

Close Encounters on the Great Plains

Lewis & Clark's Corps of Discovery spent several sleepless nights as they proceeded through the lands occupied by the powerful "Teton" Lakota tribes. The Captains had been warned that these tribes exacted a high toll before allowing any traffic on the river to pass, and that if the price they named was not met, the Lakota would take it by force. The journal entries for the dates of September 23-30, 1804, note that the soldiers were on high alert during their stay in the vicinity of present day Pierre and Fort Pierre.

The Captains' worst fears were almost realized during their first meeting with the local Lakota chiefs at the mouth of the Bad (Teton) River. The lack of a competent interpreter sent the council to the brink of violence with weapons drawn and sighted on both sides. Given the time it took to reload the guns carried by the army volunteers, the advantage lay on the side of the Lakota warriors, whose bows could be re-nocked with greater speed. The "Teton" Chief, Black Buffalo, managed to diffuse the situation, gaining him greater status with his own people, and with the Army officers.

Although Lewis & Clark spent the next few days talking to, lecturing, feasting with, and studying the Lakota people, the tension didn't ease. In fact, it almost erupted into violence a second time. Sometime after 1 a.m., after a night of feasting and being entertained by Native dancers, Clark boarded a pirogue bound for the keelboat. The steersman inadvertently ran over the anchor cable of the keelboat, sending the vessel to the mercy of the current. The shouting of men trying to regain control of the keelboat alarmed the "Teton" warriors who lined the riverbanks apparently prepared for battle.

The next day brought the final "battle of wills" and violence between the Expedition and the Lakota was narrowly avoided for a third time. Followers of Chief Black Buffalo grabbed the rope tethering the keelboat to the riverbank and wouldn't release it, demanding more tobacco. Lewis refused. Tempers flared on both sides as armed

warriors again lined the bank, and Clark prepared to fire the port swivel gun. Lewis insisted that the Corps would proceed, and calling Black Buffalo's leadership into question, goaded the Chief into significantly reducing the amount the warriors were demanding. This done, Lewis disdainfully tossed a few twists of tobacco toward the men holding onto the rope, and Black Buffalo jerking the rope from their hands, handed it to the steersman. The encounter with the "Tetons" was over.

Today, you can stand in the grass in a city-owned park at the mouth of the Bad River and envision the keelboat anchored 70 yards out in the middle of the Missouri River. Imagine yourself surrounded by proud Lakota warriors watching the US soldiers parade in full military dress. Or, you can drive a little north of town and overlook the approximate area where the anchor was lost.

A self-guided historic driving tour is available at the Pierre Convention & Tourism Bureau that will direct you to local Lewis & Clark sites as well as other historic sites in the area. Traveler's seeking a Missouri River Cruise, the Capitol City Queen, 48-passenger excursion boat. Daily Excursions departing from LaFramboise Island Causeway in Pierre. Your two hour cruise on the Missouri includes a guided tour of historic sites including the mouth of the Bad River where Lewis & Clark's expedition held counsel with the Teton tribes.

**For more information contact
Pierre Convention & Tourism Bureau**

**Call: 605-224-7361
Toll Free: 800-962-2034**

Online: www.pierrechamber.com

Pierre/Ft. Pierre In-Your-Face History



Confrontation ... escalation ... weapons drawn and sighted at point blank range. The lack of a competent interpreter sent Lewis & Clark's first meeting with the "Tetons" to the brink of violence. Given the time it took to reload the guns carried by the army volunteers, the advantage lay on the side of the Lakota warriors. In an instant, the expedition would have ended.

Today, you can stand on the grass at the mouth of the Bad (Teton) River, where the council with the Teton Lakota nearly turned the expedition back. You can see the bluffs of the Missouri, just as they looked when Lewis gazed on them. We're sure that you'll enjoy exploring what William Clark called "a land of Plenty". Call the Pierre Convention & Tourism Bureau at 800-962-2034 or look us up at www.pierrechamber.com for more information.

Pierre/Fort Pierre, South Dakota ♦ On the River ♦ On the Lewis & Clark Trail