



*In this etching, a lone trapper crosses a cold stream. What can you learn about a trapper's interaction with Indians and other aspects of his lifestyle by examining the art?*

*A trap meant death to beavers, who were valuable for their soft, thick fur pelts.*

## Mountain Men

Dominguez and Escalante came into Utah almost by accident. Fur trappers, on the other hand, came with a clear purpose. In the early 1800s, a few fur trappers followed Indian trails across the Rockies into Oregon. They traded with the Indians, exchanging metal objects and blankets for furs. Soon other trappers

came and started trapping furs. As they left the Great Plains to trap in the mountains, they became known as mountain men. They were employees of American, British, or Mexican fur companies. The company traders took the *pelts* to St. Louis to sell. Most of the fur eventually ended up across the ocean in Europe.

About 3,000 men, along with some women and children, went west to trap. They dressed like the Indians in shirts and trousers made of leather. Porcupine quills sometimes decorated their shirts. Around his neck a trapper hung a "possibles sack." Inside the sack was a mold to make bullets, a knife, flint, a tin cup, and other useful items. When game was plentiful, the trappers ate raw buffalo liver and feasted on buffalo steaks roasted over an open fire. During lean times, the trappers lived off the land as well as they could.



# Rendezvous!

Through the fall, winter, and spring, the trappers tended their traps. They had too many furs to carry with them, so they often dug a hole, hid the furs, and covered the hole with dirt, large rocks, and brush. Such a hole was called a **cache**. In July, trappers came out of the wilderness and **retrieved** their furs from the caches. They met Indian men, women, and children, and other fur traders and their families at a place chosen the year before. They called the events a **rendezvous** (RAHN·day·VOO).

For the trappers, traders, and Indians, the rendezvous was an important time. The rendezvous was usually managed by a large fur-trading company. The company and the mountain men **bartered**, or traded, furs for supplies. The rendezvous was a wild event. One trapper described it as a time of “mirth, songs, dancing, shouting, trading, running, jumping, singing, racing, target-shooting, yarns, [and] frolic.”

After the first day of having fun, the men bargained with the traders from large fur companies. The men usually got a good price for their furs. Thick beaver

*At this rendezvous near the Green River in Wyoming, trappers and Indians sold furs to owners of large fur companies. What aspects of trapper and Indian life are shown in the painting?*

pelts often sold for about \$6–\$10 each. Today that would be the equivalent of about \$100. But the traders charged high prices for flour, bullets, tobacco, knives, sugar, coffee, and other supplies they had hauled to the rendezvous.

## Cache Valley

Most of the rendezvous sites were in Wyoming. However, six of the sixteen rendezvous were held outside the United States on land claimed by Mexico. This region included today’s Utah.

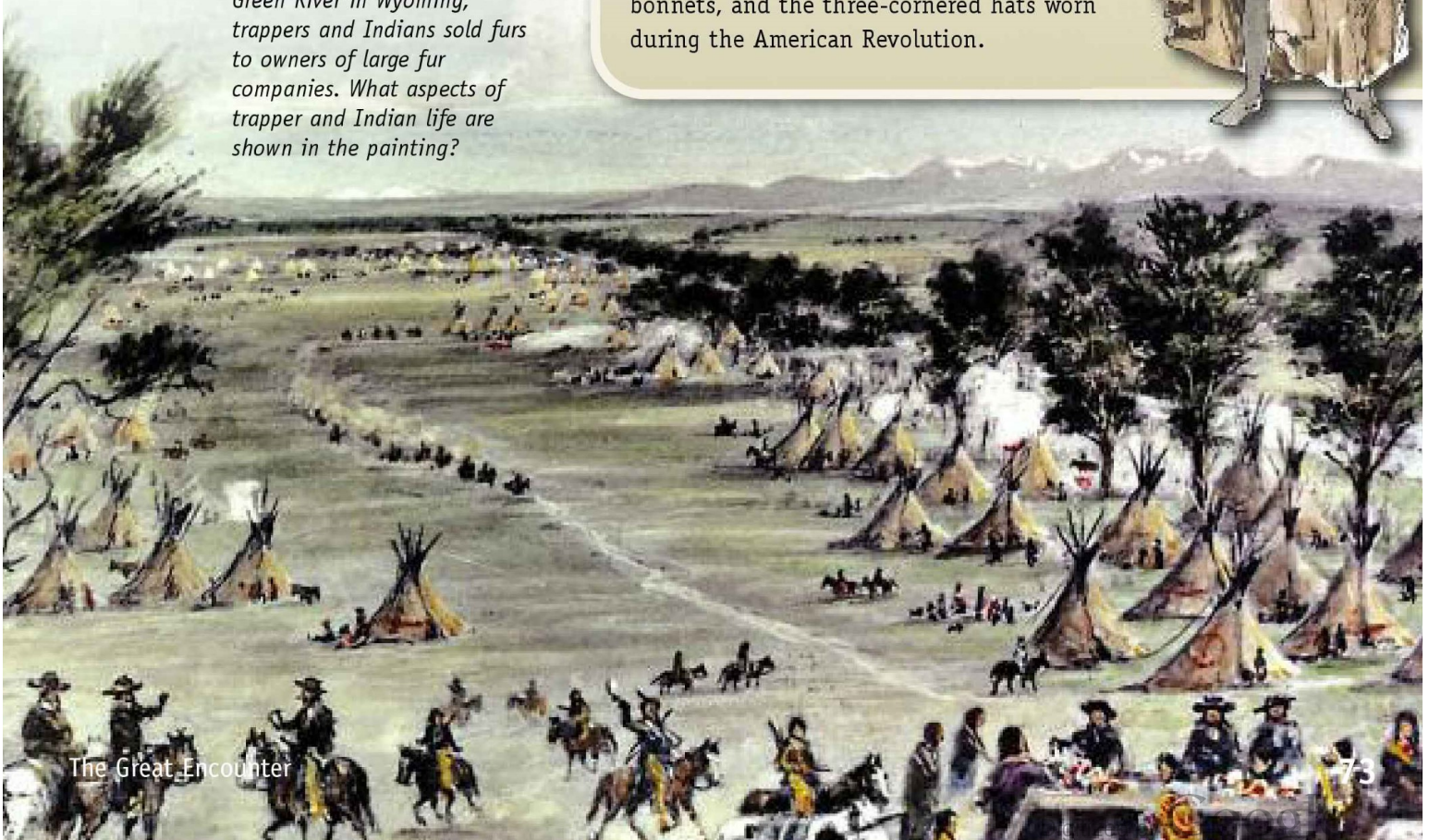
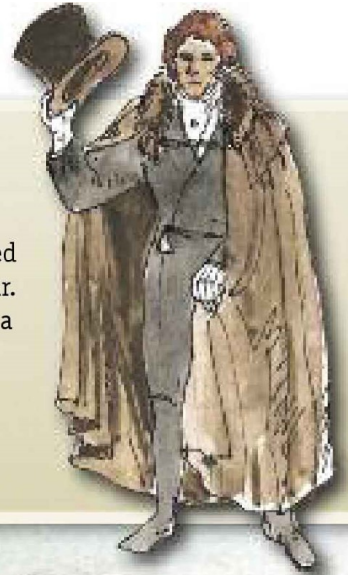
Cache Valley, home of the Shoshone, was one of the sites. It got its name because it was a place trappers used to cache their supplies. Can you visualize a rendezvous of hundreds of campsites, maybe 500 mountain men, one or two thousand Indians, and thousands of horses in beautiful Cache Valley?



*A pelt is the animal skin with the fur still attached.*

## Beaver Hats

In the early 1800s, fashionable Europeans and people in the eastern part of the United States wore tall felt hats made of beaver fur. Hat makers used the short-haired fur from a beaver’s belly to produce the soft felt. The hats came in all shapes—top hats, felt bonnets, and the three-cornered hats worn during the American Revolution.



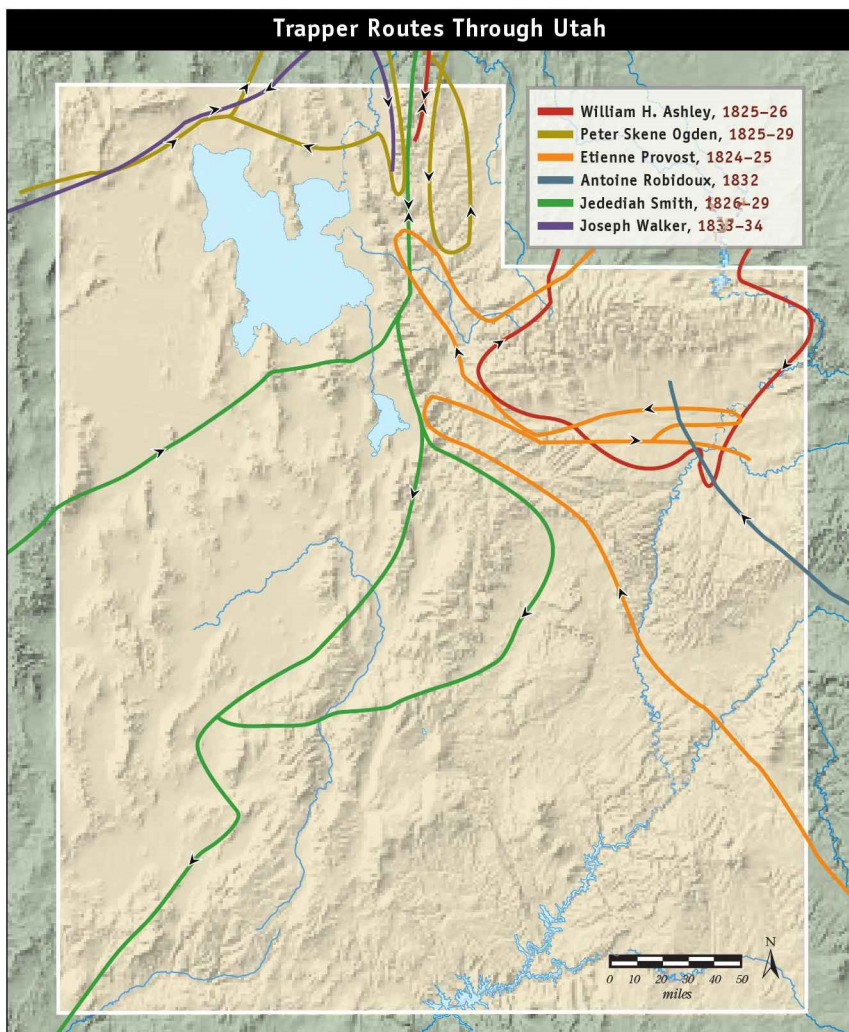
# Indian-Trapper Conflict

Many times the Indian people were friendly to the trappers and served as guides along the rivers and trails. They sometimes let the trappers spend the winters in their lodges, and some Indian women married trappers. Sometimes, however, Indian people did not want the trappers on their land, disturbing their way of life. To drive the trappers off their land, Indians attacked them and took their horses and furs.

The story of the mountain men is a complex one. Historians now see the subject differently. For a long time, historians mostly saw the story of the mountain men in very positive terms. They saw the fur trade as an episode in "The Winning of the West."

Now, historians write about the costs, not just the benefits. They talk about not only what it meant for whites, but what it

*Choose one of the trapper routes on the map, and then read about that trapper on the following pages. Who came closest to your town?*



meant for American Indians. They see trapping as a money-making venture by men with no particular love of nature or respect for Indian ways.

Mountain men were seen as heroes in their time, but today we see that they represented the best and the worst in people. They were brave, hardworking men. However, they often did not understand American Indians. Instead of respecting them, many trappers often saw Indians as people in the way, or people to be used to help the trappers obtain wealth.

## What do you think?

Is it wrong if earning a living harms or changes the lifestyle of other people? Choose a point of view from the text above. Can you defend your point of view?

## Trapping Companies

Two large fur trapping companies sent trappers to Utah. Other trappers also came and worked alone or in groups.

1. British trappers from the **Hudson's Bay Company** were first. They followed the Bear River to Bear Lake and then into Cache Valley. Later they went down into what is now the Ogden Valley. **Peter Skene Ogden** worked for this group.
2. Americans who worked for the **Ashley-Henry Fur Company** were next. They found the Green River and other places in Wyoming loaded with beavers. Ashley directed the first supply caravan to the mountains at a place where all of the trappers could buy supplies and sell their pelts. Ashley's men then sent the pelts to St. Louis. It was the first of 16 annual rendezvous. **Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, Jim Beckwourth, John Weber, and Jim Clyman** worked for this company.
3. Trappers such as **Etienne Provost, Antoine Robidoux, Joseph Walker, Osborn Russell, and Miles Goodyear** also trapped and explored in Utah. They did not work for the large fur companies.

# Utah's Mountain Men

## JEDEDIAH SMITH

Jedediah Smith came into the region as one of Ashley's leaders. Many stories are told about him. Along with his rifle, Jedediah took a Bible with him when he went to trap. Sometimes he read to himself, and sometimes he read to other trappers around the evening campfire.

In South Dakota a grizzly bear attacked Jed. It ripped one of his ears and part of his scalp almost all the way off. Jed asked one of his friends, James Clyman, to sew his ear on again. Here is what Clyman wrote in his diary:

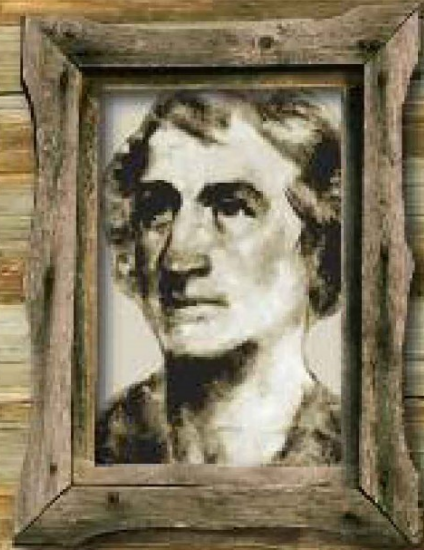
One of his ears was torn from his head out to the outer rim after stitching all the other wounds in the best way I was capable and according to the captains directions the ear being the last I told him I could do nothing for his Eare O you must try to stitch up some way or other said he then I put in my needle stitching it through ... as nice as I could.

On one of his many trips in search of beaver, Jedediah Smith left the Great Salt Lake region and traveled with other men through the dry land of Nevada and California. He was only 27 years old. He and some other men trudged across the flat Mojave Desert in the burning autumn sun. They almost died because they couldn't find enough food or water. At last they wandered into a Spanish mission in California. Later, they crossed the high Sierra Nevadas, rode their horses across Nevada, and returned to Utah.

The men crossed the Jordan River by raft, and then made their way north to Bear Lake. They arrived at the 1827 rendezvous, where there was much rejoicing because the other trappers thought Smith and his men were dead. (You can read more about the rendezvous on the last page of this chapter)

Jedediah was a respected leader of other trappers. He was the first to travel across Utah's length and width. He clearly showed that no rivers flowed from the Great Salt Lake into the Pacific Ocean. Smith also rediscovered South Pass, which shortened the route through the mountains of Wyoming.

Several years after he left Utah, Jedediah was killed by Indians. Scouting for water one day near the Sante Fe Trail in today's New Mexico, he found it. He also found the Comanches waiting for him. They killed him, took his guns, and left him in the woods.





## PETER SKENE OGDEN

Working for a rival trading company before it joined the British Hudson's Bay Company, Peter Ogden led many trappers into the Cache Valley and Ogden regions. He later explored the western deserts of Utah and Nevada. His daily journal is one of the earliest written accounts of northern Utah. He said the land was swarming with huge black crickets and the air was filled with seagulls. When he first entered the site of today's Huntsville, he called it a "hole" because mountains completely surrounded it.

Ogden was married twice, each time to an Indian woman. He discovered South Pass in Wyoming, but kept it a secret. The city of Ogden and the Ogden River are named after him, although historians believe he probably never crossed the mountains to enter the site where the city now thrives.



## JIM BRIDGER

Like most of the other mountain men, Jim Bridger was young. About twenty years old when he came to Utah, Jim hadn't gone to school much, but he was a great storyteller.

Jim and other trappers entered what we now call Cache Valley and camped on the Bear River. Bridger followed the river in a round bullboat made of animal skins until it flowed into a large body of water. He tasted the water and discovered it was very salty! Thinking he must have reached the Pacific Ocean, he and his men explored the lake for miles. Later he found out it was a great salty lake, not the ocean at all. Without good maps, the explorers had to do a lot of guessing about where they were.

After the trapping days were over, Jim Bridger stayed in the West. He opened a trading post in Wyoming, now called Fort Bridger, where travelers going farther west could stop and rest and buy supplies. He traded the travelers one fat cow for two or three thin, worn-out cows. He made a profit by letting the thin cows rest and eat. When they were fat again, he traded them to different pioneers.



## JAMES BECKWOURTH

Beckwourth was another of Ashley's trappers. He was also an explorer, miner, army scout, and businessman. Beckwourth was born a slave in Virginia to a white father and a black mother. When James was a teenager, his father moved him to Missouri. James headed farther west to avoid slavery. A tribe of Crow Indians adopted him, and he lived with them for several years and married a Crow woman. For the rest of his life, he often dressed like the Crows. He wrote a book about his life that many said was highly exaggerated.

## ÉTIENNE PROVOST

You have read that Jim Bridger was the first mountain man to see the Great Salt Lake. Provost (pra·vo) is also given this fame. He guided important expeditions into the valleys. He also established Indian trading posts along the shores of the Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake. At the trading posts the Indians could trade furs for metal objects, cloth, and other things from the East.

Often the Indian people and the trappers got along well together, but Provost was not so lucky. He and other trappers met a group of Indians in the valley of the Great Salt Lake. The Indian leader invited Provost and his men to sit and smoke a peace pipe with him. Provost and his men put down their weapons and joined the group. At a signal from their leader, the Indians attacked the trappers. Provost and a few of his men dashed for safety and escaped. The rest were killed. This was the first reported clash between American Indians and non-Indians in Utah.

The city of Provo and the Provo River are named after Provost.

## ANTOINE ROBIDOUX

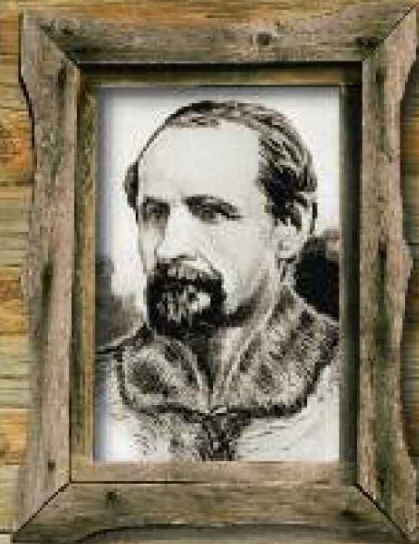
Robidoux worked out of New Mexico with Provost. He built many forts and used them as trading posts. Robidoux spoke English, Spanish, French, Ute, and other Indian languages. Fort Robidoux in the Uinta Basin was his trading center among the Utes. While he was there, he carved a message in French on a rock. Translated into English, the message reads:

Antoine Robidoux passed here November 13, 1837,  
to establish a house of trade at the Green or Uinta River.

## JOSEPH R. WALKER

Walker was a trapper who later worked as a guide for pioneer groups going to California. The trail he established across Nevada became the main route for travel to California. Although much of Walker's route had already been used by others, it was his published report of the route that made it popular to travelers.

Walker, who married an Indian woman, knew the Indians of the Great Basin better than most white trappers. However, he spent little time in Utah.



## The Old Spanish Trail

The Old Spanish Trail cut a path through Utah. People needed a way to send goods between Santa Fe and the shipping port in Los Angeles that would avoid the dangerous Indian country of Arizona. They also needed to avoid the deep canyons of the plateaus, so they used a trail that seems to us now to be much longer than it needed to be. Archaeologists have found artifacts in places that show some stretches of the old trail had earlier been used by Archaic Indians and Fremont Indians.

There were plenty of sheep in New Mexico, so woolen goods (blankets, rugs, and fabric) from there were traded for the horses and mules that roamed freely in California valleys. Ships at California's seaports carried the goods to other ports around the world.

Unfortunately, the traders on the trail, including Walkara, also swapped Indian men, women, and children for animals, furs, and other goods. They sold them as slaves to work in mines, as household servants, and for other work. The Indian slave trade was the strongest in the 1830s and 1840s.



### Walkara (Wakara, Walker)

About 1815–1855

A man of legend, Walkara was a colorful figure. Born in central Utah, Walkara was an intelligent, resourceful Ute who took what he wanted. An excellent horseman and hunter, he was joined by other war-minded Indians from several bands of Utes. Together they raided Navajos, Paiutes, and Goshutes, stealing horses, women, and children. They sold the women and children for slaves to other bands and later to the Spanish.

Walkara spoke Spanish and English in addition to his native language. For years, he traded with mountain men and others along the Old Spanish Trail. He traveled as far as California and Mexico, buying and selling. Later, when the Mormon pioneers came, Walkara sent many messages back and forth to Brigham Young. He invited the Mormons to settle in what is now Manti, which they did. You will read more about Walkara and his brother Arapeen and the Walker War later in this book.

## The End of an Era

The mountain men worked in the West for about twenty years. By the early 1840s, their trapping business was over. The mountain men and Indians had hunted beaver so much that only a few remained. Fashions changed, as they do today, and European and American gentlemen wanted hats made of shiny silk.

Then some of the trappers worked as guides for pioneers going to California and Oregon and for government explorers and mapmakers.

### Government Explorers Came Later

Although the western part of North America was first being explored by the missionaries and then trappers, little knowledge of the land was sent to people living in the eastern part of the continent. More accurate information and mapping of the American West came a few years later from the official reports of government explorers such as John C. Fremont, Captain Howard Stansbury, John W. Gunnison, and many years later, Major John Wesley Powell. (You will read about some of these men in later chapters of this book.)

### Cultural Exchange

The contact between the explorers and trappers and the American Indians changed the lifestyle of the Indians forever. When Escalante's description of the Indians is compared with trappers' accounts seventy years later, a great change had occurred. The Indian people in Utah Valley, for example, then had guns and horses and other metal objects. Even some of their clothing styles had changed.

At first, trade made the Indians' lives easier and made them more powerful against their enemies. When great numbers of white settlers started living in the Utah region, the balance of power shifted from native peoples to the newcomers. We will talk about the interaction between the new settlers and the Indians in a later chapter.



## Activity | Wise Use of Wild Animals

Making money by selling furs was the main goal of the mountain men. When the animals were gone from one place, the hunters moved on to another place. The beaver population in Europe was almost completely wiped out. Then trapping companies came to America.



Most people today think about wise use of natural resources, including wild animals. They know they need to use the land, plants, and animals wisely to insure that there will be resources in the future. People have to answer tough questions, such as:

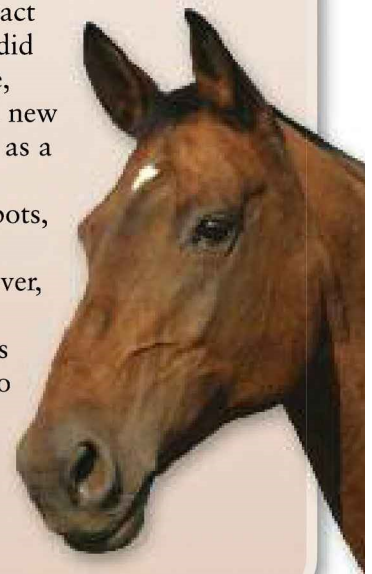
*"Should we restrict the hunting of some animals by issuing licenses?"*

*"Should we protect the natural habitat of animals who live in mountains or deserts, even if people need the forest trees for wood and the land for homes or industry?"*

With your class, discuss problems and solutions concerning the protection and wise use of animals where you live.

### Utes Obtain Horses

Horses were one example of cultural exchange. After the Dominguez-Escalante expedition, the Ute people around Utah Lake had little contact with the Spanish. Other Utes, however, did meet new people, both Indian and white, who introduced them to new things and new ideas. The Indian people saw the whites as a resource for goods they wanted. They eventually obtained metal beads, guns, pots, and arrow points, as well as mirrors, blankets, and other items. Horses, however, were the most important thing they got from the Spanish. Tribes who had horses had an advantage over tribes who had to walk and carry their own loads. Horses were valuable for moving with the seasons and for hunting trips. Horses also made it easier for Indian bands to attack their enemies.







## Memory Master

1. Who was probably the first non-Indian known to have come into Utah?
2. What were Fathers Escalante and Dominguez searching for when they came into Utah?
3. How did Silvestre and Joaquin help the expedition?
4. Why did the fur trappers come to today's Utah?
5. What country first sent trappers to Utah?
6. Describe a rendezvous. What took place there?
7. Choose one of the trappers and tell at least three things about him.



## Activity | Point of View

Pretend that five people came to early Utah. All wrote reports to send back East. All five reports were true, but they gave very different information. Why?

People see events from their own experiences. One visitor may have been an American Indian looking for a new place to hunt. Another may have come to make money trapping beaver. One may have come to make maps for the government. One may have come to find a route to the Pacific Ocean.

If all of the writing about a place is done from only one point of view, is it possible that the report is only part of the story? If only men write history, would it contain a woman's point of view? If only one race of people or one social class write history, does it tell the complete story?

On a separate piece of paper, make a chart like the one below. Think of a place or event where three people might be at the same time. Write the place or event on the line. Label each box with a description of a person (explorer, pioneer housewife, twelve-year-old boy, farmer, etc.). Write in the bubble what that person might say about the place or event.

WHAT THE PERSON  
MIGHT SAY ABOUT THE  
PLACE OR EVENT

WHAT THE PERSON  
MIGHT SAY ABOUT THE  
PLACE OR EVENT

WHAT THE PERSON  
MIGHT SAY ABOUT THE  
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DESCRIPTION  
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OF PERSON

PLACE OR EVENT



# Go to the Source

## Jedediah Smith's Journal

*In 1827, almost fifty men from St. Louis, loaded with freight wagons of supplies, arrived at the Sweet Lake (Bear Lake) rendezvous near today's Laketown. A small black iron cannon mounted on two wheels was pulled to the site along with the freight wagons.*

*One day in July a surprise guest entered the rendezvous camp. Jedediah Smith had left St. Louis in late October with sixty men, 160 mules, and \$20,000 worth of trade goods. Most thought he had died in the deserts of the Great Basin or in California.*

*These entries from Smith's journals shed light on the surprise:*

July 1st

25 Miles North East along the shore of the Lake. Nothing material occurred. Made our way to the Cache. But just before arriving there I saw some Indians on the opposite side of a creek. It was hardly worth while as I thought, to be any wise careful, so I went directly to them and found as near as I could judge by what I knew of the language to be a band of the Snakes. I learned from them that the Whites, as they term our parties, were all assembled at the little Lake, a distance of about 25 Miles. There was in [the] camp about 200 Lodges of Indians and as they were on their way to the rendezvous I encamped with them.

[July] 3d

I hired a horse and a guide and at three o'clock arrived at the rendezvous. My arrival caused a considerable bustle in camp, for myself and party had been given up as lost. A small Cannon brought up from St. Louis was loaded and fired for a salute.

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1. Smith refers to the Snake Indians, which are actually Shoshone. What can you learn about interaction between the whites and Shoshone by reading this journal entry?
  2. Do you think Smith was confident that he would be safe as he approached the Indians? Why or why not?
  3. What can you learn about the number of Indians who attended the rendezvous?
  4. Why might the Indians have wanted to attend the rendezvous?
  5. Why was the cannon fired when Smith and his group entered the rendezvous site? Imagine the scene and write about what you think might have happened next.