



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

Newsletter of the Jedediah Smith Society • University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

SPRING 2014

## Things Learned Pursuing the Reestablishment of Monument No. 660

(Presented at the Jedediah Smith Society's 2014 Spring Gathering on March 15th)

By Joe J. Molter

Periodically I like to review the book the Society printed in 1999 called: *Jedediah Smith and His Monuments*, which is actually a update of an earlier version called: *Monuments to Jedediah Smith*, originally printed in 1984, both written by Raymund F. Wood, historian, professor and past president of our Jedediah Smith Society.<sup>1</sup> By doing so, I become more aware of the 66 documented monuments, plus an additional half dozen more that have since been established that I've added to the back of my book, all dedicated to Jedediah Strong Smith, his travels and accomplishments. This practice came about after several times arriving home from trips and realizing with disappointment that I had passed right by one of these monuments or locations important in the history of this great trapper, trader and explorer, without even a thought that Jedediah had been there!

without making a visit and prepared myself by getting familiar with the access roads and general area by looking at computer maps and satellite images. During this time, a couple other Society members started enquiring about this monument and last year during a Board Meeting, the possibilities of reestablishing this plaque were discussed.

Not long after, I was able to visit this site and factors associated with its location evoked thoughts and questions of whether this was a proper and suitable spot to reestablish this monument. The naked boulder, stripped of its plaque, lies today isolated along the southern edge



Monument stone without plaque.

of the old Edison Highway. This two lane road was once the main artery east from the valley floor over the Tehachapi Mountains to the arid lands of the Mojave Desert and has since been replaced by a new, four lane, divided Highway #58. Both thoroughfares parallel the "old" Tehachapi route, which was thought to be the route Jedediah utilized. The main usage today of this old highway has changed; instead of passenger cars, there's now a constant hum of garbage trucks, going to and from some nearby landfill. The monument sits tucked-in along the edge of a citrus grove, which on the day I visited had been plowed around it, with a ditch along its edge, forcing me to jump over to obtain access. Also a heavily used double set of railroad tracks is situated across this road, adding to my initial feelings towards this site.

After this visit, I started to investigate if there was a more suitable site, one that would be safer, with less chance of being stolen again and one that would be exposed to a greater number of people who would find its historic information enriching to their understanding of the past. As I started researching potential relocation sites, questions soon arose as to their proximity to Jedediah's actual trail and I knew I needed to research and establish its location before proceeding any



Original plaque

One such monument that I had read about and passed several times without visiting was an official California Historical Landmark No. 660. It's located is 13.5 miles east of the city of Bakersfield in the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, which is the southern portion of California's Great Central

Valley. This monument was dedicated and placed in 1959, but unfortunately its bronze plaque was stolen 18 years later in 1977. This plaque was titled: JEDEDIAH STRONG SMITH TRAIL, and read: NEAR THIS SPOT ABOUT THE FIRST OF FEBRUARY 1827 JEDEDIAH STRONG SMITH, FIRST UNITED STATES CITIZEN TO REACH MEXICAN CALIFORNIA OVERLAND, PASSED THROUGH THE PRESENT AREA OF KERN COUNTY WITH HIS PARTY OF FUR TRAPPERS. FROM SAN GABRIEL MISSION THE GROUP WAS ENROUTE NORTH TO A LAND REPORTED TEEMING WITH "PLENTY OF BEAVER." SMITH AND HIS MEN WERE TRAILBLAZERS WHOSE EXPLOITS SOON LED TO THE AMERICAN CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA. I had determined not to pass this site again

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further. I also realized the need to go back and see why the original monument site was chosen 55 years ago. In reading the original "Application for Registration of Historical Point of Interest," filed with the State of California in 1958, it stated that Jedediah Smith entered the San Joaquin Valley by crossing the mountains to the east of this location "via Willow Springs and Oak Creek Pass."<sup>2</sup> Believing he would have kept close to the foothills upon emerging from the mountains due to his need of water for his party and for trapping purposes, the present location along Route 466 (Edison Highway) was chosen for being near his supposed trail. In the final paragraph of this application titled: "History and Description", it sums up what was really known about this route at that time of its submission, when it states "The record of Smith's journeys across what is now Kern County is somewhat sketchy and indefinite."

Eight years after its dedication in 1959, an important manuscript came to light which I feel has a direct bearing on this monument's present location and any future relocation sites. In 1967, a long lost portion of Jedediah's Journal was discovered that covers his travels through this part of the country, which sadly took an additional 10 more years before it was published and made available to the general public!<sup>3</sup> This manuscript reveals in Jedediah's own words that he entered the south end of the San Joaquin Valley not using the "old" Tehachapi route, but a route that had to be much further south! Between the dates of February 7th through the 10th of 1827, Jed wrote these words: "I resumed my NW course for two short days travel, the low Mt. still on my left and barren plains on my right, when I fell in with some Indians who I suppose were runaways from some mission as they had some horses. I ascertained by enquiry of them that there were some streams and lakes ahead. I engaged a guide to conduct me to them and after two days travel, still continuing my NW direction, I arrived at a lake called by the Spaniards, Too Laree or Flag Lake. I arrived at the lake quite late and found the bank so muddy that it was impossible for my horses to get any water, yet I was obliged to encamp. From what I could learn of the Indians, the Spaniards



Enlargement of a portion of the 1857 Britton & Rey's Map of the State of California

had named it from report but be that as it may, the name was quite appropriate. Too Laree Lake is about 12 miles in circumference and is in a fine large valley which commences about 12 miles south of

*it. Coming into the valley from the southeast, I had passed over a range of hills which in their course a little east of north, appeared to increase in height."*<sup>4</sup>

The "Too Laree" Lake mentioned by Jedediah has to be old Kern Lake that was situated in the extreme southern end of the San Joaquin Valley. It was connected by a sough to a slightly larger adjacent lake lying to its northwest called Buena Vista, both watered primarily by the Kern River. This "Too Laree" or Kern Lake is not to be confused with the larger Tulare Lake that was located approximately 50 miles further northwest up the valley and was at least 25 times larger. All these lakes no longer exist today, with the exception of a small remnant of Lake Buena Vista, being converted to agriculture lands many years ago. Kern Lake fits well with Jed's Journal entry, in that it is about "12 miles in circumference" and is in a "fine large valley" which does commence about "12 miles south of it,"



Route Location Map

depending on where that measurement are taken.

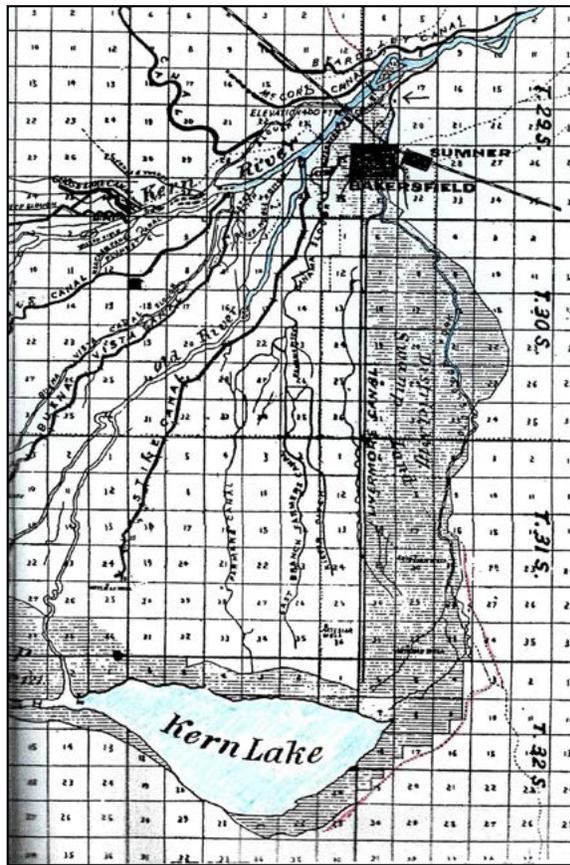
His approach to this Lake being in a northwest direction would rule out him coming over "old" Tehachapi route. If he had, Jedediah and his party would have been too far north to intercept Kern Lake on the bearing and distance they were heading! They would of also had to turn southwest upon entering the valley and cover approximately 20 additional miles, a good days journey in itself, to reach the shores of this lake. John C. Fremont in 1844 used this same "old" Tehachapi route in-reverse, totally unaware that Kern and Buena Vista Lakes existed, as shown by their absence on his detailed map published in his 1845 report.<sup>5</sup> It is my belief that if Jed was led this way by his Indian guide, he would have continued in a northerly direction, his main destination, also over-looking these lakes! The Kern River would have been close-at-hand upon entering this valley, being sufficient to meet his immediate needs, as well as the other lakes and rivers further north. To turn southward involving a day's journey

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and then back again would be unnecessary and loss of valuable time and effort.

Prior to Jedediah's entrance into the San Joaquin Valley, he was required to enter into the Mexican Territory of California, far to the south "for want of provisions and water,"<sup>6</sup> becoming the first American to enter Alta California overland from the east. The Mexican Government was suspicious of the true purpose of this group of men and detained them for a month and a half at the Mission San Gabriel before they were allowed to leave. Requiring them to leave the same way they entered, Jed and his men headed back in an easterly direction towards the gap separating the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains, the Cajon Pass. Upon passing through these ranges of Mountains, he felt that he had complied with their stipulation because, most at this time felt that Mexican California was a territory narrowly defined as "the settled belt along the coastal plain."<sup>7</sup> On the other side of these mountains is the Mojave Desert, dry, barren and hot, something Jedediah and his companions had recently endured and something he didn't want to risk life, limb and property again. Resuming his journey, Jed writes: "I was then obliged to turn my course NW for want of water having the low range of Mts on my left and the barren desert on my right."<sup>8</sup> This course is along the backside of the San Gabriel Mountains until they reach the small northeast tending mountain range called the Tehachapi's.

I have already established that his crossing of this range prior to entering the San Joaquin Valley had to be considerably south of the Tehachapi Pass area to allow him to intersect Kern Lake heading on a northwesterly course. To do this I see a couple possible options that would accomplish this course. The first is using an ancient native trail now known as the Old Tejon Pass<sup>9</sup> that was utilized by the Spanish explorer Pedro Fages and Padre Francisco Garces in the 1770's. It was also surveyed by the U.S. Army in 1853 as a possible route for a railroad.<sup>10</sup> This pass is fifteen miles to the northeast of the present Tejon Pass and was a possible route the Indian guide would have lead Jedediah over, but it did require a day's

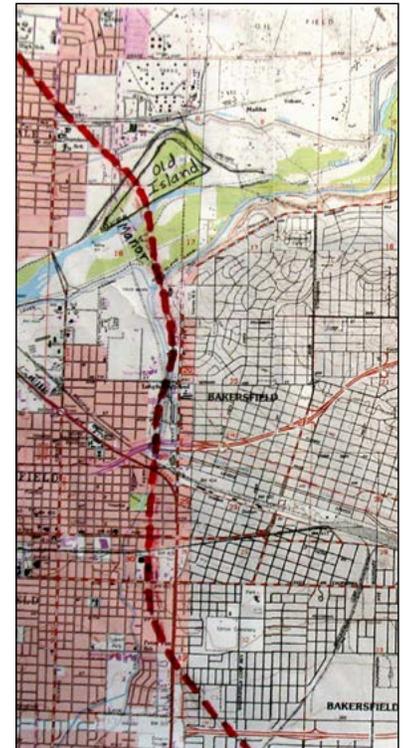


**Elliott & Co., S.F. ca 1882 Map**

jaunt across a finger of desert in Antelope Valley to access. The other possible route would be to continue NW along the edge of the San Gabriel Mountains, following today's California State Highway 138 and connecting with Interstate Highway 5 near Gorman and continuing to follow that northwesterly down Grapevine Canyon into the valley towards Kern Lake. Both of these routes have the potential for being the one that Jedediah utilized to enter the valley, but I tend to side with Brooks who favored the "old" Tejon Pass because it was the "traditional Indian trail" that Jed's Indian guide would have probably used.<sup>11</sup> I believe determining which pass is not critical to this study because both led to Kern Lake and the reestablish this Monument further north is being based on his route on leaving this lake.

On reaching the southern shore of Kern Lake, Jedediah and his men encamped for the night. The following day, which would be February 11th, Jed wrote this in his Journal: "...in moving along the bank of the Lake I surprised some Indians who immediately pushed out into the lake in canoes or rather rafts made of flag. My guide succeeded in getting them to return to the shore. One of them could talk some Spanish and I engaged him for a guide. I watered my horses and got some fish from the Indians (who I observed had some horses stolen no doubt from the Spaniards) and moved on about 3 miles along the Lake and then up an inlet about 10 miles, crossed over and encamped. On this inlet was some timber; Cottonwood and Willow. Where I crossed it was 8 or 10 yard wide, rapid current 2 feet deep and comes from the East."<sup>12</sup>

Jedediah's movements this day I believe were eastward for three miles along the southern edge of the lake until intercepting an "inlet," upon which he traveled 10 miles or northerly along. This "inlet" would be the



**Jedediah's Route through modern day Bakersfield**

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terminus of the Old Slough Fork, the eastern most drainage of the Kern River delta, where it enters the east side of Kern Lake.<sup>13</sup> This delta started to form in the vicinity of present day Bakersfield and was also comprised of the “Old River” and multiple other unnamed sloughs, channels and water courses that drained the Kern River down and southward into the basin where Kern and Buena Vista Lakes resided. This fan shaped delta forming an enormous area the early maps labeled



San Miguel Commemorative Grove.  
Note Jedediah route  
superimposed as black line.

“swamp and overflow lands,” something that Jed would have wanted to stay out of!<sup>14</sup> He would have skirting along its eastern edge using old Indians trails that still existed and were being used when this area was first settled in the mid 1800’s,<sup>15</sup> noting “*Cottonwood and Willow*” trees as he proceeded north. His distance stated as 10 miles for this days travel is a little short for the actual distance, being more like 18 miles, but this could be a variable factor, depending on the size of Kern Lake and the Kern River channel location, at the time of Jedediah’s visit. His route would have taken him right up through the present city of Bakersfield, staying on the high ground and paralleling the current Kern Island Canal as he approached the Kern River. His crossing of this river would have most likely exploited a ford being used by the Indians at that time and one that continued to be used by the later settlers of this area, even after ferries were introduced along this stretch of the river.<sup>16</sup> There was such a ford in line with this trail which utilized an Island that has long since disappeared, located north of the current Manor Street Bridge. Upon crossing the Kern River, Jedediah confirms the identity of this river by mentioning “it comes from the east” and then encamped on its north bank.

The Jedediah Smith Society, this author and others, feel strongly that this California Historical Landmark needs to be reestablished to commemorate this early visit to Kern County by this unique individual. We would also like to see it placed in a location that would be historically correct in relation to Jedediah’s actual route, in a more pleasant and safer location than its present site and in an area that is available to greater number of the general public. I believe my research shows that this monument’s present location east of Bakersfield is not along Jedediah’s actual route, but in fact he passed up through the center of Bakersfield! I believe there are several suitable locations to reestablish this monument within the city of Bakersfield. My favorite being south of the Kern River and west of Manor Street in the vicinity of the San Miguel

Commemorative Grove and the Kern River Parkway Bike Trail, which is right along Jed’s trail. I have a personal reason why I would like to see this done, that being I’m a product of such a monument! Forty two years ago as a young student at California State University, Sacramento, my imagination and curiosity were aroused when discovering a similar bronze plaque attached to a boulder on campus that commemorated Jedediah Strong Smith’s passage through that area. Not long after I purchased his biography at the college bookstore and began to learn more about this remarkable Mountain man and have ever since been amazed and impressed by his exploits, explorations, endurance and his honorable character.

### NOTES

1. Both of these books are out of print, but the 1999 version is still available through the Jedediah Smith Society.
2. This is the “old” Tehachapi route that enters the Tehachapi Mountains from the SE, following up what is called today, the Tehachapi Willow Springs Road and then over Oak Creek Pass and down into the town of Tehachapi, then following Tehachapi Creek down past Caliente into the San Joaquin Valley. Today’s Highway follows much of the “old” route, but has been straightened out and streamlined, no longer utilizing Oak Creek Pass, but now using Tehachapi Pass instead.
3. George R. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826-1827* (Arthur H. Clark Company, 1977, rpt. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
4. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*, 133-134.
5. Brevet Capt. J.C. Fremont of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, *Map of an Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842 and to Oregon & North California in the Year 1843-44*.
6. Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Exploration of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829*, (Arthur H. Clark Company, 1941, rpt. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 209 – “an attestation of his character and good faith.” Also see Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, (Orig. 1953, rpt. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 205 – “I was only a hunter & the Dire necessity had driven me here.”
7. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, 206.
8. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*, 132.
9. Wikipedia Web Site, *Old Tejon Pass*, ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_Tejon\\_Pass](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Tejon_Pass)).
10. Wikipedia Web Site, *Old Tejon Pass*.
11. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*, footnote #186, 134.
12. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*, 135-136.
13. *Map Showing the Irrigation System About Bakersfield, Cal: Lithographed for county history*, (Elliott & Co., S.F., ca 1882). Partial copy included in this article.
14. George H. Goddard, C.E., *Britton & Rey’s Map of State of California* (Britton & Rey, S.F., 1852). Partial copy included in this report.
15. United States General Land Office Survey Plates, *Township’s 29-32 South, Range 28 East, Mount Diablo Meridian*, (Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior) ca 1855. These four maps show a trail that follows the eastern edge of what is listed as “Kern River Overflowed Lands, Kern River Swamp and Slough, or Swamp and overflow Land,” depending on the map, from bottom of Kern Lake, north to the Kern River.
16. Current Topographic map of Bakersfield, CA, with old trail and island crossing imposed upon it, using U.S. General Land Office Survey Plats and the 1882 Irrigation System about Bakersfield map, previously introduced.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article by Stephen Darley, “1826 Fur Trade Rendezvous in Cache Valley,” in the Winter 2014 edition of *Castor Canadensis*. Darley makes valid points about the discrepancy between the two potential sites for that event. I have no issue with the Hyrum site but I have a few comments about some of his remarks.

Darley’s statement “...one ought to proceed with extreme caution when disputing a conclusion reached by Morgan,” should be taken with extreme caution itself. That Morgan is a fine historian is not in dispute, but anyone doing legitimate research must always examine the field to satisfy their own hypothesis and not take anyone or anything for granted.

Taking Morgan at face value is exactly what happened to Barton Barbour in, Jedediah Smith, No Ordinary Mountain Man. Barbour accepted Morgan without going any deeper in regard to Smith’s trip west in the Fall 1825. (trouble starts on p. 82). Barbour clearly relied on Morgan without “disputing a conclusion reached” by the famed historian but should have dug deeper. When Morgan wrote his biography of Smith, Fayel’s Robert Campbell Narrative had not come to light. In Morgan’s *West of William Ashley* (p. 143) Morgan divulges the discovery of Robert Campbell’s journal for the same period and admits his error in the Smith biography. Campbell provides a compelling story of getting stuck in the snow along the Republican Fork, many horses die, etc. (see pp. 18-21 in the Ye Galleon Press edition.) Fortunately, Barbour corrected this error in his second edition.

I, too, was recently embarrassed by doing that very thing. In an article for *Overland Journal* regarding trappers on the Humboldt River, I quoted Morgan as saying the Humboldt is the longest river in the country that does not cross another state boundary. (Morgan, *The Humboldt, Highroad of the West*, 6). Turns out, the Sevier River, in Utah (Morgan’s home state!) is 53 miles longer. I should have done my own homework.

Darley credits William Ashley as the person “who conceived the idea of an annual rendezvous,” which is not correct. It would be more correct to state that Henry and Ashley are credited with bringing the concept of an annual rendezvous to the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Native Americans had been holding yearly trade fairs for decades prior to the Henry-Ashley Company’s first rendezvous. Surely Americans involved with the fur trade would have heard of the annual rendezvous at Grand Portage held by the North West Company at Fort William. Peter Pond provides a marvelous description of the 1770 event (Pond, *Narrative of Peter Pond*, 47).

In all probability, it was more Andrew Henry’s idea to initiate a similar event in the Rocky Mountains. He rounded up the company brigades on the Wind River in 1824 to divvy up what few supplies they still had. Daniel Potts wrote of having made \$350 from pelts turned at what might be considered the first rendezvous in the mountains. This is a topic that deserves more research.

In describing the 1827 and 1828 rendezvous at Bear Lake, Darley said “The site in Bear Lake that both would need to reach is called Rendezvous Beach Bear Lake State Park, where a monument has been erected.” Frankly, lots of monuments have been erected in wrong locations; this is a good example. A much overlooked reminiscence by Phillip Covington, who accompanied William Sublette to the 1828 event, reveals the site as several miles south and west of the lake. (A map depicting the site described by Covington can be found online at: <http://www.bearlakerendezvous.com/home/>). Covington’s story was published in *Colorado Heritage Magazine* in 1982 but has received surprisingly little attention from historians.

Incidentally, this “new” location supports the idea Darley conveys about getting from Blacksmith Fork to the Bear Lake rendezvous because it shortens, by several miles the distance covered by Smith from that direction and lengthens the distance to be traveled from Cove. To be more accurate, the concept of air miles should be jettisoned. With Google Earth so readily available, if research cannot be done “on the ground,” such a resource is far more valuable than “as the crow flies” estimates from a topographical map.

Finally, a comment about the Robert Campbell journal Darley mentioned. The *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal* will have an extensive article regarding this newly discovered primary document in Volume 8, due out in July 2014. Turns out, it may not be Campbell’s diary after all – handwriting analysis indicates it was likely written by another prominent fur trade personality who had as big an influence on the early history of the West as did Campbell ... but readers will have to wait till July to find out who!

Sincerely,

Jim Hardee, Editor  
The Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal  
Museum of the Mountain Man  
Pinedale, WY  
[hardee@mmmuseum.com](mailto:hardee@mmmuseum.com)

## INVITE A FRIEND TO JOIN

Jedediah Smith Society membership is open to all who wish to join in support of research, preservation and information about the 1st American arriving overland 1826 and other California pioneers of the 18th & 19th centuries.

Student \$10.00	Individual \$20.00
Sponsor \$50.00	Patron \$100.00

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Please make check payable to: JEDEDIAH SMITH SOCIETY  
Bob Shannon, P.O. Box 7937, Stockton, CA 95267

### Society Notes

**Spring Gathering:** All who attended the Spring Gathering this last March 15 at the San Joaquin Historical Society Museum not only enjoyed the four speakers presentations on early California history but were thankful for the opportunity to visit this fine museum. The topics presented, ranged from the Native Americans of the San Joaquin County to the early visits of those intrepid trappers. One of these presentations is being reproduced here in this issue.



The photo to the left shows Bob Shannon, President (left), Rich Cimino, Board Member (right), presenting David Stuart, (Middle), San Joaquin Historical Society Museum Director the "Ol Griz" award.

**Induction Ceremony:** On May 12, 2014, an Induction Ceremony was held at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, in Dubuque, Iowa, where American explorer, Jedediah S. Smith, was inducted into the National Rivers Hall of Fame. Historian and Jedediah Smith Society member, James C. Auld, was there to give a brief talk about Smith, not only about his background and national explorations, but his time on the Upper Mississippi River.

**D-Day Remembrance:** Did you know that there was a "Liberty Ship" called the S.S. Jedediah S. Smith which participated in the D-Day landing at Normandy on June 6, 1944? It was a type EC2 "emergency cargo"– Liberty Ship, built in 1943 and carried 480 men and 120 army vehicles. This ship left service in 1963 when it was scrapped.



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Dues will expire Jan 1<sup>st</sup>

