Book: ***Lewis & Clark Among the Indians***
by James P. Ronda, 1984

excerpt from the Afterword

On a cold rainy day in mid-May 1806, Meriwether Lewis sat in camp along the Clearwater River and wondered where the Indians were. For the first time in many weeks no [Nez Perces](http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/images_NezPerce.html) came to talk, trade, or stare at the bearded strangers.  It was almost two years to the day since the Lewis and Clark expedition had begun its western venture. Those years had been filled with a native presence that bound Indians and explorers together in a common struggle to survive. Formal conferences, personal friendships, and chance meetings all bridged the cultural divide. Indians were so much a part of the life of the expedition that their absence was worthy of note. When no Indians were present as actors and audience, Lewis and Clark felt strangely alone.

Whether written as simple fact or out of belief to be free from inquisitive neighbors, Lewis's observation reveals something fundamental about western exploration in general and Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery in particular. Exploration was a cooperative endeavor requiring substantial information and support from the Indians. The Indians shaped the exploratory effort by their very presence on the land. They were people to be reckoned with, whether as potential sources of aid or as possible enemies. … The anticipated behavior of the Indians was a decisive factor in the choice of equipment, personnel, routes, camp rules, and even ultimate destination. Whatever the official objectives, explorers carefully considered their presence.

But we need to measure more than explorer's reactions to a passive population. Indians were active participants in exploration, as the first comers to the land and, later, as guides for Euro-Americans. To a vast enterprise they lent their intelligence, skill, and nerve. Certainly the Lewis and Clark expedition benefited greatly from the Indians' knowledge and support. Maps, route information, food, horses, openhanded friendship—all gave the Corps of Discovery the edge that spelled the difference between success and failure. The presence of Sacagawea on the expedition's roster is only the barest hint of what Indian support meant to Lewis's "darling project." That roster should also include names like Sheheke, Cameahwait, Old Toby, Tetoharsky, Twisted Hair, and Flint Necklace. There needs to be a place for those unnamed [Shoshoni](http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/images_Shoshoni.html) women who carried expedition baggage over Lemhi Pass as well as for countless Indians who traded food and affection. As guides, packers, interpreters, and cartographers, native Americans were essential to Lewis and Clark's achievement.

Lewis and Clark left St. Louis filled with apprehension about encounters with hostile Indians. But what emerged over nearly two and a half years of western travel was an atmosphere of friendship and mutual trust between men and women who shared a common frontier life. Indians and explorers stood together in the rituals of hunting, holidays, and horse racing. … The assertion that the Corps of Discovery acted like "a conquering army" of hungry imperialists does not square with either the Lewis and Clark record or the larger history of North American exploration.  …

…For their part, Lewis and Clark recognized the necessity of Indian cooperation. There were undeniable moments of swagger, bluster, and arrogance, but more often than not good sense and patience won the day. … For most of the journey there was mutual respect born of expediency. That respect and friendship was genuine nonetheless. Lewis and Clark left behind among many Indians a legacy of nonviolent contact. Those who came later enjoyed that legacy and too often betrayed it.

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