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Jedediah Smith's First Far-Western Expedition

By Charles L. Camp

Over six years ago I came across a reference to this article, and spent a considerable amount of time and effort to obtain a copy! Since then I've wondered how many others are aware of this well researched article, therefore I went about obtaining permission to reprint it here in the "Castor."

Charles L. Camp, now deceased, was a notable paleontologist and professor at the University of California, Berkeley, is well known to students of the American West for his editing the personal records of mountain men James Clyman, George C. Yount, and other western figures, and for his up-dating and revisions of H. R. Wagner, ed., *The Plains and the Rockies: A Bibliography of Original Narratives of Travel and Adventure, 1800-1865*.

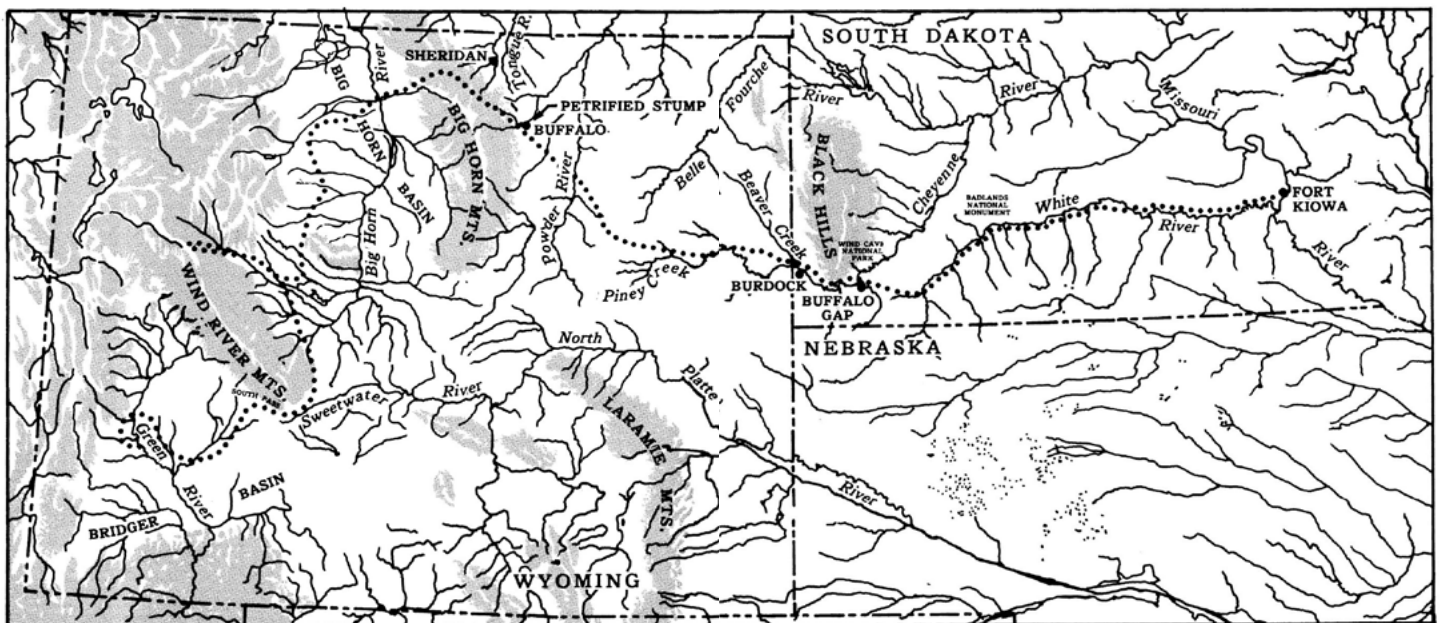
In this article, Professor Camp provides an interesting note to studies of the trail of the Jedediah Smith expedition west from Fort Kiowa in September 1823, illustrating his method of verification of much of the route by on-the-spot travel, following geological and geographical traces, and guided by extant written records. The map published with the article is based on maps supplied *WHQ* by Professor Camp and corrects maps published heretofore by Camp and others. — (Editor, J.J.M.)

The Black Hills of South Dakota and the uplands of eastern Wyoming should preserve some remnants of the old trapper trails where Jedediah Smith, the famous explorer, led his band of mountain men in 1823. They were the first white men on record to enter the southern Black Hills. Our knowledge of their doings is limited to two imperfect accounts: the very brief "Solitaire" article in the Saint Louis *Weekly Reveille*, March 1, 1847, and James Clyman's reminiscences printed in the *Napa Weekly Reporter*, March 30 to May 11, 1872.¹

I have attempted to follow the Clyman-Smith trail, on the ground, so far as possible. Seventeen years ago we crossed the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming to track down the fossil forest and the tall petrified stump Clyman discovered and described. Eight years later

Smith party was trapped overnight and to find the ridge where they traveled westward across the arid plains of eastern Wyoming. We were encouraged to think that we might be able to locate the "brushy bottom" where Jed Smith was literally half-scalped by a grizzly bear. Before going into all this, however, a bit of the regional history should be reviewed.

French explorers, the Vérendryes, were the first known white men to enter the vicinity of the Black Hills. Their date was the mid-1700s, and much speculation and doubt have ensued as to just where they went. They may have seen the snow shining on the distant summits of the Big Horns, but more likely they approached the bare granite crests of the Black Hills. In any event, they deposited a lead memorial plaque near present Pierre, South Dakota.



we made a brief visit to the Black Hills and in 1968, with the generous assistance of Drs. Reid Macdonald, John Harksen, and Edwin Oshier, we traveled by jeep for a week through the southern Black Hills and eastern Wyoming. The summer of 1970 saw us in the Powder River basin.

Our hope was to identify the narrow canyon where the main

In 1804 Loisel identified the Costa Nigra, or Black Hills, as "a name which was doubtless given to those mountains because of the color of the earth," which indicates that Monsieur Loisel had never been very close to those hills.² Jean Valle told Lewis and Clark that he had spent the winter of 1803-4 "three hundred leagues up the Cheyenne River

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in the Black Hills.” The distance is far too great to be credited, and nothing more can be said about this lone Frenchman.

Trappers operated in the vicinity of the Black Hills from the time of Manuel Lisa in 1809 and the Astorians in 1811, but actual penetration of the hills is not recorded. This brings us down to the time of Jedediah S. Smith and his first expedition, organized by Gen. William H. Ashley.³

William Henry Ashley, most persevering of men, outfitted and led two venturesome voyages far up the Missouri in 1822 and 1823. One of his keel boats met disaster early when it capsized at the mouth of Sniabar Creek in Missouri. Ashley's expedition of 1823 also met disaster when the Arikara killed or wounded fifteen men and all of his horses. Salvaging this expedition was a notable feat. Most of Ashley's boatmen had been fished out of grog shops in Saint Louis, and many of them rebelled after the Arikara fight and refused to go on up the dangerous river. Ashley had to release one of his precious boats to ship thirty-eight of these deserters back to Council Bluffs. With these were five wounded men, which still further reduced the effectiveness of the expedition.

With his forces so badly weakened, lacking horses for overland travel, and unable to continue upriver by boat, Ashley was forced to improvise. He was determined to pursue his trapping and trading ventures into the mountains. Misadventures and disasters to other fur companies had opened the upper Missouri country freely to him if he could only put his trappers back into that region. Enough pack horses were secured to start Andrew Henry's party away toward the Yellowstone. The men had to walk. Hugh Glass, one of these, was almost fatally chewed up by a bear. Others met with accidents or were killed by Indians.

A second overland party of at least eleven, perhaps as many as seventeen, hardy volunteers was sent out from Fort Kiowa with meager equipment and untrained horses, skittish and restive under packs. This makeshift outfit was under the charge of twenty-four-year-old Jedediah Smith, who had satisfied Ashley with his energy, courage, and leadership the previous year. Fort Kiowa, farthest outpost of the “French Fur Company,” the Chouteau firm, had been established the previous year above the right bank of the Missouri near what is now Chamberlain, South Dakota. Horses there were in short supply, and Ashley could borrow only enough to transport Smith's beaver traps, ammunition, camp outfits, robes, blankets, and trade goods. The men had to walk and, worse yet, lead and control their balky horses.

Thus, inauspiciously and precariously began what soon evolved into one of the most extended and important explorations of the West. These two Ashley overland parties were the beginnings of ventures extending far across mountains, rivers, and deserts to the shores of the Pacific in California and Oregon during the next five years.

Smith, an eastern farm boy born in New York State and lately from a farm in Ohio, had not yet been well exposed to the rough-and-tumble life of the wilderness. The same could be said of most of his men, some of whom were destined to become notable figures on the frontier. There was Thomas Fitzpatrick, a durable, freckle-faced Irishman at the beginning of a long career and a charmed sort of life among the Indians and grizzly bears. There was William L. Sublette, scion of a frontier family, soon to become famous in his own right. There was the young frontiersman, James Clyman, who many years later wrote the story of the expedition. There was that mysterious, inseparable pair, S. Stone and Alexander K. Branch, later to join the Bent's Fort and Ceran St. Vrain crowd. A few years later (1826-28)

Stone and Branch joined Ewing Young, “Dutch” George Yount, and the Patties in New Mexico and Arizona. They were all stout men whose hair-raising adventures and activities became significant in the opening of the West.

Standing out even in this company was Jedediah Smith, America's prime explorer after Lewis and Clark. He was the first Anglo-American to find his way to California directly overland, the first to surmount the snowbound heights of the Sierra Nevada, the first to traverse the length and breadth of Utah and to cross central Nevada, the first to find his way overland through the densely forested northwest coast of California into Oregon. Earlier he had led the first westward party through the great South Pass, and he was among the first American trappers to exploit successfully the rich beaver streams of the upper Colorado River basin. In a career of only nine years he was responsible more than any other man for the opening of the central route to the Far West. In contrast to the great federal expeditions, he was often forced to travel with the most meager preparation and equipment. Disaster dogged his steps, but he persisted to set his footsteps over much of the American West.

Jedediah Smith met an untimely death at the hands of the Comanche in southwestern Kansas in 1831. His records, except for a few important letters, were scattered and lost for a hundred years and more. The manuscript maps he constructed have disappeared. Fortunately, a copy remains of one of them, made by George Gibbs, about 1850, and sketched on a Fremont map of 1845. The David Burr map of 1839 contains information necessarily taken from a Smith manuscript map. The same could be said of other maps of the period, particularly those by Tanner and Gallatin. Harrison Dale in his *Ashley-Smith Explorations* drew attention to Smith's importance and printed some of his records. Maurice Sullivan, as late as 1934, after an extraordinary sleuthing effort among the scattered Smith clan, recovered and published hitherto unknown journals and other documents. Finally, the late Dale L. Morgan of the Bancroft Library, with his comprehensive knowledge of fur trade history, provided the most complete account of Jedediah Smith's remarkable career.

The Clyman “Narrative” of 1871, written forty-eight years after the event by an eighty-year-old man, may be afflicted with some lapses of memory. Yet this is the best available record of Smith's first overland expedition. It contains the only eyewitness story of how Smith was halfscalped by a grizzly and is regarded as one of the classic narratives of western history.

Clyman, in his terse way, describes the features of the country traversed, from the Missouri River, through the Black Hills, across eastern Wyoming, over the Big Horn Mountains to Wind River and on across South Pass to Green River. The look of the land along their line of march remains today much as it was 150 years ago, though some of the smaller streams have disappeared, diverted into stock ponds, and browsing animals have no doubt reduced the number of wild chokecherries and other growth.

They bought and borrowed a few horses at Fort Kiowa. Horses were scarce there, as reported by a notable visitor, Prince Paul of Württemberg, only a month before. So everyone had to walk leading the stubborn pack animals. They had only a half-day's travel to reach the river. As Clyman says, they left Fort Kiowa: ⁴

about the last of September [1823] and proceeded westward over a dry rolling highland ... in [the] evening we camped on White clay Creek [White River] a small stream running thick with a white sediment and resembling cream in

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appearance but of a sweetish pu[n]gent taste our guide warned us from using this water too freely as [it] caused excessive costiveness which we soon found out

To reach White River from Fort Kiowa they would have gone southwestward, not "westward." It might be thought that they went up Medicine Creek or Bad River rather than the White. There are two good reasons why this cannot be so: The Gibbs copy of Smith's map delineates their route along the north side of White River; and Clyman himself, in 1840, mentioned his "passage from the headwaters of White River of the Missouri to the Shiann River."

After a day or two on the trail the guide told them they would attempt a cutoff to avoid a large bend in the river, a route on which they would experience "two days of thirst and Starvation." Clyman tells the whole story:⁵

We proceeded up this stream one day [Trees] not in sight since we left the Missouri part of the next day same when our guide [from the French Fur Company?] informed us to take what water we could as we would not reach water until about noon the next day our means of taking water being very small⁶ we trailed on until dark and camped on a ridge where the cactus was so thick that we could scarcely find room to spread our Blankets⁷ Starting early about 11 o'clock we arrived at our expected water But behold it was entirely dry not even dam[p] mud to be found but here we found a few Shrubby oaks to protect us from the scorching sun We rested perhaps half an hour 15 miles to the water yet and being all on foot and a pack horse to lead can we if we hold out reach it before dark we urged and hauled our stubborn horses along as fast as possible our guide getting a long way ahead and finely out of sight my pack horse being more tractable than most others I soon got ahead of my companions and we got strung out a mile in (length) [length] the country somewhat rolling and one steering off to the right or left in search of water we were not only long but wide and it appeared like we might never all collect together again I followed as near as possible the last appearance of our guide but deviating slightly to the right struck on a hole [of] water about an hour before sunset I fired my gun immediately and then ran into the pool arm deep my horse following me

Coming out I fired my gun again one man and horse made their appearance the horse outran the man plunging into the water first each man as he came fired his gun and Shouted as soon as he could moisten his mouth and throat Sufficiently to make a noise about dark we all got collected except two who had given out and were left buried in the sand all but their heads Capt Smith Being the last who was able to walk and he took Some water and rode about 2 miles back bringing up the exhausted men which he had buried in the sand and this two days of thirst and Starvation was made to cross a large bend of the white clay River in the morning we found it yet 4 or 5 miles to the [White] river where our guide [was] waiting for us I have been thus particular in describing the means and troubles of traveling in a barren and unknown region here our River is a beautiful Clare stream running over a gravelly bottom with some timber along its course having [emerged] from its bed of mud and ashes for the sediment spoken of is nearer its mouth

The White River, a permanent stream along its entire course, furnished the trappers with distasteful though necessary water for 150 miles westward. The stream in its final 120 miles runs milky white, heavy with sediment in suspension. It is barely drinkable unless allowed to settle for several hours (the fine white clay will eventually fall to the bottom of a container, leaving less than one-fourth of the volume of clear water at the top). The river in its lower reaches is saturated with this white mud, which is also deposited along its banks during high water. The mud comes mainly from the soft white clay beds of the Brule and Chadron formations, as well as from other badland exposures in the Pine Ridge Reservation. Badlands farther down the river in the present Badlands National Monument also contribute their share of mud.

West of Cedar Pass in the big badlands the river becomes clear, or nearly so, in times of low water. This occurs after the summer rains are over. The upper river is a small, shallow stream running over a gravelly bottom where Porcupine Creek enters. It is fordable without the slightest trouble, except in time of flood. So far, Clyman's description agrees well with present conditions, and there can be no doubt that the party went up White River.

The bend mentioned in the passage would have been at least thirty miles across to require two days of travel. The puzzle is: *There is no such bend within two days' march of Fort Kiowa.* There is a shallow bend about sixty miles upstream. It would seem foolish to attempt to bypass even this one just to save some five or six miles of travel. Possibly Clyman forgot how far along the river they had gone when they took the cutoff. There is a northward bend of about thirty miles between Little White River and Pass Creek (south of Murdo to south of Kadoka). This is a possibility. There is another broad bend south of Cedar Pass. Clyman says that when they came out of the cutoff the river was a clear stream running over a gravelly bottom. This is so, at low water, near the mouth of Porcupine Creek where the Scenic-Rockyford road now crosses on a bridge.

Clyman discovered the water hole that saved the party from disaster. The water may have been a pool in the otherwise dry bed of Pass Creek, and the dry water hole encountered earlier may then have been in the bed of Black Pipe Creek. This is speculative.

Something is peculiar. Could it be that their guide indulged in a bit of treachery, trying to discourage them at the start of their long journey? Why was it necessary to camp on a bed of prickly pear cactus? Why were they led to a bone-dry water hole which could not have contained a trace of moisture at this time of year? Why did the guide sprint on ahead to leave his followers scattered out fanwise behind him rather than together as they should have been? Again, why did it remain for Clyman, rather than the guide who was on ahead, to find the water hole that evidently saved their lives? From all this it might be inferred that the guide was deliberately misleading them. Possibly he did not relish the idea of going 160 miles up to the Sioux country and then returning all that way alone.

A more charitable interpretation would be that the guide, Indianwise, wished to travel a direct route rather than walk a few miles farther along the river. He had not reckoned on a dry water hole. By the time they reached the next water, fifteen miles away, they were hot, famished, and exhausted. It may have been Smith himself who buried the two men in the attempt to conserve the moisture in their bodies. The guide had gone on ahead out of reach, so he could scarcely have done this himself. Smith used this trick again in 1827 to save one of his men in the desert of western Utah.

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They met the Bois Brulé Sioux, traded for horses and secured "27 or 28." Here, presumably eight or ten miles north of present Oglala, in the southwest corner of South Dakota, they "crossed" the White River, having been traveling for a while at least, on its south side. This was their final view of that stream. Here, also, their guide left them to return to Fort Kiowa with the horses borrowed from the French Fur Company.

In his 1840 "Memorandum" Clyman says:⁸

In our passage from the headwaters of White River of the Missouri to the Shiann River we passed over a high and most singular Tract of country of about 15 or 20 miles from East to west how far it extends N. & S. I cannot tell it is almost Completely bare of vegetation nothing growing except here and there a stunted prickly pear the soil being of a most loose sterile nature possible and the appearance extremely singular it having been all carried away by the thawing of the snows and shows of rain in to ravines of extreme depth leaving the plain very uneven ...

And standing full of rounded conical hillocks of pyramidal form some large at the Base and upwards 100 ft high and all sizes from that down to ordinary hillocks not more [than] three feet high From its present Shape I would Judge that at about the depth of 50 feet below the common surface of the earth the top being carried away to that depth from some cause or other perhaps from a greater accumulation of moisture a slight formation of sand stone occurs which shields the tops of all the larger mounds and from which cause retain their present elevation the earth being of all shades from light gray to a dark brown an becomes remarkably easily saturated on the surface Mixing in large Quantities with the water the water where filled with earth has a sweet taste causing those that are under the necessity [of] using it to be remarkable costly

Exactly! They were now headed northwestward toward the outer ridges of the Black Hills, dim and dark in the distance. The Ogalala Sioux provided them with "a few more horses," and "we swapped off some of our more ordinary," says Clyman.⁹ They also found buffalo on these prairies and short grass for their horses.

Along this route they passed outlying badland "teepee" buttes and "cobble mounds of a regular taper from top to bottom all of them of the precise same angle and the tops sharp," as Clyman describes them.¹⁰ They crossed the South Fork of Cheyenne River "a few miles below where it leaves the Black Hill range of Mountains here some alluvial lands" looked "like they might bear cultivation," as indeed they are cultivated in broad green fields today.

Ahead rose the abrupt outer rim or hogback of the Black Hills. A deep notch in this rim would certainly have been noticed when they were still far away. They would perceive that by entering this gap, Buffalo Gap, they would have far easier access than by climbing up over the hogback. Another gap to the south, Fall River Gap, would not have been so readily seen had they taken that more unlikely route, and the peculiarly warm water in Fall River would doubtless have been mentioned, as well as the hot springs along the river.

After crossing the Cheyenne, a shallow stream, a drizzly rain came down, and the horses had some trouble with the gray mud of the country balling up on their hooves. This is a distressing feature of the blue-gray Pierre Shale beds lying to the southeast of Buffalo Gap. Following up Beaver Creek they would have made their way

through the gap into a totally new kind of country: "a pleasant undulating pine Region cool and refreshing so different from the hot dusty plains we have been so long passing over and here we found hazelnuts and ripe plums a luxury not expected."¹¹ These were luxuries obtainable in the vicinity of Buffalo Gap, but not very much farther north into the higher hills.

They continued to ascend toward the main divide, into the uplands, over open grassy hills perhaps as far as the southern end of present-day Wind Cave National Park. Here the landscape is still preserved in its pristine state. The dark forests of small ponderosa pines surround open pastures where antelope, elk, and bison roam. Prairie dogs in their villages chirp saucily at the wandering coyotes.

A little to the west of this rising ground, the country becomes brushy, with scrub pine and juniper, the latter "covered in purple berries" in October. To the north the forest becomes thicker. Rock cliffs and deep ravines prevent easy travel. We can well imagine Smith's party choosing the open glades and passageways through the forest. Present Pleasant Valley would provide such an avenue. Following this avenue through the woods southwest of Pringle would have led them along a small stream upon which they no doubt hoped to camp at nightfall. This stream led them into a box canyon. Let Clyman continue his story:¹²

one evening late going down a small stream we came into a Canyon and pushed ourselves down so far that (that) our horses had no room to turn while looking for a way out it became dark by unpacking and leading our animals down over Slipery rocks three of us got down to a nice open glade where we killed a Buffalo and fared sumptuously that night while the rest of the Company remained in the Canyon without room to lie down

Is it possible to identify this canyon? Mrs. E. J. Shriner, who lives on a ranch in Pleasant Valley, tells us that Hell Canyon is too easily traversed to qualify. She has ridden horseback and driven cattle through this canyon. The walls of Hell Canyon nevertheless are so steep that in most places it would be impossible to take a horse out up the sides. The same applies to Pass Creek Canyon, which is much shorter than Hell Canyon and can be traversed even more easily.

Red Canyon is a different story. This gorge heads at the Pleasant Valley Ranch, marked on topographic maps as Richmond Farm. The canyon walls close in just south of the present ranch buildings. The stream bed entering the canyon is now dry. Francis Conlon, who owns the ranch at the mouth of Red Canyon, tells us that he saw water flowing through the canyon forty years ago, but that the stream is now absorbed in stock ponds and wells. He thinks Red Canyon, which has the reputation of being the most difficult of all the gorges in this part of the Black Hills, would be the most likely route to agree with Clyman's story.¹³ Mert Arthur, who lives at Pleasant Valley Ranch at the head of Red Canyon, says that he has been through the canyon on horseback and that the trip is very difficult even with a well-shod horse. Clyman's Indian ponies were of course unshod. Arthur mentions a stream of water that still flows in an eastern tributary of Red Canyon and enters the canyon over a "jumpoff" three hundred feet high. About three miles downstream the canyon narrows and is blockaded with fallen boulders dropping from the limestone ledges above. Once into this gorge, it would be impossible to take horses out up the sides. In some parts of the rough canyon bed a pack horse would have to be unloaded to get through.

Smith's party, if they actually blundered into Red Canyon, was

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badly fooled. Had they avoided the gorge, they could have crossed the country without much trouble as the side ravines, such as Hawkwright, are easily traversed, crossed, or avoided. The entrance to Red Canyon is deceptively sheltered and innocent looking. The water was evidently anticipated as time for their night camp approached. The open glade where they enjoyed a "sumptuous" barbecue of buffalo steaks was probably in the flat country near the mouth of upper Red Canyon. Below this, Red Canyon Creek plunges again into the broad gap north of Edgemont. The party would now have become deeply suspicious of these water gaps through the hogback, the one north of Edgemont and probably the one east of Dewey as well. These would be too likely to lead them into another rocky gorge. As Clyman says:¹⁴

we now found it would not do to follow down any stream in these mountains as we were shure to meet with rocky inaccessible places So with great exertion we again assended to the top of a ridge and were Quite lucky in getting a main devide which led us a considerable distance before [we] had to desend again

This seems to mean that they climbed to the summit of the steep hogback bearing southwest of the mouth of Red Canyon in the direction of present Burdock. From this height they would have had a good westward view across an expanse of arid swales and mesas through which the green cottonwood groves along the Cheyenne River could have been seen far ahead. Below, almost beneath their feet, they would have traced the dark course of Beaver Creek coming from the north to join the Cheyenne. Beyond to the west lay a broad, flat-topped mesa which they may have accepted as an accessible route, above and between a maze of small twisting ravines intersecting the low hillocks across this barren land.

This broad mesa, now called the "21 Devide," lying north of the great north bend of the Cheyenne and west of what is now Dewey, answers to what was Clyman's "main devide" which led them "a considerable distance" before the party had to descend again.¹⁵

but this portion of the mountain furnished our horses with no food and they began to be verry poor and weak so we left 3 men and five horses behind to recruit while the rest of us proceeded on there being some sign of Beaver in the vicinity and hoping to soon find more where we Might all Stop for a time

They had crossed a dry and barren stretch of country ten miles or so north of present Mule Creek Junction, Wyoming, and they could have possibly left their worn-out animals to recruit in the grassy cottonwood groves along the Cheyenne bottoms near present Hampshire, Wyoming. There are beaver still in that vicinity, although parts of the main river are dry at this fall season. The Cheyenne bottoms as well as those of the two Thunder Creeks are lined with thick groves of cottonwood. Along Lodgepole Creek the stands of timber are more sparse, and the water lies in pools along the dry course of the stream bed. Except in these river beds, there are no trees or thick brush of any kind across this wide, bare expanse. Grass is practically absent in September and October, except on the river bottoms, in this brown, barren, and desolate land, where even today the cattle ranches are few and far between.

And now we approach another puzzle in the Clyman story. After Jed Smith's encounter with the bear, says Clyman:¹⁶

we were still on the waters of [South Fork of] shiann river

which heads allmost in the eastern part of the Black hill range taking a western course for a long distance into an uneven vally where a large portion of (of) the waters are sunk or absorbd then turning short to the east it enters the Black hill rang th[r]ough a narrow Kenyon in appeareantly the highest and most abrupt part of the mountain enclosed in immense cliffs of the most pure and Beautiful black smooth and shining [slate] and perhaps five hundred to one thousand feet high how [far] this slate extends I cannot tell We passe[d] through this slate Quarry about 2 miles and one of the men observed here or at some such place Mosses must have obtained the plates or tables on which the declogue was inscirobed

A different description of this phenomenon was written by Clyman in his "Memorandum" of 1840. It seems possible that Clyman visited the canyon of the Cheyenne River east of Edgemont, South Dakota, where the river cuts through evenly stratified layers of dark gray Pierre Shale. But it is not clear just when this side trip was made, and it would not be pertinent here except that it was by inference during the time Smith was recovering from his bear fight. And we have now come to a main event in the Clyman narrative: the attack on Jed Smith by the grizzly.¹⁷

five days travel since leaveing our given out horses and likewise Since Rose left us late in the afternoon while passing through a Brushy bottom a large Grssely came down the vally we being in single file men on foot leding pack horses he struck us about the center then turning ran paralel to our line Capt. Smith being in the advanc he ran to the open ground and as he immerged from the thicket he and the bear met face to face Grissly did not hesitate a moment but sprung on the capt taking him by the head first pite[h]ing sprawling on the earth he gave him a grab by the middle fortunately cat[c]hing by the ball pouch and Butcher K[n]ife which he broke but breaking several of his ribs and cutting his head badly

Clyman does not say so, but the bear was shot, probably as soon as guns could be pulled out of the packs. The Smith family descendants once claimed to have a claw of this bear as evidence of its demise. Where did all this occur?

Five days from where they left their horses, probably on the Cheyenne bottoms near the junction of Black (or Big) Thunder Creek, Wyoming, would seem to have brought them from forty to sixty miles westward into an open upland region where there are very few trees and no brushy bottoms to speak of. If we were to cut down the distance traveled to about thirty miles, they would have approached the eastern base of a high ridge dotted with little pines. The broad canyon or valley of Piney Creek issues from the recesses of this piny ridge. Its entrance is accessible between steep slopes nonnegotiable for a pack train. It spreads out into brushy flats or bottoms where high sagebrush grows thickly, forming what might even be called "thickets", and this is the only part of this region that supports such high sagebrush. There are similar patches of sagebrush along Antelope Creek some fifteen miles to the south. Here the sagebrush is lower and is interspersed with cottonwood trees. There are a few thickets of chokecherry bushes along Black Thunder Creek, but no one would normally try to lead a pack horse through them.

Another clue: A mile or so to the west of the brushy flats or bottoms at the mouth of Piney Creek Canyon, water appears in springs and pools

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beside grassy glades leading up toward the summit of the piny ridge.

Now it may be thought that Clyman might have remembered one of the cottonwood-forested bottoms along Thunder Creek, or even on the main Cheyenne River, as a "brushy bottom," but I think when Clyman said brush he meant brush and not cottonwood trees standing in groves where the approach of a bear would not be easily seen. Another thing might be considered: Is it likely that there were climbable trees, such as thickly growing cottonwoods, available where the grizzly came down the valley toward the captain? A man's instinct would be to run to a tree rather than into the open. At the Piney Creek site there are only widely scattered dwarf pine trees, no thickly growing cottonwoods to interfere with the progress of a pack train or to afford a means of escape.

The high ridge west of Piney Creek would be one of the few places where Clyman could have had a good view of the country. He would have seen the courses of the Cheyenne and its tributaries marked for miles and miles by threads of green contrasting vividly with the dun-colored landscape. How else, except by extensive travel in this generally flat region, could he have "ascertained" that they were still "on the waters of shiann river"? And if he had gone up Antelope Creek, which is a tributary of the Cheyenne, he would have had no question as to the stream drainage he was on.

Going back to where Jed lay bleeding, we must let Clyman finish telling his story: ¹⁸

none of us having any sugical Knowledge what was to be done one Said come take hold and he wuld say why not you so it went around I asked the Capt what was best he said one or 2 [go] for water and if you have a needle and thread git it out and sew up my wounds around my head which was bleeding freely I got a pair of scissors and cut off his hair and then began my first Job of d[r]essing wounds upon examination I [found] the bear had taken nearly all of his head in his capcious mouth close to his left eye on one side and clos to his right ear on the other and laid the skull bare to near the crown of the head leaving a white streak whare his teeth passed one of his ears was torn fom his head out to the outer rim after stitching all the other wounds in the best way I was capabl and according to the captains directions the ear being the last I told him I could do nothing for his Eare 0 you must try to stich up some way or other said he then I put in my needle stiching it through and through and over and over laying the lacerated parts togather as nice as I could with my hands water was found in about ame mille when we all moved down and encamped the captain being able to mount his horse and ride to camp whare we pitched a tent the onley one we had and made him as comfortable as circumtances would permit this gave us a lisson on the charcter of the grissly Baare which we did not forget I now a found time to ride around and explore the immediate surroundings of our camp and asserted that we ware still on the waters of [South Fork of] shiann river . . . This is a fine country for game Buffaloe Elk Bare deer antelope &c likewise it produces some Hazel nuts Plumbs white thorn Berries wild currant large and of fine flavour and abundance of nutritious grass and some land that would bear cultivation

Plums, chokecherries, and berries would have been found along Antelope Creek as well as on Piney Creek. The "land that would bear cultivation" lies now along U.S. 59, the uplands north and

south of Gillette, Wyoming, where there are fields of hay and grain. It seems probable that Clyman crossed the clear headwaters of the Belle Fourche, when he went from the Cheyenne drainage to the Powder. Here are his words: ¹⁹

after remaining here ten days or 2 weks the capt. Began to ride out a few miles and as winter was rapidly approaching we began to make easy travel west ward and Struck the trail of Shian Indians the next day we came to their village traded and swaped a few horses with them and continued our march across a Ridge [of] mountains not steep & rocky (in general) but smooth and grassy in general with numerous springs and brook of pure water and well stocked with game dsending this ridge we came to the waters of Powder River Running West and north country mountainous and some what rocky.

[Edward] Rose with 15 or 16 Crow Indians came to our camp as soon as we raised a fire in the evening they had been watching for two days passed to assure themselves that no Shians were with us they and the Shians being at war they the Crows brought us several spare Horses which relieved our Broke down animals and gave us a chance to ride but they caused us to travel to fast for our poor horses and so Capt Smith gave them what they could pack sending Rose with them and we followed at our own gait stopping and Traping for beaver occasionally

Twenty miles to the west of Piney Creek would have found the trappers near the head of Porcupine Creek near present U.S. 59 about forty-five miles south of Gillette. This open, treeless upland region would answer Clyman's description of "land that would bear cultivation" in contrast to the barren country to the east. Then would come the "smooth and grassy" ridge or upland dividing the Cheyenne from the Powder. There they would have found the springs and clear streams at the headwaters of the Belle Fourche, the northern branch of the Cheyenne River. Then traveling northwest toward present-day Buffalo, they would have crossed the Powder River south of present Interstate 90 between Buffalo and Gillette. Throughout the broad drainage basin of Powder River in this area there does not appear to be a place that would fit Clyman's description of a "brushy bottom," except immediately along the river among the cottonwoods.

Presumably it was during this interval when they had sent Rose and the Crows on ahead and when they stopped and trapped for beaver that Clyman found the petrified stump that he could "barely lay [his] hand on top sitting in the saddle." Remember, they had been afoot until Rose returned with the fresh horses. This stump was one of the landmarks on the Smith-Clyman route. At another time (1840) Clyman said it "required some exertion for me to reach the top sitting on horseback." That would be an extraordinary height for a fossil stump. Where may such a recognizable landmark be located?

Clyman in his 1840 "Memorandum" says it stood in an: ²⁰

uneven vally in which the heads of the Shianne and Powder River rises ... in their vally and on the hight of Land dividing the two river we found a great quantity of petrifaactions Mostly of the vegatable Kingdom and on the North side of a ridge we pased almost an entire forrest of petrified Timber apearantly of the pine species the stumps of which were

Jedediah Smith's First Far-Western Expedition

standing thick ... some nearly perpendicular But mostly in an inclining posture some one way & some another

It was here that Clyman found his tall stump.

Paul O. McGrew, geologist at the University of Wyoming, put me on the trail of such a specimen. He promptly sent a picture published in a circular put out by the Buffalo Commercial Club. We visited Buffalo and after some inquiry were guided to the petrified forest and the Clyman stump by a son of Louis Timar, on whose ranch this fossil was located. The site lies eleven miles east of Buffalo on Dry Creek fork of Crazy Woman Creek, a branch of Powder River. Here there are many large petrified logs lying deeply embedded in the ground. Low stumps protrude from the surface, and logs in the ground lie upright and inclined at various degrees, agreeing with Clyman's description.

The tall stump stands about a mile south of the main "forest." It rises to a height of ten feet five inches and is four feet in diameter. The wood is completely silicified, very hard, and rings like metal when struck. Inquiry among the ranchers as far north as Sheridan and as far east as the Black Hills has disclosed no knowledge of any other upright stump of this size. I think this is a definite marker along the Jedediah Smith trail. With this to guide us, we may now return to the expedition.

Leaving the vicinity of the fossil stump, they crossed "several steep and high ridges which in any other country would be called mountains."²¹ These were surely the Big Horn Mountains near Granite Pass southwest of Sheridan, Wyoming, for Clyman immediately mentions their crossing of Shell River: "Quite a stream running into the bighorn as I believe the mountains here do not appear to have any regular direction but run in all directions are tolerable high but not general[ly] precipitous... on Tongue river we struck the trail of [Rose and] the Crow Indians."

From there, according to the Gibbs copy of Smith's map, they followed Greybull River to the west and then south across the Owl Creek Mountains (probably along the route taken in reverse by William A. Jones in 1873), a route which was passable by wagons.²²

This led across a pass about six miles west of Phlox Mountain and twenty miles or so southeast of Washakie's Needle, thence west to Dry Creek, down that twenty-five miles to Wind River some eight miles southeast of Crowheart Butte, thence across Sage Creek to Camp Brown on Little Wind River. An oil spring a mile or so east of Camp Brown furnished asphalt for the buildings there. It may have been the oil spring mentioned by Clyman, but is not the one shown on the Gibbs-Smith map.

What can be said of Smith's leadership on this his first "command"? There were blunders, perhaps too many blunders, some ignorance and lack of foresight. The thirsty White River march could have been avoided with a few canteens of water. And later in Smith's career a canteen or two might have prevented even more suffering, but such was the pride of the trapper — he could disdain water. A bit of reconnaissance would have demonstrated the dangers of Red Canyon. They should not have plunged blindly into the maw of that chasm, but they were easterners, unfamiliar with canyons. It is hard to understand why the horses were allowed to go without feed so long after leaving the Black Hills. Why did they not go down into the Cheyenne bottoms sooner instead of plugging along on that dry mesa top? Lastly, did Smith have his gun handy when the bear came down the valley to attack him? Perhaps all the guns were in the packs, and no one could reach a weapon in time to prevent Smith from being half-scalped.

Jedediah Smith, inexperienced as he then was, became a courageous, intrepid, and indefatigable leader. His men would follow him anywhere. But there seems to have been a vein of carelessness or even recklessness in him that may have led him into difficulty, not only on this first expedition but later when his parties were massacred by Indians on the Colorado River and later still on the Umpqua when he was out of camp.

Smith and his men spent the winter with the Crows on Wind River. They tried and failed to cross Union Pass in the snow. Then with the help of a Crow sand map, engineered by Clyman, they made their way south to the Sweetwater, west over South Pass, and on into history.

Footnotes:

- 1 Charles L. Camp, ed., *James Clyman, Frontiersman, 1792-1881: The Adventures of a Trapper and Covered-Wagon Emigrant as Told in His Own Reminiscences and Diaries* (Portland, 1960), hereafter cited as Camp, up-dates and revises the first edition (San Francisco, 1928) and includes the Memorandum and Diary of 1840 and other documents not included in the first edition. "Col. James Clyman's Narrative," covering the 1823-24 expedition, was written at Napa, California, in 1871, and sent to Lyman C. Draper for his collection, now in the Wisconsin Historical Society. This is printed in Camp, 7-29. The "1840. - Memorandum and Diary of J Clyman," in Camp, 48-56, is a printing of the first twenty-eight pages in a notebook kept by Clyman and later in the possession of Everett Graff. The complete set of Clyman's original diaries, nine small notebooks, together with other personal papers of Clyman, are held by the Henry E. Huntington Library. Transcripts of the Clyman diaries were made by R. T. Montgomery for H. H. Bancroft and are in the Bancroft Library.
- 2 Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804*, 2 vols. (Saint Louis, 1952), II: 738.
- 3 Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Indianapolis, 1953), best summarizes the career of Smith. But see also Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley: The International Struggle for the Fur Trade of the Missouri, the Rocky Mountains, and the Columbia, with Explorations beyond the Continental Divide, Recorded in the Diaries and Letters of William H. Ashley and His Contemporaries, 1822-1838* (Denver, 1964). Earlier studies include Maurice S. Sullivan, *Jedediah Smith, Trader and Trail Breaker* (New York, 1936) and Harrison Clifford Dale, ed., *The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829, with the Original Journals* (Cleveland, 1918; rev. ed., Glendale, 1941). Regarding maps, see Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and His Maps of the American West* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1954) and Carl I. Wheat, *Mapping the American West, 1540-1857: A Preliminary Study* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1954), 80-97.

- 4 Camp, 15.
- 5 Camp, 15-16.
- 6 They had to rely on their powder horns and camp kettles, evidently having no canteens (did Smith ever carry canteens?). Later in the western desert of Utah he had to bring water back in a "kettle" to one of his men, buried as usual in sand. Four lines previously I have supplied the word "trees" with doubt. There were straggling cottonwoods along White River, as noted by Prince Paul of Württemberg, who was there that year.
- 7 Broad patches of dwarf beaver tail cactus, thickly growing, are common here.
- 8 Camp, 50.
- 9 Camp, 17.
- 10 Camp, 17.
- 11 Camp, 17.
- 12 Camp, 17.
- 13 The head (entrance) of Red Canyon is in Sec. 2, T. 6 S., Range 3 East. The canyon cuts through the bright red Spearfish formation of Triassic period (these softer red rocks overlie the hard ledges of gray Minnekahta limestone, which in turn rest on the Opeche formation). At the bottom of the gorge lies the Minnelusa limestone, which would be slippery for an unshod horse.
- 14 Camp, 17-18.
- 15 Camp, 18.
- 16 Camp, 18-19.
- 17 Camp, 18.
- 18 Camp, 18-19.
- 19 Camp, 19-20.
- 20 Camp, 51.
- 21 Camp, 20.
- 22 *Report upon the Reconnaissance of Northwestern Wyoming Made in the Summer of 1873 by William A. Jones, Captain of Engineers, U.S.A.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), 43 Cong., 1 sess., *House Ex. Doc.* 285 (x1615).

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
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The spring luncheon has been moved and will be incorporated into the Fall Rendezvous in which plans are already being formulated.



Historical Panel Installed at Jed's Overlook

By Joe Molter



Looking SW from panel towards Turnabout Flat

Visiting the Bureau of Land Management's Redding Field Office on January 15th of this year, I was pleasantly surprised to hear that the long anticipated historic panel, commemorating Jedediah Smith's passage through these Northern California lands, had finally been installed at Jed's

Overlook the previous month! ¹ Excited to see it, I went the following day and had a pleasant hike to the overlook where I took these pictures, enjoyed the beautiful view and contemplated Jed's travels through this area so many years ago. Thanks to the Bureau of Land Management, this well done panel will help educate and remind us of the significant contributions this worthy man made towards western exploration. This historic panel can be accessed via an easy 1½ mile trail from the Iron Canyon trailhead and parking lot off of California State Highway 36, which is located 7.5 miles northeast of Red Bluff, CA. For further information, contact the BLM's Redding Field Office by phone at 530 224-2100 or connect to their computer web site at www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/redding.

Footnotes: 1. See articles written by the author dealing with "Jed's Overlook" in past issues of the *Castor Canadensis*, as follows: *Jed's overlook and Turnabout Flat*, Fall, 2006 and *Jedediah Smith's Buenaventura Farewell*, Summer, 2012.



Jedediah Smith Society
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Dues will expire Jan 1st

