



## John C. Fremont

1813–1890

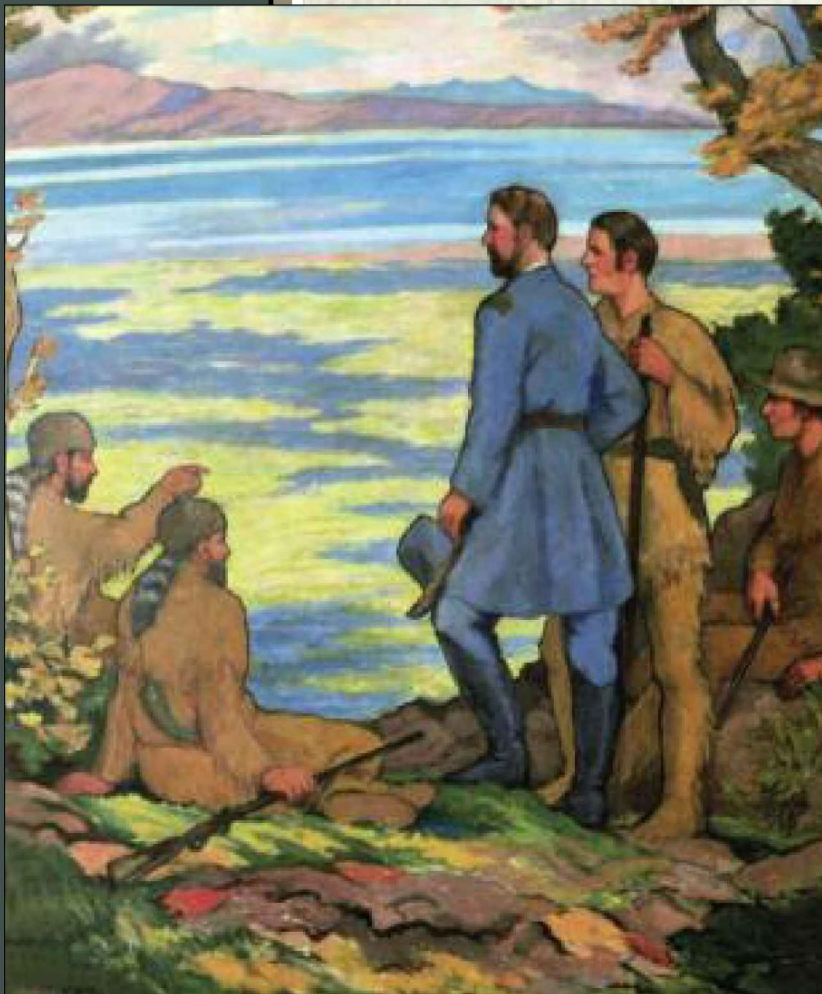


### Fremont, the “Pathfinder”

While still in his teens, Fremont got a job with the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers. For two years he worked beside one of the most skilled mapmakers in the United States and learned to take careful readings of instruments, sketch field maps, and make notes of plants and minerals.

Later, Fremont met fifteen-year-old Jessie Benton and eloped with her despite the protests of her father, Senator Benton.

*Fremont, Kit Carson, and others saw the Salt Lake Valley for the first time on Fremont’s second expedition. This painting of the event is part of a mural in the Utah State Capitol.*



Making the best of the situation, Benton hired his new son-in-law to lead a team to explore and map the Oregon Trail. After his return to Washington, Jessie used Fremont’s notes to write a glowing 207-page report of the trip. Government leaders were so dazzled by the writing that they printed 10,000 copies of the report.

### The Second Expedition, 1843–44

Fremont and a group of about thirty mountain men, guided by Fitzpatrick and Kit Carson, worked their way along the Bear River through Cache Valley and camped for a week on the northern shores of the Great Salt Lake. A few men took a leaky rubber boat to a small island in the lake that is now named Fremont Island. They soon joined the Oregon Trail and turned westward to California.

The group later returned to Utah, following the Old Spanish Trail through *desolate* desert land to today’s Las Vegas and then up through today’s St. George and Santa Clara. At the time, Indians lived in these places.



*[By May 1844 we had reached] a halting place of very good grass on the clear waters of the Santa Clara fork of the Rio Virgin. [The land] began to be wooded with cedar and pine, and clusters of trees gave shelter to birds—a new and welcome sight—which could not have lived in the desert we had passed. [The land] gave everyone . . . a more lively spirit.*

### The Third Expedition, 1845

Mountain men Joseph Walker and Kit Carson guided this expedition, entering Utah through the Uinta Basin. They rode horses to the Provo River, followed it to Utah Lake, and went north along the Jordan River. Arriving in the Great Basin in colorful October, they spent two weeks camped on the future site of Salt Lake City while they explored the region.

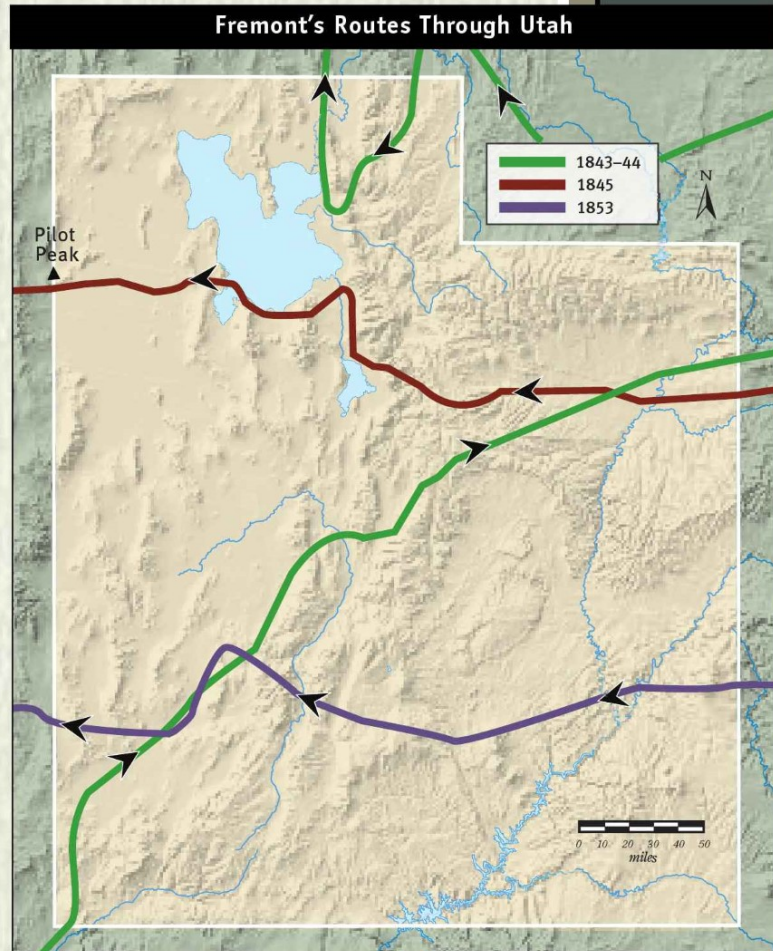
One of their goals was to search for a water route from the Great Salt Lake to California. At night, Kit Carson and a group headed across the salt flats. The next afternoon, Fremont led the rest of his company out into the desert. They traveled into the night, and before morning Fremont made fire signals to tell Carson where he was. That afternoon, all were at the base of Pilot Peak, named because it had guided them across the salt flats.

Fremont reported in error that the freshwater Utah Lake and the salty Great Salt Lake were the same body of water. He also said Utah was a garden spot, fertile and well-watered.

### The 1853 Expedition

With the goal of finding a suitable route for a transcontinental railroad, Fremont later entered Utah again. By this time, Salt Lake City and many smaller towns dotted the Utah region. Fremont's group was sheltered from a harsh winter in the small settlement of Parowan.

*Fremont made a total of five expeditions in the West, a record that earned him the popular nickname of “the Pathfinder” or “the Path Maker.”*



### Fremont's Contributions

Despite some errors, Fremont took accurate measurements of Utah's altitude, collected soil samples, wrote about the land, water, and plant life, and made important maps. The information added to the knowledge of the West.

Fremont and his family moved to California, where he was elected a senator and even ran for president of the United States, though he lost the election.