

Lewis and Clark Expedition

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We just returned from a river boat cruise along the Columbia and Snake Rivers following the exciting adventure of the Lewis and Clark expedition to discover a water route from the east to the west coast. The boat was the Empress of the North, which we recommend for outstanding service due, we believe in part, to an incentive system in which the entire crew shares in a "tip pool."



Rather than give you the usual clichés such as "It was a great trip" and "We wish that you could have been with us," I would like to share a few oddball facts about the trip.

Mount St. Helens

We all read about the disaster but here are a few items that were quite stunning: The explosion was equal to 27,000 atom bombs. The few people working or living close to the mountain did not hear the earth moving at high velocity down on them, but the sonic boom startled people 500 miles away in British Columbia.



It was Sunday and only four loggers were working when the silent killer suddenly moved tons of earth, stone, and hundreds of gigantic trees in their direction. Only one logger survived. If the event happened on Monday, 1,000 loggers would have been in the path of the deadly earth movement.

One gentleman who lived at the base of the mountain for 50 years and was the proprietor of an inn responded to warnings to evacuate with, "I have lived with the mountain all my adult life. There is not enough material in that hill to bother me, even if it moves." He and his beloved inn are now buried under 600 feet of ash.

The underground tour in Pendleton, Oregon

Pendleton was a wide-open, anything-goes frontier town with prostitutes sitting at the second floor windows of the hotel for "Working Girls" located above a saloon in a downtown building. To solicit business, the girls would throw buttons on top of the wide-brim hats of cowboys on the street to attract their attention. When the customers climbed the creaking stairs to the second floor, the "girls" suggested with a charming smile, "You smell like an outhouse. Better go down to Hop Sing's, the Chinese laundry in the basement, take a bath and get your clothes washed. Then come back and we'll have a good time."

Hop Sing's laundry

Hop Sing had a sign over a tin bathtub, "Hot bath 10 cents." It was 10 cents in the morning, but as the day moved on, the price dropped to 8 cents, then 6 cents because the water never changed. Hop Sing only added more hot water.

Since there was no way to thoroughly dry clothes, the cowboys dressed in clean clothes that were somewhat damp. To iron, Hop Sing would fill his mouth with water and through a gap in his two front teeth, spray water on the cloth stretched out on his ironing board. In an adjacent windowless room, some 80 Chinese men slept on tatami mats with a small block of wood to rest their heads. Chinese women were not allowed to enter the country with the men. Those men with more money rested their heads on a small block of smooth porcelain that had an opening on the side for their valuables. In those days there was a "Sunset" Law that any Chinese on the street after sundown could be shot dead by anyone, with no recrimination.

The bartender in the saloon

Customers often paid for drinks with gold dust deposited on a miniature scale. The bartender, who was only paid about a dollar or two a day for a 12 hour shift, would take a pinch of the gold dust in his thumb and forefinger, deposit it on the scale as payment for a drink. But, the gold dust was usually a foot or so away from the scale so that a few flecks of the dust would land on the



bar. As you may have seen in western movies, the bartender was continually wiping the bar with a rag. The ostensible purpose was to keep the bar top clean. Actually, his motive was to sweep the gold dust on the floor. Then, when his shift was almost over, he would walk into the alley, get mud on his shoes and return to capture, on the bottom of his shoes, the almost invisible flecks of gold dust all over the floor. His income was 400 or 500 dollars a week.

The Empire Meat Market

Swartz and his half-brothers from Germany ran the meat market. They kept records and discovered that the most handsome of the brothers sold the most meat to the ladies. So, he became the "front" man for the market. The lads were the entrepreneurs of the frontier days because one ran a ranch with cattle, another managed the slaughterhouse and the third operated the retail meat market.

To preserve meat, it was necessary to carve out heavy blocks of ice from a pond and load it on to a wagon for the trip into town. The boys decided that it would be easier to make their own ice in the basement of the market with equipment they purchased from back east. Not only did they have all the ice they needed in their business, but also they had plenty of ice for sale to other merchants.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition

Our historian on the boat was an attractive woman nicknamed "Toots" who was in her late 40's with a Greek fisherman cap, wire-rimmed glasses, beige cargo pants, and a tiny gold cross on a delicate chain around her neck. She recommended a number of books but her favorite was "*Undaunted Courage*" by Steven Ambrose. Everything she explained about the journey by Lewis and Clark was fascinating. For example, researchers located one of their campsites and to verify the authenticity, they wanted to locate the latrine, which they knew was, by custom in those days, to be about 300 feet from the camp "kitchen." They measured 300 feet, began to dig and found the evidence they were looking for. It was mercury in a series of holes because the purgative used to flush one's system was composed in large part of mercury.

Some more oddball facts

As our tour bus moved along the countryside, Lynn, our driver, pointed out Russian Olive trees that were not native but appeared and proliferated at an alarming rate. They were colorless, produced nothing worthwhile and had ugly scraggly leaves. No one has yet discovered a way to get rid of them.

You are not considered to be a serious farmer in Eastern Washington unless you have 5,000 acres or more of land.

That's it! By all means, for one of your future vacations, jot down a trip by riverboat along the Columbia and Snake rivers. It is fun!

JJA

Your comments about this article can be sent to the writer at jim@tpr-world.com