

in fall 1805. On November 16, 1805, Freeman dined privately with the president at the White House, and had the honor of seeing Jefferson finally inscribe "To Thomas Freeman Esquire" across that long-inert letter of exploring instructions.¹⁶

In Freeman Jefferson had found an exploration leader with superior scientific skills and who had optimism and vigor on his side. As Freeman wrote to his friend John McKee shortly after dining with the president, he well understood the hazards of "travel in the Neighborhood of *St. Afee* . . . [a] Great many difficulties, and some personal danger will attend the expedition, but, I will—'Stick or go through' The more danger the more honor."¹⁷

Now the administration had to find a naturalist equally willing to hazard life and limb on such a dangerous assignment. This search, too, tells us much about the trials of early western exploration and the state of Enlightenment science in America. Given that many of the famous names in American natural history were considered, and given Jefferson's goal of selecting the first trained American naturalist to explore the West, it's a search that certainly ought to have more visibility in Jefferson-era science than it does. Those invited to apply or who made application to take "the department of Natural History in the voyage up the Red River" included the erratic genius, Constantine Rafinesque, the internationally known author William Bartram (sixty-five years old when Jefferson extended the invitation), and an eager Alexander Wilson, soon to be recognized as founder of American ornithology with his nine-volume *American Ornithology* (1808–1814).

Through Bartram, Wilson had been in contact with Jefferson about matters ornithological since March 1805. He learned of the Red River exploration from Jefferson's offer to Bartram, and on February 6, 1806, the two of them wrote the president encouraging Wilson's appointment as naturalist. Wilson was literally on the edge of his seat awaiting reply through much of that winter, and the wait led him finally to wonder

whether Jefferson failed to respond to his letter about "our Journey" because he "expects a brush with the Spaniards." Wilson told a friend that "very probably the design of sending parties through Louisiana will be suspended." By late April Wilson had decided to accept a position working on an encyclopedia.¹⁸

In fact, by February 1806 Jefferson already had a naturalist. The selection had fallen to twenty-five-year-old Peter Custis, a medical student from a well-connected Virginia family in Jefferson's home county. Custis was then studying with America's top academic naturalist, Benjamin Smith Barton, at the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁹ When Jefferson personally selected Captain Richard Sparks, familiar to him via Meriwether Lewis as "one of the best woodsmen, bush fighters, & hunters in the army" to head the military contingent, the search for leaders was complete.²⁰

Now all was haste in procuring guides and laying in supplies so that the Grand Excursion could enter the river soon enough to navigate their pair of specially designed barges as far as the Wichita villages, from whence they planned to explore upriver by horseback. In addition to various microscopes, thermometers, and three sextants, scientific supplies included a nautical almanac for 1806, a high-quality chronometer for establishing longitudes, a portable barometer for taking elevations, and an achromatic telescope of either 60x or 75x to fix latitudes by observing the eclipses of Jupiter's moons. The party also had a camera obscura to produce topographic images, although they seem never to have used it. For natural history work, Custis brought his shotgun, plant presses, and various traps and preservation equipment, plus reference volumes by Le Page DuPratz, Jefferson, Bartram, Humphrey Marshall, Thomas Walter, and his mentor, Barton. But he relied primarily on Linnaeus's four-volume *Systema Naturae* and the single-volume world compendium *Systema Vegetabilium* (which unfortunately saved space by eliminating information on geographic ranges) for vertebrate and botanical classification.²¹

By mid-April 1806 the bulk of the exploring party had assembled in Natchez and was conducting its last

16. Thomas Freeman to Thomas Jefferson, November 10, 1805, Thomas Jefferson, letter of introduction and credit for Thomas Freeman, November 16, 1805, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Jefferson Papers).

17. Freeman to John McKee, November [?], 1805, John McKee Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

18. In Alexander Wilson to Thomas Jefferson, February 6, 1806, Wilson first mentioned his bird project, telling Jefferson that a hundred drawings were completed. Other pertinent letters include Wilson to William Duncan, February 26, 1806, and Wilson to William Bartram, April 22, 1806, all letters in *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, ed. Clark Hunter (Philadelphia, 1983), 232–48.

19. See Jefferson to Constantine Rafinesque, December 15, 1804, and Bartram to Jefferson, February 6, 1806, both in series 1, Jefferson Papers. See also Hunter, ed., *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson*, 79; Flores, ed., *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, 56–61; and Dan Flores, "The Ecology of the Red River in 1806: Peter Custis and Early Southwestern Natural History," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 88 (July 1984), 1–42. Custis was related by marriage to the Byrds, Randolphs, Lees, and to George Washington.

20. Dunbar to Dearborn, March 18, May 6, 1806 in Rowland, ed., *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar*, 332, 341.

21. See Flores, "The Ecology of the Red River in 1806," 13. A fruitless search for a portrait of Peter Custis did turn up in the North Carolina State Library collection a portrait of a Dr. Peter Barton Custis (1823–1863), perhaps a son named for mentor Benjamin Smith Barton.

round of outfitting at Fort Adams and at Dunbar's plantation, "The Forest." At Fort Adams, Lieutenant Enoch Humphreys was so eager to accompany the expedition that he volunteered to go without pay and was added to the party as assistant astronomer. Muster rolls from 1806 indicate that among the two noncommissioned officers and seventeen privates attached to the expedition were Joseph Parsons, Samuel Reed, Eliphalet Kelsey, John Martin, Edward Mooney, Nimrod Fletcher, and Doughty Nicholson, men carefully selected for their "general good health & . . . robust temperaments." As with Lewis and Clark, there was a single black man in the southwestern party, as well. Unlike York, however, we do not know his name.²²

When President Thomas Jefferson's exploring party into the Southwest finally entered the mouth of the Red River on May 1, it anticipated a yearlong probe penetrating some 1,300 river miles into the interior. Despite high spirits and "perfect harmony," however, the party could not miss the warning signs on the Spanish border. As Custis would put it in his journal, "This expedition seems to have thrown their whole Country into commotion."²³

In fact, the American explorers could not have grasped the dimensions of the maelstrom they were entering. Spanish unease about the soft underbelly its *Provincias Internas* (New Spain's interior northern provinces, particularly Texas and New Mexico and sometimes Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon) presented to the world was a century old in 1806, and it had not mellowed with age. New Spain's colonial officers in Texas and New Mexico were veterans of the eighteenth-century game of finding interloping French traders. More recently they had taken to arresting and even killing Americans like Philip Nolan, shot for the sin of mustanging in the Texas outback in 1801.²⁴ In March 1804, when Spain initially learned from its slippery contact, General James Wilkinson, that Jefferson was planning to explore the Missouri, the Council for the Fortification and Defense of the Indies concluded that the Crown should defend a boundary running from the Gulf of Mexico to Los Adaes (well within present Loui-

siana) and on to the Red River—and from there northward to the far bank of the Missouri.

While the Council needed little urging about how to react to Jeffersonian exploration, it got it in no uncertain terms from Wilkinson: Since any weakness would give the key to the continent to the United States—Spain's "most dangerous neighbor and the revolutionary spirit of the times"—Wilkinson warned Spanish officials to "detach a sufficient body of chasseurs to intercept Captain Lewis and his party . . . and force them to retire or take them prisoners." In the Southwest, Spain should "drive back every illegal usurpation toward the region of Texas," and block all American probes on the rivers else "they will very quickly explore the right path which will lead them to the capital of Santa Fe."²⁵

Who knows what Wilkinson was up to? Historians have widely divergent opinions, but given Wilkinson's encouragement of Jefferson in his western explorations and his simultaneous secret reports urging Spain to capture those same parties, the cynical but logical answer is that the man was a reprehensible individual who wanted a confrontation and probably a war, something to lay open the *Provincias Internas* to his and Aaron Burr's exploitation. Just how manipulated New Spain's officials were is questionable, but they did make at least three attempts to have a Pedro Vial-led party intercept Lewis and Clark. Each time, distance and Indians foiled Vial's journeys of interception. Speculation about the possible result *if* Vial had been successful once led historian Donald Jackson to pen an essay, "What If the Spaniards Had Captured Lewis and Clark?" Perhaps the best way to answer that is to look at what *did* happen with Freeman and Custis.²⁶

When the Spanish boundary commissioner Marques de Caso Calvo learned from Wilkinson in early summer 1804 that Jefferson was planning an expedition into the Southwest, he wrote Antonio Gordero y Bustamante, the Spanish governor of Texas, that this

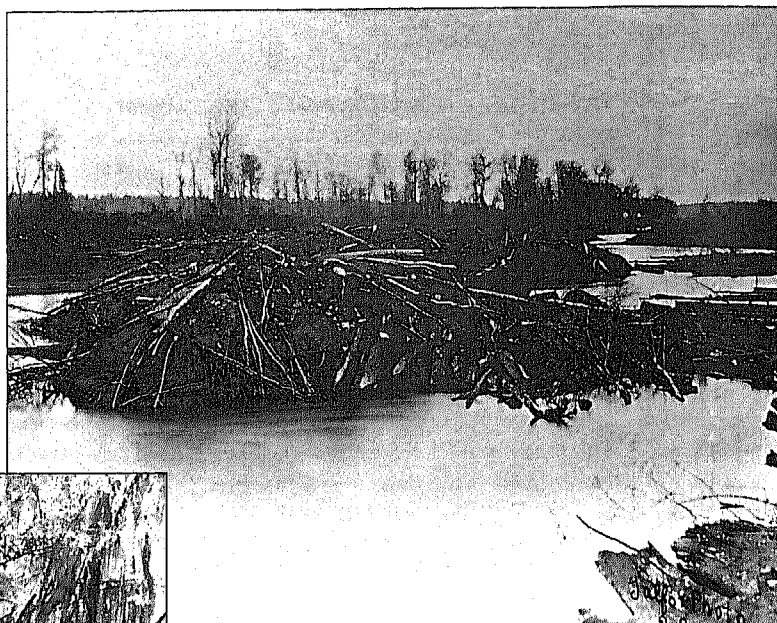
22. Muster Roll of a Company of Infantry under the Command of Captain Richard Sparks in the 2nd Regiment of the United States, commanded by Col Thos. H. Cushing from 30 April when last Mustered, to 31 May, 1806, and 31 May to 30 June, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, RG 94, NA; Dunbar to Dearborn, June 15, 1804, Dunbar to Jefferson, May 6, 1806, in Rowland, ed., *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar*, 138-39, 194-95.

23. Where I quote either Custis or Freeman in the following section, my sources are Custis's four reports to the War Department written during the expedition, and portions of Freeman's journal still extant. All the above were assembled for and appear in Flores, ed., *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, 99-279.

24. For recent scholarship on the Nolan story, see Flores, *Journal of an Indian Trader*, 10-15; Maurine Wilson and Jack Jackson, *Philip Nolan and Texas: Expeditions to the Unknown Land, 1791-1801* (Waco, Tex., 1987).

25. The Council's decision on the boundary was sent to Provincias Internas officials in a communication from Andres Lopes Armesto in Chihuahua, Mexico, April 22, 1804, Bexar Archives, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas-Austin (hereafter Bexar Archives); Wilkinson's letter is reproduced in "Reflections on Louisiana" in *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807*, ed. James A. Robertson, 2 vols. (Cleveland, Ohio, 1911), 2:325-47.

Within a week of leaving Natchitoches, the explorers confronted an ancient and massive logjam, the Great Raft (shown at right in 1873), and had to detour through the vast swamp it had created. To Custis, the swamp's cypress, Spanish moss, and Neotropical wildlife was a botanical and zoological wonderland that probably resembled present-day Lake Bistineau (below, 1981). To other expedition members it was a misery.



R. B. Talbot, photographer, Louisiana State University-Shreveport Library

Courtesy the author



“daring undertaking” must be frustrated, that Spain had to be willing to “divert and even to destroy such expeditions.” Amidst the rumors, during fall 1805, Provincias Internas commandant Nemecio Salcedo decided that war with the revolutionary Americans was “already fact.”²⁷ When word reached him that Jefferson was stubborn enough to launch an exploration over Spain’s objections, Salcedo got active in a hurry. He dispatched not one but two bodies of troops to intercept Freeman and Custis. One, commanded by ramrod-straight Francisco Viana, the adjutant inspector of troops in the Provincias Internas of New Spain, was sent from Nacogdoches to confront the Americans on

the lower river. The other intercepting force, referred to proudly by Zebulon Pike (who mistakenly thought he was its target) as “the most important ever carried on from the Province of New Mexico,” was the insurance policy. Commanded by Lieutenant Fecundo Melgares, it left Santa Fe bound for the Red in early June.²⁸

With that, time and the summer 1806 merely waited out the rendezvous of the opposing historical forces. When the exploring party arrived in Natchitoches, the last American outpost on the Red, and heard of the plethora of troop movements, the two questions the members must have asked themselves were: How far are we going to get? and, Will I live through this? But this was the president’s own mission, now brought up to fifty men and seven boats—the largest American exploring party of the age—with the addition of twenty more troops. New party members included Spanish interpreter Lieutenant John Joseph DuForest, métis guide François Grappe, and Lucas Talapoon, an Indian or métis whose skills in Plains Indian sign language had thrilled the American scientific community in 1800.²⁹ Once they posted their reports and Custis wrote his mentor, Barton, summarizing his natural history work so far, the explorers reentered the Red River on June 2. Freeman’s “stick or go through” aphorism was about to be tested.

Confronting only nature, the aphorism worked. Within a week the American explorers found themselves

26. See Donald Jackson, *Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains: Exploring the West from Monticello* (Norman, 1993), 154. The journal and documents of Vial’s first attempt to intercept Lewis and Clark appear in Abraham Nasatir, “More on Pedro Vial in Upper Louisiana,” in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley, 1762–1804*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 100–119.

27. Marques de Caso Calvo to Juan Bautista de Elguezebal, June 17, 1804, Antonio Cordero y Bustamante to Nemecio Salcedo, San Antonio de Bexar, October 23, 1805, Bexar Archives.

28. Salcedo to Cordero, April 13, 1806, Bexar Archives; Fecundo Melgares to Real Alencaster, Santa Fe, June 2, 1806, Spanish Archives of New Mexico, New Mexico State Archives and Records Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

29. See Flores, ed., *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, 131–32 n. 14.

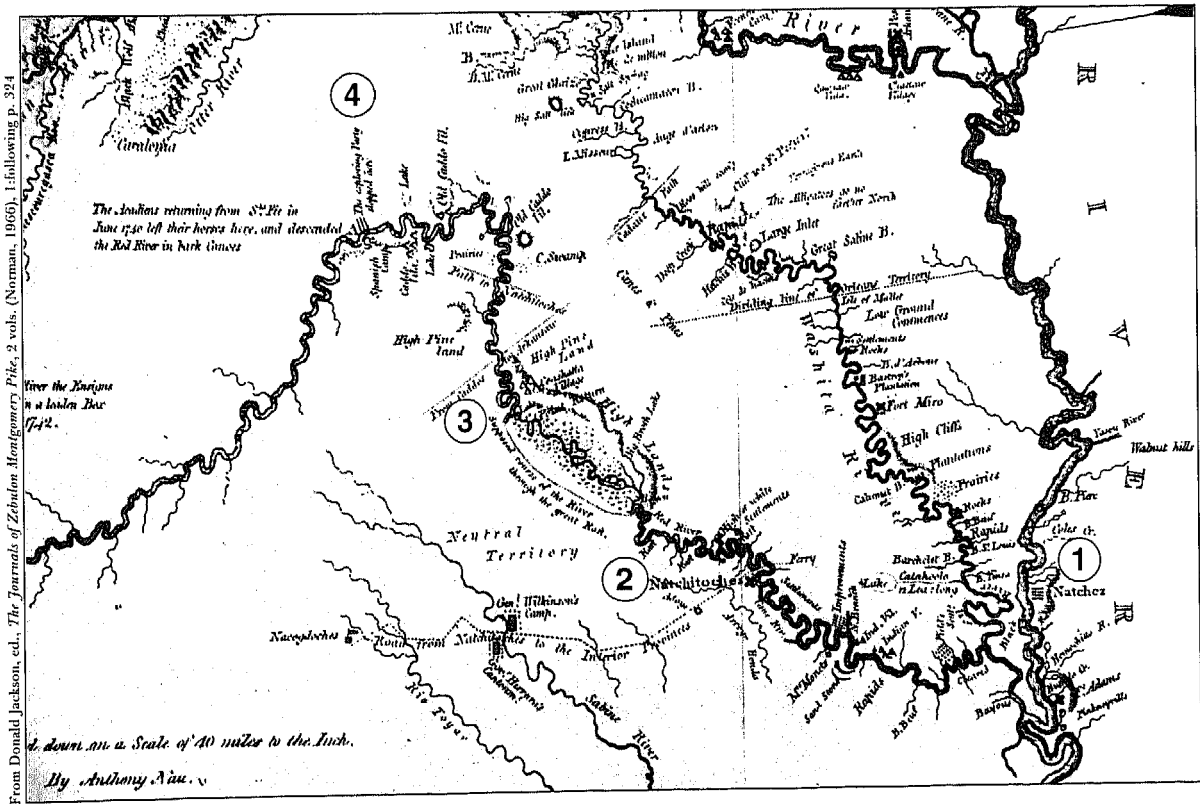
in a watery maze, the river blocked by a remarkable phenomena of the Red River's natural ecology. The chaos of debris filling the river before them was the Great Raft, an ancient and massive logjam. Possibly five centuries old, the Great Raft had exerted a tremendous influence on the environment and history of the Red River Valley. Over the centuries, as its lower end rotted away and the upper end continued to accumulate drift, the raft had slithered upriver like some immense brown serpent, and by 1806 it dammed the channel for one hundred miles. The only way around it by that time was a tortuous, twisting detour through its creation, the Great Swamp. Lying east of the clogged channel, these lowlands rerouted the brick-colored waters through a world of cypress, Spanish moss, and Neotropical wildlife. For Custis the Great Swamp was a botanical and zoological treasure. For everyone else it was misery, "fourteen days of incessant fatigue, toil and danger, doubt and uncertainty," as Freeman put it.

Beyond the Great Raft, Freeman got a first opportunity to try his diplomatic skills on the Indians whose country they now entered. Claimed by both Spain and the United States, this was actually Cadodoquia, the ancestral lands of an ancient but reduced population of Mound Builders known as the Caddo Confederacy. Camping adjacent to an Alabama-Coushatta (Creek)

village on a bluff above the river from June 29 until July 11, the Americans treated with Dehahuit, hereditary chief of the Caddos, and forty of his principal men. While Freeman presented United States flags and successfully solicited Caddo endorsement of the exploration, Custis was free to observe Creek ceremonies and Caddoan customs and skills (their talents with the bow put him in mind of stories from the *Iliad*) and to post a twenty-six-specimen botanical collection downriver. For young Custis, the beautiful Red River Valley seemed "the Paradise of America," the naturalist's Eden Jefferson had promised.

In his letter of exploring instructions, Jefferson made it clear that he valued whatever information his explorers could gather, no matter how far they explored. Freeman and Custis obliged, proceeding upriver in July 1806 busily gathering information on the river valley, fully aware that a Spanish force four times their number was shadowing them in the undulating hills to the west. Guided now by the Caddos Cut Finger and Grand Ozages, the party engaged in a series of minor adventures. On July 19 they visited the former site of the Lower Kadohadacho village, and with Indian guides Freeman ascended Cha'kani'na, the Medicine Mount of Caddoan creation myth. By July 22 they had rounded the Great Bend of the Red. Now heading due west, they

The detail below of Anthony Nau's 1807 map, *The First Part of Capt. Pike's Chart of the Internal Part of Louisiana*, shows discoveries by the Freeman and Custis and Dunbar-Hunter expeditions. The numbers superimposed on the map indicate (1) Natchez, (2) Natchitoches, (3) the "Supposed course of the River through the great Raft," and (4) the Freeman and Custis Expedition's point of retreat. Note the annotation: "The exploring party stopped here."



From Donald Jackson, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 2 vols. (Norman, 1966), 1, following p. 324.

Upstream from the Great Raft, the Freeman and Custis party camped near an Alabama-Coushatta (Creek) village and treated with its leaders. Part of the Caddo Confederacy, these Indians lived in grass and pole lodges similar to the one pictured at right, detailed from an 1860s photograph by William S. Soule.

The young Creek warrior (below, no date) was drawn by American artist John Trumbull (1756–1843).



Both images National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



visited two more abandoned Caddo village sites. On July 27—portentously—the Caddos told them that they had reached the former location of La Harpe's post, the most westerly of the French settlements on the Red River. Distressingly, too, after going two weeks without a summer thunderstorm, the water in the Red had become alarmingly shallow for their barges (1806, it turns out, may have been one of the single driest years in the climate history of the Southwest).³⁰

The Spanish army's movements were equally direct and purposeful. After angrily cutting down the American flag he found flying in Dehahuit's Caddo village, Viana marched his force north to the Red, taking a position on a bluff known since as "Spanish Bluff," a few miles short of the present Oklahoma line. As he told his superiors, he knew "the irremediable damage that would result to this Province if the union is accomplished of the Expedition of the United States with the faithless Taboayases [Wichita] Indians, and the Comanches." He would therefore confront the Americans above the old French post and "where the territory of the Taboayases begins," since "this territory is ours."³¹

30. David Stahle and Malcolm Cleaveland, "Texas Drought History Reconstructed and Analyzed from 1698 to 1980," *Journal of Climate*, 1 (January 1988), 59-74.

31. Francisco Viana to Cordero, June 3, 1806, Bexar Archives.

32. Tabulated costs for the exploration appear in Flores, ed., *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, 295-96 n. 25.

33. The manuscript of Clark's map and the printed version may be compared in Carl Wheat, comp., *1540-1861: Mapping the Transmississippi West*, 5 vols. (San Francisco, 1957-1963), 2:maps 291 and 316. Freeman and Custis's route and Viana's route of interception appeared on Fray José María de Jesús Puelles, *Mapa*

The actions of three individuals prevented violent encounter. There was Viana's firm and even polite refusal to allow the Americans to pass on the afternoon of July 28. Then there was Captain Richard Sparks's skilled deployment of the outnumbered Americans into a defensive perimeter. And there was Freeman's mature assessment of his situation. Thus, on July 30, 1806, having ascended the Red River some 615 miles to the edge of the Blackland Prairies but still only halfway to the mystery of the Red's sources, Freeman finally stuck. President Jefferson's Grand

Expedition into the Southwest had encountered "the other" in the American wilderness. Rather than proceed on, the expedition had been forced to do the unthinkable. It was forced to fall back.

For a total expenditure of \$8,700, what had Jeffersonian America realized from this expedition?³² Compared to the results of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, or even the geographical knowledge Zebulon Pike's overland trek into the southern Rockies provided later that fall and winter, the cost-benefit must have seemed paltry. While Freeman's astronomical readings produced by far the most precise maps to emerge from Jeffersonian exploration, he had barely penetrated to unknown territory, and he had failed particularly to resolve the question of the Red's sources. The official map of the exploration was a beautiful study done by Nicholas King in 1807. Yet while it appeared on Anthony Nau's *The First Part of Capt'n. Pike's Chart of the Internal Part of Louisiana* (1807), when William Clark's map of the West was published in 1814, the

Geographica de la Provincias Septentrionales de esta Nueva Espana (ano de 1807). Copy in map collection, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas-Austin.

34. On the proposed Arkansas River expedition, see particularly Jefferson to Dearborn, February 14, 1807, Jefferson Papers, series 1; Dearborn to Dunbar, March 30, 1807, in Rowland, ed., *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar*, 197-98; Freeman to Dearborn, June 15, 1807, RG 165, NA. On Freeman's later career, see Flores, ed., *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, 313-16.

35. Item on Edwin James's death, Louis H. Pammel Papers, University Archives, Iowa State University Library.

Freeman and Custis route was cropped out by a printer's decision.³³

Meager geographic results (coupled with Spain's reaction) reduced Jefferson's 1807 consolation plan of sending Freeman to explore the Arkansas to a nonstarter in Congress, and effectively brought to a conclusion a vision of exploring the Southwest that Jefferson had entertained at least since 1804. As a "favorite of government," Freeman was rewarded with the post of surveyor general of the country south of Tennessee, a position he occupied until his death in 1821.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, Freeman's detailed daily journal of the Red River expedition was turned over to botanist and chronicler Edwin James of the Stephen Long Expedition, which had also targeted the Red River for examination. The valuable journal subsequently vanished, most likely consumed when James had all his papers burned at his death.³⁵ If Freeman's journal or other materials were to turn up, however, as have so many materials from the Lewis and Clark Expedition,³⁶ undoubtedly there would be renewed interest in the Red River exploration.

Custis's work, if anything, turned out to be even more ill-starred. Indeed, a major reason the Red River expedition disappeared almost immediately into a black hole of even scientific memory may have had much to do with Custis. In truth his four reports from the expedition, which I discovered in the National Archives in 1982, and his extant specimens (they turned up among the Lewis and Clark specimens at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural History the same year) constitute an extraordinary encyclopedia of early Red River ecology. Custis catalogued 267 species, recognizing 22 as new, and proposed seven new scientific names. And his specimens collection concentrated particularly on ethnobotanical plants used by the Indians and on species

indicating the party's approach to the semiarid western prairies.

Today Custis's reports provide a time-travel view of a Red River "wilderness" extensively shaped by both the Indian and previous European presence.³⁷ Yet he ended up getting virtually no credit for this in his lifetime. Although he did produce an article for the *Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal* on the natural history of the Red below Natchitoches, Custis spent most of 1807 completing his doctorate and searching for a suitable position.³⁸ His mentor, Barton, among many other projects had accepted the task of identifying Lewis and Clark's specimens, and apparently was

stretched too thin to help Custis work up the many remaining—and most interesting—of his discoveries for publication.

Unpublished discoveries were nothing, however, to the disaster of the "official report" of the expedition. In 1807 the Jefferson administration produced a small run of Nicholas King's redacted version of the explorers' journals, *An Account of the Red River in Louisiana*. Precursor to Nicholas Biddle's 1814 rewrite of the Lewis and Clark journals, King's version of the Red River probe showed just how far government science had to go. *An Account* was a total embar-

arrassment with its horrific mangling of Custis's Latin binomials and descriptions.³⁹ By 1808 Dr. Custis had retreated to New Bern, North Carolina, where he established a medical practice, successively married the daughters of two fellow physicians, gave the name "Linnaeus" to one of his sons—and never wrote another word about natural history. Known in Carolina society as "highly popular," although counterintuitively also as "somewhat blunt and caustic in his manner, and [in] the life of all social companies in which he appeared," he died there on May 1, 1842, the longest-lived



Courtesy the author

Information gleaned from the Freeman and Custis Expedition was relegated to obscurity by circumstance and historical timing. Freeman's journals vanished, and the only animal from Custis's collection still credited to and named for him is the Louisiana fox squirrel (above, 1972).

36. For example, the Whitehouse journal, Charles Floyd's brief journal, the John Ordway journal, Lewis and Clark's so-called Eastern Journal, Clark's field notes, and Lewis's astronomy notebook. See Gary E. Moulton, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 12 vols. (Lincoln, 1993-1999), 2:appendix B, 530-48.

37. See especially Flores, "The Ecology of the Red River in 1806," 34-42.

38. Peter Custis, "Observations Relative to the Geography, Natural History, and etc., of the Country along the Red-River, in Louisiana," *The Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal*, 2 vol. (1806), 2:pt. 2, 43-50; Peter Custis, "Bilious Fever of Albemarle County" (doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1807); Custis to Barton,

May 21, 1807, Benjamin Smith Barton Collection, Library of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (hereafter Barton Collection).

39. Nicholas King, *An Account of the Red River in Louisiana, Drawn Up from the Returns of Messrs. Freeman and Custis, to the War Office of the United States, Who Explored the Same, in the Year 1806* (Washington, D.C., [1807]). The original 142-page manuscript of this redaction is in the Peter Force Collection, Library of Congress. Only ten copies of the printed version are known to exist. According to the Library of Congress, its copy came bound to the back of King's redaction of Pike's 1805 Mississippi River account. See Thomas Streeter, *Bibliography of Texas, 1795-1845*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 1:item 1040.

of any who led Jefferson's frustrated hopes to explore the Southwest.⁴⁰

Although Jefferson's letters do not reveal the extent of his disappointment about his southwestern expedition, the president's public reaction was clear enough. Donald Jackson has called the exploration "a headstrong decision that put in danger the lives of Americans pursuing an impossible goal,"⁴¹ and it does in fact appear that the result of his stubbornness embarrassed Jefferson. Too, there was the undercurrent of public suspicion that Jefferson had known about and privately approved the Burr Conspiracy. At least one prominent newspaper would later editorialize, perhaps a little sensationally, that the ferment with Spain in 1806 was *not* caused by Burr, as the administration tried to insist, but by Jefferson's "secret expeditions, secret orders, and secret plans" of exploration.⁴² True or not, Jefferson clearly decided to put the expedition behind him and concentrate on the far-happier results of Lewis and Clark, an exploration that had featured the grand theme of Americans confronting the wilderness rather than Americans confronting "the other." The country has been emulating Jefferson in that decision ever since.

The fate of Jefferson's southwestern exploration sparks intriguing speculation about the Lewis and Clark journey. I have already mentioned that historian Donald Jackson once pondered what might have happened had the Spaniards captured Lewis and Clark.⁴³ The best answer may be to look at the aftermath of the Freeman and Custis Expedition and admit that not much would have been changed. In the Southwest, commerce pushed American traders into the interior despite the fate that befell Jefferson's Red River explorers. The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 clarified United States holdings in the Southwest along the line of the Red

River, and acquisition of the entire region followed in the 1840s. If the Spaniards had succeeded in blocking Lewis and Clark, American history would surely have lost a great adventure with the western "wilderness," but judging from the history that followed Jefferson's southwestern counterpart, failure by Lewis and Clark would not have altered Big Picture history in the northern West very much. Someone else would have discovered the pronghorn and grizzly.

Still, for those of us who excavated Freeman and Custis's forgotten southwestern expedition, it is difficult not to imagine a more successful fate for it. Donald Jackson fashioned an entire novel around the idea, sending Freeman and Custis (renamed "Dr. Raphael Bailey") on a fictional 1807 voyage up the Arkansas River to the Colorado Rockies, including an almost friendly confrontation with a Spanish force from New Mexico.⁴⁴ Although an ancestor from the Spanish side of my family (José Flores of Nacogdoches) served as an officer in the army that stopped Freeman and Custis in 1806, I have similarly speculated on what might have been. In an imaginary version of my own, the Spaniards permit the expedition because they realize it will send Jefferson's men into the heart of the southern high plains; that is, into the heart of nowhere.⁴⁵ As fun as this story is to imagine, it probably gives Spanish policy-makers credit for knowing more geography than they knew in 1806.

In fact, the real exploration history of the Red River is quite different. Unlike the Missouri and Columbia, the Arkansas and Rio Grande, and even the Colorado, the Red continued to shimmer and dance like some high

40. On Custis's later life, see Custis to Barton, October 29, 1808, Barton Collection; Notice of marriage, Dr. Peter Custis to Mary Pasteur, daughter of Dr. Edward Pasteur, April 20, 1809, in *Raleigh Register*, April 27, 1809; Alan Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County* (New Bern, N.C., 1987), 323. On his marriage in 1818 to Katherine Carthy, daughter of Dr. Daniel Carthy, see Craven County Marriage Bonds, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina. On his personality, see "Recollections of Physicians in early North Carolina," Stephen Miller Memoir, collection no. 371, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. On Custis's postexploration life, also see Peter Custis Will and Testament, June 30, 1840, Craven County Original Wills, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina. (The will lists as his children: Linnaeus, Peter, Sally, Betsey, Pennan, and Park.) Custis Family Bible, New Bern Historical Society, New Bern, North Carolina; Dr. Peter Custis, Certificate of Death, May 1, 1842, Will Book D, pp. 54-55, Superior Court, Craven County, North Carolina.

41. Jackson, ed., *Exploring the West from Monticello*, 234.

42. *New Orleans Louisiana Gazette*, May 16, 1811. On Jefferson's knowledge of the Burr Conspiracy, see Dearborn to Wilkinson, January 21, 1807, RG 165, NA.

43. Donald Jackson, "What If the Spaniards Had Captured Lewis and Clark?" *Among the Sleeping Giants* (Urbana, Ill., 1987), 10-22.


44. Donald Jackson, *Valley Men: A Speculative Account of the Arkansas River Expedition of 1807* (New York, 1984).

45. Dan Flores, "The River That Flowed from Nowhere," in *Horizontal Yellow: Nature and History in the Near Southwest* (Albuquerque, 1999), 37-79.

46. Randolph Marcy, *A Report on the Exploration of the Red River, in Louisiana* (Washington, D.C., 1854). Scholars had never been able to locate the headwaters scenes Marcy described, but his biographer, Eugene Hollon, speculated in 1955 that Marcy may actually have explored Tule Canyon. By comparing Marcy's descriptions and especially lithographs of the scene with on-site examinations, I was able to demonstrate this in 1990. See Eugene Hollon, *Beyond the Cross Timbers: Travels of Randolph B. Marcy, 1812-1887* (Norman, 1955); Dan Flores, *Caprock Canyonlands: Journeys into the Heart of the Southern Plains* (Austin, Tex., 1990), 106-7, 114-15.

47. Ernest H. Ruffner, "Survey of the Headwaters of the Red River, 1876," in *Report of the Secretary of War, 45th Cong., 2d sess., 1877*, H. Doc. 1, vol. 2, pt. 2, serial 1794. An easily accessible version is now available: T. Lindsey Baker, ed., *The Texas Red River Country: The Official Surveys of the Headwaters, 1876* (College Station, Tex., 1998).

plains mirage beyond reach of official American exploration for another seventy years. In 1807 Zebulon Pike found the Rio Grande where he thought the Red should have been. Thirteen years later, explorer Stephen H. Long was flabbergasted when the “Red River” somehow transmogrified itself into the Canadian. In 1852, Captain Randolph Marcy finally entered the maze of striped badlands and 700-foot-deep canyons sluiced by the Red’s exit from the Llano Estacado, but his romantic descriptions and drawings of the river’s “head sources” turned out to represent Tule Canyon, a sheer side-gorge one hundred miles short of the river’s true headwaters.⁴⁶ Not until 1876 did Lieutenant Ernest Ruffner finally spend two months exploring and mapping the multihued desert canyonlands—so strikingly different from the snow-clad mountains Americans had

imagined—that give rise to a river Jefferson had targeted seventy-two years earlier as “next to the Missouri, the most interesting water of the Mississippi.”⁴⁷ 

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Spanish intervention kept Freeman and Custis from fully ascending the Red River, but the river’s source eluded explorers for another seventy years. Not until 1876 did Lieutenant Ernest Ruffner finally map the desert canyonlands of the Llano Estacado and with it the sources of the Red in canyons and draws, such as the one shown below (1986), a point of origin Thomas Jefferson could have little imagined.

Courtesy, the author



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The Magazine of Western History

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Montana The Magazine of Western History (ISSN 0026-9891) is published quarterly by the Montana Historical Society. Subscriptions are \$24 per year or \$45 for two years. Foreign orders add \$8 per year for postage in U.S. funds. Direct subscription and advertising questions to Business Manager and editorial correspondence to Editor, Publications, Montana Historical Society, 225 N. Roberts St., P.O. Box 201201, Helena, MT 59620-1201. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned without return postage. Authors are responsible for the interpretation in their articles. Articles are abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life*, Santa Barbara, CA; *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, Institute for Scientific Information, Philadelphia. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals postage paid at Helena, MT and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Montana Historical Society, P.O. Box 201201, Helena, MT 59601. ©2000 Montana Historical Society. USPS 594 320
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Cover

Among the elements that tie this issue together are rivers, from exploration on the Red River of the Southwest to steamboating on the Missouri River of the northern High Plains to hydraulic development of the Pacific Northwest's mighty Columbia. Even in Douglas Steeples's examination of the Mojave Desert's borax industry, beginning on page 28, there is a river—the Mojave. Although its presence is muted, the Mojave, like all rivers, contributes to a sense of place and serves as a reminder of just how precious watercourses are in the West.

Rivers similarly provided focus for Henry F. Farny (1847–1916) and James Everett Stuart (1852–1941), whose artwork is featured on the front and back covers.

Born in France, Henry Farny came to the United States with his family when very young. He developed a lifelong interest in Indians from his boyhood experiences with the Senecas of western Pennsylvania and through a number of trips west later in life. Having studied in Europe and later working as an illustrator, Farny visited the Far West first in the early 1880s. Unlike contemporaries Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington, Farny avoided sensational action to concentrate on the stability and harmony of intimate views, and unlike Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, who reveled in sublime panoramas, he emphasized near viewpoints. Such are the components of Farny's *Days of Long Ago* (1903, oil on board, 37½" x 23¾"), reproduced on the front and back covers courtesy the Buffalo Bill Historical Center of Cody, Wyoming, in which an Indian family departs from camp.

Panorama is more in evidence in James Everett Stuart's *Indians on the Bank of the Columbia River with Mt. Hood* (1884, oil on canvas, 24" x 36"), reproduced on the back cover courtesy the Marquard Collection, Bill Allen, photographer. Stuart, grandson of the famous painter Gilbert Stuart, was fond of the Columbia River landscape and was known for portraying the sunset glows and snowcapped peaks of the Pacific Northwest. Such elements comprise the aesthetic of the Columbia, which William L. Lang contrasts with the monumental efforts to put that river to practical use in an article beginning on page 44.