



Cycle of life continues for the Corps of Discovery

*While winter storms rage,
members witness life and death*

By Melissa Rinehart, park ranger
Bonneville Lock and Dam

February 1805 held many of the aspects of a full life. The birth of Jean Baptiste, Sacagawea's son, on Feb. 11, preceded the death of a very old Mandan man who had weathered 120 winters.

Lewis wrote in his journal: "11th February Monday 1805 - About five o'clock this evening one of the wives of Charbono was delivered of a fine boy. It is worthy of remark that this was the first child which this woman had boarn, and as is common in such cases her labour was tedious and the pain violent; Mr. Jessome informed me that he had freequently administered a small portion of the rattle of the rattle-snake, which he had assured me had never failed to produce the desired effect, that of hastening the birth of the child; having the rattle of the snake by me I gave it to him

and he administered two rings of it to the woman broken in small pieces with the fingers and added to a small quantity of water. Whether this medicine was truly the cause or not I shall not undertake to determine, but I was informed that she had not taken it more than ten minutes before she brought forth [sic]."

The birth of Jean Baptiste would remind the members of families left behind. Only 54 days later Sacagawea would strap the infant to her back and continue the journey to the West Coast.

Jean Baptiste would live a life of travel and adventure. By 18 he was working at a trading post in Kansas City, Kan., where he met Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttmberg, Germany. Jean Baptiste traveled to Germany with Wilhelm, learned the language and helped the duke with his studies.

By 1829 he was back in St. Louis working as a fur trapper in the environment he loved. Jean Baptiste set off to find gold in Sacramento; a place

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he called home for 18 years. The gold bug bit again when he was 61, and he packed up and headed out to find his fortune in Montana, but he never made it. Jean Baptiste Charbonneau died of pneumonia along the trail at Danner, Ore.

Regarding the old Mandan's death, Lewis' journal entry read, "I am informed of the Death of an old man whome I saw in the Mandan Village. this man, informed me that he was 120 winters old, he requested his grand Children to Dress him after Death & Set him on a Stone on a hill with his face towards his old village or down the river, that he might go streight to his brother at their old village under ground [sic]."

Even in the face of birth and death, life must go on. The Corps of Discovery members and the area tribes completed the tasks necessary for surviving a cold North Dakota winter.

The boats were finally freed from the ice this month by

breaking through multiple layers of ice and water. The Mandan still came with bags of corn to trade for battle axes made by the blacksmith.

Meat was so scarce that the tribes were suffering and the men were sent many miles away to hunt. During one hunting trip they were waylaid by about 100 Indians they took to be Sioux. Two horses and some meat were stolen, although according to the journals, wolves did much more damage to their meat supplies, stealing as much as they could.

Throughout the month, Clark spent time reviewing his notes and the information received from the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes and trappers from the Northwest Trading Company, making a descriptive list of the rivers and surrounding lands.

Caring for the basic needs of food and shelter and preparing for their spring departure continued. Another month or so of preparations would keep them busy, and frequent visits from trappers, Mandans and hunting expeditions allowed the men to pass the month of February industriously.

