SECTION 7  Return to St. Louis

March 23 to September 23, 1806

The expedition left its winter quarters at Fort Clatsop on March 23, 1806 and headed up the swollen Columbia River. Clark toured up the Multnomah (Willamette) River, missed during their foggy, rainy descent, reaching a point near modern-day Portland, Oregon. The rapid early spring waters and strong Columbia River Gorge winds created difficulties for the corps. Near Dalles, Oregon, the expedition purchased horses and traveled by land to the confluence of the Columbia and Walla Walla rivers. Instead of returning up the Snake River, they followed an overland Indian trail along the Walla Walla River to the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers.

The Expedition proceeded overland past present-day Lewiston/Clarkston and Canoe Camp into the heart of the Nez Perce nation. Finding deep snow in the Bitterroot Mountains, the Indian chiefs explained that the earliest attempt at the Lolo Trail should be made after the flood waters of the Clearwater reduced for at least five days. On June 10, they moved out of the Clearwater Valley and started up the Lolo Trail. Excessive snowpack from the numerous winter storms produced depths between 10 and 18 feet. The party retreated and made a second attempt on June 25. Safely over the Bitterroots by the end of June, the expedition split into two parties. Lewis led one group back to the Great Falls of the Missouri and then led a smaller party to scout the Marias River. Lewis’s party rejoined the larger group below the falls near the end of July and proceeded down the Missouri to rendezvous with Clark at the confluence of the Yellowstone River. Clark took the other party back to the supplies left at the headwaters of the Missouri (Jefferson River) and then proceeded to the Yellowstone River and followed it back to the Missouri.

Rainy and thunderstorm-laden afternoons plagued the corps during the summer of 1806. Both parties reunited east of Williston, North Dakota, on August 12 and together reached the Mandan villages on August 14. Staying only a couple of days, the party said good-bye to interpreter Charbonneau, his wife Sacagawea, their son “little Pomp,” and expedition member John Colter, and proceeded down the Missouri. Moving at times 60, 70, or 80 miles a day, the expedition passed Sioux City, Iowa, on September 4 and paid respects to the only expedition member to die, Sergeant Charles Floyd. Returning to the sultry midsection of America, the corps passed Kansas City on September 15. Just as it had bid them farewell in May of 1804, rain greeted their return to the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. They moved on to St. Louis on their last day of travel, September 23, 1806.

The systematic entries for the Lewis and Clark Expedition daily narrative journals as well as those of the army sergeants and privates were made every day in 1806. However, not every journalist noted weather, water, or climate data each day. As in the previous section, each day’s entry begins with the data from the Weather Diary’s Observation Tables (when available), followed by the corresponding remarks (when available), and finally excerpts that pertain to weather and climate from the expedition members’ daily narrative journals.

River rise and fall observations begin again during the trip up the Columbia River. Although not like previous recording episodes, the data usually is not for a 24-hour period unless they are encamped. In most cases, when the party stopped for the evening, it is surmised, following Lewis’s habit from previous journal entries, that a mark was made and measured the next morning. Thus many observations were made for only an 8- to 10-hour-long period.

Different journals and notebooks were used during the expedition. Weather data reported here are from Coves, Volume III, pages 1277–1281, 1293–1298; Moulton, Volume 7, page 42 –
Volume 8, page 375; Thwaites, Volume 6, Part II, pages 208–229. For a more detailed explanation on the journals and entry practices consult Cutright (1976) and Moulton (1986).

Note The expedition leaves Fort Clatsop on the Pacific Ocean to begin its long journey back to St. Louis in the Louisiana Territory of the United States.

Sunday, March 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>4 p.m.</th>
<th>River</th>
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<tr>
<td>Temp</td>
<td>Weather</td>
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Weather Diary it became fair at 12 Ock. and continued cloudy and fair by intervales without rain till night

Lewis the wind is pretty high but it seems to be the common opinion that we can pass point William— at 1 PM we bid a final adieu to Fort Clatsop. The wind was not very hard—

Clark This morning proved So raney and unceratain that we were undetermined for Some time whether we had best set out & risque the river which appeared to be rising or not. the rained ceased and it became fair about Meridian, at which time we loaded our canoes & at 1 P.M. left Fort Clatsop. not withstanding the repeated fall of rain which has fallen almost Constantly Since we passed the long narrows... indeed we have had only days fair weather since that time. and proceeded on, thro’ Meriwethers Bay, there was a Stiff breese from the SW which raised Considerable Swells around Meriwethers point which was as much as our canoes could ride.

Gass There was a cloudy wet morning— The afternoon was fair.

Ordway this morning proved so rainy and uncertain that our officers were undetermined for Some time whether they had best Set out & risque the [wind] which appeared to be rising or not. The rained Seased and it became fair about meridian at which time we loaded our canoes & at 1 P.M left Fort Clatsop on our homeward bound journey. Notwithstanding the reputed fall of rain which has fallen continualy Since we passed the long narrows on the Novr last, indeed we have had only days fair weather since that time. There was a stiff breeze from the SW which raised considerable Swells around Merewethers Point.

Whitehouse It rained very hard, during the whole of last night. This morning it still continued raining, & the Weather appeared very uncertain. About 12 oClock AM it ceased raining; & the weather became Clear & pleasant, & we loaded our Canoes, & got every thing in readiness to ascend the Columbia River. At 1 oClock we embarked...we went around a point of land called by our officers Merryweather point [Astoria, OR] when the wind rose & blew hard from the South West, & the waves ran very high. We proceeded on, & passed another point of land called point William [Tongue Point].