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PIERRE'S HOLE RENDEZVOUS

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Between 1824, when Jedediah Smith brought a small band of Saint Louis trappers west through South Pass, and 1840, when depressed beaver prices forced most mountain men to seek other employment, a series of annual fur trade rendezvous provided marketing services and supplies to Rocky Mountain fur hunters. An exciting festival and fair, each rendezvous brought trappers, Indians, and company agents together for more than two weeks each summer. In 1832, an especially large and important rendezvous was held in Pierre's Hole, now known as Teton Valley.

Rival fur trade companies--Rocky Mountain and American, primarily--competed for business there at a time just before trapping entered a severe decline. Hudson's Bay Company representatives did not attend, but Nathaniel J. Wyeth's party and several additional groups of trappers showed up. More than 200 fur hunters participated, along with 800 or more Shoshoni, Nez Perce, and Flathead Indians. William Sublette employed about fifty packers to bring \$15,620 in supplies from Saint Louis. On July 25, when business was completed, Sublette took over Rocky Mountain Fur Company management by contracting to assume \$46,650.88 in old and current debts. Sublette's crew hauled 13,719 pounds of beaver pelts back to Saint Louis, where sales were supposed to recover their value, pay \$6,860 in transportation, and yield a considerable profit.

Aside from business, trappers and Indians engaged in sports and other diversions. In a biography of Joe Meek, Francis Fuller Victor explained that at Pierre's Hole:

When Captain Sublette's goods were opened and

distributed among the trappers and Indians, then began the usual gay carousal; and the "fast young men of the mountains outvied each other in all manner of mad pranks. In the beginning of their spree many feats of horsemanship and personal strength were exhibited, which were regarded with admiring wonder by the sober and inexperienced New Englanders under Mr. Wyeth's command. And as nothing stimulated the vanity of the mountainmen like an audience of this sort, the feats they performed were apt to astonish themselves. In exhibitions of the kind, the free trappers took the lead, and usually carried off the palm, like the privileged class that they were. But the horse-racing, fine riding, wrestling, and all the manlier sports, soon degenerated into the baser exhibitions of a "crazy drunk" condition. The vessel in which the trappers received and carried about his supply of alcohol was one of the small camp kettles. "Passing round" this clumsy goblet very freely, it was not long before a goodly number were in the condition just named, and ready for any mad freak whatever.

Then on July 17, when Milton Sublette and Henry Fraeb set out for their fall hunt, an Indian battle with a passing Gros Ventre band provided a spectacular climax to an already exciting trappers' convention. Fought farther up in Teton Valley, that conflict brought an end to Idaho's most important fur trade rendezvous.

Although more than one fur company camp was set up in Pierre's Hole in 1832, most business transactions and sports events took place at Sublette's camp along Teton Creek just south of later Driggs. A site was chosen far enough from Teton River swamps to be relatively free of mosquitos.