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Book Review: Encyclopedia of the Lewis and Clark Expeditions

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Encyclopedia of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. By Elin Woodger and Brandon Toropov. Foreword by Ned Blackhawk. New York: Facts on File, 2004. xxv + 438 pp. Maps, photographs, illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. \$70.00.

In their preface, the authors hope “that this book will prove a valuable resource to students of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.” Regrettably, numerous errors and contradictions drastically reduce its value. Consider the treatment of a well-known incident on the voyage: the near loss on May 14, 1805, of a pirogue piloted by Toussaint Charbonneau on the Missouri River in present-day Montana. The entry for Pierre Cruzatte credits him with saving the situation by shouting instructions to Charbonneau from the expedition’s keelboat, an impossibility considering that the keelboat was then en route to St. Louis. (See the entry for Corporal Richard Warfington, who commanded the keelboat’s return crew). The entry for Private Joseph Whitehouse dates the same accident, identified by direct reference to Cruzatte’s heroics, to April 13, 1804—one month before the expedition left St. Louis. Captain Meriwether Lewis’s journal for April 13, 1805, reveals that Charbonneau had indeed been found wanting as a helmsman on that day, too, but credits George Drouillard with taking the tiller from him. See Gary Moulton’s *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* for full details of both incidents.

Other examples of mistaken or contradictory entries are all too common. In one place, Private Whitehouse is referred to as a sergeant (35). Another entry credits Captain William Clark with the “system of sessions in a sweat lodge” that cured Private William Bratton’s bad back without mentioning that Private John Shields suggested the treatment (234). Only later does Shields get credit for bringing up the idea (321). Most disappointing is the designation of the shadowy “La Liberté” or “Joseph Barter” as an Army private (40). Although this man’s exact name remains a mystery, the captains’ rosters of their men in the journals make

it clear that he was a hired civilian boatman, not a soldier.

Three significant problems are apparent in the “Spirit Mound” entry. We are informed that the expedition ascended the “Whitestone River” to reach the landmark near today’s Vermillion, South Dakota. While Clark did use the name “Whitestone River,” readers should have been told it is called the Vermillion on present-day maps. The entry also makes an erroneous reference to “Sioux City, South Dakota.” Finally, the authors call Spirit Mound privately owned when it is now a state park. Limited space prevents further discussion, but it is readily apparent that this book was rushed into production without sufficient attention to detail.

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