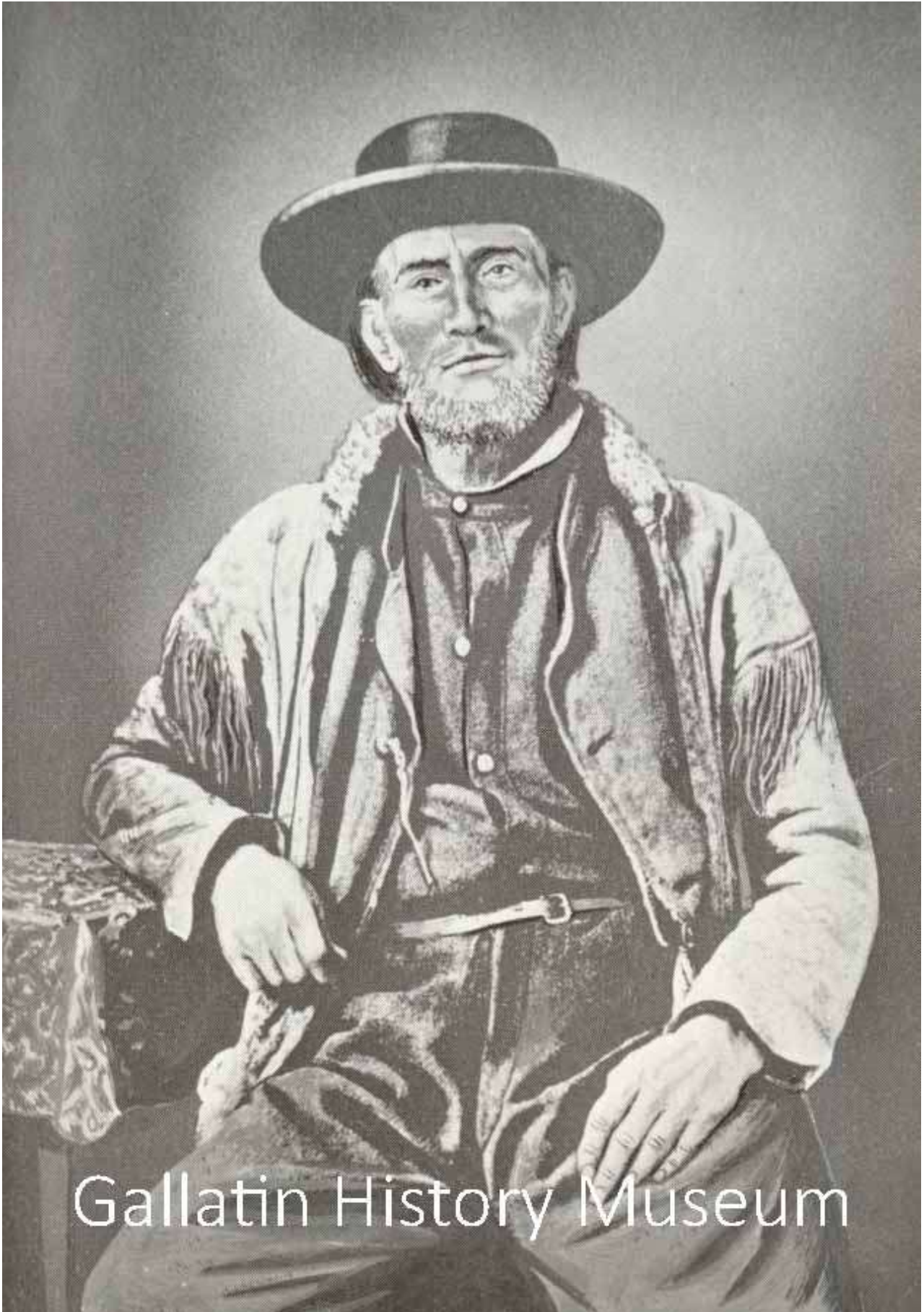


Jim Bridger



Gallatin History Museum

Famous Frontiersman Blazed Bridger Trail

The most famous frontiersman to blaze a trail into what is now Montana was said to be Jim Bridger, a hardy mountaineer who led his first party over the divide in the early 1860's.

It was after him that Gallatin County's beautiful Bridger mountains, canyon and creek were named.

Many times after his first trip, Jim Bridger guided wagon trains of hardy pioneers over the same route. He piloted the first one into Bozeman on July 6, 1864.

How ran the Bridger Trail?

It left the main transcontinental route — the Oregon Trail — at a point on the North Fork of the Platte River, a little east of Wyoming's Independence Rock. Then it ran

northward, crossing tributaries of the Big Horn River, and entered Montana west of the Pryor Mountains in what is now Carbon County.

The route then swung in a northwesterly direction. Reaching the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, it hit that river at the mouth of Bridger Creek in what is now Sweetgrass County.

Then it proceeded along the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Shield's River, up this tributary and a western branch of the same and through Bridger Pass of the Bridger Mountain Range. It then led down Bridger Creek, through the Canyon and into Bozeman.

From here the route led in a southwesterly direction to Virginia City and Bannack.

Jim Bridger, Knew His W

OF ALL the hunters, trappers, traders and scouts who traveled over the Rocky mountain region and the Great Plains area during the last century, James Bridger probably covered a larger territory and was familiar with more country than any of them. While exploration was not his primary purpose, the services which he rendered to the country in that regard were notable. Bridger was the first white man to see the Great Salt lake. He discovered it in 1824. He visited the Yellowstone park region in 1830, the second white man to do so. The region had previously been crossed by John Colter, a trapper in the employ of Manuel Lisa about 1807, but Colter left no record of his trip.

Bridger's stories of the park were later found to be true. At the time they won for him no credit unless it be that which would attach to the title of a championship liar, which honor was accorded him all over the west as the result of his descriptions of the geysers, boiling springs and other wonders which he found there. Miffed at the lack of credence given his tales he really did tell some monster lies about the region to get even with those who refused to believe the truths he had told them.

Fort Bridger, historic fortification and trading post in southwestern Wyoming, was founded by Bridger in 1843. He long prior to that had found the south pass across the Rocky mountains and he opened the overland route to the Great Salt lake by way of Bridger pass. He acted as guide for the United States army exploring expedition under Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston and served Gen. G. M. Dodge as guide when the latter was making surveys for the Union Pacific railroad, as well as in Indian campaigns of 1865 and 1866.

Bridger many times paddled the length of most of Montana's rivers, and in the state's trails he left the imprint of his moccasined feet over many a weary mile. In the dome of the state capital at Helena is a painting of him as representing the typical trapper of the old west. Montana has a town and a creek named in his honor. These are, in a way, monuments to his memory. The only stone monument to him, is that at his grave in Kansas City, where his body was moved by General Dodge some time after his death at his farm near Santa Fe, Mo.

Born in Virginia

Bridger was born in Richmond, Va., March 17, 1804. He died in 1881. He was the son of a farmer who was also a tavern keeper and who had some knowledge of surveying. The family moved to St. Louis in 1812, and in that then booming world fur market, young Bridger received his early impressions and his early training. His mother died in 1816 and his father in 1817 and the youngster and his brothers and sisters were parceled out to live with relatives.

By the time that he was 13 years of age, young Bridger had acquired a wide knowledge of river trading with the Indians along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and the other rivers through Missouri and adjacent territory. He quit the traders for several years, however, and served an apprenticeship as a blacksmith, knowledge of which trade proved of great value to him during later years in the wilderness.

In 1822 he joined a party of trappers bound for the Three Forks of the Missouri in Montana. The group was in the employ of William H. Ashley and Andrew Henry, who financed it, and

was commanded by Henry, himself. Bridger's purpose in joining the expedition was to make enough money to send his sister to school. On the way up the Missouri river the boat was run into a snag below Fort Osage and the entire cargo of trading goods, valued at \$10,000, was lost. The crew escaped death or injury, however, and proceeded on their journey. The men were unable, however, to reach Three Forks. They wintered at the mouth of the Yellowstone.

The next spring Bridger was one of a party detached from the main group and which, under command of Etienne Provost, ascended the Yellowstone to the Powder river, and then went up Powder river crossing through south pass of the Rocky mountains to winter in the Cache valley in western Wyoming. It was while there that Bridger, to settle a bet, followed Bear river to the Great Salt lake, and became the first white man to see that body of water. A Spanish priest had heard the Indians talk of it many years before, but had himself only gotten within 60 miles of it at a point in what is now southern Utah.

Discovered Salt Lake

Bridger, returning to camp, told his comrades of having found a great body of salt water, and expressed the belief that it was an arm of the Pacific ocean. The Provost party went on to the lake and explored it in boats, and finding no outlet, established the fact that it was a lake. Provost established there for Ashley and Henry a fur trading post which became headquarters for trappers from all over the northwest. Bridger remained with Ashley and Henry until 1826. In that year Ashley and Henry sold to Smith, Jackson & Sublette. It was while on one of his many expeditions for that concern that Bridger entered the Yellowstone park region. After his return to civilization, finding that no one would believe the stories he told them of the wonders he had seen, he embarked upon a campaign of telling tales that were tales, and from that time was dated his reputation as the west's champion liar.

One of the stories he told was of an attempt to shoot an elk. He saw it grazing in what he thought was shooting distance, and fired at it. The animal continued to graze, paying no attention to his shot. He fired again after advancing upon it, but with the same result. He then clubbed his rifle and charged it, thinking to best it in personal encounter and ran against a glass wall, which, he said, proved to be a mountain of solid and crystal clear glass, upon the other side of which the elk continued to graze. Not only, he said, did the mountain prove to be of glass, but was of telescopic lense material and the elk, while appearing to be within rifle shot, was in reality 25 miles away.

In 1832 Bridger and Tom Fitzpatrick started on a trapping expedition. They were followed by two trappers named Vanderburg and Dripps, employed by the rival American Fur company. Bridger and Fitzpatrick, unable to outdistance them, lured them into the country of hostile Blackfeet Indians. Vanderburg was killed by the Indians and the remainder of the party fled into the country of the Pend d' Oreilles.

The party of Bridger and Fitzpatrick was also attacked by the Indians, however, and although they escaped, Bridger was seriously wounded. He was shot in the thigh with two arrows. In

attempting to remove them, the shaft of one of them came away and left the metal arrow head in Bridger's leg. It was not removed until three years later, when Dr. Marcus Whitman took it out at Walla Walla. In the meantime Bridger had traveled thousands of miles by trail and river.

Entered Business

In 1843 Bridger embarked in a business venture all by himself. He went to St. Louis and bought a stock of trading goods, and established Fort Bridger on Green river in southwestern Wyoming. He enjoyed an excellent trade there for some time, but eventually was harassed by the Mormons who had emigrated into Utah and was forced to move. When the United States troops were sent to Utah to enforce the federal laws among the Mormons, Bridger guided them. Later, in order to obtain winter quarters for the soldiers, the government bought the Mexican grant belonging to Bridger upon which Fort Bridger was located, and the fort itself. But Bridger never was paid for it. Eight years after his death his family was paid for the improvements, but no rent was ever paid, although the property was used for a long time by the government.

In 1850 Bridger led Captain Stansbury over the route which later became that of the pony express, the Overland Mail stage line and the Union Pacific railroad. In 1854 Bridger entered the services of Sir George Gore, English sportsman whom he met at Fort Laramie. He remained with Gore's hunting party as guide for two years, during which time they fared far and wide over the west in search of big game. Bridger left the party at Fort Berthold in Colorado and joined his family in Kansas City. In 1859 Bridger was employed as guide for the party of Capt. W. F. Reynolds on an exploring expedition up the Yellowstone river. In 1861 Bridger guided the Russell & Holladay expedition, seeking a stage route between Salt Lake and Denver. In 1862 he guided a government party across the plains to Utah. In 1865 he guided an army expedition from Fort Laramie against the Indians in the Powder river country. His last duty as a guide was for Gen. Phil Sheridan in an expedition against Indians in the southwest. During the years Bridger guided scores of emigrant trains into Montana over what is known as the Bridger trail, which, while not as short as the Bozeman trail, was claimed by Bridger to be safer from attack by Indians.

Married Three Times

Bridger was married three times, each time to an Indian woman. His first wife was the daughter of a Flathead chief. One of their daughters, Mary Ann, was sent to the Whitman school at Walla Walla and was killed in an Indian massacre when 11 years old. Another daughter, Josephine, and a son Felix, were sent to school at St. Louis. Felix served in the Civil war and died on the Bridger farm at Santa Fe, Mo., in 1876. There is no record as to what became of Josephine.

Bridger's second wife, whom he married after the death of the first, was a Ute. She died in 1849 after the birth of her second child. The infant, named Virginia, was brought up on buffalo milk, and when five years old was sent to a friend at St. Louis. When seven she was placed in a convent school. It was this daughter who cared for Bridger during the latter part of his life.

Bridger married his third wife, a Snake Indian, in 1850. It was this wife whom he established on the farm near Santa Fe, Mo., which he acquired as a home, after leaving Fort Bridger. He had two children by his last wife. When falling eyesight and advancing age forced Bridger to retire permanently to his farm, he spent much of his time trying to collect the sum owed him by the government for Fort Bridger, but without success during his lifetime.

During the 50 years that he spent

age, young Bridger had acquired a wide knowledge of river trading with the Indians along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and the other rivers through Missouri and adjacent territory. He quit the traders for several years, however, and served an apprenticeship as a blacksmith, knowledge of which trade proved of great value to him during later years in the wilderness.

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During the 50 years that he spent roaming over the west on foot, on horseback and in canoes, Jim Bridger visited every section of the country from Mexico to the Canadian border and from St. Louis to the Pacific ocean. His selection as the type for the typical trapper is amply justified.

11

Some descriptions of the Bridger Road
in Montana, made by W. W. Alderson in 1864.

~~xxxxxxx~~

Monday, June 27. Left Big Horn River and drove 7 miles.

Tuesday, June 28. At Gray Bull River about 9 a. m. Camped at night where road leaves Gray Bull.

Wednesday, June 29. Broke camp at 7 a. m. Drove late to Stinking Water. (Shoshone)

Thursday, June 30. Crossed at ford. Difficult fording. Drove ~~xxxxxxx~~ from river about 1 mile.

Friday, July 1. Laid over all day to rest teams

Saturday, July 2. Broke camp at 5:50 a. m. Drove over bluffs, camped at spring in valley

Sunday, July 3. Made ford on Clerk's Fork.

Monday, July 4. Forded river at 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ a. m. Drove over low bluffs to creek and corralled

Tuesday, July 5. Drove up creek (Rock Creek). Camped on branch about five miles from main creek.

Wednesday, July 6. Drove about 12 miles. Rough country.

Thursday, July 7. Over high hill. made 10 or 12 miles.

Friday, July 8. Broke camp at 7 a. m. Over hilly country 6 or 7 miles. Then drove to Rosebud. Laid over.

Saturday, July 9. Forded "Rosebud" very rough. Water high. We now pulled out from freight train, as they were moving too slow for us. Passed over high hills 6 or 8 miles. Then descended steep hill into ditto canyon. Down it about 10 miles, crossing the creek 40 times or more. This they called Bridger Canyon.

Sunday, July 10. Broke camp about 7 a. m. Down canyon crossing creek 13 times. Very rough. Came out about 9 a. m. Down to the Yellowstone River. Dined near two small creeks. Splendid grass to right of road. Good grass and land along the road in afternoon. Came to another trout stream. John caught 5. Made about 13 miles.

Monday, July 11. Forded stream. Down to river again. Nooned at ferry and ford. Ferryped wagon and horses. Drove up about miles and camped.

Tuesday, July 12. Broke camp at 7 a. m. Drove over bluffs down to Yellowstone again. Moved then over bluffs to North Forks (Shield's River) and camped.

Wednesday, July 13. Crossed creek. Left Bridger Road, took Jacob's Cut-off, now steep rocky hill. Dined on small stream flowing to South Forks. Struck in valley to go over the divide. Camped about midway.

Thursday, July 14. Broke camp at 7:15 a. m. Up one of the most beautiful and picturesque valleys the eye ever beheld, abounding in springs of clear water, flowers and grass in abundance. Fine pine timber on each side. Crossed the divide and then down to Gallatin Valley. Camped at the crossing of East Gallatin. (now Bozeman or Montana City)

Note: The Alderson Brothers had good teams, and except for a few days traveled in a small company and apparently traveled rapidly. I have briefed the diary from June 27 to July 9. Are they going too fast to go from Big Horn to Gray Bull to Shoshone and to Clark's Fork.

On July 9th is the "Rose Bud" the Stillwater? The Bridger Canyon appears to describe the present Bridger Creek road rather well.

10th. Forded stream. Would this be the Boulder?

11th. Ferryed wagon and horses. Bozeman seemed to have ferried or forded near Springdale, Munter's Hot Springs. Is this about right here?

They are still traveling fast.

13th and 14th over the divide from the Yellowstone to the Gallatin is also fast traveling, considering what the road must have been like, but probably only about 15 miles a day.

Stellar Scout Along the Bozeman Trail of Early West Was Jim Bridger; His Life And Times Full of Exciting Adventures

Of all the great personalities whose exploits in the development of western United States won them great fame a century ago, there was one who towered above the others. Although his name is still revered along the old Bozeman Trail in Montana, he is not widely known throughout the country. Buffalo Bill Cody and Kit Carson, exploiting the publicity value of their work, became public heroes. But not James Bridger, the stellar scout and frontiersman of them all.

Bridger was the teacher of Kit Carson. His explorations and discoveries and his detailed knowledge of the then trackless West, together with his integrity and intelligent reporting of scouting expeditions, made him one of the most valuable individuals in opening the West to habitation.

Unable to read or write, James Bridger's achievements nevertheless have been fully documented by personal letters which he dictated and which were written about him by persons on whom he made a lasting impression.

Bridger was born in Richmond, Virginia, on March 17, 1804. His parents gave up a tavern and farm to move to St. Louis in 1812. Bridger's training as a scout and guide began as the Territory of Missouri launched its campaign for statehood. At fourteen, he took temporary charge of a ferry boat run. He became a blacksmith's apprentice in St. Louis, then a village of 1,500 persons, resounding with the daily tales of pioneers, adventures and tough transients.

He became a trapper for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and led bands of men through the wilds of Montana, the Dakotas, Wyoming, Idaho and Utah. Indians were the greatest peril, attacking the white intruders in hordes of as many as 700, with 2,000 squaws and children assisting in the fighting and carrying the dead from the field. Bridger stopped a couple of Indian arrows and had a horse killed in one bloody battle.

In a letter dated December 30, 1841, Father P. J. De Smet, a Jesuit missionary, discussed the aftermath of these battles:

I expressed a desire to know the medicines used; they



JIM BRIDGER—This renowned explorer and guide of the early West was a man of great achievement. Today, as one looks north from the Winter Fair grounds, can be seen a permanent memento to this man—the Bridger range of mountains, and the Bridger canyon, by which he came to the Valley of the Gallatin.

his return reported his discovery. The fact of the water being salt induced the belief that it was an arm of the Pacific; and in the spring of 1826, four men went in skin boats around it to discover if any streams containing beaver were to be found emptying into it.

I went to Willow or Cache valley . . . and recollect their report that it was without outlet. . . . Both men are of strictest integrity and truthfulness. . . . James Bridger was the discoverer of the Great Salt Lake.

In a biographical sketch of Bridger by Major General Grenville M. Dodge, the latter reported that Bridger "was probably the first fur trader to make known the wonder of Yellowstone park. . . . Bridge talked about the Yellowstone lake and its surroundings to everyone he met and it was not his fault that the country was not explored and better known until the sixties. A small lake near the headwaters of the

United States, and established the first fur trading fort west of the Mississippi. Thus, it was his explorations that helped advance the American line into the wilderness and his fort that helped to secure it. He tells of this fort in a dictated letter addressed to Pierre Chotéau, Jr., in 1843:

I have established a small fort, with a blacksmith shop and a supply of iron in the roads of the Emigrants on Black Fork of Green River. . . . In coming here they are generally well supplied with money; but by the time they get here they are in need of all kinds of supplies. . . . The fort is a beautiful location on Black Fork, receiving fine fresh water from the snow on the Utah range. The streams are alive with mountain trout . . .

In the History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West, General H. M. Chittenden wrote: "The expedition of Lewis and Clark and the founding of Fort Bridger (Wyoming) determine the limits of a distinct period in Western history." Those two developments were "the beginning of the era of emigration into the far west."

Bridger was married three times and fathered five children. His wives were all Indian women. One of his daughters, whom Bridger fed on Buffalo milk when the mother died, cared for him in his old age. Twenty years or so after Bridger's death on July 17, 1881, the daughter, Mrs. Virginia Waschman, told of his declining years in a letter to his old friend, General Dodge:

In 1873 father's health began to fail him, so that he could not see good, and the only way that father could distinguish any person was by the sound of their voices.

I got father a good old horse, so that he could ride around. . . . The old faithful horse would guide him along, but at times father would draw the line wrong, and they would get lost in the woods. Sometimes father wanted to take a walk in the fields with old Sultan (his dog) by his side and came in hand to guide his way out to the wheat field. He would want to know

laughed at my question, replied laughing, "We apply nothing to our wounds, they close themselves." This recalled to me the reply of Captain Bridger in the past year. Being asked if the wounds had been long suppurating, he answered humorously, "In the mountains meat never spoils."

On one expedition, Bridger discovered the Great Salt Lake. The letter in which this historical fact was recorded was written by Robert Campbell, of St. Louis, well known for his acquaintances in the fur trade. Excerpts from that letter, written in reply to an inquiry from Lieutenant G. K. Warren of the U. S. Topographical Engineers, follow:

... as to who was the first discoverer of the Great Salt Lake.

... A party of beaver trappers who had ascended the Missouri with Henry and Ashley found themselves on Bear River in Cache (or Willow) valley ... in the winter of 1824 and 1825; and in discussing the course which Bear river ran, a bet was made between two of the party and James Bridger was elected to follow the course of the river where it passes through the mountain, and there he discovered the Great Salt Lake. He went to its margin and tasted the water and on

Yellowstone had been named Bridger lake." Further north at Bozeman are the Bridger mountains with which the famous western pioneer was familiar.

Bridger loved the land and returned often to gaze in silent awe at the scenic wonders, many of which he, first among the white men, had alone beheld.

It was Bridger and his trappers who developed the first great highway across the plains, which in the early days was called the Overland Trail, and was known later as the Oregon Trail. Heavy travel, passing over the trail, carved it into a grassless furrow often a hundred feet wide. The road made a tremendous impression on the Indians, as reported in a letter written by Father De Smet:

Our Indian companions who had never seen but the narrow hunting paths ... were filled with admiration on seeing this noble highway. ... They conceived a high idea of the "Countless White Nation," as they express it. They fancied that all had gone over that road, and that an immense void must exist in the land of the rising sun (back east).

Bridger bought some land from the Mexican government, in what is now Wyoming, before any of the country was ceded to the

how high the wheat was, and then father would go down on his knees and reach out his hands to feel for the wheat, and that was the way he passed his time.

Father at times wished he could see ... so he could go out back to see the mountains. Father spoke of you, and would say, "I wonder if General Dodge is alive or not; I would give anything in the world if I could see some of the old army officers once more to have a talk with them of olden times, but I know I will not be able to see any of my old-time mountain friends any more. I know my time is near."

The government had treated Bridger very badly. The army had purchased from him his Mexican land grant, but neither paid him for the property nor paid rent, and it was not until after his death (at the age of 77) that the courts awarded his heirs \$6,000.

They buried James Bridger on his farm, but in December, 1904, General Dodge erected a monument to his old friend in Mount Washington cemetery, Kansas City, Missouri. To that resting place they took the body of the great frontiersman—a gallant and genial guide, archetype of the strong, resourceful Western gentleman.

Billings Gazette

MAGAZINE

Section E
Sunday, March 14, 2004



TALL TALES TRUE

JIM BRIDGER, WHO REPORTED SEEING A MOUNTAIN OF GLASS AND FISH THAT SWAM OVER THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE, LEFT NAME AND FOOTPRINT ON THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST

By **JIM GRANSBERY**
Of The Gazette Staff

In the spring of 1804, the Corps of Discovery, under the leadership of William Clark and Meriwether Lewis, prepared to embark from St. Charles, Mo., on a multi-year exploration of the Louisiana Purchase, a huge expanse of North America bought by President Thomas Jefferson from the French. That same spring was born another explorer, Jim Bridger - mountain man, who would come to know the northern intermountain West better than any of his contemporaries.

He would be the first non-Indian to explore many of its rivers, plains and mountain passes, noting the flora and fauna that flourished in the uncharted land.

Some of his discoveries were so incredulous that he found the need to embellish the facts into "tall tales," stories to impress visitors and travelers who would employ his expertise as a guide over dangerous and unknown landscapes.

He told fables of a mountain of glass, of a place where fish could swim across the Continental Divide, of where water ran so fast, it heated itself by friction.

Tall tales, for sure. But many of Jim Bridger's were tall tales true.



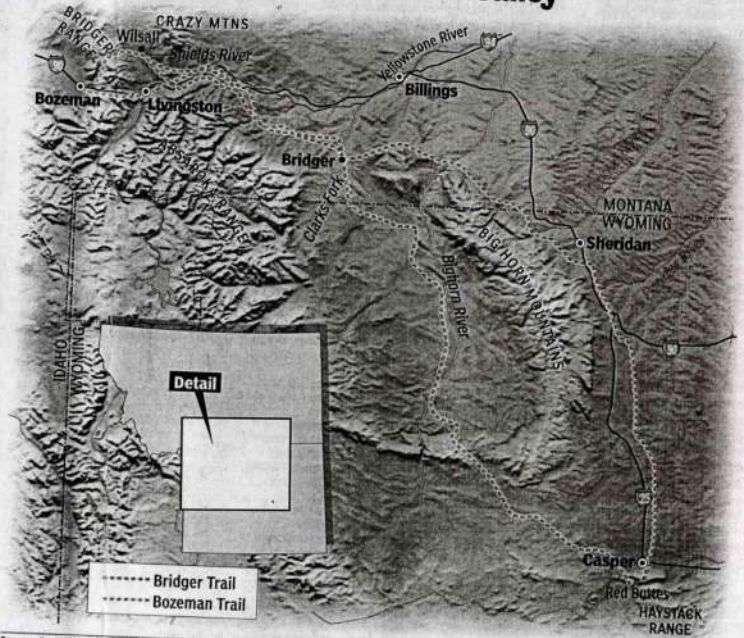
Jim Bridger was born in Virginia on St. Patrick's Day, 1804. In 1812, the family migrated west to St. Louis, where they had a farm and his father, a land surveyor, put his skills to work.

Before his 14th birthday, Bridger was orphaned. He was apprenticed to a blacksmith and remained there working his new-found trade until 1822 when he signed on as a trapper for the Henry-Ashley Fur Co.

The men who worked with the fur entrepreneurs were to ascend the Missouri River to its sources, trapping beaver for their pelts. There was a fortune to be made from the skins as no gentleman in Europe or America at that time could be without a top hat made of beaver.

Please see **Bridger, 3E**

Bridger's road to the Gallatin Valley



Source: Jim Bridger and His Road to the Gallatin Valley by John C. Russell

VICTOR ADY/Gazette Staff

Bridger

Continued from 1E

It was the beginning of Bridger's life as mountain man, the genesis of a legend.

During a trip upriver in the summer of 1823, Bridger's party was attacked by Indians. Two of the men were killed, another two wounded. An older member of the band, Hugh Glass, set out to hunt for food for the retreating trappers and got in a serious argument with a sow grizzly bear.

When Glass was found by his companions, he was near death, lacerated by fang and claw. Not wishing to be inhumane, the party decided to leave two of its members with Glass until he died, then they would catch up when they got up north, taking beaver.

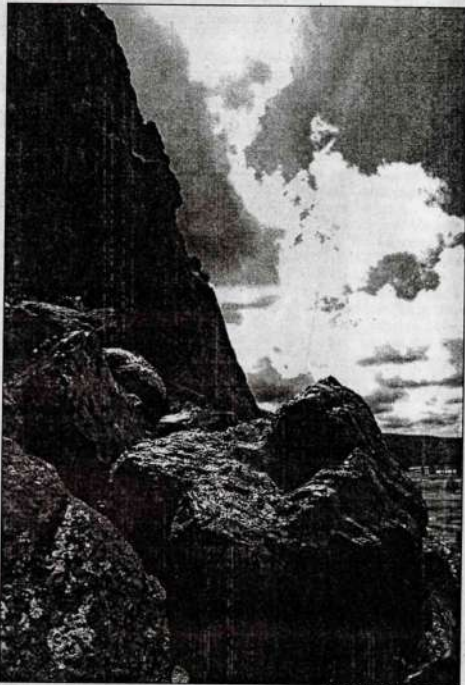
Bridger, then 19, along with a man named Fitzgerald, stayed with the torn Glass. After three days, with Glass showing no improvement and the imminent threat of Indian attack, the two men left him, knowing he would surely die, and took his personal weapons with them.

Bridger and Fitzgerald joined their companions on the Yellowstone River for the trapping season and their winter quarters on the Big Horn River.

In the dead of winter, Hugh Glass returned from the dead.

Miraculously surviving, his story itself the material of tall legend, Glass was on a journey of vengeance, to kill Bridger and Fitzgerald, who had abandoned him.

When confronted, Bridger came clean on the lie and waited for the end he knew he deserved. But Glass, apparently sensing the young man's shame and sorrow,



A century and a half after Jim Bridger's tall tale of the Glass Mountain, the Obsidian Cliff gleams in the sunlight in what is now Yellowstone National Park.

BOB ZELLAR/Gazette Staff

of his large goiter. The mountain man, Jedediah Smith, called him "Old Gabe" after the Archangel Gabriel.

In 1824, he and others discovered the South Pass in Wyoming, a less arduous path through the Rocky Mountains that connected to what would become the Oregon Trail.

sonable assumption, but the ocean was several mountain passes farther west. "Old Gabe" had found the Great Salt Lake: its valley would become a haven for the Mormons as they escaped persecution back in the United States.

wonderland produce several of his best stories.

J. Cecil Alter in his biography "Jim Bridger" relates that during Bridger's first visit to Yellowstone, he led his trappers through the Sylvan Pass to the canyons of the Yellowstone River. "He afterward told many friends there was a river that was hot at the bottom (Fire Hole), petrified trees still standing and a dark glass cliff (Obsidian Cliff)."

On his way south to Jackson Hole, he would find Two Ocean Creek, a place where fish can swim across the Continental Divide.

In later years, Bridger would embellish his discoveries.

In Vestal's version: "One day, Jim said, he sighted a bull elk, drew a careful telescope lens, and pulled the trigger. The elk did not even raise his head from the grass to show that he heard the rifle crack. Still the elk grazed undisturbed. A third and fourth shot did no better. Jim was close now. He grabbed his rifle by the barrel, raised it like a club and charged the elk. Suddenly he was brought up short, and found he had crashed into a mountain of clear glass. Through it he could still see the elk grazing.

"Stranger still, the mountain was not only of pure glass, but was a perfect telescope lens, and whereas, the elk seemed but a few yards off, it was in reality, twenty-five miles away."

Obsidian is volcanic glass, and the cliff in Yellowstone National Park is a popular stop for visitors to the park. So popular, that tourist access is restricted because so many were taking chunks of the shiny black material home. Indigenous peoples from across North America used the obsidian to make arrow and spear points for hundreds of

may cross the mountains in safety."

◆ ◆ ◆

For decades, Bridger explored, guided, trapped, sold goods to travelers. He scouted for the Army and wagon trains making their way to the Promised Lands of the Oregon, California, Utah and Montana. He provided provisions for the ill-fated Donner Party headed for the Golden State. Trapped by snows in the high Sierras, many of the party died from cold and starvation. Some survived by eating the deceased.

Bridger was the personal tour leader for the eccentric Irish nobleman Sir George Gore, of Sligo. The hunting expedition in 1855 on the plains of now eastern Montana, was of epic proportions. Gore's retinue included at least 50. Vestal reports that the entourage included "secretaries, stewards, cooks, flymakers, dog tenders, hunters, servants," besides a string of saddle horses and hounds galore.

The taking of hundreds of animals as trophies, "enough to stock a half dozen museums," left the Indians stunned by the waste.

But Bridger enjoyed the company of the knight; the Irishman reciprocated. At night around the campfire, Gore would read Shakespeare to the mountain man.

Margaret Carrington, in her "Absaraka Home of the Crows" observed Bridger at the Laramie Peace Commission: "He cannot read, but enjoys reading. He was charmed by Shakespeare; but doubted the Bible story of Samson's tying foxes by the tails, and with firebrands burning the wheat of the Philistines...The murder of the two princes in

Bozeman Trail.

Bridger's track stayed west of the Bighorn Mountains, coming north through the Bighorn Basin, passing between the Pryor Mountains on the east and the Beartooths to the west.

A small creek, just south of Bridger, Mont., bears his name. There his path crossed the Clarks Fork River. The trail bears to the northwest, crossing the Yellowstone, and moving up the Shields River to near present-day Clyde Park. It then goes directly west up Brackett Creek to the base of the Bridger Mountain Range, then turns south and into the Gallatin Valley at Bozeman.

Even though it was less arduous and safer, the route never became as well known as the Bozeman Trail.

In the late 1890s, a miners settlement called Stringtown developed where Bridger's trail crossed the Clarks Fork. In 1898, it became Bridger. It was formally established in 1907.

Each summer, on the third weekend in July, residents of Bridger and Carbon County celebrate the old trapper's exploits. A marker dedicated in 1935 remains in the city park. A steel sculpture, erected in 1976, welcomes visitors arriving from the south.

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In the late 1860s, his eyesight failing, Bridger retired to a farm outside Kansas City, Mo. There, looked after by a daughter, he lived in retirement, longing for the days in the mountains where a man could see farther than elsewhere.

By 1875, he was blind. On July 17, 1881, his steel gray eyes closed forever. He is buried in Mount Washington Cemetery in Kansas

did not take his life.

Later Glass went in search of Fitzgerald, who had left the trapping party and gone down the Missouri River to Fort Atkinson.

The reprieve left Bridger a changed man; for the rest of his life he would look out for others, as friend and as hired guide. It put steel behind his steely gray eyes.

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According to biographer Grenville Dodge, Bridger full-grown was "over six feet tall, spare, straight as an arrow, agile, rawboned and of powerful frame, eyes gray, hair brown...expression mild and manners agreeable. He was hospitable and generous and was always trusted and respected."

Among the Indians, he was known as "Big Throat" because

That winter, he bull-boated into the Great Salt Lake.

In camp with a group of trappers, an argument ensued over where the Bear River, which rises in present southeast Idaho, went.

Bridger agreed to find out. He killed a buffalo and stretched its hide over a willow frame work. In what resembled "a leather tub," according to biographer Stanley Vestal, Bridger took off down the canyon. At the bottom of the mountains, he traveled another 25 miles.

Vestal relates, "There, finding his craft more buoyant than it had been in the river, Bridger dipped up some of the water, tasted it. It was brine!"

On his return to camp, his companions heard his tale of finding a large body of salt water.

They assured him he had found the Pacific Ocean. A rea-

In 1825, Bridger would wander into what is now Yellowstone Park.

The Clark expedition had ignored the source of the Yellowstone River in the summer of 1806. In a hurry to rendezvous with Lewis, who was going down the Missouri to its confluence with the Yellowstone in present-day North Dakota, a few miles east of the Montana border, Clark chose not to seek where it began.

A member of his group, John Colter, would return alone to explore the land of mud pots, boiling springs and geysers. "Colter's Hell" it would be called in frontier lore. Few, if any, gave Colter's stories credence, although among the Crow, the area's wonders were well known.

Bridger's trip through this

Bridger's story of Two Ocean Creek was verified as early as 1836 and by an Army mapping party in 1859.

Mark H. Brown in his "The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone" tells this story put down by one of Bridger's friends. The great explorer was, himself, illiterate.

"Waters from the melting snow on Yount Peak, between the Tetons and the Absarokas, run down into a little valley where...it divides equally one east running West and the other East thus bidding adieu to each other bound for the Pacific and the other for the Atlantic ocean. Here trout of 12 inches in length

tion."

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Bridger left his footprint everywhere and his name graces the topographical maps of the West. He provided an alternate trail to the gold fields of the Treasure State. A trail, creek, lake and mountain range bears his name and a small Montana town celebrates his courage and wisdom every summer.

In 1864, with emigrants headed for Virginia City and the Gallatin Valley, Bridger knew of a route to the Yellowstone River, an alternate to the better-known

by Maj. Gen. Grenville Dodge honors his accomplishments.

In more modern times he was honored with a song:

*Let's drink to ol' Jim Bridger
Yes, lift your glasses high.
As long as there's a USA
Don't let his memory die.
That he was making history
Never once occurred to him.
But I doubt if we'd been here
If it weren't for men like Jim.*

Jim Bridger - recorded by Johnny Horton

The Man Who Knew "Jim" Bridger



OF the thousands who go to Mount Washington cemetery, in sorrow bound or bent upon discovery, few halt as they pass a gray granite boulder monument on the main road running north and south, at the little creek, where they might read the name:

JAMES BRIDGER
1804 1881

The Union Pacific railroad has the name on its founders' registry. Few men have mightier monuments than this name James Bridger. It would be gilding gold to amplify the legend cut deep in that everlasting stone, cut there by order of one of the greatest railroad builders who ever surveyed a horizon, Gen. Granville M. Dodge. For James Bridger never stepped one foot before the other that he was not pioneering in the gigantic West, the West that is the granary of the world, the West that feeds the flocks and the herds of the land.

James Bridger was buried in Kansas City's cemetery because James Bridger's home was in Kansas City. It can be seen today, if one cares to look to the left just after climbing the hill from the new-old grist mill at Dallas. As heedless as are the thousands who languidly or tearfully travel the beautiful grounds of Mount Washington cemetery are those tens of thousands who pass the Santa Fe marker at the first settlement south of the old mill, whose name none of them know.

Little Santa Fe is correct, and little enough it is now, but it had as many as 100 to 250 wagons and teams and their attendants in the '50s and '60s. Little Santa Fe was quite a place when Jim Bridger lived there. Richard Moore, whose great arms and hands and legs wrestled with the tons of yoke irons, and wagon wheels, and horse shoes, and king bolts, and whiffletree hooks and everything else emigrant trainmasters had to do with about a blacksmith shop, yet lives there. If the man and the machine, to paraphrase slightly, would halt at the red-stone boulder and look toward the third house on the north side the road he might see Richard Holmes sitting there as he did a few days ago, under a cherry tree, hale and hearty but "not going about much," mainly because he does not have to.

"I knew Jim well," said Mr. Holmes, "and I never knew a better. He was a tall, springy, broad shouldered fellow. We lived neighbor for fifteen or twenty years. If that big red barn was out of the way I could show you his house

As soon as winter broke we would see Jim hook up and drive west. Then we saw him no more till the early winter. He would be out conducting emigrant trains along the Republican Valley and scouting for the government or the railroads."

HE WAS ALWAYS "JIM."

"Jim," Mr. Holmes called this American Livingstone. "Jim" everybody else whoever spoke or wrote—few enough—called him. Stanley and Livingstone were what Artemus Ward called "educated cusses." Bridger never learned from books. He could not write. But he could draw. If you were permitted to run through the files of the Union Pacific railroad you would find this letter:

Records show that in 1855, before there were any railroads west of the Mississippi River, in the conversation with the editor of a Kansas City newspaper, question was brought up how a railroad could cross the Rocky Mountains. Jim Bridger suggested a way through Antelope Pass, Laramie Plains and the Green River country. He picked up a piece of old straw paper and, with a blunted pencil, drew a rough sketch of a pass through the mountains. This was kept by the editor for a great many years.

The Union Pacific followed that very route. Gen. Zebulon Pike discovered a tremendous mountain and for his honor they called it Pike's Peak. But Pike's Peak is a barrier. Jim Bridger found a road all the way to the great Salt Lake. No barrier ever interested this old settler; he was a pathfinder. Any man with a pound of freight to ship to or from the Pacific would not take a million Pike's Peaks for "Bridger's Pass," through which he led Gen. Granville M. Dodge's pioneers, who with transit and ax and shovel and ties and rails knitted the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Bridger discovered the Yellowstone Park, and when he told of the geysers was branded "the greatest liar on earth." And the young fellow was only telling the truth. When he told of the salt waters of an enormous desert lake he was branded a bigger liar than ever. When he got home to Little Santa Fe, according to Mr. Moore, he would meet the same guffaw. Nobody believed his Old Faithful stories. They believed his Indian fight yarns, though, because all of them were going through the same experience.

POSTERITY LOST TO HISTORY.

"He married a Blackfoot Indian," says Mr. Moore, "and she was a queer sort of a person. She looked like any other Indian. Jim was good to her. They had three young ones. You never could find her around the house. As soon as Jim would head West, his woman would start camping out. I reckon she slept in the house, but if ever we wanted her we had to go out into the timber, down by the creek and holler for her. She was an Indian, all right."

"What became of her?"
"Nobody ever knew. Leastwise I never could tell. One of her boys was simple."

This "woman" is worth telling about. Bridger was captured by some Indians for a fist fight with one of the band after a truce. Being then 18 or 20 years old he was a good looking chap. An Indian girl like him, slipped into his tent the night of his capture and cut his thongs, thus freeing him. Jim made his escape under cover of the night and that summer found the girl and married her. He never had any other wife. That is she whom Mr. Moore says was Jim Bridger's "woman," who would not stay around the house when Jim was away.

In a serial recently completed in the Saturday Evening Post, "The Covered Wagon," this and one other squaw are referred to and Jim Bridger is portrayed as a drinking man. In one chapter he and another scout have a drinking bout, which they wind up with a shooting match. Each aims at an object upon his friend's bared head. The work is neat.

"Jim was an accurate shot, all right."

says Mr. Holmes, "but we never knew him to drink. We had three saloons here, and all the drink a train could carry. The Indians were paid off here, and that brought in liquor by the eastern rail. Jim would hang around, and once in a while he would take a nip, but that

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was all. He played poker mostly—and I know myself he played a good game," the old blacksmith laughingly recounts.

REMEMBERS WHEN "JIM DIED."

According to the Times of 1881 Bridger died in his seventy-seventh year on his farm near Little Santa Fe, and

was buried in a lot near Martin City. Mr. Moore remembers the day Jim died, but did not attend the funeral. What was the use of going to Jim Bridger's funeral? He was just a trapper. But General Dodge's monument in Mt. Washington Cemetery, and official records say

that Pike and Fremont and Livingstone and Stanley and even Cecil Rhodes did no such wonderful discovery work. Anyhow, Mr. Moore did not bother to ride north a piece to the next farm, where old Jim lay dead. He had been "po'ly for nigh three years, and had

not known much about anything in particular," Mr. Moore explains.

If the community did not pay much attention to the death of Bridger, the builders of the Union Pacific railroad did, for they decided that a man who had taken such an important part in opening the West must have a marked grave.

So General Dodge sent an ambassador to Jim's little grave, near Martin City, and had the body taken up, put into an enduring casket, and deposited in one of the most beautiful of Kansas City's cemeteries, and there put at his head a boulder, a monument that a captain of hosts might strive to earn.