

Rendezvous with History

BARON ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT was one of the foremost scientists of his time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century he journeyed to Mexico, returning to Europe to write a *Political Essay upon the Kingdom of New Spain* that was crammed with information about the antiquities and the geography of western America. Heir to all the Spanish adventurings, he brought them into the purview of organized knowledge. He drew upon both the manuscript journal of Escalante and the map of Miera, and his own map of interior western America, published in 1808, left a 40-year impress on American cartography.

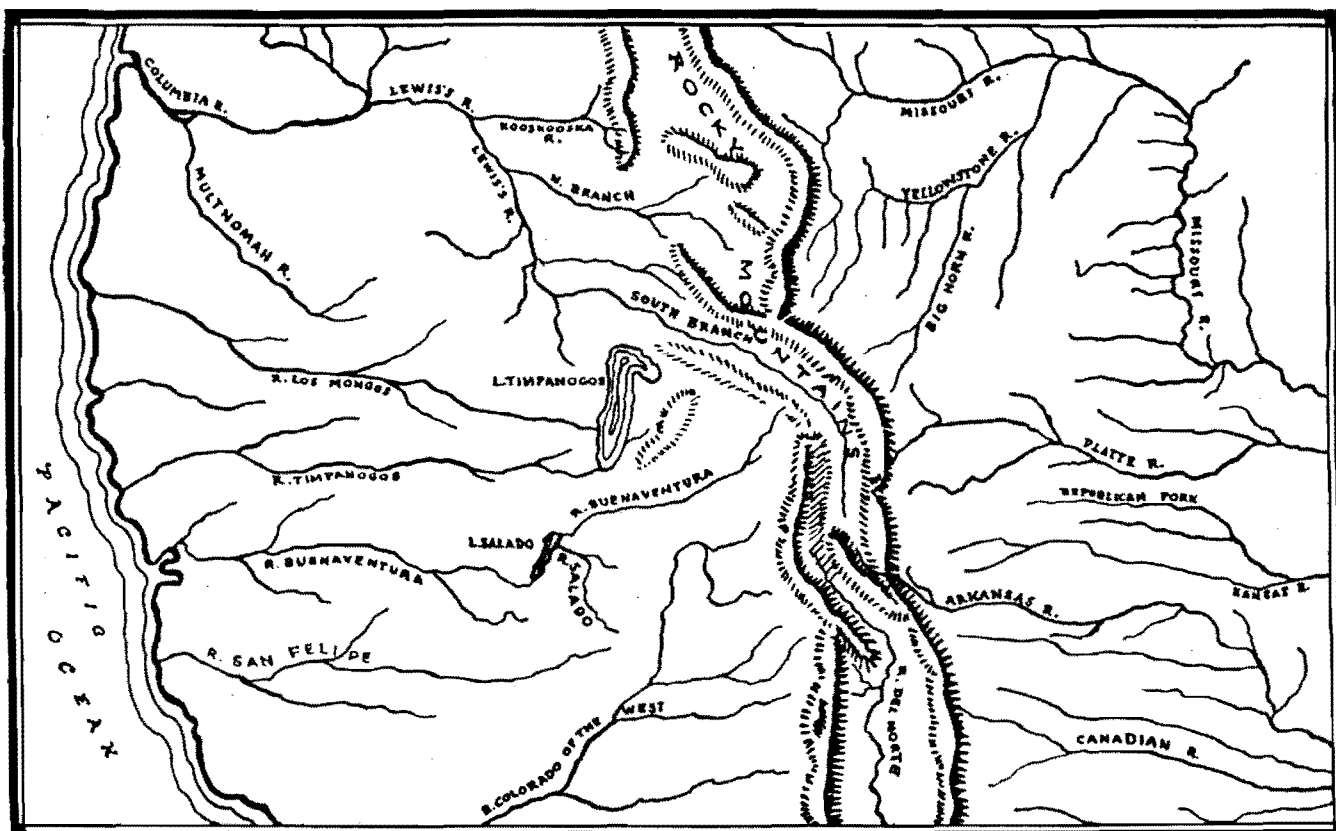
Humboldt's geography of the northern Spanish dominion was compounded equally of fact and myth. On his manuscript map, Don Bernardo de Miera had depicted a Laguna de los Timpan[o]gos (Utah Lake) connected with a more northerly lake unnamed and of indefinite extent, fed from the east by a Rio de los Yamparicas (the Weber; or possibly the Bear) and drained from the west by an unnamed river of large size. Except for that western outlet, a fancy of his own, Miera's cartography was entirely sound. His map of the country to the south, however, had the grave defect of uniting the Sevier River with the Green as the "Rio de San Buenaventura." The brackish lake into which the Sevier discharged (Sevier Lake) he named Laguna de Miera, indicating at the same time another eastern affluent, the Rio Salado. The western limits of the Laguna de Miera he made no attempt to define.

All this information Humboldt faithfully incorporated into his map, except that he made the Rio de los Yamparicas a western rather than an eastern affluent of unnamed Great Salt Lake, and except that he gave no name to the vaguely defined Sevier Lake. From Humboldt's map these features, with other details derived from the Escalante journal itself, went immediately into the maps of western America. To the Humboldt conception was added only the ideas derived from the map William Clark published in 1814. Ascending

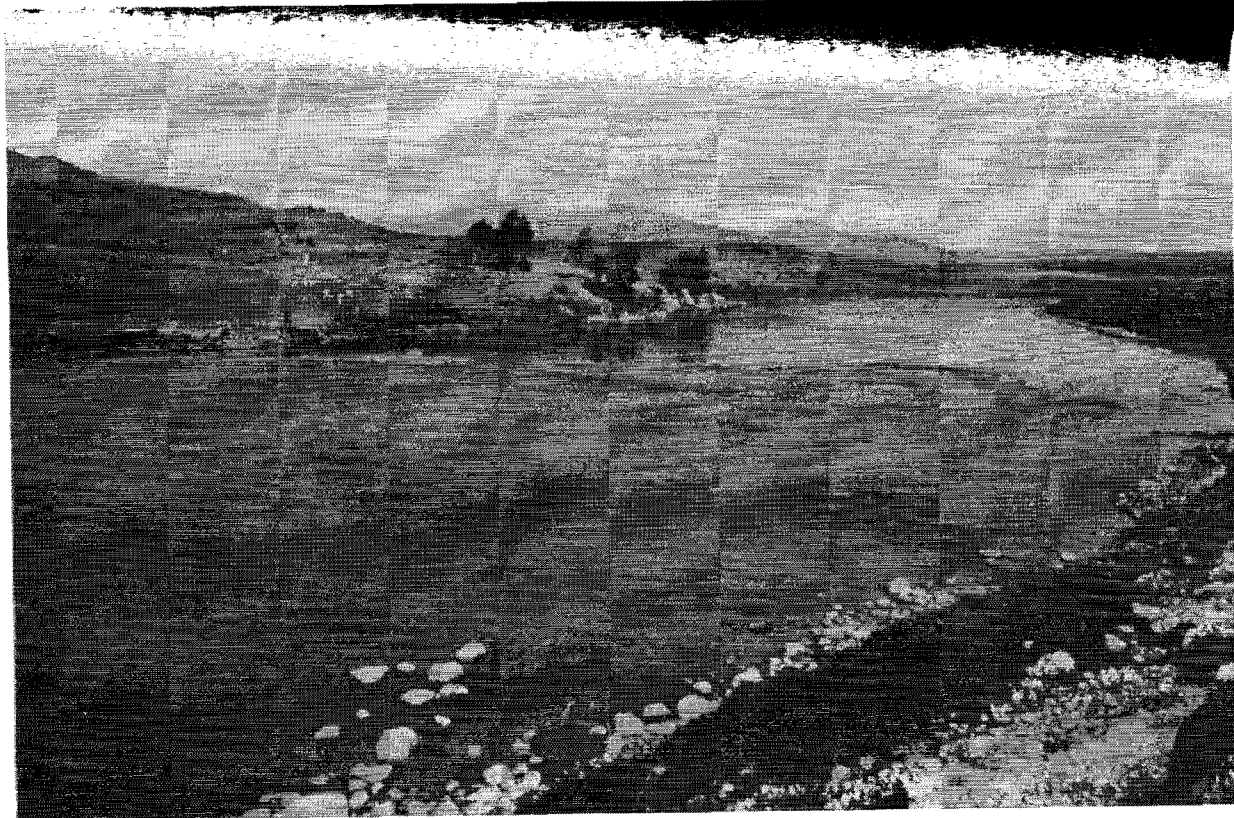
the Columbia in 1806, Lewis and Clark had learned of a large affluent, the Willamette, heading far in the south. After a brief reconnaissance William Clark had "perfectly satisfied" himself of the size and magnitude of this river, which evidently watered "that vast tract of Country between the western range of mountains and those on the sea coast and as far S. as the Waters of Callifornia about Lat^d. 37 North." Named the Multnomah, the river was shown on Clark's map as extending far to the south and east, roughly paralleling the course of the Snake.

These were the sources of the myths. The cartographers quickly combined the unnamed Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake into a single body of water, which sometimes was left unnamed but usually was styled the Timpanogos. This lake was represented at first as drained by a single outlet, the Multnomah. At the same time Miera's conception of a R. Buenaventura and a R. Salado draining into an unnamed lake was faithfully followed—the cartographers, like John Melish in 1816, tentatively draining that lake with a "Supposed course of a river between the Buenaventura and the Bay of San Francisco which will probably be the communication from the Arkansaw to the Pacific Ocean." Melish was satisfied with a single outlet for his unnamed Timpanogos, and so was John Robinson in 1819, but Robinson would have no truck with the Multnomah; instead he drained his Timpanogos by a Timpanogos River flowing into the Bay of San Francisco. There was a notable lack of agreement about which of the two lakes, Timpanogos or Salado, should have the honor of debouching into the Bay of San Francisco; thus Thompson in his *New General Atlas* of 1820 gave back the Multnomah to Lake Timpanogos and scrupulously depicted (Miera's) "Salt Lake" with its affluents, the Buenaventura and Salado, but firmly echoed Melish's conception of a Buenaventura continuing on to San Francisco Bay. In the same year the French map maker, Brué, reintroduced an old idea into the mapping of the Great Basin. His Timpanogos was more than orthodox, with a river at its head creditably resembling the Bear, and with Humboldt's imaginary western affluent, the R. Yamparicas. But he tentatively joined the Timpanogos with the southern lake, and this latter he boldly called "*L. Teguayo ou Sale*."

Thus at a stroke the early Spanish conception of a Lake Teguayo returned to history. Next year the German cartographer Weiland



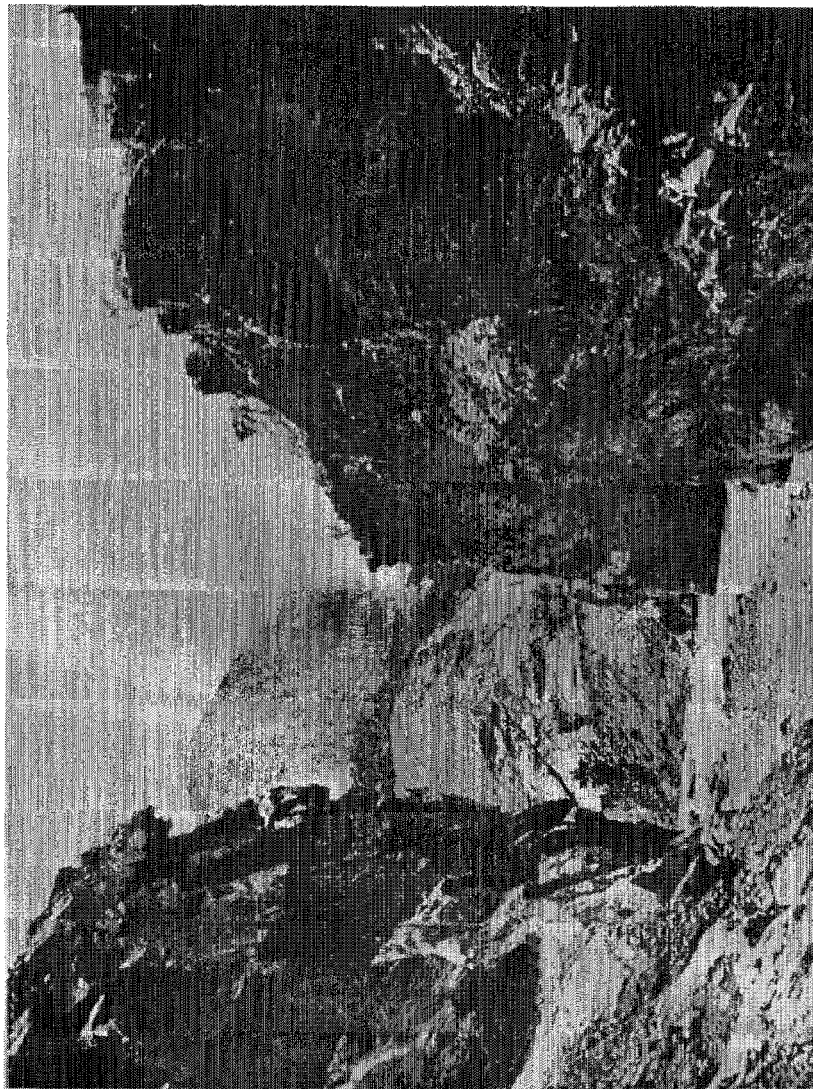
The mythical lakes and rivers of the pre-exploration West, based on the map by D. H. Vance in Anthony's *Exploration of the West*.



W. H. Jackson

Courtesy, U. S. Geological Survey

Soda Springs at Bear River on the Oregon Trail (about 1870), now submerged by the Soda Springs Reservoir.


W. H. Jackson
Devil's Gate, Weber Canyon (1870)
Courtesy, U. S. Geological Survey

adopted Brué's idea of a "*Sal oder Tegujo See*"; and, as Lake Timpanogos was now sagging from having to carry on its shoulders the idea of the true Great Salt Lake, he stood that lake again firmly on end.

Gradually the Multnomah was contracted from out of the Timpanogos area, but in 1826 a fresh innovation captured the map makers. The Vance map of that year depicted not only a Timpanogos draining from the southwest tip of Lake Timpanogos, arriving at the Pacific between Cape Mendocino and the Bay of San Francisco, but also a "R. los Mongos," which flowed directly west to the Pacific south of Cape Orford.

With these staple ingredients the mappers of the mythological drafted their maps for the next twenty years, each according to his fancy. Least subject to aberration was the representation of Sevier Lake in the south; piously the cartographers supplied it with its affluents, the Buenaventura and the Salado, and no less piously they drained it by a real or tentative Buenaventura flowing to the Pacific. The only details subject to vagary were the name of the lake and the point where its outlet reached the Pacific. The lake itself was called Salt Lake, Lake Salado, Lake Teguyo, or, once in a while, Lake Buenaventura. Concerning the outlet of this lake the cartographers could not make up their minds. Now and then the Buenaventura was made to flow to San Francisco Bay, but this idea in its purity lost its appeal. The conclusion finally worked out was that the Buenaventura flowed into the Pacific south of Monterey, but the river had a new identity by the time it reached the ocean, being alternatively called the San Felipe or the Carmelo, the former name drawn from the explorations of Father Francisco Garcés in California's Tulare Valley in 1776 and perhaps originally applied to the Kern River, but now come to be a confused conception of the Salinas River.

The idea of the Buenaventura River became, finally, the most stubborn of the myths. It lasted longest, died hardest and left the most enduring impress on history—this because ultimately it became identified with the Sacramento. In the face of actual exploration now to reveal the Unknown Land the idea of the Rio de los Mongos, the Timpanogos and the Multnomah died quickly. But the Buenaventura as an idea transferred itself first to Great Salt Lake and then at last to a river almost without source conceived to gather itself in

the desert Unknown, carve asunder the Sierras and flow to San Francisco Bay.

What the maps might say did not much concern the *engagés* and the free trappers. But to the brigade leaders and captains who hungered after fame and sought not furs alone among the spinal ranges, twisting canyons and sage-sown valleys beyond the Rockies the maps presented puzzling problems. Discovery was a complex combination of unlearning and learning; and the learning was complicated because the mountain men soon showed themselves in their own right prolific makers of myths and legends, among which exact geographers might venture at their peril.

The opening up of the West had to wait upon the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812; the fur trade could not flourish while the British intrigued among the tribes of the upper Mississippi and Missouri. Slowly interest reawakened, and by 1817 the St. Louis press was urging that a powerful company be established to prosecute the fur trade to the "White Capped Mountains, and along Jefferson's, Madison's, and Gallatin's rivers." Giving point to such arguments, within a few weeks Manuel Lisa came down the Missouri from his fort near the mouth of the Platte with a cargo of furs valued at some \$35,000.

That kind of business was worth looking into. By 1821 numerous parties of traders and trappers were operating in the upper Missouri country. And as a fillip to enterprise, in that year revolution in Mexico opened Santa Fe to American trade.

Among the Missourians aroused by these developments on the western frontier was Virginia-born William Henry Ashley, who had come to Missouri not long before Lewis and Clark returned from the Pacific. Rapidly, he became not only a "gentleman of credit" but one of political and military eminence. In Andrew Henry, who had taken up lead mining after retiring from the mountains in 1811, Ashley found a natural partner. Early in 1822 with a gratifying fanfare of publicity the two men launched their first expedition to the mountains. Their advertisement in the *Missouri Gazette*, February 13, 1822, which called for 100 "enterprising young men" to

ascend the Missouri to its source, "there to be employed for one, two or three years," has been called the most famous of all want ads. It peremptorily summoned to their destiny a group of continental explorers as remarkable as any America has known.

Among those who now or soon thereafter joined the Ashley enterprises was Jedediah Smith, a young New Yorker of stern Methodist conscience, humorless yet compassionate, driven resistlessly to exploration of far places. There was William Sublette, known as Cut Face to the Indians from a slash along his chin, a tall, blond, blue-eyed, Roman-nosed fellow, able Indian fighter and energetic bourgeois. Thomas Fitzpatrick was fully the equal of Sublette and a man of finer grain; a large-framed, ruddy-faced man whose hair turned gray after a terrible experience with the Blackfeet, to the Indians known as White Hair or as Broken Hand, from a hand injured in the bursting of his rifle. Jim Bridger, "Old Gabe," or, as the Crows called him, "the Blanket Chief," was spare of frame but powerful, gray-eyed and brown-haired, ill-educated but with a mind receptive to a limitless knowledge of the West and sauced by a shrewd native wit. Jim Clyman, laconic and drily witty, writer of rude poetry and natural leader in dangerous country; Moses (Black) Harris, swarthy fellow with a large capacity for wondrous lies—as Clyman said, "A free and easy kind of soul Especially with a Belly full"; Hugh Glass, he of the terrible adventure with the grizzly, described as "bold, daring, reckless & excentric to a high degree"; Mike Fink, the last of the river men, of undying fame in our folklore for the end he met on this expedition; Jim Beckwourth, the "Enemy of Horses," mulatto of ferocious courage and infinite talent for living and telling extravagant lies. . . . They compose a great company.

Scores of others, of hardly less renown, joined them within the next few years. Joe Walker, six-foot Tennessean, dark and bearded, one of the bravest and most skillful in a company where courage and skill were everyday commonplace; Joe Meek, cousin of future President James K. Polk, exuberant daredevil and wit; Kit Carson, squat, deep-chested and broad-shouldered, with sandy hair, flat features and a relentless energy; Old Bill Williams, gaunt and red-headed, with shambling gait and unbounded eccentricity of speech

and manner. . . . No catalogue can name them all. They made the West their own and, like their country's destiny, different because of them.

In the spring of 1822 Andrew Henry established his base at the mouth of the Yellowstone and dispatched parties up the affluents of that river and the Missouri. Ashley brought him reinforcements later in the summer and in March 1823 set out from St. Louis with still another group of men—a crew of such extraordinary character that Jim Clyman dismissed Falstaff's Battalion as "genteel in comparison." But there was no luck for Ashley on the Missouri. The Indians who had driven the Americans from the upper Missouri a decade ago now again began to stalk the trappers with diabolical success. Four of Henry's men were slaughtered by the Blackfeet near the mouth of Smith's River; seven of the Missouri Fur Company's trappers were ambushed by the same tribe on the Yellowstone; and the Assiniboin ran off fifty of Henry's horses—all in a matter of weeks. The culminating disaster befell Ashley himself. As he reached the Dakota country at the end of May, the Arikara fell treacherously upon his company. Thirteen were killed and almost as many wounded. They withdrew down the river a distance to lick their wounds and summon help. A punitive force under Colonel Henry Leavenworth came up from Fort Atkinson near old Council Bluffs, and this was reinforced by Henry and some of his men, a detachment of Missouri Fur Company trappers and a large contingent of Sioux. A three-day battle was somewhat inconclusive, but the Missouri highroad was reopened.

Taking 13 men, Andrew Henry turned back up the river toward his post on the Yellowstone, from which he would dispatch parties southwest into the mountains. The remainder of the Ashley force, save only those who returned down river with Ashley himself, obtained horses and late in September 1823 started directly overland from Fort Kiowa toward the mountains. They were commanded by 24-year-old Jedediah Smith, who so soon had won his spurs, and notably among their number were Fitzpatrick, Clyman and William Sublette.

As Henry's men worked slowly southward up the Yellowstone toward the continent's intricate vertebral ranges, Jedediah took his company across South Dakota, through the badlands west of the

Cheyenne River and into the Black Hills. It was here they came upon the grove of petrified trees famous in mountain lore—that "putrified forest with putrified birds on the branches a-singin' putrified songs." In this country young Jedediah had his cruel initiation to the West; a grizzly's fangs ripped bare his whole skull, almost to the crown of his head.

Though Jedediah bore to the end of his short life the scars of this savage encounter, within two weeks he was sufficiently recovered that they could move slowly westward again. In February, after vainly endeavoring to cross the snowy mountains north of the Wind River range, they tried a new route farther south. Thus they struck upon the Sweetwater and in March made the epic rediscovery of South Pass.

Through the pass they went on as far as Green River, splitting up into small parties which trapped throughout the spring. In June they turned back toward the Sweetwater, the appointed place of rendezvous.

That rendezvous established a famous precedent and a famous institution. Heretofore trappers had operated from fixed posts, to which they returned with their furs to trade for supplies, but after 1824 supplies were brought instead to places of rendezvous, in annual caravans which came up from the Missouri frontier. Rendezvous was the year's summing up for all the adventuring and far wandering. Here the coups were counted, the lies exchanged, the horses raced, the whisky drunk and the year's business done. The rendezvous severed the bonds that held the mountain men to home, and they stayed in the mountains, growing into a race apart. To the red man's life, which they adopted, they added an appalling efficiency and a cold ferocity which made a dozen of the Fur Brigade a match for anything they might anywhere encounter. They took squaws from among the tribes and roamed the West, imprinting upon their minds the intricate desert immensities and the infinite wisdom of survival in a land where God himself was often careless whether men survived. Now and then they might take the back trail, but their hearts yearned for the blazing stars and the clean wind off the sage or down the piney canyons, for the unleashed freedom the mountain-desert alone could give them.

Late that first summer Fitzpatrick got some furs down out of

the mountains, not enough to excite Ashley, but a foretaste of things to come. It was a greater wealth than fur that Fitzpatrick brought from the mountains. The promise of the Missouri had never been anything but a surly assurance of trouble. Now the Missouri could be abandoned to its snag-filled, turbid channels and the deadly Blackfeet infesting its headwaters. The rolling brown Platte down whose valley Fitzpatrick had come was, to be sure, useless for any kind of navigation. But the returning Astorians 11 years before had descended its valley talking of it as a road, and now it could be seen as an immense natural highroad to the mountains—and to all that lay beyond.

The river craft that had served America well—flatboats, keelboats, canoes, pirogues, rafts—might be exchanged for riding animals and pack mules, for wagons and prairie schooners. Water could cease to have the significance of transportation and become, bitterly representative of all the West, something to open the dry throat of the wayfarer, existence itself. And also the West could now be discovered to the nation's mind. For all the heroic journeying of Lewis and Clark and the Astorians, the Pacific Coast had been an infinitely far island of the sea. Now it became continent's end. Oregon promptly became something more than a political abstraction; California was entangled in the American destiny beyond extrication. And the idea of South Pass was erected against the western horizon like a beacon for a church not even conceived yet soon to be in search of sanctuary.

From their first brief rendezvous on the Sweetwater in the summer of 1824 Ashley's men turned back to the mountains, to the thousand fascinating questions of where creek or river ran, what might lie over the next divide or at the end of a canyon. But South Pass by no means was the only avenue to the West's wealth of beaver. Other parties of trappers spread through all the mountain country, south out of the Oregon country and northwest across the mountain deserts from Taos.

Etienne Provost had been one quick to take the trail to Santa Fe after Mexico flung open the gates of trade. Concerning his partner, LeClerc, little is known, not even his first name with certainty,

though possibly he was the onetime Astorian, François LeClerc. Provost and LeClerc began trapping out of Taos, possibly in the fall of 1823, and by the end of the next year, perhaps following in general the route of Escalante half a century before, they reached the southern slopes of the Uinta Mountains in eastern Utah, separated from Ashley's men in the upper Green River Valley only by the high wall of the Uintas.

The details of Provost's adventuring have only recently begun to emerge into view, and it's impossible to say how far north and west he ranged in this fall of 1824. There is a great deal more than a probability that he got as far west as Utah Valley and the valley of the Great Salt Lake itself; he may have been first among the American trappers to see that darkly low-lying salt sea with its amethystine islands and tall, flanking ranges. But history has no certainties about Provost, only elusive glimpses of him. It was apparently in the autumn of 1824, in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, that his party was treacherously set upon while smoking the peace pipe with a band of Snakes. Seven men were slain and the survivors, including Etienne himself, necessarily fled to the Uinta Basin where, at the mouth of White River, LeClerc and the rest of the party were wintering. This was hardly a propitious introduction to the Great Salt Lake country, but in the spring Provost rode again in that direction.

Meantime Ashley's men were ranging widely from their base in the upper valley of the Green. The larger of the detachments, under William Sublette, crossed the divide to the valley of the Bear, and, perhaps following the long northern sweep of that stream to Soda Springs and so on south, they reached what they called Willow Valley, soon to be renamed Cache Valley. Here, only a few miles above the gates through which Bear River plunges down into the valley of the Great Salt Lake, the trappers went into winter quarters. When argument arose as to the course of the river on which they were encamped, the trappers backed up their opinions with hard cash, and young Jim Bridger was saddled with the job of deciding the wager. Accompanied by several others, Bridger followed the river down through its canyon until the lake in its misty immensity spread out before him. Going on to its shores, the little party of mountain men dismounted to drink, only to choke on the unexpected

brine. "Hell," Bridger ejaculated, "we are on the shores of the Pacific!" Even at an altitude of 4,200 feet above sea level, that was an illusion not immediately dispelled.

Bridger's claims as first discoverer were backed up in 1857 by an old comrade, Samuel Tullock, yet the persistent mystery shrouding all the early history of Great Salt Lake has resisted such definite claims to discovery. Myth and history together have proposed other discoverers among the ranks of the mountain men, including even Bridger's later partner, Louis Vasquez. In October 1858 the Salt Lake correspondent of the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* came away from an interview with Vasquez with the idea that in the fall of 1822 (*sic*) Vasquez had wintered with a party of trappers in Cache Valley and had been forced by an eight-foot fall of snow to hunt a better valley. Descending Bear River, the story went, Vasquez in company with several others rode into Great Salt Lake Valley and so discovered the lake, at first taking it to be an arm of the Pacific. "They found the valley free from snow, and well filled with herds of buffalo. Returning to their party, they guided them over into this valley, when they divided—one party under Weber, wintering on the river which now bears his name; the other party wintering on Bear river, near its mouth." Though this account is specific in its details, the context establishes its events as of 1825-1826, not 1824-1825, and Vasquez is known to have been not in the mountains but in St. Louis during that historic first winter.*

The claims for Vasquez led to a further ramification in the tale of discovery. They came to the ears of W. Marshall Anderson, who had known Vasquez in the mountains in 1834, and he hastened to state in the *National Intelligencer* of February 25, 1860, the prior rights of Etienne Provost, to whom alone belonged, he said, "the credit of having discovered and made known the existence and whereabouts of that inland sea." Nothing but this most elusive tradition has supported the claims of Etienne Provost until late years.

Claims of discovery, however, have been registered for still other men. On July 4, 1897, the *Salt Lake Tribune* published a letter from a resident of Bellevue, Iowa, concerning his acquaintance 40 years before with a onetime Danish sea captain, John H. Weber. This man

assertedly had gone to the mountains in the spring of 1822 as a partner with Ashley and Henry. "The Captain told me more than once of his discovery of Salt Lake in 1823. He called it a great boon to them, as salt was plentiful around the border of the lake, and for some time before they had used gunpowder on their meat, which was principally buffalo. . . . Captain Weber was also the discoverer of Weber Canyon and Weber River, both of which bear his name. . . . In the autumn of 1827 [he] returned to St. Louis; in 1832 he removed to Galena, Illinois . . . a few years later he came to Bellevue, Iowa, where he died in February, 1859." In this letter there are many inaccuracies, yet the existence of a person by this name is attested not only by the name of Weber River but by the interview with Vasquez in 1858. Perhaps the multiplicity of the claims of discovery proceeds in some part from misunderstanding. Reminiscences of trappers intended only to describe their own first experience of the lake may have become in the ears of their auditors narratives of outright discovery.

Complex as it is, in this puzzle there are still other involutions.

Late in the summer of 1824 Jedediah Smith separated from William Sublette's company and with a small party of six men struck northwesterly across the Green River Valley into Jackson's Hole. Then, like the westbound Astorians 13 years before, he crossed the great Tetons and descended into the valley of the Snake. Andrew Henry had been in this country in 1810, and the men of the North West Company had crossed and recrossed it since 1818; perhaps Jedediah and his six men were not surprised to fall in with a dozen tatterdemalion Iroquois trappers, a detachment of the Hudson's Bay Company's first Snake Country Expedition. But that encounter was symbolic. British trappers, too, had their dramatic part to play in the revelation of the Great Salt Lake country.

The Hudson's Bay Company Snake Country Expeditions became a famous institution. The first of them had been taken south from Flathead Post by Alexander Ross in February 1824. They had trapped their way to the headwaters of the Salmon River, and, with some misgivings since the Iroquois were notoriously unreliable, Ross had dispatched a party of 12 Iroquois to trap the country farther east

* This account of Vasquez has escaped the attention of historians of the fur trade. It is found in the *Bulletin* for October 29, 1858.

and south. The misgivings were only too well founded; the Iroquois neglected their trapping, traded away their goods to the Indians for trivialities, were duly pillaged and, when the Americans under Smith stumbled over them, were ragged and destitute.

With the Americans in company the disgraced Iroquois returned to the Salmon River in October. Ross regarded them with a jaundiced eye, for they had not only squandered four months in the field but had arrived actually in debt to the Americans. Moreover, Ross was disposed to view the Americans with suspicion, taking them rather to be "spies" than trappers; he was not pleased to hear that the quarter was "swarming with trappers who next season are to penetrate the Snake country with a Major Henry at their head, the same gentleman who fifteen years ago wintered on Snake River."

His unwelcome visitors evinced a disposition to accompany him, and Ross took them with him in turning back from the Snake country to Flathead Post. On arrival there toward the end of November, he was handed a letter from Governor George Simpson appointing him in charge of the post and naming the energetic Peter Skene Ogden to the command of the Snake Expedition.

In Ogden a striking personality entered the history of the Great Salt Lake country. He was born in Quebec in 1794 of old loyalist American stock. His father had intended him for a clergyman or a lawyer, but the great West seized upon his imagination, and at the age of 17 he entered the service of the North West Company. During the bitter warfare between that firm and the Hudson's Bay Company he served his employers so well that when the courts took a hand and began to find indictments, he was among those for whom the North West Company found pressing assignments in its inaccessible Columbia Department. After the fur wars ended with the merger of the two companies in 1821, he was left at loose ends. But when Governor George Simpson came to the Columbia Department in the fall of 1824, determined to end the shameful mismanagement, wasteful extravagance and constant dissension which had made the department not only a moral disgrace but, and more stingingly, a financial liability, he settled upon Ogden to revitalize the Snake Country Expedition.

Dangerous and unrewarding except in hardship, it was not a popular post, but to win the eye of the governor counted for a great deal. Ogden swiftly made his preparations for departure. Thoroughly out of patience with Ross for bringing the Americans into the heart of the Oregon country, Ogden nevertheless took them south with him—perhaps as the most expedient means of getting rid of them. Ross said farewell to them on December 20, impressed with the proportions of the effort that was to be made, "the most formidable party that has ever set out for the Snakes," with 2 gentlemen, 2 interpreters, 71 men and lads, 364 beaver traps, and 372 horses.

In the valor of his ignorance Governor Simpson designed that the Expedition should proceed "direct for the heart of the Snake Country towards the Banks of the Spanish River or Rio Colorado pass the Winter & Spring there and hunt their way out by the Umpqua and Wilhamet Rivers to Fort George [the successor to Astoria] next summer." These plans reflected two geographical misconceptions, that the Colorado (i.e., Green) was identical with the Bear, and that the Umpqua and Willamette extended so far into the interior as to head near that river.

Ogden made first for the sources of the Missouri, trapping with some success as he went, though 18 horses were stolen by the Blackfeet. The going was very hard as the southward journey continued, the snow and cold taking a heavy toll of the horses, and for 20 days after reaching the Salmon River in March the party was unequal to the hazard of crossing the mountains. On March 20 they got across the divide, though the snow had drifted three and four feet deep, and they reached the Snake on April 2. Blackfeet, however, were prowling in the vicinity, and within three days a man was killed at his traps.

Ogden had now to learn like Ross before him that in this country it was one thing to command and another thing altogether to enforce commands; he had to exert all his powers of persuasion before he could induce his men to go on south with him. They began the ascent of the Blackfoot River, but on April 23 another war party ran off 20 more horses.

The freemen and *engagés* became openly mutinous, and it was only by a mixture of threats and promises that Ogden again got his

party moving south. Crossing the divide, they reached the Bear on May 5, perhaps near Soda Springs.

With unalloyed pleasure Ogden here parted from Jedediah Smith. The seven Americans ascended the river in search of their compatriots while the Hudson's Bay Company men went on down the stream. This river, Ogden remarked, was "supposed by Mr. Bourdon who visited in 1818 and subsequently Mr. Finan McDonald who were at its Sources to be the Spanish River or Rio Colorado, but it is not." It was another river system entirely. Trapping as he went, Ogden followed this river southward, at one of its forks learning from a band of Snakes that a party of 50 Americans had wintered there but had returned home early in the spring without taking many beaver.

As it had been for Bridger a few months before, Bear River became for Ogden the highroad to discovery. On May 20, 1825, he found that the river "discharged into a large Lake of 100 Miles in length"—the earliest known description of Great Salt Lake by one who had seen it. But misfortune which had closely stalked Ogden throughout the winter overtook him here in the proportions of disaster; his explorations were abruptly ended; and he fled the Great Salt Lake country to avert a complete debacle.

Three days after he reached the shores of the salt lake, Ogden was surprised to fall in with "a party of 15 Canadians and Spaniards." From their leader, Etienne Provost, Ogden was amazed to hear that they had come from a "Spanish" settlement "called *Taas* distant about 100 miles from St Fe." which was supplied with goods brought overland in wagons from St. Louis. Trappers were swarming from everywhere. Indeed, before nightfall still another party of American trappers, to the number of 25 or 30, rode up brazenly with 12 or 15 of Ogden's Iroquois. The Americans—among whom, Ogden observed with a bitter imprecation on the head of Alexander Ross, were some of the seven who had come south with him from Flathead Post—encamped a hundred yards away. At once they hoisted their country's flag, and bellowed to the British trappers that as they were in United States Territory, whether indebted or engaged, all were now free.

On this bristling note the situation rested until morning. The

American, Gardner, then swaggered to Ogden's tent. The British trappers were in United States territory, he blustered. Britain had ceded all its rights to this country, and as Ogden had no license to trade or trap, he should get out.

Ogden coldly looked the American over. "When we receive orders from the British Government to abandon the country, we shall obey."

Gardner strode off but only to harangue Ogden's trappers, whose surly mood for months had verged on open rebellion. When Ogden angrily followed the American into an Iroquois lodge, one of his own Indians turned on him. All the Iroquois including himself, the rebel burst out, had long wished for an opportunity to join the Americans. "If we did not the last three years, it was owing to our bad luck in not meeting them, but now we go, and all you can say or do cannot prevent us." And here was Gardner, intolerably virtuous: "You have had these men too long in your service and have most shamefully imposed on them, treating them as *slaves* selling them goods at high prices and giving them nothing for their furs." Yes, the Iroquois shouted, it was all true! As for the gentlemen of the company, they were "the greatest villains in the world, and if they were here I would shoot them, but as for you, sir, you have dealt fair with us all. We have now been five years in your service, the longer we remain the more indebted we become although we give 150 beaver a year, we are now in a free country and have friends to support us, and go we will!"

The Iroquois made off with their furs, shouting the most galling obscenities, and the Americans boisterously welcomed them. Only in his two gentlemen, William Kittson and Thomas McKay, was Ogden able to place any confidence, but the support of these was enough to prevent the entire pillaging of his party. Twenty-one men made off to the Americans, and two more deserted when at daylight the next morning Ogden gave orders to raise camp. This "most formidable party that had ever set out for the Snakes" was reduced to barely 20 men, and of the allegiance even of these Ogden could not be certain. He had to get out of this vicinity or risk losing everything.

He could not escape, however, without having to hear through the triumphant Gardner: "You shall shortly see us in the Columbia and

this Fall at the Flat heads and Kootenais, as we are determined you shall no longer remain in our Territory!" Ogden replied shortly, "When we receive orders from our own Government we shall withdraw, but not before." Gardner howled a last word after him: "Our troops will reach the Columbia this fall and make you!"

Ogden was convinced that the Americans had been trying to goad him into firing on them, whereupon they would have had an excuse for making an end to his whole party. The importance of this whole episode, however, was not its nearness to land piracy but its significance as revolution. A bad situation had grown up in the Columbia Department by which the Hudson's Bay Company trappers were assessed too much for their supplies and paid too little for their furs. After Ogden's report of his debacle, sweeping changes were made in the rate structure and the Snake Country Expedition was made into an instrument for sweeping the country of its furs—an instrument so efficient that the threatened invasion of the lower Columbia by American trappers was forever forestalled.

That, however, was the work of the next half-dozen years. In this spring of 1825 Ogden rode north out of the Great Salt Lake Valley with bitter feelings, damning Alex Ross for ever having brought the seven Americans to Flathead Post, apprehensive lest he fall in with other American parties and lose the 3,000 beaver he still possessed, certainly in no mood to explore west of the salt lake for the sources of the Umpqua and the Willamette (he might thereby open a new road to Fort George for the convenience of the Americans).

Ogden found his way north to the Snake, which he reached on June 5 by a route different from his outbound trail—very likely up the Bear and over the divide to Marsh Creek and the Portneuf. Thence, several times alarmed by reports that parties of Americans were in his vicinity, he made his way back to Flathead Post via the sources of the Missouri.

Where that promising expedition of 1825 met with disaster it is not yet possible to say except that it evidently occurred within three-days' travel from the point where he came upon Great Salt Lake. The likelihood is strong that the locale was the lovely mountain valley above the city of Ogden, which from the time of the Fur Brigade has been known as Ogdens Hole.

Ashley himself set out for the mountains in November 1824,

leaving Fort Atkinson with 25 men, 50 pack horses and, significantly, a wagon and teams. The initial part of his route, up the Platte to its forks, anticipated the route the Mormons adopted 22 years later, and much of his route after arriving at the Front Range in northern Colorado subsequently became known first as the Cherokee Trail and then as the Overland Route. He crossed the continental divide by that high desert upland, Bridger's Pass, and went northwesterly to come upon the Big Sandy, an important affluent of the Green. Eager for further explorations, Ashley selected six men to build two boats and embark with him on a voyage down the Green, while he split up the rest of his party in three detachments, to trap in as many directions.

Ashley himself descended the Green as far as Desolation Canyon, appalled by the red rock country through which the river flowed, with its "lofty mountains heaped together in the greatest disorder, exhibiting a surface as barren as can be imagined." Turning back, he purchased a few horses from some friendly "Eutau" Indians, and ascended the Duchesne to its remote headwaters. Crossing the Uintas in the vicinity of Bald Mountain, Ashley fell upon the headwaters of the Bear. Familiar reflex of the day's geography, he called this river the "Beaunaventura." From this stream Ashley made his way directly to the place of rendezvous on Henrys Fork.

Including the Hudson's Bay Company deserters, there were 120 men at the rendezvous. For a year they had been scattered in small detachments throughout the Green, Snake, Bear and Great Salt Lake valleys; the record of their wanderings would be priceless in our history. Although Ashley's curiosity was aroused by reports of a "Grand lake or Beaunaventura," particularly because the Indians were understood to say that a river flowed out of its western side into an unknown country, he must be a businessman first and solicitous of the tender feelings of his creditors in St. Louis. With an escort of 50 men, including young Jedediah Smith, on July 2, 1825, he left the rendezvous to find a navigable point on the Big Horn from which to float his furs down to St. Louis. Hereafter furs would go out by land on pack mules, but this last time the Missouri river system might be used. And the thing was done in style, if Jim Beckwourth may be believed. They arrived in St. Louis with a full

grown grizzly in tow, and the redoubtable Jim led it through the streets and chained it to the apple tree of the quaking Major Thomas Biddle, a fearsome token of the general's esteem.

A man in quest of a reputation as well as wealth, and shrewd in the uses of publicity, Ashley was not long back from the mountains before he drafted for General Henry Atkinson of the War Department a letter descriptive of his experiences. His account of the Great Salt Lake country reflects in some degree the experiences of his men and exhibits the state of knowledge concerning the salt lake in July 1825. Some of his hunters, he said, had crossed to this region in the summer of 1824 and wintered on and near the borders of the lake. "They had not explored the lake sufficiently to judge correctly of its extent, but from their own observations and information collected from Indians, they supposed it to be about eighty miles long by fifty broad. They represented it as a beautiful sheet of water deep, transparent, and a little brackish, though in this latter quality the accounts differ; some insist that it is not brackish." (This uncertainty as to the salinity of the lake has been attributed to the saltiness of Bear River Bay, which varies with the flood stage of Bear River.)

Though Ashley might thus answer his responsibility to geography, he was not the man to be equally responsible to history. There was no naming of names in his narrative, save only that of Jedediah Smith, and though Ashley must have been well aware of their extent, Etienne Provost's explorations were totally neglected.

What Ashley had to say to the War Department he was more than willing to repeat to the press, and on March 11, 1826, the *Missouri Advocate* printed the momentous news of a "NEW ROUTE to the Pacific Ocean, discovered by GENL. WILLIAM H. ASHLEY, during his late Expedition to the Rocky Mountains."

"The route proposed, after leaving St. Louis and passing generally on the north side of the Missouri river, strikes the river Platte a short distance above its junction with the Missouri; then pursues the waters of the Platte to their sources, and in continuation, crosses the head waters, of what Gen. Ashley believes to be, the Rio Colorado of the West, and strikes for the first time, a ridge, or single connecting chain of mountains running from north to south. This, however,

presents no difficulty, as a wide gap is found, apparently prepared for the purpose of a passage. After passing this gap, the route proposed, falls directly on a river, called by Gen. Ashley, the Buena-ventura, and runs with that river to the Pacific Ocean."

The description rings down the corridors of history, a prescience of the Oregon Trail, though the idea that the Buena-ventura ran to the sea was unfounded. At the same time the *Advocate* gave itself the distinction of being first to publicize the existence of the great lake in the mountains:

"Gen. A. . . . fell upon what he supposed to be, the sources of the Buena-ventura and represents those branches, as bold streams, from twenty to fifty yards wide, forming a junction a few miles below where he crossed them, and then empties into a large lake, (called Grand Lake,) represented by the Indians as being 40 or 50 miles wide, and sixty or seventy miles long—This information is strengthened, by that of the white hunters, who have explored parts of the Lake. The Indians represent, that at the extreme west end of this Lake, a large river flows out, and runs in a westwardly direction. Gen. A. when on those waters, at first thought it probable they were the sources of the Multnomah; but the account given by the Indians, supported by the opinion of some men belonging to the Hudson Bay Company, confirms him in the belief, that they are the head waters of the river represented as the Buena-ventura. To the north and northwest from Grand Lake, the country is represented as abounding in SALT."

Though this information was in some degree inexact, both as to the lake and as to a road to the Pacific, and though it exhibited the confusion of the explorers in trying to liberate themselves from the tyranny in which the map makers still held them, it was the fruit of personal investigation and experience, a strong white light of reality beginning now at last to penetrate into what had been so long the province of myth and dream.