

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

IDAHO EXPLORERS, 1805-1880

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After Lewis and Clark explored parts of Idaho in 1805-1806, a number of fur hunters investigated all but some unusually difficult mountain and desert areas that had little or no beaver streams. David Thompson surveyed extensive portions of North Idaho, and Donald Mackenzie followed with far more extensive exploration than anyone else attempted. A few missionaries, Pacific Railway route investigators, and international boundary surveyors filled in some more details before a flood of prospectors searched for gold in all parts of Idaho's mountain wilderness. Only a few new territories that prospectors added to Idaho's map are recorded accurately, but by their time (from 1860 on), most of Idaho had been explored. State and territorial boundary surveyors and Northern Pacific Railway expeditions penetrated difficult areas between 1868 and 1874. Military expeditions engaged in a wild 1879 Sheepeater campaign recorded important additional information for Idaho's central mountain wilderness where some important features may have remained undiscovered. By 1880, Idaho's geography had been pretty well investigated: many small scattered tracts had not been examined closely, but cadastral surveyors who began to map townships and ranges in 1867 were filling in important details. Land surveys contributed additional information for decades before aerial photography revolutionized Idaho's map making.

### Idaho Explorers:

- 1805-1806 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark discovered Idaho and explored more Salmon and Clearwater River country than they intended to. Their extensive journals are classics, and no other Idaho exploration matches their's for contemporary or subsequent coverage.
- 1806 John Ordway discovered two routes between Kamiah and China Garden on Snake River: he explored a lower Salmon River Canyon segment also.

- 1808 John Colter discovered an area between or including Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks; his exploration of Idaho extended over a limited distance that cannot be ascertained with any precision. Like John Ordway and Peter Weiser, he had traveled near Salmon and across North Idaho with Lewis and Clark.
- 1808-1809 David Thompson explored and surveyed a large tract of North Idaho, mainly Kootenai River and Clark's Fork. He established Idaho's fur trade and discovered practical routes for it.
- 1809-1823 Finnan MacDonald managed and expanded much of David Thompson's fur trade operation in Idaho, where he expanded Thompson's exploration. He continued as a North West Company agent--generally based at Spokane House--and as a Hudson's Bay Company Snake brigade leader, but most of his discoveries came in commonwealths adjacent to Idaho.
- 1810 Andrew Henry discovered Henry's Fork and explored an extensive segment of that Upper Snake plains area after Blackfeet Indians drove him out of his Upper Missouri post that he tried to establish in 1810. After spending a winter at Fort Henry near Saint Anthony, he and his trappers explored some more unrecorded areas in Idaho.
- 1811-1812 John Hoback. Although they did not get as far as Bear River, John Hoback and two companion fur hunters from Andrew Henry's post explored some of Blackfoot River and other parts of that Upper Snake region. In addition to Edward Robinson and Jacob Reznor from Fort Henry, an Astorian partner--Joseph Miller--joined in that exploration.
- 1812 Peter Weiser. After his trip with Lewis and Clark and John Ordway, Weiser returned to Idaho or at least western Wyoming. He identified Weiser River as a landmark so clearly that it was named for him by 1812: if he actually had been to Lower Weiser before then, he discovered a large part of southern Idaho, but precise records of his exploration in Idaho after 1806 are unavailable.

- 1811/1818 Donald Mackenzie and an overland Astorian party navigated Snake River from Fort Henry to Murtaugh in an exploratory expedition that, for Mackenzie, continued as an overland discovery walk along a north side Indian route through Boise Valley and down Snake River to Homestead. Then he took a Seven Devils Indian route (later known as an old Boise Trail) to Lewiston and Astoria where he arrived in 1812. Returning to southern Idaho in 1818, he explored southwestern beaver streams, including Bear River. His ascent of Snake River from Lewiston to Boise River in 1819 also included exploration of a major water route. In 1819 he discovered a Camas Prairie route to Little Lost River, which he also explored. Before completing his Pacific Northwestern travels in 1820, he discovered more Idaho land than anyone else did.
- 1811 Wilson Price Hunt led an expedition to Astoria that explored a large part of southern Idaho west of Fort Henry. One of his partners, Donald Mackenzie, undertook most of that discovery, but Hunt explored a segment along Snake River's north bank west of Murtaugh before following Mackenzie's route into Boise Valley.
- 1811-1812 Ramsay Crooks explored a route south of Snake River (but close to its course) from Murtaugh west to Oregon, and returning with Robert Stuart in 1812 discovered Bear River which they explored above Soda Springs before heading north to Snake River where they engaged in additional discovery on their indirect route to South Pass.
- 1818/1822 Michel Bourdon explored Bear River into Cache Valley (1818) and discovered a segment of Salmon River around Challis in 1822.
- 1818 Francois Payette participated in a number of Snake brigade expeditions of discovery. His Payette River exploration was particularly notable.
- 1818/1819 John Grey, one of Idaho's most prominent Iroquois fur hunters, explored Gray's Lake.
- 1819 Thyery Goddin, also Iroquois, explored Lost River as a member of Donald Mackenzie's Snake brigade.
- 1824 Alexander Ross discovered Upper Salmon River and explored it past Stanley Basin to Challis. He also discovered Panther Creek, Trail Creek Summit from Lost River to Wood River, Little Smoky Creek (along with all

Upper South Boise drainage down to Little Camas Reservoir), Upper Squaw Creek, Little Weiser, and some Upper Weiser valleys (Indian Valley and Council Valley primarily), and sent out a detachment that discovered Marsh Creek and other Upper Salmon River Middle Fork features. Altogether, he explored a lot of difficult country.

- 1826 Peter S. Ogden took over Alexander Ross' Snake brigade in 1824 and explored vast western areas, mostly beyond Idaho. His Idaho discoveries included City of Rocks and Granite Pass, along with Upper Bruneau and Owyhee tracts.
- 1826 David E. Jackson and William L. Sublette may have explored Payette River from Squaw Creek to Payette Lake in 1826, but this possibility is speculation based upon a map indicating such a route.
- 1830 Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, who returned to Idaho and other beaver areas after an interesting European tour, explored a lot of craters and lava fields west of Arco when he thought he had to avoid Blackfeet warriors in November.
- 1831 A party of mountain men searching for beaver resources persuaded a mountain Shoshoni guide to take them from Stanley Basin through Bear Valley and Deadwood to Long Valley, where he showed them a large elk herd.
- 1832 Louis Boisvert and J. S. Laurin (or Lorange) left John Work's Snake brigade to descend Salmon River Canyon with Miquam Plant and A. Dumaris who were lost in a rapids, 19 July 1832. Boisvert and Laurin completed their exploration of Salmon River below Alexander Ross', Michel Bourdon's, and William Clark's discoveries.
- 1832 John Work explored Upper Little Wood River; ascended Warm Springs Creek from Ketchum to Little Smoky; discovered Upper South Boise and summit to Upper Salmon; went from Cap Horn to Upper South Fork, Payette, and descended it to Banks; some of his party crossed to Boise Basin which had been discovered by earlier French explorers.

- 1834 Joseph R. Walker, returning from a fur trade trip to California, came down Goose Creek, part of which he may have explored in Idaho above Oakley. If, as is less likely, he came through Granite Pass and approached Raft River via City of Rocks, he was not examining any new country. And earlier trappers may have already explored that part of Goose Creek.
- 1835 Samuel Parker came via Teton Valley, Birch Creek, and Lemhi Valley to explore the Nez Perce Trail to Camas Prairie. His route on to Lewiston may have led to some more discovery.
- 1842 P. J. DeSmet and Nicholas Point explored the Montana Trail, mainly on ridges between Clearwater and Saint Joe River drainages, while establishing their Coeur d'Alene Jesuit mission. Joseph Joset and other Jesuits traveled a Coeur d'Alene River route in transferring their mission to Cataldo in 1846.
- 1848 Benoni Hudspeth and J. J. Myers explored an old Indian trail that they utilized for Hudspeth's Cutoff between Soda Springs and Raft River.
- 1854 John Mullan, searching for a practical route for a wagon road from Walla Walla to Bitterroot Valley, checked out a series of passes between Idaho and Montana--an investigation that required considerable local exploration. From 1859 to 1861, more local exploration followed as he located his military road over two different North Idaho routes.
- 1858 Mosie Reivez (Moses Reeves), a French Canadian hunter who supplied Mullan's expedition, explored Coeur d'Alene River's North Fork to its headwaters and returned with very good placer samples.
- 1859 An international boundary survey party explored a mountainous forty-ninth parallel area between Idaho and British Columbia while marking much of that line.
- 1860 Elias Davidson Pierce explored a route across upper prairies around Southwick and Grangemont to Pierce.
- 1861 John Healey and a prospecting party discovered Florence and explored its area high above Salmon River.
- 1862 George Grimes and Moses Splawn explored Jordan Creek and parts of Boise Basin some of which no doubt remained undiscovered after Idaho's fur trade era.

- 1862 James Warren discovered an important mining area across Salmon River from Florence.
- 1862 Prospectors radiating out from Pierce investigated Moose Creek in 1862, but useful discoveries came only in 1868.
- 1862 Palouse mines, primarily Hoodoo placers, followed extensive prospecting of those areas.
- 1863 John Stanley explored a major central Idaho wilderness area between Warrens and Stanley Basin and also discovered a good route on to Atlanta and Boise Basin.
- 1863 An important route from Boise Basin to Rocky Bar also involved exploration of intervening mountain terrain.
- 1863 A miner's trail and wagon road route was discovered from Little Camas reservoir to Rocky Bar.
- 1863 Crooked River placers, followed by lode discoveries at Banner in 1864, resulted from exploration of that area.
- 1864 Prospecting of a long ridge extending east from Bennett Mountain led to discovery of a lode at Volcano, 12 March.
- 1864 Michael Jordan's Owyhee campaign against local Indians, prior to a clash there, 9 July 1864, resulted in exploration south of Silver City.
- 1864 Prospectors explored Loon Creek, without discovering gold sufficient to attract interest until 1869.
- 1864 Bayhorse prospectors preceded later, and more successful, mineral hunters in that drainage.
- 1865 Gold discoveries west of Hailey, 11 September, resulted from prospecting of Upper Camp Creek.
- 1866 Prospectors examined Thunder Mountain and Upper Big Creek in 1866, but mining did not follow until two decades later near Edwardsburg and until after 1900 at Thunder Mountain.
- 1866 Exploration of north Boise lodes at Silver Mountain in 1866 preceded Matt Graham's promotion there two decades later.

- 1866 Sewell Truax explored Upper Lolo Creek and Snowy Summit for an improved Lolo Trail route.
- 1866 Louis H. Marshall's and John J. Coppinger's military expeditions explored difficult Owyhee territory.
- 1867 Lode discoveries at Pearl, 7 December, led to mining development there three decades later.
- 1868 Daniel Major's Idaho-Oregon boundary survey extended southwestern Idaho exploration to Nevada.
- 1868 South Mountain lode discoveries resulted from exploration of high country south of Silver City and Flint that had been seen but not prospected successfully before 1868.
- 1869 Nathan Smith, who had examined much of central Idaho's mountain wilderness led a gold rush from Loon Creek to Yellow Jacket after hearing an unsubstantiated rumor of mineral discoveries there. Years later, lode mining actually followed at Yellow Jacket.
- 1870 Jesse Fairchild discovered gold on Cariboo Mountain north of Soda Springs.
- 1870 D. B. Varney discovered gold on Yankee Fork, extending mining there from Loon Creek. A road from Challis to Bonanza and Custer followed additional exploration there.
- 1871 Daniel Major's survey of Idaho's southern boundary resulted in considerable exploration there.
- 1873 A Washington-Idaho boundary survey explored new territory.
- 1879 Henry Catley and R. F. Bernard explored territory around Chamberlain Basin and Sheep Mountain during their military operations.
- 1880 John A. James and William Peck discovered mining lodes at Mineral City, northwest of Weiser.