

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### CALDRON LINN

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Just below Milner Dam, Snake River descends into a narrow lava canyon that ranges around 450 feet in depth and extends for about fifty miles, measured along the course of the stream. Almost eight miles down the channel (and about six, measured directly) from Milner, the river drops through a falls known to the original explorers there as Caldron Linn. A linn is a pool below a falls, the term coming from Scotland--the home of some of the discovery party which came down Snake River with Wilson Price Hunt in the fall of 1811. Traveling overland from Saint Louis to Astoria--a new fur trade outpost of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company--Hunt's men had made canoes on the upper Snake, hoping to have an easy boat trip down to the Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean. Between Milner and Caldron Linn, they got into serious trouble:

The 28th of October. . . . was a day of disaster. The river again became rough and impetuous, and was chafed and broken by numerous rapids. These grew more and more dangerous, and the utmost skill was required to steer among them. Mr. Crooks was seated in the second canoe of the squadron, and had an old experienced Canadian for steersman, named Antoine Clappine, one of the most valuable of the voyageurs. The leading canoe had glided safely among the turbulent and roaring surges, but in following it Mr. Crooks perceived that his canoe was bearing toward a rock. He called out to the steersman, but his warning voice was either unheard or unheeded. In the next moment they struck upon the rock. The canoe was split and overturned. There were five persons on board. Mr. Crooks and one of his companions were thrown amid roaring breakers and a whirling current, but succeeded, by strong swimming, to reach the shore. Clappine and two others clung to the shattered bark, and drifted with it to a rock. The wreck struck the rock with one end, and, swinging round, flung poor Clappine off into the raging stream, which swept him away, and he perished. His comrades succeeded in getting upon the rock, from whence they were afterward taken off.

This disastrous event brought the whole squadron to a halt, and struck a chill into every bosom. Indeed, they had arrived at a terrific strait, that forbade all further progress in the canoes, and dismayed the most experienced voyageur. The whole body of the river was compressed into a space of less than thirty feet in width, between two ledges of rocks, upward of two hundred feet high, and formed a whirling and tumultuous vortex, so frightfully agitated as to received the name of "The Caldron Linn." Beyond this fearful abyss the river kept raging and roaring on, until lost to sight among impending precipices.

After considerable thought and investigation, Hunt's men divided up into three parties for a long walk to the Pacific Ocean. They had to cache most of their goods near the site of their disaster.

Almost a year later, on September 29, 1812, Robert Stuart and a party of Astorians returning east to the United States, came back to Caldron Linn. Stuart reported that at Caldron Linn, "one of the unfortunate canoes was lodged among the rocks, but although we wished on several accounts to see in what state she was, the Bluffs intimated that to gratify our wish we must risk our necks, so we of course decline it." Proceeding on to the caches, Stuart

found six of them open and except a few Books which lay scattered by the wind in every direction, the whole of the contents had vanished. . . .

Of all the Canoes left here by the Party last Fall, only three remain & those too much shattered to be good for any thing--30 Miles below our present station is a fall of between 40 & 50 feet, from whence to this spot, the River banks on both sides are nothing but cut Bluffs of a Rock & Giving some indications of Iron, at least 300 feet perpendicular, there is in some places a Beach under these Cliffs, but seldom of any extent and entirely composed of immense masses of Rocks which have from time to time been hurled from the adjacent Precipices-- But for the greater part nothing that walks the earth could possibly pass between them, & the water, which in such places is never more than 40 yds wide, rushing with irresistable force over a bed of such Rocks as makes the spray fly equal to the surf of the Ocean, breaking violently on a lee shore, In particular spots the stream expands to the breadth of an hundred yards, but its general width for the 30 miles in question is from 35 to 40, and in one place, at the Caldron Linn the whole body of the river is

confined between 2 ledges of Rock somewhat less than 40 feet apart & Here indeed its terrific appearance beggars all description--Hecat's caldron was never half so agitated when vomiting even the most diabolical spells, as is this Linn in a low stage of water & its bearing in idea such a proximity of resemblance to that or something more infernal, I think well authorizes it to retain the new name it has, more particularly as the tout ensemble of these 30 miles has been baptised the Devils Scuttle Hole.

Caldron Linn received little attention after 1812. But more than a century later--in 1938--some old rusty traps and guns were recovered about two miles below Milner Dam. In those two miles below the forty foot fall at Milner Dam, the river descends over a hundred feet more. Then the river drops another fifty feet before reaching Caldron Linn. Caldron Linn includes nearly half of another fall of eighty feet before Dry Creek enters a mile below. The traps and guns, coming from below Clappine's Rapid and above Caldron Linn, appear to be the kind brought out by the Astorians; they are of a style too old for later mountain men based from Saint Louis, and different from the kind of traps and guns used by British trappers of the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company. They now are on display in the museum of the Idaho State Historical Society, and appear to have come from Ramsay Crook's canoe lost in the disaster above Caldron Linn.