

A Garden... or a Desert?

The Lewis and Clark Expedition's Assessment of the West

Was the West a garden or a desert? In 1803, President Jefferson commissioned Lewis and Clark to report on the Western lands of the Louisiana Purchase, particularly their potential for agricultural purposes.

NRCS was created in the 20th Century and addresses similar interests. Lewis and Clark described soils based on the kinds of plants and animals they would support, as well as other qualities and properties. NRCS soil scientists use similar descriptions today.

Jefferson's charge to Lewis and Clark reflected the need of our young nation to know and understand its natural resources. Today, NRCS helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment through local, state, and national partnerships.



"All those part of the hills which was Clear of Grass easily dissolved and washed into the river and bottoms, and those hills under which the river run, Sliped into it and disolves and mixes with the water of the river."

William Clark—Chamberlain, SD, Spetember 14, 1804



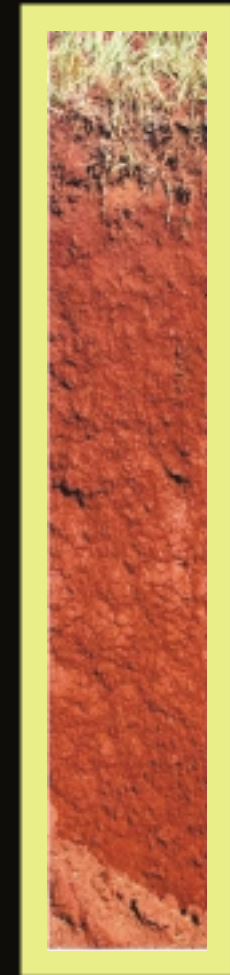
"... a cloudy morning & Smokey all Day from the burning of the plains, which was set on fire by the Minetaries for an early crop of Grass, as an enducement for the Buffalow to feed on."

William Clark—Ft. Mandan, ND, October 24, 1804

Above are two of a series of fourteen paintings commemorating the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. All were created using natural soil pigments by NRCS employee Jan Lang.



Below: list of tools used by Lewis and Clark, with examples – a theodolite on its tripod and a compass.



Davidson Soil monolith made at Monticello by NRCS personnel, as seen in the photos at left.