

Adventures on the American Frontier

EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Part Nine

Jed Smith and the Search
for the Buenaventura



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In the early 1800s, much of America was still unknown. Most of the land in the West had not yet been explored. But men heard stories about the great bounty of animals in the western wilderness, and they traveled west to hunt and trap, exploring as they went. In this way, they helped to fill in the empty spots on the maps.



Among the trappers working in the West was a young man named Jedediah Smith. Jed was always looking for more than the money and adventure that beaver trapping brought him. He wanted to give his life purpose by doing something to help people.

In 1826, Jed and sixteen other men sat near their campfire on the last night of a great gathering of trappers in what is now the state of Utah. Trappers from far and wide came together once a year at



a mountain valley. There the fur-trading company men came with packs of supplies and money to trade for the furs. The yearly get-together was called a *rendezvous*, the French word for meeting.

Another trapper, Bob Evans, sat beside Jed. A group of men at a nearby campfire had just finished singing a rowdy mountain song, but Bob was thinking about the trip the men were to begin at dawn.

“Jed,” he asked, “what are the plans for our trip?”

“Well,” said Jed, “I plan to cut south and west. I’d like to find the Buenaventura River.” The Buenaventura was a river that everyone had heard about but no one had seen. No one knew where it was.

Jed went on. “Just think what that would mean to people in all the years to come,” he said. “If there is a river to the Pacific, as every old Spanish map shows, then there must also be a pass through the Rocky Mountains. The river would have cut a canyon through them.”



Bob pictured the great Buenaventura River filled with boats carrying people swiftly across the land. "We should be able to find it, Jed." he said. The loud singing began again.

"We'll get going before sun-up," Jed told his men. He stood up and stretched his tall, lean body. The firelight threw his shadow far toward the next campfire and lost it there. Jed took his blanket and spread it on the ground. Soon, in spite of the noise around them, he and his men were sleeping.