

## Tribal Information

The Lewis and Clark Expedition encountered over fifty Indian groups on their 8,000+ mile journey. President Thomas Jefferson gave Capt. Lewis instructions regarding the expedition's contact with the tribes.<sup>1</sup> Lewis and Clark were to 'inform' the tribes that they were now living on American land, and that Jefferson was their new, great white 'father.' Obviously, reactions to this message were mixed. Some tribal members wanted to kill the expedition outright- deeming their message a threat. However, many hoped to gain a new trade partner in the United States, and welcomed the expedition with hospitality. Indeed, the opening of commerce with the tribes (in competition with the British) was a key goal for Jefferson, as exhibited in his letter of instructions to Lewis:

*The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of these people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit.*

*with the names of the nations & their numbers...<sup>2</sup>*

Here are some of the tribes that met the Lewis and Clark Expedition:<sup>3</sup>

**Jiwere (Oto):** The Jiwere are part of the Siouan language family, and are closely related to the Winnebago. They numbered about 500 in 1805, though they were living with the Nutachi- which increased the total population of their bands.

**Nutachi (Missouri):** They called themselves the "people with (dugout) canoes." In 1780, there were an estimated 1,000 Nutachi, though Lewis and Clark estimated only 300- likely the result of casualties from smallpox and disease. In the early 1800s, most of the group joined the Otos in an alliance. The Nutachi are part of the Siouan linguistic family.

**Arikara (Sahnish):** They called themselves "the people" or the "corn eaters." They are part of the Caddoan linguistic group, and numbered about 2,600 in 1804. Smallpox epidemics in the 1780s-1790s had cut their population, thought to have once numbered 20,000 to 30,000.

**Lakota (Teton) Sioux (Oce'ti Sakowin):** One of three main Sioux groups. Their self-name, Oce'ti Sakowin, means "the seven council fires"- which hints at the seven main sub-groups that comprised the Lakota Sioux. They numbered about 25,000 to 30,000 in the early 1800s.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Expedition's contact with Indian people see James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson: Writings*, ed. by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library Classics of the United States, 1984), p. 1128. For Jefferson's letter of instruction, see pp. 1126-1132. See also Donald Jackson, *Thomas Jefferson & the Stony Mountains: Exploring the West from Monticello* (Norman, OK and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> John R. Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America*. Washington, DC and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1952; reprint 1969.

**Mandan (Neu'dia):** "Mandan" is possibly a distorted version of the Dakota name, "Mawatani." They also called themselves Numakaki ("men/people," pre-1837) and Metutahanke (named after former village, post-1837). In 1780 the population may have been 3,600. The Lewis and Clark population estimate was 1,250 in 1804. They are part of the Siouan linguistic group.

**Hidatsa:** Also called "Minnetarees" and "the settled people" by other groups, their self-name is thought to be derived from the name of a former settlement. They numbered 2,100 in the early 1800s, though this number was likely higher at one time- the drop attributed to smallpox casualties. They are part of the Siouan linguistic stock and linked with the Apsaalooka (Crow).

**Pikuni (Blackfeet):** In reality, there are three main groups that, together, constitute the Blackfeet Confederacy. In 1780 there were 11,000-15,000 total, though by the time of the Expedition the population may have dropped by one-half due to smallpox epidemics. Also call themselves "Nizisitapix," which means "people of the Sacred One."

**Apsaalooka/Absarokee (Crow):** Called "crow; sparrowhawk; or bird-people" by other groups. Their name means "black-bird people," or "people of the raven." Thus, the name "Crow" is a misnomer. A part of the Siouan linguistic family, they numbered 3,500 in the early 1800s.

**Aqui-Dika (Northern Shoshone):** Also called "snakes" or "grass-hut dwellers" by other Indians (and by Europeans). The meaning of the word "Shoshone." The Aqui-Dika belonged to the Uto-Aztecan language family.

**Nimiipu (Nez Perce):** The French means "pierced noses," but they called themselves simply "the people." Lewis and Clark estimated their population to be 6,000 in 1805. They are part of the Sahaptian linguistic family.

**Selis (Salish, Flathead):** Their name, "Selis" (Salish), probably is a place name. Other tribes mistakenly called them "Flatheads" because *other* Salishan groups (on the west coast, for example) flattened the heads of their infants. About 600 lived in 1806 (Lewis and Clark).

**San'ka/Asan'ka (Kutenai):** The name "Kutenai," it is believed, came from the Blackfeet Indians- and was derived from the name of a San'ka band called "Tunaha." Their own names mean possible "people of the water." Estimated population in 1790 was 1,200.

**Qlispe (Kalispel, Pend d'Oreille):** The French name was given because when Europeans first met the Qlispe, they wore shell earrings. Their name for themselves mean "Camas People"- camas roots being a staple in their diet. Lewis and Clark estimated a total population of 1,600.

**Wallawalla:** Their language belongs to the Sahaptian language family, and their name means “little river.” In 1805, the Lewis and Clark expedition estimated their population to be 1,600, though this number may be inflated.

**Chinook:** Derived from Tsinuk, their Chehalis moniker. Lewis and Clark estimated their population at 400 in 1805. They spoke a Chinookan dialect, though they merged with Chehalis in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Clatsop: Their moniker comes from a word meaning “dried salmon.” They spoke a dialect of the Chinookan linguistic family. Lewis and Clark estimated their population at 300 in 1806.*