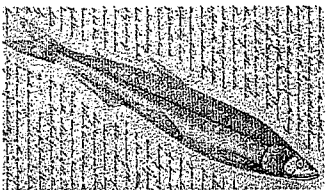
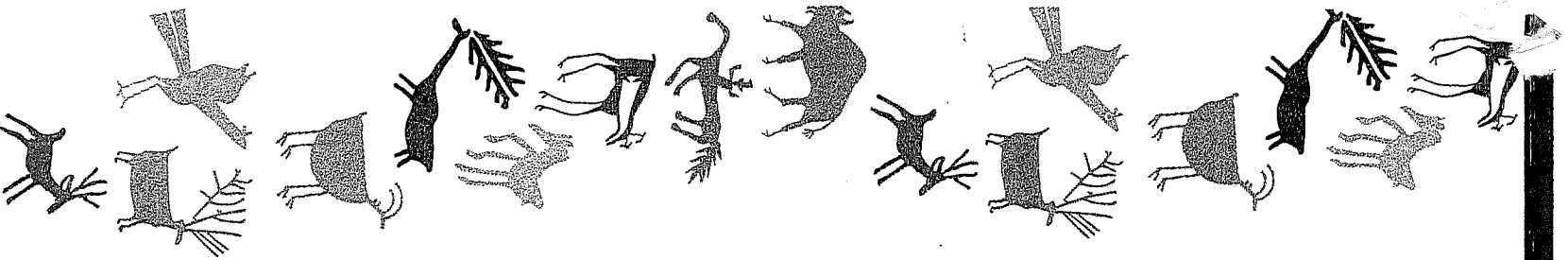


THE CULPUBRES, ONE JOURNEY

by Rebecca West



"I now prevailed on the Chief to instruct me with respect to the geography of his country. This he undertook very cheerfully, by delineating the rivers on the ground. ... He placed a number of heaps of sand on each side which he informed me represented the vast mountains of rock eternally covered with snow through which the river passed. ... the Chief further informed me that he had understood from the persed mosed [Nez Perce] Indians who inhabit this river below the rocky mountains that it ran a great way toward the setting sun and finally lost itself in a great lake of water. ... " — Meriwether Lewis, August 20, 1805



Most of the Corps's meetings with Native Americans were friendly and peaceful.

Gathering information on the American Indian tribes of the West was one of the goals set by President Thomas Jefferson for the Corps of Discovery. Ultimately, the explorers' challenging journey was successful in part because of the guidance and assistance they received from more than fifty Indian tribes along the way.

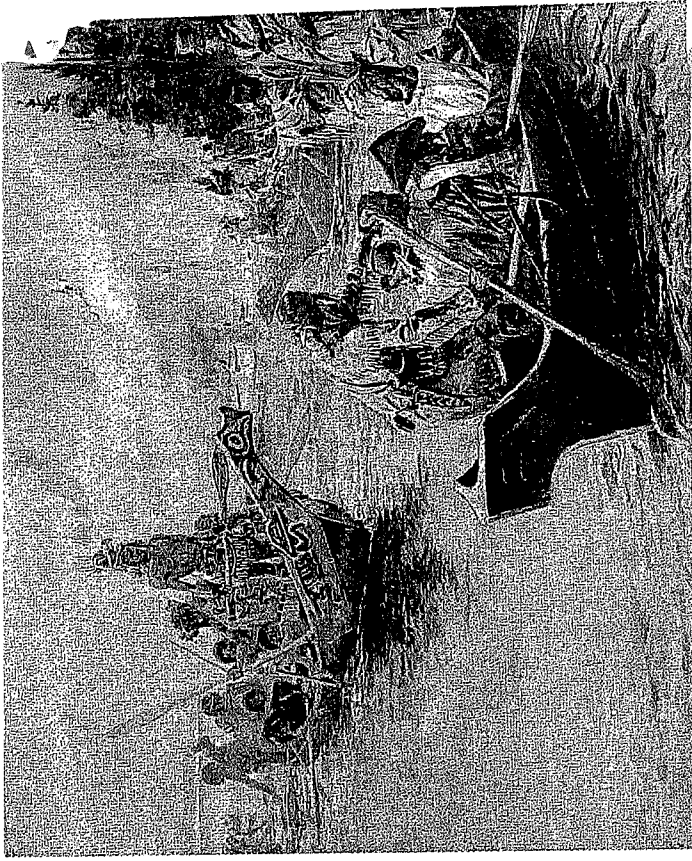
The tribes shared more than just information about their cultures: They generously offered food, friendship, shelter, horses, directions, and safe passage to the Corps. And these gestures of aid often came at critical points in the explorers' journey. The American Indians knew the western land and its resources very well — after all, it had



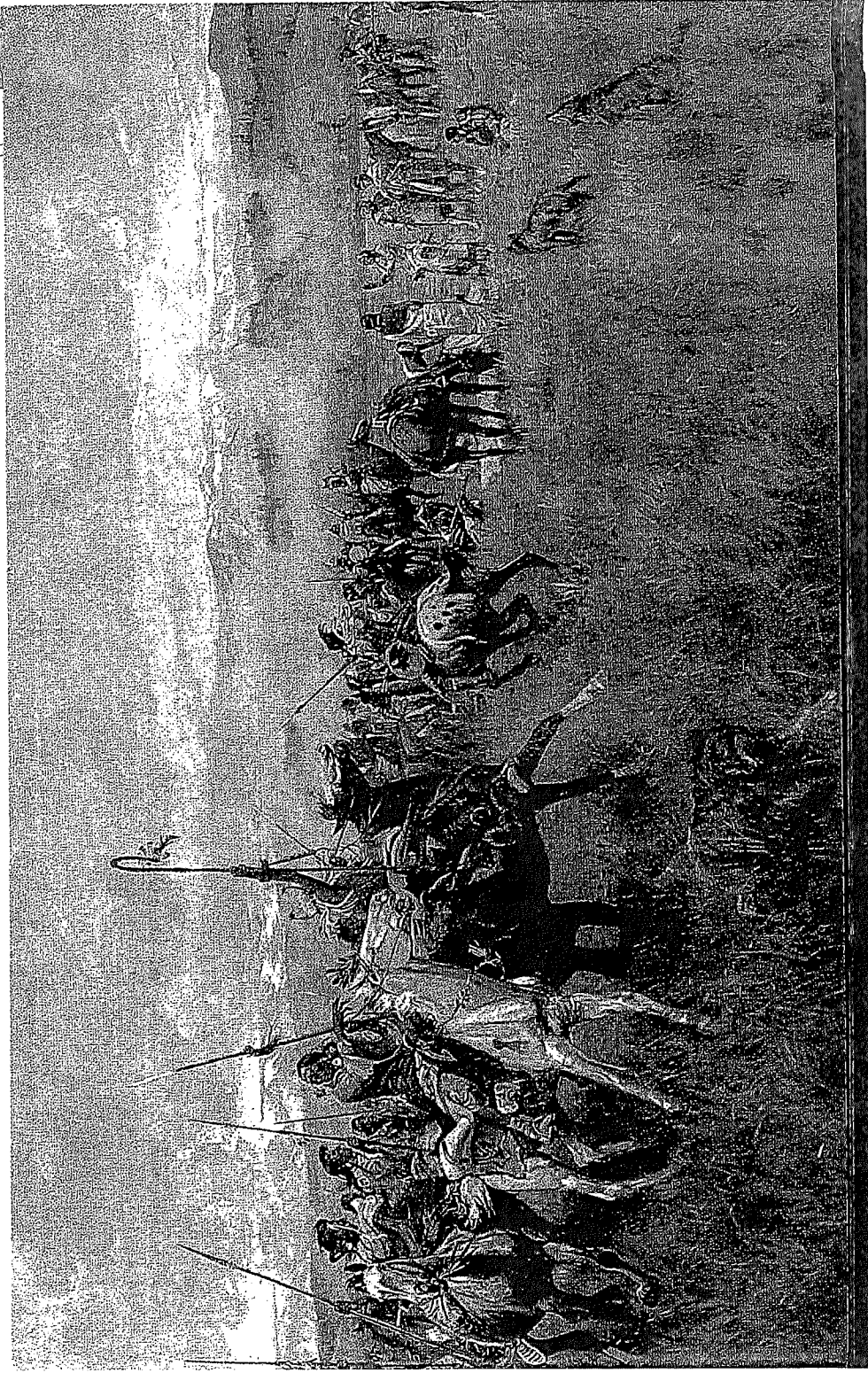
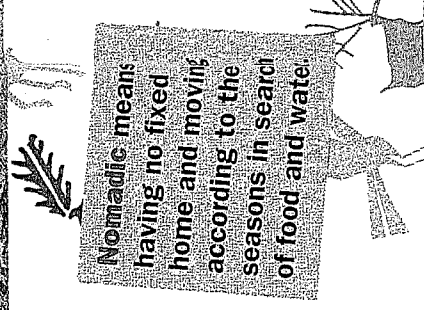
Lewis and Clark learned that Native Americans along the Columbia River, such as the Chinook, were great fishermen and traveled in large carved canoes.

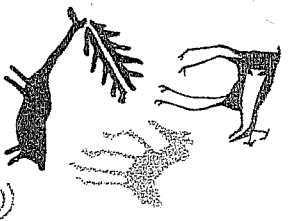
been their home long before the arrival of the expedition.

Each American Indian tribe living in the regions between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean was unique. The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara of the Missouri River tribes were farmers and hunters who resided in earthen lodges. The Shoshone, Sioux, Blackfoot, and other Plains tribes were more **nomadic**, hunting on foot or horseback and living in tipis. Tribes on the Columbia River plateau were fishers, gatherers, and hunters and inhabited mat houses. Tribes in the lower



Columbia area and along the Pacific Ocean — such as the Chinook, Tillamook, Clatsop, and others — built impressive canoes, hunted, fished for salmon, and lived in cedar plank houses. Each tribe had its own language and traditions,





Ethnographers
are those who
study human
cultures.

*The Corps
spent the
winter of
1804–1805
in a fort
they built
near the
friendly
Mandan
and Hidatsa
Indians.*

which were expressed through ceremonies, tales of origin, clothing, and art.

As they observed the lives of these native groups, Lewis and Clark acted as *ethnographers*. Most of the Corps's encounters with the Indians were brief, giving the group just a glimpse of how the tribes existed.

The expedition learned more, however, about certain Indian tribes, such as the Mandan. Over the winter of 1804–1805, the explorers lived in a nearby fort and participated in buffalo hunts with the Mandan. While there, Lewis and Clark hired Toussaint Charbonneau and his young wife, Sacagawea, as interpreters. Sacagawea was familiar with both the Shoshone and Hidatsa

cultures and proved to be a valuable interpreter (see page 21).

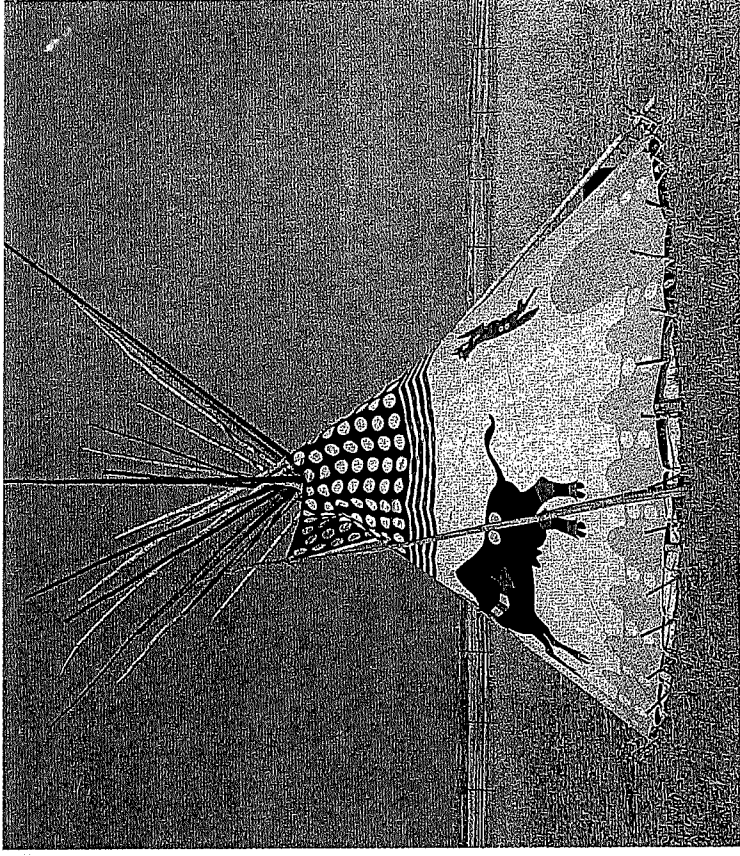
The expedition usually was received with warmth and curiosity. Initial meetings were formal and respectful. Lewis and Clark often began their introductions by announcing that the land belonged to the United States. They spoke of Jefferson as the new “great father.” Then the Corps offered goods — knives, kettles, beads, tobacco, axes, cloth, buttons, and other items — to the Indians. Tribal leaders were given official documents or peace medals to symbolize that the U.S. government wished to be on good terms with their people. Indian spokespersons typically responded with speeches, gifts, and similar tokens of goodwill.



But there also were instances of fear and hostility on the part of the American Indians. Sometimes, Indians tried to steal horses belonging to the Corps. Patrick Gass, one of the expedition's journal keepers, wrote of an encounter: "Four men set out early with the horses and sleds to bring home our meat; and had gone down about 25 miles when a party of Indians...came upon them and robbed them of their horses...." Language differences created problems, too (see the sidebar on page 20).

Exploration by the Corps of Discovery opened the way for events that forever changed the traditional lifestyles of American Indians. It encouraged a massive movement from East to West in the nineteenth century. And with those new settlers came trade routes, railroads, the discovery of minerals such as gold, and the commercialization of natural resources. To some American citizens, this meant progress and opportunity.

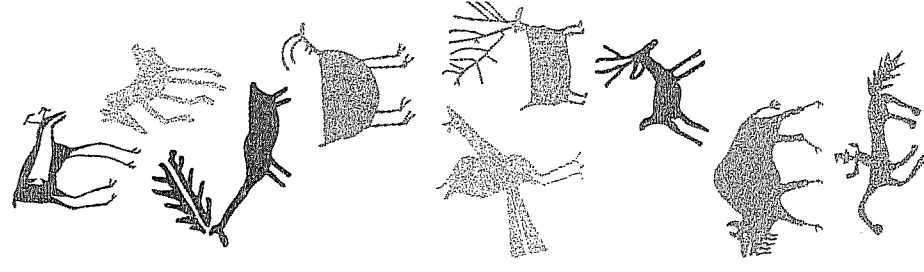
To the American Indians, however, it meant something else. Many suffered through these rapid changes, experiencing disease and warfare, as well as the loss of their homelands, natural resources (such as buffalo), and fishing rights. American Indians were moved onto reservations, forcing them to change their ways of life.



Lewis and Clark could see how easy-to-move tipis suited the roaming lifestyles of the Plains Indians.

Despite centuries of hardships however, descendants of the tribes encountered by Lewis and Clark today exist with strong identities and thriving traditions. Most tribes still are centered on reservations, but they have their own tribal governments, schools, and cultural centers and maintain their identities by keeping ceremonies, arts, and languages alive.

As Justin Gould, a Nez Perce tribal member, said, "People need to realize that we never left this place. We're not museum pieces." Most tribes welcome a remembrance of the expedition's bicentennial as a part of American history, as long as *both* sides of the story are told accurately. 🦄



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