Letter from Capt. Clark, One of the Party Appointed by the President to Explore the Missouri, &c, to His Brother, St. Louis, September 23, 1806

by William Clark

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by the creditors, those several species of debt amounting on the 1st Jan. 1803, to something more than $46,000,000, would be converted into 8 per cent stock, amounting to less than $40,000,000, which the continued annual appropriation of $8,000,000 would (besides paying the interest on the Louisiana debt) reimburse within a period of less than seven years, or before the end of the year 1816, as will appear by the table marked (H.)

The total annual expenditure for those seven years would then, allowing still $3,500,000 dollars for current expenses, and 400,000 dollars for contingencies, amount to something less than twelve millions of dollars; which deducted from a revenue of fourteen millions of dollars, would still leave after the year 1808, a clear surplus of more than two millions of dollars, applicable to such new objects of general improvement or national defence, as the legislature might direct, and existing circumstances require. And after the year 1815, no other incumbrance would remain on the public stock, but the interest of the Louisiana debt; the last payment of which in the year 1821, would complete the final extinguishment of the public debt.

All which is respectfully submitted.

ALBERT GALLATIN,
Secretary of the Treasury.

LETTER FROM CAPT. CLARK,
ONE OF THE PARTY APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT TO EXPLORE THE MISSOURI, &C. TO HIS BROTHER.

DEAR BROTHER,

St. Louis, 23d Sept. 1806.

We arrived at this place at 12 o'clock, to day from the Pacific Ocean, where we remained during the last winter, near the entrance of the Columbia river. This station we left on the 27th of March last, and should have reached St. Louis early in August, had we not been detained by the snow which barred our passage across the Rocky Mountains, until the 24th of June. In returning through those mountains we divided ourselves into several parties, descending from the route, by which we went out, in order to the more effectually to explore the country, and discover the most practicable route which does exist across the continent by the way of the Missouri and Columbia rivers. In this we were completely successful, and have therefore no hesitation in declaring, that such as nature has permitted we have discovered the best route which does exist across the continent of North America in that direction. Such is that by way of the Missouri to the foot of the rivers below the great falls of that river, a distance of 2,072 miles, thence by land passing by the Rocky Mountains, to a navigable part of the Koskoseke 340; and with the Koskoseke 72 miles, Lewis's river 134 miles, and the Columbia 413 miles to the Pacific Ocean, making the total distance from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi, to the discharge of the Columbia into the Pacific Ocean 3,553 miles. The navigation of the Missouri may be deemed good—its difficulties arise from its falling banks, timber imbedded in the mud of its channel, its sand-bars and the steadiness of its current, all which may be overcome with a great degree of certainty, by using the necessary precautions. The passage by land of 349 miles from the falls of Missouri to the Koskoseke, is the most practicable path of the tract proposed across the continent. Of this distance 350 miles is a good road, and 240 miles over tremendous mountains, which for 80 miles are covered with eternal snows. A passage over these mountains, however, practicable from the latter part of June to the last of September; and the cheap rate at which horses are to be obtained from the Indians of the Rocky Mountains, and West of them, reduces the expense of transportation, and this portage to a mere trifle. The navigation of the Koskoseke, Lewis's river, and the Columbia, is safe and good from the first of April to the middle of August, by making three par...
travages on the latter river. The first of which, in descending is 1500 paces at the falls of Columbia 261 miles up that river, the second of two miles at the long narrows 6 miles below the falls, and a third, also of 2 miles at the great rapids 63 miles still lower down. The tide flows up the Columbia 123 miles, and within 7 miles of the great rapids. Large sloops may with safety ascend as high as tide water, and vessels of 300 tons burthen, reach the entrance of the Multnomah river, a large Southern branch of the Columbia, which takes its rise on the confines of New-Mexico, with the Galbin’s and poetio’s rivers, discharging itself into the Columbia 123 miles from its entrance into the Pacific Ocean. I consider this track across the continent of immense advantage to the fur trade, as all the furs collected in nine-tenths of the most valuable fur country in America, may be conveyed to the mouth of the Columbia, and shipped from thence to the East, by the first of August in each year; and will of course reach London earlier than the furs which are annually exported from Montreal arrive in G Britain.

In our outward bound voyage, we ascended to the foot of the rapids below the great falls of the Missouri, where we arrived on the 14th of June, 1805. Not having met with any of the natives of the Rocky Mountains, we were of course ignorant of the passes by land, which existed, through those mountains to the Columbia river; and had we even known the route we were destitute of horses, which would have been indispensably necessary to enable us to transport the requisite quantity of ammunition and other stores to ensure the remaining part of our voyage down the Columbia; we therefore determined to navigate the Missouri, as far as it was practicable, or unless we met with some of the natives from whom we could obtain horses and information of the country. Accordingly we undertook a most laborious portage at the falls of the Missouri, of 16 miles, which we effected with our canoes and baggage by the 3d of July. From hence ascending the Missouri, we penetrated the Rocky Mountains at the distance of 71 miles above the upper part of the portage, and penetrated as far as the three forks of that river, a distance of one hundred and eighty miles further. Here the Missouri divides into nearly equal branches at the same point. The two largest branches are of nearly the same dignity, that we did not conceive that either of them could with propriety retain the name of the Missouri; and therefore called those streams Jefferson's, Madison's, and Galbin’s rivers. The confluence of those rivers is 2846 miles from the mouth of the Missouri, by the meaners of that river. We arrived at the three forks of the Missouri the 27th of July. Not having yet been so fortunate as to meet with the natives, although I had previously made several excursions for that purpose, we were compelled still to continue our route by water.

The most northerly of the three forks, to which we had given the name of Jefferson's river, was deemed the most proper for our purpose and we accordingly ascended it 240 miles to the upper forks, and its extreme navigable point; making the total distance to which we had navigated the waters of the Missouri, 3096 miles, of which 429 lay within the Rocky mountains. On the morning of the 17th of August, 1805, I arrived at the forks of Jefferson’s river, where I met captain Lewis, who had previously penetrated with a party of three men, to the waters of the Columbia, discovered a bend of the Shoshone nation, and had found means to induce 35 of their chiefs and warriors to accompany him to that place. From these people we learned that the river on which they resided was not navigable, and that a passage through the mountains in that direction was impracticable, being unwilling to confide in this unfavourable account of the natives, it was connected between Capt. Lewis and myself, that one of us should go forward immediately with a small party, and explore the river, while the other, in the mean time, would lay up the canoes at that place, and engage the natives with their horses in raising in transporting our stores and baggage to the camp. Accordingly I set out the next day, passed the dividing mountains between the waters of the Missouri and Columbia, and descended the river which I since called the East fork of Lewis's river, about 70 miles. First
ing that the Indians’ account of the country in the direction of this river was correct, I returned and joined Capt. Lewis on the 29th of August at the Shoshone camp, excessively fatigued as you may suppose; having passed mountains almost inaccessible, and compelled to subsist on berries during the greater part of my route. We now purchased 27 horses of those Indians, and hired a guide, who assured us that he could in 15 days take us to a large river in an open country west of these mountains, by a route some distance to the north of the river on which they lived, and that by which the natives west of the mountains visit the plains of the Missouri, for the purpose of hunting the buffalo. Every preparation being made, we set forward with our guide on the 31st of August through these tremendous mountains, in which we continued until the 23d of September, before we reach the lower country beyond them; on our way we met with the Oglalas a band of the Tuchapaks, from whom we obtained an accession of seven horses and exchanged eight or ten others; this proved of infinite service to us, as we were compelled to subsist on horse meat about eight days before we reached the Kooskooskee. During our passage over these mountains we suffered every thing which hunger, cold, and fatigue could impose.

Nor did our difficulties with respect to provisions cease on our arrival at the Kooskooskee, for although the Pallotepalors, a numerous nation inhabiting that country, were extremely hospitable, and for a few trifling articles furnished us with abundance of roots and dried salmon, the food to which they were accustomed; we found that we could not subsist on these articles, and almost all of us grew sick on eating them; we were obliged therefore to have recourse to the flesh of horses and dogs as food to supply the deficiency of our guns, which produced but little meat, as game was scarce in the vicinity of our camp on the Kooskooskee, where we were compelled to remain in order to construct our pirogues to descend the river. At this season the salmon are meagre and form but indifferent food. While we remained here I was myself sick for several days, and my friend Capt. Lewis suffered a severe indisposition.

Having completed four pirogues and a small canoe, we gave our horses in charge to the Pallotepalors until we returned, and on the 7th of Oct. re-embarked for the Pacific Ocean. We descended by the route I have already mentioned. The water of the river being low at this season, we experienced much difficulty in descending, we found it obstructed by a great number of difficult and dangerous rapids, in passing of which our pirogues several times filled, and the men escaped narrowly with their lives. However, this difficulty does not exist in high water, which happens within the period which I have previously mentioned. We found the natives extremely numerous and generally friendly, though we have on several occasions owed our lives and the fate of the expedition to our number, which consisted of 34 men. On the 17th of November we reached the ocean, where various considerations induced us to spend the winter; we therefore selected for an eligible situation for that purpose, and selected a spot on the south side of a little river, called by the natives Netul, which discharges itself at a small bar on the south side of the Columbia, and 14 miles within point Adams. Here we constructed some log houses, and defended them with a common stockade wall; this place we called Fort Clatsop, after a nation of that name who were our nearest neighbours. In this country we found an abundance of elk, on which we subsisted principally during the last winter; we left Fort Clatsop on the 27th of March. On our homeward bound voyage, being much better acquainted with the country we were enabled to take such precautions as in a great measure secured us from the want of provisions at any time, and greatly lessened our fatigue, when compared with those to which we were compelled to submit in our outward bound journey. We have not lost a man since we left the Mandanias, a circumstance which I assure you is a pleasing consideration to me. As I shall shortly be with you, and the post is now waiting, I deem it unnecessary here to attempt minutely to detail the occurrences of the last eighteen months.

I am, &c. your affectionate brother,

W.M. CLARK