

The story of Lewis and Clark is so fascinating to me. Thomas Jefferson, after the great Louisiana Purchase, commissioned these men to explore the Missouri river and to find its headwaters and with them any possible connection to the waters of the Pacific Ocean. One purpose was to find the most direct and practical water route across the continent for the purposes of commerce. These men were also to study the Indian tribes, botany, geology, Western terrain and wildlife in the region.

This expedition appealed to me especially as a young explorer. My friend Blanton Miller and I figured that we were made of the same kind of rugged material as Lewis and Clark. We went camping many times, and these were usually great adventures. On one particular occasion, we went to what was called the "Savage Gulf" area of middle Tennessee. It was a wild natural area that had always held us in awe, and was to us so much uncharted territory.

We approached our entry point into the area without any map, and without any real idea of the actual location of the gorge that gave the place its name. This, of course, was the way that Lewis and Clark had to do things. And we didn't even have a native American guide. So we parked our vehicle, gathered our gear, and began to follow a stream to its source.

It was a fairly large stream at the start. We climbed among house-sized boulders and huge trees until we gained significant altitude. The size of the watercourse naturally began to shrink, but it was recognizable for quite some time. We were very hot and tired by the time we emerged near the mountaintop and found ourselves following a tiny ditch almost hidden in a thicket. After a short while, there was not much more to follow. That night we camped high up on a ridge in uncharted territory, and the next day we took another path down the mountain and went home.

We had accomplished our mission, but there was not the satisfaction of seeing a single point that we could claim as the origin of this branch. There was no "X" marking the spot. Our journey of discovery had been just that, and it had been wonderful. But just like other occasions in life, there was no absolute answer. And among the lessons that we learned was that no matter what, we must just keep searching.