



Our Natural History: The Lessons of Lewis and Clark

By Daniel Botkin

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Often referred to as America's national epic of exploration, the 28-month Lewis and Clark expedition was certainly America's greatest odyssey. Commissioned in 1804 by Thomas Jefferson, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set off on the greatest wilderness trip ever recorded. Beginning in St. Louis, they navigated up the Missouri River and through the prairies, enduring a winter with the Mandan Indians in North Dakota, reaching the summit of the Rocky Mountains and then following the Columbia River to their final destination, the Pacific Ocean. Trained in natural history and in the methods of collecting plant and animal samples, Lewis and Clark carefully and meticulously recorded the conditions of the rivers, prairies, forests, mountains, and wildlife of pre-industrial America. Now, in this new edition of *Our Natural History*, Daniel B. Botkin, a distinguished botanist and naturalist, re-creates the grand journey--taking us on an exciting ecological adventure back to the landscape of the great American West. In retracing their steps, Botkin reveals what this western landscape actually looked like and how much it's been changed by modern civilization and technology. With fresh insight, Botkin shows us that from the explorers' observations, we can learn much about the environment of our past, our environment today, and what our environment might be in the future. Now with a new Afterword marking the 200th anniversary of the expedition, this timely and thought-provoking book captures our imagination and stimulates our sentiment with lessons about our environment and our place within it. *Our Natural History* offers a stunning and rare portrait of the rugged, beautiful, disappearing wilderness of the American West.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Daniel Botkin sets out to cover the same ground Meriwether Lewis and William Clark did in their 1804-1806 survey of the Missouri River. He maintains that their careful observations on the native species, landscapes, and human residents of that great stretch of country should serve as models for avoiding "a glamorized utopian vision of nature" and seeing the landscape for what it really is. "One of the ways our knowledge of nature has changed since the time of Lewis and Clark," he writes, "is that the field of statistics has developed, and we can state our errors quantitatively." Not so much exploring as following old paths, we can also gather data more thoroughly than did our ecologist predecessors, knowing a little better what it is we are looking for. Botkin does just that in long discussions of salmon ecology and the mismanagement of natural resources.

From Publishers Weekly

This intriguing volume begins with Lewis and Clark's search for a pass in the Rocky Mountain wilderness; it ends with the author's search for original prairie in Omaha, Nebraska. Botkin (*Discordant Harmony: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century*) describes the American West as seen by Lewis and Clark in 1804-06 and compares it with today's West as shaped by industrial civilization. It is a unique picture of frontier wilderness, interwoven with Botkin's own perspective on nature. He maintains that our present approach to environmental issues is based on faulty beliefs, mythologies and religious convictions. The records of Lewis and Clark are valuable for helping us understand what nature was like before we changed it. Botkin notes that we rarely approach conservation with the methodical intensity found in the explorers' journals. He has given us a fresh and welcome perspective on that historic expedition. BOMC selection.

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From Library Journal

Botkin, president of the Center for the Study of the Environment and director of the Program on Global Change at George Mason University, examines the journals of Lewis and Clark to understand change in nature. His question is "What was nature like before modern, technological civilization?" For people to have a better, more secure future, Botkin asserts that they must understand their relationship with the environment. They must know not only their own history but the history of nature as well. Addressing timeless topics, Botkin blends the historic past with the newsworthy present to offer solutions for the future. Recommended for all libraries.

Patricia Owens, Wabash Valley Coll., Mt. Carmel, Ill.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Maureen Harris:

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Alma Saunders:

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