

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### JIM BRIDGER IN IDAHO

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After he joined William H. Ashley's fur trapping company, Jim Bridger spent his first winter west of the Rockies in Idaho. (What now is Idaho was part of the Oregon country at that time.) He crossed South Pass in the summer of 1824, trapped along Bear Lake that fall, camped that winter with John H. Weber's party in Cache Valley at a spot only a short distance north of what was then the Mexican border. He trapped both in Idaho and Utah that winter, and went from his Idaho camp down Bear River, where he explored the lower course of that stream into Salt Lake. He then went into Wyoming to attend W. H. Ashley's rendezvous on Green River. Bridger returned to Cache Valley (in both Idaho and Utah) to spend a second winter (1825-1826), after which he went on a spring hunt on the Portneuf.) There he met Peter Skene Ogden April 9, 1826. Rendezvous in 1826 was at Bear Lake (also split between Idaho and Utah), where W. H. Ashley sold out his fur trade interests to Jedediah Smith, William L. Sublette, and David E. Jackson, July 18. Bridger continued with the new company, heading north after rendezvous to Snake River, Henry's Fork, and Yellowstone Lake. In the fall of 1826, he had spent a substantial share of his first two years west of the continental divide (1824-1826) in Idaho.

Bridger returned to Bear Lake for the annual Rocky Mountain fur trade rendezvous in the summer of 1827, but otherwise his trapping expeditions kept him away from Idaho until he turned up in Pierre's Hole, August 20, 1829. Following a late rendezvous there, he went up Henry's Fork and Fall River to upper Snake River in Wyoming. Then another two years went by before he got back to Idaho. Rendezvous was scheduled for Bear Lake in 1831, but supplies from St. Louis (routed that year through Santa Fe) failed to arrive. Bridger finally gave up and went on a fall hunt on Salmon River. After a side trip to Flathead House in Montana, he finally received his supplies on Salmon River, where he spent the winter. After Christmas he moved southward up the Lemhi, and in March he crossed Lemhi Pass into Montana on his way to the important Idaho rendezvous in Pierre's Hole in 1832. This episode, complete with a battle between the Nez Perce and the Gros Ventre, became a classic story in the Rocky Mountain fur trade.

After participating in the Pierre's Hole excitement, Bridger returned to Salmon River by way of Henry's Fork and Camas Creek.

Then, in order to elude competing trappers, he crossed over into Montana, where his unwary opponents might get into trouble with the Blackfeet. After he, too, had some skirmishes with the Blackfeet, Bridger decided to spend the winter in the Snake River Valley. Then he left Idaho again for rendezvous on Green River.

Bridger returned to Idaho in the fall of 1834 as a member of the new fur trade firm of Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Bridger, formed at rendezvous, June 10, 1834, to succeed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. While spending the winter in Idaho on or near Henry's Fork with some Nez Perce and Flathead Indians, he and his trappers (including Joe Meek, Kit Carson, and Robert Newell) had another misadventure with some Blackfeet horse thieves who crossed the continental divide to raid their camp. After a reasonably successful Idaho hunt, he left the next spring going up Snake River, crossing into Wyoming toward Star Valley on his way to the 1835 rendezvous. Returning to Idaho after rendezvous, he escorted Samuel Parker as far as Pierre's Hole, arriving there August 28. Parker went on northwest with the Nez Perce, and Bridger, after trapping at Henry's Lake and on Camas Creek, spent a hard winter on the Blackfoot River. In March of 1836 he left Idaho again, going to a Wyoming rendezvous.

Returning to Idaho in the spring of 1838, Bridger came from the Yellowstone country to Henry's Lake, Pierre's Hole, and Snake River, where he learned that rendezvous would be held on Wind River in Wyoming. He came back to Idaho immediately, reaching Pierre's Hole again on August 5. He returned to the Salmon River with his wife's people for a time, where he left his family for the winter. He now joined the American Fur Company and made a trip to St. Louis. There he became acquainted with Pierre Jean De Smet, a Jesuit missionary whom he escorted back to the Flathead country in 1840. How far he went with De Smet is uncertain, but he may have brought him at least to Pierre's Hole in Idaho.

After he built Fort Bridger in Wyoming, he depended mostly upon emigrant trade and had no occasion to go on long trapping expeditions. He also was in great demand as a guide, and in 1860 he accompanied William F. Reynolds' military reconnaissance to Pierre's Hole (June 17) and Henry's Lake. He took Reynolds on to the upper Missouri and prepared the way for F. V. Hayden's surveys that popularized the upper Snake and upper Yellowstone country. Between 1824 and 1860, when he retired from the region, he had been in Idaho for parts of at least 10 years, and perhaps two or three more. While his actual exploration was confined to other parts of the country, he had done much to make the wonders of southeastern Idaho known over the land.