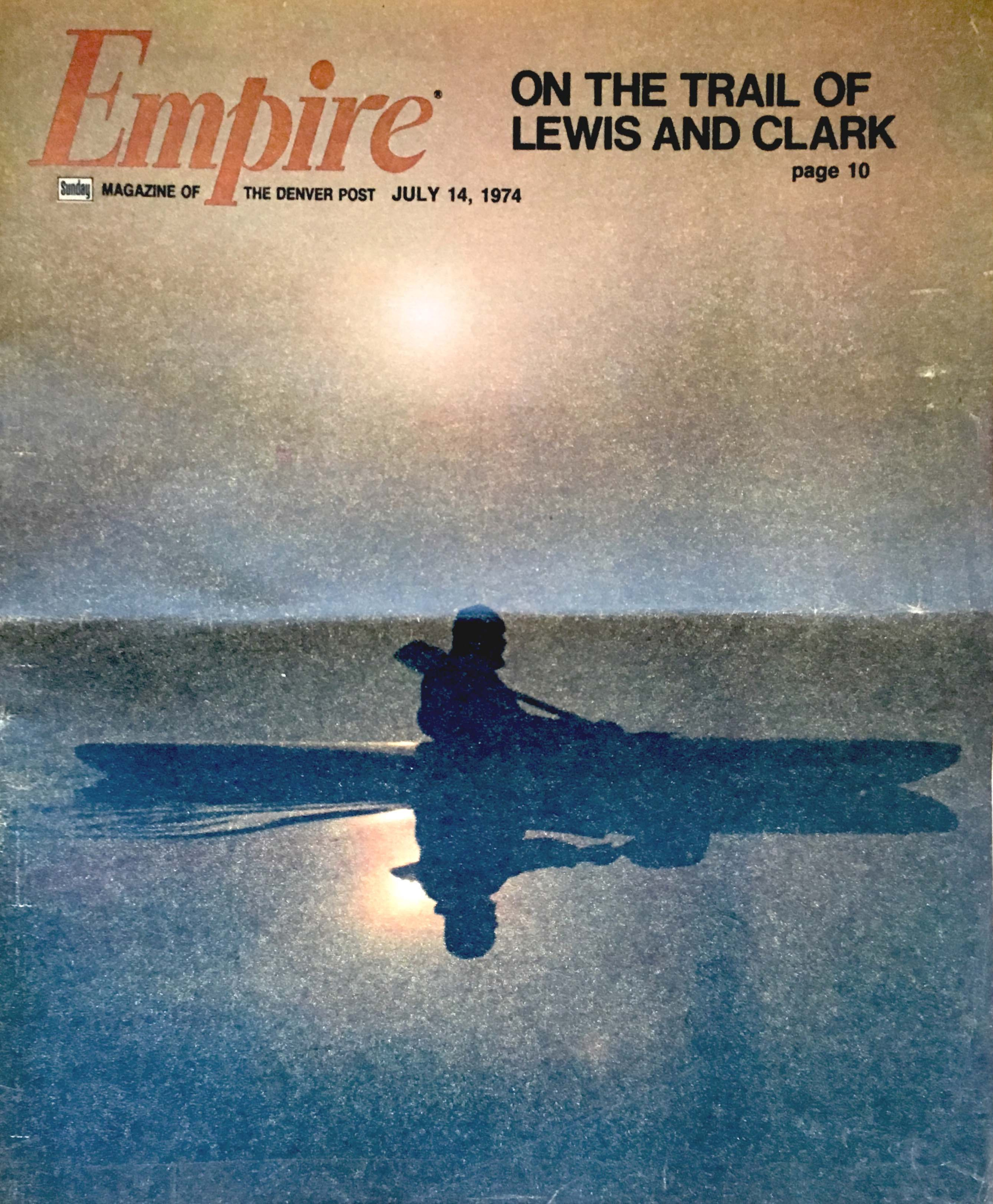


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## ON THE TRAIL OF LEWIS AND CLARK

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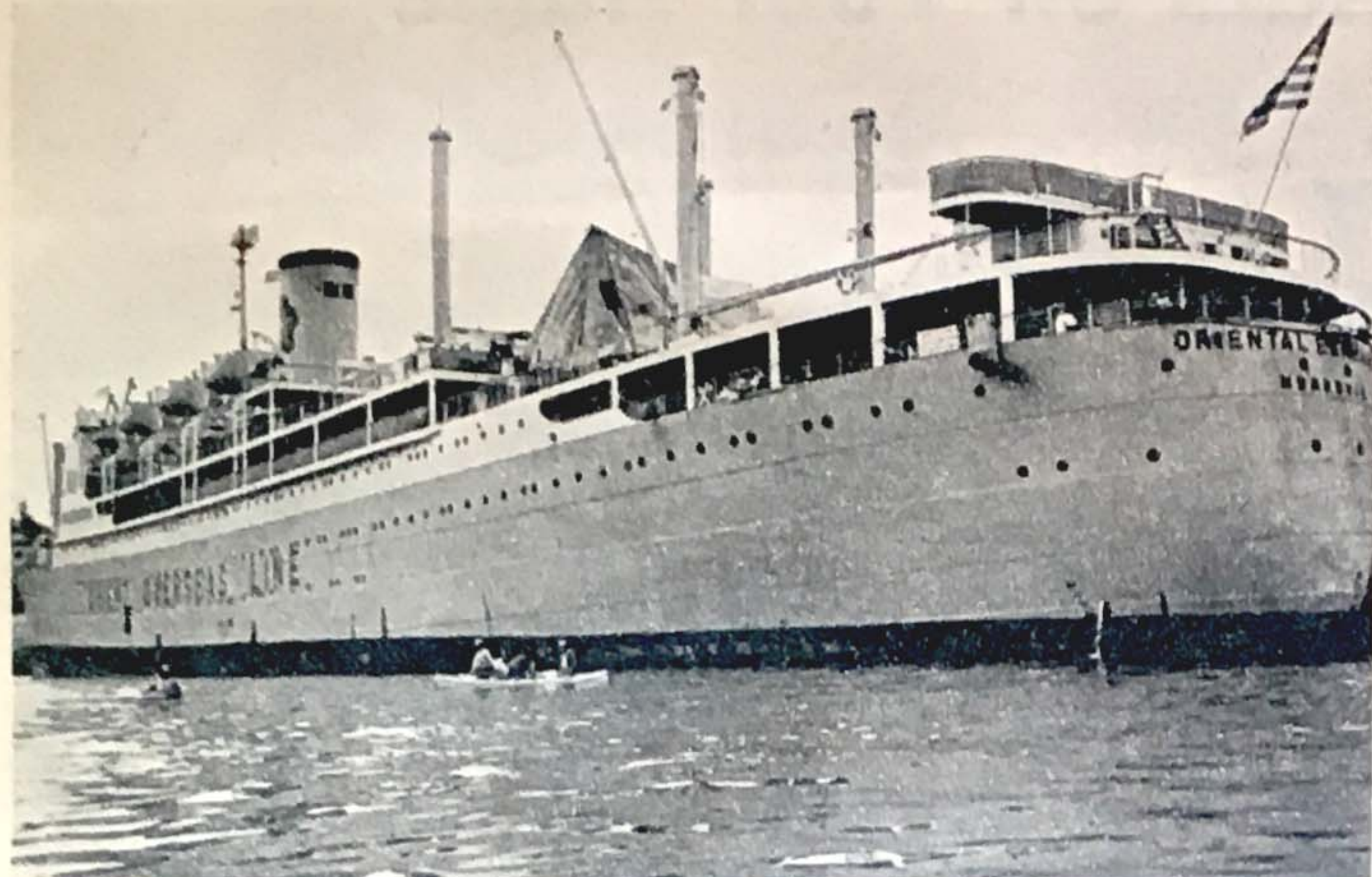
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# On the trail of Lewis and Clark

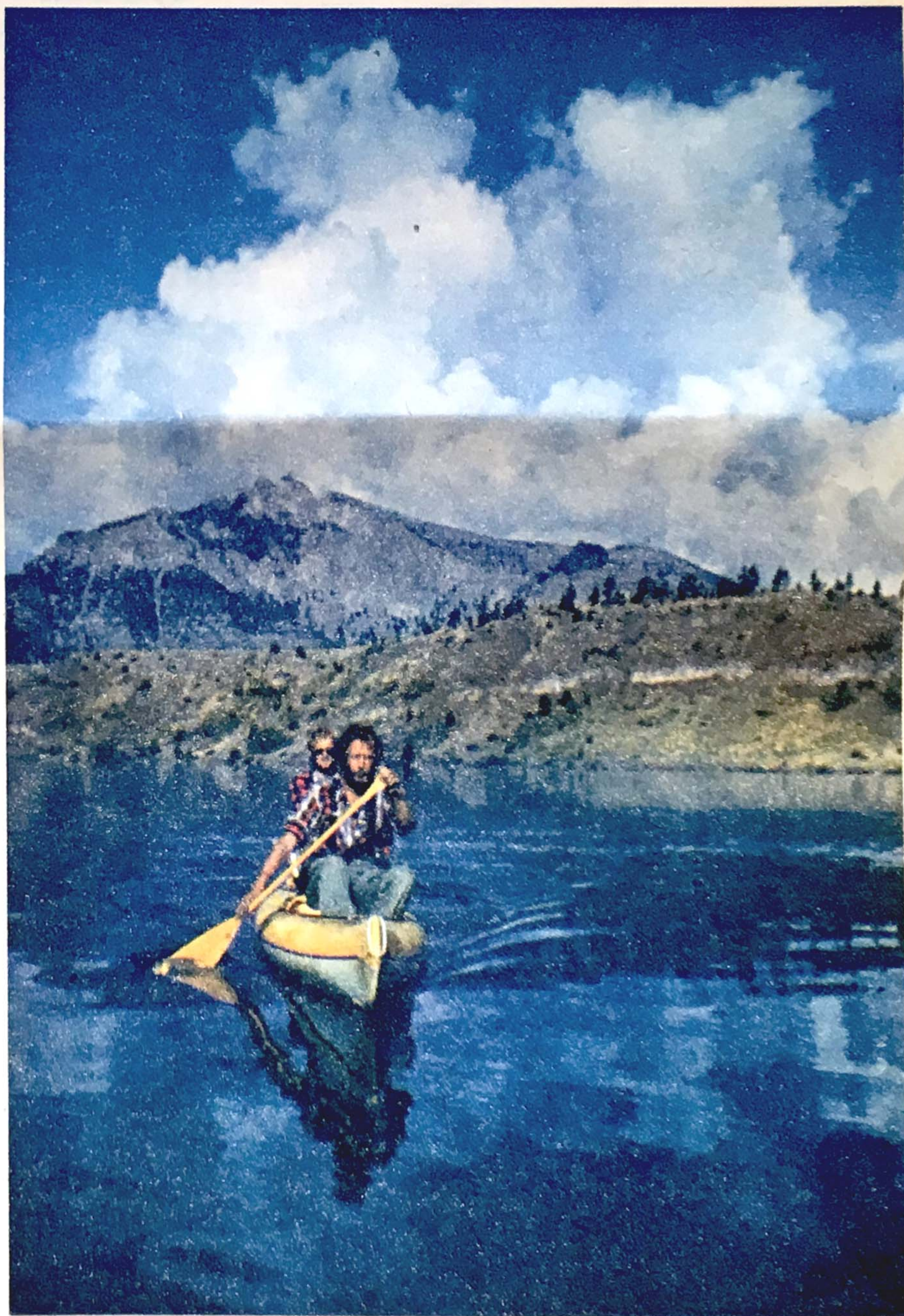
By GARY KIMSEY



Lewis and Clark met no ship like this on the Columbia River, but the 1973 party yawed over its 7-foot wake.



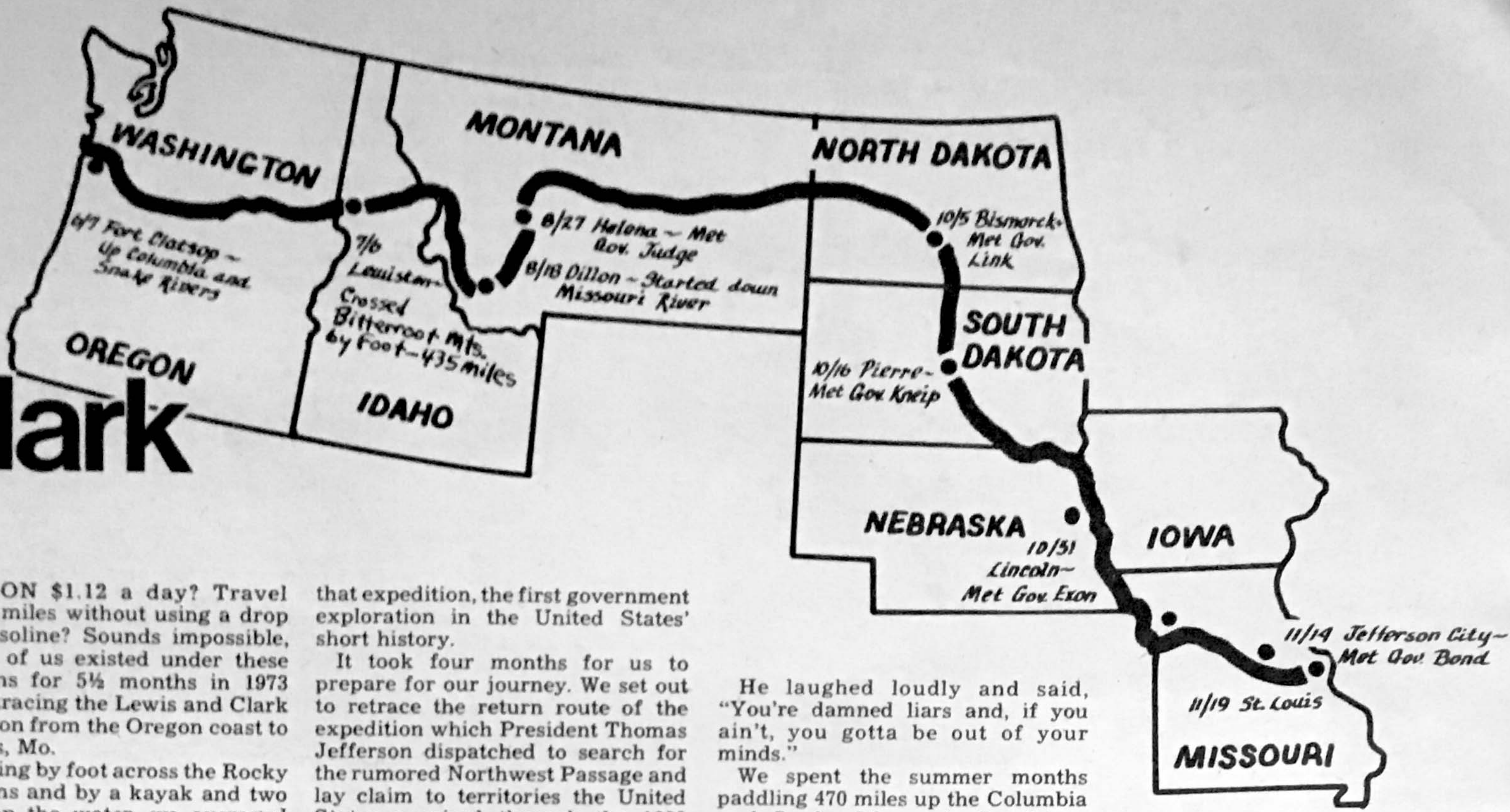
Carrying 65-pound packs, the modern explorers trugged 435 miles across Idaho's Rocky Mountains in 6 weeks.



Retracing route of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Mike Cochran (front) and Bob Miller canoe the Missouri River in eastern Montana.



# Clark



**L**IVE ON \$1.12 a day? Travel 3,800 miles without using a drop of gasoline? Sounds impossible, but five of us existed under these conditions for 5½ months in 1973 while retracing the Lewis and Clark Expedition from the Oregon coast to St. Louis, Mo.

Traveling by foot across the Rocky Mountains and by a kayak and two canoes on the water, we averaged three miles an hour. We purchased our food—1,400 pounds of dehydrated substance—at bulk prices and ate three balanced meals a day.

Our route, which could have been covered in three hours by a jet airliner, meandered along rivers and mountain paths, touching 11 states in the Northwest and Midwest; it was the same length as a straight line drawn from the Bahama Islands to Seattle, Wash.

Besides myself, the expedition consisted of a solidly built photographer and former Canadian canoeing guide, Bob Miller, 23. He now is a salesman for a Denver wilderness outfitting company. The oldest member was Mike Cochran, 29, an illustrator and ex-Marine medic from Fort Collins, Colo. Mike Wien, 22, is a public relations consultant in Steamboat Springs, Colo. The youngest and most rugged member was Clay Asher, 18, an Eagle Scout who graduated from a Twin Falls, Idaho, high school a week before our expedition started.

Four of us, excluding Asher, met while attending Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Miller knew Asher from a previous canoe trip in Canada. All of us went into debt to finance our expedition, which cost almost as much as the first endeavor. Congress appropriated \$2,500 for

*The author was one of five men who last year completed a journey following the return route of the 1804-06 Lewis and Clark Expedition. Four of the men are Colorado residents. Kimsey, 23, lives in Fort Collins, Colo.*

that expedition, the first government exploration in the United States' short history.

It took four months for us to prepare for our journey. We set out to retrace the return route of the expedition which President Thomas Jefferson dispatched to search for the rumored Northwest Passage and lay claim to territories the United States acquired through the 1803 Louisiana Purchase.

Scrutinizing the eight volumes of journals written by the expedition leaders, Army Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, we mapped our route as closely as possible to the one spearheaded by the 31 explorers who spent 28 months in the wilderness to the northwest of St. Louis, then the last dot of civilization before the unmapped western lands.

Those explorers journeyed in one party to the Pacific Ocean, where they spent the winter of 1805-06 in Ft. Clatsop, at the mouth of the Columbia River. On their six-month return trip, they split into three groups and explored territories in addition to the vast area they had discovered on the westward journey. Since we were a small party, our group followed a combination of their return routes.

In an early morning coastal breeze on June 7, 1973, we left Ft. Clatsop and paddled up the Columbia in a heavily loaded craft. We soon discovered some "obstacles" that Lewis and Clark never saw: Huge oceanliners heading upriver toward Portland, Ore., and leaving behind 7-foot-high wakes that were nearly impossible to navigate. However, our canoes were swamped just once — by a cutter.

As we paddled into Astoria, Ore., the port town three miles across the mouth of the Columbia from Ft. Clatsop, we neared a tugboat moored at a dock. The captain waved.

"Where you headed in them little toy boats?" he yelled.

"St. Louis," we replied.

He laughed loudly and said, "You're damned liars and, if you ain't, you gotta be out of your minds."

We spent the summer months paddling 470 miles up the Columbia and Snake Rivers to Lewiston, Idaho. Then we hiked, each with 65-pound backpacks, 435 miles across the Rockies to Dillon, Mont. There we picked up our craft that had been sent ahead. Our canoes and kayak now floated in the headwaters of the Missouri River, nearly 2,800 miles from our St. Louis destination.

During Indian summer we hurried east on the Big Muddy across Montana. We followed the river south with thousands of migrating Canadian geese through the two Dakotas, Nebraska, parts of Iowa and Kansas, and the state of Missouri to the waterway's confluence with the Mississippi River at Wood River, Ill. It was here that the original expedition wintered in 1803-04 before starting the journey.

In an early morning fog on Nov. 19 — 166 days after we left the Pacific Coast — we departed from Wood River for the remaining 12 miles down the Mississippi to the Gateway Arch in St. Louis. Within an hour we reached it and were greeted by city officials. The celebration for us matched that given for the original explorers, who had been considered dead because no word had been heard from them for over a year.

According to their journals, Lewis and Clark met with the chiefs of Indian tribes along the trail to present them with friendship medallions. Many of the Indians had never seen a White man. We met with as many "chiefs" of the local "tribes" as possible — five governors, more than four dozen mayors and almost 100 community dignitaries — and presented them with historical mementos marking the 169th anniversary of

the start of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Our first ceremony with a governor, Tom Judge of Montana, was in his executive suite in Helena. We again met him the next weekend when we paddled across Holter Lake, near Helena. We paddled to a small dock in front of the governor's house trailer on the shore. Judge was dressed in a T-shirt, cowboy boots and dirty trousers held up by a belt that had a silver buckle. He and his friends were eating french fries and drinking beer.

Judge talked about the many regions of Montana which still retain the wilderness flavor of the time of Lewis and Clark.

The governor, tall and heavy-set, later rode in our kayak. After Cochran helped him squeeze into the tiny and tipsy craft, Judge paddled briskly and confidently to Holter Lake. In a letter to us several weeks later, Judge wrote that his arms were sore for days from paddling.

Soon after our expedition started we developed the same respect for nature that the Lewis and Clark explorers expressed in their journals. More than half of them didn't know how to swim, even though the greater part of their journey was on water. Unexpected high winds, giant waves and treacherous whitewater rapids constantly threatened those men whose canoes capsized repeatedly. Most of our problems stemmed from the wind, too.

Lewis described the wind problem in his journal entry of April 1806 on the Columbia near what is now The Dalles, Ore.:

Photography by the author



**'Why did we come?' one asked.  
The reply: To reach St. Louis**



Mike Wien (front) and Cochran paddle through a grove of trees flooded when a dam was built on the Missouri in South Dakota.



Winston Marugg

The author, 23, takes a long stride across one source of the Missouri River, Trail Creek in western Montana.

**EXPEDITION** *continued*

This morning about daylight I heard a considerable roaring like wind at a distance and in the course of a short time waves rose very high (on the river) . . . the winds swelled and blew so hard and raised the waves so immensely and tossed our canoes against the shore in such a manner as to render it necessary to haul them up on the bank.

We faced almost the same problem at nearly the same location, only we had finished paddling for the day when the wind tossed our heaviest canoe end over end 50 yards through a rocky ravine. Miller caught it while the rest of us hid behind boulders along the shore. Unable to pitch a tent because of the wind and a driving rainstorm, we built a foot-high rock wall for a windbreak and slept uncomfortably behind it.

Once we paddled across Washington's Snake River at a point where it was a mile wide. The wind blew gently over the cold water. But when we reached mid-river the wind whipped up 4-foot-high waves. A canoe abruptly capsized. Cochran, Asher, the canoe, and much of our food and equipment bobbed in the waves. It took the three of us still in our craft two hours to rescue them.

That episode, one of the 21 times our vessels capsized, resulted in the loss of our cooking equipment. We had to cook out of bailing cans for two weeks until we reached Lewistown where businessmen gave us new cooking equipment.

The journals of Lewis and Clark often reflect the loneliness of the explorers. They saw no White men after they journeyed west from their 1804-05 winter encampment at the fort they built among the Mandan Indian Nation, near present-day Bismarck, N.D.

Earlier in our expedition, we hiked across the Rockies via the Lolo Trail, the ancient Nez Perce buffalo path that the Lewis and Clark explorers crossed on horseback in a blizzard. We saw no one for weeks at a time while crossing the Lolo.

One afternoon we walked along a high mountain ridge. Wien, limping from a sore leg muscle and bent over from the heavy backpack, gazed at the mountains we had to cross, wiped sweat from his tanned forehead and asked me, "What in the hell are we doing this for?"

I didn't answer him.

Two months and nearly 1,000



The triumph: The 1973 expedition reaches its objective, St. Louis, Mo., and the city's landmark, Gateway Arch.



miles later, the Steamboat Springs man asked the same question as we paddled across the desolate Fort Peck Reservoir, a 150-mile lake on the Missouri in eastern Montana. At that time we were exhausted from canoeing 300 miles in eight days, traveling day and night into a stiff wind and high waves.

We originally had started our journey for much the same reason that Lewis and Clark had: To record what we saw of the country and natives. But, by that weary day on Fort Peck, our expedition also had developed into a contest of whether five young modern men could make it.

"To see if we can get to St. Louis," I replied to Wien, wondering at the same time that — perhaps — the real and unspoken purpose of the original expedition for the captains and their hardy companions was to see if they could survive until they returned to St. Louis.

We initially expected local people to greet us with unfriendliness. The rigorous ways of the trail caused us to become bearded, ragtagged and "mountainmanish," as the garrulous Gene Leahy, the former mayor of Omaha, Neb., described us when we

met there in late October. I had lost 45 pounds. Asher, the slim high school graduate when we left in June, had put on 30 pounds of muscle. The others weighed nearly the same, but their suntanned faces and shoulders — broadened by long hours of paddling — testified that they also were physically fit.

During a tour of Omaha with Leahy on Halloween, the five of us entered a costume contest "disguised" as ourselves — modern American explorers — and won first prize over a number of entrants dressed as ghouls.

We met more than 2,000 persons, most of whom went out of their way to help us. Hundreds opened their homes for us to rest in, or offered us home-cooked meals, a welcomed change from our dehydrated food.

Three days after newsmen covering our departure waved goodbye to us from the shore of Williston in western North Dakota, we arrived at a long bridge spanning the Missouri near New Town, N.D.

We climbed a high bluff to the bridge and were greeted by a rotund man.

"What took you fellows so long to

get here?" he asked. "Ever since I seen the newscast from Williston that you was headed this way I've had scouts keeping an eye out for you. My name's Ed Hansen. Big Farmer is what they call me around here. I weigh 384 pounds and I'm 60 years old and I know more about what Lewis and Clark did in this area than anybody else."

We hadn't been able to say a word yet.

"Get into my truck," said Big Farmer. "Let's go into New Town so I can buy you fellows a steak dinner and then we'll go see the site where them explorers stopped as they came by here."

Speechless, we were off. By nightfall, we had eaten the steaks and seen the site. And Big Farmer—like many persons we met on the expedition would—was still giving us a tour of the historical points.

The original Lewis and Clark Expedition had only one unfriendly encounter with an Indian tribe. The Blackfeet attempted to steal their horses. That resulted in the fatal shooting of a Blackfoot by one of the explorers.

We also had only one episode with an unfriendly "native."

He was a South Dakota farmer who attempted to run us down in his truck and then stole our craft after we accidentally frightened 10,000 geese from what he called his "game refuge." The refuge was the temporary resting ground for geese during their winter migration to the south. For the past 10 years, the farmer has been charging hunters \$15 a day to shoot the waterfowl as they fed in his cornfields. He was irate because we — unknowingly — had scared the geese, as he was expecting 25 hunters the next day. At gunpoint, the farmer kept our canoes for two days until South Dakota Gov. Richard Kneip helped us retrieve them. After the conflict, we learned that Kneip was one of the hunters.

In addition to experiencing a variety of incidents with the "natives," the five of us discovered a changed country that would shock Lewis and Clark.

The first river we paddled—the Columbia—was thickly covered at its mouth with oil spills from oceanliners. Our St. Louis arrival was clouded by a murky haze of smog that hid the 630-foot-high Gateway Arch from our view until we were less than a half mile away.

Uncle Sam has constructed nine dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers between the coast and Lewiston. The dams, which provide hydroelectric power to dozens of cities in the Northwest, have obliterated the river currents and backed up nearly 400 miles of water into lakes that covered the Columbia's great Celilo Falls and many other magnificent landmarks the explorers had discovered.

The Rocky Mountains, once so

thickly timbered that the explorers found it difficult to lead their horses, now have thousands of eroding acres dotting the slopes. These are the results of logging operations and forest fires. For the most part, the Lolo Trail has fallen into the oblivion of underbrush and is paralleled by an unmaintained dirt road constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps of pre-World War II days.

We traveled the Missouri River from where we jumped across its thin and sparkling-clear tributaries in the Rockies to its mouth. We drank from mountain streams and the Missouri River in Montana and the two Dakotas without treating the water. But we stopped drinking river water at Sioux City, Iowa, where we saw waste dumped from open sewers into the Missouri. We then carried purified water in large containers.

The foremost obstacle facing the original expedition was the upstream journey on the Missouri. The explorers toiled for more than a year pulling their craft up the Big Muddy, which then was incredibly choked with snags and false channels. Those men often averaged only 10 miles a day moving slowly and tediously up river. But, on the return trip, the swift current carried them up to 90 miles a day.

Now, though, there only remains a 150-mile stretch of the Missouri as wild as in the period of Lewis and Clark. Starting at Fort Benton, Mont., the Wild Missouri—as local canoeists knighted it—passes through an uninhabitable series of jagged white cliffs and bleak terrain.

Fifteen dams back up more than 1,000 miles of the Missouri from its eastern Montana headwaters at Three Forks to Yankton, S.D., site of the last dam. The lakes created by the dams were the foremost obstacles for us. We averaged less than 2 miles an hour (about 25 miles a day) because of the slack water and high winds that skimmed at us across the lakes.

The Missouri is a controlled river from Yankton to its mouth. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers straightened the once-meandering channel to prevent the annual flooding of river communities and to make it easier for tugboats to run their barges on the river.

But the channelization gave birth to a phenomenon—giant whirlpools bursting up from the river bottom—which occasionally turned our craft, tipping them so water poured in over the gunwales.

But, despite the problems we faced, the five of us agreed that retracing the Lewis and Clark trail was not only a great adventure, but it also deepened our appreciation for those early explorers who charted an unknown wilderness.

And, besides, what closer way is there to see America than on foot or by slow canoe?



Bob Miller, foreground, and (l-r) Mike Cochran, Clay Asher and Mike Wien, at Ft. Clatsop as trip started.