CASTOR CANADENSIS

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

WINTER 2026

Jedediah Smith's First Entry into California
by Joe J. Molter

As a new year starts to unfold before us, 2026 will mark the 200th anniversary of Jedediah Smith's entry into California, making him the first American to do so using an overland route from the east. When this occurred in fall of 1826, the boundaries of California weren't as defined as they are today! Those of Jed's time felt that California was the coastal plain located between the Pacific Ocean and the San Bernardino mountains and other ranges that separate this corridor of land.

Jedediah Smith Crossing the Mojave Desert, by H. Tom Hall

It would be nice to have a specific date of his entry to use for this upcoming anniversary and Jed himself gives us a hint of such a date in a letter written slightly over a month after crossing the Colorado River. This letter was written "To the United Sates Plenipotentiary at Mexico"[1] while Jed was at the port of San Diego, Provence of New California, December 16th, 1826.[2] He states: "*...on the 10th of Nov Started for California.*" This statement refers to his westward travel after this crossing and would actually be Jedediah's fourth crossing of the Colorado River during the fall of 1826, but would this be his first entry into this state?

His first crossing of the Colorado River occurred on October 4, 1826, at the confluence of the Virgin River. Jed was moving southerly on his initial journey from the area of the Great Salt Lake and after this crossing continued down the east side of this river. The date of this crossing is well documented and agreed upon by several prominent historians and others.[3]

His second crossing occurred after reaching the upper settlement of the Mojave Indians and spending eight days with this tribe prior to his crossing on October 30, 1826.[4] In doing this, Jed did enter into the modern-day boundaries of California but his efforts to proceed westward were thwarted by the negative actions of the Mojaves. Their reluctance to provide a guide and their misinformation pertaining to the correct route caused Jed to end up in an area after two days, that was lacking in water. After his most valuable horse was stolen, Jed stated: "*it was the policy of the Indians to send me into the desert to perish. In this situation I saw no alternative but to retrace my steps.*"[5] He then headed back to the Colorado River.

His third crossing was back over again to the eastern side of the Colorado River on November 3, 1826 and

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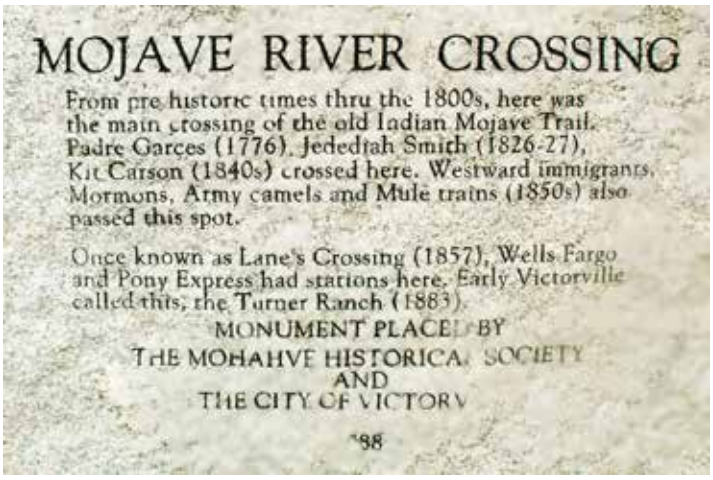
moved ten miles down to the lower settlement of the Mojaves where he spent seven additional days with this group of Indians. The seven days plus the eight days he spent in the upper settlement is confirmed in another letter he wrote to Gen. Wm. Clark, Supt. of Indian Affairs on July 18, 1827, when he wrote: "*I therefore remained there fifteen days and recruited my men.*"[6] This statement refers to the total time he spent within the settlements of the Mojave Indians in 1826.



Lane's Crossing Monument — 3 miles NW of Victorville, CA

His fourth and final crossing of the Colorado River that fall of 1826 occurred on the 10th of November. Just prior to this, Jed made this comment in his Journal: "*...finally I succeeded in engaging two Indians that lived in the vicinity of the Spanish Settlements.*"[7] These guides allowed him to successfully navigate westerly through what is currently the state of California towards its coastal plain. Though he stated that this date was when he "*started for California*," it really wasn't his first entry into this state but his second! It appears that Jed's first actual entrance into the boundaries of California was on October 30, 1826! Even though this was a failed attempt, he did spend almost four full days within its current boundaries, qualifying this date, I believe, as the official date of Jedediah Smith's first entry into California.

[1] A Plenipotentiary is a person, especially a diplomat, invested with the power of independent action on behalf of their government, typically in a foreign county. Oxford Languages

[2] A copy of this letter can be found in: *Dale L. Morgon, Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, (Lincoln 1953) pp. 331-333 and hereafter cited as *Opening.*

[3] *Opening* p.199, George R. Brooks, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith*, (Lincoln 1977) pp. 66-67 and hereafter cited as *Southwest*, Dale L. Morgan and Carl I. Wheat, *Jedediah Smith and his Maps of the American West*, (San Francisco 1954) p. 63.

[4] *Southwest* p. 78.

[5] *Southwest* p. 79.

[6] *Opening* pp. 334-337.

[7] *Southwest* p. 85.

The President 's Stump

Hello and how are you? When you read this issue of the Castor, spring season will be right around the corner. Our membership is scattered throughout many states. I hope to meet with each of you in the near future. Currently I'm still employed full-time as a small business owner. My company is a nature tour firm celebrating its twenty-fifth year. While touring the inter-mountain states, if I'm nearby, I'll reach out so we can meet for coffee.

THE RENDEZVOUS SYSTEM Each year, members attend the membership meeting and later gather around the dinner table for camaraderie, engaging discussions, recognition of Jed Smith research progress, and to discuss new monument placement. I invite you to join us during the spring rendezvous and begin planning travel to Red Bluff, CA.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING Mark your calendars! The Society's annual membership meeting will take place on Friday, April 10, at 1pm at the Red Bluff Public Library. All members and guests are warmly invited to attend this important gathering. There will be a no-host dinner after the meeting.

BLACK POWDER SHOOT PARTICIPATION On Saturday, April 11, Society members will be present at the Black Powder Shoot. This free event is open to the public. It offers a welcoming opportunity for community engagement. Members of the JSS Board of Directors will be present—look for our table with the Jedediah Smith Green Banner. Learn more on page 3 of this Castor, or visit louderbacks.org/history.html, for additional details.

CELEBRATION OF THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF JEDEDIAH SMITH'S ENTRY INTO CALIFORNIA Looking ahead, join us from October 16 – 18, 2026, as we commemorate the bicentennial of Jedediah Smith's historic entry into California in 1826. The celebration will be held near Needles, CA,

in the Mojave Desert Heritage Museum. For additional information about the lodging or the museum site, please contact president@jedediahsmithsociety.com or themojaveroad.org

Our keynote speaker will be Lance Holt, a member of the Society from Salt Lake City, Utah. The topic will be Smith's 1826 southwest expedition route across the Mojave Desert.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL AND SUPPORT If you have received your annual dues reminder, we kindly encourage you to renew your membership dues at your earliest convenience. Your continued participation ensures the Society can maintain its commitment to fur trapper history, community engagement, and the legacy of Jedediah Smith plus annual rendezvous events for your participation. With your timely dues renewal, we can plan an annual budget.

In addition to your dues, donations are always appreciated. Please note that any contributions you make are tax-deductible, helping to further support our programs. Using PayPal or a personal check is fine. The address is below in the Donations box.

On the Website

Did you know that you can read back issues of *Castor Cadensis* going back to 2009 on the Jedediah Smith Society website? Have you read Jed's famous 1830 letter lately? You can also find and order the wall map of Jed's travels, learn about upcoming events, order Castors and other publications. The website has much to offer. Stop on by!

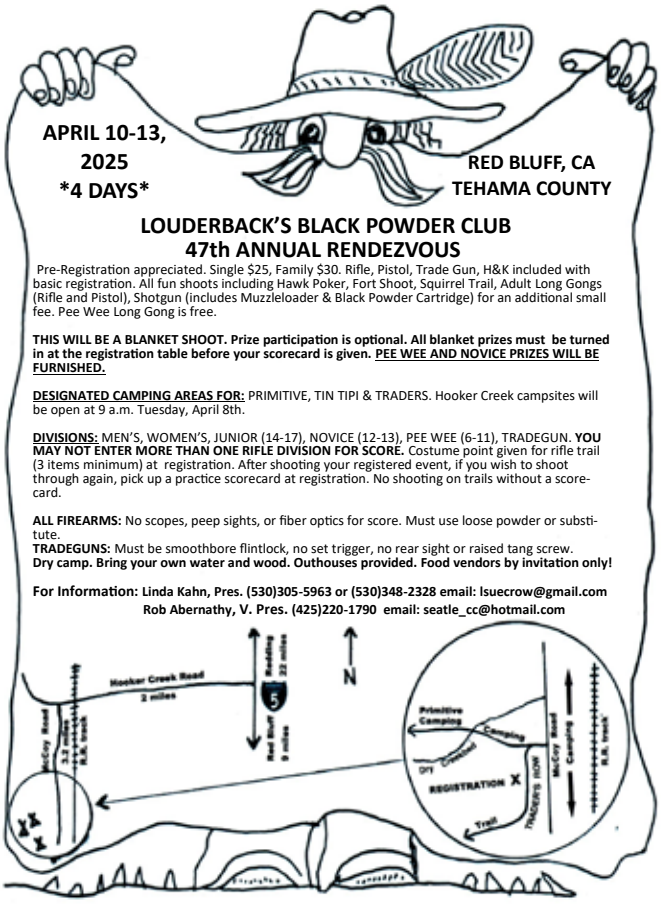
Donations

Your generous donations will fund our education and outreach efforts regarding Jed's work and life, and will make membership events and rendezvous possible. Mail contributions to Arthur Hurley, 1230 Olive Hill Lane, Napa, CA 94558, online at jedediahsmithsociety.org/donations, or via Zelle at 707-246-8942.

We are a 501c3 nonprofit; all gifts are fully tax deductible.

Our Society's new members are John Davis, Jim Crumbler, William Hearst, Annie Cassons, Nicholas Brokaw, and a Jedediah Smith.

With Appreciation,
Rich Cimino, President
president@jedediahsmithsociety.org



Visit louderbacks.org/history.html to learn more about Louderback's Black Powder Club 47th Annual Rendezvous.

Castor Canadensis Newsletter Guidelines

The Castor is your publication and your contributions are welcome. Please write to president@jedediahsmithsociety.org with your proposed ideas and to learn about specific guidelines for articles. We are seeking a volunteer to assist Rich Cimino and co-editor Lisa Thompson in this tri-annual process.

- Submit articles in Microsoft Word, photos welcome.
- After receipt, the article will be reviewed by a technical editor. Once this is completed the author will be notified.
- Please note the *Castor Canadensis* is not responsible for either the research or the opinions of the writer.

Call for Volunteers

We are in the planning stages to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Jed's crossing of the Colorado River into what is now California in 1826. We're looking for a few volunteers to help make the rendezvous happen. Please contact the appropriate contact person below.

- Help compile a list of hotels along the travel route: Art Hurley (treasurer@jededIahsmithsociety.org)
- Help collect and create collateral material for the rendezvous, detailing the travel routes, maps, and historical information: Peter Meyerhof (p.meyerhof@comcast.net)
- Help craft a boiler-plate press release that can be edited for various media outlets: Rich Cimino (richcimino@jededIahsmithsociety.org)

Message from the Treasurer

Thank all those who have sent in dues, especially those of you who have donated at higher levels. Remember you are all central to our success, consider telling your friends about our organization and encourage them to become members! Happy Trails!

Receive this Pathfinder magnet after sending your membership dues.

October 2025 Rendezvous Report

Trip attendees were Peter Meyerhof, Joe Molter, Jim Ocallaghan, Ken Hurley and me, Rich Cimino. Also attending were Steve Smith traveling from Riverside, CA, and Grayson Sorrels traveling from eastern Oregon. As we assembled for the walk we spent time discussing and sharing our individual knowledge of Jed Smith's California travels, as well as our knowledge of local California history. The camaraderie was an outstanding part of this rendezvous.

At the kiosk, Joe Molter provided an overview of the site. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and have a brief discussion.

The rendezvous started with Saturday's field trip departing from the BLM parking lot at 9am. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) trailhead is five miles east of Red Bluff. The trail leads to the BLM kiosk "Jed's Overlook", highlighting Smith's departure from the Buenaventura/Sacramento River. The trail is approximately three miles round trip, rated as moderate with little elevation gain—it's rough and rocky in certain areas requiring hiking boots.

Along the trail, we encountered three women with insight into the local tribal culture: tribe gatherings, lands and pow-wow events. The conversation was rewarding and allowed us a bit of a rest. The leisurely hike in warm autumn weather with ample time at the kiosk took us about 3.5 hours. BLM maps & guides were available for attendees.

Grayson Sorrels, Jim O'Callaghan, Steve Smith, Rich Cimino, Art Hurley, Peter Meyerhof and Joe Moltor.

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