Chapter 3

Makers of Legends

It was a wonderful journey on which the Baron Lahontan set out in September 1688. Or, if the journey itself was in any way unremarkable, assuredly the tale of it was not. As he set out from Michilimackinac, the Baron was equipped with a formidable apparatus of exploration, complete with soldiers and huntsmen and "new Canows loaded with Provisions and Ammunition, and such Commodities as are proper for the Savages." He crossed Lake Michigan and by way of Green Bay and the Wisconsin River made his way to the great Mississippi. There was little of note in this, perhaps, but as the Baron journeyed along the Mississippi he came upon a marvel hitherto unguessed, the Long River.

This new and wonderful river was the least of his discoveries, for after a voyage up it requiring 48 days, he arrived at the villages of the Gnacsitares. The chief of this nation received the Frenchmen coldly, but eventually he condescended to see the voyageurs, bringing with him not only 400 of his own subjects but four Mozemlek savages—slaves of appearance so singular that the Baron, he said, mistook them for Spaniards. They wore clothes, had thick bushy beards, and their hair hung down under their ears. Their complexion was swarthy, their address civil and submissive, their mien grave, and their carriage engaging. They came from a country far to the west, beyond a ridge of mountains six leagues broad, "and so high that one must cast an infinity of Windings and Turnings before he can cross 'em."

The Mozemlek country clearly was a most extraordinary one. Their principal river emptied itself into a Salt Lake 300 leagues in circumference, and its lower course was "adorn'd with six noble Cities, surrounded with Stone cemented with fat Earth." The houses of these cities had no roofs, being open above, like a platform. Nor was it enough that there should be six such noble cities; there were also "above an hundred Towns, great and small, round that sort of Sea, upon which they navigate with such Boats as you see drawn in [my] Map." The people of that far country made "Stuffs," copper axes and other manufactures of such kind as the Baron's interpreters could not give him to understand, as being altogether unacquainted with such things. The people about that salt lake called themselves Tahuglauk, and were "as numerous as the Leaves of Trees."

Fascinated by the reports of such marvels, the Baron questioned the Mozemleks closely, but all of importance he could learn was that the great river of their nation "runs all along westward, and that the salt Lake into which it falls is three hundred Leagues in Circumference, and thirty in breadth, its Mouth stretching a great way to the Southward."

Long River, Mozemlek, Tahuglauk and all, it was a gorgeous yarn that the Baron published at The Hague in 1703. In the presence of a glowing myth, it has always been difficult to be content with noonday facts, and the Baron's readers wanted to believe him. They still want to believe him; they go on searching for reasons not to disbelieve him. Were there not Pueblo villages in the Southwest, bearded Indians in Utah, a Colorado river of the West and, above all, a mountain sea? History, geography and archeology are impertinent to question the Baron closely.

Worthier legends are the heritage from Spanish adventuring, for however the stories are colored, they have the authority of the honest experience that went into their making.

In 1540 the conquistador Francisco Vasquez de Coronado marched north from Mexico in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. While resting at Zuñi he dispatched one of his captains, García López de Cárdenas, to explore the desert lands to the north. Cárdenas made his way to the southern rim of the Grand Canyon but could find no way down to the bright waters of the Colorado glinting in the canyon depths and turned back to Zuñi. It was a dry and terrible land he had seen, and through two centuries explorers were content to leave it to itself.

Lack of information only stimulated the geographers, who wanted to think that somewhere in the trackless north was a lake of Copalla from which the ancient Aztecs had come, and a color of belief came into such ideas after the Spanish colonization of New Mexico in 1598. The provinces to the north were divided as two, Quivira and Teguayo. Quivira was the realm of great plains spreading eastward
from the Rockies, which during the next two centuries became the scene of very considerable Spanish activity, as far north as the North Platte. But that other province, northwest of Santa Fe, remained almost wholly unknown. On his Colorado River expedition of 1604-1606, Juan de Oñate learned from the Indians that the source of the stream was 160 leagues to the northwest, and this remote northern land was called by the name of Teguayo when in 1678 Governor Peñalosa unavailingy proposed to explore it. Little was known of Teguayo except that it was peopled by many different tribes of Indians, but a captive who claimed to have escaped from Teguayo said that during two years' captivity he had seen a large lake on the shores of which dwelt many people.

Was this that mysterious northern lake from which the Aztecs had come in antiquity? For a century and a half, Lake Teguayo might vie with the lake of the Tahuglauk for the credence of the map makers.

There are never any finalities in history. Back of the beginning is always the shadowy intuition of other beginnings, and monolithic facts which stand up rebellious and alone. In 1938, in the wall of the Colorado's Glen Canyon, Charles Kelly found a strange date: 1642. The inscription has all the appearance of genuineness. If genuine, who carved it? A forgotten Spanish adventurer 134 years before Escalante?

In this realm of the nameless and the unknown there is the French enigma, too; the question whether trader or voyageur too obscure to be caught in history's wide net may not have penetrated anywhere before any other. As early as 1706 the Spanish found traces of French trading activities in eastern Colorado, and who may say whether such traders did not drift among the Indians from one tribe to another as far west as the desert valleys beyond the Rockies? No tradition of such far wandering got back to the French settlements in upper Louisiana, however. At late as 1794, when La Compagnie de Commerce pour la Découverte des Nations au haut du Missouri began exploratory operations up the Missouri with the idea of ultimately extending its trade all the way to the Pacific, there was no certain information as to the nature of the country at the head-

waters of the Missouri even—nothing but a rumor from the Indians concerning Great Falls.

Except for another of history's stubborn monoliths, one would have to relegate to the cloudland of dream and mere possibility all ideas of original discovery by the French in the Unknown Land which the Spaniards had called Teguayo. The traveler, Jules Remy, opens a door upon possibility. On the occasion of his visit to Great Salt Lake City in 1855, eight years after its founding, Remy remarked that what little had been known of the region before the coming of the Mormons was owed to the accounts of some Canadian trappers, and he added to his narrative a cryptic footnote: "There is still to be seen, in a naturally-formed cave in the mountains about the Salt Lake, an inscription in French almost obliterated, but in it the name of 'Lecarne, 17 . . . ' is still legible." Was this hearsay only, something invented out of Gallic pride, or something Remy saw himself? In pioneer times a well-known cave was situated at the southern extremity of Great Salt Lake, and it is not altogether impossible that an inscription was carved upon its walls. But, unluckily, that cave has been buried under the slag dumps of the Garfield smelters, and it may be a millennium or two before anyone gets into it again.

From all such shining intangibles history has to turn to everyday certainties, to journals and maps which may be taken in hand and assessed with calipers and the calendar. In the struggle with the Unknown Land, it is the expedition of the two Franciscan priests, Silvestre Vélez de Escalante and Francisco Atanasio Dominguez, that first gives comfort to history. Yet these priests were themselves makers of enduring legends.

By 1776, as the fruits of 11 years of desultory exploration north from Santa Fe, a considerable knowledge of southwestern Colorado had been gained. By 1776, also, the settlement of California had so far progressed that six missions had been established. With a view to extending the explorations so as to find an overland route to connect Santa Fe with the new settlements in California, the two devout Franciscan friars, Escalante and Dominguez, sought the sanction of the government for an expedition of discovery.

Escalante had come to New Mexico in 1768. His duties required wide travel in New Mexico, Arizona and Sonora, and in the spring
of 1775 he made some preliminary reconnaissance of a possible route to Monterey, venturing as far west as the Hopi towns in Arizona. The idea of seeking an overland route farther to the north, through the lands of the "Yutas," he first advanced in October 1775. Such a route, he conjectured, might be easier and more direct than one south of the Colorado. Moreover, there was some rumor of Spaniards dwelling beyond the Colorado, perhaps descendants of shipwrecked sailors who had gone inland and settled in the country of the Yutas. It was not least among the advantages of the proposed exploration that discovery of these people "would be very useful to the Religion and to the Crown, either to prevent any invasion of our kingdom if they are strangers, or to unite them with us if they are Spaniards as the Indians say."

The Governor lent financial support and backing, and accordingly, with a small escort of 10 soldiers including the retired captain of militia, Don Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco, who was the map maker for the party, the two friars on July 29, 1776, set out from Santa Fe. Two members of the little party of exploration on several occasions had traveled north as far as the Gunnison River, and it was with some assurance that the priests and their escort rode north into Colorado. The Spaniards were not entirely ignorant of the nature of the country to which they were going, for a month after the journey began, Escalante made mention of a "Yuta" band among whom were "some Timpangotzis [Utah Valley] Indians through whose land we intended to pass."

At the villages of some "Yutas" on the North Fork of the Gunnison they found two Timpangotzis Indians whom they persuaded to guide them. Setting out again on September 2 in a course generally north and west, they crossed the Grand and White Rivers, and arrived on September 13 at a stream to which they gave a name very soon to become central in the legendry of the West—the San Buenaventura (St. Goodventure). It was the Green River. Crossing to its west bank, near present Jensen, Utah, they followed the Duchesne and Strawberry Rivers through the Uinta Basin, and by way of Diamond Creek and Spanish Fork Canyon on September 23, 1776, emerged into "the lake and vast valley of Nuestra Senora de la Merced de los Timpanogotzis"—Utah Valley.

On all sides tremulous columns of smoke cried out the alarm of the Yutas at their arrival. Perhaps, the priests surmised, they were mistaken for Comanche. The guide, Silvestre, rode off to allay any fears, and soon the warlike preparations changed to earnest expressions of peace and affection. To the people who gathered from the various camps in the valley, the priests explained that one of the main reasons for their coming was to seek the salvation of the Indians' souls. If they received the Law of God, Fathers would come to teach them, and Spaniards to live among them, men who would instruct them how to plant and raise cattle. By such means they would become possessed of food and clothing like the Spaniards, and the Spanish king "would look upon them as his own children and would care for them as if they were his own people."

The Indians gave tokens of friendship, and it was with glad hearts that the Spanish company, on the third morning, turned southward in quest of Monterey. With them they took a report of this far country—a report from which the world might gain its first knowledge of an actual salt lake beyond the Rocky Mountains. The Timpanogotzis Lake, the Indians had told them, was joined to the north with another lake stretching for many leagues, a lake with waters "harmful or extremely salty, wherefore the Timpano Indians assure us that anybody getting a part of his body wet, instantly feels a severe itching around the wet part." Around this lake lived a populous and peaceful tribe whose name, Puaguampe, signified witch doctors, or wizards. They spoke the Comanche language, fed on grasses and drank from springs of good water found around the salt lake. Their huts were built of dry grass and roofed with earth. They were not enemies of the Utah Valley Indians, so the priests heard, but because on one occasion they approached and killed a man, they were not considered as neutral as before.

Had the friars yielded to curiosity and gone north another fifty miles to the low-lying expanse of Great Salt Lake, history could pigeonhole the lake within a comfortable finality, "discovered in 1776 by the Spanish priests, Dominguez and Escalante." In turning south with no more than the report of the lake's existence, they gave history something priceless, a page forever left blank to the imagination, to myth and dream.
The southward journey made its own contribution to the legendary of this land. Four days after resuming their journey, the little company rode up to the banks of a river which appeared from the name given by the Indians to be the San Buenaventura. Escalante was frankly doubtful, for if it were indeed the Buenaventura, the river flowed less water here than where they had crossed it higher up, nor had the guide Silvestre intimated that the San Buenaventura flowed near his home.

No such doubts troubled the map maker, Don Bernardo de Miera. With vigorous strokes of his pen he joined the two rivers as one, and made this river to flow into a blackish lake of indefinite extent, a lake to which he gave his own name.

It was the Sevier River and Lake, the explorers had reached, and here they came upon the race of bearded Indians of whom the rumor had reached even so far as Santa Fe. These Indians, who spoke the Yuta language, were found indeed to possess thicker beards than Indians of Utah Valley and in their features they resembled the Spaniards "more than they resembled any of the other Indians so far known in America." The devout priests had come upon a curious sort of substantiation for a part of the tale of the redoubtable Baron Lahontan.

These bearded Indians told the explorers of Sevier Lake, and that after leaving the lake the river followed a westerly course. But there was no word of Monterey, nor indication that the Indians had ever heard of white men in the west, and the country was unpromising for water. The little company continued its journey southward in the face of a freezing wind on which the snow began to blow. For two days they were snow-bound, and even after they prayed the intercession of the Virgin Mary, it remained freezing cold.

Plainly it was time to reconsider the advisability of trying to reach Monterey. An immense distance to the west was still to be traversed, yet they had found no likely route, and the mountain passes would be filling with snow. To go on would be at the risk of their lives, by starvation as well as by freezing. And, mark well, if they went on to Monterey, they could return to Santa Fe before June. What then, of their promise to the Yutas? Would the Indians not be frustrated in their hopes or even consider that they had been deliberately deceived? Finally, there was the consideration that a new and shorter route might be found to Santa Fe, and that other Indians before unknown might be discovered . . . The two priests decided on returning to Santa Fe.

Don Bernardo de Miera, however, had built up great hopes of honor and profit to accrue to him from reaching Monterey overland. Sullen and caustic by turns, as they recommenced the journey, he argued that Monterey could be no more than eight days' travel to the west. What a fiasco, to give up now! He found willing ears, and after three days the party was ripe with dissension. First imploring divine mercy and the intervention of their patron saints, the priests proposed that the decision be left to the will of God, that they cast lots to determine whether to return to Santa Fe or make the effort to reach Monterey. All agreed, as Escalante wrote, "like Christians, and with fervent devotion recited the third part of the rosary, while we recited the Penitential Psalms with the litanies and the other prayers which follow. Concluding our prayers, we cast lots, and it came out in favor of Cosnina. We all accepted this, thanks be to God, willingly and joyfully."

So they made their hard way back to Santa Fe through the Colorado badlands, completing their epic journey on January 2, 1777.

No one will ever know for what reasons, but the promised mission was never sent to the Yutas. It was obscure traders only who, as the years went by, went in the track of the padres to the Yuta country—obscure necessarily, because such trading expeditions were forbidden by law, and violation was punishable by imprisonment and confiscation of goods. The first white man who ever looked upon Great Salt Lake—first, perhaps, even to taste its bitter waters—may have weighed in his mind, against the pains and penalties of the law, a distinction of discovery . . . and found the distinction outweighed in the balances. During the half-century after Escalante, only the most shadowy glimpses may be had of Spanish adventuring in the Great Basin. A Spanish document of 1805 records vaguely an expedition into the Yuta country of a Yuta interpreter named Manuel Mestas, who sought to recover stolen horses, and a more detailed account has survived of a party of seven men under Mauricio Arze and Lagos Garcia who traveled in 1813 to the lake of Timpanogos. According to its story, this company displeased the Timpanogos
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Yutas by refusing to buy slaves, and after a fight in which eight horses and a mule were killed, made its escape south to the "Rio Sebero." There the party encountered the bearded Indians seen by Escalante a generation before. Again meeting a hostile reception, they took the road to the Colorado. The chief Guasache waited on the road to trade with them, as was his custom. Again the reluctance of the Spaniards to buy slaves offended the Indians, but, profiting by their earlier experience, the traders bought 12 slaves so as to proceed in peace, and thus, after an absence of almost four months, they came back to Abiquiu in July.

The implication of such fragmentary documents is that the trail to and from the Yuta country was well known, but no real information as to the activity of the Spanish traders in the far north has come to light. It is to the journals of Lewis and Clark that one must turn for indications that by 1805 the Spanish traders had extended their operations up through the valley of the Great Salt Lake as far north as the Bear.

Meriwether Lewis reached the anxiously sought camp of the Lemhi Shoshoni, in central Idaho, on August 13, 1805. Among many other things of interest he learned that the Shoshoni possessed horses with Spanish brands, a bridle bit, and other articles significant of contact with traders. This evidence of intercourse with the Spaniards Sergeant John Ordway soon documented in his journal—"it is only by their acc 8 day travel to the South to the Spanish country." Eight days' hard travel southward on horseback would be a journey very nearly to Bear River, the southern boundary of the Shoshoni country. If one may infer from that an acquaintance by the Spanish traders with the entire valley of the Great Salt Lake, one may also infer that not many ventured north of the Yuta country at this date, for Private Joseph Whitehouse, who likewise made note of the eight-day southward journey to the Spanish country, added in his own journal, "but these Indians git but little trade amongst them."

So the expedition of the great captains holds up a dim mirror to reflect the northern limits of Spanish adventuring and offer a tantalizing half glimpse of Spanish traders in the valley of the Great Salt Lake in the first years of the century, men dead to history whose names might have been writ in large letters. The captains themselves at Lemhi had reached their farthest south. After turning north to the Bitterroot Valley, they went on west across the mountains to the Columbia and the sea. Next year they came home in triumph, bringing America the heritage of a known and named land, though there remained, beyond the farthest southward reach of their map, a terra incognita—the Spanish Country.

The homeward-bound captains, as they floated down the Missouri, encountered a first embodiment of the forces and the enterprise that would finally reveal fully that unknown land. In August 1806 near the Mandan villages they met two American trappers, Joseph Dickson and Forest Hancock, who, as Sergeant Ordway noted, "were from the Ellynoise country, and have gathered a great deal of peltry since they have been out about 2 years and have carshed the most of it in the ground they tells us that they are determined to Stay up this river and go to the head where the beaver is plenty and trap and hunt untill they make a fortune before they return." Private John Colter, though he had been away from home two years, was given permission to join these trappers. So he was caught up on the first wave of a tide washing west upon the "Shining Mountains."

The tide was one difficult to resist. After a year of adventure, spent perhaps on the Yellowstone, in the summer of 1807 Colter came down river again, only to meet with the second wave of that westward-setting tide, the party with which Manuel Lisa was instituting organized fur trade in the Louisiana Purchase. Colter turned back, once again, into the West. He had already spent an adventurous three years in the mountains, and it was three years more before he saw St. Louis again.

Lisa's party built a post at the confluence of the Yellowstone and the Big Horn, and it was from this fort, later in the year, that Colter made the lone southward journey which gave Colter's Hell, a luminous prescience of Yellowstone Park, to American folklore. More significant was the enterprise of Andrew Henry in the fall of 1810. The relentless Blackfeet forced the abandonment of the post at the mouth of the Big Horn, but Henry did not at once retreat from the north country; his men penetrated south as far as Wind River, and across the continental divide to Henry's Fork of the Snake, where was built the first American post beyond the Rockies. Though Henry abandoned that fort in the spring and returned to St. Louis, his venture bore immediate fruit. The company of overland Astorians
under Wilson Price Hunt, which came up the Missouri in May 1811, learned from several of Henry's men that there existed a better route for crossing the mountains than Lewis and Clark had found—a route south toward the headwaters of the Platte and Yellowstone.

The Astorians sold their boats to Lisa and bought horses for the overland journey. Crossing South Dakota and central Wyoming, they surmounted the continental divide by Union Pass and the Tetons by Teton Pass, arriving early in October at Henry's deserted establishment on the Snake. Here four trappers were detached, John Hoback, Jacob Reznor, Edward Robinson and Martin H. Cass, and they were joined by Joseph Miller, who in irritation had resigned his partnership in the Astorian enterprise. The rest of the company, after building canoes, began the dangerous voyage down the Snake. At Caldron Linn, after the drowning of one of the party, the journey was resumed by land. Beyond the Boise River, however, Hell's Canyon obstructed their course along the Snake even by land, and most of the now-starving company turned west across the formidable mountains of eastern Oregon to reach the Columbia. The fragmented party thence struggled down the river to Astoria.

Lewis and Clark had been first to look upon the Snake, but only for a short distance above its confluence with the Columbia. The Astorians had followed its entire course in the long arc through southern Idaho, and to that extent they had made known the country, almost as far south as the Spanish possessions.

The work of exploration and legendmaking was continued by a detachment of Astor's men which promptly set out back across the continent. Saluted by the cannon of the fort, the returning Astorians, an "express" under Robert Stuart, left Astoria on June 29, 1812. The six men journeyed up the Columbia and then retraced the route of the previous year's party across the mountains. As they traveled south along the west bank of the Snake, they fell in with an Indian who had guided the westbound Astorians over Teton Pass the preceding fall. From this Indian history gets its first intimation of a fateful fact of geography, South Pass—"a shorter trace to the South than that by which Mr. Hunt had traversed the R Mountains."

Eight days later Stuart's little company astonishingly came upon an almost naked white man fishing in the Snake. It was John Ho-
One of the four wanderers, Joseph Miller, chose to join with Stuart, his "curiosity and desire of travelling thro' the Indian countries being," as Stuart drily observed, "fully satisfied." With Miller as their uncertain guide, the little company continued east along the Snake to the Portneuf, up that river, and over the divide to Bear River, a route familiar in reverse to thousands of later travelers of the Oregon Trail. On Saturday, September 12, the Astorians passed the Bear Lake outlet, where "the mountains receded to a great distance and a beautiful low Plain occupied the intervening space," but they had no intimation of the existence of the blue mountain lake soon to be famous in the annals of the fur trade, and chose to follow the Bear proper because the "south Branch" seemed out of their course.

They had an Indian lodge trail to follow, but on this very day they fell in with a party of Crows, adroit thieves whose idea it was to trade horses for gunpowder with the amply justified expectation that they could promptly steal the horses back. Smoke signals gave frank warning that the trail up the Bear was full of hazard, so on September 13, 1812, the returning Astorians left the river for a course more easterly. Miller had led them to expect a river in this direction, but they could find nothing of it, and with the sharp peril from the Indians, it seemed best to move north and retrace across the mountains the route of 1811. Catastrophe overtook them on September 19. They could have no doubt it was the Crows they had met on Bear River who swept suddenly upon the camp, yelling, to stampede every horse—and "once those creatures take fright," Stuart lamented, "nothing short of broken necks can stop their progress;"

The seven men, left afoot, tightened their belts and set out for home. "We have food enough for one meal," Stuart wrote gamely, "and rely with confidence on the inscrutable ways of Providence to send in our road wherewith to subsist on from day to day."

It was a reliance not misplaced. Their courageous purpose took them over Teton Pass, down into Jackson's Hole, up the Hoback River and over the divide into the valley of "Spanish River"—the Green—on a course generally east, but trending to the south. This route, on September 21-22, 1812, took them southeastward through that great open plain which has become one of the great names in American history—South Pass. They are the first white men known to have traversed it. Beyond the Pass they fell upon a "Branch" soon to become known as the Sweetwater, and from this point in their long, hard journey down the Platte their every footprint marked out the future Oregon Trail. On April 13 they reached the Oto village on the lower Platte and from two traders obtained a skin canoe enabling them to go on by water. On April 30, 1813, "a little before sunset we reached the Town of Saint Louis all in the most perfect health after a voyage of ten months from Astoria during which time we had the peculiar good fortune to have suffered in one instance only by want of provisions."

Robert Stuart's party was within the physical bounds of the Great Basin for seven days only, and any knowledge they would have of the Great Salt Lake would come from the explorations of others—ten, twenty and thirty years after their time. But they brought back to the frontier settlements not only their own ragged selves but the stuff of a newly fascinating legend. The legend of the West itself was implicit in their confident word of a road across the backbone of the continent. Immediately on their arrival, the Missouri Gazette published a long account of their experiences, and in that account was a significant summation:

"By information received from these gentlemen, it appears that a journey across the continent of North America, might be performed with a waggon, there being no obstruction in the wheel rout that any person would dare to call a mountain, in addition to its being much the most direct and short one to go from this place to the mouth of the Columbia river. Any future party who may undertake this journey, and are tolerably acquainted with the different places, where it would be necessary to lay up a small stock of provisions, would not be impeded, as in all probability they would not meet with an Indian to interrupt their progress; although on the other [Lewis and Clark] route more north, there are almost insurmountable barriers."

The Gazette might thus instruct Americans as to their destiny and find willing echoes in the most influential journals of the day. But for the moment destiny must wait. From the traders at the Oto village Stuart had gotten the first intimation why—"the Americans and English were at logger-heads." The War of 1812 had been in progress very nearly a year, and within a few months it proved
the climactic disaster in a succession of catastrophes that had befallen the Astorian venture; Astoria fell into the hands of the great North West Company of Canada, which had reached the Columbia almost simultaneously with the Americans.

In terms of United States history and the westward movement, the extinction of Astoria constitutes a full stop, an area of dead energies where much had promised. But in the larger terms of American history, as of dramatic discovery in the Great Salt Lake country, much was gained by establishment of a British flank in Oregon: The Nor’ Westers contributed their own chapter of uncertainty and conjecture to the tale of the Unknown Land.

Donald Mackenzie, who had come overland with the Astorians, remained for a time as a Nor’ Wester. A tub of a man, aboil with inexhaustible energies, he took upon himself the job of leading the brigades which in 1816 the Company resolved to send into the unexplored country “south and west toward California and the mountains.” Mackenzie located Fort Nez Percé near the confluence of the Columbia and the Snake, and from this post in 1818 took a party 25-days’ journey south and east, penetrating finally to a rich beaver country beyond the Snake to what was termed, elusively, “the Spanish waters.” But the Indians in that region were inclined to be hostile; Mackenzie swung north in a wide circuit to the headwaters of the Snake and thence west again back to Fort Nez Percé.

He remained at the fort only seven days before setting out again for the south, resolved, “should the natives prove peaceably inclined and the trapping get on smoothly among them, to spend part of the winter in examining the country further south,” at which time he was anxious also to have an interview with the principal chiefs of the Snake (or Shoshoni) nation, not having hitherto seen them. While on this journey Mackenzie wrote Alexander Ross, a fellow Astorian who likewise was now a Nor’ Wester, a letter with a tantalizing date line, “Black Bears Lake, September 10, 1819.” He had almost certainly reached Bear Lake; he may even have given it its name. But it is unlikely that he went much farther south.

In 1820-1821 Mackenzie took a third expedition to the Snake Country, but it is impossible to say precisely where he went. Whether an expedition was kept in the field in 1821-1822 is not clear, but in 1822-1823 a party was fitted out for the Snake Country under Finan Macdonald, and this company apparently returned again as far south as Bear River. Yet again no one may say where the trappers penetrated except that they, being “at its Sources,” presumed it to be “the Spanish River or Rio Collorado,” and the presumption must be that no one descended the Bear so far as the immense salt lake into which it gives up its waters.

The adventuring of Mackenzie and Macdonald is the British bequest to the legendry of the Great Salt Lake country, a legendry in which all things are forever possible and Frenchman, Spaniard, Briton and American are the heroes of any dream. Positive discovery, now swiftly to follow, must deal with a strange heritage of mystery and myth with which the legendmakers of three centuries had cloaked the unknown.