References to Lewis and Clark "scarcely appeared" in history books even during the United States centennial in 1876 and the expedition was largely forgotten despite having had a significant impact on increasing American owned land.

Exploration of the interior before Lewis and Clark

Before 1537 Cabeza de Vaca crossed central Texas or northern Mexico from the Gulf to northwest Mexico. In 1539-42 Hernando de Soto crossed much of the South from Georgia to Arkansas. In 1540-42 Francisco Vásquez de Coronado traveled from Arizona to eastern Kansas. Since these expeditions found nothing of value the Spaniards largely abandoned northward expansion. In 1608 the French founded Quebec and quickly spread through the Saint Lawrence basin. In 1682 René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle went down the Mississippi from the Great Lakes to the Gulf. The French then established a chain of posts along the Mississippi from New Orleans to the Great Lakes. In 1714 Etienne Veniard, Sieur de Bourgmont ascended the Missouri as far as the mouth of the Cheyenne River in central South Dakota. In 1720 the Villasur expedition from Santa Fe was defeated by the Pawnee in eastern Nebraska. Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye opened the area west of lake Superior and in 1738 reached the Mandan villages on the upper Missouri in North Dakota. In 1743 two of his sons reached, probably, the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming. From Hudson Bay, in 1690 Henry Kelsey reached Saskatchewan River, in 1754 Anthony Henday followed the Saskatchewan almost to the Rocky Mountains and in 1771 Samuel Hearne reached the Arctic coast at the Coppermine River. In 1789 Sir Alexander Mackenzie (explorer) followed the river named after him to the Arctic Ocean. In 1793 he ascended the Peace River, crossed the Rocky Mountains and reached the Pacific twelve years before Lewis and Clark. Provoked by Russian expansion down the Alaska coast Juan José Pérez Hernández explored the Pacific coast in 1774, followed by James Cook in 1778. This led to a British Sea Otter trade with China, the Nootka Crisis and Anglo-American claims on the Oregon country. In 1792 Robert Gray (sea captain) found the mouth of the Columbia River.

Thus Lewis and Clark had first to connect to lower Missouri to the Mandan country in North Dakota. Everything west from North Dakota to the Pacific was unknown, except that the Rocky Mountains existed and the upper Missouri seemed to flow from that direction. We might also mention methods of travel. Coronado and De Soto travelled with large gangs of armed men. Hearne and the younger Vérendrye joined bands of roving Indians. La Salle and Mackenzie used professional voyageurs and Indian guides. Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific mostly under their own power.
Jefferson had a long interest in western expansion, and in 1780s met John Ledyard who discussed a proposed trip to the Pacific Northwest. When he became President, he asked Congress to fund expedition through the Louisiana Purchase, and to head to the Pacific Ocean. He used a secret message to Congress to ask them to fund the trip.

Jefferson read Mackenzie's book about the trip in 1802, and this influenced his decision to send an expedition.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned the Corps of Discovery, and named U.S. Army Captain Meriwether Lewis its leader, who selected William Clark as his partner. Their goals were to explore the Louisiana Purchase, establish trade and U.S. sovereignty over the native peoples along the River Missouri. Jefferson also wanted to establish a U.S. claim of "Discovery" to the Pacific Northwest and Oregon territory by documenting an American presence there before Europeans could claim the land. According to some historians, Jefferson understood he would have a better claim of ownership to the Pacific Northwest if the team gathered scientific data on animals and plants.

The U.S. mint prepared special silver medals with a portrait of Jefferson and had a message of friendship and peace, called Indian Peace Medals or peace medals. The soldiers were to distribute them to the nations they met. These symbolized U.S. sovereignty over the indigenous inhabitants. The expedition also prepared advanced weapons to display their military firepower. They also carried flags, gift bundles, medicine and other items they would need for their journey. Much time went into ensuring a sufficient supply of these items.

See also: Timeline of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

There were 33 people, including 29 participants in training at the 1803–1804 Camp Dubois winter staging area in Illinois Territory, near present day Hartford, Illinois. They left on May 14,
1804, and met up with Lewis in Saint Charles, Missouri, a short time later; the corps followed the Missouri River westward. Soon they passed La Charrette, the last Euro-American settlement on the Missouri River. The expedition followed the Missouri through what is now Kansas City, Missouri, and Omaha, Nebraska. On August 20, 1804, Sergeant Charles Floyd died, apparently from acute appendicitis. He was buried at Floyd's Bluff, in what is now Sioux City, Iowa. During the final week of August, Lewis and Clark reached the edge of the Great Plains, a place abounding with elk, deer, bison, and beavers.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition established relations with two dozen indigenous nations.[29] Without their help, the expedition would have starved to death or become hopelessly lost in the Rocky Mountains.[30] The Americans and the Lakota nation (whom the Americans called Sioux or "Teton-wan Sioux") had problems when they met, and there was a concern the two sides might fight.[31] One of their horses disappeared, and they believed the Sioux were responsible. Afterward, the two sides met and there was a disagreement, and the Sioux asked the men the stay or to give more gifts instead before being allowed to pass through their territory. They came close to fighting several times, and both sides finally backed down and the expedition continued on to Arikara territory. Clark wrote they were "warlike" and were the "vilest miscreants of the savage race."[32][33][34][35][36]

In the winter of 1804–05, the party built Fort Mandan, near present-day Washburn, North Dakota.

One chief asked Lewis and Clark to provide a boat for passage through their national territory. As tensions increased, Lewis and Clark prepared to fight, but the two sides fell back in the end. The Americans quickly continued westward (upriver), and camped for the winter in the Mandan nation's territory. Here they met a French-Canadian fur trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau, and young Shoshone wife, Sakakawea (or Sacajawea) who helped translate.

They followed the Missouri to its headwaters, and over the Continental Divide at Lemhi Pass. In canoes, they descended the mountains by the Clearwater River, the Snake River, and the Columbia River, past Celilo Falls and past what is now Portland, Oregon at the meeting of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. Lewis used William Robert Broughton's 1792 notes and maps to find the stratovolcano mountain for navigation.

The expedition faced its second bitter winter, and voted on whether to camp on the south side of the Columbia river (modern Astoria, Oregon), building Fort Clatsop. The Corps turned home
on March 23, 1806, using canoes, and later by land.[37] On July 3, after crossing the Continental Divide, the Corps split into two teams so Lewis could explore the Marias River. Lewis’ group of four met some men from the Blackfeet nation. During the night, the Blackfeet tried to steal their weapons. In the struggle, the soldiers killed two Blackfeet men. Lewis, Drouillard, and the Field brothers, fled over 100 miles (160 km) in a day before they camped again. Meanwhile, Clark had entered the Crow tribe's territory. In the night, half of Clark’s horses disappeared, but not a single Crow had been seen. Lewis and Clark stayed separated until they reached the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers on August 11, along with Clark's. While reuniting, one of Clark's hunters, Pierre Cruzatte, mistook Lewis for an elk and fired, injuring Lewis in the thigh. Once reunited, the Corps was able to return home quickly via the Missouri River. They reached St. Louis on September 23, 1806.

The Corps met their objective of reaching the Pacific, mapping and establishing their presence for a legal claim to the land. They established diplomatic relations and trade with at least two dozen indigenous nations. They did not find the Northwest Passage.[3]

The Lewis and Clark Expedition gained an understanding of the geography of the Northwest and produced the first accurate maps of the area. During the journey, Lewis and Clark drew about 140 maps. Stephen Ambrose says the expedition "filled in the main outlines" of the area.[38] The expedition documented natural resources and plants that had been previously unknown to Euro-Americans, though not to the indigenous peoples.[39] Lewis and Clark "were the first" Americans to describe "the place officially".[40] Their visit to the Pacific Northwest, maps, and proclamations of sovereignty with medals and flags were legal steps needed to claim title to each indigenous nations' lands under the Doctrine of Discovery.[41]

Lewis and Clark's expedition had no greater advocate and no greater beneficiary, than the American Philosophical Society (APS).[42] Their duties, as assigned by Jefferson, were preeminently scientific. Specifically, they were instructed in geography, astronomy, ethnology, climatology, mineralogy, meteorology, botany, ornithology, and zoology.[43] The expedition recorded more than 200 plants and animals that were new to science and noted at least 72 native tribes.[44]

Jefferson had the expedition declare "sovereignty" and demonstrate their military strength to ensure native tribes would be subordinate to the US, as European colonizers did elsewhere. Upon the completion of the expedition the maps that were produced allowed the further discovery and settlement of this vast territory in the years that soon followed.[45][46][not in citation given]
In 1807 Patrick Gass published an account of the journey.[47] Paul Allen edited a two-volume history of the Lewis and Clark expedition that was published in 1814, in Philadelphia, but without mention of the actual author, banker Nicholas Biddle.[48][49] Even then, all of the report was not completely made public until more recently[when?].[50] The earliest authorized edition of the Lewis and Clark journals reside in the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library at the University of Montana.

Sacagawea

Main article: Sacagawea

Sacagawea, sometimes called Sakajawea or Sakagawea (c. 1788 – December 20, 1812), was an indigenous woman who accompanied her husband Toussaint Charbonneau on the expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Her son Jean Baptiste Charbonneau was born in 1805 with the help of the expedition.

Though she has been discussed in literature frequently, much of the information is exaggerated or fiction. Scholars say she did notice some geographical features, but "Sacagawea...was not the guide for the Expedition, she was important to them as an interpreter and in other ways."[51] The sight of a woman and her infant son would have been a reassuring sight to some indigenous nations, and she played an important role in diplomatic relations by talking to chiefs, easing tensions, and giving the impression of a peaceful mission.[30][52]

In his writings, Meriwether Lewis presented a somewhat negative view of her, though Clark had a higher regard for her, and later on provided some support for her children in subsequent years. In the journals, they used the terms "squar" and "savages" to refer to Sakakawea and other indigenous peoples.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_and_Clark_Expedition