 in Oacoma.

Lake Francis Case, like Lakes Oahe and Sharpe north of it, is a fishery dominated by walleye. Clifton Stone tells us that about 90 percent of the fish harvest on the reservoir is walleye. But he adds that there are a lot of other species that have good populations in the reservoir.

"There are pretty good populations of smallmouth bass, white bass and catfish," he says. "We had some high-water years in the mid '90s and had good reproduction of pike. Fifteen-pound pike are not uncommon."

The reservoir has numerous access points, especially on the south end. Some of the best for shore fishing include Pease Creek, Snake Creek, Platte Creek, North Point
and Whetstone Bay. There is also good access to the reservoir around the town of Chamberlain, and this area offers excellent shore fishing.

"When people think about walleye fishing they think of the rocks at Chamberlain," Stone says. "Any of the rocks near town, it doesn't matter. Just be out there fishing when the schools swim by."

As in Lewis and Clark Lake, numerous other lesser-known fish call this water home, including the bigmouth buffalo, black bullhead, black crappie, channel cat, common carp, shiner, creek chub, flathead minnow, freshwater drum, gizzard shad, goldeneye, Johnny darter, largemouth bass, northern pike, red shiner, river carpsucker, sauger, shorthead redhorse, smallmouth bass, smallmouth buffalo, white bass, white crappie and yellow perch.

**Big Bend Dam, Lake Sharpe**

We spend one long night fishing the tailwater at the northern end of Lake Sharpe for walleye. We have company in the form of Rick and Pony, two local longhaired anglers full of energy that we meet at the fishing access. They proudly show us their stringer of two walleye and one huge rainbow trout. They are fishing crappie rigs baited with earthworms. Nick and I secretly agree they are eating speed.

"You have to get it way out there," says Pony as he heaves his set-up out into the current of the tailwater. We are standing on rocks five hundred yards below the dam. "And you have to pay attention."
A school of sturgeon runs through the tail-water while I fish a crappie rig with two earthworms as bait. In twenty minutes I catch a half-dozen sturgeon, all between one- and three-feet long, including one double catch (two sturgeon on at once) that I think for a moment might be a paddlefish.

Pony and Rick say the fishing around Pierre rocks. They offer to take us fishing the next day in a canoe up the Bad River, which lows into Lake Sharp opposite Pierre.

"Lots of catfish up Bad River, lots of carp," Pony says. He says we’ll paddle around the river and look for big fish. He claims the big ones are easy to see. "Maybe we’ll bring the bow," he says.

They take their stringer and leave sometime around three in the morning, intent on getting back home so as not to annoy Rick’s girlfriend, at whose house they live. As the leave, they make a big deal about being ready at sunrise.

"You got to be early in the morning for the really big fish," Pony says as he puts his dog in the back of his truck. "Early or real late."

The next morning we are up before the sun, having slept on the ground at the base of the dam. Rick and Pony don’t show. We wait a while and fish a little, but catch nothing. The cold and wetness in the morning makes my collie Hunter’s arthritis act up, so we decide to find a warm diner with a pay phone.

We call Rick’s girlfriend to see what’s going on, all she tells us before she hangs up is, "Pony’s in jail."

So, we never fish the Bad River, and we never find out what happened to Pony. Rick’s girlfriend doesn’t tell us, and the police don’t either, even when we evoke the Freedom of Information Act.
Lake Sharpe sneaks up on the traveling angler, and can almost be missed. A scant seventy miles long, by far the shortest reservoir in the middle-Missouri section, Lake Sharpe is best known for hosting the capital of South Dakota, Pierre.

The walleye is the most abundant, and sought after, sport fish in Lake Sharpe. The lake also has good populations of catfish, white bass, sauger, pike and a few tiger muskie.

According to Robert Hanten, a fisheries biologist with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, some of the best fishing on Lake Sharpe is located just outside of Pierre at the Farm Island Recreation Area. He says this spot has very high walleye counts and offers easy access to the water. Some of the other access points that have good shorelines to fish from are West Bend and North Shore. But Hanten says anglers can do well at most of the campgrounds along the lake, if they know what good walleye areas look like and are willing to walk away from the boat ramps. This is true, he says, with all of the Missouri River reservoirs in South Dakota.

"Most of the people camping come here to fish," Hanten says. "Those campgrounds were put there because they are good fishing spots. People sometimes overlook that."

Easy access to the river exists right in Pierre, and many people put their boats in the river here. There are good fish-cleaning stations here, and plenty of room to store boats at one of the marinas. These same boat put-ins offer the wading angler good access to some nice water.

Lake Oahe
Lake Oahe is the largest of the Missouri River reservoirs in South Dakota, stretching from Oahe Dam, just north of Pierre, all the way to Bismarck, North Dakota. The lake is divided into three zones because it is so enormous. The lower third of the lake is a cold water habitat where the water stays below 59 degrees Fahrenheit year round. This allows the lower third to support a stocked population of Chinook salmon and rainbow trout. There is no natural reproduction of salmon or trout on the lake, but the state stocks the reservoir every year in the spring.

The best time to catch salmon or trout in the lower reservoir is early spring and late fall. Because salmon and trout are cold-water fish, they can only come up in the water during the spring and fall when the water is cooler. Anglers can hook up from shore at these times, fishing around the dam intakes and in the creek inlets, especially around spring creeks. Whitlocks Bay, just west of Gettysburg, is a hot spot for salmon in the fall.

In the summer, the salmon and trout move down deep into the lake. It is impossible to catch either from shore during the warm summer months. The only way to get to the fish is use of a downrigger. There are a number of guides in the area who can take you after these big fish year round.

The main sport fish in Lake Oahe, however, is the walleye. They are found throughout the reservoir, along with smallmouth bass and catfish. Hanten says the size of the reservoir makes shore fishing a challenge.

“Lake Oahe is really tough, even harder than Lake Sharpe because it is so big,” he says. “The best way to fish it is to park at a boat ramp and walk out on a point. The most
important thing is to look for structure, such as rocky areas, because that is where the walleye are.”

Some of the best fishing on Lake Oahe is found near Mobridge, South Dakota. This area is well known as a trophy walleye fishery. Numerous national and regional fishing tournaments are held in the area every year.

But aside from the outstanding fishing, one of the best things about spending time in this area is simply to get a feel for what nights on the Great Plains were like for the Corps of Discovery. Mobridge, with a population of fewer than 4,000 people, is the biggest town within 80 miles in any direction.

We spend a glorious night of walleye fishing on Lake Oahe under a crystal clear sky. As we cast, we watch the reflection in the mirror-flat lake of fireworks so bright it lit up the entire sky. Then we realized it is a shooting star. The Milky Way arcs overhead, and coyotes (the “Small wolf with a large bushy tail”, as Clark once called them) howl on both sides of the lake. Within their serenade is the reminder that there is still a vastness and wildness to the Great Plains. We fish well into the night, and catch a couple of nice walleyes that we fry for a dawn-lit breakfast.

Indian Creek Campground, located on Lake Oahe just south of town, has good bank fishing for walleye right off the campground. The small cove at the south end of the campground is excellent fishing in the spring and fall. In summer, walleye move out into deeper water, so trolling from a boat and fishing farther down in the lake is the best strategy.

This part of Lake Oahe used to be known as the northern pike capitol of the world, but many years of low water in the lake during the 1980s severely damaged
spawning conditions for pike. The area, however, is making a recovery as a pike fishery. Numerous pike over 10 pounds are caught every year in the area, and fish over 20 pounds are not uncommon.

Other game fish common to this area include the omnipresent catfish and smallmouth bass. Bluegill, crappie, white bass and yellow perch are also common.

**Heading Towards Winter Camp: The Corps in North Dakota**

The expedition hardly fished at all while in North Dakota. The vast majority of the time the Corps spent in North Dakota was during their stay at Fort Mandan. The men had plenty to do that winter, and considering what they had been through physically during the previous summer and fall, the free days they had would have been welcome. And the Missouri River was frozen over during most of their stay.

During the fall of 1804, they were too occupied with getting to the Mandan villages and preparing for the brutal winter they would endure. The game was as abundant as ever, and buffalo was becoming more and more the bulk of their meat supply. They needed the buffalo hides as well, primarily to use as coats in the winter. After their arrival at the villages, the men were busy building Fort Mandan. They were pushing their luck with the weather, and needed to get the fort done as quickly as possible. They moved in on November 13, but the fort was not complete. Still, it would suit their needs, and they could finish the fort while they lived in it.

The men probably missed the catfish they had enjoyed thus far. Their exertion rowing the keelboat and pirogues upstream required a lot of protein, and they were
getting it every day in the form of deer, buffalo, elk and antelope. They also got a lot of protein from fish, and if nothing else it provided a much needed change in diet.

Frontiersmen were never picky when it came to food; they were simply happy to have enough to eat. But the monotony of the same meal three times a day can get to anyone. The catfish was much appreciated. Aside from the beaver tails that the captains often commented the men loved, it may have been one of their favorite meals.

One of the more intriguing journal entries that gives us a good idea how the men spent many of those cold, dark winter days in North Dakota comes from Patrick Gass. On April 5, 1805, two days before they left Fort Mandan, he wrote a passage about Indian women. “If this brief Journal should happen to be preserved, and be ever thought worthy of appearing in print: some readers will perhaps expect, that, after our long friendly intercourse with these Indians, among whom we have spent the winter; our acquaintance with those nations lower down the river and the information we received relative to several other nations, we ought to be prepared now, when we are about to renew our voyage, to give some account of the fair sex of the Missouri; and entertain them with narratives of feats of love as well as of arms. Though we could furnish a sufficient number of entertaining stories and pleasant anecdotes, we do not think it prudent to swell our Journal with them; as our views are directed to more useful information. Besides, as we are yet ignorant of the dangers, which may await us, and the difficulty of escape, should certain probable incidents occur, it may not be inconsistent with good policy to keep the Journal of as small and portable a size as circumstances will make practicable. It may be observed generally that chastity is not very highly esteemed by these people, and that the severe and loathsome effects of certain French principles are not uncommon.
among them. The fact is, that the women are generally considered an article of traffic and *indulgencies* are sold at a very moderate price. As a proof of this I will just mention, that for an old tobacco box, one of our men was granted the honour of passing the night with the daughter of the head chief of the Mandan nation. An old bawd with her punks, may also be found in some of the villages on the Missouri, as well as in the large cities of polished nations." So that is how these young, vibrant men spent their days and nights. Who needs fishing for entertainment when there is plenty of gratuitous sex to be had? It also begs the question, if the men were frequently having sex with Indian women, did the captains? They never wrote about it, but of course that doesn't mean they didn't partake in the pleasures the men were enjoying.

The captains never mention fishing while they were in North Dakota on the outward journey. In the fall, they had far too much to talk about, mostly their relations with the Mandans and Hidatsas. In the spring, as they began the journey into territory never explored by white people, they were also preoccupied with talking about the landscape and wildlife. The journal entries for this time are long. But fishing was the last thing on their mind. This is a trend present throughout the journals. When there were a lot of other things going on, the captains simply didn't write about fishing.

Fishing was at times an important source of food, especially in those areas where game was scarce. Just as often, it seems the men fished for the same reason we do today-to relax and enjoy the day or evening. On days with extraordinary catches, they talk about it. Most of the time, however, it is merely something the captains throw in at the end of the day's entry.
The same void of fishing entries is true with the journey back through North Dakota. The men wanted to get back to St. Louis, especially the captains. They had discovered so much, had accurate maps, detailed descriptions of the landscape and numerous plant and animal specimens. Lewis did not want to jeopardize the success of what they had accomplished. He wrote after the altercation with the Blackfeet that he would have rather been killed than give up his journals. And the Corps of Discovery was cruising downstream, enjoying the current that had been their worst enemy for so many months on the way westward.

John Ordway is the only sergeant who wrote about fishing in North Dakota. On April 13, less than a week after they departed Fort Mandan, he tells us that “Som of our men caught 2 beaver and one fish last night”. On April 17, he wrote “Some of the men caught 2 beaver and Several Small fish.” Later, in that same entry, Ordway says “one of the men caught a number of Small cat fish in the river.” This was the first time it was written that the catfish were small. As the men moved upriver, the catfish became smaller. They comment on this several times while in Montana. While they may not have provided as much food, these small catfish are excellent to eat. The tradeoff would have been worth it.

Ordway writes the next day that “the Game is gitting pleantyier every day.—“ It was one of the many entries from all of the journal keepers in which the increase in game is mentioned. On April 19 he wrote, “Some of the men caught a quantity of Small cat fish in the river”. Ordway’s final entry while in North Dakota comes on the Yellowstone River. He was with a party that went ahead of the boats by land, lead by Lewis. They were scouting the area around the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri, an area
the captains knew was important as a potential future fort site. Lewis wanted to take observations, as he always did at important places. After camping the night of April 25 two miles up the Yellowstone, they spent the next day hunting in the area around the confluence. Ordway wrote, “Capt. Lewis took an observation at 9 oC. and at 12 oClock, also at 4. he caught Several Small fish in the River Roshjone”. Ordway was using the French name for the Yellowstone, Roche Jaune. Later in the same journal entry, Ordway describes the area, “on the River Roshjone and the Missourie the Game is verry pleanty, viz. buffaloe Elk Deer Goats Some bair. Pleanty of bever, fish &C and a beautiful country around in every direction.” Lewis wrote a detailed description of the area, but did not mention the fish he caught.

That was the last mention of fishing while the expedition was in North Dakota. Of course the fact that they were leaving today’s North Dakota meant nothing to them. But getting past the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers did mean something. The captains knew what an important site this was, and what an important river the Yellowstone was. The landscape was changing a little every day. They had been getting information about the geography ahead of them all winter from the Mandans and Hidatsas. And as much as they talked about plentiful deer, elk, bear and antelope during the previous year, nothing had prepared them for the spectacle of wildlife they were about to witness in today’s Montana. The fishing in Montana would also be excellent. But their minds were on something else. They still had the mountains to cross.

_Garrison Dam, Lake Sakakawea_
On the west side of Garrison Dam sits Pick City, and in this town there is only one restaurant you can go to for a burger, a beer and to watch some baseball. So this is where we find ourselves the night of a 2000 Boston Red Sox/ New York Yankees playoff game. Nick is a Yankees fan, and I am a Red Sox fan, so this is a charged situation to begin with.

The game is a good one, and we stay for the whole game. By the time the Red Sox lose, we are both somewhat loopy and have gotten to know most everyone in the bar. I should have been in a horrible mood, but instead I was kept very cheerful all night long by a mounted trophy that sat behind the television. Seven walleye, each one weighing over 13 pounds, were mounted on a backing, with a stringer arranged between the fish, looking like the fantasy version of a good day fishing.

It is no wonder that Lake Sakakawea breeds large fish. It is a huge lake, stopped by a huge dam. The Garrison Dam is one of the largest earthen dams in the world. The dam is two-and-a-half miles long, half a mile wide and 210 feet high. It stops 178 miles of river, creating in the process 368,000 surface acres.

We love Lake Sakakawea. It is beautiful, the landscape unpopulated, and the people wary but kind. It is just that we are sick and tired of dams and reservoirs. They all look alike! The far shore always looks the same. The towns look similar to the last one. The fish are all the same fish being caught one dam down.

The same is true here for the fishing. Walleye, catfish, bass, carp, trout, salmon, pike and drum live here and are caught with the same methods used further down river. This is a much bigger lake than all the others, so there are more fish here. But because of its shear size, it is an intimidating place to fish.
In the town of Williston we meet Wally, the walleye, a giant fiberglass fish that presides over the town center. For a fish that every person in town is chasing with hooks and boats, he looks pretty happy.

**Ft. Peck, Montana**

I wake up to the sound of pheasants and coyotes. Our campsite at the bottom of Ft. Peck dam is a wooded wonderland, welcome after the hundreds of miles of missing river bottom.

A flimsy ice layer lines the outside of our tent. It is cold! I run to the car to grab some long underwear. As I stand in my bare feet, boxers and fleece, a gun goes off somewhere near the river.

“Christ, that was close!” Nick says, sticking his head out of the tent. Too close, we both agree. Is bird season beginning? Is that a poacher out hunting? We’ve been out of the state for a few weeks, and Nick, normally so sure of hunting seasons and regulations, is unusually unsure. Either way, we have a dog with us, and neither one of us want to head out fishing where people are shooting.

Plus, did I say it is cold! A bitter cold that bites through the long underwear I pull on. A cold that follows us out of the tent and makes it easy to decide to pack up and eat in town somewhere.

Town is Ft. Peck, a grouping of buildings perched on the hill overlooking the dam. Mule deer dot the hills throughout town. The only restaurant open is inside a giant building on top of the hill. The only other customers are a family of nine in town for a
wedding. Through the breakfast the waitress talks with this family and finds out she is related to the family through the bride’s family. They talk loudly about families, plans, bankruptcies and the suitability of the groom.

Nick and I eat our eggs, bacon and biscuits quietly. We were up late the night before, talking fishing with some drunks in Wolf Point. This morning, even though we know the family fishes the reservoir, we don’t have the energy to talk shop. We’ve asked dozens of anglers hundreds of questions in the last three weeks. We’ve filled notebooks with fishing facts and stories. We’ve photographed fish, cooked fish, talked fish and thought fish for too long. But listening to the group talk about relatives, vacations, family news, local gossip and the upcoming wedding, we both realize we’re missing the home life.

So we decide to go home.

Silas chides us as we drive the empty highway west toward Missoula. Some fishermen you are, he says with relish. First taste of cold and rain and you want to go home. Good thing you didn’t try to get on the Corps of Discovery couple hundred years ago. You never would have made it.

We tell him to be quiet, but he spends the rest of the trip chortling in the back seat.

As for the fishing, well, Ft. Peck Reservoir is notorious for big fish. Be it twenty-pound trout, 15-pound walleye or 25-pound pike, this is the opportunity to catch some monsters. Fishing the tailwater is the best bet for fly-fishermen. Fishing from a boat the best bet for other anglers. Always worth a trip, this lake is the destination for many big-fish hunters.
Chapter Four: Montana, the Upper Missouri

Nowhere does the Missouri River's identity fluctuate more than in Montana. Sometime giant reservoir, sometime tailwater, sometime freestone stream, the Missouri River above Fort Peck Reservoir includes fishing for everyone.

For walleye fishermen, Canyon Ferry Lake, outside of Helena, offers high limits and the shot at a world record fish. Trout fishermen have thirty miles of tailwaters to fish in, waters where ten-pound trout are common. Catfish, sauger, pike and borbet live in the Wild and Scenic stretch (between Ft. Hayden and the reservoir). Largemouth bass live in the ponds in Three Forks.

The reputation of the upper Missouri as a great fishery was first recognized by trout fishermen. The tailwater sections offer ideal conditions for the growth of trout populations. The cool water, drawn from the bottom of the reservoirs above and well oxygenated by the turbines, and abundant plant life in the river's bottom offer trout protection, easy living and plenty of food. Rainbow and brown trout, stocked after the completion of the dams, grow large and strong here. The native cutthroat and bull trout are gone, early victims to the invading elements.

Trout anglers flock to the Missouri from around the world. Of all the waters in Montana, the Missouri is the most fished, by locals, travelers and destination vacationers. Fly fishermen in particular find the fishing challenging and rewarding. Sam Meridan, an angler from Chicago with worldwide fly-fishing experience, comes to Wolf Creek looking for trout every year.
"These are the best rainbows around," says Meridan, 43. "They're big, they're strong, and they're beautiful. What more do you want?"

This reputation as only a trout fishery is now being challenged by the walleye opportunities in the area. Walleye, which were introduced to the upper Missouri watershed by so-called "bucket-biologist" (amateur and illegal fish stockers), have found a wonderful environment to grow populous and large. So large, in fact, the next world record sized walleye may come out of the upper Missouri.  

The Corps of Discovery in Big Sky Country

When the expedition continued past the mouth of the Yellowstone River and into Montana they were, as almost every day throughout the expedition, experiencing many new species of plants and animals. But the creature that was most on their minds was the grizzly bear, or "white bear" as Lewis and Clark often described them. They had heard so much about the grizzly the previous winter. On April 13, while traveling upstream in North Dakota, Lewis wrote that "we saw also many tracks of the white bear of enormous size, along the river shore and about the carcases of the Buffaloe, on which I presume they feed. we have not as yet seen one of these anamals, tho’ their tracks are so abundant and recent. the men as well as ourselves are anxious to meet with some of these bear. the Indians give a very formidable account of the strength and ferocity of this anamal, which they never dare to attack but in parties of six eight or ten persons; and are even then frequently defeated with the loss of one or more of their party."

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4 According to Nick Gevock, a biologist he interviewed told him that he (the biologist) had seen a walleye weighing over 20 pounds come out of a lake shock in Canyon Ferry Lake. Nick does not have this report confirmed, nor does he have the fellow’s name.
It was over two weeks later when Lewis finally got his wish and killed a grizzly. They had seen several other grizzlies on the banks of the river, and even wounded one that got away on April 28. The next day Lewis was walking on shore with another man (he doesn’t say who) and came upon two grizzlies. Lewis wrote about the experience: “about 8 A. M. we fell in with two brown or (yellow) [X: White] bear; both of which we wounded; one of them made his escape, the other after my firing on him pursued me seventy or eighty yards, but fortunately had been so badly wounded that he was unable to pursue so closely as to prevent my charging my gun; we again repeated our fir and killed him.”

Lewis went on to describe the bear. It was a young male that Lewis estimated to weigh about 300 pounds. He made comparisons with the black bear and called the grizzly “a much more furious and formidable anamal, and will frequently pursue the hunter when wounded. It is asstonishing to see the wounds they will bear before they can be put to death.” Over the next several months, the expedition encountered dozens of grizzlies. The bears were plentiful in the river bottom, where they scavenged game, especially buffalo and elk.

Fishing is hardly mentioned at all during the first few weeks in Montana. The game continued to become more and more plentiful as they moved west. A week after they entered Montana, on May 4, 1805, Lewis wrote, “I saw immence quantities of buffaloe in every direction, also some Elk deer and goats; having an abundance of meat on hand I passed them without firing on them; they are extreemly gentle the bull buffaloe particularly will scarcely give way to you. I passed several in the open plain within fifty paces, they viewed me for a moment as something novel and then very unconcernedly
continued to feed.” A few days later Lewis tells us that “we saw a great quantity of game today particularly of Elk and Buffaloe, the latter are now so gentle that the men frequently throw sticks and stones at them in order to drive them out of the way.” Clearly fishing for food would have been a waste of time with bison as tame as cattle around.

And the captains were spending a lot of time describing the landscape and wildlife, much more than they did on the lower sections of the Missouri. The journal entries became a lot longer in Montana and also became even more descriptive of the landscape.

They described the river valley as being timbered in most places, although the density varied a great deal. Cottonwood was the most common tree, but there was also some willow. The Missouri in this area wound through an immense shortgrass prairie that Lewis called a “handsom level plain”. He said the plains were fertile and beautiful. Both captains complement the scenery almost every day in their journals. Lewis wrote a considerable amount about the soil and minerals this area, even more so than he normally did.

Both the plains and the river bottom contained scores of wildlife. The river valley was like an oasis in a desert, drawing game by the thousands. The captains often walked atop the river valley on the edge of the plains. They frequently commented that the game was more abundant in the valley, which made hunting easy because the hunters did not have to drag their kills far to get them to the crew. They were, as they had been the entire journey along the Missouri, living well off the land. But because it was spring, none of the wild fruits and berries were ripe yet, and their diet that was so heavily dominated by meat must have become repetitive.
Lewis gives us a hint that even though they didn’t need to fish, they still were, although not with the success they had the previous year. On May 5 he wrote “we kill whatever we wish, the buffaloe furnish us with fine veal and fat beef, we also have venison and beaver tales when we wish them; the flesh of the Elk and goat are less esteemed, and certainly are inferior. we have not been able to take any fish for some time past.”

This journal entry sheds light on how much the men liked to eat the fish they were catching in the Missouri. Lewis tells us they have all the game they want. But still they were fishing, albeit without any luck. The men had gone all winter without catfish, and weren’t happy about it.

One also has to wonder why they weren’t catching any catfish? We know that there were catfish in this section of the river. Clark and the sergeants continually wrote the previous year about how easy catfish were to catch, saying at times that they could be caught anywhere in the Missouri. In the middle and late fall, just before they stopped at Fort Mandan, it was mentioned a few times that fish were not as common and getting smaller. Still, they were catching them.

The reason for the decreased harvest may be twofold. First, catfish are primarily a warm-water fish, although they can live almost anywhere. They thrive in warmer water, where they grow large and reproduce well. This explains why the catfish they were catching were much smaller than the previous summer. The benefit to catching these small catfish is that generally, as with most fish, the smaller fish are much better to eat. The flesh quality of catfish that weigh from 2 to 5 pounds is excellent. As fish get bigger, their flesh tends to get soft.
These small catfish must have been delicious, but the journals never mention that they tasted any better than those of the previous summer. Instead, the men complained about the size of the fish. Like most anglers, they were more concerned with the size of the fish they were catching. Then again, maybe the men simply were not catching enough fish to provide everyone with some fish. Since we have only the journals of a small number of the people on the expedition, we do not know how many crew members were getting some of these fish. During the previous summer, everyone got to enjoy catfish as they were routinely bringing in fish that weighed 30 to 40 pounds, and catching dozens of them. Certainly the spring of 1805 would have been a good time for fish-lovers on the expedition to buddy-up with Goodrich.

The next time the captains mention fishing comes on May 22. Lewis noted “we have caught but few fish since we left the Mandans, they do not bite freely, what we took were the white cat of 2 to 5 lbs. I presume that fish are scarce in this part of the river.” The catfish he was referring to was most likely the channel catfish, which Lewis called the white catfish throughout the journey.

On May 26 Lewis climbed the hills next to the river and observed the Rocky Mountains for the first time. He wrote of the experience: “while I viewed these mountains I felt a secret pleasure in finding myself so near the head of the heretofore conceived boundless Missouri;” Little did Lewis know that they still had several hundred miles of river to travel, just on the Missouri itself! They were three months from crossing the Continental Divide. Still, knowing they had to cross the mountains and spending a full year on in the Great Plains anticipating the mountain crossing made the mere sight of the Rockies a victory. They were making progress.
On the night of May 28, a bull buffalo came through their camp. It nearly stepped on some of the men as they slept. Lewis credits his dog, Seaman, with saving his and Clark’s lives by barking at the bull, changing its course away from their tent. A rifle and one of the blunderbusses had been damaged when the bull passed near the white pirogue, but otherwise no one was injured. Lewis was not usually superstitious in his writing, but he did write a curious note to the incident in the next day’s journal entry: “it appears that the white perogue, which contains our most valuable stores, is attended by some evil gennii.” He mentions the “evil gennii” again later in his journal on May 31 when the pirogue nearly tipped. “I fear her evil gennii will play so many pranks with her that she will go to the bottomm some of those days.”

The Corps kept moving upstream. Their next goal was the Great Falls, which they expected to see very soon. Before they got there, they had a pause at the mouth of the Marias River, where they were uncertain which was the Missouri. They scouted both of the rivers, and quite the debate ensued regarding which was fork was the Missouri. Lewis decided the left fork was the true Missouri. They continued up the river, even though most of the men thought that the right fork was actually the Missouri. But they never questioned the leadership of their captains and followed their orders to the word. It was the right choice.

As they moved closer to the Great Falls, the fishing began to improve. Lewis gives us a long description of the fishing and fish in the area around Fort Benton: “Goodrich who is remarkably fond of fishing caught several douzen fish of two different species-- one about 9 inches long of white colour round and in form and fins resembles the white chub common to the Potomac; this fish has a smaller head than the Chubb and
the mouth is beset both above and below with a rim of fine sharp teeth; the eye
moderately large, the pupil dark and the iris which is narrow is of a yellowish brown
colour, they bite at meat or grasshoppers. this is a soft fish, not very good, tho’ the flesh
is of a fine white colour. the other species is precisely the form and about the size of the
well known fish called the Hickory Shad or old wife, with the exception of the teeth, a
rim of which garnish the outer edge of both the upper and lower jaw; the tongue and
pallet are also beset with long sharp teeth bending inwards, the eye of this fish is very
large, and the iris of a silvery colour and wide. of the 1st species we had caught some few
before our arrival at the entrance of Maria’s river, but of the last we had seen none untill
we reached that place and took them in Missouri above it’s junction with that river. the
latter kind are much the best, and do not inhabit muddy water; the white cat continue as
high as the entrance of Maria’s R, but those we have caught above Mandans never exceed
6 lbs. I beleive that there are but few in this part of the Missouri."

Lewis was the first to describe the sauger, and he was probably comparing it to
the white bass that he knew from the Potomac River. He was also the first to describe
the goldeye, comparing it to the gizzard shad, well known to today’s anglers because it
is an important forage base for popular sport fish in many waters. It is surprising that
Lewis wrote that the sauger was not good to eat; today, along with its close relative the
walleye, the sauger is considered one of the very best freshwater fish to eat.

Lewis’ comments also shed more light on how much Goodrich liked to fish. On
the lower Missouri, Clark usually simply said that Goodrich caught the fish. But he never
wrote that Goodrich so enjoyed fishing. Goodrich must have been an avid fisherman for
many years before the expedition to have developed the skills he had. Where and when
he grew to love fishing as he did is anyone’s guess, given that we know so little about him. His skills were coming in handy, and certainly he must have taught some of the novices on the crew how to fish.

This is one of the few times that Lewis talks about the bait they were using. They had plenty of meat and grasshoppers. They were probably using meat throughout the trip to catch catfish, and it worked for other types of fish as well. Lewis gives another account of a bait they were using the next day. He had just walked 27 miles and killed some game. He wrote, “This evening I ate very heartily and after pening the transactions of the day amused myself catching those white fish mentioned yesterday; they are here in great abundance I caught upwards of a douzen in a few minutes; they bit most freely at the melt of a deer which goodrich had brought with him for the purpose of fishing.”

Moulton believes the “melt” was the spleen of the deer. Goodrich must have figured out it was effective as bait through experimentation. And they had more than enough guts to go around, although if the fish specifically liked the spleen the men may have argued over who got them. If Goodrich was the one to pioneer its use as bait, he most likely had first take on using them. Besides, the men could just sit back and enjoy the fish he was catching, because he so enjoyed fishing.

Lewis wrote the next day, June 13, that “This morning we set out about sunrise after taking breakfast off our venison and fish.” They finally reached the Great Falls that day around noon. He wrote a long description of what he saw, and conveys disappointment that he cannot do better. “I hope still to give to the world some faint idea of an object which at this moment fills me with such pleasure and astonishment…” Lewis
goes on to say that they conclusively know that this is the Missouri, something even he still had some lingering doubts about.

Later in the same journal entry, Lewis describes for the first time the native trout of the Rocky Mountains, the cutthroat. “Goodrich had caught half a dozen very fine trout and a number of both species of the white fish. these trout \[NB: caught in the falls\] are from sixteen to twenty three inches in length, precisely resemble our mountain or speckled trout in form and the position of their fins, but the specks on these are of a deep black instead of the red or gold colour of those common to the U. States. these are furnished long sharp teeth on the pallet and tongue and have generally a small dash of red on each side behind the front ventral fins; the flesh is of a pale yellowish red, or when in good order, or a rose red.—“

Sixteen to 23 inches! Today’s flyfishers would give anything to routinely catch such beautiful trout. The cutthroat is well known to be the strongest fighting of all trout. And Goodrich was pulling them in left and right. It must have been one of his better days of fishing. His catch made him the first white man to catch a cutthroat. It is quite a claim to fame. Today thousands of anglers who flock to the West to catch the native trout of the Rocky Mountains. And for good reason, because the cutthroat is well known for the fight it puts up when hooked. The combination of fight and beauty make the cutthroat a truly remarkable sport fish.

Lewis ended his long journal entry for the day on a happy note, “my fare is really sumptuous this evening; buffaloe’s humps, tongues and marrowbones, fine trout parched meal pepper and salt, and a good appetite; the last is not considered the least of the luxuries.” He was having the time of his life on his “darling project”.

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His next fishing quote comes two days later. The men were spending a few days looking around the area, hunting and deciding how to approach the portage around the falls. Lewis wrote about his own trout fishing experience. "I amused myself in fishing, and sleeping away the fortiegues of yesterday. I caught a number of very fine trout which I made Goodrich dry; goodrich also caught about two dozen and several small cat of a yellow colour which would weigh about 4 lbs. the tails was seperated with a deep angular nitch like that of the white cat of the missouri from which indeed they differed only in colour."

What followed was one of the most grueling episodes of the entire expedition—the portage around the Great Falls. They expected it to take only a few days. Instead it lasted a month, during which they endured intense summer storms, sickness and shredded feet from walking over sharp rocks and prickly pear. Clark wrote that the men never complained.

Sacagawea was very sick, with a high fever. The captains had been treating her, mostly by bleeding her and with a number of Lewis’ remedies. He had instructed her to eat only certain things, and was angry with Charbonneau when she didn’t. On June 19 Lewis wrote, “the Indian woman was much better this morning she walked out and gathered a considerable quantity of the white apples of which she eat so heartily in their raw state, to with a considerable quantity of dried fish without my knowledge that she complained very much and her fever again returned.” Charbonneau was scolded for allowing her the meal. In the same entry, Lewis again wrote about his fishing time, "I amused myself in fishing several hours today and caught a number of both species of the
white fish, but no trout nor Cat.” They were still catching sauger and goldeye, but far preferred trout and catfish. Lewis does not say whether they ate the “white fish”.

Sacagawea was much better the next day. “The Indian woman is quite free from pain and fever this morning and appears to be in a fair way for recovery,” Lewis wrote, “she has been walking about and fishing.” This was one of the only times it was mentioned that Sacagawea fished. It should come as no surprise. She was a Shoshone, and they lived in an area in which the rivers and streams had plenty of trout and salmon. Lewis does not mention how she fished, or if she caught anything.

They continued the portage. It took its toll on the crew. The captains constantly write about the state of the men’s health and the abuse they were taking. Clark wrote that “to State the fatigues of this party would take up more of the than other notes which I find Scercely time to Set down.” At least the men were well fed. The captains had established an advance camp led by Lewis that had a few good hunters whose job it was to stockpile a good supply of meat. The hunting remained productive. But fishing did not and is hardly mentioned at all. The next time it was, on June 25, Lewis wrote, “I have made an unsuccessful attempt to catch fish, and do not think there are any in this part of the river.”

It must have been Lewis’ luck only, because the others were still having great luck just a few miles downstream. Or possibly Lewis was right; the river could have had very few or no fish in his area. Certainly Lewis knew how to catch them after so many nights fishing with Goodrich. It had been a long time since Clark had mentioned fishing. He had hardly written about it at all since Fort Mandan. On June 25, the same day Lewis declares there are no fish in the river, Clark wrote, “we Catch great quantities of Trout,
and a kind of mustel, flat backs & a Soft fish resembling a Shad and a few Cat.” Moulton suggests the flat back Clark referred to may have been slang for suckers xi.

The work went on through June. There is a long gap in the journals in fishing entries. Again we hear about the immense numbers of game. Lewis wrote about the area around Clark’s camp, “more buffaloe than usual were seen about their camp; Capt. C assured me that he beleives he saw at least ten thousand at one view.—“

All this time, while Lewis was ahead with a few men at the advance camp, he and his crew were working on his iron-framed boat. It was to be covered with skins, preferably elk skins although they were not plentiful in the area. So he tried to use buffalo skins. But it did not work. He could not get the seams to seal because there were no pine trees in the area, which would have provided the tar they needed. It proved a colossal waste of time. Lewis wrote days earlier that he had realized they would not make it back to Fort Mandan for the winter. It was getting too late in the year. The iron-frame boat fiasco only added to his anxiety. But he would not give up on the boat for several more days.

On July 3, Lewis wrote again of his fear of finding enough food. “the Indians have informed us that we should shortly leave the buffaloe country after passing the falls; this I much regret for I know when we leave the buffaloe that we shal sometimes be under the necessity of fasting occasionally.” The bison had been their primary food source for the past 10 months. Lewis was right; the next three months would be the most difficult on the entire journey for the men to feed themselves. Fish would take on a much more important role.
For now, however, the fishing remained poor. Clark wrote on July 3 that “we discover no fish above the falls as yet—“ On the next day, the Fourth of July, Lewis wrote that he scrapped the plan to send back a canoe because they did not want to reduce the size of the party in the event the Shoshone were hostile. But he had never even mentioned to the men such a plan, and was not going to now. Lewis wrote, “all appear perfectly to have made up their minds to succeed in the expedition or perish in the attempt. we all believe that we are now about to enter on the most perilous and difficult part of our voyage, yet I see no one repining; all appear ready to meet those difficulties which wait us with resolution and becoming fortitude.” That evening they drank the last of the whiskey. Lewis wrote that some of the men “appeared a little sensible of it’s effects” They danced to the fiddle and told jokes, celebrating their second Independence Day together.

When they put the iron-framed boat in the water on July 9, it leaked terribly and Lewis finally admitted defeat. He wrote a long passage on what he should have done differently, but blamed the lack of pine tar the most. Lewis might have been right. Pine tar might have sealed the seams. It was far too late in the year to continue with any more experiments. They had to be getting on. They spent the tenth burying the boat and a few other items. Lewis relaxed in the evening, “having nothing further to do I amused myself in fishing and caught a few small fish; they were of the species of white chub mentioned below the falls, tho’ they are small and few in number. I had thought on my first arrival here that there were no fish in this part of the river.”

The Corps continued and passed through the famous Gates of the Mountains area of the river, which Lewis named. They saw numerous bighorn sheep on the cliffs beside the river. The captains wrote nothing of fishing in this area.
On July 21, near today's Canyon Ferry Dam, Lewis wrote “we saw a number of trout today since the river has become more shallow; also caught a fish of a white colour on the belly and sides and of a bluish cast on the back which had been accidentally wounded by a setting pole. it had a long pointed mouth which opened somewhat like the shad.” It is uncertain what type of fish the wounded one was. At least they were seeing fish again.

Four days later, on July 25, they reached the three forks of the Missouri. They spent several days in the area scouting the rivers and deciding which one might take them westward toward the mountains. They wanted to meet up with the Shoshone so they could secure the horses they knew they would need. But Indians were nowhere to be found. Lewis wrote on July 27, “we are now several hundred miles within the bosom of this wild and mountainous country, where game may rationally be expected shortly to become scarce and subsistence precarious without any information with respect to the country not knowing how far these mountains continue.”

Lewis was right about the decrease in game, although there were still deer around. And as late in the summer as it was he had every reason to be nervous about getting trapped in the mountains. He knew that if they failed to cross the Rockies and had to winter in the mountains, they would starve to death. Once again they made the right choice and went up the southwest fork, which they named the Jefferson River. Clark was very sick at the time. He had a large boil on his ankle and just felt generally bad with soreness in his muscles. Lewis, as always, did his best as a doctor and gave him a variety of medicines to ease his suffering.
On July 29, Lewis wrote about fishing in the Three Forks area, "we see a great abundance of fish in the stream some of which we take to be trout but they will not bite at any bait we can offer them." He does not mention the different baits they were using, but regardless the inability of the crew to catch fish must have added to Lewis' anxiety about starving.

The captains decided to split here, with Lewis going ahead on foot with Drouillard, Charbono and Gass to try to make contact with the Shoshone and Clark bringing the main party in the canoes. Lewis didn't take Sacagawea, which was odd because she was the only person who could fully communicate with the tribe that at this point in the expedition was the most crucial to their success. They simply had to get horses to cross the Rockies, or else they would die in the mountains. It was one of the few bad decisions Lewis made on the entire expedition.

The Wild and Scenic Missouri

The river below Great Falls flows freely from the final Great Falls dam (the great falls that Lewis and Clark described has been reduced to a series of three minor dams) all the way to the Fort Peck Reservoir. From Ft. Benton down, the river is one of the nation's newest National Monuments, thanks to President Clinton and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. This section is one of the few stretches of the Missouri River that looks like it did two hundred years ago. The river runs through private property, most of it cattle ranches. In some places the cattle have trampled the riverbank, and fences are common, but otherwise the river feels like land still undiscovered.
Canoeists and other boaters find this a popular and satisfying float. Fishermen feel the same. While the fish numbers are low in this stretch, the variety of fish available make up for it. Walleye, sauger, pike and paddlefish share the river with smallmouth bass, rainbow trout, brown trout and sturgeon. Ling, carp and whitefish live here also. The river is big here, often muddy from the numerous tributaries that join it. Fly fishermen rarely ply these waters with their feathery lures, leaving it mostly to bait and lure casters. The many floaters camp in designated campsites, making for some pretty threadbare looking campsites.

One friend of ours drifted this section this past summer, and told us thus story; they were trolling a streamer off a fly rod behind their canoe as they paddled downstream. For three days they caught nothing. The third night they forgot to take the fly out of the water when they pulled their canoe up on the shore. In the morning, their canoe was pulled as far out as its bowline allowed. The fly rod, jammed between a seat and a cooler, was bobbing slightly. When they pulled everything in, they found a six-pound catfish at the end of the line.

Nick and I, along with our spouses and dogs, plan on floating this stretch pretty soon. Work, life and school have kept us from that trip thus far, but we hope to do it soon.

**Great Falls to Canyon Ferry Dam**

In August of 2000, after many dry seasons, the state of Montana threatens to burn. The state closes rivers and forests to the public, arguing that the fire risk is too high for
recreation. Fishing outfitters and guides are limited as to where they can bring clients who want to fish. While they still can, many opt to take trips on the Missouri.

Which is where I find myself on a hot August morning. I am one of three guides hired to take some orthodontists fishing, and the Missouri River is what these gentlemen want to fish. I camped last night here at the access, and at six a.m. the anglers are at the put-in with me, putting on their waders. It is already too hot for waders, so I wear only swim shorts and a muted Hawaiian-print shirt. The two other guides, both from Helena outfitters, wear khaki shirts and Gore-tex waders. I wonder if I am professional enough for this job.

It is a good thing I got here the night before, because by the time our boat is in the water and we are fishing the first run off the bank, a line of cars stretches away from the access. I have never seen so many cars here before! Rubber boats, wood drifters, fiberglass and metal boats sit on trailers, ready to be put in. The two other boats in our trio start fishing a run just above the put-in, but I start feeling claustrophobic with all these boats around, so we row downriver to a good slot I know. Dropping anchor, I tie small bead-head nymphs to the doctors’ fly lines and let them run long drifts through the slot. They both quickly catch a fish. David Barrett fights the fish on one side of the boat, Mike Wilson on the other. Both fish fight long and hard, as Missouri River trout are known to do. One jumps repeatedly, one buries its head and tries to break off in the weeds on the bottom. Eventually, both fish are boated, two beautiful rainbows, each bigger than three pounds. Not a bad start to the day.

We stay anchored and continue fishing the run. We are off the current, tucked near the bank, fishing into the shoreline. Many boats pass behind us, including the two
we are fishing with. But we stay in one place, running nymphs and catching fish. Not tons of fish, but enough to prevent us from moving on. Each fish is big, as they are known to be on this river, so the doctors are very happy.

We move a little throughout the morning, mostly staying along the one slot near the shoreline. The other boats leave us alone, and I feel that on a river so crowded, we might as well stay where we have some privacy. Barrett eventually says he wants to move on, but just as I pull the anchor he catches the biggest fish yet--a five-pound-plus brown trout. So I drop anchor again and we stay put.

At noon we stop fishing. I start rowing downriver to catch up with the other two boats, but as I row past bend after bend we still don't see them. Dr. Barrett eventually asks if I mind if we pull over to catch a nap. Not a typical request on a guided trip, but on this hot day, totally understandable.

So we pull over, and the two doctors duck beneath a cottonwood to lie down on the cool, soft ground. They are both asleep instantly. I find some shade underneath a crumbling bank and watch the river.

The river was wider, shallower and muddier when Lewis and Clark came through here. The trout they caught were cutthroats and the giant dark animals on the shoe grizzlies and bison, not cattle and horses. Otherwise, this was the same landscape Silas saw when he fished at night.

"Hey Silas," I ask.

Yeah, he answers.

"How was the fishing here?"
Down low it was pretty good, by the great falls we portaged, he says. Caught lots of cutthroat there, very pretty. Here, though, we were pretty busy, really moving fast through here.

"So you didn’t fish here?"

'Well, I wouldn’t say that,’ Silas says with a chuckle.’ I fished some. Caught a couple most nights, just didn’t make a big deal about it.’

I’m silent as Silas looks over the river, his patient eyes studying the water for sings of fish. I try to mimic the slow move of his eyes over the water’s surface. A fish jumps a foot away from me, catching me totally unawares.

“I think you need 200 years of practice just to see everything,” I say to Silas.

That’s why the best anglers are always old, Silas says with a chuckle.

The doctors eventually wake up and eat a very late lunch, watching other boats work their way down past us. Eventually, we set off down river. They both fish a little more once the afternoon cools off, but they both show more interest in talking and telling stories. Wilson beings out two cigars and a bottle of scotch whiskey. When we pull into the take-out the sun is behind the hills and the other orthodontists have left.

**Canyon Ferry, other reservoirs**

More reservoirs. Walleye, pike, trout, etc.

**Three Forks**
In April 2001, my old housemate Mark Kurowski calls me.

"You see about the ponds?" he asks.

"No, I had not, what ponds?"

"Bad fish kill at ice-out. Lots of dead bass."

When he says bass, I know he’s talking about Three Forks.

When I moved to Three Forks in the summer of 1993, I thought I had lots of trout fishing to discover. But then I moved into a house the same day as Mark and Aleece Kurowski, who got the other apartment in a two-apartment top floor. They had two dogs and two cats, so we got to be good friends quickly. I hoped they would bring me to some good trout holes, since they had both lived in the area a number of years. But that didn’t happen. Instead, they showed me their bass holes.

Mark is from Rhode Island and grew up chasing largemouth bass on the outskirts of Providence. He still thinks bass are the finest game fish in Montana. One reason he moved to Three Forks, he told me all those years ago, was for the Three Forks Ponds.

Three Forks Ponds are a series of three ponds that help frame the public golf course. These have been stocked with a variety of fish, and provide many hours of family enjoyment for many Three Forks residents. Largemouth bass were introduced at one point and a wild population took hold. Mark showed me some of his hot spots, and we spent many wonderful afternoons fishing there, catching lots of bass in the one- to five-pound range. I watched Mark catch a seven-pounder once.

Whenever Nick and I drive past the Three Forks exit on I-90, I always point to the ponds and say, “Lots of five-pound bass in there.” Nick always nods but never really
believes me. He has a look he gets when he thinks I’m full of shit. I say, “Really, no kidding.” And he nods with the same look.

But now Mark tells me the Bozeman Chronicle reports hundreds of dead fish were found in the ponds.⁵ “They’re not sure what happened, maybe a discharge from Willow Creek,” he reads me over the phone. “But they’re saying they had some big bass in there. One 14-pounder.”

“That’s terrible,” I tell him. “Not only that all the fish are dead, but now everyone knows your secret bass stash.”

“Well, they’ll be back, and everybody will forget they’re there,” he says, and I can hear him smile. “It’s all trout people around here anyway.”

The three headwaters of the Missouri River—the Gallatin, Madison and Jefferson rivers—offer everything a trout hunter needs: great fishing, beautiful settings, easy access and convenient locations near comfortable towns.

Agriculture dominates this country of rich bottom lands. Large cattle operations and fields of grains line the rivers’ banks. Giant irrigation systems sprout like weeds. Public land exists mostly in the headwaters of these three rivers, providing plentiful and easy access to these rivers.

Most anglers attracted to this area are fly-fishermen. While many locals still throw worms and lures into these rivers, the vast majority of anglers in these waters cast a fly.

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⁵ The article Mark was quoting was written by Nick for the Chronicle. Nick tells me the fish kill was eventually credited to purely natural reasons. “Normal winter kill,” according to Bruce Rich, fisheries biologist with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.
While Lewis and Clark chose the Jefferson as the route of choice, many anglers traveling today choose the Gallatin or Madison. These two rivers hold national recognition as destination fisheries, while the Jefferson is maybe a side trip. In truth, all three rivers offer fantastic fishing. The lower stretches of all three rivers are very similar, sharing characteristics such as slow water, high grass banks, shifting islands and strands of giant cottonwoods.

"Three Forks proper isn’t necessarily known for its fantastic fishing, but there are some super large trout in the area. Not great numbers, but some really big fish, browns and rainbows," says Chad Olsen, owner of Greater Yellowstone Flyfishers in Bozeman. "The upper Missouri, the lower Gallatin, the lower Jefferson and the lower Madison are all known as big fish fisheries."

Silas loves Three Forks. Lots of fish, beaver tails to eat and room to stretch. Let's spend some time here, he asks when we drive by late one afternoon in late fall, 2000. I don’t have time to stop, things are too busy everywhere in my life, but I find myself pulling off the road and heading to the Headwaters State Park, where the three forks join to create the Missouri. I park the car, and the three of us (me, Hunter and Silas) walk to the river. Opposite us the Jefferson flows into the Madison. The Gallatin is immediately below.

Looks different, Silas says.

"How so?" I ask.

And for the next three hours, while the sun sets behind the Tobacco Root mountains and flocks of migrating waterfowl pass overhead, I listen to the river’s tales.
East Gallatin

"Don’t overlook the East Gallatin, which flows into the Gallatin near Manhattan," says Olsen. "It’s a great fishery- a smaller stream but a great fishery for huge browns and rainbows. A very good fishery that is underrated and not that well known by people other than locals. You just don’t hear about the East Gallatin." While there exist very few official access areas to the East Gallatin, Olsen says it is always possible to jump into the river from any of the numerous county bridges. "Park in the pullout by the bridge, and access the river right from the bridge." Olsen says not all Montana landowners are thrilled about this access, but it is legal by Montana law.

Clark followed the East Gallatin with horses on his way eastward toward the Yellowstone River.

Lewis and Clark on the Jefferson

On August 3, Lewis wrote that "The fish of this part of the river are trout and a species of scale fish of a while [white] colour and a remarkable small long mouth which one of our men inform us are the same with the species called in the Eastern states bottlenose." The bottlenose was most likely the northern sucker. He did not say whether they were fishing for them. Clark also mentions seeing trout and bottlenose on the same day.

The next day, August 4, Lewis arrived at a fork in the river, where today’s Beaverhead and Ruby Rivers come together to form the Jefferson. They had been hiking
overland and missed the third major river, today’s Big Hole, which comes in from the southwest. He hiked around the area, making observations on each of the rivers. Faced with another difficult decision about which river to take, Lewis reasoned that because the middle fork was warmer and less clear, it originated farther away in the mountains and passed through more open country. He left a note on a tree for Clark telling him to take the middle fork if Lewis was not there when he arrived. Lewis still wanted to go farther up the southwest river, just to make sure they were taking the best river. He also hoped to meet some Shoshones.

Clark arrived at the forks, but never saw the note. Lewis had put the note on a green tree and a beaver had cut the tree down and carried it off. Clark took the southwest fork because he thought it went more in the direction they wanted to be going. It was a very difficult river to ascend, with numerous rapids and braided channels that were overgrown with willow. They had to cut their way through a quarter mile stretch of overgrowth. Several of the men were injured around this time. The toil of the labor of the past several months was taking its toll on the men, but as was always the case they pushed on.

They were seeing scattered signs of Indians on the banks. Usually it was nothing more than a few footprints. Clark commented once that they looked very fresh and that he believed the Indians were watching them. When Drouillard came back down the Big Hole River and found Clark camped up the river a mile, he informed Clark of the continued difficulty on the river ahead. Drouillard had also scouted well up the middle fork. There he saw numerous Indian tracks; yet another reason to take the Beaverhead.
Jefferson River

Night hits us about the same time we float to the take-out on the Jefferson River where we left the cars. Two boats pull into the gravel shoreline smoothly, but one boat somehow manages to miss the take-out and floats over an impressive rapid in the dark. It takes six of us to pull that one drift boat back up the river. We all groan and moan and thrash about afterward, talking about how tired we feel. Then we talk about the soldiers doing just this on a daily basis, on a scale grander than we can imagine. So we stand in awe afterwards, hearts pounding, holding our beers up to the spirits of those before us.

We spend three weekends floating the entire length of the Jefferson River. With friends from Bozeman, two other boats and three other dogs (including on black Newfoundland puppy we had to call Seaman), we fish the full seventy miles of the Jefferson, never floating more than 25 miles in a weekend.

Of the three forks of the Missouri, the Jefferson may be the least famous. Chosen by the Corp of Discovery as the source of the Missouri, it is surprising that more anglers do not flock to this valley. Its sister rivers, the Gallatin and Madison, instead attract the international glory as destination streams and the Jefferson is left to its slow-moving ways.

Which many would say is a blessing. While in truth the fish count of the Jefferson is far below the numbers of its neighboring waters (including the Jefferson’s three headwaters; the Ruby, Beaverhead and Big Hole, all fantastic fisheries), the Jefferson offers the traveling angler a true taste of the old country.
Brushy, undercut banks and deep runs and holes characterize most of the Jefferson. Brown trout are the dominant species here, although rainbows and whitefish can also be caught. The Jefferson is famous for brown trout up to ten pounds, but these fish are rare. Ten- to fifteen-inch fish are more common.

We find the fishing best further up river, above Silver Star. Using heavy nymphs and streamers we catch numerous brown trout, the bigger fish close to three pounds. These fish have a vivacious appetite. Chad Olsen, along on the trip, catches a brown trout on a streamer that had a white fish and a sculpin already in its gullet when it ate Chad’s fly also.

The canyon section, between Cardwell and Sappington Bridge, offers classic riffle to pool fishing, but on a large scale. Standing on a gravel bank and swinging heavy nymphs with an indicator through the heads of these pools works great. Again, fewer fish, but big!

The lower river, from Sappington Bridge to Cardwell, makes for a pleasant and uneventful canoe ride. Some public access points exist here, and a great bridge in the town of Willow Creek is fun to jump off. The water warms up here and trout numbers drop, but the fishing can be good for ten- to 14-inch browns and the occasional rainbow. When I lived in Three Forks, the Jefferson River was my most oft fished river. Normally I would drive into the canyon section, park my car and walk across the train tracks to my favorite holes. Hunter was my constant fishing companion, and the two of us would venture to new bends on a regular basis. I remember spending whole weekends fishing the Jeff, then at work on Monday being laughed at a little for liking such a river. My co-
workers thought I should have been on the Gallatin or Madison with them, instead of the Jefferson with my dog. But I enjoyed the solitude the Jefferson offered.

It was on the Jefferson River the John Colter first stepped into the books of legend with his daring escape from the Blackfeet Indians. Colter was the Corps member who asked Lewis for permission to return to Montana before they were back in St. Louis. Lewis gave his permission, paid him what he could, and then watched as Colter joined some beaver trappers and headed up the river again.

Colter headed for Three Forks along with another Expedition member, John Potts, in search of the “many thousands” of beaver the Expedition had seen in the area. Knowing they were in Blackfeet territory, the trappers set trap lines at night, and checked them only when it was dark. Even with these precautions, the Blackfeet found them. While trapping for some beaver on a side stream above Three Forks, Colter and Potts were attacked by 500 Blackfeet Indians. Potts was killer instantly, but Colter was not. His clothes were stripped from him, and he was offered a chance to “run the gauntlet” for his freedom. Convincing the natives he needed a slight head start, Colter ran naked over the rocks and prickly-pear cactus toward the Madison River, some five miles away. When he was close to the river, an Indian came upon him with a spear, but tripped as he charged. Colter grabbed the weapon and killed the Indian, and then made for the river, where he hid under a beaver dam until the Blackfeet stopped looking for him. Afterwards, he walked 250 miles across the state, all the way to a Fort Remon on the Big

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6 This report can be found a number of different places. All accounts come from a writer who was at Fort ? on the Big Horn River when Colter arrived naked and sunburned. Colter told this writer his story, who then took the news back to the east coast via a steam wheel on the Missouri River.
Horn and Yellowstone rivers. When he arrived, naked and blistered and 50 pounds lighter, his friends did not recognize him.

Colter returned to Three Forks twice more, each time in search of beaver and otter pelts, and both times was sent packing by the Blackfeet. In 1810 he went up with George Drouillard, another Corp member, and 80 other trappers. They built a fort and tried to make a stand at Three Forks, but the Blackfeet eventually drove them out, killing Drouillard in the process.\(^7\)

Colter eventually quit provoking the Blackfeet and moved to Missouri, where he married and resumed his life as a farmer. Yellow fever claimed his life in 1813, as it did many of his native pursuers.

**The Beaverhead**

Damn! Is it cold. The wind howls upriver, my car rocks in the breeze. John Crandall sits in the passenger seat, looking at the day outside. The wind makes whitecaps appear on the surface of the Beaverhead River.

“We could just wade fish,” I tell John. “Fish until we get too cold, then head for a bar and watch some football.”

“Who’s playing,” he asks.

“It’s the playoffs, I don’t know who’ll be playing, but some game will be on.”

He opens his door and steps outside. “Still cold,” he says. The air in the car instantly loses all warmth.

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\(^7\) There is now a wonderful fishing access named the Drouillard access in Three Forks. While this is not a great fishing hole, it is a good place to take dogs for a walk.
“If we put the boat in, we’re committed!” I yell at him. “We’re out in this no matter what happens!” He closes the door, walks back to the boat on the trailer and takes off the straps. I sigh. I was hoping to end up in a warm bar watching football. But if I really wanted that, I’d have found someone to take other than John. He is the consummate fisherman, and not someone to be turned back by mere cold weather. No, he was here to fish the Beaverhead, and that’s what he was going to do.

The Beaverhead River is home to some of the largest fish in Montana. Like the other big-fish tail-waters of Montana—the Missouri and the Big Horn—the Beaverhead is a destination fishery for anglers looking for big trout. Rainbows and browns over three pounds are common, and ten-pounds plus fish are caught yearly.

The Beaverhead begins below the dam at Clark Canyon Reservoir and flows 50 miles north to its junction with the Big Hole River, where they form the Jefferson. The upper river, the 15-mile stretch between Barretts Diversion and Clark Canyon Dam, winds through a narrow canyon with lots of willows, undercut banks and beautiful rock outcroppings. The lower river runs through a large broad valley teeming with agriculture, and encircled with rocky peaks. The river runs mostly through private lands, so access is limited to just a few Forest Service maintained fishing accesses. Because of the limited access, and the characteristics of the river, most anglers float the river in a boat.

This river does not look like its neighbors the Big Hole and the Ruby. Instead of a braided-channel, riffle-pool-run pattern, the Beaverhead features a single, smooth-surface channel with a fast current, under cut banks, and lots of crazy meanders. Thick strands of willows crowd the bank, providing good protective covering that helps trout thrive.
The nutrient rich waters of Clark Canyon dam, the cold temperature of the dam releases and the ideal habitat of the river combine to create ideal growing conditions not just for trout but also the insects they eat. Caddis, stoneflies, crane flies, mayflies and midges are just part of the fantastic bug diversity.

The upper Beaverhead supports one of the best trout populations in Montana. It holds over 2,000 trout per mile, most of these fish being in the 2 to 5 pound range. All of these fish are crammed into a small channel.

There has to be a catch, and this is it: the fishing is tough! Those same ideal conditions that give the trout cover provide lots of frustration for the angler. The tight willows claim flies and lures regularly. A river rule-of-thumb, though, is “if you’re not loosing flies, you’re not getting it tight enough.”

Getting flies or lures to the fish is the first difficulty. Once you do it, though, you still have to land the fish. With a fast current and many underwater snags and roots, the giant fish avoid the net with a high rate of success.

The Beaverhead is a difficult river to wade fish. The thick willow growth, steep drop-offs and deep channels prevent wading along most of its length. For this reason, and because of the limited access, most anglers choose to float this river. Floating solves some of the problems—it is easier to cast in a boat than from shore, you cover more ground, etc.—but it does not make the fishing any easier. Any fish caught on this river is a success. If I ever boat more than a half-dozen big fish, I gloat and boast for weeks.

Drift boats and rubber rafts float the top section mostly, rarely venturing below Dillon. More fish live in the upper river, where tributaries can’t bring agricultural run-off.
so fishermen stay up there. The fish do live in the lower river, but they are fewer and further in between.

The day never warms as I fish with John Crandall. He is a fisheries biologist who works with the Nature Conservancy on the MacCloud River, in northern California. An avid fisherman, I met him in Yellowstone Park when he was counting coyotes for a study. Today, despite the cold, he is excited by the two fish we catch, both brown trout over five-pounds. We are fishing tiny nymphs on long leaders, with good weight to get the flies to the bottom.

"The secret is the drift," he keeps saying, throughout the day. "If you can keep a fly in the water long enough, and make it look natural for long enough, a fish is going to eat it."

To prove the point, he catches a twenty-inch rainbow with a nice long drift.

Silas would have liked John, I think. When it was cold and nasty, and there were other things to do, Silas still went fishing.

Clark Canyon Reservoir

Might as well have a sign off the highway saying, "Big Trout Live Here." Not here in Lewis and Clark's time, but worth a stop today.

Chapter Five: The Corps Pushes Into the Land of Salmon
The expedition continued up the Beaverhead, still searching for the Shoshone. They passed the point where the Red Rock River and Horse Prairie Creek meet to form the Beaverhead; Lewis chose to follow the creek because it came directly from the west. It was not until August 11 that they actually saw one. Lewis was still traveling ahead of the boats with a small group of men. He saw a lone Indian on horseback and tried to establish a rapport with him. But two of his men kept advancing on the Indian, and when Lewis got within 100 paces of the Indian, he rode off. Lewis was sorely disappointed and rather angry at the men for not stopping. He thought the incident could have ruined his chance to get horses from the Shoshone.

They continued west along the creek on an Indian road, nearing the Continental Divide. Lewis wrote on August 12 about his anxiousness to taste the waters of the Columbia River. As they worked their way up, Lewis wrote about the experience of finally reaching the headwaters of the Missouri, “…the road took us to the most distant fountain of the waters of the mighty Missouri in surch of which we have spent so many toilsome days and wristless nights. thus far I had accomplished one of those great objects on which my mind has been unalterably fixed for many years, judge then of the pleasure I felt in allying my thirst with this pure and ice cold water which issues from the base of a low mountain or hill of a gentle ascent for ½ a mile. the mountains are high on either hand leave this gap at the head of this rivulet through which the road passes. here I halted a few minutes and rested myself. two miles below McNeal had exultingly stood with a foot on each side of this little rivulet and thanked his god that he had lived to bestride the mighty & heretofore deemed endless Missouri.” What a sweet feeling it must have been.
But the joy was short lived, for later that day they reached the top of Lemhi Pass, only to see ridge after ridge of high mountains to the west. Lewis now knew that the all-water route to the Pacific did not exist, nor would the portage be a quick and easy one. They continued on the Indian road, making them the first white Americans to cross the Continental Divide. Lewis and his party were several days ahead of Clark and the main party. And still the only Indian they had seen was the man on the horse they had scared away. He had almost certainly alerted other members of his tribe of the parties approach and probably believed they were Blackfoots or another tribe on a raid. It was a stressful time for Lewis.

There was something else to add to Lewis’ anxiety. The farther into the mountains they went, the more scarce game became. The possibility of starving became very real. It was a sharp contrast from the land of plenty—the game-rich plains. There, the hunters hardly had to work to keep the crew fed.

On August 13, Lewis continued west down the Indian road that lead to a river valley. They were in today’s Idaho, approaching the Lemhi River. Lewis saw the Lemhi mountain range off to the west and commented that there must be a river in the valley bottom because of the type of vegetation. They traveled parallel to the river, heading north. After a few miles they saw two women, a man and some dogs ahead who were watching them. Lewis approached alone, but the women ran off quickly. The man waited until Lewis was within 100 paces, then ran off as well. Lewis wrote that he thought about tying beads around the dogs necks in a gesture of goodwill, but the dogs would not let him get close enough.
They tracked the Indians, finding that they returned to the road. Lewis and the men continued down the road and in a mile saw three Shoshone women. The men were not seen until they got within 30 paces of the three women. A young woman immediately ran off, but an older woman and a girl stayed, thinking the men were too close to get away. Lewis wrote about the experience, “I instantly laid by my gun and advanced towards them. they appeared much allarmed but saw that we were to near for them to escape by flight they therefore seated themselves on the ground, holding down their heads as if reconciled to die which the expected no doubt would be their fate; I took the elderly woman by the hand and raised her up repeated the word tab-ba-bone and strip up my shirt sleeve to sew her my skin; to prove to her the truth of the ascertainment that I was a white man for my face and hads which have been constantly exposed to the sun were quite as dark as their own.”

It was certainly a terrifying moment for the Indians. Lewis did a remarkable job of calming them and convincing them of the parties intentions. He gave both the women numerous gifts and had Drouillard sign to the older woman to call back the girl. She did so and the girl returned. Again Lewis gave her gifts. He had succeeded in establishing good initial relations with the Shoshone. But the Shoshone men they had seen earlier almost assuredly had gone to alert the rest of the tribe of the parties presence. Lewis, his men and the Indians started down the trail to go to the Shoshone camp. After about two miles they meet up with about 60 warriors on horseback. The women with Lewis showed the warriors the gifts they had been given and explained that the whites were friendly. Greetings were exchanged and tobacco smoked to signify peace. Lewis
explained, through signing by Drouillard, his intentions. During the ceremony Lewis
meet the main chief. His name was Cameahwait.

Lewis had managed to get off to a good start with a tribe whose resources were
desperately important to the success of the expedition. He commented when the warriors
first rode up that they were riding “excellent” horses. The sight of those steeds must have
pleased him, or at least relieved him. Lewis was also very lucky to not have been attacked
by the warriors, given the stupid decision he made to not have Sacagawea along with the
advance party. As was almost always the case with Lewis, luck was on his side.
The other thing that Lewis had done, although didn’t yet realize it, was make contact with
the tribe that depended the most on fish for its survival. Now that Lewis was over the
Continental Divide and into the Columbia River drainage, salmon was the main fish. The
Shoshone was the most downtrodden tribe in the region. They lived in a valley
surrounded by high mountains. As the Corps of Discovery had been learning during the
previous weeks, the plains were much more productive for game. Deer cannot feed nearly
the numbers of people that bison can. And when the Shoshone crossed the Divide to get
into buffalo country, they were frequently attacked by other tribes. The salmon they
caught in the rivers was one source of protein they could count on.

Every tribe that Lewis and Clark would encounter from this point to the ocean
would rely heavily on salmon. They were in the drainage of the greatest salmon fishery
on earth. Biologists estimate that between 10 million and 16 million salmon migrated up
the Columbia and its tributaries in prehistoric times. There spring and fall runs, and they
made it far into the mountains, filling even small mountain streams. And there were three
types of salmon: chinook, coho and sockeye. The salmon was to the Northwest tribes what the bison was to the Plains tribes.

Later that day, Lewis had his first taste of salmon. He wrote, "on my return to my lodge an indian called me in to his bower and gave me a small morsel of the flesh of an antelope boiled, and a peice of a fresh salmon roasted; both which I eat with a very good relish. this was the first salmon I had seen and perfectly convinced me that we were on the waters of the Pacific Ocean." It was good insight of Lewis to make this comment. The salmon was the emblem of the Pacific Ocean and the entire Northwest. The fish poured up the Columbia River and its tributaries by the millions, as the Corps would find out in a few weeks. It was a staple food for Northwest tribes, something they could count on every year. Later in the same journal entry, Lewis wrote that Clark's party behind him was still catching trout and had caught some every day since they separated.

Lewis spent August 14 resting. He wanted to give Clark time to catch up and used the day to get information about the country ahead from Cameahwait. What the chief told Lewis was not encouraging. The river they were on meet with another river downstream and eventually turned west into country so rugged there was no turning around. To the south, there was desert country that had no water at this time of year, had no real game to speck of and was so rocky it would ruin the horses feet.

Cameahwait was speaking of the Salmon River and Snake River plain, respectively. Today we know that the Salmon runs through the most remote and rugged terrain in the Continental United States. The river has earned the nickname "River of No Return", and flows through a wilderness area of the same name. Cameahwait advised Lewis to wait until the following spring, at which time he could guide them over the
mountains. Lewis asked him about the existence of other routes, especially to the north. Cameahwait told him about one that the Nez Perce used, but said it was very rocky, heavily timbered and scarce with game.

Lewis had heard all he needed to determine his route, “however knowing that Indians had passed, and did pass, at this season on that side of this river to the same below the mountains, my rout was instantly settled in my own mind, provided the account of this river should prove true on an investigation of it, which I was determined should be made before we would undertake the rout by land in any direction. I felt perfectly satisfied, that if the Indians could pass these mountains with their women and Children, that we could also pass them; and that if the nations on this river below the mountains were as numerous as they were stated to be that they must have some means of subsistence which it would be equally in our power to procure in the same country.” How arrogant of Lewis to make such an assumption. The expedition had been very successful thus far in living off the land and finding their way. But they had been out in the plains, where they were simply following rivers, could see for many miles and had plenty of game. This would be very different. The mountains had little game. And just riding the horses over such brutal terrain and staying on the trail would be very difficult. If there was any part of the journey in which the men may die, either from the elements or by starving to death, this would be it.

On August 15, Lewis was ready to take the Shoshone to meet Clark. The Indians were suspicious. A rumor had spread that the white men were leading them into an ambush. Cameahwait said he didn’t believe it, but most of the other braves didn’t want to go. Lewis wrote, “I readily perceived that our situation was not entirely free from danger
as the transition from suspicion to the confirmation of the fact would not be very
difficult in the minds of these ignorant people who have been accustomed from their
infancy to view every stranger as an enemy. I told Cameahwait that I was sorry to find
that they had put so little confidence in us, that I knew they were not acquainted with
whitemen and therefore could forgive them...he told me for his own part he was
determined to go, that he was not afraid to die. I soon found that I had touched him on
the right string; to doubt the bravery of a savage is at once to put him on his metal.”
Again Lewis is somewhat baffling here. Of course the Shoshone would be suspicious.
They were constantly being attacked by other tribes, especially when they crossed the
Divide and entered the buffalo country, which Lewis was taking them to do now. And
these were the first white men they had ever seen. They were also the most downtrodden
of all the tribes the expedition would encounter, often near starvation because they lived
in a mountain valley with little game. The Shoshone could ill afford to lose men to an
ambush.

Still, Lewis had succeeded in convincing them to go. As the warriors left, several
women in the village wept. They believed the men were going off to die. Eventually
many Shoshone came along with them. They crossed back over Lemhi Pass and dropped
down into the valley. That night they camped along Horse Prairie Creek.

The next day, August 16, as they continued east along the creek, Drouillard killed
a deer. When the Shoshone heard about the kill, they went running towards the kill.
Lewis arrived a few minutes later and described the scene, “when they arrived where the
deer was which was in view of me they dismounted and ran in tumbling over each other
like a parcel of famished dogs each seizing and tearing away a part of the intestens which
had been previously thrown out by Drewyer who killed it...some were eating the kidneys the melt and liver and the blood running from the corners of their mouths, others were in a similar situation with the paunch and guts but the exuding substance in this case from their lips was of a different description. one of the last who attracted my attention particularly had been fortunate in his allotment or rather active in the division, he had provided himself with about nine feet of the small guts one end of which he was chewing on while with his hands he was squeezing the contents out at the other.” Lewis went on to say he felt sorry for the “poor starved divils.”

They came to where Clark was supposed to meet them. Clark, however, was not there. Lewis was worried, for every time they said other whites would be there and they were not, the Indians would grow more suspicious that they were being led into an ambush. Lewis gave his gun to Cameahwait and told him to use it however he wanted, “or in other words that he might shoot me,” if enemies were around. The other men also gave their guns to the Shoshone. It reassured them. Then Lewis had a man go retrieve the note he had left for Clark. Lewis told the Indians Clark had sent a man with the note forward. It said, according to Lewis, that Clark was moving upstream slowly and didn’t know when he would arrive. Lewis was to wait for him.

It was a justified bit of trickery, given that Lewis in fact didn’t know when Clark would arrive and could have been in real danger because of the Indians suspicion. Lewis also told them they had a Shoshone woman traveling with them. This was yet another instance in which the presence of Sacagawea and her child Jean Baptiste would signal to a tribe that the white men came in peace. But Sacagawea was not with the advance party, and talk of her presence was simply that-talk.
Meanwhile, Clark continued the grueling task of moving the boats upstream with the main group. The men spent most of the day in the cold water, which was taking its toll on their health. They were having a tough time finding game, just as Lewis had. Some trout were still being caught. We learn this from Lewis, whose journal entries about Clark at the time were largely a copy of Clarks with a few extra details. Lewis most likely added to his entry to the day later on to keep a more complete record of the days events. It was a good backup in the event that Clark’s journal was lost or ruined.

The next day, August 17, Lewis sent Drouillard ahead with an Indian. After two hours the Indian, who had gotten ahead of Drouillard, came back and said the white men were in sight. It was a godsend for Lewis. The Indians were still suspicious. The sight of the white men, and especially the presence of an Indian woman and infant dispelled any remaining fears that the white men were a war party. Sacagawea was, in many ways, the most important member of the party. What happened next, although today it seems unbelievable, further proved her importance.

Clark arrived with Charbonneau, Sacagawea and Jean Baptiste. When Sacagawea began translating, she realized that Cameahwait was her brother. It could have come straight out of a novel. She was also reunited with a woman who had been captured in the same raid. The Indian woman had managed to escape her captors and rejoined the Shoshone. It surely was an overwhelming moment for Sacagawea, full of tears and emotions she couldn’t contain.

August 18 was Lewis’ birthday. It was the first time in several days in which he talked about fishing. “I had the net arranged and set this evening to catch some trout which we could see in great abundance at the bottom of the river,” Lewis wrote. Never
before on Horse Prairie Creek did he mention that there were numerous fish in it. His
journal entry continued with his famous quote about how little he had done to help
mankind, and a pledge to do so in the future. It is one of the quotes that lead many
historians to believe Lewis was suffering from depression at times throughout the
expedition.

The net, which was left out overnight, proved unsuccessful. "we took up the net
this morning but caugt no fish," Lewis wrote on the 19. But later he tells us, "this evening
I made a few of the men construct a sein of willow brush which we hawled and caught a
large number of fine trout and a kind of mullet about 16 Inhes long which I had not seen
before. the scales are small, the nose is long and obtusely pointed and exceeds the under
jaw. the mouth is not large but opens with foalds at the sides, the colour of it's back and
sides is of a bluish brown and belley white; it has the faggot bones, from which I have
supposed it to be of the mullet kind. the tongue and pallate are smooth and it has no teeth.
it is by no means as good as the trout. the trout are the same which I first met with at the
falls of the Missouri, they are larger than the speckled trout of our mountains and equally
as well flavored.—" The mullet was the northern sucker, which Lewis had first
encountered on August 3 but described in much more detail on this day.

In the same journal entry, which was very long and had a huge body of
ethnography on the Shoshone, Lewis wrote that "in fishing they employ wairs, gigs, and
fishing hooks. the salmon is the principal object of their pursuit." The later sentence is
not surprising. The tributaries of the Columbia were teeming with salmon in prehistoric
times. When a run of salmon was taking place, it would have been simple to catch them.
The first sentence gives us insight into the techniques the Indians used.
The wair was a special fish trap that Lewis described in detail the next day. The gig was a special type of bone spear for fishing. When the river was full of salmon, it would have been easy to spear them. Clark described the method the next day. The hooks were most likely not being baited at all. Rather, the Indians probably snagged most of their fish with the fishing hooks. Lewis doesn’t say whether the fishing hooks were items acquired through trade, in which case they could have been indirectly from whites. The hooks were probably made by the Indians, possibly of bone.

Goodrich caught a bunch of trout on August 20, “several dozen,” according to Lewis. An Indian also gave Clark three salmon that day, which was very generous given the tenuous situation the Shoshone lived in regarding finding food. It would become common over the next few weeks for the Shoshone to give the expedition salmon from the river. The Corps was returning the favor, sharing their game with the Shoshone. On August 21, Clark went ahead of Lewis by a few miles and found a small group of Shoshone dwellings. Clark’s party was given all the boiled and dried salmon they could eat. The Indians then took Clark to see their wear, or fish trap, on the Lemhi river. Lewis described the device in his journal, although it is unclear whether he actually saw it. He most likely described it after reading Clark’s entry, and he probably went to see the trap when he reached that area as well. His description is lengthy: “after smoking with them he visited their fish wear which was abut 200 yds. Distant. he found the wear extended across four channels of the river which was here divided by three small islands. three of these channels were narrow, and were stoped by means of trees fallen across, supported by which stakes of willow were driven down sufficiently near each other to prevent the salmon from passing. about the center of each a cilindric basket of eighteen or 20 feet in
length terminating in a conic shape at it’s lower extremity, formed of willows, was opposed to a small apperture in the wear with it’s mouth up stream to receive the fish. the main channel of the water was conducted to this basket, which was so narrow at it’s lower extremity that the fish when once in could not turn itself about, and were taken out by untlying the small ends of the longitudinal willows, which formed the hull of the basket. the wear in the main channel was somewhat differently contrived. there were two distinct wears formed of poles and willow sticks, quite across the river, at no great distance from each other. each of these, were furnished with two baskets; the one wear to take them ascending and the other in descending. in constructing these wears, poles were first tyed together in parcels of three near the smaller extremity; these were set on end, and spread in a triangular form at the base, in such manner, that two of the three poles ranged in the direction of the intended work, and the third down the stream. two ranges of horizontal poles were next lashed with willow bark and wythes to the ranging poles, and on these willow sticks were placed perpendicularly, reaching from the bottom of the river to about 3 or four feet above it’s surface; and placed so near each other, as not to permit the passage of the fish, and even so thick in some parts, as with the help of gravel and stone to give a direction to the water which they wished.-- the baskets were the same in form of the others. this is the form of the work, and disposition of the baskets.”

Quite a detailed description of a fish trap. This is a classic example of the kind of ethnography Lewis often did throughout the journals. While he is often praised for his skills as a naturalist, the incredible body of ethnographic material Lewis recorded during the expedition is equally as impressive. He often wrote at length about all aspects of the Indians they were encountering. His were the first accounts of the Great Plains tribes,
making Lewis an anthropologist as well as a military leader, diplomat, naturalist, woodsmen and, of course, fisherman.

Clark also described Shoshone fishing techniques on that day. His description of the fish trap was similar to Lewis', although not as long and detailed. Clark also wrote about how the Indians would spear salmon, which the captains called gigging, "...two men joined me at my Camp on the right Side below the 1st Clift with 5 Sammon which the Indians gave them at the forks, the place they gig fish at this Season. Their method of taking fish with a gig or bone is with a long pole, about a foot from one End is a Strong String attached to the pole, this String is a little more than a foot long and is tied to the middle of a bone from 4 to 6 inches long, one end Sharp the other with a whole to fasten on the end of the pole with a beard to the large end, the fasten this bone on one end & with the other, feel for the fish & turn and Strike them So hard that the bone passes through and Catches on the opposit Side, Slips off the End of the pole and holds the Center of the bone". The place where the Shoshone were gigging was on the Lemhi River just southeast of present-day Salmon, Idaho, where the Lemhi meets the Salmon River. The Corps made a fish trap of their own on the next day, August 22. Lewis wrote, "late in the evening I made the men form a bush drag, and with it in about 2 hours they caught 528 very good fish, most of them large trout. among them I now for the first time saw ten or a douzen of a whte species of trout. they are of a silvery colour except on the back and head, where they are of a bluish cast. the scales are much larger than the speckled trout, but in their form position of their fins teeth mouth &c they are precisely like them they are not generally quite as large but equally well flavored. I distributed much the greater portion of the fish among the Indians."
Moulton suggests this may have been Lewis’ first encounter with the steelhead, which is simply a rainbow trout that goes to sea. There, they grow large, enjoying the rich food sources that the cold Pacific Ocean has to offer. Just like a salmon, they return to their place of origin to spawn. It is a run that generates a great deal of excitement for anglers, because the steelhead has a reputation as being the feistiest of fighters.

I don’t believe it was the steelhead that Lewis described here. Lewis stated that the trout they were catching were smaller than the cutthroats they had been catching throughout Montana. An average steelhead would be much bigger than the cutthroat trout they had been catching. If these were steelhead returning up the Columbia, Snake, Salmon and finally Lemhi Rivers, they would have been some of the most hardy fish, traveling farther than almost all the others.

Instead, Lewis may have been seeing the westslope cutthroat, as opposed to the Yellowstone cutthroats they were now accustomed to. The Yellowstone cutthroat is a pale, dark-tan color with large, dark spots. Westslope cutthroats look similar to rainbow trout. They are primarily silver, with a darker back. They still have the most distinguishing characteristic of a cutthroat, the blood-red slash below their gills that so identifies them as the trout native to the Rocky Mountains. Then again, Lewis did not mention the red slash, which he had before when describing the trout they had seen in Montana.

If the fish were steelhead, it is unfortunate their first experience with them was not with a hook and line. They would have experienced the fight of one of the toughest sport fish there is. But given the severe lack of game in the area, a good fight was the last
thing on their mind. The Corps was more worried about a good meal. With 528 fish to go around, everyone, including the Shoshone, was able to enjoy the feast.

That night their luck ran out. Lewis wrote that “in the evening we attempted to gig fish but were unsuccessfull only obtaining one small salmon.” Lewis was now on the North Fork Salmon River, north of today’s town of Salmon, Idaho. They were now traveling on horses, which they had purchased from the Shoshone for a pittance. The captains knew the season was short, and the Shoshone told them that soon it would snow. Game was still scarce. Lewis wrote that all they saw was an occasional squirrel and a “pheasant”, which is what he called a grouse. Their supply of dried food was down to less than 10 days worth.

This was one time during the expedition when fish became an immeasurably important food source. The captains note almost every day that a few trout were being caught. On most of those days, the fish made up a large majority of what they ate. They would not have gone hungry -- they still had some dried provisions. But the captains also knew from the Shoshone that they would be in mountains such as these for the next several weeks. Today we think of the mountains as the place to find game. But 200 years ago, these areas had little game, or at least far less than the plains. And even if there was game in the mountains, they would have to be fairly lucky to find it because of the dense forest in the middle and higher elevations. This was the beginning of a period in the expedition when the prospect of starving was very real. It must have weighed on the men’s minds.

On the same day, August 23, Clark took a scouting mission to look down the Salmon River to determine the feasibility of following it through the mountains. What he
saw is what people still see today, a river that carves through the mountains, with cliffs that frequently come straight down to the river. It is some of the most rugged country in the lower 48 states today, and remains largely pristine and roadless. Clark and his party had to direct their horses into the river in some places where the water was so deep they had to swim. A few days later captains decided it was not the best route. It was a wise choice.

The route that they decided upon was a trail the Nez Perce used to cross from their country, on the plains west of the mountains, into the buffalo country east of the Divide. Today the route is most commonly called the Lolo Trail. It is also called the Nez Perce Trail. The captains were once again lucky; there was an old Shoshone man who had crossed the trail before. He was willing to guide the expedition over the mountains. The captains called him Old Toby.

On August 24 both captains wrote of catching fish. Lewis’ journal, as was often the case, is simply a rewording of Clark’s. They were frequently split up at this time. Lewis was east of the divide in Montana transporting equipment with the help of the Shoshone. Clark was ahead, scouting different routes. The split party makes it difficult to follow where everyone was. Lewis was copying what Clark had written about the events of the day. It is a common trend throughout the journals, and there were times when Clark did the same thing, often copying Lewis’ journal verbatim. But it was still important to have an extra copy in the event that a set of journals was destroyed.

“the party had killed Several pheasants and Cought a few Small fish on which they had Subsisted in my absence. also a heath hen, near the Size of a Small turkey.” Clark wrote on the 24. The pheasant was a ruffed grouse; the heath hen a sage grouse.
The Shoshone continued to give salmon to the party nearly every day during the time they spent in the area around Salmon, Idaho. It was very kind of the Indians; they did not have a surplus of food for themselves. But this was one of the best times of the year for them because the salmon were running. They were busy drying fish to sustain them for several months.

The party also fished every day, usually catching at least enough fish for a light supper when combined with some berries, a grouse or a beaver tail. On August 25, one of Clark’s hunters saw nine elk in the timber east of the Lemhi River. It was a reason for hope, but they didn’t kill any and would continue to see little game in the area. The next day Clark wrote of the difficulty in finding food, “not one mouthfull to eate untill night as our hunters could kill nothing and I could See & catch no fish except a few Small ones. The Indians gave us 2 Sammon boiled which I gave to the men, one of my men Shot a Sammon in the river about Sunset those fish gave us a Supper. all the Camp flocked about me untill I went to Sleep-- and I beleve if they had a Sufficency to eate themselves and any to Spare they would be liberal of it”

Clark’s party remained at the Shoshone fishing camp for several more days, resting and waiting for Lewis to catch up with the equipment. Clark constantly wrote about the men’s fear of starving. His journal gives a lot of insight into the men’s thoughts. On the 27, Clark wrote, “one man killed a Small Sammon, and the Indians gave me another which afforded us a Sleight brackfast. Those Pore people are here depending on what fish They Can Catch, without anything else to depend on; and appeare Contented, my party hourly Complaining of their retched Situation and [contemplating?] doubts of Starveing in a Countrey where no game of any kind except a fiew fish can be found, an
Indian brought in to the Camp 5 Sammon, two of which I purchased which afforded us a Supper.”

The next day Clark again purchased salmon from the Shoshone and were given two others. He also received a message from Lewis via one of the men. Lewis was at the upper Shoshone village and had purchased 22 horses. They were ready to proceed with the plan to take the Lolo Trail over the Bitterroot Mountains. Now they had the horses they desperately needed.

On August 28, Clark gave three fish hooks to the Indians, which they put to use immediately. Clark also wrote that day about the toll his daily diet of fish was taking, “Those Sammon which I live on at present are pleasant eating, not with standing they weaken me very fast any my flesh I find is declineing.”

Finally, on August 30 they started down the Lemhi River to cross Lost Trail Pass and get to the Lolo Trail. They had several Shoshone guides. The horses they purchased, it turns out, were the worst of the Shoshone herd. But the captains should have expected that. The Shoshone enjoyed a seller’s market. Clark noted that “we had great attention paid to the horses, as they were nearly all Sore Backs and Several pore, & young Those horses are indifferent, maney Sore backs and others not accustomed to pack, and as we Cannot put large loads on them are Compelled to purchase as maney as we Can to take our Small proportion of baggage of the Parties.”

They began the journey over Lost Trail Pass. This is the most controversial section of the entire Lewis and Clark Trail regarding the route they took. Clark’s course and distance table was way off, but that is understandable given where they were. The terrain was rough and there were downed trees in the timber. Yet it was nowhere near as
difficult as Lolo Pass would be in a few weeks. The journey over Lost Trail Pass was like a training ground for what they would endure. It prepared them mentally for what would be the most difficult part of the entire expedition. On September 1 they snagged four salmon, and killed a deer as well. They had been having some success at hunting; deer were becoming more common.

During the next week they crossed the pass and came down through the thick timber, they fell in with the East Fork Bitterroot River near today’s Sula, Montana. A short distance downstream from there, they arrived at the place where the West Fork joins the East Fork to form the Bitterroot River. The party encountered a group of around 400 Salish Indians, whom the captains referred to as “Flatheads.” The tribe had over 500 horses. Fortunately, the Salish were friendly.

They traveled downstream, north through the Bitterroot Valley. They traveled several miles to the east of the river, which they called the Flathead River after the local tribe they had encountered. As they looked to the west, they saw the towering presence of the Bitterroot Mountains. It must have been a scary sight, knowing they had to cross those mountains with winter fast approaching.

On September 9 Lewis described the day’s travel and the Bitterroot River. His journal entry is quoted at length: “we continued our rout down the valley about 4 miles and crossed the river; it is hear a handsome stream about 100 yards wide and affords a considerable quantity of very clear water, the banks are low and it’s bed entirely gravel. the stream appears navigable, but from the circumstance of their being no sammon in it I believe that there must be a considerable fall in it below. our guide could not inform us where this river discharged itself into the columbia river, he informed us that it continues
it's course along the mountains to the N. as far as he knew it and that not very distant from where we then were it formed a junction with a stream nearly as large as itself which took it's rise in the mountains near the Missouri to the East of us and passed through an extensive valley generally open prairie which forms and excellent pass to the Missouri. the point of the Missouri where this Indian pass intersects it, is about 30 miles above the gates of the rocky mountain, or the place where the valley of the Missouri first widens into an extensive plain after entering the rockey mountains. the guide informed us that a man might pass to the missouri from hence by that rout in four days.”

The journey from the Gates of the Mountains to this point had taken them nearly two months. Now they were being told it could be made in four days? That must have been difficult news to stomach, given the labor that went into pulling the boats up the Jefferson River and transporting the equipment over two mountain passes. But they didn’t have horses when they left the Gates of the Mountains, so it would have taken longer than four days. And they had orders to follow the Missouri to its source, which they had accomplished.

Lewis’ observation that the absence of salmon meant a large falls was downstream on the river the Bitterroot drains into (the Clark Fork River) was a reasonable one. Based on the incredible numbers of fish they had seen on the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers, they assumed every tributary of the Columbia would have salmon in it. And the Bitterroot was a decent-sized river, certainly big enough to have a salmon run. Fish played a major role in a major decision. We know today that if Lewis and Clark had built canoes and floated down the Clark Fork River, they could have floated the entire way to the Columbia River. The float would have taken them into today’s northern Idaho
and Lake Pend Oreille, then onto the Pend Oreille River, which flowed north into
Canada. There, it drains into the Columbia River. It would have been a very long float
and they may have arrived at the coast in early winter, but they would have been going
downstream. The land journey would have been over.

Again it is impossible to second guess the captains. We get to look at maps and
surmise why they did this or why they didn’t do that. Given the information the captains
had, they almost always showed sound judgment. The Lolo Trail went due west; the
Clark Fork River northwest. They were running out of time, and taking the most direct
route was their main priority at this stage of the expedition. The knowledge that they had
just taken almost two months to get where they could have gotten in five days certainly
influenced their decision.

Old Toby told them when they reached a large creek that came in from the west
that it was the one they wanted to follow into the mountains. Lewis decided to stop and
rest for a few days along the creek. He named the creek Travelers Rest Creek, which is
today’s Lolo Creek. The men needed some time to prepare for the mountain crossing.
The past few weeks had been tough on them. Every day of the expedition was difficult,
but at least on the plains they weren’t going up steep mountain grades.

They set out on September 11. What followed was the most difficult part of the
expedition. The Lolo Trail, which got the name many years after Lewis and Clark, was a
crude Indian road that stayed high along a ridgeline. It is miserably difficult terrain.
Downed trees were common. It frequently traversed steep, rocky slopes. And it was not
easy to follow. They would have never found their way without Old Toby.
One day they traveled through heavy snow. Clark wrote that he feared frostbite in his feet. Two times when their food supply ran low, they had to kill a young horse for food. They named a creek Colt Killed Creek to mark the place. And they did get off the trail, following today's Lochsa River instead of staying high along the ridge that the Indian road followed. One day a horse fell 40 yards down a slope but managed to escape uninjured.

They never wrote about fishing during the mountain crossing, even though they were along the Lochsa River and numerous creeks at times. It is not surprising, though, because they had a single thought the entire time -- get over these mountains or die. The day of heavy snow just confirmed their worst fear. There was no time for anything except a forced march. The captains wrote that the men were getting weak because of the lack of food.

On September 20, Clark's party reached Weippe Prairie. They had made it. Clark came upon a Nez Perce village. The warriors were gone; most of the people there were young and old. The Indians offered them dried salmon, berries, some bison meat and bread made from Camas roots. Those roots, along with dried salmon, would be the staple of the party's diet for the next several weeks. It would keep them alive, which was no small matter considering what they had just been through. But it would also make them dreadfully sick, to the point of being bedridden. That first night Clark closed his journal entry, "I find myself very unwell all the evening from eating the fish & roots too freely."

Lewis reached the prairie on September 22. He and his party were famished. Clark had sent Reubin Fields with some roots and fish for Lewis to eat. The men
devoured it. Clark went to meet Lewis. Clark wrote that he warned them against overeating. He also informed Lewis of what lay ahead, based on a map that a Nez Perce chief named Twisted Hair had drawn for him. They knew the creek they were on drained into a river, which drained into a still bigger river that finally fed a huge river. They were referring to today’s Jim Ford creek, Clearwater River, Snake River and Columbia River, respectively.

Lewis wrote that he was glad to be out of the mountains because he expected the lower country to have more game in it. But these plains were nothing like the Great Plains. The game simply was not there in even remotely the same numbers as east of the Divide. They would get a few deer, but their favorite game, the bison, were not there. They would depend on roots and salmon purchased from the Indians for the next several weeks. They needed to build canoes, but they were nearly incapacitated from their diet.

On September 24, Clark wrote, “several 8 or 9 men Sick, Capt Lewis Sick all Complain of a Lax & heaviness at the Stomack, I gave rushes Pills to Several”. Clark wrote on the 27 that “nearly all the men Sick.” And on the 28, he added, “Our men nearly all Complaining of ther bowels, a heaviness at the Stomach & Lax”.

Throughout the ordeal, Clark kept administering Rush’s pills. Just what the men needed, heavy laxatives while they were already nearly invalids. One wonders how they ever managed to finish building their canoes. In addition, they kept eating the fish and roots. The men could not adequately digest the Camas roots and the salmon may have had bacteria. The hunters did manage to kill a few deer at the time. It was a welcome food source that helped, at least temporarily, to settle their stomachs.
The days passed, but the sickness did not. Every day Clark mentions the severity of their illness. Lewis was so ill he quit writing. On October 5, Clark wrote, "nothing to eate but dried roots & Dried fish, Capt Lewis & my Self eate a Supper of roots boiled, which filled us So full of wind, that we were Scercely able to Breathe all night felt the effects of it."

Finally on October 7 the canoes were ready and loaded. The captains branded their horses and left them with the Nez Perce until the spring. The Corps was waterborne again, this time enjoying the current for the first time since they left the Ohio River. Their canoes, which they built using the Nez Perce method of burning out the log instead of carving out, leaked a little. They were floating down the Clearwater River, heading for the Snake River. Two Nez Perce chiefs came along to help make relations easier with the tribes downstream.

As they floated, they met hundreds of Indians. People were along the river, watching the Corps. The captains noted that they saw the places where the Indians were fishing. The expedition continued to buy fish from the Nez Perce, and also started buying dogs to eat. They would buy numerous dogs in the coming months from natives. The men, the captains wrote, liked the meat of dog. It became their favorite food in the Northwest, much preferred to the salmon. On October 10 they came into the Snake River, near today's Lewiston, Idaho. They knew they had some serious rapids on the Snake ahead of them before they reached the Columbia.

The Bitterroot River
Lewis and Clark came upon the Bitterroot River from above. They followed a fork of the river off of Lost Trail Pass, and this remains the preferred introduction to the Bitterroot.

The crystal-clear headwaters of the Bitterroot tumble out of the rocky Bitterroot and Sapphire peaks before joining in the bountiful Bitterroot valley. This river has a rich history in the settlement of the state. The timber for mines in Butte came from this valley, bringing fortunes for railroads and loggers in the 1890s. Today, companies building custom log homes and agriculture are the main businesses. And, of course, sport fishing.

The Bitterroot, also Montana’s state flower, is ninety miles of beautiful, productive, easily fished river that parallels Highway 93 from Conner to Missoula. In its upper stretches anglers catch cutthroat and brook trout and in the lower stretches they go for largemouth bass and northern pike. Brown trout, rainbows and bull trout can be caught throughout, as can whitefish, pikeminnow and suckers.

West of the Bitterroot towers the Bitterroot mountain range, which is full of massive rocky peaks. East lie the smooth Sapphire Mountains. Between the two ranges live ospreys, herons, eagles, hawks, beaver, moose, black bears and deer. The occasional elk even wanders down to the river from the mountains.

The Bitterroot winds around numerous islands, with lots of eroding banks, exposed sand bars and braided channels. The river does not drop much over its length, offering easy wading and fishing. Characterized by riffles, pools, log jams, deep holes beneath banks and big eddies, the Bitterroot is an easy river to fish. Numerous Forest Service-maintained fishing access areas are accessible off of Highway 93.
Lolo Creek

My first day visiting Missoula in 1994 was a scorching hot day in the middle of August. Four friends (including my now wife, Shannon) and five dogs left town and parked along Lolo Creek in a thick strand of trees. There, on a day so hot we struggled to leave our fan-cooled kitchen, we found the coolest spot imaginable.

The river wrapped around a spot evidently used for camping. The river was on three sides of our picnic ground, cooling the air. We ate lunch, fished, swam, ate dinner and fished some more. Using only a beat-up grasshopper pattern and an elk-hair caddis, I caught over a dozen fish, all between 10 and 14 inches, without leaving the strand of trees. Afterwards we played a round of disc golf at Blue Mountain and I was in love with Missoula.

Following route 12 along Lolo Creek offers the traveling angler a last taste of ideal Montana fishing. This beautiful stream summarizes trout fishing in the state. The lower section, which meanders through private land and offers very little access, consists of long riffles running into deep holes.

Lolo Creek flows into the Bitterroot River ten miles southwest of Missoula. For twenty-five miles the creek flows westward into the Bitterroot Mountains. The lower section’s valley bottom offers lush vegetation along the water. Despite evidence of recent growth and building spurt, the valley floor stills supports a few cattle operations.

This lower section is hard to gain access to, and as it becomes subdivided, private river access is being hoarded and protected. While there are many landowners who will still give permission, it is better to drive up into the canyon section where access is easy.
Up high, within the Lolo National Forest, the river runs through undeveloped (but noticeably logged) forest setting.

Here, the river drops through glades of pines, cottonwoods and willow trees. Black boulders jumble through the waterway, creating pools and deep holes that just scream of trout habitat. This is classic Montana fishing for wild trout. Browns and rainbows dominate the catches here, but cutthroats, brook trout and the wily bull trout can be found here also.

This kind of water cries to be fished with a fly. The rhythmic ripples that join shallow runs to deep holes almost demand a fly. While dangling worms in the deep water and swimming trout lures works well, we much prefer a fly. Drifting an Adams or a stimulator over the drop-offs and against undercut banks almost always draws a quick strike.

The Clark Fork

In early September I fish the Clark Fork River with two clients, putting in the Joannie Marie at the edge of Missoula. Kelly Island fishing access offers a well-maintained boat ramp where the Bitterroot starts merging with the Clark Fork, and we manage to catch a few small rainbows right by the ramp, using small Adams dry flies. By the time we hit the river junction everyone has caught a fish, and I start to feel less anxious about catching fish and more interested in enjoying the day. That's when I see the beaver behind us and drop anchor. When the boat stops moving with the current, we all look upriver and try to figure what we are looking at.
Maybe it's a beaver, we agree. But it's got a pink head, and a weird-looking body. It's not a dog, unless it's a short, fat, ugly dog. No, we know it's not a dog, but not a beaver, but what is it? As we watch it slowly spins, set in motion by the water, and we all get a good look at the profile.

Coming downriver is a pig, swathed in a camouflage life jacket, kicking its leg uselessly as it spins in the current. We start laughing and rubbing our eyes, but it really is a pig, in a life jacket, spinning down the river.

Just as we realize its identity a canoe comes around the corner heading downriver. The guy in back is rowing furiously, rocketing the canoe forward with each stroke. The guy in front holds his spinning rod out at an angle, with his line in the water and a bend in his rod. He pulls his rod up and dips a net into the fast water, but comes up empty.

"Slow down!" we hear him say to the rower. "Hurry up and land it," the rower replies. The man tries with his net again, and this time comes up with the heavy load of a thrashing trout. The angler hoots, then looks up and sees us. He hollers again and holds up his net for us. It looks like a big fish for sure, and we hoot and holler back at him as they pass us and overtake the drifting pig. As the rower puts his paddle down, reaches into the water and pulls the jacket-wrapped animal, which is not very big at all, we hear him say somewhat harshly, "Stupid pig."

So that's the Clark Fork in a nutshell: big fish, beautiful scenery and some crazy stories.

This is our home river. Both of us live with our wives and pets a few fly-casts away from the Clark Fork, in the center of Missoula. When we talk about going fishing, if we don't use a name we mean the Clark Fork. A dozen different named fishing holes
sit less than ten minutes from our doorsteps. Big rainbow trout, bigger but fewer northern pike, the occasional cutthroat, brown or bull trout and lots of whitefish can be caught through town.

Immediately outside of Missoula the city disappears at the river’s edge. Here, cottonwoods and willows ground the bank, competing for room with grassy floodplain and steep rocky hills. Eagles, hawks, osprey, herons and kingfishers soar above or perch in trees, eyes out for fish.

Old-timers around Missoula like to talk about the old days of the river, back when big cutthroat and bull trout could be caught by the dozens. Most of them have pictures of happy families with strings of huge trout hoisted proudly between them. These days, the fishing just does not get that good. The native fish’s numbers are a mere shadow of what they once were, and average size barely compares.

No one reason exists for the historical decline of the Clark Fork as a fishery. The growth of Montana as a settlement greatly impacted this waterway. Mining, logging, cities sewage, dams and agricultural chemicals have worked for 100 years, slowly decimating insect and trout populations.

Even today, the threat of a catastrophic ecological disaster looms regularly over the Clark Fork River. The mining wastes that have accumulated from Butte and Anaconda’s heydays as copper-producing empires have resulted in one of the nation’s largest Superfund sites. Here, a series of ponds hold the water and let the heavy metals settle out of the water, leaving the bad stuff behind as the water moves on.

The problem is that the bad stuff does not move on also. It just sits there, and does not go away. The same thing is happening outside of Missoula, at Milltown Dam. This
dam holds behind it 60 years worth of tailings-poisoned sediment. If ever one of these sediment-containing barriers gives way, which could happen after a particularly bad winter, the arsenic in the sediment could kill everything downriver.

So that’s one of the crazy stories. But I also said the river is about big fish. Rainbows and browns over two pounds common and the occasional trout up to 10 pounds. Northern pike over ten pounds live here, as do some largemouth bass. Suckers, pikeminnows and whitefish get large, also.

The Blackfoot River

Researching for this book is the sort of work that spouses don’t think is actual work. It involves a lot of driving to fishing spots, talking to fishermen, doing some fishing ourselves, maybe cooking a meal and camping out by the river. Sometimes visiting a bar. We always bring a dog, sometimes three. Not the sort of thing most equate with a day at the office.

The Blackfoot River is a classic example. My wife Shannon watches while I get my fishing stuff together.

“I thought you said you were working today,” she says. She is dressed for the office.

“I am.”

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8 The largemouth bass are somewhat of a surprise. This warm water fish lives in some of the warmer sloughs that saturate the lower Bitterroot Valley. These bass, stocked by private landowners over the last century, now can be found wild in some of the slower sections of the Clark Fork River. Rarely fished for, these bass get large, their sizes often surprising wildlife biologists doing fish surveys. One of the few Missoula anglers that chase these bass tells us the bass fishing is endlessly rewarding and frustrating. He says he catches few bass, but when he hooks them they are big. He claims bass over five pounds are average, but few.
“Going fishing is work?”

“It’s for the book.”

“Yeah, you do a lot of fishing for your book.”

Today is a fishing day all the way. We want to take some pictures of the Blackfoot, one of Missoula’s local rivers. We are bringing our fly rods, cameras, five dogs and a buddy named Thomas. In summer this stretch of river, the lower 15 miles, hosts a bevy of swimmers, floaters, tubers and tourists. Now, on a late October day with a cold rain threatening, the river is empty.

Nick tells a story about hunting grouse on the Blackfoot. I point to where I caught a heavy bull trout. Thomas talks about a disc golf disc his roommate found in the river.

The Blackfoot River corridor is a major migratory route for many different animals. Deer and elk come out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in the winter, coyotes and fox are abundant, and black bears are common. Eagles, owls and osprey ply the riversides from the air, and hawks of every type live in the fields behind the trees.

We get off highway 200 and follow the Blackfoot Recreational Corridor dirt road. The road stays tight on the river, but we do not see any fishermen. We have the river to ourselves today.

We stop at Sheep Flats and start rigging our rods. Thomas puts on a heavy nymph set up, using two stone fly nymphs to make sure he gets really low. Nick puts on an orange stimulator as an October caddis imitation—a hatch that still could be coming off this time of year. I tie on an olive Zonker streamer to a sinking-tip line. We walk down to the river, split up and start fishing. Instantly, we all realize we’re using the wrong flies and group back together. Nick wants nymphs, Thomas wants a small dry fly, and I have
my line in a nasty knot. We all sit down and Thomas breaks out a six-pack of Red Hook beer. It starts to rain. Stories begin again.

The Blackfoot River is not the river Norman MacLean wrote about in *A River Runs Through It*. Mining, logging, extensive grazing and a poor fisheries management program has resulted in a wild-looking river that almost ran out of Trout. People who fished the Blackfoot ten or 20 years ago remember a time when a good fish was a rarity. Today, thanks to an educated fish recovery program and the support of many private landowners and sportsman, the Blackfoot River is gaining its reputation back as a premier fishery.

The waters of the Blackfoot are turbulent as the river drops 10 to 25 feet per mile. Steep, stable and confined channels, scoured to bedrock in some places, provide a diversity of aquatic habitat. Rainbows and browns dominate the lower section, with some fish getting over five pounds. The further up, the smaller the fish get, but they also get more plentiful. Above Lincoln, cutthroat and brook trout dominate the fish populations, with none of them getting very big. Bull trout live throughout the drainage.

The Blackfoot River receives an annual flush of spring snow melt, changing the river from a tame, crystal-blue stream into a raging ferocious mess. This big water attracts white-water enthusiasts during the high-water season, and maintains a few big rapids year-round. First-time floaters should be careful, since river changes and snags in the high stretches are common, and some of the rapids down low can be tricky.

Fishing from a boat is definitely a good idea on the Blackfoot, since the fish are spread out on the river bottom. Most floaters put in at the confluence of the North Fork and float to the county line, a 12-mile float through Box Canyon that is all but
inaccessible without a boat. This stretch is wild, with high treed walls and cliffs on both sides of a quick stretch of water. Rainbows dominate, but browns and cutthroats can also be caught. Bald eagles, osprey and kingfishers watch you intently as you fish underneath them here.

Below Box Canyon the river threads through ranch land. High banks hide the river from view, and cottonwoods dominate the riverside. Large rapids are common here, separated by long stretches of calm, slow-moving water over surprisingly deep holes. Rainbows and browns, with an occasional bull, live in this water.

The river then enters the Blackfoot Recreational Corridor with its canyon walls, giant boulders, rocky bottom and big bends. Characterized by a big-river feel crammed into a too-small canyon, this is the stretch most sought after by recreationalists. Swimmers, cliff jumpers, kayakers, rubber rafters and traveling anglers come here to fish. Except, it seems, on cold, wet October days.

We finally get our flies on and set out. Nick walks downstream, but doesn’t catch anything. Thomas walks further down, and also does not catch a fish. I fish upstream, stripping a streamer into all the deep holes. Nothing doing. We all keep fishing though, until we find ourselves, dripping wet, standing around drinking beer, telling stories in the rain all over again. That’s when we decide to get back in the car and go home.

As we drive the winding road back to the highway they come upon an older man on the side of the road, flagging us down. His gray beard reaches his belt, a thick braid comes out of his beat-up cowboy hat and he carries a hiking stick with an eagle’s head carved on top. “You fellows see that bear?” he asks.
We look across the river and see a fat black bear romping on the hillside. As the light fades we watch the bear forage and listen to the old guy's stories. Turns out, this guy has been coming to this spot for thirty years. Sometimes he fishes; sometimes he just walks around. He tells us about a giant party that used to happen out there, the Blackfoot Boogie. He tells us about a mountain lion he saw and a bull trout he caught and released a year-or-so-ago. Eventually the bear meanders out of sight and the car starts up again and we drive back into Missoula.

"How was work?" my wife asks when I get home.

The Lochsa River

The wild Lochsa River runs through the last true wilderness area of the Lewis and Clark Trail. Here, in the mountains of north-central Idaho, the hand of man stays out of sight. With the exception of some blatant logging activity, the river and its valley look just as they did in 1805. The Lochsa does not have the dams that plague the rivers below, and homesteaders never made their way up into the cold and tough-looking Lochsa Face.

The Lochsa Face is the giant wall of trees that rises north of the river, sometimes over 2,000 feet above the creek. This wall, thick with pines, firs and spruces, towers over the south side of the Lochsa. The river falls, cutting and weaving at the base of the Face, turning giant rocks into pebbles. It is this drop that attracts the attention of most people. The Lochsa is known more for white-water thrills than for fishing. Every spring, kayakers and rafters from around the northwest flock here for high water. The big drops, fast water and numerous rapids, combined with a road that follows the river the whole
way, make this a busy river when the water is up. After the snow melt, though, attention
go elsewhere, leaving the river alone to just a handful of anglers. Which is just how the
anglers like it.

Salmon, steelhead, bull trout and westslope cutthroat live here, just as they did
200 years ago. Sadly, though, the fishery does not compare to how it used to be. Wild
salmon and steelhead runs have all but disappeared because of downriver dams. Despite a
heavy stocking program, very few fish (less than one percent) make it back up river as
adults.

The low steelhead and salmon numbers may be beneficial to the other trout
populations. Cutthroat and bull trout numbers are good, although not as high as they used
to be. High enough, still to provide for some excellent fishing. The cutthroat live in pods
together, scattered around the river. They like deep holes, with a solid seam. Look for any
spot that has fast water next to slow water and over deep water; that is where the fish live.
Because the fish are scattered, it is important to move around on this river, keep looking
until you find a pod of fish, then stay there and work that hole.

Another fish that has lived here since Lewis and Clark’s time is the Mountain
Whitefish. One of the craziest sights I see on our travels is a pod of whitefish getting
ready to spawn in the fall. I am just downriver from where the Corps left the river on
their way west, catching cutthroats on orange stimulators (imitating the October caddis),
when I see hundreds of whitefish stacked in a shallow hole. The fish are as tight as they
can get, wrapped around and between some rocks and the shore. I cast above them, but
every fish ignores my flies. I strip some streamers in front of them, and bounce a nymph
right through them, but they keep ignore my flies. So I walk in river and try to grab them.
Well, they avoid me handedly, but at least they move and I get to see how many of them are there. When the fish spook the whole hole moves with them, and the bottom of the river turns to liquid shadow.

The whitefish and cutthroats do not have this river to themselves. While it is easy to dismiss the salmon and steelhead runs as meager, the truth is that they are improving. In the year 2000, over 1000 salmon were counted making their way up the Lochsa. That represents the largest salmon count they've had in forty years. We talk to an angler at the Lochsa Lodge

"I'm afraid to say this, because this could be a fluke, but this is the best fishing I've ever seen here," says Jerry Ledgins, who lives in Lewiston, ID, who has fished this river for twenty years. "It's been getting better every year, we may have a real salmon run up here yet."

If the salmon and steelhead runs continue to improve, the Lochsa River will regain its reputation as a destination fishery. Sadly, the Lochsa fish need to navigate the Snake River dams in order to reach the Pacific, and those four dams are proven fish killers (see Snake River Dams). So until the Snake River dams come down, the Lochsa will not reach its full glory as a fishery.

**The Idaho Clearwater**

Thank god for the unemployed, who are always up for fishing. Josh Hudsdon, 28 and currently between jobs, and Thomas Fogerty, a 27 year-old computer-science college student, both think the idea of casting in the rain for three days sounds fun. So we pack
up my car, load the *Joannie Marie* on its trailer, fill the Mule with camping gear, grab four dogs (my three and Thomas' Shiva) and head for the Clearwater River in Idaho, less than two hours drive away.

The rain starts as we leave Missoula, just a steady cold sprinkle. Perfect for steelhead fishing, we agree. We drive over Lolo Pass and drop into Idaho, sticking close to the Lochsa River. The rain stops and the sky clears a little. Perfect for steelhead fishing, we agree. In the last hour of sunlight, with the eastern hills lit in muted gold, we see elk on the hilltops, seven white mountain goats fighting on a cliff face, deer and turkeys everywhere. We pick up the Middle Fork where the Selway and Lochsa join at Lowell. The water looks clear, and wherever the road gets close to the river we strain in vain to see giant fish swimming upstream.

We are equipped only for fly-fishing. I have a six-weight and a ten-weight rod, neither one a recommended steelhead rod. Josh has a borrowed eight-weight, which most people agree is the right rod for steelhead fishing, and Thomas his six-weight. We all have shopped at the same Missoula fly shops for steelhead flies and had bought the same patterns, mostly gaudy green and pink streamers with lead heads and flashy tails. We also have a variety of egg patterns, wholly-buggers and leaches.

When we get to Kooskia we see that the campground on the edge of town is not going to be dog friendly (four dogs can wreck some havoc) and that the South Fork is opaque with mud. We consult the maps and decide to drive back to the Selway River for some camping. We drive back upriver and set up camp in the dark, falling asleep to the wonderful sound of water in motion.
In the morning we wake to a clear and sunny morning. Josh cooks eggs and bacon, then puts them on bagels with cheese, frying everything in the bacon grease. Delicious! Then we pack everything back into the boat, drive back to Clear Creek where we put the boat in the water, rig our fly rods with streamers and egg patterns, and drift down to join a line of boats anchored at the highest point open to fishing on the river. Rubber rafts, drift boats and dinghies make up the armada.

The fishermen regard us as we float behind them, taking pictures and asking for fishing news. The fishing is slow, we hear. Most of the fish are above us, high in the Middle Fork and its tributaries. This line of boats represents the highest in the river fishermen can fish; the river is closed above. These anglers hope to catch some of the stocked fish from the Clear Creek hatchery, located immediately upstream, where we had put the boat in the water, but they tell us they are not catching anything yet, and that the fishing had been slow as of late. “They’re all in the tribs by now,” an angler tells us from his yellow, one-man rubber raft. His short oars look like toys against his large body. He fishes a brown buck-hair jig under his long bobber, with three feet of leader between. He has not caught a fish today but isn’t worried-- the day is still long.

We anchor below the boats and cast with streamers for a little while before moving on. We have aboard a cooler filled with beer, bacon and hot dogs, a large dry box with all our cooking gear and dry food, two huge dry bags filled with tents and sleeping bags, and an assortment of smaller dry bags. Tarps on top of the bags provide solid areas for dogs to perch, so the four dogs have no trouble staying dry and out of the way. We make quite a sight as we drift downriver. Numerous anglers comment and laugh, a fishing warden says we look like we’ll be out a week.
All day we float downriver, stopping often to fish at good-looking holes. We catch nothing. We talk to a few anglers who have caught fish, but only witness one landed, a giant trout easily as long as the angler’s leg that caught it. Anglers populate most every bend of the river. We have to ferry back and forth across the river to avoid shore fishermen. One woman hails us from way above the river, where she was hidden from sight by a wall of pine trees.

“Watch my line!” she hollers at us, and it is a good thing she did because none of us had noticed her presence. She stands with a few other fishermen on the road’s shoulder forty feet above the river. We see they all have their lines anchored somehow in the river and are up watching their bobbers. We wonder how they can get down the steep rocky embankment to land a fish, but by the time we round the next river bend none of the roadside anglers had moved.

At day’s end I catch one whitefish on an egg sucking woolly-bugger.

We find a campsite on the west side of the north-flowing river. Between the train tracks and the river, on the inside of a long bend, a flat area dominated by tall Ponderosa pines offers almost-ideal camping. After setting up tents, unpacking the kitchen and gathering firewood, Josh and Thomas grab fishing rods and walk downriver, leaving me alone with Silas.

According to the somewhat ambiguous set of maps before me, we are camping very close to the site of the Long Camp, where Lewis and Clark stayed while they made canoes for the run down to the Pacific. They had just spent time in the mountains, wet, hungry and miserable. Here they stayed for four weeks.
I can imagine Silas Goodrich’s reaction when they finally reached the river again. I bet he had no pole, but made one quickly from a willow, tied on his ever-handly gut line with hook, baited it with some old dog gut from a previous dinner, and tossed a line into the water. What did he catch? It was late fall, so the steelhead would have been running. How many were they? Millions? When Silas swung his baited hook through these waters, how many steelheads did he catch? Everyone he landed would have been eaten, and eaten gladly, I think. I am not sure Silas fished just for food, though. After weeks of overland travel, with very few river miles included, he would have been awfully anxious to wet a line. I see him on the very first evening, after the camps have been erected and a dinner eaten, grabbing his new pole and heading upriver, maybe walking to this same spot I stand today, and casting long past dark.

The next morning we stoke the fire and cook more bacon-and-egg bagel sandwiches, then fish another day. We spend more time anchored and working one spot after a successful streamside angler tells us, “Remember, they’re just passing through, not sticking around, so you just keep a hook in their path.” I fish with my six-weight rod, using an indicator above an egg-sucking leach and an egg pattern. I set the hook a hundred times, but each time it is just the ground that causes the indicator to move. Then, after one set, the ground starts moving. Not upriver, but to the side. My heart stops. “Fish on, I think,” I say, and Thomas and Josh both reel in their lines and stand up excitedly. We are fishing from the boat, anchored off a six-foot deep run on the outside of a bend, near some rock shelves on the shoreline. I am standing in the rower’s seat in the middle of the boat, with my line stretching downstream and moving into the middle of the river. I try to reel line in but swiftly realize my six-weight rod holds no authority in
this situation. This fish controls the scene, not me. It heads into the current for a little while, then swims back toward shore. I try to bring line in, and succeed a little when the fish swims closer to the boat. But then the fish runs back into the current, my rod doubles over and the reel screams. I palm the reel to slow the fish, but it is just too strong, and suddenly most of my line is in the water. Then the fish stops and I think it is wrapped around a rock, but instead it is lazily moving upriver again. I take in line slowly, but then the fish feels my presence again and just turns downriver and leaves. Too late I realize we need to pull the anchor up and chase after the fish, and before we can change seats in the boat the fish wraps around a rock s long ways downstream and throws the hook. My rod straightens and the three of us grow silent. Then it starts raining again.

We fish hard the rest of the day, but that one moment is the closest we get to a big fish. Josh catches a small rainbow, but none of us hook another steelhead. At the end of the day we watch a giant steelhead leap out of the water twice behind us, seemingly dancing in the water we had just fished. Why did the fish need to show us its size and beauty after we had failed to catch one? Out of spite? Just to let us know we are merely people and not fish?

Back in Missoula we tell all who ask that no, we didn’t catch any steelhead, but that no one had while we were there, that the mud was up and the bite was off. “Everyone said the fishing was slow,” I told Nate down at the Kingfisher in Missoula, “so it doesn’t feel that bad that we didn’t catch anything.”

“I talked to some fishermen who were there the Sunday you were there,” Nate says. “They said they caught nine fish on flies in just the morning.”

Oh.
Chapter Six: The Final Run to the Pacific

Snake River and its dams

Talking about the Snake River used to mean talking about its fifty-nine named white-water rapids, its solitude and fishing for salmon, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat. Now, things are different. The 140 miles of dropping river that passed through rolling high-valley desert disappeared. The rapids are buried beneath four dams and the fish are primarily walleye and small-mouth bass. But the changes are even more than that. The Snake River has become a political issue.

The four dams that divide the Snake River serve very little practical purpose. Built during the height of the Cold War when America was proving its economic might, these dams do not control flooding, provide irrigation or generate much electricity. Instead, these dams allow the town of Lewiston, Idaho, to claim the title as America’s most inland seaport. They allow grains and timber products to come and go on barges, avoiding the costs of highway and train track.

When the politicians called for dams on the Snake River, concerned fishermen such as President Dwight Eisenhower warned of a deathblow to the area fishery. The salmon stocks, already low due to over-harvesting and poor logging practices, were thought incapable of surviving another series of obstacles. Despite these warnings, the dams were built, and the dire warnings turned out to be true.

These four dams are as unfriendly to fish as they come. Giant earth-and-concrete structures with no fish ladders, salmon and steelhead die in the turbines and locks going up and down river. The trip down river kills almost ninety percent of the smolt released,
and forty percent of the adults returning, says Matt Hunter, a project specialist with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"There is no secret about it, those dams kill fish," Hunter says. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife is responsible for maintaining the Columbia basin as a fishery, working within guidelines the government gives them.

"The problem with river management is a lot of times you end up managing after the fact. We have to factor the dams in as part of nature," Hunter says.

Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite dams came on line in 1962, 1969, 1970 and 1975, respectively. Since then, all Snake River coho have become extinct, and the Snake River sockeye and chinook have been listed as endangered species. Steelhead trout were listed as endangered in 1997. These fish have disappeared not just from the Snake and Clearwater rivers, but also from the host of other rivers upstream. Oregon’s Imnaha, Grande Ronde, Wenaha, Lostine, Minam, Wallowa, and Powder rivers, Idaho’s Salmon (all three forks), Selway, Rapid and more all have endangered or extinct salmon and steelhead stocks.

Most every angler, biologist and government employee we talk with agrees that the Snake River dams are the leading factor for the declining Columbia basin fisheries, most notably for the rivers above Lewiston. Factor in the money the government is spending to truck and barge smolt around these dams and the question arises, why keep these dams? They produce only five percent of the electricity used in the region, make irrigation more difficult, and do not serve as flood controls. Even the transportation the river provides is mocked by a modern highway and freight train track that parallel the river. So again, why keep these dams?
Well, we don’t get a lot of answers for that one. Some people like Lewiston as an inland port. Some people like the walleye and small mouth bass fisheries that have developed in the Snake River. And some people just think dams are good ideas all around. However, everyone else is opposed. When hearings were held in the late 1990s concerning the removing of the dams, residents of the northwest overwhelmingly supported tearing the dams down. Even when the US Army Corps released a study saying removing the dams will create 12,000 new jobs, the dams stay up.

Sadly, the dams have become a political issue. Conservatives and liberals have decided that salmon and dams are something they disagree over, and meanwhile nothing gets done. Until a resolution can be reached among the halls of Washington D.C., these dams will continue serving as agents of genocide. With the election of George W. Bush as president the issue promises to be pushed onto the back burner, since Bush acknowledges his support for their continual use.

Meanwhile, other species benefit from the warm-water reservoirs. Non-native species like walleye and smallmouth bass in thrive in this water, and have become dominate sport fishes. Catfish do well in the Snake River, and provide for enjoyable fishing. Sturgeon can be found also, but not in the numbers they have in the Columbia. The native pikeminnow (the squawfish), while never very numerous in the cold water, exist in huge numbers. So many pikeminnow, in fact, that these native predators have a bounty on their heads.

“It’s a feel-good fishery, it gives people the feeling they are doing something to save the salmon, but its like putting a band-aid on an amputation,” says Hunter. “There are people making seventeen to twenty-thousand dollars a summer catching pikeminnow.
It is easier to pay people to catch the trash fish than it is to get people to use solar power or conserve energy.”

“I’m not going to say it’s not helping, but it hasn’t done much,” Hunter says.

**Lewis and Clark witness the Greatest Salmon Fishery on Earth**

Even though going downstream on the Snake River had to be nice after all those laborious months of dragging their boats upstream, running rapids in quickly-made canoes was stressful. But the time they made going downstream made the risk worth taking. The captains knew they needed to get to the coast and build a fort before the Northwest winter set in. They knew it wouldn’t be nearly as cold as what they had endured at Fort Mandan. Still, it would be winter, and a wet one in the coastal rainforest.

On October 11, Clark wrote, “passed a rapid at two miles, at 6 miles we came too at Some Indian lodges and took Brackfast, we purchased all the fish we could and Seven dogs of those people for Stores of Provisions down the river.” With so many salmon in the river, it is curious that the captains chose to buy salmon from the Indians instead of harvesting their own. The expedition was, most likely, simply in too much of a hurry to spend time fishing, including in the evenings. The captains do write frequently of how much the men enjoyed the meat of dogs. They bought both fish and dogs the entire way to the ocean.

In the same journal entry, October 11, Clark wrote of the Indians’ fishing places: “we Passed today nine rapids all of them great fishing places, at different places on the river saw Indian houses and Slabs & Spilt timber raised from the ground being the
different parts of the houses of the natives when they reside on this river for the purpose of fishing.”

The Corps was running rapids every day. Clark wrote on October 13, “We Should make more portages if the Season was not So far advanced and time precious with us”. They were experiencing another first-whitewater! Today people flock to Western rivers to experience the thrill of big water in rafts, kayaks and canoes. That the expedition was able to handle this kind of water in canoes they built in under two weeks is another tribute to their resourcefulness and determination.

Today these stretches of the Snake are backed up behind four dams. The once mighty rapids are inundated and the river much slower and warmer. The salmon runs have declined dramatically and in the early 1990s several were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Because of the listing, there have been proposals to partially breach the four lower Snake River Dams to restore the runs. But that is unlikely anytime soon.

Clark also wrote on the 13 about the good fortune of having Sacagawea with them, “The wife of Shabono our interpetr we find reconsiles all the Indians, as to our friendly intentions a woman with a party of men is a token of peace” At times Clark could be almost poetic in his writing. And he was always quick to give credit to Sacagawea because he fully understood her importance to the expedition.

They had a near disaster on the 13. “at this rapid the Canoe a Stern Steared by drewyer Struck a rock turned the men got out on a rock the Stern of the Canoe took in water and She Sunk the men on the rock hel her, a number of articles floated all that Could be Cought were taken by 2 of the othr Canoes, Great many articles lost among
other things 2 of the mens beding Shot pouches Tomahaws &c. &c. and every article wet of which we have great Cause to lament as all our loose Powder two Canisters, all our roots prepared in the Indian way, and one half of our goods, fortunately the lead canisters which was in the canoe was tied down, otherwise they must have been lost as the Canoe turned over” (Clark).

Running rapids became a daily event on the Snake. Many of the rapids were two or three miles long. Their canoes were ground against the rocks and their equipment constantly wet. Lewis’ special lead containers were especially important here. Gone were the mellow floats of the big, wide Missouri. The Snake and Columbia dropped rapidly from their headwaters, much more so than the Missouri with its 2,500 mile course through the Plains. And the rocky bottom of Western Rivers created rapids that simply do not exist on mud-bottomed rivers such as the Missouri.

The expedition came upon numerous fishing huts along the river. Many of these had underground storage pits in which the natives stored salmon. Clark wrote on the 14 that they found one such fishing camp in which there were no people. They didn’t take any fish, but Clark confessed to taking something else, “we have made it a point at all times not to take any thing belonging to the Indians even their wood. but at this time we are Compelled to violate that rule and take a part of the Split timber we find here bured for fire wood, as no other is to be found in any direction.”

They floated into the Columbia on October 16. Near the confluence of the Snake, which they called Lewis’ River, and the Columbia, they meet some Indians of a different tribe. Moulton suggests they were Palouse.
Clark gives a description on the 17 of an Indian fishing lodge that he came upon when they went up the Columbia 10 miles to look around, "passed 3 very large mat lodges at 2 mile on the Stard Side large Scaffols of fish drying at every lodge, and piles of Salmon lying. the Squars engaged preparing them for the Scaffol—a Squar gave me a dried Salmon". Clark went on to describe a river that drains into the Columbia, "This river is remarkably Clear and Crouded with Salmon in many places, I observe in assending great numbers of Salmon dead on the Shores, floating on the water and in the Bottoms which can be seen at the debth of 20 feet. the Cause of the emmence numbers of dead Salmon I can't account for So it is I must have seen 3 or 400 dead and many living".

The dead fish had already laid their eggs, after which they die. Clark was not familiar with the life cycle of Pacific salmon. Atlantic salmon survive after spawning and return to the sea, but it is unknown whether Clark was familiar with the spawning pattern of Atlantic salmon. In either case, he was witnessing one of nature's greatest mysteries, still not understood today. Pacific salmon return to the river where they were born. After hatching, they go downstream into the ocean where they spend several years at sea and grow large, feeding on the rich foods available there. When they are ready to spawn, they swim upstream and lay their eggs in the gravel-bottom of the river of their birth. With their life mission completed, they die, providing nutrients for the river and the life dependent on it.

Every tributary of the Columbia had a salmon run. Each individual population is called a stock. In the Twentieth Century, many stocks have gone extinct as a result of
overfishing, dam building and excessive logging close to stream banks. Today's salmon runs are a mere shadow of what Lewis and Clark witnessed.

The Palouse tried to sell them fish that they had found dead. Clark declined, but did purchase 40 dogs to build up their provisions. He met their chiefs and smoked with them. Then the party resumed their journey down the Columbia. They would purchase numerous dogs over the next few weeks to sustain themselves. Clark wrote of the scarcity of game and timber in the area. It was a desolate area, dry because it sits in the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains.

The expedition continued down the Columbia, heading for the Cascades. Every day they saw Indian lodges and racks with salmon drying on the shore. They had to purchase wood, and the Indians made them pay a great deal for it. It was a precious resource in such a barren area. The Corps also continued buying the majority of their food. Fish, roots, dogs and acorns were the staple of their diet. The high prices took its toll on the captain's supply of trade goods.

Clark described the Indian method of storing fish for winter on October 22, "5 large Loges of Indians, great numbers of baskets of Pounded fish on the rocks Islands & near their Lodges thos are neatly pounded & put in very new baskets of about 90 or 100 pounds wight." He also wrote, on the same day, of one of the Indian methods of taking fish, "Several Indians in Canoes killing fish with gigs (and nets) &c." With so many salmon spawning in the river, it would have been easy to spear them.

And then Clark gave a more detailed description of how the Indians preserved their fish, "I observe great numbers of Stacks of pounded Salmon (butifully) neatly preserved in the following manner, i.e. after Sufficiently Dried it is pounded between two
Stones fine, and put into a species of basket neatly made of grass and rushes of better than two feet long and one foot diameter, which basket is lined with the skin of salmon stretched and dried for the purpose, in these it is pressed down as hard as is possible, when full they secure the open part with the fish skins across which they fasten thro' the loops of the basket that part very securely, and then on a dry situation they set those baskets the corded part up, their common custom is to set 7 as close as they can stand and 5 on the top of them, and secure them with mats which is raped around them and made fast with cords and covered also with mats, those 12 baskets of from 90 to 100 w. each (basket) form a stack. thus preserved those fish may be kept sound and sweet several years, as those people inform me, great quantities as they inform us are sold to the whites people who visit the mouth of this river as well as to the natives below."

On the 24, Clark again mentions the dogs they were eating, "we purchased 8 small fat dogs for the party to eat the natives not being fond of selling their good fish, compels us to make use of dog meat for food, the flesh of which the most of the party have become fond of from the habits of using it for some time past." He also describes a fishing lodge in which there were over 100 drying racks for fish. Clark estimated that at the site they could process a total weight of over 10,000 pounds of fish. The lodges they were now passing were those of the Chinook tribe. It was a large tribe that inhabited the lower part of the Columbia.

Some rapids were portaged; other times Clark wrote that they wanted to portage rapids but simply couldn't. And sometimes the men who couldn't swim would carry equipment on shore. They took the most valuable things—the guns, powder and of course the journals. The risks they took were calculated; they weighed the chance of tipping the
canoe with the time portaging would take. They had to keep moving. On October 24, they were just above the present town of The Dalles, Oregon, where they ran a set of rapids at which the Columbia was only 45 yards wide. The entire flow of the Columbia forced through such a narrow channel made for serious whitewater. Half the men ran the rapids, the other half walked the bank. Today those rapids are inundated behind The Dalles Dam.

These rapids were one of the prime fishing holes for the Indians. Clark wrote on the 25 that “Several places on which the Indians inform me they take the Salmon as fast as they wish;” He also wrote about a new fish, “one of the guard saw a Drum fish to day as he Concevd.” There is no type of drum in the Columbia and it is impossible to say what it was.

The expedition began to see a lot of steelhead. They were catching the fall run. Clark found steelhead delicious: “one man giged a Salmon trout which we had fried in a little Bears oil which a Chief gave us yesterday and I think the finest fish I ever tasted,” Clark wrote on the 26.

As they floated downstream, the Chinook Indians they met were very friendly to the expedition. Often the Chinooks gave the party dried fish, berries and bread made of dried roots. The captains continually purchased stores from the Indians. They would buy a large quantity when they did, because they were traveling a long way every day and did not take a lot of time to interact with the Indians on most days. They wanted to continue making good time. Clark commented about the fine craftsmanship of Chinook canoes. They were masters at building them, which was important because they lived on such a big river.

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On November 1, Clark wrote of Chinooks coming downstream to trade. "three Indian canoes loaded with pounded fish for the &c. trade down the river arrived at the upper end of the portage this evening. I Can't learn whether those Indians trade with white people or Inds. below for the Beeds & copper, which they are So fond of...Those Beeds they traffic with Indians Still higher up this river for Skins robes &c. &c.”

A few days later, on the 4, Clark commented on the increasing number of European items he was seeing with the natives, "The Indians at the last village have more Cloth and uriopean trinkets than above I Saw Some Guns, a Sword, maney Powder flasks, Salers Jackets, overalls, hats & Shirts, Copper and Brass trinkets with few Beeds only.” This increased number of European goods was a good indication that they were nearing the mouth of the Columbia. They had been seeing European items with many tribes throughout the expedition, but not nearly as many. Clark also wrote that he could once again see “Mt. Helien” (Mount St. Helens), but in reality what he had seen on October 19 was Mount Adams, which he thought was Mount St. Helens.\(^\text{10}\)

Clark wrote on November 7, “Great joy in camp we are in View of the Ocean.” They were actually looking at the Columbia estuary, but the thought that they were so near the Pacific must have been an amazing feeling, given what the men had been through. And it must have been extremely rewarding for the captains. Lewis in particular must have felt that he had fulfilled his destiny. His entire life had been geared for this task. Now that he had made it, he had to survive the winter and return to Washington with the maps and journals.

Over the next few days they experienced tall waves and typical Pacific Northwest weather. The rain drenched the expedition and its gear. Clark wrote that they had to stop

\(^{10}\) Moulton, “Journals”, vol. 6, p. 18.
frequently because the waves in the river were too high. They would wait out a storm, attempt to dry the gear and then set out again. Often, they were driven right back to the shore to wait longer. It was frustrating. Clark wrote on the 10th, “The rain Continud all day— we are all wet, also our bedding and many other articles. we are all employed untill late drying our bedding. nothing to eate but Pounded fish”.

On November 11 they encountered a group of Indians with canoes full of fish, “...five Indians Came down in a Canoe loaded with fish of Salmon Spes. Called Red Charr, we purchased of those Indians 13 of these fish, for which we gave, fishing hooks & some trifling things, we had Seen those Indians at a village behind Some marshey Islands a few days ago. they are on their way to trade those fish with white people which they make Signs live below round a point, those people are badly Clad, one is dressd. in an old Salors Jacket & Trousers, the others Elk Skin robes. we are truly unfortunate to be Compelled to lie 4 days nearly in the Same place at a time that our day are precious to us...the Indians left us and Crossed the river which is about 5 miles wide through the highest Sees I ever Saw a Small vestle ride, their Canoe is Small, maney times they were out of Sight before the were 2 miles off Certain it is they are the best canoe navigators I ever Saw” (Clark). The red charr was the sockeye salmon. The knowledge that Indians were heading to trade with whites must have given hope to the captains that they would encounter a trading vessel on the coast. The captains wanted this very much because their supplies were terribly depleted.

The party remained pinned down by the weather. On the 12th they caught their own fish, instead of buying them, “I walked up the branch and giged 3 Salmon trout. the party killed 13 Salmon to day in a branch about 2 miles above. rain Continued”

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Clark was doing all the writing at this time. Lewis had gone ahead with a small party to scout the coast and evaluate potential fort sites. Both parties were on the north bank of the river, in today's Washington. The shores were sandy in many areas and had small cliffs in others. There were numerous small tributary creeks that had salmon runs, and the men took advantage and caught fish in them. Clark notes that they were "pore" fish. They were probably in the early stages of decay because they were soon to lay their eggs. The men, however, had no choice but to eat them because they had nothing else.

The weather kept them pinned on the river banks for days. Clark described their frustrations on the 15th, "The rainey weather Continued without a longer intermition than 2 hours at a time from the 5th in the morng. untill the 16th is eleven days rain, and the most disagreeable time I have experienced Confined on a tempiest Coast wet, where I can neither get out to hunt, return to a better Situation, or proceed on: in this Situation have we been for Six days past. — fortunately the wind lay about 3 oClock we loaded I in great haste and Set out" They were getting a taste of the weather they would experience for the next four months on the Pacific Coast. The captains wrote often in the next few months about how miserable the men were. The winter before had been bitterly cold. But they were comfortable during their stay the previous winter at Fort Mandan — warm and dry in their rooms. Northwest winter temperatures were much warmer than the Plains, but it was constantly damp and it took its toll on the mens' health.

They spent several days on the river bank, evaluating the area and deciding where best to build a winter fort. The men went out to hunt deer, elk and waterfowl. As they had often throughout the journey, they ate a lot of ducks and geese. Chinooks came by in canoes loaded with roots. The captains smoked with them, but were not overly friendly
because the Chinooks had stolen several items from them in the past few weeks. The captains always recovered their things somehow, but they developed a deep distrust of the Chinooks.

Lewis continued scouting the coast near Cape Disappointment, right at the mouth of the Columbia. He was looking for a suitable fort site. They wanted to make sure there was game in the surrounding hills. On the 17th Clark discovered an odd-looking fish on the beach, "we found a Curious flat fish Shaped like a turtle, with fins on each side, and a tale notched like a fish, the Internals on one Sid and tale & fins flat wise This fish Flownder has a white (belly) on one Side & lies flat to the Ground" Moulton believes it was a starry flounder. Clark also went out on Cape Disappointment, then traveled north along the coast in today's Washington. On the 19th he wrote about some dead fish he found on the beach, "Saw a Dead Sturgen 10 feet long on the Sand, & the back bone of a Whale". Moulton suggests the sturgeon could have been a green sturgeon. It may also have been a white sturgeon, which can easily grow to over 13 feet long. Clark also wrote of yet another curious deer, "The Deer of this Coast differ materially from our Common deer in a much as they are much darker deeper bodied Shorter ledged horns equally branched from the beem the top o f the tail black from the rute to the end Eyes larger and do not lope but jump—." Clark was seeing another animal new to science, the Columbian black-tailed deer, which is a subspecies of mule deer.

The expedition stayed on the north side of the river for several more days, pondering where to winter. The men voted on where to spend the winter on November

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12 Moulton, “Journals”, vol. 6, p. 63.
13 Moulton, “Journals”, vol. 6, p. 68.
24. Sacagawea and York were allowed to vote. Wintering on the south side of the Columbia, where they had heard more elk lived, received the most votes. Clark wrote about their decision on the 24th of November. It is an interesting passage because it reveals their thinking in terms of how they would survive the winter: “being now determined to go into Winter quarters as Soon as possible, as a convenient Situation to precure the Wild animals of the forest which must be our dependance for Subsisting this Winter, we have every reason to believe that the nativs have not provisions Sufficient for our Consumption, and if they had, their price’s are So high that it would take ten times as much to purchase their roots & Dried fish as we have in our possesion, excluding our Small remains of merchindz and Clothes &c. This Certinly enduces every individual of the party to make diligient enquiries of the nativs the part of the Countrey in which the wild Animals are most plenty. They generaly agree that the most Elk is on the opposit Shore, and that the greatest numbers of Deer is up the river at Some distance above—

The Elk being an animal much larger than Deer, easier to kiled better meat (in the winter when pore) and Skins better for the Clothes of our party: added to—, a convenient Situation to the Sea coast where we Could make Salt, and a probibility of vessels Comeing into the mouth of Columbia (“which the Indians inform us would return to trade with them in 3 months[“]) from whome we might precure a fresh Supply of Indian trinkets to purchase provisions on our return home”.

This passage makes it clear that the captains never intended to fish at all while they wintered near the Columbia. It is a great mystery, because throughout the winter months they constantly complain about the “pore elk” they are forced to subsist on, yet they were camped within a few miles of the greatest salmon fishery on earth. And they
had fished successfully throughout the journey. Certainly the Columbia would have been no different. They had seen the fishing methods of the Northwest tribes. Why wouldn’t they employ those techniques themselves and feast on one of the most nutritious foods available on the entire expedition? The question has baffled historians for years.

They crossed the Columbia on the 26th. The river was intimidating to the men. Clark wrote often of how high the waves were. Storms moved in very quickly. Clark also wrote of watching Indians cross the river in waves that would obscure them from view on shore. He heaped praise on their boating abilities, and wrote freely of his unwillingness to float in the same conditions. That night the expedition camped in a marshy area on the south shore. They meet several members of the Clatsop nation and bought fish and roots from them. The Clatsop were a closely related nation to the Chinooks, sharing a common language and customs. The Clatsops would be the Corps neighbors for the next four months, so it was important to establish good relations with them.

On November 28, Clark wrote of how the weather had them pinned down. The hunters did not find any deer in the forest to the south: “we have nothing to eate but a little Pounded fish which we purchasd. at the Great falls. This is our present Situation! truly disagreeable. added to this the robes of our Selves and men are all rotten from being Continually wet...O how Tremendious is the day. This dredfull wind and rain Continued with intervales of fair weather, the greater part of the evening and night.”

By December 2, they still hadn’t decided exactly where they would winter. Their main concern was making sure there were enough elk to sustain them. “I am very unwell,” Clark wrote, “the drid fish which is my only diet does not agree with me and Several of the men Complain of a lax, and weakness” Lewis was out with a few men,
searching for game. Clark wrote that if Lewis did not return soon, he would move on and look for a place with more abundant game. Joseph Fields came back that night. He had killed an elk and seen a lot of sign. It was a big relief.

Clark tried to eat some elk meat the next day, but couldn’t. He was too sick. He did buy some roots from Indians who came by canoe. The Indians were given small fish hooks in exchange for their goods. Combined with some “Elks Soupe,” it brought him great relief.

Lewis and his party came back on the 5th. They had killed six elk and five deer. Clark was pleased. A decision was made to winter closer to the area where Lewis had seen all that game. They intended to winter on a small tributary of the Columbia, slightly inland from the coast. The captains had found the place for their winter fort, on today’s Lewis and Clark River, just southeast of Astoria, Oregon.

They spent the next few weeks building the fort and preparing for winter. It would be nothing like winter at Fort Mandan. While it was much warmer, the constant rain and drizzle wore on the men. They were constantly sick, with persistent coughs. They almost never saw the sun, and wrote about it when they did. The weeks spent building the fort gave them a taste of the winter they were about to endure. As they had been in the region for the past six weeks, they knew what to expect. But they weren’t happy about it.

They also in this time came to better know their winter neighbors, the Clatsops, for whom they would name Fort Clatsop. On December 9, Clark wrote, “met 3 Indians loaded with fresh Salmon which they had Giged in the Creek I crossed yesterday in the hills”. The Clatsops lived in a nearby village, to which they invited Clark. He accepted,
and began getting to know the tribe. The Clatsops gave Clark salmon, fresh berries, roots, berry bread and a kind of berry syrup that Clark found “pleasent.”

This is yet another passage that begs the question why the expedition didn’t fish. The Clatsops were catching fish within a few miles of Fort Clatsop. And the fish were easy to catch—they were simply spearing them out of a small river.

Clark’s entry from December 10 also shed light on Clatsop fishing methods, “I saw Indians walking up and down the beech which I did not at first understand the Cause of, one man came to where I was and told me that he was in Search of fish which is frequently thrown up on Shore and left by the tide, and told me the “Sturgeon was verry good” and that the water when it retired left fish which they eate this was Conclusive evidence to me that this Small band depended in Some Measure for their winters Subsistance on the fish which is thrown on Shore and left by the tide”. From this passage, it seems the Clatsops were eating nearly as much white sturgeon as they were salmon. Or at least they liked the sturgeon equally as well.

Clark went to their village. The Indians offered their best food. Clark tried to trade for a sea otter skin, which he desired very much. The Clatsops wanted nothing of what Clark had to offer. The only thing that interested them in exchange for the skin were blue and white beads, of which Clark had none at the time. He only had red beads. Clark learned that this tribe would be difficult to barter with, as with the other Northwest tribes that had traded with whites. If only they had known about the tribes preference for blue and white beads. But how could they have?

That evening, the hunters brought in six elk. Lewis and some men began cutting trees for the fort. They worked hard over the next few days. The Clatsops visited often,
and were always looking to trade. “they are tite Deelers, value Blu & white beeds verry highly, and Sell their roots also highly as they purchase them from the Indians abov for a high price” Clark wrote on the 12. His second entry for the 12 read, “I can readily discover that they are Close deelers, & Stickle for a verry little, never close a bargain except they think they have the advantage”. It must have been somewhat frustrating, given that most of the tribes they had encountered were such pushovers when it came to barter. The captains often wrote of their frustration in trading throughout the winter. Fish hooks and blue beads were the most valuable goods they had left.

Lewis wrote little throughout this period. Many of his writings from Fort Clatsop were descriptions of flora and fauna. As always, they were meticulous. He described the gray jay on December 18. It was an unknown bird in the scientific world.

The Corps moved into their unfinished huts on the 23. So began three months of pure drudgery. They grew to hate the Oregon Coast in that time, disgusted with constantly gray skies and misty days. Clark also wrote on that day about the fish the Clatsops were eating, “the Indians of this neighbourhood prize the pound’d fish verry highly, I have not observed this method of Secureing fish on any other part of the Columbian waters then that about the Great Falls.” He sent some pounded fish to a sick Indian in the village. The expedition had some fish, and was occasionally eating some.

Why then, didn’t they eat it much more often? There were probably several reasons. The runs were almost over-most of the salmon would have been dying in the rivers. And pounded fish was probably not very appealing, given how much they had eaten in the past few months, and how sick they had been after they crossed the Bitterroots. Even if the fish didn’t make them sick, it would be a difficult thing to eat
with an upset stomach. I believe these are the main two reasons they didn’t feast on fish while wintering near the Columbia River.

**Columbia River Fishing**

Brian Seltser drives trucks for a living. His routes take him around the Pacific Northwest on a regular basis. I meet him in Umatilla, OR, in a diner next to a Texaco gas station.

“I work my schedule so my spare time is spent here,” he tells me over a late dinner (11:00 p.m.) of chicken fried steak and eggs. “This is the best walleye fishing in the world.”

Wait a second! I just came from the best walleye fishing in the world, I tell him, and that’s the Missouri River reservoirs.

“What do they call a big fish over there, eh?” he asks. “Twelve pounds?”

“Yeah,” I admit, thinking I have never caught one over three pounds. “That’s pretty big.”

“Well,” he says, “let me tell you about the fish I missed last night.”

The world record walleye, he tells me, is a 25-pound fish caught in 1960 by Mabry Harper in Tennessee, and there are some people who claim that that fish was a pure aberration and should not be classified as a honest-to-goodness world record.14

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14 This is purely Seltser’s opinion. We have not found many people who agree with this statement. However, most walleye anglers, when pressed, will admit that they find it fishy that a world record hasn’t been broken in over thirty years.
"I've been fishing all my life, and I've never caught a walleye close to 25 pounds," he says. He has caught a lot of big walleye, though, and has found that the biggest walleye live in the Columbia River, upriver of the Bonneville Dam.

So last night Seltser went out fishing with his two regular fishing buddies, both are truckers and neither one here tonight. "If they were here they would tell you this story is Bible," Seltser tells me. "It's a true story, so help me God." They fished a stretch of the river not far from the diner we sat in, although he wouldn't tell me exactly where. They used his buddy's boat and trolled baited lures behind the boat from midnight until dawn.

The fishing was pretty poor, which was kind of what they expected, because of a front coming in. But right at the end of the night, when they were almost back at the truck, the middle rod in the boat buckled and the reel screamed. Seltser grabbed the rod and thought he had a sturgeon, which shocked him a little because he never catches sturgeon when he is out after walleye. He fought the fish for maybe twenty minutes, during which time the fish made numerous runs toward the bottom. Finally he pulled the fish up to the boat, and he and his buddies saw it the fish was a walleye.

"He was giant. I've caught lots of big walleyes, but nothing this big," Seltser says. "The first thing I thought when I saw him was 'He's the record.'"

But then Seltser saw that the treble hook on his lure was barely in the fish's mouth, hanging on by just the barb. He nursed the fish closer to the boat, afraid to pull too hard. He got the fish right up to the boat, but when his buddy reached down with a long-handled net ("A fucking easy operation," as Seltser puts it), he barely nudged the fishing line, the hook left the fish's mouth with an audible pop and the men could just watch as the fish swam away.
“Both those guys have a lot of experience with big fish, and they both said the fish was bigger than 25 pounds,” Seltser says, although he isn’t so sure. “Would have been nice to get it on a scale somewhere.”

I ask him if he is pissed at the friend who broke the fish off, and he replies,” You know, he didn’t mean to, so I guess I forgive him.

“Plus, it’s his boat, so I can’t get too mad.”

The Columbia River is big time fishing, carry a big rod or go home kind of fishing. Seven-foot sturgeon, 50-pound salmon and 25-pound steelhead live here, waiting to beat senseless any offering.

The fishing can be phenomenal on this river, depending on what you are going after and when you are doing it. Salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, smelt, and shad are the principal species caught in the Columbia River. Walleye and small mouth bass are growing in numbers and popularity.

The most noticeable feature of this river here is its width. This is not a free-flowing river but a series of serious impoundments. The four dams that impound the Columbia between the Pacific Ocean and the Snake River provide hydropower electricity to a huge chunk of America, in addition to opening the river to navigation and flood control. They have been retrofitted with successful fish ladders, and have begun to flush smolt downriver with a lower morality rates. We stop at each dam, going in to look at the windows into the fish ladders.
Chinook and coho salmon move slowly up the ladder, the shad and steelhead with more energy. Lamprey eels stick to the window glass, giving us a view of their tooth-lined sucking mouth.

Salmon and steelhead move upriver listening to an age-old call of the wild. Their genetic makeup guides them up rivers to their original birthplace. They work their way up the ladders, heading upriver until they find their home river. When they get to the mouth of their tributary, they stop and gather before heading up. You can always tell where they are gathered by following the fishing boats. Wherever the boats are tightly grouped, that’s where the fish are.

**Fly-fishing the Columbia**

It is no secret that the best fly-fishing is not on the Columbia but in its tributaries. A dozen fantastic rivers with salmon, steelhead and trout flow into the Columbia out of nutrient- and bug-rich mountains. It is to these rivers that most fly-fishermen head. The Deschutes, Hood River, the White Salmon River, the John Day and numerous others provide excellent fly-fishing for wild fish.

“Within an hour of here, eleven good tributaries into the Columbia offer good fly fishing,” says Dan Fawcett of Hood River Flies. “There’s steelhead and salmon in the tributaries, as well as trout and smallmouth bass.”

James Loop, or Portland, Oregon, drives to the Deschutes River most weekends during steelhead season. He fishes the river near its confluence with the Columbia, certainly a spot that Lewis and Clark investigated.
“Most people use sinking line to get the flies down,” Loop says, pulling line off his reel. “You want the fly to get right in the face of the fish, so if you don’t get one right away, you move forward a couple steps and cast some more. You really want to hit them with the fly.”

When fishing for the rainbow trout that call the Deschutes home, Loop suggests using nothing but small flies. “These trout are huge,” Loop says, “but they only like size 18 or smaller flies. Big stuff they’ll ignore, no matter how well tied.”

The Lower Columbia

We find boats and anglers chasing sturgeon, salmon and steelhead all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Shore-bound anglers stick mostly to tail waters or bridges over tributaries. Boats cling around tributary mouths. The closer we get to the ocean the more fishermen we see, and the more the boats become important. By the time we get to Portland we don’t see much access for the shore angler. In Warrenton, Oregon, near the mouth of the river, we find a parking lot overstuffed with empty trailers surrounding a busy bait and tackle shop. The man behind the counter tells us about the river layout.

“The river is five miles wide here, which sounds wide but the current is moving a lot quicker than it looks. There is 2000 miles of river coming through that cut, and its moving a lot of river,” he tells us. He sends us to Hammond, Oregon, which sits even nearer the mouth of the Columbia. Here we find even more boats putting in the water and taking out. Hundreds of vehicles crowd the parking lot. People load fishing gear into all sorts of boats, from small wood skiffs to giant fiberglass cabin cruisers. Fish are carried
out of boats and brought up to the scale to be weighed and photographed. Two county
sheriff officers inspect the boats for proper safety equipment. In the midst of it all we
meet Michelle O’Shea, a port sampler for the Oregon State Fish and Wildlife.

Michelle’s job is to count the numbers and types of fish that people catch. She
tries to meet each boat that comes in after fishing, carrying with her notebook, tweezers,
electric scanner and lots or plastic bags with tags. She uses to scanner to search for small
computer chips that were implanted on certain stocked fish. When her detector finds a
fish with this chip implanted, she cuts the head off, encloses it in a plastic bag, marks the
tag with the size of the fish and a scale sample, and then moves on to the next boat.
Michelle’s numbers, taken with the counts of other port samplers as a percentage of total
fish caught, decides when a particular season ends. On the Columbia River, a number of
fish that can be caught from each stock is decided upon before each season by state
authorities. Once that number of fish has been caught, the season is declared over. The
heads are sent to a facility where the chips are removed and studied.
“Salmon are still very new to science, we’re just beginning to understand them,” she tells
us during a brief lull in the action. “The tagged fish tell us a lot about what’s going on
underwater.”

As Michelle continues her duties, we mosey around the docks, asking what baits
and lures worked. Most people are fishing herring or shad as bait, hooking it behind a
flashy spinner weight like a Delta diver. The anglers catching the most fish are trolling
close to the surface. A commercial boat comes in with 58 silver cohos, all caught on
spoons and hoochies, no bait.
After hours of walking these docks we get worn out from all the dead fish.

Nowhere else on the Trail do we witness such large-scale harvest of fish. So we pack our car look for the ocean, the end of the Trail!

**Lewis and Clark Winter by the Ocean**

Christmas Day, 1805, started with a shouting and song. As usual, it rained. The men tried to make the best of it. They gave a few presents to the captains – some clothes they had made. The rest of the tobacco was divvied out. The men moved into their cabins within the fort. Clark wrote of their Christmas meal, “we would have Spent this day the nativity of Christ in feasting, had we any thing either to raise our Sperits or even gratify our appetites, our Diner concisted of pore Elk, So much Spoiled that we eate it thro’ mear necessity, Some Spoiled pounded fish and a fiew roots.”

The men got a taste of something that had tormented them on the lower Missouri – insects. Their blankets were infested with flees, and because the coastal climate is so temperate, musquitos were ever-present. Clark complained often of the bugs. The dreary weather certainly did wear mentally on everyone, and it shows through in the captains’ constant whining in their writing.

Their elk meat was often spoiled before they reached the fort. The warm temperatures and constant rain made transporting the meat very difficult. The captains would trade with the Clatsops for roots at this time. There were days in which they had nothing to eat except rotten elk. They ate the flesh – it was better than nothing.
December 29 brought news of a whale that had washed up on shore, not far from the expedition’s salt making camp. The Clatsops were already gone, getting oil and blubber from the whale. Such resources were extremely valuable. A whale could feed the entire village for several weeks, maybe even a month. This certainly wasn’t the first time the Indians had found a whale, but it probably didn’t happen too often. “the wind proves too high for us to proceed by water to See this monster, Capt Lewis has been in readiness Since we first heard of the whale to go and see it and collect Some of its Oil,” Clark wrote.

The 30th was an excellent hunting day. Droullaird and some men killed four elk, “we had a Sumptious Supper of Elks tongues & marrow bones which was truly gratifying,” Clark wrote. The fort wall was completed that day. At sunset, the gates would be closed and Indians must leave, the Clatsops were told. They did not take the news kindly.

“Happy New Year!” greeted the captains on the 1st. The crew fired a volley and shouted, then went back to their huts. Clark summed up the mood, “our repast of this day tho’ better than that of Christmas Consisted principally in the anticipation of the 1st day of January 1807”. They dined on elk and water.

This was certainly a time for reflection for all the men, and the captains in particular. They had done it – made it to the coast. But it would all be for naught if they couldn’t get back with their journals and specimens. And although they knew the way home, they had plenty of challenges ahead. They had come this far, however, and once they reached the Missouri it would be a simple cruise home.
Lewis must have had an awful time, given his poor mental condition. The effect of light depredation is well documented today, and it must have been hard on Lewis. Perhaps this was when he began his slide into depression that would ultimately take his life years later. Probably not, because Lewis continued to lead well for the next nine months.

As for the men, they were also bored. They had things to do. Most importantly, they made clothes from elk skins for the return voyage. By this time, they were probably not wearing anything they had begun the expedition with a year and a half earlier. They also probably slept a lot, trying to recover from the incredible strain of the journey. And they turned to one of their favorite pastimes the previous winter—recreational sex with the natives. The Clatsops were similar to many tribes they had encountered in this regard. Lewis wrote more often after the first of the year. On January 3rd, he wrote about how much better the men’s health was when they were eating dogs, “for my own part I have become so perfectly reconciled to the dog that I think it an agreeable food and would prefer it vastly to lean Venison or Elk.” It makes one wonder what ever happened to Seaman, because he is not often talked about thereafter. And such a big dog would have been several meals worth.

On January 5th, two men returned who had been with the party sent out to make salt. That crew had established a good camp on the beach, about 15 miles southwest of Fort Clatsop. An elk and several deer had been killed, and they had plenty of meat stored up. Contact had been made with the next tribe south, the Tillamooks. They were friendly and had even given the men a bunch of whale blubber. The men could make up to a
gallon of salt a day, by boiling sea water. Lewis wrote about how much he missed salt, and how he very much appreciated it.

Sacagawea went to the coast with Clark, Charbonneau and a party of men on the 6th. Lewis wrote about her trip, “the Indian woman was very impotunate to be permitted to go, and was therefore indulged; she observed that she had traveled a long way with us to see the great waters, and that now that monstrous fish was also to be seen, she thought it very hard she could not be permitted to see either (she had never yet been to the Ocean).” Of course she would want to go. The Shoshone woman would have never had such a chance had she not joined the expedition, albeit without any choice. But like for anyone, seeing the ocean is a real thrill. A whale would only add to the experience.

At this point in the journey, Sacagawea had come into her own. She was no longer just the wife of the Frenchman and an interpreter. She was a valuable member of the party, essential to its success. Clark realized that long before everyone, but by this time, everyone knew it. And to do all she did while caring for an infant only increased the respect she garnered.

Clark was traveling out to the salt-making camp on the 7th when he mentioned a fish, “in walking on the Sand after crossing the river I Saw a Singular Species of fish which I had never before Seen one of the men Call this fish a Skaite, it is properly a Thornback.” Moulton thinks it was a big skate.

A glimpse of Clark’s religious beliefs, and his taste for the whale blubber they were given by the Tillamooks, comes on January 8th, “...the Small Stock of merchindize I had taken with me were not able to precure more blubber than about 300 wt. and a few gallons of oil; Small as this Stock is I prise it highly; and thank providence for directing
the whale to us; and think him much more kind to us than he was to jonah, having Sent
this monster to be Swallowed by us in Sted of Swallowing of us as jonah’s did.” He also
wrote about where the natives were catching fish in the area, “In Salmon Season they
Cought great numbers of that fish in the Small Creeks, when the Salmon was Scerce they
found Sturgion and a variety of other fish thrown up by the waves and left by the tide
which was verry fine”.

This is further evidence that the salmon simply weren’t running when the
expedition wintered near the coast. Clark writes of what the Tillamooks did in the salmon
season, which it wasn’t. When the fish were spawning and running upstream, their
numbers were staggering. Catching them would have been so simple, it was laughable.
But this was no laughing matter for the coastal tribes. This was life or death. They
preserved thousands of pounds by drying them. It was their bread and butter. The
captains often wrote that these tribes were not good hunters. There were plenty of elk and
deer around, but the Northwest natives bow and arrow technology was nowhere near as
refined as that of the Plains tribes. The captains wrote that the Indians went after elk, too,
but rarely got one.

Besides salmon, the ocean and mouth of the Columbia provided numerous other
species of fish that sustained the Indians. Not the least of which was the white sturgeon, a
fish that is still plentiful in the area. They grow upwards of 13 feet, and can weigh over
700 pounds. Today, they are sought after by sport anglers for their legendary fighting
ability. Anglers sometimes fight the big fish for close to three hours, bringing the fish in
and letting it out in an effort to wear it out. For the Tillamooks and Clatsops, these big
monsters would have been a lot of food.
Private McNeal was nearly killed by a Tillamook man on January 9. The Indians invited him for a meal in their hut, which he accepted. They changed huts, and eventually when a man left the hut a woman grabbed McNeal. She wanted him to know that the Indian man planned to kill him for his things. Clark heard a yell, and sent men to get the private. No one was harmed, but McNeal could have gone down in history as the other man to die on the expedition.

Lewis also wrote about the whale, describing how the natives boiled the blubber. The expedition got very little of it, but loved what they did get. It was 105 feet long. Such a find was like gold for the natives. They ate the blubber and oil with roots.

The days drug on. And on. These were the darkest, and shortest, days of the year. But at least they were getting longer. Thoughts of spring were on everyone’s minds. It probably didn’t take long for the men to forget about the toils of getting to the coast. Moving along every day and seeing new places and things was fun. Sitting around in cabins in dreary weather, in time, wasn’t fun.

Lewis did a lot of writing about natural things at this time. He was recording the plants and animals he saw, as he had throughout the expedition. It was something to do to pass the time. Clark, on the other hand, often did a lot of whining in his journal entries. He was clearly ready to get moving again. And he hated the dismal climate. Clark often simply recorded the events of the day. He also frequently copied Lewis’ journal, or portions of it. While this added nothing in terms of information for the president, it was at least another copy.

On January 14, Lewis wrote about the quantity of fish the natives were taking along the Columbia River, “the natives inhabiting that noble stream, for some miles
above the great falls to the grand rapids inclusive annually prepare about 30,000 lbs. of pounded sammon for market. but whether this fish is an article of commerce with the whites or is exclusively sold to and consumed by the natives of the sea Coast, we are at a loss to determine.” Of course, Lewis’ guess on the quantity of fish was just that – a guess. He goes on to write that he believes the Indians were trading with whites, because he saw a lot of European-made items among them. But he also writes that the tribes farther inland may be trading with tribes closer to the coast, who would be the ones trading directly with trading vessels. Lewis did not understand what the whites would want with all that salmon.

Lewis wrote on January 16 that they had decided to depart Fort Clatsop on April 1. Just the thought of that made the men happy. He commented that they could leave right away, and get to the timbered country before the mountains. The Indians informed them that would be foolish, because the plains around the Columbia were deep with snow in winter. Lewis then went into a description of Indian fishing methods, “The Clatsops Chinnooks &c. in fishing employ the common streight net, the scooping or diping net with a long handle, the gig, and the hook and line. the common net is of different lengths and debths usually employed in taking the sammon, Carr and trout in the inlets among the marshey grounds and the mouths of deep creeks. the skiming or [s]cooping net to take small fish in the spring and summer season; the gig and hook are employed indiscriminately at all seasons in taking such fish as they can procure by their means. their nets and fishing lines are made of the silk-grass or white cedar bark; and their hooks are generally of European manufactory, tho’ before the whites visited them they made hooks of bone and other substances formed in the following manner”. The captain then
goes into a long description of how they attach two pieces of bone together with sinew and resin to form a sharp-angle hook. The next day Lewis wrote of how the Clatsops put hot rocks in bowls to boil their fish.

The Corps kept hunting elk. They must have taken a terrible toll on the elk herd in that area. The natives rarely were able to get elk anyway, or at least they weren’t according to the captains. The expedition’s hunters were wildly successful sometimes, and could not find anything at other times. The captains wrote that they had killed five or six elk, then they went days with nothing. They must have been finding good-sized herds of elk, and killing quite a few each time they did. On January 20, Lewis wrote of how their meat supply was getting low, as it often did, “we have latterly so frequently had our stock of provisions reduced to a minimum and sometimes taken a small touch of fasting that three days full allowance excites no concern.” He also wrote that they could now understand the natives better. The captains were told that the Indians traded their fish with other tribes, and not the whites.

“Not any occurrence today worthy of notice; but all are pleased, that one month of the time which binds us to Fort Clatsop and which seperates us from our friends has now elapsed.” Lewis wrote on February 2. Clark, too, wrote often around this time that there was little to write about.

Lewis gave a description of one of their better meals on February 7th, “This evening we had what I call an excellent supper it consisted of a marrowbone a piece and a brisket of boiled Elk that had the appearance of a little fat on it. this for Fort Clatsop is living in high stile.”
The natives told the captains on February 13 that a run of small fish was about to start, "the Indians inform us that we shall have great abundance of a small fish in March which from their discription must be the herring." It was probably the eulachon, which began running a few weeks later. Lewis’ drawing of the fish is one of his more famous. Clark wrote on the 14th that he had completed his map of the country between Fort Mandan and the coast. The captains both stated that they had indeed found the best route across the continent, with the exception of the shortcut from the upper Missouri to Travelers Rest Creek. It was mission accomplished. And although Jefferson was not going to get his water route across the Rockies, at least he would know the truth. The fur trade could still go on, it would just require a combination of water and horseback travel.

On February 22nd, the eulachon, sometimes known as the candle fish, started coming up some nearby rivers, "these women informed us that the small fish began to run which we suppose to be herring from their discription." (Lewis). There were more sick men than at any time that winter, Lewis wrote. They were suffering from general colds and had fevers. Lewis believed they all had the flu.

He continued in that entry to write about game animals pursued by the natives in the area. Antelope were on the plains of the Columbia, he wrote, but not nearly in the numbers as the Great Plains. The Indians went after them when the big salmon runs of summer and fall were over. They used antelope hide to make clothing. The captain also described a mountain goat, which he called a sheep. They never got close to one, but Clark thought he saw one on August 24, 1805. Lewis is basing his description on furs he saw with the natives. It is not surprising – mountain goat hides are incredibly soft and
thick, and are highly prized today by hunters. And the area in which Clark believed he saw one, just north of Lost Trail Pass, still has a lot of mountain goats today.

Elk were becoming increasingly more difficult to find in the area. Lewis complained of their scarcity on February 24, and was worried because it remained their principle food source. The Clatsops, however, came with Droullaird and brought some food that day, “The chief and his party had brought for sail a Sea Otter skin some hats, sturgeon and a [s]pecies of small fish which now begin to run, and are taken in great quantities in the Columbia R. about 40 miles above us by means of skimming or scooping nets.” He then went into one of his typical intricate descriptions of the eulachon. Lewis found the fish delicious, “I think them superior to any fish I ever tasted,”. He also liked the sturgeon, although not nearly as much. He sent out two parties of men; one to look for elk and one to catch some of those fish. Clark liked the fish as well, describing them as “deliciously fine.”

The next day Clark also said they were the best fish he had ever tasted. But his journal entry is simply a copy of Lewis’. He was copying his colleague all the time throughout the winter. You would think the immense amounts of time he had would inspire him to write something original. Instead, he slipped into lethargy. Clark was possibly tired after long days of map making, which he was very good at. Lewis sent men to catch some eulachon, which he started calling anchovies, on the 26. He instructed them to buy some from the natives if they could not catch any. He sent out another party of elk hunters as well.

The Clatsops showed up at the fort every day to trade. They continued to ask high prices for their goods. It’s almost as though they knew the expedition’s supply of trade
goods was getting lower, yet the men were getting more desperate. The elk were now close to 10 miles away. Dragging these animals that often weighed over 700 pounds was a lot of work. It seems the men were simply failures at catching fish in the area. They continued buying from the Indians. The expedition was nearly out of trade goods.

The Corps also ran out of food more and more often. Lewis complained not only of a shortage of food, but also the poor quality of their diet and how it impacted the crew, “The diet of the sick is so inferior that they recover their strength but slowly. none of them are now sick but all in a state of convalescence with keen appetites and nothing to eat except lean Elk meat. late this evening Drewyer arrived with a most acceptable supply of fat Sturgeon. fresh Anchovies and a bag containing about a bushel of Wappetoe. we feasted on Anchovies and Wappetoe.”

Lewis wrote on March 3 that there was “no movement of the party today worthy of notice. every thing moves on in the old way and we are counting the days which seperate us from the 1st of April and which bind us to fort Clatsop.—“ They were ready to get out of there. It became so bad that a few days later they decided to leave the fort before the 1st of April.

“we live sumptuously on our wappetoe and Sturgeon. the Anchovy is so delicate that they soon become tainted unless pickled or smoked.” Lewis wrote on March 4. He then goes into a long description of how the Clatsops cured the eulachon by smoking them. The captain also wrote about how the Indians often steamed their sturgeon.

By March 5, the Corps food supply was very low. And more bad news came in; the hunters were seeing no game, “They had neither killed nor seen any Elk. they informed us that the Elk had all gone off to the mountains a considerable distance from
This is unwelcome information and rather alarming, we have only 2 days provision on hand, and that nearly spoiled.” Lewis wrote that day. He sent Sgt. Pryor up the Columbia, with a few trade items, to the Indian fishing camp to buy some fish to eat.

Lewis received some eulachon, which he continually called anchovies, from an Indian on March 6. At this point, they were badly needed. He wrote of the poor health that many of the men were in. “Bratton is now weaker than any of the convalescents, all of whom recover slowly in consequence of the want of proper diet, which we have it not in our power to procure.—“

Sending off Pryor paid off. He brought back scores of fish on March 11, “Early this morning Sergt. Pryor arrived with a small canoe loaded with fish which he had obtained from the Cathlahmah’s for a very small part of the articles he had taken with him.”

Lewis compiled a list of all the fish he was familiar with in the area on March 12, “Beside the fish of this coast and river already mentioned we have met with the following species viz. the Whale, Porpus, Skaite, flounder, Salmon, red char, two species of Salmon trout, mountain or speckled trout, and a species similar to one of those noticed on the Missouri within the mountains, called in the Eastern states, bottlenose. I have no doubt but there are many other species of fish, which also exist in this quarter at different seasons of the year, which we have not had an opportunity of seeing. The shell fish are the Clam, perrewinkle, common mussle, cockle, and a species with a circular flat shell. The Whale is sometimes pursued harpooned and taken by the Indians of this coast; tho’ I believe it is much more frequently killed by running fowl on the rocks of the coast in violent storms and thrown on shore by the wind and tide. in either case the Indians
preserve and eat the blubber and oil as has been before mentioned. the whale bone they also carefully preserve for sale.—" Lewis had written about all of these fish before. This passage read like a recap of the some species they saw on the west side of the Continental Divide. The next day Lewis went into brief descriptions of each type of fish.

He also wrote that the salmon runs may soon start up again, according to the natives, "The Indians tell us that the Salmon begin to run early in the next month; it will be unfortunate for us if they do not, for they must form our principal dependence for food in ascending the Columbia above the Falls and it’s S. E. branch Lewis’s river to the Mountains." They were counting on salmon as they went upstream because they would not have time to hunt.

The next day, Lewis went into a long passage about the fish in the area. "The Porpus is common on this coast and as far up the river as the water is brackish. the Indians sometimes gig them and always eat the flesh of this fish when they can procure it; to me the flavor is disagreeable. the Skaite is also common to the salt water, we have seen several of them that had perished and were thrown out on the beach by the tide. The flounder is also an inhabitant of the salt water, we have seen them also on the beach where they had been left by the tide. the Indians eat the latter and esteem it very fine. these several species are the same with those of the Atlantic coast. the common Salmon and red Charr are the inhabitants of both the sea and rivers. the former is usually largest and weighs from 5 to 15 lbs. it is this species that extends itself into all the rivers and little creeks on this side of the Continent, and to which the natives are so much indebted for their subsistence. the body of this fish is from 2 ½ to 3 feet long and proportionally broad."
Lewis then went into detailed descriptions of both the chinook salmon, which he called the common salmon, and the sockeye salmon, which he called the red char. The porpus was the harbor porpoise, the skaite the big skate, the flounder was the starry flounder.\textsuperscript{15}

On the 16\textsuperscript{th}, Lewis wrote about clams, perewinkles, mussels and cockles. He mentions that the Indians sometimes ate shellfish, but did not say whether the Corps had been. They almost certainly did not, because the captains never wrote about it.

A few coho salmon began running at that time. Lewis wrote that, "The white Salmon Trout which we had previously seen only at the great falls of the Columbia has now made it's appearance in the creeks near this place. one of them was brought us today by an Indian who had just taken it with his gig." He described the coho in great detail. Such was their luck – after spending the entire winter in a place they hated, eating emaciated elk, the great salmon runs of the Columbia began.

They began preparing to leave Fort Clatsop on March 18. Lewis wrote a great deal about the tribes in the area over the next few days. He also mentioned how ill some of the men were, and how unfortunate it was that they were because the party was about to leave. On the 20\textsuperscript{th}, he wrote, "Altho' we have not fared sumptuously this winter and spring at Fort Clatsop, we have lived quite as comfortably as we had any reason to expect we should." They bought a few dogs and dried fish from the some Clatsops and Tillamooks on the 22\textsuperscript{nd}, just to stock up.

And that was it. The men started for home on March 23, 1806. It had been nearly two years since they left St. Louis. They had accomplished their mission, and in doing so

\textsuperscript{15} Moulton, "Journals", vol. 6, p. 414
had lost only one man. Of course they still had to get home for any of it to mean anything. But even if they died getting home, at least they would know they had made it.

Buoy 10

We hear of Buoy 10 first from newspapers. They report the chinooks have arrived at Buoy 10, and the coho, and action is good. We picture Buoy 10 as a river marker, maybe one on stone pilings we can fish off of. But we learn it is out in the ocean, marking the end of the Columbia River. Not only that, but to get there, boats need to get out over the Bar.

"The Columbia Bar is one of the nastiest bars in the world," says Capt. Bobby Ellingson, who runs a fishing charter service out of Hammond. "Experienced boaters have trouble out there. I rolled a boat yesterday. Took water in over the transom, everyone had to jump out. The boat sank in ten seconds. And I didn’t do anything wrong. I’ve been doing this 30 years, 20 years professionally."

We drive out to South Jetty, a wall of giant rocks that protects the river’s south side. Here we see the Bar, a frothing fury of white-topped waves. The water out by the channel buoys looks as fierce as close in. We watch a large fishing boat cut through the mess, the boat getting thrown around considerably.

When we climb up on top of the rock jetty and stare out over the Pacific we see Buoy 10. Fishing boats clustered in the open water beyond it, drifting in the high waves. We see how the salmon and the fishermen of the ocean act like their counterparts upriver,
at the mouth of the Columbia’s tributaries, clustered around the opening at the mouth of the river.

We walk out to the end of the jetty, a monstrous mound of rocks that stops Pacific swells from pounding the Columbia’s mouth. Out on the tip of the jetty we met two Asians who speak no English fishing for salmon. They cast baited hooks into the ocean side of the jetty, then sit and watch their bobbers. We hope they catch a fish, because the light is good for photographs and the landscape could not be more surreal.

But they don’t, and we have a hard time communicating, so we end up leaving them alone and walking back to the car over the spray-soaked rocks.

So tonight we find ourselves in Seaside, OR, end point of the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Seaside

Seaside is a party town, we are told by the first fellow we meet in town, a gas station attendant. Lots of kids come here for spring break, he says, which makes the town go nuts with craziness. Now, in late fall, the town is quiet and peaceful

“You picked a good time to be here,” he tells us. “Things are quiet right now.”

This town represents the furthest border of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. While they may have gone further on surveillances, or when they hiked down the beach a number of miles to see a dead whale, this was the furthest they went as a group. Here many of the men spent their days at the salt oven, where they boiled huge amounts of seawater to get salt for the return trip.
Silas certainly was part of this crew. His fishing habits probably suited him well at the salt stove, where sitting in one spot for hours was important. Plus, being so close to the sea gave him unfettered access to fishing. Striped bass, halibut, salmon, flounder and numerous other fishes lived immediately offshore, ready for a baited hook at any moment. While there is no mention in the journals of men fishing while working the salt stoves, we know Silas was out on the beach, casting into the great unknown.

As Nick and I stand with our backs to the nation, looking out over the swelling blackness of the Pacific, we hear Silas come up besides us. For a long time we are silent, just listen to waves washing over the miles of beach.

Never did catch shit out of the ocean, Silas says finally. Not from a lack of trying, just didn’t catch fish.

Give me a river anytime, he says. Better yet, a bunch or rivers.

He turns and heads back, and we turn with him.

Chapter Seven: The Return Trip

The Corps did not fish nearly as much on the return journey. Their minds were on home, plain and simple. But as they had throughout the journey, they did eat fish from time to time. That was especially true as they worked up the Columbia River, because there was not a lot of game in the area. They kept buying some dried fish from the Indians. But the salmon runs had not begun yet, and they did not have time to wait. The expedition relied on dogs on the way up the River. They had to keep moving, because the Nez Perce planned to cross the mountains in early May. The Corps would have lost their
horses. And without their horses, they would have had little chance of making it over the Bitterroots.

The captains were held up for a long time before they could cross over Lolo Pass. Although they were incredibly anxious to get over that barrier, they knew better than to push too early and fight deep snows. Their horses were with the Nez Perce, ready for the return trip.

Once they made it over the mountains, in late June, the captains decided to explore more areas as they passed through Montana. They split into multiple parties, to explore as much as possible. Lewis made his biggest mistake as a leader when he went deep into Blackfoot territory with just a few men. But the reason to do so was justified. If he could find a tributary of the Missouri that went farther north than the 49th parallel, that territory would be claimed for the United States.

After following the Blackfoot River over the Continental Divide and heading north, in the plains along the Rocky Mountain Front, Lewis and his party had their infamous fight with a small group of young Blackfoot braves. The men killed two Indians, then had to ride for almost an entire day straight to get away. They killed two Blackfeet, and easily could have been killed themselves. Just before the fight, Lewis did some fishing on Cutbank Creek near today’s Cutbank, Montana.

Clark and his party went south, back down the Bitterroot Valley towards Lost Trail Pass. This time, however, when they reached the pass they turned east, instead of continuing towards today’s Salmon, Idaho and going back over Lemhi Pass. They passed through the Big Hole Valley, then continued east. Eventually, they made their way back to the Three Forks of the Missouri, then continued east to the Yellowstone River. They
followed that river to its junction with the Missouri, where they rejoined Lewis. The party was whole again.

Both captains had the occasional mention of fishing. But their journals are more centered on describing new territory. Lewis wrote few descriptions of plants or animals. And after the Indian fight, he really wanted to get home. Lewis probably realized the gross mistake he made by heading so far into Blackfoot territory. He jeopardized everything the expedition had accomplished. Now it was time to get those journals back to St. Louis, and eventually to the president.

Once they reached the Missouri, they were floating once again. And the current that had tormented them was now in their favor. After reuniting the party at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri, the Corps really flew downstream. On several days, they made 80 miles. They again caught some of those monster catfish, and a few other warm water fish.

When the men returned to St. Louis, they were national heroes. Balls were held to recognize their accomplishment. The captains were the guests of honor at many galas. There was a lot of drinking, and Lewis was not shy about partaking. Many historians believe Lewis began his excessive drinking right away – an illness that, coupled with his mental illness, eventually led to his suicide. Clark was able to handle the notoriety, and went on the live a productive life.

Certainly during those first few months back, the men were equally as sought after. For the common man, they would have provided hours of entertainment. The men’s eyes were the closest thing to video cameras at that time, they would have to try to explain a world that was simply alien to everyone. They told stories about the bison, and
the antelope. They talked of the different tribes they encountered, and the landscapes. The harsh winter at Fort Mandan, and giant trees, and the sight of the Pacific Ocean would have been wonders to anyone. And certainly, maybe even before they talked about everything else, the men told stories of the incredible fishing.

The Yellowstone

In Livingston I pull off the highway to do some last minute shopping for a float on the Yellowstone River. I was hoping to take Shannon on this trip, but she could not make it at the last minute. So instead I have all three of my dogs, as well as Undaunted Courage, my journal and Silas Goodrich as company. A six-pack of good bear would go well with this trip, hence the trip to the store.

An older couple walks into the grocery store ahead of me.

“Should I get that thing?” the old man asks the old woman.

“No,” she replies, “get the other one.”

“Okay,” he says, and sets off across the store.

I think about this transaction later, as the Joannie Marie drifts effortlessly down the river. Wouldn’t it be great, I think to myself, to communicate with a river like the way those two did? Not with words, but with a basic understanding of meaning, an unspoken bond of common purpose. I ask Silas what he thinks. He laughs.

You talk too much, Drew, he says. You can’t have an unspoken anything.

We are floating from Mallards Point to Pine Creek, a relatively short float but with great views of the Absoroka Mountains. The dogs are all being active on this hot summer day,
and seem surprised to have the boat to themselves. With no anglers in their way, they bound around the boat, doing laps around me in the rower’s seat.

The Yellowstone is a good size river here, but nothing compared to the Columbia or lower Missouri. Browns, rainbows and whitefish make up most of the fish in the river. Some cutthroats lurk down this low, but most live up high in or close to Yellowstone Park.

When I first became a fishing guide, this was the river I guided. I worked out of Cooke City, at the northeast entrance to Yellowstone Park, and took anglers on the upper Yellowstone regularly. When I got the Joannie Marie I put her in this river first, and spent almost all my river days here, floating between Gardiner and Big Timber. If there is any river I could have a silent communication with, this is it.

So I ignore Silas’ silly observations, and I quietly concentrate on what the river is saying. I listen past the water on the hull, the wind in the trees and the waves on the shore. With my eyes close, I reach out to the Yellowstone with nothing but conscious, and wait for revelation.

Instead, I run aground. The dogs take the chance to jump out of the boat and run around the rocky shoreline. We are beached on an island in the middle of the river, an island I have camped on in the past. I sit in my seat, not moving, still trying to hear the river.

“Silas,” I ask. He sits on the bow of the boat, his feet in the water. A fishing pole made of willow fits in his hand like fingers. His back hunches a little as he peers into the river below him. He uses no bobber. “Can you hear anything?”

“You talk too much,” he says again. “You need to fish more.”
Appendix I

Our Boats, Vehicles and Gear List

We bring Nick’s canoe, a Mad River boat named *Sacagawea* on our first trip to St. Louis. I move the cargo box on the roof of my car to make room for it. The car looks funny, with a sticker-laden cargo box leaning over one edge of the roof and a giant green canoe off the other. Inside the box we put all our fishing gear, including waders, tackle boxes, five fly rods, four spinning rods, one bait box and two folding, comfortable fabric chairs.

My car is named the Mule, because it carries so much and goes so far. It is a 1992 Nissan Pathfinder, black, four-door with 200,000 miles. Numerous dents and paint scrapings decorate its side (most with stories involving me being an idiot), and the spare-tire carrier carries a lot of rust. This car has seen a lot of rough miles, but still stands proud, even now with such a huge load dominating the roof. *Sacagawea* makes the drive to St. Louis take a little longer than we think it should have. It hurts fuel efficiency and makes for some scary driving in the wind. When a herd of whitetail deer appears in the highway around midnight in Wyoming though, the canoe
does not interfere with the necessary defensive maneuvers (swerves, brakes, accelerations etc.).

We keep the *Sacagawea* locked to the Mule’s roof rack. At every stop along the Missouri River we look to put it in, but end up leaving the canoe on top of the Mule. We both say to each other, “We could put in here, I guess,” but never end up doing it. Truthfully, the river scares us both. It churns past us, brown and unfathomable. Huge eddies and rip tides abound. Every fisherman tells us about drowned friends or loved ones.

So we leave the canoe on top of the Mule until Iowa. We put it into numerous Iowa ponds, including Blue Pond, Browns Lake, Lewis and Clark Lake and Onawea Lake. We find bass and panfish in these lakes.

We never put the canoe into the reservoirs of the upper Missouri. These giant bodies of water are just too intimidating for us. The winds that build three- to five-foot waves would surely boss us around with authority.

In Montana and Idaho we use one of my two boats for our fishing trips. They are both designed for floating rivers, and get blown around on lakes and reservoirs. One is a 16-foot, fiberglass drift boat made by ClackaCraft of Idaho, named *Joannie Marie*. The other is a rubber, 13-foot NRS raft with a rowing frame, named *Sheena Moon*. On most trips, *Joannie Marie* is the preferred boat, because of her incredible capacity to carry gear, people and dogs. On rivers that involve big drops, white water and diversion dams, the rubber *Sheena Moon* gets the nod. On the Montana lakes, we use *Sacajawea*. 
We never get a boat into the Columbia River. We try hitching a ride into the fishing zones at the mouth of the Columbia, but never succeed in getting out. That is still a trip we need to make.

We camp out every night\textsuperscript{16}, which requires a lot of gear. Nick brings a Sierra Design two-person tent, which is just big enough for Nick. I start the trips with an eight-year-old Eureka dome tent. One night, while we are camping across Lake Frances Case from Chamberlain, a torrential downpour, accompanied with a magnificent wind, my tent failed miserably in keeping me dry. The next day I drive to the Cerebella's store in Mitchell, SD, and buy a new tent. I get a Eureka three-person, four-season tent, which has a vestibule built into the rain flap. After I get this tent, Nick stops taking his, as the tent proves to be rooms and weatherproof.

We both have sleeping bags, sleeping pads and extra blankets and tarps.

We bring propane stoves, a propane grill and a propane lamp for cooking and light. A box in the car carries all this, as well as numerous pots, pans, utensils and other kitchen goodies, as well as an axe and saw to cut firewood.

Even with all this cooking gear, we end up eating at restaurants and diners often. Most days we pass on cooking our own breakfast and instead find a good greasy spoon for eggs and bacon. Many days this proves to be a good idea, as there are always fishermen at greasy spoons.

\textbf{Fishing Gear}

\textsuperscript{16} Not quite true. We sleep at friend's houses when we can (St. Louis, Portland and Three Forks). One night, in Pick City, we got a hotel room because it was raining heavily. We stayed at a Boarding House, where we hung up two nights worth of wet clothing, tents and one dog.
We both bring an assortment of fly rods and spinning poles on the trip. I have a five-weight Orvis, a six-weight Fenwick and a ten-weight St. Croix, all nine-feet long. I also have a Zebco spinning rod and reel combo as well as a Shakespeare rod with a Shimano reel. I have many boxes full of flies, a box of lures, a Styrofoam work container Pony from Pierre left with me and a bait bucket.

Nick carries a five-weight Browning and a Shakespeare spinning rod.

The Dogs

Three dogs come for much of the trip. Hunter is an eleven-year-old collie, Dagny, a border collie, is the same age, and Trout, four years old, is a Mountain Swiss mix. They were all very well behaved and never caused problems. Honestly.

Appendix II

The Fish of the Lewis and Clark Trail

Catfish

Of all the grand fish that inhabit the Missouri River, the catfish deserves the most praise. This fish thrived in here long before Lewis and Clark’s time. Archeology digs of Native American sites along the river have unearthed catfish scales over 10,000 years old. The species survived droughts, floods, chemical pollution, and over-fishing and
introduced competition. Today, two hundred years after the Corp of Discovery reported fantastic numbers of catfish caught (often in the hundreds), the Missouri River still stands out as one of the top catfish rivers in North America.

Historically, the Missouri River was an important catfish fishery for both commercial and recreational anglers. Fresh catfish was a staple of the St. Louis market even when Lewis first set foot there. However, in 1992, Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri outlawed commercial catfishing in the Missouri River, in reaction to surveyed anglers reporting fewer catfish caught, especially large ones. Since the ban, surveys show that that angler harvest rates and average fish size have increased by as much as 25 percent. More notably, all the bait-and-tackle shops along the river have recent stories of giant cats and pictures of monsters up on the walls.

Catching cats is often more about catching dinner than hooking the hogs. Most of the fish you catch are pretty small, sometimes up to one-to-two pounds. Catfish are mostly caught to eat, and any angler will tell you the small ones taste the best. However, when it comes to sport fishing, it is the big fish that really catch your attention. People pull 50+ pounders out of the Missouri River yearly. The river produced Missouri’s state-record blue cat in 1991, a monstrous 103-pounder. Missouri’s largest flathead, a 77.5-pounder, also came from the Missouri River.

The channel cat and the less common blue catfish are scavengers that clean up dead fish and worms from the river bottom. Their eyesight is poor and so they have developed a great sense of smell, which allows them to follow their noses to food.

Which explains some of the concoctions fishermen have created as bait. Some simply use minnows, frogs or chicken guts. If the bait is old and stinky, all the better.
Others mix baits of cheese that's gone bad or brew up a batches of coagulated beef or chicken blood, heated with thickeners like flour or cornstarch. One St. Louis fellow uses squirrel hearts.

It is a different thing when fishing for the third major sport catfish. The flathead catfish is not a scavenger at all, but a predator. It will have nothing to do with messy, smelly baits. It wants live baits, the fresher and friskier the better.

Fishing with bait such as minnows, worms, cornmeal and commercial catfish bait is the most popular way to fish for cats. If you are looking for dinner, the best way is to fish from shore, with two hooks and a weight. As in all other kinds of bottom fishing, a slip-sinker rig is a good idea, since it allows the fish to bump and peck at the bait, and eventually run off with it without feeling resistance.

Cast into the eddy behind a wing dam and sit down. Go ahead and bring a chair to the river's edge. Also get something to prop your rod up so you can watch the tip, a forked stick will do. At some point a catfish will eat your bait. The rod tip will bounce a little, and then start straining. You just have to set the hook and reel the fish in.

It sounds easy, but it is like every other kind of fishing- the longer you do it, the better you get. At least, that is our excuse. We had a tough time knowing just when the cat was good to hook, and missed a few fish by setting too early. The old timers knew exactly when to hit it. The good ones don’t even have to leave their chairs.

This is good fishing for dinner and the chance at a big fish. However, if all you want is to catch one of those monsters you see pictures of at all the bait shops, you may have to do things a little differently.
First of all, a person needs to make the commitment to catching one of these mammoth beasts. The way to fish for these fish is unlike most other fishing strategies. Most old timers have their own secret and time-tested methods—jug fishing and trot lines both common methods—but limb lining is my favorite big-fish method.¹⁷

Bluegill

These obliging fish are perfect fish to fish for. They will attack almost anything, fight like banshees, and taste fantastic. They like shallow water, and so are generally found close to shore.

A good time to catch bluegill is during their spawning season, which generally runs from mid-may to mid-June. Bluegills use their tail fins to sweep out nests in sand or gravel in shallow water. Male bluegills protect the nests and will strike at any artificial lure or fly cast toward them.

After spawning, bluegill move to deeper water, where they look for cover such as submerged trees, stump fields and automobile chassis. Bluegill bite on a variety of natural baits, including earthworms, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles and ants. They also will chase most artificial lures, including small popping bugs and wet or dry flies.

¹⁷ The first step to limb line fishing is to get the right equipment. Get a big hefty hook and a spool of kite string. Then, just as the sun is setting, head to the river and catch a pan fish or a little carp. This is a fun time to pull out the fly rod and fish with a little popper, or a wooly bugger.

Once you have caught a fish, say a blue gill, find a tree with a branch that sticks out over the water. The good branches all have kite string remnants flapping in the breeze. Tie the kite line to the branch (the preferred knot seems to be the four-times hitch), and tie off the hook so it sits maybe a foot under the water. Then hook the blue gill through the tail, toss the fish in the water and go away. The next morning swing back by and hoist your huge catch out of the water. Bring a friend, because these things can get tough to carry. Be careful not to drop the really fat ones, they may explode.
In fact, bluegills are one of the finest fish to go after with a fly rod. With a floating line and two-pound leader, a fisherman can quickly catch a limit. Lots of bluegill can be taken on nymphs and wet flies, but it is a lot more fun to catch them on the surface. Casting a small popper with rubber legs into a pond with blue gill in it instantly draws all the fish toward it. As you slowly pop the popper back, the fish will follow it, seemingly confused but not willing to leave this strange thing alone. More courageous fish will dart at the fly, snapping at it, causing you to miss sets, but when you hook on to one, they offer a great fight. In fact, pound for pound, many anglers will say it is the scrappiest fish out there. Even though these fish top out at about a pound-and-a-half, they are always worth the pursuit.

**Crappie (pronounced “croppie”)**

Like the bluegill, this is a scrappy panfish that makes a great dinner. These get a little bigger than bluegill, sometimes topping two pounds.

Crappies are seasonal in their habitat selection. In late winter and early spring, crappies are found near deep-water structures along tributaries and backwaters. As spring progresses and the Missouri nears flood stage, crappie move in tributaries and off-channel areas.

As the hot summer months approach, crappies seek cooler water and rock structures along the main channel border. With cooler autumn temperatures, crappies return to the side channels. Fallen trees and bank structure usually produce good crappie habitat.
Bass

There are five types of bass that call the Missouri River valley home: largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, striped and white bass. All five of these fish are considered a game fish, and all five can be caught in the Missouri River below the Yankton Dam.

This lower section of the Missouri hosts a vibrant population of bass. The muddy water hosts fantastic bass habitat along its entire lower length. The wing dams that protrude into the river teem with bass, mostly spotted and white bass. These fish cruise the eddies behind the posts, eating smaller baitfish, insects and whatever else floats in from the current.

The many bodies of water besides the river that dot the Missouri River valley bottom also host large numbers of bass. The larger lakes that host state parks are all managed as bass fisheries, and often offer fantastic fishing opportunities. Striper bass and largemouth bass are the most often stocked fish in these waters. Lures and rubber worms are the favorite fishing methods for stalking these bass, but poppers and surface plugs also catch fish.

Farmer’s ponds and other similar small bodies of water are similarly stocked with bass, mostly with largemouth. These little ponds can generally be fished simply by asking a landowners permission. We have yet to be turned down for permission to fish any farm pond along the Missouri River.
Largemouth Bass

Of all the bass, the largemouth bass is the most oft pursued. These fish are famous for explosive strikes and fantastic furious fights. Largemouth bass prefer off-channel habitat near cover such as structures, downed trees or riprap. Good places for catching largemouth bass include wing dikes and bank stabilization areas, where the bass take advantage of the cover provided. Places with large rocks are ideal largemouth bass areas.

These fish can get large in the Missouri River drainage. Bass larger than five pounds are common. The Missouri state record is just less than 14 pounds. Anglers pursue these fish with lures, bait and flies. The most popular bass lure of all time may be the rubber worm twitched along the bottom, but there are many other methods also. Spoons, Rapalas, spinner baits, jigs and plugs are popular lures. Streamers, flogs, mice and poppers are good flies for fly-fishermen. Minnows, frogs and worms make for good bait. Regardless of style, when one of these fish takes a hook, the angler has a fight ahead.

White Bass

White bass are plentiful in the Missouri River. Because they like swifter water, white bass are a common catch out of the main channel of the lower river. These fish offer fast action, a good fight and make for fine eating.
Below dams and in front of wing dikes are also good places to find this fish. The best time to catch white bass is during low, clear water conditions in late summer and throughout late fall.

Like most sport fish, white bass are sight feeders. Effective bait is a small minnow or an artificial lure. Yellow and white lead head jigs are also efficient. Because these fish eat so many baitfishes, stripping a streamer works for the fly-fisherman.

**Freshwater Drum**

Drum are very common on the Missouri River. Drum like swift water and can often be caught in the main channel, especially below locks and dams and in flowing side channels. The best bait is the earthworm, but they can also be caught on a variety of natural and artificial baits. Swinging a wet fly through the current is a great way to chase drum.

Drum are a tasty white fish. Immediately fillet the fish and put the fillets on ice, as they can lose their excellent taste if not taken care of quickly. Drum taste wonderful when rolled in flour and corn meal mixture and deep-fried at 385 degrees. Freshwater drum are also tasty blackened. They are closely related to the red drum, prized as “blackened redfish” along the Gulf Coast.

**Carp**
Some fishermen call carp trash fish, but many anglers will tell you the carp is a fun fish to catch. Carp are renowned for their fighting ability, their willingness to take almost any kind of bait or artificial, and as a tasty meal.

The carp is a member of the minnow family, a large member. Originally an Asiatic fish, the carp was introduced from China into Great Britain and continental Europe in 1227, when the Romans still occupied Europe. For centuries, they were gourmet table fish and were selectively cultivated in ponds. They were brought to this country in the 1872. The idea was, we think, that all these people in the new world are going to need something to eat. Either that or some sentimental European did not want to leave his or her favorite pastime behind. Either way, the introduction of carp to the new world is an example of absolute adaptation. By 1956, carp had been recorded in all lower 48 states.

This fish, often compared to coyotes because of their ability to adapt to many different environments, can be found in all the waters of the Missouri River, although their numbers decline above Great Falls. They prefer the warmer waters of lakes, ponds, canals, ditches and sloughs.

Carp are essentially vegetarians that multiply profusely. They devour plants, roots, tubers, algae, and on occasion worms, insects, crustaceans and fish eggs. Like many bottom feeders, they tend to roil the water, leaving a signature muddy tint in the water.

Tight-line fishing around submerged brush and rocks or above a wing dike are both effective ways of catching carp. Many anglers fish with dough bait and have their own dough ball recipe, but carp are not real selective. They will eat worms and live bait,
jigs, lures and flies. Dawn and dusk are good times of the day to catch carp, and the best
time of the year is June through September.

**Northern Pike**

“A torpedo with teeth,” they’re called. Throw in a nasty attitude and you have the
Northern Pike. Natives of the Missouri drainage, pike can be found in most of the
Missouri reservoirs. Known for the quick, explosive strikes, often after a length stalk,
pike may be the meanest of the game fish along the Trail. In addition pike are very tasty.

The pike are generally the king of the hill in these lakes—the biggest and most
aggressive predators around. These fish will eat anything that swims, and act the same
way toward fisherman’s offerings. While only a relative minority of fishermen stalks the
pike specifically, many catch them on their walleye, bass or catfish rigs.

Pike spawn in the spring, and pike like to spawn in flooded grass meadows.
During high water years, they can often be found in town parks where grasses are
submerged. Because flooding vastly improves pike spawning habitat, pike numbers
generally increase after high-water years.

Pike like to cruise, generally avoiding moving currents all together. They are
individual creatures, gathering together only to spawn. Instead they hunt alone, circling
their Stillwater territory, looking for prey. Pike grow quickly; after five years a pike can
be 30 inches long and weigh up to 8 pounds. They achieve this weight gain by eating lots
of fish. They eat yellow perch, bullheads, carp and bluegill, anything they come upon in
their silent journeys around the reservoir. This includes salamanders, crayfish and baby muskrats.

Because of their voracious eating habits, Pike will jump on most any lure throughout the fishing season. They are notoriously picky during the spawn in spring, but after spawn their appetite returns quickly. They eat big gaudy spoons, noisy plugs and flashy spinnerbait. Bait such as chubs or shiners work well also.

Fly-fishing for pike has grown in popularity the last few years. Anglers work long streamers through quiet backwaters, often using patterns like the Clausser Minnows, Zonkers or wholly buggers. Other specialty flies such as mice, drowned mice or frogs also work. Even big poppers on the surface can catch pike.

Whether fishing with flies, lures or bait, it is important to always use a steel leader. The pike’s teeth are sharp and vicious! They will slice cleanly through monofilament, and an angler’s hand if they get the chance. Keep your fingers away from these teeth! Use pliers to remove hooks, grabbing them from behind their gills.

“I don’t know why everyone doesn’t fish for northerns,” says Bert Schumacker, a retired electrician who lives in Chamberlain, South Dakota. “They fight hard, a lot harder than walleye. And they taste better than walleye.”

**Paddlefish**

Imagine a blind shark with a giant shovel for a nose that lives in fresh water and eats only microscopic plankton. That’s pretty much a paddlefish. These creatures are primitive fishes whose history can be traced back over 200 million years. They used to
live throughout the Mississippi drainage, but their numbers have declined along since the main-stem dams on the Missouri River destroyed their spawning habitat.

The reason Silas Goodrich never caught a paddlefish was he was fishing with bait on a hook. Because paddlefish seine water with their large mouths eating only zooplankton and other invertebrates, they are impervious to any offering on a hook. The only way to catch these giant fish is to snag them.

Anglers go after paddlefish with heavy salt-water casting rods. They lob large treble hooks and with heavy lead sinkers (6-8 ounce weights) as far as they can out into the river, then repeatedly swing their rods swiftly backward, hoping to snag a paddlefish with the trebles.

This snagging makes for memorable fishing. First of all, the fish can get huge. Fifty-pound fish are common, and the occasional 100-pounder is still caught. Their large size, combined with the wing-like effect their noses create in the swift Missouri currents, makes landing one of these behemoths truly a task. Add to the scene a dozen or more other snaggers, all casting into the same rushing current, all chasing the same giant fish.

Paddlefish snagging in the Missouri River occurs mostly in the tail water below Gavins Point Dam. During the snagging season, which is kept short to allow paddlefish ample opportunity to spawn and reproduce, anglers line the rock walls below the dam, repeatedly casting out to the current and snagging backwards. There is an etiquette here that is strictly adhered to. An angler who casts across others lines or snags another anglers lines is frowned upon indeed. Landing these fish is always a two-person job, and it is assumed you will help your neighbor land a fish.
There used to be an open season on paddlefish, with people lined up below the dams during spawning season, snagging absolutely giant fish on cast after cast. These fish were often bigger than 100 pounds (the South Dakota state record is a 120 pound, 12-once fish caught in 1979 below Fort Randall dam), and the fish were caught for sport almost as much as they were caught for food. Old black-and-white photographs on many local restaurant walls show fishermen with paddlefish as tall as the men that held them, the fish often outnumbering the anglers.

The paddlefish are mostly caught in the waters immediately below Gavins Point Dam, but their habitat extends far down the Missouri River. They used to be common in Iowa and Missouri. The Iowa state record paddlefish of 107 pounds was caught in 1981 by Robert Pranschke in a side channel off the river. The next day Pranschke was back in the same spot at the same time, when he snagged into another big fish. The fish that he snagged on that second day was big enough to pull his boat around the lake. He got so scared by the strength of this fish, the fish that was pulling him around like a toy, that he cut the line.18

Corp of Engineers hatchery programs, located at the base of all their dams, are very active in managing and maintaining area fisheries, especially the paddlefish. There is an understanding that the eradication of this old and noble species would not be a good thing, and after their numbers plummeted with the building of the dams, the taming of the river and their reputation as a game fish, the Corps started their hatchery program. This

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18 This story related to us in a bar in Onawa, IO, by a woman claiming to be Pranschke’s brother. The side channel where the paddlefish was caught is called Lake Onawa, and is notorious for good fishing. All fishermen we talk to in the area tell us to go to Lake Onawa, except for one man in a Decatur, NB, bar. He tells us that sure Lake Onawa is good for sport fish, but if we want to go after a truly fun fish (carp), we should stick to the Missouri River.
includes the milking paddlefish eggs from wild and captive paddlefish, the rising of the fry to larger fish able to survive in the river, and their release into the wild.

**How to Clean a Paddlefish**

People do not snag paddlefish just for the sport of it. Paddlefish is delicious meat. Whether cut in steaks and grilled, poached in butter or cut up in pieces and fried, every angler talks about its fantastic taste. It is often compared in taste to lobster.\(^{19}\)

First, remove the notochord by cutting around the narrow part of the tail to the soft cord, then pull the cord and the tail away as one unit. Remove the head and entrails. Next, slice the body crossways into one- to two-inch steaks. Lay each steak on a flat surface and trim the off the skin, along with the red, dark outer layer of flesh. It is important to get all this red meat, to leave only the inner, lighter-colored meat. The fish is now ready for smoking, frying, deep-frying, broiling or any other method used to prepare fish.

**Walleye**

Walleye are simply the most sought after fish in the Dakotas. A good-looking fish with spooky marble eyes, this fish is better known for its meat than for its sport.

The walleye is a native Dakota fish that have thrived in the lakes of the Missouri. A member of the perch family, the walleye gets its name from its glassy pupil. The eyes

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\(^{19}\) In all fairness, there are numerous fish along the Lewis and Clark Trail that are compared in taste to the lobster; these include the ling, paddlefish, sturgeon and crabs.
get their color from light that is reflected through the pupil by material in the back of the
eye. These eyes allow the walleye to see well in low light conditions, and make them
efficient nighttime feeders.

The main reason walleye are such a popular sport fish is because they are so tasty.
When you hook into a walleye you generally know it, because they are not known as
being much of a fighter. They are certainly nothing like a trout or a largemouth bass. But
almost everyone you talk to say the walleye is the best freshwater fish to eat, and after
having a few we agree. The white meat is flavorful, but not overly fishy, and is best
prepared as a fillet or as a fish sandwich. Walleye are bony fish, so fillet them for best
results.

While many anglers chase walleye in boats, walleye fishing can be very good
from shore. Walleye like structure, so casting from the bank often leads to success, as
long as you know where to cast.

Anglers seeking walleye should look for some type of structure, such as a rocky
bank or point that drops off quickly into deeper water. Walleye also like sandy bottoms.
Look for areas where the bank is sandy but drops off fairly quickly from the shore.

Walleye fishing, like all fishing, can be inconsistent. Some days, everyone on the
lake will catch his or her limit. On other days, most everyone comes back empty handed.

Walleye travel in schools of similar sized fish. They are night feeders for the most
part, but certainly can be caught during the day, particularly during overcast weather or
when the wind has put a chop on the water. Dawn and dusk are good times to fish.
Spring and fall are often angler’s favorite times for walleye fishing. Walleye spawn in the spring, and the pre-spawn period is known as a big fish time, as the large females garner strength for the spawn.

Walleye, and their look-alike cousin the sauger, live in both the river and reservoirs. The walleye prefer the quieter waters while sauger stick to the currents. This may explain the biggest physical difference between the two fish. Walleye are shorter and stouter, while sauger are thinner and longer.

One local standby for walleye is a ½-ounce white, chartreuse or yellow jig tipped with a minnow, fished vertically beneath a drifting boat. Live-bait rigs with red, chartreuse, white, silver or blue spinner blades also work well.

A walleye’s colors vary, depending on the waters they live in, but they are generally olive-brown on top changing to a white or yellow on the belly, with a batch black pattern. A white tip is found on the lower lobe of the tail.

**Trout**

Trout fishermen enjoy waxing poetically about the magical experience of stalking the wild trout. Stories full of words like “education of solitude” and “mystical tranquility” appear in print yearly. Trout fishermen find each other in bars and talk about hatches, upstream mends and the merits of a 16-inch Rapala over an 8-inch one.

Non-fishermen think trout anglers crazy; other fishermen often think the same thing. As we drive the Lewis and Clark Trail and tell anglers where we live, instead of the envy we expect to hear in people’s voices, we hear sympathy as they say, “You just
have trout there, don’t you?” Some folk say trout taste inferior to white-meat fish like the
catfish or walleye. Others say they fight poorly compared to a pike or bass.

We listen to people’s negative opinions of trout and nod our heads, rarely arguing.
When some folk say they enjoy trout fishing, we nod then also, admit we like it
ourselves. But the truth remains that we love trout fishing. We both live in Montana
because of the superb trout fishing in the state.

Trout are the predominant game fish of the Rocky Mountains. Although there are
a number of other worthy game fish in these waters, trout are the most eagerly sought
after. Their picky eating habits and fleet races once hooked make them irresistible to
anglers. Their pink meat, while not as sought after as the white meat of walleye, is still
very tasty.

Rainbow Trout

The rainbow trout, once native to the Pacific coast from southern California to
Alaska, has since been introduced to many waters across the world. The rainbow fights
acrobatically, and provides an exciting challenge to most anglers. Rainbows feed on
insects, crustaceans, worms and smaller fishes. They are a muscular and resourceful fish,
and have earned a reputation as fun to stalk.

The rainbow trout, like all other trout, is extremely variable in color, spot
formation and body form. The trout is normally silver, with a soft-green or light-blue
back. The gill plates sport a little red, the lower fins a little yellow and the adipose fin a
faint border in black. The most obvious physical characteristic is the rainbow stripe, a red band that runs the length of the rainbow body, from gill plate to tail.

The rainbow lives in all the Trail waters from Iowa to the Pacific Ocean. Because they can adapt to a range of water conditions, and because they grow to good sizes and offer such a good fight, the rainbow is the most heavily stocked of the trout.

Rainbows spawn in the spring, their bodies lit up in color. As the water warms and the rainbow start moving in April and May, fishing can be hot.

**Brown trout**

No trout various in color and appearance as much as the brown trout. Sometimes a rich buttery color with orange spots, sometimes silver sided and sometimes green and yellow, the brown trout vary from river to river on the Lewis and Clark Trail.

The first brown trout appear in the tailwaters of the Dakota dams. In these fish Meccas, brown trout up to twenty pounds can be caught from the deep holes, pulled out with bait fished with a lot of weight. In the Missouri through Montana, browns two to ten pounds can be caught on flies and lures. Once in the high streams, small browns live in all but the highest of headwaters.²⁰

Brown trout are native to Europe but have been part of the American landscape for over 100 years. Introduced to Montana and Idaho late in the 1800s, browns adapted well, creating a large wild population.

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²⁰ Brown trout live in the Missouri, the Gallatin all the way into Yellowstone Park but no higher, the Madison all the way into the headwaters, the Jefferson all the way, the Bitterroot, the Clark Fork, the Blackfoot, and the Yellowstone. They do not, however, live in the Lochsa, Clearwater, Snake or Columbia River.
Brown trout are known to attack a wide variety of foods. Pumping the stomach of a brown trout is always an experience. Mayflies, worms, crayfish, minnows, frogs and mice can come out of even a small one.

These fish are strong and stubborn fighters, and easily grow over twenty inches in length. The bigger brown trout eat mostly other fish, but smaller browns can often be easily caught with dry flies on the surface.

**Cutthroat Trout**

Cutthroat trout are easily identified; they have what looks like a cut throat. Two orange-red slashes line their jaws, looking every bit like damage from a blade.

These are the native fish, the fish Lewis was so impressed by when he found them above Great Falls. This is the fish that Silas caught so many of during their days through western Montana.

The cutthroat no longer live in such numbers as Silas found. Warmer rivers, introduced competitors and agriculture run-off have hurt this sensitive fish, and now they can only be found in the colder headwaters of the Missouri and Columbia.

Two types of cutthroat can still be found along the Trail. Yellowstone Cutthroats, with rich yellow backs and dark spots thicker by the tail, can still be found in the Yellowstone River, although most live higher up, in Yellowstone Park. Westslope Cutthroat, greener bodied fish with almost a rainbow stripe running the length of their body, are not in the Missouri but still live in good numbers in the Bitterroot, Clark Fork and Blackfoot rivers.
Cutthroat spawn in the spring, when they turn from a colorful fish into a fiesta. Their gill plates turn beet red, the cuts at their throat look as if dripping blood, and their bodies color vividly. Already one of the most beautiful fish along the trail, in spawning dress they are unsurpassed in beauty.

Steelhead Trout

Of all the game fish that call the Lewis and Clark Trail home, the steelhead is perhaps the most mystical. Part freshwater fish, part salt water, the steelhead represents northwest fishing at its finest. First, steelhead get big. The steelhead in the Columbia drainage average ten to twenty-five pounds, with fish in the thirties possible. Secondly, they fight like hell. When they jump, you feel the sea in them. Known for spectacular acrobatics and viscous runs, steelhead trout send pulses racing. Thirdly, these are some of the most beautiful wild fish in the world.

The steelhead gets its name from the metal-looking blue coloring down its head and back. Their native range stretches from the Alaska to southern California. Unlike its close relative the rainbow, the steelhead is an anadromous fish. They hatch in the cold headwaters, live their for a couple years, then migrate over one thousand miles downstream to the sea. There they grow large following schools of baitfish. Then the urge to spawn calls, and they make their way back to their birthplaces. Unlike salmon, steelheads survive their spawn, and are able to spawn again. The fish that return for a second spawn can get enormous.
The dams of the Columbia and Snake rivers stopped the easy migration for steelhead and salmon. Now, steelhead navigate through eight dams in order to get from the sea to the Clearwater River. Very few of them make it, and because of this, steelhead numbers are dangerously low in the Columbia drainage.

Stocking programs supplement the wild steelhead population, enabling anglers to catch good numbers of steelhead trout. The various stocking schedules have resulted in steelhead runs every month of the year. The means that when you fish here, steelhead will be running.

Don’t expect easy fishing, though. Whether bait, lure or fly-fishing, steelhead cause a lot of frustration. First, they have to be found. Steelhead are not everywhere in the river. They tend to congregate in deep holes where they conserve energy for a push up river to spawn. Once over their spawning beds, steelhead can be spot-fished to from shore, but that generally means a lot of walking to find a fish. Second, they have to be hooked. Spawning steelhead have little interest in food, and getting them to take a hook often requires a lot of patience and numerous casts. Once hooked, they have to be landed, which can be the hardest part of all.

Few people have success their first few times steelhead fishing. This kind of fishing requires time and patience. What works best for us is when someone shows us good holes, ones where fish are known to live. The steelhead is almost worth hiring a guide for.

Salmon
Salmon are tied more closely to early Americans cultures than any other fish. Like the mystical beliefs tied into the yearly arrival of bison to Great Plains tribes, salmon runs meant more than just food for northwest tribes; the fish represented a harmonious balance in the world.

If salmon do act as a barometer, than the western rivers are out of whack. Where once ran tens of millions of salmon a year, today only a small fraction exists. This decimation of salmon numbers did not happened overnight, but has been going on since early settlement days.

Salting and curing salmon became big business for early white settlers. By the 1880s, forty Columbia River canneries were sending salmon east on the new Northern Pacific Railroad transcontinental railroad. As the demand for salmon grew, methods for catching salmon changed in order to catch more fish. In 1879 the fish wheel was introduced to the river. This was a contraption that would literally scoop salmon out of the river by the hundreds. The wheels would be set up in places where salmon ran thick, pulling the salmon from the river and dumping them into canneries. By 1913, fish wheels were scooping up 35 tons of fish on one day.

By 1883 people were already noticing a decline in salmon numbers. This started a trend that continued for over 100 years. In the 1990s the salmon counts have finally started going back up. Still, the numbers are not promising. Twelve million salmon spawned yearly up the Columbia 200 years ago, less than one million do today, and eighty percent of them are stocked.

Columbia River salmon supported entire cultures in Lewis and Clark’s time. Today, an entire culture has sprung up that supports salmon in the Columbia River.
Nowhere along the Trail does the heavy hand of government management play as important a role in an area’s fishery than on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Here, on rivers known throughout history for teeming with runs of wild salmon, fish populations would be virtually non-existent without heavy stocking. State and federal stocking programs pour billions of salmon and steelhead smolt into the river yearly, all in an attempt to keep fish populations from disappearing.

How did this happen? What happened to those salmon runs that fed entire tribes of Indians, runs that numbered in the millions of fishes a year? Well, in a word, dams happened. Four major dams stop the Columbia River of the Lewis and Clark Trail, four more hold up the Snake. These eight dams, built for various reasons and different times, hinder the salmon on their way down the river, and on the way back.

These dams have all but destroyed the native population of salmon. Salmon hatch in the cold waters of the upper rivers such as the Lochsa. They stay where they hatch until they are roughly five inches long, and then they make their way to the Pacific, where they grow to adulthood. They swim the whole way downriver backwards, keeping the current in their gills. They have to make their way past eight dams, each with turbines that crush up to 15 percent of them. The giant slack waters created by these dams provide another obstacle and are filled with introduced predators like walleye, pike and bass. Before the dams, the Snake and Columbia rivers carried smolts 900 miles in under a week. Today, the same trip takes up to two months.

Once salmon reach the sea they go about the business of maturing. They roam the Pacific Ocean, from Japan to the Aleutian Islands, diving incredibly deep to avoid sea lions and killer whales. Then they get the urge to head back up river and lay some eggs,
and they have to make their way back up past all the same obstacles. This time they have
the added difficulty of getting past all the anglers out looking for them.

All in all, less than one percent of salmon hatched make their way back up to their
birthplace. So hatcheries work to produce more salmon, and the cycle begins again. All
this just so anglers can keep catching fish. Recreational fishing brings in a lot of money
to the Columbia River basin, enough money so the states work hard to maintain a fishery.

Stocked Salmon

An estimated eighty percent of the salmon swimming in the Columbia River
drainage are products of hatcheries. Hatcheries produce so many salmon in order to let
the wild fish survive. For this reason, hatcheries clip the adipose fin from the salmon
smolt they release. When an angler catches a salmon, a quick look at the back fin
identifies the fish as wild or not. Wild fish generally have to be returned (even if
regulations say a couple can be kept, we believe the wild ones should be always released)
while stocked fish can be kept, in season.

Three types of salmon live in the Columbia River basin: the chinook, the sockeye
and the coho. In the Columbia River drainage, salmon are identified by where they
spawn, which is where they come from. In this manner, some stocks are considered
endangered or even extinct.
The Chinook

Also called a king salmon, the chinook is the larger of the two salmon. Ranging from 12 to 50 pounds and up to five feet long, these fish are known as hard fighters.

Chinook run up the Columbia three times a year—spring, summer and fall. They make their way as far up river as they can, always looking for colder water. They like to hold in deep pools of the upper rivers.

The easiest way to identify a chinook is by its size. If it is over 30 pounds, it is a chinook. If it is smaller, look for a black interior to the mouth and scattered black spots across a green back.

Snake River chinook are listed as endangered.

Coho salmon

Smaller than chinooks, the coho has the reputation as the fighters of the family. Known for aggressive strikes and aerial acrobatics, the coho are commonly called “silvers” because they are bright silver when caught in the saltwater. Their bodies turn crimson as they work their way up freshwater streams. Their mouths are white with black gums. Small spots are scattered on their back, with no spots on the bottom half of a forked tail.

The Snake River chinook runs are listed as endangered under the ESA in 1992.
Sockeye

The smallest salmon, the basic color of a sockeye is platinum or silver, with a back that is green leaning toward black. These get bright red as they spawn. There are very few sockeye in the Columbia River drainage, although historically their numbers have been in the millions. Columbia River sockeye are listed as endangered.

Sturgeon

Our first taste of Columbia River fishing we find at the base of McNary dam, west of Kennenwick. Here we find a dozen people of carrying ages and sex, casting into the waters below the dam. They use 12-foot casting rods with salt-water reels, casting heavy weights baited with dead fish parts out into the current. Six fishing rods sit propped up with lines in the water, and the anglers watch the rods as they drink beer and talk. This is sturgeon fishing.

"It’s like hooking one of these rods to a pick-up truck and trying to slow it down," says Lyndon Bayman, who comes down here most evenings to fish, describing catching a white sturgeon.

“You hook a fish, you’re going to get a blister,” adds his buddy Brad Limmiyotti, showing us the blisters on his reel hand. “When they start fighting you just have to hang on.”

Bayman shows us how he ties his bait to the hook, using an elastic thread to keep a herring’s head on the hook. The weight hangs below and away from the hook. A series
of nasty spikes are welded to the weight. Bayman explains that they help keep the weight anchored in the rocks while the bait floats above. The other anglers suggest other baits such as pickled herring, squid, shad, “anything pickled,” shrimp scampi and salmon steaks.

While Bayman casts the talk turns to other fish in the river. Walleye, catfish, smallmouth, salmon, steelhead, a few trout, a few largemouth ("down nearer Patterson"), shad, sucker, carp, squawfish and lampreys are all discussed. They all agree that the most exciting fish, however, is the white sturgeon.

"Hooking them is easy, it’s landing them that’s hard," says Limmiyotti. "A eight foot fish will knock you down without even noticing you’re there."

Just then the rod baited with the herring’s head twitches and suddenly three men stand by the rod. It moves again, Bayman picks the rod up. The 12-foot rod towers above him. He waits and we are all silent, then he hammers the rod above his head, setting the hook hard.

"Got him!" he yells as his rod bows. He moves the rod tip over the other rods, letting line scream out of his reel. We all look into the river and see the sturgeon jump. It is an incredibly sight! This fish is huge, easily bigger than six feet, with armored plating and spikes running the length of its body. It flies straight up out of the river; easily clearing a couple feet before it crashes down, sending up a wall of spray.

Bayman gives the rod to a burly member of the party, Monty Williams, who works for twenty minutes trying to land this fish. The sun sets while we watch him sweat and strain. In the last light of the day he loses the fish when the line breaks. The one look is all we get.
Appendix III

Fishing Reports, Contacts and Information

It is impossible for us to include all the fishing techniques needed for fishing the Lewis and Clark Trail. For that type of specific information, the following addresses and web sites offer up-to-date fishing information.

T.Hargrove Flyfishing, Inc.
A fantastic flyshop, filled with delicious characters
9024 Manchester Rd. St.Louis, MO 63144 (314) 968-4223.
www.thargrove.com

Statewide Weekly Fishing Report
From St. Louis to Iowa border, all the information for Missouri River fishing
www.conservation.state.mo.us/fish/fishrt/index.shtml

The Kansas Angler
A great webs site for reports on Kansas and Iowa fishing.
www.kansasangler.com/iowareport.html

Fishing Reports for South Dakota
www.state.sd.us/gfp/fishing/Info/Reports.htm

Fishing Reports for North Dakota.
Fish and Game offers a very good fish report for North Dakota
www.fishandgame.com/nd1.htm

Fishing Reports for Missouri River Reservoirs
From the Garrison Tailrace to the South Dakota Border
www.fishingbuddy.com/report/missouririver.asp

Fishing Buddy, the Dakota’s Internet Outdoor Heaven
Updated fishing reports and information.
www.fishingbuddy.com
**Fishing Report for Fort Peck Lake**
www.outdoornet.com/fishreports/media/usa/MT/198.shtml

**Montana Outdoors**
fantastic fishing connection, on my favorites list
http://www.montanaoutdoor.com/fishing.php3

**Wolf Creek Outfitters & Terminal Tackle.**
2185 Little Wolf Creek Rd.
Wolf Creek, Montana 59648
Phone: (406) 235-9000 Fly Shop
wolfcreekoutfitters.com/guides.htm

**Jefferson River**
Current stream conditions, map
Country Roads Inc., PO Box 710 Sheridan, MT
www.countryroadsinc.com/fishing/Jeffersonmap.htm

**The Beaverhead River**
Map of river and updated fishing reports
www.beaverheadriver.com

**Kesler's Four Rivers**
Corner of 3rd and Higgins, Missoula, MT 59802 406-721-4796
www.fourrivers.net

**Grizzly Hackle International Fishing**
215 W. Front Street Missoula, MT 59802. 406-721-8996
www.grizzlyhackle.com

**The Kingfisher**
926 East Broadway, Missoula MT 59801 406-721-6141
www.kingfisherflyshop.com

**The Twin River Anglers Fishing Report**
a fantastic web page with reports for ID, MT, OR, WA, and WY
www.traflyfish.com/reports/

**Lochsa River Company**
PO Box 8117, Alta, UT 84092 801-742-3615 1-800-562-4723
www.northwestoutdoors.com/idaho/clearwater.htm

**Snake River Guide Service**
Fishing reports, guide service
snakeriverguide.homestead.com/Clearwater.html
Clearwater Drifters and The Guide Shop
14010 Hwy. 12 PO Box 1661 Orofino, Idaho 83544-1661 (208)476-3531
www.idfishnhunt.com/guideshop.htm

Oregon Guide Service
Columbia River Fishing Reports
www.worldwidefishing.com/oregon/

Columbia River Fishing Report
Specializing in the search for walleye
www.walleyecentral.com/columbia-river.htm

Buoy 10 Fishing Reports
www.gamefishin.com/reports/saltwater/bouy10.htm

Good Government Listings

Columbia Fisheries Resource Office
608 East Cherry St., Room 200, Columbia, MO 65201-7712, 573-876-1909
Jim Milligan@fws.gov

Missouri River Coordinating office
420 South Garfield Ave., Suite 400, Pierre, SD 57501-5408, 605-224-8693

Missouri River Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office
3425 Miriam Ave., Bismarck ND 58501-0918
http://fisheries.fws.gov/bismarck

Montana Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office
4052 Bridger Canyon Rd., Bozeman, MT 59715-8433, 406-585-9010
http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov

Idaho Fisheries Resource Office
P.O. Box 18, Ahsahka, ID 83520-0018, 208-476-7242
http://idahofro.fws.gov

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office
2600 Southeast 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266-1398 503-231-6179
http://pacific.fws.gov

Lower Columbia River Fish Health Center
61552 State Road 14, Cook, WA 98651-9000 509-493-3156

United States Fish and Wildlife Service
www.fws.gov
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Pony, from Pierre, we hope all is well.