

Lewis and Clark's Expedition

Then & Now



As part of their exploration, Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery came in contact with over 50 Native American tribes. In doing so, they were able to see how varied Native American culture was – some lived in mud huts, some in teepees. Some tribes ate mostly corn, some lived on buffalo. Some spoke a little bit of English, and some did not.

The Corps had a formal meeting with every tribe they came across to show that they did not want to fight. They brought small medals with them, called Jefferson Peace Medals, to give to tribal leaders.

Here are some of the major tribes they encountered:

Shoshone: The Shoshone lived both east and west of the Rockies. The Shoshone were Sacagawea's tribe: in Montana, they happened to run into Shoshone chief Cameahwait - Sacagawea's long-lost brother.

Nez Perce: The Nez Perce lived in the plains west of the Rocky Mountains and were the largest tribe the Corps met with. The Nez Perce relied primarily on horses: they owned the largest group of horses in the United States, and were able to teach the Corps how to care for their horses. They were called Nez Perce, French for 'pierced nose,' after a piece of jewelry many tribe members wore.

Missouri: The Missouri tribe lived along the banks of the Missouri River. Their first meeting was held in what is now Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Chinook: The Chinook lived along the Columbia River and by the Pacific Ocean. There were about 400 of them when the Corps arrived in their territory. They lived in long, rectangular houses called plank houses and relied on salmon and fish from the river for food.



Painting of a Shoshone village



Portrait of a Nez Perce family