

THE ACTUAL ROLE



purposeful
member
of the
Corps

or

casual
“tag along”?

*front view of the
statue of Sacagawea,
executed by Alice
Cooper of Denver and
dedicated in 1905 in
Portland, Oregon. It
stands today in
Washington Park in
that city.*

OF THE BIRD WOMAN

by E. G. CHUINARD

Not long ago in this magazine, the best known and most written about Indian woman in American history was finally laid to rest. One may hope that the careful research and reasoned approach which it embodied helped end the disputatious questions of where and when she died.* Perhaps now students of the Lewis and Clark Expedition may turn to resolving once and for all a question of more substantive historical significance: the real role of Sacagawea during the journey of discovery. Was the 17-year-old mother, with her baby strapped on her back, officially hired by the captains to serve as interpreter and guide, or was her husband, Charbonneau, the one who was really wanted, with Sacagawea just a casual “tag-along”?

Sacagawea’s presence with the corps, from the time it left the Mandan Villages near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, on April 7, 1805, until it returned to the same place on August 14, 1806, is well documented by diarists of the party, including the two leaders. Her *intended* status with the group probably will never be known, unless some undiscovered statement by one of the captains comes to light. Yet we can apply to questions about Sacagawea some reasonable interpretations and come to some very logical conclusions — conclusions regarding not only her function and activities during the journey but why she was allowed to come along at all.

Let us first put ourselves in the position of the two prudent, intelligent captains who were looking for all possible information and help, and ask ourselves what kind of personnel we would want on the Expedition. The captains answer for us repeatedly: hardy, healthy, unmarried men — the latter because they wanted no excess baggage. Let us then approach the probable role of Sacagawea by giving thought to considerations that probably influenced Lewis and Clark in their decision to include her in the party. In order to take a fresh, objective look at all of this, however, it is desirable — even imperative — to brush aside the emotional gloss which has been accumulating for more than 170 years and finally cease impaling this admirable woman on the twin horns of eulogy and disparagement.

*Irving Anderson’s “Probing the Riddle of the Bird Woman,” appeared in this magazine in the Autumn issue, 1973. The author of the present article uses the generally accepted spelling for the name of the subject, one more question whose final answer has eluded scholars for many years.

the eulogizers

Right after the turn of the century, a zealous Oregonian named Eva Emory Dye wrote a book called *The Conquest, the True Story of Lewis and Clark*. Despite its title, it was a novelized history, prompted by centennial observances of the Expedition then underway. Although Mrs. Dye obviously was caught up by the need to recognize the contribution of the corps and its members, her bias as a historian tends rather to spring from her support of the Oregon suffrage movement, then in full swing. Perceiving that Sacagawea symbolized what the women of Oregon were striving for, she proceeded to embellish the Indian woman's role as heroine of the Expedition. Mrs. Dye took this unknown Shoshone Indian girl who had been living the simple life of the squaw of a French trader in the Mandan Villages and transformed her into a heroic pathfinder who literally pointed the explorers — and, by inference, the nation — to the western ocean.

Dye praised Sacagawea in the best Victorian manner: "Sacajawea's hair was neatly braided, her nose was fine and straight, and her skin pure copper like the statue in some old Florentine gallery. Madonna of her race, she had *led* [italics ours] the way to a new time. To the hands of this girl, not yet eighteen, had been entrusted the key that unlocked the road to Asia."

The manner in which the myth of Sacagawea and the woman suffrage movement coalesced is illustrated by the leadership of the Sacagawea Statue Association, of which Mrs. Dye was president and Abigail Scott Duniway, a suffrage leader, was honorary president. This group proclaimed ten reasons why the women of the Northwest should erect a statue to their Indian heroine. Among these was not only the indisputable claim that Sacagawea was the only woman to accompany the Expedition, and that she was the first pioneer mother to cross the Rocky Mountains and carry her baby into the Oregon Country, but that she was sole guide and interpreter for the corps of discovery.

"It was she who led the expedition through the tortuous ravines of the eastern slope of the Rockies," these eulogizers said, "led them safely past the retreat of the murderous Blackfeet, and it was she who stood on the bow of that shining range and unlocked the gates of the Pacific Coast empire to the baffled heroes into whose hands she was luckily cast."

As Edwin Poole pointed out in an article of recent date, the suffragists had selected a potent image: "Sacajawea became a symbol — evidence of the contribution of women — a rallying point. And women who wouldn't have been found dead on an Indian reservation took her to their bosoms. Women rallied to her cause and vice versa; women wrote about her; women did things to glorify her and perpetuate her — and they haven't quit yet."

Thus the money for the statue was raised and at the dedication, Mrs. Dye spoke about her heroine: "At a time when the hearts of the leaders of the expedition had well nigh fainted within them . . . this woman came to their deliverance and pointed out to the captains the great pass which leads from the forks of the three rivers over the mountains. Then silently strapping her papoose upon her back she led the way, interpreting and making friendly overtures to the powerful tribes of Indians, who but for her might at any moment have annihilated that brave band of intrepid souls. Forerunner of civilization, great leader of men, patient and motherly woman, we bow our hearts and do you honor."

Although she must be forgiven for the flowery sentiment that was typical of the Victorian era, the Dye message was clear: Sacagawea was responsible for the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Borrowing upon these ideas, later historians further extended and amplified the legend. Writing in 1925, Rollo Reynolds went beyond the evidence in relating the Indian woman's importance to the Expedition, saying she could speak the Shoshone, Blackfoot, and Crow languages and that she was more than once the salvation of the party.

An even more flowery tribute came from Donald C. Peattie in 1942: "Sacajawea could not really understand what that fluttering banner (the United States flag) stood for. Yet when you look at it today, remember that she put five of the stars on it. She did this, if you like, for the love of a man, a white man. But it was a love as pure and clear and cold as the sources of the Missouri and Columbia. And out of it has descended to us a mighty flow.

"Every day for the next fortnight Sacajawea was busy, and in the most intellectual employ she had ever had in her life, translating for Lewis and the Indians. At the camp where she had first met her brother, in the Lemhi Pass, or down the other side in the valley of the Lemhi where she was born, she was needed at all hours of the day and many of the night. It was Sacajawea who chose for her captains the site of their winter camp, a few miles from the sea on the south side of the Columbia."

THE BIRD WOMAN AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

Suffragettes were in the vanguard of a long parade which moved through the streets of Portland, Oregon, on Thursday, July 6, 1905, enroute to the site of the Lewis and Clark Exposition, where a monument to "SACAJAWEA — THE BIRD WOMAN" was unveiled. The statue, the work of the well-known woman sculptor, Alice Cooper, stands today in Washington Park in the Oregon city. The daily Oregon Journal printed a picture of the monument, and the verse which follows. Then in an accompanying front page story, the paper said: "Gallant men of the western states today honored the memory of a brave Indian woman — Sacajawea — guide of the explorers who a century ago accepted and nobly discharged the mission of President Jefferson and sought a route over which afterward moved the column of civilization's army to conquer this region." It was, the editor said, in a large sense woman's day, for the occasion marked the achievements of women, including the crusaders for the right to vote. The great Susan B. Anthony, who was the main speaker of the day, referred to Sacajawea as "one of the greatest of American heroines, second not even to Molly Pitcher," and she pitted the woman who was "unable on this occasion to worship at the shrine of the Indian 'squaw'."

Behind them toward the rising sun
The traversed wilderness lay —
About them gathered — one by one
The baffling mysteries of their way!
To westward, yonder, peak on peak
The glittering ranges rose and fell —
Ah, but among that hundred paths,
Which led aright? Could any tell?

Where'er you turned in wonderment
In that wild empire, unsurveyed,
Unerring still, she pointed west —
Unfalling, all your pathways laid!
She nodded toward the setting sun —
She raised a finger toward the sea —
The closed gates opened, one by one,
And showed your path of Destiny!

The wreath of Triumph give to her;
She led the conquering captains west;
She charted first the trails that led
The hosts across yon mountain crest!
Barefoot she tolled the forest paths,
Where now the course of Empire speeds;
Can you forget, loved Western land,
The glory of her deathless deeds?

Brave Lewis and Immortal Clark!
Bold spirits of that best crusade,
You gave the waiting world the spark
That thronged the empire-paths you made!
But standing on that snowy height,
Where westward yon wild rivers whirl,
The guide who led your hosts aright
Was that barefoot Shoshone girl!



In yonder city, glory-crowned,
Where art will vie with art to keep
The memories of those heroes green —
The flush of conscious pride should leap
To see her fair memorial stand
Among the honored names that be —
Her face toward the sunset still —
Her finger lifted toward the sea!

You halted in those dim arcades —
You faltered by those baffling peaks —
You doubted in those pathless glades,
But ever, ever true she speaks!
Where lay the perilous snows of Spring,
Where streams their westward course
forsook,
The wildest mountain haunts to her
Were as an open picture-book!

Beside you on Fame's pedestal,
Be hers the glorious fate to stand —
Bronzed, barefoot, yet a patron saint,
The keys of empire in her hand!
The mountain gates that closed to you
Swung open, as she led the way —
So let her lead that hero host
When comes their glad memorial day!

Exaggerations about the contributions of Sacajawea have been chorused by a host of other writers from the turn of the century to fairly recent date. Indeed, as late as 1972, the *Readers Digest* carried an article by John King, in which the old refrain is repeated: ". . . Sacajawea, the young Indian princess who . . . led the Lewis and Clark Expedition safely through the Rocky Mountain barrier."

Statuary, which has risen from the Dakotas to the Oregon Coast, has traditionally depicted Sacajawea leading and pointing the way westward, with legends alluding to the same general theme. A legend on a monument at Clark Canyon at the head-

waters of the Beaverhead River south of Dillon, Montana, for instance, proclaimed that the Expedition and the subsequent opening of the West was "largely due to the guidance and loyalty of the Indian girl Sacajawea." Ironically, this message is now flooded by the backed-up waters of Clark Canyon Dam, built in the early 1960's by the Bureau of Reclamation. Impounded waters also cover the town of Armitage, located at the confluence of Horse Prairie Creek and Red Rock River, near the spot where the party contacted Sacajawea's people in August, 1805. Sadly, vandals have seized or destroyed all other signs at this historic spot.

the disparagers

Credit for initially challenging the exaggerated image of the Bird Woman belongs to C. S. Kingston in his *Sacajawea the Guide*, published in 1944. Unlike many later disparagers, however, he treated Sacagawea gently, rating her as “. . . a useful but not indispensable member of the expedition.” Kingston’s work, which dealt chiefly with Sacagawea’s purported role as guide, dissects the subject in a scholarly way. A number of Kingston’s successors, however, have been inordinately caustic and vicious in their interpretations.

Richard L. Neuberger, the late Senator from Oregon, writing in 1951 in the *Oregonian*, totally discredited the Indian woman’s role: “. . . this is merely a legend and nothing more . . . there is barely a thread of truth in all the vast fabric of fancy and fiction which has been woven out of this unsupported myth. Sacajawea was brave and resourceful, but she was never a guide for Lewis and Clark.”

In 1969 John C. Hunt agreed with Neuberger by summarily rejecting the idea that Sacagawea served at any time in the capacity of guide: “She was never a guide . . . she did not lead the men, pointing the way. She could not because she did not know the way.”

The highly regarded Bernard DeVoto, even though he credited Sacagawea with solid help on the homeward journey, joined the company of disparagers when he wrote in his *The Course of Empire*: “The tropical emotion that has created a legendary Sacajawea awaits a study by some connoisseur of American sentiments. . . . More statues have been erected to her than to any other American woman. Few others have had so much sentimental fantasy expended on them. A good many men who have written about her, including a couple with some standing as historians, have obviously fallen in love with her. Almost every woman who has written about her has become Sacajawea in her inner reverie. And she has received what in the United States counts as canonization if not deification. . . .”

In effect, DeVoto summarized the position of the Indian woman’s detractors when in the same book, he quipped: “. . . from Bismarck to the sea many antiquaries and most trailmakers have believed that Lewis, Clark and their command were privileged to assist in the Sacajawea Expedition.”

the moderates

The position which stresses the limited although important nature of Sacagawea’s contributions to the Expedition dates to the work of James K. Hosmer in 1904. “The Bird Woman had not forgotten the tongue of her people,” he wrote, “and the Captains, thinking she might be useful as an interpreter when they reached the mountains, had persuaded her and her husband to join them. Though carrying at her back her papoose, but a few months old, she bore all that her male companions did, and quickly made her way to their respect by her efficiency and kindly nature. Near the Three Forks of the Missouri the Bird Woman recognized a spot where in childhood she had been taken captive.”

E. H. Criswell, writing in 1940, noted that Sacagawea’s language ability proved useful in obtaining horses from the Shoshone Indians and to a limited extent as a guide. “When the expedition had halted for its midday dinner on July 22nd,” Criswell wrote, “Sacajawea had suddenly begun to recognize the country through which they were passing. This, she said, was the very river, along which her band of Shoshones lived, and the Three Forks were not a great distance ahead. As they soon reached the Three Forks, they knew she was right and they were in Shoshone country at last.

“Sacajawea also told them that the upper reaches of the river would be much like what they saw, without waterfalls, and she identified a creek to which her tribe came to collect white earth for paint. All began to ‘console themselves with the anticipation of shortly seeing the head of the Missouri yet unknown to the civilized world.’ It was one of the few occasions when Sacajawea was able to give accurate geographical information.”

John E. Bakeless also noted Sacagawea’s value as a guide. Of the three possible passes Clark found only the modern Bridger Pass and the modern Bozeman Pass on his return in 1806. When Sacagawea recommended the latter, Clark took her advice. DeVoto, in spite of the rather disparaging remarks he made elsewhere in his *Course of Empire*, wrote, “It [Gibbon’s Pass] led on down to the Big Hole Valley, where Sacajawea could really be a guide.”

R. D. Burroughs noted that when Lewis learned that Charbonneau was married to a member of the Shoshone nation, he immediately hired the Frenchman to act as cook and interpreter in order to secure

the services of Sacagawea, who, he felt, would be invaluable to the Expedition "as soon as it reached the land of the Shoshones."

David Lavender might also be considered a moderate critic of Sacagawea in that he does not make scathing remarks about her. But he scarcely gave her due credit when he wrote in his *Land of Giants*, published in 1958: "For the young mother the meeting with Lewis and Clark was an introduction to immortality . . . As debunkers tirelessly show, little of the adulation is deserved. Though the captains hoped she might serve as a guide,

her knowledge of geography, even that of her own homeland, proved almost non-existent. Such usefulness as she possessed arose largely from the accident of her language and her sex; she could interpret, and her presence convinced suspicious tribes that the whites were peaceful or they would not have brought a woman along. . . ."

In view of the fact, documented in the journals, that Sacagawea gave Clark the correct route across Bozeman Pass, it is hard to justify Lavender's blanket statement about her almost total ignorance of geography.

The Indian woman was depicted in the lead position as guide in this imposing marble bas-relief sculpture at the entrance of the Oregon state capitol building in Salem.



Oregon State Highway Commission

some of the clues

As we have said, unless some undiscovered statement by one of the captains comes to light, their intentions regarding Sacagawea, or indeed her husband, will never be known with certainty. Yet there is boundless evidence from which reasonable conclusions can be drawn. There are clues in the correspondence which passed between Lewis and Clark in 1803, for they suggest that neither Sacagawea (a woman) or Charbonneau (a married man) would have been initially considered.

On June 19, from Washington, Lewis wrote to his co-captain: ". . . when descending the Ohio it shall be my duty by enquiry to find out and engage some good hunters, stout, healthy, unmarried men, accustomed to the woods, and capable of bearing bodily fatigue in a pretty considerable degree. . . ."

Yet another dimension is suggested in a letter Clark sent to Lewis in July. Writing from Louisville, he advised his partner: "I have temporally engaged some men for the enterprize of a description calculated to work and go thro' those labors & fatigues which will be necessary. Several young men (gentlemen's sons) have applied to accompany us. As they are not accustomed to labour and as that is a verry essential part of the services required of the party, I am cautious in giving them any encouragement."

Lewis and Clark began recruiting personnel and establishing their winter camp at Wood River on December 12, 1803. After carefully selecting and disciplining a crew of various skills, they gathered their supplies and departed on May 14, 1804, a very complete and self sufficient unit. Although they hired George Drouillard as a hunter and an interpreter fluent in Indian sign language, the sources indicate that no one in the corps was designated as guide. In fact, a guide was not necessary — the Missouri was their highway, and they possessed good maps of the river as far as the Mandan Villages.

The wisdom of the captains' decision about their company was evident from the first. J. G. Jacobs wrote in *The Life and Times of Patrick Gass* in 1859, apparently relating information given to him by Gass, that at Wood River "Several of those who volunteered and were accepted, felt their ardor suddenly cool, when the time came for starting. The immediate prospect of exchanging civilization for barbarism, comfort for hardship, and safety for

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Many of the sources consulted for this article are clearly slanted toward eulogizing and/or disparaging the role of Sacagawea, while many others contain both elements. In the first category: Eva Emory Dye, *The Conquest, the True Story of Lewis and Clark*, A. C. McClurg, Chicago, 1902; Edwin A. Poole, "Charbono's Squar," *Pacific Northwesterner*, Winter 1964; Rollo G. Reynolds, *The Great Adventure of Charles Gilbert Hall*, New York, 1925; Donald C. Peattie, *Forward the Nation*, New York, 1942; Grace Raymond Hebard, *Sacajawea, Guide and Interpreter of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Arthur H. Clark, Glendale, Calif., 1953.

Speaking most clearly for the detractors: C. S. Kingston, "Sacajawea as Guide: The Evaluation of a Legend," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Jan., 1944; Ronald W. Taber, "Sacajawea and the Suffragettes: An Interpretation of a Myth," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Jan., 1967; Richard L. Neuberger, "Was Sacajawea Guide for Lewis and Clark? Explorers Journal Indicates Tale Only Myth," *The Oregonian*, Portland, Nov. 18, 1951; John C. Hunt, "A Reason for Statues and Plaques in Her Honor," *The Oregonian*, Portland, Dec. 28, 1969.

peril, with the chance of never returning, proved too much for their philosophy; and to use an expressive term, they backed out."

Alexander Willard, another member of the Expedition, enjoyed telling in later years how his fine physique in 1803 enabled him to pass the stiff inspection for enlistment. More than a hundred possible recruits failed to measure up to the expectations of Lewis and Clark.

The rigors of travel and problems of health and discipline that would be faced became increasingly apparent during the journey up the Missouri to the Mandan Villages. Reed deserted, and the insubordinate John Newman was court martialed and given 75 lashes. Despite pleadings for reinstatement, the captains were unmoved, and sent the malefactors back to St. Louis, indicating that the Expedition was a military one and subject to its procedures and discipline. The captains had thoroughly demonstrated that only individuals of stamina and unquestioned loyalty would be allowed to continue westward. To have altered their original structure to add a woman and a man of questionable abilities and steadfastness must have meant that Lewis and Clark believed Sacagawea would be of special value.

The moderates are most strongly represented by: James K. Hosmer, *History of the Expedition of Captains Lewis and Clark*, A. C. McClurg, Chicago, 1904; Elijah H. Criswell, *Lewis and Clark: Linguistic Pioneers*, University of Missouri Studies, St. Louis, 1936; John E. Bakeless, *Lewis and Clark, Partners in Discovery*, William Morrow & Co., New York, 1947; R. D. Burroughs, *Exploration Unlimited*, Wayne University Press, Detroit, 1953; David Lavender, *Land of Giants*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1958 — and, on balance, Bernard DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1952.

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recruiting at mandan

The corps arrived at the Mandan Villages on October 27, 1804. On this same day the captains noted in the journals, "we met with the frenchman by the name of Jessomme [Rene Jessaume, a free trader among the Indians] which we employ as an interpreter." They further noted that the man had an Indian wife and children in the village. On November 3, Jessaume and his family moved to Fort Mandan. Further notes indicate that Jessaume was to serve as the interpreter among the Mandans.

On November 4 the journals record, "a Mr. Chaubonie [Charbonneau] interpreter to the Gross Ventre nation Came to See us . . . this man wished to hire as an interpiter." Clark's field notes for the same date make it clear that both Charbonneau and one of his wives were hired to accompany the party: "a french man by Name Chabonah who Speaks the Big Belley language visit us, he wished to hire & informed us his 2 Squars were Snake Indians, we enga[ged] him to go on with us and take one of his wives to interpret the Snake language."

Scattered references in the journals indicate that the captains had information about the Snake or Shoshone Indians and that they realized their dealings with that tribe in order to secure horses and a guide would be crucial for the success of the Expedition.

Sergeant John Ordway's journal recorded that on November 11, "a frenchmans Squaw came to our camp who belonged to the Snake nation. She came with our Interpreters wife. . . ."

On several occasions, while the corps was wintering at Fort Mandan, Jessaume acted as interpreter to the Mandans and Charbonneau to the Gros Ventres. Apparently Sacagawea also proved of some value in this regard. Charles Mackenzie, a representative of the Northwest Company, observed at least once the complicated procedure by which Sacagawea served as interpreter: "the woman . . . understood a little Gros Ventres, in which she had to converse with her husband, who was a Canadian and did not understand English. A mulatto, who spoke bad French and worse English, served as interpreter to the Captains, so that a single word to be understood by the party required to pass from the Natives to the woman, from the woman to her husband, from the husband to the mulatto, from the mulatto to the captains."

Sacagawea as an individual was referred to in the journals for the first time on February 11, 1805, when this entry appeared: ". . . about five O'clock this evening one of the wives of Charbono was delivered of a fine boy." A footnote in the Thwaites edition says that the mother was Sacagawea, "the Shoshone captive purchased by Charbonneau, who had two other wives among the Mandan."

The ultimate reason for Sacagawea's inclusion in the corps personnel roster was suggested for the first time on March 11, when Clark wrote: ". . . We have every reason to believe that our Menetarre interpreter (*whome* we intended to take with his wife, as an interpreter through his wife to the Snake Indians of which nation She is) has been Corrupted by the _____ Company &c. Some explanation has taken place which Clearly proves to us the fact, we give him to night to reflect and deturmin whether or not he intends to go with us under the regulations Stated."

The blank in the entry represents a place in the original journals which could not be deciphered, but no doubt refers to the Hudson's Bay Company whose representatives had inspired disloyalty in Charbonneau, convincing him that he should be required to do no menial work along the way for these rival

Americans but function only as an interpreter. In view of the military discipline they had already imposed on men of the corps for lesser displays of insubordination, it is reasonable to assume that the captains would have considered Charbonneau good riddance and fired him on the spot.

Instead, they gave him more time to reverse himself. On March 17, came the beginnings of a settlement: "Mr. Chabonah Sent a frenchman of our party to say that he was Sorry for the Foolish part he had acted. . . ." On the next day, the matter was final: "Mr. Tousest Chabono Enlisted as Interpreter this evening."

On April 7, 1805 the Expedition left the Mandan Villages for the West. Clark listed the entire membership of the party, including as interpreters Drouillard and "Shabonah and his Indian Squar to act as Interpreter & interpretress for the snake Indians . . ." This was the first specific reference to Sacagawea as an interpreter with the Snake Indians, whose language Charbonneau could not speak.

The next day Lewis recorded that a Mandan came up after they had encamped and brought with him a woman who was anxious to accompany one of the men of the party. This, however, they positively refused to permit. These two journal entries at the time of departure indicate that there was a definite purpose in taking Sacagawea on the Expedition and that no other women were wanted. It is also highly doubtful that the free-wheeling Charbonneau, who had multiple wives, would have insisted that one particular wife accompany him when partners were easily obtainable along the trail.

The function of the interpreters is, however, still in some doubt. Drouillard using sign language, served as interpreter throughout the Expedition. Charbonneau was hired as interpreter to the Minnetarees although he did not know that language well. Keeping in mind that Lewis and Clark recognized Drouillard's knowledge of the sign language and were certainly aware of Charbonneau's deficiencies beyond the Minnetaree, it might well be asked why the captains considered taking Charbonneau along at all. Furthermore, Charbonneau had disassociated himself from the Expedition and demanded privileges which the captains would not give him. The captains had never before relented toward their men once a decision was made. Why, then, did they do so with regard to Charbonneau? It seems evident that it was Sacagawea, not her husband, who was the important individual. Only she could offer assurances of conversing with the Shoshone and obtaining horses from them.

It is evident from these considerations that the captains recognized Sacagawea as having more potential value as an interpreter than her husband. When the captains wrote in their journal on April 7 that the couple was "Interpreter and interpretress," Charbonneau was thus listed, as a manner of stating his official status, rather than his true ability. Moreover, early in the Expedition's progress, on May 20, the captains showed their appreciation of the Indian woman by naming a river "Sah-ca-ger-we-ah or Bird Woman's River, after our interpreter the Snake Woman."

Her contribution as an interpreter is further reiterated by the captains' final journal entry on August 17, 1806, as they took leave of Charbonneau and Sacagawea at the Mandan Villages on their way home: "we also took our leave of T. Chabono, his Snake Indian wife and their child who had accompanied us on our rout to the Pacific Ocean in the capacity of interpreter and interpretress."

role as guide

Most of the controversy about Sacagawea has always concerned her role as guide. There is no doubt that her function in this area has been greatly exaggerated. An example of such distortion is the statement of Charles Hall in *The Great Adventure*, published in 1935: "When they came to the three forks of the river, they were again at a loss which way to go. The Indian woman said she knew this country well; and showed them which fork to take. Captain Lewis decided to do as she said."

Much of the confusion arises from uncertainty as to whether commentators are discussing her role as a guide throughout the journey or only at certain places. Lewis recorded on April 14, 1805: ". . . the upper creek largest which we called Sharbono's creek [probably present-day Indian Creek] after our interpreter who encamped several weeks on it with a hunting party of Indians. This was the highest point to which any white man had ever ascended, except two Frenchmen." Thus Charbonneau certainly could offer no service as guide.

No doubt part of the difficulty in understanding Sacagawea's role as guide is semantic. Webster defines a guide as "a person who heads or directs another in his way or course." Although the captains never designated Sacagawea as "guide," more than once they indicate she reassured them that

they were on the right path to her people. Certainly confirmation of direction and course falls within the proper function of a guide. Webster's definition, unlike many of Sacagawea's detractors, does not require that a guide be in the lead.

Lewis wrote on July 22 that "the Indian woman recognizes the country and assures us that this is the river on which her relations live and that the three forks are at no great distance. This piece of information has cheered the spirits of the party . . ." On August 8 he wrote again that the "Indian woman recognized the point of high plain to our right, which she informed us was not very distant from the

summer retreat of her nation. . ."

Nor did Clark hesitate to give her credit for recommending the trail that he chose through the Bozeman Pass on the homeward journey in 1806. On July 13 he wrote: "The Indian woman, who has been of great service to me as a pilot thru this country, recommends a gap in the mountains more south which I shall cross." Guided by her landmarks, they reached the place where they had sunk the dugouts in a pond on the way west the previous August.

In what was perhaps her greatest single service, Clark recognized Sacagawea's staunchness of character, and offers a fair estimate of her services



Detail from the sculpture by Henry Lion again features Sacagawea pointing the way. Created from a sketch made by Charles M. Russell, a number of large bronze castings of this sculpture exist, including one at the Montana Historical Society's building in Helena.



Montana's great contemporary sculptor, Robert Scriver of Browning, has created the latest monument to the explorers and the Indian woman. A number of smaller casts have been made of this superb model, with the heroic sized monument dedicated at Fort Benton this summer.