

In this lesson, students will learn mapping skills by looking at the fur trade posts and routes in what is now North Dakota during the early 1800s.

## Supplies

- Paper
- Variety of pencils and colored pencils
- Maps of North Dakota with explorers' routes and forts (provided)
- Outline of North Dakota with rivers (provided)
- Access to North Dakota Studies textbooks and/or [www.ndstudies.gov](http://www.ndstudies.gov)
- Modern roadmap of North Dakota (not provided)

## Setup

- Students should have experience reading and labeling maps.
- This activity may be used as a closing activity to summarize the main points of the fur trade. It will tie the impact of the past to the present.
- It will likely take a few class periods to complete the entire lesson.

## Objectives

- Students will better understand the context of fur trade activities in the region.
- Students will identify the locations of North Dakota's fur trade forts.
- Students will practice map reading and mapmaking skills.

## Background

When European and American fur traders arrived in present-day North Dakota, Native American trading partners already had a pre-existing and sophisticated North American trade network in place for thousands of years. By the early 1600s, long before fur traders arrived, European trade goods made their way from the East Coast of the United States and Canada through the mainland and were beginning to appear in North Dakota. The Hudson's Bay Company began trading with Native American groups farther east, and trade networks such as these brought European goods to the Plains people before Europeans arrived.

The first European fur traders entered North Dakota from the north following two basic routes—either by going south on the Red River or by going west along the Assiniboine River in Canada, then southwest across land to the Missouri River. A French trader, Pierre La Vérendrye (lah-ver-ON-dree), was the first European American to explore North Dakota and travel to the Mandan villages.

Traders along the Red River in Canada also traded with Indians living in northeastern North Dakota. During the fur trade era, many companies competed over goods from the region. These included the Hudson's Bay Company, North West Company, American Fur Company, and the Missouri Company.

In 1828, the American Fur Company sent James Kipp to build Fort Union Trading Post near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers in northwestern North Dakota. Fort Union quickly emerged as the major trading and supply post for the fur trade in the region and eventually became one of the most important trading posts in the western United States. In 1831, Kipp returned to the Knife River villages near today's town of Stanton to build Fort Clark as a base from which to trade with the Mandans and Hidatsas. Fort Clark also became a major trading post in the region.

The fur traders were most interested in beaver pelts, but they also traded for the skins of fox, raccoons, otters, mink, weasels, coyotes, wolves, bears, bison, elk, and deer. Initially, the beaver pelts were transported to Europe, where the fine underhair was shaved from the skin and made into felt hats. Later, the furs were processed and sold in the United States. Pelts were stretched, dried, and pressed into heavy packs at the trading posts. Next the furs were carried on horses, Red River carts, or boats to the nearest city or port for shipping, such as Montreal or Hudson Bay in Canada; St. Louis, Missouri; or St. Paul, Minnesota.

Trade goods transported by ship from Europe traveled in the opposite direction.

Furs were not the only product of the fur trade in North Dakota. Fur companies also traded for food from the Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras living in agricultural villages along the Missouri River. They grew large quantities of corn, beans, sunflowers, squash, and other vegetables. The vast herds of bison were another potential source of food. Around 1810, Métis hunters in the Red River area began hunting bison to sell the meat to the fur trading companies. The Métis, an ethnicity blending American Indian and European cultures, were fur traders and trappers but also had small farming settlements near Winnipeg, Canada, and in northeastern North Dakota. By the 1840s, the Métis were mounting at least two major hunting expeditions a year into the Plains south and west of Pembina. Hundreds of Métis took part in hunting and processing the meat, much of which was made into pemmican and hauled back to Pembina in Red River carts.

The final phase of the fur trade era in North Dakota was the large-scale slaughter of the bison herds for hides mostly by European and American hunters. Teams of hunters sometimes shot hundreds of bison in a single day, skinned the animals, and left most of the meat to rot. The destruction of these herds deprived Native Americans of food and other resources.

## Activity

1. Introduce the activity as a study of trade related to North Dakota. This activity will focus on the fur trade of the 1700s and 1800s and how it influenced major trade routes today.
2. Hand out the blank map with North Dakota rivers on it.
3. Have the students create a legend for their map that includes the following:
  - Compass rose
  - Color for highways
  - Separate colors for each explorer
  - Dots for towns
  - Color for rivers
  - Shape and color for forts
  - Color for oxcart trails
4. Have students label the following rivers on their map:
  - Red River
  - Sheyenne River
  - James River
  - Missouri River
  - Cannonball River
  - White Earth River
  - Heart River
  - Knife River
  - Souris River
  - Little Missouri River
  - Yellowstone River
5. Have the students use their North Dakota Studies books or the website [www.ndstudies.gov](http://www.ndstudies.gov) to complete the chart on the “Fur Trade Era Timeline” handout.
6. Once the chart is completed have students place the forts on the blank map that the rivers are labeled on. Be sure they follow the legend they created when doing so.
7. Then, share the explorers’ maps with them (Lewis and Clark and La Vérendrye). Have the students label the explorers’ routes on their own map as well.
8. Discuss the following:
  - a. Why were so many forts located on rivers? (Easier transportation; game also lived near or visited water so could be caught there.)
  - b. Why did the explorers travel near or around the rivers? (Rivers provided a path to follow; the explorers were looking for certain routes like the Northwest Passage; the Mandans lived along the river and were already trading, which offered a ready market; wild game used the rivers)
  - c. What impact do you think these early explorers and trade routes had on North Dakota? (They brought interest to the area; their presence led to the establishment of businesses but also to the destruction of wildlife, conflict with Native Americans, etc.)

9. Discuss how the events of the past affect us today. You will use a contemporary map of North Dakota to demonstrate this. These can be purchased, picked up from a tourism agency, or projected on a screen for the students. Using the same map they started with, have the students draw in the following roads and cities as they appear on the map today.

- Interstate-29
- Interstate-94
- N.D. 1804
- N.D. 1806
- U.S. Highway 83
- Bismarck
- Fargo
- Grand Forks
- Minot
- Williston
- Washburn
- Pembina

10. Ask the students what they noticed.

- a. What were some similarities between the routes and forts of the past and the roads and towns of today? (roughly in the same locations; along water routes)
- b. Why do you think there are differences? (water routes no longer needed for trade; competing entities came in; the economy moved away from the fur trade and dependence on the river; other modes of transportation like the railroad impacted how trade goods were shipped; river positions changed over time)

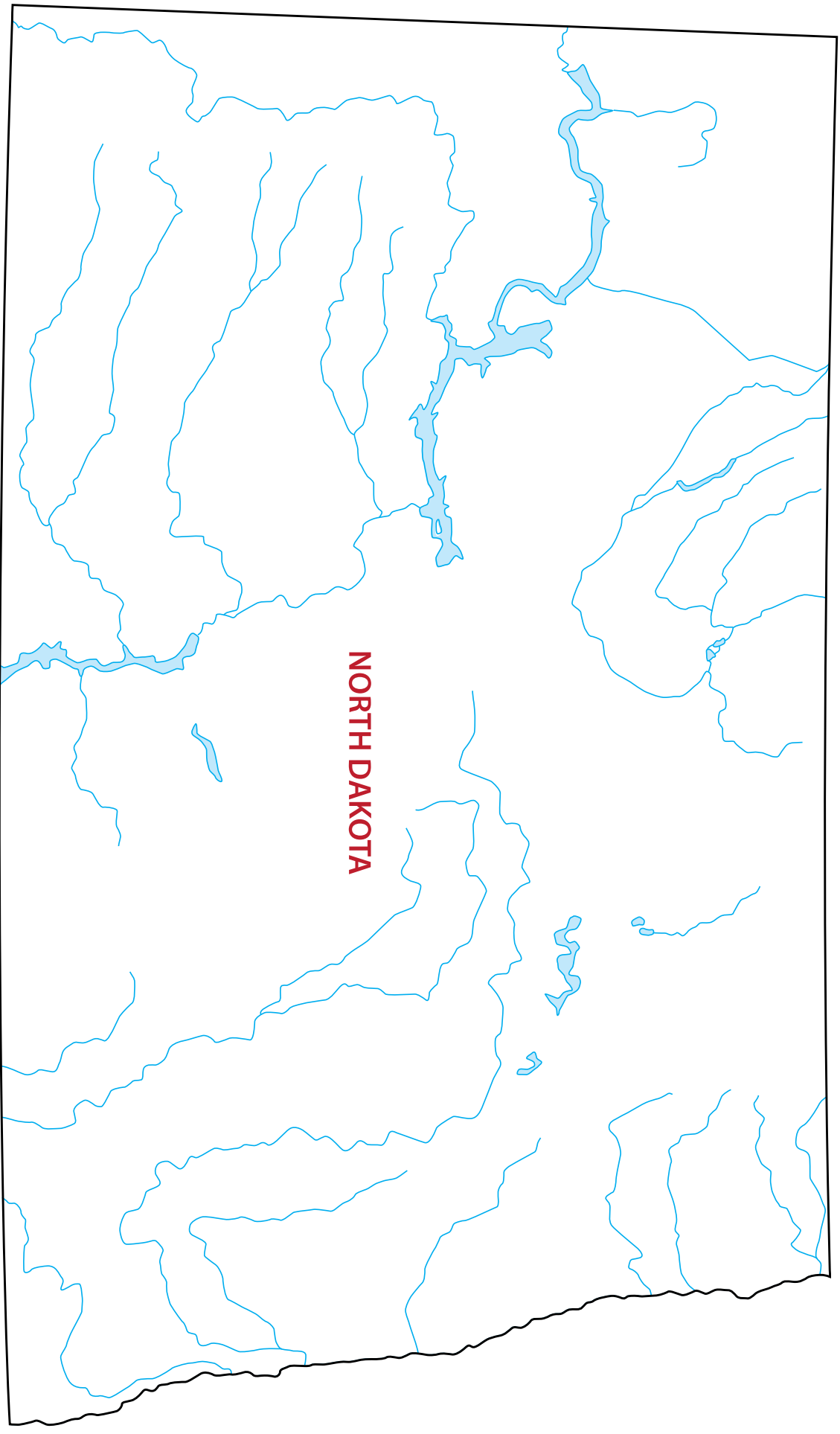
c. The state no longer trades in furs, but how might roads and waterways be used for making money today? (recreation and tourism; transporting goods via trucks or other vehicles; hydroelectric power; irrigation of farmland)

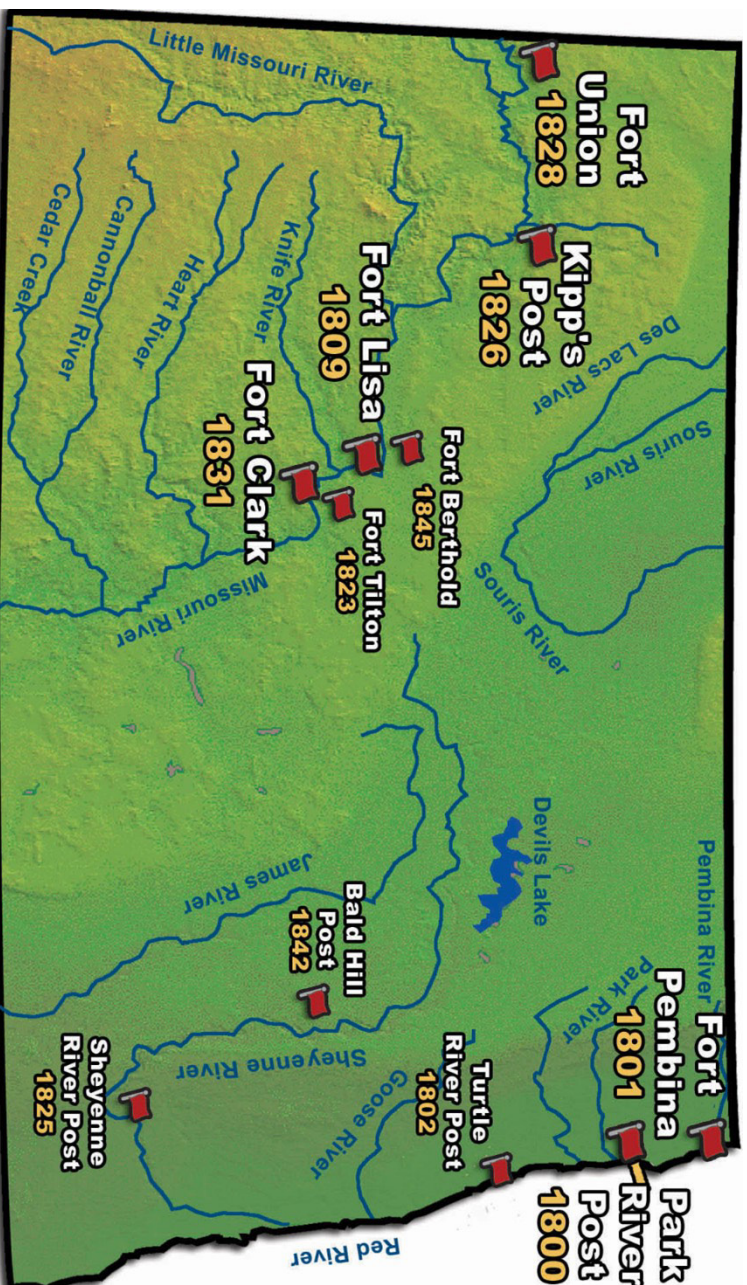
## Extension

1. Have the students research the founding of their own community. How or why did it start where it did? Was the economy or transportation routes the cause of its founding? How does that impact the community today?
2. Have students research the trade goods produced by their community (energy products; agricultural products). On a state, national, or even global scale have them map these products' destinations.
  - a. Discuss how these goods end up in their final locations (rail; sea; highway; air, etc.)
3. Compare and contrast the characteristics of North Dakota's trade routes with major trade routes such as the Silk Road or Amber Road.

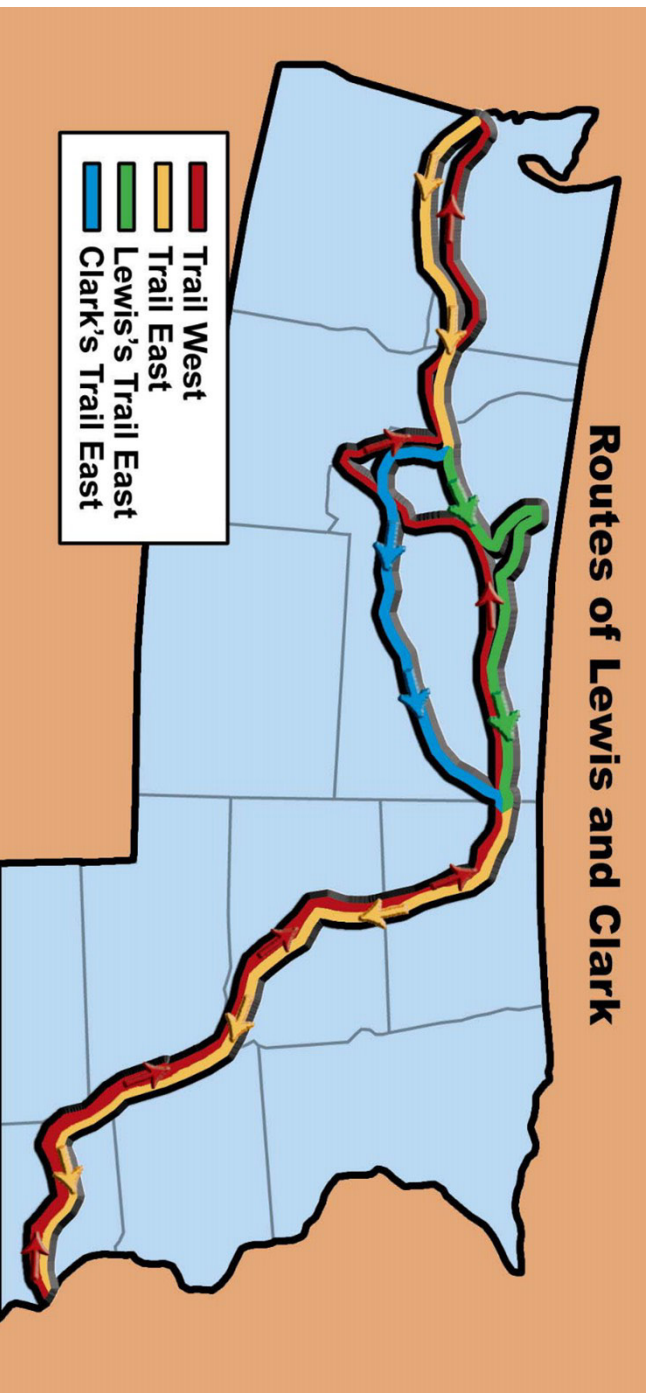
## Reflection questions

1. Besides towns and roads, what else may have been impacted by early exploration and trade in the state?
2. Why were rivers so important during the fur trade?
3. What other ways does the past affect us today?

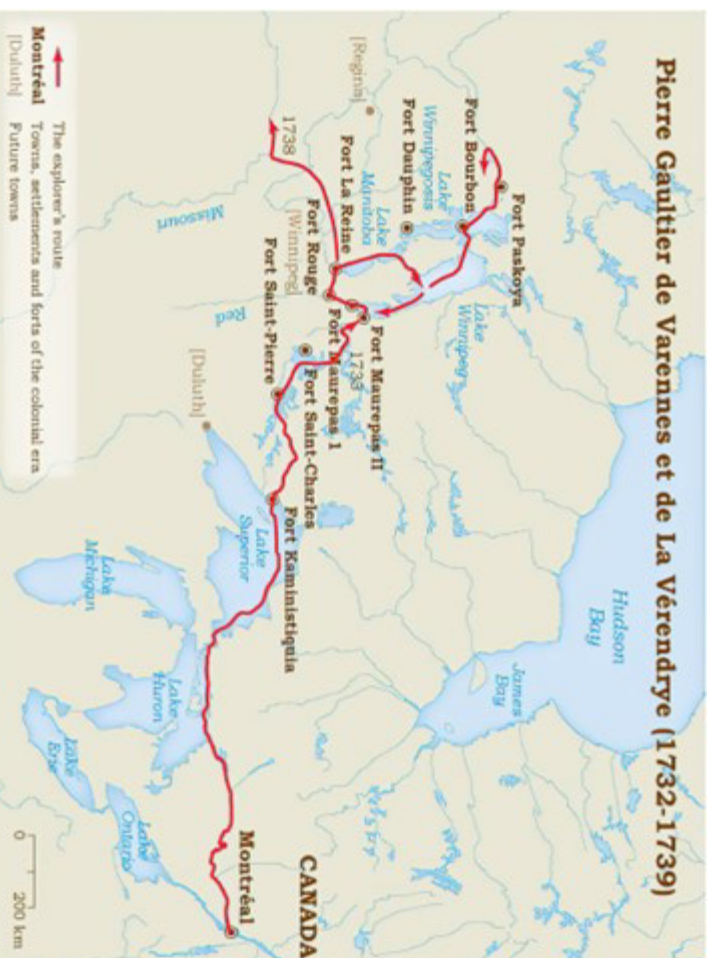








Routes taken by the Corps of Discovery under the leadership of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. *North Dakota Studies*



Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de La Vérendrye was the first European American to explore what is now North Dakota. He travelled to the Mandan villages along the Missouri River. *Virtual Museum of New France*

[Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de La Vérendrye 1732-1739 | Virtual Museum of New France \(historymuseum.ca\)](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca)





## Fur Trading Era Timeline

Year Established	Fur Trading Fort	Location	River	Significance or Point of Interest
1801		Northeast corner of North Dakota		First permanent non-Indian settlement in North Dakota
	Fort Mandan (not a fur trading fort)		Missouri River	
1809		Near Stanton		First American fur trading post in North Dakota; established by Manuel Lisa
	Kipp's Post		Confluence of White Earth and Missouri rivers	Fur trade resumed in North Dakota after the War of 1812
1828		Near Williston		
	Fort Clark		Near confluence of Missouri and Knife rivers	

## Fur Trading Era Timeline ANSWERS

Year Established	Fur Trading Fort	Location	River	Significance or Point of Interest
1801	Fort Pembina	Northeast corner of North Dakota	Confluence of Pembina and Red rivers	First permanent non-Indian settlement in North Dakota
1804	Fort Mandan (not a fur trading fort)	Near Washburn	Missouri River	Protected Corps of Discovery during 1804-05 winter
1809	Fort Lisa	Near Stanton	Missouri River	First American fur trading post in North Dakota; established by Manuel Lisa
1826	Kipp's Post	Northwestern North Dakota	Confluence of White Earth and Missouri rivers	Fur trade resumed in North Dakota after the War of 1812
1828	Fort Union	Near Williston	Confluence of Yellowstone and Missouri rivers	Through 1828-1867, Fort Union was the most important and longest lasting fur trading post on Upper Missouri
1831	Fort Clark	Near Stanton	Near confluence of Missouri and Knife rivers	Named in honor of William Clark