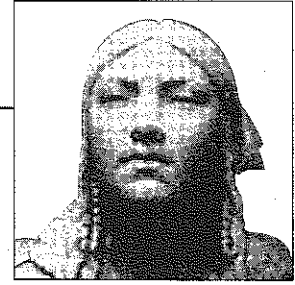


## Sacagawea

### Native American Guide

*While most of the facts of Sacagawea's life remain a mystery, one thing is clear. Without her help, the Lewis and Clark expedition might never have crossed the western United States to reach the Pacific Ocean.*



The girl who became Sacagawea (1788?–1812?) was born along the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains in what now is Idaho. She was a member of the Shoshone people, a wandering tribe who used horses to hunt buffalo. Their enemies were the Hidatsa, rivals who often raided their villages seeking horses and prisoners.

When the girl was about twelve, the Hidatsa kidnapped her and took her far from her home into what is now North Dakota. They renamed her Sacagawea, or “Bird Girl.” Sacagawea lived among the Hidatsa and their Mandan neighbors for about five years. During this time, a French-Canadian fur trapper won her as a gambling prize and made her one of his wives. His name was Toussaint Charbonneau. Both Native Americans and whites regarded him as cowardly and bad-tempered.

**Meeting Lewis and Clark** In the winter of 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark came to the Hidatsa and Mandan villages. President Thomas Jefferson had sent them to explore the Louisiana Territory, which he had bought from France in 1803. Lewis and Clark were leading a group of 31 men across the vast Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, hoping to be the first U.S. explorers to reach the Pacific Ocean by land.

Lewis and Clark decided to stay in the area until spring. They built a camp they called Fort Mandan. While there, they met Sacagawea, who was pregnant.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Frenchman's squaw came to our camp who belongs to the Snake nation [Shoshone]. She came with our interpreter's wife and brought with them four buffalo robes and gave them to our officers.

SERGEANT JOHN ORDWAY,  
quoted in *Sacajawea*

Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau, who spoke both Hidatsa and French, as another interpreter for the journey. They asked him to bring along Sacagawea, who could speak Hidatsa and Shoshone. The group hoped to get horses from the Shoshone when passing through their lands. Another member of the party, François Labiche, spoke English and French. Though it was awkward, Lewis and Clark could give messages to Labiche, who would tell Charbonneau, who would tell Sacagawea, who would tell the Shoshone they met.

**Rare Courage** Lewis and Clark's party left Fort Mandan on April 7, 1805. The youngest member was Sacagawea's eight-week-old baby, Jean Baptiste. Clark grew very fond of the boy and nicknamed him Pompey.

Sacagawea quickly made herself valuable to the expedition. On the second day, for example, she dug up wild artichokes for the group to eat.

A few days later, she made an even greater contribution. Her husband, Charbonneau, panicked when a gust of wind struck the boat he was steering along the Missouri River. He could not swim, and instead of trying to right the boat as it tipped over, he turned loose and began shouting wild, frantic prayers. Another group member threatened to shoot Charbonneau if he didn't right the boat immediately. As this was going on, Sacagawea made sure her baby wouldn't drown. Then she balanced herself and reached far into the water to rescue the floating supplies.

The journey got no easier when the group reached the Rocky Mountains. They almost drowned when a flash flood raged through the ravine they were walking in. Then Sacagawea became sick with a fever and nearly died. A

hailstorm battered their camp, and food was running out.

**Reunion and Success** On July 22 their efforts paid off. Sacagawea recognized the river where her people spent summers. Six days later, she said she was sure they were camped at the very spot where she was kidnapped by the Hidatsa.

Sacagawea was finally reunited with her people on August 17. When a crowd of Shoshone came to greet the explorers, one woman ran to her and hugged her. It was her childhood friend, Jumping Fish, who had also been captured by the Hidatsa but who had escaped. Later that night, at a meeting between the explorers and the Shoshone, Sacagawea got another surprise.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[Sacagawea] came into the tent, sat down, and was beginning to interpret, when in the person of [the chief] Cameahwait she recognised her brother: She instantly jumped up, and ran and embraced him, throwing over him her blanket and weeping profusely [greatly].

NICHOLAS BIDDLE, *History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark*

Sacagawea helped Lewis and Clark get horses, supplies, and guides from the Shoshone, and on September 4, the group set off across the mountains. They finally reached the Pacific Ocean in November.

Now Lewis and Clark could report how big the North American continent was and what it was like. It would take another year for them to cross back over the mountains and return to the East. By August 14, 1806, Sacagawea was back in North Dakota with her baby and husband.

**Mysterious End** From then, what happened to Sacagawea is a mystery. Shoshone oral tradition holds that Sacagawea left Charbonneau and began to wander the wilderness. She reportedly settled with the Comanches before returning to the Shoshone as an old woman. Official records

indicate that a woman calling herself Sacagawea died at the Wind River Indian Reservation in 1884.

Other written records suggest that Sacagawea moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to allow Clark to pay for her son's education there. In 1811, Charbonneau and a wife described only as "a woman of the Snake [Shoshone] nation" guided a traveler going from St. Louis into Mandan country.

This woman died in 1812 at Fort Manuel in what is now South Dakota. Was she Sacagawea, or another of Charbonneau's wives? Historians may never know for sure.

**Modern Honors** Lewis and Clark paid Charbonneau \$500 for his services on the journey. Sacagawea was not paid, although Clark later wrote that she "deserved a greater reward for her attention and services . . . than we had in our power to give her." Almost two centuries later, in the year 2000, the U.S. government honored Sacagawea by putting her likeness on a new one-dollar coin.

### Review Questions

1. How did Sacagawea come to be married to Charbonneau?
2. Why did Lewis and Clark want Sacagawea on the trip?
3. How did Sacagawea help the expedition succeed?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Evaluating** How courageous was Sacagawea?
5. **Making Inferences** Why do you think Sacagawea did not stay with the Shoshone once she was reunited with them?
6. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** Which story do you believe about Sacagawea's final years? Why?