

A WRECK ON THE GREEN RIVER.

And How it Resulted in the Naming of the Provo, the Bear and the Ashley Rivers, and Made in Cache Valley in a Single Day An Independent Fortune for a Famous Trapper.

By Ike Russell.

For J. W. Powell the people of Utah have anything but an unkindly regard. From him the world first learned, or at least its Anglo-Saxon portion, how great a natural wonder was the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and the people of Utah learned that the state would have the greatest natural wonder in the world except for the unfortunate fact that a still greater one lay just across the border in Arizona. Therefore, it is requested that the item next following be considered as evidence to what extent a celebrated era can pass completely off the map and be totally forgotten, when comes another era with people whose interests do not run beyond its borders.

The latest act of the United States Forest service has been to name a Utah forest lying east from Vernal "Ashley Forest." How Ashley, preceding the Mormon immigration by twenty-three years, and all immigration by eighteen years, came into Utah to fight for its possession against Peter Skeen Ogden, a Britisher out of Montreal, who wished to drive the Americans from all territory west of the Rocky mountains, just as his company had driven the Astorians away from the Columbia, has already been considered. Consider now this treatment of Ashley by Powell, who at best can never hope to have anything like the place in history to which Ashley is entitled, in reports written of his exploration of the Green river country forty-five years after Ashley had traversed every foot of it.

On page 17 of the government document by which Powell's explorations became public he mentions that on June 2, 1869, while floating down the Green river, he was compelled to make a portage, and while following the trail around some falls, found on a high rock beside the trail the inscription: "Ashley, 1855." "The third figure is obscure," continues the observation, falling into the fatal error which prevented Powell from putting into history the story of an inscription which will yet become one of the most important incidents of Utah's early career—"the third figure is obscure, some of the party reading it 1835, some 1855." All that Powell knew of Ashley, whom Irving mentions as being so famous twenty years before him, was that James Baker, "an old-time mountaineer" (and at that time there were no genuine old-time mountaineers in active life), told him a story "about a party of men starting down the river, and Ashley was named as one. The story runs that the boat was swamped, and some of the party drowned in one of the canyons below." And a little farther along, on page 27, when the Powell party is written of as in the "Disaster Falls," a story of Ashley's fate is written. Thus it is remarkably set forth:

"As Ashley and his party were wrecked here, and as we have lost one of our boats at the same place, we adopt the name of Disaster falls for the scene of so much peril and loss.

"Though some of his companions were drowned, Ashley and one other survived the wreck, climbed the canyon wall and found their way across the Wasatch mountains to Great Salt Lake City, living chiefly on berries as they wandered through the unknown and difficult country. When they arrived at Salt Lake they were almost destitute of clothing and nearly starved. The Mormon people gave them food and clothing and employed them to work on the foundations of the Temple until they earned sufficient to enable them to leave the country. Of

their subsequent history I have no knowledge. It is possible they returned to the scene of the disaster, as a little creek entering the river below is known as Ashley's creek, and it is reported that he built a cabin and trapped on this river for one or two winters."

And this is all one of the best informed men of his time knew of one of the most famous trappers, who in their careless regard for records, let their work go into the shadows of obscurity while those who benefited by it did so often without knowing the source of their help. Could Powell but have known the truth he would have known that the mysterious figure he could not interpret was a 2 and not a 3 or a 5. The occasion of its being written there was one to which the world owes the discovery of the fact that the Green river ran to the Pacific and not to the Atlantic. Its very name comes from a subordinate of Ashley who was assigned it as his trapping station. To the fact of that shipwreck is due the naming of Provo City, of Cache Valley, of almost every fork of the Green and Bear rivers, the first practical use of South Pass, through which the Mormon immigration made its way across the Rocky mountains; the naming of Ogden City and Bear lake, and it gave rise to one of the greatest American fortunes made in a single season in the entire fur trade.

The furs were valued in the neighborhood of \$200,000. They were gathered by Britishers, and were sold in St. Louis by Americans, who to secure them raised the caches of Peter Skeen Ogden in Willow valley, and ever thereafter referred to the valley as Cache valley, while the origin of the name was to be explained, generations later, as being due because of the facilities offered to "cache goods by early trappers."

Since the previous article was written on Ashley's affairs in Utah, the writer's attention has been drawn to a "History of the Fur Trade" by Henry M. Chittenden. From it a comprehensive view of the origin of the movement which brought trappers to the mountains can be secured. Ashley began Anglo-Saxon history for this section of the country by an advertisement in the Missouri Republican of March 20, 1822. It read:

"To enterprising young men—he subscriber wishes to engage 100 young men to ascend the Missouri river to its source, there to be employed for one, two, or three years. For particulars enquire of Major Andrew Henry, near the lead mines in the county of Washington, who will ascend with and command the party, or to the subscriber, near St. Louis.

(Signed) WILLIAM H. ASHLEY."

Of the "enterprising young men" brought together by this advertisement, western history is familiar with many through the fact that their names survive in geography, even if every other item of their history has been overlooked. There was Jim Bridger, whose Fort Bridger, built in 1843, not as a trapper station, but to catch immigrant trade on the Oregon trail, then forming as a transcontinental highway, marks as surely the end of the trapping era in the mountains as the advertisement quoted above, marks its beginning. There was Etienne Provost, the man who discovered South Pass, and who, though surviving one of the most cruel Indian massacres in frontier history, at the mouth of the river flowing past Mount Timpanogas into Utah lake, gave to it his name, which, slightly abbreviated, it still bears, in spite of various ingenious explanations of the name's origin. There was Jedediah Smith, who first of all white men crossed the Sierra Nevada mountains and explored the route from Great Salt Lake to Los Angeles, known for a decade as "Smith's trail," and then two decades later as the "Mormon trail." There was James Beckwith, a famous tale teller of the mountains, from whom Beckwith plateau along the

Green river takes its name. There was Andrew Henry, from whom Henry's lake is named and Henry's fork of the Green river; Edward Rose, who later became famous as a Crow chieftain; Mike Finch, the notorious gun man, who was fond of exhibiting his skill in frontier saloons; Hugh Glass, whose adventures with a grizzly have become a frontier classic; and David Jackson, remembered in the name of Jackson Hole, the most disreputable of all mountain valleys and the place where desperado life has lingered longest after extinction elsewhere.

Besides accomplishing the opening of Great Salt Lake valley to the world, Ashley and his men explored the Platte, the Green, the Yellowstone, the Bear and the Snake rivers; named Independence rock, the most famous western landmark; were the first to cross the continent over the southwest trail, and brought the first wheeled vehicle over the Oregon trail—a six-pounder cannon, brought out in 1826, destined to grace Fort Ashley, built in 1825 in Utah valley. This group of traders from 1822 to 1829 lost 70 men, none of them by natural death, but all given as the toll that has ever accompanied the finding of new routes and the discovery of unknown regions. They lost \$100,000 in property from looting Indians, accidents, and the treacherous Missouri waters, but they made in furs from the mountains 1,000 packs of beaver, worth \$500,000, and all of this wealth was converted into cash at St. Louis, where the telling of their stories brought hundreds of competitors into the mountain district, and attracted the rivalry of John Jacob Astor and his powerful American Fur Company, whose western branch, with headquarters at St. Louis, made most of the early Missouri history, including the introduction of the steamboat as successor to the older keel boats in which Ashley floated to and from his rich Utah possessions.

To follow Ashley through his beginnings in the fur trade to the wonderful good fortune which overtook him in Willow valley when its name was changed to Cache, would be too long a story for this paper. From the point of beginning in 1822, there is a story of struggles and heavy losses until 1824, when Ashley turned his attention to the mountains. Breaking up a large party on the upper Missouri waters, which in 1822 had gone up the Yellowstone a short distance from its mouth, and in 1823 had fought a historic Indian battle before the Aricara villages, he sent them in various directions to trap, with orders to meet in the summer of 1825 at an appointed place of rendezvous in the Green River valley. Etienne Provost was sent off to the southwest, while Ashley himself set out down the Green river, which was then thought to run to the Atlantic. Provost came south to Utah lake, through Great Salt Lake valley, and there found a band of Snake Indians, under the leadership of Mauvais Gauche, an Indian much hated in the west from that time on, and unsuccessfully hunted for the sake of his head until 1834. Provost was induced to smoke the calumet of peace with him, and while he and his men were seated in a circle, with the Indian braves on the shore of Provo river the Indians suddenly threw back their blankets and flew at the white men with tomahawks and scalping knives. Provost, a powerful man, and four others escaped, while fifteen, according to an account by Ferris, and seventeen, according to an official record made by Provost to Indian commissioners, were killed. Provost then started east, and succeeded in intercepting Ashley, who had floated down the Green river to the point where he was wrecked near Ashley fork, of present day geography. The united parties, in solving the problem of finding a route back to the Missouri, decided to retrace their steps back into Utah valley, then north across Salt Lake valley, into Willow valley, through which Bridger the year before had fol-