LEWIS AND CLARK RE-EXpedITION:
A SUGGESTED MODEL FOR TEACHING IN 1976

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During the last ten years change has certainly become a part of life in America. We are cognizant not only of increasing taxes and food prices but also of changes in education, mostly called innovations. With greater emphasis on humanizing education, we now speak of "individualized learning" and "work at your own pace." This may be a desired direction educationally, yet today's youth are mostly confined to the classroom with an occasional field trip to the city or forest preserve. Even though our liberal arts courses may require classroom facilities, others need not be so confined. Often it is more a place of convenience. Since college students are no longer restricted to home, greater relevancy in their educational experiences can be the rule rather than the exception. The purpose of this article is to share with colleagues the excitement of a proposed project at College of DuPage which has not only aroused interest of many students but also of faculty and administrators.

Since the Bicentennial is filled with various types of celebration for our national birthday we are made aware of historical events through all forms of media. For those teachers who are always looking for new ways to enhance the learning climate of their courses, I propose using the Bicentennial or some other related historic event as a place to "hang" courses from any discipline.

During the summer of 1976 a group of College of DuPage students will spend five weeks re-exploring the Northwest Passage established by Lewis and Clark in 1804 and 1805. The intent of this interdisciplinary re-expedition is to explore the "charge" given to Lewis and Clark by President Jefferson in 1803 following the Louisiana Purchase. According to Gerald S. Snyder, the author of In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark, Jefferson "charged them with exploring the Missouri River and finding the most direct and practical water route across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. They kept daily records of the weather, visited previously unknown Indian tribes, and described hundreds of plants and animals, many for the first time." Snyder further comments, "I made a discovery of my own . . . some of the country that Lewis and Clark traveled through looks just as it did to them. Although cities, dams, and the changing courses of rivers have obliterated much of the trail, it is still possible in many places to follow in the explorers' footsteps."

In early May, 1804, Lewis and Clark journeyed from the mouth of Wood River in Illinois Country, crossed the churning Mississippi, and entered the mouth of the Missouri. This commenced a journey that would take the explorers hundreds of miles, crossing present day states of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana. Once they reached the end of the Missouri River in western Montana, they crossed the rugged Rocky Mountains by foot and horseback. Using the Lochsa and Clearwater Rivers, they crossed Idaho, and joined the Snake River at the border of present day Washington. From that point it was clear sailing down the Snake to its junction with the mighty Columbia and on through Oregon Territory to the Pacific.

Since the purpose of our re-expedition is to retrace the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, studies will be of plants, animals, mountains and tribes of native Americans with a backdrop of scenic and historic grandeur. Credit for participants of the re-expedition is available in biology, geography, and anthropology. Since community college education is designed to serve the community, families of the students are invited to join the expedition, combining their summer vacation with a educational experience in the Bicentennial year. Interactions between family and non-family units should be a beneficial sociological experience for students in which to evaluate their own role and place in our changing society.
The trip has been designed to allow maximum freedom for the explorers who will be living in remote and wilderness places for five weeks. Rather than travel in a bus or a caravan of vehicles from place to place, students will provide their own tents and share costs of food and travel among themselves. Unity of the study group will be maintained by camping and studying for three to five days at each of seven base camps, allowing for individual exploring and travel time between each camp.

Base camps have been selected as study sites because they are representative of the flora and fauna from many different habitats across America. The first is a site near the junction of the Platte and Missouri Rivers, a region where the vegetation is not only representative of the Arkansas forest ecotone but also of the floodplain which is characteristic of prairie rivers. To the north of this site and along the bluffs of the Missouri River, Lewis and Clark held their first council with the plains Indians, overlooking territories of the Omaha, Potawatomi, Oto and Missouri tribes.

Along the river to the next base camp are landmarks which predated the journey of Lewis and Clark, including not only a large bald eagle preserve but also Spirit Mound, a legendary sanctuary of evil spirits. Up the river to the Great Bend of the Missouri near Fort Thompson, South Dakota, is the study site on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation of the Sioux Nation, located in mixed grass prairie and wooded ravines. Through several reservations of the Sioux and territory of the now extinct Mandans, the 1976 explorers will journey on to the next base camp at Fort Peck Lake. Plant and animal species of this high plain in northern Montana exhibit characteristics common to species adapted to a climate of long and cold winters.

On the long westward trek to the Great Falls of the Missouri, the travelers will have their first encounter with the Rocky Mountains, Bear Paw, and Judith Ranges. Flora and fauna of this study area are typical of the northern mountain forests, nut-crackers and Engelmann spruce. Traveling on through the valleys of western Montana, the explorers will reach the Bitterroot Mountains, an awesome challenge for Lewis and Clark. Lolo Pass, our base camp at the summit, will provide the 1976 re-expedition team an opportunity to study a wilderness of spruce, fir, and the recently recut trails of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians.

West of the Continental Divide all rivers and roads lead to the Pacific. The Clearwater joins the Snake at Lewiston and Clarkston, and then flows into the Columbia Basin. At this point our explorers will experience the deserts of eastern Washington and Oregon. A base camp at the junction of the John Day and Columbia Rivers will emphasize studies of plant and animal biology in the cold northern deserts. The final trek will take the 1976 explorers along the now gentled Columbia River and its dams, through the Columbia Gorge, and on to the pounding surf of the cold Pacific. Reconstructed Fort Clatsop, where Lewis and Clark prepared for their return trip, is the last base camp of the re-expedition. Since the vegetation and habitats of the Pacific Northwest are numerous, daily explorations will be taken to the Oregon Dunes, Olympic Peninsula, Willamette Valley, and Mount Hood, where each location will provide representative flora and fauna for study. The re-exploration team may return to Illinois along different recommended routes, and the experiences of the re-expedition can continue.

Relevant education? However that may be defined, the learning experiences and the friendships made along the Lewis and Clark Trail will never be forgotten!

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... should have had a comfortable nights lodge but for the musquitoes which infested me all night. Late at night I was awakened by the noise of some animal running over the stoney bar ...  

Meriwether Lewis, July 30th, 1805