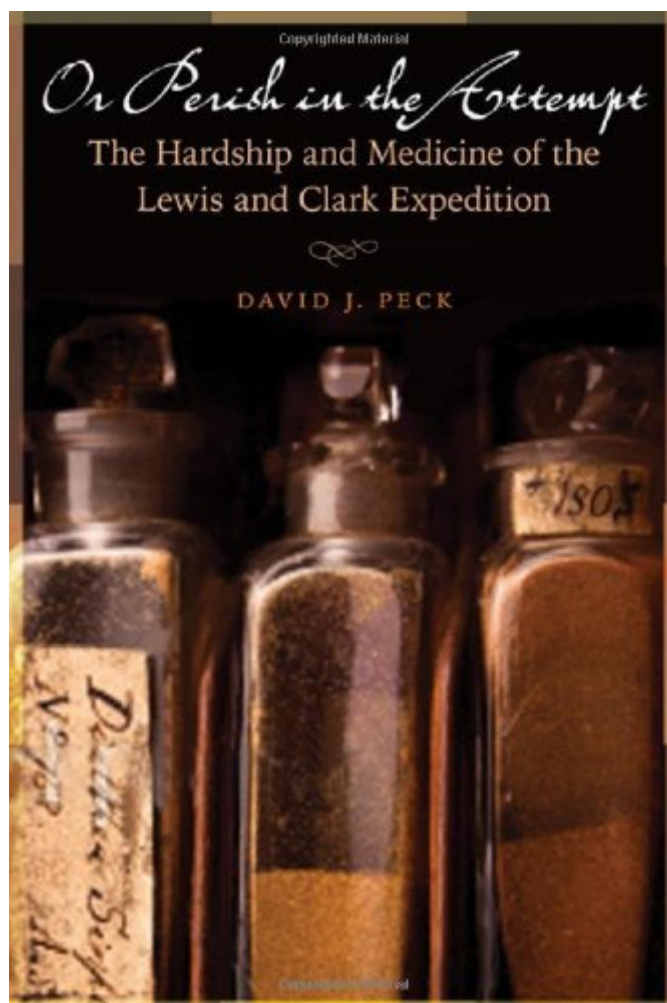


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Or Perish In The Attempt: The Hardship And Medicine Of The Lewis And Clark Expedition



Synopsis

David J. Peck's *Or Perish in the Attempt* ingeniously combines the remarkable adventures of Lewis and Clark with an examination of the health problems their expedition faced. Formidable problems indeed, but the author patiently, expertly and humorously guides us through the medical travails of the famous journey, juxtaposing treatment then against remedy now. The result is a fascinating book that sheds new light not only on Lewis and Clark and the men and one remarkable woman (and her infant) who accompanied them along an eight-thousand-mile wilderness path but also on the practice of medicine in their time and place.

Book Information

File Size: 4876 KB

Print Length: 360 pages

Publisher: Bison Books; 1 edition (June 1, 2011)

Publication Date: June 1, 2011

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B006TRPQUC

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #908,702 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #183

in Books > Medical Books > Basic Sciences > Histology #415 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Science & Medicine > Medicine #569 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries

Customer Reviews

Every person interested in either the Lewis & Clark "Voyage of Discovery", or the person interested in early "modern" medicine (i.e., the period when medicine was changing from alchemy, sorcery and potions, to developing a scientific method) will treasure this book. There have been two books written on the medical aspects of the Voyage of Discovery, the only other book than this one was written in 1960 by Dr. Chuinard. As a physician, my displeasure with Dr. Chuniard's book is that he is an orthopedic surgeon (limited scope of medical experience), but even worse is his criticism of

Lewis & Clark, and the physicians that trained them: he compared their medical care (including disavowed procedures, such as bleedings & laxatives), with the standard of care held in 1960. Dr. Chuniard would not want his surgical care in 1960 compared to today's standard of care. Dr. Peck's experience as an emergency and urgent care physician places his experience more squarely within the scope of problems encountered on the Lewis & Clark Voyage. Dr. Peck portrays the standard of care with that of the best-trained physicians in America in the early 1800's. He does an entertaining and informative job of describing different illnesses and injuries that the men encountered, as well as the difficult birth of Sacagawea's son, Pompey. Many of the medical conditions mentioned in the "Journal of Lewis & Clark," are compared with the descriptions of these problems mentioned in the journals kept by other men on the journey. Dr. Peck does a masterful job of combining these accounts to develop likely diagnoses, and how the treatments administered effected the medical issues. This refreshing book demonstrates why Dr. David Peck is such a requested speaker at Wilderness Medicine Meetings.

For the last decade I've been making a living as a Lewis and Clark historian and speaker. As the Bicentennial of the Expedition approached, I discovered a new book on the medical aspects of the Expedition: *Or Perish in the Attempt*, by Dr. David Peck. The subject greatly interested me because I was looking for some "angle" on the Expedition that would appeal to everybody, particularly those who had little interest in history. Everyone, I figured, has been sick and/or injured. Two hundred years ago, what treatments were available? More to the point, as Lewis and Clark prepared for the Expedition, what illnesses and injuries did they anticipate they may need to treat, and what did they procure that would "answer the purpose?" *Or Perish in the Attempt* answered those questions and inspired me to purchase a Lewis and Clark medical chest with samples of the drugs Lewis purchased and replicas of period surgical and dental instruments. Over the years I have relied upon *Or Perish in the Attempt* as a medical reference text. But recently I had the great pleasure of reading the latest edition cover-to-cover. To create a lively narrative from the massive amount of primary evidence, seasoned with background reading, is much more difficult than it would seem, and Peck has admirably succeeded. This is no dry, stuffy medical treatise. Dr. Peck's passion for what has been termed the "American Odyssey" infuses the text. The first sentence of the first chapter points the way: "A love for the wilderness and outdoor adventure are born into the heart and mind of every American, or, at the least, learned early in life." If that resonates within you, *Or Perish in the Attempt* is a must-read, whether you are already a Lewis and Clark buff or not. An outdoorsman himself, Dr.

"Or Perish in the Attempt" is a marvelously entertaining account of the Lewis & Clark "Corps of Discovery" journey. Like so many Americans, I have heard recounted superficial descriptions of the Lewis & Clark Expedition and its attempt to find a Northwest Passage. In truth, until reading "Or Perish in the Attempt", that was all that I really knew of the expedition. Dr. Peck's narrative of the travails of the expedition details the "Gestalt" of that harrowing journey in a candidly humane consideration of the hardships that faced the band assembled by Lewis & Clark for the purpose of their intended explorations. Though Dr. Peck's focus is upon the "Wilderness Medicine" used to treat the multitude of afflictions and injuries suffered by the members of the Corps, it is by no means limiting to the reader who wishes to understand the purpose and multiple aspects of the expedition in general. With humor, warmth and an empathy that reverberates throughout the book, Dr. Peck brings to life the personalities of the Captains, Meriwether Lewis & William Clark, and the soldiers, outdoorsmen and the lone woman and her child that made the incredible journey of discovery into what had been the uncharted wilderness of the territories of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. One becomes immersed in the story telling ability of this author; as you read you can imagine yourself a child at the knee of a grandfather as he spins a tale of courage and adventure from a time long past. Adventure comes to life, high and humorous, as Dr. Peck relates incidents that occur as the Corps struggles outward to the Oregon Coast, only to engage a new set of dangers and obstacles on their return to St. Louis. As the story unfolds the physician in Dr.

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