

THE TRAIL OF BLEACHED BONES By IKE RUSSELL

Take the word of the Salt Lake Route for it, as given in a book of the route published under the editorship of Douglas White, just after the road was completed, and the "Mormon" trail to Los Angeles will be the theme described in treating the route's trail-blazers.

Consider the word of the older available Utah histories, and there will be seldom if ever a suggestion that any other party than that under Rich and Lyman, which settled San Bernardino in 1851, was a "trail-blazer" along the route. In fact, the survivors of the San Bernardino colonization wear "trail-blazer" badges furnished by Senator W. A. Clark as a token of his regard for them.

In this series on the Great Basin pathfinder, it has already been considered how Etienne Provest discovered the South Pass, and sent General Ashley out of Utah, back through it with the Ogden furs in 1825, and how Ashley discovered that the Green river went to the Pacific in that same year, and has only just been given his credit, in having the Ashley forest named after him this summer.

This paper takes up the trail to Los Angeles, and the most shabbily treated of all the early Utah inhabitants and explorers. And here it should be explained that no blame attaches to anyone, that the dust of forgetfulness has fallen over those whose exploits were the most hardy, and brought the greatest results in attracting followers towards the paths they made. We saw before how so great a government explorer as Major Powell knew totally nothing of what Ashley had done in the river he voyaged on, two decades before this time. The thing that worked to the neglect of the subject of this paper, Jedediah S. Smith, was that interest, except in a very limited circle, did not attach to this country on the part of the nation now governing it. When later that interest was found to be awake, the men who had hallooed to it, and prodded it, and stirred it into conscious activity, were perhaps too far out on the frontier to be given notice, or fell, as did Jedediah Smith, with a Comanche's arrow in his back, just at the beginning of a national interest in his work.

In the conception of Utah as a barren wilderness to which people, "except a few straggling hunters and trappers," first came in 1847, the first step to discredit the early inhabitants is taken.

With this view in mind it was difficult for the writer to gather a conception of the trail from southern Utah to Los Angeles as one on which an extensive interstate traffic had existed for twenty years before 1847, a trail which Fremont found in 1843, nine years before it was "path-found" by the first party given recognition, to be a long trail of bleached and bleaching bones, noting the route of the Santa Fe caravans, bound for the California missions, and Mexican settlements. The oldest of them were black with decay. The newest in his day were from his exhausted horses, and even from a good many of his company who fell too far in the rear and were murdered by the Indians who infested it.

The trouble was not in Utah, or a spirit of unfairness here to those deserving credit. It was a national trouble, that everywhere now is being adjusted. Jedediah Smith's explorations between Great Salt Lake and Los Angeles brought him first across the Sierra Nevada mountains, curiously enough from east to west. The records of what he did, come to the historian with patient digging, and each year more and more of them are coming to light. They never would have fallen into forgotten neglect, except that the trail seemed to have no importance to America at the time, and when the consciousness of this importance came to the people, the records were not easy to get at and they seized the most available, honored the first trail-blazers they could locate, and left the earlier work buried deep in the archives of the fur trade, from which historians are now digging it up. Fortunately for this chapter of Utah's history, Henry M. Chittenden has dug through the St. Louis archives, waded through the files of the St. Louis papers, and gone through the government reports and maps made during the era when the actual discoveries were being made.

His work it is which makes it possible to tell of Jedediah Smith in any complete way, and if ever a historical society is formed in Utah to recreate these early characters and read them permanently into the record, it will find Jedediah Smith the most shabbily treated of all of them, and with a record that places his work of the greatest importance.

Because one of his men was severely wounded on its banks, and killed a little farther on, the Virgin river carries its name. Because he made his camp upon the stream after being ordered out

of California by the Mexican governor, the American river is still known in history with a name dating to that incident. He it was who first carried a fear of the Americans into the hearts of the placid Mexican Californians. He was one of the first great mountaineers to meet his death. The others lived on. Jim Bridger, his companion, outlived the trapper era, and the trader era as well, and worked through the era of government scouting, to end up as a respectable settlement farmer on a quiet, home-like farm. Therefore, to some extent he came into contact with army officers, literary men, and newspaper reporters, so that some record of his work came into general literature.

The writer's interest in the trapping and exploring era commenced with an explanation from John Hunt, son of Jefferson Hunt, who guided the Mormon settlers to San Bernardino in 1851, that the party had a map of the route given them by the mountaineers. The records of Kit Carson showed with very little reading that the conception of him as a wild, romantic half-Indian was wrong, and of the trappers as isolated individuals, roaming at random, and living corrupt, licentious lives, was equally wrong. It was not until the days of Buffalo Bill and the pony express that the frontiersman known to literature began to develop. To his era the hard drinking, the careless shooting, and the gun-protected card game belonged. It was thirty years before they came that the explorers did their work and went their way. And men whom we remember as "mountaineers" did not pack a little merchandise on their back. They headed great companies. Their pack animals numbered into the hundreds. They represented great fortunes put into commerce for Indian trade, and maintained a discipline that would have fitted these men for the greater roles in any variation of life's drama. General Ashley, for instance, lost \$10,000 in merchandise when a single one of his fleet of boats sank in the Mississippi.

Bancroft, it is true, does not picture them this way. But, however formidable Bancroft's many volumes of history may look from the outside, the more one has to do with them inside the covers, the less he wants to have. With an air sniffing superiority, Bancroft seemed to burn with a desire to belittle every man who had preceded him into the West, and to pre-empt the whole section for himself alone. To get a view point on the man, a choice bit of reading

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