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Book Review: On the River with Lewis and Clark

Carol Medlicott
Dartmouth College

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On the River with Lewis and Clark. By Verne Huser. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. xiv + 205 pp. Photographs, map, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

Verne Huser, a lifelong professional guide on western rivers, provides an interesting addition to the Lewis and Clark literature by aiming to reveal "how rivers figured in every aspect of the journey." His familiarity with running rivers in hand-powered craft well equips him to provide authoritative background for anyone wishing to interpret Lewis and Clark's journey as "essentially a river trip." Huser's strength is his ability to enliven the expedition journals' accounts of daily struggles with handling the various watercraft, with river conditions, and with the broader natural environments the expedition encountered in various river ecosystems. A substantial portion of Huser's text centers on the watercraft and river conditions east of the Continental Divide, in the Missouri, Yellowstone, and Beaverhead watersheds. As such, the volume should be of particular interest to readers of *Great Plains Quarterly*.

The book clearly lacks academic rigor, however, and exhibits excessive editorial flaws.

Abundant claims and assertions throughout the text are left unsupported by citations to scholarly literature or primary research. In a passage analyzing the features of one of the expedition's key boats, the "white pirogue," readers learn that "David Cain, who has rowed Glen Bishop's replica of the white pirogue, believes that the men rowed from a standing position." But Huser gives no clue as to the identities and credentials of either David Cain or Glen Bishop. And none of the many examples of knowledge Huser alludes to having received from Native American sources is treated with the techniques of standard scholarly citation. While perhaps acceptable in a popular press volume, one would expect a more exacting standard from a university press.

Huser's "research" amounts to his own life experience and his many years of engagement with the Lewis and Clark story as an amateur historian. Except for the portions dealing with the technicalities of river travel, the text is entirely derivative of other scholars' work. In the chapters recounting general observations about the expedition's events, personnel, and its broader meaning, Huser is bland, descriptive, and entirely lacking in critical insight. One is left with the impression that he would have been wiser to restrict himself to the scale of a chapter in an edited volume. As a book-length work, his text is poorly organized, undercited, and meanders as much as many of the river systems he describes. Huser's "angle" of reinterpreting the expedition as "river trip," however, is a novel one that will undoubtedly make the book a commercial success among Lewis and Clark "buffs," an audience that will probably overlook its many editorial flaws.

CAROL MEDLICOTT
Department of Geography
Dartmouth College