

Sacagawea

Most experts believe Sacagawea lived with the Shoshone Indians in the Rocky Mountains (on the border of Idaho and Montana) until she was 11 or 12 years old, when warriors of a rival tribe, the Hidatsa, captured her and took her to North Dakota.

A trader named Toussaint Charbonneau (pronounced TOO-sahnt SHAR-ba-no) either bought or won Sacagawea from the Hidatsa when she was about 14. A few years later Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau as a guide, and he and Sacagawea, now 16, joined the expedition's winter camp on November 4, 1804 at Fort Mandan near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. On February 11, 1805, Sacagawea gave birth to a boy, Jean Baptiste, at Fort Mandan in present day North Dakota. Expedition members nicknamed him "Pomp" from a Shoshone word meaning "leader."



Indian Mother and Child, 1980, Painted bronze by Harry Jackson, (b. 1924 -)



Sacagawea is shown in artwork holding her baby in a cradleboard and in a blanket. She probably used both methods to carry him. The Hidatsa method of carrying babies is facing forward in a blanket wrapped around the mother's back. The Shoshone tradition is to carry the baby for the first year in a cradleboard.

Sacagawea helped make the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery expedition a success in many ways. She was able to identify edible plants to keep the explorers fed. The presence of Sacagawea and her baby indicated to the various Indian tribes they met that the expedition was not a war party. She also served as a guide through Shoshone territory, but according to the journals, her biggest contribution was interpreting with the Shoshone in order to secure horses and find the best route over the Rocky Mountains. Sacagawea was reunited with her brother, Chief Cameahwait, and other members of her family, but continued with the expedition. Sacagawea spent 21 months with Lewis and Clark and covered more than 2,700 miles on foot, in canoes and on horseback.

After reaching the Pacific Ocean, the expedition returned to the Mandan village where they left Sacagawea and her family. She later had a daughter, Lizette. Evidence indicates Sacagawea died of an illness at age 25 in Fort Manuel, South Dakota on December 20, 1812. Although it has been written she lived to be 100 years old, most believe she died at age 25. Her son and infant daughter were adopted by Captain Clark.

Pomp later received an education thanks to William Clark, traveled to Europe and Africa, but returned to the United States in 1829 and became a mountain man and guide. He died at the age of 61 after contracting pneumonia. Charbonneau worked as an interpreter and fur trader up into his 80s. He is thought to have died in 1843 at the age of 86.

Sacagawea's name remains a puzzle. The members of the expedition called her "Janie" and spelled her name 17 different ways. Here are the two most common versions:

Sacajawea (sack-uh-juh-WEE-uh), a Shoshone word meaning "canoe launcher"

Sacagawea (sah-KA-gah-we-ah), from two Hidatsa words meaning "bird woman"