



A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF SACAJAWEA

Sacajawea's people, the Agai'dika (*Salmon Eater*) Shoshone-Bannock, were a nomadic tribe whose homeland was in the vicinity of present day Salmon, Idaho. In the autumn of 1800, during the annual buffalo hunt, a Hidatsa war party attacked the Agai'dika at the forks of the Missouri River. Sacajawea, who was about 12 years old at the time, was taken hostage along with several other Agai'dika. The Hidatsa took the hostages to the Knife River Village complex (in present day North Dakota), a large Mandan and Hidatsa trade center. Within the next few years Sacajawea became the woman of a French Canadian trader and interpreter, Toussaint Charbonneau. The circumstances of their union are debated to this day. Charbonneau had at least 2 Shoshone "wives", the second from a tribe who lived south of the Agai'dika.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition built Fort Mandan near the Knife River Village complex in preparation for the winter of 1804-1805 and hired Charbonneau as an interpreter in November 1804. When Lewis and Clark learned Sacajawea's people were the Shoshone living near the divide between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, her interpretive skills became an unexpected benefit to hiring Charbonneau. Sacajawea gave birth to her first child, their son Jean Baptiste, on February 11, 1805. Charbonneau, Sacajawea, and Jean Baptiste departed Fort Mandan for points west with the Expedition on April 7, 1805.

Sacajawea had an emotional reunion with her people in August, where she learned that in the 5 years she was away, all but 3 of her relatives had died. When it came time to interpret she realized the chief was her kin, Cameahwait. It was another emotional reunion. Sacajawea's biggest contribution to the success of the Expedition was her skillful interpretation during the negotiation for horses. She also persuaded her brother to postpone the Agai'dika's departure for the annual buffalo hunt to help the Corps of Discovery portage their supplies over Lemhi Pass.

After wintering at Fort Clatsop, the Expedition started on its return trip east in March 1806. The party split at present day Lolo, Montana. Lewis went north and Clark south. The Charbonneau's accompanied Clark. Sacajawea's role turned to guide when she led Clark to shortcuts at the Big Hole and Bozeman Pass. The group reunited and the Charbonneau's left the Expedition on August 17, 1806, upon their return to the Knife River Villages.

The Charbonneau's remained there for 3 years. In 1809 they moved to St. Louis. After 2 years, Charbonneau and Sacajawea left Jean Baptiste with Clark to be educated and returned to the upper Missouri River. In 1812, Sacajawea gave birth to a girl, Lizette, at Fort Manuel where Charbonneau worked as an interpreter.

Most historians believe Sacajawea died at Fort Manuel on December 12, 1812. Clark ended up with custody of Lizette around this time. However, according to Eastern Shoshone oral tradition, it was Charbonneau's other wife who died at Fort Manuel. They believe that Sacajawea left Charbonneau in 1813, went to live with the Eastern Shoshone and died on April 9, 1884, in Fort Washakie, Wyoming. She has a marked grave on the Wind River Reservation.