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PACIFIC FUR COMPANY EXPLORATION OF SOUTHERN IDAHO

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Exploration of southern Idaho commenced in 1805 with Lewis and Clark along Salmon River, continued in 1808 with John Colter's return to another border area in Teton Valley, expanded considerably in 1810 with Andrew Henry's Upper Snake expedition, and reached its initial climax in 1811-1812 with extensive Pacific Fur Company investigation of practical routes for travel between South Pass and lower Columbia trading posts. Idaho's primary era of exploration resulted from Pacific Fur Company operations, with Donald Mackenzie more active than anyone else in that pursuit. Wilson Price Hunt, Ramsey Crooks, and Robert Stuart (all of whom, like Mackenzie, gaining national prominence for their exploits) joined in expanding Mackenzie's initial effort. After 1816, Mackenzie returned to Idaho to develop an enlarged beaver empire for Montreal's North West Company. Altogether, he became Idaho's most industrious explorer, and a diverse group of sites associated with his early activities, coupled with supplementary searches of his associates, are appropriate for National Register recognition. Scattered in a number of parts of southern and central Idaho, they provide an appreciation of hardship as well as of remarkable achievement. A large share of southern Idaho exploration was entrusted to fur hunters who had to walk hundreds of miles to make their way across an often difficult terrain. Particularly during winter, such trips involved a great deal of disagreeable work.

by Merle W. Wells

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