August 31 to December 11, 1803

On August 31, 1803, Meriwether Lewis left Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a small party in a keelboat and canoes. They moved slowly down the Ohio River due to low water conditions brought on by drought. Lewis arrived at the Falls of the Ohio near Clarksville, Indiana / Louisville, Kentucky on October 14 and met William Clark with additional recruits. As author and historian Stephen Ambrose noted, “When they shook hands, the Lewis and Clark Expedition began” (Ambrose 1996, 117). They set out from Louisville on October 26, arriving at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi on November 14 and moved up the Mississippi through early December. Heading up the Mississippi was made difficult by low water and strong currents, and even more burdensome as late-fall cold fronts and accompanying strong northwest winds pushed against the boats. They arrived near St. Louis on December 12 and established winter quarters across from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers at Camp Dubois near the mouth of the Wood River (See Section 2).

The journal entries in this section are known as the Eastern Field Notes and came to light when the grandsons of Nicholas Biddle (the first editor of the Lewis and Clark Journals) discovered new documents in their grandfather’s personal notes. Milo Milton Quaife published these for the first time in 1916 and this section’s excerpts are drawn from that work, with some bracketed clarifications and footnotes from Moulton (1986 2: 65–143). To learn more about the history and publication of the journals, see Cutright (1976) and Moulton (1986 2: 8–48, 530–567).

Note Meriwether Lewis prepares for the journey to St. Louis in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from July 15, 1803 until his departure down the Ohio River with a keelboat, canoes, and a small party on August 31.

Wednesday, August 31

**Lewis** Left Pittsburgh this day at 11 ock with a party of 11 hands.* The river is extremly low; said to be more so than it has been known for four years. The water being sufficiently temperate was much in our favor.

Thursday, September 1

**Lewis** The Pilott informed me that we were not far from a ripple which was much worse than nay we had yet passed, and as there was so thick a fogg on the face of the water that no object was visible 40 paces he advised remaining untill the sun should acquire a greater altitude when the fogg would ascend and disappear. Remained untill eight Oclock...we set out again. These Foggs are very common on the Ohio at this season of the year as also the spring but do not think them as frequent or thick in the spring. Perhaps this may in some measure assist us to account for the heavy dues

*Although the original journals have August 30 written for this date, Lewis’s letter to Thomas Jefferson on September 8 notes that he left on August 31 (Jackson 1978, 121). Thus begins the initial writings leading up to the Expedition departure up the Missouri the following year from Camp Dubois.
which are more remarkable for their frequency and quantity than in any country I was ever in—...They are so heavy the drops falling from the trees from about midnight until sunrise gives you the idea of a constant gentle rain, this continues until the sun has acquired sufficient altitude to dissipate the fog by its influence, and it then ceases. The fogs are likewise more heavy during summer than elsewhere but not so much so as at this season—the fog appears to owe its origin to the difference of temperature between the air and water the latter at this season being much warmer than the former; the water being heated by the summer’s sun does not undergo so rapid a change from the absence of the sun as the air does consequently when the air becomes most cool which is about sunrise the fog is thickest and appears to rise from the face of the water like the steam from boiling water—

**Friday, September 2**

Lewis  the weather is extremely dry but there was some appearance of rain this morning which seems now to have blown over—Thermometer stood at seventy six in the cabin the temperature of the water in the river when emersed about the same—Observed today the leaves of the buckeye, Gum, and sausafras begin to face, or become red—

**Saturday, September 3**

Lewis  Very foggy this morning. Thermometer 63° Ferrenheit, immersed the Thermometer in the river, and the mercury arose immediately to 75° or summer heat so that there is 12° difference is sufficient to shew the vapor which arises from the water; the fog this prodused is impenetrably thick at this moment; we were in consequence obliged to lie by until 9 this morning.

**Sunday, September 4**

Lewis  Morning foggy, obliged to wait. Thermometer at 63°—temperature of the river-water 73° being a difference of ten degrees, but yesterday there was a difference of twelve degrees, so that the water must have changed its temperature 2d in twenty four hours, colder; at 1/4 past 8 the mercury rose in the open air to 68° the fog dispeared and we set sail; the difference therefore of 5° in temperature between the water and air is not sufficient to produce the appearance of fog— from the watermark we fixed last evening it appeared that the river during the night had fallen an inch perpendicularly— The water is so low and clear that we see a great number of fish of different kinds

**Monday, September 5**

Lewis  Again foggey, loaded both my canoes and waited till the fog disappeared set out at 8 Ock. Rained at six this evening and continued with some intervals through the night to rain pretty hard

**Tuesday, September 6**

Lewis  The fog was as thick as usual this morning detained us until 1/2 past 7 O’C. when we set out—observed the Thermometer in the air to stand at 71° water 73°— the fog continued even with small difference between the temperature of the air and