

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

JOHN WORK'S EXPLORATION OF 1832 IN CENTRAL IDAHO

Number 1066

January 1995

Searching for new beaver resources for his Hudson's Bay Company Snake Brigade, John Work explored new routes from Wood River to Stanley Basin via Vienna and from Long Valley to Bear Valley and Deadwood while investigating some upper Payette streams in 1832. Two of his trappers accomplished a far more remarkable achievement that summer when they descended Salmon River Canyon from Panther Creek to French Creek and eventually continued their difficult journey to Fort Nez Perce west of Walla Walla. By completing their Salmon River Mountain exploration, Work's trappers concluded that any further search for beaver there could not be justified. They learned more than they wanted to know about hazards of travel in that country.

So many Hudson's Bay Company expeditions had searched for Idaho beaver streams that Work's crew did not have much easy country to cover. Alexander Ross had discovered Stanley Basin in 1824, and some of his trappers had explored northwest from Stanley into Salmon River's upper middle fork sources. Ross also had checked out much of Boise River's upper south fork in 1824, but had omitted an access route directly north from Ross Peak into Upper Salmon drainage around Vienna. From members of his party who had been there eight years earlier with Ross, Work learned what he had explored May 26-27. After continuing north through Stanley Basin and advancing to Bear Valley, Work's trappers explored more new country. A group of mountain men based out of Saint Louis had preceded them a year earlier from Stanley Basin through Bear Valley to Long Valley, where their Mountain Shoshoni guide had taken them to see an exceptionally large elk herd. But they had found no worthwhile beaver streams before they returned to report their failure. Work's band tried more options without locating any fabulous beaver resources.

After two days travel past Cape Horn to Bear Valley, June 4-5, he examined some Deadwood River streams before trying his luck in Garden Valley, June 16. Finding a difficult canyon that obstructed his progress below Garden Valley, he moved back north across ridges that finally led his party into southern Long Valley and Round Valley. Crossing over a ridge to Smith's Ferry, June 18, he continued west to Upper Squaw Creek, where his trappers had been active in earlier years. Proceeding on to some middle Weiser streams, he had no trouble finding his way to a Snake River crossing between Payette and Weiser.

When John Work's beaver hunters completed their central Idaho exploration in 1832, they had checked out all but a Salmon River Mountain bloc that omitted Chamberlain Basin and much of Salmon River's middle fork and south fork drainage. But they satisfied themselves that all that surrounding border area they explored had too few beaver colonies to be worth examining. Serious additional investigation of that difficult terrain had to wait for miners and prospectors who came in search of gold.

(This information has not been edited.)

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428