

Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis

20 June 1803

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it's course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, ... may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.

Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, you will take <careful> observations of latitude & longitude, at all remarkable points on the river, & especially at the mouths of rivers....& other places & objects

The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted... with the names of the nations & their numbers;

*the extent & limits of their possessions;
their relations with other tribes of nations;
their language, traditions, monuments;
their ordinary occupations... and the implements for these;
their food, clothing, & domestic accommodations;
the diseases prevalent among them, & the remedies they use;
moral & physical circumstances...
peculiarities in their laws, customs & dispositions;
and articles of commerce they may need or furnish...
... the state of morality, religion, & information among them;*

Other objects worthy of notice will be

*the soil & face of the country, it's growth & vegetable productions, especially those not of the U.S.
the animals of the country generally, & especially those not known in the U.S.
the remains or accounts of any which may be deemed rare or extinct;
the mineral productions of every kind...
volcanic appearances;
climate...*

...endeavor to inform yourself, by enquiry, of the character & extent of the country watered by it's [Missouri River] & especially on it's Southern side.

Two copies of your notes at least & as many more as leisure will admit, should be made & confided to the care of the most trusty individuals of your attendants.

Some account too of the path of the Canadian traders from the Missisipi...

In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit ...

Should you reach the Pacific ocean inform yourself of the circumstances which may decide whether the furs of those parts may not be collected as advantageously at the head of the Missouri ... as at Nootka sound...

Should you find it safe to return by the way you go, after sending two of your party round by sea, or with your whole party, if no conveyance by sea can be found, do so; making such observations on your return, as may serve to supply, correct or confirm those made on your outward journey....

Excerpts taken from the full text of Jefferson's instructions. Full text found in Donald Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1978), p61-66.