

Understanding the Expedition

Note: For more information on the works of art listed in bold, please refer to the Images and Descriptions section of this Teacher Guide.

Who was Prince Maximilian?

Prince Maximilian Alexander Philipp of Wied (1782-1867) was a respected naturalist, ethnologist and explorer. His interest in natural history began in childhood and continued as he became a student of the reputed father of physical anthropology, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. In 1815, Maximilian's scientific interests took him to the Brazilian rain forests to study the flora, fauna, and native cultures. The Prince's publications of the Brazilian expedition were illustrated with engravings based on his own field drawings.

Maximilian's Brazilian experience fueled his desire to explore the North American frontier before it was changed by settlement. Realizing that his own art abilities were adequate but not accomplished, he was determined to seek the services of a skilled, professional artist to produce reference drawings and illustrate the book he intended to write. He discovered the work of the young Swiss artist Karl Bodmer, who had gained some recognition for his Rhine River landscapes. An agreement was negotiated between the prince and Bodmer. In addition to Bodmer, Maximilian's travel team included David Dreidoppel, an experienced hunter and taxidermist who joined Maximilian on his previous journey in Brazil, and while in North America, had the duty of collecting specimens. The three departed for America in 1832. Maximilian was 49 years old when he began this epic endeavor.

Maximilian was dedicated to his work, a methodical and prolific observer, collector, and record keeper. While others preceded him into the vast new frontier of the Louisiana Purchase, Maximilian's journey is regarded as one of the most important of the early expeditions. No previous exploration of North America combined the abilities of an experienced scientist with those of a talented artist. Moreover, their expedition occurred during a period of rapid and intense change, effected by the fur trade, the subsequent opening of the west to a tide of immigrants, and the devastating effect of epidemics—in 1837, an outbreak of smallpox nearly decimated the once populous Mandan Indians, among whom the travelers spent the winter of 1833-1834. Maximilian and Bodmer saw a transforming western frontier, and their observations are the foundation of much of our collective memory and understanding of that era.

The print, ***The Travellers meeting with Minatarre Indians near Fort Clark***, shows Maximilian and Bodmer being introduced to a group of Minatarre Indians, more commonly called Hidatsa, near Fort Clark in 1833. The two explorers are on the right side of the image; Maximilian, wearing dark green clothing, stands beside Bodmer, who wears a light brown coat and top hat.



Who was Karl Bodmer?

Karl Bodmer (1809-1893) was born in Zurich, Switzerland. At the age of thirteen he began to study art with his uncle Johann Jakob Meier (1787-1858), a painter and printmaker. Bodmer and his elder brother Rudolph, who was also a pupil of Meier, traveled around Switzerland with their uncle, learning to engrave, sketch, and paint in watercolor. In 1828, Karl and Rudolph left Switzerland and followed the Rhine to Koblenz where they began to work on their own. Koblenz was a popular area for illustrators because of the beauty of the Rhine and the surrounding picturesque countryside. Bodmer worked there for three years, producing drawings and sketches that were etched by Rudolph and sold to tourists in travel albums. It was while he was in Koblenz that the young Bodmer met Prince Maximilian in January of 1832. The Prince was planning a trip to North America and was looking for an artist to illustrate his travels. Bodmer served the expedition in much the same way as a modern-day photographer would on a contemporary journey. His landscapes recorded the western frontier so accurately that the landmarks—where they have not been altered by time or settlement—are identifiable today. And his detailed portraits of Native Americans are among the most important visual records of the Plains Indian tribes in the early 19th century.



Discussion: Ask students to imagine and describe what Maximilian and Bodmer's meeting with these Native Americans was like.

Why did Prince Maximilian want to travel to America?

In the early nineteenth century, Europe was intrigued with the strange and exotic, with tales of new lands and their native inhabitants, as well as new species of plants and animals. Educated Europeans made up a vast and diverse army of explorers in what has been called “The Second Great Age of Discovery.” Prince Maximilian traveled to North America with Karl Bodmer to gather information and document the land and its people. They shared the experience with others through Maximilian’s publication of the book *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 1832-1834 and an accompanying illustrative atlas of Bodmer’s prints.

Discussion: Discuss possible motivations for present day exploration in the world.

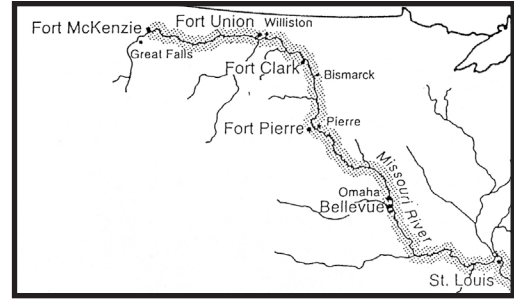
Where did Prince Maximilian and Karl Bodmer go on their expedition?

Europe to St. Louis: May 17, 1832 – March 24 1833

On May 17, 1832, Maximilian and Bodmer boarded the *Janus* and set sail from the Netherlands. They arrived in Boston on July 4, 1832, amid Independence Day celebrations. From there, they traveled by stagecoach into New York City and across Pennsylvania, stopping to visit in Philadelphia, Bethlehem, and Pittsburgh.



From there they continued west through Ohio and into Indiana spending the winter in New Harmony, Indiana, [*Cutoff-River, Branch of the Wabash*] so Maximilian could recover from illness. The five-month stay there was also a key educational experience for Maximilian. The town of New Harmony was, at the time, an experimental community focused on science and education. Although this early mission had failed, it was still the home of some of America’s leading scientists and scholars, including Thomas Say and Charles-Alexander Lesueur. Say had been on two American frontier expeditions with Major Stephen Long who, a decade earlier, explored the Rocky Mountains; Lesueur was respected for his study of living organisms in Australia as well as North America. Maximilian took advantage of this opportunity to visit with the scientists, and utilize the town’s library that contained one of the best natural history collections in the country. In the spring, the journey continued by riverboat to St. Louis, Missouri, which served as the gateway to the West.



St. Louis to Fort Union: March 24-July 6, 1833

In April, Maximilian and Bodmer boarded the American Fur Company's steamboat, *Yellow-Stone*, [*The Steamer Yellow-Stone on the 19th April 1833*] to begin their historic journey up the Missouri River. In early May, the *Yellow-Stone* docked at Bellevue, located just south of present day Omaha, Nebraska, where Maximilian and Bodmer visited a trading post and Indian agency operated by Major John Dougherty [*Bellevue, Mr. Dougherty's Agency on the Missouri*]. The party continued upriver to Fort Pierre where they boarded the larger steamboat, *Assiniboine*. Seventy-five days after leaving St. Louis, the expedition reached Fort Union, in present day North Dakota, which was the farthest a steamboat could navigate on the Missouri at that time. Like the other Missouri River forts visited by Maximilian and Bodmer, Fort Union was not a military encampment but a commercial outpost owned by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company and operated for trading purposes.

Fort Union to Fort McKenzie: July 6 – September 14, 1833

In order to push further west, Maximilian's party boarded a Fur Company keelboat and traveled another 500 miles upstream toward Fort McKenzie, north of what is now Great Falls, Montana. On the way, they stopped in Fort Pierre, Fort Clark, and Fort Union, other Fur Company posts. While traveling on the upper Missouri, they passed through a particularly beautiful area of the Missouri River where Bodmer depicted the *The Citadel-Rock on the Upper Missouri*.

Winter at Fort Clark: November 8, 1833 – April 18, 1834

After spending six weeks at Fort McKenzie, the expedition returned downriver to Fort Clark, located about 45 miles north of the present city of Bismarck, North Dakota; they wanted to meet and learn more about the Mandan and Hidatsa [Minatarre], whose villages were located near the post [*Winter Village of the Minatarres*]. They spent an extremely bitter winter in 1833-1834 at the fort where they endured many hardships. In spite of this, however, the two men continued their work with great interest and in good spirits. Maximilian collected information from the warriors and elders of the tribe; and Bodmer executed dozens of studies of the villages, ceremonies, and individual people.



St. Louis to New York: May 27-July 14

On April 18 the party left Fort Clark and continued downriver, landing at St. Louis on May 27. Their journey back to New York took them to the Great Lakes and to Niagara Falls. They sailed for Europe on July 16. Maximilian and Bodmer took with them vast numbers of specimens of flora and fauna (including live bears!), densely packed pages of notes, and many sheets of detailed drawings and watercolors produced during the journey.

Discussion: *Using the map of the expedition, ask students to identify historic and contemporary places on the journey.*

What modes of transportation did the explorers use?

Maximilian and Bodmer journeyed by way of stagecoach, steamboat, keelboat and occasionally, horseback, during their journey across America and up the Missouri River. Their travel around the eastern part of the United States from Boston to New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia was by stagecoach. At Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, they witnessed one of the newest transportation inventions at the Lehigh coal district. A narrow railroad had been constructed to deliver coal from the mines to the town. Coal cars were hauled up the mountain on a narrow rail track by horses, and on the return, the force of gravity provided the loaded cars a quick trip down the mountain. So many people came to see this ingenious device that a rail coach service was established to carry people up the mountain. Maximilian included a picture of one of these rail coaches in his journal while visiting there. In Wheeling, West Virginia, they boarded a steamboat for the first time and headed for Ohio. From then on, the explorers traveled mainly by boat.

In St. Louis, Maximilian and Bodmer connected with the American Fur Company, a trading operation that carried trade goods from St. Louis to the upper Missouri. From St. Louis to Fort Pierre, Maximilian and his party traveled upriver on the fur company's steamboat *Yellow-Stone*. The treacherous Missouri River had fierce currents filled with dangerous snags, submerged and shifting sand bars, and hidden mud flats. The *Yellow-Stone* frequently ran aground; more than once part of its cargo had to be removed to set the boat free, as illustrated in the work *The Steamer Yellow-Stone on the 19th April 1833*.

At Fort Pierre the explorers boarded a larger steamboat named *Assiniboine* traveling on to Fort Union, which was the upper limit of steamer traffic on the Missouri in 1833. Their voyage continued, however, as they boarded a Fur Company keelboat and headed to Fort McKenzie. Keelboats operated by sail, but when there was insufficient wind, the hard-laboring crew propelled the vessels upstream by pushing them with poles, or hauling them from the riverbanks with strong ropes.

Discussion: Talk about the difference between travel in the 1800s and travel today. How did the modes of transportation available to Maximilian and Bodmer affect the length of their journey? How did it influence where they traveled on their journey? How would their journey be different if they had access to technology such as the car, or airplane?

What Native American tribes did they encounter?

As Maximilian took detailed notes documenting the Native American people they met along their journey, Bodmer created powerful portraits and scenes of everyday life among many of the Plains Indians along the Missouri river, including the Omaha, Sioux, Mandan, and Hidatsa (Referred to as Minatarre in Bodmer's prints), Assiniboin, and Piekann (one of the three Blackfoot tribes). While sharing the larger landscape of the Great Plains, and interacting with each other through trade, each tribe has nuances in their language, life styles and traditions. Maximilian and Bodmer came across Mandan and Hidatsa [Minatarre] Indians while in Fort Clark, Assiniboin Indians while visiting Fort Union, and Piekann (Blackfoot) Indians when they reached Fort McKenzie. (Refer to map at the end of the packet for further information regarding tribe location around the time of Maximilian and Bodmer's journey).

Examples of Bodmer's work depicting these tribes include, but are not limited to:

Mató-Tope: A Mandan Chief; Wahk-tä-ge-li: a Sioux Warrior; Dakota Woman and Assiniboin Girl; Bison-Dance of the Mandan Indians in front of their Medicine Lodge in Mih-Tutta-Hangkusch; The interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief; Pehriska-Rhupa, a Hidatsa Warrior in the costume of the Dog Dance; Winter Village of the Minatarres; Assiniboin Indians; Encampment of the Piekann Indians.

As an explorer and student of these Native American cultures, it was critical that Maximilian earn the trust of important social and political leaders, such as individuals like Mató-Tope and Pehriska-Rhupa. Maximilian described both Mató-Tope and Pehriska-Rhupa as "worthy men" and important sources of information about their respective peoples, the Mandan and the Hidatsa. These leaders worried about Maximilian's welfare and frequently invited him to attend their ceremonies, dances and feasts, occasionally exchanging gifts with him.

Discussion: Discuss the importance of Bodmer's documentation of these tribes in the 1800s. Ask students to think about why Maximilian and Bodmer would have been interested in recording scenes of everyday life and portraits of Native Americans. Discuss how and why life for Plains Indians has changed.

What did they record about the natural environment?

Maximilian collected zoological specimens (including live bears and a prairie fox!) and recorded information about the flora, fauna, and geological formations encountered throughout the expedition. Bodmer not only accurately documented what the two men saw, but also created works of art. An example of this is the print *Cutoff-River, Branch of the Wabash*. Bodmer captures every detail, including the now extinct Carolina Parakeets perched in the large foreground tree, while also beautifully rendering this scene along the Fox River. When the two explorers reached the Missouri River, Bodmer painted the buffalo and elk [*Herds of Bison, on the Upper Missouri*] indigenous to the area as well as the rock outcroppings by the river.

Discussion: Ask students to discuss how the documentation of the expedition would have been different if the camera had already been invented.

How did they share the information about their journey with others?

After their return to Europe, Maximilian spent the next several years working on the manuscript for his book. Bodmer moved to Paris to supervise the production of the prints for Maximilian's publication. In all, 81 hand-colored aquatints were produced and distributed as supplements to Maximilian's text. *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834* and its accompanying atlas of Bodmer's prints was published between 1839-1843. In spite of efforts to promote its sale, the book was not a financial success. The publication of the prints lagged behind the publication of the text, and expenses increased beyond anyone's expectations, resulting in a publication that few purchasers could afford.

Discussion: How do scientists and explorers today share their discoveries? Why would Maximilian have been interested in sharing his experience in North America with other people in Europe?

How do Maximilian and Bodmer compare to explorers and scientists today?

Look in magazines such as National Geographic and find articles of current explorations of the world. Compare these explorers to Maximilian and Bodmer.

Discussion: Name some modern-day explorers. Can you name any women scientists working in other parts of the world? Were there any women who traveled on scientific expeditions in the 1800s? Discuss modern-day methods of observation, documentation, and travel. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the current methods?