



The Last Voyageurs: Retracing La Salle's Journey Across America: Sixteen Teenagers on an Adventure of a Lifetime

Lorraine Boissoneault

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In 1976, America's bicentennial, 24 young men set out to re-create French explorer La Salle's voyage down the entire length of the Mississippi River, abandoning their modern identities in order to live like the voyageurs of the 1600s...

Reid Lewis never wanted to be an ordinary French teacher. With the approach of the American Bicentennial, he decided to put his knowledge of French language and history to use in recreating the voyage of René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, the first European to travel from Montreal to the end of the Mississippi River. Lewis' crew of modern voyageurs was comprised of 16 high school students and 6 teachers who learned to sew their own 17th-century clothing, paddle handmade canoes, and construct black powder rifles.

Together they set off on an eight-month, 3,300-mile expedition across the major waterways of North America. They fought strong currents on the St. Lawrence, paddled through storms on the Great Lakes, and walked over 500 miles across the frozen Midwest during one of the coldest winters of the 20th century, all while putting on performances about the history of French explorers for communities along their route. The crew had to overcome disagreements, a crisis of leadership, and near-death experiences before coming to the end of their journey. *The Last Voyageurs* tells the story of this American odyssey, where a group of young men discovered themselves by pretending to be French explorers.

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