



CASTOR CANADENSIS

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Jedediah Smith's Buenaventura Farewell –

A trail study of Jed's route as he departed the north end of the Sacramento Valley in 1828.

By Joe J. Molter

Heading up through the north end of California's Central Valley in 1828 and following the "Buenaventura River", which is the Sacramento River of today, Jedediah Strong Smith was on the last leg of a long, troublesome and frustrating journey to the Southwest in hopes of finding "parts of the country as well stocked with

with over 300 head of horses and mules, Jedediah and his men encountered something that would change his entire course, reveal the true source of the "Buenaventura River" and have a serious impact on the entire venture! Approaching from the southeast of the present town of Red Bluff and continuing approximately five miles above, Jed's movements



1820 Map of United States by B. Warner, showing the Buenaventura River.

Beaver as some of the waters of the Missouri".¹ What was originally anticipated to be a year of trapping and exploration starting in August of 1826, turned out to be a three year ordeal with many privations due to the aridness of parts of that country, attacks by hostile Indians and delays and detainments created by the indecisiveness of the Mexican government. Current maps of that time which Jed possessed and the information he obtained from the Mexicans, revealed a river north of San Francisco Bay called the "Buenaventura River." It was this river, thought to originate in the vicinity of the Great Salt Lake and flowing westerly to the Pacific Coast that Jedediah was planning to intercept and follow back. Jed had sold his furs in San Francisco and invested in 250 horses and mules which he adding to the 65 he already had. He was calculating they would bring at the summer rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains, "ten times the negligible amount he had paid for them in horse-rich California".²

Working his way up to the northern end of Sacramento Valley

were suddenly halted. Jed's Journal entry for that day reads as follows: **"10th April, NW 6 miles, I moved on with the intention of traveling up the Buenaventura but soon found the rocky hills coming in so close to the river as to make it impossible to travel. I went on in advance of the party and ascending a high point took a view of the country and found the river coming from the NE and running apparently for 20 or 30 Miles through ragged rocky hills. The mountains beyond appeared too high to cross at that season of the year or perhaps at any other. Believing it impossible to travel up the river I turned back into the**

valley and encamped on the river with the intention of crossing."³ No other location up to this point, along the Sacramento River matches Jed's Journal entry of land's being pinched out my rocky hills, than the spot upriver from Red Bluff which this author has called "Turnabout Flat".⁴ At this spot Jed and his men were forced to halt their forward progress and eventually turn back into the valley. Probably using the natural ramp located not far from mouth of Sevenmile Creek's north bank, Jed was able to ride his horse up out of this steep canyon to a prominent high point to assess his situation, which the Bureau of Land Management has attached the name of "Jed's Overlook". From this elevated location he could see that the "Buenaventura" was curving to the Northeast and terminated in a rocky range of hills. What he was actually seeing was the Battle Creek drainage, for the Sacramento River, after making a large bend in the opposite direction above this point, continues in a northerly direction towards the snowy volcanic cone of Mount Shasta. From this overlook,

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Jed made a crucial decision to change his course, deciding to head Northwesterly towards a “gap in the mountains” and the Pacific Ocean he knew lay beyond, instead of trying to scale the snowing peaks to the north and east.

Turnabout Flat was crucial in determining this portion of Jedediah’s trail. It’s a “bench mark” or starting point I could use to determining his route either to or from this site, because



Turnabout Flat near the Sacramento River.

this unique landform found no other place, pinpoints a specific location on the map. I was also fortunate to have Jed’s daily Journal entries covering this portion of the trail which are quite descriptive regarding the prevailing land forms he encountered and the accuracy he documented his bearings and distances traveled. Most of those who have written descriptions of Jed’s travels in this area have him crossing the Sacramento River in the vicinity of Red Bluff, ⁵ either above or below this point, but are quite vague in their descriptions of his actual route beyond this point. The few that have been more specific in their descriptions of this portion of Jed’s Trail west of the Sacramento River crossing, have him heading up along Dibble Creek, then continuing along Dry Creek to the crossing at Begum Creek, basically following State Highway 36 to that point. In this study, it is my intent to propose another route which I have determined to be more accurate that is slightly further north. It starts by following up Blue Tent Creek after crossing the Sacramento River and heads overland towards the “gap in the mountains” which Jed was aiming for.

Jed was daily recording his progress by a method used by sailors called “Dead Reckoning”. By keeping track of his directions through bearings from his compass and the distances traveled on each of those bearings and plotting this course on a chart of a certain scale from his departure point, he was able to determine his relative position. He was using the “sixteen principal points” of the compass for his bearings, which was an acceptable method then but has since been replaced with the degree method. This earlier method consists of the four cardinal points of the compass,

i.e. North, West, South and East, with each of these quadrants containing 90° between each point. These quadrants are divided in half again, now forming four more new points of 45° each consisting of NW, SW, SE and NE. These again are divided equally, forming eight new divisions consisting of 22.5° each, which completes the sixteen points. Using the quadrant between North and West as an example, with north being 0° and West being 90° and half way between these being 45° or NW, the division between N and NW would be NNW (north northwest) and the division between NW and W would be WNW (west northwest). Of course this would apply to the other three quadrants, using their prospective bearing points. When Jed was recording his bearings, he would choose one of the sixteen points that was closest to the direction he was going, which fell within 11.25° of either side of that selected bearing point.



At the end of each day, Jed would plot his course and document his travel.

I also used “Dead Reckoning” to determine Jed route. By plotted his bearings, distances and landforms, mentioned in his Journal after he crosses the Sacramento River on a piece of Mylar at the same scale of the map I planned to overlay, I was able to verify Jed’s route if those on the Mylar matched up to those on my map. Before I could actually do that, I had to determine where Jed crossed the Sacramento River, his “departure point.” As mentioned previously, some have said he crossed just below Red Bluff and others have said just above Red Bluff. I was aware of the southern crossing, which is shown on the 1849 map drawn by P.B. Reading as “French Ford.” ⁶ It is also described and shown on another map in a diary entry for October 12th, 1841, by Midshipman Henry Eld, who was part of the Wilkes Expedition following what was called the “Old Hudson’s Bay Trail.” ⁷ Using the coordinates provided by Eld and the map he sketched, it was determined that the Wilkes Expedition crossed the Sacramento using an Island which is called today Blackberry Island, located approximately five miles below Red Bluff. ⁸ Laying my Mylar with its plotted route on the west side of this crossing, I was unable to match anything up on my map, causing me to question this site and look for another.

My next choice for a crossing site was in the vicinity of the mouth of Dibble Creek, which was based on those who had previously study his route. ⁹ Using several aerial photos dating from 1962 to 1999, plus an on-the-site visit to this crossing, confirmed this was not a safe crossing! The banks on both sides of the river at this location were quite steep and the river was wide, deep and had a strong current. Jed would have lost a lot more if he had crossed at this location, when he said on **11th April, “The canoe being finished I crossed my things over in it and swam the horses. All got over safe with the exception of a colt which was drowned.”** ¹⁰ Again, overlaying my Mylar with its plotted course upon the map in this location showed no matches!

When studying the 1962 aerial photo, I had noticed an island located up-river of Dibble Creek and approximately two miles north of Red Bluff, directly across from the mouth of Blue Tent Creek. Its width in that early photo was over half the width of the Sacramento River. This island has diminished somewhat since 1962, most probable due to less deposition as the result of the construction of Shasta Dam in 1945, but still exists today. Thinking how the Hudson’s Bay Company used an island (Blackberry Island) to cross this large river south of Red Bluff, brought to mind a reenactment I attended at a State Park in Idaho. It was at Three Island Crossing where I watched horse drawn wagons, men on horses and driven horses, cross from island to island using the gravel bars connecting these islands in the Snake River. It then came to me that using these islands was quite a beneficial advantage if they were available to use. Again I overlaid my Mylar on this new area and to my surprise and delight, I started to see my lines and land forms begin to line-up to the map! With some minor adjustments, slight movements of the Mylar from side to side, more points that Jed described became apparent. As you will remember in my earlier description of Jed’s use of the “sixteen principal points” of the compass, each point is separated from each other by 22.5°, thus allowing me some leeway in adjusting my original layout of this route.

Feeling fairly confident that what I had discovered appeared to be the route that Jed and his men used after crossing the Sacramento River, I took an additional step to confirm this. This was to get on the ground during the same season when Jed passed through and followed as much of this route as possible with Jed’s Journal-in-hand. This proved to be quite beneficial, revealing items that would further confirm this route that I would have never gleaned from my maps alone. In describing this route, I will continue to use Jed’s quotes from his Journal, but only selecting those statements with relevance to his specific route.

“12th April at the same camp.” ¹¹ This camp would be at the mouth of Blue Tent Creek, which is located on the west side of the Sacramento River.

“13th April NW 8 Very hilly and rough traveling the timber generally scrubby Oak. My route was in the direction of a Gap of the Mountain through which I intended to pass.” ¹¹ This course would take Jed up along Blue Tent Creek, under the present day Interstate Highway 5 and up to a point this creek branches, one to the north and the other to the northwest, Jed following the later until it changes its course to a southwesterly direction. Here Jed departed from this creek, still heading toward the “Gap of the Mountains,” continuing a short distance before encamping. The gap Jed was heading for lies seven miles above the small community of Platina on State Highway 36. It traverses over McFarland Ridge, which is not only the shared County line for Shasta and Trinity but also the divide between those drainages that flow easterly into the Sacramento River and those flowing westerly into the Trinity River. The “scrubby Oak” which Jed mentions is the Blue Oak, *Quercus douglasii*, which are quite prevalent throughout this area.



Gap in the Mountain from Jed’s Overlook.

“14th April WNW 6 Miles and encamped on a creek 20 yards wide running NE.” ¹¹ Jed was traversing multiple seasonal drainages that normally carry small flows of water, such as Hooker Creek, Pine Creek and several other unnamed drainages until coming to the South Fork of Cottonwood Creek which snakes it way in a NE direction and has a good flow of water matching Jed’s description when he camped here.

“15th April WNW 12 Miles. At 1½ Mile from camp crossed a Creek 15 yards wide running NE. The country rough and hilly but fortunately a ridge or divide ran nearly in the direction in which I wished to travel on, the top of which



South Fork of Cottonwood Creek.

I was enabled to move on without much difficulty until nearly night when I turned a little NE and went down into a deep ravine to encamp on the bank of a rapid stream 20 yards wide running SE. I drove the horses under a steep bank next the Creek that I might have a convenient place to catch them. The Creek on which we had encamped had some appearance of Beaver.”¹¹ Leaving the South Fork of Cottonwood Creek and at the distance Jed stated is another creek called Dry Creek, which to my surprise wasn’t dry at all but had a good flow similar to Jed’s observations. Continuing on along Jed’s bearing, which was still towards the “Gap of the Mountain,” and about midway for this days travel, a ridge is intercepted that today has a jeep trail along its length. Being on a private ranch, I got permission to access this area which the landowner confirmed could have handled a herd of 300 horses and mules. Almost 12 miles as stated in his Journal is a deep ravine called Crow Gulch, leads down in a NE direction to the Middle Fork of Cottonwood Creek. This creek also meets Jed’s descriptions pertaining to size, direction and velocity of flow. To my delight, lying next to this creek was a natural corral with steep walls and large enough to handle the number of livestock Jed was herding. Strolling over to the water’s edge, there was a gnawed stump of a tree, evidence of a recent beaver at work!



The natural corral along the Middle Fork of Cottonwood Creek.

“16th April West 12 Miles. On account of the roughness of the country I was obliged to turn West. The traveling was exceedingly bad and through a country timbered with some Oak and an abundance of Bastard Cedar. I encamped at the foot of the Mountain which was on the West and North West.”¹² Turning west Jed would have traveled up the Salt Creek drainage and across Oak Flat. Before ground truthing this route, Jed’s comment about “Bastard Cedar” had puzzling to me, but when I got into this area, it all became clear! Here was an isolated grove of California Juniper, *Juniperus californica*, which I didn’t expect seeing because I had never observed them growing west of the Sacramento River in this area. Juniper are in the same family as cedar, both being in the Cypress Family, CUPRESSACEAE, thus Jed recognized the family characteristics but felt these were strange looking from the ones he was familiar with. Jed’s camp for that



Jed’s Bastard Cedar up the Salt Creek drainage.

evening was in the vicinity of what is called Beegum and the mountain he was referring to was either Arbuckle Mountain or Knob Peak. Having had some problems with local Indians that day, Jed states: **“Lest they should return and shoot some of my horses I had a pen made to put them in and had them guarded as I had done the night before.”**¹³ Twenty one years later in 1849, miners prospecting for gold in the same area left a descriptive narrative of what they saw: “The prospectors did not see the trace of a white man, in all the country which they explored, from the North Fork of Cottonwood, until they came to about the place where they made their last camp near the Bee Gum Fork; and, it is most likely, that there had never been a white man there before. They found the signs of white men in the neighborhood of the Bee Gum Fork, which had been made years before, probably by men who had been trapping on the Bee Gum Fork, and from there over on the Trinity River.”¹⁴ Is it possible the signs that these miners saw, were the remnants of the horse pen that Jed and his men had built to protect their horses?

“17th April WNW 10 Miles and then NW 6 Miles. At ½ Miles from camp I crossed a creek 15 yards wide running East. From that place the ascent of the Mountain for 10 Miles was in some places quite steep and timbered with Oak & Pine. Then crossing the ridge of the Mountain where there was some snow and high peaks on the right and left I came to waters that ran to the North West and in a few Miles came to a creek 15 yards wide on which I encamped after traveling down it a short distance.”¹⁵



Snowy Peaks from the the Gap of the Mountains.

Along this entire length of Jedediah’s trail that I have been describing so far, this days travel is the only one that I had some problems. The bearings that Jed has documented in his Journal appear to be correct, but the distances don’t work out when plotting his course! Right away when reading this entry I saw a problem. The distance he traveled that day was 10 miles on one bearing and 6 miles on another, for a total of 16 miles! Looking back on Jed’s travels after crossing the Sacramento River, I noticed that those days he was traveling through hilly and rough ground, he was averaging only 6 to 8 miles per day and on the better days, he was covering 12 miles per day. Sixteen miles appeared too many miles for the type of terrain he was moving through! Plotting his course for that day entry, using his two stated bearings and laying them out along a route that I felt Jed would have used to move his livestock up and over this mountain, I started to see a pattern. After crossing the creek that was ½ mile from camp, which would be the eastern flowing segment of Beegum Creek, the bearing and distance given by Jed was relatively accurate when he said that the ascent from that spot up the mountains was 10 miles. If you draw a straight line from the Beegum crossing to the “Gap in the Mountains,” it’s a little over 9 miles and on a WNW bearing, but Jed was unable to do that. He took the best way for his livestock by heading up Goldsborough Gulch, then past the present community of Platina following today’s Highway 36 where it passed Harrison Gulch, which is 6 miles on the bearing Jed stated. As one progresses up this grade today, you’ll see the vegetation starting to change

from oaks to Ponderosa Pine, *Pinus ponderosa*, as Jed did. At Harrison Gulch Jed makes another bearing change, now heading NW for another 6 miles, heading up Spiers Gulch and over the divide at McFarland Ridge, which is the “Gap in the Mountains,” where I also noticed high peaks on my right and left with snow. Continuing on this same bearing and distance he “came to the waters that ran North West” which would be Hall City Creek, that he following down to Hayfork Creek. This major creek, Jed followed a short distance, possible to the mouth of Wilson Creek and encamped near its mouth, this spot being about a mile north of Wildwood, which today is just a small grouping of homes. Here I’ll end my narrative, hoping I have clearly explained what I believe to be the actual trail Jedediah Strong Smith used after crossing the “Buenaventura River” at the north end of the Sacramento Valley when he gave his last farewell to this mysterious river of the west.

Beyond this point to the South Fork of the Trinity, Jedediah trail becomes straight forward and easy to follow using Jed’s Journal, with its bearings, distances and the landforms all falling in place as one progresses westward. He would continue along Hayfork Creek through Hayfork Valley and the present town of Hayfork before winding down to the small community of Hyampom, where Hayfork Creek empties into the South Fork of the Trinity River.¹⁶ He and his men would continue down the South Fork to the main branch of the Trinity River, then down the Klamath River to the Pacific Ocean, where they would laboriously ascend northward along the coastline, coaxing their herds through heavy vegetation, steep terrain and across deep rivers. It was on the Umpqua River that his crucial decision he made way back on that high point next to the Buenaventura River, to change is coarse, came to fruition. While Jedediah was out scouting a route for the following day’s travel, local Indians entered his camp under what appeared peaceful intentions, suddenly turn on his men and killed all but one and stole all their belongings. This of course would have a serious impact on his entire venture, as well as the remorse and guilt he would endure due to the loss of his men. Fortunately, He and his partners David Jackson and William Sublette hadn’t invested their total efforts into



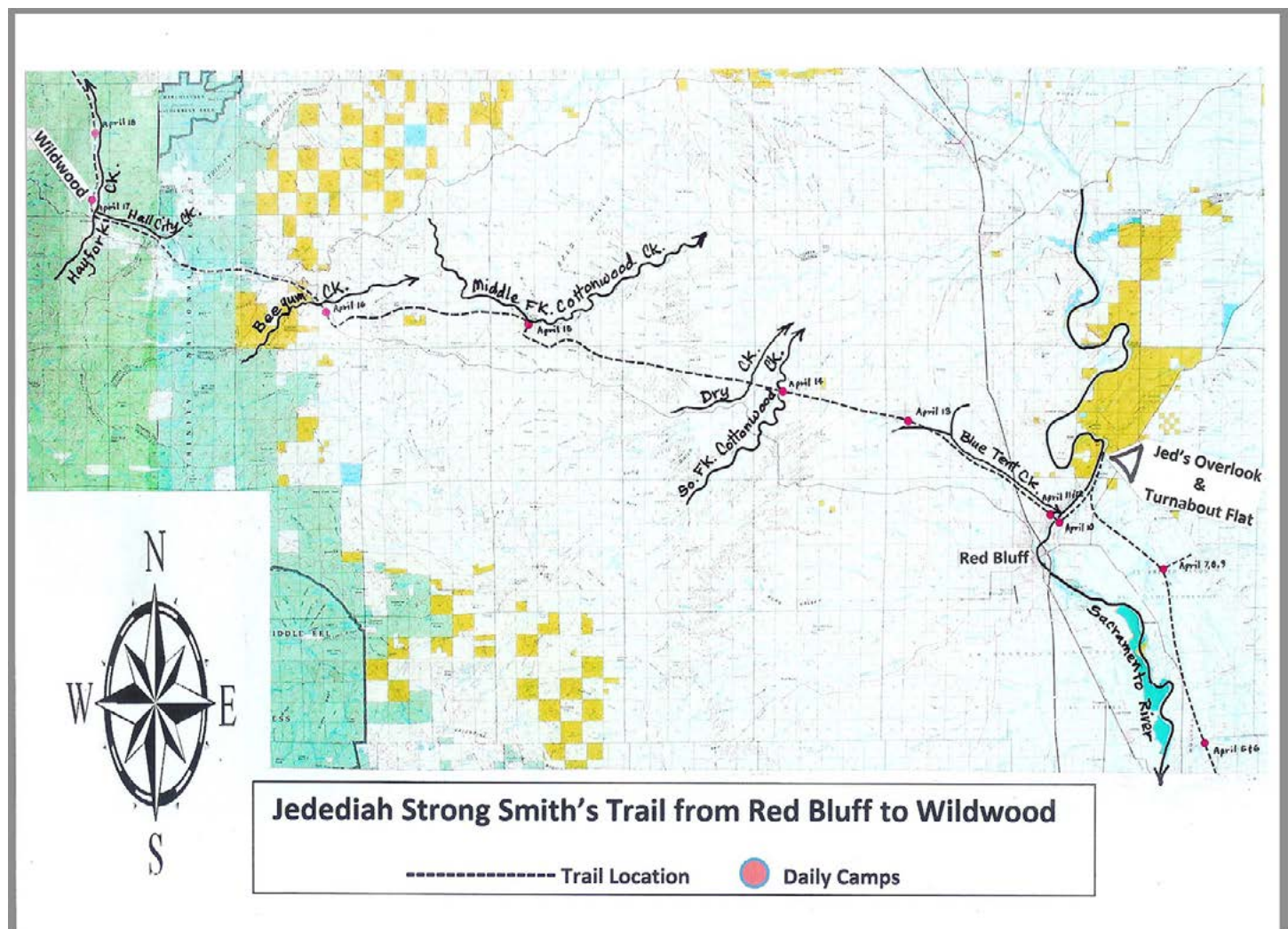
Wildwood, were Jed started up the Hayfork Creek.

this Southwest Expedition and were able to recoup some of the losses in other parts of the country through successful trapping ventures during that same period. Even though Jed was able to recover some of his belongings from this disaster, the most important thing to come out of these travels was his observations and information he would share with the citizens and Government the United States of “a section of country which has hitherto been measurably veiled in obscurity.”¹⁷

Footnotes:

1. Brooks, George R., *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California 1826-1827* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1989), p. 36.
2. Smith, Alson J., *Men Against The Mountains* (The John Day Company, New York, NY, 1965), p. 129.
3. Sullivan, Maurice S., *Travels of Jedediah Smith: A Documentary Outline, Including His Journal* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1992), p. 79.
4. Molter, Joe, *Jed's Overlook and Turn Around Flat* (Castor Canadensis, Stockton, CA, Fall, 2006) p. 1. Note: When I wrote this article, I called this flat “Turn Around Flat”, but have since changed it to “Turnabout Flat.”
5. For those who would question this location as Jedediah's crossing point of the Sacramento River, I believe the Fremont-Gibbs-Smith Map confirms that it was in the vicinity of Red Bluff. This map can be found in the scholarly study done by: Morgan, Dale L. & Wheat, Carl L., *Jedediah Smith and his Maps of the American west* (California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA, 1954). Also see the following digital map of the same: <http://collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=agdm&CISOPTR=868&CISOSHOW=865> Even though many

- of the stream are unnamed on this map, having lived in this area 35 years, I was able to label them without much problem, showing that Jed crossed the Sacramento River above Red Bank Creek, which is in the vicinity of Red Bluff.
6. Map titled: *Sacramento River above Sac'to City and its Tributaries*, By P.B. Reading, from actual observations, 1849, copy in author's collection, Shasta Historical Society and original in California State Library.
 7. Wilkes Expedition: *Diary of Passed Midshipman Henry Eld*, (7 September 1841 to 29 October 1841), Entry for Oct. 12th, 1841. The Old Hudson's Bay Trail was an early trail used by the Hudson's Bay trappers to access California from the Columbia River between the years of 1829 – 1843.
 8. Map titled: *French Ford – Red Bank Creek*, calculations by Richard Silva, 2/17/99, copy in author's collection.
 9. Quint, California B., *Jedediah Strong Smith*, (The Covered Wagon, Redding, CA, 1960) pp. 14 - 18.
 9. National Park Service, *Jedediah Smith Draft National Trail Study*, (Pacific Northwest/Western/Rocky Mountain Regional Offices, April, 1986) Map 5.
 10. Sullivan, *Travels*, p. 79.
 11. *Ibid.*, 80.
 12. *Ibid.*, 81.
 13. *Ibid.*, 82.
 14. Frank, B.F. & Chappell, H.W., *The History and Business Directory of Shasta County, as written in 1881* (The History of Shasta Co. and it's communities, Trans. by Kathy Sedler, Shasta Co. CA) p. 7. <http://www.cagenweb.com/archives/history/shasta/shas01.htm>.
 15. Sullivan, *Travels*, p. 82.
 16. Author's Note: For a good narrative that covers the trail beyond this point, see Davis, Lee, *Tracking Jedediah Smith Through Hupa Territory*, (The American Indian Quarterly, Fall, 1989, Vol. XIII, No. 4) pp. 369-387.
 17. Morgan, Dale L., *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1964) p. 334, Letter dated July 12th, 1827 from Jedediah Strong Smith to General Wm. Clark.



A Recent Visit to Monterey



Bronze plaque found in Monterey walkway.

Earlier this year I made a trip to Monterey, California, to see its historic sites and spend a little time on this beautiful portion of the Pacific Coast. Walking up to the old Colton Hall, where California's first Constitutional Convention was held in 1849, I was surprised to discover a small bronze plaque imbedded the walkway leading up to this impressive, two-story building, dealing with Jedediah Strong Smith! I thought I knew where all the Monuments were because I had a copy of Raymund F. Wood's book, Jedediah Smith and His Monuments! This plaque describes an unpleasant night's stay that Jed spent in the "Calaboso" or jail, which Jed calls the Guard house, summonsed here because he was thought to be a spy! Listen to Jedediah's own words when he wrote about this in November of 1827:

"I was detained at St. Joseph (Mission San Jose) 12 or 14 days before I received a letter from the Gov. and at the same a guard to accompany me to Monterey....On receipt of the Governors letter I made all haste and started immediately for Monterey. The journey employed us three days until 11 O Clock at night before we arrived at the Presidio, where I was immediately introduced to the Guard house and closely watched until the next day. In the mean time Capt. Cooper came to see me, bringing some breakfast with him and endeavoring to console me in my unhappy situation".¹

Even though there's a jail on the backside of Colton Hall, it's not the one Jed was forced to spend the night in. The one at Colton Hall was built in 1854, 27 years after Jed's visit. Jedediah's "unhappy situation" was spent in the old Spanish Calaboso, which was part of the early Presidio of Monterey. In 1815, Peter Corney, an English sailor who visited the old presidio, describes it as having:

"about 50 houses of one story, built in a square, surrounded by a stone wall, about 18 feet high; on the south side of the square stands the church; on the west, the governor's house; and on the east side, the lieutenant-governor's house and king's stores; on the north side is the grand and principal entrance, gaol, and guard-house, and in the middle are two field-pieces, 6-pounder." ²



The old Spanish Calaboso of Monterey.

The old Spanish Calaboso has long disappeared with the ravages of time, as well as most of its other structures, except one that still defies the ages, the Royal Presidio Chapel. Also called the Cathedral of San Carlos Borromeo, it was built in 1794, making it the oldest continuously operating parish and the oldest stone building in California. This venerable structure stands today as a witness of a brave and courageous man, Jedediah Strong Smith, who once visited here, endured much hardship, but never gave up! J.J.M.



The Royal Presidio Chapel.

Footnotes:

1. Sullivan, Maurice S., The Travels of Jedediah Smith – A documentary Outline Including the Journal of the Great American Pathfinder (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1992) p. 38.
2. Horne, Kibbly M., A History of the Presidio of Monterey (Defense Language Institute Language Center, Presidio of Monterey, CA, 1970) pp. 18 – 19.

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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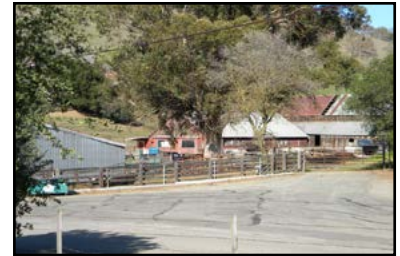
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Mission San Jose

Save this date!
Fall Rendezvous 2012
10 AM Saturday, September 15, 2012

Meet at
Old Mission San Jose & Museum
where we'll meet



Tim Koopman Ranch

Rich Cimino who will speak on Jedediah's stay at the mission in 1827 and guide us along Jed's route to Sunol Valley were lunch will be served at the Tim Koopman Ranch in Pleasanton, California.

At the Ranch our host, Rancher and Conservationist Tim Koopman, 2011 recipient of the California Leopold Conservation Award, will give the opening remarks to be followed by a presentation on:
A Historical look at the topography of Sunol Valley, Pigeon Pass and Altamont Pass in 1827.

After lunch there will be additional opportunities to see more of Jed's route and the beauty of the surrounding countryside and its attractions.

Cost: \$25.00, check made out to Jedediah Smith Society, which will include a Tri-tip lunch with all the fixings.

IMPORTANT! RSVP and payment must be in by Sept. 3rd! *Sorry no walk-ins.*

RSVP to Rich Cimino, 1281 Ridgewood Road, Pleasanton, CA 94566.

email: yellowbilledtours@gmail.com or phone: 925 462-6418



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Dues will expire Jan 1st

