

## Exploration Leads to Discovery\*

Two hundred years ago?

What are two hundred years, when the people they visited had lived beside the Missouri for a thousand summers or more, and did not care about the lines Easterners drew on maps?

President Thomas Jefferson cared enough to send Meriwether Lewis along with William Clark on their famous expedition, with a vision of turning these heathen people into farmers, and traders. There was, however, already a city (sixteen hundred miles from the mouth of the river) where 4000 lived—more than in Washington, or St. Louis. And their farms provided the corn so these explorers would survive the cold of 1804 to 1805.

Amy Mossat lives today in New Town, North Dakota, along with her fellow Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. Here she plants this same corn in her garden, unmodified by hybridization, or genetic engineering.

Lewis, in his journals, referred to the native people as “children.” The Indians, in return, named one of their own who acted as a guide “Furnishes the white men with brains.”

Amy Mossat can no longer live in Old Town, because it was hybridized, or perhaps genetically engineered, some decades ago, inundated by the Garrison Dam along with 155,000 acres of farm land—that many acres of memories, and of sacred places.

Lewis and Clark passed through 50 nations. Each with its sacred places. You and I know a few names, like the one we borrowed for a capital city after the Omaha village of Tonwontaga was wiped out by the pox, or Chinook, because we gave it to a fish.

We take the time to worry about the future of fish. But who can tell me what has happened to the Chinook people? The Otoe and the Missouri were expelled to Oklahoma, where descendants still long for their northern plains. The Lemhi Shoshone were herded to the desert of southern Idaho. Some of the elders of the Nez Percé, in 1877, who were children when that tribe twice saved our explorers from starvation, remembered—as they were rounded up and removed.

You, too, can remember. Just follow the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail through towns where suicide is the number one cause of death.

Steve Bloom  
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\*Based on reporting by Timothy Egan (*New York Times*, June 15, 2003)