

Adventures on the American Frontier

Westward Over the Blue Ridge Mountains

Part One

Thomas Batts Finds the Great Warpath



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It was a fall day in Virginia in 1671. The United States of America was not yet a country. The land was almost all wilderness, except for a settled strip along the Atlantic Ocean. Colonies had sprung up—little villages near the mouths of rivers, with farms scattered between them. The people who lived there had come, mostly from England, to find a new home in America. There was a western frontier, but the country was so new that it was less than 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean.





There were a few forts on the frontier.
They had been built because of the fur
trade. It had not taken the colonists long



to learn that Native Americans would bring them fine furs to trade for knives or cloth or beads.

One of the forts was named Fort Henry. It stood where Petersburg, Virginia, is today. The man in charge of Fort Henry was General Abraham Wood. Like many other men, General Wood looked often to the western wilderness and wondered what was out there. But unlike most of the others, General Wood did something: he went exploring.

Each time General Wood headed west, he found himself climbing hills that led only to higher hills. Beyond the higher hills was a long ridge of mountains. The mountains rose like a great wall, running from Pennsylvania and New York in the north to Georgia in the south. At first, the colonists thought they could find a river that would cut through the mountains. Just on the other side, they were sure, was the Great Western Sea—the Pacific Ocean. But all of the rivers they followed flowed down into the Atlantic



Ocean, not west through the mountains.

“We’ll have to look for a river that starts just over the mountain ridge,” they decided.

“It will go to the Pacific, and we can open a road to it. Then we’ll be able to trade with China.”

There was still plenty of room between the mountain wall and the Atlantic Ocean. No one was crowded in the colonies, and there was still a great deal of farmland to be cleared. But General Wood wanted to learn more about the land over the mountains.